

# Travel



Thursday, April 23, 1987 O&amp;E

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## Bed and breakfast in Feliciana Parish

### Second of a series.

Bed and breakfast accommodations are sweeping the South, as they are sweeping the rest of the country. You will find them in everything from log cabins to antebellum plantations.

Last week I told you about bed and breakfast accommodations in plantations along the River Road between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. This week, we cover the plantations in Feliciana Parish, north of Baton Rouge in the area around St. Francisville.

David King Gleason, who wrote and photographed plantations of Louisiana and the Natchez area, published by University of Louisiana Press, called this period the "brief flowering of the unique civilization of the Old South."

These plantations north of Baton Rouge were usually cotton plantations. Sugar was more profitable but it was more vulnerable to frost and flood, so sugar was usually grown south of the 30th parallel.

When the cotton gin, the sugar granulating mill and the steamboat made fertile Mississippi river land accessible during the first quarter of the 19th century, planters came from the east and made fortunes overnight. They brought a luxury life style with them.

If you would like to overnight in or near what remains of that plantation life, here's a list. I have not actually visited any of these places except Millbank, but I have it on good authority that the B and B experience is worth exploring here just as it is in the places I visited south of Baton Rouge.

**MILLBANK** is an antebellum mansion originally built as the Clinton Port Hudson Railroad Banking House in 1838. It is now owned, along with the nearby Bear Corners Restaurant, by Leroy Harvey and stands amid the downtown streets of Jackson, La. Millbank is on the National Register of Historic Places.

There are five gracious guest rooms on the two floors of the house, which is beautifully furnished in accordance with its history. The rates are \$75 downstairs and \$85 upstairs for the room plus a full country breakfast.

Contact Millbank, 102 Bank St., Jackson, La. 70748 or telephone (504) 624-5901.

**ASPHODEL PLANTATION**, built in 1830, is in the same area. The Couch family of St. Francisville bought it and moved in in 1958. There are now 18 guest rooms, a gift shop and restaurant on the site.

The house has a pitched roof and the columned porch usually associat-



### one-of-a-kind traveler

**Iris Jones**

contributing travel editor

ed with an early simpler plantation style. Accommodations are in cabins. Contact Asphodel Plantation, Highway 68, Jackson, La. or telephone (504) 654-8858.

**THE MYRTLES** in St. Francisville has its own ghost, and holds masquerades and mystery weekends that re-enact the murder that occurred in the house. The original part of the house was built in 1796, an addition in 1851.

The house is known for the intricate ornamental ironwork on its long, wide verandas. Accommodations are in the house and in an annex. Contact The Myrtles Plantation, P.O. Box 387, St. Francisville, La. 70788 or call (504) 545-2730.

**CATALPA**, also in St. Francisville has only two bedrooms for guests. The park surrounding the home is set with live oaks planted in 1814.

Contact Catalpa, P.O. Box 131, St. Francisville, La. 70775.

**COTTAGE PLANTATION**, also in St. Francisville, was built between 1795 and 1850. It is one of the few remaining complete antebellum plantations in the South.

Accommodations are in the plantation house. Contact Cottage Plantation, Cottage Lane at U.S. 61, St. Francisville, La. 70775. Call (504) 635-3574.

**MOUNT HOPE**, in what is called the "Dutch Highlands" area of Baton Rouge, is an excellent example of a charming and beautifully kept 19th century farmhouse. Not the tall square red brick style we have in Michigan, but a graceful Acadian style, with sloped roof and verandah.

I drove past the house and was impressed with its setting amid green grass and live oak trees on a beautiful residential street. Contact Mount Hope, 8151 Highland Road, Baton Rouge, La. 70808 or call (504) 766-8600.

**BARROW HOUSE**, in the heart of St. Francisville is not what we think of as a plantation house, but it is a charming two-story home built in 1809 and offering bed and breakfast on historic Royal Street.

All rooms have balconies overlooking the street. Contact Barrow House, 524 Royal Street, P.O. Box 1461, St. Francisville, La. 70775 or telephone (504) 635-4791.

For information on plantation homes and other attractions, contact the Baton Rouge Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, P.O. Drawer 4149, Baton Rouge, La. 70821. Telephone (504) 383-1825.



