

THE ESNARD – BIRD – GASSIE HOME

By Mary Olga Gassie Landry

Edited by Jerry Gassie
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Preface

November 14, 2007

My father, Herbert H. Gassie, first obtained a photocopy of the *Esnard - Bird Gassie Home* document in the mid-1970's, when I was but a young teenager. Even at that time, I found myself fondly interested in my family's history. At that time, I recall writing my grandmother, Wilmae Edwards Gassie, for additional information with respect to our family history. Unfortunately, those letters are no longer available, and I can hardly recall the contents.

Sometime during the late 1990's, I was fortunate to again come across the copy of the *Esnard - Bird - Gassie Home* document that my father had been given. I scanned every page so that I could have my own copy of the document, using the highest resolution settings available on the flatbed scanner I owned at the time. However, having a photocopy or scanned copy of the document was still not good enough for me. Being in the field of Information Technology myself (computers, etc.), and with the prevalence of computers in homes around the world, we are more accustomed to being able to search documents for specific words and phrases. The original *Esnard - Bird - Gassie Home* document had no table of contents, no index, no references, i.e., there was no way to search the document. So, I took the task upon myself to create a 'soft' copy of this document.

I originally attempted to use OCR technology (Optical Character Recognition), to assist in the project, but of the many software programs I tried, none could do the job well enough, and none would do the job faster than typing the document out myself directly into a word processing program. However, I am happy at this time to provide this first 'soft' copy of the document.

Discrepancies and Changes made to the Original Document

I should take the time to point out the changes I have made to the original document. The copy of the document my father had contained two versions of page 10. It would seem that someone had edited the original version, perhaps to place paragraphs in a more appropriate timeline, and to list the children of Eda Schexnayder. I am not aware of who created the additional page, but no content has been left out of this version I have provided here. I have merged the available material into this version of the document, although some of the material may be in a slightly different order than the original document created by Mary Olga Gassie Landry.

The bulk of the original material is intact, using the same syntax provided by Mary, with perhaps one or two spelling corrections (perhaps made

by the woman who typed the original document). Some abbreviations were removed and spelled out completely. Beyond this, the following has been added in this new revision:

1. Footnotes, for clarification and additional related information
2. Table of Contents
3. Preface
4. A few pictures not provided in the original version
5. Addendum

Some of the definitions of terms used in the footnotes were taken from online dictionaries, or other online sources that could be considered non-authoritative. The pictures from the original document could possibly be cleaned up more, although I do not have the original sources.

There is a listing of the original book on amazon.com, recorded as “The Daniel Benoit Home”. It is listed as ASIN: B0007AMO1G. I am not aware of how it was listed as such (perhaps by the descendants of Benoit), but there is no other information about it available, other than stating the book has an unknown binding.

Jerry Gassie

Acknowledgments (Revised Edition)

Many thanks to the following organizations for their assistance:

- The West Baton Rouge Museum
(www.westbatonrougemuseum.com)
For information and pictures, primarily regarding the Eureka school in Brusly, and the later Gassie store which was reopened by William Gassie, Jr.
- St. Joseph's Academy of Baton Rouge (www.sjabr.org) &
Sisters of St. Joseph's Archives (www.sistersofstjoseph.org)
For providing documentation and a picture of the school referenced as St. Francis in this book.

Acknowledgments (Original)

To write the history of a home in your family seems easy at first, and most interesting to the writer, but great aid comes from research in court records, architectural literature and sometimes even history.

To Theodore E. Landry, a landscape architect, a frequent guest in this home at parties, goes my appreciation and thanks for his information.

To Roy J. Hotard, architect, goes my thanks for his sketch of this house, copied but improved, from my drawing of memory.

And last but not least, my thanks are extended to my husband, Paul B. Landry, Jr., who helped with the editing and to Mrs. L. I. Lefeaux, Jr. for her beautiful typing of all this history.

May 1975

Mary Olga Gassie Landry
(Mrs. Paul B. Landry, Jr.)

The Esnard - Bird - Gassie Home

The happiness that existed in this lovely elegant old home in Brusly Landing, Louisiana, was often overshadowed by episodes of sadness. The house, built for comfortable, joyous living and entertainment, was the setting for many parties and social gatherings which formed a significant part of the social life of the era. While these occasions were the source of much pleasure to those who participated therein, nevertheless, the owners of the home experienced disappointment and sorrow as well.

The property was originally a Spanish land grant of 107.05 acres to Daniel Benoit, confirmed by a United States land patent issued in 1807. Public records indicate Alexander Esnard bought the back section of Benoit Plantation for \$900.00 in 1811. In 1816, he acquired the balance at a price of \$900.00, making a total of \$1,800.00. Upon the death, in 1819, of Alexander Esnard, the property passed into the hands of his widow, Marceline Daigle Esnard, and his children, Alexander Esnard, Jr. and Arthemise Esnard. Alexander Esnard, Jr. became the husband of Josephine Broussard and Arthemise Esnard married Thompson W. Bird. After the death of Alexander Esnard, Marceline Daigle Esnard occupied the home with her daughter and son-in-law until 1837, in which year Mrs. Esnard donated to her daughter an interest in the property, and a like amount to her son. However, in 1820, Thompson W. Bird purchased the home and home premises, described as measuring three-quarters of an arpent¹ front by a depth between parallel lines of forty arpents for the sum of \$400.00. The deed reserved to Mrs. Esnard the right to live in the home the rest of her life. Unfortunately, records do not disclose when or by whom the home was constructed. It appears most probable that the home was built prior to 1860, and perhaps before 1819. However, we consider circa 1840's probable date.

The home, of the 18th century Louisiana Plantation architectural style, was three stories high; the ground floor being an above the ground basement. The first floor, composed of red brick walls finished with white plaster on the inside, contained a serving room, wine cellar and a banquet room later known as a ballroom where the family entertained with dancing.

The upper stories of the home were of frame construction painted white. On the second floor a broad porch extended across the front of the edifice. The porch was enclosed with a wooden balustrade² except the opening for broad steps which led to the ground. Each side of the steps was also provided with a wooden balustrade of a design the same as that on the porch. The ceiling of the front porch was painted sky blue. The entrance door, set opposite the steps, was very tall, as also were all other doors and windows in the home. The entrance door was enhanced with a transom³ above and sidelights on either side, all embellished with sectioned panes of soft, pale wine pink glass. The sidelights, and also all exterior doors and windows were recessed the depth of the walls, approximately 12 to 14

¹ The arpent was a pre-metric French unit of measurement, especially used for land areas in parts of Canada and the southern United States and equal to about 0.85 acres. One square arpent is formally converted slightly different from state to state.

