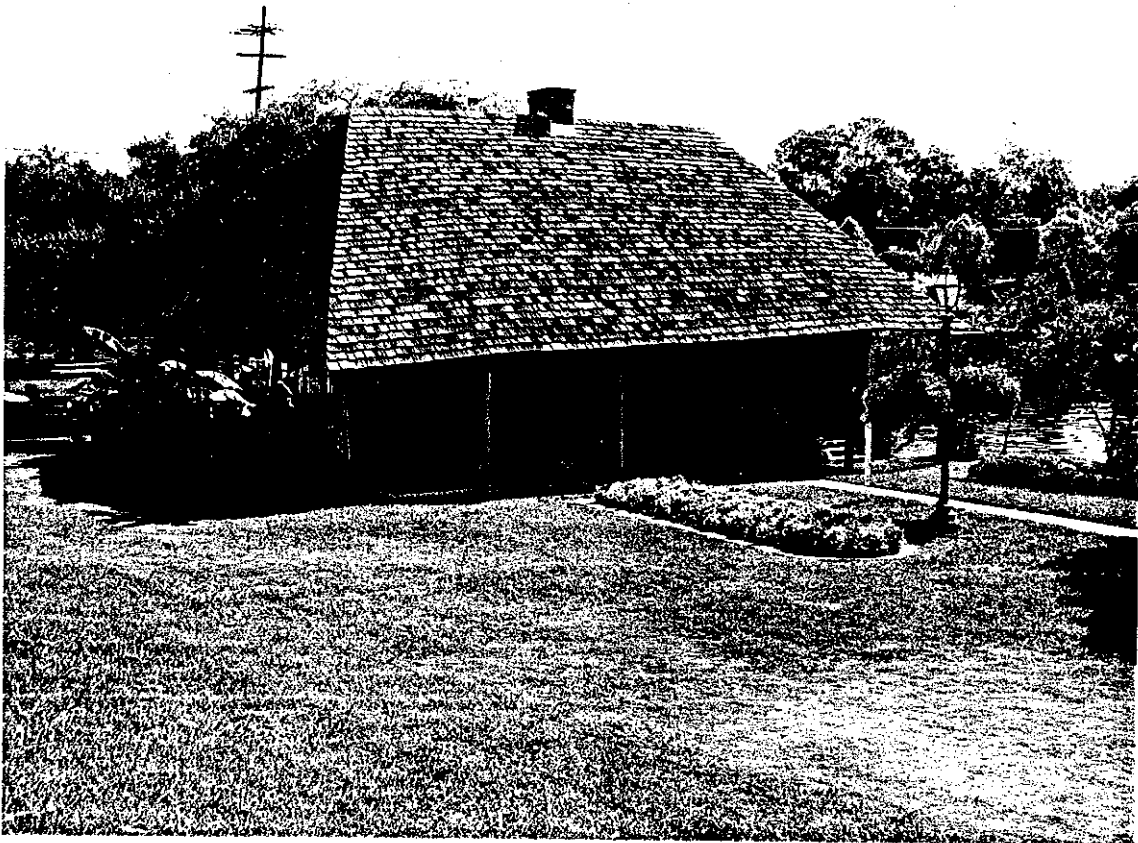


Cane River National Heritage Area

Master Interpretive Plan



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Master Interpretive Plan Cane River National Heritage Area

PURPOSE

This Master Interpretive Plan was developed for the Cane River National Heritage Area (CRNHA) by Dr. Brenden Martin to enhance visitor experiences and guide the future interpretive programs of the heritage area. In accordance with Public Law 103-449, the federal act that established CRNHA, this document provides “an interpretive plan to address the cultural and natural history of the area, and actions to enhance visitor use.” To that end, this plan offers:

- a study of heritage area visitors and their experiences;
- an interpretive framework that links together site histories;
- an inventory of existing and potential heritage area resources;
- specific recommendations to delineate and enhance the interpretive focus of each site and the heritage area as a whole.

Cane River National Heritage Area is a complex and fascinating region that offers a unique cultural landscape for tourists to discover the history of Louisiana, the South, and the United States. The diverse sites of the heritage area also interpret many unique features found only in the Cane River country. But with each attraction focused on its own story, the site interpretations offer a fragmented and incomplete picture of the overall history of the region. This disjointed presentation diminishes the visitor experience and obscures the true historical significance of the area.

To address this problem, this Master Interpretive Plan provides an interpretive framework to link together the separate site histories and guide the future interpretive efforts of CRNHA. The goal will be to develop an interpretive framework that will improve visitor experiences, foster cooperation among the sites, and promote the growth of heritage tourism in the region.

Introduction

The story of Natchitoches and Cane River is a complex and fascinating tale of how different people and landscapes have interacted over time. During its history, the area has evolved from Native American settlement to frontier trading post, from plantation district to tourist attraction. Throughout this process, the region has seen a diversity of people and cultures take root to struggle and thrive amid the constant changes of time.

Today, history and heritage are all-important to Cane River's communities. Cultural and heritage tourism have emerged as important components of the local economy. Indeed, the future growth of tourism along Cane River seems inevitable, making it necessary to plan for the future. Tourism can be a "double-edged sword," bringing either positive or negative consequences depending in large part on the quality of planning. Without proper planning, tourism can destroy the very historic or natural amenities that attract visitors in the first place. Likewise, tourism can also serve as an important economic incentive for environmental and historic preservation and cultural enhancement. Thus, planning is the key for success in tourism, especially in a largely rural area like Cane River, where the main draws are rustic charm and natural scenery.

For rural areas that rely on cultural and heritage tourism, interpretive planning is one of the best ways to boost visitation and inter-site cooperation. However, the interpretive planning process for Cane River is complicated by the complexities of its history. The region's story is so interwoven with legend that it is often difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. Moreover, most of the sites along Cane River are historic house museums, some of which have embraced legends and traditional interpretive approaches as part of their tour program. Indeed, the interpretation of the heritage area is inhibited by a tendency to avoid important and interesting issues and facts that are regarded as negative or controversial. For that reason, a great deal of additional research must be done to clarify the past and to present it with honesty and sensitivity.

This plan does not attempt to reinterpret the past, but rather it seeks to identify issues and areas for review and further research to enhance the interpretive efforts of the heritage area. Additionally, it identifies current

and potential interpretive themes, recommending appropriate sites for the presentation of these themes. Lastly, it evaluates current interpretive approaches and makes specific recommendations for the enhancement of the visitor experience at each site.

The CRNHA offers interpretive resources that are staggering for a rural community of its size. The heritage area possesses the resources to pursue interpretive efforts along two lines: 1) the national and international significance of the area; and 2) the unique stories and characteristics found only along Cane River. In many ways, the heritage area represents a microcosm of the American experience from prehistory to the present. The sites and resources offer the potential to interpret broad historical themes of U.S. and Southern history, most notably colonization, western settlement, military history, plantation life, women's history, and race relations. On the other hand, Cane River offers a cultural and historical experience unlike anywhere else. This interpretive plan strives to balance both the culturally unique as well as the historically significant elements of the Cane River National Heritage Area.

While I assume full responsibility for the contents of this report, I must acknowledge the many kind and wonderful people who have helped to make possible the completion of this project. I wish to extend many thanks to: Nancy Morgan, Kass Byrd, Jason and Wendy Lott, Ann Brittain, Robert DeBlieux, Sadie Newell, Betty Jones, Pete Gregory, Marietta LeBreton, Jim McCorkle, Dayna Lee, Janet Colson, Leon Davis, Mary Linn Wernet, Rolonda Teal, Theodocia Nolan, George Avery, Rufus Davis, Sonny Carter, Laura Soulliere, Terrell Delphin, Carla Cowles, June McCash, Julia Hildebrand, Ed Ward, Betty Hertzog, Scott DeBose, Leva Warford, Ann Stevens, Ada Jarrett, Mary Lynn Wilkerson, Rick Seale, Iris Harper, Stephen Hatten, Amanda Chenault, Donna Spears, Ray Berthelot, Janet Broadway, Cornial Cox, and Sadee Dark. I would also like to thank the many students and visitors who completed invaluable visitor surveys and reports. Lastly, I need to thank my two sons, Eric and Gabriel, for their immense patience during a painful and difficult time in our lives.

Primary interpretive themes

Based on an area's purposes, significance, and resources, primary interpretive themes are so important that every visitor needs to be exposed to them. This list of interpretive themes does not include everything CRNHA sites want to interpret, but it does cover those ideas that are critical to a visitor's understanding of the heritage area's significance. Given the resources and sites of CRNHA, the primary interpretive focus should remain on the chronological period from the early 1700s through the mid-twentieth century. Within this chronological framework, the recommended primary interpretive themes for Cane River National Heritage Area are:

1. *Frontier Gateway*—The area's strategic location as the historic boundary between French Louisiana and Spanish Texas placed it in a pivotal spot for frontier trade and military activity. The heritage area lies at the convergence of the French, Spanish, and American frontiers, making it an ideal region to interpret the themes of frontier life, westward expansion, and military history. The heritage area has the distinction of being perhaps the only site in North America that can compare and contrast the differing frontier lifestyles of the French, Spanish, and Americans. The regional fort sites are ideal for interpreting the entire scope American military history, especially colonial rivalries, the American military on the western frontier, and the Civil War. The heritage area also has the potential to extend its interpretive focus to World War II with the Louisiana Maneuvers as well as the modern military at Fort Polk.

2. *"Creolization" on the Cane*—Over time, the cultural and economic interactions along Cane River between Native American, African, French, Spanish, Italian, Jewish, and Anglo-American settlers produced distinct cultural characteristics, such as unique architectural styles, culinary traditions, language forms, and artistic expressions. Of course, the multi-cultural melting pot reflects larger trends of U.S. history, but the Cane River experience is distinctive because of its tri-racial caste system that is unlike anything most out-of-state visitors have ever seen. The diverse ways of life that flourished within the white, black, Native American, and Creole communities should be interpreted at each site. The current emphasis on white planter families should be broadened to reflect the realities of diversity on Cane River. By utilizing both major archaeological collections, identified sites, and living American Indian communities, the heritage area

possesses impressive potential for interpreting Native American culture. The heritage area also has enormous potential to tell the fascinating, but often neglected, stories of African Americans and Creoles of color. In spotlighting the separate communities, this interpretive plan stresses these communities' mutual dependence despite racial and social barriers.

3. *Evolution of Plantation Life*—Despite their timeless appearance, the area's plantations have been in a state of constant change over the years, continuously adjusting to demographic shifts, economic and political upheavals, and transformations of the landscape. The plantation sites offer a tremendous opportunity to interpret the transformation of agricultural labor systems from slavery to mechanization and the evolution of southern agriculture from the colonial era to the 20th century. The heritage area sites could educate visitors on the cultivation and uses of several staple crops, including indigo, tobacco, and cotton. Also, CRHNA is one of the only heritage attractions in the South where the plantation district and the hill country lie side-by-side, offering a unique opportunity to interpret a major theme of southern history—the interactions and conflicts between planters and plain folk. Several nineteenth century travel accounts describe the jarring cultural differences between Cane River society and the poor white communities region of the Kisatchie Hills. To capitalize on this unique story, the heritage area could integrate the Kisatchie National Forest and other nearby communities into the interpretive plan.

4. *A Woman's Place*—The legacy of strong and independent women represents one of the most fascinating and well-documented aspects of local history. Few regions possess the diversity of resources and multitude of stories to interpret women's history as Cane River does. In both its interpretive and marketing plans, the heritage area must celebrate women, such as Marie Therese Coincoin, Kate Chopin, Carolyn Dorman, Cammie Henry, Clementine Hunter, and the real women of "Steel Magnolias."

5. *This Beautiful Land*—The people and land of CRNHA share a symbiotic relationship. Waterways and natural resources shaped all human activities; likewise, human activity has greatly modified the landscape. The lands, waterways, and wetlands of CRNHA provide habitat for a rich diversity of plant and animal life. The beauty, diversity, and resources of the landscape should also be emphasized throughout the heritage area.

Summary Proposed Recommendations

1. *Develop a strong interpretive orientation program at a central visitor center*—The proposed visitor center must serve as a means to orient visitors to the heritage resources of the area and to funnel them to the sites. The center must provide a historical overview through a combination of exhibits, an orientation film, publications, and on-going hands-on programs. These interpretive mediums could convey the primary interpretive themes, giving visitors a greater appreciation for the region as a whole and spark visitations to more sites. The production of the orientation film could be contracted as part of a larger project to develop a documentary film and video vignettes for interpretive kiosks. The core exhibition could follow an interpretive storyline approach that promotes heritage area sites at appropriate places throughout the exhibit. The heritage area should also hire interpretive staff that could shuttle tourists from the visitor center to the sites on interpretive bus tours.

2. *Use interpretation to promote greater cooperation among sites*—Currently, there seems to be a strong sense of mistrust among the heritage area sites. Instead of viewing the heritage area as a partnership, there are adversarial relationships and organizations that compete more than they cooperate. Some of these recommendations seek to foster cooperation with joint interpretive programs and marketing efforts.

3. *Embrace and celebrate diversity in interpreting the heritage area*—The rich multicultural heritage of the region is one of the most valuable and unique assets of Cane River National Heritage Area. Interpreting the region's fascinating cultural diversity will be a huge draw for increasingly diverse visitors. In particular, the heritage area should encourage more interpretation of the history of Native Americans, African-Americans, and Creoles of color.

4. *Implement a unified training program for all docents and tour guides*—The CRNHA could partner with local historical organizations (i.e. Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches, National Park

Service, Creole Center, Black Heritage Committee, etc.) and develop a series of workshops with two main objectives:

- a) to train docents and guides on a variety of tour techniques;
- b) to enhance their tours by providing them with accurate historical and archaeological information;
- c) to inform tour guides about the resources available for grants and technical assistance.

5. *Develop package tours of heritage area sites*—To boost visitation, increase revenue, and encourage longer stays, the CRNHA could develop package tours in which tourists could visit all the sites for one reasonable price. At current prices, an adult pays \$26 for admission fees to all of the heritage area sites. The total admission fees for a family of four range from \$52 to \$94 depending on the age of the children. I recommend pricing an individual pass at \$15 to \$18 and a family pass at \$40 to \$50 for all heritage area sites. On its website, the CRNHA could also develop specialized thematic package tours of heritage area sites, complete with itineraries and discounted fees.

6. *Promote hands-on living history by forging a grant-based coalition between NSU and cooperating sites*—The Louisiana Board of Regents offers an Industrial Ties Research grant that could support the enhancement of interpretative programs at heritage area sites. The grant process could weave together the efforts of the Departments of Social Science, Hospitality Management and Tourism, Theater, and Education in an effort to develop and implement living history and interactive educational programs at participating sites. In an effort to attract more school groups to the sites, this partnership could also produce curriculum-based packets of pre and post-visit activities and lesson plans.

7. *Enhance outdoor interpretation*—Given the beauty and historic significance of Cane River, the CRNHA should encourage more waterfront interpretation. Improved signage along the downtown riverfront could be an especially effective way to interpret Native American life, natural history, and the importance of river commerce and steamboats. An interpretive boat cruise down Cane River would not only enhance visitor experiences, it could also serve to reassert the historical importance of the river to the region.

Also, the heritage area should do more to interpret its natural amenities, for its beauty and diversity make it an ideal destination for eco-minded tourists.

8. *Continue to develop thematic tours*—The CRNHA is already taking steps towards developing thematic tours with its support of a Creole Heritage Tour, a Black Church tour, and a Military History Tour. These tours are an effective way to reach audiences with specific interests and will help to increase visitation. The heritage area could partner with the Natchitoches Tourism Commission and the State of Louisiana to fund the development of additional tour booklets. Some additional tour themes to consider are: women, Native American sites, architecture, cemeteries, artists and writers, African Americans, outlaw folklore, etc.

9. *Develop a coordinated interpretive signage plan for the heritage area*—The heritage area should spearhead a review of all existing historical markers and interpretive signs. This review should consider that historical markers are the interpretive “front line” of the heritage area and should be developed in a coordinated manner both interpretively and stylistically. Since some historical markers in the Natchitoches area are thought to be misleading or culturally insensitive, a heritage area committee should review all existing signage for language, accuracy, and content. The heritage area should also consider implementing new signs and markers to commemorate significant sites along Cane River. Furthermore, the CRNHA Commission should adopt a consistent and appropriate design for all outdoor markers and signs.

10. *Attract visitation to sites with interpretive kiosks*—Placed at strategic locations for maximum visibility, appropriately designed kiosks can serve as an effective medium for informing visitors of our rich heritage and advertising specific sites and programs. The heritage area should consider developing a promotional documentary that could be the foundation for the orientation film as well as an interactive touch-screen program for these site-specific kiosks.

11. *Improve visitor services*—Much could be done to enhance the visitor experience through improved services and facilities for tourists.

Specifically, a central visitor center with an orientation program/exhibit will help to familiarize visitors with the overall historical significance of the region. Another problem is the relatively short visitation hours for most heritage area sites. Most plantation sites are open only during the afternoon, making it impossible for visitors to tour more than one or two sites per day. Expanding, or perhaps staggering, visitation hours is strongly recommended. Also, the lack of restaurants and picnic sites makes it difficult for visitors to fully explore the Cane River area. The heritage area should explore the possibilities of developing picnic grounds with interpretive signage/kiosks along Cane River. Another possibility is to advertise catered lunches at one site, such as Melrose, or to rotate sites.

12. *Develop joint interpretive programs and events*—To boost event-driven visitation, the heritage area could coordinate a series of interpretive programs in which each site participated. The host site of the biannual program could rotate, so that each site would eventually benefit from the exposure. Focused on a particular theme, each program could feature interpreters and displays from each site. By combining resources, the heritage area could develop popular interpretive events that will allow every site to be featured to a large number of visitors.

13. *Encourage sites to diversify tours and develop rotating interpretive exhibits*—To promote return visitation, heritage area attractions must abandon the “one size fits all” approach to tours and diversify tour offerings for school groups, families, seniors, and other groups. Also, rotating elements of the interpretive exhibits will encourage visitors to come back again and again.

14. *Sponsor a lecture series focusing on local history and archaeology*—CRNHA should coordinate a series of quarterly lectures featuring local historians, scholars, and longtime residents discussing issues related to the heritage area. This series could also be developed as a series of moderated conversations with notable local people on issues such as historic preservation, race relations, changes in agriculture, memories of World War II, and more.

15. *Encourage more heritage area events centered around food and music*—Out-of-town visitors expect good music and good food when they

come to Louisiana, and the heritage area should strive to meet those expectations by sponsoring more cultural events at the sites. By incorporating the diversity of Louisiana food and music into the interpretive plan, it broadens the visitor appeal. Each site should consider integrating foodways and music into their program to make their tours more multi-sensory.

