Historical and Archeological Investigations at the Chalmette Battlefield, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve

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A Report Prepared for
The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
New Orleans District

To
The Military Engineers
of the
United States
Both Past and Present

In this wet, sucking place it is easy enough to imagine that everything that ever was here still is—that it is all down there somewhere in the dark, pressed layers, that New Orleans is a giant slowly settling palimpsest.

—Frederick Turner, *Remembering Song: Encounters with the New Orleans Jazz Tradition*

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PREFACE

Often the fate of the world turns on the consequence of little things, and the Battle of New Orleans is one of those "little things" that sets the world spinning off in new and unexpected directions. In comparison to many battles of the Napoleonic Era, it was modest in size. Yet, without the Battle of New Orleans, there would be no United States as we now know it today and probably a very different current world and assemblage of nations. If the battle had not been fought and won by the United States, the Treaty of Ghent would have become one more meaningless slip of diplomatic paper. This small engagement of arms fought on the Plains of Chalmette closed off Britain to further influence in the West; broke the military and political clout of the last powerful Indian tribes, England's indigenous allies; and thereby opened the United States to the opportunity of a westward destiny. The War of 1812 has been called "The Second War of Independence," and the Battle of New Orleans won that war for a very young and fragile United States. Moreover, it is significant that General Andrew Jackson achieved his striking victory at the Battle of New Orleans with an incredibly eclectic and diverse army, one drawn from nearly all the regions and ethnic pockets of the nation. Perhaps no other single event in our history better underscores the lesson that America's strength lies in its diversity.

This report deals with that battle, or more exactly, with the historical geography and archeology of the battlefield itself. It also touches upon how people put the battlefield to use after the War of 1812 as a place for generations of people to live, work, and play. Also covered are some of the things, both bad and good, we have done over the years to commemorate the battle and remember this important event in our nation's past.

This report owes its existence to historic preservation compliance investigations funded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers prior to the construction of a major levee setback along the riverfront of the Chalmette Unit of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. These investigations emerged out of consultations held among representatives of the Corps of Engineers, the National Park Service, and the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Section 106 essentially requires federal agencies to consider and minimize their impacts on the

significant physical remains of America's past. As has so many times happened since the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act, we learned new and exiting things about our history that may never have come to light without benefit of this enlightened law. We had an opportunity to re-examine what we knew about the Chalmette Battlefield, and it was truly a privilege for me, as Principal Investigator, to have been given this opportunity to conduct work in such a special place, to have been provided a chance to help unravel the strands of history and archeology associated with one of the great events in American history.

But every opportunity can be both a privilege and a curse. And this project proved to be some of each. It was early October in 1983 when I first caught wind of the proposed investigations. I was in the administrative headquarters at the Chalmette Unit where I had just stopped by to pick up some artifacts while en route to the airport. I saw the Unit Manager and some other people heading into a meeting. I asked what was going on. They said, "We are going to discuss your project," and then they shut the door. Perplexed, I returned to the Southwest Cultural Resources Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I did not hear more for roughly a month, though I wondered occasionally what was up.

I finally learned about the purpose and specifics of the project in late November and had to move fast to gather the necessary personnel and equipment. Because of a tight construction timeline, the Corps of Engineers wanted us to be in the field no later than early January of 1984. By late December I had recruited the help of Larry Murphy of the National Park Service's Submerged Cultural Resources Unit to conduct the magnetometer survey. In turn, Larry Murphy enlisted the technical and archeological assistance of "Jock" Coverdale of the Tennessee Valley Authority. The Tennessee Valley Authority was very interested in testing their magnetometer capabilities in the pursuit of elusive archeological anomalies, and the Chalmette Battlefield offered that opportunity in deuces. Jake Ivey, a National Park Service historical archeologist with long experience with military sites, and Larry Nordby, one of the National Park Service's most experienced field archeologists, rounded out the archeological team.

Although we had little preparation time, it was apparent to all that we could not enter the field without benefit of at least some prior historical guidance. Luckily, Jerome Greene, a National Park Service military historian with the Denver Service Center, had already begun writing a Historic Resources Study of the Chalmette Unit, and he was recruited by Regional Historian Melody Webb to provide our field crew with the minimum background materials that would be

essential to informed archeology at the Chalmette Battlefield. Similarly, the National Park Service contracted the services of Jill-Karen Yakubik of Christopher Goodwin and Associates, Inc., to supply historical advice and documentation on the post-battle occupation and use of the Chalmette Unit.

Our crew arrived at the Chalmette Battlefield on January 9, 1984, one day after the anniversary of the main engagement of the Battle of New Orleans. As in 1815, it was cold, rainy, and foggy. It continued like that for weeks. Once, in the midst of a constant cold drizzle, a thunderstorm intruded and dropped what seemed like tons of water on the test excavations; our pump struggled vainly to keep up while we just splashed about defeated and impotent in the mud and rising water. The only respite came when it got colder and the water in the test pits froze solid as temperatures plummeted to as low as eighteen degrees Fahrenheit—extremely cold for New Orleans. When it did not rain, we received the gift of cold sleet and a brisk wind to aid our sodden work. We soon came to know something of what it must have been like for those soldiers in 1815 who fought under similar, if not worse, weather conditions. But unlike them, we could go to a warm motel at night and stuff down New Orleans' oyster hoagies.

