

Bagatelle is a one-story wood frame Greek Revival house with a hipped roof. Instead of the more common clapboarding, the entire house is sided with flush boards, giving it a smooth, temple-like appearance. On December 7, 1841, Augustin Marius (A.M.) Tureaud (owner) and Robert S. Chadsey (builder) signed a building contract for Bagatelle. The house has been moved twice – on the same piece of property (after the 1927 flood) and the second time (1977), from St. James Parish to its present site in Iberville Parish. The house has a rural setting facing the Mississippi River. Alterations since construction have been confined mostly to the rear façade.

The Moves:

The first move occurred after the 1927 flooding. The new levee system was constructed and the house and outbuildings were moved further back from the levee. The second move occurred in 1977 when the Missouri-Portland Cement Company purchased the land on which Bagatelle was situated. At this time the house was moved in one piece on a barge from St. James Parish to Iberville Parish. The house was moved 30 miles from its original location, or 75 river miles. Four surviving outbuildings were also moved (see below). The house is now situated on a plot of land that is consistent with its original setting. It sits in a rural setting and it faces the Mississippi River as it did originally. The only difference in its present site is the setback from the road. The house is about 800 feet back from River Road. Historically it was situated closer to the road.

Exterior

Bagatelle's foundation is composed of brick piers with wooden latticework filled in between. The front façade has a railed gallery running the entire width and is supported by six fluted Doric columns. The gallery has wooden panels on the underside, between the columns. This paneling is carried to the corners of the front facade. Pilasters at each corner, with molded capitals, continue the paneling motif. Unlike the typical pilaster, which appears only on the façade, these finish off the corner by continuing on the side elevation. The entablature has dentil moulding. (This treatment encircles the house.) The columns do not have bases, in the Greek Doric manner, but have carved indentations around the base to allow for breathing. There is a seven step railed staircase leading up to the porch. The hipped roof is covered with asphalt shingles and has two original dormers on the facade and two on the rear, four internal chimneys and a widow's walk. The dormers are well detailed and make an important contribution to Bagatelle's Greek Revival character. They feature an entablature, a strongly articulated pediment, and fluted pilasters with molded capitals.

The front entrance is centrally located and is flanked by two windows. The door surround is composed of sidelights, with three lights each, and a rectangular transom composed of eight lights. The doors are paneled French double leaf wooden doors. The wooden members of the door surround are applied in a way to suggest Greek fretwork. The window surrounds also carry this motif. The screen doors, a later addition, are also double doors. The facade windows are triple hung sliphead windows with shutters. Each window panel is comprised of six lights (6 over 6 over 6). The shutters are functional (as opposed to decorative) and held to the wall via wrought iron hooks and use a standard butt hinge.

The eastern and western side façades of Bagatelle are identical and have three six-over-six sash windows with shutters and surrounds matching the front façade. There is one six-over-six dormer per side. Unlike the front and rear dormers, these are 1940s additions made by Reverend Monsignor Celestine M. Chambon. (They copy the appearance of the original dormers.)

The (southern) rear façade has an addition, under a separate roof, spanning its width (also from the 1940s by Father Chambon). The addition has a centrally located doorway in a pedimented railed portico, supported by two columns and reached via a side staircase with a railing. To the left of the portico are three evenly spaced six-over-six sash windows with surrounds mimicking the original ones. The corners of the addition also mimic the original pilaster treatment on the façade. To the right of the portico are three small windows grouped together. They also have six-over-six lights and have the same window surround pattern as seen elsewhere.

Interior

The floor plan of Bagatelle reads like a traditional Greek Revival central hall plan on the exterior. However, the central hall space is wider than usual and was designed as a double parlor. There are two roughly equal sized rooms to each side of the double parlor configuration. The rear range originally consisted of a small room at each corner with an open porch between (in the manner of a French Creole *cabinet-loggia* range).

