

# Fort St. Jean Baptiste State Historic Site



## Fort St. Jean Baptiste Information

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1. Our colonial wood working shop, cabin, and fort are outdoor museums. Please do not touch items on display or rearrange furniture.
2. Be sure to “Like us”  on Facebook and tag us in your photos.
3. Don’t miss out! Be sure to click pictures throughout this guide book to see special features like videos and pictures.
4. If you have any questions throughout your visit, please ask any of our park staff.

# OUTPOST ON THE EDGE OF AN EMPIRE

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Natchitoches was founded by French Canadian Louis Antoine Juchereau de St. Denis in 1714 while he was en route to Mexico from Mobile, Alabama, on a trade mission. When he reached the village of the Natchitoches Indians on the Red River, he constructed two huts within the village and left a small detachment there to guard the stores and trade with the inhabitants. This became the first permanent European settlement in the territory later known as the Louisiana Purchase.

In 1716, Sieur Charles Claude Dutisné was sent to Natchitoches with a small company of colonial troops to build and garrison an outpost that would prevent the Spanish forces in the province of Texas from advancing across the border of

French Louisiana. This strategic outpost was named *Fort St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches*. Economically, Natchitoches evolved into a primary French trade center in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Native American tribes of the three Caddo Confederacies played a vital role in establishing trade and communication links among the French, Spanish, and the Native Americans of the Region. The trade developed with the Caddo forever changed the material culture of the tribes, and by the mid-18th century they were almost completely dependent upon French trade goods. The diplomatic success of the fort was assured when St. Denis was named commandant in 1722. His influence would thrive in the colony until his death in 1744.

The fort continued to serve as a military outpost and commercial trade center until 1763, when France's defeat by England in the French and Indian War forced them to cede the Louisiana colony to Spain. Under Spanish authority, the fort served as a trade center and a link in Spain's intra-colonial communications network.

# Fort Facts

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- The first fort was built by Charles Du Tisné in 1716.
- St. Denis was the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandant of the post. He was preceded by Blondel (two different terms), Du Tisné, and d'Hauterive.
- Fort St. Jean Baptiste was commanded by a member of the St. Denis family for 60 of its 90 years of existence.
- The original 1716 Fort included homes owned by Sieur Henri Labinaries, a coureur de bois, and the White Chief of the Natchitoches Indians.
- Changes on the frontier were not always quick. Even though the Spanish took control over the Louisiana Territory in 1763 it was not until 1766 when they took possession of Fort St. Jean Baptiste. Fort St. Jean was not formally turned over to the American's until April 1804, a full four months after the United States acquired the territory from France.
- Felix Trudeau was the only person to serve in the role as Commandant of French and Spanish Fort St. Jean Baptiste.
- Etienne-Martin de Vaugine de Nuisement was both a prisoner and a commandant at Fort St. Jean Baptiste.

## Commandants of Fort St. Jean Baptiste

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### French

Lt. Philippe Blondel; 1714-1716, 1718-1720  
Claude du tisé, 1716-1718  
Renault d'Hauterive, 1720- 1721  
Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, 1721-1744  
Jean Louis Cesaire de Blanc de Neuveville, 1744-1763  
Antoine Francois Ledoux, 1763-1764

