



For Release to the News Media:

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LAKE VILLAGE—The Lakeport Plantation, one of Arkansas’s premier historic structures, will open officially as a museum and educational center during ceremonies and activities open to the public on Friday, Sept. 28.

The plantation was donated to Arkansas State University in 2001 by the Sam Epstein Angel family, and the university has received nearly \$6 million in grants for its restoration as a national model for preservation standards.

Though work on the house is not yet complete, Project Director Ruth Hawkins noted that the restoration has reached a stage whereby the house can be shared with the public as remaining work proceeds.

“In time the house will include exhibits in each room,” Hawkins said. “These will focus on the lives of those who lived and worked at the Lakeport Plantation over the years, as well as the craftsmanship that went into the house, and the preservation techniques utilized in saving it.”

There is no intent to ever furnish the house, according to Hawkins, although pieces of family furniture and other artifacts original to the house will be featured as part of the exhibit plan.

Highlight of the Sept. 28 Grand Opening event will be a public ceremony and presentations at 3:15 p.m. on the Lakeport Plantation lawn, followed by a reception also open to the public. Other public events during the day include a Grand Opening Symposium, featuring members of the restoration team discussing various aspects of the restoration.

The symposium will begin with a welcome at 9:30 a.m, followed immediately by a panel featuring Skip Stewart-Abernathy, Russellville station archeologist for the Arkansas Archeological Survey, and Dr. Thomas DeBlack, associate professor of history at Arkansas Tech University in Russellville. Stewart-Abernathy was involved with archeological investigations at the site, while DeBlack's dissertation on the history of Lakeport and the Johnson family is being updated and will soon be published in book format.

Presentations at 10:45 a.m. will feature Claudia Cathcart Shannon of Shannon Design Enterprises in Jonesboro, restoration team director, and Charles Witsell of Witsell Evans Rasco in Little Rock, project architect.

Afternoon programs will begin with a 12:30 p.m. demonstration of restoration techniques by Ronnie Walker, Lakeport facilities manager and graduate of the Arkansas Institute for Historic Building Trades in Helena, and Becky Witsell of Studio Werk in Little Rock, a nationally recognized expert on historic decorative finishes.

Three students in the Arkansas State University Heritage Studies Ph.D. program will present results of their research related to the African American history of Lakeport at 1:30 p.m. Students include Nicole Smith-Neal, Aketa Guillory and Rose Ong'oa-Morara.

A Plantation Luncheon will be served from 11:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m. and is open to all attendees at the symposium at no charge, but reservations must be made in advance.

Other events associated with the Grand Opening include a Lakeport Professional Development Day for teachers on Thursday, Sept. 27, and a Greater Johnson Family Reunion on Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 29-30. Pre-registration for the Thursday and weekend events is required.

To reserve a space for lunch on Friday, or to pre-register for the Teacher Workshop on Thursday or the Family Reunion on Saturday-Sunday, contact Paula Miles at 870-972-2803, pmiles@astate.edu no later than Friday, Sept. 21.

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Significance of the Lakeport Plantation Arkansas State University

The Lakeport Plantation house in Lake Village, Arkansas is considered one of the top 10 historic structures remaining in the state. Much of its significance derives from the fact that it is the only remaining plantation home on the Mississippi River in Arkansas. The 1859 structure has remained virtually unaltered and retains many of its original architectural features.

This plantation also is representative of the western expansion of the antebellum, slave-based cotton economy. Lakeport has remained in continuous cotton production since the 1830s when slaves carved it from the heavily forested Arkansas frontier. Thus, it provides complete documentation of agricultural development in the region and the accompanying changes in the African American experience.

Additionally, the house was owned by the Lycurgus Johnson family, part of a political dynasty that extended from Virginia to Kentucky to Arkansas. Members of the Johnson family were instrumental in gaining statehood for all three states, and family members included a vice president of the United States, members of Congress, state legislators, and federal judges.

Because of its significance, preservation advocates have long encouraged its placement into public hands so that it could serve as a national model for historic preservation. Thus, in 2001 it was donated to Arkansas State University by the Sam Epstein Angel family. The university will operate it as a museum and educational center, focusing on preservation and heritage studies, along with the African American and agricultural heritage of the Delta.

