



The Friends of Oakley has supported many projects, including funding speakers, programs at the park, acquisition of artifacts, restoration of collection items, and preservation.

The Oakley Leaflet

A Publication of the Friends of Oakley.

November, 2025

Message from the Chair:

History is a set of facts. Its interpretation is mutable and often influenced by the education, environment and culture of the beholder. This denotes that history is alive, the object of much curiosity and visual stimuli.

Recently I gave a presentation on a courthouse for Feliciana that still stands in Jackson and has been preserved by the Jackson Assembly and other citizens of the area. It is a splendid example of provincial architecture built for a public purpose.



Chair Ann Reiley Jones

Photo by Olivia Pass

After Feliciana was divided into east and west sectors in 1824, a new government location was surveyed for East Feliciana. That town

Joseph Mason Trail, funded by FHWA Grant, is completed

By Olivia Pass

On October 22, George Francise and his crew completed the dirt, mulch, and limestone part of the Joseph Mason Trail. Although the Federal Highway Administration's Louisiana Recreational Trails Program grant that was approved and awarded a \$100,000 fully-funded grant stipulated that the second part of the trail would be dirt and mulch with limestone placed only in heavily eroded areas, the Office of State Parks recently determined that limestone must be used for the entire dirt/mulch part of the trail.

An official opening/dedication/ribbon-cutting with the participation of the Office of State Parks and the Lt. Governor's Office is planned for the near future.



The beginning of the trail.

Photo by Olivia Pass

(Message..... continued on Page 8)

(Joseph Mason Trail..... continued on Page 2)

**Save the Date for the Spring Fete on the Grounds of Audubon State Historic Site
April 11, 2026
4-7 PM**

Join us for food and fun on the front lawn under the oaks of Oakley. James Linden Hogg will be playing throughout the event. Ticket information available in January, 2026

Joseph Mason Trail ... Continued from Page 1

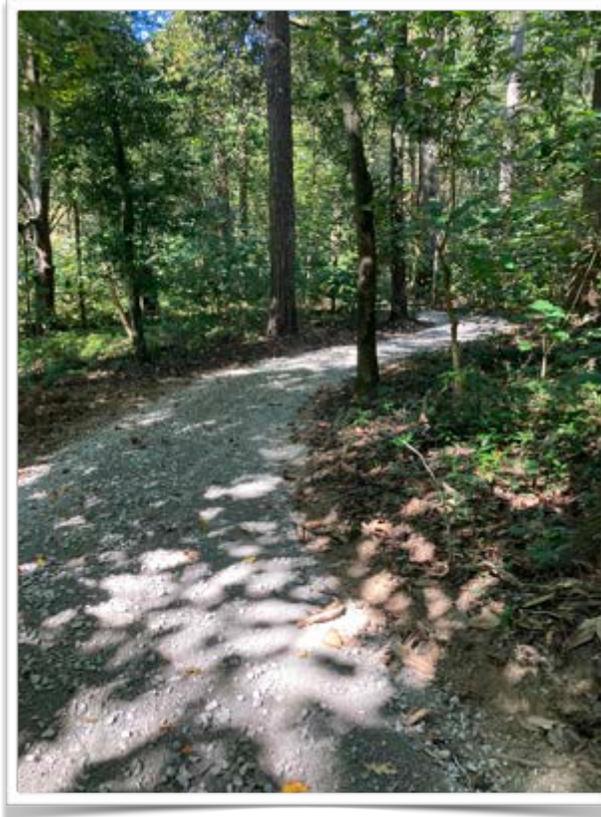
The grant, which was written by John House, recently retired ASHS Manager, and Olivia Pass, who was Chair of the Friends of Oakley at the time of application, was checked throughout its writing and aided by Michael Domingue, who is the Administrator of the FHWA Recreational Trails Program at the Louisiana Office of State Parks.



