
Administrative History of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve

Prepared for
Organization of American Historians

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Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve
419 Decatur Street
New Orleans, Louisiana

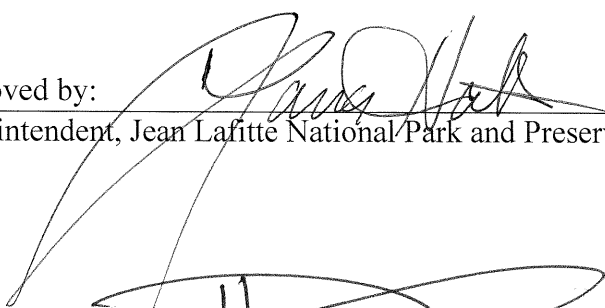
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About the cover:
The Creole Queen docked at Chalmette. (New Orleans Paddlewheels Inc.)

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve

Administrative History

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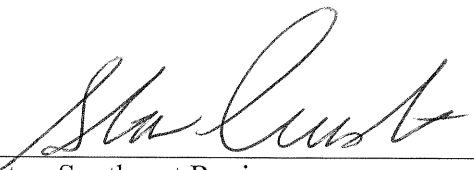
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Dedication

I am very proud and very pleased with what has been accomplished with the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. This is a wetland park in an area closer to a major population center than anywhere else. So many of the areas of marshland in Louisiana are subsiding and being lost. Wetlands are not well enough understood. Their role in storm suppression is tremendous and their role as habitat for wildlife and marine life is extremely important. Their beauty and atmosphere are part of the Louisiana psyche, and so I am glad we have a place where those qualities can be appreciated by visitors. The park has been a great success.

Senator J. Bennett Johnston, March 2010

Acknowledgments

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1 David left the NPS in January 2011 to take the position of Louisiana State Director of the National Wildlife Federation.

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Introduction

The history of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve is actually the history of four parks. Jean Lafitte has four units: the Barataria Preserve Unit, the French Quarter Unit, the Acadian Unit, and the Chalmette Unit.¹ The Chalmette Unit commemorates the 1815 Battle of New Orleans and has a long history that predates the creation of Jean Lafitte. A portion of the Chalmette Battlefield became part of the National Park System in 1933 with the transfer of War Department sites to the National Park Service (NPS). In 1939, Congress designated that inherited tract and the Chalmette National Cemetery as Chalmette National Historical Park. The NPS then waged a 20-year campaign to obtain enough land to complete the Chalmette park. Upon the establishment of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve in 1978, Chalmette lost its status as an independent park, becoming the Chalmette Unit of the new park. Jean Lafitte's 1978 authorizing legislation gave the NPS broad authority to operate in the Lower Mississippi Delta Region. Eventually the park developed the four units mentioned above, as well as several sites that it has assisted through cooperative agreements. This multiplicity of units is one of the unique features of Jean Lafitte that have made writing its history interesting and rewarding.

The primary audience for NPS administrative histories is an internal one. Managers and staff coming to a park benefit greatly from having a comprehensive, well-documented source of information on the park's origins, development, and management history. This Jean Lafitte history will serve as a ready reference for present and future park employees. Beyond that, the Jean Lafitte story has a number of facets that will be of interest to outside readers. The experience of the

Barataria Preserve Unit² has important implications for the internationally important issue of restoring endangered wetlands. Similarly, heritage tourism is an area of increasing interest to many. The approach adopted by Jean Lafitte managers in preserving and presenting the traditions of multiple cultural communities has broad implications.

The meanings of heritage, commemoration, remembering, and forgetting have attracted great interest among historians in recent decades. These lines of inquiry were pioneered by Pierre Nora and his colleagues in France in the 1980s through their work on the sites and realms of memory. David Lowenthal, Michael Kammen, David Blight, and others have pursued similar issues concerning the American past. The portion of this study dealing with the Chalmette Battlefield presents a case study of how one important American battle has been remembered. Chapters 3 through 5 provide the first in-depth examination of the long commemorative tradition at Chalmette. As just one example, the Chalmette Monument was completed through the efforts of the United States Daughters of 1812.³ The Daughters were one of a number of patriotic and heritage-oriented groups of women who pioneered the historic preservation movement in America in the 19th century. The importance of these groups in preserving the national heritage and providing women with new roles in the public sphere is only beginning to be recognized and examined. Moreover, during the decades of Jim Crow segregation from the 1880s to the 1960s,

1 In the 1990s, the Chalmette Unit and French Quarter Unit were combined administratively to form the Crescent City District.

2 The park's 1978 enabling legislation designated the portion of the park in Jefferson Parish as the Barataria Marsh Unit. The 2004 boundary expansion act officially renamed it the Barataria Preserve Unit. For convenience, I will commonly refer to this location as either the Barataria Unit or the Barataria Preserve Unit.

3 The first name of the organization was the Louisiana Society, United States Daughters of 1776 and 1812. In 1930, the group changed its name to the United States Daughters of 1812, Chalmette Chapter. In the interest of concision, the group will at times be referred to as the United States Daughters of 1812 or simply the Daughters.

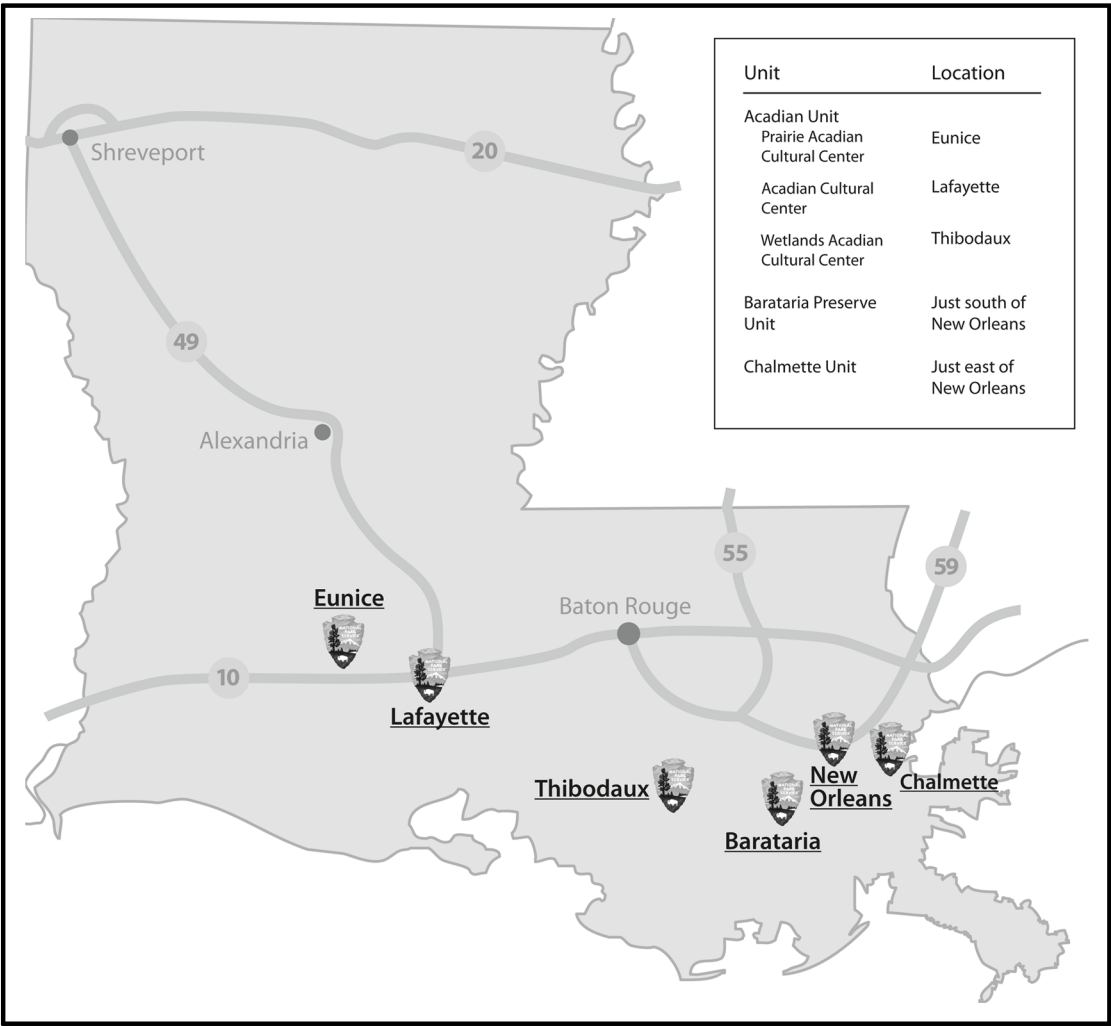


Figure 1-1. Units of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. (Madeline Baum)

the Chalmette Battlefield and Chalmette National Cemetery were at times contested spaces. The racial dimensions of the ownership of public space and public memory run through the history of commemoration there.

Another compelling facet of the Chalmette story is the eagerness shown by New Orleans businessmen and politicians to attract a major industrial plant to the area in the early 1950s. In pursuit of this goal, they readily acquiesced in the construction of an aluminum plant on the site of the Battle of New Orleans. This 1951 incident reveals much about the intense national security fears that prevailed at the height of the Korean War and the low priority accorded to historic preservation during this period.

The obliteration in the 1960s of a long-established African American community, Fazendeville, at Chalmette is another story with broad

implications.⁴ This decision was characteristic of the NPS’s long-standing tendency to view residents on newly acquired parkland as “problems to be removed.”⁵ The NPS was by no means the only government agency in the post-World War II era that found it easy to justify displacing people and communities in pursuit of what was seen as the greater good. Students of urban renewal and public-works projects and their human impact will find material of interest in the Fazendeville story.

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve represented a distinct departure for the NPS, as it was one of the first parks informed by a modern ecological perspective. Standards for the

4 Per the 16th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, compound ethnic terms like African American are not hyphenated.

5 Anne Mitchell Whisnant, *Super-Scenic Motorway: A History of the Blue Ridge Parkway* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 132.

inclusion of areas in the National Park Service were evolving in the 1960s and 1970s. During this period natural scientists were increasingly urging federal protection of functioning ecosystems, even if they had been substantially altered by manmade activities and even if they did not include awe-inspiring scenery. The Barataria Preserve was just such a heavily compromised, but still viable, ecosystem.

Jean Lafitte and Lowell National Historical Park in Massachusetts were the NPS's first major forays into the protection of resources linked to living cultural communities. At Lafitte, the agency's mission included "the perpetuation of cultural institutions and activities and encouraging greater appreciation of cultural diversity."⁶ Accomplishing these goals presented park managers with a variety of challenges and started a reexamination of ingrained NPS ways of operating. A recurring theme in this history is the tension involved in conserving the traditional experiences of diverse cultures while respecting the dynamic nature of living cultures. Many who are involved in heritage tourism or folklife programs should find the story of this pioneering NPS effort to be of considerable interest.

Finally, the park's legislative history demonstrates how different the process of park creation became once Congress rather than the NPS had the lead role. NPS leadership was not convinced of the national significance of the Barataria Preserve and attempted to have it established instead as a Louisiana state park. The Louisiana congressional delegation's success in adding Jean Lafitte to the National Park System reflects the altered dynamic of park creation as of the late 1970s.

The structure of this history is as follows. Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of the geography, history, and cultural communities of South Louisiana. Because of the widely varying resources of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve and the park's emphasis on cultural diversity, some familiarity with this background is needed to understand the park's development. This chapter also provides background essential for comprehending NPS decisions to approve

cooperative agreements with institutions representing various cultural communities.

Chapters 3 through 5 address the history of the Chalmette Battlefield and Chalmette National Cemetery. Commemorative efforts began at Chalmette in the 1850s with the support of the state of Louisiana and were later continued by the Daughters of 1812 and the War Department. The NPS then managed the battlefield and cemetery for decades before they became part of the Jean Lafitte park. For purposes of coherence, chapter 5 completes the Chalmette story by covering the period during which it was a unit of Jean Lafitte.

Chapter 6 examines the movement in the 1960s and 1970s to create a wetlands park in Jefferson Parish, which culminated in the 1978 legislation creating Jean Lafitte. It is followed by a brief chapter on the early organizational and management decisions that affected the park as a whole. Chapter 7 also addresses the formation and role of the Delta Region Preservation Commission, the establishment of which was stipulated in the park's authorizing legislation. The commission's appointed members were charged with advising the NPS on various items, including the selection of units and the development of an interpretive program for the park, during its first 20 years.

The subsequent chapters cover the development of the individual park units and cooperative agreement sites. Chapter 8 covers the French Quarter Unit and park headquarters. The Barataria Preserve Unit is the subject of Chapter 9. Chapter 10 contains the story of the park's cooperative agreement sites as well as cooperative agreements that were proposed but never implemented. The three sites—Eunice, Thibodaux, and Lafayette—that became the Acadian Unit of the park are covered in Chapter 11.

Jean Lafitte's staff was involved in the establishment of two other parks in Louisiana and several other initiatives that extended beyond the park's boundary, some of them of national scope. These activities are treated in summary fashion in chapter 12. Chapter 13 sketches the impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on park resources and operations. Only a very preliminary assessment of the far-reaching effects of the storms can be offered in this work; a more definitive treatment

6 National Park Service, Denver Service Center, *General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park* (Denver: NPS, July 1982), 11.

must await the passage of more time. Finally, in Chapter 14, the author offers some observations and conclusions on the challenges of managing this unique park.

An Overview of the Geography, History, and Peoples of South Louisiana

Land and Water

The face of South Louisiana, home to all of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve's units, has been and continues to be shaped primarily by the action of water. Over the last three million years, glacial periods, when significant quantities of the earth's water were frozen, alternated with interglacial periods. When glacial periods ended, huge amounts of meltwater carrying sand and gravel (known as outwash) coursed through what is known today as the Lower Mississippi Valley to the sea. During each period when water was released from the glaciers, the sea level rose. Today's Lower Mississippi Valley began to take shape after the most recent glaciation, the Wisconsin, began to recede about 20,000 years ago. Some seven to eight thousand years ago, the rising sea was approaching its current level. From then until the arrival of Europeans around 1700, the Mississippi River routinely overflowed its banks and changed its course. In this process, sediments carried by the river were laid down, creating an alluvial valley from 30 to 90 miles wide starting near Cairo, Illinois, where the Ohio River joins the Mississippi. In South Louisiana, the sediments carried to the river's outlets formed a series of overlapping delta lobes, which together make up the Mississippi Deltaic Plain. The outlets that carry the river's waters into the Gulf of Mexico are known as distributaries.¹

With some 1,500 tributaries, the Mississippi River watershed drains approximately 40 percent of the

lower 48 states. After receiving waters from the Red River some 175 miles above New Orleans, the Mississippi has no more major tributaries, but only the distributaries already described. The flow of river water into one major distributary, the Atchafalaya River, is now controlled by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. From the Atchafalaya down to Head of Passes, the river is confined within levees. Below the Head of Passes, distributaries known as Southwest Pass, South Pass, and Pass a Loutre carry the Mississippi's waters into the Gulf. These form what is known as the Bird's Foot Delta, the river's currently active deltaic lobe.²

Prior to human intervention, each spring the Mississippi flooded much of South Louisiana, leaving behind millions of tons of sediment and adding regularly to the land mass. Along the riverbanks, the sediment formed high ground, known as natural levees. These natural levees were found not only on the Mississippi and its distributaries, but also on other rivers and bayous of the state.³ The height of the natural levees varied, with heights of 12 to 15 feet being typical around New Orleans. Sediments carried farther away from the streambed also added to the land mass, forming and adding to wetland areas. The

1 Roger T. Saucier, *Geomorphology and Quaternary Geologic History of the Lower Mississippi Valley* (Vicksburg, Miss.: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1994), 22, 36, 320-22; John Day Jr. et al., "Restoration of the Mississippi Delta: Lessons from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita," *Science* 315 (March 23, 2007):1679-80.

2 Day et al., 1680; Charles Robert Goins and John Michael Caldwell, *Historical Atlas of Louisiana* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), ix, 5-6; Louisiana Writers' Project, *Louisiana: A Guide to the State, Compiled by Workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Louisiana* (New York: Hastings House, 1945), 9-10.

3 The term *bayou*, derived from the Choctaw language and appearing in French accounts as early as 1740, is the regional term for a slow-moving stream. Jean Dubois, Henri Mitterand, and Albert Dauzat, *Grand Dictionnaire Etymologique et Historique du Français* (Paris: Larousse, 2001), 95.

typical progression was from the natural levee, to swampland, to marshes. Each major distributary formed a basin. In the upper stretches of a basin, the marshes contained freshwater, but salinity increased gradually toward the Gulf. When streams shifted their beds, the previously formed natural levees remained as ridges of higher ground. From prehistoric times, these elevated areas have attracted human settlement.⁴

Almost as soon as the French founded New Orleans in 1718, they began to build artificial levees—linear dikes along the river’s edge—in order to protect plantations and settlements from flooding. Today, the human engineering of the river has reached huge proportions, with upstream dams, thousands of miles of levees, spillways (floodplains controlled by floodgates), and jetties. Dams, especially those on the Missouri River, have dramatically reduced the amount of suspended sediment that reaches the Lower Mississippi. To provide deep-draft navigation channels, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers maintains jetties at the passes of the Mississippi. The jetties cause the river’s flowing water to keep channels scoured, but also prevent sediment from spreading over the deltaic plain. Instead the sediment is carried to the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico (creating another set of challenges for the plant and animal life of the Gulf). Without the annual replenishment of the land through the deposition of sediment, natural and manmade subsidence and the rising sea level have resulted in significant losses of land area. South Louisiana has lost about 1,900 square miles of land since 1900 and is projected to lose about 10 square miles of land to the Gulf annually over the next 50 years.⁵

The topography of South Louisiana is one of very low relief, accompanied by a high water table and ample rainfall, around 60 inches per year. Coastal marshes form a band 20 to 50 miles wide along the Gulf of Mexico, marked by numerous bays and inlets. These marsh areas are among the world’s most productive estuaries, forming habitats for many species of fish, shellfish, and birds and giving

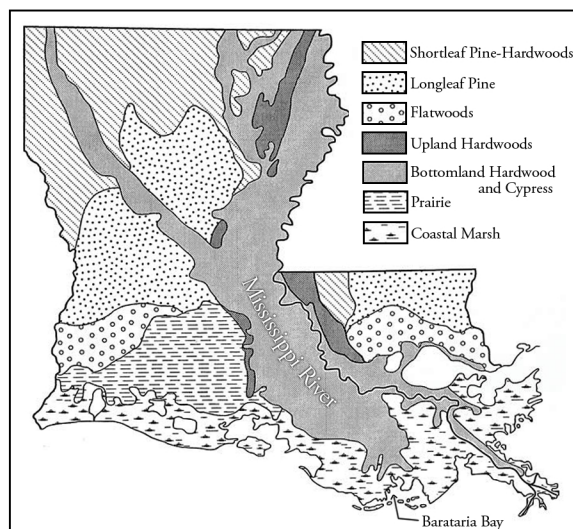


Figure 2-1. Louisiana vegetation regimes. (adapted from Loyola University’s Center for Environmental Education web site)

rise to Louisiana’s important fisheries industry. One bay, Barataria south of New Orleans, was the base of operations for the early 19th-century privateer, pirate, trader, and patriot Jean Lafitte, for whom the park was named.⁶ Farther inland, beyond the band of marshes, much of the land lying between the levees is low-lying swamp. Many freshwater lakes dot the landscape.⁷

The climate of South Louisiana is moist, marked by long, hot, steamy summers and mild winters. The growing season is long, ranging from 250 to 300 days. Sedges, grasses, and rushes are the dominant vegetation in the brackish and saline coastal marshes. In the upper reaches of the estuarine basins, such as the Barataria Preserve, freshwater marshes have more diverse vegetation. Mixed hardwood forests of oak, sweet gum, hickory, and pecan are typical of the higher areas along the natural levees. Bald cypress and water tupelo swamps are found on their lower flanks.⁸ Southwestern Louisiana has a large, mostly treeless, tallgrass prairie region, forming a rough triangle with the apexes at Lake Charles, Ville

4 Goins and Caldwell, 11-12; Louisiana Writers’ Project, 9; John B. Rehder, *Louisiana’s Vanishing Plantation Landscape* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 12-17.
5 National Research Council of the National Academies, *Drawing Louisiana’s New Map: Addressing Land Loss in Coastal Louisiana* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2006), 5; Day et al., 1680.

6 Jean Lafitte is a controversial historical figure, particularly because of his role as a slave trader. Lafitte’s history and legend and the implications of naming a national park after him are considered below in chapter 14.

7 Goins and Caldwell, 3; Fred B. Kniffen, *Louisiana, Its Land and People*, rev. ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 55.

8 Bald cypress, genus *Taxodium*, which grows in Louisiana, should not be confused with cypress of the genus *Cupressus*, which is not native to the American Southeast. Subsequent references to cypress are to bald cypress.

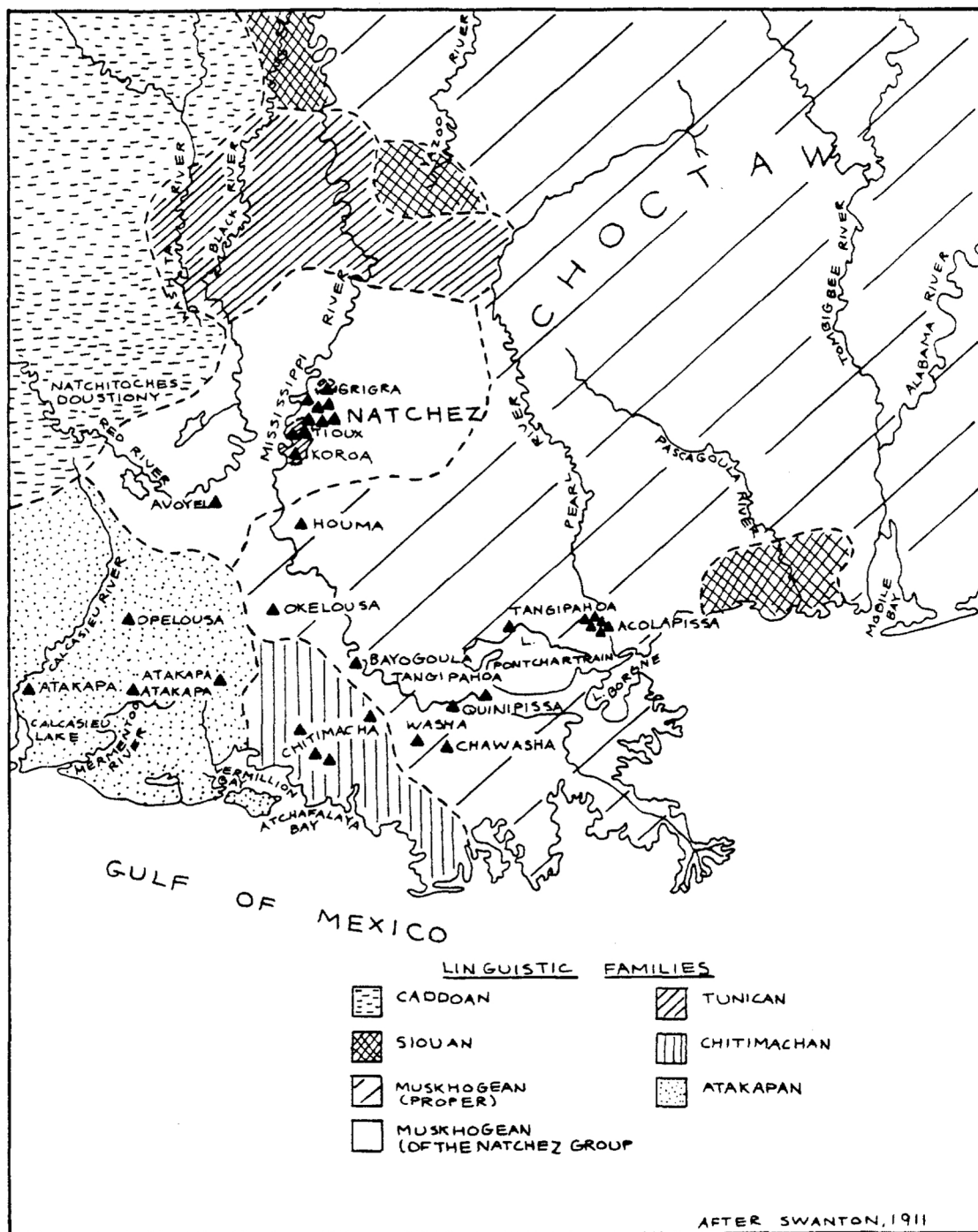


Figure 2-2. Indian groups in Louisiana at contact. (adapted from Swanton 1911)

Platte, and New Iberia. South Louisiana supports large populations of muskrat, mink, otter, deer, nutria (a species introduced from South America), swamp rabbit, amphibians, and reptiles, including alligators. The Mississippi Flyway, a major migration route for North American waterfowl, terminates in South Louisiana. The Central Flyway, another important route for migratory waterfowl, ends in Southwestern Louisiana and adjacent portions of Texas. Hurricanes and tropical storms

hit South Louisiana with regularity. Some of the more damaging recent hurricanes have been Audrey in 1957, Betsy in 1965, Andrew in 1992, Katrina and Rita in 2005, and Gustav in 2008. Much of South Louisiana and adjacent Gulf waters have substantial deposits of oil and natural gas beneath them.⁹

9 Goins and Caldwell, 3, 7, 10, 13; Louisiana Writers' Project, 10-11.

The natural environment of South Louisiana has had many consequences for its human populations. Large-scale agriculture was feasible in limited areas, mostly on the higher ground along rivers and bayous. The presence of many bays, lakes, bayous, and swamps made travel by boat much more practical than overland travel, and it also contributed to the relative isolation of some groups, such as the Acadians, through much of their history. Insect-borne diseases, like yellow fever, were a constant threat. From a geopolitical standpoint, the Mississippi's outlet to the Gulf was bound to be of strategic importance once European powers began vying for dominance in North America. Over the millennia, prehistoric and historic residents of South Louisiana have accommodated to their low-lying, watery environment, drawing sustenance from it, traversing it in pirogues¹⁰ and skiffs, and keeping a wary eye on its habit of periodically threatening them with storms and floods.

American Indians

Native people have inhabited the area now known as the state of Louisiana for many thousands of years. Over time, these peoples made the transition from a nomadic hunting and gathering existence to a sedentary life based in permanent villages. Between about 1650 and 700 BCE, a large, regionally important city, now known as the Poverty Point site, arose in Northeastern Louisiana on Bayou Macon. When the French began to settle South Louisiana around 1700, the native population had already suffered devastating population losses, largely due to diseases introduced by earlier European explorers and conquerors. It is estimated that about 15,000 American Indians were present within the borders of present-day Louisiana as of 1700.¹¹

In South Louisiana, circa 1700, three linguistic groups were present: the Atakapan group in the west; the Chitimachan in the area of the Atchafalaya River, Bayou Teche, and Bayou Lafourche; and the Muskogean on the left (east)

bank of the Mississippi River. The Atakapan and linguistically related Opelousa peoples were spread thinly over the southwestern prairies. The Chitimacha may have numbered as many as 4,000 in the late 17th century; the related Washa and Chawasha were less numerous. In the Muskogean-speaking area east and north of the great river were a number of tribes who spoke Choctaw dialects but did not belong to the Choctaw Confederacy. These included the Houma, the Okelousa, the Bayougoula, the Quinapisa, and the Tangipahoa. In general, all these tribes lived in villages ranging in size from a few to several dozen houses. These peoples all cultivated corn, beans, and squash, supplementing their diet with hunting, fishing, and the gathering of wild nuts, fruits, and berries. During the 18th century, the growing pressure of European settlement caused major migrations among many of these tribes. For example, the people now known as the Tunica-Biloxi once lived largely on the Yazoo River, in the present-day state of Mississippi, before moving west across the Mississippi River.¹²

The Arrival of Europeans and Africans

Spain was the first European power to claim the Lower Mississippi region. The survivors of Spaniard Hernando de Soto's expedition reached the mouth of the Mississippi River in 1543, providing the basis for Spain's claim. Finding no treasure along the Gulf Coast to match that of Mexico and South America, Spain was slow to establish colonial outposts here. An initial 1559 settlement at Pensacola was abandoned after two years. The Spanish did not try again until 1696, when Pensacola was permanently established.

During the 17th century, French trappers and explorers from Canada penetrated deeper into the Mississippi Valley. In 1682, Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle, followed the river to its mouth, claiming the entire Mississippi watershed for France and naming the vast territory Louisiana in

10 A pirogue (pronounced pee-row in Louisiana) is a small boat dug out from a single log and propelled with a pole.

11 Goins and Caldwell, x, 16; Fred Kniffen, Hiram F. Gregory, and George A. Stokes, *The Historic Indian Tribes of Louisiana, from 1542 to the Present* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 28-34.

12 Goins and Caldwell, 17-19; Kniffen, Gregory, and Stokes, 44-57; Sarah Sue Goldsmith and Risa Mueller, *Nations Within: The Four Sovereign Tribes of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 4-7; Bennett H. Wall, ed., *Louisiana: A History*, 3rd ed. (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1997), 14.

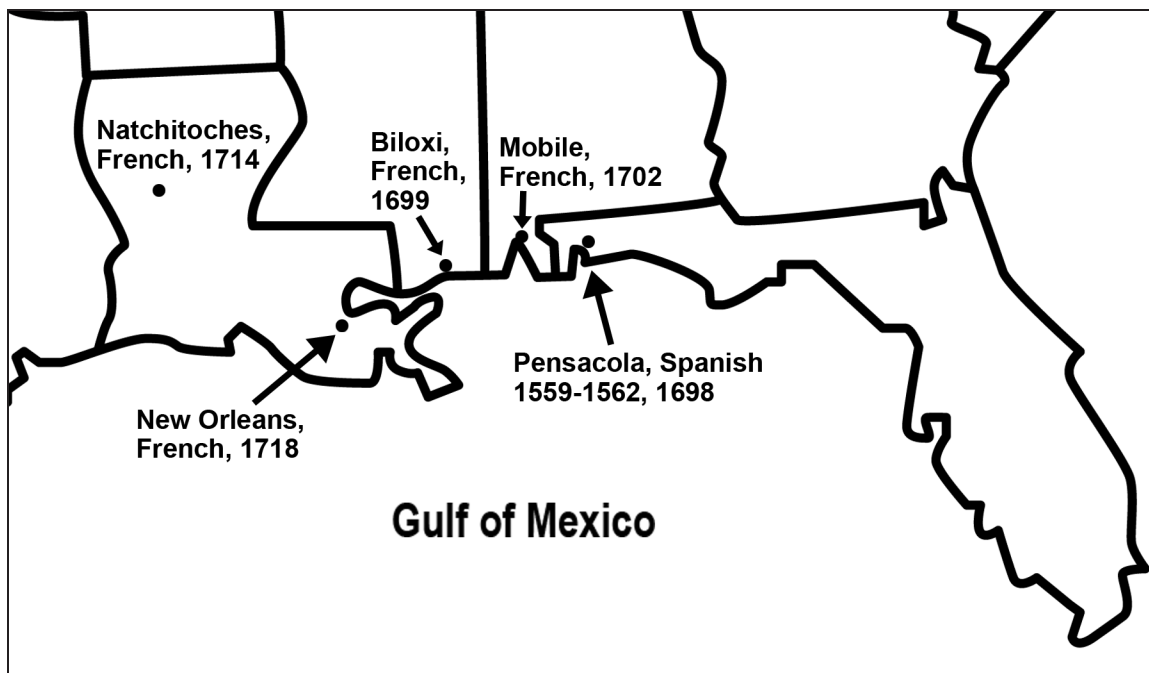


Figure 2-3. Early Spanish and French settlements. (Madeline Baum)

honor of his king, Louis XIV. Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, led the French colonization of Louisiana, establishing the first permanent French settlement in 1699, near Biloxi in present-day Mississippi. From the first, the French recognized the strategic and commercial advantages of an outpost near the Mississippi's mouth. In 1718, Iberville's brother, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, established a settlement on L'Isle de Nouvelle Orléans, about 100 miles upstream from the river's outlet. This was the genesis of the city of New Orleans. The site offered high ground along the Mississippi River and a short portage from the river to Lake Ponchartrain via Bayou Saint John. The lake provided a second outlet to the Gulf of Mexico and access to the French settlements at Biloxi and Mobile. In 1722, the French moved Louisiana's capital from Mobile to New Orleans.¹³

Individuals born in French and Spanish colonies came to be known as creoles, a term that requires some explanation. The English "creole" comes from the French *créole*, which in turn derives from the Spanish *criollo*. Recent research indicates that the term *criollo* came into use as early as the 1560s in Spanish colonies and was at first used to

distinguish slaves born in the West Indies from those born in Africa. In the French colony of Saint-Domingue (present-day Haiti) by the seventeenth century, *créole* meant simply native-born, and the term was applied to anyone born in the West Indies of European, African, or mixed descent, distinguishing them from persons born in Europe or Africa who later settled in the Americas. This meaning became accepted in French Louisiana as well. Following the purchase of Louisiana by the United States in 1803, the mostly Catholic French-speaking elite increasingly seized upon creole identity to distinguish themselves from the mostly Protestant Anglo-Americans who flooded into the territory. In antebellum Louisiana, creole took on this added connotation, while it continued to be widely used to describe those who were native-born, whether black, colored, or white, free or slave. The term was also used as an adjective to describe locally derived products, as in "creole cuisine," "creole tomatoes," and "creole cattle."¹⁴

13 Bernard Lugan, *La Louisiane Française, 1682–1804* (Paris: Perrin, 1994), 16–19; Louisiana Writers' Project, 37–40; Ari Kelman, *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 4; Wall, 36.

14 The historian Garcilaso de la Vega (1539–1616), known as "The Inca," wrote that blacks in the Americas invented the term *criollo* and applied it to their brethren born there. Joseph G. Tregle Jr., "Creoles and Americans," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 137–39; Carl A. Brasseaux, *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma: A Primer on Francophone Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 88–89.

Following the American Civil War, former slaves and former free people of color (*gens de couleur libres*) in Louisiana attempted to assert their newly won political and social freedoms. This effort inaugurated a period of intense, sometimes violent, struggle for status and power with profound racial dimensions. For the first time it became important for whites of French and Spanish heritage to insist that *creole* was a term that never had been applied to blacks or people of mixed blood. What historian Joseph Tregle Jr. has called “creole mythology” arose. The two major tenets of this mythology were that creole status required “pure” white blood and that the creoles were a refined and cultivated group, set apart from the coarser Anglo-Americans. The tendency of those outside Louisiana, ignorant of local nuances and influenced by popular culture, to construe *creole* as implying mixed European and African ancestry caused proponents of the myth to insist all the more on the whites-only definition. Attempting to contest this exclusive definition, some in recent decades have described themselves as “creoles of color.” For the purposes of this history, it is important to keep in mind that the particular meaning of creole is highly dependent on the context of its use and the background of the speaker.¹⁵

The inhabitants of colonial Louisiana, whether new arrivals or creoles, confronted many challenges. Several crops—tobacco, indigo, cotton, rice—were tried during the 18th century, but none proved a consistent moneymaker. Known to be poor and unhealthy, Louisiana attracted relatively few settlers from France. Until early in the 19th century, however, the great majority of white settlers were French speakers, and this pervasive French influence set South Louisiana apart from all other areas that would become part of the United States. Other ethnic groups added much to the regional culture, but always within the French sphere.

By 1730, African slavery was firmly established in the colony. As historian Gwendolyn Midlo Hall has demonstrated, a high proportion of Louisiana slaves came from Senegambia in Africa. These forced immigrants were able to preserve a number of cultural practices, which melded with French and Indian traditions to form a distinct Afro-Creole culture. This culture in turn influenced

subsequent settlers in the colony, both black and white. Around 1720, French officials encouraged Germans from the Rhineland, the Palatinate, other areas of Germany, and the German-speaking portion of Switzerland to settle in Louisiana. Of those recruited, as many as 1,000 survived the journey and remained there. Many settled just upriver from New Orleans in a section of St. John the Baptist Parish that is still known as La Côte des Allemands (the German Coast).¹⁶

A lasting legacy of the French colonial period was the “long lot” system of land distribution. Because transportation was by water and since high ground suitable for building and planting was limited to the natural levees, land was allotted in long, narrow strips, so that each owner had frontage along the river. On a typical farm, buildings were concentrated on the levee; next came cropland, then lower-lying pastureland, and finally, farthest from the river, swamps that provided cypress logs for buildings and fences. The clustered settlements on river banks came to be known as line villages. The French unit of measurement for real estate was the *arpent*, which was a unit of both length and area. A linear arpent was 180 French feet, equivalent to 192 English feet. A square arpent was 32,400 French square feet, about 0.85 acres.¹⁷

Louisiana had been settled for just six decades when France emerged as the big loser in the Seven Years War (1756–1763).¹⁸ Forced to cede Canada to

16 Hundreds of the German emigrants died from disease in the French ports of Lorient, La Rochelle, and Brest while waiting to ship out. Based on the 1724 census of the Louisiana colony, the German-speaking emigrants were about 80 percent Catholic and 20 percent Protestant. J. Hanno Deiler, *The Settlement of the German Coast of Louisiana* (Philadelphia: Americana Germanica Press, 1909), 15–17; Helmut Blume, *The German Coast During the Colonial Era, 1722–1803*, translated, edited, and annotated by Ellen C. Merrill (Destrehan, La.: German-Acadian Coast Historical and Genealogical Society, 1990), 8–10, 23–26.

17 Goins and Caldwell, 27; Kniffen, 122–24; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of an Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 158–59; Brasseaux, *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma*, 11–14; Wall, 48.

18 The first hostilities in what became known as the Seven Years’ War occurred in present-day Western Pennsylvania in the summer of 1754. British colonists in North America called the war the French and Indian War. This colonial war merged into the broader Seven Years’ War, which was contested in Europe, North America, the Indian subcontinent, and on the high seas.

15 Tregle, 132–35; Brasseaux, *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma*, 106.

Great Britain as a result of the war, France hoped at some point to reassert itself in North America and wanted to limit Britain's gains. Spain had entered the war on France's side in 1761. Partly as a reward for Spain's aid and partly to serve as a buffer against British expansion, France ceded all of Louisiana west of the Mississippi plus the Isle of Orléans to Spain. Louisiana's colonial population at the time was around 7,500. As part of the peace treaty, Britain received East and West Florida from Spain. The transition from French to Spanish rule had little practical effect in South Louisiana, which remained thoroughly French in language and customs. Louisiana was somewhat more prosperous as a Spanish colony (1762–1803). The population increased fivefold, but no consistent cash crop emerged. A devastating fire in New Orleans in 1788 forced most of the city to be rebuilt.¹⁹

Spanish rule also brought other ethnic groups to the area. Between 1778 and 1783, the Spanish authorities transported 2,300 residents of the Canary Islands to Louisiana. These immigrants settled originally in four places: Galveztown on Bayou Manchac, Bayou Terre-aux-Boeufs in St. Bernard Parish, Valenzuela on Bayou Lafourche, and along Bayou des Familles in what is now the Barataria Preserve. This represented the most significant immigration of Spanish speakers to the colony. Most of the 57 families who occupied land along Bayou des Familles stayed only a few years. In St. Bernard Parish, the descendants of the Canary Islanders came to be known as Isleños. These immigrants largely assimilated into the larger Francophone community, but retained a number of aspects of their culture. Today, some 50,000 people trace their ancestry to these settlers from the Canary Islands.²⁰

Another group that would have a lasting impact on South Louisiana arrived during the Spanish period: the Acadians. When war broke out in 1754 between Great Britain and France in North America, Britain demanded a loyalty oath from French speakers in the Atlantic provinces of

Canada, which had been British since 1713. This area had been called Acadia by the French; the British renamed the most populated portion Nova Scotia. Some 10,000 Francophones who refused to swear allegiance to Britain were forced to leave the Canadian maritime provinces. Wanting to break up a potentially hostile population, the British scattered the Acadians widely. Some were sent to France, while others were sent to seaports in the 13 British colonies between Canada and Florida. The conditions of travel were brutal and many deportees died en route. The Acadians, however, possessed a strong group identity and many clung to the goal of reestablishing their community. Additionally, those sent to English-speaking places found little economic opportunity, giving them a further incentive not to remain where they first landed. Eventually, between 1765 and 1785, some three to four thousand Acadians made their way to Louisiana, which had remained firmly French in language and culture even after the transfer to Spain in 1762.²¹

The bulk of the Acadian immigrants ended up in rural South Louisiana, particularly in the area from Bayou Lafourche west to the Vermilion River. Most of the productive land along the Mississippi River was already taken, and the established French-speaking population of Louisiana looked down upon these impoverished immigrants, most of them small farmers. Under the generally accepted antebellum understanding of the term, the Acadians (born either in the Canadian provinces or Louisiana) were creoles. Because they were shunned by the established residents, however, the rural Acadians were less likely to self-identify as creoles, and it became customary to divide Louisiana's French speakers into Acadians and creoles. The Acadians who could not find suitable agricultural land in Louisiana became fishermen and trappers. Because conditions in Louisiana differed from those in coastal Canada, the Acadians adopted new foods, clothing, and building traditions. By the second and third generations, a minority of Acadians had assimilated to creole and (later) Anglo-American customs and shed their Acadian identity. The majority, however, developed a distinctive and cohesive culture, based

19 Goins and Caldwell, 28–29.

20 Gilbert C. Din, *The Canary Islanders of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), xi–xii, 25, 28, 207; Jill-Karen Yakubik, *Archeological Investigations of Six Spanish Colonial Period Sites, Barataria Unit, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve* (Santa Fe, N.M.: NPS, 1989), 14–19.

21 Brasseaux, *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma*, 17–19; Malcolm L. Comeaux, "Cajuns in Louisiana," in *To Build a New Land: Ethnic Landscapes in North America*, ed. Allen G. Noble (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 177–78.

on strong kinship ties, Roman Catholicism, and traditional customs, many of which had their roots in rural France. As some Acadians moved west to the prairies of southwestern Louisiana, a cultural division emerged within the Acadian community. This was because the Atchafalaya Swamp limited communication between the “Prairie Acadians” to the west and the “Wetlands Acadians” to the east.²²

Increasingly in the 19th century, Louisianans of Creole, Anglo-American, and other ancestry intermarried with the descendants of the Acadian immigrants. The term Acadian was shortened to “Cajun” and often became a pejorative, similar to “hillbilly” or “cracker” in other parts of the South. As *Cajun* became more and more of an epithet, it was no longer reserved exclusively for those with Acadian ancestry. By the 1870s, the term was being applied to nearly all French speakers in rural South Louisiana. As outlined below, recent decades have witnessed a revival of pride in Acadian ancestry. Today, approximately half a million persons self-identify as Cajun or Acadian. Twenty-two parishes (Louisiana’s equivalent of what other U.S. states refer to as counties) are considered to constitute “Acadiana” or “Cajun Country” (see figure 11-1).²³

Slaves and free people of African descent were important elements of Louisiana’s population throughout the French and Spanish periods. The territory had about 10,000 slaves when Spain assumed control in 1762. French and Spanish law afforded certain basic rights to slaves, but these seem to have been honored inconsistently in daily practice. It was, nevertheless, somewhat easier for slaves in French and Spanish territories to achieve freedom through self-purchase or through an owner’s will than in British colonies. In general, the persistent shortage of white labor in Louisiana led colonial authorities to afford broader roles to both slaves and free people of color.²⁴

The Louisiana Purchase

Britain’s 13 North American colonies achieved independence as the United States of America in 1783. This dynamic nation of three million began a westward expansion, with thousands crossing the Appalachian Mountains to settle in the valleys of the Tennessee, Cumberland, and Ohio Rivers. The most convenient path to market for crops and livestock from these new farms was down the Mississippi watershed to New Orleans. As the 18th century closed, Americans were increasingly uncomfortable with foreign control of New Orleans. In 1800, Napoleon Bonaparte persuaded Spain to sign a secret treaty, which gave Louisiana back to France, in exchange for Napoleon’s guarantee that the province of Tuscany in Italy would remain subject to the Spanish crown. At the time, Napoleon planned a major expansion of French activity in Louisiana. First, though, he had to address a serious slave rebellion in Saint-Domingue (present-day Haiti). Napoleon dispatched a large army to Saint-Domingue, which was devastated by yellow fever. The loss of this fighting force effectively ended Napoleon’s plans for the Western Hemisphere. Consequently, when President Thomas Jefferson’s agents approached the French government in 1803 to purchase New Orleans, they found Napoleon willing to sell all of Louisiana. At the cost of \$15 million, the United States secured the watershed of the Mississippi and doubled its size.²⁵

In 1803 the Louisiana Territory had a population of about 250,000 Indians, 22,000 whites, and 28,000 slaves of African descent. About 80 percent of the non-Indian population was in

25 Goins and Caldwell, 31; Louisiana Writers’ Project, 42-44.

22 Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People, 1803-1877* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), 3-19; Brasseaux, *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma*, 90; Daniel H. Usner Jr., “Patterns of Livelihood, Networks of Exchange: Economic Life Inside the Louisiana Purchase,” in *The Louisiana Purchase and Its People*, ed. Paul E. Hoffman (Lafayette, La.: Louisiana Historical Association, 2004), 55-56.

23 Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun*, 104-5.

24 Daniel C. Littlefield, “Slavery in French Louisiana: From Gallic Colony to American Territory,” in *Creoles and Cajuns: French Louisiana—La Louisiane Française*, ed. Wolfgang Binder (Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang, 1998), 96-102.

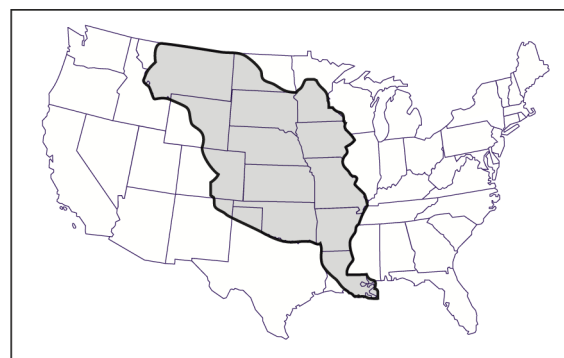


Figure 2-4. The Louisiana Purchase. (Madeline Baum)

Lower Louisiana (roughly corresponding to today's state of Louisiana). The French-speaking, overwhelmingly Roman Catholic population of Louisiana was understandably wary of becoming part of the majority Protestant, English-speaking United States. U.S. authorities assured the people of Louisiana that freedom of religion would be upheld and that their traditions of civil law inherited from France and Spain would be maintained.²⁶ The French speakers of New Orleans and the plantation country accommodated over time to American rule. The Acadians, as a largely separate community, were at first little affected by the transition. The U.S. Congress in 1804 divided the Louisiana Purchase into the District of Louisiana and the Territory of Orleans. The Territory of Orleans joined the United States as the state of Louisiana in 1812; The District of Louisiana ultimately was split into multiple states.²⁷

Just as Louisiana became part of the United States, a new group of immigrants arrived in the region: refugees from Saint-Domingue, which had been France's most profitable colony in the late 1700s. In 1789, when the French Revolution began, the colony produced three-quarters of the world's sugar. A unique three-tiered society had evolved in the colony: as of 1789 Saint-Domingue had approximately 40,000 whites, 28,000 free people of color, and 450,000 slaves. As in colonial Louisiana, free people of color could own property and were active in many areas of the economy, occupying a social stratum between whites and slaves. In 1789, they owned about 30 percent of the island's agricultural land, and a significant minority of them owned slaves. In 1791, a slave insurrection began in Saint-Domingue that went through a number of phases, culminating in the proclamation of the Republic of Haiti on January 1, 1804. The twists and turns of this revolutionary movement produced waves of refugees, many of whom ended up in Louisiana. Some refugees arrived in Louisiana in the 1790s, but the most

important influxes came later. The withdrawal of Napoleon's expeditionary force in 1803 produced a major exodus. Then, in 1809-1810, exiles from Saint-Domingue who had been allowed to settle in Spanish Cuba were expelled to Louisiana. The United States had by this time banned the importation of slaves from abroad. The French-speaking refugees from Cuba were given a special exemption, enabling them to bring their enslaved people to Louisiana.²⁸

The arrival in Louisiana of between 15,000 and 20,000 Francophones from Saint-Domingue had lasting effects that only recently have attracted the attention of historians. The migration included large numbers of free people of color, more than doubling the size of this community in New Orleans. This influx substantially reinforced the influence of Caribbean building styles, foodways, and musical and dance traditions in Louisiana. The expertise and manpower brought from Saint-Domingue were crucially important in establishing the sugar industry in Louisiana. In some cases, planters from the island arrived with their entire force of experienced overseers and slaves. The newcomers established a number of important Francophone cultural institutions in New Orleans, including newspapers, theaters, and schools. Finally, Pierre Lafitte and possibly his brother Jean Lafitte came to Louisiana from Saint-Domingue.²⁹

The War of 1812 and the Battle of New Orleans

From 1791 to 1815, Great Britain and France were almost continuously at war. Neither power

26 Most European countries have a civil law tradition, which relies heavily on written codes. Emperor Napoleon would expand on French civil law with the promulgation of the Napoleonic Code of 1804. The Anglo-American tradition relies much more on common law, or law that evolves through the accumulated precedent of court decisions. The legal system in the state of Louisiana today is heavily based on the civil law tradition, with substantial additions from common law.

27 Usner, 53; Louisiana Writers' Project, 44-45.

28 Nathalie Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007); Brasseaux, *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma*, 20-23.

29 Dessens, 81-83, 170-72. Jean Lafitte's early life is shrouded in mystery. The most exhaustive recent work, by historian William C. Davis, makes a compelling case that the two Lafittes were born in Pauillac in the Bordeaux region of France. Davis bases his conclusions on research into parish records in Pauillac and written statements of the two brothers. All suggestions of other birthplaces come from secondhand sources produced several decades after the brothers died. The family spelled the name in a variety of fashions. Jean and Pierre wrote it as "Laffite." Because the park name uses the "Lafitte" spelling, it will be used in this history. William C. Davis, *The Pirates Lafitte: The Treacherous World of the Corsairs of the Gulf* (Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt Books, 2005), 5-7, 25-26, 494-95.

respected the neutral rights of American shipping, frequently stopping and boarding U.S. merchant vessels. The United States fought France in an undeclared naval war over these issues from 1798 to 1800. American frustration with British seizures of American sailors, alleged British meddling with Indian tribes in the Ohio Valley, and a desire among some Americans to annex Canada led the United States to declare war on Great Britain on June 18, 1812, beginning the War of 1812. The major land campaign in the early years of the war was an American invasion of Canada that ended in failure. Much of the early combat took place at sea. For Britain, the war in America was secondary to the fight against France in Europe. When Napoleon was defeated in 1814, Britain sent large expeditionary forces to North America. A British offensive from Canada was frustrated by the Americans in battles near Niagara Falls and through a major American naval victory on Lake Champlain. Another British force burned much

of Washington, D.C., but then failed to take Fort McHenry in Baltimore harbor.³⁰

Britain's third prong was a campaign in the Lower Mississippi Valley. The initial intent was to land east of New Orleans, proceed overland to the vicinity of Baton Rouge, and take the city from upriver. East and West Florida had been returned to Spain in 1783, following the American Revolution, but Spain's hold on the Floridas was weak. During the War of 1812, British agents operated in Florida to supply the Indian tribes who were also fighting the Americans. A large portion of the Creek Nation, angered by white encroachment on Indian lands, had risen up against the Americans in 1813. The so-called Redstick Creeks were soundly defeated by

30 Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine in Baltimore and Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial in Put-In-Bay, Ohio, are two other NPS sites that commemorate the War of 1812.

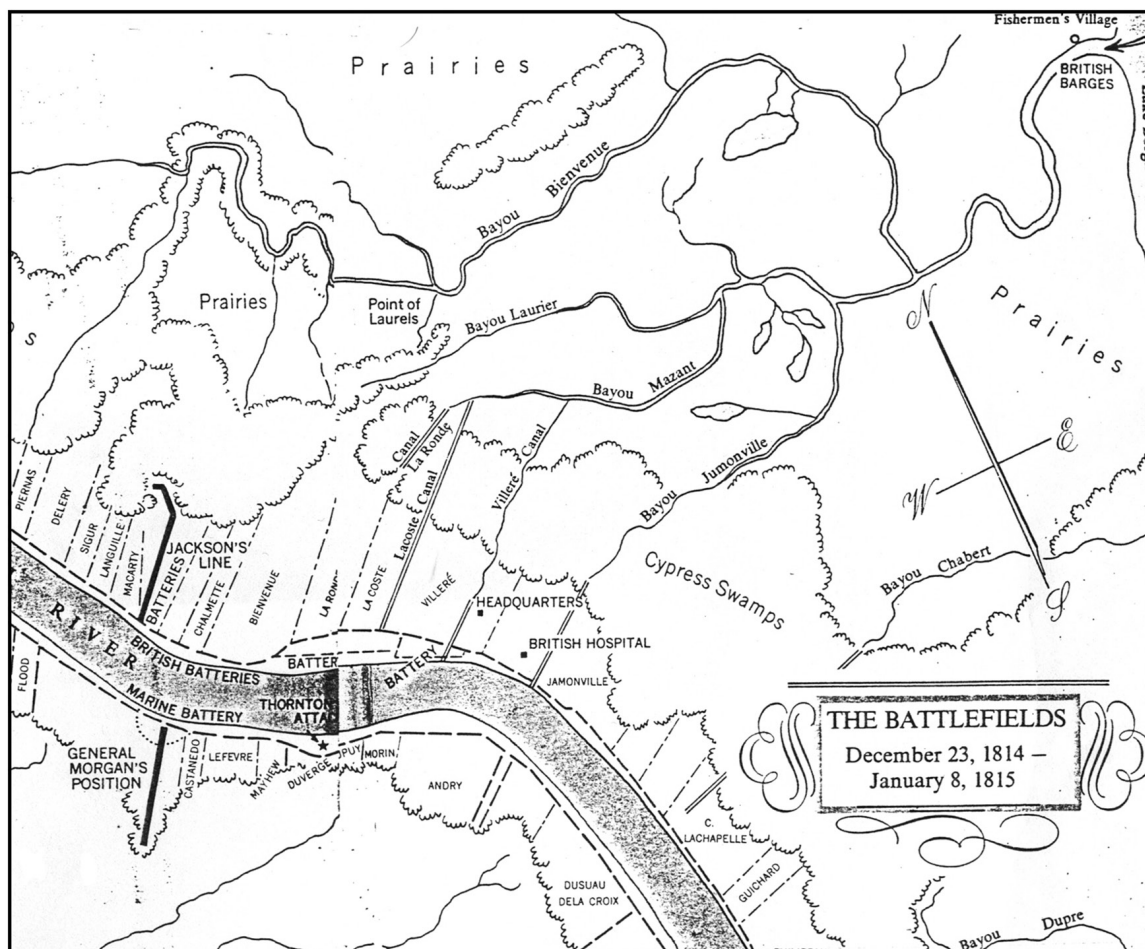


Figure 2-5. Mississippi River plantations below New Orleans and British invasion route, 1814. (JELA)

an American, Cherokee, and pro-American Creek force under Andrew Jackson at Horseshoe Bend on March 27, 1814. Jackson then moved on to occupy the Spanish outposts at Mobile and Pensacola to prevent them from being used by the British. Unable to capture either place, the British decided on a more direct attack on New Orleans.³¹

A British fleet carrying 14,000 veteran troops left Jamaica on November 26, 1814. Sailing up the Mississippi to New Orleans was a difficult proposition because of two American forts and sharp bends in the river that left ships exposed to shore fire while they awaited a change in wind direction. The British decided to anchor their war ships off the coast of present-day Mississippi and row their troops across shallow Lake Borgne. From there, the British force followed Bayou Bienvenu and the Villeré Canal to the banks of the Mississippi, intending to march up along the river's levee and take New Orleans from below.³²

When U.S. authorities got wind of British designs on New Orleans, President James Madison made Andrew Jackson a major general and gave him command of all U.S. forces in the South. Jackson and about 2,000 men set out for New Orleans in late November. At the same time, additional volunteers from Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Mississippi Territory began forming and heading to New Orleans. Jackson reached the city on December 1 and quickly began to take stock of its defenses. Because of the many possible approaches to the city, Jackson ordered several defensive works established and kept his main force ready to move to any point that was threatened. Around 1:30 p.m. on December 23, Jackson received reliable information that a British force was present at Villeré's Plantation on the left bank of the Mississippi, just nine miles below New Orleans. Jackson ordered a nighttime attack that probably saved the city. In a fierce two-hour engagement that took place on the Villeré, LaCoste, and De la

Ronde Plantations³³ the Americans checked the British advance and gave notice that the capture of New Orleans would not be a cakewalk. The resulting caution on the part of the British probably doomed their campaign.³⁴

The British failure to move quickly upriver to New Orleans allowed Jackson to establish a strong defensive line on a narrow front between the river and an impenetrable cypress swamp. Jackson had an émigré engineer from Saint-Domingue, Arsené Latour, lay out a breastwork (known as Line Jackson) just west of the Rodriguez Canal, an old millrace that separated the Chalmet³⁵ and Macarté plantations. The delay also gave time for more militia units to reach New Orleans, steadily augmenting the American force. Jackson eagerly sought any help he could get. Militias composed of free men of color had been a mainstay in New Orleans throughout the Spanish period; Jackson lost no time in enlisting some four to five hundred free men of color from New Orleans, some of them recent arrivals from Saint-Domingue. He promised them the same pay and privileges as his white troops. Some 10 to 15 percent of Jackson's troops at the Battle of New Orleans were free men of color, commanded by Major Jean Daquin. The Choctaw Chief Pushmataha had formed an alliance with the United States, and a contingent of Choctaw warriors under Pierre Jugeant joined Jackson's army at the Battle of New Orleans.³⁶

Jackson found another ally, somewhat against his will, in the Lafittes and their trading partners—the

31 Robert V. Remini, *The Battle of New Orleans* (New York: Viking, 1999), 7-23; Tim Pickles, *New Orleans 1815: Andrew Jackson Crushes the British* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1993), 7-12. Space does not allow a fuller examination of the links between the Creek War of 1813-1814 and the southern campaigns of the War of 1812. The Creek War is remembered at NPS's Horseshoe Bend National Military Park in Alabama.

32 Remini, 53; Pickles, 8, 39-40.

33 Most of the fighting between the American and British armies during the New Orleans campaign took place on a number of typical long-lot plantation properties on the east bank of the Mississippi River, some five to nine miles below the city center. The Mississippi River runs roughly west to east at the site of the battles for New Orleans, but by convention the banks are often referred to as the east (north) bank and the west (south) bank. The plantations were, from east (downstream) to west (upstream), the Villeré Plantation (site of British headquarters), the LaCoste, De la Ronde, Bienvenu, Chalmet, and Rodriguez properties, and finally the Macarté Plantation (site of Jackson's headquarters). Jerome A. Greene, *Historic Resource Study: Chalmette Unit, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve* (Denver, Colo.: NPS, 1985), 4.

34 Remini, 24, 42-45, 66-79; Pickles, 29, 40-49.

35 Chalmet was the spelling of the family name; over time the favored spelling in the area changed to Chalmette.

36 Remini, 84-85; Pickles, 29, 49-57. Jugeant is spelled Jugeat or Juzan in some sources.

pirates and privateers of Barataria Bay. By 1809, Pierre and Jean Lafitte had established a highly profitable business based at Barataria. The brothers owned ships that captured goods on the high seas and acted as selling agents for other captains. Jean Lafitte may have participated in some voyages, but the Lafittes' main role was the smuggling of captured goods, including slaves, to eager buyers in and around New Orleans. Jean Lafitte oversaw the operations at Grand Terre on Barataria Bay, where cargoes were landed. The goods then traveled on pirogues to the city via Lake Salvador and various bayous. Pierre Lafitte moved back

and forth between Barataria and New Orleans. The sea captains of Barataria sometimes operated under the authority of letters of marque³⁷ (issued by France when it was at war with Britain and later by the breakaway Republic of Cartagena in South America). The U.S. government considered the

37 Letters of marque were issued by governments at war, giving private ship captains the authority to attack and capture enemy ships. Many have suspected that Lafitte's men did not confine their attacks to Spanish ships, the only ones that would have been covered by the letters of marque from Cartagena.

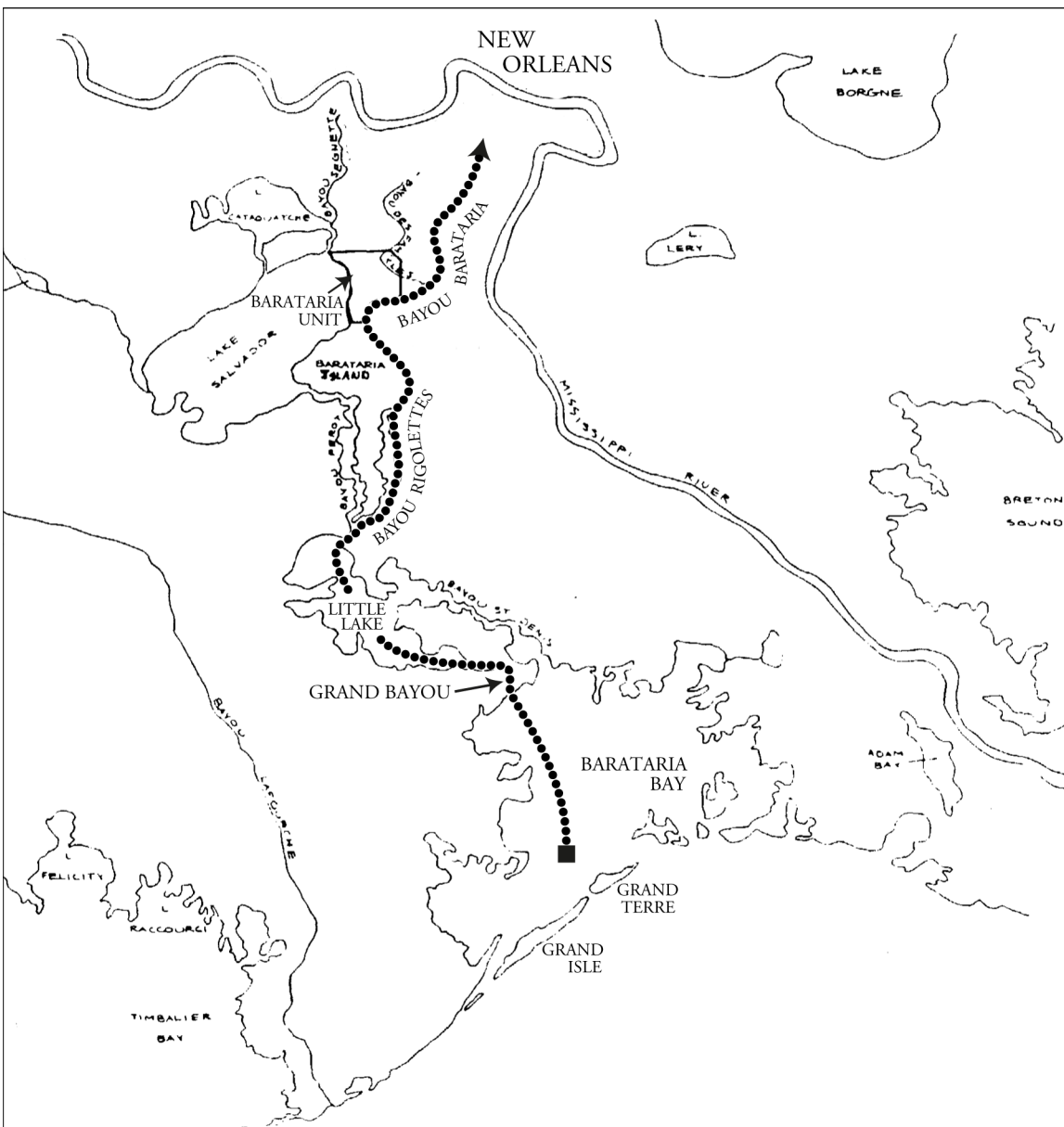


Figure 2-6. The Lafitte Brothers' smuggling routes. (Madeline Baum)

Lafittes outlaws—violators of customs laws at best, and outright pirates at worst.³⁸

Both the British and Americans in 1814 came to realize that the Lafittes possessed unparalleled knowledge of the waters of South Louisiana as well as a number of artillery pieces and experienced gun crews. When the British tried to buy Jean Lafitte's loyalty, he saw an opportunity to gain an advantage with U.S. authorities. Lafitte was shrewd enough to realize that American officials would not tolerate his activities indefinitely; the offer from America's enemy gave him a bargaining chip. He forwarded the British offer to Louisiana Governor William Claiborne and volunteered his assistance to General Jackson. Jackson's first response was that he would have nothing to do with "hellish banditti." After learning that the Lafittes also had 7,500 sorely needed musket flints, Jackson relented, thereby gaining the services of the pirates in planning his defenses. Although it is virtually certain that Jean Lafitte was not at the Battle of New Orleans, Pierre had a role in laying out Line Jackson, and skilled Baratavia gunners manned the line. In return for their services to Jackson, the Lafittes obtained full pardons from the U.S. government.³⁹

Two days following the night battle of December 23, General Sir Edward Michael Pakenham arrived at Villeré's Plantation to take command of the British army. Pakenham ordered an attack on Line Jackson on December 28, which came close to achieving a breakthrough but was abandoned. Pakenham then decided to bring up more heavy guns and try an artillery barrage on New Year's Day 1815. The ensuing artillery duel was inconclusive. After waiting for the arrival of more troops from his fleet 60 miles away, Pakenham ordered a major assault for January 8. The British had about 7,500 men available on the east bank of the river, the Americans, about 4,500. Pakenham's army was divided into a right wing under Major General Samuel Gibbs and a left wing under Major General John Keane. From left to right on Line Jackson were Choctaws and Tennessee militia

under Brigadier General John Coffee, militia commanded by Major General William Carroll, the 44th U.S. Infantry, Daquin's free men of color, Pierre Lacoste's battalion, Major Jean Baptiste Plauche's battalion, the 7th U.S. Infantry, and U.S. Marines at the far right along the river. The Battle of New Orleans lasted less than two hours and was a devastating defeat for the British, who suffered more than 2,000 casualties; Jackson reported fewer than 100. General Pakenham was mortally wounded on the field.⁴⁰

Following their stunning defeat on the Plains of Chalmette, the British attempted to reach New Orleans by way of the Mississippi River, but could not get past the American defenses at Fort St. Phillip, about 30 miles from the river's mouth. They made no attempt to renew the fighting around Chalmette, beginning a withdrawal on January 18. By the 27th the last troops had rejoined the fleet, and it set sail for Mobile Bay on January 30. On February 13, the British forces in the Gulf got word that the United States and Britain had concluded a preliminary peace treaty at Ghent in present-day Belgium on December 24, 1814. Two days later the expeditionary force left American waters for the British Isles. The bloody Battle of New Orleans was fought after the peace treaty had been signed, but before it had been ratified by the United States. This fact has led many to downplay the importance of the battle.⁴¹

The Battle of New Orleans, however, was significant on multiple levels. The city was saved from what no doubt would have been a devastating looting and occupation. Historians have differed on the possible broader effects of a British victory. Some have contended that had they been victorious, the British might have failed to honor the Treaty of Ghent and demanded more American concessions or even attempted to occupy the entire Lower Mississippi Valley. Other historians have concluded that the British were thoroughly disillusioned with the war in America and would

38 Remini, 28-29, 72; Davis, 107-10; Arsené Lacarrière Latour, *Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana in 1814-1815* (1816; rpt. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 89.

39 Remini, 30-36; Davis, 211-16.

40 Remini, 133-49, 171-74; Pickles, 37, 64-76; John R. Elting, *Amateurs to Arms! A Military History of the War of 1812* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books, 1991), 306.

41 Remini, 171-83; Pickles, 81.

have abided by the treaty's terms regardless of the battle's outcome.⁴²

Perhaps most important, the British invasion brought the various peoples of South Louisiana together. In the face of the invasion, the diverse population of the New Orleans area united readily under the American banner in defense of the city and the Mississippi Valley. The British miscalculated when they assumed that the French-speaking majority in New Orleans would view the Americans as an occupying power and refuse to help them. No matter what their feelings about les américains among them, white and free colored Francophones distrusted the British, old enemies of France, and were eager to drive them off. The great victory at New Orleans was a huge boost to

American morale and national pride; no European army has invaded the United States since January 1815. Finally, the victory made a national hero of Andrew Jackson, setting him on a path that led to two terms in the White House (1829–1837).

After the Battle of New Orleans, the Lafittes operated briefly from Galveston Island in Texas (then part of Mexico). Pierre died in the Yucatan in 1821 and Jean died at sea in February 1823. Many other destinies, some of them extremely fanciful, have been proposed for Jean Lafitte. Historian William C. Davis's discovery of a March 1823 article on Jean Lafitte's last battle in the *Gaceta de Cartajena* settled the question of his fate.

As the years passed, the legend of "Lafitte the Pirate" grew along the Gulf Coast. The roles of the two brothers became conflated, and the Lafitte who figured in the legends typically was Jean. As pirates and privateers disappeared from the seas, they increasingly populated 19th-century poems and novels, notably Lord Byron's poem "The Corsair" (1814) and Joseph Holt Ingraham's novel *Lafitte: The Pirate of the Gulf* (1836). Persistent rumors circulated that Lafitte treasure was buried here and there along the Gulf Coast. The tales exaggerated almost every feature of the Lafittes' lives, including their role in the Battle of New Orleans.

42 See James A. Carr, "The Battle of New Orleans and the Treaty of Ghent," *Diplomatic History* 3 (1979):273–82. Carr points out that the British ministry expedited approval of the Ghent Treaty and rushed it to Washington for U.S. ratification without waiting to learn the results of the British campaign in the Gulf. The treaty reached Washington in mid-February, where it was immediately ratified by the Senate. The treaty became effective on February 17, 1815, when ratifications were exchanged with the British ambassador to the U.S. Carr also quotes a December 28, 1814, letter from the British prime minister, Lord Liverpool, to the British ambassador to Portugal. Liverpool observed: "We might land in different parts of their coast and destroy some of their towns, or put them under contribution; but in the present state of mind in America it would be vain to expect any permanent good effects from operations of this nature" (p. 280).

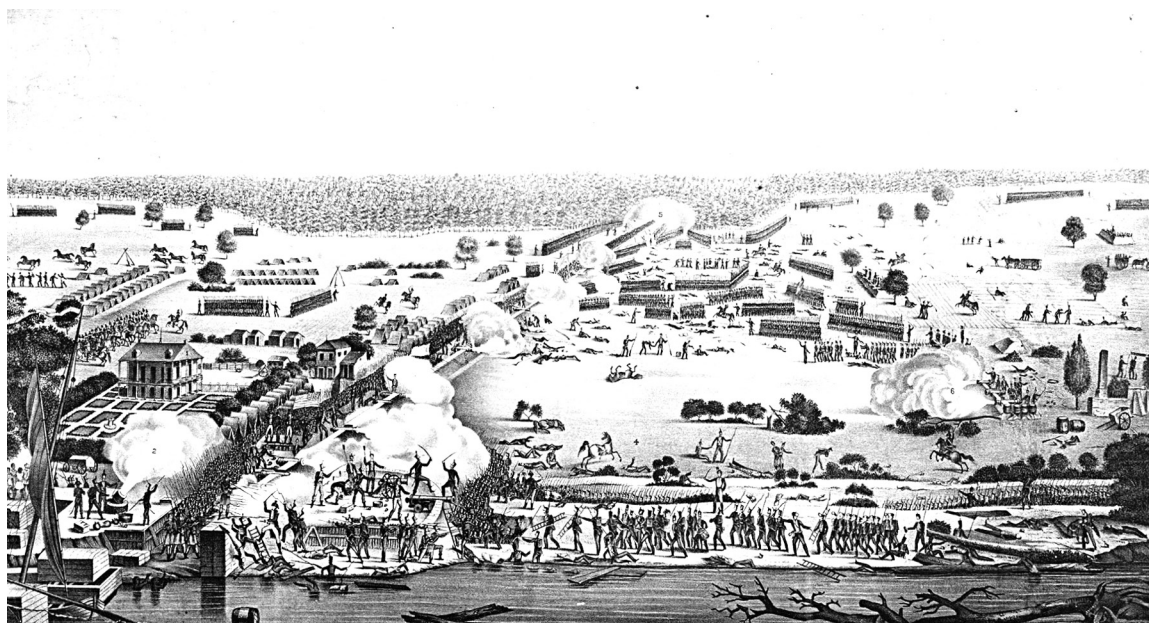


Figure 2-7. Battle of New Orleans, by Jean-Hyacinthe Laclotte, 1815. (JELA)

By the early 20th century, Jean Lafitte had become a symbol of independence, bravery, and ultimate redemption through patriotism—the kind of legend that appealed to many Americans. In 1930, Louisiana author Lyle Saxon published a biography, *Lafitte the Pirate*, which sold well. Cecil B. DeMille of Paramount Pictures adapted the story for a 1938 film called *The Buccaneer*. Paramount remade the picture in 1958 with Yul Brynner playing the role of Jean Lafitte and Charlton Heston playing Andrew Jackson.⁴³ As much as anything, these movies helped to keep the legend of Lafitte before the American public.

Antebellum South Louisiana

From 1815 to 1861, South Louisiana developed a plantation-based economy that attracted Anglos and slaves from the eastern states as well as immigrants from abroad. The state's population rose from 153,407 in 1820 to 708,002 in 1860. The development of new, cold-resistant varieties of sugar cane and the arrival of sugar planters from Saint-Domingue gave South Louisiana its first lucrative cash crop. By the 1850s Louisiana was producing some 100,000 tons of sugar annually. Cotton also became a significant crop, mostly in the drier areas of the state. New Orleans quickly emerged as the South's most important port; by 1860, the city annually handled \$185 million of goods from the interior. The antebellum decades were the age of the steamboat, with hundreds of these vessels bringing freight down the river

to New Orleans to be transferred to oceangoing vessels.⁴⁴

New Orleans also became a major port of entry for European immigrants. All told, some 550,000 immigrants passed through New Orleans before the Civil War. Although precise data are lacking, more than half settled permanently in Louisiana. Tens of thousands of Irish and German settlers came to Louisiana from the 1830s through the 1850s. Most settled in New Orleans, placing a considerable strain on the city's resources while they became assimilated. Immigrants from France continued to arrive throughout the antebellum period, averaging about 1,000 per year between 1820 and 1852. Spurred by the growth of cotton and sugar plantations, Louisiana's slave population increased substantially in this period. Sporadic illegal cargoes of slaves reached Louisiana after 1807,⁴⁵ but the slave population grew primarily through natural increase and the interstate slave trade that brought large numbers of enslaved people from the Upper South. New Orleans's free colored population peaked at around 15,000 in 1840. Louisiana's free people of color had somewhat broader rights, including the right to freely buy and sell property, than those in most southern states. As the racial ideology of the South grew more rigid after 1840, however, Louisiana passed laws to make individual emancipations more difficult and to encourage free people of color to leave the state. In spite of all attempts at regulation, interactions among slaves, free people of color, and whites were impossible to control in the cosmopolitan city of New Orleans. These interactions helped to create the unique cultural climate of the city. On the eve of the Civil War, Louisiana had a population of more than 700,000, including 331,000 slaves and 18,500 free people of color.⁴⁶

43 Davis, 454-55, 462-65; Leonard Maltin, ed., *Leonard Maltin's Movie Guide, 2006 Edition* (New York: New American Library, 2005), 177-78.

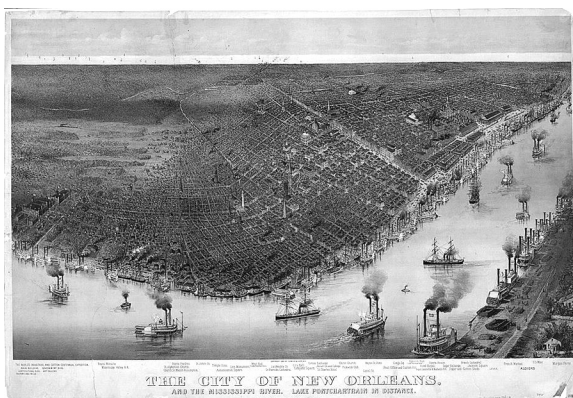


Figure 2-8. New Orleans in the steamboat era. (Library of Congress)

44 Goins and Caldwell, 37; Brasseaux, *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma*, 2, 26; "Sugar Industry," in *The Encyclopedia of Southern History*, ed. David C. Roller and Robert W. Twyman (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 1169-70.

45 Federal law prohibited the importation of slaves to the United States as of January 1, 1808. An exemption from the law was granted to Saint-Domingue planters who brought their slaves to Louisiana after this date.

46 Carl A. Brasseaux, ed., *A Refuge for All Ages: Immigration in Louisiana History* (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1996), 6; Brasseaux, *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma*, 24-26; Caryn Cossé Bell, "The New American Racial Order," in *Visions and Revisions: Perspectives on Louisiana Society and Culture*, ed. Vaughan Burdin Baker (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2000), 18.

From the Civil War to World War I

Louisiana seceded from the Union on January 26, 1861, and became part of the newly formed Confederate States of America in March. From the start, the federal government viewed control of the Mississippi River as key to winning the war. A blockade of southern ports was quickly instituted, and federal forces occupied New Orleans on April 30, 1862. It was during the federal occupation of South Louisiana, in 1864, that the national cemetery at Chalmette was established (see chapter 3). Fighting in Louisiana in 1863 and 1864 laid waste to substantial sections of the state. The federal victory in the war ended slavery in the United States, making it necessary for Louisiana and the rest of the South to establish new labor arrangements for millions of former slaves. The Reconstruction period in Louisiana began with the federal occupation of parts of the state in 1862 and lasted until 1877. The struggle by blacks to gain full civil rights, haltingly begun in this period, would last another century.⁴⁷

From the end of Reconstruction to the beginning of World War I (1914), South Louisiana faced difficult economic times. As America's railroad network expanded, the importance of waterborne traffic declined and the port of New Orleans suffered. The city's commercial elite moved to improve the city's rail connections and modernize its port facilities, thereby reversing much of the decline. Agricultural prices were low, and the majority of Louisiana's farmers were forced into sharecropping or tenancy arrangements. Many of the state's natural resources came to be controlled by northern interests. Northern timber firms clear-cut many of the state's forests between 1888 and 1914. A devastating Mississippi River flood in 1883 led to expanded levee-building efforts by the federal and state governments.⁴⁸

After the upheavals of the Reconstruction period, immigration through the port of New Orleans rebounded. In the 1880s and 1890s, Germany and Ireland again supplied the largest number of immigrants; after 1890, Italians began arriving in greater numbers. Between 1865 and 1924, some 105,000 Italians arrived at New Orleans, with more

than two-thirds remaining in Louisiana. Italian migrants to Louisiana came almost exclusively from the wine- and fruit-producing regions of the island of Sicily. Although their numbers were far smaller, immigrants from Lebanon, Croatia, and many other lands made important contributions to South Louisiana. The Croatians, for example, were significant in the establishment of the oyster industry in the Mississippi Delta.⁴⁹

The Twentieth Century

Well into the twentieth century, Louisiana remained a predominantly rural state. As late as 1935, 60 percent of the state's population was classified as nonurban. A major change in the state's economic structure began shortly after 1900 with the exploitation of the state's substantial reserves of oil, natural gas, and sulfur. Oil refineries and chemical plants began to sprout along the banks of the Mississippi from Baton Rouge to just below New Orleans. This development would cause many problems in later years for the managers of the site of the Battle of New Orleans at Chalmette and the Barataria Unit of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. In 1927, an unprecedented flood inundated 27,000 square miles in the Lower Mississippi Basin, bringing widespread devastation to Louisiana. The great flood also produced federal action in the passage of the Flood Control Act of 1928, which greatly expanded the role of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in flood control efforts. The system of

49 Brasseaux, *A Refuge*, 7-9; A. V. Margavio and Jerome J. Salomone, *Bread and Respect: The Italians of Louisiana* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing, 2002), 36-43.



Figure 2-9. One of South Louisiana's many oil refineries. (Library of Congress)

47 Goins and Caldwell, 38-40.

48 Kelman, xiv; Wall, 225-28, 274-75; Louisiana Writers' Project, 49-50.

dams, levees, and spillways currently in place in the Mississippi watershed is an outgrowth of this and subsequent legislation.⁵⁰

In the first decades of the twentieth century, many Americans became uneasy over the number of foreign-born persons in the country. This unease led to sharp cutbacks in immigration and an emphasis on “Americanization.” European immigration virtually stopped during World War I, and the Immigration Act of 1924 introduced a quota system that drastically cut immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe. Louisiana’s Cajuns also felt the impact of this new devotion to Americanism, narrowly defined. Louisiana’s 1921 constitution established English as the state’s only language, and the public schools attempted to eliminate the use of French.⁵¹

Following the Second World War, a new wave of industrialization hit Louisiana, affecting in particular the oil, natural gas, and chemical industries. As agriculture became increasingly mechanized and broader job opportunities opened in the North, thousands of African Americans moved away. Louisiana’s black population grew from 559,000 in 1890 to 1.4 million in 2000, but while African Americans constituted 50 percent of the state’s residents in 1890, they represented only 32 percent in 2000.

In recent decades, new elements have been added to South Louisiana’s gumbo of cultures. Cuba’s 1959 revolution spurred Cuban immigration to Louisiana. Others have come from Honduras, Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic. United States intervention in the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s brought Vietnamese and Laotian migrants to Louisiana. Vietnamese immigrants often were aided by Catholic charitable groups. The Vietnamese community, now numbering more than 25,000, has been active in the fishing and shrimping industries. In 2008, voters in Louisiana’s 2nd congressional

district made Anh “Joseph” Cao America’s first U.S. representative of Vietnamese descent.⁵²

Many factors account for the unique cultural complexion of South Louisiana. Above all, the pervasive French influence makes the region unique. Other important historical factors were the presence of large numbers of free and enslaved people of color, substantial immigration until the First World War, close ties to the Caribbean, and the constant exchanges typical of a major port city. Each new group arriving in South Louisiana has brought its own cultural practices, and new cultural expressions have arisen from the interactions among the various peoples of the region. Acadian culture has experienced a substantial revival since the 1960s, furthered by the 1980s craze for Cajun cuisine and widespread national and international exposure for Cajun and zydeco musicians.⁵³ A prime example of cultural fusion is the development of jazz in New Orleans around 1900. Jazz combined African American folk music, a European brass band tradition, and rhythmic inspiration from Africa and the Caribbean to create a new art form. The instruments of early jazz were mostly European in origin—the trumpet, trombone, and clarinet—but also included one with roots in West Africa, namely the banjo. New Orleans musicians, both black and white, took jazz on the road, and it has proved enduringly popular

52 Goins and Caldwell, xiv-xv, 56-57; Carl L. Bankston III, “Southeast Asians in Louisiana,” in *A Refuge for All Ages: Immigration in Louisiana History*, ed. Carl A. Brasseaux (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1996), 663-71.

53 Zydeco is a musical form that arose among African Americans in Southwest Louisiana. Featuring a button accordion and a metal rubboard, zydeco combines Cajun and German influences with American blues and rhythm and blues.

50 Wall, 279; Goins and Caldwell, 10; John M. Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America* (New York: Touchstone, 1998), 399-411.

51 Margavio and Salomone, 36; Brasseaux, *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma*, 75-76.



Figure 2-10. An Isleño trappers’ camp, 1930s. (Library of Congress)

throughout the world. Jazz is just one of many cultural manifestations that make South Louisiana unique.

The response of managers of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve to their mandate to preserve natural and historic resources and portray the cultural diversity of South Louisiana is considered later. The battlefield of Chalmette, however, existed as a historical unit of the NPS for 45 years prior to the establishment of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve in 1978. The story of Chalmette as an independent park will be recounted in chapters 3 through 5, before the narrative turns to the creation of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.

Chalmette, After the Battle, Before the National Park Service

Early Commemorative Efforts

In the decades following the American victory at the Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815, the Chalmette Battlefield attracted only an occasional visitor. A few travelers were interested enough to be driven by carriage from New Orleans to the battle site. In the 1830s, teacher and author Joseph Holt Ingraham and a companion went in search of the battlefield, recruiting the superintendent of a nearby sawmill as a guide. The local resident seemed quite knowledgeable and presumably had led other visitors to the site. While examining the field, Ingraham was approached by African American youngsters who had stocks of souvenirs—cannon shot and bullets—for sale. Ingraham found no markers of any kind on the field and noted that he would have taken it for a peaceful agricultural scene had his guide not assured him that they were standing on the battleground and pointed out the plantation houses that served as headquarters for Generals Jackson and Pakenham.¹

A citizens' committee in New Orleans invited Andrew Jackson, the 72-year-old former general and president, to visit the city in 1840 for the 25th anniversary of the battle. Newspaper accounts from the period make reference to the laying of cornerstones for both a statue in the Place d'Armes in the French Quarter and a monument at the battlefield. These are the only known references to any cornerstone-laying at Chalmette. No physical evidence of a cornerstone has been found, and

there remains considerable doubt that a stone was actually placed there in 1840.²

Eleven years later, in 1851, local citizens organized the Jackson Monument Association with the goal of erecting one or more suitable memorials. The association was able to raise only about \$4,000 to achieve its ends and appealed to the state legislature for assistance. The legislature responded by passing an act on February 29, 1852, that appropriated \$10,000 for “erecting a suitable monument to General Jackson” in the Place d'Armes (soon to be renamed Jackson Square) and \$5,000 “to designate the site of the memorable battle of 1815 near the City of New Orleans.” The act stipulated that the “object of designation” at Chalmette was to be “of iron or marble with suitable inscriptions.” Pursuant to a subsequent act of March 18, 1852, the \$5,000 was used to purchase a portion of the Chalmette Battlefield from Pierre Bachelott in 1855 as the monument site. The legislation gave the Jackson Monument Association the task of selecting a design for the Chalmette monument and seeing it through to completion.³

From the four designs submitted, the association chose a fairly simple 142-foot obelisk resting on a five-step platform. The monument was to be

1 Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The South-West, by a Yankee*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Bros., 1835), 197-206. Ingraham in 1836 published *Lafitte: The Pirate of the Gulf* (New York: Harper & Bros.), described by him as a “web of fact and fiction” centering on the romantic figure of Jean Lafitte.

2 The 60-year effort to erect a monument on the Chalmette Battlefield is covered in detail in Leonard V. Huber's *The Battle of New Orleans and Its Monument*, 2nd ed. (New Orleans: Louisiana Landmarks Society, 1983) and Jerome A. Greene's *Historic Resource Study: Chalmette Unit, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve* (Denver, Colo.: NPS, 1985), 221-22. Only a brief summary of this saga will be presented here.

