Vernacular exposures at the Aillet House: anthropological interpretations of material culture and cultural change

Kelli Ostrom
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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VERNACULAR EXPOSURES AT THE AILLET HOUSE: ANTHROPOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF MATERIAL CULTURE AND CULTURAL CHANGE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by
Kelli Ostrom
B.A., St. John’s College, 1986
May 2005
Acknowledgments

This project spanned several years, thus there are many advisers and friends who must be recognized for their patience. Projects like these place great demands on family life, and I am immensely grateful for the support and tolerance given me by my husband, John. Also, I was the happy recipient of many editorial comments written in the margins by my daughter, Katherine, who now wishes to get started on her own thesis.

I am indebted to my adviser, Paul Farnsworth, who has endured my schedule without complaint. This paper has benefited from his thoughtful reading and several critical suggestions to clarify the presented argument. All flaws that remain are, of course, my responsibility. The thesis would not have been accomplished without the support of my thesis committee members, Miles Richardson and Rob Mann, who graciously overlooked the very last minute defense.

Warm thanks go to Caroline Kennedy and Neal Williams of the West Baton Rouge Parish Museum who have generously supported my research at the Aillet House. In addition, I have enjoyed working with them on the plans for the exhibit, and anticipate lots of fun this coming year when we present it before the public.

I initially got started on this project through the invitation of Chris Hays, Regional Archaeologist for the Southeast region of Louisiana. His relaxed guidance was very appreciated. My boss at the time, Thurston Hahn, gave me great advice on resources, for which I am grateful. Sid Gray’s enthusiasm for vernacular architecture is infectious, and I was fortunate to have received several lessons from him on architectural matters. Thanks to Sherry Wagener for the many conversations on what is and what is not creole.

The completion of the thesis brings to a close my graduate studies at Louisiana State University, studies I decided to pursue several years ago after falling in love with New Orleans
archaeology. I found material culture, jokes in the field, theoretical conversations, and beers after work such heady stuff. Shannon Dawdy was with me when I got started, and I am grateful for her continued friendship.
Preface

It is fitting that I preface this paper with a brief description of how I initially became involved with an archaeological project at the Aillet House site (16WBR45), as well as an account of how I became reinvolved with that same project some years later. In 1999 the property owner of the original Aillet tract gave to the West Baton Rouge Parish Museum ceramics and bottles recovered from the site during landscaping activities. The museum then called upon Christopher Hays, Regional Archaeologist in Louisiana’s Southeast area, to investigate the site and determine if other materials were present. Caroline Kennedy, director of the museum, saw this as a wonderful opportunity to expand the interpretation of the Aillet House. Chris Hays, in turn, sought a volunteer from among the anthropology students at Louisiana State University to test the site. Thus I began investigations at the Aillet house site (Figure 1). My initial survey was completed in May of 1999. The sixteen shovel tests satisfied the explicit purpose of Chris Hays’s invitation—to test for National Register eligibility under Section 106; subsequently I completed a report of my initial findings and submitted it along with a summary of my historical investigations (Ostrom 2000) to Chris Hays and Caroline Kennedy. At that time, I discussed with Ms. Kennedy the potential of further excavation and the possibility of including members of the community in the dig. This, however, was not to be.

After a time, the Tulliers, the current property owners of the house site, decided that further testing or excavation would not complement their landscaping plans. Given the paucity of artifacts coupled with the heavy disturbance from bulldozers at the site and given my fears that I had failed in my interactions with the property owners, I despaired of completing a thesis project at the Aillet House site. As a student just getting started in archaeology, I had more ideas than
Figure 1: The project area in 1980 (source: USGS Baton Rouge West, Louisiana, 7.5 min. quadrangle 1980).
experience, and I can now admit to feeling a bit relieved when the Tulliers asked me to withdraw. At the time, I was determined to write an archaeology thesis and the disturbance at the site disappointed those expectations. This first foray on my own left me feeling a bit ridiculous, and perhaps for this reason I did not consider seriously whether or not I had any further obligation to the community of West Baton Rouge or the museum.

Some years later while working for the Louisiana Division of Archaeology, I was made aware of the goals of public archaeology, and I began to think of my work at the Aillet House in a new light. As stewards of cultural resources, archaeologists have an ethical responsibility to communicate their findings with the public, particularly with those groups whose heritage is impacted by inquiries from which cultural insights and knowledge of the past are drawn. (Lynott and Wylie 1995:31, Herscher and McManamon 1995:43). Volumes have been devoted to the needs, justifications, and concerns of public outreach. The celebrated successes are typically on the national scene where federal legislation, tourist dollars and the national park service come together in an effort to engage the public, bring to light neglected parts of the past, and in general excite our national memory (Little 2002, Shackel 2002). The attention given to sites of national importance invites a comparison to the attention given to sites of regional importance. While it is not uncommon for small museums to have exhibits of local culture, it is certainly not the rule that the results of archaeological investigations find their way into the public eye at that level. Praetzellis (2002:58) suggests that greater efforts can be made in this regard, possibly through regulations set out by State Historic Preservation Offices. Furthermore, the support and interest of the public notwithstanding, it is professionals who must agree on how to engage the public, and how best to share research conclusions in the context of a community’s past (Potter 1990). Newly aware of my obligations and impressed by the Louisiana regional libraries’ thirst for
traveling exhibits (resulting from conversations with staffs during the management of the Haag Traveling Exhibit), I determined to test how few artifacts are needed to compose an exhibit.

Thus my evaluation of the archaeological research at the Aillet House begin to change. I had thought that the story of the site was so impoverished by the low number of artifacts that, discounting the novelty of archaeology at the site, interest in the archaeological story would be poor also. Actually, archaeology is admirably suited to explaining negative results and interpreting absence (Dawdy and Ibáñez 1997; Dawdy 2000b). Furthermore, I began to consider the house itself and how below-ground and above-ground archaeology might correlate.

When I approached her again in 2004, Caroline Kennedy was very receptive to the idea of bringing an anthropological perspective to the ongoing interpretation of the Aillet House. I thought it wise to ask for the museum’s participation up front so that the focus of my interpretation would coordinate with ongoing programs. Efforts are underway at the museum to assess the current guided tours and to rewrite the script of the Allendale Cabin and the Aillet House tours. My anthropological project will complement their efforts to refresh their interpretation. In discussions concerning the depth of the material analysis and the scope of anthropological interpretation, Ms. Kennedy welcomed my offer to develop an exhibit. Artifacts and interviews with family members will tie in to a study of the house as a vernacular structure. This will enhance the current exhibit of period furniture within the restored house. As plans for the project are currently under development, it is unclear whether it will become a permanent or a revolving exhibit.

Writing for a public audience demands some restraint with reference to both professional jargon and academic argumentation. Given my aim of collaborating with the West Baton Rouge Parish Museum in designing an exhibit, I think it appropriate to give them this paper outlining
the scope of my research and the interpretive results. In writing this paper then I will strive to present the case study, the justifications for interpretive tacks, and the discussion of results in language that will not alienate a reader who is not a practicing archaeologist or anthropologist. I trust that the presentation will not suffer; I know writing it has posed a welcome challenge. I found in writing this paper that an outside audience encouraged a large measure of reflection, and for this I am grateful.
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Abstract

The thesis project developed from preliminary archaeological testing in 1999 at site 16WBR45, the original location of the Aillet House. The results of the testing were informative as they suggested the placement of the house and attested to casual activity on the porch. However, the results certainly did not answer the need for a more discerning interpretation of the historic house museum known as the Aillet House, currently on display at the West Baton Rouge Parish Museum. I collaborated with the museum in 2004 to bring to their current interpretive program anthropological insights gained from archaeological remains, an architectural survey of the structure, a social analysis of the house, and a social history of the lives of the two families.

The identity of the house was explored in three stages related to the construction and development of the house. The Acadian Cottage was constructed during the Landry period, circa 1830, and their tenancy illustrates the social and political life of an Acadian small planter before the Civil War. The material identities detected within the home illustrate a contest between the presentation of ethnic allegiances and cultural stability. During the Aillet period at the turn of the century, the house was modernized with the addition of a kitchen and dining room. It was determined that some materials lost their power to convey meaning in face of the increased valuation of mass-produced goods. Despite the changes of material identities, certain Acadian continuities were detected in the use of the attic space as a sleeping chamber and the use of the gallery as an outside room. The house is now presented at the Parish museum as a monument to the French-Creole life in antebellum South Louisiana.

An opportunity exists for community involvement in the reconstruction of social memory. An exhibit illustrating the lives of the Landry and Aillet families as well as notable
changes through time in room use and in material identity will contribute to the museum’s interpretive program.
Chapter I: Introduction

The Aillet House, French Creole Cottage, c. 1830—thus reads the large banner stretched across the facade of The West Baton Rouge Parish Museum, announcing that one of the oldest surviving plantation homes in the parish is open for the public to enjoy. The historic house (Figure 2) was principally inhabited by two families, the Landry’s and the Aillet’s, both of whose ascendants came to South Louisiana as Acadian pioneers. Since beginning work on behalf of the West Baton Rouge Parish Museum, I have become intrigued by the relationship of the Creole and the Acadian. Was this a Creole house or an Acadian house? This question became shorthand for the direction of my recent research in vernacular architecture. Typically a summary of construction details and a floor plan determine an architecturally defined identity. This is not,
however, the complete story of identity. A social analysis of the room layout, material culture analysis, and in the second case study, oral interviews and archaeology, explore ethnic identity in an attempt to clarify the confusing architectural description of the Aillet House. The case studies explore the social, ethnic and material identities of the occupants and the house within two time periods. Thus there is an opportunity to interpret cultural change and to draw a more dynamic portrait of nineteenth and early twentieth century life above the Acadian Coast.

The thesis traces the development and life of the Aillet House itself in three parts: a history of how the house was dressed for identity in its antebellum years; how its form and function were modernized in the age of industrialization; and how its history as a symbol of French Creole culture was rewritten in the late twentieth century. The house can be viewed as an active participant in the lives of its occupants and their negotiation of identity (Beaudry et al. 1991), one that changes through time; a protagonist in an unfolding story that provides context for other actors (the family members). It is not merely a blueprint for ethnicity or action.

In my discussion of evidence I will interpret artifacts from both above and below the ground as complex and malleable symbols. The symbolic power of the house does not reside in the house as an isolated entity, but in the multiple connections between the house and the people who reside within (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:44). Said differently, ethnic symbolism is differentially generated by cultural practice and the use of space (Jones 1997). These connections, negotiations and interpretations are strained without ethnographic and documentary evidence, to be sure. Nevertheless, a spatial analysis that identifies work areas, gendered spaces, and the fluidity of room use lend interpretive power to this study. Looking at spatial and structural elements symbolically subverts the implications of categories used by the architectural historian. For example, the identification of a two-room cottage with galleries does not make a
French Creole cottage. The social use of the house has more import than architectural elements on the identification of a French Creole Cottage or an Acadian Cottage.

Similarly, the symmetrical facade present in cottages after 1800 is attributed to Federalist styling, and is often taken as a sign that the French Creoles (and implicitly the Acadians) adopted the Anglo philosophy of order and efficiency, inherent within the capitalist ideology (Edwards 1985:75). By contrast, the facade could be seen as less fixed, more malleable or changing, even as an element whose power ebbs and wanes with shifting social forces. The facade could be seen as a front that the French Creoles projected for the purpose of social leverage within the Anglo community. Perhaps it functioned as an outward salute to the capitalist ideology without reinforcement within the home. It is also possible that the facade was merely a popular fashion, and did not resonate or otherwise demand an investment of identity from the occupant (Upton 1996). The open-endedness of interpretations here is a welcome change from positivist models prevalent in studies involving ethnicity and identity.

I also wish to put forward an interpretation of events within the house that transcends a structural reading. After establishing the insights available from a spatial and social analysis of the rooms, I will take a more ethnographic approach within the last case study. Archaeological materials and oral interviews are available for a consideration of the implications of bringing the kitchen from outside to meet the new dining area in the intimate surrounds of the house.

This paper details my collaboration with the museum, first as archaeologist and then as guest curator of an exhibit highlighting vernacular aspects of the house. As a result, an overarching theme of the thesis is the contribution of anthropology to an interpretation of the historic house museum. Chapter I describes the museum’s acquisition and restoration of the house to its present state as a historic house museum. In order to set a social milieu for the
Landrys and the Aillets and establish a context that illustrates both the economic circumstances of each family as well as the broad changes that occurred between occupations, a history inclusive of political and economic events is presented in Chapter II. The three stages of the life of the Aillet House give form to Chapters III-V. The first two stages are illustrated in two case studies of the house in Chapters III and IV. Chapter III outlines the house as it was constructed c. 1830 and discusses the distinction between French Creole and Acadian architecture and the process of creolization in general. Chapter IV outlines the tenure of the Aillets within the house and their improvements to the house, most notably the ell addition, containing the kitchen, dining room and back porch c. 1900. Artifacts recovered archaeologically from the conjectured porch area, together with family interviews and spatial analysis detail cultural changes and shifting strategies of family life. The last and present stage of life as a historic house museum, in which the furnished interiors and community activities on its grounds depict a 19th-century way of life, is presented in Chapter V.

The elaboration of themes and interpretations discussed in the case studies and the collection of material for the exhibit were all undertaken in response to the current historical interpretation of the Aillet House. In order to understand the museum’s decisions regarding the interpretation of the house, it seems appropriate to begin with a background of the museum’s mission statement and a description of how the Aillet House was first acquired.

**History of the Aillet House Museum**

The West Baton Rouge Parish Museum was founded in 1968 as a history museum. It is located in downtown Port Allen and houses several galleries featuring a variety of rotating exhibits and two permanent exhibits on sugar production (Figure 3). The museum is governed by two entities, the West Baton Rouge Historical Association (WBRHA), which sets policy and
Figure 3: The West Baton Rouge Parish Museum.

Figure 4: The Aillet House on its original site (16WBR45) prior to its move to the museum grounds (source: WBR Museum 1968-2004).
owns the collections; and by the West Baton Rouge Museum Board, which administers the parish funds and buildings. Policy is set by the Museum Board and the Director. In practical terms, the Museum millage runs the museum. The Board is dedicated to raising supplemental money and supporting the programs run by the WBRHA (WBR Museum 1968-2004).

The museum’s mission statement is very broad which allows it a great deal of flexibility in its choice of exhibits and acquisitions. The museum’s statement of purpose at the time of the Aillet House acquisition was “to foster interest in history, particularly that of West Baton Rouge Parish, and to encourage research, collection and preservation of materials illustrating past or present activities of the parish (WBR Museum 1968-2004).” The museum’s decision to accept the Aillet House (Figure 4) and develop it as a historic house museum fit well within its mission and its interpretive program of the sugar industry. At the time of the donation, the centerpiece of this program was the Allendale Cabin c. 1850, which operated both as an open-air gallery dedicated to the “plantation worker” and a site for living history events. “...The addition of the [Aillet] house will also allow a better interpretation of the economic and social history of the area, with the house representing the more affluent aspects of society, and the cabin the lower economic and social strata,” wrote Karen Corkern in a press release dated 6/20/90 (WBR Museum 1968-2004). The acquisition of the Aillet’s house promised a new dynamic in the presentation of the social history of plantation life in material and ideological terms. These material contrasts and corresponding interpretive themes developed by the museum are explored in Chapter V.

“The Aillet House (c. 1830) is a one-and-one-half story frame Creole residence, which also contains elements of the Federal style.” So reads the first descriptive statement of the National Register of Historic Places document (Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation
The Aillet House was donated to the museum by Dow Chemical U. S. A. in 1990. Because the circumstances involved in the donation had an impact on cultural resources, I will describe the transaction in greater depth. By 1990, Dow had completed construction plans for a new plant south of Addis, and had arranged to relocate the families displaced by this corporate expansion. Then Dow purchased the Aillet House and its approximate 300 acres, and the Tulliers (the current property owners) were later moved to a subdivided portion of this property. The Aillet House was sold for timber but was saved in the last hour when Dow learned of its historic value from the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation. Mr. Carroll Macalusa of Dow worked with the WBRHA to ensure that the donation of the house to the museum would succeed. In the end Dow funded the purchase of the house, its move to the museum grounds, and the stabilization and exterior restoration of the house.

Dow’s support of historic preservation is to be commended, and indeed it was. For their contribution to the community, Dow received awards from the Louisiana Association of Museums, the Louisiana Preservation Alliance, and the Foundation for Historic Louisiana. In a press release dated 4/25/91, Ms. Corkern Babb, the Director of the West Baton Rouge Parish Museum, wrote to the West Side Journal, “It is exciting to see Industry taking an active role in historical preservation. Dow’s generosity and vision have provided the people of West Baton Rouge with a valuable gift; the opportunity to experience their cultural heritage, material aspects of which are disappearing at an alarming rate” (WBR Museum 1968-2004). Ironically, the archaeological record was bulldozed after the house was removed from its site of 160 years.

Unfortunately, the underground cultural resource at the house site was severely damaged by the mechanical clearing done in preparation for new construction. In the end, the donation was great public relations for the industry; for despite the social upheaval caused to the displaced
families, Dow Chemical U. S.A. was viewed publicly as a company sensitive to the community. It is my hope that archaeology’s involvement with the museum in West Baton Rouge Parish will raise the profile of the valuable cultural resources expressed archaeologically.