16. *Spearhead a hospitality training effort to promote heritage area sites*—Employees at local restaurants, hotels, gas stations, and other tourism-related businesses need information about the heritage resources of the area. To that end, the heritage area could furnish all local tourism-related businesses with laminated cards that highlight the “must-sees” of Cane River Country. Furthermore, the CRNHA commission could produce “extend the stay” promotional materials to be placed in all regional hotel rooms

17. *Establish a dynamic interpretive and marketing presence on the internet*—The world wide web could be utilized as a major interpretive and marketing tool for CRNHA. As more and more people plan their vacations on the internet, there arises an unprecedented opportunity to establish a website that will reach greater numbers of people, tell them the fascinating story of Cane River, and encourage them to plan a visit.

18. *Provide written and Braille tour guides for each site to accommodate sight and hearing impaired people*—In accordance with spirit of the American Disabilities Act, the heritage area could provide tour guide scripts to visitors who are sight impaired or hard of hearing. Spearheaded by the heritage area but funded through grants, this effort could help to accommodate our elderly visitors in a rapidly aging society.

Tourism in Natchitoches

History

Cane River country has long been a destination for travelers. In the past, the patterns of roads and rivers funneled tribes, explorers, traders, armies, and westward bound settlers to Natchitoches. More recently, the region has emerged as an important destination for tourists in search of cultural and historical experiences.

The roots of local cultural tourism begin in the 1920s, when Natchitoches initiated its annual Christmas festival. What began as a modest lighted tree by the riverfront in 1926 evolved into the Festival of Lights, a month-long celebration that now draws an estimated 500,000 visitors every year. The Festival of Lights and the Natchitoches Christmas Festival remain the largest tourist-oriented event in the parish.

Heritage tourism, however, is a relatively new phenomenon in the area. Its origins lie in the efforts of key groups and individuals who recognized the historical significance of local structures and took actions to preserve them for future generations. The earliest and perhaps most significant of these groups is the Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches (APHN), which was originally chartered in 1943 with the name Association of Natchitoches Women for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches (the name officially changed in 1979). Following the organization's initial project to save the Lemee House, APHN spearheaded local efforts to preserve surviving historical documents, old homes, and plantations. Aside from maintaining two of the parish's most popular tourist attractions, Melrose Plantation and the Kate Chopin Home, APHN also initiated the area's first heritage and cultural tourism events—the Annual Tour of Homes (initiated in 1954), which draws thousands of visitors to Natchitoches every October, and the Melrose Plantation Arts and Crafts Festival (established in 1974).

Another important step in the promotion of heritage tourism was the opening of State Historic Sites at Fort Jesup (1957), Los Adaes (1970s), and Fort St. Jean de Baptiste (1979). Highlighting the region's rich military and frontier history, these historic sites currently offer the heritage area's most

innovative approaches to first-person interpretation. Still, heritage tourism did not really begin to gain momentum until after 1976, when the U.S. bicentennial sparked public interest in historic preservation throughout the nation. It was also the year that Natchitoches citizens elected Bobby DeBlieux as its mayor. An ardent preservationist who recognized that heritage tourism was a key to the future of the community, DeBlieux took critical steps to boost awareness of the region's historical significance. Also in 1976, the establishment of the Natchitoches Parish Tourist Commission signaled the beginning of a more aggressive campaign to promote tourism. Under the determined leadership of executive directors Betty Jones (1979-1996) and Iris Harper (1999-present), the Tourism Commission presided over a dramatic expansion of visitation to Natchitoches Parish over the last twenty-five years.

The rapid increase in tourism over the last decade can be attributed to two main factors: 1) the international exposure from the filming of "Steel Magnolias" in Natchitoches; and 2) the increased presence of the federal government. Filmed in 1989, the critically acclaimed film "Steel Magnolias" captured the beauty and charm of Natchitoches, generating a wave of visibility and visitation that continues to this day. Indeed, the sites associated with the film and its real life characters remain perhaps the most popular points of interest on all Natchitoches tours.

The federal government stepped into the picture in 1994, when Congressional action brought the creation of Cane River Creole National Historical Park and Cane River National Heritage Area. While the impact of the national park and heritage area cannot yet be fully assessed, a recent transportation study projects that annual visitation to CRNHA will grow to 50,400 by the year 2014, nearly a 60% increase over current visitation. The future official opening of the national park, coupled with the media attention from the publication of *Cane River*, means that heritage tourism will continue to grow and will play a prominent role in the future development of Cane River country.

The Visitors

Since there has been no formal visitor survey specifically focused on the Cane River National Heritage Area, much guesswork enters into

determining who comprises the current audiences. Furthermore, visitation patterns vary from site to site within the heritage area, with some depending more on school groups and local travelers than others. Nevertheless, a general profile of current and potential visitors can be formed from tourist data collected for the state of Louisiana, the Natchitoches Parish Tourism Commission, local heritage attractions, and personal observations garnered through interviews with site docents and administrators. This amalgamation of data suggests that current visitors are primarily:

- In-state visitors and local school groups, which comprise the largest share of visitors;
- Out-of-state visitors between the ages of 40 and 59 who travel without children and are primarily from the states of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Mississippi, in that order;
- Senior groups over the age of 60 who travel by bus, but are less likely to stay overnight and tour more than one or two sites;
- A relatively small, but significant, segment of visitors from outside the U.S., with France, Germany, England, and Canada as the primary nations of origin.

The fact that visitation to the Natchitoches area is driven by heritage and cultural attractions bodes well for the heritage area. Studies show that heritage and cultural destinations attract visitors that spend more and stay longer. For instance, a Travel Industry Association of America report indicates that:

- Heritage travelers spend, on average, \$615 per trip compared to \$425 of all U.S. travelers;
- Heritage travelers stay an average of 4.7 nights away from home as compared to 3.3 nights for all U.S. travelers;
- Heritage travelers are more likely to make shopping a part of their trip (45% as compared to 33% of all U.S. travelers);

- Heritage travelers are slightly older, more educated, and have higher incomes than other U.S. travelers.

In short, heritage tourism generates a clientele that benefits the community. Early indications are that the recent terrorist attacks will benefit domestic tourism by diverting some of the 22 million U.S. residents who flew to overseas destinations in 2000 to homeland attractions. Heritage attractions also stand to benefit from the post-attack wave of patriotism as more and more Americans seek to re-connect with our nation's past.

Future Challenges and Opportunities

The prospects for the growth of tourism, however, are not entirely positive. Current economic and demographic trends suggest that some difficult challenges and promising opportunities lie ahead. More than any other major industry, tourism is subject to fluctuations in the economy. Given the economic uncertainties of the last several months, many visitors are reluctant to travel long distances. Additionally, personal bankruptcies and household debt are at an all-time high, meaning more and more families are seeking out leisure activities that are nearby and inexpensive. All of this suggests that there is an opportunity for the heritage area to target local and regional audiences within a 300-mile radius.

Another fundamental challenge lies in the explosive growth of Louisiana's tourism attractions over the last two decades. A recent study funded by the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism suggests that, although tourism has increased by 55% in recent years, the number of new tourist attractions in Louisiana has grown by nearly 150% just since 1980, putting attractions in sharp competition for a smaller piece of the tourist pie. The report points out that "those particularly affected have been cultural and historic attractions, notably plantations and historic homes."

Important demographic changes in the age and ethnicity of the U.S. population will also have far reaching effects on visitation for CRNHA in years to come. In the next thirty years, approximately 100 million "Baby Boomers" will retire and inherit as much as a trillion dollars from the previous generation. Indeed, by the year 2016, "empty-nesters" who are

mortgage and kid free will make up almost one-third of all U.S. households. While the boom of retirees will create an enormous pool of potential visitors, it poses difficult challenges to heritage attractions like those in CRNHA. These new seniors will have needs and desires different from traditional tour clientele. Several studies indicate that baby boomer tourists will be much more experienced travelers, more adventurous than earlier ones, and will expect more out of their vacations than past generations. Baby boomers seek not only entertainment when they travel, they also want to learn new things. The adventurous, educational, and activity-oriented expectations of baby boomers do not bode well for attractions whose offerings that can be labeled as "been there, done that." Baby boomers tend to have a much greater interest in individual self-guided tours versus guided tours and are looking for greater variety, new attractions, and what one writer has called "organized independence."

Another important demographic shift that will affect tourism is the projected rapid increase in non-white segments of the U.S. population. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that between the years 2000 and 2050, the Hispanic-American population will grow from 32.5 million to 98.2 million. In this same time period, African Americans will increase in population from 35.3 million to 59.2 million. The State of Louisiana has recognized the growing importance of Hispanic and black travelers and is currently developing marketing strategies to attract these important niche markets.

These combined trends—including greater competition, the more exacting demands of baby boomers, and the rapid growth of Hispanic and African-American travelers—provide both challenges and opportunities for CRNHA. Clearly, the heritage area's attractions must adopt more innovative interpretive approaches and marketing strategies to compete in the future. The heritage area possesses the resources to meet each and every one of these challenges, but the failure to embrace diversity and innovation will certainly pose fundamental problems for the future of CRNHA and its associated sites.

Heritage Area Resources

The following inventory of heritage resources begins with the sites at the western edge of the heritage area and proceeds eastward to Natchitoches, then south down the Cane River.

Fort Jesup



History

Fort Jesup depicts a pivotal era of U.S. military history from the 1820s to the 1840s, a time when a young nation struggled to define itself amid the growing pains of territorial expansion and frontier hardships. When the Louisiana Purchase treaty of 1803 failed to clarify the western boundary of Louisiana, a dispute erupted between the United States, which claimed eastern Texas, and Spain, which claimed western Louisiana. This conflict gave rise to the "Neutral Ground," a strip of disputed territory where the laws of neither nation were enforced. Rogues and outlaws ruled the region for nearly twenty years, until the U.S. and Spain were finally able to resolve the dispute in 1819 by establishing the boundary at the Sabine River. The United States government built Fort Jesup in 1822 to guard what was then

the westernmost boundary of the nation. Fort Jesup remained an important military outpost for nearly 25 years.

Established and commanded by Zachary Taylor, who later became President of the United States, Fort Jesup was named in honor of Taylor's friend Brigadier General Thomas Sidney Jesup. Taylor and his soldiers established law and order on the former Neutral Strip and opened the way for frontier settlers by building roads, surveying land, and negotiating treaties. The soldiers of Fort Jesup were also called upon to put down potential slave insurrections in Alexandria and Natchitoches. At its peak, the fort had 82 structures that accommodated nearly 150 officers and men.

The garrison at Fort Jesup emerged as a stopping place for the thousands of American settlers who migrated through the area en route to Texas. After Mexico attained independence from Spain, American settlers in Texas grew unhappy with new restrictions imposed by the new Mexican government and proclaimed their independence. Following the U.S. annexation of Texas, border disputes between Mexico and the United States eventually erupted into the Mexican War in 1845. Fort Jesup became an important staging ground for the Mexican War as half the U.S. army moved through the area. The U.S. military victory and annexation of Mexican territory rendered Fort Jesup obsolete as a border outpost. Consequently, it was abandoned in 1846.

After a brief period in which the former fort site was used as a Masonic park in the 1870s, the area was opened as a parish park in the 1930s. In the early 1950s, the Fort Jesup chapter of the DAR organized an effort to preserve the site as a public park. Their efforts paid off in 1957, when Fort Jesup was designated a state historic site. Four years later, Fort Jesup joined a select group of sites by being named a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Department of Interior.

Interpretive Approach

Today, Fort Jesup is a 22-acre site that provides a unique glimpse of life when Louisiana was still part of the nation's frontier. The only remaining historic structure is the kitchen, which has been furnished as it would have been in the 1840s. The site's primary interpretive area is the reconstructed officers' quarters, which houses exhibits, a gift shop, staff

offices, restrooms, and visitor services. The rest of the site has been preserved for current and future archaeological studies.

The interpretive approach at Fort Jesup State Historic Site strives to be what one tour guide describes as “high-impact living history.” Interpreters tell the story of the site in period costume and offer demonstrations of firearms, frontier life, and military skills. Fort Jesup also offers a rich variety of special programs, ranging from frontier music to antique workshops to military encampments. The recently renovated exhibits contrast the experiences of officers and regular soldiers in the U.S. Army from the 1820s to the 1840s. Exhibit techniques include a diorama showing the renovation of Fort Jesup in the 1830s, recreated barracks and officer’s quarters, and traditional displays of tools and firearms. There is also space for rotating exhibits, which recently featured an exhibit on slavery on the frontier.

Recommendations

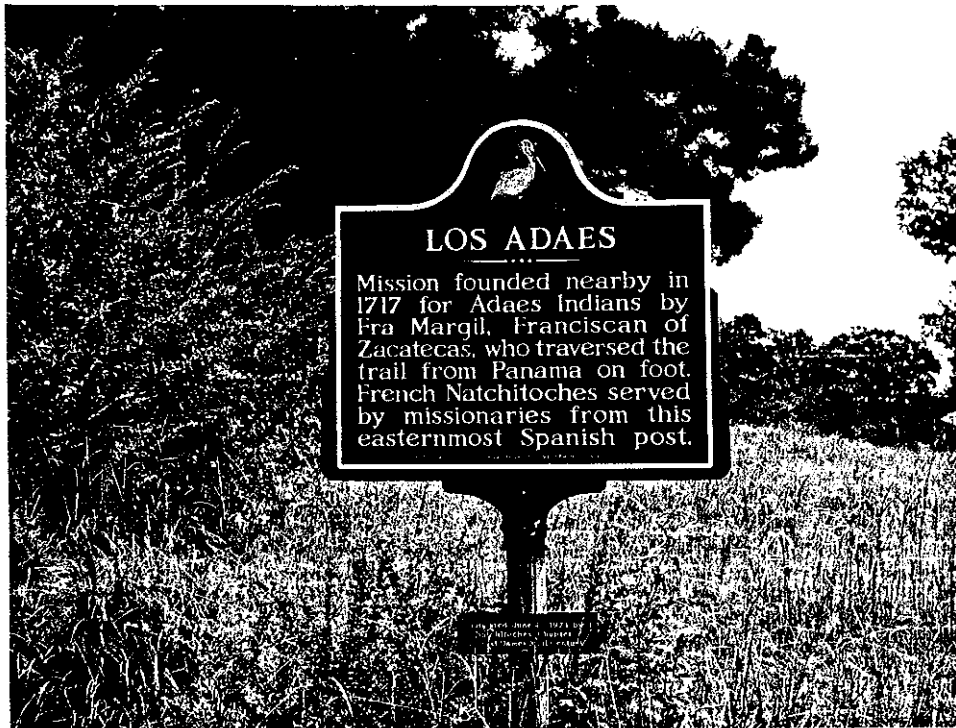
The primary interpretive themes at Fort Jesup are military history and frontier life, which seem entirely appropriate for the site. Generally, the interpreters seem to do a very good job of conveying the history of the Fort and the life of a soldier in the Age of Jackson. However, the larger strategic importance of the fort is sometimes lost in the details of the site history. The simple utilization of maps could establish the site’s significance as a frontier outpost that played a key role in the settlement of the American southwest. In other words, while the site does an excellent job of conveying its primary themes, it could improve its interpretation of the historical significance of the site.



The site offers a choice of guided tours or self-guided tours. The self-guided tours could be enhanced with more visually attractive signage on the site. The site also could expand its interpretive services by reconstructing several of the site’s original buildings. For instance, the enlisted men’s

barracks closest to the Museum could serve as a museum annex to interpret life in the infantry. Reconstructions of the hospital and Sutler's Store could be used for additional living history programs. In summary, Fort Jesup SHS could enhance its current interpretive program by placing greater emphasis on the site's strategic significance and building upon its living history-based program with additional reconstructed buildings.

Los Adaes



History

Los Adaes is a very important colonial site that interprets the Spanish presence in western Louisiana in the eighteenth century. In the wake of the establishment of a French outpost in Natchitoches in 1714, Spanish colonial officials decided to establish missions across the province of Texas to create a buffer against any further French intrusions. They hoped that the missions would convert the native population to Roman Catholicism and that civil settlements would develop around the missions. As part of this effort, a Spanish expedition led by Captain Domingo Ramon established a series of missions in Texas. The further eastern settlement in Texas was Mission San Miguel de Linares de Los Adaes among the Adaes Indians, established in 1717 just fifteen miles west of the French Fort St. Jean de Baptiste. The Adaes, who are believed to have been part of the Caddo Indian group, initially welcomed the Spanish.

In 1719, prompted by a war between Spain and France in Europe, a group of French soldiers “attacked” and took control of the mission from the one soldier and one layman who were there. After Spain and France reached a truce, Spanish colonial administrators sent a large military expedition, led

by the new governor of Texas, Marques de Aguayo, into East Texas to reassert Spanish control of the area. In 1721, the Spanish reestablished the mission at Los Adaes at a different location, and within a few years had built a presidio manned by 100 soliders. Thus, Los Adaes became a cornerstone in New Spain's defense against the French.

In 1729, Los Adaes was named the capital of the province of Texas, though the Texas governors had been residing at Los Adaes since 1721. That same year, the number of troops at Los Adaes was reduced to sixty. Over time, the wooden presidio rotted and was rebuilt several times. In spite of the international rivalries between France and Spain, Los Adaes had close ties to Fort St. Jean de Baptiste because of their proximity in the remote frontier. Not only did they engage in illicit trade, the two outposts shared soldiers and priests when necessary. In the aftermath of the French and Indian War, in which France ceded all of its land holdings west of the Mississippi to Spain, Los Adaes was no longer an important strategic location. Furthermore, the mission to the Adaes Indians had been a failure. Consequently, Spanish officials ordered Los Adaes to close in 1772, and its residents moved to San Antonio. A few years later, a group of Adaesaños returned to East Texas and established the town of Nagodoches. Today, many local communities, including Zwolle, Ebarb, Spanish Lake, and Robeline, have direct ties to Los Adaes.

Following the abandonment of Los Adaes in 1772, the site lay relatively undisturbed until the twentieth century, when it was raided by local pot hunters. Fortunately, the archaeological efforts of Dr. Pete Gregory helped to identify and preserve the site in the 1970s, when it was acquired from the Natchitoches Parish Police Jury by Louisiana State Parks. Insufficient funds prevented much development, but eventually an archaeology lab was built on the site around 1984. Interpretive programs did not begin until the 1990s. Today, Los Adaes State Historic Site is still largely an undeveloped archaeological site with limited interpretive programming. The park's long range plans call for a partial reconstruction of the presidio and mission to be located away from the original foundation to protect the archaeological integrity of the site. The plan also proposes a new state-of-the-art archaeological facility, a visitor center, and interpretive trails.

