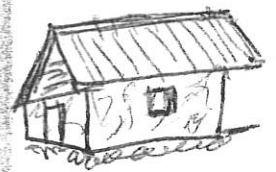
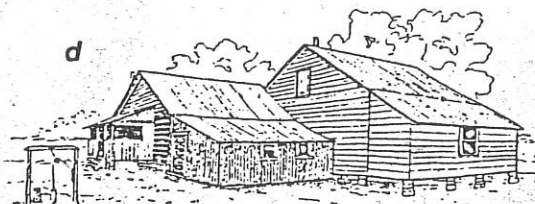
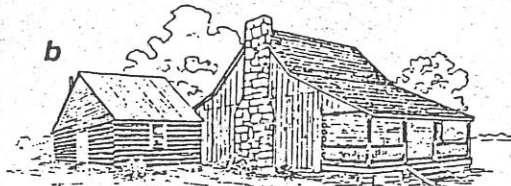
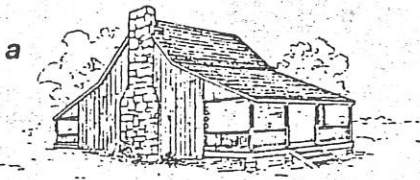


Material Culture

~~1910~~ 1900
Kitchen



cantilever
porch



Summer 1990

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Don Brasseur

The Duclos-Pashia House: Survival of Creole Building Traditions into the Twentieth Century

C. Ray Brassieur

Introduction

In 1723 François Philippe Renault, an officer of John Law's Company of the West, was granted large tracts of land in Missouri along with the authority to conduct mining operations. One of Renault's claims encompassed an area of present-day Washington County, Missouri, called La Vieille Mine, or Old Mines (Swartzlow, 1934; Hanley, 1942; ASP, 1834, 162-164). Since Renault's time, mining has been central to this area (Schoolcraft, 1819; Rafferty, 1980, 124-127). Lead mining was the principal industry there until around the end of the nineteenth century when interests began to shift increasingly to a mineral locally called tiff, or barite (Clark, 1920). Until about 1950, some of the French miners of this area continued to employ traditional hand mining techniques which had been passed down from one generation to the next for centuries.

To this day, very old French customs and lifeways continue in the Old Mines area. French culinary dishes like *beignes*, *croquecignole*, *boudin*, *andouille*, and *boullion*, are prepared locally, at least on special occasions. A few of the residents continue to speak French. More or less ancient elements of oral tradition and custom, like the Guignolée, an essentially Celtic New Year's mumming ritual, have carried forth in the community (Dorrance, 1935; Carriere, 1937; Thomas, 1981).

It should not be surprising that the material culture of this vicinity also reflects the continuity of older traditions. The Duclos-Pashia house, for example, an active residence for the past century-and-a-half, provides some compelling examples of the survival of Creole vernacular expression into the twentieth century.

The house is located on a farm, near the spring head of Salt Pine Creek, about three miles east of Old Mine Creek (Fig. 1), as one of thirty-one original 400-arpent tracts granted to the inhabitants of Old Mines by the Spanish government (ASP, 1834, 552-554; ASP, 1860, 728-734). In 1841, this property was purchased by Antoine Decelle Duclos II, who shortly before his death in 1846, transferred a portion of this land and a dwelling to his youngest son, Paschal

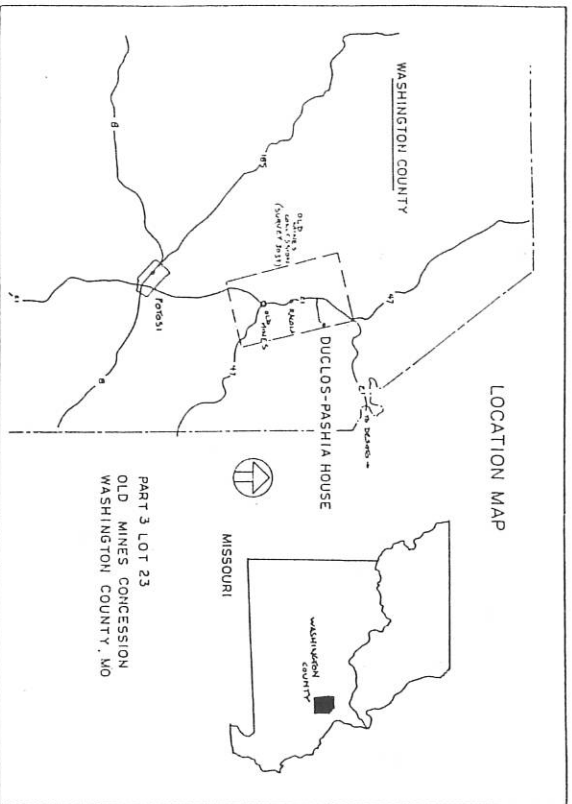


Fig. 1 Location of Duclos-Pashia house. Illustration by Debbie Sheals.

