TWIN OAKS PLANTATION REVEALS HISTORY, ROMANCE OF THE AREA

by

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Four photographs precede the article and has this caption: "Typical Acadian Home still stands at "Twin Oaks Plantation" -- Built in 1828 this typical Acadian type plantation home near Carencro in the Beau Bassin area still stands on the plantation of Paul Coussan, affectionately known as "Mr. Paul." The plantation still gives evidence of the Indians, who roamed over its acreage and the Spanish, English, German and Acadian Settlers who lived on it at one time or another. Treasure seekers are still digging for the Spanish treasure...black gold...also being sought there. Mr. Paul is shown on the front gallery of the home built of cypress milled from trees grown in the cypress swamp on the place also pictured above. A front view of the home reveals the "bousillage" (a mixture of clay and moss), which was an effective insulation used by the Acadians for their homes.

The saga of "Twin Oaks Plantation near Carencro, the plantation of Paul Coussan in the Beau Bassin area, provides a composite history of this area.

The land still gives evidence of its having supported Indian tribes and Spanish, French, German and English settlers before coming at last into the capable hands of the Acadians.

A bullet hole in the frame of the front door is a lasting souvenir of the War Between the States. Treasure seekers in search of Spanish treasure supposedly buried on the plantation have looked for it here for over 100 years.

Most recent evidence of their digging was found last spring. Newly ploughed fields always turn up Indian arrow heads. A son, Paul Jr., has over 100 arrow heads of varying sizes and designs which he has found over the years.

"Life was so enjoyable here," says 86-year-old "Mr. Paul," who has owned the property for over 52 years now, "that is why I have lived so long to such a 'young age'," he smilingly added.

"This was a paradise," he reminisced. Now turned into a cattle ranch because of the inability to secure satisfactory farm labor, the 670 arpent tract of land supports some 150 to 200 head of cattle, which includes 5 registered bulls.
Top cowboy in the family is still the 86-year-old owner of the cattle ranch. When branding time arrives, he is still busily engaged in roping the tough ones. Often his sons, who help with the branding, yell out, "Pop here's a tough one, get him for us!"

Last spring while he was engaged in the corral with roping a particular steer another one, realizing he would be next, gored him. The doctor who examined Cousson said, "Well, I can't find anything wrong with you, but how is the bull?"

The aristocratic-looking, gentleman farmer and cattle owner, whose looks and bearing belie his cowboy abilities, has not lived on the plantation for some years now, making his home instead in the town of Carencro. "Mr. Paul", whose father came from Northern France to be one of the first teachers in the area, now devotes a lot of time to reading, going out each evening to the plantation to check on the cattle.

If the roads had not been so bad, I never would have left the place," he emphasized. "But when I bogged down 11 times in my Model T when I was trying to get the twins to church for their christening, I realized we couldn't continue to stay on the plantation.

The problem of getting the children to school was another factor which decided them in favor of living in town rather than continuing to stay on the plantation. The Coussans had 11 children: Paulette (deceased); Odile (deceased), who was a nun in the Mt. Carmel order; Eloise, Lafayette (Mrs. Charles Corne, Jr.), a teacher; Ambroise, Opelousas businessman; Riolan, Carencro, construction engineer; Stephen Albert, Lafayette, member of the staff of the State Department of Education; Doucet, Lafayette businessman; Odette, Carencro, a teacher; the twins Paul, Carencro, on the SLI staff, and Amelie, Broussard, (Mrs. L. D. Bernard); and Louis, SLI Professor of Education, affectionately referred to as the "Caboose" or "petite bebe a Mom."
Carita Melchior (Mrs. T. J. Arceneaux) grew up with and was so much a part of the Coussan family that all consider her as one of them.

"She is like my own daughters," Mr. Paul said.

A niece, Jeanne Comeaux (Mrs. L. B. Long), was also a close member of the family, who was always at "Twin Oaks."

"Dr. Long was always here, too, to do his courting," Mr. Paul said, "but I kept him busy, too, delivering all the babies."

HISTORY OF TWIN OAKS PLANTATION

In relating the history of the Twin Oaks Plantation Coussan pointed out the Indian Mounds and displayed the found on the place arrow heads as evidence of the presence of Indians on the tract of land.

A Spanish settler, Louis Richard, built the first house, a log cabin structure, and a dirt floor log smoke house on the land. The tract of land allotted him as a Spanish grant contained 670 arpents. This was more land than was ordinarily given in the "Spanish Eagle" (the 640 arpents usually contained in the quarter of land obtained by Spanish Grant) but since this acreage in the corner of the parish contained that amount of land Richard was given 670 arpents.

His son Jean Louis Richard inherited the land and in turn sold it to the Singleton's, who had come to the area from Kentucky. The Singleton's sold some 300 arpents of the tract on the east side. Some 360 arpents came down to Sidney Singleton. He added 270 arpents when he bought this amount of land bordering on his from a German family named Steen. This was sometime in the 1830's or 1840's.

