

## Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Lefort House (c.1855) is a one-and-one-half story Greek Revival style cottage located two miles east of the city of Thibodaux in Lafourche Parish. The setting is essentially semi-rural. The house faces, but is separated from, Bayou Lafourche by Highway 1 and is sited immediately adjacent to the Southern Pacific Railroad line. It was built in two stages. It began as a small, c. 1840 cottage that was connected to a newly built and larger Greek Revival style cottage around 1855. Thus, the house is being considered as an 1855 building for the purposes of this nomination. Despite some alterations, overall the house retains its National Register eligibility.

Archival research has determined that the Lefort family built the (front) Greek Revival style house roughly a decade or so after the property's previous owner completed the smaller dwelling. Lefort is a raised frame cottage on brick piers about four feet above the ground. The house is constructed with cypress wood framing and has wood weatherboard cladding on all sides. The side-gabled cottage has a corrugated tin roof with exposed chimneys perforating the ends of each gable.

The facade features a simple full entablature that wraps the front gallery and is supported by six simple square columns. The columns have simple molded capitals. Pilasters, identical to the columns, are located at either end of the façade and serve as corner boards. The gallery has simple square balusters in the railing. This five bay façade is articulated with a central front door that has a seven light transom and four light sidelights on each side of a four-panel wood door. French doors with three light transoms and operable louvered shutters (fixed panel below) are located on either side of the front door for a symmetrical fenestration pattern. The windows are six-over-six lights throughout with operable louvered shutters attached. On each side of the house, French doors with transom and sidelights are also located at the point where the earlier house is attached to the later one.

On the interior the central hall is flanked on either side by two rooms (one in front of the other). The hall measures seven feet wide and has simple horizontal board wainscoting that runs the length of the hallway. The wainscoting is met at the other end of the hall by a four-panel wood door with transom and sidelights identical to those on the façade. The front parlors of the Lefort House have simple Greek Revival style mantels that are original to the house. The second rooms on either side of the hall do not have fireplaces. All rooms on the lower floor of the c. 1855 portion of the house have plaster walls. The interior four-panel doors boast a *faux bois* finish, which simulates the look of rich grained wood. The attic space has an exposed chimney and is very non-descript. Currently, it is used as a bedroom/storage area. Access to the attic is obtained by a steep staircase located behind a door at the rear of the central hall. The earlier (rear) wood frame portion of the house is one room deep and two rooms wide. There is an original working brick fireplace on the east side of one room.

Since its completion, the following changes have been made to the Lefort House:

1. In the c. 1855 Greek Revival portion, the second room on the west (right) side was converted into a bathroom with a ceramic tile floor.
2. In the c. 1840 portion, the present owner shifted removed some walls to add a kitchen, small bathroom, and pantry in one room; shifted a wall in the other room, replaced a stolen mantel (although the brick fireplace is original), and added new wood floors.
3. The wooden shake shingles covering both portions of the house were replaced with a tin roof around the 1940s.
4. The present owner also added a large carport to the property on the east side. It connects to the

house via a breezeway.

Assessment of Integrity:

Despite the above changes, the house retains the essential features that establish its identity as a Greek Revival cottage. On the interior the changes are minor. The historic floor plan and its plaster walls, interior *faux bois* doors, and mantels are still in place. In addition to this, the original openings are still extant. On the exterior, the 1855 house retains its historic appearance. The large carport is positioned on the east side close to the rear of the lot and does not detract from the house because it is basically shielded by vegetation. The Greek Revival house is highly visible on Highway 1 and remains a fine representation of that style. This identity, of course, is the basis for its significance.

Significant Dates: c. 1855  
Criterion: C  
Architect/Builder: Unknown

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

As a rare example of the pre-Queen Anne Revival taste within Lafourche Parish, the Lefort House is locally significant in the area of architecture under Criterion C: Design & Construction. Although this style must have once been quite common, survey data indicates that Lefort is one of a limited number of surviving houses which retain a strong, unaltered Greek Revival style with sufficient integrity to merit National Register listing.

