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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USD/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Hearn, Lafcadio House, New Orleans, Orleans Parish, LA

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Hearn, Lafcadio House

Other Name/Site Number:



2. LOCATION

Street & Number 1565-67 Cleveland Ave.

Not for publication: NA

City/Town New Orleans

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana

Code: LA

County: Orleans

Code: 071

Zip Code: 70112

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: Statewide: Locally: X

Signature of Certifying Official/Title Jonathan Fricker, Deputy SHPO, Dept of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

Date 3/16/06

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official/Title

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
Determined eligible for the National Register
Determined not eligible for the National Register
Removed from the National Register
Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

5. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property
Private: X
Public-Local:
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property
Building(s): X
District:
Site:
Structure:
Object:

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing
1

Non contributing
buildings
sites
structures
objects
0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: NA

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: domestic Sub: multiple dwelling

Current: domestic Sub: multiple dwelling

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Greek Revival; Italianate

Materials:

Foundation: brick

Walls: brick

Roof: other: tar and gravel; asphalt

Other: cast-iron

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Lafcadio Hearn House (1860 – 61) is a two story, common bond brick, double townhouse with elevations set directly on the street. Rising to a parapet with a distinctive frontal stepped tablet, the house is transitional Greek Revival – Italianate. It is set prominently on a street corner in an area near the New Orleans Central Business District characterized today by modern buildings and parking lots. By at least the 1880s, the candidate was being used as a boarding house. The exterior has been little altered, the interior more so, but the house would still be easily recognizable to its most notable tenant – local color writer Lafcadio Hearn.

There has been some question as to whether the house was originally built as a single residence and converted to a double later. The architectural evidence overwhelmingly indicates that it was built as a double house. There is no evidence of a renovation program to effect such a change. The house's Greek Revival era detailing is consistent throughout. The wall dividing the units is unbroken (at least until recently in the rear). Each living unit has a curving stair ascending to the second floor. The staircases feature mid-century details. They also match, mirroring each other in configuration. Moreover, they are set opposite each other on either side of the dividing wall. Finally, each unit has a narrow service wing. These are set back-to-back in mirrored configuration with corresponding fireplaces set on either side of a central chimney flue.

Each unit is one room wide. In the main block each unit consists of two tall roughly square rooms set front to back on each story with the stair hall behind. On the lower story, the two rooms are connected by a wide set of pocket doors. Behind the stair hall is a recessed service wing consisting of two narrow rooms upstairs and down with wooden galleries. The service wings culminate in small privy chambers upstairs and down. Like the wings, these are set in mirrored configuration. Collectively they form a distinctive protrusion at the very back of the house.

Unusual in a double house, the units are entered on different elevations, made possible, of course, by the corner lot location. One unit is entered on the Cleveland Avenue façade, while the other is entered on the S.

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Robertson Street façade (which reads mainly as a side elevation). There is also a second entrance on S. Robertson further back that accesses the stair hall from the street. All three entrances feature Greek shoulder molded surrounds and granite stoops. Shoulder moldings are also found on the interior pocket doors.

The house's other major Greek Revival features are the wooden aedicule style mantels found in most rooms of the main block. The entrance doors feature some rounded panels (some with glass) – evidence of the rising Italianate taste. In addition, two of the downstairs mantels in the main block are arched in the Italianate manner. They are made of painted slate. The decorative cast-iron cantilevered second story covered balcony that embraces both street elevations should be viewed within the context of the Italianate taste. Featuring a sinuous vine and leaf design, the balcony has a curious documentary history. Its distinctive shape (with a curve turning the corner) appears on the 1885 Sanborn map. But it does not appear on the 1895 map (this shows only a front balcony – on the Cleveland Ave. elevation). However, the two-sided balcony with the curving turn appears again on the 1908 Sanborn Map. It must always have been there because both elevations feature second story French doors that open onto it. And these have original shutters attached with mid-nineteenth century hinges that are *in situ*. Finally, the style of the balcony is something one would expect from about 1860.

