

O'SHEE HOUSE
1606 Fourth Street
Alexandria
Rapides Parish
Louisiana

HABS NO. LA-1177

HABS
LA,
40-ALEX,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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GENERAL HISTORY.

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Preamble.

This initial section of the historical report documents the factual and historical material related to the ownership, design, construction and occupation of the O'Shee House located at 1606 Fourth Street in the City of Alexandria, Rapides Parish, Louisiana. It attempts to build a factual history of the house in terms of the families who owned and occupied it, and through this sheds light on the historic significance of the structure.

Ownership Patterns.

References to the chain of title to the land upon which the structure stands are in the office of the Clerk of Court of the Parish of Rapides in Alexandria, Louisiana.

The Rapides Parish Courthouse was destroyed by fire on May 13, 1864. All official records were concurrently lost, and title of the land prior to this date is consequently not recorded. As a result of this loss of documentary evidence and the conditions prevailing in the aftermath of the Civil War, the early history of the land is rather confused.

The earliest extant record of ownership is dated 1866, and takes the form of a recognition of title by the Ninth District Court in favor of Jacob Irving. An examination of the Court Record of these proceedings indicated that Lots 1, 3 and 4 of Block 35 in the Town of Alexandria were - together with certain other real property - purchased by Jacob Irving from James Smith in 1853. The action for recognition of title instituted by Irving was not opposed by James Smith, and it is therefore possible to establish - despite the absence of title records to support this - that Smith is the first documented holder of title to the land on which the O'Shee House was subsequently built.

The first extant deed to the land appears in Conveyance Book A, Page 337, and confirms Jacob Irving's title in terms of this judgment. Irving was, by all accounts, a 'man of substance' in the life of Alexandria at this time.

The provenance of the land between the establishment of Irving's title and the next documented record in the records housed in the Rapides Parish Courthouse is less than clear. It is evident that the land was sold by Irving, but an extensive search of all records for the 1866-1869 period reveals no recorded transfer of title relating to Lot 1 of Block 35 of the Plat. It is once again possible, through an examination of records

relating to the 1869 acquisition of the property by Jessie Buice Jones, to establish probable prior title, but this is conjecture rather than fact.

The judgment in suit Number 1371, Ninth District Court, delivered on December 22, 1868, in which action was brought by Jessie Buice Jones against Nelson Taylor, resulted in the transfer of title in respect of Lots 1 and 2 of Block 35 to Jessie B. Jones, the daughter of Alexander Edgar Jones.

Taylor was sued by Jones for defaulting on payment of a Note for \$800, dated July 21, 1863 and secured by a mortgage on Lots 1 and 2 of Block 35. The land, together with all buildings and improvements, was offered for sale by public auction on February 6, 1869. The last and highest bid of \$867 was made by Jessie B. Jones, and the property was subsequently sold, conveyed and delivered to her by John De Lacy, Sheriff of Rapides Parish.

While there is no record of the sale of Lots 1 and 2 of Block 35 to Nelson Taylor by Jacob Irving, the chain of title for Lots 3 and 4 of the same block are extant. It shows that Lots 3 and 4 were conveyed to Laura Taylor, the wife of Nelson Taylor, on March 3, 1866. These lots were sold by Laura Taylor to John Bogan on July 12, 1866, who in turn transferred them to his wife Alice on July 19, 1866. It seems reasonable, as a result of these records and the existence of the mortgage referred to above, to assume that Lots 1 and 2 of Block 35 were conveyed to Nelson Taylor by Jacob Irving, quite probably in July of 1862, and that the record of this conveyance was lost when the Rapides Parish Courthouse was destroyed in 1864.

Jessie Buice Jones married J. L. Conella, a teacher and well known figure in Alexandria at that time, in 1869, and Lots 1 and 2 of Block 35 were sold by her in October of 1870 to Richard O'Shee. There is no documented evidence to indicate that the Conella family occupied the house at 1606 Fourth Street during this brief period.

