ENGLISH TURN CEMETERY
English Turn Road
Braithwaite
Plaquemines Parish
Louisiana

HALS LA-8
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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

THE ENGLISH TURN CEMETERY

HALS NO. LA-8

Location: English Turn Road, Braithwaite, Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana

Latitude: 29.874002, Longitude: -89.967126 (Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)

Significance: The English Turn Cemetery is a Colored cemetery segregated by nineteenth-century German colonizers that holds a unique place in American history, spanning from slavery to modern-day Black culture. It includes graves of some of the first recorded and documented Black Isleños, an often overlooked culture from the Canary Archipelago Islands.

Description: The English Turn Cemetery is located south of a bend or "turn" in the Mississippi River along English Turn Road, north of Bazile Drive in Braithwaite, Louisiana, southeast of New Orleans. The cemetery is unmarked and unregistered. It is one of the oldest Baptist African American cemeteries in Louisiana and is managed by one of the oldest Black Baptist congregations in Plaquemines Parish, St. Andrew Missionary Baptist Church.

The cemetery is about 1.5 acres of flat land. It is covered with lawn and scattered shade trees. The remaining historic raised tombs and vaults are typically constructed of concrete block and/or brick often covered with stucco. In-ground burials are marked with stone or concrete markers, and some family lots are delineated with iron fences. The repairs made after the 2012 Hurricane Isaac included the introduction of some modern replacement masonry above-ground vaults.

History: The local name "English Turn" comes from a September 1699 event that occurred in the area. Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville came down the Mississippi River to meet the British, who were coming up the river to choose a settlement site. Bienville convinced British Captain Lewis Banks that the territory was in possession of the French. Early concessions were established in the vicinity.[1]

The English Turn Cemetery was likely established by white plantation owners for their slaves and or sharecroppers. Many buried here probably farmed rice on the Camerun and St. Clair Plantations, which the German colonizers used to create flour. Many died from yellow or typhoid fever that frequently killed plantation workers.

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[1] Historic Marker erected by the Louisiana Department of Commerce and Industry, 1963.

The cemetery includes tombs, vaults, and headstones, including some for the first recorded and documented Black Isleños. Vast research has been done by Louisiana scholars about the French and Spanish settlements, but little is known about the Black Isleños. Canary Islanders came to Louisiana beginning in 1778 when 700 men were recruited to increase the size of the Louisiana Regiment for the Spanish King, who anticipated an invasion by Great Britain. The king looked to the Canary Islands for the recruits to protect Louisiana. These recruits had to be "17 to 36 years old, healthy, without vices, and more than five feet tall". Recruiters were paid extra for every half-inch their recruits stood over five feet. The Canary Islanders were located by Governor Galvez in four strategic locations where they thought the British were most likely to attack.

The Black Isleños eventually settled in four locations: Saint Bernard, Plaquemine, Pointe á la Hache, and, Braithwaite, Louisiana. These lush, green, and wet settlements in the marshlands proved to be beneficial and familiar for both the African Cameroon Grasslands, and Equatorial Guinea peoples. The Islanders cultivated communities and cuisine (okra). Also, they carved out sustainable channels in the marshlands and perfected their skills in agriculture and farming, mainly growing rice on plantations they helped to create. The Islanders were skilled fisherman, trappers, tradesman, agriculturalists, explorers, and inventors. The contributions to Louisiana by the descendants of the African Islanders were many. Some enlisted in the Navy to build ships, some fought in the Civil War, World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War. Some worked at the Plaquemine Parish Court House, and others worked at the Port of Embarkation in New Orleans, Louisiana.

For almost two centuries, the cemetery was an attractive place of solitude and rest. Unfortunately, when Hurricane Isaac devastated the Gulf Coast Region in August 2012, it disturbed about seventy percent of this cemetery. Tombs, vaults, and caskets freely floated across the road and remained there for months. One week before the devastation of hurricane, the author, a direct descendent of the Black Isleños culture, took photographs that were later used to repair the cemetery by various crews from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Army Corp Of Engineers, and the Louisiana State University (LSU) Forensic Anthropology and Computer Enhancement Services (FACES) Laboratory. The latter team identified unmarked dislocated remains.

Sources: Alexander-Bloch, Benjamin, "Hurricane Isaac plays havoc with Plaquemines cemeteries," NOLA.com / The Times-Picayune, September 16, 2012. www.nola.com/hurricane/index.ssf/2012/09/hurricane_isaac_plays_havoc_wi.html Accessed January 2014.

U.S. Gulf Coast States Geotourism MapGuide : The English Turn Cemetery www.usgulfcoaststatesgeotourism.com/content/the-english-turn-

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Vigne, Elaine. Master Thesis: "The Canary Archipelago Islanders of African Descent in the Parishes of St. Bernard and Plaquemines: Louisiana's Jewels," 2012, Southern University of New Orleans, Library of Congress Registration Number TXu l – 851-818. Copies available at the Historic New Orleans Collection, (www.hnoc.org/) and the Amistad Research Center (www.amistadresearchcenter.org/), New Orleans.

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January 29, 2014

The English Turn Cemetery during the process of restoration following Hurricane Isaac (Elaine Washington Vigne, March 2013).