Veranda Hotel has witnessed its share of tragedy

By Ken Dupuy

Journey Into The Past

In what could be characterized as a foray into enemy territory, fire struck again near the Veranda in October of 1892. It was thought that it was起了 the strength and capabilities of the opposing forces.

Fire had gotten itself ready for a frontal assault on Abbeville and didn't want to make any mistakes. In this feigned attack at the flank of the enemy, fire struck on Concord street, apparently by making its initial strike on Horace Trahan's saloon, on the corner of Concord and Jefferson streets. Across from the Staufer Brothers' store. In this test of Abbeville's firefighting units, it bounced back and forth on Concord Street.

When it was over, Trahan's saloon, the Laporte building in which the Rittergen Brothers' clothing store was most probably located, and Adam Brassseau's saloon, a free man's, were reduced to a heap of ash. The front of Godard's two-story wooden drugstore, on the south side of Concord Street, had sustained severe damages. Interestingly, Henry Duvall's saloon, located on Magdalene Square, near the bagand and operated its saloon there, temporarily.

It may have been the only time that a private enterprise of the town was allowed to operate on this square. Adam Brassseau also utilized a tent, near the Veranda, for his saloon. The fire had come close to the Veranda, and had scared but spared it once again.

Only a few months later, after much scheming, fire attacked Abbeville again, this time all of its fury, on February 19, 1893. This time it destroyed buildings wildly and voraciously in the vicinity of the Veranda. The blaze to life in the Beauregard building, directly across Concord Street from the hotel, the fire began its destruction.

Although it was brought under control in about two hours, the fire had reduced more buildings to ashes than it had when it raged so long in the previous two conflagrations combined. Dozens of businesses and offices were razed that night.

When it was over, all of the buildings on the south side of Concord Street, some of the buildings on the west side of State Street, and some of the structures along the east side of Jefferson Street were left in smoldering heaps of ashes and rubble. And even though it had burned so fiercely across the street, fire had spared the Veranda.

There had been and would be other major fires in other parts of Abbeville, including the one that heavily damaged the Beauregard building in 1914, but the Veranda Hotel was always spared the indignity of a direct attack by fire. Perhaps, the hotel had become smug and felt invincible against fire.

All went well for several more years. Then, on November 3, 1917, fire struck the hotel and nibbled at its innards. Unlike so many of the previous fires, this one came to life at 3 o'clock, on a Saturday afternoon.

This fire occurred while World War I was raging unchecked, with our men and boys leaving town for training camps. In fact, on this very day, the Meridional reported that the French forces had had a rare victory. French forces had captured a huge German airship in perfect condition, and the only one on capitivity.

To return to our visit to the Veranda, here is what happened, according to the Meridional. In a side room that was used to heat water, some heating oil - there was still no natural gas to heat or to cook with - caught fire. Soon the flames ate through the wall of Numa Broussard's barber shop. Minutes later, the fire "was leaping hungrily through the doors and was climbing to the top of the second story."

As usual, the "Hoodoo" (sic) fire truck could not run and there was some delay in getting hose to fight the fire. In 1917, in Abbeville, the fire truck simply carried hoses that were then connected to the fire hydrants; the truck didn't carry a supply of water.

A large crowd was on the scene and kept the fire from getting out of control, and in fact, put out the flames. Buckets of water were probably used. Almost everything was taken out of the hotel and out of Miller's saloon.

The Meridional praised the honesty of the crowd, saying that it had carried out the "big stock of liquor in J.B. Miller's saloon and there was nothing broken or stolen."

Plenty of water had been thrown on the flames, leaving the wettest part of the hotel flooded. In had been a $1,400 loss, but more important, no more would the Veranda feel secure and unassailable.

The Veranda Hotel was witness to many other dramatic events. It was in the coffeeshop of Henri Blanc that the seeds of a fatal duel were sown one night in 1874. Sheriff G.B. Shaw and State Representative Paul Fontenelle, as you may recall from our previous visit with these men, had come to the Veranda as the best of friends.

