Some twenty-five miles southwest of Natchitoches about one mile off Hwy. 1 is Chopin, Louisiana. In summer green cotton plants blanket the clay-red fields that surround the large, old, general store which domiciles the Chopin Post Office. In front of the store is a worn and fading sign which utilizes the phonetic pronunciation and identifies the site as "Chopan."

From the front porch of the store you can see the railroad tracks and the station house, the latter having been moved into the cotton field because the train no longer stops at Chopin. But if trains no longer stop at Chopin, tourists do. Just beyond the railroad tracks and down the hill to the left is "Uncle Tom's Cabin," or rather an exact duplicate of that building of literary infamy. Harriet Beecher Stowe was supposed to have visited this place when it was a plantation known as Hidden Hill. The plantation's owner, Robert McAlpin, is supposed to have been the "model" for Simon Legree. McAlpin also had an old body-servant named Tom, whose cabin was located at the exact spot where the present replica stands. Other details about the plantation and characters created by Mrs. Stowe mesh closely with the general physical appearance and inhabitants of Hidden Hill as it was then.

After McAlpin's death the plantation was bought by the Chopin family—and it is this family whose name is still borne by the community. In 1892 Judge DanTe! B. Corley of Abilene, Tex., who liked to settle some of the ambiguities of history, came to Chopin and started getting affidavits supporting the claim that Uncle Tom's Cabin was actually the cabin on the McAlpin plantation. With the consent of—and, I believe, a bill of sale from—Lamy Chopin Sr., the cabin was moved to Chicago for the World's Fair. Whether Uncle Tom's Cabin was distributed in bits and pieces as souvenirs, or whether it just got mislaid is not known—but Uncle Tom's Cabin never came back to Chopin.

The Natchitoches Rotary Club last year decided to replace the missing cabin with an exact reproduction. They used hand-hewn logs, wooden hinges on the door and used as their "blueprint" a drawing that had appeared in the New Orleans Times-Democrat on Dec. 4, 1892. Although Uncle Tom's Cabin is back, and located on its original site, the plantation on which it stands is owned neither by McAlpin nor the Chopins. Wortham of Houston now owns the "Little Eva Plantation." And the nearby Negro Baptist church, which had been known as the "Church of St. Simon," has changed its name to the "Uncle Tom Memorial Baptist Church."