



DRAFT

Team Project

Preservation Leadership Training Natchitoches, Louisiana April 5-12, 1997

Introduction

The Team Project is a key component of the PLT experience. It is the portion of the week's program that gives PLT participants an opportunity to build upon their work experiences and apply the lessons of each day's educational sessions in seeking solutions to real problems. The Team Project is designed to be a participatory experience, thus it serves as both lesson and exercise for those involved. Participants work with each other to seek solutions to problems facing the host community and those statewide organizations who have or expect to have heritage areas established in their state. Working in groups of seven, four separate teams will address a variety of preservation issues related to the Cane River Creole National Historical Park and Cane River National Heritage Area (Heritage Area).

The Team Project will hone skills in teamwork, analysis, fieldwork, time management, and public speaking. During the week, participants will interact with the community, local officials, civic leaders, and fellow team members. The Team Project will culminate Friday evening as each team makes a public presentation of their observations and recommendations related to their specific problem or issue.

A special focus within this particular Team Project is the connection with statewide preservation organizations. Most of the participants for this workshop represent statewide organizations, and therefore the role of a statewide in helping to create, manage, advocate for, and promote heritage areas in its state is a logical extension of the Team Project. In addition, the complexities of managing a large and diverse operation--like a statewide--are very much akin to the challenges facing the management of a heritage area. For example, the geographic and cultural diversity of the Cane River Heritage Area is not dissimilar to what exists in other states. Differing attitudes, prejudices, and long distances are just a few of the hurdles that must be overcome in problem solving for large areas. A statewide organization that can cope with these differences will be better suited to manage its own disparate affairs. And, because this PLT focuses on building state level preservation leaders, it is intended that participants use the Team Project exercise to enhance skills in advocacy, organizational development and strategic planning--all important components of successful statewide, non-profit preservation organizations.

History

Natchitoches is the oldest city in Louisiana and the oldest permanent settlement in the Louisiana Purchase. France had a vital interest in controlling the western portions of its early 18th century Louisiana territories, and therefore ordered expeditions to erect forts and trading ports along the Mississippi River and its tributaries. In 1714, after an exploration of the Red River (to open trade with local Caddo tribes), Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, a French-Canadian adventurer, founded Natchitoches as a military and trading post to forestall Spanish occupation of the area. Natchitoches was well suited to sustain a frontier economy due to navigational blockage on the Red River which made it the terminus for river traffic. In addition, it was situated near the Spanish Camino Real, a major east-west overland route, which further bolstered the area's status as a crossroads. For the next century, interaction among French, Spanish, and American interests would shape the area's economy and culture.

From its founding to well into the 19th century, Natchitoches served as a prosperous cotton port. Its commercial importance declined after 1832 when the Red River, then the city's main transportation artery, changed its course five miles to the east and left behind what became known as Cane River Lake. Between the Civil War and World War II, Natchitoches remained an agriculturally based economy, punctuated by the establishment of Northwestern State Normal School which served as Louisiana's primary teaching college for many years. After World War II, the city sought and acquired diversified industry to complement its agricultural base of cotton, soybeans, pecans and beef cattle. Today's industrial activity includes chicken processing, cotton processing, paper and plywood production, and the manufacture of brick and tile. Northwestern State University (NSU), the Louisiana School (for gifted high school juniors and seniors), and a U.S. fish hatchery are also major employers located in Natchitoches.

Today

In the last 20 years, though particularly in the last decade, Natchitoches has discovered heritage tourism as a new economic stimulus. Colonial period architecture and antebellum plantations (Cherokee, Melrose, Magnolia, Oakland, and others) that line Cane River Lake are major tourist attractions. In addition, a number of colonial and expansion era forts are operated as Commemorative Areas by the State of Louisiana. Natchitoches is also a Main Street town which includes a 33-block National Historic Landmark district that boasts vital commercial and professional businesses, and serves as a beautiful backdrop to the annual Christmas Festival of Lights. Annual tourist visitation to this community of only 17,000¹ totals more than 100,000. In 1994, Natchitoches and NSU became home to the National Park Service's National Center for Preservation Technology and Training.

