
Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Frost House is located on a narrow but deep, well-landscaped lot in a historic residential neighborhood of Thibodaux, the seat of Lafourche Parish. Standing on tall brick piers, the one-and-one-half story frame residence is an example of the Colonial Revival style. Although the house has experienced some alteration since attaining its current form c. 1916 (see the following paragraph), it retains its original architectural character and its National Register eligibility.

When the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation submitted a multiple property nomination for Thibodaux in 1986, the Frost House was omitted because locals mentioned that it had been significantly altered. This comment was based upon the knowledge that the residence was originally a three-story house. However, the LASHPO has now learned that the house has existed in its current one-and-one-half story form for at least 92 years. According to the current resident, a descendant of original owner H. W. Frost, workers rushed the three-story house to completion in 1912 so that the terminally ill Frost could die in his new home. He succumbed to his illness shortly after occupying the residence. Within a relatively short time, Mrs. Frost decided to reduce the structure's size because she did not want such a large house and the roof leaked. The remodeling (which kept the lower story and much of its architectural elements intact) had been completed by 1916, no more than four years after the home's original construction. Because it attained its current size, shape, and appearance very early in its history and has appeared thus for the vast majority of the historic period, the Frost House should be considered a c. 1916 building and merits National Register evaluation as such.

Despite having experienced a reduction in size, the c. 1916 Frost House is still a large residence and assumes a commanding presence on the street. The raised house is deeper than it is wide. Its massing is that of a large, rectangular and symmetrical galleried house with a big dormer facing the front. Colonial Revival style characteristics associated with the Frost House include:

- 1) a full-length, three bay gallery featuring fluted Tuscan columns rising from square plinths to fully developed Tuscan capitals composed of necking, neck molding, echinus, and abacus.
- 2) a full entablature outlining the gallery. The entablature's frieze is unornamented except for thin bands of molding along its upper and lower edge. Its architrave and overhanging cornice are both subdivided into two narrow bands. The bands within the architrave appear to be formed of narrow boards applied in a corbelled manner. Those on the cornice are formed by the application of moldings.
- 3) corner boards composed of fluted pilasters and Tuscan capitals similar to those outlining the gallery. Nearby, tall molded panels serve as corner boards for the side elevations.
- 4) the treatment of the entrance area, where additional pilasters flank a recessed doorway. These pilasters are smooth rather than fluted, and their capitals are more restrained than those on the corner boards. Within the recessed space, a single, six-panel door centered beneath a three-panel transom opens into the house. Long, narrow sidelights flank this door.
- 5) three pediments composed of raking cornices and heavy horizontal cornices. These are found above the front facing dormer and above projecting polygonal bays on each side elevation. The tympanum of each pediment contains an applied triangular shaped panel pierced by a small fanlight.
- 6) the balustrades on the gallery and the interior stairway. That on the gallery is composed of sets of intersecting members that resemble a starburst. That of the interior staircase features turned balusters and a molded and paneled newel-post surmounted by a sculptural urn.

Although the majority of the home's ornament is Colonial Revival, all of the original windows except the previously mentioned small fanlights contain upper sashes vertically subdivided in a manner suggestive of the Craftsman style.

On the interior, the first floor plan is organized around a center hall with three rooms on each side. The outside walls of the middle rooms take the form of long but shallow polygonal bays. The staircase to the second floor is located at the rear of the central hall. The first floor features back-to-back corner fireplaces in the front and middle rooms of the home's right side, additional back-to-back fireplaces centered on the wall between the front and middle rooms on the opposite side, paneled doors accompanied by operable transoms, and a set of pocket doors (also paneled). The upper level had three rooms (one facing the front and one facing each side) and a large attic. Doors to two of these rooms also have transoms. Changes to this level will be discussed below.

The house has experienced some alteration since achieving its c. 1916 appearance. On the exterior the only change was the replacement of the original wooden gallery stairs with one built of brick. On the interior of the first floor, the changes include the construction of a built-in bookcase in the right front room, the addition of closets in two rooms, the replacement (due to loss) of all the mantels, the modernization of the kitchen, the installation of a modern wainscot in the dining room, and the enclosure of both sides of the back gallery (the middle remains open) to create a utility/sunroom with large plate glass windows on one side and a bathroom on the other. On the second level, the wall of the original bedroom on the front corner was moved outward to create more space, an additional bedroom and a bathroom were added, and part of the attic was opened up to create a playroom.

The above changes do not negatively impact the integrity of the house. The brick staircase leading to the gallery does not obscure any of the important Colonial Revival features that contribute to the home's architectural significance. Also, the expanded second level bedroom is not visible on the exterior, and the altered rear gallery is not visible from the front. As one of the very few landmark examples of post-Queen Anne, early twentieth century design in the community of Thibodaux, and as an excellent example of a Colonial Revival style house, the Frost House is a legitimate candidate for National Register listing.