3 Marie Cruzat de Verges, “The History of Chalmette Monument and Battle Ground and the Work of the Louisiana Society United States Daughters of 1776 — 1812 for the Care and Completion of Chalmette Monument,” January 1959, Box 1, Records of the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Commission, RG 79, NARA II; Greene, 223-24.

of brick, faced with marble panels, enclosing a spiral iron staircase giving access to an enclosed observation room at the top. The contract for construction was awarded to Newton Richards (the designer of the monument) and John Stroud & Co. in June 1855. The legislature ultimately appropriated \$60,000 to cover both the erection of an equestrian statue of Jackson in Jackson Square and the obelisk at Chalmette. The Jackson Square statue, costing \$33,153, was formally dedicated on February 9, 1856, in an elaborate ceremony. The much more prominent location and smaller size of the equestrian statue seem to be the reasons why it was given priority for completion. When the Jackson Square statue was unveiled, more than \$14,000 had been expended on foundations for the obelisk at Chalmette. The remaining balance of slightly more than \$12,000 was not nearly enough to complete the obelisk, and the legislature appropriated an additional \$15,000 in 1857.⁴ The 1857 appropriation ran out in 1859, by

4 Greene, 225-228; Louisiana Act No. 255 (March 19, 1857); Alfred F. Theard, "Work of Completing Chalmette Monument," *Journal of the Association of Engineering Societies* 43:3 (Sept. 1909), 90-91.

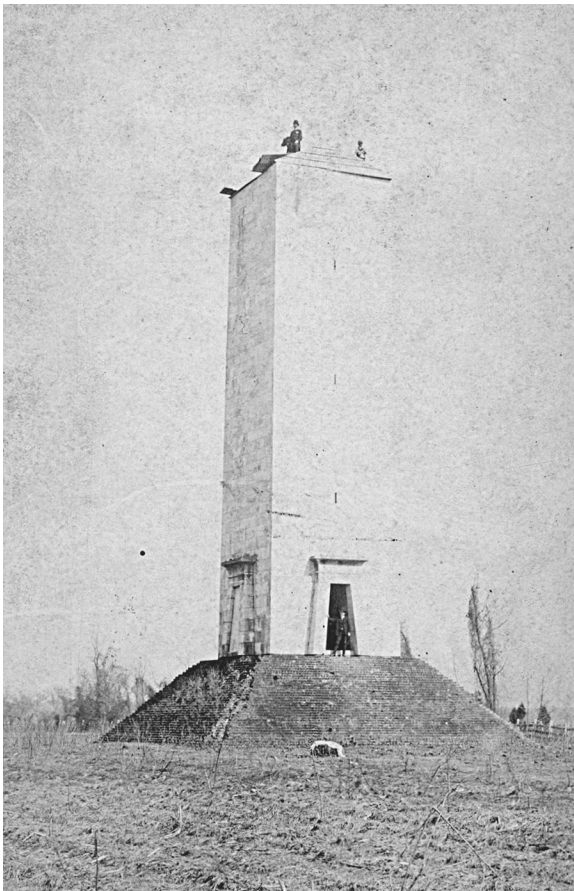


Figure 3-1. The unfinished Chalmette Monument, late 19th century. (JELA)

which time the monument had reached only the 56-foot level. With the coming of the Civil War and Reconstruction, completing the Chalmette monument dropped to the bottom of the state's list of priorities. A temporary wooden cap was placed atop the shaft, which would remain unfinished for almost 50 years.⁵

The state's failure to complete the obelisk at Chalmette did not mean that the people of New Orleans had forgotten the events of 1814–1815. In 1855 the Louisiana legislature made January 8 an official holiday. Throughout the 19th century Jackson Day, as it came to be known, was celebrated with parades and festivities in New Orleans. In the recollection of many, it was a more prominent holiday than the Fourth of July.⁶ As New Orleans author Grace King put it in the 1890s:

The glorious 8th of January eclipsed every other fête day in the city; its annual parade is one of the great memories of the happy childhood before the Civil War. Not a negro nurse but ... could name the heroes of the Battalion d'Orléans as it passed, and tell of the great battle they had won, always linking in the company of the free men of colour [sic], with the heroism and patriotism of the whites. They were all Hectors and Achilleses to the proud children!⁷

A prominent participant in the parades was Jordan Bankston Noble, who at age 14 had been a drummer for the American army during the battle. Born of a black father and white mother in Georgia in 1800, Jordan lived most of his life in New Orleans, dying in 1890. Noble was a well-known character about town and handed out cards identifying himself as "Jordan B. Noble, the veteran drummer."⁸

5 Greene, 228; Huber, 19-22; S. G. Heiskell, *Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee History*, vol. III (Nashville: Ambrose Printing Co., 1921), 576-83.

6 Act 55, Louisiana Acts of 1855.

7 Grace King, *New Orleans: The Place and Its People* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 254.

8 "A Noble Effort," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, Feb. 9, 2001.

The Role of the United States Daughters of 1776 and 1812

In the 1890s, the Louisiana Society of the United States Daughters of 1776 and 1812 made the completion of the Chalmette monument its special mission. The Daughters were one of many patriotic and heritage-oriented women's societies, like the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Colonial Dames of America, that sprang up toward the end of the 19th century.⁹ Socially prominent white women formed these organizations to honor the American past and expand their presence in the public sphere. The promotion of patriotism and caring for memorial landscapes were seen as particularly appropriate activities for women, an extension of their traditional roles as educators, guardians of morals within the home, and custodians of the rituals surrounding death and mourning. In the South, women had taken the lead in commemorating the deeds of Confederate soldiers, partly as an outgrowth of their wartime aid work. Another reason why remembering Confederate deeds of valor fell to women was that, in the immediate aftermath of the war, northern occupation troops were suspicious of any organized activity among former Confederate soldiers. Women's organizations were less likely to be suspected of having a secret agenda involving a renewal of resistance to federal authority. In the postbellum South, women's heritage-preservation work gradually expanded to other periods and other projects, such as the completion of the Chalmette monument. This work in turn was a prelude to activism in other areas for some women. As historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage has demonstrated, these groups of elite southern white women had a particular slant on the past, one that prized early arrivals to America over more recent immigrants and took for granted the need for social separation of the races. These presuppositions influenced the choice of events to be celebrated and the roster of those invited to participate. Despite all of their limitations, women's groups

were responsible for saving and maintaining many historic sites, including Washington's Mount Vernon and Andrew Jackson's Hermitage in Tennessee.¹⁰

Flora Adams Darling formed the first chapter of the United States Daughters of 1776 and 1812 in Cleveland, Ohio, on September 19, 1891.¹¹ Mrs. Adams had previously helped to organize the Daughters of the American Revolution. She founded the Daughters of 1776 and 1812 as an organization for:

- 10 Wallace Evans Davies, *Patriotism on Parade: The Story of Veterans' and Hereditary Organizations in America, 1783-1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955), 68-70, 100-102; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2005), 12-33.
- 11 The group later dropped 1776 from its name, becoming the United States Daughters of 1812.

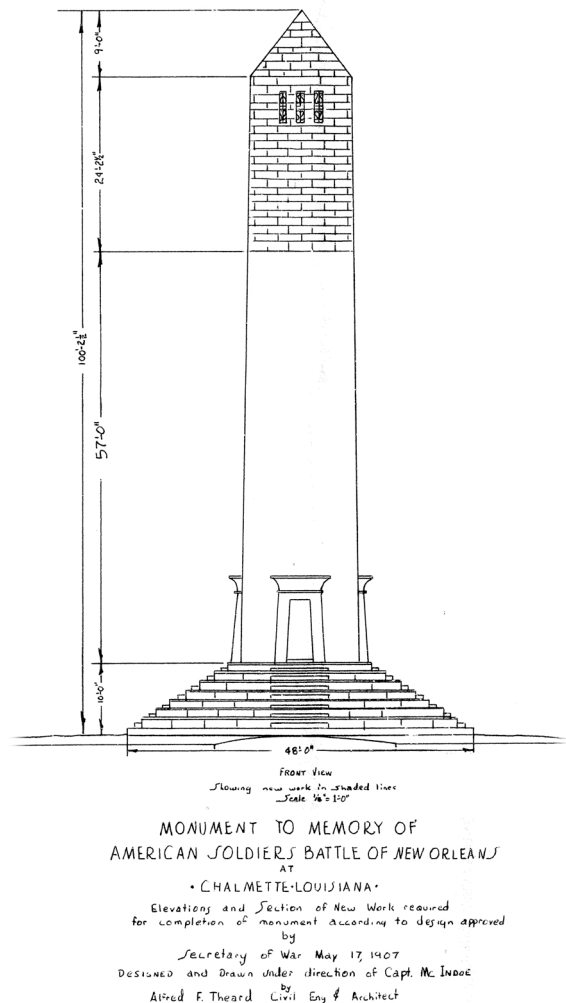


Figure 3-2. Alfred Theard's plan for completing the Chalmette Monument, 1909. (adapted from Theard 1909)

9 Various groups calling themselves Daughters of the Confederacy sprang up following 1865. In 1894, many joined to form the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). Some of the same factors motivated the formation of both the UDC and hereditary societies like the United States Daughters of 1776 and 1812. The status of the Confederacy as an effort to break away from the national government, however, gave a significantly different emphasis to the UDC.

ladies who are lineal descendants from an ancestor who assisted in the war of 1776-1812 [sic], either as a military or naval officer, a soldier, or a sailor, or in any way gave aid to the cause, provided always that the society reserves to itself the privilege of rejecting any nomination that may not be acceptable to it.

The society's goal was "to secure the genealogies, facts, and traditions of the founders of America." Chapters of the society soon formed in Maryland, New York, Louisiana, Texas, and Michigan. The first meeting of the General Society (now known as the National Society of the Daughters of 1812) took place in New York in January 1895.¹²

Organized on January 17, 1893, the Louisiana Society of the Daughters of 1776 and 1812 received its state charter in January of the following year.¹³ The society successfully petitioned the state to grant it custody of the unfinished Chalmette monument and its grounds. The legislature provided only \$2,000 in funding, which was used to make some minimal improvements to the grounds. The Daughters took charge of the battle anniversary observances at Chalmette and began to seek the much larger sum required to complete the obelisk. January 8th observances in 1897 involved a group of Daughters, two soldiers from the nearby Jackson Barracks, and a number of schoolchildren. Frank B. Richardson, described as the last surviving member of the 1850s Jackson Monument Association, gave an address. The Daughters had a thorough study of the unfinished monument made by a local engineer, Alfred F. Theard. After testing the foundations, Theard concluded that they would not support a structure of 142 feet, but that a monument of 100 feet was entirely feasible. Armed with Theard's report and convinced of the national significance of the Battle of New Orleans, the Daughters looked to the federal government for funds. Mrs. W. O. Hart of the Daughters went to Washington and testified before the Library Committee of the House of Representatives

in January 1906, also meeting with President Theodore Roosevelt. Congress established the Chalmette Monument and Grounds on March 4, 1907, appropriating \$25,000 for the completion of the monument, but stipulating that the Daughters would have the entire responsibility for the care and maintenance of the monument upon its completion. The Louisiana legislature had already, in 1902, provided for the cession of the monument and its grounds to the federal government if the latter would agree to complete the monument. The parcel purchased by the state in 1855 from Pierre Bachelott extended from the river to some 450 feet north of the St. Bernard Highway. The state sold the portion north of the highway, and the grounds that it turned over to the War Department in 1909 consisted of 15.92 acres.¹⁴

Completion of the Chalmette Monument

The War Department accepted Theard's plans for the completion of the monument and awarded a contract to M. P. Doullot, with Theard as supervising engineer. The monument was completed in 1908. On June 29 of that year, five members of the Louisiana Society of the United States Daughters of 1776 and 1812 rode out to Chalmette in a tallyho carriage to inspect the structure. The Daughters formally accepted "the care of the Chalmette Monument and the grounds surrounding it" in March 1909. The monument was completed largely according to the original specifications, but with the pyramidal cap at the 100-foot level rather than the originally planned 142-foot mark. The Daughters arranged to have a 24-inch by 24-inch, shield-shaped bronze tablet placed on the wall of the observation room. The tablet is inscribed:

12 Davies, 69; membership criteria from *Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1894* (New York: D. Appleton Co., 1895), 642.

13 In January 1930, the group changed its name to the Chalmette Chapter, United States Daughters of 1812. See undated leaflet in vertical file "United States Daughters of 1812," Tulane University Special Collections.

14 Huber, 26-30; *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, January 9, 1897; Theard, 91-93; Heiskell, vol. III, 574; Louisiana Act No. 8 (January 17, 1894); Louisiana Act No. 41 (July 19, 1902); An Act providing for the completion by the Secretary of War of a monument to the memory of the American soldiers who fell in the battle of New Orleans at Chalmette, Louisiana, and making the necessary appropriation therefore, 59th Cong., 2nd sess. (March 4, 1907) (34 Stat. 1411); Roy E. Appleman, "Chalmette National Battlefield Site: Inspection Report and Recommendations," April 13, 1938, 7, JELA HQ files.

MONUMENT
TO THE MEMORY OF THE
AMERICAN SOLDIERS
WHO FELL IN THE BATTLE OF NEW
ORLEANS
AT CHALMETTE LOUISIANA
JANUARY 8TH 1815
WORK BEGUN IN 1856 BY JACKSON
MONUMENT ASSOCIATION
MONUMENT PLACED IN CUSTODY OF
UNITED STATES DAUGHTERS
OF 1776 AND 1812 ON JUNE 14TH 1894
MONUMENT AND GROUNDS CEDED UNTO
THE UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA BY THE STATE OF LOUISIANA ON
MAY 24TH 1907
COMPLETED IN 1908 UNDER THE
PROVISIONS OF ACT OF CONGRESS
APPROVED MARCH 4TH 1907.

Because of its reduced height, the Chalmette Monument does not adhere to the customary proportions of an Egyptian obelisk. Measurements of Egyptian obelisks show a typical height of nine times the width at the base. The Chalmette Monument's height (100 feet) is six times its base width (17 feet) and thus presents a truncated appearance to an observer with experience of



Figure 3-3. Crowd at Chalmette during the 1915 Battle of New Orleans Centennial. (JELA)

other obelisks like the Washington Monument on the National Mall in Washington.¹⁵

Although the Daughters accepted the keys to the monument in 1909, they did not officially dedicate it until the centennial of the Battle of New Orleans in January 1915. The theme of this three-day celebration was 100 years of friendship between Great Britain and the United States (see chapter 5). Many observers also noted the contrast between those peaceful bilateral relations and the terrible world war then raging in Europe and elsewhere. As many as 10,000 spectators were present on the field of Chalmette on Friday afternoon, January 8, 1915, as five “true daughters” of men who had fought with Jackson presided over the unveiling. First the U.S. flag of 1815 and then the British flag of the period were hoisted to the top of the monument. The text of a second inscribed tablet

- 15 Theard, 97; Greene, 239-41; Mrs. Victor Meyer, president, United States Daughters of 1776 and 1812, to the Secretary of War, March 5, 1909, Box 9, Records of the War Dept. Relating to the NPS, 1892-1937, RG 79, NARA II; Pamela Scott and Antoinette J. Lee, *Buildings of the District of Columbia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 100-102; An Act providing for the completion ... of a monument ... at Chalmette (March 4, 1907).



Figure 3-4. The Spotts Monument at Chalmette. (author)

that the Louisiana Historical Society intended to place on the exterior of the monument was read. Official histories of the Chalmette Chapter of the Daughters suggest that the tablet was affixed to the exterior of the shaft for a few years. The War Department, however, did not approve of the tablet, believing that it compromised the artistic effect of the monument and that the tablet that had been installed in the observation room was sufficient. The exterior tablet was either never placed or soon removed because of this objection.¹⁶

In connection with the centennial, the Daughters had a small monument to Lieutenant Samuel Spotts erected near the entrance to the monument grounds. Tradition has it that Spotts fired the first shot in the Battle of New Orleans.¹⁷ The Spotts Monument consists of a decorated marble loving cup on a three-piece base of marble blocks, now resting on a fourth block made of concrete. The intermediate marble block is inscribed:

IN MEMORY OF MAJOR
SAMUEL SPOTTS
U.S.A.
WHO SHOT THE FIRST GUN AT THE BATTLE
OF
NEW ORLEANS. JAN. 8. 1815. THIRD
REGIMENT
SEVENTH BATTERY ARTILLERY CORP.
BORN NOV. 30. 1788 IN PHILADELPHIA PA
DIED JULY 11. 1833 IN NEW ORLEANS
LOUISIANA.

Two years later, the Daughters attempted to install on the grounds a small marker to honor Brigadier General Daniel Morgan, one of Jackson's subordinate officers in 1814-1815. The War Department asked the Commission on Fine Arts to review the design.¹⁸ The design for the Morgan Monument featured a rectangular plaque on a vertical slab of quarry-faced stone. The commission was not impressed by the Morgan proposal. It found the proposed inscription "a conspicuous example of bad English" and objected to the use "of the rough-hewn boulder setting" for the plaque. These arbiters of taste insisted that the setting "should be cut stone, no matter how simple in design."¹⁹ The Daughters dropped the proposal for the Morgan monument.

The Monument under the Daughters and the War Department

The Daughters had custody of the monument and its grounds until 1930, doing their best to maintain them with limited resources. Early on, the Daughters received two appropriations of \$1,000 each from the state. Beyond that, they relied on membership dues, the sale of pecans from trees on the site, and the leasing of the northern portion of the tract for pasturage, typically at a rate of ten dollars a month. At some point between 1895 and 1915, they arranged to have a five-room caretaker's cottage and several outbuildings erected south of the monument.²⁰ They hired a caretaker to live on

16 The group used the term "true daughters" to distinguish daughters of War of 1812 veterans from subsequent generations of descendants. The five true daughters participating in 1915 were Virginia R. Fowler, Elizabeth Reden Hackney, Lelia Montan Harper, Mrs. Alexander Keene Richards, and Felicité Gayoso Tennent. The tablet inscription was "This monument unveiled by the U.S.D. of 1776-1812 at the close of a century of peace and concord between the United States and Great Britain. January 8th 1915." "Thousands Crowd Chalmette Field for Celebration," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 9, 1915; de Verges, 15-16; Edward H. Schulz, Corps of Engineers, to L. E. Bentley, Chair, Special [Centennial] Committee, December 14, 1914, Box 9, Records of the War Dept. Relating to the NPS, 1892-1937, RG 79, NARA II.

17 Colonel William W. Harts, Executive Officer, Commission on Fine Arts, to Chief of Engineers, War Department, May 22, 1915, Box 9, Records of the War Dept. Relating to the NPS, 1892-1937, RG 79, NARA II; de Verges, 15.

18 Congress established the Commission on Fine Arts in 1910. The commission's primary mission was to advise regarding the location and design of monuments and other structures erected in Washington, D.C., but the War Department and other agencies occasionally called upon the commission for artistic advice on monument proposals outside the capital. Scott and Lee, 49-50.

19 Colonel William W. Harts, Executive Officer, Commission on Fine Arts, to Chief of Engineers, War Department, March 10, 1917, Box 9, Records of the War Dept. Relating to the NPS, 1892-1937, RG 79, NARA II.

20 The five-room house replaced a "hut" on the site and was substantial enough to serve as a temporary museum for the NPS in the 1950s while the Malus-Beauregard House was being rehabilitated to serve as a museum. Charles H. Browning, *The American Historical Register and Monthly Gazette of the Patriotic-Hereditary Societies of the United States of America*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia, Pa.: Historical Register Publishing Co., September 1895-February 1896), 400, 507.



Figure 3-5. Peace Versus War, 1915 newspaper cartoon. (*Times Picayune* 1915)

the site, maintain the grounds, and greet visitors. Among the men hired as caretaker were Louis Bollinger, Alexander Latil, and Marcel Serpas. The Daughters also fenced the grounds, erected an iron entry gate facing the river, planted rose bushes, installed benches, and paid \$1,000 for the paving of a five-foot-wide walkway from the entrance to the monument. Caretakers were responsible for maintaining only the portion of the grounds from the monument south to the entrance gate. North of the monument, grazing livestock served as the only check on vegetation growth.

Lightning struck the monument three times during the Daughters' stewardship. The Daughters made a pitch for government help in repairing the damage, but the War Department stuck to the letter of the 1907 law—maintenance was the exclusive responsibility of the Daughters.²¹

Marcel H. Serpas, the last caretaker hired by the Daughters, resided on the site with his wife Josephine and six children from June 1915 until September 1932. By the end of Serpas's tenure, the Daughters were sharing the proceeds from the sale

of pecans and the grazing fees with him. Serpas also generally was allowed to keep, as a tip, the 10-cent deposit he required from visitors when he loaned them the monument's keys. With visitation averaging one party per day, this hardly amounted to a significant source of income. Serpas also worked as a watchman at the nearby Chalmette Slip, a ship berth constructed by the New Orleans Terminal Company in 1907. Serpas's children often gave tours of the monument and grounds to visitors. They also had the chore of polishing the banisters inside the monument. The Daughters persuaded Mr. and Mrs. Serpas to name their son, born in 1921, Andrew Jackson Serpas. Andrew's widow remembers that the Daughters thought of her husband as "their baby."²²

Until the 1880s, access to the monument tract and national cemetery was from the river side. Visitors came by boat or along a road atop the levee. In the 1880s the War Department secured easements from private property owners to build a road from the Jackson Barracks to the Chalmette Cemetery, a distance of about a mile. Running next to the levee, this road also provided access to the village of Fazendeville, which is discussed later in this chapter. In the early 1880s, a railroad was built from New Orleans into St. Bernard Parish, running just north of the monument tract and the national cemetery. Service on this line was well enough established by 1884 that a New Orleans post of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) suggested to the War Department that the main entrance to the cemetery be shifted from the river end to the northern end facing the rail line. The Quartermaster General declined to make the change, writing that "the river is, and probably will continue to be, the most pleasant and popular means of reaching the cemetery, and it is not

21 L. Bollinger to United States Daughters, 1776 and 1812, November 23, 1896; Lease, November 1, 1906, between Louisiana Society, United States Daughters 1776 and 1812 and Alexander Latil; Bid, F. Arnemann to United States Daughters, 1776 and 1812, December 6, 1909, United States Daughters of 1812, Chalmette Chapter, Papers, Tulane University Special Collections.



Figure 3-6. Caretaker' house on Chalmette Monument grounds, 1934. (JELA)

22 "Keepers Lose Old Post at Monument," *New Orleans Item*, November 2, 1932; 1910 and 1920 Census, consulted at www.ancestry.com on March 22, 2010; daughter of Frank Godwin, personal communication.

thought advisable to attempt any radical change in entrance arrangements.”²³

In 1905, the New Orleans Terminal Company announced plans to erect a major new port facility just west of the monument tract. This step inaugurated the industrial development of the Chalmette area that would change forever the tranquil, semirural surroundings of the historic site. By 1907, the company had built a mammoth slip for the loading and unloading of ships, 1,600 feet long by 300 feet wide, at a 47-degree angle to the river. Also included in the development were two large concrete warehouses and a railyard. At this time the terminal company also acquired most of the acreage between the monument and the cemetery and a tract just east of the national cemetery. Additionally, the American Sugar Refinery Company built a large new refinery west of the new Chalmette Slip. The construction of the slip required the closing of the road along the river that connected the Jackson Barracks to the national cemetery. In 1909, the War Department formally agreed to the closing of the road in exchange for a 50-foot parcel of land donated by the terminal company, allowing the national cemetery to be expanded on the north to meet the railroad right-of-way. St. Bernard Parish then extended St. Bernard Avenue along the northern side of the monument tract.²⁴ As early as 1914, the Daughters asked the federal government to build an access road from the St. Bernard Highway, across the railroad right-of-way, to the monument. Although there previously may have been a dirt track in this location, not until 1928 did the War Department seek a \$15,000 appropriation to construct a shell-surfaced entry road to and around the monument

from the north. Figure 5-3 shows the relationship of the Chalmette Slip to the monument tract.²⁵

By 1929, the financial and administrative burdens of caring for the monument and grounds proved too much for the Daughters. In November 1929, the Chalmette chapter wrote to the Secretary of War, asking that the War Department assume responsibility for the site. Congressman James O'Connor introduced a bill (H.R. 6161) to accomplish the transfer of responsibility. Secretary of War Patrick Hurley agreed that the transfer was needed to maintain and preserve the memorial “in a manner commensurate with the importance of the great national victory which it commemorates.” He recommended passage of the bill and advised Congress that the annual cost of maintaining the site would be \$1,200. President Herbert Hoover signed the bill into law on June 2, 1930.²⁶

The War Department found the monument site to be in need of some work and placed the monument under the care of Chalmette National Cemetery Superintendent John W. Schiffler. His first reports indicated that the garage, chicken house, and outhouse all needed to be painted and that the fences were in bad repair. The water supply at on-site was rainwater collected in a cistern. The Daughters' caretaker, Marcel Serpas, stayed on until the War Department decided that it wanted to give the position to a World War I veteran. The department dismissed Serpas in September 1932 and hired Frank Godwin at an annual salary of \$747 from a civil service list as his replacement. During its three years of stewardship (June 1930 to August 1933), the War Department painted and repaired fences as well as resurfacing and widening

23 Merl E. Reed, “The New Orleans Short Lines,” in *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History*, vol. xiv, *New Orleans and Urban Louisiana*, ed. Samuel C. Shepherd Jr. (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2005), 472-74; Quartermaster General to Major J. W. Scully, New Orleans, June 12, 1884, General Correspondence, National and Post Cemeteries, RG 92, NARA II.

24 The St. Bernard Highway is the common name for the extension of St. Claude Avenue in New Orleans. In the 1940s the state designated the highway as Louisiana Route 1; it is currently Louisiana Route 46.

25 [St. Bernard] Parish Immigration League, *St. Bernard Parish: Its Natural Resources and Advantages* (Chalmette, La.: Parish Immigration League, circa 1906), 18-28; Board of Directors, United States Daughters of 1776 and 1812, to Senator Joseph E. Ransdell, January 20, 1914; W. R. Gibson, Quartermaster Corps, to Commanding Officer, Jeffersonville [Indiana] Quartermaster Depot, May 25, 1928, Box 10, Records of the War Dept. Relating to the NPS, 1892-1937, RG 79, NARA II; War Department Appropriations, March 23, 1928 (45 Stat. 354, 357).

26 Huber, 36; An Act to authorize the Secretary of War to assume the care, custody and control of the monument to the memory of the soldiers who fell in the Battle of New Orleans, at Chalmette Louisiana, and to maintain the monument and grounds surrounding it, P.L. 293, 71st Cong., 2nd sess. (June 2, 1930) (46 Stat. 489); Report No. 194 to accompany H.R. 6151.

the recently built shell road. It also had a fence and a gate with pillars erected at the north entrance to the monument grounds. This work was completed by the summer of 1931.

The War Department's annual appropriations for the Chalmette Monument were meager. The site did not even have its own lawnmowers until 1933, relying on those of the national cemetery. A few hundred dollars were spent in June 1932 for repairs to the monument. This small contract was awarded to Arrow Building and Repair Services of New Orleans, a black-owned firm. Because of this minority ownership, the cemetery superintendent sought explicit approval from his superiors to award the contract to Arrow. At this time, the caretaker's cottage received a telephone and was connected to the municipal water supply for the first time.²⁷

Frank Godwin remained caretaker at Chalmette until 1942. When John Schiffler retired as cemetery superintendent, the Godwins moved into the cemetery lodge. His daughters remember living at

27 John W. Shiffler, Cemetery Superintendent, to W. H. Noble, Quartermaster, 4th Corps Area, Fort McPherson, Georgia, June 18, 1932; Contracts W-54-QM-968, W-54-QM-966, and W-54-QM-1116; Chalmette Monument Quarterly Reports, September 30, 1930, March 31, 1931, and June 30, 1933, Box 10, Records of the War Dept. Relating to the NPS, RG 79, NARA II.

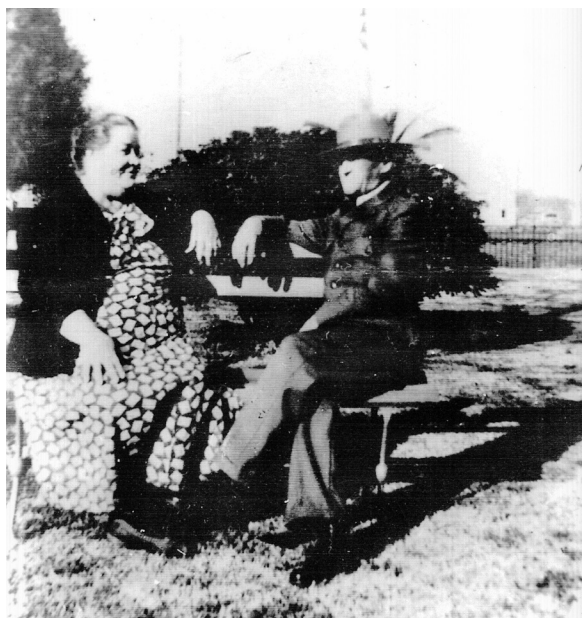


Figure 3-7. Anna and Frank Godwin, Chalmette Monument caretaker, 1932-1942. (collection of Herb Morales)

Chalmette as quite peaceful. The children helped with chores like cutting the grass and sweeping the stairs in the monument. One of Godwin's daughters remembers finding a sword or dagger handle in the trunk of an oak tree. When there was a funeral in the national cemetery, the children had strict instructions to stay inside the lodge until it was over.²⁸

In August 1933, Chalmette Monument and a number of other War Department properties were transferred to the National Park Service by executive order. Many sources erroneously state that Chalmette National Cemetery was also transferred at this time, but the cemetery remained with the War Department until the 1939 creation of Chalmette National Historical Park. The confusion may stem from the fact that President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued two executive orders in 1933. Executive Order 6166, issued on June 10, 1933, listed all War Department national cemeteries, including Chalmette, as properties that would go to the NPS. NPS managers quickly decided that running active cemeteries was not in keeping with the agency's mission. NPS Director Horace Albright worked behind the scenes in Washington to reverse some of the objectionable aspects of order 6166. This resulted in Executive Order 6228, dated July 28, 1933, which postponed indefinitely the transfer of cemeteries still open for burial and thus excluded Chalmette from the list of cemeteries transferred to the NPS.²⁹

28 Personal communication from two of Frank Godwin's daughters.

29 Harlan D. Unrau and G. Frank Williss, *Administrative History: Expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s* (Denver, Colo.: NPS, 1983).



Figure 3-8. Entrance from river to monument grounds, 1934. (JELA)

The Chalmette tract that the state had purchased in 1855 represented only a fraction of the 1815 battlefield. The long, narrow sliver that became the monument grounds had frontage of approximately 135 feet at the levee and 450 feet at the railroad right-of-way, with side dimensions of approximately 2,650 feet. This tract of 15.92 acres embraced most of Line Jackson and a small portion of the site where the American camp stood in 1814-1815. The site of the December 23, 1814, battle, the British camp, British artillery positions, and the field where most of the British troops fell on January 8 all lay downstream (east) of the monument tract. Once the NPS had control of the Chalmette Monument and Grounds, it sought to obtain more of the battlefield. The agency's aim was to lay out a tour road so that visitors could gain a better appreciation of the events of the battle. That story is recounted in chapter 4.

The Malus-Beauregard House

In 1832, Alexandre Baron purchased a 15-acre portion of the former Chalmet Plantation, where the Battle of New Orleans had taken place. This tract had a frontage of about 200 feet on the Mississippi River. Baron had a house built on the property for his mother-in-law, Madeleine Pannetier Malus, a widow. The house was 62 feet wide by 20 feet deep with galleries on the north and south (riverfront) sides. There were just three rooms on each floor. In 1856 Caroline Fabre Cantrelle, widow of Michel Bernard Cantrelle, purchased the house from the Malus family and remodeled it in the then-fashionable Greek Revival style. Caroline Cantrelle sold the house in 1866 to José Antonio Fernández y Lineros, who named it "Bueno Retiro." Fernández added a two-story brick wing on the west side of the house. In 1880, the house was purchased from Fernandez's wife by René Toutant Beauregard, son of Confederate General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard. René Beauregard placed a two-story frame addition on the east side of the house around 1900.³⁰ In November 1904 he sold the house and grounds to the New Orleans Terminal Company, which

eventually became part of the Southern Railway System. The terminal company occasionally had an employee or tenant living in the house, but did little to maintain it. The house sits on the 36-acre tract purchased by the state of Louisiana and transferred to the NPS in 1950 (see chapter 4).³¹

The Civil War: Earthworks and a Refugee Camp

When the Civil War began in April 1861, it was immediately apparent that New Orleans, the Confederacy's most important port, would be an early target of Union forces. Confederate authorities worked to improve and expand defensive positions across the most likely routes of invasion. Forts Jackson, St. Philip, Pike, Macomb, and Livingston represented the city's outer line of defense. Confederate officers laid out an inner line of defense that straddled the Mississippi River a few miles below New Orleans. On the east bank, this line occupied a portion of the 1815 battlefield. The line started at the river, about 700 yards downriver from the unfinished Chalmette obelisk, and ran to the same cypress swamp that had anchored Jackson's line 46 years earlier. The earthworks were 2,200 yards long with multiple salients and a ditch in front of them. When New Orleans fell to the Union in April 1862, federal forces took over these earthworks to defend against a possible Confederate attempt to recapture the city. Behind (upriver from) the earthworks was a federal encampment. As in many parts of the South, this camp became a magnet for enslaved people escaping from areas of Louisiana still under Confederate control. Throughout the occupation of New Orleans, the camp at Chalmette grew. The unsanitary conditions typical of camp life took their toll, and soldiers and former slaves began to be buried there.³²

30 In 1995, the NPS began to refer to the house as the Malus-Beauregard House, recognizing the original owner and the 24-year ownership by René Beauregard. Previously the house had generally been known as the Beauregard House. DRPC minutes, April 12, 1995.

31 Pearce Horne, Southern Railway Co., to Louisiana Parks Commission, September 26, 1938, JELA archives; Greene, chapter 14; advertisement cited in Charles E. Peterson to Chief, EODC, April 11, 1956, Box 107, Accession 79-67-A-1022, RG 79, NARA M-A.

32 Greene, 155-62; Carl Gaines Jr., "Chalmette National Cemetery: An Administrative History, Part II: A Freedmen's Cemetery in New Orleans" (unpublished typescript), 1987, JELA Collection, Special Collections, UNO.



Figure 3-9, Remains of Civil War earthworks east of Chalmette National Cemetery. (Kaiser Collection, Bancroft Library)

Establishment of the National Cemetery

Recognizing the need for more permanent burial arrangements, the city of New Orleans in May 1864 donated a tract of about eight acres at the Chalmette encampment to the U.S. government for the development of a national cemetery.³³ As the number of burials increased, the city donated an additional 5 acres in January 1867. The city made the gift official by executing a deed ceding 13.6 acres to the federal government on May 26, 1868. At first, both U.S. soldiers and black civilians were buried in what was originally called Monument Cemetery. Federal policy for national cemeteries soon dictated that only federal soldiers be buried in them. In May 1867, the Freedmen's Bureau, created by Congress in 1865 to help former slaves make the transition to freedom, established a separate cemetery for freed people, immediately west, or upstream, of Monument Cemetery. The remains of approximately 2,000 black civilians were removed from the national cemetery and reinterred in the nearby Freedmen's Bureau cemetery. Around the same time the remains of as many as 7,000 Union soldiers were moved to the Chalmette cemetery from hastily established cemeteries at various posts such as Cypress Grove No. 2, Camp Parapet, Metairie Ridge, and Algiers

(all in Louisiana) and Ship Island, Mississippi. As of June 20, 1868, the national cemetery had 12,230 burials.³⁴

The freedmen's cemetery at Chalmette lasted only a bit longer than the federal government's postwar commitment to securing rights and opportunities for the South's former slaves. Following a number of battles between President Andrew Johnson and the Congress over the role of and budget for the Freedmen's Bureau, Congress terminated all of its functions in 1870. Until its abolition, the Freedmen's Bureau adequately maintained its Chalmette freedmen's cemetery. The cemetery was enclosed by a fence, wooden headboards marked many of the graves, and a few had inscribed marble headstones. By 1873, however, the Chalmette freedmen's cemetery was described as abandoned and overgrown. In May 1876, when Lieutenant J. O. Shelby of the U.S. Quartermaster Corps inspected the area, he reported finding only about 160 legible grave markers, with inscriptions that included "Buried from Refugee Camp" and "Buried from General Hospital." Within a few more years, all traces of the cemetery had disappeared. While 19th-century records indicate that the freedmen's cemetery lay west of the national cemetery, on acreage that is now part of the battlefield park, the exact location of the cemetery has not been established.³⁵

The location of the Chalmette National Cemetery was problematic. Traditionally, cemeteries in the New Orleans area had relied on above-ground tombs. The high water table and frequent flooding typical of the region made in-ground burial a difficult and often macabre affair because of the tendency of bodies to float out of graves in times of high water. The U.S. Army apparently believed that the higher elevation along the levee at Chalmette would permit in-ground burials. There is also some indication that, after the Confederate surrender, some of the breastworks in the vicinity were leveled and the material used to fill in the lower (northern) portions of the national cemetery. The result was still less than ideal; cemetery records over the years are full of accounts of silt from the

33 At this time, the U.S. Army commander in New Orleans appointed the mayor and other city officials, mostly drawing from the federal occupation forces. Joseph G. Dawson III, *Army Generals and Reconstruction: Louisiana, 1862-1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 5-23.

34 Gaines, 6-9; U.S. War Department, *Report of the Secretary of War* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1868), 955.

35 Gaines, 11-15, citing Lieutenant J. O. Shelby to Quartermaster General's Office, May 22, 1876, Navy and Old Army Records Division, RG 92, NARA II.



Figure 3-10. Standing water in the national cemetery, 2008. (author)

riverbank (known as batture) being used to fill in sunken graves. To this day, the northern area of the cemetery is subject to flooding after a heavy rain.

The national cemetery laid out at Chalmette resembled dozens of other such cemeteries established by the United States during and shortly after the Civil War. The fact that the tract was an elongated rectangle (a legacy of the long-lot system of land surveying) imposed limitations on the cemetery's designers. The original 13.6 acres of the cemetery had a frontage of 250 feet along the river and extended some 2,317 feet to the north. The cemetery was laid out with a 16-foot-wide central drive. Six circles with a diameter of 40 feet were placed along the length of the drive at equal intervals. On each side of the central drive, the designers established a grid arrangement of burial sections. Each section measured 54.5 feet by 48 feet. Every section had a capacity of 96 graves

and was separated from the adjoining section by a four-foot-wide pathway. Trees were planted in six roughly parallel rows: a row just inside each lateral brick wall, one on either side of the central drive, and two rows running midway between the side walls and the central drive. Species planted were primarily cedar, arborvitae, magnolia, and live oak. The rows of trees lining the central drive formed an alley, or *allée*. An ornamental flower garden was laid out near the cemetery's entrance on the river road, next to the levee.³⁶

The Army in 1874 built paneled brick walls on the east and west sides of the cemetery and placed iron fences on the north and south. Congress in 1873 appropriated \$1 million for placing permanent stone markers in all national cemeteries. Marble tombstones replaced the wooden markers at Chalmette in 1875. In 1880, the Army built a two-story brick superintendent's lodge near the river road entrance to the cemetery. This replaced an older three-room brick lodge that was described in 1873 as being "unpretending and out of all taste."³⁷

36 Greene, 262-78; Kevin Risk, *Chalmette Battlefield and Chalmette National Cemetery Cultural Landscape Report* (Atlanta, Ga.: NPS, 1999), 24-26. Risk's work and its recommendations are further considered in chapter 5.

37 Inspection report, July 2, 1873, Records of the War Department, RG 92.

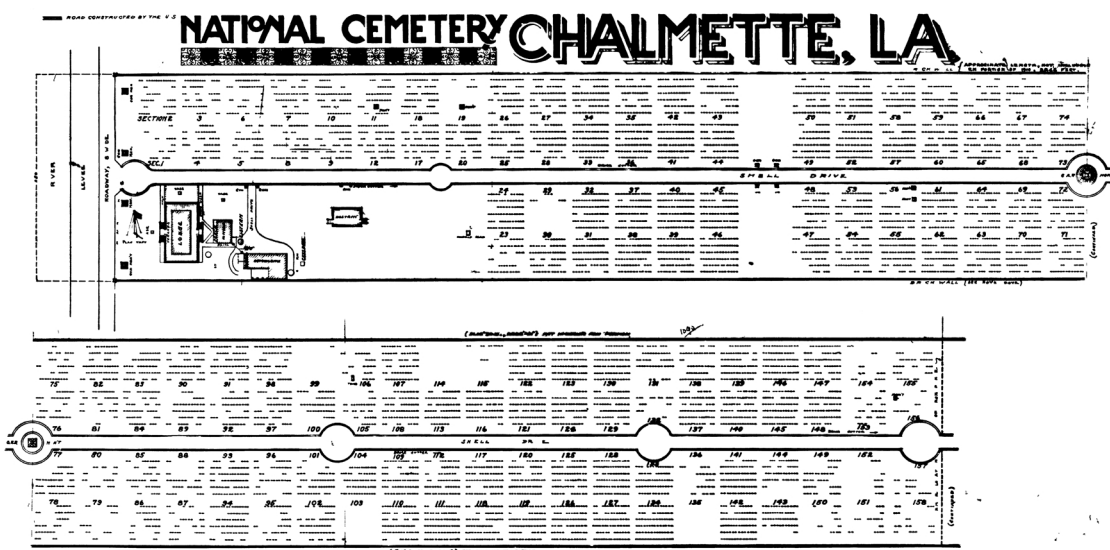


Figure 3-11. Plat of Chalmette National Cemetery. (JELA)

The Joseph A. Mower Post³⁸ of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) began raising funds for the erection of a monument to the fallen at the cemetery in 1874. The GAR was the major association of veterans who had worn federal blue during the Civil War. The cemetery monument was not completed until 1882, at an estimated cost of \$2,000 to \$3,000. It originally stood on a mound in one of the circles in the cemetery drive, but was later relocated (see chapter 5). The monument has suffered some minor losses over the years; as constructed, it consisted of a square base supporting a squat column, both of gray New Hampshire granite. Four cannon tubes adorned the top of the base at the corners, and a row of cannonballs surrounded the bottom of the column. Atop the column was a sculpted bronze arrangement of a drum, furled flags, and stacked muskets. On the column shaft was the emblem of the GAR in bronze. The only inscription was the Latin phrase *Dum Tacent Clamant*, which appears on one face of the base and has been variously translated as “Although they are silent they do cry out” and “While they pass over, they declare.”³⁹

Sometime before 1882, the Army erected a rostrum on the east side of the central drive, 300 feet from the main entrance. Rostrums were typical features in national cemeteries, used for Decoration Day (i.e., Memorial Day) services (see the discussion of Memorial Day in chapter 5). The Chalmette rostrum was of the usual pattern and measured 38 by 23 feet. It was an open-sided structure, with a metal roof supported on brick posts.⁴⁰ In 1892, the cemetery was expanded in the direction of the river, and the brick walls were also extended. In 1896-1897 the Army built an L-shaped, brick combination stable, carriage house, and utility

building near the superintendent’s lodge. After the cemetery was extended on the north by a 2.4-acre parcel donated by the New Orleans Terminal Company in 1905, the brick walls were extended in that direction as well.⁴¹

More than seven thousand African American veterans are buried in Chalmette National Cemetery. Most are veterans of the Civil War. Some are Buffalo Soldiers, black cavalymen who served in the West from the late 1860s to the 1890s. The War Department maintained separate sections within the cemetery for the burial of black and white veterans from its establishment in 1864 until its closure in 1945.⁴²

In 1927, a disastrous flood devastated the Lower Mississippi Valley. As part of the response to this catastrophe, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1928 decided to enlarge the levee at Chalmette. To do so, the Corps of Engineers was required to take over part of the national cemetery and demolish the existing superintendent’s lodge and some outbuildings. Of the 19th-century cemetery buildings, only the 1897 stable remained until it fell victim to Hurricane Betsy in 1965 (see chapter 5).⁴³ Some 572 graves were relocated to make room for the new levee, begun in 1929 and completed in 1931. In 1929, the Army built a new, two-story, brick superintendent’s lodge and detached brick garage near the main entrance to the cemetery (now on the north side of the cemetery away from the river following the official closure of the river road in 1905).⁴⁴ Four cannon tubes set in masonry (gun monuments) were moved from near the river entrance to just inside the new (north) entrance at this time. Between this late 1920s building campaign and the NPS’s takeover of the cemetery in 1939, few changes occurred at the cemetery, which had reached its final size of 17.33 acres. On October 1, 1939, the War Department transferred jurisdiction of Chalmette National Cemetery to

38 Established on April 10, 1872, the Joseph A. Mower Post was the most senior post in the GAR’s Department of Louisiana and Mississippi. Joseph A. Mower (1827–1870) was a career Army officer who reached the rank of major general in 1864 and commanded the Department of Louisiana at the time of his death in 1870. Joseph W. Morton Jr., ed., *Sparks Around the Camp Fire: Tales of the Old Veterans* (Philadelphia: Keystone Publishing, 1890), 578; Dawson, 94-102.

39 Greene, 275; “Grand Army of the Republic Monument,” Works Progress Administration data sheet, circa 1930s, State Library of Louisiana, available online at http://louisdl.louislibraries.org/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/GFM&CISOPTR=662&CISOBX=1&REC=15.

40 A second, smaller rostrum was later erected in the northern half of the cemetery (see chapter 5).

41 Form 10-768, “Rostrum,” December 28, 1949, JELA FM files.

42 SMR, 1930s through 1950s.

43 The stable building was brick on a concrete foundation, with 835 square feet on the main floor and 525 square feet on the attic floor, after it was remodeled and reduced in size in 1929. Form 10-768, JELA FM files.

44 The cost of the lodge was \$9,224.20; the garage was built for \$1,426 and received a \$1,719.11 addition in 1931, followed by another addition costing about \$750 in 1938. Forms 17-768, 1949, JELA FM files.

the NPS as part of the new Chalmette National Historical Park.⁴⁵

National cemeteries were created for the Union dead, but over time Congress enlarged their mission. In 1873, Congress gave all honorably discharged veterans the right to burial in a national cemetery. Subsequently, the right was extended to spouses of service personnel. Burials at Chalmette ceased in 1945, with certain exceptions detailed below. The history of the cemetery under the NPS appears in chapter 5.⁴⁶

Fazendeville

In the years immediately after the Civil War, an African American community arose between the monument tract and the Chalmette National Cemetery, on a portion of what had been the Chalmet Plantation. Around 1867, Jean Pierre Fazende, a free man of color before emancipation, began selling lots to freedmen. Presumably some of the purchasers had taken up residence in the refugee community that developed at Chalmette during the U.S. Army's occupation. Fazendeville was a linear settlement, running along an unpaved road perpendicular to the river. The village eventually included about 40 houses, a church, one or two general stores, an elementary school, and at least two benevolent societies. Fazendeville was a close-knit community of black working-class families that survived for almost 100 years. Male

residents typically worked as longshoremen or laborers and the women as cooks, seamstresses, or maids. For generations Fazendeville supplied laborers for the nearby national cemetery. The 1920 census indicates that Mary Minor kept a store in the village and that 24-year-old Maria Calvin was a teacher, perhaps at the elementary school in Fazendeville.⁴⁷

From the moment the NPS assumed authority over the monument in 1933, NPS planners wanted to develop something more: a full-fledged national historical park that would interpret the action of the January 8, 1815, battle. Because Fazendeville village sat right in the middle of the battlefield, it represented a barrier to this NPS goal. The story of the acquisition of the Fazendeville properties and of the obliteration of the village in the 1960s is recounted below in chapter 4. As time passed, the realization grew that a viable and vibrant community had disappeared when Fazendeville was removed. In recognition of Fazendeville's history and heritage, the NPS placed a wayside exhibit describing Fazendeville on the battlefield in 2008.

47 Allison H. Peña, "Fazendeville: Highlighting Invisible Pasts and Dignifying Present Identities," *CRM* 5 (2001): 25; U.S. Census Bureau, Louisiana Schedules, 1920 Census, consulted at www.ancestry.com.



Figure 3-12 Historic view of Fazendeville. (JELA)

45 Greene, 279-80; Quartermaster's Depot, Jeffersonville, Indiana, "Specifications for the Construction of a Brick Lodge at the Chalmette National Cemetery, Arabi, Louisiana," December 1928; George H. Schumacher, Quartermaster 4th Corps, Fort McPherson, Georgia, to Superintendent, Vicksburg National Military Park, September 23, 1939, Boxes 159 and 167, JELA archives.

46 Veterans Administration web site, www.cem.va.gov/hist/history.asp, consulted May 28, 2009.

Creating Chalmette National Historical Park: Legislation and Land Acquisition

The enactment of legislation in August 1939 establishing Chalmette National Historical Park was the culmination of at least 30 years of effort. Well before this date the United States had an established model for the development of battlefield parks. The idea of creating national historical sites at U.S. battlefields initially arose in the 1890s when veterans of the Civil War moved to set aside major battlefields from that conflict as parks. Later, battlefields from the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 began to be considered for park status. These early battlefield parks were administered by the War Department, which understandably considered maintaining them as secondary to its primary mission of defending the country. Congress initially supported the idea of battlefield parks, but after 1900 it moved cautiously, showing considerable reluctance to add to the War Department's responsibilities in the area of battlefield preservation. Congress was especially leery of committing federal funds to the acquisition of land for parks, including battlefield parks.¹

Battlefield Commemoration in the United States

Prior to the 1890s, commemoration at American battlefields was restricted to the erection of individual monuments. At first these were the result of local initiative. Examples include the erection

between 1825 and 1845 of a monument at the site of the Battle of Bunker Hill in Massachusetts and the 1856 dedication of a monument to the Washington Light Infantry on the field of Cowpens, South Carolina (also a Revolutionary War engagement). The first was sponsored by a private association, the Bunker Hill Monument Association, and the second was paid for by members of the Washington Light Infantry. The effort to erect the Chalmette Monument beginning in the 1850s, described above in chapter 3, is part of this early trend of commemoration. In the 1870s



Figure 4-1. Yorktown Monument, 1903. (Library of Congress)

¹ An account of the origins of the battlefield park movement can be found in Timothy B. Smith, *The Golden Age of Battlefield Preservation: The Decade of the 1890s and the Establishment of America's First Five Military Parks* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008) and Ronald F. Lee, *The Origin and Evolution of the National Military Park Idea* (Washington, D.C.: NPS, 1973).

and 1880s, the U.S. Congress for the first time appropriated federal funds for the construction of monuments at Revolutionary War battlefields. Congress allotted funds for monuments at Yorktown, Bennington, Saratoga, Newburgh, Cowpens, and Monmouth.²

In the 1890s, the Congress moved beyond merely placing monuments and began to create parks that preserved major portions of Civil War battlefields. This change in policy was the result of two major factors. Following the very public celebration of the nation's centennial in 1876, Americans were increasingly interested in commemorating their past. Additionally, hundreds of thousands of veterans of the Civil War were growing older and giving more thought to how they would be remembered. Veterans filled the halls of Congress and looked with favor on the campaigns of veterans' groups like the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) that urged the federal government to establish battlefield parks to honor the men who fought and often died to preserve the Union.

Between 1890 and 1899, Congress established four large battlefield parks: Chickamauga and Chattanooga, Shiloh, Gettysburg, and Vicksburg. Congress also established Antietam National Battlefield Site in 1890, but provided for the acquisition of far less acreage there than at the other four sites. Key components of the battlefield park concept were the marking of the positions of the various units that fought and the construction of carriage roads to allow visitors to tour the battlefield in comfort. Battlefield tourism became an increasingly popular pastime for veterans and their families. The model established at these four battlefields in the 1890s became a standard model for both the War Department and later the NPS. Beginning shortly after 1900, voices were raised in Louisiana to give the Chalmette Battlefield similar treatment.³

Efforts to Establish a Battlefield Park at Chalmette

The Daughters of 1812, the Colonial Dames of America in Louisiana, and others were lobbying to

get a national park for Chalmette as early as 1903. The Louisiana legislature entered the campaign with House Concurrent Resolution 27, approved on June 30, 1908. The resolution called on the U.S. Congress to “establish and maintain a national park at the scene of the Battle of New Orleans.” In 1915, Congressman Albert Estopinal introduced H.R. 6096, directing the Secretary of War to “investigate the feasibility of establishing a national military park on the Plains of Chalmette.” This bill failed to pass, as did similar bills introduced in 1917 and 1919. In 1921, Congressman James O'Connor introduced H.R. 2232, “In reference to a national military park on the plains of Chalmette.” The House Committee on Military Affairs asked for an opinion from the Secretary of War, who referred the matter to the Army Corps of Engineers. The Chief of Engineers reported that the establishment of a park of 226 acres, embracing the most important battle areas, was feasible, but that its desirability would require further study. The cost of acquiring the land was estimated at \$500,000. Based on this report, H.R. 2232 was enacted into law on November 19, 1921, directing the War Department to conduct an investigation, prepare plans for a park, estimate its costs, and report back to Congress.⁴

Pursuant to the 1921 law, the Army Corps of Engineers held a conference on March 18, 1922, in New Orleans. Lieutenant Colonel E. J. Dent presided, and various state and St. Bernard Parish officials and concerned citizens attended.⁵ In Dent's report on the meeting, he noted that some “historically minded persons” argued for

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- 4 Mrs. Kate L. Bruns, Colonial Dames, to L. G. Heider, Vicksburg NMP, October 31, 1933, JELA archives; Resolution of the Legislature of Louisiana; H.R. 6096 (December 16, 1915); H.R. 4242 (May 8, 1917); H.R. 5918 (June 16, 1919); H.R. 2232 (April 11, 1921); House Report No. 81 to accompany H.R. 2232; An Act in Reference to a national military park on the Plains of Chalmette (November 19, 1921), P.L. 94, 67th Cong. (42 Stat. 221).
 - 5 Attending the meeting were O. O. Melancon, U.S. District Engineer's Office; E. K. Ross; A. B. Booth, State Adjutant General; A. S. Nunez; Sebastian Roy; A. P. Perrin; A. S. Livaudais; Albert Laburre; St. Bernard Sheriff Albert Estopinal Jr.; St. Bernard Treasurer J. C. Bourg; Sidney F. Lewis; Gervais Lombard, Board of State Engineers; Dr. W. C. Stubbs; E. L. Gladney; J. E. Kell, American Sugar Refinery; J. Wilfred Gaidry; Colonel Allison Owen; and General J. B. Levert, Sugar Exchange. Edward S. Bres, “Notes on the Establishment and Development of Chalmette National Historical Park” (unpublished typescript, August 1964), JELA library.

2 Lee, 7-10; Cameron Binkley and Steven Davis, *Cowpens National Battlefield: An Administrative History* (Atlanta: NPS, 2002), chapter 3.

3 Lee, 13-16, 40-41.

a riverfront park extending from the monument tract to Bayou Bienvenu on the north, embracing as much as 1,325 acres. On the other hand, some St. Bernard Parish representatives felt that the riverfront should be reserved for industry, which provided the parish with jobs and tax revenues. This split between preservationists and proponents of industrial development would continue to characterize the debate on development of the Chalmette park through the 1950s. Based on a recommendation from the Corps's district engineer for the New Orleans District, the Secretary of War in late 1923 advised the Speaker of the House that "it is not feasible to establish the proposed park, by reason of the excessive cost" of the land that would need to be acquired.⁶

Besieged by numerous proposals to establish battlefield parks, Congress decided in 1926 to attempt to bring some order to the process of investigating and establishing them. On June 11, 1926, President Calvin Coolidge signed into law "An Act to provide for the study and investigation of battlefields for commemorative purposes." This was the first broad-based survey of any category of historic site authorized by the federal government. The Army War College developed a classification system to rate the importance of battlefields. Battles were rated as Class I, Class IIa, or Class IIb. Between 1926 and 1932, officers from the Army War College under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel Howard L. Landers conducted systematic historical and field studies of battlefields. In 1931, Congress appropriated \$300 to pay for a survey of the Chalmette Battlefield as part of the broader Army study. The Secretary of War reported annually to Congress on the progress and findings of the study.⁷

The Army study placed just two Revolutionary War battlefields—Saratoga and Yorktown—in Class I. Among the nine battlefields assigned to Class IIa

was Chalmette. This meant that Chalmette was "of such great military and historic interest as to warrant locating and indicating the battle lines of the forces engaged by a series of markers or tablets." In its 1931 report to Congress, the War Department recommended the acquisition of an additional 136 acres beyond the 33 acres already included in the monument tract and the national cemetery. This included a triangular parcel of 15 acres west of the monument tract, all the acreage between the monument and the national cemetery south of the railroad right-of-way, and a detached tract of 23 acres at the ruins of the De la Ronde Plantation. The War Department saw no need to acquire any acreage north of the St. Bernard Highway or immediately east of the national cemetery. The estimated cost of acquiring the additional acreage was \$540,000 and the yearly maintenance cost was estimated at \$10,000.⁸

The War Department study motivated local park proponents to step up their efforts. In June 1931, the New Orleans Association of Commerce moved to form a special committee to promote a national park at Chalmette. The association sent a letter to dozens of individuals and organizations soliciting the nomination of individuals to serve on the committee. The letter observed that "the establishment of this park can mean much to New Orleans as a drawing card to tourists, aside from the historic and sentimental value attendant upon the proper and fitting commemoration of one of the most glorious victories in the annals of military history."⁹

The 1933 transfer of responsibility for battlefield parks from the War Department to the NPS brought another burst of activity by proponents of a battlefield park at Chalmette. As historian Anthony J. Stanonis has shown, New Orleans civic leaders saw the Chalmette Battlefield as an attraction that would boost the area as a tourist destination. In the 1930s, more prominence was given to a Jackson Day foot race, begun by the Young Men's Christian Association in 1907 to commemorate the December 1814 dash of General

6 U.S. Engineer's Office, New Orleans, Louisiana, "Notes on conference held March 18, 1922 re: proposed National Military Park at Chalmette"; John W. Weeks, Secretary of War, to Speaker of the House of Representatives, December 3, 1923. Box 9, Records of the War Dept. Relating to the NPS, 1892-1937, RG 79, NARA II.

7 P.L. 372, 69th Congress (June 11, 1926); Lee, 47-50; An Act to provide for the study, investigation and survey for commemorative purposes, of the battle field of Chalmette, Louisiana (February 5, 1931), P.L. 869 (46 Stat. 1045).

8 Senate Document No. 27, 72nd Cong., 1st sess., December 11, 1931.

9 New Orleans Association of Commerce to Interested Organizations and Individuals, June 22, 1931, contained in "Jean Lafitte National Historical Park," vertical files, Tulane University Special Collections.

J. B. Plauché's men from Lake Pontchartrain to the defense of the city. Paramount Pictures' 1938 release *The Buccaneer* had its world premiere in New Orleans, marked by a parade and other festivities. Directed by Cecil B. DeMille and featuring Fredric March as Jean Lafitte, this highly romanticized depiction of the Battle of New Orleans provided the city with an opportunity to further promote itself as a desirable vacation and convention destination.¹⁰

Action continued on the legislative front as well. Members of the Louisiana delegation in Congress continued to introduce bills to establish a Chalmette park. The state legislature passed a new concurrent resolution in 1934 urging the creation of a park. The New Orleans Association of Commerce continued its efforts while other Louisiana groups, including the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Kiwanis, and the Police Jury Association of Louisiana, sent letters to their representatives or the Department of the Interior. In February 1935, First District Congressman Joachim O. Fernández introduced H.R. 5368, "An Act to provide for the addition of certain lands to the Chalmette National Monument in the State of Louisiana, and for other purposes." Both the House and Senate held hearings. Long-time park advocate Colonel Edwin Bres of the Army Reserves, representing the New Orleans Association of Commerce, gave extensive testimony before the Senate Committee on Public Lands and Surveys. Colonel Bres had worked closely with the NPS and was well briefed on the agency's plans to create a battlefield park. He believed that two to three hundred acres would be needed "just as a start." Bres stressed that time was running out, because of the encroachment of industry in the area. He repeated the estimate from

the War Department's study that land acquisition costs would be in the neighborhood of \$500,000.¹¹

H.R. 5368 passed both Houses of Congress, only to be rejected by President Franklin Roosevelt. Once again the sticking point was the cost of acquiring the land. Preoccupied with fighting the effects of the Great Depression, the President's budget advisors had warned the NPS that the administration would not look favorably on any park legislation that required federal expenditures to buy land. NPS officials thought that they had made this clear to the bill's Louisiana sponsors. Nonetheless, the bill sent to the President included authorization for federal appropriations to acquire land, and accordingly, Roosevelt vetoed it.¹²

Following the 1936 setback, park proponents understood that they were unlikely to get a Chalmette park unless they could persuade the Louisiana legislature to buy land and donate it to the federal government. As indicated in Colonel Bres's Senate testimony, NPS planners had a clear idea of how much acreage was minimally necessary to create a battlefield park with a tour road, roughly on the pattern of Civil War sites. In the 1930s, Congress generally heeded recommendations from the NPS on questions of park establishment. The NPS director and his staff were not likely to testify in favor of a new Chalmette park bill unless they were comfortable that this minimum acreage had been, or soon would be, acquired. The 1936 veto showed that the federal government was not inclined to buy the land; it was up to the state of Louisiana.

State action was not long in coming. On July 2, 1938, Governor Richard W. Leche signed Act No. 163, appropriating \$300,000 to purchase land for "establishing a National Military Park to commemorate the victory of the Battle of New Orleans and to meet the requirements of

10 Anthony J. Stanonis, *Creating the Big Easy: New Orleans and the Emergence of Modern Tourism, 1918–1945* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 96–97; *The New York Times Film Reviews*, vol. 2, 1932–1938 (New York: The New York Times, 1971), 177–78; SAR 2005. As of this writing, the race is still held under the auspices of the New Orleans Track Club.

11 New Orleans Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, to Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, August 10, 1935; Resolution of Police Jury Association of Louisiana in support of bill for Chalmette National Historical Park, April 29, 1936; Louisiana Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 6, May 24, 1934, Boxes 1916 and 1918, Central Classified Files, RG 79, NARA II; "Hearing Before the Committee on Public Lands and Surveys, United States Senate, 74th Congress, Second Session on H.R. 5368," March 12, 1936.

12 Director, NPS, to Edwin Bres, December 11, 1936, Box 1918, Central Classified Files, RG 79, NARA II; *New Orleans Morning Tribune*, January 9, 1937.



Figure 4-2. Louisiana Governor Richard W. Leche. (Library of Congress)

the National Park Service” and “to authorize the State Parks Commission of Louisiana to transfer such lands to the National Park Service.” The money was to come from the state’s severance tax on mineral extraction (largely oil and natural gas), and this aspect of the law was controversial. Traditionally, these tax revenues had been devoted to education and to natural resource conservation. For this reason, Louisiana teachers’ organizations opposed the Chalmette bill. Some members of the legislature also questioned whether landowners would reap windfall profits from the state purchase. In spite of these objections, the bill was passed and signed into law.¹³

The passage of the Louisiana land acquisition act motivated the NPS and the local Chalmette park boosters to ramp up their advocacy efforts to get the U.S. Congress to establish the park. In March 1939, Congressman Fernández introduced H.R. 4742, calling for the “establishment of the Chalmette National Historical Park.” To forestall the possibility of a presidential veto, this time the bill stipulated that additional land for the park could come by donation only; no federal funds were to be committed for land acquisition. In its initial version, the bill called for a park of up to 1,000 acres, but this was reduced to 500 acres when the Bureau of the Budget objected to the larger number. With this change, the bill received the

support of Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, passed both houses, and was signed into law by President Roosevelt on August 10, 1939.

Chalmette was the third national historical park established in the United States. This designation is usually applied to units of the National Park Service that are established to mark historic events and consist of more than a single building or site. Morristown National Historical Park in New Jersey was the first, established in 1933. Virginia’s Colonial National Monument was redesignated Colonial National Historical Park in 1936, making it the second.¹⁴ The text of the Chalmette establishing legislation appears in Appendix A.

Once Congress had acted, the state’s commitment to acquire the land became entangled in Louisiana politics. On June 15, 1939, just a year after committing the state to spend \$300,000 for Chalmette, Governor Leche resigned. For three years he presided over a breathtakingly corrupt administration. Leche was under indictment for federal crimes, including mail fraud, and would end up serving time in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary. He was succeeded by his lieutenant governor, Earl K. Long, younger brother of Huey P. Long.¹⁵ Leche’s resignation set the stage for a bruising Democratic gubernatorial primary in 1940. In the one-party South of that day, victory in the primary ensured victory in the general election. Leading candidates included Long, Sam Houston Jones, and James A. Noe. Jones campaigned openly as a reformer against the Long machine, while Noe was a former Long stalwart who had abandoned ship. The campaign has been described as “one of the rowdiest and dirtiest in Louisiana history,” which is quite an accolade. In the months leading up to the first round of the Democratic primary in January 1940, Governor Long repealed the state sales tax and increased spending on school lunches and state pensions. Long also refused to

13 Louisiana Act 163, 1938; Editorial, *New Orleans States*, June 1938; J. Walter Coleman, Superintendent, Vicksburg NMP, to Director, NPS, October 21, 1939, Box 1918, Central Classified Files, RG 79, NARA II.

14 An Act to provide for the establishment of the Chalmette National Historical Park in the State of Louisiana (August 10, 1939), P.L. 368 (53 Stat. 1342); House Report No. 544 to accompany H.R. 4742, May 4, 1939; NPS press release, August 13, 1939, Box 1916, Central Classified Files, RG 79, NARA II.

15 Huey Pierce Long, a controversial populist, dominated Louisiana politics from his election as governor in 1928 until his assassination in August 1935, when he was a U.S. Senator. His legacy lasted for decades after his death, as Louisiana politicians competed over who was best qualified to carry on Long’s work.

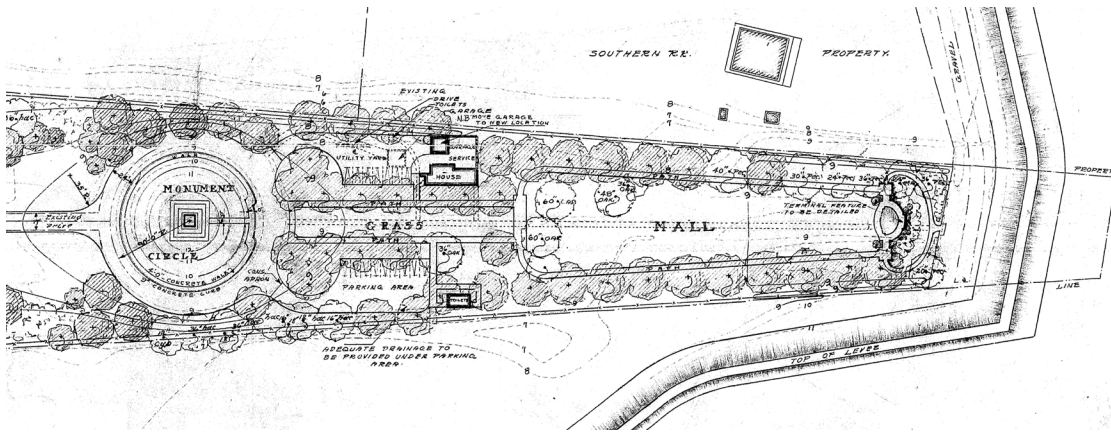


Figure 4-3. 1934 Chalmette development plan, including a mall. (NPS TIC)

release the \$300,000 appropriated for Chalmette land acquisition and made it a campaign issue. Jones narrowly defeated Long in the second round of the primary, with substantial support from the state's teachers. Once in office, Jones opted to shift Chalmette's \$300,000 to the state school fund. This decision likely had multiple motives: all legislation from the discredited Leche era was tainted in the public's eye, the state faced a \$10 million deficit, and Jones probably felt he owed something to teachers for their support. On July 19, 1940, Jones signed Louisiana Act No. 279, rescinding the Chalmette appropriation. With understandable frustration and a bit of hyperbole, the *St. Bernard Voice* announced the "death-knell of the greatest historical project that Louisiana has ever known."¹⁶

NPS officials must have felt more than a bit whiplashed by Louisiana politics. Relying on the state appropriation, the NPS had supported the establishment of a national historical park. It had accomplished this goal, with an authorized boundary embracing up to 500 acres. Now, with the state's U-turn on land acquisition, the NPS was left with plans for a battlefield park, a mere 33 acres in federal ownership, and no legislative authority from Congress to purchase expensive acreage in an area with substantial existing industrial development.

Completing the National Historical Park

Upon assuming responsibility from the War Department for the Chalmette Monument in August 1933, the NPS began planning its development. The Service soon decided to postpone major development of the site until more land could be acquired and a true battlefield park, rather than a memorial site, could be created. From 1933 until 1943, Chalmette was administered by Vicksburg National Military Park, with Vicksburg's superintendent serving as the coordinating superintendent for Chalmette. The on-site manager of Chalmette was designated a custodian for most of this span. NPS Chief Historian Vern Chatelain made a quick inspection trip to Chalmette in September 1933. The following month, NPS Director Arno B. Cammerer asked the acting superintendent at Vicksburg, L. G. Heider, to visit at the "earliest possible moment." It will be recalled that, until 1939, the NPS owned only the 15.92 acres of the monument tract. Heider and Chatelain agreed that high priority should be given to acquiring all the land between the monument tract and Chalmette National Cemetery. Heider recommended moving the caretaker's house farther away from the monument and adding plantings at the western park boundary to screen the view of the Chalmette Slip. He thought that the Malus-Beauregard House possessed "great historic significance" and should be acquired and preserved if possible.¹⁷

16 J. Walter Coleman, Superintendent, Vicksburg NMP, to Director, NPS, October 21, 1939; "Long Vows He'll Block Chalmette," *New Orleans Item*, December 8, 1939; Conrad Wirth, NPS, to Charles C. Zatarain, New Orleans Association of Commerce, May 7, 1940, Box 1918, Central Classified Files, RG 79, NARA II; Michael L. Kurtz and Morgan D. Peoples, *Earl K. Long: The Saga of Uncle Earl and Louisiana Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 102-12.

17 Vern E. Chatelain, Memorandum on Chalmette National Monument, September 22, 1933; NPS Director Cammerer to L. G. Heider, Acting Superintendent, VICK NMP, October 25, 1933; L.G. Heider, Notes on Inspection, November 6, 1933, Boxes 1916, 1917, 1919, Central Classified Files, RG 79, NARA II.

The NPS Eastern Division of the Branch of Plans and Designs (EDBDP) drew up a tentative development plan in fall 1934. It called for hard-surfacing and improving the entrance road, building an entry gate with a pair of pylons, moving the caretaker's garage to a less prominent location, erecting a comfort station, and creating a grassy mall south of the monument, with two curving, paved paths leading to an overlook at the river. Of these planned improvements, only the new road and the relocation of the garage actually occurred. The road improvements were accomplished as a Public Works Administration (PWA) project in 1935-1936, at a cost of \$45,418.63. The contractor, H. Pratt Farnsworth of New Orleans, poured concrete over the War Department-era shell road to and around the monument, built culverts under the two railroad tracks, and substantially regraded much of the site. Bids for a comfort station were opened in May 1935. All proved to be over the \$3,750 allocated, and this project was dropped. Interestingly, plans for the comfort station exist in two versions: one shows separate facilities for African Americans and the other does not. Having recently assumed responsibility for War Department battlefields and historic forts, many of them in the South, the NPS was faced for the first time with the question of designing visitor support facilities in states with legally mandated segregation. The existence of two sets of plans for the Chalmette comfort station suggests some uncertainty over the appropriate agency stance vis-à-vis Jim Crow.¹⁸

Another long-needed improvement was to equip the monument with a lightning protection system. On May 11, 1937, lightning once again hit the monument, dislodging several marble panels near the apex. During the summer and fall, the monument was repaired and a lightning rod mounted, with appropriate grounding of the system.¹⁹

That the NPS and local park proponents looked forward to doing much more with an expanded Chalmette property is clear from a November

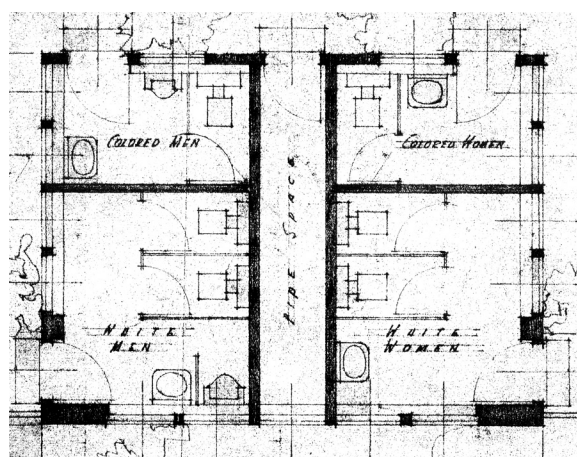


Figure 4-4. NPS plan for Chalmette comfort station with "colored" facilities. (JELA)

1933 letter from Congressman Fernández to NPS Director Cammerer. The Congressman wrote, "It appears to be the consensus of opinion that the park should embrace a much larger area than at first contemplated." He advocated acquiring a 15-acre tract east of the monument, which contained the Malus-Beauregard House; the rest of Line Jackson lying north of the St. Bernard Highway; and the ruins of the De la Ronde house and its oak alley or *allée*. These oaks were often called the Pakenham Oaks, because of the misconception that General Pakenham died under them. (The British did use the De la Ronde house as a forward headquarters during the New Orleans campaign, but Pakenham died on the battlefield.) Concentrating on the effort to get a larger national historical park established, the NPS abandoned the remaining improvements from the 1934 development plan. Agency planners believed that a much better design could be achieved on a larger tract. In the words of engineer Oliver G. Taylor, chief of the EDBPD, the "long drawn out parcel of land [makes] a good treatment of the area very difficult."²⁰

When it became apparent in 1938 that the state was likely to make an appropriation for land acquisition, NPS officials began to devote more attention to the Chalmette site and its potential. Two reports from spring 1938 indicate that little besides the PWA road and grading project had been accomplished in the five years since the

18 Bureau of Public Roads, "Final Construction Report, Chalmette Monument and Grounds National Battlefield Site, St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana," July 1937, JELA FM files; Drawing NPS-CHAL-1003A, "General Development—Chalmette NM," April 1, 1935; SMR, May 1935.

19 SMR, May, June, and September, 1937.

20 J. O. Fernández to Arno B. Cammerer, November 7, 1933; Oliver G. Taylor to L.G. Heider, Acting Superintendent, Vicksburg NMP, April 6, 1934, both in JELA HQ files.

NPS assumed responsibility for the monument tract in 1933. In February 1938, on his way back from a superintendents' conference, Sequoia National Park Superintendent John R. White visited Chalmette. He shared his thoughts and recommendations on the park with the director in a three-page memo. White found little improvement at the site in the 26 years since his previous visit. Predictably, he commented that "the great need is for more area." He recommended that a landscape architect prepare a plan for "the whole area," to include a museum building, suitable interpretive markers, and a parkway or walk connecting the monument with the De la Ronde ruins. White lamented the aesthetic deficiencies of the bright, white concrete PWA entrance road, suggesting that it be tinted and surrounded with plantings "to break up the glare."²¹

Acting Regional Historian Roy Appleman visited Chalmette in March 1938 and prepared a detailed report. Appleman echoed most of White's comments, observing, "I think it likely that no material change or improvement has been made in the Chalmette National Battlefield Site in the years since it was transferred to the Department of the Interior." Appleman reiterated the need for "suitable narrative markers" and noted the complete lack of any identifying signage on the St. Bernard Highway. He was especially eager to acquire the Rodriguez Canal, which was on Southern Railroad property, separated from the monument tract by a wire fence. He noted that the canal was "the only remain [sic] . . . that exists today associated with that historic event [the Battle of New Orleans]." Appleman considered the Malus-Beauregard House "a most interesting structure" that could be "renovated at a relatively small cost." He noted that preliminary studies for master plan development were underway and would be carried forward by Regional Landscape Architect V. R. Ludgate.²²

The White and Appleman reports touched off a period of study and discussion within the NPS about the development of Chalmette. Expecting the \$300,000 appropriation from the state to be available soon, the NPS devoted considerable

attention to priorities for land acquisition. The agency considered the approximately 100 acres lying between the monument tract and the cemetery to be of greatest historical significance. It bowed to the wishes of the state, however, and gave the tract north of the St. Bernard Highway (the remaining portion of Line Jackson) highest priority. The NPS was also very interested in obtaining some acreage west of the monument tract (which contained a portion of the site of the 1814-1815 American camp). This was the agency's preferred location for administrative facilities, and the tract would also serve as an additional buffer against the port activities at the Chalmette Slip. Planners gave serious thought at this time to relocating the entrance road to this parcel just west of the monument tract. They also wanted to develop a mall area south of the monument, extending to an overlook at the river. At this period, planners believed that a thoroughgoing reconstruction of Line Jackson was impracticable, stating that the available "description of the fortifications is so general."²³

When the state appropriation for land acquisition was rescinded in July 1940, all of this planning was temporarily shelved. A bit more than a year later, in December 1941, the United States became a full participant in the Second World War, and the operations of the NPS and most other domestic agencies of the federal government were sharply curtailed. As Director Newton Drury wrote to the New Orleans Association of Commerce in 1944, "Our whole program has been greatly affected by the war and, until times are more favorable, we shall not urge land acquisition or developments other than routine maintenance, protection, and planning." During the war the Chalmette grounds were heavily used by servicemen, both for organized programs like calisthenics and for recreation. Navy personnel from a naval air station on the north side of the St. Bernard Highway helped with mowing and other routine maintenance chores. With the war's end and the transition to a peacetime economy, the NPS

21 John R. White to Director, NPS, February 14, 1938, JELA HQ files.

22 Roy E. Appleman, "Chalmette National Battlefield Site: Inspection Report and Recommendations," April 13, 1938, JELA HQ files.

23 J. Walter Coleman, Superintendent, VICK NMP, to RD, Region 1, August 8, 1938, transmitting Harold B. Swope, "Report to Accompany a Preliminary Study for the Development of Chalmette Monument and Grounds Battlefield Site"; Herbert Evison, Acting RD, Region 1, to Superintendent, Vicksburg NMP, October 18, 1938; Director Cammerer to William C. Rankin, Louisiana Dept. of Conservation, October 31, 1938, all in JELA HQ files.

revisited the issues involved in developing the park. Also, the New Orleans Association of Commerce and other park proponents renewed their efforts to obtain the acreage needed to complete the park.²⁴

Between 1944 and 1946, NPS planners, landscape architects, and historians returned to the Chalmette planning effort. Under consideration were the appropriate locations for administrative facilities, a museum, an access road from the St. Bernard Highway, and a battlefield tour road. In February 1946, Acting Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman²⁵ approved a tentative boundary for Chalmette National Historical Park. The boundary embraced a 40-acre tract west of the monument grounds, the acreage between the monument and the cemetery, and an L-shaped

tract of 72 acres lying east of the cemetery reaching as far as the site of the Bienvenu House,²⁶ making a total of 242 acres. The NPS in 1946 contemplated the elimination of the entrance road on axis with the monument and the creation of a new entry on the parcel to be acquired on the west. This parcel would also contain administrative and visitor contact facilities. After entering the park at its western end, visitors would follow a tour road that skirted the monument, went south of the Malus-Beauregard House, proceeded along the river, then north along the cemetery wall, finally looping back to the monument circle. Had this plan been adopted, the memorial aspect of Chalmette would effectively have been obscured. The obliteration of the formal, axial approach to the monument would

- 24 Director Newton B. Drury to Charles J. Tessier, New Orleans Association of Commerce, July 26, 1944, Box 1918, Central Classified Files, RG 79, NARA II.
- 25 Chapman was undersecretary at the time and would be appointed secretary in 1949.

- 26 The Bienvenu Plantation was the next one downstream from the Chalmet Plantation; see chapter 1, footnote 29.

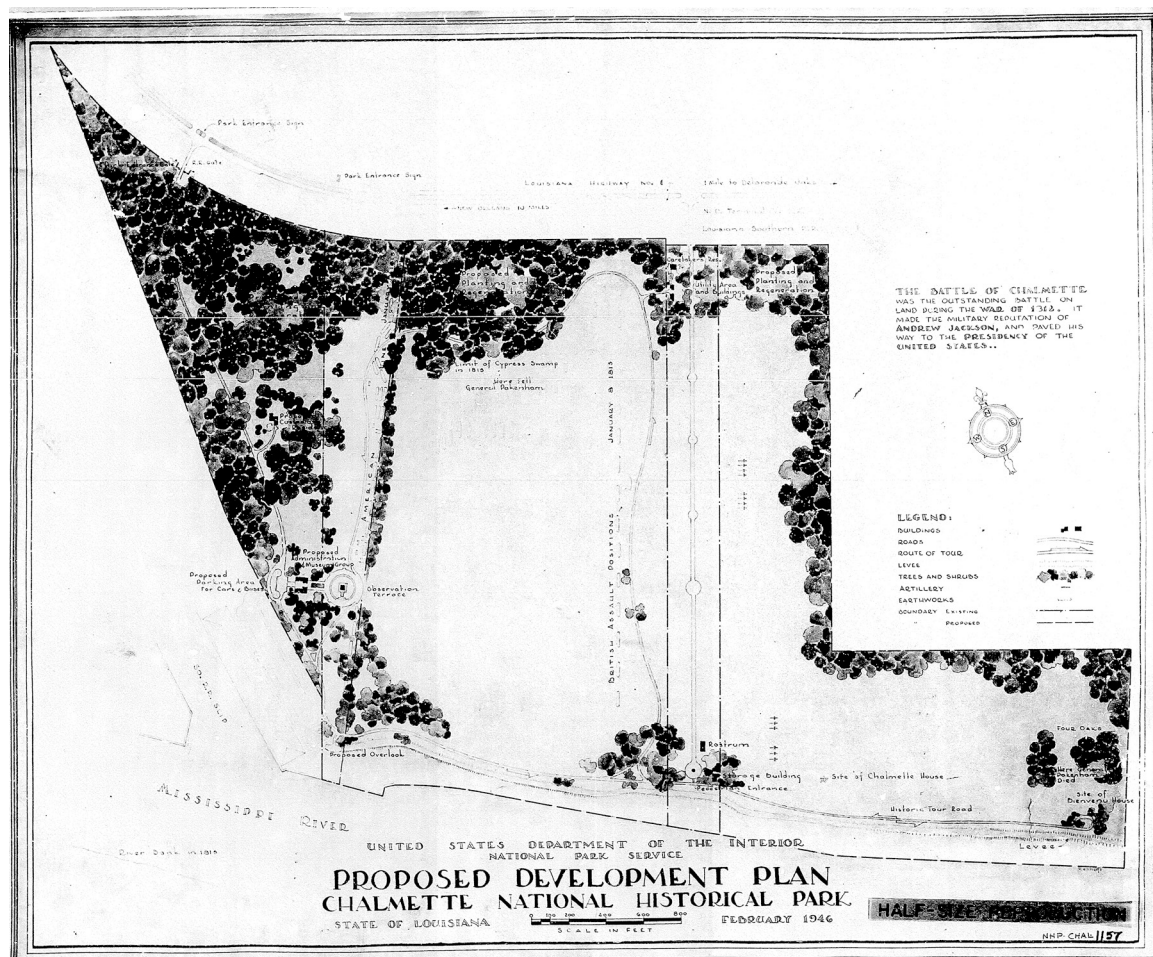


Figure 4-5. 1946 designation of Chalmette NHP boundary. (NPS TIC)

have effectively deemphasized that feature, placing the focus more emphatically on the battle scene.²⁷

The NPS, of course, still faced the challenge of acquiring more than 200 additional acres to implement this plan. The agency remained bound by the 1939 establishing legislation and could accept land for the park only through donation. The New Orleans Association of Commerce once again took the lead in lobbying the state legislature for an appropriation. Upon becoming custodian at Chalmette in July 1944, Clarence L. Johnson joined the association and its National Defense Committee, which had the development of Chalmette as its special concern. To aid in its lobbying campaign, the association in early 1946 developed an illustrated, two-color brochure entitled “Chalmette National Historical Park.” The group distributed 1,000 copies to legislators and prominent Louisianans. In May, House Bill No. 458 was introduced, appropriating \$500,000 to the State Parks Commission for land acquisition at Chalmette. The House later reduced the amount to \$100,000. With this change, the legislation passed both houses and was signed into law on July 15, 1946, by Governor James Houston (Jimmie) Davis as Louisiana Act No. 138.²⁸

The \$100,000 appropriated was not enough to complete the park, but it was a beginning. It fell to the Louisiana State Parks Commission to begin negotiations with the Southern Railway Company for the most coveted land—the acreage east of the monument tract that contained the remnants of the Rodriguez Canal and the Malus-Beauregard House. Governor Davis appointed a five-member committee to assist the Parks Commission in its negotiations. The state wanted to purchase the entire 50 acres lying between the monument and Fazendeville. The railroad proved to be a tough

bargainer, insisting that the land was worth \$3,000 an acre, not the \$2,000 per acre that the state was offering. Negotiations began in early 1947 and dragged into 1948. The railroad finally accepted a price of \$2,750 per acre for 36.25 acres. It also granted the state a one-year option at the same price for an additional tract of about 14 acres west of Fazendeville. The Parks Commission approved the purchase from the railroad in February 1949, and the NPS formally accepted the acreage in May 1950.²⁹

After securing the \$100,000 appropriation from the state in 1947, park boosters continued their efforts to get additional funding from either Congress or the state legislature. Congressman F. Edward Hébert (1st District, Louisiana) introduced H.R. 1324 on January 27, 1947, to appropriate \$200,000 for land acquisition. Because this resolution did not specifically amend the language in the 1939 establishing legislation stating that the federal government could acquire land for Chalmette by donation only, the Bureau of the Budget weighed in against the bill, and it died.³⁰

The New Orleans Association of Commerce then renewed its efforts to coax funds from the state legislature. Working with Chalmette Custodian Clarence Johnson, the association revised its lobbying brochure. On May 17, 1948, House Bill 70 was introduced, containing an appropriation of \$575,000 for land acquisition.³¹ Earl K. Long had recently been elected governor and was the key to the bill’s fortunes. Custodian Johnson went to Baton Rouge, where he and park booster Ambrose H. Smith (chair of the Louisiana House Appropriations Committee) obtained an audience with Governor Long. Johnson reported:

27 Custodian Clarence L. Johnson to RD, Region 1, November 16, 1944; Director Newton B. Drury to RD, Region 1, March 8, 1946, Region 1 files, Accession 79-62-A-305, RG 79, NARA M-A; “Tentative Boundary Map—Chalmette National Historical Park,” drawing NHP-CHAL-7002, February 26, 1946.