Decisions about the structural form of the historic house were made very quickly with long-term consequences for the interpretation of the historic house. Removing the house from its original site was a matter of some urgency, for Dow was intent on keeping its construction schedule. The company agreed to pay the costs involved in the relocation and renovation (initially estimated to be $78,000.00) with the stipulation that it be concluded within the same fiscal year. The museum was thus pressed for time, and the decision was made to restore the building to the time of its construction c. 1830, the time of the antebellum occupation by the Landry family. Consequently, the ell addition of the Aillet occupation was not restored. Although the decision can be justified from an architectural standpoint, in hindsight it was unfortunate, especially when the social history of the house and region is considered. “In seeking the “original,” never lose sight of your principal focus, human life. The house is more important to you as your historical characters lived in it over the years than it was before they moved in. Do not remove traces of them without the most careful consideration” (Seale 1979:10). “Contemporary preservation philosophy is less enthusiastic about arbitrarily fixing one date or period to which a building’s appearance is restored and more prone toward accepting the complexity of time’s traces” (Barthel 1996:9).

Architectural historian, William Seale, also notes that the changes throughout the years of a house “chronicle the ongoing relationship the family has with their surroundings. To choose a time period for restoration demands that you interpret the family in a time when the house was more relevant to the world around it” (Seale 1979:29). It is my opinion that such relevance is
expressed during a construction episode; structural change impacts social use of the house and the choice of materials and functions comment on regional economic and social history. The finer points of the house and the house’s relevance as material culture will be discussed in the case studies; suffice it to say here that in the absence of the ell addition, any interpretation of the Aillet’s occupation is compromised.

The restoration of the Aillet House continued with great speed, and it was completed in time for the dedication ceremony on March 23, 1991 (Figure 2). The interior fabric of the building was stabilized, preserved, and restored where necessary, new underside supports for the floor were added, some openings and trim were patched or replaced, the exterior was painted, and utilities and an air handling system were planned. Sid Gray, a historic building consultant who managed the renovations, also surveyed the original finishes and colors used on the woodwork and walls. In August 1991, the Aillet House was included on the National Register of Historic Places.

The present Director of the WBRM, Caroline Kennedy, fondly recalls hard-hat tours that showed visitors the work in progress at the Aillet House. Beyond the walls, significant attention to the interior was delayed until February 1997 (WBRM Museum 1968-2004). During this rather barren room period, a representative from the American Association of Museums visited in July of 1992 and encouraged this delay in interior renovation to give the museum time to conduct substantive research and oral interviews to inform deliberations on interior finishes and furnishings (WBRM Museum 1968-2004). However, the Board of Directors gave unrelenting support to the development of furnished rooms (Caroline Kennedy, personal communication 2004). In 1997, formal research committees were formed and a furniture historian was consulted to achieve the authentic interpretation. He scouted pieces on the museum’s behalf that would fit
both the 1830 and the 1880 periods. Several pieces incorporated in a period bedroom display at the main museum were moved to the Aillet House. The house had sat empty and vulnerable to trespassers for ten years before Dow’s purchase; the few authentic pieces incorporated in the Aillet House displays were donated by family members. The preponderance of items were characterized as “typical of the period” (WBR Museum 1968-2004).

A historic house is incomplete without a landscape. The museum contacted Dr, Neil Odenwald of the LSU School of Landscape Architecture who agreed to research appropriate exterior plantings and draw up a layout for the house’s proposed gardens (WBR Museum 1968-2004). In the end, this plan was not used due to a lack of funds. A parterre garden was considered until maintenance issues disallowed it. The present landscape consists of gravel walkways, to accommodate mobility-impaired visitors. The central gravel walk leading to the gallery steps circles a huge sugar kettle surrounded by a bed of iris. The kettle is a replica that was donated to the museum (Caroline Kennedy, personal communication 2004).

Karen Corkern Babb, wrote in a 1992 press release that, “An historic house is not only a building, but a document that tells a story about its past inhabitants and the way they lived. An Aillet House research committee has been formed to investigate the Aillet House’s own unique story” (WBR Museum 1968-2004). Some license has been taken in the retelling of this tale of period rooms. The two front rooms are the “headliner” rooms furnished in the fashion of mid nineteenth century, the Landry period. The two back rooms or cabinets depict the Aillet years and also contain a display of the various analyses used to recover the interiors of the two periods of occupancy. The museum pursued the presentation of an “authentic” period of the house identified as its nascent period. This choice gives preferential treatment to the Landry occupation and the irony of this preference is that the “insider” accounts in the forms of photos and
interviews, which the museum has in its possession, pertain to the Aillet occupation. In pursuit of the authentic, the museum unwittingly created a tradition for the house museum that might not be accurate. The desire to freeze frame the ethnic or the French Creole aspect of the house is frustrated not only because cultural continuities are not necessarily visible in the material world, but also because an ethnic identity is not a single thing or behavior that can be summed up by a material identity (Upton 1996). These statements will be elaborated further in the discussions of the two case studies of identity. Let us now turn to the histories of the Landrys and the Aillets to gain a necessary perspective for the interpretation of their material cultures, which will follow in the case studies.
Chapter II: A Social History of the Landry and Aillet Families

The history in this chapter provides a general social, political, and commercial context in which to view the settlement of the Aillets and the Landrys on the Mississippi Coast as well as the class disparity of the Acadians in the early nineteenth century. This history also illustrates a cultural context for the development of Cajun ethnicity. The case studies that follow this history remark on the material and ethnic identities of the inhabitants of the Aillet House. Both families are of Acadian descent however it is not clear whether they identify themselves as Acadian or French or Creole or Cajun or even American. The issue of ethnicity is no small matter as it informs the cultural use of material, continuities of material attachments, and the social community of the Landrys and the Aillets on the shores of the Mississippi River. Therefore, this social history will explore the ethnogenesis of the Cajun people as a backdrop for the dynamic transformations of identity detailed in the case studies. The story of Cajun ethnogenesis pertains in large part to the core group of Acadians, a conservative faction who settled further west. Thus, there is an opportunity to contrast the lives of the Landrys and the Aillets with the lives of their cousins to the west, and thereby gain an additional appreciation for the cultural changes within the sugar plantation region of West Baton Rouge Parish.

The portrait of the Cajuns described in Dormon’s essay (1983) on ethnogenesis tells a complex tale of isolation, pride, self reliance and the conscious maintenance of an ethnic boundary (Barth 1969) which separated their people from the Creoles and the Anglos and later the Americans. Although this characterization plays into the caricature of the Cajun which first depicted the Cajuns as social outcasts, the trope of isolated folk seen in travel writing and commentaries of Louisiana reflected an ascription that also helped the Cajuns sustain their cultural identity.
There was a great deal of variation in social relationships, marriage patterns, class, wealth, social standing and so on, among Acadians/Cajuns in different geographical regions of South Louisiana. There was also a great deal of mobility between these groups. Thus, special care must be taken to balance a cultural fielty even among those Cajuns who achieved wealth and social standing among outsider groups, such as the Creoles and Anglos (Dormon 1983). In other words, it is useful to recognize the theme of ethnogenesis as a fluid yet binding frame of the Acadian experience. In what follows the family histories of the Landrys and the Aillets are presented.

The story of ethnogenesis began in Acadia circa 1755, when 6-8,000 Acadians became victims of British geopolitical strategy at the onset of the great French and Indian War (Dormon 1983). Who were the Acadians? The qualities that characterized their unique identity can be addressed with a brief synopsis of their life in Canada.

The French settlers of Novia Scotia became relatively self-sufficient within one year because of the assistance provided them by the Micmac Indians. The success of the colony in terms of survival and the fur trade hinged upon the Micmac. The familiar practice of subsistence agriculture was supplemented by gathering shellfish, small-scale fishing, hunting, trapping, or a combination of these activities. The Acadians also claimed many craftspersons: weavers, coopers, gunsmiths, carpenters, tailors, who contributed to the self-reliance of the Acadian settlements. However, the settlers remained tied to the imported manufactured goods from Europe and the Americas. In exchange for these imports, the Acadians offered pelts, hand-made woolens and linens, furniture and candles (Brasseaux 1987). Their development as Acadians was accelerated by the colony’s isolation, as well as the laissez-faire policies of both British and French colonial administrations toward the Acadians' local affairs.
Much of the labor was performed in groups organized through extended families. Construction of houses, trapping expeditions, cultivation and harvest of crops, as well as the dyking and draining of sea marsh areas were accomplished by labor pools. This form of labor had a cultural precedent within French regional peasant farming traditions (Brasseaux 1987). Cultural cohesion and political solidarity were maintained through extended family networks.


The Acadian community remained quite isolated until the threat of domination presented itself during the War of the Spanish Succession in 1709. The British two-year occupation of Port Royal resulted in hostile tensions and skirmishes between the British and the Acadians. England was awarded Acadia following the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. British attempts to exact allegiance from the Acadian settlers were unsuccessful. The Acadians considered themselves removed from the larger conflict, and insisted on a neutrality that was near autonomous (Dormon 1983:14). As the Acadian peninsula lay between British Newfoundland and French Quebec, the British viewed the Acadians lack of allegiance as a security threat. Later when the British secured Halifax in 1749, they no longer needed to rely on the Acadians for supplies. Consequently, the British began attempts to expel the Acadians from their homeland.

The forced deportation began in 1755, when approximately 6,000 of the 15,000 Acadians living in Nova Scotia were uprooted from their homes and forced to leave with only their moveable possessions. The remaining 9,000 left by their own will or by force. Exiles formed large settlement camps in the French territories of North America. Two to four thousand secured
passports to the French-dominated Ile St. Jean and Prince Edward’s Island. It was not until the Treaty of Paris in 1763 that a final resolution was drawn. Article IV of that treaty stipulated that the Acadians had 18 months to abandon Britain’s North American colonies. The Acadians in turn sought refuge further south, as well as in the West Indies and France (Brasseaux 1987). Their homes were burned and Anglo-American settlers from the New England quickly took up their cleared lands for development as an British colony.

Augustin Landry (grandfather to Dorville Landry), his wife Marie Babin, and his six children were among the first group of exiles to be shipped out of their homeland in 1755. The Landrys were shipped with approximately 900 others to Maryland. There was some expectation that the Catholic minority there would provide assistance (Dormon 1983:17), but the Acadians were greeted by a distinctly hostile colony. The family settled in Upper Marlboro according to a 1763 Maryland census (WBR Museum 1968-2004).

The French presence in the Ohio River Valley led to increased tensions between Britain and France and the ensuing battles along with Indian raids on the British frontier resulted in a wave of hatred for the "papists." Although Maryland was originally founded as a Catholic colony, the Protestants passed laws to prevent Acadians from leaving, to require men to work or face jail, to remove children from overtaxed families for bondage with local farmers. By 1763, only 667 Acadians survived from the original 913 (Brasseaux 1992). An accommodation was finally reached with the colonial government, which chartered ships for the Acadian emigration to Louisiana. The Landrys traveled 78 days from Baltimore to New Orleans before traveling up the Mississippi River to their new home (Voorhies 1973:430).

Augustin Landry received a land grant from the Spanish government in 1766 to settle the Spanish-British frontier with fifty other immigrant families. Augustin Landry was given farm #6,
an eight arpent parcel near Fort St. Gabriel (Voorhies 1973:429). Territory East of the Mississippi River had been transferred to Britain after the Treaty of Paris in 1763. The Spanish governor, Ulloa, settled the immigrants at St. Gabriel to counter British forces at Manchac, if ever hostilities arose. Rival colonial governments attempted to create alliances among the riverfront tribes and simultaneously undermine the diplomacy of the other. The Choctaw, Creek and Cherokee, erstwhile French allies, were marshalled by the British on the border. The Houma on the west bank were primarily seen as a friendly tribe until the skirmishes with the Talapousa in the 1770s. Skirmishes between tribes as well as raids against settlers contributed to a very hostile border, and the settlers were in constant fear of attack (Brasseaux 1987).

It is tempting to consider that the Houma, for example, might have shown the settlers how to adapt to their new environment. Some first homes in the late eighteenth century were palmetto huts, and very different agricultural and dietary practices were adopted by necessity (Usner 2000). However, given the hostilities, it seems more reasonable that the Acadians were advised about new lifeways by their Creole neighbors.

Augustin Landry’s son, Mathurin (Dorville’s father), was twelve when they settled at St. Gabriel. On May 30, 1779, at the age of 24, he married Perpetue Braud and they settled on the west bank of Iberville parish. His second marriage was to Marie Appoline Hebert, with whom he had four children. Dorville Landry was born on December 29, 1804.

On January 5, 1826, Dorville acquired a 1-1/2 x 40 arpent parcel of property bound on the North side by his mother’s parcel, and on the South side by the land of Joseph Doiron, “together with the adjoined fences which are found there, outbuildings, and the contents of a store which is built there” (COB G/35). There is no mention of a house on the property. Dorville took a bride on August 25, 1828 at St. Joseph Church near Baton Rouge. It is probable that he
constructed the house on the occasion of his marriage. His wife, Aureline Daigle and he had six children, four of whom survived into adulthood.

Upon the death of his mother in 1832, he purchased her property adjoining his, described as 1.1/4 x 40 arpent parcel, for $1305 over and above the mortgage (COB I/326). The Louisiana Census of 1840 listed 20 slaves (14 of whom are in agriculture) belonging to Dorville Landry. The Census of 1850 maintains the same number of slaves and also states that two of his sons, ages 16 and 12 were in school. The Census of 1860 listed his occupation as planter, with real estate valued at $47,000.00 and personal property at $2500. The census also claimed that his 28 slaves were housed in 12 houses (U.S. Population Census 1850 and 1860: West Baton Rouge Parish Census Manuscript).

Here we will pick up the threads of the Aillet ascendants’ involvement in the Grand Derangement. Unlike the Landrys, they were not among the first exiles to be deported and they were shipped to France where they remained for twenty-seven years before rejoining their extended families in Louisiana. Victoire Dugast, great grandmother to Anatole Aillet, and her family resided in St. Malo in Northern Bretagne. When Victoire was 23 years old, her mother died, and records were no longer kept of the family. In 1775, Victoire is mentioned as a witness to her brother’s wedding (Robichaux 1981:Vol III:950). Interestingly, the curé who performed the nuptial benediction was a J. Aillet, brother to Thomas Aillet whom Victoire married that same year.

Brasseaux (1987) writes that during the decade following the Grand Derangement until 1775, more than 3,000 Acadians sought refuge at the port cities of France. In France, the exiles expected some form of remuneration for the losses suffered in Acadia and for some of the group’s experiences as prisoners of war. However, the government did no more than offer a
small dole as support from the crown. The French resented the presence of this impoverished throng gathered at their port cities. From indentured servants on French soil to colonists on the frontier of Nova Scotia, the Acadians had forged a different cultural identity. Their insistence on neutrality during the Seven Years War would have further distanced them from a shared past with the French Nationals.

Various attempts were made to relocate the Acadians to the interior of France. One such plan involved the relocation of 1500 to the area of Poitou to till sterile land with no water source. Not surprisingly, the Acadians learned to refuse such offers and began to seek colonialization offers in Louisiana through the Spanish government. Charles III of Spain was agreeable to sending farmers to Louisiana to develop its agriculture and agreed to absorb the costs of homesteading. Louis XVI gave his permission on March 31, 1784, and further agreed to pay the Acadians’ debts incurred during their holdover in France (Brasseaux 1987, Hebert 1995).

Seven ships carried a total of 1,596 Acadians to Louisiana between May and October of 1785. Victoire Dugast and her two sons Thomas, aged 10, and Louis, aged six, made the voyage to Louisiana from St. Malo aboard La Villa de Archangel (Hebert 1995).

La Villa de Archangel took nearly three full months to transport its 309 passengers (fifty-three families) to Louisiana. The trip to the colony was harsh; provisions were depleted some days before they reached the shores of Louisiana. The ship ran aground at La Balize, near the mouth of the Mississippi River. The disembarkation papers reported that thirty-eight passengers were gravely ill, two had deserted, fifteen had perished during the voyage, and still many others were in poor health. The Spanish administrators offered the passengers care and rest before the three week voyage to New Orleans was resumed (Hebert 1995, Kellough and Mayeux 1979).
The majority of the Villa de Archangel passengers settled in Bayou des Ecores and Costa de la Fourche. The Spanish government equipped each family with “all necessary axes, hatchets, shovels, hoes, meat cleavers, and knives” (Winzerling 1955:150). By February 22, fifty-three families were established at Bayou des Ecores, six families at La Fourche, and one family at New Orleans. In stark contrast to French sentiment, Intendant Martin Navarro, a Spanish colonial administrator, welcomed the new colonials. He wrote to Jose de Galvez, the regional governor, “I can assure you that after four years these Acadians will be America’s most prosperous and sturdiest colonists, because they love their new home, and are determined to give Louisiana in 1786 its best harvest” (Winzerling 1955:150).

The Acadians had certainly proven themselves to be hard-working and adept at agriculture. However, an explanation for these blandishments was given by the Baron de Carondelet in August 10, 1792. In an order to the commandant Nicolas de Verbois, Baron de Carondelet recommended that ownership of land be given to those who build their own levees (Lowrie and Franklin 1834: 10: 355). As one can imagine, those taking the responsibility of levee maintenance would save the government a tremendous cost. Levee maintenance along the riverfront plantations would also render the backlands available for use. Once they were properly drained, back swamps made fertile fields that were subject to only occasional flooding.

Nearly all (89%) of the passengers from La Ville d’Archangel settled Bayou des Ecores, while a few others settled near Baton Rouge (Winzerling 1955). “Immigrants were furnished funds, supplies, housing, and medical attention at the government expense. Each party of settlers was also permitted to remain in New Orleans for approximately one month, while the surveyor reconnoitered vacant properties along the Mississippi River” (Brasseaux 1987:109). In many instances, the settlers remained on the Spanish dole until they were established. A strong
advantage to both settlements, Bayou des Ecores and West Baton Rouge, was that they adjoined existing settlements. Often new settlers reunited with their extended family in South Louisiana.

