

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Tacony plantation house is set to the rear of the Old River levee, amid open flat farmland, several miles east of the town of Vidalia. Although the house enjoys the privacy of its own setting thanks to several well placed trees, there is an almost adjacent and relatively modern farm complex. There are no remaining outbuildings.

The plantation house, which appears to date from the mid-nineteenth century, has an irregular cross-shaped plan. The main floor, which is raised a full story above the ground, consists of two large, high ceiling parlors, front and rear, and a third high ceiling room off to the side. This part of the house is constructed of brick. Appended to the other side is a wooden wing consisting of two smaller, low ceiling rooms with a chimney between.

One would think the wooden wing, and the more pretentious brick part of the house, were built at different times. But the beam structure, the beaded door and window frames, the floor boards, the chimneys, and the brickwork are very similar in both parts of the house. The similarity of these features suggests that the two parts of the house are at least roughly contemporary.

The house has undergone numerous changes since its construction. Most of the galleries have been replaced. These include the gallery which encompasses the wooden wing on three sides, and the rear screened porch on the brick portion. The four-column, pent-roof front porch on the brick portion is original, but it has lost its flight of approach steps. Although these new galleries are built of modern materials, they echo the form of the original galleries as shown in old photographs. There is also a small filled-in gallery on the front of the brick portion which contains a bathroom. Most of the lower story of the brick portion was always enclosed, though not finished. Part of this area contains a cistern, and part has been finished off with modern materials. At one time there was an interior staircase leading to the large back parlor. This has been removed. The lower story of the wooden wing appears to have been open at one time, though it was enclosed with board and batten siding which matched the upper story by the late nineteenth century. This siding has since been replaced with clapboard. All but four of the windows have been replaced, but most of the doors (the Victorian, four panel type) are original. The two main upstairs rooms in the wooden wing have been paneled over in knotty pine, the fireplaces have been covered up, and the floorboards have been covered. However the more pretentious rooms in the brick portion are largely intact. Each of these three rooms has a fireplace with its own chimney. The three Victorian, cast iron mantels constitute the only high style feature of the house. Two of them are Rococo Revival and the third is a rather plain example of the Renaissance Revival influence.

The joists are spaced approximately two feet apart, and all of the bricks are of the old soft type, laid up in common bond.

From a design standpoint, Tacony Plantation house must be viewed as an awkward, rambling assemblage of rooms, porches, galleries, hip roofs, pitched roofs, and chimneys, with no consistency, either of style or overall form. Although the house is large and comfortable with a few high style elements, there is no pretension. Nonetheless, the house conveys a strong sense of its antiquity, and of its historic importance as a plantation house.

SPECIFIC DATES ca. 1850
BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Tacony Plantation is significant in the area of local history as the home of planter Alfred Vidal Davis and as the only remaining antebellum plantation house in the Vidalia area. It is also the last remaining brick building in Concordia Parish.

It is not known precisely when the house was built. Architectural evidence suggests a date of about 1850.

The tract on which the house stands was originally claimed by Ann B. Walker.¹ There is no document conveying the land from Ann B. Walker to someone else, but a partition agreement from 1829 between the heirs of Stephen Minor states that Minor had obtained the tract from Ann B.

Walker at some point during his lifetime. As a result of the partition, Minor's son obtained the land. His name was also Stephen Minor.² For the next quarter century the tract was part of his plantation. In the marriage contract from 1829 between Stephen Minor and Charlotte C. Walker, Minor listed the property he owned, and it included "The plantation on which the said Stephen Minor now resides, situated in the Parish aforesaid on Lake Concordia, including all and singular improvements and dependencies, valued at \$530,000." This presumably included the tract on which the present house stands.³ Stephen Minor or an heir may have built the house during the time it was owned by them between 1829 and 1854.