Duclos I. The house was likely completed in the early 1840s. A deed, dated September 13, 1846, granting the use of this property to Seicelle (Cecile) Aubuchon Duclos, Antoine's widow, describes the property as a "farm and Mansion house." Seven slaves and an undisclosed number of horses, hogs, and cattle were also mentioned in this deed.

Within living memory, this house was located in a neighborhood known as Rabbitville. Before the building of Highway 21 during the 1920s (Villmer, 1987), Rabbitville was linked with La Grande Prairie, Cannon Mines, Thibeau Town, and many other miners' neighborhoods by a network of ridge-top trails. Today the house is relatively isolated from other dwellings. It has never been joined to public utility services of any type.

• Since it was built, the house has been inhabited by the family and heirs of Antoine Duclos. Presently it is the home of Charlie Pashia (b. 1909), the great-great grandson of the original owner, and Mary Alice Coleman Pashia (b. 1910). Charlie Pashia has worked as a miner and hauler of tuff, a blacksmith specializing in mending and resharpening miners' hand tools, as a subsistence farmer, and as a dance musician. His repertoire and style on the fiddle are rooted in French musical traditions.

Charlie and Mary Alice Pashia have reared fourteen children in this house. In 1990, they are in their sixtieth year of marriage. When any of their eighteen great-grandchildren visit Charlie and Mary Alice Pashia, they are visiting an active dwelling once inhabited by their great-great-great-great grandparents.

The Duclos-Pashia House: Construction and Evolution

The original house was somewhat of a hybrid, having both Anglo-American and Creole architectural features. Its walls were constructed of round horizontal logs, saddle-notched at the corners. This construction method is considered an Anglo-American trait which entered Missouri by the 1790s along with westward expansion (Kniffen and Glassie, 1986, 165-178). Inside the house, a fluted mantle decorating the stone fireplace suggests that the Duclos family was at least moderately interested in the prevailing fashions of the 1840s.

The galleries of the original house, however, are linked to the French vernacular traditions of the Mid-Mississippi Valley. Though the original roof was destroyed by storm, evidence from a remaining original log plate indicates that the original roof was much steeper than the present one—much too steep to have enclosed the galleries in a single slope. Originally, a break-in-slope, or "double-pitch" roof enclosed full length galleries on the front and rear of the house (Fig. 2a). The original chartered columns, mortised to receive a balustrade, support the present roof of the east gallery. Houses roofed in such a manner fit within Edwards' (1986, 7) Class II Creole classification.

The finish of the exterior walls of the original house is also typical of those of Creole Louisiana. A thick layer of mud and straw covers the log walls that are protected under the east and west galleries. This mud covering has been plastered and whitewashed inside and out. The tradition of applying whitewash to plastered walls retained its popularity in the Old Mines area far into the twentieth century. In describing plastered and whitewashed walls of St. Louis, Charles Peterson (1949, 23) remarked that:

Such finish was often mentioned in eighteenth century specifications for house construction and is popularly employed even yet among the French farmers and tuff miners of Washington County.

The evolution of the Duclos-Pashia house indicates that traditional building methods were carried forth through the nineteenth

Evidence from a Nov 2011 study indicate no gallery on creek side of House.

