Preserving the Past

By DANNY HEITMAN

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The site profiles are sent to the Library of Congress, where they can help the preservation of some of the area’s oldest buildings. "William Brockway and Barrett Kennedy work at the LSU Office of Community Preservation, a place that most people know nothing about. But area residents will get a chance to learn more when Brockway and Kennedy speak at the LSU Rural Life Museum later this month. It’s all part of "Gulf Coast Architecture of the 19th Century," a March 13 symposium at the museum featuring architecture experts from around Louisiana. The 19th century is familiar territory to Brockway and Kennedy, both on the faculty of LSU’s School of Architecture. Through the Office of Community Preservation, they teach people far beyond the Baton Rouge campus about the value of historic preservation. "We work with communities so that they can better understand their architectural resources," Kennedy said. "It really runs the whole range. We’ve worked with slave quarters, we’ve worked with sugar mills, we’ve worked with the big (plantation) houses."

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A window of one of the slave cabins at the LSU Rural Life Museum affords a view of the blacksmith’s shop in the background. The buildings will be featured in a tour that’s part of an upcoming symposium at the museum on 19th-century architecture.

Museum hosts architecture symposium

The fifth Jose E. Burden symposium, "Gulf Coast Architecture of the 19th Century," is slated for Saturday, March 13, at the LSU Rural Life Museum, located at 102 and Essen Lane. Several architecture experts will speak at the daylong event, which is sponsored by the museum docents.

The symposium begins with registration of 8 a.m. and ends at 2:15 p.m. Lunch is included in the $35 registration fee.

Barbara Baust, senior architectural historian for the Division of Historic Preservation in the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, will begin the morning talk on "The Plantation Landscape and Outbuildings." She will be followed by F. Lestar Martin, professor of architecture at Louisiana Tech University, who will speak on "Folk Style Architecture of the Hill Parishes." Eugene Cisek, director of the preservation studies program at Tulane University, will discuss "The Architectural Heritage of Louisiana and Cuba."

Next, David Broussard, preservationist and cabinet maker, will report on his research on the Old St. Gabriel Church, the oldest church in the Mississippi River Valley. He will present a slide show as well as a model of the building. After lunch, Jay Edwards, professor of anthropology and director of the LSU Fred Kniffen Cultural Resources Lab, will lecture on "What Louisiana Architecture Owe to Hispaniola and What It Does Not."

The last two speakers, William Brockway and Barrett Kennedy of the LSU Office of Community Preservation, will speak on "Preservation of Louisiana Architecture." Brockway will conclude the lecture with an architectural tour of the Rural Life Museum.

Because of limited seating, pre-registration is strongly suggested. For more information or to sign up, call the museum at 765-2437.
be consulted by scholars from around the world. If profiled buildings are ever destroyed, future generations can consult OCP's research and get an exact impression of how the building looked. For Brockway, the possibility that an old building will eventually disappear makes such documentation vital.

Nationally, of the thousands of sites listed in the HABS survey over the years, "it's estimated that about 30 percent are no longer standing," Brockway said.

While many Southerners think of antebellum mansions when they hear the word "historical," Brockway is quick to point out that OCP's site profiles include more than plantation homes. Along with studying celebrated structures like the Olivier House in St. Martinville and Whitney Plantation in St. John Parish, the OCP developed an extensive portfolio on the LSU Livestock Judging Pavilion, built in 1926. "It's not what people think of when they think about historic buildings," said Brockway, noting that the pavilion was among the first buildings constructed on the present campus. "That's one of the reasons we call it the LSU Office of Community Preservation. We're not just talking about the big (plantation) house."

Kennedy is especially excited about the Internet as a way of getting information about historical preservation to the general public. Along with the Division of Historic Preservation of the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, the OCP has developed an electronic archive of Louisiana properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Users can log into the site at http://landmarks.lsu.edu.

It includes links to related sites, and Kennedy wants to develop even more Internet destinations for those interested in historical preservation. His lecture at the symposium will focus on cyberspace as a preservation tool. "I want to talk about these Internet resources so people can learn more about them," Kennedy said.

Along with developing an inventory of historical sites, the OCP has also advised property owners and government officials on a range of preservation problems. Last week, Brockway and Kennedy met with officials at the State Capitol to discuss deteriorating mortar at the Armory Building on the Capitol grounds.

"The mortar that you go buy today is incompatible with the mortar they used back then," said Kennedy, citing a typical challenge involved in preserving landmarks. The OCP has also worked with the state in preserving the Pentagon Barracks near the Capitol.

Visitors to the Old State Capitol can see another example of the OCP's handiwork. "We did the models at the Old State Capitol," Kennedy said. "We built models of the Old State Capitol as it was first constructed, then as it was remodeled at the turn of the century."

Brockway and Kennedy talked about their upcoming symposium lecture while sitting in an overseer's cabin at the Rural Life Museum. For Brockway, it's an example of the diversity he'll be discussing in his symposium lecture. "I'm going to give a quick overview of Louisiana architecture, which goes from Victorian Uptown New Orleans to what you see here."

"We've got such a rich heritage that we tend to take it for granted, and that puts us at risk," Kennedy said. "We still have some of it, but we're losing it at a pretty fast clip."