

THE FRERET-WILLEFORD HOUSE  
1707 Second Street

Architectural Rating: Blue  
Construction Date: 1860  
Architect: William Alfred Freret

Nomination Information

Date: March 9, 1978  
Nominated by: Renna Godchaux  
Seconded by: Jane Ferguson, Lois Martin  
Recommended by: Staff

Site Description

Square 245, Lot 24  
4th M.D., 12th A.D.  
Zoning: RM-4  
Lot Size: 30' x 141'5"1"

Owner

Mrs. James F. Willeford

The nomination of this building was based upon its architectural significance, as a row of identical detached houses and the fact that it was designed by an important architect. Each of the four areas of criteria used in determining landmark qualification, and outlined in City Ordinance #5992 M.C.S., will be examined on an individual basis in order to produce information upon which a final decision will be made whether or not to designate the property.

Architectural Significance

According to records in the Office of Conveyance, William Freret purchased the lot on which this house stands in August of 1855. Assessment records indicate the house was standing in 1863, and title research on other houses in this row indicate 1860 as the actual date of construction. Assessment records for the row from 1858-1862 are lost.

This frame two story double galleried house is predominately Greek Revival in style, with Italianate brackets appearing on the cornice. By 1860, the Greek Revival style was being replaced in popularity by the Italianate, and these houses are an excellent example of the transition from one style to the other. The overall form of the house is typical for New Orleans residences of the period, three bays wide with a two story columned gallery across the facade and a galleried service wing extending towards the rear of the property. The house retains its original front door frame, with rectangular sidelights and transom. Four square wooden columns support the second story gallery.

The column treatment of the second story gallery differs from that used below in the fact that the two inner columns are round, fluted and carry Tower of the Winds capitals of cast iron. Such capitals are common features of Greek Revival houses in New Orleans. The original cast iron gallery railings remain on the second story gallery; none remain on the lower gallery. The cornice carries a row of Greek Revival dentils, which are interrupted at regular intervals by Italianate paired brackets.

In conjunction with 1703, 1711, 1715 and 1719 Second Street, this house forms a row of identical detached houses. For the period from 1840 to 1870 in New Orleans, only two other such rows survive intact. In 1845 J.N.B. de Pouilly designed the five identical houses at 1206-1234 Chartres Street, and in 1861 William Alfred Freret designed the five identical houses at 2700-2726 Coliseum Street. Rows of this type were built as speculative investments.

## Architect

The design of this row of houses is firmly attributed to William Alfred Freret. Since the houses were built by the Freret family, there was no need for a building contract. William Alfred Freret was born in 1833, the son of William Freret, a former Mayor of New Orleans. His cousin, James Freret, was a prominent architect in New Orleans from 1870 till 1890. Directory and assessment records indicate that William Alfred Freret lived at 1715 Second Street for several years, and for a short period of time owned three of the five houses. He began his architectural career just before the Civil War, specializing in commercial and public buildings. In 1859 he designed the Merchant's Mutual Insurance Company Building at 622 Canal Street, one of two remaining cast iron facades in New Orleans. He was also the architect for McDonogh Schools 1-20 in the 1870's and 80's.

The five houses on Second Street are a rare example of Freret's residential work. The only other known extant houses by William Alfred Freret are located at 2700-2726 Coliseum Street, curiously another row of five identical detached houses, although more pretentious than the houses under consideration here. The row on Coliseum is popularly known as "Freret's Folly", so named because the Civil War broke out shortly after they were finished and they consequently became a financial liability to the architect. The culmination of Freret's career came in 1887, when according to the July 21st Times Democrat he was appointed Supervising Architect in charge of U.S. Treasury construction. He died in 1911.

## Historic Personages

1707 Second Street was the property of William Freret from 1855 until his death in 1864. William Freret was twice Mayor of New Orleans, from 1840-42 and 1843-44. He owned three of the five houses at the time of his death.

## Cultural, Economic and Social History

As a rare example of a row of identical ante-bellum houses, this building and its four neighbors are historically significant. They represent the sort of speculative construction that ceased with the economic collapse that followed the Civil War.