

CARTER PLANTATION
23475 Carter Trace
Springfield
Livingston Parish
Louisiana

HALS LA-6
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

CARTER PLANTATION

HALS NO. LA-6

- Location:** 23475 Carter Trace, Springfield, Livingston Parish, Louisiana. Carter Plantation is located along State Highway 1038, south of US Highway 190 and the town of Springfield, and east of the Blood River. 30.414136, -90.577367 (Center of Carter Plantation House, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)
- Significance:** Historically Carter Plantation was a working southern plantation. The plantation changed hands many times throughout its history, and its many owners have guided its evolution. The site was a major timber source for the surrounding area with the Blood River used for water transport. Thomas Freeman built the plantation between 1817 and 1820, and named it "Sycamore." The property historically included around 2,000 acres. Freeman is documented in a commission report from 1820 as being the first black man to own property in the Livingston Parish area. Freeman lived there with his wife and five children. Freeman, himself a free man of color, also owned slaves. Eventually he sold the plantation in 1838 to William L. Breed. Marcus Carter acquired the property in 1858 and named it "Carter Plantation."¹
- Description:** Currently, Carter Plantation is open to the public. It includes a golf course, a residential community, hotel accommodations, and dining on the site. The Carter House itself serves as a real estate center for the community. Historically, the landscape of Carter Plantation is significant for cypress harvesting in the 1800s. In a vernacular, cultural, and ethnographic sense, the landscape was very important because it was one of the few examples where a free man of color in the south gained freedom and owned property.

The landscape of the plantation can be easily defined through its landscape features. The oak allées and groves on the site historically created a nice spatial relationship with the landscape and the plantation fields and crops created large open spaces that provided views.

Natural Features

The natural hydrological systems of this lowland, cypress swamp environment have defined and shaped the landscape of Carter Plantation. The Blood River flows along the property, which includes many drainage ditches that allowed for crops to be grown. Ponds are also prevalent and were used historically as focal points. All water on the site drains to the river and ponds on the site. The wetland

¹ *History of Livingston Parish, Louisiana* (The History Book Committee of the Edward Livingston Historical Association, 1986).

landscape supports many native indigenous species, such as alligators and egrets.

Topography

The landscape surface of the property has very few changes in slope, elevation, and solar aspect. There are no significant hills or rock outcroppings on the site. Topography occurs naturally and is all low-lying and swampy terrain. Human impacts have been minimal in terms of affecting the topography. However the cypress harvesting may have contributed to surface erosion. Also drainage ditches and ponds have been carved into several places in the landscape as it has been cultivated over the years.

Vegetation

The site has several live oak groves and alleys along its roadways. Grasses cover the old fields of the plantation. The edge forests contain many species such as spruce pine, field pine, pecan, sweet gum, and sassafras. The plantation house itself had many exotic species brought in to include in its adjacent gardens. Species of roses, jasmine, crape myrtle, and others were used.

Designed Features

Three main designed and changed features on the site include the cypress farm, the crop fields, and the oak alleys and gardens.

Land patterns

The land patterns on the site include mostly low-lying swamp areas with the separated crop fields and forest edges.

Circulation

The systems of movement within the landscape include a main route around the plantation, defined by the alignment of the roads with the surrounding Blood River. The river historically was used for transport and circulation.

Views and vistas

The front view of the plantation is framed by a live oak allée, and the property overlooks the river. The non-historic golf course has negatively impacted the integrity of the views.

Buildings and structures

Buildings on the site were historically tied to the operations of the plantation. The plantation house was the main building on the property. Historically barns, slave quarters, mills, and camps were located on the property. Materials for building mainly consisted of the cypress wood harvested from the property.

Archeological sites

Many potential archeological sites exist on the property including the site of the former slave quarters.

History: The property was first documented in 1804 when the property was acquired by James Rheams [Rheims] [Rheem] under a Spanish land grant. Thomas Freeman, a free man of color, built the Carter House in 1817-1820. He was the first black man to record a legal transaction in his own right in the Greensburg District of East Louisiana, as well as the first to own property in what is now Livingston Parish. By 1820, Freeman had built the renowned Federal style house and records indicate he named it "Sycamore". The original kitchen and dining room, which were detached from the main house, burned in the late 1880s, and the present dining room and kitchen were added. Wiley H. Sharp, Jr. and his sister, Beverly Sharp Burgess restored the house during the 1970s and 1980s.

Landscape architect, designer, shaper, creator

The Carter Plantation landscape was never professionally documented as having been designed, but it was a working plantation. Thomas Freeman, his relatives, and his enslaved laborers probably played the biggest role in shaping the land. Also historically as a timber farm, there was much tree harvesting activity around the cypress swamp on the property.

