

The Thomas M. Babington House was built around 1900. It is a one story frame structure located near a busy commercial intersection in the Washington Parish town of Franklinton. Stylistically, it is a low key, vernacular interpretation of the Colonial Revival with slight touches of Queen Anne Revival influence. The house has experienced rehabilitation and alteration associated with its use as a medical clinic but remains eligible for National Register listing.

The building's original floor plan consisted of a wide central hallway with four rooms on each side. Architectural evidence (the treatment of the windows) and historic photographs show that an additional room attached at one front corner is original to the structure. A large gallery shaded the house on the front and one side elevation. Most of the house was incorporated beneath a large tripped roof whose pitch flared outward slightly to cover the front and side galleries. The previously mentioned front corner room had its own hip roof, as did a full length back porch. Most of these features remain.

Colonial Revival features found on the Babington House include Tuscan gallery columns which rise from paneled bases and several catalog ordered mantels. Two of the latter feature mirrored overmantels. Queen Anne influence is seen in the fishscale shingles which decorate the gable and sides of the roof's single front facing dormer and in the polygonal bay window which projects onto the front gallery. This bay is ornamented by panels of vertical flush boards, each of which contains a small circular indentation. The uniform height of these indentations makes it clear that they were meant as decorative elements.

In addition to the previously mentioned mantels, the interior features Eastlake door and window surrounds ornamented by floral motifs, brackets with similar motifs in the central hall and formal rooms, beaded board ceilings in all rooms, tall windows in the rooms facing the front gallery, transoms over interior doors, and a set of pocket doors apparently added after the wall between the parlor and central hall had been constructed. These doors slide into spaces created by constructing a new wall furred out a few inches from the original. The woodwork surrounding these furred out spaces matches that found throughout the rest of the home.

After serving as the Babington family's home, the house was purchased for use as a hospital and, more recently, as a medical clinic. Alterations made to serve these functions are as follows:

- 1) During the home's hospital period,
 - a) the rear porch was subdivided and enclosed,
 - b) two small rooms were attached to one side of the enclosed area beneath a shed roof,
 - c) two additional small rooms (used for examining patients) were created within a projecting addition on one rear corner (see plan),
 - d) closets were added beside the mantels in several rooms, and one room was subdivided into a smaller room and a hall,
 - e) the front door, which was slightly recessed from the rest of the facade, was replaced by a modern industrial strength glass door. However, its sidelights and surround remain intact. In addition, the recessed area was enclosed in glass to create a vestibule, and the home's rear door was also replaced by one of glass.
- 2) Recent alterations to facilitate the home's current use as a medical clinic include:

- a) the removal of a wall between two rear rooms, the subdivision of the resulting space into a hallway and three small examination rooms, the installation of a dropped tile ceiling above these spaces, and the construction of a small equipment room (housing the equipment associated with a sprinkler system) on the side gallery.
- b) the cutting of window sized openings in several walls in order to facilitate business transactions between the clinic's staff and patients,
- c) the installation of carpet in the central hall and parlors, and
- d) the construction of a large ramp on the rear elevation.

The above outlined changes are relatively minor in nature, and many could easily be reversed. Thus, there is no doubt that Thomas M. Babington and members of his family would easily recognize the building as their former home if they should return to Franklinton today. As the home of a member of one of Franklinton's most significant late nineteenth and early twentieth century families (see Part 8), the Thomas M. Babington House is a legitimate candidate for National Register listing.

Significant dates	N/A
Architect/Builder	Builder: Peter Paquet
Criterion B	

The Thomas M. Babington House is locally significant in the area of commerce because it is associated with the Babington family, whose members played an important role in the economic revitalization of Franklinton in the early years of the twentieth century. Specifically, it was the home of Thomas M. Babington from its construction c.1900 until his death on January 1, 1936.

Franklinton is an old community which has experienced distinct periods of growth. The first began in 1819 with the creation of Washington Parish and the temporary designation of a rural spot five miles from Franklinton's current location as parish seat. That same year, John W. Bickham donated to the parish government 30 acres of land at what would become Franklinton's permanent location. A year later, the Louisiana legislature designated the location as the temporary parish seat and in 1821 gave the community its name. However, it appears that parish officials did not relocate the courthouse until a July 4, 1826 election made the town's designation as Washington Parish's seat permanent. A post office was established in 1829, and a brick courthouse had been completed by 1830. The town received a charter in 1861 but apparently its municipal government remained largely inactive. Another charter was issued in 1888. At that time the town's corporate limits encompassed one square mile of land with the courthouse at its center. From this time forward, city fathers actively governed the town.

