

THE RICHARDSON HOUSE
623 Orange Street

Architectural Rating: Red
Date of Construction: Circa 1845-50
Architect: None found during research

Nomination Information

Date: August 8, 1985
Nominated by: Camille Strachan
Seconded by: Jane Brooks, Joanne Whitley

Site Description

Square 79, lot 12
1st Assessment District, 1st Municipal District
Zoning: LI
Lot size: 63'11"2'" front on Orange Street, same width in rear, by a depth of 159'10"1'" between equal and parallel lines.

Owners: Mr. William Gerard Richardson, Sr., William G Richardson, Jr.
and Miss Ursula Richardson

The nomination of this property was based on the building's architectural significance, particularly the fact that it embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type which can be valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or of indigenous materials or craftsmanship. Each of the four criteria used in determining landmark qualification, as outlined in Ordinance No. 5992 M.C.S., will be examined on an individual basis in order to produce information upon which a final decision whether or not to designate this property will be made.

Architectural Significance

This building is one of only a very few remaining of a type that was once quite prevalent in the Lower Garden District and Irish Channel areas of New Orleans. Made of brick, it is two stories tall but only two bays wide. It has a low-pitched hipped roof. A distinctive element is the gallery on the second floor that wraps around the front and all the way down the right side. It is different from a "double-galleried" building in that the first level does not have a porch or gallery; the doors on the lower level simply open out to the pavement or yard surrounding the house. The building itself is raised only slightly off the ground.

The detailing on the gallery has been changed, in that cast iron balustrades and columns now replace the original wooden balustrades and columns. This change was probably made many years ago. A wooden cornice still remains. The main body of the building appears to have had very few alterations. The bricks have been painted, and appear to be in good condition. The alternating doors and windows have their same configurations, and all are covered with louvered shutters. The changes on the gallery are of the type that can rather easily be removed and replaced with elements more closely resembling the original, as was recently done at 1707 Religious Street, where a building very similar to this one is located, just four blocks away. For this reason the staff does not consider the changes to have compromised

the building's integrity seriously.

The building at 1707 Religious Street, so similar to this one, was designated a local landmark by the New Orleans Historic District Landmarks Commission on August 9, 1985. Research conducted on that building from Notarial Drawings and other sources showed that similar structures existed on Chippewa Street between Market and Richard Streets, on Richard Street between Chippewa and St. Thomas Streets, on Euterpe Street between Camp and Magazine Street, and on Euterpe between Constance and Annunciation Streets. There were also two side by side on Constance between Race and Euterpe Streets, plus undoubtedly many more that did not show up in early drawings or maps.

Despite the fact that so many buildings of this type seem to have existed in this area, today, beside the Richardson House and the landmark on Religious Street, the staff has only located one other similar structure, on Harmony Street, and it has been seriously altered, with the gallery completely removed from the facade. Therefore, the staff feels that it is important to recognize and preserve the Richardson House as a rare specimen reminding us of the true appearance of this neighborhood in the late nineteenth century.

It should be noted in support of this designation that the Richardson House is set back from the street and has a small geometrically organized garden in front of it. An archival drawing of just such a building complete with an historical plan depicting the layout of trees, walks, and vegetation in front of and beside it, is used to illustrate the section on Gardens in the Lower Garden District in the New Orleans Architecture series, Volume 1. Not many structures retain plantings in the pattern they had years ago. Since this one does seem to have maintained a traditional garden layout, that should be thought to enhance its historical significance.

History

One reason this building seems to have had so few changes made to it (besides the gallery alterations outlined under Architectural Significance) is that it has remained in the possession of one family and their descendants for ninety-six years. The property is currently owned by William Gerard Richardson and his children. Mr. Richardson and his late wife Rose Gallagher Richardson acquired the property in 1945 in the division of property in the succession of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Gallagher, Mrs. Richardson's parents. Thomas Gallagher acquired it from the succession of his mother, Maggie Mahoney Gallagher, who inherited it along with four siblings in 1922 when the estate of their parents, Mr. and Mrs. James Mahoney, was partitioned. Although the chain-of-title is unclear prior to 1912 (because the court records for the succession of Mrs. James Mahoney #10191 C.D.C., Division D, are stored in the warehouse in the basement of the Wildlife and Fisheries Building), the Assessment Records provide good information concerning both ownership and property value back through 1863.

According to the Assessment Records, James Mahoney, the great grandfather of Mr. Richardson's late wife, owned this property from 1891-1915. It has remained in the possession of his descendants since then. Mahoney apparently purchased the property from John Spencer on September 17, 1891, for \$4675. Prior to Spencer, the property was owned by a man whose name is illegible in the records from 1867-1875, and before that the records indicate that it was owned by the estate of John Donovan. It was assessed at \$2800 in 1863, but that is the earliest information we can obtain from the Assessment Records; they are not available before that year for this area.

Since no exact date of construction can be found using either the chain-of-title or the Tax Assessment Records, parameters for possible dates will be estimated using information we know about similar structures. The Tays-Bates House at 1707 Religious Street has a construction date of circa 1835. Other houses like these, though now demolished, are depicted in Notarial Archives Drawings. The dates on two of the drawings, which were usually made several years after the building's construction, are 1852 and 1854. Based on these comparisons it seems fair to estimate that the building at 623 Orange Street was probably built around 1845-50.

Architect

None

Historic Personages

None

Social, Political, and Economic Significance

None

Staff Recommendation

The staff recommends for the designation of this property as a landmark, based on the fact that it embodies characteristics of a distinctive architectural type that, though once common in the Lower Garden District and Irish Channel areas, is now extremely scarce. The original appearance of these types of buildings is fairly well documented, so the possibility of a faithful restoration of this one exists. It has undergone some alterations through the years, but the staff feels they could be easily reversible if a restoration was undertaken. Without the protection afforded by the landmark designation, a small building of this type could easily be overlooked and lost, and the complete eradication of this unusual building type would be one step closer.