

THE PHILLIPS HOUSE  
2120 Carondelet Street

Architectural Rating: Blue  
Construction Date: circa 1850  
Architect: none found during research

Nomination Information

Date: November 8, 1984  
Nominated by: Camille Strachan  
Seconded by: Joanne Whitley, Jane Brooks

Site Description

Square 236, Lots 15 and 16  
Fourth Municipal District, Eleventh Assessment District  
Zoning: G-1A  
Lot Size: Lots 15 and 16 each measure 29'8"3" front on Carondelet Street and the same in the rear, by a depth of 150' between equal and parallel lines. Lot 16 commences 130' from the corner of Carondelet and Jackson Avenue.

Owner: Avenue Plaza Apartment Company

The nomination of this property was based on its architectural significance and its association with historically significant personages. 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

The Phillips House at 2120 Carondelet Street is a fine example of an early raised cottage built in the Greek Revival style. It has the simple, clean-cut lines characteristic of the best works of this style, and the prototypical elements of the cottage form. Those elements include the five-bay arrangement with a large central entranceway flanked by four full-length windows, the wide, columned gallery across the front of the building, the side gabled roof with two pedimented dormers, etc.

What makes this building all the more interesting are its history and its present situation. Currently, it stands as a rather forlorn-looking nineteenth century home wedged between large-scale twentieth century hotels, apartment buildings and a parking garage. It functions as a striking reminder of the characteristics that once graced Carondelet Street, when it was a real residential thoroughfare lined with graceful buildings.

It does more than characterize Carondelet Street, though; it also exemplifies St. Charles Avenue buildings from around 1850, because all records indicate that this house was actually constructed on St. Charles Avenue around that time as the home of the Phillips family, and then moved to its present location around 1877 when it was purchased by Duncan F. Kenner.

Notarial archives reveal that Mr. Alexander Phillips, a native of Amsterdam who came to New Orleans via Philadelphia, purchased the entire square bounded by St. Charles Avenue, Josephine Street, Carondelet Street and Jackson Avenue from Mathilda Poultney in a "compromise agreement" on February 16, 1851 for \$1500. The City Directory from 1849, 1850 and 1851 all list Alexander Phillips already living in that square: on "Mayades (the former name of St. Charles Avenue) between Jackson and Josephine", so it may be that Phillips had already built on the square before making the ownership official. An early tax assessment record from 1857 confirms this information by listing Alexander Phillips as the owner of the entire square, with the cash value of house and lots at \$25,000. Phillips died between 1860 and 1864: the 1860 City Directory lists his name and residence on St. Charles near Jackson Avenue, but the 1864 tax records show the ownership of the square belonging to his estate. In 1864 the house and lots were valued at \$30,000, and a note was made that P.T. Phillips had a grocery store on the corner of St. Charles and Jackson Avenue. That grocery, designed by Henry Howard, was designated by the New Orleans Historic District Landmarks Commission on June 22, 1978, and appears almost exactly as it did when it was constructed in 1860.

Up through at least 1871 the tax assessment records indicate that only one residence existed on this square, the whole of which was still owned by the Phillips estate. Although no exact location for the residence is given, it was obviously on St. Charles Avenue at that time. City Directories through 1874 list the Phillips address as 525 St. Charles, and archival maps confirm that this was the 500 block in the old numbering system.

In 1877 the heirs of Alexander Phillips sold some of their property in the square at an October auction. The lots on Carondelet Street where the house stands now, numbers 15 and 16, were purchased by Duncan Kenner for \$2500. Kenner also purchased most of the footage along St. Charles in that square except for the Phillips grocery store.

Six years later in the 1883 Robinson Atlas, the earliest map available of this area, there is no structure, besides the grocery, facing St. Charles Avenue on that lot. That would seem to indicate that Mr. Kenner had demolished the house on St. Charles soon after he purchased it. On that same map the house on lots 15 and 16 is shown, in exactly the same position it is in today, facing Carondelet Street. A logical assumption might be that Kenner had had that structure built during the same time period the other had been demolished, from about 1877-1883. However, according to a Times-Picayune article about this house written by John Pope in 1981, the upstairs walls of the house at 2120 Carondelet Street bear the signatures of several members of the Phillips family: "T. Neville Phillips, Jr., September 28, 1864" and "W.A. Phillips, June 24, 1864 - Confederate States of America." Carved into a downstairs window is the name Rosa Phillips. Since we already know that the Phillips family owned the only residence on the square during the Civil War years, and since the Carondelet Street house obviously belonged to the Phillips family in 1864, the conclusion to be drawn is simply that the house was moved from a St. Charles frontage to its present location between 1877 and 1883.

