HAUNTED JAILHOUSE IN BEAUREGARD?

Ghost hunters want to take look inside jail

Facility was site of 1928 double execution

BY SHAWN MARTIN AMERICAN PRESS

DERIDDER — Ghost hunters want to investigate Beauregard Parish’s Old Gothic Jail, where two convicted killers were executed nearly eight decades ago.

Louisiana Spirits, a group from Central Louisiana, is asking the Police Jury for access to the jail, built in 1914, to determine if it is haunted or if paranormal phenomena occurs there.

The group has chapters statewide.

One of the members from this area told Brad Duplechien, the group’s founder, about the jail and felt it would be a good subject for an investigation.

Duplechien agreed because of the history of the jail, which has been closed since 1984.

Sentenced to die

On March 9, 1928, the place earned its “hanging jail” title when Joe Genna and Molton Brasseaux were hanged for the Aug. 28, 1926 slaying of 45-yearold DeRidder taxi driver J.J. Brevelle.

The crime captured headlines across the state and nation.

The slaying was in Beauregard Parish, the body was disposed of in Vernon Parish and the taxi was found burned out in Calcasieu Parish. Brasseaux was arrested in Calcasieu Parish and Genna and three others in Orange, Texas.

As part of a robbery scheme hatched by Genna and Brasseaux, the two coaxed Brevelle into driving them to a remote spot in eastern Beauregard Parish.

There, the plan went awry, and Brevelle was severely beaten with a car leaf spring, stabbed in the head and his throat was slashed.

The crime netted the culprits around $14 and Brevelle’s Ford, which they used to leave DeRidder.

Brevelle’s mutilated body was dumped into an old mill pond in Pickering, 18 miles north of DeRidder. Genna and Brasseaux then headed for Lake Charles.

According to Genna’s and Brasseaux’s confessions, Brevelle begged the two to spare his life.

Their confessions and photos were printed in the American Press of March 10, 1927.

During the attack, Brevelle was reported to have said, “Take my money, boys, if you want my money, and let me go.”
Brasseaux was reported to have responded, “Hell no. We’re not going to let you go.”

In his last plea, Brevelle said, “I’m dying boys, I’m thrw (sic) with ... Let me go, take my money, take my car or anything you want.”

In his confession, Genna said Brasseaux cursed Brevelle and told the dying man to shut up or “I’ll knock your damn brains out.”

After dumping the body, the two returned to DeRidder for clothes and then fled. Along the way, they picked up Katie and Edna Saddler.

Their freedom was shortlived — they were caught on Sept. 2, 1926. Genna was arrested along with the two Sadler sisters and Harvey Perkins. Brasseaux was arrested in Sulphur, his hometown.

The Sadler sisters and Perkins were held as material witnesses.

Six days after their arrests, a Beauregard Parish grand jury indicted Brasseaux and Genna for Brevelle’s murder.

Genna was found guilty by a jury after a four-day trial on Oct. 15, 1926. Jurors and the judge ignored his insanity plea. On Dec. 11, Genna was sentenced to death.

Brasseaux’s three-day trial ended with his conviction on Oct. 21. He was also sentenced to death on Dec. 11.

For 15 months, the case went through the appeals process. During that time, the two each received two stays of execution.

After their appeals were exhausted, the two were hanged shortly after noon on March 9, 1928.

Genna, 25, was the first to make the short walk to the temporary gallows at the top of the jail’s spiral staircase.

He was weak from a suicide attempt the previous day when he overdosed on pills.

Beauregard Parish Sheriff’s Deputy Jim Crumpler led Genna to the platform. At 12:59 p.m., its trap was sprung. Genna was pronounced dead of a broken neck at 1:06 p.m.

Brasseaux mounted the platform at 1:14 p.m. Three minutes later, the trap was sprung. At 1:29 p.m., he was pronounced dead of a broken neck.

“Joe Genna and Molton Brasseaux had paid at the bar of justice for the murder of Joe Brevelle; they had reaped the harvest of their lives of sowing,” wrote American Press reporter Robert R. Faxon, who covered the hangings.

Beauregard Parish Sheriff Dr. J.D. Frazier reported neither man had any last words on the gallows.

However, on the way to the gallows, Genna told Crumpler: “I am dying at peace with the world. I have no hard feelings for anyone, and if I’ve got to go, I’ve got to.”

Brasseaux echoed, “I say the same thing.”

Genna was buried in Lake Charles and Brasseaux was buried in Sulphur.

The platform and hangman’s noose are long gone, but the jail, which was closed in 1984, is still there. The spiral staircase is there, easily visible upon entering the jail’s cellblock area.

Some say the jail is haunted, including some who worked there over the years. Others say its just an old building with a rich history of Louisiana jurisprudence.
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Others have died there over the years. None were officially executed like Genna and Brasseaux.

"This is why we like to come to places like this," Duplechien said. "There is so much there, and we want to take in as much as we can."

The group has investigated other famous Louisiana landmarks — the Municipal Auditorium in Shreveport, the home of the Louisiana Hayride, and the Oak Alley Plantation, Restaurant & Inn in Vacherie.

When the group was known as the South Louisiana Ghost Hunters, its investigation of the Oak Alley Plantation was featured on the Sci Fi Channel's "Ghost Hunters." The episode was the television program's top-rated show for that season.

Duplechien said conducting an investigation at the jail could increase its publicity and boost local tourism.

"However, tourism and publicity are not our main goals, as the scientific study of paranormal activity is our priority," he said.

Once the group begins an investigation of a site, it can take from three to five hours to collect the data using night vision-equipped cameras, digital and non-digital cameras, infrared thermometers and electromagnetic field meters.

Cameras are constantly monitored for any movement or strange activity. Investigators are equipped with hand-held cameras as they move about the building.

Duplechien said it takes about 12 to 20 hours to analyze video footage and photographs to determine the presence of paranormal activity.

The group’s request is expected to be recommended by the Police Jury’s economic development committee during its 4:30 p.m. meeting on Tuesday. If recommended, the full Police Jury could vote on the issue as early as the 6 p.m. regular monthly meeting.

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AMERICAN PRESS ARCHIVES Louisiana Spirits wants to conduct a search for paranormal activity at Beauregard Parish’s Old Gothic Jail, where two men were executed nearly 80 years ago.