The two parlors are separated by large paneled pocket doors so that when the doors are closed the rooms are separate parlors and when opened they form a space similar to a central hall. The floors and ceiling are wood. The original plaster was largely destroyed during Bagatelle's moves; however, one painting on plaster, depicting cattle, remains over the fireplace in the rear section of the double parlor. According to family tradition, this was painted in the late nineteenth century. Each parlor features a wooden mantel (with slightly splayed pilasters). The mantels are painted to look like black marble. The fireboxes are of black painted brick. The rooms to the right of the double parlor configuration are similarly designed. They each contain a fireplace with a faux black marble mantel. (The building contract specifies a faux marble treatment for the mantels.) The southwest corner room's firebox is of pressed metal decorated with acanthus leaves with a coal grate instead of painted brick. The two rooms to the left of the double parlor configuration also have fireplaces with wooden mantels. These are painted to resemble brown marble, which one suspects is a later alteration. (It looks newer and is not of the quality of the faux black marble.) There is no decorative cornice line in any of the rooms.

The profile of the door surrounds and baseboards is consistent throughout the house and fits with the Greek Revival design. All of the interior doors are paneled, with two panels above and two below a central paneled divide. The rear of the second parlor has a doorway composition like that of the façade (again, as one would see in a central hall configuration). The surround is identical but the doors have been replaced with multi-pane glass doors. These doors were added by Father Chambon in the 1940s when the addition across the rear was constructed. The addition includes a sunroom (with a dropped ceiling), a kitchen, and a curved staircase leading to the attic and widow's walk. A bathroom has also been added to this space.

Modifications

As noted previously, historically the southern façade was built in the *cabinet/loggia* style. This was enclosed and enlarged in the 1940s to create a sunroom and a larger kitchen. The rear entrance was moved from its original location to this new façade. A portion of the original rear façade can be seen in the kitchen with the original door into the *cabinet*. It is a French double door located on the rear of the *cabinet*, which is unusual. Typically a window pierces the rear wall of a *cabinet*. (This treatment is shown in a 1920s photo.) Also, as noted previously, a dormer was added to each side elevation, and the faux marble treatment on two of the mantels most likely is not original.

Non-contributing structures:

Two cisterns are located within the nominated boundaries but are considered non-contributing as they were rebuilt after the move from St. James Parish. They are in the same location (one at each rear corner) as shown in early photos.

Outbuildings:

When the house was moved four outbuildings were moved as well. The buildings are not being included in the nominated acreage because they would be considered non-contributing under National Register guidelines, for the following reasons: (1) Two of the four are not in the same configuration as found after the late 1920s move. (2) The two pigeoniers have received notable alterations. (3) Related to #1, the Register would consider the grouping an "artificial assemblage," and "artificial assemblages" are not eligible for the Register.

The buildings are being mentioned here for purposes of documentation. They are as follows:

- (1) a double entry side gable Creole cabin of brick between posts construction. It has brick piers with a sheet metal roof. This building is placed close to River Road, marking the entrance to the driveway leading to the main house. It is missing its gallery posts.
- (2) To the rear of the house on the western side is a brick side gable double entry Creole cabin on brick piers. It has a wooden gallery with Doric columns and a wooden shingle roof.
- (3) Two wooden sided brick pigeoniers with metal covered pyramidal roofs are located to the rear of the house in the same position as in St. James Parish. They are now shorter than when built. The upper sections, where the pigeons roosted, were removed during the 1940s due to deterioration.

Assessment of Integrity:

The 1977 move has not compromised Bagatelle's National Register eligibility. Both St James and Iberville

parishes historically had a similar architectural and economic history. Geographically both sites face the Mississippi River and are pastoral in nature, providing a continuity of setting. While Bagatelle has a deeper setback than it had originally, it does not look out of place for a plantation house along the Mississippi River. Finally, Bagatelle remains within the context for its architectural significance – Louisiana's Great River Road.

SIGNIFICANT DATE: 1841-1842

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: R. S. Chadsey, builder

CRITERION: C

Bagatelle Plantation House is of local architectural significance as a major expression of the Greek Revival taste along Louisiana's Great River Road.

Greek Revival was the dominant style in America between the 1820s and 1850s. Due to its popularity, for everything from banks to homes, it was sometimes called the "national style." In the South, Grecian architecture appeared in various forms, some of which differed significantly from the national norm. In its purest form, the Greek Revival attempted to mimic the look of real Greek temples, with a huge pedimented portico spanning the entire front of a building. An adaptation of the classical temple form was a pedimented portico attached to a larger building.