Exterior alterations include the application of stucco to the brick walls up to the level of the lower story window sills and the addition of a small lean-to on one service wing (Robertson St.). Also, the galleries on the service wing have been replaced. (The upper galleries no longer provide access to the rear privies.) Interior changes include new flooring veneer in the lower story of the main block (the original 4 inch boards are still visible upstairs) and the installation of some partially lowered ceilings for ductwork. The area under each staircase has been identically enclosed for a half bath. The frame dividing wall has been removed from both stories of the service wing. This has created larger rooms with two fireplaces in each. The upper story of the main block has been reconfigured with side halls that provide access to the large front bedrooms. The rear rooms of the upper story main block have been carved up for bathrooms and closets.

Despite these alterations, the exterior is largely intact and recognizable as is most of the interior on the main block lower story. There is no doubt that Lafcadio Hearn, who lived there in the 1880s, would find the house familiar.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National Register Criteria: A__ B_X C__ D__

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): NA A__ B__ C__ D__ E__ F__ G__

Areas of Significance: literature

Period(s) of Significance: 1881-1887

Significant Dates: NA

Significant Person(s): Hearn, Lafcadio

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: unknown

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The house at 1565-67 Cleveland is of local significance in the area of literature because it was the home of Lafcadio Hearn, a prolific and important New Orleans local color writer. Hearn rented rooms in the house from late 1881 until 1887, when he moved briefly to New York, then to the French West Indies, and finally to Japan. Hearn lived in multiple residences during his 10 year tenure in New Orleans; the house at 1565-67 Cleveland is easily the house where he lived the longest. Additionally, it is where he lived during his most important and prolific phase. The author's works produced while living at the candidate gained substantially in importance as he transitioned from writing local color essays to full-length manuscripts describing New Orleans culture. Also, while living at the boardinghouse, he completed the work for which he is best known in this country, *Chita: A Memory of Lost Island*.

Lafcadio Hearn was born in 1850 on the Greek island of Leucadia, the son of a British military surgeon, Charles Hearn, and an island native, Rosa Cassimati Hearn. During his youth, Lafcadio and his mother traveled to Ireland to be looked after by his paternal grandmother while his father continued to serve in the British military. This was the beginning of Hearn's experience as a wanderer. He never again settled in one city, much less residence, for very long, until moving to New Orleans. In 1856, his parents' marriage was annulled and Rosa traveled back to Greece, leaving Lafcadio in the care of his paternal relatives. He continued to be passed around among relatives and friends of the family, and attended St. Cuthbert's College in England, until 1867. There, he was blinded in one eye in a school yard accident. For the rest of his life, his damaged eye caused him self-consciousness and embarrassment over his appearance. He moved into his great-aunt's house, and after his father died, he was sent to the home of his great-aunt's former maid in London. In 1869, he was sent to a distant relation's home in Cincinnati, Ohio with the understanding that he would receive assistance in getting settled. The relative, however, turned him out into the streets with only a pittance. Hearn struggled, virtually penniless, until he began writing professionally for *The Cincinnati Enquirer*. He went from the *Enquirer* to *The Commercial*, where he continued to write essays on a variety of subjects.

Lafcadio Hearn moved from Cincinnati to New Orleans in 1877. He left behind his African-American wife, Alethea Foley, to whom he was illegally married in 1874, when miscegenation was still outlawed. He began writing for *The City Item*, a New Orleans newspaper, in 1878. After saving most of his income from writing, he opened The Hard Times restaurant with a friend who became his business partner. Within one month of the restaurant's opening, his partner absconded with the cook and all of the cash on hand. Lafcadio was left with only a failed business and a load of debt. He continued at *The City Item* until late 1881. For the next few years Hearn worked for the *Times-Democrat*. During his time in New Orleans, he submitted countless essays to national publications, including *Harper's Monthly*, *Harper's Weekly*, and *Harper's Bazaar*.