² In French, balustrade means "railing". In this context it is defined as a rail and the row of balusters or posts that support it, as along the front of a gallery.

³ A transom is the horizontal framing member between a door and a window above; it also can refer to the window above a door.

inches. All outside doors and windows had dark green shutters that proved a comfort during the warm seasons. On each side of the front porch, three hollow round wooden columns supported the roof line. One day in the late 1880's, smoke was observed pouring out of the top of the column at the corner of the house. When the fire was extinguished, it was found that a bird had built a nest in one of the columns and somehow the nest had caught fire.

A heavy, elegant wood cornice encircled the roof over the porch which was of Greek Revival design with trim of Gothic influence. This same trim was on the rest of the roof line and on roof lines of all outbuildings including a large carriage house, a stable, chicken house, kitchen, storage facility and pigeonnaire⁴. A sketch of this trim is inserted in this book. Victorian influence was seen in the furnishings of the home when Gassie bought it and furnished it.

A parterre garden⁵ in front of the home was enclosed by a white picket fence of a popular design. The big yard around the premises was bordered by a fence of similar design and construction. Several cedar trees beyond the garden fence were used by guests to tie and rest their horses in the shade when visiting the home. Just beyond the cedar trees was a slough or large drainage ditch across the front of the yard on the opposite of which was a huge oak tree reached by a decorative foot bridge across the Petite Bayou, as listed in court records of description of property, but the children called it the "big ditch".

[Reference in the Pictures section: Figure 1](#)

Originally a detached kitchen stood to the rear of the house. However, when Gassie bought the property in 1881, he added a kitchen and ironing workroom. This addition, elevated to the level of the second story, had no enclosed basement below. Stairs on both sides of the kitchen led to the ground thus furnishing ingress and egress⁶ from the outside. A wide hall ran down the center of the second floor leading to a large dining room situated across the better part of the rear of the house where a door opened into the added kitchen and workroom.

When Gassie [Sr.] acquired the property, he commissioned an artisan of France who was working in New Orleans at the time to come to Brusly and redecorate the home. The walls of the second floor hallway contained three painted panels on each side, outlined and framed with molding, as illustrated in this book. The panels were painted in the "faux marbre" (false marble) design. In non-French speaking sections, these decorative processes were known as "grained wood or marble design painting." An article describing this art of painting is inserted in this book. All interior walls of the house were finished in white plaster.

A wide mahogany balustrade stairway situated at the north end of the dining room led to the third floor on which was situated two bedrooms and a dressing room. A reproduction of the stairway is shown in the picture appearing in this book. The third floor rooms were connected by hallway across the rear of that floor, a popular floor plan of the period.

⁴ A pigeonnaire (pigeonnier in French) is a "pigeon loft", a small building intended for a pigeon farm, or birdhouse.

⁵ In French, the word parterre means "border". A parterre garden has been defined as an ornamental flower garden having the beds and paths arranged to form a pattern.

⁶ An ingress is an entrance, and an egress is an exit.

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The parlor was situated on the north side of the second floor of the house. It was a large room containing wall brackets for candles to provide illumination, candles being the customary mode of lighting when the house was constructed. Two chimneys, one on each side of the house, provided small fireplaces for heating. Each fireplace was finished with a painted embossed metal front adorned with a white marble mantel. One of the fireplaces was located in the parlor, the other in the master bedroom on the south side of the house on the second floor. A dressing room was situated behind the parlor. Another bedroom was located to the rear of the master bedroom.

The roof had two dormer windows⁷, each providing light for one of the upstairs bedrooms.

The large premises boasted of lovely, well tended trees, shrubs and flowers, and a white picket fence enclosed a parterre garden in front of the house, which provided an ideal setting for picnics and parties. Many such entertainments were held there during the occupancy of the Gassies which seemed to mark the greatest days of the grand house.

When the "War Between the States" commenced, Thompson W. Bird volunteered in the Confederate Army, converted his fortune into gold coins, placed the major part in fruit jars and cached them in a small brick building on the premises. Under the loose wood floor of the building, he dug a pit and buried the fruit jars. The remainder of the coins, he left in three earthenware jars which were placed on the floor of the structure. He stationed slaves to guard his treasure, one by day and one by night. Upon a return from duty, he dug up the jars with the help of Buck Woods, a slave, and placed the money in the kitchen of the home. Bird told Woods that Bird would rebury the money the next night, alone, because Bird wanted no one to know his new hiding place. Bird also threatened Buck with death should Buck discover the new cache and reveal its whereabouts to anyone. Tradition has it that Bird did not even tell his wife the whereabouts of the fortune lest she inadvertently disclose its hiding place.

Shortly after Bird returned when the war was over, he suffered a stroke and lost his speech completely. His paralysis was such that he could never convey to his wife the location of the money. The Birds had no children. The money was never found. With time, Mrs. Bird's funds were depleted, and she was compelled to mortgage the property. Some assistance was provided by friendly neighbors who, according to family lore, furnished food for about a year. Family narratives recount that of the neighbors, the Hebert family was most generous to the Birds.

At Bird's death, his widow saw the property sold at sheriff's sale to defray unpaid taxes. To the neighbors who befriended her, Mrs. Bird donated the contents of the home which consisted of beautiful furniture of the French and American Empire periods. One particularly interesting item was a life-size oil portrait of Mr. Bird in his Confederate uniform. The portrait was contained in a handsome frame

⁷ A dormer is a structural element of a building that protrudes from the plane of a sloping roof surface. Dormers are used, either in original construction or as later additions, to create usable space in the roof of a building by adding headroom and usually also by enabling addition of windows. A dormer window is a window set into the dormer. Like skylights, dormer windows are a source of light and ventilation for top floors, but unlike skylights (which are flush with the roof surface) they also increase the amount of headroom in the room and allow for more usable space.

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measuring approximately 8 to 9 feet in height. Numerous items of furniture were given the Hebert family, and were eventually sold on the antique market in New Orleans. The portrait of Mr. Bird, however, has been retained in the family by relatives in Baton Rouge. For several years, the portrait was on display in the Historical Museum in Port Allen.

