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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Edificio Empresas Ferré

Other names/site number: Centros Sor Isolina Ferré Inc

Name of related multiple property listing: Rafael Ríos Rey, A Puerto Rican Muralist, 1911-1980.
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & Number: 834 Eugenio María de Hostos Avenue

City or town: Ponce Playa State: Puerto Rico County: Ponce

Not for publication [ ] Vicinity [X]

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance: [ ] national [X] statewide [ ] local

Applicable National Register Criteria: [X] A [ ] B [X] C [ ] D

Diana López Sotomayor — Diana López Sotomayor SHPO/Director — July 3/2013

Signature of certifying official/Title: — **Date**

Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting Official — **Date**

Title — **State of Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

[✓] entered in the National Register.
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register.
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register.
[ ] removed from the National Register.
[ ] other, (explain):

for Edson H. Beall — 8.27.13

Signature of Keeper — **Date of Action**

Edificio Empresas Ferré | Ponce, Puerto Rico
Name of Property | **County and State**

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- [X] Private
- [ ] Public-local
- [ ] Public-state
- [ ] Public-federal

Category of Property (Check only **one** box)

- [X] Building(s)
- [ ] District
- [ ] Site
- [ ] Structure
- [ ] Object

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	Buildings
0	0	Sites
0	0	Structures
0	0	Objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)
COMMERCE/TRADE/ office building

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)
EDUCATION/ college

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions.)
International Style

Materials (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property: Concrete; bricks; terracotta blocks; glass, metal

Edificio Empresas Ferré | Ponce, Puerto Rico
Name of Property | **County and State**

Description

Summary Paragraph (Briefly describe the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

The **Edificio Empresas Ferré** is located at 834 Eugenio Maria de Hostos Avenue, in the urban ward of Ponce Playa, in the municipality of Ponce. Designed by US architect Robert M. Little, and occupying a lot of three thousand three hundred and eleven (3311) square meters, the property is a 1953, 32,000 square feet, three-story, concrete, steel and terrazzo blocks, International Style, rectangular plan, flat roofed building. The **Edificio Empresas Ferré**, which has a remarkable level of integrity, brought a new and modern architectural language into the area. From 1953 until the early 1980s, **Edificio Empresas Ferré** housed the administrative offices for the Ferré Enterprises, an industrial complex of great social and economic relevance not only in the southern region, but island wide. The property is extremely important as recipient and custodian of two significant murals painted by Rafael Rios Rey in 1953, specifically done for the building.[1]

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable.)

The **Edificio Empresas Ferré**, originally designed as an office building to house the administrative offices of *Empresas Ferré*, faces west towards Eugenio Maria de Hostos Avenue, the old *Camino Real* (Royal Road), a two miles stretch that separates the ward of Playa from Ponce's traditional urban center. The main façade contains the main access to the building's interior, directly from the sidewalk. The entrance, with the original 1950s glass and metal *Kawneer*[2] door that recedes from the sidewalk line, is covered by a two-wing, sliding, iron-bar gate. A slump brick wall dominates the façade of the first level, only interrupted by the entrance space. The brick wall is topped with a row of seven original glass jalousies windows. Four gray-painted steel columns complete the first level West elevation.

Just above the entrance, a set of original cast concrete letters spell the name of the building, EMPRESAS FERRE. Other set of letters and signs indicate the current use of the building: a green acrylic sign, just above the concrete cast letters with the words "*Trinity College of PR*" and a set of wooden letters spelling "*Centro Sor Isolina Ferré Inc. A.D.M. Central*", centered in between of the window strips.

The building's division in two additional levels is only shown (on the main façade) through the use of two aluminum awning type windows strips[3], covered with a protruding corridor of five-foot high vertical louvers (brise soleil), embedded in a concrete box-like frame. Three original flag poles are equally embedded in the lower strip frame. The main façade surface is composed of red clay bricks, stacked flush, jointed with white mortar (**Fig. 1**).

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[1] National Register of Historic Places Multiple Properties Cover Document, *Rafael Rios Rey, A Puerto Rican Muralist, 1911-1980.* June 2012.

[2] Kawneer Company was established in 1906 in a small shop in Kansas City. During the 1920s, it became the first manufacturer to use aluminum in architectural products.

[3] Originally, all windows in the building were the aluminum awning type, manufactured by *Miami Windows Corporation*. In later years, many have been changed to glass windows with operable louvers (especially in those rooms use as classrooms in the second floor) and fixed glass windows. Many of the original awning type windows are in use in the West façade, and other rooms in the building.

The North and South elevations are almost identical. Just like the West elevation, they are extremely significant in understanding the building's structural composition, as the design intended to highlight the buildings construction materials, without disguising ornamentation. Organized by the structural columns, the first two levels on both elevations, present eighteen exterior bays. The third level, which comprises almost one third of the two hundred and seventy three (273) feet of the building's length, has only five exterior bays. Every bay is symmetrically organized with four sets of glass windows, evenly separated by a clay brick pier, with exposed terracotta blocks underneath the window section **(Fig. 2)**.

In 2013, a new entrance with a concrete portico was added to the South elevation to provide access to and from the parking lot, located south of the building. The two parking lot entrances, from Playa's main road *Avenida Eugenio Maria de Hostos* and from a small back road (*calle Iglesias*), have an identical wrought iron, two-wing, swinging gate, with the letters *PR* in one wing, and *IW* in the other; initials for *Porto Rico Iron Works* **(Fig. 3)**.[4]

When built in 1953, **Edificio Empresas Ferré** was thought-out as an administrative office building and a workshop facility simultaneously. The first floor had a wide and open receiving lobby on which an elegant curved wall was the most attractive architectural detail; an elevator and stairs to the upper floors. It also had direct access to two areas designated as shops and an unseen large open warehouse that occupied more than three quarters of the first level rectangular plan. The second floor had the administrative offices of the President, four Vice-Presidents, managers, secretaries, and a large unused area subdivided as future office, connected by a long corridor. The third floor was designed as a large open Club House for executives and guests, with bathrooms, kitchen, bar area and a small, open terrace with a canopy looking east.[5] With a different use today, the buildings layout, spatial relationship and construction materials, have not change significantly.