Although the temple was the most popular form for houses and other buildings in the United States as a whole, it was not as common in Louisiana. Here the local French Creole style evolved over about fifty years into what became a distinctive Southern subspecies of the Greek Revival. Known to architectural historians as the "peripteral mode," it consists of a squarish house surrounded by massive columns and lacking porticoes.

The very grandest Greek Revival houses in Louisiana were built in the temple style or peripteral mode. Far more typical was the application of Grecian details to the popular galleried cottage form (as in Bagatelle). This became the standard for small to medium sized plantation houses, appearing in both gable end and hipped roof houses. Most of the state's Greek Revival galleried cottages featured square wooden pillars with molded capitals. Other Grecian-inspired details might include pedimented dormers, denticular cornices, ear molded door and window surrounds, and mantels with heavy entablatures and pilasters.

Countless Greek Revival houses, banks, schools, etc. once dotted the Louisiana landscape. One of the state's most famous and recognizable group of Greek Revival houses is found along the banks of the Mississippi on what is known as the Great River Road. Built by wealthy sugar cane planters in the booming decades before the Civil War, the grandest were two story mansions with broad galleries, sometimes encircling the house (in the peripteral mode). As far as the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office can determine, none were in the temple style. Small to medium size plantation houses (Bagatelle being the latter) followed the state norm of Grecian details applied to the galleried cottage form.

From old photos and other documentation, it is clear that Greek Revival was the dominant style on the River Road on the eve of the Civil War. Most likely, more have been lost than survive. Today the Great River Road retains nine major expressions of the Greek Revival. And while the other eight are larger and grander, Bagatelle clearly is part of this select company. An architectural jewel set on the verdant Mississippi River landscape, Bagatelle compensates in detail for what it may lack in size. The well-proportioned house boasts true Doric columns (as opposed to wooden pillars with molded capitals), a fully developed entablature (cornice, frieze and architrave) with denticular molding, exquisite dormers with a strongly articulated pediment and fluted pilasters, an abundance of door and window surrounds with a Greek fretwork-like design, and on the interior, six Greek Revival mantels. Although not specifically Greek Revival, the tongue and groove sheathing gives the house a smooth, finished-off appearance – like that of a temple (albeit one with a hip roof).

Historical Note:

Bagatelle is one of a "family of houses" built by Louisiana's preeminent plantation dynasty, the Bringiers. Great River Road landmarks built by various Bringiers include La Maison Blanche, Union, L'Hermitage, Bocage, Colomb, Tezcuco, Ashland and Bagatelle. Four of these no longer exist (La Maison Blanche, Union, Colomb and Tezcuco).

Located adjacent to Union Plantation, the main house at Bagatelle was built for Augustin Marius Claiborne Tureaud, son of Louise Elizabeth "Betzy" Bringier (nee) and Augustin Dominique Tureaud of Union, and grandson of Emanuel Marius Pons Bringier of Maison Blanche. (Maison Blanche was the first of the Bringier homes.) A. M. Tureaud married Frances Aurore Mather, daughter of George Mather, Sr., of Belle Alliance Plantation. A. M. Tureaud had nine children by Frances Aurore Mather, through which Bagatelle descended until 1929. The last of the children, Louise Olivia Tureaud, died in that year, and Bagatelle passed to Gordon McDonald Mather, her cousin.

Mather's main residence was in Ohio. The house was unoccupied until Mr. Mather sold the property in 1941 to the Right Reverend Monsignor Celestine M. Chambon. Father Chambon lived there until 1946, when he sold Bagatelle to Francis Henderson James. Upon the death of James, the house was vacant from 1959 into the 1970s.

James' son and daughter-in-law, Trenton and Kay James, saved Bagatelle from certain destruction in 1977 by moving it to Iberville Parish. They continue to make Bagatelle their home.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Building contract for Bagatelle, filed under Augustin Marius Tureaud-Duplicate-No.267 (p.350), Conveyance Book D, St. James Parish, dated December 27, 1841.

Circa 1900 photo of Bagatelle, Louisiana State Museum.

Historic American Building Survey documentation on Bagatelle, conducted in 1977, prior to the move.