When the property was sold for taxes in 1881, William Gassie, Sr. had previously paid the taxes for the years 1875 to 1878, inclusive, as a favor to Mrs. Bird. Mr. Gassie was interested in acquiring the property which was then burdened with a mortgage in the sum of \$1,225.53, plus 5% interest from 1869; held by one Arthur Thibault. Several smaller liens also encumbered the property. As the highest bidder at the tax sale, Mr. Gassie acquired the property for the sum of \$1,380.00, which the records show to be two-thirds of its appraised value in 1881. That valuation represents a mere minute fraction of the present day replacement value of the home, excluding the approximately 100 acres of land which formed part of the estate.

After acquiring the property, William Gassie, Sr. moved into the house, with his wife, Appoline (Pauline), his daughters, Rema and Alice, and his son, William Gassie, Jr. The furniture in the bedrooms was of early Victorian with massive four poster beds, one bed in particular was greatly oversized, with hollow hexagon posts in mahogany, and carved headboard. The focal point in the parlor was the large prominent gold leaf framed mirror over the mantel of the same design as the Lincoln period of the furniture. The dining room of the Lincoln period also had a large massive sideboard with carvings of a full sized dog's head at the uppermost point, birds and rabbits applied to the doors; a side server and large dining table with heavy chairs. This dining room furniture was formerly in St. Delphine home and bought by Gassie to help the brother-in-law when he and his sister were forced to sell the plantation⁸.

The pleasure the family experienced as occupants of the grand house was short-lived. Rema, the elder daughter, died seven months later at age 14, while attending St. Michael's Boarding School at Convent, Louisiana. Upon the return of the young lady's body for burial, only a handful of persons attended the funeral because people thought the deceased had died of yellow fever which was then believed to be contagious, but it was learned later that she died of pneumonia.

Six years after the death of his elder daughter, William Gassie, Sr. experienced the death of his wife, Pauline. At this time the daughter, Alice, was away attending school as was also her brother, William, Jr. Alice left school to return home and manage the home for her father and brother. Some time thereafter, Alice became engaged to marry Octave Levert, son of a prominent West Baton Rouge family. All preparations for the marriage were complete when Alice died of typhoid fever, two weeks before the wedding date. She was buried in her wedding gown in 1891. Following her death a circular concerning her was anonymously distributed throughout the parish. A copy of that document is included in this book. Although

⁸ There is a Historical Marker in the town of Brusly for the St. Delphine Plantation ("The Big House"). William's brother-in-law would have been Isadore Daigle, who was married to Julia Gassie, William Gassie's sister. Isadore was the son of L. Isadore Daigle, who died prior to the sale of the St. Delphine property to August Levert. The furniture mentioned would likely have been purchased in the early 1870's. More details on the St. Delphine Plantation are available on the web site for Brusly, LA (www.bruslyla.com).

family members have surmised the author of the pamphlet, its true source has never been known to a certainty.

Alice's death left Mr. Gassie alone except for his son, William, Jr., who graduated from Springhill College, Mobile, Alabama, cum laude, in 1892. Although William Gassie, Jr. was graduated with a degree in Arts and Sciences, with majors in Greek and Latin, he made immediate plans to enter Cornell University to become an engineer.

In Memory of Alice Gassie

(author unknown)

Kind and gentile Alice, just in the bloom of her young life, has been called to her final rest in heaven. Hers was a beautiful life filled with maidenly virtues. Left without the tender counsels of a saintly mother whom she has now gone to meet, she proved a solace and comfort to her devoted father, and a tender guide in the rearing of a younger brother. To her the silver lining of the clouds was ever turned outward. Firm in her attachments, devoted to those depending upon her justice and kindness, a life unsullied, her later days were colored with the brightness that enamels a pure and well spent existence. Taken from us she now lives in a heavenly home where the mourner's tear is wiped away forever. Sorrow clouds our heart at her absence, but joy reigns absolute at her translation to an angelic home. Adieu, adored, dear Alice, our parting is but for a time.

A FRIEND

Port Allen, Nov. 2, 1891.

Reference in the Pictures section: Figure 5

After Alice's death her beautiful long tresses of hair were cut off and woven into several patterns of plaiting to form a watch chain with each end enclosed in a gold cap and chain, which was a custom of those days. Her father wore this as a watch chain across his vest. This chain is on display in the West Baton Rouge Historical Museum⁹.

His [William Gassie, Jr.'s] penchant for engineering is easily understood when it is known that while in Springhill, he devised a method to provide running water for his bedroom on the third floor of the home. His plan was simple. He merely installed a cistern on top of the one located on the side of the house. From this source, he piped water to his tub and lavatory in his dressing room on the third floor.

The summer before he left to enroll at Cornell, he decided to travel extensively with his good friend, Guy Hebert, a graduate attorney. When he announced his plan, his father readily agreed. The Senior Gassie realized he was to be alone most of that summer and himself decided to take a vacation. Being a card-playing friend of Lew Cody, better known as "Buffalo Bill", it is quite probably that the elder Gassie found "Buffalo Bill" that summer and renewed his acquaintance with

⁹ According to the WBR Museum, this item was returned to Mary Olga Gassie Landry in 1977.

his long time crony. "Buffalo Bill" was such a close friend of William Gassie, Sr., that whenever Cody came to the Baton Rouge area with a circus, the Gassie children were always taken to Cody's tent. It was Cody's custom to have an Indian family in attendance, much to the delight of the Gassie children at seeing "Buffalo Bill" in person, and their fright at encountering live Indians.

In 1892, William Gassie, Sr. remarried, taking as his second bride Eda Schexnayder of Thibodeaux, La., a young lady 21 years of age. From this marriage the following children were born:

Edward, b. 10-9-1893, d. 9-23-1897;
Julian, b. 9-15-1898, d. 4-16-1902;
Joseph Harry, b. 6-29-1897, d. 9-26-1952 (married Wilmae Edwards)
Marion Mark, b. 2-23-1901, d. 1-13-1961 (married Cecile Hebert)

Family tradition recounts that Mrs. Eda Gassie's graciousness was readily reciprocated by the acceptance and love of her stepson, William Gassie, Jr. Her charm and warmth also endeared her to her step-grandchildren, whom she considered as her own grandchildren, even though she had children of her own by their grandfather. On the birthdays of the several step-grandchildren, Mrs. Gassie gave as presents pieces of jewelry left by the children's deceased grandmother until all were given.

