

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The house was initially built in 1848 as a five-bay, gallery-fronted, Greek Revival raised plantation house with a hip roof. The frame of the house was constructed of virgin cypress with all joints mortised and pinned with wooden pegs. Weatherboarding planks were nailed to the framework with hand-wrought iron nails. Brick kilns and saw pits were erected on the site, and all doors and window sash were cut and assembled with wooden pegs.

The plan comprised three bedrooms, a parlor, and a dining room, each 17 feet by 20 feet; a central hall, 12 feet by 35 feet, front and rear galleries, and a kitchen separated from the house. Each of the five major rooms had a fireplace at the perimeter of the house. Ceiling height was 15 feet.

The first major changes in the structure were made in 1884 by Alonzo Walker, who moved the house to Gibsland. Architectural changes were as follows:

1. The four exterior bedroom-parlor fireplaces were combined.
2. The gallery, which, extended across the front, was reduced to a portico with four columns.

Significant date	1848
Architect/Builder	Builder: William George Walker

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Sylvan Retreat stands as a substantial five-bay plantation house with pedimented portico. Taken within the context of north central Louisiana, it is a pretentious example of Classical Revival architecture. Although the portico was not created until the 1880's, it speaks of a strong continuing interest in Classical architecture, which persisted in rural Louisiana and even after the Civil War. Indeed, the fact that such a Classical feature was created so late is a statement of the architectural history of the region, i.e., the strength of the Classical tradition.

The house was built in 1848 by William George Walker, a planter from Columbus, Georgia. In that year he selected a site in the pine hills of Bienville Parish on which to construct his plantation home. Walker had an unfortunate life. He had left Georgia in 1843 and moved west, but on the journey a horse backed off a bridge and killed his wife. At some point he returned to Georgia and married Augusta Candler of Atlanta. Then in 1850, he moved with his wife and four children into the house. But he could not adjust to the climate and in the same year went to Mississippi to take mineral baths and died soon after.

The house was eventually purchased from his estate by his son Alonzo, who married Winnie Prothro of Mt. Lebanon. They moved into the house in 1876. Alonzo Walker made some major changes in the structure in 1884. (See "Description.") The railroad from Monroe to Shreveport had been completed and the town of Gibsland had been established two miles south of the home. Due to Mrs. Walker's loneliness and her fear of living in the country, he moved the house to Gibsland, dismantling the structure board by board. Each piece was lettered and numbered, hauled to the new site, and reassembled. Removal and rebuilding took a full year.

The Walkers reared five children in the house. The wife died in 1901, and after the husband's death in 1919, their daughter Pearl Pumphrey inherited the home. Mrs. Pumphrey adapted the house for convenient living in the early twentieth century. (See "Description".) She was an avid horticulturist, noted for her orchids and daylilies. The grounds, which were known as "Pumphrey Gardens," were at their greatest splendor in the 1940's and 1950's. Mrs. Pumphrey died in 1975 at the age of 97. The house remains in the hands of descendants of its builder.

Major Bibliographical References

Bienville Parish Conveyance Records

Egan, Lavenia, AMemoirs of North Louisiana," unpublished, 1940's.

Martin, F. Lestar, "Sylvan Retreat: A Restoration Project," North Louisiana Historical Association Journal 9 (Summer 1978): 135-142

Mount Lebanon Masonic Lodge, Minutes, 1848-1898.

Pumphrey, Pearl W., "History of Sylvan Retreat," unpublished, 1950.

Walker, T. A., Deed of Sale for Gibsland Homesite, 1884.