

EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH

Magnolia Mound Plantation



When James Hillen in 1786 received a Spanish patent from Estevan Miro, governor of the Province of West Florida, for an habitation of just over 1,000 *arpents* on the east bank of the Mississippi River, Baton Rouge was described as a dirty little village, “a right French one,” according to traveler Fortescue Cuming, of a few decent frame homes and some 60 rude cabins crowded together along the riverbank. With the help of 5 adult slaves, Hillen planted crops of indigo and tobacco, but by 1791, widowed with 7 minor children, he sold the property to Irishman James Joyce of Mobile for 1,200 pesos.

Joyce began construction of a bousillage cabin on the highest point of the Magnolia Mound land to keep safe from floodwaters and to catch the cooling breezes from the river. The 4-room structure was to

be raised about 3 feet high and made of mud walls between stakes, 47 feet long by 20 feet wide, with double chimneys, shingle roof, and a gallery 10½ feet long. It was a practical house, one that would later be called charming but one of the least pretentious of sugar residences. It would be so well built that it survives today as one of the finest examples of simple Creole architecture in the state, vividly illustrating the architectural influences of early settlers from France and the West Indies.

In May of 1798, Joyce boarded the schooner *The Mobilian* bound from New Orleans to Mobile. While sleeping on deck to avoid the heat below, he was apparently swept overboard in a heavy sea. Joyce’s French Creole widow, Constance Rochon, in 1802, wed widower Armand Allard Duplantier, who had served as Lafayette’s aide-de-camp in the French



Magnolia Mound Plantation House. Photograph by Henry Cancienne.



Vintage photograph of Magnolia Mound Plantation House prior to restoration. Photograph courtesy Magnolia Mound Plantation.

military regiment sent by King Louis XVI to aid America's revolution. Until his death in 1827, the family enjoyed the lifestyle of prominent sugarcane planters, enlarging the Magnolia Mound house and raising a large family of 11 children (his, hers, and theirs), watching the march of history as the area passed through colonial control of both French and Spanish crowns, then finally to American statehood in the decade after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803.

When the Marquis de Lafayette visited New Orleans in the 1820s, Armand Duplantier escorted his old friend to Baton Rouge for a visit. Some versions of history also briefly associate Magnolia Mound in subsequent years with another notable Frenchman, Prince Charles Louis Napoleon Achille Murat, nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, who sought exile in

America in 1821. Murat settled in Florida, where he married a great-grandniece of George Washington, and lived for a short time in Louisiana, practicing law in New Orleans and supposedly raising sugarcane at Magnolia Mound.

Mid-1900s Louisiana writer Harnett Kane, who could make an amusing story out of anything, regaled readers of his book *Plantation Parade* with tales of the prince, who constantly chewed tobacco and was always accompanied by an unfortunate shaggy dog, whose fur the prince used in formal parlors in the absence of a cuspidor. Prince Murat spoke 7 languages, entertained lavishly, and joyfully ate and drank everything he could get his hands on—except water, to which he had a distinct aversion. It was said that once, while experimenting



Vintage photograph of Magnolia Mound Plantation House prior to restoration.
Photograph courtesy Magnolia Mound Plantation.

with cane sugar, he fell into a vat of cooling syrup, which necessitated his actually taking a bath, an exercise in which he rarely indulged, according to author Kane. Murat enjoyed cooking such delicacies as rattlesnakes, cow's ear stew, alligator tail soup, turkey buzzard stew, fried toadstools, and roast crow, with the small game prepared in the popular French manner—*faisande* (odiferously close to spoiling; the estimable Bernard de Marigny of early-19th-century New Orleans, for example, offered his dinner guests “snipe kept until they ripened and fell from their hangings”). To the horrified governor of Florida, Prince Murat supposedly served a large baked owl; offered his choice of parts, his excellency replied he would try any but the head.

Today the Friends of Magnolia Mound have

included rather more appealing period fare in their wonderful cookbook *The Magnolia Mound Plantation Kitchen Book: Being a Compendium of Foodways and Customs of Early Louisiana, 1795-1841*. The book gives a clear, concise picture of plantation life, including a thorough and carefully researched explanation of the skills and equipment required for preparing elaborate meals in the outside kitchen, detached from the main house because of the heat from the constant flames, the clatter and odors, and, of course, the ever-present danger of fire (not only did the kitchens often catch fire, but so too did the cooks). The recipes in the book are two-fold; first the historic version, and then an updated one. Several recipes from the book are shared here, and copies may be purchased in the museum shop on plantation grounds.





