

Cane River Creole

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Historical Park
Louisiana



The Cotton Press

Spring 2013

Interpretation Team at Work

Here at Cane River Creole NHP we often consider winter-time to be our “slow” season. However, when reflecting on what we’ve accomplished these past few months, “slow” is hardly the best adjective to describe the efforts of the park’s interpretive division.

November and December saw the premiere of the park’s downtown walking tours. The downtown walking tours came about as a result of a partnership with the Historic District Development Commission. The tour provided visitors with a broad overview of the area’s history from the early 1700s to the present day. Rangers Tim Van Cleave and Jo Ann St. Clair played a key role in the success of these programs. The park hopes to present more of these tours in the future.

Another December highlight was the park’s annual Christmas

Downriver events. Now in its eighth year, Christmas Downriver traditionally features live music and Christmas craft activities. On December 8, blues guitarist Buddy Flett provided the music at Magnolia, and on the following weekend Reverend



Charley’s Patent Medicine Show entertained the crowd at Oakland. Herbalist, Dawn Hendrix was also on hand at Magnolia sharing her knowledge of herbal remedies. Oakland’s event also featured the grand opening of the park’s newly furnished slave/tenant cabin.

Elvin Shields, a park volunteer and former Oakland resident led the effort to furnish one of Oakland’s two remaining cabins. The furnished cabin represents the 1950’s era, when tractors were beginning to replace human labor. Oakland’s cabin is one of the few slave/tenant cabins in the country to be furnished to this period with the help of a former plantation resident.



The park also partnered with the Cane River National Heritage Area in judging the annual Christmas Downriver Lighting Contest. The contest, which has been renamed in the honor of the late Terrel Delphin Jr. recognizes local home light displays. This year’s platinum winner was Natchez resident Obbie Gillie.

We were able to catch our breath for a moment in January before launching into February’s



African American History Month programs. Rangers Jessica Scott and Jean Carter led this outreach effort that saw the park present programs to every Head Start classroom in Natchitoches Parish. This year’s program highlighted African American contributions to Louisiana’s rich musical legacy.

February also saw the park’s participation in the annual Great Backyard Bird Count. Rangers Jo Ann St. Clair, Tim Van Cleave and volunteer Anna Tong counted birds with assistance from the first and second graders from Cloutierville School. Ranger Jo Ann went on to submit the figures to the Great Backyard Bird Count website. Scientists use this information to get the “big picture” about what is happening to bird populations.

As you can see, we remained pretty active during our “slow” period. In next quarter’s newsletter I’ll share with you what happened during the normally “busy” spring months.

-Nathan Hatfield:
Chief of Interpretation

The Archives of Cane River Creole NHP: Making Park Resources Available to the Public

Spring 2013



NPS-CARI was fortunate to receive funding in 2012 and 2013 to conduct a much-needed and long-anticipated archives cataloging project. Archivists, Anna Kephart and Grant Maher of History Associates, Inc. (HAI), began work on an archives project for NPS-CARI in August 2012, which will make the documents, records, and paper-based artifacts of the park available for research. The National Park Service has contracted with HAI in an effort to eliminate a backlog of unprocessed archival materials. Kephart and Maher are processing three distinct collections: Magnolia Plantation Records, Oakland Plantation Records & Prud'homme Family Papers, and CARI Resource Management Records, with the goal of having all three collections open to the public by August 2013. The resource management records will document the activities of NPS staff, as

well as special projects conducted, such as oral history recordings. The two historical collections contain personal and agribusiness records of the Lecomte-Hertzog and Prud'homme families, who owned and operated Magnolia and Oakland Plantations (respectively) for over two hundred years. These records will be a wonderful resource for those interested in researching and learning more about the Cane River region and its rich agricultural

heritage.

Grant Maher came to CARI from North Carolina, where he attended Appalachian State University (ASU) for undergraduate and graduate studies. His graduate program in Public History included coursework in archival studies, historic preservation and national parks. During his studies, he worked for ASU's Special Collections, processing collections and assisting the university archivist in a variety of archival and records management tasks. Prior to working on the NPS-CARI project, he served as a records analysis intern for NPS-Blue Ridge Parkway and a Theodore Roosevelt Center Intern for Dickinson State University. As a public historian, he is very interested in the myriad ways in which records can be used, not only for historic research, but also to preserve Cane River history, document

cultural resource planning and use, contribute to CARI exhibits, and enhance the overall education and interpretive endeavors of CARI staff.

