Fort Jesup
State Commemorative Area

Louisiana STATE PARKS

FEB 09 1998

LOUISIANA GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS
Fort Jesup is a reminder of a young nation's growing pains and a relic of Louisiana's rich international heritage. When the Louisiana Purchase Treaty of 1803 failed to clearly define the western boundary of Louisiana, which was also the western border of the country at that time, the United States claimed eastern Texas and Spain claimed western Louisiana. The ensuing dispute gave rise to the "Neutral Ground," an area where the laws of neither nation were enforced. Soldiers and settlers were kept out and rogues of various stripes ruled the region. After the territorial boundary was finally fixed at the Sabine River by the Florida Purchase Treaty of 1819, the United States built Fort Jesup in 1822. Lieutenant Colonel Zachary Taylor established and commanded the garrison, which was originally called Cantonment Jesup in honor of Taylor's good friend Brigadier General Thomas Sidney Jesup. Taylor's troops managed to establish law and order in the Neutral Ground and Fort Jesup remained an important military post for nearly 25 years.

Soldiers at Fort Jesup performed many duties which opened the frontier to American settlers: building roads, surveying the frontier, clearing the Red River and negotiating treaties. The garrison at Fort Jesup was also called on to control slave insurrections in Alexandria and to catch criminals trying to cross the border. The soldiers of Fort Jesup saw thousands of settlers move into the province of Texas and then watched Texas become independent of Mexican authority. In 1845, half of the U.S. Army traveled through the Fort Jesup area en route to war with Mexico.

The fort was abandoned in 1846 when it was no longer needed as a border outpost. In 1961, Fort Jesup was designated a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior and, as such, joined a select group of properties which have been recognized for their importance in American history.

Located on the historic San Antonio Road, the fort was once a large complex of 82 structures. Four companies of the Seventh Louisiana Infantry made up the first garrison of Fort Jesup. There were 141 officers and men. Another 51 soldiers manned Cantonment Taylor, a nearby temporary post established in 1823. Together they made this area the most securely garrisoned outpost in Louisiana.
State Commemorative Area

The Kitchen/Mess Hall

One small kitchen is the only historic structure remaining from the large compound that once spread across the 22-acre site. It stands behind the ruins of high stone pillars which once supported the main floor of one of the soldiers' quarters. The kitchen serviced the 20 to 25 men who were housed in the adjacent quarters. Cooking was always done in a detached building on plantations and military posts to reduce the danger of fire and also to keep heat and cooking odors away from the living areas.

This one-story structure, restored to its original appearance, is constructed of squared timbers laid atop one another with "waterproof" or slanted interlocking joints at the corners. The fireplace is made of stone and has a 7½-foot opening in the hearth. The interior of this combination kitchen/mess hall has been furnished as it would have been in the 1840s. Sturdy benches and tables made of native cypress, storage bins, plate racks, washing and serving tables—all would have been built by the post carpenter. Iron and pewter utensils would have been purchased by the quartermaster in New Orleans and shipped upriver to the fort. An old butcher block and a few other original articles have survived the years and have been returned to the kitchen. The ancient, rustic structure stands as a tribute to the men who felled the timber and built this outpost with broad ax and adze in the Louisiana wilderness.

Officers' Quarters

The reconstructed officers' quarters houses a museum, meeting room and information center. There were originally four officers' quarters buildings which were built in the 1830s and were located across the parade ground. Historians of the Quartermaster General's Office and the National Trust for Historic Preservation assisted in the reconstruction effort.

The story of Fort Jesup is told in the museum with maps, documents, illustrations and military artifacts. A diorama shows the fort under construction in the 1830s. In the main building, the Commanding Officer's bedroom is furnished as it would have appeared when General Taylor occupied it in 1845.

Fort Jesup provides a unique glimpse of life when Louisiana was still part of the nation's frontier. Today the pleasant sounds of picnickers beside the ponds have replaced the sounds of horses' hooves and the cadences of marching drills. What was once an important part of our nation's system of defense is now a site everyone can learn about and enjoy—Fort Jesup State Commemorative Area.
Nearby Attractions:

North Toledo Bend State Park (9 miles southwest of Zwolle off LA 3229)—Located on Toledo Bend Reservoir, the park offers fishing, a boat launch, improved campsites, 10 vacation cabins, group camp facilities, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, picnicking, pavilion, playgrounds, trails and a conference center.

Mansfield State Commemorative Area (4 miles south of Mansfield on LA 175)—The site of the last major Confederate victory of the Civil War. Visitors may take daily tours, see interpretive programs, spend time in the museum with its comprehensive collection of Civil War artifacts, and walk the trail through the battlefield area.

Rebel State Commemorative Area (3 miles northwest of Marthaville on State Hwy. 1221, and 25 miles west of Natchitoches and I-49)—Features the gravesite of an unknown Confederate soldier and is home of the Louisiana Country Music Museum. An amphitheater offers concerts featuring gospel, country and folk music, as well as the Annual Fiddling Championship.

Los Adaes State Commemorative Area (1 mile northeast of Robeline on LA Hwy. 485)—The 14-acre site located on the “El Camino Real” near Natchitoches features the remains of a Spanish fort built in the 1700s to protect Texas from the French. It is a major archaeological site and offers interpretive programs.

Fort St. Jean Baptiste State Commemorative Area (130 Moreau Street, Natchitoches)—Located on the banks of historic Cane River, the fort is a full-scale replica of a French colonial fort built in the 1730s. Featured are log walls sharpened to protect the barracks, a warehouse, chapel, mess hall, powder magazine, Indian dwellings and interpretive programs.

Historic Town of Natchitoches (off I-49 on Cane River Lake)—The oldest settlement in the Louisiana Purchase, it has a 33-block Historic Landmark District featuring Creole architecture, bed and breakfasts, restaurants, shops and historic homes.

Cane River Country (South of Natchitoches along LA 1)—Features some of the South's oldest plantation homes situated along the 32-mile oxbow-shaped Cane River Lake. The countryside is dotted with pecan orchards, cotton farms, historic landmarks, plantations and churches.

Sabine Wildlife Refuge (5 miles south of Zwolle)—This 14,780-acre area of loblolly and short leaf pine is open to visitors to enjoy hunting, birding and camping.

National Fish Hatchery and Aquarium (615 Hwy. 1 south, Natchitoches)—Tours feature aquarium exhibits of native Louisiana fish species and include turtles and alligators as well as a video presentation. Visitors may also observe seasonal operations such as feeding fish, hatching eggs and harvesting fish.
Fort Jesup State Commemorative Area
(32 Geoghegan Rd.,
Many, Louisiana 71449;
318-256-4117 or
1-888-677-5378) is located in Sabine
Parish, just 30 minutes from Natchitoches and
I-49, and six miles east of Many off LA 6 (formerly
the San Antonio Road). Facilities include a museum,
restrooms and a picnic area.