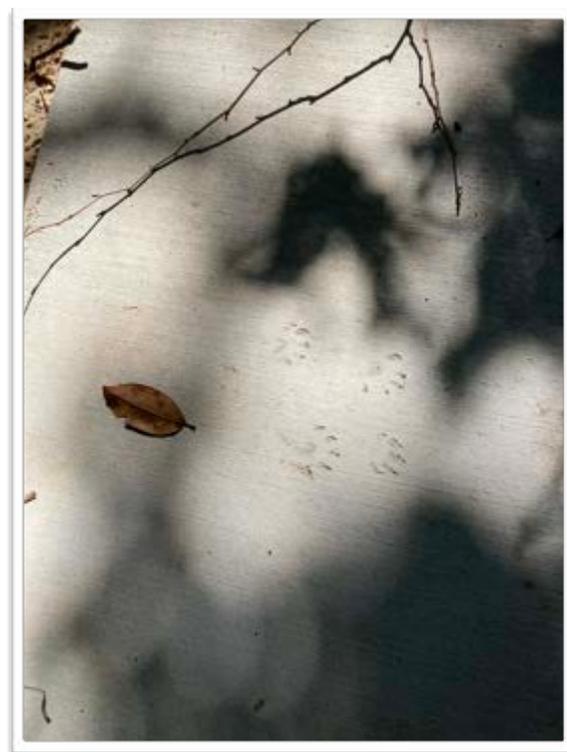
*The raccoons enjoyed the wet concrete part of the trail.
Photo by Olivia Pass*



*The newly refurbished trail is ready for hikers.
Photo by Olivia Pass*



*An inviting look at the newly resurfaced part of the Joseph Mason Trail at Oakley
Photo by Olivia Pass*



*Sunlight filters through the branches, showing raccoon prints in the new concrete.
Photo by Olivia Pass*

Historic Landscape Survey and Management Plan

By James Dart and Joe Boneno

In 2023, the Friends of Oakley applied to the Pennington Foundation for monies to conduct a first-ever landscape survey of the Audubon State Historic Site's 100-acre property and to develop a long-term management plan. Initiated by Board member and president Ann Reiley Jones, the Friends of Oakley was awarded \$150,000 from the Pennington Foundation for the project, and a committee of the Board was formed to identify consultants and implement the work. The committee is composed of Ann Reiley Jones, Joe Boneno, and James Dart.

The intent of the *Historic Landscape Survey and Management Plan* is a simple one: the integrated ecological restoration of the Site, ridding it of invasive and non-native species to the greatest practical extent, along with a long-term plan to preserve and interpret the Site across its 3,000 to 5,000 years of human occupation, but focusing on John James Audubon's time there when he created the first twenty plates of the *Birds of America*.

In summer 2024, the committee crafted a Request for Proposal issued to a selected short list of qualified consultants with expertise in historic landscapes and cultural resource management. New Orleans-based Waggoner and Ball, a multi-disciplinary design firm of architects, landscape architects and planners, were selected for the project. Their experience working with the Office of State Parks with Poverty Point was an important factor in their selection.

The Steering Committee for project (Ann Reiley Jones, Board members Joseph Boneno and James Dart, Site Manager John R. House III

and Ranger Daniel Wilcox, and Office of State Parks Landscape Architect Leigh LaFarque) began meeting with Waggoner and Ball in early 2025, beginning with an on-site tour of Audubon State Historic Site and a review of much of the existing historical record of the Oakley House and the Site.

The committee and consultants continued their work with two successive tasks: "Discover and Define" and "Design and Deliver." On-site explorations use Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR), Ground-Penetrating Radar (GPR) and Geographic Information System (GIS) to identify ASHS's historic uses, habitations, artifacts, and its natural and human ecologies. Collaborative discussions among these individuals provided a deeper understanding of the Site's unique constraints and opportunities. An on-site "Project Definition Workshop" identified the project scope, focusing on the visitors' experience and identifying pilot areas for ecological transition across the Site. Here, the goal of amplifying the Audubon experience became the key component envisioning the Site's future.

While eventually examining the entire 100-acre site, an initial pilot project will focus on the 20-acre area around Oakley house to develop a plan to replace invasive and non-native species with plants appropriate to the 1795-1824 interpretive period.

The Plan, supported by the Pennington Grant, will provide a Master Plan for Audubon State Historic Site. The foundation document will serve to guide the Site's future development as a cultural landscape of national significance--as a National Historic Landmark. ASHS is presently a State Historic Site and wishes to have National Historic Site designation through the implementation of this grant.