Interpretive Approach

Based on personal observations and visitors' evaluations, it seems that the current interpretive focus of Los Adaes SHS varies from guide to guide. Some focus on cultural interactions between the Spanish, French and Native Americans; some interpret frontier military life; some choose to interpret the Adaesanos; others focus on archaeology. While all of these are appropriate themes for the site, the interpretive program at Los Adaes should be clearly designated according to thematic focus. All in all, visitors were pleased with their visit, according to evaluations. The need for greater marketing of this site is apparent in that some visitors indicated that "I did not know any of this information before I went to Los Adaes" or "I had never even heard of Los Adaes until now." Still, some visitors noted that "it was rather boring.



There was nothing there but an empty field." The site should reflect the Spanish colonial nature of settlement and the multi-cultural evolution of the community. Los Adaes also has strong potential for the interpretation of Native American life and cultural interactions with Europeans. However, these themes are currently inhibited by a dispute between the

leaders of the Adaesanos and Adai-Caddo communities. Moreover, without an interpretive facility, it is difficult for guides to interpret cultural interactions in a meaningful way.

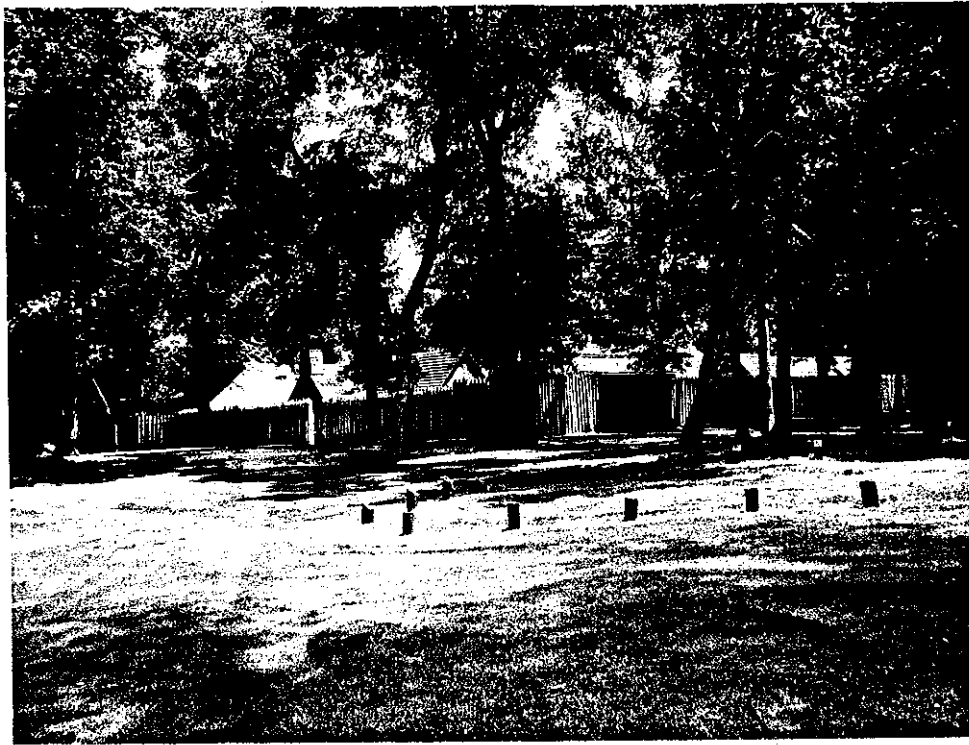
Recommendations

Until the partial recreation of the fort is built, archaeology is the perhaps site's strongest interpretive angle. Because it is the best preserved site in the world where colonial Native American, Spanish, and French cultures coexisted, the interpretation of archaeology should play an important role in its development. It is a great resource to educate visitors about the principles, methodologies, and ethics of archaeology. While the

site should be careful not encourage pot hunting, it could allow visitors the opportunity to identify and classify artifacts as a hands-on activity. The site could allow class groups to engage in a mock archaeological dig patterned after those at Tolmec Mounds. After the new facilities outlined in the long-range plan have been developed, the interpretive focus should broaden to include cultural interactions, religion, foodways, and Native American life.

The current components of interpretation include guided tours, static exhibits, outreach programs, and special programs. Given the limited personnel at this site, Los Adaes should consider developing self-guided tours of the site. This could be done with interpretive signage or a brochure with a site map to indicate areas of interest. Judging from visitor surveys, the current attempts to utilize interpreters in period dress has been only moderately successful, working best at special events. Once the new facilities have been constructed, however, Los Adaes should make a concerted effort to enhance and expand its living history approach.

Fort St. Jean de Baptiste



History

Fort St. Jean de Baptiste is a testament to the resourcefulness of French explorers who first settled the backcountry of Louisiana in the early 1700s. About a quarter of a century after LaSalle first traveled down the Mississippi River and claimed all of the lands it drained for France, a band of Natchitoches Indians guided a group of French soldiers up the Red River in search of trade outlets. Led by a French Canadian named Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, the French were on a mission to Mexico to establish trading ties. Nearly one hundred and forty leagues up the Red River, they encountered an impenetrable logjam that prevented further navigation. The French hastily built two crude huts, which grew to become Fort St. Jean de Baptiste and the town of Natchitoches, the oldest permanent settlement in the entire Louisiana Purchase territory.

Following the establishment of a fort in 1716, Fort St. Jean de Baptiste evolved into an important frontier military outpost and a vital trade center between the French, Spanish, and Caddo Indians. St. Denis was named the commandant of the fort in 1722, and the colony thrived until his death in 1744. However, an attack of the Natchez Indians in 1731 exposed

the vulnerabilities of the small French fort, prompting French officials to send engineer François Broutin to oversee the construction of a larger and stronger fortification. Although the construction of the larger fort on the west bank of the river caused Spanish officials to charge it was an invasion of Spanish territory, St. Denis politely ignored their protests.

The fort continued to be garrisoned by French marines until 1762, when the France's defeat in the French and Indian War forced her to cede Louisiana to Spain. Spanish authorities continued to operate the fort as a military outpost and trading center, but since it no longer protected a territorial boundary, the fort's strategic importance was diminished, and the Spanish eventually abandoned the fort. By the time the United States acquired the territory in 1803, the fort was in ruins and was no longer of any use. Thus, the Americans built Fort Claiborne in Natchitoches to protect the western frontier.

Today, Fort St. Jean de Baptiste State Historical Site is situated on the west bank of the Cane River a few hundred yards from the 1732 fort site. Built in 1979, this full-scale replica is based upon extensive archival research and Broutin's plans of a similar fort that was never built. The fort includes a trading warehouse, a powder magazine, a church, slave quarters, the commandant's house, barracks, a guardhouse, bastions, and assorted huts. The site also currently has an entrance station. Future plans call for a building to house an interpretive center and administrative offices on Jefferson Street.

Interpretive approach

The current interpretive focus at Fort St. Jean de Baptiste is French colonial history, with an emphasis on the everyday life of French soldiers. The site features interpreters in period costume on a daily basis. Additionally, Fort St. Jean de Baptiste SHS offers several 18th century living history encampments and programs each year. These special programs bring in interpreters and performers from all over the nation to sell wares, give performances and demonstrations, and interpret military life in the colonial era.

Visitor evaluations indicate that most visitors think the admission of \$2 for adults is very reasonable. Most visitors believe that site does a good

job of recreating French colonial life. One visitor commented: "It was not until I actually visited the fort that I realized what life must have been like to live during the colonial period in Louisiana." Several visitors commented that the replicas are effective in bringing the past to life: "I enjoyed sitting on the hard pews and imaging how church was conducted back then." Generally, they regard the tour guides as "informative and nice" and appreciate the period dress.

However, the experience of visitors was not entirely consistent. Some visitors did not have a tour guide, resulting in several negative comments. For instance, one visitor commented: "My least favorite thing would definitely be that they did not walk around with us to tell us the history of everything in there." Another suggested "the site would be better if people would take you around and tell you stories about what went on at the fort." These survey responses suggest that Fort St. Jean de Baptiste is not well suited for self-guided tours: "I wish someone would've been there to explain it to me"; and "the only information I took in was that which was posted on some of the doors of buildings." Although one visitor complained "the tour guide wasn't very enthusiastic" and "went on and on and on," most visitors seemed pleased with the quality of their guides, when they had one. The only other negative comment concerned the cotton mill: "A disadvantage of the fort, I felt, is the location across the street from the cotton seed mill, which is noisy and took away from the atmosphere of the fort." When asked how to improve their experience, one visitor suggested "artifacts that soldiers and people of the village used could enhance the experience."

Recommendations

The interpretive focus on the everyday life of French soldiers is appropriate, but it could be broadened to reflect more closely the multi-cultural realities of life on the French colonial frontier. Specifically, this site offers the heritage's area best opportunity to explain how French colonial practices and customs were different from the other major colonial powers. These practices account for the area's unique tri-racial racial caste system of white, black, and Creole. Unlike the Spanish and English, French colonists depended upon the fur trade with Native Americans, creating circumstances in which it made good economic sense to learn native tongues, adopt Indian ways, and inter-marry with native residents. Furthermore, prior to the development of a plantation society with its strict slave codes, the colonial

French practiced a more liberal system of slavery that fostered the development of a sizable class of free people of color who evolved into today's Creole community along Cane River. In short, the economic and cultural circumstances in colonial Louisiana fostered cultural and racial mixing to a degree found nowhere else in the United States. This is an important point that must be stressed at Fort St Jean de Baptiste, because it explains in large measure why Louisiana is so different from the rest of the South and the nation.



The interpretive issue of slavery on the colonial frontier has not been fully developed at this site. With the strong research resources available (i.e. baptismal records, conveyances, wills, etc.), the experience of enslaved Africans and Native Americans at the site could emerge as a major interpretive theme. Indeed, this is the

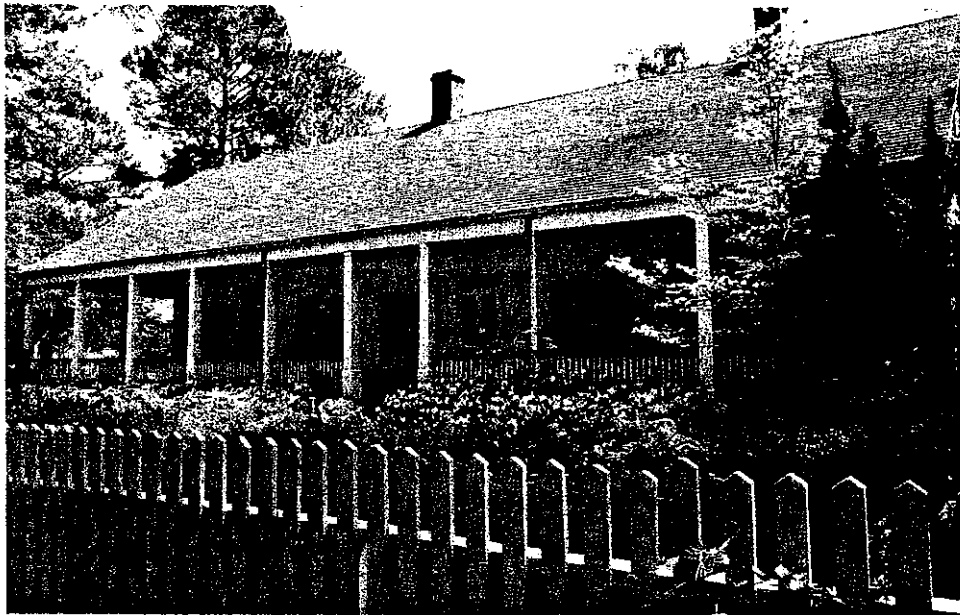
only site west of the Mississippi River with the resources to interpret the evolution of colonial slavery as it transformed from a temporary status for Native Americans to a permanent, inheritable status for Africans.

The military and strategic importance of the fort and its commercial importance are currently obscured by the lack of maps and visual aides. This will undoubtedly be addressed with the creation of exhibition space in the site's future orientation center. But in the meantime, interpreters could use scrolls of replica maps highlighting the strategic importance of Fort St. Jean de Baptiste by showing its proximity to the Spanish borderlands.

Another potential interpretive theme at Fort St. Jean de Baptiste is that of architecture. The site's structures reflect a unique blend of architectural methods with European, African, and Native American roots. For instance, the servant's quarters feature a post in the ground style that represents a hybrid of African and Native American techniques. The functional nature of colonial architecture on the French frontier should also be stressed.

Lastly, Fort St. Jean de Baptiste SHS offers a beautiful waterfront area where some meaningful interpretation of the river's importance to the area could be accomplished. The river was the lifeblood of the fort and its surrounding community. It was a trading and transportation route as well as its connection to the outside world. This site provides an opportunity to reclaim the importance of the river with interpretive signage and a recreated period *bateau* for demonstrations.

Beaufort Plantation



History

Beaufort captures the elegance and grace of French Creole society as well as the toil of daily life on a Louisiana cotton plantation. Local legend holds that the house is situated near the site of a 1760s fort, hence the name “Beaufort.” The date of construction for the house is disputed by local sources. Some believe it was built around 1790 for Louis Barthelemy Rachal, who received the original Spanish land grant for the property in 1780s and was living in a dwelling on the property by 1790. Married in 1785, Rachal gradually acquired more land and wealth until his death in 1833, when he owned nearly twenty slaves. Rachal’s slaves included many elders, suggesting this was an established slave community whose members had been together for a number of years. The division of the estate must have been very painful, for ten different men purchased the slaves. (Malone).

Others believe that the house was built for Narcisse Prudhomme, who purchased the property at a public auction in January 1834. Regardless of when the house was built, it was likely constructed by the enslaved artisans. Prudhomme enlarged the plantation considerably. At the time of his death in 1844, he owned twenty-eight slaves including several elders. One of the

elders was Prince, who was one hundred years old in 1834, meaning he was likely born in Africa.

Narcisse Prudhomme II acquired the plantation and continued to grow the family's fortunes. By the time of the outbreak of the Civil War, he owned a total of 112 slaves. Records indicate that Prudhomme allowed his slaves to improve their situation by accumulating livestock through extra work. One such person was Ceraphin, who by 1861 had sixty chickens and eighteen cattle. The successive waves of Confederate and Union soldiers who swept through Cane River country in April 1864 during the Red River campaign wiped him out. Ceraphin, who adopted the name of LaCaze upon emancipation, was forced to begin life as a freedman without any property. Although a federal court later awarded him \$220 for his loss of property, he would become a sharecropper like so many black southerners after the Civil War.

In 1928, the Prudhomme heirs sold the home and five acres to Charles Edgar Cloutier, who called it St. Charles Plantation for the college his sons attended. In 1944, Cloutier's son, C. Vernon Cloutier, and his wife, Helen Elizabeth Williams, purchased the house, although they had lived in the home since soon after their marriage in 1937. They renamed the plantation "Beaufort" because local tradition claimed a French fort had once stood on the site. Since the house had deteriorated to a deplorable condition by this time, they decided to restore the house to its original splendor. Mrs. Cloutier, affectionately known as "Miss Beth," displayed her indomitable will by overseeing the restorations and furnishing the house with family antiques and portraits. The current owners are Jack and Ann Brittain, who is the niece of Miss Beth.

Interpretive Approach

Beaufort currently employs a traditional interpretive method for historic house museums in which tour guides lead visitors around house and discuss the architecture, the function of each room, the furniture, and the history of the families that owned the plantation. The art and craftwork of local residents, such as Clementine Hunter, comprises a secondary theme. Additionally, the guides tell interesting stories associated with the furniture, art, and outbuildings.

Visitors are welcomed to the site with a line of beautiful towering live oaks and a lovely garden surrounding the house. The house and five-acre site are surrounded by a 265-acre working cotton plantation, which significantly adds to the ambience of the place. This first impression succeeds in projecting the image of the Old South. As one visitor put it, Beaufort “invites you back to the early 1800s . . . to a time when life’s pace was much slower and the social graces demanded more of one’s attention.” Another visitor commented: “You almost feel like you have entered another world.”

Surveys indicate that the current tour guides, namely “Miss Sissy” and “Mr. David,” do an excellent job of interpreting the history of the house. Visitors believe that these guides were very effective in adding a special element found at none of the other Cane River sites. One visitor commented: “I was taken around by an elderly lady who leaned on me for support throughout the tour, adding a very personal touch to the tour. . . . The tour was great.” Another indicated “our tour guide was Mr. David, a very kind and informative man. He has worked at the plantation for 38 years, which added a unique touch to the tour.” Visitors seem to retain a great deal of information about the functional aspects of the rooms, such as the “shoo-fly” or the tax reasons behind no closets and double fireplaces. While some visitors enjoyed the descriptions of the furniture, others (mainly younger visitors) found it to be dull and were more interested in the stories associated with the site.

In total, there were very few negative comments about the visitor experience at Beaufort. The only negative critique came from an African-American visitor who felt the site could do more to interpret black history. This visitor reported: “I would not go back nor recommend it to anyone. If it were not for Clementine Hunter and that local male artist, there would probably be no mention of black folks at all.”

Recommendations

Beaufort’s traditional interpretive approach, found at so many historic house museums, works well for the site and for the current docents. Looking ahead, however, future audiences will have greater expectations for their visitor experience. Also, the charm of the current docents will be hard

to match. One basic problem is that Beaufort's interpretive focus on the families, furniture, and architecture is identical to nearly every other Cane River historic house. Beaufort must strive to distinguish itself by offering more diversified interpretive themes.

Architecture should remain a primary interpretive theme at Beaufort. Beaufort offers an excellent example of the Creole architecture found along Cane River. However, so do all of the other plantation sites. Certainly, this site merits the special attention it gives to architecture. I propose for other sites to defer to Beaufort on this issue and allow it to be a primary site for interpreting the architectural heritage of Cane River. This interpretation could be further developed to give it a more hands-on approach. For instance, a small-scale cypress framework and mixing bin could be built on the grounds that would allow visitors to opportunity to mix the filler ingredients of *bousillage* and to pack it on the wooden frame. Such an activity would give visitors a much greater appreciation for the resourcefulness and hard work that went into building these Creole houses.

Another theme that could be interpreted almost exclusively at Beaufort is the social life of Cane River planters. Tradition holds that Beaufort was a popular social gathering place for Cane River's French Creole planters. While briefly discussed by current docents, this theme could be further enhanced. One way to help bring to life planter society would be to play appropriate music and teach visitors some of the popular dances among the white planters of the early 19th century. Also along these lines, Beaufort is a wonderful site to interpret the foodways of the planter class.

