



San Francisco Plantation: Let's keep preservation going

STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANDERSON

Preserve Whitney Plantation

New Orleans

It was with mixed feelings that I learned of the plans of the Formosa Plastics Corp. to acquire historic Whitney Plantation in St. John the Baptist Parish as the site for a huge chemical plant. The buildings of Whitney Plantation are among the oldest and finest Louisiana colonial plantation complexes in existence.

Perhaps the proposed chemical plant might be the salvation of these important examples of Louisiana's architectural heritage if this Taiwanese company follows the example of the Energy Corporation of Louisiana (ECOL), which some years ago bought San Francisco Plantation and undertook its careful restoration, setting aside a small amount of the plantation acreage for the preservation of the house.

This was done through the far-sightedness of ECOL's Frederick B. Ingram, who, when ECOL had to dispose of its unfinished refinery to the Marathon Oil Co., set up an agreement that the restoration of the house would be completed and opened to the public as one of the outstanding plantations on the River Road. How great it would be for Louisiana if Formosa Plastics made a similar generous civic gesture and assured the preservation and restoration of Whitney Plantation.

Whitney and the beautifully restored adjacent Evergreen Plantation were both built by the

Haydel brothers, the former by Jean Jacques Haydel and the latter by Christophe Haydel. Both were built before 1800, possibly in the 1780s or 1790s, and were originally identical in plan and design.

When Christophe Haydel died in 1801, Evergreen was acquired by his daughter Magdeleine (born in 1754), widow of Pierre Antoine Beonel. At her death in 1830, Evergreen, then known as the Beonel Plantation, became the residence of her grandson Pierre Clidament Beonel, who, by April 3, 1832, made a contract with a St. Charles Parish carpenter and builder by the name of John Carver to extensively remodel the house, rebuilding the roof, adding the belvedere or captain's walk, the two-story plastered brick columns and the two circular front staircases as well as the symmetrically arranged outbuildings.

At about the same time in the 1830s or '40s, Marcelin Haydel, who then owned Whitney, did some slight remodeling at Whitney, enclosing the side galleries and having the remarkable wall and ceiling paintings done on the interior. Thus, in Whitney, the original appearance of Evergreen can be seen.

Certainly everything possible should be done to assure the preservation of this unique 18th-century plantation and its barn and pigeoniere.

Samuel Wilson Jr.