

THE WOODWARD-GREEN HOUSE
443 Lowerline Street

Architectural Rating: Purple
Construction Date: 1898
Architect: William Woodward

Nomination Information

Date: February 9, 1988
Nominated by: Marc Cooper
Seconded by: Jane Brooks, Ernest Jones
Recommended by: Staff

Site Description

Square 64, Undesignated Lot
6th Municipal District
15th Assessment District
Zoning: RD-2
Lot Size: 60' by 120'

Owner: Mr. & Mrs. Peter Green

The nomination of this property was based upon its architectural significance and for its association with a historic personage. Each of the four areas of criteria used in determining landmark qualification as outlined in City Ordinance No. 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 Notarial Archives, the land on which this building stands was acquired by William Woodward on December 30, 1897. Property tax records indicate that at the time of his purchase, the property was vacant and unimproved, yet by the start of 1899, the assessment on the property had risen and a new house was noted on the lot, supporting the construction date of 1898. William Woodward was listed as residing at 7321 Felicia Street, since re-named Benjamin, in the 1899 directory, an address which corresponds to this property, which fronts on both Benjamin and Lowerline.

The house which William Woodward constructed as his residence is basically rectangular in form, with the long side of the house oriented towards Benjamin Street and the short side towards Lowerline Street, corresponding to the dimensions of the lot. The house is of frame construction, placed upon a very low masonry chain wall foundation, topped with a pyramidal hipped roof. Set within the mass of the house, at the corner towards the intersection of Lowerline and Benjamin Streets, is an L shaped porch, on both the first and second floor levels. On the ground floor this porch is paved with bricks laid in the ground.

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The porch is framed on the ground level with square wooden columns and on the second level by slender wooden colonettes, modeled upon those found on late 18th and early 19th Louisiana Colonial style residences both in the city of New Orleans as well as along the banks of the Mississippi River. The original main entrance to the house was placed on the second floor, with the door set in a round arched doorway complete with a fan transom and sidelights, again copying from local historic residential architecture of the early 19th century. The other major ornamental detailing on the exterior of the house is the wooden railing on the second story porch, which combines plain square balusters with panels featuring a sunburst motif.

The fenestration of the house is relatively simple, with minimal ornamentation on any of the door and window frames. In keeping with the fact that the upper floor of the house was to serve as the principal living area, most of the windows on that floor are full length to provide maximum ventilation. Visual access to the Lowerline Street elevation of the house is now partially obscured by a modern vertical board fence.

The overriding architectural significance of this property lies in its association with the revival of interest in Louisiana Colonial architecture which arose in the 1890s. In 1892, a group of Louisianans organized the World's Columbian Association of Louisiana, the purpose of which was to see to it that the state was represented at the World's Columbian Exposition that was to be held in Chicago in 1893. This group planned for the construction of a Louisiana exhibition building at the Columbian, which was designed by the New Orleans architectural firm of Sully and Toledano. This exhibition building was to take the form of Louisiana Colonial plantation house. With financial assistance from the state legislature, the Louisiana building was erected, and stocked with a variety of products representing the state. One of the displays centered on works of art by Louisiana artists, selected by a committee co-chaired by William Woodward, who at that time was a member of the Newcomb College art faculty, teaching drawing.

Although Woodward did not leave any written statements with respect to his involvement in the Columbian Exposition and the later design of his house, we can surmise, mainly on the basis of his later artistic and teaching career, that his interest in architecture and architectural drawing must have been enhanced by his association with the Columbian Exposition. When it came time to prepare plans for his own house, Woodward took the lead from the Louisiana Building at the Columbian and turned to the Colonial architecture of the state for his models.

As if often the case in the early stages of any architectural revival, be it Greek, Italianate or Queen Anne, the first works are often not literal copies of their sources, and this is certainly true of William Woodward's house. Thanks to the fact that

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two sets of plans have survived for the house, we can see how the design was developed, and simplified at the same time. The basic form of the house was always rectangular, as was the placement of the inset front porch. The first design called for a much more elaborate roofscape than was actually executed, probably due to the increased cost of the extra elements, which included six elegant dormer dormer windows as well as rooftop balustrade. The dormers, which are drawn in pencil on the first plan, were to be similar to the dormers found on several of the early 19th century Colonial style houses along Bayou St. John, as well as a number of upriver plantation houses such as Uncle Sam and Voisin.

