

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Acadia Plantation nomination has both an archaeological and standing structures component, as outlined below:

ARCHAEOLOGY

The Acadia Plantation archaeological site is located south of Bayou Lafourche, along the crest of the natural levee. Highway 1 is now approximately 50 meters to the north, and Nicholls State University is approximately 500 meters to the west-northwest.

The nominated area now includes pastures, a house--formed of earlier structures, and plantation outbuildings. This encompasses the original locations of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Acadian homes and probably includes remains of Acadian farm outbuildings, as well as archaeological deposits associated with mid- to late-nineteenth century homes and an early sugar mill. The sugar house, built in 1830, was located southwest of the house that is standing today. It was used until a new sugar mill was built in another area in 1854. Slave quarters and an overseer's house probably were near the original sugar mill.

The areas where the Acadian homes were located as well as the areas where the early sugar mill and slave quarters may have been are all in pasture. They have been disked to a depth of two to three inches, but have never been plowed for agriculture, or otherwise deeply disturbed. Land surrounding the nominated area is used for agriculture and has been plowed. Therefore, it is unlikely to have intact deposits.

The succession of ownership of the land is well-documented. The Plater family, current owners of the plantation, have copies of original documents of sale, sheriff's sale inventories, slave lists, and structural inventories. The Lafourche Parish Courthouse also houses Conveyance Records from the nineteenth century that document the early property owners at Acadia.

Through these records, it is known that Acadian farmers first settled along Bayou Lafourche at Acadia in the late 1700s. Their farms were long and narrow, so many owners could have bayou frontage. Bayou Lafourche provided the transportation link with the rest of the region.

Records do not show when the first Acadians arrived, but by 1812, the nominated area had three owners. Pierre Gadre owned Section 34, Jean Morange owned Section 35, except for the upper one arpent, which Nicholas Lanie owned.

This upper portion of Section 35 is the location of the "east locality" archaeological site. When Lanie sold this land to James Bowie in 1828 it included "improvements," which probably referred to a house and other structures.

The area now called the "west locality" archaeological site in Section 34 was bought from Gadre by Henry S. Thibodaux, then sold to Mr. Picout in 1818, who owned it until his death. The Picout estate sold it to Stephen Bowie in 1830, and the records of sale show that a small house was on the property at that time.

Thus, it is documented that the nominated area was settled by Acadian farmers who later sold the land to the Bowie brothers. James Bowie, known for his dueling exploits, may have lived in Rapides Parish during the time of Acadia ownership. Stephen lived in Lafourche Parish, possibly at Acadia, and served as the parish sheriff in the 1830s. Rezin, designer of the Bowie knife, served in the state legislature and lived in Lafourche Parish. He probably lived at Acadia and managed the first steam-powered crushing mill in the state. It is this mill that was located southwest of the big house now standing. The Bowies sold the plantation to three men from Natchez, Mississippi in 1831, and subsequently the property changed hands many times.

The Plater family, knowledgeable about this history, had observed artifacts in the west locality and east locality. They invited archaeologists from the Louisiana State Archaeologist's Office to visit Acadia in 1976, and they have subsequently funded test excavations at the site. The archaeologists who recorded the site conducted a pedestrian survey, with shovel testing and probing. They investigated two apparent house sites, at the north end of Section 34 and at the north end of Section 35.

In the west locality, they recorded midden and artifacts over an area 50m (NE-SW) by 130m (NW-SE). The material collected included ceramics, glass, brick fragments, and oyster shells. The artifact types suggested an occupation throughout the nineteenth century.

In the east locality, they recorded artifacts over an area of approximately 35m (NE-SW) by 65m (NW-SE). A large percentage of the ceramics were pearlware or creamware, suggesting an occupation in the early nineteenth century. The size, depth, and materials observed are those expected for historic houses. This initial recording and survey suggested that the east locality may have been the Acadian house sold to James Bowie in 1823. If so, it does not appear to have been occupied after that time.

The west locality, however, was occupied during and after the time Stephen Bowie lived at Acadia. It may have been the Acadian residence sold to Bowie. Based on the time it was used, this could also have been the location of one of the houses that was consolidated to form the large house that is now standing.

