



A Good Home for a Poor Man Fort Polk and Vernon Parish, 1800-1940

**Published
1999**

Background:

From the 1870s to the coming of the lumber industry in the late 1890s, Vernon Parish was a very good home for a poor man. Away from the main courses of human migration and interaction, the sylvan countryside of the newly formed Louisiana parish offered its hardy settlers the “solitudes of the pine barren country”. Their farms were scattered widely across this countryside, but generally clustered along the creeks that ran into the Sabine or Calcasieu rivers. To the east of this area the soil was less fertile and referred to as “Hog Wallow Land” and what is today known as Fort Polk. Despite poor farmland, the region did have one asset of immense value to an emerging twentieth-century America and a South recovering from the Civil War---the longleaf pine.

Objective:

The objective of the project was to produce a historic context study for Fort Polk and Vernon Parish. This goal of the study was to provide the context in which historic period archaeological sites within the installation could be evaluated against for their eligibility for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

Summary of Approach:

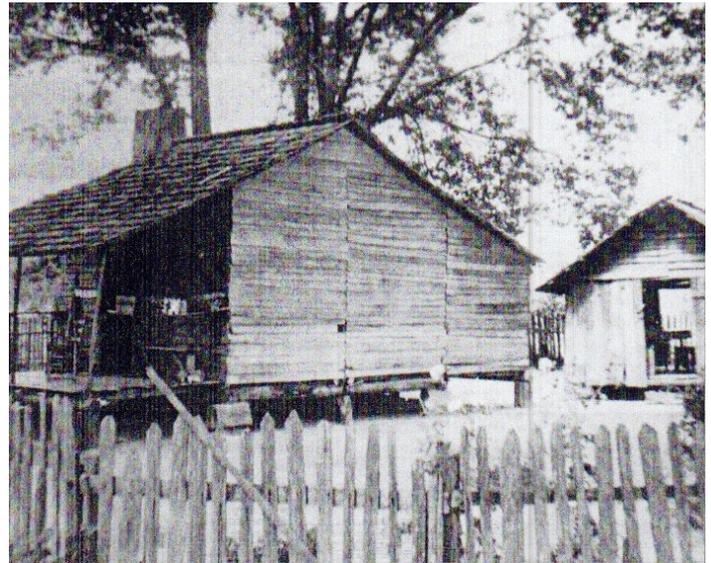
The project includes the area of western Louisiana, Fort Polk, and Vernon Parish and the story of the transformation of its piney, wooded landscape. It was the landscape that influenced the region’s settlement, culture, wealth, poverty, and industry-its past and future. The landscapes provide the framework for interactions between people and the land and for reconstructing a sense of place in time and space. Therefore, the project used a landscape approach which views the changing land through time, space, and culture. As our culture changes, the land is altered, creating new responses from the environment. The landscape approach is especially useful in providing an organizational framework for telling the Fort Polk and Vernon Parish story. The project relates the history of the region by “painting” the landscape prior to Euroamerican settlement and then describes the changes that occurred as non-Native Americans occupied the region in gradually increasing numbers.

The study examines the development of settlement and population, agriculture and industry, transportation, and social-political change within four chronological

landscapes between 1800 and 1940. The “neutral ground”, the Civil War, forestry and the building of Camp Polk were also researched and incorporated into the project.

Benefit:

The research and compilation of the history of Fort Polk and Vernon Parish resulted in a technical historic context that used the cultural landscape in order to measure change through time. In addition, the author wrote a publicly accessible report that demonstrates the important role that the Vernon Parish pineland and its people played in American history.



A homestead located within the Fort Polk Main Fort area on Six Mile Creek.

Accomplishments:

The project accomplished a chronological history of the regional settlement at Fort Polk. In addition, the fort’s historic resources were organized into logical themes that characterized the culture and people who lived in that area. Ultimately, the historic context statement provides the means for managing historic sites on the installation.

Reference:

Steven D. Smith
A Good Home for a Poor Man, Fort Polk and Vernon Parish, 1800-1940. Southeast Archeological Center of the National Park Service, 1999.