The chain of title in respect of the land is relatively clear after 1869, and can be documented as follows:

- 1869 Deed, Conveyance Book B, Page 283
 Nelson Taylor to Jessie Buice Jones

- 1870 Deed, Conveyance Book C, Page 248
 Jessie Buice Connella to Richard O'Shee

- 1902 Deed, Conveyance Book LL, Page 488
 Bridget O'Shee to James O'Shee

- 1910 Deed, Conveyance Book 54, Page 64
James O'Shee to Jefferson E. McAdams
- 1951 Judgment, Cause Number 3984, July 18, 1951
Gilligan, Thornton and Emmons (succession)
- 1951 Deed, Conveyance Book 419, Page 295
McAdams Estate to Gilligen, Thornton and Emmons
- 1955 Deed, Conveyance Book 484, Page 59
Gilligan, Thornton & Emmons to Carl S. Carstens
- 1961 Deed, Conveyance Book 577, Page 532
Carl S. Carstens to Bricklayers, Masons and Plasterers
International Union, Local Number 7

The property has, subsequent to this last documented transfer of title, been purchased by the State of Louisiana as a part of its program of land purchases to secure rights-of-way for the I-49 project currently under construction. The structure, which is currently being leased by the Bricklayers and Masons Union, will be demolished to allow for the construction of the I-49 bypass in Alexandria unless suitable arrangements for its transfer to another site and its restoration can be concluded.

Occupancy.

The occupancy of the structure which became known as the O'Shee House can be seen as falling into two distinct phases; the use of the original house built on the lot which spanned the period between the Civil War and the last decade of the nineteenth century, and that subsequent to the construction of the house as it exists today.

The deed relating to the transfer of title from Bridget O'Shee, the widow of Richard O'Shee, to James O'Shee in 1902 makes reference to the fact that the "house and improvements on the first described property" which was defined as Lot Number 1 of Block 35 was specifically excluded from the terms of the conveyance. The style and detail of the house are such that they tend to confirm that the present structure was both designed and built in the first decades of this century. Although the Victorian style was prevalent and in use at the time that Richard O'Shee acquired the land in 1870, there are certain elements of Roman Classicism which are strongly evident in the design of the house which tend to be more consistent with the style and practice of the first decade of the twentieth century. It therefore appears that the original house was either demolished or moved to some other site in 1902, and that the second O'Shee house was constructed by James O'Shee at this stage.

The history of the house located at 1606 Fourth Street prior to its purchase by Richard O'Shee in 1870 is somewhat difficult to reconstruct, particularly as no factual evidence appears

to exist. It does however seem probable that the first structure was occupied by Jacob Irving, and that he spent the period between 1853 and 1862 living in the house.

Jacob Irving appears to have sold the property to Nelson Taylor in 1862, and it seems reasonable to assume that Taylor and his wife Laura lived in the house from 1862 to approximately 1868. This assumption is supported by the fact that Taylor purchased land in the immediate vicinity for his livery stables and his business as a livestock merchant.

Taylor's business apparently deteriorated rather rapidly and significantly in the last years of the 1860's, and he was declared bankrupt in 1870. The house and its lot were purchased by Jessie B. Jones as a result of a mortgage foreclosure in February of 1869, and Jessie Jones sold the property to Richard O'Shee in October of that year. The brief period existing between these two transactions, coupled with the fact of Ms. Jones' marriage to J. L. Conells during the intervening eight months period, make it seem likely that the house was not occupied during this period or, if occupied, was rented to a short-term tenant.

The O'Shee's took possession of the structure then standing on the property on the eighth of October in 1870, and the family owned and lived in the house for forty years until its transfer to Jefferson McAdams in 1910. The original O'Shee House was demolished or moved in 1902 or 1903, and the existing house was constructed at about that time for James O'Shea, a land attorney and sawmill owner, who lived in the house between 1903 and 1910.

The McAdams family, which consisted of Jefferson McAdams, his wife Ollie Mae and their three daughters Dorothy, Louisa and Effie Lee, were prominent in the life and commerce of Alexandria during the first half century. The family owned and occupied the house, again for a period of forty years, until it was transferred to Carl S. Carstens in 1955.

