THE GREEK REVIVAL STYLE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Greek architecture did not become known in the West until about 1750-1760. (By contrast, Roman architecture was rediscovered and emulated much earlier in the Italian Renaissance.) It all began when British architect James Stuart visited Greece with Nicolas Revett in 1751. Stuart and Revett then published the multi-volume *Antiquities of Athens*, which to say the least, was less than a bestseller. "Athenian Stuart," as he is sometimes known, designed a few small buildings in the Grecian taste. According to Penguin's *Dictionary of Architecture*, by Sir Nikolaus Pevesner, John Fleming and Hugh Honor, the earliest Greek Revival building is a garden temple at Hagley (England) by Stuart (1758).

Stuart died the unsung "father of the Greek Revival" in 1788, in the decade the style began to become fashionable. It culminated in England and other European countries in the 1820s and '30s. In America, the Grecian Style swept all before it, dominating for almost 30 years (roughly 1825-1855). While its forms and elements were virtually all derived from Europe, the style was embraced in the United States as nowhere else in the world.

If the American Greek Revival could be said to have an emblem, it would be the Greek temple form, with its strong columns and gently pitched pedimented roof. Jacksonian era Americans idolized the form, applying it to everything from churches, to courthouses, to office buildings, to homes, to privies, even to bird boxes.

Of all the styles that gained favor in the United States prior to the Civil War, the Grecian is by far the most prolific, both in terms of numbers and geographical spread. Indeed, west of the Appalachians, Greek Revival buildings represent a great many communities' earliest architectural heritage. And in a poetical sense, if there were an architectural stamp to mark a young flourishing America, still largely agrarian and Jeffersonian, where the greatest minds were still engaged in perfecting society, rather than in commerce, it would be the Greek Revival.

The Grecian Style was spread primarily through architectural instructional pattern books with plates showing elevations, details and plans – in short, everything the local architect, builder, artisan or carpenter needed. Some of the most prolific were Asher Benjamin's *The American Builder's Companion* (previously quoted), John Haviland's *The Builder's Assistant,* and Minard Lafever's *Beauties of Modern Architecture.* The Grecian look was also spread through apprentice training which at the time was the primary means of training young would-be architects. (A university education in the field was a thing of the future.)

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF THE AMERICAN GREEK REVIVAL

The temples of ancient Greece were the inspiration for the Greek Revival; however, the style was modified somewhat to suit modern (nineteenth century) usage. Character-defining features of the American Greek Revival are as follows. (Louisiana variants are discussed in a separate section below.)

- Columns in the ancient Greek orders (Doric, Ionic, Corinthian) with an entablature above (a horizontal member between the column capitals and the roof).

- The Greek temple form was the American norm -- four, six or eight columns supporting an entablature and a pediment. Often square pillars were substituted for the round columns of Greek temples. The temple style appears both as a building in the shape of an actual temple (i.e., the portico spans the entire front) and as a pedimented portico appended to the front of a larger building.

- Where the temple form is not used, Greek Revival buildings may have a colonnade of columns across the front, or more simply, columns marking the entrance.

- Square head openings (windows and doors). (The round arch was unknown to the ancient Greeks.)

- Aedicule openings – an opening with a column each side supporting a section of entablature above. This classical framed unit appears in the form of main front door surrounds, surrounds for the more important windows, grand interior openings (such as between double parlors), and fireplace mantels.

- Shoulder, or ear, molded openings (exterior and interior).

- Greek temple style doors with two tall vertical inset panels.

- Window and door openings with a slight point or pediment shape to the top.

- Carved, or cast plaster, acanthus, anthemion, or patera ornament (motifs used in ancient Greek architecture). This appears most often in ceiling medallions and on door and window surrounds.

<u>Materials:</u>

In Greece, temples were built of marble painted in primary colors. But by the time they were discovered by Europeans in the eighteenth century, the paint was long gone, leaving the white marble. And to this day, people associate the Greek Revival with the color white – the white columned look.

Alex de Tocqueville, when touring America in the 1830s, admired from a distance a grouping of marble Grecian "palaces." He was disappointed to learn upon closer inspection that they were in fact "white-washed brick" and "painted wood" – far less noble materials. In the United States the great majority of Greek Revival buildings are not of some fine stone, but of deTocqueville's materials.