Anna Kephart also came to CARI from North Carolina, where she received her M.S. in Library Science with a concentration in Archives and Records Management from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. While at UNC, she worked at the Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library where she processed collections for the Southern Historical Collection, University Archives, and Southern Folklife Collections. She also worked in the Special Collections and Archives while earning her undergraduate degree from Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, and gained additional experience as a Junior Fellow in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, where she processed the papers of Congressman Jack Kemp, as well as through archival internships at the United States Supreme Court, National Law Enforcement Museum, and University of Maryland, College Park. A native Midwesterner, Anna has been thoroughly enjoying learning about the history and culture of Louisiana and the Cane River region, and working with a fascinating variety of materials from Oakland and Magnolia, which have proven to be a treasure trove of information, covering a wide range of topics and time periods.

-Dustin Fuqua
Chief of Resource Management

So came the cries from the crowds lined up along the streets in the Cane River area yelling for beads, cups, stuffed animals, candies, and assorted trinkets from Krewe float members and participants in the local Mardi Gras activities.

Cane River Creole National Historical Park participated in two area Mardi Gras parades in February 2013. The first event was the Cloutierville Creole Mardi Gras parade routed along Main Street and School House Drive in Cloutierville. The second event was the Dionysus Mardi Gras parade that rolled through the city of Natchitoches.



Junior Rangers. Although celebrating Mardi Gras north of Alexandria, Louisiana is a fairly new tradition to our area, both locals and visitors enjoyed the festive atmosphere of “carnival season”. Cane River Creole National Historical Park is happy to share a few of our photos taken during these two occasions and a short history of Mardi Gras.

While we enjoy the Mardi Gras season it is also important to note the significance of the carnival period and to learn why Mardi Gras is a part of the history of French Catholic Louisianians. Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday, is the last day of Carnival, a season of celebration that begins on January 6. Also known as Epiphany or King’s Day, January 6 is traditionally celebrated as the day the three kings arrived in Bethlehem following the birth of Jesus. Shrove Tuesday or Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday), is the last day of the Carnival season,

and always falls on the Tuesday that is 46 days before Easter. It is the day before Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent which is a period of penitence and fasting in the Catholic Faith.

North America’s first Mardi Gras was celebrated in 1699 by a party of Frenchmen led by brothers, Iberville and Bienville LeMoyné. On March 3, 1699, Mardi Gras of that year, the party camped near present-day New Orleans and had a spontaneous party. They named the site Pointe de Mardi Gras!

Many of Mardi Gras’ traditional “throws”, trinkets such as beads, cups, and doubloons thrown from the Mardi Gras parade floats, may have origins in medieval times. In many parts of Europe, it was customary for the nobility and landed gentry to ride through the countryside tossing coins, round cakes, and other trinkets to waiting peasants before Lent.

Now that you know a little of the history and tradition of Mardi Gras, “Laissez Les Bons Temps Rouler” (Let the Good Times Roll)!

-Jean Carter
Cane River Creole Heritage
Ranger



The variety of spectators along the parade routes for both of these parades echoes the multi-cultural population of our unique region. Our Mardi Gras float held our Krewe of Junior-RangerRex which included staff representatives, park partners and volunteers along with our

Volunteer Spotlight

I’m a retired Med-Tech that likes to travel. Volunteering at National Parks has become my new job. I’ve volunteered from the Red Woods in the west to Cane River in the east and several parks in between. Being able to travel around the US and learn about their history has been very

fulfilling.

I have three grown children. One lives in San Francisco, one lives in Colorado Springs and my oldest lives in Keller, Texas. I like to think they are proud of me for getting out and doing what I love to do.



-Anna Tong
Volunteer

N'Oubliez-Pas (Don't Forget)! The Louisiana French Language in Natchitoches Parish

Spring 2013

While the legacy of the Louisiana French language is well-preserved in the form of historic archives, retention and transmission of its spoken form is severely threatened. In the context of linguistic preservation, status of the Louisiana French language as a whole is not yet technically considered endangered. However, significant cultural maintenance is necessary to ensure reciprocation to subsequent generations. In 2013, amidst urban sprawl, gentrification, and tourism-driven encroachment, the situation in Natchitoches Parish is at a crucial crossroads with regard to preservation and propagation of its linguistic heritage.