The next link in the chain of title to the house site is a deed from 1854 conveying the land from Stephania Minor Chotard and her husband Henry Chotard, Jr. to Alfred Vidal Davis. The deed transferred 196 acres in return for a consideration of \$8,826.75. By this transfer the house site became part of Davis' "Tacony Plantation," which was already in existence.⁴

Tacony Plantation had been started by A. V. Davis' father Samuel Davis, a millionaire from Philadelphia who died in about 1853. Samuel Davis was the son-in-law of Don Jose Vidal, commandant of the original Post of Concord from 1798 to 1803. The town of Vidalia was named for Vidal in 1811. Samuel Davis forged Tacony out of lands originally belonging to Don Manuel Texada, Donna Maria Solibellas, and the older Stephen Minor (who had also owned the house site prior to 1829). All three of these people lived in Natchez and were important in the early historical development of the Natchez region.⁵

At the time of Samuel Davis' death in 1853, his property was divided among four heirs, and A. V. Davis received Tacony. Shortly afterward he added the house site to the lands already comprising Tacony.⁶

If Stephen Minor or one of his heirs was not the builder of the house, then Alfred Vidal Davis almost surely was, and he was a significant figure in the history of the area. By 1860, he was among the ten largest slaveholders in the state, owning a total of 637 slaves who lived in 123 dwellings on four different plantations in Concordia Parish. He was 33 years old and had \$500,000 in real and \$40,000 in personal property. He owned a total of 7,684 acres, of which 3,560 were improved. In the course of the previous year his lands had produced 3,387 bales of cotton and 17,000 bushels of corn. He was the second largest producer of cotton in the state in 1859. Davis was far and away the leading planter of Concordia Parish in 1860.⁷

Tacony Plantation formed a significant part of Davis' holdings, consisting of 825 acres, of which 625 were improved. The cash value of the plantation was \$61,875, and there was in addition \$8,133 worth of farm implements and machinery on the premises. Tacony had \$14,335 worth of livestock, and during the previous year had yielded 617 bales of cotton and 2,000 bushels of corn.⁸

It seems certain that Alfred V. Davis resided in the Tacony house a good part of the time during his ownership of it. It may not have ever been his full-time residence, since like most of the "nabobs" of Concordia Parish, he apparently also maintained a home in Natchez. (According to Harnett T. Kane, for a brief time Davis owned Dunleith.) As J. W. Dorr wrote in his description of Concordia Parish in 1860, "Many of the planters who own and cultivate these lands are among the largest agriculturists in the State, and exercise the authority of ownership over estates as broad as some German principalities, and yielding far greater revenues. But very few of these lords of the soil reside on their estates, but have their residences across the river, on the higher but scarcely more pleasant lands of Mississippi--in Natchez or elsewhere."⁹

Several sources testify that Alfred Vidal Davis resided in the Tacony house for a substantial portion of his life, although the period of his occupancy cannot be fixed with certainty. Mrs. Lily Vidal Davis Boatner, granddaughter of A. V. Davis, stated that he lived there as a young man and then again later on as a married man. In addition, a map dating from the Civil War located in the National Archives labels Section 34 (where the house is located) as "Davis Home Place."¹⁰

Other documents have been found which suggest that Davis was a resident of the parish and an activist in its affairs. The Concordia Intelligencer of August 4, 1854, noted that he had been appointed overseer of roads and captain of slave patrols in District 15. A petition for partition from May 1, 1854, states that he was a resident of the parish. In Calhoun's History of Concordia Parish, Davis is listed among several officers of the Confederate Army "accredited to Concordia Parish" as a captain in Company E, 4th Battalion, Louisiana Infantry. Concordia Parish Police Jury Records list him as a police juror during the period 1869-1871.¹¹

The Tacony house remained in the Davis family until 1902, when it was sold to Joseph Friedler. The house then passed through the hands of several owners between 1902 and 1977. In 1978, the City of Vidalia purchased the house and ten acres of its grounds, and under the leadership of a ten-member citizens' committee, the city plans to restore and preserve the house as a locally-significant antebellum plantation home.¹²

The Tacony plantation house is probably unique for having fronted three different bodies of water while remaining on the same site. It was situated on Lake Concordia until the 1880's when the Mississippi River broke in to claim the lake bed. Since 1939, when the new levee again changed the Mississippi's course, Tacony has stood on the bank of Old River.¹³

