

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Narrows Plantation House was built in the 1830s and completely remodeled between 1910 and 1912. It is now a one-and-a-half story galleried house in the Arts and Crafts style. It occupies an open prairie setting in extreme western Vermilion Parish and has received only minor alterations since the 1910-12 remodeling.

The 1910-12 remodeling was so extensive that it is difficult to tell much about the original house. Presumably it was about the same shape and size as the present structure. It appears to have had a central hall with two rooms each side and a front gallery overlooking Lake Arthur. Heavy hewn and pit sawn timbers can still be seen under the floorboards, and some of the original bousillage walls survive.

But virtually the entire visual character of the present house was determined by the 1910-12 renovation. As it stands the Narrows is an enormous cottage with a gables ended roof and galleries on three sides. The galleries are set under a continuous false gallery type extended roof, which lends additional complexity to the roofline. The attic rooms are lit by massive pent dormers which run nearly the length of the house. Exterior detailing is plain with simple square gallery posts and drop siding.

The Narrows' significance rests upon its Arts and Crafts interiors. The ground story consists of a large living room and a large dining room with a stair hall between. There is also a plantation office "shoehorned" under the principal landing of the staircase. In renovating the interiors, the designer made every effort to eliminate as much wall surface as possible and create an open floor plan. But this was not done in a haphazard way as it might have been under the Queen Anne Revival. The space was opened and articulated in a very axial and controlled way which reflects the influence of the Beaux Arts. One enters on axis with the staircase in the center of the main front. A secondary axial space unites the stair hall, the living room and the dining room through openwork piers and beams. This is linked with a third axis which runs through an alcove and the dining room. Spaces are further united by opening the walls above the wainscot and by the extensive use of balustrade screens. In addition, the eye is carried from room to room by the pattern of the double frame beam ceilings which extends throughout the ground story almost uninterrupted.

The staircase is complex and boldly three dimensional, employing four runs of steps and four landings merely to ascend one story. It also makes extensive use of plain square teal balusters and heavy paneled newel posts.

All interior woodwork is of varnished cypress. Most of the walls feature a high paneled wainscot which, together with the other woodwork, gives an effect which is both Japanese and vaguely medieval. The living room and dining room terminate in projecting bays with window seats. The house's single fireplace features a Craftsman-looking battered brick mantel. The second story has four bedrooms with more or less conventional turn-of-the-century details.

Since the 1910-12 renovation the following changes have been made in the house:

1. The old kitchen, which was connected to the west side of the house by a short gallery, has been reworked. Also, the gallery has been enclosed for a dining area.
2. A second story sleeping porch (east side) has been enclosed for a bathroom.

These changes have not affected the first story interiors, which are the source of the house's significance.

Outbuildings

Near the house are two dependencies, one of which has a large carport addition. Both appear to be contemporaneous with the period of significance for the house, and hence are listed as contributing elements. There are also two relatively modern metal sided sheds. These are listed as non-contributing elements.

Specific dates 1910-12
Builder/Architect 1910-12 remodeling: John Macdonell (Builder)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)
Criterion C

The Narrows is of local significance in the area of architecture because its interiors constitute an important example of the early twentieth century Arts and Crafts influence within the context of southern Louisiana.

In a very general sense the thousands upon thousands of bungalows in the region reflect the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement. But these houses are merely pale and diluted examples of the taste. High style, convincing examples of the movement are very rare. Most bungalows in southern Louisiana have plain interiors with perhaps a brick mantel or a few oak cabinets. Many have Mission or Colonial Revival interiors. By contrast, the interiors at the Narrows feature paneled wainscotting, double framed ceilings, balustrade screens, and a very elaborately articulated staircase. These features set the Narrows interiors among the top few examples in the region. Moreover, in one sense the Narrows is superior to them all. None of the comparable examples known to the State Historic Preservation Office have the degree of openness and spatial complexity found at the Narrows. This single aspect places the Narrows in the vanguard of open planning as it was developing in the early twentieth century.

Major Bibliographical References

Vermilion Parish Conveyance Records