28 SMR, December 1945 and May, June, and July, 1946; An Act to authorize the State Parks Commission of Louisiana to purchase additional lands, situated in St. Bernard Parish, July 15, 1946. Jimmie Davis (1899–2000) will forever be remembered not for his political career but as a country and western musician. He is closely associated with the song “You Are My Sunshine,” which he recorded in 1939 and later used at his campaign rallies.

29 The five members of the special committee were General Kemper Williams, General Raymond F. Fleming, C. L. Stiffel, Dr. Joseph C. Menendez, and Captain Arthur de la Houssaye. William W. Wells, Director, State Parks Commission, to Director, NPS, December 6, 1946; Custodian Clarence L. Johnson to Director, NPS, April 11, 1947; William W. Wells to Director, NPS, February 17, 1948; NPS acceptance of conveyance, June 20, 1950, Box 14, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-67-1-1022, RG 79, NARA M-A.

30 A Bill to provide for the addition of certain lands to the Chalmette National Historical Park in the State of Louisiana, H.R. 1324, January 27, 1947; Oscar L. Chapman, Acting Secretary of the Interior, to Richard J. Welsh, Chair, Committee on the Public Lands, July 17, 1947, Box 14, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-67-A-1022, RG 79, NARA M-A.

31 SMR, May and June, 1948.

The Governor informed him [Smith] that he was opposed to similar bills in 1936 and 1938 and was opposed to this bill and to any other that might be introduced. Efforts to secure his approval for progressively lesser amounts even down to \$41,250 to buy the 15 acres remaining between the property now being acquired and the Fazendville [sic] Road, were unsuccessful. We have used and exhausted all our resources to influence the Governor with no avail. With Governor Long in the saddle for 4 more years, and his influence sure to be felt long after that, the future of the park as to enlargement is very dark.³²

Johnson had no way of knowing, but the skies soon would grow even darker.

Kaiser Aluminum Comes to Chalmette

No new avenues for land acquisition were on the horizon when, in early 1951, rumors began to reach Chalmette Superintendent Russell Gibbs that the Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corporation was about to purchase a large property just east of the national cemetery. The rumors were confirmed on February 15, 1951, when Kaiser announced its purchase of a 273-acre tract for the construction of a large aluminum reduction facility. The tract that Kaiser acquired included 72 acres that were within the authorized boundary for the Chalmette park, approved just five years previously by the Secretary of the Interior. On that acreage were the site of some of the British batteries, the British reserve's position, and the last remnants of the earthworks dating to the Civil War.³³

Kaiser's purchase presented the NPS with a huge problem. As Regional Director Cox noted:

[I]f this property is developed as planned, it is doubtful if the Service will ever be able to add to Chalmette National Historical Park any of the land east of the cemetery. ... One

unfortunate result which we can visualize would be the dwarfing of the Park by the near-by plant development. Another would be the rise in value of the property between the cemetery and that recently donated to us by the State."³⁴

Complicating the situation, aluminum was a key defense commodity and the United States had been at war in Korea for eight months. The NPS would need to be careful in its approach to acquiring land from Kaiser, so as not to open itself to accusations of obstructing the war effort and the global fight against communism.

Ironies abound in the Kaiser story. First, Kaiser Aluminum was essentially a creation of the federal government and benefited from extraordinary government generosity. Because of aluminum's contribution to national defense and the huge amounts of electricity required for its manufacture, Kaiser's expansion required approval from the Secretary of the Interior. In December 1950, the Secretary gave the go-ahead for Kaiser to place a major manufacturing facility in one of four potential areas in Louisiana or Texas. As described further below, Kaiser then shopped around for the best deal it could get. It is uncertain how much information reached the Secretary as the company zeroed in on Chalmette as the plant's location. Apparently Kaiser officially notified the Department of the Interior of its decision to build at Chalmette only when it made the public announcement in February 1951. An explanation of how Kaiser ended up on land that the NPS had long considered necessary for the full development of Chalmette National Historical Park requires some background on the aluminum industry's history and the Cold War realities of 1951.³⁵

When the United States entered World War II, the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) was the only producer of primary aluminum in the country. To keep aluminum flowing to manufacturers of airplanes, tanks, and other war matériel, the federal government hastily built a number of new aluminum reduction plants, more than doubling

32 Custodian Clarence Johnson to RD, Region 1, June 24, 1948, Box 14, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-67-A-1022, RG 79, NARA M-A.

33 SMR, February 1951; "Kaiser Aluminum Plant To Be Built in Chalmette in St. Bernard," *New Orleans States*, February 15, 1951; RD, Region 1, to Director, March 19, 1951, Box 14, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-67-A-1022, RG 79, NARA M-A.

34 RD, Region 1, to Director, March 19, 1951, Box 14, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-67-A-1022, RG 79, NARA M-A.

35 Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman to GSA Administrator Jess Larson, December 13, 1950, Henry J. Kaiser Papers, folder 57.3, BL.

the industry's production capacity. At the end of the war, the government decided to lease and eventually sell its plants to Reynolds Metals Company and Permanente Metals (later renamed the Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corporation). Permanente was part of Henry J. Kaiser's industrial empire. To ensure that these firms would be viable competitors with Alcoa, the government offered extremely liberal terms. Kaiser ultimately paid \$43.5 million for plants that the government had spent \$127 million to construct; the postwar replacement cost of these facilities would have been even greater.

When the Korean War erupted in summer 1950, government officials became deeply concerned about looming shortages of aluminum. In response, Congress took additional, unprecedented steps to ensure an adequate supply of aluminum for the armed services. To encourage the development of new aluminum production plants, the government instituted very liberal tax regulations for the amortization of new plants and promised to purchase all aluminum that the market could not absorb for a period of five years at the prevailing market price. Economic historian Merton J. Peck has observed that in the 1950s the federal government granted the aluminum industry "a risk protection unique in American industrial history."³⁶

It was in this unprecedented environment, when the Cold War had unexpectedly turned hot in Korea, that Kaiser in late 1950 began to look for a site for the first primary aluminum plant to be developed by the company, rather than purchased from the government. Operating with the benefit of the federal government's new guarantees, Kaiser risked very little in embarking on a major expansion. Henry Kaiser had been impressed with the possibility of taking advantage of inexpensive natural gas supplies in Texas since the late 1940s. Much of the country's existing aluminum capacity was in the Pacific Northwest, which had abundant inexpensive hydroelectric power. The government was leery of adding new capacity there, however, because of potential droughts

that periodically reduced power output and the perceived vulnerability of the area to attack by Soviet bombers. Eager to expand his aluminum business with government help, Kaiser in late 1950 was actively looking to build a large plant in either the Houston or Corpus Christi area. But then, De Lesseps Story (Chep) Morrison, mayor of New Orleans from 1946 to 1961, decided to make a major play to get the plant for his area.³⁷

Beginning late in November 1950, Morrison began meeting with the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce, natural gas suppliers, state officials, and the Louisiana congressional delegation to organize a campaign to sell Kaiser on New Orleans. He personally contacted Henry J. Kaiser at the corporation's Oakland, California, headquarters, and later Morrison spent several days showing Kaiser representatives potential plant sites and introducing them to natural gas suppliers. Interests in Texas and Gulfport, Mississippi, were also actively wooing Kaiser, giving the industrialist more bargaining power. A critical factor in the selection of a Louisiana site was the state's decision to grant Kaiser "the largest industrial tax exemption in Louisiana history"; Kaiser's huge plant would owe no state *ad valorem* taxes for ten years. Leander Perez, political boss of Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes, was also an important player. He controlled substantial oil and gas reserves in Plaquemines and worked to secure an attractive 20-year contract with United Gas Pipeline Company to supply the new plant. Kaiser considered another location in the New Orleans area, but finally opted for the 273-acre Chalmette site, which possessed superior rail and river transportation connections.³⁸

Kaiser Aluminum waited until it had all the pieces of the puzzle in place before announcing the deal: The New Orleans Terminal Company formally offered the Chalmette tract to Kaiser on February 9, and the natural gas deal was signed on February 13. On the 15th, the head of Kaiser's Washington,

36 Merton J. Peck, *Competition in the Aluminum Industry, 1945-1958* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), 8, 11-19, 149-50; the quotation is from p. 150. Officials were looking beyond Korea; many informed Americans in 1950 to 1952 feared that all-out war with the Soviet Union loomed, in which case demand for aluminum would go off the charts.

37 H. Till of MKT Lines to E. E. Trefethen, Permanente Metals, November 28, 1949, Eugene E. Trefethen Papers, folder 53.29, BL; Bill Cunningham, "Finds Lessons for Boston in Orleans," *New Orleans Item*, March 9, 1953.

38 A. P. Fant, New Orleans Chamber of Commerce, to Henry J. Kaiser, November 25, 1950, Eugene E. Trefethen Papers, folder 53.29, BL; *Investment Dealers' Digest*, March 31, 1952; "Kaiser Aluminum Plant to Be Built at Chalmette in St. Bernard."

D.C., office wrote to Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman as follows:

This is to advise you that Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corporation has decided to locate its new aluminum reduction facilities on a tract of land comprising approximately 275 acres in Saint Bernard Parrish [sic] on the Mississippi River near the City of New Orleans, Louisiana. This location has only recently been definitely decided upon.³⁹

Kaiser's announcement that it was bringing a new industry and one thousand or more new jobs to the area was greeted with immense enthusiasm in New Orleans. Mayor Morrison and Chamber of Commerce President Joseph M. Rault released triumphant statements to the press. Morrison said, "The decision of the Kaiser people to place this vast plant in our metropolitan area is wonderful news and a source of great satisfaction to those of us who have worked continually with the company officials over a period of time." Rault singled out Morrison, Governor Earl K. Long, Senators Russell Long and Allen Ellender, and Congressmen Hale Boggs and F. Edward Hébert for their contributions. The *St. Bernard Voice*, which had been a consistent supporter of the Chalmette park for two decades, reported the Kaiser news without mentioning its impact on the historic

battlefield. A few preservationists, however, were concerned. The Louisiana Landmarks Society and the Chalmette National Historical Park Association immediately wrote to Henry Kaiser to alert him of the battlefield's historical significance. They pleaded with him to use his influence to secure the acreage between the monument and the cemetery (still owned by the railroad) for the park.⁴⁰

It is uncertain whether Secretary of the Interior Chapman had any advance warning of Kaiser's purchase of a portion of the battlefield, but the firm's decision caused great consternation among his subordinates at the NPS. In March 1951 Assistant NPS Director Conrad Wirth wrote to the director of NPS Region One, suggesting an effort to convince Kaiser to give the NPS a buffer strip along the east wall of the national cemetery.⁴¹ This portion of the Kaiser tract contained the last remnants of the earthworks erected during the Civil War. Wirth also wondered whether Kaiser could be persuaded to purchase the remaining 66 acres west of the cemetery and donate them to the government. He ended somewhat wistfully,

39 New Orleans Terminal Company to KACC, February 9, 1951; E. E. Trefethen to George Woods, February 13, 1951; C. F. Calhoun, KACC, to Secretary Chapman, February 15, 1951, Eugene E. Trefethen Papers, folder 6.26, BL.

40 Statement of Mayor Chep Morrison; Statement of Mr. Rault; Samuel Wilson Jr., Louisiana Landmarks Society, to Henry J. Kaiser, February 21, 1951; Mrs. Edwin X. DeVerges, Chalmette NMP Association, to Henry J. Kaiser, Henry J. Kaiser Papers, folder 57.9, BL; "Kaiser Aluminum Plant for Parish," *St. Bernard Voice*, February 17, 1951. See chapter 6 for Congressman Boggs's role in the establishment of JELA.

41 The NPS adopted a regional structure in August 1937. Chalmette was assigned to NPS Region 1, which was renamed the Southeast Region in 1962. In November 1971, Chalmette was reassigned to the Southwest Region.



Figure 4-6. Announcing the new Kaiser Aluminum plant. (*Times Picayune* 1951)

“We are hopeful, however, that there are many persons in New Orleans sufficiently interested in their heritage to support efforts toward keeping the damage of such an industrial plant to a minimum.” When NPS managers learned that the railroad had sold to Kaiser at a price of \$1,000 per acre, their consternation grew. Clearly his aluminum executives were sharper negotiators than the representatives of the state, who had given the railroad \$2,750 per acre for 36 acres just a few years earlier.⁴²

Kaiser completed its \$79 million Chalmette plant in record time, taking just 10 months to get it up and running. The firm decided to gain the maximum publicity out of the plant opening, chartering eight airliners to bring in 500 prominent guests to witness the first aluminum “pour” and housing these guests at the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans. Present were U.S. Director of Defense Mobilization Charles E. Wilson, Senators Long and Ellender, all of Louisiana’s congressmen, the president of General Motors, and New Orleans Mayor Morrison. Company publications from the time underscore the Cold War patriotic fervor that tied U.S. industrial might to the fight against the Soviet Union. Kaiser crowed that each year the plant would produce 400,000 pounds of aluminum, “for weapons of war which we count on to discourage the spread of Communism and hence actually *weapons of peace* [emphasis in the original].” Kaiser played up the tie to the events of 1815 in these words:

Historically, Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corporation could not have chosen a more appropriate site for its new aluminum reduction plant than Chalmette, Louisiana, about six miles from the City of New Orleans. The memorable Battle of New Orleans in 1815—when Gen. Andrew Jackson and an outnumbered band of American irregulars routed thousands of picked British troops led by Gen. Edward Pakenham—was fought here. ... A threat of foreign domination was removed by that American victory of the past. Today, some of the silvery aluminum now being made on the same ground

42 Conrad Wirth to RD, Region 1, March 29, 1951, Box 1691, Central Classified Files, RG 79, NARA II; Superintendent Gibbs to Director, May 29, 1951, Box 108, Administrative Files, RG 79, NARA II.

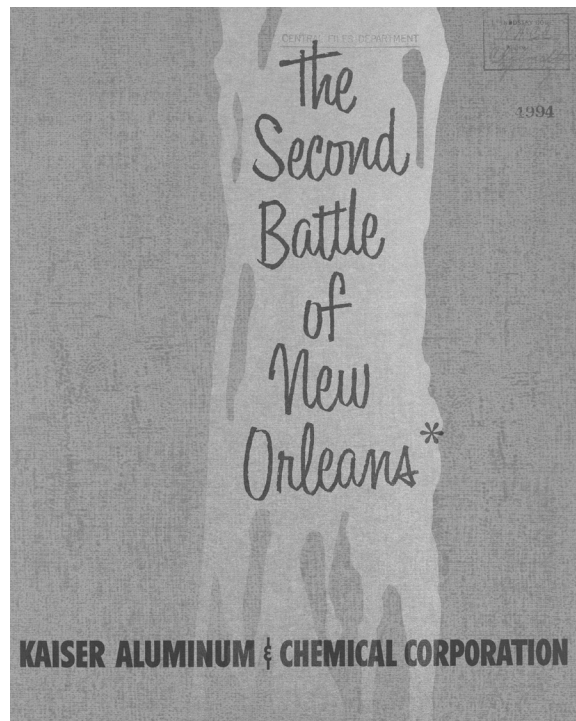


Figure 4-7. “The Second Battle of New Orleans,” Kaiser press kit. (Kaiser Collection, BL)

is being used for national defense to safeguard this country from aggression once again.⁴³

Even before the Chalmette plant went into production, Kaiser announced an expansion that would double its production capacity. The Kaiser plant produced aluminum ingot, and it was apparent from the beginning that the new plant would likely attract to the Chalmette area additional factories to convert ingot into sheet, foil, extrusions, and other secondary products. NPS managers rightly feared that all remaining riverfront property would soon be purchased for industrial plants. The Kaiser aluminum reduction plant already constituted a major intrusion on the viewshed of the Chalmette park. The impact grew even greater in 1956 when Kaiser engineers erected a 500-foot smokestack to alleviate problems with noxious fumes coming from its operations.⁴⁴

43 George J. Binczewski, “The Energy Crisis and the Aluminum Industry: Can We Learn from History?,” *JOM* 54:2 (February 2002), online at www.tms.org/pubs/journals/jom/0202/binczewski-0202.html; *Kaiser Aluminum News*, January 1952, 2; Fred Drewes to E. E. Trefethen, November 28, 1951; media kit for first pour, Eugene E. Trefethen Papers, folder 6.28, BL.

44 C. F. Calhoun, KACC Washington Office, to E. E. Trefethen, KACC, May 16, 1951, E. E. Trefethen Papers, folder 48.8, BL.

In early 1952, rumors began to circulate that Kaiser had entered into negotiations with the Southern Railway to purchase the remaining acreage between the monument and the cemetery (the acreage lying on either side of Fazendeville). According to the rumors, the company contemplated erecting a rolling mill for the production of aluminum sheet. Losing the land east of the cemetery was bad enough, but these 66 acres were critical portions of the battlefield, over which the British troops made their advance. Industrial development between the monument and the cemetery would virtually destroy any chance for visitors to appreciate the historic scene at Chalmette. Although the *St. Bernard Voice* reported in April that negotiations were complete and the appropriate papers were waiting to be signed, Secretary Chapman made some effort to get Kaiser to respect the significance of Chalmette. Chapman's May 7, 1952, letter to Henry J. Kaiser was, however, curiously diffident in tone. The Korean War was still going on, and Chapman assured Kaiser that he wasn't asking him "to take any steps that would slow up our defense effort." He did observe that, if the intervening acreage did not become part of the park, "the park program envisioned by the Congress and the State of Louisiana can never be realized except in name." If development occurred, "the State would lose the greater part of its most important single historic site of national significance." Still, the Secretary did not ask that Kaiser abandon its purchase or buy the land and donate it. He merely observed that "anything that you or the Kaiser Corporation may be able to do to advance the realization of the National Historical Park program would be given appropriate recognition," perhaps by the erection of a suitable plaque within the park.⁴⁵

Kaiser's response to the Secretary was not very encouraging. Henry Kaiser observed that "in the event that we decide to purchase the property it would be for the purpose of industrial expansion." Further, the firm had not "definitized" the nature of its intended "industrial improvements." Kaiser closed with vague assurances that "consideration will be given ... to devoting an appropriate area to the historical significance of the site" as long as



Figure 4-8. Kaiser smokestack looming over Boy Scout reenactors. (Rodney Williams Jr.)

that activity did not interfere with the company's industrial operations. Kaiser completed its purchase later in 1952, touching off the final phase of the battle between growth advocates and historic preservationists over the completion of the Chalmette park. Curiously, by the time Kaiser Aluminum completed its purchase of the 66-acre tract, its application to the federal government for favorable tax treatment of a rolling mill in the New Orleans area had already been denied. Specifically, in late 1951 Kaiser had filed an application for a \$65 million plate and coil mill "in the vicinity of Kaiser's Chalmette operations." This application was denied in early March 1952.⁴⁶

As Chapman hinted in his letter to Henry Kaiser, the acreage lying between what the NPS owned at the monument tract and the national cemetery was critical to the NPS plan of finally making Chalmette a true battlefield park. The NPS goal was to lay out a tour road that would take visitors to both the American and British positions, with pulloffs and wayside exhibits at key points. Blocking this development now were the acreage recently purchased by Kaiser Aluminum and the 7 acres occupied by the village of Fazendeville, the latter comprising 35 or more small lots with modest houses. The hope was to get the Kaiser acreage via donation; the individual properties at Fazendeville would need to be purchased, with the money coming from either the state or the national treasury. The Kaiser acreage was crucial, because it was far larger and because its development would ruin any chance of completing the park. The NPS's

45 SMR, March 1952; "Kaiser Purchases Additional Land," *St. Bernard Voice*, April 11, 1952; *Kaiser Aluminum News*, January 1952, 13; Secretary Chapman to Henry J. Kaiser, May 7, 1952, Box 1691, Administrative Files, RG 79, NARA II.

46 Henry J. Kaiser to Secretary Chapman, June 19, 1952, JELA HQ files; Kaiser Washington Office Memorandum, October 12, 1951; Kaiser Washington Report, March 7, 1952, Eugene E. Trefethen Papers, folders 52.24 and 52.25, BL.

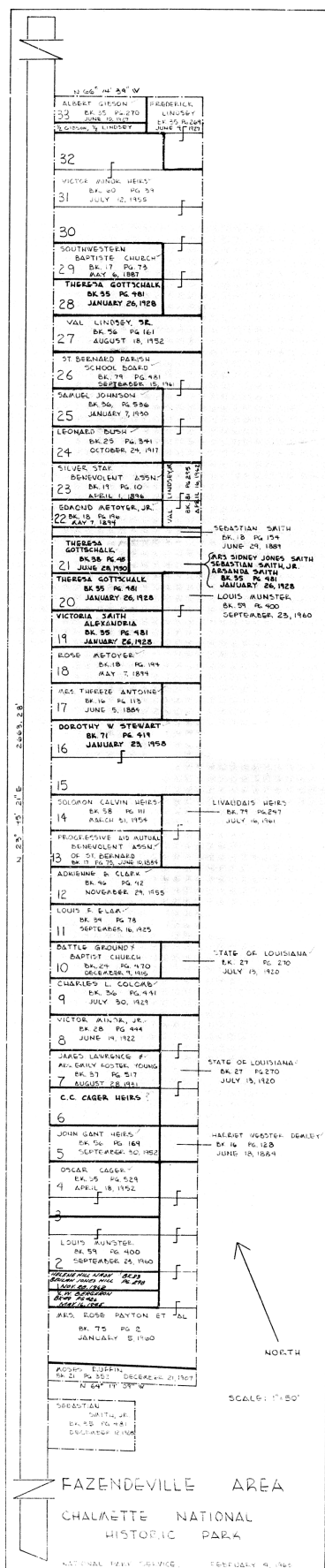


Figure 4-9. Plat of Fazendeville properties. (JELA)

assumption was that, if the Kaiser property could be obtained, buying and razing Fazendeville would be a less formidable challenge.

The NPS did have local allies in its effort to complete the park. A major player in the campaign to acquire the Kaiser property was the Louisiana Landmarks Society, which had contacted Kaiser after the firm's initial purchase. Formed in 1950 as a coalition of civic and heritage groups, the society benefited from the determined leadership of Mrs. Martha Robinson.⁴⁷ Also active was the Chalmette National Historical Park Association, the park's cooperating association, founded in 1948. Others who wrote to Henry Kaiser included the Louisiana Historical Society, the Society of the War of 1812 in Louisiana, the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Louisiana, and the Sons and the Daughters of the American Revolution. For much of the 1950s Mrs. Edwin X. de Verges was president of both the cooperating association and the Chalmette Chapter of the U.S. Daughters of 1812 and played a leading role in getting the park completed. General Bres, who had testified before the Senate in the 1930s and was on a first-name basis with both Louisiana senators, worked tirelessly behind the scenes. Another strong advocate for the park was Edwin M. Roy, owner and editor of the *St. Bernard Voice*.⁴⁸ Roy repeatedly argued that needed industrial development in the parish did not have to come at the expense of its heritage and attractiveness as a tourist destination. Charles "Pie" Dufour, long-time columnist for the *New Orleans States*, also wrote many articles supporting the full development of the Chalmette park. NPS managers ranged widely in their search for allies, even contacting former NPS Director Horace Albright

47 Mrs. Robinson and the Louisiana Landmarks Society would again play a key role in the ultimately successful 1960s fight against a proposed expressway in the French Quarter. This saga is recounted in Richard O. Baumbach Jr. and William E. Borah, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: The Vieux Carré Riverfront-Expressway Controversy* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1981).

48 William F. Roy founded the *Voice*, a weekly, in January 1890. His son Edwin took over in January 1948, later turning the paper over in turn to his son, Edwin Roy Jr., who continues at this writing as owner and editor. Under three generations of Roys, the *Voice* has been a strong supporter of the Chalmette park.

to see whether he had any useful contacts within the Kaiser companies.⁴⁹

Arrayed against the NPS and the preservationists were St. Bernard Parish businessmen and politicians, New Orleans Mayor Morrison, and the powerful New Orleans Chamber of Commerce. The chamber, a longtime supporter of the park's expansion, did an abrupt about-face when it learned of Kaiser's purchase. Before Kaiser's acquisition of the 66 acres was complete, the association published an editorial in its news bulletin. Taking much of the credit for attracting Kaiser to the area in the first place, the association claimed that verbal assurances had been given to the firm that it could expand onto the 66 acres. The editorial concluded with the assertion that the group respected history and tradition but "feels that the advantages inherent in the dedication of this land to modern purposes transcend those that would accrue from an historic consecration."⁵⁰ Mayor Morrison went so far as to publicly advise Kaiser to develop its 66 acres quickly, before any coalition of preservationists could become organized and effective. Morrison returned from spending a day with Henry Kaiser at Lake Tahoe in California and told the press that he advised Kaiser "that it would be a good idea to announce plans soon for using the land because of the possibility of a controversy raised by groups which want to see the site set aside as a national monument commemorating the Battle of New Orleans."⁵¹

The Louisiana Landmarks Society, the Chalmette Property Owners Association, the Daughters of 1812, and others wrote Henry Kaiser asking that he donate the land needed to complete the park. Park Superintendent Russell A. Gibbs believed in September 1953 that Kaiser was favorable to donating at least the 15 acres lying west of Fazendeville Road, but nothing came of this. In late 1954, newly arrived Superintendent Lyle K. Linch reported that "Mr. William Brown, Kaiser

Public Relations Official, advises his company is not favorable to donation or sale of acreage to our service."⁵² In an additional complicating side issue, Kaiser believed that its purchase from the railroad included 1.5 acres lying between the south cemetery wall and the river. Much discussion and legal research ensued before the U.S. Attorney ruled in August 1955 that the parcel in question belonged to the United States.⁵³

Earlier in 1955, the NPS had renewed its efforts to get some or all of the 66 acres from Kaiser. In February, Associate NPS Director Jackson Price, Assistant Regional Director Lisle, and Superintendent Linch met with Kaiser representatives in Chalmette. Director Conrad Wirth followed up with a letter asserting that "industrial development of this area would be a disastrous blow to the Park." Wirth even raised the possibility that if Kaiser went ahead with an industrial facility, the NPS would need to "reconsider the desirability of continuing the administration of the existing lands as a national historical park."⁵⁴ Again, Kaiser was unwilling to consider a donation or a sale.

In early 1957, yet another complication arose. St. Bernard Sewerage District Number 1 announced plans to build a sewage treatment plant on 1.5 acres offered to it by Kaiser. The plant was planned for a site just east of the NPS holdings at the monument and only 100 yards from the Malus-Beauregard House. The prospect of a malodorous sewage plant in this location served to further concentrate the minds of park advocates, who stepped up their efforts to finally acquire the missing 66 acres and complete the park. There was no doubt that the parish needed the sewage treatment plant somewhere; in the 12 years following World War II, St. Bernard Parish had grown tremendously. It was releasing raw sewage into the Mississippi River, and the state department of public health was threatening to begin imposing fines. Congressman Hébert had secured \$143,000 in federal funding for

49 SMR, August 1950; "The Chalmette Park," *St. Bernard Voice*, April 11, 1952; "Charter of the Chalmette National Historical Park Association," January 10, 1948, Box 16, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-66-A-661, RG 79, NARA M-A; Horace Albright to Ronald F. Lee, NPS, July 18, 1952, Box 1691, Administrative Files, RG 79, NARA II.

50 "The Land at Chalmette," *Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin*, May 1, 1952.

51 "Mayor Returns, Hints Kaiser To Add New Plant," *New Orleans States*, August 25, 1953.

52 SMR, December 1954.

53 "Material [from Chalmette] for Director's Annual Report," June 1, 1953; U.S. Attorney to Superintendent, Chalmette National Historical Park, August 29, 1955, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-62-A-605, RG 79, NARA M-A.

54 Conrad L. Wirth, Director, to Glenn Weekley, KACC, March 10, 1955, Region 1 Files, RG 79, NARA M-A.



Figure 4-10. Sewage plant on the battlefield, 2008. (author)

the plant, but construction had to begin before July 1, 1957, or the money would be forfeited.⁵⁵

Just why the admittedly much-needed sewage plant could not be located in a more suitable place than on the field of the Battle of New Orleans is difficult to determine. There are hints in the written record of some collusion between Kaiser and the political leadership of St. Bernard Parish. As mentioned earlier, St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes in this period were the political fiefdom of Leander Perez, who had long been district attorney for the 29th Judicial District (embracing both parishes) and consistently placed reliable supporters on the parishes' police juries, levee boards, and sewerage district boards. He is best remembered today as a virulently racist defender of segregation, having been Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond's Louisiana campaign manager in 1948 and an organizer of white citizens' councils throughout the South. As the upper portion of St. Bernard Parish industrialized after World War II, Perez's grip on that parish was threatened by the influx of wage earners who owed nothing to his political machine.⁵⁶ Superintendent Linch made some interesting comments in his 1957 annual report:

They [Kaiser executives] have placed key employees in leadership of many local organizations such as two of the three member Parish Sewerage Board, three civic

improvement association presidents, etc. They have courted the District Attorney [Perez] who has been a life-time thorn in the side of this area's expansion program because of his national segregation leadership. To put lightning in our storm clouds, the company is now sponsoring, behind the scenes, the location of a Parish Sewage Treatment plant on Kaiser land near the river end of Fazendville [sic] road. ...

The Kaiser strategy appears to be to make only an area adjoining our R.O.W. available for the sewage plant with the hopes this will block future demands for the balance of their inholdings.⁵⁷

The parish needed the sewage treatment plant, and Kaiser probably offered the needed 1.5 acres for considerably less than nearby riverfront property would fetch. The potential advantage to Kaiser was to have another development incompatible with historic preservation on the site, allowing Kaiser to argue that the historic scene had already been compromised if it later sought to develop the rest of the acreage.

Park supporters at first attempted to keep the sewage plant off the core area of the battlefield. Superintendent Linch, Mrs. De Verges, editor Roy, and B. A. Parsons, president of the Louisiana Historical Society, attended a meeting of the Board of Sewerage District No. 1 on March 20, 1957, to plead with its members. The Louisiana Historic Landmarks Council, comprising representatives from 27 heritage and veterans groups, campaigned vigorously for an alternate site. Acting Secretary of the Interior Roger Ernst wrote to Henry Kaiser, suggesting the treatment plant be located east of the cemetery. In the end, all this concerted effort succeeded only in getting the plant moved a bit farther from the Malus-Beauregard House, to a location at the southeast end of Fazendeville Road, rather than at the western boundary of the Kaiser tract. Tellingly, the telegram to Kaiser executives requesting the change in location came from District Attorney Perez, not the sewerage district. The district completed the sewage plant late in 1958, and it began operating in early 1959. Park staff planted trees and shrubs in an attempt to screen it from view. Superintendent Linch

⁵⁵ SMR, January 1957; Martha Robinson to General Edwin Bres, March 18, 1955, Records of the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission, RG 79, NARA II.

⁵⁶ Glenn Jeansonne, *Leander Perez: Boss of the Delta* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 160-61.

⁵⁷ SAR, 1957.



Figure 4-11. Aerial view of monument, Fazendeville, and parish sewage plant. (JELA)

observed that “the new sewerage treatment plant is no ROSE, but could be much worse.”⁵⁸

The fight over the sewage plant spurred the NPS and park proponents to renew their efforts to get Kaiser to donate the intervening acreage. Martha Robinson coordinated the preparation of a petition to Henry Kaiser signed by 45 Louisiana civic, veterans, and heritage organizations. She also wrote to everyone who might possibly be of assistance, including Civil War historian Bruce Catton, multimillionaire philanthropist Paul Mellon, and executives of Paramount Pictures.⁵⁹ Mrs. Robinson even wrote directly to Mrs. Henry J. Kaiser. The president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation also wrote to Kaiser. Acting Secretary Ernst’s June 27, 1957, letter to Kaiser, which touched on the sewage plant issue, also included another plea for a partial or complete gift of the 66 acres. This letter, in fact, was written at the instigation of the Eisenhower White House, as

indicated by the transmittal memo from the NPS to Interior, which began, “In view of the interest of the White House, we have prepared a letter for your signature.” In July Interior staff prepared a letter for White House Chief of Staff Sherman Adams to send to Kaiser, but there is no record of it actually being sent. Adams did assure Mrs. Robinson of the administration’s support and its hopes “that a resolution may be found.”⁶⁰

This all-out campaign brought a slight shift in Kaiser’s position. At one of its meetings, the Kaiser board of directors considered the question of a donation. It found a gift impossible, but raised the possibility of exchanging the 66-acre tract “for other river-front property in the vicinity of the Chalmette plant.” This proposal led to a meeting in New Orleans in October 1957 among Kaiser representatives, NPS Assistant Director Jackson E. Price, and NPS Region One Director Elbert Cox. The NPS went into this meeting believing that Kaiser had specific property to propose

58 SMR, March, May, and July 1957, April 1959; Secretary of the Interior to Henry J. Kaiser, June 27, 1957, Box 14, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-67-A-1022, RG 79, NARA M-A; “Kaiser Corp. Re-considers and Offers Fazendeville Road Site,” undated clipping, *St. Bernard Voice*.

59 Mrs. Robinson contacted Paramount because it was producing a feature film, *The Buccaneer*, that highlighted the role of Jean Lafitte in the Battle of New Orleans.

60 Copies of letters by Martha G. Robinson, Box 16, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-66-A-661, RG 79, NARA M-A; Director Wirth to Secretary of the Interior, June 17, 1957; “Help for Park Plan Assured,” *New Orleans Times*, undated [July 1957], Box 14, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-67-A-1022, RG 79, NARA M-A; Richard H. Howland, President, National Trust for Historic Preservation, to Henry J. Kaiser, July 11, 1957, Box 1692, Administrative Files, RG 79, NARA II.

swapping for the needed 66 acres, but this was not the case. Things seemed to have reached an impasse, and Superintendent Linch observed that condemnation of the Kaiser holdings seemed the only alternative.⁶¹

Throughout 1958 there appeared to be little movement on the land acquisition question. In March, the NPS recognized the new realities at Chalmette and officially changed the designated boundary of the park. The agency noted that the area east of the national cemetery now contained an aluminum plant and that all efforts to obtain acreage west of the monument area to use for a park administrative area had failed. On March 20, 1958, Secretary of the Interior Frederick Seaton approved a new boundary enclosing 136 acres. This included the 52.28 acres of the monument tract/Beauregard House area, the 17.33 acres of the national cemetery, and the 66 acres of Kaiser holdings and Fazendeville village. This new boundary was far less than the 500 acres mentioned in the 1939 establishing legislation, but the NPS believed that the 136 acres would make a viable historic battlefield park. In April 1958, Congressman Hébert introduced H.R. 11910, "A Bill to authorize the acquisition of land for Chalmette National Historical Park." No action was taken before the end of the second session of the 85th Congress.⁶²

When the 86th Congress convened in January 1959, Congressman Hébert introduced H.R. 790, "A Bill to authorize the acquisition of land for Chalmette National Historical Park, provide for the enlargement of the national cemetery therein, and for other purposes." Despite the expanded title, this was essentially the same bill as H.R. 11910.⁶³ Three months later, in April 1959, Kaiser Aluminum announced its intention to donate all or part of the 66 acres, in installments, to the NPS. The firm said that it was able to make this offer

because it had recently obtained an option from the Southern Railway System to purchase 30 acres adjacent to its 273-acre plant property. It assured the government that the 66-acre tract sought by the NPS "will not be used for industrial purposes by this company." The size and timing of future donations to the NPS were left vague. Kaiser wrote of its "hope to donate at least part of the tract later this year or next year, with the balance to be donated from time to time in the future."⁶⁴

Kaiser's desire to let go of the property in yearly installments was dictated by its desire to gain the most favorable tax treatment of the donated property. It is unclear whether the newly acquired option on other property was a real determinant in Kaiser's decision or merely a face-saving gesture designed to make the company's seven years of hesitation seem more justifiable.

Undoubtedly, changing conditions in the aluminum industry played the greatest role in Kaiser's decision to make the gift. By 1959 the industry had substantially expanded and was able to easily meet both civilian and defense demand. After being denied favorable tax treatment for a rolling mill close to Chalmette in 1952, Kaiser seems increasingly to have looked to other parts of the country as locations for fabricating facilities. In March 1953 Kaiser secured favorable tax treatment for a plate and sheet mill in Mentor, Kentucky. As early as 1951 the firm had secured an option on a 2,600-acre tract on the Ohio River at Ravenswood, West Virginia. Kaiser exercised that option in 1954 and built a huge sheet and rolling mill there. One reason given for the choice to build at Ravenswood was its proximity to eastern and midwestern markets for secondary products. By 1959, it seems clear that a site as small as the 66 acres at Chalmette, separated as it was from the reduction plant by the national cemetery, was of little practical value to Kaiser. The staged donation by Kaiser of the Chalmette acreage would cause considerable heartburn for NPS managers as they rushed to complete the tour road in time for the

61 "Kaiser Corp. Will Not Sell or Donate 66 Acres for Enlargement of Park," *St. Bernard Voice*, August 9, 1957; "Meeting of National Park Service and Kaiser Officials Is 'Disappointing,'" *St. Bernard Voice*, November 1, 1957; SMR, November 1957.

62 Director, NPS, to Secretary of the Interior, February 21, 1958, approved by the Secretary, March 20, 1958, Box 1, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-68-A-636, RG 79, NARA M-A.

63 Acting Director, NPS, to Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Public Land Management, March 4, 1959, Region 1 Files, RG 79, NARA M-A.

64 Chad F. Calhoun, Vice President, KACC, to Director, NPS, April 8, 1959, Box 1, Records of the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission, RG 79, NARA II.

1965 sesquicentennial of the Battle of New Orleans (see chapter 5).⁶⁵

Having finally secured the Kaiser land, or at least its promised donation, the NPS faced one final obstacle to completing its development plans: the village of Fazendeville. Over the years, Chalmette superintendents had complicated relations with Fazendeville residents, many of whom had been employed at the national cemetery. Lawrence Page, born in Fazendeville in 1922, began working at the cemetery in 1937 for 25 cents an hour, using a sickle to cut grass and weeds. Page received his 30-year pin in September 1967 and retired as maintenance foreman in June 1973. In early 1951, Superintendent Russell Gibbs reported two “gambling joints” operating in Fazendeville. Lyle Linch, superintendent from July 1954 to September 1964, attempted to regulate pecan picking on the grounds of the park. He issued pecan-picking permits, cost-free, many of them to Fazendeville residents. In early 1955, Linch floated the idea of sponsoring an all-black Boy Scout troop in the village, although nothing seems to have come of this. Fazendeville residents were occasionally a source of annoyance to Linch, as indicated in the following two examples from his monthly reports: “A gang of little colored possum hunters attempted to smoke out their quarry and succeeded in burning down the old hollow Huckleberry”; “Two 6 year old negro Fazendeville [sic] panhandlers were caught twice during the month begging nickels from visitors.”⁶⁶

65 Kaiser Washington Report, March 6, 1953, Henry J. Kaiser Papers, folder 57.26, BL; Mark S. Foster, *Henry J. Kaiser: Builder in the Modern American West* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 206.

66 SMR, February 1951, February and October 1955, October 1958; Superintendent Arthur Hehr to file, September 28, 1967, JELA HQ files; SAR, 1973.



Figure 4-12. Fazendeville residents picking pecans. (JELA)

Despite the 80-year history of the Fazendeville community, NPS managers from the start believed that it would have to be obliterated in order to provide a meaningful visitor experience of the historic scene at Chalmette. As early as 1939, an editorial in the *St. Bernard Voice* saw the ultimate elimination of Fazendeville as inevitable and speculated on where its residents would end up. In 1944, the NPS Region One office asked for estimated valuations on the Fazendeville properties in the expectation that the state might purchase them. The willingness to displace residents in the interest of the greater good was widespread among NPS and other government planners in the middle decades of the 20th century. In the 1930s and 1940s the NPS removed nearly 2,500 inhabitants to create a 500,000-acre natural park in the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina. The forced removal of the Fazendeville residents came at a time when governments and opinion leaders in the U.S. believed that the greater good would be served by eliminating “slums” and redeveloping urban areas. In the 1950s and 1960s, hundreds of thousands of mostly working-class families, many of them minorities, were displaced in cities across America as part of urban renewal schemes. Not surprisingly, poor and working-class people with little access to the levers of power, like the Fazendeville residents, were easier to evict than wealthy people or large industries.⁶⁷

The enactment of Senate Joint Resolution 60 as Public Law 87-759 on October 9, 1962, gave the federal government authority to use appropriated funds to acquire all the properties in the Fazendeville village.⁶⁸ The NPS believed that approximately \$165,000 would be needed for this purpose. The agency preferred to negotiate the

67 “Chalmette National Park To Absorb Burg,” *St. Bernard Voice*, July 22, 1939; Chalmette Custodian to RD, Region 1, September 9, 1944, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-67-A-1022, RG 79, NARA M-A. The experiences of Fazendeville’s residents were strikingly similar to those of people displaced by urban renewal projects in which whole city neighborhoods were purchased with the power of eminent domain, typically using federal funds. The cleared parcels were then turned over to private parties to develop. Often no serious attention was given to finding new homes for the displaced residents. See Richard Moe and Carter Wilkie, *Changing Places: Rebuilding Communities in the Age of Sprawl* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), 57.

68 The legislation also established the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission, as described below in chapter 5.

purchase of land that it needed, but was willing to use its power of eminent domain to forcibly evict residents if necessary. The agency planned to get appraisals from “disinterested, experienced, and reputable appraisers” and use them to arrive at a mutually agreeable purchase price with most owners. The government would resort to court-ordered valuations only if negotiations failed. Because the majority of houses in Fazendeville were small and without indoor plumbing, the NPS expected the appraisals to be modest.⁶⁹

The residents of Fazendeville who were forced to give up their homes and see their community destroyed understandably viewed the process very differently from NPS officials and local historic preservationists. Anthropologist Joyce Marie Jackson has interviewed former residents and documented their abiding attachment to the community they lost in 1964. Many residents remember Fazendeville as a peaceful, caring, and close-knit community, and some remain bitter over their loss. Some of these families had been part of the community for generations. The Cager family, evicted in the 1960s, appears in the 1870 census for Fazendeville. Census records and World War I draft registration records indicate that the Lindsey and Minor families were established in the village well before 1900. The taking of the homes in Fazendeville occurred while blacks in St. Bernard Parish were struggling to register to vote and secure a decent education for their children. A number of those displaced saw connections between these events. To them the federal government’s elimination of a longstanding black community seemed of a piece with the state government’s denial of voting rights and educational opportunities to blacks. Because of housing discrimination in St. Bernard Parish in the 1960s, it was impossible for the refugees from Fazendeville to purchase homes in the residential subdivisions near the park. Many of them ended up in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, just across the parish line. One of Fazendeville’s key

institutions, the Battle Ground Baptist Church, sold its Fazendeville building to the government and relocated to a new structure in the Lower Ninth Ward. The homes of many of its members were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. The church suffered damage but survived as a rallying point for residents trying to rebuild in the eastern sections of the city.⁷⁰

The longstanding exclusion of African Americans from formal commemorative activities at the Chalmette Battlefield made it harder for Fazendeville’s residents to view their sacrifice as a regrettable necessity for the full development of the historic site. As described below in chapter 5, black veterans had a long tradition of celebrating Memorial Day at Chalmette National Cemetery. It is also clear that, back in the 19th century, African Americans had collected relics and sold them to visitors. African Americans certainly had not been welcome as members of the Daughters of 1812 and were not on the program for the centennial observances in 1915. Organized black groups did visit the monument at least as early as the 1930s, but not as part of the January 8 observances. As late as the 1950s the NPS-organized Little Colonels group of volunteer park guides excluded African American girls. Throughout the long Jim Crow era, park managers and the major New Orleans media often overlooked the contributions of the free men of color to General Jackson’s victory in the Battle of Orleans. As described in chapter 5, the Secretary of the Interior had to intervene to achieve even token participation of African Americans on the committees that planned the celebration of the 1965 sesquicentennial of the Battle of New Orleans. Consequently, when the NPS decided to raze Fazendeville, its residents had very little sense of ownership of the commemorative tradition at Chalmette. Additionally, the NPS seemingly did a poor job of communicating its intentions. Fazendeville residents were unfamiliar with the concept of a battlefield park; for them a park was a recreational area, typically with a playground and picnic tables. They were puzzled and often angry that their community was destroyed to create what appeared to be nothing more than an open field that tourists (almost all of them white and middle-class) could drive through. Had the

69 Joint Resolution to establish the sesquicentennial commission for the celebration of the Battle of New Orleans, to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to acquire certain properties within the Chalmette National Historical Park, and for other purposes, 87th Cong., 2nd sess. (October 9, 1962); Director, NPS, to Office of the Solicitor, April 21, 1961; Assistant Director Donald E. Lee to Senator Russell B. Long, October 8, 1962, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-70-A-4751, RG 79, NARA M-A.

70 Joyce Marie Jackson, “Declaration of Taking Twice: The Fazendeville Community of the Lower Ninth Ward,” *American Anthropologist* 108/4 (December 2006):765-80.

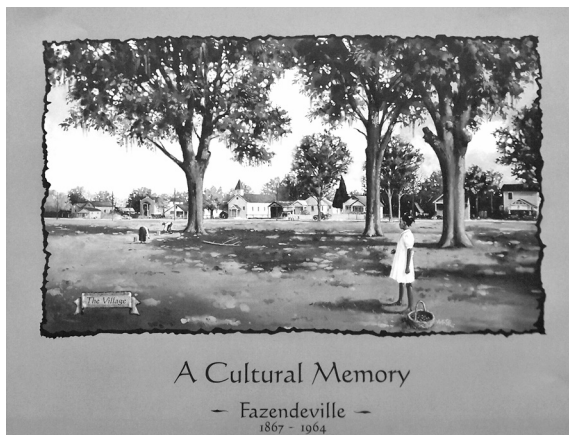


Figure 4-13. Fazendeville poster with painting by Martin Pate. (JELA)

commemorative tradition at Chalmette been more consistently biracial and had Fazendeville residents been a part of it, the taking of their community might have been more comprehensible.⁷¹

Several factors complicated the acquisition of the Fazendeville properties. As mentioned above, the takings came at a time when St. Bernard African Americans were fighting for their civil rights. Some residents believed that the obliteration of their community was government retaliation for their newfound assertiveness. Many Fazendeville properties were held by large numbers of heirs. Once appraisals had been made, multiple owners had to be located and titles verified. Because this process took a widely varying amount of time for different properties, some owners received settlement offers far in advance of others, leading to accusations of preferential treatment.

One letter from Martha Robinson, a tireless New Orleans preservationist and strong supporter of the NPS's plans to develop Chalmette as a battlefield park, reveals both the anxiety of Fazendeville residents and the paternalistic attitude of elite whites toward African Americans in the early 1960s:

I have been telephoned by a man, Eugene Cager, who says his family has lived in Fazendeville for at least a hundred years. He says these people are very attached to their land there and are a community that want [sic] to hold together and not be separated. I told him he would be well-compensated for the land. ... He said, even a very good price would not bring

him enough money to enable him to get another house and he has 11 children. He said he is only one of the homeowners there who is terribly worried about the moving of Fazendeville. I told him I would try to see if we couldn't get them some special relief. ... It seems a great pity when you have a respectable group of colored people who are attached to the land and who are good citizens to have them uprooted even though we know it is essential for the making of the national park.⁷²

An indication of the difficulties of dealing with multiple owners appears in this report from Superintendent Linch about a meeting with four Lindsey heirs:

It was a two hour session in which Val Lindsey lost his temper and stalked out and the entire confab consisted of bickering, arguing and the heirs trying to shout one another. The Gibson woman insisted ... that Kaiser had stolen a portion of her land over the years and that the description of the property was wrong and that she either couldn't or wouldn't understand the ½ interest in the ten foot alleyway. ... Before Val Lindsey left the gathering, he said ... that he would rather wind up without a single penny after it was settled, than to be pushed around and offered an unfair price.⁷³

A handwritten letter from Clinton J. Minor to Regional Director Elbert Cox conveys some of the anger and frustration that he and many of the residents must have felt:

As of now I have never been contacted or informed of any action concerning my property at 576 Fazendeville Rd. ... I intend to hold Mr. Lyle K. Linch liable for any information I haven't received. As for his appraisers I don't regard them at all, for good reasons. My house is completely equipped with all utilities. It has eight rooms and two baths. The house is in good condition. ... So if I have to go to court the price of \$20,000, which I first quoted to replace

- 72 Martha Robinson to General Edwin Bres, September 28, 1962, Records of the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission, RG 79, NARA II.
- 73 Superintendent, Chalmette, to RD, SER, September 23, 1963, Box 11, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-70-A-4751, RG 79, NARA M-A.

71 Jackson, 765-80.

my property will no longer stand. The price will be much higher.⁷⁴

Appraisers went to work in Fazendeville soon after the law was enacted and reported that they were two-thirds finished by February 1963. In May, Clifford Harriman, Regional Chief of Lands, was at Chalmette conducting negotiations. Park administrative aide Paul McCormick negotiated purchase options and contracts with 41 of 44 property owners, leaving only three cases in which the sale price was decided by a judge. In February and March 1964, Superintendent Linch reported “bitter complaints” over the slow pace of settlements and payments. Condemnation suits were instituted in March 1964. A condemnation proceeding did not necessarily indicate that a price had not already been negotiated; often a condemnation suit was needed to establish a clear title to a property. When settlement checks were received, a few owners removed their houses to other properties, but many were simply razed. Fazendeville Road was closed to the public on November 25, 1964. By December, all but two houses had been moved or razed. The tour road was opened, and the Sesquicentennial had come and gone before the last houses, the Minor and Colomb residences, were razed in April 1965. Payments to Fazendeville property owners eventually amounted to \$191,667.⁷⁵

In later years, some Fazendeville residents contended that they were not adequately compensated for the loss of their homes. The average price paid for the 44 parcels was \$4,256.⁷⁶ On the other hand, some residents felt the change was for the better. Rose Drew Cager observed in 1989, “All them little raggedy houses in the Village, people were glad to get in some decent houses. I don’t know nobody that was angry.” A possible indication of dissatisfaction at the time came in two instances of vandalism to the park’s boundary fence, which Superintendent Linch attributed

to Fazendeville residents.⁷⁷ Looking back on the Fazendeville community, various former residents have pointed to its peaceful, bucolic character, but the opening of the Kaiser aluminum plant in late 1951 had seriously compromised that character. Had the NPS not acquired Fazendeville as part of the park, it is not certain that the village could have remained a viable residential community.

While the NPS was acquiring the Fazendeville properties, Kaiser Aluminum started to make good on its promises. The firm deeded the first parcel, 13 acres lying between the monument tract and Fazendeville Road, to the government on September 19, 1960. After a bit of prodding, Kaiser released a second parcel of 11 acres in August 1963. The following August brought another 10 acres. The final donation was not completed until December 1965, making it necessary for the NPS to obtain an easement from Kaiser in order to complete its loop tour road prior to the sesquicentennial festivities in January 1965.⁷⁸

Park Development in Advance of the Sesquicentennial of the Battle of New Orleans

NPS plans for Chalmette had to remain provisional until the agency was assured that the Kaiser and Fazendeville acreage would be made available for completing the park. From the mid-1940s, NPS planning had centered on the creation of a tour road that would take visitors to the major American and British positions. This plan was refined and amended throughout the 1950s. Understandably, the NPS was not interested in piecemeal development of the park, and final decisions on the route of the tour road were not made until 1964. With the advent of the Mission 66 program, approved by the Eisenhower Administration in 1956, additional funding became available, and the park’s development plan was

74 Clinton J. Minor to RD Elbert Cox, May 4, 1964, Box 11, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-70-A-4751, RG 79, NARA M-A.

75 Norton L. Wisdom, U.S. Attorney’s Office, to Superintendent Linch, August 13, 1964; Superintendent Courtland T. Reid to RD, Region 1, November 23, 1964, Box 11, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-70-A-4751, RG 79, NARA M-A.

76 The median value of a house in the state of Louisiana in 1960 was reported to be \$10,700.

77 “Community Lost Its Life on Chalmette Battlefield,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 1, 1989; the Cager quotation is in Jackson, 771; SMR, March 1964.

78 “Kaiser Gives Tract to U.S.,” *New York Times*, September 20, 1960; “Kaiser Corporation Donates Land to Interior Department for Chalmette National Historical Park in Louisiana,” Department of Interior press release, August 8, 1963; Robert L. Maier, KACC, to Donald Lee, NPS, August 10, 1964, Box 11, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-70-A-4751, RG 79, NARA M-A; SMR, October 1964 and December 1965.

expanded. Mission 66 was a comprehensive effort to update and replace park facilities in time for the 50th anniversary of the Service in 1966. The national parks were doubly stressed in the 1950s: the NPS had yet to make up for the lost years of World War II, and the postwar economic boom brought millions more visitors to the parks. Mission 66 funded hundreds of projects that added roads, utility systems, residences, and visitor centers to the National Park System.⁷⁹

The first phase of major development at Chalmette came after the addition of the 36 acres purchased by the state from the Southern Railway in the late 1940s. This tract contained the Malus-Beauregard House and a railroad section man's house, generally referred to as the Bonner House. In the mid-1940s there had been a debate within the NPS over the fate of the Malus-Beauregard House. The general development plan for Chalmette approved by NPS Director Newton Drury in March 1945 had marked the house as a feature to be eliminated. On the other hand, historian Roy Appleman and others argued that it had architectural and historical significance and should be converted for use as a museum and administrative offices. Regional Director Thomas J. Allen believed that the presence of a circa-1833 house made interpretation of the 1814-1815 events difficult and that a modern, purpose-built museum building would be more efficient and less costly to maintain. Director Drury decided in October 1946 that the house would be preserved. Two major misconceptions clouded the debate. First, local tradition held that the house was a plantation house, allowing some to contend that it could serve as a stand-in for the missing houses, such as the Marcarté and Chalmet plantation houses, that figured in the battle events. Locals also asserted that James Gallier Sr., a prominent New Orleans architect, had designed the house. Subsequent research demonstrated that the house was built and used as a suburban retreat, not a plantation residence, and almost certainly was not designed by Gallier. There is a possibility that his son, James Gallier Jr. had a hand in the



Figure 4-14. Malus-Beauregard House and Bonner House, early 1950s. (JELA)

1850s remodeling, but no documentation has been found to support this claim.⁸⁰

A Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) project had documented the Malus-Beauregard House in 1935, and locals held it in high regard. These factors also contributed to the NPS's decision to retain the house, and it opened as the park museum and main visitor contact point in May 1958. This allowed the park at last to raze the old caretaker's house near the monument, which had served as a temporary museum. (A more complete treatment of the conversion of the Malus-Beauregard House is provided in chapter 5.) Mrs. Bonner, widow of the last railroad employee to occupy the section man's house, was allowed to stay in her home for a while; the park completed the removal of the house in February 1955.⁸¹ In 1957 and 1958 the NPS expanded the parking area south of the monument, constructed a comfort station between the monument and the Malus-Beauregard House, and built a utility building and paved utility court at the cemetery. The comfort station (now replaced) had brick walls and a low-pitched gabled roof. The brick-walled utility

79 Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 181-84.

80 Roy E. Appleman to RD, Region 1, September 10, 1946; RD, Region 1, to Director, September 11, 1946; Assistant RD Cox to RD, May 10, 1951, Box 1917, RG 79, NARA II. Talbot Hamlin, in his ground-breaking work *Greek Revival Architecture in America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), attributed the house to Gallier; however, when asked by the NPS for his source for the attribution, Hamlin could recall only verbal reports provided to him in New Orleans. Talbot F. Hamlin to Elbert Cox, January 11, 1951, Box 106, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-67-A-1022, RG 79, NARA M-A.

81 Historic American Buildings Survey LA-18-7, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/collections/habs_haer; SMR, February 1955, April and May, 1958.

building has two open sides and, at this writing, remains in the utility court at the cemetery.⁸²

The key element in the park's development was the tour road. The original plan for the tour road had it running between the Malus-Beauregard House and the river. Members of the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission objected to this alignment, believing it would "entirely destroy the Dixie aura" of the house. They felt strongly enough about it to have Senator Russell Long telephone the NPS director, and the route was altered. Park superintendents, meanwhile, had long complained of the inefficiency and danger involved in having to use the St. Bernard Highway to travel from the monument area to the national cemetery. The park's 1950s plans called for a utility road to depart from the northeast section of the tour road, extending through a breach to be made in the brick cemetery wall and connecting to the utility court at the cemetery. Plans also called for one or two employee residences to be constructed on the spur road. When the NPS bowed to General Bres's request to reconstruct all of Line Jackson, additional funding had to be found. (The saga of the reconstructed rampart is covered in chapter 5.) The NPS deferred construction of the employee residences and shifted the funds to the completion

of the tour road and the reconstructed rampart. The residences were never constructed (see figure 5-3).⁸³

As the January 1965 sesquicentennial approached, the NPS had to scramble to finish the tour road and related wayside exhibits. General Bres wrote to Regional Director Cox in April 1964, complaining of delays in the construction program and sending copies of the letter to his senators and Congressman Hale Boggs. A conference among NPS Washington officials and Capitol Hill staffers resulted in an NPS decision to reprogram \$250,000 from other projects to the Chalmette effort. Even so, the contract for constructing the tour road was not awarded until September 10, 1964, and the work was finished just before the end of the year, at a cost of \$104,000.⁸⁴

With the opening of the tour road, Chalmette National Historical Park was essentially completed, after six decades of effort. The contribution of the tour road to the development of interpretation at Chalmette is covered in the next chapter.

82 The parking area and related walks cost \$28,529.40; the comfort station, \$6,936.85; the equipment storage building, \$5,917.84; and the paving of the utility court, \$3,211.00. Contracts 14-10-131-260, 14-10-131-295, and 14-10-131-679, JELA FM files, Box 40, NPS Office of Design and Construction, Accession 79-68-A-636, RG 79, NARA M-A.

83 R.H. Morvant, Sesquicentennial Commission, to R. E. Hunter of Senator Long's Office, May 26, 1964; Superintendent Linch to Director, NPS, June 6, 1964; J. E. N. Jensen, Assistant Director, NPS, to Senator Ellender, June 25, 1964; Assistant RD, SE Region, to Director, NPS, September 21, 1964, Records of the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission, RG 79, NARA II.

84 General Bres to RD Cox, April 27, 1964; Superintendent Linch to Brignac and Burns Construction Company, September 10, 1964, JELA archives; SMR, December 1964.

Interpretation, Commemoration, and Resource Management at Chalmette

Interpretation

For years the delay in acquiring the area between the monument and the national cemetery limited interpretive efforts at Chalmette National Historical Park. As indicated above, the NPS's goal from early on was to establish a tour road on the battlefield with appropriate wayside interpretive panels. Although road construction would significantly disturb the historic battleground, this was the time-honored approach of the NPS at battlefields. Until the tour road was finished in late 1964, interpretation at the park largely consisted of markers along the site of Line Jackson and the distribution of park brochures. The park's museum started in temporary quarters in the former monument caretaker's house in early 1956, moved to the Malus-Beauregard House in 1958, and finally occupied a purpose-built museum and visitor center in 1986. Beginning in spring 1953, the park had a historian on staff who was available to give tours to groups and special visitors. Superintendent Lyle Linch in the 1950s established the Little Colonels Club, one of the first formally organized volunteer programs in the National Park System.

Another complicating factor in NPS interpretation at Chalmette was faulty information about how much of the battlefield had been lost to the river. Until 1984, the NPS labored under the misconception that about 800 feet of the battlefield, including the positions of American batteries 1, 2 and 3, had been lost. When archeological investigations proved the loss to be much less, the park revised its interpretive program accordingly. The work of historian Betsy Swanson and archeologist Ted Birkedal, which has considerably advanced the understanding of the battleground, is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

During his March 1938 inspection of Chalmette, NPS Historian Roy Appleman found four painted metal signs along the site of Line Jackson, which he described as "old, dilapidated . . . and scarcely readable." The signs seemed to have been mounted before the War Department took responsibility for the site in 1930 and marked the presumed positions of batteries 3, 4, and 5 and the Rodriguez Canal. The information on these signs, the plaque in the observation room of the monument, and the small Spotts Monument were all that was available to help visitors understand the significance of the Chalmette Battlefield. Appleman recommended (1) the installation of new interpretive markers, (2) development of literature to be provided to visitors, and (3) the erection of a temporary visitor contact station. He was also the first of many observers to suggest that an overlook be created at the river, citing the importance of the river to the battle action.¹

The NPS implemented most of Appleman's recommendations over the course of the next several years. Vicksburg National Military Park fabricated nine wooden interpretive signs that were placed at Chalmette in summer 1941. The NPS produced a 16-page booklet on the Battle of New Orleans and its importance. Printed in November 1942, the booklet sold for ten cents. The director of the Louisiana State Museum found a few errors in the publication, and the NPS revised it in 1944. Custodian Olaf T. Hagen seized the initiative and had two color postcards of the battlefield made in 1945, the first to be offered for sale at the site. At

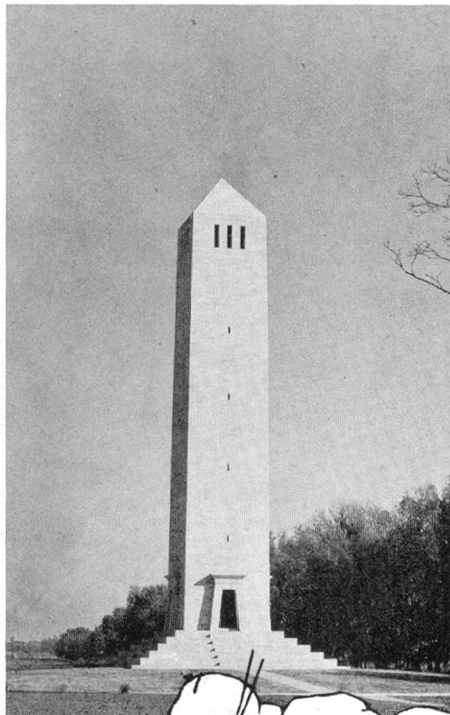
1 Roy E. Appleman, "Chalmette National Battlefield Site: Inspection Report and Recommendations," April 13, 1938, JELA archives; Caretaker Godwin to Director, August 11, 1934, Box 1916, Central Classified Files, RG 79, NARA II.

CHALMETTE

National
Historical
Park



LOUISIANA



COMMEMORATING THE
BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS

Figure 5-1. Chalmette brochure cover, circa 1950. (JELA)

some point the NPS prepared a standard two-fold free brochure for Chalmette. This item went through several revisions until it was replaced in 1968 by the new minifold format, which featured a sanserif font and a solid blue front page. A new, full-color brochure in the NPS unigrid format became available in November 1983.²

Further interpretive advances other than the development of publications did not occur until the 1950s. Until that decade, most visitors at Chalmette did not benefit from any kind of personal services. Custodian Clarence Johnson estimated that in 1948 only about 5 percent of visitors (2,700 out of 51,933) had a personal contact. When possible, the park custodian tried to be present on Sundays to open the monument to visitors and answer questions, but during the week visitors were largely on their own. Unless they made their way to park headquarters in the superintendent's lodge at the national cemetery, they had only the markers to guide them. In January 1951, the park erected an outdoor kiosk and registration desk with a small vitrine for notices and exhibits at the monument area. With this addition the park could offer the free folder at the monument and direct visitors to the cemetery lodge to purchase the 16-page booklet.³

Vicksburg Historian Francis F. Wilshin was detailed to Chalmette in early 1951 to research the Malus-Beauregard House and to evaluate the park's marker program. Wilshin's report, released in April 1951, pointed out various deficiencies, among them the frequent need for repainting the wooden markers, the lack of maps on markers, and the need for more markers to tell the broader story of the battle rather than just mark troop positions. He recommended the use of cast aluminum for

markers and suggested that four of them include maps. The park installed three aluminum markers in October 1953, six more in July 1955, and one for the Malus-Beauregard House in 1957.⁴

Soon after the 1939 establishment of Chalmette National Historical Park, the Daughters of 1812 began requesting that a plaque be placed on the obelisk exterior, recognizing the organization's role in completing and caring for the monument. World War II delayed the consideration of this request, but in 1947 NPS Acting Director Hilary Tolson approved the text for a plaque, which was unveiled in a ceremony on October 19, 1947. The Daughters thus gained the public recognition at the site that they had been denied by the Commission on Fine Arts in 1915.⁵

The plaque is inscribed:

CHALMETTE MONUMENT

THIS MONUMENT WAS ERECTED BY THE STATE OF LOUISIANA AND THE UNITED STATES TO COMMEMORATE THE MEMORABLE VICTORY WON HERE BY GENERAL ANDREW JACKSON AND THE MEN UNDER HIS COMMAND IN THE BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS, JANUARY 8, 1815. THE CORNERSTONE WAS LAID ON JANUARY 8, 1840. CONSTRUCTION OF THE MONUMENT BEGAN IN 1855 AND WAS CARRIED TO A HEIGHT OF 55 FEET WITH FUNDS PROVIDED BY THE STATE OF LOUISIANA. IN 1908 THE MONUMENT WAS COMPLETED WITH FUNDS PROVIDED BY CONGRESS.

IN 1894 THE STATE PLACED THE MONUMENT AND GROUNDS UNDER THE CUSTODY OF THE UNITED STATES DAUGHTERS OF 1776-1812, WHO CARED FOR THE AREA UNTIL 1929 WHEN THE WAR DEPARTMENT ASSUMED

- 2 James R. McConaghie, Superintendent, Vicksburg NMP, to Julie H. Haycraff, July 8, 1941, JELA archives; SMR, November 1942; M. Madeleine M'Grath, Chief, Editorial Section, Office of Information, to Superintendent, Vicksburg NMP, November 9, 1942; Stanley Arthur, Louisiana State Museum, to Secretary of the Interior Ickes, January 14, 1943; Superintendent, CHAL, to Director, NPS, January 15, 1945. Boxes 1917 and 1918, Central Classified Files, RG 79, NARA II; Information and Interpretive Services Annual Narrative, February 24, 1969; "New Publication Available at Chalmette Battlefield," November 7, 1983, JELA HQ files.
- 3 SMR, January 1951; SAR, 1948; Park Historian Roush to RD, Region 1, January 12, 1955, Box 1196, Administrative Files, RG 79, NARA II.

- 4 Francis J. Wilshin, "An Evaluation of the Marker Program of Chalmette National Historical Park, Louisiana, with Recommendations for Revisions," April 18, 1951, RG 79, NARA M-A; SMR, July 1955 and June 1957.
- 5 Mrs. F. H. (Daisy) Chisholm, President, Chalmette Chapter, USD, to NPS Director, October 18, 1937; Acting Director Tolson to RD, Region 1, April 9, 1947, boxes 1916, 1919, Central Classified Files, RG 79, NARA II.

RESPONSIBILITY. THE UNITED STATES DAUGHTERS OF 1776-1812 THUS HAD CONTINUOUS CUSTODY OF THE MONUMENT AND GROUNDS FOR 35 YEARS, ENCOMPASSING PERIODS OF BOTH STATE AND FEDERAL OWNERSHIP, THE STATE HAVING CEDED TITLE TO THE UNITED STATES IN 1902.

IN 1933 THE MONUMENT AND GROUNDS WERE TRANSFERRED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, AND ON AUGUST 10, 1939, CHALMETTE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK WAS ESTABLISHED.

THIS PLAQUE PLACED BY THE CHALMETTE CHAPTER UNITED STATES DAUGHTERS OF 1812 OCTOBER 19TH 1947.⁶

The park was finally able to hire a historian, J. Fred Roush, in March 1953, taking some of the interpretive burden from the superintendent. Roush devoted much of his time to contacting visitors, but he also began a historical research program and soon was at work on a park handbook. Roush left the park in April 1956, and the handbook was finally released in January 1959 as number 29 in the NPS handbook series, priced at 25 cents.⁷

The Malus-Beauregard House

As early as 1938, Coordinating Superintendent J. Walter Coleman suggested adapting the Malus-Beauregard House as a museum and administrative building. Chalmette Custodian Clarence Johnson repeated the suggestion in 1944. In the early 1950s, it became apparent that the Southern Railway was not willing to donate or sell the parcel west of the monument, which the NPS long had viewed as ideal for an administrative area. This obstacle made the Malus-Beauregard House an almost inevitable



Figure 5-2. Malus-Beauregard House in 1934, before restoration. (HABS)

choice as the main visitor contact point once the state donated it to the NPS. NPS Director Demaray in June 1951 confirmed the decision to restore the exterior of the house to its period appearance and adaptively reuse the interior as a museum and park offices.⁸ Few of the original interior finishes remained, so an accurate restoration of the interior was not feasible in any case. By the time the NPS received the house in 1950, the brick addition on the west had collapsed. Park managers had the rubble cleared away and also removed the circa-1905 frame wing on the east, sealed the house against the weather, repaired exterior woodwork, painted the house, and replaced the slate roof. Funds to remodel the interior became available in 1956-1957.⁹

While the work of rehabilitating the Malus-Beauregard House was underway, in early 1956, the park opened a temporary museum in the old caretaker's cottage near the monument. The museum consisted of an exhibit room and a lecture room, the latter with 40 folding chairs supplied by Kings Mountain National Military Park. The highlight of the exhibits was an electric map of the 1814-1815 New Orleans campaign fabricated by the NPS museum laboratory. The museum also held a few artifacts (mostly cannonballs), racks for

6 The text has been transcribed exactly as it appears on the plaque and reflects the Daughters' understanding of the site's history in 1947. As mentioned in chapter 2, no evidence of a monument cornerstone has been found.

7 SMR, March 1953 and April 1956; "New National Park Service Booklet Describes United States Victory over British in Historic Battle of New Orleans," press release, January 25, 1959, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-66-A-661, RG 79, NARA M-A.

8 The NPS seems not to have been fully aware at this period that the 1850s remodeling of the house had substantially altered its original exterior appearance. It is not clear whether the NPS decided on a period of significance for this initial restoration.

9 J. Walter Coleman to RD, Region 1, August 8, 1938; Custodian Clarence Johnson to RD, Region 1, November 16, 1944; Charles Peterson to Chief, EODC, April 11, 1956, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-67-A-1022, RG 79, NARA M-A.

brochures on NPS and Louisiana park areas, and an office for the park historian.¹⁰

Between 1956 and 1958, the NPS expended more than \$90,000 to restore the exterior of the Malus-Beauregard House and convert the second floor to an exhibit area. Another \$24,000 went for exhibit cases and museum furniture. The NPS was fortunate in retaining noted New Orleans architect and preservationist Samuel Wilson Jr. to oversee the work. A marble floor and a visitor contact desk were installed on the first floor. On the second floor, the original three-room configuration of the house was changed by the removal of an interior wall to make two rooms into one on the east side. In March 1958, park staff moved the electric map into the second-floor west room, and installed seven new exhibit cases. The superintendent moved his office from the cemetery lodge to the first floor of the remodeled house. The park organized a reception for the opening of the new visitor center on May 18, 1958, featuring an address by NPS Chief of Interpretation Ronald Lee. The event attracted considerable publicity, and the facility logged 7,000 visitors in its first week of operations. The park's new comfort station, located south of the monument, was functional in time for the opening. The new museum in the Malus-Beauregard House permitted the park to demolish the caretaker's cottage erected by the United States Daughters of 1812 in the early years of the 20th century.¹¹

In April 1986 a new visitor center opened at Chalmette, ending a 28-year period during which the Malus-Beauregard House fulfilled that function. Between 1993 and 1995, the NPS undertook a restoration of the house. In the 1950s restoration no clear decision had been made as to the period of significance. By the 1990s, the NPS had established that the house had been remodeled in the Greek Revival style in the 1850s. Evidence for the house's appearance before that remodeling was limited, and the NPS decided that

no attempt should be made to match the original appearance; rather, the restoration would be to the house's 1856-1866 appearance. The 1990s restoration reversed many of the alterations that had been made in the 1950s to convert the house to a museum and visitor center. The original three-room floor plan on the second story was reestablished, and interior mantels, window frames, and other woodwork replicating the 1850s finishes were installed. From time to time since then, NPS staff members have discussed putting period furnishings in the house and interpreting it as a 19th-century suburban retreat. The lack of any documentation on how the house was furnished in the historic period and the cost of obtaining furnishings have prevented this.¹²

Reconstructing Line Jackson

The loss of all the battle-era plantation houses in the vicinity and the presence of surrounding industrial development made it difficult to convey to visitors the conditions that prevailed in January 1815. The Rodriguez Canal survived, but Line Jackson had long ago eroded away. The question of the feasibility and desirability of reconstructing all or some portion of the mud rampart at Line Jackson preoccupied NPS planners in the 1950s and early 1960s. Superintendent Linch believed that the inconsistencies in the period descriptions of the rampart made an accurate reproduction impossible. He therefore gained approval to reconstruct a small portion of the rampart as an interpretive aid, using sediment from the Mississippi River (known as batture). Park staff built a 100-foot section between 1955 and 1957, working on the project as their other duties permitted. The rampart was extended to a length of 400 feet and seeded with grass in 1958.¹³

Long-time park advocate General Edward S. Bres, who was named chair of the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission in 1963, was adamant in believing that as much of the length of the rampart as possible should be reconstructed. Bres was quite impressed with the reconstructed earthworks on the field of

10 SMR, January 1956; Regional Historian James W. Holland to Chief of Interpretation, Region 1, March 30, 1956, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-62-A-305, RG 79, NARA M-A.

11 SMR, September 1956, November 1957, and May 1958; Superintendent Linch to RD, Region 1, January 30, 1960; "Chalmette Museum Floorplan," November 19, 1956, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-68-A-2955, RG 79, NARA M-A.

12 SAR, 1986, 1994, and 1995; "Beauregard House Renovation Reveals Historic Treasures," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, May 15, 1994.

13 Superintendent Linch to RD, Region 1, May 30, 1959, Box 14, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-68-A-2955, RG 79, NARA M-A.

Yorktown at Colonial National Historical Park and wanted something comparable at Chalmette. He thus began exerting his influence to achieve what he considered a suitable reconstruction. After much correspondence and the intervention of Louisiana's two senators, the NPS agreed to reconstruct some 1,200 feet of the rampart. There was considerable discussion over the use of cotton bales in Line Jackson. Bres and NPS historians agreed that bales had been used at the embrasures (gaps in the rampart to accommodate cannons). Bres at first insisted that the American batteries were mounted on platforms made of bales, but he was apparently relying on a faulty English translation of a German account.¹⁴ The Service expended \$7,000 on 200 replica bales made of concrete for the embrasures. Reconstructing the rampart cost an additional \$74,000, and the purchase of four replica cannon tubes and eight cannon carriages ran to \$17,662. General Bres interested himself in every detail of the reconstruction, to the point of giving his advice on how large the links in the chains holding down the cotton bales should be. The reconstructed rampart was approximately five feet high. Fences of cypress planks (palings) held the dirt in place. The last 100 feet of the line, on the north, consisted of a log revetment (parallel rows of logs held in place with stakes). Superintendent Linch believed that the reconstructed line was far more elaborate and uniform than what the Americans could have thrown up in the course of a couple of weeks of intermittent labor. His parting comment was that although the rampart "would no doubt shock sincere historians and Andy Jackson . . . it should have considerable appeal for non-discerning and non-critical visitors." Today, historians know that Line Jackson was laid out by a French-trained engineer and was considerably higher than the 1960s reproduction. In September 1965, Hurricane Betsy scattered or destroyed the replica cotton

bales; they were not replaced when the rampart was repaired.¹⁵

The Tour Road

The completion of the loop tour road in late 1964 and the reconstruction of a large portion of Line Jackson allowed the NPS to interpret adequately for the first time the historic scene of the Battle of New Orleans. As the park's interpretive prospectus for the road stated, "The tour road will provide visual access to all significant parts of the battlefield that are still remaining. . . . The route of the principal [British] attack column as well as the reconstructed Mud Rampart . . . will all be visible from some part of the tour road." The tour road was one-way and began at the parking area just south of the monument. The ideal visitor experience consisted of (1) a turn off the St. Bernard Highway onto the park entrance drive, with a view of the Chalmette Monument straight ahead; (2) stops at two pullouts with interpretive markers along reconstructed Line Jackson; (3) parking the car south of the monument for a visit to the museum in the Malus-Beauregard House; and (4) stops at four pullouts with markers along the tour loop road.¹⁶ The six interpretive stops were as follows:

- Stop 1 (on entrance drive): Marker indicating location of batteries 7 and 8 and route of British advance in relation to them. Eight parking spots.
- Stop 2 (entrance drive just north of monument circle): Marker indicating location of batteries 5 and 6 and their relationship to British advance. Interpretation of mud rampart. Six parking spots.
- Stop 3 (east of Malus-Beauregard House): Marker describing the battle on the west bank

14 The text in question was Vincent Nolte's *Fünzig Jahre in beiden hemisphären. Reminiscenzen aus dem leben eines ehemaligen kaufmannes* [Fifty Years in Both Hemispheres] (Hamburg, Germany: Perthes-Besser & Mauke, 1853). Nolte was a German businessman living in New Orleans in 1814–1815.

15 Acting RD, SER, to General Bres, December 2, 1963; General Bres to RD, SER, March 25, 1964, Records of the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission, RG 79, NARA II; Harold L. Peterson, Staff Historian, to Donald S. Nutt, EODC, undated; Contract 14-10-0131-1304, awarded to Daniel I. Hadley, June 29, 1964; Completion Report, Construct Mud Rampart, February 17, 1965, SER Files, Accession 79-70-A-4751, RG 79, NARA M-A; SMR, July 1964.

16 "Interpretive Prospectus for Tour Road in Chalmette National Historical Park," approved February 15, 1962, JELA archives; "Tour Road and Related Work/ Headquarters Area/Chalmette NHP," drawing 3020-B, January 1, 1965.

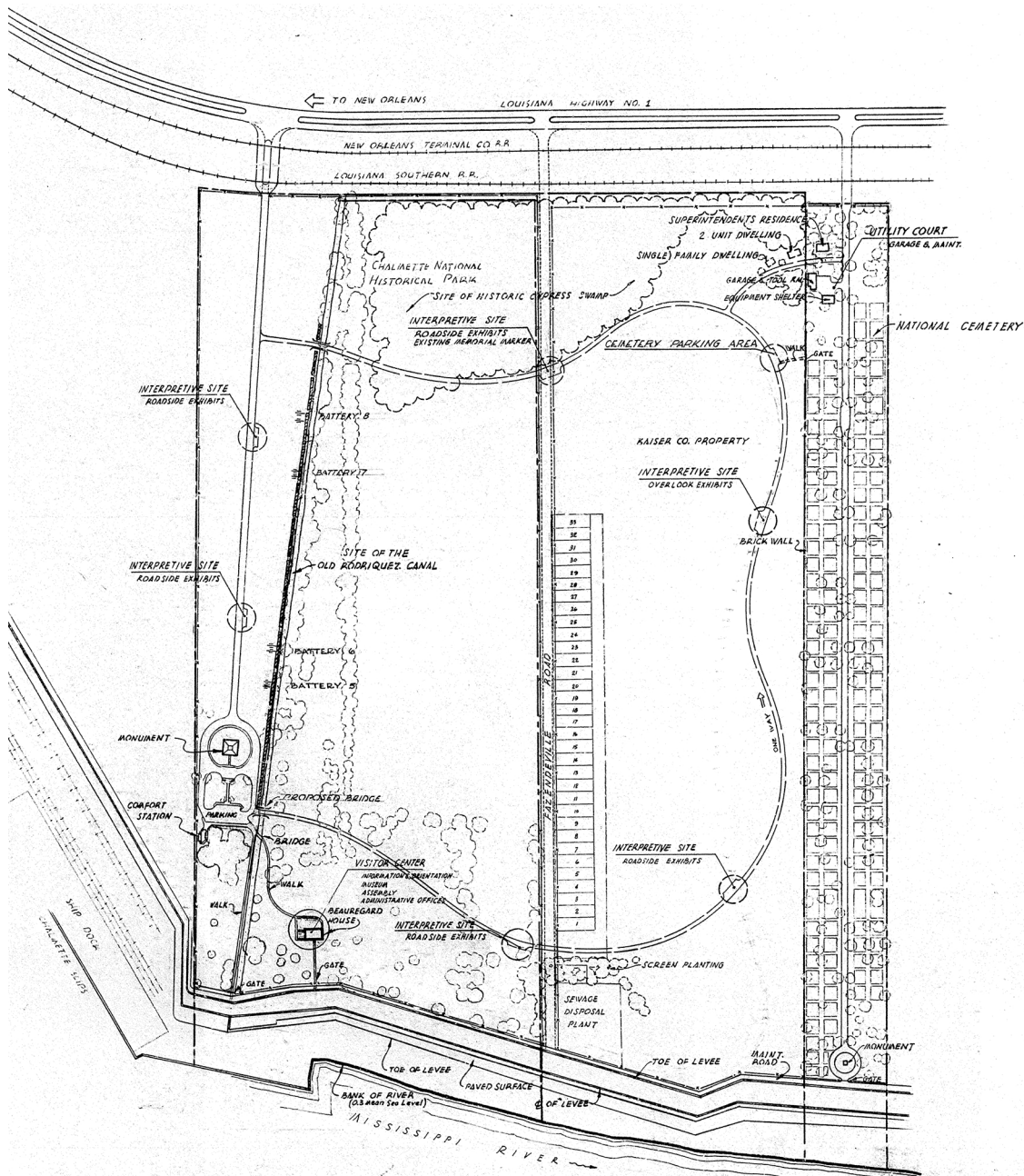


Figure 5-3. Planned route of Chalmette tour road, showing Chalmette Slip and Fazendeville. (NPS TIC)

and traverse movement of 93rd Highlanders. Ten parking spots.

- Stop 4 (southeast portion of field near cemetery wall): Marker discussing British use of artillery on January 1 and January 8. Six parking spots.
- Stop 5 (northeast portion of field): Marker with map on an overlook elevated 3 to 5 feet above grade, providing view of field and Line Jackson. Marker to include list of British units involved. Ten parking spots.
- Stop 6 (northwest portion of field): Marker describing cypress swamp and wounding

and death of General Pakenham. Six parking spots.¹⁷

The tour road crossed the site of Line Jackson in two places, thus potentially disturbing the archeological remains of the original earthwork and Rodriguez Canal. This road construction occurred before the passage of the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act, which mandated a review process for development projects that affected historic or prehistoric resources.

17 "Interpretive Prospectus"; drawing 3020-B.

Superintendent Lyle K. Linch's Interpretive and Public Relations Initiatives, 1954-1964

When Lyle Linch arrived as the new Chalmette superintendent from Pipestone National Monument in Minnesota in July 1954, he was disturbed by the lack of development at the park and what he perceived as local indifference. Linch soon implemented a number of novel ideas. In February 1955 he began an occasional column called "Acorns" in the weekly *St. Bernard Voice*. Linch used the column to communicate news about his park and invite the public to visit. From time to time he also included news on his family and his vacation trips. The column continued throughout Linch's ten years as superintendent.¹⁸

Another Linch innovation was the Little Colonels Club. To supplement his small staff, the

superintendent in January 1959 began recruiting high-school girls to greet visitors and give brief interpretive talks.¹⁹ The girls dressed in antebellum-style gowns of their own making. As Linch put it, "the attractive Southern Belles add a quaint charm to the old home that intrigues visitors, old and young." In the club's first year and a half, members contributed more than 3,300 volunteer hours. In later years, club members created interpretive exhibits, and each was required to prepare a research report on some aspect of the New Orleans campaign. Although the club's charter prohibited discrimination on the basis of race or national origin, there is no indication that Linch recruited African American girls from St. Bernard or Orleans Parishes. The moonlight and

19 It is probable that Linch took the club's name from the 1935 Shirley Temple film *The Little Colonel*. A romance/comedy centering on the theme of sectional reconciliation after the Civil War, the film contained a famous sequence of Temple dancing down a staircase with Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. Leonard Maltin, ed., *Leonard Maltin's Movie Guide, 2010 Edition* (New York: Signet, 2009), 812.

18 *St. Bernard Voice*, February 4, 1955.



Figure 5-4. Little Colonels in their gowns. (JELA)

magnolias aura of the club and its participation in events like the Natchez, Mississippi, Confederate Ball hardly encouraged African American girls to participate. As segregation faltered, park staff tried to recruit black members for the club, but as late as September 1974 they had not succeeded. In March 1980, after Chalmette had become a unit of Jean Lafitte, Unit Manager A. Wilson Greene stated the goal of shifting the group's focus "from decorative hostesses to park interpreters." In April he issued guidelines to the club members to help them in developing 12- to 15-minute talks featuring a stronger interpretive emphasis. Greene also reminded them of NPS standards for costumed interpretation, which meant wearing no modern wristwatches or earrings while in period costume. Some group members resigned, but gradually the park shifted the emphasis of the Little Colonels Club. The traditional name was soon dropped, and club members were invited to join a Volunteer in the Parks program.²⁰

Superintendent Linch took advantage of every opportunity to enhance the park's image. Every holiday season, he packaged some of the pecans harvested on the site and gave them to friends of the park. He cultivated the managers of the adjacent Kaiser aluminum works, and received favors from them, such as the donation of surplus plants from the firm's experimental garden. Some of Superintendent Linch's other initiatives were less successful. Although the Chalmette National Historical Park Association had been in existence since 1948, Linch attempted to form a new friends group in 1959. Linch appears to have wanted a group that could actively lobby for the park and that could coordinate the yearly anniversary celebration and other special events. The regional director saw no need for a new group and advised the superintendent to work through existing groups.²¹

During the 1950s and 1960s, superintendents permitted religious observances in the park that would later be banned by court rulings. Easter sunrise services began in the park as early as 1950 and continued well into the 1970s. Attendance was reported at about 50 people in 1950, but was in the thousands by the early 1960s.²² In 1961, Superintendent Linch began decorating the Malus-Beauregard House at Christmas, lighting a bonfire on the levee, and inviting locals to sing carols. As reported in the *Times-Picayune*, "There were candles on the levee Wednesday night—candles tightly clutched in the mittened hands of hundreds of school children who stood beneath moss-draped trees and raised their voices to sing 'Silent Night.' " Nativity scenes and the celebration of a Catholic mass were at times included in the programs. In 1974, Superintendent Hehr described the joint NPS-Chamber of Commerce evening activities at the park as meant to "offset the commercialism of the Christmas season with programs emphasizing putting 'Christ back into Christmas.' " He added that "it would appear that this activity can no longer be permitted under the three-part test" established by the Supreme Court for assessing the appropriateness of government support of religious activities. The park had already cut the program from six nights to one in 1973, because of the energy crisis. It discontinued the Christmas observances in 1976, citing inadequate staffing, which was probably a graceful way of ending a program that raised First Amendment issues.²³

In December 1993, the unit inaugurated a historically based observance of Creole Christmas at the Malus-Beauregard House. This event included decorating rooms of the house as they might have looked at different periods in the 19th

20 Memorandum of Agreement between Little Colonels Club and NPS, July 1, 1959, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-68-A-2955, RG 79, NARA M-A; SAR, 1960; SMR, February 1959, March 1962; Superintendent, CHAL, to RD, SWR, September 16, 1974; Management Goals, FY 1980, March 27, 1980; "Guidelines for Interpretive and Public Contact Activities," April 3, 1980, JELA HQ files.

