Veranda played host to smoked-filled poker games

By Ken Dupuy

In March 1916, A.A. Dubus gave a supper at the Veranda to celebrate the good work of the police jury in improving and building good roads in the past two years.

So, why should this man be concerned about good roads? Mr. Dubus was one of the first of our auto dealers, and was the most successful for many years. He sold Hupmobiles, Fords, and Dodges. From accounts that I read, he would take the orders, the cars would come in on the train and Dubus would deliver them.

Sometimes, Dubus and others would travel to other cities to pick up deliveries. So, Mr. Dubus, who was also one of Abbeville's town councilmen in the early 1920s, was very much concerned that Abbeville and the vicinity should have good roads. Remember, too, that even as late as 1928, Abbeville's streets and the parish roads, if not the State, were at best gravel roads. Now, we can understand why A.A. Dubus gave a supper to the members of the police jury. Because of its famous cuisine, we also know why he chose the Veranda Hotel.

In 1919, on Armistice Day, yet another group came to "Dessie Tread's restaurant," to enjoy a "fine meal." The men in this group were some of the veterans of the War in Europe, including the "crippled and wounded." After supper, "some of the boys fought the war over again, putting the Hana to flight."

Imagine the war stories that were told that night, but also imagine the emotions that these stories stirred in the souls of these survivors.

Two years later, on August 11, 1921, thirty-six members of the local American Legion Post 29 met at the "Veranda Hotel Cafe" to partake in an "excellent banquet." What do you want to bet that most of these individuals were the same ones who had supped at this hotel in 1919? Surely their war experiences were brought out more or less to be looked at and passed around the group.

These memories would then be returned to each veteran's soul when they proffered "grace like irrigating grains of sand inside of one's shoes."

Let's remember that the Veranda was not the only hotel in town, it had to compete with such hotels as the Wall Hotel, Young's Key Club, and the Pythian's Hotel which stood where Guarino's Black Bull Restaurant is today. For example, on November 28, 1924, the Pythians had a celebratory supper at the Wall House. It was on this night that the local lodge was installed. Thirty local men were elected.

W.W. Kushing and J.R. Killett became some of the first officers of the local lodge. After the meeting, everyone "repaired" to the Wall House, for the celebrations.

The Wall House had a name change in 1914, when explorer Adam Boudreaux and his wife opened the New Oak Hotel. I don't recall how long they operated this hotel.

The Vermain Hotel competed with the Veranda briefly, but well, I'm sure, it opened its doors in January 1926, under the ownership of G.G. Least, a former mayor of Abbeville, and under the management of Gaston A. Levy. He had been in business selling dry goods, notions and clothing only a few doors south of the hotel, prior to the Vermain Hotel's opening.

This hotel met with an untimely demise when it was destroyed by fire in 1910. The Vermain Hotel was the finest of the three, it would seem to me, in terms of construction, but especially in terms of accommodation.

Because of its central location, the Vermain Hotel, like Madagan Square, witnessed and recorded much of the community. Just this lot - Megret's lot 40 - could recount the historical moments that it has observed. Those of us who appreciate history would have a grand time listening as it recalled us with tales of drama, of ease, of the mundane, and of tragedy.

However, since it cannot relate these events, we must rely on the information provided by our other trips into the past, and on the newspaper accounts during those early years.

The Vermain Hotel had a front row seat to many of the most destructive fires in Abbeville. It stood across from State Street when this town was devoured by fire.

It witnessed the futile attempts of the firemen to protect the building. It was the successful prosecution of the fire's spread to other buildings, like those of the O'Bryan and Walter law offices of R.P. O'Bryan and Walter White, on the corner of Tivoli and State Streets, and the new Methodist church farther north on State Street.

Appropriately, the wind was blowing from the southeast, thus leaving the Vermain out of the path of the burning debris. The fire was spreading from the courthouse, in the west, and slowly, the hotel was surrendered to the fire's fury.

Surely, it heard the discharge of weapons that had been confiscated and stored in the Sheriff's office. Did any of those bullets strike the hotel?

The Vermain was aimed at, with silent patience, while the courthouse square lay fallow for five years. At last, in 1925, the hotel was watched and listened to the distinctive brick courthouse, designed by Geo. Horndell, was constructed. The Vermain was all of the hero in 1921 to witness the ignoble razing of that magnificent work of architecture, or the completion of the courthouse of our present courts in 1933.

On January 5, 1900, another fire began in the same building of Opelousas on the corner of Peace and State Streets. This calamitous fire, one of two that struck Abbeville in 1900, destroyed all of the buildings on the east side of State Street between Peace and Lafayette streets.

It left untouched the surface of State Street, undamaged by the tremendous amount of water used in fighting the fire - and consumed a couple of the buildings on the west side of State Street.

A fire-fighting trait and its equipment came over on a special train from New Iberia to offer assistance. This was another fire that could not be forgotten by those who had witnessed it. Again, the Vermain leaved a sigh of relief when it was all over.