

Program Summary:

This project involves the restoration of a 200-year-old early Acadian cottage into a welcome center and museum for a small city in South Louisiana.

Program Statement:

This cottage was found enveloped in a pink Victorian house near the city center. The city council and a former mayor saved the cottage, purchased it, and had it moved one block from its original location. The design team led the restoration of the cottage to its former glory to what will soon open as a new, innovative cultural landmark for its city.

Preservation work included carpenter marks, peg construction and bousillage. A new freestanding restroom facility, added to the rear of the historic cottage to serve the welcome center, evokes the traditional massing of the cottage with modern details and materials.

The design team worked with the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to preserve original elements, including the front porch with its steep stair (garçonnière), reconstruction of the small chamber at the left side of the porch that was removed during the house's Victorian phase, mud (bousillage) walls, and wood peg construction, ensuring that the cottage's historical integrity remains intact.

Prior to this project, the city had little in the way of organized documentation of its own history. The design team benefited from the work of committed volunteers who aided the curation of the museum exhibits in what may be the oldest structure in its community.

RR-270.01

Building Area: (sf)
898 SF

Cost per Square Foot:
\$450

Construction Cost
\$410,000

Date of Completion:
March 2023



RR-270.02

The restoration makes a point of combining historic elements with new interventions, highlighting the qualities of one through juxtaposition with the other.

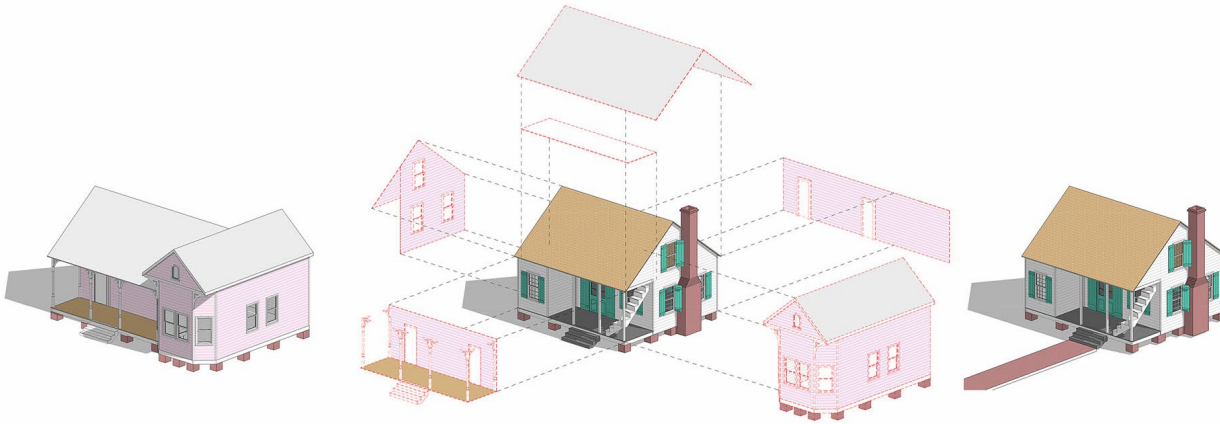
The original *cabinet* (small side room) was restored at the left side of the porch. The design team realized the original cottage had the *cabinet* because of the carpenter marks at the studded wall.

Evidence left from pulling back soffit and fascia added during Victorian times provided further clues as to the original porch design. Whitewash showed capitals of the three original columns. The design team could also see from carpenter marks where the studs were put in.

RR-270.03

The pink Victorian house in which the cottage was found enveloped was moved from a block away in order to save it from demolition. See diagram at top left and photo of 'moving day' at bottom left.

The new site is a prominent corner that better welcomes people as they come off the interstate. It is located at the intersection of the main collector road for motorists as they come off the interstate and one of the main streets of the historic urban core.



RR-270.04

Pegs, carpenter marks, and locations of studs (where they plugged into structure) made evident which historic wood members were studs as opposed to columns.

Original opening for garçonnière was evident. Attic floor had an existing opening. The door at top of stair is original. The chimney was added back; the design team knew it was there as it was present on the original site.

The design team also knew locations of original windows and doors based on carpenter marks in roman numerals. If an area of wall was missing *barreaux* marks, that indicated an opening.





RR-270.05

The addition of a contemporary restroom facility accommodates a trailhead for local cyclists.

ADA access is ensured through the project. Note the ramp at the rear entry to the historic cottage. Wooden bollards define the buildings' yard and protect them from automobile damage.

The brick pavers were taken from the 1920s Carencro High School building which was demolished in the 1970s.

The seams on the metal cladding on the restroom addition are complementary to the historic siding on the cottage, providing a contrasting sense of rhythm and scale, reflecting the continuum between the eras the two buildings represent.

RR-270.06

The site is enclosed with a wooden picket fence made of cypress, a wood native to South Louisiana. Pickets are widely spaced both to lighten the sense of enclosure and also to provide security by introducing a porous barrier rather than an opaque one which would provide a hiding place.