William Gassie, Sr. operated a large country general merchandise store known as "Anchor Store", aptly so named because river boats anchored at a pier on the river bank in front of the establishment, which was situated at the corner of River Road and what later became known as Addis Lane, on property owned by Mr. Gassie's mother-in-law. As part of his operation, Gassie advanced funds to his customers. The building, large and two-story, had living quarters at the back of the second floor, the front part of this floor being a warehouse or stock storage.

When those two men [William Gassie, Jr. & Guy Hebert] returned from their summer travels in time for William Gassie, Jr. to enter Cornell University, they learned to their dismay that conditions had greatly changed, investments had gone bad and they were broke.

The financial tragedy caused William Gassie, Jr. to cancel his reservation at Cornell and go to work instead. Having a degree from Springhill College, he secured employment as a school teacher in a one room school located at Sardine Point. He rode to school each day on horseback. His pay was \$25.00 a month, which the parents of the school children provided by taking up a monthly collection among themselves. At the end of his second year of teaching, William Gassie, Jr. felt he was making no financial progress and decided to look for other work. The school at which the younger Gassie taught no longer exists. It was taken in a levee set back years after his brief teaching career ended.

A few years later, William Gassie, Sr. closed out his mercantile business and retired to his home in Brusly Landing. The store remained closed for several years.

In 1898, William Gassie, Jr. entered the business world. He reopened the store formerly operated by his father. He lived in bachelor's quarters on the second floor of the store building. He was attended by a former family slave who served as his faithful and trusted valet and servant.

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William Gassie, Jr. did no long enjoy a bachelor's life. In 1902, he took Lillian Mary as his bride. The young couple lived in Brusly, Louisiana, with the groom's father and stepmother. This arrangement lasted for a while, and then the Junior Gassies moved into the living quarters in the Gassie store. At this time the valet left, vowing that he "would not work for no woman."

This property on which the Gassie Store was situated was owned by Mrs. Trasimond Hebert¹⁰, grandmother of William Gassie, Jr. Mrs. Hebert offered to leave her interest in the property, which included considerable acreage, to her grandson if he and his wife would move into Mrs. Hebert's home and take care of Mrs. Hebert and her unmarried daughter, Azema, for the rest of their lives, including a \$40.00 monthly contribution to Azema as long as she lived. Mr. Gassie replied that he could make no decision on the matter until he first discussed the proposal with his wife and his wife would be the one most directly concerned with the care of the two ladies. Later, Mr. Gassie advised his grandmother that her offer was accepted. He and his wife moved into the grandmother's home and cared for Mrs. Hebert and her daughter. Mr. Gassie continued to operate the store and plant the acreage in sugarcane and cotton, giving employment to the black laborers living on the place. There were twenty-four Negro cabins, some larger occupied by two families.

[Reference in the Pictures section: Figure 7](#)

At Mrs. Hebert's death, William Gassie, Jr. inherited her half interest in the property which contained approximately 100 or so acres extending from the Mississippi River to the Texas and Pacific Railway right of way at Addis, Louisiana. He acquired the interest of the other half of the tract from his grandfather's heirs for the sum of \$5,075.00. In compliance with his agreement with Mrs. Hebert, he paid his aunt, Azema Hebert, the sum of \$40.00 per month until her death.

In 1906, St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Brusly, Louisiana, burned. Miss Aurelie Levert, church organist, staged plays and parties to raise funds to purchase a new church organ. Entertainments were held at the home of various church parishioners, the mistress of each home serving as hostess. Each hostess selected as the party theme, the foods and culture of a particular foreign country. The hostesses dressed in authentic costumes of the country selected. Card playing as a rule and chances or raffles added to the pleasure and enjoyment of the assembled guests.

Beginning the first Sunday of Lent, parties were held in the following homes:

1. Dr. and Mrs. Mark W. Levert
Iceland – ices, ice cream, cookies and similar edibles were served.
2. Mr. and Mrs. Olga Mary
Holland – A Dutch Beer Party; Refreshments consisted of beer, sandwiches and other appropriate foods.

¹⁰ This is Mrs. Rosemond Hebert (also spelled Rosamond), whose maiden name would be Pauline Marson. Some sources have her full name as Marguerite Pauline Marson. She was the mother of William Gassie's first wife, Pauline Hebert. Her sister Elmire Marson was the wife of Pierre Gassie, the father of William Gassie, Sr.

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3. Mr. and Mrs. August Levert, Jr.
Japan – the guests enjoyed tea, rice cakes, sandwiches, cookies and other sweets.
4. Mr. and Mrs. Emile Gassie
The scheduled entertainment was cancelled due to inclement weather.
5. Palm Sunday
Mr. and Mrs. William Gassie, Sr.
Italy – A spaghetti meal
6. Easter Sunday
St. Francis School Auditorium
The Grand Finale – A United States Ball – A patriotic theme – The auditorium was decorated with American Flags and bunting. A band provided music for dancing – refreshments were enjoyed by all.

An admission charge was levied at each party. Guests paid for their refreshments. The events were availed of as an opportunity to socialize with friends and renew old acquaintances. A commencement hour was set for each party, but guests were urged to remain as long as they desired. The parties were a huge success. When the final party was held, it was learned that enough funds had been raised to purchase an organ for the church to be rebuilt.

As a young swain, William Gassie, Sr. often went to New Orleans with his brother, Emile, in search of pleasure and entertainment. On one such occasion, William, as a joke, decided to have his fortune told.

In his advanced age, William Gassie, Sr. became ill and developed a tumor on his left hand. His ailment left him somewhat depressed. In 1907, his friends decided to give him a surprise birthday party on his seventy-second birthday to cheer him up. As his assembled friends raised their glasses in a toast, he turned pale. His friends were alarmed and inquired what was the matter. He told them he recalled that as a young man, he and his brother Emile had gone to New Orleans, as they frequently did, and on one such occasion, he, William, had his fortune told. He then told his friends that over the years a number of things the fortune teller told him had come to pass, and that the last prediction was that he would die when 72. The tumor on his left hand gradually worsened. A few months after his seventy-second birthday, he went to New Orleans. Examination disclosed that surgery was suggested because the condition was cancerous, and there was no known cure at that time. As there were no anesthetics in those days, the patient was given huge quantities of liquor to drink in the hope it would put him in an intoxicated stupor and lessen the pain of the operation. He was accustomed to drinking morning, noon and night, a custom with some in those days, and anesthetization proved of little effect. During the surgery, the patient's screams could be heard blocks away. Following the operation, William Gassie, Sr. returned home. He died of cancer, a few days before his 73rd birthday in 1908.