Jefferson McAdams was a merchant, and proprietor of a number of companies trading in the downtown area of Alexandria. The range of goods his corporations marketed was wide, and included men's and women's clothing and apparel, groceries, liquor and many of the specialty items found in today's department stores. He was in addition active in a number of speculative investment ventures, and for a time served as President of the Alexandria Bank and Trust Company and the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce.

It appears, through the study of entries in the Alexandria City Directories, that Jefferson McAdams died in 1931 or 1932, and that his widow Ollie Mae Calcote McAdams lived in the house until her death in 1950. The three McAdams daughters inherited the property in 1951 and, after renting it as a residence to Gaspard Emeric, a compositor on the Alexandria Daily Town Talk for a two year period, sold the property.

Its pattern of use at that stage changed from residential to predominantly institutional, and the house has been used by a number of short-term tenants in the period subsequent to its sale by the McAdams family. An outline of this use-pattern is as follows:-

1952 to 1954 Gaspard Emeric, Compositor (Residential)
1955 to 1957 Vacant
1957 to 1959 Rapides Parish Mentally Retarded School
1960 to 1968 Vacant
1969 to 1971 Parents for Action in Community Endeavors Inc.
1971 to 1972 Parents for Action in Community Endeavors Inc.
Bricklayers and Masons International Union
1972 to 1973 Bricklayers and Masons International Union
Lower Third Neighborhood Service Center Inc.
1973 to 1982 Bricklayers and Masons International Union
Cenla Community Action Committee Inc.
1982 to 1985 Bricklayers and Masons International Union

The Architect.

It is clear, from an examination of the nature of the planning, the particular aesthetic, the stylistic devices, the general form of construction and the level of detail resolution incorporated in the house that it is not the work of a contractor or even a pattern-book solution, and that an architect was involved in its design and construction.

An examination of the Alexandria City Directory for 1906, which was published some four years later than the probable date of construction of the house, reveals that there were four architects practicing in Alexandria at that time.

The architectural firms appearing in this listing are:-

J. D. Bragg, Architect, at 613 12th Street

G. C. Wilson, Architect, in the Garner Building

C. Scott Yeager, Architect, in the Albert Building

and,

Joseph Waitz, Architect, at 829 Fisk.

Based on the material evidence presented by the structure itself, it was consequently considered likely that either Bragg, Wilson, Yeager or Waitz provided the architectural services for the design and construction of the O'Shee house, as all of these architects were active in the development of the physical fabric of Alexandria at that time. No records in either the Clerk of Court's Office or the Municipal Office were found which provided the name of the architect. The sole practice which survives is that of Scott C. Yeager, and no factual or oral evidence of either their involvement or that of one of the other firms resulted from discussions with the firm.

The Alexandria City Directory published in 1906 does however contain a photograph of the O'Shee House. This appears in an advertisement placed by J.D. Bragg, advertising his services as an Architect and Builder. It is therefore clear that J.D. Bragg was responsible for the design and architectural development of the James O'Shee residence, and further that Bragg was in all likelihood the contractor responsible for the construction of the house.

No information on the type of practice maintained by Bragg in the first decade of the century was available. No biographical listing containing his name was found in any of the references consulted. His name is not listed in either the 1914 or subsequent issues of the Alexandria City Directories, and it therefore appears that his practice and construction activity was confined to the very early part of the century. The stylistic characteristics and level of design typified in the O'Shee House however make it clear that J.D. Bragg was academically trained and well versed in both the theoretical and technical aspects of architecture at the time, and that his practice must consequently have been significant.

Construction.

No available records exist which either provide an accurate date of construction for the building or the name of the building contractor responsible for the construction of the 1606 Fourth Street. While it is highly probable that the house was constructed by J.D. Bragg in view of the photograph of the house which appears in Bragg's advertisement in the 1906 Alexandria City Directory, no other evidence was found which would substantiate this inference.

