Restoration of Destrehan Plantation House is Goal

Effort for Historic Home Is Under Way

By JOSEPH A. LUCIA
(Times-Picayune UPI Bureau)
DESTREHAN, La.—A determined effort is underway here to restore the historic Destrehan Plantation House.

Once an imposing monument to the old South, the proud ante-bellum home is now in an advanced state of deterioration and is almost completely, but mercifully, hidden from view by tall weeds and underbrush.

The deterioration started nearly a decade ago when the American Oil Company, owner of the house, closed its refinery in Destrehan. It has worsened with each passing year.

The Herculean task of restoring the house has been undertaken by the year-old River Road Historical Society, which is headed by Mrs. Myles Gaupp.

"With hurricanes Betsy and Camille having destroyed so many of our beautiful Southern homes," Mrs. Gaupp said, "it is now more important than ever to try to save the Destrehan Plantation House. The house is unique, irreplaceable and its value incalculable."

Immediate goals of the society, according to Mrs. Gaupp, are to prevent the ravages of time, weather, vandalism and neglect from causing further deterioration.

She said the possibility "appears very good at the present time" that the American Oil Company will donate the house to the society. While the negotiations are underway, she said, the society is hopeful that the existing roof can be replaced in an effort to curtail deterioration of the building.

Mrs. Gaupp said other steps being contemplated include securing the house against destruction by the elements and vandals by boarding up the windows and doors until restoration can begin, thoroughly cleaning the interior of litter, trash, dirt and debris, repairing the fences and gates and clearing the grounds, which occupy approximately three acres.

The long range goals include complete restoration of the house and furnishing it with authentic pieces representative of the furnishings employed by the plantation owners.

She said the society is interested in hearing from anyone who has old photographs or memorabilia of the house or information as to the present location of any furnishings or articles which the house once contained.

Serving with Mrs. Gaupp are...
officers of the society are Henry Friloux, vice-president; Harold Carrode, treasurer, and Mrs. Henry Friloux, secretary. Other members are Mrs. E. S. Schexnayder, Henry Boudin, State Rep., Ralph Miller, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Murray, Jr., Mr. Murray, who has served as legal advisor to the society and has helped with much of the research, said the Destrehan Plantation House "has great possibilities as a tourist attraction and as an historic site." He said the grounds could be used as a rest and picnic area and perhaps a portion could be set aside for formal or informal gardens which would feature Louisiana followers and plants.

Built in 1797, some five years before the Cabildo in New Orleans, Destrehan Plantation House is "one of the oldest houses in Louisiana and one of the best documented structures of the Colonial period," according to architect-historician Samuel Wilson Jr. Writing in the March, 1969 issue of THE LOUISIANA ARCHITECT, Wilson said the house represents three major phases of construction and illustrates the changes in style in Louisiana architecture of over half a century, from the time of its original construction in 1797 to its remodeling in the popular Greek Revival style in the 1830s.

Charles Parish Architect

Paul Murray, Jr., who also is a member of the River Road Historical Society, said "the Destrehan Plantation House is the only four-gabled plantation house built in St. Charles Parish prior to 1800." The other three were built in 1810. The sisters, Mrs. Foster of New Orleans, the Trepass Rouge, and the Ormond Plantation in Destrehan.

"The house is open," Mrs. Murray said, "but all the still stands. The Trepass Rouge, which stood in ruins until about 1820, has been restored. The house that remains is the remains and 365 miles of the ruins.

Destrehan Plantation House, not destroyed by the builder and roasting ball, is the inevitable destruction which will happen in the future, and it is allowing the relentless ravages of time to continue taking its toll.

"Destrehan is an important part of our architectural heritage. A striking feature of the house is the West Indian roof line. Other features of the house and the 20 columns located in the front and rear of the house and the parapet which were probably added in the 1840s.

"The real tragedy is the fact that 10 years ago the house was sold by the Margraves family. The past 10 years since the closing of the American Oil Refinery have been the most historic in the house's history. Its destruction cannot be allowed to continue."

"Murray said American Oil Company has agreed to use $12,000 for remodel work to stop damage from vandalism and to stabilize the roof. The work will include a new roof, boarding up the windows and clearing up the property around the house.

Although the building is now almost impossible to reach because of the heavy growth of underbrush, the house is still well-known to tourists and many of them stop at the site to try to get a glimpse of the structure, he said.

Murray, who has been credited with having the building included in the recent reclamation of the plantation house, said the company would consider the donation, but only to a nonprofit organization.

"Ralph Miller, president of the board, and Rep. Ralph Miller, of the legislature, contacted American Oil in Feb., 1969. Following several meetings a year and a half later, American Oil approved the charter but requested an interminable "in delay." the statutes. The state would receive the house.

The first organizational meeting was held Aug. 14, 1969, and a charter was drawn up by Ralph Miller. American Oil approved the charter but requested an interminable "in delay." the statutes. The state would receive the house.

The charter was received from the state Jan. 8, 1969, and Ralph Miller took the charter and submitted the request to the state's membership in the society at the invitation of Rep. Miller and said he was "completely in agreement regarding the donation of the Destrehan Plantation House from American Oil Company. The house should be presened as an important historical site for all of Louisiana.""