

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

LYONS, BENSON H. HOUSE, Leesville, Vernon Parish, LA

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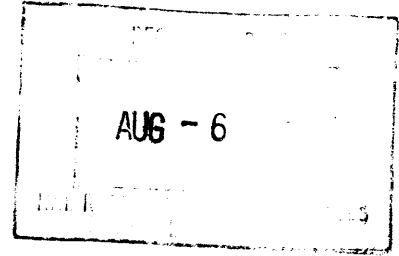
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Lyons, Benson H. House

Other Name/Site Number:



2. LOCATION

Street & Number 203 South 1st Street

Not for publication: NA

City/Town Leesville

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana

Code: LA

County: Vernon

Code: 115

Zip Code: 71446

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

Jonathan Fricker

August 3, 2004

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

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 (checked)
Determined eligible for the National Register
Determined not eligible for the National Register
Removed from the National Register
Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper: [Handwritten Signature]

Date of Action: 9-15-07

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
2 buildings
sites
structures
objects
2 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: Single Dwelling
Current: Domestic Sub: Single Dwelling

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Queen Anne-Eastlake

Materials:

Foundation: Brick
Walls: Vinyl
Roof: Asbestos
Other:

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Benson H. Lyons House (c. 1900) is a large, two-story Queen Anne Revival style residence with a prominent double wraparound gallery reflecting the Eastlake taste. It stands on a corner lot directly across from the rear elevation of the Vernon Parish Courthouse in downtown Leesville. The home has experienced some alteration since its construction, most notably the application of aluminum siding and metal shutters to its exterior. Nevertheless, it more than retains enough integrity to convey its status as one of the most pretentious historic houses in Vernon Parish.

The house consists of a two-story main block and a one-story rear wing. The main block's floorplan is asymmetrical and consists of a central hall running west to east with a living room on one side (labeled #2 on the attached floor plan) and a dining room on the other. A third room (called living room #1 on the floor plan) projects outward from the dining room and hall on the front elevation. The second level contains the same floor plan. The rear wing contains four rooms, one of which projects toward the side (see attached floor plan). In addition to the previously mentioned double wraparound gallery on the facade, the house once had an "L" -shaped back porch extending across the rear elevation and the south side of the wing. The portion of this porch behind the house is now enclosed. Another porch parallels the wing on its north side.

The home's exterior reflects the following Queen Anne Revival features:

1. the aforementioned asymmetrical floor plan with two projecting rooms, one of which features a polygonal bay,
2. a busy roofline displaying cross gable massing and chimneys with corbelled chimney tops,
3. the presence of textured surfaces in the front and two side cross gable ends. Each has shingles in three shapes and a prominent opening whose surround is composed of pilasters with simple capitals and a steeply pitched, molded pediment. Although the motif cannot be seen clearly in photographs, there is a sunburst within the peak of each pediment. The opening in each gable contains additional texture through the presence of a louvered vent and small Queen Anne Revival style colored window panes which outline it. Finally, there is also texture provided through carved vine-like motifs in the short wall connecting the front gable to the roof of the gallery below it.

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4. two transoms (above large, single window panes) outlined by small Queen Anne Revival style colored window panes identical to those in the gable ends. In addition, the home's three main doors also feature these small colored glass panes (here outlining large clear glass panes).
5. the aforementioned wraparound gallery, which outlines both levels of the main block on three sides and follows the shape of the polygonal bay. Eastlake motifs found on both levels include balustrades with turned members, turned columns, brackets, and screens with turned members outlining the two gallery roofs' edges. Additional interest is provided by the angled gallery steps. Although all these members are typical manufactured Eastlake details, their abundance gives the wraparound gallery an interesting and elaborate appearance.

The interior woodwork exhibits elements of the Eastlake and Colonial Revival styles. For example, the door surrounds feature two Eastlake designs. One is a semi-circular, fan-like motif which surmounts the top corner blocks. (These are also found above the window surrounds.) The other is a leaf and berry pattern, composed of carved and applied elements, found below a reeded band on the door surrounds' lower blocks. The home has four identical Eastlake mantels made of wood sawn to produce an elaborate burlled pattern in its graining. Each mantel shelf is supported by two over-large brackets displaying carved vine motifs. A horizontal spindle band connects the two brackets on each mantel. Bull's eye ornaments are present on each bracket just below the mantel shelf. The stairway's balustrade is composed of Eastlake balusters, but its newel post is Colonial Revival. In addition to a ball ornament at the top, the newel post has recessed panels of burlled wood.

Mantels with mirrored overmantels highlight two downstairs rooms. Both are in the Colonial Revival style. One burlled wood mantel consists of smooth round columns with simple round capitals flanking the firebox, while its overmantel features fluted columns with Ionic capitals. The lower set of columns supports the mantel shelf; the upper set supports a molded entablature. This mantel's cast iron coal insert remains intact. The other mantel and overmantel are flanked by smooth tall columns rising from simple bases. These columns also support a molded entablature, this one featuring a carved motif at its upper edge. The mantel shelf for this fireplace is supported by curved brackets.

Four other elements of the home are of interest. Multi-light folding doors below a multi-light transom connect living room #1 to the dining room, while an elaborate wainscot is found in the upper and lower hallways and the parlor. It consists of vertical strips applied in repeating patterns of threes: one smooth plain strip, one wood reeded strip, and one burlled wood strip. Windows reaching to the floor pierce the exterior wall in living room #2. Finally, much of the home's original hardware survives.