THE LOUISIANA STORY

While the temple form was the national norm for the Greek Revival, is was not nearly as common in Louisiana as were other forms (see below). A notable institutional temple is the Center Building at East Louisiana State Hospital in Jackson (1853). Here local builder G. N. Gibbens shoe-horned four stories into a massive Ionic temple. Notable residential Greek temples are Madewood Plantation House (Assumption Parish, 1840-48, Henry Howard, architect, Photo 1) and the much smaller, but finely detailed Brame-Bennett House in Clinton (c.1840). Among the most interesting "temples" in Louisiana is a c. 1850 country store in Keachi, DeSoto Parish (Photo 2).

Most temple style Greek Revival buildings in Louisiana feature a pedimented portico attached to a wider façade. Easily the most impressive of these is Gallier Hall, dedicated in 1853 to serve as the New Orleans City Hall, James Gallier, architect (Photo 3). Here the richly detailed monumental portico almost, but not quite, spans the entire façade.

In Louisiana (and certain other Southern states) the Greek Revival often looked very different from the Greek temple form so popular elsewhere in the United States. The most common variants in Louisiana are the galleried cottage, the double gallery house, and buildings in "the peripteral mode."

Galleried Cottages:

The majority of Grecian buildings in Louisiana took their cue from the state's well established Creole tradition of galleried houses and cottages. Louisiana architectural historian Joan Caldwell notes, "Greek Revival tendencies found a ready reception in the South on two accounts: the style was revered for its Classical antecedent, and it lent itself to the Region's climate. Columns, porticoes and porches were practical features that met the need for shade and were provisions that let leisure be taken and conversation enjoyed as a natural part of living. In

Louisiana, where galleried houses were an entrenched tradition, the Greek colonnade became an easy graft. The aesthetic and utilitarian combined seamlessly in Greek Revival architecture."

So it was that the Creole cottage was fitted up with strongly proportioned columns (sometimes just posts with molded capitals), a deep entablature, and perhaps Grecian door and window surrounds. These classical features were often striking, robust and boldly formed, lending an air of consequence to even the smallest "Grecian" cottages. Excluding New Orleans, easily the majority of Greek Revival buildings in Louisiana take the galleried cottage form. "Cottage" is something of a misnomer, for they are certainly not always small. Roofs are more often gable-end than hip (photos 4 & 5). Usually the larger or grander examples feature a broad hip roof.

Double Gallery Houses:

In New Orleans the galleried tradition produced the now iconic double gallery house (photo 6). Scattered across parts of the city by the hundreds (Garden District, Lower Garden District, etc), these two story wood frame houses feature a Grecian gallery on each level. Sometimes the columns are simple wooden pillars with molded capitals on both levels. On the finer examples, and there are legions of these, the columns are fluted, with the Ionic order on one level and Corinthian on the other. As the Italianate style began to be popular, double brackets might be added above the columns of an otherwise purely Greek Revival house.

Peripteral Mode:

Probably the most impressive local variation is what architectural historian Henry Russell Hitchcock labeled the "peripteral mode." This is a Grecian two-story building, most often a plantation house, without pediments, surrounded by colossal order columns. Typically, the grand white columns are on all four sides. At Houmas House (Ascension Parish, Photo 7), they are on three sides only. Peripteral houses are related to the grand two-story Creole plantation houses of previous generations, with their encircling galleries. (The only extant non-plantation houses in the peripteral mode are the East Feliciana and Claiborne courthouses.)

(Note: The foregoing narrative is not an exhaustive discussion of building types in the Greek Revival style in Louisiana. See the "Associated Property Types" section below.)

Floorplans and Interior Details:

Some otherwise Grecian residences in Louisiana featured the traditional Creole hall-less plan. But as the American taste finally triumphed in the 1830s and '40s, houses incorporated the American central hall or side hall plan. Greek Revival pioneer Benjamin Latrobe bemoaned the coming of these American style floor plans to Louisiana: "So inveterate is habit that the merchants from the old United States…have already begun to introduce the detestable, lopsided

London house, in which a common passage and stair acts as a common sewer to all the necessities of the dwelling."