Copies of the Sanborn maps for Alexandria, which may well have given a clear indication of a probable construction date for the existing house, could not be found. As a result, the probable date of construction has had to be inferred from the conveyancing records lodged in the Rapides Parish Courthouse, and these would seem to indicate that the house was constructed in at some stage after 1902, and quite probably before the end of 1903.

The major evidence supporting this contention is to be found in the record of the conveyance of the property from Bridget O'Shee to James O'Shee in 1902. This deed records that, in the sale of Lot 1 of Block 35, only title to the land was conveyed. The house and other structures were specifically excluded from the sale, and it is probable that the then existing structures were either demolished or moved to make way for the construction of the new house.

The style and detail of the house currently existing on the lot do, as has been mentioned previously, tend to support this inference. A search for municipal records relating to the probable date of construction of the house was carried out. No information relating to this period, either in the form of copies of building permits issued by the City of Alexandria or copies of the approved plans for the structure, could however be found.

There is consequently no concrete evidence beyond the deed itself which supports or corroborates the probability of the house being constructed in 1902, and the more extensive title and tax-record search which might have yielded this information was beyond the scope of this report.

MATERIAL HISTORY.

Preamble.

This section of the historical report documents the material conditions related to the O'Shee House at 1606 Fourth Street, Alexandria, and presents factual descriptions of the site and the house. It further evaluates the house in terms of its architectural style, and places it within a specific stylistic category generally recognized as being prevalent in the latter part of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries.

The Site:

The site of the O'Shee House is located in the City of Alexandria, which is the seat of Parish Government for the Parish of Rapides in the State of Louisiana. Diagrams showing the location of the O'Shee House within both the general fabric of Alexandria and that of its immediate environment may be found on pages 16 and 17.

The house and its site are located on the Eastern fringe of the historic Alexandria Central Business District, at 1606 Fourth Street. The lot is on the South side of Fourth Street, at the

intersection of Fourth and Fulton Streets. While the neighborhood in which the house is located has deteriorated significantly in terms of both its physical fabric and environmental quality, records do indicate that it was considered to be a prime residential location and a highly 'respectable' address in the late part of the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries.

The lot on which the house stands is square, and is a corner lot. The Northern boundary of the property is defined by Fourth Street, and its Western boundary by Fulton Street, which is oriented on a North-South axis terminating in the levee defining the banks of the Red River. The site is separated from the approach ramp for the Alexander Fulton Bridge which crosses the Red River to the East of downtown Alexandria by Fulton Street, which it parallels.

The formal description of the lot and its location which appears in the conveyancing records lodged in the Office of the Clerk of Court for Rapides Parish reads as follows:

Lot One of Block 35 of the City of Alexandria, fronting on Fourth Street one hundred and six feet and eight inches and running back therefrom between parallel lines one hundred and six feet and eight inches, being bounded in North by Fourth Street, on the West by Fulton Street, on the East by Lot Number 2 of Block Thirty-Five and on the South by Lot Number 4 of Block Number 35.

A review of conveyancing records indicates that the Plat identifying the Old Town of Alexandria within which these lots fall was prepared by Ira W. Sylvester, Certified Engineer, although evidence documenting the original date of subdivision of the land was not found. Block 35, and Lots 1, 2, 3 and 4 of that Block, appear on a number of early maps of Alexandria, and are consequently significant in the pattern of historic development of the Old Town.

The house itself is currently the only structure located on the site. It parallels the western boundary of the lot on Fulton Street, and its major facade faces onto Fourth Street. The location of the house on what amounts to the western half of the property establishes the pattern of open-space usage on the site, and the major yard area consequently occurs on the eastern portion of the lot.

There is evidence that additional structures occupied a portion of this side yard at some stage in the house's history, but no information as to their type and use was found. References in the title deeds do however indicate that another house was located on this portion of the lot, and information in early city directories corroborates this evidence with references to a number 1620 Fourth Street being located between the O'Shee

House and the house occupying lot number 2 of block 35. It would appear that the house occupying this section of the lot was demolished in 1931, as there is no reference to 1620 Fourth Street in the City Directories after that date.

