

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Survey:

The historic and architectural survey which resulted in the Lake Providence Multiple Resource Nomination was conducted by Jonathan Fricker, architectural historian for the Louisiana National Register Program, and East Carroll Parish historian Maude Van Fossen in cooperation with the East Carroll Historical Society during February and March of 1980. The town was covered exhaustively by car and low flying aircraft. Each structure which was possibly at least 50 years old was pinpointed, inspected and abstracted. The findings were then evaluated building by building for possible architectural and historical significance by a committee consisting of the aforementioned architectural historian and historian and Mrs. Betty Reed, President of the East Carroll Historical Society.

General Description:

Lake Providence is the seat of East Carroll Parish as well as the parish's only major town. It is situated on low flat delta land between the Mississippi River levee and the shores of Lake Providence, an oxbow lake which was created when the Mississippi changed its course. The town's most prominent land feature, the levee, has twice advanced to claim the downtown area. As a result, although the town of Providence (later changed to Lake Providence) dates from 1833, the present historic downtown commercial area dates from the early twentieth century.

This 2 1/2 block corridor of Lake Street set behind the levee consists of 1 and 2 story brick structures closely placed with open ornamental shop fronts and considerable decorative brickwork. Relatively well-preserved, the Lake Street corridor represents the heyday of Lake Providence as a river port, social center, and commercial focus for the parish. Records indicate that in its day it contained numerous saloons, dry goods stores, grocery and drugstores, an opera house, and three ferry landings. A more modern and considerably less concentrated commercial area consisting of parking lots, garages, convenience stores, drive-in banks, etc. stretches along Route 65, which is the main road into town.

The town's earliest extant residences date from the mid-nineteenth century. They are the Hamley house, the Delony house, Arlington, and the Bass house. Set along the lake, each in a general sense represents the cotton planter heritage of the town. Although styles vary from Federal to Italianate, all are relatively free of Gulf Coast influence, following instead architectural models from the eastern states.

Lake Providence experienced a modest wave of residential construction during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which paralleled the construction of urban Lake Street. Few of the buildings it produced survive; however, the town still retains a significant compliment of large and pretentious residences of the period including two massive frame galleried houses sparingly trimmed in classical details, five substantial Queen Anne residences, three of which have turrets and curving galleries, and two unusually large bungalows.

The town's predominantly post-1940 residential area is "peppered" with approximately ten small and undistinguished early twentieth, century residences. There are basically two reasons for this residential configuration. First, so many other houses dating from the early twentieth century have been lost. Secondly, in the early twentieth century the basic density was one or two houses per block; however, the post-1940 infill changed the density to six to eight houses per block. As a result, the earlier houses are isolated from each other and do not form any distinct grouping. Therefore, they cannot be nominated as a historic district. Nor can they be nominated separately because, as modest local examples of Queen Anne and bungalow style residences, none have sufficient architectural or historic merit.

Historically the most pretentious residences have been built along the lake. As a result, a more or less continuous strip of large old residences comprise the Lake Providence Residential Historic District. There are also three individually nominated homes. Finally, the courthouse square, which is also being nominated, reflects the traditional role of Lake Providence as the parish seat of government and provides, with its broad lawns and mature oak trees, a park-like setting for the town center.

PROPERTIES NOMINATED:

1. Lake Providence Commercial Historic District (currently listed on National Register)
2. Lake Providence Residential Historic. District
3. Arlington
4. Fischer House (currently listed on National Register)
5. Nelson House
6. Courthouse Square

Courthouse and Public Square

Set on a two acre public square, the old East Carroll Parish Courthouse consists of two full stories with a three story side tower. Much of the structure has been modified, but the second story courtroom with its wainscoting and lunet windows is intact. The exterior is noteworthy for its crisply cut fenestration, which is emphasized with brick molding. Other ornamental features include the first floor label molded windows, the tower oculus, the paneled frieze, and the Colonial Revival porch which is a later addition. The courthouse is significant as a good representative example of late nineteenth century civic Romanesque Revival architecture as well as the area's only example of that style.

