

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Sylvest house has been placed in a rural environment in a wooded portion of the Washington Parish fairgrounds. Originally the house was in Fisher but was moved when it was threatened with demolition. The character of the new location approximates the old with the exception of a large one-story metal-sided building approximately 50 yards from the front of the house.

The house itself dates from the 1880's with a dog trot plan and an early 20th century kitchen attached to the back of the rear gallery. At one time there were brick chimneys at each end of the house. These were removed when the house was moved but they are slated to be reconstructed.

The house is constructed of small and medium sized round logs, saddle-notched at the corners. The sills and girths are over 45 feet long from end to end of the house. The sills rest upon solid wood supports cut in wedge shapes from wide diameter logs. The rear kitchen is of frame construction with board and batten siding. The windows and shutters are replaced. Originally the exposed side walls were sheathed in clapboard. This is slated to be replaced.

Because the house has been moved to its present location, only the building itself is being nominated to the National Register.

SPECIFIC DATES	c.1880
BUILDER/ARCHITECT	Nehemiah Sylvest

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of the Sylvest House is both architectural and agricultural. It is a surviving representative example of a log constructed dog trot house. Rare in the area, it is quite possibly the only extant example in Washington Parish. Its irregularly sized logs, its irregular corner construction, and its use of windows mark the Sylvest House as a distinctly late example. Preserving this late example is important because it represents the last generation of dog trot houses and log construction. It shows the degree to which vernacular architecture can perpetuate traditional forms. In addition it helps to give an overall sense of the development of the dog trot form and method of construction over time.

The late date (c.1880) of the Sylvest House provides an indication of the rather late date of the development of Washington Parish and is therefore an excellent representative of the local history of the area. According to local historian Daunton Gibbs, "Washington Parish was the center of a vast wilderness area and remained as such until 1900. Most of the land owners were stock raisers with a few acres of land in cultivation." The occupants of the Sylvest House seem to have been typical of the time and place. ¹

According to local tradition, the Sylvest House was built by Nehemiah Sylvest in 1880 - 1881 while he, his wife, and their four or five children lived in a small structure which was to become their smokehouse. Ultimately the parents reared a total of twelve children in the house. ² (Since a courthouse fire in 1897 destroyed the local records of Washington Parish, most important early documents on the Sylvest House no longer exist. ³)

In 1880, Sylvest was a thirty-five year old "farmer," according to the federal census. His wife Lenora, twenty-five years old, was "keeping house." They had been born in Louisiana, and both of

their fathers had come here from Portugal. In 1880 they had four children -- two sons and two daughters -- ranging in age from one to seven.⁴

The 1880 Agriculture Census provides detailed information concerning Sylvest's farm as of that date. He owned a total of 160 acres, of which fifteen were under cultivation. The value of his farm, including land, fences, and buildings, was \$400. He owned \$255 worth of livestock and \$25 worth of implements and machinery. The estimated value of all his farm production in 1879 was \$235. His livestock consisted mainly of twenty-five swine and fifteen barnyard poultry. The poultry had produced 75 dozen eggs in 1879. Four acres of corn planted had produced 50 bushels. Seven acres of cotton had produced three bales. One acre of sweet potatoes had produced 100 bushels.⁵

Not much additional information is available on the Sylvests. Like most of the rest of the 1890 census, the data on Washington Parish for that year was destroyed. As of 1900, there were eight children, ranging in age from three to eighteen, living in the household with the parents. Since the agriculture census data for 1900 was also destroyed, there is no information available on the farm as of that time.⁶

FOOTNOTES

¹ Daunton Gibbs, "A brief History of Washington Parish, p. 1, typescript in National Register nomination file for Sylvest House, State Historic Preservation Office, Baton Rouge.

² "Mile Branch Settlement: 1977," pamphlet by Washington Parish Fair Executive Committee, copy in National Register nomination file for Sylvest House, State Historic Preservation Office, Baton Rouge.

³ Amy Quick, The History of Bogalusa, the "Magic City" of Louisiana (Reprinted from Louisiana Historical Quarterly, Vol. 29, January, 1946), P. 9.

⁴ Census of 1880, Louisiana, Washington Parish, Population Schedule, p. 6

⁵ Census of 1880, Louisiana, Washington Parish, Agriculture Census, p. 5.

⁶ Census of 1900, Louisiana, Washington Parish, Population Schedule, as communicated in telephone interview with Mark Samuelson, Public Affairs Office, National Archives, Washington, D. C., July 5, 1978.

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