

Constructed c. 1870, the Kerner House is a vernacular builder's version of the transitional Greek Revival/Italianate style popular in and around New Orleans at that time. The one story, frame, raised cottage stands on a mixed-use street in a late nineteenth/early twentieth century neighborhood only a few blocks from the Mississippi River's west bank in the Jefferson Parish Town of Gretna. (Gretna is across the river from New Orleans.) Although the building has experienced alterations over the years, it remains eligible for the National Register.

The home is a traditional galleried residence composed of a main block with a gable end roof and a rear wing. A five-bay gallery spans the length of the facade. Originally a second "L"-shaped gallery wrapped around the rear elevation and the wing's facade (see below). The main block contains four rooms, two on each side of a central hall. The wing contains three additional rooms.

The facade is distinguished by the above-mentioned gallery, whose boxed columns are somewhat unusual. The upper half of each has chamfered edges, but the lower half is plain. Although the chamfering of columns is not uncommon in the Italianate style, chamfering of only part of a column is not often seen. The columns support a narrow entablature which outlines the gallery roof. The gallery's balustrade contains boldly turned members. The entrance is composed of a single door accompanied by a transom and sidelights. It is ornamented by a surround composed of pilasters supporting a heavily molded cornice, and by a handsomely paneled recess which separates the plane of the door from that of the facade. Smaller versions of the entrance cornice surmount the facade's four floor-to-ceiling windows, which are protected by shutters. The facade's wood siding is cut and beveled to represent rusticated stone. The roof's highlight is a pair of Italianate dormers containing arched six-over-six windows surmounted by decorative keystones and flanked by attenuated pilasters. The pilasters' molded capitals form the bottom portions of the dormers' raked pediments. In addition, the capitals' layered moldings, as well as the pilasters' molded neckings, extend around the side of each dormer to further ornament these roof projections. The simple boxed columns on what remains of the rear gallery (see below) should be classed as Greek Revival. Two sets of six-light French doors provide entrance into two of the rear wing's rooms. The interior is distinguished by five different coal-burning fireplaces. Their mantelpieces combine the Greek Revival form with Italianate details such as oversized brackets and dentils and layered mantel shelves. The interior's original four-panel doors remain in place, outlined by molded surrounds. The dining room, located in the rear wing, features a wainscot composed of horizontal boards.

The house is currently undergoing a rehabilitation which consists, for the most part, of repairing damaged members and bringing the facade back to its original appearance. Older alterations previously experienced by the home include:

- 1) the expansion and enclosure of the portion of the rear "L"-shaped gallery paralleling the main block. This project created two small rooms on the gallery's southeast corner. (In the current renovation, the latter spaces have been combined into one large bath.) The rest of the gallery between the rooms and the wing (and at the foot of the central hall) was converted into new living space. Both the hall and new space (which are open to each other) received tile ceilings.
- 2) the installation of a modern kitchen in the wing room nearest to the main block
- 3) the replacement of the original side, six-over-six windows with metal windows containing two horizontal panes in each sash; and the addition of asbestos shingles to both sides of the original building, the back wall of the expanded gallery, and the rear wall of the ell.
- 4) the addition of a closet to the right front room, the removal of the wing's chimney, the enclosure of a small end portion of the rear gallery paralleling the wing, and the painting of the home's brick piers.

Despite these alterations, the home retains its National Register eligibility. Although the addition of the asbestos siding and the loss of some original windows are certainly regrettable, the stylistic details on the facade and interior remain intact. Importantly, the asbestos shingles do not impact the facade with its important decorative details such as cut and beveled siding, the paneling surrounding the doorway recess, the entrance surround, and the cornices above the entrance and windows. As one of few buildings to represent Gretna's early architectural character (see Part 8), the Kerner House is a legitimate candidate for National Register listing.

SIGNIFICANT DATES:	c. 1870
ARCHITECT/BUILDER:	Unknown
CRITERION:	C

The Kerner House is of local architectural significance within the context of Gretna. With its transitional Greek Revival-Italianate character, it is among a small select group of buildings to represent the town's early architectural heritage.

Gretna traces its founding to 1836 when Nicolas Noel Destrehan commissioned surveyor Benjamin Buisson to draw a plan for a settlement called Mechanikham. In 1838 the St. Mary's Market Steam Ferry Company began to develop a settlement called Gretna immediately adjacent to Mechanikham. The two areas were collectively known as Gretna, although they maintained separate designations on maps as late as Norman's 1858 chart of the lower Mississippi River.

Although Gretna has a National Register historic district encompassing the oldest portion of the town, no official Standing Structures Survey has been implemented. However, staff knowledge of the area (much of it gained while working on this district) allows a fair assessment of the community's architectural patrimony. Gretna resembles an older New Orleans neighborhood both in terms of its streetscape and the local building types and styles. Undoubtedly this is because the town developed as part of the overall New Orleans metropolitan area. With few exceptions its buildings are similar in size and scale, with one-story galleried cottages, shotgun houses and bungalows dominating. Most of these are only one story in height and are set close together and fairly close to the street. Public and commercial buildings stand relatively near the river, while residences are located throughout the town.

The town's earliest buildings are concentrated in the 737 building National Register district. Only a very few (the candidate and maybe two or three other galleried cottages) are located outside the boundaries. Of the district's 737 buildings, only 18 date to before 1880 – i.e., represent the French Creole, Greek Revival, and transitional Greek Revival/Italianate style. These include one shotgun with late Greek Revival details, galleried cottages, and brick commercial buildings that are loosely Greek Revival. About 50 buildings in the district are shotguns in the so-called "New Orleans bracketed" style – an 1880s - 1890s version of the Italianate mainly known for its elaborate brackets. The majority of styled historic buildings in the district, and Gretna as a whole, are in the Eastlake, Colonial Revival, and Bungalow styles.

Against this background, the Kerner House is a landmark in Gretna because it helps portray an important aspect of the town's early architectural character – i.e., a galleried cottage in the Greek Revival or transitional Greek Revival-Italianate taste.

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#### Historical Note

Little is known of the Kerner House's history before the turn of the twentieth century. On April 28, 1900, Emily Kerner Trauth inherited the home from her mother, Agnes Kerner Stapler. At that time the Kerners owned the entire block. Once Emily owned the property, she sold off lots one by one. John Jacob Brupbacker purchased the house from her on November 24, 1900, and it remained in his hands until his death. His descendants continued to own the home until March 30, 1999, when they sold it to Laura Turkman Carroll.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Division of Historic Preservation, National Register Nomination of Gretna Historic District, 1985.

Site visit by National Register staff.