



FEMA's Historic Preservation Staff and Coastal Environments, Inc. created this pamphlet in partial fulfillment of the Standard Treatment Measures (STMs) for the Belle Chasse Water Treatment Plant Expansion and Main Street Drainage Improvement projects. These projects included ground disturbing activities that affected a historic property in a way that directly affected the characteristics that made the property eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and per 36 CFR 800.6 constituted an adverse effect. Therefore, in 2016, FEMA determined a finding of Historic Properties Adversely Affected for this Undertaking along with a proposal to resolve adverse effects through application of Standard Treatment Measures (STMs) set out in Stipulation X.E. of the 2011 Louisiana State-Specific Hazard Mitigation Grant Program Programmatic Agreement (LA HMGP PA). Consulting parties to the LA HMGP PA were the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Louisiana Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP), Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer of the Department of Culture Recreation & Tourism (SHPO), Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas (ACTT), Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana (CTL), Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO), Jena Band of Choctaw Indians (JBCI), Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI), Seminole Tribe of Florida (STF), and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP).

Images

Portrait of Judah P. Benjamin
and 1852 Slave List

Belle Chasse Plantation Mansion in 1940-1945.
Courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection, Chet S. Kellogg Collection, Acc. No. 2003.0156.1.60.

Belle Chasse in circa 1916.
Courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection,
Acc. No. 89-27-L



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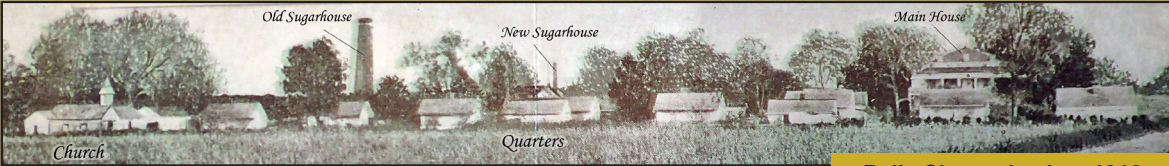
Belle Chasse Plantation Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana



Judah P. Benjamin



Belle Chasse Main House in 1940-1945



Belle Chasse in circa 1916

The French first settled Plaquemines Parish in the 1720s. They grew indigo on Mississippi River plantations located above and below Belle Chasse. French families settled between these plantations, but most abandoned their farms in the 1730s. In the 1740s, the French built Forts St. Leon and Ste. Marie at English Turn because of its strategic location.

Free people of color, some likely former slaves, acquired most of the river frontage in the Belle Chasse area beginning in the 1740s. Members of these families owned slaves and manned Fort St. Leon in the War of 1812.

In 1822, Scotsman William Hill, from Dennistoun, Hill & Company of New Orleans, bought 2.1 miles of river frontage to form Belle Chasse, one of the largest sugar plantations in Plaquemines Parish. Hill sold a third of the land to George B. Milligan, of Maryland, who managed the plantation until his death in 1841.

Judah P. Benjamin and Theodore Packwood bought Belle Chasse in 1844. Born to British Jewish parents, Benjamin would become Attorney General, Secretary of War, and Secretary of State for the Confederacy during the Civil War. Packwood was among the earliest sugar planters in Plaquemines Parish and managed Belle Chasse while Benjamin practiced law in New Orleans.

Benjamin had a Greek Revival style mansion built on Belle Chasse between 1848 and 1850. His sister and mother lived in the mansion while he visited on weekends. From 99 to 183 slaves lived on the plantation. Among them were engineers, vacuum pan sugar boilers, coopers, drivers, hostlers, carpenters, harness makers, bricklayers, blacksmiths, seamstresses, and nurses.

The plantation sugarhouse used the latest technology. It had a steam-powered sugarcane grinder by 1827. A \$33,000 Rillieux Apparatus arrived in 1845. Newly invented by Benjamin's friend Norbert Rillieux, a French-educated engineer and free man of color, this series of vacuum pans produced sugar using very little fuel. In 1847, Belle Chasse became the first Louisiana plantation to use tigers, pneumatic pans that separated molasses from sugar. A bone black filter for cleaning cane juice, also rare, arrived in 1852.

In 1852, Benjamin sold his interest in Belle Chasse to the Packwoods, who passed the plantation to Virginian James E. Zunts in 1860. Zunts sold Belle Chasse to Pennsylvanian William Stackhouse in 1865, but the land reverted back to Zunts in 1874. By 1879, their plantation had grown to 3.25 miles of river frontage. Zunts' heirs passed Belle Chasse to Virginian Joseph Kearney in the early 1890s. Kearney built a second sugarhouse on the plantation and a railroad spur to the New Orleans, Fort Jackson and Grand Isle Railroad. In 1896, Kearney partnered with Irishman Richard Allen Milliken, then the third largest sugar planter in the state.