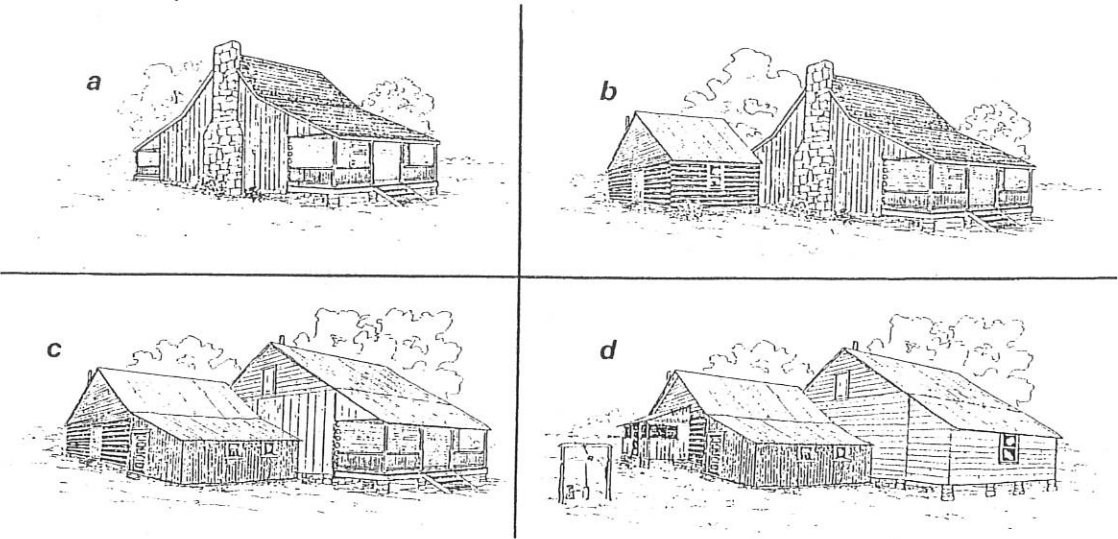


Fig. 2 Evolution of the Duclos-Pashia house: a. original house, circa 1844; b. outside kitchen added, circa 1900; c. vertical-log addition, circa 1916; d. circa 1960. Illustration by Debbie Sheals.

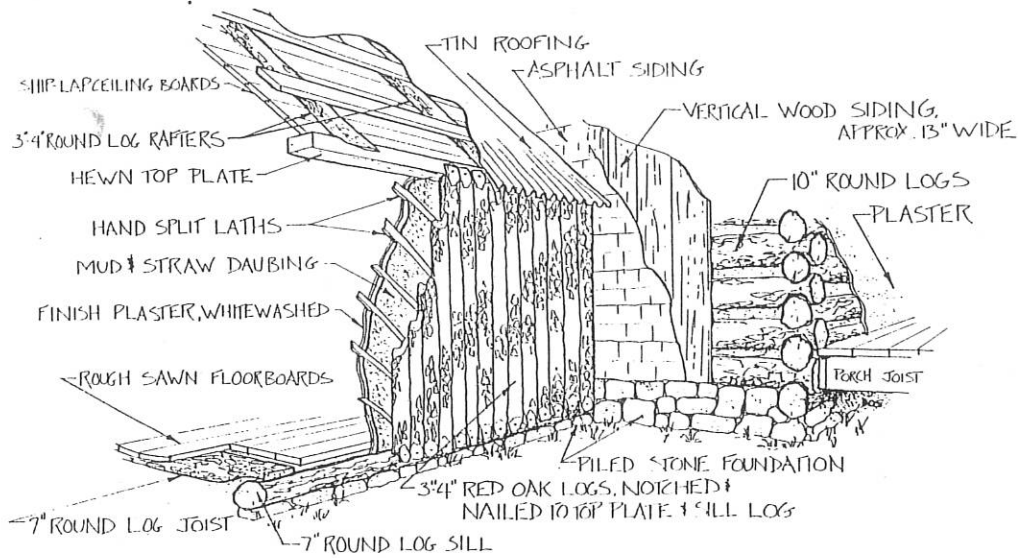
and into the twentieth centuries. In the year 1900, an outside kitchen was constructed of horizontal saddle-notched logs, very similar to those in the original house (Fig. 2b). Several years after the kitchen was built, a storm destroyed the original roof of the Duclos-Pashia house. At that time, the stone fireplace and chimney were removed, and a new single-pitched roof was built to cover the house and enclose the galleries.

Around 1916, the need for additional space was addressed by the construction of a shed addition, or *appentis*, attached to the kitchen (Fig. 2c). This addition was probably built by the sons of Pascal Duclos II, Jim and Patrick Duclos, that is, Charlie Pashia's uncles, and neighbors. It served as sleeping quarters for the girls of the family. When it was built, the roof of the outdoor kitchen was enlarged to cover this new addition.

The newly enlarged roof also joined the kitchen and the new addition to the gallery of the main house, and it provided storage space and sleeping loft above the ceiling of the kitchen. Pierre Boyer (1989), a cousin of Charlie Pashia, recalls that his grandfather, Pascal Duclos II, who lived in the house until his death in 1928, referred to this space as *le bas-cote*. Dorrance (1935, 57) documented the usage of this term in the Old Mines area in the early 1930s. He defines a *bas-cote* as "a low room with sloping roof built as an addition to a house (frequently by enclosing a part of the gallery)." Seguin (1968, 10) documents the usage of this term in eighteenth-century Canada to describe "a small building often attached to one side of the house...[that] would serve as kitchen and attic."

Possibly the most noteworthy survival of older Creole building traditions at this site may be the form and construction of the walls of the 1916 addition. These load-bearing walls are fashioned of closely-set, vertical posts that average nearly four inches in diameter. The ends of each post are notched, tapered, and nailed top and bottom to the top plate and log sills respectively (Fig. 3). This method of attaching wall to roof structure is identical to that used at the Bequette-Ribault house in Ste. Genevieve (Thurman, 1984, 6-7) a century earlier.