Calendar of Events

December 5th, A Jane Austen Christmas School Day, 9 AM-11:30 AM: Preregistered students will learn about Christmas traditions in Colonial America. Wassailing, hunting for Christmas dinner, playing period games, and learning the origins of Christmas traditions are just some of the things students will experience. There will be black-powder-weapon hunting demonstrations, Christmas traditions of Jane Austen, wassail, period games, and more. Preregistration is required.

December 6th, A Jane Austen Christmas 5:30 PM-8 PM: On Saturday night, the plantation comes to life during the holidays as it shows off its seasonal decorations. Costumed guides accompany the visitor in a trip into the past through the candlelit Oakley House. Take a taste of what's cooking in the kitchen, enjoy our yearly Christmas dance, or hear music by the Lagniappe Dulcimers. Chestnuts will be roasting and wassail served.

December 20th This Old Cookbook 1 PM-4 PM: We explore the open hearth at Audubon through an original handwritten cookbook of Oakley Plantation. Three recipes will be prepared in the afternoon on the original hearth for the public to taste.

Membership in The Friends of Oakley runs from January to December of 2026



Friends of Oakley One-Year Membership

Become a Supporting Member of
THE FRIENDS OF OAKLEY

Please enter your name as you would like it listed in public acknowledgments (donation amounts will not be made public): _____

Check here if you do not wish to be acknowledged publicly: _____

Indicate membership level and amount of donation from the following:

- 1) **Warbler Individual Membership** (includes two admission tickets to Oakley house and grounds): \$50-99. Please accept my gift of \$ _____.
- 2) **Cardinal Family Membership** (includes four admission tickets to Oakley house and grounds): \$100-499. Please accept my gift of \$ _____.
- 3) **The Lucy Audubon Circle** (includes one annual day-use permit—effectively unlimited admission to all of Louisiana's state parks and historic sites):
\$500 and greater. Please accept my gift of \$ _____.

Make checks payable to **Friends of Oakley** and mail to **P.O. Box 1097, St. Francisville, LA 70775.**

OR Charge to Credit Card:

Card Number _____ Exp Date ____/____/____ CVV _____

Print name on credit card _____

Signature _____

_____ Please check here if you wish to decline the gift of the admission tickets with your membership.

Send my membership card to

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Country _____ Postal Code _____

Email address: _____ Telephone: _____

(Optional) My gift in the amount of \$ _____ is in memory OR in honor of _____

(Gift amount will not be mentioned.) Please send acknowledgment of my gift to the following:

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

The Friends of Oakley has a 501(C)(3) classification. Donations are deductible to the extent provided by IRS guidelines; therefore, please consult your tax professional.

Park Manager John House Retires after Almost three Decades



Friends of Oakley Board Members James Dart, Becky Rothschild, and Chair Ann Reiley Jones enjoy the celebration.



*Retiring Manager of Audubon State Historic Site
John House*



Historic Site District Manager for Louisiana Office of State Parks Ray Berthelot gives a tribute to John House.

Photos by Cheryl Horst



Mark Dauer, Friends of Oakley Board treasurer, congratulates John House and presents him with a gift from the Friends.



Friends Board members Joanne Grimsley and Joe Boneno enjoy House's retirement party.



Glenda Kimble and Susan Caston join in wishing John a fond farewell.



John House and Friends of Oakley Chair Ann Reiley Jones



Sharing in the celebration are Rosedown's Park Manager Trish Aleshire, retired District Manager Bill Roberts, retired Port Hudson Park Manager Greg Potts, and retired Manager of Louisiana State Arboretum Jim Robinson.



John House with his wife, Kari and newsletter co-editor and past Friends of Oakley Chair Olivia Pass.

Tribute to Retired Site Manager John House from Past Chair of Friends of Oakley Olivia Pass

By Olivia Pass

Who has ever known birds better than John James Audubon? He knew people well too. I think if Audubon were here today, he would call John House “a rare bird” in the flock of humanity. I know I do, and I’m so very thankful to have finally met such a rare bird and been able to work with him for a decade as a member of the Friends of Oakley, plus the last three years of work on the Federal Highway Administration grant to upgrade the Joseph Mason Trail.