The Lyons home has experienced the following alterations over the years:

1. the previously mentioned application of aluminum siding and metal shutters to the exterior. Unfortunately, this was not accomplished in the most sensitive manner, for siding was placed over areas which were never clapboarded. These include the vertical members of the door and window surrounds and the entablature between the lower gallery's Eastlake screen and the balustrade of the upper gallery. A historic photo documents that the entablature was once composed of smooth boards.
2. the enclosure of two small sections of the upper gallery, one on the south side and one on the north side,
3. various changes at the rear, including the enclosure of part of the "L"-shaped porch that once spanned this elevation, the enclosure of the east ends of the remaining porches which flank the ell, and the screening of the remainder of the porches. Although some of the columns remain on the wing's south porch, both balustrades are gone.
4. the cutting of two arched openings. One is an enlargement of a previously cut door converted from an original rear window and the other is a pass-through. Both connect the dining room and the enclosed rear porch room (now the kitchen),

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5. minor floorplan changes, such as the subdivision of one room in the ell wing and the installation of a kitchen in one upstairs room,
6. the installation of wall-to-wall carpet in each room and the application of ceiling tiles and wall paneling in the three upstairs rooms.

While the above list might at first appear lengthy, only two of the alterations are notable enough to merit discussion. Of course, one wishes that the home had not received aluminum siding or, at the very least, that the material had been applied only to the clapboarded areas. The other alteration of possible concern is the south side upper gallery enclosure. Fortunately, the enclosure and the vinyl siding are overwhelmed visually by the large expanses of strongly detailed Eastlake gallery that remain untouched and the home's other original features. Historic photos show that the Lyons House looks much as it did over 100 years ago on the exterior. And it retains almost all of its original interior character as well. Thus, the building continues to rank as one of Vernon Parish's most ornate and pretentious period homes.

Non-contributing Elements:

Two non-contributing elements stand on the Lyons property. The first is a two car, wooden garage with metal doors and exposed rafter tails. The second is a small, one-story, unstyled rectangular cottage clad in vinyl siding. Both buildings were constructed well after the completion of the main house and do not contribute to the house's architectural significance.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National Register Criteria: A__ B__ C X D__

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

Areas of Significance: Architecture

Period(s) of Significance: c. 1900

Significant Dates: c. 1900

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 Benson H. Lyons House is locally significant in the area of architecture as one of the finest late-nineteenth/early twentieth century period residences surviving in Vernon Parish.

The lumber industry brought prosperity to Leesville and Vernon Parish in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sanborn maps, old photos, and the recollections of citizens indicate that this affluence was reflected in a number of large two-story houses built around that time. However, many of these were lost during the twentieth century's second half. This loss is reflected in the Louisiana Comprehensive Historic Sites Survey. As background, this survey records a total of only eighty-nine 50+ year old structures in Vernon Parish. Most of these are cabins or bungalows. A total of twenty-nine surveyed structures represent the fashionable residential styles of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries such as Queen Anne Revival, Eastlake, or Colonial Revival. Eighteen of these more fashionable structures are relatively simple one-story Queen Anne Revival cottages and two are relatively elaborately styled one-story Queen Anne cottages. An additional five are large but plain two-story houses whose only references to the Queen Anne Revival are their cross gable massing and, in one instance, a wraparound gallery. The parish survey identifies only four pretentious two-story Queen Anne Revival residences, all of which have broad encompassing verandas. Of these four, only the Wingate House (N.R.), with its Colonial Revival elements and Queen Anne Revival turret, surpasses the Lyons House in the quality of its architectural detailing. The G. R. Ferguson House and the Booker-Lewis House, both considered part of this quartet, are listed on the Register for their role as symbols of lumber industry-generated prosperity rather than for their architectural significance. Compared with these buildings, the Lyons House is an architectural standout, and a legitimate National Register candidate, because of the abundance of its intact Eastlake exterior detailing and the visual interest provided by its asymmetrical façade.

Historical Note:

According to tradition, the Lyons House was built by Dr. E. E. Smart (Leesville's founder) for his daughter, Lula Smart Lyons. Mrs. Lyons was the wife of Benson H. Lyons, a very prominent Vernon Parish citizen. Lyons served as Vernon Parish sheriff and was also a prominent lumberman, owning thousands of acres of timberland in Vernon Parish and other parts of Louisiana and at least one mill town -- Pinewood. Lyons played a prominent role in the rebuilding of Leesville's commercial area after fire destroyed much of it in 1907. Mr. and Mrs. Lyons donated land for churches and schools and were involved in many other civic endeavors. Their home is located on the corner of First and Lula Streets, the latter of which was named for Mrs. Lyons. She lived in the house until her death in 1944, then left the property to her daughter, Maggie Lyons Palmer. Mrs. Palmer owned the house until 1963; and Harry Edward James, Jr. owned it 1963-2003. The Lyons House is now owned by LaFonda and Joseph Stelly, who plan to restore the dwelling.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Conveyance Records; copies in National Register file.

Historic photos of the Benson H. Lyons House; copies in National Register file.

Louisiana Comprehensive Historic Sites Survey, Vernon Parish.

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

Acreage of Property: less than an acre

UTM References: **Zone Easting Northing**
 15 475300 3445200

Verbal Boundary Description:

Lots 6, 7 and the South 1/2 of Lot 3, West 60 feet of South 1/2 of Lot 4, West 60 feet of Lots 5 and 8, Block 20, Old Survey, Town of Leesville, Vernon Parish, LA

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Boundary Justification:

Boundaries follow current property lines. (Conveyance records show that the acreage was originally larger.)

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register Staff

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

Telephone: (225) 342-8160

Date: Spring 2004

PROPERTY OWNERS

LaFonda and Joseph Stelly
203 South 1st Street
Leesville, Louisiana 71446
(337) 208-8462

BENSON H. LYONS HOUSE FLOORPLAN

Vernon Parish, Louisiana

