



Oakland Plantation Big House Historic Structure Report



PLEASE RETURN TO:

TECHNICAL INFORMATION CENTER
DENVER SERVICE CENTER
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Cultural Resources
Southeast Region





IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Southeast Regional Office
Atlanta Federal Center
1924 Building
100 Alabama St., S.W.
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

H3017

June 15, 2004

Dear Colleague:

In accordance with the National Park Service "Guidelines for the Management of Cultural Resources," we are pleased to provide you with copies of three Historic Structure Reports for buildings at Cane River Creole National Historical Park: the Big House at Oakland Plantation, Prud'homme's Store, and the Gin Barn at Magnolia Plantation. These reports are part of our ongoing effort to provide comprehensive documentation and management guidelines for the cultural resources of National Park Service units in the Southeast Region.

These Historic Structure Reports were prepared by the Southeast Region's Division of Cultural Resources, Historic Architecture Branch, but reflect and incorporate the work of many others who have conducted critical historical research and building investigation on these buildings over the last decade. We hope this information will prove valuable to those interested in the historic architecture of Oakland and Magnolia plantations.

Sincerely,

Dan Scheidt
Chief, Cultural Resources Division

Enclosures

CANE RIVER CREOLE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
OAKLAND PLANTATION

~ BIG HOUSE ~

HISTORIC
STRUCTURE
REPORT

Cultural Resources, Southeast Region
National Park Service

2004



**Cultural Resources
Southeast Region
National Park Service
100 Alabama St. SW
Atlanta, GA 30303
(404) 562-3117**

2004
Historic Structure Report
Big House at Oakland Plantation
Cane River Creole National Historical Park
Natchez, Louisiana
LCS#: 91620

Cover photograph: The Prud'hommes' Big House, c. 1930 (Prud'homme Family Collection)

The historic structure report presented here exists in two formats. A traditional, printed version is available for study at the park, the Southeastern Regional Office of the NPS (SERO), and at a variety of other repositories. For more widespread access, the historic structure report also exists in a web-based format through ParkNet, the website of the National Park Service. Please visit www.nps.gov for more information.

Oakland Plantation Big House

Historic Structure Report

Recommended by: J. Anthony Padden 8-28-02
Acting Chief, Cultural Resources Stewardship, Date
Southeast Regional Office

Approved by: Jana Bates 9/5/02
Superintendent, Date
Cane River National Historical Park

Concurred by: John Belfer 10-15-02
Regional Director, Southeast Region Date



Table of Contents

Foreword		xxi
MANAGEMENT SUMMARY		
Executive Summary		1
Site	4	
Foundation	4	
Framing	4	
Roof, gutters, downspouts	4	
Windows	5	
Doors	5	
Shutters	5	
Galleries	5	
Wood Siding and Trim	5	
Interior	5	
Electrical	5	
Plumbing	6	
HVAC	6	
Handicapped Accessibility	6	
Administrative Data		7
Location Data	7	
Related Studies	7	
Cultural Resource Data	8	
PART 1 DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY		
Historical Background & Context		13
Bermuda Plantation	16	
The Civil War	22	
Reconstruction	27	
Oakland Plantation	31	
Chronology of Development & Use		43
Original Construction, 1818 - 1821	44	
Antebellum Additions and Alterations, 1825 - 1860	46	
Reconstruction-Era Additions and Alterations, 1865 - c. 1880	51	
Alterations Prior to World War I	54	
Additions and Alterations after World War II	56	
NPS Stabilization, 1998-2000	60	

Physical Description

67

Historic Character	68
Associated Site Features	68
Foundation	69
Structural System	71
Exterior	72
Interior	79
Mammy's Room (101)	82
Museum (102)	83
Store Room (103)	85
Cooling Room (104)	85
Wine Cellar (105)	87
Gas Room (106)	88
Dressing Room (201)	89
Bedroom (202)	91
Bathroom (203)	94
Closet (204)	95
Bedroom (205)	96
Parlor (206)	98
Office (207)	99
Hall (208)	102
Bedroom (209)	104
Dining Room (210)	106
Stranger's Room (211)	108
Breakfast Room (212)	110
Bathroom (213)	111
Kitchen (214A)	112
Sitting Area (214B)	114
Pantry (215)	115
Wash Room (216)	115
Hall (217)	118
Utility Systems	119

PART 2 TREATMENT & USE

Introduction	125
Ultimate Treatment & Use	127
Requirements for Treatment & Use	129
Recommendations for Treatment & Use	133
Alternatives for Treatment & Use	151

