

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Lambert House, Convent, St. James Parish

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Lambert House

Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number 5669 LA HWY 44

Not for publication: NA

City/Town Convent

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: St. James Code: 093

Zip Code: 70723

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

March 29, 2005 Date

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):

Edouard H. Beall 5/10/05

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
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: Louisiana's French Creole Architecture

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: domestic Sub: single dwelling
Current: work in progress Sub:

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: other: French Creole
Materials:

Foundation: brick
Walls: weatherboard
Roof: wood shakes
Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Lambert House is an early nineteenth century three-room French Creole house. Its hand hewn and pegged frame features *bousillage* infill. In September 2001 the small house was moved about a quarter of a mile on Louisiana Highway 44 (Mississippi River Road) – both locations on the outskirts of the small community of Convent. Today the candidate is being pristinely restored for use as a guesthouse. Because of the condition of the house, various items had to be replicated. However, virtually all of its French Creole character-defining features are original.

The September 2001 move was necessary to save the house from demolition. The then owner wanted the land entirely for agriculture, devoid of buildings. The candidate was severely deteriorated and there were various alterations and a rear addition. The goal of the almost completed restoration was to restore the house as much as possible to its original appearance. So the rear addition was not moved and alterations were corrected. (For example, the front room had been subdivided and the Federal style mantelpiece described below was encased in beaverboard.) The core was moved intact. The fragile Norman truss roof (see below) was taken apart piece by piece, numbered and carefully reassembled. (Restoration specialist Robert Judice felt that greater damage would be done by trying to move the deteriorated roof structure intact.)

The new setting is within site of the old and is virtually identical in character. The only difference is that the house was moved from one side of River Road (LA HWY 44) to the other side. It originally faced the Mississippi River. Now it faces the opposite direction, on the other side of River Road, between the highway and the Mississippi River levee. At this point along the river there is actually quite a bit of land between the road and the levee. The house was sited back from the road among mature oak trees. A period-looking (but new) fence surrounds what will be a small front garden. Both the original and new location would be described as semi-rural. The original location had almost entirely new construction (including a trailer) within the viewsheds. The present viewsheds include both historic and non-historic houses.

The Lambert House's constructional details indicate a date very early in the nineteenth century, perhaps the last years of the eighteenth. (One cannot be certain. Constructional clues change slowly over time.) Its heavily built, complex roof structure is something not seen in Louisiana's French Creole houses after about 1820. The one stylistic clue is the mantelpiece (described below), which looks 1820s – a bit later than Norman trusses. (Perhaps the present mantelpiece replaced an earlier one.)

The Lambert House is indeed a *petite maison* in terms of indoor living space. In typical French Creole fashion, there are no halls. Spanning the façade is a room 21 ½ feet by 18 ½. Behind are two rooms of roughly equal size (one ten feet by eleven, the other ten by twelve). This core is capped by a quite generous gable end roof with a Norman truss (a heavily built roof structure found in Louisiana's earliest surviving French Creole houses). The truss' kingpost is thirteen feet, two inches.

The house is raised a foot or so off the ground on brick piers (as it was originally). It has a deep inset gallery spanning the façade with a typical French Creole exposed beam ceiling. The gallery posts were long gone, but the restoration specialist (Robert Judice) found an original chamfered post being used as a gallery floor support. The four posts presently in place are copies of it. (All replication was done in cypress, the type of wood used originally.) A mark on the surviving posts revealed the profile of the simple hand rail, which was then replicated. Marks on the plastered façade indicated the presence of a chair rail. The surviving chair rail on the interior was copied for the façade. The façade's two French door openings are symmetrically placed. (Symmetry is not typical in French Creole houses.) The French doors and shutters

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were long gone. The ones in place at present were handcrafted by the restorer, based on what would have been typical for a house of this period. The weatherboard on the sides and rear dates from the restoration. (The original was badly deteriorated.) A wood shingle roof was re-introduced.

