

The Bryan House was built c.1835 and significantly enlarged some 10 to 20 years later. The original portion is of log construction with the remainder wood frame. Located in the gently rolling countryside of southwestern Webster Parish, the house has vernacular late Federal and Greek Revival details. It retains most of its historic architectural fabric on both the interior and exterior.

Please refer to the attached schematic sketch map for an appreciation of the Bryan House's evolution. It began c.1835 as a wide story and a half log dogtrot house with a front and rear gallery. In typical fashion, a room was located to each side of the dogtrot corridor. Facing south, the dogtrot main block was flanked by a pair of forward projecting single rooms. Each flanker was appended at the corner of the main block and had its own gable roof with a front facing chimney. The flankers could be accessed only from the front gallery. The creator of this very unusual plan must have been familiar with the architecture of the eastern states during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Indeed, the use of these "flankers" seems to indicate a frontiersman's attempt to create a Palladian Revival house plan. The flankers are of frame construction but are probably contemporaneous with the log dogtrot core.

This original portion of the house features hand-planed tongue and groove boards on all downstairs interiors -- walls and ceilings -- although the walls in two rooms have been covered with paper. Hand-planed tongue and groove boards cover the facades of the log walls, which would in their day have been protected under galleries. The c.1835 portion also features 12 over 12 and 9 over 9 sash windows and three folk Federal/Greek Revival style mantels. A fourth one has been lost (in the flanker now used as a kitchen). The mantels have a homemade country look, featuring blocks of wood not finished with molding. One mantel has a layered mantel shelf (in the Federal manner) created by placing one board atop another.

The upper story of the dogtrot is a high knee-wall garret with rough hewn exposed logs and skinned pole rafters. The high knee-wall condition and the single fireplace indicate that the garret was always intended for human habitation. According to the owner, this fireplace, which now has a modern appearance, once consisted of a very orange powdery brick. Four small windows light the garret rooms from the south knee-wall. Due to replacement of fabric, it is not known if they are original. They appear in a c.1940 photograph of the house. After that time they were reduced in size by raising their sills to accommodate a new gallery roof (later incorporated into a sun room addition, see below). The current staircase that ascends in the dog-trot corridor to the garret is old but may not be original.

Some ten to twenty years after construction (c.1850), the house was significantly enlarged and reoriented (see sketch map). A range of two rooms was added on the east side, giving the house an overall "L" shape. The east side became the new front, complete with a five-bay vernacular Greek Revival front gallery and a new north flanker to balance the old flanker on the south side. The pitched roofline of the new front incorporated the old (east) side gable of the original dogtrot. It appears as a forward-facing gable skewed to one side of the facade. The c.1850 expansion also involved cutting a door in the old east log room to provide access to the new front gallery. The present chimney that services the fireplace in this room was undoubtedly installed at this time.

The Greek Revival addition features flush board walls, large 6 over 6 sash windows and one aedicule style mantel (in the flanker). At one time there were two other mantels but these have been lost. The Greek Revival-looking mantel in the north room next to the north flanker is a twentieth century replacement (perhaps using some old parts). Throughout the house are two-panel doors of the type popular in the Greek Revival period. It seems likely that they date from the c.1850 expansion/remodeling.

During the twentieth century the house fell into disrepair, as documented in surviving photos. It was restored by new owners in the late 1930s/early '40s. In 1953 the present owner's parents acquired the house.

Alterations made during this period are as follows:

- 1) The old gallery on the south side (the original front) was long gone when the house was restored c.1940. A sunroom was built between the flankers at this time, which in turn was expanded in the 1950s.
- 2) A covered patio was added in the northwest corner of the house.
- 3) A small bathroom was added behind the north flanker.
- 4) One of the c.1850 rooms was subdivided for a bathroom. (This room no longer has a

mantel.)

- 5) (One of the c.1835 flankers is now a kitchen. While its mantel is gone, it still retains its original hand-planed walls and ceilings.
- 6) Concrete chinking was added to the log garret. The present owner remembers this space as a young man and indicates his father added the present treatment because there was no chinking. (There is no evidence of battens having been used.) The owner also recalls the ceiling as being unfinished with the skin pole rafters visible. His father covered the ceiling with boards. (The skin pole rafters are visible through a hole cut in this new material.)

#### Assessment of Integrity:

All in all, the Bryan House retains a considerable amount of its historic fabric on both the interior and exterior. The facade looks just as it did after the c.1850 expansion, complete with the very distinctive flanker configuration. In addition, the flanker configuration on the south elevation is still intact either side of the sunroom. Finally, the house retains its important log dogtrot core and more than enough Federal/Greek Revival features to fully establish its architectural identity as a rural residence of that era.

#### Non-Contributing Element:

A few feet to the south of the house is a modern garage.

Significant Dates: c. 1835, c. 1850  
Architect/Builder: Unknown  
Criterion: C

The Bryan House is of local architectural significance within the context of northern Louisiana as a rare example of domestic log construction. As such it exemplifies the folk architectural tradition of the Scots-Irish/Appalachian Uplanders who were by far the principal pioneer settlement group in the region. The house is also locally significant because with its late Federal/Greek Revival styling, it is one of very few buildings remaining to represent Webster Parish's earliest architectural history.

According to cultural geographer Milton Newton: "By about 1825, the shape of Louisiana society for the next two generations had been determined. The Uplanders had possessed north Louisiana . . . and installed their Jacksonian politics." Log construction was fundamental to this hardy, distinctly American pioneer stock. Indeed, the Uplanders were the only pioneer group to consider log buildings the norm for a permanent dwelling. Thus, one may surmise that on the eve of the Civil War, after three or four decades of Uplander settlement, the disbursed hamlets and irregular farms of the northern hill parishes boasted many hundreds of log houses. But today this impressive heritage is all but gone. Standing structures surveys for the parishes of Bienville, Lincoln, Union, Webster, Jackson, and Claiborne show a total of 23 surviving log dwellings that are thought to be pre-Civil War. This number is probably lower, given the fact that the surveys are from 2 to 15 years old and some of the abandoned log buildings may have been demolished or may have fallen down. As one of the rare survivors, the original log dogtrot core of the Bryan House is of considerable importance to the region.

The late Federal/Greek Revival character of the house is significant within the context of Webster Parish. The standing structures survey for the parish was completed in 1983. At that time a total of 432 buildings over 50 years old were identified. Although Webster Parish was settled in the 1830s and 1840s, there is very little left from before the late nineteenth century. The vast majority of buildings recorded in the survey are bungalows, plain cottages, Queen Anne Revival cottages, and twentieth century commercial buildings. The Bryan House is one of only about a dozen buildings (all residences) that survive from the late Federal/Greek Revival period. As such, it is part of the parish's earliest patrimony.

#### Historical Note:

The house takes its name from its original owners, the Bryans, who owned it until c.1870. The next owners were the Plant family, who occupied the house well into the twentieth century. Bob and Winnie Tomlinson acquired the property c.1940 and undertook the previously mentioned restoration. Harold Montgomery purchased it in 1953 and named it Ranch Azalee, in honor of his wife. He lived there until his death in 1995. The present owner is his son.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Circa 1940 photos of the house before and after restoration. Copies in National Register file, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.

Historic Structures Survey, Bienville, Lincoln, Union, Webster, Jackson, Claiborne parishes. Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.