21 SMR, October 1963; Superintendent Linch to RD, Region 1, April 1, 1959; RD, Region 1, to Superintendent Linch, June 15, 1959, Records of Region 1, Accession 79-66-A-661, RG 79, NARA M-A.

22 SMR, April 1950, March 1964.

23 "Children Sing in Candlelight," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, December 21, 1961; Superintendent Hehr to RD, SWR, February 21, 1974; SAR, 1973; Acting Superintendent Iris Coumes to Robyn Carter, July 23, 1976. The three-part test probably refers to the majority opinion in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, a 1971 U.S. Supreme Court decision that sought to establish standards for permissible state support of religious instruction or observances. Under what became known as the *Lemon* test, a government action that had the effect of supporting religion was permissible if (1) it had a secular legislative purpose, (2) it did not have as its primary effect the advancement or inhibition of religion, and (3) it did not constitute "excessive government entanglement with religion."

century, volunteers in period dress, and lighting bonfires on the levee along the Mississippi River.²⁴

Superintendent Linch worked hard for ten years to develop the Chalmette park, rehabilitate the Malus-Beauregard House, and prepare for the battle's sesquicentennial celebration in January 1965. By that date, however, he was no longer the park's superintendent. In June 1964, the regional director proposed a lateral transfer for Linch, who was approaching retirement age, to Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona. Linch emphatically rejected this offer. A month later he accepted a position as park naturalist at Lake Mead National Recreation Area, which the NPS in a press release characterized as a promotion. Courtland T. Reid, formerly assistant superintendent at Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas, took over as Chalmette superintendent in late September. Available records do not indicate the reasons for the change, but regional officials may have wanted someone else in place to greet distinguished guests during the sesquicentennial events. Regional Historian James W. Holland noted in 1956 that Linch was an indefatigable worker but also a bit erratic and lacking in "*savoir faire*." Linch's parting from the Southeast Region seems to have been acrimonious. General Bres and Martha Robinson wanted to invite Linch to attend the sesquicentennial events. When Bres suggested this possibility to Linch, "he was highly incensed and stated that under no circumstances would he return to New Orleans, and if necessary, would become violently ill" to prevent it. He may have changed his mind, however, because the *Times-Picayune* reported him as present at Chalmette on January 8, 1965.²⁵

Marking the Anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans

As indicated in previous chapters, New Orleans residents early on began marking the battle anniversary each January 8. From the mid-1850s until 1915, Jackson Square was the primary site of anniversary observances. That practice changed with the dedication of the Chalmette Monument in 1915. New Orleans advanced big plans for the battle's 100th anniversary. Louisiana congressmen attempted, without success, to get a \$250,000 federal appropriation for the centennial. Organizers had high hopes of enticing President Woodrow Wilson to the affair, but had to settle for Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Andrew J. Peters. The festivities stretched over three days, from Friday, January 8, through Sunday, January 10. Friday's highlight was the official dedication of the obelisk at Chalmette, attended by a crowd estimated at 15,000. On Saturday, the Ladies' Hermitage Association laid a wreath in Jackson Square made from evergreens growing around Old Hickory's tomb in Nashville. A pageant of young women representing each state that sent men to the Battle of New Orleans and a grand parade concluded the celebration on Sunday.²⁶

In the years following World War I, the New Orleans Chapter of the Reserve Officers Association of the United States organized the anniversary ceremonies at Chalmette. Historical Technician Stuart Cuthbertson from Vicksburg represented the NPS at the 119th anniversary

26 A Bill providing for the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans, H.R. 2475, 63rd Cong. (April 14, 1913); multiple articles in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 8 and 9, 1915, and the *New York Times*, January 8, 1915.

24 SAR, 1993; "Battlefield Visitors Turn Back the Yule Clock," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, December 15, 1996.

25 SMR, June and July 1964; "Reid New Superintendent at Chalmette NHP," NPS press release, September 18, 1964, JELA Collection, UNO; Edward S. Bres to Martha Robinson, August 28, 1964, Records of the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission, RG 79, NARA II; James W. Holland to Regional Chief of Interpretation, Region 1, March 30, 1956, Box 68, Region 1 Files, Accession 79-62-A-305, RG 79, NARA M-A; "Rededication to Peaceful Course, Progress Pledged," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 9, 1965.



Figure 5-5. Chalmette battle anniversary observance, 1938. (JELA)

in 1934, the first following the transfer from the War Department. Custodian Frank Godwin reported an attendance of approximately 2,000 on January 8, 1937. Patriotic orations, wreath laying, band concerts, and volleys from field artillery typically were part of the festivities. Prominent speakers included Louisiana State University (LSU) President James Monroe Smith²⁷ in 1939 and Assistant Secretary of War Louis H. Johnson in 1940. With America's entry into World War II in 1941, many reserve officers returned to active duty and were no longer available to organize the anniversary ceremonies. During the war and for a few years thereafter, no observances occurred at Chalmette, although small ceremonies continued at Jackson Square.²⁸

The scope of anniversary celebrations picked up gradually after the war. In January 1946, newly elected New Orleans Mayor Morrison laid a wreath at Chalmette. Park superintendents often participated in the ceremonies at Jackson Square as well as those at Chalmette Monument. More elaborate observances featuring the Society of the War of 1812 and the Sons of 1812 occurred at the park in 1953 and 1954. Superintendent Lynch was also energetic in promoting the anniversary. In January 1957, Lynch inaugurated a reenactment of the battle using local Cub and Boy Scouts; this would become an annual event. The scouts and their parents crafted simple uniforms, representing many of the units involved, including U.S. regulars, Tennessee militia, the Baratarians, and British units. These reenactments were more notable for the enthusiasm of the participants than for their authenticity, but they were very popular. As the



Figure 5-6. Craig Berthold and Rodney Williams Jr. as a British soldier and a Baratarian, 1960s. (JELA)



Figure 5-7. Young re-enactors, circa 1970. (JELA)

- 27 Governor Huey P. Long appointed Smith president of LSU in 1930, plucking him from the obscurity of Lafayette, where he was a dean at Southwest Louisiana Institute (now the University of Louisiana at Lafayette). Known by some of his students as "Jimmy the Stoooge" and "Jimmy Moron," Smith participated in the widespread looting of state funds that marked Governor Leche's administration and later was convicted of federal and state crimes. Harnett T. Kane, *Louisiana Hayride: The American Rehearsal for Dictatorship, 1928-1940* (New York: Morrow, 1941), 214-15, 313, 385.
- 28 Invitation to 119th battle anniversary, January 7, 1934, Box 1916, Central Classified Files, RG 79, NARA II; SMR, January 1937, 1939, and 1940; "Anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans Will Pass Unobserved at Chalmette Monument," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 8, 1944.

NPS refined its standards for reenactments and living history, Chalmette staff attempted to improve the quality of the annual scout extravaganza. Superintendent Robert Jacobsen noted in 1967 that "the re-enactment does not have the sanction of Park Service policy," but that there was "no immediate prospect of phasing this activity out, due to a long history which gives it, locally, that status of a right." Superintendent Arthur Hehr reported a crowd of 7,000 for the 1972 scout reenactment. Bad weather pushed the 1973 festivities back to March, and the *Times-Picayune*

reported that firecrackers used to simulate gunfire started grass fires.²⁹

The Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial

Shortly after obtaining Kaiser's commitment to donate its holdings, General Bres, Mrs. Robinson, and other park supporters began to plan for an appropriate celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans. In the words of *New Orleans States* columnist Pie Dufour:

Now that the Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corporation has promised to give 66 acres of land to the [N]ational [P]ark [S]ervice for the maximum development of Chalmette National Historical Park, it isn't a bit too early to start planning for the 150 [sic] anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans.

General Bres worked with staffers from Senator Long's office, Congressman Hébert's office, and the Washington NPS office to draft sesquicentennial legislation. Congressman Hébert introduced House Joint Resolution 261 in February 1961, and the two Louisiana senators introduced Senate Joint Resolution 60 in March. President John F. Kennedy signed the Senate resolution into law on October 9, 1962.³⁰

The law created the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission, with 23 members. Eight of these were U.S. House members appointed by the Speaker of the House, and eight were senators appointed by the President of the Senate. The Director of the NPS, Conrad Wirth, was a member and the commission's executive officer. President Kennedy had the authority to appoint six members. On February 28, 1963, he named his appointments:

Maj. Gen. Edward S. Bres (retired), New Orleans and Washington, D.C., chair

Mrs. Martha G. Robinson, New Orleans, vice chair
Mr. Robert E. LeCorgne Jr., New Orleans
Mr. Raphael H. Morvant, New Orleans
Mr. Edwin M. Roy, Arabi, Louisiana
Mr. Hugh M. Wilkinson Sr., New Orleans

These six members and Director Wirth (succeeded by George Hartzog in January 1964) constituted the executive committee of the commission. The legislation directed the commission to "cooperate with and assist such groups as the State of Louisiana and the city of New Orleans may establish to celebrate the sesquicentennial." The commission established and appointed members to a number of committees, including a budget committee and a commemorative stamp committee. In the fall of 1963, a Battle of New Orleans 150th Anniversary Committee of Louisiana was formed to assist the federal commission in raising funds for the observances, among other duties. New Orleans Mayor Victor H. Schiro appointed members to the Louisiana committee, in consultation with Martha Robinson.³¹

Among the dozens of people appointed to the various committees of the federal commission and the Louisiana committee, there were at first no African Americans. The New Orleans Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) pointed out this omission to the sesquicentennial commission in September 1964. Mrs. Robinson reported to General Bres, "I have had another letter from the NAACP, who, I am sure, are going to try to give us hell. . . . I have known from the first that we had to give them some participation in the event. The delay in making any plans, I think, has worsened the situation." The New Orleans chapter got the NAACP Washington Bureau to write to Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall. The bureau's counsel noted: "Since this is a federally sponsored activity, we feel that the Department of Interior should assent [sic] its authority to guarantee that all citizens are allowed to participate without regard to race." This letter prompted Interior to discuss

29 SMR, January 1946, January 1953, January 1954, and January 1958; Annual Report, Information and Interpretive Services, January 7, 1967; Information and Interpretive Services Annual Narrative—1972, JELA archives; "Battle of New Orleans Is Celebrated," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March 19, 1973.

30 "Now That Chalmette's Safe, Why Not Plan 150th Battle Celebration?" *New Orleans States*, April 18, 1959; Public Law 87-759 (October 9, 1962).

31 See Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission, *Final Report to the United States Congress of the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965), for a detailed account of the commission and its activities. Hereafter this will be cited as Battle of New Orleans Commission, *Final Report*.

the matter with General Bres. Mrs. Robinson then wrote to Henry Z. Carter, chair of the Louisiana committee, as follows:

Messrs. Morvant and Roy and I have agreed that it is necessary to put three outstanding Negro educators on the 150th Anniversary Committee of Louisiana. The NAACP has been after us, and this is the only way we can prevent trouble that would cause very bad publicity for New Orleans and the South.

Through Mayor Schiro, the commission added the presidents of three historically black schools—Dillard University, Grambling College, and Southern University—to the 150th Anniversary Committee of Louisiana.³² The *Louisiana Weekly* reported that three black couples attended the official banquet of the sesquicentennial commission. These undoubtedly were the university presidents and their wives.³³

The addition of three black members to the Louisiana committee came some three years after the U.S. Civil War Centennial Commission nearly foundered over racial segregation in South Carolina. As described by historian Robert J. Cook in *Troubled Commemoration*, the refusal of a Charleston hotel to accommodate a black delegate from New Jersey for the commission's fourth national assembly put that federal commission in a very bad light and came close to derailing the centennial.³⁴ Although it took some prodding, the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Committee did somewhat better.

The official theme of the sesquicentennial was "150 years of peace and cooperation between the two great English-speaking nations of the world." The

sesquicentennial commission planned an eight-day celebration, which unfolded in New Orleans and its environs on January 1-8, 1965. A halftime performance by the fife and drum corps of the Canadian Black Watch Regiment at the Sugar Bowl game kicked off the sesquicentennial festivities on Friday, January 1.³⁵ The ensuing week was filled with tours (the French Quarter, Garden District, and plantations), a military parade, and receptions on the heavy cruiser U.S.S. *Newport News* and on the H.M.S. *Whirlwind*, an antisubmarine frigate. Some 700 people attended the official banquet of the sesquicentennial commission in the Roosevelt Hotel on Thursday, January 7.³⁶

The sesquicentennial commission had high hopes for the success of a commemorative medallion as a fund-raising item. The medallions, however, did not sell well; many were given away, including one to Edgar Kaiser of Kaiser Aluminum. New Orleans sculptor Angela Gregory designed the medallion. The U.S. Post Office issued a commemorative stamp for the battle sesquicentennial. One of 17 commemorative issues that year, the five-cent stamp featured General Jackson in silhouette leading his troops and also included both faces of the commemorative medallion in its design. The government printed 120 million stamps. Postmaster General John A. Gronouski dedicated the stamp on its first day of issue, January 8, in front of a crowd of about 2,000 in Jackson Square.³⁷

35 Louisiana State University beat Syracuse, 13-10, in the football game.

36 Battle of New Orleans Commission, *Final Report*, 16, 34-53.

37 Battle of New Orleans Commission, *Final Report*, 16-19, 57-58; "Battle Stamp Is Dedicated," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 9, 1965; Harold V. Lauth to Edgar F. Kaiser, November 14, 1964, E. E. Trefethen Papers, folder 5.15, BL.

- 32 The three presidents were Dr. Albert W. Dent of Dillard, Dr. R. W. E. Jones of Grambling, and Dr. F. G. Clark of Southern.
- 33 Martha Robinson to General Bres, October 1, 1964; J. Francis Pohlhaus, NAACP Washington Bureau, to Secretary Udall, October 6, 1964; Martha G. Robinson to Henry Z. Carter, October 26, 1964; Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior George E. Robinson to J. Francis Pohlhaus, December 2, 1964, Records of the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission, RG 79, NARA II; "3 Couples Attend Battle of N'Orleans Banquet," *Louisiana Weekly*, February 16, 1965.
- 34 Robert J. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 88-119.

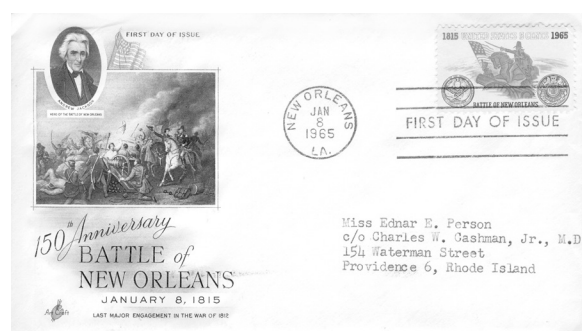


Figure 5-8. First day cover of Battle of New Orleans sesquicentennial stamp. (author's collection)

The commission arranged with the Louisiana Landmarks Society to have nine monographs published on topics related to the Battle of New Orleans. Charles “Pie” Dufour coordinated the preparation of the following titles:

- *New Orleans as It Was in 1814–1819* by Leonard V. Huber;
- *Sea Power and the Battle of New Orleans* by Rear Adm. E. M. Eller, Dr. W. J. Morgan, and Lt. R. M. Basoco;
- *Major-General Sir Edward M. Pakenham* by Val McNair Scott;
- *Louisiana at the Battle of New Orleans* by Powell Casey;
- *Tennessee at the Battle of New Orleans* by Elbert L. Watson;
- *Plantation Houses on the Battlefield of New Orleans* by Samuel Wilson Jr.;
- *The Battle on the West Bank* by Richard R. Dixon;
- *Negro Soldiers in the Battle of New Orleans* by Marcus Christian; and
- *The Weapons of the Battle of New Orleans* by William E. Meuse³⁸

The sesquicentennial commission sponsored an essay competition for high-school students in the four states that contributed troops to Jackson’s army: Louisiana, Mississippi, Kentucky, and Tennessee. The commission specified the points that it wanted to see emphasized, notably that “the battle cannot, therefore, be dismissed as of little importance.” The winner, Dagmar Christianne Andersson of New Orleans, obliged by depicting in dark terms what the consequences of a British victory might have been. She even posited that, had the Lower Mississippi Valley remained in British hands, North America might have seen combat operations during World War II. Andersson’s essay also reflected the consensus school of American history that dominated in the 1950s and 1960s. This approach to history sought to minimize conflicts in the American past and held up the assimilation of different immigrant groups as one of the country’s great achievements. Accordingly, Andersson’s essay viewed the “Americanization” of the Creole population of New Orleans as one of the results of the battle, asserting that contact with the soldiers from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi had led

to “a gradual assimilation of the American spirit . . . among the Creoles.”³⁹

Completion of the work at the Chalmette Battlefield was critical to a successful sesquicentennial, and at times during 1964 the commission doubted that the NPS would be ready. In April, Regional Director Elbert Cox wrote to General Bres that “Plans for the work [at Chalmette] are now in progress, and we hope to get the work under contract as soon as the funds become available.” With only eight months remaining before the sesquicentennial, the general understandably wanted a stronger commitment. Bres branded Cox’s statement “vague and indefinite.” He feared that, if the schedule was not accelerated, visitors in January 1965 would be “greeted, probably, with a muddy unattractive site.” He closed by observing that “we cannot permit this Celebration to collapse because of this possible delay in activating beginning of the work.” To make certain that the message got through, Bres copied his senators and congressmen. By May, the NPS had made a firm commitment to completing all work before the end of 1964.⁴⁰

The celebration of the sesquicentennial culminated with an afternoon of speeches and observances at Chalmette on Friday, January 8. The sesquicentennial commission devoted considerable thought to the choice of a keynote speaker. President Lyndon Johnson and former President Eisenhower were at the top of the commission’s list, but both declined. Mrs. Robinson knew whom she didn’t want, writing, “Heaven knows, I don’t want Dean Rusk if the President would send him as his representative, nor Hale Boggs, nor Hubert Humphreys [sic]—but I suppose we would have to take whoever we got.” In the end, they got Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall. The NPS erected a speaker’s stand just north of the monument. General Bres was master of ceremonies. In addition to Udall, Governor John J. McKeithen, Senator Russell Long, and Congressman Hébert spoke. NPS Director George Hartzog also participated, and

38 Battle of New Orleans Commission, *Final Report*, 22.

39 Battle of New Orleans Commission, *Final Report*, 20–21, 142–48.

40 RD Cox to Edward Bres, April 9, 1964; Edward Bres to RD Cox, April 27, 1964; Associate Director Stratton to Senator Russell Long, May 12, 1964, Records of the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission, RG 79, NARA II.



Figure 5-9. Aerial view of sesquicentennial activities, January 1965. (JELA)

official representatives of the British and Canadian governments were on hand, as were descendants of General Pakenham and Andrew Jackson. The Little Colonels and the Boy Scouts assisted by escorting the dignitaries. Secretary Udall lauded the efforts of the United States, Britain, and Canada in promoting peaceful settlement of international disputes. He also used the occasion to promote preservation, asserting that “the job of historic conservation and preservation is not solely the federal government’s” responsibility, but everyone’s.⁴¹

By all accounts, the sesquicentennial commission and local opinion leaders were satisfied with the observances. The *Times-Picayune* noted:

[N]othing but praise comes to mind relative to the very thorough work of the celebration

41 Martha Robinson to Edward Bres, October 23, 1964, Records of the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission, RG 79, NARA II; “Rededication to Peaceful Course, Progress Pledged,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 9, 1965.

committee, headed by Maj. Gen. Edward S. Bres (Ret.), and of the various organizations that cooperated to make it an outstanding success. The commission’s own special committees proved worthy of their tasks, and though not as much money seems to have been raised for the observances as the goal set, the deficiency was not apparent. . . . It was a celebration on behalf of the nation.⁴²

Battle Anniversaries after the Sesquicentennial

Following the big celebration in 1965, January 8 activities were less elaborate, but continued to be the high point of the year at Chalmette. Bowing to the realities of the working world, the observances occurred on the Sunday or weekend closest to January 8. By 1982, the unit had managed to end the scout reenactments and replaced them with more authentic living history camps. In some

42 “Very ‘Successqui-ful,’ ” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 10, 1965.

years, a notable speaker was recruited, such as Congressman Billy Tauzin in 1984 and Andrew Jackson biographer Robert V. Remini in 2005. In 1996, however, the anniversary fell victim to the political battle between the Republican-controlled Congress and President Bill Clinton. The impasse over the federal budget led to a shutdown of nonessential government services between December 16, 1995, and January 6, 1996. Unsure how long the shutdown would last, park managers on January 2 announced the cancellation of the observances. Following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, at the request of parish officials, the NPS agreed to open the battered park for battle anniversary observances in January 2006 (see chapter 13). About 1,000 people showed up to view a living history encampment and hear ranger talks. This represented St. Bernard Parish's first visitor-oriented event in the aftermath of the storm.⁴³

NPS Administration of Chalmette National Cemetery

Chalmette National Cemetery was open for burials when the NPS assumed responsibility for it on October 1, 1939, but was running out of space. Interments had averaged about 100 per year in the 1930s. At that rate, all available plots would be used within another six to eight years. NPS managers would have preferred to close the cemetery immediately upon taking it over, but pressure from local veterans' groups convinced the agency to keep it open. A December 1939 NPS press release announced that "burial in the Chalmette National Cemetery . . . will be continued under the same conditions that were maintained when the area was under the jurisdiction of the War Department."⁴⁴

Discussion of adding acreage to the Chalmette National Cemetery began almost as soon as the cemetery was established in the 1860s. At first, expansion was urged as a means of providing enough land for cemetery landscape designers

to lay out an aesthetically pleasing cemetery. As burials continued in the 19th century, concern grew that the cemetery eventually would fill up. In 1905, when the New Orleans Terminal Company purchased the acreage on either side of the cemetery, the War Department showed some interest in purchasing state-owned land on the north side of the new shell road (later named the St. Bernard Highway), but nothing came of this. In the 1930s, shortly before the cemetery was turned over to the NPS, the question of enlargement was again raised. The Quartermaster General decided against purchasing land north of the existing cemetery because of both the prohibitive cost and the need for extensive filling of the low-lying land to make it suitable for burials. The War Department discussed the purchase of noncontiguous acreage on the Metairie Ridge or other high ground, but no action was taken before the cemetery was transferred to the NPS.⁴⁵

When the United States entered World War II in December 1941, the question of finding additional burial space for New Orleans-area veterans took on added urgency. Chalmette National Cemetery recorded its fifteen-thousandth burial in November 1944, and the few unoccupied plots were in the low-lying northern portion of the cemetery. Consequently, NPS Director Newton Drury in November 1944 approved Region One's recommendation that the cemetery be closed to new burials as of June 30, 1945, except for existing reservations of space. The Service realized that this decision would be controversial, and the director urged the regional office and Custodian Johnson to advise the local community that the closure was coming. Following these informal contacts, Region One released a statement announcing the closure, noting that "the usable space is nearly all occupied now, and since the remainder of the area is not desirable for burials, it seemed wise to establish a date after which interments should cease."⁴⁶

43 "All Dressed Up and No Place To Go," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 3, 1996; "Chalmette Battlefield Observes 190th Anniversary," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, December 31, 2004; "Fighting Back," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 8, 2006.

44 Questionnaire for Superintendent, Chalmette National Cemetery, December 8, 1936; "Chalmette Is Closed to Burial of War Vets," *New Orleans States*, October 20, 1939; NPS Division of Information, press release, December 6, 1939, JELA archives.

45 *Report of the Inspector of National Cemeteries* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1875), 75; *New Roadway to Chalmette, La., National Cemetery*, 59th Cong., 1st sess., 1905, H. Rep. 221; George M. Schumacher, Acting Quartermaster, to Superintendent, Chalmette National Cemetery, September 20, 1937, JELA uncatalogued archives.

46 SMR, November 1944; Director Drury to RD, Region 1, November 24, 1944; Park Custodian Johnson to Gus Martin, *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, December 5, 1944.

Reaction to the cemetery's closure was not long in coming. Congressman Hébert, the Real Estate Board of New Orleans, and American Legion posts lobbied not only to keep the cemetery open but to expand it. The NPS had earlier considered the idea of expansion, but rejected it, largely because the land on both sides of the cemetery was historically associated with the Battle of New Orleans. This land also had the same problems of a high water table and subsidence that had plagued the Chalmette National Cemetery from the beginning. The NPS held that it was the War Department's responsibility to find suitable sites for new national cemeteries to serve the population of South Louisiana. Agitation for an expansion of the Chalmette cemetery continued off and on until Kaiser Aluminum's purchase of the land on first the east, and then the west, side of the cemetery rendered the question moot. The cemetery was briefly made available for a limited number of burials of Vietnam War casualties in the 1960s. The NPS did not publicize this reopening, but honored individual requests from local veterans' families for space.⁴⁷

Physical Changes at the Cemetery Under the NPS

From the beginning, the NPS was primarily interested in developing a battlefield park at Chalmette. Its chief aspiration for the national cemetery was to keep it looking presentable for visitors. Because of subsidence and a subtropical climate, the grave markers at Chalmette required continual straightening and cleaning. Visitors accustomed to the sparkling appearance of national cemeteries in more northerly climes sometimes assumed that the Chalmette National Cemetery was being neglected. Not infrequently, Chalmette staff members were called upon to explain why a Louisiana cemetery on the banks of the Mississippi could not be kept in the same condition as, say, Arlington National Cemetery. The NPS made few changes at the cemetery before the middle 1950s. One change involved the removal of



Figure 5-10, Straightening headstones in the national cemetery, 1950s. (JELA)

a small rostrum from the northern portion of the cemetery in 1947. This was not the main rostrum, and it may have been used only when both black and white veterans were conducting observances on the same day.⁴⁸

In summer 1955, Region One managers determined that the main cemetery rostrum had deteriorated to a point that it could not be repaired economically, and it was razed in October 1956. African American veterans' groups, who had often used the rostrum in their Memorial Day observances, registered some complaints. Superintendent Linch reported that "One group of well educated, but slightly over celebrating, Negro visitors were especially irked over the razing of the rostrum but seemed to feel better after I insisted they come in the office and look at pictures showing how dangerous the old rostrum was before razing." In December 1955, the NPS awarded a contract to the Texas Bitulithic Company to pave the shell road running through the cemetery. As part of this project, the circles or nodes that punctuated the road were eliminated. The park then moved the GAR monument from the circle in the center of the cemetery to a turnaround at the river end of the cemetery.⁴⁹

47 "Enlarge Chalmette Cemetery, Is Plea," *New Orleans Item*, February 6, 1945; "Many Protests Are Filed Anent Cemetery Closing," *St. Bernard Voice*, June 23, 1945; Assistant Secretary of the Interior to Richard J. Welsh, Chair, House Committee on Public Lands, May 3, 1948; "Chalmette Cemetery Open to Viet Dead," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, July 22, 1968.

48 Acting RD, Region 1, to Custodian, CHAL, March 31, 1947, Box 5, Region 1 files, RG 79, NARA M-A. An inspection report conducted in 1933 refers to a new rostrum erected in 1931 at the cost of \$998, which may be the one removed in 1947; see Inspection Report of Major J. W. King, JELA FM files.

49 Acting Regional Chief of Operations, Region 1, to Superintendent, CHAL, September 9, 1955; Notice of Award, Region 1 to Texas Bitulithic Co., December 13, 1955; SMR, January, March, November, and December 1956.

When NPS workers disassembled the GAR monument in January 1956, they discovered a time capsule that had been placed within the monument at the time of its construction in the 1870s. Inside a 10-inch by 6-inch by 4-inch corroded copper box were newspapers, coins, and paper money of the period; Army and Navy registers; a GAR badge; and a medal inscribed with the number of known and unknown burials then contained in the cemetery. The NPS decided to photograph the contents and return the time capsule to the monument when it was reassembled, along with a new capsule, a copper cylinder. The new capsule was loaded with newspapers and coins from 1956, photographs of the dismantling and reassembly of the monument, and the signatures of all who were present at the opening of the 1870s time capsule.⁵⁰

In the 1960s Superintendent Linch came up with a novel method of keeping the cemetery walls in alignment. Because of the high water table and subsidence, the walls were unstable and tended to lean to one side or another. The vibrations from Kaiser's pile sinking and other operations from 1951 on further weakened the east wall, and occasionally small sections of it would collapse. When the west wall began leaning outward, in April 1963, Linch got some National Guard troops to pile up dirt on the outside of the wall, stabilizing it. This expedient allowed the NPS to cancel a scheduled \$30,000 repair project, and in June 1964, Linch received a \$500 award for his cost-saving idea. The mounded dirt proved too successful in some spots, and it had to be removed when it was discovered to be pushing the wall out of plumb in the opposite direction.⁵¹

On the night of September 9-10, 1965, Hurricane Betsy struck the New Orleans area. St. Bernard Parish was particularly hard hit, with some 600 homes destroyed and virtually every structure in the parish flooded from the storm surge. The Kaiser Aluminum facility just east of the park ceased production for a week and served as an emergency evacuation center for as many as 4,000 parish residents. The hurricane seriously damaged the 1897 stable building at the cemetery, which

was demolished and removed by the Laguna Construction Company in 1966 as part of a \$13,000 storm cleanup contract. The stable was the last of the 19th-century cemetery buildings.⁵²

The Contested History of Memorial Day at Chalmette

When the NPS took over Chalmette National Cemetery in 1939, there was already a history of Memorial Day (originally Decoration Day) observances there dating back about 70 years. In 1868 and 1869, General John A. Logan, commander-in-chief of the GAR, directed all GAR posts to decorate veterans' graves and hold suitable memorial services on May 30. This soon became an established ritual throughout the northern states, many of which established it as an official holiday. In the South, black and white Republicans took on the responsibility of observing Memorial Day at national cemeteries.⁵³ Former Confederates and their families developed a separate tradition of decorating the graves of Confederate veterans, which became known as Confederate Memorial Day. Several southern states designated April 26 (the date on which General Joseph E. Johnston surrendered his Confederate army to General William T. Sherman in 1865) as Memorial Day, but this practice was not uniform.⁵⁴

In the early 1870s, when a racially integrated Republican Party was a political force in Louisiana and federal troops remained stationed in the state, Memorial Day brought large numbers of white and African American celebrants to Chalmette on May 30. As the *Louisianan*, an African American

50 "1874 Is Year Time-Capsule Was Placed in Monument," *St. Bernard Voice*, March 2, 1956; SMR, January, February, and March 1956.

51 SMR, April 1948, August 1951, July 1960, April and November 1963, April and June 1964.

52 KACC, *The Great Disaster: Hurricane "Betsy," Sept. 9, 1965* (Chalmette: KACC, 1965), 2-11; Completion Report, Contract 14-10-103101613, July 28, 1966, JELA HQ files; SMR, September 1965. Hurricanes also had hit Chalmette in September 1947, September 1956 (Flossie), June 1957 (Audrey), and September 1961 (Carla), doing damage mostly to trees.

53 Historian David Blight contended that the first Memorial Day observances took place in Charleston, South Carolina, in May 1865, when thousands of residents, mostly African American, decorated soldiers' graves at the Race Course Cemetery. David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2001), 69-71.

54 John R. Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 136-39, 148-50.

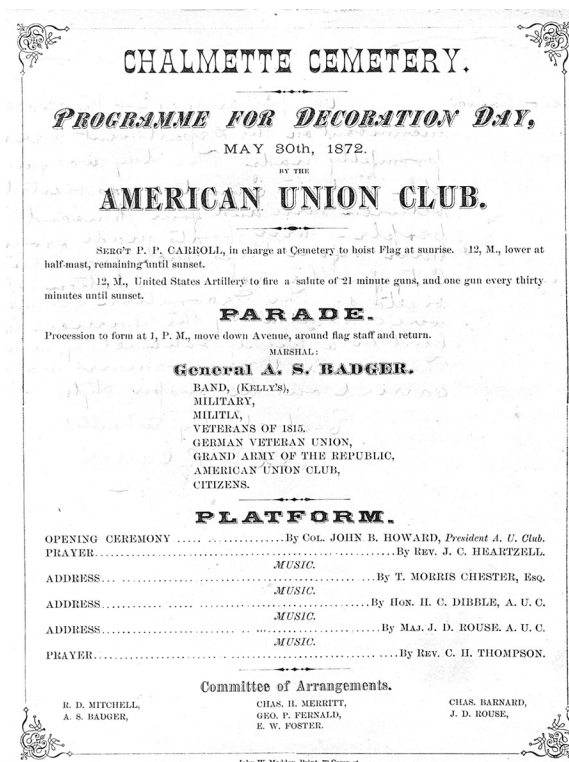


Figure 5-11, 1872 Memorial Day program. (JELA)

newspaper, observed in 1871: "According to annual custom the Republican portion of our community repaired on Tuesday in large numbers to Chalmette, the sacred spot where repose the ashes of those who gave their lives in vindication of the sovereignty of the Union." In 1871 New Orleans Mayor J. D. Rouse and J. R. G. Pitkin spoke to a crowd estimated at 7,000. Horace Greeley, the nationally known editor of the *New York Tribune*, also spoke. During these early years the New Orleans American Union Club organized the observances. Celebrants came down the river from New Orleans on steamboats, with the last visitors often getting back to the city well after sunset.⁵⁵

By 1877, federal troops had been withdrawn from Louisiana, the power of the Republican Party in Louisiana was broken, and Francis T.

Nicholls, a Democrat and former Confederate officer, was in the governor's chair. The federal government abandoned any further resistance to the determined efforts by southern leaders, using violence if necessary, to deny African Americans a political role. A new rhetoric of reconciliation between northern and southern whites was beginning to take hold nationally. Increasingly, this reconciliation ignored emancipation as an aim and result of the war and came at the expense of blacks' hopes for political and social equality.

The new spirit of sectional reconciliation was apparent in Decoration Day observances at Chalmette as early as 1878. Apparently for the first time, Confederate veterans formally participated in the day's events. Members of the Louisiana Division of the Army of Northern Virginia were on hand to present a floral tribute in the shape of a shield, bearing the legend "Gray to the Blue." In an address, a former Confederate soldier hoped that the GAR would "receive it with the same feeling that we present it, and may it be one of the links that will help bind our country closer together, and bury the discord which has agitated since the war." During this period the Joseph A. Mower Post of the Grand Army of the Republic organized and conducted Memorial Day observances at Chalmette. The Mower Post, backed by the leadership of the GAR's Department of the Gulf, refused to admit black veterans. Although black veterans still apparently participated in Decoration Day at Chalmette, the GAR's refusal to grant them official standing rankled some in the New Orleans-area black community. The increasingly prominent role accorded to Confederate veterans on Decoration Day was also a sore point.⁵⁶

The local GAR's discriminatory policies led to a boycott by black veterans of the 1887 Decoration Day ceremonies at Chalmette. As *The Weekly Pelican*, an African American journal, noted:

If the colored people stayed away from the exercises, they did perfectly right. Colored ex-soldiers in the South are not allowed, either to become members of the posts organized therein, or to form separate posts. A majority of the Grand Army members here say it is inexpedient to admit the Negroes; that no sooner than it is done the ex-Confederates will

55 "Decoration Day," *Louisianan*, June 1, 1871; "In Memoriam," *Daily Picayune*, May 31, 1871. Union clubs, or union league clubs, were organized during the Civil War to bolster the Lincoln administration and counter organizations of Confederate sympathizers that sprang up in the North. Most northern cities and southern cities occupied by federal troops had a union club. Total membership was two million by the war's end. Many of the clubs carried on activity after the war. See James D. Nowlan, *Glory, Darkness, Light: The History of the Union League Club of Chicago* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 5-8.

56 "Decoration Day," *Daily Picayune*, May 31, 1878.

cease to fraternize with them, etc. If such be the sentiments of these gentlemen, the less the black man has to do with them the better. No organization should be countenanced by the colored people which discriminates against those of their race who, as loyal and as brave as the white man, bared his [sic] breast to the shot and shell of these same Confederates with whom our white Union soldiers now hob nob.

We object—not to the spirit of good will and friendly feeling existing between the ex-Confederate and white ex-Union soldier—but, to having brave colored ex-Union soldiers in the South denied admittance to what they have a right to belong too [sic], simply because a few narrow-minded, color-blinded men are afraid such admittance would militate against their social pleasure.⁵⁷

The refusal of the leaders of the GAR Department of the Gulf either to admit black veterans to existing posts or to grant them charters for separate posts became an issue at the national encampment of the GAR in St. Louis in September 1887. Up to that time there was no appeal from a department commander's decision to deny a charter to a group of veterans seeking to establish a post. A number of GAR representatives at the national encampment spoke out strongly against the discrimination suffered by Louisiana's African American veterans. In the words of one delegate, identified as Comrade Wagner: "The colored troops fought bravely, and we can not, as an organization, refuse them admission into this Grand Army because they are black." A California delegate, Edward S. Salomon, went further, arguing that any department commander who denied a charter to veterans simply because of their color ought to be immediately removed from his post. Edgar Allen of the Department of Virginia told the delegates that he and others had fought successfully for 20 years for the right of African Americans to establish posts. Allen went on to say:

Whenever the question arises, as it does frequently with us, that I must elect whether I give my hand to the man who in the dark days of our country's history, was battling for the destruction of the Union, or the black man who

stood side by side with me, my hand will be outstretched to the man of dusky skin.⁵⁸

The arguments of some southern delegates were of the sort that segregationists would continue to advance for decades. William J. Ramage of the Department of Tennessee and Georgia asserted that black veterans lacked the "ability or the knowledge" to comply with the reporting requirements of the GAR. A. S. Graham, the Gulf Department Commander who had refused charters to the Louisiana veterans, maintained that the GAR was a social organization, and that department commanders had the right to decide with whom they wanted to associate. He went on to say, "It is impossible for a man in Maine to say what should be done in California or Louisiana." This message carried the clear implication that a GAR department in Maine might allow blacks to form posts (or join existing posts) without suffering social ostracism, but that such was not the case in Louisiana. Graham stated that black veterans had not been soldiers, at least not "in the same sense that the volunteers were." Following this debate, the national encampment decided to allow black veterans in the South the option of applying

58 GAR, *Journal of the 21st Annual Session of the National Encampment, Grand Army of the Republic* (Milwaukee, Wisc.: Burdick & Armitage, 1887), 251-55.



Figure 5-12. GAR Monument, Chalmette National Cemetery, 2008. (author)

57 "The Blue and the Gray," *The Weekly Pelican*, June 4, 1887.

directly to the national commander for a post charter.⁵⁹

Under this new rule, black veterans in Louisiana and Mississippi were able to organize nine GAR posts with 747 members by early 1890. The leadership of the GAR Department of Louisiana and Mississippi (formerly the Department of the Gulf) refused to recognize the legitimacy of the new posts and barred them from electing departmental officers and delegates to the 1890 national encampment. The department also attempted to keep the black posts from participating in the Memorial Day observances at Chalmette cemetery that year, but the War Department intervened. The *New York Times* noted that War Department orders “giving the white posts control were so modified as to give the colored posts opportunity to celebrate before 3 o’clock and the white posts after that hour.” This compromise averted “a race riot that some people had expected.” *The Daily Picayune* remarked that “there was but one Memorial day and two celebrations.” Significantly, the black veterans came by rail to the secondary entrance of the cemetery (literally the back door), while the whites arrived on steamboats at the main entrance on the river. The white veterans refused to join members of the new black GAR posts in decorating the Chalmette graves. A New Jersey delegate to the GAR’s 1890 national encampment reported:

Those who love to shake hands with the gray refused to decorate at Chalemette [sic] on Memorial Day, and we did it while they stood around, and the rebels said to us, “You boys have our sympathies. Don’t you see how your old friends treat you?”

This acrimonious 1890 Memorial Day marked the beginning of a tradition of separate observances of Memorial Day at Chalmette that was to last more than 80 years.⁶⁰

The *Picayune*’s account of the two observances at Chalmette in 1890 highlights the dramatic

differences between the two commemorative traditions that had emerged in the 25 years following the end of the war. Leading the procession of 500 African Americans at the cemetery was Caesar Carpenter Antoine, who had been Louisiana’s lieutenant governor from 1872 to 1876. Antoine was a living reminder of the brief Reconstruction period when the presence of federal troops permitted blacks to vote in large numbers and to hold statewide office. The main speaker at the 1890 African American ceremonies, Dr. James T. Newman, noted that it was fitting and proper that people of color observe the day, saying of the black soldier that “his blood filled the same trenches” as that of his white comrade in arms. Newman called the Civil War a “fight for freedom” in which “the liberty of humanity was concerned.” He ended his address with a glowing tribute to Abraham Lincoln. Later in the day, after the African American crowd had departed, Dr. James Snively spoke to a white assemblage. He had nothing to say about human liberty or freedom for blacks. He emphasized how former combatants had moved away from “fratricidal strife [to] clasp hands in a fraternal union to-day which ignores the differences of the past.” A mere 25 years after the war, white Americans could honor “simply the courage, the perseverance, the fidelity and the heroism of the American soldier, whether he wore the blue or the gray.”⁶¹

Dr. Snively exemplified what historian David Blight has called the reconciliationist vision, which dominated white discourse in America from the 1890s until the 1960s. By focusing on the courage and devotion of white soldiers on both sides, the rhetoric of reconciliation conveniently omitted both the role of African American soldiers in the Civil War and emancipation as a war aim. In this vision, “ignoring the differences of the past” meant ignoring the causes and consequences of the war. The rightness and inevitability of white supremacy lay just beneath the surface of the reconciliationist vision. In contrast, Dr. Newman represented the emancipationist vision, held by African Americans and their dwindling number of white supporters. This vision refused to ignore or forget the contributions of African Americans to the preservation of the union and to their own emancipation. It strove to remind the nation that the liberty of humanity was indeed central

59 GAR, *Journal of the 21st National Encampment*, 253-55.

60 GAR, *Journal of the 24th Annual Session of the National Encampment, Grand Army of the Republic* (Detroit: Richmond & Backus, 1890), 256-58; “There Was No Race Riot,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1890; “Memorial Day,” *Daily Picayune*, May 31, 1890.

61 “Memorial Day,” *Daily Picayune*, May 31, 1890.

to the Civil War and its aftermath. Although the *Picayune* devoted far more space to the white reconciliationist orator, it was unusual in this period for the emancipationist vision that marked the black observances to receive even the minimal coverage granted on this occasion.

The white leadership of the GAR's Department of Louisiana and Mississippi continued its resistance to African American posts. The 1891 GAR national encampment then debated the idea of forming a separate department solely for the African American posts in the two states. It decided that the posts should remain within the existing department. The national GAR commander-in-chief ordered the departmental commander to recognize the nine black posts. The order was ignored, and a department encampment voted to surrender its charter. The national GAR leadership disregarded this move. The commander-in-chief dismissed three successive department commanders who refused to recognize the black posts. Finally, in June 1892, a former department commander, A. S. Badger, was appointed and directed to recognize the nine posts. When he complied, five of the white posts disbanded and the membership in the remaining three declined. From

that point onward the GAR in Louisiana consisted almost entirely of African American veterans.⁶²

The NPS inherited this tradition of separate Memorial Day ceremonies when it took over responsibility for Chalmette National Cemetery in 1939. Usually, black and white veterans gathered on different days. Occasionally, when Memorial Day fell on a Sunday, the day would be divided, as had happened in 1890. Superintendent Hagen reported in 1943 that the VFW "conducted a program in one section of the cemetery area while a program sponsored by several colored patriotic, veterans and religious organizations was held in another section." In addition to the formal ceremonies, there was also informal visitation by families on Memorial Day, as Clarence Johnson observed with dismay following his arrival as Chalmette custodian in 1944. According to Johnson, the African American celebration at the cemetery was a "social all day get-to-gether [sic] with dinner on the ground" that sometimes took three days

62 Mary R. Dearing, *Veterans in Politics: The Story of the G.A.R.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 415-18; GAR, *Journal of the 26th Encampment, Grand Army of the Republic* (Albany, N.Y.: S. H. Wentworth, 1892), 71-72, 119.



Figure 5-13. African American Memorial Day observances at Chalmette, circa 1955. (JELA)

to clean up after. Johnson informed the regional director that he was “determined that this shall not be repeated.” He noted by comparison that the few white families who came to the cemetery on Memorial Day hastily laid flowers and left. He observed that a deputy sheriff was present but served only “to prevent the negroes from killing each other.” Johnson seems not to have had much sensitivity to the good-times ethos of South Louisiana, and within a few years he had imposed his concept of appropriate decorum. In 1948, he reported that “order was excellent” on Memorial Day and cleanup minimal for the first time in his tenure.⁶³

The tradition of separate observances on successive days continued into the 1950s and 1960s, a time when African Americans were challenging legal and customary racial segregation across the South. In these post-World War II decades, Chalmette superintendents forwarded programs from “white Memorial Day” and “black Memorial Day” to the regional office without comment. At last, in 1976, Superintendent Lionel Bienvenu wrote to all the local veterans groups, informing them that there would be a single, integrated Memorial Day observance at Chalmette in 1977. Bienvenu wrote:

For the last time, I am giving permission for these two separte [sic] services to be held. It goes against all that I have been taught to think that the DAV’s must be separated from the VFW’s, the blacks from the whites, and the GAR’s from the WW II’s. . . . Next year I hope to be able to attend one, well-publicized, large Memorial Day Service, on the official United States Memorial Day, with all Veteran’s groups and auxilinarie’s [sic] participation.⁶⁴

Thus, 112 years after the last shot of the Civil War was fired, the separation of the races for Memorial Day observances at Chalmette came to an end.

Interpretation at the National Cemetery

Interpreting the national cemetery has been something of a dilemma for NPS managers. As NPS landscape architect Edward Zimmer put it in 1942, “the existing cemetery has no historical relationship to the battle at Chalmette and . . . the development of the historical park is, in a measure, handicapped by its existence.” Zimmer noted in particular that the cemetery was placed directly on the battlefield, obscuring the positions of some of the British batteries. The cemetery was a physical barrier between the site of Line Jackson and the British rear areas and the site of the December 23, 1814, engagement farther downriver. The cemetery is, however, an outgrowth of the Civil War activities at the site. Potentially, therefore, interpretation of the strategic location of the Chalmette plain could link the 1814-1815 activities there with those of the Civil War and Reconstruction period, including the establishment of the cemetery. Just as Jackson chose to protect New Orleans with fortifications at Chalmette, later Confederate authorities made the same decision. This combination of events from two wars often requires explanation to visitors who assume that fallen soldiers from the Battle of New Orleans are buried there. The reluctance of park staff to interpret Civil War activity at Chalmette has sometimes been taken to extremes. In 1983, a park technician wrote in response to an inquiry, “I’m sorry to say that Chalmette National Historical Park doesn’t have anything to do with the Civil War.”⁶⁵

Like many national cemeteries, Chalmette once had painted cast-iron tablets with stanzas from the poem “The Bivouac of the Dead” placed along the cemetery road. According to the Department of Veterans’ Affairs, these tablets were cast at the War Department’s Rock Island Arsenal in the early 1880s and placed in most or perhaps all of the nation’s national cemeteries. In 1986, the park decided that the signs were “a maintenance problem” and removed them.⁶⁶

63 Superintendent Johnson to RD, Region 1, February 25, 1944; Superintendent Johnson to RD, Region 1, May 31, 1948, Box 1917, Central Classified Files, RG 79, NARA II.

64 Superintendent Bienvenu to John Brown, St. Bernard Disabled American Veterans Chapter 36, April 23, 1976, JELA HQ files.

65 Edward Zimmer to RD, Region 1, March 5, 1942; Park Technician Lapcewich to Rodney Painting, September 10, 1983, JELA uncatalogued archives.

66 JELA management staff meeting notes, February 10, 1986; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs web site, www.cem.va.gov/hist/bivouac.asp, consulted May 15, 2009.

In more recent years, the park has found ways to communicate the cemetery's significance. In the 1980s, the park produced its first site bulletin on the cemetery. In June 1994, the park conducted a ceremony for a Civil War soldier, Lyons Wakeman, buried at Chalmette. Lyons was actually Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, a woman who dressed as a man in order to serve in the 153rd New York Infantry Regiment and who died at Jackson Barracks in June 1864. In the 1990s, ceremonies honoring Buffalo Soldiers buried in the cemetery were held.⁶⁷

Chalmette as a Unit of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve

Following the establishment of Jean Lafitte, residents of St. Bernard Parish began to realize that being one unit of a multi-unit park was not the same as being the only NPS site in the state. Some residents claimed that they had not previously understood that Chalmette would lose its separate identity with the creation of Jean Lafitte, although there was no ambiguity on this point in the enabling legislation. They were particularly upset that the legislation failed to provide for any St. Bernard representatives on the Delta Region Preservation Commission (DRPC). The DRPC was the legislatively mandated commission established to set priorities for the new Jean Lafitte park. (The DRPC's role is covered in chapter 7 below.) Committees of protest were formed, and federal legislation was passed in October 1979, giving the parish police jury the right to appoint two members to the commission. This move helped quiet the agitation. Still, 30 years after the establishment of Jean Lafitte, Ed Roy, publisher and editor of the *St. Bernard Voice*, felt that Chalmette had lost out because of the change. Lionel Bienvenu, the last superintendent of Chalmette National Historical Park, was acting superintendent of Jean Lafitte from November 1978 to January 1979. He then served as Jean Lafitte's historian and chief of interpretation, before retiring in 1982. Jean Lafitte's first superintendent, James Isenogle, selected

A. Wilson Greene as the first unit manager at Chalmette in early 1980.⁶⁸

When Jean Lafitte was established, Chalmette had been running smoothly since the sesquicentennial in 1965. Understandably, getting the new Jean Lafitte units up and running was the top priority for park staff, and the operations at Chalmette tended to get less attention. Unit Manager Wilson Greene, nonetheless, wanted to make his mark. After becoming acquainted with the park and its staff, he produced a list of 84 management goals for 1980. Some, like rewriting the obsolescent 1959 park handbook, had been languishing for years. Others, such as "solving the drainage problem in the national cemetery," would have required supernatural intervention.⁶⁹

In the mid-1980s, Chalmette at last got a building specifically designed to serve as a visitor center. The use of the Malus-Beauregard House as a visitor center had placed severe stress on that historic house, and the need for a new visitor center was clear. There is some evidence that Superintendent Isenogle forced the issue. The regional office seems to have suggested more master planning for Chalmette before a visitor center could be constructed. Given the general feeling within St. Bernard Parish that Chalmette was being neglected, the superintendent feared a local uprising if more planning was proposed before a visitor center was built. Only \$200,000 could be found for the project, however, and the park got a visitor center of just 1,200 square feet. The contractor was the Maronge Electric Company. Within weeks of the opening of the new visitor center in April 1986, rangers observed that the seating in the audio-visual area was inadequate. The 1980s visitor center was condemned and demolished after suffering severe

67 DRPC minutes, June 15, 1994.

68 Chalmette staff meeting notes, February 26, 1980, JELA archives. P.L. 96-87, enacted October 12, 1979, added the two St. Bernard representatives and increased the Barataria core area to 8,600 acres. Bienvenu apparently had some hopes of being named JELA's first superintendent and likely was disappointed about going from an independent to a subordinate role with the establishment of JELA, Laura Hudson, interview with Robert Blythe, August 28, 2008.

69 "Management Goals FY80—Chalmette National Historical Park," March 27, 1980, JELA uncatalogued archives.

damage from Hurricane Katrina. It has now been replaced by a new facility (see chapter 13).⁷⁰

The 1983 archeological investigations conducted as part of regulatory compliance for the new visitor center project led to discovery of the site of the Rodriguez House. Previously it was assumed that the house site and as much as one-third of the battlefield had been lost to the Mississippi River. Researcher Betsy Swanson prepared a study on the Rodriguez House and one on the topography of the Chalmette Battlefield. Archeologist Ted Birkendal returned to Chalmette in 1984 to do more extensive archeological investigations, which confirmed the location of the Rodriguez House and proved false the assumption that some 700 to 800 feet of the battlefield had been lost. In reality, only about 180 feet had been lost, and the sites of all the American batteries except number one lay well to the landward side of the levee. Based on this new information, the park in 1989 installed a series of new waysides, including color reproductions of paintings of the battle and maps that showed the correct location of battle-era features.⁷¹

The NPS had long wanted to achieve better interpretation at nearby historic sites associated with the British invasion of 1814-1815. Among these were the Villeré Canal (part of the British invasion route) and the ruins of the De la Ronde plantation house, a British headquarters (see figure 2.5). In 1983 park staff attempted unsuccessfully to negotiate a cooperative agreement with Murphy Oil Company, which owned the portion of the canal closest to the Mississippi River. In the 1920s and 1930s, both the War Department and the NPS had considered making the De la Ronde ruins and their associated oak allée part of the park. Since that time, however, the house ruins had not been maintained and were crumbling. Vibrations

from traffic on Louisiana Route 39 and nearby train tracks are a constant threat to the brick wall remnants. In 1990, the park was able to secure \$25,000 to document the ruins in accordance with the standards of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and provide treatment recommendations. The park signed a cooperative agreement with St. Bernard Parish to accomplish this work. In February 1992, the NPS gave the parish the HABS drawings and an outline of possible treatments. The parish declined the NPS's offer of technical assistance and went ahead with its own plans for marking the ruins with signs.⁷²

The Chalmette Kaiser Aluminum plant, opened to such fanfare in 1951, closed permanently in 1983. The company's long-term contract for natural gas was about to run out. Faced with a huge increase in the cost of power and fierce competition from lower-cost overseas aluminum producers, Kaiser decided on a permanent shutdown. In 1989, the St. Bernard Port, Harbor and Terminal District purchased the 273-acre site and converted it to an industrial park. The district demolished the main buildings that had housed the smelting operation. It kept the 500-foot smokestack, the administrative building, and some other structures that could be adapted for reuse. With Kaiser's departure the Chalmette Unit lost a noisy neighbor and the surrounding community lost 3,000 jobs. The Kaiser smokestack remains as a dominant feature

72 Chalmette staff meeting minutes, August 3, 1982; DRPC minutes, January 24, 1990; Superintendent Belous to ARD, Resource Management, SWR, June 18, 1993, JELA HQ files.

70 JELA staff meeting notes, April 19, 1985, JELA RM files.

71 SAR, 1983, 1989; Ted Birkendal, ed., *The Search for the Lost Riverfront: Historical and Archeological Investigations at the Chalmette Battlefield*, JELA (N.p.: NPS, 2005), 772-78; "Public Offers Ideas on Battle Park; Rodriguez House among Suggestions," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, May 7, 2005; Betsy Swanson, *A Study of the Military Topography and Sites Associated with the 1814-1815 New Orleans Campaign* (draft) (New Orleans: author, 1985); Betsy Swanson, *Annotated Archival Source Listing Relevant to the Archaeological, Architectural and Historical Interpretation of the Rodriguez Plantation Buildings* (draft) (New Orleans: author, 1984).



Figure 5-14. Kaiser Aluminum smokestacks, 2008. (author)

of the unit's viewshed. In 2001, St. Bernard Parish announced plans to decommission the sewage treatment plant on the battlefield and eventually demolish it. The plant soon ceased operations, but funds to accomplish an environmentally sound demolition had not been secured as of this writing.⁷³

An addition to the unit's commemorative marker program came in early 2005. Shortly after its founding in 1987, the 7th Infantry Regiment Association contacted Jean Lafitte's superintendent with a request to place a marker on the Chalmette Battlefield. The 7th Regiment had been among General Jackson's troops at the January 1815 battle. The request led park managers to think about how all the various contingents of the American forces might be honored. In the end, nine simple bronze plaques mounted on Georgia marble slabs were placed in the circular expanse of lawn surrounding the Chalmette Monument. The markers rise only a few inches above grade and do not intrude on the memorial landscape. The park dedicated the markers on the 190th anniversary of the battle, January 8, 2005. The nine markers honor the 7th and 44th U.S. Infantry, the U.S. Marines, the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Artillery, the Louisiana Militia (including the free men of color), the Mississippi Militia, the Choctaw Nation, the Kentucky Militia, and the Tennessee Militia.⁷⁴

Boat travel to the battlefield became available in 1970 when the excursion boat *Voyageur* from New Orleans began making stops at the Chalmette Battlefield. Passengers disembarked on the levee at 4:00 p.m. and were on the site for about half an hour. In 1972, some 27,000 visitors reached the park in this way. In the early 1980s, the Corps of Engineers determined that levee work was in order at Chalmette. The Corps considered enlarging the levee but instead built a three-foot seawall atop the existing one. At this same time, the St. Bernard Port, Harbor and Terminal District built a larger



Figure 5-15. The Creole Queen docked at Chalmette. (New Orleans Paddlewheels Inc.)

dock at Chalmette, one that accommodated bigger vessels. By 1985, the *Creole Queen*, which could carry up to 1,000 passengers, was making regular stops. By 1993, the two vessels that regularly stopped at the dock accounted for 60 percent of the unit's visitors. Some park interpreters, however, felt that the excursion boats were a mixed blessing. Because the boat travelers' length of stay was short, and because the Malus-Beauregard House is right on the river, many visitors never got beyond the house and left without learning much about the Battle of New Orleans. Excursion boats continued to stop at Chalmette until August 2005, when Hurricane Katrina destroyed the dock. The *Creole Queen* resumed its stops at the Chalmette Battlefield on December 26, 2009.⁷⁵

Superintendent Geraldine Smith, who arrived at the park in June 1996, was eager to expand the interpretive program at Chalmette to give greater recognition to the 600 to 700 free men of color who fought with Andrew Jackson. She also wanted to reach out to the area's African American population, which in segregation days had not always felt welcome at Chalmette. As early as 1972 Superintendent Arthur Hehr had attempted to recruit African American scout troops to participate in battle reenactments, though without much success. In 1975, he convinced some of his maintenance staff to don period uniforms and represent the free men of color. Superintendent Smith wanted to build on these efforts but had to

73 JELA management staff meeting notes, November 1, 1990; George J. Binczewski, "The Energy Crisis and the Aluminum Industry: Can We Learn from History?" *JOM* 54/2 (February 2002), online at <http://www.tms.org/pubs/journals/jom/0202/binczewski-0202.html>; St. Bernard Parish President Charles Ponstein to Superintendent Smith, August 13, 2001, JELA HQ files.

74 "Markers Added to Battlefield," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 6, 2005; Program, Chalmette Battlefield Marker Dedication, January 8, 2005, JELA HQ files.

75 Superintendent, CHAL, to RD, SWR, July 7, 1973; Superintendent, CHAL, to Director, January 15, 1973; "Dock at Chalmette Park Boosts Tourism," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, April 24, 1985; Briefing Statement, New Tour Boat, April 15, 1993, JELA HQ files; Allison Peña, personal communication, April 18, 2011.

overcome some suspicions. She remembers staff telling of going into grocery stores in the Lower Ninth Ward in uniform in the 1990s and hearing comments like, “Oh, you work in that white park.” Superintendent Smith wanted African Americans to see Chalmette as their park, too. Many young blacks did not know that their ancestors fought at the battle or that many Buffalo Soldiers were buried in the national cemetery. To address this situation, the park began the Free Men of Color Junior ROTC Living History Project at Chalmette. The park worked with the Junior ROTC programs at Frederick Douglass High School in Orleans Parish and Andrew Jackson High School in St. Bernard Parish, teaching the students about the battle and its context and showing them how to load and fire muskets. Outfitting each reenactor with period dress and reproduction gear cost about \$2,000. The park had to be creative in funding the program, eventually committing \$55,000 to it. The school program later expanded to Edna Karr High School in New Orleans. The NPS Southeast Regional Office recognized the program with its 2003 “Keeper of the Light” award for interpretive excellence. An annual ceremony including the laying of wreaths at the graves of Buffalo Soldiers interred at the cemetery also began in the 1990s.⁷⁶

Superintendent Smith and the park’s cultural anthropologist, Allison Peña, also sought for the first time to reach out to the displaced residents of Fazendeville and their descendants. The park began an oral history project with former residents in 2001 and invited them to the park for reunions. These efforts drew considerable coverage in the local media. Peña wrote an article on Fazendeville for *CRM*, a Service-wide cultural resource publication. In 2003, with funding from the NPS Southeast Archeological Center, the park commissioned a painting by Martin Pate of historic Fazendeville. A reproduction of the painting was given to the congregation of Battle Ground Baptist Church. In the following year, the park produced a site bulletin on the community. After Hurricane Katrina, Peña published an article concerning

Fazendeville descendants’ experiences in the Lower Ninth Ward in *American Anthropologist*.⁷⁷

In 1999, Kevin Risk of the NPS Southeast Regional Office prepared a cultural landscape report (CLR) for the Chalmette Battlefield and Chalmette National Cemetery. The CLR was the first attempt to provide a comprehensive picture of the various layers of history at the battlefield: the prebattle landscape of plantations, the landscape elements that remained from the battle, and the memorial and interpretive landscape created in later years. The report contained some innovative treatment recommendations, including the removal of the automobile tour road on the battlefield. As mentioned above, when the creation of the Barataria and Acadian Units absorbed most of the energies of park staff, some in St. Bernard Parish felt Chalmette was being neglected. Partly as a reaction to that sentiment, Congressman Tauzin in 2002 passed legislation creating a Chalmette Battlefield Task Force. The goals of the task force were to improve communications between NPS staff and the local community and to develop suggestions for improvements at the unit. The 12-member task force made its final report in August 2004. Among its concerns were the lack of a visitor-friendly atmosphere at the unit, inadequate signage directing visitors to the unit, poor maintenance, and less than comprehensive interpretation.⁷⁸

Before they could implement any of the recommendations of the CLR or the task force, park managers needed to engage in a planning process. In early 2004, the park began to develop a General Management Plan Amendment and

76 Superintendent, CHAL, to RD, SWR, December 12, 1972; Superintendent, CHAL, to David Panebaker, NPS Albright Training Center, October 5, 1975, JELA HQ files; Geraldine Smith, interview with Robert Blythe, November 7, 2008; “Overdue Salute,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 11, 2002; SAR, 1996, 2005.

77 Superintendent Smith to Senator John Breaux, May 8, 2003, JELA HQ files; SAR, 2001, 2003, 2004; Allison Peña, “Wade in the Water: Personal Reflections on a Storm, a People, and a National Park,” *American Anthropologist* 108/4 (December 2006):781-98.

78 Kevin Risk, *Chalmette Battlefield and Chalmette National Cemetery Cultural Landscape Report* (Atlanta, Ga.: National Park Service, Southeast Regional Office, Cultural Resources Stewardship Division, 1999); David Muth, interview with Robert Blythe, November 5, 2008; Final Report of the Chalmette Battlefield Task Force, August 23, 2004. The members of the Task Force were Park Superintendent Geraldine Smith, Elizabeth McDougall, Faith Moran, Anthony A. Fernandez Jr., Drew Heaphy, Paul Perez, Mrs. George W. Davis, Eric Cager, Captain Bonnie Pepper Cook, Alvin W. Guillot, Michael L. Fraering, and Col. John F. Pugh.

Development Concept Plan for the Chalmette Unit. With the bicentennial of the War of 1812 set to begin in just eight years, the GMP amendment would be particularly timely. Public meetings were held and preliminary alternatives were drafted in 2005. The planning team had just presented the alternatives to Southeast Regional Director Patricia Hooks in July 2005 when Hurricane Katrina struck, putting the whole planning process on hold. As of this writing, a final draft of the GMP amendment had been approved by the NPS Southeast Region and was under review in the NPS Washington Office.⁷⁹

The new understanding of the geography of the battlefield, the insights from the CLR, and the renewed interest in the unit's potential in St. Bernard Parish augur well for the future of the Chalmette Unit. The Battle of New Orleans and associated events will always be the focus of interpretation at the unit. There is considerable potential to refine how the battle and the battle-era landscape are presented to visitors. Much could also be done to interpret the subsequent history of the site, including its uses during the Civil War and Reconstruction, the complicated history of the memorial activities at the monument and cemetery, and the lives of the residents of Fazendeville.

79 Chalmette GMP online newsletter, www.nps.gov/sero/planning/chalmette_gmpdcp, consulted May 18, 2009; Muth interview; John Barrett, personal communication, April 29, 2011.

The Movement for a Jean Lafitte Park

The primary impetus for the creation of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve was the steady loss of wetlands in the region surrounding New Orleans. As the city grew after World War II, wetlands were drained to make way for suburban development and industrial uses. Additionally, canals were cut into the marshes and swamps south of the city to facilitate petroleum exploration and commercial shipping. A handful of determined people in Jefferson Parish and nearby areas deplored the loss of the natural wetland environment; in the 1960s they began urging government action to set aside some of it as a park or preserve. These conservationists would have been satisfied with action by the parish or the state, but that was not forthcoming. As a result they sought national park status for the wetland environment. They needed 15 years to accomplish their goal, and the final park legislation embraced considerably more than a wetland area in the Barataria Basin.

As early as 1939, the idea of establishing a national park unit in a cypress swamp area of the South had attracted some support within the National Park Service. In August of that year, the NPS forestry branch transmitted a report to the Director, entitled “A Cypress Swamp National Monument.” The report noted that “primeval cypress swamps, once numerous and extensive, are fast disappearing.” Willis King and Victor H. Cahalane of the NPS wildlife division, the report’s authors, believed that the agency should give serious consideration to preserving a representative example of this endangered ecological community. They visited two areas in Louisiana that they deemed worthy of consideration for national protection. These were Pass Manchac, between Lake Ponchartrain and Lake Maurepas northwest of New Orleans, and the Pearl River area on Louisiana’s border with Mississippi. The forestry branch also believed



Figure 6-1. Photo from “A Cypress Swamp National Monument,” 1939. (JELA)

that cypress areas in the Great Dismal Swamp of North Carolina and Virginia, the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia, and the northwestern portion of the Everglades should be studied. The branch supported the recommendation that “further study and consideration be given to the establishment of an area to preserve an example of the cypress swamp type.” No action was taken on this recommendation before the advent of World War II delayed any prospect of adding units to the National Park System.¹

Following 1945, the growth of the New Orleans area and accelerated exploitation of oil and natural gas deposits put further pressure on Louisiana’s cypress swamps and other wetland areas. By the

¹ Acting Chief of Forestry to Director, NPS, August 25, 1939, transmitting Willis King and Victor H. Cahalane, “A Cypress Swamp National Monument,” April 1939, JELA HQ files.

early 1960s, as the northern portions of Jefferson Parish became bedroom communities for New Orleans, some parish residents actively sought to protect natural areas in the parish as parkland. The leader of this effort was lifelong parish resident and educator Frank J. Ehret Jr. Ehret's grandfather had settled in Jefferson Parish in the late 19th century, and his father maintained a dairy farm and also ran a charter boat on Barataria Bay. During his youth Ehret hunted and fished in the parish's forests and wetlands. As he put it:

I have loved this area, ever since I was a child, all this area here. We had 60 acres that my mother and father bought after they moved from Gretna. [My father] ran beef cattle to market all the way down the bayou to Lafitte. He loved to hunt and fish, and I tell you, he had a lot of stories about old Bayou Coquille.²

After World War II, the parish's wetlands were increasingly drained for suburban development. In the 1950s, while developing special education programs for Jefferson Parish schools, Ehret also found time to promote a bond issue for West Jefferson Parish and serve as president of the Barataria Civic Association. This association was among the first groups to raise concerns about how the flood control works contemplated by the Army Corps of Engineers would impact local wetlands. Ehret increasingly was convinced that preservation of the parish's natural resources would come only through the creation of a park. He specifically had in mind an area about 10 miles south of Marrero, bounded by Lake Salvador on the west, Bayou des Familles on the north and east, and Bayou Barataria on the south. At one time, Jefferson Parish's planning department had produced maps showing proposed roads crisscrossing this area. Ehret developed a slide presentation on the area, and in 1963 he began showing it to civic federations, sportsmen's clubs, and any other group that he could assemble. As he remembers it:

They were draining wetlands like mad. I was trying to tell people years ago to stop draining these wetlands, because the wetlands protect us from hurricanes. People told me, "You don't know what the hell you're talking about." In

2 "Never Stop," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, November 30, 1980; Frank J. Ehret, interview with Robert Blythe, June 14, 2008.



Figure 6-2. Frank Ehret and his awards. (author)

those days, wetlands were just wastelands that people wanted to drain and build houses on. I went on preaching about wetlands. Anytime I would get an audience of ten people or more, I'd have a meeting. I had a slide show, some beautiful slides of the swamp, the oak trees, and everything. I'd tell them we have to have a park.

Other early supporters of a park in Jefferson Parish were Bethlyn McCloskey, Betsy Swanson, Mary Lou Maulsby, Sidney Rosenthal Jr., and Phil Fischer. Rosenthal in 1974 founded the Friends of Lafitte Park. The Orleans Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, the Fund for Animals, and the League of Women Voters were among the groups that pushed the idea of a park in the Barataria Basin. They faced a very difficult political environment in Jefferson Parish in the 1970s, where many landowners and developers sat on the parish council or had considerable influence with council members. Frank Ehret's vision for the park and persistence were of critical importance in this period. Barry Kohl, who has been active with the Orleans Audubon Society since the 1970s and later served on the Delta Region Preservation Commission, has stated that the park "would never have happened without Frank's involvement."³

3 "Never Stop"; "Longtime Conservationist Saw Park Dream to Reality," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 24, 1993; Ehret interview; Barry Kohl, interview with Robert Blythe, March 25, 2009; DRPC minutes, March 3, 1993; Ehret to Congressman Hale Boggs, March 11, 1971, JELA RM files. The Delta Region Preservation Commission, to be discussed below, was created by the legislation that authorized Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.

and Lamar Gibson, head of Louisiana's Parks and Recreation Commission. Ehret remembers that the governor thought the park was a wonderful idea. With sponsorship from Senator Mollere, joined by Jefferson Parish Representatives James E. Beeson, Francis E. Lauricella, John G. Schwegmann Jr., William J. Dwyer, and George R. Blue, the Louisiana legislature authorized the creation of Lafitte State Park by Act 100, signed into law on July 2, 1966. The legislature, however, appropriated no funds for land acquisition, hoping that land could be obtained by donation or lease. The legislators envisioned a park of about 1,000 acres. The act authorized the State Parks and Recreation Commission to create a park, but did not supply any resources. As a result, the commission did not conduct a comprehensive study of the area, but in early 1967 it prepared a preliminary plan for a park of about 3,000 acres. State contacts with local landowners revealed that none was willing to donate land for a park. A December 1967 report prepared by the State Parks and Recreation Commission indicated that leasing park properties for a period of 25 years would cost between \$700,000 and \$900,000. The commission and the Jean Lafitte State Park Committee, chaired by Frank Ehret, prepared a number of option agreements for lease or donation of land, but persuaded only one landowner to sign. By spring 1971, the state legislature still had appropriated no funds for the purchase or lease of property for a park; accordingly, proponents began to explore the possibilities for action at the national level.⁴

In proposing a state park, advocates could emphasize wetlands preservation and the recreational needs of the rapidly expanding population of Jefferson and Orleans Parishes. The creation of a state park would provide fishing, boating, hiking, and camping opportunities for this population. To achieve national park status, however, proponents would have to persuade Congress that the natural or historical values of the area rose to the level of national significance. Ehret pointed out that the area he wanted to protect



Figure 6-4. The Lafitte Cove subdivision, 2008. (author)

embraced several distinct ecological communities: hardwood forest along Bayou des Familles, tupelo gum and cypress swamp, and freshwater marsh. Ehret exaggerated a bit by branding a six-mile stretch along Bayou des Familles as “solid wilderness.” He also pointed to the historic and heritage values of the area, noting that its history included American Indian occupation, Isleños homesteads from the late 18th century,⁵ and 19th-century plantation agriculture. Jean Lafitte had also used areas of the Barataria Basin to move smuggled goods from Barataria Bay to buyers farther north (see figure 2-6). The legacy of the Lafitte brothers remained very much alive in the area. Frank Ehret consistently employed the “colorful legend of Lafitte the Pirate . . . passed down by families of the Barataria Bay region” as an organizing theme for the proposed park.⁶

The movement for a national Jean Lafitte park came during a period when the political and social environment in which the NPS operated was undergoing unprecedented changes. Among the most significant of these was a growing tendency of Congress to establish new park units as a means of satisfying constituents and boosting local economies. Increasingly in the 1960s and 1970s, members of Congress understood the political advantages of establishing or expanding national

4 Ehret interview; “Never Stop”; “Frank Ehret to Receive LOWA Van Pelt Award,” *Baton Rouge Advocate*, February 25, 1990; Fondren & Associates, *A Feasibility Report for the Proposed Jean Lafitte State Park*, April 1, 1975; Statement of Gilbert C. Lagasse, Secretary, Louisiana Department of Commerce and Industry, Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation, Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, *Hearing on S. 3546*, 94th Cong., 2nd sess., 1976, 35-36.

5 Archeological evidence of the Isleños' presence along the Bayou des Familles was not available until considerably later and was not a factor in early planning for the Barataria Unit. David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2001.

6 Frank J. Ehret, “A Proposal of Action for Development of a State Park of National Historical Significance in Jefferson Parish,” n.d., JELA RM files.

park units within their districts. Constituents tended to view parks as an unmitigated positive, and congressmen were eager to reap the political rewards of providing them. Through the middle 1960s, the Congress largely followed NPS recommendations on the merits of proposed new parks, but thereafter the Congress was more inclined to make its own determinations on additions to the system. Within the agency there was considerable unhappiness with this new state of affairs, but upper management concluded that accepting stewardship of some areas of debatable national significance was a small price to pay for continued congressional support of the NPS's broad mission.⁷

At the same time, under the growing influence of the environmental movement, many began to rethink the criteria for additions to the National Park System. In the early years of the conservation movement, the aesthetic and spiritual qualities of wild places inspired the creation of the first national parks. Mount Rainier, Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, and Yosemite were awe-inspiring places that stirred men's souls. The huge geographic expansion of metropolitan areas following World War II, the attendant rapid disappearance of open space, and a growing understanding of the fragility of ecosystems led to greatly expanded views of what merited protection. Many environmental groups and some professionals within the NPS began to perceive value in protecting almost any viable ecosystem from development and further degradation. The new generation of environmentalists was less concerned with an area's scenic beauties or national significance than with saving natural areas from development and sprawl. In addition, some scientists argued that each of the nation's major physiographic regions deserved representation within the National Park System.⁸

A third important trend in the 1960s and 1970s was the great national concern with the social ills of America's cities. Vast numbers of middle-class Americans fled the cities in the 1950s and 1960s, leaving behind mostly working-class and poor citizens, many of them black and Hispanic. Large sections of the nation's cities were in

physical decline, and city administrations found it increasingly difficult to provide the most basic of services, including parks and playgrounds. Riots in many cities, beginning with those in the Watts district of Los Angeles in August 1965, convinced many that the nation faced an urban crisis. During the administration of Lyndon Johnson (1963-1969), the amelioration of urban poverty and urban social pathologies became an avowed goal of the federal government. Many, although certainly not all, NPS managers saw an agency role in providing recreational and educational opportunities to inner-city residents.⁹

The changed political and social environment of the 1960s and 1970s thus put considerable pressure on the NPS to accept new parks, especially ones that would serve urban populations. Accommodating himself to the pressure from Congress to add parks, NPS Director George Hartzog (1964-1972) oversaw the addition of 58 units to the National Park System. Only two of these, Fire Island National Seashore (New York) and Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (Indiana), provided recreational opportunities near major urban areas. The NPS's interest in national seashores and lakeshores dates to the 1930s, and these two new parks were seen as fitting into that tradition rather than representing a new departure. In 1972, Congress established Gateway National Recreation Area in New York City and New Jersey and Golden Gate National Recreation Area in and around San Francisco. Both parks were the outgrowth of strong local initiatives; they did not originate as agency proposals. In the words of an NPS-published history of the National Park System, "These two acquisitions placed the NPS squarely in the business of urban mass recreation for essentially local populations—not previously a federal responsibility." The Nixon administration (1969-1974) supported Golden Gate and Gateway, hoping that they would be the last urban recreation areas added to the system. Under Nixon's conception of federalism, recreation was properly a function of state and local, not federal, authorities. To the Nixon administration it was appropriate for the NPS to provide models in Golden Gate and Gateway, but recreation in other urban areas should be provided by the states and municipalities. As it turned out, however, the

7 Ronald A. Foresta, *America's National Parks and Their Keepers* (Washington, D.C.: Resources for the Future, 1984), 75, 78-79.

8 Foresta, 99.

9 Foresta, 178-79.

establishment of these two units encouraged other urban areas to seek national park status as well.¹⁰

When the proponents of a Jean Lafitte park began to seriously pursue national park status, they found an ally in Congressman Hale Boggs. Boggs represented Louisiana's Second Congressional District in 1941-1943 and then continuously from 1946 until his death in October 1972. He held leadership positions from 1961, first as majority whip for the Democrats and then becoming majority leader in January 1971. Unable to persuade the state to buy land for a park, park proponents looked to Boggs to use his considerable influence on their behalf. Frank Ehret wrote to Congressman Boggs about a Lafitte park as early as October 1968. Interested groups such as the Orleans Audubon Society also started contacting the congressman. The West Bank Campers Club, for example, presented him with a petition containing 1,300 signatures in support of national park designation. With attention now turning to Washington, the State Parks and Recreation Commission put its efforts in the Barataria area on hold. The Department of the Interior advised Congressman Boggs that the first step toward the potential establishment of a park would be the preparation of a suitability and feasibility study. In response, Boggs introduced H.R. 11056 on October 4, 1971. Referring to the "unique natural values and unique cultural values" of the Barataria region, the resolution authorized a feasibility study and appropriated \$40,000 for it. Instead of passing a separate bill, Boggs was able to authorize and fund the feasibility study through the Interior Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 1973, signed on August 10, 1972, as Public Law 92-369.¹¹

The NPS approved the task directive for the Lafitte feasibility study in November 1972, hoping to have the study completed by the fall of 1973. Although H.R. 11056 referred specifically to a park in the "Barataria region," the appropriations bill merely

mentioned a "Jean Lafitte" park. Consequently, the Department of the Interior did not limit the scope of the feasibility study to the Barataria area, but expanded it to include the Mississippi Delta west of the river and south of New Orleans. Shortly before the feasibility study's initiation, on October 16, 1972, Congressman Boggs died when a small plane carrying him crashed on a flight between Anchorage and Juneau, Alaska.¹² The congressman's widow, Marie Corinne Morrison Claiborne Boggs, universally known as Lindy, won his seat in a 1973 special election and continued to represent Louisiana's second district until her retirement in 1991. The NPS did not release the feasibility study until December 1973, prompting Mrs. Boggs to introduce a placeholder or "skeleton" bill establishing a Lafitte park in Jefferson Parish on October 2, 1973. The pressures for development in the parish and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' plans to construct an extensive hurricane protection levee in the area of the proposed park convinced park proponents that any further delay might be fatal. By introducing a bill even in the absence of the completed feasibility study, the congresswoman hoped to forestall development and put the parish and other interested parties on notice that there was high-level interest in creating a national park.¹³

Before recommending an area as an addition to the National Park System, the NPS must be satisfied that it is of national significance and that it is both suitable and feasible to develop and administer as a park. The authors of the Jean Lafitte suitability and feasibility study acknowledged that the natural resources of the Barataria area were probably not nationally significant. They did note that the area was "part of the most extensive marsh ecosystem complex in the United States" and included "all life habitats in the area." They also acknowledged the degradation caused by the canals cut through the marsh, oil and gas drilling, and the introduction of exotic species such as the nutria. The study further noted that "the Mississippi Delta contains

10 Foresta, 174-77; NPS Harpers Ferry Center, *The National Parks: Shaping the System* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 2005), 78-79.

11 H.R. 11056, A Bill to authorize the study of the feasibility and desirability of establishing a unit of the National Park System to commemorate the unique values of the Barataria region of Louisiana, October 4, 1971; Frank Ehret to Congressman Hale Boggs, March 11, 1971; Assistant Secretary of the Interior to Wayne Aspinall, Chair, House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, October 12, 1972, JELA RM files.

12 A 39-day search failed to find the wreckage of Boggs's plane. In its first act in January 1973, the House of Representatives determined that Boggs had perished and declared his seat vacant.

13 "Dream of Swamp Park May Become Reality," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March 25, 1973; H.R. 10665, a Bill to authorize the establishment of Jean Lafitte Historical Park in the State of Louisiana, October 2, 1973.



Figure 6-5. A Louisiana cypress swamp. (Library of Congress)

no pristine remnants” and that the Barataria area was less developed than most others. The authors took the position that the establishment of a Jean Lafitte park, while it could not save the entire delta, could serve as a first step and an example. They wrote that “the economic forces at play in the Barataria region are therefore pushing the land ever closer to the point where the biological equation will be reversed and the environment will be permanently impaired.” This rhetoric reflected the new environmentalism, with its call for urgent action to preserve viable, largely intact ecosystems wherever they were found. Unique scenic beauty or pristine wilderness was less important from this point of view.¹⁴

Recognizing the weak case for a nationally significant natural environment, the study argued instead for the national significance of the “cultural expressions” of the area. Among those cited were the American Indian shell mounds, the Wetlands Acadian culture, plantation agriculture, the activities of Jean Lafitte and his men, and South Louisiana’s “cultural mosaic that has received international interest.” The study’s preferred alternative was an “Extended Jean Lafitte National Cultural Park.” The NPS had almost no prior experience with administering sites that were significant based on their cultural values. It had been administering historical areas for 35 years, but only sites that celebrated discrete events in the past, not living cultures. The cultural park was a brand-new concept within the NPS, having been approved by the Secretary of the Interior

on June 17, 1971.¹⁵ The new category of park was intended to “preserve folkways of the past as well as establishing sites for contemporary programs.”¹⁶ The feasibility study authors considered that the resources of South Louisiana could also justify the establishment of a historical park, but believed that the cultural park category was more inclusive and would reinforce the importance of emphasizing the living folkways of the area in interpretive programs. Significantly, the study did not propose a national recreational area, although it did note that “the park would respond affirmatively to the needs of an urban area” in a state underserved by national parks. An awareness of the Nixon administration’s opposition to having the NPS provide urban recreational opportunities probably steered the authors away from the recreational area designation.¹⁷

The study’s preferred alternative saw the core of the new park as approximately 7,000 acres of the Upper Barataria Basin, as well as the existing Chalmette National Historical Park and a visitor center in the French Quarter. The park would be an “extended” cultural park because it would cultivate relationships with existing historic sites and local governments across South Louisiana to promote preservation and influence land use policy. The authors hoped that the new park would have a “catalytic or multiplier effect” in mobilizing regional energies for the preservation and reclamation of resources. It would have a cultural park board composed of owners and managers of natural and cultural resources, sponsoring groups, and associated cultural communities. Also recommended was a Delta Region Preservation Commission, with representatives from the cultural park board and local, state, and federal

14 NPS DSC, *Suitability/Feasibility Study, Proposed Jean Lafitte National Cultural Park, Louisiana* (Denver, Colo.: NPS, December 1973); the quotations are from pages 12, 55, and 15.

15 Previous NPS interest in cultural expressions had been limited. Prior to 1933 NPS Director Horace Albright gave some thought to establishing parks centered on indigenous culture on Samoa and Hawaii. Both Shenandoah National Park (established in 1935) and Great Smoky Mountains National Park (established 1934) made efforts to interpret the culture of “mountain folk.” These efforts focused mostly on material culture, such as log cabins and handicraft items.

16 The idea that it was possible to “preserve” folkways or cultures was one that many would come to question. See chapter 7 for a discussion of the concept of “cultural conservation,” which began to emerge in the 1980s.

17 *Suitability/Feasibility Study*, quotations from pages 53, 69, 71, and 5.

governments. Jean Lafitte's career and personality were proposed as a linking thematic vehicle to support the interpretation of regional cultures. A suitability and feasibility study always puts forward several alternatives. The three rejected alternatives in this case were (1) no action, (2) a state park; and (3) a "nuclear Jean Lafitte National Cultural Park" consisting of a portion of the Barataria Basin, Chalmette Battlefield, and a French Quarter visitor center, but without any cooperative efforts with other stakeholders.¹⁸

The Jean Lafitte study concluded that the area was suitable for national park designation because no other park in the system represented the cultural aspects of South Louisiana. The feasibility analysis was rather cursory. The study stated that the park proposal was feasible because it "meets the purpose of a national cultural park." Typically, however, feasibility turns on questions of whether an area is large enough to ensure adequate protection and capable of being efficiently administered. The authors had high hopes that a 7,000-acre preserve could serve as a catalyst for the preservation of much larger areas of the Mississippi Delta. They did not closely examine the challenges that park managers would face in administering an area with many unrestricted means of access and much detrimental activity taking place in adjacent lands and waters. The authors also strained to present a sanitized and romantic version of Jean Lafitte. While characterizing Lafitte's slave smuggling as disturbing, they argued that the offense was mitigated by the fact that Lafitte's men did not purchase slaves in Africa, but merely captured Africans who had already been enslaved. It also made the undocumented assertions that Lafitte freed his own slaves before his death and "recognized that the institution of slavery could not endure."¹⁹

The NPS formally presented its Jean Lafitte suitability and feasibility study to Congresswoman Boggs on December 4, 1973, and to the public at a meeting of the Jefferson Parish Council in Gretna, Louisiana, on December 6. Mrs. Boggs was reported to be favorably impressed with the preferred alternative of an extended cultural

park. Most members of the parish council also reacted favorably, although at least one, Harold L. Molaison, was opposed to a park in any form, believing that the Barataria area's highest use was industrial. Even those council members who favored the park proposal wanted to exclude some lands with high industrial potential along the intracoastal waterway (an extension of Bayou Barataria) at the southern end of the proposed Barataria Unit of the park. Prodevelopment forces remained strong within the parish, and there was considerable suspicion of the federal government and its motives. John Henneberger of the NPS Southwest Regional Office told the council members that it could be up to four years before Congress acted on the study's recommendations. In December 1972, the parish council had imposed a moratorium on development in a large, undeveloped area of the parish in order to preserve land that might be recommended for inclusion in the park. With the release of the suitability/feasibility study and the uncertainty over when or if Congress might actually establish a park, the council voted to lift the ban for all but the approximately 7,000 acres addressed in the study.²⁰

Park proponents were confidently looking forward to the beginning of NPS planning studies for the new park when, in May 1974, NPS Director Ronald M. Walker announced the agency's official position against its establishment. The Nixon administration had intervened to overrule the recommendation of the suitability and feasibility study. Nixon had appointed Walker as director in January 1973 after firing George Hartzog, a holdover from the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Walker, age 36, previously had handled travel arrangements in the White House and had no background in park matters or agency administration. Nixon wanted an NPS director who was personally loyal to him and expected Walker to pull back from the expansion of the system that had characterized Hartzog's tenure.²¹

18 *Suitability/Feasibility Study*, 72.