Vehicular access to the site was achieved by means of a drive located on the south boundary of the property with access off Fulton Street. The major pedestrian access to the house is from Fourth Street, and a pathway leading to the entrance staircase occurs on the major axis of the house. There is evidence of a secondary pedestrian access leading to the screen porch occurring at the rear of the house, and giving access to the kitchen and service areas.

There is virtually no remaining evidence of site development and landscaping, although this must certainly have been a feature of the site in the early part of the century. Four large pecan trees remain on the lot, two occurring between the western boundary and the house proper, one at the rear of the house and the remaining tree in the open area to the east of the house. These trees appear to have been deliberately located and work effectively as shade trees for the house itself and the yard. No evidence relating to the establishment or existence of a kitchen garden could be found.

The House.

The O'Shee House is a two story structure, although its external appearance and style is that of a single story house. It was, as has been previously mentioned, in all probability constructed in late 1902 or early 1903, although no information supporting an accurate construction date and construction cost could be found.

The house has a main living floor which is markedly raised off the ground, and a second story which could be considered an attic, although the extent of the accommodation this 'attic' space contains makes the use of this specific terminology rather difficult.

The main living and reception rooms are located on the first floor of the house, with the sleeping accommodations occupying the second or attic floor. Access to the second or attic floor is by means of a dog-leg staircase, located in the central hall of the house.

The plan configuration of the house follows the traditional central hall or modified dog-trot pattern, with the private spaces or living rooms attached to a generous circulation spine which bisects the house from front to back. This circulation pattern is continued on the upper floor of the house, with the four rooms which make up the attic being symmetrically disposed about the hallway.

The accommodation provided in the house consists of a large entrance hall, a front parlor, a formal dining room, two bedrooms, a bathroom and the kitchen/scullery on the first floor, and three bedrooms and a bathroom on the second floor. The house, in addition, makes effective use of rather extensive porch spaces to extend its living and sleeping areas, and these occur both at the first and second floor levels. The porch space occurring on the South side of the house at the second floor level is a sleeping porch, a feature common to houses of the period.

The median width of the house at the first floor level is forty-five feet, and its median length is seventy-two feet. The floor to ceiling height at the first floor level is thirteen feet, while that of the attic level is ten feet.

The floor area of each level of the O'Shae House is:-

First Floor.....	2050 square feet
Second Floor.....	1050 square feet
Sleeping Porch.....	240 square feet
Screen Porch.....	240 square feet
Front Porch	600 square feet
Total Enclosed Area.....	3100 square feet
Total Porch Area.....	1080 square feet
Total Usable Area.....	4180 square feet

Most rooms in the house share a common dimension, and are 16 feet square. This dimension is one often associated with traditional or vernacular house form, and was generated by the particular constraints established by early construction techniques. Its use in the O'Shae House is one of the structure's interesting aspects.

The form of the house is characterized by its simple three-dimensional mass, its projecting bays and its high and complex roof, with multiple ridges, hips and valleys, gables and turret. The front porch, which is one of the structure's most developed features, extends across the full width of the house and has a turret-topped circular "gazebo" which wraps around the east corner. The use of the classical motifs of Ionic columns and the pedimented temple-front in the articulation of this porch enhance its prominence and significance.

The major entry into the house occurs on its north and dominant facade, and is located on the major axis of symmetry of the plan. This location, together with the high level of articulation of the porch and the use of the Palladian tri-partite division of the front door itself, serve to reinforce the frontality of the north facade and bring order to its asymmetrical composition.

There are two additional entries giving access to the house: one leading into the kitchen from the screen porch on the south facade, and another leading into the front bedroom from the

porch which occurs on the east facade. A late addition to the building has been the installation of ramps to permit access by the handicapped, and these were in all likelihood installed when the building was used for institutional purposes after 1955.

Construction.

The techniques used in the construction of the O'Shee House are traditional in most respects, as are the materials selected and used in the house. The choice of both materials and construction techniques was obviously influenced by both the parameters of the 'Vernacular Victorian' style which governed the design of the house and the environmental and economic considerations which were operative at the time.

