

## 5520 HURST STREET

### Landmark Designation Report

April 14, 1998

Architectural Rating: Blue

Construction Date: c. 1850s

Architect: Construction - unknown; Renovation - William Freret (unsubstantiated)

### Site Description

Square 402A, Lot Y-1. Lot size - 76' X 145'

Sixth Municipal District, Fourteenth Assessment District

Zoning: RD-2, Two Family Residential

Owners: Paul Lewis

5520 Hurst Street

New Orleans, LA 70115

### Nomination Information

Date: February 9, 1988

Nominated by: Dr. Ernst

Secounded by: Ms. Jane Brooks, Mr. Ernest Jones

The nomination of this property was based upon its architectural significance and as the residence of a prominent New Orleans architect. Each of the four areas of criteria used in determining whether a property is worthy of or meets the qualifications for landmark status, as outlined in City Ordinance #5992 M.C.S., will be examined.

### History of Property

This house is located on a square that was part of a plantation owned by the Ducros family for more than thirty years, until 1817. It was an eight *arpent* tract extending from Valmont Street to the upper boundary of Joseph Street, which later became the line between Rickerville and Hurstville. It was purchased by Thomas Beale in 1818, who sold it to his illegitimate son, Thomas, Jr., on April 27, 1819. Thomas, Jr. had a house built on the property in 1820 by Jeremiah Fox in the square bounded by what would become Magazine Street, Jefferson Avenue and Leontine Street, probably the present site of the Poydras Home. After his death, the plantation was sold to Daniel Treadwell Walden in 1831, "together with dwelling house, out houses and other improvements." Charles F. Zimpel's "Topographical Map" of 1834 shows this tract as still being under cultivation, with a master house located near the river. After a messy legal battle with the legitimate heirs of Thomas Beale, Sr.'s estate, a judge declared that Walden's plantation be subdivided and sold, and so it was subdivided as the Faubourg

Rickerville in 1849. At that time it was owned by multiple claimants, two fifths of which were of the Ricker family. The square where 5520 Hurst Street is located was owned by the City Bank of New Orleans, after Daniel Walden declared bankruptcy shortly before the act of partition. The bank sold it to Augustus Walker and W.B. Partee. In 1855, Walker and his partner sold it to Williamson Terry for \$6,000. No building was mentioned in the 1855 sale, but Cohen's 1856 *Directory* lists Williamson Terry, trader, as dwelling in Rickerville. It is likely that he lived on this site, for Rickerville was slow to develop. The city directory, even after the Civil War, listed only fifty-three households in Rickerville. In *New Orleans Architecture, Vol. VII: Jefferson City*, the Architectural Inventory section, p. 130, speculates that the house may have been built by Williamson Terry in the 1850s.

Williamson Terry sold the property in 1858, and after a few successive owners, it was sold to Miss Fannie Freret, acting for architect William A. Freret. Freret resided there until 1901. "It is assumed that Freret added the twin mansard towers, brackets, cast iron crestring, and gallery - all of which bear the stamp of the flamboyant style of Freret's architectural office. This addition created a highly unusual specimen out of what was basically a simple, four-bay, gable-sided, rural cottage." (*New Orleans Architecture, Vol. VII: Jefferson City*, p. 130)

Oral history refers to the house at 5520 Hurst as the overseer's house for the Cornelius Hurst plantation. Another source says that the Hurst family lived at 5520 Hurst before the main house was built, and then after they moved, it became the overseer's house. However, this site was never owned by Hurst, and there is no record of him ever living there. Joseph Street was the dividing line between the Hurst property, later subdivided as Hurstville, and Rickerville, the faubourg where this house is located. The proximity of the properties does lend some credence to the theory that this could be a dependency from the Hurst plantation that was sold off and moved, but no evidence has been found to substantiate this.