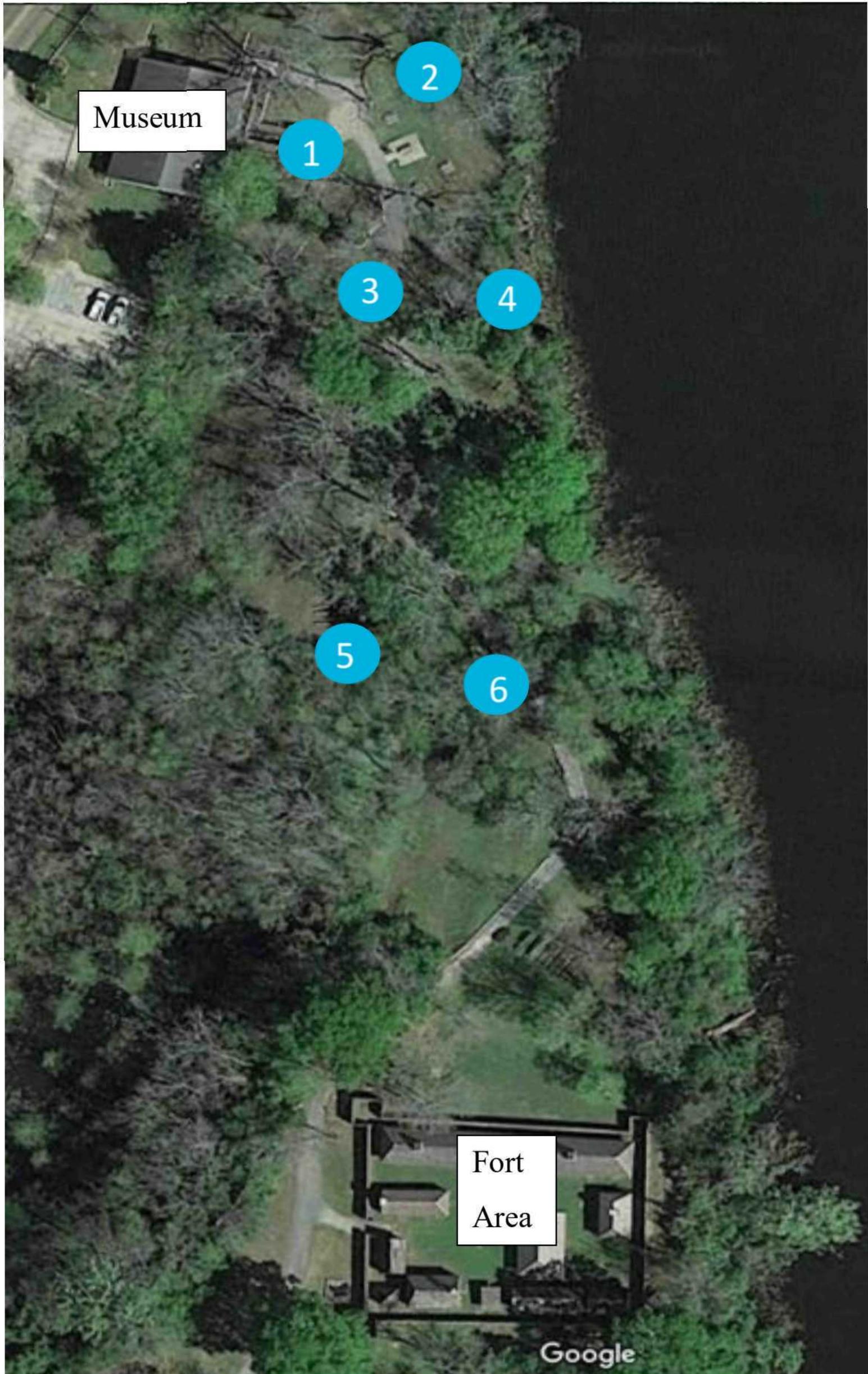
### Spanish

Louis George de la Perriere, 1765-1767  
Francois Coulon de Villiers, 1767-1769  
Christophe Athanase Fortunat de Mezieres, 1769-1779  
Étienne-Martin de Vaugine de Nuisement, 1779-1786  
Pierre George Rousseau, 1786-1788  
Louis Charles de Blanc 1788-1796

### Spanish/French

Felix Trudeau 1796-1803

# TRAIL STOPS



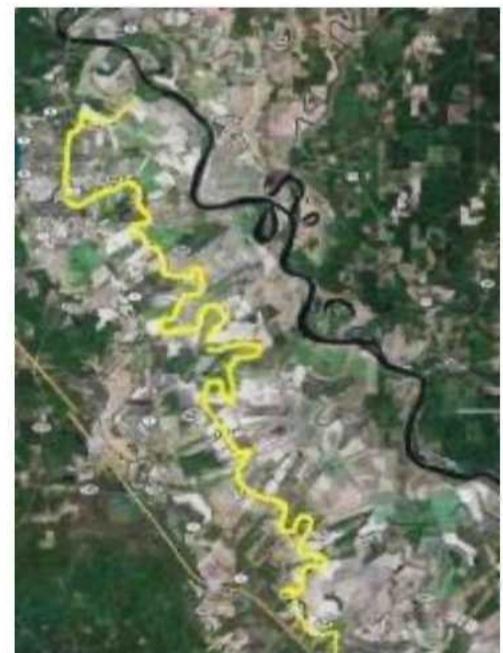
# TRAIL STOP 1 CANE RIVER LAKE

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The pier of the deck provides a scenic view of Cane River Lake. Cane River Lake was originally called *Rivière Rouge* or Red River. In fact, during the 18th-century the Red River consisted of two equal size channels. The western channel became known as Cane River and the eastern channel is modern day Red River.