The structural pattern and system used in the construction of the house is that of traditional 'balloon-frame' construction, and the morphology of the plan and the structural shell is consistent with the demands imposed by a system of this type. Lateral stability is enhanced through the use of major architectural elements which act as buttressing elements, and the general form of the house is highly appropriate in structural and constructional terms.

The major floor structure, composed of sills and transverse joists, is supported by a system of brick foundation piers, which are organized in a casual grid approximately sixteen feet square. The direction of the foundation piers, which are approximately 12" by 36" in size, has been varied to provide lateral stability, and these consequently follow the bi-axial framing system of the house. The fireplace core or stack is of solid masonry construction and is rotated on the diagonal, once again acting as a stiffening feature in the structure of the house.

The framing for the interior and perimeter walls rests directly on the sub-structure of the floor, and both internal and external wall sheathing are fixed directly to the structural framing members. The sheathing for the interior walls is of 1" by 6" sawn pine boarding, while that for the exterior is of 1" by 6" pine, wrought to a shiplap pattern.

All perimeter walls are loadbearing, and the plan of the house is traversed on both axes by interior bearing walls. All openings in perimeter and interior walls are framed using conventional techniques. Lateral support of the perimeter walls is achieved through the disposition of interior structural walls, in addition to the architectural elements mentioned previously. The porches occurring at both the front and rear of the house use a trabeated form of construction, with structural loads being distributed by a system of composite perimeter beams, carried vertically down by the columns and redistributed by the perimeter sill system.

The perimeter and interior structural walls support a system of joists at the second floor level, and the tongue-and-groove boarding which forms the floor for the attic or second floor spaces is fixed directly to these joists. Stub walls extend from this second floor system to support the roof framing.

The roof is framed using 2" by 6" rafters, approximately 32" on center. The rafters bear directly on either wall-plates which terminate the perimeter wall framing, on perimeter beams supported by the column systems defining the exterior porch spaces or on the stub walls which carry roof loading down to the interior structural walls.

The general form of the roof of the O'Shea House is relatively complex due to the demands of the style within which it is built, and the general and accepted method of framing has been remarkably well adapted to meet the demands of this complexity. The roofing material is carried on a system of battens fixed directly to the major rafters.

Staircases occurring in interior follow the conventional pattern of structural stringers spanning from floor to landing, and carry timber treads and risers.

The house has been designed to respond effectively to natural environmental factors. The relatively generous ground to first floor airspace maximizes the cooling potential of the sub-floor air circulation, and the pattern of cross-ventilation appears to have been carefully considered. The orientation of major rooms and use-zones within the house tends to work extremely effectively from an environmental point of view, and the disposition and use of porches and screen-porches would tend to enhance the basic qualities inherent in the plan.

Materials.

Exterior.

Walls: 5" Shiplap siding, painted, on structural framing. Foundation piers of pressed red brick, with 1" by 1" painted lattice screens interposed between piers. Gable ends are finished in decorative scalloped shingling.

Fenestration: Mahogany casements and sashes of two by two pattern, with decorative lights set in upper sash, stained and varnished.

Doors: Solid mahogany in beveled and paneled pattern, stained and varnished and hung on brass butt hinges.

Roofing: Original roofing of split cedar shakes on tiling battens; subsequent roofing of pressed asbestos

cement tiles, integrally colored gray, in diamond pattern.

Flooring: Exterior porches are floored in 3" wide pine tongue-and-groove boarding, painted. Exterior walkways in trowelled, integrally colored Portland cement.

Columns: Fabricated timber columns using the Ionic order with carved capitals and bases, painted

Ceilings: Exterior ceilings over porches are in 4" grooved pine matchboarding, painted.

Interior

Walls: Patterned wallpaper on muslin backing on 6" by 1" lath. Main living rooms have stained pine wainscot to 45" height, articulated in 14" by 7" bevelled and paneled pattern.

Trim: Baseboards, cornices and mouldings in stained pine, varnished, as are handrails and stair elements.

Ceilings: Paper on 1" by 8" lathing, painted.

Flooring: 3" Red pine tongue-and-groove boarding, sanded and waxed.