19 *Suitability/Feasibility Study*, quotations from pages 73 and 54.

20 "Lafitte Park's Plan on Dec. 4," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, November 15, 1973; "Lafitte Park Is Feasible, Jefferson Council Told," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, December 7, 1973; Acting RD, SWR, to Associate Director, Legislation, WASO, December 12, 1973, JELA RM files.

21 Foresta, 85; Michael Frome, *Greening the National Parks* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 79-83.



Figure 6-6. A young alligator in the Barataria Unit. (JELA)

In conveying his decision to Congresswoman Boggs, Director Walker wrote that, after a thorough review of the suitability and feasibility study, the NPS had concluded that “perpetuation and interpretation of the cultural heritage of the area would not be achieved by the National Park Service assuming additional land management responsibilities in the area.” The agency’s position was that acquisition and management of parklands in the area was more appropriately a function of state and local governments. Walker noted that these levels of government could potentially tap funds for land acquisition through the Land and Water Conservation Fund.²² Finally, he stated that the NPS was open to participating in the proposed Delta Region Preservation Commission through the existing Chalmette National Historical Park. Walker’s decision was in line with the Nixon administration’s desire to limit the NPS’s involvement with urban parks to Gateway and Golden Gate.²³

With the national park proposal seemingly dead, Jefferson Parish representatives went back to the state legislature. In its 1974 session, the state legislature passed Concurrent Resolution 59, directing the Louisiana Parks and Recreation Commission to “conduct a feasibility study and master plan of development . . . on the acquisition and development of the proposed area for Jean Lafitte State Park.” The commission chose a New Orleans landscape architecture firm, James F. Fondren and Associates, to prepare this feasibility study. The study’s preferred alternative called

for a park of 7,300 acres, with an estimated land acquisition cost of \$6,580,000. During its 1975 session the state legislature authorized the acceptance of a 1,000-acre tract in the heart of the proposed park that belonged to New Orleans’s Charity Hospital, provided that legal questions surrounding the title to the tract could be resolved. The legislature also authorized \$6.6 million for land acquisition as part of a large, multiyear bond issue. Given other state priorities, however, it seemed unlikely that bonds for the Jean Lafitte State Park would be brought to market for many years.²⁴

The movement for a national Jean Lafitte park did not get back on track until two major political changes took place at the federal level. In 1972 Louisiana state senator J. Bennett Johnston was elected to the U.S. Senate, replacing Allen J. Ellender. Then, in November 1976, Georgian Jimmy Carter narrowly defeated President Gerald Ford, putting a Democrat in the White House for the first time in eight years. Senator Johnston chaired Carter’s Louisiana campaign committee. Eager to see a new national park in his state, Senator Johnston introduced S. 3546, “A Bill to authorize the establishment of Jean Lafitte National Park in the state of Louisiana.” As chair of the Senate’s Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation, Johnston held hearings in Gretna on December 6, 1976. Representatives of environmental groups and other local interests testified, most of them in favor of the bill. The 94th Congress, however, adjourned without acting on Johnston’s bill.

When the 95th Congress convened in early 1977, the stars were at last favorably aligned for the establishment of Jean Lafitte as a unit of the National Park System. As the *Times-Picayune* noted in late 1976, the park had been talked about for so long, “some people could conceivably think the park already exists.” Now there was a Democrat in the White House and comfortable Democratic majorities in the House and Senate. President Carter and his Secretary of the Interior, Cecil Andrus of Idaho, were generally favorable to expanding the National Park System. Carter appointed James A. Joseph, a native of Opelousas, Louisiana, to the position of Undersecretary of the Interior. In addition, during the 95th Congress, the Senate revamped its committee structure. The old Senate Committee on Interior and

22 Congress established the Land and Water Conservation Fund in 1964 as a dedicated source of funding for the acquisition of open land by federal, state, and local governments. See Frome, 172-73.

23 Director Walker to Congresswoman Lindy Boggs, May 1, 1974, JELA RM files.

24 Statement of Gilbert C. Lagasse, 37-39.

Insular Affairs became the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, retaining its responsibility for the Department of the Interior and assuming broad authority over energy policy, including offshore drilling and energy research. Bennett Johnston was the third-ranking member of this powerful committee. Finally, in the House of Representatives, Phillip Burton of California became chair of the Subcommittee on National Parks. Burton well understood the eagerness of members to establish parks in their districts. He pioneered the use of omnibus park bills, aggregating dozens of proposals for establishing and expanding parks into a single bill and thereby maximizing the number of members who could be counted on to support it.²⁵

After becoming a U.S. Senator, Johnston had been surprised to learn that the Chalmette National Historical Park was the only unit of the National Park System within the state of Louisiana. Johnston also discovered that Texas possessed two national parks, a national monument, and a national seashore, while Mississippi had a national seashore and the Natchez Trace Parkway. Johnston and his staff began to investigate areas in Louisiana that might merit designation as new units of the system, and they quickly learned of the history of the Jean Lafitte park proposal that Congresswoman Boggs had been promoting, as well as Frank Ehret's tireless efforts for the park. Johnston later observed that talking to Frank Ehret about the Lafitte park was like trying to get a drink of water from a fire hose.²⁶ The years of the Ford administration were not the most auspicious time to add units to the system, but the situation changed with the election of Jimmy Carter.

In November 1976, the *Times-Picayune* published a news analysis that explicitly portrayed the effort to establish the Jean Lafitte park as a test of Senator Johnston's clout. Noting that Johnston had managed Carter's Louisiana campaign, correspondent Kenneth A. Weiss observed that

Johnston was "putting his personal reputation and prestige on the line behind the park plan." After recounting the history of the park effort, Weiss concluded:

If Congress passes and President Carter signs Johnston's bill to give Louisiana its first major national park, the Louisiana Senator will look very good. If that does not happen, Johnston will be very embarrassed and look rather bad.²⁷

In February 1977, Senator Johnston formally requested the assistance of the NPS legislative division in drafting a bill to establish the park. The senator's staff worked closely with Richard Curry, the NPS associate director for legislation, and his staff in crafting the bill. Heading the effort for the senator was his legislative director, Laura C. Hudson, who would continue to have primary responsibility for Jean Lafitte throughout Johnston's time in the Senate. Hudson sought advice from James Beirne, another Senate staffer who had worked on a number of park bills. Discussions among Senate staff and NPS staff led to the drafting of a bill that aimed to create a new model for a national park unit, a model that would not involve 100 percent federal ownership.²⁸

Based on these discussions and testimony from the December 1976 hearings, the NPS legislative division recommended that the size of the Barataria Unit be increased to 23,700 acres. Early drafts of the bill included the park advisory board as well as the Delta Region Preservation Commission (DRPC), as recommended in the suitability and feasibility study. At some point, it was determined that the missions of the two entities would overlap, so the bill as introduced dropped the advisory board, providing only for the DRPC. Southwest Regional NPS Director John Cook acknowledged that a regional commission would involve some "inherent inter-organizational and inter-personal problems," but concluded that it was required to implement a truly cooperative approach across South Louisiana as recommended in the 1973 suitability and feasibility study. The inclusion of a number of DRPC members from Jefferson Parish was a shrewd way of gaining support for the park in an area with deep suspicions of the federal

25 "Park Procrastination," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, November 11, 1976; "La. Senate Power Boosted by Overhaul," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, February 8, 1977; Foresta, 80-81; Public Papers of the Presidents website, University of California, Santa Barbara, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=6910, consulted May 1, 2009.

26 Ehret interview, Laura Hudson, interview with Robert Blythe, August 28, 2008; Senator J. Bennett Johnston, interview with Robert Blythe, March 22, 2010.

27 "Sen. Johnston Betting on Lafitte National Park," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, November 21, 1976.

28 Hudson interview.

government. NPS managers discussed whether the new park should be a “cultural park,” a “national recreational area,” or a “national historical park.” Senator Johnston was never comfortable with the cultural park terminology, preferring that the park be designated the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park.²⁹

Senator Johnston introduced S. 1829, “a bill to provide for the establishment of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park in the State of Louisiana,” on July 11, 1977. Congresswoman Boggs introduced an identical measure in the House as H.R. 8290 on July 13. The park’s purpose was to preserve “significant examples of natural and historical resources of the Mississippi Delta region” and interpret them “in such manner as to portray the development of cultural diversity in the region.” The park would include (1) a Barataria Marsh Unit of 23,700 acres, (2) Big Oak Island,³⁰ (3) a French Quarter unit, (4) the existing Chalmette National Historical Park, and (5) “additional natural, cultural, and historical resources.” Just two months previously, the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments had advised the Secretary of the Interior against establishing the park. This unfavorable recommendation caused some consternation among park proponents, but Senator Johnston was confident that his bill would gain the support of the NPS and Congress. The Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held hearings on the bill in Louisiana in December 1977 and in Washington on February 3, 1978.³¹

29 RD, SWR, to Chief, Office of Legislation, WASO, March 2, 1977, and April 4, 1977; Acting Legislative Counsel to Senator Johnston, June 20, 1977; Hudson and Johnston interviews. The Jean Lafitte proposal had many aspects that would later emerge more formally in the concept of National Heritage Areas.

30 Big Oak Island, in eastern New Orleans, is an important American Indian midden (refuse disposal) site occupied by the prehistoric Tchefuncte culture. As detailed below in chapter 10, the NPS has never owned or managed this site.

31 “Lafitte Park Motion Has Little Weight,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, May 15, 1977; *Hearings on S. 1829*, 95th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1978). The Historic Sites Act of 1935 established the advisory board (now called the National Park System Advisory Board) to provide broad policy recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior on National Park Service and historic preservation matters. “National Park System Advisory Board,” NPS website, www.nps.gov/policy/advisory/Boardhistory.pdf

Testimony at the new hearings did not differ greatly from that presented at the December 1976 hearings on the previous bill (S. 3546, introduced in the 94th Congress). The secretary of Louisiana’s Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, the president of the Jefferson Parish Council, and New Orleans Mayor Ernest “Dutch” Morial all expressed strong support for the park. The state legislature had previously passed a concurrent resolution supporting the creation of a “wetlands national park near Lafitte, Louisiana.” Barry Kohl of the Orleans Audubon Society appeared on behalf of his organization, the New Orleans Chapter of the Sierra Club, the Fund for Animals, and the Ecology Center of Louisiana, all of which favored the bill. The Jefferson Parish League of Women Voters and the National Parks and Conservation Association submitted statements favoring the park.³²

The official position of the Department of the Interior on Senator Johnston’s bill was conveyed in a letter to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources dated February 3, 1978. The department was not interested in having the NPS acquire and manage a Barataria Unit of more than 23,000 acres, as proposed in S. 1829. Rather, the department supported the creation of a Jean Lafitte National Cultural Reserve on a core tract of 8,000 acres, within a 24,000-acre Reserve Protection Zone. Interior estimated that the 8,000 acres could be acquired for about \$34 million, while the larger acreage would have cost \$53 million. Under this alternative, monies from the Land and Water Conservation Fund would be used to acquire the acreage, but the park would be operated and managed by the state of Louisiana with the guidance and cooperative assistance of the National Park Service. The department had no objection to other provisions of the bill, including an NPS presence in the French Quarter, entering into cooperative agreements, or providing financial or other assistance to managers of historic, cultural, and natural sites within the region. Interior endorsed recognizing the significance of South Louisiana’s resources through the creation of a unit of the National Park System, but wanted to limit NPS ownership. Rather the department’s wanted

32 *Hearings on S. 1829*, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., Publication 95-97; House Concurrent Resolution No. 172, Regular Session, 1977.

the NPS play a coordinating and supporting role for the state and other site owners. Several senior NPS officials were decidedly lukewarm about a Lafitte park, and their skepticism is reflected in the official position. There were some exceptions, notably Richard Curry, associate director for legislation, and John Cook, who was in his first stint as director of the NPS Southwest Region (1977-1979). Cook argued for more openness on the part of the NPS to the concept of a cultural park in South Louisiana.³³

NPS Director William J. Whalen elaborated on Interior's position in his testimony before the subcommittee. He stressed the limited role envisioned for the NPS:

With the national recognition afforded by national historical park designation, orientation and interpretation for the public in a central park-service operated facility, and financial, technical, and interpretive assistance to individual component properties, the outstanding cultural resources of Greater New Orleans and the visiting public could benefit greatly.

In an exchange with Whalen, Senator Johnston took pains to have the director reaffirm that fishing, hunting, and trapping would continue to be allowed in the Barataria Unit, subject to necessary regulations to protect other visitors. This provision was essential to securing local support for the park. Residents of Jefferson and surrounding parishes were very concerned about retaining their accustomed recreational uses in the new park. Whalen testified that the NPS would work with Jefferson Parish to create new land use regulations in the Reserve Protection Zone, but that the zone would be under local, rather than federal control. Senator Johnston objected to the word "reserve," feeling that it connoted property that was off limits to the public.³⁴

Two Jefferson Parish council members, Lloyd F. Giardina and James E. Lawson Jr., testified against the proposed park. Their concerns centered on

the fate of long-established family hunting and fishing camps within the proposed Barataria Unit, whether commercial fishermen would be able to operate within the unit, and the loss of tax revenues resulting from the removal of so much acreage from the tax rolls. Giardina believed that the higher ground along Highway 45 was suitable for residential subdivisions, which would add to the parish's tax base. Much of Giardina's and Lawson's opposition stemmed from a general suspicion of the federal government. Complaints about the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency's restrictions on development of wetlands figured in their testimony. Giardina went so far as to brand S. 1829 "a pork barrel bill." These witnesses and others also feared that the DRPC would be dominated by New Orleans interests to the detriment of Jefferson Parish. At the December 1976 hearing, John A. Chantrey, president of the Louisiana Commercial Fishermen and Boat Owners Association, had expressed the serious reservations of his members over the potential loss of their livelihoods from the creation of the park.³⁵

The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources considered S. 1829 in early April 1978, amending it to reflect the results of the subcommittee hearings. Finessing the tricky issue of nomenclature, the bill now designated the park as the "Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve." This name was meant to differentiate the portions of the park, like Chalmette, that commemorated historic events from the Barataria Unit, where traditional uses like trapping and fishing, would be preserved. The committee followed Interior's advice and divided the Barataria Unit into an 8,000-acre "core area" and an approximately 12,000-acre "park protection zone" (PPZ) to the north and northwest of the core area. The new language directed the NPS to work with state and local governments to develop land use regulations for the PPZ that would aid in preserving and restoring the ecology of the core area. The reduction of the acreage to be purchased by the federal government was a concession to local concerns and also reduced the prospective cost to the federal treasury. The Secretary of the Interior was given standby authority to purchase properties in the PPZ should local government

33 Undersecretary of the Interior to Henry Jackson, Chairman, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, February 3, 1978; John Cook, interview with Robert Blythe, March 3, 2009.

34 *Hearings on S. 1829*, 94-102; Hudson and Johnston interviews.

35 *Hearings on S. 1829*, 33-45; *Hearings on S. 3546*, 150-54.

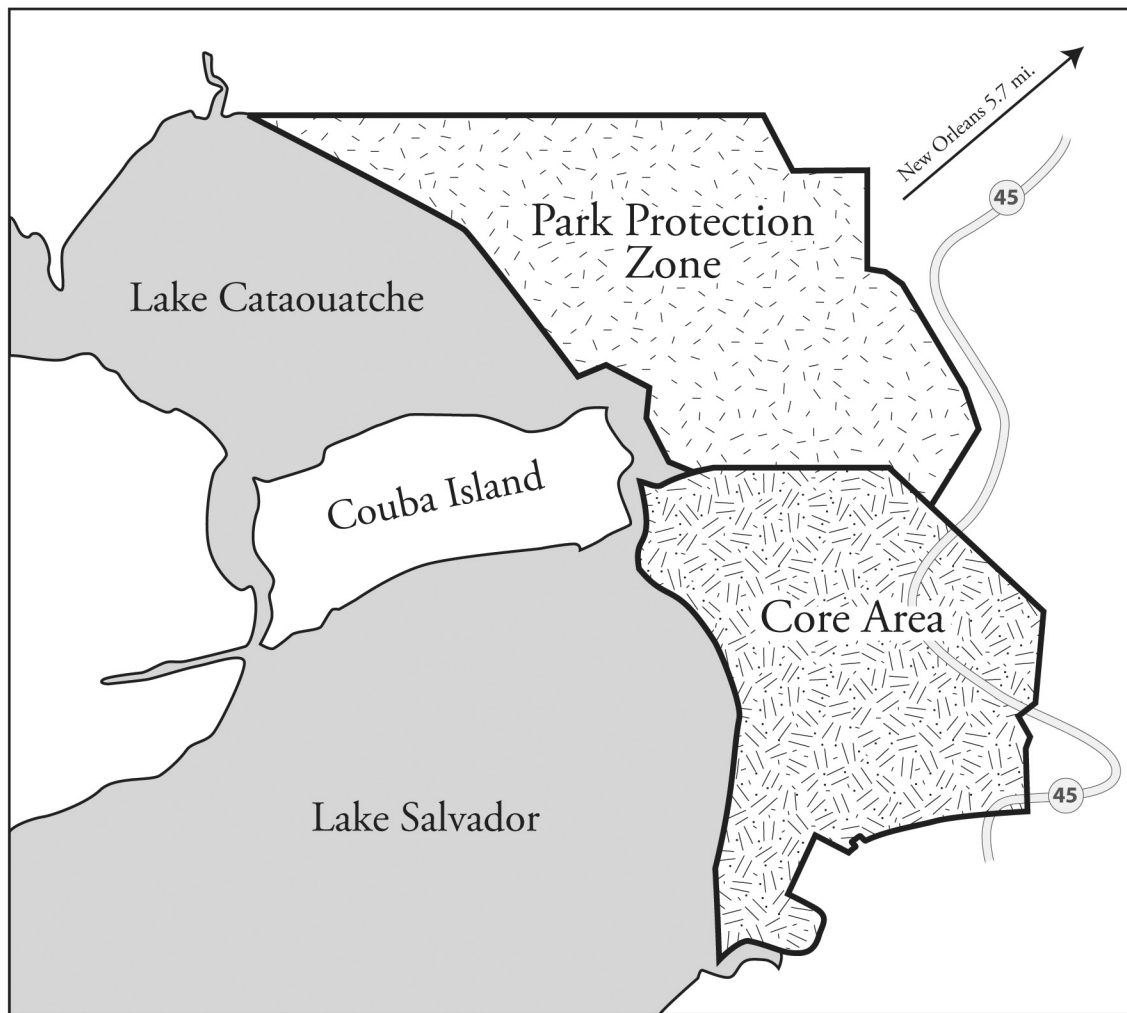


Figure 6-7. Barataria Unit, core area and park protection zone. (Madeline Baum)

fail to adopt appropriate regulations. The committee expected “that this standby acquisition authority will be used sparingly.” On April 11 the Senate committee approved the revised bill and recommended passage by the Senate.³⁶

On April 25, 1978, the Senate passed the Jean Lafitte bill as amended and sent it on to the House. Concurrently, Congressman Phillip Burton was shepherding a huge omnibus parks bill through the House, which was ultimately enacted as the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978. Early drafts of Burton’s bill called for the establishment of 12 new parks. The bill also established new national trails and national wild and scenic rivers, expanded the boundaries of 21 park units, and raised the authorized budget ceilings of 29 park units. It has been conservatively estimated that the

bill affected at least 200 congressional districts, strategically positioning it to gain broad support. Because Congresswoman Boggs had introduced a separate bill in the House (H.R. 8290) to establish the Jean Lafitte park, Jean Lafitte was not at first part of the omnibus bill.³⁷

When the Lafitte bill was referred to the House, Republican Representative Keith G. Sebelius of Kansas, a member of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, objected that the Barataria marsh lacked national significance. Sebelius offered an amendment to the omnibus bill that added the Jean Lafitte park to it. The amendment, however, omitted the Barataria Unit from the proposed park and called instead for a comprehensive study of the natural resources

36 *Jean Lafitte National Park, Report No. 95-743 to Accompany S. 1829, 95th Cong., 2nd sess.*

37 A Bill to provide for increases in development ceilings in certain units of the National Park System, and for other purposes, H.R. 9601, October 17, 1977, 95th Cong., 1st sess.

of the Mississippi Delta region. The provisions covering Big Oak Island, a French Quarter visitor center, and NPS authority to enter into cooperative agreements were carried over from the Boggs bill to the omnibus act. Apparently doubting whether the House would have time to consider the original, stand-alone Jean Lafitte bill, Congressman Burton allowed the Sebelius amendment to pass, thus incorporating the Jean Lafitte proposal into the House's omnibus bill. Burton apparently believed that he would later be able to restore the language of Johnston's bill, including the Barataria Unit, as part of his omnibus bill. The Sebelius amendment was adopted by the full House on July 12, 1978, and made part of the omnibus bill.³⁸

Between July 12 and early October, Burton succeeded in removing the Sebelius amendment and restoring the Barataria Unit, with an 8,000-acre core area and a 12,000-acre park protection zone, to the omnibus bill. He then added the entire omnibus bill, including a Title IX establishing Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, as an amendment when the House was considering S. 791, a bill appropriating additional funds for Idaho's Sawtooth National Recreation Area. The House approved this legislation with the omnibus bill attached on October 4, 1978. The Senate passed the bill with some minor amendments on October 12, requiring the House to act on the Senate version, which it did on October 13. President Carter then signed the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 on November 10, calling it "the most significant conservation legislation to pass the 95th Congress."³⁹

Title IX of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 authorized the establishment of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. The park's purpose remained unchanged from the first draft: "to preserve . . . significant examples of natural and historical resources of the Mississippi Delta region and to provide for their interpretation in such manner as to portray the development of cultural diversity in the region." (See Appendix A for the full text of the legislation.) The law

created a "Barataria Marsh Unit" with a core area of up to 8,000 acres to be purchased by the federal government, along with a 12,000-acre park protection zone (PPZ) that would remain outside of federal ownership but would become subject to new land use regulations to be enacted and enforced by state and local governments. If state and local governments failed to enact adequate regulations, the Secretary of the Interior was authorized to purchase land within the PPZ. Contrary to Interior's wishes, no provision was made for the ultimate transfer of the federally purchased land to the state. The Barataria Unit would be operated by the federal government with substantial federal land holdings.

The other units of the park remained the same as in the original bill: Big Oak Island, an interpretive and administrative unit in the French Quarter, and Chalmette National Historical Park, which was redesignated as the Chalmette Unit of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. The NPS was authorized to acquire property for the French Quarter Unit by purchase or lease.

Section 904 of Title IX gave the Secretary, through the NPS, broad authority to enter into cooperative agreements with "owners of properties of natural, historical, or cultural significance" in the Mississippi Delta region. The law specifically mentioned resources in the French Quarter and Garden District of New Orleans, forts in the region, plantations, and Acadian towns and villages in the Saint Martinville area. The act, however, did not limit cooperative agreements to these specific resources, but explicitly authorized agreements covering any significant areas or sites within the region. The NPS was authorized to provide "management services, program implementation, and incremental financial assistance" to help cooperating owners in marking, interpreting, preserving, and restoring resources. Senator Johnston and his staff worked to include considerable flexibility in the legislative mandate, hoping to provide NPS managers with a varied "tool bag" to use in accomplishing the law's purposes.⁴⁰

The act established the Delta Region Preservation Commission (DRPC), to be made up of representatives appointed by the state, Jefferson

38 *National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978*, H.R. 95th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* (July 12, 1978), H6490-H6504; "House OKs Lafitte Plan, But Not \$50 Million," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, July 14, 1978.

39 *National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978*, H.R. 95th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* (October 4, 1978), H11535; Public Law 95-625.

40 Hudson interview.

Parish, the City of New Orleans, conservation organizations, the commercial fishing industry, and the National Endowment for the Arts. The act did not provide for DRPC members from St. Bernard Parish, home to the Chalmette Unit. The DRPC was given a broad mandate to advise park managers on the choice of sites for inclusion in the park, the development of the park's general management plan, and the development of an interpretive program.

In a curious holdover from Congressman Sebelius's amendment, Section 910 of Title IX directed the Secretary to prepare and transmit to the Congress "a comprehensive report with recommendations as to sites within the Mississippi River Delta Region which constitute nationally significant examples of natural resources within the region." Given that Sebelius's original intention was to identify more worthy natural areas than Barataria, it seems strange that the final version both created a unit of the National Park Service in the Barataria area and retained the provision for additional study of other areas.

Pursuant to Section 910 of the act, the NPS prepared a *Mississippi River Delta Natural Areas Significance Study*, released in September 1980. The intent of the study was to provide information to federal, state, and local agencies, conservation organizations, and others concerned with natural resource protection in the delta. The study concluded that the 11.5 million-acre delta region contained 15 nationally significant natural areas that were severely threatened by subsidence, erosion, saltwater intrusion, and development. It further recommended that four areas, Lake Maurepas, Terrebonne Marsh, Gheens Marsh, and Lac Des Allemands, be studied further for possible addition to the National Park System. The study's scope did not include in-depth analysis of resource protection alternatives for the nationally significant areas identified. Like all such studies, this one encouraged all levels of government to cooperate in "vigorously" pursuing protection and restoration of threatened natural resource areas. The study fulfilled the congressional mandate, but seems not to have had significant impact.⁴¹

41 Manager, DSC, to RD, SWR, April 24, 1980; Manager, DSC, to RD, SWR, transmitting study findings and recommendations, September 5, 1980, JELA HQ files.

Getting the Jean Lafitte Park Up and Running

Establishing a new park with several units in the Louisiana delta was a major undertaking. The NPS's Southwest Region, to which Louisiana belonged at that time, had its offices in Santa Fe, New Mexico. It fell to that office to choose a superintendent and initiate the planning studies that Jean Lafitte would need.

Chalmette National Historical Park's last superintendent, Lionel Bienvenu, served as acting superintendent of the new Jean Lafitte park from November 1978 until January 15, 1979. The reins then passed to James Isenogle, who was appointed by John E. Cook, director of the NPS Southwest Region. Isenogle was a 22-year NPS veteran who had held a series of administrative positions in the Northeast and Rocky Mountain Regions. At the time of his appointment, he was director of NPS operations in Utah. Isenogle had also served in the NPS's Alaska Region, working extensively with the state's native peoples. Cook selected Isenogle because of his ability to work with diverse communities and his talent as a planner. Upon his arrival, Isenogle stated that his two immediate priorities were finding a home for the French Quarter visitor contact facility and establishing the Delta Region Preservation Commission (DRPC). He recognized that some intricate negotiations with various stakeholders would be involved in this new park. Each commission member could be expected to have his or her own priorities for the park, and the park had a broad mandate to establish cooperative agreements. The superintendent worked at first in temporary quarters at the Chalmette Unit of the park but soon moved the park's headquarters to the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Building at 400 Royal Street in the French Quarter (see figure 8.1.)¹

Superintendent Isenogle gradually began to build his staff. In February 1980, George Neusaenger arrived as the park's first chief of visitor protection and resource management. A. Wilson Greene became manager of the Chalmette Unit that same month. In February 1981, Linda Canzanelli was hired as the first manager of the French Quarter Unit, and Oscar Rodriguez came on board as the first manager of the Barataria Unit in May 1981.²

The Delta Region Preservation Commission

The legislation establishing Jean Lafitte gave the Delta Region Preservation Commission (DRPC) a significant role in setting the direction for the new park. It also represented a sharp change for the NPS, which at the time was accustomed to planning for and operating its units with little input from those outside the Service. Over the course of the commission's life, some superintendents consulted regularly with the commission, others less frequently. At times, sharp differences of opinion emerged on specific issues. Some superintendents had more highly developed political skills and better navigated the personalities and the widely differing interests and priorities represented on the DRPC. The commission included members appointed by state and local government, representatives from conservation groups, and one representative from the commercial fishing industry. This diversity ensured that many decisions would be reached only after considerable debate. Decisions were to be made by majority vote, and decisions affecting a park unit wholly within a parish or municipality had to have the approval of a majority of members

1 "Jean Lafitte Park Chief Is Named," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 16, 1979; James Isenogle to RD, SWR, March 8, 1978, JELA RM files; John Cook, interview with Robert Blythe, March 3, 2009.

2 SAR, 1981; George Neusaenger, interview with Robert Blythe, March 10, 2009; JELA management staff meeting notes, February 26, 1980, JELA HQ files.

appointed by that governmental body. For example, any decision affecting the Barataria Unit would need majority approval from among the four members appointed by Jefferson Parish. Members served two-year terms and could be reappointed indefinitely. All DRPC meetings were open to the public and announced in advance. The commission had a broad mandate to shape the park's general management plan, the most important planning document for a park. It was also charged with helping to develop the park's interpretive programs and advising on the selection of sites to be included in the park. Jean Lafitte's enabling legislation was amended on October 12, 1979, to clarify some of the provisions regarding the DRPC. Two members were added, to be appointed by the St. Bernard Parish Police Jury, and a ten-year limit was placed on the life of the commission. As described below, Congress ultimately extended the commission's life to a total of 20 years.³

Several months passed before the various appointing authorities all completed their selections for the DRPC. The responsibilities for appointing members were as follows:

Appointing Authority	Number of members
Governor of Louisiana	2
President, Jefferson Parish	2
Jefferson Parish Council	2
St. Bernard Parish Police Jury	2
Mayor of New Orleans	2
Commercial fishing industry	1
Citizen conservation organizations in the delta region	3
Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts	1

With four members appointed by Jefferson Parish interests and three members coming from conservation organizations, the Barataria Unit was destined to be the principal concern of the DRPC. The two members from St. Bernard Parish, understandably, were most concerned with the Chalmette Unit and the cooperative agreement that eventually led to creation of the Isleños Center in

the parish (see chapter 10). In general, five or six commission members took leading roles while the others were less active. Frank Ehret saw himself as the father of the Barataria Unit and took an intense interest in its operations. Because the members represented different constituencies and various political subdivisions, they tended not to plan comprehensively for the park, but rather focused on the individual unit or units of most interest to them.⁴ Appendix C contains a list of the individuals who served on the DRPC.

The commission convened its first meeting on November 19, 1979, in Gretna. Dr. Nicholas R. Spitzer of the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism gave an hour-long presentation on the region's cultural groups. At its second meeting, the DRPC elected Frederick "Fritz" Wagner, Ph.D., as chair and Frank Ehret as vice chair. Wagner, then director of the School of Urban and Regional Studies of the University of New Orleans, was appointed to the DRPC by New Orleans Mayor Ernest "Dutch" Morial.⁵ Wagner and his department had close connections to the city administration. He served for eight years on the New Orleans City Planning Commission, and a fellow member of his department, Anthony J. Mumphrey, was head of planning and development under Morial. Wagner quickly realized that many NPS officials were not enthusiastic about the new park. The new superintendent, however, was strongly supportive. Frank Ehret, selected by the governor, had been pushing for a Lafitte park since at least 1963. Wagner and Ehret would remain as chair and vice chair throughout the 20 years of the DRPC. At its second meeting the commission also approved five standing committees: planning and program development, ethnicity, prehistory/history, natural systems, and art and architecture. A publicity committee was later established.⁶

As the DRPC approached the end of its legislated ten-year existence, members realized that much work remained, notably planning for the three Acadian Cultural Centers, which had been authorized in 1988 (see chapter 11). Commission

3 Public Law 96-87, 96th Cong., 1st sess. (October 12, 1979). St. Bernard Parish, where the Chalmette Unit of the park is located, originally had not been given representation on the DRPC.

4 David Muth, interview with Robert Blythe, November 5, 2008; Nicholas Spitzer, interview with Robert Blythe, April 17, 2009.

5 Morial was the first African American mayor of New Orleans, serving two terms from 1978 to 1986.

6 DRPC minutes, November 19, 1979, and January 22, 1980, JELA HQ files; Fritz Wagner, interview with Robert Blythe, February 18, 2009.

members secured Senator Johnston's support for a 10-year extension of its life, and the NPS acquiesced. Legislation enacted in 1987 gave the commission a new ending date of November 10, 1998. As this date approached, a few DRPC members, Frank Ehret in particular, floated the idea of another extension. Chairman Wagner, however, "thought we had gone as far as we could." By 1998, the three Acadian centers were up and running, Senator Johnston had retired, and it was less likely that funding for additional cultural centers or major cooperative agreement sites would be forthcoming. Senator Johnston paid tribute to the commission's work: "They have been extremely helpful. One of the things a citizens group can do is assess the needs of the park and communicate that to the [congressional] delegation. . . . The squeaking wheel gets the grease." The DRPC's final meeting took place on October 21, 1998. The commission made important contributions to the development of the park over the course of 20 years. At times, there was tension between park superintendents and individual commission members over specific issues.⁷

Planning Documents for the New Park

The enabling legislation called for the park's general management plan (GMP) to be adopted within three years, by November 10, 1981. To provide the GMP team with an adequate knowledge base for planning, Superintendent Isenogle initiated several studies to be accomplished under contracts or cooperative agreements. The first and most important of these was the *Mississippi Delta Ethnographic Overview*, completed and delivered to the NPS in November 1979. The National Council for the Traditional Arts prepared the overview, with Nicholas R. Spitzer as project director. The overview was meant to provide basic information on the ethnic groups of South Louisiana, with emphasis on those outside New Orleans. Spitzer had attended a 1977 NPS-sponsored meeting devoted to the interpretation of living cultures at the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis. Soon thereafter he learned about the new Lafitte park, with its mandate to interpret the cultural diversity of South

Louisiana. Spitzer had done extensive fieldwork among rural Creole and Cajun communities in Southwestern Louisiana. Named director of the Louisiana Folklife Program in 1978, Spitzer visited Superintendent Isenogle to express his interest in the park's mission. Spitzer saw a great opportunity for the state to work in tandem with the NPS in documenting and interpreting the traditional cultures of the state.⁸

Spitzer was unsure as to the NPS's commitment to engaging with living cultures. Feeling his way in an early meeting, he suggested to the new superintendent that they cooperate on a project dealing with the region's famous aboveground cemeteries. Spitzer believed this was a way to ease the NPS into dealing with living cultures through their burial customs and All Saints rituals, because the topic also involved tangible historic resources. But Isenogle responded, "I'm not so worried about the dead people; it's the living people I'm concerned about." Spitzer knew immediately that this was a superintendent he could work with. When he became project director for the ethnographic overview that the park commissioned from the National Council for the Traditional Arts, he arranged with his superiors in Baton Rouge to take release time, if needed, to finish the overview. Spitzer assembled a team of historians and ethnographers from Louisiana State University, the University of Southwestern Louisiana (now the University of Louisiana at Lafayette), and Northwestern State University of Louisiana in Natchitoches. The study was completed in record time, was path-breaking for the state, and would become influential for Louisiana's subsequent folklife and heritage efforts.⁹

7 RD, SWR, to Director, July 7, 1987, JELA RM files; "Mission Finished for Park Panel," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 17, 1998; Wagner interview.

8 DRPC minutes, November 19, 1979, January 22 and July 31, 1980, JELA HQ files; Spitzer interview. Ethnographic groups included in the 440-page ethnographic overview included the colonial French, Afro-Creoles, Cajuns, the colonial Spanish, Isleños, Houma and Chitimacha Indians, British, African Americans, Germans, Italians, Yugoslavs, Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, Latvians, Lithuanians, Greeks, Jews, Syrians, Lebanese, Filipinos, Chinese, Vietnamese, and recent arrivals from Latin America. National Council for the Traditional Arts, Joseph T. Wilson, executive director, Nicholas R. Spitzer, project director, Ray Brassieur, Michael Caron, Jeffrey Mark Golliher, H. F. Gregory, C. Paige Gutierrez, Janice Pierce, Robert R. Rathburn, Nicholas R. Spitzer contributing authors and researchers, *Mississippi Delta Ethnographic Overview* (N.p.: NPS, November 1979).

9 Spitzer interview; Allison Peña, interview with Robert Blythe, November 7, 2008.

The *Mississippi Delta Ethnographic Overview* focused on the less documented, mostly rural, traditional communities of the delta, including the Houma Indians and remote Creole and Acadian communities. The authors observed:

Jean Lafitte National Park has the potential to be unique among National Parks in acknowledging and presenting local folk cultural life with the aim of preserving the heritage of ethnic groups of south Louisiana and the unique regional quality of life to which these groups as a whole contribute.

One key insight of the overview had to do with how the French influence sets South Louisiana off from other regions in the United States. Many regions of the United States are marked by cultural diversity, but the regional culture of South Louisiana is unique in that, while shaped by a number of ethnic groups, it developed within the context of a pervasive French influence. The overview's authors noted that almost all previous studies had examined cultural communities individually and did not attempt to integrate "the cultural and natural relationships and traits as a whole into a broader concept of region." The idea of "creolization" was seen as a promising avenue for understanding how the various cultural communities of South Louisiana had interacted and influenced each other to form a regional identity. The overview recommended additional in-depth ethnographic investigations. The study ended up serving as the major driver of the park's interpretive programs for years to come.¹⁰

In addition to the ethnographic overview, the park commissioned numerous other studies to help it prepare to address its legislative mandate. Among these were:

- A Barataria water sampling survey via an interagency agreement with the U.S. Geological Survey
- A survey of archeological resources in the

Barataria area (conducted by Richard Beavers, University of New Orleans)

- A National Register of Historic Places nomination for archeological sites along Bayou Coquille (Richard Beavers)
- A survey of plantations and fortifications (Labouisse Graeber Ltd.)
- A history of fortifications (Jerry Greene, NPS Denver Service Center)
- An ethnohistory of Indians (Mike Schene, NPS Denver Service Center)
- An ethnohistory of Isleños (Gilbert Din, St. Lewis College)
- A survey of vernacular architecture in francophone areas (Jay Edwards, Louisiana State University)
- An analysis of archeological data for Big Oak and Little Oak Islands (Richard Shenkel, University of New Orleans)
- An evaluation of archeological collections in Louisiana (John Davis, Tulane University)
- A study of the folklore of African American children in New Orleans (John Cook, University of New Orleans)
- A vegetative analysis of the Barataria Unit (Alfred Smalley, Tulane University)¹¹

As with most everything connected with Jean Lafitte, the involvement of the DRPC added a new wrinkle to the process of developing a GMP. Park planner Bill Jones of the NPS Denver Service Center headed the GMP project team. Fritz Wagner, the commission's head, chaired public scoping meetings for the GMP in March 1980. The commission's members followed very closely the development of the plan's alternatives, at one point asking that a fifth alternative be added to the four developed by the project team. The NPS released a draft GMP for public comment in July 1981; in August the park and the DRPC conducted public meetings on the draft in New Orleans, Gretna, Chalmette, Thibodaux, and New Iberia. The DRPC approved the draft in February 1982, and the GMP was formally approved by the NPS in April 1982.¹²

10 Spitzer interview; *Mississippi Delta Ethnographic Overview*. "Creolization" refers to the processes of cultural change and adaptation that typically occurred when Europeans and Africans encountered Indians in North and South America. Language, literature, food, dress, and music are among the elements that are profoundly affected by this sort of cultural exchange

11 DRPC minutes, July 31, 1980.

12 SAR, 1980; DRPC minutes, March 25, 1981; "Park Service Unveils Five Plans for Jean Lafitte," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, August 4, 1981; NPS Denver Service Center, *General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan /Environmental Assessment for Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, Louisiana* (Denver, Colo.: NPS Denver Service Center, 1982), hereafter cited as JELA GMP.

As the park's foundational planning document, the GMP was meant to guide the development of the park for 10 to 15 years. It noted that the NPS's mission at Jean Lafitte was to "interpret the cultural diversity [of the region] and preserve the basis for the continuation of that diversity." It emphasized both the historic roles of cultural communities and their "current status and activities." Cooperative agreements¹³ were highlighted as the means by which the NPS would foster cultural traditions and activities. The GMP saw the NPS's role as one of support, encouragement, cosponsorship, and technical assistance to cooperators. Each unit was expected to "present its own part of the cultural diversity story" and orient visitors to all of the other NPS-run or NPS-affiliated sites. It was further expected that the French Quarter Visitor Center would "serve as a primary orientation point" for all the units, given the quarter's prominence as a tourist destination. The GMP established a goal of working with regional transportation providers to provide visitors with means of reaching scattered sites of cultural interest throughout the region.¹⁴

The Jean Lafitte GMP was approved at a time when ethnographers, folklorists, and others were beginning to move away from the idea that cultural *preservation* was either possible or desirable and toward an increasing recognition that cultures are not static but constantly evolving. By 1983, the American Folklife Center was promoting the term "cultural conservation" as an alternative to cultural preservation. It was believed that the concept of cultural conservation better captured the dynamic nature of cultures and placed greater emphasis on the fact that "local groups constitute their own heritage."¹⁵ In other words, heritage does not reside in buildings or craft productions, but in the cultural community itself. This emerging paradigm in many ways challenged the NPS's customary approach to heritage and culture. As anthropologist Benita

J. Howell has observed, the NPS for decades valued "historical over contemporary cultural expressions."¹⁶ The Service also tended to believe that heritage resided in specific objects, such as a pioneer log cabin or a handmade quilt. Such attitudes had led the NPS, when it developed Great Smoky Mountains National Park, to remove the painted clapboard houses in Cades Cove, almost universally preferred by 1930s residents, and retain only the older log houses as cultural exhibits.

The Jean Lafitte GMP primarily followed the older paradigm of preserving cultural heritage rather than the emerging idea of cultural conservation. It stated a goal of putting "visitors into direct contact with the contemporary and traditional cultures," but it also enjoined park managers to "strive to assist cultural groups in maintaining their heritage." The use of the verb "maintain" implies a static rather than dynamic view of culture. Further, in response to the clear language of the enabling act, the GMP spoke of the need to "preserve the basis for continuation of that [cultural] diversity" in the region. While stressing the diversity of South Louisiana cultures, the GMP failed to pick up on the important insight, expressed in the *Mississippi Delta Ethnographic Overview*, that the French heritage makes the region distinctive. The overview had spoken of the need to move beyond a focus on "atomistic separate components" to a regional synthesis, which would recognize the contributions of specific ethnic groups to a regional cultural climate under the predominant influence of French culture. As David Muth, longtime chief of planning and resource stewardship at Jean Lafitte, has observed, park managers only gradually incorporated the insights of the overview and the emerging concept of cultural conservation into their planning decisions.¹⁷

Given the above emphases, it is not surprising that the GMP focused primarily on the development of individual park units. Although the document referenced the region's "nationally unique regional character," it failed to identify French heritage as

13 Cooperative agreements are used by the federal government when it wishes to work with other agencies, institutions, or groups in situations where both parties to the agreement will make contributions and derive benefits. The requirement of mutual obligations and benefits distinguishes cooperative agreements from government contracts and government grants.

14 JELA GMP, 3, 11-12. The park completed its first Resource Management Plan in 1997. SAR, 1997.

15 Mary Hufford, "Rethinking the Cultural Mission," in *Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage*, ed. Mary Hufford (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 4.

16 Benita J. Howell, "Linking Cultural and Natural Conservation in National Park Service Policies and Programs," in *Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage*, ed. Mary Hufford (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 122.

17 JELA GMP, 8-9; *Mississippi Delta Ethnographic Overview*, 386, 392; David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2011.

the overarching influence on that character. The GMP proposed that “each unit will present its own part of the cultural diversity story,” implying an atomistic rather than a holistic conception. The document did not suggest developing a single comprehensive visitor center that, while recognizing the contributions of each successive ethnic group that reached Louisiana, would also address the regional culture as a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Additionally, the GMP identified craft fairs, folk performances, and other exhibitions as activities worthy of NPS sponsorship.¹⁸ This approach may be seen as validating a conception of culture as embodied in objects, preferably those made in traditional ways that have largely been abandoned. The ultimate development of the park as a collection of units, each of which tends to present the story of one cultural group, is foreshadowed in the GMP. As the development of each unit of the park is presented in the following chapters, the GMP guidance for the unit will be discussed at greater length.

Museum Program

At the time of Jean Lafitte’s establishment, Chalmette National Historical Park had never had a museum technician or curator position. Jean Lafitte was able to hire a museum technician in 1987. Prior to that date, all curatorial functions had been handled by rangers as collateral duty. In 1987 the park established a GS-5 museum technician position that has since evolved into a GS-11 curator position. In 1982, the park entered into a cooperative agreement with the Louisiana and Special Collections Department at the University of New Orleans (UNO) Earl K. Long Library; under this agreement the university would house the bulk of the park’s archival collection. At present, more than 90 percent of park archival materials are at the university. Among the items at UNO are videotaped oral history interviews and videos of folklife and musical performances, which

constitute a valuable resource for future scholars and students of Louisiana folklife.

The park’s collection of historic artifacts began when the Chalmette Monument was maintained by the War Department. The NPS inherited these artifacts in 1933. The plan for the new park headquarters at 419 Decatur Street included a climate-controlled curatorial work room and curatorial storage room (described in chapter 8). These spaces became available in 2002. Artifacts collected for the Acadian Cultural Centers were moved from temporary, leased storage in Lafayette to 419 Decatur, as were the majority of artifacts from the Chalmette Unit and some from the Barataria Unit. The park’s archeology artifacts are stored at the NPS Southeast Archeological Center in Tallahassee, Florida.¹⁹ The park’s natural history collection is small and is mostly housed at the Louisiana State University Museum of Natural Science, the Louisiana State Herbarium, and the Tulane University Museum of Natural History.²⁰

Eastern National Bookstores

When Jean Lafitte was established, Eastern National Parks and Monuments Association (now known simply as Eastern National) had been operating the bookstore concession at Chalmette for about two decades. A nonprofit corporation, Eastern National was formed in 1947 to assist NPS units in publishing park-related books and pamphlets and to operate bookstores at parks. The new Jean Lafitte park continued the relationship with Eastern National, which currently operates the sales areas at all six park sites.²¹

19 The artifacts were moved from the Southwest Archeology Center following the 1995 shift that placed Louisiana park units under the administration of the NPS Southeast Region.

20 NPS, SERO, *Museum Collection Management Plan, JELA* (Atlanta, Ga.: NPS, SERO, 2005), 1-3; Kathryn Lang, interview with Robert Blythe, January 23, 2009.

21 Eastern National web site, http://www.easternnational.org/EN_OurHistory.pdf, consulted February 25, 2010.

18 JELA GMP, 11, 22.

French Quarter Unit/Park Headquarters

Of all the activities projected for the new Lafitte park, establishing an NPS presence in the French Quarter was perhaps the easiest to implement quickly. The park's 1982 General Management Plan (GMP) and 1983 Interpretive Prospectus laid out goals for the French Quarter Unit. The GMP envisioned a visitor contact station staffed by NPS personnel that would serve as the primary orientation point for all the park's units and cooperating sites, as well as for nonaffiliated historical, natural, and cultural attractions in the region. The plan was for the park headquarters to ultimately be in the same building as the visitor center. This goal took some time to accomplish; until 2002, park headquarters and the French Quarter visitor contact facility were physically separated. The primary interpretive emphasis in the French Quarter was to be the region's cultural diversity. The NPS expected to sponsor demonstrations and performances of regional folkways, music, crafts, and cuisine. These were seen as taking place in a variety of venues through leases and cooperative arrangements with partners. The Interpretive Prospectus contained more detail on the contact station, which was to have exhibits, a small video and slide presentation area, a 100-seat auditorium for longer films as well as craft and music demonstrations, and a sales area. Ranger-guided tours that complemented rather than competed with tours offered by other organizations were planned. The issue of ranger-led tours would prove to be one of the more contentious in the history of the French Quarter Unit. Also part of the plan for the visitor center was the provision of information on transportation alternatives for reaching various destinations throughout the region.¹

1 National Park Service, Denver Service Center, *General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment for Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, Louisiana* (Denver, Colo.: NPS Denver Service Center, 1982, 11, 22-24; NPS DSC, *Interpretive Prospectus, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park* (Denver, Colo.: NPS, 1983), 16-18.

By June 1980, NPS rangers were conducting walking tours of the French Quarter from the park's administrative headquarters at 400 Royal Street, where the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries had offices (see figure 8-1). The Royal Street building provided the NPS with offices, but there was no space for exhibits. The park soon reached an agreement with the state of Louisiana to lease a separate visitor contact space in the historic Lower Pontalba Building facing Jackson Square. This facility opened on October 10, 1980, and gave the NPS a presence in the very heart of the French Quarter. The unit's first manager, Linda Canzanelli, was responsible for developing French Quarter interpretive programs. At first the room in the Lower Pontalba Building contained temporary exhibits; in 1983 the park awarded a \$70,000 contract to replace these with more substantial exhibitry.²

In August 1982, the park moved its administrative headquarters from 400 Royal Street to the second floor of the Reimann House³ in Louis Armstrong Park. Armstrong Park, across Rampart Street from the French Quarter, was the centerpiece of an urban renewal effort of the city of New Orleans in the Tremé neighborhood. The city was eager for the NPS to participate in and support its efforts in Armstrong Park. The NPS quickly outgrew the space available to it in the Reimann House and, in 1983, moved park headquarters to the U.S. Customs House at 423 Canal Street. The Reimann House continued as office space for French

2 "Quarter Foot Tour Opposed," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, August 9, 1980; SAR, 1983, 1984; DRPC minutes, March 25, 1981.

3 As part of an urban renewal project, the city of New Orleans moved the 19th-century Reimann House from 618 South Gayoso Street to Armstrong Park. The house later became part of New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park. Roulhac Toledano and Mary Louise Christovich, *New Orleans Architecture*, vol. 6: *Faubourg Tremé and the Bayou Road* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing, 1980), 78.

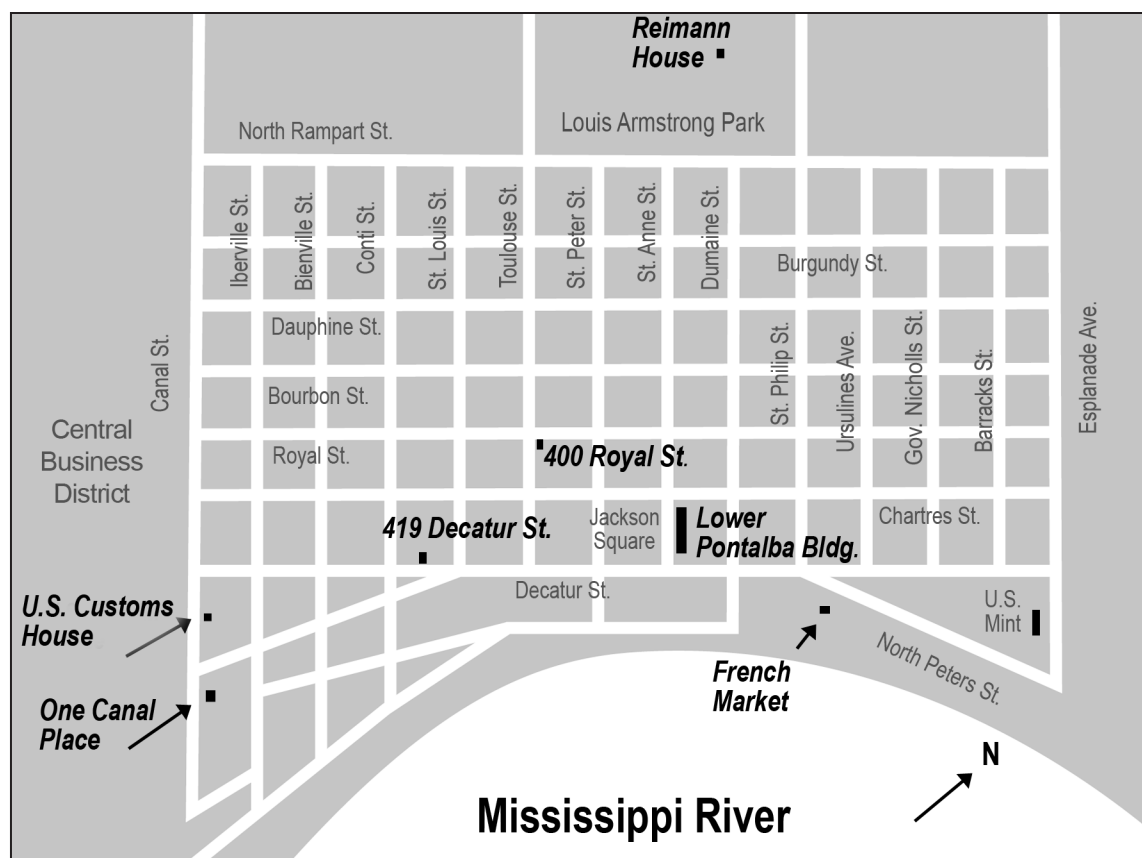


Figure 8-1. NPS locations in the French Quarter. (Madeline Baum)

Quarter rangers and staff until 1987, when the city asked the NPS to move. In November 1987, the French Quarter staff offices were consolidated with park headquarters in the Customs House. In late 1994 park headquarters moved again, this time to the building known as One Canal Place, at 365 Canal Street. It remained at this building, first on the 30th floor and later on the 24th, until March 2002.⁴

The Louisiana World Exposition

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve was involved with two areas of the Louisiana World Exposition, a world's fair that operated on an 82-acre site in the historic warehouse district of New Orleans from May 12 to November 11, 1984. The park cosponsored the exposition's folklife pavilion and mounted and staffed an NPS exhibit in the fair's Great Hall. The NPS exhibit, underwritten by ARA Services, Inc., and the National Parks and Conservation Association, presented an overview

of the NPS and its work. The Louisiana Folklife Pavilion was the brainchild of Nicholas Spitzer, director of the Louisiana Folklife Program within the state's Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism. As detailed in chapter 7, Spitzer had been the project director for the park-commissioned *Mississippi Delta Ethnographic Overview* and had developed a good working relationship with Superintendent Isenogle. As head of the Louisiana Folklife Program, Spitzer had been asked to develop scripts for the state's Louisiana Pavilion at the fair. Spitzer was not enthralled with the state's ideas, which centered on a boat ride with life-size animatronic Cajuns, something like the "Pirates of the Caribbean" attraction at Disney World. He had attended the 1982 Knoxville World's Fair (officially the Knoxville International Energy Exposition), which had included a southern folklife area. Rather than give the public robots and simulated hurricanes, Spitzer wanted to showcase Louisiana's rich traditions of music, crafts, and cuisine, using real people. He phoned Jim Isenogle and made his case in these terms:

Jim, what can we do? They're asking me to do these automatons. I've seen what can happen if

4 SAR, 1982, 1983, 1987; "U.S. Park Service Will Move," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 16, 1982; DRPC minutes, January 11, 1995; Lesley Adams, interview with Robert Blythe, November 7, 2008.

it's done with living cultures. I think we've got the people we can put in place. We can fund some fieldwork in the Florida Parishes, near New Orleans, where we would then be able to bring a lot of people in from nearby, as well as from Cajun country and rural Creoles, native New Orleanians and jazz, Mardi Gras Indians, blues, and everything else.⁵

To carry out this plan Spitzer would need funding. The NPS and the National Endowment for the Arts provided small amounts of seed money. Encouraged by his wife, Katherine Hattic Long, Louisiana Senator Russell Long became interested. Senator Long put Spitzer and the other sponsors in touch with the Louisiana branch of the forest products industry, which ultimately contributed \$530,000 for the Louisiana Folklife Pavilion. This pavilion was located in a 22,000-square-foot portion of the old Federal Fibre Mills Building on the fairgrounds. Within the pavilion, the forest industry had a modest display highlighting the products produced from the nation's forests. Relying on information compiled in the park's ethnographic overview, an exhibit on the first floor highlighted the history and crafts of Louisiana's ethnic groups. Called "The Creole State: Folklife in Louisiana," this exhibit in part explored the concept of creolization. For the most part, the exhibit assembled contemporary forms of traditional material culture under headings such as "Domestic Crafts"; "Ritual, Festival, and Region"; and "Living Off the Land." Among the items on display were Mardi Gras costumes, quilts, furniture, toys, and musical instruments. The pavilion offered a variety of folklife and craft demonstrations such as pirogues being carved out of whole cypress logs, decoy carving, quiltmaking, and Houma Indians demonstrating blowguns and telling stories about werewolves in French and English. Also featured were cooking demonstrations representing various Louisiana traditions, including Serbian, Italian, Cajun, Creole, and African American cuisine. Most popular at the

pavilion was "The Backdoor Stage," a performance area on the second floor of the mill building that presented as many as 14 daily music performances.⁶

The folklife pavilion, especially the Backdoor Stage, proved to be one of the hits of a fair that was overall a major financial disappointment to its sponsors. The performance area had a dance floor and could hold up to 350 visitors. Many New Orleans jazz, blues, and rhythm and blues musicians appeared, as did Cajun and zydeco performers. The well-known New Orleans piano "professor," Isadore "Tuts" Washington (1909-1984), appeared regularly until August 5, when he performed his usual 45-minute set, then collapsed onstage from a fatal heart attack.⁷ Other performers included Cajun D. L. Menard and Chicago blues legend Robert "Junior" Lockwood. The Backdoor Stage introduced many visitors to the glories of South Louisiana culture. The folklife program at Jean Lafitte's French Quarter Unit benefited greatly from the relationships begun at the fair. NPS staff learned much about both the state's heritage and the mechanics of presenting programs. A pirogue carved at the fair by Tan Brunet and Willie Badeaux became part of the park's collection. Ray Brassieur, a Louisiana-born folklorist and musician who worked at the pavilion, later was hired by the park on a term appointment. The Louisiana Folklife Pavilion demonstrated the widespread appeal of the state's folklife, notably its music. The positive

6 Spitzer interview; "Pavilion Is the Best of Gulf South Folklife," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, August 5, 1984.

7 New Orleans has a rich heritage of piano players, stretching from Jelly Roll Morton through Tuts Washington and Professor Longhair to Allen Toussaint and Dr. John. It is unclear just when New Orleans piano acers first earned the sobriquet "professor," but by the 1950s it was a common usage.

5 SAR, 1984; Mary-Kate Lorenz Tews, "The Evolving Cityscape: Socio-Economic Impacts of the 1984 Louisiana World Exposition" (master's thesis, University of New Orleans, 1986), 1-2; Nicholas Spitzer, interview with Robert Blythe, April 17, 2009. The boat ride ultimately took shape as the "Louisiana Journey," a 14-minute excursion through "simulated swamps and bayous" within the 15-acre, air-conditioned Great Hall; see *Official World's Fair Guidebook* (New Orleans: Picayune Publishing, 1984).



Figure 8-2. Morris Ardoin, Alphonse "Bois Sec" Ardoin, and Canray Fontenot on the Back Door Stage, 1984 World's Fair. (Nicholas R. Spitzer, courtesy Louisiana Division of Arts)

reception that these programs received apparently came as a surprise to some local opinion leaders.⁸

By August it was clear that the fair was drawing far fewer visitors than originally projected, and the fair authorities began to cut back promised allocations of funding for the folklife pavilion. Some of the \$530,000 from the forest products industry was siphoned off to meet shortfalls in other areas. Many of the staff recruited for the pavilion were themselves musicians and craftspeople. As money to pay performers was reduced during the final months of the fair, the staff filled in as performers and demonstrators. Before the fair had run its course, the exposition authority sought bankruptcy protection. Spitzer began to fear that creditors might attempt to seize some of the artifacts on display, many of which had been promised to the state or the Smithsonian Institution. Spitzer worked with Superintendent Isenogle to dismantle the exhibits a few days before the official fair closing, under the protection of the National Park Police. In the end the fair drew five million fewer visitors than projected and lost \$100 million. As of this writing, it remains the only world's fair to go bankrupt before its run finished.⁹

During and after the fair, the NPS continued to staff its French Quarter Visitor Center in the Lower Pontalba Building, where it provided visitor orientation and folklife programs. In advance of the 1984 World's Fair, the center's existing exhibits were moved to the fair. New exhibits focusing on the Mississippi Delta's history and its various cultures were installed to replace them. Then, in spring 1985, the state notified the NPS that its lease in the Pontalba Building would not be renewed and that the NPS would need to vacate by July 1. Even before this, in late 1984, the NPS had begun looking for space in the French Quarter that would allow it to more successfully mount a folklife program of craft, cooking, and musical demonstrations. Interest centered on the historic French Market, which stretches for five blocks along the riverfront from St. Ann Street to Barracks

Street. The NPS began working with the General Services Administration to negotiate a lease for space with the French Market Corporation. As often happens, it took some time to negotiate a lease and reconfigure space in the market as a visitor center. As a result, for 17 months, beginning in July 1985, visitor contact was conducted from a cart on Decatur Street at the foot of Dumaine Street. The park's Folklife and Visitor Center opened at 916 North Peters Street in the French Market in October 1986.¹⁰ This facility contained a public contact desk, a sales area run by the Eastern National Parks and Conservation Association, a small stage for musical performances and crafts demonstrations, and a kitchen for foodways demonstrations. There was also a tent area for outdoor performances and demonstrations nearby in the French Market. During this period the park had sufficient funding to present a wide variety of programs. During 1987, for example, the French Quarter Unit sponsored 179 special events centered on the cultures of South Louisiana. These included performances of Cajun, gospel, brass band, and rhythm and blues music; Saturday presentations of regional foodways; and demonstrations of blacksmithing, wood carving, and cotton spinning. Some events were tied to seasonal observances, such as St. Joseph's Day, March 20, when many Italian Americans erect an altar to this saint and adorn it with flowers and food.¹¹

Managers of the French Quarter Unit during its French Market days were Elizabeth Mazzillo, Susan Davenport, and P. J. Ryan. Davenport recalled how lively some of the folklife events became:

I remember one time we had a Cajun Mardi Gras group come to New Orleans—minus the horses, for the *tour de Mardi Gras*. We had them in there with their *capuchons* and the captain with his whip, and we did a mock Cajun run around the French Market building, chasing a chicken – they brought a chicken in with them.

8 Spitzer interview. The Backdoor Stage took its name from D. L. Menard's most famous song, "La Porte d'en Arrière," a 1962 classic about a Cajun man who has to sneak in the back door after a night of honky-tonking.

9 SAR, 1984; Tews, 1-2; "Pavilion Is the Best of Gulf South Folklife," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, August 5, 1984; Nicholas Spitzer to Louisiana Exposition Authority, August 13, 1984, JELA HQ files.

10 As described in chapter 12, this space later was taken over by New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park.

11 DRPC minutes, October 5, 1983, May 10 and September 12, 1985, March 16, 1994; SAR, 1986 and 1987; JELA staff meeting minutes, December 17, 1984, January 28 and July 19, 1985; P. J. Ryan, personal communication, March 17, 2010.

After the little run we had the chicken in a cage and we didn't have a little cup for water for it, so they cut a beer can in half and put it in there with water. Some folks from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals came by and they really got upset, thinking that we were one, hurting the chicken, and two, giving it beer. I never thought anything like that would happen, but it did.¹²

The park's emphasis on craft demonstrations in the French Quarter (and to some extent in other park units) has been seen by some as enshrining a "curatorial" approach to culture. Some began to question the appropriateness, for example, of having demonstrations of the hand carving of a pirogue from a cypress log, when the contemporary culture had almost universally adopted machine-made aluminum skiffs. The emerging concept of cultural conservation, described above in chapter 7, seemed to argue for a greater emphasis on what community members were doing in the present rather than reviving largely abandoned practices.¹³

Around the time the park's visitor center in the Lower Pontalba Building was closing, park staff coordinated an extensive program of historical vignettes in Jackson Square. Focusing on several different periods in the history of New Orleans, the vignettes featured costumed interpreters representing typical citizens as they reacted to events and ran on weekends from July 6 through September 1, 1985. The vignettes were intended to raise the profile of the NPS in the city at a time when the park temporarily lacked a visitor center.¹⁴

The Delta Region Preservation Commission (DRPC) and NPS administrators increasingly saw the need for the NPS to own its headquarters and visitor contact space in the French Quarter. In April 1983 DRPC chairman Fritz Wagner noted that the park was leasing space in New Orleans from the state for visitor contact and from the city for offices. He believed that the nonrenewal of either agreement would be "disastrous to the



Figure 8-3. 419 Decatur façade, before restoration. (JELA)

park's management and operations in the French Quarter." A June 1985 management review noted that "our experience so far with trying to operate permanent programs out of space acquired through cooperative agreements or leases is that a successful program generates a desire by the landlord, or cooperator to either raise the rent or control the program, or both." Superintendent Isenogle believed that the French Quarter interpretive program would be handicapped until it could be housed in permanent quarters. Accordingly, he began to look around for a building that the NPS could purchase. When Ron Switzer arrived as assistant superintendent in July 1987, he was told to keep his eyes open for a building. M. Ann Belkov arrived as superintendent in late 1987 and instructed her staff to continue the search. Around January 1988, Ranger Byron Fortier let Switzer know that a 23,000-square-foot property at 419 Decatur Street known as Acadian House was being offered for sale or lease.¹⁵

419 Rue Decatur

Park staff considered several locations in addition to 419 Decatur: the old U.S. Mint on Esplanade, the Louisiana Fish and Wildlife Building at 400 Royal Street, the New Orleans Police Substation in the French Quarter, and a former fire station. Superintendent Belkov met with Prieur J. Leary Jr., owner of 419 Decatur, and became enthusiastic about purchasing the building. In June 1988, William Jewell, a land acquisition officer from Big

12 Susan Davenport, interview with Robert Blythe, May 6, 2009. In *Cajun French*, le capuchon is the conical hat worn by Mardi Gras riders.

13 David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2011.

14 "Jean Lafitte Park Seeks Recognition by Staging Vieux Carré 'Vignettes,'" *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, July 4, 1985; JELA staff meeting minutes, July 19, 1985.

15 DRPC minutes, April 27, 1983; Superintendent to Division Chiefs and Unit Managers, June 12, 1985; Byron Fortier to Ron Switzer, undated but annotated "1/5," JELA RM files, JELA HQ files.

Thicket National Preserve in Texas who assisted Jean Lafitte, went to New Orleans to meet with Superintendent Belkov and Leary and arrange for an appraisal of the building. An appraisal in the amount of \$1.8 million was received and approved by the NPS. On September 20, 1988, Jewell made Leary an offer in that amount. Leary attempted to have the appraisal amount raised, but eventually agreed to sell for \$1.8 million. On December 2, 1988, before the transaction closed, the Darryl Berger Investment Corporation wrote to Regional Director John Cook to advise him of two alternative locations: a property for sale at 100 Conti Street and space available for lease in the Marketplace at Jax.¹⁶ Berger Investment pointed out that the 419 Decatur Building would require substantial renovation. The Berger firm believed that its two alternatives were “available at a substantial cost savings to the federal government and taxpayers.” It is unclear whether the NPS gave serious consideration to these sites; the agency closed on the purchase of 419 Decatur on January 13, 1989.¹⁷

419 Decatur Street was a complex of four connected buildings that had been remodeled and reconfigured several times over the course of approximately 200 years. The buildings occupied a lot with a frontage of 59.84 feet on Decatur and a depth of 233.26 feet. (Decatur Street runs roughly southwest to northeast; to simplify matters, the front of the building will be referred to as the south side and the other sides as the west, north, and east sides.) Building I, facing Decatur Street, consisted of two four-story brick buildings from the late 18th or early 19th century that had been joined into a single building around 1882. Behind Building I were Buildings III and IV, two-story brick structures with their long sides running parallel to the west lot line. In the 1970s, a two-story, metal-

and-glass-faced structure, Building II, was added to join Building I with Building III. A carriageway ran through Building I along the east lot line to a 5,500-square-foot courtyard.

The complex at 419 Decatur Street possessed various advantageous features for the NPS. It was just two and a half blocks from Jackson Square, the focal point of the French Quarter. Additionally, it sat roughly midway between the central business district, with its concentration of large hotels, and Jackson Square, and thus was well positioned to capture a large amount of foot traffic. At 23,000 square feet, the buildings offered ample space for

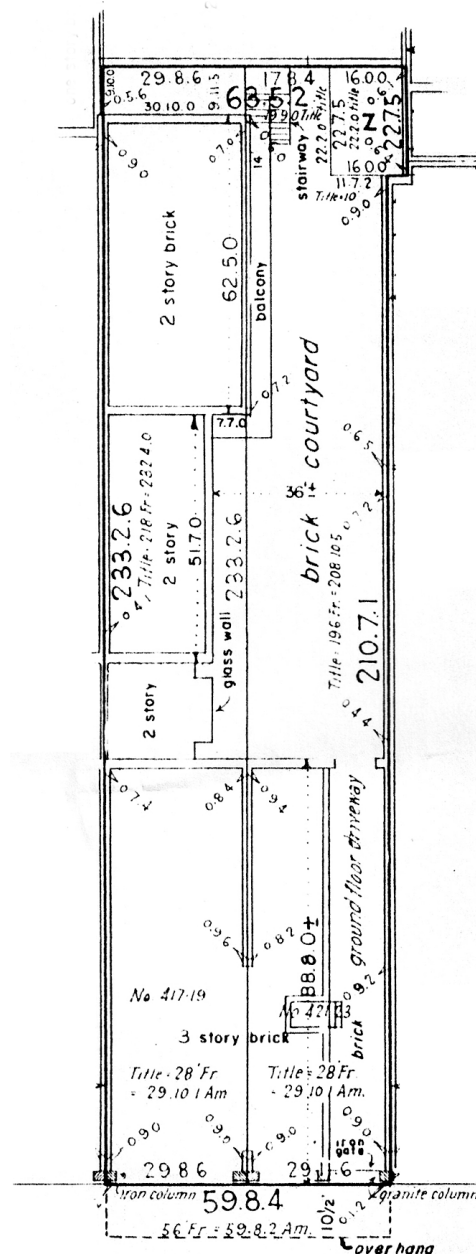


Figure 8-4. 419 Decatur ground plan. (JELA)

16 The Jackson Brewery building in the 600 block of Decatur Street dates to the 1890s and once housed the largest independent brewery in the American South. After the brewery ceased operations in the 1970s, the building became a mixed-use complex with retail, restaurant, and residential components. Andrew Collins, *Moon Handbooks: New Orleans* (Emeryville, Calif.: Avalon Travel Publishing, 2004), 64-65.

17 William B. Jewell to Superintendent, JELA, May 13, 1993; Rhonda Daigle, Darryl Berger Investment Corp., to JELA Superintendent, December 2, 1988, JELA HQ files; "Jean Lafitte National Historical Park & Preserve Purchases 419 Decatur Street," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 19, 1989.

park offices, museum collection storage, a visitor center, and an auditorium for folklife programs. Finally, the large courtyard afforded additional space for performances and a pleasant resting spot for visitors. On the down side, the buildings would require substantial work, no free visitor parking was available, and hourly rates in nearby parking lots were high. The building was also historic and subject to the local preservation ordinance.

The buildings at 419 Decatur had been remodeled in the 1970s and were partially occupied as offices when purchased by the NPS in early 1989. The interiors had been cut up into a number of small offices. At the time, Superintendent Belkov believed that the park's administrative offices could move to the building by July 1989 and that the Folklife and Visitor Center would open during 1990. Inspections of the buildings revealed that considerable work would be needed to bring them up to code and that many of the interior finishes were nearing the end of their useful lives. The NPS decided to rehabilitate interior spaces on the upper floors of Building I in a first phase and to make the creation of the visitor contact area on the first floor the second phase. It was further decided to rehabilitate and partially restore the Decatur Street elevation in keeping with its appearance from 1882 to 1937. Because of the added cost of rehabilitating an occupied building, it was decided to defer moving any park staff into the building until the rehabilitation of the upper floors was complete. Work on the buildings proceeded slowly through the early 1990s. Park staff members were looking forward to moving into 419 Decatur in mid-1993, when serious structural problems were belatedly discovered.¹⁸

More than \$1.7 million had been expended on rehabilitating the 419 Decatur buildings when they were found to be infested by Formosan subterranean termites. This invasive species first appeared in the New Orleans area in the late 1950s and has caused extensive damage to buildings and trees. The termite discovery led to a thorough examination of the four buildings in

summer 1993. As a result of these inspections, the NPS determined that Building I was structurally unsound and would need substantial remediation. This work involved driving new steel foundation pilings up to 90 feet into the ground, erecting a steel frame for the building to relieve some of the load from the masonry walls, and replacing the existing roof with a new metal roof. Building IV was discovered to be in danger of collapse and eventually had to be razed. Some original fabric was salvaged, but the building had to be reconstructed. A considerable amount of interior finish work had already been completed when the structural problems were discovered. This completed work had to be ripped out to accomplish the remedial work, after which new interior finishes were applied. DRPC Chair Fritz Wagner was not indulging in overstatement when he said that 419 Decatur was "a mega-headache."¹⁹ The visitor center in the building opened in December 1999. Park staff moved into offices on the second and third floors in March 2002, and an official dedication ceremony was held August 23, 2002. Once the Jean Lafitte visitor contact operation vacated the premises, New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park took over the 916 North Peters Street location in the French Market as its visitor center on July 8, 2000.²⁰

While the structural problems at 419 Decatur were being addressed, the NPS continued to plan the exhibits for the first-floor visitor center, working with Point Zero Design as a contractor. The 1989 Interpretive Prospectus identified three objectives for the visitor center: (1) orienting visitors to the park's purpose and its various units, (2) interpreting the history of the French Quarter, and (3) exposing visitors to Mississippi Delta cultures. As planning advanced, considerable attention was also devoted to interpreting the physical environment of the delta and the ways in which various cultures have interacted with that environment. There is an entrance to the visitor center directly from Decatur Street as well as one from the courtyard. The auditorium for the visitor

18 Chief, Division of Planning, Design and Environmental Coordination, SWR, to ARD, Planning & Resources Management, SWR, February 7, 1989; "Design Analysis and Guidelines, Rehabilitation of the Interior and Rehabilitation and Partial Restoration of Front Façade, 419 Decatur, New Orleans, Louisiana," July 1990, JELA RM files; SAR, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993.

19 Superintendent, JELA, to Acting RD, SER, May 22, 1997; DRPC minutes, July 26, 1995, and August 27, 1997, JELA RM files; "Historical Park Dedicating Headquarters," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, August 23, 2002.

20 Squad notes, July 12, 2000, JELA RM files. The role of Jean Lafitte staff in the development of New Orleans Jazz National Historic Park is covered in chapter 12.

center is located in Building IV and is accessed from the courtyard.²¹

As of this writing, the Decatur Street visitor center continues to orient visitors to the cultures of South Louisiana, the various units of the Jean Lafitte park, and other sites of cultural, historical, and natural interest in the region. Folklife performances and demonstrations are offered, and there are occasionally special observances of notable anniversaries. Some within the NPS had hoped that the French Quarter visitor center would feature extensive exhibits and provide comprehensive interpretation of the cultures of South Louisiana. It seems clear that the vision of Jim Isenogle and Nick Spitzer entailed using the concept of creolization under a predominant French influence to present the interactions among the various groups that came to Louisiana. Because of the millions of dollars required merely to make 419 Decatur habitable and the retirement of Senator J. Bennett Johnston in 1997, this vision would not be realized. Also, the park's General Management Plan emphasized separate centers for distinct ethnic groups rather than a center focused on the regional cultural complex. The NPS suffered considerable embarrassment over the costs of restoring and rehabilitating the building, and it was not politically feasible to seek large sums for exhibits. The exhibits at 419 Decatur provide an introduction to the natural, historic, and cultural resources of the region—but only an introduction. In 2007 the street-level façade of the building on Decatur Street was revamped to provide storefront exhibits that can be easily changed in coordination with current park programs.²²

Folklife events at the French Quarter Unit have not been as numerous in recent years as in the early years when the park had more money for programs. As the park added facilities over the years, funds once available for programming were needed to maintain and staff the facilities. In one major departure from this pattern, the park participated in a number of events commemorating the bicentennial of the 1803 Louisiana Purchase. Both the French Quarter Visitor Center and the Acadian Cultural Center in Lafayette mounted

temporary exhibits on the history of the Louisiana Territory. A ranger also did a daily presentation on Louisiana Purchase documents at the Historic New Orleans Collection. The year-long observation of the purchase culminated in a flurry of activity in late December 2003. The park partnered with the city of New Orleans and others in presenting a four-day event focusing on the impact of the Haitian Revolution on the Louisiana Purchase. The NPS took the lead in arranging a reenactment of the transfer of authority from France to the United States, with the raising of the American flag in Jackson Square on December 20, 2003. Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton and the ambassadors of France, Spain, and Haiti participated in the observances. The park also hosted a period ball at the Chalmette Unit's Malus-Beauregard House.²³

Park planners had hoped early on that visitors to the French Quarter Unit would be able to travel to other units of the park on public or concessioner transport. For a brief period in 2001, Jefferson Parish Public Transit offered bus service to the Barataria Unit. Park staff at 419 Decatur attempted to make visitors aware of the service, but it was inconvenient to say the least. Expecting that they could get a bus from the French Quarter directly to Barataria, visitors were understandably nonplussed when they learned what they actually would have to do. First they needed to board a bus at Poydras and St. Peters Streets (in the central business district, not the French Quarter) that would take them to Gretna on the West Bank. At Gretna they would take a second bus to the Barataria Unit. Each of the two buses required an exact-change fare; there were no transfers. Finally, only one bus left Gretna each morning for Barataria, and just one returned from there in the afternoon. Only 314 visitors took advantage of this option during its summer of operation, and the service was discontinued.²⁴

21 NPS Division of Interpretive Planning, "Interpretive Prospectus, French Quarter Folklife Center/Visitor Center," 1989; DRPC minutes, April 17, 1996; "Historical Park Dedicating Headquarters."

22 SAR, 2007.

23 Program, "Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Celebration"; Employee meeting minutes, November 20, 2003, JELA RM files; SAR, 2003.

24 SAR 2001; JELA Ranger Jim Van Dorin, personal communication, March 3, 2010; "Bus To Visit Jean Lafitte Wetlands Park Daily," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, February 8, 2001.

Controversy over an Aquarium in the French Quarter

NPS park superintendents are expected to monitor the condition of nearby National Historic Landmark (NHL) properties. One of the responsibilities of Jean Lafitte's superintendent was to keep tabs on the many NHLs in Louisiana. In December 1965 the Secretary of the Interior had made the French Quarter a National Historic Landmark (Vieux Carré NHL District). Additionally, Jean Lafitte's establishing legislation gave the NPS a role in the French Quarter, calling for an interpretive facility there and foreseeing cooperative agreements to protect the historical and cultural resources of the quarter. James Isenogle took his responsibilities for both the park and the Vieux Carré NHL District quite seriously. He and a number of New Orleans preservationists were troubled when a powerful movement arose in 1985 and 1986 to construct an aquarium at the riverfront between Canal Street and Bienville Avenue, within the NHL district. They feared that this large building would obscure the historic relationship of the French Quarter to the river. The aquarium project was strongly promoted by New Orleans mayor Sidney J. Barthelemy and Ron Forman, the director of the Audubon Park and Zoological Gardens, which would operate the proposed aquarium. Louisiana was experiencing economic hardship at this time because of a decline in oil and natural gas prices, and the aquarium had strong support from business leaders as a means of bringing more visitors to New Orleans. On November 4, 1986, New Orleans voters, by a 70 percent majority, approved a tax increase to fund the aquarium.²⁵

Preservation of the French Quarter had also attracted interest at the highest levels of the NPS. Its director, William Penn Mott, visited New Orleans on March 29 and 30, 1986. The aquarium project was already a topic of conversation, and Superintendent Isenogle and Mott toured the proposed site at the Bienville Street Wharf. Mott persuaded a longtime friend, the Pasadena-based modernist architect Wayne R. Williams, to prepare a study of the New Orleans riverfront on a *pro bono* basis. Williams recommended that the aquarium be located on the west bank of the Mississippi River

and that the Bienville Wharf site be made into a park, restoring the connection between the French Quarter and the river.²⁶

The Williams report had been informally commissioned by the NPS director, but its conclusions were never adopted as NPS policy. As events would show, its recommendation for the aquarium location did not have the support of the Reagan administration. Superintendent Isenogle very publicly and vocally opposed locating the aquarium in the French Quarter and was widely quoted in the New Orleans media. He told television station WWL, "Personally, I find the idea of building it on the Bienville Street wharf not only silly but very, very dangerous." In May 1987, Isenogle wrote Mayor Barthelemy:

The National Park Service is opposed to the construction of an aquarium at the Bienville Street Wharf site due to its location within the boundaries of, and its adverse effects upon, the Vieux Carré National Historic Landmark District. . . . The National Park Service will oppose any federal action to permit, license, or approve the aquarium construction at that site because of its adverse effect on the Vieux Carré Landmark District.²⁷

By taking this stance Isenogle essentially ended his NPS career. His superiors directed him to retract his statement, and he soon announced his retirement. On June 4, 1987, Isenogle wrote a second letter to Mayor Barthelemy, making the following points:

First, the National Park Service has no position favoring or opposing any site for the aquarium.

Second, the appropriate time for taking a position will be when and if the National Park Service is requested to do so by the National Advisory Council for Historic Preservation.

Third, we do not know what the National Park Service's position may be once additional information is developed.

²⁵ "French Quarter Aquarium: Boon or Boondoggle?" *New York Times*, December 27, 1986.

²⁶ SAR, 1986.

²⁷ Superintendent Isenogle to J. Michael Early, General Manager, WWL Television, November 21, 1986; Superintendent Isenogle to Mayor Sidney J. Barthelemy, May 20, 1987, JELA HQ files.

Fourth, views I have expressed in media, correspondence, and conservation are not necessarily those of the National Park Service.²⁸

The aquarium continued to be controversial, and the Vieux Carré Property Owners Association took the matter all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The court refused to intervene, and the aquarium opened in late 1990 on the Bienville Street Wharf as originally proposed. The NPS and Louisiana's congressional delegation remained interested in the New Orleans riverfront, and at the request of Senator Johnston, the NPS prepared a study of the area. The study focused on "potential National Park Service roles on the riverfront" and offered "specific concepts for public access, open space, and interpretive treatment of the riverfront" by the NPS and others. The report was made public in November 1988. No political support was found for an expanded NPS role along the riverfront, however, and the report was largely forgotten.²⁹

Ranger-led Tours in New Orleans

When NPS rangers began giving free tours of the French Quarter in June 1980, charges of unfair competition arose almost immediately. Protests came from the Friends of the Cabildo and from commercial tour operators. The Friends of the Cabildo are a nonprofit group that supports the mission of the Louisiana State Museum in the historic Cabildo³⁰ on Chartres Street facing Jackson Square. The tours given by the Friends, priced at \$5.00 in 1980, were a source of revenue that helped to support the museum. There was also some opposition from individuals who saw the tours as an example of wasteful federal government spending. Finally, some local residents expressed the belief that it was impossible for rangers raised in other parts of the country to understand and interpret their city adequately. The NPS believed that the tours helped to fulfill the park's statutory mission of interpreting the cultures of South Louisiana. Furthermore, the NPS felt that its tours had a substantially different



Figure 8-5. The building in French Quarter, popularly known as "Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop," 1930s. (HABS)

emphasis from those offered by the Friends of the Cabildo. The NPS pointed out that its tours did not enter building interiors and did not describe in detail the architectural details of buildings. As the NPS expanded its roster of tours to include the Garden District and Saint Louis Cemetery No. 1, the controversy became increasingly acrimonious. Travel sections of major newspapers wrote about the NPS tours, which at times were fully booked two or three days in advance.³¹

Critics stepped up their efforts in late 1989 and early 1990, when the park was offering up to six tours per day. The board of directors of the Louisiana State Museum, which runs the Cabildo, formally requested that the NPS discontinue its French Quarter tours. New Orleans Councilwoman Jacquelyn Clarkson wrote to Southwest Regional Director John Cook, alleging that the NPS tours were "in direct competition with both our Friends of the Cabildo and our commercial tours." Clarkson and others wrote to Senator Johnston and Congresswoman Boggs in hopes that they would pressure the NPS. Senator Johnston declined to become involved because other constituents, notably New Orleans hotel operators and the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce, welcomed the NPS tours, feeling that they provided an added attraction to tourists, especially families on limited budgets. The NPS tried to defuse the situation by limiting each tour to 30 people and taking pains to let visitors know about the other tour opportunities available in the city. In summer 1990 the NPS attempted to develop a cooperative agreement with the Friends of the

28 Superintendent Isenogle to Mayor Sidney J. Barthelemy, June 4, 1987, JELA HQ files.

29 "Supreme Court Rejects Suit To Block Aquarium," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 9, 1990; SWRO, "New Orleans Riverfront Study Chronology," January 1, 1989, JELA RM files.

30 The Spanish built the Cabildo in the 1790s as the seat of the city's government.

31 "Quarter Foot Tour Opposed," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, August 9, 1980; New Orleans Regional Transit Authority, *Streetcar Tracks*, November 1983; SAR, 1987, 1991.



Figure 8-6. A ranger leading a tour group in the French Quarter. (JELA)

Cabildo that would limit the number of NPS tours. The Friends rejected a draft of the agreement in January 1991, but the NPS verbally agreed to limit its tours to two a day in the French Quarter and one in the Garden District.³²

The park stopped giving its cemetery tours in March 1991, not because of opposition from other operators but for safety reasons. While a ranger tour was in progress, a visitor in another part of the cemetery was assaulted and the ranger had to interrupt his tour to respond. After this event the park decided that it was no longer wise to give cemetery tours.³³

The controversy over tours receded for some years until the NPS increased its number of daily tours from one to three in February 2003. By this point the number of commercial tour operators was substantially greater than in the early 1980s; in fact, the president of the Tour Guides Association of Greater New Orleans, Servando Mendez, said that he represented nearly 300 guides. After considerable media coverage of the dispute, the NPS quietly agreed to return to one tour per day. The issue returned again in fall 2007, with the city's tourism industry struggling to recover from the effects of Hurricane Katrina.³⁴ The issue has never been satisfactorily resolved and is not likely to be resolved any time soon. NPS policy and the position description for rangers make providing interpretive talks and tours a major part of rangers' responsibilities. Park managers are unlikely to consider it sufficient to have rangers merely staff a contact desk, give a general orientation, and answer questions. In fact, when the park attempted in 2003 to substitute ranger programs given at 419 Decatur for tours, it quickly discovered that visitors did not want ranger programs—they wanted tours. No matter how the NPS tries to configure its tours so that the emphasis and content do not overlap with commercial tours, there will likely still be some people who object to NPS rangers giving tours of any kind.

32 James F. Sefcik, Director, Office of State Museum, to Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan, May 4, 1990; Jacquelyn Clarkson to RD John E. Cook, May 23, 1990, JELA RM files; *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, February 17, 2003; SAR, 1991.

33 JELA management staff meeting notes, May 23, 1991; SAR, 1991; Davenport interview.

34 "French Quarter Guides Want Free Park Service Tours To Take a Hike," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, February 17, 2003; "Free Quarter Tours Draw Fire," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 28, 2007.

