THE OLD ARSENAL POWDER MAGAZINE
State Capitol Grounds • Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Admission: Adults $1.00 Children 6-17 $ .50 Senior Citizens 60+ Free Chaperons of organized groups Free

Children under 6 Free

(504) 342-0401
Welcome to the Old Arsenal

This imposing powder magazine, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, is an exceptional Baton Rouge landmark. The site was of particular military importance because of its location on the river for early settlements, and later as the main defensive position of the southwestern United States.

The Historical Background of the Arsenal Magazine

The existing Arsenal Powder Magazine was probably built in 1838 and is the third such structure to stand on this site. The British constructed Fort Richmond near the present capitol complex in the 1760's but their defenses failed to deter Governor Bernardo de Galvez of Spanish

Louisiana who captured Baton Rouge in 1779. Galvez expanded the fortifications and paid special attention to the powder magazine. After a brief restoration of French rule in 1800, the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory in 1803. By 1812, Louisiana had entered the federal union as the eighteenth state.

In 1819, the United States Army began work on the Pentagon Barracks and on a new powder magazine. It was soon apparent, however, that the magazine was too small to adequately serve the garrison and was located too close to the barracks. For reasons of size and safety, the present powder magazine was constructed.

In the late 1830's, General Zachary Taylor commanded the post at Baton Rouge. Among the officers who served in the garrison or who visited the fortifications were Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, William T. Sherman, George B. McClellan, P.G.T. Beauregard and Ulysses S. Grant. Baton Rouge and its military compound served as a major staging area for the Mexican war. Meanwhile, the regional differences between the North and South reached the breaking point. On January 26, 1861, Louisiana seceded from the Union. At the direction of Governor Thomas O. Moore, state militia seized the arsenal. Shortly thereafter, Louisiana joined the new Confederate States of America and the weapons, ammunition and powder stored in the Baton Rouge compound was rushed to the embattled Southern armies.

In May, 1862, Union forces recaptured Louisiana's capital city. U.S. Marines and, later, Army troops occupied the arsenal and the fortifications. In August, a Confederate army under General John C. Breckinridge tried, but failed to drive the Union soldiers into the Mississippi River.

After the Civil War, the U.S. Army transferred jurisdiction of the arsenal from the Ordnance Corps to the Quartermaster's Department. Munitions and equipment were shipped to Rock Island, Illinois. In 1884, the Baton Rouge post was placed under the control of the U.S. Department of the Interior which, in 1886, gave the entire property to Louisiana State University. The old powder magazine was used for library storage and as a barn.

Governor Huey P. Long, developing his grandiose plans for a new capitol, wanted to demolish the powder magazine but was dissuaded by Edward McIlhenny and other prominent citizens of the state. A similar threat to the building's existence was later rebuffed by the Manchac Chapter of the Daughters of the Revolution. Since then, the Arsenal has served the needs of the State Police and the National Guard, prior to its most recent incarnation as a museum. Today, it stands as a sentinel of the past and as a reminder of Louisiana's great heritage.
Follow the numbers below as a guide to the exhibit.

1. Be sure to read the U.S. Ordnance guidelines circa 1830.
2. Turn left- open each barrel’s doors to discover how much powder each powder barrel packed.
3. Note the Indian tribes that lived in this area.
4. Louisiana! Roll the map wheels and see how its borders and rulers change.
5. Rest a minute on the stacked barrel seats before entering the Baton Rouge Arsenal area. Follow the evolution of the Arsenal from a United States military post to Louisiana State University.
6. Can you identify the flags that have flown over this real estate?
7. Notice the air vents in the brick walls. Each has an angle midway through the 4 1/2 foot wall to allow air to pass, while protecting the powder magazine from rifle fire.
8. See how we’ve “raised the roof” of the powder magazine.
9. Next, meet Zachary Taylor and some of the boys at the video station. Select one of the topics that cover the history of the Arsenal since its construction.
10. Trace the development of the Capitol Complex area from the earliest dirt fort to the opening of the New State Capitol in 1932.
11. Using the puzzle, see how the Capitol Complex area has changed since the Civil War. Can you see which buildings are still around today from that era?
12. Look down in the space under the floor where barrels of charcoal were placed to absorb moisture and keep the powder dry.
13. See the tongue-in-cheek “tribute” to Confederate General John C. Breckinridge of Battle of Baton Rouge fame written on the wall by a Michigan soldier.

The Old Arsenal Powder Magazine

This museum was restored and reopened in 1992 as a joint public-private venture by the Louisiana Legislature, the Office of the Secretary of State and the Foundation for Historical Louisiana, a non-profit historic preservation organization.

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