

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Moro Plantation house (c.1839) is a two-story Greek Revival country residence set in the flat delta farmland of western Tensas Parish near the Mississippi River. Although the house has undergone several changes since construction, most are superficial and removable. None are detrimental to the overall architectural significance of the property.

Moro began c.1839 as a two-story, central hall, double parlor plan house with stuccoed brick construction on the ground story and pit sawn frame construction on the upper story. Originally the north side of the house (which faces Muddy Bayou) was the front. The second story has always been the main story, but until recently the only access to it was by means of exterior staircases set on the galleries.

The original upper story consisted of four large rooms and a central hall. Large chimneys were set between the front and rear rooms on each side. The central hall was enclosed at each end by double doors with side lights. These were set in massive aedicule motif frames which resembled mantels. There were no transoms. The other noteworthy feature of the hall was the staircase leading to the attic. It had an elaborately cut string and a banister which terminated with a series of five Sheraton style turned newels.

Each of the four large rooms had its own distinctive woodwork, as follows:

1. The southwest room featured a plain aedicule motif mantel as well as door and window frames with beveled corner blocks and pediment shaped tops.
2. The southeast room featured similar woodwork except that the corner blocks were more elaborately cut.
3. The northwest room featured a plain aedicule motif mantel and door and window frames with heavy shoulder moldings and pediment shaped tops.
4. The northeast room, which was originally the parlor, had the most elaborate woodwork. The mantel featured Greek key motifs set at the ends of the entablature. The door and window frames had similar Greek key motifs as well as guilloche panels and molded boards.

Most of the doors had four panels; however, a few had two. Two of the rooms had closets set next to the chimney flue.

The lower story had an open central hall, four unornamented rooms, brick floors and fireplaces, but no mantels.

The exterior of the house featured a massive pitched roof with two large chimneys and a five-bay, two-story gallery on both the front and the rear. The facades themselves actually had seven bays because all of the rooms had doors opening off the galleries as well as pairs of windows. The lower galleries featured stuccoed brick columns and the upper galleries featured wooden columns with molded capitals and a full entablature.

Moro's present appearance is as described above, but with the changes described below:

In the early 1900's, with the construction of Louisiana 566, the orientation of the house was reversed and the south elevation became the "front" and the north elevation became the "rear."

At that time the following changes were made:

1. Several of the old six over six windows were replaced with two over two windows.
2. The ends of the upper north gallery were enclosed for a kitchen and bathroom.
3. The remainder of the north upper gallery was screened in with clapboard siding installed below the waist level.
4. The original doorway at the south end of the upper hall was reworked. The aedicule motif frame was retained, but the double door was replaced with a single glass door and two massive plate glass side lights were installed.

With the acquisition of Moro in 1957 by the present occupants, the following changes were made:

1. The ends of the lower hall were enclosed with plywood and two-by-fours.
2. A staircase was built from the lower hall to the upper hall.
3. The upper south gallery was screened in.
4. The original upper hall staircase was reworked and four of the five newel posts were removed.
5. The upstairs fireplaces were covered and gas heaters were installed.
6. The present exterior double staircase on the south side was built.
7. The present small awning was added above the north gallery.
8. A temporary exterior staircase was added on the north side.

Assessment of Integrity

Moro is significant because it is a fully developed two-story galleried Greek Revival plantation house and because it has outstanding interior woodwork in the four main rooms of the upper story. Both of these aspects of the house remain more or less intact. The woodwork is completely intact. A few of the described changes have eroded the basic galleried form of the house somewhat. These include the enclosure of part of the upper north gallery, the screening in of the remaining upper galleries, the construction of exterior stairs on the south facade, and the addition of an awning above the north gallery. However, these changes have not substantially obscured the architectural identity of the house. In any case, they are all easily reversible.

Specific dates 1839
Builder/Architect Builders: Jane Murchison & Theophilus Buck

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)
Criterion C

Moro Plantation House is architecturally significant on the local level as an important example of a Greek Revival plantation house. It is one of the few remaining examples in Tensas Parish, where once they must have been quite numerous. Also, among the half dozen or so that have survived, Moro is noteworthy in several important respects, as described below.

The importance of Moro, within the context of Tensas Parish, as a Greek Revival plantation house can be graphically illustrated by examining the census schedules of 1860. On the eve of the Civil War, the population of the parish was 91% slaves and there were 118 large slaveholdings (i.e., fifty or more slaves). Of these 118, the average size of a slaveholding was 100. The absentee ownership rate was 34%. Hence of the 118 large slaveholdings in the parish, 78 of them involved individuals who resided there. Given the above, it is clear that there must have been numerous Greek Revival plantation houses in Tensas Parish on the eve of the Civil War. However, as far as the State Historic Preservation Office can determine, there are only about a half dozen or so remaining examples. Consequently, Moro is of special importance in the architectural heritage of the parish.

In addition, among those few Greek Revival plantation houses that do survive, Moro is noteworthy in the following respects:

1. It has the finest interior woodwork. As a rule, the other Greek Revival plantation houses in the parish feature the same woodwork design throughout. Moreover, in most cases the woodwork is

relatively plain (standard aedicule motif door frames and mantels, etc.). By contrast, the woodwork at Moro varies from room to room, with each having its own distinctive, fully articulated design. Moreover, the Greek keys and guilloche panels found at Moro are unmatched elsewhere in the parish.

2. It is one of only two substantially intact two-story examples remaining in the parish.
3. Of the above two, it is the older.

Major Bibliographical References

Tensas Parish Conveyance Records, Tensas Parish Courthouse

Menn, Joseph K. The Large Slaveholders of Louisiana: 1860. New Orleans, Pelican Publishing Company, 1960.