For generations, a blend of history and legend has drawn visitors to this meeting place of incredible natural beauty and unique historical background. In legend—the area was the meeting place of the ill-fated lovers, Evangeline and Gabriel. In history—it was the meeting place of exiled French aristocrats fleeing the French Revolution, and of Acadians of Nova Scotia seeking refuge after the British expulsion. It was also the meeting place of wealthy New Orleanians escaping the oppressive heat and epidemics of the city. In nature—it is the meeting place of the swamp and the prairie.

At Longfellow-Evangeline State Commemorative Area, visitors are introduced to the diverse cultural interplay among the French-speaking peoples along the famed Bayou Teche. Many visitors may be familiar with the 1755 expulsion of the Acadians from Nova Scotia, and their arrival in Louisiana, as portrayed in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1847 epic poem “Evangeline.” In Louisiana, the story is also known through the poem’s local counterpart, Acadian Reminiscences: The True Story of Evangeline, written by Judge Felix Voorhies in 1907.

Prior to the arrival of the Acadians, or Cajuns, in 1764, the Bayou Teche area had already begun to be settled by the French. Many of these settlers were descendants of the first wave of French settlers in Louisiana. They are sometimes called “Creoles,” meaning native, since they were born in colonial Louisiana.

Maison Olivier—Take a tour through this perfectly preserved Creole cottage and learn how early 19th century sugar cane planters lived.
State Commemorative Area

The presence of other people, especially Indians, slaves, and free people of color—contributed to the historical tradition of cultural diversity in the Teche region. French became the predominant language, and it remains very strong in the region today.

Maison Olivier

Once part of Louisiana’s royal domain, the commemorative area site was first used as a vacherie, or cattle ranch, and later developed as an indigo plantation. A wealthy Creole family acquired the property in the late 18th century, and Charles DuClozel Olivier inherited the property in the early 1800s. Under his management as a sugar planter, the plantation attained its greatest prosperity.

DuClozel built the plantation house, the central feature of Longfellow-Evangeline SCA, circa 1815, with improvements to the home in the 1840s. The structure is an excellent example of a simple and distinctive architectural form called a raised Creole cottage, which shows a mixture of Creole, Caribbean, and French influences. The ground floor walls, 14 inches thick, are made of brick from the clays of the adjacent Bayou Teche. The upper floor walls consist of a mud and moss mixture called “bousillage” which is placed between cypress uprights.

The house is furnished with a variety of Louisiana pieces dating to the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. The landscape surrounding the home includes native and exotic fruit, nut, and shade trees.

In 1934, the property became the first park of the Louisiana State Parks system. In 1974, Maison Olivier was designated a National Historic Landmark.
Life and Livestock in Acadiana

Near the Visitor Center you will find a charming Acadian cabin which vividly illustrates how different the lives of the Acadians and Creoles were. The cabin is typical of those constructed by the first generation of Acadian settlers in the area. It is small and rustic, a stark contrast to the lovely, graceful Maison Olivier.

A recent, innovative project at Longfellow-Evangeline is taking place in and around an Acadian-style barn which was built in 1820 in Grand Coteau and moved to this site in 1994. An ambitious livestock breeding program provides a sampling of horses and the unusual breed of cattle that was bred during the 1800s at Maison Olivier. Vegetables, indigo, and cotton are grown in small gardens nearby. Medicinal herbs and native plants are also raised near the home. Visit the farmstead and enjoy a glimpse of plantation life on a ranch in Acadiana.

Additional Attractions

The Visitor Center contains displays on the history, culture, and lifestyles of both the Acadian and Creole people of the area. An early handpegged Acadian weaving loom is exhibited, along with other items relating to the plantation economy.
Longfellow-Evangeline State Commemorative Area (1200 N. Main Street, St. Martinville, LA 70582; 318-394-3754 or 1-888-677-2900) is located on LA 31 in St. Martinville, 30 minutes southeast of Lafayette. The site tells the tale of the French-speaking people of the Bayou Teche area. Guided tours of historic Maison Olivier are available, special interpretive programs and events take place throughout the year, and an ambitious livestock breeding program has made this charming site a lively destination.