The City's appreciation for heritage tourism dollars and the presence of the National Park Service (via the Center and the Cane River Creole National Historical Park and Cane River National Heritage Area) have raised awareness about the benefits of heritage tourism. So, while agriculture and education still dominate the economy, tourism is moving up fast. With the

¹City limits; Natchitoches Parish population is approximately 40,000

benefits of heritage tourism, however, come the responsibilities of management and stewardship. Natchitoches enjoys a delicate balance of small town atmosphere, quiet rural areas, and nationally renowned attractions that must be preserved if the tourism dollars are expected to continue to flow.

As Natchitoches' tourism market grows, so will its problems. The area is sprawling, and yet while more people are ensconced in their automobiles, the distances between people and cultures is shrinking. Every day new people arrive bringing fresh ideas and new challenges. Meanwhile, old attitudes and traditions are compromised. Already, the City faces a number of complex problems involving: traffic and transportation, preservation of the National Historic Landmark district, environmental and cultural issues. Suffice it to say that tourism and growth are double-edged swords that cut both ways. When a city plans and allocates its resources, it must do so with respect to the very things that make the area a place of interest. This, in turn, requires there to be a balance between residents' needs and tourists' needs.

Cane River Issues

The Cane River, Natchitoches' *raison d'être*, has been the area's figurative "artery" for centuries. Once the primary transportation route and water source for the region's agricultural bounty, more recently the Cane River has provided Natchitoches and its visitors with recreational opportunities and tourism opportunities. This has come, principally, through boating and fishing, seasonal tours of the Cane River plantations, bed & breakfast lodging, motoring, and an antiques festival at Melrose Plantation.

The establishment of the Park and Heritage Area, however, means that tourism will bring more and varied visitors, and the tourist "season" will extend throughout the year, witness the popularity of the Creole Heritage Days festival in January. A deeper and more sensitive understanding of the cultural heritage of these new attractions will be required of both residents and tourists alike.

The subject of the PLT Team Topic is the Cane River Heritage Area as it presents both opportunities and challenges for the host community. In 1994, U.S. Senator J. Bennett Johnston helped secure passage of an amendment to Senate Bill 1348 which:

- 1) recognized the importance of the Cane River Creole culture as a nationally significant element of the cultural heritage of the United States;
- 2) established a Cane River Creole National Historical Park to serve as the focus of interpretive and educational programs on the history of the Cane River area and to assist in the preservation of certain historic sites along the river; and
- 3) established a Cane River National Heritage Area and Commission to be undertaken in partnership with the State of Louisiana, the City of Natchitoches, local communities and settlements of the Cane River area, preservation organizations, and private landowners, with full recognition that programs must fully involve the local communities and landowners. (*Congressional Record*, October 6, 1994)

It became the responsibility of the National Park Service (NPS) and the Cane River National

Heritage Area Commission (Commission) to implement policies to achieve the goals as set out in S. 1348. To that end, the NPS has followed up on staffing and on purchasing historic properties at Magnolia Plantation and Oakland Plantation. Likewise, the Commission was formed and began preparing a management plan for the heritage area. Now, in 1997, both the NPS and the Commission are working toward achieving their goals.

The following topics have been drawn from real issues pertinent to the Heritage Area. PLT participants will contribute to the resolution of these problems by studying the situation, making objective (and sensitive) observations, and suggesting ideas for the community to consider.

1. **“Will James and the Trailer Park”**

Team Leaders: Will James and Saidee Newell

One of the benefits of preservation, its proponents argue, is the injection of dollars into the economy. “Preservation means jobs,” say its advocates. Often, these jobs are tourism related or service related which means they typically offer lower wages. Likewise, there are “home-grown” ventures that may mean the initiation of a small business or the development of land that is adjacent to or proximate to an attraction. Should these enterprises be encouraged? Should someone be allowed to develop his or her property to the highest and best use? Isn’t this exactly what preservationists say is the reason that heritage tourism should be promoted? But what happens when new businesses, or business expansions are strangled with regulations? And what about private property rights? Consider the repercussions of no controls. Could the very historic resources that are attracting investment be compromised by unplanned growth?