Non-Contributing Element

A large, one-story brick carport/patio also stands on the property. Its roof takes a hipped configuration on one end and a gabled shape on the other. Although located only a few feet from the historic home's rear wall, the two buildings do not touch. They are connected by a short covered walkway. Modern in age and appearance, this structure is clearly a non-contributing element.

Significant Dates: c. 1916
Criterion: C
Architect/Builder: Unknown

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The Frost House is locally significant under Criterion C: Architecture. The context for evaluation is the town of Thibodaux in Lafourche Parish. The house's importance is based upon two factors. First, it is an excellent example of the Colonial Revival style and the transition that occurred between the style's earliest interpretation and later incarnation. Second, it is a rare landmark in a community that has very little post-Queen Anne Revival, early-twentieth-century residential architecture.

Historical Background

Thibodaux, with a population of about 14,431 in 2000, is the seat of government for the large rural parish of Lafourche (1,141 square miles). It is located on the banks of Bayou Lafourche, a waterway that branches off the Mississippi River at Donaldsonville in Ascension Parish and runs through the length of Assumption and Lafourche parishes before emptying into the Gulf of Mexico. The town bears the name of Henry Schuyler Thibodaux, who settled in the area around 1801. Originally named Thibodauxville, the community became the parish seat in 1808, incorporated in 1830, and was well established by the Civil War. The town owes its historical importance to agriculture (most especially the cultivation of sugar cane), the availability of steamboats and railroads for transporting passengers and freight, and its role as a commercial center for the surrounding territory. By 1892 it had a population of 1900, and by 1907 this figure had jumped to 4300. The present building stock as well as other available evidence indicates that the years from c.1890 to c.1910 (an era of great sugar production) were particularly prosperous ones for Thibodaux.

Architectural Background

The Colonial Revival style dominated domestic building throughout the country during the first half of the twentieth century. The style has several sub-categories based upon historic Georgian, Federal or Adam, Dutch Colonial, and Postmedieval English precedents. Additionally, American architects and builders created Colonial Revival houses by freely reinterpreting and combining elements from two or more of these prototypes in many examples. As a result, pure copies of colonial houses were far less common than were eclectic mixtures.

The Philadelphia Centennial of 1876 is credited with first awakening an interest in our colonial architectural heritage. In 1877 the fashionable architects McKim, Mead, White, and Bigelow took a widely publicized tour through New England to study original Georgian and Adam buildings at first hand. By 1886 they had executed two landmark houses in the style—the Appleton House (1883-84) in Lennox, Massachusetts, and the Taylor House (1885-86) in Newport, Rhode Island. These important examples typify the two types of Colonial Revival houses that were most common before 1910: 1) the Free Classic sub-category of the Queen Anne Revival style, in which colonial details such as classical columns and cornices, elliptical arches, and Palladian windows were superimposed freely upon asymmetrical Queen Anne houses, and 2) the more authentic symmetrical hipped roof house also exhibiting classical or colonial ornament. Details in both tended to have exaggerated proportions, and neither type was historically correct.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the Colonial Revival fashion began shifting toward carefully researched copies with more correct proportions and details. As a result, examples of the style became more sober and boxy. The change was encouraged by the wide dissemination of books and periodicals like the *White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs* and *American Architect and Building News'* extensive series called "The Georgian Period." Both contained photographs and drawings of authentic colonial buildings

and helped to create a better understanding of the prototypes on which the Revival was based. As a result, Colonial Revival houses built in the years between 1915 and 1935 more closely resemble early prototypes, at least from the exterior, than did those built earlier or later. A favorite feature to copy was George Washington's huge and ungainly portico at Mount Vernon. Improved in proportion by the skilled hands of trained architects, the Mount Vernon portico became the hallmark of literally thousands of Colonial Revival houses coast to coast. The economic depression of the 1930s, World War II, and changing postwar fashions led to a simplification of the style in the 1940s and '50s. These later examples are most often of the side-gabled type, with simple stylized door surrounds, cornices, or other details that merely suggest their colonial precedents rather than closely mirroring them.

With one notable exception (the shotgun house), Louisiana's experience with the Colonial Revival paralleled that of other states in the Deep South. In the early phase (c. 1895-1905), conventional Queen Anne revival houses with asymmetrical massing were fitted with colonial style features. During the first decade of the twentieth century the classical aspect of the Colonial Revival began to dominate. Massing became quieter. Houses became boxy and symmetrical and made frequent use of prominent white columns of both one and two stories. A favorite device was to have a one-story porch running across the front of the house with a superimposed two-story monumental portico. Some Colonial Revival residences began to bear a striking resemblance to antebellum Green Revival houses. Large white-columned houses reminded Southerners of the region's antebellum past, which was becoming increasingly romanticized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rightly or wrongly, experts considered such houses to be correct interpretations of their historical precedents. Additionally, several dozen homes featuring Mount Vernon-like porticoes survive in Louisiana, as do other manifestations of the "correct colonial style." But on the whole, this more refined and scholarly mode of the Colonial Revival had less impact here than it did in the eastern states.