Live oak trees form an archway over the carriage path at Rosedown Plantation, built in 1835 by wealthy cotton planter Daniel Barrow.

Rosedown is a photographer's delight, especially when the azaleas are out. They photograph down the avenue of live oaks to the great

house, with its pillared porches rising above geometric gardens and surrounded by gazebos, marble statues and picturesque outbuildings.

## Past lives in Audubon area

This is not the kind of plantation house you saw in the movie "Gone With the Wind," where the carriage road leads through 100-year-old live oaks to a white-pillared Greek Revival mansion.

You enter Oakley Plantation House past a split rail fence and through a cypress picket gate, the kind that was common in the 1790s, during the time of Spanish land grants.

The flatboats had already started gathering, and the pioneer bars were open, at Bayou Sarah, near St. Francisville, but most of the great sugar plantations hadn't been built yet. That era didn't begin until the steamboat era of the 1800's.

The era of painter James J. Audubon was also half a century ahead, as were the tall tales told about the beautiful Eliza, the Scarlet O'Hara of Feliciana Parish.

This area on the west side of the Mississippi River was part of Spain in 1789, when a Carolina planter called Ruffin Gray acquired 5,656 acres for a cotton plantation north of Baton Rouge. His widow Lucretia married James Pirie, and together they built the 12-room plantation house that still stands in its original form on 100 surviving acres of land.

The house stayed in the family until the Louisiana bought it in 1947. The house and grounds are now the Audubon State Commemorative

Area. Budget cuts have recently closed Louisiana's seven commemorative parks but they are scheduled to reopen to the public in July.

Most of the old plantations that survive from the 18th century were originally four-room cottages, which grew grander with the years, but Oakley stands now as it stood almost two centuries ago, a square white wooden house on a high brick basement, with cool shuttered porches in the West Indies style.

Eliza, the famous daughter of Lucretia and James Pirie, was responsible for the fact that James J. Audubon first came to Feliciana Parish. She was 16 when Audubon was hired as her tutor and began his long love affair with the birds and animals of Louisiana. A collection of his original first edition prints are displayed in the house.

Audubon spent 30 years painting in the area, and left his work on many of the plantation walls in and around St. Francisville. St. Francisville was and is the heart of plantation country. It was built on a ridge above Bayou Sarah and has been called "the town that is two miles long and two blocks wide."

The plantation houses that range along the river on either side of town, are often historically connected. Anyone who has visited Oakley House, for example, knows the story of the beautiful Eliza. Eliza had three husbands.

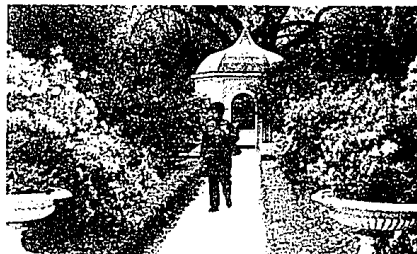
The first one, Robert Barrow of a Highland Plantation, carried his new bride across the flooded Homochitto Bayou and died of pneumonia six weeks later.

The second husband was the Reverend William R. Bowman, first rector of Grace Episcopal Church, which still stands among flowering bushes and live oaks in St. Francisville. Her third husband was a Pennsylvanian.

Eliza's son married a lady called Sarah, from Rosedown Plantation, not far from Oakley Plantation. The great white house at Rosedown, with its encircling porches, is first viewed down a dramatic tunnel of live oaks. Like most of Louisiana plantation houses, it is built of cypress wood, which doesn't decay and resists termites.

Rosedown was built in 1835 by wealthy cotton planter Daniel Barrow. His wife Martha built a 17th century garden in the Louisiana wilderness. The plantation was bought and restored in 1956 by Catherine Fondren Underwood of Houston, Texas, who returned it to its mid-1800's beauty and now shows it as a museum of the lavish southern way of life before the Civil War.

For more information on plantations and other attractions in the Baton Rouge area, contact Baton Rouge Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, Drawer 4149, Baton Rouge, La. 70821 or telephone (504) 383-1825.



A visitor strolls through the garden at Rosedown Plantation near St. Francisville, La.

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