Already, it serves as a primary laboratory for the Heritage Studies Ph.D. Program. Since the beginning of the restoration project, Heritage Studies students have interacted with architects, consultants and preservation professionals, using Lakeport as a case study.

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**Professional Development Day for Teachers
Lakeport Plantation
Thursday, Sept. 27, 2007**

**Discovering Your Heritage Workshop
8:30 a.m.-12:30 a.m. (4 hours credit)**

Introduction:

Discussion: Family histories and their importance in piecing together community histories and the history of our nation.

Family Units:

Discussion: Types of family units (traditional, blended, step families, adoptive and birth parents, single parents, etc) and how students can record these relationships on a personal chart.

Oral History Interviews:

Discussion: Filling in missing family information through family records such as Bibles, letters, photos, oral history interviews, etc.

Reading Historic Photos:

Discussion: History of photographic processes and how to date photos, including understanding the messages conveyed through photos.

Public Records:

Discussion: Learning about families through public records such as birth, marriage and death certificates; census records; deeds; wills, etc.)

Conclusion:

Ways these activities can be adapted for use with students at different grade levels.

12:30-1 p.m. Box Lunch

**Arkansas History: The Lakeport Plantation
1:00-3:00 p.m. (2 hours Arkansas History Credit)**

A discussion of the lives of those who lived and worked at the Lakeport Plantation, including (1) the Johnson family and how they influenced Arkansas Statehood and the growth of the Cotton Kingdom, and (2) the African American agricultural heritage of the region, from enslaved labor to tenant farming to farm mechanization and resultant changes in the Delta.

(Faculty: Dr. Ruth Hawkins, Dr. Skip Stewart-Abernathy, Dr. Thomas DeBlack)

**Greater Johnson Family Reunion
Schedule of Events
Saturday, September 29, 2007-Sunday, September 30, 2007**

Saturday, September 29—Reunion Activities

- All Day **Registration**, Lakeport Plantation Lawn
- 7:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m. **Oral Histories; Professional duplication of family photographs and documents**, Lakeport Education Center
- 8 a.m. **Optional Tour:** Depart Lakeport Plantation for Family Homes in Mississippi (\$15 per person)
Mount Holly – built by Margaret Johnson Erwin, 1855
Ward-Erwin-Shutt House – built by Junius Ward, 1830
Belmont Plantation – built by Dr. William W. Worthington, 1857
NOTE: Guests staying in Greenville should meet at the Greenville Higher Ed Center (GHECC) on Highway 1 at 8:45 a.m.
- 12:30 p.m. **Return to GHEC, then on to Lakeport Plantation**
- Noon-2:00 p.m. **Box Lunch**, Lakeport Plantation Lawn (\$10 per boxed lunch)
- 2:30-3:30 p.m. **Optional Tour:** Epstein Cotton Gin (No charge)
- 4:00-5:00 p.m. **Optional Tour:** Levee Tour of Johnson Home sites in Chicot County (No charge)
- 6:00-8:00 p.m. **Catfish Dinner**, Lakeport Plantation Lawn (\$15.00 for persons over 12; Children under 12 free)*

Sunday, September 30—Reunion Activities

- 9:00 a.m. **Renewal of Wedding Vows**, Norm and Eva Roberts (married at Lakeport Plantation in 1946)
- 10:00 a.m. **Memorial Service**, Lakeport African-American Cemetery
- Noon **Memorial Service**, Cable Johnson Crypt
- 1:00-3:00 p.m. **Barbecue**, Lakeport Plantation Lawn (\$15.00 for persons over 12; \$10 for children 6-12; Free for children under 6)*