The adjacent new courthouse, built circa 1935, is comparatively low in proportion, considering its three story height. Ten bays wide, the building is ornamented with streamlined classical detail including heavy fluting, beveled corners, and horizontal lines cut in the limestone to accentuate the windows. Because it is close to 50 years old and because it represents a distinct period in Louisiana courthouse architecture, the new courthouse is listed as a contributing element to the old courthouse square.

Arlington House

Arlington House overlooks Lake Providence behind a broad sloping lawn. The property includes the plantation house, a cistern surmounted by a gazebo, a frame garage, an old buggy shed, and a twentieth century frame cottage.

The house is significant for its six-bay, two-story, Doric gallery which has fluted columns on the upper story. It is also noteworthy for its handsome leaded fanlight and sidelights at each end of the central hall and for its elaborate interior paneling. The balustrade and the interior staircase date from the late nineteenth century. It is regionally significant in the area of architecture as one of about four two-story, galleried, Greek Revival mansions in northeastern Louisiana.

The house also has important historical associations with Edward Sparrow, an immensely wealthy cotton planter and Confederate politician. See statement of significance on National Register form for additional information.

Nelson House

Located in a suburban setting, the Nelson House is an "L" shaped plan which incorporates two semioctagonal bays and a large and prominent corner turret with a circumscribed Colonial Revival curving gallery. Many Louisiana Queen Anne residences have some reference to a turret, but few are as large, prominent, or well-developed as this. The house has movable louvered shutters, large plate glass windows, and an irregular side hall plan. A garage was added behind the house in the 1940's.

Lake Providence Residential Historic District

The Lake Providence Residential Historic District comprises 14 large and pretentious residences, most of which are set along the south shore of Lake Providence. Though they are

mainly significant as individual works of architecture, they are also the only continuous group of historic residences in East Carroll Parish. Unifying elements of the district include its predominant 12 story scale, its semi-rural character with large lots, its common shoreline, and its architectural quality. Each of the major contributing structures represents the "high water mark" of its particular period or style achieved in northeastern Louisiana.

LAKE PROVIDENCE RESIDENTIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT INVENTORY

** 1. Delony House

Built ca 1840. Legend has it that the house was moved to its present location in the 1870's. It is a pit sawn frame, five bay, central hall plan house, with a pedimented portico and a rear kitchen wing. Noteworthy details include corner block fenestration, simple aedicule mantels, double panel doors, and slender posts. The house is significant as one of only two pedimented Greek Revival houses in the parish and one of only about six in the region

* 2. Walsworth House

Built ca 1925. This is one of the two largest bungalow style residences in the parish. The porch has recently been sensitively enclosed with darkened glass.

** 3. Voelker House

Built ca 1905. This is probably the largest Queen Anne Revival residence in the area. The interior features considerable wainscoting and etched glass doors, though the plan is rather ordinary, having a central hall, double parlors, and 3 wings. Nonetheless, it is unusual for a Louisiana Queen Anne house to have as many as 3 semioctagonal bays. Equally unusual is the completely circumscribed porch and the separately articulated pavilion port cochere under its own double transverse gable roof.

INTR 4. Kennedy House c.1940. 1 story cottage.

* 5. Holt House

Built ca 1880, this large 5 bay, one story, central hall plan house has full length sliphead windows, shoulder molded fenestration, two wooden aedicule motif mantels, and one carved slate mantel. It is significant as a fine representation of the last phase of the Greek Revival--a style which persisted in Louisiana much longer than one might expect.

* 6. Minsky House

Built ca 1925. One of the two largest; bungalows in the parish, the Minsky House is in a good state of preservation. The only recent change has been the partial glazing in of a side porch.

** 7. Bass House

Built ca 1875. The Bass House is a two story, brick, central hall plan residence with painted slate mantels, elaborate ceiling moldings, a pair of two story protruding bays, an elaborate onion hanger cornice, arched windows, and a one bay scrollsaw ornamented porch. It is probably the only extant fully developed example of the Italian villa style in the region.

INTR 8. Deal House--ca 1970 ranch house intrusion

** 9. King House

Built ca 1905, this frame, 12 story, central hall plan residence has been partially burned on the upper half story and is currently under repair. Many of the Colonial Revival columns on the double curving porch have been lost, but the strapwork in the central gable is intact. The house's double turret design is almost unique in Louisiana.