On the map to the right, the Cane River appears yellow and the Red River is black. In 1915, an earthen dam was constructed on the northern end of Cane River and a spillway was built on the southern end; the end result was a 36-mile oxbow lake. Although cane vegetation can be found all along the river, it is not the native cane for which the river was named. It was an invasive species brought into the region during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



## TRAIL STOP 2

### VIEW OF ORIGINAL FORT LOCATION

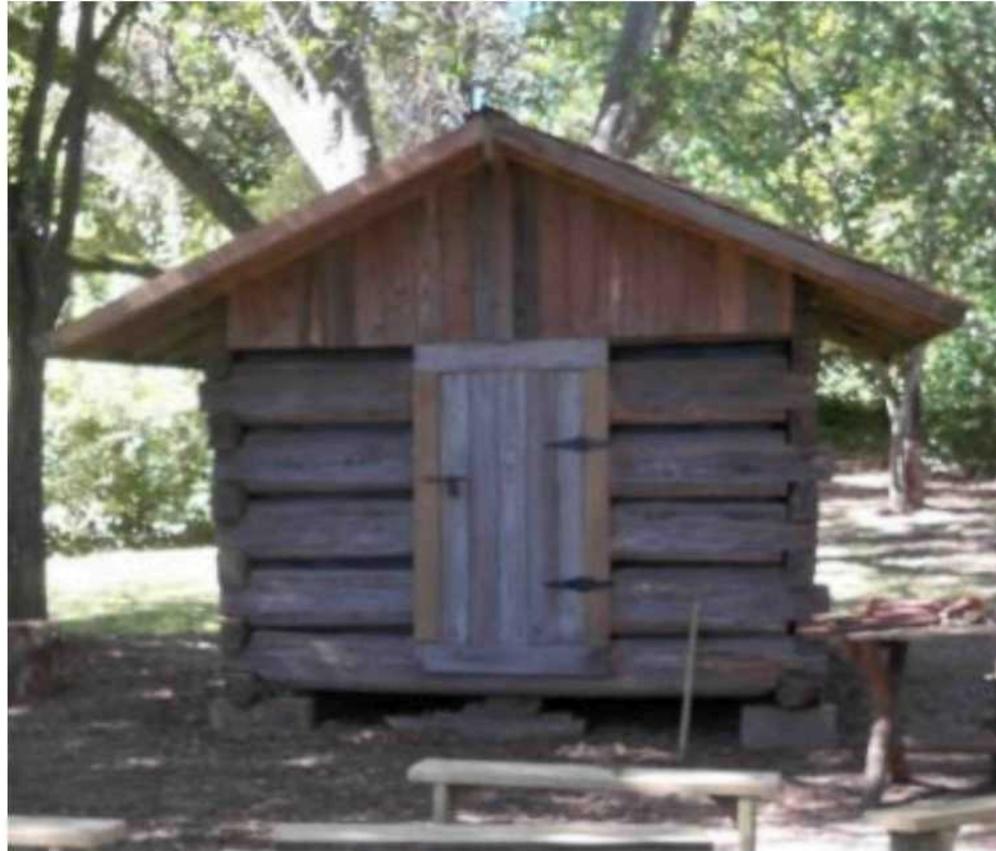
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The original site of the first fort is believed to be in the Keyser Bridge Area; although, its exact location has not been determined. Park staff believe the fort was located on the area of high ground at western foot of the bridge, and either was destroyed or buried during bridge construction in the early 1900s. Your current location is indicated on Broutin's map by a green circle.

## TRAIL STOP 3 COLONIAL HOMESTEAD

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This log home anchors the colonial programming at Fort St. Jean Baptiste. The log structure was originally a 19<sup>th</sup> century structure donated to the park. The home was moved to its current location by fort staff and reconstructed in an 18<sup>th</sup> century-style including hand forged hinges, handmade shingles, and bousillage. Colonial homes were usually small, as their main purpose was sleeping quarters. Most homes would have outdoor kitchens and storage areas.

