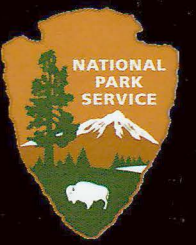


Oakland Plantation

Cane River Creole National Historical Park
4386 Hwy 494, Natchez, LA 71456



History of the Park

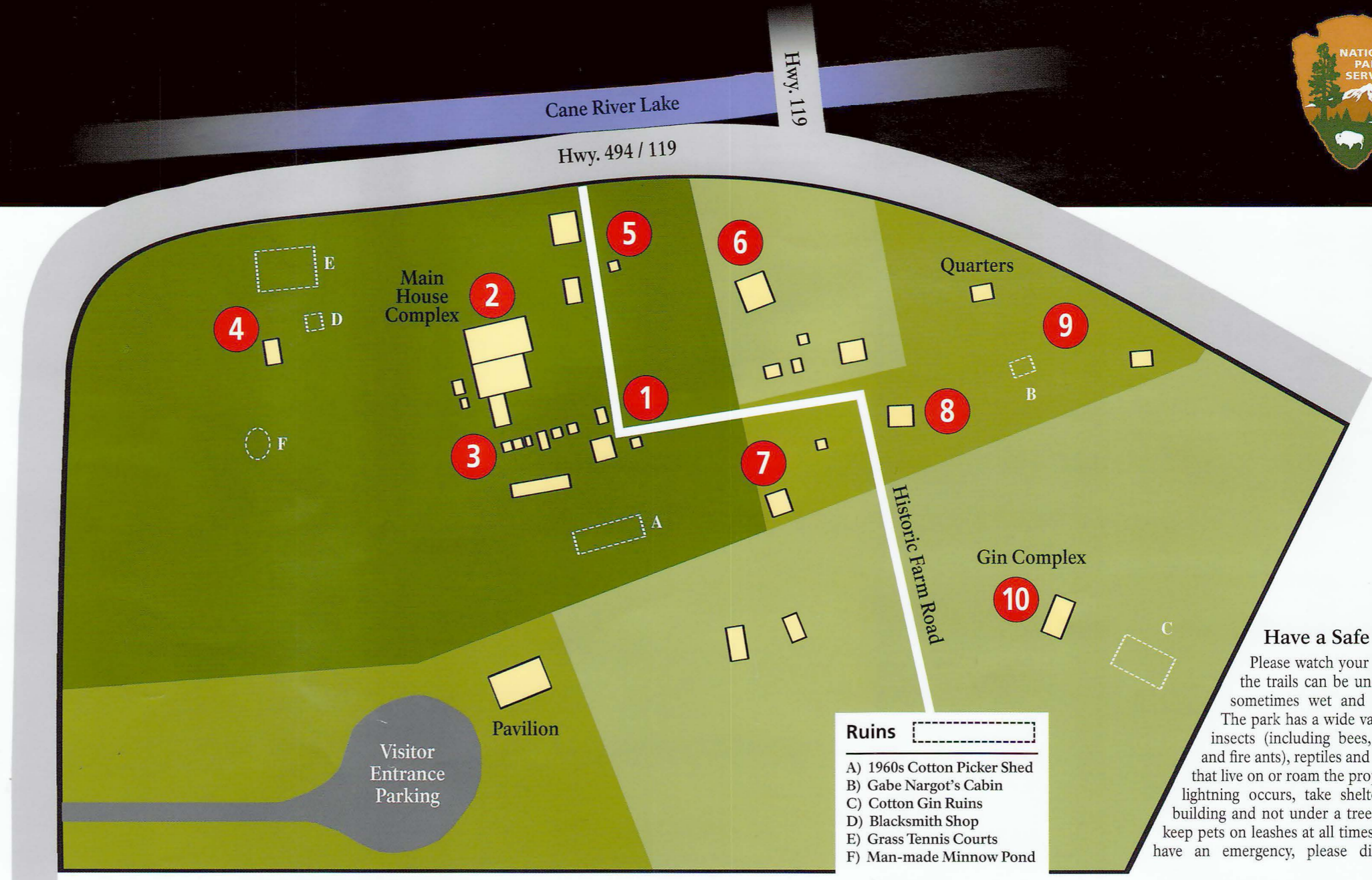
Cane River Creole National Historical Park, consisting of the Oakland and Magnolia Plantations, was established in 1994, along with the Cane River National Heritage Area. In creating the Park and the Heritage Area, Congress recognized the area's unique history, the cultures that developed here, and their progress to the present day. The surviving plantation complexes at Oakland and Magnolia represent three centuries of plantation history and help us to better understand the region's diverse cultures and the generations of families who lived and worked here.

History of Oakland Plantation

Jean Pierre Emanuel Prud'homme founded Oakland Plantation (originally called Bermuda) in 1785 on a Spanish land grant. A small enslaved work force grew the original cash crops of tobacco and indigo. From agricultural workers to craftsmen such as blacksmiths, carpenters and masons, the skills and strengths of enslaved African Americans were crucial to the plantation's survival.

