

Delta Sources and Resources

**Louisiana State University
Rural Life Museum**
4560 Essen Lane
Baton Rouge, LA 70808
by Cynthia V. Campbell

“A path to the past”

The Louisiana State University Rural Life Museum in Baton Rouge, which opened in 1970, collects, preserves and interprets the culture, material goods and architecture of rural Louisiana and the Lower Mississippi River Valley.

The museum is a major component of a 440-acre property that includes Windrush Gardens and the LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens, featuring a Children’s Garden, an arboretum, a swamp and urban forest with walking trails. Literally in the heart of Baton Rouge, the museum is minutes from downtown.

Rural Life attracts visitors from all over the world. It focuses on the folk ways of the historical working classes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both free and enslaved. From Interstate I-10, it is reached by a short drive be-



Acadian House.

Photograph courtesy of LSU Rural Life Museum.

neath oak trees and past agricultural research fields. The new \$5 million Visitor Center is open daily to all ages. Here people can explore extensive collections of artifacts and exhibits both indoors and outdoors.

A new permanent exhibit area provides insight on the museum’s mission. Displays explain the difference between upland South and Gulf Coast plantations. Details on slavery in Louisiana include an indoor slave pen and shackles. Other topics include plantation hierarchy, Creole planters, wetlands life, effects of Civil War and Reconstruction, and the Industrial Revolution in Louisiana. The old barn is filled with historical carriages, wagons, and hearses. Hundreds of items (now unfamiliar to modern families) include tin bath tubs, medicine bottles and farm equipment. Here, you’ll also find looms for weaving and accoutrements used by people during their periods of mourning in the 1800s and 1900s.

Beyond the barn is Louisiana’s largest collection of vernacular architecture with some thirty authentic buildings. The working plantation area includes authentic slave cabins and an overseer’s house, as well as a kitchen, blacksmith’s shop, school, and sugar house. The Upland South section features a dog-trot house, pioneer cabin, Stoker Barn, split-rail fence, Oak Ridge jail, cemetery, and the College Grove Baptist Church. The Acadian area contains an Acadian House, shotgun house, and cypress barn.

The Rural Life Museum melds many aspects that make Louisiana a unique place. It provides educational and research resources that advance an understanding of the material and cultural regions. The museum serves as a classroom for Louisiana State University, Southern University, and other scholars free of charge. Educational programs are intertwined with the Louisiana Department of Education re-



Girls work at the pioneer cabin.
Photograph courtesy of LSU Rural Life Museum.

quired lesson plans. More than a hundred volunteer adult hosts and 55 junior docents assist with numerous tours and special events. It hosts major conferences and welcomes people from around the world who are engaged in education, research, preservation and culture of the past.

The LSU Rural Life Museum is open daily, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. year round. For more information contact David Floyd, Director,

dfloyd@lsu.edu; Elizabeth McInnis, Marketing Director, ebenne4@lsu.edu; and/or Carrie Couvillon, Tourist Information Specialist, ccouvillon@lsu.edu. By mail contact LSU Rural Life Museum P.O. Box 80498 Baton Rouge, LA 70898. For reservations, information on booking, and general information, the museum can be contacted by phone, at (225) 765-2437, or via e-mail, at rurallife@lsu.edu. ▲▼▲



David Floyd with mules and mule driver.
Photograph courtesy of LSU Rural Life Museum.