* 10. Grace Episcopal Church

Built ca 1926. This two story basilica plan church is sparingly articulated with roundhead windows and a side tower. The style might be described as vaguely Romanesque.

INTR 11. Leach House Ca 1970 ranch house intrusion

** 12. Hamley House

Built ca 1840. This one story frame house has been considerably modified in the interior and several of the original 6 over 6 windows have been replaced. The handsome pedimented portico with its open work columns dates from the 1870's. It is significant as one of only two pedimented Greek Revival residences in the parish and one of about six in the region.

* 13. Parra House

Built ca 1905. This two story frame boxlike Queen Anne Revival residence is distinguished only by its Eastlake porch and strapwork gable. It is more or less typical of middle class residences found in eastern cities at the turn of the century, but untypical of rural northeastern Louisiana.

* 14. Brandenburg House

Built ca 1905. This two story frame boxlike Queen Anne Revival residence is distinguished only by its Eastlake porch and large scroll brackets. It is more or less typical of middle class residences found in eastern cities at the turn of the century. but untypical of rural northeastern Louisiana.

** Major contributing structure

* Minor contributing structure-important to the scene

INTR Intrusion

Specific Dates n/a
Builder/Architect n/a

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)
Criteria A, B, C

Lake Providence's architecturally significant cultural resources encompass most building types and styles normally found in small parish seats at the turn of the century. In addition, there are some important structures from earlier periods. Most of these resources are significant as large and pretentious works of architecture in an area which is otherwise largely devoid of historic buildings.

The town's most outstanding residence, Arlington, is one of about 4 two-story, galleried, Greek Revival mansions in northeastern Louisiana. The Bass House, an Italianate villa, represents a mid-nineteenth century style rarely seen in Louisiana outside of New Orleans. Aside from the new courthouse (ca 1935), the old East Carroll Parish Courthouse is the only pretentious governmental structure in the vicinity and the area's only example of Romanesque Revival architecture. Typical of the town's larger Queen Anne residences is the Nelson House, which like its fellows has unusually well developed massing. Its large and prominent turret, for example, is rare in a state where most Queen Anne houses are simple "I" shaped boxes with applied details. Finally, the turn of the century commercial downtown area is significant not only for its relatively elaborate brickwork, but also for its unusually high proportion of surviving original shop fronts.

When the town of Lake Providence was formed in the 1830's, it was located in Carroll Parish, which had been created in 1832. The parish was divided into East and West Carroll Parishes in 1877. Lake Providence has always been the seat of government for the parish except from 1855 to 1870 when the seat was moved to Floyd (now in West Carroll Parish).

The antebellum years were the most significant ones in Lake Providence's history. As was the case in the South as a whole, cotton was indeed king in antebellum Carroll Parish. On the eve of the Civil War Carroll led the state in cotton production and was the state's second richest cotton

producing parish. Seven of the top twelve cotton producers in the state were in the parish. Slaves comprised 77% of the population and there were 91 large slaveholdings (holdings of 50 or more slaves) in the parish.

Lake Providence was the largest town in the parish at the time and was the shipping center for much of the interior. A river guide of the period spoke of Lake Providence in 1856 as being "a very handsome village, population about 359, with a considerable trade in cotton and plantation supplies." "There were," continued the guide, "many fine plantations in the area around the lake." The only extant example in Lake Providence of the grand plantation homes of this era is Arlington, which stands as a symbol of the area's antebellum prosperity and grandeur.

In addition, Arlington is significant as the home of Edward Sparrow, an immensely wealthy cotton planter and Confederate politician. Sparrow owned Arlington from the 1850's when he purchased it until his death in 1882. He is buried there in the family cemetery.

Sparrow's accomplishments are numerous. Born in Ireland in 1810, Sparrow was one of the twelve largest cotton producers in Louisiana on the eve of the Civil War. Estimates on the number of slaves he owned vary from approximately 390 to approximately 460. The 1860 Census lists Sparrow as having four holdings--3 in Carroll Parish (1 of which was a partnership) and 1 in Concordia Parish. His estate, as reported for the 1860 census, was \$1,248,050. Sparrow was thus one of the richest men of the South, both in wealth and slaves.