It is no secret that Natchitoches Parish flagrantly boasts its status as the earliest French settlement in the LA Purchase Treaty. Such contemporary pride is evident throughout the parish, whereas numerous residents' vehicles sport fleur-de-lis (lily or 7th daughter) stickers while French-themed flags adorn households and municipal locales alike. *Jamais ma vie* (Never in my life), even the trash cans of the City of Natchitoches arrogantly bear the date "1714" in commemoration of its establishment. However, during a trip to Natchitoches Parish, visitors are more apt to be greeted by tourism workers with a strong Anglo "twang" or *Americain* (American or Yankee) accent rather than to experience anything remotely resembling a francophone dialect. *Tonnere m'ecrase* (Thunder crush me), a visitor is more likely to be struck by a firework in the



"City of Lights" than to experience anything resembling authentic Louisiana French culture. *Pense donc* (Think of that! or As if), one may debate the validity of such a statement, yet one cannot refute *la vérité* (the truth) of this point.

The last stronghold of traditional French culture is isolated within the Cane River community in the southern part of Natchitoches Parish. Such is the result of what anthropologists term as cultural diffusion, a process by which traditional culture tends to coalesce and isolate itself in non-threatened geographic areas of similar interests. Factors beginning with statehood in 1812, followed by the Civil War, and subsequently exacerbated by progressive-era US policies led to the decline in retention of traditional francophone culture in Natchitoches Parish. Not only did the parish witness diminished francophone retention, but also beheld decline with regard to American Indian and colonial Spanish cultural traditions as well. The zeal to unite everyone as American, however, came at a price. Between 1916 and 1921, state legislative actions outlawed the use of the Louisiana French language in public schools and

essentially made it illegal to speak *la belle langue* (the beautiful language) in public settings. Corporal punishment and ridicule were used by school administrators to effectively quell the transmission

of Louisiana French from parents to their children. In many cases, parents chose not to pass on their native language in fear that their children would face persecution. It was not until after the Civil Rights movement that use of the traditional languages was again embraced, thereby resulting in a generation gap of traditional cultural practitioners.

Today, according to statistics provided by the LA Creole Heritage Center, there are less than 10 traditional Louisiana French speakers remaining in Natchitoches Parish. The majority of these traditional speakers are *gens de couleur* (people of color) in excess of 80 years old. Such is an extreme case, whereas the median age of native Louisiana French speakers in the Acadiana parishes is approximately 55 years old. Although the legacy of its francophone heritage lives on in tourism venues, place names, foodways, and traditional cultural activities, the Louisiana French language in Natchitoches Parish is perhaps the most-threatened example in the state. Effort is currently being made to develop *La Table Française Aux Natchitoches* (The French Table of Natchitoches) as a means to

preserve, retain, and advance use of the Louisiana French language locally. A French Table is a grassroots movement by which traditional speakers meet weekly or monthly to practice their language skills and keep their cultural traditions alive. NPS-CARI generously provided a meeting

space at the Magnolia Plantation Overseer's House to host the first La Table Française Aux Natchitoches meeting in January. The second monthly meeting is scheduled to take place at Fort St. Jean Baptiste State Historic Site in the City of Natchitoches. Traditionalists, semi-speakers,

students, and heritage enthusiasts with l'envie (desire) alike are invited to attend meetings of La Table Française Aux Natchitoches.

- Dustin Fuqua
Chief of Resource Management

The Green Thumb

Medicinal Tree of Oakland

~Common Name(s): Jujube, Chinese date, Zi-Zi

~Scientific Name: *Ziziphus ziziphus*

~Native to: Asia



As you are approaching the Doctor's House at Oakland Plantation from the north on Hwy 494 you will see lining the perimeter of the pasture a line of juvenile and mature jujube trees. The slightly sweet, small red fruit ripens in summer, to the enjoyment of many park visitors.

The dried fruits made their way from Asia into Europe during the days of Marco Polo, a merchant traveler during the 11th century. The introduced fruits found such favor in Europe, that in time, the term jujube came to apply to any dried sweetmeat and then to candy in general. Though the candies sold at theaters today probably do not contain any actual ingredient of the jujube, their namesake, is from the much revered dried jujube fruit.

Despite its unfamiliarity to Westerners, the jujube is known throughout Southeast Asia and Europe for its medicinal use. All parts of the tree are utilized; roots, bark, heartwood, leaves and fruit as curatives. The list of medicinal uses mentioned below is not comprehensive, the tree has been used by many cultures for millennia, it serves as a brief overview.

