



Oakland Plantation Prud'homme's Store Historic Structure Report



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June 15, 2004

Dear Colleague:

In accordance with the National Park Service "Guidelines for the Management of Cultural Resources," we are pleased to provide you with copies of three Historic Structure Reports for buildings at Cane River Creole National Historical Park: the Big House at Oakland Plantation, Prud'homme's Store, and the Gin Barn at Magnolia Plantation. These reports are part of our ongoing effort to provide comprehensive documentation and management guidelines for the cultural resources of National Park Service units in the Southeast Region.

These Historic Structure Reports were prepared by the Southeast Region's Division of Cultural Resources, Historic Architecture Branch, but reflect and incorporate the work of many others who have conducted critical historical research and building investigation on these buildings over the last decade. We hope this information will prove valuable to those interested in the historic architecture of Oakland and Magnolia plantations.

Sincerely,

Dan Scheidt
Chief, Cultural Resources Division

Enclosures

CANE RIVER CREOLE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
OAKLAND PLANTATION

~ PRUD'HOMME'S STORE ~
HISTORIC STRUCTURE REPORT

Cultural Resources, Southeast Region
National Park Service

2004

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11/19/2004



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2004
Historic Structure Report
Prud'homme's Store
Cane River National Historical Park
Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana
LCS#: 91617

Previous page, Prudhomme's Store, c. 1980

The historic structure report presented here exists in two formats. A traditional, printed version is available for study at the park, the Southeastern Regional Office of the NPS (SERO), and at a variety of other repositories. For more widespread access, the historic structure report also exists in a web-based format through Park Net, the website of the National Park Service. Please visit www.nps.gov for more information.

Prud'homme's Store

Historic Structure Report

Recommended by: *J. Anthony Paredon* *Aug 8 2002*
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Foreword

We are pleased to make available this historic structure report, part of our ongoing effort to provide comprehensive documentation for the historic structures and landscapes of National Park Service units in the Southeast Region. Many individuals and institutions contributed to the successful completion of this work. We would particularly like to thank the staff at Cane River Creole National Historical Park, especially the park's superintendent Laura Soilliere and its historical architect Eric Z. Ford; Mary Lyn Warner at the Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana; and the staff at the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC. We hope that this study will prove valuable to park management and others in understanding and interpreting the historical significance of the Prud'homme's Store at Oakland Plantation.

Dan Scheidt, Chief
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Executive Summary

The rural stores that sprang up all across the South in the decade after the Civil War quickly became the center of rural life. As Dr. Ann Malone pointed out in her study of Oakland, “the postbellum rural merchant was all things to his community... His store was the hub of the local universe. It was the market place, banking and credit source, recreational center, public forum, and news exchange.”¹ Because of this, Prud'homme's Store at Oakland, which began operation during the Reconstruction period and remained in operation until 1982, is perhaps the most important surviving structure for interpretation of plantation life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Historical Summary: Much of the historical information in this report is found in historical research compiled by Cane River Creole National Historical Park since 1994. Especially important is

1. Dr. Ann Malone, "Oakland Plantation, Its People's Testimony" (incomplete and unpublished MSS prepared for the NPS, 1999), p. 92.

the work of Dr. Ann Malone Rose and Carolyn Breedlove. For preparation of this historic structure report, research in official Post Office records documented the history of Bermuda Post Office and its tenure in the store. The park has compiled numerous oral interviews with family members, and transcripts of these interviews provide a number of details about the store's history. Additional oral interviews with Vivian Prud'homme Flores and Kenneth Prud'homme were also conducted by the National Park Service's Cultural Resources Stewardship staff during the course of the present study. Mr. Prud'homme was especially helpful in documenting details of the store's treatment and use in the twentieth century. In addition, the Prud'homme papers in the Southern Historical Collection at University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill were researched. These include store ledgers and a variety of other documents pertaining to the operation of the store. Finally, numerous documents, books, and other materials at the Cammie G. Henry Research Center of the Watson Memorial Library at Northwestern State University of Louisiana in Natchitoches have been essential to compilation of this report.