Quite often (perhaps in a majority of instances) Greek Revival buildings in Louisiana have simple unadorned square head openings (doors and windows). More intensely styled buildings feature shoulder, or ear, molds on the openings. Occasionally openings have a slightly pointed top (in the manner of a pediment). Only in the most notable, generally architect-designed buildings, are openings ornamented with acanthus leaves, patera, or anthemions.

On the most basic of Louisiana Greek Revival houses the mantels might be the only interior features that could be categorized specifically as Greek Revival. The simplest, and most common, Greek Revival mantel is in the aedicule style (an entablature resting on two columns, seen as a unit). In the vast majority of houses, the "columns" are simple molded pilasters. The most "high style" Greek Revival buildings in the state have plaster ceiling medallions formed of Grecian favorites such as anthemions or acanthus leaves. On the larger houses, pocket doors (in a Grecian frame) separate double parlors.

Materials:

In Louisiana as a whole there are more wooden Greek Revival buildings than brick or plaster-over-brick. There is no native stone. So, when stone is seen, it has been imported – for example, granite piers defining the ground level of Greek Revival commercial buildings in New Orleans and marble mantels on the finest of residences. On some finer homes the wooden mantels and door frames might be false-grained to resemble a different wood (*faux bois*) or marble (*faux marbre*).

It is in the Greek Revival period that cast iron first begins to come into its own as a building material, mainly for column capitals, lintels and chase decorative balustrades (the latter in contrast to the florid cast-iron balconies and galleries of the Italianate style).

Architects:

The vast majority of Greek Revival buildings in Louisiana were "builder jobs." Professional architects of the day were almost entirely confined to practicing in New Orleans. The city was home, for a brief period, to Benjamin Henry Latrobe, America's first professional architect, one-time architect of the U. S. Capitol, and the designer of the country's first Greek Revival buildings. His design for the New Orleans Waterworks (1811) included a strongly proportioned pedimented portico and an octagonal tower reminiscent of the Tower of the Winds in Athens. No longer extant, this may well be Louisiana's first building seriously incorporating elements of the Greek Revival. Latrobe did not come to New Orleans until 1819. His potential career in Louisiana was cut short by his death from yellow fever in 1820.

Less well known but far more prolific architects designing in the Greek Revival were James Dakin, Charles Dakin, James Gallier, J. N. B. de Pouilly, William Freret and Henry Howard. Of these, only Howard appears to have practiced much outside the Crescent City.

Date Range:

At the national level, the heyday of the Greek Revival is generally recognized to be the period 1825 – 1855. Realistic dates for Louisiana would be 1830 – 1861 (the latter when the Civil War commenced and construction virtually ceased). But Greek Revival-style buildings continued to be constructed in rural Louisiana for a couple of decades after the War's end. These, no doubt, were merely following established builder tradition and were probably no longer conceived of as Grecian.

There were also periods of transition. In the early days there were Grecian looking buildings that had some hangover Federal Style features – most notably a Federal elliptically arched fanlight over the front door way. Towards the end, with the rising tide of the Italianate taste, there were Grecian buildings with some Italianate features – most notably scroll brackets at the entablature level. In this transition phase, just when a building stops being mainly Grecian and starts being mainly Italianate can be difficult to parse. These transitional houses are quite plentiful in New Orleans, and when surveying a historic district, staff of the Division of Historic Preservation has used the label "transitional Greek Revival-Italianate."

Geographical Range:

Before the advent of large-scale railroad construction in the state (1880s), much of Louisiana was a wilderness. Thus, Grecian buildings tend to be confined to regions reachable by water – New Orleans, bayou towns, Mississippi River Road towns and plantations, interior steamboat port regions. Some older wagon road towns in northern Louisiana also have a heritage of Greek Revival architecture. Finally, there are three rural Louisiana parishes that are widely recognized as centers of Greek Revival architecture: East Feliciana, DeSoto and St. Mary.

