

Woodlawn, Napoleonville,  
Assumption Parish, Louisiana

HABS - LA.-20

HABS  
LA  
4. NAPP.V  
1.

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of Louisiana

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Richard Koch, District Officer  
518 Audubon Building, New Orleans, Louisiana



Louisiana - 20.  
Page 2.

the works of Asher Benjamin and Minard Lefever. Woodlawn belongs to the latter group. Here two large wings are added to a familiar type of Louisiana house, forming an unusual ornamental composition. The colonnade of the main house is the Greek Ionic Order from the Erechtheion. The simple details of the wings, a direct solution of the problem, are on contrast with the elaborate ornament of the central portion, and give weight to the tradition that the wings were built ten years after the main house. The plan of the middle portion is that of an American house with a hall thru the middle, living room on one side and on the other a library and dining room. In the wings are a billiard room, master's room, other sleeping rooms and a bath. The kitchen, now gone, was in a separate building, but connected with the main house by a covered porch of blinds, probably similar to the detail of the court which is so characteristic of Louisiana. The main rooms had elaborate centerpieces of the period, plaster cornices, and mantels of wood that had been marbleized. What is also noteworthy is the low ceiling heights, so unusual in this part of the country in an important house. The color of the interior was white with vermillion baseboards. The exterior, cement on brick walls, is still a beautiful soft pink with the trim white, and green blinds; the rear porch was of wood. Today, Woodlawn is a bleak ruin; and, several years ago, while the Survey was measuring the building, it was occupied by migrating colored workers from the nearby cane fields who were breaking the doors for firewood.

Louisiana - 20.  
Page 3.

Madewood nearby, designed by Henry Howard, an architect from New Orleans, and built in 1854 by Thomas Pugh, a younger half-brother of William Whitmell Pugh, had the same general composition as that of Woodlawn, but the gable of the center block faced the front as in a Greek Temple and the scale of the rooms was much larger as would be expected in a house of that time.

According to Dr. Thomas Boyant Pugh of Napoleonville, Woodlawn was built by his father, William Whitmell Pugh in 1840, and the wings were added after a second marriage to Josephine Nicholls in 1850. The Pughs were three brothers of a large Welsh family who had lived on the North Carolina - Virginia border (Bertie County) for a hundred years, and about 1818 came to Louisiana. They were part of the great migration to the South - west which so changed the architectural character of the South. The trip, made in a gig, took about six weeks. William Whitmell Pugh came with his father, Dr. Whitmell Pugh, and they first settled in St. Mary's Parish on Judge Porter's place, where they raised indigo; but as this crop was not a success, they then moved to Lafourche Parish where a fortune was made in sugar and rice. Also of interest is the background of these men. William Whitmell Pugh studied at the University of North Carolina, and his father, Dr. Whitmell Hill Pugh of Birdie, North Carolina had been apprenticed to a Dr. Eascom from Edinburgh, and had then

Louisiana - 20.  
Page 4.

attended the University of Pennsylvania, where, according to a letter dated June 13, 1804 from Dr. Rush, Dean of the School, he was an honor student. Augustin Pugh, who is said to have first come <sup>to Louisiana</sup> /in 1818, built Belleview near Paincourtville, a raised cottage of a type said to have been similar to the Briers in Natchez.

Woodlawn was not only modern in its planning, but we are told that the first installation of gas in Louisiana was in this house, as also a speaking tube from the dining room to the upstairs bedroom, and a bathroom which was still a rarity at the time of its building. The marble tub resembling a Roman sarcophagus is still in Napoleonville and a similar one was in Judge Porter's house, Oaklawn, near Franklin, and the Tricou house in New Orleans.

Woodlawn, in its heyday, was described as follows in DeBow's Commercial Review, Volume 8, page 149, Article 7, written at Oak Grove, Bayou Black, November 14, 1849:

" ..... Woodlawn does not belie its name. From the first glance we have of it in the beautiful lawn gently sloping to the Bayou, on both sides, the soil carpeted with suitable grass for purposes of pasturage, interspersed with shade trees, presents a rich appearance. The pasture ground extends the whole length of the plantation, two miles long and several hundred yards wide, embracing quite 200 acres in all, exhibiting a front view from the dwellings, though there is a large body of land beyond, used for

Louisiana - 20.  
Page 5.

farming purposes. There are in this plantation 1,500 acres under fence, 800 in cane. It is in depth more than a mile. There are nearly 100 miles of ditching on this place. It combines all the qualities of a Tennessee farm in relation to raising stock of all kinds and pastures, with every quality which characterizes a sugar-planting interest. There are 300 slaves on this plantation. The quarters are very comfortable houses, supplied with every necessary of life, arranged in proper method, and several rows of shade trees run continuously between these two rows of buildings, presenting in a high degree an aspect of comfort.

  
Richard Koch,  
District Officer,  
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
IN LOUISIANA.

December 14, 1942.

DATA NOT COMPILED AND NOT GUARANTEED  
BY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS