REPRESENTING SLAVERY AT OAKLAND PLANTATION,

A NATIONAL PARK SERVICE HISTORIC SITE

IN CANE RIVER CREOLE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK, LOUISIANA

by

NELL ZIEHL

(Under the Direction of Ian Firth)

ABSTRACT

This paper provides a framework for slavery interpretation at Oakland Plantation, a National Park Service site that is part of the Cane River Creole National Historical Park in Louisiana. The analysis discusses modes of interpretation; evaluation of primary source material, with an emphasis on historic structures, cultural landscapes, and archaeology; evaluations and recommendations for the use of secondary source material; and interpretive strategies that can be applied to any site dealing with the issue of slavery representation. The paper also includes a discussion of select themes and issues related to slavery interpretation, such as contemporary racism, class oppression, the plantation system in the Southeast, and the historiography of slavery scholarship.

INDEX WORDS: Museum interpretation, Southern history, African-American history, Slavery, Historic preservation, Plantations, Louisiana history

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A.B., Bryn Mawr College, 1997

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2003

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December 2003

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my grandmother, Helen Josephine Bryan, who first piqued my interest in Southern history and race relationships in the Southeast through the history of our family in Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. She is much missed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have completed this work without the support of the faculty and students of the University of Georgia's School of Environmental Design and the advice and assistance of the staff of the Cane River Creole National Historical Park. In particular, I owe many thanks to Ian Firth, whose advice and guidance in this process have been invaluable, and to my committee, Mark Reinberger, Kwesi Degraft-Hanson, and John Beck, for their suggestions and encouragement. I am deeply grateful to all of my friends and family for their thoughts and criticisms, and – especially – for their patience with my occasional Marxist diatribes and explosions over the racist ideologies that still permeate American culture. Finally, I would like to thank my partner Aaron, who risked a great deal to move to Athens and help me pursue my dream of a master's degree in historic preservation. I could not have done it without him.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THESIS INTENT AND ISSUES IN INTERPRETING SLAVERY

Thesis Intent

The history of slavery in the United States has always been fraught with controversy, from those who believed that the institution directly conflicted with the ideals of the Constitution, to those few who escaped enslavement to decry its horrors, to those who despised slavery based on their interpretation of the Christian faith, to those whose livelihood was dependent on slave labor for profit. Because slavery has had such an impact on the social and economic development of this country, and because school curricula often deal with slavery in a perfunctory way, many people – young and old, black and white – rely on historic sites to augment their understanding of this critical period in American history.

The aim of this thesis is to discuss a framework for the interpretation of slavery and slave life at Oakland Plantation, a site located in the United States National Park Service's Cane River Creole National Historical Park near Natchitoches, Louisiana. Designated in 1994, the park is relatively new and lacks a formal interpretive program for slavery. Since the site is part of the National Park Service, it has a federal mandate to provide educational programs to the public, and also has access to greater resources than many plantation museums. Additionally, a few high-quality precedents now exist for aspects of slavery interpretation, and I will draw on these precedents throughout this paper to help construct a "state-of-the-art" model of slavery interpretation.

As part of the discussion of this interpretive program, I will emphasize context (Oakland's relation to the greater economic system of slavery in Louisiana and the United States, as well as the greater socio-cultural background); evaluate sources for understanding slavery, with an emphasis on archaeology, historic structures and landscapes; and investigate progressive models of slavery interpretation, with the recent book *Representations of Slavery* by Eichstedt and Small as a springboard. At Cane River Creole National Historical Park, interpreters benefit from access to written documents, archaeology, extant historic structures and landscapes, and oral histories. This diversity of resources makes Oakland an excellent site for a complex understanding of enslavement in Louisiana and the Southeast.

It is important to note that the slave experience differed from plantation to plantation, and it may not be possible to build a universal model for slavery interpretation. Nonetheless, by documenting the process of building an interpretive program (evaluating source material, documenting the choices made for interpretation, and evaluating the tools and methods used for education), I hope to create a better understanding of the issues involved and thereby facilitate slavery interpretation at other sites in the antebellum Southeast.

Methodology

To facilitate this project, I have undertaken general research on slavery and the preservation of antebellum resources. My evaluation of Oakland began with phone interviews. As part of my research, I reviewed the information and resources regarding slavery that have been gathered for the National Park Service, and worked with park staff to document the process of data collection and interpretation. The documentation regarding slavery at Oakland, described in detail in Chapter III, will address the following aspects, among others:

- slave-related historic resources (structures) that are extant on the property;

- slave-related landscapes that have been discussed, documented and/or are visible;
- preservation and restoration plans for extant historic resources;
- collected data related to slavery (including written records, archaeological findings, oral histories, etc.);
- explanation of how each type of resource can help illuminate the slave experience;
- documentation of which internal (Oakland-specific) materials and resources should be incorporated into an interpretive program;
- documentation of which external materials should be incorporated into an interpretive program;
- possibilities for guided tours and programs that specifically address the slave experience, as well as integrated programs; and
- areas for expansion in an interpretive program and future research directions.

In May 2003, I conducted a site visit to better understand Oakland's structures and landscape, as well as the current state of the interpretive program. Finally, I used the general and site-specific information to build a framework for slavery interpretation and discuss possibilities for a model framework applicable to other sites, taking into account the varying level of resources available at historic sites.

The Importance of Understanding Slavery and the Slave Experience

Preservation of Collective Memory

The most obvious reason to investigate and interpret slave life is for the preservation of collective memory. The ramifications of the system of slavery can still be felt in American racism and the daily challenges, based on race, that are felt by African-Americans in this country. Without an understanding of the crucial role that slavery and its aftermath played in the

development of the United States, modern Americans cannot begin to understand current racial tensions or the reality of exploitative labor systems. Furthermore, as in the case of many Holocaust memorials, a motivating factor for slavery interpretation is the knowledge that the horrors of history should be understood to help prevent their recurrence.

Many authors have noted the difficulties faced by contemporary white and black visitors to historic sites dealing with slavery (Goodheart 2001, Rahier and Hawkins 1999, Schreiber 2000, Thompson 2000). The problem appears to stem from two separate, but related, issues: the desire to view one's ancestors as strong and morally sound, and the perception of an uncomfortable relationship between the plantation system, or at least its interpretation, and current racial conflicts in America. Often whites, particularly white Southerners, do not wish to be reminded of a cruel history of enslavement, and some African-Americans equate slavery, or at least its interpretation, with weakness and degradation, circumstances that are best left in the past (Bankole 1999, 203; Rahier and Hawkins 1999, 217; Thompson 2000). To address this, plantation museums must help visitors engage in the historical narrative without equating themselves with "ancestors" based on racial identifiers. The second part of the problem, the relationship between historical race relations and current race relations, is one reason that the exploration and interpretation of slavery is so critically important. Although there is no universal solution to these problems, in this paper I have suggested ways that museums can address these issues. Regardless of interpretive strategy, we must move toward an understanding that history belongs to everyone, and that the preservation of collective memory (as opposed to an elite white version of history) is a necessary and worthy goal that will help shed light on the situations and tensions we face in contemporary society.

The Role of Plantation Museums

Historic sites offer an educational opportunity that cannot be conveyed through history books: the chance for a tangible, experiential link to the past. Many antebellum plantation resources in the South have been preserved and operate with an educational mission, usually achieved through docent-led interpretation, and many Americans patronize these sites to supplement their understanding of history. In a recent survey of 1500 Americans, researchers Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen found that eighty percent trusted what they learned at historic sites (Rosenzweig and Thelen in Schreiber 2000, 49). Because historic sites are instrumental to our understanding of history, interpretive programs for plantations should explain the nature of the plantation system, which was dependent upon the forced labor of enslaved African and African-American workers, who often comprised more than eighty percent of the population of a farmstead or plantation. Through anecdotal experience, bolstered by the research compiled by Eichstedt and Small in *Representations of Slavery*, it is apparent that there are large discrepancies in how well these facilities meet this challenge.

Publications geared toward historic preservation and history have become increasingly interested in slavery interpretation; as heritage education and heritage tourism becomes more popular, it is necessary to consider the need for scholarly accuracy along with the tourist draw. This issue has become increasingly complicated in the South, where tourist interest in the slave experience is often at odds with interest in "picturesque" notions of the Old South (Eichstedt and Small 2002, Goodheart 2001, Rahier and Hawkins 1999). The challenge for plantation sites is to promote as accurate a portrayal of the antebellum South as possible, while still maintaining tourist interest. Hopefully this paper will provide suggestions for sites struggling with these issues.

Issues in Interpreting Slavery

Throughout this paper, I will address several themes and issues in the discourse surrounding slavery, all of which I believe will help interpreters consider the slave experience in a dynamic way relevant to contemporary life. These themes include the importance of using non-textual data, such as historic resources, for evaluation and interpretation; the socio-cultural context(s) of American slavery; and the relationship of slavery to other exploitative labor systems. Respectively, these themes relate to the *evidence* regarding enslavement and the slave experience; the specific historical *context* of American slavery; and the *interpretation* of slavery as an economic system related to other systems. By examining types of evidence, defining cultural contexts, and evaluating modes of interpretation, plantation museums can more easily help visitors understand American slavery and apply that knowledge to contemporary life.

Using Non-Textual Data

The history of slavery and black and white interaction in the South is complex and difficult to understand, and that understanding has impacted race relations in this region and across the country. Until the 1970s, the discussion of the full range and nature of the relationship was weighted in academia toward the white point of view (and, in some cases, revisionist rationale), for which textual documentation exists. Since the 1970s, the field of African-American studies opened up and many scholars reacted against white-centric views of the slave system. Although much good work has been done in the intervening years, the history of slavery is still overly reliant on source material controlled by or originating from the elite class (see Chapter 2 of this paper for a more in-depth discussion of source materials and the historiography of slavery). Understanding non-textual evidence at historic sites, particularly historic structures,

historic landscapes and archaeology, can help alleviate this problem and move us toward a more balanced perspective.

One major component of any plantation interpretive program should be the inclusion of landscapes and structures related to slavery in the general tour. Unfortunately, many sites focus primarily on the "big house" and have left the buildings related to enslaved workers and the farming enterprise to fall into neglect. I would argue that, without evidence of the plantation complex and its status as a working farm, the house itself has little educational value. In addition to providing historic and archaeological data, outbuildings and landscapes provide a tangible link to the past and can help us access the multi-faceted and still largely unknown lives of African and African-American slaves.

Socio-Cultural Context: Race, Class and Agrarian Enterprise

Within the antebellum South, many different cultural and social influences impacted the practice of enslavement and forced labor on plantation sites. The context of agrarian enterprise dependent on slave labor is common across the region; however, this enterprise was shaped by the interaction of various European and African cultures, and the circumstances of slave and elite life varied accordingly from site to site. In this paper, I will discuss the impact of French and Creole history and culture on the slave experience at Oakland, with a particular emphasis on the role of race and class within the broader system of Southern slavery.

This aspect of interpretation is particularly important to the issue, mentioned earlier, of helping visitors engage in the narrative but not equate themselves with "ancestors" based on racial identifiers. In particular, Louisiana's Franco-American and Franco-African socio-cultural context defines race in a more complex way than the black/white division typically found in the Anglo-American slave states (see Chapter 2 for a more in-depth discussion of this point).

Louisiana's history complicates the story of Southern slavery and illustrates the critical point that race is socially and culturally defined. If conceptions of race in America are critically examined, slavery can be understood, and interpreted, as a case of class exploitation for the benefit of agrarian enterprise.

Two Themes in Slavery Interpretation: the Holocaust Metaphor and Exploitative Labor Systems

Historian Robert Fogel describes two ways in which scholarship on slavery responded to the anti-racist and anti-Fascist sentiments following the Second World War: one metaphor aligned slavery with the extermination of Jews in the Holocaust, and the other connected methods of slave resistance with those practiced by resistance movements under Fascism (Fogel 1989, 154). Although neither metaphor addresses the particular socio-cultural and economic contexts of American slavery, the Holocaust metaphor, in particular, has influenced the ways in which slavery has been interpreted. Fogel credits Eugene Genovese with emphasizing a critical difference between American slavery and the Jewish Holocaust, which was that Africans were enslaved for agricultural labor, and that the need for "passive cooperation" on the part of enslaved workers influenced the degree to which slaveholders could exact their will on captives (Genovese in Fogel 1989, 188-89). This is not to suggest that the Holocaust metaphor is never appropriate, particularly in slave memorials and in monuments to the devastation of the Middle Passage, but, in the case of slavery interpretation at plantation museums, a different model should be employed.

The system of slavery in America is not without historical precedent, although it had characteristic details, such as subjugation based on a formalized, racist ideology, that were particular to the "peculiar institution" and often reflected in its legislation. In practice, American

slavery was an economic system of exploitation associated with colonial imperialism; if interpreted within this historical context, slavery can be made relevant to modern history and contemporary life. One can find a broad spectrum of exploitative labor practices throughout human history; some modern examples could include factory labor as a combined result of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution, the forced labor of prison inmates in the United States and elsewhere, and global corporations' current exploitation of cheap labor in developing nations. In Great Britain, for example, the National Trust's Quarry Bank Mill and Styal Estate museum illustrates, with the aid of a wealth of historic resources, the lives, living conditions and sometimes personalities of children held captive for labor at the mill during the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century (see the Quarry Bank Mill web site for more information). If Southern slavery is perceived as a particular example in a long history of exploitative labor practices employed to benefit wealthy elites, it is possible to make that history relevant to current issues and increase the general public's knowledge of such systems. For all the comparisons that may be made between exploitative systems, however, it is important to note that the critical difference lay in the definition of an American slave as life-long property of another and all that definition implies (Genovese 1974, 49-69).

Modes of Slavery Interpretation Defined by Eichstedt and Small

In *Representations of Slavery*, Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small defined four modes of slavery interpretation at the 150 plantation museum sites they visited in Georgia, Louisiana and Virginia: symbolic annihilation, trivialization and deflection, segregation, and relative incorporation (Eichstedt and Small 2002). Although I will strive to place Oakland Plantation's program beyond the category of relative incorporation, into a framework of balanced interpretation, it is useful to examine the pitfalls of the other interpretive modes.

Symbolic Annihilation

"Symbolic annihilation" dominates slavery interpretation at more than eighty percent of the sites visited by Eichstedt and Small (2002, 108; please note that the categories overlap for some of the sites investigated, depending on different aspects of the full interpretive program for each site). Eichstedt and Small define this method in the following ways (from Eichstedt and Small 2002, 107-08):

- Exclusive focus on the material and social life of the plantocracy, even though these people usually represented a tiny fraction of a given plantation's population
- Absence of any mention, acknowledgement, or discussion of slavery, the enslaved, or African-Americans
- Mention of the enslaved or Blacks in a perfunctory and fleeting way, usually in a throwaway statement of fact, with no details or elaboration and usually little or no context
- Use of euphemisms to refer to the enslaved and slavery, most commonly *servant* and *servitude*
- Use of the passive voice and neutral pronouns to discuss enslaved people's labor and achievements
- Universalizing and ahistorical statements that clearly refer only to (elite) white experience

Although many of these obvious pitfalls will be avoided by a systematic and sustained discussion of slave life at Oakland Plantation, the use of euphemisms, passive voice and neutral pronouns, as well universalizing and ahistorical statements, deserve further examination. By using euphemisms such as *servant* or *servitude*, docents deflect attention from the fact that enslaved persons were in fact enslaved, and therefore denied personal freedoms, including the right to movement and communication, as well as payment for their services (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 130). By using neutral pronouns such as "they" or the passive voice (*e.g.*, "food was cooked here," with no mention of the individual performing the action), interpreters effectively erase the identity and sometimes the very presence of enslaved persons at the site (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 134 and 136).

Universalizing and ahistorical statements often occur when the interpreter attempts to engage the visitor by inviting him/her to identify with the white elite family at the site. For example, on her tours, Professor Eichstedt, a white American, was often told, "If you came to visit, this is where you would sleep, eat, etc.;" on the same tours, Professor Small, who is black and British, was given no such description (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 138). Docents who employ these universalizing statements encourage white visitors to identify with the white elite, which de-emphasizes the fact that the lifestyle of the plantocracy was only available to a very small percentage of the white population (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 137). At the same time, by unifying white visitors with the planter's family across the lines of time and economic class, interpreters place a barrier of race between visitors and uphold the myth of the Old South's romantic heritage as belonging to all whites (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 145). This division of heritage by race is particularly damaging to any discussion of slavery: if white visitors are asked to identify solely with the elite family, the family's enslavement of other humans will reflect negatively on white visitors, and therefore is often a topic left unexplored. Moreover, this approach excludes black visitors from participating in tours in a meaningful way, since black visitors are not asked (and probably would not want) to identify with the elite white family; instead, such a strategy asks black visitors to endure a celebration of slaveholding whites, while the lifestyles and contributions of enslaved African-Americans are marginalized.

Interestingly, Eichstedt and Small link symbolic annihilation to the neglect of physical structures related to slavery, which erodes the tangible reminders of an uncomfortable past. At the Nottoway Plantation in Louisiana, Professor Small encountered a decaying structure defined by employees as "an old slave building," which had no visible access and was obscured by vegetation and full of junk. In examining the building's stark contrast to the well-maintained

plantation house, Small and Eichstedt argue that this neglect "mirrors the lack of verbal and intellectual attention paid to slavery in the rest of the site" (2002, 110).

Trivialization and Deflection

Eichstedt and Small's second category, "trivialization and deflection," appears at twenty-seven percent of the 150 plantation museum sites visited (2002, 148). This interpretative mode employs two strategies: 1) "representing slavery as a possibly benevolent institution… in which details of individual enslaved persons are provided to show that they received favors and rewards from the master-enslaver and that they expressed contentment in slavery"; and 2) "valorizing whiteness through references to good owners or owners' good intentions" and emphasizing the hard work of elite whites on the plantation, thus appropriating the accomplishments and contributions of the enslaved Africans and African-Americans who worked at the site (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 147).

This approach may be compelling for museums that wish to discuss slavery without discomforting their white patrons, especially those museums set up as shrines to the achievements of the "great white men" who lived and worked at the site. Both strategies are typically reliant on historical documents from the planter family (for examples, see Eichstedt and Small 2002, 150, 152). When these documents are utilized without criticism, they uphold the paternalist ideology of many Southern slaveholders by suggesting that slaves were, at best, inconsequential to the success of the plantation and, at worst, unable to care for themselves and in need of white governance. Some sites present slave narratives that contain stories of loyalty to whites and gratefulness to white owners; while important to our understanding of slavery, these stories must be critiqued as well. If a slave or formerly enslaved person told the story to a white recorder, it is possible that the narrative was shaped for white ears (see Eichstedt and Small

2002, 215 for how this issue was addressed at Montpelier, home of James and Dolley Madison). Recognizing that there may have been "feelings of genuine caring between the enslaver and the enslaved," Eichstedt and Small stress that the relationship can only be understood within the context of slavery; they suggest a comparison between these "caring" relationships and those documented between long-term hostages and their kidnappers (2002, 156-57).

As examples for how this interpretative mode plays out in tours, Eichstedt and Small point to stories about the benevolence of white owners, the loyalty of slaves who helped quell insurgencies and rebellions, the care of slaves for their owners, the material comfort of slaves in comparison to poor whites, and the predilection of slaves for theft and laziness (2002, 151-58). On many tours, docents indicate that former slaves continued to work on the plantation as house servants or sharecroppers after Emancipation. While this situation was common, many docents trivialize the experience of slavery by implying that slaves did not stay on out of necessity, but out of loyalty to their owners or satisfaction with their lives (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 156). Many of these stories are imparted through "humorous" anecdotes, further reducing the opportunity for an educational discussion of slavery (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 147). One final strategy of deflection is the discussion of black slaveholders, with the implication that the presence of African-American slaveholders could somehow either legitimize the institution or at least deflect the full burden of enslavement from Euro-American history (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 160-61). Historically black slaveholders were extremely rare and, as Eichstedt and Small contend, should not be incorporated into the interpretive program of most white-owned plantation sites. Nonetheless, the presence of black slaveholders does emphasize the fact that the foundation of American slavery was economics, not racism, although the latter played a significant and devastating ideological role.

Segregated Knowledge

The third category identified by Eichstedt and Small is "segregated knowledge," which describes those sites that segregate information about the slave experience into special focus tours or exhibits (2002, 170-71). Segregated educational programs may deal with the story of slavery particular to that site or address slavery across the state, region or country (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 172). Although this strategy can impart significant information about slavery to visitors, it also may exclude the mainstream tourists from that information. Problems with the model of segregated knowledge include the following:

- Tours and exhibits focussed on the slave experience may not be available during the standard tour schedules, thus discouraging widespread participation (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 172);
- The lack of incorporation of slavery into the standard, non-slavery-focussed tour, as well as the use of "normal" or "regular" to describe standard tours, implies that the slave experience was not essential to the history of the plantation or its operation (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 171-72); and
- Segregated tours offer a means through which a site can downplay the uncomfortable, slave-owning history of famous or heroic persons, such as George Washington (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 179).

Generally, segregated knowledge is better than trivialization or symbolic anniliation. In their discussion of segregated knowledge, Eichstedt and Small highlighted the Carter's Grove slave life tour and the "Other Half" tour at Colonial Williamsburg as particularly effective examples. At Carter's Grove, the reconstructed slave quarters and working areas served as a physical base for the first-person interpretative tour, in which an actor or actress would impart

information about slave life through the emotional and physical trials of a single slave (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 182-89). While first-person interpretations are often quite uncomfortable for visitors, this strategy successfully engages them in understanding the reality of slavery. In addition to storytelling, interpreters asked questions to illustrate the racism and classism inherent in American slave-holding society, and relate that knowledge to contemporary experience. As noted by Eichstedt and Small (2002, 186):

> The guide asked everyone in the group to put a hand in the air, and then to put down our hand if we weren't white and male and didn't own acreage. Only one person on the tour was left with his hand up. The interpreter then asked the rest of us, "Who do you think you had the most in common with? Those who have their hand in the air and could make decisions, or all the other people with their hands down?"

