

# Opinions

## Taxing questions

First, on November 22, 2021, the Police Jury made a smart move on a motion by Brady Nelson and seconded by Rodney Sones to buy the computer software necessary for the Police Jury to do its own billing for the \$12 per month garbage tax. JCP, Inc. has been charging us \$1.75 per invoice to accomplish that billing. The people of Catahoula Parish were paying \$1.75 per invoice whether anyone actually paid the invoice itself or not. JCP, Inc. was in effect charging only to bill, not to collect. Now the Police Jury will be able to do its own billing. Whatever you think of the garbage tax, and personally I am not happy that the Police Jury has decided to tax us without submitting the question to the voters in a referendum, this is, in my opinion, an improvement on the administration of the tax. Besides, who knows when the Police Jury might decide to pass another tax? They can probably use the software to collect that one, too.

Next, the School Board's big move to rebuild the gymnasium, cafeteria and classroom building in Harrisonburg is coming up for a vote, Saturday,

December 11th, 2021. It is a vote that will have consequences for every area of the parish and every school child in it. If the Harrisonburg-Manifest-Aimwell referendum passes, it's likely that similar referenda will be put to the voters at least in the Sicily Island and Jonesville areas. If the property tax to replace the old gym-cafeteria-classroom building in Harrisonburg fails, then it is probable that similar referenda will not be proposed elsewhere in Catahoula Parish, at least not in the near future.

So, what seems to be the issue in Harrisonburg (other than paying more property taxes)? Understandably, some people want to know, "What about the gym and classrooms up on the hill?" One answer is that the building is now leased to the Sheriff Department for training. A second is that the building is presently used for records storage and keeping old text books just like the Dallas School Book Depository which was the site Lee Harvey Oswald used to snipe President John F. Kennedy in 1963.

A third point, I'm told, is that it has been over thirty years since the school board has asked

the voters to approve a project to upgrade the Catahoula Parish schools physical plant. And the building up for replacement had its corner stone laid down over 97 years ago. Time flies when one has fun.

No doubt everyone wants the best for their own children. We might be a little less charitable, however, when it comes to other peoples' children. But there's another consideration: the general economic well-being of the entire parish. Good – or at least half-way decent - schools are an absolutely essential part of any area's economic development plan. If the schools are unattractive, poor or failing, it's game over. Turn out the lights.

We have a lot of heavy lifting to do to raise up Catahoula Parish. The first load is on the voters affected by the proposition on the ballot this December 11th. Whether any more improvements to Catahoula's schools occur may well be decided by what the voters do about the old gym and cafeteria in Harrisonburg.

It's your call, Catahoula.

By: Leo Chappelle

## Living in Sargent House

If you've lived in Louisiana any time at all, you have probably run across many old buildings that the owners apparently abandoned. You may have wondered why or how something that was once so beautiful would be left to history and the elements.

Thanks to a Facebook group called 'Abandoned Louisiana' that allows members to share photos, express interest, or ask questions about abandoned properties throughout Louisiana, I happened on a post about the Sargent House in Harrisonburg. So I immediately joined the group. Of course, the Sargent House is not exactly 'abandoned' but it looks like it may be to some.

I decided to add my experience with the Sargent House. I lived there as a young child. My Mom was a Sargent, and grew up there. My aunt Fannie Sargent owned the place, and we spent many a Christmas and New Years there celebrating the old year and New Year.

I wrote about it as I remembered it. They were all good memories. The response was wonderful from a lot of members thanking me for sharing my memories. Some even said I should write my memories in a book before I lose them to old age: that it was a story that needed to be told.

Of course, I appreciated their sincere comments and realized that they were absolutely right – those memories really need to be passed on to those who appreciate the past, good or bad, because the past is 'our story.' All of us are the result of the past. And we are not only entrusted with it, but obligated to share it with future generations so they may know their own history.

Among the posts and comments, this one briefly told a history that I had only heard as a child but didn't know what all it meant. It was posted by Gwen Ryder, a very active member.

[Gwen Ryder](#)

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c1800's Sargent House in Harrisonburg. The house is a story and a half traditional raised cottage with board and batten siding, constructed with wooden pegs and square nails. Scars from the Federal gunboats are said to be visible. Travelers on the steamboats would find a room at the house while waiting to finish their journey. The house is mostly unchanged from its original design- one noticeable change is the new tin roof. Possibly the oldest building in Harrisonburg. Of interest is the killing of Lt. Col. Charles Jones by the Liddell family at the Sargent house. A feud that started some twenty years earlier and some say as many as fourteen killings occurred during the feud.

The feud is a story in itself and would have to be told by historians who knew all the important, and even the unimportant details. From what I read, it could well be a Hollywood movie. I'm sure a Google search will produce a considerable amount of information on the subject.