The root of the tree is used to promote hair growth and the bark a wash for inflamed eyes. The heartwood is considered a powerful blood tonic. The pits of the fruits when aged are used to treat wounds and

abdominal pain. The leaves are made into a tea to kill parasites and the fruits to cure a plethora of ailments associated with the; lungs, kidneys, back and throat.

The food we ingest either supports or diminishes health; a handful of jujube fruits, like an apple a day, may well keep the doctor away. This tree of many uses is well adapted to Louisiana, is easy to maintain and long lived. If you do not wish to prepare any curatives, the fruit eaten fresh is high in Vitamin C, a know antioxidant.

-Bernadette Cooney
Master Gardener

CARI Creates

Ode to the Bottle Garden

There is much anticipation for spring blooms,
a menagerie of color,
a banquet for the eyes,
a bouquet for the nose,
a scent of heaven.
Busy ground beneath,
Dewey air currents above,
Melodious songs throughout.
Gratitude without boundary,
Wonder without end,
Plants in all their beauty,
Enclosed by bottles of all shapes and colors.

The Gardener

From the Desk of the Superintendent

Spring 2013

Cane River Creole National Historical Park remains a very special unit of the national park system. Living today in the communities surrounding the park - from Natchitoches to Bermuda to Melrose to Derry to Cloutierville - are people integrally connected with this place called Cane River. Their family connections to the lands of Oakland and Magnolia Plantations often go back to the eighteenth century. These people retain a depth of understanding of their family's history, their use of the land, and their cultural traditions. People with the surnames of Prud'homme, LeComte, Hertzog, Metoyer, Shields, Hélaire, Bobb, Solitaire, Williams, Davis, and Wilson are all part of that history, along with hundreds of others. We in the National Park Service learn from them on a daily basis. They have taught us about the importance of family and hard work, they have told us of hard times - and there were more hard times than easy ones.

Bookstore Buzz

The Eastern National store at Cane River Creole National Historical Park had its best year since the park was established with sales totaling over \$ 17, 000. This is roughly a \$ 5,500 increase from FY 11. In conjunction with these totals, the park also saw a 93 % increase in passport book sales; this was the best in the region from May-July; to celebrate our success, Eastern National representatives Becky Burke and Julie Castille hosted a pizza party for interpretive staff members.

Other highlights include hosting a CD release party in May for "Sunpie and the Loui-

They have told us family stories and legends. They have given us a much better understanding of the special resources under our stewardship. And we thank them wholeheartedly.

To highlight that history, two projects have been underway for some time, and they are particularly noteworthy. One is the completion of three large paintings by artist Martin Pate. The paintings will represent scenes of Oakland and Magnolia, and a montage of images from Cane River. The paintings, developed with the participation of a number of Cane River people, will assist us in interpreting the history and cultures of this area to the visiting public.

The second project is perhaps of even greater importance. For the past year the park has been working with staff at the Smithsonian's new Museum of African American History and Culture in developing its exhibits. The park has begun discus-

siana Sunspots" featuring New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park Rangers Bruce Barnes and Matt Hampsey. Their new compact discs entitled "Freedom is Coming" and "Songs of the Lower Mississippi Delta." were just two of the many new items to be sold this year. "Songs for Junior Rangers" rounded out the new musical selections. New books included "The Creole Book", "Main Streets of Louisiana", and "Plantation Homes of Louisiana." New children's books include the Civil War activity book. We had a great year and are very proud of our accomplishments. We look forward to continuing our success in the FY13.

sions with family members, and we will continue with public meetings in the near future, in a community dialogue about the potential long-term loan of some of the artifacts from the park's museum collection to the Smithsonian. Often plantation items used by people of African descent were left behind, repurposed, or forgotten; but here at Cane River we have been fortunate enough to retain one of the greatest collections of those items anywhere in the United States. The national park and the community have an opportunity to showcase some of the items from the collection to thousands of people annually at this new Smithsonian Museum. Hopefully in doing so we can encourage greater visitation to this area to support the local economy and tell the fascinating history of this corner of the world.

-Laura Soullière Gates
CARI Superintendent

When asked what is one of my favorite items in the bookstore? I would have to answer that it might be the *Forgotten People* by Gary Mills or *Louisiana Highway One* by Anne Butler and Henry Cacieene. I really enjoyed reading the story of the Cane River Creoles in Gary Mills' book. Anne Butler's book is enjoyable because the reader gets a glimpse into small towns that Highway One passes through; sometimes it's fun to get off the interstate and take a drive along the old highways.

-Tim Van Cleave
Park Ranger