

THE HAMSHIRE HOUSE

For over a century three old homes near Taylor's Bayou in South Jefferson County have been landmarks of the area. Their history and that of their occupants throughout the years has been so intermingled that the story of one of them can hardly be told without that of the others. The land on which they stand was bought by blood at the Alamo. The patent for the William H. Smith League was applied for, and a certificate issued by the Republic of Texas to the heirs of Smith, in recognition that William H. Smith had fought and died for his country at the Alamo. But it was not until 1847, after Texas had become a state that J. Pinckney Henderson, first Governor of Texas, signed the patent granting the league of land at the head of Taylor's Bayou to the widow of William H. Smith and his children.

By the late 1840's descendants of the Acadians who had settled in Vermillion Parish and Imperial St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, were looking for new pastures for their cattle, and they turned their eyes toward the green prairies of the Texas Gulf Coast. They and their progeny were to profoundly influence the development of the cattle, rice, and oil industry in Jefferson County, Texas.

Two brothers, Pierre Onexeme and Edward T. Broussard, each had three sons who migrated to Texas. The sons of Edward were Savan, Moise, and Eloi, and Pierre Onexeme's sons were Emil, Theophile, and Deuneville. Sometime before 1850 the Broussards built large cumbersome ox carts, loaded their household possessions on them, hitched two yokes of oxen to each cart, and with their herds, began the long trek to Texas. It took eight weeks to make the trip from Vermillion Bayou to Jefferson County. On the way they had to cross several rivers and bayous. To make the crossing they tied floating logs to the carts and towed them across with a skiff in which the women and children rode.

Even before he acquired land in Jefferson County, Texas, Pierre Onexeme Broussard registered his cattle brands. On October 11, 1846, he registered two brands \overline{CD} and \overline{A} . On January 1, 1847, $3IX$ was registered to his son "Edouard Teofille Broussard," and Sh to his son "Emille Broussard." In June of that same year three brands were registered to Edward D. Broussard, who probably was Deuneville, 1^+1 , $5h$, and $h.S$.

On September 16, 1851, he acquired a deed to 1150 acres of land in the West one-fourth of the William Smith League from David and Matilda Garner. The Garners had gotten the land from William Armstrong, who received it from Mrs. Elizabeth Smith as payment for his services in clearing her headright as heir of her husband who was slain at the Alamo.

Since all the instruments relating to the land describe Pierre Onexeme as a resident of Vermillion Parish, Louisiana, and his son Emil had been living on the land for some time at the start of the Civil War in 1861, it seems unlikely that he ever lived permanently in Texas. It is more likely that Emil took care of his father's interests here. At any rate, in 1859, with the title still in Pierre Onexeme's name, Augustus Mobray of Sour Lake Station, now known as Nome, began work on a house on the land. Mobray had just completed a house for Sevan Broussard. Like Sevan's home, this house was made of wide cypress boards shipped from the Lake Arthur area of Louisiana. It was a sturdy story-and-a-half building with an outside stairway, architecture typical of the area at that time. A long porch ran down the front of the house toward the kitchen, which, like most houses then, was separate from the main house. The house was roofed with hand-drawn cypress shingles.

Before 1860 the house was complete enough to move into, although it was not until 1861 that the two large fireplaces were finished. To commemorate their completion, one of the Broussards painstakingly carved out the numerals "1861" and fixed them to the mantelpiece of one of the fireplaces. In front of

the house was a large underground cistern to supply water, and nearby was the iron washpot and battling board for laundry.

If Pierre Oneseame Broussard ever lived in the house, his stay was short, for by the time the Civil War began, his son Emil was living there, and the 1860 Census for Jefferson County shows that Emil's eldest child, Elodis, then eight years old, was born in Texas. The census also reveals that Emil's younger brother, Deuneville, then twenty-one, was a part of his household. His other brother, Theo, who was married, built a house a short distance away, also on Pierre Oneseame's land.

Along with the other Broussards, Emil began to make cattle drives to New Orleans. There, although the drive was long and dangerous, he found a profitable market. Then the Civil War plunged the country into conflict. Theo and Deuneville and their cousins Moise and Eloi, were in the fighting. Theo brought his wife to stay in the home of his brother Emil, who stayed behind to protect the women and children, and to attend to the cattle and crops. While Theo was away at war, his daughter Zilda was born in Emil's home, and a son was born to Emil and his wife.

When the war was over, the men came home battle weary and defeated. During the war there had been no market for the cattle, although Emil had furnished some beef to the Confederate Armies camped near Beaumont, and at Sabine Pass. His herds had increased, and pastures were lush further South. Emil and his family moved on to what would later be known as Langham's Ranch. Theo, too, moved to a location on Hillebrandt Bayou near where Port Acres is today, and when Deuneville married, he began to live in Theo's old home. Years later, when Theo died, he had a most unusual funeral. The bayou was at flood stage. His body was placed in a small boat and rowed out to a larger boat carrying the mourners. They floated down the bayou to a little grove of trees where he was buried. The location was lost, and Theo lies in an unmarked grave.

