

THE BULLITT-LONGENECKER HOUSE
3627 Carondelet Street

Architectural Rating: Purple
Construction Date: 1868-69
Architect: Edward Gottheil

Nomination Information

Date: April 19, 1979

Nominated by: Jane Ferguson

Seconded by: Renna Godchaux & Howard Green

Recommended by: Staff

Site Description:

Square 429, Lot: B-4

6th M.D., 14th A.D.

Zoning: RD-2

Lot Size: 206' 2" 2' 1" X 104' 4" 3' 1" X 205' 6" X 121' 10" 7' 1"

Owner: Mr. & Mrs. Geoffrey Longenecker

The nomination of this property was based upon its architectural significance. Each of the four areas of criteria used in determining landmark qualification, as outlined in City Ordinance #5992 MCS, 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

Property Description

According to records in the Notarial Archives, Elizabeth White, wife of Cuthbert Bullitt, purchased the land on which the property in question originally stood on October 17, 1864.¹ Mrs. Bullitt purchased the city block bounded by Nayades (St. Charles), Apollo (Carondelet), Gen. Taylor and Peniston for \$4,500 cash.² According to the Manuscript Tax Rolls for the city of Jefferson, which at the time extended to Toledo Street, the land was valued at \$6,500 in 1867, with no improvements noted.³ In 1868, the land was valued at \$7,000, with improvements to the property totaling #3,000 indicating that construction of some sort had commenced.⁴ The 1869 tax rolls indicate that the land was now valued at \$13,600, with the improvements valued at \$9,000.⁵ It is important to note that the tax records for the City of Jefferson list the land value and the value of improvements separately, combining the two figures to determine the total taxable value of the property. Thus, the \$9,000 figure noted in 1869 can be taken to represent an estimate of the cost of the house and accessory buildings Cuthbert Bullitt erected on that square. Bullitt's new house attracted the attention of a writer for the Daily Picayune in September of 1868 who noted :

"Among the many elegant buildings which are springing up in Jefferson City, we notice one which is being built by our fellow citizen Cuthbert Bullitt, Esq. It is being erected in the center of a large square of ground, which has been greatly improved, and is to be a beautiful Swiss villa. The plan, we understand, was brought from Europe by Mr. Gottheil, our Commissioner to the Paris Exposition, who is giving his personal supervision to its construction".⁶

Judging from this article and the assessment records, it appears that construction began in late 1868, with completion of the house in 1869. Bullitt's new house must have been quite a novelty, for in the sale of the property to H.H. Hansell in June of 1870, the improvements were described as "An elevated one and a half story Swiss cottage house and outbuildings".⁷ The appearance in a real estate transaction of an architectural description such as this is most unusual. Frederick Forde Hansell purchased the house from the estate of H.H. Hansell in September of 1881, and the house was again described as "an elevated one and a half story frame Swiss cottage residence."⁸

Simon Hernsheim purchased the property on May 8, 1883 for \$17,200.⁹ Hernsheim acquired five lots of ground forming the Carondelet and Amelia Street corner of the square bounded by Baronne, Foucher, Carondelet and Amelia in June and July of 1883 for \$1,950.¹⁰ On June 26, 1883, Hernsheim contracted with Jeremiah Lincoln to have the house, then known as the Hansell Cottage, moved to his property at the corner of Carondelet and Amelia Streets where it currently stands. The house was to be set back from Carondelet Street about 30 feet, and placed upon an eight foot high foundation, a foot higher than the original piers. The contract price for moving the house to the new location, including the removal and reconstruction of the chimneys and a new foundation, was \$1,350. Hernsheim's motive for relocating the Bullitt house was based upon the fact that he purchased the block facing St. Charles Avenue for the purpose of erecting a new house on the site. The Bullitt house, according to the Atlas of the city of New Orleans, Louisiana published in 1883, stood in the center of the block!¹¹ Hernsheim's huge new house, now the Columns Hotel, designed by Thomas Sully and built in 1884,¹² was built where the Bullitt house had formerly stood.¹³ Hernsheim sold the relocated house to John G. Parham for \$9,500 on May 9, 1984.

Architectural Description

The Bullitt-Longenecker House is a frame one-and-a-half story structure raised on eight foot high brick piers. This house is a superbly detailed and maintained example of perhaps the rarest of all 19th century architectural styles, the Swiss cottage or Swiss chalet style. The chief proponent of many mid-1800's revival styles in the U.S., Andrew Jackson Downing, had high praise for such cottages. In his most important book, The Architecture of Country Houses, Downing states that:

"The genuine Swiss cottage may be considered the most picturesque of all dwellings built of wood. Bold and striking in outline, and especially in its widely projecting roof, which is peculiarly adapted to a snowy country, rude in construction, and rustic and quaint in ornament and details, it seems especially adapted to the wild and romantic scenery where it originated."