The fortunes of the Hurst plantation might also support the idea that the house at 5520 Hurst was moved there from the Hurst Plantation. The original Hurst residence, which was constructed in 1832, was sited facing the river, on the square bounded by Tchoupitoulas, Arabella, Annunciation and Joseph, and it did have multiple outbuildings. Mr. Hurst apparently began to suffer financial problems, and he had his property subdivided into "Hurstville" in 1837. Subsequently, Mr. Hurst lost the house and property to his creditors, and it was sold by the sheriff on April 15, 1840. It is conceivable that during this time period, when Hurst needed money, the 5520 Hurst Street building could have been sold off, which may also have further facilitated the subdivision plan. (As a point of interest, the Hurst house was sold in 1921 to be moved from the land. The house was dismantled and reerected at its present location at No. 3 Garden Lane, backing onto the golf course of the New Orleans Country Club.) However, it is just as possible that the current building was built on the site, or moved there from another neighboring plantation, as no evidence has been discovered to support its true origin.

### Architectural Significance

This house appears to be a Greek Revival building that has undergone numerous additions and alterations. The original structure was probably a four bay frame cottage, two rooms wide and

one room deep. The four original front facade openings are full length windows, one pair of 6/6 and one pair of 6/9, with louvered shutters and Greek key surrounds. A central chimney pierces the side gable roof, which was altered in the 1970s by raising the pitch on the rear facade. A single bay addition appears to have been pieced onto each side, and this is where the doors are located. The main front entrance is a double door, paneled and glazed, with a rectangular transom and Greek Revival surround. The other door, which was originally a window, is a simple paneled door with a Greek key frame that matches those of the front windows. Over each of these entrances was added a mansard-roofed "tower," which is crowned by elaborate cast iron cresting. These towers retain their slate cladding. A gallery extends the full length of the front facade and is supported by not one but two rows of slender square columns. The roof of the gallery appears to have had three periods of alteration. The original gallery roof was supported by a single row of columns. This roof was extended when the towers were added, and then topped by a stepped parapet with a bracketed cornice. This heavy addition apparently necessitated the second row of columns, making a total of eight columns. Later, when water intrusion became a problem, a slight shed roof supported by exposed rafter tails was added in the section between the two towers. The bracketed cornice wraps around both towers and around to the rear of the original building on the downriver side. Non-original masonry steps and iron hand rails lead to the entrance.

The middle portion of the building appears to date from the late Victorian era, 1890s to 1900, as evidenced on the interior by the ornate mantels, etched glass doors, bull's eye moldings, 1/1 windows, brackets, arches and other details. What was originally only two rooms in the attic was expanded in the 1970s renovation into a full second floor with windows onto the rear. A side gabled, screened porch in the ell between this section and the rear two story section features a decorative barge board not found anywhere else on the building. Unfortunately, one end of this porch was enclosed to house the spiral stair to the second floor. The rear of the house, which may have been a two story service wing originally, is on a slab, in contrast to the rest of the house, which is on masonry piers. The uptown side originally had a two story side gallery, the second floor of which has been enclosed. A second floor addition has also been added on this facade. This addition unfortunately protrudes outward and cuts off the top of one of the dining room windows below. This addition appears to have occurred in the mid-twentieth century. One very interesting feature of this two story section of the house is the presence of a historic wall safe on the ground floor. There is no access between the second story on the middle portion of the house and the second story on the rear portion of the house. It should also be noted that rarely do two doors or two windows match in this house.

The Robinson Atlas of 1883, which is based on information from the 1870s, shows a single building on this site. It is a very asymmetrical building, and "Samuel Smith and Others" is written across the block. The square had not yet been divided by the extension of Hurst Street, which was originally known as Freret Place. Therefore, at this time the house faced St. Charles Avenue on a lot that stretched from St. Charles to Garfield. Reminiscences from the early twentieth century speak of the house "set far back on the lot beyond an elliptical, tree-bordered drive." (*New Orleans Architecture, Vol. VII. Jefferson City, p. 130.*) The Sanborn Insurance map of 1896 shows the house in basically its present complex form, with the rearmost section shown as two stories. The current Sanborn map shows the house situated on a lot that goes through the block from Hurst to Garfield. The lot encompasses a two story carriage house,

labeled “servants,” and another two story dwelling. The lot has subsequently been divided, with the carriage house and second dwelling now on a separate lot together. The present owner stated that a two story masonry and frame structure just to the upriver side of his property line was believed to be the original kitchen for 5520 Hurst, but it had been sold to the neighboring property at some point in the past. Given the apparent age of the kitchen structure and the neighboring house, this seems very probable.

