Heaton to be among homes on annual Landmarks tour

BALDWIN — Unique among the landmarks of Louisiana is the ante-bellum residence of Mr. and Mrs. H. H. Dinkins, now located three miles north of Baldwin on the Charenton Road (Highway 326). Little is known about the builder, Albert Heaton, except that he was a cooper who moved to Franklin from “Jeanerette’s Place” and was married to Mrs. America Chapman, at Cox, the Franklin home of G. W. Chapman. Built in 1832 next to the cemetery in Franklin, the house with five and one-half arpents was sold in 1854 to George Runk, whose family occupied it for about one hundred years.

In 1963, Samuel Wilson Jr. of the New Orleans firm of Koch and Wilson, restoration architects for “The Shadows-on-the Teche” and many other notable buildings, recognized the plan of this Italian style house as an Alexander Davis design which had appeared in A. J. Downing’s “The Architecture of Country Houses” in 1850.

Davis, an important 19th century architect, who is cited in the introduction to the 1968 edition of the book as “one of the most talented architectural draftsmen America has produced,” was honored recently by an exhibition of his drawings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. One of the best known of his houses is Lyndhurst, property of the National Trust at Tarrytown, New York. It is interesting to note here that James Gallier Sr. worked for the firm of Town and Davis in New York before coming to New Orleans where he later designed some of that city’s finest buildings.

The house, which had been in a deplorable condition for some time, stood on land purchased in 1963 by Charles Borne for a proposed building site. Wilson urged the local Landmarks Society to make every effort to save and as no other purchaser was found, Mr. and Mrs. Dinkins decided in December of 1966 to move the old building by barge some fifteen miles up Bayou Teche to Linwood near Charenton. Under the direction of Mr. Wilson, the house was restored as faithfully as possible and made suitable for modern living.

Of board and batten construction, this “small villa in the classical manner” is painted a mauve gray. Ten wide French doors constructed to catch the light and any available breeze are flanked by shutters of the original turquoise blue. “The exterior of the design” wrote Downing, “is characterized by symmetry, good proportion, and a certain chasteness and simplicity which we like in a country house, while the whole mass obtains dignity from the height given to the central portion.”

The house is built of swamp cypress, the so-called “wood eternal”, with the exception of the graceful stairway. Plain tapered octagon spindles support the curving bannister hand-fashioned of walnut softly and resplendently polished by time and use. The original wide floor boards are found throughout the house and unusual panelled ceilings in several rooms. The construction of the house can be seen in one upstairs room where the wide boards have been unfinished, revealing the 1850 circular saw marks.

During the restoration, a newspaper, probably used for wallpaper backing, was found pasted on the wall behind a door on the ground floor. Dated October 17, 1857, it is from a copy of the “Weekly Delta”, the country edition of the New Orleans “Daily Delta”. The old newspaper has been framed and left for the record.

Heaton, is one of four homes on the annual tour of homes sponsored by the St. Mary Chapter, Louisiana Landmarks, from 1 to 5 p.m. April 25. Visitors from the West could turn off of Highway 90 onto Highway 326 at Adeline, and see this interesting home before coming in to Franklin.