Associated Property Types:

- Temple-form (temple spanning entire façade) commercial, public and residential buildings (unusual in Louisiana). (See photos 1 & 2.)
- Large two story buildings with a temple-style pedimented portico (i.e., a pedimented portico attached to a larger façade). (See photo 3.)
- One or one-and-a-half story houses (gable end and hipped roof) with a gallery spanning the façade. (See photos 4 & 5.)
- Double gallery houses (New Orleans) – a two story house with a gallery on each floor spanning the façade. (See photo 6.)

- Peripteral mode (plantation houses and 2 courthouses – Claiborne and East Feliciana parishes). (See photo 7.)
- Galleried public buildings (Pentagon Barracks, Baton Rouge; Center Building, Centenary College, East Feliciana Parish). (See photo 8.)
- Two story houses with colossal columns spanning the façade (with no pediment or portico). These are similar to the peripteral mode, but have colossal columns only on the façade. (See photo 9.)
- Churches. These are almost always simple country churches with a temple shape (photo 10).
- Occasionally in Northwest Louisiana, one finds the marriage of the Upland South dogtrot with the country Greek Revival style (a milled lumber dogtrot with a Greek Revival gallery and other details).
- Party wall commercial buildings (almost entirely in New Orleans). In general, these are similar to prototypes in other parts of the country – Greek Revival piers (granite or cast-iron) forming the shopfront with a three to five bay façade crowned with a heavy entablature (sometimes with a denticular cornice). Generally, these buildings do not have galleries. (See photo 11.)
- In New Orleans, free-standing, masonry, generally red brick, three-story houses with an entablature and a Greek Revival doorway (photos 12-13).
- In New Orleans' Vieux Carre (mainly), party wall masonry buildings with Greek Revival details and cast-iron galleries across their street frontage. Sometimes these galleries are original; sometimes they were added later in the more florid Italianate taste.
- Greek Revival complex (unusual – only examples in Louisiana would be Manresa House of Retreats, St. James Parish (photo 14); Jackson Barracks, Orleans Parish; and East Feliciana Courthouse and Lawyer's Row, Clinton (admittedly not all the law offices are Greek Revival).
- Historic districts with a significant complement of Greek Revival buildings – most notably in New Orleans.
- In South Louisiana (mainly New Orleans), above-ground tombs with either a temple shape (i.e., with a pediment) and Greek Revival details or a squarish mass with Greek Revival details. These tombs sometimes bear Grecian funerary details (for example, inverted torches).

National Register Registration Requirements:

The following is a list of the broad range of arguments that have been used successfully, or may be used, in National Register statements of significance under Criterion C (architecture).

National Level:

- Rare example of a Greek Revival historic district. Grecian buildings almost invariably survive singly, either in rural areas, or in a town or urban setting characterized by numerous other buildings of many periods – mostly later. An entire architectural ensemble fully characterized by the Greek Revival taste would be nonexistent in many states and very rare in the others.
- A superior, well-detailed, grand or especially imposing example of the peripteral mode, as a regional Greek Revival variant, adding considerable richness to the overall national Greek Revival heritage.

Because there are a large number of notable Greek Revival buildings in America, it would be challenging to list a Louisiana building (other than the peripteral mode just mentioned) on the National Register at the national level. At present, the only non-peripteral Greek Revival building in the state that has been accorded national significance is Gallier Hall, a grand temple-style design designated a National Historic Landmark in 1974.

State Level:

- Superior examples of regional prototypes such as peripteral mode (plantation houses and institutional buildings), galleried houses, or institutional galleried buildings as supporting Louisiana's architectural identity within the Greek Revival genre.
- A temple-style Greek Revival building as following the national norm but being unusual in Louisiana. Because temple style buildings are fairly rare within the state, almost any example that retains integrity would be NR eligible at the state level.

Local Level:

- Rare surviving example of simple Greek Revival country church. (These are not full temples, but have a temple shape.)
- Local landmark in a community or parish where almost all the buildings are much later. Such Greek Revival buildings are eligible because they represent the area's earliest architectural heritage.
- Superior example within a given local geographical context – i.e., town, parish, Great River Road. Some of the successful nominations in the past have used the 1860 census schedules to provide a context – specifically, the list of large holders of enslaved people. These numbers provide important clues to wealth – i.e., plantations of this size would most likely have had major Greek Revival residences.
- There are three parishes in Louisiana that are centers of rural Greek Revival architecture (non-New Orleans): DeSoto, St. Mary, and East Feliciana. Here one might find numerous good examples. In the past National Register staff in the

Division of Historic Preservation have argued successfully that any example retaining integrity is eligible at the local level because it contributes to the parish's distinct architectural identity.

