

Historic District Landmarks Commission
January 4, 1977, Item No. 2
LMK-02

Milton P. Doullut House, 400 Eganias Street.
Begun 1905, completed c. 1907; architect,
attributed to Milton P. Doullut

Landmark Site: Square 51 or 50* in the 9th Ward, 3rd Municipal District, bound by Lizardi, Douglas and Eganias Streets and by the Mississippi River levee, consisting of the land on which the described improvement is situated.

At the November 10th, 1976 meeting of the Historic District Landmarks Commission, Jane Ferguson nominated the Doullut House at 400 Eganias Street as a landmark, pursuant to Section X, Part A(1) of City Ordinance No. 5992. M.C.S. The nomination was seconded by William R. Pitts and Dr. Virginia D. Kock. On January 4, 1977, the Commission held a special meeting. A public hearing on this proposed designation was held at that time. The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were two speakers. Dr. Bernard Lemann spoke in favor of designation. Mr. Lloyd Hayes, who is married to a Doullut family descendant, asked questions of the Commission, but did not voice opposition to the designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

During the early years of the twentieth century, Captain Milton P. Doullut designed and built two identical houses which are among the most fascinating and unique structures in this city which is known for its outstanding architecture. The design of the houses appears to be influenced by an interesting mixture of styles, including those based upon the architecture of steamboats and plantation houses as well as upon the Golden Pavilion or Kinkaku, a Japanese exhibition building at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. In recent years, the houses have gained national and even international recognition, largely through the photographs of Clarence Laughlin, the prominent local photographer and author, and through the discussions and illustrations of the houses in Clay Lancaster's widely respected book, The Japanese Influence in America.

The houses are located near the river on Eganias Street, which is not far from the St. Bernard Parish line. This area was once the site of small plantation tracts, some of which were subdivided as early as the mid-nineteenth century. The Louisiana Sugar Refinery, dating from 1831, was also nearby. By the end of the nineteenth century, the area was experiencing a major residential development. Many of the cottages dating from this period remain, though all of the earlier buildings have disappeared.

Even before the construction of his famous twin houses, Milton P. Doullut and his family lived at the foot of Eganias Street. It was fitting that Doullut lived near the river since both he and his wife were river captains and he had spent much of his younger life piloting tugboats and other small craft. During the early years of the twentieth century, however, he and Horace Williams founded the construction firm of Doullut & Williams. In addition to ship building, the firm was responsible for constructing a majority of the wharfs, docks and piers along the lower Mississippi River.

At the turn of the century, both Milton Doullut and his son Paul lived and owned land in the vicinity of Eganias and Douglas Streets. By examining tax records and city directories of the period, it appears that Doullut began construction on the first of his twin houses in 1905 and completed it some two years later. This house, now located at 400 Eganias Street, was originally situated nearer the river. Within a few years of its construction, however, the house was moved to its present site prior to the completion of the levee along this stretch of the Mississippi. After settling into his new house, Doullut decided to build a duplicate of it for his son Paul, who was also involved in ship building and heavy construc-

*This square is referred to as Square 51 or 50 in the legal description of the property as recorded by the Department of Property Management, Division of Real Estate and Records.

tion. This newer house, constructed between 1912 and 1913, is located at 503 Egan Street, directly catercorner from that built for the senior Doullut. Both houses are still owned and occupied by direct descendants of Milton and Paul Doullut.

In addition to their work in ship building and heavy construction, Milton Doullut's firm undertook architectural contracts, and it is believed that he was responsible for both the design and building of his twin houses. As previously mentioned, the stylistic influences upon the houses are both complex and wide ranging, resulting in one of the most highly individual designs of the period. Perhaps the most over-riding influence on the basic plan is that of the lower Mississippi River plantation house. As in the early plantation houses, the Doullut houses have a raised masonry basement below a frame structure. When originally built, the basement level of the Milton Doullut house was red brick. White glazed tiles, however, were used for both the walls and the structural posts during the reconstruction of this structure and in the building of the Paul Doullut house. Other plantation style characteristics include the broad galleries and the overhanging eaves.

What makes Doullut's design unique are the distinctive proportions and the use of elaborate ornamentation. Unlike the decidedly rectangular shape of most plantation houses, Doullut's plan is nearly square, as was that of the three story Golden Pavilion at the 1903-04 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis. The Pavilion was a replica of the fourteenth century Kinkaku near Kyoto. It is not known whether Milton Doullut visited the exposition or even saw one of the published photographs of the building, though the similarities of contour and proportion are striking. The Egan Street houses are not only square in plan, their roofs are concave, giving them a strongly oriental character. These houses also have a small third story that projects from the roof, as does the Kinkaku. This feature can also be compared, however, to the pilothouse of a steamboat or the belvedere of a plantation house. The galleries that entirely surround the houses can similarly be compared to all three potential design sources. The galleries are unusually deep as they would be on a steamboat. Other elements characteristic of steamboats are the cylindrical metal smokestacks, the angled corners and the ample outside staircases. The applied architectural ornaments give an added distinctiveness to Doullut's design. These include the pressed steel eave crestings and the graduated wooden balls strung on steel wires between the gallery posts. Although the house has undergone minor alterations, including the replacement of the green tile roof, it still retains the special character that has made it unique among the outstanding architecture of the city.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the four areas of criteria determining landmark qualification, any one of which will qualify a property for designation, the Historic District Landmarks Commission finds that the Milton P. Doullut House at No. 400 Egan Street meets the requirements of three of these categories, in that it reflects the broad cultural, economic and social history of the state and community; is identified with historic personages in local history; and embodies distinguishing characteristics of architectural types, inherently valuable for a study of periods, styles, methods of construction and indigenous materials or craftsmanship.

Following the public hearing at the special meeting of January 4, 1977, the Historic District Landmarks Commission voted to designate the Milton P. Doullut House at 400 Egan Street as a landmark and its related landmark site, pursuant to Section IX, Part A (1) and Section X, Part A (10) of City Ordinance No. 5992 M.C.S. The following Commission members voted for the designation: Vice-Chairman Leah D. Thayer, Jane P. Ferguson, Muriel B. Francis, Howard C. Green, and William R. Pitts. There were no negative votes cast.