



The Yucca House

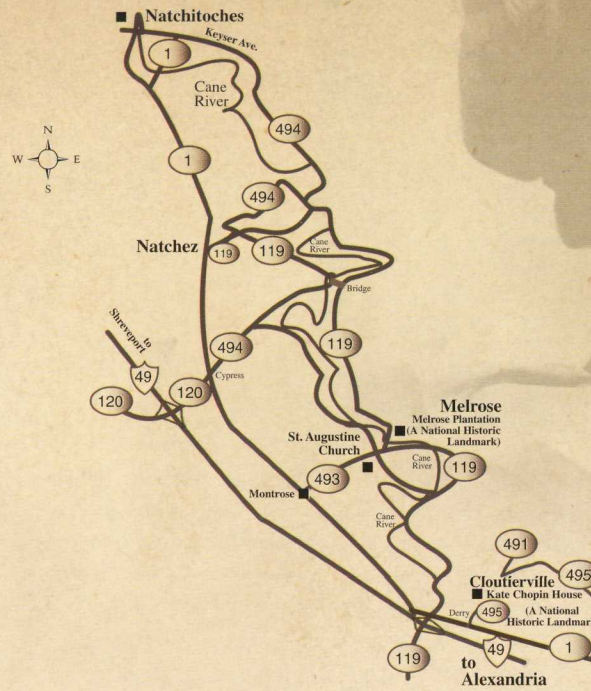


African House Mural

Clementine Hunter was one of the plantation's most celebrated residents. Her work graces the walls of the upstairs in the African House. They make what François Mignon has described as the "most colorful room in Louisiana." For most of her years, Clementine lived on the plantation, working first in the fields, then as cook at the Big House, before devoting her time to painting.



Restoration of the African House and Yucca House was deemed a Save America's Treasures Official Project in 2002. The Association for Preservation of Historic Natchitoches owns and operates Melrose.



16 miles south of Natchitoches, Louisiana in the Cane River National Heritage Area, open daily, noon-4 pm (closed major holidays) Large groups by appointment.

**To reach Melrose**

- Via Highway 1: 14 miles South from Natchitoches to Montrose, left turn onto Highway 493, 2 miles to Melrose
- Via Keyser Avenue from Natchitoches, Highways 494 & 119 (cross bridge at Bermuda), Hwy 119 to Melrose
- Via I-49: from north- Cypress exit 127, turn left on Hwy 20 to Cypress, turn right at Cypress on Hwy 1, proceed to Montrose, turn left on 493, 2 miles to Melrose; from south, Derry exit 119 and North on Hwy 119.



This brochure was made possible in part through a grant from the Cane River National Heritage Area Commission

The Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches owns and operates Melrose.

For more information, call Melrose at 318-379-0055 or 1-800-259-1714 Natchitoches Parish Tourist Commission or write: Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches PO Box 2248 • Natchitoches, LA 71457 or [www.natchitoches.net/melrose](http://www.natchitoches.net/melrose)

In 2002, Melrose was designated as an associate site of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the Historic Artists' Home and Studios group, based on Clementine's life and works at Melrose.

**Annual Historic Tour of Natchitoches and the Cane River Country:** 2nd Weekend in October  
**Melrose Arts & Crafts Festival:** 2nd Weekend in June

A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

Melrose



A CANE RIVER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA SITE



# Melrose

## OUR STORY

The life of Melrose Plantation is measured, not by years, but by generations. Its story will endure, for it is recorded not only in fiction and fireside legend, but on the indelible pages of history.

The Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches has undertaken the careful restoration of the eight structures composing the Melrose complex. In 1971, in the interest of maintaining Melrose as a monument to Louisiana history, Southdown Land Company, which had acquired the plantation, conveyed the six-acre site and complex of buildings to the Association. In 1974, the Cane River plantation was declared a National Historic Landmark.

The story of romantic Melrose Plantation begins with the legend of Marie Thérèse Coincoin, who was born, in 1742, a slave in the household of Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, the first commander of the post at Natchitoches. Marié Thérèse became the matriarch of family of fourteen children – four black children and ten of Franco-African blood – and the founder of a unique colony of people. Along with several of her children, she was sold to Thomas Pierre Metoyer, who later



Marié Thérèse Carmelite Anty Metoyer, granddaughter of Marié Thérèse Coincoin

freed her and eventually all her Metoyer children. Between 1794 and 1803, she and her sons received a number of land grants, the lands forming the Melrose Plantation being recorded in the name of her son Louis. Descendants of the Metoyers live along the river today, a people proud of their heritage and culture.

It was at Melrose that the Metoyers built Yucca House, the African House, and other structures. It must have been a tremendous undertaking for them to clear the land, build roads and fences, and raise indigo, tobacco, cotton, and other crops to achieve a successful plantation operation.

Yucca (c. 1796), the original main house at Melrose, incorporated local materials exclusively-heavy, hand-hewn cypress beams, uprights, and sleepers; walls made of mud from the river bottoms, mixed with deer hair and Spanish moss. The African House (c. 1800), a strange-looking construction reminiscent of the straw-thatched huts found in the Congo, was built as a combination storehouse and jail for rebellious slaves. The Big House was constructed on the Melrose grounds about 1833, a Louisiana-type plantation home, the lower floor of brick, the upper story of wood. Twin hexagonal garconnières and a kitchen wing were added later by the Henry family.

In the economic upheaval of the 1840's, the plantation passed to white ownership. It was bought by Hypolite and Henry Hertzog, who, in turn, lost it in the aftermath of the Civil War. In 1884, the plantation was acquired by Joseph Henry.



Miss Cammie Garrett Henry

At the turn of the century, Melrose became the home of John Hampton and Cammie Garrett Henry, the latter known affectionately as "Miss Cammie" to her Cane River friends. In the succeeding years Miss Cammie's patronage of the arts and preservation of local artifacts made Melrose justly famous. Mrs. Henry replanted and extended the plantation gardens, rescued the colonial buildings, revived local handicrafts, and accumulated her famous library of Louisiana books and materials.

Artists and writers were invited by Mrs. Henry to stay as long as they wished, so long as they were working on some creative project. Among the many who visited and worked at Melrose were Erskine Caldwell, Alexander Woolcott, Alberta Kinsey, Caroline Dormon, Rose Franken, William Spratling, Gwen Bristow, Ross Phares, and Ruth Cross. One warmly remembered personality who wrote for years at Melrose was Lyle Saxon, whose *Children of Strangers* portrays the Cane River area. A friend and collaborator of Mrs. Henry's was François Mignon, the writer in residence who arrived at Melrose for a six-week visit and stayed for thirty-two years. He recorded in *Plantation Memo* his memories of life at Melrose. During the 1940's, Clementine Hunter, one-time Melrose cook, emerged as Louisiana's most celebrated primitive artist. Some of her paintings remain at Melrose.



Clementine Hunter



Wash Day  
by Clementine Hunter