

King's Tavern

King's Tavern is considered to be the oldest freestanding building in Natchez, if not in the state of Mississippi.

This 3-story structure was built before 1789 during the time of the Spanish occupation in the Natchez territory.

Constructed of rough brick, hand hewn cypress and ship timbers, it is believed that this building was originally part of a Spanish military outpost. There are visible timbers in the dining area downstairs that came from flatboats. The first record of a flatboat traveling down the Mississippi was in the early 1780's, when a Pennsylvania farmer built one to ship his flour to the port of New Orleans. By the 1830's, thousands of flatboats had traveled on the River. Of course, these easy-to-build wooden boats were only able to travel downstream. So once the boat reached its destination the wood would be dismantled and sold, and the boatman (commonly referred to as "Kaintucks") would walk northward home on a footpath that became known as the Natchez Trace. In 1810 alone, more than 10,000 of these boatmen travelled north along the Trace from Natchez.

The first known owner of King's Tavern was Richard King of Long Island, New York. King's Tavern played a prominent role during early Natchez. The Tavern was the starting point for those travelling north on the Natchez Trace, or the last stop for the more rare souls travelling south on land. However, it was known to the cutthroats and criminals of the area that if someone was travelling north, it meant they had sold their goods and had pockets full of money. Because of this, many patrons of King's Tavern were not just riverboat men, but horse thieves, pickpockets, slave runners, and murderers. Those heading north would sometimes have to wait in Natchez for weeks in order to get a party together large enough (often 40 or more persons) to attempt the travelling the treacherous Trace. While they waited, a lot of these riverboat men—not so honest themselves—would often gamble and drink away their money before bandits could even get to it.