

St. Francisville's 3 V Tourist Court stands well back from the road along one of the West Feliciana Parish town's main streets. Constructed in 1938, the court consists of six small frame rental units displaying Craftsman influences. Also on the site are a contemporary manager's house and three units which have been altered to the extent that their integrity has been severely damaged. The contributing units have also undergone some change, but their National Register eligibility remains intact.

Historic photographs and the locations of the surviving structures indicate that the court was originally built as a series of single cabins arranged in a "U" shape around an open parking area (see plan). The cabins in each segment of the "U" were connected by latticed carports, but each resulting row stood separate from the other two.

Five of the cabins on the eastern leg of the "U" survive, along with their connecting carports. One cabin and its accompanying carport were removed recently from the row, leaving a scar on the wall of one end building. (The current owner is negotiating to purchase and move the row's lost unit back to its original site.) On the western side of the "U" only one contributing cabin survives. It was formed by joining two cabins in an L shape and reads as a cabin to which a rear wing has been appended. The facade is identical to those on the eastern row. It still presents its historic front on to the parking lot and thus should be considered a contributing element. No contributing elements survive on the third side of the "U", as will be detailed later.

Each of the surviving rectangular cabins has a gabled roof, is covered by clapboard siding, and is reached by concrete steps rising directly to the door without benefit of a porch. Each door features a subdivided glass pane above horizontal wooden panels. Each facade is also pierced by a single window and an attic vent whose shape mimics the roof gable. Craftsman details found on each building include an overhanging roof with exposed rafter ends and a gable-shaped hood supported by plain brackets. The hood also mimics the shape of the roof and provides a measure of protection from the elements for each door and step.

The floorplan consists of one room with an enclosed bath and open kitchenette installed on the wall opposite the door (see plan). Several of the cabins have had paneling installed over their beaded board walls.

As mentioned above, a frame manager's house is also located on the site. It is being counted as a contributing element because historic photos show that it is contemporary with the motel units. A clapboarded folk bungalow with screened porch, the building has overhanging eaves and a jerkinhead roof but otherwise lacks stylistic ornamentation. The photographs show that it has changed little since its construction.

Non-Contributing Elements

Also, as mentioned above, three frame buildings on the site are being counted as non-contributing elements. Two stand on the lower portion of the "U" and the third is located on the "U"'s western leg. Each has been formed by combining two of the individual cabins to create a larger structure. One is now a rectangular duplex (not to be confused with the "L" shaped contributing duplex unit described above), and the other two are enlarged single rental units. In the opinion of the State Historic Preservation Office, the re-working of these units has changed their appearance to the extent that their National Register eligibility has been lost.

Assessment of Integrity

Despite the foregoing changes, the 3 V Tourist Court retains sufficient integrity to merit Register listing. In short, it still looks like an early motel court. Because the eastern row survives almost intact, complete with its distinctive latticework connecting carports, a traveler from the historic

period would easily recognize the property if he were to revisit St. Francisville today. It also should be noted that historic motel courts are so rare in Louisiana (see Part S) that even partially surviving examples are quite important.

Significant dates	N/A
Architect/Builder	unknown
Criterion A	

The 3 V Tourist Court is significant at the state level in the area of transportation history because it is an extremely rare example of a stage in the development of the motel industry. The period of significance ranges from the construction date of 1938 to the fifty year cutoff date of 1942.

The mass production of the automobile in the early years of the twentieth century brought a new freedom of mobility to the masses. For the first time, the average family could travel purely for pleasure, a privilege previously reserved to the wealthy. This new mobility spawned a whole line of roadside industries to service traveling Americans, from gas stations, to diners, to motels, to tourist attractions, to automobile dealerships.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of roadside architecture is the development of the motel. When Americans first began touring the country, they simply camped along the roadside, often littering the countryside and tangling with roadside property owners. Because of the need for control and the desire to lure these potential customers downtown, towns began around 1920 to provide free municipal campgrounds. Then to keep out undesirables, towns began to charge a fee, which in turn opened the field to private development. A transition from pay camps to tourist cabins occurred in the mid to late 1920s, marking the beginnings of the motel industry.

The first tourist cabins were little more than shacks where the patron still camped out, but at least he had a roof of sorts over his head. Due to intense competition, cabins continued to be upgraded until they were homey cottages, complete with flower boxes and a picket fence. A typical early cabin complex consisted of rows of free-standing cabins with a central building containing bathroom facilities. Later the cabins would be connected by perhaps carports and later still would be totally joined to resemble today's motels.

It is not possible to know exactly how many tourist courts were built in Louisiana during the historic period. Several major highways ran through the state at this time, and each must have had a number of courts along its route. However, most of these have vanished. The Division of Historic Preservation is aware of only four which have survived to represent the earliest type -- i.e., individual cabins, whether completely free-standing or joined by carports. St. Francisville's 3 V Tourist Court is one of these.

The court was built in 1938 by three brothers named Vinci (hence the name "3 V" Tourist Court), who also operated a gas station, combination cafe/dance hall, and a store in St. Francisville. The other brothers eventually withdrew from the motel business, but Samuel Vinci continued to rent the rooms until shortly before his death in 1991. The current owner, Robin Roberts, saved the property from demolition, and the court is in use for weekly rentals.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Historic photographs of the 3V Tourist Court, St. Francisville, LA; copies in National Register file.