Early in 1866, after the Civil War was over, Eloi Broussard, younger brother of Sevan and Moise, married Mary Azema Hebert, beautiful daughter of the wealthy pioneer cattelman, Joseph Hebert. In December of 1866, a son was born to Eloi and his wife, and they named him for his grandfather and his father, Joseph Eloi Broussard.

On August 10, 1867, Pierre Oneseme Broussard deeded the old Emil Broussard home and 319 acres of land to Eloi, but they had moved into the house several months earlier, when Eloi's and Azema's son Joseph was only three weeks old. They moved so soon after the baby was born, because the weather had been dry, and the bayous were low, making it less difficult for the clumsy oxcarts carrying their household possessions to cross.

Joseph Hebert's daughter had been accustomed to an easier life. In 1860 he was one of the wealthiest cattlemen in Jefferson County, owning almost 3000 head of cattle, twelve slaves and other large holdings. But their new home was strong and warm, and in spite of hardships and loneliness, the young couple and their child settled into the house and began to make a happy life for themselves.

They had been in the house a little over a year when Eloi and the baby became ill, probably with yellow fever. In a few days Eloi was dead. For a long time the child Joseph hovered between life and death, but finally he began to recover, and Azema Broussard had to consider what to do with her life. Apparently she carried on the business of the ranch. Her brother, Ben Habert, and a negro hand lived on the place with her. In 1868 the record shows that she represented her minor son, Joseph Eloi Broussard, in the partition of the estate of his grandfather Edward T. Broussard.

After remaining a widow for several years Azema Broussard married Lovan Hamchire in 1871. The old house began to come alive again. She and

Hamshire raised a large family besides her son Joe Broussard. Their home became a meeting place for the community. There were no Catholic churches in the Taylor's Bayou area for many years, and missionary priests stopped several times a year at the Hamshires' to perform baptisms, weddings, and to celebrate the Mass. Sometimes a teacher was hired to teach school there. There were always several "hands" who slept in the big upstairs room with the Hamshire boys and rode the prairie with Lovan Hamshire in the never ending task of branding and rounding up the cattle. The upstairs room was often used for dances too, and the old walls echoed the scrape of the fiddle and the shuffle of dancing feet.

Lovan Hamshire and his crews, like the other cattlemen, made the long dangerous drives to New Orleans, and later to the railheads to get his cattle to profitable markets in the beef hungry North. Besides the cattle business, a few men began to plant rice. Lovan Hamshire was among the first to try the crop on a commercial basis. In the early 1890's he and Louis Aubey planted about sixty acres of Honduras rice near his home. He threshed about 300 sacks and sold it to Joe Broussard for \$3.00 a sack.

In 1891 Joe Broussard built a small pumping plant to irrigate rice from Taylor's Bayou. The next year, 1892, he added machinery to the grist mill he already owned to put into operation the first successful rice mill in the state. This son of Azema Hebert and Eloï Broussard was to build an empire in land, cattle, oil and rice that would reach far beyond the old house where he spent his boyhood, and profoundly affect the future of Jefferson County and Southeast Texas.

The Hamshire family was growing up, and the community surrounding the old house was growing up too. In 1895 the Gulf and Interstate Railroad was built from Beaumont to Galveston. Little towns grew up where the trains stopped. A few miles from the old Hamshire home was one of the stops, and the town that sprang up there became known as Hamshire. It bears that name

In 1898 Rev. John J. A. Gallagher came to serve Catholics in the Port Arthur-Taylor's Bayou mission area. Lovan Hamshire and his wife Asema gave an acre of land, and together, Father Gallagher, Hamshire, and the men of the community erected the first Catholic church in that vicinity. When it burned in 1960, it was the oldest Catholic church still being used as a church in Jefferson County.

One of the daughters of Lovan and Asema Hamshire, Lena, married the son of Theo Broussard, Perry. Another daughter, Eunice, married the son of Tenas Arceneaux, Presley. After the death of the Hamshires, the young Arceneaux couple began to live in the old home, and Mrs. Arceneaux, now a widow, still lives there.

The Hamshire house has weathered and settled into it's surroundings, but it has changed little since Emil Broussard first moved into it. The kitchen and dining room have been built onto the house. Wallpaper covers the once painted walls. In 1900 the house was battered by a destructive hailstorm. Again that same year it was pounded by the 1900 hurricane while the Hamshire family and friends huddled within it's walls. The roof was damaged, and the handmade cypress shingles had to be replaced. The house is in excellent condition, and in almost it's original state architecturally.

The Hamshire house has played an important part in the history of Texas and Jefferson County. The land on which it stands was bought by blood at the Alamo. It's occupants were a part of the struggles and privations of the early days of Texas' statehood. They fought and suffered defeat in the War Between the States. They saw the rise of the cattle kingdom and the beginning of the rice industry. The little schooners that so many years ago had brought lumber from Louisiana to build the house were replaced by large ships. Railroads were built where the horse and the

oxcart had been the only means of travel. The car and the airplane became commonplace, and all of them, perhaps---the ships, trains, cars and airplanes---were powered with products from oil that flowed from the ground where cattle brought by the Broussards from Vermilion Parish had once grazed.

*This is an account of the
ancestral home of
Cepithia Broussard Rod's
family - she is a friend
of Linda Hogan Clark,
Ed Hogan, Jr's daughter.*