THE TWINS OAKS

It was the Singleton's who built the Acadian type plantation home still standing on the site of the log cabin in the shade of the twin oaks said to be over 300 years old. Mr. Paul added that the late Dr. Elwin L. Stephens, first president of Southwestern, had had tree experts to examine the trees.
about thirty years ago to determine their age. At that time they had estimated them to be over 290 years old.

The house was built from lumber milled out of the cypress trees grown in the cypress swamp on the place. The cypress stand still covers a 14 to 16-carpent tract.

"It was cut into lumber at a little saw mill on Bayou Teche," Mr. Paul said. "A year later, when the lumber had dried, the house was built by Sidney Singleton. This was in 1828. The bricks used were made at the brick yard on the place, which is near the Singleton family cemetery," Mr. Paul said, pointing to a spot visible from the front gallery.

"The heavy work was done by the slaves. The carpenter was a Mr. Daly who had newly come from England."

The house is a typical Acadian type home with walls insulated with "boussillage" (a mixture of moss and clay) plastered over and whitewashed. A gallery extends across the front of the house with a banister enclosing it. A wide hall leads into the dining room with its corner cupboards. Opening off the hall are two rooms on either side. The kitchen in back of the dining room opens onto a gallery running along the side of the house.

Upstairs is one huge room the width and depth of the main part of the house. Raised high off the ground by brick pillars, the high hand hewn cypress floor sills that support the house are visible to the eye with their dovetailed and key construction to insure strength and solidity. They have remained impervious to termites and time for some 130 years now. The foundation has not settled at all; the floors are as even as the day they were laid, and the doors all hang evenly and open with ease.

Farming was the chief occupation of the Louis Richard, who first settled on the land. When Mr. Paul acquired the tract from Singleton, he, too, engaged in farming the land, planting cotton, sweet potatoes, corn and sugar cane.

A syrup mill on the place provided them with some 5,000 gallons a season
in addition to that made on shares for the neighbors, who also grew cane. The Coussans operated the sugar mill for some 35 to 40 years.

The cows provided about 10 gallons of milk a day. Cattle, hogs and wild game provided an endless supply of meat; and the fish in the nearby swamp gave them all the seafood they needed.

THE FIRST CONSERVATIONIST

The first conservationist in the area, Mr. Paul never fired a gun at any of the game that abounded on the plantation. But when the cock quills got to coming into the yard to raid the guinea hens of the baby guineas, he set traps for them and caught them alive. A huge cage 30 x 10 x 6 feet was thus kept filled with quail, squirrel and wild duck for use when wanted.

The girls of the family and their friends used the "tremail" (a seine) to catch seafood as it was wanted in the nearby swamp. The seine with pockets in it was placed at one point in a semi-circle. The crowd then went into the swamp above the point where the seine had been placed and walked towards it driving the fish into the seine. When they reached it, the seine was closed trapping the fish.

BOUCHERIES

The boucheries were also happy events, when on cold nights the hogs were killed and the meat hung in the trees overnight. Crackling; lard, boudin, blanc et rouge, pate foie gras; and meat cooked or salted and put into jars and crocks for later use were the results of these pleasant gatherings. The only food supplies needed to be bought in the town were coffee, flour and sugar.

Mr. Paul operated the land as a true plantation. There were seven tenant families on the place. Feed was raised also for the 14 head of mules used to farm the land.

At noon the Negroes came into the barn area, fed their mules and then sat down to eat and later to swap tales.

"There never was a more delightful time for me," Louis said, "than when I
among them to hear their stories and to listen to their carefree laughter."

A sort of dean of these tenant farmers," Mr. Paul said, "was Michael Gabriel."
"In the last years he worked on the place he kept all he raised instead of farming on shares."

On the edge of the Cypress Swamp where virgin cypress, ash and oak trees rise almost 100 feet into the blue, sunlit sky above, Coussan indicated the picnic spot where the family and their friends enjoyed many happy hours.

Picnic tables about 20 feet long were laden with food and later, when the feasting was over, served as a dance floor for the hard working but pleasure loving Acadians.

The Singleton's family cemetery on a hill not far from the house has graves over 100 years old. "I promised the Singleton's I would keep it intact, when I brought the land," Coussan said, "but when I moved into Carencro, the scavengers hunting for the Spanish treasure broke into the graves and cracked the heavy marble slabs with sledge hammers."

When the plantation was turned into a cattle ranch, a 150 arpent tract was set aside as a pasture. Here and there about the area are colored rags and stakes driven into the ground indicating that another kind of treasure is also being sought on the place...the liquid, black gold of the oil industry, which this year is celebrating its 100th anniversary.

Sitting on the cool front gallery under the spreading moss-draped live oak trees that give the plantation its name, Mr. Paul reiterated, "Yes there were no worries then." "If it hadn't been for the bad roads, I'd still be here."

Mamonakis, Mario. "Twin Oaks Plantation Reveals History, Romance of the Area," The Lafayette Progress, Saturday, September 12, 1959, pp. 1, 6

Also in Daily Advertiser, September 13, 1959, p. 10, col. 1-7, "Twin Oaks Plantation Reveals History, Romance of Bayou Area."