The architectural evidence indicated that the fairly small window openings on the sides and rear originally were not filled with glass. It was clear that the surviving window sashes were additions. To be able to heat and cool the house, but still give the semblance of an open window, openings were fitted with a single sheet of glass. The shutters which once covered the windows were gone, except for one, which was used as a template for the remainder. The attic is ventilated via two shuttered openings on each side. These openings are much taller than those below.

The three rooms feature the characteristic French Creole exposed beam ceiling (beams unbeaded). Hand planed ceiling boards are about seven inches wide in the front room and range from ten to twelve inches in the two rear rooms. Walls are finished in plaster (which was redone as part of the restoration). The front room's end wall fireplace features a Federal style mantelpiece with slightly splayed pilasters, an entablature with a molded cornice and a shelf that wraps around the chimney flue. The pilasters have molded capitals and bases. Most of the chair rail in the three rooms survived, with only a small amount of repair and replication necessary. The same is true of the baseboards. The batten door between the two rear rooms is original, while the doors (2) opening from the front room into the rear rooms date from the restoration.

As observed above, the soon to be completed restoration project was almost entirely a matter of correcting alterations and replicating missing features. The only actual change made (other than the single pane of glass over the windows) was changing a window into a door on the rear elevation. Because the candidate will be a guest house, one of the rear rooms did not have to be converted into a modern kitchen. A "kitchen" is cleverly concealed in a custom made corner cabinet in the front room. One rear room was converted for bathroom use.

Assessment of Integrity:

Admittedly the condition of the Lambert House necessitated replication of missing and/or severely deteriorated elements, as described above. However, the important point in terms of Register eligibility is that almost all of its character-defining French Creole features are original – the floorplan, *bousillage*, exposed ceiling beams on the gallery and interior, and the heavily built Norman truss roof (albeit reassembled). The only French Creole features replicated are the two French doors on the façade. Other noteworthy original details are the handsome mantelpiece and the interior chair rail. As an exceedingly rare example of an early small French Creole dwelling, the Lambert House merits National Register listing, as explained in Part 8.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National Register Criteria: A__ B__ C_X D__

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

Areas of Significance: architecture

Period(s) of Significance: c.1810

Significant Dates: c.1810

Significant Person(s): NA

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 Lambert House is of local architectural significance as one of a limited number of French Creole residences remaining in St. James Parish, which once had many more examples. It is particularly important as a rare surviving example of a small French Creole house.

St. James was settled in the French colonial period and became a government unit (parish) in 1807. Its economy rested almost entirely on sugarcane cultivation and processing. The famed 1858 Persac map of the Mississippi River shows some 111 St. James Parish plantations identified by name, plus there are a large number of unnamed agricultural tracts.

Of course, one will never know the number of French Creole houses that once existed in the parish. However, given the foregoing settlement patterns, it is clear that they once would have been thick on the ground, surely over one hundred in number. But today, survey records show only thirteen survivors to represent the parish's native architectural patrimony. (This does not include late nineteenth century houses that continue to have a French Creole shape.)

The Lambert House is particularly important for its small size. *Petite maisons* such as this were far more common than medium or large size French Creole houses, but it is the larger houses that have survived. (This is true across Louisiana as a whole.) Houses this small are not ripe for redevelopment, unless under certain circumstances such as the guest house use for the candidate. As the only one of its type in St. James, the restored Lambert House makes a very important contribution to the parish's architectural patrimony.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Historic structures survey, St. James Parish, commissioned by the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, on file at the Louisiana State Library.

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):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreege of Property: less than an acre

UTM References: **Zone Easting Northing**
 15 710980 3320280

Verbal Boundary Description: Boundaries parallel elevations of the house, each at a distance of 20 feet.

Boundary Justification: There are no historic boundaries to recognize for this moved property. Discrete boundaries were chosen, as noted above.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register staff

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Date: November 2004

PROPERTY OWNERS

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