

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received JAN 24 1983  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Afton Villa Gardens

and/or common Same

2. Location

street & number U. S. Highway 61, 0.5 miles north of St. Francisville N/A not for publication

city, town St. Francisville X vicinity of

state LA code 22 parish West Feliciana code 125

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied (caretaker)	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	N/A being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. and Mrs. Morrell Feltus Trimble

street & number 7020 Green Street (504) 861-7365

city, town New Orleans N/A vicinity of state LA 70118

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. West Feliciana Parish Courthouse

street & number Highway 61 (no specific address) P. O. Box 71

city, town St. Francisville state LA 70775

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title LA Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1982  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records LA State Historic Preservation Office

city, town Baton Rouge state LA

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>    N/A    </u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The 140 acres of rolling countryside being nominated is all that remains of the gardens of Afton Villa. Begun in 1849 and restored in 1915, the terraced garden is a typical example of southern plantation landscape architecture, albeit a rare Louisiana survivor. The garden is located about five miles north of the town of St. Francisville near Bayou Sara. Over the years the garden has lost some of its original features. Nonetheless, the features which remain are sufficiently significant for the garden to merit listing in the National Register.

The landscaping effects at Afton Villa were achieved by taking advantage of the natural contours of the property. This represented the most advanced taste in mid-nineteenth century landscape design. However, in many other ways it was a conservative and traditional southern plantation garden.

Like most southern gardens, Afton Villa has a long driveway enveloped by an alley of live oaks. (See map - letter A.) In this case the oaks are planted four abreast. However, unlike the traditional southern alley, the mile and a half long alley at Afton Villa has a series of serpentine curves which follow the contours of the land. This reflects the picturesque aesthetic of A. J. Downing and others. However, unlike a typical Downing design, the basic alley is retained. If the driveway had been designed in a purely picturesque mode, it would have abandoned the alley in favor of clumps of live oaks planted to look as though they had occurred naturally.

Like many traditional formal southern gardens, Afton Villa has terraces which descend in stages away from the house. But unlike traditional straight terraces, the terraces at Afton Villa curve elaborately to follow the contours of the land. (See map - letter B.) Again this follows the picturesque aesthetic, but not entirely because in a fully picturesque design terraces would have been abandoned in favor of a highly calculated naturalistic look. At Afton Villa the terraces descend to what was once a series of pineapple beds. However, this area, which was the lowest terrace level, is completely overgrown. The brick steps which traverse the terraces are thought to be original, though they have been cemented over.

Afton Villa Gardens' most typical traditional features are its maze and its parterre garden. (See map - letters C and D.) Most southern gardens had geometrical parterres set near the house. At Afton Villa both the parterre garden and the maze retain their original designs, though of course some of the actual plants have been replaced. The paving material for the walks has also been replaced. At one time it was compressed gravel and now it is brick. Moreover, there used to be a small gazebo in the center of the parterre garden, but it was demolished due to deterioration over twenty year ago. A sun dial marks the spot where it stood. Despite these changes, the formal portions of Afton Villa Gardens retain most of their original feeling. The pie slice sectional parterres and subsidiary areas of the parterre garden remain as does the complex rectilinear pattern of the maze. The parterre garden also retains the large live oak trees which were originally planted at each corner.

CONTINUED

**United States Department of the Interior**  
**Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet Afton Villa Gardens

Item number 7

Page 2

## Description (cont'd)

Another original feature of the garden is the almost perfectly round lake set near the main entrance. (See map - letter E.) It is a conservative feature in that it has a regular shape. If it had been designed with the picturesque aesthetic in mind, it would probably have had an irregular shape. The present cast-iron fountain in the center dates from 1936 as does the ring of azaleas around the lake.

Afton Villa itself (1849) was destroyed by fire in 1963. The brick foundations survive to an average height of about four feet. In recent years the standing walls have been stabilized and planted in the manner of a rock garden. (See map - letter F.)

Next to the parterre garden is the Barrow Family Cemetery. (See map - letter G.) The centerpiece of the cemetery is a large marble Tuscan obelisk which resembles a pilaster. It was erected by the United States Congress in memorial to Senator Alexander Barrow upon his death. The cemetery is the only feature of the present garden which predates 1849. It dates back to the time of the first plantation on the site in the late-eighteenth century. The cemetery is surrounded by a large hedge which is probably about forty years old.