Beaufort could also enhance what visitor surveys suggest is one of their favorite aspects of the site—the surrounding grounds. One visitor felt “an overwhelming sense of nostalgia inside the house, but especially when I was walking around the outside of the house.” Surrounded by cotton fields, Beaufort is in a unique position to interpret the cultivation of cotton—the primary cash crop of the area since the early 1800s. Undoubtedly, the National Park will interpret the evolution of cotton farming, but Beaufort can take a different angle at this issue by focusing on the life cycle and uses of the crop itself.

Lastly, Beaufort could integrate more black history into its tours, especially since it is currently one of the only sites in the heritage area with

an African-American interpreter. Black history will be a major interpretive thrust of the national park, but Beaufort has the resources and the stories to play a role in this important, but often neglected aspect of Cane River's history. For instance, the story behind the painting of the white planter and his mixed race son offers the opportunity to convey how planters dealt with this common issue along Cane River, giving rise to a third caste of Creoles of color.

Oakland



History

The history of Oakland Plantation is intertwined with the story of eight generations of the Prud'homme (now spelled Prudhomme) family, one of the earliest French Creole families in Northwest Louisiana. It is also the story of the workers, both free and unfree. The first Prudhomme in Louisiana was Jean Pierre Prudhomme, a French soldier from the Dauphiné province of France, who came to Fort St. Jean de Baptiste in the 1710s. He later purchased land adjacent to the fort and emerged as an important trader and planter in the colony. Tradition holds that, on a trip to New Orleans in 1725, he met and married Catherine Mellier, a native of Paris who was the daughter of another trader. The couple returned to Natchitoches where they reared a family, including Jean Baptiste Prudhomme, the progenitor of the Oakland Prudhommes.

The founder of Oakland was Pierre Emmanuel Prudhomme, who was the son of Jean Baptiste. A third generation resident of Natchitoches Parish, Emmanuel began to farm the area in 1785 and received a Spanish land grant on what was then the Red River in 1789. He and his wife, Catherine Lambre, established the Bermuda Plantation, as it was originally named. Being among the first in Louisiana to plant cotton on a large scale,

Prudhomme prospered as a planter. Construction on a four-room Creole cottage began in 1818, but Emmanuel soon realized that it was too small, so three rooms were added on the north side. Enslaved labor completed these and other additions by 1821.

By the time of Emmanuel's death in 1845, there was a sizable population of ninety-eight enslaved workers at Bermuda Plantation. Emmanuel's son, Phanor, inherited the property and continued to expand the plantation's slave population to 146 by 1861. The research of Ann Malone indicates that the slave community at Bermuda during its mature phase was relatively stable and established deep bonds of kinship and friendship. She argues that the Prudhommés were fairly lenient in allowing some slaves the opportunity for autonomy and personal initiative.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, farming went on under different conditions. Phanor died in 1865, leaving the plantation to his two sons, Jacques Alphonse and Pierre Emmanuel. They eventually decided to divide the plantation in 1873. Alphonse retained the property and old home west of the river, which he renamed Oakland, and Emmanuel received the property on the other side of river, which he built into Atahoe Plantation. During this time, the agricultural labor system evolved into sharecropping, a method of renting land in exchange for a share of the future crop. Coupled with low cotton prices and the crop lien system, in which tenants mortgaged their future crop to buy supplies from the plantation commissary on credit, sharecropping usually trapped families in a perpetual cycle of debt and poverty.

When Alphonse died in 1919, the plantation went to his oldest son Phanor II, who passed it onto his son, Alphonse, in 1948. By this time, the nature of southern agriculture was changing as mechanization became a reality and sharecropping was rendered obsolete. The Prudhommés continued to operate Oakland as a working plantation until the late twentieth century, when the property became part of the Cane River Creole National Historical Park in 1994. Today, the plantation house and the remaining outbuildings stand as a testament to the will and determination of the Prudhommés as well as the generations of free and unfree communities who lived there.

Interpretive Approach

This site has very impressive resources to tell the story of the evolution of plantation life in Louisiana from the early 1800s to the mid-twentieth century. With its original furnishings, the restored “Big House” at Oakland offers a unique glimpse of Creole planter society over time. The current interpretive program within the “Big House” emphasizes features of the architecture and yardscape, the history of the Prudhomme family, and the functions of the rooms. The interpretative focus shifts to the experiences of workers, both free and unfree, when the tour reaches the outbuildings behind the house. Currently, the distant outbuildings are not part of the tour, but the park has plans to incorporate them into both guided and self-guided tours.

Since the park only recently fully opened to the public, it was difficult to measure the quality of visitor experience at Oakland Plantation. Based on personal observations and visitor surveys, however, a few generalizations may be made. Overall, most visitors have a positive experience and indicate that they would come back for another visit. African-American visitors, in particular, rated this as one of their favorite sites along Cane River because of its interpretation of the experience of African-descended plantation workers. One visitor indicated: “Oakland Plantation opened my eyes to the real life of slaves.”

Most negative impressions stem from the fact that, until October of 2001, the park was still in an incomplete and partially open state. Since October, however, three park interpreters offer tours seven days a week. Some visitors expressed confusion over whether the park was officially open or not. “I’d been by this site a few times before, but there was always a sign by the gate saying it was closed.” Another visitor commented: “I guess the house is still being worked on, because there’s plywood covering everything. That really takes away from the historical feel of the site.” Still, most visitors seemed satisfied with their experience and are eagerly anticipating the opening of the park. The above stated “plywood” complaint was followed by: “It’s going to be great when they finish the work.” While interpret services are currently being offered, there will be on-going construction at both park units for at least another three years, depending on federal funding.

Almost all visitors were very satisfied with the quality of their tour. When asked to suggest an improvement for the site, one visitor griped, “this

site can improve by getting a tour guide that doesn't bore the tourist. The tour guide at the park was not that interesting and really did not grab my attention right off." More typical of the responses, however, was: "I can say that I enjoyed every single moment of my visit and would not change a thing. I plan to take my husband and daughter when she gets old enough to understand."

Recommendations

This site offers perhaps the most complete plantation complex in the heritage area, making it an ideal site to interpret the evolution of plantation agriculture from the 1700s to the mid twentieth century. Resources permitting, the park service should consider making this site into a living plantation interpreting the transition in labor systems, technology, and everyday life of southern agriculture. Oakland has the resources to interpret all of the following themes: social organization of French Creole plantation society, plantation entrepreneurship, relations between workers and families, the communities of enslaved and free workers, and the intricate economic structures of the tenant farming system.

Living history components could be developed incrementally. For instance, the site could begin with living history demonstrations at special events. To highlight the changes in agricultural technology, demonstrations of mule drawn plows could be juxtaposed with an antique tractor show. To celebrate Christmas or Juneteenth, local church choirs could perform participatory programs for visitors. To reclaim the historical importance of the river, the park service could integrate the river into its interpretive program with appointment-only guided boat tours down the Cane. If these tours went from Oakland to Magnolia, it would be a nice way to help visitors connect to Cane River. These tours could provide an opportunity (and a captive audience) to discuss natural history and the historical importance of the river as a transportation and communication lifeline to the outside world.

To give visitors a personal stake in their visit, allow them to experience the site as a real-life person associated with the site. Borrowing the "character" technique of several recent exhibits (i.e. Titanic and Holocaust Museum), Oakland could develop profiles of several plantation residents over time. When visitors arrived they could be assigned one of these profiles and experience each component of the site from that

character's perspective, whether it is as a slave, overseer, sharecropper, mistress of the plantation, or a guest. It could be an especially effective method of teaching visitors about the notorious relationship between sharecropping and crop liens that ensnared generations of rural southerners into a cycle of debt and poverty. For instance, visitors could experience each component of the site from the perspective sharecropper's seasonal cycle of securing an oral contract to sharecrop, being "furnished" by the plantation store, planting and allocation of crop lands, "lay-by" time for church and recreation, and the harvest. The sharecropper character experience could end in the general store for "settlin' time," when visitors find out if, after paying debts for rent and supplies with their cotton harvest, they made a profit, broke even, or fell into debt. Thus, the visitor has an emotional investment in his or her character and is kept in suspense as to their success or failure until the end.

With the original furnishings and a big house with architectural integrity, Oakland has one of the best preserved Creole plantation houses. However, rather than replicate the interpretive focus (i.e. planter society and architecture) of other heritage area sites (and for the sake of fostering cooperation), the park service could concentrate its interpretation on agriculture and plantation life. As most of the other plantation sites will likely maintain their focus on the white owners, it is imperative for the Cane River Creole National Historical Park to tell the story of black and Creole workers. Additionally, Oakland's surviving outbuildings provide the resources to tell visitors how southern agriculture evolved from the colonial era to mechanization.

Melrose



History

The history of Melrose is a remarkable story that weaves together a series of fascinating people and events. As told at the site, the story begins with Marie Therese Coincoin, the matriarch of the Isle Brevelle Creole community who was born a slave in 1742. Coincoin, whose parents were part of the first generation of enslaved Africans brought to Louisiana, was a resourceful and intelligent woman who eventually attained freedom and prosperity for herself and her children. She bore fourteen children, ten of them fathered by a French merchant named Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer, who eventually bought her freedom, gave her a small lot of property on the Red River, and used his influence to allow her and her children the right to acquire more property. Through hard work, Coincoin and her children parlayed that small plot into massive holdings of land and slaves, making the Metoyers one of the wealthiest families of color in the nation.

An important part of this emerging empire was Yucca Plantation, which is now known as Melrose. Records indicate that Coincoin's son Louis Metoyer was deeded the property in 1796, though he was still technically enslaved at this time. Although many dispute the claim that Coincoin ever lived at Melrose, tradition holds that she held the title until

Louis was free and could legally own property. It is believed the Yucca House was probably built between 1796 and 1800. Yucca remained the largest domicile on the plantation until 1833, when Louis Metoyer built the big house now known as Melrose. The Metoyer family continued to own the plantation until 1847, when creditors represented by Phanor Prudhomme forced a sheriff's sale.

Henry and Hypolite Hertzog owned the property until 1881, when Francis Roman Cauranneau purchased it. Three years later, the property came into the Henry family, ushering in the next phase of its development. The Henry years at Melrose revolve around Cammie Garret Henry, a remarkable and energetic woman who transformed Melrose into a haven for artists and writers. When she and her husband, John, moved into Melrose in 1898, she devoted her time and energies to restoring the plantation and preserving its history and structures. She also welcomed writers and artists to seek refuge and respite at the resplendent Melrose Plantation. Over time, Mrs. Henry sponsored several writers at Melrose, including Rachel Field, Roark Bradford, Francois Mignon, and Lyle Saxon. It was here that Saxon wrote his best-known novel *Children of Strangers*. Melrose also spawned the artistic achievements of Clementine Hunter, one of the South's foremost primitive artists.

Ownership of Melrose passed to the Henry's son in the 1940s, after John and "Miss Cammie" had passed away. Since he was an absentee owner, Melrose fell into disrepair and was not inhabited for more than two decades. In 1971, Southdown Land Company purchased the property and donated the house and six-acres of surrounding land and outbuildings to the Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches. The APHN still maintains and interprets the site, which is currently the most visited heritage attraction in the Cane River National Heritage Area.

Interpretive Approach

The interpretive focus at Melrose is centered on Cammie Henry and Clementine Hunter; the secondary themes include the Metoyer story and the writers who lived at Melrose. Melrose offers strictly a guided tour for all walk-in visitors that lasts about one and half to two hours. The main docents are Todd and Leslie Cooper, who have lived on the site for several years.

When visitors arrive, they must either wait for the next tour to begin or join a tour already in progress.

The tour begins with an approximately 20 minute video program that spotlights some of the remarkable women along Cane River, including Kate Chopin, Cammie Henry, and Clementine Hunter. After the video, the docent leads the visitors to the Yucca House and tells the story of Coincoin and the Metoyer family; nevertheless, the interpretation of Yucca is focused primarily on Lyle Saxon. Next, visitors are guided into the Africa House, where they view a series of large murals of daily life on Cane River painted by Clementine Hunter. After a brief interpretive stroll through the grounds, the tour then goes into the Big House, where a docent offers a room-by-room description of the furniture, architecture, functions of the rooms, and anecdotes about the Henrys and their guests. The tour concludes with the weaving house, where the processes of spinning and weaving are demonstrated, and the bindery, which has been converted into a gift shop.

Judging from the visitor surveys, Melrose is the most popular plantation site on Cane River. One visitor flatly stated: "I preferred this plantation more than the other plantation I went to see." Another visitor chose to go to Melrose "because the tourism information center informed me this was the best in the area." Another specific comment on why this site was so popular was: "This site was more interesting to me because it contained more information pertaining to my black heritage." Most visitors enjoy the tours and are captivated by the stories of Marie Therese Coincoin, Cammie Henry, and Clementine Hunter, whose artwork adds enormously to this site. The favorite aspect of the tour seems to be the Africa House and its Clementine Hunter murals. Visitors are also fascinated by the architectural styles and functions of the site's different structures. When asked to assess the strengths of Melrose, one visitor commented: "The most apparent strengths of Melrose are the four buildings that are examples of eighteenth and nineteenth century architecture." Others thought had high regard for the tour guides: "The staff was friendly and had great knowledge of the plantation." In sum, most visitors had a very good experience at Melrose and would recommend it to others. As one visitor put it: "As a whole I really enjoyed the tour. I have visited many plantations in the past and I have to say that this is by far one of the best ones I've ever seen."

However, not all of the impressions were positive. When asked about their least favorite parts of the Melrose experience, the most common

responses were the continuous tours and the video. When most visitors arrive, they are forced to join tours already in progress. This frustrates some visitors because they felt as though they had missed the important orientation information at the beginning of the tour. One visitor complained: "I did not like the way the continuous tours were done. If someone comes and wants the tour and has no knowledge of Melrose they will be lost." Many visitors believe that "the video was the worst part of the tour." It seems that visitors perceive the video as dull and poorly produced. One visitor protested: "We were made to watch a long, boring video that was so old you couldn't even hear it." The other complaints often voiced in visitor surveys were monotone guides, poor signage, and overly long tours. The length of the tours seems to be especially problematic for senior visitors who have difficulties standing, much less climbing stairs, for long periods of time.

Recommendations

While visitor impressions of Melrose are quite high, there is room for enhancing visitor experiences. First, it is recommended that Melrose address what visitors regard as their primary weaknesses—the orientation video and the continuous tours. Given that these two aspects of the tour constitute the visitors' first impressions of Melrose, the orientation and introduction to the site must properly greet the visitor and set the tone for the interpretation. To that end, two recommendations are offered: 1) discontinue the video until another short orientation video can be produced; and 2) diversify tour offerings. Discontinuing the video would not only remove a sore point with visitors, it would also appease other local historical sites that complain that Melrose's 2-hour tour exhausts the visitors and diverts their visitation flow. Nonetheless, a visitor orientation to the site is still needed. In addition, Melrose should consider abandoning the "one size fits all" approach to their tours and diversify their tours by establishing "interpretive zones" and developing self-guided tours of the grounds. Staffed by different guides focusing on specific parts of the site, interpretive zones give visitors the freedom to linger at the parts of the site they most enjoy. Guides can further enhance these interpretive zones with living history techniques, such as first person perspectives and hands-on demonstrations. Self-guided tours of the outbuildings and grounds would accomplish numerous visitor objectives. It would allow families with small children to enjoy the site without disturbing the formal tours; it would give

elderly visitors the opportunity to experience Melrose at their own pace; and it would help to accommodate disabled visitors.

As for the interpretive focus of the site, the strong emphasis on the Metoyers, Cammie Henry, and Clementine Hunter should be maintained, yet slightly modified. Clearly, visitors are fascinated by Marie Therese Coincoin, and this is currently the only heritage area site where her story is being interpreted. While more research is needed to clarify her association with the site, Coincoin should figure prominently into the history of Melrose, no matter who the tour guide is. Currently, some visitors and local residents feel that there is not enough attention paid to her extraordinary accomplishments. On the other hand, there are others who feel that Melrose exaggerates her association with the site, pointing out that there is no evidence that she ever lived there. Nevertheless, until her story is told at a more appropriate site, Melrose should retain Coincoin as an element of tours. Also, for a few visitors, it was a "revelation to learn that people of color owned slaves." Visitors also seem intrigued by Cammie Henry and the art/literary colony that flourished at her behest. To give visitors the opportunity to linger and enjoy the many artistic expressions of the area, Melrose should consider setting aside space for a reading room and exhibition space. In keeping with the tradition of promoting art and literature, a space to highlight regional artists and writers would reinforce Melrose's historic role as the creative hub of Cane River.



Center. In many of these interviews, she describes in her own words her inspiration for particular works of art. Interactive audio/video clips in close proximity to her artistic works and place of residence would allow visitors to connect with Clementine Hunter as never before.

Lastly, the interpretation of Clementine Hunter could be significantly enhanced with the opening of her cottage. Her story could be brought to life with audio and video excerpts from numerous oral history interviews, many of which are part of the Mildred Hart Bailey Collection at the Cammie Henry Research

Magnolia



History

Magnolia Plantation represents one of the most complete and best preserved antebellum plantation complexes in the South. In 1830, Ambroise LeComte II and his wife, Julia Buard, established Magnolia on land that his family had been acquiring for several years. Indeed, his great-grandfather, Jean Baptiste LeComte, who had been stationed at Fort St. Jean de Baptiste, acquired a French land grant in the vicinity as early as 1753. Still in his early twenties when construction of Magnolia began in 1830, Ambrose LeComte was a resourceful and ambitious man who emerged as a leading planter along Cane River. Committed to large-scale cotton production, the LeComte family owned two other plantations in the region.

By 1860, LeComte was the largest slaveholder in Natchitoches Parish with 235 enslaved workers. As the cotton production and slaveholdings increased, Magnolia evolved into a fairly sophisticated and largely self-sufficient plantation complex. With such large slaveholdings, LeComte housed his workers in approximately twenty-eight “quarters,” where a relatively stable enslaved community developed. Most of the plantation’s structures and outbuildings were constructed during the plantation’s heyday

from the 1830s to the 1850s. During this time, the skilled enslaved laborers of LeComte built most of the extant buildings on the site today, including the gin barn, the brick slave quarters, and a slave hospital. Yet, troubled times were to come.

The Civil War left Cane River Country relatively unscathed until the Spring of 1864, when Union forces mounted the Red River Campaign with the dual purpose of cutting off Confederate supply lines from Texas and to raid the region's rich cotton reserves. Following Confederate victories at Pleasant Hill and Mansfield, Union forces quickly retreated, wreaking destruction as they left Cane River Country. Union troops burned down Magnolia's original "big house," but they fortunately left most of the plantation's other structures standing.

