

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Thomas A. Lemoine House (c.1885) is a one-and-a-half story, wood frame, Italianate cottage located in a pastoral setting. The surrounding acreage is mainly flat cultivated farmland. Although the house has been moved twice and has received a few alterations, it easily retains its landmark status in Avoyelles Parish.

The main block of the Lemoine House has a central hall plan, two rooms deep. A rear dining room-kitchen wing gives the house an overall T-shaped configuration. The attic was always unfinished; however, the present owner plans to convert it to usable space. To this end a staircase has been added in one of the rear rooms of the main block.

An old photograph reveals that the Lemoine House originally had a hip roof crowned by a small rectangular cupola and a parapet with a thin band of ornamentation. It was also raised higher off the ground than it is now. In about 1912 the building was moved some one hundred yards and received its present pitched roof form. The house's most striking exterior feature is its five-bay richly ornamented Italianate front gallery. It features square columns with molded tops and an entablature with elaborate scroll brackets and a scalloped jigsaw border. When the present owner acquired the house, the balustrade on the front gallery was gone. The current one however, is a duplication based on photographic documentation. The much simpler square post gallery that wraps around the rear and side of the dining room-kitchen wing is original, but the side gallery on the east elevation dates from c.1912. Access to the front gallery is provided by not only a central doorway but four floor-length windows which can be raised up into the wall. Other windows are of the more conventional six over six type.

The Lemoine House is entered through a central doorway with a transom and side lights. The door has a single rectangular pane of clear glass surrounded by stained glass multi-color blocks. The walls of the central hall feature wide headed boards applied in an alternating chevron pattern. The pattern is given additional emphasis by the use of contrasting light and dark woods. The ceiling features a different chevron pattern culminating in a central lozenge. The center of the pattern is marked by a scroll sawn ceiling medallion. The four rooms off the central hall are not particularly noteworthy. Only one of the house's two mantels survives, and it is a fairly standard design for the period. The other mantel was gone when the current owner acquired the property. The present replacement is from the period. Doors feature a much faded false grain treatment.

The Lemoine House's most significant interior treatment is found in the dining room. The walls have wide beaded boards applied in a chevron pattern using alternating light and dark woods. The recently restored c. 1887 painted ceiling has a central geometric design featuring repeating curves and circular patterns, four different types of fruit, and five inset stars, with the largest in the center. The remainder of the ceiling is plain except for a wide border with a ropework edge. Each corner of the border features a repeating ogee pattern and a design formed by a bell, a triangle, and a pair of gold leaf tassels. The ceiling background is white, while the border and central design are done in burgundy, deep blue and gold.

ASSESSMENT OF INTEGRITY:

Alterations:

All changes have been mentioned above. The c.1912 addition of a side gallery and the more recent interior staircase addition and loss of a mantel have had only a minor visual impact and do not detract from the house's architectural importance (i.e., Italianate styling, painted ceiling and interior wall treatment). It should also be noted that the staircase is discreetly placed in an unimportant rear room. The present balustrade, as mentioned, is a duplication of the original. Granted, the c.1912 reworking of the roofline did make a noticeable change in the house's appearance, but the Italianate gallery, interior wall treatment, and painted ceiling still remain, and it is these features that make the house significant.

The Moves:

As mentioned previously, in about 1912 the Lemoine House was moved approximately one hundred yards. It was relocated to the south on the same property in order to make room for a new house the owner was planning to have built. It still faced Bayou des Glaises.

Faced with destruction in 1978, the house was purchased by the present owner and moved about two miles within the same parish (from Moreauville to Hamburg). Although the move changed the compass point orientation of the house (from facing westward to southward), the setting remained rural Bayou des Glaises was about 600 feet in front of the house and now it is about 1700 feet to the east. Finally, the house was not moved out of the parish which is the context for its significance.

Adjacent to the rear of the house is a modern reproduction of an antebellum-type cistern. It, of course, is listed as a non-contributing element.

Specific dates c. 1885, c. 1887
Builder/Architect Builder: Thomas A. Lemoine

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)
Criterion C

The Lemoine House is architecturally significant on the local level as a rare example of the Italianate taste within Avoyelles Parish and because its interiors are among the finest in the parish. Its painted ceiling is of artistic significance within the parish.

Italianate was the dominant style in American residential architecture from c.1850 to c.1880. However, this popular style is not very well represented, at least numerically, in Avoyelles Parish. The Louisiana Historic Standing Structures Survey reveals that of the 812 recorded 50+ year-old buildings in the parish, there are only six examples of the Italianate taste. Besides the Lemoine House, there are two residential reflections of the style. One is a Queen Anne house with Italianate brackets and the other has a bracketed Italianate gallery. The other three are commercial buildings where Italianate detailing is confined almost exclusively to segmentally arched windows. The Lemoine House's stylistic character is defined by its elaborate Italianate entablature. Although this is but one feature, it dominates the exterior articulation and is a major component of the Italianate style. Although Avoyelles Parish may never have had very many Italianate buildings, those which remain represent an important manifestation of mid-nineteenth century taste.

The Lemoine House achieves further distinction because of its interior wall treatment. The historic structures survey previously mentioned recorded some 150 residences in the parish dating from the period when headed board wall patterns were popular (c.1890-c.1910). However, there are very few, if any, period houses which match the Lemoine House in terms of sheer elaborateness. The more typical example would have a vertical hoard treatment in contrast to the more complex chevron pattern found at the Lemoine House.

Finally, the Lemoine House is also significant because of its painted ceiling. Generally speaking, only the grandest of homes in late-nineteenth century Louisiana had a painted ceiling. It seems unusual to find such a degree of refinement and pretension in rural Avoyelles Parish. Rather surprisingly, the Lemoine House is one of four residences in the parish with surviving painted ceilings.

Historical Note:

The ceiling painting is said to have been painted by an Ursuline nun; however, no precise information on the artist seems to be available.

Major Bibliographical References

Louisiana Historic Structures Survey, Avoyelles Parish.

La Commission des Avoyelles. Avoyelles: Crossroads of Louisiana. Baton Rouge: Moran Publishing Company, 1981.

Avoyelles Journal. October 13, 1981. Page B1 (article on restoration of painted ceiling)