

Site of National Significance

Pierre Menard House, Illinois

Location: Randolph County, Fort Kaskaskia State Park, west of Illinois 3, about 5 miles north of Chester.

Ownership: State of Illinois; administered by the Department of Conservation, Division of Park and Memorials, 100 State Office Building, Springfield, Illinois, 62706.

Statement of Significance

The Menard House, erected about 1802, is a magnificent and little-altered example of a large French Colonial "raised cottage" Louisiana-type plantation house. Because there is less alteration, this dwelling is probably superior to the famous Kellar (Homeplace) Plantation House, built at Hahnville, Louisiana, around 1801. It is only surpassed by the Parlange Plantation, c. 1750, near Mix, Louisiana.

History

Pierre Menard, born in Canada, moved to Kaskaskia in 1790. He soon became a successful trader and a trusted friend of the Indians. He wielded much influence during the territorial and early statehood years of Illinois, was presiding officer of the first Territorial Legislature and first Lieutenant Governor of Illinois in 1818. The present house was built in the best French Colonial tradition for Menard by the master carpenter Joseph Champaigne in 1802. The structure remained in the possession of the Menard family until 1902, when it was purchased by Louis Younger. In 1927 the State of Illinois acquired the house and 201 acres of surrounding land to form Fort Kaskaskia State Park. The Menard House has been open to the public as an historic house exhibit since that year.

Condition

The two-and-a-half-story, hipped and dormered roof Menard House is two rooms deep in basic plan. A wide galerie or veranda, with light balustrade and supported by large square stone pillars, extends across the front and around the two ends of the house. This porch provides access to the second-story rooms. The frame house is raised above a high stone basement with two-foot thick walls. One huge room, this

area was used by Menard for the storage of his trading goods. Resting on these stone foundations are the immense beams and sills of the house frame. Of white oak, these great timbers are 12 by 14 inches in size and 53 feet in length. A reconstructed stairway, located at the center of the front facade, leads up to the galerie and the main living rooms on the second floor; The front central hall is flanked on the right by the master bedroom and on the left by the parlor. At the rear of the hall is the dining room, which has a bedroom and bath in line to the right, and two more bedrooms in line to the left.

Over 90% of the present house represents original fabric and workmanship. This includes the fine interior walnut trim, the flooring, doors, hardware, most of the window glass, and all of the exterior solid wooden shutters except two. The exterior beaded clapboard siding on the front and ends is also original and only on the rear has there been some replacement. Inside, only the board ceiling of the northwest (rear) bedroom has been reconstructed and this was copied from the original board ceiling still in place in the northeast (rear) bath. Other reconstruction has been limited to the replacement of the galerie flooring and supports.

The upper floor of the house was never finished off and here is visible the excellent French trusswork. The great timbers are mortised-and-tenoned and fastened together with wooden pegs. Nearly all of this roof frame is original.

The stone kitchen, separated from the main house by an open porch, has an immense fireplace, a large Dutch oven, and a water basin carved from solid stone. To the rear of the kitchen and house is the original two-story brick smoke house, which is now in the process of being restored. The Menard House is maintained in excellent condition and is furnished with many original Menard pieces.

References:

Hugh Morrison, Early American Architecture (New York, 1952), 256, 259; Charles E. Peterson, "Early French Landmarks Along the Mississippi," Antiques, LIII (April, 1948), 286-287; Charles E. Peterson, "French Houses of the Illinois Country," Missouriana, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Aug.-Sept., 1938), 9-12; John Drury, Historic Midwest Houses (Minneapolis, 1947), 57-59; John Drury, Old Illinois Houses (Springfield, Ill., 1948) 7-9; Rexford Newcomb, Architecture of the Old North-West Territory (Chicago, 1950), 23; Illinois, a Descriptive and Historical Guide (American Guide Series) (Chicago, 1947), 496-497; Historic American Building Survey: (8 photos, 1940).

