

The Newberger-Levine House  
1640 Palmer Avenue

Architectural Rating: Blue  
Construction Date: 1908-09  
Architect: Emile Weil

Nomination Information

Date: January 13, 1983  
Nominated by: Jacqueline McPherson  
Seconded by: Joanne Whitley, Eugene Cizek  
Recommended by: John Ernst

Site Description

Square 90, Lot 4A  
Sixth Municipal District, Fifteenth Assessment District  
Zoning: RS-2  
Lot Size: 61'-8" x 147'-0" x 61'-8" x 147'-2"  
Owners: Dr. and Mrs. Richard Levine

The nomination of this property was based upon its architectural significance and the fact that it was designed by a noted 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 individually. This information will be the basis for a final decision about the designation of this property.

Architectural Significance

The lot on which this house stands was part of the property of Aurora McGehee at the turn of the century. On July 21, 1905, McGehee sold the property, which included half a square of land, to Sylvan Newberger, a cotton broker. Newberger subdivided the property into two lots on St. Charles Avenue and three on Palmer Avenue, and kept the middle lot on Palmer for himself. He commissioned Emile Weil to design his house, which was first illustrated in October 1909 in Architectural Art and its Allies (as the residence of "J. C. Newberger"). Newberger's address is listed at 1640 Palmer for the first time in the 1909 city directory. The house was again illustrated in a promotional book published by Weil's office about 1920. Sylvan Newberger resided at this address until 1931 (and became a well-known civic and philanthropic worker); Dr. and Mrs. Levine have lived there since 1980.

The Newberger house is a two-and-a-half-story building with a raised basement. The facade is divided horizontally by materials: the base and first floor are finished with a smooth stucco scored to look like stone; the second floor is faced with roughcast stucco; and the gables are half-timbered. It is also divided vertically by a setback. The plane of the left half of the facade is set behind the plane of the right half along a line that runs from the porch floor to the roof. Even the porch roof is divided, the left half set back behind the right, and this division leads to one of the most interesting design elements of the facade. The porch is divided into two bays along the setback line, and it is the arrangement of the porch columns that is noteworthy. The columns are doubled at both ends of each bay (including the sides) of the porch, supporting the ends of the shallow pointed arches that enclose the bays. Against the front wall, this doubling takes the form of a pilaster and detached column. In the front corners, there are three columns to support the front and side arches; the corner column acts as the second in both directions. In the middle, the porch roof is supported by four columns, two for each of the offset front arches. The columns themselves are of a unique design. The shaft of the column is a square wooden member, chamfered below the capital, which is made up of overlapping horizontal and vertical moldings. The porch roof includes a projecting cornice, supported by large brackets above the columns and faced by a plain fascia board. The gutter forms a surprisingly effective decorative element along the fascia board. The original wooden railing and balustrade on the porch roof (which ran between wooden posts detailed and arranged like the columns below) have been replaced by a decorative iron railing. While not visually strong enough to be appropriate, the iron railing is not obtrusive, and is the only major facade change since the house was built.

The vertical division of the facade along the setback is an important factor in the design of the facade, because within each half of the facade (with the exception of the entryway) the architectural elements are arranged symmetrically. To the left of the setback line, the first floor entrance to the living room (twelve-light double doors with sidelights and transom) is located in the center of the wall. The two double hung windows on the second floor are located symmetrically, and the gabled dormer with its two diamond-paned casement windows is centered over that half of the facade. The half of the facade to the right of the setback line is capped by a half-timbered gable, which is separated from the second floor level by an elaborate molding course and large projecting brackets. Centered in the gable is a pair of double diamond-paned casement windows. Below them, and also centered on the right side, is a pair of full-length openings at the second floor. The only non-symmetrical elements are on the first floor, where the main entryway sits to the left and a pair of casement windows with a transom (providing light to an alcove within) to the right. All of the openings on the first floor are surrounded by simple frames; the front doors are enclosed by a simplified classical cornice supported on brackets that mimic the shape of the porch brackets.

The basic form of the Newberger house is rectangular, covered by a tall red-tiled hipped roof. Three gables project from this hipped roof: one above the right half of the facade, and two larger cross gables on the sides. All three gables share the same design features: half-timbering; two pairs of diamond-paned casement windows; elaborate moldings at their bases; and large carved wooden brackets supporting the lower slopes of the gabled roof. The hipped roof extends its slope beyond the line of the building on rafters with exposed carved ends.

A bay enclosing the stair hall (which features stained glass in a largely geometric pattern) and what was originally a breakfast room projects from the right (Marquette St.) side of the house. On the left side, there is a curved bay at the dining room, covered by a curved stepped cornice and a copper roof. At the rear end of the left side of the house there was originally an open gallery with columns off of the dining room. However, in 1917, Emile Weil designed an addition to the house that enclosed the gallery, turning it into a sunroom, and included a sleeping porch on the second floor. The sleeping porch features a series of paired casement windows with transoms, framed by simplified classical pilasters and moldings. Finally, the rear of the building has been modified by the addition of an arcade and pool enclosure done in a rough-stucco Spanish Colonial style.

The Newberger house is difficult to classify in stylistic terms because it follows no particular style in either its general form or in most of its details. In fact, the only stylistic references are the simplified classical details of the main door enframingent (and, later, the sleeping porch) and the half-timbering and diamond-paned windows in the gables, which are medieval English or Tudor elements. The simplicity of both materials and form, and the original character of the details, indicate a kinship with the spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement. The Arts and Crafts movement was a reaction in taste in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries against the florid and extremely picturesque character of the late Victorian styles. It stressed simplicity in massing and originality in detail within a picturesque (not formal) overall effect. Weil's design shows just such tendencies, especially when compared to his Classical Revival designs of the same time. Many of the details are original to Weil, and craftsman-like in nature, and other details (like the exposed eaves and projecting brackets) can be found in similar form on other Arts and Crafts buildings of the period. Yet, however original the massing and detailing, the design elements arranged in a way that shows the strong ordering force of Weil's personality and professional ability. This house is unusual among Weil's works, because he designed most of his buildings according to one or another of the revival styles. This is one of the best of Weil's non-stylistic designs, and ranks among the best house designs of his whole career.

#### Architect

Judged by the number of commissions and the social rank of his clients, Emile Weil was one of the most prolific and prestigious architects in New Orleans in the first three decades of this century. He designed in a number of classical and

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eclectic styles for many different building types. His clients included retail merchants (among them the Kress Store, 1910); banks (including the headquarters and branches of the Whitney and Canal - now FNBC - Banks), and Jewish congregations (Touro, Sinai, and Beth Israel synagogues). He also designed numerous houses in Uptown New Orleans, particularly for Jewish clients. Among his best extant houses are the HDLC landmark Schwartz house (14 Audubon Boulevard), in the Spanish Colonial style, the Benjamin house (5531 St. Charles) and the Adler house (6153 St. Charles) in the Classical style, and the Newman house (3804 St. Charles), an essay in the Richardsonian Romanesque.

Historic Personages

None

Social, Cultural, and Economic History

None

Staff Recommendation: for designation. This building is a well-preserved example of some of the best work of a noted New Orleans architect of the early twentieth century.