Builder, contractor, laborers, suppliers

The property was originally managed and built by Thomas Freeman, his relatives, and his enslaved laborers. Slave labor continued to be the driving force in shaping the landscape throughout the years that followed. Several of the owners had installed rose gardens on the property and likely planted exotic species.

Original and subsequent owners, occupants

The property was acquired by James Rheams [Rheims] [Rheem] under a Spanish land grant in 1804.

The Federal style Carter House was built by Thomas Freeman, a free man of color between 1817 and 1820. He named it "Sycamore." He was the first free man of color to record a legal transaction in his own right in the Greensburg District of East Louisiana, and the first to own property in what is now Livingston Parish. Freeman lived there with his wife, 5 children, and his enslaved laborers.

Thomas Freeman sold the house and land to William L. Breed in 1838, where he lived until his death on November 7, 1843. William Breed married Rachel Tregg Moore in 1824 and they had three children. In 1828, he was a Colonel in the Militia, a bondsman, and owned a brick yard and the Rome Ferry on the Tickfaw River. He was appointed the first sheriff of Livingston Parish in 1832, when the parish was formed from St. Helena. He also became a State Representative from Livingston Parish in 1835. No records have been found that indicate where Mr. Breed was buried.

George Richardson acquired the Sycamore Plantation in 1856. Born in 1795, Richardson came to Louisiana from Georgia around 1819 with his brother, mother, and other members of his family. The same year he arrived in Louisiana, he and Margaret Eliza Hamilton were married. She was the daughter of Mathew Hamilton. George and Margaret had nine children. Margaret died in 1836 and some records indicate she was buried in St. Helena Parish.

George Richardson's daughter, Amanda Richardson, married Marcus Tullius Carter in 1855. Records indicate Marcus Carter was born in 1828 in East Feliciana Parish and his wife, Amanda, was born in 1830 a few miles from Ponchatoula. Marcus Carter was a lawyer, Judge, and District Attorney. Marcus and Amanda had six children. Marcus Carter renamed the plantation "Carter Plantation." George Richardson died May 14, 1858 at Carter Plantation and was buried in the cemetery located near the plantation house. Marcus Carter died at Springfield in 1884. Amanda Carter died at Carter Plantation in 1913.

The house was restored by Wiley H. Sharp, Jr. and his sister, Beverly Sharp Burgess during the 1970s and 80s.

The Community Development District (CDD) is the current owner of the Carter House and 5.916 acres property surrounding the house. The CDD acquired the property from the Developer of Carter Plantation on May 4, 2005. On January 9, 2003 in accordance with the CDD Act the Carter Plantation CDD was formed by Livingston Parish Ordinance No. 02-41 by the Parish Council of the Parish of Livingston. The Petitioner was CP-Land, LLC.

Periods of development:

a. Original plans and construction

The original house built by Thomas Freeman was made of brick and cypress that were made and found on the property. The early site around Carter Plantation was a very heavily forested area with a cypress swamp near the river. The property near the plantation house had crop fields and an oak grove. The plantation has been restored, and remains very similar to the original condition.

b. Changes and additions

The plantation itself had several renovations and additions over the course of its history. In 1817 – 1820, Thomas Freeman built the Carter House. Freeman was responsible for constructing the four original front rooms of the house. The original kitchen and dining room, which were detached from the main house, burned in the late 1880s, and the present dining room and kitchen were added. Over the years the Carter family made several additions to the house. Three separate fires damaged the kitchen. Richardson Carter added additions to the back of the house. In the 1970s – 1980s, the house was restored by Wiley H. Sharp, Jr. and his sister, Beverly Sharp Burgess. In this restoration beams and

joists from the original plantation were recovered and used in the current kitchen. Currently 4 of the 5 mantles in the house are original. Upstairs the moldings were replaced everywhere but in the front rooms. A golf course was built on the adjacent property between 2000 and 2005.

Historical Context

The Carter Plantation historically included around 2,000 acres. It has a unique history which involves the ownership of the plantation by Thomas Freeman, the first free man of color to own property in Livingston Parish. He and his enslaved laborers managed the land and planted crops. The ownership changed over the years, but the property continued to operate as a plantation until the Civil War. The plantation's cypress swamp was a major timber source for the surrounding area. The timber harvesting was the plantation's main source of income and the Blood River was the main source of transportation and access to the site. Historically the river was used to transport the timber mainly south to New Orleans. The journey by boat to New Orleans used to take 2-3 days. With the arrival of the railroads, the river became less important for transport, and the plantation began to slowly lose business.

