Alexandria, La. ---- Tyrone Plantation House will be among the 7 sites of historic interest open to the public on the Heritage Tour scheduled April 24-25 by the Historical Association of Central Louisiana. The buildings all will be open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day. Tour tickets are $7 and will be available at each site. Tyrone is situated on the left bank of Bayou Rapides, 5 miles from Alexandria on Highway 496.

With its Irish name, its Louisiana bayou setting and its memories of the many people who have lived in it and loved it for the past 134 years, Tyrone is one of this state's antebellum plantation homes still standing and still fulfilling its destiny as a home for a family. Gone with time and the wind is the plantation itself, its 2200 acres long since divided and re-divided; sold and re-sold. Gone with the war are the plantations original buildings, all save the house itself.

Tyrone Plantation, named by a former owner who was a native of County Tyrone in Ireland, was purchased February 7, 1842 and the dwelling house began shortly thereafter by George Mason Graham, a Virginia gentleman of distinguished lineage. His mother, Elizabeth Hooe Mason Graham, was the widow of George Mason, eldest son of Col. George Mason of Gunston Hall, famed Revolutionary statesman and author of the Va. Bill of Rights; hence Graham's middle name. His father, George Graham, was the wealthy owner of "Lexington", a palatial estate in Fairfax County, Va., where in 1807 their son was born.

Graham was educated at West Point and the University of Virginia. In the fall of 1828, his father sent him to Rapides Parish in La. "to see into the condition of and causes of unproductiveness of a cotton plantation... on the Bayou Boeuf at the debouchment of it of the Bayou Lamourie", which he had acquired some years earlier and entrusted to the management of overseers. Except for a few brief intervals, George Mason Graham spent the remainder of his long and useful life in Louisiana, which he loved genuinely and served well. He became a successful and prosperous cotton planter, a statesman and an educator. As a captain, he commanded Co. E, Third La. Regiment, in the Mexican War of 1846. On his return from that war,
he was elected Brigadier General by the officers of the two militia regiments of Avoyelles and Rapides Parishes; for all of his life thereafter he was known as General Graham. In 1866 the post-civil was governor commissioned him Adjutant General of the State of Louisiana.

Education was a lifelong interest of General Graham, who in 1853 served as chairman of the board of trustees directed by the La. General Assembly to plan and erect a building on land which it had purchased in the hills back of Pineville for the site of the Seminary of Learning, which proved to be the forerunner of La. State University. Then as vice-president of its board of supervisors, which is reputed to have held its initial meeting at Tyrone, he was insistent that the institution's program be molded on that of the Va. Military Institute of his native state; accordingly, the name was changed to La. State Seminary of Learning and Military Academy. Too, General Graham was largely responsible for the board's employment of a West Pointer, Gen. Wm. Tecumseh Sherman, as the college's first superintendent. The two men became close friends and Gen. Sherman was a frequent visitor at Tyrone, before the war. L.S.U. remained ever dear to the heart of General Graham, who took great pride in its success and remained on its board of supervisors for more than 30 years.

The Civil War was devastating to Tyrone, as to all plantations in the path of General Banks' federal troops in the last year of the war, 1863-64. When the war began, General Graham was a wealthy man. By his own description, "his gin and 600 bales of cotton and all of his barn burned, his corncribs full of corn and all others of his farm's foodstuffs stolen, along with his horses, mules and oxen; his cattle, hogs and sheep slaughtered and his slaves gone." Only Tyrone house itself was spared, reputedly at the instruction of his old friend and war-time enemy General Sherman. The only animals saved were Graham's sister's carriage mules and his children's ponies, hidden in the lower half of the house, with battened doors and windows, for 6 weeks.

Penniless, heavily in debt and without machinery, equipment, laborers or animals, the courageous general began over again at Tyrone, after the war. Only by astute management and determination was he able to save his plantation from being sold for taxes. He lived in his beloved home until his death there in 1891, when he was almost 84. His descendants occupied Tyrone until 1915, when it finally passed out of the hands of the Grahams.

No imposing mansion such as those to be seen on plantations along the Mississippi's "River Road", Tyrone rather is a classic example of the many large, luxuriously furnished
antebellum plantation homes which lined the banks of bayous throughout the sugar cane and cotton growing sections of Louisiana. A two and one half story structure in the raised-basement architectural style, it is characterized by spaciousness, simplicity of design and solid construction. The foundation and walls of the ground floor are of brick, made on the plantation by slaves labor; topping this are sills of immense cypress logs, 12" x 16", hewn by slaves from the original trees on the plantation and still sound today, axe marks and all. It was modern in its equipment; a large iron tank of several thousand gallons capacity in the upper story of an outbuilding furnished it with running water for its bathrooms and a sewer system was so skillfully devised that it is still functioning well after 134 years.

New owners have remodeled and renovated the house, making necessary changes and additions at various times to adapt it to comfortable modern living. Through all, however, Tyrone has retained its dignity, its charm, its serene beauty. The history of Tyrone is not that of a house but rather, of a man and his times. Times of great prosperity and wealth; times of war and devastation; the agonies of reconstruction years and, in a final triumph over adversity, the molding by that man of a new way of life in Central Louisiana bayou country.

Since 1954, Tyrone has been owned by Col. and Mrs. Rae Donaldson, both of whom are native Louisianians, intensely interested in the history of the state and the proud heritage of their bayou home and its distinguished builder.

A display of interesting memorabilia of early L.S.U. will be on view and refreshments will be served at this plantation home during the Heritage Tour.