Office of State Parks hopes St. Francisville plantation will continue to thrive as the newest State Historic Site.

By CYNTHIA V. CAMPBELL
Travel editor

REAMS, past and present, permeate Rosedown Plantation like a melody playing over and over in the mind. Yet, the magnificent plantation house in St. Francisville is much sturdier than a misty-dream survivor of frontier settlement. Cotton Era wealth, victory, Civil War, Reconstruction and several changes of ownership; the house still stands — a Louisiana treasure.

Rosedown became a Louisiana State Historic Site in November. Acquired from Gene Slivka for $5.7 million, the property includes the historic home and a 28-acre garden. The sale also involved 371 acres and 13 outbuildings, including the kitchen, doctor's office, barn and Man X's wing. The acquisition also included furnishings in every room of the house, windowpanes, draperies and assorted artifacts valued at $1.3 million.

The sale put the property firmly under the direction of the Louisiana Office of State Parks, which is currently studying and cataloging every aspect of Rosedown's history and contents. Gregg Potts, commemorative area manager at Monticello, is serving as interim manager at Rosedown Plantation.

"To me, this place has three heroines," said Potts, "The first was Mildred Turnbull, the original owner. She built the gardens. The second was Catherine Fondren Underwood of Houston who bought the property in 1956 and undertook a magnificent restoration. She had everything restored, and the gift shop (building) was turned into a restoration workshop. The third heroine is Lt. Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, who has taken it upon herself to see that Rosedown will continue to thrive.

"Places like Rosedown are important to Louisiana. They are our museums. This is a way to keep the importance to Louisiana in process — to show off heritage for future generations," Potts said.

Potts said the Office of State Parks will conduct studies to authenticate all aspects of Rosedown, including learning more about the contributions of African-Americans to the property. "I'm certain a lot of the brickwork and carpentry was done by black people," he said. Potts explained that records are scanty. "No one even knows where the slave cabins were located."

continued on Page 18

TOP: A view from one of Rosedown's second-story windows on a rainy day in November attests to the site's dream-like atmosphere. The photograph was taken just days after Louisiana acquired the property as a state Historic Site.

ABOVE: An upstairs bedroom in Rosedown is furnished in 19th-century children's furniture. Toys, including the rocking horse and doll's carriage, were discovered in the attic during the home's restoration in the 1950s.

LEFT: Rosedown's Entrance Hall features a curved mahogany staircase. The wallpaper, selected by the house's original owners, Daniel and Martha Turnbull, features panoramic historical scenes on a sky-blue background.

Continued on Page 18
Audubon house visit a fitting bookend to Rosedown trip

BY CYNTHIA V. CAMPBELL
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Audubon Pilgrimage, one of the outstanding home-garden tours, will take place Friday-Sunday, March 16-18, in St. Francisville. Like other pilgrimages, this one features outstanding examples of 19th-century homes. It also gives people a chance to observe a community that enjoys sharing its heritage with visitors.

The scenic wallpaper in Rosedown's 8. Dufour, was selected by the Turnbulls, and brought us to the house. Both are serving as caretakers of the home, whose mother Sue Sanders was the same time as the house.

From this plantation, designed by New Orleans architect W. L. Stevens, features a classical style. Built in 1965, it was a gift from a brother to his sister, the wife Judge Samuel Lawrason. Today, the descendants of the late Samuel Lawrason Butler are preserving the structure.

Sunny-side: Owned by Mr. and Mrs. David Floyd, the house was built in 1838 by Charles Tressler for the niece of Gen. Phineas Thomas of West Florida Rebellion fame. Built in Pine Pointe Copper Parish, the house was moved to its present site and retains its original floor plan, millwork and hardware.

The Cottage: The cottage follows a dogtrot design and was built by Andrew Back Brant, a survivor of the Civil War. As a Confederate infantryman, Brant served under Gen. Sterling Price during the Shemeshob Valley campaigns of 1862. He lived to attend the 50th anniversary reunion of the battle of Gettysburg in 1912. Several contemporary families trace the roots back to A.B. and Josephine Temple Bright.

Rural Homestead: Native materials, handwoven cotton shingles and aged wood create this riverside retreat. The building represents the life of simple farmers in the 10th-century South. During Pilgrimage local volunteers demonstrate open hearth and wood stove cookery, basket weaving, quilting, spinning and more.

Gardens on Pilgrimage: After Villa gardens feature a mile-long oak alley lined with century-old azaleas. It leads to the foundations of the home that was once the site of the Audubon house visit a fitting bookend to Rosedown trip.

Henry Clay furniture. The massive Gothic tester bed and large double armchairs are carved walnut bookcases designed by Robert Turnbull and his wife, Caroline S. Butler, whose mother was the great granddaughter of Martha Washington. Their daughter Sarah married James Marshall, a Free French plantation in St. Francisville. Since William drowned in a ship accident on the Mississippi River in 1859, it was the Bowman family and their descendants who eventually inherited the plantation.

Emory and Loretta Dogue of Crowley were making the tour with house guest, Alan and Brenda Davis of New Orleans, Belgium. "St. Francisville is always a nice area to visit," said Dogue. "This is a great tour!"

We asked the Bartons for their impressions of Rosedown. "In Europe, there is a myth of the American South linked to the Civil War," said Mrs. Barton. "This plantation is a good illustration of all the stories we've learned about the period and movies we've seen like Gone With the Wind."

As we wandered through the gardens, we walked to the rear of the mansion to Mass Nims Wing, a section of the home built for the last surviving member of the Butler family. The Poirot windows to even more antiques, all original to Rosedown. Just beyond, we absorbed the view of the small pond, the budding trees, and glanced at the view to say goodbye to site manager Potts and remarked how pleasant the entire site appears. "It can't really explain it," he said. "It's just comfortable. You feel good being here."