Mulberry Grove Among Oaks, Magnolias

By CLAIRE PUNKEY

HÖHEN SÖLMES, La.—On the Mississippi River road in Ascension Parish, about midway between White Castle and Donaldsonville, is the 129-year-old stately plantation home known as Mulberry Grove.

In gleaming whiteness, this lovely three-story mansion stands back from the east bank of the river in a breath-taking setting of oak and magnolia trees.

Built in 1836 by Dr. Edward Duffel, it carries out both the architectural motif of his native Virginia, and that of the Acadians who had made this section their home following expulsion from Nova Scotia.

Dr. Duffel's wife was the daughter of the area's first American commandant, Joseph Landry, an exiled Acadian who had come to Louisiana.

Today, Mulberry Grove is owned by Mrs. Clarence C. Clifton Sr., who bought it because she wanted a place in the country.

In her search, she had her eyes on Madewood down Bayou Lafourche near Napoleonville, only to learn the property was not available. Next a place in St. James Parish attracted her, but that, too, was not for sale.

Then, F. A. Graugnard Jr., a St. James Parish sugar planter, told her of Mulberry Grove.

So Mrs. Clifton organized a picnic on the Mississippi River levee near Mulberry Grove to get a good look at it. She liked its potential, bought it in June, 1951.

Restoration of the house began in February, 1952. It was completed a year later, with two sets of carpenters and three sets of painters on the job.

were married six days before she was 22 and went to Cisco, Texas, to live.

Their son, C. C. Clifton Jr., lives in New Orleans. The Junior Cliftons have a four-year-old son, also named Clarence, who enjoys his grandmother's country place.

Today a widow, Mrs. Clifton takes a keen interest in country life and in Mulberry Grove's agricultural advancement. There is a sugar cane there, and a herd of Hereford cattle, some of them wearing cow bells she brought home from Switzerland.

Her farm is run according to a plan devised by Soil Conservation Service technicians in the Lower Delta Soil Conservation District, and crowning and ditching on her 704 acres is paying agricultural dividends.

Mrs. Clifton is particularly fond of her cut-of-doors, her rose garden, where her favorite flower blooms profusely even though, as she said, "This is not rose country, they say."

Mulberry Grove, with four large rooms on each of its main floors, is beautifully furnished with family heirlooms and pieces picked up at home and in many countries she has visited. In one room is the bed in which she was born.

As elsewhere, backdoor living has come to Mulberry Grove. Mrs. Clifton some time ago established a driveway in the front of the house and sheelled it, but "I can't get anyone to use it," she said.

Viewed from the back or the front, from one side or the other, Mulberry Grove is a beautiful place to see.

It was reduced to its shell, down to the beautiful cypress, and rebuilt, using as much original material as possible. The downstairs partitions of brick, despite their beauty, had to be covered with Oriental stucco to prevent leakage.

Floors had to be replaced, and Mrs. Clifton insisted that the original specifications be used. "The six-inch flooring is exactly like that in the old floors it has replaced," she said.

The shingled roof leaked, so it was replaced by one of sheet iron. The original doors continue in use, along with parts of marble mantles.

There are two heating systems in the house, but open fireplaces, stacked with logs, continue to be used—a couple of times out of necessity when the modern method failed to function.

Mulberry Grove is constantly filled with relatives and friends, whenever Mrs. Clifton, who has a great liking for people, is at home.

A native of Plaquemine in Iberville Parish, the former Hattie Grace attended St. John High School there, then went on to Loyola University in New Orleans for her degree in pharmacy.

At 16, she met the man she would marry, Clarence Clifton of Assumption Parish. He became affiliated with the oil industry in Texas, and a lively correspondence between them ensued.

"I even received my engagement ring through the mail from Texas," she said. They