
History of Washington



The Town of Washington

Founded in 1720 and incorporated in 1835, is the third oldest settlement in Louisiana. The community was first established as Poste des Opelousas, a French trading post. Early records indicate that the community was later called Church Landing because the settlement included the first church in the Opelousas district, La Iglesia Paroquial de la Inmaculada Concepcion del Puesto de Opelousas, built in 1774. The land had been originally deeded to Jacques Courtableau. It was subsequently granted to the “guardian of the church,” which began selling lots in 1822.

In the 1800's, Washington was an important steamboat port with cotton, cattle, sugar, and molasses being the major products shipped from the region. It became the largest steamboat port between New Orleans and St. Louis, Missouri. With the arrival of the railroad in 1883, Washington's importance as a center of commerce declined. The last steamboat departed in 1900, leaving the town with a wealth of antebellum plantation homes and Victorian houses that have today formed the basis for a significant and growing tourism industry.

Washington National Historic District

Eighty percent of the buildings in the Town of Washington have been identified as being of historic or architectural significance. Listed in 1978.



Authentic Washington

The town of Washington is to Louisiana what Williamsburg is to Virginia. Unlike Williamsburg, however, with its many reconstructed replicas, the historic homes and businesses of Washington are graceful, original buildings from Louisiana's nineteenth century past. For example, the old Steamboat Warehouse located on Bayou Courtableau just upstream from the steamboat turnaround, is a fascinating reminder of the bustling steamboat era which drew to a close only after the coming of the railroad in the late 1800's. For much of the nineteenth century, Washington was the largest inland port between New Orleans and St. Louis.

Name Changes Throughout History

The area in which Washington is located, along what was at the time called the "River Opelousas", was originally granted to Jacques Courtableau. He deeded the site of the town to Louis Buhot, "guardian of the Church", and in 1822 Wardens of the Catholic Church began selling arpent lots. The resultant community was called "Church's Landing" Because the bayou was navigable south to New Orleans and northward by flatboat to the rich agricultural area, the town rapidly a center for commerce and transportation.

In May of 1900, the last steamboat left Washington and since that time other areas in the state have surpassed the little community on Bayou Courtableau as major commercial centers. However, Washington has never lost the character of its rich heritage.

Architecture

Washington contains many examples of various Architecture, ranging from broad and batten cottages to towering plantation houses with full galleries. The brick commercial buildings on Main Street are also of major interest, since a number of them still maintain their 19th century ornamental store fronts. Washington has many wonderful old live oaks, many of which re recorded in the register of the Louisiana live Oak Society. Beneath the oaks are plants popular 150 years ago.

The historic significance of Washington is recorded in the National Historic Registry, encompassing 80% of the town. In recent years many of the historically significant structures have undergone major restoration.

Clearly, visitors in search of a “taste of the past” will not be disappointed with a trip to Washington, Louisiana. Washington offers a fascinating doorway into the 19th century. Easily accessible from Interstate 49, Exit 25.

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