Originally, this report was scheduled for completion in 1985. Obviously, that schedule was not met. Preliminary reports were prepared for the Corps of Engineers and submitted on time to meet the Section 106 compliance schedule, but progress on the main and final report was interrupted by other National Park Service priorities throughout 1985. The most critical interruption came in December of 1985 when I accepted a career opportunity of a lifetime and transferred to Alaska as the new Regional Archeologist for the National Park Service. Full of promises and false hopes, I took the burden of the report with me and labored fitfully and intermittently on it over the years.

From the beginning, the report "grew like Topsy" when I realized that no part of the story could be understood except in the context of the whole. Despite this tendency toward growth, the majority of the report came together between 1985 and 1988 because my fellow authors did their part and I devoted most of my leave during this period of years to writing the initial drafts of the report sections for which I was responsible. Thereafter, increased family and work responsibilities brought progress, appropriately enough for Alaska, down to a glacial pace. In 1989, I was assigned supervisory and program responsibility for the entire cultural resources team in Alaska, and as each bureaucratic wave of the National Park Service washed in and out, I began to nurture a forlorn hope for a

tomorrow that never came—an open window of time to finish the long-delayed report.

A tomorrow rich in free time never came; I finally realized that I would have to re-set priorities and make the required time, or the report would remain forever uncompleted. I was particularly spurred to action in the fall of 2000 when I was asked for long-distance advice by a new generation of National Park Service archeologists who were planning to use an updated bevy of remote sensing approaches to reveal the historical and archeological mysteries of the Chalmette Unit. I was excited to hear that attention had again refocused on this small but important unit of the National Park Service. An excellent volume by Historical Landscape Architect Kevin Risk, *Chalmette Battlefield and Chalmette National Cemetery: Cultural Landscape Report* (1999), was first to evidence this renewed interest in the New Orleans Battlefield. Still, although I was pleased by this new round of studies, I also felt somewhat shamed and awkward, like a movie director who learns that the sequel to his yet unfinished film has premiered before the original has even been released. As it turned out, the "sequel" research reported in John Cornelison's and Tammy Cooper's *An Archeological Survey of the Chalmette Battlefield at John Lafitte Historical Park and Preserve* (2002)*(2002)* has happily confirmed and reinforced the value and accuracy of our findings of two decades past. This latter-day support for the conclusions of the long-delayed report demonstrated that the volume still retained its relevancy and value as an important and detailed source on the history, historical geography, and archeology of the Chalmette Unit. As my former secretary, Kathy Koenig, succinctly put it, this reaffirmation of the findings was fortuitous, for it meant that we did not have to "hit the delete button" on the report after all these years.

The report is organized into three separate but related parts, (1) "The New Orleans Campaign of 1814-1815 in Relation to the Chalmette Battlefield," (2) "Historical Investigations of the Civilian Occupation of the Chalmette Battlefield," and (3) "Archeological Investigations of the Chalmette Riverfront." The first two studies initially appeared as chapters in Jerome Greene's *Historic Resource Study: Chalmette Unit, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.* This study was published in 1985, but only a limited number of copies were ever printed and distributed. It was always the National Park Service's intent from the start to also incorporate these two historical studies as integral components of the present report prepared on behalf of the Corps of Engineers. Corps funds helped to partially cover the costs of writing and researching Greene's military history of the battlefield, and these same funds fully covered the

production of Jill-Karen Yakubik's archival work on the civilian history of the Chalmette landscape. Thus, it is fitting and right that they reappear here as essential components of the present volume.

The third part of the report, "Archeological Investigations of the Chalmette Riverfront," addresses the historical archeology and geography of the New Orleans Battlefield, and it brings the different lines of inquiry together in a final set of conclusions. In this last section of the report, archeology is unabashedly enlisted as a "handmaiden" of history, and rightly so, for history is a worthy pursuit in and of itself. And if archeology can make for better history, then so be it. This historical emphasis, of course, does not preclude others from employing the data presented herein in more anthropological lines of archeological inquiry, but that is for others to do if they so wish. No single study can pretend to serve all masters equally.

Close readers of the report will observe that, although the three main parts of the report agree for the most part with one another in content, there are some unresolved differences that appear from time to time in points of detail. This is necessarily the case with different authors approaching the available evidence each in their own way, and therefore, no attempt was made to dictate seamless consistency throughout the report. Similarly, the report does not adhere to a single style of citation and notation. The two historical works use the traditional historical style of citation and notation; the archeological section employs the usual scientific style. To have imposed one style on each of the three major sections of the report would have gained overall consistency, but betrayed the value that each discipline places on its own, time-honored stylistic approach.

Finally, though the report achieved completion in the first years of the twenty-first century, it primarily remains a product of the 1980's. That is the decade when the fieldwork was accomplished and the bulk of the report was written. Because it is a product of its time, though much delayed, I have not attempted to bring the report kicking and screaming into the present century. In fact, many sections cannot be easily updated because the technologies and methodologies employed in the original investigations preclude meaningful modification. For instance, though the magnetometer research and the computer color maps produced by the Tennessee Valley Authority were at the cutting edge back in 1984, they may now appear somewhat archaic. The only solution would be to redo the work, but that is for future researchers. The other problem is that several of the co-authors of this work have long since moved on to other projects

and employment. They did their part back then and are not anxious to have the study come back to haunt them for updates in their new and present lives. From the start, this report was intended as a new beginning, not as an end to serious historical and archeological research at the Chalmette Unit of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park. There are undoubtedly errors contained in the present study that will need to be corrected by future work and unquestionably much more to learn about the battlefield's history and its environs. Hopefully, this report will help to spur that critical and continued future level of inquiry that the Battle of Orleans and the Chalmette Unit both merit and deserve.

GENERAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Nothing that counts very much in this world can be done entirely alone, and the work described in this volume, as well as the report itself, owes a great deal to the contributions of many dedicated and fine people. Their interests often differed, but an amazing number freely gave their help because of their love of the past and their devotion to a postage-stamp-sized piece of real estate known as the Chalmette Unit of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. All who assisted with this project, whether specifically named herein or not, have my most sincere thanks as well as my apologies for taking so long to complete the long-awaited report.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the staff members and leadership of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for their forbearance and patience during the production of this report. I would, in particular, like to thank Tommy Ryan, who, as the Archeologist for the New Orleans District, conceived of the project and sought the National Park Service's partnership in the venture. I would also like to single out Carroll Kleinhans, who, as successor to Tommy Ryan, gave me only encouragement and support when anyone else would have given me grief.

A. Wilson "Will" Greene, then Unit Manager of the Chalmette Unit, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, deserves thanks as Tommy Ryan's co-conspirator in the conception of this study. The late Jim Isenogle, former Superintendent of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, merits prominent mention for giving his personal stamp of management approval to the project. This was a brave act. Following "Will" Greene's departure, Tom Tankersley took on the job of Acting Unit Manager of the park area and never hesitated in giving welcome assistance and encouragement.

Barbara Holmes, Ethnographer and Cultural Resource Management Specialist for Jean Lafitte National Park and Preserve in the mid-eighties, demands special mention, for she is the one who recruited me into the cultural resource compliance work in Jean Lafitte and gave me unstinting support. Historian Mike Strock followed in her footsteps to give aid and advice, and he in turn passed the burden of dealing with me to Allison Pena, the present Ethnographer and Cultural Resource Management Specialist for Jean Lafitte National Park and Preserve. Allison's help, together with the support of David Luchsinger, Superintendent; Dave Herrera, Deputy Superintendent, and David

Muth, Resource Manager, Jean Lafitte National Park and Preserve, allowed this report to eventually see the light of day.

Alvin Williams, the Maintenance Foreman at Chalmette in the eighties, shared his Tareytons with me and freely gave me whatever logistic support I required. His staff, including both Charlie Tippen and R.C. Tippen, were always ready to help.

Melody Webb, Regional Historian with the Southwest Region of the National Park Service at the time of the project, after putting my evidence and ideas to critical scrutiny, provided solid support and ran bureaucratic interference for me in close cooperation with my equally supportive bosses during this period: Ron Ice, Regional Archeologist, and Richard Sellars, Chief of the Southwest Cultural Resources Center. Regional Director Bob Kerr of the Southwest Region surprised me with his genuine interest in the Chalmette finds, and his support was more than welcome when I upset the planning applecart for the Chalmette Unit. My current National Park Service bosses in Alaska—Tim Hudson, Associate Regional Director for Resources and Operations; Victor Knox, Deputy Regional Director; and Marcia Blaszak, Regional Director—have continued this tradition of supervisory support. Ralph Tingey, the former Associate Regional Director for Resources and Operations, and my supervisor during much of the writing of this report, also gave me every encouragement with the project.

Archeologist John ("Jock") Coverdale of the Tennessee Valley Authority assisted Larry Murphy, National Park Service Archeologist, with the magnetometer survey. When lightning struck the cables linked to the magnetometer, he and Larry Murphy convinced GeoMetrics to send an instant replacement unit. They succeeded in this endeavor using the ruse that Walter Cronkite of CBS News was coming in two days to report on the work at Chalmette. Walter and CBS would have been surprised to hear of these "plans." A colleague of "Jock" Coverdale's, Kenneth Holmquist, a cartographer and computer specialist with the Tennessee Valley Authority, created the excellent magnetometer maps that are contained in the report. These maps were ahead of their time in 1984, and I am grateful for his devotion to quality work.

Jerome Greene, National Park Service Historian, Denver Service Center, generously shared his knowledge at all times. As one of the many over-committed authors of this report, he even donated his sick leave to finish his account of the Battle of New Orleans. Jill-Karen Yakubik, another co-author, gave her all to the project and wrote the civilian history of the battlefield and the ceramic artifact sections. At the time of the original writing, she was an employee

of Christopher Goodwin and Associates; today she runs her own contract firm in New Orleans, Earth Search Incorporated. Both Jerome Greene and Jill-Karen Yakubik, in their roles as primary co-authors, have their own unique set of acknowledgements to make, and these may be found immediately following these opening remarks of appreciation.

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Bill Fields, both a general with the New Mexico National Guard and a civil engineer in the National Park Service (and for a time my boss), laid the surveying and mapping ground work for our field investigation in the fall of 1983. He and his support crew did a fine job for us and the park. George Neusanger, Chief Ranger at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, generously helped take follow-up sightings. The inked archeological maps, plans, and profiles are the able product of Lyndi Hubbell, an archeological illustrator noted for her readable and exact schematic style. I thank her for her strong patience with my revisions.

