

## National Historic Landmark Nomination

### Physical Description

**Introduction:** The Badin-Roque House, located on the west bank of the Cane River, along Highway 484, near Melrose, Louisiana (see Figure 1, See photo 1), is an early nineteenth-century poteaux en terre (post-in-the-ground) French Creole cottage with bousillage construction walls. The house has two major front rooms, heated by a double fireplace, and a front and back gallery. The back gallery has been filled with two cabinettes and an enclosed breezeway (see figure 2). At the southeast corner of the building is a cistern, with another cistern to the south. Archeological investigations have demonstrated the Badin-Roque House also had a dovecote in the front yard and a barn in the rear. A kitchen which stood behind the house has been moved.

**Physical Appearance:** The Badin-Roque House is a typical poteaux en terre house of the French Creole cottage style. The main upright posts, or structural members of the house were set upright in the ground and fastened to each other at the top with mortise and tenon joints to horizontal structural members (see figure 3). According to Eugene Cizek,

The walls were filled between the posts with either clay and grass (bousillage) or with stone and mortar [n.d.: 22].

Originally, the Badin-Roque House had only two interior rooms, with the north room being approximately 4 m x 6 m and the south room being approximately 5 m x 6 m in size (see photo 2). The north room had six doors providing egress to the front and back galleries, the north side of the house and the south room. The south room had four doors, one in each wall. These rooms were heated by a double brick fireplace (see photo 3). On the east and west sides of the house were equally sized open galleries, approximately 2.5 m by 9 m. The west gallery has been filled in with two smaller rooms, or cabinettes and an enclosed breezeway (see figures 4 and 5; see photo 4). All of the floors were rammed earth and lime, with the exception of the large south room which had a partial brick floor, dating from the late nineteenth-century (Cizek n.d.).

Covering the two interior rooms and the galleries was a beaded tongue and groove ceiling. The ceiling rafters were covered with flooring creating a large open attic space 9 m x 11 m (see figure 3).

At a later date the north and south ends of the west, or back gallery were enclosed by two small rooms or cabinettes, approximately 2.5 m x 4 m and 2.5 m x 3 m., leaving an open space or breezeway 2.5 m x 2 m. Eventually the breezeway was also enclosed (see figure 4). The original roof was a hip roof with galleries all around. The evidence for this is that the studs under the clapboards are pitted indicating that they were exposed to the elements for a goodly number of years. In addition, the bousillage was originally not covered. The only way these two conditions could have existed without the rain washing the bousillage away

would be for the walls in question to have been protected by an overhanging gallery (D. Fricker, personal communication, 1994.)

Sometime in the 1850s the present pitched roof was added. In addition, the flat gable ends of the north and south sides of the Badin-Roque House acquired their wooden siding of the first floor and cypress shingles on the attic level (see figures 6 and 7; see photo 5). It is possible the new roof was installed during the ownership of the structure by the Catholic Church (1857-1859). The present roof had cypress shingles and acquired a metal roof in the late nineteenth-century.

**Archeological Investigations:** In September of 1981, under a contract with the St. Augustine Historical Society, Dr. Hiram Gregory, of Northwestern State University undertook archeological investigations in and around the Badin-Roque House before the moving of earth containing cultural deposits required for restoration. A series of 12 one meter square units were excavated “to reveal wall construction details and/or drip line debris and/or construction trenches” (Gregory et al. 1982:5).

Excavations demonstrated the house was built without construction trenches and that the main structural members, or post ends of hewn cypress, were simply set into 40 cm deep square post holes, on a friable clay subsoil that offered support against subsidence from the weight of the house (Gregory et al. 1982:8). Gregory observed that over time the ends of the cypress posts had rotted and this had caused the house to subside.

Excavations also provided details on the construction of the floors of the house.

The floor inside the house showed a minimum of four levels of alternating lime and silt-loam. Apparently, the floors had been rammed down, covered with lime, and when that began to wear off, another layer of silt was added to level the floor and it was limed again. This technique was used primarily in the northeast room of the house and extended onto the whole floor of the gallery as well [Gregory et al. 1982: 9].

The floor of the large southeast room was partially floored with brick, probably in the late nineteenth-century (Gregory et al. 1982: 10). None of the three rooms on the west end, or back of the building, showed any floor preparation (Gregory et al. 1982: 13). Gregory was of the opinion that the three rooms on the west end were originally an open back gallery. Later, this part of the gallery was partially enclosed with rooms on the north and south end with an intervening breezeway, or brissette. Later, this breezeway was enclosed also (1982:13).

Excavations within the interior of the Badin-Roque House also yielded ceramic artifacts which date the original construction to between 1830 and 1840 (Gregory et al. 1982:15).

