Local black history recalled

NEW IBERIA — In recognition of February being Black History Month, the Iberia Parish Library will co-sponsor "Emancipation in Acadiana," a program presented by Bradley Pollock of the USL History Department.

The lecture will be at 7 p.m., Feb. 22, at the Iberia Parish Library, 415 Main St., here.

The lecture will be based on recently assembled research by Pollock.

Through the study Fedmen’s Bureau papers, censuses, military records, letters and diaries, Pollock has pieced together the story of the process by which African American slaves obtained freedom.

"A rarely discussed topic, the process of freeing slaves in southwestern Louisiana during the 1860s has not been studied in great depth until recently," Pollock said. "It is appropriate for consideration during Black History Month because it focuses on local Black history."

As part of his investigation, he reviewed the papers of the Weeks family, the original owners of the Shadows on the Teche.

"We are pleased to co-sponsor a lecture which is of local historical importance," said Shadows director Shereen Minvielle. "The Shadows is continually looking to broaden its audience and a topic of such local significance should interest a great many people."

Though Pollock has family roots in Acadiana, his main reason for studying the subject is intellectual, he said, because of the agricultural uniqueness of the area.

"During the 19th Century, most of the Deep South had only one major crop — cotton — but southwestern Louisiana had two — cotton and sugar," Pollock said. "The emancipation of the people who worked in these staple crops make an intriguing comparison," said Pollock.

Emphasizing the way in which sugar parishes differed from cotton parishes, his talk on Feb. 22 will concentrate on the impact of the transition from slavery to freedom of people in southwestern Louisiana.

A complete collection of Pollock’s research will be compiled in his Ph.D. dissertation "Picking and Chopping: The Freedfolk of Southwestern Louisiana and the Evolution of a Black Working Class, 1860-1880," to be reviewed later at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Following the lecture, refreshments will be served. Though the event is free of charge, reservation for seating is required. For more information and reservations, call 369-6446 or 369-6321.