Historic site expands with addition of new center

By WANDA HORN
Advocate People editor

Just as Magnolia Mound Plantation puts the finishing touches on Hart House, renovation has begun on the plantation's new interpretive center.

The plantation house, located at 2161 Nicholson Drive, was once the center of a 900-acre operation. It was restored through endeavors of the Foundation for Historical Louisiana, following purchase of an initial five acres by the East Baton Rouge Parish Recreation and Parks Commission.

Magnolia Mound was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972 and was opened to the public in 1975. The American Association of Museums accredited the historic structure in 1985.

Magnolia Mound has been restored to the 1800-1830 period when the family of Armand Duplantier lived there, although the initial structure was built in the 1790s.

Duplantier moved into Magnolia Mound in 1802. His wife, Constance, had inherited the plantation from her first husband, John Joyce of Mobile, an absentee landowner who made trips back and forth from Mobile to Baton Rouge. Joyce drowned in the Gulf in 1798 on a trip back to Mobile.

When Constance, Duplantier's widow, came to Baton Rouge to settle the estate, she met, and later married Armand, and they moved into Magnolia Mound.

Magnolia Mound's new interpretive center is located just north of Magnolia Mound and is the old Berwick property," says Gwen Edwards, the plantation's director.

The new building will serve as an orientation site for the plantation and the gift shop will be relocated here.

"When we move the museum shop out of the main house, then the whole house will be on tour," says Edwards.

The renovation of the interpretive center comes on the heels of the completion of the renovation of Hart House, which serves as an administrative office and a meeting place for the plantation.

With money from fund-raising efforts like the Culinary Classic, which is planned for March 28, the board of Magnolia Mound continues to restore the properties.

The Hart House, located behind the main house, was purchased by BREC eight years ago. It was built in 1904 by Robert Harman, early mayor of Baton Rouge, as his own residence.

When Magnolia Mound was restored in 1973, the last Harman descendant — Annabelle Hart Anderson — was living in the house.

The four bedrooms of Hart House are now used as offices with the living room, dining room and family room serving as entertainment areas.

The home has been decorated in the Victorian period.

"As it's not used for the public, we are not trying to restore as carefully and authentically as we did the main house," says Edwards.

Hart House is also used for scheduled luncheon and dinner meetings, as well as wedding and reception.

Lunches are catered by Betty Ramsey for $8-$12 a person; with dinners ranging in price from $10-$15. Candlelight hours of the historic home can also be arranged with the dinner for $5 extra. Some 50-60 persons can be accommodated for a sit-down dinner. Magnolia Mound board members serve as hostesses and sometimes as waitresses.

The house, which has 12-foot ceilings, was decorated in shades of rose, blue and green. Lace panels are used at the windows and the Victorian love seats were acquired especially for Hart House.

The big armoire in the parlor, the dining room chairs, marble top chest in entry hall and the chest in the dining room are on loan from Pat Smylie.

The portrait over the fireplace was donated by the Hall family. It is the portrait of Emma Hall, whose husband George Otis Hall owned Magnolia Mound during the Civil War period.

"The Hall family has been generous in sharing artifacts and decorative arts," says Edwards, who has been working with George Page of San Francisco, a descendant of George Otis Hall.

"Page has original letters describing Baton Rouge and Magnolia Mound during the Civil War period," says Edwards, "and we have been working with LSU archives and Page to have the have the original letters deposited. They are a rich source of description of what happened to Baton Rouge during the Civil War."

Page also gave Magnolia Mound a set of crystal decanters that belonged to George Otis Hall.

"We have been corresponding about him donating a set of dueling pistols," adds Edwards.

"We want to mount an exhibit of what happened to plantations during Civil War period."

Culinary Classic is plantation benefit

A romans will abound and food fantasies will become reality when the fifth Culinary Classic is presented at the Riverside Centreplex Exhibition Hall on Wednesday, March 29.

Cocktails and display viewing will begin at 6:30 p.m., with the 7 p.m. buffet dinner preceding the 9 p.m. awards ceremony.

Magnolia Mound is the beneficiary of the 1989 food extravaganza sponsored by the American Culinary Federation of Greater Baton Rouge.

This year some 75 chefs and cooks from Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Oklahoma, Florida, Alabama and Tennessee will enter over 150 items. The chefs will be competing for national recognition in the sanctioned, competition show. Among the judges are Paul Prudhomme, Patrick Mould, Tom Thompsons, Felix Sturmer, Charles Brandt, Paul Gates, Louis Jesewskie, Klaus Friedenreich of Richmond, Va., Michel Bonif of Chicago, Bill Daras, Bill Ode, Bernard Gote, Pat Baldridge, Vernon Roger, Smiley Anders, Betty Eppes and Bernard Urban of Houston.

"This is the first hot buffet competition in the United States to be sanctioned by the American Culinary Federation," says Miriam Jahan, Magnolia Mound docent and wife of Glynn Jaban, chairman of the Culinary Classic. A lavish buffet, complimentary wine, music by the LSU Jazz Quintet and a trip for two to San Francisco are part of the lagniappes for this taste event.

Committee members for the event include Laura Clarke, Jahan, Frances Halligan, Connie Ogden, Suzette Tanneshill, Gwan Edwards, Dennis Hargruder, Louis Jesewskie, Martha White, Charlotte Smith, Marilyn Davis, Lucille Munson, Winnie Byrd, Laura Webb, Tim Landry and Miriam Jaban.

Round tables seating eight each may be reserved. Tickets are $50 per person. Call Magnolia Mound at 343-4945 for more information.