One thing that my experience in New Orleans has taught me is that good historical archeology depends on good archival work. Besides the help of Jill-KarenYakubik mentioned above, I benefited from the active assistance of Rose Lambert of the Louisiana State Museum Library and Betsy Swanson, archival sleuth "extraordinaire." Betsy Swanson, who has written much on the history of the New Orleans area, shared many of her finds and special insights with me during the course of this study. She also shot and prepared the artifact

photographs as a contractor and lent me several earlier landscape photographs that appear in this report. And it is no accident that Betsy Swanson found the inspired epigraph that introduces this report. Her enthusiastic and informed assistance proved truly invaluable and is deeply appreciated. I know of no one who is a better servant of the muse of history than she.

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Ted Birkedal

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Jerome A. Greene and Jill-Karen Yakubik

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(*Note: This list of contributors gives the authors' institutional and business affiliations at the time the study was carried out [ca. 1984-1985]).*

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Ted Birkedal

This report presents the results of archival and archeological investigations undertaken by the National Park Service on behalf of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The study site is the Chalmette Unit of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, a small Park Service area located in St. Bernard Parish near the eastern edge of the city of New Orleans, Louisiana. Originally established as an independent national monument in 1939, the Chalmette Unit commemorates and preserves the core battlefield where American and British troops clashed during the Battle of New Orleans at the end of the War of 1812. From this engagement, the United States emerged as the clear victor, and although the battle was fought after the official close of the war, it had a major and lasting effect on the course of American history. The victory launched Andrew Jackson on his rise to the presidency, reaffirmed the claims of the United States to the Louisiana Territory, and gave the American people the military confidence to determine their own destiny in world affairs and follow future directions that were largely independent of Europe's shifting power structure and political turmoil (Coles 1965:236, 270-271; Remini 1969:91; Owsley 1981:178, 194-195).

The Setting

The Battle of New Orleans was fought in the rural hinterland of New Orleans, among the elegant plantations and estates of the city's country elite (Map *i-1*). It was undeniably a grand setting—the kind one might encounter in historical romances, but only rarely finds in true accounts of history. Much has changed, however, in the years since 1815, and the battleground now lies in the industrial heartland of St. Bernard Parish. The sole visible reminder of the former rural glory of the Battle of New Orleans period is the eroding brick ruin of the de La Ronde master house. Once the most imposing of all the plantation residences along this section of the Mississippi River, its lower walls and foundation now stand in odd isolation on a small traffic island between the east and west lanes of the St. Bernard Highway. The fate of this important structure is both illustrative and representative of the changes that have forever altered the original historic scene of the battle.

The area that has been set aside by Congress to commemorate the battlefield is very small. In its entirety, the Chalmette Unit encompasses no more than 142.9 acres (57.8 ha) of land; and of this total, 17.3 acres (7 ha) are taken up by the Chalmette National Cemetery, which lies along the east edge of the unit. Located only 6 miles (9.6 km) from downtown New Orleans, the Chalmette Unit is surrounded by the industrial landscape of St. Bernard Parish. The busy St. Bernard Highway runs beside the park area's northern flank. The huge smokestacks and slag heaps of the Kaiser Aluminum Plant visually intrude to the east. To the south, the high embankment of the modern levee interrupts the once clear view of the adjacent Mississippi River. At any time of the day, it is not unusual to see two or more international tankers passing close by the park area. Because the Mississippi is artificially channeled by the levee system, its waters often rise above the neighboring land surface, and the larger ships tower over the battleground as they make their way slowly up and down the river. The St. Bernard Parish Sewage Treatment Plant is another modern intrusion. This working facility, which predates a late National Park Service land expansion, protrudes into the south-central portion of the Chalmette Unit. The Chalmette Slip, a large commercial port, lies just off the southwest corner.

The two most prominent features within the unit are actually historic structures, but both postdate the Battle of New Orleans. One of these, the Chalmette Monument, rises over 100 ft (30.5 m) above the ground surface in the western third of the park area (Figure *i-1*). This is an enormous Egyptian-style obelisk constructed of brick and faced with white marble. Started in 1855 and finally completed in 1908, the Chalmette Monument was built in patriotic memory of the American soldiers who fought in the Battle of New Orleans. The second prominent feature is the Beauregard House, a two-story, columned mansion that sits near the river in the southwestern quadrant of the Chalmette Unit. Originally constructed in the 1830s, this historic building was restored by the National Park Service to its present condition between 1957 and 1958. Until recently, the Beauregard House served as the National Park Service's main visitor contact station and interpretive center.

The Chalmette Unit preserves a semblance of the original rural character of the battlefield. For the most part, it consists of a flat, nearly featureless expanse of grassy terrain (Figure *i-2*). The only relief of any note is provided by two recent interpretive reconstructions. One of these, a reconstructed section of the American military rampart, is located in the west-central part of the unit. Erected in 1964 on top of the actual American defensive position, this low-slung, flat-topped earthwork measures 1378 ft (420 m) in length and 20 ft (6 m) in width, but it averages no more than 5 ft (1.5 m) in height. Several hundred meters to the east of this first feature is an equally low, rectangular mound. This second earthen feature usually sports a British flag and measures 43 ft (13 m) by 31 ft (9.5 m). The mound's presence has no basis in historical fact; it was simply constructed to serve as a convenient observation platform for the interpretation of the British attack on the American line of defense.