Finally, it is important to note that visitors must pass the reconstructed quarters to join the standard tour of the main house, which encourages greater patronage of the slave life tour (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 182). At Colonial Williamsburg, like Carter's Grove, the guide stressed race and class divisions in seventeenth and eighteenth century societies, with an emphasis on the similar status and living conditions of poor whites and free and enslaved blacks; additionally, she provided detailed information about legislation regarding slaves and the lives of particular slaves to support her points (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 180-82).

Eichstedt and Small estimate that approximately ten to twenty percent of total visitors participate in slave life or black history tours at segregated sites (2002, 199). While this strategy may provide a substantial educational opportunity, it rarely impacts the majority of tourists, who participate in the general tour alone. On the whole, segregated knowledge allows most visitors to experience the site without confronting the uncomfortable existence of slavery, the economic system on which plantation society was based. Segregated tours, however, also identify those visitors willing to confront complicated or controversial topics, such as a critical class-based

analysis of slavery. In this way, segregation of knowledge provides an avenue for interpreters who wish to "push the envelope" and may offer a more challenging experience than mainstream tours, even those that fall under the category of "relative incorporation."

Relative Incorporation

Eichstedt and Small assign those sites, comprising 3.3 percent of all plantation museums, to the fourth category of "relative incorporation", calling them "the best representational and rhetorical efforts of the sites [they] explored" (2002, 203). The criteria for relative incorporation are as follows (from Eichstedt and Small 2002, 204):

- Throughout the tour, visitors were provided with information about the ways in which the system of slavery operated at that specific site. The information was neither perfunctory nor degrading.
- The site provided information about those who were enslaved at that site. This demonstrates some investigation into the lives of enslaved people, indicating that such investigation was considered valuable and appropriate.
- It acknowledged the links between the subjugation of some (enslaved African-Americans) and the elevation of others (the enslavers). That is, the site noted that it was the labor of enslaved people that provided the wealth and time for the enslavers to pursue hospitality, political theorizing, and other traits and behaviors that led to the characterization of these men as great.
- The site complicated the identity of the master-enslaver and the family, so that the fact that they enslaved people is part of their definition. The enslavers are no longer presented as solely romantic, political, hospitable, and so on.

It is important to note that a single docent can make the difference in whether or not a site incorporates slavery into the main tour (Eichstedt and Small 2002: 205). To ensure that the tour falls consistently within this category, the site must develop detailed interpretive material on slave life that can be standardized for docents; an alternative strategy is the development of a video or audio tape that imparts this standardized knowledge. Critical evaluation of historic resources and documentation is necessary for the preparation of such material, and this critique can be explained to visitors as an interpretative strategy, such as the following example from an

audio tour of Montpelier, the home of James and Dolley Madison (quoted in Eichstedt and Small 2002, 215):

> It is difficult to know with accuracy how Montpelier's slaves felt toward their masters. Visitor Margaret Bayard Smith noted of a maid who was helping her: "Nany, you have a good mistress." And Nany replied, "Yes, the best I believe in the world. I am sure I would not change her for any mistress in the whole country." It is not possible to know whether this statement reflected Nany's true feelings.

Finally, the strategy of relative incorporation often relies upon the incorporation of historic structures related to slavery, the identification of the visitor with the slave experience (as opposed to the slave-holding experience), and/or detailed information about particular enslaved individuals (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 209-13). In essence, relative incorporation views the plantation as a system dependent on the labor of slaves and attempts to illustrate the reality of slave life and experiences in a critical and sensitive manner.

Black-Centric Sites

As part of their research, Eichstedt and Small investigated alternative modes of slavery representation at African-American heritage sites in Virginia, Georgia and Louisiana (2002, 233-70). In addition to the humanization and personalization of enslaved workers and their experiences, these sites typically depict the system of antebellum slavery as universally inhumane, degrading, cruel and grievous. Eichstedt and Small define the overall mode of interpretation in the following way (from Eichstedt and Small 2002, 241):

> Tour guides mention many experiences of African-Americans that are studiously avoided in the mainstream tours. They are likely to talk about the drudgery and tedium involved in cooking, cleaning, serving, and working long hours in the homes and fields of master-enslavers and about the fatigue, exhaustion, injury, and death that resulted from such labors. The accounts include stories of whippings, punishment, and torture; also discussed are sexual abuse and rape. Docents and tour guides explicitly mention the underbelly of plantation society, which is what enabled the great houses to be built, the gardens to be laid out and tended, and the rich master-enslavers and their families to live a genteel lifestyle.

The stories told at African-American sites can balance the stereotypes presented at many plantation museums; for example, there are stories of survival and resistance, but not of loyal slaves and benevolent owners (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 241). Interestingly, Eichstedt and Small note that both black- and white-centric sites share common goals shaped by contemporary values; both seek to validate the history and experiences of each representative group (2002, 254). Eichstedt and Small view the mainstream, white-centric sites as telling the story of the American dream, the elevation of the (white) individual through hard work; they characterize these sites as celebrating the justness and fairness of contemporary society and legitimizing history through that lens (2002, 255). In the same way, they argue, black-centric sites have shaped historical narratives based on an understanding of contemporary racialized injustices and degradation, coupled with the need to portray the significant contributions made by African-Americans in the creation and development of the United States, an aspect of history left out of many white-centric sites (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 255).

In their investigation of alternative modes of interpretation, Eichstedt and Small effectively argue that the present framework for interpretation at most plantation museums is inherently racist (2002, 258-59). They argue that (from Eichstedt and Small 2002, 258):

> Direct intent [in the perpetuation of racism at historic sites] on the part of many participants is generally not needed once racist systems are in place. While some people who participate in the plantation museum system may have explicitly racialist beliefs that accept and perpetuate white supremacy, we assume that many do not. Indeed, neither structural nor cultural racism requires for its replication any active intent on the part of most participants…. Representational styles that present whites as the only important contributors to the development of the United States are still central to the official and unofficial culture of this country, even after hundreds of years of resistance on the part of peoples of color and thirty years of academic demonstrations that this myopic view is wrong. When sites replicate this view, they are contributing to a way of thinking that is fundamentally racialist and racist.

The racialized framing of antebellum Southern history is potentially damaging to interpreters and visitors alike; it aligns contemporary people only with those who shared their ethnicity in the past, which discourages critical thinking and divides heritage along racial lines. Black-centric sites participate in the racialization of American history, but they have grown up in response to the racialized framing at white-centric plantation sites, as part of an effort to provide a balanced view of history. At white-centric sites, this racialization is based on the combined lack of slavery representation and elevation of white enslavers and their achievements. Eichstedt and Small note that the strategy of collapsing class differences between whites, in holding up wealth and leisure as an attainable goal for all hard-working whites, is a strategy practiced by most plantation museums; furthermore, they argue, it is the same strategy that ensured the loyalty of poor whites to the system of enslavement and later Jim Crow segregation (2002, 259).

CHAPTER 2

CONSIDER THE SOURCE: MATERIALS FOR UNDERSTANDING SLAVERY

This chapter will introduce some contemporary ideas about the slave experience and the sources used to define and support those ideas; the discussion of these issues, however, cannot take the place of a full investigation into the history and development of American slavery, which is far beyond the scope of this paper. The first portion of this chapter describes some of the most relevant documentary and oral sources and their conclusions, followed by a brief historiography of slavery scholarship; the second section details a range of current issues regarding slavery that are based primarily on documentary and oral sources; and the final two sections discuss the importance of using other forms of evidence, such as historic structures and landscapes, to research and discuss the history of slavery in America.

Written Documents and Oral Histories

Written documentation forms the basis of most interpretive programs on slavery. The venerable tradition of the historian rests on the written record; this is the most familiar and accessible form of raw historical data, and therefore the most commonly used. On the whole, the greatest problem with written and verbal documentation is the human filter: consciously or unconsciously, both the conveyer and recorder of the data may corrupt the information. In some cases, such as memoirs or personal narratives, the information presented is necessarily subjective, and occasionally shaped to suit political ends.

Written Documents

Since they were collected for financial, legal or statistical purposes, the least corrupted written documents are usually those related to record-keeping, such as the Federal Census, tax maps, wills, or deeds. Because the plantation operated as an agrarian enterprise, detailed written records related to specific planters can generally be pieced together with documents at the local courthouse. Deeds and other legal land-related documents, such as surveys, can define the boundaries and ownership of the farm at a given period in time; inventories or estate sales can describe the nature of the property, including enslaved workers and furnishings; and Census records can provide information, including names, gender, occupation and age, on whites and sometimes enslaved workers living at the plantation. Typically, ownership of twenty or more slaves defined the planter class, and one hundred or more slaves defined the elite planter class; this type of basic information can be gathered from governmental sources (Vlach 1993, 7-8). As with most written records at the time, legal, financial and statistical documents outline the planter's holdings and operations from the interests and point of view of the governing white society, offering little information about the lives of slaves beyond the physical world they inhabited.

Newspapers can provide interesting illustrations of the socio-cultural context of slavery; they may supply factual data but also yield information regarding the interests and biases of the dominant planter class, as well as information about the ways in which elite Southern whites perceived themselves. Because articles often support negative, racist stereotypes of enslaved workers and free blacks, they must be evaluated accordingly if information contained in those articles is to be used in an interpretative program. Likewise, agricultural journals in slave-holding states often served as forums for planters for the discussion of issues related to agrarian

enterprise and slavery, including the management of enslaved workers; these journals can supply useful information about the planters' sphere and socio-cultural context, but they must be understood from that perspective.

Since a plantation was a business, planters' papers related to the day-to-day operation of the farm can prove a valuable source of information regarding slavery. Planters often documented the names, ages and occasionally other characteristics of slaves on slave rosters; this information can especially benefit genealogical researchers and those interested in uncovering the specific African descent of particular slaves, since African names frequently appear and can be traced to countries or regions of origin. Physical and psychological descriptions of slaves must be considered heavily subjective and weighted from the white point of view. Overseers' records can illuminate the work experience of enslaved workers and shed light on systems of rewards and punishment, as well as stories of particular slaves. Finally, the letters and journals of the farm's white family and associates can provide the intriguing familial and social context for plantation life; however, this information must be treated with extreme caution because of its subjective nature, especially with regard to slavery. Some white writers (including planters) went so far as to publish treatises and discourses on the slave system, ostensibly as a rebuttal to abolitionist critiques but probably also as a means to ameliorate their own discomfort with the system. These documents illuminate the particular beliefs and ideals of specific planters; they may be interpreted as universally applicable to the planter class, but they have special significance for those plantation museums with access to such a document by a previous plantation owner.

White and Black Narratives

In addition to the planters' narratives that attempted to justify and support the system of slavery, some European and Euro-American travellers to the antebellum South compiled and published records of their travels. These narratives fluctuate widely in objectivity and accuracy and each must be taken on its own merits, with particular attention to individual bias. Throughout the nineteenth century, travelogues by Europeans and Northerners typically scrutinized the Southern system of slavery with a special interest in documenting its cruelty. Frederick Law Olmsted, perhaps the most thoughtful and impartial writer on Southern slavery, attempted to document his own biases so that the reader could distinguish his inferences from the facts observed; as a result of this and his keen perception, his travelogues have been considered by historians as generally objective and reliable, at least as far as factual information is concerned (Schlesinger 1953, xlvi-xlvii). Wealthy European travellers often mocked the genteel aspirations of the Southern planting class and used slavery to illustrate the sordid underbelly of the planters' ambition, or they viewed the plantation's elite society, despite its reliance on slavery, as a welcome reprieve from the impoverished horror of the rural South. Although not without merit, accounts of the slave-holding South by abolitionists must be taken as persuasive political documents, as potentially fraught with bias as the planters' personal writings. In any instance, narrative accounts must be critiqued with the writers' bias in mind before the information may be used and interpreted.

Antebellum black narratives, written by former slaves, sometimes with the aid of white writers/editors, typically focus on the horror and brutality of the slave system, with evocative examples, and the human right to freedom. These narratives alone provide a contemporary illustration of the thoughts, feelings, struggles and successes of enslaved workers. Only a small

percentage of enslaved or formerly enslaved workers could write, however, and an even smaller percentage of those chose or were able to write narratives; in a sense, the representative narratives may be representative primarily of the most educated, forceful and passionate voices in African-American society. Historian Eugene Genovese has noted that, because of the exceptional nature of antebellum black narratives and their authors, he has preferred to rely primarily on oral histories for what he believes are more typical slave narratives (Fogel 1989, 175 and Genovese 1974, 675). Solomon Northrup, for instance, has been generally considered one of the most objective observers of the slave experience from the point of view of an enslaved worker, but his unusual situation (having been abducted as a free man in Washington, DC and sold into slavery) renders his experience necessarily atypical (Eakin and Logsdon 1968, x-xi). In comparison with white narratives, very few antebellum black narratives exist; consequently, historians have been forced to use white narratives to fill information gaps and to construct an interpretation of the slave experience (Fogel 1989, 175). Many of the famous black narratives on slavery were published after Emancipation; since the authors no longer suffered the status of "slave", the narratives may be freer in content, but it should be noted that the passage of time adds yet another filter to perception. Again, a responsible researcher should utilize antebellum black narratives to complicate and provide a balance to white accounts, as well as to understand some of the thoughts and emotions of at least a small percentage of enslaved workers (Fogel 1989, 175). Most black narratives can be viewed as persuasive pieces, but there is seldom reason to doubt their veracity, especially with regard to personal feelings about slavery and factual details, such as descriptions of the cycle of agriculture.

Oral Histories

Oral histories function similarly to written narratives and should be subject to the same critiques. Because most enslaved workers could not read or write, oral histories gathered by white researchers have formed the basis of our understanding of the slave experience. Typically, researchers document oral traditions with a particular goal in mind and this goal, as well as the socio-cultural bias of the researcher, may color the information presented in the history. With oral histories, it is important to consider the nature of the questions asked, as these will shape the narrative. In terms of accuracy, one must take into account the amount of time lapsed between the experience and the memoir, as well as the number of people through which the narrative passed (*e.g.*, whether or not someone describes a personal experience or an incident experienced by a relative or friend). Historian Robert Fogel has demonstrated that, statistically, interviews with formerly enslaved people over-represent certain geographic areas as well as the slave experience on large plantations of 100 slaves or more (Fogel 1989, 176). Additionally, Fogel notes that African-American spirituals and folklore provide a wealth of information about African-American cultural traditions, but these are also shaped by time and evolution through oral transmission and probably contain very little factual data (Fogel 1989, 176).

By far the most detailed and valuable oral accounts of the slave experience are those gathered by Fisk University and Southern University in the 1920s and 1930s and the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s and 1940s (Fogel 1989, 175). Based simply on the need for documentation, these interviews were often conducted by white anthropologists determined to convey the information as accurately and sympathetically as possible. The narratives are particularly valuable because many document the memories of formerly enslaved people, as opposed to descendants of slaves, and they may be considered more representative of the

majority of African-American society than the written slave narratives. Nonetheless, in using these narratives one must consider the context of race relations at the time; certainly the WPA's questions were framed in a white perspective, and it is probable that the black narratives were constrained simply by the presence of the white interviewers. Robert Fogel notes that historian John Blassingame believed that interviewees may have consciously distorted their accounts based on interview/interviewee relationships and subconsciously based on other external circumstances, such as the Great Depression, which may have made economic conditions under slavery seem favorable by contrast (Blassingame in Fogel 1989, 176). For instance, the WPA's 1940 compilation *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among Georgia Coastal Negroes* ostensibly documents African cultural survivals in Gullah-Geechee communities along the Georgia coast; it meets with some success but betrays a white, anthropological fascination with voodoo over other, more mundane types of survivals, such as architecture and foodways. This focus is especially unfortunate because, considering the delicate nature of religious subjects and the mainstream white condemnation of African-based spirituality, one may imagine that some African-American interviewees bent their narratives to conceal sensitive information from white ears. Along the same lines, many WPA narratives exhibit a morbid white (and possibly liberal or "left-wing") interest in punishment, rape and abuse by slaveholders; this interest prompts the researcher to examine the questions for bias, and consider the answers in the context of race relations at the time.

Synthesizing Written Documents and Oral Histories: the Historiography of American Slavery

In the early twentieth century, with its extreme racial divisions and attendant violence, academics, particularly sociologists, discussed slavery as a means of understanding current social and economic problems. Social commentators and black scholars such as W. E. B. DuBois

published their insights on the subject, and government-sponsored projects on the federal, state and local levels strove to document and help alleviate (with mixed results) the impoverished condition of many African-Americans. The most prominent synthesis on slavery from this time was Ulrich B. Phillips' *American Negro Slavery* in 1918, which was thoughtfully criticized by DuBois and Carter Woodson, who founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (Fogel 1989, 155). Generally, slavery-related materials published before World War II are highly racialized, either from a paternalist and/or racist white perspective or (in the case of DuBois and other black scholars) as a means of strengthening and educating the black community. Additionally, it was at this time that the Works Progress Administration conducted its anthropological forays into black society and culture.

In the 1950s and 1960s, white academics sought to synthesize the information in written and oral accounts to posit a fuller view of life in the slaveholding South. In 1956, Kenneth Stampp published his famous work, *The Peculiar Institution*, which brought the issue of slave culture into mainstream white academia for the first time (Fogel 1989, 158). Additionally, many of the basic compilation texts regarding slavery, such as Taylor's *Negro Slavery in Louisiana* and other state-specific overviews on slavery, were published during this period. Completely reliant on written and oral sources, these texts, and the data on which they drew, formed the basic underpinning for subsequent discussions on slavery. Following the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1965 and the socio-political upheaval of the 1960s, American researchers began to explore slavery from the perspective of exploited African-Americans, usually spurred by a growing interest in black heritage and African-American contributions to the development of this country. At the same time, academics began to evaluate antebellum Southern society in Marxist terms, viewing its exploitative racial, social and economic structures as specific results of the

common human problem of class oppression. With the publication of *Roll, Jordan, Roll* in 1972, Eugene Genovese became the most celebrated voice in this movement, which explored the social, economic and legal mechanisms of Southern class oppression. To this day, Genovese remains one of the most gifted and provocative writers on slavery, primarily for his ability to synthesize comprehensive research into imaginative and compelling hypotheses regarding the reality of the slave experience, for which very little concrete data exists.

In the 1980s and 1990s, academics began to investigate heretofore-unknown aspects of American slavery, with archaeology and architectural history at the forefront of this investigation. John Michael Vlach, whose 1993 book *Back of the Big House* revolutionized the popular perception of the antebellum plantation, helped launch a powerful re-evaluation of American slavery through the investigation of historic structures and landscapes. Like Genovese, one of Vlach's most important contributions to the discussion is his ability to "fill in the blanks": with very little textual or extant physical evidence, he demonstrates that it is still possible – and necessary – to hypothesize about the lifestyles of enslaved workers and the human experience of slavery. Although still reliant on earlier slavery scholarship, academic journals related to architecture, archaeology, ethnic studies, sociology, and history are re-evaluating specific case studies in more complex detail, by eradicating racist overtones or uncovering new information.

As is apparent from the preceding discussion, the investigation of Southern slavery is a potential quagmire of information and bias, fraught with class, race and social complexities and constrained by contemporary values. Although little can definitively be said about the antebellum Southern society and the slave experience, some generalizations still may be made. Pieced from the sources outlined above, the following overview describes some contextual issues

regarding Southern slavery that will impact my evaluation of slavery at Oakland plantation and my suggestions for its interpretive framework.

Current Issues in the History and Context of American Slavery

The most common context for American slavery was the plantation system, which derived from the colonial European pursuit of agricultural products and raw materials for export to Europe, coupled with the colonial practice of importing African captives to develop and produce these materials for European consumption (Firth and Turner 2003, 19; Fogel and Engerman 1974, 14-15). Essentially an early capitalist or "pre-capitalist" venture, plantations differed from subsistence-based, smaller farms in that they typically relied on a large captive workforce and a single staple crop to yield a profit for owners and/or investors (Firth and Turner 2003, 19; Fogel and Engerman 1974, 67; Genovese 1974, 44-46). Typically, plantation owners employed a combination of "task" and "gang" systems to elicit labor from their workers: in the task system, a laborer was given a task to complete by a certain time; and in the gang system, common in crop production, gangs of workers were closely supervised by a driver or overseer, and often whipped to exact the maximum amount of labor (Firth and Turner 2003, 38). Plantations profited by taking advantage of economies of scale, and successful planters continually increased their land and slave holdings to increase their earning potential. Following the American Revolution and until the Civil War, North American plantations retained their basic colonial structure and continued to supply cotton, sugar, rice, tobacco and other goods to the new Republic and for export to Europe (Firth and Turner 2003, 24). In essence, for more than 300 years, much of the Euro-American world relied on the Americas' slave-dependent plantation system for goods and/or profit.

The physical context of the plantation is described in greater detail under the section on historic resources in this chapter. Economically and structurally, antebellum plantations existed not only as farm complexes, but also as service centers for neighboring small farms, offering goods, services and informal lending to the community at large. Socially, plantations served a variety of functions, from winter residences of the elite to gathering places of the wealthy and the enslaved; they were also the primary stage for the interaction of black and white cultures in the antebellum South.

