

The one story, wood frame Edmond Smart House (c.1870) faces the old Leesville central business district, a block away. The house is not easy to pigeonhole stylistically, but on the whole should be viewed within the overall late Greek Revival/Italianate taste as it appeared typically in rural Louisiana. With the exception of a rear gallery enclosure and the loss of chimneys, the exterior looks much as it did when constructed. The interior has received some cosmetic alterations and losses, as explained below.

While family tradition has the house being built in the late 1850s, the architectural evidence suggests the late 1860s or the 1870s – roughly contemporaneous with the founding of Leesville in 1871. (For the purposes of this nomination a date of c.1870 will be used.) As explained in Part 8, Smart is considered the town's founder. The house looks like a plantation house, and indeed, the setting would have been rural in the very early years. (Leesville remained a small rural hamlet until the 1890s.) Dr. Smart's considerable acreage extended back to Castor Creek. Today the house sits on less than an acre.

The house's exterior character is defined by a broad, spreading hip roof with a low pitch and a quite distinctive gallery. Originally the gallery encircled the house. Today the rear portion is enclosed. The "one of a kind" columns should be viewed within the Italianate taste. They can be interpreted as a country builder's take on a richly paneled Italianate column. From a distance they look pierced – i.e., a single piece of wood with a cutout design – but closer inspection reveals that the pattern is formed by multiple pieces of wood. A popular Italianate convention was the richly paneled column (perhaps with a roundel) set atop a high base. This overall configuration is seen at the Smart House, but instead of a paneled column and base, the builder chose a pierced look (column and base) formed of straight-sided and rounded pieces of wood. Rounded pieces of wood are also found where the balustrade attaches to the columns. The balustrade features straight balusters. The columns' simple boxed "capitals" are echoed at the corners in pilasters. The bold articulation of each column part (at the expense of the whole) should also be viewed within the Italianate taste.

The house rests on brick piers about a foot above grade. Because all of the exterior walls were protected by galleries, they are sheathed in flush boards. Windows are six over six with the upper sash fixed in place. Shutters (original) have a fixed lower panel and a movable upper panel. The symmetrically placed entrance features a four-panel door with side lights and a transom. The heavy molding seen in the surround, the side light panels, and the door is very typical of the 1870s. There is also an original door opening on the southern (side) elevation. It provides independent access to a front room. (The door itself has been altered.)

While the interior has received some cosmetic alterations, it retains its original floor plan (central hall with two rooms to each side) and some of its details. The four rooms and hall have been covered with modern paneling and have celotex ceilings. (Some ceilings are lowered; some are not.) Two mantels of the the original four are missing; the corners of two rooms have been furred out for closet space; and multi-pane French doors (early twentieth century) fill an opening between rooms. Original interior details include almost all of the doors (four panel), molded door frames and baseboards, and two mantels, one quite different from the other. One of the mantels is quite "chunky" in proportion. The boards forming its entablature and pilasters feature quite heavy, almost oversized bands of molding. The shelf is a simple board. The other mantel, far lighter in character, has fairly narrow boards for pilasters and a grooved, or reeded, entablature. Here too the mantel shelf is a simple board. Also surviving is the original rear entrance at the end of the central hall which matches that at the front.

To summarize, exterior alterations include: the enclosure of the gallery across the rear, screening a small portion of a side gallery (where it abuts the rear enclosure), loss of the two chimneys, and pairing two original windows (toward the rear of the side elevation, probably done when the rear gallery was enclosed).

SIGNIFICANT DATES:	c. 1870 (architecture); c. 1870-1908 (exploration and settlement)
ARCHITECT/BUILDER:	Unknown
CRITERION:	B and C

The Smart House is locally significant in the area of exploration/settlement as the longtime home of the town's founder, Dr. Edmond Ellison Smart. Here the period of significance spans from c.1870, the date of construction, until Dr. Smart's death in 1908. The house is of local architectural significance because it is all that is left to represent the town's early architectural heritage.

#### Exploration/Settlement:

The Smarts were clearly the family of early Leesville and Vernon Parish. John R. Smart, Edmond Ellison's father,

is regarded as the “Father of Vernon Parish” because he introduced the bill in the Louisiana Senate in 1871 that created the parish. The village of Leesville was established in the legislation as the seat of government. (There were existing communities in what became Vernon Parish, but a new one was established, all due seemingly to the influence of the Smarts.) Dr. Edmond Ellison Smart, a physician and merchant, donated the parish courthouse site in 1871 as well as land for the townsite. According to tradition, it was he who chose to honor Robert E. Lee in the town’s name. The contract for the first courthouse was awarded to John F. Smart – surely a relation.

The town that Smart founded remained a tiny rural hamlet until the Kansas City Southern Railroad arrived in the 1890s, making possible a lumber boom which lasted until the 1920s. By 1900, the population was 1,148, and 2,043 by 1910. A second period of growth came with the establishment of Camp Polk (now Fort Polk) in 1941. By 1950, the population was 4,670.

In addition to being regarded as the “Father of Leesville,” Dr. Smart served as Vernon Parish’s first treasurer and as state senator. He lived in the house with his wife Harriet Neal Smart until his death in 1908. Mrs. Smart, known as Hattie, is described in a 1909 biographical directory as “a well preserved woman, strong and vigorous.” At that time only two of the Smarts’ seven children were living, Nannie and Maggie. The house remained in the Smart family until the 1950s. Today it is vacant.

#### Architecture:

Despite the considerable prosperity of the lumber boom era (and attendant rapid population growth), the vast majority of the historic buildings seen today in Leesville are modest and lacking in architectural distinction. Very importantly, with the notable exception of the Smart House, all are 1890s or later (mainly later). Given the demolition of lumber boom era landmarks that occurred in the mid-twentieth century, the survival of the Smart House is rather remarkable. As the sole building to represent the look of early Leesville – to represent the city’s early architectural heritage – its local architectural value is considerable.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Early photo (late 19<sup>th</sup> century) of the Smart House. Copy in National Register file, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.

Smith, Steven D. *A Good Home for a Poor Man: Fort Polk and Vernon Parish, 1800-1940*. National Park Service, 1999.