Lafourche is one of Louisiana's earliest settled parishes. It was originally created in 1805, although settlement by immigrants from Spain, Germany, England, France and the Canary Islands began much earlier. Despite the parish's age, staff knowledge of the area indicates that the architectural patrimony of this mostly rural parish consists primarily of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Queen Anne style houses; bungalows; nondescript cottages and quarters houses; and twentieth century shotguns, outbuildings and commercial buildings. The loss of the parish's older architectural patrimony, which would have consisted of examples of the French Creole and Greek Revival styles, was the result of a new round of prosperity caused by, among other things, the re-emergence of the sugar industry at the end of the nineteenth century. At that time many of the region's older buildings were replaced with structures reflecting the popular styles of the late Victorian era.

To understand the magnitude of the parish's architectural loss and the importance of the pre-Queen Anne Revival style buildings that remain, one needs to have some idea of the numbers of these structures that once existed. Although exact numbers are not available, certain generalizations can be made given the settlement patterns of the parish. It was the French who first dominated the area architecturally; their ascendancy lasted until approximately 1820. Thus, it is fair to assume that Lafourche Parish once had a large number of French Creole buildings. The parish is currently being re-surveyed because its first review, completed in 1979, provided only partial coverage and is quite out-of-date. However, because this original survey covered all of Lafourche Parish's significant population centers and high probability sites, its findings can be taken as indicative of the entire parish's surviving Creole patrimony. The survey covered 1,100 of the approximately 3,000 historic structures now thought to exist in the parish and showed a total of 142 buildings reflecting some Creole influence. However, at that time less than ten (or one percent) survived with enough

stylistic features or historic integrity to merit their identification as genuine Creole cottages. The overwhelming majority of the buildings identified as reflecting Creole influence were quarters houses which were "Creole" only in that they exhibited the general massing (umbrella roof and full facade gallery) of a Creole structure. It is quite probable that the new survey will show a number of these Creole-influenced buildings to have been lost in the past eighteen years.

After the 1820s the American Greek Revival style began to influence building patterns in Lafourche Parish. This influence would grow and then last until long after the end of the Civil War. Some idea of the importance of the style can be gained by examining the census schedules of 1860. On the eve of the Civil War, there were thirty-seven large slave holdings (i.e., fifty or more slaves) in the parish. Of these, the average size per slave holding was 104.3 and only two involved individuals who did not reside in the parish. In addition, there were undoubtedly numerous slave holdings of less than 50. Given this information, it is fair to assume that there must have been numerous Greek Revival influenced plantation houses (probably at least 30), as well as a number of Greek Revival institutional and commercial buildings, in Lafourche Parish on the eve of the Civil War. Some of these examples would have been fairly large, while others would have been considered moderate or even small in size. However, few examples of the style survive today. Staff and the surveyor's knowledge of the parish indicate that of the approximately 3,000 buildings 50 years of age or older, only seven are substantial examples of the Greek Revival style. It is fair to assume that many of the smaller examples, which once survived, are also now lost. Sadly, the almost completed new parish survey so far confirms this assumption.

Against this background, the importance of the Lefort House emerges. Despite the unfinished condition of the parish historic structures survey, it is evident that French Creole and Greek Revival style buildings make up only approximately one percent of the historic structures surviving within Lafourche Parish. This makes the house, although a small and restrained example, part of a very limited collection of buildings representing the parish's pre-Queen Anne Revival taste. Thus, the Lefort House is a legitimate candidate for National Register listing.

#### Historical Note

The Boutary family built the earlier structure during the 1840s and resided there until they lost the house in a sheriff's sale in 1854. An inventory of their estate shows that Anton Boutary was in the lumber, cattle and sugar business.

Pierce Lefort acquired the property at the 1854 sheriff's sale. It was around this time that he had the main house constructed. The location of the earlier house, immediately adjacent to the Southern Pacific Railroad line, was probably one of the main reasons the Lefort's purchased the land. According to research, the Leforts operated a big store on one corner of this property. Lefort also opened a store in Lockport. Pierce had a son, Joseph, who married Cecile Lirette in 1868. Pierce and Cecile had a daughter by the name of Lillie Lefort, who died in the house in 1969. After Lillie died, the house went to a niece until around 1985. In that year, J. Paul Leslie and family acquired the property. The Leslie family remains the current owner.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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Interview with homeowner/historian Dr. Paul Leslie, Professor of American History at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, April 4, 2008. Dr. Leslie is also a long-time resident and surveyor of Lafourche Parish

Probate Records No. 368 or H-74, Marie Bourtary, 1854, Lafourche Parish Courthouse.

Site visit by National Register Staff.

Staff knowledge of Lafourche Parish.

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