Preservation of Chalmette Oaks Discussed

STANDING by one of the dead trees among the de la Ronde Oaks at Chalmette are James Fondren (left), resident landscape architect of Tulane University, and Valentine Riess, president of the St. Bernard Parish Police Jury, who inspected the tree Friday. Preservation of the remaining trees was discussed.

Funds Needed to Save Trees

Dozen Oaks Dead from Years of Neglect

Years of neglect have killed at least a dozen oak trees in Chalmette and experts predict the death of many more unless immediate action is taken.

This was the finding of a conference Friday conducted on the site of the deaths — the faded double row of de la Ronde Oaks, which are thought to date back 143 years.

Immediate funds of from $10,000 to $15,000 are needed to save the trees and about $5,000 annually to maintain care, said James Fondren, resident landscape architect at Tulane University.

"No one can restore a dead tree, but much can be done to salvage the others," said Fondren. "The money needed at once is to make immediate tree repairs and halt decay in the most serious cases. Additional care will include improvement of fertilization and drainage to save the rest."

The oaks are located on land leased by Southern Railway to the St. Bernard Parish Police Jury on an annual basis. The president of the police jury, Valentine Riess, said every effort will be made to provide proper care for the trees.

Over the years, even their background has been neglected. A state marker relates that the trees were planted in 1783 by plantation owner Pierre Dennis de la Ronde, but de la Ronde did not acquire the plantation until 1799. Secondly, the trees are often mistaken for the Pakenham Oaks.

Historical evidence indicates they were planted about 1822 byster, of the third Ward of the Dennis de la Ronde V., son of St. Bernard Parish Police Jury.

Fondren and Harnett T. Kane, president of the Louisiana Landmarks Society, also appraised the condition of two oaks at Chalmette High School. These are the last two oaks left standing from an avenue of the trees which ran from Lacoste Plantation, where the high school now stands, to the river.

One appeared to Fondren as in good condition, but the other, badly in need of fertilization due to a paved walk constructed over its roots. He said better drainage was also needed around the trees.

Other participants in the meeting were Dr. Robert Judice, first vice-president of the Landmarks Society; John DeCall, Landmarks plantation expert; Mrs. Nathaniel Chesnut Jr., of the Civic Beautification Association; and Edwin M. Roy, Mrs. Helen Mayer and Louis Mun.

Times-Picayune
July 31, 1965
P. 14, c. 3-5