The second plan for the house, which is preserved in blue-print form only, eliminated the above mentioned dormers and balustrade, and slightly changed the roof profile, but is otherwise identical to the ink drawing which preceded it. In keeping with an evident interest in Louisiana Colonial house design, Woodward chose to place the main living rooms and bedrooms of the house on the second floor, and to place the main entry door on that level, reached by a T shaped staircase, which no longer survives. The final form of the house is closer in appearance and scale to some of the houses in the False River area, particularly Labatut and the Riche House, the latter of which could have provided the source for the unusual outer stair design.

The construction of this house must have had some influence upon William's younger brother Ellsworth, also on the faculty of the Newcomb Art School, when he prepared the design for the Pottery Building at 2828 Camp Street in 1902. That structure also combines various Louisiana Colonial design features, but from different sources, also topped off by a hipped roof.

Architect

The house in question was designed by it's owner, William Woodward, but Woodward cannot be considered to be an architect in the true sense of the word, as he was not so trained, nor was he responsible for any other architectural work in his professional career.

Historic Personage

William Woodward, 1859-1939, was born in Seekonk, Massachusetts. In 1877 he enrolled as a student at the newly established Rhode Island School of Design, from which he graduated in 1883. He then enrolled in classes at the Massachusetts Normal Art School in Boston. In 1884 he was contacted by William Preston Johnston, the president of Tulane University, and was offered a position with the university teaching drawing in the manual training department.

Woodward remained on the Tulane faculty until 1887, when he joined the newly established art faculty at Newcomb College, where he remained until 1894. At that time, Tulane established the College of Technology, basically the predecessor of the current engineering and architecture schools, and Woodward was named to the position of Professor of Drawing and Architecture. The College of Technology was renamed the School of Architecture in 1907, and from that year until 1921 Woodward taught drawing there. In April of 1923, Woodward was named Professor Emeritus by Tulane University.

In addition to his tenure at Tulane, Woodward was to play a significant role in the artistic life of New Orleans, as well as playing a major role in the development of local professional architectural organizations. He was a founding member and president of the Artist's Association of New Orleans, the College Art Association. In 1897 he was made an honorary member of the American Institute of Architects, and he was to serve as the secretary of the Louisiana Architects Association.

Woodward was also active in the cause of historic preservation, working along with Allison Owen to defeat a proposal in 1895 which called for the demolition of the Cabildo. For much of the 20th century, Woodward both etched and painted scenes in the French Quarter, with the etchings being used to illustrate the book French Quarter Etchings, which was published in 1938 as a means of raising funds to support the then fledgling Vieux Carre Commission.

For most of the 1920s and all of the 1930s, Woodward lived in Biloxi. After suffering a massive heart attack in early November of 1939, his family moved him to New Orleans for medical treatment, where he died on November 17, 1939. Woodward was a prolific painter, producing numerous oil sketches and paintings, as well as the previously mentioned etchings. His works were the subject of several exhibitions, both before and after his death.

Social, Economic, Cultural and Political History

None

STAFF COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON LANDMARK NOMINATIONS

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This small and rather unpretentious residence is of major significance in the context of the revival of interest in Louisiana Colonial architecture, which began in the 1890s and continues today. The house was designed by the noted artist/educator William Woodward, borrowing design characteristics from Louisiana Colonial period houses of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In addition to his artistic career, Woodward was a founding faculty member of the Tulane School of Architecture, who, along with fellow faculty member Nathaniel Courtland Curtis, Sr., had a major influence upon local architects in terms of their awareness of the city and state's architectural heritage. The staff has not received any comments from the owners indicating their opinion of the potential designation of the property. The staff recommends the designation of this property.