Froghmore provides perspective

By DENISE COOLMAN
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FERRIDAY (AP) - The one-room slave quarters whisper tales of past hardships, while a nearby computerized cotton gin shouts the glory of the modern technological age.

Together, these buildings and others on Froghmore Plantation are helping Buddy and Lynette Tanner tell the progression of cotton and plantation life from days of slave labor through today's high-tech farming.

"We've always been interested in history," Lynette Tanner said. "We wanted to restore the plantation back to the way it originally was so people could see for themselves what a plantation really looked like."

Froghmore Plantation, located near Ferriday on U.S. 84 in Concordia Parish, began in the early 1800s when Daniel Morris and two slaves cleared 15 acres to plant crops. Visitors can follow the story of the plantation - the sorrow and death of Morris in 1839 after the loss of his wife, the trials of caring for an infant son, drought and depression - by reading framed copies of original documents that line the walls of the plantation's gift shop.

Most of the buildings on the plantation were more than dilapidated; they were little more than splinters. The Tanners wanted to preserve this part of history, so they started a restoration project in May 1997. Finding buildings that dated back to the 1800s was one of their first challenges.

"We wanted the plantation to look like it did in the 1800s, and the only way to do this was to find buildings that dated back to that time and move them here," Lynette Tanner said.

Three slave cabins and a barn were the first structures to come to Froghmore. They were a gift from Phillip Watson, owner of Cross Keys Plantation in Tensas Parish. Lynette Tanner's mother, LaVonne Ater Cannull, had the buildings moved to Froghmore as an anniversary gift to the couple.

Six cabins make up the plantation's slave quarters. The cabins have a center fireplace flanked by two rooms, each of which housed a family. Some cabins have the original roof with hand-hewn pole supports. Furnishings are meager. They are a rope bed, straw mats, a chair or two and a table.

One outhouse rests at the end of the quarters, but Lynette Tanner said they are looking for more to place among the slave cabins.

A overseer's dogtrot cabin, built in 1810, overlooks the slave cabins. An overseer's dogtrot cabin, built in 1810, overlooks the slave cabin.

Overseers had modest housing, but it was more comfortable than the slaves'. The overseer's cabin at Froghmore has a center breezeway with an enclosed room on each side. Timbers are pegged together, the same construction used to build the big house.

Visitors to Froghmore Plantation can also see a log cabin, believed to have been built in the late 1700s. The log cabin was built with mud and moss between large logs. Most of the early settlers built these cabins until they could afford a nicer home.

Other buildings include a storage site for surplus food, a barn, a planter's office used by former plantation owner John Gillespie, a smokehouse and a cottonseed house. A sugar grinder and an 1884 cotton gin are also displayed.