The Cushman-Slaughter house, which houses the Heritage Museum and Cultural Center in Baker, was built in 1906.

Museum named to National Register

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BAKER — The Baker Heritage Museum and Cultural Center has been accepted for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The city-operated museum is housed in the Cushman-Slaughter home on Main Street, built in 1906, and was accepted for its architectural significance to the community, said museum director Jean Byers.

Baker officials were notified of the national recognition in a March 19 letter from state historic preservation officer Leslie P. Tassin.

Museum officials attempted to list the home on the National Register shortly after the city bought it in 1974, basing the application on the fact that its original owner, Dr. Willard S. Cushman, was a direct descendant of a Mayflower passenger, Isaac Allerton.

The application was denied, however, because Cushman was not directly involved in a major historical event, Byers said.

The successful application stressed the structure's architectural significance in a local context, she said.

"If this house was located in Baton Rouge on a street with others built in 1906, it might not be significant," Byers said. "But in 1906, this house was really not typical for Baker."

Most of the houses standing in Baker at the turn of the century would not have had the Cushman home's Victorian influence, would have lacked interior bathrooms and the kitchens would have been located in a wing rather than in the main part of the house.

The house features unique glass panes in front window transoms, an original oval glass door and walk-through windows connecting the front porch and parlor.

Architect William Brockway is a member of the state committee that reviewed the Baker application, and had to recuse himself from voting because he had drawn the plans for the building's restoration, Byers said.

"But we felt good about it going into the review because we knew he had led the work correctly," she added.

The city spent 80 percent of the project's budget restoring the exterior, and had to deviate from the architect's plans to complete the interior work, she said.

"But when we deviated from his plans, we did not destroy anything original," Byers said. "We plan to include money in each year's budget to finish the work, room by room."

Cushman sold the house to Carrie Slaughter when he moved to Baton Rouge after being elected parish coroner in 1917. Slaughter lived in the house until her death in 1960.

The house then passed through a succession of owners, including a construction company and the Baker Shriners, who sold it to the city.

The restoration work was a project in Baker's observance of the American Revolution Bicentennial.

The museum joins two other Baker landmarks on the National Register, the old Leland College site and the local Presbyterian church.