The Lafayette Building, once the home of Baton Rouge's first probate judge, is believed to be the oldest building in Baton Rouge.

The Lafayette Building has survived hundreds of years, many owners and several renovations and is now believed to be the oldest building in Baton Rouge.

By CAROL ANNE BLITZER
Associate staff writer

The Lafayette Building, actually two adjacent buildings of Spanish Colonial architecture on Lafayette Street, is possibly the oldest building in Baton Rouge. The north building is believed to have been built in the mid-18th century probably during the time that Louisiana was a province of Spain. It is said that in a previous restoration of the building, workmen found a board dated 1762, lending some people to believe that the building was built in that time.

The Lafayette Building was built in the French Quarter, which was part of the extensive Spanish-Coroner area.

In January 1820, Cline transferred the property to Judge Charles Tessier, who served from 1821 to 1825 as East Baton Rouge Parish's first probate judge. The north building was the judge's town house and for years after his death was known as the Judge Tessier House. A letter from Avery Bassich of New Orleans to the Landrys dated June 6, 1825, gives some insight into Tessier. His letter said, "I..."."

In 1877, the property was transferred from E.L. Bassich to J.R. Ferchaud and from Ferchaud to Lydia Cline. The view proposed then for a "kitchen wall" is mentioned in the property, is now believed to be the oldest building in Baton Rouge. The north building is believed to have been built in the mid-18th century probably during the time that Louisiana was a province of Spain. It is said that in a previous restoration of the building, workmen found a board dated 1762, lending some people to believe that the building was built in that time.

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The entrance lobby and the first office of the north building are on two levels. The lower level is the audience area and the upper level was a stage of El Teatro Poqueno, which was operated by the Little Theatre Guild in the building.
Frances Landry and the late Jules Landry had to plead with the police jury to get permits to restore the Lafayette Building. They were photographed in 1978, when the building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The exterior of the Lafayette Building has changed little over its 200-year history.
The building's original cast-iron work, shown in this photo from 1978, is similar to that found on buildings in New Orleans.