WELCOME TO THE BAYOU FOLK MUSEUM:

RESTORATION OF THE KATE CHOPIN HOME

Owned and Operated by Mrs. Mildred L. McCoy

AGE OF HOUSE: Stands on Spanish Land Grant No. B1701 of the late 1700’s. House believed to be constructed in early 1800’s by Mr. Alexis Cloutier who gave his name to this village in 1822. In 1816 Mr. Cloutier donated the Catholic church site, built the first chapel, and donated the cemetery.

TYPE OF CONSTRUCTION: Typical Louisiana-type construction built by slave labor. Lower story made of hand-made brick and mortised together with clay. Upper story of heart cypress mortised together with wooden pegs (featuring the joints known as ‘dovetail’). All nails in building are hand-made square nails. Upper inside walls are ‘bousillage’ (mud and Spanish moss enforced with wooden pegs). In a 1937 restoration, this mud was covered with plywood and it remains. The wainscoting upstairs is the original (lower walls of all the rooms). Four fireplaces share a common chimney. The French doors opening to the porch upstairs are the originals and much of the glass is the original home-made glass. The wooden shutters are restorations modeled after some found in the attic. The shutter hardware was copied from the original by a local blacksmith and the square nails used in making the shutters are authentic square nails retrieved by the owner in the demolition of old buildings in the area. Under the metal roof is an old wooden shingle roof put on with square nails. Originally the lower story was an above the ground basement and had a dirt floor. There are no stairs inside the house from the first to second floor.

OTHER BUILDINGS: From information secured from a lady born in this house in 1893 and from the granddaughter of a slave who cooked here in 1852, we know that the kitchen was a separate building removed from the main house, but we are unable to pinpoint the exact spot it stood on. We also know there were barn and stables and a cabin where the cook lived. To the left of the house stood a store in the 1800’s which was a plantation store or a commissary.

FURNISHINGS: Lower floor devoted to history of the Cane River Country with special emphasis on an original edition of ‘Bayou Folk’, Kate Chopin’s collection of short stories set in this locale. Second story is furnished in furnishings of mixed periods which were found in the poorer homes along the Cane. It was all acquired locally and was refinshed by a man of color, Eugene Metoyer, a deaf and dumb mute. Most of it was found in the cabins of people of color, much is home-made or ‘primitive’. The church furnishings are from the local church and were discarded in a restoration of the church in the 1950’s. The lamps are all original kerosene lamps from this area and represent the start of Mrs. McCoy’s collection.

BLACKSMITH SHOP: This was originally a log barn on the Bertrand Place and is over 100 years old. It was dismantled, moved here, and remudded. Contains a display from the agricultural years of yore on the Cane River and Little River.

DOCTOR’S OFFICE: This building was moved to this site in 1938 and used until the late 1950’s as a doctor’s office. Contains many relics from the old doctors’ offices in this area, which at one time counted many doctors.

KATE CHOPIN: The lady who came to this home in 1880 with her husband, Oscar, and her six children and lived in this house until 1883. In 1882, she lost her husband during a ‘swamp fever epidemic’ so she returned to St. Louis, city of her birth in 1883, and it was then that she recorded her memories of the simple people of this area in many short stories. In 1894, she compiled her first stories into a book which she titled—‘BAYOU FOLK’ and it is to her and to the people that she wrote about that this Museum is dedicated. One of her Bayou Folk stories, “Desiree’s Baby” has been recognized throughout the years by literary critics as her outstanding Creole short story. In recent years much interest has been aroused on her life and a new works in two volumes of all her writings has been brought out by Per Seyersted, a professor of Oslo, Norway. Mr. Seyersted has also written a Critical Biography on Kate Chopin. Her controversial book, “The Awakening” has been reprinted in paper back. All these works may be obtained at Bayou Folk Museum.

In November 1970 Bayou Folk Museum received an official marker from the Louisiana Tourist Development Commission denoting it as a Louisiana Landmark.

In May 1971 the owner, Mildred L. McCoy, received the Harnett T. Kane Award from the Louisiana Landmark Society for the best preservation of a Louisiana Landmark for the year 1970.