

Melrose



As you travel the long gravel road it is like going back in time, to an era in which legend and history are intertwined as deeply as the roots of the magnolias and the live oaks.

You have arrived at Melrose, a unit of Natchez National Historical Park, a site whose story is that of antebellum Natchez. Wealthy cotton planters lived in mansions on spacious estates surrounding Natchez.

Natchez planters controlled vast cotton plantations in Louisiana, Arkansas and Mississippi. Thousands of slaves worked on these plantations. Some were sold in Natchez at the second largest slave market in the region. The lifestyle of the planter culture was built on the buying and selling of human beings as property and the use of that property to cultivate the cotton plantations.

"In November we went south and spent the winter alternately in plantations and at Melrose, the residence of John's father, two an one half miles from Natchez Mississippi, and one of the most beautiful places of the many beautiful ones in the vicinity of Natchez."

Alice Austen McMurrin, 1856



John T. McMurrin's story is typical of other Natchez planters. Born in Pennsylvania in 1801, McMurrin moved to Chillicothe, Ohio to study law. While there he met fellow law student and future law partner, John Quitman. By 1823 McMurrin had made his way to the southwest frontier of Mississippi. By late 1826, McMurrin was practicing law with his friend Quitman, who had arrived in Natchez in 1821.



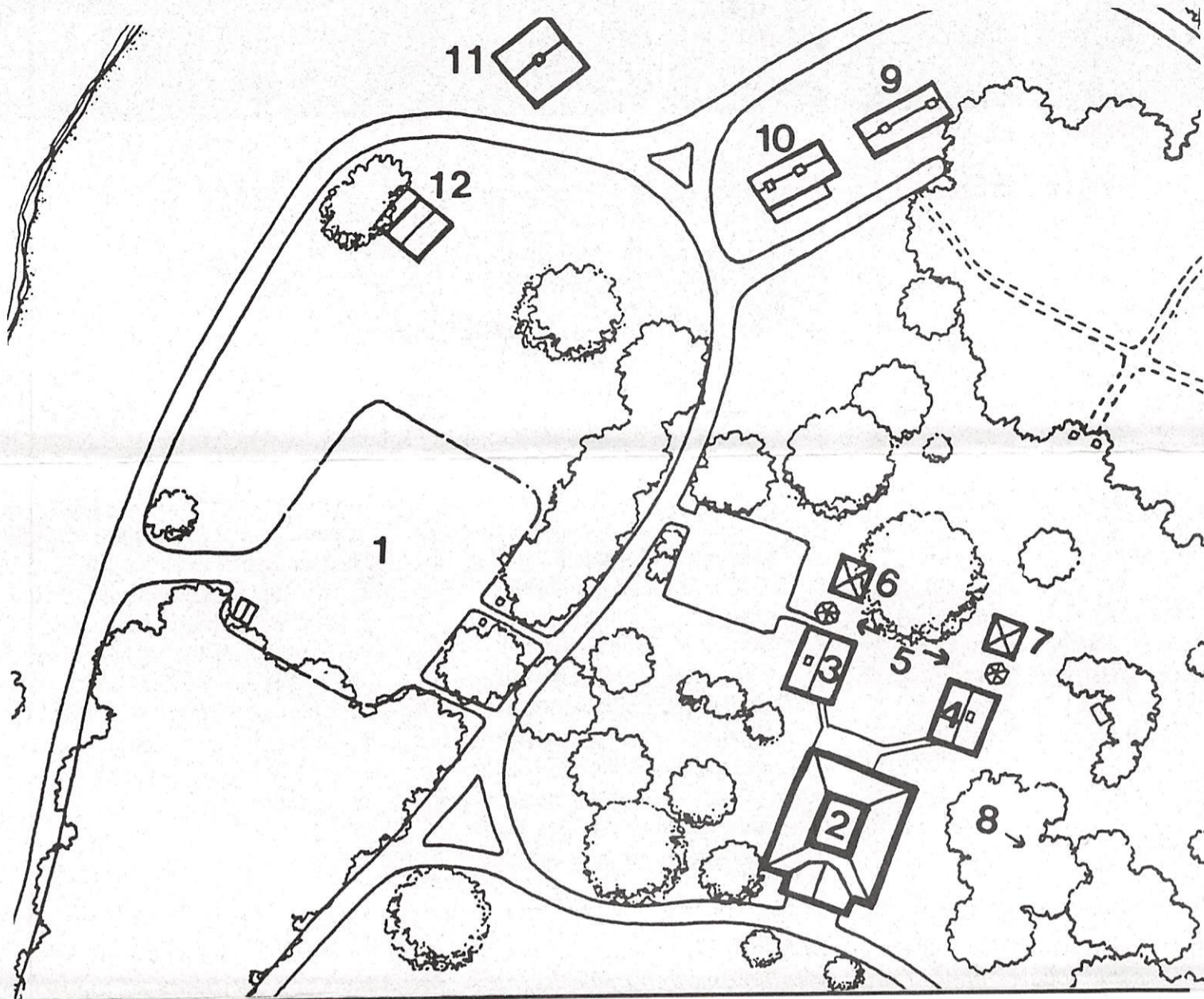
On January 11, 1831, John McMurrin married seventeen-year-old Mary Louisa Turner. The marriage moved McMurrin into an influential family and a close knit community. The couple had three children, two of whom survived to adulthood. They quickly began to acquire land and slaves with which to establish cotton plantations.

In the late 1840's the McMurrins moved into their newly completed estate, Melrose. The lifestyle they enjoyed was one of summer months spent in the Northeast or

on trips to Europe. Winter months were spent in Natchez tending to the plantation business and entertaining. This lifestyle was elegant, yet also fraught with hardship. Disease such as yellow fever and dysentery regularly struck the community. The McMurrins lost a child and two grandchildren to these diseases.

In January, 1866, The McMurrins sold Melrose and many of its furnishings and moved to Mary Louisa's family home, Woodlands. In December of that year John McMurrin died following a terrible steamboat accident. Mary Louisa continued to live in Woodlands until her death in 1891.

Melrose's subsequent owners, the Davis, Kelly and Callon families, worked to preserve it. In 1990 the National Park Service bought it as part of Natchez National Historical Park.



Self Guided Grounds Tour

- | | | | |
|----|--|-----|--|
| 1. | VISITOR PARKING | 7. | PRIVY
Modern public restrooms can be found in this building. |
| 2. | GREEK REVIVAL MANSION | 8. | FORMAL GARDEN
This area contains flower beds, an orchard and paths. |
| 3. | OUTBUILDING
The first floor was used as a kitchen in the antebellum era. Today the first floor is the site of the visitor center and bookstore. | 9. | SLAVERY EXHIBIT
An exhibit on slavery and recreated slave quarters are in this building. |
| 4. | OUTBUILDING
This building was probably a laundry.

The second floor of each outbuilding served as living quarters for house slaves. | 10. | COTTAGE
This building houses park offices. |
| 5. | CISTERNS
These two structures cover and protect the cisterns, so vital for storing water. | 11. | STABLE
A typical antebellum estate would have had livestock such as horses, mules and cows. |
| 6. | STORAGE BUILDING
Traditionally called the smokehouse and later used as a pumphouse, the original purpose for this building remains a mystery. What do you think it was? | 12. | CARRIAGE HOUSE
Carriages, wagons, harnesses and other equipment were stored in this building. |

*Text by Wendy Jansen, edited by William Justice
Cover graphic of Melrose by Janice Turnage*