MAURICE HEYMANN, center, deeded the Art Center site to the USL Foundation at the corner of St. Mary Blvd. and Girard Park Drive. Fred Bates, the first president, and J. Winston Fontenot, then president, accepted this gift in the spring, 1967. Just three days later, below, DR. CLYDE ROUGEAU, president of USL, turned the first spade of dirt at the groundbreaking on April 11 with Horace B. Rickey, Jr., Fred Daspit, curator, Fontenot, Dean Herbert Hamilton, and Bates looking on. Behind them a Dixieland jazz band played.
June 5, 1965

Mr. Winston Fontenot, Pres.,
USI Foundation, Inc.
718 S. Buchanan St.,
Lafayette, La.

Certified Mail
Return Receipt Requested

Dear Mr. Fontenot:

In June of 1962 I offered to donate to U. S. L. Foundation, Inc., a site for the construction of a Museum, with the provision that the necessary funds would be raised by your organization for the construction of building to cost not less than $200,000.00, and provided further, that this building would be completed by June 1964.

Prior to the expiration of my offer Messrs. Bates and Schroeder called on me and I, then, agreed to extend the option for an additional six months from February 1, 1965, and as further incentive, I agreed to contribute $25,000.00 towards the project if the terms of the agreement were met within this period.

It is now three years since my original offer, and there appears to be very little activity towards this project, and since less than 60 days remains of this extended period, this is to advise you and your organization that my offer now stands as follows:

(1) Unless, by August 1, 1965, you have raised the necessary funds for this building, my offer of the $25,000.00 contribution is completely withdrawn, and

(2) Six months from August 1, 1965, unless the necessary funds have been raised, my offer of donation of the real estate is likewise completely withdrawn, and I will arrange to use the property for other useful purposes.

I regret that I find it necessary to take this action, but feel certain you can appreciate the fact that this offer cannot be extended indefinitely, and it is only human to look forward to success in any of one's undertakings.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Maurice Heymann

cc: Mr. W. W. Schroeder
cc: Mr. Fred Bates
The Art Center for Southwestern Louisiana Was Maurice Heymann’s Last Pet Project
By Frances Love (written for The Advertiser shortly after Heymann’s death in 1967)

“I want to drive by the corner of St. Mary and Girard Park Drive and look at the Art Center building,” the late Maurice Heymann told me many times. I want to see it built while I am still alive.”

This project meant a lot to both Heymann and Horace B. Rickey, Sr., the contractor. They had worked with the idea since its concept after the important Wm. E. Groves Art Collection was given in 1962; and they both donated generously to its building fund.

Heymann’s gift was to the Art Center was the three and a half acres of land valued conservatively at $300,000 and a pledge donation of $25,000 toward the building fund.

Thirty minutes before the Advertiser’s deadline for the Sunday issue, April 8, 1967, Mr. Heymann called USL Foundation president, J. Winston Fontenot, and told him that he was ready to sign the deed over to the Foundation for the Art Center in his office. Then he called me and asked, “Please come and bring your photographer.”

Since both photographers that I used, John Stephen and Calvin Blue, were both out of town at a convention, Sheldon Blue said that he would come for Calvin. The often used picture of Mr. Heymann by himself at his desk, smiling over the blue prints of the Art Center was probably the last one that would be taken of this important Lafayette philanthroper. It is the one that I have used for many years, and it is the one at the top of this page.

Few of the Foundation board members could be found on such short notice on a Saturday morning. Within minutes Blue and the TV cameras recorded this civic milestone, and it was the last time that the two old friends signed a transaction together.

Mr. Heymann sealed the deal by handing Fontenot a bottle of Scotch whisky labeled, From the private stock of Maurice Heymann.

Three days later ground was broken and three weeks later Mr. Rickey Sr. died of a heart attack. Fortunately, Rick, Jr. has worked with this project every step of the way and he was in charge of the building. The favorite architect of Heymann and Rickey was always A. Hays Town, who had designed most of their projects, including the Oil Center.

Fontenot casually mention the fact that USL faculty at the School of Art and Architecture had opposed the design of the building as not functional.

Mr. Heymann smiled just like he did for his photograph and said, I don’t care how
functionable the second building is in the future, the front building of the Art Center must be classic in design so that it will continue to be beautiful fifty years from now. It must look like a design that Louisiana people can identify with.

I really enjoyed my encounters with this man who had been born in the Vieux Carre’ in 1885, and had done more for business growth and philanthropy in Lafayette than any other person. I spent two full hours with him the first time that I had gone to see him in behalf of Foundation business. And I told him that I liked working with him.

He said, “I enjoy talking with you too. If I had not, I would have stepped on an electric bell under my desk and Mrs. Duhon (his longtime secretary) would have come in and told me that I had another appointment.”

I have always been sorry that he did not see the completion of the Art Center, but I am sure that he did look down upon it.