

# DEW PLANTATION

In the spring of 2004, a group of students at University of Houston embarked on a class project that brought them off campus and into the community. Led by instructor James P. Arnold, the historic preservation class was given the project of documenting a turn-of-the-century plantation house in Missouri City, Texas, just outside Houston. Plans were underway to demolish the house and the class project was a small way of preserving the structure's past.

The Dew Plantation House is one of the last remaining buildings of its kind in Fort Bend County. The Dew Brothers' business was one of the plantations central to the production of sugar cane in the region and contributed to the Imperial Sugar Company's thriving business. This house represents a way of life that existed throughout the region over a century ago.

The Dew Brothers were among the founding fathers of Missouri City, and were central in the development of the area into a viable economical district. They were also very involved in the Houston community.

Henry Wise Dew was one of the eight men involved in establishing the Houston Fat Stock Show and Rodeo in the summer of 1931. Since then, the Houston Rodeo has gone on to become the largest rodeo in the country.

Until recently, the future of this house was bleak. The house had been vacant for several years and the owner, Muffie Moroney, could no longer afford its upkeep. Much of the house had fallen into disrepair, and developers were buying up the land on either side of the house. It would only be a matter of time before the house would be slated for demolition and lost forever.

Moroney, a descendent of the Dew family, did not want to see her family's history disappear; therefore, she worked with Jim Arnold and Historic Houston to help preserve the history of the home through a Historic American Buildings Survey.

The house received several additions since it was originally built. In the late 1920s, the second-floor porch was enclosed, a new roof line was created, and two room additions were made on the north and south sides of the house. This Colonial Revival Conversion only changed superficial aspects of the house, so the original architecture, fabric, and feeling were still evident.

After the semester ended and the project was completed, the land was eventually sold to the developer. With the demolition date set, Muffie Moroney decided to host a going away party of sorts for the house. Friends and family got together to say goodbye to the house. It is rare when preservation can actually occur at the eleventh hour, but something happened at this farewell gathering that will change the course of the plantation house's history.

A plan unfolded to move the house to the nearby Kitty Hollow Park within the Sienna Plantation development. Muffie Moroney donated the house to Historic Houston, which in collaboration with Johnson Development Corp. and Fort Bend County Commissioner Grady Prestage, arranged to relocate the house. Johnson Development Corp. and Ms. Moroney decided to share the cost of this move.

One of the first rules of preservation is that once a historic structure is disconnected from its original land and environment,

the historic value diminishes. Undoubtedly, moving the house off the plantation land and away from the majestic, century-old oak trees would take away some of the house's distinction. However, this solution was better than completely destroying the structure.

On February 25, 2006, Texas Highway 6 was shut down in both directions from 11:00 p.m. – 4:00 a.m. as the Dew House slowly crept down the road to its new home in Kitty Hollow Park. County Commissioner Prestage would like to see the house restored and preserved for public use. He is working with Barry Moore, FAIA,

and the University of Houston School of Architecture's 5th year design studio. Together they are looking at possible design plans for the house at its new site that would involve the entire park.

Preservationists in Houston often fight losing battle after losing battle. The historic preservation students that became involved with this project two years ago were able to experience the feeling of preservation success and recognize that such successes are few and far between. ■◆

—Jenna B. Leventhal



*In order to move the Dew Plantation House to its new home, Historic Houston first removed parts of the structures that were not original to the house. Next, the house was cut into two pieces to facilitate the difficult move. Historic Houston, a non-profit organization, has had over 35 houses donated to them for relocation purposes since its founding in 1998.*