In January, 1861 Sparrow was elected as an immediate secessionist to the Louisiana secession convention, which unanimously appointed him to membership in the Provisional Confederate Congress. In November, 1861 he was chosen to be one of Louisiana's two Senators in the Confederate Congress, a position he continued to occupy until the end. In fact, he was one of the eight men to be members of the Congress from the first day to the last. During the entire war period he was chairman of the powerful Committee on Military Affairs.

Despite difficulties with labor, floods, and low prices, cotton remained the major money crop in Carroll Parish in the postbellum era. In fact, in 1880 East Carroll topped every parish and every county in the South in productivity per acre. Instead of being worked by slaves, the parish's cotton plantations were now worked by tenant farmers and sharecroppers.

As it had been in the antebellum era, Lake Providence was an important commercial focal point for the area in the postbellum period. At the turn of the century the old downtown area was the place where the people of East Carroll Parish came to purchase needed goods and foodstuffs. People, also came from parts of Mississippi by ferry. By all accounts ferry business was brisk. Knowledgeable old residents of the town report that Lake Providence was, indeed, the place where people came to shop. Newspaper advertisements from the turn of the century confirm this. For example, they list clothing stores such as T.J. Powell's, Nemo White's, Max Levy, S.W. Green, and Hill Bros. They list drug stores such as Guenard Drugs, City Drugs, and the Levee Street Drug Store. They also list coal for sale at Maguire and Schneider's landing, and foodstuffs for sale at S.A. McNeil Grocery Store. In addition, there was a fish market, a lumber mill, a cotton seed oil mill, several dry goods stores, and several hardware stores. The fact that the town's business supported so many stores and manufacturing concerns indicates the importance of Lake Providence as a commercial center for the area.

Lake Providence was also a place to come for amusement and diversion at the turn of the century. Old residents report that gambling was a daily activity in the back rooms of the commercial area from the late nineteenth century until the early 1950's, when the practice was broken up by Sheriff "Red" Gilbert. At any given time, there were ten to twelve saloons operating in town. An example was the Phil McQuire Billiards and Pool Hall, which was advertised as the sole distributor for the Live Oak Distillery Company of Cincinnati, Ohio. Another example was Van's Saloon, just back of the levee, which was frequented by blacks and had a reputation for rowdiness.

There was an opera house which gave regular musical performances. But even if there were no planned events such as a circus or musical, people still came to Lake Providence to meet friends and "watch the people." Old residents have reported that Saturday was a significant day in old Lake Providence. It was the day when families from the surrounding plantations came to town to shop. But more than a shopping trip, it was also a social occasion in which people mingled, received news of other families, picked up the mail, attended a movie or musical performance, and simply sat and watched passers-by.

Preservation efforts in Lake Providence do not look beyond registration of the town's eligible resources. It is hoped that a Register listing itself, with the Tax Act and recognition factors, will help provide for the ultimate survival and enhancement of the town's historic buildings.

There is no comprehensive plan for growth in the area. However, the survey information has been incorporated into the statewide survey for use by state and federal agencies in the planning process.

Major Bibliographical References

Title Searches, East Carroll Parish Courthouse

Warner, Ezra J., and Yearns, W. Buck, Biographical Register of the Confederate Congress, Baton Rouge, LSU Press, 1975.

Pinkston, Georgia Payne Durham, A Place To Remember: East Carroll Parish, Louisiana, 1832-1976, Baton Rouge, Claitor's Publishing Division, 1977.

Hair William Ivy, Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest, Baton Rouge, LSU Press, 1969.

Alexander, Thomas B., and Beringer, Richard E., The Anatomy of the Confederate Congress, Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 1972.

Menn, Joseph K., The Large Slaveholders of Louisiana, 1860, New Orleans, Pelican Publishing Company, 1964.

National Register Nomination Form, Lake Providence Commercial Historic District, Located in Lake Providence Commercial Historic District National Register File, State Historic Preservation Office, Baton Rouge.