The central problem to focus on is: “How can tourism and new development peacefully coexist with the fragile historic resources that serve as the drawing card for Natchitoches?”

Other questions to consider and perhaps ask team leaders and interviewees are: Are there palatable forms of control that allow for economic growth without threatening historic and cultural resources? Can a balance be struck between rights and regulations--whether in the downtown National Historic Landmark district or in the Heritage Area? Without some controls might Natchitoches become a victim of its own success--similar to what has happened in historic cities that have become over-touristed such as New Orleans, Charleston, Nantucket, and Santa Fe? And what about the Cane River itself? Long a recreational amenity for boaters, fishers, and skiers, how can their interests be weighed against concerns for noise, bank erosion, archaeological concerns, and water pollution, etc.?

What is the role of a statewide organization in assisting with the resolution of any of these issues? Can a statewide be a source of technical assistance or information in refuting or confirming any of the aforementioned issues? Is there a need for education or advocacy that a statewide can help meet? Where is that outreach best aimed--at legislators in the state capital, or at local political leaders? **How can a statewide most effectively assist local governments and local preservation organizations in addressing issues concerning development and regulations in areas like the Cane River Heritage Area?**

2. "This Land is My Land..."

Team Leaders: Janet Colson and Alicia Trissler

The major impetus that led to the creation of the Cane River Heritage Area was the recognition and celebration of the Creole culture. This means, among other things, conserving the Creole architecture and Creole culture which pervades the area. As the legislation indicates, the only sensitive approach to achieving these goals is through the establishment of a Commission which will become a public-private "partnership which fully involves the State of Louisiana, the City of Natchitoches, local communities and settlements of the Cane River area, preservation organizations, and private landowners, with full recognition that programs must fully involve the local communities and landowners." (*Congressional Record*, Oct. 6, 1994)

The complexity and magnitude of the Heritage Area dictate that a diverse group of people comprise the Commission. With diversity, however, comes both challenges and opportunities. For example, engendering a sense of ownership means getting people involved who have a stake. But, at the same time, this means that proprietary issues often come into play, such as "Whose project is this?," "Why don't the priorities reflect my (our) concerns or goals?," and "Why are we spending time and money on that phase of the project when there are others equally deserving?" And, while the Creole culture was the impetus for establishing the Cane River Heritage Area, there are other ethnic and cultural groups present with rights, privileges and stories to tell: African-American, Euro-American, and Native American. How can all of these groups share equally in the development and interpretation of the Heritage Area?

With federal, state, local, non-profit, and private ownership of lands, how can the various interest groups work together to achieve a common mission? What is the best way to reach consensus? How can a statewide organization help? It is not uncommon for a statewide organization to act as a "hopper" for a variety of issues--representing urban and rural interests for example. With limited time and resources, how does a statewide prioritize those issues and take action?

3. "So Far Away"

Team Leaders: Mary Kelley, Rick Seale and Frances Walker

The Cane River Heritage Area spans two parishes--Natchitoches and Sabine--in a kind of boomerang shape, and the geographical and cultural differences could not be more pronounced. On the surface. Closer examination, however reveals a number of significant similarities between the two ends of the Heritage Area. Whereas the predominant resources along the Cane River are antebellum plantations, the archaeological remains of Los Adaes and the interpretive site at Ft. Jesup State Commemorative Area are most conspicuous in the west. The French, Spanish, and African interacted despite their cultural differences and, indeed, each depended on the other to survive. The same can be said of the two legs of the Cane River Heritage Area "boomerang."

The Creole element within the Cane River Heritage Area is a dominant theme, but in truth this

element represents only part of the story. Much of the other half of the Heritage Area story is told through the historical development of the lands west of Interstate 49, places like Robeline, Los Adaes, Ft. Jesup, and along the El Camino Real. Just as the Cane River antebellum plantations tell a story of this region's economic and cultural growth, the western portion of the Heritage Area tells stories of the United States' westward expansion, transportation development, military history, etc. Each leg, therefore adds something to the understanding of the whole.