Doors: Solid paneled pine on brass hinges.

Fireplaces: Cast iron inserts in carved and stained pine or faience tile surrounds.

Fixtures: Fixtures in bathrooms and kitchen are standard items from then-current sanitaryware suppliers. Basins are of pedestal type, and all faucets and fittings are chrome-plated. Light fixtures in all rooms are single element, glass-bowl drop chandeliers.

Architectural Style.

The period between the middle of the nineteenth century and the end of the first quarter of the twentieth is marked by a vast range of architectural styles, and of rapid transitions between stylistic movements. It is a period characterized in many ways by a series of revivals: Colonial, Greek, Roman, Romanesque, Italianate, Egyptian and Renaissance and Classical. It is also characterized by a series of isms: Classicism, Neo-Classicism, Eclecticism, Romanticism and the like. The style of this age however which subsumed and controlled the revivals and movements was the development and refinement of what has been termed the

Victorian aesthetic, and a vast range of works built between 1840 and 1920 are often and generally referred to as Victorian.

The O'Shee House is clearly an example of this broadly defined Victorian style, and possess a number of characteristics which both fit within and contradict its characteristics. It possesses certain characteristics which would identify it as a Queen Anne style house; others which relate it to the Modified Stick style which became popular in Louisiana at the turn of the century. It has certain aspects which belong to Roman Classicism, and others which are close to certain stylistic devices used by architects designing in the Shingle style. These stylistic concordances and contradictions make the simple determination of the house's style rather difficult.

The roots of the form of the O'Shee House are, it appears, to be found in its vernacular origins. The basic form and organization of the plan is relatively simple. It is really no more than a simple rectangle, bisected by a central hallway and with the major rooms disposed symmetrically on either side. The basic three-dimensional articulation of its spaces is likewise, in essence, relatively clear with the major axis of its dominant roof running from north to south, from front to rear. These aspects are highly traditional, and are common to vernacular house form in Louisiana from the eighteenth century to the twentieth. Its stylistic roots therefore are traditional, rather than what would have been considered 'modern' at the time of its construction.

The basic simplicity and clarity of its plan and three-dimensional form have been modified and at times contradicted by the way in which its plan and volume have been articulated. The bays, towers, cross gables, pointed dormers and large verandahs and porches are stylistically consistent with the Eastern Stick Style, and it is clear that the house closely parallels the tenets of this style. The decorative aspects of the style, which are so characteristic, are however not present and their absence consequently makes it extremely difficult to label the O'Shee House a true example of this style.

The pedimented temple-front with its Ionic occurring on the northwest corner of the house belongs to the realm of Roman Classicism, a stylistic movement which was prevalent between 1790 and 1830. Its strict classical form and severe austerity however is not stylistically consistent with the formal vocabulary used by most of the styles of the Victorian period. It is in many ways an echo of the not-too-distant past, and it could be argued - from a critical point of view - that its use in the O'Shea house has no place within the parameters of the general stylistic vocabulary of the time.

The apparently traditional bias of the house, the use of the classical temple-front, its apparent consistency with certain tenets of the Eastern Stick Style and its avoidance of the use of the detailed articulation so important to that style set up, as

