

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Moss Grove Plantation House, Catahoula Parish, LA

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

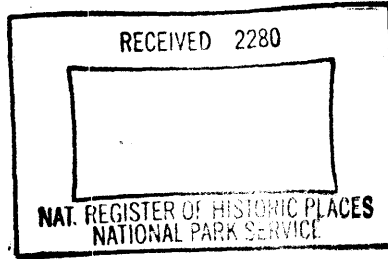
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

779

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Moss Grove Plantation House

Other Name/Site Number:



2. LOCATION

Street & Number 509 Black River Road

Not for publication: NA

City/Town Jonesville

Vicinity: X

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: Catahoula Code: 025

Zip Code: 71343

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

Date 7/21/06

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): _____

Edson H. Beall
Signature of Keeper

9.6.06
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: NA

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

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

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Greek Revival; Italianate

Materials:

Foundation: brick
Walls: wood: board and batten (sides); flushboards (façade)
Roof: metal
Other:

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Moss Grove Plantation House (c.1870) is a wood frame story-and-a-half residence set in an idyllic rural setting on Black River a few miles south of the small town of Jonesville. Most of the stylistic features are Greek Revival (a country interpretation), the only exceptions being two Italianate mantels. Despite alterations (at the rear and on the interior), Moss Grove easily retains sufficient integrity to convey its architectural identity.

Due to changes in the landscape, the house has an unusual relationship to the Black River and its levee. The front lawn now sweeps down to the river without an intervening road. Historically there was a one-lane dirt road in front. Some of its roadbed can be seen. A gravel road atop a levee leads from paved Louisiana Highway 124 to the rear of the house. The levee was built behind the house in the 1970s at the owner's request. Placing the levee closer to the river would have meant moving the house back on the property, and the owners did not wish to lose the original verdant landscape of their home. Of the many mature trees on the property, the most impressive is easily a huge and ancient live oak in the front yard. Not far beyond the oak is a 20-something foot drop down to the Black River.

As is typical of the Greek Revival in rural Louisiana, the house takes the form of a gable end galleried cottage with a central hall plan with two back-to-back rooms on each side. The front rooms are eighteen by eighteen feet; the rear rooms, eighteen by sixteen. The façade is sheathed in flush boards while the side elevations are covered in board and batten. (One suspects the latter is an early but not original treatment.) The inset five-bay gallery has paneled wooden posts with molded capitals and matching pilasters. The paneling appears both on the main shaft and then again above the necking. The balustrade, formed of simple squared-off balusters, is mortised into the columns and façade. The façade features a symmetrical pattern of openings – a central entrance with two windows on each side. What is unusual is the twelve foot width of the central entrance (matching the width of the central hall) and its paneled folding doors. This feature is repeated at the rear of the hall. When the doors are folded back on themselves, the effect, as built, was that

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of an open dogtrot. (The central hall is now subdivided, as explained below.) The front and rear entrances each have a multi-pane transom crowned by a Greek Revival pedimented frame. The same pedimented treatment accents the façade's six over nine windows (with their original shutters).

Surviving original visible features on the interior include most of the floorplan (see below), pedimented window and door frames, two wooden Italianate mantels, most of the flooring, and flushboard sheathing on the walls and ceiling of the central hall and one wall each of the four rooms.

Moss Grove was renovated in the 1970s. Alterations made at that time include:

- 1) The conversion of the attic to livable space and the insertion of a staircase at roughly the middle of the central hall. The two-turn staircase, with a closet below, encompasses the width of the hall. Behind it, and accessed via a door, is the remainder of the hall. (The new doorway copies the home's pediment shaped surrounds.) The attic conversion also added two windows in each side gable.
- 2) Dropping all ceilings, except for the central hall, from their original 13 ½ feet to about 12 feet and covering them with modern materials.
- 3) Covering most of the original flushboard walls in the four rooms with thin sheetrock.
- 4) The work spanning the rear elevation (an open porch on one side with details copied from the front gallery and a board and batten enclosed area). As part of this project, a window was converted to a door. Originally a gallery matching that on the front would have spanned the rear. According to oral tradition there was a rear ell at one time. The architectural evidence is inconclusive on this point.
- 5) The subdivision of one rear room to provide a bathroom for the front room. The remainder of the rear room is a kitchen.

Other changes include the loss of two mantels, the loss of the chimney tops, and the replacement of most of the battens on the southern facing side elevation. The shutters for the side elevations' six-over-six windows are on the property awaiting re-installation. The front gallery was recently restored (to arrest rot); perhaps five percent of the fabric is in-kind replacement (mainly some of the balusters). Work on one pilaster (at the top) is yet to be completed.

Assessment of Integrity

The most notable alteration is easily the insertion of a large staircase that divides the central hall. But this change notwithstanding, Moss Grove retains those features which establish its Greek Revival identity and importance within Catahoula Parish – its gallery with paneled columns and its pedimented door and window surrounds. The quite wide front and rear openings, with their original folding doors, are also important surviving character-defining features.

