As the air turns cooler and November days continue to pass by, it can only mean that the Christmas season is upon us. Come ring in the holiday season with your family and friends at the Rural Life Museum’s, A Rural Life Christmas, on Sunday, December 3rd. Don’t forget that Papa Noel will be making his annual trek from the North Pole down to the Rural Life Museum to visit with the children and take part in the lighting of the bonfire. There is no better way to get in that Christmas cheer than stopping visiting museum, have a cup of apple cider, and immerse yourself in the holiday activity of our rural past.

Relive memories of an old fashioned Louisiana Christmas as you view candle lit plantation buildings decorated with freshly cut greenery. Visit with costumed re-enactors recreating holiday festivities of the nineteenth century, as well as noted artisans performing living history demonstrations. You can also make wreath with grapevines to give your home a little old fashioned holiday flair. There are new choirs and artisans ready to perform this year.

The museum grounds will be bustling with the sound of holiday favorites across several musical genres. Come hear the Greater King David Baptist Church’s Alpha and Omega choir perform hymns and seasonal favorites in gospel style. Enjoy performances of hand bells, dulcimers and the Baton Rouge Youth Orchestra playing seasonal favorites. Close your eyes and enjoy performances by vintage performers Jim and James Linden Hogg and Roscoe, Lee, and Abadie as they recreate the sounds of the 1800’s using instruments commonly used in that time period. Catch the bluegrass and country flair of The Fugitive Poets. Take a minute to dance a reel or two with the Vintage Louisiane Dancers as they show visitors common dances of the 1800’s. There will be plenty of music for all to enjoy!

To put a huge bow on the holiday fun, visitors are encouraged to join in the procession to our bonfire led by the Baton Rouge Pipes and Drums. The Christmas Eve bonfire is a Louisiana folk tradition that dates back to the late 1800’s along the Mississippi River levees of St. James Parish. The tradition spread to the parishes of St. John the Baptist and Ascension. The bonfires lighting on Christmas Eve is seen as lighting the way for Papa Noel. We recreate this tradition with a bonfire of our own and we are delighted that Papa Noel will make an appearance at the bonfire to visit with the children, and they may even go home with a satsuma!

‘Tis the Season for Christmas Shopping... Again!

As our gift to you, please use the below coupon for your Christmas shopping in the LSU Rural Life Museum’s Gift Shop. This coupon is in addition to the regular discounts offered to Members, Friends and Docents. However, this coupon must be presented to the cashier in order to receive this discount.
Making old treasures new again into fashionable jewelry is the focus of the 2018 Tea, Fashions, and Fancies. The theme of the event will be Repurpose, Recycle, Reimagine and will feature guest speaker Susan Davis, the owner of Grandmother’s Buttons in St. Francisville. Susan uses antique buttons that are more than 100 years old and redesigns them into new and beautiful jewelry. Treat yourself, your mother, your daughter, a best friend or special someone to a special English style tea menu. Various samplings of tea, pastries and specialties will be served in multiple courses. Guests will be treated to a showcase of Davis’ jewelry, gain insight into her business, and explore the intricate jewelry designs. Children attending the tea will have an opportunity to make their own jewelry pieces.

Join us on Saturday, February 24, 2018, from 2 to 4 p.m. at the LSU Rural Life Museum. The annual event is a joint partnership between the Friends of the LSU Rural Life and the Friends of the LSU Textile and Costume museums.