Vintage photograph of Magnolia Mound Plantation House prior to restoration.
Photograph courtesy Magnolia Mound Plantation.

Open-hearth cooking is demonstrated several times weekly, except in summer, in the reconstructed outside brick-floored kitchen, flanked by a tidy kitchen garden maintained by the Master Gardeners of Baton Rouge. The kitchen with its immense hearth and separate bread oven is filled with fascinating early utensils and implements—fish board, cast-iron spider pots and Dutch ovens, kettles swinging from cranes, waffle iron and reflecting oven, sugar nippers and huge wooden dough bowl, spice box and herb-drying rack for the all-important plants used for medicinal as well as culinary purposes, and an immense olive jar that arrived full of olives and olive oil and would later be used to keep foodstuffs cool by sinking it into the ground. Kitchen shelves are brightened by colorful Mocha ware found during archaeological digs on plantation grounds, and above

the fire hangs an intriguing spit jack with pulley and flywheel turned by the slow descent of a sand-filled gourd to rotate roasting meats.

Here the elaborate meals were prepared for service in the formal dining room in the main house, where the overhanging punkah stirs the air and shoos the flies. The table is elegantly set in the Creole fashion, cutlery face down and unique crystal rinsing bowls ready to cleanse the stemware between wines.

Now a property of the Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge (BREC), Magnolia Mound Plantation is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and accredited by the American Association of Museums for the sensitivity of its restoration and the great care taken by the Friends of Magnolia Mound in furnishing the home with fine Federal period

furnishings, many made in Louisiana. Considered Baton Rouge's oldest wooden structure, with its rare cove ceiling in the salon and exposed wall of bousillage and hand-planed cypress in the boys' room, its original overseer's house and a slave quarter cabin from River Lake Plantation, Magnolia Mound Plantation is open for daily tours and

also sponsors special events and educational programs interpreting early French Creole customs and plantation practices.

For information, contact Magnolia Mound Plantation, 2161 Nicholson Drive, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70802; telephone 225-343-4955; Web site www.magnoli mound.org.

A Fricassee of Pigeons

Take 8 pigeons, freshly killed, cut them in small pieces and put them in a stew pan with a pint of claret and a pint of water. Season your pigeons with salt and pepper, a blade or two of mace, an onion, a bunch of sweet herbs, and a good piece of butter just rolled in very little flour. Cover and let them stew until there is just enough for sauce, and then take out the onion and sweet herbs and beat the yolk of three eggs, grate half a nutmeg and with your spoon push the meat all to one side of the pan and the gravy to the other, and stir in the eggs; keep them stirring for fear of turning curds. When the sauce is fine and thick, shake all together, and then put them into the dish, pour the sauce over it, and ready some slices of bacon toasted and fried oysters. Throw the oysters all over and lay the bacon.

Updated Version

8 Cornish hens, cut in small pieces
Salt and pepper
1 pt. claret
1 pt. water
¼ tsp. ground mace
1 small onion
1 bunch sweet herbs, dried and tied together
1 tbsp. butter rolled in flour
3 medium eggs, beaten
½ tsp. nutmeg
4 slices bacon, fried
2 dozen fried oysters

After cutting up the hens, season with salt and pepper, and place in a stew pot with the claret, water, mace, onion, sweet herbs, and butter. Cover and cook for 1 hour 15 minutes on slow heat. Take out the onion and sweet herbs, set aside the hens, and add the eggs and nutmeg to the gravy, stirring until it is smooth and thick. Put the gravy over hens arranged on platter. Crumble bacon over sauce and surround with fried oysters. Serves 8.

Pigeon Fricassee recipe originates from the records of Judge Thomas Butler (1785-1847) of the Cottage Plantation. Both recipes from *The Magnolia Mound Plantation Kitchen Book: Being a Compendium of Foodways and Customs of Early Louisiana, 1795-1841*, by Friends of Magnolia Mound Plantation. Magnolia Mound has its own pigeonnier for raising squab for the table.





Open-hearth cooking in Magnolia Mound's outside kitchen. Photograph by Henry Cancienne.



Green-rimmed china and crystal stemware rinsers set a fine table at Magnolia Mound. Photograph by Henry Cancienne.

Apple Pudding

Take twelve large pippins, pare them and take out the cores, put them in a saucepan with four or five spoonfuls of water, boil them till they are soft and thick; then beat them well. Stir in a pound of loaf sugar, the juice of three lemons, the peel of two lemons, cut thin and beat fine in a mortar, the yolk of eight eggs beat. Mix all well together, bake in a slack oven, when it is near done, throw over little fine sugar. You may bake it in a puff paste.

