

The Calkins-Orvis House (1901) is a one-and-a-half story frame residence located on a corner lot in an old residential neighborhood of the small community of Welsh. Despite its symmetrical articulation, the house is squarely in the Queen Anne Revival tradition. Alterations have been relatively minimal, and most that have occurred date from the 1920s.

The Calkins-Orvis House is not typical of turn-of-the-century Louisiana, a difference which undoubtedly can be explained by the fact that its original owner was from Minnesota. It is articulated as a steeply pitched gable end block with an enormous dormer front and rear. Each dormer features a band of windows under a vertical gable whose shape is accentuated with gable end returns and a band of rectangular-shaped shingles. The face of the gable (above the windows) has particularly three-dimensional shinglework formed by two patterns. Spreading below the front dormer is a porch which extends around each side of the house by two or three feet. The boxed porch posts are very simple, featuring a slight chamfer as their only decoration. There are two entrances on the facade -- one leading to a stair hall, the other to the living room. A large three-part window lights the living room.

The side elevations feature a very distinctive and unusual treatment in their steeply pitched gables. Each gable's shape is emphasized by a section of shingled surface that extends beyond the main wall plane. The sloping sections and the bottom of the gable peak feature a rectangular shingle pattern while the peak has scalloped and pointed shingles. Each side elevation also has a one story polygonal bay, one at the rear and one at the front. Finally, there is a small one story service wing at the rear.

The house has a more interesting floorplan than its squarish footprint would suggest (see attached). This is partially due to the previously mentioned side polygonal bays -- one at the end of a large front living room, the other in a back bedroom. A diagonally placed corridor with various turns in it cuts across from the entrance/stair hall to the rear dining room. This severs the living room from the rear bedroom (on the other side of the hall) at a 45 degree angle. Overall, the living room has a total of nine different wall planes and the bedroom has eight (if the bays are included).

A two-flight staircase with turned balusters ascends to a capacious attic with a small hall from which three bedrooms fan off wedge fashion. This too makes for a polygonal character; indeed, all of the attic bedrooms have between five and six sides.

The house's single fireplace is set in the living room and features a golden oak mantel with a mirrored overmantel. The composition is set within Ionic columns featuring egg and dart molding in their capitals. The mantel is also embellished with a dentil band and bead and reel molding and has a cast-iron insert ornamented with classical motifs. The focus of the dining room is a built-in oak china cabinet with glass doors featuring prism-like angle cuts. The house's door and window frames are of oak and are of a simple design. Varnished oak doors have five horizontal panels.

Virtually all alterations since construction occurred in the 1920s after the Orvis family purchased the house. (They purchased it in 1920 and lived there until sometime in the 1960s.) Because the alterations were made not that long after the house was built and are well crafted, they would not have been recognized without the recollections of a family member. They include:

(1) Adjustment of the upper level windows: The band of windows in the front and rear dormers was increased from three to five windows, and new multi-pane casement windows were inserted. Also, the eastern side elevation at the attic level originally had two windows (per an old photo). This was changed to a band of five casement windows matching those on the dormers. Finally, a window was added to the western elevation to provide further light for the stairhall.

(2) Two sets of pocket doors were sealed into the walls with an oak facing to cover their location, and the openings were fitted with glass multi-pane oak doors.

(3) The opening between the living room and the porch received French doors.

(4) Openings fitted with double doors were cut in the angled walls of the upstairs bedrooms.

Alterations of a more recent vintage include the sandblasting of the weatherboards and the conversion of a butler's pantry to a bathroom, although the beaded board built-in cabinets were retained. There is also an appendage to the rear service wing of unknown origin. One wonders if it is a former dependency connected to the house and reworked.

#### Assessment of Integrity:

As noted above, the 1920s alterations were very cleverly done and do not detract from the

house's appearance. Most importantly, the house retains all of those features which define its very distinctive character.

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1901  
ARCHITECT/BUILDER Unknown  
CRITERION C

The Calkins-Orvis House is of local architectural significance as a landmark in the turn-of-the-century residential heritage of Welsh. This status is based upon its unusual massing (most notably the distinctive treatment of its side gables) and its profusion of intricate shinglework.

Like much of southwestern Louisiana, Jeff Davis Parish, where Welsh is located, was not settled until the late-nineteenth century. And its early residents were largely from the Midwest. The parish traces its origin to the building of the Southern Pacific Railroad across the region in the early 1880s. This transportation artery as well as a considerable influx of Midwesterners with progressive farming techniques made possible a major rice boom in the late-nineteenth century. Towns sprang up along the railroad in the 1880s, with Welsh being platted in 1884. Almost all of its early settlers were from northern and midwestern states, lured there undoubtedly by the immigration arm of the Southern Pacific and by relatives already in the area. The small town in the heart of the rice belt was incorporated in 1888, receiving its name from Henry Welsh, the community's first mayor and recognized founder. The greatest period of growth occurred between 1900 and 1910, when the population almost quadrupled (320 to 1250).

Although a small town, Welsh historically would have had a respectable number of turn-of-the-century homes, given the foregoing developmental history. And given the fact that areas of northern or midwestern settlement in Louisiana typically had some of the state's most interesting Victorian-era residences, one suspects that Welsh once must have had various landmark homes, or certainly more than it retains today. A windshield survey of the town made it abundantly clear that there are two, possibly three landmark



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