A garden party was planned for July 14, 1911, to celebrate the seventh birthday of Mary Olga, the oldest child of William Gassie, Jr. Unhappily, a torrential rain developed by noon of the party date, and the celebration was cancelled. The disappointment was somewhat relieved by presentation to the honoree of a silver thimble bearing her initials and date, which gift had been acquired for the occasion.

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In 1911, St. Francis Catholic School, operated by the St. Joseph nuns in Brusly Landing, Louisiana, closed because of a lack of students. At that time, although the population in Brusly, and the surrounding area, was increasing, the financial condition of the vicinity was not good. Many persons, who formerly sent their children to the school, could no longer afford the tuition. The St. Joseph nuns went to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and there established a private school known as St. Joseph Academy, which still exists as one of the most prominent private schools in that city¹¹.

[Reference in the Pictures section: Figure 8](#)

At this same time, the small elementary public school known as "Eureka" was located across the road from the Gassie property. The closure of St. Francis Catholic School increased enrollment at Eureka to the point that all students could not be accommodated there. To relieve the overcrowding, the Parish School Board rented the basement of the Gassie home as a classroom for the Eureka fourth grade, its largest class. In 1912, Brusly High School was constructed at Brusly, Louisiana. All students of Eureka School were then transferred to Brusly High School for the year 1912 and later years. After this, the Gassie home became a boarding house for teachers at Brusly High School. When the Gassie home was sold in 1919, blackboards, which had been installed in the basement which had been used as a classroom in 1911, were still hanging on the walls of the large banquet room of this old home.

[Reference in the Pictures section: Figure 9](#)

In 1916, Alfred Hebert, father of Elmo and Reaud Hebert, approached members of the Gassie family seeking permission to explore the property in search of the gold fortune reputedly buried on the place by Thompson W. Bird during the Civil War. An agreement was reached whereby Hebert defrayed the cost of the workmen employed on the project, and Gassie fed the crew while the search progressed. It was also agreed that Hebert and Gassie would share equally any gold found. Buck Woods, the negro slave who purportedly assisted Thompson W. Bird in burying the treasure, at first under the brick outbuilding, was still living, although then nearly 100 years old. He assisted in the search by pointing out locations where he thought the treasure might likely be found. Mr. Hebert utilized a metal detecting instrument which he obtained for this particular purpose. One day the instrument indicated the presence of metal in the ground near a large oak tree. Excavation of the spot began immediately. When the spade hit earthenware in the hole, Mr. Hebert told Marion Gassie, the younger half-brother of William, Jr., "Go get your brother Willie and tell him we have found the money." When Willie Gassie, Jr. reached the scene, he learned that Hebert had uncovered only large broken pieces of a large earthenware container. It was then that Willie Gassie, Jr. recalled that as a boy, he had, at his mother's bidding, disposed of the pieces of a large broken jar across the "big ditch" near what was then a rather small oak.

¹¹ Actually, this information is not entirely accurate. The school in Brusly had no association with St. Joseph's Academy of Baton Rouge, which was established in 1868. It is possible that the sisters who served in Brusly had also served at St. Joseph's. St. Joseph's does not have documentation of the school in Brusly being called St. Francis, but it could be that it was indeed. The available documentation states that the school in Brusly was opened in 1891; closed in 1899 'because of the schism that divided the parish'; reopened 4 years later in 1903; and closed for good in 1911. It was always a day school. Relations with the pastor were always a bit difficult, and finances accounted in large part for the difficulties.

The Esnard - Bird - Gassie Home

In 1918, William Gassie, Jr. advised his stepmother¹² she should not live in the big house alone with her youngest son¹³, the older son¹⁴ having already volunteered in the United States Army of World War I. He promised his stepmother that if she would move into a smaller house which he owned and which was located nearby his own home, he would take care for her the rest of her life. Mrs. Eda Gassie accepted her stepson's offer and lived in a house of his until his death in 1953, when her son bought the house from William Gassie's estate. After Mrs. Gassie moved out, people of the area believed the house to be haunted. Strange noises were reportedly heard there at night.

In 1919, the house was sold to J. T. Hanjaras, who later transferred it to his brother, Nick. In the 1920's, the house, which had remained vacant for quite some time, was occupied by caretakers allowed to live there, rent free, by the then owner. Although aware the house was thought to be haunted, the tenants, being poverty stricken, the husband being unable to work because of ill health, nevertheless moved in. After remaining in the house for a time, the caretakers requested and were granted permission to rent out a room. It is reported that the roomer, a dauntless individual, heard noises at night and decided to investigate. He found that in the parlor, wall brackets had been removed and placed on the floor in front of the fireplace. He also found that bats, which were roosting in the chimney, were flying around the room. Apparently the bats fluttering around the wall brackets were the source of the eerie noises which caused the house to be known as a haunted house.

Children of the neighborhood always referred to the house as "the Castle" because of its vast size and ornate trim which caught their youthful fancy.

In the late 1930's, the grand old house was demolished. Dilapidated and in ruin from lack of maintenance, it had become a "white elephant" to its owner. The final rumor connected with the place is that the Hanjaras searched for and found the fortune buried by Thompson W. Bird. Thus ends the history of a grand old landmark of its time.