On the interior and between the vertical posts there is a thick layer of mud and straw held in place by hand-split laths nailed to the posts from the inside. The interior of these walls are finished with plaster and whitewash. The exterior of the walls exhibit the exposed vertical posts.



BEDROOM ADDITION

ORIGINAL HOUSE

Fig. 3 Construction details of 1916 vertical-log addition. Illustration by Debbie Sheals.

Twentieth Century Vertical Posts: What Do They Mean?

This addition displays *poteaux sur sole*, or post-on-sill construction, a method which apparently increased in popularity relative to post-in-ground (*poteaux en terre*) construction during the colonial period (Peterson, 1949, 34-36). Admittedly, the well-mortised and pegged earlier structures standing today do not greatly resemble this twentieth-century addition with its small, nearly unmodified, crudely-joined vertical posts. But, though these older buildings surely represent the most solidly built structures of their type, they may not represent the most typical or the most numerous. Oral testimony and photographic information confirms that vertical-log dwellings built like this 1916 addition were fairly common in twentieth-century Washington County (Blount). Did these more crudely-built structures derive from a class of colonial buildings no longer represented on the landscape?

How else may we explain this twentieth-century use of vertical post construction? There are clearly economic factors at work in the choice of materials. The vertical posts, round-log sill, hewn top plate, pole rafters, hand-split oak laths, mud and straw, were all free for the taking. This inexpensive option must have appealed to the hand-milking family whose cash base was controlled by the going price of hlf—\$1.25 per ton in 1920.

A review of comparative documentation (Baraka, et al., 1981, 135-196; Neilman, 1986, 292-314) reveals a tendency for authors to refer to vertical-post dwellings as impermanent. In describing Newfoundland vertical-log construction which persisted into the mid-twentieth century, O'Dea (1987, 55) uses the term "subvernacular," a term he uses for structures that are either temporary or subordinate to other vernacular structures. In the same article, O'Dea refers to evidence from as early as 1680 indicating the continuous use of vertical-log construction in Newfoundland into the twentieth century. It seems ironic that the products of such a remarkably durable building tradition could be classified as "sub-vernacular" or "impermanent."

In my opinion, the issue of impermanence creates more problems than solutions. For instance, how do we derive an empirical measurement for impermanence? Whose values should be used in classifying a building as "temporary"—those of the builder, the resident, or the architect historian? The 1916 vertical-log addition to the Duclos-Pashia house has endured for seventy-five years. It was permanent sleeping quarters for two generations of girls. I have no evidence suggesting that its builders or residents ever considered it to be temporary.



Fig. 4 Paschal Duclos II (b. 1853) and his wife, Mary Coleman Duclos. Photograph courtesy of Kent Keauline.

Mary Susan Green (1984, 27-28), attempting to explain why nearly eighty percent of the colonial villagers of Ste. Genevieve lived in *poteaux-en-terre* houses, suggested that "some villagers undoubtedly selected these construction methods because they accorded with their view of suitable housing." Green and others (Giffin, 1989) have argued that the eighteenth-century Creole value system stood in stark contrast to that of the incoming Americans. In parts of Washington County, Creole values related to material wealth seem to have survived alongside some of the enduring elements of Creole material culture. It seems unreasonable to assume that either the colonial *poteaux en terre* structures of Ste. Genevieve or the 1916 vertical-post addition of the Duclos-Pashia house can be understood in terms of Anglo-American materialism—past or present.

On the other hand, an adequate explanation for this remarkable twentieth century vertical-log addition must include the undeniable persistence of Creole building traditions—traditions that passed from one generation to the next for centuries. Like many other Mid-Mississippi Creole lifeways, these traditions "ran in the family." A house lived in by Alexandre Decelle Duclos was described in the conveyance records of the Village of Chartres in 1737 as "a house built of pickets, covered with straw.... also plastered" (Brown and Dean, 1977, 439, 453). Alexandre Decelle Duclos was the great-great grandfather of Pascal Duclos II (Fig. 4), the head of the Duclos family when the 1916 addition was built. It is tempting to conclude that vertical-post and plastered-wall construction carried forth in the Duclos family for over 250 years.

In describing French colonial houses, architect historian Charles E. Peterson (1940, 2) offered the following summary:

By the end of the 18th century definite regional styles around New Orleans and St. Louis had been developed.... These styles eventually gave way before the Anglo-American architecture, but were used commonly in isolated communities until about 1840.

As Peterson suggested, French colonial architecture completely "gave way" perhaps before Anglo-American architecture by 1840. However, a number of Creole building traditions certainly did not.

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