Historical Edwin Epps House
under reconstruction at LSUA

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Town Talk

ALEXANDRIA — The Edwin Epps House, an early rustic plantation home, has been moved to a Louisiana college campus for inclusion in the school’s Center for Plantation Studies.

The house will be the centerpiece of a plantation complex at LSUA at Alexandria.

"We dismantled the house board by board so it could be placed on LSUA’s campus," said Dr. Robert Cavanaugh, chancellor at LSUA. "When it’s reconstructed it will be back in its original style."

The house was built in 1852 on Epps’ plantation grounds in Holmesville, a port on Bayou Boeuf, which is now called Eola, said Dr. Sue Eakin, a retired LSUA history professor.

The house was deteriorating in a cane field on the Townsend Plantation at Eola at the time it was rescued and moved to Bunkie by a preservation group established in Epps' name.

Eakin said the house is being restored according to 1974 architectural drawings by Lauren F. Marchive.

It took about two months to dismantle the house, and reassembly is expected to last about two or three months, Cavanaugh said.

The Epps House is the first of several structures the school plans to include in its Center for Plantation Studies, an educational history exhibit scheduled to open at the university next year. A formal academic curriculum on the subject is also in the works. The program will focus on studies of the plantation as the base of Louisiana’s economy until 1950.

Plans for the project also include development of the historic Northup Trail, which was named after Solomon Northup, a free black man from New York state who was kidnapped in Washington, D.C., and sold into slavery in central Louisiana in 1841. Northup’s experiences in slavery until 1853, when he was rescued by white friends from New York, are recorded in his book "Twelve Years a Slave.”

The modern version of the book was edited by Eakin and Joseph Logsdon. Eakin said the trail expansion could include nearly 50 documented sites in Rapides and Avoyelles parishes. The trail would be extended to include sites in St. Landry Parish and those through which Northup, who was called Platt as a slave, was taken to Franklin, La., in 1845 as one of a gang of cane cutters.

Epps purchased his plantation with funds indebted to him by Rapides planter Archy P. Williams, who also gave Epps eight slaves. The cash was enough for Epps to purchase his own plantation of 325.5 acres in Holmesville, three miles south of the present-day Bunkie. He took the eight slaves to his plantation, and a description of each slave was provided in the documented sale.

Eakin said LSUA has plans to include the Shaw-Harper House in its plantation complex. The Shaw house, which was located across Bayou Boeuf from the Epps Plantation, was described in Northup’s book.

Eakin said that, as soon as money can be raised, the Shaw House will be moved to the LSUA campus.

Other buildings to be included in the Center for Plantation Studies exhibit are several cabins, a black Baptist church no longer in use and a country store.