Not only did the Civil War bring physical destruction to the plantation, it also forced a re-organization of plantation labor systems in the aftermath of emancipation. As slavery dissolved and technology changed, tenant farming emerged as the dominant agricultural labor system in the South. Many formerly enslaved workers stayed at Magnolia and continued to work the plantation on a somewhat different, though still subservient, basis. Gradually, the plantation resumed its operations. After finding a ceramic white dove in the ashes, Mathew Hertzog took that as a sign to rebuild. So, on the foundations of the old house, a replica of the original house was completed in 1897. Magnolia evolved into a thriving community revolving around church and family. Sharecropping was a way of life from Reconstruction until the mid-twentieth century. By this time, a combination of factors, namely boll weevils, mechanization, and the Great Depression, forced most workers to leave the plantation and find jobs and new lives elsewhere. It was the end of an era.

But the story of Magnolia is yet unfinished. Betty Hertzog, who is a descendant of the LeComtes, is now the custodian and part owner the big house at Magnolia. Most of the outbuildings, however, are part of the Cane River Creole National Historical Park. Though separated in ownership, Magnolia Plantation will be forever linked in history.

Interpretive Approach

Magnolia Plantation offers two separate, yet complementary, visitor experiences at the big house and the plantation complex. At the big house, tour guides present a traditional historic house tour focused on the history of the LeComte/Hertzog family and the furnishings and functions of the rooms. When visitors first arrive at Magnolia, they are enchanted by the enormous live oaks believed to be more than 200 years old. However, some visitors had a less favorable first impression of the grounds: "The front courtyard is overgrown with ivy and shrubs and a large abundance of cats are roaming everywhere." Another visitor commented: "The overall impression of the grounds was less impressive. . . The area outside of the house is in need of some major tending."

Once inside the house, however, visitors were favorably impressed with the tour of the house. Although one visitor felt that the tour guide was "unenthusiastic," others rated their tour guides (at least two) highly. When asked to recall the most memorable part of the tour, the most common responses were the Civil War stories and the chapel. A 10 year-old child felt that interpreting the functional aspects of the bed was most interesting. Not all visitors enjoyed the traditional approach. For instance, one visitor wrote: "I heard the same story about the rolling pin headboards at Melrose! . . . I really wanted to know more about who slept in the bed."

After the house tour, many visitors are primed to tour the rest of the plantation, but are currently unable to because the national park part of the property is currently open only by appointment. When visitors are fortunate enough to have a guided tour of the Magnolia complex, they are introduced to an entirely different interpretive approach focused on the community of free and enslaved workers on the plantation. The interpretive program at Magnolia Complex cannot yet be fully assessed as it is still in its formative stages. Still, one can ascertain the framework of this program by reviewing the site's current interpretive program plan and interviewing current guides. The primary interpretive theme for this site is: the life and work of enslaved African-descended people at Magnolia. Guided tours are available by appointment, but park administrators are envisioning this as primarily a self-guided tour site.

The guided tours (and by assumption the self-guided tours) offer information about the functions of the structures and individual workers who

lived and worked there. At the Blacksmith's Shop, visitors learn about Daniel and Charles, two enslaved blacksmiths at Magnolia. Visitors also learn about the adaptive uses for the Overseer's House/Slave Hospital. The quarters and plantation store offer unique glimpses into the social and economic lives of black southerners. Lastly, the gin barn provides a fine example of a cotton screw press—an important piece of agricultural technology.

Recommendations

The two Magnolia sites offer extraordinary potential to interpret the evolution of southern plantation life from the early nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Yet these interpretive possibilities are limited by lack of resources and a lack of coordination. A key to the future of this site is to foster greater coordination between the Hertzog family and the Cane River Creole National Historical Park. Currently there seems to be much apprehension over the interpretation of slavery at Magnolia Complex. This is to be understood, and it is in fact a relatively common issue that arises when private sites are turned over to public agencies. The Hertzogs view Magnolia as a testament to the indomitable spirit of their ancestors.

Naturally, they wish to present the family in a positive light and are wary of anything that might sully the family's reputation. Meanwhile, park service officials wish to interpret slavery as the cruel and exploitive system it was. Slavery is always a difficult topic to interpret, because it is so heavily laden

with controversy, guilt, shame, and anger.



The heritage area administrator can serve as a proactive agent to ease tensions and foster greater coordination between the two Magnolia sites. The good news is that the apprehensions may be “much ado about nothing.” The NPS ethnographic surveys reveal that local

residents are generally opposed to living history depictions of slavery. Even

if the park service wanted to implement first person interpretation, the park is several years away from such resources. Still, the park service should continue to seek out ways to develop special programs using living history interpretive approaches. For instance, visitor surveys indicate that those who attended the formal opening of the traveling exhibit on slavery and the abolition movement seemed to be deeply moved by the experience. One audience member reported that the program made him “look at slavery in a totally different way than I had before.”

Fortunately for Mrs. Hertzog and her family, it appears that their ancestors were not abusive slaveholders; to the contrary, most indications are that they were progressive and could afford to be relatively humane. Since the plantation stayed in the same family, Magnolia’s slave community was quite stable and never experienced the wrenching separations of an estate sale. The existence of a slave hospital also indicates some concern for the well-being of laborers. However, that should not preclude the park service from interpreting the more painful aspects of slavery. For instance, it appears that some Magnolia slaves participated in an armed plot in 1804 to escape to Nagodoches, illustrating an active resistance to enslavement. To present a balanced perspective, both components of the Magnolia site should embrace the idea that slavery was a complex, multi-faceted institution.

From the visitors’ perspective, the contrast between the interpretive perspectives is startling. This “startling contrast” could be addressed by joint interpretive planning that looks at the site as a whole rather than two separate and competing entities. The big house and plantation complex are two wings of the same bird, part of the same story. Somehow, the Hertzogs should be given a voice in the interpretation of the complex; likewise, the Hertzogs should work directly with the park service on how to improve the visitor experience and bridge the interpretative gap.

Currently, Magnolia’s big house has an interpretive focus and experience very similar to Beaufort and Melrose. To boost visitation and differentiate the site’s interpretation, it is recommended that Magnolia shift its focus to the adaptation of Cane River planters from the Old South to the New South. Making the Civil War and Reconstruction a primary theme for the site would do much to generate interest in the site and to distinguish it from the other local plantations. Perhaps some space could be set aside for rotating Civil War displays to generate return visitation. Given that the house was burned during the Civil War and reconstructed in the 1890s, the

reconstructed house stands as a testament to the indomitable spirit of the planter class. It makes sense to shift the focus to the Civil War and post-bellum transition, especially since no other heritage area sites focuses on this period. In doing so, the vintage footage of Magnolia Plantation from 1938 to 1950 could be used very effectively to help visitors understand the thriving community that once surrounded Magnolia—and offering a transition to the visitors' trip to Magnolia Complex.

The interpretation at Magnolia Complex is appropriately centered on the communities of free and enslaved workers on the plantation. However, the primary focus on slavery threatens to neglect other valuable interpretive themes for the site. For instance, the rise of sharecropping and the development the crop lien system are largely ignored in the current interpretive program. With a general store as the main gateway for visitors to the site, this interpretive theme could be significantly enhanced. Furthermore, the sole focus on slavery seems misplaced when you consider that largescale enslavement existed on the site for less than forty years, while tenant farming lasted for nearly a century. By focusing on the transition from slavery to freedom, the park service can develop a coordinated interpretive experience between Magnolia House and Magnolia Complex. Also, it could use the old footage of Magnolia as a very effective interpretive tool. Projected on the walls in the cabins and in the store, the footage could help to give life to the lonely, empty cabins that once fostered generations of communities.

Kate Chopin House/Bayou Folk Museum



History

This Creole-style home celebrates its most famous resident, Kate Chopin, and its original inhabitant, Alexis Cloutier. Built by slave labor between 1805 and 1809, the structure exemplifies the early nineteenth-century homes of the area. Alexis Cloutier had built a plantation out of the canebrakes and had amassed a fortune without learning to read or write. He became part of the elite plantation society of Cane River in the early nineteenth century. However, he was not as successful in his marriages. After his first wife died in 1806, he later had a short-lived marriage to Marie Rachal. Tradition holds that Cloutier insisted that it was his wife's duty to wash his feet; if she refused, he allegedly became physically abusive, prompting her to attain a separation (and eventual divorce) just three months after the marriage. He later hatched a plan to divide Natchitoches Parish and establish a new parish with his property, Cloutierville, as the parish seat. When this plan failed, an embittered Cloutier sold all of his land in Cloutierville and lived until his death in 1836 on a plantation downstream now known as Little Eva.

Marie's brother, Antoine, purchased the township from Cloutier around 1822. Deciding that Cloutierville would not develop into a thriving town, he turned most of the lots into farmland. The Rachals continued to own the property until Oscar Chopin bought the house in 1879 at a sheriff's sale. Chopin was a cotton factor in New Orleans who decided to move his family to Cloutierville after his business had failed. His wife, Kate, was an assertive twenty-nine year old woman who had lived her entire life in St. Louis and New Orleans. She had already had five children, and she was pregnant with their sixth child. Kate Chopin refused to conform to local traditions for women. She smoked, wore the latest fashions, had "Yankee" mannerisms, and reportedly flirted with other women's husbands. Oscar's relatives complained that he gave her too much freedom. When Oscar died of "swamp fever" in 1882, Kate continued to live in Cloutierville, despite being an unwanted outsider. She ran the general store and allegedly had an affair with Albert Sampité, a married man. In 1884, she left Cloutierville and sold the property five years later. Over the next fifteen years, Kate Chopin launched a literary career that culminated with the publication of *The Awakening* in 1899. Unappreciated as a writer in her own time, Kate Chopin is now regarded as one of the most important American writers of the late nineteenth century.

Chopin sold the house to Dr. Josephus Griffin, who established a partnership with his friend from medical school, Dr. Samuel Scruggs. While more research is needed to clarify ownership history in the early 1900s, it appears that Dr. Lloyd Wink purchased the house in the 1940s. Dr. Wink eventually left Cloutierville and moved to Shreveport, leaving the house behind as rental property. The house had fallen into a serious state of disrepair, when Mildred McCoy, a lifelong resident of Cloutierville and an admirer of Kate Chopin, convinced Dr. Wink to donate the house as a museum. Paying only the closing costs, Ms. McCoy acquired the house in 1965, began the restoration process, and opened it as the Bayou Folk Museum. However, in the mid-1970s, Ms. McCoy became ill and deeded the property and a trust fund to Northwestern State University. After spending the trust fund, NSU did not have the resources to maintain the house. In 1979, Miriam Neesom, an NSU English professor, played a key role in convincing the Association for the Preservation for Historic Natchitoches to become the stewards of the property. Lucille Carnahan and Emma Masson kept the house open to the public during this period, but in 1986, the property insurance company demanded a live-in overseer of the property. Two separate couples lived at the site until 1990, when Amanda

Chenault became the overseer and curator of the Bayou Folk Museum/Kate Chopin House. A major renovation of the house in 1999 resulted in the installation of central air and heat. Today, the restored house offers visitors the opportunity to learn the history Cloutierville and its most famous inhabitant, Kate Chopin.

Interpretive Approach

The current interpretive themes are Kate Chopin and the history of Cloutierville, two appropriate themes for the site. Currently, most tours are given by Amanda Chenault, a longtime resident of Cloutierville who has lived on the site since 1990. Her manner of delivering tours adds a unique element to the visitor experience. Her connection to the area and her informal delivery make it a relaxed and informative experience.

When visitors first arrive, they park on the street, proceed through the gate, and ring the outside bell for the docent. When Ms. Chenault arrives, she greets the visitors and lets them into the house, where visitors are given an orientation to the site and the opportunity to watch a short video program about Kate Chopin. Visitors are then systematically toured through the house in a traditional tour format that focuses on the furniture, the restoration of the house, Kate Chopin, and the lifeways of local folk. Visitors are free to visit the implement shed behind the house, but they are not allowed to enter the un-restored doctor's office at the left rear corner of the site.

Generally, visitors felt that this site was a hidden gem, although some felt it was too hidden as they complained about having difficulties finding the place. Their impression of the tour guide was good. One visitor commented: "She knew a lot and I was impressed. She was one of the best tour guides I have ever had." However, another visitor thought the tour guide was "unprofessional" because she wore regular clothes. Nevertheless, visitors seem to have few complaints about their tour guide.

Instead, visitors are disappointed with the lack of interpretive focus on Kate Chopin. The sentiments of many visitors can be summed up as: "What I disliked most about the tour was that it did not have a lot to do with Kate herself." Another visitor added: "The Kate Chopin House does not have anything to do with her. . . The tour was more based on how Mrs. McCoy

restored the house.” Yet another visitor reported that: “They should not call it the Kate Chopin Home if they do talk about her that much, and if they do not have many artifacts.”

Another common complaint was the video. “The only thing about the tour I did not like was the video at the beginning . . . it was just plain boring.” Visitors also did not appreciate being denied entry into the doctor’s office. Lastly, a few visitors disliked the arrangement of tools in the shed, commenting that: “The antiques in the shed looked very cluttered. There was no explanation about what all those things were.” Aside from these complaints, in the end, visitors rated this site highly. Most indicated that they would return for another visit.

Recommendations

This site could make much better interpretive use of its connection to Kate Chopin. The story of Kate Chopin should be emphasized and expanded in the tour, as clearly expected by visitors. First, visitors must understand Chopin’s role in American literature. Shunned during her own times, Chopin is now an internationally known literary figure who is widely regarded as a seminal feminist writer. Indeed, her works are required reading in many American literature classes.

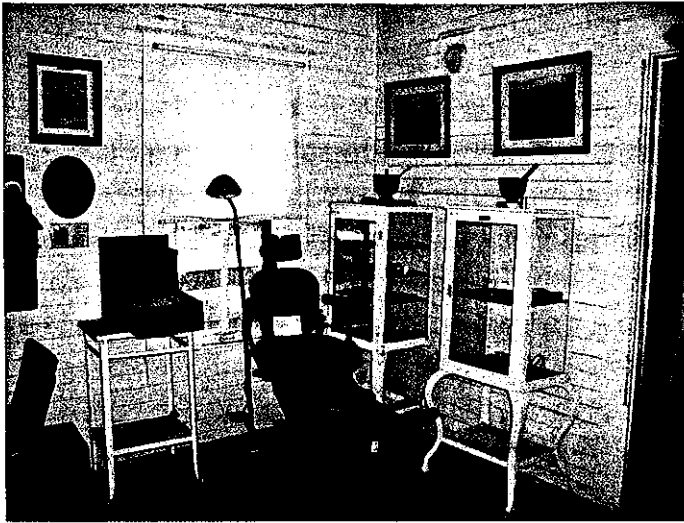
Although Chopin resided in Cloutierville for only three years, her time in Natchitoches Parish period was a pivotal time in her life that, in many ways, set the course for her future literary career. Having lived all of her life in St. Louis and New Orleans, it was her first time to live away from the city. Fascinated by the rural folk of Cane River, her experiences became the fodder for her “Bayou Folk” short stories. Two years after moving, Kate’s husband, Oscar, died of “swamp fever.” Kate was 32 years old with six children, marooned among people who didn’t particularly like her. She felt like an outsider, a feeling that would be a defining trait of Edna in *The Awakening*. Nonetheless, she asserted her independence, ran her husband’s store, and had an affair with a married man—all socially aggressive actions for the time. Eventually, she moved back to St. Louis, but Cane River left an indelible imprint on her life and on her writings.

Thus, the Kate Chopin House should fully embrace Kate Chopin as the primary interpretive focus of the house. The front downstairs rooms

could offer a storyline exhibit of Kate Chopin's life and an explanation of why her time on Cane River was so important. The video could be converted to either a continuously playing feature of the exhibit or edited to thematic touch screen programs sprinkled throughout the exhibit space at appropriate places in the storyline. Since there is currently a lack of artifacts directly associated with Kate Chopin at the site, the exhibition could make heavy use of photographs and hands-on representations of period dress and furnishings. The exhibit could function at two different levels: appealing to adults, the text/image-rich exhibit could follow an interpretive storyline approach weaving together the story of Kate Chopin with other issues concerning women's history; appealing to younger audiences, the exhibit could include hands-on elements that would allow visitors trying on corsets or playing Victorian card games. This interpretive approach would allow the site to fulfill its visitors' expectations about a Kate Chopin-centered attraction.

Following the strong feminist motif of Chopin, the site could also broaden its interpretive focus to include the legacy of other strong and remarkable women from Cane River. Although women's history is already a primary theme (though somewhat muted) at Melrose, APHN's other site, the Kate Chopin House could offer an ideal forum to interpret this legacy in greater depth. Rotating exhibits could present notable women and women's organizations, such as Caroline Dorman, Clara Turner, the women's suffrage movement in Louisiana, APHN, the young women of Old Normal, and the real life women of *Steel Magnolias*.

While it is strongly recommended that Kate Chopin and women's history should be the primary interpretive themes, it does mean to suggest that the local story should be excluded. Indeed, the site has strong resources to interpret local history, but these resources are not currently being utilized. For instance, the doctor's office and its furnishings provides an amazing resource to interpret regional medical history, including local folk remedies and the rise of professional medicine. But due to a lack of restoration funds, the structure is unsafe for visitors and thereby closed to the public. The restoration of this building could add an interpretive theme not found anywhere else in the heritage area—health care and medicine.



In a region historically plagued with diseases, an interpretation of health care is certainly necessary for a full understanding of the area. Also, the site features a collection of agricultural equipment that could be used to interpret farm life among the “bayou folk,” but instead it sits, un-interpreted and largely ignored. It is recommended to adopt some

form of systematic explanation of these antiques, such as a guided tour, a printed guide, or interpretive signage.

Perhaps one way to reconcile Kate Chopin to the interpretation of local history is to employ living history techniques. This entire site has strong potential for first-person interpretation. Imagine a visitor who arrives and is greeted at the door by gossipy bayou folk neighbor or by Kate Chopin herself. It could add an unforgettable touch to their visitor experience.

Secondary Interpretive Themes

Secondary interpretive themes are issues and events that relate to specific sites, but not necessarily to the heritage area as a whole. While related to the primary interpretive themes—the messages that need to be conveyed to every visitor—secondary interpretive themes are targeted to particular audiences and are more site specific. The secondary interpretive themes have been divided into two broad categories: people and themes. The category of “people” includes the diverse populations of Cane River, including Native Americans, European Creoles, African Americans, Creoles of color, Jews, and Italians. The category of “themes” includes more specialized issues, including agriculture, architecture, creative expressions, military, natural history, religion, and *Steel Magnolias*.

People

Native Americans—The heritage area has much untapped potential for the interpretation of Native American history. Currently, there are two sites in Natchitoches Parish focusing on Native American history and culture: the Williamson Museum at NSU and the Adai-Caddo Museum. There are also a few sites (namely Los Adaes, Fort St. Jean de Baptiste, and the Fish Hatchery) where Native American history is a secondary theme. With this segmented interpretation of the Native American experience, it is difficult for visitors to fully understand the important role of Native Americans in Cane River’s history. When local authorities were asked what were the most important interpretive issues concerning Native Americans that should be conveyed to visitors, the consistent responses were the Native American role in early settlement, how trade relations and cultural interactions affected both Indians and white settlers, and the evolution of living communities of Native Americans in the area.

