

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The site of Germantown is situated in a clearing at the foot of a hill, amid rolling forest land near Minden. The Germantown colony once consisted of many buildings including stores, barns, houses, shops, a kitchen-dining hall, and a bachelor's hall. Today however only Countess Leon's residence and the kitchen-dining hall remain, being presently surrounded by sympathetic but non-associated buildings. To the north is a barn complex and to the south is a modern log cabin which houses a bathroom. The bathroom, the Leon house and the kitchen-dining hall are enclosed by a six foot chain link fence. The boundaries encompass only the two remaining historic buildings along with an adjacent well.

Both Countess Leon's residence and the kitchen-dining hall are constructed of hewn logs with dovetailing at the corners. The kitchen-dining hall has a dry wall stone cellar and an adjacent frame shack (it is now known when the shack was built. None of the porches is original and many of the windows are replaced.

Most of the buildings of Germantown have been lost, but the present buildings are significant even in their altered state. They convey in their crude and primitive character something of the life style of the Germantown settlers.

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 type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Germantown is significant as the earliest religious communal settlement in the state of Louisiana. It was founded by Germans in 1836 and lasted as a commune until 1871. Elisa Leon, the "Countess of Leon," led the founding of Germantown. She was the widow of the religious leader Maximilian Ludwig, "Count of Leon" (1788-1834), whose ideas were the basis of the settlement. The surviving buildings convey a sense of the settlement's history in several ways. First, the Countess's residence, as the home of one of the settlement's leaders, and the kitchen-dining hall, one of the centers of daily life in the settlement, were among the most important buildings in Germantown in its historically significant period. Second, they have a rustic character which gives a sense of the primitive, pioneering side of life in the settlement. Finally, the Countess's residence and the kitchen-dining hall, along with the well and the shack, communicate the sense of a complex much better than a single building would.

"Count Leon" was born Bernhard Mueller and changed his name several times during his career before settling on the name by which he became best known. He was driven by the conviction that he was the "organ" chosen by God to prepare the world for Christ's rule on earth. He believed that in 1816 God had vested him with a secret power and that it would soon be followed by a public power and authority, which would lead to revolutions and unrest among the peoples of the world. After this time would come a great judgment, and the organ was to be one of the judges sent by God. This judgment would in due course be followed by the return of Christ in human form and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.¹

Count Leon began his career in 1816 at Würzburg in Germany, where he quickly rose to leadership of a movement centered around this belief that the millenium lay in the near future. His appeal seems to have rested on an extraordinary ability to persuade people, including several important people, of the truth of his ideas. In 1829, he published a message to the world that the time of the public power of the organ was beginning. Soon afterward he was arrested by officers of the Bavarian government at his estate in Offenbach. An agreement was worked out according to which Count Leon would leave Bavaria. He soon laid plans to come to America.²

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Arndt, Karl J. R. The Genesis of Germantown. Pamphlet reprinted from Louisiana Historical Quarterly, Vol. 24 (April 1941).
 Copies of documents at Germantown in the possession of Rita Moore Krouse.
 Deiler, J. Hanno. Eine Vergessne Deutsche Colonie. New Orleans, 1900. Pamphlet.
 Harris, D. W., and B. M. Hulse. The History of Claiborne Parish, Louisiana. New Orleans: W. B. Stansburry and Co., 1886.
~~Krouse, Rita Moore. Fragments of a Dream: The Story of Germantown. Ruston,~~

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approx. one
 UTM REFERENCES

1970

A	1,5	4,7,8,4,0,0	3,6,1,7,8,5,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated area is an approximate 50' x 60' rectangle which encompasses the two remaining historic buildings.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Dan Hodson

Revised by John Easterly and Jonathan Fricker

ORGANIZATION Coordinating and Development Council of NW La. DATE Revised March 1978
 STREET & NUMBER P. O. Box 37005 TELEPHONE
 CITY OR TOWN Shreveport STATE Louisiana

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Bernard Canier

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE 24 April 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

[Signature]

DATE 3/14/79

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST: *Bill Labovich*
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE March 9, 1979

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Germantown

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8. Significance (cont'd)

The estate of Offenbach was sold, and in July, 1831, Count Leon and about forty of his followers sailed for New York. They first settled at George Rapp's colony at Economy, Pennsylvania, but conflicts between the two religious leaders soon led Count Leon and his followers to move on to nearby Philippsburg (near present-day Monaca, Pennsylvania), which they hoped to establish as "a gathering place for all true believers to rescue them from the destruction of the impending judgment." But the settlement did not take root, in part due to continued conflicts with the Rappites.³