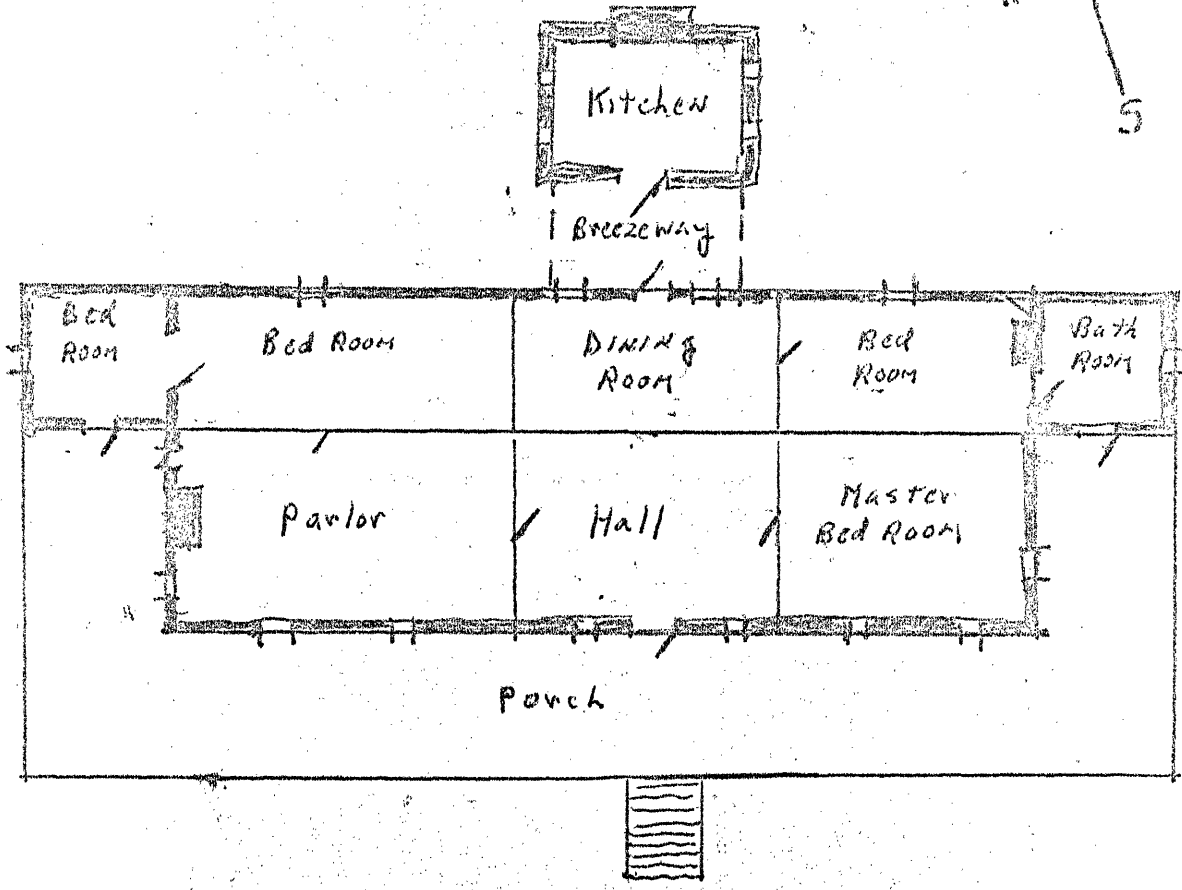
PIERRE MENARD HOUSE, RANDOLPH COUNTY
ILLINOIS

Boundaries of the Historic Site:

Approximately 201 acres of land, including the Pierre Menard House, that comprised Fort Kaskaskia State Park. The precise boundaries of this site are identical with the established legal boundaries of the State Park. The Menard House is located within a quadrangle marked by the following corners: southwest corner, latitude $37^{\circ}57'38''$ N. - longitude $89^{\circ}54'26''$ W.; northwest corner, lat. $37^{\circ}57'42''$ N. - long. $89^{\circ}54'26''$ W.; northeast corner, lat. $37^{\circ}54'42''$ N. - long. $89^{\circ}54'19''$ W.; and the southeast corner, lat. $37^{\circ}57'38''$ N. - long. $89^{\circ}54'19''$ W. The precise location of the Menard House, as described above, is recorded in red on a copy of U.S. Geological Survey Map: Chester Quadrangle, Illinois-Missouri, 15 Minute Series (Topographic), 1947, on file with the Branch of Historical Surveys, Division of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service.



