

The Decareaux House (c. 1898) is a one story, frame cottage in the French Creole style. It is located in the Village of French Settlement and stands about 150 yards behind the community's municipal building on Louisiana Highway 16. Although it has experienced some change over the years, it retains its National Register eligibility.

Creole features found in the Decareaux House include the following:

- 1) French joinery with angled wind braces at the corners,
- 2) a Class III gabled roof with central chimney,
- 3) a full length gallery,
- 4) exposed unbeaded ceiling beams, both on the gallery and on the ceilings of all four original rooms,
- 5) two wraparound mantels, and
- 6) a floorplan reflecting Creole geometry. This plan consists of two equal sized rooms in front and rooms of unequal size in the rear.

Other features of interest found in the cottage include interior three batten doors, variable width flooring, two sets of double leaf outer shutters composed of three battens each, six inch shiplap siding on the sides and rear, four inch flush board facing on the facade, and interior flush horizontal wall boards ranging in size from four to seven inches.

Alterations to the Decareaux House since its construction include the following: !

- 1) the replacement of its detached kitchen building. This structure stood only a few feet from the main house and was connected to it by means of an uncovered raised wooden walkway. Because of severe deterioration, it was replaced in 1978 by another historic kitchen building moved from a site two miles away. The replacement kitchen is attached to the rear of the main house at the opposite corner than was the original, creating a rear wing. A covered gallery connects -the two buildings and also wraps around the side of the two-room kitchen structure.
- 2) the replacement of some pieces of original siding,
- 3) the replacement of the facade's original doors, as well as a side door, with multi-pane single leaf doors,
- 4) the addition of a closet in the larger of the rear rooms, and
- 5) the attachment of a false gallery to the main roof of the home.

Despite these changes, the Decareaux Home's identity as an example of the Creole building tradition is clearly evident. Its French joinery, wraparound mantels, exposed unbeaded ceiling beams, and Creole floorplan all remain intact. The false gallery changes the roof shape slightly, but is easily dominated by the large and pronounced original Creole roofline. Although the doors are not original, they are in keeping with the architectural character of the house since they are derivatives of single-leaf French doors. Although the replacement of the Decareaux Home's original kitchen is regrettable, the change is located at the rear of the cottage, has a minimal visual impact upon the Creole massing of the home, and is not visible at all from the principal elevation. As a rare and intact example of the final flowering of the Creole style in Livingston Parish (see Part 8), the Decareaux [louse is a strong candidate for National Register listing.

Non-Contributing Element

A large board and batten shed built in the 1980s from salvaged parts stands directly behind the kitchen addition of the Decareaux House. It is being counted as a non-contributing element for the purposes of this nomination.

Significant dates c.1898
Architect/Builder Harris and Alexander Lambert (builders)
Criterion C

The Decareaux House is locally significant in the area of architecture because it is a rare and intact example of the French Creole style within Livingston Parish.

A Historic Structures Survey has not yet been implemented for Livingston Parish. However, the area was settled primarily by persons of Anglo descent, and few structures influenced by the Creole building tradition were erected there. Just one French enclave--the Village of French Settlement--is known to exist. A windshield survey of French Settlement has identified only twenty surviving houses which can be classified as Creole. All but two of these dwellings are the result of a lumber boom which occurred between 1880 and 1915. Many French Settlement men worked in the lumber mills and had access to inexpensive or free lumber, which they used to build new houses for their families. Almost all of French Settlement's older homes were replaced at this time. For the most part, these new houses used late nineteenth century building technology (stud walls) and materials rather than the older, more traditional Creole methods of construction such as the use of bousillage. However, they very much resembled the Creole houses built several generations previously because they copied the floorplans, the central chimney location, the full length front galleries, and the gabled umbrella roofs which characterized these earlier Creole homes. They often also retained Creole stylistic motifs such as wraparound mantels and exposed ceiling beams. Thus, they illustrate the enduring importance of the Creole tradition in Southern Louisiana and represent the final flowering of that tradition in Livingston Parish.

Unfortunately, however, the majority of French Settlement's eighteen late Creole homes have lost their historic integrity. For example, many have sustained inappropriate additions. Others have lost original features. Still others are falling apart and abandoned. The Decareaux House is one of only a small group whose physical integrity and Creole character remain basically intact. Thus, its integrity, its rarity in a parish not generally recognized as a center of Creole culture, and its status as an example of the last phase of the expression of the Creole tradition in Livingston Parish make the Decareaux House a prime candidate for Register listing.

Historical Note

The cottage was constructed as a home for Mr. and Mrs. Alex Decareaux by Harris and Alexander Lambert, who were Mrs. Decareaux's father and brother, respectively. The family worked in lumbering and farming. In 1977 the house was donated to the Village of French Settlement, which in turn gave the French Settlement Historical Society a long-term lease on the structure. It is now known as the Creole House Museum.

Major Bibliographical References

Edwards, Jay
1982 "Old Creole House Museum." A Survey of Louisiana French Vernacular Architecture.
Vol. II, Baton Rouge: LSU Museum of Geoscience. A Report to the Division of Historic
Preservation and the Louisiana Division of the Arts. pp. 69-71.

Windshield survey of French Settlement, LA by Dr. Jay Edwards, Department of Geography and Anthropology, LSU.

Site visit by National Register staff.

Edwards, Jay. Draft National Register Nomination, Department of Geography and Anthropology, LSU, Baton Rouge.