To help guide this team in analyzing this problem, the following questions are to be considered: **What is the relevance and significance of each leg of the boomerang to the other?** How did the Heritage Area take on this unwieldy shape and size? **How can the western leg of the boomerang be better promoted as an integral part of the Heritage Area?**

What are the responsibilities of a statewide organization in representing the concerns of small and isolated areas? What are the realities of a statewide successfully representing those areas? **How does a statewide balance the need to get involved with local issues and still maintain its focus on equally serving the needs of preservationists across the state?** Is there a place or role for a statewide to help develop local groups to the point where they (the local groups) can build their capacity to promote and manage their own issues and resources?

4. **"The Communication Crescendo"**

Team Leaders: Kass Byrd and Bobby DeBlieux

According to the legislation that created the Cane River Heritage Area, the Commission shall terminate ten (10) years after its first official meeting. The Commission may petition for a five (5) year extension, but the legislative intent is for the Commission to perpetuate its work independent of the federal entities that created and currently support the Commission (National Park Service). That is, long term management of the Cane River Heritage Area should continue through some form of non-profit organization or "Friends" group. According to the legislation, partnerships and cooperative agreements with interested parties should be pursued to help achieve the stated goals of the Commission. In light of this, the profile of the Commission assumes greater importance in that it must establish ties with the community (Natchitoches Parish, Sabine Parish and State of Louisiana) that will encourage and facilitate public participation. Thus how well the Commission "sells" its mission and how well it communicates with the public are critical elements in determining the ultimate success of this project.

To help guide this team in considering what approaches the Commission should take to build public awareness and involvement, the following questions are posed: **How well informed is the general public about the mission of the Commission?** Is there a regular form of communication between the Commission and the community? **What is the most probable (and likely to succeed) way in which the Commission will self-perpetuate?** What are the organizational successes and failures of the Commission? **Noting the similarities between this Commission and a typical statewide organization's board, what advice can you offer the Commission to help it implement and achieve its goals?**

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT OF THE CANE RIVER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

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Natchitoches is blessed with an extraordinary wealth of historic, cultural and natural resources. In order to maintain the integrity of the Cane River Heritage Area, it is critical that any new development of the Heritage Area be preceded by appropriate planning. Planning mechanisms must be implemented to protect the great variety of historical features with original elements in both rural and urban settings as well as the cultural landscape, which represent the various aspects of Creole culture, and provide the base for a holistic approach to understanding the broad continuum of history within the region. All concerned parties (Cane River National Heritage Area Commission, State of Louisiana, City of Natchitoches, and Natchitoches and Sabine Parishes) should strive to implement policies and procedures to protect and sustain the natural landscape, including the river within the confines of the Cane River National Heritage Area. First and foremost, the creation of a Master Plan for the Parishes should be completed. The master planning process should be a community vision process which brings together the many diverse constituencies to decide the future of this community. The recommendations in this report are all issues that should be looked at in the master planning process.

HERITAGE TOURISM

Natchitoches is a lovely community, unlike any other community in our country. The potential to promote the special cultural and natural resources is a sleeping giant. To be done well, to retain your sense of community and to avoid being overrun by a tourist industry gone wild, your community must plan. Not just any tourism planning will do, here the community has the added responsibility to plan for "Heritage Tourism." The Heritage Tourism Program was initiated by the National Trust in 1990, and it has become the biggest buzz word in the industry. Heritage Tourism is defined by these five principles:

- **Focus on Authenticity and Quality:** Here you have the real history, don't mess with it, don't "Disneyfy" it. Tourists are hungry for site integrity and the opportunity to see and experience the variety of cultures that we have here in the United States.
- **Preserve and Protect Resources:** This is the collective responsibility of the entire community, not the Cane River National Heritage Area Commission or the Natchitoches Historic Commission alone, but each citizen, for the greater community good. This means going beyond the preservation of bricks and mortar of any one historic building, but to protect all of the historic sites in their historic context.
- **Make Sites Come Alive:** This is the historic sites' responsibility to provide the interpretation through all sensory participation.
- **Find the Fit between your Community and Tourism:** This is particularly important to Natchitoches. The planning and improvements should be prioritized for the community. Tourists do not want to go to Touristville, USA.
- **Collaborate:** Involve all of the sites, share and communicate with all parties involved, go