The Southern Caste System

As the plantation system developed and expanded, the stratification of Southern society created a caste system based primarily on kinship, wealth and racial identity. White planters, who enjoyed the highest level of prestige and power in Southern society, were defined by large land holdings and the ownership of at least twenty slaves, regardless of plantation profit and actual wealth; in this way, slavery became inextricably tied to the definition of Southern elites (Genovese 1974, 44-45). In 1860, at the height of Southern slavery, slaveholding whites constituted 24 percent of all white Southerners, planters made up approximately 12 percent of slaveholders, and those owning large plantations with 100 slaves or more comprised only one percent of slaveholding families (Vlach 1993, 7-8). The elite planter families intermarried, and the slaveholding white minority filled most of the professional and government positions appropriate to their caste, which helped perpetuate their wealth and status. For example, many planters (and their kinsmen) were also lawyers, judges, or politicians, a circumstance that helped shape the social order, as well as laws and law enforcement, in their favor.

The wealth of the planting caste was predicated on the exploitation and appropriation of the labor of enslaved Africans and African-Americans, who provided the work necessary to

develop and maintain large-scale agrarian operations. Until 1808, African slaves were legally imported into America, primarily from West Africa, by way of the terrifying and often fatal Middle Passage (Boles 1983, 26-30). After that time, white planters relied on reproduction and illegal importation to increase the slave population. Although, as noted above, only a small percentage of Southern whites can be identified as planters, most of the South's antebellum black population can be viewed within the plantation context. By 1860, more than half of the South's 3.9 million African-Americans lived in slave communities of twenty people or more, and even greater numbers lived in proximity to large plantations (Boles 1983, 107).

Between the planter caste and the slave caste hovered the rest of Southern society. Stringent social regulations bound white women, including planters' wives, in subservience to white men and limited their access to educational and professional opportunities (Genovese 1974, 81-82). Non-slaveholding and poor whites labored in industry and agriculture without much opportunity for education and upward social mobility. Within the plantation context, overseers were usually responsible for exacting the highest level of exhaustive work and productivity from enslaved laborers; throughout the South, overseers had a reputation for laziness, ineffectiveness and cruelty from planters and enslaved workers alike (Genovese 1974, 12-22). William Scarborough, however, has challenged that generalization, pointing out that planters often relied on overseers to serve as a buffer between themselves and the slave community, as overseers generally meted out the punishments and harsh treatments that would have threatened the paternalistic master-slave relationship (Scarborough 1984).

Free blacks and people of mixed Native American, European, and/or African descent occupied a social caste between poor or disenfranchised whites and slaves. In Louisiana, Creoles of Afro-European origin developed a stratified society that paralleled white Euro-American

culture, with Creole slaveholders in the highest caste and Creole slaves in the lowest caste (Genovese 1974, 408-09; see also Gregory and Moran 1996). Free blacks and Creoles, who either arrived free from the West Indies or were emancipated in America, often competed with poor whites for jobs, which inflamed racial tensions (Genovese 1974, 403-04). As the threat of abolition and slave rebellion increased through the nineteenth century, free people of color were often the most rigidly confined of all the castes by laws drafted to restrict their social, political and economic power (Taylor 1963, 155-58, 167).

Race Relations and the Law

On large plantations, concentrations of African-descended peoples developed kinship bonds and formed distinct African-American communities despite cultural and language barriers. These community ties extended between plantations and were bolstered through social interactions at holiday gatherings, and as relations and friends were bought and sold to different plantations. Although distribution varied by region and locality, by 1860 African-Americans made up more than 50 percent of the population in most Southern states (Boles 1983, 107; Vlach 1993, 7). The sheer size of the black population, though necessary for the maintenance of the plantation system, gave rise to a great deal of fear in whites – a fear that, inflamed by various slave rebellions and insurrections, increased in severity over the course of the nineteenth century until the Civil War (Boles 1983, 50-51). As a result, legal codes monitoring black action became more restrictive and punishments for infractions more severe. At the same time, late antebellum pro-slavery writers called for more humane treatment and better material accommodations for enslaved workers. Though clothed in humanitarian concerns, this movement probably originated from an acknowledgement by planters that improved living conditions would reduce the chance of slaves' rebellion (Genovese 1974, 50-53).

Given white dependence on black labor, the reliance on reproduction for increase, and the sheer number of Southern slaves, whites and blacks reached an uneasy *modus operandi* that commonly resulted in paternalism. Legally, planters had the responsibility to provide for slaves and the authority to punish those in their care; if the planter failed to meet his obligations or injured his captives too severely, enslaved workers could sometimes appeal to neighbors and even the courts for intervention (Genovese 1974, 3-7). Under this circumstance, the paternalist ideal of benevolent master and loyal slave developed, fostered primarily by whites but permitted in part by blacks as a strategy for living and working together. Although merely an ideal, paternalism proved to be a tenacious and powerful way for elite white Southerners to defend the slave system. Eventually, paternalism provided a certain amount of material protection for enslaved workers, on whom planters were wholly dependent, and it may have survived in part because it suited the codes of honor and chivalry created by white Southern elites (Genovese 1974, 3-7).

Despite its widespread adoption and tenacity, the white paternalist ideal suffered under the reality of enslavement. Throughout the South, individual strategies of slave resistance included theft, faking illness, running away, and murder; collective strategies of resistance included insurrections and rebellions, and networks for escape such as the Underground Railroad (Genovese 1974, 597-98, 657). Slaveholders did perpetrate horrific acts of punishment, cruelty, abuse, murder and rape that have been documented in white and black narratives alike; however, slaves were valuable property, and it has been argued that the average planter would protect his investment rather than severely injure or murder an enslaved worker (for examples, see Fogel and Engerman 1974, 146-47 for a discussion on whipping as a last resort; Genovese 1974, 63-7 on whipping and its abuse). The issue of "discipline" and treatment of enslaved workers on the

plantation highlights the importance of distinguishing between generalized slavery and site-specific slavery. While economic considerations may have supported, on average, relatively humane treatment of enslaved workers, it is crucial to recognize that the situation was left to the whim of slaveholders, their families and their employees. On some plantations, concessions and rewards did as much, and possibly more, to control captives and uphold the system of slavery (Fogel 1989, 194). But on other plantations, owners and overseers performed horrendous acts of violence against which captives could not defend themselves, and, since punishments were not always recorded, we may imagine that the reality of the situation was, in many cases, much more brutal than the extant documentation leads us to believe.

Franco-American planters in Louisiana have sometimes been regarded as more humane in their treatment of enslaved workers than Anglo-American planters in the South; however, this view may originate primarily from Franco-American writers (for an opposing view, see Benjamin Henry Latrobe's January 10, 1819 journal entry in Carter et al, eds. 1980). This perception is based largely on Louisiana's *Code Noir*, which stipulated (though could not guarantee) more rights for blacks than most Southern legal codes, including the right to Catholic baptism and burial, adequate provisions and treatment, a holiday on Sunday, and restricted the sale of husbands from wives or of children under fourteen from their mothers (Taylor 1963, 17, 22, 223-224). The *Code Noir*, however, still offered slaves no political and few personal rights, including the right to movement, and held the essential definition of a slave as legal chattel for life, which characterized the slave caste as distinct from other exploited laborers in the South and elsewhere (Taylor 1963, 168-69, 194-95). By legal definition, an American slave was of African descent, a racist particularity that separated New World slavery from other slave systems and provided the basis for black disenfranchisement that has continued to the present day.

Ethnic Identity and the Formation of an African-American Culture

Through the plantation system and its attendant white supremacist ideology, American socio-cultural definitions of "white" and "black" developed (Durant 1999, 8-13). White Americans of European descent were not a homogeneous group; they derived from many different cultures and nationalities, spoke different languages, practiced different religions and belonged to a range of socio-economic classes. Black Americans of African descent derived from many countries and ethnic groups, such as the Ibo, Ewe, Biafada, Bakongo, Twi, Ga, Seres, Wolof, Bambara, Ibibio and Arada (Durant 1999, 10). Euro-Americans and African-Americans have always interacted sexually, with or without coercion or emotional attachment; in Louisiana, the historical truth of miscegenation is especially evident in Creole ethnic identity, which acknowledges a mixture of French, Spanish, Native American and/or African descent. Louisianans frequently blame Anglo-Americans for the concept of "Negro blood" that eventually prevailed in Southern legal and social definitions of race; this idea, which underscores American racism to the present day, defines any person of any African ancestry as "black," regardless of socio-cultural affiliation or physical appearance (Bell 2000; Gregory and Moran 1996, 14).

In his 1999 article on plantation society, Thomas Durant defines the plantation as a "social crucible" though which various African cultures became distilled into the single, socio-economic definition of "Negro slave" (Durant 1999, 10 and 14). In the same way, a universal idea of "white" was accorded a social and economic status above other perceived races, despite the reality that most white Southerners labored under harsh economic conditions. Allegiance to the elite idea of "white" encouraged poor white Southerners to believe themselves superior to "blacks," with whom they competed economically; it also fostered the illusion that they could rise to the level of the planter caste – an illusion which helped ensure the social (and physical)

protection of the elite class (Durant 1999 and Genovese 1974, 4-7, 22-23, 92, 403-04). This white supremacist distillation of "white" and "black" cultural identities, which universally links "white" with wealth and "black" with poverty, has formed the basis of American racism and has become so entrenched in our language and conception of race that it is almost inescapable.

In slavery scholarship, the issues of African-American cultural autonomy, in terms of the degree to which an African-American culture developed independent of white influence, and the uniformity of African-American culture, in terms of the degree to which African-Americans developed common views and cultural norms, have long been subjects for debate (Fogel 1989, 168). Historian Robert Fogel believes that cultural autonomy may only have been possible on large plantations, especially those with absentee owners, that housed communities of 50 or more enslaved workers (Fogel 1989, 185-86). The issue of a uniform African-American culture is more difficult to address, since so little cultural evidence exists for comparison. One may at least hypothesize that, although ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse, African-Americans throughout the Southeast reacted similarly to similar situations and developed similar strategies for living and succeeding within the context of enslavement. Although the details of this debate are too complex to be considered here, these issues have particular bearing on the interpretation of the slave experience in different socio-cultural and economic contexts.

The bounty of historical information surrounding slavery and the plantation system must be considered holistically, with other types of (non-textual) resources informing and complicating the textual documentation. This is a particularly important issue when dealing with slaves and other disenfranchised people who were unable to contribute heavily to the written historical narrative. The following discussion of resource types illuminates avenues that any

plantation site may explore, with the understanding that each member of the plantation community contributed to the function of the enterprise.

Historic Structures

Historic structures provide a palpable link with the past, and their construction, layout and uses can provide a museum visitor with detailed information about the experience of enslaved workers, and communicate that information in a visceral and memorable way. A major problem with historic structures is their evolution over time, and the plantation museum should investigate its historic structures for specific chronological information, alterations and ways in which structures have reflected the changing lifestyles of their occupants. In *Representing Slavery*, Eichstedt and Small note that most plantation sites show the process of development, destruction and redevelopment over decades and even centuries (2002, 139). The plantation's physical evolution can confuse visitors who attempt to understand the layout and mechanisms of the farm at a particular moment in time.

The evolution and eventual ruination of most historic structures related to slavery bears some discussion; in the same way that it is important to contextualize history as distorted by historians' biases, it is equally important to consider the treatment and, generally, neglect of these historic structures, which reflect historical issues. In the colonial period and through the beginning of the nineteenth century, many structures related to plantation operation and to slavery were constructed poorly, of temporary materials – while the plantation's profit went to improve living conditions for the white family or to investors. As noted earlier, the nineteenth century witnessed an increased interest in providing better material accommodations for slaves. Those structures that did survive tended to have been built as status symbols, reflecting the humanitarianism and wealth of the plantation owner, or as an outgrowth of this mid-nineteenth

century emphasis on better material conditions. Many structures that did not fall as a result of poor materials or construction were destroyed during the Civil War. After the Civil War and Emancipation, some surviving structures continued their basic use, but often in modified form – this time as cabins for tenant farmers or sharecroppers. Following the mechanization of agriculture in the 1950s and 1960s, those structures remaining were allowed to decay. Some were actively destroyed to pave the way for new development or as a result of their association with enslavement.

As a result of this general evolution, much of the evidence for slave structures derives from photo documentation by the Historic American Buildings Survey conducted in the 1930s. (This situation is particularly evident in Vlach's *Back of the Big House*, which is based almost entirely on HABS documentation.) The earliest movements for historic preservation in America, primarily spearheaded by white Southern women, neglected structures related to the lower- and middle-classes almost entirely. As interest in historic preservation spread, these and other efforts culminated in the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which defined those properties worthy of inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places as having 1) an association with historical events (typically defined as single events rather than social movements, though this definition has broadened over the years); 2) an association with historic figure(s); 3) architectural or artistic significance; 4) potential archaeological or historical interest. Until very recently, the NHPA's definitions of significance have supported, and in many cases continue to support, the preservation of the "Great Man" view of history over the more contemporary understanding of social history and its broad-scale movements. As Rahier and Hawkins have noted, "the historic preservation movement played an important role in the invention of southern tradition;" as an example, they indicate the exclusively Southern use of the

emotionally-laden word "pilgrimage" to describe a series of house tours, which highlight the lives of "great men" and almost never deal with enslavement or include slave-related structures (1999, 207; the first of these was inaugurated in Natchez, Mississippi in 1932). Additionally, Catherine Howett has argued that the preservation and restoration of historic buildings and landscapes in the Southeast have been rooted in the maintenance, if not construction, of a mythical, romanticized agrarian past that cannot co-exist with a realistic view of slavery (Howett 1985, 65-68).

In the 1980s a handful of sites attempted to protect (or at least keep from active destruction) some slave-related structures; this trend grew and included restoration efforts in the 1990s. Even these modest restoration efforts, however, often obscure or distort the historical record; in places like Monmouth plantation in Mississippi and Tezcuco in Louisiana, extant slave quarters, which are not interpreted on the general tours, have been "restored" as bed-and-breakfast units (Rahier and Hawkins 1999, 210 and Goodheart 2001, 36). For the most part, those structures that evoke the reality of centuries of abuse and exploitation have been allowed to vanish from the landscape and from memory. Apart from those historic sites that have chosen to protect their slavery-related resources, development and new construction are eradicating the few examples that are still extant.

Plantation Layout and Construction

Basing their farmsteads on European manorial estates and ideals of order, nineteenth century planters typically segregated their holdings into functional areas. Regional preference and farm products determined the nature and style of plantation buildings, which were designed and laid out by the planter, and typically constructed by slaves. It is important to note that many African-American slaves were skilled artisans and built a great deal of the antebellum

architecture of the South. African building technology included blacksmithing, carpentry, wood carving, weaving, and brass-working, and Southern planters often sought out slaves with these skills for work or for hire (McDaniel 1982, 31, 40). Generally, however, high style architecture was completely dictated by European tastes, and it is very difficult to determine African-American contributions because generally slaves were not allowed to sign or otherwise take credit for their work.

Slave spaces were usually arranged behind the planter's residence, separated and divided by function and status. Typical slave-occupied areas and outbuildings included fields, workyards, kitchens, smokehouses, barns and stables, production buildings, hospitals and nurseries and quarters (see John Michael Vlach's 1993 book *Back of the Big House* for in-depth examples of these plantation types). As will be noted in the section related to cultural landscape, the segregation of slave areas behind the big house created a world within the plantation that was dominated by slaves. Visitors to Southern plantations often commented on "slave streets" and "slave towns," where the residences and work areas – kitchens, blacksmith and coopers' shops, stables, barns – would be collected in what is basically a town format. These areas were typically within sight of the planter's house but left with a certain amount of autonomy, which enabled the development of an enslaved African-American community – a community under severe restriction, but a community nonetheless.

Slave Quarters

The quarters that have survived represent the most durable and well-built examples of that type of housing; most survivors date from the nineteenth century and may embody the white slaveholders' response to humanitarian concerns as well as the increasing value of slaves (Chappell 1999, 242-43). As Carter's Grove historian Edward Chappell states, each remaining

structure offers information about "perceptions of sufficiency, in number and size of rooms, quality of construction, amount of light, degree of finish, and allowance for privacy" (1999, 242). A thorough investigation of extant structures can expose approximate dates and architectural changes over time.

For house and field slaves, most residences were single- or double-pen – one room per family – and were sometimes adjoined to a work area. Materials and quality of construction varied, depending on resources and the planter's decision about how well to house his slaves and protect his investment (Vlach 1993, 21-22, 160-61). Slaves were generally housed adjacent to the service space to which they were assigned, such as the kitchen or the fields. Within the community of enslaved workers, house slaves tended to have the best accommodations, usually in the main house or in brick or clapboard residences close to the main house. Field slave accommodations usually consisted of one-room cabins constructed of logs or boards, unpainted, with one window (no glass), one door, and a dirt floor. The first floor was multi-purpose, and a small loft area usually used for sleeping. Of slave architecture, these buildings were once the most common, but generally the most poorly constructed and least likely to survive (McDaniel 1982, 52; Vlach 1993, 156).

Cultural Landscapes and Archaeological Resources

Examination of cultural landscape and the archaeological record at a given site will illuminate the physical evolution of and human impact on that site. The primary problem with both cultural landscape and archaeological research is that the physical record is subject to fragmentation and individual interpretation. For instance, disparate pottery sherds may form the basis of archaeological data, but that data is then filtered through an archaeologist, who will determine the significance and meaning of the distribution. The fragmentary nature of

archaeological data can make it difficult to make broad-scale interpretations; basically, the accuracy of the interpretations relies heavily on the amount and quality of data gathered. In the case of cultural landscapes, natural and human alterations to the land can present obstacles to reconstructing the landscape to a defined historical period. Archaeology and cultural landscape research should be used in consort with, and as complements to, written documentation.

Cultural Landscapes

The study of cultural landscapes explores the interaction of humans with the environment. Because plantations were large farms, landscape and weather conditions played significant roles in the siting of farms and structures, and helped determine the success or failure of the enterprise. The natural landscape provided identifiable resources such as soils, rivers or cypress trees; many historical land resources are still in existence but have changed over time, reflecting modifications in human activity, exhaustion of soils, climate fluctuations, and other natural and cultural impacts. In addition to resource use, humans shaped the landscape to suit their economic, social and cultural needs.

White planters determined the accumulation of a plantation's acreage, as well as the siting and design of the farm and its structures, often based on English manorial estates (Vlach 1993, 1, 3-4). In the transition from colonial to autonomous government, American society began to stratify vigorously and the wealthiest citizens pursued new and increasingly ostentatious ways of exhibiting their place in the hierarchy. During the height of nineteenth century plantation society, the highly rationalized layout of plantations underscored the centrality of the big house, emphasized the status of the planter through the conspicuous size and quality of architecture and leisure areas, and limited the visibility of less aesthetically appealing aspects of plantation living, including the presence of enslaved workers (Vlach 1993, 7-8). Through the

manipulation of the landscape, one of the primary goals of plantation design was to convey the planter's wealth, as well as his dominance over enslaved workers and poorer white neighbors (Vlach 1993, 8). This hierarchical, essentially feudal design and social order, idealized in the context of large plantations, probably formed the basis of American post-bellum nostalgia for a romanticized Southern society (Howett 1985, 65-68). As noted earlier, this nostalgia for the white Southern myth, first created and promoted by aristocratic planters, has impacted preservation and restoration efforts to the present day.

Typically a plantation may be understood through white and black spheres of living and working, although it is important to note that Vlach's division of the plantation landscape into black and white spheres does not always apply to the more ethnically and culturally diverse French Creole society in Louisiana. The "big house" and its immediate environs, including pleasure gardens and other areas for leisure activities, belonged to the sphere of the white planter family (Vlach 1993, 7-8). With the exception of house slaves, who interacted in both black and white worlds, enslaved workers dominated the rest of the landscape through work in the fields and in designated areas usually located behind the big house, as well as life in the quarters (Vlach 1993, 1). They impacted the landscape through their activity and modified it as a strategy for survival. In some cases, slaves' agricultural knowledge helped create the cultural landscape of the plantation; for instance, the utilization of slave expertise in building rice fields has been well documented (Boles 1983, 45). Within the confines of the plantation layout, the concentration of enslaved workers from various regional and cultural backgrounds created distinct African-American societies, with attendant forms of cultural and artistic expression, such as music and dance (Vlach 1993, 12-13).

On some plantations, enslaved workers farmed small plots of land for their own use or raised livestock to supplement their diets or to produce items for sale (Vlach 1993, 167-68). The removal of slave areas from the white sphere of existence often afforded opportunities for enslaved workers to develop their own, unsupervised interaction with the landscape; in Virginia, for instance, slaves commonly created networks of footpaths and used river conduits for communication and sometimes, ultimately, avenues for escape (Vlach 1993, 13). Historian Robert Fogel, among others, has noted that enslaved workers' personal gardens probably encouraged an interest in property ownership and freedom, and "nourished independence because it permitted slaves to make their own decisions about what and how much to grow, about how to dispose of their product, and about what to buy with the money earned from their sale" (Fogel 1989, 190-91). When building a program for the representation of slave landscapes at plantation sites, it is also useful to consider John Michael Vlach's observation that "acts of appropriation leave few physical marks, and therefore they must be consciously recalled in order to be factored into our interpretation of surviving slave buildings and spaces" (1993, 17).

Archaeological Resources

Archaeology remains the foremost tool for understanding populations that did not leave written records. Through archaeology, it is possible to explore the complex physical world that enslaved workers created within the confines of the plantation, including foodways, labor stratification, the use of domestic and working space, and craft production (Singleton 1999, 12). Archaeology is especially important in its ability to provide evidence that complicates or contradicts written documentation; it should be considered a valuable balance to textual data (Singleton 1999: 16). Because archaeology relies solely on physical data, it is possible to

examine what materials a populace has used, produced and consumed, but it is more difficult to access the cultural significance or individual meanings behind those activities.