Tickets are $60 per person for ages 13 and over; $25 for under 13. Friends of the LSU Rural Life or the Textile and Costume museums will receive a $5 discount. Sponsorship levels are available. Tables may be reserved in advance. For more information, call the LSU Rural Life Museum at (225)765-2437.
The LSU Rural Life Museum is fortunate to have many works of art. Our most prized are the works by our founder, Steele Burden. Not only do we have Steele Burden’s beautiful gardens but also his paintings and unique ceramics. Another artist well represented in the LSU Rural Life Museum’s art collection is Louisiana artist Don Wright. In the 1970’s and 1980’s, Steele Burden commissioned Don Wright to paint the buildings on the grounds of the Museum. Steele Burden was Don Wright’s personal friend and mentor. Some paintings are small and some are striking in their size; all are matted appropriately. Hanging in one of the museum’s office walls are three very diverse paintings. One is a swamp scene in misty blues and greens; one is the Acadian house on the museum’s grounds – included in this painting is a rooster that used to roam the grounds on a daily basis. Our Red Rooster Bash pays homage to this rooster. The third one is of an iconic local preacher, George H. West, who was a fixture on the banks of the Mississippi River in downtown Baton Rouge during the days when the ferry ran from Baton Rouge to Port Allen. He is depicted along the Baton Rouge riverbank in a white robe and carrying a cross. The LSU Rural Life Museum is proud to have one of the largest collections of Don Wright paintings. Come to the LSU Rural Life Museum and treat yourself to these treasures!

Don Wright, a native of Shreveport, Louisiana, was born in 1938 and was a prolific artist until his death in 2007. His paintings can be found in diverse venues such as art galleries and at the LSU Rural Life Museum. Although he remained a resident of Louisiana, he was well-traveled. He had a studio in Hammond, Louisiana, where he was often seen at local restaurants, art venues and theaters.

After graduating from Franklin High School in 1957, Don Wright enlisted in the United States Navy where he served until 1961.

Following his Navy days, Don Wright joined an exploratory seismographic company that allowed him to travel and experience many different terrains such as the glaciers of Alaska and Canada and the beaches of the Bahamas. While with the seismographic company, his interest in art began to grow. At the age of 24, Don Wright began attending classes at Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, Louisiana. After completing his BA, he entered the MFA program at the Pratt Institute in New York City where he graduated in 1970. Notable graduates of the Pratt Institute include William Van Alen, architect of the Chrysler Building in New York City; fashion designer Betsey Johnson; and actor Robert Redford.

The Pratt Institute was founded by industrialist Charles Pratt in 1887. At the Pratt Institute, Don Wright developed his interest in painting, drawing, and, what he would later call his favorite medium, sculpture. While most established Louisiana artists are known for their interpretations of rural landscapes, bayous or the Vieux Carre, Don Wright seems never to have settled on a particular theme. His style of painting is unmistakable and can be found in subjects ranging from swamps to nudes and from courtyards to cabins.

In his own words, Don Wright said of his art: “My intent is to infuse internal reality within the artist with outside stimuli, the product being the finished art object. I deliberately subordinate all questions of style, technique, subject, and medium to this simple credo.”
I must say that the short time I have worked at the museum has been nothing short of incredible. Each day I have the opportunity to see and learn new things in an area that I never expected to work in. However, as I worked my first full Harvest Days on staff, I realized that I am actually still learning about subject matter related to my animal background. These lessons are presented simply in a different century than what I am used to! Harvest Days is an event that truly brings to life the history displayed in this museum. One of the aspects I noticed was just how important animals were to the success and survival of people in the nineteenth century. This got me wondering about some specifics of the animals used in that era.

Animals in the 1800’s were a very important aspect for survival and a necessity when it came to travel and work. A mule lugged the plow across the ground and rolled a wagon down the trail. A horse pulled a carriage into town or was ridden to a needed destination. These animals were used out of need and this is a fact well known; however, I pondered a question related to another important livestock species of the time. Coming from a family who owned a dairy and working with cattle all my life, I could not help but think about a cow in the nineteenth century, specifically the dairy cow. I know the purpose of cows in olden times: they give milk that can be used for butter and cheeses and calves could be sold or eaten, but I wanted to know if there were any certain breeds native to Louisiana in that time.