Belle Chasse processed its last sugar crop in 1906, when the plantation was sold to a planting company and the mansion abandoned. The sugarhouses were gone by 1921, although a chimneystack and the cane grinder foundation survived into the 1950s. For a levee setback in 1934, the mansion was moved back from the riverbank to the site of the old sugarhouse. It was demolished in 1960.

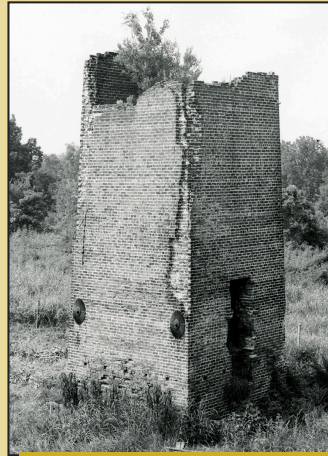
In 2015 and 2017, FEMA hired archaeologists to excavate a small part of the Belle Chasse Plantation site prior to improvements to the town's water treatment plant and street drainage. This construction threatened archaeological deposits containing information on plantation life not recorded in historical sources. Fragments of dishes, bottles, animal bone, and other artifacts were recovered from these deposits. Archaeologists identified a burned wooden structure, brick foundations from two buildings associated with the sugarhouse, and part of the millpond. Concrete footings from a 1940s house intruded into the nineteenth-century remains.



19th.-Century Louisiana Sugarhouse



Norbert Rillieux, Engineer
& Free Man of Color



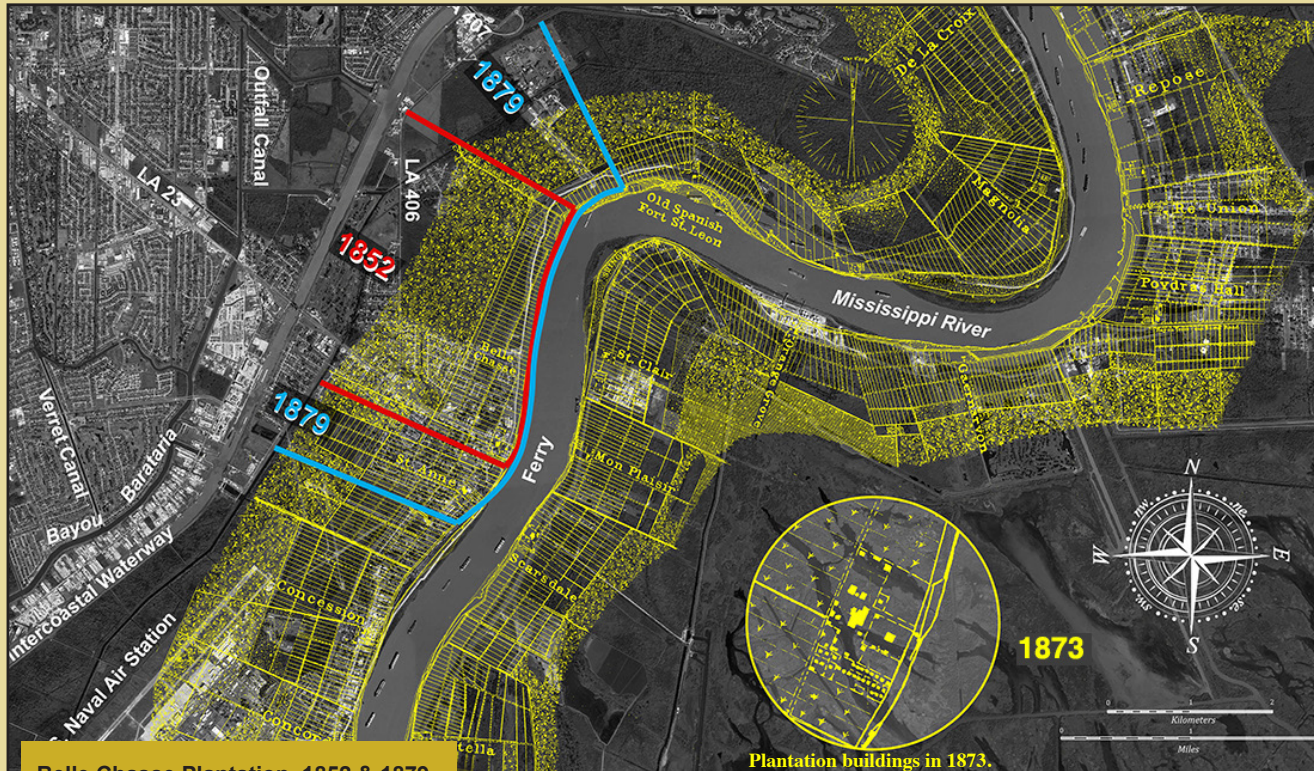
Belle Chasse Chimneystack



Belle Chasse Cane Grinder Foundation



Archaeological Excavations



Belle Chasse Plantation, 1852 & 1879

Plantation buildings in 1873.



Belle Chasse Artifacts