

# Concord, 1794

## Governor Manuel Gayoso de Lemos

Prepared by the Historic Natchez Foundation



The grandest building of the Natchez colonial period (1716-1798) was Concord, built for Spanish Governor Manuel Gayoso de Lemos (above) in 1794-95.

Gayoso bought a tract of land about a mile and a half from Fort Rosalie in 1794 "to build thereupon a house" and "to raise the commodities" to support a family. Wanting more land for pasture, he petitioned for a Spanish grant to enlarge his property.

The land purchased and granted in 1794 constituted the original Concord property, which was once a working plantation of 1,000 acres.

Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, the son of a Spanish consul, was born in Portugal and married three times. His first wife, Theresa, was Portuguese and died in 1790, the year after he arrived in Natchez. In 1792 he married Elizabeth Watts, an American who died three months after the marriage. Her mother and sister continued to reside with Gayoso at Concord.

By 1795, rumors were circulating that Gayoso was keeping a mistress in Natchez, had built her a house, and intended to marry her.

In February of that year, he transferred ownership of Concord to Margaret Watts, the sister of his deceased second wife. He wrote a letter explaining his "connection" with Margaret Watts and related that they had signed a marriage contract and he had deeded her "an elegant country house." He explained that he had to wait for the king's permission to announce his marriage to secure a

military pension for his wife.

In July 1797, Margaret Watts gave birth to a son, Fernando. The couple soon left Natchez for New Orleans when Gayoso was promoted to Governor-General of Louisiana. Biographer Jack D. L. Holmes described an unusual religious ceremony in which the Bishop of Louisiana "baptized young Fernando and married his parents on the same Sunday, December 10, 1797." This unusual ceremony occurred in St. Louis Cathedral, which became the final resting place of Gayoso who died of yellow fever in 1799 and was buried beneath the altar.

Gayoso served as governor of Spanish Natchez from 1789 until 1797 and was immensely popular and influential. Educated in Great Britain, he spoke fluent English and French. Stephen Minor, an American who

served as the last Spanish authority in Natchez, eulogized him as having an "excellent and generous heart, a liberal mind, and an enlightened understanding." A practitioner of "banquet diplomacy," Gayoso lived large and entertained in a grand manner.

Gayoso's contributions to Natchez were lasting. He directed the platting of the town plan and created the public park overlooking the river. He instituted zoning and required licenses for taverns. He created militias and the city's first police force and was also interested in sanitation, fire protection, and roads.

In the 1830s, writer Joseph Holt Ingraham noted Natchez's nostalgia for its Spanish past which was often recalled as the city's "golden age."



Surveyor George Dougherty drew this 1839 map of Concord filed in a deed book in the Adams County Courthouse.





*Pennsylvanian Stephen Minor served the Spanish government under Gayoso and purchased Concord in 1800.*



*Concord was a symbol of the "golden age" of Spanish Natchez, and postcards which pictured the house continued in popularity long after it burned in 1901.*

Gayoso's widow sold Concord a month after his death, and it changed ownership twice before Stephen Minor acquired the property in 1800 for \$10,000.

Neither Gayoso nor Minor ever knew the house with colonnades and curving front steps. Stephen Minor's widow Katherine Lintot Minor added the distinctive columned portico, curving steps, and columned side galleries after the 1815 death of her husband.

Fifty years after the Minor family bought Concord in 1800, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the Minor family's title to the property. Gayoso's son Fernando initiated a legal challenge in 1832 that was continued by his descendants. The issue was whether or not Margaret Watts Gayoso had the right to sell Concord or whether Gayoso's infant son Fernando should have inherited the property. This 1850 court ruling includes correspondence, testimony, and documents related to the history of Concord and the illegitimacy of Fernando Gayoso's birth.

Dr. Stephen Kelly of New York, who bought Concord in 1890 and rented it in his absence, owned the house when it burned. His son, George Malin Davis Kelly who resided at Melrose, still lamented its loss in the 1940s.

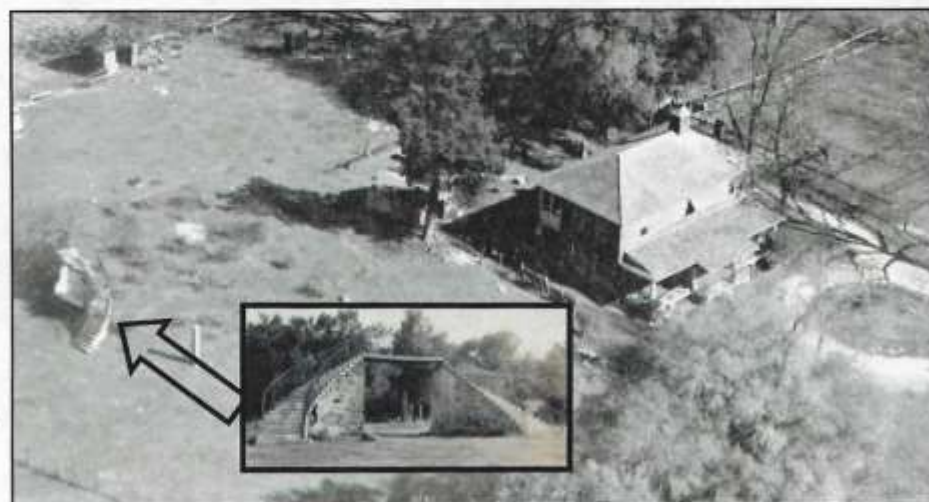
And what remains of Concord today to interpret its significant Spanish history? Remaining on the site are a deteriorated small building whose original use is unknown and a two-story brick building that originally served as one of two matching quarters for enslaved house servants.

## Concord Quarters

The two matching brick buildings that originally flanked the rear courtyard behind the main house were built ca. 1820 for the Minor family. Each featured a two-story gallery supported by giant order columns. The same configuration of building siting and details exist at Melrose, built in the late 1840s.

Remodeled and enlarged to function as a single-family residence

in the early 20th century, the house was badly deteriorated when recently purchased by Gregory and Debbie Cosey. It survives today to tell the story of Governor Gayoso and the "golden age" of Spanish Natchez and the lesser known story of African Americans who labored under enslavement to produce the cotton wealth of Natchez and to operate the mansion estates of wealthy planters.



*The top photograph illustrates the surviving Concord quarters for enslaved workers as it looked in the 19th century. The main house is visible in the background. The lower photograph dates to about 1930 and illustrates the site of the house with a portion of the exterior staircase surviving (see inset of photograph of stairs surviving after the 1901 fire).*