Pakenham Oaks to Stand, Kaiser Plant Engineer Says

Rumor of Dynamiting Denied as Protection Assured

The Pakenham Oaks near Chalmette won't be removed to make way for the Kaiser Aluminum reduction plant.

The oaks—four of them—are located near the river on property being sold by the Southern railway to Kaiser.

They are frequently confused with the de la Ronde Oaks—the two rows of live oaks—at State Highway No. 1 and Paris rd. This oak alley, considered by

historian Stanley C. Arthur, "probabl the finest in the world," is not on the property involved.

W. T. Turner, vice-president and executive agent for the railway, said here Tuesday that the de la Ronde Oaks are about 2600 feet from the property line of the tract on which the plant will be erected.

And Frank Backman, the engineer in charge of constructing the multimillion dollar project, said not only won’t the four Pakenham Oaks be removed but that "we'll do everything we can to protect them."

He said that he thinks the trees should be guarded from destruction and marked as a historic site.

He pooh-poohed rumors that his men were going to dynamite the live oaks that shaded British Gen. Edward M. Pakenham as he died from wounds inflicted by the Americans at the Battle of New Orleans.

The Pakenham Oaks are near the Bienvenu plantation house close to the Mississippi river levee.

Backman said that industrialist Henry J. Kaiser "doesn't want a tree removed that doesn't have to be. I know how he feels about it because I once removed some trees that didn't have to be. Our policy is definite and has been for a long time.

On this job, no tree that is 24 inches or larger in diameter will be taken down. And no tree will be destroyed that absolutely does not have to be. So far there is no specific tree or trees marked for oblivion. Only an area has been marked. Trees certainly should make a plant more attractive, and we want to have an attractive plant."

He pointed out that a number of trees in the plant area are dead or dying, some from lack of care.

He specifically denied there is any dynamite mark on the Pakenham Oaks.

Miss Carmen Colomb, recently evicted from the old plantation home, had reported earlier that the oaks were marked for destruction.

Backman said, "I sincerely regret that Miss Colomb had to be evicted. It was either having a plant or having a house. We had no choice."

Historian Arthur, secretary of the Louisiana Live Oak Society and "only human member" (all other officers and members are oak trees) said, "I am happy to learn that the Pakenham Oaks are not to be destroyed. They have great historical significance. Gen. Pakenham was carried to the four oaks and died there."

Backman related, "Mr. Kaiser wouldn't want us to touch these old oak trees. I'm certain. Why, he had us move some buildings in our steel plant because of some eucalyptus trees."

As for the old plantation manor, that will be used during construction as a field engineer house. And Backman said he wasn't certain it would be torn down when no longer needed:

"It might be preserved. I don't know yet."

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