

# Papers give vivid view of Garyville

The papers lay crushed under a pile of old children's books, novels, and dictionaries in a box in Walter Stebbins' former office at the Timbermill museum in Garyville.

"I wanted to put all the books in the vault," said Norman Marmillion, director of the Garyville Timbermill Museum. As he emptied one box of books into another, he found the papers that he and Carl Monica had been looking for for years, papers that have changed the scope of the Timbermill project and added excitement to the job of renovating the old office building.

Marmillion found the architectural drawings of the original plans done by New Orleans architect Southron R. Duval.

"I found them the last week of December," Marmillion said. "The week of Christmas."

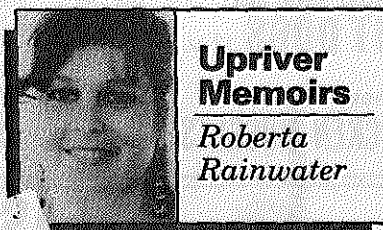
The drawings are of every building the Lyon Cypress Lumber Co. built in the town of Garyville in 1903: the sawmill, the planing mill, the homes, the monorail, the saloon, the hotels and big store, everything having to do with the original town.

"We found prints on vellum, tracing paper, linen, in watercolor, and the original blueprints done by Duval," Marmillion said. "All his works were in one box. We also found the 1917 specifications that tell everything that was in the buildings and on the property.

"As soon as I found them I called everyone." When Monica, president of the Garyville Timbermill Museum Association, got to the mill, Marmillion sat him down at his big desk and let him look at the prints. Monica was quiet for a long time.

"He sat at the desk and just grinned," Marmillion said. "He'd been looking for them for five years."

The designs were found at a fortuitous moment for the association. They were days away from



repairing the leaking roof on the building, renovating it to pre-Hurricane Betsy style.

But what had been on the building then was not the original roof, as shown by Duval's drawings.

"What's amazing about it is why they came up with this design," Marmillion said. Most out-of-state businesses — especially lumber businesses — built nondescript buildings in the style of the architecture of the area they come from. But not Lyon Cypress.

"Why did they build something so distinctive? I think it was because the owners were from Chicago and wanted to make this look like a Louisiana business, so they made it look like River Parishes architecture. They chose Duval to interpret the design to fit the area. It was a great public relations move on their part."

The building is a Creole-style house with a double-pitch, hipped roof. Originally, the roof was red and the building was two tones of gray, with shutters and dark green trim. The facade sign was turquoise with Chinese red and black lettering.

It was a colorful building with galleries that went around on both upper and lower stories. It resembled a plantation home of the period.

"It's the only lumber office which reflects Louisiana architecture in the state," Marmillion said. Bernard Lemmon, professor emeritus of architecture at Tulane University in New Orleans, told him that the office building was "one of the prettiest build-

ings between Baton Rouge and New Orleans."

Duval was born in New Orleans in 1862, the youngest son of Theodore and Emily (Rhodes) Duval. He lived in New Orleans until 1876, when at 14, he began working as a civil engineer, topographer and railroad worker in Canada, the United States and Mexico before settling in New York City.

In New York, he learned architecture, married, and then returned to New Orleans in 1890 when his father died. Here he formed the firm of Favrot & Duval and became a successful architect.

He designed St. George's Episcopal Church and several mansions on St. Charles Avenue, and McDonogh No. 6 school on Chestnut Street. He died in 1916. One of his last projects was the building designs of the town of Garyville.

In retrospect, it seems natural that Duval obtained the lumber company project. His grandfather Rhodes, of Pascagoula, Miss., "was a prominent pioneer sawmill man and operated the first circular saw in the south," says the Volume 1 of the Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Louisiana published in 1892. More than that, Duval was among the best in his field in New Orleans.

"Lyons Cypress picked the best architect they could," Marmillion said. "He had all the right credentials, and he was a French Creole. His design follows the great architectural tradition started by Gallier, de Pouilly (St. Louis Cathedral), and Dakin (the Baton Rouge Capitol). These men are the Frank Lloyd Wrights of the 19th century.

"We recovered one of the great architectural treasures of the century," he said. "I still think we're in the process of discovering what we have here.

"When it was built, it was the largest building in the area —

even larger than San Francisco Plantation."

The roof elevation was 53 feet, tall enough to see over the levee — which was lower than it is now — and there were no trees to obscure the view of the Mississippi River from the upper gallery and cupola or widow's walk. The area had been Glencoe Plantation before Lyon Cypress bought it and the cypress swamps that extended into Livingston Parish, where the company also established the town of Livingston.

The Garyville Northern Railroad was built to connect the two towns and carry the cut cypress to the mills in both towns. The swamps have been taken over by hardwoods, with few cypress trees left. The company cleared the area of cypress in less than 20 years.

But what Lyon Cypress left was not limited to the devastated swamps. It also left a historical treasure to the River Parishes.

The Garyville Timbermill Museum Association has dedicated itself to preserving the mill and opening it to tourists and students. Its long-term plans include opening a small restaurant in one of its buildings for bus tours, working with the Louisiana Nature & Science Center in New Orleans to create a nature trail on some of the land, and renovating the mill office to its former plantation style.

The museum is available to schools for field trips. Call Marmillion at 535-3202 for information.

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