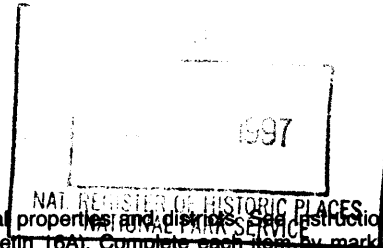


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



876

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Fontenette-Bienvenu House

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 201 N. Main N/A not for publication

city or town St. Martinville N/A vicinity

state Louisiana code LA county St. Martin code 099 zip code 70582

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jonathan Fricker June 30, 1997
Signature of certifying official/Title Jonathan Fricker, Deputy SHPO, Dept. of Culture, Recreation and Tourism
Date
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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): _____

Maureen Boy Signature of the Keeper Date of Action 8/21/97

Fontenette-Bienvenu House
Name of Property

St. Martin Parish, LA
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Louisiana's French Creole Architecture

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/single dwelling

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

vacant/not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

other: French Creole

Federal

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick

walls weatherboard

roof tin

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Fontenette-Bienvenu House, St. Martin Parish, LA

Section number 7 Page 1

The Fontenette-Bienvenu House is a one-and-a-half story Creole cottage of *colombage* construction with Federal details. It is located on Main Street near the central church square in the parish seat of St. Martinville. The house was completed in either 1817 or early 1818 for Jacques Fontenette, who died on April 23, 1818. His succession, opened May 4, 1818, refers to "a fine house, newly constructed" being located on the property in question. Because the house has been owned since the 1850s by the Bienvenu family, the historic name chosen for this submission recognizes both the Fontenette and Bienvenu names. Despite twentieth century alterations and a recent fire, the Fontenette-Bienvenu House easily retains its architectural identity and enough character-defining elements to establish its architectural significance.

The plan consists of two front rooms of equal size with a pair of unequal sized *cabinets* behind with a long room between. The principal story features brick-between-post construction with French angle braces at the corners. The second story is reached directly from the broad front gallery by a steep central staircase which ascends between the two front rooms to the finished attic. The placement of the stair in this manner is most unusual for a Creole house in Louisiana.

A large brick chimney is set behind the previously mentioned central staircase and services fireplaces in the two front rooms. These feature an identical pair of elaborate Federal mantels with decoratively cut pilasters, a three-panel entablature and intricate systems of built-up moldings forming the shelves. Also Federal, at least in spirit, is the overall delicacy of the molded window and door surrounds and the raised panels on the distinctive eight-panel interior doors.

Certain other features attest to the house's early date. These include 9 over 6 sash windows with fixed upper sashes and double leaf French doors on the facade with ten lights per leaf. Other noteworthy features include the ceilings with exposed beaded beams and beaded ceiling boards and the baseboards which also feature a decorative bead.

Historic Alterations

The rear now has a protruding wing which gives the house an overall "T" shape. This appears to have been a free-standing structure (c. 1840) with a temple front which was moved up to the rear of the house sometime during the historic period. Surviving pilasters on its flush board facade indicate its original Greek Revival style. The uneven spacing of the beams in this addition and the irregular siding indicate that this building, or possibly part of a building, was rather casually attached to the rear of the house. Evidently, when this building was attached, the

CONTINUED

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Fontenette-Bienvenu House, St. Martin Parish, LA

Section number 7 Page 2

rear wall in the old rear central room was removed to create a single large space.

Several of the original windows have been replaced with turn-of-the-century two-over-two sash windows. In addition, hinge marks indicate that a number of the doors have been moved around. Also, a long, shallow closet has been installed in the rear wing along a side wall. Finally, the front gallery columns have been replaced numerous times. Currently one old, but not original, column survives and the porch floor is missing. Architectural evidence indicates that originally there were eight equally spaced posts across the front gallery.

Non-Historic Alterations

These include the installation of a bathroom in one *cabinet* and a kitchen in the other.

Fire

A recent fire has almost completely destroyed the central staircase and charred approximately one-third of the beams in the attic. It also damaged the beams of the side walls that flank the central staircase.