The earliest certain references to a store at Oakland Plantation are J. Alphonse Prud'homme's business licenses for the store, which are dated in June 1873. It is possible that the store was actually in existence for a few years before that, although that is not likely. Certainly the store did not exist before 1868. If it had been constructed before that date, the store's construction almost surely would have

been mentioned in the plantation journals that were regularly kept through 1867.²

By the first decade of the twentieth century, Alphonse Prud'homme II recalled, the store "had everything from something to eat, to something to work, to something to wear."³ In addition to its function as a retail outlet, the store housed the Prud'hommes' plantation office in a room added at the rear of the building around 1880. This is where plantation accounts were kept and settled with the sharecroppers and tenants who worked the land. Interpretation of this role is as important as interpretation of the retail use of the store itself.

Prud'homme's Store also housed the Bermuda Post Office sporadically after its establishment in 1877 and continuously from 1924 until 1967, when the post office was finally discontinued. The presence of the post office reinforced the overall importance of the store to the entire community around Oakland Plantation, although the store itself continued to operate until 1982.

Architectural Summary: Ms. Barbara A. Yokum, architectural conservator with the Building Conservation Branch, Northeast Cultural Resources Center, National Park Service (NPS), conducted an extensive analysis of the painted finishes and other materials in the store in 1998. Her investigation confirmed the approximate date for the store's construction that had been suggested by historical research. Her investigation also established a general

2. Malone, "Oakland Plantation ...," p. 127.
3. Malone, "Oakland Plantation ...," p. 156.

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

chronology of the store's historical evolution, which has been refined and expanded during the course of the present study. Also in 1998, Ali A. Miri, historical architect with the Southeast Regional Office (SERO), NPS, developed a historic structure assessment report on the physical condition of the building. Both of these studies have greatly informed the present study and are included in the appendix to this Historic Structure Report.

Prud'homme's Store is a one-story, wood-framed structure set on brick piers, measuring approximately 41'-5" by 57'-5" and containing just over 2,000 square feet of floor space, which includes the front porch. The structure consists of the original end-gabled building (c. 1873) plus a series of additions that brought the structure to its present form and configuration by about 1910. Not used as a store for nearly twenty years, the building remains in relatively sound condition, in spite of significant deterioration of the front and back porches and of portions of the additions.

Vernacular design and construction techniques broadly define the character of Prud'homme's Store. Like most such buildings, including the store at Magnolia Plantation, the Oakland store is a simple, utilitarian structure that was built in response to specific needs and circumstances, with little consideration of architectural style or refinement of detail. Several aspects of the present building contribute to the vernacular character of the store. The reuse of materials from older buildings is significant and most prominent in some of the counters and shelving in the main store and in

the paneling that was added at the east end of Room 004. Windows, siding, hardware, and woodwork were also relocated and reused from one part of the store to another as the various additions were made.

Also significant to the overall vernacular character of the building is the craftsmanship exhibited in various aspects of the building's construction and maintenance over the years. The main store (002), the office (006), and record room (007) were well-built, if simply designed; some of the later additions (e.g. 001A, 003 and 005) amount to little more than sheds and are devoid of interior finishes beyond a wooden floor. The manner in which the Prud'hommes repaired and maintained the building is a significant aspect of the building's historic character, particularly as it evolved after World War I. Features such as the use of two or three pieces of glass to replace single broken panes in the back door, the use of 7-foot doors in 7½-foot openings, and the mixture of shutter types and styles around the building are all indicative of an approach to construction, repairs, and maintenance that focused entirely on utilitarian considerations while virtually ignoring any aesthetic considerations.

Recommendations: Issues of use have been central to the development of recommendations for treatment, since it is changes in use that generally dictate most rehabilitative treatment. If the store were used as a place for assembly or for offices, for instance, those uses would require extensive changes and alterations to the building. The proposed use of the store for sales and interpretation is, techni-

Executive Summary

cally, a change in use; but the impact of that change can, if carefully managed, be minimal and need not require extensive rehabilitation and the inevitable diminishment of its historic character and integrity.

Since the historic building is largely intact and, although deteriorated, easily repaired; and, since no drastic change in its use is proposed, preservation is the recommended approach to treatment of the building and its individual elements.

Administrative Data

Location Data

Building Name:	Prud'homme's Store
Building Address:	4386 LA Hwy. 119 Natchez, LA
LCS#:	91617

Related Studies

Ballos, T. *Completion Report - Oakland Plantation Emergency Stabilization, Cane River National Historical Park, Natchitoches, Louisiana*. North East System Support Office, North East Cultural Resources Center, Building Conservation Branch, and Denver Service Center, NPS, 1997.

