

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Walnut Grove is a one-and-a-half story wood frame residence with its earliest construction from circa 1830. It faces a two-lane highway in a rural setting just south of the small town of Mer Rouge in northeastern Louisiana. The term “no style” would be most appropriate for the data retrieval portion of this form. The house has received numerous additions and alterations, from the mid-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries. Despite the twentieth century modifications, one could argue that the house retains enough of its early appearance (on the exterior) to merit consideration for the National Register.

It is impossible to determine with certainty the early construction history of the candidate. Various clues (pegged construction, pit-sawn lumber, batten doors, “ghost marks” of wrought iron manual latch locks, and floorboards leveled with an adze) suggest that the present house evolved from a much smaller early nineteenth century house (most likely a dogtrot – see below). Because construction details change slowly, it is impossible to be more specific on the earliest date of construction. Circa 1830 will be used for the purposes of this nomination. By the mid-nineteenth century the house had acquired the appearance shown in photos dating from circa 1880 (showing most of the façade) and 1889 or 1890, a three-quarter view showing the entire house. (The photos were dated by White descendants based on the age of ancestors shown in the images.)

The house shown in the early photos is the main block of the house seen today (minus later modifications). The gable end house has an inset gallery spanning the façade. At the center of the roof is a massive gabled dormer with two windows. While not original, the dormer is an early addition, for it is constructed of square nails (generally indicating a date from before about 1880). The dormer appears in the previously mentioned circa 1880 photo. The five bay gallery features delicate chamfered columns with matching pilasters. The present columns are copies based on the surviving pilasters (see modifications section below). At present there is no balustrade. The one shown in the early images is simple, but the exact appearance of the spindles cannot be determined. The 1889 or 1890 photo shows an ell wing (since expanded).

The façade’s most distinctive feature, as seen in the early images, is a very wide central opening corresponding to a central hall. While the multi-light transom is typical of the period, the opening is too wide to have standard side lights. To each side of the double doors is a wide window, with what appear to be twelve panes of glass. This opening was enclosed in the late 1930s, but a White descendant recalls that the side windows were fixed in place. (There is some speculation that the house was, in its earliest form, an open dogtrot. The unusual configuration of the side windows -- their width -- supports this view.) The central opening had two evenly spaced six-over-six windows to each side (with the upper sashes fixed in place). This configuration survives on the north side. Three six-over-six windows are now grouped on the south side. The façade is sheathed in fairly wide beaded flush boards. The same type of boards fill in the central opening. They were removed from the walls of the central hall. Windows on the side elevations are six-over-six as well.

Regrettably, the interior of the early core has received various alterations, although some of its early fabric survives. The plan consisted of two rooms of unequal size on each side of a central hall. The front rooms are considerably larger than the rear. (There is evidence in the attic that the rear rooms were extended at some point -- prior to about 1890 -- by maybe two feet.) In 1936 one wall of the central hall (on the left as you enter the house) was removed and a wide shallow arch was inserted in its place. Additionally, a wall was inserted, with an arched opening, to subdivide the hall (on the same plane as the rear walls of the front rooms). Finally, at the rear of the hall, the doorways into the smaller rear rooms have been removed.

Surviving early fabric on the interior is as follows: The large front room on the south side retains its fairly wide beaded flush board walls. The ceiling at the rear of the central hall is sheathed in flush boards.

There are a few doors consisting of two vertical panels. The attic has batten doors with “ghost marks” showing that that have been moved there from elsewhere. The house also retains its early door and window surrounds.

Summary of alterations and additions since the mid-nineteenth century:

- 1) The front gallery columns are copies and the balustrade is missing.
- 2) The central opening has been filled in and a much smaller doorway inserted.
- 3) The façade windows to the south appear in a tripled configuration.
- 4) The chimneys (on each side elevation) are gone.
- 5) There have been various additions (mainly 1920s-1950s) at the rear and side (see floor plan sketch). These additions have more than doubled the square footage.
- 6) On the interior (of the main block), there have been floorplan changes (as described above), the mantels (2) have been replaced, and much of the wall and ceiling surfaces have been covered in newer materials. Surviving original fabric, as noted above, includes the beaded flush board walls of the south front room, the ceiling at the back of what was once the hall, various doors, and the window and door surrounds.
- 7) The small porch on the north side of the ell is recent. Its columns copy those on the front gallery.

Assessment of Integrity

Additions and alterations to the White House have admittedly been numerous. The alterations to the early fabric are, in the opinion of the LA SHPO, more of an issue than the various additions. That said, the main block does convey much, but certainly not all, of its early appearance on the exterior. Because houses of this vintage are so very rare within Morehouse Parish, the candidate, alterations and additions notwithstanding, merits Register consideration. Surviving exterior features include the galleried cottage form, most of the window pattern (and the windows themselves), the beaded flush board façade, and the chamfered pilasters and columns (although the latter are copies). And, as noted above, there are some surviving interior features and early construction details.