After completion of excavation units in the house, a resistivity study was conducted around the house to locate the sites of historically associated features. In the front of the house, a

one meter square excavation unit located the archeological remains of a dovecote or pigeonnier (Gregory et al. 1982:6).

**Site Layout:** The Badin-Roque House and its attendants were oriented toward the Cane River. The house faced the river only about 100 feet away. The house had a dovecote in the front yard and a kitchen (moved to downtown Natchitoches) and a barn (now gone). Two cisterns, one on the south side of the house and one at the southeast corner of the house, completed the layout of the Badin-Roque property.

At this time, there is no information on any other cultural features, such as pathways, gardens, or animal pens, that once existed at the Badin-Roque House. Historical photographs of the house, dating from the later 1940s, show the house surrounded by bare ground. Further work is needed to determine what features around the house may have existed.

**Integrity:** In 1982, the St. Augustine Historical Society with assistance from the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office restored the Badin-Roque House. The house had been listing due to rotting of the ends of the posts in the ground. The house was internally supported with jacks, and the structural members realigned and stabilized.

The bousillage walls were rebuilt and plastered, and the metal roof was repaired. The house is in overall good condition.

A small non-contributing shed is located behind the Badin-Roque House.

Significant Dates: 1830s-c.1900  
Architect/Builder: Unknown  
NHL Criterion: 4

### **Summary Statement of Significance:**

The Badin-Roque House is considered of national significance as a rare extant example of a French Creole style poteaux en terre (posts-in-the-ground) cottage. It represents a French colonial form of construction which once was prevalent in the lower Mississippi River Valley and Gulf Coast during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Badin-Roque House is the only surviving example in the lower Mississippi River Valley. The Badin-Roque House is also significant because of its association with the Isle Brevelle colony of French Creoles, referred to as the Cane River Creoles of Color, who developed many of the plantations along the Cane River.

## **XVI. ARCHITECTURE**

### **X. Vernacular Architecture-Creole Cottage**

## **XXX. AMERICAN WAYS OF LIFE**

## **E. Ethnic Communities (Creole)**

### **Background History of the Badin-Roque House**

Archeological and architectural research place the construction of the Badin-Roque House between 1830 and 1840 (Gregory et al. 1982:27). This early nineteenth-century date is supported by a study of the chain-of-title for this building (Cizek n.d.).

The first known owner of the land on which the Badin-Roque House is situated was Francois Frederic, who sold the property to Augustin Metoyer in 1827 for \$1000 but retained “use of the said plantation until the first of March, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-nine” (1829) (Cizek n.d.:11). The “said” plantation may refer to the Badin-Roque House.

Augustin Metoyer was a free Creole of Color and one of the sons of Madame Marie Therese Coincoin Metoyer. Marie Therese Coincoin appears to have been born, according to parish records, in 1742, as a slave into the household of Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, the founder of the French colonial settlement of Natchitoches; and commander of the French military post at that location. There are other indications that Marie Therese was born in Africa and transported to the French colonial settlement of Natchitoches as a young girl (Greenlee n.d.).

By 1767 Marie Therese had borne four black children for the St. Denis family, when she was purchased by Thomas Pierre Metoyer, a French soldier at the Natchitoches fort and became his common-law wife. Between 1768 and 1787 they had nine or ten Franco-African or Creole children. As Marie Therese was a slave, her children were also slaves and the property of Marie Therese’s owner. Pierre purchased his first four children in 1776, and in 1778 he acquired his fifth child and Marie Therese. Thereafter, the four or five children born after their mother’s purchase were considered free, and Pierre later assisted her in freeing the remainder of her fourteen children (Greenlee n.d.; Anonymous n.d.).

Pierre and Marie Therese’s common-law marriage was not unusual for the Louisiana frontier of the late eighteenth century, however, a Catholic priest new to the area declared them “living in sin” and broke up their household. Pierre continued, however, to assist Marie Therese and helped her acquire her first land grant from the Spanish government of Louisiana of 800 arpents (677 acres). Her family’s property holdings and those of her children continued to grow until almost the entire region south of Natchitoches was Metoyer owned (Greenlee n.d.). Marie Therese founded Yucca Plantation (designated a National Historic Landmark May 30, 1974), and one of her sons, Louis Metoyer, built the large plantation house on this property, called Melrose.

Under the Napoleonic Law Code, land succession required that all children receive an equal share of property. The large Metoyer family would have required extensive property holdings to disperse to their children and grandchildren. It is probably for this reason—to

acquire additional property for a child—that Augustin Metoyer, who succeeded his mother Marie Therese as head of the Metoyer family, acquired the Badin-Roque property, in 1827.

In 1840, Augustin Metoyer had his lands and buildings appraised and identified in an act of donation to his children. This appraisal identified “one small master house, \$100,” which is believed to be the Badin-Roque House (Cizek n.d.:12). The property was donated to his son, Jean Baptiste Augustin Metoyer, Jr. on March 6, 1840.