It’s sadly interesting that I have been a teacher/professor/administrator for almost sixty years, and I’ve always wanted to work with a person exactly like John and never did until FINALLY, here at Oakley, I was given the honor and privilege of working with such a unique person, who blends exceptionally well what are considered by some researchers as “gender traits” for leaders. I believe that it is due to these special skills that John has done such an incredibly superb job with Audubon State Historic Site for almost three decades!

According to some experts, male leaders set a direction for themselves and the team, express needs and desires confidently, and take accountability for actions. John certainly does all that well, but with the added grace of humility and thoughtfulness. Thus, he also possesses what these experts call the “feminine qualities” of emotional intelligence, vulnerability, and empathy. I very much appreciate his treating me, during my time as member, secretary and President of the Friends of Oakley Board, as an equal. We worked TOGETHER so well! John doesn’t dictate; he communicates. I have never seen him angry, selfish, or childish. And I cannot remember a time that he did not quickly respond to a call or to an email I sent him. Furthermore, although he’s a very busy man, he gives time to others. When I had an art show in New Roads, John took his

mother and wife to it, and then kindly sent me an email, telling me about what he liked about the show. Such actions mean so much to me as I’m sure such thoughtful actions do to most other people as well!

John House, as you can tell, is one of my heroes: he is brilliant, knowledgeable, hard-working, communicative, kind and humble. He loves nature and what he does. In fact, he’s so self-effacing that it’s a miracle that we people in Louisiana have had the privilege to have him at the helm here for twenty-six years. HE is the primary reason why Oakley is so special--he’s kept it special and pure. There’s nothing here that bespeaks of his going after money rather than preserving and treasuring beautifully the delicate legacy left here by John James Audubon’s stay at Oakley and the historic beauty of the house and wooded area.

There is a quote from Thoreau’s *Walden* that illuminates John’s life well: “If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings.”

BRAVO to John for such a life and sharing it with us here! Thank you so much for all you’ve done and for how you treat others. Have a wonderful retirement with your dear wife Kari and your son! Lord knows, you have deserved it! Thanks so much for the memories and the wonderful gift of my being able to work with a leader like you for awhile! I will treasure this time always. You have truly given so much to so many!

Message from the Chair...Continued from Page 1

was named Clinton, which is more or less in the center of the parish. At that time two courthouses were designated for East and West Feliciana, in Clinton and St. Francisville respectively.

The first new courthouse in Clinton burned, and so in 1840 a massive peripteral-colonnaded, two-story building was erected on the square, bounded on the north side by Lawyers Row. The bar in the Felicianas was known statewide and further for its excellence and activity, thus the erection of a series of small offices across from the square for the legal trade.

What has this to do with John James Audubon, one may ask. It is to draw focus to the center of the area to which he migrated in the early 1820's. The governmental center of Audubon's Happyland was Jackson, not far from Oakley where he resided as a teacher. Jackson, St. Francisville, Bayou Sara, the Plains, Port Hudson, Liberty and Woodville as well as Natchez would have been civic haunts for him; Clinton had not yet been established.

Audubon's wanderings took him throughout this area. Laced with streams and wild lands, sparsely populated, and inherently scenic, the geography entranced Audubon with its birdlife and commerce.

Business was at a sustaining level because of the Mississippi River and the Bayou Sara port and later the riverside landing at Port Hudson. Two railroads were eventually constructed as a result of the commercial activity from the region—the West Feliciana Road Company (chartered 1831) and the Clinton & Port Hudson (chartered 1833). They were incorporated and constructed post-Audubon; however, they are indicative of the prosperity washing over Feliciana and of its agricultural enterprise that attracted Audubon to its settlers and their farming outposts.

The built environment, as demonstrated by the nineteenth-century Feliciana courthouses, deeply influenced the lives and livelihood of the residents of the Felicianas. All land transactions, business

treaties, census details and civil actions would have eventually resided in the parishes' courthouses.

And then, turning to the domestic side of life, a fine example of early nineteenth-century residential architecture is Oakley. That it is still preserved by the Office of State Parks is a miracle in the making.

