



Prud'homme store in the Oakland Plantation.



Red River.

Canadian Connections

Down South

Oakland Plantation.

Discover Louisiana's other half

By Wendy and Rob Lindsay

Northern Louisiana is a vibrant, historically rich, hospitable part of the state often overshadowed by New Orleans, Shreveport's flashy sister on the coast. Who knew that Shreveport was where Elvis got his start or that Natchitoches (pronounced Nack-a-tish) had French-Canadian connections? Who knew there would be so

many friendly folks and so much great food? In 1713, five years before New Orleans was founded, French-Canadian explorer Louis Antoine Juchereau de St. Denis, a native of Beaufort, QC, was making his way down the Red River (not the one in Manitoba) to Mexico. He stopped by a Natchitoches Indian village on the banks of

the river, built a couple of huts, and left behind a small detachment of men to guard the goods and to trade with the locals. The next year, he was back to establish a more permanent settlement, the first permanent European settlement in what would later be called the Louisiana Purchase. Two years later, in 1718, a small company of colonial

troops were sent to expand their presence and build an outpost to prevent the Spanish forces in Texas from advancing into the French territory. This strategic outpost was named for a French patron saint and the local native tribe: Fort St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches. That original French-Canadian colony grew into the present day city of Natchitoches, a 120-kilometre (75-mile) drive from Shreveport.

Southern Women
You may have seen Natchitoches without realizing it, for it was the setting for the award-winning 1989 movie *Steel Magnolias*, with Sally Field, Dolly Parton, and Shirley MacLaine. When Robert Harling lost his younger sister, Susan, to complications of diabetes, he channelled his grief into writing a play celebrating the legendary strength and friendship of Southern women that

had sustained his mother and sister. A few years later, Harling was commissioned to write the screenplay, and he persuaded the studio to film the movie in his hometown. Today the 33-block Landmark District of Natchitoches is a B & B lover's dream thanks in no small part to that movie. Prior to *Steel Magnolias*, the city had only four or five B & B's; today there are some 40 in a profusion of architectural styles—Antebellum, Queen

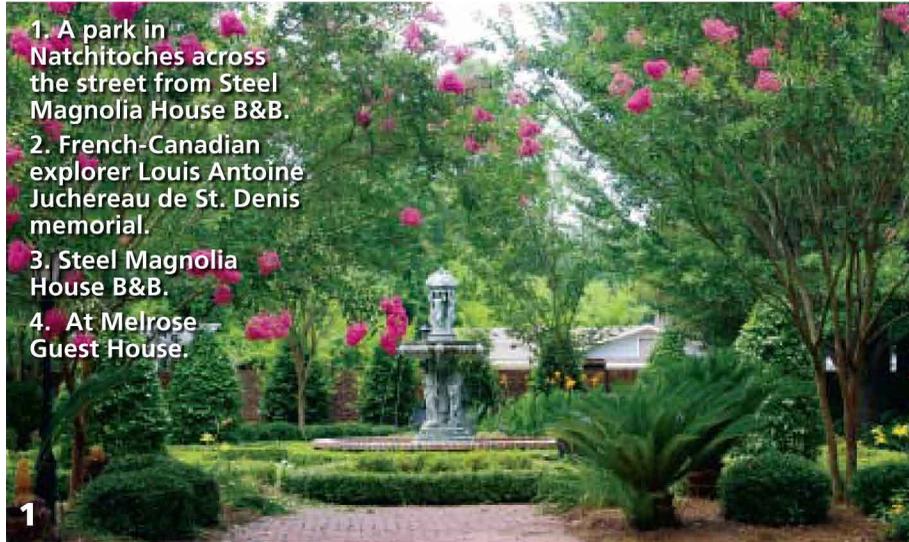
Travel

CANADIAN CONNECTIONS DOWN SOUTH



Anne, Creole raised cottages, French and Spanish colonial, and traditional Victorian. Many were built as the “town home” of plantation owners in the era when cotton was king.

During our three-day visit we began to feel as if we were staying on a movie set (and apparently some of the crew and minor cast had stayed in our B & B, the Bayou Amulet House). The grand red-brick B & B at the end of the street (now re-named Steel Magnolia House) was where the wedding reception in the film was shot. Local guide Barbara Bailey (whose husband, Doyle, played the father of the groom in the movie) kindly showed us all the local



1. A park in Natchitoches across the street from Steel Magnolia House B&B.
2. French-Canadian explorer Louis Antoine Juchereau de St. Denis memorial.
3. Steel Magnolia House B&B.
4. At Melrose Guest House.

