



Plantation Homes of Louisiana and the Natchez Area: The David Gleason collection

David King Gleason

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From the Greek Revival grandeur of Belle Helene, to the Moorish fantasy of Longwood, to the simplicity of Rosella, the plantation homes of Louisiana and the Natchez area powerfully recall the brief flowering of the unique civilization of the Old South. In their noble façades, sculptured interiors, and scattered outbuildings can be seen the feudal splendor of the great cotton and sugar planters, and the doomed glory of the Confederate war effort.

In these 120 resonant full-color photographs, David King Gleason fully captures the aura of Louisiana's plantation homes -- some beautiful in the morning light, some shaded by trees and hanging moss, some crumbling in decay and neglect. Taking each house on its own terms, Gleason's photographs present the buildings and their environs sharply and without deception. Accompanying the photographs are captions that give a brief architectural evaluation of each house and provide notes on its construction, history, and present condition.

Gleason has organized his book as a journey along the waterways that were the lifeline of Louisiana's plantations, their link to New Orleans and to the markets and factories of the North. Beginning in the vicinity of New Orleans and the lower Mississippi, Gleason presents such houses as Evergreen, with its columns and twin circular staircases; the exuberant San Francisco; and Oak Alley, set at the end of a spectacular avenue of 28 oak trees. Continuing along the bayous that lead into the western part of the state, he shows us the palatial Madewood, constructed from seasoned timbers and 60,000 slave-made bricks; the meticulously restored Shadows-on-the-Teche; the ramshackle Darby House; and Bubbenzer, which served as a Union army headquarters during the Civil War. From Cane River country and north Louisiana, the photographs portray Magnolia, burned by Union troops and then rebuilt to its original specifications; Melrose, built in the early 1830s by a freed slave; and Oakland, the location for the Civil War movie *The Horse Soldiers*. Moving overland towards Natchez; the elaborate, octagonal Longwood; Rosemont, the boyhood home of Jefferson Davis; Oakley, where John James Audubon was once engaged as a tutor; and Rosedown, with its elaborate gardens. Continuing south of Baton Rouge along the River Road, Gleason closes his tour with homes including Mount Hope, built in the eighteenth century; Nottoway, the largest plantation home in the South, completed on the eve of the Civil War; Indian Camp, a leprosarium for most of its existence; and the pillared galleries of Belle Helene.

The plantation homes of Louisiana were highly personal expressions of pride and faith in the future. Yet the building of these spectacular monuments was a brief phenomenon. In the wake of the Civil War, the South's economy was devoted to survival, not luxury. A tribute to the plantation home, David King Gleason's photographs reveal the beauty, grandeur, and poignance of these monuments.

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