For museums, an important use of archaeology is in the reconstruction of areas of activity. Archaeological data and historic structures reports can help recreate the furnishings, finish and use of space within dwellings; generally, individual aspects of slave life that are not typically documented in planters' papers. Outside of structures, archaeology can help determine footpaths, wagon roads, fire pits and other aspects of working life in the landscape dominated by enslaved workers. Finally, when historic structures are no longer extant, archaeology is the only means to document the physical layout of the vanished plantation complex.

CHAPTER 3

OAKLAND PLANTATION AND SOUTHERN SLAVERY

In many ways, the history of the Emanuel Prud'homme family and their plantation, later called Oakland, is typical of French-Creole planter families and the evolution of plantation agriculture throughout the Southeast. As many researchers have catalogued the family's history, and since the focus of this paper is the slave experience at Oakland, I have appended a timeline for reference and will concentrate on the two generations of Prud'hommes, Jean-Pierre Emanuel (b. 1762- d. 1845; hereafter referred to as "Emanuel") and his son Pierre Phanor (b. 1807- d. 1865), who owned and managed the plantation before the Civil War. In particular, I will discuss what is known about the life and labor of enslaved workers in this time period.

Within the context of American slaveholding society, perhaps the most distinctive aspects of the Prud'homme family's history are the French-Creole identity, the ongoing interest in incorporating technological advances into the plantation's operation, and the longevity of the family at this particular site (Firth and Turner 2003, 31). According to family accounts, the Prud'homme family arrived in the Cane River area in the early eighteenth century, at a time when the region was still frontier; throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the family retained its ties to French language and culture, including Catholicism (Breedlove 1999, 5; Firth and Turner 2003, 31). The Prud'hommes further bolstered their socio-cultural identity through kinship and marriage bonds with other French Creole families in the area (Firth and Turner 2003, 31). Although in this case the Prud'hommes were particularly French Creole, intermarriage between planting families was common throughout the Southeast, thereby reinforcing the status

of planter society as well as planters' reliance on each other. In addition, as was common for planters of his caste, Phanor Prud'homme participated in legislative and government representation, including serving in the revision of the state's constitution in the 1840s and as a delegate of the American (or "Know-Nothing") Party to the Baton Rouge state convention in 1856 (Breedlove 1999, 12, 20). It is likely that Emanuel also participated in political and legislative activities, at least on the local level, but I have uncovered no documentation to that effect.

By the time Emanuel Prud'homme founded his plantation, the family already had a legacy of small-scale farming and agricultural enterprise, including slaveholding (Breedlove 1999, 5-6; Firth and Turner 2003, 32). Family accounts credit Emanuel Prud'homme as being the first farmer in the region to grow cotton on a large scale, thus profiting from the high price of the crop in the early nineteenth century (Firth and Turner 2003, 33-34). Also according to family accounts, in 1817 Emanuel Prud'homme began building a raised Creole manor house and dependencies on land that he had worked for more than twenty years, between the Bayou Brevelle and the Cane River, which later became known as Oakland plantation (Breedlove 1999, 6). As noted in the following historic structures section, the house illustrates the socio-cultural background of its designer and builders; its utilitarian character and layout are considered representative of French Creole architecture, distinct from the more monumental Anglo-American plantation architecture found throughout the Southeast (National Park Service 2000, 122; see also Figure 3.2).

Beginning with the establishment of the plantation in the early nineteenth century, Emanuel and Phanor Prud'homme consistently held acreage and a captive workforce whose size numbered them among the largest-scale plantation owners in the area. Throughout the life of the

plantation, the Prud'hommes grew cotton as the primary cash crop, and the cycle of cotton planting, cultivation and harvesting ordered the lives of the Prud'hommes, their overseers and their enslaved workforce (Firth and Turner 2003, 41). To supplement their diets and incomes, the Prud'hommes and other plantation residents produced other crops and raised livestock on a smaller scale (Firth and Turner 2003, 40, 43-46). To take advantage of economies of scale, both Emanuel and Phanor continued to acquire more land and more slaves throughout their lifetimes (Breedlove 1999, 48; Firth and Turner 2003, 33-38;). Although they resided year-round on the plantation at a time when many Southern planters did not, the Prud'hommes employed overseers to help administer the farm and deal with the enslaved workers (Firth and Turner 2003, 39; Genovese 1974, 11 for part-time and absentee Southern planters in the Lower South). The proximity of the family to the enslaved workers suggests complex interactions between both groups in work and leisure time, though the exact nature of this interaction is unknown. The size of their captive workforce generally numbered between 100 and 150, which is consistent with other large-scale planters throughout the Southeast; approximately half of these workers would be "full hands," *i.e.*, capable to devote their full time to working the cotton fields (Firth and Turner 2003, 28, 68).

Born in 1807, Phanor Prud'homme played a large role in the plantation's management by the late 1830s; in 1845, following his father's death, Phanor took over ownership of the plantation as well (Breedlove 1999, 8-11). Phanor kept detailed records of the plantation's management, successes and failures in journals; it is from these documents that we understand the most about Oakland's operation, including the work of its enslaved laborers (Firth and Turner 2003, 36). Although the crop varied in size from year to year, sometimes dramatically, the 1850s may have yielded the plantation's highest production and profit, which would be

consistent with other large plantations in the Southeast; however, it is impossible to know for certain, as many of Phanor's records from the 1850s are missing (Firth and Turner 2003, 43, 74). During the 1850s, Phanor employed a number of overseers; by far the most prominent was Seneca Pace, whom Phanor employed from 1855-1861 (Firth and Turner 2003, 56). Phanor and Pace, an Anglo-American from Mississippi, apparently enjoyed a friendship that became almost familial; his longevity and closeness to the family may have been typical of the French Creole society in the region, but was certainly atypical of owner-overseer relationships throughout the Southeast (Firth and Turner 2003, 65; for more details on the typical overseer, see Genovese 1974, 14-17). Seneca's style of management, probably partly derived from his socio-cultural background, directly impacted the lives of Oakland's enslaved workforce.

During the Civil War, Phanor Prud'homme helped provide Confederate soldiers with supplies, including draft animals, food produced by and equipment and cloth made by slaves at the plantation; he also leased out enslaved workers to help build fortifications and perform artillery service (Breedlove 1999, 31, 35). As many other Southern planters did, Phanor turned over a portion of his cotton fields to the production of corn and other rations for the plantation and the army, and enslaved workers began to produce at home those supplies in heavy demand, such as candles, cloth and soap (Breedlove 1999, 32). In mid-1863, Phanor began looking for a place, possibly Texas, to which he could remove his enslaved workforce and protect them from the war (and freedom), but his plan for removal never took place (Breedlove 1999, 36). Despite the devastation that met most of the South's plantations, Oakland escaped the Civil War with comparatively minor losses (Breedlove 1999, 36).

In October, 1865, Phanor Prud'homme's death coincided with the South's transition from slavery to sharecropping (Breedlove 1999, 38). His property, less the value of approximately

150 former slaves, was transferred primarily to his sons Alphonse and Emanuel Prud'homme in 1868, though other siblings received a share (Breedlove 1999, 41). In 1873 Alphonse and Emanuel divided the plantation into two parcels, separated by the Cane River; Alphonse called his 893-acre parcel Oakland, and it is part of this property that is now owned by the National Park Service (Breedlove 1999, 45). In 1864, Alphonse had married Elizabeth Eliza Lecomte of Magnolia Plantation, now also part of the Cane River Creole National Historical Park, and they began to reconstruct the Prud'homme's plantation under sharecropping in the 1870s (Breedlove 1999, 37). With regard to slavery, the most interesting yet common aspect of this transition is the fact that many of Oakland's formerly enslaved workers remained and became sharecroppers (Firth and Turner 2003, 150; Malone 1998, 110-15).

In terms of plantation size, size of captive workforce, types of crops, diverse land holdings and net worth, the Prud'hommes did not differ much from other successful planters in the Red River region and throughout the South's cotton belt (Firth and Turner 2003, 150-51). In this way, the Prud'hommes may be considered typical of the Southern planter class, and Oakland may be portrayed as a typical Southern, particularly French Creole, plantation. The individual characteristics of the Prud'homme family and its lifestyle have been documented in other papers; in the following sections I will catalogue the source material available for understanding slavery at Oakland, and attempt to illustrate antebellum slave life on this particular plantation.

Written Documents and Oral Histories

The National Park Service is fortunate to have at its disposal a great wealth of information concerning the lives of those who lived and worked at the Emanuel Prud'homme plantation. The Prud'homme family threw away very little, and historians and ethnographers working for the park have used the family's resources to compile syntheses of the plantation's

history. In particular, two documents bear mention here, as they have been the source of most of the data collected for this paper: Carolyn Breedlove's 1999 thesis *Bermuda/Oakland Plantation, 1830-1880*; and Ann Patton Malone's 1998 paper *Oakland Plantation, Its People's Testimony*, which is still a work in progress.

Prud'homme Family Papers

The Prud'homme family papers in the University of North Carolina library in Chapel Hill contain journals, written by family members and overseers, that describe the farm's agricultural cycles, construction projects and other details related to the operation of the plantation. Phanor Prud'homme kept almost daily records, and in his journals document the names, activities, rations and sometimes descriptions of enslaved workers (Breedlove 1999, 2; Firth and Turner 2003, 54-55). During his tenure, Seneca Pace also kept an overseer's journal, in which he recorded information about the crops and the health and activities of enslaved workers, and it is from his documents that we have obtained the few extant references to discipline on the plantation (Firth and Turner 2003, 61). The Prud'homme family papers served as the source for the historical information in the introduction to this chapter; additional specific details are noted in the synthesis of slave life at the end of this chapter. Personal journals from Oakland itself are lacking; however, Lestan Prud'homme, who lived at a neighboring plantation, kept a journal that documented personal relationships and other social aspects of plantation life on Cane River.

Government and Church Records

The United States Census and succession inventories for the Prud'homme family have provided a great deal of information about the numbers, names and occupations of enslaved workers at Oakland. By 1830, at the Bermuda plantation the US Census shows Emanuel; his wife Marie Catherine Lambre; a young white male who may have been his son, Pierre Phanor; a

free woman of color between the ages of 55 and 100; and 92 enslaved workers, 51 males and 41 females, all under 55 years of age (Breedlove 1999, 7-8). Phanor purchased eight slaves from his brother Narcisse in 1830: Thibaud, Salinette and their six children Alexis, Loise, Celestin, Raimand, Laide and Favie (Breedlove 1999, 9). The 1840 US Census counted Emanuel, with 104 enslaved workers, and Phanor, with 40 enslaved workers, as separate heads of households (Breedlove 1999, 11). Two succession inventories have supplied a great deal of information about the names, ages, occupations, familial relationships of enslaved workers in the 1850s: the first was Emanuel Prud'homme's 1850 succession inventory and the second occurred after the death of Phanor's first wife in 1853 (Firth and Turner 2003, 69).

In addition to government sources, historian Ann Malone has investigated slave baptisms and christenings; much of this information has yet to be published, but it will shed light on the age and gender composition of the slave community, its multi-cultural make-up and its kinship network (Malone 1998, 42-43 has an incomplete list of Emanuel's records). Using this and other information, the National Park Service is currently engaged in genealogical research to document, as much as possible, the extent of the slave community's kinship and cultural connections.

Oral Histories

As part of a project for the National Park Service, historian Ann Malone has compiled oral histories from the Prud'homme family and descendants of the share-cropping families at Oakland, many of whom were descended from the plantation's enslaved workforce. Although contemporary oral histories may be better suited for interpreting Oakland's period of sharecropping, some details may be used to "fill in the blanks" for the lives of enslaved workers, although it should be noted in interpretation that this has been done. In addition to the oral

histories, Malone also investigated the Prud'homme family papers and attempted to build a picture of slave life on the plantation, including kinship ties, that could then be compared to the later sharecropping period, about which we have more information. Specific details from her work are noted in the synthesis on slave life at the end of this chapter. Additionally, H. F. Gregory and Joseph Moran compiled an ethnographic analysis of the Cane River Creole community, its history and kinship networks; this ethnography does not relate specifically to the lives of enslaved workers at Oakland but does provide a good illustration of the socio-cultural background of the region (Gregory and Moran 1996).

Historic Structures

In terms of historic integrity, Oakland is remarkably intact (see Figure 3.1 for the locations of the extant structures). The plantation's subsidiary buildings allow visitors to easily imagine the site as a working farm, and they provide the National Park Service with further information about the plantation's operation, including the experience of its captive workforce. Many of these dependencies are, however, in poor condition, and not all have survived to the present day. The National Park Service is currently in the process of analyzing, documenting and restoring the historic resources at Oakland, which are described in detail below. Data on the buildings are currently being compiled through historic structures reports; once available, this more detailed information, including confirmation or revision of construction dates, should be used to augment and/or revise any future interpretive program.

The National Park Service plans to restore the Cane River Creole National Historical Park's historic structures and landscape to their appearance circa 1960 (National Park Service 2001, 5). This date would result in few changes to the existing structures, thus protecting resources from potentially damaging relocation or alteration, but the time frame will impact

interpretation of slavery at the site. Primarily, the 1960 date reflects the end of the sharecropping era, and it will be necessary to interpret slavery at Oakland through the lens of sharecropping (National Park Service 2001, 13).

Until a formal interpretive program is developed to address the transition of slavery to sharecropping, an interpretation of slavery at Oakland should rely primarily on the extant antebellum resources. An interpretive program on sharecropping will be able to utilize the full range of resources, while discussing which structures have survived from the slavery era. The following descriptions list the resources available and illustrate part of the physical environment in which enslaved laborers lived and worked. An interpretive program based on sharecropping can use the continuity of these structures and their uses to help demonstrate the historical continuity between agricultural labor systems from slavery until the mechanization of agriculture in the 1960s (see McDaniel 1982 and Reinberger 2003 for preliminary case studies on the relationship of the architecture of slavery and sharecropping).

Prud'homme House

Between 1818 and 1821, slaves began constructing the hip-roofed, raised Creole cottage that served as the plantation's main house for seven generations of Prud'hommes. The house was completed by the late 1830s and is in fairly good condition (National Park Service 2000, 122). A superb example of French Creole colonial architecture, the home design is fairly utilitarian, an aspect distinct from the more monumental and symbolic architectural features generally associated with the Anglo-American plantation society. Aspects of the plantation layout, such as the entry allee of oaks and the parterre garden, give the effect of refinement and order that was typical of plantations throughout the Southeast, though French Creole architecture typically did not exhibit the axial structure common to Anglo-American plantations (Firth and

Turner 2003, 33, 87). The National Park Service is currently undertaking efforts to restore the structure for visitor use and new exhibit space, and plans to add historic furnishings (National Park Service 2000, 43).

The kitchen garden and fruit orchard associated with the Prud'homme house were located near the ornamental garden and working yard; these spaces would have been tended by enslaved gardeners (Firth and Turner 2003, 33). Enslaved domestic workers would have been present throughout the house, and there is evidence that the basement was used in part as living quarters for an enslaved nursery maid, in addition to provision storage (Firth and Turner 2003, 132 for storage; Historic Structure Assessment report quoted in Carla Cowles' script, appended, for maid).

Slave/Tenant Quarters #1 and #2

These wood frame and bousillage structures represent Creole architectural traditions, as well as a typical plantation building type. Slave/Tenant Quarters #1 was built between 1820 and 1830, and the two-room Quarters #2 was constructed sometime in the early-mid nineteenth century (National Park Service, 122; see also Figure 3.4). Both houses depict the transition from plantation slavery to tenant sharecropping, as they were used continuously with some alterations in the tenancy period. Both cabins are currently in poor condition and are undergoing restoration by the National Park Service to reflect the 1960 date of significance (National Park Service 2000, 122) According to oral histories, at least some of the quarters originally had dirt floors and very little interior finishing; shuttered windows were unglazed (Malone 1998, 127-28). The National Park Service plans to use the quarters to "interpret stories associated with the people, lifeways, and events associated with those structures including the slavery and tenant periods as revealed through further research" (2000, 45).

It is important to note that most of the quarters area falls outside the property owned by the National Park Service; this information should be communicated in interpretation (Firth in personal communication). The quarters area, arranged around a communal yard, probably extended far south of the extant cabins, but the precise layout is unknown (Firth and Turner 2003, 130). A log fence marked the boundary of the yard, which was probably used for keeping livestock, including hogs and chickens (Firth and Turner 2003, 130-31). A garden for the quarters was located close to the 1860 steam-operated gin, although sections of the plantation's cultivated land were sometimes given for slave use (Firth and Turner 2003, 131).

Overseer's House

Constructed in 1861, this hip-roofed, bousillage structure is representative of French Creole architecture and a typical plantation building type. Originally the house was sheathed in beaded board or weatherboard and had a front gallery and brick piers (National Park Service 2000, 122; see also Figure 3.6). Although currently in poor condition, the house illustrates the overseer's presence in the management of the plantation and its captive workforce, and is currently undergoing restoration by the National Park Service to its 1960 appearance. The structure, later used as a tenant cabin, was originally built for Seneca Pace (Firth and Turner 2003, 65). The National Park Service plans to display exhibits in the house and use it as a site for occasional interpretive programs (National Park Service 2000, 45).

Doctor's House and Barn

Built in the early nineteenth century, the Doctor's house, originally a residence for Phanor Prud'homme and his wife, is a single story, timber-frame and bousillage structure that remains in relatively good condition, with some twentieth century alterations (Firth and Turner 2003, 56, 70 notes a journal reference to a cottage, probably for Phanor, being built to the south of the main

house in 1835). The adjacent L-shaped barn, a cypress timber frame structure, has an unknown construction date (National Park Service 2000, 123). There is a journal reference to a garden near the house after the arrival of Doctor Hulen in 1860 (Firth and Turner 2003, 130). The National Park Service plans to restore the house and barn for external interpretation and for use as park offices and storage space (2000, 45). Public comments on the National Park Service's proposal included a desire for general interpretation of and access to the Doctor's house, although it is uncertain whether or not the park will alter its plan (National Park Service 2001, 3).

Cook's House/Cook's Cottage

Originally built near the main house in the early-mid nineteenth century, the cook's house was added onto the main house, where it is currently located, once a new kitchen was constructed in the early 1920s (National Park Service 2000, 125). A bousillage and cypress timber structure, the cook's cabin is representative of a common plantation architectural type that was used into the sharecropping era. The house is currently in fair condition. The National Park Service plans to restore and interpret the cabin's exterior but will restrict visitor access to the interior (National Park Service 2001, 45).

Mule Barn

Built sometime between 1820 and 1830, the two-story cypress timber mule barn was originally used as a smokehouse. The barn is in fair condition, with some late nineteenth and early twentieth century alterations, and is significant as one of Oakland's oldest and most intact outbuildings (National Park Service 2000, 125). The National Park Service plans to restore the barn and make it accessible for visitors; this will include interpretation of the building's original use as a smokehouse and later use as a barn (2000, 43). The original mule barn burned; it was

probably one of the largest structures in the plantation yard, as there were over 40 mules on the plantation in 1860 (Firth and Turner 2003, 131).

Carpenter's Shop

Built in the mid-nineteenth century, the cypress log carpenter's shop exhibits half dovetail notching and a door of diagonal boards and battens (National Park Service 2000, 125; see also Figure 3.5). The shop, which has some twentieth century modifications, may once have had a side gallery and clay chinking. Oakland's enslaved carpenters, including Solomon Wilson, are mentioned by name in succession inventories and family papers; this shop could be the cabin that was built by Solomon Wilson in 1862, or it could have been situated near that cabin (Firth and Turner 2003, 133; Malone 1998, 58). The National Park Service plans to restore the exterior of the shop and restrict visitor access to the interior (2000, 45).

In addition to the structures listed above, journal references mention multiple corn cribs, a corn mill, a 1862 "servants house" and a potato house in the working yard behind the Prud'homme's house; there was probably also at least one antebellum chicken coop (Firth and Turner 2003, 132). The plantation bell, currently on display inside the Prud'homme house, was originally located on a tower in the yard (Malone 1998, 63). Oakland's yard currently contains the following structures, probably constructed in the antebellum period, which will be restored on the exterior with limited visitor access to the interior (National Park Service 2000, 45, 123-36):

- a wood-frame and cypress timber **fattening pen** and **setting pen**, both of which have suffered deterioration and alterations;
- a wood-frame and cypress timber **carriage house**, which was probably originally built in the 1820s and modified through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries;

- a wood-frame **corn crib** with a board-and-batten door;
- two **pigeonniers**, one of which was moved from its original location, that provided carrier pigeons and squab, an important component of the French Creole diet; and
- a **privy**, which probably also dates to the early nineteenth century.

The following descriptions document Oakland's extant resources that should be utilized in an interpretation program that reflects the post-war transition from slavery to sharecropping.

Plantation Store

Originally built in the early nineteenth century, the wood-frame plantation store with shed roof porches has been modified by shed additions. The structure also contains its own cistern, a contributing feature of the plantation store complex. Currently in poor condition, the store is representative of a plantation outbuilding type especially typical of the post-Civil War sharecropping era (National Park Service 2000, 123). The store functioned as a general store for the area, providing supplementary income to the Prud'homme family; additionally, tenant farmers could trade, interact socially and obtain rations there (Malone 1998,126-27, 154-55). The National Park Service plans to restore the structure for use as a "cooperating association sales outlet for books, postcards, and similar materials;" in addition, plantation artifacts will be displayed there and the building will be interpreted (2000, 45).

Seed Barn/Seed House

Constructed shortly after the Civil War, the single-story, wood-frame seed house is the last of its kind in the state of Louisiana (National Park Service 2000, 125). The 2,550-square foot structure was used to store cottonseed and is representative of plantation architecture from the latter nineteenth century. An earlier seedhouse was mentioned in an 1861 journal entry, but

its location is unknown (Malone 1998, 62). The National Park Service plans to restore the seed house for indoor maintenance functions (2000, 45).