Updated Version

3 tart apples, peeled and sliced
2 tbsp. water
½ cup white sugar
½ cup brown sugar
2 tbsp. lemon juice
Grated rind of ½ lemon
2 medium egg yolks, beaten

Cook apples and water until soft and thick like applesauce. Stir to keep them from scorching. Stir in white sugar and 2 tbsp. brown sugar, juice and rind, then whisk in egg yolks. Pour into a greased 3-4 cup casserole dish. Bake uncovered in a preheated 325-degree oven for 30 minutes. Sprinkle with 2 tbsp. brown sugar and bake 10 minutes more. Optional: Bake in a puff pastry pie shell. Serves 4. Pudding recipe from Butler Papers. Both recipes from *The Magnolia Mound Plantation Kitchen Book: Being a Compendium of Foodways and Customs of Early Louisiana, 1795-1841*, by Friends of Magnolia Mound Plantation. The book notes that puddings in early 19th-century Louisiana were extremely popular as desserts.



Formal dining room at Magnolia Mound. Photograph by Henry Cancienne.



Rear of Magnolia Mound Plantation house and kitchen garden. Photograph by Henry Cancienne.



Detached kitchen as seen from the back gallery at Magnolia Mound. Photograph by Henry Cancienne.

LSU Rural Life Museum



Not everyone, of course, enjoyed the lavish and privileged lifestyle of the prosperous plantation owners in antebellum times. There were merchants and milliners, tutors and tradesmen, religious men of the cloth and roistering riverboat men, slaves and skilled *gens de couleur libres*, respected statesmen and sleazy snake-oil salesmen, small farmers and fishermen, gardeners and grooms, musicians

and traveling minstrels, midwives and undertakers, and everything in between.

The Rural Life Museum at Louisiana State University is a sprawling complex of historic buildings and exhibits paying tribute to these largely forgotten lifestyles and cultures of 18th- and 19th-century rural Louisiana, with rustic shingle-roofed structures scattered along oak-shaded lanes flanked by



An old field hand and an even older white mule. Collection of the author.
Photograph by Henry Cancienne.



A COUNTRY CART.

A country cart. Edward King, *Scribner's Monthly*, 1874. Courtesy Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

productive farm fields. Indeed, the museum's mission is "to provide and sustain a publicly accessible center for the collection, preservation and interpretation of the material culture, cultural landscapes and vernacular architecture of Louisiana and the Lower Mississippi Valley." With its 32 buildings spread across 25 acres and its extensive collections of the tools and implements employed by ordinary folk in daily living, the museum is remarkably successful in preserving a vivid picture of our vanishing rural heritage.

The museum is located on lands once owned by Philemon Thomas, an early statesman/soldier who served as a leader of the West Florida Rebellion, which freed the area from Spanish control in 1810. Pioneer settler William S. Pike acquired the property and presented it to his niece Emma upon the occasion of her 1856 wedding to John Charles Burden. In the 1920s, Windrush Plantation became home to William Pike Burden and his wife, Ollie Steele, whose children,

Ione, Pike Jr. (through his widow Jeanette), and Steele, would eventually donate the property to LSU.

Part of the plantation is preserved as a serene natural wilderness surrounded by bustling urbanity; part is used for agricultural research; and the lovely 25-acre Windrush Gardens, landscaped by talented Steele Burden himself, are accessible for public strolls.

The highlight of the area is the Rural Life Museum. Its cavernous barn overflows with hundreds of exhibits including dozens of horse-drawn vehicles—buggies and cotton wagons and even glass-sided hearses. The working plantation section showcases typical 19th-century dependencies such as the overseer's house and commissary, slave cabins and sick house, blacksmith shop and pigeon cote, gristmill and sugar house. A dozen auxiliary structures illustrate indigenous Southern rural folk architecture—split-cypress barn, country church, pioneer's cabin, shotgun and dogtrot houses, log house and



Candle-making at Rural Life Museum. Photograph by Henry Cancienne.

barn, 19th-century jail, and Acadian house.

Visited by more than 20,000 fascinated folks each year, the museum complex boasts the state's largest collection of Louisiana vernacular architecture and its most extensive collection of material culture from 18th- and 19th-century rural life.

