Science Substitutes
For Patient Spiders

By Lydia Kremer

It isn’t likely that anyone in 1955 could be persuaded to trust spiders just to make a wedding more romantic.

No one even suggested it when plans for reenacting the famous Durand wedding in St. Martinville during an Acadian bicentennial celebration Sunday, were made.

Instead, the planners called on Fred Forsburg, dean of the College of Engineering at Southwestern Louisiana Institute, to devise some way of providing the spiders who needed to make the re-enactment authentic.

Charles Durand came to St. Martinville from France in 1829. To make his daughter’s wedding the most memorable in Acadian history, it is said that he sent his slaves to catch spiders at Catahoula which spited the gossamer web in Pine and Oak alley.

To add enchantment to the spider web, slaves used bellows to sprinkle it with gold dust.

In recreating the scene, several problems were solved for Dean Forsburg.

He wrote to four major movie picture studios in Hollywood for advice. They explained their methods of making webs, but none could tell him of any device which would spray the trees with spider webs.

So, he built a centrifugal machine with a series of sieves that will make the webs synthetically from a solution of rubber and gum.

It produced filaments the color of spider webs, but they were much too thin to be convincing.

To remedy this situation, he plans to have a blower force the filaments out of the centrifugal stretching and twisting them as they are pushed out into the tree branches. The air pressure will cause them to twist, turn, and entwine around each other so that they will resemble the work of spiders.

The equipment has been tested in the shop at 21 PSI hours, but all is in working order. The web will be sprayed the night before the celebration in Pine and Oak Alley from sunrise to sunset.

If weather permits the centrifugal machine and blower will be manned on a truck from which men will operate the equipment.

Artist’s work of spinning the synthetic webs will be done by night, probably from midnight until dawn when the wind is at its lowest ebb.

At one end of the avenue of trees, an altar will be placed just up the street was in the original Durand wedding. The re-enactment of the scene is planned for 10 a.m. Sunday.

Descendants of Charles Durand will take part in the wedding, along with other major events in Southwest Louisiana during the Acadians’ bicentennial year in the state.

As the bride and groom move toward the altar, they will be preceded by attendants dressing the scientifically produced spider’s web with synthetic gold.