Additionally, Oakland has the following post-war structures, some of which may also reflect the physical environment of the antebellum period; these will be restored on the exterior with limited visitor access to the interior (National Park Service 2000, 45, 123-26):

- a wood-frame and cypress timber **chicken coop**, probably built sometime in the nineteenth century;
- a wood-frame and cypress timber **storage shed**, built sometime in the nineteenth century;
- a **corral**, which may have elements from the early nineteenth century; and
- a heavy timber frame **wash house**, probably dating to the early twentieth century.

Cultural Landscape and Archaeology

Information from the cultural landscape and archaeological reports has been incorporated into the historical background and historic structures sections of this paper. The following information concerns those aspects of the physical environment which are no longer visible at Oakland, or have been significantly altered over time. Because the plantation existed as a large and complex agrarian commercial operation, cultural landscape and archaeological investigations are critical in documenting the boundaries and uses of plantation land and structures.

Cultural Landscape

In 1996 and 1997, the National Park Service Southeast Regional Office conducted a cultural landscape inventory; this and a comparative analysis of the historical record formed the basis of the 2003 Cultural Landscape Report (Firth and Turner 2003, National Park Service 2000, 119). In addition to detailing aspects such as boundary fluctuations, roadways, historic land use, river alterations and other information related to the physical environment, the report is

particularly valuable for its contextualization of those findings within the broader historical record. In terms of understanding slavery, the report offers data from written documents not included in Malone's or Breedlove's syntheses, while providing an illustration of the landscape that sustained, threatened and nourished those who lived and worked on the plantation. Specific details from the Cultural Landscape Report are noted in the synthesis on slave life at the end of this chapter.

The Cultural Landscape Report emphasizes the fact that most of the historical plantation lands are not owned by the National Park Service. Currently Oakland is comprised of 44 acres of the original plantation, which included more than 3,400 acres, approximately 1,000 of which were in cultivation (Firth and Turner 2003, 119; National Park Service 2000, 114). The discrepancy between the park's current property and the original plantation boundaries and land uses is an important distinction for understanding the environmental context of slavery at Oakland. The map of the plantation, circa 1860, that was included in the report should be a valuable resource in developing a formal interpretative program on slavery at Oakland.

Archaeology

In 1997, the National Park Service Southeast Archaeological Center conducted a comprehensive subsurface auger testing program at Oakland Plantation. As part of this program, archaeological deposits around the site were identified, including the location of the blacksmith's shop, and forty-six units were excavated (National Park Service 2000, 118-19). Archaeologists also determined the boundary of an historic cemetery, probably for plantation workers, along the east bank of Bayou Brevelle; there are no references to a cemetery within the park's current boundary (Firth and Turner 2003, 136; Malone 1998, 65). Additional investigation located traces of slave quarters south of the National Park Service's property boundary (Firth in personal

communication). Although further testing has been recommended, preliminary studies offered the park significant information for resource planning and management.

Although Oakland has retained an unusual number of its historic resources related to slavery and cotton production, archaeological investigations are still needed to collect information on vanished structures, especially those critical to the plantation's operation. In 1860, the plantation operated three gins, two of which were located within the park's boundary; we know the location of the steam-powered gin but the area has not been investigated, and the site of the older mule gin is unknown, though it may have been located north of the Prud'homme house (Firth and Turner 2003, 134-35). Further archaeological research could be used to document the vanished brick kiln, charcoal kiln, grist mill, forge, cotton magazine(s), slave hospital, sawmill and other structures and features no longer visible in the landscape but known from documents (Firth and Turner 2003, 57, 135; Malone 1998, 57, 59-60).

Synthesizing the Sources for the Slave Experience:

What We Know and What We Don't Know

Based on the source material described above, the information regarding the experience of enslaved workers at Oakland is most complete for the years 1850-1860, during the heyday of Phanor Prud'homme's ownership of the plantation. Most of the extant structures date from this period or earlier, and the historical data provided by Phanor's journals, as well as those of his overseers, can help interpreters construct the story of slave life at Oakland. In the following text I have attempted to illustrate what is known and not known about the typical experience of an enslaved worker at Oakland during that period. Although every year proceeded differently, the cycle of agriculture remained the same, the number and make-up of the enslaved workforce remained roughly the same, and the longevity of the players (especially Phanor, Seneca Pace,

and the many enslaved workers who bridged the time from slavery to sharecropping) helps provide a foundation for understanding slavery at Oakland.

The 1850 US Census records that Phanor held 126 slaves, and the 1860 Census lists 147 slaves, a number that made Phanor one of the top three slaveholders in Natchitoches Parish at that time (Breedlove 1999, 40; Firth and Turner 2003, 59). Enslaved workers provided most of the labor for the plantation, including constructing buildings, working at various mills, making improvements to the landscape, tending and butchering livestock, performing domestic chores for themselves and the Prud'hommes, and, of course, planting, cultivating and harvesting crops. Based on available evidence, it appears that the Prud'hommes adhered to the widespread practice of Southern paternalism in the treatment of their slaves (Breedlove 1999, 3). Enslaved workers constituted the most valuable investment for the plantation, and economic sense, if nothing else, dictated that a sufficiently housed, well-nourished and socially stable workforce would provide the best return on that investment (Firth and Turner 2003, 21, 75; see also Engerman and Fogel 1974).

Working as a Slave at Oakland

Field hands commonly worked six days a week, from sunrise until sunset and sometimes later (Firth and Turner 2003, 42). The plantation bell woke enslaved workers before sunrise; they walked to the fields, where they worked in gangs supervised by the slave driver, Hilaire, and Seneca Pace, probably with a break in the morning and a longer break for a midday meal (Firth and Turner 2003, 23 and Malone 1998, 63). I have not found documentation on who prepared midday meals or if the workers brought their own food; Lestan's journal may provide some insight. In January and February, the female "trash gang" cleared and burned the residue of the previous year, and workers began plowing with teams of oxen and mules (Firth and Turner

2003, 69). In February and March, workers usually ginned and pressed the previous year's cotton for shipping; at the same time, teams of workers used draft animals to prepare for the new crop (Firth and Turner 2003, 69-70). Workers typically planted crops in March and April, and often more than once to ensure a good harvest (Firth and Turner 2003, 77). Between planting and harvest, enslaved male workers turned and cultivated the soil with mule-drawn plows, scrapers and sweeps; men and women followed with hoes to weed and thin the crop (Firth and Turner 2003, 78). In the cotton picking season, beginning in August or September, each field hand filled a cotton sack that was then emptied into a large basket and weighed at the end of the day (Breedlove 1999, 78-79). The product of each field hand was recorded. Typically the workers picked the fields three or more times, since the bolls opened at different times, and spread wet cotton on platforms to dry before ginning (Breedlove 1999, 79). In October, ginning and pressing began, and by December, shipping; these activities, interspersed with construction, cleaning the fields and other projects, took place until the following spring (Firth and Turner 2003, 79). During wet weather or as appropriate throughout the year, field hands worked on specific construction projects, hauled equipment and supplies, or performed indoor tasks such as sewing or basket-weaving (Firth and Turner 2003, 60, 69, 72; please note that the Cultural Landscape Report gives a detailed account of the cotton cycle, which was not repeated here).

Although all slaves were expected to attend to the cotton crop when possible, many enslaved workers had additional skills of value to the plantation, and were exempted from some field work to perform their specialized tasks (Firth and Turner 2003, 43). Additionally, elderly and infirm enslaved workers, as well as children, would typically be assigned light or domestic tasks, such as gardening, weaving or driving livestock (Firth and Turner 2003, 22). The 1850 succession inventory lists the names and some occupations of the 46 enslaved workers who

passed from Emanuel to Phanor Prud'homme, including a slave driver (Hilaire), blacksmith (Solomon), coachman (Charles), laundress and ironer (Martha Ann), a carpenter (Solomon), a house servant (Mary), a midwife/nurse (Celeste), and field hands, plus a half-interest in a weaver (Lindor) and his wife (Breedlove 1999, 15; Firth and Turner 2003, 51). Additionally, the 1850 inventory lists a cowherder, a cook, a young male house servant, another carpenter and another midwife, all of whom were sold (Breedlove 1999, 14-15). Finally, Phanor's wife's 1853 succession inventory also lists a shoemaker (Alexis), a brick mason (Butler), a painter (Nathan), and a highly-valued man named Minique who may have been a carpenter and a fiddler, all of whom remained on the plantation (Breedlove 1999, 93; Firth and Turner 2003, 60).

Although Phanor did not purchase all of Emanuel's slaves, it is likely that he held enslaved workers with the skills mentioned, as they were desirable to continue the efficient operation of the plantation and the standard of living to which the family had become accustomed. To further profit from his skilled workforce, as was typical of many Southern planters, Phanor Prud'homme occasionally leased out slaves for employment and/or training (Breedlove 1999, 90). In 1855, Phanor apparently sent a young slave named Raymond to J. B. Clouthon of Union Plantation to be trained as an engineer, though there is no evidence that he was sent for hire (Breedlove 1999, 90 and Firth and Turner 2003, 60). In her thesis, Carolyn Breedlove estimates that the percentage of skilled labor at Oakland (approximately five percent) was consistent with other plantations in the Southeast (Breedlove 1999, 94). Some documents, including the 1853 inventory, list ages and/or market value of slaves, which can help determine how many slaves were "full hands," who labored exclusively in the cotton fields; in 1856, Phanor noted that he had 58 male and female slaves between the ages of 15 and 45; these could probably be considered full hands (Firth and Turner 2003, 68).

A September 1857 entry in Seneca Pace's Cotton and Plantation Record and Account Book mentions punishment by flogging, which is the only known reference to use of the whip on enslaved workers at Oakland (Firth and Turner 2003, 69; in correspondence, Ann Patton Rose (formerly Ann Patton Malone) has questioned this interpretation). As noted in the Cultural Landscape Report, it was common for overseers and planters not to record punishments; if the interpretation of the reference is correct, it is probable, based on the casual reference, that Seneca used the whip more often than he documented (Firth and Turner 2003, 69). Other types of punishment may have included suspension of privileges or time in the stocks, though there are no documented references to the latter (Firth and Turner 2003, 70; Malone 1998, 84). Seneca does record rewards for enslaved workers, including the occasional Saturday or Saturday afternoon off, or time given for celebratory dances, such as the ball given for the marriage of Seraphin and Jane in March 1860 (Firth and Turner 2003, 70). Other types of rewards could have included distribution of tobacco and whiskey or permission to travel from the plantation (Firth and Turner 2003, 48).

According to historian Joe Gray Taylor, an average enslaved worker in Louisiana received a daily allowance of half a pound of pork and a quart of corn meal (Taylor in Firth and Turner 2003, 40). Exact provisions for Oakland's captive workforce are unknown, but plantation accounts occasionally list provisions purchased for the workers; in 1846, records indicated a large expenditure for pork and smaller expenditures for molasses, salt, tobacco and whiskey (Firth and Turner 2003, 48). Additionally, workers raised livestock and grew fruits, vegetables, sweet potatoes and corn, sometimes in separate plots adjacent to the quarters, to supplement their diets (Firth and Turner 2003, 48-49). This practice was common on antebellum plantations, but Phanor also sold surplus produce and livestock on the slaves' behalf, which was more

controversial and allowed enslaved workers to accumulate money of their own (Firth and Turner 2003, 48). The workers produced their own clothing from raw materials, and Phanor supplied shoes, which may have been produced by an enslaved shoemaker, as well as heavier clothing such as coats in the winter (Firth and Turner 2003, 49).

In addition to the plantation doctor, records indicate that a hospital existed on the plantation, and that the building was used for a variety of functions during Phanor's ownership (Firth and Turner 2003, 49). Seneca Pace documented workers' illnesses in his journal, and Emanuel's succession inventory lists "hernia" as a common disability among enslaved workers (Firth and Turner 2003, 60, 70). Pregnant and nursing women were typically given lighter chores and/or smaller picking quotas; in the antebellum and sharecropping period there are references to "suckler" or "nursing gangs," who performed other work but also tended enslaved children until they reached an age acceptable for light or domestic chores (Breedlove 1999, 87).

As noted in earlier chapters, faked illness was a common form of resistance to the hardships of forced agricultural labor, but we have no concrete documentation of it at Oakland. Seneca Pace did complain of "laziness" among the field hands, which may be interpreted as resistance (Firth and Turner 2003, 69). During the Civil War years, dozens of enslaved workers and children abandoned the plantation with the Union Army, joined the "contrabands" or simply ran away (Firth and Turner 2003, 104). There are no other references to enslaved workers running away before this time.

Living as a Slave at Oakland

Because our understanding of the slave experience at Oakland is based primarily on journals kept by Phanor Prud'homme and Seneca Pace, we do not know as much about the life of enslaved workers outside the realm of plantation labor. Although Phanor continued to buy and

sell slaves during his management of Oakland, the existing slave community had likely developed a balanced population structure and certain social cohesion by the 1850s, including extensive kinship ties (Firth and Turner 2003, 68; Malone 1998, 78-80). The slave sale following Emanuel's death disrupted the community in 1850, but Prud'homme family members purchased many of the workers and it is probable that communication and interaction between separated enslaved kinsmen and friends continued (Firth and Turner 2003, 59-60). Ann Malone's research indicates that many of Oakland's enslaved workers in the 1850s had colonial ancestors who worked on the plantation; she also determined that nuclear families formed the basis of the social structure, and childless married couples and singles held kinship ties that kept them supported within the community (Malone 1998, 79).

In 1853, only nine of Phanor's enslaved workers were 60 years of age or older; these people may have been born in Africa. The 1836 Cotton Book lists the Christian names of plantation's enslaved workers; the names appear to be French or English with a few that may be African (Firth and Turner 2003, 39). As mentioned earlier, Ann Malone has compiled some information on baptisms and christenings, which should shed some light on the composition of the community. The majority of the enslaved workforce could be described as Franco-African, having created a Creole culture of French and African influences and, presumably, language. In Phanor's journals there are references to Anglo-African (often referred to as English or American) and mulatto workers as well (Firth and Turner 2003, 39). In 1855, Phanor's second wife Cephalide brought seven slaves to the plantation, including four children, two of whom were mulattoes (Breedlove 1999, 16, 18). In 1857 Phanor purchased a Creole griffe (of mixed African and American Indian descent) named Severin and an American (Anglo) mulatto named

William (Firth and Turner 2003, 59). Little is known about the social and cultural interaction of enslaved workers from different backgrounds.

As in any community, Oakland's enslaved workers probably developed levels of status and hierarchy to define its members. Some of this stratification may have been based on work assignments and skills; some of this information, as well as market value, is recorded in the succession inventories. Ann Malone postulates that domestic workers, because they interacted closely with the Prud'hommes, would have enjoyed an elevated status with Oakland's white residents, though perhaps not with the field hands; she also suggests that the artisans, nurses and midwives would have been universally appreciated in both black and white spheres (Malone 1998, 75). The Prud'hommes accorded the slave driver a special status but, again, it is difficult to imagine how he would have been perceived in the quarters. It is also possible to imagine that the enslaved community would have valued and awarded special status based on kinship connections, and to musicians, storytellers, herbalists/root workers and others whose leadership or entertainment skills are not entered in the plantation records. Although the slave community was divided by labor and living arrangements, it is likely that the field hand quarters served as the setting for the community's everyday domestic activities as well as special occasions (Malone 1998, 59).

The representative extant cabins at Oakland measure approximately 25 feet by 32 feet by 18 feet; according to the 1860 Census, each cabin held approximately four or five residents (National Park Service 2000, 122). If the extant structures are in fact representative of Oakland's slave quarters, it seems that the Prud'homme family provided adequate, even comparatively spacious accommodations for the plantation's captive workforce. We do not have documentation on how these structures were furnished. A reference to a "cabin in the yard," as

opposed to the quarters, in February, 1862 probably indicates that enslaved domestic and skilled workers lived behind the main house and not in the quarters, a separation that would presumably affect social status and interaction between domestic and field hands; a March, 1862 reference indicates that these quarters may have had brick walls and therefore been more substantial than the extant quarters (Malone 1998, 58). Within the quarters, some stratification probably took place; the driver Hilaire and his family probably occupied one of the larger cabins in the first row (Malone 1998, 59). In the tenancy period, at least some of the quarters had their own fireplaces and wood stoves, where families prepared meals individually; it is not known whether or not this applied to the slavery era as well (Malone 1998, 128). Very little has been documented about foodways at Oakland plantation in the black or white sphere; until archaeological investigations provide us with specific information, we may hypothesize that African cultural traditions influenced food preparation.

Typically, enslaved workers had Sundays off to tend their own gardens and livestock, as well as relax and engage in social activities; in 1860, hands were also given one Saturday per month from March through July (Firth and Turner 2003, 71). Dances and balls took place on special occasions, including marriages and after peak periods in the agricultural cycle (Firth and Turner 2003, 61, 71). Holidays included Christmas and New Year's Day, and usually a whole and/or half-day preceeding or following the holiday itself; in 1860, enslaved workers from Oakland attended a Christmas dance at Octave Metoyer's plantation, which offered an opportunity for social interaction with workers from other plantations (Firth and Turner 2003, 69, 73). We do not have any detailed descriptions of these events, but historians such as Eugene Genovese have compiled information on other slave celebrations, which may be used in the absence of this data (Genovese 1974, 566-84). Phanor Prud'homme occasionally sent enslaved

workers on assignments that required travel over long distances, and workers were allowed to visit other plantations on their days off (Malone 1998, 78). Lestan's journal contains references to enslaved workers who accompanied him on hunting and fishing expeditions (Firth in personal communication).

Based on references to marriage and the mention of married couples, it appears that, as the *Code Noir* reflects, the Prud'hommes and their overseers acknowledged the institution of marriage between slaves, although little is known about the ceremonies themselves. One may surmise that these and other celebrations included African and European elements, but we have no documentation specific to Oakland. As was dictated in the *Code Noir*, the Prud'homme family baptized their enslaved workers in the Catholic faith; again, we know little about the ceremony itself or religious activities of the enslaved community (Firth and Turner 2003, 39). Enslaved workers were buried in a slave cemetery located on the plantation grounds; presumably, the enslaved community held funerals but we do not know the nature of the ritual. Again, Eugene Genovese is a good source for information about slave rituals on other large plantations, and we may hypothesize about the lives of the Oakland slave community in this context (Genovese 1974, 463-82 on marriage, 195-202 on funerals).

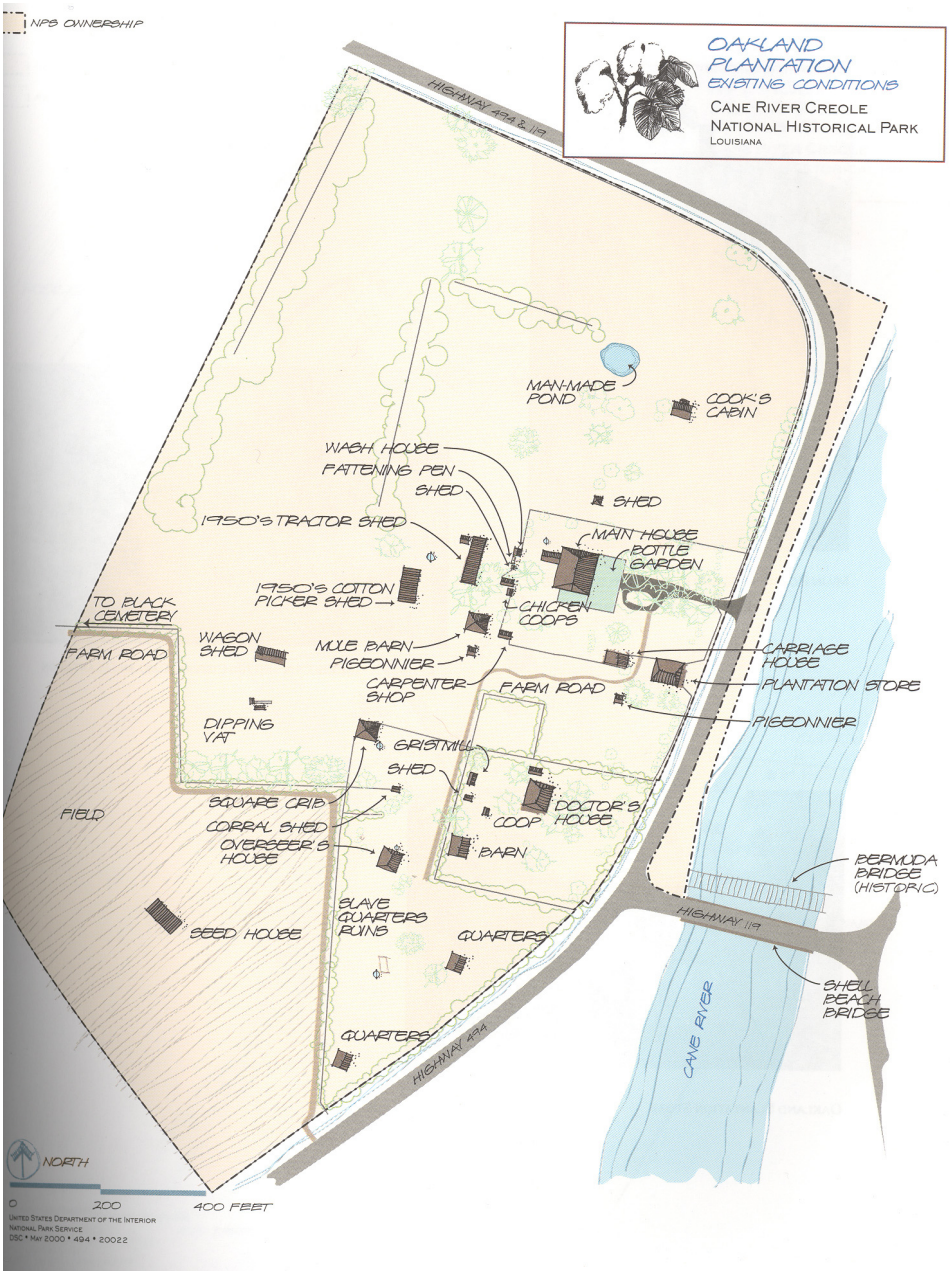

Fig 3.1: Map of Oakland Plantation (Courtesy of National Park Service, Draft General Management Plan, 2000)

Fig 3.2: Prud'homme Family Home, Oakland Plantation

Fig 3.3: Workyard and Farm Structures at Oakland

Fig 3.4: Slave Cabin at Oakland

Fig. 3.5: Carpenter's Shop (foreground) and Mule Barn

Fig. 3.6: Overseer's House at Oakland

Fig. 3.7: Sugar Cane Kettle and uga7□SOakland

CHAPTER 4

INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES FOR OAKLAND

The National Park Service has not yet developed a formal interpretive program for Oakland Plantation, and the site has undergone changes in staff, with attendant changes in interpretive modes. The current Acting Chief of Interpretation, Rick Gupman, worked with the two former chiefs, Carla Cowles and Marjie Ortiz, and explained to me some of the challenges faced by interpreters. One of the primary challenges is the wealth of information at the site: how does one consolidate ethnography, historic resources, written documentation, archaeology and oral histories into a single 30-minute tour that will inspire and educate all visitors? Cowles developed a standardized script that is still used to train interpreters; Ortiz wanted to build on the structure of this script to create a formal program (see Cowles script, appended). Because of the sheer volume of material available on Oakland, Gupman prefers to allow docents to frame their tours around the legislated goals of the park, using their own areas of expertise to build individual tours. His hope is that this approach will allow more flexibility and variety in tours and allow individual docents to respond to visitors' particular interests; Gupman acknowledges that the obvious pitfall in this approach is that the strength of the tour is heavily dependent on the interest and knowledge of individual docents.