Barataria Preserve Unit

The Barataria Preserve was the centerpiece of the 1978 legislation creating Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. This was the area that Frank Ehret and his allies had been attempting to save for two decades and that Senator Johnston chose to make a major Louisiana outpost of the National Park System. The NPS had no prior operations in this area and would have to purchase land, build a visitor center and support structures, establish policies to protect resources, and craft an interpretive program. The narrative of the development and management of the Barataria Preserve will be preceded by a description of the unit's natural and cultural setting and the NPS's management goals for it.

Natural Resources

The approximately 20,000 acres established as the Barataria Preserve are in the upper portion of the Barataria Basin. The basin is defined as that portion of the Mississippi Delta lying between Bayou Lafourche on the west and the Mississippi River on the east. The basin once contained an active deltaic sublobe of the Mississippi River, known as the Bayou des Familles–Bayou Barataria branch of the St. Bernard delta complex. This sublobe was abandoned by the river a few thousand years ago. Both Bayou Lafourche and Bayou des Familles (which runs through the Barataria Preserve) carried the main channel of the Mississippi in earlier times. Today, within the Barataria Basin, freshwater gradually gives way to brackish water and then to salt water as one nears the Gulf of Mexico, the southern boundary of the basin. The Barataria Preserve lies within the upper, freshwater portion of the basin. Prior to human intervention, the hydrology of the basin was affected by the river, rainfall, and tidal action. When the park was created, the river was not much of a factor because annual spring flooding no longer occurred, and the river's distributaries had been blocked. Before the extensive system of levees was built along the Mississippi, rainwater and river flood waters

worked their way gradually into the marshes and lakes as surface flow (sheet flow). The Davis Pond Freshwater Diversion Project, dedicated in 2002, allows river water to once again enter the upper basin from the river through four box culverts in the levee, imitating the annual spring flood (as further described later in this chapter).¹

Tidal action is minimal in the upper portion of the Barataria Basin, except when strong storms come in from the Gulf or strong frontal passages produce high winds or rapid shifts from a southerly to a northerly wind direction. The tidal surges that accompany major storms bring saltwater into the freshwater areas of the basin. Many plant species thrive only within a narrow range of salinity; abrupt changes in salinity resulting from storm surge can severely damage plant communities. Before humans interfered with the hydrology, the marshes of the basin served to slow down and diffuse the rising storm surge coming in from the Gulf. As marshland has disappeared, this buffering effect has diminished. The marshes of the upper basin, including those in the preserve, remain largely intact. Their buoyant or semibuoyant mats of vegetation (known locally as flotant marsh) continue to buffer interior areas from storm surge.²

Human engineering has interfered with the preexisting hydrology regime in a number of ways. In addition to confining the Mississippi between levees, humans have constructed levees around residential and commercial developments in the upper portions of the Barataria Basin. These levees allow the land to be drained for

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- 1 Robert T. Saucier, *Geomorphology and Quaternary Geologic History of the Lower Mississippi Valley* (Vicksburg, Miss.: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1994), 280-82; website of the nonprofit organization Restore or Retreat, http://www.restoreorretreat.org/solution_davis_pond.php, consulted April 26, 2011. The Davis Pond Project has not always operated at its full capacity.
 - 2 NPS DSC, "Expanded Background Paper for General Management Planning" (Denver, Colo.: NPS, July 1980), 32; David Muth, personal communication, April 26, 2011.

agriculture, commerce, industry, and residential development and protect these areas from storm surge. Rainwater runoff from the areas protected by the levees no longer enters the marshes as sheet flow, but is pumped over the levees at a few points into bayous and canals. Further, this channelized runoff contains manmade contaminants. The basin is now also crisscrossed by canals and navigational channels. The first of these were dug in the 18th and 19th centuries to support agricultural endeavors. Many more were created in the 20th century to facilitate logging, oil and gas exploration, and general navigation. The canals and other manmade channels divert water, restricting its free flow through the surrounding marshes. Often, the spoil material from the dredging of a canal was piled alongside the channel, essentially creating a dam. These spoil banks further interfered with natural surface water flow. Once completed, the canals also serve as conduits

for saltwater intrusion during storms and other unusual weather conditions.

The legislation establishing the park divided the Barataria Preserve into a core area that would be purchased by the NPS and a park protection zone (PPZ) lying north and northwest of the core area (see figure 6-7).³ The 20,000 acres of the preserve lie south of U.S. Highway 90, a main artery running through the communities of Westwego, Marrero, and Harvey. Bayou des Familles follows a meandering course through the eastern portion of the preserve. Louisiana Highway 45 runs on the natural levee just west of Bayou des Familles, where roads have existed since colonial times.

- 3 The concept of the PPZ lost its meaning once it became clear that Jefferson Parish would not establish regulations to protect it. The term is retained here because it helps explain the changes in the park's land acquisition program.

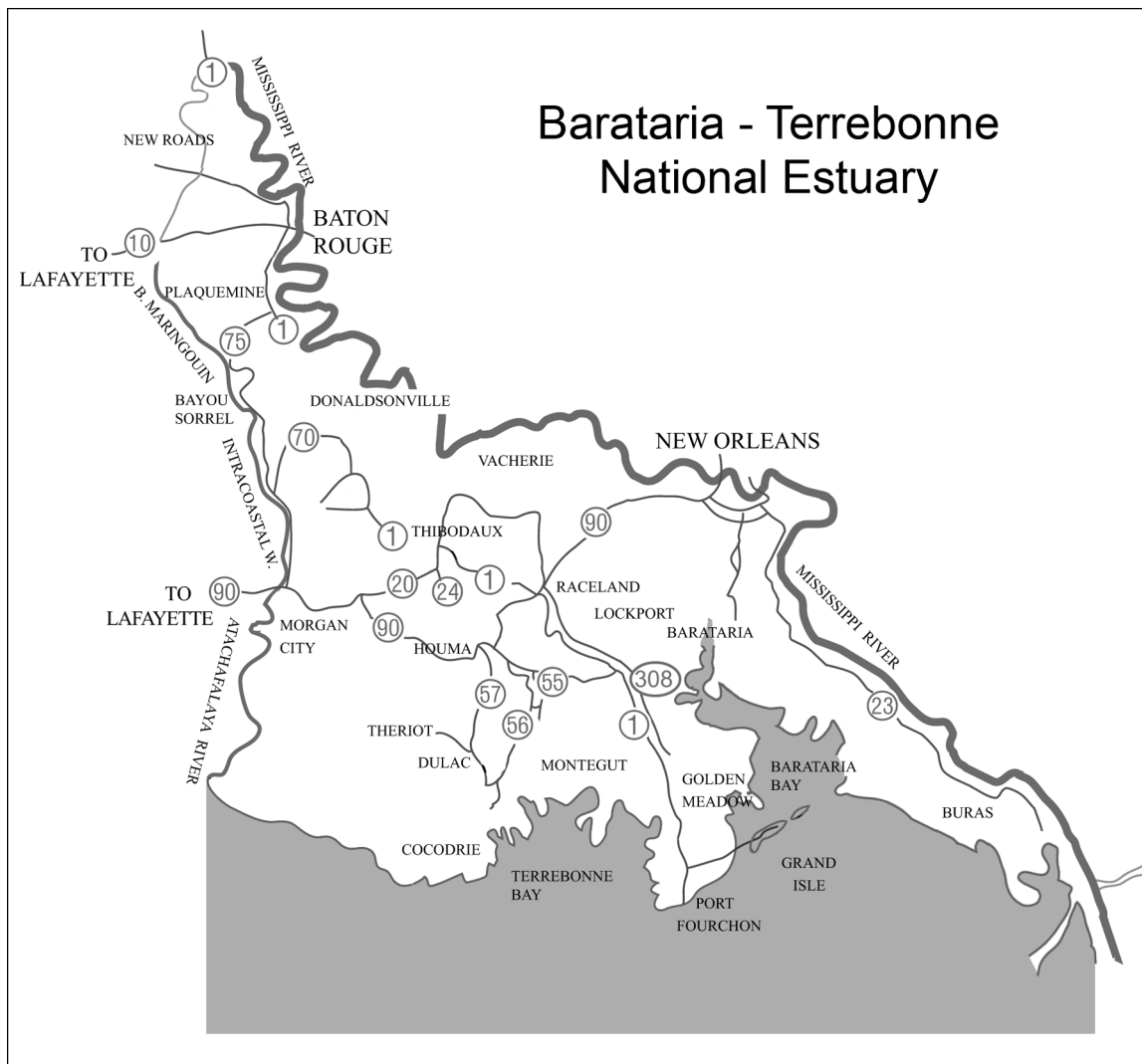


Figure 9-1. Terrebonne-Barataria Estuary. (Madeline Baum)

Bayou des Familles joins Bayou Barataria (a part of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway), which forms the southern boundary of the core area. Bayou Barataria is connected to Lake Salvador by Bayou Villars. Lake Salvador forms the western boundary of the core area. North of Lake Salvador is Couba Island (which is separated from the preserve by Bayou Bardeaux) and Lake Cataouatche. Bayou Segnette runs north to south through the PPZ. A navigation canal, the Bayou Segnette Waterway, runs through the western portion of the core area, between Bayou Segnette and Bayou Villars. The Millaudon Canal, excavated before the Civil War, cuts across the PPZ from west to east. A number of canals, among them the late nineteenth-century Kenta Canal and the mid-twentieth-century Pipeline Canal, cut through the marsh in the core area. Bayous Barataria and Segnette are maintained as navigable waterways by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. At the time of the park's establishment, a new highway, known as the Lafitte-Larose Highway or Louisiana Highway 3143, was planned just east of the park's eastern boundary. Now finished, it connects Marrero with the city of Jean Lafitte.

Protection from the storm surges accompanying hurricanes became of increasing concern after World War II as the New Orleans area expanded, bringing development to communities on the West Bank. The U.S. Congress took initial steps toward authorizing a hurricane protection project in 1946, but Hurricane Betsy in 1965 made action more pressing. Congress gave authorization and funding to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which developed three related hurricane protection projects in the New Orleans area. The project with the greatest potential effect on the Barataria Preserve is known as the West Bank and Vicinity Hurricane Protection Project.⁴ The project (which was further subdivided into three areas, Lake Cataouatche, Westwego to Harvey Canal, and east of Harvey Canal), eventually involved the construction of more than 60 miles of earthen levees and floodwalls, designed to protect the developed areas of the Barataria Basin from storm

surge.⁵ Federal agencies and Jefferson Parish officials engaged in protracted conversations over the location of the levee for the Westwego to Harvey Canal area. The parish argued for a more southerly location, hoping to enclose wetlands that could be drained for development. The Environmental Protection Agency and local environmentalists wanted the levee to protect only areas in the northern portion of the parish that already had been developed, preserving as much of the existing wetlands as possible. The location of the hurricane protection levee was important for the planners of the Barataria Preserve Unit of the park, because it would establish the effective northern boundary of the PPZ. Land enclosed by the levee would be cut off from most natural hydrological processes and consequently not a good candidate for inclusion within the preserve. The quality of the water from built-up areas that would be pumped over the levee into the preserve was also a concern. The West Bank and Vicinity Hurricane Protection Project, aspects of which were reconsidered and modified following storms in the 1990s and early 2000s, remained unfinished when Hurricanes Rita and Katrina struck in 2005 (see chapter 13 below).⁶

The overall management objective for the Barataria Preserve, as stated in the 1982 General Management Plan (GMP), is to restore “the natural water flow in the unit’s waterways, as feasible, but with recognition of the past development of leveed waterways.” This objective was essentially confirmed in the 1995 amendment to the GMP. The objective was: “to reestablish to the greatest practicable degree the natural flow of freshwater and sediment in support of the park’s wetland

4 On the East Bank, the Corps initiated two projects: the Lake Ponchartrain and Vicinity Hurricane Protection Project and the New Orleans to Venice Hurricane Protection Project.

5 The Corps of Engineers designed the West Bank Hurricane Protection Project to withstand the storm surge to be expected from the “standard project hurricane,” a model of a hypothetical hurricane developed by the U.S. Weather Bureau based on historical data on hurricanes from 1900 to 1956. The standard project hurricane was defined as “the most severe storm that is considered reasonably characteristic of a region.” “An Autopsy of Katrina: Four Storms, Not Just One,” *New York Times*, May 30, 2006.

6 American Society of Civil Engineers Hurricane Katrina Review Panel, *The New Orleans Hurricane Protection System: What Went Wrong and Why* (Reston, Va.: American Society of Civil Engineers, 2007), 17-20; “Get On with Hurricane Levee,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, February 23, 1987; “The Mean Season,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, May 31, 2003.

environment.” A complete restoration of natural conditions, of course, could never be accomplished without eliminating the urban area of New Orleans and removing all the water control devices installed by the Army Corps of Engineers. Among the steps contemplated to help reestablish more natural conditions in the unit were eliminating or piercing spoil banks along canals, filling in the manmade canals, eliminating pollutants in runoff from developed areas, eliminating or controlling exotic species like the water hyacinth, and erecting water control devices (weirs) that could be deployed selectively to block saltwater infiltration from the lower portion of the basin. Typically, the NPS does not attempt to interfere with natural forces in managing its units. In the Barataria Preserve, previous large-scale human intervention made this laissez-faire approach ineffective. The basin is no longer being replenished with sediment and nutrients from overbank flooding by the Mississippi River. Though subsidence and erosion are natural forces, they have been exacerbated in the region by manmade changes, including strengthened tidal forces conveyed by the canal network and the loss of wetlands to saltwater intrusion. The greater tidal forces now affecting the preserve are the direct consequence of the loss of buffering wetlands between it and the Gulf and the deeper and straighter manmade channels that now connect it to the Gulf. Moreover, the extraction of petroleum and natural gas from below ground

has increased the rate of subsidence.⁷ If these human-produced or human-abetted forces were allowed to operate unchecked in the preserve, they would eventually (over the course of decades or centuries) cause the preserve to erode away completely. Therefore, from the onset, NPS managers understood that from time to time they would need to counteract natural forces to ensure that they would continue to have a resource to manage in the Barataria Preserve. As the park’s 1997 Resource Management Plan put it, natural processes can be “successfully mimic[k]ed by judicious management of water, nutrients, and sediment.”⁸

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- 7 Global climate change, spurred by the burning of fossil fuels and other activities that increase global temperatures and foster the melting of glacial ice, is causing sea levels to rise worldwide, adding another human-instigated force, wholly beyond the control of park managers, to the mix.
- 8 National Park Service, Denver Service Center, *General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment for Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, Louisiana* (Denver, Colo.: NPS Denver Service Center, 1982) (hereinafter JELA GMP), 16; National Park Service, Denver Service Center, *Amendment to the General Management Plan, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve* (Denver, Colo.: NPS Denver Service Center, 1995) (hereinafter JELA GMP Amendment), 25; David Muth, interview with Robert Blythe, November 5, 2008; National Park Service, *Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve Resource Management Plan* (New Orleans: NPS, 1997), 25-26; John Day Jr. et al., “Restoration of the Mississippi Delta: Lessons from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita,” *Science* 315 (March 23, 2007), 1679-82.



Figure 9-2. Wild irises in bloom, Barataria Unit. (JELA)

Managing Natural Resources

The collection of accurate data on the natural resources of the unit and the basin was a critical prerequisite to the establishment of any program aimed at restoring natural conditions. The NPS partnered with the U.S. Geological Survey to produce a baseline snapshot of water quality within the unit. For one year, beginning in April 1981, surface water samples were collected monthly from six sites along the unit's bayous and canals. Biological, chemical, and physical analyses were then performed on the samples. The results of this study have been used to guide an ongoing program of water quality monitoring. A resurvey of surface water and bottom material in 1999-2000 found only minor changes from the 1981-1982 results. In almost all cases, the resurvey found chemical and metal concentrations below levels likely to produce biological impairment.⁹

Guidelines for the Park Protection Zone (PPZ)

Jean Lafitte's establishing legislation called for the NPS and Jefferson Parish to "develop a set of guidelines or criteria applicable to the use and development of properties within the park protection zone (PPZ) to be enacted and enforced by the State or local units of government." As discussed in chapter 6 above, the PPZ was made part of the Barataria Preserve of the park both to reduce the cost of federal land acquisition and to assuage local concerns over a "federal land grab." Because water flows from the PPZ into the core area, conditions in the PPZ are critical to the health of the ecosystem in the core area. Park staff worked on draft guidelines in spring 1980, and Superintendent Isenogle in August forwarded a set of 11 guidelines for the PPZ to the Jefferson Parish Council, hoping that they would be enacted by ordinance. Among other provisions, the guidelines prohibited alteration of existing water movement and drainage patterns, the discharge of concentrated storm runoff and pollutants, and

the introduction of exotic plant species within the PPZ. Protracted discussions with parish officials ensued. Ultimately, the parish and its attorneys decided that they lacked the authority to impose land use controls on private property owners in order to further the federal government's management goals in the Barataria Preserve. The Jefferson Parish Council on May 9, 1984, adopted a resolution officially declining to establish guidelines in the PPZ.¹⁰

With Jefferson Parish unwilling to act, the NPS looked to the standby authority, granted to it in the establishing legislation, to purchase land in the PPZ. In June 1985 the director of the NPS Southwest Region gave the park permission to begin purchasing property in the PPZ up to the Millaudon Canal. In 1994 the park requested and received further authorization from the region to acquire all tracts within the PPZ lying north of the Millaudon Canal. The 1985 decision not to attempt acquisitions north of the Millaudon Canal was largely based on the belief that the spoil bank on the south side of the canal prevented contaminants originating farther north from entering the unit. By 1994, however, park managers realized that that breaches in the spoil bank made it an ineffective barrier. Furthermore, it was clear that the entire wetland system was highly integrated both hydrologically and biologically. The conclusion therefore was to purchase as much land within the PPZ as possible.¹¹

While the park and Jefferson Parish discussed proposed regulations for the PPZ, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers continued its studies and planning for the West Bank Hurricane Flood Protection Levee. The Corps released its plan and environmental assessment for the levee in late 1986. The levee would run from the Harvey Canal on the east to the city of Westwego on the west. The initial plan called for taking 33 acres from within the authorized boundary of the Barataria Preserve in order to increase the height of the

9 Charles R. Garrison, "Water Quality of the Barataria Unit, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, Louisiana (April 1981–March 1982)," Open File Report 82-691 (Baton Rouge, La.: USGS, 1982), 1-3; Christopher M. Swarzenski, "Resurvey of Quality of Surface Water and Bottom Material of the Barataria Preserve of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, 1999-2000" (Baton Rouge, La.: USGS, 2004), 27.

10 P.L. 95-625; Superintendent Isenogle to Joseph Yenni, President, Jefferson Parish Council, August 4, 1980, JELA HQ files; DRPC minutes, November 29, 1984.

11 "Barges Slice Marsh, Ruin Water Source, Park Official Says," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, September 28, 1985; JELA staff meeting minutes, May 20, 1985; Acting Superintendent, JELA, to RD, SWR, March 7, 1994, with attached justification document, JELA HQ files; David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2011.

existing V-Line Levee in Jefferson Parish, so as to enable it to withstand hurricane storm surge. The V-Line Levee is so named because it forms a V when plotted on a map. Built around 1950, this levee was to be substantially enlarged as part of the Corps's hurricane levee. Park managers felt that taking 33 acres was excessive and that the amount of park land sacrificed could be minimized if the levee were widened on the north rather than the south side. Superintendent Isenogle acknowledged that some park land ultimately might have to be given up, but he wanted to surrender only what was necessary. The Corps responded that widening the levee on the north was feasible but would add several million dollars to the construction cost. After studying the issues, the Corps in early 1998 agreed to widen the levee on the north side, saving park land but adding approximately \$4.4 million to the levee's overall cost. The NPS obtained \$150,000 to conduct a study of the recreational potential of the levee, which was completed in 1998 as the Barataria Recreational Corridor Study. The study identified bicycling, wildlife observation, and fishing opportunities along the levee right-of-way. Levee construction is a years-long process, involving multiple additions, or lifts, of material. The final lift had not been added to the West Bank Hurricane Protection Levee when Hurricane Katrina in 2005 necessitated an extensive rethinking of the project. Since then the footprint of the levee, its materials, and issues of access into the park all have been revisited. As this history went to press, park managers continued to consult closely with the Corps and other authorities to ensure that the redesigned levee would be constructed in a way that minimizes impact on park resources.¹²

Surface Water Management Plan

In 1985, park managers began working with the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, the Louisiana State University Center for Wetland Resources, and others to draft a comprehensive surface water management plan for the Barataria Preserve. This plan went through numerous revisions and reviews over the course of several years. A

key component of the plan was the use of water control devices, including variable crest weirs. The weirs were intended to control the infiltration of saltwater from the Gulf and encourage the flow of freshwater from upstream. The park proceeded with the design and permitting process for the installation of eight weirs in 1990. The next year, park managers and the DRPC concluded that more study of the conditions in the unit was needed before the installation of any water control devices. Soon thereafter the park obtained \$300,000 to fund a three-year study of conditions in the unit. Conducted in partnership with the U.S. Geological Survey and National Biological Service, the study took place from 1994 through 1996. The study team placed about 200 monitoring stations in the unit. Based on data gathered on water levels, temperature, salinity, marsh composition, and other parameters, a computer model was created that allowed testing of various restoration plans. Based on this computer modeling and other studies, the idea of placing water control devices such as weirs was abandoned.¹³

- 13 SAR, 1992; DRPC minutes, January 7, 1986, October 11, 1989, March 16 and November 9, 1994, and April 12, 1995; SAR, 1990; "Preliminary Water Management Plan for JELA National Park," August 1988, JELA Collection, UNO.



Figure 9-3. A Southern Louisiana hardwood forest community. (LSU Herbarium)

12 "Park Chief Willing to Give Some Land for Proposed Levee," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 17, 1987; SAR, 1986; "Corps of Engineers Alters Path of West Bank Hurricane Levee," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March 9, 1988; SAR, 1998; Muth interview.

A step toward restoring the hydrology of the Barataria Preserve was accomplished in summer 1993. When Louisiana Highway 45 was originally constructed, the flow of water between Bayou Coquille and Bayou des Familles was interrupted. The road was built on fill, and water was carried under the road by culverts, which soon became clogged with silt. The NPS convinced the state to place a bridge where the bayous converged, restoring the free flow of water. Built at a cost of \$96,000, the bridge was put into service in September 1993.¹⁴

The greatest long-term threat to the Barataria Preserve was subsidence, an inevitable result of the wetlands being denied replenishment from annual spring flooding. A more immediate concern was erosion of the core area's marshes by the action of waves from Lake Salvador. The lake's eastern shore comes very close to the Bayou Segnette Waterway. *The Times-Picayune* in 1987 characterized the threat in these words:

Like a bogeyman at the back door, Lake Salvador on the west bank of Jefferson Parish is threatening to gnaw away the fragile coastal wetlands in Jean Lafitte National Park. . . . The threat is two-fold: the harsh, wind-driven waves from the lake erode the shore, and the higher salinity of the lake water could destroy the delicate ecological balance in the marsh, which has a lower salt content.¹⁵

In summer 1991, the lake broke through the west bank of the Bayou Segnette Waterway, leaving only the tree-lined east bank to prevent lake water from continuing to erode the wetlands lying east of the waterway. This development heightened the urgency of the situation, but the least damaging means of shoring up the bank to create a barrier was not clear. The quickest and least expensive expedient would have been to dredge sediment from the bed of Lake Salvador and apply it to the waterway's bank. The NPS opposed this proposal at the time because of the damage that it might do to the lake bed and the fear that the dredging would increase saltwater intrusion into the marshes. Hurricane Andrew

in August 1992 caused a complete failure of the remaining protection between the lake and the waterway. In 1992 and 1993 the state and federal governments appropriated funds for a multiyear Lake Salvador shoreline protection project. The first phase involved construction by the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources of a 6,800-foot rock erosion barrier along the western bank of the Bayou Segnette Waterway. Some 3,600 feet of the barrier were within NPS property. The second phase involved the installation of innovative geotextile tubes within cribs constructed with pilings, about one fourth of a mile offshore from the rock barrier. The tubes were filled with sediment in order to serve as a lightweight foundation for an erosion barrier in an area with soils too poor to support traditional wave barriers. Once this work was completed, the plan was to restore marsh between the crib and the shore. Installed in 1996, the crib was tied back into the marsh with rock revetment placed on top of geotextile. Funding was not available to complete a wave barrier above the geotube within the crib. In subsequent years, various approaches to fashioning an inexpensive wave barrier were tried, including placing thousands of discarded Christmas trees into the crib. The park received additional funds in 2010, much of which was used to extend the highly successful rock revetment north of the geocrib to protect additional marsh and the Chenier Grand Coquille Indian midden complex.¹⁶ At the midden, which had experienced substantial erosion, offshore rock dikes were constructed. The dikes were built offshore to protect subsurface archeological material, but even this required the dredging of a channel to permit barges to carry

16 A midden is a refuse pile, typically including animal bones, discarded implements, and other artifacts.



Figure 9-4. Geo-textile crib shortly after installation at the Barataria Preserve. (JELA)

14 "Park Bridge Is Completed, Ranger Says," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, September 3, 1993.

15 "Lake Salvador Erosion Is Threat to Lafitte Park," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, July 14, 1987.

rock to the site. The contractor placed dredge spoil between the midden and the rocks, both to increase long-term protection of the midden and to provide soil for the planting of live oaks, which had previously characterized the spot.¹⁷

The project was ongoing, with a second lift of material being added in August 2005, when Hurricane Katrina struck. The storm dislodged the incomplete second-phase geocrib and did considerable damage to the crib structure. The structure was almost totally lost; the NPS received about \$2.9 million in hurricane damage funds. The NPS and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers then prepared a new design, and the second lift, composed of rocks anchored to the geotube, is under construction at this writing. In addition the Corps contributed sediments dredged from a second project, on the Algiers Canal portion of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, to restore approximately 55 acres of marsh between the crib and the rocks along the Bayou Segnette Waterway. After 20 years the project is finally nearing completion.¹⁸

Another feature of the NPS's plans to restore the hydrology of the preserve involved filling in canals. In 2001 the park received \$511,000 to fill in two canals leading from Lake Salvador that had been dug in the 1950s to facilitate oil test drilling. Two different techniques were employed. In one canal, only material from the canal's spoil bank was used; in the other canal, sediment from Lake Salvador was pumped in to supplement the spoil bank material. Both techniques showed considerable promise in marsh restoration. Some 50 acres of freshwater marsh were restored in these two backfilling operations. In 2010, with funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of

2009 (P.L. 111-5), the park restored an additional 4½ miles of modern-period canals.¹⁹

Removing Exotic Plant Species

Many exotic species, such as the Chinese tallow tree (*Sapium sebifera*), water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*), water spangle (*Salvinia minima*), and alligator weed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*), have found a home in the upper Barataria Basin. These species have the potential to crowd out indigenous plants. Water hyacinth is a free-floating, fast-growing import from South America that can entirely cover bayous and trenaies.²⁰ It impedes the free flow of water and can make it impossible for visitors to canoe in the Barataria Preserve. Starting in the mid-1980s, the park attempted to control water hyacinth and other invasive aquatic plants with mechanical harvesters. Experiments with weevils that eat the plants have also been conducted. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers uses herbicides in the Bayou Segnette Waterway, including the portion within the Barataria Preserve, to fulfill its mandate to keep the canal open to navigation. Herbicides are not used in other areas of the park. The park's first weed harvester was delivered in January 1986, and a second, larger machine was purchased in 1991. In 2000, the park reconditioned its two United Marine International aquatic vegetation harvesters. Both soon became inoperable and were not replaced. Park managers concluded that the meager benefits achieved in using the machines to keep waterways open for canoeing did not justify the high cost of replacing them, annual maintenance costs, and the drain on staff time. No long-term solution to waterway choking by exotics has yet emerged.²¹

A large-scale project of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers may eventually provide another means of restoring the marshes of the Barataria Basin, including those within the Preserve. The Davis Pond Freshwater Diversion Project, begun in 1997, is designed to divert freshwater

17 "Lake Salvador Erosion Is Threat; Park Wary of Quick Fixes," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 2, 1992; DRPC minutes, December 10, 1997; SAR, 1992, 1993; David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2001. *Chênière* (often anglicized as *chenier*) is a Louisiana French term for an oak grove. It appears to derive from *chênaie*, the word employed in France for an oak grove. The presence of live oaks near the midden led to the name *Chenier Grand Coquille*, *coquille* being French for shell. Jean Dubois, Henri Mitterand, and Albert Dauzat, *Grand Dictionnaire Étymologique du Français* (Paris: Larousse, 2005), 191; Jules O. Daigle, *A Dictionary of the Cajun Language* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edwards Brothers, 1984), 32.

18 David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2001; DRPC minutes, December 10, 1997; SAR, 1992, 1993.

19 SAR, 2000; "Project Aims To Renew Marshes; Jean Lafitte Park Canals To Be Filled," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 29, 2002; "Backfill Dead-end Canals, Final Report," February 1, 2006, JELA RM files; David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2011.

20 Trenaie is the Louisiana term for a ditch dug through a marsh.

21 JELA management staff meeting notes, January 27, 1986; SAR, 1991, 2000; Muth interview.

from the Mississippi River into the upper basin. The selective release of water, suspended soil, and nutrients is meant to partially duplicate the replenishment of the wetlands that once occurred through the annual flooding of the river. Water is taken from the river at a point 23 miles above New Orleans, where it flows into a 10,000-acre ponding area, then into Lake Cataouatche and the wetlands beyond. This diversion also carries some risks, because the waters of the Mississippi contain not just sediment and nutrients, but also contaminants. Water first flowed from the project in March 2002. At first there were some problems with the dikes that surrounded the ponding area, keeping the project from functioning as intended. The dikes were fixed, and in 2008, the project operated at 13,500 cubic feet per second (cfs) during a test, 3,000 cfs above design capacity. The park and the U.S. Geological Survey are jointly monitoring the diversion's effects on vegetation.²²

The state of Louisiana's interest in protecting coastal wetlands has noticeably increased since the park was established in 1978. In the park's early years, state officials were largely in favor of development and petroleum drilling in the wetlands. Section 404 of the 1972 Clean Water Act required the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to issue a permit for certain activities, including deposition of dredged material, but enforcement was lax (see the discussion below of the incident involving the Prairie Producing Company). In 1989 Governor Charles "Buddy" Roemer nominated the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary for inclusion in the National Estuary Program (NEP). The NEP, administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), was established by the 1987 Clean Water Act to provide a mechanism for protecting and restoring the health of the nation's estuaries. In 1995 the park began working with the EPA and the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources to develop a Comprehensive Coastal Management Plan for the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program. This plan was approved and published in 1996. The park holds a seat on the management

conference, a group of diverse stakeholders that provides oversight and guidance to the program.²³

Cultural Resources

Human settlement on the natural levees of the Barataria Basin began soon after the Bayou des Familles-Barataria deltaic lobe began to form, approximately 500 BCE. Successive Native American cultures in the basin included the Tchefuncte (550 to 100 BCE), Marksville (100 BCE to 300 CE), Troyville (300 CE to 700 CE), Coles Creek (700 CE to 1100 CE), and Plaquemines (1100 CE to 1700 CE). Like the Native Americans before them, European settlers gravitated to the high ground along bayous. During the French colonial period, there appears to have been relatively limited settlement in the Barataria Basin. Under Spanish rule in the 1790s, emigrants from the Canary Islands settled along Bayou des Familles, giving the bayou its name.²⁴ Beginning in the 1820s, sugar plantations arose along Bayou des Familles, but large-scale agriculture declined in the later 19th century. During the early 20th century, logging took place along Bayou des Familles and in the nearby backswamp. In addition, some land on the levees was used for seasonal hunting and fishing camps. Betsy Swanson's 1991 study for the park, entitled *Terre Haute de Barataria: An Historic Upland on an Old River Tributary Overtaken by Forest in the Barataria Unit of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve*, provides a comprehensive treatment of the prior human use of the land within the park boundary. Since the mid-1970s Swanson has studied the land use patterns in the Barataria Basin, working with professional archeological firms and the Delta Chapter of the Louisiana Archeological Society. She has contributed significantly to the knowledge base of cultural resources in the basin.²⁵

22 Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force, media release, "Water Flows through Davis Pond," March 26, 2002; Muth interview.

23 Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program website, www.btnep.org, consulted May 4, 2011; SAR, 1995, 1996; David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2011.

24 The Bayou des Familles got its name from the Isleños families that settled along its banks.

25 Barbara Holmes, *Historic Resource Study, Barataria Unit* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Division of History, Southwest Cultural Resources Center, SWR, NPS, 1986), 27, 30, 49, 57, 74; Betsy Swanson, *Terre Haute de Barataria: An Historic Upland on an Old River Tributary Overtaken by Forest in the Barataria Unit of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve* (Hanrahan, La.: Jefferson Parish Historical Commission, 1991); Allison Peña, personal communication, May 12, 2011.

At the time of the park's establishment in 1978, few standing historic structures were present in the unit, but a number of archeological sites were present, representing the periods of occupation outlined in the preceding paragraph. Prehistoric sites include shell middens and earthen and/or shell mounds that served as burial sites or foundations for houses. These are found mostly along Bayou des Familles and Bayou Coquille, with a few also on the shore of Lake Salvador. Archeological evidence of the Isleños homesteads is present along the Bayou des Familles. Two post-Civil War sugar plantations, Christmas Plantation and Kinta Plantation, were established along Bayou des Familles and Bayou Barataria. No buildings associated with the plantations survive, but their field systems and drainage ditches are still identifiable. Fifty-seven archeological sites and six historic structures of the Barataria Preserve were entered on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989 as the Barataria Preserve Historic District. The 1982 GMP set the goal of protecting known archeological sites against damage from vandalism and development. No action was contemplated to protect sites from the natural processes of subsidence. A 1986 archeological assessment indicated that the areas of greatest archeological sensitivity lay along Bayou des Familles, Bayou Coquille, Bayou Barataria, and the eastern shore of Lake Salvador.²⁶

Shell middens left behind by native groups continued to be used in the historic period. Middens and natural levees, which were the only high ground in the Barataria Basin not subject to seasonal flooding, attracted settlement in the colonial period. The large shell midden on the eastern shore of Lake Salvador, known as Chenier Grand Coquille, has been used by Europeans since at least the 18th century. By the time the park was created, this midden had been mined for shell and was being eroded by the lake's action. The park tried various means of protecting this important site. The one that finally was successful was a rock barrier, created just offshore from the midden itself.²⁷

Reminders of logging and petroleum extraction activities in the Barataria Preserve include canals and capped oil wells. Kenta Canal, which dates back to the plantation era, was widened, deepened, and extended in the logging period of the early 20th century. It is a contributing feature of the Barataria Preserve National Register Historic District. Although abandoned oil wells testify to the continuing human use of the area, they are a hazard and an intrusion on the natural scene. An inventory conducted in 1988 revealed one abandoned and 44 plugged wells within the boundary of the Barataria Preserve; 11 of these still had exposed casings. Congress appropriated \$100,000 for inventorying and remediation of the wellheads. Where the firm that drilled the well was still in business, the firm was contacted to pay for removing all aboveground traces and replugging the well below grade. Eight wells were replugged and capped below ground in 1995 and the remainder in 1997.²⁸

Seasonal recreational camps constitute another category of cultural resource within the Barataria Preserve Unit. For generations, area residents have moored houseboats or built hunting and fishing camps on stilts for occasional use. In 1990, the park reported that at least 16 recreational camps existed on federally owned land within the boundary of the Barataria Unit. Within the core area, the camps were along the Bayou Segnette Waterway, Chenier Grand Coquille, and Treasure Island. Most of the camps were leased from property owners, but in a few cases the users owned small tracts of land. The camps on Treasure Island were in the latter category and were purchased along with the underlying real estate. The Chenier Grand Coquille camps were removed to protect the midden there. Within the preserve boundary but outside the core area were about 150 camps on the Wisner property and more than 20 on Whiskey Canal. Around 1988, as the park was purchasing land along the Bayou Segnette Waterway, it began the process of issuing special use permits to the camp users, to replace leases that had been in effect with previous landowners. The special use permits were issued for a period of three years and required the permittees to install state-approved sewerage disposal systems. There was considerable resistance among permit holders to the park's efforts to

26 National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, "Historic District, Barataria Unit, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park," 1989; JELA GMP, 17.

27 Muth interview.

28 National Register Form, Section 8, 3-4; Mining and Minerals Branch, Land Resources Division, NPS, "Oil and Gas Well Plan and Abandonment Report to JELA," August 21, 1990; SAR, 1994, 1995, 1997.

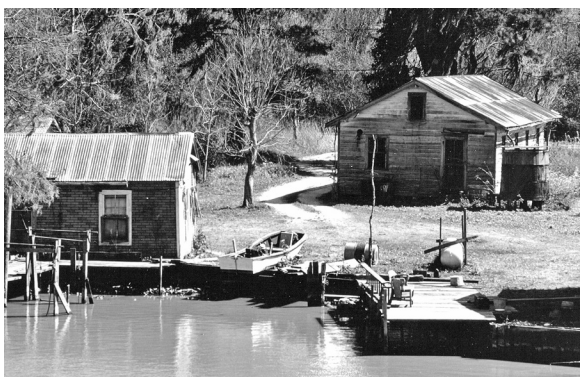


Figure 9-5. A recreational camp on a bayou. (JELA)

secure compliance with the new requirements on sewerage disposal. Over time, as people gave up the camps, the park moved to remove all traces of them. In 1997 and 1998, the park dismantled and removed 18 abandoned camps. Also in the 1990s, the park commissioned a traditional use study on the camps and other activities within the Barataria Preserve. Some of the remaining camps were destroyed by the two hurricanes of 2005.²⁹

Traditional Uses

Section 905 of the park's establishing legislation provided that "[w]ithin the Barataria Marsh Unit, the Secretary shall permit hunting, fishing (including commercial fishing), and trapping in accordance with applicable Federal and State laws." On lands owned by the NPS, these activities could be excluded in certain areas "for reasons of public safety." To both Senator Johnston and the NPS, the continuation of these traditional uses was critical in building local support for the new park. Louisiana does, after all, promote itself as a "Sportsman's Paradise," and prohibiting these activities in the park would have been extremely unpopular. After studying the issues and consulting with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the park issued preliminary hunting, fishing, and trapping regulations in October 1982. The park's fishing regulations followed the state's regulations exactly. Hunting regulations were more stringent than the state's in several

respects: only shotguns were permitted, night hunting was prohibited, and all spent cartridges and shell casings had to be removed. Hunting is not permitted in areas of intensive visitor use, and no waterfowl hunting is permitted anywhere within the unit. Hunters and trappers had to apply for permits issued by the NPS, which established shotgun and bow-hunting seasons.³⁰

Although hunting and trapping were specifically provided for in the enabling legislation, some members of the DRPC and some conservationists were never entirely comfortable with these uses. Some felt that the unit was too small for these activities to occur safely, while others believed that trapping was taking place too close to areas frequented by other visitors. Michael Strock, who was a historian on the park staff in the 1980s, has never forgotten his introduction to the methods used by nutria trappers. When the trappers went around checking their traps, they took the nutria into their boats and clubbed them to death, creating unforgettable scenes of "dying nutria in the bottom of [the] boat, blood all over everybody." Some were concerned about the effect that such activity would have if observed by other visitors, especially families with young children.³¹

Others complained that the NPS had failed to conduct censuses of fur-bearing mammals and that trapping should not be permitted until the size and sustainability of species populations had been established through research. From 1981 through 1987 approximately 10,000 fur-bearing animals were trapped within the park; 90 percent of these were nutria, while the remainder were muskrats, raccoons, and small numbers of minks and otters. The trapping of a few river otters was of particular concern to the conservationists. In August 1987, as the park was in the process of moving toward a final draft of its hunting and trapping management plan, the DRPC formally recommended a moratorium on trapping, pending the completion of censuses of the species. In December, after the NPS declined to follow this recommendation, the Orleans Audubon Society

29 David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2011; DRPC minutes, December 10, 1997; SAR, 1990, 1995, 1998; Muth interview; Kate Richardson, personal communication, March 18, 2010; Michael A. Downs, Deborah M. Tootle, Betsy R. Strick, and John C. Russell, *Traditional Use Study: Barataria Preserve, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, Final Report* (La Jolla, Ca.: Impact Assessment, Inc., 1998).

30 Senator J. Bennett Johnston, interview with Robert Blythe, March 22, 2010; P.L. 95-625; NPS press release, "Hunting, Fishing Regulations for Barataria Unit of Jean Lafitte Park Set," October 28, 1982, JELA HQ files.

31 Michael Strock, interview with Robert Blythe, May 6, 2009.

and the Fund for Animals filed suit against the NPS in federal district court seeking to ban trapping on park land. Two members of the DRPC, Barry Kohl and Sidney Rosenthal, had been placed on the commission by these groups. The NPS vigorously opposed the lawsuit because it went against the clear language of the enabling legislation and out of concern that it would set a troubling precedent for NPS operations nationwide. The controversy contributed to a distinct cooling of relations between some members of the DRPC and Superintendent Ann Belkov, who had arrived in November 1987. In the wake of the lawsuit, the Secretary of the Interior did not approve the reappointment of Kohl and Rosenthal to the commission. After hearing testimony from the plaintiffs' witnesses, the presiding federal judge strongly encouraged the NPS to seek a resolution with the complainants. An agreement was reached in November 1988 that allowed nutria trapping to continue but suspended trapping of other species until the NPS had adopted a final trapping management plan. The NPS circulated a draft trapping management plan for comment in early 1990, and it was approved by the NPS Southwest Regional Director on October 5, 1990. The district court dismissed the lawsuit on February 27, 1991.³²

Hunting, fishing, and trapping have generally taken place within the park without interfering

32 SAR, 1987; "Lafitte Hunting, Trapping Restrictions Scrutinized," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, August 3, 1987; "Panelists Angry as Park Holds Wildlife Data," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, July 6, 1988; "Trapping of Raccoons, Minks Banned in Lafitte Park Accord," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, November 26, 1988; *Order, Orleans Audubon Society, et al., v. Secretary of the Interior, et al.*, February 27, 1991; Barry Kohl, interview with Robert Blythe, March 15, 2009; David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2011.



Figure 9-6. A trapper skinning a muskrat, 1930s. (Library of Congress)

with the park's management goals. Trapping of nutria and the hunting of deer actually help the park to achieve resource management goals. The nutria (*Myocastor coypus*) is a large herbivorous rodent introduced to the United States from South America. In the 1930s, nutria that had escaped from commercial fur-raising operations established themselves in the wild along the Gulf Coast. The feeding and burrowing habits of the nutria are highly destructive because the nutria strip the marshes clean of vegetation, leaving them vulnerable to erosion. Local interest in trapping nutria is directly related to the market price for pelts. Fur prices collapsed in the mid-1980s and have generally remained low ever since. The park attempted to encourage trapping by offering a bounty of from \$2.00 to \$3.00 per hide in 1990 and 1991, but found few takers. In the late 1990s the park instituted a "direct reduction program" under which park staff members were permitted to shoot nutria. During the 2002-2003 trapping season, the state of Louisiana began offering a bounty of up to \$4.00 per pelt to trappers, but this offer still attracted few trappers to the Barataria Preserve. For example, in 2005 just three trappers participated, removing 1,700 nutria from the unit. Scientists estimate that marsh environments support up to 2,000 nutria per square mile, and all efforts to date have had little effect in reducing nutria populations. Feral pigs have also been a problem in the unit, and the park conducted controlled hunts of them beginning in the 1980s. With the loss of predators like cougars and wolves, deer herds in South Louisiana lack natural checks, and controlled hunting, which is permitted in the Barataria Preserve, helps to check population growth.³³

Developing the Barataria Preserve

Under the park's enabling legislation (as amended in October 1979), the NPS had authority to acquire 8,600 acres in the core area. Early in 1980, the state of Louisiana donated 1,691 acres to the NPS. The NPS then began the process of appraising properties, negotiating with landowners, and purchasing land within the 8,600-acre core area.

33 JELA Resource Management Plan, 1997, 32-33; Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries website, <http://www.nutria.com/site2.php>, consulted March 23, 2009; SAR 2005; DRPC minutes, March 27, 1991, and August 19, 1992.

It employed local appraisers with knowledge of local market conditions. After an appraisal came in, it could be challenged by a landowner. When an agreement on the price could not be reached or title defects needed to be cured, the NPS would institute condemnation proceedings. Because of Louisiana's inheritance laws, properties often end up in fractional ownership among multiple heirs, who then must be tracked down and contacted. Once the land acquisition process began, many landowners who had opposed the establishment of the park proved eager to sell. This change typically happened once the landowners accepted the fact that no further levees, which would have permitted residential development, would be built around their land. At the time, there were some accusations that land values had been inflated by paper transactions—that is, by recording sales of properties between closely related parties at increasingly higher prices when no money actually changed hands. Research into land records to verify the truth or falsehood of such claims lies beyond the scope of this history. The park's enabling legislation allowed the NPS to acquire rights to oil and gas only with the consent of the seller. In cases where these rights previously had been leased, the NPS acquired the lease obligation along with the property. By the end of 1981, more than 4,000 acres within the core area had been acquired. At the close of 1983, the figure was 5,400 acres; by the end of 1984, it had risen to 6,242.51; and by the end of 1990, 8,199.79 acres of the core area were in NPS ownership, leaving just 400 acres to be obtained.³⁴

Unforeseen events from time to time caused interruptions in the land acquisition process. The NPS waited until the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers made a final decision on the location of the West Bank Hurricane Protection Levee before moving to acquire land adjoining it. The park also hesitated to buy land along the eastern shore of Lake Salvador until erosion was addressed. Louisiana law gives ownership of the lake bottoms to the state, and the

park did not want to pay for land that might soon become lake bottom and pass from NPS to state ownership.³⁵

In 1981 a change in presidential administrations temporarily slowed land acquisition. It was the policy of incoming President Ronald Reagan to limit, as much as possible, the amount of land to be held in fee simple by federal land management agencies. One of the first actions of James Watt, Reagan's first Secretary of the Interior, was to halt expenditures from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This fund was the principal source of monies used to acquire acreage for national parks, including the land for the Barataria Preserve. Watt's moratorium on land purchases, imposed in May 1981, was soon lifted. In April 1982 the Secretary directed federal agencies to "use to the maximum extent practical cost-effective alternatives to direct federal purchase of private land, and when acquisition is necessary, acquire or retain only the minimum interests necessary to meet management directives." In response to this policy, the NPS arranged for each of its units that contained nonfederal land within its authorized boundary to prepare a land protection plan. The purposes of this plan were to identify land that needed to be protected and to consider the various alternative methods of protection, with emphasis on less-than-fee-simple arrangements. Jean Lafitte was required to scrap its land acquisition plan and prepare a land protection plan. By the time of Reagan's inauguration, the park protection zone was already dead because of the parish's unwillingness to enact regulations, so park managers had little prospect of protecting wetlands by means other than fee-simple ownership. As directed, the park prepared the required land protection plan. Watt resigned in October 1983, and Jean Lafitte went back to purchasing land according to its established plans.³⁶

As the NPS began to acquire land within the preserve, it had to clean up areas that had been used as dumps or target ranges for decades. Superintendent Isenogle was startled by the debris

34 SAR, 1980, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1990; William Jewell, interview with Robert Blythe, March 25, 2009; Kohl interview; George Neusaenger, interview with Robert Blythe, March 10, 2009; David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2011. The state had acquired 556.07 acres as part of its proposed Jean Lafitte State Park; an additional 1,134.88 acres were in the Charity Hospital tract. Public Law 96-87, enacted on October 12, 1979, increased the size of the core area from 8,000 acres to 8,600 acres.

35 SAR, 1991.

36 "Parks Land Moratorium Lifted by Watt," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, June 24, 1981; "Park Policy Challenged by Group," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, April 28, 1983; DRPC minutes, September 23, 1982; NPS, *Jean Lafitte National Historical Park Land Protection Plan* (N.p.: NPS, 1984), 1-2.



Figure 9-7. Part of the clean-up required at Barataria. (JELA)

that he found when he first arrived: “People would dump refrigerators, car bodies, dead dogs, you name it.” If park staff could find envelopes or other evidence of where the trash had originated, they returned the debris to that address. Gradually local people came to understand that the NPS was serious about protecting the natural resources of the preserve. By early 1983, Barataria Preserve Unit Manager Oscar Rodriguez believed that vandalism and illegal dumping were under control. Another early effort involved clearing obstructions and vegetation from canals and bayous to accommodate canoes and boats.³⁷

In September 1985, the irresponsible actions of an oil driller led to a temporary halt in land acquisition and a blast from Superintendent Isenogle against the state’s stewardship of coastal areas. The Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) had granted a permit to the Prairie Producing Company to move a drilling barge up Bayou Boeuf in the PPZ. The barge, however, was 15 feet wider than the bayou and had to be forced along by four tugboats, causing considerable damage to the bayou’s banks and a widening and deepening of the channel. The superintendent announced that the DNR was “an ineffectual farce as far as protecting Louisiana’s coastal marsh is concerned.” To reinforce the point, he announced that he was suspending land purchases for the park until he felt certain that the state would permit no repetition of this incident.³⁸ The NPS had some hope that matters

might improve if the state recognized the entire Barataria Preserve as a “special management area” under its coastal management program. The DRPC felt that this was inadequate protection, however, and by early 1987 park managers had concluded that only fee-simple ownership would provide the needed protection. The NPS thus began buying land again.³⁹

The Prairie Producing Company incident was emblematic of the difficulties that park managers faced in the Barataria Preserve Unit’s early years. The prodevelopment mindset in Jefferson Parish and Louisiana only gradually gave way to a more ecologically sensitive approach. The U.S. Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 encouraged coastal and Great Lakes states to establish coastal zone management plans. Although participation was voluntary, the act provided incentives for states to participate. Without much enthusiasm, Louisiana enacted its State and Local Coastal Resources Management Act in 1978, the same year in which Jean Lafitte was established. The act “set criteria and established guidelines for protecting, developing and restoring the natural resources of the delineated coastal zone while allowing for adequate economic development and growth.” A Coastal Management Division was created within the state’s Department of Natural Resources to administer the law. The act required a coastal use permit for certain activities within the zone, including dredging; the discharge of dredged or filled material; shoreline modification; and urban, recreational, and industrial development. Activities were classified as of either state or local concern. Parishes with approved local coastal management plans were allowed to regulate activities of local concern. Jefferson Parish adopted a coastal management program in 1982.⁴⁰

Careful review of permit applications and conscientious monitoring of permitted activities did not follow immediately upon the passage of these laws, as the 1985 Prairie Producing Company event demonstrated. Over time, however, as the

37 “Superintendent Leaves Better Park Behind,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, August 23, 1987; Neusaenger interview; DRPC minutes, February 23, 1983.

38 Although the superintendent made this statement to the media, it seems unlikely that the threat by itself would have had any influence on state and local governments.

39 “Tugs, Barges Damage Park’s Water Supply,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, September 28, 1985; DRPC minutes, August 6, 1986, and February 16, 1987.

40 J. G. Wilkins, R. E. Emmer, D. J. Hwang, G. P. Kemp, B. Kennedy, M. Hassan, and B. Sharky, *Louisiana Coastal Hazard Mitigation Guidebook* (N.p.: Louisiana Sea Grant College Program, 2008), 37; *Louisiana Revised Statutes*, Title 49; *Code of Ordinances, Jefferson Parish*, Chapter 25; Muth interview.

threats to Louisiana's wetlands have increased, the attitude of state government has changed dramatically, and Louisiana is now at the forefront of wetland protection efforts. Because mineral rights in the Barataria Preserve are not owned by the U.S. government, state regulations apply. The state is often in a position to apply more stringent requirements for oil and gas drilling than the NPS can bring to bear. In some recent cases the state has prohibited exploratory drilling within the preserve when the NPS was powerless to do so. The disastrous hurricanes of 2005 pushed the state to go even further in its efforts at coastal restoration and the protection of human life.⁴¹

Expansion of the Unit Boundary

In 1994, the park initiated a boundary study for the Barataria Preserve, with the aim of determining whether the acquisition of additional properties adjoining the preserve was necessary "to more efficiently protect natural and cultural resources within the Barataria Preserve." Three areas were identified in the final boundary study as appropriate and feasible as additions to the preserve:

- The Bayou aux Carpes Study Area, consisting of 2,905 acres, mostly wetlands, east of the preserve.
- The Bayou Segnette Study Area, consisting of 2,728 acres north of the preserve. A portion of this land, the 787-acre CIT tract, was already federally owned.
- The Bayou Verret Study Area, consisting of 161 acres of marshland adjoining the far northwestern tip of the preserve.

These areas were relatively undisturbed and, as legally protected wetlands, could not be developed. Three additional areas were ultimately eliminated from consideration as a result of public comments on the draft study. These areas and the reasons for their removal are as follows:

- Couba Island, comprising approximately 3,475 acres. While the study was being prepared, the

owner of the island, the Timken Foundation, donated the greater part of the island to the City Park Improvement Association, an agency of the state of Louisiana, which placed it under the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, ensuring its protection.

- Highway 3134 tract, approximately 41 acres southeast of the unit. The concerns of private owners of property in this tract outweighed the resource values of this small area.
- Isle Bonne, approximately 58 acres south of the unit. Landowner resistance was strong in this small tract as well.

Robert Belous, who became the park's superintendent in February 1991, said of the boundary study that it looked at what park planners would want to include in the park if they were planning it anew. The boundary study was completed and released in October 1996.⁴²

Not long after the release of this study, the federal government acquired 2,200 acres in the Bayou aux Carpes area. This tract and the 787-acre CIT property came into federal ownership upon the settlement of lawsuits brought by landowners who claimed that they were denied the ability to develop their holdings because of federal wetlands regulations. The owners argued that the limitations imposed by the regulations constituted a "taking" of their property under Article V of the U.S. Constitution, for which they deserved to be compensated. The U.S. Department of Justice and the landowners reached a settlement in 1994, before adjudication of the underlying legal issues. The settlement involved federal purchase of the lands. Since the three areas addressed in the boundary study were outside the originally legislated boundary of the park, it was necessary for Congress to enact a boundary change before the park could incorporate them. Park staff began working with the Louisiana congressional delegation in 1997 in an attempt to expand the boundary. In April 1999, the Jefferson Parish Council gave support to NPS incorporation of the two federally owned properties. The park assumed

41 Muth interview. Oil and gas drilling in national parks is regulated under the provisions of 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 9B.

42 DRPC minutes, April 17, 1996; SAR, 1994, 1996.

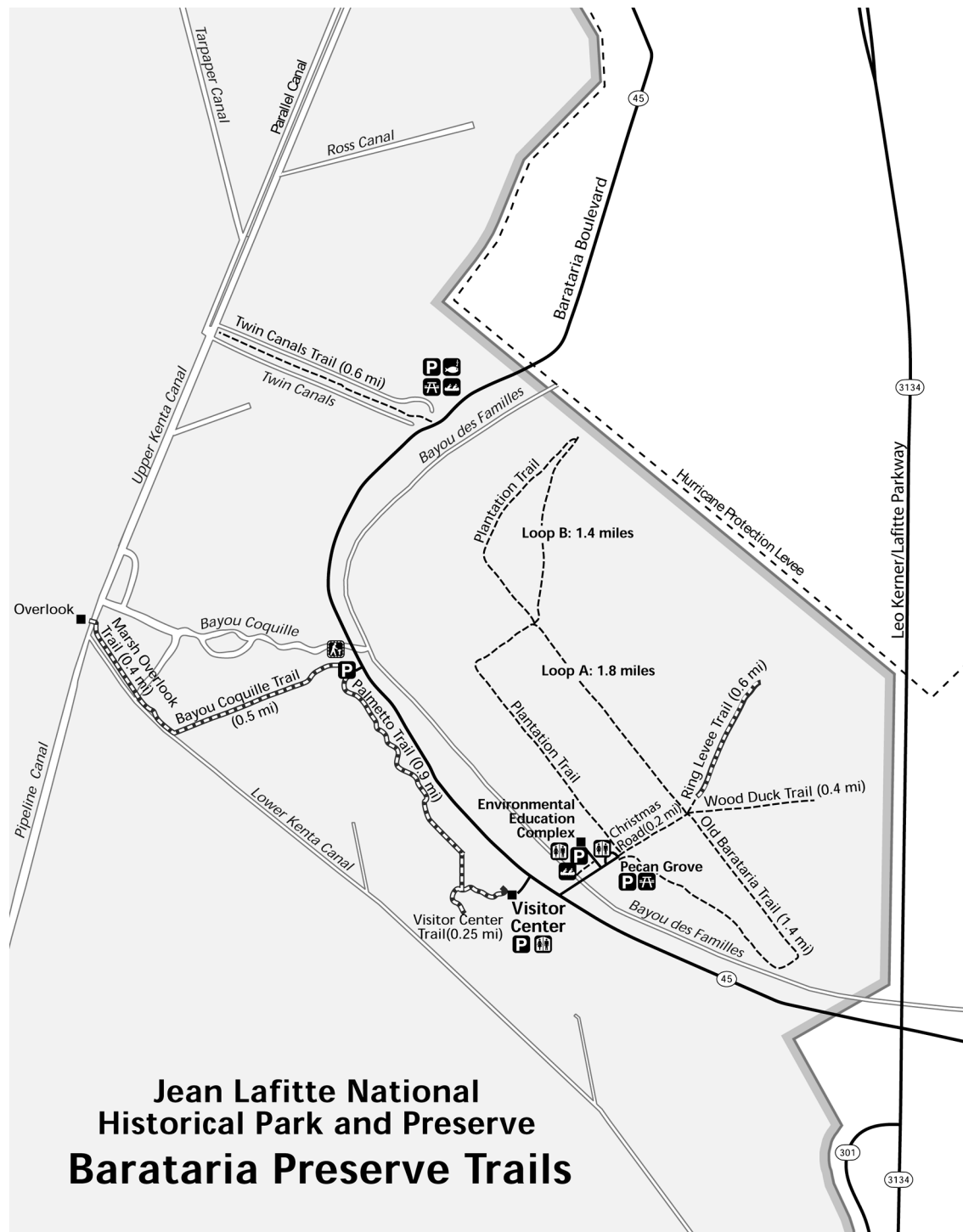


Figure 9-8. Trails and visitor facilities at the Barataria Unit. (JELA)

management of the tracts under the legal doctrine of constructive possession in 2000.⁴³

In 2000, the park renewed its efforts, working with Congressman William J. “Billy” Tauzin’s office, the park resumed efforts to draft legislation that would incorporate the Bayou aux Carpes and CIT tracts into the Barataria Preserve. Beginning in the second session of the 108th Congress, Louisiana’s delegation, led by Senator Mary Landrieu, introduced legislation that would (1) enlarge the authorized boundary of the Barataria Preserve Unit to 23,000 acres; (2) give the NPS authority to accept the Bayou aux Carpes and CIT tracts; (3) authorize the NPS to purchase 821 privately held acres from willing sellers, subject to appropriations; (4) formally change the unit’s name to “Barataria Preserve Unit”; and (5) abolish the obsolete division of the unit into a core area and park protection zone. This legislation failed to pass in 2004; similar legislation in 2005, 2007, and 2008 also failed to pass. Finally, on March 30, 2009, President Barack Obama signed into law the Public Land Management Act of 2009. Section 7105 of Title VII accomplished the desired goals for Barataria. As adopted, the act also gave the NPS the authority to expand the park boundary further, with the consent of the local governing authority

and the affected landowner, without additional congressional action. Nevertheless, because the boundary could only be expanded by the purchase of a fee-simple interest, an action unlikely to be accomplished without a congressional appropriation, Congress in effect retained control of future boundary changes.⁴⁴

Visitor Facilities

From the beginning, it was clear that, aside from access by boat, visitor access to the Barataria Preserve would be from Highway 45 (Barataria Boulevard), which traces a loop through the unit. The Barataria Preserve’s first two trails, one on each side of the highway, opened in 1982. In 1981, the park had begun the development of a trailhead parking lot on the west side of Highway 45, where it crosses Bayou Coquille. From that point, a half-mile boardwalk trail was built in a southwesterly direction to the Lower Kenta Canal. On the east side of Highway 45, about a mile south of Bayou Coquille, in an area then known as Big Woods, the park built the Ring Levee Trail, six-tenths of a mile in length. During this same period, 2½ miles of Bayou Barataria, Kenta Canal, and Pipeline Canal were cleared of surface vegetation to allow visitors to use canoes.⁴⁵

The only practicable location for visitor service facilities in the Barataria Preserve was on the natural levee of Bayou des Familles, along Highway 45. The park’s 1982 GMP identified a site on the west side of Highway 45, known as the Cotton Patch, as the best location for a staffed interpretive facility for the Barataria Preserve, unit offices, and a maintenance complex. A nearby site on the other side of the highway, Big Woods, was slated to receive an environmental center and group use complex. A system of walking trails was also planned, with parking lots at the trailheads along Highway 45.

The NPS awarded a contract to Atlas Contractors, Inc., of Fort Worth, Texas, in November 1983, covering construction of the visitor center and

43 SAR, 1997, 2000, 2001; David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2011; Statement of Janet Snyder Matthews, Associate Director for Cultural Resources, NPS, before the Subcommittee on National Parks, of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, concerning S. 2287, to adjust the boundary of the Barataria Preserve Unit of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve in the State of Louisiana and for other purposes, June 8, 2004, available at <http://www.nps.gov/legal/testimony/108th/jlafitte.pdf>, consulted May 4, 2011.



Figure 9-9. Crew building a trail at Barataria, 1980s. (JELA)

44 SAR, 2000; Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, JELA Boundary Adjustment Act of 2004, 108th Cong., 2nd sess., 2004, S. Rep. 108-325; S. 207 (2005); H.R. 162 (2007); S. 783 (2008); Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, March 30, 2009.

45 DRPC minutes, March 25, 1981; SAR, 1982.



Figure 9-10. Senator Johnston cutting the ribbon at Barataria Visitor Center. (Lesley Adams)

office building and its parking lot at the Cotton Patch, a nearby maintenance building and yard, the Bayou Coquille Trail and its parking lot, and a sewer system. The NPS Denver Service Center (DSC) was responsible for providing contract specifications and overseeing construction. Originally the DRPC had hoped that the visitor center would be operational before the Louisiana World Exposition closed in November 1984, but this timetable proved to be optimistic. Construction was substantially delayed by the DSC staff's unfamiliarity with the wet soil conditions of the Barataria Preserve Unit, confusion over the specifications for pilings that had to be driven into the mucky soil, and various change orders. The original contract amount of \$1.687 million ultimately had to be increased to \$2.065 million. As construction on the visitor center stretched into summer 1985, members of the DRPC became increasingly unhappy. Complaints to Senator Johnston's office brought pressure to bear, with the result that, by September 1985, the DSC was required to provide weekly reports on construction progress to the NPS director. A final inspection of the project took place in February 1986, and the visitor center opened to the public in April of that year.⁴⁶

The Barataria Preserve's visitor contact facility comprises two separate structures surrounded by a boardwalk plaza raised on pilings. The 4,000-square-foot visitor center building includes a visitor contact desk, an exhibit area, a 48-seat auditorium, a sales area, and office space. The second building, of 1,664 square feet, houses additional offices and a comfort station. A separate maintenance facility for the Barataria



Figure 9-11. Barataria Visitor Center, 2008. (author)

Preserve, with 1,400 square feet of interior space and about 700 square feet of sheltered exterior space, was placed into service in 1989. Two trails start at the visitor center: the quarter-mile Visitor Center Trail and the 0.9-mile Palmetto Trail. The park's Interpretive Prospectus indicated that the visitor center's exhibits would "be used to show how people relate to the delta environment in general and the Barataria basin in particular." The emphasis was not to be the natural forces that shaped the delta environment, but rather how various cultures had used the resources of the delta over time. Exhibits included a diorama demonstrating the geology, ecology, plants, and animals of the delta. Two hand-made pirogues, representing a traditional method of navigating the bayous, were a focal point of the exhibit area.⁴⁷

When the park's three Acadian Cultural Centers opened in the early 1990s (see chapter 11), the NPS took a new look at the Barataria Visitor Center exhibits. The exhibits in the Acadian centers focused heavily on how Acadians and Creoles had interacted with and exploited the natural resources of South Louisiana. In a sense, this duplicated the emphasis of the exhibits at Barataria. Additionally, NPS rangers at Barataria had observed that many visitors came to the Barataria Preserve for nature observation and were frustrated that the exhibits did not shed more light on the plants and animals that they saw from the park's trails. A 1995 amendment to the park's GMP called for a redesign of the exhibits with greater attention to natural resources and their management. New

46 "New Facilities Planned for Jean Lafitte Park," *St. Bernard Voice*, February 10, 1984; Completion Report, Barataria Unit Visitor Facility, February 1989; General Accounting Office, "Construction Contract at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park," September 1986, JELA RM files.

47 National Park Service, Denver Service Center, *Interpretive Prospectus, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park* (Denver: NPS, 1983), 14-15; "Wood Pilings Gird Park Visitors' Center," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, August 16, 1986; JELA Resource Management Plan, 10; JELA Facility Management Software System.

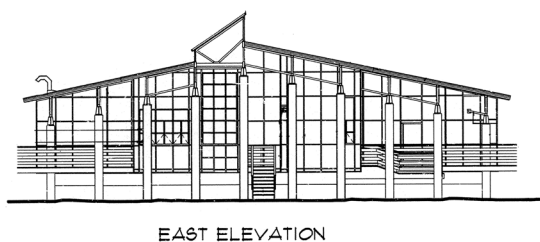


Figure 9-12. Elevation drawing, Environmental Education Center. (NPS TIC)

exhibits opened in the visitor center in March 2007. The new exhibits focus on the ecology of Louisiana's wetlands, the threats to them, and efforts to restore them. Human use of the area is treated in one section of the exhibits, "Living Off the Liquid Land," but this is no longer a primary focus. Cultural artifacts are used in two places in the new exhibits.⁴⁸

As noted above, the park's GMP called for an environmental education and group use complex to be built east of Bayou des Familles at the Pecan Grove site. This complex was to include facilities that could be used by school and other groups, both on a day-use and overnight basis. The complex was also to include a picnic area and would be the starting point of several trails. Several members of the DRPC considered it critically important that children from the inner city, in particular, have the opportunity to experience the natural setting of the Barataria Preserve. The Environmental Education Center (EEC) was intended to provide that opportunity. In July 1987, Superintendent Isenogle spoke in terms of a tent platform that would accommodate 40 campers, "Adirondack shelters" that would hold another 40 campers, and an amphitheater that would seat 120. By this time, however, Isenogle had announced his retirement, and other superintendents would direct the completion of the EEC. As with the Barataria Visitor Center, the DSC had the responsibility for overseeing the EEC's construction; this assignment caused some consternation among DRPC members. When Superintendent Isenogle briefed the commission on planning for the EEC in August 1986, several members were described as "incensed" that the DSC would again be involved,



Figure 9-13. Indoor amphitheater at the Environmental Education Center. (author)

given the problems encountered over the visitor center. The DSC, nonetheless, saw the project through to completion.⁴⁹

Site development work for the EEC began in summer 1987 and was completed the following summer. This stage of the project included construction of a new bridge over Bayou des Familles, an enlarged parking area, a picnic area, and a canoe launching dock. During 1987 and 1988, the DSC worked on design and contract documents for the main building. Delays ensued when all bids for building construction came in 25 percent or more over the budgeted amount, requiring that the bidding process begin anew. As the plans evolved, the NPS backed away from the idea of providing overnight camping facilities at the EEC. Park management believed that the overnight facilities would require adding three to four staff members. Staff also concluded that given the temperature variations, humid conditions, frequent rainfall, saturated ground, and biting insects, such facilities would receive limited use. In addition, by the late 1980s the NPS was committed to developing and staffing the three Acadian Cultural Centers, and budgets were tight. The movement away from overnight facilities became a major bone of contention with some members of the DRPC. There was extended discussion of the issue at the commission's October 1989 meeting, at which a resolution calling for the provision of overnight facilities was passed. Superintendent Belkov believed that the presence of dormitories at the nearby Bayou Segnette State Park made it unnecessary to have overnight facilities within the

48 "Chalmette, Barataria Ready for Visitors," *Baton Rouge Advocate*, August 26, 2007; Muth interview; National Park Service, Denver Service Center, *Amendment to the GMP, JELA* (Denver: NPS, April 1995), 23.

49 DRPC minutes, August 6, 1986, and July 30, 1987.

preserve. Further, she believed that the question could most appropriately be resolved through an amendment to the park's GMP, which was about to get underway. When the GMP amendment was finally approved in April 1995, it left the door open to "primitive overnight facilities, such as tent camps . . . subject to available funds." As of this writing, no funds have become available and no camps have been built.⁵⁰

Eskew Filson Architects of New Orleans designed the main building of the EEC. A groundbreaking ceremony, attended by Senator Johnston, occurred on October 4, 1991, and the structure was essentially finished in 1993. Before it was opened to the public, on July 9, 1994, it hosted a memorial service for the park's first superintendent, James Isenogle, who died on July 2. One of his favorite songs, the Roy Orbison classic "Blue Bayou," was played at the service.⁵¹

The EEC is a striking 8,250-square-foot building of concrete, steel, and glass with wood cladding. Continuous concrete piers rise from the ground and support openwork trusses that carry the roof. The floor plan is composed of interlocking polygons. In the center is an amphitheater area with benches for educational programs. Because this area is inside the building, it can be used year-round, while the glass walls that surround it orient it toward the outdoors. Offices and a field laboratory are to the right and a multipurpose activity room is to the left. The Louisiana Chapter of the American Institute of Architects recognized the Environmental Education Center with an Honor Award of Excellence, noting that the architects carefully situated the building to fit



Figure 9-14. A Youth Conservation Corps crew at Barataria. (Lesley Adams)

unobtrusively into its surroundings of palmetto swampland.⁵²

The park has had difficulty in finding funds to staff the EEC adequately and provide public programs. The park began a search for a qualified education coordinator as the center was nearing completion in 1993. Six years later Superintendent Geraldine Smith reported that the center had been used at only about 40 percent of its capacity and that she was contemplating steps to make better use of it. This syndrome of underutilization is common within the NPS; securing funding to build a facility usually requires just a single appropriation, while funds for personnel must be allocated every year.⁵³

As of this writing, the Barataria Preserve has about two miles of elevated boardwalk trails on the west side of Highway 45 and approximately five miles of at-grade hiking trails and a half-mile-long boardwalk trail east of the highway. Segments of the hiking trails follow the old Barataria Road and plantation roads from the 19th century (see figure 9.8). In November 1996 the NPS banned pets from all trails within the unit. This action was taken largely because of problems with barking dogs frightening wildlife and owners not cleaning up after their dogs. During many summers throughout the park's history, crews from the Youth Conservation Corps have been available to help with construction and maintenance projects in the Barataria Preserve.⁵⁴

50 DRPC minutes, October 11, 1989; SAR, 1988; *Amendment to the GMP, JELA*, 23; "National Park Drops Overnight Cabin Plans," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, May 3, 1988; Completion Report, Big Woods Developed Area, Phase I, November 15, 1988, JELA FM files; Muth interview. Getting urban youngsters to camp overnight in the Barataria Preserve was a longtime dream of Frank Ehret, and he was bitterly disappointed that this did not come to pass. Park staff, however, consulted extensively with school officials and others, who candidly stated that overnight camping in that environment lacked appeal.

51 DRPC minutes, November 13, 1991, and July 6, 1994; Fritz Wagner, interview with Robert Blythe, February 18, 2009.

52 "Excellence in Architecture: New Orleans Firms Win Top Awards," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 7, 1995.

53 SAR, 1993, 1999.

54 "Jean Lafitte Says No to Pets," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, November 7, 1996; SAR, 1990.



Figure 9-15. A canoe tour in the Barataria Preserve. (JELA)

Most waterways within the preserve, including Bayou Segnette, the Bayou Segnette Waterway, Pipeline Canal, and most of Tarpaper Canal, are open to motorized boats and canoes or pirogues. Bayou des Familles, Bayou Coquille, Twin Canals, and historic Kenta Canal are open to hand-propelled boats only. The NPS maintains three canoe launches within the Preserve, at Bayou des Familles in the Pecan Grove area, Twin Canals, and Lower Kenta Canal. The preserve does not have a canoe concession, but canoes can be rented at locations near the unit in Crown Point and launched into Bayou des Familles.⁵⁵

Ranger Services

Once the unit's first trail, the Ring Levee Trail, was in place in 1985, NPS rangers began offering guided nature walks. In 1987, guided canoe tours and bird-watching walks were added. Monthly full-moon canoe tours proved very popular when introduced in 1988 and elicited much media coverage. A New York Times writer observed, "In the light of the moon the swamp and marshes looked a likely hangout for the pirates who once took refuge there." Spring is wildflower season in South Louisiana, and native irises in particular once drew large numbers of visitors to the Barataria Preserve in March and April. Louisiana is home to five species of wild iris of the *Hexagonae* series, three of which occur in the park. The showy blue and indigo blooms of the giant iris (*Iris giganticaerulea*) are particularly striking. The park began a Volunteers in the Park program, "Wild Iris Rovers," in 1996. In general, the volunteers

55 "Jean Lafitte Park: So Near, So Far Away," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, April 20, 1988; David Muth, personal communication, April 28, 2011; "Creek Trek," *Baton Rouge Advocate*, June 20, 2008.



Figure 9-16. A school group at the Environmental Education Center. (JELA)

were present in the park on four consecutive "Wild Iris Weekends." Alternating droughts and saltwater intrusion beginning in 2001-2002 and culminating in the record storm tides from the 2005 hurricanes have caused a gradual decline in iris blooms visible from the boardwalks. Although the iris show no longer occurs as of this writing, 20 other wildflowers bloom in March and April, and visitation remains high in the spring. In October and November, bur marigolds (*Bidens aristosa*) are in bloom, carpeting the swamp in gold. From 1990 through 1996, the Westbank Sportsman and Conservation Club sponsored a Youth Fishing Rodeo, busing children to the Twin Canals area for the event. Earth Day activities have occurred in the preserve nearly every April.⁵⁶

Visitor Access

The feasibility study and GMP for Jean Lafitte expressed a strong desire that visitors to the French Quarter would be able to travel easily to the Barataria Preserve, some 20 miles away. Many French Quarter visitors fly into the city and do not rent cars, so they lack an easy way to reach the Barataria Preserve. As described in chapter 8, the 2001 experiment with Jefferson Parish Transit bus

56 Superintendent to Division Chiefs and Unit Managers, JELA, June 26, 1985; SAR, 1987, 1996; "Jean Lafitte Park: So Near, So Far Away"; "Canoeing among Alligators," *New York Times*, January 15, 1989; SAR, 1996; "Volunteers Spruce Up Jean Lafitte Park Tours," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March 31, 1992; "Earth Day Features Fun, Games," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, April 18, 1996; "Everything's Not Coming Up Irises on Park Trails," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, April 27, 2008; "Spring into Action," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March 12, 2010; "Kids Fishing Rodeo," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, May 8, 1996.

service from the central business district to the Barataria Preserve via Gretna was not successful.⁵⁷

Access to the Barataria Preserve, especially for those without private automobiles, has remained a vexing issue for park managers. The preserve is quite a distance from other attractions that typically draw visitors to the New Orleans area. As of this writing no public transportation option to the unit's visitor center or trails exists. For those who do drive, however, recreational options are available. The opening of the Barataria Preserve provided new business opportunities for some retailers in Jefferson Parish; canoe rental outlets, swamp tour operators, and restaurants on the fringes of the park have attracted increased business.⁵⁸

57 "Bus To Visit Jean Lafitte Wetlands Park Daily," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, February 8, 2001; "Bus Signs Aim for More Visitors," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 24, 2001; Muth interview.

58 "Park's Closure Puts a Dent in Lafitte Business," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 4, 1996.

Cooperative Agreement Sites

Jean Lafitte's 1978 establishing legislation provided broad authority for the park to enter into cooperative agreements to accomplish its mission. As outlined above in chapter 7, "the development of cultural diversity," emphasized in the park's enabling act, received major attention in the park's General Management Plan (GMP). In the park's early years, this legislative language was seen as a mandate to tell the story of each important regional ethnic group. The park's *Mississippi Delta Ethnographic Overview*, published in 1979, identified and provided background on the most significant ethnic groups in the delta. In spite of hints in the overview that a holistic, regional approach to culture might be desirable, the DRPC and park management largely responded to requests for cooperative assistance as they were received from various groups. The GMP had given no sanction to a comprehensive treatment of the regional cultural character and had not established priorities for cooperative agreements. Not surprisingly, organizations that approached park managers with reasonably well-defined plans for a cultural center and that could offer relevant assets, like buildings or funding, stood a better chance of getting a cooperative agreement.

As early as February 1987, some members of the DRPC felt that the park was "overloaded" with cooperative agreements.¹ By mid-1990, the park had uniformed NPS staff at three cooperative agreement sites: the Isleños Center in St. Bernard Parish, the Chitimacha Center in Charenton, and the Tunica-Biloxi Center in Marksville. It also had begun adding staff for the three Acadian Cultural Centers, and plans for an Italian American Cultural Center and a German American Cultural Center were in the works. Additionally park staff had already had some discussions concerning an African American Cultural Center² and an Asian American Cultural Center. Park managers and the

NPS Southwest Regional Office became concerned about these growing commitments. It seemed increasingly likely that the park would be unable to provide uniformed staff at all the cooperative agreement sites.

After the NPS decided to prepare an amendment to the 1982 GMP, planners from the NPS's Southwest Regional Office and Denver Service Center made an October 1989 presentation to the DRPC to explain why a GMP amendment was necessary. As the planning process got underway, the question of cooperative agreements came to the fore. A park self-evaluation exercise undertaken in late 1991 made this point:

Continued and sometimes unrealistic expectations of Cooperative Agreement site partners for additional monetary/staffing assistance is a strain on Park ONPS [Operations of the National Park Service] budget planning and process. Tighter criteria for selection and specific terms and conditions related to "available funding" should be developed for cooperative agreements.

The expansive view of what the park might be able to accomplish is reflected in a March 1990 piece in the Times-Picayune, which observed: "As long as there are ethnic groups that contributed to New Orleans and Louisiana left to honor—the Irish, Spanish, Africans, Chinese, Vietnamese, Yugoslavs and others—Jean Lafitte Park . . . may just keep on growing." While the GMP amendment was in development, the park often deflected requests to enter into new cooperative agreements, saying that it was awaiting new guidelines from that document.³

Because of changes to the planning team and a change in park superintendents in 1991, the GMP

1 DRPC minutes, February 16, 1987.

2 The park never followed through on plans for an African American Cultural Center, an issue that is addressed in greater depth in chapter 14.

3 DRPC minutes, October 11, 1989; Superintendent, JELA, to ARD, Administration, SWR, April 15, 1992, Box 10, JELA archives; "La. National Park Outgrows Its Name," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March 26, 1990.

amendment process was lengthy. When finally approved in April 1995, the amendment stated that cooperative agreements “constitute a potentially escalating commitment that . . . requires increased levels of management oversight, and quality control by the regional office.” The amendment established three new guidelines for cooperative agreements. The most important of these stipulated that any cooperative agreement involving NPS funding of construction or the assignment of NPS personnel would have to be preceded by a formal suitability and feasibility study, undergo National Environmental Policy Act compliance, and be approved in writing by the regional director. These represented substantial hurdles. The clear upshot of the guidelines was that the NPS would no longer be staffing cooperative agreement sites. Before very long, in fact, the NPS pulled its staff from the three centers where they had been stationed.

In the early 1990s, as the park was preparing its GMP amendment and a park statement for management (released in August 1994), park managers were coming to a new understanding of how cultural diversity had produced a “nationally significant regional culture” in South Louisiana. The mere presence of diverse ethnic groups in the region scarcely made it unique. More and more, managers realized that the pervasive French heritage was the factor that made the region’s cultural expressions unique. Each successive ethnic group—Africans, Germans, Irish, Canary Islanders—added its own cultural characteristics within the overarching sphere of French influence to produce a nationally unique regional culture. This emerging view began to find expression in the 1994 statement for management:

The real significance of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve lies not in any single natural or cultural resource. Rather, the park’s importance is in preserving, interpreting, and celebrating *the totality of the region’s diverse character* [emphasis added].⁴

Perhaps because this statement applies to natural, historic, and cultural resources, it used the verb “preserve.” As applied to living cultures,

“conserving” regional character might be more appropriate. The statement for management continued to place the focus on tangible resources more than on contemporary cultural communities.

The Isleños Center

As related above in Chapter 2, a significant number of immigrants from the Canary Islands settled in St. Bernard Parish in the late 18th century. Descendants of these settlers, known as Isleños, continue to represent a significant portion of the parish’s population. One of the DRPC members appointed by the St. Bernard Police Jury, Frank Fernandez, was an Isleño and had been the parish’s historian since 1967. Fernandez had done considerable research on Isleños history and believed that an NPS cooperative agreement to support an Isleños cultural center would be in line with the park’s legislative mandate. The park’s ethnographic overview had also identified the Isleños as an ethnic group of particular importance in South Louisiana. At its July 31, 1980, meeting, the DRPC approved a motion to establish a cooperative agreement with St. Bernard Parish for the purpose of establishing an Isleños Museum.⁵

Park staff worked with the parish and the Los Isleños Heritage Club (later the Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society) to create the museum. The Isleños Museum was developed on the grounds of an existing site known as the Ducros Museum Complex. The Isleños Museum was to be housed in a circa-1840, brick-between-posts Creole cottage on St. Bernard Highway east of Poydras. Vicente Núñez de Villavicencio built the house, which later came into the Molero family. In May 1980 Marie Louise Molero O’Toole and Mabel Isabel Molero Quatroy donated the house and grounds to the Los Isleños Heritage Club in memory of their parents, Manuel and Camille Sylvera Molero. The society conveyed the house to St. Bernard Parish in September 1980. Under the terms of the cooperative agreement with the parish, the NPS assumed responsibility for developing exhibits for the museum, as well as maintaining and staffing it. The Park Service hired two women of Isleños heritage, Antonia Gonzalez and Helen Alfonso, to staff the museum; they would report to the manager of the park’s Chalmette Unit. The

4 National Park Service, *Statement for Management, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve* (New Orleans: NPS, August 1994), 1. I am indebted to David Muth for educating me on this crucial evolution in park managers’ thinking.

5 DRPC minutes, January 22, 1980, and July 31, 1980.



Figure 10-1. The Isleños Center. (JELA)

museum opened in 1981, with exhibits consisting of artifacts, photographs, and contemporary craft items, most of them donated by parish residents.⁶

A major annual event at the Isleños Museum has been the Isleños Festival/Museum Days (now known as the Isleños Fiesta). The park first collaborated on this event in October 1982. The weekend event, which soon moved to April, was a major celebration of Isleños heritage. Demonstrations typically have included making mattresses from Spanish moss, pirogue building, duck decoy carving, bird calling, net making, quilting, and trapping. Music and food also are featured, including the singing of décimas, traditional 10-stanza folksongs that tell of everyday life and events in the Isleño community. Irvan Perez, who passed away at age 85 in January 2008, was one of the last masters of the décima, performing them frequently in St. Bernard Parish and at prominent venues such as Carnegie Hall in New York.⁷ Occasionally, the museum sponsored

classes for children in Spanish conversation, cooking, dancing, and paddle making.⁸

The NPS continued to staff and support the Isleños Museum into the late 1990s. In 1994, the NPS began working with the Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society to rehabilitate and modernize the museum's exhibits. Also in 1994, the NPS restored two porches, braced the floors, and put a new roof on the museum building. New exhibits were completed in 1997, but in that same year the NPS withdrew its staff from the museum. After the three Acadian Cultural Centers opened and NPS budgets grew tighter, the park decided that it could no longer staff the Isleños Museum. The NPS has maintained, however, its commitment to providing technical assistance to the museum. In 1995 the Canary Islands Descendants Association of St. Bernard Parish split off from the Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society, and the two organizations now operate independently.⁹

St. Bernard Parish suffered tremendous losses from Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Flood waters reaching as high as 10 feet surged over the Ducros Museum Complex, and an 80-foot-tall water oak fell on the Isleños Museum (Molero House), adding to the damage and revealing years of termite infestation. When restoration proved impossible, the house was demolished in March 2008. Under the leadership of Parish President Craig T. Taffaro Jr. and William de Marigny Hyland, parish historian and director of the Isleños Museum, the complex was restored and a replica of the Molero House was built using Federal Emergency Management Agency funding. The Isleños Fiesta went on without a break, taking place at the parish government complex in 2006 and 2007. The fiesta returned to the grounds of the museum complex

6 Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society website, www.losislenos.org/losislenos.htm, consulted May 3, 2009; Canary Islands Descendants Association web site, www.canaryislanders.com, consulted March 2, 2010; A. Wilson Greene to Superintendent, JELA, December 9, 1981, JELA uncatalogued archives; DRPC minutes, September 23, 1982; Leslie Adams, interview with Robert Blythe, November 7, 2008; St. Bernard Parish website, http://www.sbp.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1425&catid=2&Itemid=2, consulted May 12, 2011.

7 The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) awarded a National Heritage Fellowship to Perez in 1991. NEA website, www.nea.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/NHF_listYear.php, consulted April 18, 2011.

8 "Free Festival To Showcase Canary Islanders' Culture," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, April 17, 1985; "Isleños Heritage a Winner," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, May 29, 1986; "Irvan Perez, Singer of Décimas Preserved Isleños Culture, Dialect," *Washington Post*, January 17, 2008.

