

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Austerlitz (c.1832-1836) is a two-story, fully raised, brick and frame plantation house in the French Creole style. Anglo influence can be seen in -the floorplan, symmetrical facade, and Federal details. The house rests on its original rural site facing False River in Pointe Coupee Parish approximately one mile northwest of the hamlet of Oscar. The remnants of a semi-formal garden and allee stand between the house and the nearby highway, partly blocking the view of the structure from the road. Despite a few alterations, the house easily retains its Creole character and hence its Register eligibility.

Austerlitz's Creole characteristics include:

- 1) its configuration as a fully raised plantation house whose primary living floor stands atop a plastered brick basement story,
- 2) a French timber frame of heavy hewn timbers and full-length braces mortised and pegged into the sills and wall plates of the upper floor,
- 3) bousillage infill between the timbers of the frame,
- 4) an original and complete Norman truss supporting a Class III tripped umbrella roof (refer to enclosure). Intact parts of the truss include a heavy roof ridge, collar-mounted king posts, truss blades with raking struts, king purlins between the four king posts, and large pegs holding the members together.
- 5) encircling galleries,
- 6) wraparound mantels,
- 7) exposed beaded ceiling beams in four rooms,
- 8) French doors,
- 9) French colonial style hardware on doors and shutters, and
- 10) the use of a decorative chair rail on the lower gallery and Federal crown molding on the upper gallery. These features illustrate the Creole custom of finishing gallery spaces for use as outdoor rooms.

In addition to the crown molding, other Federal elements found in Austerlitz include a symmetrical facade, oval fanlights above the main doors on both levels, simply built mantels displaying layered mantel shelves in the home's formal front rooms, and interior crown moldings (smaller in scale than those on the exterior). Also of interest is the home's unusual axial and formal plan, which is identical for each floor. This plan consists of a wide central hall flanked by a set of four rooms. Each of these sets includes a front parlor and chambre and two smaller rear rooms which suggest the idea of the Creole cabinet (see attached floorplan).

Most of the alterations to Austerlitz occurred around 1899. At that time a large two-story addition was appended to the rear! an interior staircase was added, the right side of the previously unfinished basement was floored and plastered for use as living space, and the front gallery was rebuilt. Several changes were necessary to complete this gallery work. They included: 1) replacement of all but two of the original massive chamfered octagonal wooden first floor columns with thick squared columns, 2) replacement of the upper gallery colonnettes with slender turned columns, 3) replacement of the original balustrade with one in the Victorian style, 4) removal of the front gallery's stairway, and 5) the insertion of plain joists to replace all but a few of the gallery's original beaded beams. The house required additional work in the 1930s, apparently as the result of storm damage. At that time several dormers were removed and two rear chimneys were cut down below the roof line.

Despite these changes, Austerlitz stands as a rare and significant example of Creole architecture. Its configuration as a raised plantation house, its heavy timber frame and bousillage infill, its French doors and wraparound mantels, its original umbrella roof with Norman truss, its encircling galleries, and its interior exposed beaded ceiling beams remain totally intact. Its Federal detailing also stands unchanged. The 1899 rear addition does not impact the facade, the upper

gallery columns are in a style appropriate to the period of the home's construction, and the gallery itself still retains the configuration and overall appearance identified with the Creole architectural tradition. Finally, symmetrical and axial floorplans such as that at Austerlitz are extremely rare in raised Creole houses. For all of these reasons, Austerlitz is a strong candidate for National Register listing.

Significant dates c.1832-1836
Architect/Builder unknown
Criterion C

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

Austerlitz is significant in the area of architecture at the state level because it is a rare and landmark example of the raised Creole plantation house which was the ultimate expression of French architecture in Louisiana. It also exhibits decorative elements and a particularly rare transitional floorplan which show the influence of both the French and the Anglo-American architectural traditions.

Although Creole dwellings once dominated the rural landscape of central and southern Louisiana, today perhaps only 300 - 400 examples of these buildings remain standing outside New Orleans. Of these, the majority are small or moderately sized one story houses, while only approximately thirty (30) are members of the distinct group of substantial raised plantation houses regarded as the apex of the Creole style. Austerlitz is one of these.

In addition, the house contains a collection of important Creole and Anglo-American features often lacking in the smaller houses. These features include the following:

- 1) Although one-story Anglo-French houses with transitional floorplans focused upon central hallways exist in Louisiana, raised Creole plantation house constructed with central hallways are very rare.
- 2) In terms of its interior space (eight rooms plus hallway on each floor), it is probably the largest raised Creole house in the state.
- 3) It features a complete Norman roof truss which is one of the finest examples surviving in the Mississippi Valley.
- 4) It also features a pegged timber frame and bousillage infill, elements which usually are found only in the earlier Creole houses.
- 5) Its French doors, interior exposed beaded ceiling beams, wraparound mantels, and significant elements of the exterior gallery decoration remain intact.
- 6) The Federal gallery cornice has an unusual and intricate pattern of reeding and molding. We also believe the two surviving wooden chamfered octagonal columns to be exceedingly rare.

Major Bibliographical References

Seebold, Herman Boehm de Bachel, Old Louisiana Plantation Homes and Family Trees. Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 1941.

Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, Historic Structures Survey of Pointe Coupee Parish.