Hotel has played host to colorful patrons

(Editor's Note: This is the continuation of Ken Dupuy's feature on the Veranda Hotel.)

Now that we've met most of the owners of the Veranda Hotel, let's look at some of the patrons of the Veranda Hotel. There were the usual travelers that one would find in hotels today. However, there were others that were not so common, especially when we consider that they came into town and plied their trade in the hotel.

For example, traveling dentists stayed for days and some for a week or more, to handle all work in the "Dental line," as was said of Dr. Armand Mary, a dentist from New Orleans. In January 1892, he came ready to "extract teeth without pain."

Dr. Mary advertised that he used chloroform, gas, and cocaine. This was at a time when our local dentist, and mayor of Abbeville, Dr. Elijah Bourne had been dead about a year, and long before Dr. P.P. Nelson settled in Abbeville. Dr. Bourne had begun his career in Abbeville, first as one of these roving dentists, in 1884, and had stayed at the Veranda. Other dentists some even equipped sleeping rooms and worked in there.

I can imagine the moans and groans coming from these rooms at times during "office hours," especially before pain killers came into use.

On at least one occasion, an occultist - Prof. S. Waldman, from St. Louis - stayed at the Veranda where he offered his services for a few days, in November 1891.

Perhaps the men who most often frequented hotels, like the Veranda, were the sales representatives from the different commercial houses. In those days, salesmen often announced their approach by beating drums. Thus, the term "drummers" came to be applied to traveling salesmen.

This book also points out that the term "bagman" replaced the term "drummer." This title was in reference to the salesmen's bags of samples. I found another quaint term that was used in the Meridional, in 1898, to refer to a salesman: "knight of the grip." Surely, some of these commercial travelers - yet another term used for salesmen - sometimes rehearsed their spiel aloud, in front of the hotel mirror. Therefore, we can imagine the sound seeping through the walls during those false starts, stammers, and often the vacant quality of persistence and genuineness that exemplified the top salesmen.

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In the proceedings, and what about their attention spans?

How passive are they, do they allow the opinions of the more forceful jurors to sway their decisions? Also, how competent are the judges and how much are they in control of the proceedings?

Let's not forget the problems and concerns that jurors bring with them into the courtroom. Often, time plays a vital role. For example back in the early 1800s, for many jurors there was the concern of getting crops planted and harvested, and cattle and other animals cared for and fed, to say nothing of the work of running the home.

And, also, some jurors were businessmen who worried about their businesses being carried on efficiently and profitably. So, time was and is of the essence. Let's hear what must be said and let's make our decisions as quickly as possible so that we can get on with our lives, might have been the attitude of more than one juror.

The temperature and humidity in the old courtrooms must have influenced the patience of concerned.

Indeed, I am sure you can add your own factors that influence the outcome of a grand jury or trial jury. As if these factors weren't enough to create stress, imagine the strain of knowing that one is literally playing with the lives of others in that jury room, as facts and suppositions are thrown around the room for the just consideration.

In view of the stress and strain produced in the courtroom, the unwinding effects of liquor, and the acceptance of the use of alcohol in society in the 1800s, it is small wonder that the Veranda saloon.

It competed with the other saloons in town for the dollars of these tired, confused, and impatient jurors. However, jurors certainly were not the only patrons of the barroom, nor did all jurors patronize the bars. It was in the Veranda Hotel's own "coffee house" that a fatal duel began.

The Veranda Hotel's barber shop also brought in income for the hotel. There one could hear the light banter and raucous laughter, as well as the latest gossip, and predictions of doom and success.

There were the sounds of straight razors being honed, slowly and methodically, on leather stop.

The tinkling of brushes striking the sides of the shaving mugs as lather was mashed, and predictions of doom and success.

The Veranda Hotel had its share of these gatherings, including euchre card games.

Other functions took place at this hotel Fraternal organizations - like the Pythians did in early December 1896 - sometimes met here for suppers. Mayor J.O. Lege, his bride, Marie Bernard, and their wedding guests came here on April 4, 1891, for the reception. J. Nelson Greene, ex-mayor and ex-alderman, returned from New Orleans with his bride of only a few weeks on August 26, 1899.

After citizens from many parts of the parish "rendered one of Wagner's masterpieces on cymbals, conch-shells, and cowhorns," and after a brief speech by Erastus Mouton, "the crowd then repaired to the Veranda Hotel where a Delmonico supper was served and many toasts drank to the health, happiness, and prosperity of the newlyweds.

Not even my 1897 dictionary tells us what such a supper consisted of. Mr. Greene was elected District Attorney only six months after this reception.