

The one story, wood frame Deslattes House (c. 1900) occupies a lush setting on Louisiana Hwy. 16 in the rural community of French Settlement. Because of the proximity of numerous old trees and bushes, it is impossible to see the house in its entirety in one view. The home is not easy to pigeonhole stylistically, but on the whole should be viewed within the Italianate taste as it appeared typically in rural Louisiana in the late nineteenth century (the builder Italianate, more appropriately). The house has been changed very little over the years; hence it readily conveys its local architectural value.

Raised about three feet on brick piers, the Deslattes House has an L-shaped footprint, but the ell wing projects forward (rather than the typical rear projection). A gallery extends across the fairly narrow front of the forward projecting wing, and then down the side and across the section at the rear. The roofline at the front of the forward wing features a shingled gablet with a skirting roof. What is known as a "false gallery" extends beyond the main roof (i.e., a roof extension resting on brackets to protect and shade the gallery). The gallery retains its original wide floorboards and all of its original columns, which are chamfered at the top and bottom. All but a small section of the pronounced Italianate-style balustrade survives. A section at the very front was lost when that portion of the gallery was screened. At the same time, steps were relocated from the middle to the side. Steps were also located at about the middle of the back section of the house. They have been removed, but the gate (styled like the balustrade) survives. (The gate on the very front was moved when the steps were relocated.) Other exterior details include six over six windows with the upper sash fixed in place, shutters with movable louvers, and four doors opening from the gallery.

The interior retains virtually all of its original character. Easily the most interesting elements are the three identical folk mantels whose pilasters echo the shape of the gallery's balusters. The entablature features a sinuous cutout design and the plain board shelf wraps around the flue in the manner of French Creole houses. The five rooms are sheathed in flush board, with the same treatment being found on the ceilings. (The walls had been covered in plywood paneling. The current owners removed it as part of their in-progress restoration work.) Door and window frames are plain. Baseboards feature a pronounced molding. Doors are the four-panel type.

Alterations have been minimal. They include:

- 1) The previously mentioned loss of a portion of the balustrade when the very front of the gallery was screened. The balustrade was replaced with a low clapboarded wall. The columns were not removed. The present owners plan to correct this alteration.
- 2) A simple crown molding has been installed throughout.
- 3) At some point fairly early in the house's history the rear gallery was enclosed and a small porch added off the enclosure.

Contributing element:

Immediately adjacent to a gallery corner is a large barrel cistern made of cypress staves and resting on a brick base. It is being counted as a contributing structure.

SIGNIFICANT DATES: c. 1900
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Unknown
CRITERION: C

The Deslattes House is of local architectural significance as a landmark within Livingston Parish, an area with a distinctly modest, largely "no style" historic building stock. With its folk Italianate styling, the Deslattes House represents some of the earliest architecture extant in the parish.

Livingston Parish, roughly 660 square miles in size, historically was a rural, sparsely settled area. (It remains so today except for the western portion which is bleeding into eastward growth from Baton Rouge.) Early settlers came in the first years of the nineteenth century. The parish was created in 1832. Livingston's economy historically was based on

small-scale agriculture and the lumber industry. Towns were quite small. For example, the entire parish had a population of only 5,769 in 1890. Even as late as 1930, this figure was a low 18,206. In that year, most communities were still too small to have attained village status. The “big city” was Denham Springs, with a population of 1,002 in 1930. And the majority of the parish’s small population consisted of people of fairly modest means - small farmers, Hungarian immigrants, sawmill workers, etc. While there must have been some citizens of means, one cannot discern it from the surviving residence – the grandest of which are middle class, fairly simple, fairly small Queen Anne cottages.

Livingston is yet to be surveyed for historic structures. However, the staff of the Division of Historic Preservation has conducted fieldwork there over the past 20 + years and can make the following general comments about the historic building stock. Very few buildings survive from before the twentieth century (stylistically from before the bungalow era). Only a minority of historic buildings are styled in any manner, regardless of how hesitant. And the “no style” buildings are not of architectural importance (i.e., not log dogtrots, for example). In summation, the historic building collection in Livingston consists of a smattering of middle-class, fairly simple, fairly small Queen Anne cottages (perhaps 15-20); folk bungalows; “no style” cottages; “no style” or hesitantly styled twentieth century commercial buildings; and utilitarian farm buildings. Among the most important surviving buildings are three vernacular houses that are French Creole in form, dating from c.1860 to c.1910 (all on the National Register); the Federal style former parish courthouse at Springfield (NR); Santa Maria Plantation House, with Federal and Greek Revival details (NR); three early twentieth century fairly simple Gothic style churches (all aluminum sided); and the 1930 Walker High School (NR). Within the foregoing context, the folk Italianate Deslattes House is a rare and well-preserved survivor to represent the look of Livingston Parish at the turn of the twentieth century.

Historical Note:

Conveyance records point to Florian Deslattes as the home’s original owner. On February 12, 1900, Alfonse Mayers sold 25 arpents of land to Florian Deslattes for \$45. Then on March 23, 1903 Deslattes sold 11 of the arpents, together with buildings and improvements thereon, to Mary LeBourgeois for \$625. Had it not been for this clue in the title research, the staff of the Division of Historic Preservation would have dated the house a bit earlier. Square head nails, which generally went out of use in the 1880s, are used throughout. For a purely stylistic standpoint, the house could date from the 1880s or as late at c.1900.

The house is often referred to locally as the Brignac House. Anita Brignac lived there for many years, beginning in 1940. It remained in Brignac ownership until very recently, when the present owners purchased it.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Free State: A History and Place Names Study of Livingston Parish. Published by Livingston Parish American Revolution Bicentennial Committee, 1976.