

Saint Augustine Historical Society

The *Badin-Roque* House, itself an amazing architectural anachronism, was always a repository for the history of the community. In the 1920s and 1930s, it was occupied by old people: Zeline Badin Roque, Juliette St. Ville, Joe Roque, and Choucouroute. Creoles visited these people at that place, particularly Creole children, for a variety of reasons, and almost all the contemporary older people have stories about it and the people living there. Not an isolated place, it stood in the line of structures strung along the crest of the natural levee, along the road that would eventually become Louisiana Highway 484. It was a special place, with special people in it. As late as the early 1960s, the house was still occupied, with no electricity; a woodburning stove had replaced the fireplace cooking, but little else seemed to change. There, sitting on the front gallery, stood a *pile et pilon*, a log mortar and pestle (Figure 31). Old tools lay scattered about; even the doorsill was a flattened wagon tire. The old man who lived there was loquacious and told stories, recited poems. It is rumored (Mills 1977) that Zeline was Lyle Saxon's main informant for the ethnographic detail he wove into the novel *Children of Strangers*. Certainly, many events described in that novel were archaic at the time it was written, taken from the memory of some older people. Certainly, contemporary Creole elders use *Badin-Roque* as a referent to the past, and it works its way in many

conversations. When the last owner, Wood Antee, swapped the old kitchen house to a local tourism developer, Dr. Lum Ellis, for a new shed, it mobilized the community. St. Augustine Historical Society organized, and one of its first acts was to purchase the house and a lot.

Like the painting of *Augustin Metoyer* that hangs in the church, St. Augustine Church, built originally in 1803 at his request, the house at *Badin-Roque* is an overt symbol in people's minds of who and how they are Creole.

Even before they lost the kitchen house, they had lost the house of Madame *Aubin Roque*, before that, the painting of *Grandpère Augustin*, and before it all, Melrose Plantation had passed into non-Creole hands. Gone were Marie *Thérèse Coin-Coin's* house there (she may have lived in Yucca House, according to local tradition, at some point) and her son Louis's architectural contributions. Mrs. Cammie Henry, fascinated by what she found in Creole hands, began collecting, and the furnishings at Melrose were pulled together from all over the Creole community. Her role as a preservationist is appreciated by many, but Creole feelings towards her are ambivalent. Many point out that she managed to glean items from people that might not have understood their value to the community. The feeling that she took advantage of people's needs runs deep. Even now, if some older objects have disappeared, Creoles will say they may "be at Melrose."

Craft maintenance, then, at Isle Brevelle is often linked to the preservation and maintenance of the Creole culture.¹

1. We Know Who We Are: . . . by H. F. Gregory and J. Moran
pp. 126-127