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RECEIVED

CREOLE AND GULF COAST COTTAGES IN BALDWIN COUNTY

NOV 8 1988

(Thematic Group)

NATIONAL REGISTER

Owner: Mrs. F. J. Reynolds
Star Rt. A Box 65
Stockton, Al. 36579

Historic Name: Nelson House

Common Name: Reynolds House

Location: East side Highway 59 North, Latham

Verbal Boundary Description:

Portion of the south half of the northwest quarter of Section 36, T 2 N R 2 E. Bounded on the west by Highway 59, the south by the township line, the north by Lot 2 and the east by the line dividing the northwest and north-east quarters of Section 36. Contains 56 acres more or less.

Acreage: 56

UTM: A-16/421/000/3439/380
B-16/421/000/3439/020
C-16/420/480/3439/020
D-16/420/450/3439/380

Date of Construction: 1912

Statement of Significance

Criterion C-Architecture:

The Nelson-Reynolds House is the purest example of the Creole Cottage style of architecture in Baldwin County. It retains all the classic features of the style: recessed front porch, gable roof, interior chimneys, two front doors with no central hall and massed floor plan. Its late date, 1912, represents the persistence of this popular style on the Gulf Coast. It is also the northernmost example in Baldwin County, being just north of the thirty-first parallel, and is thus, unusual.

Integrity:

The Nelson-Reynolds House retains its integrity of location, materials and plan. The basic "Creole" floor plan of massed rooms with no interior passages is unaltered. Basic architectural changes involve the foundation, porch columns and back porch. The house sits on a solid brick wall foundation, constructed after Hurricane Federick knocked it off its piers in 1979. The porch's original turned posts had rotted away by 1952, and two-by-fours were substituted. The present boxed columns with balusters between were added in 1980. The southeast corner of the porch was filled in 1980 to create an additional room. The north-east room on the rear is original, reminiscent of the "cabinets" in the 18th century Creole Cottages in New Orleans. The present wood shingled roof replaces the original, torn off in 1980 by a tornado.

Description:

The Nelson-Reynolds House is a one story frame, four bay Creole Cottage resting on a brick wall foundation. There are two interior chimneys on its gabled roof, one on the front slope and one on the rear slope, each with back-to-back fireplaces. A recessed front porch covers the full facade. The expansive gable ends are a clue to the original builder providing room for a half story which was never added.

The plan of the house is classic Creole Cottage style: two front doors and massed rooms with no passageways. The four main rooms, almost square (15' by 18' and 18' by 21') are symmetrically arranged, with a "cabinet" at the northeast corner. The original back porch was filled in to create a room at the southeast corner in 1980. Each front door opens directly into a front room. All of the rooms have hardwood floors and flush board ceilings and walls. Each room has a fireplace on its interior wall, another hallmark of the Creole style. The simple wooden mantels have paired brackets at each end. All rooms are connected with four panel wooden doors with simple frame surrounds. Original hardware is present on many of the doors.

Historical Summary:

When the Nelson-Reynolds House was constructed in 1912, Latham was a well-established rural community. White settlement in the area dated back to the early 1800s. After the Creek Wars settlement became more general and turpentine and logging important occupations. Access to Mobile was possible via the Tensaw River and the community was linked to Stockton by a public road.

By the turn-of-the-century, tenant farming was an established part of community life. There were some fifteen to twenty white families and an equal number of blacks. Latham had a school, church, post office and a grocery. Many of the tenant families left after World War I and with the advent of World War II others joined the service or took shipyard jobs in Mobile. Thus, Latham today is a loose collection of residences and farms, no longer the self-sufficient community it once was.

It was within this context that the Nelson-Reynolds house came to be built. In June of 1899 Edward G. Nelson and his wife left their home in Bay Minette. In an attempt to escape yellow fever, they settled in Latham to the north. To support his family, Nelson ran a sawmill, gristmill, blacksmith shop and a bakery. He also farmed and raised cattle, sheep, chickens and pigs. There were five tenant houses on the property as well as a commissary. Nelson provided land for his children from his considerable holdings (over 3700 acres). His second son Earl constructed a house in 1912 on a fifty-five acre plot with lumber from his father's mill. Earl's wife, a native of Maryland, wanted an additional story and this was provided for in the design though never executed.

The narrow public road that ran in front of the property was unimproved until graveled in 1925 and paved in 1940. Earl Nelson and his wife moved out in 1925, trading the house to his sister Mary Elizabeth, now married to one Maynard Coghlan. The Coghlan's rented the house out over a twelve year period before moving in themselves in 1937. In 1942 Mary was appointed postmistress at Latham and a post office was constructed on her property. This small frame structure still stands. Maynard Coghlan worked in the Mobile shipyards during the war, as did so many from rural Baldwin County. In 1972 their daughter Ruth and her husband Forrest Reynolds acquired the property.

