Jennings, just a stop on the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1880, was settled by midwestern farmers in 1883, thus becoming a "Yankee" settlement in the "Cajun" country of southwestern Louisiana. Jennings McComb, for whom the town was named, was a contractor on the Southern Pacific Railroad. At one time it appeared that McComb would give his surname to a town on the Louisiana Western Railroad, but the site chosen for McComb, Louisiana, failed to develop.

The first settler in Jennings was A. D. McFarlain, who came from St. Mary Parish in 1821. This energetic young man was the first rice grower, first merchant, first postmaster, first suggestor, first builder. McFarlain prospered with Jennings' growth and later became one of the town's most prominent business men and civic leaders.

He opened a store in Jennings in 1831 and its great size is known of his activities until the arrival of "Father" Cary, who was reported to be on a very moderate trade with the adjoining Acadians.

The most important personal appearance in the early days of Jennings was that of Judge Jennings L. Cary. His achievements were so great as to merit for him designation as the town's founder and the affectionate title of "father."

Until his arrival, Jennings was only a name. Churches, schools, streets and other pre-requisites of a community were non-existent.

Cary visited Jennings on the advice of the Louisiana State Commissioner of Immigration, William H. Harris. The reason Cary gave for his travel from the state of Iowa was that he was "seeking a home where there was no winter or mortgage."

Cary arrived in Jennings on Feb. 7, 1883. On his way he found only the McFarlains and 10 section hands. The town's four buildings consisted of the depot, a section house, a dwelling house and McFarlain's store.

Two days after his arrival in the area, Cary obtained two tracts of land in Jennings, each consisting of 180 acres. He paid the Federal Land Office a fee of $110 for each tract.

Impressed by the new area, Cary began to write letters to midwestern farmers preparing to migrate west, and convinced many of them to come to Jennings instead.

Cary obtained a job with the Southern Pacific Railroad and was made Northern Immigration Agent, enabling him to promote literature for distribution throughout the middlewest.

The settlers came from throughout the middlewest, but the majority were from Iowa. Those who came were, in most instances, fairly prosperous farmers for they brought with them household goods, livestock and farm implements.

Some of the first people to migrate to Jennings were E. Gallop, George B. Spenecer, David Patterson, J. D. Cox, Fred Nible, Harold White, William Bull, N. S. Craig, A. S. Blair, Dr. Reynolds, E. David, O. Williams, and J. Smallwood.

The settlers continued to come, and by 1880 the population of the Jennings region reached 150; by 1880, it was 412, and by 1885 it had grown to 1,538.

Title further indicates that the large land in the original city limits was first procured by homesteading.

The people were quick to organize for the purpose of carrying on the society to which they had been accustomed. Religious services began in 1884 and were first held in the depot, which was not a busy place in the daytime for the only two trains going through Jennings were scheduled to stop at night.

Gathering of churchgoers in the waiting room of the depot was a regular part of the Sunday routine.

An outgrowth of these gatherings was the first Sunday school with Cary, a Presbyterian, as its superintendent.

In 1885, McFarlain built and donated to the town a one-room schoolhouse, which was located near the site where Central School now stands. Cary was the first teacher, teaching was known as a "common school," financed by a nominal fee of $2.50 per month per student.

The first house, other than the original dwellings, was erected in 1883 by J. G. McMartin on the corner of Cary Avenue and Nespique Street. The first commercial building was the druggist of Dr. Remat, built in 1884.

Since most of the settlers were farmers, agricultural pursuits became of prime importance in the new community. Wheat had been the principal crop, but factors of soil and climate made the raising of wheat impracticable in the new locality.

Fruit was the first marketable crop grown, and rice soon became the main crop.

The Frozin Roy Home
First House in Jennings

1941 Ford

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