REFERENCE

Sources of Information	157
Primary Sources	157
Secondary Sources	159

APPENDIX A

HABS Drawings	161
---------------	-----

APPENDIX B

Materials Analysis	187
--------------------	-----

List of Figures

- 1** Detail from Walmsley's plat of vicinity of Bermuda Plantation, 1818. Arrow denotes Section 104, site of the Prud'hommes' Big House. Most of the landowners shown on this plat can be identified in the Federal territorial census of 1810. (Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana) 15
- 2** Portraits of Pierre Emmanuel Prud'homme (1762-1845) and Catherine Lambre Prud'homme (1763-1848), painted in Paris in 1821. (CARI Collection) 17
- 3** Pierre Phanor Prud'homme I (1807-1865), youngest son of Emmanuel and Catherine Lambre Prud'homme. (Prud'homme Family Coll.) 19
- 4** Announcement of death of Phanor Prud'homme in October 1865. (Melrose Scrapbooks, Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana) 28
- 5** Jacques Alphonse Prud'homme I, c. 1890. (Prud'homme Family Coll.) 33
- 6** Phanor Prud'homme II and Marie Laurie Cloutier, c. 1895. (Prud'homme Family Coll.) 34
- 7** Earliest known photograph of Oakland, c. 1910. (Henley Hunter Coll., Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana) 35
- 8** View from front porch of Big House, around 1910. (Henley Hunter Coll., Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana) 36
- 9** View of front porch of Big House, around 1910. (Henley Hunter Coll., Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana) 36
- 10** Phanor and Laure Prud'homme and their son Alphonse II at Oakland, c. 1910. (Melrose Collection, Scrapbook 0071, Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana) 37
- 11** View of living room at Oakland, c. 1990. (Image published in Gross, Daley, & Wieneck's Old Houses) 41
- 12** Reconstructed floor plan of Big House as it was originally constructed, c. 1821. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 44

- 13** Conjectured appearance of the Big House as it was originally constructed, c. 1821. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 45
- 14** Reconstructed floor plan of Big House, c. 1825. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 46
- 15** Reconstructed floor plan of Big House, c. 1835. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 47
- 16** Conjectured appearance of the Big House, c. 1835. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 48
- 17** Reconstructed floor plans, c. 1875. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 50
- 18** Conjectured appearance of the Big House, c. 1875. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 51
- 19** Reconstructed floor plans, c. 1885. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 52
- 20** Conjectured appearance of the Big House, c. 1885. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 53
- 21** Reconstructed floor plans of the Big House, c. 1927. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 55
- 22** Reconstructed floor plans of the Big House, 1948. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 56
- 23** The Big House, c. 1948. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 57
- 24** Floor plans of the Big House, 1953. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 58
- 25** Floor plans of the Big House, 1964. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 59
- 26** The Big House, after 1964. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 60
- 27** View of Oakland Big House from northeast. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 68
- 28** View of south side of old kitchen (c. 1865) off west side of main house. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 68
- 29** View of cistern beneath rear gallery. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 69
- 30** View of cistern beneath kitchen gallery. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 69
- 31** Brick piers on north end of east gallery. Pier at left is from the original house,

- c. 1821; pier at right is from the first expansion of the house, c. 1825. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 70
- 32** Demolished foundation for fireplaces under kitchen wing. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 70
 - 33** Detail of north wall of gas room (106), showing two earliest generations of brick work, both with mortar joints pencilled in white over red. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 71
 - 34** View of timber-framed bousillage construction, whitewashed, visible in stairwell to attic. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 72
 - 35** View to southwest in attic, showing original roof framing. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 72
 - 36** Typical semi-octagonal gutter and round downspouts, which date to early twentieth century. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 73
 - 37** Typical French doors with solid wooden shutters. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 73
 - 38** Typical 12/12, double-hung window with louvered shutters, c. 1835. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 74
 - 39** .Views of earliest type of foundation enclosures, (c. 1870). (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 75
 - 40** View of a somewhat of foundation enclosure. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 75
 - 41** View of the third type of foundation enclosure. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 75
 - 42** View north on front or east gallery. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 76
 - 43** View to northwest on rear gallery, showing intersection with gallery on south side of kitchen wing. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 76
 - 44** Brick stairs to rear gallery, shown here, and similar stairs to the south gallery replaced wooden stairs after World War II. Brick stairs to front gallery date to the nineteenth century. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 77
 - 45** Typical gallery post, balustrades, and flooring. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 77
 - 46** View of typical porch header and column top. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 78
 - 47** View of front porch light fixture. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 78

- 48 Myers pump on rear gallery, still connected to cistern located below. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 79
- 49 Board ceiling, typical of those found in most rooms on the main floor of the house. Paneling detail around chimney breast is typical of that found in 202, 205, 206, and 210, although molding details are different in each room. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 80
- 50 Typical beaded, tongue-and-groove boards used to panel parts or all of walls and ceilings in 202, 204, 207, 209, 215, and 216. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 80
- 51 View of board door at basement level, typical of the oldest doors in the house. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 81
- 52 View of four-panel door from 1880s and, through doorway, typical six-panel door from 1830s. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 81
- 53 Early spring lock on French doors in dining room. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 81
- 54 View southeast in Room 101, showing plumbing lines from bathroom 203. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 82
- 55 View north in Room 101, showing stairs to first floor, which were probably abandoned shortly after the Civil War. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 83
- 56 View to east of north side of "Museum" in 102. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 84
- 57 View to south showing connection between the two sides of Room 102. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 84
- 58 View south in 103. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 85
- 59 View to north in 104, showing door exiting beneath north gallery. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 86
- 60 View to southwest, showing stairs rising to hall on main floor. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 86
- 61 View to northeast in wine cellar. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 87
- 62 View to northwest in wine cellar. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 87
- 63 View of interior of "gas room," 106. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 88
- 64 View west under south gallery, showing door to gas room. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 89

