

Describe the present and original (it known) physical appearance

Oak Hall was begun in the late nineteenth century and successively altered in stages, culminating in a major 1923 renovation. It is a rural residential complex of five Arts and Crafts style buildings and a bridge disposed about a formal live oak garden. The nominated acreage encompasses the main house, a servant's cottage, a gazebo with an attached arbor, a Delco house, a garage, the aforementioned bridge, and the remains of a few other landscape features. Overall, the Oak Hall property is in an excellent state of integrity.

In its heyday the property was somewhat larger than it is today, It was entered from Louisiana Highway 29 through an elaborate Chinese/Craftsman-looking gateway redolent of the Forbidden City. Passersby must have wondered what on earth it led to. The long curving driveway made its way into the estate through an area of formal plantings. The way was lit by numerous Persian-looking lampposts. About the halfway point, the driveway crossed Bayou Boeuf via an ornamental bridge with built-in planting boxes. After that it came around another formal garden in front of the main house crossed a second bridge, and terminated at a five car garage (see map). This second bridge traversed an artificial brook fed by an artesian well. The formal garden was ornamented with statues, urns, benches, and additional Persian lampposts. Old photographs reveal that at night the effect of all this could be truly astonishing. Not only could all the scores of garden and driveway lamps be lit, but the house itself was encrusted with hundreds of light bulbs set under the eaves.

Today the gate is gone as are most of the garden and driveway lampposts. The artificial brook is gone, although the brick and concrete bridge that formerly traversed it still exists (see map). Nothing of the gardens remains east of Bayou Boeuf, and the Bayou Boeuf bridge has collapsed and is in ruins. The present formal garden retains its pathways, hedges, and basic layout, along with some concrete urns and benches. The driveway is gone, but its route is still traceable.

In all but one case, the five buildings at Oak Hall are virtually unaltered since 1923. The exception is the servant's cottage, which has lost its red tile roof covering. In addition, a modern wing has been built on the west side. Nevertheless, the cottage still retains its essential appearance, including massing and fenestration, and thus it should be considered a contributing element.

The precise architectural history of the main house is difficult to ascertain. Evidently, it was built in the late nineteenth century and renovated in successive stages, culminating in a major 1923 renovation. Originally it was a large but relatively plain central hall plan house, two rooms deep, with an almost encircling gallery and a massive hip roof. There was also a rear kitchen-dining room wing separated from the house by a covered breezeway. Although the gallery posts were plain and square, the numerous gabled dormers were ornamented with Eastlake "carpenter's lace". The large central dormer provided for a covered balcony. It is not known if the present front porte-cochere dates from this early period or not.

There are extant plans/specifications dated 1923 for a major renovation to Oak Hall. These plans show that certain alterations had already been made. For example, the present front columns are shown as existing, and they are obviously early twentieth century replacements. Also, in many respects, the 1923 plans were not followed, with substitutions often being made.

By the time the 1923 renovation was complete, numerous interior changes had been made. The breezeway and a rear hallway had been incorporated into a large living hall with a dramatic cascading staircase in one corner. All of the interior woodwork on the main floor had been replaced. The living hall, dining hall, and central hall were fitted with oak ceiling beams and oak paneled wainscotting. Most of the wainscotting is at least eight feet high, and in the dining room, it is ten feet high with a bracketed plate rail. The dining room wainscotting is also distinguished by its tapered chamfer treatment. All of the mantels and overmantels were also replaced by the time the 1923 renovation was complete. In most cases the replacements might best be termed "baronial neo-Georgian." But in the central hall the treatment is quite different. The 1923 renovation plans call for the central hall to be converted into a "living room," which was possible because the hall is over thirteen feet wide. The focus of the room is an elaborate oak mantel which incorporates Gothic, Art Nouveau, and Oriental elements. Particularly noteworthy are the cabinets in the overmantel with their oak filigree doors. The scale of the hall is such that it evokes a church nave rather than a domestic space.

The following exterior changes were made either during the 1923 renovation or had been made by the time it was undertaken:



1923 Plans, E. Burke Mason, Architect.

Saucier, Corinne. History of Avoyelles Parish. New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1943.

Old photographs of Oak Hall in possession of owners.