

ALEXANDRE MOUTON HOUSE  
(Maison Dimanche)  
(Lafayette Museum)  
1122 Lafayette Street  
Lafayette  
Lafayette Parish  
Louisiana

HABS LA-202  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS  
FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### ALEXANDRE MOUTON HOUSE

HABS No. LA-202

Location: 1122 Lafayette Street in Lafayette, Louisiana 70501.  
Township 9 South Range 4 East Lafayette  
Latitude 30° 13' 15.20" North  
Longitude 92° 1' 15.59" West

Significance: The Alexandre Mouton House was home to the first Democratic Governor of Louisiana. The original house, *Maison Dimanche* (or Sunday House), is one of the oldest surviving structures in the area. From its original French construction to its many renovations and additions, the Alexandre Mouton House is an architectural embodiment of the cultural exchange and evolution of the region. Each alteration is architecturally indicative of local growth and diversification with a growing influence from Anglo-Saxon culture. The evident transition from traditional Acadian design to Greek Revival Style and an eventual Italianate décor reveals an important architectural documentation of the evolution of style in South Louisiana.

Present Use: The Alexandre Mouton House is presently home to the Lafayette Museum and contains various historically significant artifacts ranging from 19<sup>th</sup> century furniture to decadent Mardi Gras regalia circa the mid-nineteenth century. The staging and displays of the museum portray the unique history of the area.

Significance: Lafayette, Louisiana was first located near the Vermillion River and founded as Petite Manchac. Later the name was changed to Vermillionville, and the judicial district relocated near the Alexandre Mouton House. Jean Mouton, founder of the Alexandre Mouton House, donated a portion of his land for the city of Lafayette. This area proliferated as the epicenter for regional business, culture, and politics. The immediate site of the Alexandre Mouton house resides at the convergence of the colonial grid and the French long lot system. This convergence is based on the contextual collision of the railroad grid and the French arpent land division dependant on the nearby Vermillion River. The gradual curvature of Lafayette Street before its intersection with University Avenue is indicative of the contextual grid shift that results from the interaction of the diverging layouts

Description: The original structure of the Alexandre Mouton House consisted of a large single room with a detached kitchen and a smokehouse. These structures were built in traditional Acadian fashion. Subsequent additions conveyed a more American Colonial and Greek Revival style. The ornament and proportions of the additions and renovations reveal a transition from Acadian design to a Greek Revival style. The Italianate ornament is typical to the trends and styles of Colonial America in the South.

*Maison Dimanche* is a single story, side-gabled, simple plan constructed with *brique entre poteaux* (brick between post). A deep overhang faces south for shading, as is typical with Acadian structures. Although the detached smokehouse is primarily brick construction, the roofs of both structures were originally hand hewn cypress framing with coursed cypress shingles on a moderate slope. *Maison Dimanche* was built on four rows of masonry piers nearly 3'-6" above the ground while the smokehouse was built on grade.

The first additions were multiple rooms detached but aligned on axis with the existing structure. The two buildings shared a porch that remained oriented south. While not much is known about these initial additions, the basic layout is traditional Acadian design, similar to the vernacular layout of the dogtrot design.

Later additions transformed the building into what can be seen today. A second and third story was added to the building, and the orientation was directed east toward the street front. The primary building shows hints of both Greek Revival and Italianate style as indicated by its full façade porches with denticulated cornices and a third story cupola. The front façade uses a two-tiered column system to support the second floor balcony. The columns are a vernacular simplification based on the Doric column order with square bases and chamfered corners. The floor plan of the main house is a linear extended hall-and-parlor with the front porch facing the street. The formal entrance hallway is further evidence of an Anglo-Saxon influence, as traditional Acadian design did not incorporate hallways. Perhaps one of the most distinguishing features of the house is the first floor stairway, which gradually changes orientation towards the front entrance. The addition intended to be used as Dr. G. W. Mills's office reveals Italianate décor with its bracketed eave overhang. The window proportioning is more vertically pronounced than the rest of the home, and the addition does not maintain any Greek Revival characteristics. Italianate ornament became popular in the area during the 1850s, and the surviving building maintains some of those motifs.

History:

Jean Mouton, the original owner, designed the house circa 1800 as his Sunday House. During this time it was common for plantation owners to build small town houses near the church for use as family gathering areas on Sunday's after worship. His Sunday house or *Maison Dimanche*, consisted of one large room and a kitchen. The original house is located on the south side of the property. As described by Mario Mamalakis's book, "The main building is of Anglo-American architecture. This building and the Acadian house attached at the rear are both of *brique entre poteaux* construction (bricks between posts) with exterior cypress siding and pitched roofs with split cypress shingles under the present corrugated iron roofing." In addition to the construction of the *Maison Dimanche* Jean Mouton gave land to a Catholic chapel and the potential location for a courthouse, "with the request that the church and courthouse always face each

other”(Mamalakis 89). The structure on the east side of the home known as the “smoke house,” was also original to the house.

Alexandre Mouton, son of Jean, added 3 rooms to the original house to accommodate his growing family in 1820. Alexandre had 3 sons in the house, one of which was a hero during the Civil War. “The eldest, Alfred, later to become a general in the Confederate Army and the hero of the Battle of Mansfield..”(Mamalakis 89). Alexandre was the active president of the local Succession Covention, and the home functioned as the Governor’s Mansion for a short period of time during the Civil War.

Dr. W. G. Mills acquired the home in 1849. During this time under Dr. Mill’s ownership the most significant changes of the home were made and still seen today. The second floor was added to the home along with the third floor cupola or lookout tower. William B. Erwin acquired the house in 1859, and the home was occupied by one of his four daughters. She occupied the home until the home was purchased by Percy Girard in 1920. The Girard Family occupied the home until 1940, and the home remained vacant for over a decade until the Lafayette Museum Association purchased it in 1954.

The Lafayette Museum Association currently owns and operates the Alexandre Mouton House, and the house functions as a museum to showcase memorabilia of early Vermilionville.

Sources:

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Kiesel, Jean S. *Images of America Lafayette*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2007.

McAlester, Virginia, and Lee McAlester. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 2003.

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<http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/75000850.pdf>.

Project

Information:

The Alexandre Mouton documentation was carried out by a team from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette as part of the graduate coursework. The documentation team included the following participants: Brad Domingue & Jake Grandon. Project Completed May 2013.

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