In describing the Swiss cottage, Downing is stating one of the main ideals of the picturesque movement: the adaptation of man's environment to that of nature. Such a cottage was highly valued because of its response of the demands placed upon it by the climate of Switzerland. Downing further praised the Swiss cottage type by stating that "the expression of the Swiss cottage is highly domestic, as it abounds in galleries,¹⁴ balconies and large windows, and other features indicative of home comforts."¹⁵

When one faces the Bullitt-Longenecker House, it seems that Downing's words have been rendered in solid materials. The great overhanging roof and the deep front porch of this house are remarkably similar in feeling to the Swiss cottage Downing illustrates in Figure 47 of The Architecture of Country Houses.

The Bullitt-Longenecker house is essentially t-shaped in plan, and built around a broad center hall. The facade is five bays wide, with the entrance placed in the center of the facade. A very wide wooden staircase leads from the ground to the front porch, approximately five feet deep, which spans the width of the facade. The flat, almost two dimensional railing balusters are unusual. They look more like the silhouettes of the more common turned balusters of the 1860's and 70's. Upon closer examination, the entrance enframement appears almost out of place, being composed of two square pilasters supporting a simple entablature. This treatment is commonly found on Greek Revival and Italianate houses in New Orleans, where such classical elements predominate. As if to compensate for using so classic a touch on so rustic a house, the architect chose to divide the transom and side lights with a mullion design that reads as lattice-work, producing the appearance of many small diamond-shaped panes of glass. To either side of the entrance are two large four over four double hung windows. Each of these openings is topped by a decorative overhang which mimics the pitch and decorative treatment of the roof above, and includes a finial at the apex and the usual jigsaw-cut cornice drapery which is attached to the underside of these overhangs.

The upper half story of the facade is highlighted by a balcony set above the entrance. The balcony is supported by two large millwork brackets. The balcony rail and baluster design is identical to that found on the porch below. Access to the balcony is provided by a rather tall opening with casement sash. This opening is flanked by two smaller casement sash sidelights. To either side of this large opening, set virtually under the eaves of the roof, are a pair of very small openings, serving more for ventilation than for lighting. Each of these upper story openings features a decorative overhang identical to those above the first floor facade windows.

The most significant aspect of the facade is the very elaborate treatment given the facade wall itself. The complex system of horizontal and vertical support beams and the X bracing between them is fully revealed on the facade. Tongue and groove boards are laid in horizontal courses behind this exposed framing system. The corners edges of all the exposed beams and cross braces have been chamfered, or beveled, so as to create another surface instead of a projecting angle. The exposed framing system is also found on the soffit of the overhanging roof. The use of such an exposed structural system was promulgated in Downing's books. A wooden house should not, according to Downing, be treated in a manner that would give it the appearance of masonry, such as wood cut to imitate blocks of stone. Downing felt that masonry was more desireable for house construction than wood, but where brick or stone were unavailable or unaffordable, wood, properly used, could be used to produce a fine residence. The Swiss cottage that Downing illustrates features the same external expression of framing, although in a less dramatic manner, as found on the facade of the house in question. In essence, if a builder was to erect a frame house, the fact that it is to be a frame house should not be disguised and that the expression on the outside of the house, of the actual structural members within, was to be encouraged and admired.

The most picturesque aspect of the Bullitt-Longenecker house is the overhanging, multi-gabled roof. On the Carondelet Street facade, the roof overhangs about four or five feet. This great projection or overhang is supported by four beams that extend from inside the house. Each of the beams is further supported by a large millwork bracket. A large cruciform brace near the apex of the facade gable serves to further strengthen the overhang. The facade gable roof has two distinct pitches, one from the apex to the larger support beams at the ends of the facade, the second extending from that point to the edge of the roof. The outside edge of the entire roof is decorated by vertical jigsaw cut boards most often referred to as cornice drapery. The primary function of such a treatment was to cast an intricate shadow line on the outside walls of a house. As one turns to either side of the house, one finds a smaller gable set only a few feet back from the main facade. These gables create space for a triple window opening into the upper half story rooms. Towards the rear of both side elevations is a semi-octagonal bay which is covered by a steeply pitched gable roof. The rear elevation, barely visible from Amelia Street, features a recessed gallery for the upper half story, terminating by the great overhang of the roof.

Some minor additions and alterations have been made to the side elevation, of the house. On the Amelia Street side, two small screen porches have been added along side the semi-octagonal bay, but have resulted in the loss of no important details, such as the decorative overhanging cornices above each window. On the basis of a 1924 photograph of the house, we know that the second window back from the facade was originally floor length and has been cut down in size. On the Foucher Street side, a frame porch projects beneath the first roof gable. This porch, of undetermined date, mimics the roofline and cornice drapery of the original design. The numerous chimneys are of special interest, as they are rather tall and covered in stucco. The chimneys are setback as they rise above the house, terminating in octagonal chimney pots.