Oakley's highest values are in its architectural history, its natural history and its family history. Oakley is redolent of the 1820s when Audubon was in residence. It is important to keep in mind that Audubon was America's finest nineteenth-century natural historian--with the *Birds of America* being the finest hand-colored natural history publication of the period.

It is up to us of these later generations to continue to celebrate Oakley's unique contribution to local, state and national histories and to make Audubon's mark here at this site as indelible as possible. The Friends of Oakley are committed to this objective and recognize the privilege that we have to assist State Parks in the interpretation and preservation of this remarkable remnant of Audubon's life, his work, and the prosperity of the Felicianas in the early period of Louisiana's statehood.

Indeed, the set of facts that is Oakley's history and the interpretive example offered to visitors of John James Audubon's residence there underline the cultural and ecological importance of the site.

The Friends' quest to elevate the significance of Oakley on a national map continues, and we welcome any and all who will join us in this great adventure and be inspired by the house in which Audubon resided and by the woodlands that he roamed. You may see a bird that he drew while there.

Ann Reiley Jones, Chair
Friends of Oakley

Daniel Wilcox Is Site Manager for Audubon State Historic Site

By Tom Yarborough

The moment when a longtime leader steps aside, and a new figure emerges to assume the mantle of leadership, can be fraught with uncertainty—and not a little bit of anxiety. Elements of change and continuity often collide as long-ingrained processes, methods and traditions are supplanted by new visions and divergent ways of doing things. But transition can also be an orderly and affirming process, one in which the steady hand of experience effortlessly passes the torch off to the next cohort of institutional leadership.

Such a moment has recently taken place at Audubon State Historic Site. After twenty-seven years of thoughtful, devoted service, Site Manager John House stepped into a well-earned retirement. And after several weeks of vetting and interviewing candidates to step into House's gigantic shoes, on October 5, the Office of State Parks announced that long-tenured Interpretive Ranger, Daniel Wilcox, will assume leadership as the new Park Manager of Audubon State Historic Site. Advantage, continuity—though not without caveat.

If Wilcox's name rings a bell, it is because he has served Oakley Plantation as an Interpretive Ranger—and as House's indispensable lieutenant—for nearly three decades. There is not a corner, crevice or nuance of Oakley Plantation with which Wilcox is not familiar. He has organized and overseen innumerable military reenactments, school events, nature

walks and community outreach activities. He breathes the daily rhythms and routines of life at the Site. Wilcox has also acted as a patient and good-humored mentor to newer rangers and has outlasted nearly all of them.

As Wilcox contemplates the challenges and opportunities of his new role as Site Manager, he has a well-defined vision of Audubon State Historic Site's path forward. "I really want to reintegrate the park into the life of our local community. I want to offer things like evening programs in our theater, more outreach to our local schools, and more collaboration with our local historical community. We've gotten away from that. I think it's important that we rebuild those linkages," said Wilcox. "We have so much to offer, and I think we can do a better job getting the word out about Audubon State Historic Site.



*Site Manager Daniel Wilcox attends his first Friends Board meeting in his new position.
Photo By Cheryl Horst*

SAVE THE DATE
Join us for the new Flagpole Dedication
April 30, 2026



Audubon State Historic Site Manager's Message



Daniel Wilcox, new Manager of the Audubon State Historic Site at Oakley.

With John House's retirement, we enter a new chapter in Oakley's story. I am honored and humbled to have been chosen to succeed him. I will do my utmost to uphold and build upon the Site's legacy of history, nature, and culture.

Over the past few weeks, we've resumed both the American Cruise Line's (ACL) and Viking's rotations. We had been averaging three ACL and two Viking programs per month. Starting in November, we increased that to four Viking programs and twenty-one ACL programs per month.

We've completed the renovation of the "old bay," which is the concrete storage building near the barn. It has been transformed into a bunkhouse and an interpretive storage area. Additionally, plans are underway to enhance the value of the Joseph Mason Trail, which has recently been expanded and renovated. An outdoor interpretive area is being constructed at the center of the Trail to support this goal.