Assessment of Integrity

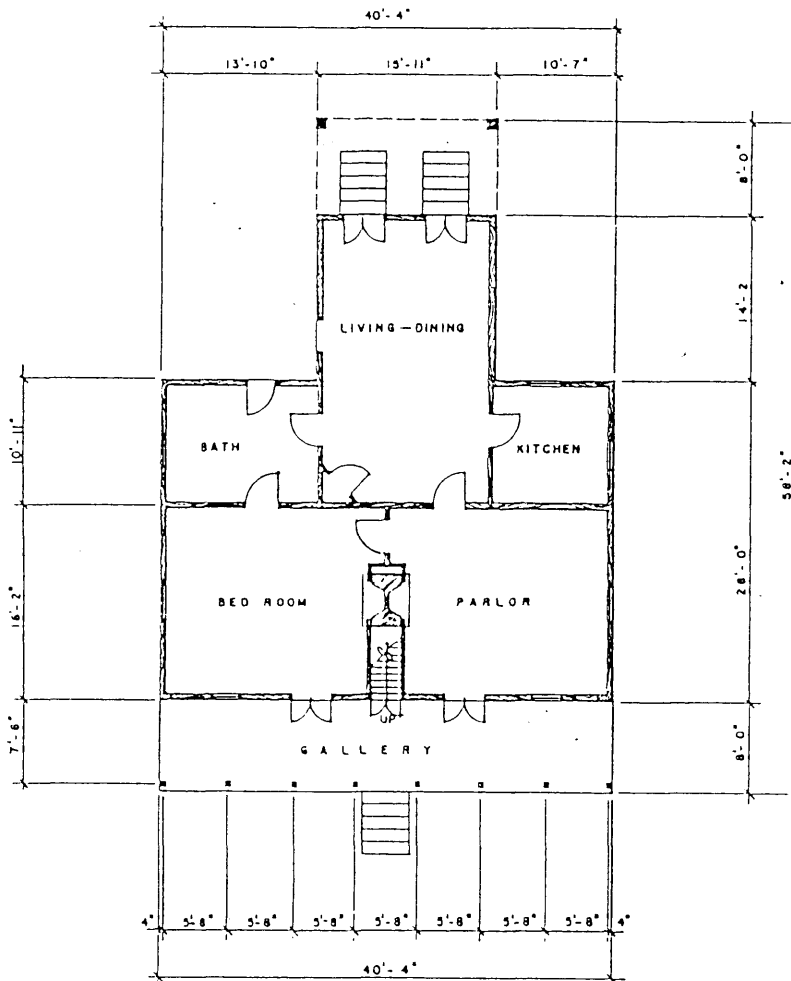
Despite the previously mentioned changes and losses, the Fontenette-Bienvenu House remains a strong candidate for the National Register. It still has its Creole shape, its very unusual (in rural Louisiana) brick-between-post construction and its early and significant decorative woodwork. In addition, this nomination is being pursued with the purpose of procuring a grant to stabilize and ultimately restore this property as a museum. Thus, such defects in integrity that it has will be corrected.

United States Department of the Interior
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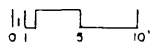
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Fontenette-Bienvenu House, St. Martin Parish, LA

Section number 7 Page 3



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.) N/A

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

architecture

Period of Significance

1817-18

Significant Dates

1817-18

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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 # LA-1182
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

Name of repository:

**United States Department of the Interior
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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Fontenette-Bienvenu House, St. Martin Parish, LA

Section number $\frac{8}{9}$ Page $\frac{1}{1}$

The Fontenette-Bienvenu House is of local significance in the area of architecture as a very rare surviving example of St. Martinville's earliest architectural heritage. Indeed, it is thought to be one of the two or three oldest structures in this ancient settlement.

The parish seat of St. Martinville is among Louisiana's oldest communities, having been settled in the eighteenth century and incorporated as a town in 1817. Located at the head of navigation on Bayou Teche, it thrived in the antebellum period due to its status as a major interior port. Despite the town's great age, there are only a limited number of buildings to represent its early development. The town experienced considerable development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and thus its present building stock largely reflects that period. Approximately 20 - 25 buildings survive from the pre-Civil War era. Although this is more than survive in most Louisiana communities, it is a small number when one considers what this bustling town must have looked like in the decades before the Civil War. Collectively, these buildings are immensely important because they represent the town's early patrimony. The most important of them are the few (less than 10) that represent the very earliest architecture (i.e., French Creole and Federal).

The Fontenette-Bienvenu House is very conspicuous among this group, being one of the two or three oldest. Most importantly, it is thought to be the only one to feature a significant collection of pre-Greek Revival woodwork and detailing. Its elaborate Federal mantels are surely unmatched within St. Martinville. Finally, it features brick-between-post construction, which was very unusual in Louisiana settlements outside of New Orleans.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

St. Martin Parish Historic Structures Survey, Division of Historic Preservation (combined with staff knowledge of St. Martinville).

St. Martin Parish Succession No. 239, Jacques Fontenette, May 4, 1818.

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Fontenette-Bienvenu House, St. Martin Parish, LA

Section number 10 Page 1

Legal Property Description:

That certain parcel of land, together with all buildings and improvements thereon erected and thereto belonging, situated in the First Ward, Town of St. Martinville, St. Martin Parish, Louisiana, on the west side of Bayou Teche, measuring 100 feet front, more or less, on Main Street by a depth extending to the property of Harold G. Bienvenu, and being bounded on the north by property of Jefferson Bienvenu or assigns, south by Hamilton Street, east by Main Street and west by property of Harold G. Bienvenu. See Book 39, Folio 130, under Entry No. 16940, Book 47, Folio 527, under Entry No. 24912, Book 57, Folio 344, under Entry No. 29608, Book 66, Folio 144, under Entry No. 33030, Book 89, Folio 514, under Entry No. 43300, Book 150, Folio 627, under Entry No. 62963, Book 90, Folio 455, Book 196, Folio 514, under Entry No. 78906 of the Conveyance Records, St. Martin Parish, Louisiana.

Boundary Justification: Boundaries follow property lines of parcel of land upon which nominated resource is located.

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Fontenette-Bienvenu House, St. Martin Parish, LA

Section number N/A Page N/A

Owners:

Barbara Oubre	320 Gauthier St., St. Martinville, LA 70582
P. J. Dautreuil	2315 Jefferson Hwy., Apt. B, Jefferson, LA 70121
J. Ramsey Bienvenu	9631 Longmont, Houston, TX 77063
Bert Bienvenu	1703 Mossy Stone, Houston, TX 77063
Theresa Formeller	122 Church Street, St. Martinville, LA 70582
Ruth Boudreaux	121 Washington St., St. Martinville, LA 70582
Rita Bulliard	P. O. Box 2661, Parks, LA 70582
Gaston Dautreuil	P. O. Box 95, St. Martinville, LA 70582
Adelia Murphy	8118 Twining Oaks, Spring, TX 77379
Jean Broussard	409 Cora Street, St. Martinville, LA 70582