

The beauty of Whitney Plantation adds to Louisiana's splendor

Editor's Note: Most of the research for the following article was done by Ms. Irene M. Prechter for a Louisiana History Class in the fall of 1975.

We would like to thank Mr. Alfred M. Barnes, Jr. of New Orleans for allowing us to take pictures of the house and for making the information available to this newspaper.

Every evening at approximately the same time the ebony night that surrounds the new Whitney Plantation is dimly lit by the flickering glow of a candle which shines through a window opening to the wide front gallery.

All is now quiet on the stately plantation grounds. The slaves have returned to their quarters while engage's or hired hands have retreated back to their respectful homes for a hot meal and a night of rest.

Women slaves are mending the baskets and bruises on the blue-black hands of their husbands. Most of the slaves and engage's have made strenuous efforts towards making cypress shingle hinges, heavy bolts and other hardware which are to be used to adorn the homes which they are constructing. They know their efforts are not in vain for in about a week the stately manor we now know as Whitney Plantation was to have been completed.

Many years have passed since the early 1600's but the "maison de maîtres" known as the Whitney Plantation lives on as proof of how early French Colonialists lived their young years of life.

Today it is not known whether the existing Whitney Plantation House, located at the lower end of La Côte des Allemandes (the German Coast) in West St. John Parish, was built by Jean Jacques Haydel or by his brother Nicholas.

It is known however that the Haydel brothers were sons of Ambros Haydel (Haydel), an emigrant from L'Orléans, France, to the Louisiana Colony in 1721 on the ship "La Charante" and who became the progenitor of all the Haydel families in Louisiana.

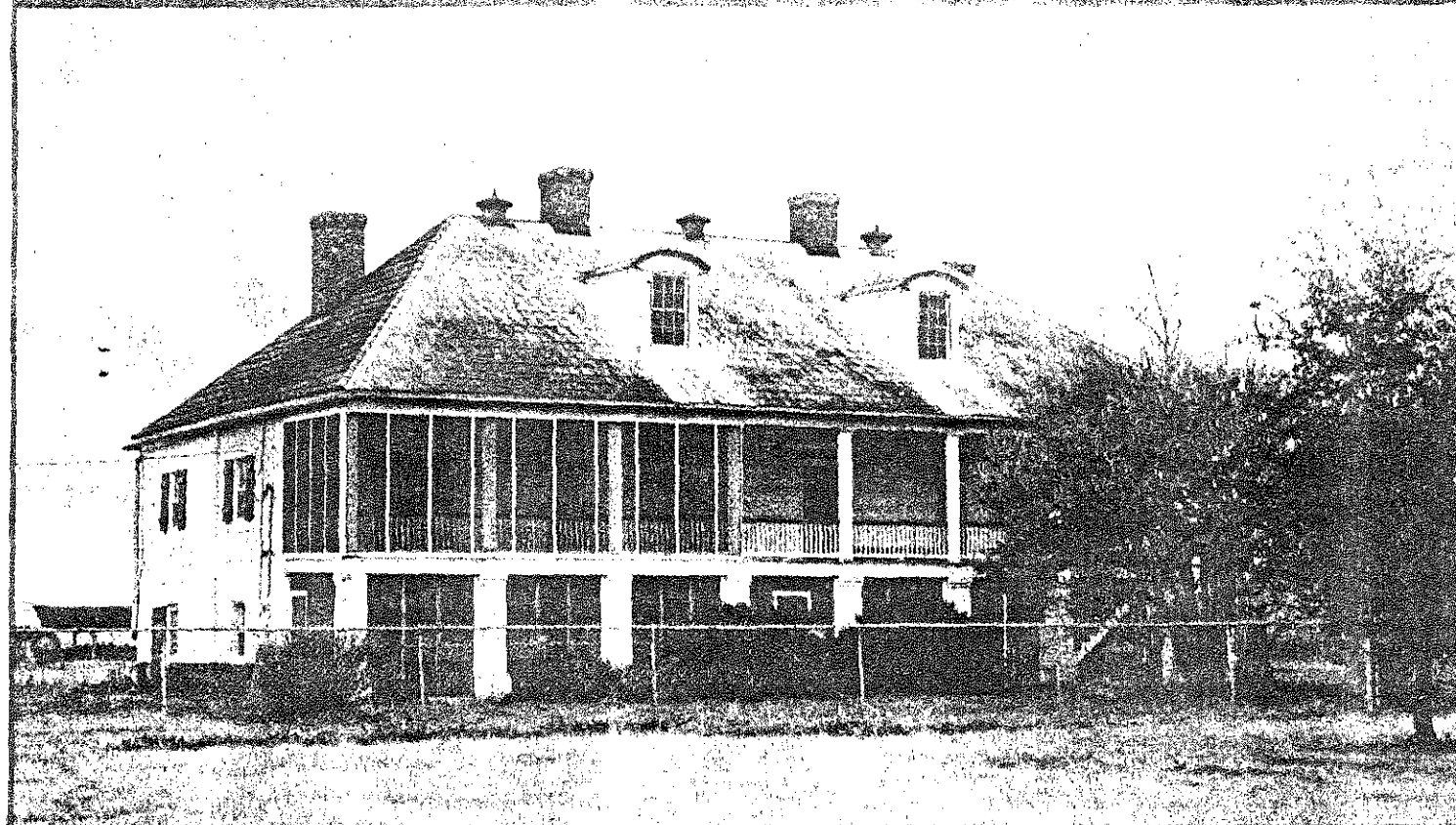
The present acreage of the Whitney Plantation is the same as the 23 arpents front (an arpent being an old French land measure of about 183 feet) once owned by Marcellin Haydel since 1787. The frontage is the sum of the claims of Nicholas Haydel, Marcellin's uncle, his father's brother, and of Jean Jacques Haydel, Marcellin's father.