Colonial life activities such as trade, cooking, and home life are told, as based on the life of Joseph Verger, a colonial trader born in Paris. Verger's home was originally located across from the Natchitoches Indian village, about a mile-and-a-half down Keyser Avenue. The house was only 16 x 16 feet or 256 square feet. It was built in the mid-1700s by Rondin and Derbanne, in exchange for 10 barrels of corn and 40 jars of oil. By comparison, the home of St. Denis, founder of Natchitoches, was 22 x 19 feet or 418 square feet.

## TRAIL STOP 4 COLONIAL WOODWORKING SHOP

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Woodworking, like any colonial trade, was vital to the settlement. It was not uncommon for colonists such as builders, cabinetry, and roofers to specialize in certain woodworking skills, techniques, and methods. In the 1730s at *Post de Natchitoches*, at least four different contractors were building homes in different styles. The shaving horse or draw horse that is located here can be used to create many types of objects such as shingles and ax handles.

## TRAIL STOP 5 MOREAU NATURE KIOSK

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SPONSORED BY CANE RIVER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA, NATCHITOCHEES HISTORIC DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION, & U.S. FOREST SERVICE – KISATCHIE DISTRICT



The Moreau Nature Kiosk is an interactive educational animal display for children and adults alike. The kiosk is named for the Moreau wetlands that run through the middle of the site. The wetlands are a remnant of an old branch of the Red River. The front side features an animal track guessing game. To play, simply take a guess at which animal created the track and open the panel to reveal the name and basic information about the animal. All of the animals have been found at some time on the park site, with the exception of the wolf, which was native to the area in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century. Some of the animal's labels have 18<sup>th</sup>-century drawings by French naturalist, Antoine-Simon Le Page Du Pratz. The back panel has information on insects, snakes, and more! As you explore our site you will encounter many plants and animals, so we ask you to look but do not touch. Now have fun. If you're lucky you may get a glimpse of our elusive bobcat "Rufus", red fox "T", or our bald eagle "de Blanc". Good luck!



## TRAIL STOP 6 MOREAU POND

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Moreau Pond is the remnants of the old branch of Cane River (18<sup>th</sup>-century Red River) that separated the *Petite Isle des Natchitoches* from the *Grand Isle des Natchitoches*. During the 18<sup>th</sup>-century this channel would have been as large as the modern Cane River channel. During colonial times the main channel had high rapids, making boating difficult; so colonists would take this secondary channel when traveling south. The channel would meet up with the main branch of the river near present day Derry, LA.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century the area served as an unofficial dump, and occasionally trash such as wagon wheels and old bottles turn up along its banks. Today, Moreau is a designated wetland home to a variety of animals including owls, coyotes, beaver, bobcats, raccoons, ducks, and alligators.

