

The Francois Cousin House (c.1790) is a one-and-one-half story, frame, French Creole cottage which received a large rear addition during the late nineteenth century. It stands in a rural setting on the west bank of Liberty Bayou in what is now a suburb of the St. Tammany Parish town of Slidell. This area is part of a region known locally as the North Shore. Despite various alterations, the home remains eligible for the National Register.

The core's early date is based upon architectural and documentary evidence originally gathered in 1976 by Vaughn L. Glasgow, then Chief Curator of the Louisiana State Museum in New Orleans. The historic documents indicated a settlement date of between 1778 and 1789 for the property. And, according to Mr. Glasgow, the type of nails used in the construction date from before about 1790. Based upon the foregoing, as well as his stylistic analysis, he indicated a date of 1787-88. For the record, the Division of Historic Preservation has not seen the nails in question; however, there is nothing the staff observed that would contradict such a date. Since an exact date is not known, circa 1790 will be used for the purposes of this nomination.

The home is comprised of two masses. The original Creole block (which stands closer to the bayou) is characterized by a gable end roof whose ridge parallels the nearby waterway. The late nineteenth century mass is connected to the rear of the older building. It stands beneath its own gable end roof whose ridge runs perpendicular to the older core. Because it is wider than the Creole portion, the addition connects to side galleries (also added as part of the expansion) which flank the original building and connect to the front gallery at its corners.

Characteristics of French Creole architecture found in the Cousin House include:

1. Braced frame construction with *briquette entre poteaux* walls (bricks between posts).
2. A hall-less floorplan consisting of two equal size front rooms with a central chimney and one large room spanning the rear. Although the inclusion of such a large room in a Creole home is unusual, there is no visible architectural evidence to suggest that the space was ever subdivided.
3. A central chimney containing flues for two wraparound mantels (see below).
4. Exposed beaded ceiling beams throughout the three original rooms and on the front gallery.
5. Chamfered front gallery columns. (The columns on the later side galleries are not chamfered.) A rough entablature from a later period surmounts the chamfered columns.

Other features of interest found within the three room cottage include a very plain cornice in the large rear room, original wood floors, four pane transoms above all exterior doors, plank shutters (of which all but three are original), and historic wrought iron ram's horn hinges. Although the home has eight sets of French doors and two sets of casement windows, the architectural evidence indicates they are not original. Each door has four moderately sized panes of glass above two decorative panels; each casement also contains four panes. There is no sign of re-glazing. Based upon knowledge of other examples from the period, each of the original doors and windows would have had ten or more small panes. Although the exact date of their replacement is unclear, it is known that the present doors and casement windows have been in place for more than 75 years.

As mentioned previously, the small dwelling received a large rear addition in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. It consisted of a large room adjoining the cottage's rear wall (now called a "great room") and two bedrooms separated by a narrow hallway. It appears that the side galleries added at this time extended to flank this addition as well as the Creole core.

In addition to this expansion and the other alterations mentioned earlier, modifications to the three room cottage were made when the home was rehabilitated by the current owners in the mid-1970s. These included:

1. the removal of the original wall plaster, which could not be saved. New plaster was placed on the walls in one front room and on some of the walls in the other. However, the owners chose to leave the *briquette entre poteaux* walls exposed in two places in one front room, as well as throughout the rear room and the rear exterior wall. (The rough nature of the exposed framing in these spaces makes it clear that the walls were once covered by plaster, and the owners confirm this.)
2. the fabrication of two wraparound mantels to replace originals previously lost and the installation of a layered Federal style cornice in the two front rooms.

3. the replacement of a crude dormer with a more finely crafted unit featuring a salvaged arched window and the finishing of the attic. (The replaced dormer may have been from the late-nineteenth century expansion project.)
4. the screening of the front and side galleries.

Modifications to the addition were also made as part of this project. All included enclosing space from the side galleries. On one side of the "great room" a kitchen (open to the large room) was added, with a bath constructed behind the kitchen to serve one bedroom. On the other side a small entry (opening to the portion of the side gallery next to the Creole core), a powder room, and a bath serving the second bedroom were added.

Despite its many alterations, the home retains its architectural significance because many of the features which identify it as an early structure survive. These include the *briquelette entre poteaux walls*, the chamfered front gallery columns, the central chimney for wraparound mantels, the exposed beaded ceiling beams, the hall-less floorplan with two front rooms and a central chimney, and the wrought iron ram's horn hinges. As a rare example of St. Tammany Parish's earliest architectural patrimony (see Part 8), the Francois Cousin house is a viable candidate for National Register listing.

Non-Contributing Elements

Four non-contributing buildings stand on the property fairly near the rear of the main house. All were built by the current owners after their purchase of the parcel in the mid-1970s, and all are of frame construction. They include a poolhouse, an artist's studio, a large shed, and a guest cottage composed of two buildings joined together. The pool is also being noted as non-contributing (structure).

SIGNIFICANT DATE: c. 1790
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Unknown
CRITERION: C

The Francois Cousin House is locally significant in the area of architecture because, as one of only a very small number of buildings whose construction pre-dates the Civil War, it is a rare survivor representing St. Tammany Parish's earliest architectural patrimony.

Located on the north shore of Lake Ponchartrain, St. Tammany is a large rural parish which also contains a number of villages and towns. Most of these are located in lower St. Tammany (that region below Interstate 12 and fairly near the lake) where settlement first occurred. For many years the French dominated this area. They arrived in the mid-1720s and continued their influence well into the nineteenth century. For example, Creole planter Bernard de Marigny subdivided his North Shore plantation in 1835 to create the town of Mandeville.

Because of this early settlement pattern, one would expect lower St. Tammany to contain a fair number of French Creole dwellings and at least some buildings reflecting other pre-Civil War architectural influences. However, the parish experienced a substantial growth boom during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries due to the area's popularity as a health resort, the presence of the lumber and shipbuilding industries, and the arrival of the railroad. For this reason, the vast majority of the parish's buildings date from the later period. A recently completed survey of lower St. Tammany found that of approximately 1,400 buildings which can be classed as 50 years of age or older, only 24 are of pre-Civil War vintage. Although upper St. Tammany (that area between Interstate 12 and the Washington Parish line) has not yet been surveyed, Division of Historic Preservation staff know of very few pre-Civil War buildings in this area. Thus, the Francois Cousin House is among the two or three percent of St. Tammany's structures which survive to represent the parish's earliest architectural styles. For this reason, the home is a legitimate candidate for National Register listing.

Historical Note

Francois Cousin was born in 1745 in New Orleans. After reaching adulthood, he entered his father's lumber and brick making business. The source of the lumber and the clay to make the brick was across Lake Pontchartrain in what is

now St. Tammany Parish. Schooners transported the finished materials back across the waterway to New Orleans, where the company's office was located on Carondelet Walk and St. Claude. The company owned six schooners, one of which was seized by the British in 1779 as retaliation for Spain's refusal to let the British ship enter Bayou St. John. Cousin also engaged in shipbuilding and the trading of naval stores such as tar. The exact date upon which Cousin settled in St. Tammany Parish is uncertain; documents suggest it occurred some time between 1778 and 1789. He owned property on Bayou Lacombe as well as on Bayou Liberty. In the 1811-1812 tax roll he was listed as the largest taxpayer, and he was apparently the largest land owner as well. Cousin died in October 1819.

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Notes of telephone interview by Laura Wooldridge (Division of Historic Preservation staff member) with Vaughn L. Glasgow, September 1, 1976.

Site visit by National Register staff.

Staff knowledge of upper St. Tammany Parish.

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