- The marriage of Upland South house types (in this case dogtrots) with the Greek Revival taste. All known examples are in Northwest Louisiana.
- Greek Revival tombs have generally been listed as part of above-ground cemeteries containing numerous tombs in various popular nineteenth century styles. They have been recognized for their identity as examples of Louisiana's distinctive above-ground burial tradition and not as Greek Revival structures per se.

Architectural Integrity:

Integrity is as critical to National Register eligibility as is significance. In other words, the building as built may have been of great architectural significance, but it has lost many of its character-defining elements – those features that make it Greek Revival. Hence it would not be eligible.

As much as one might like a set of guidelines that would consistently act as an integrity filter for National Register candidates, it is simply not possible. Whether a candidate has "lost integrity" for National Register purposes must be decided on a case-by-case basis, per National Park Service guidance.

The fundamental thought process is as follows: What are those features that make the building Greek Revival – the character-defining features of the Greek Revival? Which ones survive? Which ones have been lost? Which ones have been replicated? Replication is an issue, no matter how well done. Quoting National Register Bulletin 16A ("How to Complete the National Register Registration Form"): "Not only must a property resemble its historic appearance, but it must also retain physical materials, design features, and aspects of construction dating from the period when it attained significance."

Columns, typically wooden in Louisiana, are a particular problem, for they are often critical to Greek Revival identity. With the state's subtropical climate, columns rot and are replaced – sometimes in kind, sometimes not. Occasionally one finds a perfect replication based upon copying a surviving gallery pilaster. Whether column replacement or replication equals "not eligible due to loss of integrity" has to be decided on a case-by-case basis, depending on the number and quality of other surviving original Greek Revival features. For example, a simple country Greek Revival galleried cottage with a replicated gallery (no matter how perfect) and no other surviving Greek Revival features, other than its form, would generally not be eligible due to loss of integrity. But the prognosis would be different for a Greek Revival house with a gallery replication that also retained various other notable Greek Revival features (shoulder-molded surrounds, mantels, etc.). In this example, the candidate retains (in original fabric) the

bulk of its Greek Revival features. It can still convey, in original features, its identity as a Greek Revival galleried cottage.

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PHOTO GALLERY

Photo 1. Madewood Plantation House, Assumption Parish, 1840-48, Henry Howard, architect.

Photo 2. The Greek temple style Keachi Store, c.1850, DeSoto Parish.

Photo 3. Dedicated in 1853 as the New Orleans City Hall, Gallier Hall is Louisiana's grandest, most richly detailed temple style Greek Revival building. Unlike the ancient Greek temple prototype, the "temple" is attached to a wider façade. (James Gallier St., architect, New Orleans)

Photo 4. An important Deep South variation on the Greek Revival is the galleried cottage, with either a gable end roof (as shown here at Palo Alto Plantation House, Assumption Parish) or a gable end roof, as shown in the next photo.

Photo 5. The Oaks, a Greek Revival galleried cottage in DeSoto Parish.

Photo 6. An iconic New Orleans house type – the Greek Revival double gallery house. It is quite typical to find different Greek orders on the two galleries.

Photo 7. The peripteral style Houmas House in Ascension Parish.

Photo 8. Pentagon Barracks, Baton Rouge, 1825, colonnades added early 1830s.

Photo 9. Bocage Plantation House, Ascension Parish, c.1840, attributed to James Dakin.

Photo 10. Keachi Presbyterian Church (c.1850, portico enclosed c.1890).

Photo 11. There are many Greek Revival commercial buildings in the New Orleans Central Business District. This one retains its original granite pier shopfront.

Photos 12-13. A handsomely detailed Greek Revival townhouse in the New Orleans Central Business District. Its Greek Revival doorway, complete with anthemions, is shown to the right.

Photo 14. The main building (1842) at Manresa House of Retreats (formerly College of Jefferson), St. James Parish. There are various Greek Revival buildings on the campus.