

Dulcito Plantation House (c. 1850) is a one-and-a-half story frame house mainly in the French Creole tradition. It is set back about a half mile from Louisiana Highway 182 near Spanish Lake in a grove of live oaks. Despite various alterations over the years, Dulcito retains enough of its original character to merit National Register listing.

There is some controversy over the date of Dulcito. The house is popularly believed to have been built in the late eighteenth century; however, the architectural evidence points clearly to a date of c. 1850 for the present house.

The gable end house is built of circular sawn timbers and is raised about six feet on a common bond brick basement. (Circular saws first appear in Louisiana in the 1830s.) The columns on the front gallery are believed to be original. When the present owners acquired the house in 1993, the entablature had been added to, the column capitals were missing, and the gallery had been screened. In an attempt to bring the facade back to its original appearance, the screening and the addition to the entablature were removed and capitals were installed. Because there was no architectural evidence, they are conjectural based upon period examples. A historic photograph of Dulcito uncovered since the work was done shows that they are accurate. Marks in the columns indicated the height for the balustrade, which is otherwise conjectural but appropriate. Openings on the facade consist of a central entrance flanked by two six over six windows. The windows are unusual because they do not have sills. Instead, the molding continues around the bottom.

As originally built, the house's front range of rooms consisted of a central hall with a large room on each side. The south hall wall has been removed. The rear range consisted of three unequally sized rooms and a small space containing a staircase to the unfinished attic. The room behind the staircase has since been subdivided into three small spaces. Surviving original interior features include four panel doors, exposed beaded ceiling beams in all rooms, and door and window surrounds with molding profiles typical of the late 1840s and '50s. The latter match those found on the facade. The most unusual interior feature for a house of this type is a transomed doorway with pocket doors at the end of the central hall.

Dulcito has experienced the following alterations in addition to those noted above:

- (1) A side gallery was added at the turn of the century. Because of the flush board wall and baseboard under the gallery, identical to the treatment on the facade, one wondered if the side gallery could possibly be original, although such a treatment would be extremely unusual. However, clues at the basement level demonstrate that the house did not originally have a side gallery. The gallery extends beyond the original basement, resting on piers of different brick (both type and method of laying). One can also see a change in the brick where the front basement wall was extended to link with the system of piers supporting the side gallery. The side gallery addition is dated to the turn of the century because of its beaded board ceiling. It appears that when the side gallery was added, the columns from the front were copied. As odd as it seems, the only explanation for the previously mentioned flush board wall is that it is an alteration designed to match the facade -- i.e., when the side gallery was added, clapboards were replaced with flush boards.
- (2) The fenestration pattern on the galleried side has been reworked. What is now a door near the rear was originally a window. Also, a short door and a rectangular transomlike window were added. All of this work was done using salvaged parts.
- (3) It appears that the house did not originally have a rear gallery. The present rear gallery with its beaded board ceiling dates to the turn of the century. Now partially enclosed, it extends beyond the basement on brick piers of the type described for the side gallery.

Again, oddly enough the original rear wall of the house is flush board rather than clapboarded.

- (4) The chimneys and mantels have been lost. The one mantel in the house is twentieth century.
- (5) Pecky cypress paneling was installed in the large room created by removing a wall. One wall has a pecky cypress wainscot.
- (6) Six over six double windows (salvaged) have been added to the rear wall (only visible from inside the rear central room or the rear gallery).

Assessment of Integrity

Despite the foregoing alterations, Dulcito retains enough of its original character to merit Register listing. Thanks to restoration work completed thus far, the facade looks much as it did when the house was built.

Significant dates c.1850
Architect/Builder unknown
Criterion C

Dulcito Plantation House is locally significant in the area of architecture as one of a limited number of buildings remaining to represent Iberia Parish's pre-Civil War architectural heritage.

Settlement of what would become Iberia Parish began in the mid-eighteenth century, and by the end of the century the area was well-populated, principally around Spanish Lake and Bayou Teche. In the first half of the nineteenth century the parish developed as a center for sugar production. Like most of Louisiana's sugar parishes, the economy boomed in the thirty or so years before the Civil War.

The foregoing settlement patterns illustrate that Iberia Parish was once replete with large numbers of French Creole houses (colonial period and well into the nineteenth century) and Greek Revival houses from the prosperous pre-War years. On the eve of the Civil War, Bayou Teche was lined with plantation homes, and Spanish Lake was practically ringed with them. Two of the most outstanding houses, Our Lady of the Lake and Darby, were lost in recent times.

The importance of Dulcito emerges against this background. While today's Iberia Parish retains hundreds of historic buildings, all but a small minority are from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is relatively little left to illustrate, from an architectural standpoint, that there was earlier development in the area. Staff knowledge, a survey and other sources reveal that there are probably only two dozen or so buildings remaining which date from before the Civil War. As one of these survivors, Dulcito is of special importance in the parish's architectural patrimony.

Historical Note:

On June 10, 1797, Jacques Fontenette petitioned Spanish authorities to acquire the tract of land upon which Dulcito stands. The basis of this petition was that the land had been abandoned by one of the Spanish settlers of New Iberia. Following the usual procedures involved for a Spanish land grant, the land was granted to Fontenette.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Historic Structures survey, Iberia Parish, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.

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