9 "Isleños Museum Getting New Look," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, August 29, 1996; "Volunteers Now Staffing Museum," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March 9, 1997; Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society website; SAR, 1994; "St. Bernard's Isleños, a Past with a Future," *La Prensa*, January 1997. "Influx of Voters Brings Division in Isleños Club," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 14, 1995; "New Isleños Group Gains Steam after Election-Night Rift," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, December 16, 1995.

in 2008, with NPS staff participating. In March 2010 the Ducros Museum Complex, including the reconstructed Isleños Museum, was rededicated.¹⁰

Big Oak Island

The 1978 establishing legislation specifically included “the area known as Big Oak Island” within the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. Big Oak Island and Little Oak Island lie near the southeastern shore of Lake Ponchartrain in East New Orleans, south of Interstate 10. Big Oak Island is a shell midden site approximately 750 feet long by 80 feet wide by 7 feet high, located on a subsided natural levee and associated with the Techefuncte culture. Little Oak Island lies some 6,500 feet east of Big Oak Island. Little Oak is a marsh island (stranded beach ridge) with an earthen midden approximately 300 feet by 100 feet and 3 feet high, containing post holes and ceramics associated with the Marksville culture. Occupation dates are approximately 500 BCE to 500 CE for Big Oak and 500 to 800 CE for Little Oak. While both sites are within the hurricane levee system, the land around Big Oak was drained while the area around Little Oak remained wet; the latter area is a marsh that retains tidal connections to the Gulf of Mexico through water control devices in the levee. The two sites were known as early as the 1930s, and were investigated by archeologist J. Richard Shenkel of the University of New Orleans in the early 1970s. The sites contain significant ceramic remains, stone tools, and shell and faunal remains and are considered to have important archeological information potential. Big Oak and Little Oak Islands were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in July 1971. By 1977–1978, when the NPS and Senator Johnston’s office were drafting the Jean Lafitte park legislation, residential development had been proposed for the area surrounding the two sites. While there is little in the written record indicating why Big Oak Island was specifically singled out for protection, it differed from hundreds of other midden sites in

the delta in being essentially intact, unaffected by erosion or shell mining.¹¹

The park’s enabling legislation did not specifically authorize the NPS to acquire the Big Oak Island site. The 1982 GMP recommended that 11 acres of Big Oak Island be preserved through easements or cooperative agreements, stating that the land would remain in private ownership. A walkway from a parking area on proposed Louisiana Highway 68 would bring visitors to the archeological site where waysides would be used to interpret “the story of the adaptation of prehistoric cultures to a wetland environment.” The GMP also explored options for nearby Little Oak Island. Because Little Oak Island was still surrounded by marsh and not threatened by imminent development (although a proposed subdivision had been platted), the GMP recommended no NPS involvement there. When the park was created, a development firm called New Orleans East, Inc., the brainchild of Texas oil tycoon Clint Murchison, owned both Big Oak and Little Oak Islands. In 1982 the NPS entered into a cooperative agreement with New Orleans East to protect 12 acres at Big Oak Island. The firm agreed to provide visitor access to the site, subject to NPS approval of all plans. The company sponsored some additional archeological work at Big Oak Island in 1982.¹²

A serious economic downturn in 1981 and 1982 had lingering effects in Louisiana, and the grand plans of New Orleans East fell apart in 1985. A creditor, First Savings of Arkansas, became owner of Big Oak Island. The bank tried without success to sell the 2,900-acre tract that included the island. Although the original cooperative agreement lapsed when New Orleans East went bankrupt, park managers worked with the bank in an effort to protect the archeological resources. First Savings went bankrupt and was taken over by the Resolution Trust Corporation in 1991, then sold to a developer in 1994. Superintendent Robert Belous continued to hope that an interpretive center could be erected at the site. In the meantime, the Bayou

10 “Isleños Festival To Celebrate Culture, History This Weekend,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March 23, 2007; “Fiesta Celebrates Isleños Heritage,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, April 3, 2008; “Isleños Fiesta Helps Celebrate Old Culture,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, April 2, 2009; “Signs of Recovery,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March 19, 2010.

11 Peter Neal Peregrine and Melvin Ember, eds., *Encyclopedia of Prehistory*, vol. 6: *North America* (New York: Kluwer Academic, 2001), 93-94; National Register Nomination; RD John E. Cook to Roulhac Toledano, November 17, 1977, JELA RM files; David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2011.

12 JELA GMP, 31; SAR, 1982, 1983; David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2011.

Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge was created in 1990 from 18,000 acres that once belonged to New Orleans East, Inc. This acreage included Little Oak Island. As a result of interagency discussions on the desirability of protecting the resource, the 1994 master plan for Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge proposed acquiring the Big Oak site as part of the refuge. At this writing, however, Big Oak Island remains in private ownership.¹³

Chitimacha Cultural Center

The Jean Lafitte park's *Delta Region Ethnographic Overview* emphasized the importance of Louisiana's American Indian tribes to an understanding of the history and culture of the region, particularly of those tribes culturally associated with the park such as the Chitimacha. The Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana had established a small museum on its 400-acre reservation in Charenton, Louisiana, in 1976. Tribal leaders approached the NPS for assistance, and in 1984 a cooperative agreement was signed under which Jean Lafitte would help to upgrade the museum exhibits and provide technical assistance and staffing. All artifacts remained the tribe's property, with the NPS providing assistance regarding their care. In September 1984 the Service hired Jodie Bacque, a Chitimacha, as a part-time ranger for the museum. She soon became a full-time employee, and a second tribe member, Barbara Lambert, was hired part-time to cover Bacque's days off, allowing the museum to operate seven days a week. The tribe's museum had a small exhibit area. The Chitimacha are known for their traditional double-weave swamp cane baskets dyed red, ochre, and black. These were a highlight of the exhibits. In 1989 the NPS contracted with Glen Pitre of Côte Blanche Productions to produce a video on the Chitimacha people. Bacque gave tours of the museum and also arranged tours of the school on the reservation for visiting groups. She and the tribal leaders felt it was important to show outsiders that the curriculum at the tribe's school was identical to that in other Louisiana schools. A tribal elder and historian, Nicholas "Nick" Stouff,



Figure 10-2. Exhibits at the Chitimacha Center. (JELA)

would sometimes come to the museum and tell stories or gather a group in his front yard.¹⁴

As Jean Lafitte began to pull its uniformed staff from the cooperative agreement sites in the 1990s, the Chitimacha were in a position to take over the operations of the museum. The tribe opened its Cypress Bayou Casino in 1993, giving it a source of income for museum operations. The NPS also funded a revamping of the museum's exhibits. The cooperative agreement with the tribe was not renewed after 2002, and NPS staff members no longer work in the museum. The museum closed temporarily in fall 1999 and reopened with new exhibits in fall 2000. The transition from NPS staffing to tribal staffing of the museum seems to have gone smoothly.¹⁵

13 "Buyers Line Up for Historic Island," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, April 6, 1992; DRPC minutes, June 15, 1994; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service website, www.fws.gov/bayousauvage, consulted May 3, 2009; David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2011.

14 Jodie Bacque, interview with Robert Blythe, April 27, 2009; SAR, 1986, 1989.

15 Bacque interview; Kathryn Lang, interview with Robert Blythe, January 23, 2009; Cypress Bayou Casino website, www.cypressbayou.com, consulted May 19, 2009; Susan L. Meyn, *More Than Curiosities: A Grassroots History of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board and Its Predecessors* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2001), 209.

Tunica-Biloxi

In May 1989, the park signed its first cooperative agreement with the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana, in Marksville, Louisiana, to assist with the planning and operation of programs related to preserving the tribe's culture. The NPS hired a tribal member, Rose M. White, to staff the Tunica-Biloxi Regional Indian Center and Museum. Activities centered on conserving and interpreting the "Tunica Treasure," an important collection of 18th-century artifacts related to the tribe's trade relations with the colonial French. In summer 1991 and 1992 the park gave financial support to the tribe's Fête du Blé, a corn feast held around the time of the summer solstice. In 1993 the park transferred \$60,000 to the tribe for the repair and rehabilitation of its museum, a building designed to resemble a prehistoric mound. This included replacement of the museum's heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system. The museum was later found to have serious structural problems and was razed in 1999. The NPS never took ownership of any of the tribe's extensive collection of artifacts, but it did provide technical assistance. In 1995 the NPS committed \$25,000 for training of a tribal preservation officer who would fulfill the museum's responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The last cooperative agreement with the tribe expired in August 1996, and the park had already withdrawn its ranger from the tribal museum three months earlier. The Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana had opened the first full-scale Indian-operated casino in the South in 1994 and had more resources of its own to support cultural programs.¹⁶

The German-American Cultural Center

The German Heritage, Cultural and Genealogical Society and Mayor Ronnie Harris of Gretna approached the park with a proposal for a

German-American Cultural Center in 1987. Although its name is of Scots origin, Gretna was founded by German immigrants in 1836. In the late 1980s the city's Primary School Number One, built in 1910, was being converted into the Jefferson Parish Archives. The proposal presented to Jean Lafitte was to devote a portion of the building to a cultural center honoring the heritage of German Americans in Louisiana. On January 26, 1988, the DRPC recommended that the NPS conclude a cooperative agreement to establish the museum, and an agreement between the parish and the park was executed on January 11, 1989. Under the agreement's terms, the parish undertook to rehabilitate the school building, provide 3,000 square feet on the building's first floor for the cultural center, and maintain the building. The NPS commitment was to design, fabricate, and install exhibits; to provide janitorial services for the cultural center; to cover utility costs for the center; and to provide "staff to operate the designated interpretive space" in the building. As with the other NPS cooperative agreements, all artifacts and archives remained the property of the heritage society. The agreement had a three-year term.¹⁷

Delays in rehabilitating the school building prevented exhibits from being installed on the timetable originally contemplated. In the meantime, cuts to the park's budget caused it to rethink its ability to staff cooperative agreement cultural centers. In February 1995 the park informed the parish that its assistance would be limited to designing and installing exhibits, training volunteers, and providing technical assistance. Congress appropriated \$224,000 for the center's exhibits, which were installed in early 1999. The center opened to the public on June 30, 1999, a dozen years after the first proposal. The NPS helped to staff the center for three months while training volunteers. Beginning on October 1, staffing was provided by the Friends of the German-American Cultural Center. The exhibits highlight the contributions of German Americans from their first arrival in Louisiana in the 1720s to the present. Themes in the exhibits include settlement patterns, culture, typical trades and

16 DRPC minutes, January 24, 1990; SAR, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996; Cooperative Agreement CA-7530-9-0002, May 24, 1989; Superintendent Belous to ARD, Administration, SWR, August 12, 1994; Cooperative Agreement CA-7029-3-0020, JELA HQ files; Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana website, <http://tunicabiloxi.org/museum.php?PHPSESSID=6866f473c90194c7c5379a4d16bf58ba>, consulted April 18, 2011; Lang interview.

17 Cooperative Agreement between Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, and JELA, January 11, 1989; German Cultural Center chronology, no date, JELA RM files.

occupations, and the cultural crises engendered by America's two wars with Germany.¹⁸

The American Italian Cultural Center

The American Italian Renaissance Foundation approached the NPS in 1989 for assistance with a museum that it had established at 537 South Peters Street in New Orleans four years earlier. The foundation was established by New Orleans resident Joseph Maselli in 1974 as a statewide organization devoted to celebrating and commemorating the culture and achievements of Italian Americans. A first cooperative agreement committed the NPS to underwriting new exhibits for the museum, providing technical assistance, and staffing the museum with NPS rangers. As park managers reevaluated their commitments in the 1990s, they pulled back from the idea of staffing the museum. A new cooperative agreement signed in July 1993 limited the NPS's role to paying for new exhibits (subject to congressional appropriations) and technical assistance, including training of museum staff.¹⁹

The NPS provided \$220,000 for the planning, design, and installation of new exhibits for the American Italian Museum and Research Library, which was officially rededicated on March 26, 1993. The museum contains exhibits on societies and festivals, music, the immigrant experience, genealogy, and notable personalities in business, government, and the arts. It also features the Louisiana American Italian Sports Hall of Fame. The library contains an extensive reference collection on the Italian American experience and a number of oral histories. The American Italian Renaissance Foundation was understandably disappointed when the NPS pulled back from the idea of staffing their museum with rangers. The fact



Figure 10-3. American Italian Renaissance Museum & Library. (author)

that the park eventually pulled its staff from the Chitimacha, Isleños, and Tunica-Biloxi operations eased feelings somewhat—the NPS was applying a uniform policy to all of its cooperative agreement sites. The foundation has occasionally received assistance from park staff, such as when exhibits have needed treatment or rehabilitation.²⁰

Cooperative Agreements Contemplated But Never Consummated

Destrehan Plantation. The park's establishing legislation specifically mentioned plantations in the delta as possible cooperative agreement sites. In 1980 the park commissioned a study and inventory of plantations in the delta. In 1982 and 1983 the NPS was on the verge of a major commitment to cooperate with Destrehan Plantation, on the

18 "German-American Center Opens," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, June 24, 1999; "Germany's Local Legacy Celebrated in Gretna," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, July 1, 1999; Superintendent Robert Belous to Senator John Breaux, March 15, 1996, JELA HQ files.

19 DRPC minutes, April 25, 1989; "National Park Service to Run Italian Museum," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, September 29, 1990; Cooperative Agreement between American-Italian Renaissance Foundation and JELA, July 12, 1993, JELA HQ files.

20 SAR, 1993; DRPC minutes, September 22, 1993; American Italian Renaissance Foundation website, www.airf.org, consulted May 10, 2009; Lang interview.

Mississippi River Road about 20 miles from New Orleans. The big house at Destrehan was constructed in the 1780s and remodeled in the Greek Revival style in the 1840s. Park staff and the plantation's owner, the River Road Historical Society, drafted and approved a cooperative agreement that provided for park rangers to give tours of Destrehan and for NPS assistance in developing exhibits and interpretive programs. At the last minute, the society received significant financial assistance from other sources and decided to opt out of the agreement with the NPS.²¹

United Houma Nation, Dulac. In 1982 and 1983, park staff discussed a cooperative agreement with the United Houma Nation. An agreement was drafted to have the NPS assist with an interpretive exhibit in one room of a community center at Dulac, on Bayou Grand Caillou. For reasons that are not clear from available records, the agreement was never signed, and the idea was dropped. The fact that the United Houma Nation is not a federally recognized tribe may have entered into this decision.²²

Albania Plantation, Jeanerette. The park was interested in this National Register-listed property as a site for interpreting sugar cultivation in Louisiana. Negotiations for a cooperative agreement commenced, but they collapsed in 1983, largely because of the projected costs of bringing the main house to acceptable standards. The park also examined another sugar plantation, Laurel Valley, near Thibodaux, but no agreement resulted.²³

Fort Proctor on Lake Borgne. In the early 1980s, DRPC commissioner and St. Bernard Parish historian Frank Fernandez became interested in having Fort Proctor become a unit of Jean Lafitte. Located on the shores of Lake Borgne, the fort was begun in the 1850s but never finished. St. Bernard Parish owned the fort, and Fernandez and parish officials hoped that the NPS would take over its maintenance and interpretation. In 1985 Superintendent Isenogle helped to secure \$98,000

in NPS funding to build a breakwater to protect the fort, but the NPS declined to become involved in any further way. As of this writing, the fort is mostly inundated and surrounded by water.²⁴

Abbeville. In 1990, Mayor R. Brady Broussard of Abbeville, 20 miles south of Lafayette and the seat of Vermilion Parish, approached the park for assistance in developing an interpretive center in his city. The owners of a circa-1920 rail station had proposed donating it to the city, and the mayor wanted to turn the site into a center for heritage tourism. The city hoped that the center could become a unit of Jean Lafitte, with NPS rangers staffing it. Park managers and the DRPC felt that a new unit was not justified, but wished to assist the city. A cooperative agreement with Abbeville was signed, leading to \$149,000 of Park Service funding for a downtown tourism development project. The assistance supported the construction of a gazebo for musical and folklife events in historic Magdaline Square and the development of a brochure.²⁵

Asian Americans. The 1979 *Mississippi Delta Ethnographic Overview* had included brief chapters on Filipinos, Chinese, and Vietnamese in the region, but interpretation of Asian American cultures had never been a major objective in park planning. In 1989 the park commissioned the Center for the Pacific Rim at the University of New Orleans to prepare an ethnohistory of South Louisianans of Asian descent. Project Director Edward J. Lazzerini and contributing researchers studied 11 distinct Asian ethnic groups of the region. The study was completed in January 1990. The park also hired an architectural firm, Arthur Q. Davis & Associates, to study possible sites and potential programmatic needs for an Asian cultural center. The firm considered the space needs for a facility that would include exhibit areas, a library, a demonstration kitchen, and offices, and it identified three potential locations in New Orleans. Before any of these recommendations were acted upon, however, the park pulled back from entering

21 "Plantation May Add Tour Guides," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, November 5, 1982; DRPC minutes, September 23, 1982, and May 3, 1983.

22 SAR, 1982, 1983; DRPC minutes, April 27, 1983.

23 DRPC minutes, October 5, 1983; SAR, 1983; DRPC minutes, August 8, 1984.

24 DRPC minutes, April 27, 1983; "Waves Are Beat Back at Fort Wall," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, April 27, 1985; "Proctor: Fort Weary, But Standing," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, November 24, 1985.

25 DRPC minutes, March 7, 1990, and November 18, 1992; Superintendent, JELA, to RD, SWR, January 4, 1995, JELA HQ files.

into new cooperative agreements that would involve construction.²⁶

26 Edward J. Lazzerini, *The Asian Peoples of Southern Louisiana: An Ethnohistory* (New Orleans, La.: Center for Pacific Rim Studies, UNO, 1990); Arthur Q. Davis & Associates, *Greater New Orleans Area Asian Cultural Center Building Program and Site Analysis* (New Orleans, La.: Davis & Associates, 1990).

The Acadian Cultural Centers

Jean Lafitte's enabling legislation stated that the park would include "Acadian towns and villages in the Saint Martinville area," and the park's 1979 *Mississippi Delta Ethnographic Overview* identified Acadians (Cajuns) as an important ethnic group within the delta. The legislation did not, however, give the NPS the authority to purchase any property in the Acadian parishes.¹ In 1978, the legislative intent was that any NPS role in Acadiana would be accomplished through cooperative agreements. The park's 1982 General Management Plan (GMP) recommended the preparation of a historic resource study for "potential cooperative agreements, including the Garden district, Acadian

towns and villages, and other sites," but identified no specific sites or activities for Acadiana.²

The initial impetus for the eventual creation of three NPS-owned and -operated cultural centers in Cajun country came from an energetic and politically astute mayor of Eunice, Louisiana, Curtis Joubert. Mayor Joubert was extremely proud of his Cajun heritage and quite unhappy with the stereotyped images of Cajuns that were prevalent in the national media and general public perception. An image of Cajuns as lazy, fun-loving, ignorant, illiterate, simple-minded, and unwilling to assimilate to the dominant English-language culture began to take hold in the 1870s and 1880s. To many observers from the mainstream culture, rural French speakers in Louisiana were an undifferentiated mass. All were seen as shiftless Cajuns, regardless of whether they had descended from Acadian immigrants or not. Outsiders occasionally noted two positive traits—rural French speakers were very hospitable and had strong family ties—but they failed to notice that the communities were diverse, including successful merchants, educators, and professionals as well as fishermen and trappers. These stereotypes persisted after World War II and were reinforced by Hollywood movies like the 1956 production *Bayou*, which was rereleased in 1962 with the title of *Poor White Trash*, just in case audiences didn't get the point. *Southern Comfort* (1981) was another film that offered an unfavorable portrait of Cajuns. As Mayor Joubert put it in an interview, the most common stereotype about Cajuns was that they walked barefoot along the bayou, wrestling the

1 The Louisiana state legislature has designated 22 parishes as part of Acadiana: Acadia, Ascension, Assumption, Avoyelles, Calcasieu, Cameron, Evangeline, Iberia, Iberville, Jeff Davis, Lafayette, Lafourche, Pointe Coupee, St. Charles, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, Terrebonne, Vermilion, and West Baton Rouge.



Figure 11-1. The 22 Acadian parishes. (Madeline Baum)

2 National Park Service, Denver Service Center, *General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment for Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, Louisiana* (Denver, Colo.: NPS Denver Service Center, 1982), 38.



Figure 11-2. A Cajun band from the 1930s. (Library of Congress)

occasional alligator on the way to the nearest beer joint.³

When Mayor Joubert learned about the new Jean Lafitte park and of Superintendent Isenogle's interest in working with partners to nurture and interpret the cultures of South Louisiana, he saw an opportunity. In February 1985 the Eunice City Council passed a resolution authorizing Mayor Joubert to pursue with the NPS "the establishment of a satellite historical office" of the park "to perpetuate and promote the Acadian culture." The mayor, who had served in the state legislature with J. Bennett Johnston, made sure that the senator was aware of his efforts. Senator Johnston assured Joubert of his strong support and directed his staff to work with the NPS and the city. Mayor Joubert then invited the DRPC to have its next quarterly meeting in Eunice. On May 10, 1985, nine members of the commission convened in Eunice to view presentations and watch videos on Cajun culture. Congressman John Breaux and Congresswoman Catherine S. Long attended the meeting and expressed their support for an NPS presence in Eunice. Others supporters included Cajun musicians Dewey Balfa, Houston Lejeune, and Marc Savoy, documentary filmmaker Les Blank, State Representative Dale Sitting, and State Senator John Saunders.⁴

3 Curtis Joubert, interview with Robert Blythe, November 6, 2008; Carl Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People, 1803-1877* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1992), 100-103. The dominant stereotypes of Cajuns are remarkably similar to those attached to another group of rural southern whites, the residents of Appalachia, who have long been typecast as "hillbillies."

4 Resolution, City of Eunice Board of Aldermen, February 12, 1985; Senator J. Bennett Johnston to Curtis Joubert, March 12, 1985; DRPC minutes, May 10, 1985, JELA HQ files.

Eunice is located in western St. Landry Parish, in the prairie region of Louisiana. Lafayette, some 30 miles to the southeast, is generally considered the "Cajun capital." As Superintendent Isenogle and his staff began to consider the NPS's role in Acadiana, the idea of having three cultural centers arose. This idea resulted in part from an awareness that the Prairie Acadians in the west had different cultural characteristics from the Wetlands Acadians to the east. The concept was also heavily influenced by political considerations: Isenogle was a savvy political operator and understood that having centers in more than one location would increase political support. Congressman John Breaux (who would be elected senator in 1986 upon the retirement of Russell B. Long) was born in Crowley, Louisiana, 27 miles west of Lafayette, and had a strong interest in placing an NPS center in his part of Acadiana. Additionally, William J. "Billy" Tauzin II, born just outside Thibodaux, who represented Louisiana's 3rd Congressional District, was also of Cajun descent. Not surprisingly, he felt that Thibodaux would be an excellent location for a Cajun cultural center too.⁵

At the DRPC's September 1985 meeting, park historian Michael Strock presented a proposal for three Acadian Cultural Centers, in Lafayette, Thibodaux, and Eunice. Lafayette was seen as "a central point from which, through exhibits, audio-visual programs, and brochures, visitors would then be encouraged to travel to Eunice and Thibodaux" to gain a deeper understanding of Acadian heritage. Mayor Joubert was in attendance and reiterated his strong desire to become part of the Jean Lafitte family. Discussion ensued among commission members over how much interest Lafayette and Thibodaux had shown in becoming cooperative agreement sites. The commissioners thought that it would be a good idea for them to visit the two cities, and they passed a motion authorizing Superintendent Isenogle to pursue cooperative agreements with Thibodaux and Lafayette. By this point a cooperative agreement between Eunice and the NPS had already been drafted and was ready for execution. In 1986, the NPS engaged the services of Hamilton & Associates, an Opelousas architectural firm, to research Acadian folklife and history and put together a conceptual plan for the interpretation of

5 Laura Hudson, interview with Robert Blythe, August 18, 2008.

Acadian culture in the three locations. Hamilton contacted Dr. Barry Ancelet of the University of Southwestern Louisiana,⁶ who put together a team of folklorists, historians, linguists, and photographers. This team assembled a large amount of documentation and turned over a five-volume report on Cajun history and culture to the NPS in July 1987.⁷

While the Hamilton study was going forward, the city of Eunice demonstrated its commitment in spring 1986 by purchasing a 1924 movie palace, the 800-seat Liberty Theatre, at Park Avenue and Second Street in downtown Eunice, diagonally across the street from city hall. Although the theater had been dark for some time, many local residents had fond memories of seeing movies and live stage shows there. The theater was refurbished using volunteer labor and mostly donated materials. Senator Johnston lauded the effort in these terms:

[I]t was not at all unusual to find a number of restoration committee members at the theatre during the wee hours of the morning chipping away old cement to reveal the original richly tiled green and white ceramic floors, scrubbing for hours on what appeared to be permanently black fixtures only to uncover the magnificent brass splendor that had been hidden for years. . . . An area bank volunteered their employees to work a minimum of 20 hours each on the theatre. Lumber, building materials and fabric to recover . . . the original seats were all donated.

Mayor Joubert saw the refurbished theater as the perfect venue for all-ages shows featuring Cajun and zydeco music. Traditionally, this music had been played in dance halls and taverns, adults-only establishments that served alcohol; in contrast, the Liberty Theatre would provide entertainment that the whole family could attend. In October 1986, regular Saturday night shows began at the Liberty

and have continued ever since as the “Rendez-vous des Cajuns.”⁸

The effort in Eunice was part of a resurgence of interest in Cajun culture, cuisine, and music that began in the 1960s and gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s. The Louisiana legislature in 1968 authorized the formation of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL), or, in French, *le Conseil pour le développement du français en Louisiane*. CODOFIL provoked considerable controversy over its predilection for Parisian rather than Cajun French, but it did lead an effort to establish French language instruction in the public schools of the Acadian parishes. In 1984 the Cajun French Music Association was founded as an organization dedicated to perpetuating and promoting Cajun music and Acadian heritage. In the 1980s the national media also began to take increasing note of Cajun music and cuisine. St. Landry Parish native Paul Prudhomme opened his K-Paul Restaurant, specializing in Cajun and Creole dishes, in New Orleans in 1979 and published *Paul Prudhomme's Louisiana Kitchen* in 1984, sparking a national mania for gumbo and blackened fish. In August 1985 observances across South Louisiana marked the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the first Acadians in Louisiana, providing yet another indication of a newfound pride in Acadian ancestry.⁹

At some point in the planning for the Acadian centers, Senator Johnston decided that they should be NPS-owned facilities. In 1988, he and Congresswoman Boggs pushed through Congress

6 Since 1999 this university has been known as the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

7 DRPC minutes, September 12, 1985; Dr. Barry Ancelet, interview with Robert Blythe, March 30, 2009; Hamilton & Associates, *The Cajuns: Their History and Culture* (Opelousas, La.: Hamilton & Associates, 1987). The contract, in the amount of \$276,803, was awarded to Hamilton & Associates on January 28, 1987.

8 “City of Eunice Gains Recognition through Restoration Efforts,” 100th Cong., 2d sess., *Congressional Record* 134 (March 29, 1988); “Eunice: Small La. Town Restoring Its Old Liberty Theater as Community Cultural Center,” *Baton Rouge Sunday Advocate*, April 26, 1986; “Radio Returns to Eunice,” NPS media release, September 1986, JELA HQ files.

9 Interestingly, the revitalization of Cajun culture and newfound pride in Cajun identity scarcely diminished Hollywood’s fascination with Cajun stereotypes. In addition to the previously mentioned *Southern Comfort* (1981), there were *The River Rat* (1984), *Down by Law* (1986), *No Mercy* (1986), and *Shy People* (1987). Shane K. Bernard, *Cajuns: Americanization of a People* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), 121; Vincent Fontenot, interview with Robert Blythe, May 31, 2008; “Cajun Pride Coming of Age beyond the Bayous,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, July 28, 1985; Cajun French Music Association website, www.cajunfrenchmusic.org/history.html, consulted May 7, 2009.



Figure 11-3. Poster for Le Rendez-Vous des Cajuns at the Liberty Theater. (JELA)

a successful amendment to Jean Lafitte's enabling legislation, authorizing the Secretary of the Interior to construct folklife centers in the Acadian region. The Secretary was further authorized to acquire up to 20 acres in Acadian villages and towns for the folklife centers, either by donation or by purchase with donated or appropriated funds. The legislation did not specify the location of any facility. Ultimately the NPS opened a Prairie Acadian Cultural Center in an old farm-implement showroom in Eunice, a Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center in a historic warehouse building in Thibodaux, and an Acadian Cultural Center in a new building in a city park in Lafayette. The establishment of these centers was made possible by appropriations totaling \$14 million, secured largely through the efforts of Senator Johnston.¹⁰

Development of the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center

In Eunice, the NPS built on the local efforts already underway. NPS planners decided to build an addition on the west side of the Liberty Theatre to supplement the very small lobby space in the historic building and to provide handicapped-accessible restrooms. The NPS also purchased the unoccupied Seale Building, located in the same block as the Liberty Theatre, to be rehabilitated for exhibits, folklife demonstrations, and offices. The Seale Building, constructed in the 1930s, had first been a grocery, then a car dealership, and finally a dealership for tractors and farm implements. The NPS also undertook a more thoroughgoing restoration and rehabilitation of the Liberty Theatre, bringing the seating capacity in line with city codes (it went from 800 to 518) and installing up-to-date audiovisual equipment. The lobby and restroom added to the theater were intentionally set back from the Park Avenue façade of the theater and are lower in height, minimizing the impact on the National Register-listed theater. Work began on the Seale Building in March 1990 and on the theater in November 1990. While work was ongoing at the theater, the Saturday night music programs moved temporarily to the auditorium of the Eunice High School. In a decision that would prove a challenge for future managers, a single



Figure 11-4. Liberty Theatre, Eunice, 2008. (author)

heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system was provided for both the NPS-owned space and the theater, which remained the property of the city. An area approximately 100 feet wide between the theater and the cultural center building became a landscaped plaza, which could be used for special events.¹¹

The Seale Building provided ample space for the various activities of the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center. Visitors enter a large room that can accommodate temporary exhibits, with a visitor contact desk and bookstore at the far end. From that point one may enter the permanent exhibit room or turn in the direction of an activity room or a generously sized demonstration kitchen. There is also a theater for performances and viewing videos. Behind the contact desk are staff offices. The exhibits in Eunice focus on the history and folkways of the Prairie Acadians. The French-speaking refugees from Canada settled first along the bayous of South Louisiana, but eventually some moved west to the prairies, where they raised cattle and cultivated rice and other crops. Horses, rodeos, and horse racing became important aspects of the Prairie Acadian lifestyle, and a unique celebration of Mardi Gras evolved among them. Some of the exhibits in the center—on the exile from Canada, language, and family, for example—address the broader Cajun experience and are similar to those in the Thibodaux and Lafayette centers. The exhibits also touch upon the Creole and Afro-Creole cultures of the area. The DRPC and the scholars who advised the park pushed

10 Public Law 100-250, enacted February 16, 1988. Appropriations for the centers amounted to \$11 million over fiscal years 1988 and 1989. DRPC minutes, January 26, 1988, and August 19, 1992.

11 Fontenot interview; "Jean Lafitte Prairie Cajun Park Is Cultural Tourism at Its Finest," *Acadiana Free Press*, April 2, 1991; Status of Development Briefing Statement, JELA, n.d. [early 1991], JELA RM files.

for the centers to be called “Acadian and Creole Cultural Centers” to underscore the diversity of the region, but the NPS demurred. Some of the scholars also were eager for the exhibits to portray cultures that were living and constantly evolving, rather than cultures frozen in the past. This is, of course, a challenge when one is planning permanent exhibits, but the Eunice exhibits do carry the Acadian story into the 20th century, addressing such topics as the impact of the oil and gas industry in the Acadian parishes.

The NPS cast a wide net in its search for artifacts for the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center and the centers in Thibodaux and Lafayette. Institutional Services, Inc., of Dallas had the contract to develop the exhibits and drew up extensive lists of items that could be displayed. In May 1988, the NPS issued a media release asking residents to look for:

old maps, letters, and drawings; . . . furniture and furnishings, clothing, cooking utensils, . . . household or personal items, religious items such as antique rosary beads, prayer cards, and home altars, festival and special event memorabilia, . . . craftwork, . . . tools, clothing, and equipment used in fishing, boat building, hunting and trapping, crawfish and oyster harvesting, shrimping, ranching, and the oil, rice and sugar industries; . . . photos, sketches, plans, paintings of examples of early homes . . . books, letters, and recordings illustrating Acadian French language . . . and sheet music, instruments (home-made and store bought).

This call brought in more than 2,400 objects. Ranger Vincent Fontenot tells of venturing into attics and barns all around the area, often with park curator Kathryn Lang, to pick up items. Former park historian Michael Strock, who went on some of these excursions, remembers the quantities of coffee he drank in kitchens across the region. Ranger Jodie Bacque spent two days a week for close to a year helping with the cleaning, accessioning, and cataloging of the artifacts coming in. This work was done in several rooms of leased space at an office complex in Lafayette. Donors understandably were interested in where the items would be displayed. Some attempted to stipulate which of the three centers should receive their family items, but the NPS could make no promises in this regard. The NPS ended up in some embarrassing situations when it proved able to use

only about 1,000 of the objects in the three centers. Vincent Fontenot remembers relatives coming into the Prairie Cultural Center and asking questions like “Where’s Papa’s watch?” Gifts to the NPS are irrevocable, and the park ended up needing to store the artifacts that it was unable to use. In recent years, the NPS has changed its regulations on deaccessioning artifacts, and curator Lang has succeeded in donating some items to other museums.¹²

The 1987 Hamilton & Associates study *The Cajuns: Their History and Culture* guided the development of the exhibits in Eunice and the other two cultural centers. Some of the scholars involved with the Hamilton study had hoped to continue in a formal consulting role to help shape the exhibits, but the NPS developed the exhibits largely on its own, relying on the study. The question of how much Cajun French to use in the exhibit text at the cultural centers engendered extensive discussion. Many local French speakers and scholars who had worked on research studies for the park wanted the complete exhibit text to be in Cajun French as well as English. The Park Service resisted this idea, believing that most visitors would know no French. NPS managers also believed that having the full text in both languages would clutter the exhibits and draw attention away from the artifacts. Dr. Barry Ancelet and others countered that the park had a legislative mandate to represent the cultural diversity of the delta, and that language and culture could not be separated. They believed that, if the NPS did not employ Cajun French whenever it had an opportunity to do so, it would be contributing to the decline of Cajun culture. After much conversation, some of it acrimonious, the decision was made to have the exhibit text in English, but to write the title of each section in French. For example, the section on farming was headed *Les Récoltes* (the French term for harvests), and one on blacksmithing was titled *Les Forgerons*. Other Cajun French terms, italicized, were employed in the exhibit panels, where the visitor could be presumed to understand them from the context of the sentence. The three centers attract a sizable number of visitors from France and French Canada. After a few years the NPS translated the

12 Fontenot interview; “Acadian Culture Centers,” NPS media release, May 1988; Kathryn Lang, interview with Robert Blythe, January 23, 2009; Jodie Bacque, interview with Robert Blythe, April 27, 2009; Michael Strock, interview with Robert Blythe, May 8, 2009.

exhibit panels into French for a booklet that can now be provided to French-speaking visitors. As of this writing, the park is working to produce audio guides or podcasts in French and other languages to make information on the exhibits more accessible.

There was also a dispute over the appropriate language to be used by the host of the Saturday night shows at the Liberty Theater. Again, the lines were drawn between the NPS (which preferred English) and that of local musicians and scholars of Cajun culture (who wanted Cajun French). Dr. Barry Ancelet recalled a meeting on the issue that included the great Cajun fiddler Dewey Balfa (1927-1992):

The park superintendent said something along the lines of “Well, you know, look, this program has got to be in English. I mean this is for Americans.” Dewey Balfa, who was sitting at the table, said, “Ma’am, we are Americans.” This enormous silence fell on the room, because everybody in there realized that he had just put his finger right on the issue. He went on to say, “In fact, this little two-hour program once a week at the Liberty Theatre is really one of the only indications that the money I turn over to Uncle Sam every April 15 is coming back to me in anything but interstates and bombs.” Once again, tremendous silence in the room.

The issue persisted up to the Saturday of the first show. Dr. Ancelet had been asked to be the host, and his position was firm. He told the park managers that they were welcome to find someone else to be the emcee if they wanted the program done in English but that, if he was going to do it, it would be in Cajun French. The NPS went ahead on those terms with considerable reservations, knowing that it could always replace the host in the future. The programs proved to be a huge success. As of this writing, Dr. Ancelet continues as the host unless he is out of town, and the program is conducted in Cajun French.¹³

13 Ancelet, Fontenot, and Joubert interviews; Nicholas Spitzer, interview with Robert Blythe, April 17, 2009. The appearance of Dewey Balfa, Gladius Thibodeaux, and Louis “Vinesse” Lejeune before 17,000 at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival first brought Cajun music to a national audience.



Figure 11-5. Bruce Daigrepoint at the Liberty Theatre, 2009. (City of Eunice)

The decision in favor of Cajun French received a measure of vindication when John E. Cook, director of the NPS Southwest Region, came to Eunice on a Saturday. After viewing the show, Cook, who is of Cherokee ancestry, commented that the show was one of the best things the NPS had ever undertaken. He went on to say that if his people had been encouraged or allowed to do something similar in their languages, they might have preserved much of what they ended up losing.¹⁴

One of the first persons hired for the NPS operation in Eunice was Vincent Fontenot, a musician and cofounder of the Cajun French Music Association (CFMA). In 1986, Fontenot was president of the CFMA and owned the Main Street Lounge, a tavern in Basile, eight miles down the road from Eunice. As Fontenot recalled, Jean Lafitte staff member Tom Tankersley was in St. Landry Parish getting acquainted with the area’s culture (as part of his official duties) and pulled up to the lounge on his motorcycle. Tankersley was impressed with Fontenot and the Main Street Lounge, and this meeting led to a cooperative agreement between the NPS and the CFMA. Fontenot also was added to the advisory committee assembled by Mayor Joubert to work with the NPS. Joubert and others were eager to staff the cultural center with local French speakers who had a deep understanding of the area’s cultural heritage. In May 1987 Fontenot was hired as a GS-1 on a part-time basis; he later became a full-time employee, proving invaluable in booking acts for the Liberty

14 Ancelet interview; Joubert interview.

Theatre and serving as an ideal bridge between the NPS and local communities.¹⁵

The grand opening of the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center in early October 1991 was held in conjunction with the state's eighth annual Folklife Festival.¹⁶ The festival ran from Friday to Sunday, October 4–6, occupying several blocks in downtown Eunice. Four stages offered music, storytelling, and craft and foodways demonstrations. Acts included the Tremé Brass Band (jazz), the Cox Family (bluegrass/gospel), Boozoo Chavis (zydeco), Eddie LeJeune and the Morse Playboys (Cajun), the Zion Travelers (gospel), and Irvan Perez (Isleños décimas). Foodways of the Coushatta tribe, Isleños, Cajuns, Creoles, Italian Americans, Filipino Americans, and Americans of Syrian and Nicaraguan descent were all demonstrated. Inside the cultural center visitors could take Cajun dance lessons, view and touch musical instruments, and watch videos on aspects of Louisiana folklife and the NPS. The festival helped to kick off the new center and moved it in the direction of fulfilling the park's legislative mandate, because it offered attendees the opportunity to talk and interact with members of a wide variety of cultural communities. The state's Folklife Festival returned to Eunice in 1992 and 1993.¹⁷

Mardi Gras is a big event for the Prairie Acadians, and the Eunice cultural center is the only Jean Lafitte site that remains open on that day. Cajun Mardi Gras customs are quite different from the much better known festivities in New Orleans. The Louisiana prairies are a stock-raising area, so horses and horsemanship have traditionally been a key part of the culture. It is not surprising that Cajun Mardi Gras centers on a raucous communal horse trek, known as *le courir*. This custom has roots deep into the medieval period in France. On the Louisiana prairies, riders in brightly colored costumes go from house to house, asking for an ingredient for a gumbo at each stop. The riders then parade through the main street of town, where a huge pot of gumbo is prepared. In some communities *le courir* is on Fat Tuesday, while in



Figure 11-6. Cajun Mardi Gras riders. (City of Eunice)

others it takes place on the preceding weekend. Following the opening of the NPS cultural center in Eunice, the city has sponsored an annual Mardi Gras festival, with an outdoor dance, special shows at the Liberty Theatre, and craft booths. Inside the center the NPS offers a full day of folklife and foodways demonstrations.¹⁸

Another event that draws large crowds to downtown Eunice each November is “Main to Main: A Cultural Road Show.” Main to Main is an initiative of the Louisiana Main Street Program, dedicated to the revitalization of Louisiana's downtowns and administered by the state's Division of Historic Preservation. The concept is to encourage visits to the state's more than two dozen designated Main Street communities (literally, “going Main to Main”). Each community puts on a series of special events showcasing its “culture, commerce, history, and abundance of creative and natural assets.” In Eunice, afternoon concerts take place at the Liberty, and park staff organize a roster of special events, focusing on handicrafts, foodways, and other aspects of the area's cultural

15 Fontenot interview.

16 Eunice had also hosted the festival in 1988 and 1989.

17 Official Program, Louisiana Folklife Festival, Eunice, La., 1991; “Opening of Prairie Acadian Cultural Center Begins Folklife Festival,” NPS Media Release, September 9, 1991, JELA RM files; SAR, 1992.

18 Barry Ancelet, “*Capitaine, voyage ton flag*”: *The Traditional Cajun Country Mardi Gras* (Lafayette, La.: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1989); Fontenot interview.

heritage. Craftspeople and food vendors also set up booths on downtown streets.¹⁹

Attendance at the Saturday night “Rendez-vous des Cajuns” at the Liberty Theatre has waxed and waned over the years, often as a function of the following enjoyed by the act booked and the amount of media coverage that the programs receive. From its inception the programs have been broadcast on live radio. Public radio station KRVS in Lafayette broadcasts the shows to Louisianans and makes them available online as well. Each show is also recorded on video, providing a permanent record of local music and culture. In the early years, the NPS contributed to the costs of mounting the show; as budgets became tighter, this contribution became impossible and was discontinued in 1997. The NPS owns the audio equipment and continues to maintain it. The original decision to place the city-owned theatre and the NPS-owned cultural center building on the same electric utility line has resulted in some difficulty. Separating the two systems was determined to be impractical, and a solution was worked out by which the NPS continues to pay the entire electric bill, while the city provides janitorial services for the center along with lawn mowing and maintenance of the plaza between the two buildings.²⁰

When no special festival, like Mardi Gras or Main to Main, is taking place, visitation to the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center tends to be modest. The staff there rarely has access to funds for a special exhibit, which would give visitors who have seen the permanent exhibits a motive to come in. In 2007, the center did host a temporary exhibit, “Key Ingredients: American by Food,” in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution. Eunice is off the beaten path, even for heritage tourists with an interest in Acadian and rural Creole culture. Lafayette, Breau Bridge, Opelousas, and even Avery Island (where tabasco sauce is made) get more media coverage. In addition, since the explosion of interest in all things Cajun beginning in the 1980s, many communities in the 22 Acadian

parishes have developed attractions, and the competition for a visitor’s attention is fierce. Curtis Joubert, who more than anyone was responsible for bringing the NPS to Eunice, believes that more could be done to market the center regionally to service clubs, retirement communities, and even the casinos. Nevertheless, relative to the community’s size, the center has been quite successful. Eunice is a city of 12,000, and the center there annually attracts about five times that number of visitors.²¹

Development of the Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center

As in Eunice, in Thibodaux as well a local effort to convert a historic building for use as a library and cultural center provided the impetus for the eventual location of an NPS site. Thibodaux is about an hour’s drive southwest of New Orleans on Bayou Lafourche in Lafourche Parish. Settlement began on the bayou in the 1750s, and a number of Acadian refugees ended up establishing homesteads in the vicinity. In the 1960s Martha Sowell Utley, a Thibodaux resident, began a campaign to secure an adequate library for the city, one that would include a cultural center as well. She created the Martha Sowell Utley Memorial Library Trust and organized an annual antique show as a fundraiser. When Mrs. Utley died in 1981, she left \$125,000 to the trust. Her husband raised an equivalent sum, and the trust in 1982 purchased a large two-story brick building just west of downtown. The Percy Lobdell Building, which faced Bayou Lafourche, had been constructed around 1905 as a wholesale grocery warehouse. Shortly after the building’s construction, St. Mary Street was extended along the south side of the building. The building thus had a street entrance at one end and a riverfront entrance at the other. The trust donated the building to the Thibodaux Chapter of the Friends of the Library, which in turn leased the building to the Lafourche Parish Council for use as the Thibodaux branch library. The parish and the friends group began to renovate the building, with considerable donated labor and materials.²²

19 Karl Hakala, interview with Robert Blythe, May 4, 2009; Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism website, www.crt.state.la.us/maintomain/index_flash.aspx, consulted May 8, 2009.
20 Fontenot interview; Hakala interview; Superintendent Smith to Eunice Mayor Gil Young, September 23, 1996, JELA HQ files; SAR, 1997.

21 Fontenot, Joubert, and Hakala interviews; SAR, 2007.
22 “The Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center Has a Rich History!” NPS site bulletin, n.d.; “Dream of Center Becomes a Reality,” *Daily Comet, Lafourche Parish*, November 20, 1992.

While renovation of the building was ongoing, the NPS met with parish officials and decided to make Thibodaux the cooperative agreement site for interpreting Wetlands Acadian culture. The NPS signed a cooperative agreement with the Friends of the Library in February 1986, committing the two groups to work together in developing exhibits and multimedia and folklife programs in the Percy Lobdell Building. With the shift to NPS ownership in 1988 and 1989, the plans for the building became considerably more ambitious. The NPS decided to construct an addition on the west side of the building to house a 200-seat theater that would be used by the NPS, the Thibodaux Playhouse, Inc., and other local groups. The theater group, which had been organized in 1960, gave performances from 1987 through 1989 on the main floor of the Percy Lobdell Building. The Friends of the Library donated the Percy Lobdell Building and grounds to the NPS, which agreed to share the building with the branch library. In all, the NPS purchased about five acres to provide an appropriate setting for the cultural center. As part of the site development, the NPS acquired and demolished two houses fronting on St. Mary Street (Louisiana Highway 13) and removed two underground petroleum storage tanks.²³

The NPS began the rehabilitation of and new construction on the Percy Lobdell Building in May

23 "The Wetlands Acadian Center Has a Rich History!"; William Jewell, interview with Robert Blythe, March 25, 2009. Jewell, who handled the acquisitions in Thibodaux, was particularly pleased to be able to assist an elderly couple with a handicapped daughter who rented one of the houses to find far better housing in Lafayette when they were displaced.



Figure 11-7. Percy Lobdell Building, Thibodaux. (author)

1990. The building is long and narrow, with brick walls and massive cedar columns and beams on the interior, and a handsome elevation on St. Mary Street in the Italianate style. The theater addition on the west has a one-story lobby and gallery space that incorporates the exterior brick wall of the warehouse. Beyond the lobby is the theater, which rises to about the level of the cornice of the original building. The lobby connection is recessed from the street and screened with trees so that the theater itself, which comes to the lot line, reads as a separate structure. The NPS also constructed an entrance pavilion on the east side of the original building. This entrance is shared by the NPS and the library branch on the second floor. A parking lot for the complex is located just east of the building.

The grand opening of the Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center took place on November 21 and 22, 1992. Senators Johnston and Breaux and Congressman Tauzin attended. Festivities included music by the Bayouland Dixieland Band and the Lafourche Cajun Band, craft and foodway demonstrations, and children's programs. The Thibodaux Playhouse offered performances of *The Great Big Doorstep* in its new home.²⁴

The first floor of the Percy Lobdell Building contains the NPS's exhibits, a bookstore and visitor contact station, a large activities room, and some office space. The exhibits in the new Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center were provided by Institutional Services, Inc., in consultation with the NPS, once more relying on the research from the 1987 Hamilton & Associates report. The exhibits focus on how the Cajuns of the area used the waters of bayous, lakes, and the Gulf of Mexico for earning a living, supplying their tables, and traveling from place to place. As in Eunice, there are sections on the exile from Canada, language, the church, and the family. The general approach and choice of presentation style and typeface is identical to those used at the Prairie center, with section headings in French; for example, the section on shrimp fishing is headed *Les Pêcheurs de Crevettes*. At the bayou end of the building is the activity room, which is used for educational and handicraft programs. An innovative feature of the

24 Status of Development Briefing Statement, JELA, n.d. [early 1991]; Program for Grand Opening, Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center, JELA RM files.

center is the Gumbo Room, a hands-on activity area for school children. Funded by the American Sugar Cane League, the Gheens Foundation, Eastern National, the Center for Traditional Louisiana Boat Building, and the Chitimacha tribe, the Gumbo Room opened in February 2003. It offers interactive experiences including an opportunity to listen to recordings that demonstrate how Cajun, zydeco, and mainstream country and western music influenced each other.²⁵

During Paul Carson's tenure as manager of the Wetlands center in the 1990s, a weekly Monday night Delta Music Jam was instituted. A ranger who worked for Carson came up with the idea of inviting local musicians and music fans to use the center, which was open on Monday evenings because the library was open, but not heavily visited. The program has been a success and continues as of this writing. Carson also pioneered summer history and heritage camps for schoolchildren. The idea began small, with just two one-week programs at Thibodaux, but has expanded considerably. At least five of the park's sites have offered summer camp programs.

The large craft room at Thibodaux has been used for various demonstrations, including some by the Center for Traditional Louisiana Boat Building. Relationships with craftspeople have posed a challenge, primarily for financial reasons. In the park's early days, when appropriations were healthy, the NPS could compensate craftspeople for demonstrations. It has since lost that capacity, and therefore, unless craftspeople see an opportunity to sell some of their products, they often are reluctant to volunteer to give demonstrations. The center uses the lobby space between the historic building and the theater for temporary exhibits. Special exhibits mounted at the Wetlands Center have included:

- Photographs of Louisiana Folklife, by Elemore Morgan (1996)
- Everyday Life in America, 1780-1800 (1996)
- LaBelle: The Mystery of LaSalle in the Gulf (1998)



Figure 11-8. Carving a pirogue. (JELA)

- Heart and Soul of Our Culture: A Celebration of Louisiana's Seafood Heritage (1998)
- The Jazz Age in Paris, 1914-1940 (1999)
- Photographs of Louisiana Dance Halls, by Dennis Sipiorski (2005)

"La Belle: The Mystery of LaSalle in the Gulf" was a major exhibition and attracted considerable media coverage during its run from June 3 through August 9, 1998. A notable collaboration between the NPS and the Thibodaux Playhouse in April 1995 called "French Connections" brought musical and dance groups from Acadiana, Maine, and the French province of Brittany to the stage at the Cultural Center.²⁶

Beginning in 1996, La Fête d'Ecologie has been held in Thibodaux with major participation by the Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center. In recent years this event has been organized by the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program. La Fête d'Ecologie celebrates the natural, historical, and cultural resources of the estuary; the 2007 event drew more than 5,000 participants. Every November the Thibodaux Fall Festival brings more than 10,000 people to downtown Thibodaux. The Wetlands center mounts special programs of music and folklife in conjunction with the festival.²⁷

Having three entities—the NPS, the library branch, and the theater group—share the cultural center has presented some challenges for all involved. The renovation of the building was planned with a single, shared entrance for the library and the

25 JELA squad notes, February 26, 2003; SAR, 2001. Few people, for example, know that Hank Williams's 1952 smash hit *Jambalaya* takes its melody from a traditional Cajun song about lost love called *Grand Texas*.

26 Program, "French Connections," Box 10, JELA archives; SAR, 1996, 1998.

27 SAR, 2007.

NPS space. This arrangement requires an NPS staff member to be present whenever the library is open. The library has approximately 10,000 square feet on the second floor for its collections and reading areas. Office space was created by partitioning off a portion of the open floor area. The agreement with the NPS allows the library to make use of meeting and other spaces on the main floor, subject to the NPS's needs. From time to time the library board has expressed an interest in making ongoing use of portions of the first floor for storage or in having space added to the building. As of this writing, no addition is planned. Thibodaux Playhouse is the primary but not the exclusive user of the theater, putting on five to six productions each year. Because the NPS is the landlord, NPS standards and regulations apply, and an NPS staffer must be present whenever the playhouse group has a rehearsal or performance. The group reimburses the NPS for these personnel costs and for a share of utilities and other costs. Chief of Facility Management Brian Strack worked out a formula for reimbursement based on the number of hours during which the group is in the theater. The theater has a separate entrance, opening onto the lobby and gallery space, so that the historic building can be closed off when a performance occurs.²⁸

The NPS developed a relationship with the Center for Traditional Louisiana Boat Building, founded in 1979 and located on the campus of Nicholls State University in Thibodaux. In 2003, master builder Dana Wright constructed an open boat with a capacity of 16 to 20 people in the activity room of the Percy Lobdell Building. This project allowed visitors to observe the construction and interact with the builder, learning about traditional boat building techniques. After the boat was finished, it was used for excursions on Bayou Lafourche. Some of these are relatively brief trips that give visitors a sense of the bayou environment; others are offered in partnership with Madewood Plantation, an 1840s Greek Revival plantation house on Bayou Lafourche that is a National Historic Landmark. In 1997 CODOFIL, the organization promoting use of the French language, was granted a special



Figure 11-9. Bayou Lafourche dock at the Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center, Thibodaux. (author)

use permit to temporarily occupy an office in the Wetlands center.²⁹

Development of the Acadian Cultural Center, Lafayette

When the NPS adopted the concept of three centers, it intended for the one in Lafayette to provide a comprehensive orientation to Acadian culture and, to a lesser extent, Creole, Afro-Creole, and American Indian culture. Ideally, it envisioned visitors coming first to Lafayette for the broad picture and then visiting the centers in Eunice and Thibodaux. It was understood, however, that many visitors would come to just one of the centers, and that therefore each one had to provide at least a basic overview of the cultures. The Lafayette center was also intended to serve as the headquarters for the three-site Acadian Unit of the park. Lafayette was the logical choice for the principal center interpreting Acadian heritage, as it is by far the largest city in the 22 Acadian parishes and is often referred to as the Cajun capital. Lafayette lacked a historic building that seemed suitable for a cultural center, but Lafayette Parish had land available in Beaver Park on the east side of the city that it was willing to donate. The parish and the city, through the Bayou Vermilion District, were planning a heritage-themed attraction in Beaver Park, known as Vermilionville. This was to be a village of relocated and reconstructed houses and

28 Hakala interview; Paul Carson, interview with Robert Blythe, March 30, 2009.

29 "Boat Building in Progress," Jean Lafitte media release, February 21, 2003; "Cruise Into Our Past," NPS rack card, July 2005, JELA HQ files; Center for Traditional Louisiana Boat Building website, www.nicholls.edu/boat/index.html, consulted May 7, 2009; SAR, 1997.



Figure 11-10. Acadian Cultural Center, Lafayette.

stores meant to represent life in the area from 1765 to 1890. The parish and the city of Lafayette were eager to partner with the NPS.³⁰

At first the parish hoped that visitors would have to pass through Vermilionville to reach the NPS cultural center. Because Vermilionville had an admission charge, however, the NPS could not allow such an arrangement. Beaver Park is bordered by Bayou Vermilion, and the NPS studied the 100-year and 500-year flood elevation lines in choosing a site for the cultural center. In the end the building was placed as close as possible to the intersection of Surrey Street and Fisher Road, on a hillside, keeping most of the building above the 100-year flood elevation. This decision had some negative consequences, because it placed the center close to a busy street and within sight of a number of commercial buildings. In March 1990 Lafayette Parish donated 6.7 acres to the NPS to be used for the cultural center, a parking lot, and landscaped grounds. Access to the NPS parking lot was directly from Fisher Road. In researching the title to the 6.7 acres, the NPS discovered that this parcel and several others were subject to a recapture provision, dating to the World War II construction of a nearby Army airfield, that gave the Army the authority to resume control of the tracts under certain circumstances of national need. Because the NPS does not accept title to property encumbered in that way, it had to go through the tedious process of getting the Army to relinquish its claims.³¹

30 Briefing Statement, Status of Development, n.d. [early 1990?], JELA RM files. A locally sponsored act of the Louisiana state legislature created the Bayou Vermilion District in 1984 with the mission of preserving the natural and cultural resources of the bayou watershed. Bayou Vermilion website, www.vermilionville.org, consulted May 9, 2009.

31 Statement of Findings for Floodplain and Wetlands Compliance, Acadian Cultural Center, March 25, 1991, JELA RM files; Jewell interview.



Figure 11-11. Fiddle maker at Acadian Cultural Center, Lafayette. (JELA)

Ground was broken for the \$2.3 million, 14,000-square-foot Lafayette Acadian Cultural Center on December 9, 1991. The nearby Vermilionville living history village had already opened to the public in April 1990, with a developed area of eight acres. It featured six historic buildings moved in from other locations and 16 reconstructions. The NPS Acadian Cultural Center had its grand opening on March 29, 1994, with a keynote address from Senator Johnston. As constructed, the cultural center has a central block and two wings. The back of the center faces the road intersection, and the visitor drives into Beaver Park to reach the center's parking lot. The lobby area is a large, sunlit space with a visitor contact desk straight ahead and a large bookstore area to the right. The side of the building facing Surrey Street has few windows and is screened by trees. The lobby area is frequently used for temporary exhibits. Beyond the visitor contact desk is a 148-seat theater. In the wing to the left is a 3,000-square-foot area of permanent exhibits; the wing on the right contains offices.³²

The permanent exhibits at Lafayette are more extensive than those at Eunice and Thibodaux. At the entrance to the exhibits are five freestanding towers with backlit photographs taken in Acadiana. Sections within the room include *Le Grand Dérangement* (the displacement of Acadians from Canada), *Les Prairies*, *Une Place à Ranger* (homes and material culture), *La Famille* (the family), *La Cuisine*, *L'Eglise* (the church), *Les Jeux* (pastimes), *La Pêche* (fishing), *L'Huile* (the oil and gas boom),

32 "Grand Opening Ceremony," NPS media release, March 21, 1994, JELA HQ files.



Figure 11-12. Dancing at Acadian Cultural Center, Ranger Claudia Wood on bass. (JELA)

Le Bayou, and La Cyprière (lumbering). There is an alcove devoted to Cajun and zydeco music, and near the center of the room are models of three typical South Louisiana house types from the historic period. Within a few years of the center's opening, inadequate drainage under the building led to moisture and mildew problems in the museum exhibits. In 1997 a barrier wall was added behind one of the exhibits and the floor replaced. Approximately 200 artifacts were removed, given any necessary conservation treatment, and replaced in their cases.³³

Once the operations at Lafayette were on a sound, routine footing, park staff began to mount temporary exhibits in the center's lobby. The first one featured photographs of Cajun and zydeco music by the noted Lafayette-based photographer Philip Gould. Another displayed photographs of national parks across the country, while the 2005 display "Images of France and Louisiana" compared châteaux in France with Louisiana plantation houses. In 2007, in honor of the 250th anniversary of the birth of the Marquis de Lafayette, the center hosted a substantial exhibit on this man who figured in both the American and French Revolutions. In 2008 and 2009 an exhibit interpreted the history and impact of the Louisiana Civil Code, first enacted in 1808. Several exhibits have been mounted with the help of French-born

artist Jacques Royal and his wife Adrienne, local residents who are passionate collectors of historical items that document the close ties between France and Louisiana.³⁴

The Acadian Cultural Center in Lafayette has developed nine different curriculum-based educational programs for students in kindergarten through grade 8. Ranger Jodie Bacque developed the programs for grades 4–6 and 7–8 on her own and partnered with a professor of education from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette to create the others. The center's staff hope to develop programs for high-school students in the future.

The living history village at Vermilionville failed to attract large numbers of visitors in its early years and experienced financial problems. After the NPS center opened in Beaver Park, Lafayette Parish looked for federal help. In spring 1994 parish officials were hoping that the NPS would take over Vermilionville or at least provide it with funding. Senator Johnston asked the NPS to look into the question. The NPS responded in these terms:

[I]t is the conclusion of this report that National Park Service involvement in Vermilionville on an operational level is neither warranted nor appropriate. Acadian lifeways, as currently depicted at Vermilionville, are well represented in the three National Park Service Acadian sites. . . . The business-entertainment nature of [Vermilionville], while not in keeping with the mission and practices of the National Park Service, can advance its own distinctive attraction as part of a larger visitor experience to [sic] the Vermilionville-NPS location.

The most help that this report offered was that the NPS might provide technical assistance to Vermilionville "on a limited basis." Over time, however, operations at Vermilionville have stabilized; Vermilionville and the NPS center have developed as complementary destinations and have worked on various projects together.³⁵ The staff at the cultural center have partnered with Vermilionville to offer boat rides on Bayou

33 SAR, 1997; Kathryn Lang, interview with Robert Blythe, January 23, 2009.

34 Bacque interview; "Man's Show Highlights Ties to France," *Baton Rouge Advocate*, March 16, 2008.

35 "Federal Aid Sought for Vermilionville," *Lafayette Daily Advertiser*, April 1, 1994; Vermilionville Report to Senator J. Bennett Johnston, November 1, 1994, JELA RM files.

Vermilion. They also work together on Earth Day, during Native American Heritage Month, and for the annual Bayou Vermilion River Fest each October. The NPS helped Vermilionville in competing successfully for a grant from the Lower Mississippi Delta Region Initiative to construct a palmetto hut with bousillage³⁶ walls in the manner used by native tribes in Louisiana. The Evangeline Area Boy Scout Council has an annual summer camp program that brings 200 scouts to Beaver Park, where they move back and forth between Vermilionville and the NPS cultural center, fulfilling requirements for merit badges.³⁷

A highlight of the program at Lafayette's Acadian Cultural Center is the regular presentation of a 37-minute film, *The Cajun Way: Echoes of Acadia*. A coproduction of the NPS and the Canadian government, the film explores the French settlement of the maritime provinces of Canada and the brutal expulsion of French-speaking residents by the British. Another film, the 16-minute *Atchafalaya Revisited*, is shown immediately following *The Cajun Way*. This film, excerpted from a longer production by Louisiana Public Broadcasting, traces a visit to the Atchafalaya Basin by noted wildlife photographer C. C. Lockwood, who returned to the basin 25 years after his celebrated 1979 *National Geographic* photo essay to record the changes that the area had undergone. Other videos are available and shown to visitors upon request.

36 Bousillage is a mixture of mud stiffened with Spanish moss or animal hair and used to fill in the spaces between wooden posts in a building.

37 Bacque interview. See chapter 12 for more details on the Lower Mississippi Delta Region Initiative.



Figure 11-13. Entrance to exhibit hall, Acadian Cultural Center, Lafayette. (author)

The three Acadian Cultural Centers were planned and developed at a time when the park had ample funding and continued to have some interest in creating centers to interpret other cultures. The development also occurred as park managers were moving away from interpreting cultural diversity simply as ethnic diversity, but had not fully embraced the idea of presenting Louisiana's regional culture as characterized by many ethnic groups making contributions within a sphere of French cultural dominance. With the retirement of Senator Johnston in 1997 and the general retrenchment in NPS budgets, other cultural centers never materialized, leaving the park in the somewhat anomalous situation of having three fully staffed cultural centers devoted to Acadian culture and no center devoted to African American culture, Asian American culture, or any other culture important in the history of South Louisiana. The question of the overall planning for Jean Lafitte and its approach to cultural centers is addressed in chapter 14.

Present at the Creation: Helping to Launch New Louisiana National Parks and Programs

Perhaps establishing national parks is like eating potato chips: it is hard to stop after just one. After successfully establishing Jean Lafitte, Senator Johnston was the key figure in the establishment of two other national parks in Louisiana: New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park and Cane River Creole National Historical Park. These two parks merit their own administrative histories, to be penned by other historians. All that will be addressed here is the role of Jean Lafitte and its staff in placing these more recently created units of the National Park System in operation.

New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve was established in large part to support conservation and interpretation of the cultural manifestations of South Louisiana. Undeniably, African Americans have contributed as much to the region's cultural evolution as any immigrant group. In the park's early years, when cultural diversity was defined largely as ethnic diversity, there would have been a strong argument for an African American cultural center. Many observers have marveled that the park has three cultural centers devoted to Acadian culture but none devoted to African American culture. Some have attributed the lack of an African American cultural center to the great diversity of Louisiana's population of African descent. Laura Hudson, Senator Johnston's longtime aide, recalled that in discussions of how Jean Lafitte could interpret and celebrate African American heritage, the heritage of jazz was mentioned repeatedly:

What we tried to do was to think about how we could incorporate something on the musical tradition of the African American experience—that seemed to be the story people were the proudest of and wanted to have told at that point. That's not necessarily the most important story, but it was the one the people seemed to focus on.¹

Discussions among Senator Johnston, Congresswoman Boggs, and NPS legislative and planning staff led to the passage on November 2, 1990, of "An Act to authorize and direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of the feasibility of establishing a unit of the National Park System to interpret and commemorate the origins, development, and progression of jazz in the United States."²

Although the title of the act referred to "jazz in the United States," its text referred only to New

- 1 Laura Hudson, interview with Robert Blythe, August 18, 2008.
- 2 Public Law 101-499 (104 Stat. 1209), November 2, 1990.



Figure 12-1. Bunk Johnson and George Lewis, New Orleans jazz pioneers, 1940s. (Gottlieb collection, Library of Congress)

Orleans, universally viewed as the birthplace of jazz. The act directed the Secretary of the Interior (through the NPS) to investigate sites and structures in New Orleans associated with the early history of jazz and to consider ways in which the federal government might help preserve them. Section 2 of the act specified that “[t]he study shall also assess and include a recommendation concerning the desirability of including” any such site or structure “as a unit of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park.” Recommendations on public outreach and education as park functions were to be included in the study. In response, the NPS’s Denver Service Center prepared a special resource study under team captain Nat Kukendall. Jean Lafitte Superintendent Bob Belous, Assistant Superintendent Steve Hickman, and Cultural Anthropologist Allison Peña served on the study team, and its report was released in April 1993. Drawing on the model of the DRPC, which had helped to guide the development of Jean Lafitte, the legislation established the Preservation of Jazz Advisory Commission and gave it the mission of advising the Department of Interior in the preparation of the suitability and feasibility study. Congresswoman Boggs and New Orleans pianist and educator Ellis Marsalis later were named cochairs of the commission. Dr. Fritz Wagner, chair of the DRPC, was also a member of the Preservation of Jazz Advisory Commission.³

Considerable controversy surrounded the work of the jazz commission. Not surprisingly, various individuals and groups in New Orleans had widely different views as to what a jazz park should embody. The most profound divide was between those who believed that the park should concentrate on educating future generations of jazz musicians and those who wanted to emphasize the preservation of sites associated with the music’s history. Another hot topic was whether the sites included in a jazz park ought to be administered as pieces of the Jean Lafitte park or form a separate unit of the National Park System. Almost inevitably, the act establishing the jazz park attempted to straddle the various positions. Public Law 103-433, enacted October 31, 1994, established New

Orleans Jazz National Historical Park (JAZZ). Of considerable importance to the NPS, the law stipulated that the new park would “be administered in conjunction with the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.” It further stated, “To minimize operational costs associated with the management and administration of the historical park and to avoid duplication of effort, the Secretary shall, to the maximum extent practicable, utilize the facilities, administrative staff and other services” of the Lafitte park. To guide planning for the new park, a new commission, the 16-member New Orleans Jazz Commission, was created.⁴

Particularly in the early years of the JAZZ park (which had no funding of its own in fiscal year 1995), Jean Lafitte staff assisted with many of its activities. Jean Lafitte Chief of Operations Gary Hume was appointed acting superintendent of JAZZ and took the lead in setting up its first programs and activities. Among the early efforts were an educational program at the 1995 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, an educational concert entitled “Origins of Jazz in New Orleans, 1895-1927,” and a three-day symposium, “Imaging a Century of Jazz,” in September 1995. The park

4 Public Law 103-433 (108 Stat. 4471), October 31, 1994; “Jazz Park Faces Money Snag as Panel Gears Up,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, Jan. 26, 1996. In the view of David Muth, the language in the law requiring the new park to share administrative functions with Jean Lafitte reflected a period of downsizing and retrenchment within the NPS.

3 Public Law 101-499; “Congress To Get Plans for Jazz Park,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 31, 1993; DRPC minutes, August 14, 1991; NPS DSC, *Louisiana: New Orleans Jazz; Special Resource Study; Suitability/Feasibility Study and Study of Alternatives; Environmental Assessment* (Denver, Colo.: NPS, 1993).



Figure 12-2. Sidney Bechet, jazz great, 1930s. (Gottlieb collection, Library of Congress)

also produced a portable jazz-themed exhibit in conjunction with the Tulane Jazz Archive.⁵

Ray Harper was appointed the first JAZZ superintendent in 1996. As the acting superintendent had done, Harper reported to the Jean Lafitte superintendent; that park handled all human resources, contracting, and purchasing activities for the new park. A notable event in this period was the participation of JAZZ staff members in planning events for the 1997 centennial of the birth of jazz clarinetist Sidney Bechet. In September 1998, Gayle Hazelwood became the second superintendent at JAZZ. She convinced the director of the NPS Southeast Region that JAZZ should no longer report to Jean Lafitte but directly to the regional office. This arrangement continued until April 2009, when JAZZ was again placed under the Jean Lafitte superintendent. As of this writing, Jean Lafitte Assistant Superintendent Joseph Llewellyn is in charge of JAZZ.⁶

The 1998 General Management Plan (GMP) for JAZZ reiterated the desirability of cooperation between the new park and Jean Lafitte, particularly in the areas of administrative services, resource management, interpretation, and maintenance. Both parks had their offices in Canal Place for a number of years. The JAZZ planning team considered the option of having the JAZZ visitor center share the 419 Decatur Street location with Jean Lafitte, but rejected it. It was believed that not enough space existed for two visitor centers and that each park needed to have its own identity. At present, the JAZZ headquarters is on the third floor at 419 Decatur Street. This proximity of offices allows staff from Jean Lafitte and JAZZ to share ideas and expertise.⁷



Figure 12-3. Melrose Slave Hospital, Cane River, 1940. (HABS)

Cane River Creole National Historical Park

Senator Johnston had a keen interest in the historic resources of the Cane River area in northwestern Louisiana. In 1990, he secured funding for a suitability and feasibility study of the area; initial meetings began in 1991 and the study was published in 1993. Based on the findings of the study, Johnston introduced S. 1980, which became Public Law 103-449, enacted November 2, 1994. The act established Cane River Creole National Historical Park and National Heritage Area, as well as a 19-member Cane River Heritage Area Commission. The park at Cane River consisted of buildings and grounds of two plantations, Magnolia and Oakland. The heritage area embraced a 35-mile stretch of the Cane River, including the historic city of Natchitoches. Staff from Jean Lafitte served as advisers on studies for the new Cane River unit, made trips to the area to investigate its resources, and provided administrative support in getting the park going. Support included arranging for the completion of building inventories, inspections, and oral histories. Kate Richardson, management analyst at Jean Lafitte from 1993 to 1999, devoted considerable time to legislative and planning issues connected with the park and heritage area at Cane River. In 1996 Jean Lafitte Park Curator Kathryn Lang helped to supervise an effort to inventory and secure artifacts at Magnolia Plantation. Gary Hume of Jean Lafitte served as one of Cane River's acting superintendents until Randy Clement was appointed the first permanent superintendent. After Clement's 1997 departure, Kate Richardson and Susan Davenport of Jean Lafitte were acting superintendents at Cane River prior to the arrival of the park's second permanent superintendent,

5 SAR, 1995, 1996, 1997; DRPC minutes, April 12 and July 16, 1995; "Jazz Symposium," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, Sept. 3, 1995; David Muth, personal communication, May 3, 2011; Lesley Adams, personal communication, April 26, 2011.

6 SAR, 1996, 1997, 2004; Lesley Adams, personal communication, April 26, 2011; Gayle Hazelwood, personal communication, May 4, 2011. Bechet, who died in 1959, was one of the seminal early soloists in the history of jazz. He performed widely in Europe starting in the 1920s and was important in introducing jazz to a world audience.

7 NPS DSC, *General Management Plan, New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park* (Denver, Colo.: NPS, 1998), 13, 48.



Figure 12-4. Oakland Plantation Store, Cane River. (HABS)

Laura Soulliere Gates, in August 1997. In Cane River's early years Jean Lafitte handled the new park's human resources, contracting, and purchasing activities.⁸

After the establishment of New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park and Cane River Creole National Historical Park and National Heritage Area in 1984, substantial discussion ensued within the NPS about the appropriate administrative relationships among the three Louisiana parks. At this point, the Louisiana NPS units were still administered by the NPS Southwest Regional Office in Santa Fe. Regional Director John Cook and Jean Lafitte Superintendent Bob Belous were the principal participants in these discussions. Belous apparently believed that the Lafitte superintendent could function as a general superintendent over the three Louisiana parks. The JAZZ legislation provided stronger authority for such an arrangement than did the Cane River legislation. Cane River is in a different geographic region of Louisiana, creating greater justification for an independent operation, because exercising even general oversight over an area more than four hours away by car is a challenge. Before any new arrangement for the Louisiana parks was implemented, the NPS abolished the Southwest Regional Office and, in October 1995, assigned Louisiana to the NPS Southeast Region, which comprised nine states and two U.S. territories.⁹

8 Task Directive, CARI Study of Alternatives, September 1991; Senate Report 103-276, to accompany S. 1980; SAR, 1994, 1995, 1999; Kate Richardson, personal communication, March 18, 2010.

9 A tenth state, Arkansas, is part of the Southeast Region for NPS external programs, but not for park operations.

Superintendent Belous proposed the idea of a coordinating superintendent to the Southeast Regional Director, but it was not adopted. The failure to broaden the role of the Jean Lafitte superintendent may have been a factor in Superintendent Belous's decision to retire in 1996.¹⁰

Lower Mississippi Delta Region Initiative

The enabling legislation for the jazz park, Public Law 104-433, also created the Lower Mississippi Delta Region Initiative (LMDRI). This law directed the Secretary of the Interior to identify and assist in interpreting the resources and cultural heritage of a vast area, beginning in southern Illinois and extending to the Gulf of Mexico. The LMDRI undertook a comprehensive study of the heritage values of the broadly defined delta region, sponsored conferences and workshops, and instituted a grant program to assist partners. In 1995 Jean Lafitte was designated as the lead park for this seven-state initiative. This decision caused park staff to devote time to various studies and inventories connected with the LMDRI. Among the first of these were a study of the Highway 165 corridor between Alexandria and Monroe, Louisiana, and a three-day symposium at Southern University. In July 1995, Superintendent Belous reported that one of his staff members, Kate Richardson, was devoting 80 percent of her time to LMDRI projects. As this history goes to press, the LMDRI continues to function, with involvement by NPS superintendents in the 309-county area covered by the initiative. The LMDRI grants project funding of up to \$25,000 on a competitive basis.¹¹

Atchafalaya Basin

The Atchafalaya is a tributary of the Mississippi and Red Rivers that feeds the largest alluvial swamp ecosystem in North America, embracing about 25

10 David Muth, interview with Robert Blythe, November 5, 2008; Kate Richardson, personal communication, March 18, 2010; Laura Gates, personal communication, March 25, 2010.

11 SAR, 1995; *Mississippi Delta Initiatives Newsletter*, April 1995; DRPC minutes, July 26, 1995; Frank J. Miele, Regional Historian, NPS SERO, personal communication, March 2, 2010.

percent of the Mississippi Deltaic Plain. It is home to 250 bird species and more than 100 species of fish and aquatic life. The basin has avoided the fate of much of the alluvial swamp system of the Lower Mississippi, because the Army Corps of Engineers preserved it as a spillway in the interest of flood control. By means of the Old River Water Control Structure at the confluence of the Red and Mississippi Rivers, the Corps regulates the flow of water from these rivers into the Atchafalaya. The Atchafalaya Basin has experienced some human manipulation, but is the most important and biologically productive remnant of the ecological regime that once prevailed. It is an essential part of the hydrology of South Louisiana and provides a habitat for birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, and fishes.¹²

Over the years, conservationists and recreational planners have looked at the possibility of protecting portions of the basin. Senator Johnston secured \$75,000 in the Interior Department's fiscal year 1991 appropriation for a study of the Atchafalaya Basin. Johnston seems to have intended a modest visitor center in the basin, with boardwalks into the swamp for wildlife observation, possibly as a unit of Jean Lafitte. A special resource study was prepared, with Jean Lafitte Superintendent Belous and three staff members serving on the project team. Belous and Regional Director John Cook viewed favorably the idea of expanding the natural resource base of the Lafitte park. Park staff also conducted public meetings connected with the study, which was ultimately published in September 1998, after extensive revisions of the original draft. Among the four alternatives in the study were the creation of an Atchafalaya unit of Jean Lafitte and the creation of a national heritage area. By the time the study came out, both Belous and Senator Johnston had retired, and the issue lay dormant for some time. Meanwhile, the state of Louisiana had acted on its own in 1997, establishing the Atchafalaya Trace Heritage Area. Jean Lafitte Chief of Planning and Resource Stewardship David Muth, who had

worked extensively on the revised special resource study, took part in the state planning effort.¹³

The idea of making the Atchafalaya a national heritage area never died and saw fruition in the 21st century, with the support of Senator Mary Landrieu. Sections 213 to 220 of the National Heritage Areas Act of 2006 created the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area. The heritage area embraces the parishes of Ascension, Assumption, Avoyelles, Concordia, Iberia, Iberville, East Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Pointe Coupee, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, Terrebonne, and West Baton Rouge. The Atchafalaya Trace Commission and the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism (DCRT) are responsible for planning and management in this area. It is anticipated that the NPS may assist the DCRT in the future with the heritage area's interpretive programs, including waysides. Starting in 2007, Jean Lafitte Superintendent David Luchsinger and Acadian Unit Manager Karl Hakala began attending heritage area meetings, but both men left the park staff in 2009. At this writing, park staff members are not actively involved in heritage area projects. The development of a management plan for the heritage area, meant to guide resource protection, sustainable economic development, and educational activities for approximately 15 years, is ongoing at this time.¹⁴

Trails and Rails: An NPS Partnership with Amtrak

Jean Lafitte initiated a partnership with Amtrak (National Railroad Passenger Corporation) that evolved into a national program. In 1994, New

12 "Officials Keeping Atchafalaya Basin 'Wet, Wild,'" *Baton Rouge Advocate*, March 30, 2000; "Preserving Atchafalaya," *Baton Rouge Advocate*, Sept. 1, 2009; Roger T. Saucier, *Geomorphology and Quaternary Geologic History of the Lower Mississippi Valley* (Vicksburg, Miss.: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1994), 30.

13 "Jean Lafitte Park Making Plans for the Atchafalaya," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, August 3, 1993; "National Park Service Has Plan for Basin," *Sunday Iberian*, July 25, 1993; William Jewell, interview with Robert Blythe, March 25, 2009; John Cook, interview with Robert Blythe, March 3, 2009; NPS DSC, *Special Resource Study, Atchafalaya Basin, Louisiana* (Denver, Colo.: NPS, 1998); Atchafalaya National Heritage Area website, www.atchafalaya.org/content/natural-heritage, consulted April 26, 2011; David Muth, personal communication, April 26, 2011.

14 "Senate Again Endorses Establishment of Atchafalaya National Heritage Area," media release, December 8, 2004; Public Law 109-338 (120 Stat. 1783-1862); SAR, 2007; Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism website, www.atchafalaya.org/index.php?page=management-plan, consulted March 2, 2010; Muth interview.

Orleans Unit Manager Susan Davenport, Chief of Interpretation and Resource Management Jim Mičulká, and Park Cultural Anthropologist Allison Peña were on an Amtrak train bound for San Antonio. While sitting in the train's lounge car, they overheard passengers speculating about the scenery they were passing. The NPS staff joined the conversation, identifying trees and offering some comments on the history, geography, and cultural heritage of the areas that the train was passing through. An Amtrak marketing executive happened to be in the car and asked who these knowledgeable folk were. They said that they were from the NPS and that they answered people's questions for a living. The Amtrak representative, intrigued with the possibility of providing interpretive services to Amtrak passengers on a regular basis, asked to meet with Mičulká in New Orleans. Amtrak then requested NPS rangers to provide programs on the inaugural run of the newly extended Sunset Limited, which was running east of New Orleans to Jacksonville and Miami, Florida, for the first time. Amtrak officials present on that run were impressed by the NPS staff's interpretation and the possibilities inherent in providing additional talks to Amtrak passengers.¹⁵ Further discussion led to initiation of the RAILS program (Rangers and Amtrak Interpreting Landscapes).

Informational programs on intercity trains had existed in a few places before the 1990s. In the 1930s, a railroad in Florida hired college students to give programs on trains. In the late 1980s, NPS rangers from New River Gorge National River began offering programs on Amtrak trains. Jean Lafitte's newly established relationship with Amtrak expanded gradually. Beginning in summer 1994, rangers from Jean Lafitte rode the Sunset Limited from New Orleans to Lafayette, Louisiana, talking to passengers about the natural and cultural heritage of Louisiana. A \$4,000 grant from the National Park Foundation helped to launch the program. The rangers talked to passengers over the train's public address system and also set up temporary exhibits in the lounge car. In this first season, park staff contacted some 11,000 passengers, and the program proved very popular. Park managers soon decided that having volunteers provide the interpretation would prove

more cost-effective, and the NPS role shifted to training volunteers and overseeing the program. In 1995, the program expanded to the City of New Orleans route (the Amtrak train from New Orleans to Chicago), with volunteers on board from New Orleans to Jackson, Mississippi. Volunteers brought various areas of expertise to the program: some introduced passengers to Cajun culture and vocabulary, while others explained the little-known Civil War history of Louisiana or the state's flora and fauna. One, who also volunteered at the Audubon Zoo, brought critters with her.¹⁶

The RAILS program was a resounding success, although there were some growing pains at first. It was a stretch at times for Jim Mičulká to oversee an expanding program with Amtrak while also serving as the park's chief of interpretation and resource management. The RAILS program received a strong endorsement from Superintendent Geraldine Smith, who came to the park in 1996. It also meshed with the priorities of Robert G. Stanton, who became director of the NPS in August 1997. Stanton, the agency's first African American director, was eager to bring NPS programs to people who lacked the means to take extended vacations to places like the Grand Canyon, particularly minorities and the working poor. Amtrak riders typically were of moderate means and included many minorities and foreign visitors. Amtrak had previously experimented with having guides on trains, using Forest Service personnel in the west and NPS rangers in West Virginia, but lacked a national program. Superintendent Smith lobbied the Washington NPS office to support RAILS and succeeded in taking it to the national level as the Trails and Rails program. In the meantime Jim Mičulká had become manager of the Crescent City District of Jean Lafitte (consisting of Chalmette and the French Quarter operations).¹⁷ For a time he continued in that role and as director of the national Amtrak program as well. Jean Lafitte eventually secured a \$150,000 increase to its base budget to support the program and Mičulká was able to devote all of his time to

15 James Mičulká, interview with Robert Blythe, May 4, 2009.

16 DRPC minutes, June 15, 1994; Mičulká interview; "Take a Ride on Amtrak's Nature Train," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, May 20, 1994; SAR, 1994.

17 The Crescent City District was created in the late 1990s and continues to be the park's designation for the Chalmette and French Quarter operations as of this writing. Lesley Adams, personal communication, April 26, 2011.



Figure 12-5. Rangers on the Vermonter train. (courtesy James Mičulka)

it, reporting to the Chief of Interpretation in the Southeast Regional Office. In 1997, Mičulka was honored as outstanding interpreter in the NPS's Southeast Region.¹⁸

Mičulka shifted his office to Union Station in New Orleans soon after the program went national and was based there until August 2005. In the early years of Trails and Rails, he spent much of his time developing guidelines for the program. Amtrak wanted the prestige associated with having all of its volunteer interpreters be part of the NPS program. Volunteers who had been on the trains before the NPS program started were retrained to meet NPS Volunteer in the Parks standards. Mičulka also did his best to recruit new parks to the program. Following Hurricane Katrina he relocated to the NPS cooperative program at Texas A&M University and continued to direct Trails and Rails. At least 13 NPS units have participated in the program, providing interpretation on 12 Amtrak routes. In fiscal year 2008, some 650 volunteers presented 2,100 programs on Amtrak runs, reaching 600,000 passengers. The NPS now has an agreement with Texas A&M and can provide internships for students who help to develop presentation scripts for volunteers and introduce new technology such as podcasting. After Hurricane Katrina, Jean Lafitte ended its participation in the program, but New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park entered the picture and, in 2009, was coordinating a cadre of volunteers for

the New Orleans-to-Jackson leg of the City of New Orleans route.¹⁹

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve was the laboratory for this innovative partnership program with Amtrak. Without the encouragement and support provided by Superintendent Geraldine Smith and Deputy Superintendent Kevin Cheri, it is unlikely that the program would have thrived or become national in scope. The contacts that Geri Smith had made in the Washington office when she was NPS Chief of Planning proved invaluable in getting Trails and Rails established and funded.

Poverty Point National Monument

In 1988, Congress established Poverty Point National Monument. Poverty Point is an extremely significant Archaic Period American Indian site on Bayou Macon in West Carroll Parish in northeastern Louisiana. The expectation at the time was that the previously existing 400-acre state historic site would be transferred to the NPS, which would administer and staff the site. Congress can authorize national parks or monuments anywhere in the country, whether or not the federal government owns any land. Ordinarily, however, Congress does not authorize a national park or monument unless it believes that land will be donated by a state or private organization to the federal government for administration. Many of the large national parks in the eastern United States, such as Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Everglades National Park, were authorized by Congress but not considered as established until the states involved (Tennessee, North Carolina, and Florida in these two examples) purchased the land and donated it. As noted in chapter 4, Congress similarly authorized Chalmette National Historical Park in 1939 with the expectation that the state of Louisiana would acquire more land to complete the park.

In the case of Poverty Point, the federal government's expectation for action by the state of Louisiana was not met. The state attempted to make the conveyance of land conditional on

¹⁸ Mičulka and Muth interviews; Leslie Adams, interview with Robert Blythe, November 7, 2008; Kevin Cheri, interview with Robert Blythe, March 31, 2009; DRPC minutes, June 15, 1994, and December 10, 1997.

¹⁹ Mičulka interview. As of May 2009, the NPS was providing interpreters on the following Amtrak runs: Adirondack, Ann Rutledge, California Zephyr, City of New Orleans, Coast Starlight, Crescent, Empire Builder, Heartland Flyer, Maple Leaf, Southwest Chief, Sunset Limited, and Texas Eagle.

covenants and assurances that were unacceptable to the Department of the Interior's lawyers; as a result the state never made the donation. Jean Lafitte's superintendents were involved in some of the negotiations with the state over Poverty Point. The site continues to operate as a state historic site, with a visitor center, museum, and guided tours. Congress has never rescinded its national monument authorization for Poverty Point, so it remains on paper as a unit of the National Park System, but without any federal facilities or staff. This situation has engendered considerable confusion among visitors. Early on, Congress made some appropriations and some equipment was purchased for Poverty Point. In January 1992, some of this equipment was transferred to Jean Lafitte and the remainder to other NPS units. At this writing, there is little prospect that the state will convey Poverty Point to the federal government.²⁰

20 "Poverty Point—Louisiana's Newest National Monument," NPS media release, November 2, 1988; Briefing Statement, Poverty Point National Monument, August 27, 1991, JELA RM files; JELA management staff meeting notes, January 29, 1992; Response to questions from the Senate Appropriations Hearings, May 9, 1990; Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism website, www.crt.state.la.us/parks/ipvertipt.aspx, consulted March 2, 2010; David Muth, personal communication, April 26, 2011.