The only topographical features of historic origin are a series of partially filled and abandoned ditches which run from the southwest to the northeast across the central portion of the unit (Figure *i-3*). Almost totally filled with silt and covered by grass, they mark the locations of old agricultural drainage ditches. The largest and most visible of these is the Rodriguez Canal. This feature consists of a shallow, linear depression located immediately forward of the American defense line. The other ditches are much smaller and are almost imperceptible from a distance. These occur at various intervals in the central part of the battlefield and run parallel to the Rodriguez Canal.

Trees are relatively few and primarily occur toward the margins of the unit and in the vicinity of structures and visitor support facilities. The majority represent recent plantings, though some of the larger live oaks date back to the first half of the nineteenth century. The most common trees are magnolias, pecans, and cottonwoods. The densest stand of vegetation occupies the northern edge of the unit, where the National Park Service has encouraged a heavy growth of trees and shrubbery in order to mimic a section of forested swampland which historically bordered the central battlefield. This thick stand also doubles as a visual screen against the traffic on the adjacent St. Bernard Highway.

The landform upon which the Chalmette Unit rests is a natural levee of the Mississippi River. Near the river, this natural levee reaches elevations up to 7.8 ft

(2.4 m) above sea level; away from the river and closer to the St. Bernard Highway, the elevations drop to 2 ft (.7m) above sea level as the levee slope approaches the area of the old back swamp. The unit's soils are of the Commerce-Sharkey association (Wicker et al. 1982:11). These soils are locally noted for their agricultural potential, and their occurrence helps to explain why the early land-use history of the Chalmette Unit is predominantly a story of plantation farming. Commerce soils occur at the higher elevations and consist of a dark grayish brown silty loam or silty clay loam underlain by a grayish brown silty clay loam subsoil. These better-drained soils of the Commerce-Sharkey association offered the best conditions for settlement as well as for agriculture. The soils in the Sharkey category are generally found on the far down-slope of the natural levee and are composed of a dark gray clay surface soil and a gray clay subsoil. Though suitable for certain crops, such as sugar cane and indigo, these saturated soils attracted little nonagricultural use until the end of the nineteenth century, when land scarcity forced people to build upon them.

The climate of St. Bernard Parish is no different from the rest of the New Orleans vicinity in that the summers are hot and humid, and the winters are relatively mild. Yet this subtropical climate does not guarantee warm weather. In winter, strong frontal movements frequently produce squalls and steep drops in the temperature gradient. In fact, freezing temperatures are not uncommon, especially at night. Rainfall is typically heavy and averages 63 in (160 cm) per year (Wicker et al. 1982:13). During the summer months, much of the rain falls in the form of afternoon thundershowers; in the winter, large stationary fronts often bring days of constant rain and drizzle. These periods of continuous cold rain are particularly common between mid-December and mid-March. Thick river fogs which spread out over the adjacent land surface are also typical of the area, especially in winter and spring, when the temperature of the Mississippi River tends to drop below the surrounding air temperature. Not to be forgotten are the hurricanes and floods which are a fact of life in the delta country of Louisiana. These two powerful forces of nature have had a tremendous influence on both the natural and cultural landscape of St. Bernard Parish (Cowdrey 1977:xiii-xv).

A high water table is another important attribute of the local environment. The height of the water table fluctuates seasonally, but, as elsewhere in the lower Mississippi Delta, it never remains far from the surface. In even the higher

portions of the Chalmette Unit, water may often be encountered within 12 in (30 cm) of the ground surface. At lower elevations, the water table may reach the level of the topsoil or rise above the surface of the ground. This high water is the nemesis of all who seek to dig in the soil of Chalmette, be they soldier, builder, or archeologist.

History of the Project

By early 1983, the Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District, had reached the unavoidable conclusion that the levee and bank in front of the Chalmette Unit failed to provide an adequate level of flood protection. The foundation stability of this section of the New Orleans levee system was questionable and no longer met accepted federal standards. In response, the Corps of Engineers developed five alternative plans designed to correct the problem. The most extreme of these plans called for the construction of a new levee 140 ft (42.6 m) landward from the center line of the old levee and the acquisition of 3.5 acres (1.4 ha) of additional right-of-way. The least disruptive plan required no more than 0.1 acres (0.04 ha) of additional right-of-way and a minor levee center line setback.

After careful consideration of the various plans, the Corps decided upon the minimal impact alternative as the plan of preference. It guaranteed a satisfactory level of flood control for the least cost and posed the smallest threat to the existing physical, natural, and cultural aspects of the local environment. This plan for levee reinforcement called for a 10 ft (3.05 m) setback of the levee center line, the construction of a concrete "I"-type floodwall along the land-side edge of the levee crown, and a general de-grading of the river bank and levee slope. New ground disturbance on the landward side would be restricted to two small tracts of land. The first of these construction easements, or zones, which was to be located in the extreme southwestern corner of the park unit, would be used to shift the vehicle access ramp to the levee crown 5 to 10 ft (1.5 to 3.05 m) farther to the north. The second easement, located in the eastern third of the park area, would also involve an access adjustment required by the levee center-line change. Here, a section of the shell-paved levee access road would be realigned so that it would run 7 to 10 ft (2.1 to 3.05 m) more to the landward. In both zones, earth-disturbing activity was designed not to exceed 1 ft (30 cm) below the local ground surface.