In September, 1833, Count Leon and his followers embarked on a voyage that took them to Grand Ecore, Louisiana (on the Red River in present-day Natchitoches Parish), where in February, 1834, they founded a new settlement. Grand Ecore, however, proved to be a disastrous choice for the group. Not long after their arrival, a yellow fever epidemic broke out, and many of the settlers died, including in late August, 1834, Count Leon himself. His faithful followers refused to believe that his death was final and continued to be confident that he would one day return to judge the world. Meanwhile, his wife Elisa, "Countess of Leon," who was at that time in her mid-thirties, became head of the group, with Dr. Johann Georg Goentgen, a highly educated man who had been Count Leon's secretary, as religious advisor. The group survived the epidemic, but then the settlement was hit by floods which destroyed many of the houses and even the cemetery.⁴

The Countess soon decided to move the settlement to a better location, and in July, 1836, they started on the journey which led them to a site about eight miles northeast of present-day Minden, where they established the settlement of Germantown. They bought a tract of land from a homesteader and proceeded to build homes and other structures and plant crops. But in 1839 they discovered that by a mistake they had actually settled on government land. Given this discovery, John Bopp, the settlement's business manager, claimed the land as a homestead for the settlement.

In the years immediately after 1836, the settlement took shape. Soon there were five dwelling houses plus the "bachelor hall" for unmarried men. There were also the kitchen-dining hall, the general store, and the school, as well as several barns, workshops, and outbuildings. The amount of tilled land was steadily extended and the livestock increased. Most of the settlers were well educated, and they took care to provide for the education of their children. Dr. Goentgen was their first teacher, and later William Stakowsky succeeded him.⁵

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8. Significance (cont'd)

The general store, run by John Bopp as storekeeper and Stakowsky as bookkeeper, was a good one. Almost anything available in a typical general store of the period could be obtained from this store, which did a thriving business, at least until the Civil War. The settlement also had its own blacksmith shop and its own cotton gin.⁶

At least some of the settlers at Germantown continued to remain loyal to the religious ideas of Count Leon. According to Karl J. R Arndt in "The Genesis of Germantown," poems written by some of the settlers as late as 1858 still revealed their belief in Count Leon and their confidence that he would return to judge the world.⁷ Religious services in Germantown were held in private homes in winter and in summer outdoors in a grove of oaks, weather permitting.⁸

According to an interview from about 1900 conducted by J. Hanno Deiler, Count Leon's brand of religion was a very important aspect of life in Germantown during its historically significant period. The interview was with a Mrs. Rainold, who had been reared in Countess Leon's house in Germantown. In 1852, at the age of five, she and her two sisters were left orphans by the death of their mother. According to Mrs. Rainold, "She [the mother] was a good friend of the Countess Leon, who promised her in her last illness to take care of us and to bring us up in her own house in Germantown. She also promised to respect the wish of my mother that we should not be taken up into the religious community of Germantown." As a child Mrs. Rainold had attended religious services in Germantown, and according to her account the teachings of Count Leon were still the basis of religious belief in the community: "We were not instructed in the teachings of Count Leon, since we, as has been said, stood outside the religious community, but nobody objected if we attended the religious services... The spiritual head of the community at the time of our coming was Dr. Goentgen, the successor of Leon."⁹

Available evidence strongly suggests that Germantown was a true commune; that is, its economic resources belonged to the group as a whole and there was no private property. According to an account of an interview done about 1886 with William Stakowsky, the store's bookkeeper and for a time the teacher, "The colony...had its own minister, physician, mechanics, etc. and of course held everything in common."¹⁰ In her recollections to Deiler, Mrs. Rainold also touched on the economic arrangements of the settlement: "The entire property belonged to the community, and nobody but the business manager ever had any money in hand."¹¹

A research report based on documents at Germantown makes the following statements about the question of the commune: "Apart from the records kept for the regular customers of the store at Germantown, was another record. This

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8. Significance (cont'd)

was kept for the members of the colony,...which was truly a communal colony. No one had money of his own. Whenever he desired an article, or needed goods from the store, he was allowed a certain amount every month. Whenever he went to the store to get what he wanted, it was entered into the ledger."¹² Copies of pages from this ledger support this statement. The pages date from 1851-1852, and the heading at the top of the page reads "Gemeinde Conto at Germantown."¹³ The first word is German, and means "commune" or "community," according to Lagenscheidt's Concise German Dictionary (edition of 1964). The second word is Italian and means "account" or "bill" according to Cassell's Italian Dictionary (edition of 1964). Thus the phrase would translate "Community [or commune] Account at Germantown." It is unlikely that accounts would be kept in such a manner if the settlement were not communal.