*Wine and Beer Cash Bar sponsored by the Friends of Lakeport

Lakeport Plantation Time Line

- 1831 Joel Johnson leaves Kentucky and moves to Chicot County in the Arkansas Delta. He begins to purchase land along the Mississippi River near an old steamboat landing called Lakeport.
- c. 1835 Lycurgus Johnson, Joel's oldest son, moves to the Arkansas delta and begins to purchase land south of his father's property.
- 1846 Joel Johnson dies. At the time of his death he owns 3,700 acres of land and 95 slaves. Lycurgus Johnson becomes the administrator of his late father's estate, but a legal dispute prevents him from obtaining clear title to the Lakeport property.
- 1858 Settlement of the legal dispute gives Lycurgus Johnson clear title to the Lakeport property.
- c. 1859 Lycurgus Johnson builds his Lakeport Plantation house.
- 1860 On the eve of the Civil War, Lycurgus Johnson owns more than 4,400 acres of delta land and 155 slaves. The plantation produces 1,300 bales of cotton and 10,000 bushels of corn.
- 1861-1865 Soldiers from both sides in the Civil War ravage the delta. Some of Lycurgus Johnson's property is confiscated by federal troops.
- 1870 Despite losses of more than \$100,000 in slaves and other property, Lycurgus Johnson manages to partially rebuild his holdings. Lakeport produces 600 bales of cotton, the largest crop in the county. A Freedmen's Bureau agent refers to Johnson as "a model man of Chicot County."
- 1876 Lycurgus Johnson dies.
- 1897 Lycurgus Johnson's wife, Lydia Taylor Johnson, dies.
- 1907 Lycurgus Johnson's youngest son Victor marries and becomes owner of the family home. He sets up his medical office in one room of the house.

- 1917 Victor Johnson moves his family to a home in Greenville, Mississippi.
- 1927 Victor Johnson sells Lakeport to Sam Epstein. Epstein was one of a sizable number of east European Jewish immigrants who came to the delta to seek a better life. Through hard work and skilled investments he becomes a wealthy man. Neither Epstein nor any of his descendants ever live in the plantation house, though it was occupied for a period by his farm managers.
- c. 1939 Resettlement Program purchases 500 acres of Lakeport Plantation along State Highway 142.
- 1950-1972 Alvin Ford, who farms the Lakeport Plantation, and his family become the last occupants of the plantation house at Lakeport.
- 1950-2000 The Alvin Ford family farms approximately 1300 acres at Lakeport.
- 1974 Lakeport Plantation is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.
- 1983 Arkansas Historic Preservation Program makes small stabilization grant.
- 1984 University of Arkansas Architectural Students draw Historic American Buildings Survey architectural documentation.
- 1999 Lakeport Restoration Team formed by Claudia C. Shannon. Includes Maribeth Frazer, Charles & Becky Witsell, Howard Shannon, Ruth Hawkins, Skip Stewart-Abernathy, and Tom DeBlack.
- 2000 Arkansas Historic Preservation Programs grants \$40,000.00 to Lakeport Restoration Team for research.
- 2001 Sam Epstein Angel, the grandson of Sam Epstein, makes the decision to place the house in public hands to facilitate restoration. March 16.
- 2001 May 19 – 20, First Lakeport Reunion draws twenty-seven heirs of Joel and Lycurgus Johnson to the old home to exchange information with the Restoration Team. More than 100 persons attend the Sunday afternoon Bar-B-Que

including approximately 20 descendants of enslaved families.

- 2001 Spring, Angel family gives conservation easement to Arkansas Department of Heritage on Lakeport house.
- 2001 October, Sam Epstein Angel, grandson of Sam Epstein, and his family make the decision to deed the Lakeport house to Arkansas State University to facilitate restoration.
- 2001 Arkansas State University designates Ruth Hawkins as Lakeport project director, with construction oversight by Terry Carty, ASU construction coordinator, and daily project management by Paula Miles.
- 2001 Restoration professionals contracted by Arkansas State University to assist with the restoration process include Claudia C. Shannon, ASID, as restoration director and Charles Witsell, FAIA, as lead architect. Other consultants and allied professionals were drawn into the process as required during the years that followed.
- 2002-2006 Arkansas Natural and Cultural Resources Council awards the first of five grants for archeology, exterior, and interior restoration, with successive grants each year. The five grants total \$4,925,000.
- 2002 ASU restoration project begins July 1, 2002.
- 2002-2003 Save America's Treasures Grant Recipient, \$320,000.00.
- 2003 ASU receives a start-up grant of \$50,000 from the legislature for the Lakeport project, and a \$3,900 Arkansas Forestry Commission Grant through the Urban Forestry Program.
- 2003 Ronnie Walker, first graduate of the Arkansas Institute for Building Preservation Trades in Helena, is employed as facilities manager to be the owner's representative on site for the restoration. Other key members added to the restoration team included architects Aaron Ruby and John Greer, architects; Randy Guendling, archeologist; and Sonya Walker, office assistant.
- 2003 First of three ASU Heritage Studies Graduate Assistants, Nicole Smith-Neal, is employed to conduct research related

