

The Jean Baptiste Bergeron House is a brick and frame plantation home in the French Creole style. It faces the Chenal Road (Louisiana Highway 414) between the rural agricultural communities of Jarreau and Chenal in Pointe Coupee Parish. Although it has experienced alteration since its c.1840 construction date, the house retains its National Register eligibility.

Original Creole features present in the Jean Baptiste Bergeron House include:

- 1) a main living floor raised upon a low brick basement story,
- 2) a French braced frame,
- 3) bousillage walls,
- 4) a floorplan reflecting Creole geometry in its organization. The primary living space contains a two room core with a full length gallery on the front and a cabinet/loggia range on the rear. Architectural evidence suggests that, in this case, the loggia-like space was originally enclosed. The low basement consists of two unfloored rooms.
- 5) a gallery decorated as an outdoor room with its original simple baseboards, chair rail, and door and window surrounds intact,
- 6) exposed beaded ceiling beams in all main floor rooms, and
- 7) two mantels which wrap around the chimney flue in the French manner. These mantels display simple Greek Revival styling.

The home experienced some serious alterations over the years -- changes which have necessitated a concerted restoration effort. The pitch of the roofline was lowered, the home's siding was replaced, and its French doors were lost. It is also probable that exposed ceiling beams on the gallery were lost when the original gallery columns were removed. Many of these problems are being addressed as part of the current restoration. This work includes the following:

- 1) the construction of a new roof of appropriate pitch and the replacement of the top portion of the central chimney, which had been cut off at ridge level,
- 2) the replacement of modern brick piers supporting the gallery with piers constructed of old brick, the replacement of the gallery's damaged floor and stairs, and the installation of six chamfered colonnettes on the gallery. These colonnettes have been placed in the same locations as the originals. (The locations were evident from holes found in the plate.)
- 3) the covering of some deteriorated interior bousillage walls with sheetrock and the replacement of several lost windows,
- 4) the replication of lost basement story plank front doors and hardware using as guides originals which survive on the side of the home, and the addition of door and window shutters and a gallery balustrade copied from a nearby Creole house, and
- 5) the construction of a glazed rear addition to house a modern kitchen and sitting room.

Although some historic features of the Jean Baptiste Bergeron House have obviously been lost, it presents an authentic appearance and retains enough architectural integrity to justify its nomination to the National Register. The new space is located at the rear and does not impact the Creole facade. Whenever possible, lost materials are being replicated using surviving materials on

the house as guides. The building's restored roofline is similar to those found on other comparable homes in the area. Its new gallery columns are similar in size to the originals and are appropriate to the period. More importantly, the house retains several important original Creole features which are rare within Pointe Coupee Parish, which is the context for this nomination (see Part 8). Thus, the house is a viable candidate for National Register listing.

NOTE: Although the work is not yet complete, the lost original doors will soon be replaced by French doors copied from the nearby Valmont Bergeron House, which was built at approximately the same time as the house under consideration for the brother of Jean Baptiste Bergeron.

Significant dates c.1840
Architect/Builder unknown
Criterion C

The Jean Baptiste Bergeron House is locally significant in the area of architecture within the context of Pointe Coupee Parish because it is one of a select number of houses which illustrate rare and significant features of the Creole style.

Although Pointe Coupee Parish has long been recognized as an important area of early French settlement, time and changing tastes have eroded the parish's collection of significant Creole houses. The Louisiana Comprehensive Historic Structures Survey has identified 799 50+ year old buildings in the parish. Of these, 193 are in the Creole style and hence reflect, at least in a general sense, the French origins of the area. However, most of these buildings are Creole in plan and configuration only and lack other significant features associated with the style. Instead, they usually display Greek Revival, Victorian, or bungalow details. Of the 193 structures identified as Creole, only approximately twelve to fifteen retain enough integrity in their stylistic and construction features to justify their recognition as noteworthy examples of Creole architecture. The Jean Baptiste Bergeron House is one of these dwellings.

Features present in this house which are not found in the majority of Pointe Coupee's Creole homes include bousillage walls and a French timber frame. The vast majority of Pointe Coupee Parish's Creole houses have plain frame walls with no infill. The home is also one of only ten in the parish known to contain French wraparound mantels. In addition, it retains exposed beaded ceiling beams in all of its rooms.

Historical Note

The house stands on land which was once part of the estate of Julien Poydras. This estate was settled between 1838 and 1841, at which time strips of land were offered for sale. Jean Baptiste Bergeron and his brother Valmont both built houses on the former Poydras land within sight of each other. The Valmont Bergeron House is listed on the National Register.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Historic Standing Structures Survey of Pointe Coupee Parish.

Site visit by Division of Historic Preservation staff.