The only other land-side, earth-modifying activity scheduled under the minimal impact plan was maintenance of the levee road. The entire length of this shell-paved road would be kept in good repair and in a smooth condition to accommodate heavy equipment operation during the life of the project. At most, the work would require regular additions of fresh shell paving coupled with blading and compaction. Since this maintenance activity was not anticipated to extend below the original shell base of the road, it was not seen as a major alteration of the landscape. Nonetheless, the potential for inadvertent exposure of deeper deposits was sufficient to cause some concern.

Alert to the historical importance of the battlefield and the obligations imposed by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the Corps of Engineers negotiated an Agreement of Work with the National Park Service for the performance of a cultural resource assessment of the area of effect. The agreement, entitled "Archival Investigations at Chalmette Battlefield," was signed on November 15, 1983, and the investigations outlined by this document were designed to meet three separate, but related, areas of need in historic preservation planning:

1. The findings of the assessment would be used by the Corps of Engineers in its project-specific consultations with the State Historic Preservation Officer and the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

2. The results were also to be incorporated in a wider environmental assessment of the project in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. This broader assessment would treat the potential environmental effects of all five project alternatives, not just the preferred alternative.

3. Finally, the acquired data was intended for long-term planning use beyond the framework of the immediate project. It was hoped that the results would provide guidance in the design of any future Corps projects slated for the Chalmette Unit riverfront.

The geographical scope of the investigations specified by the Agreement of Work included nearly the entire Chalmette Unit river frontage—from the inner toe of the 1983 levee to an arbitrary project boundary set 200 ft (61 m) to the landward. Its length, a distance of 2150 ft (655 m), was defined by the east and

west borders of the park unit. Only a narrow strip of highly disturbed riverside frontage, which contained the existing levee and bank, was to be excluded. Yet even this zone, where the original land surface had been lost to earlier levee construction and river erosion, was to receive some consideration as an indirect result of the historical investigations called for in the agreement.

Despite the lack of reference to archeology in the work agreement title, the document did emphasize the critical importance of archeological investigations as a key element in the program of research. These on-the-ground investigations were to focus particular attention on the position of the American defense line and the battery emplacements that had once been located along this line. The Corps of Engineers realized that these features would be among the most significant cultural resources under threat by the proposed levee reinforcement project. Further, the Corps understood that the discovery of one or more battery positions would provide a firm, and heretofore missing, geographical link between the battlefield of the past and that of the present. With the aid of this ground-truth, a more accurate reconstruction of the battle geography would become possible and, in turn, guide projections to other features of historical interest that might be located within the assessment zone. The cultural landscape of the Chalmette Unit was for the most part a *terra incognita* prior to the start of the assessment.

Pressed by a tight schedule of planning milestones and construction deadlines, the Corps of Engineers urged the National Park Service to begin the required investigations as soon as possible after the signing of the Agreement of Work. A general plan of research was hastily put together, and background archival research and other preparatory work was under way by December of 1983. Although the National Park Service postponed entry into the field until the last acceptable moment, there was still insufficient advance time. The schedule only allowed enough time for the production of a cursory historical overview of the Chalmette Unit riverfront and a rough prediction of the features and artifacts that might be expected to emerge as important clues in the course of the archeological research. Much of this background effort was devoted to a hypothetical reconstruction of American battery architecture and the associated military activities that would leave a telltale archeological signature within or around a battery remnant.

In view of the fact that the Chalmette Unit had been part of the National Park system since 1939, it might at first seem that the historical preparatory work

would have necessitated little new effort. However, the archeological discovery of the buried ruins of the Rodriguez master house in early April of 1983 had demolished previous and long-standing ideas concerning the physical reality of the battlefield. Evidence of the existence of this prominent battle landmark had unexpectedly come to light during routine archeological clearance investigations in advance of a new visitor contact station. The Rodriguez House, together with a sizable portion of the American defense line and three gun batteries, had originally been thought to have fallen victim to bank changes of the Mississippi River. The National Park Service had even erected a special interpretive sign in the southwestern corner of the Chalmette Unit to tell the story of the "lost" batteries. The discovery of the foundations of the Rodriguez House indicated that only a small segment of the American defense line had been destroyed, and further, that two of the three "lost" battery positions had probably survived. Unfortunately, the exact locations of these two historic features could not be projected with any practical degree of certainty. Contradictions in the available archival maps precluded accurate repositioning on the basis of the Rodriguez House alone. In short, the discovery of the house foundations had forever shattered the traditional historical geography of the Chalmette Unit, but these foundations did not provide sufficient information to rebuild the geography at a tolerable level of precision. As the situation stood in December of 1983, the major historic features of the Chalmette Unit still remained in a perplexing locational limbo.