With my question in mind, I took to today’s technology and did some research, and sadly not much information was out there that I found helpful to my search. There are plenty of articles about beef purpose breeds of the 1800’s. They were piney woods and longhorn breeds. There was little to be said about the dairy cow, however, except that most small farmers and families had one if they could afford it for milking. I wanted to know what breeds existed for this purpose or at least what breed of today they were closely related to. The most I could find was that dairy-type cattle of the time were probably related to a shorthorn or jersey breed type of cattle, but no article I found gave an exact or perfect answer to my question.

Although my quest for information was not extremely successful, I was able to use the information I did find to answer many questions from the children and even adults who stopped to visit my dairy cow at this year’s Harvest Days. I believe that, even today, animals are still very important to agriculture and life itself. It is always an amazing opportunity for me to educate people about these animals whether it is from the perspective of long ago or in our own world today!

Stoker Barn’s New Hinge

Well, it was on the list. There is always a list of things to be done at the Rural Life Museum (RLM). Jean Becnel approached the Baton Rouge Woodworking Club with this list and replacing the hinges on the Stoker barn was on it. The original was worn pretty well and patched over the years with wire nails.

These hinges were all wood. The wood used to make the replacements is white oak. Finding white oak thick enough to make these large hinges took a little time, but a sawyer from Clinton had some and donated it. Using the original as a template, the pieces were cut out and shaped to match. The pins were cut by hand and shaped with a rasp to a mostly round shape to fit the holes drilled with a brace and bit. They were treated with linseed oil when all the shaping was done.

At the museum, the vertical boards were attached to the hinges and mounted to the barn. The original was attached with wooden pins to the barn and this look was maintained when attaching the doors to the barn. Over the last few months after the installation, the new parts are blending into the look of the old existing wood.

There are lots of opportunities for the Baton Rouge Woodworking club to work with the museum. It gives members the opportunity to work with pieces and tools that may not normally be available to an individual. This benefits both the museum and the club members. The buildings get the much needed care and members have an opportunity to learn and work on items from the past.
It happens every year without fail: my oldest son, the one who has always loved to eat calls. “Hey, Mom, can you tell me again what we will be having for Thanksgiving (or Christmas) dinner?” I recount a menu that has evolved slowly over the years. In our family, you can never take away a holiday dish, you can only add more to the menu. I use recipes from both sides of our families and a few I have garnered over the years, rather than the few ‘receipts’ that might have been written down in the 1800s. Much of that cooking was developed from experience and availability rather than from a recipe.

So back to my holiday preparations, which go into full swing the week between my son’s call and the holiday, getting all the ‘favorites’ ready for holiday arrivals. During this time, there is also time to wonder what would my preparations have looked like if I had lived during the 1800s? Obviously, there would have been no phone call, but how might I have prepared for the holidays? Who would have been there? My children now travel 380 and 750 miles to celebrate with us, usually by car in one day. Then, they might have traveled a distance of 4 – 8 miles by wagon over several hours. What food would have awaited the family when they arrived?

At Thanksgiving, my husband simply places a call to a friend who has for years fried our turkeys, telling him how many and how big, rather than taking his gun out to the woods to shoot a bird. I must admit, I don’t regret missing the opportunity to clean and dress the bird. For Christmas, rather than going to the smoke house to get a ham from a pig we butchered and cured earlier in the fall, I pick up my favorite brand at the grocery. Our sides vary with each holiday. For Thanksgiving, we have sweet potatoes, long a staple of Louisiana cooking. I like to buy mine at the Farmer’s Market early in the fall, rather than gathering them from the fields where they grow so abundantly in Louisiana. Either way, cooks have known for decades that they need to be picked early to give them time to cure, becoming sweeter, moister, and more flavorful. Sweet potatoes have been more a staple than a mere holiday food in Louisiana. They helped to stave off starvation and were even roasted and ground for coffee during her Civil War. They also make a delicious pie.