Date of Construction

The exact date of Moss Grove is open to interpretation. The house remains in the original family, and according to family tradition, it was built after the Civil War to replace an earlier house either destroyed or heavily damaged by Union gunboat bombardment. Because a circa 1870 date is plausible from the

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architectural evidence, that date is being used for the purposes of this submission. However, most of the details could just as easily be 1850s. But some suggest a later date: the Italianate mantels and the molding profiles on the folding doors.

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.1870

Significant Dates: c.1870

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.

Moss Grove Plantation House is of local architectural significance as an important example of the Greek Revival style within Catahoula Parish. It is one of very few examples, and within the context of Catahoula, it is well-detailed.

The large rural parish of Catahoula was created in 1808. Its seat, Harrisonburg, on the Ouachita River, was platted in 1818. There were and are no population centers beyond the size of village or small town. The entire parish had only 11,651 residents in 1860. The tiny parish seat of Harrisonburg did not have enough population to be incorporated as a village until 1872. Apparently the largest, most thriving early community was Trinity, located at the confluence of the Tensas, Ouachita and Little rivers. It was incorporated as a village in 1850. Today virtually nothing survives of old Trinity. Jonesville, today the parish's largest population center (about 3,000), developed in the early twentieth century.

In the antebellum years the rich alluvial soils of Catahoula produced many a good-size cotton plantation. For example, on the eve of the Civil War, there were thirty-seven large slaveholdings (fifty or more slaves) in the parish (8 of which had absentee owners). Smaller plantations would have been even more numerous. Given the foregoing development patterns, there must have been dozens of Greek Revival plantation houses and smaller cottages in Catahoula. (Greek Revival – or Greek Revival with some Italianate influence such as brackets or mantels -- would have been the only possibilities. Catahoula is not a part of French Creole Louisiana. Full-blown Italianate was seldom seen in rural areas of the state.)

Today extremely little survives to represent the early architectural history of Catahoula. This is documented in a historic buildings survey commissioned by the Division of Historic Preservation and completed in 1986-87. Of the 432 buildings at that time over 50 years of age, almost all are plain or modestly styled and date from the twentieth century. About a half dozen display elements of the Greek Revival style, ranging in date from circa 1830 to c.1870. Of these, the Green-Lovelace House (NR), Marengo (NR) and the candidate are the most important survivors. (They have more important features and their original architectural character is more intact. Green-Lovelace, regrettably, received vinyl siding subsequent to Register listing.) Among the survivors, Moss Grove is one of only two to have paneled columns and the only house with pedimented window and door surrounds.

Historical Note:

Moss Grove remains in the same family which established the plantation. The following is from unpublished family history and tradition. Samuel and Caroline Cotton Wilmoth established the plantation in 1836. The original house was heavily damaged (or destroyed) by Union gunboats during the Civil War. The present house was constructed after the war when the widow Caroline (Samuel died in 1850) married a neighboring plantation owner, Noah Reddick. After the death of Caroline in 1878 and Noah in 1883, Caroline's only surviving child, Clara Amanda Wilmoth, lived in the house. Her marriage to Dr. Green Berry May ended with his death. (There were no surviving children.) Clara Amanda lived in the house until her death in 1924. Living with her since 1904 was the family of Noah Reddick Cotton, nephew of Caroline Cotton Wilmoth Reddick. After Clara Amanda's death in 1924, tenants occupied the house until 1958, when one of Noah Cotton's sons began rehabilitation work. In 1971, Sue Cotton Avery, granddaughter of Noah Cotton, inherited the house. She and her husband, William G. Avery, began extensive work and lived in the house until 1980, when they moved to Baton Rouge. Today they use it as a second home and base of

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operations for their cotton farm.

Archaeological Excavations:

Dr. Joe Saunders of the State of Louisiana's Regional Archaeology Program conducted investigations at Moss Grove in 2004 at the request of the owners, who observed a brick feature as they did landscaping work. The feature is located approximately five meters northwest of the northwest corner of the house. A 4 x 4 meter area over the exposed brick was excavated, and a total of 252 artifacts were collected. Sixty-seven percent of these were artifacts associated with architecture (nails, window glass and one glazed brick). Tablewares included 19 pieces of semi-porcelain, four fragments of pearlware, and three porcelain fragments. Personal items included three buttons, a slate pencil, a piece of slate (tablet?), and two small mirror fragments. Excavations did not determine the age or function of the brick feature. Artifacts uncovered were inconclusive as to whether or not there had been a fire at the location. Because work at the site was limited, the National Register eligibility of the site (as an archaeological resource) is unknown at this time. (The foregoing, abstracted from Dr. Saunders 2004 Annual Report, is included for purposes of providing the fullest possible information about the property.)

