



# A COSMOPOLITAN ALLUVIUM

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These seven and a half acres are among the newest parts of the world. The top layer of soil that crunches beneath your feet as you walk among the water oaks probably arrived about the time that Joe Carmichael was born in 1927. Yet the place is thick with history. The tree roots reach into layers of sediment carried from the Rockies and the Alleghenies and everywhere between, over millennia, by the Mississippi River’s spring floods. It is a cosmopolitan alluvium.

All human inhabitants of this place have had to adapt to land and water always in motion. Native Americans here cultivated maize, beans, and squash. They fished and shellfished, hunted deer, bear, and turkey, and traveled the waterways in dugout canoes, often made of bald cypress. Native Americans near this bend in the river included Washa and Chawasha people, who probably spoke Chitimachan languages, as well as Bayougoulas, who were speakers of a Muskogean language that was shared by many other people in the region. Some of those original inhabitants called the river *bulbansha*, meaning place for foreign languages.

When the French arrived in the early eighteenth century, they named the territory “Louisiana,” and this peninsula “Twelve Mile Point.” The stretch of river that curved around it they called “English Turn,” because in 1700, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville’s bluff prompted the British fleet to retreat from this point, changing the course of empire.

The Company of the West parceled out land concessions along Twelve Mile Point. They were long lots with narrow frontages on the river, which resolved into the swampy lowlands away from the natural levee. By the late 1720s, this parcel had come into the possession of Paul Barré, a native of Montreal. He arrived with his wife, Marie-Jeanne Girardy, and four people they held as slaves. An inventory of



Barré's property, created after his death in 1761, names two enslaved men in particular: Michel and Triton. Identified as skilled carpenters, they may have helped to build the first structures here.

In 1786, Barré's son sold the property to Santiago Larche, a Spanish veteran of the American Revolution, who in 1801 sold the plantation to François Dusuau de la Croix, a portrait artist and native of Saint-Domingue, who recently had fled that island's revolution.

Over the next six decades, the Delacroix Plantation became one of the largest sugar plantations in the region. In 1813, Dusuau de la Croix purchased 44 enslaved people from a white man in Natchez, and inherited forty more. By 1860, there were 94 enslaved people laboring on Delacroix plantation. They probably were among the thousands who fled rural areas for New Orleans as the Union Army arrived in 1862. Their freedom upended Louisiana's sugar industry, and Dusuau's son Gustave died in 1866, \$50,000 in debt. The plantation was soon seized by creditors.

Subsequent owners' attempts to grow rice and sugar found limited success, and the property eventually grew over enough to hide a moonshine distillery – at least until a 1930 raid uncovered 10,000 gallons of mash and an 8 horse-power boiler, which had helped stock New Orleanians' liquor cabinets during Prohibition. In the 1940s, the land was parceled into residential and small farming lots. This one lay fallow until 1969, when Lucianne and Joe Carmichael purchased it.

They encountered a spot at once ancient and new: a place of wealth and terror, intersection of empires and refuge of revolutionaries, a quiet place at the center of the world.

\*Additional research for this piece was conducted by John Bardes, Ph.D. Candidate, and Christopher B. Rodning, Tulane University Professor in the Department of Anthropology