Hearn moved to the island of Martinique, in the French West Indies, in 1887. He hoped that he would be able to publish the same sort of local color stories of Martinique that he had of New Orleans in national publications. The response was disappointing. Hearn once again was struck by wanderlust, and found himself traveling in 1890 to Japan for what he expected to be an assignment of a few months in length. He immersed himself in Japanese culture and married Setsu Koizumi, the daughter of a samurai. He gained Japanese citizenship in 1896, when Setsu's father adopted him. Hearn was 46 at the time. He continued writing and went on to work as a teacher in Japan, both at the lower and university levels. His local color descriptions of Japan became the basis of western opinions of the country, and even among the Japanese themselves as their country became more westernized. Hearn died of heart failure in Japan in 1904.

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Lafcadio Hearn is best known for his local color writing, which depicted life in New Orleans (often the underclass) using exact details, local speech and customs, and a strong sense of place. It has been argued (Kenneth Starr, *Inventing New Orleans*) that Hearn's description of New Orleans, produced for consumption on a national level, has partly shaped what New Orleans is today. By embracing Hearn's somewhat sensationalistic descriptions of Creoles, voodoo, and street life, so goes the theory, the modern culture of the city reflects the author's vision.

George Washington Cable, the best known writer of New Orleans local color, befriended Hearn when he moved to New Orleans, and aided him in getting published in *Century* and *Harper's Weekly* magazines. They eventually collaborated on recording African-Creole street music, with Hearn writing the words and Cable writing the melodies. Their friendship was off-and-on due to professional jealousy and differences of opinion on religion.

From 1877 to 1881 Hearn boarded at several addresses in New Orleans. The boardinghouse at 1565-67 Cleveland Avenue was the author's residence in the city from late 1881 to 1887 (per Hearn letters, eyewitness accounts and other primary sources). It was here that he entered his most prolific phase and matured as an artist. His job at the *Times-Democrat* paid more and required fewer hours of work, allowing him time to write longer magazine articles, which were a stepping stone to his ultimate achievement in this period: the novella *Chita, A Memory of Lost Island*. The novella was based on stories Hearn heard while in Louisiana of I'le Derniere, a barrier island washed away by the great hurricane of 1856. According to his correspondence, Hearn began to conceive the work as early as December 1882. It was first published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1888 and released by Harper Brothers in book form the following year. As his letters indicate, he began writing *Chita* during sojourns to Grand Isle (on the Louisiana coast) and completed it while living at 1565-67 Cleveland. Hearn's output while living at the candidate was indeed prodigious. In addition to *Chita*, he wrote countless pieces for national magazines and local newspapers; produced and had published a Creole cookbook, *La Cuisine Creole*, and *Gombo Zhebes*, a dictionary of Creole proverbs; translated his first literary pieces; and co-edited *Historical Sketch Book and Guide to New Orleans*.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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- Gale, Robert L. *A Lafcadio Hearn Companion*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002.
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- Metziner, Sylvia Verdun. "Lafcadio Hearn: The New Orleans Years." Bookman's Weekly. Vol. 86, No. 12. Clifton, New Jersey: Bookman Publications, 1988, pp. 24-30.
- New Orleans Historic District Landmarks Commission Designation Report for 1565-67 Cleveland Avenue. August 3, 2004.
- Sanborn Maps, New Orleans, 1885, 1895, 1908.
- Starr, S. Frederick, editor. *Inventing New Orleans: Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*. University Press of Mississippi, 2001.
- Tinker, Edward Larocque. *Lafcadio Hearn's American Days*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1924.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register. (partially)
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository):

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: less than an acre

UTM References: **Zone** **Easting** **Northing**
 15 782040 3317720

Verbal Boundary Description: Lot 1, Square 370, 1st Municipal District, City of New Orleans

Boundary Justification: Boundaries follow property lines of lot historically associated with the house.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register Staff, LA Division of Historic Preservation (assisted by Delia LaBarre)

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Date: May 2005

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