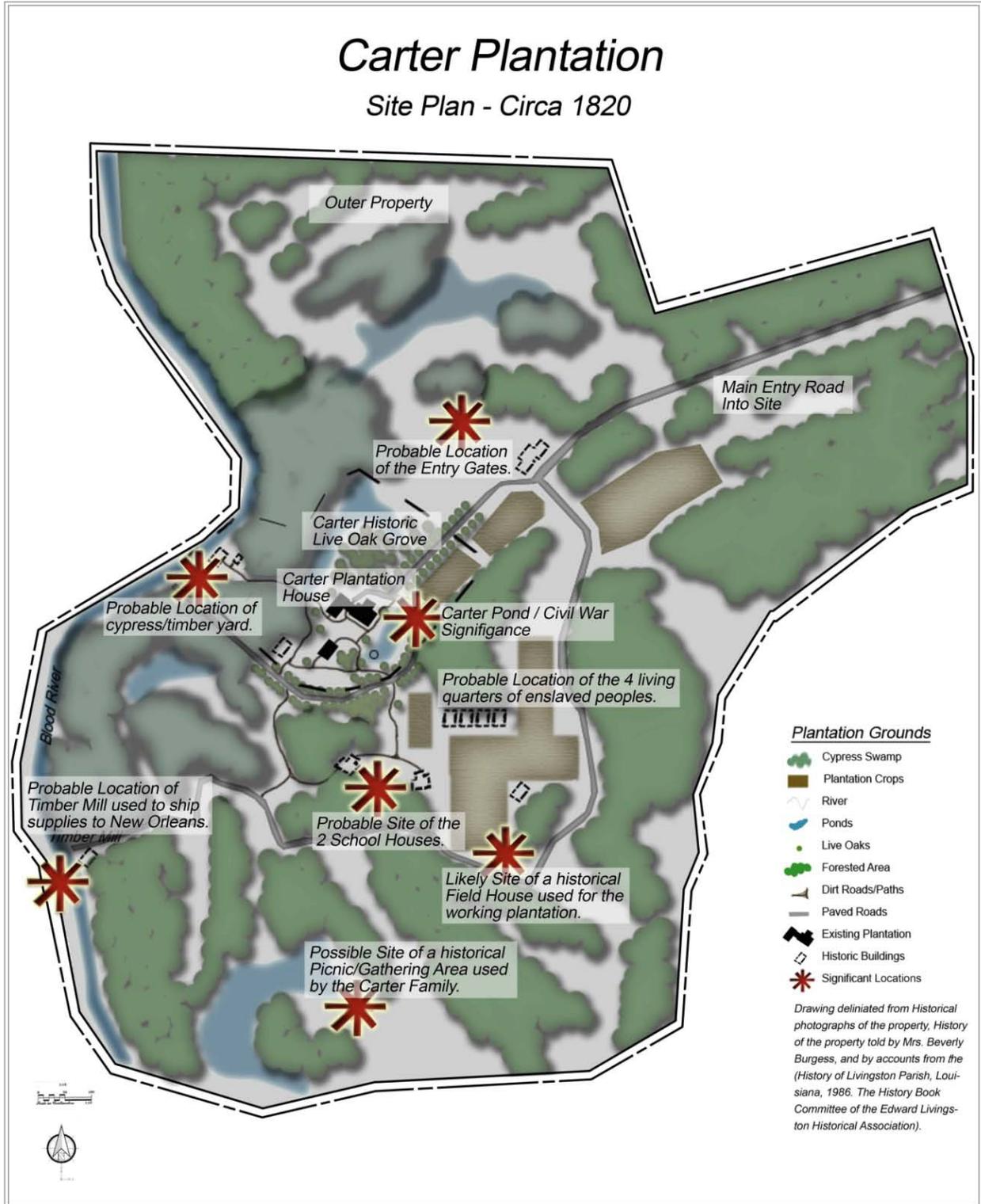
There were two school houses on the site. One of the school houses was used to educate the owner's children and cousins, and the other was a separate school house hidden in the woods for the slave children to secretly learn. The main land entry to the site was via the road that approached from the east. Crops grown on the site included many common southern fruits and vegetables including mainly corn; however the typical southern cotton crop was never grown on the site.

Sources: Carter Plantation website, <http://www.carterplantation.com/index.htm>, Accessed 2012.

History of Livingston Parish, Louisiana. 1986. The History Book Committee of the Edward Livingston Historical Association.

Interview with Mrs. Beverly Burgess on March 8, 2012 at Carter Plantation.

Historian: Gregory Hingle, Student, April 4, 2012
Faculty Sponsor: Lake Douglas, Associate Professor
Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture
Louisiana State University



Circa 1820 site plan of Carter Plantation (Gregory Hingle, 2012).