Bayou Folk Museum

RESTORATION OF KATE CHOPIN HOME
Cloutierville, Louisiana
Owner: Mrs. Mildred L. McCoy

Bayou Folk Museum is housed in a building that stands on property acquired by Alexis Cloutier in the late 1700's from Spanish Land Grant No. 1701. It is believed that the building was constructed by Cloutier in the early 1800's, a home on this particular tract of land being clearly designated on a map placed on record with the State Land Office in 1813.

To this home, in 1880, came Katherine O'Flaherty Chopin, her husband Oscar Chopin, and their six children. Oscar managed the Chopin Plantation lying on both sides of Cane River; his gifted wife Kate made herself a part of the Cloutierville community, learning to love the Cane River country, its people, its wonderful history and folklore. In 1883, after her husband's death the previous year, she returned to her native St. Louis. Yet Kate retained her memories of the simple people of this Cane River area and recorded them in her short stories, one collection of which, Bayou Folk, published in book form in 1894, serves as the focal point of the Museum.

Built by slave labor, the home is a typical Louisiana-type structure, the lower story of handmade brick, the upper of heart cypress mortised with wooden pegs. No inside stairs lead to the second floor. Originally, the lower story was an above-the-ground basement with a dirt floor. Upper inside walls are of "bousillage" (mud and Spanish moss enforced with wooden pegs), now covered with plywood.

Only handmade square nails were used in the building. The wainscoting upstairs is the original, as are the French doors opening onto the porch, and many of the panes of glass. Four fireplaces share a common chimney extending from the center rooftop.

The entire contents of the Museum were acquired locally and were restored and refinished on the premises. In November 1970, Bayou Folk Museum received an official marker as a Louisiana Landmark. In May 1971, its owner received for her preservation efforts the Harnett T. Kane Award.

A Tour of the Museum

ENTRANCE ROOM DOWNSTAIRS
Focal Point: Showcase displaying original copy of Bayou Folk and silver that belonged to Kate Chopin; above, pictures of her and her family. Oil paintings by Mary Belle deVargas, painted by use of her feet. Artifacts from old Catholic Church: silver monstrance, 1835, gift of Julia Buard; rosewood piano, Pleyel, 1855, made in France.

SECOND ROOM DOWNSTAIRS

KITCHEN
Small oak iceboxes. Old pine kitchen cupboard, late 1800's. Homemade table of sawhorse style, late 1800's. Heavy iron cooking utensils.

BACK PORCH

GUEST BEDROOM (Upstairs)

PARLOR
Red velvet sofa (1892), makes into bed. Over sofa, picture of Kate as a child of three. Watercolor paintings of house by Marjorie McCormick, granddaughter of Kate.

MASTER BEDROOM
Lady's desk. Mahogany chest from Lamy Chopin house, has pull-out shelves, brass balls on front legs. Half tester iron bed (mid 1800's) with mosquito bar, original counterpane. Matching baby bed. Rosewood armoire from Delouche family, no nails or screws, pegged with wood, original hardware and key plates.

CHILD'S ROOM
Doll bed handmade from old oak table and door. China tea sets in china closets, 1 set Kewpie Doll.

SEWING ROOM
Collection of sewing machines. Spinning wheel.