

2010 New Orleans, Louisiana Tour Report

Submitted by Ramona Alford Darden, AAFA #0715, Member AAFA Hall of Fame

Thirteen members arrived early to visit and tour New Orleans. Our first day began in the French Quarter at Café du Monde having beignets and café au lait (in our terms, donuts with powdered sugar and French coffee with cream). It was more than enough to carry each of us over until our next meal.

Our next tour was The Cabildo of the Louisiana State Museum containing mementos of the history of Louisiana. Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte had a vision of a renewed western empire for France, and his schemes included the recapture of Louisiana from Spain. Control over this vast territory would halt the westward expansion of the young United States and would supply French colonies in the West Indies with the goods they needed. In 1800, Napoleon signed the secret Treaty of Ildefonso with Spain, and the agreement stipulated that France would provide Spain with a kingdom for the son-in-law of Spain's king if Spain would return Louisiana to France. However, Napoleon's plan collapsed when the twelve-year revolt of slaves and free blacks in the French colony of Saint-Dominique succeeded, forcing French troops to accept defeat and return to France thus preventing them from reaching their ultimate destination – Louisiana - and from defending it. As Napoleon's New World Empire disintegrated, the loss of Haiti made Louisiana unnecessary.



Doris Vetri, Evelyn Mistich, Vesta Bowden. Ramona Darden and Lynn Shelley are shown in front of St. Louis Cathedral in the French Quarter.

The United States wanted to acquire the area near New Orleans primarily to guarantee its right to sail vessels down the Mississippi River through Spanish territory and unload goods at New Orleans for shipment to the Atlantic coast and Europe. Moreover, the United States wanted to possess the entire territory of Louisiana because so many American settlers and merchants were already in the region and because of its vital geographic position at the mouth of the Mississippi River.

The United States discovered the transfer of Louisiana from Spain to France and sent Robert Livingston to France in 1801 to try to purchase New Orleans. Napoleon initially refused, leading President Thomas Jefferson to send James Monroe to secure the deal. However, in April 1803, just days before Monroe was to arrive in Paris, Napoleon offered to sell the United States not only New Orleans but also all of Louisiana. Napoleon's minister to the treasury, the Marquis de Barbe'-Marbois, dealt with Livingston and Monroe over terms of the Louisiana Purchase. The United States purchased Louisiana from France for \$11,250,000.

On November 30, 1803, Spain's representatives, Governor Manuel de Salcedo and the Marques de Casa Calvo, officially transferred Louisiana to France's representative, Prefect Pierre Clement de Laussat, in the Sala Capitular in the Calbildo. Although Laussat had been instructed to transfer Louisiana to the United States the next day, twenty days actually separated the transfers, during which time Laussat became governor of Louisiana and created a new town council.

We learned much more about the history of Louisiana but the above will give you enough information about the history inside The Cabildo. We then went to Harrah's for lunch, an-all-you-can-eat buffet for \$9.95. There was a great selection of meats, vegetables, and great desserts. They really wanted to keep those who were playing the slots happy and full of good food.

We then went to the WWII Museum for a movie about the GI Joe's point of view concerning combat during the war. During the movie the seats vibrated as the big guns and explosions took place. Quite a surprise but you really felt like you were part of the war. This is a new section just opened as part of the WWII Museum complex. I am sure some of you are thinking you did not remember that on the tour list. The Presbyter cancelled our tour due to closing to set up for a new exhibit that could not be completed by the deadline with visitors in the way. The WWII Museum was the substitute for that

tour stop.



Our last stop of day one was the Old US Mint, which was the Confederacy's only mint for a few months in 1861. It continued as the U.S. Mint until 1909. We viewed displays of coins, machines and the structure. The site was renovated in the 1850's and blends Classical Revival and Victorian Styles.

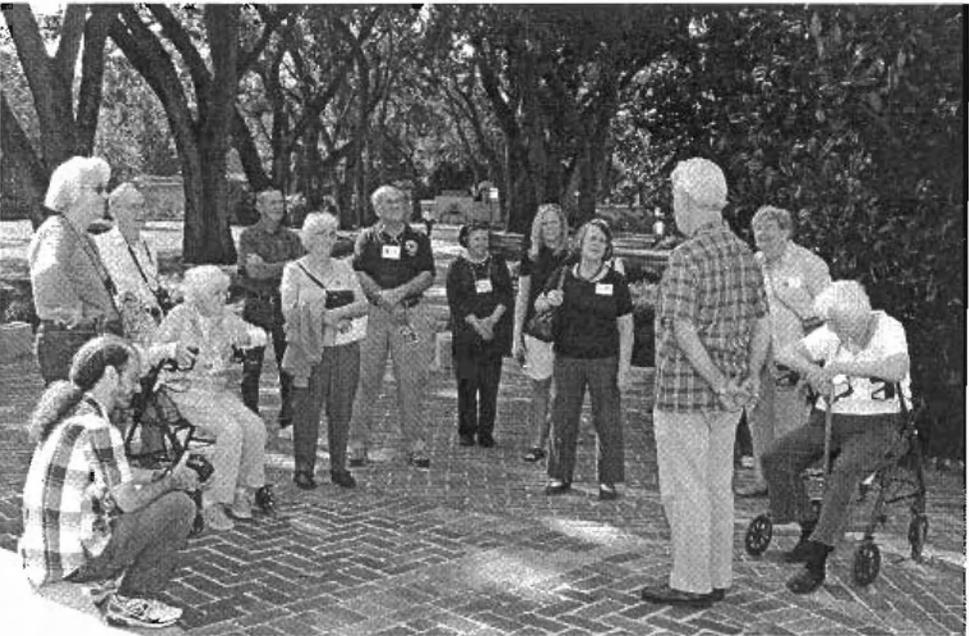
Sitting in front of a fountain in the Houmas House Gardens are: Evelyn Mistich, Vesta Bowden, Walter Schuster, Lynn Shelley, Helen Steele, Ramona Darden, Doris Vetri, Earl Alford, Bob Steele and Walt Smith. Peggy Schuster, Pauline Alford and Janice Smith are kneeling in front.