The Current State of Oakland's Interpretive Program

Although the park has not outlined a formal program, it is likely that the interpretation of the slave experience at Oakland will be viewed through the lens of sharecropping, based on the oral histories and other information collected by park researchers. Until further research on the

sharecropping era is compiled and interpreted, Oakland holds a wealth of information about the slave experience that may be conveyed to visitors; this information, if developed into an interpretive program, will only enrich any subsequent interpretation of the plantation's sharecropping era.

Docent Tours and the Interpreter Experience

Docent tours remain the primary mode of interpretation for heritage sites, and it remains the dominant mode at Oakland. When I visited the site in May 2003, I participated in a 30-minute general tour, which focussed on the function of extant historic resources, with a particular emphasis on farm-related structures and outbuildings associated with slavery. Afterwards I conducted an informal interview with the interpreter, Kiki Gallien, who has worked at the site for almost a year. We discussed issues that she faced related to the interpretation of slavery, including the definition of "Creole", intermarriage among different ethnic groups, the Prud'hommes' system of punishment and privileges for enslaved workers, and the ethnic identification of various members of the plantation community, both free and enslaved. She said that she tries to gauge visitor interest and mood (for instance, watching for note-taking or the ability to joke) and will tailor her tour accordingly. She has noticed self-segregation by race on some tours, and noted that members of the Prudhomme family have particular and sometimes unfounded expectations of the tour. She typically waits for visitors to ask questions before addressing controversial topics, and indicated that one recurring issue is the Prudhomme family's relative civility in their treatment of enslaved workers. She routinely explains that the tour is not intended to elevate the Prudhomme family but is based on data collected and evaluated by the National Park Service.

At the time of my visit, Gallien and Gupman made up Oakland's staff of interpreters, and both acknowledged that their personal backgrounds played a large role in the way they interpret and impart information. A white man from the northern United States, Gupman has a background in living history, and so is drawn to interpretive demonstrations of farm life. A student of political science at Northwestern University, Gallien is an African-American woman, with Creole roots, from California; she has become interested in, among other things, the definition and roles of Creoles at Oakland. Both interpreters structure their tours around the goals defined by the National Park Service, using their personal knowledge to "fill in the blanks" and respond to the interests of visitors. Both stressed the importance of observing other tours to improve one's own, and that interpreters who love their jobs will conduct more enthusiastic and well-researched tours.

In her article "Interpreting Slavery at National Trust Sites," Susan Schreiber outlined some issues facing interpreters of slave life at the National Trust's historic sites. The staff who participated in the National Trust's workshops on the subject reflected that visible race and background (*e.g.*, a Southern accent) of the interpreter could affect credibility; descendants of the plantation's owners or enslaved workers could be offended by a particular portrayal; and funding and time constraints could bar them from effectively communicating any substantial information (Schreiber 2000, 51). Staff also voiced a reluctance to use generalizations, despite a severe lack of information particular to a site; difficulties in framing slavery interpretation for groups composed of black and white visitors; and a general discomfort, despite sincere interest, in discussing slavery (Schreiber 2000, 52). These concerns could apply to any site struggling with slavery interpretation, and they highlight the need for frank, honest and possibly confrontational representations of the lives of enslaved workers. The primary problem is the association

between today's visitors and the historical occupants of the plantation, based on race and/or kinship. Emphasizing class distinctions over race identity is one way to combat this problem and help visitors relate to life on the plantation; another way is to individualize the stories within the greater context of American slavery. Individualization or localization can help deflect the criticisms of those visitors who feel, for whatever reason, that the portrayal of slave life at the site is inaccurate. The experience of enslaved workers varied from site to site, whenever possible, interpreters should explore individual stories, based on solid data and research, that could help communicate the slave experience at their particular site.

Specialized Educational Programs

Specialized educational programs are often conducted at heritage sites to explain a particular story, such as the African-American experience or agrarian life in the nineteenth century, or to explain the overall story to a particular group of people, such as women or children. Although not often offered regularly, these tours or demonstrations usually benefit from in-depth explorations of the topic at hand and participants who have selected particular expanded educational program. Specialized tours at Oakland include "Cotton Cotton Everywhere," which explains agricultural production and processing (offered Monday-Wednesday-Friday); "Family, Kinship and the Church," which gives more details about Creole life and the socio-cultural context of Oakland (offered Monday through Friday at 3:00PM); and annual "Feast or Famine" demonstrations, which also help explain the role of agriculture at Oakland.

Integration with Heritage Trails and Regional Programs.

The National Park Service anticipates that the Cane River National Heritage Area, which incorporates the region's historic Creole communities, will complement the recreational and

educational programs offered by the National Park Service's Cane River Creole National Historical Park, which includes Oakland and Magnolia plantations (2000, 132). By interpreting Oakland and Magnolia as part of the region's larger French Creole society, it will be possible to transmit a more holistic understanding of cultural and class distinctions, social interaction between various groups, and other characteristic aspects of Creole identity. Such an approach will provide a socio-cultural context for the park's plantations, while offering visitors the opportunity to compare and contrast Oakland- and Magnolia-specific information with broader historical information gleaned through other Cane River heritage programs. Additionally, integration with other programs, and the utilization of off-site resources, will allow the National Park Service to convey information more easily about the historical plantation as a whole, since it only owns two percent of the original land.

Free-Standing Exhibits with Signage

Eichstedt and Small suggest that free-standing exhibits are a way to thoughtfully represent aspects of slave life on a plantation, as such exhibits ensure the visibility of enslaved workers and can be carefully constructed to function without the filter of a docent (2002, 216-18). They cite the example of Montpelier in Virginia, noting that, in the exhibit, 1) the "hero" status of President Madison is expressed as complicated by his enslavement of others; 2) the dependence of the plantation upon slave labor is stressed; 3) racial categorizations and roles are explicitly stated instead of assuming that everyone is white (*e.g.*, " ' the white girls continued their education… and the children of slaves took up chores' "); and 4) common methods of slave resistance are outlined. Inside the Prud'homme family home, Oakland currently hosts a brief exhibit with photographs and other documentation about antebellum life on the plantation.

Enslaved blacksmith Solomon Williams is discussed by name, and a reproduction of his crafted iron cross grave marker is displayed for visitors.

First-Person Interpretation

As in the case of Colonial Williamsburg, first-person interpretation can be a highly effective means of conveying information about slave experience. First-person interpretive programs are rarely the primary interpretive mode at heritage sites but can function within special programs to better illustrate aspects of life at the site. With first-person interpretation, visitors are made explicitly aware of the presence of enslaved workers, and, depending on the quality of the script and the actor's talent, can be drawn into understanding slavery in a more emotional and visceral way. Typically this mode of interpretation relies on the existence of adequate documentation about a specific enslaved individual, at least enough to build a character and a life story. One critique of this method by African-American visitors to Colonial Williamsburg concerns the emphasis on portrayals of the brutality of slavery, which can be viewed as degrading, over the portrayal of African-American social and economic contributions, their methods of survival and resistance, and their enduring legacy in America (Goodheart 2001, 43).

Oakland's first chief of interpretation, Carla Cowles, began her experience with slavery representation at Colonial Williamsburg, where she conducted first-person narratives and costumed tours (Thompson 2000). At Cane River Creole National Historical Park, Cowles hosted first-person interpretations at Magnolia that depicted African fables and African-American folktales related to slavery, as well as a story about an enslaved worker who was taught to read by his white owner (Thompson 2000). In a June 2000 article in *The New York Times*, Cowles noted that blacks and whites in Natchitoches admitted apprehension about the

program before it took place, and that she chose stories not directly related to Magnolia in an effort to ease that tension (Thomson 2000). Universalizing the interpretation is one way to offset deep-rooted personal associations with either the plantation's owners or enslaved workers; however, a universalizing approach must be conveyed as such, so that visitors do not walk away with the belief that they learned something particular about slave life at the park.

Self-Guided Tours

As in the case of free-standing exhibits, Eichstedt and Small suggest that audio or book tours allow for a thoughtful and consistent representation of the slave experience at various sites (2002, 214). This method of interpretation ensures a standardized tour but does not allow for visitor-interpreter interaction, which allows visitors to learn more through asking questions, and can lessen a visitor's engagement with the experience of the site. Audio narration can be most effective when used as part of a docent tour; Eichstedt and Small give an example from Carlyle House in Virginia, at which docents play taped narrations about specific enslaved individuals at specified points in the tour (2002, 220). These narrations can be in first-person or merely explicative. Eventually the National Park Service should consider using self-guided tours at Oakland, especially as computer and recording technology permit more expanded and flexible tours, but such a program would benefit first from the development of a comprehensive, docent-led interpretive program at the site.

Other Techniques for Visibility and Interpretation

Throughout this paper, I have discussed the importance of stressing the visibility of enslaved workers on plantation sites, whether through the maintenance and interpretation of historic structures, first-person interpreters or permanent standing exhibits. Other techniques cited by Eichstedt and Small include film strips, in which actors portray enslaved workers

contributing to the wealth and upkeep of the site and white family, and the use of mannequins or cut-outs throughout the site to illustrate the presence of African-Americans (2002, 219). At Carlyle House in Alexandria, Virginia, mannequins have varying skin colors and their period garments reflect different roles and duties performed by enslaved workers at the site (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 219).

Framework for an Interpretive Program at Oakland

Every interpretive program is the result of a series of decisions, usually made by a number of people, about what information to include, the duration of tours, program structure, and program goals and objectives. As illustrated in the last chapter, because enslaved workers left no historical documentation, it is often necessary to supplement information about slave life from documentation particular to the site, coupled with external ideas about the typical lives of captives to provide a more comprehensive view. The framework of the program is then filtered through the training and performance of each individual docent, who must ideally work with the knowledge and interest of each visitor to convey accurate and interesting information. Oakland is fortunate to have a wealth of primary source material; in earlier chapters, I discussed and evaluated the types of resources available. For the information that is not available, I recommend a creative use of the scholarship of Eugene Genovese and John Michael Vlach, with a particular emphasis on examples from large plantations in French Creole Lousiana, especially the Red River region.

Because the National Park Service has access to a wealth of historical documentation about Oakland, as well as extant physical information about the plantation's structures and landscape, Oakland is a good candidate for a conscientious and thorough interpretive program regarding the slave experience. In the short term, such a program will require:

- decisions regarding interpretive strategies;
- development of materials for docent and visitor use that will help convey information about the plantation during slavery;
- development of a standardized tour that incorporates slavery; and
- development of specialized exhibits or tours regarding the slave experience for those visitors who want more detailed information.

In the long term, the program will benefit from:

- permanent illustrations of slave life, such as hypothetical interior furnishings and exterior personal space; and
- restoration of historic structures and landscapes related to slavery, as detailed in the Cane River Creole National Historical Park's General Management Plan and the 2003 Cultural Landscape Report.

Interpretive Strategies

One of the most important decisions that a site's interpretive staff must make is the choice of historical time period (or periods), which will automatically limit the stories the site is able to tell. As noted by Eichstedt and Small in their book *Representations of Slavery*, "the compression of time (and space) into a forty-minute tour or leaflet not only is confusing but also makes it difficult to treat the topic of enslavement with respect, as the number of people who were enslaved varied greatly at a specific site over time and also between different sites, as did the crops raised and the attendant labor practices" (2002, 140). In the last chapter, I suggested 1850-1860 as the period of enslavement for which Oakland has the most documentation, and from which a baseline interpretation of slavery could be developed. Since the park has a number of post-war historical resources and will eventually develop an interpretive program to address

sharecropping, it would be beneficial to construct the interpretation of the 1850-1860 data so that it may eventually be constructively compared with data from the sharecropping era.

One possible interpretive strategy would be to conduct tours based on the cycle of cotton agriculture (suggested by Ian Firth in personal communication). For instance, in winter docents would describe the activities related to clearing the fields and ginning, pressing and selling cotton, while summer tours would focus on the long, hot hours of cotton cultivation and tending. Such a structure could provide a framework for interpreting slavery as well as the lives of the Prud'hommes and their employees, as all were subject to the dictates of the agricultural cycle. This approach would encourage return visits, allow docents to communicate more specific information, and give visitors the opportunity to better understand the environmental conditions during which certain activities would take place. This seasonal interpretation would permit a comparison of the cotton cycle through different periods in the plantation's history. For instance, an interpretation of slavery in 1860 could be compared with an interpretation of sharecropping in 1920, and these could be compared with the end of the sharecropping era in approximately 1960, the close of the period of significance for the park's restoration. However, a seasonal interpretation would not convey the full range of information regarding plantation life that one might expect from a general tour; a standardized brochure could be developed to address this missing element.

Throughout this paper, I have argued for the interpretation of slavery as an exploitative economic system that can be compared to other systems that exploited and appropriated the labor of an oppressed class for the benefit of a few wealthy elites. Although the critical difference in the transition from slavery to sharecropping is freedom from life-long bondage, an aspect which cannot be over-emphasized, the comparison of the slavery and sharecropping systems will

illustrate the similarities in such exploitative systems. The interpretive program at Oakland will still, appropriately, have to address the racist ideology that supported these systems in the South. In this regard, the French Creole character of the plantation should provide an interesting and complex backdrop for discussing race and ethnic identity.

Interpretive Materials

Initially, Oakland's interpretive staff should develop a standardized script for slavery interpretation, either by using recent scholarship on the park or by revising Carla Cowles' script to reflect recent scholarship and interpretive strategies (the script is discussed in more detail in the following section on docent tours). If the park decides to focus slavery interpretation on the 1850-1860 period, it will be necessary to produce a reference map that explains the difference between the plantation circa 1860 and the park's current property. For the 2003 Cultural Landscape Report, Ian Firth and Eric Baugher prepared a map of the plantation circa 1860 that may be adapted for docent training and/or visitor use. The map could also be used as the basis for a scale model of the plantation that could be displayed in an exhibit area. Because the park owns such a small parcel of the historical property, without an illustration of the historic plantation visitors would have difficulty understanding the physical layout and boundaries for the period of interpretation, as well as visualizing the full range of the plantation's operation.

If Oakland's slavery interpretation focuses on the period from 1850-1860, docents would benefit from a compilation of all the known names, ages, occupations and descriptions of enslaved workers during this time period. Such a list would enable docents to refer more easily to captive workers throughout the tour and personalize the experience of slavery at the site. Once the park's genealogy research is complete, the findings should be used to discuss kinship networks and the multicultural character of Oakland's slave community. Finally, the park's

Cultural Landscape Report recommends using Seneca Pace's 1860 "Daily Record of Passing Events" for an in-depth understanding of the cycle of cotton agriculture during that time (Firth and Turner 2003, 155-56). Pace's records and other antebellum material can be compared with the twentieth century Prud'homme Bros. Ledgers as raw material for an interpretive program that documents the similarities and differences between agriculture under slavery and sharecropping (Firth and Turner 2003: 157). A compilation and comparison between these materials, specifically geared toward docent training, would significantly benefit Oakland's interpretation.

Regular Guided Tour

If it included a brief introduction about the Prud'homme family and the founding of the plantation, Oakland's 30- to 40-minute regular guided tour could focus on life on the plantation during Phanor Prud'homme's ownership in 1850-1860, the antebellum period for which we have the most documentation. With maps showing the plantation layout at that time, visitors could access, or at least approach, the extant historic structures related to the plantation's operation and understand their relation to the greater whole. Individual enslaved workers should be discussed by name whenever possible. The field quarters should remain the primary location for discussing the slave experience, as described in the preceding chapter, and every attempt should be made to render realistically the labor and leisure life of the plantation's working population. Finally, docents should address the composition of the slave community, including status and skill levels, interactions between people of different cultural backgrounds, and the relationship between the Prud'hommes, overseers and the enslaved workforce.

One of the first steps in building a formal interpretative program will be the reevaluation of Carla Cowles' tour format. Her 2000 version (appended) leads the visitor from the welcome area in the oak allee, through the Prud'hommes house (as a location for discussing the history of

the family on the site), to the "yard" (as a location for discussing the issue of plantation as farm), and to the quarters (as the location for discussing slave life at Oakland). When I visited the park in May 2003, my tour contained broadly the same elements but moved from the welcome area to the yard to the quarter to the Prud'hommes house. This structure marks a departure from most plantation tours, and I believe it is more effective in communicating the plantation as a farm complex, not as a beautiful large house with dependencies. Furthermore, by visiting the world of the enslaved before the world of the plantation owners, the interpreter frames the tour through the lens of the people who provided the excruciating labor necessary to profit from the enterprise, and such a framework complicates the aesthetic appeal of the main house tour. Although the structure of the tour is my foremost criticism of Cowles' format, the script should also be revised to reflect current scholarship and interpretive strategies.

Essentially, the National Park Service should strive to give visitors a tangible experience that will help them understand, if briefly, the reality of plantation slavery. Following a standardized training program, docents should be able to note which aspects of the interpretation are based in actual documentation and which are hypothesized. In addition, docents should convey that, to fully imagine the life of Oakland's slaves, it is necessary to make some assumptions (*e.g.*, about enslaved workers' thoughts and emotions, interior furnishings or leisure activities) that are not supported by the plantation records, which recorded solely those aspects of slave life that affected the plantation's operation. The program would benefit from the continued practice of tour observations to enable docents to learn from each other and to ensure that they deliver consistent and accurate information

Themed Tours and Exhibits

As it stands, the National Park Service has enough information about the slave experience at Oakland from 1850-1860 to conduct full hour-long tours exclusively devoted to the subject. If slavery is substantially addressed in the general tour, however, it may be more interesting for visitors to learn about the slave experience through specialized theme tours or exhibits. Based on the information already collected, the two best candidates for such interpretation are 1) the transition from slavery to sharecropping and 2) a biographical portrait of Solomon Williams, the plantation blacksmith.

- *From Slavery to Sharecropping.* In *Representations of Slavery*, Eichstedt and Small imply that the sharecropping system put into place following the Civil War should be understood as another form of enslavement or exploitative labor (2002, 229). Clearly there is a crucial difference in the legal status of freedom, but there is a strong association between the two systems. The association between enslavement and sharecropping can rest on the structure of the living and working arrangements, as well as the plantation system's continued dependence on cheap (exploited) labor to ensure the profitability of the enterprise and the continued ownership of the land by white elites, in this case the Prud'homme family. This transition can be addressed at Oakland through the use of historic structures, which were used continuously, and the historical documentation and oral histories compiled by Carolyn Breedlove and Ann Malone.
- *Solomon Williams: Plantation Blacksmith.* Because Ann Malone has compiled a significant amount of biographical information on Solomon Williams, Oakland's highly skilled enslaved blacksmith, he would be a good candidate for first-person interpretation or the subject of a specialized tour or exhibit. Born in 1819 in Virginia, Solomon worked

as a slave for Phanor Prud'homme and later under contract for Alphonse Prud'homme during sharecropping (Malone 1998, 75-76). His story could encompass themes of Franco-Anglo interaction at the plantation, enslaved families on the plantation, the importance of skilled workers to the plantation, the stratification of labor within the slave community, and the transition of slavery to sharecropping. Archaeological research has uncovered the location of the blacksmith's shop, which could be used as the focal point for discussion; the park also has access to examples of Solomon's work, such as the iron crosses recovered from the Freedmen's Cemetery at Oakland (Malone 1998, 76). The park also benefits from particular stories about Williams, such as his negotiation of a favorable contract once the plantation made the transition to sharecropping (Malone 1998, 119-20). Finally, folklore exists related to the Williams' appearance: he was said to have been "a veritable Vulcan of mythology;" extremely tall, with exceptionally large feet and a long flowing beard that grew white with age (Thomas Langier quoted in Wancho 1985, 85-86).