END

¹² Eda (Schexnayder) Gassie

¹³ Marion Mark Gassie

¹⁴ Joseph Harry Gassie

Figures and Pictures

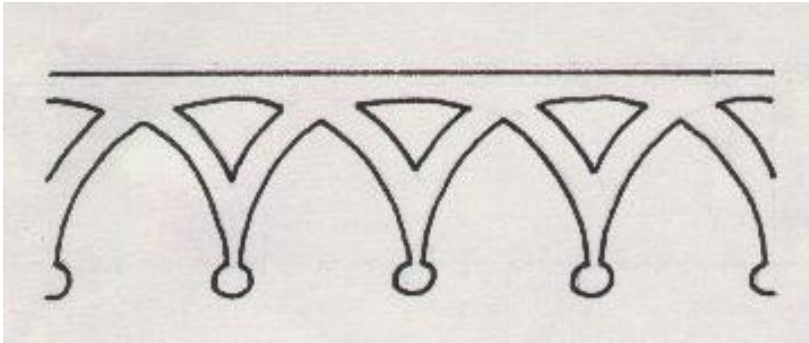


Figure 1- Trim around the roof of the home and on all out buildings

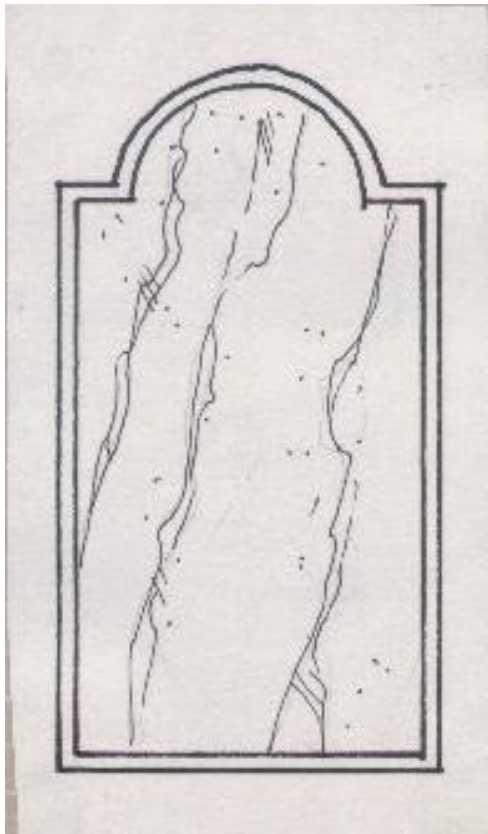


Figure 2 - Panels on walls, on both sides of the hallway

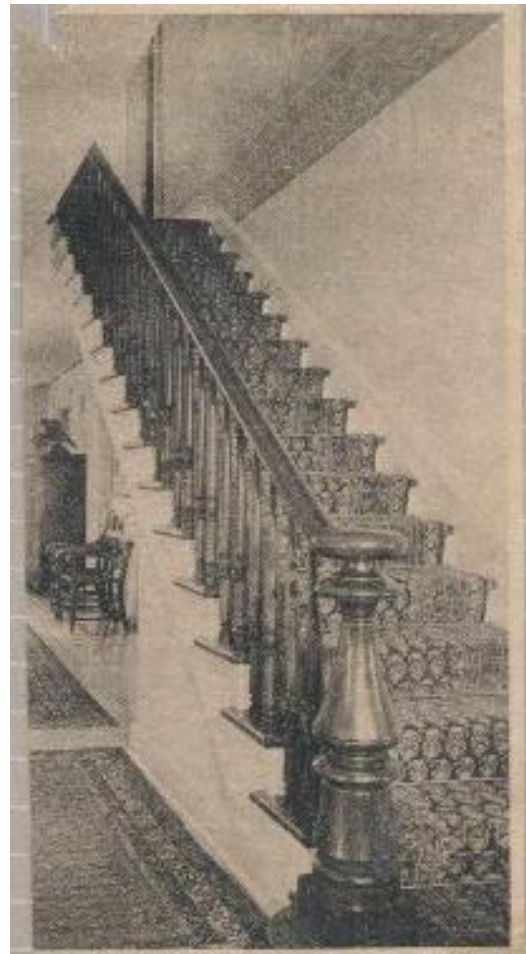


Figure 3 - Replica of stairway in dining room

TO RESTORE GRANDEUR

Master Wood Grainer to Work on Gallier House

By JEANIE BLAKE
Alchemists sought, in vain, to transform base metals into a higher, more desirable form, namely gold.

Also, no miraculous products were created and these early scientists failed in their plot.

Much wiser, however, in their aim were the early Egyptian wood designers who, in 3,000 B.C., designed wood to resemble marble.

Years passed and this art form, called "marbled" or

wood graining," continued to transform base metals into a higher, more desirable form, namely gold.

In efforts to restore the original grandeur of Gallier House, the Ella E. West Foundation has hired Malcolm Robson, a master wood grainer from London, to duplicate the Villax Carré mansion's "fancy wood."

Wood graining, a process by which any paintable material can be glazed to resemble wood, was used extensively in Gallier House, both indoors

and out.

When Gallier House was reworked in 1871, Ernest Munster of New York was assigned the task of duplicating the "false wood" which had been painted over. Luckily, the only retouching was needed to salvage the "marbled" baseboards in the formal, double parlor.

Munster died two weeks after he finished his work in the main building.

Now Robson, a fifth generation wood grainer, has ar-

rived to complete the task which was started four years ago. His mission, which should take two weeks, includes tacking all the outside doors, the kitchen, parlor, servants' quarters and a closet in the main living area.

It is only after a surface has been prepared with paint, that the hubbub of the wood grainer are employed — he converts the surface area with varnish and then deftly applies grain marks after the varnish has "set." Lastly, the entire expanse is covered with varnish for durability.

"It is both a practical and a decorative idea," explains Robson. "If one gets tired of oak, they can have the surface changed to resemble any type of wood which suits here."

Since it takes at least three years to train someone before he can start making money to pay back his education in

graining, the 31-year-old craftsman said, the craft is usually passed on from father to son.

"However, it takes at least 13 years," he continues, "before someone is ready to go on a blind date (trade any job wood graining assignment)."

Robson, who has had wood graining jobs at St. James Palace in London and the Houses of Parliament, also did work for Boris Karloff (his study), Ava Gardner (her bedroom and study), Rex Harrison (his lounge) and the Beatles (their front door).

After the completion of his Gallier House refurbishment, Robson will return to his native London. However, in a year he'll return to Louisiana to start work on St. Francis de Parish.

Previously his "blind date" in New Orleans was a successful one.

MALCOLM ROBSON, a fifth generation wood grainer from London, demonstrates his craft on a door in Gallier House. The technique,

known as "false wood," was used extensively in the 19th century French Quarter mansion.

—Staff Photo



Figure 4

In Memory of Alice Gassie.

