

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The plantation house at Battleground is set behind a ridge which rises above an open, swampy area. To the rear of the house is a random-looking grouping of relatively new farm buildings. The front yard (about a quarter acre) is encompassed by a new fence which is composed of metal bars between brick posts.

The house has a central hall plan with double parlors and a front gallery. At one time the house was evidently a log dog-trot. This original house is very old, which can be seen in the fact that the logs are well crafted, hewn completely square, and of uniform large size. In about 1850 the dog trot was enclosed, two rear parlors were added, and a new roof was built.

The cypress-timbered house is raised approximately three feet above the ground on brick piers. The log bearing walls are completely intact under the 1850 clapboarding and have square-notched corners.

Today the house presents the appearance of a typical five-bay one and one half story Louisiana plantation house of the mid-nineteenth century. The moldings are extremely heavy, both in the column capitals and around the interior doors. The fenestration on the front gallery features handsome aedicule motifs with heavy drip-molded cornices. The front gallery outside wall has flush board siding, unlike the rest of the house which is sheathed in clapboards.

Although twentieth century renovation has covered up the fireplaces in the two rear parlors, the handsome mantels in the front parlors are still extant. Like the chimneys, these date from about 1850. Both mantels have an essentially Adamesque shape, but each has a different pattern of ornamentation. One has oval panels, heavy Renaissance Revival brackets, heavy piers, and a central ogee pointed arch. The other mantel is even more elaborate, using forms which are almost entirely derived from the Gothic Revival. These include a central ogee arch and jig-saw panels cut in the shapes of cusps, foilles, and strapwork.

The following modifications were made in the twentieth century. A rear lean-to was added, the side windows were replaced, and a small false gallery was built on the front. The only replaced floorboarding is in the central hall. The heavy Victorian staircase is original.

SPECIFIC DATES	c.1850
BUILDER/ARCHITECT	Dr. Henry J. Peck

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Battleground Plantation is significant in the area of "Politics/Government" as the home of Dr. Henry J. Peck:(1803-1881). It is of military significance as the site of the last major battle between the French and the Natchez Indians. It is also of architectural significance.

The house at Battleground is a fine example of a moderately-sized Greek Revival plantation house. This can be seen in its front gallery with its six heavy columns, in its heavy moldings, and in its strongly proportioned aedicule motifs around the front windows and door. The heaviness and plasticity of the moldings mark the house as a distinctly late example. In fact the mantels reflect a combination of later tastes, the Renaissance and the Gothic revivals. It is unlikely that any plantation house in northeastern Louisiana can surpass them for elaborateness and complexity of motifs.

The house at Battleground is also significant as a well-crafted and apparently early example of a log dog-trot house. Although the original house is hidden by subsequent renovations, this is the case with most of the extant dog-trot houses wound the state. So the house at Battleground can be said to represent this early Louisiana house type as well as most other examples do.

The tract of land which was to become the site of the Battleground house was purchased in 1808 by William M. Smith from John Lovelace, Sr. He received a 600-arpent tract in return for a consideration of \$1016.¹ Smith apparently built a house on the tract, for when Lovelace's heirs in 1816 acknowledged Smith's claim to the land, the document noted in passing that the tract was "Athe same on which the said Smith resides."²

In December, 1828, William Smith's daughter Laminda Smith (1811-1871), who had inherited the home and tract, married Dr. Henry J. Peck (1803-1881). According to family tradition, Dr. Peck built the Battleground home in 1829-1830 after moving to the site with his new wife.³ Since the architectural style of the extant house suggests a date of around 1850, it seems likely that the house which Dr. Peck built in 1829-1830 was later substantially altered to the present Greek Revival structure.

Data from the federal censuses of 1830-1860 reveal that Dr. Peck's holdings increased steadily during that period. According to the 1830 census, Dr. Peck owned nineteen slaves. By 1840 this figure had increased to 35.⁴ In 1850, Dr. Peck was listed as a 48-year-old planter heading a household of six and owning \$40,000 in real estate. In that year he also owned 1382 acres of land and 65 slaves.⁵ By 1860 his holdings had increased to 75 slaves, 2200 acres of land, and \$160,000 in real estate. During the previous year, his plantation had produced 400 bales of cotton and 5000 bushels of corn.⁶