The key question to be answered is how did such a unique house come to be built in New Orleans. Downing, in fact, argued that Swiss cottages only be located in terrain similar to that of Switzerland, namely hillsides and deep valleys, claiming that "the same cottage built in a level country, amid smooth green fields, would only appear affected and ridiculous."¹⁹ The solution is to be found in the person of Edward Gottheil. In the newspaper reference quoted earlier, Gottheil was credited with supervising the construction of the house, the plans having been brought from Europe by him.

Gottheil was appointed as the chief Commissioner of the Louisiana delegation to the International Exposition of 1867 in Paris.²⁰ According to a newspaper published for visitors to the Exposition there were a number of buildings on the grounds designed in the Swiss taste.²¹ One such structure, called the Chalet de la Blanchisserie, bears a considerable resemblance to the house Gottheil erected for Cuthbert Bullitt. It is possible that Gottheil sketched this and other Swiss style buildings at the Exposition and produced the design which now stands at 3627 Carondelet Street. Since there is neither a visual inventory of every structure of the 1867 Paris Exposition, or any extant drawings by Gottheil for this house, one cannot determine whether Gottheil obtained plans of a specific building or produced his own design using features from several buildings at the Exposition.

Architect

Edward Gottheil was a successful architect and builder in New Orleans in the period from 1845 to 1870. While no building contract exists for this particular structure, Gottheil is credited with its design by The Daily Picayune of September 1, 1868. Several building contracts for Gottheil's work survive in the Notarial Archives. Most of his work was residential, the largest being the house at 1206 Third Street, built in 1852 for Bernard Koch but is best known as the residence of Confederate General John Bell Hood following the Civil War. Gottheil was also responsible for the market erected by the City of Lafayette on Magazine between Harmony and Ninth Streets in 1849.²² His appointment as Chief Commissioner from Louisiana to the International Exposition in Paris in 1867 is indicative of the respect in which he was held by his contemporaries.

Historic Personages

A native Kentuckian, Cuthbert Bullitt came to New Orleans in the 1830's and was hired by Maunsel White, a prominent businessman. Bullitt married White's eldest daughter Elizabeth in 1832. Bullitt was very active politically during the Civil War, and was elected as a Lincoln delegate to the 1864 Republican National Convention. Bullitt was appointed by President Lincoln to serve as Collector of Customs from March until November of 1863.²³ Frederick Forde Hansell, the last resident of the house at its original site, founded the well known publishing and office supply firm of F.F. Hansel and Brother, Ltd. in 1873.²⁴ Simon Hernsheim, the man responsible for moving the house to its present site, was one of New Orleans' most prominent businessmen in the late 1800's. Hernsheim was the senior partner of S. Hernsheim Brothers and Co., the largest manufacturer of cigars in the U.S. in the 1880's.²⁵

Cultural, Economic and Social History

The impact of Andrew Jackson Downing's books on American life and culture in the mid 1800's cannot be underestimated. This house is a splendid example of the villa made so popular by Downing, designed in a style that is of the greatest rarity today.

Footnotes

1. Act before Hugh Madden, Notary Public, Volume 8, Act 980
2. Ibid
3. Manuscript Tax Rolls, City of Jefferson, Jefferson Parish, 1867, Folio 23
4. Manuscript Tax Rolls, City of Jefferson, Jefferson Parish, 1868, Folio 23
5. Manuscript Tax Rolls, City of Jefferson, Jefferson Parish, 1869, Folio 25
6. The Daily Picayune, Tuesday afternoon, September 1, 1868, page 1, column 4
7. Act before R.I. Ker, Notary Public, June 2, 1870, Volume 33, Act 76
8. Conveyance Office Book 114, Folio 632, Sheriff's Sale September 2, 1881
9. Conveyance Office Book 118, Folio 167
10. Conveyance Office Book 117, Folio 323 & Conveyance Office Book 119, Folio 161
11. Act before William Joseph Catell, Notary Public, Volume 71, Act 12635
12. Ibid
13. Atlas of the City of New Orleans, Louisiana, Compiled by E. Robinson and R.H. Pidgeon. Published by E. Robinson, New York 1883.

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14. The Daily Picayune September 1, 1884, Page 3
15. Conveyance Office Book 118, Folio 543
16. Andrew Jackson Downing, The Architecture of Country Houses
D. Appleton, New York, 1851, Page 123
17. Ibid., Page 124
18. Vincent J. Scully, Jr., The Shingle Style and The Stick Style
Yale University Press, New Haven, Revised Edition 1971, Pages XXVII-XLVI
19. Op. Cit., Page 124
20. New Orleans Times – September 13, 1866, Page 3, Column 2-3
21. L'Exposition Universelle de 1867 Illustre, Paris, 1867
22. Acts before L.R. Kenny N.P. on March 15, 1849 and P.C. Cuvillier,
N.P. on June 2, 1852
23. The Daily Picayune – August 5, 1906, Page 7, Column 1-2
24. The New Orleans Item – December 21, 1943, Page 1, Column 2
25. Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Louisiana, The Goodspeed Publishing
Company, Chicago, 1892 – Volume 1, Page 473-474