

Built in 1891, the Adams House is a one-story frame cottage located in a largely commercial area of downtown Baton Rouge. The house should be viewed within the context of the Italianate taste, due principally to its boldly articulated moldings and other details. Although it has received some alteration and is currently undergoing restoration, its National Register eligibility has not been compromised.

The Adams House is a traditional galleried residence with a hall-less main block containing four rooms and front and rear galleries. This block has a gable end roof (with gable end returns), while the front gallery features solid boxed columns with heavily molded capitals and an entablature with lacks a frieze. The latter features paired brackets (in the Italianate manner), a two-part cornice, and a narrow band of molding between the cornice and the architrave. (This molding appears on the facade but not on the gable end returns.) The cornice is composed of a simple wooden base-like element surmounted by a molded metal gutter. Because the upper portion of the downspout is cast as an integral part of the gutter, it is believed that this gutter is original to the home and was intended as part of the design. Other details of the three-bay facade include a balustrade composed of decoratively cut members, floor-length windows, and two entrances with three light transoms. Original shutters survive on all windows. The house also has its original metal shingle roof.

The cottage has a two-room ell wing. The room directly connecting to the house is original; the second room was added in the 1920s. It appears that part of the original metal gutter was relocated to the rear of the ell when this addition was made.

Four Italianate mantels are located within the home. All feature reeded pilasters with bases highlighted by bull's eye ornamentation, entablatures decorated by unusually shaped panels and a central roundel with bas relief ornament, and undulating mantel shelves. The date 2/25/91 is visible carved into the rear of one of these mantels. Other interior features of note include tall molded baseboards, four panel doors surmounted by three light transoms, and original wooden floors.

In addition to the expansion of the ell noted above, the following alterations have occurred:

- 1) during the historic period:
 - A) One end of the rear gallery was enclosed in the 1920s to create a bath. An exterior window was enclosed as a result of this change. The rest of the rear gallery was screened.
 - B) Screen doors were added to the entrances.
- 2) during the post-1948 period:
 - A) Iron bars were placed over the doors and lower portions of the front windows.
 - B) The rear (added) ell room received paneling and a dropped tile ceiling.
 - C) Some interior hardware was stolen.
 - D) New concrete steps were added to reach the front and rear galleries.
- 3) during the current restoration:
 - A) the removal of the plaster (damaged beyond repair) on the main block's walls. (This material will be replaced as accurately as possible.)

Despite these changes, the Adams House remains a viable National Register candidate because all of its original character-defining details remain intact.

Non-Contributing Element

A one-story, metal, two-car garage stands on the southwest rear corner of the property. It is non-historic.

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1891
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Unknown
CRITERION C

The Adams House is locally significant in the area of architecture because it is one of very few

Italianate style residences remaining in the City of Baton Rouge. It also illustrates very well the Italianate tradition as it is more typically found in Louisiana--a galleried cottage much like one in the earlier Greek Revival style but with boldly articulated moldings, capitals, brackets, etc.

Although the founding of the community dates to the early eighteenth century, Baton Rouge is in reality a twentieth century city with relatively few historic houses which pre-date the Colonial Revival taste. This situation is due largely to a thriving petro-chemical industry which was established in the city early in the twentieth century and (with the exception of the Depression years) kept local citizens prosperous well into the 1970s. As a result of this prosperity, the community's early homes suffered considerable alteration and demolition. In addition, the area which now forms the Central Business District also contains a number of new buildings, parking lots, and vacant lots where older commercial buildings or houses once stood. The extent of this loss is documented by old photographs, oral accounts, Sanborn maps, a 1984 architectural survey of the CBD, and a recent windshield survey of the city's pre-1900 neighborhoods. This survey revealed that, although the community does have some Italianate style commercial buildings, only seven surviving houses display Italianate motifs. Of this number, three have been remodeled in an insensitive manner, leaving the Adams House as one of only four rare Baton Rouge buildings which reflect the Louisiana residential interpretation of the Italianate style.

This status as a rare example of the way in which the Italianate was commonly found in Louisiana also contributes to the significance of the Adams House. Unlike typical examples of the style found in other regions of the country, characterized by picturesque asymmetry, Louisiana examples are by far rigidly symmetrical. As noted above, and as can be seen in the Adams House, they closely resemble an earlier generation of Greek Revival residences. The difference is in the more lavish details -- for example, elaborate, boldly formed molding profiles and pronounced elements such as column capitals. The Adams House is a textbook example of this version of the Italianate taste.

Historical Note

The property upon which the Adams House stands first appears in legal records in 1875, when it was sold by Antoine L. Gusman of New York to William Holmes of Baton Rouge. Holmes sold the plot to Mary Phillips Adams in January 1891. The previously mentioned date carved into the rear of one of the home's mantels indicates that the dwelling was built shortly after Mrs. Adams assumed ownership. The property changed hands many times over the years until its purchase by Michael and Lori Manning in October 1997. The Mannings are currently restoring the house and plan to rent it as commercial space.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1885, 1891.

Windshield survey of Baton Rouge pre-1900 historic neighborhoods by National Register staff, February 17, 1998.