Irish immigrant Robert Babington had arrived in Franklinton and opened a store by 1856. At first, the business was so small that he left his wife in charge of the one room store while he worked in Summit, Mississippi as a clerk. However, the business prospered, as did the family, which grew to include at least two daughters and four sons: W. W., Thomas M., Robert H., and C. S. (Zeke). The senior Babington managed the store until 1881, when he turned daily operations over to Thomas. The firm's name changed to Babington Brothers when Thomas' younger brothers joined the business. By 1899, the company occupied a large two story frame structure and was recognized as

the largest mercantile establishment in the parish. A fire destroyed this building later in the year but the brothers soon rebuilt an even larger store. Thus, the Babington family had a major stake in the future of Franklinton. However, by 1900 this future no longer seemed so promising.

The problems facing Franklinton's civic leaders in 1900 centered upon three issues: recovery from a series of natural disasters, the community's location, and its lack of a railroad. When Tangipahoa Parish was formed in 1869, Washington Parish lost a large portion of its western lands. Because Franklinton was now much nearer the parish's new western border than its center (the preferred site for parish seats), this change left the town potentially vulnerable to suggestions for parish seat relocation. No serious challenges to Franklinton's position emerged until shortly after 1900. At about that time, the town suffered from a yellow fever scare, a fire on its main street, a major flood, and the failure of the cotton crop which financed the spending of farmers in the surrounding area. At the same time, the community was bypassed by the new railroads building lines in other sections of the parish. This situation especially concerned Franklinton's leaders, for it was generally understood that towns bypassed by the railroad either died completely or suffered from stunted growth. Indeed, two new towns, Hackley in Washington Parish and Folsom in nearby Tangipahoa Parish, soon mounted active campaigns to attract new citizens. Boosters of Hackley and Folsom even attempted to lure Franklinton's businesses and residents away by advertising the advantages of their new towns in Franklinton's own newspaper. "HACKLEY!," one ad boisterously proclaimed, "400 Lots for sale in the New Town of Hackley, The leading R. R. Town of Washington Parish;...."

"The one great and only need to which Franklinton and vicinity is subjected, [sic.] is the need of a railroad to develop its natural resources and bring its people into contact with the outside world," proclaimed the Franklinton New Era on December 5, 1903; and a majority of the community's citizens seemed to agree. The Babington brothers worked to establish both a railroad and the community's first bank. The latter was chartered in 1903, with three of the four brothers (including Thomas M.) subscribing to the stock. The bank prospered. By 1910 it had constructed its own building and had achieved a capital of \$30,000 as well as a surplus of \$6,000. W. W. Babington served as president in that year.

The Babingtons' first two efforts to secure a railroad for Franklinton were not as successful. Contacts in Mississippi refused to extend their road southward, and a deal with the Louisiana & Eastern fell through when that company was purchased by the New Orleans Great Northern (NOGN). Refusing to give up, the businessmen brothers organized a third plan, which focused upon obtaining the right-of-way for the tracks and giving it to the NOGN. Many landowners along the proposed route actually gave the needed right-of-way space free of charge. Railroad officials accepted this donation, and Franklinton welcomed its first passenger train on February 7, 1907.

Evidence indicates that the railroad did much to stimulate Franklinton's economy. For example, a promotional booklet published c.1908 shows the town's original street grid partly surrounded by a new grid of lots and squares more than three times the size of the old. (Instructions printed below the grid told interested parties to contact Babington Brothers, Ltd. for information on prices.) And, from a population of 236 in 1900, the community had grown to 814 inhabitants (an increase of over 300%) by 1910.

Today the Babington Brothers mercantile store is gone, and only three historic buildings associated with the four Babington brothers remain in Franklinton. Robert H. Babington's home was listed on the National Register in 1979. A store purchased by Thomas M. Babington in 1914 and used by him as a drugstore survives. However, this building is not associated with the period in which the Babington family made its greatest contributions to the town. In addition, a historic photograph shows that the drugstore's facade has been altered to some extent. The residence of Thomas M. is much more closely associated with the family's period of importance. Thus, the Thomas M. Babington House is a legitimate candidate for Register listing.

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