The First Acadian Coast’s population increased a dramatic 226% between 1766 and 1777. The influx of Acadians persisted; by 1786, all the prime real estate on the Mississippi River was settled (Brasseaux 1987). It would seem that the Aillet family had arrived just in time. The typical concession was a rectangular plot of 4-6 arpents along the riverfront, extending 40 arpents back from the river. The forced heirship law ruled that the property was to be divided among the surviving children. Given 4-8 children per family, a second- generation descendant would receive a very small piece of property. Consequently, the population expansion and heirship law guaranteed a certain mobility among the settlers. Expansion was only possible with relocation. The Acadians migrated to frontier areas on the periphery of existing Acadian settlements. The relocation to interior bayous and western prairies insured cultural preservation, family cohesion and economic independence. Thus, the social and economic mobility served to cohere extended communities of settlers.

Victoire Dugast (Anatole Aillet’s great-grandmother) chose to settle in the District of Baton Rouge. Vincente Sebastian Pintado’s 1799 *Mapa de Las Locaciones del Distrito de Baton Rouge* (Library of Congress, Vincente Sebastian Pintado manuscript collection, Reel 6, Folio 72) indicates that her 7 arpent parcel fronted the Mississippi River directly across from the “Fuerto de Baton Rouge” (Figure 5).

In July 14, 1800, Victoire Dugast ceded her parcel of land to her two sons (Spanish West Florida Records [SWF] “4”, folio 248). The conveyance is remarkable for its pragmatism; Victoire Dugast arranged for the property to be divided between her sons with the exception of a single square arpent of land. Upon this square, the sons were contracted to construct a house and
Figure 5: The property owned by Viuda Ayet a.k.a. Victoire Aillet in 1799 (source: Library of Congress, Vincente Sebastian Pintado Manuscript Collection, Microfilm Reel 6).
fence for their mother, to be maintained by them through time. Additionally, each son paid her two hard pesos of silver annually, as a rent of sorts. At fifty years of age, her retirement was effectively settled.

After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, concessions made in the Orleans territory during the Spanish rule were registered as claims to protect private property from the new, federal government’s access to public lands. The settlers simply had to prove to the U. S. government ownership of their properties made by the Spanish through royal grant, purchase, or habitation. Because of Victoire’s deed to her two sons (SWF “4”, folio 248), one expects that claims would be registered with the Deputy Surveyor under the names of the sons. References are given of Thomas Aillet’s property as a boundary to other descriptions, but no claim was found under his name. This suggests perhaps that the principle family property was that claimed by his mother (Lowrie and Franklin 1834: 10: 216).

Louis Aillet, grandfather to Anatole Aillet, submitted claim # 277 described as “a tract of land, situate on the west side of the river Mississippi, in the county of Iberville, containing four hundred superficial acres, and bounded on the upper side by land of Michel Mahier, and on the lower by the land of _____ Bossell (Lowrie and Franklin 1834: 10: 374).” The official plat map of Township 6 South, Range 12 East, of the Southeast District lists Louis Allaiz as property owner of Section 6. Louis Aillet’s parcel on Solitude Point must have shown lackluster profits because the area experienced rapid erosion by the Mississippi River and must have been difficult to maintain (Hahn 1996:13).

Thomas Aillet (Anatole’s grandfather on his mother’s side) married Maria Juliana Marrioneaux, widow of Louis de Richebourg on July 23, 1800 (SWF “4”, folio 250). She brought to the marriage a son of two years, two cows with calf, a large cooking pot, an axe,
shovel and plow, six wooden chairs, two candelabras, and a pressing iron. Additionally, Ms. Marrioneaux was the creditor on three outstanding debts, one for 400 pesos, one for 250 pesos, and the last for 30 pesos.

Thomas Aillet’s estate estimated at 655 pesos was well equipped for farming and hunting. They would have raised foodstuffs for their family and been able to support his mother. Although no record exists, the assumption is that the Aillets tried their fortunes at raising indigo. Sugar cultivation was only in its infancy at this time, and did not really take off until 1820.

The Spanish West Florida Papers mention Thomas Aillet’s purchase of slaves on three different occasions. He purchased one negro named Thomas, of undetermined age in January of 1802 from Armand Duplantier for the price of 600 pesos (SWF “5”, folio156). In June of 1803, Thomas Aillet purchased for 1600 pesos, one slave from the Congo named Isaac, aged 36, and another slave named Hercules from the Nado nation of the same age (SWF “6”, folio 202). Again Mr. Duplantier sold to Thomas Aillet in March of 1805 a negro named Mariana, aged 22 years, for 650 pesos (SWF “8”, folio 161).

Thomas Aillet expanded more than his labor force. He acquired a property of 2-3/4 arpents x 40 arpents from Pierre Laventure on September 21, 1802 for 150 pesos (SWF “5”, folio 227). This is described on the original plat map of Township 8 South, Range 12 East as Section 7 possessed by Thomas Aille (Figure 6). One month later, Thomas sold his portion of his mother’s original parcel to Jean Baptiste Richer on October 20, 1802. Thomas Aillet received 800 pesos for his 3-1/2 x 40 arpent share (SWF “5”, folio 283). By Preemptive Act dated the 15th of June, 1832, he consolidated his property by claiming Section 49, Range 8S, Township 12E. This parcel was finally sold to him on May 21 1836 (U.S. Land Patent 8:393).
Figure 6: The original survey of Township 8S, Range 12E, Southeastern District west of the Mississippi River (source: Phelps and Phelps 1836). Sections 6, 7, and 49 belonged to Thomas and Louis Hail. Note Section 1 was purchased by Anatole Aillet in 1880.
The good fortunes of the Aillets continued. The first federal census of 1810 (U.S. Population Census 1810: West Baton Rouge Parish manuscript census) listed nine slaves on the property belonging to Thomas Aillet. His brother’s property is listed with two slaves. In 1813, Louis Aille purchased a 120 arpent parcel, believed to be Section 6 Township 8S Range 12E (COB E, folio 15). Perhaps Thomas managed the property for his brother because Louis Aillet moved south near St. Gabriel for a period anywhere from 1814 to 1829.

The many property transfers and the fluctuating wealth indicated by documentary resources profile the lives of these small farmers. Their living was precarious at best. Debt and mortgages rode on the success of the harvest. This rhythm was exacerbated with the cultivation of sugar, because the necessary front money was so high. The labor was intensive for the small farmer, despite slave labor. If there was a bad year in the vegetable garden, corn would have to be purchased, in addition to all of the household supplies. Indeed, until the day when increased technology and mechanization drove out the small farmer, most lived in debt from one year to the next.

Sugar agriculture became popular around 1820. New technologies promised a better gamble for the small farmer. Two significant improvements that impacted cultivation were a new variety of cane and the process of windrowing. Ribbon cane, introduced in 1817, proved adaptive to the climate and the short agricultural season of South Louisiana. The technique of windrowing was developed around the 1820s to combat the cold and involved the amassing of cut cane within piles as a protective measure before the cane was finally harvested. Armed with these innovations, the farmer had only to worry about agricultural principles such as draining, crop rotation, soil fertility, and the weather (Le Gardeur et al. 1980).
An Abbot and Humphries map from 1858 shows an A. Aillet in West Baton Rouge Parish (Figure 7). Augustin Aillet, son of Louis Juliano Aillet, and father to Anatole Aillet, purchased on September 17th, 1840, a one arpent by thirty-five arpent piece of property for 2,500 piastres from Valmont Foret (COB M/439). The property is described as bounded above by Treville Landry, below by Jean Alexander, and behind by Dorville Foret. Later in 1842, Augustin allowed a path in front of his house to be used as right-of-way by his neighbors (COB M/439). In 1850, Henriette Aillet, wife of Maximillian M. Bolsener and Augustin’s cousin, deeded the square arpent to Augustin in “consideration of the work to be made on the road and levee” (COB S/207). Interestingly, she removed her kitchen from the square immediately and returned for the house at a later date (COB S/207).

Historical records describe Augustin and Appoline Aillet as modest farmers. Census records from 1850, value his real estate at $1300, but then on the eve of the Civil War the value of his property leaped to $8,000.00 in 1860 (U.S. Population Census 1850 and 1860: West Baton Rouge Parish Census Manuscript). Perhaps he built his own house on the property. However the tax records recorded in the Parish in 1867 paint a different picture of the property. The Aillets’ property containing 30 acres of land with livestock was valued at $770 (Misc I:308). In 1868 and 1869, the same property was valued at $600.00 (Misc I:328,344). Anatole was born in 1849 and would have witnessed the devaluation of their modest farm.

The Civil War decimated the sugar industry. Crops and sugar mills were destroyed during the war; the labor force was also destroyed. It was not until certain political and economic stability returned to Louisiana that sugar production improved. Near the turn of the twentieth century, sugar agriculture began to prosper. At this time, sugar producers were the large plantations with specialized labor and production activities.
Figure 7: Augustin Aillet’s property near Brusly in 1851-1852 (source: Humphreys and Abbot 1858).
As shown in the preceding sketch of the Aillets, the adaptability of Acadian economic pursuits to Louisiana’s frontier ensured the survival of the Acadians. For many, traditional sociocultural institutions were challenged by non-Acadian immigration and the rise of the plantation system (Brasseaux 1987). The pragmatism and flexibility that characterized the Acadian way of life enabled the Landrys, the Aillets and their neighbors to take on new agricultural practices, technologies and subsistence patterns suitable to South Louisiana.

Technology and mechanization increased within the sugar industry on a parallel with the consolidations of small plantations. The forced heirship laws that decimated inter-family property holdings contributed to the squeeze on the small farmer. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, those small farmers who were forced off their small landholdings joined their cousins in the interior or on the marsh. This large enclave rejected American competition and its attendant material gains for the embrace of traditional life. This group also consciously formed the conservative, Roman Catholic, monolingual French, relatively endogamous group known as the Cajuns.

Those who were able to hold on to their plantations, like the Landrys, obtained a different class standing because of their material wealth and their desire to compete in the increasingly American market. The Landrys were, however, not so acquisitive or powerful that the assimilation of material identities pronounced their “acculturation” complete. The Dorville Landry family did not assume public office, set up as commercial businessmen, or otherwise record a self-identity. Thus, the Landrys’ position between classes is intriguing, neither of the Acadian Doré class nor of the yeomanry class, the Landrys would most likely identify with both of these groups. The material identities on display at their house and the family’s behavior within their house will be explored in Chapter III.
Site History

The present project area is located just north of Brusly in Section 2, Township 8 South, Range 12 East, and Section 77, Township 7 South Range 12 East, Southeastern District of Louisiana and west of the Mississippi River (Figure 1). The property description used in the conveyance books from 1880 until the time Dow purchased the property is as follows: “A certain plantation situated in West Baton Rouge Parish measuring two arpents and three quarters (2.3/4) front to the River Mississippi, more or less, with a depth of eighty arpents, more or less, between parallel lines, bounded above by lands of J. Omer Hebert (husband to Hermogene Babin’s daughter) and below by those of Mrs. Aureline Vaughan (daughter of Joseph Landry, 1/2 brother to Jean Dorville), now or formerly the property of Ed. J. Gay, with the buildings and improvements thereon.” (COB 4, folio 688; COB 209, folio 555).

The property known as “a certain plantation of 2.3/4 x 80” was first described as such in the succession of Dorville Landry (COB Y, folio 423). The details of his own acquisition of this property are described above. Table 1 lists the chain of title of this tract from 1826 to 1991.

Table 1. The Chain of Title from 1826 to 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dorville Landry</td>
<td>1826-1866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean and Gaudens Cazes</td>
<td>1866-1877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Adonis Lopez</td>
<td>1877-1880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anatole Aillet and heirs</td>
<td>1880-1989</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 2-3/4 x 80 property was passed on as part of a larger succession of Dorville Landry’s estate recorded in December 11, 1865. The public auction of Dorville Landry’s estate, held on January 20, 1866, was advertised in Baton Rouge’s Advocate, as well as on notices posted at
three locales around Brusly since no newspaper was published on the West bank (COB Y, folio 423). The total sale of the estate equalled $16,314. Items $50 and above were payable by March 1866. The succession mentioned a 2/5 interest in a sugar house in common with Joseph Landry (Dorville’s half brother); however it is unclear whom among the purchasing parties gained that 2/5 interest.

Gauvins Cazes and Hermogene Babin purchased the 2-3/4 x 80 piece for $8,000; the SW 1/4 of Section 29, Township 7, Range 12E, comprising 160 29/100 acres for $600.00; Section 102 in Township 7, Range 12E, comprising 93 82/100 acres for $385; and lot 3 of Section 32, Township 7, Range 12E, comprising 38 88/100 acres for $160 (COB Y, folio 423). They also bought farm equipment and some furniture. Hermogene Babin conveyed his interest in the properties to Cazes in October of 1866 (COB 2, folio 172). Later Jean Cazes and Gauvins Cazes borrowed $3,000 payable on February 1st, 1877 to Joseph Adonis Lopez with 8% interest per annum (Mortgage Book 2, folio 715). Unable to pay, their properties held as security on the loan were repossessed. On February 1, 1877, Lopez acquired the properties at sheriff’s auction with the highest bid of $2,735 (COB 4, folio 673).

Lopez sold the four properties to Anatole Aillet on July 2, 1880 (COB 4, folio 688) (Figure 8). The conveyance carried one stipulation: that Anatole Aillet could take immediate possession of the house, yard, stable, cribb, garden, and all the front enclosure, however; the fields were his only after harvest, around the 1st day of January 1881. Furthermore, Anatole Aillet was entitled to “one half of the Plant Cane now on the place, the same consisting of ten arpents more or less (COB 4, folio 688).” The sugar industry experienced a small boom in this period. Bouchereau (1880:108) describes the 1880 harvest as the largest crop since the war. “It is
Figure 8: The original survey of Township 7S, Range 12E, Southeastern District west of the Mississippi River (source: Phelps and Phelps 1836). Properties belonging to Anatole Aillet at purchase in 1880. Note section 77 of T7S R12E and section 2 of T8S R12E (see figure 3) describe the “2-3/4 x 80 arpent” parcel.
a gratifying proof of progress that the sugar crop of Louisiana for the year 1880-1881, was the largest made since the war, going beyond all expectation after the freeze of last November.”

Anatole Aillet is mentioned in the Sugar and Rice records of 1880-1881 as a sugar planter on St. Mary plantation (Bouchereau 1881:48). However, no sugar produce is reported. Given the stipulations of his conveyance, it seems plausible that he wouldn’t harvest a significant crop until the following year. However, the only other mention of Anatole Aillet in the Sugar and Rice records occurs in 1890-1892. Once again, no produce is listed (Bouchereau 1892:68). The land surely is capable of a good harvest because the previous owner, J. Cazes, had 20 acres in cane, and 10 acres in seed, with a yield of 1411 lbs. of sugar per acre (Bouchereau 1879:6). Interestingly, no partnership is recorded with another planter. Mr. Gay, who owned the parcel beneath Anatole Aillet, is reported to have had a number of apparatus, an engine, and a mill (COB 4, folio 771). Perhaps Anatole processed his cane at his neighbor’s farm to the south.

Curiously, St. Mary plantation, which was cited as the name of Anatole’s plantation (Bouchereau 1881:48), was recorded under the name of August Levert in 1881 (Bouchereau 1881:30). Ignoring the possibility that there could have been two St. Mary plantations, perhaps the record of name affiliation is important. It is plausible that Anatole would have made some arrangement with Levert, the large landowner of St. Mary and St. Delphine plantation to the south. Perhaps he allowed Levert to farm his property in return for a share of the profit.

Bouchereau writes in 1880 (folio 108) that “small planters without the means of putting up modern apparatus, boil their cane juice into syrup and ship it to the nearest refinery to be granulated.” Evidence for that economy is abundant among Anatole’s neighbors (Bouchereau 1880-1897), whereby their cane is ground at nearby Antonia plantation. The absence of this kind of record on Anatole Aillet suggests a very modest living was achieved. The lots in section 32
and the SW 1/4 of section 29 were sold on January 9th, 1900 to the Morley Cypress Company (COB 8, folio 439). Perhaps this is how the addition to the house was financed.

All records indicate that the property remained in the family (with the same property description) until the Act of Exchange written by Dow Chemical (COB 268, folio 57). The Act of Exchange is the first conveyance that bears a property description defined by Section number within Township and Range. The 2-3/4 x 80 parcel along with section 102 remained in the Aillet family until 1990 when the holding was sold to Dow Chemical Company (COB 263, folio 269).
Chapter III: The Landry Occupation—Case Study I

The Aillet House was constructed by Jean Dorville Landry c. 1830, likely on the occasion of Jean Dorville’s marriage to Marie Aureline Daigle in 1828. The house is exemplary on many levels. Architecturally it is a great example of the transitional period when Creole and American influenced elements were brought together in the fabric of the house. More will be said about this transitional period later in the discussion. Historically it is remarkable because it is one of the few surviving homes from the early nineteenth century in the parish that was built by a small planter. The record of the middle class farmer’s life in antebellum Louisiana is not robust. Therefore, the house stands as a testimony to life in an Acadian settlement along the Mississippi coast. Finally, there are many stand out details to the house (beyond the existing inventory of Federalist or Creole decorations), details which range from uncommon to unique. Herein lies the pleasure of this architectural analysis; the house provides an opportunity to view several structural and decorative elements in a personal context, relating to decisions made by the Landrys themselves. In this way, we may move beyond the normative analysis of material expression as a “mask for the mind” (Glassie 1986), that refers to the unconscious pattern of the building and replication of traditional forms that reflects the mindset of the builder.

