

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Camp Hamilton House, Jefferson Davis 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: Camp Hamilton House

Other Name/Site Number:

12

2. LOCATION

Street & Number 2200 East Academy Ave.

Not for publication: NA

City/Town Jennings

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: Jefferson Davis Code: 053

Zip Code: 70546

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

January 9, 2004 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): Daniel J. Vidian 2/17/04

for 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: Louisiana's French Creole Architecture

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

Historic: domestic                      Sub: single dwelling  
Current: domestic                      Sub: single dwelling

**7. DESCRIPTION**

Architectural Classification: other: French Creole

Materials:

Foundation: brick  
Walls: weatherboard  
Roof: asphalt  
Other:

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### **Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**

The one-and-a-half story, gable end French Creole house now at 2200 East Academy in Jennings was moved there in 1974 from his original location on the outskirts of Opelousas. It was built on a plantation called Camp Hamilton, and according to tradition, was the overseer's house. It is being dated to c.1830 based on the architectural evidence. At the time of the move, the new location in Jefferson Davis Parish very near the Acadia Parish line was entirely rural and hence quite compatible. Since that time houses have been built in the area (one street only) and it is now within the corporate limits of Jennings. Today the setting would best be described as semi-rural -- a subdivision-looking street in the country (see enclosed viewshed photos). The candidate occupies a two-acre parcel with a wetlands area behind. While the original house retains most of its character-defining features, there is a large addition ending in an open carport at the rear (labeled porte-cochere on architectural plans).

### The Move:

Information on the house in its original setting and the 1974 move and subsequent restoration by Judge Walter Peters is from the following sources: pre-move photos in the possession of the current owner, combined with the architectural evidence, and an interview with Jeff Hebert, who worked on the move and restoration project. Mr. Hebert indicated that the core was moved in one piece, with the usual removal of the roof and gallery. Pre-move photos show that the house was quite deteriorated. The gallery that once spanned the facade was largely gone. All that remained was the roof overhang (minus the plate). A one room kitchen addition at the rear was removed.

### The House:

The one-and-a-half story gable end house is of *bousillage* construction (a mixture of mud and Spanish moss packed between the wall studs). The plaster that once covered the walls on the interior and on the façade was largely gone at the time of the move, revealing the French angle braces (angle braces that are extremely steep, in contrast to English joinery, where the angle is almost 45%). The house has a typical French Creole floorplan with no halls. The front range consists of three rooms. The configuration of the rear range cannot be determined with absolute certainty (see below). The three-room front range registers on the façade in a symmetrical pattern of openings more typical of Anglo-influenced French Creole architecture. At the center is a wide doorway filled with suitably wide French doors (twelve panes per leaf) and a six pane transom. (It reads like the entrance to a central hall plan house.) To each side of the central entrance is a window-French door-window pattern. Windows throughout the house are six over six. French doors have four panes per leaf. The façade openings, as well as those on the interior, feature a fairly delicate molding profile typical of circa 1830. The façade is finished off with a baseboard and a chair rail. As noted previously, the gallery was largely gone in the old location. The present one, dating from the restoration, was based on what would have been typical. It features chamfered columns and a simple balustrade, and is indeed appropriate for the house.

One suspects that the rear range had the standard French Creole treatment of a small room at each corner (*cabinet*) with a larger space (open or enclosed) in the middle. (This supposition is based on what would have been typical and certain clues in the pre-move photos.) However, it is impossible to be certain because this area was heavily reworked after the move. It now consists of one long room with a small room at one end. The wall separating the two spaces is new. Pre-move photos show a staircase at roughly the middle of the rear range. It was recycled and moved to a new location (abutting the new wall).

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The three room front range is virtually unchanged on the interior. Ceilings feature the typical French Creole look of exposed beam ceilings. The ceiling boards are beaded; the beams are not. Each room has the same high molded baseboard and molded chair rail. As noted previously, openings feature a fairly delicate molding typical of circa 1830. According to Mr. Hebert, the various batten French doors are original to the house. They have been rehung, however. The two mantels, one in each of the side front rooms, are identical. They feature simple board pilasters with a strip of wood at the top rather than molding and a fairly intricately molded cornice supporting a simple mantel shelf. The shelf itself extends (via a thin strip of wood) to wrap around the chimney flue in the French manner. (The strip of wood on each side has a mark showing where presumably it was cut and put back together when the chimneys were removed.)

The baseboards and chair-rail found in the reworked rear range are different from those of the front range (simpler and the baseboard is not as high). Whether this woodwork is original or from the restoration is not known. The same baseboard-chair rail treatment encircles the rear range, including the rear wall, which has paneling installed during the restoration. So, either the chair rail was removed and reinstalled on the rear wall, or the entire treatment dates from the restoration.

