Life Style of Planter's Life Reconstructed

Magnolia Mound Open April 26

By CYNTHIA WOODY

Everything about antiquity is problematical — problematical in that authenticity has to be established and problematical because replacements cannot be purchased at a nearby hardware store but must be fabricated anew.

H. Parrott Bacot, chairman of the furnishings committees, made this observation about Magnolia Mound Plantation House on Nicholas Drive, which will tell the story of life style of the early 19th century Louisiana planter from about 1800 to 1830. Owned by the East Baton Rouge Recreation and Parks Commission, it is being restored under the auspices of the Foundation for Historical Louisiana. It will be opened to the public April 26 at which time a festival is planned on the grounds. Information about group tours thereafter may be directed to the Foundation, 900 North Boulevard, Baton Rouge, La., 70802 or telephone 543-4151.

Mrs. Lewis Bannon, whose research on the house and the succession of families having occupied it, likened her work on the project to a jigsaw puzzle by observing "one finds a piece here and a piece there and tries to fit them together. Large gaps remain and some pieces appear to fit one place only to be found to belong to another."

Magnolia Mound's primary significance lies in its architecture. Robert Heck and his students are responsible for the architectural history and George Leake of New Orleans is the restoration architect. It was Mr. and Mrs. Bert S. Turner who gave impetus to the restoration project. Many people about the city and state have had a hand in bringing back to prominence as a showplace of the area what was once a ramshackle Louisiana planter's house, bought for the value of the site and almost lost forever.

Everything in the house will relate to that period with "just a bit of fudging," as Bacot puts it, because already Mrs. H. Payne Breazeale has given a set of 1837 fiddlebread French silver.

"I wasn't going to argue over seven years," remarked the curator, "besides it looks exactly like the stuff made in the teens and twenties and it is going to be perfect. We were thrilled to get it."

FURNISHINGS FIT ERA — A highlight of the dining room is the stately sideboard, pictured below, on which is displayed fiddlebread flatware shown in closer detail at center. The pricier, above, is one of several acquired from a French convent. It will be placed in the children's bedroom.

- Photos by John Williams

Architectural Integrity

Magnolia Mound Plantation is remarkable for its architectural integrity. The floor plan is typical of early Louisiana houses; rooms are side by side without corridors. "The staggering thing," remarked Bacot, "is that the house comes down to us from the Federal period with this 'marvellous' wooden ceiling. It may be the earliest surviving example in the entire Mississippi River Valley; in any case it is one of a handful."

Now being readied for viewing are the salon-drawing room; the dining room, a child's bedroom and the principal bedroom, all on one story.

The office will be used a reception area. Here visitors will be received and introduced to remarks made. Here a linen press, a gift from the W.T. Baynard is filled with artifacts related to the story of the restoration. Fragments of cornice as well as documentation of research will be on view.

It was during the time that the Duplantier family lived there that most of the additions were made. The local Duplantiers have helped in locating inventories and records but as yet no court record of detailed successions have surfaced nor have detailed inventories, invaluable to restoring the house as it was.

An inventory from 1880 from the Hall family has been helpful as have inventories from other houses of the same period like Oakley and Robinwood. Certain motifs repeat themselves giving researchers an idea of the taste of a family of this era. For instance, floor cloths turned up on a number of inventories of houses during that time. They are large pieces of canvas, often painted with a design used to protect the floors.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN WILLIAMS

AN ERA COMES TO LIFE — Magnolia Mound, 2151 Nicholson Drive, will reflect the life style of a Louisiana planter's family when it opens April 26 with a festival on the grounds. Mrs. W.T. Baynard, left, stands in front of a linen press as she shows a cutwork and lace tablecloth. Several Louisiana-made armoires will be placed in the four rooms open for visitors similar to the one above fitted with drawers pre-dating those adapted for hanging.