On the fourth terrace level is a Victorian female statue set in a ring of hedges. (See map - letter H.) Located on axis with the formal portion of the garden (map - letters C and D), the statue was installed in its present position in 1915. It is thought that it was salvaged from the original 1849 garden.

At one time there was a semicircular entrance to the garden driveway with Victorian cast-iron gates. However, these features were demolished in the 1930's to make way for the construction of Louisiana Route 61. The present gates, fence and pigeonier looking gatehouse date from about 1936. (See map - letter I.)

More recent additions to the garden include the installation of a pond (map - letter J) and the installation of four antique statues from Vincenza. (See map - letter K.) In the small wood above the new pond there were once winding pathways. Although these are no longer visible, archaeological evidence of them still exists.

Afton Villa Gardens is popularly known for the azaleas which are planted along the alley and in other places. These date mainly from the early twentieth century. One particular strain, known as the Pride of Afton or Afton Villa Red, was developed at the gardens.

CONTINUED

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet Afton Villa Gardens

Item number 7

Page 3

Description (cont'd)

Assessment of Integrity

Despite the aforementioned changes made in the garden over the years, the essential mid-nineteenth century features survive -- i.e., the alley, the terraces, the maze, the parterre garden, and the lake at the entrance. These establish the garden's identity and significance in the history of landscape architecture. In the opinion of the State Historic Preservation Office, the remarkable fact is not that only these features survive, but rather that anything survives at all.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
			<input type="checkbox"/> science
			<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
			<input type="checkbox"/> social/humanitarian
			<input type="checkbox"/> theater
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** c.1849

**Builder/Architect** Builder: David Barrow

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

Criterion C

Afton Villa Gardens is significant in the area of landscape architecture on the state level as a rare surviving example of an antebellum plantation garden.

Afton Villa is more typical than remarkable as an example of mid-nineteenth century landscape architecture in Louisiana. It shows a basic adherence to the traditional formal southern plantation garden, but with hesitant touches of the picturesque aesthetic. However, it remains essentially a formal park. Its significance rests upon the fact that it is a rare survivor from the antebellum period. Prior to the Civil War there were at least one hundred comparable gardens in Louisiana, but today Afton Villa remains as one of only about five more or less intact examples. Moreover, its curving terraces are thought to be unique survivors in the state. Finally, it should also be noted that Afton Villa is one of only four known examples in West Feliciana Parish which retain a serpentine alley of live oaks. (Serpentine alleys were a very common feature in West Feliciana Parish.)

### Historical Sketch:

The history of Afton Villa is entwined with that of the Barrows, one of the richest and most prominent families in antebellum Louisiana. Bartholomew Barrow purchased the land in 1820 from his brother William, and in 1839 he sold it to his son David. The latter would eventually carve out a thriving plantation empire of some 2,000 to 3,000 acres which would make him, according to the 1860 census, the wealthiest planter in West Feliciana Parish.

When David Barrow purchased Afton Villa, there was a small house already on the property. In 1849, he and his second wife, Susan A. Woolfolk, built around this existing house an imposing Gothic Revival villa of some forty rooms. The gardens were designed at the same time; it is not known for certain whether a trained landscape architect was employed.

David Barrow died in 1874 and his wife continued to live at Afton Villa until 1876, when she sold the estate. The property has changed hands numerous times since then. As noted elsewhere, the house was destroyed by fire in 1963.



**United States Department of the Interior**  
**Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet Afton Villa Gardens

Item number 9

Page 1

## Bibliography

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Overdyke, W. Darrell. Louisiana Plantation Homes, Colonial and Antebellum. American Legacy Press, New York. 1981. Page 25.

LeBlanc, Joyce Yeldell. The Pelican Guide to Gardens of Louisiana. Pelican Publishing Company, 1974. Pages 62, 63 and 64.

Cooper, J. Wesley. Treasury of Louisiana Plantation Houses, Southern Historical Publications, Inc. Natchez, 1961.

Afton Villa Nomination Form prepared by Mrs. Morrell Feltus Trimble. Copy on file at Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office.

Personal communication with Suzanne Turner, LSU Department of Landscape Architecture. Professor Turner specializes in historic landscaping, especially antebellum southern gardens.

Conveyance Records, West Feliciana Parish.

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet Afton Villa Gardens

Item number 10

Page 1

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10. Geographical Data

Boundary Justification

The boundaries were drawn to encompass the surviving features of the mid-nineteenth century garden and the ruins of Afton Villa itself. The original garden was actually larger than the nominated area, but nothing survives outside of the present boundaries.