In the following case study, I will describe the landscape surrounding the house and the architectural merits of the house. A social analysis of the house attempts to understand the Landry’s use of the house and what might have been the intention behind some of their construction decisions. Finally, I will consider the material identities of the house architecturally and culturally through creolization theory and, per force, the social and ethnic identities of its first inhabitants, the Landrys.
Landscape

The Landrys constructed their home on a 2 3/4 x 80 arpent tract (approximately 186 acres) along a stable length of levee fronting the Mississippi River just above present day Brusly (Figures 1 and 9). Parcels that extended back from the river provided a natural landscape that nurtured a self-sufficient lifestyle. At 40 arpents depth, farmers had the advantage of well-drained agricultural fields several hundred yards deep on the crest of the natural levee, sufficient backslope for grazing, and swampland for a woodlot and hunting (Rehder 1999). The conveyance record for this property gives us some idea of the landscape in its descriptions of the house, yard, stable, cribb, garden, front enclosure, and fields (COB 49, folio 688). The house would have sat within a fenced yard with the crib and stable somewhat removed from the house. The kitchen and privy are not mentioned, but these two appurtenances rarely get a notice in formal documents perhaps because their association with the house is so strong as to be a given. The kitchen is typically positioned to the rear of the house and off to one side. The privy is often settled further back.

The lack of a reference to slave dwellings in the conveyance records not withstanding, slave labor was used on the Landry plantation. The photographs in Figures 10 and 11 show three cabins and a general store on the Aillet property in circa 1967 (West Baton Rouge Parish Museum 1968-2004). It is probable that the three cabins functioned as slave housing on the Landry plantation. The position of the cabins corresponds to the position of structures shown on the Mississippi River Commission (MRC) 1883 map (Figure 12). Of course, the three cabins may not date to the antebellum era; however it was not unusual for the postbellum “plantation worker” to take up residence in the old slave cabin, nor was it unusual to erect the postbellum house in the same location as the older slave cabin in order not to disturb fields under cultivation.
Figure 9: The condition of the levee in 1935 (source: Atchafalaya Levee Board 1935 levee enlargement survey).
Figure 10: The Aillet House and store with cabins on the far right side c. 1967 (source: WBR Museum 1968-2004).
Figure 11: The Aillet’s store with three cabins on the far right side c. 1967
Figure 12: The Aillet House site in 1882-1883 (source: MRC 1883: Chart No. 66). Note the parcel located above the project area is mistakenly identified as belonging to Anatole Aillet.
The fourth building was known to have operated as a store into the twentieth century, and one might reasonably conjecture that the same store operated as the plantation *magasin* or storehouse in antebellum times.

The appearance of these cabins adjacent to the Landry’s house contradicts the well-known plantation landscape (Epperson 1999) wherein the cabins are set in a row and removed to a significant distance from the rear of the main house. That landscape is laden with the symbolism of the power and austere command belonging to the plantation owner (Vlach 1993). By contrast, the cabins on Landry’s plantation front the same River Road and offer the same view of the world as before the Landry’s house. This side-by-side plantation layout was typical of early plantations (Bacot 1997:90), presumably because the compound of buildings would have made a good defense against raids and attacks common on the frontier. It is also intriguing to consider that control was not the sensitive topic on this plantation that it was on other larger plantations. This side-by-side layout raises the question of how relations between the slave and the planter were affected by such close physical proximity.

During the colonial period, it was not uncommon for master and slave to live side by side on small plantations with two or three slaves (Crété 1978:275). Perhaps the cluster of three buildings on the Landry property is evidence of the plantation’s growth. Typically, when the plantation increased its output, additional slaves were bought, and the master either constructed a new home or upgraded an old home to reflect his increased status. Thus, the old master’s house took on a new life as a storage room, slave dwelling, overseer’s house, or a plantation store. It seems reasonable that the new home would be set apart from the cabins to increase social distance and create an appearance of greater control, for at least the benefit of his neighbors. Given the liberal use of fencing to section off yards from both gardens and enclosures
(Post 1962:92), it seems probable that fencing was used to separate the master’s house from those of his slaves.

This kind of barrier would be consistent with other social barriers between the public and the family. The roadside fence in front of the Landry’s house established the first boundary, beyond that, access became ever more restricted. Protocol dictated access beyond the gate to the gallery steps and from the gallery through the front door to the intimacy of the house’s interior.

Social Analysis

A brief architectural description of the house is provided as an introduction to the social analysis. The Landry House is an Acadian cottage. It is a 1 1/2 story heavy timber frame structure with bousillage infill, possessing a symmetrical two-room floor plan with a front gallery and rear cabinets and loggia (Figure 13). The house has clapboard siding, a facade with two sets of French doors and an umbrella roof with gabled ends. The house rests on a continuous sill on top of brick piers. Timbers are hand hewn, and the joining is mortise and tenon. Two chimneys are built in the frame at the gabled ends. An interior staircase built in an enclosed, narrow hall between the two rear cabinets provides access to the 1/2 story above.

The following is a social analysis of the Landry’s house that aims to reveal both the residents’ attitudes towards domestic activities as well as the organization of those activities within the house. My analytical tool is the floor plan; that is, a spatial framework, which organizes household functions by room size, room traffic, and room access (Barber 1994:75). This framework reveals the Landry’s ability either to work or relax; their ideas about property, privacy or security; and their relation to society. Overall the house is a testament to the delicate balance struck between traditional accommodations and the social aspirations of the Landrys. The size of the house and its decorative appointments distinguish this cottage from other Acadian...
Figure 13: The floor plans describing the first and attic floors of the Aillet House.
cottages of the period (Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation 1991). The Landry’s cottage is over 200 sq. ft. larger (not including the galley nor the attic) than typical Acadian cottages. Finely wrought details such as the gallery’s colonettes, the styling on the transoms, and the interior woodwork are more in keeping with far grander homes.

The central attic room at 462 sq. ft. is by far the largest room of the house. The stair opens onto the middle of the room with no evidence of any barriers or subdivisions. There are three doors leading off this large central room to storage areas tucked under the sloping roof (Figure 14). These attic areas, like outbuildings, held equipment, foodstuffs and other sundries and would have allowed the downstairs rooms to remain relatively free of clutter. Perhaps this is an indication of a housekeeping ethos. The large attic room is finished with horizontal plank siding, and according to historic building consultant, Sid Gray (1992), may be the oldest finished attic in Louisiana (Figure 15). The chimney at each end of the room is flanked on each side by single leaf French doors that stand in the place of windows. This accommodation increased ventilation. It is quite possible that this room remained comfortable in cold and warm weather. Following Acadian custom, the room would have been used as a sleeping chamber for the boys (Post 1962). Given that there were only two boys in the family, the room was most assuredly used for other purposes as well, perhaps as a nursery and recreation room, or even as a work room. The handmade loom—a fixture on the plantation—was typically stored in the attic or outside shed because of its imposing 6’ x 6’ x 7’ dimensions (Post 1962:101). The doors in the attic allowed for the placement of just such encumbrances.

At 374 sq. ft., the gallery also presents itself as a multi-purpose room. The hooks used to hang protective netting attest to its use during the warm months. The gallery was the setting for
Figure 14: An access analysis flow chart of the house c. 1830 during the Landry occupation.
Figure 15: The North view of the finished attic. Door on the left opens onto the stairwell, roughly half the length of this extraordinary attic.
group activities like sewing bees, family entertaining, and sleeping during the warmer months.
The gallery steps also stood as the final stop for those welcomed beyond the front gate but not admitted into the house. The two doors leading off the gallery suggest a common and undifferentiated access to the interior rooms. Indeed the facade of the house seems transparent in so far as the two front rooms and the gallery seem to function as a unit of multipurpose rooms with easy movement inside and outside for most of the year. Nevertheless, because there are two doors, the possible relevance of dichotomies or binaries must be considered. It is possible that the doors signal some differentiation, such as gender. Perhaps there were gendered doors differentiating the inside from the outside; in this case, the ladies might retire to the master bedroom after entertainment on the gallery. But this structuralist insight contradicts the spatial analysis, which favors movement through the functional unit.

The two front rooms, or salles, are known as the parlor (north side room) and the master bedroom, but it is likely that they were used also as dining room, living room, and bedroom (Seale 1979). These front rooms measure approximately 265 sq. ft. and are connected by a French door. Each room possesses an area large enough to support various functions and the furniture necessary to accomplish them. Incidentally, the north facing room is larger by a few inches width; this difference in area has been noted as a probable Acadian trait for it was observed in all surveyed Acadian Cottages (Edwards 1985). The two front rooms formed the center of the house, and by virtue of this were the hub of activity within the home. The ceiling finish unites the two rooms with tongue and groove planks fastened over the ceiling joists. As mentioned earlier, these two rooms shared functions with the gallery and are thus united both to each other and to the gallery.
Six sets of French doors featuring ten lights per leaf grace each exit from the two front rooms. The glass panes within present an elegant appearance, and provide a clear view into the next room or gallery. Activities within these two front rooms and gallery include the viewer as an actor, albeit from a distance. The glass paned doors mitigate the barrier effect of typical French Creole, solid leaf doors located between the gallery and the front rooms, as if to retain the social inclusion of the traditional one- or two- room Acadian home. An open intimacy is achieved, one that defies any modern notion of privacy.

The master bedroom has a third door located along the south side of the house. It is plausible that either an unattached set of steps allowed access to a side garden or that the door led to a side gallery, although there is no architectural evidence for the latter. It is also worth considering that the door might have provided access to the master at night for those not permitted to enter the house. Regardless, it is certain that the door would have provided additional air circulation.

The back of the house is composed of several subsidiary rooms, namely two cabinets and an enclosed hallway between them. The rear cabinets were constructed disproportionately to accommodate the interior hallway between them such that the parlor door was aligned with the back door. This construction was a break from a typical addition of two cabinets with open porch between; presumably this was for additional space and privacy without the loss of ventilation. It is not uncommon for doors to connect the cabinet rooms with the loggia, but in this house, the north side cabinet is connected, while the south cabinet is not because of the staircase leading to the attic (Figure 13). The room without access to the hall adjoins the parents’ bedroom at the rear and is known as the girls’ bedroom. With access through the parents’ bedroom only, privacy and parental control of the girls’ movements were ensured. The south cabinet is a square room,
measuring approx. 160 sq. ft. This hints at the need to accommodate several beds, a feat that is more easily accomplished in a square room than in a rectangular room.

The enclosed hall in the rear of the house was a nexus of activity between upstairs and downstairs, as well as outside and inside. The hall serves as a transition space from the upstairs children’s domain to the downstairs adult’s domain. During the evening, the stairs would demarcate the boy’s from the girl’s arena. The hall is further important because it is enclosed; the stairs are not mounted in a loggia open to the public, but are within the house where privacy and security are assured the boys as they climb the stairs to their bedroom. There are practical advantages here as well, such as protection from the rain. As a buffer zone, the hall contained the messy and unbridled natural world behind the house and prevented it from penetrating far into the ordered domestic sphere. Moreover, the hall also stood as a passageway from the plantation fields and the outdoors kitchen to the table—a channel between the production and ultimate consumption of the fruits of slave labor.

The proximity of the outside yard is important when considering the social use of the north cabinet. Although situated behind the parlor there is no access between these rooms, which isolates this cabinet from the open intimacy of the front rooms. The direct access from the hallway gives the room a connection to the production area behind the house; thus suggesting its use as an office or a dining room. Although the room may have been used also as a bedroom, perhaps for guests, the room’s size (131 sq. ft.) and rectangular shape suggests it wasn’t designed to hold a lot of furniture.

Vernacular architecture is replete with deviations from type because of the nature of craftsmen construction. The Landry’s house has several uncommon features: the glass paned French doors downstairs, the French door replacements for windows upstairs, the finished attic,
and the enclosed hallway. The enclosed hallway distorts the back room sequence of a typical French Creole house; the Landrys fashioned an enclosed and constricted hall in the loggia space. To verify the distinction of this hall, I reviewed a 1985 survey of approximately 140 vernacular houses conducted by Jay Edwards and his students for the Jean Lafitte National Historic Park of Louisiana. The team conducted windshield surveys of vernacular domestic structures within the French Creole area (Figure 16). When the property owner granted permission, the domestic buildings were mapped and recorded. Sources other than this survey were not helpful; few surveys of vernacular buildings have been conducted, and the state-wide standing structure survey organized by the Louisiana Office of Historic Preservations contains neither floor plans nor description fields for staircases.

The Jean Lafitte Park Survey (Edwards 1985) noted forty houses with stairs (the number due to expansion rather than original construction is not known). While stairs were commonly placed in a rear cabinet room, open loggia, or front hall, and often enclosed in a box or closet, a stair in an enclosed rear hallway was rare. The three forms of a Creole central hall (Edwards 1985) noted in the survey include a chambre flanked by two front rooms that differed in width but that gradually extended its line of access the entire length of the house from front door to back door.

Seven of the forty houses with stairs were two-room cottages (4.6% of all surveyed); all seven placed the stair in the loggia area. Only one house, Huron House c. 1830, possessed an enclosed loggia, but this loggia was not constricted to form a hallway as in the Landry’s house. Another striking difference between the two houses is that the Huron House is a raised cottage, which denotes an elevated status ( Heck: 1978:169). It is clear from these findings that an
Figure 16: A map of the French Creole Parishes visited during the Jean Lafitte Park survey program in 1985 (source: Edwards and Kariouk Pecquet du Bellay de Verton 2004:149).
enclosed hallway was an uncommon feature within French Creole and Acadian cottages in the early 19th century.

The meaning of the enclosed hallway and its importance to the Landry family are difficult to determine. The central hall is definitely an Anglo feature (Glassie 1986), and the Landrys assimilated the spatial function of the hall in half measure but did not mark the face of the back wall with the perfect centeredness associated with a central hall. The placement of the enclosed hallway in the rear of the home is quite significant. At the rear of the house the hall does not interfere with the parlor’s passageway suggesting perhaps that an American ideology of control, denoted by the ordered space of a central hall, is undertaken here as an experiment. The rear of the building is not on view, nor is the asymmetrical placement of the back door visible from the road. Were the central hall to have been placed in the front of the building, this would have resulted in a changed facade and a destruction of the open intimacy of the front rooms.

The house was built for an open intimacy. Social and production activities flowed through and across the bounds of the front rooms and gallery as if the facade was not there. The distinctions between inside and outside were blurred as if there was no wall but simply a screen. Viewed in this way, the front unit of the two salles and gallery are the predominant site of activity. In contrast to the downstairs rooms, the attic is quite secluded, yet the two doors at each gable end of the house bring the breeze and sunshine inside.

The Landrys appear to have cared very much for the status suggested by popular styles and refined appointments. While it is tempting to consider this as an appetite for the latest fad (perhaps to vault them into the next class) this focus on consumption ignores the impression produced among their peers. After all, the Landrys would have been interested in consolidating their standing among their own class. Given the erratic sugar economy, the appearance of
success might have inspired a certain trust from their peers. The Landrys dressed the home up for public viewing and personal satisfaction with elements strongly associated with various ethnic groups.

**Architectural History and the Creole/Acadian**

I now return to the question first posed in the introduction—is the Landry house a French Creole Cottage? A brief history of French Creole and Acadian building traditions is in order. French Creole architecture has a complex history. The accretion of its defining elements evolved over several generations in the French Caribbean colonies. It is a creolized architecture, suggesting a blending of forms on native colonial soil; an assimilation of characteristics that were necessary for its survival (Edwards 2001). Thus, French forms such as the two-room plan of *salle* and *chambre* were married to adaptive features, such as raised floors to prevent rot and galleries for comfort under the tropical sun. Furthermore, the forms were constructed with native building materials, including palmetto instead of thatch for roofs and bousillage infill for wall insulation (Cizek 1997). Decorative elements help to define French Creole elegance: turned colonnettes above the gallery and cypress mantels that wrap around the chimney.

To explore the evolution of the housing form as a cultural syncretism, Edwards (2001:90) has articulated the French Creole tradition as “a group of cultural expressions that share a unique set of deep structural rules for the derivation of their many possible expressions.” Thus, Edwards’ evolutionary sequence has traced the development of structures by the analysis of core rooms (such as the salle and chambre configuration) signifying inside spaces and peripheral spaces, such as the gallery, as outside spaces. The expression of inside and outside represents the deepest structural rule and distinguishes the French Creole tradition from other building traditions (Edwards 2001). Of course, this dichotomy is not so straightforward when the use of
the house is considered. The preceding discussion of open intimacy clearly shows such a
dichotomy as simplistic, for the gallery is used as an exterior bedroom. The outdoor living space
is of a unit with the interior living space.

The Landry’s house would be described as a two-salle core module with two expansion
forms: a chambre-loggia-chambre suite of rooms and a gallery. Whether the expansion was built
at the same time or later in the development of the house does not affect the analysis. The
evolutionary model is divided into classes depicting the progression of floor plan and,
consequently, the roof, as additional rooms create the need for an ever more expansive roof.
Thus, four classes are elaborated for the history of the French Creole’s vernacular architecture in
Louisiana, all variations of the form (Figure 17), from Class I where there is no gallery to Class
IV where there is a complete surround of gallery space or other expansion rooms (Edwards
1988:12). The implicit understanding here is that the variation on form possesses an inherent
logic because the folk builders worked from a “mental grammar” (Glassie 1975). This means
that the Class IV houses are from the same tradition as the Class I cottage since the same
grammar is at work. Thus the composition of rooms follows tradition even if the form is new.