SIGNIFICANT DATE c. 1850 – 1877
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Unknown
CRITERION: A, B

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

The White House is of local historical significance because of its association with the early settlement of the area. Specifically, it was the home of Amelia Davenport Brown Clark. Born in 1822, Amelia was connected by blood and marriage to three of the early “first families” of the Prairie Mer Rouge section of Morehouse Parish (Barlow and Davenport by blood and Brown by marriage). The earliest documentation for Amelia on the Barlow tract is 1851 (see below). She died there in 1877. In a parish that has very little to represent its early heritage, the house is an important tie to the past. The period of significance for the nomination begins circa 1850 (to correspond to the earliest documentation for Amelia on the Barlow tract) to

1877, the date of her death.

Morehouse Parish was created in 1844. The parish seat, Bastrop, was named for the self-styled Baron de Bastrop, who had been granted land in the area by Spanish officials in the 1790s. Bastrop, through an agent named Abraham Morehouse, sold the land to various individuals, among them James Barlow, one of the parish's very early settlers. Barlow was Amelia Davenport Brown's grandfather. Amelia's father, Josiah Davenport, was also among the very earliest settlers (early nineteenth century).

The land where the candidate is located was part of a large parcel (several hundred acres) known as the Barlow Headright (acquired in 1810). In a book *Looking Backward*, published in 1911, C. C. Davenport wrote: "James Barlow settled on a tract of land about two miles from the present town of Mer Rouge and right where Walter S. White now resides." Barlow died in 1828. While it is possible that the earliest construction dates to Barlow's time, it is also possible that he lived in an earlier house on the land. In any event, the candidate does not retain integrity from Barlow's lifetime.

Tracing the title to Section 46, where the candidate is located, is hampered by the loss of most conveyance records from 1844 to 1870 (due to a courthouse fire). The first available chronological clue for Amelia is from 1851, when the heirs of James L. Barlow made a claim to the U. S. government for the land. (Apparently various claims relative to the Bastrop grant were filed in the early 1850s.) The claim states that the land (at that time 696.85 acres, in four contiguous parcels) is "now cultivated by Mrs. Amelia Brown." Amelia married David Brown in 1838. (He died in 1850.) On June 29, 1854 Congress confirmed the 696.85 claim to the "heirs and representatives of James L. Barlow." One of the four parcels is Section 46.

Amelia married Dr. William L. Clark sometime before 1860. (The 1860 census shows her married to Clark.) Amelia had six children in 1860. She died in 1877, according to probate and conveyance records, "at her home on Prairie Mer Rouge." Her son-in-law, William Micou Washburn (married to daughter Julia Brown), was the executor of the estate. In a series of purchases in 1881 he bought the portions left to Julia's siblings. In 1883 William Micou Washburn and Julia Brown Washburn sold the land to Walter S. White. (White descendants reside there today.)

The chain-of-title points toward the candidate being the residence of Amelia Davenport Brown Clark. The Barlow tract was being cultivated by her in 1851, the Whites bought the land from her descendants, and there is a house (the candidate) on the property of the right vintage. The Part 8 of this nomination rests on the foregoing clues with Washburn family genealogy, which is published but not footnoted. It was provided to the LA SHPO by North Louisiana architect and preservationist, and Washburn descendant, Lestar Martin. Martin and other family members have for decades known the White house as their family home (and the home of Amelia Davenport Brown Clark, whose daughter married a Washburn, as noted above). Martin's grandfather, Joseph Storrs Washburn, was born in the house in 1880. Joseph's parents were William Micou Washburn and Julia Brown.

According to Washburn genealogy, William Micou Washburn married Julia Brown, "at the residence of her mother [the candidate], Mrs. Amelia Clark, at Prairie Mer Rouge, March 28, 1864." Again, according to family history, William Micou and Julia Washburn, and their children, lived in the candidate with Amelia until her death in 1877. As noted above, William Washburn was named Amelia's executor, and he and Julia had bought out the other heirs in 1881. (There is no known primary source documentation as to how Amelia acquired the land from the "heirs and representatives of James L. Barlow" awarded the claim in 1854.)

While Amelia Davenport Brown Clark was not among the very earliest settlers in Prairie Mer Rouge (early nineteenth century), her period of occupancy on the Barlow Tract (from at least 1851, when the land was under her cultivation) would qualify as early within the context of a parish not created until 1844. The

claim notes that the land had been under cultivation “upwards of 35 years,” although clearly not all that time by Amelia (born in 1822). Amelia would have been the second or third generation of agriculturalists on Prairie Mer Rouge.

Today there is very little remaining in Morehouse Parish to represent its early settlement. In fact, very little remains from before the twentieth century. The only surviving early to mid-nineteenth century buildings are a rural fraternal hall that has received notable alterations and replacement of fabric, an Italianate house dating from 1869-71, and the candidate. Historically there would have been modest Greek Revival farm houses and log houses, but they are all gone. Hence, within the context of a fairly old parish, the candidate is quite important.

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