- 65** View to south in dressing room. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 90
- 66** View to north in dressing room. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 90
- 67** View west in master bedroom, showing doors to dressing room. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 92
- 68** View northeast in master bedroom, showing door to dining room. The line of the back wall of the original house can be identified in the change in materials that is visible along the right edge of this opening. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 92
- 69** Top, view of mantle piece in master bedroom; below, view of chimney breast and ceiling paneling. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 93
- 70** View to southwest of bathroom. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 94
- 71** View of bathroom floor. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 95
- 72** View west of closet (204) which was rebuilt in 1953 and originally contained the stairs from the mammy's room in the basement. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 95
- 73** View northwest in front bedroom, one of the least-altered rooms in the house. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 96
- 74** View east in front bedroom. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 96
- 75** View of paneling at chimney breast in front bedroom (205). (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 97
- 76** View south in parlor (206), showing door to front bedroom. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 98
- 77** View west in parlor showing folding doors (c. 1835) to dining room. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 98
- 78** View of electrified kerosene chandelier in parlor. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 99
- 79** View north in Room 207, part of 1820s addition to original house. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 100
- 80** View south in Room 207 showing wall added c. 1880 to create central hall. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 100
- 81** View of French doors in Room 207, which are of a different era from the other

French doors in the house. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 101

- 82** View of mantelpiece in Room 207, one of two antebellum mantles remaining in the house. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 101
- 83** View west of central hall (208), created around 1880 by addition of wall at right. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 102
- 84** View east of hall, with view blocked by temporary partition. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 102
- 85** View of front door, installed as part of 1880s renovation. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 103
- 86** View southwest in bedroom (209), showing closet added in 1950s. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 104
- 87** View west in bedroom (209); door to stranger's room (211), partially visible at right, was added in early 1930s. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 105
- 88** View east in bedroom (209). Mantle is obscured by office equipment. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 105
- 89** View to northeast in dining room. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 106
- 90** View to southeast in dining room. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 107
- 91** View west in dining room. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 107
- 92** View of paneling at chimney breast in dining room. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 108
- 93** View east in stranger's room (Room 211). (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 108
- 94** View southwest in stranger's room, showing window that was closed when sitting area was created at north end of kitchen in 1964. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 109
- 95** View of water-damaged ceiling in stranger's room. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 109
- 96** View north of breakfast room, showing enclosure around attic stairs. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 110
- 97** View south, showing former location of 1920s bathroom. This room reached its present configuration in 1953. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 110
- 98** View of attic stairs where one of the early *bousillage* walls is still visible.

(NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 111

- 99** View west of bathroom created in 1953. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 112
- 100** View of 1920s-era toilet, reused when this bathroom was created in 1953.
112
- 101** View to west in kitchen, with door to west gallery at extreme left and door
to old pantry and old kitchen left of center. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 113
- 102** View to east in kitchen, showing connection to Room 212. (NPS-SERO-CRS,
2001) 113
- 103** View to north in kitchen showing connection to expanded sitting area
created in 1964. 114
- 104** View north of sitting area on north side of kitchen. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 114
- 105** View west of old pantry (215). (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 115
- 106** View east of old kitchen (216), used as a wash room after new kitchen was
built in 1947. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 116
- 107** View south in old kitchen. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 116
- 108** View of southeast corner of old kitchen; paneled inset to left of window may
have contained a water-heating apparatus. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 117
- 109** View of wooden shelf for pots next to kitchen sink. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001)
117
- 110** View of hall from east toward old kitchen. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 118
- 111** View from west toward "new" kitchen. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 118
- 112** Top, view of nineteenth- century kerosene light fixtures and, below early
twentieth- century gas light fixtures, all of which were converted to
electricity in the late 1930s. 119
- 113** Plans of existing basement and main story of house. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001)
121
- 114** Proposed plan of use for Big House. (NPS-SERO-CRS, 2001) 149

Project Team

Project Manager

Danny Scheidt, Historical Architect
Southeast Regional Office
National Park Service

Report Author

Tommy H. Jones, Architectural Historian
Southeast Regional Office
National Park Service

*Document Layout/
Intranet Access*

Jon Buono, Historical Architect
National Park Service
Southeast Regional Office

Program Reviews

Bob Blythe, History
Allen Bohnert, Curatorial & Museum
Services
Danny Scheidt, Historical Architecture
Jon Buono, Historical Architecture
Southeast Regional Office
National Park Service

*Condition Assessment and Building
Investigation*

Ali Miri, Historical Architect
Southeast Regional Office
National Park Service
Randy Conrad, Historical Architect
Denver Service Center
National Park Service
Tommy H. Jones, Architectural Historian
Southeast Regional Office
National Park Service

Materials Analysis

Barbara Yokum, Architectural Conservator
Northeast Cultural Resources Center
National Park Service

Foreword

We are pleased to make available this historic structure report, part of our ongoing effort to provide comprehensive documentation for the historic structures and landscapes of National Park Service units in the Southeast Region. Many individuals and institutions contributed to the successful completion of this work. We would particularly like to thank the staff at Cane River Creole National Historical Park, especially the park's superintendent Laura Soilliere and its facility manager Eric Z. Ford; Mary Lyn Warner at the Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana; and the staff at the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC. We hope that this study will prove valuable to park management and others in understanding and interpreting the historical significance of the Big House at Oakland Plantation.

Dan Scheidt, Chief
Cultural Resources Division
Southeast Regional Office
National Park Service

Executive Summary

Historical Summary: Much of the historical information in this historic structure report is found in documents and photographs compiled by Cane River Creole National Historical Park since 1994. Especially important is the work of Dr. Ann Malone Rose and Carolyn Breedlove, whose research and interpretation of the data has informed the present study in many ways. The park has interviewed numerous family members, who have provided a wide range of details about the house's history, especially during the twentieth century. In addition, the Prud'homme family's papers in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill were searched. These include a variety of documents and photographs pertaining to the Big House and are one of the best sources of information on the Prud'hommes and Oakland Plantation. Numerous documents, books, and other materials at the Cammie G. Henry Research Center of the Watson Memorial Library at Northwestern State University of Louisiana in Natchitoches have been essential to compilation of

Executive Summary

this report. Continuation of research in all these sources is highly recommended.

