



Foundation Document Overview

Cane River Creole National Historical Park

Louisiana



Contact Information

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Purpose



CANE RIVER CREOLE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK preserves and protects Oakland and Magnolia Plantations and, in partnership with Cane River National Heritage Area and its living communities, preserves the resources of the Cane River region and enhances the understanding of its peoples and traditions through research, interpretation, education, and technical assistance.



Significance

Significance statements express why Cane River Creole National Historical Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Cane River Creole National Historical Park preserves the most intact French Creole cotton plantations in the United States, which include an outstanding collection of original vernacular architecture and landscape features representative of working plantations that evolved over time.
- Oakland and Magnolia Plantations were owned and continuously operated by the same French Creole families since their establishment in the 18th century, and the undeveloped, agricultural setting in which the plantations reside today evoke their historical context and farming practices.
- Cane River Creole National Historical Park tells the story of the oppressive labor systems of plantations initially founded on human slavery during the colonial era and eventually replaced by other legal mechanisms of oppression, including tenant farming, sharecropping, and, later, day labor, from Reconstruction through the 1970s.



Significance

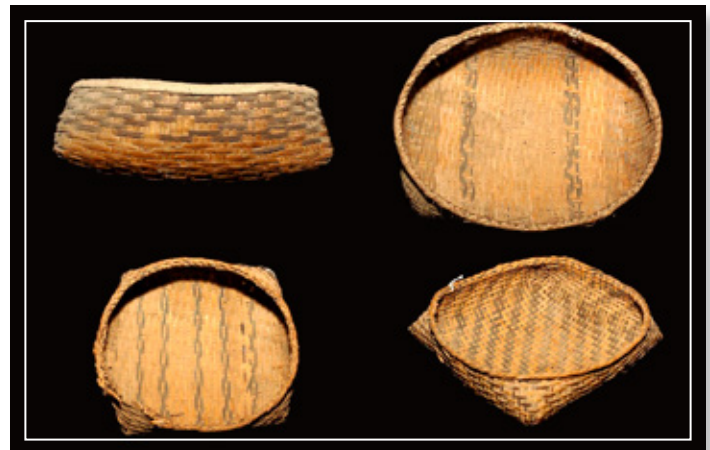


- Representing the continuum of occupation from Precontact to the end of the Plantation era, the Cane River Creole National Historical Park collection includes approximately 500,000 museum objects and archives, including one-of-a-kind examples of tools, furniture, decorative arts, and architectural elements handcrafted by enslaved people in the Cane River region and items imported from around the world. The collection spans the cultures of the Old and New World and represents the global context of Oakland and Magnolia Plantations and the broader Cane River community.
- Cane River Creole National Historical Park illustrates a centuries-long succession of changing agricultural technologies from Precontact through the 20th century. The heritage of agriculture, from human and draft animal powered labor to mechanized equipment, is illustrated by the park's collection of farming related structures and tools, including rare examples of pressing and ginning equipment.
- Cane River National Historical Park interprets a vibrant Creole culture that took root in the rich soil along the Cane River at the borderlands between New France and New Spain in the 1700s. Creole is a culture nurtured by French and Spanish colonial ways, steeped in Africanisms, and enriched by American Indian contact. The broader Creole community found across the country and throughout the world remains intimately connected to the Cane River region and park resources.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Oakland Plantation and Associated Cultural Landscape**
- **Magnolia Plantation and Associated Cultural Landscape**
- **Museum Collection**
- **Cultural Connections to the Cane River Region**
- **Partnerships in Stewardship**
- **Archeology**



Description

Cane River Creole National Historical Park was created in 1994 to commemorate the mix of cultures whose long and complex history began with American Indian trade and early 18th-century European exploration and settlement in Louisiana's Red River Valley. The park celebrates the resulting cultural interaction and interdependence among the French, Spanish, Africans, and American Indians, as well as the subsequent development and evolution of Creole culture and plantation life along the Cane River.

The park consists of two units: Oakland Plantation and Magnolia Plantation. The Oakland unit, located 10 miles south of Natchitoches, is the federally owned portion of the larger Oakland/Bermuda Plantation. The descendants of the original settlers (the Prud'homme family) continue to own and operate the majority of lands that were once part of the Oakland Plantation, including 144 acres within the authorized park boundary. The Magnolia unit, located 20 miles south of Natchitoches, is the federally owned portion of the larger Magnolia Plantation, the remainder of which is privately owned and located on property adjacent to the park, still owned by the LeComte-Herzog family. The plantations were two of the first properties west of the Mississippi River to be recognized as National Bicentennial Farms—a designation for farms that have been owned by the same family for at least 200 years—and are also designated as national historic landmarks. Many of the individuals who lived at the plantations and were responsible for the construction and continued development of Oakland and Magnolia's vernacular architecture, agricultural landscapes, and material culture were enslaved. Slavery's legacy can be seen throughout the park from handmade tools used for heavy labor held in the museum collection to the surviving brick slave/tenant quarters standing as a testament of the adversities facing the enslaved living at Oakland Plantation.

The park contains 70 historic structures, a diversity of magnificent landscapes, and nearly 500,000 museum objects and archives that provide an overarching view for understanding the context of everyday plantation life for owners, enslaved individuals, and tenant workers over time throughout the Cane River region. Moreover, the cultural landscapes that makeup Oakland and Magnolia Plantations represent a microcosm of a broader American experience that includes periods of prosperity and depression, war and peace, and dramatic changes in government, agriculture, technology, and labor systems from the 18th through the mid-20th centuries.

Public Law 103-449 (16 USC 410CC), passed by Congress on November 2, 1994, simultaneously created Cane River Creole National Historical Park and Cane River National Heritage Area. This is the only instance of an NPS unit and national heritage area (NHA) being co-legislated to protect and preserve a region's cultural resources and heritage. The legislation determined a partnership approach would best serve the preservation needs of the area, ensure the vital need for cultural sensitivity, emphasize local partnerships, and minimize the need for federal land acquisition or management.