The moving of houses seems not to have been an unusual practice in the later nineteenth century. We have documentation of exactly this same thing occurring to another of the New Orleans Historic District Landmarks

Commission's landmark buildings just a few blocks away. The Clarke House at 1620 Eighth Street was originally built on St. Charles Avenue and moved around on the same square by Col. George Soule in 1869 when he decided he wanted a larger home on the Avenue. In this case, we don't know Kenner's reason for wanting the house moved, but perhaps he also had larger plans for his lots along St. Charles, since they were all vacant in 1883.

According to City Directories, Duncan Kenner himself never lived in the house at 2120 Carondelet. He spent the last twenty years or so of his life in his New Orleans home at 257 Carondelet Street, which, according to the Robinson Map, was located about a block from the present Howard Avenue. The Phillips House did remain in the possession of Kenner family members for numerous years though, and Kenner's granddaughter, Mrs. Thomas Sloo, resided in the house for a while during the 1930's and 1940's.

In July of 1944 Mrs. Sloo sold the property to Citizens Homestead Association for \$6500. The Homestead then sold it to Mr. and Mrs. James Ricau, Sr. for \$4000. Thirty-two years later James Ricau, Jr. sold it for \$75,000 to the American Savings and Loan Association. It changed hands twice more before April 6, 1981, when the Garden District Apartments Partnership acquired the same two lots for \$146,000. That partnership was formed by William J. Mora, III and Daniel W. Osborne, who went on to buy more lots in that same square and then sell six of those lots to the Avenue Plaza Apartment Company on April 30, 1982 for \$6,000,000. The Avenue Plaza Apartment Company is the present owner.

The gallery is the most distinctive part of this structure. It is supported by six square box columns with capitals and has a balustrade of simple square balusters. A broad entablature with bands of classical molding dominates the facade. Steps lead up to the large central doorway surrounded by sidelights and a transom, all of which is encompassed by a crossette frame. The four full-length windows are protected by louvered shutters and have simple square-headed frames. The facade of the building is covered with wood siding scored to resemble stone, a practice that was fairly popular during the 1850's.

A two-story service wing with a double gallery extends from the rear of the structure. There is also a rear gallery on the back of the main building.

#### Historic Personages

Alexander Phillips was an early leader in the mercantile business in New Orleans. Born in Amsterdam, he came to the United States around 1791, perhaps as an indentured servant. He spent his first years in America training as a tinsmith in Philadelphia. He came to New Orleans in 1808, married Rosina Thomas of Natchez in 1811, and involved himself in the shipping and real estates business. Eventually, however, he restricted himself to wholesale and retail trade of groceries and was quite successful.

Phillips may have been the first Jew to hold public office in New Orleans -

he was elected "alderman" in 1826, 1827 and 1836. He had eight children who were probably raised in the family's earlier home on Chartres Street. However, in 1849 at the age of about seventy-three, he established a new home in the expanding city of Lafayette (which was soon to be annexed to New Orleans) and lived there with his large family until his death at the age of about eighty-five.

Duncan F. Kenner, although never a resident of 2120 Carondelet as far as we can tell, did purchase the house in 1877 and probably had it moved from St. Charles Avenue to its present location. Kenner was born in New Orleans in 1813 and grew to become one of its outstanding citizens - "statesman, planter, lawyer and diplomat." He owned Ashland Plantation in Ascension Parish, which at one time ranked among the great sugar plantations of Louisiana.

Kenner was a representative in the state legislature, and later a member of the Confederate Congress and friend of Jefferson Davis. Kenner became convinced that European countries would never recognize the Confederacy unless it abolished slavery, so he led a move to do just that and even made a dangerous trip to Europe to bring the news to European leaders.

After the war Kenner was elected to the State Senate and continued to serve the public. He also was able to regain almost all of his property after the setbacks suffered during the war years. He spent most of his later years in New Orleans residing at 257 Carondelet, near Lee Circle. He died in 1887 at the age of seventy-four.

#### Social, Political and Economic Significance

None

#### Architect

None found during research

#### Staff Recommendation

For designation, based on architectural significance and association with two leaders in the New Orleans community.

#### Bibliography

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