Kind and gentle Alice, just in the bloom of her young life, has been called to her final rest in heaven. Hers was a beautiful life filled with maidenly virtues. Left without the tender counsels of a saintly mother whom she has now gone to meet, she proved a solace and comfort to her devoted father, and a tender guide in the rearing of a younger brother. To her the silver lining of the clouds was ever turned outward. Firm in her attachments, devoted to those depending upon her justice and kindness, a life unsullied, her later days were colored with the brightness that enamels a pure and well spent existence. Taken from us she now lives in a heavenly home where the mourner's tear is wiped away forever. Sorrow clouds our heart at her absence, but joy reigns absolute at her translation to an angelic home. Adieu, adored, dear Alice, our parting is but for a time.

A FRIEND.

Port Allen, Nov. 2, 1891.

Figure 5 - photocopy of original newspaper clipping

The Esnard - Bird - Gassie Home (Pictures)

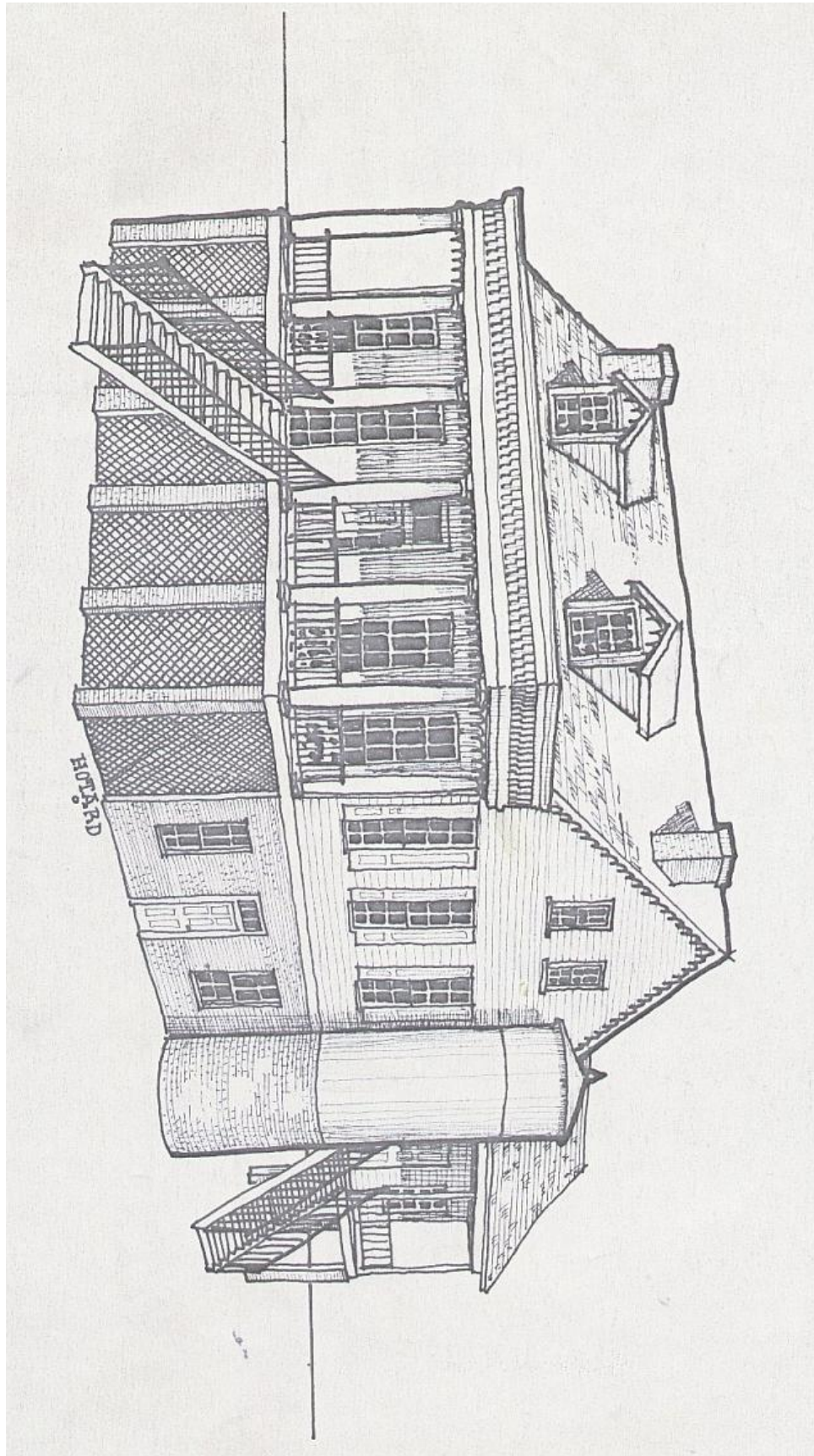


Figure 6 - Rendering of the Gassie Home by Roy Hotard

The Esnard - Bird - Gassie Home (Pictures)



Figure 7 - The Gassie Store

Picture provided by the WBR Museum. It is not clear that this would be the same building as the original "Anchor Store." Notice "Mark P.O." in the upper right corner. The city of Mark is no longer recognized. It was located near, or is now a part of Addis.

