

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received **MAR 14 1984**
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Edwin Epps House

and or common Same

2. Location

street & number Highway 71 ^{U.S.} N/A not for publication

city, town Bunkie N/A vicinity of

state LA code 22 parish Avoyelles code 009

3. Classification

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| Category | Ownership | Status | Present Use | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> district | <input type="checkbox"/> public | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum (and tourist facility) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied | <input type="checkbox"/> commercial | <input type="checkbox"/> park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure | <input type="checkbox"/> both | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress | <input type="checkbox"/> educational | <input type="checkbox"/> private residence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site | Public Acquisition | Accessible | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> religious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object | <u>N/A</u> in process | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific |
| | <u>N/A</u> being considered | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> no | <input type="checkbox"/> military | <input type="checkbox"/> other: |

4. Owner of Property

name W. Belmont Townsend Foundation c/o Sue Eakin

street & number P. O. Box 704

city, town Bunkie N/A vicinity of state LA 71322

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Avoyelles Parish Courthouse

street & number Main Street (no specific address)

city, town Marksville state LA 71351

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title LA Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1979 federal state county local

depository for survey records LA State Historic Preservation Office

city, town Baton Rouge state LA

7. Description

| | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Condition | | Check one | Check one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> unaltered | <input type="checkbox"/> original site |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved date 1976 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed | | |

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Edwin Epps House (1852) is a single story frame Creole cottage presently located on Highway 71 on the outskirts of the town of Bunkie. Despite a move and considerable replacement of architectural fabric, the house still conveys its historic appearance and consequently its association with the famous slave narrative Twelve Years A Slave.

When the Epps House was moved from its original location on the north bank of Bayou Boeuf near the small community of Holmesville, it was in a deteriorated state and in imminent danger of being demolished by the owner. A local preservation group undertook the 3-1/2 mile move in order to save the house and develop it as a museum. Had it not been for their efforts, there is no doubt that the house would no longer be standing. Unfortunately the original setting of the house was rural while the present setting is an open commercial area along a two lane highway.

Despite this change in setting, the house remains in the same vicinity and hence can still evoke the same historical associations. In any case, it was built as a plantation house, but had long since lost its plantation setting when it was moved. It stood by itself in an overgrown condition along a country road. Gone were the plantation appurtenances and the cultivated surroundings. The preservationists moved the house where they did because it needed a less remote location if it were to be properly maintained and protected. Its only viable use from their perspective was as a museum and tourist center, which demanded a location near a major route. The house is currently the headquarters of the Solomon Northup Trail, a tourist route marking various sites in the slave narrative. (The Epps House, however, is the only remaining standing structure directly associated with Twelve Years A Slave.)

The four bay galleried house is two rooms wide and two rooms deep. There is no central hall. Because it was so deteriorated before the move, much of the original fabric had to be replaced. Original features include the pitched roof galleried form, the framing, the fenestration openings, the beaded ceiling beams, the beaded ceiling boards, and about half of the interior wall boards. Replaced features include all of the siding, all of the windows, the porch columns, and all of the flooring. Both chimneys have been lost.

It should be noted that all replacement was necessary and most of it was done in kind. For example, the present siding is virtually identical to the original. The only difference is that the bead on the present flush boarding is a bit small. But this is something which requires a trained eye even to notice. There is no doubt that the Epps House conveys its historic appearance. Epps and Northup would certainly recognize it today. This is particularly evident if one considers the house's most distinctive feature. Although the two front doors abut each other, each leads into a different front room. This is a local Bunkie area fenestration peculiarity which is not seen much in other parts of the state.

SEE ITEM 7 CONTINUATION SHEET FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE MOVE

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Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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7. Description (continued)

Additional Information on the Move:

Before the 1976 move, the Epps House stood near a clump of second growth trees and was encompassed by a pecan orchard on three sides. The house faced south-southwest along Bayou Boeuf just southeast of the Texas and Pacific railroad tracks. Originally, of course, the setting for the house would have been a cotton plantation. After the move the house was placed in the original compass point orientation on what was open highway. It was only subsequently that the area experienced significant commercial development.

