

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Myrtle Grove Plantation house is set approximately 200 feet to the rear of the Mississippi River levee in the midst of open flat farmland. The immediate environs of the house are somewhat vaguely defined by large pine trees and shrubs, with a central gravel drive built by the present owners. No outbuildings survive from the plantation's historic period.

The plan is typical of many of the larger antebellum plantation houses in northeastern Louisiana, having one and a half stories. With three rooms front and back and a relatively grand staircase in the central front hall. There is a relatively monumental one story front gallery of six columns, and a narrower rear gallery.

The house is built of cypress with pegged construction.

The house shows strong Greek Revival influence. The front gallery has six heavy square posts with molded capitals, and a full entablature. The cast iron porch railings are original. The large front doorway has a strong entablature resting on four pilasters, an unusually classical configuration which encompasses the front door and side lights.

Each of the two front rooms which flank the hall has its own molded, entablatured doorway off the front gallery. Both of these side doors are flanked by a pair of windows. One of the most outstanding features of the front gallery is its panel coffered ceiling, with its double row of panels running from end to end of the gallery. The roof line is broken front and rear by pairs of shuttered dormers, each of which is surmounted by a well proportioned pediment.

The interior features a lightly proportional walnut staircase, and relatively simple mantels. All doors and most windows (58 in all) feature the original marked English locks and hardware of brass or iron. Some of the ground floor windows were replaced with plate glass in the late nineteenth century.

There have been only two other changes to the original structure; the original "L", a separate two-room dependency used as a kitchen, was connected to the main building and its gallery enclosed. The central partition was removed, making one large room opening onto the enclosed gallery.

Inside the "L" there was a separate dependency used as a ballroom-conservatory. This was in such bad state of repair that it was removed in the 1941 restoration. The area is now used as a bricked partially enclosed patio.

SPECIFIC DATES  
BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Myrtle Grove has the traditional form of a Louisiana medium sized raised plantation house. That is a one and a half story four to seven bay house with three or four rooms across the front and a broad front gallery, all under a steeply pitched roof. Of the many such examples that survive from the antebellum period, Myrtle Grove partakes of the Greek Revival style to an unusually high degree. Aside from the symmetrical composition, plan, and central stair hall, there are other more noteworthy elements. For example, where most entrances are treated with a simple transom and

sidelights, at Myrtle Grove the "ransomed, side lighted front door is encompassed within a full aedicule motif with double pilasters. Most of the doors are surmounted by full entablatures, and the dormers are surmounted by well proportioned pediments. The front gallery has the heavy masculine proportions so typical of the Greek Revival, and the fine coffered ceiling is seldom seen in rural plantation houses.

The fine Greek Revival peripteral mansions of the "Great River Road" are not found in northeastern Louisiana. Myrtle Grove is therefore regionally significant because it represents the high water mark achieved by Greek Revival plantation houses in this area of the state.

Myrtle Grove is located on Section 14 of Township 10 North Range 11 East, which was entered as the claim of Job Bass under Certificate No. B 1480 and was patented to him in 1833. The tract remained in the hands of the Bass family until 1918. The current owners of the house attempted to establish with certainty the property's chain of title, hoping that this might uncover some evidence concerning the history of the house. But their efforts did not yield a clear picture, due in part to lack of documents.<sup>1</sup> The available documents do not shed any light on the date of the house. Architectural evidence suggests a date of about 1840.

Apparently there was no deed or other document conveying the land from the original claimant Job Bass to someone else. It is known, however, that Mrs. Elizabeth Foreman, who was Mrs. Elijah Bass before the death of her first husband, obtained the land and at her deathbed passed it on to her sole heir, her son Augustus E. Bass.<sup>2</sup> It was almost surely in the decade of the 1850's that A. E. Bass got the land, because his mother Mrs. Foreman appears in the 1850 census as a 52-year-old woman who owned 1318 acres of land worth \$23,630, but does not appear at all in the 1860 census. In addition, Augustus E. Bass, who is not listed in the 1850 Agriculture Census, appears as a substantial 25-year-old planter in 1860. In that year he owned 191 slaves, \$100,000 worth of real property, and \$185,000 worth of personal property. He owned 2300 acres of land, of which 1300 were improved. The cash value of his plantation was \$230,000, and he had \$10,000 worth of livestock. In the previous year, his plantation had produced 802 bales of cotton and 4000 bushels of Indian corn.<sup>3</sup>

In 1905, A. E. Bass died at Myrtle Grove, and the plantation was inherited by his widow Jane Kempe Bass, whom he had married in 1865. Mrs. Bass died in 1918, and thereafter Myrtle Grove passed through the hands of several owners until 1941, when it was purchased by Irving Tucker, the present owner.<sup>4</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Burton L. Wade to Irving Tucker, 6 March 1868, copy in National Register nomination file for Myrtle Grove, State Historic Preservation Office, Baton Rouge, hereinafter cited as Wade letter.

<sup>2</sup> Wade letter.

<sup>3</sup> 1850 Census, Tensas Parish, Louisiana, Population Schedule, p. 607; Agriculture Census, p. 753; Joseph K. Menn, *The Large Slaveholders of Louisiana--1860* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 399-400.

<sup>4</sup> Abstract of title to Myrtle Grove, 1905-1978, copy in National Register nomination file for Myrtle Grove, State Historic Preservation Office, Baton Rouge.

#### MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Abstract of title to Myrtle Grove, 1905-1978, copy in National Register nomination file for Myrtle Grove, State Historic Preservation Office, Baton Rouge.

Census of 1850, Tensas Parish, Louisiana, Agriculture Census; Population Schedule.

Census of 1860, Tensas Parish, Louisiana, Agriculture Census; Population Schedule.

Letter from Burton Wade to Irving Tucker, 6 March 1968, copy in National Register nomination file for Myrtle Grove, State Historic Preservation Office, Baton Rouge.

Menn, Joseph K. The Large Slaveholders of Louisiana--1860. New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Co., 1964.