

## Labor at Oakland - 1835-1861

The Bermuda Prudhommes hired Irish work crews in the late 1830's to dig large drainage ditches on both sides of the plantation, 4-6 feet wide, 1 1/2 - 2 feet deep, and more than 2,000 feet long. (Entry for 6 March 1837, 1837 Journal, Vol. 2, UNC)

Evidence from the 1837 journal suggests that the Prudhommes had a sawmill in operation on their Kisatchie. It appears that, throughout the antebellum period, local whites as well as Prudhomme slaves were employed at the sawmill.

Most of the labor performed at Bermuda/Oakland, however was that of the enslaved workers.

Cotton picking records for 1860 have survived for Oakland Plantation. At Oakland, ninety slaves picked cotton during the last full week of August, 1860. The top picker was Andrew, 24, who picked 335 pounds and averaged 248 for the week. With greater dexterity, women were generally the equal of men in picking, and the second highest number of pounds on a single day, 330 pounds, was picked by Rosalie, 47, nearly twice the age of Andrew. Among the top pickers were four women over forty. Output per worker was, on the average, much higher in 1860 than it had been earlier -- which may have been due to a change in seed varieties.

The Prudhomme extended family was somewhat unusual even among Cane River French slaveowners in the degree of economic independence they allowed their slaves. It was not unusual for southern planters to allow slaves to cut wood on their time off

for their owners to sell. Prudhomme slaves produced small crops of their own, both for subsistence and for sale, as well as owning and free-ranging small amounts of their own livestock. These activities allowed some slaves to accumulate some capital with which they started their lives as freed people after the Civil War.

As early as 1837, Phanor Prudhomme I kept an account of corn he sold for his slaves Lindor, Philippe, Gustin, Alexis, *Jacot Zack*, Malingo, Baptiste l'Anglais, Antoine, Gregoire, Charles, Alexandre, Belaire, Louis, Augustin, and others. (see entries for March 6, 14, and pages 1 and 7, month not stated 1837. Prudhomme Journal for 1837, Vol. 2, UNC<sup>1</sup>

1. Oakland Plantation, Its People Testimony by Anne Malone pp. 69-70