



Godchaux-Reserve Plantation House

Alone, abandoned and left to the elements, the Godchaux-Reserve House sits on the corner of River Road and West 10th Street in Reserve.

Though time and nature have taken their toll, the Godchaux-Reserve House Historical Society is on a mission to breathe new life into one of the oldest buildings — not only in St. John the Baptist Parish — but in Louisiana.

Built around 1764 by Jean Baptiste and Marie Therese Laubel, the home changed hands many times before Leon Godchaux purchased the debt on the property in 1869 and began rebuilding the once prosperous plantation.

Godchaux, a Jewish immigrant who centralized sugar refining and developed a narrow gauge railway system leading to his sugar refinery in Reserve, provided the Godchaux-Reserve House as a home for workers at the refinery.

The plan is to restore the house and turn it into a museum. People have already begun to donate pictures and sugar kettles. We are in the process of recovering other artifacts.”

The history of the sugar industry is only one part of Reserve’s heritage to be exhibited in the proposed museum. Also featured will be the stories of other former owners of the house.

Jean Baptiste Fleming and Jeanette Teinter, free people of color, purchased the house in 1815 and owned it six years before selling to Francois and Elisee Rillieux, also free people of color.

The Rillieux brothers — whose cousin, Norbert, invented the multiple effect vacuum process that revolutionized the processing of sugar cane — substantially expanded the Reserve Plantation.

In 1833, it was sold to Antoine Boudousquie, who operated the plantation until his death in 1855. His wife Sophie was eventually forced into bankruptcy by the difficulties brought about by the Civil War, at which point Godchaux purchased the plantation. By 1893 he owned more than thirty thousand acres on twelve plantations. He had his own sugar refinery which employed hundreds of local people.

In 1909 President William Howard Taft, on a steamboat trip down the Mississippi River to study ways of improving the river, gave a speech from the top gallery of this house.

Hopefully, much of the history of Reserve will be preserved in the Godchaux-Reserve House as the stories of the community are told, retold and remembered.

Godchaux-Reserve Historical Society news article by Ronny Michel dated 4/15/2015

<http://www.godchauxhouse.com/>