After the invention of the cotton gin in 1793, the main crop became cotton. As textile mills increased their demand for cotton, the use of enslaved labor increased. By the Civil War, nearly 150 enslaved people labored here and lived in one-room cabins; these were converted to tenant housing after Emancipation. The Civil War had a profound effect on the plantation community. During the Red River Campaign of April 1864, Union troops occupied the plantation and burned the Gin Barn.

After the Civil War and into the 20th century, life continued to revolve around cotton. Descendants of enslaved workers remained as tenant farmers and sharecroppers to support their families. Increasingly mechanization replaced the need for tenant farmers; what began in the 1930s was accelerated by World War II bringing the end of plantation agriculture. The vibrant African American communities in the region trace hundreds of years of cultural history to this fertile land surrounding Cane River. Traditions rooted in African, French, American Indian, and Spanish influences give this area its character. We invite you to explore the buildings, reflect, and imagine the changes that took place on this plantation over its 200 year existence.



Have a Safe Visit!

Please watch your step, as the trails can be uneven or sometimes wet and muddy. The park has a wide variety of insects (including bees, wasps, and fire ants), reptiles and wildlife that live on or roam the property. If lightning occurs, take shelter in a building and not under a tree. Please keep pets on leashes at all times. If you have an emergency, please dial 911.

1 Mule Barn, Carpenter's Shop, and Pigeonnier

The Mule Barn was built in the 1820s as a smoke house, but was adapted to house mules after the original barn burned. Pigeonniers or pigeon houses served to emphasize the wealth of the planter, and served a practical purpose, as young pigeons were eaten as a delicacy called "squab." The Carpenter Shop provided a workspace for those skilled enslaved workers who built and repaired buildings.

2 Main House, Bottle Garden, and Live Oak Allée

The main house, a raised Creole cottage, was built by enslaved workers of cyprus with bousillage-filled walls. The 1821 house consisted of only four rooms on the main level and has seen several additions through the years. The formal front garden was once bordered with boxwood hedges. Inverted bottles were later added to decorate the edges. The avenue of live oak trees was planted circa 1825 to shade and cool the house.

3 Poultry Sheds, Wash House, Tractor Shed, and Privy

Around the house are buildings important to the plantation's self-sufficiency. Chickens were bred, hatched and fattened in the poultry shed. Martha Ann, an enslaved laundress worked in the wash house in the 1850s. In the 1940s, Martha Helaire earned \$4 a month as laundress. The bays of the 1950s tractor shed testify to a time when tractors were smaller. The four-seater privy or outhouse (which includes a baby seat) was used prior to indoor plumbing.

4 Cook's Cabin

This cabin was moved from behind the main house in the 1930s to serve as a rented "fishing camp." The Prud'hommes' also raised minnows in a pond dug behind the cabin to sell as bait, and rented rowboats. The blacksmith's shop stood in the field between the cabin and the river.

5 Store, Post Office, and Carriage House

Opened after the Civil War, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and locals continued buying supplies until the early 1980s. The Bermuda Post Office, located inside, was in operation until 1967. Inside the store is a gift shop/bookstore, as well as the park passport stamps. Outside are another pigeonnier and the carriage house. The carriage house, built of cypress timbers, originally had three bays. In recent years, the building served as a garage and workshop.

6 Doctor's Cottage (Administrative use)

This cottage served as the home to young couples of every generation of Prud'hommes. After the Civil War, it was rented to Dr. James Leveque, whose daughter married into the Prud'homme family. Behind the house are a variety of utility buildings and a barn. The cottage is now used for park offices.

7 Square Corn Crib and Jug Cistern

Built in the 1820s of hand-hewn cypress logs with carved Roman numerals, the corn crib stored dried corn. Rain water was channeled from the roof into the jug cistern which can hold nearly 5000 gallons of water. Located in the side field are a wagon shed and a cattle dipping vat from the mid-20th century used to treat cattle for ticks.

8 Overseer's House

The overseer, employed by the Prud'homme family as a plantation manager, was responsible for the day to day management of the laborers, stock, land, and tools. This house was built of bousillage around 1860 and served as a home for plantation overseers until the 1960s.

9 Slave/Tenant Cabins

These structures are all that remain of a larger community. After the Civil War, sharecroppers and tenant farmers continued to live in the quarters as late as the 1960s. Near the north cabin are the brick pier and fireplace ruins of a cabin lived in by the cotton gin engineer Gabriel Nargot, whose African-born grandmother had been enslaved on the plantation.

10 Seed House (Administrative use)

The cottonseed-processing building is the last vestige of a once-bustling ginning operation. The gin pulled the seeds out of the cotton fiber which was then compacted into bales. Cottonseed could be pressed for oil for use in baked goods and the remains used in poultry and livestock feed.