

Oakland Plantation



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Ruins []

- A) 1960s Cotton Picker Shed
- B) Gabe Nargot's Cabin
- C) Cotton Gin Ruins
- D) Blacksmith Shop
- E) Grass Tennis Courts

Cane River Creole National Historical Park, Louisiana

Owners of French Descent

The founder of Oakland was Jean Pierre Emanuel Prud'homme, who began farming the area in 1785 and received a Spanish land grant in 1789. Eight generations of his French Creole family lived and worked on this land, managing to keep the physical complex intact for two centuries. Because of the integrity of the resources here, the site has been designated as a National Historic Landmark. In 1994, Cane River Creole National Historical Park was established, insuring that the resources of Oakland Plantation will remain protected and accessible to the public.

The plantation's first cash crops were tobacco and indigo, followed by cotton in the 1800s. According to family tradition, the Prud'hommes were the first family west of the Mississippi River to farm cotton on a large scale. As textile mills in the North increased their demand for cotton, the use of enslaved labor increased in cotton-growing plantations such as Oakland. In this way the industrial revolution in the Northern states encouraged the expansion of the plantation labor systems of the South.

Workers of African Descent

The skills and strengths of enslaved African Americans are evident in the buildings they constructed at Oakland Plantation (originally called Bermuda). The proficiency of enslaved blacksmiths such as Solomon Williams, for example, can be seen in iron latches and hinges, in numerous grave crosses from the cemetery, and in a collection of skillfully made well-drilling tools found on Oakland Plantation.

Descendents of many enslaved workers remained at Oakland as tenant farmers and sharecroppers. These farmers sought to glean a small living as well as a bit of freedom from their labors. The vibrant African American communities in the Natchitoches region today trace two hundred years of cultural history to this fertile land surrounding the Cane River.

Site Map

- 1 Cook's House** - Creole structures were commonly moved from one location to another. The cook's house, once located behind the main house, was moved to its present site by P. Phanor Prud'homme II in the 1930s and its appearance modified as seen today. Here it was used as a "fishing camp" which was rented out to various families who came to Cane River to fish. "Grampa" also rented wooden boats and sold bait to the fishermen. Minnows were raised for fishing bait in the small pond behind the cook's house.
- 2 Privy** - This four-seater outhouse (which includes a baby seat) was used prior to the installation of indoor plumbing.
- 3 Live Oak Allée** - The shaded avenue of live oak trees was planted circa 1825. In addition to sheltering the entrance from strong Louisiana sunlight, the trees helped to cool the main house by drafting breezes from the river.
- 4 Main House** - The Prud'hommes' house is an excellent example of a raised Creole cottage. The brick piers allow air to move freely around the structure. This height also protects the building from rain-flooded ground. The house has seen several additions and still retains most of its original heavy cypress timber construction and bousillage-filled walls.
Bottle Garden - The garden in front of the main house was once bordered with boxwood hedges. Inverted bottles were later added to decorate the edges of this parterre garden.
Wash House - The many outbuildings at Oakland illustrate the relative autonomy of a "plantation". Martha Ann, an enslaved laundress, worked in the wash house in the 1850s. In the 1940s, Martha Helaire earned \$4 per month working here as laundress.
Poultry Sheds - Chickens were bred, hatched, and fattened in this area.
Turkey Shed - Turkeys raised here were another food source that contributed to the self-sufficiency of the plantation.
- 5 Pavilion**
- 6 Tractor Shed** - The undersized bays of this 1950s shed testify to a time when farm tractors were smaller. As farming became more mechanized, the need for human labor decreased.
- 7 Store and Post Office*** - Opened after the Civil War, sharecroppers and tenant farmers continued buying their supplies for family and farming at this store until 1983. The Prud'homme family operated the store, and for 50 years a Prud'homme family member served as postmaster for the Bermuda Post Office located inside.

- 8 Carriage House** - In recent years this structure was used as a car garage and a farm workshop, but the carriage house dates back to 1820. In its earlier years, the east bay was used as a horse stall. The overseer had the horse saddled each day and tied to the chain so that it was available for riding and checking the fields.
- 9 Carpenter Shop** - Skilled workers built and repaired plantation structures from this workspace.
- 10 Mule Barn** - The central structure of the mule barn was built as a smoke house in the 1820s. The resourcefulness of plantation residents can be seen in the adaptive reuse of the smoke house structure to accommodate the mules that were displaced when the original barn burned.
- 11 Pigeonnier** - Like other landowners in the French colony of Louisiana, the Prud'hommes harvested young pigeons for a delicacy called "squab."
- 12 Wagon Shed**
- 13 Dipping Vat**
- 14 Square Corn Crib and Jug Cistern** - Built around 1821 of hand-hewn cypress logs, the corn crib was used to store grain for the plantation. Rain water was channeled from the crib roof into the jug cistern, which was 16 feet deep and held 4804 gallons of water used for watering the stock.
- 15 Doctor's House*** - Built in the 1830s, the doctor's house has been home to young couples of every generation of Prud'hommes. For many decades the home was rented to a doctor named James A. Laveque who married into the Prud'homme family. *A garage, barn, shed, coop, and grist mill surround this area.*
- 16 Overseer's House** - An overseer was responsible for management of the plantation's laborers, stock, land, and tools. This residence was constructed by enslaved labor in 1861 for an overseer named Seneca Pace. Pace kept a daily journal of work and weather at Oakland.
- 17 Slave/Tenant Quarters and Ruins** - These structures are remnants of a larger community, which extended for a quarter-mile southward along the river. After the Civil War, sharecropper and tenant farmer families continued to live in these quarters as late as the 1970s.
- 18 Seed House*** - Gabe Nargot was a gin engineer, whose African-born grandmother had been enslaved at Oakland. Gabe Nargot was the last person living at Oakland who had been enslaved here, and the ruins (B) of his cabin are located in the area of the slave/tenant quarters. This cottonseed-processing building is the last vestige of a once-bustling ginning operation.