BRUSLY LANDING 1891

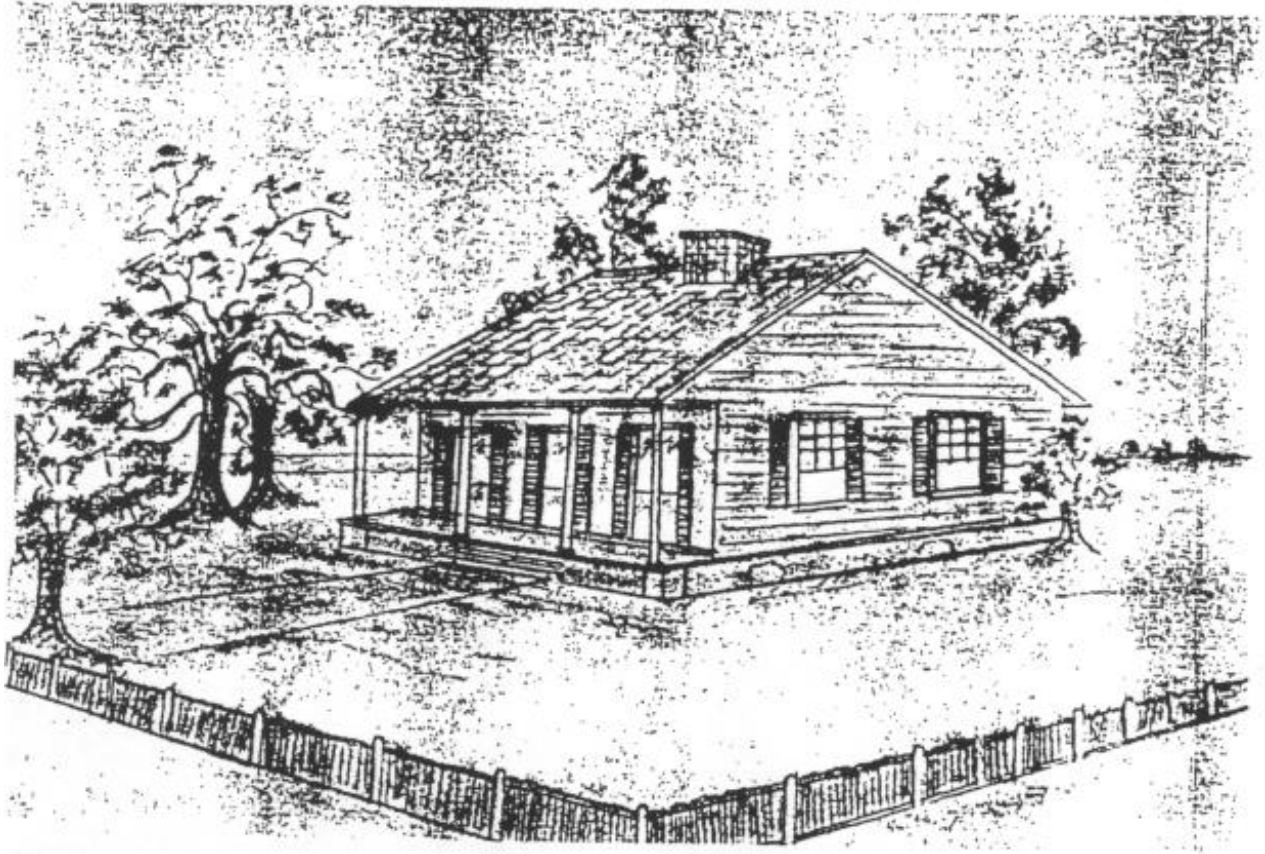


Figure 8 - Brusly Catholic School (aka St. Francis)
Picture provided by Sisters of St. Joseph's Archives

The Esnard - Bird - Gassie Home (Pictures)



6340

EUREKA CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL, BRUSLY, LA.

ILLUSTRATED POST CARD CO., N. Y.

Figure 9 - Eureka School Postcard
Picture provided by WBR Museum



Figure 10 - William Gassie Sr. and wife Appoline (Pauline) est. late 1860's



Figure 11 - Appoline (Pauline) and son William, Jr. about 1882

The Esnard - Bird - Gassie Home (Pictures)



Figure 12 - William Gassie, Sr.
From the 1890's



Figure 13 - Eda Schexnayder
1890's

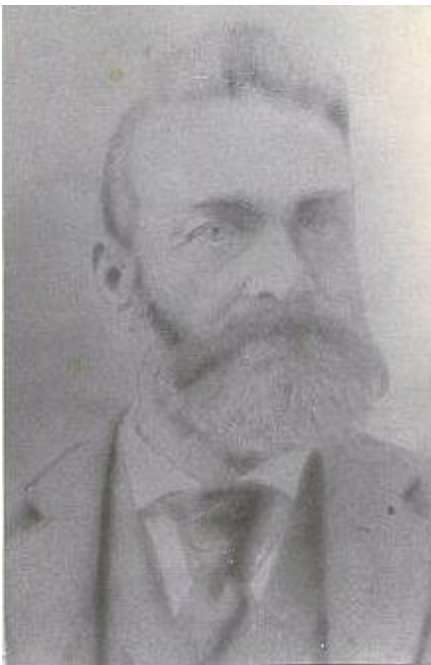


Figure 14 - William Gassie, Sr.
Circa 1900

Addendum

Catholic School at Brusly Landing

The following information was supplied by the "Sisters of St. Joseph's Archives." Note that there is no reference to "St. Francis," however, that does not mean that the school was not referred to as such during the time when it was in operation. Comments in brackets [] were not in the original document.

Brusly Landing – 1891

Another establishment of the Sisters of St. Joseph was opened in 1891 at Brusly-Landing, a little village not far from Baton Rouge. Father Laroche, the Pastor, had several times begged Mother Stephanie for religious [something's missing here?], promising her that if she would only send him Sisters he would furnish them with everything needed. Mother Desiree Tissot, 1891-186, Sister Margaret Labarre and Sister Estelle Landry were the ones chosen to open this house. Imagine their surprise when they arrived, to find not only a very dirty but also a very unfurnished house. The good Pastor apologized for this state of affairs, saying that he like St. Thomas, was unable to believe that he would really have his desire satisfied until he actually saw the Sisters. Father Laroche now appealed to all the parishioners for help in cleaning the house destined for the Sisters, and he himself bought all the furniture. In the meantime the Sisters took all their meals at the priest's residence, while they were lodged at the home of a good lady, Mrs. Hayden.

A week later their new dwelling, which was composed of three rooms and a chapel was ready for occupancy. The garret was used as a dormitory for two of the Sisters. The first year they had an attendance of ninety pupils, while the following year every child in the parish attended, which made a total enrollment of one hundred and fifteen children. No boarders were taken because of the nearness to Baton Rouge. The subjects that were taught at this time were English, French, music and needle-work.

Everything was running smoothly under the administration of Mother Raphael Sutherland, 1896-1899, when a schism divided the parish of Brusly-Landing. The schismatic parishioners were forbidden to have any religious ceremonies or instruction and for that reason the school was closed in August, 1899. The Schism was settled more quickly than had been expected. However, one was not positive if these conditions would last; therefore four years elapsed before the school was reopened.

The reopening was attended with all the difficulties of the first one. Money was so scarce that the Sisters did not have sufficient funds to make the many needed repairs. These conditions continued during the administrations of Mother Margaret Mary Labarre, 1903; Mother Mary Agnes Wiendahl, 1904-1907; Mother Bernadine Henly, 1907-1909; Mother Louise Martina Redmond, 1909-1911. Although with the coming of this last mentioned Superior, the financial conditions of the house were improved, yet not to such an extent that would justify the Sisters in keeping it open. Thus in November 1911, the house was definitely closed.