They left Blanc's hotel a short time later bicker enemies. They traveled, each accompanied by their own supporters, until they arrived at the duel ground. Because the duel itself was witnessed previously - in 1895 - suffice it to say that Sheriff Shaw walked away; an eyewitness had to be a mortal wound to the head. If only the ghost of the Veranda Hotel could reveal to us the nature of their dispute! But, would such a revelation help us to understand and accept the actions of these men, who were caught up in a situation from which neither man felt he could excuse himself?

In yet another instance, a shooting occurred directly in front of the Veranda, on July 26, 1876. The individuals in this confrontation were as different as could be. Frank R. King, often referred to as "Captain," an attorney who had come to Abbeville from Alabama around 1870. At that time he was living in Henri Blanc's hotel: the Veranda.

It is possible that he was still living in the hotel at the time of the shooting. Capt. King was a Vermilion Parish school board member from 1876 until 1878, at which time he resigned this position.

He also operated a warehouse, which was located on lot 3 (Megrard's Portion), about where the Well building is located today. He was considered to be "a most dangerous man," according to the Sugar Bowl account of the confrontations between these two men.

In late June or early July 1876, Schneider, drunk at the time, shot Capt. King, believing that he was unarmed, according to the newspaper account. He was surprised to learn that King was armed with a "small derringer with one ball."

This ball hit Schneider in the chest, but didn't prove to be life threatening. King, after four times, but the "balls were so small that they only made scratches, one through each ear, a third in the left jaw or cheek, and the fourth in the right ear.

Both men recovered from these wounds," King felt that Schneider meant to kill him "in order to prevent an exposure," as an attorney was about to make, through the courts, of certain fraudulent transactions of Schneider in his sale of certain lands.

With this background, we are ready to witness the events of the night of July 26, 1876. C.J. Edwards recorded in his diary that he, Granville B. Shaw, Geo. Lyons, and Claude Young were standing at Joe Labat's corner - corner of Port and Washington streets.

They heard "the report of a double barreled shotgun in the direction of the Brick Hotel."

How unexpected and startling that must have been. The blast must have rumbled and reverberated like a sudden clap of thunder up and down Abbeville's main street.

When Edwards and the others arrived at the hotel, Carl G. Schneider, a "Republican was living under the gallery shed with a hole in the head and dead as a stone." Edwards added that he and Claude went for the corner, Dr. W.D. White. Following an inquest, Dr. W.D. White determined a verdict of murder and King was arrested and put in the "Boose" the next day.

Parish Judge William Kibbee heard the preliminary examination and King "was bound over to appear at the next term of District Court to answer to the charge of murder."

The Sugar Bowl reported, on August 3, 1876, that it had received information that Schneider had threatened King after their first encounter. The night prior to the fatal shooting Schneider reportedly "pursued Capt. King, when he was unarmed.

King learned of Schneider threats and got a double-barreled shotgun. He then proceeded to the Veranda Hotel where he found Schneider outside and "shot him down upon sight, feeling that I had to do it."

A few days later King appeared before Judge Kibbee, as Edwards had written. District Attorney Charles took all of Friday and half of Saturday presenting his case, while Col. Albion DeBlanc defended King.

King's trial in District Court began on September 12, 1876. Again, District Attorney Chargoe represented the State while Colonels DeBlanc, Crow, and William Monten comprised the defense team.

On Friday September 15th, at 4:30 p.m. the jury was given the case. All of 20 minutes later, the jury returned with a verdict of "not guilty."

And there was the Veranda Hotel, witness to it all. It watched the shooting of Schneider on its own gallery and the ensuing commotion afterwards. It watched as Capt. King, an accused murderer, entered the courthouse across the street. Days later, the Black Market which King, a "Republican walked triumphantly out of the halls of justice.

How different Capt. King's facial expressions must have been on those two occasions.

A few days before the beginning of his appearance in District Court, it was reported that he had withdrawn his candidacy for district attorney. By 1880, F.R. King was practicing law in New Orleans, the capital of Louisiana.