The Storms of 2005 and Their Aftermath

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina, a large and powerful Category 3 storm with a storm surge of up to 28 feet, the highest on record in the Western Hemisphere, made landfall in Louisiana southeast of New Orleans.¹ The hurricane moved inland across Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes, then through St. Tammany Parish and into the state of Mississippi. Less than a month later, on September 24, another Category 3 hurricane, Rita, made landfall at the Texas-Louisiana border, pushing high tides into park units, most notably the Barataria Preserve Unit. Rita also caused extensive flooding in the communities of Jean Lafitte, Crown Point, and Barataria south of the preserve. Together these storms caused more than \$100 billion in property damage. The story of the breaching of the levees in New Orleans and the loss of life and suffering there will not be recounted here. All that will be attempted here is a brief summary of the hurricanes' effects on the park's resources, staff, and operating environment. The rebuilding of the park's infrastructure was essentially complete as this history went to press.

As Katrina moved into the Gulf of Mexico in late August 2005, many park employees had the feeling that they had been through this before. Hurricanes are a fact of life in South Louisiana, but none had done serious damage in the immediate New Orleans area for 40 years. In 1965, Hurricane Betsy, a strong Category 3 storm, had caused considerable damage at the Chalmette Battlefield and throughout St. Bernard Parish. In the ensuing decades, hurricanes either missed New Orleans or were substantially weakened by the time they arrived. This may have led to a

false sense of security among some in the area. From the establishment of Jean Lafitte in 1978 to the summer of 2005, the most severe effects of hurricanes had been erosion on the Lake Salvador shore. Otherwise, trees blown down onto trails, as occurred with Hurricane Georges in September 1998, and some lost roofing shingles had been the worst that the park had suffered.

Hurricane Katrina strengthened rapidly after it moved across the far end of the Florida peninsula early on Friday, August 26, and into the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Friday's 11:00 a.m. advisory from the National Hurricane Center (NHC) stated that the storm could become a Category 2 by Saturday, but Katrina quickly reached Category 3, with sustained winds of 115 miles per hour. There was also considerable uncertainty over the hurricane's likely path. Through business hours on Friday, as park staff made hasty storm preparations, the NHC was predicting landfall well to the east of New Orleans. Overnight, guidance from computer models suggested a westward trend for the storm. In its 6 p.m. Saturday advisory, the NHC gave a 45 percent probability of Katrina making a direct hit on New Orleans as a Category 4 storm. Mayor Ray Nagin ordered a mandatory evacuation of New Orleans, the first in its history, on Sunday morning, just 24 hours before Katrina's expected landfall.²

Coming ashore on Monday morning, Katrina devastated the Chalmette Unit. At the Barataria Preserve, the hurricane toppled much of the canopy of the mature forest along the natural levee and destroyed one boardwalk trail. Katrina also flooded the homes of 19 park staff members.

The first priority in the storm's aftermath was the welfare of park staff. Most park employees had

1 Katrina reached Category 5 on August 28, with sustained winds of 175 miles per hour, but weakened somewhat before landfall. Ivor van Heerden and Mike Bryan, *The Storm: What Went Wrong and Why During Hurricane Katrina* (New York: Viking, 2006), 85.

2 Van Heerden and Bryan, 27, 42-43, 51-52, 59.

evacuated, going in a number of directions, but some had remained and needed to be accounted for by the park or the incident management team dispatched by the NPS (see below). Those living in flooded areas of New Orleans, St. Bernard, St. Tammany, and Jefferson Parishes did not have habitable homes to return to, but even those in unflooded areas were forced to spend weeks or months away from home. Most park employees were soon accounted for, but about two weeks passed before the last two or three were located. Park headquarters at 419 Decatur was without power or running water and cell phones were not working, adding to communication problems. Fortunately, the three sites of the Acadian Unit were virtually untouched by the storm and were available as workplaces until the French Quarter, Barataria, and Chalmette Units could be used.³

Following the usual NPS practice after a major natural disaster, a national incident management team (IMT) was brought in to provide assistance to employees and begin the work of recovery. This team assembled in Houston until it could find accommodations in the New Orleans area. Once the team was in the area, it assumed much of the responsibility for initial recovery steps. These included securing assistance and counseling for employees, assessing damage to employees' houses and park buildings, and taking steps to protect natural and cultural resources. A second NPS team, known as a museum emergency response team (MERT), was also formed. It had the responsibility of assisting three NPS units (Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park, and Gulf Islands National Seashore) with the recovery and conservation of museum objects and archives. The MERT also provided extensive assistance to museums and collections not affiliated with the NPS. Both the MERT and park staff members were under the authority of the IMT while it operated. Some park employees were eager to take on more responsibility for recovery efforts in the immediate aftermath, but found that the IMT took care of most tasks. NPS Director Fran Mainella twice

visited the area to monitor recovery efforts and meet with park staff.⁴

Katrina had widely variable effects on different parts of the metropolitan area. Areas on high ground, like the French Quarter and the Garden District, did not flood. Although power was out, residents in these areas experienced relatively little property damage. Employees whose homes were flooded often had to wait months before they were able to return to the New Orleans area, and some never returned.⁵ Staff members lived in Federal Emergency Management Agency trailers, and at least one lived temporarily on a cruise ship anchored in the river.⁶ Superintendent Geraldine Smith worked tirelessly with the IMT and NPS central offices to assure that park staff were located and their needs met. Jean Lafitte Chief of Facility Management Brian Strack has described post-storm conditions in these terms:

I'm talking about impact in the entire metropolitan New Orleans zone. . . . We really didn't get our feet on the ground here for a long time but a lot of that was driven by municipal services because we couldn't run air conditioning systems, we couldn't run lighting, we couldn't run anything. And, of course, neither could the city. [There was] an armed camp for four and a half months right across the street [from park headquarters]. The parking lot on the left is where [they were] fed, and the parking lot on the right is where [they slept] for at least four and a half or five months. We were under martial law for three or four months.⁷

The Chalmette Unit suffered the worst damage, most of it from storm surge. The visitor center had 28 inches of water, the Malus-Beauregard House 42 inches, and the cemetery lodge and carriage house 68 inches. In addition, about half of the historic brick cemetery wall was knocked over. Many trees were uprooted, exposing root balls,

3 Leslie Adams, interview with Robert Blythe, November 7, 2008; David Muth, interview with Robert Blythe, November 5, 2008.

4 Hurricane Katrina NPS National Incident Management Team (IMT), briefing packet, September 13, 2005, JELA HQ files; SAR 2006; Adams interview; Kathryn Lang, interview with Robert Blythe, January 23, 2009.

5 It is notable that only one park employee was terminated for abandoning his position after the hurricane. SAR, 2006.

6 Acting Superintendent Paul Hartwig, notes from January 27, 2006, staff meeting, Paul Hartwig files.

7 Brian Strack, interview with Robert Blythe, January 21, 2009.

and many tree limbs fell, some of them damaging monuments and markers in the national cemetery. When Katrina hit, a repointing of the masonry on the Chalmette Monument was about to begin. Amazingly, the scaffolding on the monument was not destroyed by the storm, although it did have to be taken down, inspected, and rebuilt. The repointing was successfully completed during 2006. Park headquarters on Decatur Street in New Orleans suffered only minor damage, but was without electricity and running water for some weeks. At the Barataria Unit, vegetation suffered heavily with massive downing of mature trees on the natural levees. The shoreline of Lake Salvador receded by as much as 200 feet. Many trees fell along the Palmetto Trail, with root balls lifting large segments of boardwalk, making it necessary to rebuild the trail entirely. The destruction of the tree canopy caused the rapid proliferation of Chinese tallow (*Sapium sebifera*), a particularly pernicious invasive tree. The park responded aggressively, securing almost \$1 million dollars in Flexible Park Base Funding in fiscal years 2008, 2009, and 2010. The park has also granted permits to researchers seeking to study the effects of Katrina and Rita on the Barataria Preserve.⁸

Nineteen historic artifacts on display in the Chalmette Visitor Center were exposed to heat and humidity or submerged for several days, suffering damage from rust and mold. Once the MERT had arrived in the area, it worked with Park Curator Kathryn Lang, using flashlights in the darkened and malodorous building to remove objects from exhibit cases. The MERT packaged these and sent them to Springfield Armory National Historic Site in Massachusetts. The armory's curator, David H. Arnold, stabilized and restored the muskets, pistols, bayonets, and swords. National Guard troops engaged in the cleanup of Chalmette National Cemetery reported the possible presence of exposed bones. The MERT, which included archeologists, then carefully examined the root balls that had been exposed in Chalmette National Cemetery, discovering a small number of skeletal fragments as well as wood and metal fragments that

presumably had come from coffins. The human remains were reinterred in the cemetery.⁹

At Chalmette's visitor center, the flood waters created structural damage and the building's interior was covered with mold. Chief of Facility Management Brian Strack and NPS engineers examined the building and pronounced it a total loss. It was quickly demolished. The Service brought in a trailer in October 2006 to serve as a temporary visitor center. A new visitor center was completed and in use by December 2010, having its official dedication on January 8, 2011, the 196th anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans.¹⁰

The MERT decided that the park's museum collection in the headquarters building was not secure and arranged to have it temporarily moved to storage in Natchez, Mississippi. Some of the larger items in the collection were moved out from the second floor through French doors and over

- 9 Bob Sonderman and Mary Troy, MERT Trip Report to Chalmette National Battlefield and Cemetery, September 19, 2005, JELA HQ files; "Armory Saving Gems from Flood," *Springfield Republican*, September 13, 2005; Lang interview.
- 10 Strack interview; Paul Hartwig, interview with Robert Blythe, December 15, 2008; JELA website, www.nps.gov/jela/new-chalmette-battlefield-visitor-center.htm, consulted April 20, 2011.



Figure 13-1. Damaged cemetery walls at Chalmette, 2008. (author)

8 Strack interview; David Muth, personal communication, April 20, 2011; IMT briefing packet, JELA HQ files.

the balcony onto trucks waiting on Decatur Street. All of the artifacts were returned about a year later. As a gesture of goodwill to nonfederal parties, the MERT provided technical assistance to museums and to many families dealing with waterlogged and mildewed historic items, such as books and photographs.¹¹

The third priority, after caring for park staff's day-to-day needs and protecting resources, was to reestablish park operations. In the first weeks after the storm, with management staff scattered in several states, meetings of senior staff were conducted by cell phone. Staff members who had places to live or who could return from evacuation sites and find temporary housing (often with other park staff) worked at first in the undamaged Acadian Cultural Center in Lafayette or the Prairie Acadian Center in Eunice. By mid-October most were able to work at the Barataria Unit, where satellite dishes were set up for Internet and phone communications. A few also worked at the Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center in Thibodaux, which was also used by the IMT team. Because hotel rooms were hard to find, some team members slept in the building. Deputy Superintendent David Herrera worked at 419 Decatur, even though the building was without power; he was the only staff member there until mid-October. After limited power was restored to headquarters on October 11, Chief of Planning and Resource Stewardship David Muth and Cultural Anthropologist Allison Peña returned to their offices. Other staff visited headquarters as needed. Chief of Facilities Management Brian Strack, who never relocated from his home in Slidell, was a roving presence in the weeks after Katrina, evaluating damage to facilities and coordinating emergency repairs.¹²

Park headquarters remained at the Barataria Preserve throughout October and the first part of November. With traffic lights not working and many security checkpoints present, it often took two or three hours to travel to Decatur Street from Barataria or Thibodaux. Other staff members returned to 419 Decatur Street in late November, when full utilities were restored to the building.

Superintendent Smith retired, effective January 2006, and Associate Regional Director for Cultural Resources Paul Hartwig arrived for a three-month detail as acting superintendent. Hartwig found that many staff members were still living in Federal Emergency Management Agency trailers, while some had taken jobs in other parks. His first priority was to build on Superintendent Smith's efforts to reestablish staff morale. Hartwig worked hard to get essential functions performed while giving staff time to deal with their many personal issues.¹³

The acting superintendent's second priority was to continue the work of developing solid estimates for repair and rebuilding so as not to lose out on congressional disaster recovery funding. In the wake of natural disasters, agency managers in Washington typically press for quick damage estimates. In Paul Hartwig's words:

The problem that you always have in these hurricane responses is they want an answer within hours of the hurricane. They ask, "What is it going to cost?" You throw something out, and then they come back and say, "That is too much." Or they will come back later and tell you to "refine it." When you start to refine it, the estimate is substantially different from what you originally put in, because now you really have some numbers—you've had the time to look at it a little more closely.

Jean Lafitte was mostly successful in competing for hurricane recovery money, in large part because Chief of Facility Management Brian Strack took the lead in creating and entering good project statements for the work. In 2006, park staff worked with Shell Pipeline, the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, and others to clear debris from the Barataria Unit's waterways. The Palmetto Trail at Barataria was rebuilt at the cost of \$1.4 million. Some within the NPS saw a silver lining in the loss of the 1985 Chalmette visitor center, which had long been considered too small. Its replacement, located on the same spot, is about 50 percent larger at 3,500 square feet. About 50 artifacts are on exhibit at the visitor center, including a few that received conservation treatment after being damaged by Hurricane

11 Strack interview; Lang interview; "Bit by Bit, Federal Team Recoups Gulf's History," *Washington Post*, October 5, 2005.

12 Hartwig interview; Karl Hakala, interview with Robert Blythe, May 4, 2009; SAR, 2006; David Muth, personal communication, April 20, 2011.

13 Hartwig interview; David Muth, personal communication, April 20, 2011.

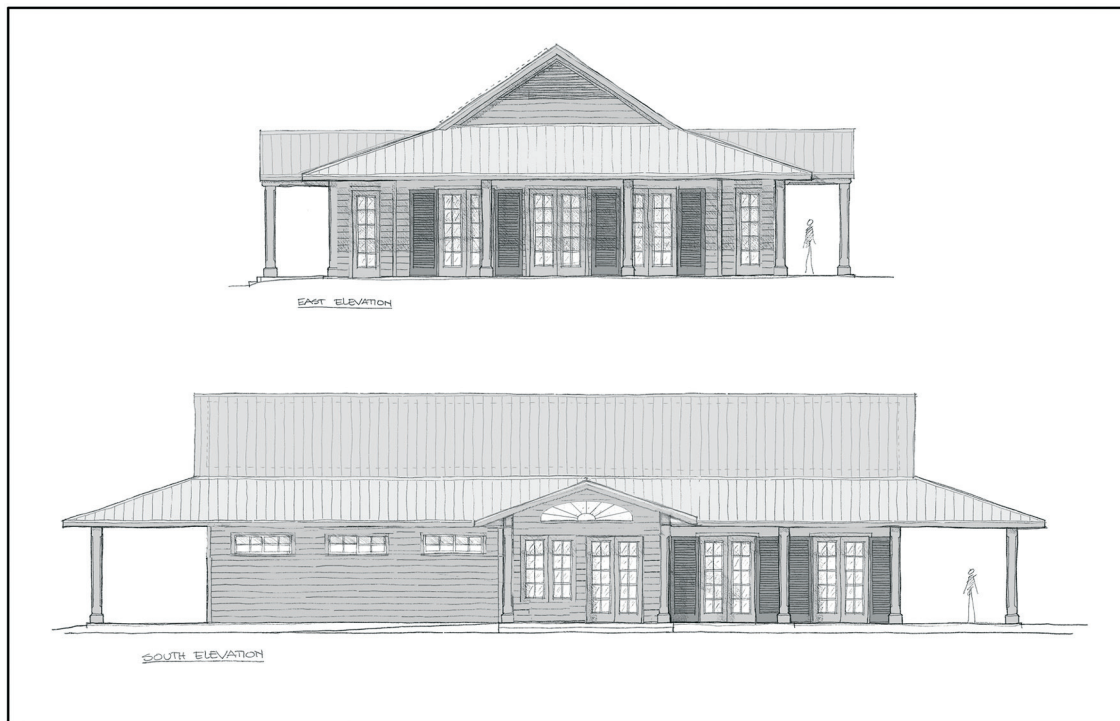


Figure 13-2. Elevations of new Chalmette Visitor Center. (JELA)

Katrina. Repairing the brick cemetery walls was a painstaking project, involving examination by hand of the historic bricks in preparation for their reuse. The walls were originally built without proper footings; the brick merely extended about four feet below grade. In the restoration, now completed, a concrete foundation has been provided for the first time.¹⁴

The tourism industry in South Louisiana was devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The first trickle of tourists did not return to New Orleans until spring 2006. Jean Lafitte recorded overall visitation of 449,679 in 2006, down from more than one million in 2004. The visitor center on Decatur Street reopened on a five-days-a-week schedule in mid-October 2005, one of the first tourist destinations in the French Quarter to do so. Seven-days-a-week operations resumed in January 2006. The reopening of the Chalmette Unit was an important symbol of recovery and hope for the entire parish of St. Bernard, where more than 99 percent of the residences had flooded. Parish officials encouraged the park to conduct battle anniversary observances in early January 2006, even though the unit still lacked electricity and

running water. By cooperating closely with the parish and volunteers, the park was able to hold a scaled-down, one-day event that attracted about 1,000 spectators. This was the first post-storm tourist event in the parish. The official reopening of the unit was still several months away, but Paul Hartwig allowed local people into the park to walk or simply get away from their urgent cares. The national cemetery was open on Memorial Day in 2006 but remained closed for the remainder of the year.¹⁵

Planning for Future Hurricanes

Disasters bring out the best and the worst in human beings, and Hurricane Katrina was no exception. Many observers felt that Superintendent Geraldine Smith did an exceptional job of looking after park employees in the aftermath of the storm. More than one staff member remembered this as the superintendent's "finest hour." Hurricane Rita pushed massive amounts of water from the Gulf up the Harvey Canal, further revealing the weak

14 Strack interview; SAR, 2006; Kathryn Lang, personal communication, May 4, 2011.

15 SAR, 2006; Hartwig interview; "Chalmette, Barataria Ready for Visitors," *Baton Rouge Advocate*, August 26, 2007; Weather Underground website, www.wunderground.com/education/Katrinassurge_part05.asp, consulted May 4, 2011.

spots in the unfinished West Bank and Vicinity Hurricane Protection Project.¹⁶ Lessons learned from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita will inform the park's future hurricane preparedness planning.

16 "Rita Pushed Harvey Canal to the Brink," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 2, 2005.

The Challenges of Managing a Unique Park

The list of factors that distinguish Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve from other national parks is a long one. Rarely before 1978 had the NPS been asked to protect and try to restore a natural area as heavily compromised by human activity as the Barataria Preserve. Jean Lafitte also had a specific mandate to “portray the development of cultural diversity.” Massachusetts’s Lowell National Historical Park, also established in 1978, had a similar mandate. Lowell’s enabling legislation cited the “cultural heritage of the city’s many ethnic groups.”¹ But because Lowell was being developed at the same time, it could not serve as a model for Jean Lafitte. Jean Lafitte’s establishing legislation was very broad, directing park managers to work extensively with partners and authorizing an unspecified number of cooperative agreements with those partners. The resources included in the park were quite diverse: a traditional battlefield park at Chalmette, a natural area in Barataria, the French Quarter, the Garden District, forts, plantations, and Acadian towns. No single interpretive theme tied these disparate resources together. Physically, the park ended up with six visitor centers strung across 250 miles of South Louisiana, presenting a real coordination challenge for superintendents. In addition, the NPS did not have an entirely free hand in developing Jean Lafitte. Park managers were given an advisory group, the Delta Region Preservation Commission, to guide the park’s development over the course of its first 20 years.

As described in chapter 6, the early discussions over the appropriate designation for Jean Lafitte revealed some of the complexities involved. It will be recalled that the suitability and feasibility study proposed a “cultural park” designation, while the Department of the Interior initially pushed for

a “cultural reserve.” Jean Lafitte has aspects of a nature preserve, a recreation area, a historical park, and a cultural park. In some respects, it was a heritage area before that designation actually existed. There is a major cleavage in the park’s mission and image between the natural area at Barataria and the other units, all of which focus primarily on historical and cultural themes. By emphasizing cultural diversity in the same legislation that created the Barataria Preserve, a natural area with significant recreational potential, Congress virtually ensured a split personality for the park. As discussed above in chapters 7 and 11, park managers’ approach to “portraying cultural diversity” evolved over time. An early emphasis on interpreting the cultural heritage of each ethnic group gave way to a more holistic approach that sought to portray a regional cultural complex distinguished by a pervasive French cultural influence, to which each succeeding ethnic group brought its own flavor.

Many in the NPS considered the Barataria Preserve, cut off by levees from the Mississippi River and crisscrossed by logging and oil exploration canals, an unworthy addition to the system. The unalterable presence of the New Orleans metropolitan area and billions of dollars of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers water control devices placed substantial limits on the possibilities for ecosystem restoration. The NPS was given a management challenge in the Barataria Preserve Unit that it had rarely, if ever, faced in the past. Before 1978, most of its natural areas were large enough that the primary resource management tool amounted to not interfering with natural processes. The NPS had received other natural areas in less than pristine condition—for example, 65 percent of the 500,000 acres of Great Smoky Mountains National Park had been logged before the area became a park—but in these other

1 U.S. Code, Title 16, Chapter 1, Subchapter LXI-A, Section 410(a)2.

cases the desired recovery of natural systems encountered fewer barriers. For example, forests can be expected to regenerate if left alone, even if the process might take a century or more. In the Barataria Basin, the interruption of the sheet flow of water by the Corps of Engineers' activities might be mitigated, but it was not likely ever to be reversed.

In the Barataria Preserve, the NPS at first was authorized to purchase just 8,600 acres. Even now, with authority to purchase up to 23,000 acres, the NPS controls just 0.5 percent of the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary System. Because of the extensive hydrologic engineering previously undertaken in the delta, the NPS and others are forced to attempt extraordinary steps to protect natural resources and replicate or replace natural forces. The Barataria Unit alone can never hope to accomplish a restoration of the entire estuary system; for this reason the NPS must collaborate closely with other land managers. With the establishment of the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary Program, a mechanism is in place for that collaboration. Even though its resource base is small, the Barataria Unit has served as a model and laboratory for estuary management practices. Park managers have accomplished a lot with a little at Barataria. Land managers in the Mississippi Delta are at the forefront of efforts to preserve and restore delta ecosystems. The geotextile barrier in Lake Salvador in particular has drawn considerable outside interest. Managers who face similar issues in the Nile and Mekong River deltas visit Louisiana to observe and learn. This in itself is evidence that the Barataria Unit is a success.

The managers of the Barataria Unit face many challenges, but the unit's mere existence is a powerful force for educating the public about wetlands issues. Ann Vileisis, in *Discovering the Unknown Landscape: A History of America's Wetlands*, has demonstrated that Americans have too often viewed wetlands as nothing more than wastelands. This is the mindset that Frank Ehret and his allies had to overcome in the 1960s and 1970s when they were campaigning for the park. Although this dismissive attitude toward wetlands has undergone considerable change in the last two or three decades, it has by no means disappeared. Residents of Louisiana and the nation can now visit the Barataria Unit and experience a wetland firsthand. Through personal services, interpretive

devices, and direct observation, visitors can better understand the important role of wetlands in distributing excess flood waters, absorbing the effects of hurricane storm surges, and providing habitats for birds, mammals, fish, and shellfish. The beauty of wetlands is a subtle beauty and often requires repeated visits to appreciate. The Barataria Unit is an ideal place for visitors to gain an appreciation of the beauty and utility of wetlands. In Louisiana and other coastal areas, such opportunities to experience large expanses of wetland are rare.

Interacting with Living Cultures

The NPS in 1978 was accustomed to managing natural areas and historic sites but had little experience with the emerging concept of cultural conservation. At almost all of its historic areas, a single event or range of events—a battle, a statesman's career, coastal defense in a fort—was the focus of commemoration and interpretation. The NPS might interact with neighboring landowners or descendants of soldiers, but rarely with contemporary cultural communities. With Jean Lafitte, cultural diversity and the promotion of conditions and events that would nurture living cultures were at the core of the park's mission. In the 1980s managers of historic and heritage sites were moving, sometimes fitfully, toward an ethnographic perspective. One key tenet of this perspective is that cultural communities are dynamic and evolving. Site managers were realizing that they must seek to understand the concept that "local groups constitute their own heritage."²

The emerging ethnographic perspective required managers at Jean Lafitte to engage members of cultural communities in conversation, learn as much as they could about the cultures and their manifestations, and find ways for members of cultural groups to interact directly with the visiting public. The NPS was not at all accustomed to doing these things. In essence, Jean Lafitte managers were required to learn how to work with and through cultural communities and to understand that, in each folklife program or demonstration the park

2 See Mary Hufford, "Rethinking the Cultural Mission," in *Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage*, ed. Mary Hufford (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); the quotation is from page 4.

sponsored, an act of cultural invention was taking place.³

By all accounts, James Isenogle, the park's first superintendent, supported the park's mission and reached out effectively to cultural communities. Isenogle's previous experience with native communities in Alaska had given him sensitivity for working with cultural groups. Other NPS staff coming from more traditional units varied widely in their sensitivity to Louisiana's cultural groups and their openness to the concept of cultural conservation. In 1982, the park hired Barbara Holmes, a cultural anthropologist, as chief of interpretation. In its early years, the park also had a designated folklorist position. In 1986, the park hired a term employee trained in cultural anthropology who was also a Louisiana Cajun, C. Ray Brassieur. His deep understanding of Louisiana cultures and contacts within various communities proved a boon in getting the park's folklife program established. After three years, however, his term appointment was not renewed. In late 1989, the park advertised a full-time position for a cultural anthropologist and hired Allison Peña, who was then working for the natural history museum in Lafayette and had taught at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.⁴ Hiring a full-time anthropologist was an important step for the park, and Allison Peña has done much to keep the park connected to the many communities that it is charged with interpreting. Jean Lafitte's mission of interpreting diverse cultures within a sphere of French influence makes the cultural anthropologist position essential.

The challenges of working with living communities surfaced in the discussions over the use of Cajun French in exhibit text and in the hosting of the Saturday programs at the Liberty Theatre (see chapter 11). The decisions to use French in the performances but largely exclude it from the exhibit text indicate the give-and-take and compromises that are inevitable in such situations. Another point of contention was whether the relevant cultural communities were adequately

represented on the DRPC and among the park's staff. When Nick Spitzer was on the DRPC in the early 1990s, he felt that French speakers were underrepresented on the commission. For most of its 20-year life, the DRPC had just one African American among its 13 members. While it should not be assumed that no white can ever adequately help shape the interpretation of African American culture or that no Anglophone can understand or interpret Francophone culture, a commitment to interpretation of living cultural communities implies giving those communities a real voice on the commission guiding the park's development. Of course, the NPS did not appoint members to the DRPC; these decisions were made primarily by local and state governments.

Cultural tensions surfaced within the DRPC membership. In the park's early years, some members were not prepared to embrace all of the delta's cultural groups. Superintendent Isenogle took some grief over his belief that urban African American folklore was as worthy of nurturing and celebrating as, for example, rural Cajun folklore. One incident is revealing of this attitude. During Isenogle's tenure the park had a poster printed with a photograph of a Mardi Gras Indian, Chief Jolly, in his elaborate handmade suit, making the rounds on St. Joseph's Eve. The response of one of the DRPC members from the West Bank was "Why the hell do we need a n***** with a flashlight on a Park Service poster?" By the 1990s, these sort of racial tensions among DRPC members seem largely to have abated. Still, when Geraldine Smith was appointed in 1996 as the park's first African American superintendent, she felt that she was not universally welcomed by the DRPC members. Smith also came to understand that many people of color in the area viewed the park as somehow a "white park." She made it one of her priorities to try to change that perception through such efforts as recruiting high-school students as living historians to represent the two battalions of free men of color who fought in Jackson's army at the Battle of New Orleans.⁵

Another aspect of the challenge of working with living cultures is the issue of recruiting members of local cultures as park staff. The regulations

3 An examination of what takes place when a government agency conducts public folklife programs can be found in Robert Cantwell, "Conjuring Culture: Ideology and Magic in the Festival of American Folklife," in *Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage*, ed. Mary Hufford (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 167-83.

4 DRPC minutes, January 24, 1990.

5 DRPC minutes, January 24, 1990; Nicholas Spitzer, interview with Robert Blythe, April 17, 2009; Geraldine Smith, interview with Robert Blythe, November 8, 2008.

guiding federal hiring generally prohibit restricting consideration to candidates from a specific geographic area or ethnic group. The regulations also often give preference to current federal employees and military veterans. Within these constraints, the park has made efforts to hire rangers from regional cultural communities. The first ranger at the Chitimacha Cultural Center was a Chitimacha, the ranger hired for the Tunica-Biloxi museum was a tribal member, and the first ranger hired for the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center was a French-speaking Cajun. The park has been criticized for not hiring more managers from local cultural communities, but managerial-level staff are typically are career NPS professionals coming from other parks.

The key issue in the development and operation of a park devoted to living cultures is one of control: how much authority should reside with the NPS and how much should be given to the communities themselves? The very idea of working with vibrant and evolving cultural communities ran counter to the NPS's preferred way of doing business as of the early 1980s. NPS employees were accustomed to calling the shots, and it was a stretch for them to surrender meaningful decision-making power to the communities. One former Jean Lafitte staffer has wondered why the NPS did not just hand the keys to the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center to the community and let community members run it once it was built. But this approach would have its own challenges, especially since it is not always clear who represents a given community. When there are differences within a cultural community, it can be advantageous to have the NPS as an arbiter with final decision-making authority.

Committed to a Commission

The legislated role given to the Delta Region Preservation Commission in planning and operating the park was also a new concept for the NPS. Many in the NPS were uncomfortable with the very idea of the commission, as the agency was not accustomed to interacting with a board composed of community members and empowered to guide a park's planning, cooperative agreements, and interpretive programs. Senator Johnston's former aide, Laura Hudson, said that the NPS resisted the DRPC, believing that it would prove unwieldy and impractical. The senator,

however, felt it needed to be attempted, because the various interests in South Louisiana had to have a seat at the table. The DRPC was an attempt to ensure that the new park would respond to the communities that it was intended to represent and interpret to visitors. Undoubtedly the DRPC at times slowed the pace of park development; for example, each cultural group seeking a cooperative agreement with the park first made a formal presentation to the commission. The commission then debated the merits of the proposal and voted on a resolution recommending a cooperative agreement. Only after the DRPC approved a resolution could park staff proceed with executing and implementing the agreement.

Although some superintendents may at times have chafed at working through the DRPC, it served a valuable purpose in building regional support for the park and also pushed park managers toward more transparent decision making. Park superintendents had to present their plans to the DRPC, which contained strong personalities who asked probing and sometimes pointed questions.

DRPC members carefully guarded their prerogatives, complaining from time to time that their advice was being ignored. Reading through the minutes of the DRPC's meetings, one at times senses impatience among park managers as some members rode their favorite hobby horses. All DRPC meetings were public, and at times audience members entered into discussions. When Barry Kohl of the Orleans Audubon Society was not reappointed after ten years on the DRPC, he continued to attend meetings as a concerned citizen. His presence made some park staff uncomfortable, but he had every right to be there, and the commission's chair, Fritz Wagner, was conscientious about letting public attendees, including Kohl, speak. Citizen commissions are much less of a novelty today and are more frequently legislated, especially for NPS-administered National Heritage Areas. In this respect, as in others, Jean Lafitte was a pioneer.

Whose Culture First?

As mentioned above in chapter 10, the park's General Management Plan (GMP) and other planning documents did not lay out a comprehensive scheme for interpreting the

cultures of the delta. The GMP certainly did not set priorities for cultural centers. Additionally, in the park's early years, staff tended to interpret the portrayal of cultural diversity as telling the story of each discrete ethnic group. Superintendent Jim Isenogle envisioned establishing one comprehensive interpretive center that would present information on all of the cultural groups mentioned in the *Mississippi Delta Ethnographic Overview*. That approach was implicit in some of the observations included in the overview. Such an approach offered the advantage of allowing a more holistic presentation. At a single center the NPS would have had the opportunity to present "the cultural diversity of south Louisiana within the sphere of French influence,"⁶ rather than presenting each ethnic or cultural group in isolation. Only gradually did park managers come to a more holistic understanding of cultural diversity and the critical role of French heritage.

Although the *Mississippi Delta Ethnographic Overview* implied that a comprehensive cultural center might be best for portraying the region's culture, the park did not develop in that way. As described above in chapter 7, the park's GMP construed cultural diversity as ethnic diversity and directed that "each unit will present its own part of the cultural diversity story." Additionally, soon after the park's establishment, groups started coming to the NPS with concrete proposals for cultural centers. Rather than acting on a plan to interpret the regional culture in all its variations in one center or working on centers in an agreed-upon sequence, the park reacted on an ad hoc basis to the proposals brought to it. As a result of this largely reactive approach and the early emphasis on ethnic diversity, the park was left with an unbalanced collection of cultural centers. The most glaring imbalance is the presence of three Acadian Cultural Centers and no African American Cultural Center. It must be remembered that the original legislation authorized the park to provide financial assistance to cooperators, but did not appropriate money for any cultural centers. The park could assign small sums from its regular operating budget to cooperators, but amounts large enough to establish a cultural center had to be specifically appropriated. It is understandable that the park and the DRPC would be most receptive to groups or communities that already had a plan and

brought some assets to the table. The Isleños had a house in St. Bernard Parish, for example, and the City of Eunice (which started out as a cooperative agreement site) had an old theater that local residents had refurbished. The unfortunate effect, though, was that cultural groups that had little money or vague or competing ideas for a center, rather than a single, agreed-upon plan, did not get as much attention.

Folklorist Nick Spitzer has described this scenario as "pay-as-you-go" ethnicity. Ethnic groups that had ascended to the middle class and had assets to offer got the inside track in celebrating their ethnicity. Less well-off urban groups such as African Americans or rural groups like the Houma Indians—groups who also, in Spitzer's judgment, have deeply rooted traditional cultures of great significance—were left by the wayside.⁷

People of African descent have played a major role in the history of South Louisiana. They constitute 30 percent of Louisiana's population and (before Katrina, at least) more than 50 percent of the population of New Orleans. In a cultural center devoted to a holistic conception of the cultural complex of South Louisiana, the contributions of African Americans would have a prominent place. Various reasons have been advanced for the absence of a center devoted specifically to African American culture. Some have observed that the African American community is very diverse and could not come together on a plan. Others pointed to the priority given to developing the Barataria Unit in the park's early years. By the time serious attention was given to the idea of an African American Cultural Center, there was no money. The DRPC hinted at this limitation in 1987:

The interpretation of the development of cultural diversity in the delta region . . . cannot be achieved without treatment of the history and contemporary culture of blacks in the region. The selection of a suitable site in New Orleans, or elsewhere in the delta is becoming a high priority item on the Park's agenda. No funds are available for planning or construction.⁸

7 Spitzer interview.

8 DRPC minutes, February 16, 1987.

By 1990, the NPS was clearly looking to Louisiana's African American communities to come up with their own plan for a cultural center. In spring 1990, Ulysses Ricard Jr. of the Amistad Research Center, New Orleans Councilman James Singleton, and Rutgers University History Professor Gwendolyn M. Hall had written to the NPS and the Department of the Interior, pressing for establishment of an African American Center. Superintendent Ann Belkov responded that such a center would "require a cohesive effort on the part of New Orleans' diverse African American Community addressing such variables as site, interpretive themes, exhibits, and funding alternatives." She further stated that "adherence to established procedures" would be critical. By this time Senator Johnston was already moving forward with plans for a jazz park. In September 1990 the DRPC passed a resolution in favor of establishing a facility in New Orleans to interpret African American and Creole culture. It wanted this facility to be made a unit of Jean Lafitte. As the DRPC could appropriate no money to back up its recommendation, however, nothing came of this initiative.⁹

Senator Johnston and his legislative aide, Laura Hudson, have suggested that the selection of jazz as the aspect of African American culture for the NPS to focus on came from within the African American community itself. Jazz music, however, is problematic as a vehicle for conveying the breadth and diversity of African American culture in South Louisiana. In the first place, jazz was an urban phenomenon with questionable relevance to the black experience in rural areas. Additionally, whites and individuals who saw themselves as Creole rather than black had important roles in the early history of jazz in New Orleans. The park certainly has made efforts to understand and interpret black culture through research, conferences, folklife programs, and temporary installations, especially from the 1990s on. In the 1980s, the park commissioned studies on the folklore of black children in New Orleans and another study on black social clubs. In the early 1990s, the park cosponsored and contributed funds to the Tremé

Neighborhood Street Festival.¹⁰ In 1994, the park commissioned a study entitled "African Americans in New Orleans Prior to the Civil War." In April 1995, using an Lower Mississippi Delta Region Initiative grant, the park cosponsored a three-day conference on African American heritage tourism in the delta. In March 1998 the park organized a major conference, "African Americans: From Slavery to Contemporary Times," which drew 300 participants. In June 2005, in partnership with Southern University, it sponsored another conference, "The Congo-Creole Connection." Nor have the park's day-to-day activities neglected black history and culture. Over the years, approximately one-third of the folklife events presented by the NPS in the French Quarter have featured African American culture.¹¹

Under different circumstances, the NPS visitor center in the French Quarter might have been larger and more holistic in its interpretive program. By the time that planning for the museum exhibits at 419 Decatur began, park managers were moving away from ethnicity as an organizing principle. Had funds been available, it might have been possible to structure the exhibits around the concept of creolization (discussed above in chapter 7) under a predominant French cultural influence, as Nick Spitzer had been envisioned in the *Mississippi Delta Ethnographic Overview*. The major unforeseen costs of making the four buildings in the 419 Decatur Street complex fit for use impinged on the funds available for interpretive exhibits. The NPS was embarrassed over the additional millions that it had to spend and the long delays that ensued before it could occupy 419 Decatur. After this expenditure it was impossible to ask Congress for large additional appropriations for the visitor center. Even if park managers had wanted to develop exhibits that emphasized a regional perspective on South Louisiana's culture, this was no longer an option given spending constraints. The visitor center that opened to the public in December 1999 provides only a general overview of the geography, history, and cultures of the Mississippi Delta.

9 Gwendolyn M. Hall to Secretary of the Interior Luhan, April 18, 1990; Ulysses S. Ricard Jr. to New Orleans Councilman James Singleton, April 8, 1990; Superintendent Belkov to James Singleton, May 29, 1990, JELA HQ files; DRPC minutes, September 12, 1990.

10 Faubourg Tremé, just north of the French Quarter, is one of the oldest continuously occupied urban African American neighborhoods in the United States.

11 SAR, 1994, 1998, 2005; DRPC minutes, July 31, 1980; Program, "African Americans: From Slavery to Contemporary Times," JELA RM files.

There was also an initial desire to use the French Quarter Unit as a feeder of visitors to other units. Early planning documents speculated about the possibility of providing transportation from the French Quarter Visitor Center to the other units of the park. This has never proven feasible. As described in chapter 8, a cumbersome public transit option from downtown New Orleans to the Barataria Unit was offered briefly, but the limited service, a starting point outside of the French Quarter, and the transfers involved doomed this effort to failure. To date, no public or private bus operator has found it feasible to offer transportation from New Orleans to the Barataria Unit. The staff at the French Quarter Visitor Center do their best to make visitors aware of the opportunities available, not only at the other park units but throughout the delta. However, interested visitors must find their own transportation to these places.

Issues of Organization, Cohesiveness, and Morale

Managers at Jean Lafitte are faced with the task of directing operations, achieving visitor satisfaction, and maintaining employee morale at six widely scattered sites. Considering just the three Acadian centers, where the interpretive themes are closely linked, it is a 45-minute drive from Lafayette to Eunice, and an hour and 45 minutes from Lafayette to Thibodaux. From Eunice to Chalmette is an approximately three-hour drive.

Broadly speaking, two main organizational approaches are available for a park like Jean Lafitte. The first option provides a unit manager for each major component (Chalmette, French Quarter, Barataria Preserve, and Acadian) and makes this manager responsible for all operational areas. The second is a divisional arrangement, with chiefs of interpretation, resource management, law enforcement, and so forth having line authority over their respective personnel in each of the units. In the early days of the park, the unit manager approach prevailed. This was certainly the easiest organizational design to implement when sites were under development, as it provided the benefit of an on-site manager with decision-making authority while facilities were under construction. The unit manager approach also had the advantage

of respecting the longstanding separate identity of the Chalmette Battlefield. After more than 15 years of the unit manager arrangement, the park moved to a modified programmatic or divisional organization.¹²

This movement toward a divisional structure proceeded slowly. As early as 1991, a park self-evaluation suggested consideration of realigning park operations “along the lines of discipline instead of units.” In 1993, the park established a division of resource management, embracing natural and cultural resources. Superintendent Bob Belous chose David Muth to be chief of resource management (now known as planning and resource stewardship), a position he held until the end of 2010.¹³ Even with the appointment of a chief of resource management, rangers and other staff at each site reported to the unit manager. In the mid-1990s, Superintendent Belous asked his senior staff for suggestions on reorganization. Park managers met over a period of time without the superintendent or Deputy Superintendent Steve Hickman participating. The two major issues considered were (1) weighing a unit manager structure versus a divisional structure and (2) how the headquarters staff should be organized. No decision was reached before Superintendent Belous retired. Kevin Cheri, who grew up in New Orleans, arrived as deputy superintendent in 1996 shortly before Geraldine Smith replaced Belous as superintendent. Cheri immediately saw problems with the unit manager approach. He felt that, with different individuals in charge at each of the four units, the park’s interpretive program lacked cohesion and direction. He also noted that a unit manager with a law enforcement background often lacked expertise in interpretation and exhibitry, while one with an interpretive background might flounder when supervising maintenance work. Cheri told Superintendent Smith that he had some ideas, but would hold them in abeyance while she learned the operation of her park. After a few months and some discussion, Smith told Cheri to begin implementing a hybrid organization structure. The Acadian Unit retained a unit manager while staff in the other units reported to division chiefs (of resource management,

12 SAR, 1999.

13 SAR, 1993; DRPC minutes, December 15, 1993.

interpretation, and maintenance)¹⁴ at headquarters. Deputy Superintendent Cheri worked from 1997 to 1999 in coordinating the transition to the new organizational structure. The rationale for keeping a unit manager at the Acadian Unit was its considerably greater distance from headquarters than Barataria or Chalmette.¹⁵

The reaction to the new divisional organization was largely positive. The different treatment given to the Acadian Unit has drawn some criticism. Some also believe that, with no unit managers at the other units, there are occasions when no one takes responsibility for correcting problems or initiating changes. Issues can be kicked up to the headquarters level and sometimes die there. Additionally, the unit manager positions had served as training opportunities for would-be superintendents. Dale Phillips, who managed the Acadian Unit, has described how his work as manager of the Acadian Unit prepared him for his first superintendency.¹⁶

As part of its reorganization, the park got its first Chief of Maintenance, Brian Strack, in December 1999. Prior to the reorganization, maintenance activities were supervised by the four unit managers. The consolidation under a chief allowed for significantly more efficient allocation of resources and manpower among the six sites of the park. Strack soon began a parkwide inventory and assessment of facilities, in order to establish priorities for maintenance and upgrades. This initiative allowed the park to greatly expand the number of maintenance and repair and rehabilitation projects in the NPS Project Management Information System and to compete more successfully for funding.¹⁷

Jean Lafitte superintendents have perennially faced the challenge of fostering cohesiveness among 70 staff members scattered from Eunice to Chalmette. Rarely is it feasible to get all or most of the staff together for a meeting or social gathering. Some rotation of personnel is possible between the Crescent City District (Chalmette and the French Quarter) and the Barataria Preserve. Distances are too great to allow rotation between these units and the Acadian Unit. Professionals, like the park curator, who have responsibilities at all six sites, spend a good deal of time behind the wheel. The shift to a divisional structure probably helped somewhat in making employees feel that they all worked for the same park. All interpreters, for example, now report to a single chief of resource education, fostering some improvement in cohesiveness. Given the spread-out nature of the park, there are no easy ways to create a sense of unity.

Jean Lafitte serves multiple constituencies and operates in a complex political environment. The park superintendent deals with officials from numerous parish, state, and federal agencies. Because so much of the superintendent's time is devoted to maintaining relationships with various constituencies, the position of deputy superintendent is particularly important at Jean Lafitte. Kevin Cheri, who was deputy from 1996 to 2000, explained:

I was responsible for the basic operations of the park. In a park of that size, typically, the superintendent is dealing with the external issues, the political issues involved in a large park operation. And especially in an urban park, you're dealing with a lot of different stakeholders and politicians and different communities. We were a spread-out park. We had all the different state, city, and parish officials to deal with. So there is little time for a superintendent to spend supervising division chiefs in the various operations within the park: administration, maintenance, resource and visitor protection, resource management, and interpretation and education.¹⁸

The park got its first deputy superintendent, Harry O'Bryant, in 1983, and the position has

14 Resource management is currently known as planning and resource stewardship; maintenance is now facilities management; interpretation is resource education. Allison Peña, personal communication, May 4, 2011.

15 Superintendent, JELA, to ARD, Administration, SWR, April 15, 1992, box 10, JELA archives; Kevin Cheri, interview with Robert Blythe, March 31, 2009; SAR 1999; David Muth, interview with Robert Blythe, November 5, 2008; Leslie Adams, interview with Robert Blythe, November 7, 2008; Dale Phillips, interview with Robert Blythe, March 23, 2009.

16 Phillips, Adams, and Muth interviews.

17 SAR, 1999, 2000; Brian Strack, interview with Robert Blythe, January 21, 2009.

18 Cheri interview.

almost always been filled since then. Deputy Superintendent David Herrera left in 2006, and (after it was vacant for four years) Lance Hatten was hired as deputy for both Jean Lafitte and the jazz park in summer 2010.¹⁹

Some 80 percent of Jean Lafitte's workforce lives in the metropolitan New Orleans area. This is not always the most congenial assignment for NPS personnel, many of whom join the agency because they want to live and work in wild places. Jean Lafitte has developed a reputation as a "training park," a place for gaining some experience before moving on. As an urban park in an area with a relatively high cost of living and safety concerns, Jean Lafitte is not always viewed as a desirable assignment. Superintendents' annual reports make frequent references to a high turnover rate among staff and to the difficulty of attracting qualified applicants when a position is advertised. This situation was exacerbated by the hurricanes of 2005. In their wake, the price of housing and many other goods rose in New Orleans, and city services were slow in recovering. New Orleans is like no other urban area in America; some transplants respond immediately to its inimitable charms, while others are put off by the gritty realities that go with the charms.²⁰ As one former employee put it, he was "only robbed once" while working at Jean Lafitte. Other former staffers return year after year for vacations in New Orleans.

The Great NPS Reorganization of 1995

Louisiana was part of the NPS Southwest Region in 1978, when Jean Lafitte was established. The NPS underwent a major reorganization effective October 1, 1995, under which the Southwest Region merged with the Rocky Mountain Region to form the new Intermountain Region. As part of this reorganization Louisiana was assigned to the Southeast Region, which has its headquarters in Atlanta. Some DRPC members had expressed a desire to leave the Southwest Region and join the Southeast as early as summer 1984. At the time several members were upset over the problems with the Barataria Visitor Center and felt that managers in Santa Fe and Denver did not know

how to build in a wetland area. They believed that the Southeast Regional Office (SERO), because it had experience with wetland areas like the Everglades, would better understand the issues in Louisiana.²¹ The DRPC, of course, had no authority to move Louisiana to a different NPS region.

When the park became part of the Southeast Region in 1995, not everyone was thrilled. Opinions have varied widely over whether Jean Lafitte was better off in the Southwest or in the Southeast. Certainly there was more expertise on wetlands issues in the SERO than in the former Southwest Regional Office. On the other hand, the Southeast has 50 percent more parks than the old Southwest, and the competition for available funds within the region can be intense. Additionally, when the NPS reorganized in 1995 it introduced the concept of clusters, with most of the regional office staff being assigned to a cluster office. The Southeast Region was divided into the Appalachian, Atlantic Coast, and Gulf Coast clusters, with Jean Lafitte assigned to the Gulf Coast. The Southeast Region ultimately abandoned the idea of clusters after several years that, from an administrative point of view, can only be described as chaotic.²²

Resource and Thematic Diversity

The four components of the park have four substantially different resource bases and thematic emphases. The War of 1812 and its legacy are the focus at Chalmette, the ecology and human use of wetlands at Barataria, and the cultures of the Acadians and related people in the Acadian centers. The French Quarter, besides serving as park headquarters, was intended as the port of entry for visitors, offering an introduction to all of the cultures of South Louisiana. Given this

- 21 DRPC minutes, August 8, 1984. The members' biggest objection seemed to be to the NPS Denver Service Center (DSC). They probably did not realize that, even had JELA been in the Southeast Region, construction supervision would still have been assigned to the DSC.
- 22 Laura Hudson, interview with Robert Blythe, August 18, 2008; Muth and Adams interviews. One of the problems with the reorganization in the Southeast Region was that, in many specialties, the regional office had only one senior expert. When staff were reassigned to the clusters, management was faced with deciding which cluster got the expert and which clusters went without one.

19 SAR, 1983; Adams interview.

20 SAR, 1987; Adams interview.

diversity, chiefs of interpretation and chiefs of resource management must be versatile in order to guide programs in the units.

One Man's Park?

For its first 18 years, Jean Lafitte had a very powerful protector in the Senate. Not only did Senator J. Bennett Johnston chair the subcommittee on national parks, but he was floor manager for the Department of the Interior's appropriations bill when the Democrats had the majority. The senator took a close interest in the park; he and his staff watched its operations closely. Superintendent Belous had hoped that his stint at Jean Lafitte would lead to the superintendency of a large natural park, but he succeeded too well in New Orleans. J. Bennett Johnston was the most important senator for the NPS, and the agency's leaders were not about to move Belous from Jean Lafitte as long as the senator was pleased with him.²³

The retirement of Senator Johnston in 1997 also had a financial impact on the park. After his departure it was not as easy for Jean Lafitte to get funding increases and earmarks. For the brief period (1995–1998) when Louisiana Congressman Bob Livingston chaired the House Appropriations Committee, he too was very good to the park. Since Livingston's retirement in May 1999 the Louisiana delegation has lacked a member with the clout of Johnston or Livingston. The lack of a "rainmaker" in the halls of Congress has contributed to stagnant operating budgets for the park. In consequence, the six NPS-staffed sites of Jean Lafitte increasingly compete for resources. Allocating resources will remain a challenge for all future superintendents.²⁴

What's in a (Park) Name?

It is safe to conclude that Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve is the only unit of the National Park System that will ever be named for a man indicted for piracy by the U.S. government. From time to time, voices have been raised against honoring a pirate and slave trader by putting his name on a national park. Many have wondered

how the name became attached to the park in the first place. Frank Ehret is an important part of the answer, as, from the beginning of his efforts to establish a park in the Barataria Basin, Ehret consistently made use of the Jean Lafitte name and legend, which have a significant aura in the delta. Local lore claims that some residents of the basin are descended from Lafitte's men who sailed from Grande Isle.²⁵ The Lafitte legend, if not the historical figure, seems to have mostly positive associations in the region, as illustrated by the number of local businesses that have made use of the name. Almost certainly the Lafitte "brand" has significantly more positive associations among the region's long-established white population than among other groups. There is a long tradition of fascination and even admiration for outlaws among many segments of the American population. It is even better if the outlaw has panache. We will never know whether Jean Lafitte was the romantic, swashbuckling swain described by legend, but the legend is surely likely to persist.

According to Frank Ehret's recollection, Senator Johnston took the stance that, if Jean Lafitte was a good enough name for Frank, it was good enough for the senator. The senator does not remember any discussion of a different name, and no other name was suggested during congressional hearings on the park bill. Only years after the park was established was there some scattered criticism of the name.²⁶ The DRPC at one point discussed the possibility of changing the park's name, mostly because of concern that the public associated the name with the Barataria portion of the park only. In the early scoping sessions for the General Management Plan amendment, a name change was listed as a topic for consideration, but was later dropped. NPS Director Roger Kennedy raised the issue of a name change with Superintendent Smith in the 1990s, but she perceived the name's local

23 John Cook, interview with Robert Blythe, March 3, 2009; Hudson interview.

24 Hudson interview.

25 The modern spelling is Grand Isle.

26 A vociferous protest against the park name came from Carl Galmon, president of the Louisiana Committee Against Apartheid. Galmon branded Jean Lafitte a smuggler, slave trader, rapist, slave owner, and criminal. He did his cause no favor by circulating an article that referred to Lafitte as the "Jewish Pirate." Carl Galmon to Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, February 14, 1998, JELA HQ files.

popularity and was not inclined to risk ruffling feathers.²⁷

The park's feasibility study proposed the historical figure of Jean Lafitte as a unifying interpretive theme for the park's various units. This concept, however, seemed more an effort to justify a name that already had considerable local support than a serious interpretive framework. The association with the historical Lafitte is strongest in the Barataria Unit, although even in that case the main sites of Lafitte's privateering activity (Grand Isle and Barataria Bay) lie well outside the unit's boundaries. Baratarians fought under General Jackson at Chalmette, but Pierre Lafitte, not Jean, was actively involved in the preparations for the Battle of New Orleans. Jean Lafitte's connections with the three sites of the Acadian Unit and the cooperative agreement sites range from extremely tenuous to nonexistent.

The Lafitte Park as a Model

In many ways the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve has represented not just a new direction for the NPS but a model for subsequent

agency activities. As the NPS expanded in other locations its operations related to interpretation of living cultures, it looked to the experience of Jean Lafitte for guidance. For example, Congress in 1989 created a joint commission with the state of Maine to explore the possibility of creating one or more Acadian French cultural centers in Maine. Members of the commission visited Jean Lafitte's Acadian Cultural Centers in 1993. Congress in 1999 authorized a special resource study of coastal South Carolina and Georgia, home to the Gullah/Geechee cultures, respectively. The preparers of this study also looked to the activities of Jean Lafitte as a model. The example was useful as Congress subsequently, in 2006, designated the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor.²⁸

When Congress created the Jean Lafitte park, it gave the park's leadership a complex, diverse, and daunting set of assignments. Among the most challenging were restoring a compromised natural area, working with a host of entities in the region, and conserving and interpreting living cultures. More often than not, the leadership of Jean Lafitte has risen to the challenges.

27 "La. National Park Outgrows Its Name," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March 26, 1990; Smith interview; Senator J. Bennett Johnson, interview with Robert Blythe, March 30, 2010; Frank Ehret, interview with Robert Blythe, June 14, 2008.

28 DRPC minutes, December 15, 1993; Paul Carson, interview with Robert Blythe, March 30, 2009; Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor website, www.nps.gov/guge, consulted March 18, 2010.

Notes on Sources

The most important sources for this history were the files and archives housed at the headquarters of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, 419 Decatur Street, New Orleans, and the park archives held at the Earl K. Long Library of the University of New Orleans. Many of the park's older files have been accessioned into the park's archives. A substantial amount of relevant material also was found in active files in three locations: central files, the files of the resource management division, and the files of the facilities management division. In addition to the records at park headquarters, the following archival sources were important for this history:

Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

Records of the Quartermaster General, War Department, Record Group 92, National Archives, College Park, Maryland

Records of National Park Service Region 1, Record Group 79, National Archives and Records Administration, Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia.

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

Henry J. Kaiser, Edgar F. Kaiser, and Eugene E. Trefethen Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

United States Daughters of 1812 Papers, Vertical Files, Special Collections, Tulane University.

The author conducted formal interviews with the individuals listed below. Additionally, informal telephone or e-mail conversations were conducted with Jim Van Dorin, P. J. Ryan, and Kate Richardson.

Lesley Adams	Administrative Officer, JELA
Barry Ancelet	Tom Debaillon BoRSF (Board of Regents Support Fund) Professor of Francophone Studies, University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Jodie Bacque	Park Ranger
M. Ann Belkov	Former Superintendent, JELA
C. Ray Brassieur	Assistant Professor, University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Paul Carson	Former Manager, Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center, JELA
Kevin Cheri	Former Deputy Superintendent, JELA
John E. Cook	Former Regional Director, NPS SWR
Susan Davenport	Former Manager, French Quarter Unit, JELA
Frank Ehret Jr.	Vice Chair, DRPC
Vincent Fontenot	Park Ranger
Karl Hakala	Former Manager, Acadian Unit, JELA
Paul Hartwig	Former ARD, Cultural Resources, NPS SER
Laura Hudson	Former Aide to Senator J. Bennett Johnston
William Jewell	Former Lands Officer, NPS

J. Bennett Johnston	U.S. Senator, Louisiana, 1972-1997
Curtis Joubert	Former Mayor, Eunice, Louisiana
Barry Kohl	DRPC Member
Kathryn Lang	Curator, JELA
James Mičulka	Former Chief of Interpretation, JELA Manager, NPS-Amtrak program
David Muth	Former Chief of Resource Management, JELA
George Neusaenger	Former Chief, Resource Management and Visitor Protection, JELA
Allison Peña	Cultural Anthropologist, JELA
Dale Phillips	Former Manager, Acadian Unit, JELA
Ed Roy	Editor and Publisher, <i>St. Bernard Voice</i>
Geraldine Smith	Former Superintendent, JELA
Nicholas Spitzer	Former Head of Louisiana Folklife Commission, DRPC Member
Brian Strack	Facilities Manager, JELA
Michael Strock	Former Historian and Manager, JELA
Frederick “Fritz” Wagner	Chair, DRPC

The following abbreviations are used in the footnotes:

ARD	Associate Regional Director
BL	Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
CARI	Cane River Creole National Historical Park
CHAL	Chalmette National Historical Park
DRPC	Delta Region Preservation Commission
DSC	Denver Service Center, NPS
EODC	NPS Eastern Office of Design and Construction
GAR	Grand Army of the Republic
GMP	General Management Plan
JELA	Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve
JELA HQ files	Jean Lafitte Headquarters, Central Files
JELA RM files	Jean Lafitte Headquarters, Resource Management Files
JELA FM files	Jean Lafitte Headquarters, Facilities Management Files
KACC	Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corporation
NARA M-A	National Archives and Records Administration, Mid-Atlantic Region
NARA II	National Archives, College Park, Maryland
NMP	National Military Park
NPS	National Park Service
RD	Regional Director
RG	Record Group
SAR	Superintendent’s Annual Report/Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Report
SER/SERO	Southeast Region/Southeast Regional Office
SMR	Superintendent’s Monthly Report
SWR/SWRO	Southwest Region/Southwest Regional Office
UNO	University of New Orleans
USD	United States Daughters of 1776–1812
USGS	United States Geological Survey
WASO	Washington Office, National Park Service

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Appendix A: Legislation

PUBLIC LAW 76-368—AUGUST 10, 1939, 53 STAT. 1342 (H.R. 4742)

AN ACT to provide for the establishment of the Chalmette National Historical Park in the State of Louisiana, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the lands in Federal ownership located in Chalmette, Louisiana, in sections 10 and 21, township 13 south, range 12 east, Saint Helena meridian, on which there has been erected a monument pursuant to the provisions of the Act of Congress approved March 4, 1907 (34 Stat. 1411), as amended by the Act of June 2, 1930 (46 Stat. 489), to the memory of the soldiers who fell in the Battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812, including the national cemetery at Chalmette, Louisiana, are hereby designated as the Chalmette National Historical Park.

SEC. 2. That upon the vesting of title in the United States to such additional lands as may be designated by the Secretary of the Interior as necessary and desirable for the purposes of the Chalmette National Historical Park, such lands shall become a part of the said park and shall be subject to all laws, rules, and regulations applicable thereto: *Provided, however,* That the total area included within the said park and any enlargement thereof shall not exceed five hundred acres.

SEC. 3. That the Secretary of the Interior is authorized, in his discretion, to acquire in behalf of the United States, through donations or by purchase at prices deemed by him reasonable, or by condemnation in accordance with the Act of August 1, 1888 (25 Stat. 357), lands, buildings, structures, and other property, or interests therein, located within the boundaries of the Chalmette National Park as fixed and determined hereunder, the title to such property and interests to be satisfactory to the Secretary of the Interior, and to accept donations of funds for the acquisition and maintenance thereof: *Provided,* That payment for such property or interests shall be made solely from donated funds.

SEC. 4. The administration, protection, and development of the aforesaid national historical park shall be exercised under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior by the National Park Service, subject to the provisions of the Act of August 25, 1916, entitled “An Act to establish a National Park Service, and for other purposes.”

SEC. 5. All Acts or parts of Acts inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed to the extent of such inconsistency.

National Parks and Recreation Act of 1979, P.L. 95-625, November 10, 1978

TITLE IX – JEAN LAFITTE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

SEC. 901. In order to preserve for the education, inspiration, and benefit of present and future generations significant examples of natural and historical resources of the Mississippi Delta region and to provide for their interpretation in such manner as to portray the development of cultural diversity in the region, there is authorized to be established in the State of Louisiana the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve

(hereinafter referred to as the “park”). The park shall consist of (1) the area of approximately twenty thousand acres generally depicted on the map entitled “Barataria Marsh Unit-Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve” numbered 90,000B and dated April 1978, which shall be on file and available for public inspection in the office of the National Park Service, Department of the Interior; (2) the area known as Big Oak Island ; 3)

an area or areas within the French Quarter section of the city of New Orleans as may be designated by the Secretary of the Interior for an interpretive and administrative facility; (4) the Chalmette National Historical Park; and (5) such additional natural, cultural, and historical resources in the French Quarter and Garden District of New Orleans, forts in the delta region, plantations, and Acadian towns and villages in the Saint Martinville area and such other areas and sites as are subject to cooperative agreements in accordance with the provisions of this title.

SEC. 902. (a) Within the Barataria Marsh Unit the Secretary is authorized to acquire not to exceed eight thousand acres of lands, waters, and interests therein (hereinafter referred to as the “core area”), as depicted on the map referred to in the first section of this title, by donation, purchase with donated or appropriated funds, or exchange. The Secretary may also acquire by any of the foregoing methods such lands and interests therein, including leasehold interests, as he may designate in the French Quarter of New Orleans for development and operation as an interpretive and administrative facility. Lands, waters, and interests therein owned by the State of Louisiana or any political subdivision thereof may be acquired only by donation. In acquiring property pursuant to this title, the Secretary may not acquire rights to oil and gas without the consent of the owner, but the exercise of such rights shall be subject to such regulations as the Secretary may promulgate in furtherance of the purposes of this title.

(b) With respect to the lands, waters, and interests therein generally depicted as the “park protection zone” on the map referred to in the first section of this title, the Secretary shall, no later than six months from the date of enactment of this Act, in consultation with the affected State and local units of government, develop a set of guidelines or criteria, applicable to the use and development of properties within the park protection zone to be enacted and enforced by the State or local units of government.

(c) The purpose of any guideline developed pursuant to subsection (b) of this section shall be to preserve and protect the following values within the core area: (1) fresh water drainage patterns from the park protection zone into the core area; (2) vegetative cover ; (3) integrity of ecological and biological systems; and (4) water and air quality.

(d) Where the State or local units of government

deem it appropriate, they may cede to the Secretary, and the Secretary is authorized to accept, the power and authority to confect and enforce a program or set of rules pursuant to the guidelines established under subsection (b) of this section for the purpose of protecting the values described in subsection (c) of this section.

(e) The Secretary, upon the failure of the State or local units of government to enact rules pursuant to subsection (b) of this section or enforce such rules so as to protect the values enumerated in subsection (c) of this section, may acquire such lands, servitudes, or interests in lands within the park protection zone as he deems necessary to protect the values enumerated in subsection (c) of this section.

(f) The Secretary may revise the boundaries of the park protection zone, notwithstanding any other provision of law, to include or exclude properties, but only with the consent of Jefferson Parish.

SEC. 903. Within the Barataria Marsh Unit, the owner or owners of improved property used for noncommercial residential purposes on a year-round basis may, as a condition of the acquisition of such property by the Secretary, elect to retain a right of use and occupancy of such property for noncommercial residential purposes if, in the judgment of the Secretary, the continued use of such property for a limited period would not unduly interfere with the development or management of the park. Such right of use and occupancy may be either a period ending on the death of the owner or his spouse, whichever occurs last, or a term of not more than twenty-five years, at the election of the owner. Unless the property is donated, the Secretary shall pay to the owner the fair market value of the property less the fair market value of the right retained by the owner. Such right may be transferred or assigned and may be terminated by the Secretary, if he finds that the property is not used for noncommercial residential purposes, upon tender to the holder of the right an amount equal to the fair market value of the unexpired term. As used in this section, the term “improved property” means a single-family, year-round dwelling, the construction of which was begun before January 1,1977, which serves as the owner’s permanent place of abode at the time of its acquisition by the United States, together with not more than three acres of land on which the dwelling and appurtenant buildings are located which the Secretary finds is reasonably necessary

for the owner's continued use and occupancy of the dwelling.

SEC. 904. In furtherance of the purposes of this title, and after consultation with the Commission created by section 7 of this title, the Secretary is authorized to enter into cooperative agreements with the owners of properties of natural, historical, or cultural significance, including but not limited to the resources described in paragraphs (1) through (5) of the first section of this title, pursuant to which the Secretary may mark, interpret, restore and/or provide technical assistance for the preservation and interpretation of such properties, and pursuant to which the Secretary may provide assistance including management services, program implementation, and incremental financial assistance in furtherance of the standards for administration of the park pursuant to section 906 of this title. Such agreements shall contain, but need not be limited to, provisions that the Secretary, through the National Park Service, shall have the right of access at all reasonable times to all public portions of the property covered by such agreement for the purpose of conducting visitors through such properties and interpreting them to the public, and that no changes or alterations shall be made in such properties except by mutual agreement between the Secretary and the other parties to such agreements. The agreements may contain specific provisions which outline in detail the extent of the participation by the Secretary in the restoration, preservation, interpretation, and maintenance of such properties.

SEC. 905. Within the Barataria Marsh Unit, the Secretary shall permit hunting, fishing (including commercial fishing), and trapping in accordance with applicable Federal and State laws, except that within the core area and on those lands acquired by the Secretary pursuant to section 902(c) of this title, he may designate zones where and establish periods when no hunting, fishing, or trapping shall be permitted for reasons of public safety. Except in emergencies, any regulations of the Secretary promulgated under this section shall be put into effect only after consultation with the appropriate fish and game agency of Louisiana.

SEC. 906. The Secretary shall establish the park by publication of a notice to that effect in the Federal Register at such time as he finds

that, consistent with the general management plan referred to in section 908, sufficient lands and interests therein (i) have been acquired for interpretive and administrative facilities, (ii) are being protected in the core area, and (iii) have been made the subject of cooperative agreements pursuant to section 904. Pending such establishment and thereafter the Secretary shall administer the park in accordance with the provisions of this title, the Act of August 25, 1916 (39 Stat. 535), the Act of August 21, 1935 (49 Stat. 666), and any other statutory authorities available to him for the conservation and management of natural, historical, and cultural resources.

SEC. 907. (a) There is established the Delta Region Preservation Commission (hereinafter referred to as the "Commission"), which shall consist of the following: (1) two members appointed by the Governor of the State of Louisiana; (2) two members appointed by the Secretary from recommendations submitted by the President of Jefferson Parish; (3) two members appointed by the Secretary from recommendations submitted by the Jefferson Parish Council; (4) two members appointed by the Secretary from recommendations submitted by the mayor of the city of New Orleans; (5) one member appointed by the Secretary from recommendations submitted by the commercial fishing industry; (6) three members appointed by the Secretary from recommendations submitted by local citizen conservation organizations in the delta region; and (7) one member appointed by the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. (b) Members of the Commission shall serve without compensation as such. The Secretary is authorized to pay the expenses reasonably incurred by the non-Federal members of the Commission in carrying out their duties. (c) The function of the Commission shall be to advise the Secretary in the selection of sites for inclusion in the park, in the development and implementation of a general management plan, and in the development and implementation of a comprehensive interpretive program of the natural, historic, and cultural resources of the region. The Commission shall inform interested members of the public, the State of Louisiana and its political subdivisions, and interested Federal agencies with respect to existing and proposed actions and programs having a material effect on the perpetuation of a high-quality natural and cultural environment in the delta region.

(d) The Commission shall act and advise by affirmative vote of a majority of its members: *Provided*, That any recommendation of the Commission that affects the use or development, or lack thereof, of property located solely within a single parish or municipality shall have the concurrence of a majority of the members appointed from recommendations submitted by such parish or municipality. (e) The Directors of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service and the National Park Service shall serve as ex officio members of the Commission and provide such staff support and technical services as may be necessary to carry out the functions of the Commission.

SEC. 908. (a) There is authorized to be appropriated, to carry out the provisions of this title, not to exceed \$50,000,000 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund for acquisition of lands, waters, and interests therein and such sums as necessary for the development of essential facilities. (b) Within three years from the date of enactment of this title, the Secretary, after consultation with the Commission, shall submit to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the House of Representatives, and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate a general management plan for the park indicating—(1) transportation alternatives

for public access to the park; (2) the number of visitors and types of public use within the park which can be accommodated in accordance with the protection of its resources; (3) the location and estimated cost of facilities deemed necessary to accommodate such visitors and uses; and (4) a statement setting forth the actions which have been and should be taken to assure appropriate protection, interpretation, and management of the areas known as Big Oak Island and Couba Island.

SEC. 909. The area described in the Act of October 9, 1962 (76 Stat. 755), as the “Chalmette National Historical Park” is hereby redesignated as the Chalmette Unit of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park. Any references to the Chalmette National Historical Park shall be deemed to be references to said Chalmette Unit.

SEC. 910. By no later than the end of the first full fiscal year following the date of enactment of this section, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate, a comprehensive report with recommendations as to sites within the Mississippi River Delta Region which constitute nationally significant examples of natural resources within that region.

Public Law 96-87, October 12, 1979

TITLE IV

SEC. 401. The National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978, approved November 10, 1978 (92 Stat. 3467), is amended as follows:

(q) Title IX, re: Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, is amended—

- (1) in section 902(a) by changing “eight thousand acres” in the first sentence to “eight thousand six hundred acres”;
- (2) in section 904 by changing “section 7” in the first sentence to “section 907”;
- (3) in section 907(a) by striking the word

“and” at the end of the clause numbered (6), changing the period at the end of the clause numbered (7) to “; and”, and adding at the end thereof the following: “(8) two members appointed by the Secretary from recommendations submitted by the Police Jury of Saint Bernard Parish.”; and

(4) in section 907(e) by inserting the following sentence at the end thereof: “The Commission shall terminate ten years from the date of approval of this Act.”.

Public Law 100-250, February 16, 1988

An Act to amend the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978, as amended, to extend the term of the Delta Region Preservation Commission, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That title IX of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978, as amended (16 U.S.C. 230), is further amended as follows:

- (a) In section 901 by adding the following new phrase and renumbering subsequent phrases accordingly:
“(4) folk life centers to be established in the Acadian region;”
- (b) In section 902 by adding the following new subsection:
“(g) The Secretary is authorized to acquire lands or interest in lands by donation, purchase with donated or appropriated funds or exchange, not to exceed approximately 20 acres, in Acadian villages and towns. Any lands so acquired shall be developed, maintained and operated as part of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park.”.
- (c) In section 907(e) by striking out “ten years” and inserting in lieu thereof “twenty years”.

Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, P.L. 111-11, March 30, 2009

SEC. 7105. JEAN LAFITTE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK AND PRESERVE BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 901 of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. 230) is amended in the second sentence by striking “of approximately twenty thousand acres generally depicted on the map entitled ‘Barataria Marsh Unit-Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve’ numbered 90,000B and dated April 1978,” and inserting “generally depicted on the map entitled ‘Boundary Map, Barataria Preserve Unit, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve’, numbered 467/80100A, and dated December 2007,”.

(b) ACQUISITION OF LAND.—Section 902 of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. 230a) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)—(A) by striking “(a) Within the” and all that follows through the first sentence and inserting the following:

“(a) IN GENERAL.—

“(1) BARATARIA PRESERVE UNIT.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may acquire any land, water, and interests in land and water within the Barataria Preserve Unit by donation, purchase with donated or appropriated funds,

transfer from any other Federal agency, or exchange.

“(B) LIMITATIONS.—

“(i) IN GENERAL.—Any non-Federal land depicted on the map described in section 901 as ‘Lands Proposed for Addition’ may be acquired by the Secretary only with the consent of the owner of the land.

“(ii) BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT.—On the date on which the Secretary acquires a parcel of land described in clause (i), the boundary of the Barataria Preserve Unit shall be adjusted to reflect the acquisition.

“(iii) EASEMENTS.—To ensure adequate hurricane protection of the communities located in the area, any land identified on the map described in section 901 that is acquired or transferred shall be subject to any easements that have been agreed to by the Secretary and the Secretary of the Army.

“(C) TRANSFER OF ADMINISTRATION JURISDICTION.—Effective on the date of enactment of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, administrative jurisdiction over any Federal land within

the areas depicted on the map described in section 901 as ‘Lands Proposed for Addition’ is transferred, without consideration, to the administrative jurisdiction of the National Park Service, to be administered as part of the Barataria Preserve Unit.”;

(B) in the second sentence, by striking “The Secretary may also acquire by any of the foregoing methods” and inserting the following:

“(2) FRENCH QUARTER.—The Secretary may acquire by any of the methods referred to in paragraph (1)(A)”;

(C) in the third sentence, by striking “Lands, waters, and interests therein” and inserting the following:

“(3) ACQUISITION OF STATE LAND.—Land, water, and interests in land and water”; and (D) in the fourth sentence, by striking “In acquiring” and inserting the following:

“(4) ACQUISITION OF OIL AND GAS RIGHTS.—In acquiring”; (2) by striking subsections (b) through (f) and inserting the following: “(b) RESOURCE PROTECTION.—With respect to the land, water, and interests in land and water of the Barataria Preserve Unit, the Secretary shall preserve and protect—

“(1) fresh water drainage patterns;

“(2) vegetative cover;

“(3) the integrity of ecological and biological systems; and

“(4) water and air quality.

“(c) ADJACENT LAND.—With the consent of the owner and the parish governing authority, the Secretary may—“(1) acquire land, water, and interests in land and water, by any of the methods referred to in subsection (a)(1)(A) (including use of appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund); and

“(2) revise the boundaries of the Barataria Preserve Unit to include adjacent land and water.”; and

(3) by redesignating subsection (g) as subsection (d).

(c) DEFINITION OF IMPROVED PROPERTY.—Section 903 of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. 230b) is amended in the fifth sentence by inserting “(or January 1, 2007, for areas added to the park after that date)” after “January 1, 1977”.

(d) HUNTING, FISHING, AND TRAPPING.—Section 905 of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. 230d) is amended in the first sentence by striking “, except that within the core area and on those lands acquired by the Secretary pursuant to section 902(c) of this title, he” and inserting “on land, and interests in land and water managed by the Secretary, except that the Secretary”.

(e) ADMINISTRATION.—Section 906 of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. 230e) is amended—

(1) by striking the first sentence; and

(2) in the second sentence, by striking “Pending such establishment and thereafter the” and inserting “The”.

(f) REFERENCES IN LAW.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Any reference in a law (including regulations), map, document, paper, or other record of the United States— (A) to the Barataria Marsh Unit shall be considered to be a reference to the Barataria Preserve Unit; or (B) to the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park shall be considered to be a reference to the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.

(2) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Title IX of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. 230 et seq.) is amended—(A) by striking “Barataria Marsh Unit” each place it appears and inserting “Barataria Preserve Unit”; and (B) by striking “Jean Lafitte National Historical Park” each place it appears and inserting “Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve”.

Appendix B: Timeline of Notable Events

1718	The French found the city of New Orleans.	April 9, 1865	Confederate Army of Northern Virginia surrenders, effectively ending the Civil War.
November 13, 1762	France cedes the Louisiana Territory to Spain.	1870s	Fazendeville village established on part of the field of the Battle of New Orleans.
1791-1804	Revolution in Saint Domingue, culminating in proclamation of Republic of Haiti.	March 4, 1907	Chalmette Monument and Grounds established by Congress.
1800	The secret Treaty of San Ildefonso returns the Louisiana Territory to France.	March 1909	United States Daughters of 1812 accept keys to Chalmette Monument.
1803	The United States purchases the Louisiana Territory from France	January 8, 1915	Chalmette Monument officially dedicated during centennial of Battle of New Orleans
April 30, 1812	Louisiana admitted as the 18th state of the United States.	June 1930	War Department assumes responsibility for Chalmette Monument.
June 18, 1812	The United States declares war on Great Britain, starting the War of 1812.	August 1933	Chalmette Monument transferred from War Department to the National Park Service.
January 8, 1815	Battle of New Orleans.		
1833 circa	Malus-Beauregard house built.	August 10, 1939	Public Law 368 signed establishing Chalmette National Historical Park, including Chalmette Monument tract and Chalmette National Cemetery.
1855	Construction of Chalmette Monument begins.		
April 12, 1861	Civil War begins with firing on Fort Sumter.	June 30, 1945	Chalmette National Cemetery is closed to burials.
1864	Chalmette National Cemetery established.		

February 1946	The Secretary of the Interior approves tentative boundary for Chalmette National Historical Park, encompassing 242 acres.	September 9-10, 1965	Hurricane Betsy does considerable damage to Chalmette National Historical Park and inundates most of St. Bernard Parish.
February 1951	Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corporation purchases 273 acres of Chalmette battlefield.	July 2, 1966	Louisiana legislature establishes Jean Lafitte State Park, but without funding.
Early 1952	Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corporation purchases 66 acres between the Chalmette Monument and Chalmette National Cemetery.	December 1973	NPS releases suitability/feasibility study for a Jean Lafitte park.
March 20, 1958	The Secretary of the Interior approves new boundary for Chalmette National Historical Park.	November 10, 1978	National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-625) establishes Jean Lafitte National Historical Park & Preserve.
May 18, 1958	Dedication of Chalmette visitor center in the restored Malus-Beauregard House.	October 12, 1979	Public Law 96-87 increases core area of Barataria unit to 8,700 acres from 8,000 acres.
April 1959	Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corporation announces decision to donate 66 acres of battlefield in installments.	November 19, 1979	First meeting of Delta Region Preservation Commission.
October 9, 1962	Public Law 87-759 enacted, establishing the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission and authorizing federal purchase of Fazendeville properties.	October 10, 1980	French Quarter visitor contact station opens at 525 St. Ann St. in Lower Pontalba Building.
		October 25, 1981	Isleños Museum in St. Bernard Parish opens.
		April 21, 1982	JELA's general management plan approved.
Fall 1964	Last residents of Fazendeville leave.		
January 1-8, 1965	New Orleans celebrates the sesquicentennial of the Battle of New Orleans.	May 1983	JELA's interpretive prospectus approved.

May 12- November 11, 1984	JELA maintains an NPS exhibit and assists with Louisiana Folklife Pavilion at Louisiana World Exposition.	November 21, 1992	Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center in Thibodaux opens.
July 1985	Temporary French Quarter contact station in cart at Decatur and Dumaine Streets opens.	March 26, 1993	American-Italian Renaissance Center in New Orleans rededicated with NPS-provided exhibits.
April 1986	Visitor centers at Chalmette Unit and Barataria Unit open.	March 1994	Acadian Cultural Center in Lafayette opens.
October 1986	French Quarter Visitor and Folklife Center in French Market opens.	April 1994	JELA rangers provide interpretation on the newly extended run of Amtrak's Sunset Limited, predecessor to the national Trails & Rails program.
September 28, 1986	First event, un Bal de Maison, held at re-opened Liberty Theatre in Eunice.	October 31, 1994	Public Law 103-433 establishes New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park.
December 4, 1986	Barataria Visitor Center is officially dedicated.	November 2, 1994	Public Law 103-449 establishes Cane River Creole National Historical Park and National Heritage Area in Louisiana. The same law creates the Lower Mississippi Delta Region Initiative.
June 1987	Regular Saturday night show, <i>Le Rendez-vous des Cajuns</i> , begins at Liberty Theatre.	October 1, 1995	Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve moves from NPS Southwest Region to NPS Southeast Region.
February 16, 1988	Public Law 100-250 authorizes NPS to purchase land for Acadian Cultural Centers.	January 1997	Laura C. Hudson Visitor Center at 419 Decatur Street is dedicated.
January 13, 1989	NPS purchases 419 Decatur Street as park headquarters and French Quarter Visitor Center.	April 1998	African-Americans: From Slavery to Contemporary Times conference, sponsored by park.
October 4-6, 1991	Park is co-host for Louisiana Folklife Festival in Eunice.		
October 5, 1991	Prairie Acadian Cultural Center in Eunice opens.		
October 5, 1991	Groundbreaking ceremony for Environmental Education Center in Barataria Unit.		

Appendix B

October 21, 1998	Delta Region Preservation Commission holds its final meeting.
June 1999	German American Cultural Center opens in Gretna with NPS-provided exhibits.
December 8, 1999	Laura C. Hudson Visitor Center opens in 419 Decatur Street complex.
December 20, 2003	Park participates in ceremonies marking bicentennial of the transfer of Lower Louisiana from France to the United States.
August 29, 2005	Hurricane Katrina strikes Southern Louisiana.
September 24, 2005	Hurricane Rita strikes Southern Louisiana.
October 2005	French Quarter visitor center reopens following Katrina.
September 17, 2006	Chalmette Battlefield grounds reopen after a temporary opening for the battle anniversary in January 2006.
October 12, 2006	Public Law 109-338 creates the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area.
March 3, 2009	Star-Spangled Banner and War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission Act (Senate 518) introduced (not enacted as of this writing).

Appendix C: Superintendents and Delta Region Preservation Commission Members

Chalmette National Cemetery Superintendents¹

Captain Charles Barnard	April 21, 1867	May 1868
Gerald Fitzgerald	June 1, 1868	July 1870
George B. Craft	October 25, 1870	March 1871
P. P. Carroll	April 1, 1871	~1875
William B. Shockley	December 3, 1878	?
J. A. Cummerford	?	October 1878
Edwin M. Main	October 28, 1886	June 1, 1905
G. P. Thornton	June 1, 1905	?
Fred A. Cimeran	?	?
John W. Shiffler	December 26, 1924	1930s
Floyd Wilcox	?	October 1, 1939

Chalmette Monument & Grounds Under the Daughters of 1812

Louis Bollinger	Caretaker	?	?
Alexander Latil	Caretaker	?	?
Marcel H. Serpas	Caretaker	June 1915	June 1930

Chalmette Monument & Grounds Under the War Department

Marcel H. Serpas	Caretaker	June 1930	September 1932
Frank Godwin	Caretaker	November 1, 1932	August 1933

Chalmette Monument & Grounds Under the National Park Service

Frank Godwin	Caretaker	August 1933	October 1, 1939
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Chalmette National Historical Park²

Frank Godwin	Caretaker	August 10, 1939	June 14, 1942
Olaf T. Hagen	Superintendent	June 15, 1942	February 28, 1942
Olaf T. Hagen	Custodian	March 1, 1942	June 4, 1943
Clarence L. Johnson	Custodian	July 1, 1944	December 10, 1949
Russell A. Gibbs	Superintendent	December 11, 1949	March 25, 1954
Lyle K. Linch	Superintendent	July 18, 1954	September 12, 1964

-
- Both Jerome Greene for his Chalmette Historic Resource Study and Kevin Risk for his Chalmette Cultural Landscape Report did research in War Department records concerning Chalmette National Cemetery. Neither included a list of cemetery superintendents in their published studies. Research in War Department records to establish a complete list of cemetery superintendents was beyond the scope of the current administrative history.
 - The Superintendent of Vicksburg National Military Park served as coordinating superintendent of Chalmette from October 1, 1939, until April 3, 1943

Courtland T. Reid	Superintendent	September 20, 1964	July 3, 1965
Robert R. Jacobsen	Superintendent	August 29, 1965	February 25, 1967
Arthur Hehr	Superintendent	May 7, 1967	July 20, 1974
Lionel J. Bienvenu	Superintendent	August 4, 1967	November 9, 1978

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve Superintendents

James L. Isenogle	January 16, 1979	August 29, 1987
M. Ann Belkov	November 8, 1987	December 15, 1990
Robert Belous	February 10, 1991	June 8, 1996
Geraldine Smith	June 9, 1996	January 3, 2006
David Luchsinger	September 14, 2006	July 4, 2009
Carol A. Clark	December 20, 2009	

Delta Region Preservation Commission Members

Dr. Frederick W. "Fritz" Wagner, Chairman
 Frank J. Ehret Junior, Vice-Chairman

Linda Adams	Barry Kohl
Barry Jean Ancelet	Roy P. Liner
Victor Barbe	Chris Lochbaum
Michael Bourgeois	Anthony Majoria
Cornelia Carrier	Joseph J. Martina
Celestine Cook	Donna Mumfrey
Timothy P. Coulon	Mercedes S. Munster
LeRoy E. Demarest	Rev. Paul Radke
David Doucet	Diane Ribando
D. David Duplantis	Jeannette R. Richard
Lida Durant	Sidney Rosenthal Junior
Charles J. Eagan Junior	Dale Ross
John A. Eckerle	Dr. John Scott
Robert Evans Junior	Dr. Nicholas Spitzer
Douglas Evry	Fred Stielow
Frank Fernandez	Joseph A. Temento
Charlotte Fremaux	John Uhl
Barbara Galiano	Edgar F. Veillon
Charles Gerrets III	Miriam Walmsley
Randolph Gros	Betty Wisdom

Dr. John Hasse
 Mrs. Robert Kerrigan

JELA superintendents and, occasionally, other NPS officials were ex-officio members of the DRPC.

Appendix D: Park Visitation

Chalmette National Historical Park

Year	Recreational Visitors
------	-----------------------

1937	2,378
1938	15,592
1939	24,948
1940	37,921
1941	25,634
1942	32,931
1943	53,438
1944	43,065
1945	36,161
1946	70,042
1947	49,753
1948	56,695
1949	53,619
1950	55,405
1951	57,475
1952	59,655
1953	61,897
1954	52,700
1955	53,500
1956	121,800
1957	133,000
1958	220,300
1959	354,500
1960	473,400
1961	417,600
1962	378,100
1963	518,300
1964	555,400
1965	270,600
1966	131,800

1967	167,900
1968	205,500
1969	191,800
1970	264,300
1971	260,300
1972	354,364
1973	200,300
1974	204,800
1975	259,000
1976	269,600
1977	291,200
1978	294,900

The dramatic increase in visitation beginning in 1956 came soon after the arrival of Superintendent Lyle Linch. A subsequent superintendent, Robert Jacobsen, was suspicious of the recorded visitation. He could find no documentation of Linch's numbers and no evidence that Linch followed NPS procedures for tracking visitation. Jacobsen concluded that Linch's numbers were two to three times actual visitation, Superintendent Jacobsen to Director, December 8, 1965, JELA uncatalogued archives.

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park & Preserve

Year	Recreational Visitors
------	-----------------------

1979	193,121
1980	271,217
1981	375,883
1982	377,209
1983	535,196
1984	849,004
1985	713,850
1986	838,881
1987	1,017,670
1988	1,023,819
1989	1,025,164

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1990	948,471
1991	875,411
1992	913,478
1993	957,336
1994	903,955
1995	943,504
1996	849,136
1997	852,674
1998	835,521
1999	874,754
2000	878,759
2001	923,604
2002	699,680
2003	631,942
2004	595,128
2005	429,267
2006	264,680
2007	303,373

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