Interpretive programming has seen moderate success. In October, our Audubon Birding Walk welcomed fifteen participants and was well received by all in attendance.

Our fall events are shaping up well. The "Revolutionary War in Louisiana" program currently has four hundred schoolchildren registered and over one hundred volunteers committed to help us. Planning is already underway for our Christmas school program, with bookings beginning to come in.

Soon my vision of Audubon State Historic Site will be laid out, and I believe all will be very pleased with the direction in which we are moving.

Thank you for your support!

***Daniel Wilcox, Manager
Audubon State Historic Site***

**Annual
Membership Meeting
Friends of Oakley
Monday, January 12
All Friends Members are invited**



The State of Oakley's Gardens

By Joanne Grimsley

The end of summer finds volunteers, Friends of Oakley Board Members, and staff trying to keep the garden watered during this very dry period. The risers in our irrigation system were repaired by Friends of Oakley Board member Stewart Hughes to improve the watering of the boxwood hedges. Otherwise, there would not be so many surviving, beautiful plants.

Thankfully, the efforts of those who love Oakley pay off. Each year at the end of summer there are numerous butterflies that enjoy the garden, particularly the lantana and zinnia plants.

Furthermore, red spider lilies (*lycoris radiata*) and butterfly gingers add color and fragrance to the grounds.

Friends of Oakley Membership Report It's Time to renew your membership.

by Rachel Howell

Membership of the Friends of Oakley is at 108 individual members and counting! We are trying to have all of our members' renewal date in December with a membership year of January through December. Therefore, we would appreciate each member—old or new—to fill out the membership form that is included in the newsletter.

All paid members will receive a lovely hardcopy of the Oakley Leaflet, as well as an electronic one. Others will receive an electronic copy only.

Many thanks to all who have become members! Your membership money goes toward helping Audubon State Historic Site in so many ways. If you wish to help further, you may volunteer to work in the gardens, help with tours, etc. Please come by and let us know. We always need more help!

Obscure Historical Fact Question

By Stewart Hughes

Are you curious about the history of West Feliciana Parish? Do you wish you could discover something about Oakley House or, West Feliciana Parish that nobody else knows? We have an Historical fact question for you.

If you answered yes, then you should consider a visit to the West Feliciana Parish Clerk of Court's office. The Clerk of Court, board member Stewart Hughes, has an office full of wonderful historical resources. Records date back to the late 1700's and include contracts, civil suit records, conveyance, marriage, succession, probate, mortgage, maps, plats, and judgments.

The public is always welcome to come into the office located in the basement of the Courthouse Annex at 4785 Prosperity Street in St. Francisville. Most of the records are available for viewing using the computer database; but if you prefer a more traditional method of research, all of the papers and books are still available.

For the ultimate convenience (which requires a small fee), the records can even be accessed remotely by the

means of www.westfelicianaclerkofcourt.org. Regular office hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The "Obscure Historical Fact Question" is designed to be difficult and encourage the use of the resources available at the Clerk's Office. Answers can be submitted to Stewart at the office for a chance to win the most valuable prizes of all, knowledge and pride.

Question# 1, which was in the last newsletter: What do John B. Dawson, Ebenezer Cooley, and Ira Smith all have in common related to the history of Oakley House and specifically Lucy Perrie?

Answer to Question #1:

All three were parties to the execution of Lucy Perrie's Last Will & Testament. Lucy Perrie declared her will at Ira Smith's home, with John B. Dawson as the Notary, all in the presence of Ebenezer Cooley and two other witnesses.

Question #2:

There were four portraits included in the sale of Oakley to the State Park Commission in 1947. Can you name the subjects of all four portraits?

Please send your answers to Stewart@kibournedart.com

The Friends of Oakley

Post Office Box 1097

Saint Francisville, LA 70775



Past and present Friends of Oakley Board members who attended Park Manager John House's retirement party are as follows: Front row, from left are Joe Boneno, Chair Ann Reiley Jones, Dot Temple, and Rose Coats. Middle row, from left, are Anne Klein, Joanne Grimsley, Becky Rothschild, Mark Dauer, and John Flippen. Top row, from left are Cheryl Horst, Olivia Pass, and James Dart.