# FORT TOUR

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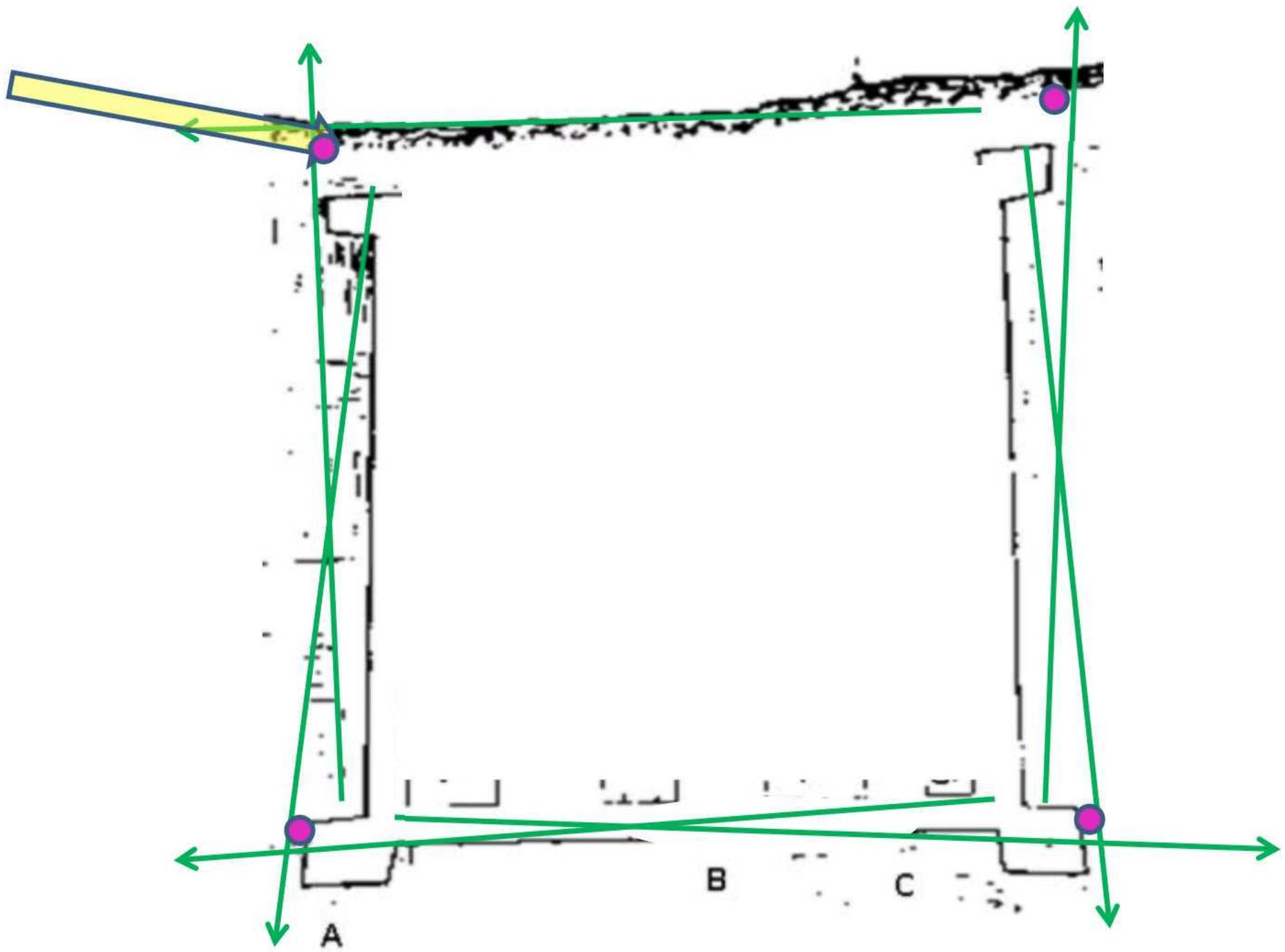


- A.** Bastion
- B.** Cannon
- C.** Entrance
- D.** Guard House
- E.** Jail
- F.** Warehouse
- G.** Powder Magazine
- H.** Church
- I.** Bread Oven
- J.** Commandant's Quarters
- K·L·M.** Servant's Quarters/ Storage
- N.** Parade Ground
- O.** Warehouse Keeper's Quarters
- P.** Officer Dining Hall
- Q.** Officer Barracks
- R·S·T·U** Soldier's Barracks
- V.** Modern Bathroom

# FORT STOP A

## BASTION, PALISADE WALLS, & CONSTRUCTION PLAN

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→ Line of fire from flank to face

→ Road entering from North

● Salient Point

# **FORT STOP A**

## **BASTION, PALISADE WALLS, & CONSTRUCTION PLAN**

### *CONTINUED*

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Fort St. Jean Baptiste, like most French forts, were designed by the king's engineer using methods established by Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban, who designed and constructed fortresses across France for King Louis XIV during the last half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Before construction could begin the engineer had to design the fort. Five major factors that had to be considered in designing the fort were topography, strategic purposes, tactical advantages, nature of weapons that might be used against the fort, and any existing structures. Using these factors the engineer would establish the location of the salient points, or the tip created where the two faces of the bastions meet. Bastions are the pentagonal shaped structures extending from the fort, comprised of two faces and two flanks. From the salient points, geometrically established lines are placed to determine the location of the flanks and faces of the bastions and the curtain walls that connected them. Properly done, this ensured a design in which everything outside the walls was flanked to deny any cover to an attacker.

Fort St. Jean Baptiste was built to withstand light artillery using a form of log construction known as stockade or palisade. Typically in stockade or palisade construction, logs, usually of about 15 feet in length and pointed at one end, were placed vertically in a 3-foot deep trench that followed the lines of the fort. Frontier forts typically had one row of palisades forming the fort walls. Fort St. Jean Baptiste was an exception with its two walled system. The outer palisades were made using 12-foot logs and the inner palisades with 9-foot logs. The reason for the difference may be due to either location or potential attackers. Single walled palisades were designed to prevent attackers that lacked large amounts of firepower (such as native tribes) from attacking the fort. The double walled palisade at Fort St. Jean would allow for short term light artillery attacks either from land or river, usually by Spanish light artillery.