The Prud'hommes were among the first families to establish themselves at Natchitoches in the first half of the eighteenth century and, by the nineteenth century, had become one of the parish's most prosperous and influential families. They were a large, sprawling clan, so much so that one early- twentieth- century visitor noted that knowing a person is named Prud'homme

means nothing if you don't know which Prud'homme. If you chance to be in this section of the country, and you're not sure of a man's name, just call him Prud'homme, and the chances are that you will hit it.¹

Emmanuel Prud'homme, whose grandparents helped settle Natchitoches in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, established a plantation along the Red River in the 1780s and began acquiring slaves around the same time. By the time Eli Whitney's cotton gin revolutionized Southern agriculture, he had the enslaved manpower necessary to be the first to grow cotton on a large scale west of the Mississippi. Educated and sophisticated, long a leader in the community, Emmanuel Prud'homme witnessed Louisiana's admission to the Union and was a member of the convention that framed the new state's first constitution in 1812.

1. Arthur Babb, "My Sketchbook," May 1, 1927, p. 211, Melrose Collection, Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana.

In 1818, the Prud'hommes began construction of a new house a few hundred feet west of their original residence on the banks of what is now Cane River. The new house, which forms the core of the present Big House at Oakland, was completed in 1821, the same year that they journeyed to France, where they bought furniture and had their portraits painted.

The youngest of the Prud'hommes' six children, Phanor, was born in 1807; and, after being educated in France, he returned to Natchitoches where he married Lise Metoyer and, eventually, assumed control of the plantation the family called Bermuda. Before Lise's untimely death in 1852, they had five children including their eldest son, Jacques Alphonse Prud'homme, born in 1838.

Bermuda Plantation was ravaged during the Federal campaign up the Red River in the spring of 1864, but the Big House escaped virtually unscathed. With Phanor Prud'homme's death in 1865, it was left to his sons Alphonse and Emmanuel to restore the family's plantation. Around 1870, they divided it into two parts, with Alphonse taking the west bank property, which he rechristened Oakland, and Emmanuel taking the east bank, which he named Atahoe.

Like his father and grandfather, Alphonse Prud'homme was a leader in Natchitoches while maintaining one of the region's most prosperous cotton plantations. In the 1870s, he also established a store at Oakland and brought the community its first post office, named Bermuda after his father's old antebellum planta-

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

tion. Like the rest of the South, Oakland's cotton production suffered from the boll weevil in the early 1900s. In spite of that, Prud'homme cotton won gold medals at world's fairs at St. Louis in 1904 and at Jamestown in 1907. The collapse of the cotton economy after World War I, followed by the Great Depression, taxed the resources of the next generation of Prud'hommes; but, as they had done in the 1860s, they adapted, "made do," and brought Oakland into the modern era.

In the years after World War II, a sixth generation of Prud'hommes took over operation of Oakland Plantation. They oversaw the demise of the old plantation system of cotton production as they replaced tenant labor with modern tractors and, ultimately, mechanical cotton pickers. The last of the Prud'hommes' tenant farmers moved away from Oakland around 1960, but even modern equipment and agricultural methods were not enough to keep the plantation profitable by the 1980s. In 1984, the Prud'hommes made the decision to quit farming and auctioned their equipment, bringing an end to almost two centuries of agricultural production by the Prud'hommes on Red River.

Architectural Summary: Physical investigation of the building has revealed much about the evolution of Emmanuel Prud'homme's modest five-room house into the sprawling structure we see today. Ms. Barbara A. Yokum, architectural conservator with the Building Conservation Branch, Northeast Cultural Resources Center, National Park Service (NPS), conducted an extensive analysis of the painted finishes and other materials in the Big House in

1998. Her investigation along with further investigation by Randy Conrad, historical architect at the NPS' Denver Service Center, helped establish the general chronology of the house's historical evolution. Also in 1998, Ali A. Miri, historical architect with the Southeast Regional Office (SERO), NPS, developed a historic structure assessment report on the physical condition of the house. Additional building investigation during the course of the present study has provided new information. This HSR synthesizes the information found in all of these studies.

Long-standing family tradition dates original construction of the Big House to 1818- 1821 and no historical documentation or physical evidence has been found to contradict this tradition. There are also family traditions relating to the subsequent evolution of the building, most of which have been substantially corroborated by further research and/or building investigation. As might be expected with a house of its age and complexity, much remains to be learned, especially about changes in its appearance and use through the antebellum period. What is clear, however, is that each generation of the Prud'homme family has left its mark on the Big House. Now, some 180 years after its original construction, the building's history is richly layered and full of interpretive possibilities that reflect the entire continuum of the Prud'hommes' occupation from 1821 until the last descendants moved out in 1998.

Recommendations: Issues of use have been central to the development of recommendations for treatment, since it is changes in use

that generally dictate most rehabilitative treatment. If the house were used as a place for assembly or for offices, for instance, those uses would require extensive changes and alterations to the building. The proposed use of the house as a museum house is, technically, a change in use; but the impact of that change will be minimal and will not require extensive rehabilitation or the inevitable diminishment of its historic character and integrity.

Site

- Investigate effectiveness of dry wells or restored cisterns in dealing with rainwater runoff from the roof.
- Re-establish positive grade away from house by selective re-grading of the site, especially around the west and northwest sides.