Corn is another staple in Louisiana, used to make breads, fritters and cakes as well as a vegetable dish. A white potato casserole always adorns our Christmas table, perhaps as a holdover from my Midwestern roots or because who doesn’t like a dish with equals parts of butter, sour cream, cream cheese, and grated cheese? With so many sources for vegetables throughout the year, I can always cook the same dishes rather than being dependent on the crop in season, what the weather allowed to grow well or what I preserved in the summer months, which would have been my choices during the 1800s.

With the ease of refrigeration and even freezing, my Christmas baking begins almost immediately after Thanksgiving rather than a few days before Christmas as I would have done back then. Moreover, no need to put sugar water in the blocks under the legs of the pie safe to keep the bugs out. While we now enjoy family cookie recipes for dessert, a hundred or more years ago, we might have feasted on that sweet potato or dried fruit pie, cakes, or a flaming plum pudding.

Our tables might have looked much the same, as I do enjoy decorating with foliage, fruits, and vegetables of the season as well as a family china full of fall colors. Though I had not read it until getting ready to write this article, I do adhere to the recommendations of The Social Mirror, copyright 1886: “The table should be spread with white damask and large white napkins to match. ... The silver should be kept bright and well washed, and the glass transparent and glistening.” Rest assured, however, that this is a holiday tradition not an every night occurrence as the book requires.

Therefore, after recounting all these differences, perhaps it is best to conclude with what remains the same: the joy of sharing a good meal with family and friends, the love that surrounds the table and the blessings of the season.

**Almond Puffs, Then and Now**


> “Blanch and skin two ounces of almonds, and beat then fine in a mortar with orange flour water, take the whites of 3 eggs and beat them to a froth, mix them with the almonds and as much powdered sugar as will make a paste, strew some sugar on white paper and drop it on in cakes, bake it in a cool oven.”

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2 oz. blanched almonds, ground
2 egg whites, medium size
1 tsp orange water
1/8 tsp salt
1 cup powdered sugar
1 tsp sugar
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> “Grind the almonds in either a mortar or food processor with orange water until very fine. Beat the egg whites with salt until stiff and will hold a peak but not dry. Add sugar slowly, one tablespoon at a time. Then fold in nut mixture. Sprinkle a lightly greased cookie sheet with a tablespoon of sugar and drop batter from spoon onto the cookie sheet. Bake at 250 until partly dry and will retain their shape (about 40 minutes). Makes 2 dozen.”

*By Sheila Govan*
LSU RURAL LIFE MUSEUM EVENTS
For more information, please contact the LSU Rural Life Museum at (225) 765-2437.

Saturday, February 24th . . . . . . An Old Fashioned Tea
Saturday, March 3rd . . . . . . Ione E. Burden Symposium
Sunday, March 25th . . . . . . An Old Fashioned Easter
Saturday, April 14th . . Zapp’s International Beerfest
Friday, April 27th . . . . . . . An Evening at Windrush
Saturday, May 12th . . . . . . . Rural Life Pops

LSU Rural Life Museum Staff
David Floyd, Director
David Nicolosi, Registrar Conservator
Steve Ramke, Curator of Education
Elizabeth McInnis, Marketing Director
Molly Sanchez, Development Director
Carrie Couvillon, Information Specialist
Nora Fierro, Administrative Assistant
Brittany Hanson / Katherine Fresina, Assistant Registrars
Cobey Hendry / Jean Becnel, Maintenance
Ken Owens, Horticulturist Assistant
Elaine Ellis, Docent Coordinator
Monique Metrailer, Artisan
Frances and John Monroe, Editors

LSU Rural Life Museum
OPEN DAILY: 8:00 am until 5:00 pm
4560 Essen Lane
(Exit 160 off I-10 at Essen Lane),
Baton Rouge, LA 70809
Mailing address: P.O. Box 80498
Baton Rouge, LA 70898
(225) 765-2437 • http://rurallife.lsu.edu

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Friends of the LSU Rural Life Museum
Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 14852, Baton Rouge, LA 70898

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