Fort St. Jean Baptiste is comprised of three different types of bastions. The Western wall contains two large bastions. The eastern wall contains one smaller sized bastion and a half or rectangular shaped bastion. The western bastions may be larger to protect the fort from a western attack from Spanish forces. Although an attack would have been unlikely, forts were designed to with stand any potential threat. The smaller eastern side bastions indicate a less of a threat from east forces; this also may be due to the river as a buffer. The northeastern bastion was rectangular shaped to accommodate a road that came from the north to the entrance of the fort.

## FORT STOP B CANNON

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Artillery was very important to the defense of any colonial fortification. Cannons ranged in size from 4-pounders to 36-pounders; “pounders” referring to the size and weight of the projectile. Cannons produced for the Ministry of Marines – the section of the French government in charge of the French navy and colonies – were made of iron, painted black, with a wooden garrison carriage painted red. The site’s cannon is a 6-pounder and weighs 1,700 pounds. The cannon is fired throughout the year during special events.

## FORT STOP C ENTRANCE

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The entrance to the fort that is used today would have been the back gate for the original fort. The original front gate would have been on the eastern side of the fort overlooking the river, allowing easy loading and offloading of items. A road leading from the north also led to the front gate.

## FORT STOPS D-E GUARD HOUSE AND JAIL

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The guard house is strategically located close to the warehouse and powder magazine. Aside from guarding supplies, the guards acted as police for the colony.

Four bunk beds are located here; each level of the bunk was made to sleep two people, for a maximum of 8 persons for the room. When forts were designed they had to be made to accommodate, at one time, the maximum number of troops assigned to the garrison. In the case of Fort St. Jean Baptiste, the fort had to accommodate 55 soldiers and officers.

Unlike larger forts, soldiers lived outside the fort walls, and the fort was manned sparingly. The jail would have been used to temporarily keep soldiers who broke rules, slaves being transported to other locations, and prisoners. Étienne-Martin de Vaugine who served as commandant from 1779-1786 was imprisoned in the jail in 1768.

## FORT STOP F WAREHOUSE

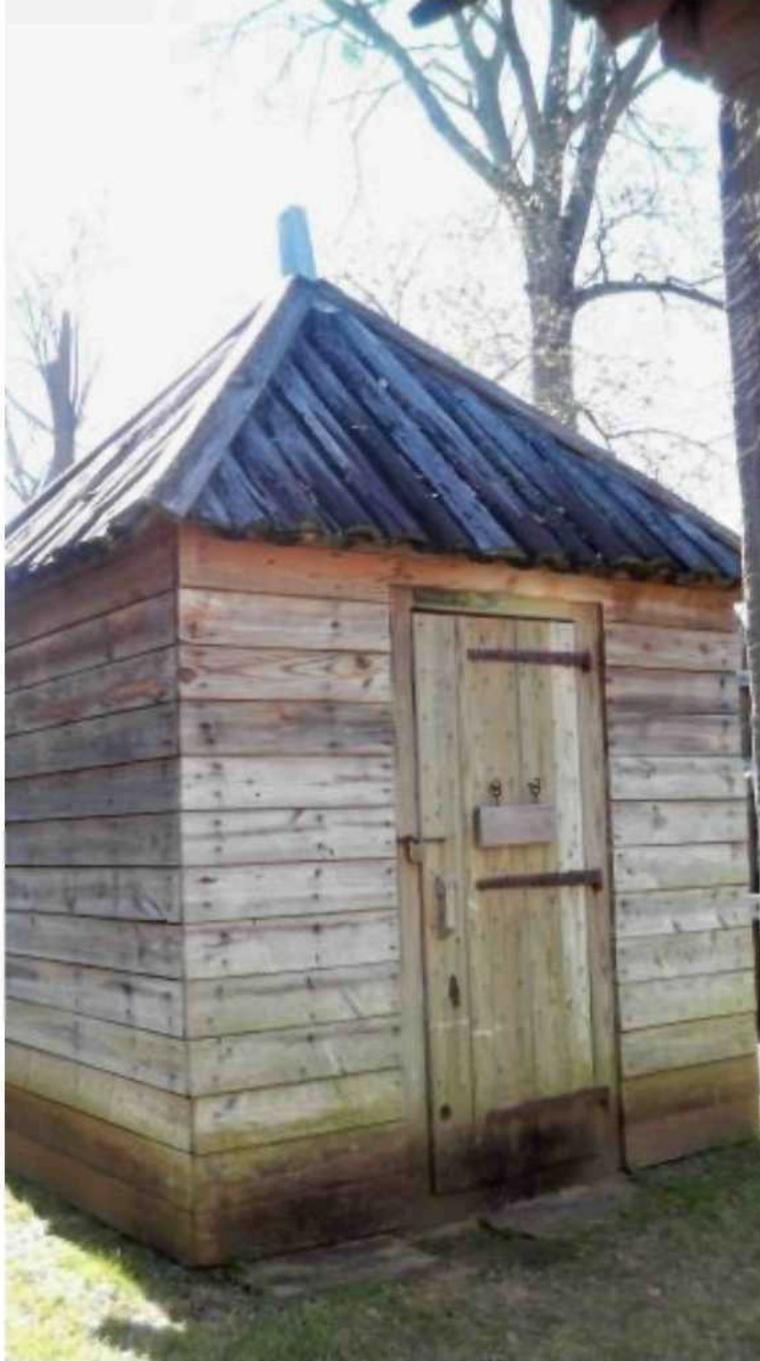
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The warehouse contained supplies that would have been issued to the soldiers. Items located in the warehouse would include barrels of goods, skins for trade, tools, lanterns, rope, and dining ware. Soldiers were sometimes paid with goods from the warehouse. In the 18th-century, shipping barrels were used like modern day crates or boxes, containing beads, tomahawks, and food items such as beans, flour, meats, and liquids.