The house in its new site received a large addition that more than doubled its size. The new wing, almost as wide as the house, extends from the rear, but has a side portion that ends in an open carport. The addition is sheathed in brick and weatherboards. Other features/finishes dating from the restoration (other than those previously mentioned) include (1) the plaster on the façade, which is coarser in texture than the original would have been; (2) the shutters for the central door; (3) new weatherboards on the side elevations (the originals being virtually gone in the old location); and (4) the unpainted treatment given to the mantels, door and window surrounds, baseboards and chair-rails.

### Assessment of Integrity:

The two integrity issues are the move and the rear addition. The move will be addressed in Section 8. Admittedly the rear wing is large and is visually prominent and modern in character on the carport side. Nonetheless the historic house itself is fairly large and commands center stage, so-to-speak. It easily conveys its historic identity as a French Creole house and retains most of its original important features. Those that establish its identity as a French Creole house are the hall-less floorplan (front range intact), the French doors on the façade, *bousillage* construction with French angle braces, and the exposed beam ceiling treatment in the three front rooms.

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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.1830

Significant Dates:       c.1830

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 Camp Hamilton House is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C at the local level because it contributes to southern Louisiana's distinctive French Creole architectural identity.

French Creole (or French Colonial style) architecture is one of the nation's three major colonial architectural traditions. It takes its place alongside British Colonial, as exemplified by the saltbox houses of New England and a later generation of "Georgian" houses, and Spanish Colonial, as seen in the missions of California and the Southwest. The French Creole building tradition appeared in "New France" – i.e., in the United States, the Mississippi Valley. Because the region was sparsely settled at the time, little French Creole architecture was built outside Louisiana. Today Louisiana is home to the overwhelming majority of surviving examples. (Other French settlement sites, such as Mobile, Alabama and Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, have only a scattering of examples.)

Within Louisiana the French building tradition is found in the southern part of the state (with the notable exception of Natchitoches Parish, a French enclave in an otherwise Anglo-Saxon North Louisiana). Very few extant examples actually date to the colonial period. The tradition continued to dominate local architecture well into the nineteenth century. Hence one has full-blown totally French houses being built as late as circa 1830. By the 1830s, generally speaking, Anglo-American architectural traditions began to make inroads, resulting in a generation of so-called "half-breed" houses – for example, an otherwise French Creole house that has acquired a central hall.

The most important features of the typical rural French Creole house are as follows: 1) generous galleries, either across the front or on three and even four sides; 2) gallery roofs supported by light wooden colonnettes, 3) on the larger examples, placement of the principal living space well above grade; 4) a form of construction utilizing a heavy timber frame combined with an infill made of brick (*brique entre poteaux*) or a mixture of mud, moss and animal hair called *bousillage*, 5) multiple French doors, 6) a floorplan that lacks halls, 7) exposed ceiling beams on the gallery and interior, and 8) interior chimneys with mantels that wrap around the flue. The previously mentioned timber frame incorporates French joinery – i.e., angle braces that are extremely steep, running all the way from sill to plate, in contrast to English joinery where the brace is almost at a forty-five degree angle. Roofs are either a type of broad spreading hip roof sometimes referred to as an "umbrella," or gable end such as the candidate. The French Creole tradition embraces everything from one room cottages to large residences, finding its highest expression in the major, two-story Creole plantation house, with the principal story being raised a full story on a brick above-ground basement.

It could be argued that French Creole is Louisiana's most important building tradition – that which sets the Pelican State apart from others. And because the southern part of the state was fairly well populated by the early 1800s, French Creole houses once would have existed by the thousands. While the state still retains an impressive collection, far more have been lost than have survived. By the most recent educated guesses, perhaps 200-300 examples survive (in varying states of integrity) outside New Orleans. Collectively, from an architectural standpoint, these buildings "say" South Louisiana, and in the opinion of the LA SHPO, any example that retains sufficient integrity (such as the candidate) is important because it contributes to this distinctive architectural identity. (Probably less than 100 French Creole houses survive in rural Louisiana with sufficient integrity to merit Register listing.)

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### The Move and Cultural Contexts:

At first glance, one would conclude that Jennings is a completely inappropriate cultural context for a French Creole house. It is a railroad town founded in the 1880s by mainly Midwesterners. However, French-speaking settlers were there prior to the railroad opening up the area to further settlement and development in the late nineteenth century. Jeff Davis Parish, of which Jennings is the seat, is at the western end of a region known as the southwestern prairies. The earliest settlers of the region (1830s and '40s) were primarily descendants of Acadians (French-speaking peoples from Nova Scotia expelled by the British in 1755). They had names like Broussard, Landry, Guidry, and Arceneaux. Those on the western edge of the prairies (where the candidate is located) were for the most part cattle ranchers of modest means. Acadians elsewhere in Louisiana were subsistence farmers and trappers. St. Landry Parish, where the candidate was built, is on the eastern edge of the prairie region. Its population was both French Creole (individuals born in France or their descendants) and Acadian. Generally speaking, French Creoles were more prosperous than Acadians.

