BATON ROUGE (AP) - A two-cell jail built 150 years ago in Morehouse Parish is the newest addition to LSU's Rural Life Museum.

"The Oak Ridge Jail is believed to be the only surviving pre-Civil War wooden jail in Louisiana," said David Floyd, director of the museum. "There are plenty of brick jails but only one wooden jail.

Nobody knows who built it. Each wall of the 12-foot-by-22-foot building is 7 inches thick, made of three layers of slab pine. Each was made by laying boards next to each other on the ground and nailing planks diagonally across them, then flipping the whole thing over and nailing on a second diagonal layer.

Every wall is studded with thousands of nails, more than 2 inches apart.

"It was really overkill," Floyd said. He said the aim was ensuring that inmates or their allies didn't climb out or escape.

"I never saw the like of nails in that building," said Emily McEnery, who gave the jail to the museum. It was moved from Oak Ridge in August and was formally dedicated earlier this month.

Like the late Steele Burden, who founded the museum, Floyd roams the state collecting 19th-century buildings. "The jail is our 25th major building, not counting chicken houses and outhouses," he said.

There was some speculation that the jail may have been a plantation or slave jail, but it is generally believed to have been a community jail used by the parish sheriff, Floyd said.

The building predates the present town of Oak Ridge," said Floyd. "Oak Ridge is an antebellum town. The Oak Ridge Baptist Church dates to the mid-19th century. This jail was always across the street from the church."

There's a story about that in Oak Ridge. People say that, while it was still owned by the sheriff's office but no longer part of the jail, folks at a Sunday service heard something like gunfire. Then they smelled liquor. It turned out that the sheriff, a deacon in the church, was running a still in the old jail.

Murphy said she has no idea how old the building is. "There are no records," she said. "The records burned... It's just old. It has always been there."

She does have an abstract of the property dating to 1868, when it was divided among the heirs of W.H. and Margaret Davis. The little building, no longer used as a jail, was on the property when the house was built between 1800 and 1900.

The land changed hands several times; Murphy's mother, Florence McEnery, bought it around 1940. Without documents, Floyd had to look at the building itself.

The wood was cut with a rotary saw, so it cannot have been built before 1845, Floyd said.

Two nails removed from the jail were "Type 8 Louisiana nails," made between 1855 and 1885, said Jay D. Edwards, professor of geography and anthropology at LSU and director of LSU's FB. Kniffen Cultural Resources Lab.

The iron in the nails is "exceptionally impure" and the heads made by machine but "rather imperfect," indicating an earlier date rather than a later one, he said.

How does a wooden jail survive for almost 150 years in Louisiana's damp climate? "A barn was built around it," Murphy said.

After the house was built, one of the owners put sheds around the sides of the jail and one continuous roof over the whole thing to convert it to a barn.

Sometimes after World War II, the side sheds were removed, and the old jail became a storage shed. "My children played in it growing up," Murphy said. "It was full of stuff from my ancestors, but it was deteriorating badly."

In later years, the floor collapsed. "When it reached the ground, it started to rot and the walls started to separate," Floyd said.

State Sen. Robert Barham grew up in Oak Ridge about 100 yards from the jail. He developed an interest in the Rural Life Museum over several visits.

At one of the museum's Evening at Windrush events, he asked Floyd if there were something he could do for the museum. Floyd turned to him and said, "There's this jail in Oak Ridge."

Barham knew exactly what Floyd was talking about. "About the time the jail was being built, my family came to Morehouse Parish," Barham said. "My great-great-grandfather was elected sheriff in 1851. There is a chance he locked someone up in that jail."

Just coincidentally, Barham was scheduled to speak to a group of ladies at Murphy's house. He told the group about the museum and then turned to Murphy and said, "They're interested in your jail."

Floyd says getting the jail creates "a rare opportunity for us to talk about crime and punishment in the 19th century," he said. "This is a subject that is often ignored because it's so unpleasant, and very little is known about these community jails."

The museum has a collection of items that have never been shown including shackles, lead knuckles, a gun that came out of a privy and a rifle used in a feud in Tangipahoa Parish. "These items do not deal with slavery but with crime," Floyd said. "We are going to exhibit a lot of them in the jail."

Museum staffers spent two days disassembling and labeling the jail in late August. It took three weeks to reassemble.

Murphy, Barham and the whole town of Oak Ridge were invited to the dedication Dec. 8. It was Murphy's first visit to the museum. "I think it's wonderful," she said.