## FORT STOP G POWDER MAGAZINE

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The powder magazine was used to store musket powder, cannon powder, firearms, ammunition and grenades. Powder magazines had to be strategically placed in forts; many magazines were placed in the center of the fort to protect it during attacks.

Due to the small nature of Fort St. Jean Baptiste, the magazine had to be placed in the southwest corner, which is the furthest point from any barracks. The walls of the magazine are 8 inches thick and the roof was not nailed down. This was to ensure that the force of any explosion would blow the rooftop off and not the walls out, thereby limiting the damage within the fort.

Hanging on the wall are the cannon accoutrements, including the sponge for cleaning the bore, the worm for removing debris, the ram rod, and the lint stock for lighting the cannon fuse. On the floor there is a barrel for cannon powder and a limber chest containing leather gloves and cannon charge box.

## FORT STOP H CHAPEL

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Catholicism was a very important part of life for most of colonial Natchitoches. Although other religious sects such as Lutherans existed in the colony, the majority of colonist and soldiers were Catholic. By 1732, a chapel had been constructed in the fort, but it would not be until 1737 when a church was erected for the colony. Jesuits and Capuchins were sent to Natchitoches to attend to the religious needs of the colonists. When a priest was either away or not assigned to the post, priests from the Spanish fort at Los Adaes would come and offer mass, perform weddings and funerals, and baptize infants and converts.

## FORT STOP I BREAD OVEN

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The bread oven was used for baking a variety of goods, including bread. The oven was made using a Spanish moss and mud mixture called *bousillage*. A fire was built in the oven and allowed to burn down to coals, to heat up the *bousillage*. The coals could then either be shoved to the back of the oven or removed and the dough placed inside. Next, the door for the oven would be put into place and the dough would cook from the radiant heat from the *bousillage*.

## FORT STOP J COMMANDANT'S QUARTERS

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The Commandant's Quarters would serve as the home for the commandant in a French fort. However, St. Denis, like most men assigned to the post, lived off site.

The furnishings in the building illustrate what a typical commander's quarters may have looked like. The side board contains a variety of pewter and ceramic ware that would have been available in the colony.

The fireplace is typical of the period and would have been used for warmth and open hearth cooking. The sleeping quarters contains a bed and a desk.