Archeological field work finally began on January 9, 1984—one day after the 169th anniversary celebration of the Battle of New Orleans—and ended on February 8, 1984, after the expenditure of eighty-two person-days of effort. As fate would have it, the field crew experienced the same order of miserable weather that had plagued Jackson's troops. The rain was close to incessant, the fog frequent, and the winter was one of the coldest in recent memory. In spite of the obstacles of weather and mud, the necessary data capture took place, and a progress report on the findings was submitted to the Corps of Engineers on February 17, 1984 (Birkedal 1984a). The Corps immediately incorporated these preliminary results in a formal environmental assessment of the various project options. This document, prepared in March of 1984, recommended the least-impact, or "preferred," alternative described earlier. To facilitate the Corps of Engineers' consultations with the State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the National Park Service completed a second report on the initial results of the cultural resource assessment on March 9,

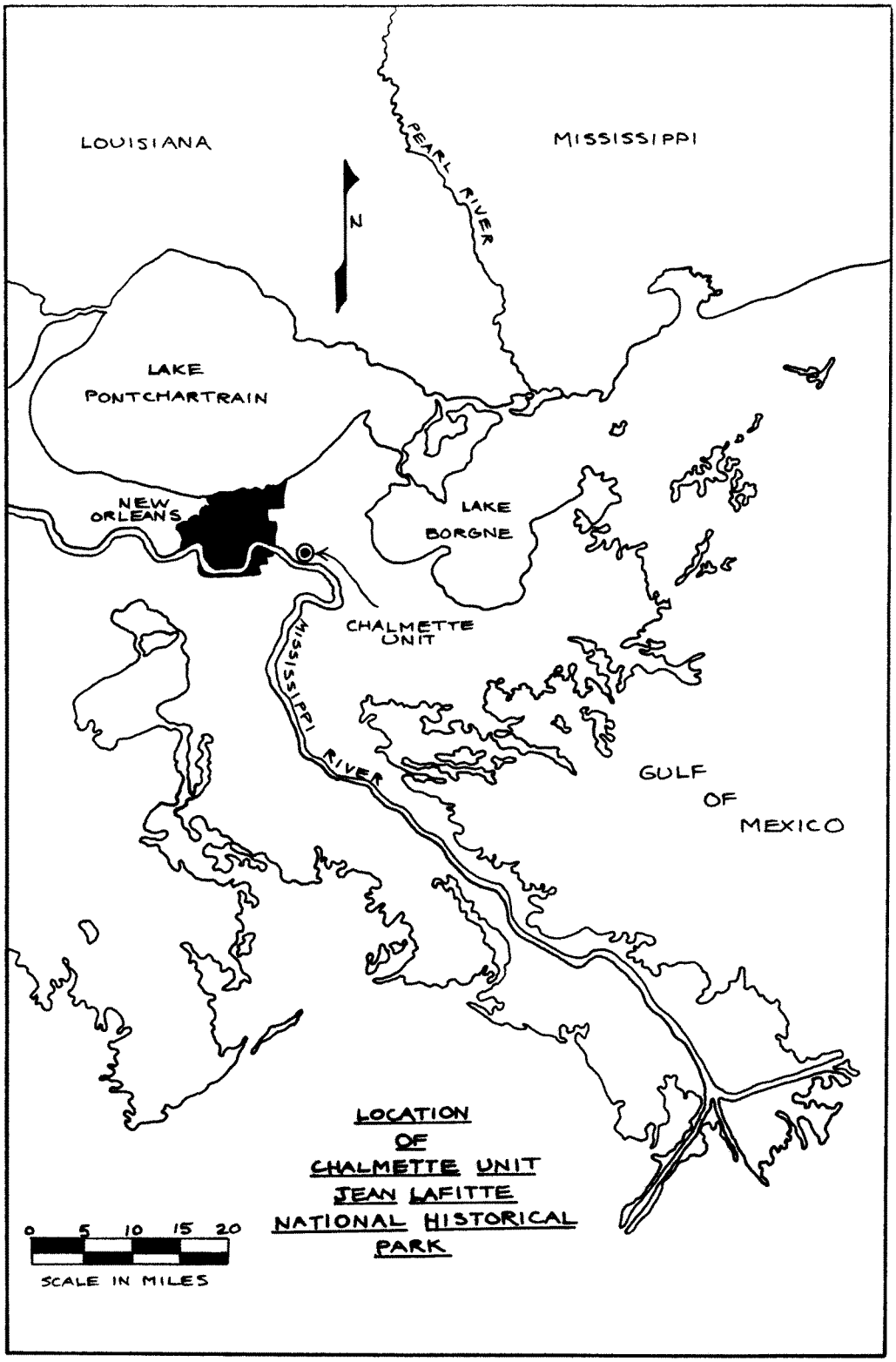
1984 (Birkedal 1984b). This interim report supplied more detail**,** and later that spring, it provided the documentary basis for a Memorandum of Agreement prepared in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Report Description

The present report documents the full findings of the cultural resource assessment. Divided into three separate parts, it attempts a balanced treatment of the cultural resources of the Chalmette riverfront. Part I, by Jerome Greene, covers the history of the Battle of New Orleans. This account, entitled "The New Orleans Campaign of 1814-1815 in Relation to the Chalmette Battlefield," places particular emphasis on the practical side of the British and American military operations, an aspect of the battle which has often been neglected in previous histories. It draws heavily on primary sources, including some newly discovered archival material, and offers a fresh perspective on the military activities of the combatants that is directly relevant to the purpose of the overall study. Part II, "Historical Investigations of the Civilian Occupation of the Chalmette Battlefield," examines the history of civilian land use and landownership within the assessment zone. This middle section of the report, written by Jill-Karen Yakubik, builds upon the excellent previous scholarship of Samuel Wilson, Jr. (1956, 1965), and, to avoid unnecessary redundancy in historical coverage, it excludes detailed treatment of the Beauregard property and the National Cemetery. The last part of the report, Part III, is a multi-author work edited by Ted Birkedal. Entitled "Archeological Investigations of the Chalmette Riverfront," this final section is devoted to the results of the archeological investigations and their integration with the findings of the historical research. Here, all the various lines of evidence are brought together and given close scrutiny in order to produce a revised historical geography and archeological overview of the Chalmette Unit river frontage.