to the African American heritage of the region. Other students include Aketa Guillory and Rose Ong'oa-Morara.

- 2003 The second family reunion is held in May, attracting members of the Johnson family and descendants of enslaved workers and tenant farmers.
- 2003 Delegates from the Strong-Turner Alumni Chapter at Arkansas State University (an organization formed to increase interest and participation of African-American alumni) visit Lakeport in October with representatives of the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network Freedom Project to explore ideas for researching African American heritage. The delegation included Ruby Henderson, Peggy Robinson-Wright, Billy Hill, and Nicole Smith-Neal.
- 2004 Sam Angel deeds additional land surrounding the Lakeport Plantation house to Arkansas State University.
- 2005 ASU receives a \$750,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to assist with restoration and development of interpretive exhibits.
- 2004 Work begins with a group interested in preserving Ward Hall, an ancestral home associated with the Johnsons in Georgetown, Kentucky. The Ward Hall Preservation Foundation is established with commitments between Lakeport and Ward Hall to share research and information.
- 2005 Lakeport restoration team members travel to Georgetown, Kentucky for reunion of the Greater Johnson family at Ward Hall.
- 2007 Legislature provides \$337,730 toward the first two years of operation for the Lakeport Plantation.
- 2007 Grand Opening and Family Reunion, September 28-30.

Lakeport Plantation Fact Sheet

- Lakeport Plantation is the last remaining antebellum home on the Mississippi River in Arkansas. It was home to Lycurgus and Lydia Johnson, members of politically prominent families that included a vice president of the United States under Martin Van Buren (Richard M. Johnson), congressmen, governors, legislators, judges and statesmen from Arkansas, Mississippi, Kentucky and Virginia.
- The plantation is representative of the western expansion of the antebellum slave-based cotton economy, and it is a key resource for understanding the evolution of the cotton economy in the Delta Region. Because the plantation has been used for cotton production continuously since 1831, it provides a complete documentation of the agricultural development of the region.
- Lakeport Plantation also provides a context for studying the accompanying changes in the African American experience. It provides a backdrop for studying the transition from frontier and plantation slavery to sharecropper and tenant farmer systems, to agricultural mechanization and the resultant mass exodus of black workers to factories in the North, to large-scale corporate farming and the limited role of black laborers in the region's current agricultural economy.
- Lakeport Plantation was a gift to Arkansas State University from the Sam Angel family in 2001. Since that time, \$5.97 million in restoration funds have been received from the Arkansas Natural and Cultural Resources Council, the Save America's Treasures program, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, in recognition of its importance to the nation.
- The Lakeport Plantation will operate as an educational center, as well as a museum for tourists and a resource for preservation professionals. Programming will include individualized school tours developed in line with curriculum frameworks, as well as in-service and professional training for area elementary and secondary teachers.
- In 2004-2005, Chicot County had 50,356 visitors who spent \$9,748,999 in the county. This generated 132 jobs and a \$2,027,400 payroll. In the first years of operation, the Lakeport Plantation is projected to add an additional 6,000 visitors annually to these county figures, generating an additional \$1.2 million each year in tourism income.
- The Lakeport Plantation anchors Arkansas's southern end of the Great River Road National Scenic Byway, which travels through 10 states along both sides of the Mississippi River, from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. National Scenic Byways generate approximately \$45,000 per mile annually, with 50 miles of the Great River Road route in Chicot County, or a total of \$2.25 million in projected revenues from scenic byway travelers.