The Henri Penne House Restored With Period Gardens

Preservationists Make Site Evaluation Of Penne House

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BREAUX BRIDGE — A power struggle between SLEMCO and Historic Preservationists is nearing an end as State Preservationist Officials decide the fate of a 138,000 kilowatt power line surveyed yesterday.

The two-way feed power lines are the 10-year-old project of SLEMCO, a Lafayette power cooperative.

The proposed site of a section of the lines is directly in front of the Henri Penne Home, a 19th century Creole plantation complex that was bought and restored by Robert Smith in Breaux Bridge. The plantation home and nearby Olivier pigeonnier have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Smith is balking at SLEMCO's plan saying that the poles will be "a detriment to an historic setting."

Following federal laws, SLEMCO first requested permission from the state Preservation Office two years ago to install the lines and included a map of the project. Robert B. DeBlieux, state historic preservation officer, approved the plan and SLEMCO began buying rights-of-way.

"We did everything the way we were supposed to," said Irving Manuel of SLEMCO. "And we'll do whatever the state tells us to do in their evaluation. By law we must comply with their decision."

DeBlieux admitted yesterday to making a mistake, according to Smith, whose plantation has been on the register since 1980. DeBlieux and State Architectural Historian Jessica Kemm made an on-site evaluation of the Penne plantation yesterday at a meeting of state officials in Breaux Bridge.

Manuel did not attend the meeting and explained this morning that since the decision rests with the state there was no need for him to be present.

The original site for the power lines was on Smith's property. In order to comply to his wishes, SLEMCO adjusted the footage 25 more feet from the pigeonnier and 56 more feet from the house, off the Smith property, but still be in view.

"This slight improvement is still not satisfactory to me," Smith said.

But Manuel said that if SLEMCO were to alter their route much more, it would cost "hundreds of thousands of dollars."

The power lines, which will service three new proposed substations in the Cecilia, Breaux Bridge and Broussard areas, will be a "transmission backbone," according to Manuel.

Also present at yesterday's survey were Harold Scheffler, president of the Acadia Sienna Club; William Pontenot of the Attorney General's Office; and several retired USL geology and English professors as well as tourism directors from the area.