Additional archaeological testing in the east and west localities was directed by Richard Beavers of the University of New Orleans. Three test pits were placed in the west locality, revealing a midden 15cm thick. The corner of a brick pier, artifacts, and a layer of brick rubble were uncovered. About 10 percent of the ceramics were creamware and pearlware, substantiating earlier findings that the area dates to the nineteenth century.

One test pit was placed in the east locality, and brick paving and ceramics were recovered. Pearlware and creamware accounted for approximately 73% of the ceramics, confirming the earlier finding that the area appears to date to the last quarter of the eighteenth century, or the first part of the nineteenth century. No testing has been conducted in the area that may be the location of the 1830 sugar mill, but it is likely that it, along with an overseer's house and slave quarters, remain in the triangular-shaped pasture southwest of the standing house.

STANDING STRUCTURES

The present standing structures at Acadia include a c.1890 frame Queen Anne Revival main house, two contemporaneous cottages, and several relatively modern outbuildings. Although the main house has been altered, it still retains enough of its Queen Anne Revival-Eastlake styling to merit National Register listing.

According to family history, the present main house was assembled from three older houses in about 1850. The resulting composite structure was raised seven feet and renovated in the Queen Revival style in about 1890. An early photograph shows two of the houses before they were "assembled." The fact that such a photograph exists tends to indicate that the house was probably moved together in the later nineteenth century rather than in 1850. However, speculation on this point is moot because the 1890 renovation was so complete that there is virtually nothing visible from the earlier houses. For all intents and purposes one is dealing with a c.1890 structure.

The house has a rambling cruciform plan with ten major rooms on the principal story. One approaches Acadia via two flights of steps which ascend a full story to an elaborate Eastlake gallery. This gallery makes a total of four ninety degree turns as it runs from one side of the house to the other. The gallery culminates in an open columnar turret which at one time had a faceted conical roof. The main entrance of the house is marked by an oeil-de-boeuf gable supported by two enormous sunburst brackets. Each of the Eastlake gallery columns is surmounted by a rounder bracket ornamented with pateras. The balusters are rather unusual, being square with rowder-cut flutes.

The complex roofline consists of a central pyramid with gabled wings coming off on all four sides. Dormers are of two types--gablets and the more conventional sash window type. All of them are ornamented with oeil-de-boeuf motifs. Overall, the roofline features a total of fifteen gables (including the dormers). The roofline is further enlivened by a central ornamental vent stack and five chimneys.

Each of the principal gables is ornamented with imbricated shingles. At one time they also featured a large oculus and decorative vergeboards, but these were removed in the 1930s. (Each oculus was replaced by a conventional sash window.)

Other noteworthy exterior features include the oculus windows at the basement level, the window and door cornices, and the shutters, most of which are original to the 1890 period. The interiors are spacious but fairly plain. Essentially the floor plan takes its shape around an off-center hall. Many of the rooms were reworked with a Georgian-looking panel treatment in the 1940s. Also at about that time part of the hall was enlarged to form a living area and small rear and side extensions were built.

Assessment of Integrity:

The statement of architectural significance is concerned with Acadia as it existed after 1890. Despite the changes the house has undergone since that time, it still retains enough significant features to establish its local architectural importance (see Item 8).

CONTRIBUTING ELEMENTS

The archaeological east and west localities are listed as contributing elements. Architectural contributing elements are shown as solid dark shapes on the attached to-scale map. They include the main house, two cisterns, and two servants cottages, all of which are contemporaneous. The early dependencies illustrate the type of support structures a large plantation house of the late-nineteenth century would have had. Non-contributing elements are shown on the map as hollow outlined shapes. They include two garages, two sheds, two small houses, two barns, and a stable, none of which date from the period of architectural significance.

CONTRIBUTING ELEMENTS COUNT: 7

Specific dates	late 18th-19th century (archaeology) c.1890 (house)
Builder/Architect	Uncertain (house)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Acadia Plantation is of state significance in the area of historic archaeology and of local significance in the area of architecture.

HISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY - CRITERION D

The archaeological components of Acadia Plantation provide an unusual opportunity to study Acadian farmsteads of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and to document consolidation of these farmsteads into a bayou-focused sugar plantation in the nineteenth century. Test excavations have shown the archaeological deposits at Acadia to be intact and well preserved. Study of these in the future will provide information that is not available at other sites of their age and that will contribute to the understanding of eighteenth and nineteenth century Louisiana.