Map *i-1*. Location of Chalmette Unit, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve

Drawn by Lyndi Hubbell for the National Park Service.



LOCATION
OF
CHALMETTE UNIT
JEAN LAFITTE
NATIONAL HISTORICAL
PARK

Figure *i-1*. General view across the Chalmette Battlefield to the southwest showing the Chalmette Monument to the right, and the Beauregard House to the left. Battery 3 is at the left edge of the distant, central clump of oaks.

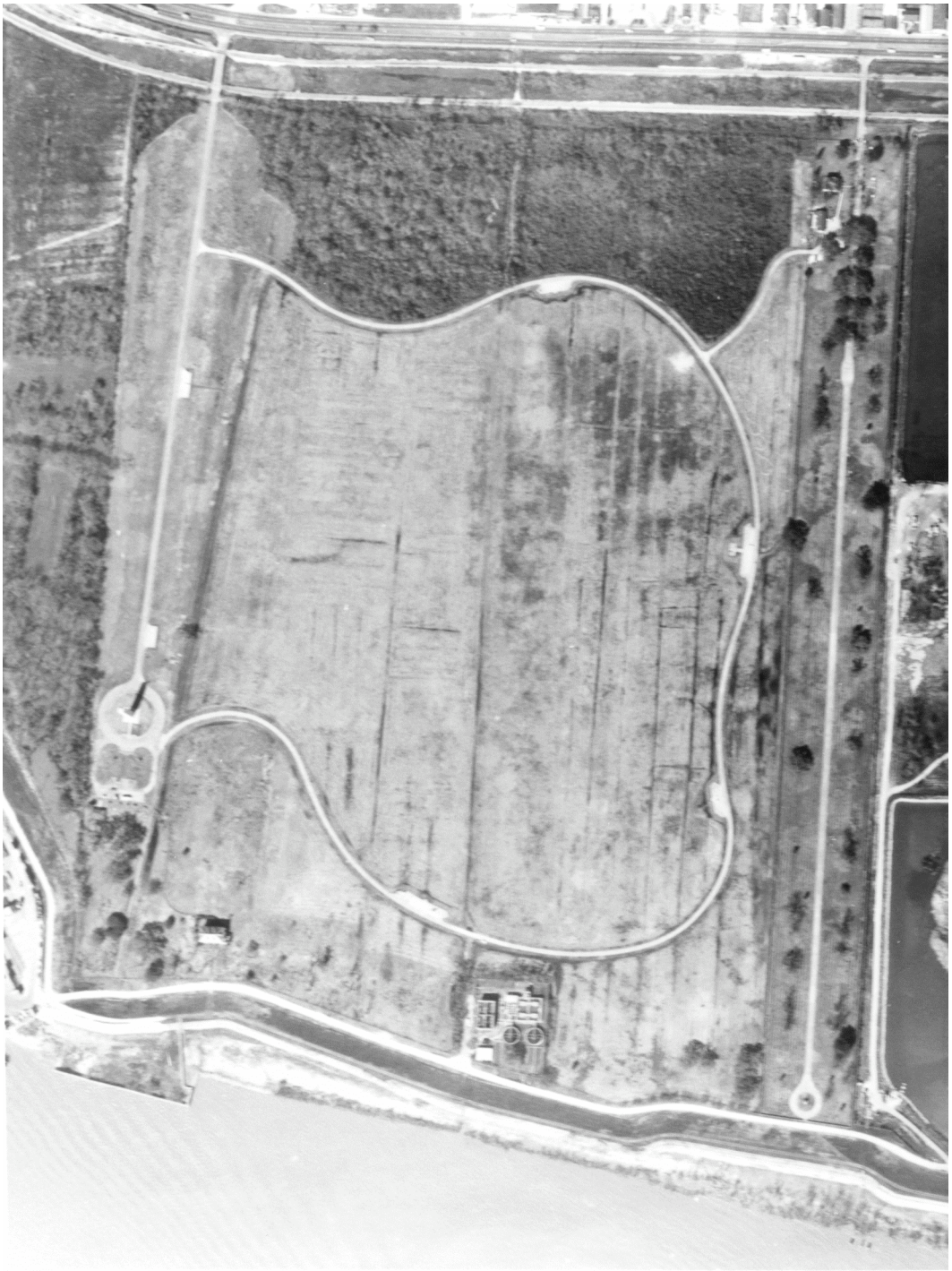
Photographer: Ted Birkedal, National Park Service.

Figure *i-2.* Oblique aerial view to the northeast of the Chalmette Unit (1984). The Chalmette Slip is in the foreground; the Kaiser Aluminum Plant is at the east edge of the park unit. The 1984 levee flanks the Mississippi River bank; the St. Bernard Parish Sewage Treatment Plant sits beside the Levee Road in the eastern quarter of the Chalmette Unit.

Photograph courtesy of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Figure *i-3.* Vertical aerial photograph of the Chalmette Unit, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve on March 5, 1981 (1:6500). Note the many ditch lines running landward from the levee edge. The Rodriguez Canal is clearly visible as the large ditch running in a slightly diagonal path from north- northeast to south-southwest in the western third of the photograph.

Chalmette Unit, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.



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