During the period before the Civil War, Dr. Peck was also active in politics, serving as a state senator, for example, from 1848 to 1852.⁷ Between 1848 and 1859, Dr. Peck contributed three articles to De Bow's Review. Two of these dealt with flood control, which according to tradition was one of his major interests as a legislator.⁸

During the decade of the 1830's, Battleground and the area around it were the scene of some scientific investigations by Dr. Clarendon Peck, the younger brother of Dr. Henry Peck. Dr. Clarendon Peck (1812-1837) was a botanist, and in 1833 and 1834 he gathered data for an article entitled "Notes on the Progress of Vegetation, or Blooming of Plants, at Sicily Island, Catahoula Parish, Louisiana, from the 10th December to 14th May, 1833-4" published in 1836 in the Transylvania Journal of Medicine. The article consisted of a list of about 300 species of plants by scientific name alongside the dates they bloomed, with their common names and other observations sometimes included.⁹ Dr. Clarendon Peck received his M.D. degree from Transylvania University in 1835 and went to live and practice in Sicily Island, where he died prematurely at the age of twenty-five in 1837.¹⁰

The Civil War and its aftermath brought great changes for the Pecks at Battleground. According to family tradition, Dr. Peck and his wife spent about three years of the war away from Battleground in Cherokee County, Texas. When the war was over they returned to Battleground, and in a letter of 1867 to former Governor Thomas O. Moore, Dr. Peck expressed his disillusionment in these words:

"I am 65 years of age and was the owner of 90 negroes before the war and a plantation of 2600 acres. I was making 400 bales of cotton per annum. I had 500 bales of cotton burned during the war by order of Gen. Taylor with my gin and mill. I have had two crops of cotton eaten up since the war by caterpillars. In short I am completely broken up and am disfranchised in consequence of having represented my district in the senate some years since."

But Dr. Peck was planning to escape the situation:

"I will not submit to Yankee degradation any longer than I am compelled to do so under these circumstances. I am disposed to emigrate to British Honduras. I will be greatly obliged to you to give me a letter addressed to the authorities of that country stating my standing as an old citizen of the State of Louisiana."¹¹

Dr. Peck never carried out his plan to emigrate, however, for he stayed in Catahoula Parish until his death in 1881. In the 1870 census, he is listed as a 67-year-old "retired physician" owning 450 acres of land worth \$3300. He also owned \$2350 acres of livestock, and during the previous year the farm had yielded 200 bushels of corn and 28 bales of cotton.¹² The census of 1880 lists Dr. Peck as part of the household of his son Thomas N. Peck, so he may not have been living at Battleground by that date.¹³

According to family tradition, soon after Dr. Peck's death in 1881, the plantation was sold to a cotton brokerage firm from New Orleans, which in turn leased the land to tenant farmers. Then, in the early 1900's, it was purchased by Charles Cornick (1869-1943).

In 1942, Cornick sold Battleground to E. W. Gambrell.¹⁴ The present owner, Garland Barron, purchased it from the heirs of Gambrell in 1964.¹⁵

A final note on the plantation concerns the region of its name. The plantation is called Battleground because it is the site of the last major battle between the Natchez Indians and the French. The battle occurred in January 1731 and marked the end of a period of several years of fighting and skirmishes between the two groups. The best historical account of the battle is that provided by John A. Green.¹⁶

After a series of fights near present day Natchez, the remnants of the Natchez population fled westward. In late 1730 and early 1731 Governor Perier mounted and led a force against the Natchez. In late January of 1731, Perier came upon the Natchez who had fortified themselves. The French attacked the "fort" with musketry, grenades, and artillery fire. The battle lasted from the 21st to the 25th of January. Perier stated that on the 25th, 45 men and 450 women and children surrendered (Green, p. 556). On the 26th and 27th Perier worked "to demolish the fort and burn the wood of which it was constructed (Green, p. 556)."

Relying on a variety of historical evidence, Green concludes that the location of the Natchez fortification was approximately 400 yards north of the present Battleground Plantation house. His suggestions have been substantiated by the finding of a variety of artifacts in the area related to the battle (Green, p. .556-557). These include cannon balls, grape shot, swords, muskets, bombshell fragments, and gunflints. As late as 1825 an entrenchment presumably related to the fort was still evident in the area. Intensive agriculture has destroyed all traces of the fort and today nothing remains. Although Green is apparently correct in his location of the Natchez Fort, it is unlikely that any intact archaeological material remains to be found and the site can be considered to have only minimal archaeological value.