Germantown's decline began even before the Civil War. Although some people other than the original settlers moved in, the settlement consistently lost population. The Civil War apparently furthered its decline, especially economically, and the situation did not improve after the war. In 1871, the communal arrangement was ended, and Countess Leon and her daughter Anna moved to Bastrop, where another daughter, Elizabeth, had already taken up residence. The other early leaders of Germantown - John Bopp and Dr. Goentgen - were dead, and it seems there was no one with the will and means to keep the settlement going. The population of the settlement throughout its history seems never to have been large. A list of persons known to have lived at Germantown at some time during the period 1836-1870 has been compiled by Rita Moore Krouse in Fragments of A Dream, and it numbers only about a hundred names.¹⁴

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Notes

1. Karl J. R. Arndt, The Genesis of Germantown, Louisiana, pp. 43-44. Pamphlet reprinted from Louisiana Historical Quarterly, Vol. 23 (April 1941). Hereinafter cited as Arndt, Genesis.
2. Arndt, Genesis, 9, 43, 45-47.
3. Arndt, Genesis, 47, 49-54.
4. Rita Moore Krouse, Fragments of a Dream: The Story of Germantown (Ruston, Louisiana: Leader Press, 1962), 18, 50-51. Hereinafter cited as Krouse, Fragments; Karl J. R. Arndt, George Rapp's Harmony Society: 1785-1847, Revised edition (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972), 450.
5. Krouse, Fragments, 51-53, 57-58.
6. Krouse, Fragments, 60-62. For additional data on the store, see research report attached to Melvin Stallcup's letter of April 28, 1977 to Ruth LeCompte, located in the National Register file for Germantown in the offices of the Division of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; hereinafter cited as "Research Report of 1977."
7. Arndt, Genesis, 57.
8. Krouse, Fragments, 65.
9. Krouse translates Deiler's interview in Fragments, pp. 86-87. For the original German see J. Hanno Deiler, Eine Vergessne Deutsche Colonie (New Orleans, Louisiana, 1900), a pamphlet, pp. 9-12.
10. D. W. Harris and B. M. Hulse, The History of Claiborne Parish, Louisiana (New Orleans: W. B. Stansburry and Co., 1886), 92.
11. Krouse translation of Deiler in Fragments, p. 88.
12. "Research Report of 1977," p. 9.
13. Copies of pages from ledger are in the National Register file on Germantown.
14. Krouse, Fragments, 72,75,80,100-102; "Research Report of 1977," p. 8.

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9. Bibliography

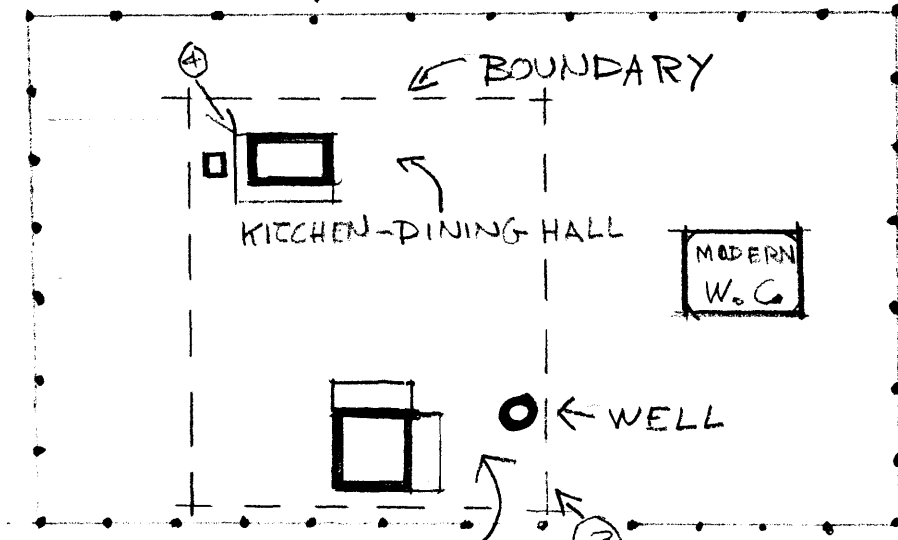
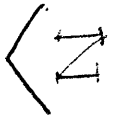
Louisiana: Leader Press, 1962.

Research report attached to Melvin Stallcup's letter of April 28, 1977 to Ruth LeCompte. Located in National Register file for Germantown in the offices of the Division of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

GERMANTOWN BUILDINGS



CHAIN LINK FENCE



LEON HOUSE

2

1