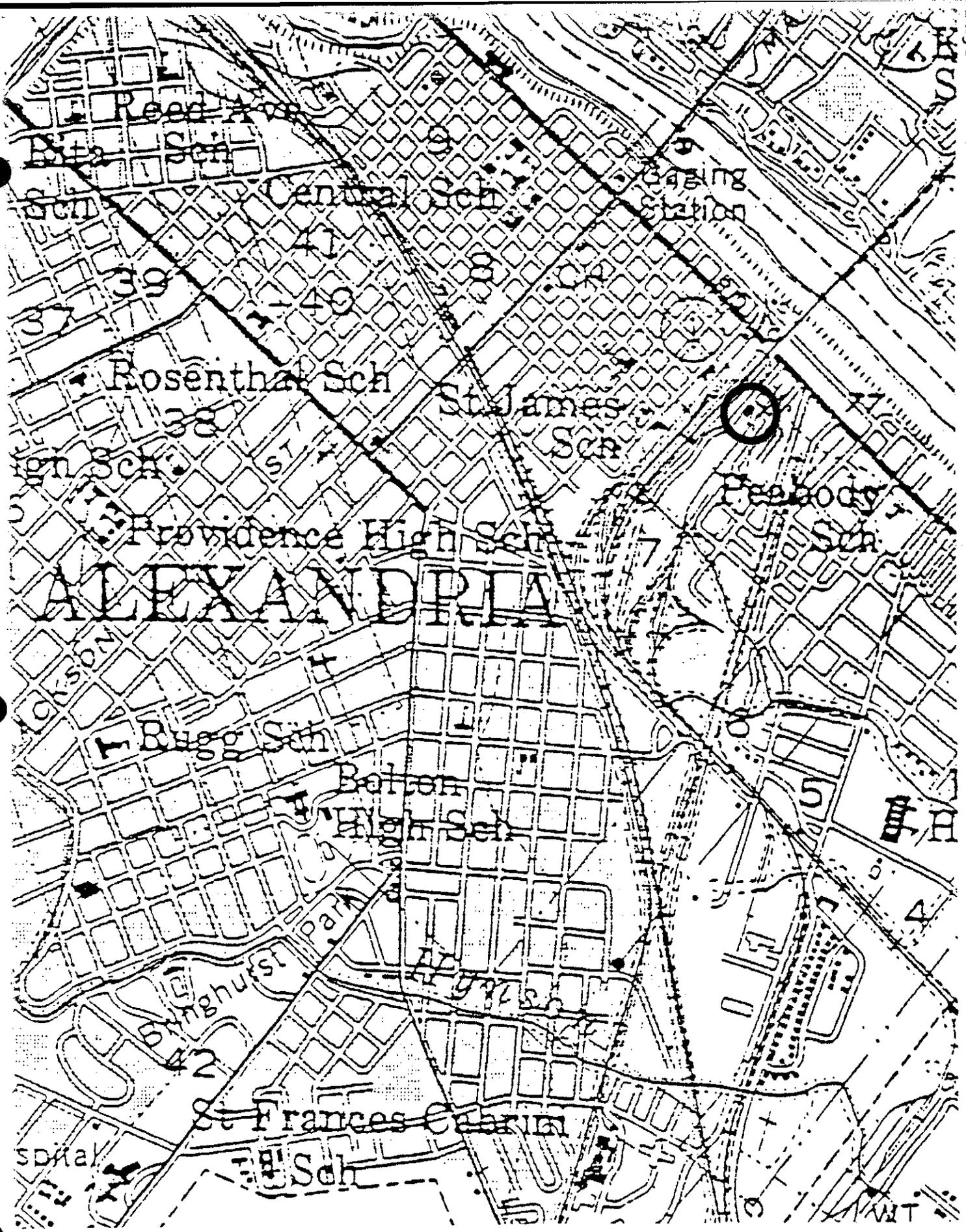
was mentioned earlier, concordances and contradictions which require resolution where the style of the O'Shee is concerned.

Carole Rifkind, in her book "A Field Guide to American Architecture", identifies a style which she terms Vernacular Victorian. Its characteristics are the reiteration of local and traditional forms; the existence of a compact and simple plan form; reduced, simplified and abstracted ornament; a lagging behind the times; the use of motifs and elements from several periods and general restraint in the use of materials.

While the O'Shee House clearly possesses the attributes which could link it to a number of styles, its characteristic aesthetic is quite clearly that of Vernacular Victorian. It conforms almost without exception to the parameters for style identification established by Ms. Rifkind, and the very inconsistencies which separate it from Late Victorian, Stick and Queen Anne serve to reinforce its vernacular roots. It is consequently argued that the O'Shee House is an example of the Victorian Vernacular Style, and that its proportion and articulation distinguish it as a particularly fine expression of the style's tenets.



LOCATION MAP - URBAN CONTEXT



LOCATION MAP - NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

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