Of all the above-mentioned sites, the Williamson Museum is currently the only site attempting to provide a contextual overview of the region’s Native American history. The Museum is already regarded as the primary repository for Native American artifacts in Northwest Louisiana. Possessing a rich collection of Native American archaeological artifacts and contemporary crafts, the Museum also has the space and resources to tell the fascinating story of Native Americans in the region. Under the direction of Dr. “Pete” Gregory, the museum has the expertise to be the primary

orientation site for regional Native American history. The museum currently has an object-oriented exhibit spotlighting prehistoric and historic Native American artifacts and contemporary crafts from several Southeastern tribes. Given the richness of the collections, this object-oriented approach is appropriate; however, the Museum should consider developing a storyline interpretive approach to provide visitors with a much-needed overview of regional Native American culture and history. Using the current categorization of objects on display, the existing permanent exhibit could be enhanced with: a revised exhibit floorplan that guides visitors through the changes in time for material culture; a storyline approach that describes the Native American experience in Northwest Louisiana; additional photos, images, and maps to correspond with the artifacts; and multi-media components, such as Native American music, to immerse the senses and to give life to the exhibit.

While the Williamson Museum has the cultural resources to provide an overview of the Native American story, it does not currently have adequate financial resources. Another significant problem to making this site an integral part of the visitor experience is that we cannot reasonably expect visitors to park on NSU's campus (a difficult prospect at best!) and find the Williamson Museum open on the second floor of Kyser Hall. Perhaps these wayfinding problems could be addressed with heritage area or private shuttles and guides who funnel visitors to the Museum at pre-arranged times without the hassle of parking or finding it.

The other site focused primarily on Native American history is the Adai-Caddo Museum located in the Spanish Lake area. Led by Chief Rufus Davis, the Adai-Caddo tribe claim to be the descendants of the Adaes Indians, a band of Caddo who were the allies of the Spanish at Los Adaes. In the first half of the nineteenth century, after Louisiana had become part of the United States, government policy and cultural prejudices forced the Adai-Caddo to give up their traditional lifeways and deny their Indian identities. Still, the insular community maintained separate schools and churches. In recent years, Chief Davis has sought to reclaim his Native American heritage by establishing a state-recognized tribal government, tribal lands, and a museum. It must be pointed out, however, that some people dispute the claims of familial and cultural kinship to the Adaes and Caddo Indians. Regardless, it is clear that the Adai-Caddo community is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural people who are proud of their Indian identity. Currently, Chief Davis is the most visible interpreter of Native Americans in

the community. The Museum is still in its infancy, but it has the potential to tell the fascinating story of this community. Indeed, Davis has ambitious long-term plans to transform this site into a major cultural tourism attraction. Until then, the Adai-Caddo Museum could trace the complex story of this living Indian community.

Again, there are three sites where Native Americans represent a secondary theme: Fort St. Jean de Baptiste, Los Adaes, and the Fish Hatchery. Fort St. Jean de Baptiste focuses mainly on the French military, but the tours also discuss Native American roles in the settlement's founding, trade, and war. Los Adaes interprets Spanish colonization practices, but also includes cultural interactions and attempts to mission to the Adaes. The Fish Hatchery is the site of a Native American settlement and burial ground that was disturbed back in the 1920s and 1930s. While there is interpretive signage, the Fish Hatchery has long-term plans to enhance their Native American interpretation.

One point of interest with the potential for Native American interpretation is the site of the former Indian Factory, approximately located behind the Courthouse Building near the south gate of the former Fort Claiborne. When the Americans took over Louisiana, they sought to regulate Indian trade through the Indian Factory, which gave only certain factors the right to trade with Indians. In operation from the 1800s to the 1810s, the Indian Factory site could interpret an important period in which American policies concerning Native Americans were evolving towards Indian removal.

European Creoles

Of all the groups of people interpreted in the heritage area, Europeans currently receive most of the attention. Indeed, as detailed below, there is an abundance of surviving structures and commemorative markers to tell the story of white settlement and development. Still, the disjointed nature of these sites makes it difficult for visitors to fully appreciate and understand the strategic significance of this region in the colonization of North American. What is lacking is an interpretative orientation that puts it all together for visitors.

Since Cane River National Heritage Area is situated at the historical boundary between Spanish Texas and French Louisiana, it has the distinction of being the only region in North America that can compare and contrast the colonization styles and practices of the French and Spanish. These contrasts between the Spanish and French help to explain cultural differences in Northwest Louisiana, such as culinary traditions, economic patterns, site names, and more. The heritage area could also emphasize the role that Natchitoches played in the white conquest and settlement of the west by using the illustrative words of numerous travel accounts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

This region has numerous sites to tell the story of the first white settlers and the communities they created. Among the sites in-town are:

1. St. Denis bust—Located next to the Tourism Information Center on Front Street, this highly visible commemoration of St. Denis, hailed as the founder of Natchitoches and first commandant of Fort St. Jean de Baptiste, provides a good starting point for visitors to understand European settlement.
2. Wells House—Built around 1776 for Gabriel Buard, this is believed to be one of the oldest surviving houses in the entire Louisiana Purchase territory.
3. Fort St. Jean de Baptiste—This recreated 1730s French fort interprets the early French settlers who struggled to forge a colony in the Louisiana backcountry.

4. Metoyer Townhouse—This brick house (c. 1850) was built for Benjamin Metoyer, a white Creole planter who used this home as his townhouse, illustrating the economic and social relationship between town and country in the South.
5. Cloutier/Blanchard/Prudhomme Buildings—This row of buildings on historic Front Street represent the oldest examples of commercial buildings in Natchitoches. This site also has the potential to interpret the economic and social ties of Cane river planters to Natchitoches.
6. Tante-Huppé—This 1850s home is associated with several European Creole families in Natchitoches, such as LeComte, Prudhomme, and Huppé.
7. Immaculate Conception Church—The sixth Catholic church built in Natchitoches, Immaculate Conception Church offers an extraordinary resource to interpret the central role of Catholicism in shaping life on Cane River.
8. French Cemetery—The old Catholic cemetery, located at the west end of Church Street, features the burials sites of many of the leading Creole planters in the area.
9. American Cemetery—Much of the history of Natchitoches clusters around this site, which was the original site of the Fort. The cemetery features the burial sites of diverse peoples dating back to the 1730s.
10. Old Masonic Lodge—Now Lasyone's Restaurant, this building used to be the lodge for the Freemasons, an important secret society that was first chartered in Natchitoches in 1818.

Outside of the town of Natchitoches, the most important sites to interpret European Creole history are the plantation sites, especially Cherokee, Beaufort, Oakland, Magnolia, and Kate Chopin. However, a few privately owned sites with secondary importance as sites to interpret European Creoles are Oaklawn Plantation, and Lambre Plantation.

African Americans

Despite the tremendous contributions that African-descended people have made to the development of the area and its economic, social, and cultural life, African Americans have been largely neglected in the interpretation of heritage attractions along Cane River. Given that the town of Natchitoches and the Cane River plantations were literally built by free and enslaved people of color, the lack of African American history in the heritage area should be addressed. The heritage area possesses extraordinary resources and fascinating stories to broaden and enhance the interpretation of the African American experience. A thematic guide is needed that will trace the African American experience from the colonial era to modern times, spotlighting the sites in town and in the heritage area associated with this story.

More importantly, however, the heritage area could take proactive measures to encourage each existing site to consider how to better weave black history into their daily tour programs. Perhaps the heritage area could promote this effort by sponsoring workshops aimed to help historic house tour guides interpret black history with accuracy and sensitivity. Also, while the heritage area is spearheading the campaign to secure funding for a black history museum in the old railroad depot, it should also consider interpretive signage targeted to African American history.

Perhaps one of the reasons there is so little interpretation of African American history is that story is so complex and unique, yet typical in many respects. The crux to the problem is the issue of slavery, always a controversial and taboo issue. There is a tendency among local whites to characterize slavery along Cane River as a "kinder, gentler" version of the institution as practiced elsewhere in the South. The notion that Cane River planters were more humane slaveholders has some basis in fact. There are numerous examples of enslaved workers being allowed the freedom to earn extra money or to purchase their own freedom. Because of a combination of colonial circumstances and Catholic law that recognized Africans as having souls and in need of catechism and baptism, early planters in colonial Louisiana did seem to treat their enslaved labor with more dignity and respect than elsewhere in the South. Manumissions and inter-racial cohabitation were quite common in colonial Louisiana. However, as Louisiana evolved into a cash-crop plantation society in the early 1800s, and after the acquisition of Louisiana by the United States, the institution of slavery

became increasingly harsh. In sum, while there is some truth to local ideas about slavery being more humane along Cane River in the colonial era, that was not necessarily true in the antebellum period during the heyday of Cane River's plantations.

So far, aside from the story of Clementine Hunter, there is almost no interpretation of African-American history from the Civil War to the present. The post-Civil War period was characterized by triumph and tragedy for African Americans of the area. The postbellum transition was a bloody period in northwest Louisiana that produced a deadly race riot in nearby Colfax and saw the region emerge as the lynching hotspot of the South. Indeed, Natchitoches received national attention for its ruthless suppression of black voters' rights in the late-1870s at the end of Reconstruction. Nevertheless, local whites professed their affection for African Americans as evidenced by the erection of the "Good Darkey" Statue in 1927. This statue, which depicted a black man with his hat tipped off and head bowed in a deferential posture to whites, may have been built with good intentions, but, to many African Americans, it represented oppression and humiliation. The statue was removed in 1968. Change in race relations has come slowly and gradually in Natchitoches, which makes the suggestions of expanding African American interpretation all the more daunting. Still, it is a story that has been neglected for far too long that our visitors are interested to hear.

The rural parts of the heritage area offer numerous sites to interpret the black experience. As described above, the primary sites for telling the story of African Americans will likely be the National Park Service sites at Oakland Plantation and Magnolia Complex. Nevertheless, there are other sites in the heritage area with the potential for additional interpretation, such as:

1. Beaufort—With a few well-documented stories of free and enslaved blacks who lived on this plantation (i.e. Prince and Ceraphin LaCase), and one of the few black interpreters in the area, Beaufort could do more to interpret African Americans, who comprised the vast majority of people who lived on the plantation.
2. Little Eva Plantation—Local legend holds that this site was the inspiration for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. While this claim is likely false, it is well-documented that Robert McAlpin, a planter from New England who owned this plantation in the 1840s and 1850s, was an

abusive slaveholder. In spite of the dubious claim of this being the site of Uncle Tom's Cabin, it makes for an interesting way to bring up the McAlpin story, which could be used to illustrate the harsh realities of slavery under a cruel and abusive master.

3. Coincoin cottage site—Although the recent HABS/HAER survey suggests that the existing structure is not the same cottage built by Marie Therese Coincoin, maps and tax records indicate that this is the same homesite where her domicile stood. So, even though this may not be her original house, the current structure was likely built upon the foundations of Coincoin's home. There needs to be at least some interpretation of her at this site, which provides a stronger and more direct link to her story than Melrose.
4. Docla site—Across the river from the Coincoin site is a tract of land once owned by Nicholas Docla, who, like Coincoin, was a formerly enslaved free person of color who acquired a modicum of wealth and property towards the end of his life. Docla first appears in public records as a slave of Derbanne in 1737, when he was baptized and married. By 1790, he was a free man who owned property. By the time he passed away in 1816, he owned several tracts of land and a few slaves. While more research is needed, Docla represents another story of a free man of color to complement the story of Coincoin. With Coincoin and Docla, the Cedar Bend section of Cane River offers an opportunity to interpret a community of free people of color who resided in the area.
5. St. Andrew's Church—This church was formed in 1875 on the lands of Shallow Lake Plantation in Derry. Its original members were mostly former slaves of the LeComte plantation of Magnolia and Shallow Lake. This site offers a rich opportunity to interpret the critical role that black churches played in the transition from slavery to freedom and beyond.
6. Cloutierville—From this community grew the most serious slave insurrection of the antebellum period along Cane River. For years, runaway slaves had been making their way west to Spanish territory to find freedom. Much to the chagrin of Louisiana officials, Nagodoches was regarded as a haven for fugitive slaves.

Judging from the newspaper notices in the early 1800s, it appears that Natchitoches was a common route for runaway slaves en route to Texas. In October 1804, a group of nearly forty enslaved workers ran away from the plantations of Alexis Cloutier, Ambroise LeComte, and the Derbanne family near Cloutierville. After stealing gunpowder, ammunition, and horses, they headed towards freedom across the Sabine River. Recently translated documents suggest that the posse sent to return them caught up to the group, but they were unwilling to engage them in an armed conflict. The group of runaways made it to Nagodoches, and, despite the protestations of Cane River planters, they were never returned. While not on the scale of Nat Turner's rebellion, it nonetheless shows that local slaves did not passively accept their enslavement.

In the town of Natchitoches, there are several sites to interpret African American history including:

1. Fort St. Jean de Baptiste—Currently, the interpretation is limited to a few comments about the servants' quarters. Yet, this site could be an excellent springboard for explaining the origins of slavery in Louisiana, highlighting the above-mentioned peculiarities about slavery in colonial Louisiana. Specifically, the servants' quarters could be used to explain the cultural adaptation and survivals of the first generations of enslaved Africans in Louisiana. Additionally, given that no other site intends to do any living history interpretation of slavery, Fort St. Jean de Baptiste could integrate first-person interpretation of slavery into its tour program.
2. Roque House—This structure can tell the interesting story of Yves Pacalé, another former slave who became a free man of color. Pacalé (often incorrectly referred to as Paschal) lived most of his life as slave, and local stories hold that he was a skilled craftsperson. In 1801, when he was about sixty-five years old, the succession of Marie LeClair Derbanne allowed him to purchase his own freedom. Within three years, he had also purchased 101 acres of property and the freedom of Marie Jeanne "Manon," who is believed to have been his wife. In 1812, he paid the hefty price of \$800 for Thérèse, a woman about forty years of age for whom he

had “paternal affections.” He built the so-called Roque House on his property, perhaps using the carpentry skills he reportedly possessed. This site offers the chance to tell a compelling human interest story about a man who overcame years of enslavement to reunite his family before he passed away in 1818. It also underscores the peculiar and complex nature of slavery in colonial Louisiana. While his story is told with a commemorative marker on site, this is a story that should be amplified with an exhibit featuring copies of historical documents that help to reconstruct his life.



3. Asbury United Methodist Church—Asbury Church, which has played an important service role in the life of the Natchitoches community, was founded in 1866 by Rev. Ebenezer

Hayward and his congregation. The first church on the corner of St. Denis and Fifth Streets was completed in 1867, but it was destroyed by fire in 1879 and rebuilt under the guidance of Rev. J. S. Hilton. Over the decades, Asbury provided a place of solace and release that nurtured generations of black leaders, including Eliza Jones and Ed Ward. While highlighting the contributions of Asbury, this site can also tell a dark story, namely that of Alfred Hazen, who was a parish member who was murdered and butchered in 1868 for trying to promote voter registration among black citizens of Natchitoches. It can also tell the story of early widespread efforts to educate African Americans with Freedman’s Bureau Schools and church schools.

4. First Baptist Church—First Baptist Church was initially organized in September of 1867 by Rev. W. M. Moody. The congregation purchased property on what is now Second Street, close to Amulet Street, and built a church in 1872. The church’s first minister, Rev. Raiford Blount, was a former slave from Georgia who became a resident of Natchitoches in 1853. After the Civil War, he

was a politically active man who served as state representative (1870-1872) and state senator (1872-1876) during the volatile Reconstruction Era. His political actions with the Republican Party threatened the traditional white power structure of the South, earning him many enemies. In September 1878, at the height of the election season, a mob of white Democrats sought to regain political control by arresting Rev. Blount and forcing he and his supporters to leave town. Four dozen local Democrats were eventually arrested for these atrocities, but later found not guilty, signaling the true end of Reconstruction in Louisiana. Yet Blount continued his ministry in Natchitoches until his death in 1905. After the death of Rev. Blount and the mysterious burning of the church building that same year, the church membership divided into two different black First Baptist Churches, which continue to exist today. The extraordinary story of Raiford Blount and his church should be told with a sign on Second Street where the original church stood.



5. Morgan Hotel—
Nicknamed the
“Brown Bomber,” the
Morgan Hotel was
built in the early
1900s to
accommodate African
American visitors
during the era of

segregation. Located just a couple of blocks from the railroad depot, the hotel served out-of-town guests and military personnel. It believed that this hotel housed such musical stars as B. B. King and Muddy Waters. This site not only underscores the era of Jim Crow, it also offers an excellent example of African American entrepreneurship in Natchitoches.

6. The American Cemetery—This cemetery is unique in that it offers burial sites of both blacks and whites. Perhaps the most notable African American grave is that of John Gideon Lewis, a prominent

Prince Hall Mason and publisher who was a black leader and promoter of racial harmony for many years.



7. Winnfield Funeral Home—One of the few entrepreneurial avenues open to people of color in the South was that of burial services. Ben Johnson founded the Winnfield Colored

Burial Association in 1939 in Winnfield, Louisiana. Within a few years he had expanded what came to be called Winnfield Funeral Home in other communities, including Natchitoches, where he headquartered his operations. Johnson emerged as the wealthiest African American in Natchitoches and used his wealth to benefit the recreational and educational activities for people of color in Natchitoches.

8. Dr. E. A. Johnson homesite—Dr. Edward A. Johnson and his wife, Mrs. Crittie Johnson, were very influential leaders in the local black community. Dr. Johnson was a physician trained at Meharry Medical School in Tennessee who returned to Natchitoches in the 1930s. Crittie Johnson, who was the daughter of black funeral home director Wallace Carroll, attended college in Kansas City and became one of the first black female morticians in Louisiana. Together, the Johnsons emerged as important leaders in Natchitoches and help to promote peaceful changes in race relations. Their home, located at 822 5th Street, provided a haven for several guests, including Thurgood Marshall, who visited Natchitoches in the late 1940s as an NAACP attorney investigating the still-segregated Normal School. Dr. Johnson's efforts to integrate the Louisiana Normal School in the 1940s led to death threats and the need for personal protection. The house also served as the offices for the Johnsons. This site provides an opportunity to discuss the nature of the civil rights movement in Natchitoches.

