

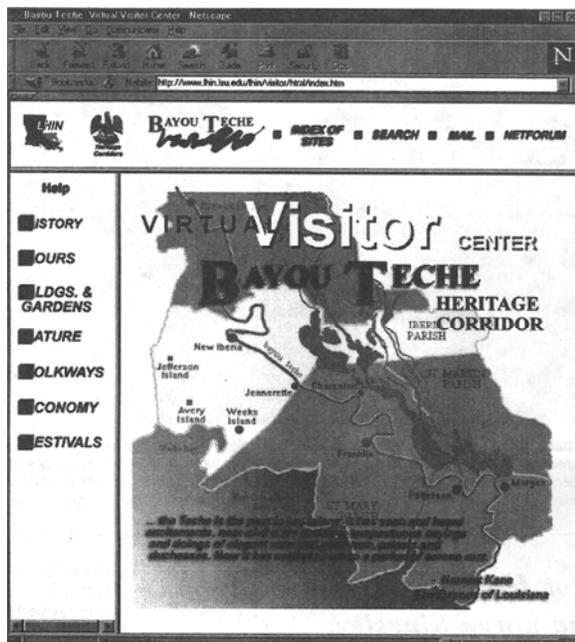
# Historic Preservation Online: The Louisiana Heritage InfoNet - Part I

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At a time when the Lower Mississippi Delta Region is losing significant parts of its cultural heritage, and the social and economic fabric of communities is threatened by a variety of forces, there is growing pressure on preservation educators, administrators, and professionals to find meaningful ways to promote heritage awareness. The prospects for addressing increasingly complex conservation challenges through emerging information technologies open up a world of promising possibilities which preservationists are only just beginning to explore.

Imagine a travel enthusiast browsing a World Wide Web (WWW) site on the Internet by interacting with digital maps and discovering an evocative Louisiana scene seemingly not of this century that fuels a desire to bundle the family into the minivan for what promises to be an out-of-country experience. A worried homeowner, remembering that only sheer luck spared his property from the wrath of Hurricane Andrew, is relieved to find a site containing easy-to-understand information about hurricane preparedness and recovery, in addition to up-to-date weather forecasts and satellite imagery. Or another, perhaps an architecture history scholar, seeking access to detailed drawings of Classical Revival plantation homes, rapidly retrieves dimensioned, annotated plans and elevations of a nineteenth-century landmark, saving months of effort. Or a musician, browsing the Internet for information about Delta traditions, selects audio clips of classic Cajun instrumental recordings and, within seconds, is two-steppin' to the chanky-chank strains of Cyprien Landreneau's accordian on a southwest Louisiana Saturday night. Still another, studying coastal ecosystems, navigates from a display of satellite images of salt domes rising above surrounding marshes to a photographic tour of the wild and scenic Atchafalaya Basin. Welcome to the Louisiana Heritage InfoNet (LHIN), a venture into the future of heritage conservation.

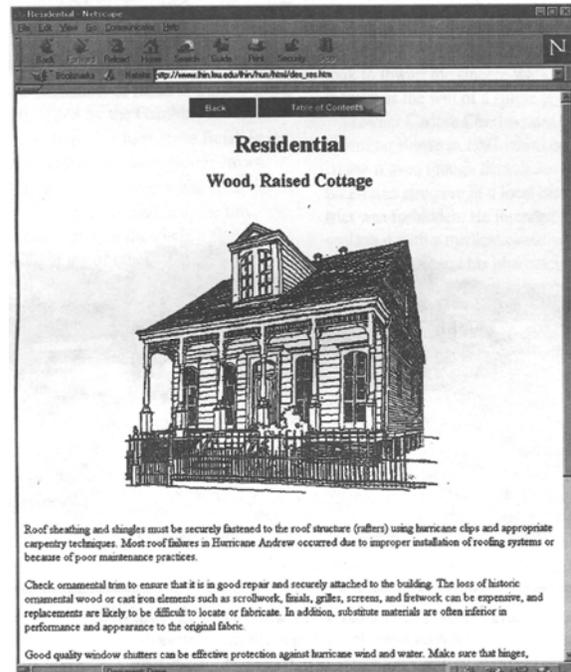
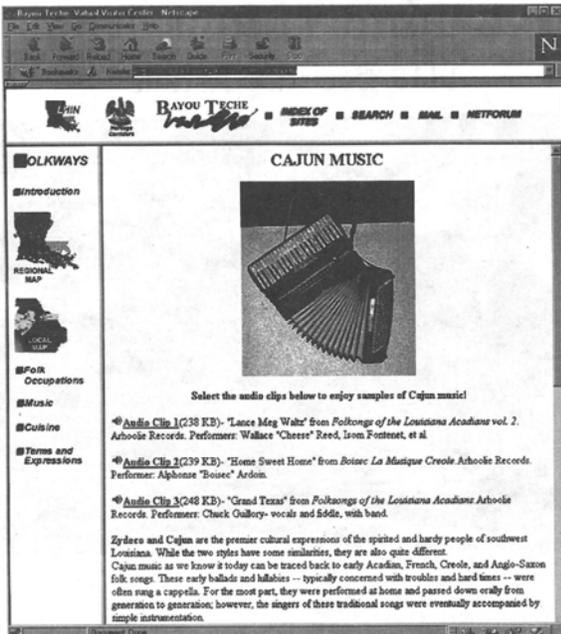
The LHIN, an initiative of the Office of Community Preservation (OCP) at Louisiana State University, is an Internet-based information system for gathering, managing, and disseminating



