Preservationists Say Murat House Condition Good

Contrary to rumors which have recently been circulated in and about Baton Rouge, the historic Magnolia Mound or Prince Murat House on Nicholson Drive is in good and sound condition, it was declared Wednesday following an inspection of the property, by two preservation leaders connected with statewide organizations.

Harnett T. Kane, president of the Louisiana Landmarks Society, and George M. Leake, architect and former chairman of the Vieux Carre Commission, joined in a formal statement designed to contradict claims made, they said, by a number of people opposed to the saving of the famous property.

Kane and Leake described a visit made to the scene a week or so ago after interest had grown in the historic property. They said: "Contrary to rumors by some individuals, we have found this rare and valuable building in good state throughout its sections."

"The walls of Magnolia Mound are structurally sound, its early style of heavy floors are in good condition, and its roof intact. We looked beneath the building and went through each of the rooms, studying doors, windows, fireplaces, galleries and other features. Nowhere did we see serious decay or dissolution, such as we are told that a number of people are claiming has occurred."

"The building needs repairs of course, with replacement of occasional sections of wood and the like, in a manner necessary in any case in which houses are unoccupied for a time. But no heavy expenditure would be needed to restore it, and such improvement or restoration would be a valuable and important undertaking for any Louisianian or group of Louisianians, and a definite contribution to the cultural-historic-civic good of our state."

Kane and Leake declared also: "We can think of few acts of better public service than such work in behalf of this fine structure. Here is a truly distinguished building, of great value, historical, architectural and otherwise."

Parts of the structure, Kane and Leake pointed out, date back at least to 1780, in the Spanish colonial era of Louisiana. "The building is of highly typical, simple Louisiana French design, with interior woodwork of particularly fine pattern, including hand-carved sections, especially handsome fireplaces, with ring-and-diamond patterns in the moldings and over the fireplaces."

Summarizing, Kane and Leake declared: "Louisiana has few structures of historic or architectural quality to match this distinguished one. If it were ever lost, all of Louisiana and all of its people would be the losers, and so would the nation." They noted that the authoritative Historic American Buildings Survey had cited Magnolia Mound for special place among finest structures of the region, and photographed and studied it in detail.

Kane and Leake are members of a special committee of the Louisiana Landmarks Society which is working to prevent demolition or drastic alteration of the historic property. Others are John DeCell III, award winning architect and expert in plantation and planning activities; Thomas Meunier, chairman of the Bayou St. John Citizens' Committee; Joseph Grima Bernard, vice president of the American Institute of Architects; Martin Cramer Jr., formerly of Baton Rouge, and Miss Gertie Espenhan, Baton Rouge member of the Landmarks Society.