Epps House Transferred
To Memorial Foundation
(Special to The Town Talk)
BUNKIE, La. - An official deed transfer of the Edwin Epps house, built in 1852, to the W. Belmont Townsend Memorial Foundation was made here last week. Mrs. W. Belmont Townsend and son Monty placed the property in the hands of the foundation which will have responsibility for its restoration. It will be moved from the Townsend plantation several miles out of Bunkie to a site in town and will be developed into a central Louisiana tourist attraction. Ward Nash, Bunkie High School agricultural teacher, is president of the non-profit foundation.

The house is typical of the plantation homes along Bayou Boeuf in the period in which it was built. It is an unpainted cypress farm house, its ceilings and walls covered with hand-planed cypress boards, sills and joists made of hewed cypress logs, and lumber joined together with wooden pegs.

The house's historical importance stems from the fact that Solomon Northup, a slave who had been kidnapped in New York and brought to Bayou Boeuf, lived 10 years on the place of Edwin Epps, owner of the house. When Northup was freed in 1853, he dictated his fabulous story to a New York printer. The book is rich in local history and dozens of names of individuals with whom Northup became acquainted. The most recent of many printings of the book was the 1968 edition published by LSU Press and co-edited by Sue Eakin, Bunkie writer and history professor at LSU at Alexandria.

Northup was a free Negro residing in Saratoga, N.Y., 32 years old, married, and the father of three children when he was kidnapped by two renegades and sold into slavery in 1841 while on a trip to Washington, D.C. Northup was shipped to New Orleans where he was auctioned off at a slave sale to William Prince Ford of Cheneyville. After two years he was sold to his final master, Edwin Epps, owner of the house, which will now become a museum.

Northup was educated, resourceful and well-fitted to dictate the narrative relating facts about life on the area cotton and sugar producing plantations. As a favorite fiddler for plantation social functions, he knew well not only affairs on the plantations on which he worked but others in the Bayou Boeuf area as well.

In 1852 he was taken out of the fields by Epps to assist in the building of the house. It was during the construction of the house that he became acquainted with Samuel Bass from Canada who smuggled a letter out to Northup's family and influential white friends in New York to gain his release. This was effected at Marksville in January, 1853, where the legal records survive at Avoyelles Parish Courthouse.

The Epps plantation was sold to the Townsend family on Nov. 4, 1899. The house was donated by Mrs. Townsend and her son to be used as a memorial honoring their late husband and father W. Belmont Townsend Sr., a prominent Bunkie civic and business leader who died in 1972.