Brick
Smoke House

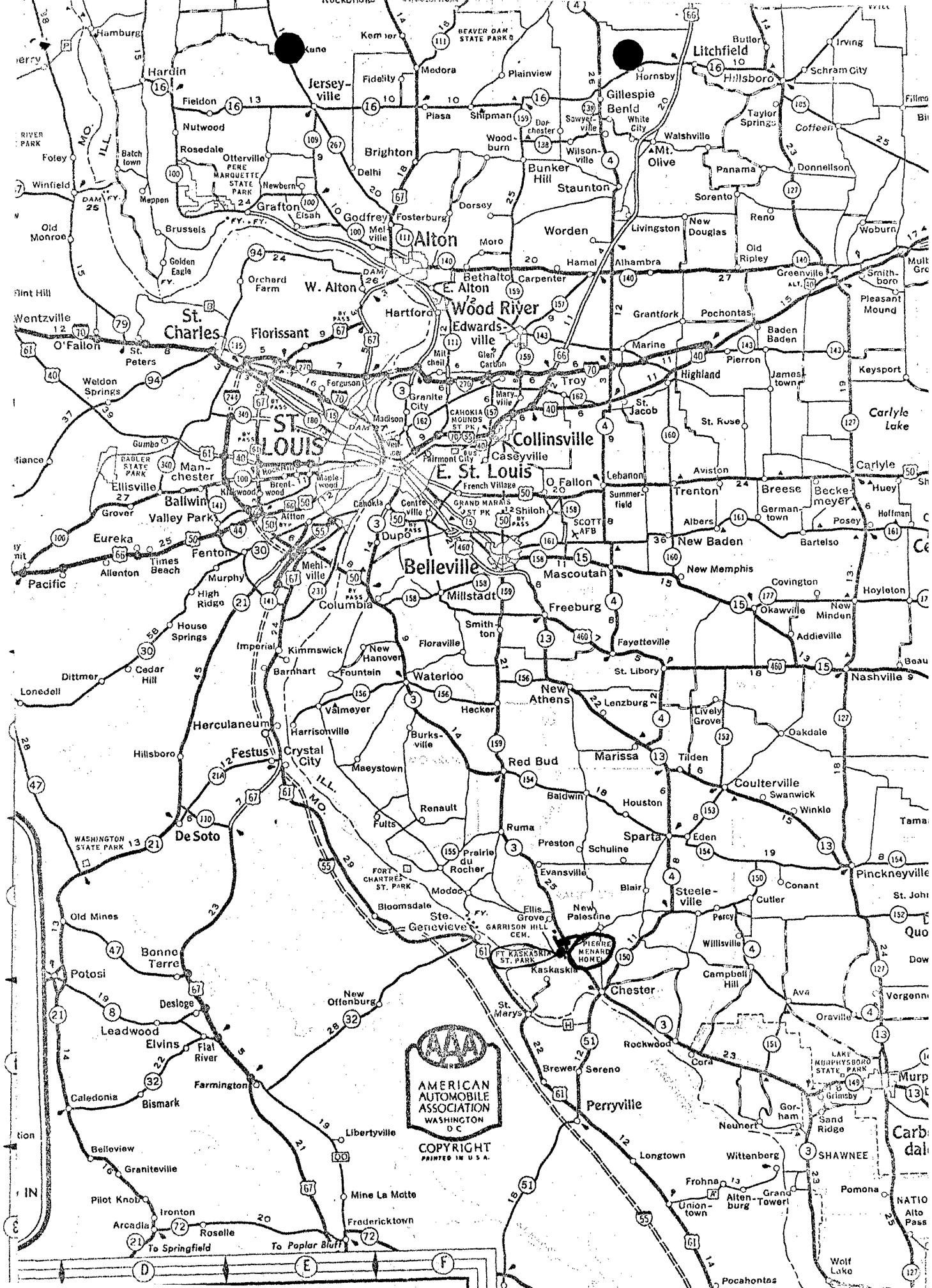


River Road

Mississippi River

Sketch Plan of Pierre Menard House
Fort Kaskaskia State Park,
Illinois

C.W. Snell, 12/18/68



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