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Catahoula Parish Survey. On file at Louisiana State Library.

Cotton family history, as communicated by Sue Cotton Avery.

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):

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: approx. 5.5 acres

UTM References: **Zone Easting Northing**
 15 613700 3490880

Verbal Boundary Description: The boundary is shown as a broken line on the enclosed sketch map.

Boundary Justification: Boundaries were chosen to encompass the house and its immediate setting, including the relationship to Black River. Following current property lines would have meant including over 1,000 acres of farmland.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register Staff, LA Division of Historic Preservation

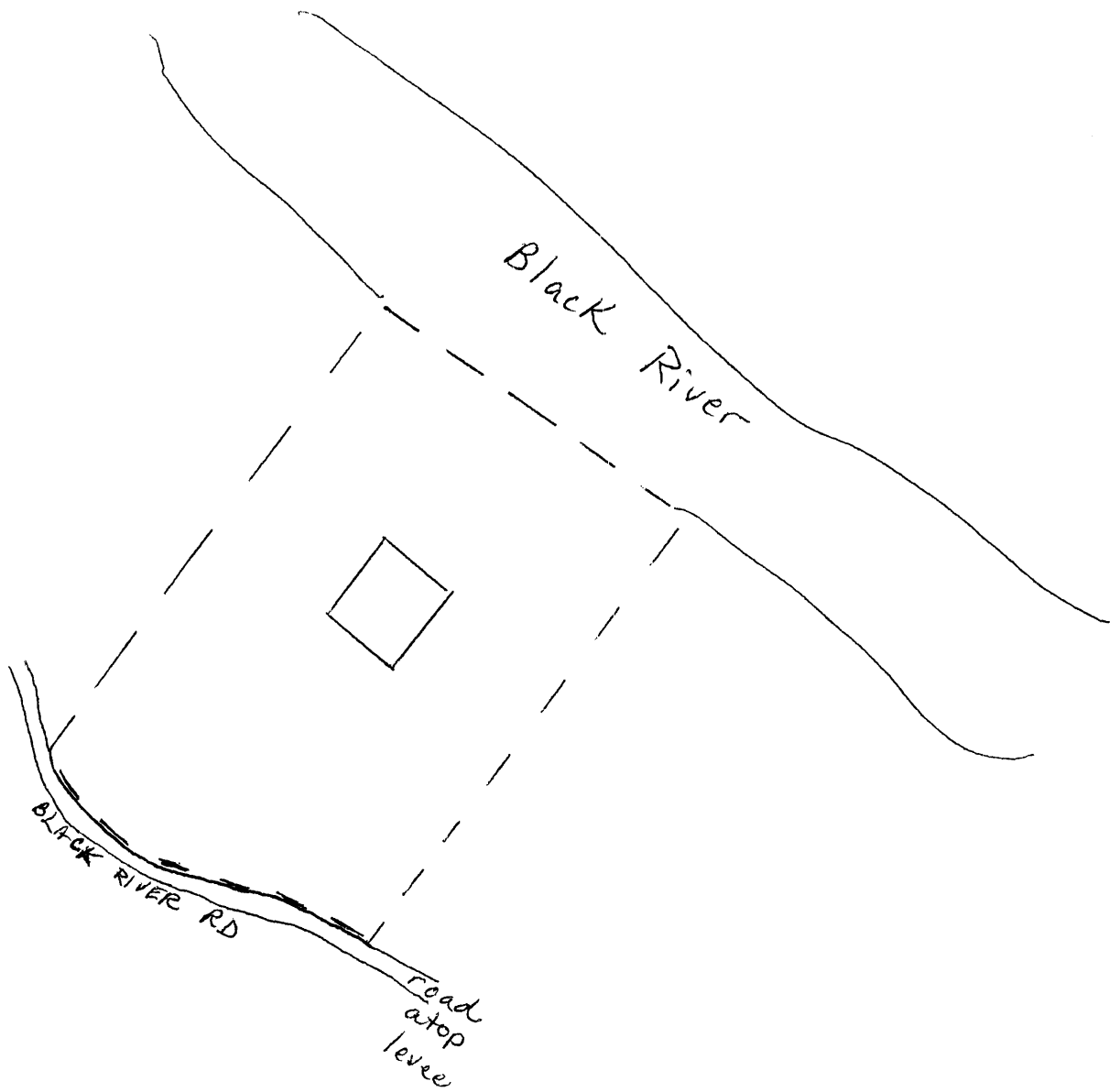
Address: P. O. Box 44247, Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Telephone: 225-342-8160

Date: May 2006

PROPERTY OWNERS

Mr. and Mrs. William G. Avery
3832 North Bluebonnet Road
Baton Rouge, LA 70809



1" = 200'

Moss Grove Plantation House
Catahoula Parish, LA



--- BOUNDARY