Open daily except on holidays, the museum also hosts interpretive programs and special events throughout the year, including an annual symposium on select scholarly topics, an apprentice program educating children in the traditional folk arts, and seasonal holiday observances. The fun fall frolic called Harvest Days features living history demonstrations re-creating the all-important agricultural and domestic skills required during harvest times on early farms and plantations—grinding corn in the gristmill, cooking sugarcane into syrup and molasses, plowing fields with sturdy plodding mules, making bricks and bousillage insulation, wood-working and candle-making, spinning and weaving, open-hearth cooking, boat building, blacksmithery,

and the construction of muzzle-loading weapons for hunting. Civil War reenactors commemorate the Battle of Baton Rouge.

Another popular observance is called an Evening at Windrush, featuring an elegant Southern supper capturing the spirit of the plantation's early days and featuring favorite libations of the period. The event travels back to the days when Englishman W. H. Russell visited a River Road plantation and was served three different juleps before finishing his morning bath, one of brandy, sugar, peppermint, and plenty of ice for the evils of the climate; a second to ward off the fever; and the third brandished by a servant with the admonition that the guest had better take it as it would be the last one made before breakfast.

Steele Burden was famous for his own mint juleps. Longtime Rural Life Museum director David Floyd says, "So elegant was Steele's presentation that Frances Parkinson Keyes mentioned it in her book *The River Road*. The juleps often complement other dishes with special meaning at Rural Life, like

the Smoked Molasses Ham. Molasses is made the traditional way during Harvest Days, with the sugarcane ground by mule power, the hand-cut stalks of cane fed through rollers as a plodding mule or ox walks the grinder's arm around in circles. Cooked in the syrup house, the molasses is used to give the smoked ham an unforgettable flavor.

For information on the LSU Rural Life Museum, write P.O. Box 80498, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70898; telephone 225-765-2437; e-mail rulife1@lsu.edu; or visit the Web site at <http://rurallife.lsu.edu/>. The museum complex is located at 4650 Essen Lane in Baton Rouge, a quiet haven of rural tranquility just off busy Interstate 10.



Syrup-making at Rural Life Museum. Photograph by Henry Cancienne.



Old syrup cans in Rural Life Museum. Photograph by Henry Cancienne.

Steele's Mint Julep

1 fifth Kentucky bourbon
½ cup sugar
1 cup boiling water
2 cups or more fresh mint leaves
Shaved or crushed ice
Small cluster of fresh mint leaves,
gardenia, or rose blossoms
Powdered sugar
Frosted mint leaves or white
grapes
1 egg white
Powdered sugar

Place the bottle of Kentucky bourbon in the freezer along with the glasses at least 2 hours before you make the juleps. Next, make a simple syrup blending the sugar and boiling water. Take 2 cups of fresh mint leaves and crush them in the simple syrup. Once the mint is crushed, place the simple syrup in the refrigerator until cool.

To make the julep, add 1 tbsp. simple syrup and crushed mint to a frozen glass. Then take a handful of crushed ice and pack it into the glass. Add another spoonful of simple syrup over the ice, and then fill the glass with crushed ice to the top. Pour the bourbon over the ice until the glass is full. Place a straw into the glass until it reaches the bottom. Garnish with mint leaves, gardenia, or rose blossoms. Sprinkle with powdered sugar before serving.

The perfect decoration for a mint julep would be frosted mint leaves or white grapes. To frost them, beat egg white until it is foamy. Dip mint leaves into this egg froth and shake gently. Dip into powdered sugar twice, making sure each leaf of mint is completely covered. Dry on a wire rack. White grapes can be frosted using the same procedure.

Recipe from Steele Burden in *Rural Life Cooks*.



Open-hearth cooking at Rural Life Museum. Photograph by Henry Cancienne.

Smoked Molasses Ham

10-15 lb. picnic ham
8 whole cloves garlic
1 qt. syrup or molasses
2 cups sugar
½ cup Italian salad dressing

- Wash the ham in clear, cool water. Stuff the ham with the garlic
- cloves. Place the ham in a baking pan and brush it all over with
- molasses. Once covered, sprinkle sugar over all parts of the ham.
- Place the ham directly on a smoker, uncovered, for 3 hours. Every
- 30 minutes, baste with molasses, sugar, and Italian salad dressing.
- After smoking the ham, place it in a pan and cover with aluminum
- foil. Bake in a 300-degree oven for another hour, and baste with
- the rest of the molasses, sugar, and dressing. This is a favorite dish
- served at the Ione E. Burden Symposium, Rural Life Museum.
- Recipe from *Rural Life Cooks*.



Blacksmith working at forge at Rural Life Museum.
Photograph by Henry Cancienne.



Old-time photographer at work, Rural Life Museum. Photographs by Henry Cancienne.