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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Venus House  
other names/site number Jim Bowie House

2. Location

street & number U. S. Hwy 190 and Academy Street N/A not for publication  
city, town Opelousas N/A vicinity  
state Louisiana code LA county St. Landry code 097 zip code 70570

3. Classification

<b>Ownership of Property</b>	<b>Category of Property</b>	<b>Number of Resources within Property</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<b>Contributing</b>	<b>Noncontributing</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: Louisiana's French Creole Architecture  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.  
Leslie P. Tassin March 4, 1991  
Signature of certifying official Leslie P. Tassin, LA SHPO, Dept of Culture, Date  
Recreation and Tourism  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.  
Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.  
 determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.  
 determined not eligible for the National Register.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain:)  
Angy Federman 4/22/91  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Museum

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Other: French Creole

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation wood (cypress blocks)  
walls weatherboard, bousillage

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roof wood shingles (cypress)other 

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

The Venus House is a one story frame structure in the French Creole style. Architectural evidence suggests that it was built sometime during the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. For the purposes of this nomination, we will use c. 1800 as the construction date. The house currently stands between the two branches of U.S. Highway 190 at the eastern edge of Opelousas. It was moved to this location in 1973 when the owner donated it to the city. The original site is about ten miles away in the Grand Prairie region northeast of Soileau (same parish). The house is now the centerpiece of a museum complex which also includes a visitor's center, a pigeon house, and another small house. Although it is unfortunate that the home cannot be viewed in its original rural setting, the age and rarity of some of its features far outweigh the lost setting and the alterations and justify its nomination to the National Register. It should also be noted that the move occurred within St. Landry Parish, the context for the house's significance.

The Creole characteristics found in the Venus House include:

- 1) a rare late colonial floorplan which was once characteristic of Creole houses in Louisiana's prairie region. It consists of a salle flanked by two equal sized chambres, two rear cabinet spaces, and an open loggia.
- 2) a salle ceiling approximately one-and-one-half feet taller than those in the chambres and on the gallery,
- 3) an exposed hand-hewn pegged timber frame which utilizes members clearly illustrating a once typical but now rare method of Creole home expansion. Joists are mortised into the salle's wall posts to support the lower ceilings of the secondary spaces.
- 4) bousillage infill,
- 5) an asymmetrical facade with multiple doors and plank panels on each corner to protect it from the rain,
- 6) a full length front gallery, and
- 7) a wraparound mantel displaying two rare features. The pilasters on each side of the firebox are unusual because they rise to support decorative raised rectangular panels without supporting the entablature

 See continuation sheet

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Venus House, Opelousas, St. Landry Parish, LA

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of the mantel itself. In addition, a French lozenge highlights the center of the entablature.

As with any house, the passage of time has brought changes to the Venus House, and its move and conversion into a museum have brought even more. The important alterations include the following:

1. the installation of a new foundation and a chimney inappropriate in shape,
2. the replacement of the roof above the wall plate, and the accompanying loss of the original Norman truss roof support system,
3. the alteration of interior and exterior walls by removing their plaster covering to expose frame members which were meant to remain covered. This treatment has created a half-timbered effect which gives the suggestion of an earlier construction date than the other architectural evidence warrants.
4. the removal of the partition between the right side chambre and cabinet, and
5. the replacement of lost or damaged features. These include the gallery columns, doors and windows, mantel shelf, exposed ceiling beams on the gallery and the interior, all of the French colonial hardware, and a great deal of the siding.

Despite the ten mile move and other changes, the almost 200 year old Venus House retains enough of its historic integrity to make it a viable National Register candidate. It is clearly recognizable as an extremely early Creole house. The exposed pegged timber frame, bousillage infill, and salle ceiling rising higher than the surrounding spaces are all intact. The rare Creole floorplan once associated with the prairie region is recognizable despite the removal of the partition separating one cabinet from its accompanying chambre. Although the loggias of many of Louisiana's Creole houses have been enclosed, the Venus House's open loggia survives. The replacement roof replicates the original, and the mantel shelf's replacement wraps around the flue in the French manner. Finally, the early and unusual French mantel has survived. For all of these reasons, and even more importantly for its age, the Venus House is a strong candidate for National Register listing.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)  
architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance  
c.1800  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates  
c.1800  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation  
N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person  
N/A

Architect/Builder  
unknown

**State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.**

The Venus House is locally significant in the area of architecture within the context of St. Landry Parish. Its importance arises from its extreme age as well as from the rarity of certain of its Creole features.

With its c. 1800 construction date, the Venus House stands as one of St. Landry Parish's oldest surviving structures. Although the area was once a center of French settlement, only a handful of exceptionally old Creole buildings survive. Instead, most of St. Landry's antebellum houses date to the period of Greek Revival influence.