Foundation

- Reconstruct missing pier under Room 214A, tilting pier under Room 212, pier at northeast corner of house, and piers under south gallery of kitchen and elsewhere if necessary.
- Repoint remainder of masonry, avoiding any treatment of north wall of Room 106.
- Repaint paling enclosure around foundation and exposed brick piers; unpainted brickwork on the gallery stairs and on the south, west, and north sides of the foundation should not be painted.

Framing

- Repair framing as necessary, avoiding full replacement of framing members wherever possible.
- Design and install footers, termite shields, and moisture barriers for posts for floor support beams beneath 201, 205, 206, and 210.
- Install clear protective covering over *bousillage* wall along north side of attic stairwell.
- Protect and interpret closet beneath attic stairs.

Roof, gutters, downspouts

- Monitor effectiveness of current roof repairs and how frequently the coating requires renewal.
- If suitable replacements can be found, replace missing ridge shingles.
- Repair metal roofing and flashing; properly prepare both and repaint with appropriate silver-colored paint.
- Reinstate horizontal downspout at west end of kitchen wing.
- Repair existing gutters and downspouts, replacing only those portions that have rusted beyond repair.
- Keep gutters and downspouts painted, including the interior of the gutter trough. Exterior should be painted white; interior of gutter trough should be painted with appropriate rust-inhibitive coating.
- Insure rapid drainage of downspout runoff away from the house.

Windows

- Repair broken glass wherever possible; replace missing glass as necessary.
- Repair or replace window sash at west end of kitchen.
- Retain aluminum awning windows.
- Repair and preserve interior sliding screens.

Doors

- Repair doors as necessary.
- Restore all hardware to good working order.
- Reinstall stored back door and French doors in kitchen (214A).
- Repair and preserve screen doors.

Shutters

- Repair and reinstall original shutters wherever possible.
- Replicate missing shutters.
- Repair all hardware so that shutters are fully operative.
- Wash all existing shutters; then evaluate for repainting.

Galleries

- Repair floor framing as necessary.
- Replace floor boards as necessary, replacing entire boards as has been done on previous occasions.
- Maintain protective coatings on balustrades and posts.

Wood Siding and Trim

- Repair siding and trim at west end of kitchen wing, replacing only what is necessary to create a sound condition.
- Maintain protective coatings on all siding and trim.

Interior

- Clean cypress and pine floors; refinish as necessary.
- Replace vinyl floor covering in kitchen, matching pattern and material of existing covering.
- Repair plaster and woodwork as necessary.
- Clean all painted finishes, using the gentlest means possible.
- Repaint ceiling in stranger's room (211) and elsewhere only as necessary.
- As an aid to interpretation, make exposures of historic paints inside and outside the house.

Electrical

- Install new branch circuit wiring to re-feed historic outlets and to feed any new outlets that are deemed necessary.
- Restore and rewire historic lighting fixtures to working order, replacing missing elements as necessary.
- Recreate the historic meter, fuse boxes and associated wiring on south gallery.
- Install complete fire detection and security system.

Plumbing

- Cap water and waste lines to south bathroom (203).
- Maintain water supply to rear bathroom (213) and maintain toilet and sink for staff use.
- Install dry- pipe fire sprinkler system.

HVAC

- Restore all windows, doors, shutters, and ventilators to good working order.
- Establish program for monitoring of indoor and outdoor temperature, relative and absolute humidity, and precipitation over a cycle of all four seasons.

- Develop interpretive plan and collections list with limitations of building inherent capacity for environmental control in mind.

Handicapped Accessibility

- Install handicapped- accessible lift to original entrance at north gallery.
- Develop special programs to interpret the attic and basement, where handicapped accessibility cannot be readily achieved; develop special programs to interpret the entire house for the visually- impaired.

Administrative Data

Location Data

Building Name: Big House at Oakland Plantation
Building Address: 4386 LA Hwy. 119
Natchez, LA
LCS#: 91620

Related Studies

Ballos, T. *Completion Report - Oakland Plantation Emergency Stabilization, Cane River National Historical Park, Natchitoches, Louisiana*. North East System Support Office, North East Cultural Resources Center, Building Conservation Branch, and Denver Service Center, NPS, 1997.

Breedlove, Carolyn. "Bermuda/Oakland Plantation, 1830- 1880." Unpublished masters thesis, Northwestern State University, 1999.

Lawliss, L., C. Goetcheus, and D. Hasty. *The Cultural Landscape*

Administrative Data

Inventory and Assessment, Cane River Creole National Heritage Area Natchitoches, Louisiana. Southeast Support Office, Atlanta, Georgia, 1997.

List of Classified Structures Team. *Historic Resources Documentation, Cane River National Historical Park*, Southeast Support Office, NPS, Atlanta, Georgia, 1998.

Malone, Ann Patton. "A Draft Response to NPS Focus Questions Relating to the Oakland Oral History Project." 1997.

Malone, Ann Patton. "Oakland Plantation, It's People's Testimony." Draft of report from oral history project, 1998.

Miri, A. A. *Historic Structure Assessment Report: Main House, Oakland Plantation, Cane River National Historical Park, Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana.* Southeast Support Office, NPS, Atlanta, Georgia, 1998.

National Park Service. *Cane River Creole National Historical Park, General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement.* 2001.

Technical Information Center. *Special Resource Study Environmental Assessment - Cane River, Louisiana.* Denver Service Center, NPS, Denver, Colorado, 1993.

Yocum, B. A. *Oakland Plantation: Overseer's House, Store and Post Office, and Manholes Materials Analysis and Physical*

Investigation, Cane River Creole National Historical Park and Heritage Area, Natchitoches, Louisiana. Building Conservation Branch, Northeast Cultural Resources Center, Northeast Field Area, NPS, Lowell, MA, 1998.