9. Lincoln Institute site—The Lincoln Institute site provides an awesome opportunity to interpret the history of African American education in Natchitoches. In 1912, under the leadership of Professor J. W. Thomas, several members of the local black community purchased land for the purpose of building a private school for African American children. Funded solely by tuition fees, the school opened in 1913 under the name Lincoln Institute. Most black schools in the area, however, depended on a combination of grant funds, the local school board, and church support. Within a few years, the Lincoln Institute became the Natchitoches Parish Training School (1919) and later Central High School (1969). This site, located at 400 Martin Luther King Drive, is the current location of the Ben Johnson Educational Plaza, making this site strongly associated with the last century of black education in Natchitoches.



10. Eureka Lodge—
Located at 920 5th Street, the Eureka Lodge embodies the experience of Prince Hall Masons in Natchitoches. Much of this history revolved around the key figures of John

G. Lewis and his sons. Lewis was a native of Canada who arrived in Natchitoches in the 1870s. Under his leadership, the Masons became an integral part of the community and opened the community's first African American printing press in the 1920s. After Lewis's death in 1931, the leadership of the Eureka Lodge passed on to his eldest son, Scott, and later to his youngest son, John, Jr. This site can interpret the important, but often neglected, role of the Prince Hall and Eastern Star Masons in providing the black men and women with a sense of identity as well as tangible benefits such as burial insurance, pensions, and scholarships.

11. “Ape Yard”—The “Ape Yard” was the racist nickname of a black business district that once existed on Horn Street. This was a social and commercial gathering place for blacks during the early to mid-twentieth century. This was where black farmers came to deal with cotton brokers. A combination of Sanborne Maps and oral interviews indicate the “Ape Yard” included a barber shop, a black night club, a boarding house, a mortuary, a restaurant, and several stores. There were also plenty of vacant lots for people to

socialize. This site could be used to interpret African American entrepreneurship during the era of Jim Crow.



12. The “Good Darkey” Statue—Also known as Uncle Jack, a statue commemorating the “Good Darkeys of Louisiana” stood at the intersection of Front and LaFayette Streets from 1927 until 1968. This

controversial statue, showing an elder black tipping his hat with his head bowed in deferential respect, held the inscription: “Erected by the City of Natchitoches in Grateful Recognition of the Arduous and Faithful Service of the Good Darkies of Louisiana.” To this day, there is widespread disagreement over the meaning of this statue. Many whites believe it was a symbol of their love and respect of blacks; many African Americans view it as a racist symbol depicting an idealized version of what whites wanted them to be. Regardless of the meanings of this statue, it gives visitors insight into the racial dilemmas of the South.

13. Natchitoches Railroad Depot—This site is currently planned to be converted into an African American History Center. Although still years away from completion, this site has the potential to fill a huge gap in the interpretation of black contributions to the development of Natchitoches and Cane River.

Creoles of Color

The region known as “Isle Brevelle” features a community of Creoles of color rooted in a matrix of kin groups dating back to Coincoin and the Metoyer family. The “gens de couleur libre” of the colonial era evolved into a tightly knit group of mixed race people whose identity was defined by the Catholicism, the French language, and Creole lifeways. Given rights and privileges not afforded to people of color elsewhere in the South, Creoles of color in Louisiana were allowed to acquire property and slaves and to attain wealth and education. Unlike the rest of the South, Creoles of color became a sort of third caste in Louisiana with access, though not full acceptance, to both white and black communities. Though many of these privileges were lost after the Civil War, the Creoles of color maintained a distinct identity and culture.

The third caste status of Creoles is a regional anomaly that fascinates out-of-state visitors. For many, it is a revelation to learn about this community of free people of color who owned property and slaves and supported the Confederacy. This seems unusual to most visitors, reinforcing the need to interpret slavery as a complex institution that changed over time. It also underscores the need for more research to interpret the unique role that Creoles of color played in race relations. This special status placed Creoles in an influential position to broker between blacks and whites on issues of race relations. For instance, anecdotal evidence indicates that Creoles of color played a critical role in shepherding the racial readjustments of Reconstruction and the 1960s and 70s. The Creoles should hold a special place in the interpretation of the heritage area, because they are one of the primary factors that make this area distinct and different from other plantation districts in the South.

The multi-cultural nature of Creoles also interests visitors. Over time, the French and African ancestry of the Isle Brevelle community was blended with Spanish, Chinese, German, and Native American bloodlines. This blending of cultures gave rise to a unique Creole way of life that defined this separate and distinct community. The idea that any African-descended people could claim an identity other than African American is alien to most visitors’ way of thinking. Visitor surveys and personal observations indicate that this is a story that interests visitors because it is so different from other plantation districts they have visited. Furthermore, within the heritage area, there are impressive surviving architectural structures and cultural resources

to tell the story. To top it off, Isle Brevelle has a core of committed activists and interpreters to project their image and message to the world.

Yet, despite the promising prospects for interpreting the history of Creoles of color, there are some significant challenges. The lack of a clear and consistent definition of "Creole" is perhaps the most significant impediment to visitors' understanding of this group. Visitors receive mixed messages about what constitutes a "Creole" from different sites and different tour guides within the heritage area. It is confusing for the visitor to hear different and competing definitions of this term. This is clearly an issue that must be addressed to improve visitor experiences. Perhaps the heritage area could sponsor a forum to define this all-important term.

Another challenge is that most sites associated with Creoles of color on Isle Brevelle are not open to the public. For instance, St. Augustine Catholic Church offers a marvelous interpretive resource, but the congregation is naturally wary of becoming a tourist attraction. More interpretation of the site means more visitors, and this is not necessarily a good thing. Badin-Roque House is open, but it is unclear to visitors if this site is off limits or not. One visitor worried: "I felt like I was sneaking onto somebody's property and might get shot." The rest of the sites are private residences or businesses and are not open to the public as a tourist attraction. This means that: most sites are appropriate only for drive-by tours; and most visitors are getting their information about Isle Brevelle from guides at Melrose. The latter is a problem because it appears, based on personal conversations, that Creoles of color are not entirely happy with Melrose's interpretation of the Metoyer story. Given the historical connections and close proximity of Melrose to the primary Creole sites (St. Augustine Church and Badin-Roque House), it would be mutually beneficial for these sites to coordinate their interpretive messages and to partner on interpretive programming.

However, there are two resources in the town of Natchitoches that help to fill the interpretive void. First, the Louisiana Creole Heritage Center serves as an important catalyst for documenting and preserving the Creole communities throughout Louisiana, especially Isle Brevelle. Funded by the State of Louisiana through NSU's Social Sciences Department, the Creole Center is at the forefront of the movement to assert Creole identity as a blend of racial and cultural backgrounds. Under the guidance of Dr. Pete Gregory and Janet Colson, the Center has accomplished numerous

objectives, including the development of an impressive databank of genealogical research and historic images and, partnering with the Louisiana Folklife Center, a driving tour of Isle Brevelle. The Center has ambitious plans to document and interpret other communities of Creoles of color throughout Louisiana.

Until recently, the other in-town resource was the St. Augustine Settlement Swamp. This was a privately owned museum that offered a lively interpretation of Creole life and culture along Isle Brevelle. Operated by Mr. Purvis Balthazar, the St. Augustine Settlement Swamp offered quilts, antiques, and personal items from the Creole community. The exhibit included a recreated swamp atmosphere in which visitors could sit in an old boat and view a video intended to create the effect of floating a swamp. Although the museum is currently closed, Mr. Balthazar intends to relocate near St. Augustine Church and reopen to the public. If he succeeds, this museum could provide the key interpretive medium for Cane River's Creole of color.

As mentioned earlier, the Louisiana Folklife Center and the Louisiana Creole Heritage Center have already developed a thorough driving tour of the Isle Brevelle community. The below sites offer some selected highlights of that tour:

1. Melrose Plantation—The origins of this site are traced to the Metoyer family. However, there seems to be some disagreement with their interpretation. Some in the community dispute their account of the Coincoin story; some feel her association with this site is exaggerated (namely the assertion that she lived here in her last years); some feel that the Metoyer years are overshadowed by the Henry years in the tours of Melrose. Regardless, there is no disputing that the majority of heritage area visitors currently receive their information about the Isle Brevelle community from Melrose tours.

2. St. Augustine Catholic Church—Initially built in 1803 with funds provided by Nicolas Augustine Metoyer and his brother, Louis, St. Augustine Catholic Church has been the hub of social and spiritual life on Isle Brevelle for nearly two hundred years. It is believed to be the first



Catholic church in the United States built and supported by free people of color. The present structure was built in 1916 and recently underwent a major expansion and renovation. Perhaps the two most important interpretive resources are the portrait of Nicolas Augustin Metoyer and the cemetery. It is recommended that the St. Augustine Historical Society develop a guided walking tour of the cemetery, spotlighting the lives of Metoyer, Carroll Jones, and others.

3. Badin-Roque House—Owned by the St. Augustine Historical Society, this house was likely built in the 1770s and was first inhabited by Jean Baptiste Metoyer, Coincoin's grandson. The house was later used as the first convent and school of St. Augustine Catholic Church. Eventually, the house passed to Zeline Badin and Joe Roque, who were the last people to live there—hence the name of the house. The St. Augustine Historical Society purchased the house in 1979 and initiated preservation efforts on what is believed to be the only surviving example of *poteaux-en-terre* architecture in Louisiana. Currently, there is a roadside historical marker but no interpretation inside the house.
4. Coincoin cottage site—As the matriarch of the Isle Brevelle community, this site is strongly tied to the history of Creoles of color along Cane River.
5. St. Charles Catholic Church—Built in the early 1900s, St. Charles was a mission church of Isle Brevelle's St. Augustine Church to

service the Bermuda community. It is now owned by the St. Augustine Historical Society.

6. Carroll Jones House—This raised Creole house offers the chance to tell the compelling story of Carroll Jones, a former slave from Tennessee who married a Choctaw and attained a modicum of wealth. After having lost his fortunes in the Civil War, he resettled on Cane River around 1869 and regained his fortune as a planter. His house was described in the 1880s as “one of the most beautiful country seats in the parish.” He became the patriarch of the Jones family, an important kin group of the Isle Brevelle community.
7. Jerry and Clara Jones House—This is an excellent example of a typical one-story Creole house. Built around 1845, its gallery posts were salvaged from the first St. Augustine chapel.
8. Wood’s Hall—Until it was closed in the 1980s, this juke joint was the main social gathering place for Creoles of color on weekends.
9. Lewis Jones House—Once owned by Carroll Jones, this home became the residence of his son, Lewis Jones. Built in the 1840s, it is still owned by a Jones descendent.
10. Rachal House—This 1830s Creole cottage served as both a residence and a store in its long history.

In addition to the Louisiana Creole Heritage Center and the St. Augustine Settlement Swamp, the town of Natchitoches offers a few other potential sites to interpret the history of Creoles of color. These sites include:

1. Roque House—Built by Pacalé, this house is closely associated with Roque family, a prominent Creole family. Moved from its original location downriver in 1967, the house is now the most visible Creole-style bousillage structure in Natchitoches.
2. St. Anthony’s Church—Originally built in 1936, this church was the social and spiritual center of a growing Creole community within the town of Natchitoches. This church and school provide

the opportunity to discuss how Creoles maintained their separate schools and churches even after moving from the country to town, a pronounced demographic shift after 1920.

3. Roque's Grocery—This juke joint was recently rated as one of the best in the world! This site is one of the few places in the region where blacks, whites, and Creoles socialize, especially on the last Saturday night of each month, when Roque's features an open blues session.

Jews

The Jewish community of Natchitoches played a significant role in the commercial and social life of Natchitoches. While more research is needed to explain the inflow and outflow of Jewish residents and to clarify Jewish contributions to Natchitoches, the small, but influential community of Jews left an indelible imprint on the town and the region. This is a relatively undeveloped and unresearched interpretive theme, yet one that merits greater attention. The identified in-town sites related to Jewish history are:

1. Kaffie-Fredericks Store—Adolph Kaffie was partner in this hardware store, which has been open since 1863.

2. Kaffie House—Built around the 1890s, this house was the residence of the Kaffie family, a prominent Jewish family in Natchitoches.



3. Jewish Cemetery—Located on Martin Luther King Drive, the Jewish Cemetery of Natchitoches is a hidden gem. Unfortunately, it is not open for visitors and is appropriate only for drive-by interpretation.

Italians

A handful of Italian individuals and families have played an important role in shaping modern Natchitoches, especially in the realm of architecture. This is an interpretive theme needing more research, but it is evident that from the 1830s to the 1850s, an Italian architect named Alphaneze Trizzini and his partner, Joseph Soldini, designed and built several of the surviving historic structures of that period, including the Lemee House, the Levy House, and the Soldini House. Based on current research, here are some sites to interpret the Italian influence in Natchitoches:



1. Laureate House—It is believed that this house on Rue Poete was built in the 1840s for an Italian named Antonio Balzaretti.

2. Levy House—Trizzini designed and built this house in the 1830s.
3. Lemee House—Joseph and Delmonico Soldini purchased the lot in 1837 and built the existing house with his partner Trizzini. Eventually, Trizzini and his family lived in the house.
4. Soldini House—This house was designed by Trizzini and built by Soldini around 1847. Soldini lived there until 1858.

Themes

Agriculture—The rich soils of Cane River supported diverse agricultural endeavors over the generations. The agricultural history of Cane River closely parallels the larger trends of southern agriculture in general, dividing into four distinct chronological periods: 1) the pioneering phase; 2) development of Old South plantations; 3) the rise and decline of tenant farming; and 4) modern farming.

In the pioneering phase, the earliest generations of settlers practiced agriculture mainly to provide needed food staples to support themselves, but gradually Cane River farmers grew more and more marketable crops, namely indigo and tobacco. Living at first in small cabins and relying on family and enslaved labor, as some Cane River farmers prospered, their farms developed into plantations as they added onto their houses, bought more slaves, and cleared more land. By 1800, the emerging cash crop was short-staple upland cotton, which hastened the development of a plantation economy in the Old South.

The Old South period of agricultural history is characterized by a reliance on slave labor and a staple crop. Along Cane River, the period from 1800 to 1860 brought the full development of a slave-based plantation society. Great fortunes were made cultivating cotton with slave labor until the Civil War ushered in a new era defined by tenant farming. After emancipation, the most common agricultural labor system that evolved was sharecropping, a type of tenant farming in which farmers paid rent with a share of the future crop. Plantation stores furnished sharecroppers with food, seed, and supplies that were bought on credit with crop liens. In spite of generally low cotton prices in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the rise of sharecropping and crop liens kept the regional economy tied to cotton and relatively impoverished. Many factors contributed to the decline of sharecropping, including boll weevils, New Deal agricultural policies, and, most importantly, mechanization. As machines gradually replaced human labor in the fields from the 1920s to the 1950s, it signified the beginning of the modern era of farming, characterized by large agribusiness corporations, mechanized operations, and absentee ownership. While more research is needed on the land use and ownership along Cane River, it is clear that the once thriving agrarian communities of Cane River did not survive these fundamental changes brought by modern agriculture.

Today there are numerous sites associated with Cane River's agricultural history, including Vienna Plantation, Futrell Plantation, Starlight Gin Complex, Oaklawn Plantation, Cherokee Plantation, Lambre Plantation, Cedar Bend Plantation, and Atahoe Plantation. All of these sites would be appropriate to include in a thematic driving tour, but the primary interpretive sites for agricultural history are:

1. Beaufort—Surrounded by cotton fields, this site is especially well suited to interpret the process of cultivating and harvesting cotton. Perhaps this theme could be enhanced with hands-on examples or photographs of the plant during each phase of its growing cycle.
2. Oakland—This site should carry much of the burden of interpreting the evolution of plantation agriculture from the colonial era to the mid-twentieth century. Though the current interpretive program focuses mainly on the Old South period, the site has the resources to tell a broader story.
3. Magnolia—Magnolia complex offers the resources to interpret two important agricultural themes: the evolution of labor systems and agricultural technology. Currently focused almost exclusively on the Old South period, this site should also incorporate the rise and decline of sharecropping so that visitors may better understand the trends of southern agriculture. The cotton press could be used as a wedge to discuss other important plantation technologies, such as the cotton gin.
4. Kate Chopin House—This site possesses some interesting agricultural implements in the shed behind the house. If interpreted, these artifacts could be used to describe the agricultural techniques used by small farmers along Cane River—an issue that is otherwise neglected in the heritage area.

Architecture

Natchitoches and Cane River are well known for the many fine examples of significant architectural structures that have been preserved. Indeed, many would argue that this architectural legacy is the main reason the federal government has recognized the importance of the region with a national park and a national heritage area. Anyone interested in historic architecture will be fascinated by the well-preserved structures to be found within the heritage area.

While there are many architectural styles to be found in the heritage area, the most notable structures are classified as Creole architecture. One of only six colonial architectural styles that developed in America, Creole architecture has three basic types of dwellings, including the single-story Creole cottage (i.e. Jerry and Clara Jones House), the raised two-story Creole plantation house (i.e. Oakland Plantation), and the Creole townhouse (i.e. Ducournau Square). Functional design and construction techniques reveal that Cane River residents were a resourceful people who adapted their vernacular architecture using local materials.

Along Cane River, the most common method of construction was



Courtesy of Library of Congress

using a mixture of mud and deer hair or Spanish moss as a fill between upright and angular wooden posts. Called *bousillage*, this type of construction is found in many of the historic homes of the heritage area. While *bousillage* is usually described as an architectural style imported from France, Canada, or the West Indies, nearly identical techniques are also found in Native American and West African societies. It is also interesting to note that the main translation of the French

word *bousillage* is “a bungled or botched piece of work,” suggesting that the French considered such crude structures below their sophisticated European styles of architecture. Creole houses had multiple French doors and large galleries set beneath broad rooflines. Their size and design varied greatly,

but they usually lacked hallways so that the rooms opened directly into each other.

Clearly, the heritage area has perhaps best preserved Creole plantation houses to be found anywhere, but visitors do not understand their significance. It must be explained to visitors why Cane River's Creole plantation homes are different in size and style from the grand plantations found in other areas of the South. Several surveys and visitor interviews suggest that tourists are disappointed to find houses that look nothing like the columned Greek revival mansions found in other plantation districts such as Natchez and Vicksburg. One visitor from New York commented: "I expected to see huge plantations home like in *Gone With the Wind*. Boy, was I disappointed!" In short, the smaller Creole-style houses do not fit visitors' perceptions of the Old South.

Through interpretation, visitors must understand that all of the Cane River plantation homes pre-date the large Greek revival plantations that dominate our imaginations of the Old South. Nearly all of the local homes were built before the cotton boom of the 1850s that financed the large mansions of other plantation districts. Furthermore, the Creole-style architecture that dominates the area reflects the cultural interactions and resourcefulness of area residents in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Once the reasons behind these differences in the style, scope, functionality, and age of plantation homes are explained, visitors will have a greater appreciation of Cane River's architectural legacy.