The houses Acadians and French Creoles built can sometimes look quite similar – indeed, sometimes identical. Both used *bousillage*, a mixture of mud and moss, as infill between the wall studs. Both had hall-less floorplans. Generally speaking, one tends to think of French Creole houses as larger and more refined and Acadian houses as smaller, simpler versions. This is generally an apt summary, but as Acadians prospered, they sometimes built houses that were virtually indistinguishable from a gable end French Creole house. (Unlike French Creole houses, which are both gable end and hipped roof, Acadian houses are almost always gable end.) Both Acadian and French Creole gable end houses had a gallery across the façade. Unlike the Creoles, Acadians inhabited the loft. In parts of Acadiana a “signature” feature is a set of stairs on the gallery going up to the loft.

The foregoing is a general overview. What did houses look like in the mid-nineteenth century in the prairie region of what would become Jeff Davis Parish? Regrettably, very little survives or is documented to convey the look of these early homes – i.e., before the Midwesterners and the railroad arrived in the 1880s. The man generally regarded as the first settler of the town that would become Jennings was Frozin Roy, of French ancestry. His classic Acadian style home survives only in a photo (see attached). It is similar in overall form to the candidate, but is decidedly smaller and more rustic (pioneer-looking). There are two French Creole/Acadian houses known to survive in or near Jeff Davis Parish. The Hebert House (National Register) is just over the parish line in Cameron Parish. It is a larger (four rooms), somewhat less rustic-looking version of Frozin Roy's house. The other survivor, in Lake Arthur, is similar in overall character to the Hebert House.

Given the settlement patterns of the western edge of the southwestern prairies, it is reasonable to assume that the Frozin Roy House is typical. On the eve of the Civil War, the area was sparsely settled by Acadians of modest means – typically cattle ranchers, who more often than not were squatters. Admittedly, there may have been exceptions to the foregoing general statement – individuals who had prospered beyond the one or two room cabin. Hence it is not impossible for a house of the size and relative refinement of the candidate to have been built in the area, but it would be atypical, given what historians know of the settlement patterns. In short, while Acadian and Creole houses can sometimes be quite similar in appearance, the candidate is probably grander (larger and less rustic looking) than anything ever built in what became Jeff Davis Parish. That said, it should be emphasized that the house remains in its overall appropriate cultural



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context -- South Louisiana. (For example, it was not moved to a parish in North Louisiana with no French settlement, whether Acadian or French Creole.) And while the physical setting is not now compatible with the original, it was when the move occurred.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Brasseaux, Carl A., Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People, 1803-1877. University Press of Mississippi, 1992.

Brasseaux, Carl A., phone interview with National Register staff, July 30, 2003. Professor Brasseaux, at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, is among the foremost authorities on Louisiana's Acadian history.

Edwards, Jay D., "Folk Architecture." In Ancelet, Barry Jean et.al. Cajun Country. University Press of Mississippi, 1991.

Pre-move photos in possession of owner. Copies in National Register file, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.

Historic structures surveys of South Louisiana parishes, on file in the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, along with staff knowledge of the region based on extensive fieldwork.

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:

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

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**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreeage of Property: less than an acre

UTM References:	<b>Zone</b>	<b>Easting</b>	<b>Northing</b>
	15	535240	3344280

Verbal Boundary Description: Boundary lines parallel building elevations, each at a distance of fifty feet.

Boundary Justification: Boundaries are discrete because there is no historic setting to recognized for this moved building. The chosen boundaries encompass the resource being nominated under Criterion C.

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

Name/Title: National Register staff

Address: Division of Historic Preservation, P. O. Box 44247, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Telephone: (225) 342-8160

Date: July 2003

**PROPERTY OWNERS**

Mr. and Mrs. Craig S. Gunnell  
2200 East Academy Ave.  
Jennings, LA 70546



Trahan House, Lake Arthur (Jeff Davis Parish, LA)  
[to accompany Camp Hamilton House, Jeff Davis Parish, LA]



This is a photo of the Frozin Roy home, considered to be the first house in what was later to become the City of Jennings. The site was to one day be North Main Street between 11th and 12th streets.

[to accompany Camp Hamilton House, Jeff Davis Parish, LA]

Camp Hamilton House, Jeff Davis Parish  
as it appeared prior to 1974 move