Although Tacony may not seem distinguished when compared to many other plantation houses across the state, it is an important landmark in the Vidalia area. Although the area has a long and rich history, it is an area in which few structures survive from before 1900. In 1939, almost the entire town of Vidalia was moved to make way for relocation of the Mississippi River levee. In addition, other plantation homes in the area have disappeared from the scene due to fire, deterioration, and razing. Tacony is the last vestige of Vidalia's antebellum past, and it is generally recognized among local citizens as embodying the parish's antebellum development as an area of large cotton plantations.¹⁴

NOTES

¹U. S. A. to Ann B. Walker, Patent of 18 July 1934, copy in National Register nomination file for Tacony Plantation, State Historic Preservation Office' Baton Rouge.

²"Abstracter's Note" and Stephen Minor and William J. Minor, Partition Agreement of 28 February, 1829, copies in Tacony file.

³Stephen Minor and Charlotte C. Walker, Marriage Contract of 12 May 1829, copy in Tacony file.

⁴Stephanie Chotard and Husband to Alfred V. Davis, Deed of 3 October 1854, copy in Tacony file.

⁵Succession of Samuel Davis, Partition of 5 May 1854, copy in Tacony file, D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1968), p. 154; Robert D. Calhoun, "A History of Concordia Parish, Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 15 (Jan. 1932), pp. 53-55; (July 1932), p. 449; Abstract of Title for Tacony Plantation compiled by firm of Dale, Richardson and Dale, copy in Tacony file; Jack D. L. Holmes, *Gayoso: The Life of a Spanish Govern in the Mississippi Valley, 1789-1799* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1965), p. 51; Amanda Geisenberger, "Texada Tavern," unpublished article on microfilm in Armstrong Memorial Library in Natchez, Mississippi, pp. 8-10.

⁶Succession of Samuel Davis, Petition of 5 May 1854, copy in Tacony file; Stephanie Chotard and Husband to Alfred V. Davis, Deed of 3 October 1854, copy in Tacony file.

⁷Joseph K. Menn, *The Large Slaveholders of Louisiana--1860* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 105, 108, 196, 202-203, hereinafter cited as Menn, *Large Slaveholders*.

⁸Menn, *Large Slaveholders*, 202-203; Census of 1860, Concordia Parish, Louisiana, Slave Schedule, pp. 84-85.

⁹Harnett T. Kane, *Natchez on the Mississippi* (New York: William Morrow and Co. 1947), p. 258; J. W. Dorr, "A Tourist's Description of Louisiana in 1860," ed. by Walter Prichard, *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* vol. 21 (Oct. 1938) pp. 1207-1208.

¹⁰Letter from Mary Eidt to State Historic Preservation Office, 21 December 1' located in Tacony file; Map from National Archives Record Group #77, copy in Tacony file.

¹¹*Concordia Intelligencer*, 4 August 1854; Samuel M. Davis *et al* vs. Molton C. Rogers,

Petition for Partition of 1 May 1854, copy in Tacony file; Robert D. Calhoun, "A History of Concordia Parish, Louisiana," Louisiana Historical Quarterly vol. 16 (Jan. 1933), p. 106; Concordia Parish Police Jury Records, 1869-1871.

¹²Abstract of Title for Tacony Plantation, compiled by firm of Dale, Richard and Dale, copy in Tacony file.

¹³Beatrice Nathanson, "Lake Concordia Was Once Near Vidalia," Concordia Sentinel, 23 August 1977.

¹⁴Beatrice Nathanson, "River Moved Vidalia," Concordia Sentinel, 12 March 1994 Interview with Catherine Winston, longtime resident of Concordia Parish, October 1978.

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Census of 1860, Concordia Parish, Louisiana, Slave Schedule.

Chain of Title of Township 7 North, Range 10 East, Section 34. Copies of documents in chain of title are located in National Register nomination file for. Tacony Plantation, State Historic Preservation Office, Baton Rouge.

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Map of Tacony tract from National Archives Record Group #77, copy in Tacony file.

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