Cultural Resource Data

National Register of Historic Places: Jean Pierre Emmanuel Prud'homme Plantation, contributing structure, originally listed 29 August 1979 (upgraded from local to statewide significance 2 August 1989) under Criteria A for association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

National Historic Landmark: Oakland Plantation, 2000, listed for its national significance in the areas of architecture and agriculture.

Periods of Significance: The NHL designation places the architectural period of significance between 1818 and the mid-nineteenth century and extends the agricultural period of significance to 1950. In developing the treatment approach for the park, the park's GMP extends the period of significance to about 1960, thereby eliminating "the potential impacts on structures from removing, altering, or moving them" to an earlier location.

Proposed Treatment: The ultimate treatment of the Big House at Oakland Plantation should be to preserve the building as it exists today while making those changes that are necessary to appropriately interpret the site and to meet

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

the Park's program of use. This approach would include:

- repair and preservation of the building's *existing* features and material;
- rehabilitation of the building's electrical system to comply with modern building and life safety codes;
- rehabilitation of the building's plumbing system;
- adaptations to improve handicapped accessibility to the building while negotiating a plan of compliance alternatives in those instances where full compliance would destroy the building's integrity;
- adaptations to more effectively control the interior climate (temperature and relative humidity) of the building in order to properly preserve the furnishings, decorations, and other interpretive artifacts which will be displayed in the house;
- installation of systems to provide fire-detection and security alarms;
- installation of a fire suppression system to protect the building and its contents from destruction.

Administrative Data



PART 1
DEVELOPMENTAL
HISTORY



Historical Background & Context

The history of the Prud'homme family in Natchitoches Parish begins with Jean Pierre Philippe Prud'homme (1673- 1739) who emigrated from France around 1718 and married Catherine Picard (1705- 1781) in New Orleans about 1725. By the time their first child was born in 1726, they had settled at the newly- established post of Natchitoches on the Red River, where Prud'homme was a trader and merchant. They remained there for the rest of their lives. At least seven children were born to their marriage, including their sixth son, Jean- Baptiste Prud'homme (1735- 1786). Trained as a doctor in France, Jean- Baptiste returned to Natchitoches as *Docteur de Roi* (royal doctor) and set up a hospital at the southwest corner of Jefferson and Toulaine. In 1756, he married Marie Françoise Chevert, but she died in childbirth the following year. In July 1758, he married Marie Josephine Charlotte Henriette Colantin (1738- 1788), with whom he had at least eight children over the next twenty years. Their third child, Jean Pierre Emmanuel Prud'homme (1762- 1845), later founded what would become Oakland Plantation.¹

Historical Background & Context

Natchitoches remained a relatively isolated, sparsely settled area throughout the colonial period; there were still only 740 inhabitants when Louisiana was transferred to Spanish control in 1763. Trading and herding gradually gave way to agriculture, however; and, by the time of the American Revolution, the majority of area residents were engaged in growing indigo and tobacco, the main products for export. Dr. Jean- Baptiste Prud'homme made this transition also, having acquired land as early as 1758 and, by the 1770s, slaves as well.²

In 1782, Dr. Prud'homme's oldest son Emmanuel married Catherine Lambre (1763- 1848), daughter of Jacques and Marie Poissot Lambre, the first of at least three marriages between the two families. In 1789, Dr. Prud'homme's daughter Susanne (1775- 1815) married the Lambres' son Remy (1761- 1815); and in 1791, his son Antoine (1764- 1856) married the Lambres' daughter Marie (1775- 1855). All three of these Prud'homme/Lambre pairings would soon establish neighboring plantations along the Red River a dozen or so miles below Natchitoches, cementing a relationship between the two families that lasted into the twentieth century.

1. "The Prud'homme Family," compiled by Mrs. Lucille K. Prud'homme, Prud'homme Coll. #613, Series 3.1.2, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, pp. 1-2; Sandra Haynie, *Legends of Oakland: The Prud'hommes of Natchitoches Parish* (Shreveport, LA: Sandra Prud'homme Haynie, 2001), pp. 5-9.
2. Anne Patton Malone, "Oakland Plantation, Its People's Testimony," unpublished MSS, National Park Service, 1998, pp. 24-25.

The death of Dr. Prud'homme in 1786 may have provided the impetus for Emmanuel's decision to establish a plantation in the rich bottom lands below Natchitoches; but the first certain proof of his residence there is his listing in the United States territorial census of 1810. It appears likely that long before Congress finally adjudicated the early French land claims in 1812 (the year Louisiana became a state), Emmanuel Prud'homme occupied more than 1,200 acres on both sides of Red River, including the site of today's Oakland Plantation in Section 104, Township 8 North, Range 6 (see Figure 1), adjoining the plantations of his brother-in-law Remy Lambre and his brother Antoine Prud'homme.³

An inheritance from their father was probably the reason that the number of Emmanuel's slaves doubled to thirty-eight by 1795 while that of his brother Antoine's slaves went from only three in 1790 to twenty-six five years later. Only Pierre Metoyer and Emmanuel's brother-in-law Remy Lambre were larger slaveholders in Natchitoches Parish in the last decade before the Louisiana Purchase.⁴ By 1810, Emmanuel Prud'homme owned fifty-three slaves; by 1820, he owned seventy-four and was well on his way to becoming one of Louisiana's most successful planters.⁵

3. Claim # B-1850, American State Papers, Vol. II, p. 717, from copies at Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana; Haynie, *Legends of Oakland*, p. 15.
4. Malone, "Oakland Plantation," p. 29.
5. Malone, "Oakland Plantation," p. 40.