Eventually, the park may consider a first-person interpretation of an enslaved field worker at Oakland, since skilled laborers such as Solomon Williams were the exception rather than the rule in terms of the slave experience. At Oakland, due to the dearth of detailed information regarding field workers, this strategy could be implemented by creating a character for a well-documented sharecropper whose ancestors were slaves on the plantation.

Illustrations of Slave Life

In addition to specialized exhibits and first-person interpretation, Oakland's interpretive program may benefit from the development of hypothetical interior furnishings for slavery-related structures and exterior personal space, such as gardens. Such illustrations would convey

a more complex view of the lives and work environments of enslaved laborers. Given the park's plan to restore structures to their 1960 appearance, these illustrations could be rendered and posted as images for visitors within appropriate structures or, in the case of gardens and other physical features that bridged the transition from slavery to sharecropping, created as models for interpretation. If such illustrations are utilized, it will be important for docents to convey the difference between representations based on Oakland-specific information and representations that include information from other sources. Future archaeological work, particularly in the slave quarters and the yard behind the Prud'homme home, will hopefully yield more artifacts and specific information about the complex details of slave life at Oakland that can be used to build representations.

Restoration of Historic Resources

Although the park does not plan to restore all of Oakland's structures related to slavery, it does plan to restore the interior and exterior of the extant field cabins, which will serve as the focal point for discussions of slave and sharecropper life on the plantation. Access to the field quarters especially will help visitors understand, in a concrete and tangible way, the physical environment in which the captive laborers lived and worked. Chapter III details the range of the park's historic resources related to slavery and notes the park's restoration plans for each resource. Further information is available in the management plans for the Cane River Creole National Historical Park, and recommendations for restoration will stem from the park's historic structures reports. Although the plan will return the structures to their 1960 appearance, there are many continuities between the slavery era and later periods, including the fact that many African-American families made the transition from slavery to sharecropping at Oakland. The location, size, shape and other slavery-era aspects of the resources will allow docents to convey a

great deal of information about slave life quickly, and will contribute heavily to the richness of Oakland's interpretative program.

The restoration of the historic landscape to its 1960 appearance is more problematic; specific recommendations can be found in the Cultural Landscape Report (Firth and Turner 2003, 149-57). As with the historic structures, there is a great deal of continuity in terms of land use and cotton cultivation, but changes in agricultural organization and technology have significantly altered the landscape (Firth and Turner 2003, 149). The primary problem that interpreters will face is the fact that the park owns so little of the original plantation lands. To address this issue, Firth and Turner have encouraged the restoration and maintenance of specific historic views, which will allow visitors to understand aspects of the plantation that fall outside the park's boundary (Firth and Turner 2003, 149, 154). Although dependent on the park's financial resources, strategic purchases of adjacent land would ensure the maintenance of these historic views. Finally, the Cultural Landscape Report recommends the incorporation of resources outside of the park's boundaries, perhaps with the use of sign markers, to help interpret the nature and extent of the nineteenth century plantation (Firth and Turner 2003, 155).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A FRAMEWORK FOR SLAVERY REPRESENTATION

The National Park Service has developed the basis for an interesting and informative interpretive program regarding slavery, which will benefit from a wide range of resources, including historical documentation, oral histories, ethnographies, historic structures, historic landscapes, and archaeology. To create the program, the Cane River Creole National Historical Park must standardize its message, develop and/or restore its resources for interpretation, and elaborate on those aspects that illustrate the ways in which Oakland was a typical cotton plantation and the ways in which it was unique.

In many ways, Oakland was a typical large Southern cotton plantation; in particular, Oakland was typical of large French Creole plantations in the Red River region (Firth and Turner 2003, 149-50). The plantation exhibits a remarkable historical continuity in terms of land use, Prud'homme family ownership, and habitation of generations of Prud'hommes and African-American families who worked on the plantation, particularly those who bridged the transition from slavery to sharecropping (Firth and Turner 2003, 149). In terms of the slave experience at Oakland, the diverse ethnic and cultural context of French Creole society impacted the community's multicultural composition and identity in a way that may have been typical for French Creole plantations, but was certainly unusual outside of Louisiana. The wealth of documentation regarding Oakland's community of enslaved workers is also unusual, and I have outlined ways in which the National Park Service can incorporate and distill this information into an interpretive program. Moreover, with the aid of Eichstedt and Small's *Representations of*

Slavery and other resources, I have discussed aspects of slavery interpretation that are problematic and sometimes offensive, and ways in which those issues can be addressed.

Because Oakland can be viewed as a typical example of a large cotton plantation, I believe that the framework presented in this paper can be applicable to other historic sites grappling with the same issues. Plantation museums should first investigate and inventory the primary source materials available for their site, including family documents, government and church sources, oral histories, ethnographies, historic structures, historic landscapes and archaeology, and analyze these resources based on the evaluations presented in Chapters 2 and 3. Whenever possible, the museum should undertake research to augment this data. A more comprehensive picture of life on the plantation may be constructed using secondary source material, especially those resources applicable to the specific socio-cultural and economic contexts of the plantation. Using Eichstedt and Small's mode of "relative incorporation" as a guideline, plantation museums can then move beyond that category into a balanced representation, by interpreting their research in a way that will represent the diversity of human experience on the plantation and inform and provoke visitors to the site.

Interpretation of slavery at historic sites is critical to our understanding of contemporary racism in America, as well as the ways in which this particular exploitative labor system was developed and maintained for more than three centuries. Although emotionally difficult, slavery representation provides one avenue for Americans to confront the historical reality in which current racial tensions are based. By confronting the history of slavery, visitors may examine and alter racist misconceptions and misrepresentations that may allow some of those tensions to be eased. The interpretation will be most successful if it emphasizes that slavery was (and is) an exploitative labor system that can be compared to other exploitative systems. Recently, National

Geographic estimated that more than 100,000 of the world's 27 million slaves are held in the United States, and many are used for agricultural labor; for example, in Florida, three orange-picking contractors who used Mexican migrant workers were indicted this year on charges of "involuntary servitude" (Bowe 2003 and Cockburn 2003; the Florida charge included allegations of holding employees captive at gunpoint, rape and restriction of movement, and extortion of labor by intimidation and violence). Understanding American slavery, and the ways in which it relates to other forms of exploitation, will allow us to compare historical systems of oppression and better recognize those systems that are alive and well in contemporary society. Hopefully, plantation museums will abandon their loyalty to the romantic myth of the American South and heed the call of recent scholarship to improve, and sometimes overhaul, their interpretive programs in favor of more progressive and provocative models.

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APPENDIX A: AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF OAKLAND PLANTATION, 1966 CANE RIVER CREOLE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

(Reprinted from Ian Firth and Suzanne Turner, *Cane River Creole National Historical Park, Oakland Plantation Cultural Landscape Report: Part 1*, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2003)

APPENDIX B: PRUD'HOMME PLANTATION TIMELINE, 1736-1865

(Reprinted from Ian Firth and Suzanne Turner, *Cane River Creole National Historical Park, Oakland Plantation Cultural Landscape Report: Part 1*, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2003, pp. 35-38)

PRUD'HOMME PLANTATION TIMELINE TO 1865

1736 Birth of Jean-Baptiste Prud'homme at the Poste St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches.
1758 Jean-Baptiste purchases 9 arpents of frontage near the Poste with an inheritance from his godfather.
1762 Birth of Jean-Pierre Emanuel, 3rd child of Jean Baptiste and his wife Charlotte Henriette Corantin Prud'homme.
1763 Transfer of Louisiana to Spain.
1780s Spanish authorities grant land to Prud'hommes in disputed area between Louisiana and Spanish settlements.
1784 January. Marriage of Jean-Pierre Emanuel to Marie Catherine Lambre. 1786 October. Death of Jean-Baptiste in Natchitoches.
1788 February. Death of Charlotte Henriette Corantin Prud'homme; settlement data records possession of 3 tracts of land and 24 slaves.
1790s Emanuel according to family accounts is working Rousseau tract 13 miles downstream from Natchitoches, although he doesn't yet own it. His home remains near the Poste where he cultivates a 51-acre tract.
1793 Eli Whitney applies for a patent for a new cotton gin. Rapid dissemination of pirated copies of his design leads to rapid adoption by planters and a great expansion of area devoted to cotton production throughout the South.
1797 Date of grant to Nicholas Rousseau of tract on both sides of river that will form the nucleus of the Emanuel Prud'homme Plantation on Isle Brevelle. 1800 Transfer of Louisiana from Spanish to French control.
1803 Louisiana Purchase.
1804 Foreign slave trade is forbidden in Louisiana, but widespread smuggling along Gulf Coast continues practice. English speaking slaves now imported from other states in the American South.
1807 Birth of Pierre-Phanor Prud'homme, 7th child of Emanuel and Catherine. Emanuel visits site of Hot Springs, Arkansas, seeking a cure for an eye ailment.
1808 US Congress prohibits foreign slave trade in all States.
1810 Population census: Emanuel reports owning 53 slaves.
1812 War between Britain and US disrupts cotton trade. Certification of Emanuel's land claims, including ownership of the Rousseau tract.
1815 Cotton prices doubles at end of War of 1812.
1816 Survey of Rousseau tract records exact boundaries and size.
1817 Price of cotton reaches 33.9 cents per pound, its highest point in the period before the Civil War.
1818 Date of construction of the main house at Isle Brevelle according to family accounts.
1820 Population census: Emanuel reports owning 74 slaves. 1821 Emanuel and Catherine travel to France and have their portraits painted. Exchange of land between Emanuel and Benjamin Metoyer.
1826 Approximate date when the oak trees were planted to form the short allee between the main house and the river. During the '20s regularly scheduled steamboat traffic starts to operate on the Red/Cane River.
1829 Emanuel purchases 40 arpents on the Isle Brevelle from Balthazar Brevelle.
1830 Population census: Emanuel reports owning 96 slaves.

1831 Purchase of Jean Baptiste Rachal's Plantation by Emanuel. Louisiana restricts importation of slaves from other states after the Nat Turner insurrection in Virginia. Restrictions are repealed in 1834.

1832 Main flow of the Red River begins to leave the channel of the Cane River and follow that of the Rigolet de Bon Dieu.

1833 Shreve begins work to clear the Great Raft on the Red River above Natchitoches.

1835 Marriage of Phanor Prud'homme to Susanne Lise Metoyer. The couple began to live in a new house south of the main house. Approximate date of construction of second gin at the plantation. More land opened up for American settlement in the region by the removal of the Caddo Indians. 1836 Plantation produces 305 bales of cotton and Phanor records a profit of $23,489. Average export price of cotton is 14.2 cents per pound.

1837 Phanor's journals and accounts begin to record some of his activities and business transactions at the Isle Brevelle plantation, which he is managing for his father. This is the year of a financial panic that has a depressing effect on commerce generally, and initiates an agricultural depression that lasts for most of the 1840s.

1838 Emanuel purchases Jean-Baptiste Trichel's plantation above Natchitoches. Birth of Jacques Alphonse, 2nd child of Phanor and Lise.

1839 Plantation produces 560 bales of cotton. Phanor records a profit of $17,085. Average export price of cotton is 8.6 cents per pound.

1840 Population census: the population of Natchitoches Parish has doubled since 1830 and stands at 14,350. Emanuel reports owning 104 slaves, Phanor owns 40. Phanor buys 200 acres of land on the left hand bank of the river. He reports major damage to his cotton crop, probably associated with an invasion of armyworms into the Red River valley.

1841 Plantation produces 428 bales of cotton, and Phanor records a profit of $15,773.

1842 Plantation profits fall to $8,372.

1844 Birth of Pierre Emanuel, youngest son of Phanor and Lise Metoyer Prud'homme. Phanor purchases 650 acres on the right hand bank of the river and two quarter sections in the Kisatchie Hills. Plantation profits are only $6,983. The average export price of cotton drops to 5.9 cents, its lowest point in the antebellum period.

1845 Jean-Pierre Emanuel dies aged 83 years. Phanor reports the production of 427 bales of cotton and a plantation profit of $14,018; the average export price of cotton has risen to 7.8 cents per pound

1846 Phanor reports a plantation profit of only $3,939. Throughout the state a drought and a plague of armyworms has decimated the cotton crop. The plantation produces only 101 bales.

1847 The plantation's profit in this year is $9,494, based on the sale of 482 bales of cotton. The average export price is 7.6 cents per pound.

1848 Emanuel's widow Catherine dies aged 81 years. Her succession inventory lists their combined property, including 103 slaves. Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ends the Mexican War, and the US acquires new territories west of Louisiana.

1849 Record high water during floods on the Red/Cane River.

1850 Succession sale of Emanuel and Catherine's property; Phanor buys the plantation at Isle Brevelle and the Old Vacherie on Saline Lake, plus 46 slaves. In the 1850 slave census, Phanor reports owning 126 slaves, and in the first agricultural census, he reports producing 230 standard 400-pound bales of cotton. Price of cotton has risen to 12.1 cents.

1852 Death of Susanne Lise Metoyer Prud'homme.

1853 Lise's succession inventory records family property, which now includes 3200 acres of land in Texas. The plantation has on hand the equivalent of 500 standard 400 pound bales of cotton.

1855 Phanor tours the North and later marries his first wife's sister, Marianne Cephalide Archinard. Seneca Pace is employed as plantation overseer. The plantation produces 495 bales of cotton. The average export price of cotton is 9.5 cents per pound.

1856 Town of Natchitoches incorporated.

1858 Sawmill at Gongreville in Pine Woods becomes part of plantation.

1859 Construction of new gin house on the right bank at Isle Brevelle; gin machinery installed in the following year.

1860 Slave census, Phanor reports 147 slaves. Second agricultural census, Phanor reports that his plantation produced 698 standard 400-pound bales of cotton. Average export price of cotton is 11.1 cents per pound. A doctor takes up residence at the plantation.

1861 Louisiana secedes from the Union, War between the Union and Confederate States. Outbreak of typhoid fever kills five workers on the plantation. 300 bales of cotton weighing around 600 pounds each produced.

1862 Changes in the crops planted on the plantation - com acreage triples. Capture of New Orleans by Union Navy disrupts cotton trade. Pace leaves to join Confederate Army, replaced as Overseer by Phelps, then McNeely. 232 bales of cotton stored on the plantation.

1863 No cotton planted - nearly all acreage devoted to food crops. Plantation is evacuated during the Union Army's Teche Campaign in April and May. At the end of the year, sugar boiling rather than cotton picking is the main activity.

1864 Union Army's Red River Campaign causes extensive damage, new cotton gin is burned, Main House plundered, and one quarter of the enslaved workforce leaves with the Yankees. But most of the plantation's buildings and livestock, and even some of the stored cotton escape destruction.

1865 The old agricultural routine is reestablished on the plantation despite fears of lawlessness, as the Confederacy is defeated. Freedman's Bureau created by act of Congress in March. Pierre Phanor Prud'homme dies in October aged 59 years. End of an era in the South coincides with the transfer of the plantation to a new generation.

APPENDIX C: OAKLAND INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM PLAN (2000)

By Carla Cowles, Chief of Interpretation,
Cane River Creole National Historical Park

Compiled May 20, 2000
Final Draft Revised June 30, 2000

Oakland Interpretive Program Plan

Theme: Several generations of owners and laborers lived and worked on Oakland Plantation through an unbroken sequence of events which included periods of prosperity and depression, war and peace, and dramatic changes in government, agriculture, technology, and labor systems. Throughout it all, Oakland endured, as did its people. [1]

Goals: By the end of the program, the visitor should be able to understand:

1. The community forged by enslaved workers
2. Primacy of King Cotton in Antebellum Cane River
3. Impact of changing technologies over time to Oakland's community
4. The endurance of the owners to maintain control of property
5. The role of the National Park Service

Objectives: By the end of the program, visitors should know:

1. The official name of the park
2. The significance of the park
3. At least one definition of the word, "Creole"
4. Two features of Creole architecture
5. The name of at least one enslaved person and one owner
6. The difference between slave, tenant, and sharecropping labor

Station I---Live Oak Grove

1. Introduce yourself---share your name and what you do for NPS so that visitors get a sense of the perspective that you bring to the tour.

   WELCOME TO CANE RIVER CREOLE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK. MY NAME IS_____name_____. I AM A __title_____WITH THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, AND I WILL CONDUCT YOUR TOUR.

2. Introduce the park---when visitors leave, they should know the official name of the park, why the park was important enough to be included as a national treasure and that the park belongs to them.
   A. Discuss the fact that the park is not officially open to the public and under construction. Emphasize the incredible opportunity that they have to see the park before it opens to the public. All National Parks are created by an act of Congress. The Park Service has been given the job of protecting and preserving the sites and all artifacts for prosperity. The mission of the park service is to care for special places saved by the American people so that all may enjoy our heritage.

      Cane River Creole National Historical Park is a "brand new" park formed in 1994, and will open when it is safe for visitors and we have comfort facilities. This park includes 42 acres of Oakland Plantation, formerly known as Bermuda Plantation, founded by the Prud' homme family, and 18 acres of Magnolia Plantation [2] established by Ambrose Lecomte. You are at Oakland. Magnolia is down the road about a 15 minute drive on the other side of the river. The "Big House" there is not a part of the park and is still owned by Lecomte's descendents who charge a small fee for tours from 1:00 to 4:00 PM daily.

      1.) This property is historically significant for several reasons:

1Malone, Ann P. *Oakland Plantation, Its Peoples' Testimony.* NPS: Unpublished Research Draft, August 31, 1998, p. 7

2 Malone, *Oakland,* p. 77

a. The extraordinary number of outbuildings that have survived help present a much fuller picture of the complexities of plantation life. It is especially significant that we have three surviving slave cabins here at Oakland and eight brick cabins at Magnolia. To your right is one of the slave cabins. The Cook's House ca 1820 was the home of a slave cook whose name we don't know. It was moved from behind the house in the early 20th century and rented out as a "fishing cabin." It is constructed of hand-hewn cypress timbers with bousillage in-fill. Bousillage, a mixture of mud deer hair and moss, is a Creole construction technique is usually reserved for the best buildings.
b. Eight **generations of a French Creole family** lived and worked here. Many **generations of African-descended people,** either as enslaved workers or tenant farmers also lived there.
c. Oakland is designated as an **American Bicentennial Farm,** meaning it has been farmed for at least 200 years (Oakland has been farmed a total of **211years,** and the part still owned by the Prud' hommes continues to be farmed.)
d. The **extraordinary number of artifacts and paper documents** that were saved by the family give a clear picture of life here. We must do extensive restoration at this particular site, and we have approximately 230,000 objects and documents that we are responsible for protecting.[3]
e. The structures are excellent examples of **Creole architecture** that affords us the opportunity to discuss in great depth the daily operations of a Creole plantation. Over the years, Magnolia and Oakland have retained their rich Creole character. The term "Creole" means many things to many people the world over. Creole, used in its original sense, is derived from the Portuguese, ***criollo***, meaning "native to place." Thus, ***Cane River Creole***, typically refers to ***the descendents and heritage of the multicultural, multiethnic group who lived in the Red River area prior to 1807.*** Outside of the Cane River area, the term may be applied further to ethnically blended peoples (usually European combined with either African or Asian) of the West Indies, Southern United States, Vietnam, India, Europe and West and Southern Africa. Today it is the intense pride in and attachment to one's French ancestry that is the key to understanding what it means to be Creole. This manifests itself in every aspect of living—be it through language, traditions, architecture, foodways, etc. For the purposes of our general discussion, we, too, will focus on this definition.[4]

3. Discuss **Safety Issues-**
   a. Watch your step---there are holes from archeological digs, armadillos, **SNAKES, INCLUDING POISONOUS ONES.**
   b. watch your head in the family "museum"—**low head clearance**
   c. watch for dangerous plants---**Trifoliate Orange, Black Locust, and Poison Ivy**
   d. **watch for red ants**

OPENING STATEMENT:
The original name of this plantation was Bermuda. It took on the name of Oakland after the Civil war when two Prud'homme brothers divided the property into two plantations. The dividing line was the Cane River. The area across the river became known as Atahoe, probably for a small stream of that name that ran through the property. The area on this side became known as Oakland, in honor of the wonderful live oak trees that grace the property. [5]

Several generations of owners and laborers lived and worked on Oakland Plantation through an unbroken sequence of events which included periods of prosperity and depression, war and peace, and dramatic changes in government, agriculture, technology and labor systems. Throughout it all, Oakland endured as did its people. As we move about these grounds and across time, think on how your life might have been affected had you lived as these folks have lived on this plantation and this region. What would your circumstances have been? What differences or commonalties would you have shared with these people? Thank on all of these things as you step back into time with me, as you discover the features that make Oakland a national treasure. One of those features lies just on the other side of the fence, follow me, please.

II. Station 2---Parterre Garden or "Bottle Garden"

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3 Laura Soulliere, Superintendent, CARI, March 2000; CARI, *Draft General Management Plan*, June 2000, p. 14.
4 Thomas, Thom. *Historic Resources Study, Oakland Plantation.* National Park Service: Unpublished Draft, No Date, p. 2. Breedlove, Carolyn. *Bermuda/Oakland Plantation, 1830-1880.* Unpublished Thesis, Northwestern State University, 1999. P.2; *Special Resource Study, Environmental Assessment.* Denver: NPS, June 1993, p. 50.
5 Malone, Ann. *A Draft Response to NPS Focus Questions Relating to the Oakland Oral History Project.* National Park Service: Unpublished Research Draft, December 2, 1997, p 12.

The founder of Oakland was Pierre Emanuel Prud'homme who began farming the area in 1785 and received a Spanish land grant in 1789. You probably noticed the **gate---1821** is the year the "Big House" was completed by **Pierre Emanuel Prud' homme & his wife, Catherine Lambre Prud'homme;** they went to Paris and purchased the furniture, having their portraits painted at the same time.[6] The park owns almost all of this furniture which has been removed from the house for cataloging and research. After the restoration is complete, all furnishings will be returned to the house. We plan to show the evolution of the plantation as lived in by eight generations of the Prud' homme family.