8. Significance

| Period | Areas of Significance—Check and justify below | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> community planning | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499 | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic | <input type="checkbox"/> conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> law | <input type="checkbox"/> science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599 | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> economics | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> literature | <input type="checkbox"/> sculpture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | <input type="checkbox"/> architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> education | <input type="checkbox"/> military | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> art | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> music | <input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> theater |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1900- | <input type="checkbox"/> communications | <input type="checkbox"/> industry | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> invention | | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify) |

1853 (publication date of Twelve Years A Slave)

Specific dates House; 1852 **Builder/Architect** Builder; Edwin Epps

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Criterion A

The Edwin Epps House is of national significance in the areas of literature and social/humanitarian because of its close association with the famous slave narrative Twelve Years A Slave,* Epps was Northup's master for the last ten years of his twelve year enslavement and the Epps House figures very prominently in Twelve Years A Slave.

IMPORTANCE OF TWELVE YEARS A SLAVE:

Twelve Years A Slave is the extraordinary story of Solomon Northup, a free black adult from New York who was kidnapped and enslaved in Louisiana. It was first published in 1853, shortly after Northup's rescue, under the title Twelve Years a Slave, Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, from a Cotton Plantation Near the Red River in Louisiana.

Northup was reunited with his family in Glen Falls, New York on January 20, 1853 and shortly thereafter began work on the narrative with the aid of a local writer named David Wilson. The book was actually written by Wilson, but as dictated to him by Northup. Unlike most of the ghost writers of slave narratives, Wilson was not an antislavery activist. Historians Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon, the editors of the most recent edition of Twelve Years A Slave, theorize that Wilson "merely became intrigued with the tragedy and recognized its publishing potential." They also feel there is no reason to doubt Wilson's statement, made in the original preface to the book, that he had dedicated himself to an accurate transcription of Northup's reminiscences.

Slave narratives were immensely popular reading in the North and Twelve Years A Slave was certainly no exception. Its sensational element (i.e., a free black kidnapped and sold into slavery) made it a best seller of its genre. The narrative was an immediate success; the first printing of 8,000 copies was sold within a month. It sold over 30,000 copies in American and European editions during Northup's lifetime and was reprinted several times after his death in 1863. In addition, his story received considerable publicity from articles in Northern newspapers as well as in the antislavery press.

Not only did Northup's story capture the general public's attention, but it also merited comment from such well-known figures as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Frederick Douglass. The first newspaper account of Northup's story (New York Times, January 19, 20, 1853) mentioned the similarity to Uncle Tom's Cabin and Stowe herself termed it a "striking parallel" to her novel. In The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin (1853), she related Northup's story and noted "the singular coincidence that this man was carried to a plantation in the Red River country, that same region where the scene

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property approximately 1/8 acre.

Quadrangle name Bunkie, LA

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

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Verbal boundary description and justification See enclosed sketch map for description.

Justification: Boundaries were drawn closely around the house in order to discretely encompass the significant resource. Little land was included because the setting is not historically associated with the house and does not contribute to one's appreciation of the house's historic value.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title National Register Staff ASSISTED BY Sue Eakin, P. O. Box 704,
Division of Historic Preservation Bunkie, LA 71322

organization State of Louisiana date January 1984 (H) 318/346-2161
(O) 318/445-3672

street & number P. O. Box 44247 telephone 504/342-6682

city or town Baton Rouge state LA 70804

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Robert B. DeBlieux

title State Historic Preservation Officer date February 29, 1984

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

for Helores Byers Entered in the 4/12/84
Keeper of the National Register National Register date

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

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8. Significance (cont'd)

of Tom's captivity was laid." Frederick Douglass, who had already recounted his experiences as a slave, recognized the compounded tragedy in Northup's account: "Think of it: For thirty years a man, with all a man's hopes, fears and aspirations--with a wife and children to call him by the endearing names of husband and father--with a home, humble it may be, but still a home . . . then for twelve years a thing, a chattel personal, classed with mules and horses Oh! it is horrible. It chills the blood to think that such are." (Liberator, August 26, 1853, quoted from Frederick Douglass's Newspaper)

Northup also apparently did some public speaking in the North on his experiences. A reaction to one such personal appearance can be found in a letter to William Lloyd Garrison two years after the first appearance of Twelve Years A Slave: "Twelve Years A Slave has been widely read in New England, and no narrative of man's experience as a slave is more touching, or better calculated to expose the true character and designs of slaveholders. But it is far more potent to see the man, and hear him, in his clear, manly, straightforward way, speak of slavery as he experienced it, and as he saw it in others. Those who have read his Narrative can scarce fail to desire to see the man . . . and to hear his story from his own lips."

