

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Excelsior (1869-71) is a substantial frame Italianate residence located in the hamlet of Oak Ridge. It enjoys an open rural setting amid the flat delta cotton fields. Alterations consist largely of additions/modifications made over fifty years ago, none of which seriously threaten the house's Italianate character.

The original portion of the house was constructed in 1869 and consists of a five bay, pitched roof, Italianate cottage with a central hall plan two rooms deep. Each of the front gallery pillars features a decorative inset panel with a bolection molding and a rounded top. At one time each also featured a pair of side scroll brackets with an inset quatrefoil, but unfortunately these brackets have been lost. The front gallery is surmounted by a fairly heavy entablature with a denticular cornice and a pair of scroll brackets over each of the pillars. The sides of the house are sheathed in clapboard, but the front gallery wall is sheathed in vertical boards and battens. Windows are six over six and the central front door features a fairly standard transom and side light combination. The interior features flush board walls and long ceiling panels with bolection moldings. Each of the three mantels in the original portion of the house is different. One is in a fairly plain late Greek Revival aedicule style, another is a Gothicized version of this, and the third features heavy moldings with elaborate scroll brackets.

In 1870-71 a pair of gabled flankers was added to the original house. These were reached by extending the front gallery floor a few feet. The flankers feature similar interiors to the original house, including paneled ceilings. Each flanker has a graceful basically Italianate facade consisting of a low pitch gable, gable end returns and a central oculus. The only non-Italianate feature of the flanker facades is the quatrefoil inscribed in each. In 1880 this new larger building was advertised as the Excelsior Hotel.

Between 1903 and 1906 three large dormers were added to the facade of the original portion of the house. The central dormer is larger than the other two and encompasses a balcony under a low pitched gable with a decoratively sawn balustrade and two bracketed posts. These additions echoed the original style of the house and should be viewed within the context of the dying embers of the Italianate taste. Also at this time a Queen Anne Revival polygonal bay was added to one of the rear rooms and a formerly free-standing rear kitchen was joined to the original house by the construction of a small rear wing.

In 1915 a rear gallery was added which has subsequently been enclosed for a bathroom. Also about this time small hyphen wings were added to connect the flankers to the main house. In about 1930 bungalow style windows and new narrower gauge siding were installed on the front of the flankers. More recently, the aforementioned brackets and the front gallery balustrade have been lost.

Assessment of Integrity:

These changes have been relatively minor given the overall scope of Excelsior's architecture. In addition, it still retains the character defining elements which establish it as an example of the Italianate style (see Item 8), which is the source of its significance.

Contributing/Non-contributing Elements:

There are six service buildings in the back yard at Excelsior. The following four are listed as contributing elements because they appear to be roughly contemporaneous with the main house: (1) a board and batten servants cottage, (2) a clapboarded cabin; (3) a chicken house; and (4) a two door privy.

Non-contributing elements: (1) a frame garage that probably dates from the 1920s or '30s (listed as non-contributing because it is not contemporaneous); (2) a historic cotton shed that was moved to Excelsior.

Significant dates 1869-71
Architect/Builder Builder: J. H. Limerick
Criterion C

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

Excelsior is of local significance within the context of Morehouse Parish as a very early structure and, more importantly, a very rare local example of the Italianate taste.

Although no formal survey has ever been conducted, the State Historic Preservation Office staff has traveled extensively in the parish and has inspected its principal towns and villages. Suffice it to say that the staff is familiar with the overall scope and quality of the parish's patrimony. Although Morehouse Parish was created in 1844, virtually nothing remains of its early architectural heritage. In fact, little remains even from the pre-Queen Anne Revival era. The present residential building stock consists almost entirely of simple Queen Anne Revival cottages, non-descript frame houses from the early twentieth century, bungalows, and Tudor, Mission or Colonial style houses from the 1930s.

It is against this background that the architectural significance of Excelsior emerges. It is convincingly treated in the Italianate style with features such as single and double brackets, pillars which have panels with rounded tops, and oculi set in shallow pitched gables with end returns. It also features paneled ceilings and a scroll bracket mantel on the interior. Excelsior is thought to be Morehouse Parish's only surviving residential example of the Italianate taste. It is also one of the parish's earliest buildings, a factor which enhances its local standing as a landmark.

The State Review Committee asked that the following be appended to this nomination for informational purposes:

Various locally prominent individuals have lived in the house over the years, including a minister, a principal, teachers, and a professional baseball player. The present owner is a retired school teacher who has amassed quite a collection of local history research materials at Excelsior. Her husband was a professional baseball player in the twenties and thirties, and there is also a great deal of baseball memorabilia at Excelsior.

Major Bibliographical References

1898 photo of Excelsior. Copy in Register file.

Interview with current owner, Mrs. W. H. Nolan, who has done a considerable amount of primary research on the house. Amazingly enough, in 1926 Mrs. Nolan met J. H. Limerick, the carpenter for the 1869-71 construction.