The evolution of the Acadian building tradition is sketchy because a proper architectural
history does not exist. The British obliterated the Acadian settlements by fire to discourage
rebels from returning to Canada after their forced expulsion. Housing information during the
period of Acadian exile is simply unavailable. Edwards (1988) noted the critical difference
between these vernacular traditions as the expansion process. For the Acadians the house
expanded along its width and remained one room deep. This expansion rule is opposite from the
Creole house that expanded proportionately in all directions. In Louisiana the impoverished
Acadian immigrants first erected palmetto huts or one room structures of posts in the ground
Floor Plan Progressions for the French Creole and Acadian Architectural Traditions

Figure 17: Floor plan progressions for the French Creole and Acadian architectural traditions. The French Creole module expanded geometrically. Depicted here is the evolution of floor plan with roof variable. A single chimney (with single or double fireplaces) was placed between the salle and chambre. As the floor plan expanded with auxiliary rooms, chimneys were added variably.

The Acadian module expanded linearly and then geometrically at Stage IV. The cottage with gabled roof was the predominant Acadian form. A single chimney was located on the exterior of the single room structure and typically located between the two major rooms in Stage III. The cottage plan shown in Stage IV would have had a chimney between the salle and chambre after the French fashion or chimneys on either end after the American fashion (Source: Edwards 1988, 1991).
construction with thatched roofs. The loft area under the roof would have been utilized as a sleeping area. These traditional houses were ill suited to the sub tropic environment because the base of the post-in-the-ground house was susceptible to rot and pest infestation. The single room buildings with indoor kitchens and without cross-ventilation also would have been very uncomfortable. None of these early, first- and second- generation houses survive (Farrell 1991). Shortly before 1800, these one-room houses were expanded linearly by adding another room on the side. Also at this time, new construction of timber frame houses occurred. The houses were constructed posts on the sill and raised from the ground to save the home from the adverse effects of the climate. These houses were still one room deep with gabled roofs (Edwards 1985) but are described as a creolized architecture because these adaptive features were assimilated in the Acadian form.

Towards the turn of the nineteenth century when sufficient wealth propelled Acadians into an arena of class disparity and cultural conflict (Brasseaux 1992, Dormon 1983), new choices of dwellings and an interest in social promotion led hundreds of Acadians to build a different manner of house. Side gabled forms were favored for both large plantation homes and small cottages in Acadiana (Farrell 1991). Many houses were built new with a cottage floor plan and an encompassing roof that allowed large sleeping areas under the eaves. The majority of Acadians chose an Acadian Cottage or a raised French Creole Cottage in which to live, well into the 20th century.

The evolutionary scheme at Stage IV c. 1820 (Edwards 1985) depicts a convergence of the Acadian Cottage with the French Creole tradition based on a shared gabled roof and a shared assimilation of American motifs. The Acadian tradition is viewed as either absorbed by the French Creole tradition or as a sub species of the same (Edwards 1985:6). Even considering the
selection of adaptive features from the French Creole tradition, the Acadian Cottage retained a most important feature—the use of the attic as a bedroom. The French Creoles did construct cottages and other modest buildings with a gabled roof, but did not use the attic as a sleeping chamber. They did not hold a symbolic attachment to the attic as the French Creoles preferred to house their boys in a garconniere.

The influence of Creole architecture on the Acadian tradition has been explained by the adoption of the gallery and the expanding floor plan. However, there is no single Acadian form that influenced French Creole architecture. It is for this reason that I disagree with the classification of the Acadian cottage as a creolized architecture. The fact that both cultures assimilated similar features within their building forms does not mean that they are the same. The reported Acadian influence on French Creole architecture (Edwards 1985) can be explained by the Acadians role in popularizing the cottage form. Thus, their contribution was to the longevity of the cottage form.

I question the rationale for the claim that the Acadian cottage is a sub species of French Creole architecture. Again, this question is important given the burden on interpretation to explain why Acadians lived in a French Creole Cottage. The depiction of the Acadian tradition as a sub-species does not explain their history as well as it illustrates a progressive and privileged subject. I don’t question the utility of a historic perspective nor do I question the evolutionary model’s ability to isolate traits for analysis and comparison. Rather I am suggesting that an acknowledgement of separate building traditions would allow greater access to the social implications of the period of “convergence.” Subsumed within the French Creole tradition, the choices made by the Acadians, and the social and economic conflicts experienced by the planter and small farmer classes are rather ignored.
The mention of social and economic conflict invites an additional complexity to the discussion. The Acadian cottage of this period did not simply emulate the French Creole design and ornamentation, which is implied by the convergence model. Nor did the French Creole culture absorb all immigrant cultures from the colonial period to the Louisiana Purchase as the Office of Historic Preservation explained as its justification for the category of French Creole architecture in its National Register criteria. This kind of argument is upheld by the evolutionary model but misses an important element—the Acadian chose an American material identity at the same time that they chose a French Creole material identity.

An example of the prevalent reformulation of material identity in early nineteenth century is provided by the Landry’s house. The Federalist influence is seen both in the structure of the house and in the style governing the house. Structurally, the house’s symmetrical facade is boxed in by two chimneys constructed within the walls at the gabled ends of the house. Viewed from the exterior, Federalist style is announced by the molded door and window facings, the molded and stepped cornice, and the rectangular transoms divided with delicate rectangular panes above each door on the front and back of the house. Inside the house, modern American decoration is seen in the wide, beaded baseboards as well as in the corbelled mantel shelves, which are painted to appear as black marble (Figure 18). The position of the two gable end chimneys on the exterior walls also affected the use of interior rooms. With the fireplaces positioned along the exterior walls, freer access between the two front rooms was achieved. Thus the Federalist style affected the appearance and function of the rooms.

Federalist influence might also be responsible for the two symmetrical front rooms, unless an influence from French Creole “polite” architecture is admitted (Oszusckik 1983). Typically when discussing vernacular architecture, great pains are taken to separate the “folk
housing” (Kniffen 1986) from the polite architecture constructed by architects (Edwards 1985). However, craftsmen would have been just as likely to incorporate elements from outside ethnic groups as from civic forms. As was explained earlier, symmetry is understood as a motif of American architecture, but if the search for new symbolic allegiances embraced elements from polite architecture, that might indicate a nostalgic turn towards the Old World past.

The various takes on what the French Creole and Federal architectural elements could have meant to the Landrys in terms of their identity and social access highlight the transformational character of identity in the early nineteenth century. I have argued that an Acadian may assume various material identities to make a social impact. I have also argued that the social use of the house differentiated a French Creole from an Acadian cottage. Outstanding
is the question of ethnicity. Were the Landrys so deeply assimilated in French Creole culture that they considered themselves French Creoles? How strong is the relationship of material identity and ethnicity? Let us turn to cultural theory for a more sophisticated look at culture change. Ideally suited for this task is creolization, which emphasizes identity shifts in response to social forces in tandem with the syncretic reformulation of material cultures (Amerlinck 2001). In the next section, the transformational nature of identity will be discussed.

**Creolization and the Creole/Acadian**

The concept of creolization was developed within linguistics before a creolization model reached historical anthropology and folklore studies. Within linguistics, the model describes the language transformation of mixed or pidgin languages into a mother tongue of native speakers, and oftentimes in a colonial context.

Given the focus of this thesis on material evidence and the creolization analogy to vernacular architecture given above, it would be remiss of me if I did not address the analogy within archaeological studies as well. The creolization model in general concerns the cultural processes that render a foreigner a native and the integration and compromises that occur relative to material life and ideology. More specifically, material things or artifacts are comparable to the words of language or the “lexicon of culture while the ways they are made, used, and perceived are part of the grammar or structure” (Ferguson 1992:xiii).

The first applications of this model were to particular African American societies. James Deetz (1996:213) emphasizes the complex mixing and reformulation of components of both the Anglo-American and Afro-American cultures at the Parting Ways settlement. For Deetz, creolization operated as a grammar where African Americans put Anglo-American artifacts to new and other than intended uses, according to their rules. The structuralist understanding of
variations of culture played out in his study of foodways and ceramics within the domestic space. Later attempts to understand the development of vernacular creations or structures within the colonial context emphasize interaction, conflict and negotiation. For example, in his study of Bahama’s unique architectural heritage, Paul Farnsworth (2001) also considers creolization as a blending of traditional ideas to reach successful solutions in a new environment, but he considers the effects of power and negotiation on the outcome. Negotiations between the planter’s reformist notions and the slaves’ ideas of housing reached a compromise. Minor variations of decorative elements suggested individual choices made by the slaves, as well as their desire to subvert the master’s plan of uniform and orderly homes (Farnsworth 2001:269).

Another focus within creolization studies is on the cognitive meanings of creole, which is predicated on shifting identities among different classes and races through time. Shannon Dawdy (2000a) worked out a complex synthesis of the vernacular processes of transformation as it correlates to Creole identity in New Orleans from the colonial period to the Louisiana Purchase. The creolization process is broken down into periods marked by social and political events that affected Creole identity. In this context, creolization is used as a frame for understanding the fluidity of identity in dynamic colonial situations and the ensuing reformulation of relationships.

With reference to the identity at issue in the Landry’s house, the family’s tenure at the house coincides with the “hybridization period” between 1805 and 1862. At this time, the dominant Creole culture begins to lose control in face of the American influx and challenges to their economic, social and political control of Louisiana. The ensuing impasse encourages negotiations, opens the playing field to new ideas, and accommodates new habits and business (Dawdy 2000a). Does the Landry’s experience fit in with the hybridization model?
Architecturally, the process is born out by what I have described as dressing for identity. The Landrys blended Federalist adornments on a French Creole floor plan. They also adapted the Federalist central hall in half measure. This vernacular adaptation departs both from the Creole adaptation of the Anglo hall and the actual central hall within the dogtrot and Georgian building forms. I mentioned earlier that the Landrys created their hall without marring the new traditional front. The conversion of an open loggia to an enclosed hall effectively concealed the domestic from outside view and delimited access to the interior from the back and the gardens and fields of production behind the house. This kind of change in the use of rooms and controlled access was not desired in the domestic center of the house. Thus, the adapted hallway points to cultural continuity in the activities conducted in the front of the house.

To address methods of change, Dawdy (2000a) has proposed intermarriage and multi-ethnic households as an effective agent for this hybridization of cultures. Although the Landrys would marry outside their cultural group, this phenomenon was delayed for another generation or two. I don’t wish to say that because the families did not intermarry, they did not participate in creolization. Most certainly the Landrys assimilated new ideas and took advantage of opportunities to advance economically through the very plantation system that propelled the Creoles forward to economic and political dominance. However, the majority of Acadians remained largely isolated from the nexus of communication, ideas and economic opportunity that would have put them in contact with the foreign French Creoles and Americans. The planter and farmer classes from the Acadia Coast parishes were affected by creolization; however, their experiences were different from those of other immigrant groups such as the Germans who acculturated and became self-identifying French Creoles.
Creolization implies a process that engages Creoles during their social and cultural redefinition. Historically, what is understood by the term creole changed over time. “... the need to establish a primacy of native identity against the newcomer, was thus present full-blown after 1803. Origin in the soil became, therefore, the very essence of the concept creole, precisely because it gave the older residents the most profound warrant of the right not to be dispossessed in their own land” (Tregle 1992:138). Under this qualification, Acadians of any class, born in Louisiana, would have been known as creole by the courts and by society, although not necessarily by their kin. This understanding soon yielded to pressures from the new immigrant group and their challenges to Creole commerce and law. In face of the onslaught of Americans, the term took on a new, ethnic meaning c. 1800 (Dawdy 2000a). Jean Dorville Landry came of age in this period, when shared language and culture would have acted as the binding force. Thus a strong differentiation between the Creole and the Acadian was operative. Although both groups were francophone, the traditions of colonial society split the two along class and cultural lines. By mid-century, the meaning of Creole changed again to denote a racial mix (Tregle 1992). There arose a furor over this maligning of their heritage by the Americans; the Creoles felt the humiliation of ascription that the Acadians had suffered for generations.

Certainly, the cultural domains of the Creoles and the Acadians were strikingly dissimilar. The Creoles composed the planter and professional classes and were the political force until the Louisiana Purchase. They maintained ties to the Old World; they were the aesthetes of Louisiana who ruled New Orleans society. By contrast, the Acadians were farmers, trappers and ranchers who lived outside New Orleans on the frontiers of the territory. Their power was negligible until the nineteenth century when those few successful planters, the “Cajun Doré” (Dormon 1983:242) rose to prominence with attendant political and social power. It is
reasonable to suggest that the small planter within the riverine parishes also leveraged themselves into a position of limited power. The small planters often formed corporations (Brasseaux 1992:9, Champomier 1844-1859) with neighbors and extended kin, and thereby assured the processing and marketing of their cane. The economic advancement of the small planter class was often achieved through extended kin networks. Despite the self-promoting material identities and the conspicuous consumption evident in their home, it seems unlikely that the Landrys would have been accepted as a partner in marriage or in business by the Creoles in the early nineteenth century.

Conclusion

Upon the arrival of the Americans (1790s onward), the French Creoles struggled with the Americans for political and cultural dominance. The struggle escalated until an accommodation was reached decades later. These conflicts also involved the rural farmer. I have sought to draw out in the preceding case study the material identities of a small planter that interacted with the political and social forces of his changing world. In so far as the French Creoles and the Americans were vying for domination of Louisiana’s economy and politics, the Landrys were in a position to contest both the Creoles and the Americans. Whether this material identification was chosen in the spirit of conciliation, accommodation, competition, or something else, it is probable that these attitudes varied between classes and families and almost certainly shifted with the years of developing relations between these groups.

While I have criticized the preference given to the Creole influence in the architectural model of evolution (Edwards 1985), I, in turn, have favored the Federalist influence on the Landry’s home. The celebration of American elements in the home does lead me to question the general opinion of the consolidated effort of Creoles and Acadians to thwart the encroaching
Americans. The evidence from the house supports the notion that Creoles and Acadians were competitors in the new economy now dominated by the Americans (Brasseaux 1992:43). I have objected to the evolutionary model that casts the Acadian architectural heritage as a sub-group not because I reject the layering of motifs and changing of structures but because the model does not highlight the very important social experience of the small planter class.

In light of the discussion of creolization, the rebirth of Cajun culture in the 1970s provides an interesting reflection. The Cajun heritage has embraced all classes of its once disparate society, from planters to fishermen and trappers, from ranchers to subsistence farmers. The social forces behind the ethnogenesis of the Cajun resonate in the long history of the Acadians from their expulsion, through their exile, and onto the shores of Louisiana. A similar remark of the ability of the French Creole culture to absorb other ethnicities is made about the Cajun culture at the end of the nineteenth century. Thus, a consideration of the vernacular through the lens of an emerging Cajun culture would provide new research opportunities and a fresh outlook on the question of ethnic identity in the early nineteenth century. Let us continue the discussion of identity in the next case study concerning the Aillet occupation at the turn of the twentieth century.
Chapter IV: The Aillet Occupation—Case Study II

The house is named after the Aillet family who resided there for approximately 100 years. The Aillet occupation (1880-1980) was marked by a major renovation to the house that celebrated the modernizing times near the turn of the century. An addition was placed at the rear of the house and perpendicular to it. The kitchen, dining room and porch brought new plumbing into the house; daily chores were altered and synthesized in these rear rooms. The additional space also provided more room for leisure activities indoors. The same progressive spirit that inspired the addition eventually led the family members nearly fifty years later to reject the house as a relic of poor plumbing and insufficient electricity. Leocadie Aillet lived out her life in the house, but in 1956, her demise meant the decline of the house as well. Leocadie’s sons, Olga, Anatole and Vincent, and her daughter, Nathalie, either lived in or looked after the house after her death. A mobile home was parked within 30 feet of the house when Dow purchased the property and suggests that the mobile home was preferred finally for its amenities and convenience. Thus, the house became an abandoned memory (Figure 4). Regarding the interiors, what the family did not take as heirlooms was left for vandals after Nathalie Aillet passed on. The house sat abandoned for ten years before it was donated to the museum.

The progressive spirit of the late nineteenth century affected the function, use and decorative style of the house. Farmhouses at this time began to resemble urban homes, where work spaces became segregated by gender (McMurry 1998), and where the rooms were defined by a predominant function. In face of these increased restrictions within the home, ideas about privacy and leisure changed as well. The attachment of the kitchen and dining room to the Aillet’s home incorporated household production and consumption activities under a single roof. The increased utility represented by the modern addition affected household functions.
established within the other rooms of the house and signaled an increased preoccupation with the domestic interior as well.

The Aillets’ occupation of the house presents in many ways a more interesting story than the previous story about the Landrys, despite the fact that the documentary record does not give us much of a sense of the Aillets’ life. As is the case when few records exist, material culture, in particular, is mined for meaning, involving function, form (in an architectural sense), and also intention and cultural implications. So to a certain extent, the following case study is an attempt to resuscitate the life of the house as it was under the Aillets, with a particular concentration on the ell addition. Artifacts and interviews are employed to enliven the story of the Aillet House, and they add to an understanding of its organic nature. Family interviews detail the layout and use of the rooms and give a rich understanding of the inhabitants’ lives. A memoir (Mire n.d.) illustrating life in a turn of the century cottage in LaFourche Parish will also be drawn upon for details of home life. Although of a different region in South Louisiana, the Germain Bergeron House (Coleman and Gray 1995) experienced a comparable modernizing addition c. 1850. Archaeological remains date to the mid nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Ironically, this richer understanding of the Aillet House is achieved despite the major material loss of its ell addition, a loss that occurred when the house was transferred from its original site to the museum.