Of the about eighty full-length slave autobiographies published before the Civil War, Twelve Years A Slave is particularly noteworthy for the following reasons:

- (1) Northup had a very unusual set of credentials because he observed the "peculiar institution" from the perspective of both a free black and a slave. Although abductions such as his were not unique, they were certainly not an everyday occurrence. Twelve Years A Slave is one of very very few slave narratives told from such a perspective.
- (2) No other slave has left such a detailed picture of slavery in the Gulf South. Relatively few slaves ever managed to win their freedom from this region and hence almost all of the slave narrators came from the border states or the Atlantic seaboard. His account is particularly valuable for its descriptions of cotton and sugar production and its portrayal of the accommodations and day to day routine of slaves in the Gulf South.
- (3) Twelve Years A Slave is regarded by historians as one of the most reliable and valuable of the extant slave narratives. Joseph Logsdon, in his Solomon Northup entry in the Dictionary of American Negro Biography, observes that leading students of slavery such as U. B. Phillips, Kenneth Stampp, Stanley Elkins, and John Blassingame have all either attested to its credibility or used it extensively in their studies of American slavery.

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8. Significance (cont'd)

This reputation is important because many slave narratives are considered "questionable" by historians because they were often ghost written by abolitionists for use in their propaganda campaign. It should also be noted that the editors of the most recent edition (1968) found Northup's account to be amazingly accurate as they checked it against other available sources.

- (4) Although Northup catalogs cruelty after cruelty and condemns the institution of slavery in no uncertain terms, his account is considered to be a well-balanced treatment of the subject. Reviewers, for example, were quick to take note of his apparent lack of bitterness. Very importantly, Northup makes distinctions between good and bad masters and points out the amenities that made his life endurable. Also, he recounts both the sensational and the ordinary aspects of life under the "peculiar institution."

THE EPPS HOUSE'S ASSOCIATION WITH TWELVE YEARS A SLAVE:

The Epps House figures very prominently in Northup's rescue, as described in the final portion of Twelve Years A Slave. In fact, it is the only extant structure directly associated with the narrative. As noted elsewhere, Epps was Northup's master for the last ten years of his enslavement.

"In the month of June, 1852, . . ." recounts Northup, "Mr. Avery, a carpenter of Bayou Rouge, commenced the erection of a house for Master Epps." Because of his skill as a carpenter, Northup was assigned to help with the building of the house, and it was thus he met Samuel Bass, the man most instrumental in his return to freedom. (Bass was one of the carpenters working on the house.) After overhearing Bass express antislavery sentiments to Epps, Northup decided to approach him for help. Northup explains that he waited until early August when he and Bass were alone working on the house to broach the subject. Bass was receptive and he met Northup that night in the unfinished house to hear the details of his story. Bass wrote letters to various Northern friends of Northup's, acquainting them with his situation, and seeking their assistance to secure his release. Because of the risk involved, Bass understandably remained anonymous. One of these letters reaped results when on January 3, 1853, Henry Northup, the scion of the family that had owned Northup's father, arrived at Epps' plantation to secure Northup's release. It was in the Epps House that Henry Northup and the local sheriff confronted Edwin Epps with Northup's true identity.

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8. Significance (cont'd)

One wonders if Northup would have ever secured his freedom had it not been for the construction of this house. Would he have met Samuel Bass otherwise? Perhaps, but suffice it to say that Solomon Northup undoubtedly considered the construction of the house to be of special importance in ending his twelve years as a slave.

*These two areas are checked because slave narratives are a literary genre and their subject matter, slavery, best fits under the social/humanitarian category in this instance. Because Twelve Years A Slave yields important information about slavery, an institution of immense national consequence, the State Historic Preservation Office felt that, by definition, the Epps House had to be nominated to the Register at the national level of significance.

