Ashland Belle Hélène Plantation

National Register of Historic Places

LA HIGHWAY 75
(Old River Road between Darrow and Geismar)
7497 Ashland Road – Geismar, LA 70734

(504) 473-1328 (504) 473-1207

DAILY TOURS – 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Admission to Home and Grounds Nominal.
Special Rates with Advance Notice.
Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year’s Day.
Special Occasions Catered with Advance Notice.
Ashland/Belle Helene Plantation Home is comfortably nestled among aged oak trees, approximately 60 miles from New Orleans and 25 miles from Baton Rouge on the Old River Road (La. Hwy. 75) between the towns of Darrow and Geismar.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, this massive Greek Revival plantation is 90 feet square surrounded by 28 columns, 3 feet square and 30 feet high. The first and second floor galleries extend nearly 15 feet on all four sides.

The home was built and designed for Duncan Kenner, beginning in 1837 and completed in 1841, by James Gallier, Sr. of New Orleans. Kenner, statesman, lawyer, planter, horse breeder, and Confederate Minister Plenipotentiary to France and England in 1864, enjoyed standing on the balcony clocking the speed of his thoroughbred horses as they raced around his private track.

The first floor consists of a double parlor, sitting room, library, dining room, butler's pantry, center hall with doors at each end opening onto the lower brick gallery. Leading off the lower hallway is one of the most graceful elliptical staircases to be found in the state, a curved structure of cypress with handcrafted black walnut balustrades lofting to the attic.

The second floor consists of four massive bedrooms, a nursery, servants' room and center hall opening at each end onto the balcony overlooking a setting of beautiful old oak trees. The unique windows open to the floor on both stories.

John B. Reuss, a native of Germany, purchased the plantation in 1889 and renamed it Belle Helene in honor of his first granddaughter, Helene Reuss, who later married William Campbell Hayward, whose heirs still own the home and most of the original furnishings. Reuss, a sugar cane planter, was said to have owned 11 plantations and five sugar mills at one time.

The extensive grounds, with aged live oak trees and cypress swamps, have effectively lent the plantation to the filming of such movies as "Foxes of Harrow" 1947 (Rex Harrison and Maureen O'Hara); "Band of Angels" 1957 (Yvonne de Carlo, Clark Gable and Sidney Poitier); "The Beguiled" 1971 (Clint Eastwood and Geraldine Page); "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman" 1974 (Cicely Tyson); "Mandingo" 1975, (James Mason, Kenny Norton, Perry King and Susan George); and "Long Hot Summer" 1985 (Jason Robards, Ava Gardner, Sybil Shepard and Don Johnson); "Fletch Lives" 1988 (Chevy Chase, Hal Holbrook, Cleavon Little and Julianne Phillips); "Wet, Wet, Wet" 1988 (Temptations Music Video); "Dora Pesch" 1988 (Movie Video); "Dark Heritage" 1988 (Movie Video), as well as several local productions.

Although not completely restored, this fact offers visitors a unique view of many interesting architectural aspects not readily seen in completely restored homes.

This beautiful setting with its extensive grounds lends itself ideally to weddings, luncheons, and special functions catered by restaurants listed in this brochure with advance notice.

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