With a clear interpretive message to help visitors better understand the significance of local architecture, there are an abundance of structures to tell the story of architecture. In the heritage area, the primary interpretive sites for architecture include:

1. Badin-Roque House—This house is believed to be the only surviving example of *poteaux-en-terre* and *bousillage* style of architecture in Louisiana, and one of only five in the entire country.
2. Beaufort—This house differs from the typical Creole-style plantation house in that its gallery is not raised and it has no wall extending the length or width of the house.

3. Oakland—This plantation complex, including fourteen outbuildings of *bousillage* construction, is one of the most intact in the United States. Furthermore, the architectural integrity of the big house and other structures makes it a showcase of Creole architecture.
4. Melrose—The site offers two significant examples of Creole homes: the Yucca House, a single story cottage, and Melrose House, a raised two-story plantation house.
5. Magnolia Complex—Like Oakland and Melrose, Magnolia Complex also offers several structures that represent a variety of Creole architectural styles. Still, the brick “double pen saddle-bag” slave cabins represent a truly unique feature of the site.

The selection of these sites does not imply that other sites are not worthy as architectural examples. Indeed, there are many such structures, but few that are consistently open to public. Thus, the heritage area sites with secondary potential to interpret architecture are: Coincoin site cottage, St. Charles Chapel, Carroll Jones House, Christophe House, Lewis Jones House, Rachal House, Oaklawn, Cherokee, Kate Chopin House, and Fort Jesup. There are also several architectural highlights in the town of Natchitoches that should be part of any architectural tour. The in-town architectural sites include: Wells House, Roque House, Immaculate Conception Church, Soldini House, Lemee House, Old Courthouse, Magnolias, Roselawn, Prudhomme-Rocquier House, Tante Huppe, Levy East, Laureate House, Streamboat House, and the National Center for Preservation Training and Technology Building (formerly the Old Women’s Gynasium on NSU’s campus).

Artistic/Creative Expressions—Cane River country has nurtured and inspired artists, musicians, and writers for several generations. The diverse creative expressions spawned in the region—everything from Kate Chopin’s writings to Clementine Hunter’s primitive art to O.C. Smith’s music—makes for a unique way to learn about this area. This is an underdeveloped interpretive theme in part because of the need for more research. Still, it represents an interesting interpretive thread to tie together multiple sites, including:

1. Melrose—This is currently the only site with artistic/creative expressions as a primary interpretive theme. In between Cammie Henry’s sponsored writers and Clementine Hunter, this site is an ideal place to develop this theme with additional interpretation.
2. Kate Chopin—While currently a secondary theme, the literary giant of Kate Chopin might be used to broaden this theme to other issues and figures of Louisiana women’s literature.
3. Beaufort—Beaufort currently features the artwork of local artists, including Clementine Hunter. However, this is probably not a primary interpretive site for this theme.
4. Magnolia Complex—An entertaining (and non-threatening) interpretive approach to this site might be to tell the story of change through music, focusing on how changes in southern black musical expressions—from African griots to work songs and spirituals to field hollers and the blues—reflect larger changes in African American consciousness and culture.

Within the town of Natchitoches, there are at least two sites for interpretation:

1. Natchitoches Visitors Bureau Building—This building was once the studio for a local art teacher known as “Mary Belle.” She was a notable artist because she was born without arms and used her feet to hold the paint brush.

2. Jim Croce crash site—On September 20, 1973, the famous singer/songwriter died in a plane crash taking off in a storm from Natchitoches Airport. The heritage area should consider placing a commemorative sign on NSU's campus overlooking Chaplin's Lake and the crash site.

Military—The strategic importance of Natchitoches and the Red River placed the heritage area in a pivotal location for military maneuvers throughout its history. By the 1690s, England, France and Spain had all extended their European rivalries to the New World, where each country tried to contain the colonial expansion of their rivals. In the 1710s, Europeans first sent troops into northwest Louisiana with the establishment of Fort St. Jean de Baptiste by France and Los Adaes by Spain. For many decades, these were important military outposts that guarded the boundary between Spanish Texas and French Louisiana. International tensions occasionally led to conflicts on the frontier, such as when French troops “attacked” Los Adaes in 1719; but the two forts were mutually dependent on each other’s trade, so they generally had friendly interactions and good relations. Indeed, when the Natchez Indians attacked Natchitoches in 1731, the Spanish governor sent a detachment of troops to assist the French. The defeat of the Natchez ushered in a long era of peace for the French and Spanish settlers.

Even when their European mother countries were at war in the French and Indian War, there were no overt hostilities between the two settlements. France’s defeat in the war, however, forced her cede all of Louisiana to Spain in 1763. While Louisiana was nominally administered by Spain from 1763 to 1801, the strategic importance of the area temporarily diminished, because it was no longer a boundary between international rivals. The Spanish eventually abandoned both Fort St. Jean de Baptiste and Los Adaes.

The U.S. purchase of Louisiana in 1803, however, restored the strategic importance of Natchitoches. Suddenly, Natchitoches was at the western edge of the American frontier. To guard the western frontier from Spanish incursions, the U.S. military built Fort Claiborne on a hill overlooking the Red River where downtown Natchitoches stands today. The greatest threat for the Americans came not from Spain, but from within its own ranks. As the American army was establishing its authority in Natchitoches, the commander of Fort Claiborne, General James Wilkinson, conspired with former Vice President Aaron Burr to provoke a revolution among western settlers and establish a new nation in the lower Mississippi Valley. In the end, Wilkinson saved his own skin by warning President Jefferson of the impending revolt and negotiating an agreement that led to the establishment of a “No Man’s Land” between the Arroyo Hondo and the Sabine River. This “Neutral Ground” agreement held until the boundary

was set at the Sabine River in 1821, assuring the strategic importance of Natchitoches for another generation.

During this time, there were new forts and military camps established in the vicinity as the American military continued to establish their presence on the American frontier. In 1819, U.S. troops abandoned Fort Claiborne and established quarters at Fort Seldon, which was strategically situated on a bluff overlooking Bayou Pierre just west of its juncture with Red River at Grand Ecore. Since the Red River was still blocked with the log jam, this site protected the primary transportation route into northwest Louisiana. Built by Zachary Taylor and the 7th Infantry Division of the U.S. Army, this fort was occupied only briefly from 1819 to the early 1820s, for after the ratification of the Adams-Onis Treaty in 1821, the Army was ordered to build a new fort in the former Neutral Strip. This led to the establishment of Fort Jesup in 1822.

Fort Jesup was one of a handful of forts established to protect the western frontier of the United States. Troops at Fort Jesup built roads and patrolled the formerly lawless "No Man's Land," paving the way for American settlers. In 1823, the year after the establishment of Fort Jesup, the newly independent Mexican government opened Texas to American immigration. Over the next twelve years, nearly 28,000 Americans flocked to Texas, passing through Natchitoches and Fort Jesup en route. Troops at Fort Jesup also helped to clear the 165-mile Red River Raft, which sparked a new wave of western settlement in northwest Louisiana and the removal of Caddo Indians to Oklahoma. American settlers in Texas eventually grew angry with restrictions imposed by the Mexican government and launched the Texas Revolution in 1836. Under the watchful eye of the American military, large numbers of men and arms passed through the area to join Sam Houston's army. About 200 soldiers deserted from Fort Jesup to join the revolution, nearly 100 of them fighting at San Jacinto, the decisive battle that won Texas its independence.

By the end of the 1830s, Fort Jesup had become one of the most important military garrisons in the western United States. It was the anchor of a string of western forts running from Fort Jesup to Fort Snelling, Minnesota. Because of its strategic location close to the Texas boundary, the fort was a staging area for the war with Mexico from 1846 to 1847. In 1844, Zachary Taylor arrived at Fort Jesup with one-third of the U.S. Army in 1844 and trained for eighteen months before moving against the Mexican

Army. During this same time, the 4th Infantry built and temporarily resided at Camp Salubrity near Natchitoches as the army prepared to defend the U.S. annexation of Texas over the protests of Mexico. It was here that a young Ulysses S. Grant was stationed in the 1840s. During the Mexican War, the outnumbered U.S. Army handily defeated the Mexican Army, which was hampered by internal problems. The 1848 treaty that ended the war forced Mexico to cede all of northern Mexico, an enormous territory that now comprises nearly one-third of the total landmass of the continental U.S.

The Mexican Cession eliminated the strategic importance of Natchitoches and northwestern Louisiana. After the Mexican War, nearly all of the U.S. military presence left to guard new and distant lands. The area's strategic importance was also diminished by the clearing of the Red River Raft, which accelerated the shifting of the Red River's main bed away from Natchitoches and diverted traffic and trade to Shreveport. However, the quiet period of the 1850s came to an abrupt end when the Civil War came to northwestern Louisiana in the spring of 1864.

The Red River Campaign sent 30,000 Union troops into northwest Louisiana with a threefold mission: to capture Shreveport, to cut off supply lines from Texas, and to confiscate a huge supply of cotton. Under the command of General Nathaniel Banks, Union troops entered Natchitoches on March 31, 1864. The Union army hastily built an earthen fort overlooking the Red River at Grand Ecore as a staging area for their campaign. However, the Red River Campaign quickly turned into a defeat for the Union. After their defeat at Mansfield and Pleasant Hill, Union troops hastily retreated from Cane River country wreaking destruction as they left. Several plantations and homes were reduced to ashes during the retreat.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, Cane River country did not have a significant military presence until the 1940s, when the Louisiana Maneuvers and establishment of Fort Polk in Leesville once again militarized northwestern Louisiana. Some the training actions of the Louisiana Maneuvers came right though Cane River. Though more research is needed, there is an interesting story about how the Prudhommes of Oakland "defeated" General Patton along the banks of Cane River. To this day, the military continues to play an important role on northwestern Louisiana.

Currently, the state parks of Fort St. Jean de Baptiste, Los Adaes, and Fort Jesup are the only heritage area sites interpreting military history. These sites do a very good job of interpreting their stories, but visitors are never given an orientation as to how military actions in this area fits into the larger context of American military history. The heritage area should help to provide this context with a military history driving tour and more interpretive signage at unmarked sites. The lack of interpretation of the Civil War is currently a gaping void in the heritage area. The Corps of Engineers is planning to establish an interpretive visitors' center at Grand Ecore, which should help. Still, the Civil War is a popular theme that deserves more attention.

In addition to the three state park sites, there are several heritage area sites with the potential to interpret the theme of military history. These sites include: Grand Ecore, Monette's Ferry, Fort Seldon site, Camp Salubrity site, Fort Claiborne site, and the Fort Claiborne guesthouse. Outside of the heritage area, there are additional military points of interest in the region, including Rebel State Park in Marthaville and the Louisiana Maneuvers Museum in Pineville. Together, all of these sites represent the broad spectrum of military history in northwestern Louisiana, but there is no interpretive thread to link them all together. The heritage area can provide that link with a thematic tour of regional military sites.

Natural History—Visitors are enchanted by the scenic beauty of Cane River country. Surveys and interviews indicate that they want to know more about the flora and fauna of the region and its landscape. Though few visitors realize it, this area has a special relationship with the land and waterways, which shaped all human activity. Visitors need to understand the special relationship between the land and people of Cane River.

Guided boat tours would be an especially effective way to interpret how the natural features of the land and river influenced the economic, social, and cultural lives of Cane River residents. While the Red River provided a mode of transportation and shaped settlement patterns, its rich bottomlands assured that this would be an agrarian economy. Likewise, they should be made aware of how humans have modified the landscape over time by playing a role in the shifting of the Red River, the draining of Spanish Lake, and the creation of Cane River Lake and Sibley Lake.

In addition to boat tours, driving tours could interpret these issues as well as point out some of the natural highlights of the region, including the species of birds and wildflowers that proliferate in the area. Perhaps the heritage area could offer seasonal tours emphasizing the changing flora of the different seasons. These tours would be ideal for visitors with an interest

in nature, such as bird watchers and other eco-tourists. As part of the driving tour, visitors could picnic along the Cane at a designated area that offers interpretation of natural history on outdoor signage.

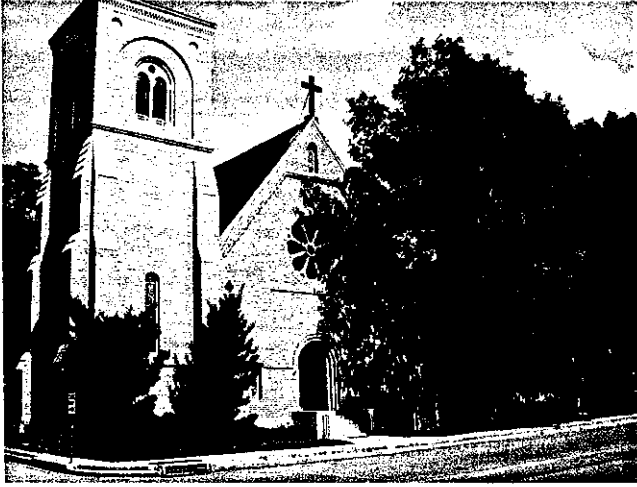


Family picnic on the Cane, 1930s, Courtesy of Library of Congress

Another feature of the landscape that should not be neglected are the Kisatchie Hills. These hills, lying just to the west of Cane River, represents both a change in the landscape and the culture. As mentioned earlier, the heritage area is only plantation district in such close proximity to hill

country. This offers the opportunity to interpret the cultural and economic differences between the people who live on these two separate, yet connected landscapes. Perhaps the heritage area could also develop interpretive signage at the downtown riverfront and at the proposed Highway 119 picnic area on the natural history of Cane River.

The recommended sites for interpretation of the theme of natural history are: Kisatchie National Forest, Grand Ecore, Briarwood, Cane River Lake, Old River dam, Sibley Lake, and the Fish Hatchery.



Religion—From prehistoric times to the present, religion has been a central factor in the lives of Cane River residents. Native American religions revolved around elements of nature and the landscape. While the religious ceremonies differed widely, the religious beliefs of Native Americans were commonly centered on the spiritual power of the living

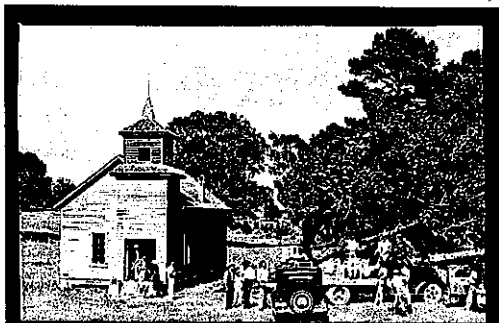
earth. When Europeans came to settle the area, they brought their religious beliefs with them. While the Spanish attempted to convert the Indians at Los Adaes, the French were much less concerned with converting the natives. In fact, since the French garrison at Fort St. Jean de Baptiste did not initially have a priest, they relied on the mission priest from Los Adaes. These variant approaches underscore the different roles that religion played in the colonization practices of the French and Spanish.

During the eighteenth century, the residents of Cane River were almost exclusively Catholic. The first Catholic church in Natchitoches was built in 1735 within the walls of the fort. According to Catholic law, even the slaves were to be baptized and trained in the Christian catechism—a major factor in explaining the seemingly more humane nature of slavery in colonial Louisiana. While slaves were nominally Catholic, another more secretive form of worship emerged in the slave quarters that stressed the themes of deliverance from bondage and redemption. Slave preachers fused African traditions and Christian beliefs to produce worship services tailored to the needs of their flock.

Still, Catholicism dominated Cane River. Three more Catholic churches were built in Natchitoches before the present Church of the Immaculate Conception was finished in 1889. By this time, other Christian denominations had taken root in Cane River country. The first non-Catholic church built in Natchitoches was the Trinity Episcopal Church, which was completed in 1858. The Civil War and the end of slavery also brought many new churches as freed people asserted their new freedoms by establishing

places of worship that were completely free of white control. Most of the new black churches on the river were Baptist. The late nineteenth century also saw the development of other white churches, primarily in the Baptist and Methodist denominations.

The religious history of Cane River is diverse, yet still dominated by Catholicism. The interpretation of religion along Cane River must convey two primary points: 1) the influence of Catholicism on the social, cultural and economic life of Cane River; and 2) the rise of independent churches for



Courtesy of Library of Congress

African Americans and Creoles of color. The recent development of a black church driving tour was a step in that direction, yet more could be done. While several sites include some mention of religion in their tour programs, no public site has religion as an interpretive focus. Of all the sites, perhaps Fort St. Jean de Baptiste is best equipped to be the

primary medium to explain the role of Catholicism; eventually, the Depot Museum can actively explain the rise of black churches. Nevertheless, there are several sites associated with religious history with the potential for interpretation, including: St. Augustine Church, St. Charles Church, St. Andrew's Church, Magnolia, Los Adaes, Fort St. Jean de Baptiste, Immaculate Conception Church, St. Joseph's College/Bishop's Residence, Catholic Rectory, Trinity Episcopal Church, First Baptist Church, Asbury Methodist Church, First Baptist Church, St. Anthony's Church, and the site of the former Jewish synagogue.

Steel Magnolias—Ask any tour guide in Natchitoches what tourists regard as the most interest points of interest in town, and they will likely tell you they are the sites associated with the film *Steel Magnolias*. Like it or not, the enduring popularity of *Steel Magnolias* makes it a secondary interpretive theme. It is, after all, an important event in local history that set the stage for the most recent wave of tourism in the last fifteen years. Few people outside of Louisiana know of Natchitoches, but they remember the quaint town and colorful people depicted in the film.

Already, the bus and trolley tours of Natchitoches prominently feature sites connected to Robert Harling's life and the filming of the movie.



The heritage area should follow suit and offer supplementary interpretive materials for these sites. Several sites could be featured, including: St. Augustine Church, where the film's wedding scene was shot; the riverfront, where the films opening and closing scenes were shot; the Taylor House, where the exterior

shots of the wedding reception occurred; the American Cemetery, where the funeral scene was shot; and Robert Harling's family home on Harling Street.

Conclusion

Cane River National Heritage Area is blessed with natural beauty, awesome heritage resources, and compelling human stories. Visitors are drawn to the quaint structures and lifeways of Cane River, but most visitors do not understand the historical significance of the heritage area because of the lack of a coordinated interpretive program. Thus, in addition to providing an interpretive critique of the heritage area, this plan also offers an interpretive framework for each site and the heritage area as a whole. Its recommendations are designed to identify clear and consistent interpretive messages for the heritage area and to facilitate the visitor experience with improved services, packaged tours, and thematic enhancement. By highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each site's interpretive program, the plan makes constructive suggestions to enhance the tour experience and define the interpretive focus. In the end, it is hoped that this plan will provide a blueprint for the future interpretive endeavors of the heritage area.