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9. Bibliography

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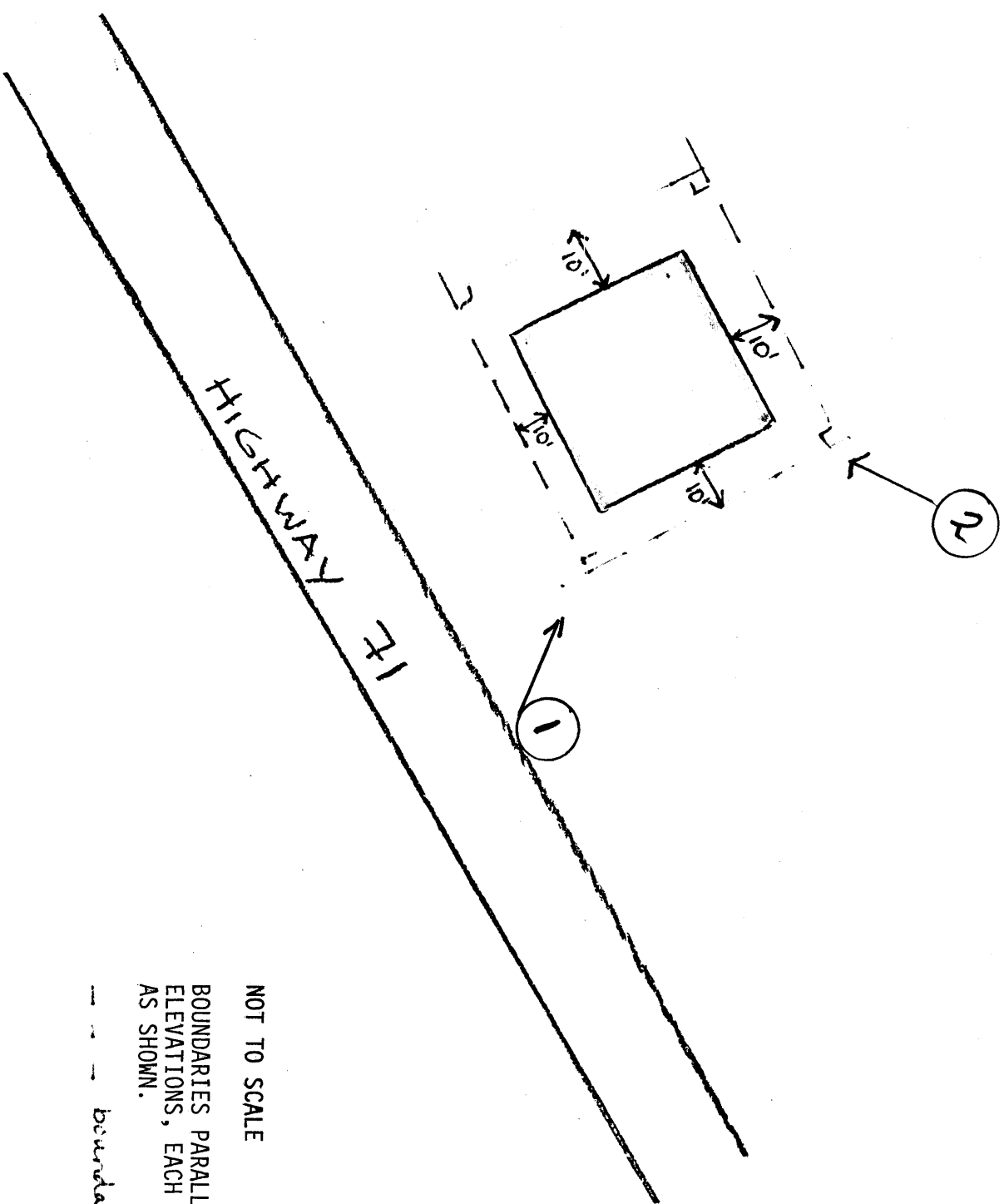
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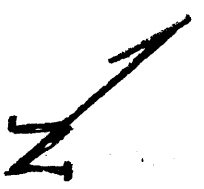
EDWIN EPPS HOUSE, BUNKIE, AVOYELLES P.

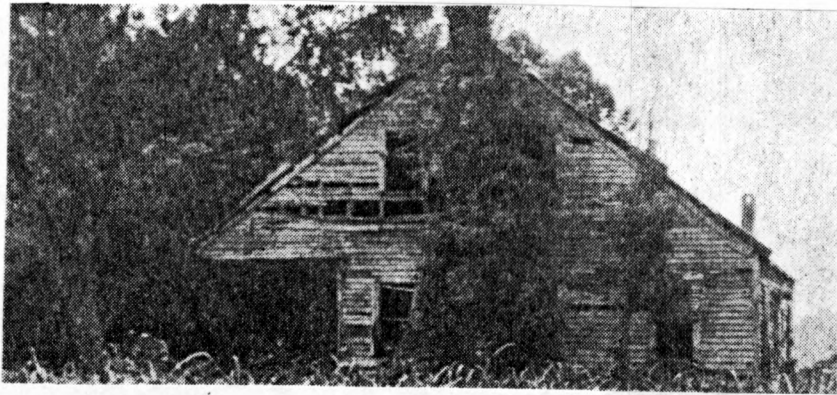


NOT TO SCALE

BOUNDARIES PARALLEL BUILDING ELEVATIONS, EACH AT A DISTANCE OF 10', AS SHOWN.

--- boundary lines





Copies of pictures showing
Epps House prior to the
move.

Edwin Epps House
Woyelles Parish
Louisiana