information about the natural and cultural heritage of south Louisiana. Established in 1992 and housed in the LSU School of Architecture, the OCP supports historic preservation teaching and research, Historic American Building Survey projects, computer visualization applications using CAD, 3-D modeling, and image processing, and an outreach program providing preservation assistance to Louisiana communities. The LHIN represents an ongoing effort to explore how emerging computer-based technologies can be adapted to enhance historic preservation efforts in Louisiana and the Lower Mississippi Delta Region. The project is expanding the service, research, and teaching capabilities of the OCP by developing prototypes for World Wide Web (WWW) accessible information systems tailored to serve heritage conservation needs.

Through research sponsored in part by the Louisiana Education Quality Support Fund (LEQSF), the OCP has acquired computer equipment and software to support the basic heritage information acquisition, processing, and dissemination needs of the LHIN. The design and development of prototype information units for the LHIN has been funded by a variety of sources, including the National Park Service, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Institute for Conservation, and the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism. The LHIN, which is located at <http://www.lhin.lsu.edu>, contains a variety of developmental units including:

- *Hurricane! Are You Ready for the Next One?* with hurricane preparedness and recovery tips, located at <http://www.lhin.lsu.edu/lhin/hurr/html/index.htm>
- *Louisiana Historic American Building Survey* for access to HABS drawings and photographs, located at <http://www.lhin.lsu.edu/lhin/html/habs.htm>
- *Louisiana Landmarks* for retrieving National Historic Landmark and National Register of Historic Places property profiles, located at <http://landmarks.lsu.edu>
- *Atchafalaya Basin* for viewing photographs of Louisiana's most remote riverine landscape, located at <http://www.lhin.lsu.edu/lhin/atchafa/index.htm>
- *Louisiana SOS!* for retrieving data about the Save Outdoor Sculpture! surveys of publicly accessible art, located at <http://www.sos.lsu.edu>



As a demonstration of the potential the Internet offers for promoting heritage education and tourism, the OCP recently developed an information delivery model called the Bayou Teche Virtual Visitor Center (VVC) as a unit of the LHIN. The VVC, which was funded through a grant awarded by the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCPTT), is an experiment in the electronic interpretation of the unique Bayou Teche Heritage Corridor. As a WWW site, the VVC aspires to become an information repository that will help Teche communities promote social and economic development through heritage education.

The VVC site, which can be accessed using a Netscape 2.0 or Microsoft Internet Explorer 3.0 (or later) browser, contains electronic exhibits that use text, graphics (still images and movies), and audio to describe the multi-faceted natural and cultural history of the Bayou Teche region. A visitor can review a chronological history of the Teche, traverse the site through interactive maps, display images of historic architecture or satellite views of the region, and retrieve detailed drawings of significant structures such as Shadows-on-the-Teche. The VVC also contains links to other WWW sites that contain complementary information about such topics as the region's music, food, and festivals.

The importance of the Virtual Visitor Center initiative to Louisiana is underscored by the positive social and economic effects of heritage conservation and the impact of heritage resources on tourism, which is expected to become Louisiana's number one industry by year 2000. In the face of this rapidly developing economic trend, there is an as yet unresolved need to adequately protect and conserve the state's irreplaceable heritage of internationally significant historic buildings and sites, many of which are threatened by uninformed management decisions, poor maintenance practices, and natural disasters.

In addition to emphasizing the importance of local traditions and memories in determining the sustainability of Teche communities, the VVC represents a study of Information Age technologies which have radically changed modes of communication, learning, and social behavior. The 1990s may eventually be viewed in retrospect as a period of historic transformation, when Louisiana's social and political institutions had the opportunity to develop the means to manipulate powerful information management tools to build stronger communities. At such a pivotal time, information providers and processors hold the key to the future of our irreplaceable cultural heritage. For its part, the LSU/OCP is trying to develop appropriate Information Age applications that will facilitate heritage conservation, education, and planning, and by doing so, help ensure that the fabric of Louisiana's past will continue to play an integral role in the *haute couture* of our future.

For more information about the Louisiana Heritage InfoNet, the Bayou Teche Virtual Visitor Center, and other Internet-based initiatives of the OCP, contact <http://www.lhin.lsu.edu>.

(LSU School of Architecture graduate students Andrew Ferrell, Jayant Swamy, and Sudeep Dey contributed to this article.)

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