NOTES

¹Articles of Agreement between John Lovelace, Sr. and William M. Smith, 7 Sept. 1808, Catahoula Parish Records, copy in National Register file for Battleground, State Historic Preservation Office, Baton Rouge.

²A copy of this document of 2 Oct. 1816 is in the Battleground file.

³Papers of Dr. Henry J. Peck, 5 March 1866, in possession of W. S. Peck, IV.

⁴Census of 1830, Catahoula Parish, Louisiana, Population Schedule, p. 6; Census of 1840, Catahoula Parish, Louisiana Population Schedule, p. 61.

⁵Census of 1850, Catahoula Parish, Louisiana, Population Schedule, p. 49; Slave Schedule, second page; Agriculture Census, p. 1.

⁶Joseph K. Menn, The Large Slaveholders of Louisiana--1860 (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 191-192.

⁷Louisiana Legislature, Senate, Official Journal, 1848 and 1850.

⁸"Deer and Deer Hunting in Louisiana," De Bow's Review 5 (March 1848): 220-229; "The Levee System of Louisiana," De Bow's Review 8 (Feb. 1850): 101-105; "Improvement of the Mississippi by Cut-Off," De Bow's Review 27 (Oct. 1859): 440-444.

⁹This article was reprinted with some revisions as part of "Historical and Statistical Collections of Louisiana--The Parish of Catahoula," De Bow's Review 12 (March 1852); 256-275.

¹⁰An obituary on Dr. Clarendon Peck can be found in the Transylvania Journal of Medicine for 1837.

¹¹Letter from Dr. Henry J. Peck to Thomas O. Moore, 10 August 1867, copy in Battleground file.

¹²Census of 1870, Catahoula Parish, Louisiana, Population Schedule, Ward No. 7, p. 14; Agriculture Census, p. 1.

¹³Census of 1880, Catahoula Parish, Louisiana, Population Schedule, Ward 2, household 81.

¹⁴This transaction is referred to in deed from the heirs of E. W. Gambrell to Garland Barron, 29 Nov. 1964, Conveyance Book 74, pp. 235f, Catahoula Parish Records. There is a copy of this deed in the Battleground file.

¹⁵Heirs of E. W. Gambrell to Garland Barron, 29 Nov. 1964, Conveyance Book 74, pp. 235f.

¹⁶John A. Green, "Governor Perier's Expedition Against the Natchez Indians, December, 1730-January, 1731," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 19 (1936): 547-577.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Articles of Agreement between John Lovelace, Sr. and William M. Smith, 7 Sept. 1808, Catahoula Parish Records, copy in National Register file for Battleground, State Historic Preservation Office, Baton Rouge.

Census of 1880, Catahoula Parish, Louisiana, Population Schedule.

Census of 1850, Catahoula Parish, Louisiana, Population Schedule; Slave Schedule; Agriculture Census.

Census of 1840, Catahoula Parish, Louisiana, Population Schedule.

Census of 1870, Catahoula Parish, Louisiana, Population Schedule; Agriculture Census

Census of 1830, Catahoula Parish, Louisiana, Population Schedule.

Deed from Heirs of E. W. Gambrell to Garland Barron, 29 Nov. 1964, Conveyance Book 74, pp. 235f, Catahoula Parish Records.

Document of 2 Oct. 1816 in which Heirs of John Lovelace, Sr. acknowledge claim of William M. Smith to Battleground tract, copy in Battleground file.

Green, John A., "Governor Perier's Expedition Against the Natchez Indians, December, 1730 - January, 1731," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 19 (1936): 547-577.

"Historical and Statistical Collections of Louisiana--The Parish of Catahoula," *De Bow's Review* 12 (March 1852): 256-275.

Louisiana Legislature, Senate, Official Journal, 1848 and 1850.

Menn, Joseph K., *The Large Slaveholders of Louisiana--1860*. New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Co., 1964.

Peck, Henry J. "Deer and Deer Hunting in Louisiana," *De Bow's Review* 5 (March 1848): 220-229.

_____. "Improvement of the Mississippi by Cut-Off," *De Bow's Review* 27 (Oct. 1859): 440-444

_____. "The Levee System of Louisiana," *De Bow's Review* 8 (Feb. 1850), pp. 101-105.

Peck, Henry J., Papers, in possession of W. S. Peck, IV, of Sicily Island, Louisiana.