The Creole features found in the Venus House are important for the following reasons:

1. The existence of a central room higher than the rooms surrounding it is very rare (see illustration IIIb in the attached Figure).
2. The floorplan is important because plans with two equal sized chambres flanking the salle are now rare. They were once characteristic of the Creole houses of Louisiana's prairie region.
3. The Venus House's construction technology (joists mortised into the outsides of the salle's wall posts) is significant because it illustrates a stage in the evolution of the Louisiana house from its humble beginnings to larger and more elegant forms.
4. The decorative French woodwork, such as is found on the mantel, is very rare. The vast majority of woodwork in surviving St. Landry Creole houses is either in the Federal or the Greek Revival style.

In summary, the Venus House is eligible for the National Register because it is a very early home containing rare Creole features.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Edwards, Jay. A Survey of Louisiana French Vernacular Architecture, Vol. II. Baton Rouge: Museum of Geoscience, LSU, 1982. A report to the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park of Louisiana, and the Division of the Arts of the State of Louisiana. 2 Vol. Survey No. 73, pp.309-312. Division of Historic Preservation. Historic Structures Survey of St. Landry Parish, 1977.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A  
 preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark  
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:  
 State historic preservation office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other  
Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property less than one acre

UTM References

A 

1	5	5	8	8	9	10	10	3	3	7	7	8	4	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

  
C 

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B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

  
D 

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Please refer to sketch map.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Boundaries were chosen to encompass the nominated house. Because this is a moved property, there was no historic setting to recognize. The boundaries cut fairly closely around the house in order to exclude nearby unrelated buildings that are part of the museum complex.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

(Revised by Div. of Hist. Preservation staff)

name/title Talal Albagdadi, Donna Abbot, Dr. Jay Edwards  
organization Fred B. Kniffen Cultural Resources Lab date June 1990  
street & number Dept. of Geography & Anthropology, LSU telephone (504) 388-2566  
city or town Baton Rouge state Louisiana zip code 70803

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National Park Service**

# **National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

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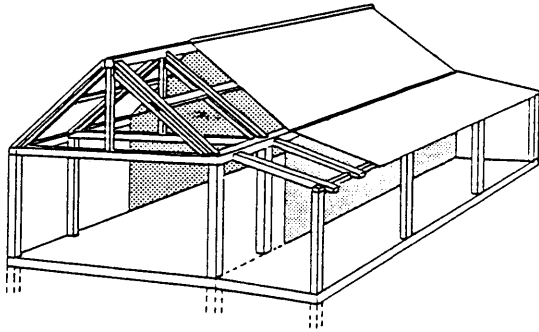
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## Historical Note

The Venus House is named for a Creole woman of color who once owned the structure. Later it passed into the possession of the Fontenot family, where it remained for many years. Although the home's current owner, the City of Opelousas, has chosen to call the structure the "Jim Bowie House," no relation to that historical character has ever been established.

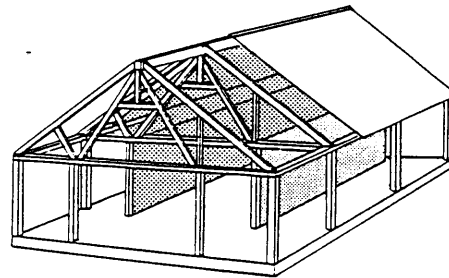
# FIGURE 5

## SOME CLASSES OF CREOLE VERNACULAR HOUSES



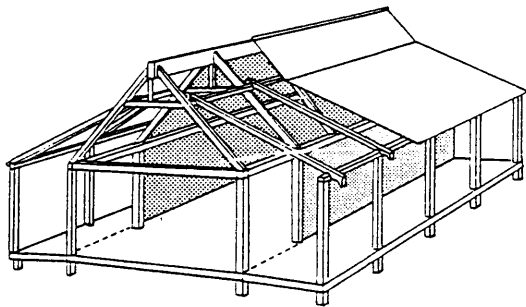
**CLASS I**

Single-pitch roof. Truss system includes the use of a king post and a double rafter system. Rafters set on wall plate. Inner rafters (truss blades) set on tie beam. Gallery optional. If present, gallery rafters tied into wall plate or front wall, and supported by an outer gallery plate, which is itself supported by light weight colonnettes.



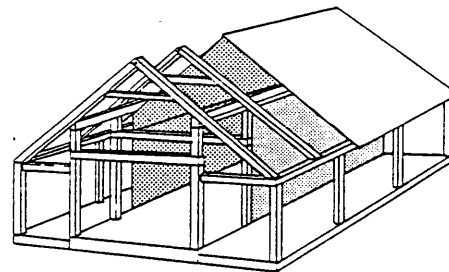
**CLASS IIIa**

Full (single-pitch) umbrella roof. Truss blades (principal rafters) mounted on wall plates. Long outer rafters mounted on outer gallery wall plates and let into or notched over the roof ridge. These rafters supported in their middles by posts (right side) or braces (left side), or by purlins supported by these.