## FORT STOP K·L·M SERVANT'S QUARTERS AND STORAGE

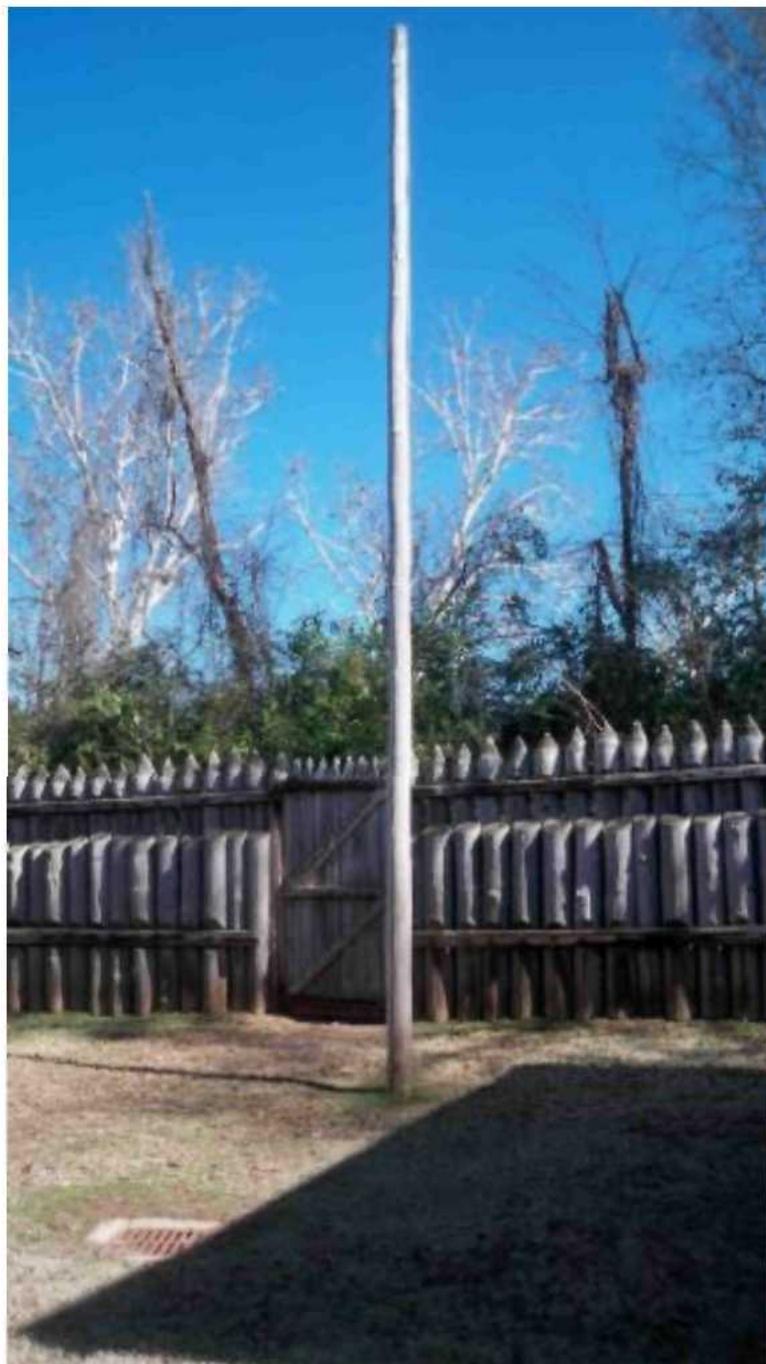
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Broutin indicated in his 1732 plan of the fort that he completed a 3-person capacity servant quarters in the fort. Today these structures are used to store lumber and wood.

## FORT STOP N PARADE GROUND

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The parade ground is located in the open space inside the front gate. Each day a regimental flag and the king's flag would be raised in a ceremony known as the posting of the colors. Each evening the flags would be taken down.

## FORT STOP O WAREHOUSE KEEPER'S QUARTERS

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The warehouse keeper was the only private citizen to reside in the fort, working as a contractor for the company (and later the king). Like the commandants at the post, most of the warehouse keepers lived in offsite housing. The building's location near the front gate allowed the warehouse keeper first access to goods as they were brought into the fort. Located throughout the building are reproductions of typical items that might have been found in a colonial warehouse keeper's quarters.

## FORT STOP P-Q OFFICER DINING HALL AND OFFICER BARRACKS

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As a separation of status, the officers' quarters differs from the regular enlisted men's quarters with an allocated room, or officers' mess, for dining and recreation. While officers' quarters could have either bunk beds or single beds, this bedroom contains four bunks that could potentially house up to 8 officers.

## FORT STOP R·S·T·U SOLDIERS' BARRACKS

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Soldiers' barracks differed greatly from officer's quarters. Up to eight men could be assigned to the room. The room served as the sleeping quarters, dining hall, and recreation area for the soldiers.