As discussed in Louisiana's Comprehensive Archaeological Plan, the most notable immigrants to the state during the late eighteenth century were the Acadians. However, knowledge of sites where they settled is meager and attempts to locate them have had disappointing results. Acadian farmsteads are identified in the plan as rare in expected frequency, and in fact, only one Acadian site of any kind is listed in the plan. Two others, in addition to Acadia, are now in the Louisiana site files, but these are both described as plantations. Small farmsteads are more typical of Acadian settlement patterns. Acadia is unique in having at least two farmsteads on the property.

Also, according to Louisiana's Comprehensive Archaeological Plan, very little research has been conducted at sugar plantations in Louisiana. Of the sugar plantations listed in the plan, all but one is on the Mississippi River. The other is on the Ouachita River, leaving no examples of bayou-focused sugar plantations. The only sugar plantations other than Acadia where excavation work has been conducted are on the Mississippi.

The early development of the plantation can be studied at Acadia because the 1830s sugar house, slave quarters, and overseer's house were abandoned in 1854 when new ones were built in another area. This gives an opportunity to study remains known to date to a brief time period. Areas around houses used in the nineteenth century are known to have been in pasture since the latter part of the century, and thus, archaeological deposits are preserved.

In summary, "Acadia represents a pattern of early settlement and consolidation common to small bayous, exemplifies the pattern of development of these plantations, provides a distinct contrast to patterns known for the large land grants along the Mississippi River and is rare in having remained a unit" (Beavers 1983:105).

Specific research goals identified in the plan that have been, or can be, addressed at Acadia include the following:

1. "Obtain basic locational data on colonial agricultural complexes like ... early Acadian farmsteads."
2. "Examine the ties between Louisiana and French Canada.... Where were the initial Acadian settlements?"
3. "Examine the role, regional diversity, and history of Louisiana's antebellum plantation society. What differences existed between the cotton plantation and the sugar plantation...?"
4. "Investigate the small antebellum farmstead. What differences exist between the small Acadian farmstead and the Upland South farmstead? What relationships existed between them and the large plantations? Between these farmsteads and the rural villages?"
5. "Define any differences identifiable in the archaeological remains of antebellum ethnic enclaves like the free blacks, Creoles, urban Irish, Acadians and those of mixed ancestry."

Acadia also can provide answers to these questions:

1. What outbuildings were associated with Acadian farmsteads?
2. How is the 1830s land consolidation reflected in the archaeological record? Were Acadian homes abandoned or reoccupied?
3. What was the design of an early steam-driven sugar mill?
4. How do the early nineteenth century slave quarters and the overseer's house compare to those of the latter half of the nineteenth century?

ARCHITECTURE - CRITERION C

The main house at Acadia is locally significant in the area of architecture as a landmark among late nineteenth-early twentieth century residences in Lafourche Parish. There is no doubt that if Acadia had not suffered the losses of integrity described in Item 7, it would be far and away the most impressive late nineteenth/early twentieth century residence in Lafourche Parish. Even in its altered state, it is still a residential landmark of the period. Its long and elaborate Eastlake gallery is a feature found on only four other period residences in the parish. In addition, complex rooflines were a favorite Queen Anne Revival device, and Acadia's is one of the five most elaborate examples in the parish. Indeed, with well over thirty roof planes, Acadia's roofline is probably more complicated than any other. Despite the loss of the conical turret top, the turret shape which remains still contributes much to Acadia's elaborate massing. Of course, Acadia is inferior in this respect to the five other Queen Anne Revival residences in the parish that completely retain their turrets. But it is superior to the hundreds of other period residences that do not have even the semblance of a turret. Finally, Acadia is a vast rambling house that in many ways has the architectural stature of a villa. It is easily the largest example of the Queen Anne Revival style in Lafourche Parish.

Major Bibliographical References

Beavers, Richard C., 1983, Preliminary Archaeological Reconnaissance and Assessment of A Plantation, Research Report No. 6, Archaeological and Cultural Research Program, University of New Orleans, New Orleans.

Old photos in possession of Plater Family.

Louisiana Historic Structures Survey, Lafourche Parish.