TRANSITION STATEMENT: The Prud'homme family, long ago realizing that this place was special and museum worthy, started their own museum. The museum was operational for a number of years and contained numerous valuable objects---many of which are now in the Park's collection. The artifacts range from Civil War military shower to antebellum drilling bits. One of the biggest challenges facing the Park is finding appropriate storage space for the abundance of material culture that has become park property. Watch your head and your step as we move under the House where the Prud'hommes maintained their very special museum.

III Station 3---Under the House---a family museum

The Prud'hommes were notorious collectors. They collected everything! A sampling of their collection can be seen here:

1. Show meat grinder, hog scraping board, blacksmith's door with sample brands, your choice of other farm implements & go to wine cooling room, peeking at the stairway, that made it accessible to the interior pantry.

TRANSITION STATEMENT This means that even though the structure has changed over the years with many additions, the essential characteristics of the original structure still remain. Construction on a four-room Creole cottage with a surrounding gallery was begun in 1818. Immediately, Emanuel realized that it was too small and three rooms were added to the North side---an office, bedroom and a small pantry opening directly into the parlor and dining room. Next, the dining room and master bedroom were extended out onto the original gallery and a new gallery added. These additions were completed by 1821.[7] Let's take a closer look at the gallery and some of the other features that make this site noteworthy.

IV. Station 4---The Gallery ("Le Gallerie")

1. Point out the stairs covered with plywood. This is an example of "mothballing" or "cocooning," another preservation term. The brick stairs are in excellent condition and the plywood is to protect the stairs from the many footsteps until the restoration is complete. These stairs show some of the American architecture influence evident after 1803 when the Louisiana Purchase was signed, and American settlers began moving into the area. Most Creole homes with a high gallery (or double gallery) would have had a simple, corner stairway coming up into the gallery. The prominent front stair began appearing in this area by the 1820's. Original stairs and rails were wooden as evidenced by the notches still visible on the flanking colonettes.
2. The gallery, the Creole word for porch was considered part of the house. You are now in a Creole house. Most of their living is going to be done on this gallery. The Louisiana heat is so intense, and the gallery would be the coolest place to be, especially in summer. Notice the features that clue you in to this being the inside of the house. Please notice the hooks around the top of the gallery. How do you think these would have been used? (for curtains and mosquito netting). Notice the chair rail, normally an architectural feature associated with the interior of a house. Notice the gate that would keep children safe while they are playing on the gallery on rainy days. There would be lots of furniture out here because the family would essentially live on the gallery. As an aside, throughout the South, gallery or porch ceilings were traditionally painted sky blue. There are several theories to explain why, but my favorite was that it discouraged mosquitoes![8] Additionally, whenever Creoles would add on to a house, they would build the rooms on the gallery.
    A. In 1864, the Civil War came to this area in the form of the Red River campaign. Local lore has it that on this very gallery, Phanor I, Emanuel's son and the second owner of Bermuda (Oakland)

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6 Miller, Christine L. & Susan E. Wood. *Oakland Plantation: Comprehensive Subsurface Investigation.* SEAC: NPS, 2000, p. 22; Malone, *Oakland,* p. 10. The first Prud' homme in Natchitoches Parish, Jean Pierre Phillipe Prud'homme, a French soldier, purchased land adjacent to the fort and leaving the army, became a planter. His son, Jean Baptiste Prud'homme, "Doctor of the King" was also a planter. Emanuel was 3rd generation. Phanor I, born in 1807, owner of Bermuda during Civil War; grandson Phanor II born the same year Phanor I died (1865); **a Phanor Prudhomme at Oakland for 140 years!**

7 Miri, Ali. *Historic Structures Accessment Report, Oakland Plantation: Volume I, Main House,* NPS, 1998, p. 2-3.

8 Better Homes and Gardens (magazine), July 1999, Volume 77, Number 6, p. 180, theories of blue porch ceilings; Yokum, Barbara, MAPI, Oakland, p. 146 Paint analysis pinpointed 1880 for porch ceilings painted blue, maybe this is a Victorian tradition?

Plantation, confronted Union Troops who came to the house to burn it to the ground. Part of the mission of the troops was to destroy anything that could be put to use by the Confederate Troops. Often they burned crops, mills, gins and houses. And in 1864, union troops came to this plantation to destroy it. The troops came to the front of the plantation and ordered everyone out of the house, because they were preparing to burn it. An aged Phanor dragged himself out of his sick bed, grabbed his shotgun and went to the gallery. In no uncertain terms, Phanor made it clear that they would have to go through him to do so. It is believed that his tenacity saved his house when so many in the area were completely obliterated. Much like Atlanta after Sherman's March, Natchitoches Parish was thoroughly burned and pillaged. One example is the value given to the plantation before the war of **$170,000** contrasted with its **$13,101.00 value after the war.**[9]

3. Other **characteristics of Creole Architecture** evident here at Oakland are:
   A. **The foundation is raised brick piers;** they adapted a French house type, and raised it up to catch river breezes and protect it from flooding. Family tradition has it that the original house was first constructed closer to the river bank.
   B. Constructed with **heavy cypress timbers with bousillage fill,** a mixture of mud, deer hair and moss, packed between the wooden frame. Wealthy planters like the Prudhommes would cover the mud walls with plaster and wooden siding like you see here.
   C. The gallery supported by **slim, wooden colonettes**. These have a canted edge to give a more finished look---a simple decorative detail. These plantations were not as fancy as the stereotypical picture of a plantation with the huge Greek Revival columns popularized by the movie, *Gone with the Wind.*
   D. The **high, hip roof encloses a generous attic,** which was never used for living space, but **only for storage**. The attic was also a place for the heat to rise, and would have been too uncomfortable for living even in the winter.[10]
   E. The **gallery** completely or partially surrounds the house.
   F. Creole houses had **no hallways**; for economy of space all rooms opened into each other and there were provisions made for cross ventilation---many windows and French doors from every room opening onto the gallery. As you see here, eventually, the Prudhommes created an entrance hall with a fashionable Victorian door. (1880's)
   G. A **separate kitchen** to protect the house from fires also kept the main house cooler. Oakland originally had a separate kitchen. The earliest structure was moved from the back of the house and reassembled across the river at Atahoe Plantation. Another kitchen was built in 1880 which you will see when we go to the back yard. This kitchen was eventually attached to the house and is now referred to as the **"kitchen ell."**[11]
   H. A **Garcionnier** (pronounced GAR shun nay) which was a separate small house for the young men of the family. Oakland also had a garcionnier. Prud'homme family lore has it that it too was moved to Atahoe Plantation.
   I. Show the **Stranger's Room** added **in 1880 when extensive remodeling was done.**[12] Originally, it had no access to the rest of the house. Common custom in the area---if you were traveling through here, you would be welcomed, fed, and offered a place to stay overnight. The plantations were isolated and the planters welcomed news and company, but they would not want to give a stranger access to all of the house.
   J. Two other characteristics that you will see once we go inside are the **mantels** and the **floor plan.**

TRANSITION STATEMENT: Let's continue further into the Prud'homme world. **Please watch your step.The floors are covered with plywood for protection. Gaps between the floor and plywood could cause you to trip.** As you enter the house, take a quick peek at the room to your right and then move into the room on your left.

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9 Malone, *Oakland,* p 10.

10 Louisiana State Museum, "Creole Architecture Exhibit" at Old Courthouse Museum, Sep 1998-Sep 1999; Gleason, David King. *Plantation Homes of Louisiana and the Natchez Area.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1982, p. ix; Miri, Evolutionary Drawings, Sheet 6; Yokum, Barbara. *Materials Analysis and Physical Investigation, Oakland Plantation, Main House,* Lowell, MA: NPS, 1998. P 62-64.

11 Miri, *HSAR, Oakland, Main House,* p 8, refers to Dr. Ann Malone oral history with Vivian Prud'homme Flores; Malone, *Oakland,* p. 151

12 Yokum, *MAPI, Oakland, Main House,* p. 62-63; Miri, *HSAR, Oakland, Main House,* Evolutionary Drawings, Sheet 6.

V. Station 5—Inside the "Big House"

1. The room to the right was the plantation office where first Emanuel, and then his sons and grandsons, all owners across time, conducted the daily business of the plantation. To the Prud'hommes, Oakland was their home. Oakland was seen by them as a plantation. A **plantation** was a place of business that grew a cash crop. A **cash crop** is the primary crop that plantations sell to make money. At Oakland, tobacco, indigo, and corn had been grown as cash crops. Local legend credits Emanuel with first introducing cotton to Natchitoches Parish.[13] Ultimately, after Emanuel first successfully grew cotton a large scale, cotton became King on this plantation and in this area as it did throughout most of the South.
2. Point out he mirror over the mantel, probably brought back from Paris in the 1820's. The **"wrap around" mantel** is the traditional Creole style, frequently painted black. English or American style mantels had the flue on the outside of the house or camouflaged with cabinets and had a flat mantel. There is more American architecture influence with the elegant Federal style doorway into the dining room, a costly feature affordable by only the wealthier planters. This style developed in the United States after 1776 reflecting values of the new republic. The paneled doors can be completely opened for entertaining, effectively combining both rooms.
3. This is a typical **Creole floor plan**, (the original four-room cottage) having a parlor with dining room behind, a front bedroom and master bedroom on the rear and all the rooms opening into each other.
4. **Step into the dining room** and imagine an elegant dinner here. Notice the **"punkah,"** a term from the country, India) meaning fan. Eventually this fan became known as the **"shoo-fly."** [14] It was the job of small, slave boy to stand in the corner, and pull the rope back and forth to keep the flies away from the table. Imagine that you were that boy. Imagine the smells coming from the table. Would you be hungry? Most likely!! It would be very tempting, yet, you wouldn't be able to eat!
5. **Step into the hallway** and notice the **trap door to the wine cooling room** in the basement rooms. This area was originally a pantry. The food would be brought in here from the separate kitchen and kept warm prior to serving.
6. **Go to the small second pantry room (breakfast room).** The attic stair was built into the second small pantry, and eventually, the older pantry and middle bedroom were combined. Here you can get a good look at the cypress structure of the house; you can see the bousillage in-fill where the plaster is peeling off.
7. The separate kitchen was not attached to the house until the late 1940's, and the present kitchen was built onto the second gallery in 1953. Thereafter, the 1880 kitchen was used as a wash room and a storage room.[15]
8. Point out the plantation bell rung about 4:00 or 5:00 a.m. to call everyone to work and the replica of the grave cross made by the plantation blacksmith, Soloman Williams for his wife, Laide.
9. Let's step outside to the back gallery. Point out the **kitchen ell or "elange."** See how it was attached. The kitchen building had two rooms with fireplaces back to back, on both the first floor and the basement floor. the fireplaces were removed on both levels and the bricks used to construct the North and West outside stairs. See the remnants under the house. There was also a fireplace in the small pantry room until the1950s. The fireplace foundation is still visible under the house although it is difficult to see from here.[16] **Show the examples of the bousillage and the mortise and tendon, explaining that this is how the house was constructed.**
10. As you see, the family used this area under the house for storage. (Point out the wagon). Notice the cistern. The water here was brackish, so several cisterns are located throughout the plantation to collect rainwater for drinking

TRANSITION STATEMENT: You have entered a world very different from the one that we have been exploring since we started on our journey through time. This world is different both socially and architecturally. It is the world of the enslaved. The extant outbuilding collection, constructed of naturally, termite and humidity resistant cypress, is one of the most complete in the state of Louisiana and affords us the opportunity to explore the structures that formed the environment of those enslaved. While the plantation landscape was chiefly the creation of the slaveholders, the enslaved imbued this landscape with their own meanings. Let's take a closer look at their world.

VI Station 5---Outbuildings Behind House

1. Because of movies like *Gone with the Wind*, plantations in modern thought have been considered glamorous places where people sit around sipping mint julips. Perhaps, there were places like that. Essentially though, a

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13 Weincek, Henry. *Old Houses*, New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1991, (National Trust book), p. 138.
14 Weincek, p. 134.
16.Miri, *HSAR, Oakland, Main House*, p. 8

16 Miri, *HSAR, Oakland, Main House,* Evolutionary Drawings, sheets 9 & 10; Yokum, p. 57.

plantation to a slave was a place of work, and that work that was done by slaves.

A. What is a slave? A slave is a person that is considered to be the property of another. As property, slaves had little to no control over their lives or the lives of their family members. Their overall daily condition would be largely dependent upon the master. At Oakland, in 1860, Phanor owned over 3000 acres and 146 slaves[17] who lived and worked beyond the confines of the "Big House." Their world was quite different from the wealthy and prestigious Prud'hommes. It was the work of those people deemed slaves that made it possible for the Prud'hommes to accumulate and enjoy that wealth. Cotton was a crop demanding much labor, and the huge profits attainable before the Civil War would not have been possible with the help of these people of African descent.

2. As you can see, some of the techniques and materials used for building the big house were used in building these structures. However these structures were not as fancy or as comfortable. You might point out to me that to compare the Big House to these workstations seems unfair, because the big house is where people lived. However, the comparison is a fair one, because slaves typically lived where they worked. These workstations are also where slaves lived. A plantation could also be viewed by the enslaved as home.

   A. The **Wash House**---*Martha Ann* was an enslaved laundress here in **1850's.** She may well have lived as well as worked in this structure. Unfortunately, we know very little about Martha Ann's personal life. She did not leave behind a diary filled with her thoughts or observations about life. Little that we have uncovered thus far in the Prud'hommes papers discusses her life. We do know that domestic slaves typically worked according to the need of the daily household of the plantation owner, so their work could be around the clock. This was especially true during Christmas or other festive times. [18] Stabilization of the structures will prevent further deterioration
   B. The adjacent **Fattening pen** was for used for fattening fowl for the dinner table.
   C. Next to that is the **Grain Storage Shed.**
   D. Two **Poultry Houses,** a small one and a large one.
   E. The larger building beyond is the **Mule Barn ca 1820 –30,** converted from the **Smoke House** in 1926 after a fire destroyed the old barn.[19]
   F. The small, log structure, probably the oldest building on the property, was the **Carpenter's Shop.** Plantations could be like small villages. The large ones like Oakland were very self sufficient, and almost everything that was needed could be made there by the slaves who were skilled artisans. We know many of the names of the enslaved people at Oakland. ***Solomon Wilson*** was a skilled carpenter and may have built some of these buildings.[20] Unfortunately, the Blacksmith shop of another Solomon did not survive. ***Solomon Williams'*** work was so sought after that he was able to negotiate a very favorable contract with Alphonse Prudhomme after the war. He made many of the iron latches and hinges in the big house as well as numerous grave crosses for the slave cemetery. You saw the replica of one he made for his wife's grave. He is also credited with having made Some very rare and unusual drilling bits that have survived. [21]
   G. Point out the **Pigeonniers ca 1820-30** mentioned earlier as a characteristic of Creole architecture. Only 20 of these unique structures surviving in the state of Louisiana and the park has three of them—two at Oakland and one at Magnolia. Some planters even housed their young men there if they couldn't afford a separate garcionnier.[22]

VII Station 7—Mammy's Room (go to door at corner of gallery)

Here you can see the Mammy's Room where a slave woman lived under the house. Notice the door and two windows. This room had a small fireplace and was located under the master bedroom. There is a trap door with a stair that opens into a closet now, but it originally opened into the corner of the master bedroom. Unfortunately, we don't know the name of the woman who served as the children's nursemaid to the Prudhomme family. More research may give us the answer. [23]

VIII Station 8---Distant Outbuildings (stand on the East side of the large Pecan tree close to the Mammy's room).

1. The **Barn (Corn Crib) ca 1820-30** was constructed of hand-hewn cypress timbers and peeled logs. It was

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17 Malone, *Oakland,* p. 10, Discusses 1860 census and an 1861 document showing 146 slaves.
18 Howell, Dana Wyant. *I Was A Slave: Book 1, Description of Plantation Life.* Washington, DC: American Legacy Books, 1998. p 27-30
20 Miller and Wood. *Comprehensive Subsurface Investigation, Oakland,* p. 24.
20 Malone, Ann. *HRS, Oakland,* p. 118-120.
22 Malone, p. 118-120.
22 Golden, Grady and Carla Cowles. "Buildings of Oakland of Plantation," NPS: unpublished paper, 1999, no page #'s
23 Yokum, p. 68; Miri, *HSAR, Oakland, p. 10;* Evolutionary Drawings, Sheets 1-11.
25 Golden & Cowles, "Buildings" no page #'s.

used for storing grains and materials related to livestock functions. The corn crib is in the center. Do not forget that the slaves were considered livestock. Their food would have been stored here too, and may account for its placement between the overseer's cottage and the main house where the food could be easily monitored.[24] You can see the large bottle cistern at the corner of the corn crib. (It is named for its resemblance to the neck of a bottle around the top of the brick structure)

2. The **Seed House** of heavy cypress timber and frame construction is not visible, but is located out beyond the corn crib close to the fields. They stored the seeds and other supplies needed for planting.
3. **Optional walk to Overseer's House, 1861** (you can point out the overseer's house from the west side of the pecan tree). Overseers were white men who were hired to run the plantation. Their primary job was to make certain the field slaves were productive. If a plantation did not have an overseer, they would normally have an overdriver—a slave who the slaveholder felt was worthy. Oakland had a slave driver, Helaire. Seneca Pace was the Overseer here just before the Civil War and left to join the Confederate Army. We know that the position of Overseer here paid $800 a year from 1838-1863.when the average salary was $400 to $600 annually.[25]
4. The **North and South Slave/Tenant cabins ca 1850-60** are the only two surviving cabins of the original 20 constructed of bousillage and weatherboard located in the original slave quarters. The Quarters were the homes of enslaved and later freed African descended people. Most of their lives would not have been spent in the quarters as field slaves worked six days a week from sunrise to sunset. They busted the soil with mules and draft horses, planted the crops in the blazing Louisiana sun, weeded those same crops, fought off the locusts and eventually harvested them. The gallery was originally an overhang supported with diagonal braces. The roof was cypress shingles, now replaced with sheet metal. [26]
5. **Optional Walk over to the Doctor's House.** Dr. Joseph Leveque came to Oakland in 1866 to be a resident physician and develop a practice for the surrounding community. He built additions to an existing cypress & bousillage cottage, ca 1820 with the understanding that any additions would become the property of the Prud' hommes. He died in the 1890's and the cottage was occupied by Prud'homme relatives. In 1862, a Dr. LeHaye was on the plantation. The **Doctor's Barn,** a two-story cypress construction was rehabilitated in May of 1999. An **Outhouse, Shed** and **Animal Pen** complete the doctor's complex.[27]

IX Station 9----"The Grand One"---Sugar Kettle

1. Ask visitors how they think such a huge kettle might have been used. Then explain that although cotton was the main cash crop, some sugar cane was grown for food. This kettle was used for the first step in the sugar-making process. The cane stalks would be pressed. The liquid produced from the pressing of the stalks would be boiled in these huge kettles until brown sugar crystals formed on the top. The liquid mixture on the bottom could be processed into rum at this stage, but smaller and smaller kettles were used to further boil the liquid, eventually producing molasses. The brown sugar would be further refined to produce white sugar. Point out the smaller kettles against the tree. There were similar kettles matching the big one in the original set. (point out the smaller kettles leaning against the tree in back)
2. The **Plantation Store built ca 1867-1874** was where freedman would have to purchase their equipment and seed for farming the land as tenants or sharecroppers. They would have used "script," money that was only good at this store. Many of Oakland's former slaves stayed on the plantation after the Civil War, although some did leave once they were free. The freedmen who stayed continuing a long tradition of close-knit families on the plantation. Because the old "quarters" were broken up, African-Americans created their own institutions to continue the sense of community among them. New churches sprang up along the river, and the plantation store also became a community gathering place especially after it become the Bermuda Post Office in the 1880's with Alphonse Prudhomme as the Postmaster. His son, Pierre Phanor, continued the tradition, serving as postmaster from 1930 to 1980.[28]
3. The structure to the right is the original **Carriage House built in the 1820's** of frame and heavy cypress timbers. It was later converted into a garage. Shed additions were attached over the years, and the rear wall was removed and the ceiling altered to allow for storage of a cotton picker in the 1950's.[29]

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26 Breedlove, p. 98-100;
27 Golden & Cowles, "Buildings," no page #'s.
28 Stallings, Evelyn Tudor, *Cane River Physician: The Practice and Letters of Dr. J. A. Leveque 1832-1893.* NSU: unpublished MA Thesis, 1987, pp. 1,6; Golden & Cowles, "Buildings," no page #'s.

28 Miri, Ali. *Historic Structures Assessment Report, Oakland Plantation: Plantation Store*, NPS, 1998 p 1;
29 Miri, Ali. *Historic Structures Assessment Report, Oakland Plantation: Carriage House*, NPS, 1998, p 1.

X Station 10----Conclusion---Choose Location

Historically, Oakland has been home to generations of Prud'hommes and workers, both enslaved and free. It has withstood the test of time. Architecturally, Oakland is one of the best examples of a Creole-styled plantation. Historically, Oakland speaks volumes to the legacy that is our own, be it good or ill. It is that legacy that makes us who we are, to some extent as individuals, but to a greater extent as a nation. It is that legacy with which we concern ourselves. We realize that we cannot change the past. We can only hope that we can learn from our mistakes and our successes to build a stronger nation for all Americans.

Thank you for visiting the Cane River Creole National Historical Park. Please plan to come back in three or four years when we are officially open and the restoration is more nearly complete. There will be a marked contrast and I think it will be even more special for you since you have had the privilege of seeing it as a "work in progress."