The discussion of identity will change focus in this case study. Previously, we wrangled with the differentiation of an Acadian and French Creole Cottage. We then turned to a social analysis where the Landrys’ decisions concerning their house construction highlighted opportunism and a shifting of material identity. Largely because we have more materials to draw the portrait of the Aillets, there is an increased opportunity to view the individual within the
home. Our focus will place Leocadie Aillet within a specialized domestic sphere where there is an opportunity to view personal identity shaped by the choices and constraints associated with mass-produced materials.

In this second case study of change and identity, I will first describe the archaeology conducted at the site and the shovel test results that bear on the Aillet’s landscape and household activities. A social analysis of the interiors will illustrate the changing function and use of the rooms of the house from the Landry period to the Aillet period. Finally, a consideration of consumption will offer a means of looking at change in the material identities embraced by Leocadie Aillet. Decisions that Leocadie Aillet made regarding the parlor will offer a reference point from which to view the turn of the century and an opportunity to understand how Americanization affected one family

**Archaeology**

The archaeology performed at the site was a preliminary testing sequence largely to determine the presence or absence of intact deposits and the limits of the house site proper. While this was a modest effort, the results in tandem with other materials may offer a richer understanding of life within the house during the waning of the nineteenth century. The presence of artifacts in locations proximate to the porch, added at the turn of the century, hint at activities that were conducted on the porch. The distribution of artifacts, noted in shovel tests along the South bank of the ditch, also give us some evidence of an outbuilding that once stood within the yard of the house.

The preliminary investigation, consisting of surface collection and the systematic excavation of sixteen shovel test pits (Figure 19), determined site boundaries and the presence of intact deposits relating to the original site of the Aillet House. Artifacts were surface collected
Figure 19: The sketch map of the Aillet House site (16WBR45).
Figure 20: The project area in 1931 (source: MRC 1931: Chart No. 66).
from both banks of the ditch located on the southern most boundary of the property. The larger site was also combed for artifacts on the surface in a general sweep northwestward from where the ditch meets the road. United States Geological Survey (USGS) and Mississippi River Commission (MRC) maps of the plantation were consulted for indications of standing structures (Figures 1 and 20). The structure, which appeared on the map approximately 20 meters west from the road, was tested as the potential location of the Aillet house. Property markers on the southern most boundary of the property served as stationary points from which two perpendicular lines were extended across the ditch to its north bank. A single, perpendicular transect was extended northward from this second line at the 25 meter mark. This transect, running parallel to the road was designed to strike through the location of the structure. Shovel tests were excavated at ten meter intervals along the transect.

The south bank of the ditch held a lot of surface material, mainly ironstone, some porcelain, stoneware, clear bottle glass, some blown olive bottle glass, table glass, and unidentified iron pieces. Shovel tests on the south bank supported the conclusion that the ditch probably functioned as a dump for household trash dated to post 1880. The presence of cow teeth and burned mammal bone corroborate this assumption. Of course, there is also the possibility that the artifacts were deposited when the house site was cleared by bulldozers in the late 1980s.

Another concentration of surface scatter was found on the north bank wall. About ten bricks were eroding out the north bank wall approximately 59 meters west from the road. No other artifacts were near the surface in this second area and a single iron concretion was found in the shovel test. The brick concentration was thought to be associated with an outbuilding. A second, very slight brick scatter was noted on the surface approximately 45 meters west from the
road. ST 45W 10N (#15) contained brick fragments and a stoneware sherd with an Albany slip interior and a salt glazed exterior, which post-dates 1850 (Greer 1981:197).

ST 25W 25N (#2) and ST 25W 35N (#3) indicated disturbance because a jumble of brick, flat glass, brown bottle glass, milk glass, and iron bits were found in levels below 20 cm. However, a red sponge printed early whiteware sherd dating to 1845-1860 (Majewski and O’Brien 1987:161) was found above 20 cm. depth. The area was thought to be evidence of disturbance associated with the impact of landscaping by Dow and by the property owner.

Both early and mid-nineteenth century ceramics were recovered from shovel test 25W 45N (#5). Brick flecks were noted through all levels of the test and hint that this might be near the location of one of the house piers. Level two contained a significant amount of iron pieces, including a hinge bracket. Also recovered were ironstone fragments and a machine made, clear green bottle neck and finish dating after 1889 (Miller and Sullivan 1984:93-94). Within level three, two pearlware sherds were found, including a shell edged blue with scalloped rim sherd dating to 1805-1830 (Hunter and Miller 1994:434). A blue transfer-printed whiteware sherd was also found and dates to 1828-1860 (Lofstrom 1976:11). Further evidence of a household is seen in a kaolin clay marble, glass shards, and pig canine and mandible. The early dates of the ceramics from level three suggest they were the remains from the Landry occupation. Given the hypothesized location of the house shown in Figure 17, the position of shovel test 5 is very near the master bedroom’s side door. Thus, housewares and food remains provoke a consideration of activities in the master bedroom. Perhaps these items were the detritus from a soiree in the bedroom. More will be said of these activities in the next chapter.

Shovel test #5 marked a high probability area, and therefore determined the placement of the second transect. At 25W 45N, the second transect was laid perpendicular to the first transect.
Excepting the two shovel tests at the extreme ends of the second transect, the cluster of tests surrounding ST 25W 45N (#5) designate the location of the structure. Table 2 below correlates the diagnostic ceramics recovered from this cluster and their position relative to the house.

Table 2. Diagnostic Artifacts from the Shovel Tests in the House Cluster

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shovel Test Number &amp; Location</th>
<th>Position Relative to the House</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#5 (25W 45N)</td>
<td>South side of house near door to side yard</td>
<td>Blue shell edged pearlware plate fragment; Pig bones; Kaolin marble</td>
<td>1805-1860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 (25W 50N)</td>
<td>Underneath front of house</td>
<td>Annular pearlware bowl fragments</td>
<td>1790-1830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8 (20W 45N)</td>
<td>Front of house</td>
<td>Ironstone fragments</td>
<td>1840-1885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9 (30W 45N)</td>
<td>South side of house</td>
<td>Slipped stoneware; Molded porcelain</td>
<td>1780- post 1850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10 (35W 45N)</td>
<td>South of back porch</td>
<td>Bone toothbrush; Soapstone pencil tip</td>
<td>turn of the century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11 (45W 45N)</td>
<td>Southwest of back porch</td>
<td>Annular yellowware sherd</td>
<td>1840-1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12 (31.6W 48.7N)</td>
<td>Underneath the house</td>
<td>Handpainted early whiteware fragment; Ironstone sherd</td>
<td>1828-1885</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within the cluster of tests, a similar artifact depth is seen. Diagnostic artifacts were recovered mainly from the third stratum defined by a depth of roughly 20 – 40 cm. The soil profile for these clustered test pits was not homogeneous, but a pattern of progression of soil color and texture was noted:

Table 3. A Soil Profile of the Shovel Tests in the House Cluster

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soil Type</th>
<th>Soil Color</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Depth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10YR4/1</td>
<td>dark gray</td>
<td>top soil</td>
<td>@ 0-5 cm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10YR3/1</td>
<td>very dark gray</td>
<td>silt</td>
<td>@ 5-20 cm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10YR4/1 (w/ brick flecks)</td>
<td>dark gray</td>
<td>silty clay</td>
<td>@ 20-50 cm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10YR4/4</td>
<td>dark yellow brown</td>
<td>clayey silt</td>
<td>@ 50-60 cm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The profile of the house was elaborated by four shovel tests placed at a frequency of five meters from ST 25W 45N (#5). Brick flecks were encountered at 20-25 cm. depth in the immediate vicinity, and could account for the piers that were removed for reconstruction at the museum. ST 25W 40N (#4) is remarkable because of its soil inclusions. The soil of level three is a 10YR 4/1, dark gray silty clay soil, mottled with charcoal and brick flecks. The soil texture is very hard packed with organic inclusions. The organics and charcoal suggest a dump or the remnants of a side garden.

Evidence from shovel tests #8 and #6 might relate to yard activities. Debris and household trash was typically strewn in the yard as a means of trash disposal. In level two of ST 20W 45N (#8), ironstone, miscellaneous iron, bottle glass, pearlware, and a shard of safety glass were jumbled to a depth of 23 cm. Despite the disturbed context, the presence of ceramics, hardware and bottle glass suggests this practice was upheld here. Two annular pearlware sherds dating to 1790-1830 (Lofstrom 1976:7) were recovered from shovel test 25W 50N (#6) at 26 cm. These sherds also evidence the Landry occupation. The two sherds were the only artifacts recovered from the test pit, and its relative sterility may be explained by its location underneath the house.

Further evidence for trash disposal activities was recovered from shovel tests nine and twelve. A plain pearlware sherd and an interior slipped stoneware sherd from for ST 30W 45N (#9) represent a date range from 1780-post 1850 (Hunter and Miller 1994:434; Greer 1981:180). Ironstone dating from 1850 forward (Majewski and O’Brien 1987:122-124); and porcelain, post 1812 (Miller 1980:17) further corroborate the proposed period of occupation. A similar range characterizes the ceramics from ST#12. The general area was probed for brick pier remnants, and several encounters with rock hard bits of clay, taken for brick, prompted the excavation of ST
31.60W 48.70N. Two fragments of an embossed porcelain bowl, dated post 1812 (Miller 1980:17), handpainted early whiteware, dated 1828-1860 (Hunter and Miller 1994:434), and ironstone fragments, dated 1840-1885 (Majewski and O’Brien 1987:122-124) represent a wide time period. The ceramics were recovered directly below a jumble of brick and mortar. Because the bricks were not articulated, the rubble was interpreted to have been coincident with the house’s move when the piers’ bricks were taken from the site to be reassembled at the museum.

The next shovel test, 35W 45N (#10), was placed 5 meters from #9 to further delineate the house location. Household artifacts were recovered from the third level of 20-30 cm. including porcelain sherds, and a cow’s pelvis bone with butcher marks that suggest food preparation, specifically that of a loin steak. Other interesting finds include a bone toothbrush in fragments and a soapstone pencil tip. Perhaps the toothbrush or pencil was tossed from off the back porch. Sid Gray (1992:2) mentioned that the extension on the back of the house appeared to have been built shortly after 1880 when the Ailletts took up residence. There was a fragment of tinfoil found within this level that cautioned the excavator concerning disturbance. The presence of the foil was attributed to the general destructive activities related to moving the Aillet House to its current location.

Shovel test 45W 45N (#11) was placed 10 meters distant in order to gauge the limits of a house association. Diagnostic material was encountered at 26-48 cm depth within an organic soil deposit. The soil is interesting to note, as it was a 10YR 3/1, dark grey clay mottled with a 10YR 4/4, dark yellow brown sandy silt, and it continued to a depth of at least 64 cm. This layer was hard-packed with organic inclusions, and suggests a privy or possibly the location of the cesspool associated with the twentieth century bathroom addition. Yellowware sherds decorated with annular brown bands were recovered from a depth of approximately 50-60 cm. and date to
1840-1900 (Liebowitz 1985:10). Mammalian long bone fragments in the test pit corroborate the identification of a privy, where casual discard of household trash was common. Machine-cut and wire nails were found in the same level, along with window and bottle glass. The overlap of wire and machine wrought nails occurred prior to 1890, after which wire nails became the dominant type (Nelson 1968:8-11). Therefore, the nails recovered from #11 might provide evidence for the renovation activities around the turn of the century, as described by Gray (1992:2-3).

A “terra cotta” drain pipe was also identified at approximately 10 cm. sub surface. The pipe ran west from Highway 1 alongside Mr. Tullier’s driveway and bordered what would have been the side of the house. Pipes such as these would have been used as a conduit for water or otherwise used as plumbing hardware. Its length is unknown, however results from probing suggest that the pipe ended proximate to ST 45W 45N (#11). Its location next to the road argues for a kitchen plumbing apparatus rather than one associated with the bathroom, which was located approximately six meters to the south on the other side of the house.

In sum, ST 10 and 11 are proximate to the back porch and the artifacts recovered from these test pits support the conjecture that artifacts were casually discarded or lost from the back porch. The artifacts recovered from the testing do more to corroborate the location of the house than they do to elucidate behavior at the site. However, it is easy to imagine a child playing on the porch whereupon her doll is broken and the severed arm is then lost. Equally easy to imagine is the scene where children gather at the dining room table to do their homework for school (Mire n.d.). The soapstone pencil found its way to the ground carelessly perhaps as it was carried between the dining room and the bedroom.
Now that the archaeological context is established, let us turn to the landscape for another set of bearings before we focus our attention back on the house and the activities within the kitchen, dining room and parlor.

**Landscape**

The appearance of the back yard and fields almost certainly underwent some change between the Landry and Aillet occupations. It is very likely that the yard was still the site of chores related to their livelihood. Presumably the house gardens remained. The outdoor oven used for baking (Mire n.d.) might have been rendered obsolete by the interior wood-burning stove. The cisterns yielded to the back yard pump. The kitchen was moved from an outbuilding on the plantation to the interior of the house. Presumably, the integration of this production unit within the house changed the appearance of the back yard, although it is possible that the building was left standing and served another purpose such as storage. Certainly, there would have been less activity between the kitchen and the house numerous times a day. The privy and stable are almost certain to have remained in the back yard. The privy would have been in use since the bathroom was not added onto the porch until some time mid-century (Bohardt, family interview, 1993). The stable might have remained as the Aillets kept a cow, chickens and a horse at one time (Bohardt 1993). The cribb is a bit more suspect, although the car was known to be parked underneath some type of overhang so perhaps the old crib would have sufficed (Bohardt 1993). Perhaps the greatest change to be seen on the landscape was the appearance of the fields. Anatole Aillet did not make his living from planting sugarcane; it remains unclear whether the property was under cultivation and who might have worked in the fields.

Several hundred feet north from their front door the Aillets kept a roadside store for the locals and passers by on River Road (Figure 11). Ms. Bohardt (1993) referred to it as one of
those country stores where odds and ends, goods in bulk, packaged goodies, sausages, and homemade crab cakes were sold. Flour and grains were weighed out for each sale. Anatole Aillet and his wife Leocadie tended the store until his death, after which time Leocadie carried on alone (Bohardt 1993). Particularly as she grew older, Leocadie’s movements were bounded by the house and the store.

The store sat next to three cabins that were rented out to African American families. According to Ms. Bohardt (1993), the renters did not stay long but at least they had a roof over their head. I expect there was some tension between Leocadie Aillet and her tenants because a neighbor reported that Leocadie Aillet called on her father to escort her home sometimes after dark when she closed up shop (LeJeune and Rodriguez, family interview, 1993).

While this sketch of rural life seems on the face of it to serve as an example of the bitterness of race relations in segregated Louisiana of the mid century (Taylor 1984), Bohardt (1993) intimates that there was a different dynamic to this relationship. She mentions that Leocadie was reassured by their proximity. Whereas this sentiment may not be accurate; if true enough, it may negate the fear and hostility but uphold the segregation. Clearly, there is a complex social connection perhaps caused by a shared history in addition to physical proximity.

**Social Analysis**

The addition of the kitchen, dining room and porch were built of a piece and connected to the rear of the house at the turn of the century (Figure 21). The physical layout of the unit resembled that of the gallery and front two salles discussed in the previous chapter. Access to all three rooms (including the porch as a room) within the unit was available through multiple doors and would have achieved a similar open intimacy (Figure 22). The back door of the house became an interior door leading into the dining room and a door was cut into the back bedroom
Figure 21: The floor plan of the kitchen/dining room addition to the Aillet House c. 1900. The bathroom was added on at an unknown later date (source: Gray 1992).
Figure 22: An access analysis flow chart of the house c. 1900.
that opened onto the back porch. Two doors led into the dining room from the porch to accommodate the amount of traffic that would pass through the room. The doors provided an additional advantage with an increase in air circulation. The use of these rooms, however, is not comparable to the front rooms. The porch’s size and placement at the rear of the house suggests that it was not a nexus for socializing but was used for more practical purposes. The porch was the transition zone between the back yard and the intimacy of the house. It also linked the two spheres of production and consumption; the back porch stood between the garden and yard (where food, tools and other things were produced) and the dining room and house (where food and things were consumed or otherwise used up).

Within the house, the porch also connected the kitchen and dining room where the same dynamic of production and consumption divisions occurred within the home. The kitchen and dining room were not designed as multi-purpose rooms for work and social gatherings, nor as rooms whose functions were mutable between rooms. These two rooms had explicit functions; the kitchen was devoted to the preparation of food and the dining room to food consumption. Although the dining room was also the location for social gatherings, the dining room table was certainly not moved into another room to accommodate changing activities. As could be expected, the other rooms also became more narrowly defined.

The kitchen (191 sq. ft.) was outfitted with a work table and chairs set around, a very long counter top with sink, and two cabinets to hold the dishes and such (WBR Museum 1968-2004). There were two stoves, the large wood burning stove and a smaller kerosene one for cooking in the warmer months. Leocadie Aillet stocked her larder with foodstuffs in bulk. Like the Pitres (Mire n.d.), the Ailllets would have had barrels for flour, sugar, grain, and other dry goods such as pecans; a 50 lb. can of lard; crocks for sauerkraut and salted pork; and rows of
canned vegetables and fruits (Bohardt 1993). Several of her grandchildren commented on her skills in the kitchen, and one exclaimed that she made the best gumbo (Bohardt 1993)! Besides cooking, other tasks would have been performed in the kitchen. Any activity involving hot water would have taken place next to the stove, such as laundry and bathing. Ms. Bohardt (1993) recalled baths in a huge galvanized tub that was set on the floor of the kitchen in front of the big potbellied stove.

