Experience Preservation in Progress at Levi Jordan Plantation

The Levi Jordan Plantation’s origins date to 1848, when Jordan, a planter, acquired more than 2,200 acres of land west of the San Bernard River in Brazoria County and relocated his family and his agricultural operation to Texas. After years of moving across the southeast in search of more fertile soil, family lore claims the Georgia-born Jordan reported finding an ideal piece of land that would outlast all in the heart of the Texas Gulf Coast region near present-day Brazoria. Upon taking possession of his land, Jordan left about a dozen enslaved workers there to begin construction of residences while he relocated his family. The main plantation house was a two-story, four-room, wood-frame Greek Revival style home. It was completed in the mid-1850s. The workers also built several slave quarters and a sugar mill. Jordan raised sugarcane and cotton and made a shrewd investment in the largest sugar mill operations in the area. This mill processed cane and the cane of several neighboring plantations. Over the 10-year period culminating with the end of the U.S. Civil War and Emancipation, Jordan owned as many as 140 enslaved workers, some Africans who were part of the illegal slave trade of the early 19th century.

Emancipation brought freedom to the enslaved workers at the Jordan Plantation, but also many new challenges. The Freedmen’s Bureau office in Brazoria County reviewed several labor contract disputes between Jordan and his recently freed laborers. While the population of the former slave quarters area fluctuated during early Reconstruction, as many as 100 Africans and African Americans remained at the plantation. Jordan died in 1873 and management of his agricultural empire fractured as it transitioned to his children’s generation. By the late 1880s, the quarters area of the plantation was abandoned and over the next few decades the structures deteriorated and were dismantled for salvage. With time the structure foundations, tools, and personal items left behind by the former plantation inhabitants would become an archeological treasure trove of artifacts related to the African American experience in 19th-century Texas. From 1896 to 2002, Dr. Ken Brown of the University of Houston conducted extensive archeological investigations at the site. The investigations focused on the former slave quarters and areas around the plantation house. Numerous artifacts were recovered from the excavations that provided insights into the material culture, daily lives, and beliefs of the former slaves at the plantation.

The site is currently an example of “preservation in progress,” with efforts underway to stabilize and restore the 1850s plantation home. Texas Historical Commission (THC) staff at the site have recently begun hosting public programs on the first Saturdays of each month.

“THe complexities of preserving and developing facilities at the site will take time,” says Brett Cruse, sites supervisor with the THC’s Historic Sites Division. “For now, the community seems excited to be able to experience the site and learn about these efforts by seeing them first-hand.”

The mid-1850s main house at Levi Jordan Plantation is undergoing stabilization and is the focus of public programs at the site on the first Saturday of each month.