The construction materials and architectural concept of the Whitney Plantation are typical early Louisiana.

Like other plantations built in the French colonial period, the Whitney is a simple, single story, raised a few feet on piers, and usually four rooms wide and one room deep, having wide porches on both the front and rear. The walls are a framework of heavy cypress and filled with a mixture of mud and moss known as the "briques entre poteaux" or brick between the posts method of construction.

Later, an identical second story was added to the basic first story. The second floor gallery is supported by brick piers with a staircase leading to the second floor from one end of the gallery.

The Whitney Plantation is a 16 room building, constructed without the use of iron nails. (Continued on page 6)



WHITNEY PLANTATION

THE ENTERPRISE

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...and the story of Whitney Plantation continues...



of naifs (all rafters are pegged together.) The main structure of the house was built of cypress with walls and pillars of brick covered with masonry. The interior walls are twelve inches thick and the ceilings are approximately twelve feet high. The ground floor was laid with six inch square brick which is still visible today on the floors of the storage rooms, while the second floors are done in cypress. There are four double flue chimneys rising above a hipped roof with two dormer windows facing the Mississippi River.

The front galleries which extend the full length of the house consist of nine square pillars while the partial rear galleries have Doric-type columns on the lower level. The upper rear gallery is enclosed with stationary shuttering. Access to the upper level can only be made by the exterior stairways, on each of the galleries, front and rear. Above each door on the second floor is an arched transom. Access to the attic can be made by a narrow ladder-like staircase on the rear gallery, upper level.

The exterior walls of the second story are covered with cypress boards which were decoratively painted. Marbleized patterns were painted on the upper front gallery but have since been painted over with coats of white paint. The enclosed rear gallery has served as protection for its exterior painting, where one can still experience the illusionistic device of classical Greek and Roman architectural painting to convey a feeling of increased space. Between the central doors is painted, with a high degree of three dimensional reality, an arched, column-supported alcove housing an enormous urn atop which is seated a nude figurine. Also painted along the length of the gallery is the impression of a cornice of geometrically patterned panels alternating in solid blue or red and a green jewel design.

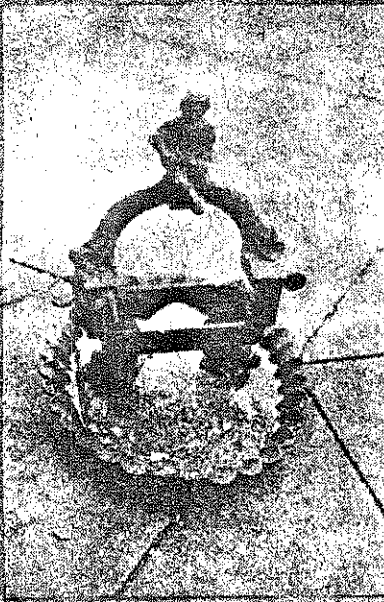
The white and gold interior of the salon, the room of central importance on the top floor was said to have been decorated by a French artist. The painting on its door panels and ceiling have been described as the type found on Dresden china.

The four French doors which give access to the galleries and the two interior doors of the salon have panels decorated with garlands, sprays or baskets of flowers.

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An illusionistic device of classical Greek and Roman architecture



Antique relics keep a watchful eye over the plantation estate

seated a wide frieze, and painted along the length of the frieze the impression of a cornice of geometrically patterned panels alternating in solid blue or red and a green jewel design.

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Painted around the edges of the ceiling are garlands of flowers, multiple-colored roses, daisies, lilacs and other flowers enclosed in a gold bordered field of sky blue. Other delicate decorations add design to the ceiling but is exemplified in the center by a golden medallion design, surrounded by a beautiful wreath of multiple colored roses, a golden architectural molding intersected with four jewel studded scroll designs, and then a wreath of ivy. A chandelier probably hung at one time from the center of this decoration.

All the paintings of the house have faded and yellowed with age, but one can easily imagine how much more beautiful and vibrant their colors were when first executed.

Marcelin Haydel was born in 1788 and died in 1845. He had no children and after the death of his widow his property was acquired by Swedish Johnson who gave it the title of Whitney Plantation.

In 1909 the Whitney was inherited by Mrs. Mathilde St. Martin, widow of Theophile Perret, and Mathilde Perret, wife of George Henry Tassin. In May 1946, the Whitney was acquired by Alfred M. Barnes from the St. Martin and Tassin estates. The main house was then renovated, preserving the original architecture. The fields continue to be planted each year in sugar cane and rice.

A single pigeoniere of the two original ones remains standing to the front of the "big house". The pigeonnaire provided squab for many hearty meals.

Several auxiliary buildings still stand on the estate including the plantation store, storage barn and two sheds. It is believed that there were once a blacksmith's building and an outdoor kitchen.

It is doubtful that there ever was a sugar house on the plantation, as there were several enormous black iron sugar pots at various locations on the property.

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A bit of the past reminds passers by of how it used to be