In April 1803, Thomas Jefferson engineered the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France for fifteen million dollars, an act that doubled the size of the United States. In 1811, Congress authorized the admission of Louisiana into the Union, the first of twelve states that would be organized out of the territory. Emmanuel Prud'homme was an early leader in Natchitoches Parish and, as a result, joined Pierre Bossier as the representatives to the constitutional convention in New Orleans in 1811.⁶

The change in jurisdiction of Louisiana from France to Spain and back to France before the territory was finally acquired by the United States in 1803 makes any attempt to document the genesis of these Red River plantations difficult, if not impossible. According to Malone, Emmanuel Prud'homme's residence in the early 1790s was still on a fifty-one-acre tract opposite the post at Natchitoches, a plantation that was thought to be "one of the first settled plantations in the parish" and which he probably inherited from his father, Dr. Jean-Baptiste Prud'homme.⁷ However, Prud'homme family tradition holds that Emmanuel Prud'homme was farming the land on which Oakland would be developed as early as 1785, apparently through some sort of rental agreement with the property's original grantee, Nicholas Rousseau.⁸ Another tradition states that

6. Haynie, p. 17.

7. Malone, "Oakland Plantation," p. 26; Donna Rachal Mills, *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana* (Mills Historical Press, 1985; reprint of original publication, 1890), p. 297.

8. Malone, "Oakland Plantation," pp. 26, 44.

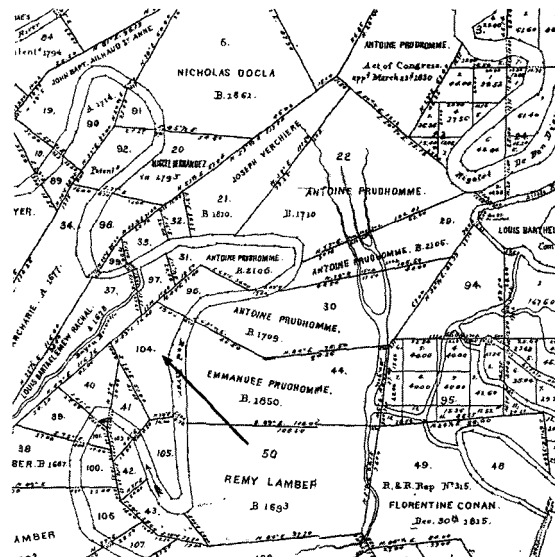


Figure 1 Detail from Walmsley's plat of vicinity of Bermuda Plantation, 1818. Arrow denotes Section 104, site of the Prud'hommes' Big House. Most of the landowners shown on this plat can be identified in the Federal territorial census of 1810. (Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana)

Prud'homme himself was actually granted the land by the Spanish provincial governor Estevan Miro in 1789, although that appears not to have been the case.⁹

The United States' territorial census of 1810 provides the first certain proof of the Prud'hommes' residence on what is now Oakland Plantation.¹⁰ Throughout the eighteenth

9. Alcèe Fortier, ed., "Jacques Alphonse Prud'homme," *Louisiana, Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions, and Persons Arranged in Cyclopedic Form* (Atlanta: Southern Historical Association, 1909), no page numbers.

10. The 1810 census enumeration corresponds almost completely with the names shown on the Walmsley plat (see Figure 1).

century, tobacco and indigo remained the most important agricultural products of Louisiana, with Natchitoches' high-quality tobacco especially prized. By the early 1800s, however, cultivation of short-staple cotton was rapidly replacing that of tobacco and indigo.¹¹ Cotton had been grown in Louisiana as early as the 1730s; but, as elsewhere across the South, the difficulties in ridding the fibers of seed prevented any more than small-scale production for home-spun material. In 1795, accounts of Eli Whitney's revolutionary cotton "engine" spread like wildfire; and in Louisiana and elsewhere, clever entrepreneurs were soon building their own models, precipitating a great boom in cotton production that would transform the face of the South.¹²

A legend that has been "repeated through many generations" in the Prud'homme family holds that, in 1797, Emmanuel Prud'homme was the first to cultivate cotton "on a large scale" west of the Mississippi. For that reason, the earliest (1821) portrait of Emmanuel Prud'homme depicts him with a boll of cotton in his hand, which would remain an apt image for the Prud'hommes throughout the nineteenth century.¹³

11. Malone, "Oakland Plantation," p. 32.

12. Bennett H. Wall, *Louisiana: A History* (Forum Press, 1984, 1990), p. 74.

13. Haynie, *Legends of Oakland*, p. 15; Association of Natchitoches Women for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches, *Natchitoches* (Natchitoches Times, 1958), p. 45; letter from M. H. Carver to Mr. and Mrs. Phanor Prud'homme, 6 September 1914, Prud'homme Coll., Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana.

Bermuda Plantation

The origin of the name of the Prud'homme plantation on Cane River has not been documented; in fact, the name "Bermuda" has not been found in antebellum records. However, according to family tradition, the plantation was originally known as "Bermuda." In correspondence, Phanor Prud'homme I occasionally used "Ile Brevelle," which has led archivists at the University of North Carolina to assume that to be the name of his plantation. However, Ile or Isle Brevelle was apparently named for the Brevelles, early settlers of the area, and was applied to the entire area between Cane River and Old River south of Bayou Brevelle and not specifically to the Prud'hommes' plantation.