In addition to relatively grand houses, the Colonial Revival produced another generation of shotgun houses. These new "colonial" shotguns, located in New Orleans and vicinity, had squarish fronts; sometimes richly ornamented entablatures; and importantly, round classical columns. As with other periods in the New Orleans shotgun-house tradition, these Colonial Revival shotguns represent a unique collection. While shotguns are found throughout the South, they are typically humble, unadorned buildings. By contrast, New Orleans shotguns are usually richly styled.

Identifying features of the Colonial Revival style in Louisiana include, but are not limited to, symmetrical facades (sometimes with side-projecting wings); porches in the form of projecting porticoes or long galleries; smooth or fluted columns and pilasters with classical order capitals; ornamented entablatures featuring dentils or modillions; decorative pediments; straight and round arched openings; elaborately treated entrance surrounds encasing front doors with transoms and sidelights; and the use of fanlights, Palladian windows, bay windows, paired windows, and windows featuring subdivided upper sashes.

Architectural Significance

Thibodaux has few examples of high style early twentieth century residences, including those in the Colonial Revival taste. Because its period of prosperity coincided with the popularity of the Queen Anne Revival, the town is a showcase of that style. Its post-Queen Anne historic residential architecture is characterized almost exclusively by the bungalow style. These occur in large numbers. However, virtually all are low-key, run-of-the-mill examples rather than elaborate ones. Otherwise, little stylish architecture appeared in Thibodaux until the ranch's rise in popularity during the mid-twentieth century. For example, impressive twentieth century eclectic houses are virtually absent from Thibodaux, and there are only four noteworthy 50+ year-old Colonial Revival houses in the community.

A comparison of these four Colonial Revival houses shows that each represents a different aspect of the

style.

- 1) Created between 1912 and 1916, when the Colonial Revival style was beginning its transition from an eclectic blend of features to a more authentic interpretation of historical precedents, the Frost House exhibits many of the style's major characteristics and reflects the common perception of a Colonial Revival style residence's appearance. Like later examples, the home's façade is symmetrical, as is its entire footprint. The residence has an impressive, three-bay gallery with substantial fluted columns. The latter feature fully developed Tuscan capitals (the classical order used most often in the Colonial Revival style) composed of necking, neck molding, echinus, and abacus. The three recognized elements of an entablature -- architrave, frieze and cornice -- are present along the gallery's roofline. The home's entrance, containing a door, transom, and sidelights, is highlighted by an ornamental surround and by its recessed location within the plane of the façade. All of the home's original windows have subdivided upper sashes. Like the earlier examples, the house also features a few elements superimposed freely on the building to help "colonialize" it. These include three pedimented gables with raking and horizontal cornices, an applied triangular panel within each pediment's tympanum, and a small fanlight piercing each panel.
- 2) The Sidney Peltier House (National Register) is far from the typical Colonial Revival example. Constructed between 1910 and 1914, it is a one-and-one-half story, hipped roof dwelling combining elements of the Colonial Revival and the Bungalow/Craftsman style that was also popular at the time. Its gallery columns occur in pairs and sets of three and rise to the roofline from tall, thick brick bases. However, these columns are slender Ionic shafts rather than the thick, tapered columns generally associated with the Bungalow. Although the dwelling also exhibits an entablature, a shallow segmental arched entrance pavilion, and a front door with transom and sidelights, it clearly belongs just as much to the Bungalow tradition as it does to the Colonial Revival. Although such houses are more common in the western United States, this form is clearly unusual for Thibodaux.
- 3) Constructed in 1937, the Senator Harvey Peltier, Sr. House is a large, mansion-like dwelling with Corinthian columns supporting its Mount Vernon style portico. Thus, it clearly reflects the tendency of some prosperous Southerners to build residences believed to be authentic representations of actual plantation house precedents. Although the house lacks the level of detail found on the Frost Home, it also has a small balcony centering upon the façade's second floor entrance and dormers piercing a roof-level balustrade. However, the house is noteworthy primarily for its size.
- 4) Also of interest due to its size, the Landry Funeral Home is a large, two-story building resembling a Georgian style mansion. However, whether or not it served as a residence before becoming a business is unclear, as is its specific date of construction. Because its front dormer is poorly proportioned and its one-story gallery appears almost as an afterthought, this building is not an exemplary example of the Colonial Revival style.

As can be seen from the above descriptions, and when compared to the community's architectural background, the Frost House's architectural significance becomes clear. In addition to being a rare example of the Colonial Revival style and a landmark within its context, it combines elements from both the early and the later versions of the style. It is an excellent example and the best illustration of the typical Colonial Revival style house in Thibodaux. Thus, it is worthy of addition to the National Register.

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Site visit by National Register staff.

Staff knowledge of the architectural heritage of Thibodaux, LA.