The project includes historic landscaping and parking in the rear of the center. The landscaping contains native plants and traditional Acadian garden elements. Pervious paving provides a space for group events in the museum's rear yard.

Native/early adopted plant species include the Peggy Martin rose, crape myrtles, and star jasmine.





RR-270.07

Exhibits collect and make visible in one location the richness and variety of local culture. Exhibits range from narrative and data to images and artifacts. Graphics and signage respect the local French vernacular and are bilingual in French and English throughout the project. Interactive smartboards (visible at top right photo) add a state-of-the-art element to this 200-year-old building, allowing visitors to design their own museum experience.

The historically correct color palette includes whitewash on the walls and indigo at the ceiling. Track lighting and HVAC registers are sensitively placed, hidden behind rafters so as to be minimally obtrusive.



RR-270.08

The extensive and expertly curated exhibits are a pacesetter for towns of this size and include:

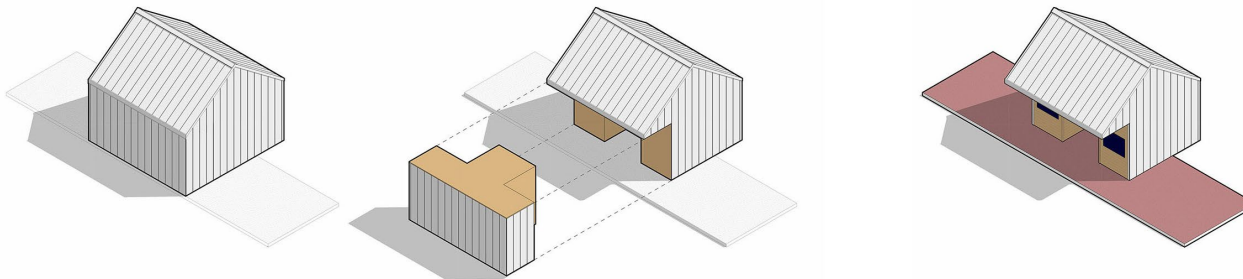
- Nature: geology, flora, wildlife
- Native American and European settlement
- Local peoples: Acadians, Africans, Native Americans
- Establishment of the city
- The railroad era
- The Evangeline Downs racetrack
- Local legend, including Evangeline's Gabriel
- Agriculture (ranching, farming)
- French language
- Festivals
- Music
- Cuisine





RR-270.09

The project creates an entryway from the parking by carving out of the simple restroom massing that mimics the volume of the original Acadian cottage, in a way similar to a front porch. This creates a sense of entry and guides visitors from parking toward the museum.



RR-270.10

Artifacts span a broad range of materials and eras and include:

- Sweet potatoes
- Labels and stamps from the cooperative
- Railroad spikes
- An accordion belonging to a famous zydeco musician (Avery Sappy)
- Brown cotton
- American Indian arrowheads found along Bayou Carencro



RR-270.11

The building itself functions as an exhibit: Exposed areas of bousillage construction are overlaid with explanatory graphics, showcasing the technology and history behind the architecture.



Stud / Montant

Locally harvested cypress was hand hewn, or hand shaped, to form wooden framing. The framing was held together with wooden pegs, and studs near the ends of the home were set at an angle to form a brace. The framing was prefabricated and numbered with roman numerals (called carpenter marks) to be able to be put together on site.

La charpente en bois de ciprés récolté dans les marécages fut travaillée à la main. Des chevilles en bois tinrent le tout en place avec des montants placés en biais pour renforcer la charpente près des extrémités. La charpente préfabriquée et numérotée aux chiffres romains permirent l'édification de la bâtisse sur place.

Barreaux

Split sticks or staves of cypress were used as rungs between the upright posts. They were shaped by hand to fit at an angle and hammered into place without the use of nails.

Des morceaux de bois fendu ou des doures servirent de barreaux entre les poteaux. façonnés à la main, ils furent fixés à un angle et martelés en place sans clous en métal.

Torchis

Bousillage, shaped like a bread dough loaf, was hung over the barreaux. The loaves were placed one next to another, compacted, and smoothed over.

Le bousillage, en forme de pâte de pain, fut suspendu au-dessus des barreaux. Les pains de bousillage furent placés l'un à côté des autres, compactés et lissés.

Moss / Bousillage

When mixed with water to form a paste, bousillage provided stability to the wall.

Mélangé à un peu d'eau, le bousillage de l'axe pour former des fibres internes de la bousillage apportèrent structure à la mur achevé.

Lime Plaster

Enduit à la chaux

The finished walls were plastered using lime.

Le mur achevé fut enduit à la chaux utilisée comme liant.

RR-270.12

Details from left:

Mantelpiece at original chimney.

Operable window shutters, painted in historic green.

Garçonnière (stair) leading from front porch to attic.



RR-270.13

This Welcome Center and Museum represents a significant cultural preservation effort that strengthens the community's identity and pride. It provides a place for current and future generations to connect with their roots and understand the heritage of their region. Residents and visitors alike will be able to learn more vividly about the Acadian way of life, historical events, and cultural practices, having a deeper appreciation for the past.