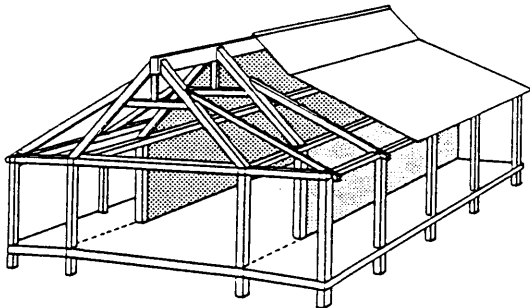
**CLASS IIa**

Mississippi Valley French Colonial broken-pitch roof (early form). Gallery always present. Gallery rafters notched over principal purlin and supported on outer gallery plate.



**CLASS IIIb**

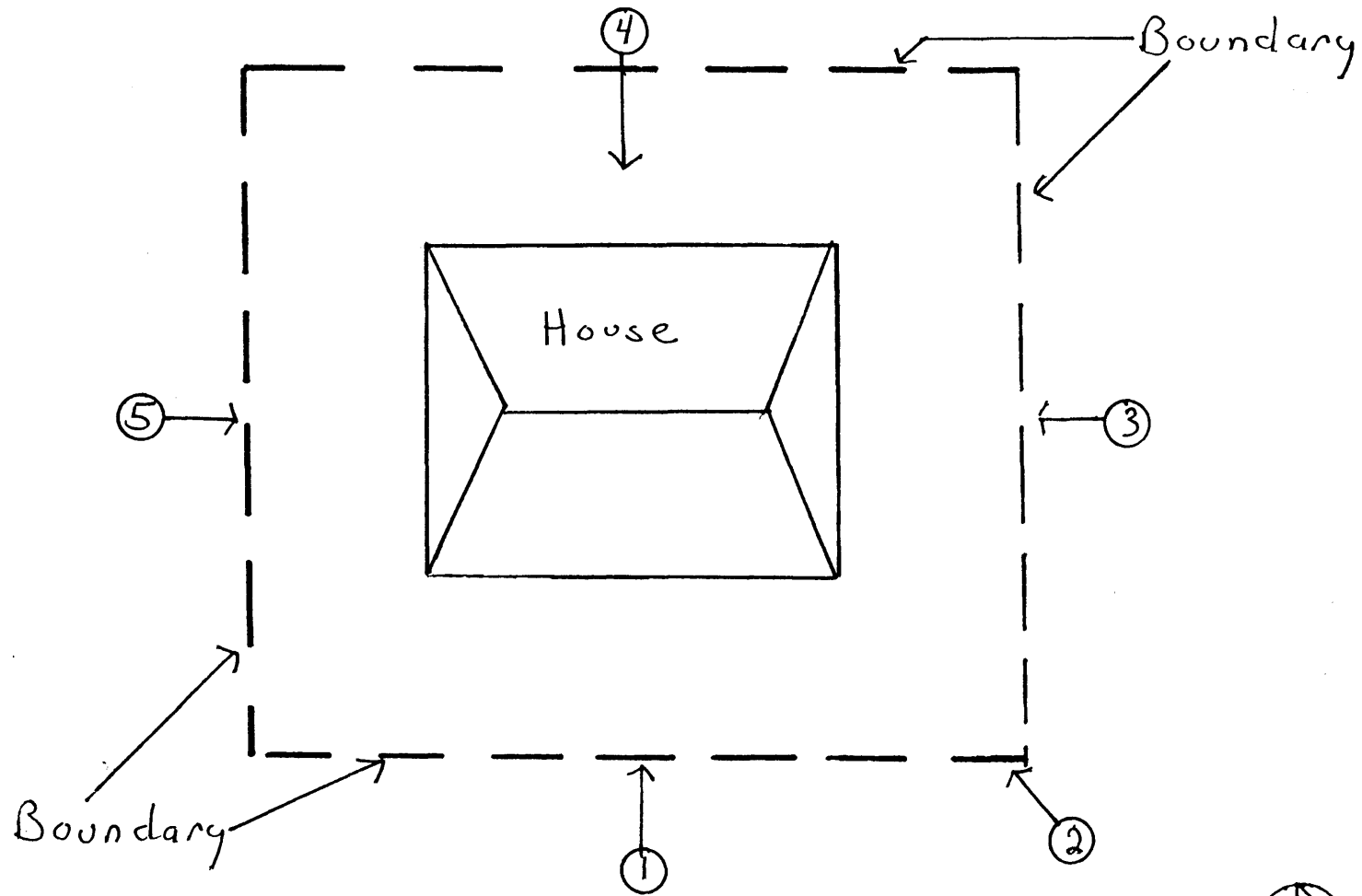
Full (single-pitch) umbrella roof (later form). Truss blades now absent. Outer rafters supported in their middles by posts or by post-supported purlins. Roof ridge generally not present.



**CLASS IIb**

Mississippi Valley French Colonial broken-pitch roof (later form). Principal rafters (single or doubled) set on wall plate. Gallery rafters let into backs of principal rafters and supported on outer gallery plates.

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Scale : 1" = 15'