The move to single function rooms corresponded to a similar move to isolated and gendered areas where cooperative activities were dampened. Increasingly, work in the home was performed by women, and this work was centered in the kitchen. A private kitchen in the home may have given farm wives more control over their workplace, but it also exacerbated the differentiation of men’s and women’s work (McMurry 1988). Although the author is speaking of turn of the century progressive farmhouses in New England, the impact of industrialization was similarly felt in Louisiana where mass produced goods supplanted goods that once were home made and the result of cooperative efforts. Furniture, clothes, soap are examples of fairly intensive production activities that were routinely accomplished with the help of others on the farm just forty years earlier.

This isolation was accompanied by an increased sensitivity to privacy. One example of an emerging need for privacy is seen on the modifications made to the interior French doors. The glass panes of each door were masked with opaque material (Bohardt 1993), which served to inhibit the visual access to each room, the very quality that was prized by the Landrys.

The dining room is another example of a single function room where many varied activities take place, but where a single activity is focused. For instance, the dining room accommodated homework activities and visiting, but it remained principally a room for dining.
More importantly, dining was perhaps discouraged in other rooms because of the dining room (Seale 1979). Thus setting a small table for a dining party among intimates in the bedroom likely became a habit associated with the old days.

With ten family members, the Aillets would have made quite a dining party each day. The dining room (219 sq. ft.) possessed a long table with twelve chairs around it and several more besides along the perimeter of the room. A large buffet and two incidental tables were arranged in the room to serve a purpose but also to make a pleasing presentation (WBR Museum 1968-2004). If the buffet was similar to the Pitre’s sideboard, it would have been made of mahogany with a marble top and two platforms on each side of a central mirror. The room is dedicated to celebrating the mundane as well as communions and birthdays. The dining room also acted as an informal living room in winter months where visitors gathered around the large fireplace after all the dishes were cleaned and put away. Ms Mire’s (n.d.) most treasured memories are of those long evenings nibbling on oranges and pecans listening to all the stories and gossip about the family and the neighborhood. It is important that this kind of visiting took place in the warm dining room rather than the parlor. It is noteworthy that Ms. Mire’s memoir, which addressed recollections of many of the rooms in the house, made no reference to the parlor, perhaps because it was a formal room, in which children were discouraged from entering.

**Material Culture and Identity**

At the end of Chapter III, a question about post-creolization was left open. What do you make of culture change and ethnicity after creolization has occurred, after the material identities associated with Creole culture have been devalued? Given this gray zone of material allegiances, the impasse of our ability to read insider choices; a change of focus on the means of creating identity as well as the vehicle for identity is necessary. In recognition of the fact that the
American market was pervasive and so dominated the material culture available in the period, following Miller’s work on consumption (1998), I will seek to investigate mass produced items for meaning. The shift to mass-produced materials has a correlate in the individual’s increasing shift from producer to consumer. I will explore the means of creating a personal identity through deliberate arrangements in the parlor.

If informal family spaces, such as the dining room, represented a balance between the contempt for display and the aspirations for material comforts and refinement (McMurry 1988:219), that restraint was abandoned in the parlor. The parlor was outfitted with several settee and chair suites placed in each of three corners of the room. Several other chairs were placed around the perimeter of the room with a lone marble top table in the center of the room (Figure 23). The furniture arrangements, following Victorian fashion, were deliberate compositions designed to accentuate a personal taste. A single table to the right of the most prominent seating arrangement would have held a carefully composed array of sentimental objects, both hand-made and consumer goods, including plaster casts of religious objects, and a vase of flowers perhaps (McMurry 1988).

“Style was what you bought at the store; taste was how you put it all together” (Seale 1979:97). Indeed a trip to the city would have been necessary to purchase the ready-made furniture that outfitted the parlor. Victorian taste did not necessarily mean a fussy plethora of small objects, taste was focused on the artful arrangements of furniture and decorative objects (Seale 1979:97). I don’t mean to suggest that Leocadie Aillet was intensely interested in keeping up with the Victorian sense of art units and the exacting shades of taste. “Once ideas of arrangement became part of a popular stylish syndrome, they were likely to be carried out to some degree,” (Seale 1979) no matter the context. It is important that Aillet bought into the
Figure 23: Furniture arrangements in the parlor, as recollected by Ms. Mora in 1995 (source: WBR Museum 1968-2004).
popular style, and that she upheld the ethos of making that personal statement with arrangements of objects and momentos on table tops and mantels.

The purchase of Victorian style offered Leocadie Aillet the consumption of a broader and more refined world outside of rural Louisiana. The settee and the curio were completely removed from the world of work; these items were not only foreign to the past of hand crafted utilitarian furnishings, but these new items were ubiquitous and created a material connection to other households. This connection to other households (Miller 1998) might be characterized as personal; both Leocadie Aillet and the wider public made choices of form, color, etc. based on their shared desires.

Incorporating the market items within the home created a whole new world, a sanctuary of the personal. To safeguard the items and the arrangements, access to the parlor was probably restricted and therefore seldom used. The parlor was “the best room” and thus many social gatherings took place on the front porch or in the informal dining room. Ms. Lejeune and Ms. Rodriguez (1993) recalled playing with two of Leocadie’s grandchildren during their summer visits, often whiling away the afternoon talking on the front screened-in porch. When the interviewer asked whether they would go inside ever, they seemed surprised. The parlor would have acted as a presentation area for weddings, sewing bees, and other uncommon events (McMurry 1988).

Was there an impetus to identify with the American dominant culture for purposes of status? Andrew Jackson Downing, an architectural pattern book author of pre Civil War picturesque ideals, claimed (1850: 97) that the “American cottager is no peasant, but thinks, and thinks correctly, that he can receive his guests with propriety, as well as his wealthiest neighbor.” The language is strong and probably signals the appeal of these products to immigrant
populations. Within Louisiana, it is noteworthy that class distinctions changed following the Civil War. Prior to the Civil War, Anatole’s immediate family was not part of the small planter class, but was struggling as yeoman farmers. By 1880, they purchased a very fine home that earlier would have been unobtainable. Whether Leocadie Aillet thought the parlor lent her a certain status among her peers will remain unknown. I like to imagine that she valued her parlor for its connection to a wider sphere than her peers in South Louisiana. Similar to prizing the possession of a passport without the intention of ever traveling, she might have prized the ability to sit alone in the parlor and imagine herself elsewhere.

In the consideration of Leocadie Aillet’s material culture, ethnic identifications were not considered, in favor of the individual’s response to mass market culture. With such a plethora of materials that are homogeneous with little variation, the choice of an object is puzzling, for what does it mean and how can these objects matter to a person if they are mass produced? Does an identification with mass produced goods imply that the person is American?

Of course, the understanding of how things matter is largely gained through ethnographic study or oral histories. I attempted to use the family interviews to such a purpose. Although there are problems with the use of the family interview, which claims knowledge of what mattered to a relative fifty years before, the insight gained of that world lends texture to our understanding of the past. I also recognize that a proper ethnography demands participant observation that should temper what people say matters with what their behavior leads the observer to understand what matters. That was impossible here. Nevertheless, I used the archaeological evidence and the social analysis of the house together with the oral history of the Aillets to interpret what mattered to Leocadie Aillet. This approach recognized that objects matter to their owners or bearers and thus contributed another insight into the identity of Leocadie Aillet.
Architecture and Identity

Unlike the house, which was portrayed as unique for its appointments and size when it was built seventy years before, the Aillet’s addition was not distinguished by its appearance. The Aillet’s floor plan (Gray 1992) was compared to that belonging to the Germain Bergeron house (Coleman and Gray 1995), an Acadian Cottage that completed extensive renovations, including a dining room and kitchen addition, c. 1845. The rooms of the addition were similar in size, the only difference was the shape of the rooms. The Bergeron rooms were rectangular in shape, whereas the Aillet rooms were squared. The difference between the two is insignificant, the shape would have affected only the available space in the dining room and the size of the dining room table. Built nearly 60 years prior, little variation existed in the style and accommodation of these rooms. This observation is supported by Edward’s (1985) survey of addition types that notes a variation primarily in the cardinal placement of the addition and the place of attachment to the building.

What is important is the fact that the Aillets did not reuse an existing building, rather they constructed the addition from new materials. At times, the old kitchen would be joined to the house, which certainly is a literal consolidation of the production sphere to the domestic sphere! The nineteenth century additions are considered vernacular structures and part of the French Creole tradition (Edwards 1985), despite the fact that the Creole material identity was devalued during the nineteenth century, a period marked by a hybridization of culture (Dawdy 2000a), a further blending, perhaps an erasure of some symbolic meaning. I mention this disconnect because it points out the impasse of clear material allegiance in the mid century. Although the addition may not resonate with ethnic meaning, it may still be considered as a regional, vernacular response to the social forces noted above.
Although one could argue that the Aillets identified with the Acadian aspect of the house since they utilized the space as a boys bedroom (Bohardt 1993), it would not be reasonable to suggest that this identification with the attic operated in the sense of a self-fashioning identity described in the earlier chapter. The Aillets inhabited the house, indeed their movements were constrained by the same features of the house (hallway, access from the gallery); however, they did not construct those features, and the function of the rooms changed with the added complex of kitchen and dining rooms. The way in which the Aillets viewed the rooms was certainly different because of segregated spaces and ideas about privacy, two issues that were discussed above. Thus, the importance of Creole material identity vs. Acadian material identity was perhaps not even recognized by the inhabitants.

Material continuities are an important consideration, and they are evident in the Aillet occupation. The use of the attic as a bedroom is one instance. The gallery was also used as an outdoor room in the Creole/Acadian manner. In fact, the attachment to socializing on the gallery was such that it was screened in sometime in the twentieth century to allow visiting in comfort. Despite the changed function and use of the two front salles, which prevented the open intimacy of the previous era, a modified use of the gallery was preserved.

**Conclusion**

Artifacts, family interviews, floor plans and room arrangements have drawn a personal account of Leocadie Aillet and a very different story from that of the Landrys. The concentration on consumption has taken us away, for the most part, from a focus on the vernacular. The material identity choices made by the Landrys were probably for group identification. Here, identity was achieved through negotiation with the market and with her own roles within the home, through arrangements of the personal and consumer goods within the parlor.
In the previous case study, material culture was used for the purpose of consolidation or prestige. “Material items are active symbols in broadcasting and even negotiating a person’s identity in culture contact situations—his or her social relations, political affiliations, and broader world views” (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995:485). The Landry house projected an identity that embraced new ideologies, and that represented a class particularly active because of its position between the traditional faction of the Cajuns and the successful planter class known as the Cajun Doré (Dormon 1983).

The mutability of identity that we saw in the previous chapter’s treatment of creolization is extended further in the Aillet’s identification with the parlor. I argued that although the furnishings were market wares, her personal touches were a way to change the face of homogeneity and infuse her fancy within the arrangements. She has made a personal room that shelters her in a way from the hubbub of eight children, while at the same time, connects her with a community of women similar to herself and relatively free of class distinction. In reference to the identity discussed in the previous chapter, a similar consideration of Leocadie as a negotiator of her identity through material culture is made, but perhaps the difference here is that Leocadie is in competition with herself, or with what she perceives as limitations.
Chapter V: The Historic House Museum

The absence of the modern addition and the addition of a fresh coat of paint took one hundred years off the life of the Aillet House. Once removed to the landscape of the museum, the history of the building and its identity as a French Creole Cottage were created. The inhabitants of the house constructed the home’s identity throughout its history. In the present, the caretakers of the house deconstructed it literally and figuratively before fashioning a new symbolism as a historic house museum. The museum built a new environment, restored the earliest appearance of the building, placed furniture and decorative arts in the rooms, and constructed the landscaped garden in front of the gallery. Thus in the late twentieth century, the Aillet House entered a new era as a historic house museum.

I would like to consider the museum interpretation, not in terms of its interior, landscape, or narrative, but in terms of the whole, the Aillet House as symbol and purpose. To erect a historic house museum invites the public to view life as it was lived in the past. The museum presents a social landscape that was once lived in and informs the visitor’s imagination regarding that past landscape so that the house becomes a symbol of the past in the present landscape. This kind of symboling may be viewed as social memory. But a question arises when public interpretation bumps up against social memory—who creates such memories?

Social Memory and Symbolic Identity

The term social memory is a conflated term with different applications in the social sciences and humanities; I use the term in reference to the museum’s efforts to impact the community with a permanent exhibit, the Aillet House. In that exhibit, the museum seeks to sustain the community’s identification with the rural lifeways of the past. How far can the preservation of the building be said to reflect the desires of the community? If Dow and the
Historical Association represent the community, then the museum is sustaining a social memory. If not, the museum could be said to create the social memory. Why is the distinction important? Climo and Cattell (2002:4) comment on the somewhat tenuous hold a memory can have on a community when they describe a social or collective memory as provisional, malleable, and contingent. Obviously, were the memory sustained by the community, rather than created by and contingent on the museum, the memory would resonate within the community.

You may remember that at the time of the house’s acquisition, the WBRHA spoke of their desire to make the museum a monument to the daily lives of early Parish residents (WBR Museum 1968-2004). Who is deciding what the stories are? What form of research is conducted for material for these stories, and for what purpose? It is imperative that the museum act more self-consciously and reflexively if it is to communicate the symbol of the Aillet House effectively. It is social groups that determine what is memorable (Burke 1989:98). Therefore, community involvement should help determine what is significant about the Aillet House and the families, as well as what is worthy of memory.

The Aillet House might be considered as a monument exclusively on the grounds of its location on museum grounds; its appearance is certainly not imposing or grand. It looks like an “old-timey house,” a quality not often associated with a monument. The Aillet House is a vernacular house and, in my view, represents the cultural and social history of the early residents of Acadian descent in that region. The Aillet House as monument works because community events, including Sugar Fest and other holiday celebrations, commemorate the past with living history activities both within the museum buildings and on the museum grounds.

Historic structures may be resources for shaping and promoting collective memories, but what we make of these resources is up to us. Public interpretation must be guided by an
understanding of what its focus is and to whom it is directed (Jameson 1997). There is an opportunity here to empower the Cajun and African American communities to participate in a critical evaluation of the past as presented at the Aillet House. The public should help create the themes of the exhibit, given that they directly relate to the community. The Aillet House, like any community symbol, has the power to either cohere or divide the community over the museum’s depiction of the past. Social responsibility in this context goes well beyond any mission statement. It speaks to the trust that the West Baton Rouge Parish community gave to the museum as a public institution charged with collecting the past for future generations and interpreting the past in meaningful ways for West Baton Rouge Parish.

Whether the Aillet House is viewed as a monument of architectural tradition or rural home life, or as one of several exhibits at the West Baton Rouge museum, the house does represent a historical period and a way of life that is part of the community’s past. The details of the representation are still to be determined in my view, pending, I hope, increased community involvement. Ideas for themes and other contexts for examination were provided in this thesis as opportunities for change and community empowerment.

Since this project began, the museum has welcomed the insights of anthropology in their interpretation of the Aillet House. I embarked on this investigation in order to provide social and historical contexts for public interpretation efforts. The museum has completed a good deal of research on Aillet and Landry family histories and furnishings, yet I believe more of this rich information can be infused in the narrative or story presented during tours of the house. In light of my goal to develop an exhibit that complements the museum’s interpretive program, I considered it necessary to judge the strengths of the exhibits within the Aillet House as well as the weaknesses, which would give me an indication of material to highlight in my proposed
exhibit. The museum staff was very generous with their time and their files. The director and her staff welcomed suggestions for improvement out of recognition that interpretation needs to change to remain relevant. A critique of both the presentation of the interiors and the narrative of the tour follow.

**Current Interpretation of the Historic House Museum**

I toured the Aillet House five times in the company of one school group and adult groups. Three different guides led the tour, and each stressed different elements, meaning that the script is not memorized. My critique will concentrate on the social and historical presentation of the house and will not comment on the performance of the tour guides. I will critique the presentation of the landscape, and the interpretation of each room given during the tour’s sweep through the house, moving from the front rooms to the back rooms. First under consideration is the parlor, then I will pass into the second salle or front room, visit the adjoining cabinet and then pass through the front rooms to reach the enclosed hallway and second cabinet situated behind the parlor. As a general overview, the furniture of the house provided the coherence to the story; the lives of the Landrys and the Aillets were explained by showing the function of a few furnishings in each room. I yearned for more details of family life and the larger contexts of regional economic and political history to make sense of family events. I will begin with my great preoccupation in this project, namely, the description of the Aillet House as a French Creole Cottage.

During the approach to the house, various architectural elements that define French Creole architecture are mentioned: the raised structure, the gallery, the French doors, and the doorways from the gallery to the interior. The audience is then told that the French Creole Cottage was built by a family of Acadian descent in 1830. The confusion of architectural
classification and ethnicity is not addressed in the tour’s narrative. As noted in this promotion piece from the Louisiana Office of Tourism, the description of an architectural tradition or style is often understood as a marker of the occupants’ ethnicity. “The Historical Association created a living monument honoring the French Creoles who raised their families in the territory of Louisiana” (Louisiana Office of Tourism 1991).

The Aillet House strikes a refined pose on the grounds adjacent to the museum with the Allendale Cabin to its rear. The stretch of lawn and the landscaped path directly in front of the house create a genteel garden impression comparable to the ordered landscape of the grand plantations (Bacot 1997). In fact, the house originally sat 20-25 m. from the road and would have had a fenced front enclosure likely crowded with flowers and vegetables. Although the grounds are not described as a historic setting on the tour, the landscape creates a strong impression that is out of context. The gravel walk that encircles a sugar kettle surrounded by a bed of iris (Figure 24) is attractive but this rendition of a garden utilizes symbols which are inappropriate. The sugar kettle surrounded by flowers strikes me as a metaphor for a nostalgic view of the past, a nostalgia on display in many suburban yards in Louisiana.

