

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The old Livingston Parish Courthouse (1835) is a two-story brick Federal style structure located on a quiet tree-shaded lot in Springfield. Alterations to the building since its construction include the replacement of its two-story front gallery, the enclosure and later removal of this gallery's twin on the rear elevation, several changes to doors and windows, and the subdivision of the large second floor courtroom into an apartment. Despite these changes, the courthouse retains its early Federal and Creole details which are the source of its local architectural significance. Also, it still retains enough of its original appearance to be easily recognizable to someone, for example, who worked there during the 1843-72 period when it served as the parish courthouse.

The courthouse's first floor consists of one large rectangular room with a mantel at one end and a stairway rising to the floor above. The second floor apartment consists of two small bedrooms on the north end and a living room containing the second mantel on the south. A dining room, kitchen, and small bath occupy the space between the north and south end rooms. Circulation between the two floors is currently prevented by the covering of the stairwell opening at the second floor level.

The building's most outstanding exterior features are its symmetry, its two gable end parapets, and its four sets of first floor French doors (two on the facade and two directly across from them on the rear). These doors are crowned by plain, barred semi-circular lunette windows with thick arched wooden surrounds. They are also framed by moveable batten shutters. A plain, steep exterior stairway hugs the facade wall between its two sets of French doors and serves to connect the front gallery's two floors. The unornamented gallery stretches the full length of the facade. Its five columns consist of square wooden posts without capitals. Other notable decorative features of the building include the flat brick arches which top the two single doors opening onto the second floor gallery and the wooden lunettes with surrounding brick arches which pierce the attic in each gable end. Most of the windows on the first floor are casement. Those on the second have sashes with nine over six lights. Some of these windows still retain their original wavy glass panes. The building's red bricks were reportedly made in Springfield.

The most outstanding visible interior features are the building's wraparound mantels with fluted Federal pilasters and panels. The walls in the downstairs portion of the building are made of brick covered by plaster. The original curved-beam construction of the second floor's hidden coved ceiling is visible from the attic. The construction is similar to that found in the hulls of ships and suggests that a former ship builder participated in the erection of the building.

Assessment of Integrity:

Since the historic period the following changes have been made to the structure:

- 1) Originally there was a two-story rear gallery. This was enclosed and a rear wing was added. In the mid-twentieth century both the gallery and the wing were demolished.
- 2) The original front gallery has been replaced with one which is undoubtedly of a similar style.
- 3) A side French door has been converted to a window and its lunette has been bricked in.
- 4) Several irregularly placed windows of various sizes and shapes have been installed on the rear elevation. In addition, a former doorway has been converted to a window.

- 5) The second floor courtroom has been subdivided for an apartment, and it appears that a partition wall on the ground floor has been removed. In addition, an interior staircase has been installed.
- 6) The original second floor curved-beam ceiling has been covered by a dropped ceiling.
- 7) The building has also experienced some superficial deterioration due to dampness.

Despite these changes, it is obvious that the old Livingston Parish Courthouse still resembles its original appearance. Its noteworthy French doors with crowning Federal lunette windows remain in place, its symmetry is intact, the front gallery reproduces the proportions of the original, the two mantels combining Federal and Creole styling still highlight the interior, and the covering of the original curved-beam construction of the second floor ceiling is reversible. Additionally, the building is one of only a handful of structures in Livingston Parish which pre-date the Greek Revival style and is one of the oldest structures in the parish.

Significant dates	1835, 1843-1872
Architect/Builder	Unknown
Criterion A & C	

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The old Livingston Parish Courthouse is locally significant within the context of Livingston Parish as an extremely rare example of the Federal and Creole styles in a parish which is thought to have lost all of its structures dating from the colonial, territorial, and early statehood periods. It is also locally significant as the focal point of the parish's civil and political activity between 1843 and 1872.

Architectural Significance:

Although Livingston Parish was settled fairly early in the nineteenth century, very few of its pre-1900 buildings have survived. Additionally, very few of the parish's early twentieth century buildings are stylistically significant. Within this context, the old Livingston Parish Courthouse stands out as 1) a finely-crafted example of the Federal style, 2) a rare illustration of French Creole influence in a parish settled largely by people with English building traditions, and 3) one of the parish's oldest buildings. The structure Federal characteristics include lunette windows above the building's four main entrances, gable end parapets, and a fine pair of mantels with fluted pilasters and fluted center panels. The Creole influence is found in the four sets of French doors on the ground floor and in the wraparound shape of the mantels. The courthouse is thought to be the only building in Livingston Parish to display such Federal and Creole stylistic influences.

Politics/Government Significance:

Springfield was named as the Livingston Parish seat in 1835. The community was chosen for this honor because of its location on a navigable river, the primary mode of transportation in rural Louisiana during this era. The law implementing the decision dictated that a suitable courthouse be

furnished without expense to the parish. Evidence suggests that S. G. Parsons, the parish sheriff, donated an appropriate building located within Square 6 of the community.

Also in 1835, the New Orleans Gas Light and Banking Company chose Springfield as the site of its new bank, apparently the first in the parish. The company erected its new building within a few blocks from the courthouse in Square 12. However, the bank failed in 1843. At that time, the parish acquired the building, although whether it was donated or purchased outright is unclear. Thus, the former bank served as the Livingston Parish Courthouse from 1843 until 1872. As such, it was the center of the parish's civic and political activity throughout the years leading to Louisiana's secession from the Union in 1861, the difficult war years which followed, and for several years during the controversial Reconstruction era.

The courthouse's most significant dispute during its period of service was the location of the parish seat. During the 1850s pressure mounted to move government personnel and records to a site near a newly completed railroad line. In 1860 the Legislature actually authorized an election to determine the question, but the Civil War temporarily tabled the issue. It quickly resurfaced after the war. An 1871 election verified the people's desire for a change, and in 1872 the Legislature approved the removal of the courthouse to Port Vincent.

Additional Historical Note:

After losing the parish seat, Springfield community leaders used the former courthouse as a voting precinct. In 1886 the J. S. Settoon family purchased the building and shortly thereafter converted it into a grocery store. It operated until 1920. After that date the building was occasionally rented as a meeting place. Later it was used as a residence for a descendant of the Settoon family. After 1962 the building went through several changes of ownership. It is now the property of Mrs. Mary Kate Spring. The first floor is currently vacant, but the second floor apartment is occupied by a small family.

Major Bibliographical References

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