

THE THORN-MORGAN HOUSE
1435 Jackson Avenue

Architectural Rating: Blue
Construction Date: 1883
Architect: William Fitzner
Builder: Conrad Wundenberg

Nomination Information

Date: September 13, 1984
Nominated by: Camille Strachan
Seconded by: Jane Brooks and Ron Pursell

Site Description

Square 203, Lot G (previously 13 and 14)
Fourth Municipal District, Twelfth Assessment District

Zoning:

Owners: Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Morgan

The nomination of this property was based upon its architectural significance and its association with a leading architect. Each of the four areas of criteria used in determining landmark qualification, as 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

Considered one of the last important raised center-hall cottages built in New Orleans, the Thorn-Morgan House was designed by the architect William Fitzner in the fully-developed Italianate style. It was constructed in 1883 by the builder Conrad Wundenberg.

The house is located on a street that has always been an important thoroughfare in New Orleans. Back when the Spaniard Don Jacinto Panis owned a plantation that included this area (it was eight arpents, or 1400 feet, wide along the river and extended back to the present St. Charles Avenue), Jackson Avenue was the central road and was called "Cours Panis". The Panis plantation was sold off by 1818, after Don Jacinto's death, and the land was soon subdivided. The area became part of the City of Lafayette, which was incorporated in 1832, and grew rapidly. It was annexed to the City of New Orleans in 1852. The many fine homes along this avenue date from about 1850 to the late nineteenth century and represent one of the most important collections of grand residential structures in the city.

A brief run-down of the ownership of this property shows that Mrs. Hattie Longshore Thorn of Cincinnati, wife of Captain Charles Thorn of New Orleans, purchased this land from Mrs. Clara Given with her own funds on April 5, 1883. The price was \$6000. Soon after the purchase Fitzner designed the house for the Thorns. Charles Thorn died on October 15, 1887 at the age of forty-eight, and the funeral at his home was attended by many of his Masonic

brothers. Hattie Thorn died on June 24, 1888 at the age of 47, and her funeral was also at the home, designated at that time by the number 235 Jackson Avenue.

The house remained in the possession of Hattie Thorn's descendants until 1906 when Henry Sloan purchased it for \$8250. On March 25, 1919, Sloan sold it to William Henderson for \$8500, and it remained in his family's possession until October 3, 1947 when Henderson's unmarried daughter Sarah left the property to a young boy named Andrew Labrot. Andrew's father Sylvester Labrot sold the property two months later to James Gibbons for \$21,000. The property then changed hands twice more before being acquired by the present owners: once in March 1956 when Mr. and Mrs. Fernando Cuquet bought it for \$26,600, and then in October 1963 when Robert Mitchell bought it for \$57,000. On April 1, 1964 Cecil Morgan purchased the house from Mitchell for \$58,000. Judge Morgan, now retired, continues to reside in the house with his wife.

The Thorn-Morgan house is built on the five-bay, center-hall "American" plan. This plan was first used in the late 1830's and became a favorite in New Orleans. Typical of the cottage or villa type, it has a side-gabled roof and a gallery across the front of the building. The gallery is supported by six Corinthian columns, with a wooden balustrade between them featuring heavy, closely spaced, bulbous balusters. Large, heavy elements characterize the late Italianate style used throughout this building. Of particular note is the single dormer window in the front slope of the roof which is quite oversized, indicative of the late construction date, and has details such as two arched windows beneath a triangular pediment. Square pilasters flank the windows.

Rounded arches, characteristic of the Italian influence, are used on all the full-length windows on the facade of the building as well as on the elaborate door frame. The windows have four-over-six light double-hung sash with handsome wooden surrounds. There is a straight projecting cornice above the arch on each frame. Split louvered shutters can provide privacy or protection when closed over the lower part of the window while still allowing light in at the top. The large door frame features paneled pilasters beneath the arch and the projecting cornice. The spandrels of the arch are also paneled. The door itself is recessed behind this frame, and has a paneled arched section in the center with transom lights and side lights surrounding it.

The same sort of heavy ornamentation is continued on the cornice above the gallery. Curving brackets are placed above each column and paired on the side of the cornice where it returns to the house. Between the brackets are small rectangular panels and modillions under the roof overhang. Smaller dentil blocks are used under the overhang of the gables on the side of the house as well.

Decorative drop siding is used on the facade of this frame structure, accented by quoins on the building's corners. The quoins are used on the junctures on the semi-octagonal bay on the house's left side also. The bay has a wide entablature with modillion blocks but no brackets.

A small, one-story rear wing extends back behind the bay. There is a one-story porch in the "U" formed by the main body of the house intersecting the wing.

Architect

William Fitzner is considered one of the more important architects who worked in New Orleans in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although perhaps not as well known as Henry Howard or the Galliers, his works included the Rice and Borne building from 1883, an Italianate commercial building which is now demolished; the main building at Dominican College, from about 1880; and a significant three-story townhouse in the Italianate style that he built at 547 Esplanade in 1879. Those works that we know by Fitzner show a consistency in planning and detail, and a real feel for the proportions of the Italianate style that mark him as an accomplished architect.

Social, Economic, Political and Cultural History

None

Historic Personages

None

Staff Recommendation

For designation, based on architectural significance and association with a famous architect, William Fitzner. The Thorn-Morgan house is one of the last significant raised villas to be built in New Orleans, and exhibits the finely-tuned proportions of this fully-developed house type. The late Italianate style used on the building harmonizes well with the form, and is characterized by a real solidity and boldness of the elements that result in a noble simplicity and monumentality.