

The Significance of Magnolia Plantation

Magnolia Plantation was the main plantation house of Ambrose LeComte. It was most likely constructed by slaves in the 1830s. The large plantation house was burned in 1864 by the army of Union General Banks as they retreated to Alexandria after the battles of Mansfield and Pleasant Hill. Construction of the plantation house was completed in 1899 in an amalgam of Greek Revival and Italianate.

Magnolia Plantation is set along Cane River Lake amid 10 acres of open flat farmland. The big house is surrounded by several 150-year-old live oaks and magnolia trees. The house itself is approached by means of a gravel driveway set on axis with the central front door.

Although the present plantation house dates from 1899, it partially follows the plan of the house that previously occupied the site. The raised plantation house has one principal floor, under a large pitched roof garret. The five-bay plan has a central hall and double parlors with chimneys set between them. There is also a front gallery and a rear gallery that encompasses not only the house but also a rear wing. The house, traditional in form and plan, is large and plain with square post galleries, transom panel doors, and simple Renaissance Revival mantels. The upstairs walls are entirely sheathed in narrow gauge wainscotting with plain mantels. All doors have four panels and windows are sash

mounted. The 2½-story structure contains 27 rooms and an extensive collection of Southern Empire and Louisiana furniture.

The plantation includes a number of important outbuilding and dependencies, such as an overseer's house,



slave quarters cabins, a plantation store, a corn crib, a blacksmith shop, a pigeonier, and a cotton press-gin building.



The cotton press-gin building contains a rare cotton press and two types of gins. These remnants of a working plantation are invaluable in understanding southern antebellum agricultural practices. The unusually large overseer's house is a hip-roof, raised Acadian cottage, which is almost completely surrounded by square post galleries. This structure served as the family residence after the Civil War to the reconstruction of the large plantation house. Modifications to the overseer's house include the tin roof and the interior, which is much reworked. The transom, doors, windows, and

shutters remain.

Of the original slave dwellings, eight remain in a double row in the southeast portion of the plantation.



These are brick, two-room, galleried houses with central chimneys and gable parapets - unusually high quality construction for slave cabins. Each fireplace has an iron lintel. There has been some deterioration, including the loss of several parapets, chimney tops, windows, and doors. In addition, some gallery roofs have collapsed. The cotton press dates back to ca. 1830 and is one of about five or six

comparable examples in the South. This building also contains 19th century ginning equipment. In addition, the landscape of fields and woodlands surrounding the plantation are intact.¹

1. Cane River Environmental Assessment by the National Park Service