On day two, there were 17 in our tour group. We visited some southern

plantations. Our first plantation is considered the Grand Dame of the Great River Road, Oak Alley. It is considered the most photographed plantation in Louisiana, with the beautiful double row of oak trees lining the entrance from the river to the mansion. It is more beautiful in real life. This home was



Shown in front of the Ogden Museum of Southern Art are: Wayne and Joyce Alford (in back), Doris Vetri, Vesta Bowden, Holly Alford, Earl Alford, Peggy and Walter Schuster, Bob Steele, Evelyn Mistich, Walt Smith, Janice Smith, Lynne Shelley, Ramona Darden, Pauline Alford, and Helen Steele.



The group is shown along the tree-lined entrance to Longue View House and Gardens. They include: Walt Smith, Ramona Darden, Walter Schuster, Vesta Bowden, Wayne Alford, Doris Vetri, Earl and Pauline Alford, Holly Alford, Lynn Shelley, our tour guide, Evelyn Mistich and Helen Steele.

built in 1839 and was originally named Bon Sejour (pleasant sojourn):

From the moment you gaze up the tree-lined drive to the splendid Greek Revival style mansion, it is evident that Oak Alley Plantation is an extraordinary place. Inside, you will find gracious interiors that echo the romance of another era, where gleaming hardwood floors and shimmering chandeliers reflect both streams of sunlight and the venerable history of this magnificent home. You will feel as though Scarlet O'Hara just walked through this lovely place. To add to the atmosphere, they sell both virgin and regular mint juleps to be enjoyed while there.

The next plantation we visited was Houmas House Plantation and Gardens. When you see it, you will know why it is called "The Crown Jewel of Louisiana's River Road." At one time during the 19th century, Houmas House farmed sugarcane on tens of thousands of acres, and

became the largest producer of sugar in the country. In fact, this grand estate was so lavish that it was described by many as "The Sugar Palace."

From the time you step into the home, guests feel transported back to a time of antebellum and southern splendor. Even our tour guide had a southern drawl and big bouffant skirt.

After our Sunday morning Alford Family History Workshop completed the official part of the reunion, we began our day three tour with 19 members. The tour began with the Ogden Museum of Southern Art. This museum had both permanent and rotating exhibits. Dedicated to Southern art, lots of the works were photographs of hurricane damage to New Orleans, but it did include lots of other art works also.

From there we went to Metarier Cemetery looking for three of our Alford family members who were buried there. Gil will give a report on these members at a later date. You would not believe how beautiful the mausoleums were in the cemetery; they would take your breath away. We had a problem with a member of our group. Janice Smith was so impressed she wanted to move right in! HA! Not only were the mausoleums beautiful, they were also very large.

We continued to Longue Vue House and Gardens, a Greek Revival Mansion and home of philanthropist, Edgar Bloom Stern, and his wife Edith. She is daughter of Sears' magnate Julius Rosenwald. This mansion is furnished with 18th and 19th Century American and English antiques, French and Oriental carpets, and British and Continental pottery. The property is surrounded by 8 acres of landscaped gardens and fountains. This home is on the national Register of Historic Places. It is one mansion that has original furnishings of the period.

Our final stop was again the French Quarter. We ate at Mulate's Restaurant where we had great food, heard zydeco music, saw Cajun dancing and had an appetizer of assorted regional foods which included crawfish, alligator, calamari, frog legs and crab balls, etc. Some were brave enough to try most of these items. We were then entertained by a French Quarter parade with a high-stepping local high school band, followed by a group of people on a float that were throwing beads. There was a convention of undertakers in New Orleans who had hired the band and float to entertain their group. Our group benefitted from the atmosphere of New Orleans. Everyone really seemed to enjoy this experience.

We returned to the hotel where some time was spent packing up the materials that were on display during the meeting. We must thank those who pitched in to help. Afterwards some time was taken to visit before saying good-bye.

Be sure to put St. Louis, Mo. on your calendar. The meeting will be held on October 7, 8, & 9, 2011. The exact place will be announced as soon as a contract is confirmed. Please join us there!