I just wanted to write what I remembered as a four or five year old. This is what I posted:

[Leroy McMillin](#)

A lot has been written here about the Sargent House. My Mom grew up there. I lived there in my early years but visited my Aunt Fannie Sargent up until she died. I played on that porch during WWII and climbed to my hideout in a big sycamore tree right there by the porch entrance. I loved to sit in the swing on the porch. I could hear piano music being played as Aunt Fannie (Nanee) taught piano lessons. Traveling salesmen would sit in rockers on the porch and tell of their travels. Christmas was special there. Carolers would stand in the street

singing wonderful songs and spreading good will and joy, just like the pictures we saw. Eggnog was always available to those who wanted it. A few nights later we could hear the big bell at the courthouse ringing in the New Year. The big windows were open on hot nights and I could hear river boats coming and going on the Ouachita River only a few hundred feet behind the house. They blew whistles to tell the bridge tender to open the draw bridge, and to tell the Lock Master a mile up-river to prepare the lock for a boat coming through... My dad owned a café up the street and even with rationing he always managed to have coffee for the local militia led by Mr. Carter, the bank president. They marched up and down the street, some with guns and some with brooms or hay-forks if they didn't have a gun. They were ready to defend the town from the evil NAZI's or Japes, whichever came first. I loved watching them march and I wanted to be a soldier too. People talked about the war and that someone had been killed. I remember there were tears and sadness. Every time my mother took me up the street to the cafe' I saw cars, horses, and horse-drawn wagons. Only a few had money to buy gas for their cars. That's why there were so many horses. These memories are forever etched into my mind. I can recall them whenever I like. Right now seemed to be a good time to share them.

Now that I've opened that part of my brain, I can add a few more memories to that story.

For example, my Mom, Dad and I lived upstairs. Today, we could call it an Attic, but then it was just another room in the house. It had a huge four-poster bed that was so high off the floor that trunks could be slid under it. I would be lifted into bed but Mom and Dad needed a step-stool. I slept between them. I can remember smelling them. Daddy smelled like the café he operated up the street. Sometimes, it smelled like bacon or coffee. Mom always smelled fresh. Perfume, she called it. It was a pretty smell.

The mattress, probably ancient by today's standards was striped canvas and filled with feathers, it was big and fluffy, and had to be shaken once a week according to my Mom. It smelled like sleep to me. It was a good smell that went well with my nap.

The pillows were also soft but smelled heavy. That's the only way I can describe them.

Sometimes, I would roam around up there looking in every corner and under floorboards, and in old trunks that smelled like old trunks are supposed to smell – musty.

An Army uniform from WW1 and an old stained lace dress felt like it was too important to disturb. I think it was from a long lost relative.

I found an old book stuck way up under the floor and asked Nanee what it was. She looked at it sadly and said it was our Sargent family records. She showed me some pressed flowers and Penny Post Cards that someone had written something on the back. The pictures looked really old.

History was neatly stored in trunks up there. And except for a dirty ragdoll, I found nothing to play with.

I spent a lot of time in the sycamore tree out front just off the porch entrance. People would walk down the street and wave to me. I tried to hide from them.

If a salesman came by to spend the night, we might all sit on the porch as he told of his travels, or that he had children my age. I listened intently but I was too busy making my own story.

The 1927 flood water mark on the porch wall was always an attention getter. I would point to it and proudly tell someone that the 'flood came to here,' as I dutifully touched the line.

My Mom liked to swing with me in the big

swing. I loved that big old swing. Nanee might be cooking dinner for any overnight guests and it would smell good. Or sometimes she may be teaching someone to play the piano and the sound came out the big window onto the porch. It didn't always sound good, but most of the time it was good enough.

The porch was screened from one end to the other, so I could play all I wanted without mosquitoes bothering me.

Inside the big dining room there was a long table where guests and town-folk would come to have dinner or supper. It got wet in the flood and had bumps where the boards didn't line up well. Nanee said it was her mother's table.

There were a lot of pictures on the walls. All were of people I didn't know. They were dressed up. The front glass was like a big bubble. No one was smiling. I've got pictures of them I can show if anyone is interested.

The war was still on and no one had money to go anywhere. Sometimes my Mom would walk me up the street to Daddy's café. I always liked going up there.

Daddy hired some black ladies to cook when customers came in. They were always smiling and laughing. Daddy said they were the best cooks in the world. I know they were always glad to see me come in. Mr. Junior, they called me. I was only four.

People sitting at the counter usually ordered coffee. Coffee was rationed due to the war. So was sugar. So a Nickel cup of coffee with sugar was a popular treat. I know the militia would come in for it after they drilled in the street.

Daddy killed a big hog one time in back of the café and strung it up to carve it up. Few people had ice boxes, and even if they did, the ice would not keep meat for very long. So people line up to get pieces of that big old hog to take home to cure in their smokehouse. I just remember it being cold outside watching all the commotion.

Then he closed the café and we went back to Nanee's for the night. He may have carried me home. But that's what Dad's do.

Yes, I know a few things about the Sargent House. And on December 3, 1980 it was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Nanee would be proud to know that.

Abandoned Louisiana home page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/641841155889098>

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## Catahoula News Booster

The Catahoula News Booster is the Official Journal of the Town of Jonesville, Village of Harrisonburg, Village of Sicily Island, Catahoula Parish School Board, Catahoula Parish Police Jury, and Tensas Basin Levee Board. POSTMASTER: Send form 3579 to Box 188, Jonesville, Louisiana, 71343. Periodical class postage paid at Jonesville, Louisiana. Kim Cloessner, Publisher Identification Number is SECDUSPS556-720. Published every Wednesday. Subscription rates: By mail in Catahoula Parish-\$25.00 annually, elsewhere in Louisiana-\$30.00 annually, out-of-state-\$35.00 annually Catahoula News-Booster, 103 3rd Street, P.O. BOX 188, Jonesville, LA 71343. 318-339-7242

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