After the Civil War, Emmanuel's sons divided their father's old plantation, with the portion on the west bank becoming "Oakland" and that on the east bank "Atahoe." When a post office was established at Oakland in 1877, it took the name "Bermuda." Family tradition is virtually the only source of information about the earliest years of Bermuda Plantation. The family believes, for instance, that Emmanuel Prud'homme built a house on the banks of the Red River (now Cane River) in the late 1790s when he began development of his plantation in earnest. Nothing is known about the Prud'hommes' first house except a vague family tradition of its general location near where the present Big House stands today (see Figure 1).



Figure 2 Portraits of Pierre Emmanuel Prud'homme (1762-1845) and Catherine Lambre Prud'homme (1763-1848), painted in Paris in 1821. (CARI Collection)

According to that tradition, a large pecan tree that stood in the open area just north of the Prud'homme store until after World War II was located in the backyard of the original house.

Emmanuel Prud'homme traveled widely, spending long periods at Hot Springs, Arkansas, where he built a cabin, and making frequent visits to New Orleans. In 1812, Prud'homme was one of Natchitoches' delegates to the convention that framed Louisiana's first constitution. Like many of his contemporaries among the Cane River planters, he built a town house in Natchitoches and, with his frequent travels, may have let the original house at Bermuda fall into disrepair.¹⁴ Frequent flooding and, perhaps, eroding river banks surely threatened the house as well and contributed to

14. Haynie, p. 17.

Prud'homme's decision to build a new house farther back from the river.¹⁵

The traditional date for construction of the Prud'hommes' new house is 1818-1821, with that completion date appearing in historical records as far back as 1909.¹⁶ There is also an old tradition that the Prud'hommes went to France in 1821, had their portraits painted in Paris and acquired furniture that was shipped to New Orleans on the ship *Le Jerome* and, from there, on rafts up the Red River to Bermuda where it arrived in July or August of 1822.¹⁷

By the time their new house was completed, Emmanuel and Catherine Prud'homme were

15. Interview by author with Kenneth Prud'homme, 6 May 2001.

16. Fortier, no page numbers.

17. Association of Natchitoches Women, Natchitoches, p. 45, gives a date of June 1822 for arrival of the furniture. Carver's letter and memorial on the occasion of Alphonse and Elise Prud'homme's 50th wedding anniversary in 1914 gives August 22, 1822, as the date on which the furniture arrived. In 1909, Fortice stated that "all its furnishings" were brought from France but did not give a date.

both in their late 50s and had the house mostly to themselves. Two of their daughters had already died: Henriette, who died at the age of twenty in 1806, and Marie Adele, who had married Jean-Baptiste LeComte in 1814 but died in childbirth the day after Christmas in 1815. The other daughter, Marie Adeline, married her cousin Jean Roquier in 1819; but, by the time her parents moved into their new house, Adeline and her husband had probably already moved to Nantes, France, where they apparently spent the remainder of their lives.¹⁸

Emmanuel and Catherine's oldest sons—Jean-Baptiste and Narcisse—were also married, but they appear to have both been living on nearby plantations that their parents had given them.¹⁹ Jean-Baptiste married Marie Therese Victorie, the daughter of the Prud'hommes' neighbor Jean-Baptiste Ailhaud St. Anne, and they were living across the river to the northeast along Bayou Cadoche. Narcisse married Marie Therese Elizabeth Metoyer, daughter of another Prud'homme neighbor Pierre Metoyer, and Emmanuel presented them with Beau Fort, just north of Oakland, after its original owner died in 1814.²⁰ In the early 1820s, even Emmanuel and Catherine's youngest son, Phanor, may have been away at school in France, where he is believed to have received his education.²¹

18. Emmanuel's oldest sister, Marie Louise, married Jean François Rouquier in 1778 and, around 1800, built what is now known as the Prud'homme-Rouquier House on Jefferson Street in downtown Natchitoches.

19. Malone, "Oakland Plantation," p. 39.

Emmanuel Prud'homme continued to expand Bermuda throughout the 1820s, beginning with an exchange of property with Benjamin Metoyer in 1821 that made Metoyer Point part of the Prud'hommes' plantation. Located just south of Oakland, the property was land that Metoyer's wife Aurore, who was also Emmanuel's niece, inherited from her father Remy Lambre after his death in 1815. Another significant addition to Bermuda came in 1831 when Emmanuel bought the rest of Rachal's plantation, which included land on both sides of the river to the north of Bermuda. He also continued to expand his labor force, bringing the total number of slaves in his possession to 96 by 1830.

By the early 1830s, Phanor Prud'homme was able to take over more and more of the responsibilities of running Bermuda. He was also courting his cousin Susanne Lise Metoyer, daughter of Remy Lambre's daughter Aurore and her husband Benjamin Metoyer. Phanor and Lise were married on January 12, 1835, and spent the remainder of their lives at Bermuda. "A man of culture and refinement,"²² Phanor Prud'homme became a leader in Natchitoches Parish as a young man, serving as a justice of the peace in the 1830s and being appointed a captain in the State Militia in 1842.

20. Beau Fort is only one of several plantations with a connection to the Prud'hommes that survive along Cane River, including Oak Lawn, Cherokee, Cedar Bend and Riverside. See Robert B. DeBlieux, *Cane River Country: "La Côte Joyeuse" and Kisatchie National Forest* (Natchitoches Times, 1993), pp. 13, 14-15, 18, 22.

21. Fortier, no page numbers.

22. Fortier, no page numbers.

