

The Blanks House (c. 1900) is an eclectic mix of several styles popular at the turn of the twentieth century. Therefore, the dwelling is being classified as of "mixed style" for the purposes of this nomination. The two-story, frame structure stands on a lushly planted lot on a residential street in the Caldwell Parish community of Columbia. The building has experienced some alteration since its construction, but its facade remains very much intact. Thus, the home remains eligible for National Register listing.

In terms of number of features present, the characteristics of the Colonial Revival style appear at first glance to dominate the home's appearance. These traits include:

- 1) a symmetrical facade.
- 2) large triple lower floor facade windows displaying multiple panes in an elongated diamond-like pattern in their upper sashes and large single panes in their lower sashes. Similarly subdivided single windows are found on the facade's second level and within an oriel-like projecting bay on the northwest side of the home (see below).
- 3) the suggestion of an entrance pavilion created by centering a gable atop the roof of the front gallery. This gable is supported by slender paired columns which rise from brick bases partially covered by stucco. The gable is pierced by an oculus window.
- 4) additional slender triple wooden columns located at the corners of the gallery. These also rise from brick bases partially covered by stucco.
- 5) the decorative treatment of a second floor balcony located above and behind the gable of the entrance pavilion. This balcony also features slender triple columns; however, these rise from wooden rather than brick bases. A solid clapboarded balustrade spans the space between these two bases. Although not specifically Colonial Revival features, a transom and sidelights surround the door opening onto this balcony.
- 6) simple entablatures outlining the front gallery, a side porch, and three sides of the home's main block.
- 7) a semi-circular window piercing the gable of a large front attic dormer (see below). This window is distinguished by a keystone.

Despite this seeming preponderance of Colonial Revival motifs, other styles also contribute significantly to the appearance of the home. For example the influence of the Queen Anne is seen in the two cross gables which extend outward from the building's tripped roof and the large bays which project on each side of the structure. One of the gables takes the form of a large front facing dormer opening to an attic level balcony which has lost its railing. The other is a large projecting gable at the rear. The two bays which stand on the front corners of the home are two stories tall and feature Gothic Revival style crenellated parapets. A third bay takes the form of a Gothic, oriel-like projection which contains a landing for the main stairway. The fourth bay, square in shape, projects from the rear elevation. The home also has overhanging bracketed eaves and an Eastlake staircase distinguished by ball drop ornaments.

The building's floorplan is unusual because it contains few square rooms. Instead, many of the rooms on both floors have either a large bay, at least one angled wall, or both. Although the first floor's plan has received some alteration (see below), the original plan survives largely intact on the second floor. Here a cruciform plan hall separates sizeable bedrooms filling each corner of the home. The hall culminates in a large central polygonal space. With the exception of the previously mentioned staircase and a dining room ceiling featuring beams applied in a spoke-like fashion, the home's interiors are simple and typical of the period.

The house has experienced the following changes since its c. 1900 completion:

- 1) The construction of a garage and storage building to one side of the home. It is connected to the historic house via a covered walkway.
- 2) the widening of the front entrance and the installation of double doors. The original single leaf door was then installed on a side entrance.

3) the previously mentioned changes to the first floor's plan, which are summarized as follows:

- a) During the residence of the second owner, the house was expanded on one rear corner in order to provide a two-room apartment for the owner's daughter. Although this addition survives, the wall separating the two rooms has been removed to make a larger single room used as a den. At one end of this room a staircase now rise to the second floor.
- b) The walls between the lower floor's original two front rooms and hall have been removed, a mantel flanked by two sets of French doors has been installed in the wall of the enlarged space, and the space's original baseboards and cornices have been replaced. The purpose of these alterations was to create a very large living room stretching across the front of the home.
- c) A modern kitchen has been installed.

4) changes to the upper floor, including the expansion of a rear porch and its conversion into a kitchen, the installation of two modern baths (one of which occupies part of the cruciform plan hall between two bedrooms), the addition of a fiberglass rosette to the ceiling of the upstairs polygonal central space, and the laying of linoleum over the upstairs hall's floor.

5) the removal of the home's original chimney and construction of a new chimney at the rear.

6) the loss of a balustrade at the level of the attic dormer.

Although this list of alterations may seem long, the majority of the changes have occurred either at the home's rear, its side, or in the interior of the building. The facade is virtually unaltered. As a large and prominent architectural landmark within the community of Columbia, the Blanks House is a prime candidate for National Register listing.

The Blanks House is locally significant in the area of architecture because it is an architectural landmark in the town of Columbia.

Although the river port town of Columbia was incorporated in 1847, there is nothing left to represent its early development. In fact, the town's oldest surviving structures date from the turn-of-the-century. With the exception of two landmark commercial structures, one landmark church, and the Blanks House, Columbia's historic buildings are undistinguished from an architectural standpoint. The Historic Structures Survey for Caldwell Parish shows that the town's historic building stock, with the previous exceptions, consists of plain one-story Queen Anne cottages, low-key bungalows, and equally undistinguished twentieth century commercial buildings.

Against this architectural background, the Blanks House is noteworthy in the following respects:

- 1) It is one of the largest historic structures, and is the largest residence, in Columbia.
- 2) In contrast to the conventional historic building stock described above, the house features an exotic blend of Gothic, Colonial Revival, Queen Anne, and Eastlake features. Thus, it is the most highly styled residence in the town.

Historical Note

Some citizens of Columbia believe the Blanks House to have been built in 1870, and signs indicating that date have been placed over two of the building's entrances. However, the architectural evidence strongly suggests a c. 1900 date for the home.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Historic Standing Structures Survey for Caldwell Parish, Louisiana.

Site visit by National Register staff.