William Freret is credited with the redesign and elaborate additions to this once modest building. Tax records from 1883-84 show the whole of square 402 being owned by Fannie Freret, and she is shown as living on the block. The property is assessed at \$7,000. By 1889, the assessment had risen to \$20,000, and to \$30,000 by 1890, seeming to indicate that major improvements had occurred to the property during this time. In 1890 a notation reads that Ms. Freret traded two lots and \$1,188 to Carl A. F. Hinderer for an iron fence. The property value continues to rise - by 1894, Hurst Street has been cut through and a notation reads, “Freret Place now Hurst.” The house is now assessed at \$41,000, and goes up to \$51,000 the following year. In 1896 lots begin to be sold on the lake side of Freret Place (Hurst Street). Also, the three identical houses across the street are accredited to William Freret, which he no doubt built as speculative houses on his newly divided property.

### Architect

The renowned architect William A. Freret, who designed many of the McDonogh Schools of New Orleans in the late 1800s, resided in this home from 1876 until 1901. Soard's Directory of 1880 lists him at the corner of Octavia and St. Charles, and for most of the 1880s he is listed as living on St. Charles Avenue between Octavia and Joseph Streets. In 1896 he is shown at Freret Place, corner Joseph Street, and in 1897 at 5520 Hurst Street. Freret Place was officially changed to Hurst Street in April, 1925, “Freret Place, from Joseph Street to Octavia Street, shall hereafter be known as Hurst Street.” (Ordinance #8412 CCS)

William A. Freret, “probably Louisiana’s best architect of this period,” was the “distinguished New Orleans architect” (*James Dakin, Architect - His Career in New York and the South*, p. 154) chosen by the Governor to restore the state capitol in Baton Rouge in 1880. He was the son of William Freret, former mayor of New Orleans, and was born in New Orleans in 1833. He completed his architectural education in France. He later became the state engineer. In 1877 Freret was named by President Grover Cleveland as United States Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department and became involved in many federal buildings nationwide. Locally, he designed numerous buildings, mainly commercial, including McDonough Schools 1-20, the old Touro Synagogue, several cast iron storefronts on Canal Street of which one survives at 622 Canal, and the Moresque Building at Poydras and Baronne, now gone. Two rows of houses that he built remain, one in the 2700 block of Coliseum Street, known as “Freret’s Folly,” and the other in the 1700 block Second Street. He actually resided in one of these, at 1715 Second Street, before moving to the house on Hurst Street. William Freret died in 1911.

### Historic Personages

William A. Freret, renowned local architect (see above), both redesigned the building and lived there for twenty-five years.

### Social, Economic and Political History

None

### Staff Recommendation

The staff recommends the designation of this property based on its architectural significance and its association with a historic personage and prominent architect. It is truly a New Orleans original, a highly unusual architectural folly, well deserving of our recognition and protection.

### End Notes

The Friends of the Cabildo and Associates of the Louisiana State Museum. *New Orleans Architecture, Vol. VII: Jefferson City*. Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company. 1989.

The Friends of the Cabildo. *New Orleans Architecture, Vol. VIII: The University Section*. Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company. 1997.

Arthur Scully, Jr. *James Dakin, Architect - His Career in New York and the South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. 1973.

Nelson, Cathy. "Hurst Home: Something Different." Unpublished paper, 1972. Wilson Student Papers, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University.

Roniger, Marjorie. "All in a Row," *New Orleans Times Picayune*, July 2, 1985.

Robinson Atlas, 1883, Folio 17 - Historic New Orleans Collection

Sanborn Insurance Maps, 1896, Volume 3, Folio 294 - Historic New Orleans Collection

Sanborn Insurance Maps, 1994, Volume 5, Folio 482 - Historic District Landmarks Commission

City Directories, 1880-1897 - New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Collection

City Tax Assessment Records, 1883-1897 - New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Collection

