Los Adaes, the symbol of New Spain in Louisiana, was once the capital of Texas and the scene of a unique cooperation among the French, the Spanish and the indigenous Native Americans. An area rich in archaeological finds, it thrives today as one of Louisiana’s most intriguing state historic sites.

**From Mission To Capital**

Los Adaes dates back to the early 1700s when a Franciscan missionary from New Spain (now Mexico), Father Francisco Hidalgo, urged the French governor of Louisiana to establish a post near east Texas. The missionary’s objectives weren’t purely religious; he knew that such an action by the French would alert New Spain and cause the Spanish government to re-establish previously closed Spanish military posts and Franciscan missions. The founding of Natchitoches in 1714 by the Frenchman St. Denis and the subsequent construction there of Fort St. Jean Baptiste had the predicted effect. In 1716, the Spanish established six missions and one fort in east Texas. The easternmost of the missions, San Miguel, was built among the Adaes Indians, only 15 miles from the French Fort St. Jean Baptiste.

An attack on Mission San Miguel, ordered by Louisiana Governor Bienville during the French/Spanish hostilities in 1719, alarmed the Spanish and they built a new presidio, or fort, to counter any further French intrusion into Spanish territory. The Presidio Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Los Adaes (Fort of Our Lady of Pilar at the Adaes) was surrounded by a hexagonal stockade with three bulwarks. Inside the walls stood a chapel, guard house, barracks, wells, blacksmith shop and powderhouse. Corrals, service buildings and the dwellings of indigenous Native Americans and the soldiers’ families were located outside the palisade.

In 1729, Spain designated Los Adaes the capital of the province of Texas. This made Los Adaes the official residence of the governor, and a house was constructed for him within the presidio. Los Adaes remained the administrative seat of government for the entire province for the next 44 years.
State Historic Site

**Frontier Soldier Life**

The 100 soldiers stationed at Los Adaes were Spanish cavalrymen who served to defend the San Miguel mission and other missions in east Texas, as well as to escort missionaries and the governor on their travels through the province. As frontier posts were expected to be self-sufficient, the soldiers also doubled as farmers and herdsmen.

Life at Los Adaes was harsh. Poor land and crop failures meant constant food shortages and rainy weather often meant spoiled supplies. The nearest Spanish supply post was 800 miles away and that distance, combined with rain, floods and hostile Native Americans, resulted in chronic shortages of everything. Without the trade of the French at Natchitoches, the inhabitants of Los Adaes would have starved.

**A Spirit of Cooperation**

Except for one raid by the French upon Los Adaes, relations between the Spanish and French in the frontier outposts were, as a matter of necessity, friendly. Although Spain strictly prohibited trade with the French, the latter eagerly sought it.

The French took advantage of supply shortages at Los Adaes, and an illicit trade soon flourished between the two posts. Even the governors at Los Adaes took part. The Indians traded with both sides and this commerce became so important that Natchitoches suffered a recession when Los Adaes closed in 1773.

Louisiana was transferred to Spain in 1762. In the subsequent Royal Regulations of 1772, Spain ordered Los Adaes closed and the inhabitants moved to San Antonio. Nearly 500 soldiers and family members endured the hardships of this relocation, and many soon left San Antonio to found the present-day city of Nacogdoches, Texas. Others eventually returned to Louisiana, where their descendants live today.
Today at Los Adaes

Visitors to this historic site receive guided tours of the archaeology lab which houses changing displays. Guides will also take visitors onto the grounds of the presidio and share the history of this colonial outpost as it has been recreated through research and archaeological study. Historic demonstrations and special programs are offered throughout the year. A calendar of events is available. A walking trail is available to visitors to study the natural and cultural features which are an integral part of the site.

Nearby Attractions:

North Toledo Bend State Park—(9 miles southwest of Zwolle off LA 3229)—Located on Toledo Bend Reservoir, the park offers fishing, 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 Historic Site—(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.

Fort Jesup State Historic Site—(6 miles east of Many off LA 6, formerly the “San Antonio Trace”)—The site of a fort established in 1822 by Zachary Taylor to secure the western border of the U.S. frontier. It features the original field kitchen, a replica of officers’ quarters which serves as a museum and visitors center, and interpretive programs.

Rebel State Historic Site—(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.

Fort St. Jean Baptiste State Historic Site—(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)—The 14,730-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.
Los Adaes State Historic Site

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Los Adaes State Historic Site is located in the Natchitoches area, one mile northeast of Robeline, Louisiana, between Fort Jesup SHS and Fort St. Jean Baptiste SHS. From I-49, exit onto LA 6 west. Turn right onto LA 485 and follow the signs. This 14-acre site is the location of a Spanish Fort, garrisoned in the 1700s. Significant archaeological finds have been a tremendous aid in interpreting the fort and its occupants.

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