The heirs of Jean Baptiste sold the Badin-Roque tract in 1855 to Dr. Sigmund Kisffy. Dr. Kisffy sold the property to the first bishop of the Diocese of Natchitoches, the Right Reverend Auguste Marie Martin, in 1856, for \$665. Bishop Martin used the Badin-Roque House as a mission convent for the Daughters of the Cross, a French order of teaching nuns (Cizek n.d.:12-13).

The nuns named their convent St. Joseph’s and established a school for local Catholic children in early 1857. Mother Hyacinth, who was the superior of the order, noted of the Badin-Roque House “As soon as the finances of our Bishop permit, he will fix the house which right now is in mighty poor shape” (Cizek n.d.:13). Later, in early 1858, Mother Hyacinth noted they had built “a partition in the chapel and a floor for our house” (Cizek n.d.:13).

In 1858, St. Joseph’s had twenty-seven students enrolled and was expecting another forty or fifty in the spring. Mother Hyacinth described the school:

This is a simple school—a modest school. The students pay \$4 a month, that is twenty francs and something. Next year, we will take some boarders. The people of this parish, although they are very rich, are disdained by the white people who do not want the mulattoes (French Creoles) in their schools. So, here we will have only mulattoes [Cizek n.d.:13].

Eventually, Bishop Martin sold St. Joseph’s to Dr. Jean Napoleon Burdin on December 27, 1859, for \$1000. Dr. Burdin was killed in 1864 by an unknown assailant, and his property was acquired from his heirs by Dr. George Lahaye on January 11, 1866 (Cizek n.d.:14).

Dr. Lahaye sold the lot and building to Gristoffe Bussi, an Italian baker, on June 3, 1867, for \$1200. Norbert Badin, a distant relative of Augustine Metoyer, acquired the Bussi property at an unknown date, and the property passed to his daughter Zeline Badin Roque on October 18, 1927. Her nephew, Edward Antee, acquired the Badin-Roque House subsequent to Zeline’s death. The St. Augustine Historical Society acquired the Badin-Roque House from Edward Antee on August 17, 1979. This organization restored the structure in the early 1980s (Cizek n.d.:15-16).

### **French Colonial Creole Cottage Architecture**

Recent archeological data from Old Mobile (1702-1711) provided insights about the basic details of the earliest period of French colonial frontier life, such as French colonial Creole Cottage construction methods and forms. Folklorists, anthropologists, and architectural historians have compiled a considerable amount of data on traditional French Colonial architecture (Brown 1975; 1976; Kniffen 1960; Peterson 1965; Thurman 1984; Wilson 1965; 1971; 1973; 1975; Boily and Blachette 1979; Laframboise 1975). They found the Gulf Coast French house form—the Creole Cottage—derived from French and African influences in northern Haiti. Jay Edwards (1988) and Philippe Oszuscik (1983, 1988) have suggested that the basic Creole Cottage originally consisted of three rooms; a central square parlor adjoining a narrow principal bedroom, and an even narrower second bedroom on the opposite side of the parlor. Double fireplaces heated the parlor and the principal bedroom. This architectural pattern was observed in the excavation of buildings at Old Mobile (1702-1711), which confirmed this theoretical construction.

A similar arrangement is seen at the Badin-Roque House, built 130 years later. The main room is in front on the south with the main bedroom joined at the north side. Similarly, a double fireplace used to heat the two main rooms is found at the Badin-Roque House. The only main difference is the placement of the smaller bedrooms at the rear in the enclosed rear gallery.

Today, there are only four known poteaux en terre French Creole style buildings in the United States: the Bequette-Ribault House, St. Gemme-Amourex House, and the Felix Valle House (only the rear section is post-in-the-ground construction) are all in Ste. Genevieve, Missouri (designated a National Historic Landmark District October 9, 1960); and the Badin-Roque House, in Louisiana. The Badin-Roque House, constructed between 1830 and 1840, is the youngest example of the Creole Cottage style.

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## National Register Nomination

Specific dates  
Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)  
Criteria B and C

The Badin-Roque house is nationally significant in the area of architecture as an example of a poteaux-en-terre (posts in the ground) cottage. It represents an ancient form of construction which was prevalent in the Mississippi Valley during the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Today it is widely held to be the state's only surviving example. Moreover, it is probably one of about five examples remaining in the entire country.

The Badin-Rogue house is also significant because of its association with the Isle Brevelle colony of mulattos known as the Cane River Creoles of color. The immediate progenitors of this community were Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer, a Frenchman and Marie Thereze Coincoin, his slave concubine whom he freed in 1783. The several children born of this Franco-African alliance were the beginnings of the Cane River colony of Creoles of color. In the 1850's the Badin-Rogue house was occupied by nuns and used as a school for these mulattos.

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