Inside the house, the first room we enter is the parlor, described as the room used for social gatherings. My first reaction is, “where are the chairs?” Property conveyance records listing inventories and sheriff sales make it clear that houses in early 19th century had many chairs. Typically, the north salle or parlor, hallway and gallery witnessed a great deal of activity. As morning shifted into afternoon and then evening, chairs and other furniture shifted to accommodate changing activities (Seale 1979:48). Chairs would have been added or subtracted from rooms to suit the changing number of bodies.
Figure 24: The approach to the Aillet House along the gravel path.

Figure 25: The parlor’s center table.
This fluidity between rooms contrasts sharply with the formal air of the Aillet House parlor. Few incidentals items are placed in the front room. In a central activity area, children would have been present, yet all the toys and paraphrenalia associated with young children are relegated to the girls’ bedroom. The ubiquitous central table (Figure 25) is set with two place settings. The number of settings begs the question of dining practice. Why are there only two settings for a family of six? Because of the dangers of theft, the gallery is not furnished with chairs and incidentals such as toys that would have been found in this “living room.” Thus, it seems doubly important to give an impression with such pieces in the parlor where the family would have gathered daily.

Next, we pass in to the master bedroom, which is the most engaging room in the tour because the furnishings elicit comparisons to current everyday practices. The mosquito netting surrounding the bed has several mends in the fabric and prompts comparisons to our current American habits of consumption. The two doors in the room provide ventilation and are described as the early nineteenth century’s alternative to air-conditioning. Information about the chamber pot and privy use is the highlight of the tour for the younger audience.

During the tour, a few items in the Landry bedroom evoked “insider” descriptions of Leocadie Aillet’s habits. Family interviews were gathered as an archive in the 90s and are sometimes used as a source for anecdotal descriptions. Visitors hear about Leocadie Aillet’s use of the armoire as a changing station (Mora, family interview, 1993). Rosary beads on a side table prompt the mention of her devotion to the Catholic faith (Bohardt 1993). Insider information is very valuable to public interpretation and greater use of the interview material might give a louder voice to the past occupants of the house.
Next we move to the Aillet period rooms in the rear of the house. Our first stop is in the girls’ bedroom tucked behind the master bedroom. Many children’s toys are placed on the floor where they are visible from the roped off doorway. It thus seems incongruous for the guide to describe the bedroom suite as one belonging to Mrs. Leocadie Aillet. Each time I took the tour, this room was described as the girls’ room because access was available only through the parents’ bedroom. The rear bedroom was another enjoyable stop in the tour because it generated a discussion among the visitors of current family arrangements and parenting.

The last room on the tour is the second rear cabinet room. (As we pass through the enclosed hall to reach the room, mention is made of the attic bedroom but it is closed to tours for reasons of public safety.) The smallest of the rooms, this rear cabinet is a multi-purpose room. In one section, the wall plaster is cut away to display insulating and plastering techniques used in construction of these early houses. There is a sideboard, a washing machine, and a display case featuring early and late hardware used in the house, segments of the original balustrade, and results of paint analysis to determine interior and exterior wall treatments. Pictures of the Aillet family also adorn the walls. The displays make this my favorite room on the tour.

Reflecting on the tour, I longed for unifying themes to give me a greater sense of what these families experienced on the plantation. I trust that the furniture selected for the exhibits, albeit gathered from many sources, was indeed in use in the 19th century among middle class farmers. Perhaps part of the problem is that the story is in many ways a general purpose story. By all appearances, the two families lived in the house similarly. Overall, there is not a clear distinction between the families, perhaps because there is no discussion of change. The Aillet’s contribution to the house (the addition, which incorporated many functions, including a bathroom) would have illustrated some meaningful changes, yet its preservation was not
considered important. The exclusion of this tangible evidence of the Aillet’s occupation
demands that their lives be written into the narrative more completely. One example of how
that might be done would be to describe the change in use of a single room. The parlor was a
multi-function area during the Landry era, particularly in the winter months when social
activities and household chores could not take place on the gallery. On the other hand, room
layouts as described in the Aillet family interview archive illustrate a change in aesthetic and
behavior. At the turn of the century, the Aillets decorated the parlor with formal settee and
chair arrangements, indicating increased consumption and a self-conscious sense of leisure
(Seale 1979:49).

There is a need here for a more dynamic and pointed interpretation, one that utilizes
economic and social histories of the region to draw distinctions between the lives of the two
families. For instance, the narrative could address differences in antebellum and postbellum
economies. The Landrys made their wealth by developing their land during a sugar boom,
whereas the Aillets made their only documented income by selling their land during a timber
boom (COB 8, folio 439). These two economic booms are divided in time by the Civil War, an
event that profoundly changed the way of life of the small sugar farmer. Another area of neglect
within the current narrative touches on the regional variant of Acadian social history. The
Acadians within the planter society of the riverine parishes drew class distinctions in order to
elevate their status above their cousins on the coast and the prairie (Dormon 1983:242). To
situate the Landrys in this exciting tableau of status and design would enrich the historical
context of the Aillet House and distinguish the history of West Baton Rouge Parish. A
researched understanding of the Landry’s means of living, including details such as #
hogshead/year, # slaves, total landholdings, # of partners and how these activities compared to
activities on larger plantations would offer a substantive portrait of the family. “Museums have a responsibility for the broad social implications of what they present, as well as for the accuracy and clarity of the particular subject with which they are dealing” (Chappell 1989:247).

Archaeology is recognized within the museum community as a vital collaborator. Archaeology is often valued for the artifacts that authenticate the interiors of house museums (Seale 1979:7-11), for the excavation results that are used to guide the restoration, reconstruction and furnishing of history museums (Busch 1990:7), and for its examination of historical, social, and cultural contexts that illuminate historical and cultural themes (De Cunzo 1990:2-3). Another strong suit of archaeology as it bears on museum interpretation is its impulse to complicate presented themes and flesh out the stories of the neglected. “While many museums and historic sites seem to be concerned with the presentation of a frequently static, well-understood past that reflects the achievements of a specific period—and frequently a particular section of society—as part of a national inheritance...modern archaeology is more concerned with questioning the validity of any interpretations or presentations of the past” (Stone 1994:16).

Recognition that the past is not to be owned by any group and that an understanding of the past changes over time (so that interpretation must necessarily change), opens the past and the scruples of anyone’s view of the past to probing. Interpretation must involve the public because it is the community’s understanding of the past that composes our heritage and carries it forward. The museum’s public is the WBRHA, the community’s interest groups, and the museum’s many visitors. The museum has therefore many opportunities to involve the public on three levels. The West Baton Rouge Historical Association is already quite involved (WBR Museum 1968-2004). Involving the community and the visitor is a continuing imperative.
Correcting the wrongs of neglect in the historical record often lead to challenges that do not sit well with conservative museum patrons. The interpretation of slavery is particularly sensitive. For example, the Landrys were slave owners; however, details about the slaves’ lives, their environment, and their contribution to Landry’s success are scarcely mentioned. The tour of the Allendale Cabin c. 1850 describes the life and household practices of the “plantation worker,” thereby skirting a more realistic portrayal. Often post-emancipation African Americans lived in the same cabins and many of them continued to work on the plantation as before the Civil War. Here is an opportunity to discuss change and continuity in this oppressive economic system (Chappell 1999:250). Not much is known about the relationship between small planters and slaves. An understanding of social and work relations on small farms would cohere the exhibits at the Allendale Cabin and the Aillet House. Perhaps the sensitivity of the subject has deterred such an interpretation. Regarding the concern that the topic of slavery is divisive and may trouble those who believe the community should move beyond its tortured past, I offer the challenge of social responsibility. Insofar as history museums aim to represent the community, they have an obligation to present a history inclusive of everyone within the community (Bograd and Singleton 1997:204).

Thus far I have addressed what I consider the needs of the museum interpretation of the Aillet House. I have described some of the reflections of an anthropologist keen on context and social history. I have also addressed the responsibility that any public interpretation has toward the silenced or marginalized people of the past, including the minorities, women, and the poor. I would now like to turn to the plans in development between the museum and the author, as it is an opportunity to realize materially some of the issues considered on paper in this thesis.
Proposed Aillet House Museum Exhibit

The exhibit is scheduled for September 10 through December 31, 2005 and the working title and description is as follows:

Looking Inside Out and Through: Interpreting Cultural Identity and Change at the Aillet House

Architectural floor plans, artifacts, interviews and photos are used in this exhibit to interpret how the house was lived in by each of the two principal families who resided there, the Landrys prior to the Civil War and the Aillets near the turn of the century. Architectural modifications and discarded household goods detail decisions and practices that affirmed their cultural identity both domestically and socially.

Several goals have been discussed with the museum. I anticipate that the exhibit will gain a more narrow focus in the next month or so, after which time, the objectives will also gain a sharper focus.

- Involve anthropological insights in the interpretation of the house museum by including archaeological artifacts in the interpretive collection and by illustrating cultural space;
- Describe the vernacular as modification—improvisational and slightly idiosyncratic—which allows a particular and personal view into the past;
- Explore the theme of cultural identification: how is material culture used as cultural symbols, and what does it mean to say a house is Creole or Cajun, i.e. how is architecture analyzed and how is identity interpreted;
- Interpret the modifications to the house in a cultural context and as integral to the story of this historic house;
Discuss the change in occupation of/at the house: change in families, change in political and economic era, and change in house and landscape.

The exhibit is still in the planning stage; logistical and design decisions still need to be worked out with input from the museum staff. The current plan suggests that the display will be composed of floor plans that relate the Aillet House to contemporary Creole and Cajun Cottages; artifacts that detail one activity area off the back porch, related to the Aillet addition erected circa 1900; interviews that corroborate both the utility of rooms and social life at the house; and photos of the family and of the region that illustrate the impact of political and technological changes on the inhabitants of the Aillet House. The exhibit will utilize one kiosk, two panels incorporating interactive modules and two display cases. In addition, one roped area delineating the floor plan of the kitchen, dining room, and porch will serve as an experiential exhibit of domestic space.
Chapter VI: Conclusion

Over the years, the Aillet House endured two transformations at the hands of the two Acadian heritage families who occupied it. A third transformation occurred when the house was donated to the West Baton Rouge Parish Museum, at which time it was reinvented as a French Creole Cottage. I examined each of these transformations to the house and have considered the relationship of material identity and ethnic identity at each stage. The Landry family constructed the house and presented a complex of material identities that attested to the social conflicts in which it was immersed immediately prior to the Civil War. Next, the Aillet family took possession of the house where upon the importance of ethnic identity was eclipsed by the effects of modernization on the structure, function, and in some ways, the use of the house. Finally, the West Baton Rouge Parish Museum acquired the house and developed its identity as a French Creole Cottage. In its first two stages, distinctive material identities were found within the house. Personal identity was considered first through the vernacular responses to Dorville Landry’s impulse to distinguish himself as a planter. Secondly Leocadie Aillet negotiated a very personal identity in response to her participation with mass market culture.

The West Baton Rouge Parish Museum’s interpretation of the house as a French Creole Cottage compelled me to engage in a collaboration with them. I intended to provide the museum with an anthropological interpretation of the house for public presentation and exhibit. Given that the archaeology could not address an interpretation of either the house or its inhabitants in a meaningful way, I chose another focus within material culture to address culture change and social identity. I employed vernacular architecture, a spatial analysis of the house, and insider accounts (from the family interviews) to interpret social use and material identification of the two families.
The overarching theme of this thesis has been the contribution anthropology can make to a historic house museum. Generally, that contribution is context, more particularly, a social history that ties family events to social and political forces. Against such a backdrop, cultural changes resonate with additional meaning. The implications of these changes are often detected within material culture, and in this case, were addressed within the Aillet house. For example, the activities in the front salle/parlor changed from the Landry occupation of 1830 to the early twentieth century. The function of the room, use of the room, even the perception of the room, changed over time. A social history and social analysis of the house documented that Dorville Landry was a small planter, and this knowledge allowed us greater understanding of the material identities expressed in his house. A spatial analysis, together with a family history allowed some insight into Leocadie Aillet’s choice of furnishings and her behavior within the parlor.

The social history illustrated the ethnogenesis of the Cajun people by focusing on the lives of these two families spanning the years from their expulsion from Acadia to their successful adaptations to Louisiana. The familiar portrait of the Acadians as a group emphasizes the challenges faced by the more conservative factions in the west Louisiana frontier, that remained relatively isolated until the 1970s. By contrast, the Landrys and the Aillets were farmers along the Mississippi River, and consequently were exposed to the influence of outsiders. At the time of their occupation of the Aillet House, the Landrys were members of the small planter class, a class that was distinguished from the yeoman farmer class by virtues of wealth and a dynamic display of material identities. The Aillets were portrayed as members of the yeomanry prior to the Civil War, after which time Anatole Aillet and his family lived, for the most part, outside the reach of historical records. For this reason, the insights of material culture
and the oral history of the Aillet family become a valuable means to understand how their life was different from the Landrys.

The identity of the house was considered as it served as a short hand for directing my research on identity. Was this an Acadian Cottage or a French Creole Cottage? The Landry’s house is an Acadian Cottage because of several defining architectural features and because of the use of space within the home. It is not a creolized form despite the many adaptive features of this house for the Creoles did not adopt any features known as Acadian. Among other features, the gallery and pier supports were modifications of the Acadian house type originally constructed in Louisiana. The gabled roof was a feature culturally significant to the Acadians; however the roof was also part of the French Creole architectural palette and was in use atop New Orleans cottages before the arrival of the Acadians in Louisiana. Even so, the cottage was distinctively Acadian because of the attic bedroom allowed by its expansive roof. The Acadian Cottage attained an enduring popularity in South Louisiana due to assimilation and diffusion. While the house is the only material evidence that carries any real weight in this exploration of cultural change, the evidence suggests that the Acadians’ material and cultural influence on others was negligible in this period, probably due to the fact of their relatively late arrival in colonial Louisiana and their concentrated settlement within somewhat isolated rural areas.

A social analysis of the house identified an open intimacy during the Landry years that is consistent with Acadian as well as French Creole social values. I also located features that suggested an Acadian ideology: an open visibility within the front rooms, a concentration of activities toward the front of the house, and an attic space used as a bedroom. Overall, however, there was a strong identification with the material identities of French Creole and American
cultures. This blending of material identities supports the view that the Landrys were very consciously transforming their identity in order that they might fit in with an elevated class.

The unfolding power of both America and its market, and their effects from the Purchase onwards, are seen in the Aillet’s tenure at the house. American ascendancy brought with it a spirit of modernization quite different from the spirit of innovation at work during colonial and antebellum times. The Landry period was marked by shifting material identities, as well as by distinctions drawn between the presentation of ethnic allegiances and Acadian cultural stability. During the Aillet period, many materials that once held symbolic meaning may well have lost their power to convey meaning in the face of the modern market and the desire for mass produced materials. The use of the house also underwent significant changes with the addition of a kitchen and dining room and the consequent shift in room function. For example, an American focus on privacy was manifest in the house. Despite these changes, continuities, which crossed the lines of class or economic status, were detected. The Aillets continued to use the attic space as a sleeping chamber. Also, despite the displacement of the center of activity from the front of the house to the back dining room, the uses of the gallery as a socializing space and sometime sleeping area were preserved.

In the twentieth century, the West Baton Rouge Parish Museum recreated the identity of the house after it was donated as an open air gallery. The historic house is interpreted to reflect both the Landry and Aillet occupations with preference given to the Landry’s occupation as it was the nascent period, which was adjudged at the time to be the “authentic period.” The Aillet House is intended as a monument to nineteenth century life in West Baton Rouge Parish. As such the museum’s community events and living history programs are conducted on the grounds of the Aillet House.
As a guardian of social memory, the museum has a responsibility to create exhibits and conduct tours that are engaging, accurate and inclusive of all historical voices. In view of this, I have recommended that the museum become involved with interest groups so that, for example, African Americans of the Parish become participants in the story that depicts their historical role as an enslaved people and later as tenant farmers. Recognizing that changes are necessary if interpretations are to remain relevant to the changing lives of community residents, the museum has undertaken its own initiative to update the tour of the Aillet House. For similar reasons, the museum has been supportive of this study.

In the work that lies ahead of me, I intend to heed the advice of Adrian Praetzellis. Concerning the public’s interest in the past, he wrote, “It is up to us [archaeologists] to give them [the public] something in which they can be interested” (2002:53). In recognition of this responsibility, I am in planning sessions with the museum to develop an exhibit that is complementary to their ongoing interpretation program. I hope to recreate the kitchen and dining room addition of the Aillet House as an experiential exhibit with a roped in floor plan that will allow visitors to step into the confines of these rooms. It is intended that the visitor will obtain a sense of how transparent and binding our perceptions of cultural spaces are. Also, the vernacular of the Aillet period of the house will be on display in an exhibit of photos, family interviews, and artifacts. While ethnicity was examined in this thesis, and while that discussion provided an example of how the use of material culture trumps descriptive categories of ethnicity; nonetheless, it is difficult to tell a lucid story of ambiguities. Rather, I think demonstrations of change between occupations would illustrate both the historical period and the personal experiences of the Landry and Aillet families in the house. Changes in the use of the house affected how work was accomplished and by whom, which in turn impacted personal identity.
To tell the story of the Landrys and Aillets through material culture, I hope to appeal to the visitors’ self interests, and invite them to consider how they construct their own identities, how others might perceive them, and what affect those perceptions might have on their behavior.
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Vita

Kelli Ostrom was raised in the Midwest, and she fled at the first opportunity. Since graduating with a bachelor of arts degree from St. John’s College in Annapolis, Maryland, she has resided below the Mason-Dixon line. Ostrom will receive her master of arts degree in May, 2005, after which she will continue gainful employment as a historical archaeologist.