Today, the first floor still functions as a receiving area. Once passed through the original 1950s *Kawneer* double glass and metal doors with a fixed glass transom, there is a security guard office (a 2013 addition) located north of the entrance in what used to be the access door to Shop 2. In the opposite side, south of the main entrance, another original 1950s Kawneer door provides access to an office, in what used to be Shop 1. After the entrance area, the lobby opens easterly with its original terrazzo floors and its popcorn ceiling.[6] Immediately, the curve wall with the 1953 Rafael Rios Rey's mural called *La Fundición* (The Foundry) grabs the attention. The mural covers the entire wall and curves with it, ending up at the straight wall where the elevator is located. Pass the elevator, a second 1953 mural, *La Presa* (The Dam) covers the lobby's eastern wall. On the eastern wall, *La Presa* extends along seven raisers up the stairs. For safety purposes, a Plexiglas sheet covers this extended section of the mural. From the entrance, the wall where the elevator is located is hidden by the protruding curve wall, creating a visual impression of continuity among the two murals **(Fig. 4)**.

In late 2012, the wall that separated Shop 2 from the main lobby was demolished, opening the space for offices, a male/female bathroom, classrooms and a lunch area; all connected by a round hallway that runs easterly and then southerly behind the curve wall where the mural is located, ending

[4] The Porto Rico Iron Works (PRIW), an iron foundry established by Antonio Ferré Bacallao in 1918, was the first company of the industrial complex latter known as *Empresas Ferré* (Ferré Enterprises). The PRIW was located in a large track of land, immediately north of the Empresas Ferré Building.

[5] Empresas Ferré. Robert M. Little, AIA, Architect. Plans and Elevations. Empresas Ferré Building. 1951-1952.

[6] The lobby's ceiling was originally made of cement plaster panels, just like the one found in the second and third floor. It is unknown when it was changed to the current popcorn or cottage cheese, Stucco ceiling.

at the new opening towards the parking lot. This intervention, however, had no physical or visual significant impact in the lobby as it was done entirely behind the existing walls, in a section of the large warehouse area **(Fig. 5)**.

At the eastern end of the lobby, the elevator and a concrete dog-leg staircase provide access to the second and third floor. The stair retains all the original elements: the terrazzo flooring in the raisers, the wooden hand rail and the design of the aluminum railings showed in Robert M. Little's 1951 drawings. The second floor, originally used to house the main administrative offices, has kept not only the same layout, but even the same function as it serves as the main administrative offices for *Trinity College*. The original offices for the Directors (all members of the Ferré Family) and their secretaries were located on the west section of the floor. The very same offices are in use today by the new administrators and their secretaries. The integrity is such that even the old names of the Ferre's still attached to the original doors for the President and the four Vice-presidents offices **(Fig. 6)**.[7] As designed in 1951, still all floors in the main offices and hallways are terrazzo; the walls are cement plaster, and the ceiling is a combination of suspended cement plaster boards in the lobby and acoustical tiles in the offices spaces. The rooms proposed as future additional offices in 1951, are used as classrooms today. Each one has the same spatial layout as originally planned; with acoustical tiles in the ceiling, vinyl tile flooring and cement plastered walls. The two glass windows set and the clay brick pier that define the exterior bays, are visible in each one of the interior offices and classrooms **(Fig. 7)**. Each classroom still accessed by a long corridor, which retains the original terrazzo floor and two originally designed skylines, allowing for sunlight into the hallway **(Fig. 8)**.

The third floor interior, designed as an Executive Club House, has received most of the changes to the original layout. The west wing of the third floor, planned as a large open space (79' wide x 45' long), is currently subdivided into easily removable offices spaces with gypsum board walls and vinyl tile flooring. Still in use, the originally designed open terrace with canopy at the eastern end of the third floor overlooking the second floor roof was enclosed with glass windows to provide an air-conditioned gathering space.

Even with a different use today as a community college and the changes required for its adaptation, the **Edificio Empresas Ferré** still retains remarkable integrity in location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association **(Fig. 9)**

[7] Antonio Ferré Bacallao, founder of the family and business, brought his four male sons into the company: Luis A. Ferré (who eventually became governor of Puerto Rico from 1968-1972); José A. Ferré; Hermán Ferré and Carlos F. Ferré. Each one of them had the title of Vice-President and a designated office in the second floor's west wing.

Edificio Empresas Ferré | Ponce, Puerto Rico
Name of Property | **County and State**

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- X **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ___ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- X **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ___ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ___ **A** Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ___ **B** Removed from its original location.
- ___ **C** A birthplace or a grave.
- ___ **D** A cemetery.
- ___ **E** A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ___ **F** A commemorative property.
- ___ **G** Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)
Art
Architecture
Social History

Period of Significance
1953

Significant Dates
1953

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder
Little, Robert M. (architect)
Ríos-Rey, Rafael (muralist)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The **Edificio Empresas Ferré** is of statewide significance under criterion C in the area of Art as the property is the recipient and custodian of two important murals painted by the renowned artist Rafael Ríos Rey. The property is also statewide significant under criterion C in the area of Architecture as it represents an outstanding early example of the International Style in Puerto Rico. Furthermore, **Edificio Empresas Ferré** is statewide significant under Criterion A in the area of Social History as the building housed the administrative offices of one of Puerto Rico's most relevant industrial complexes. The building's period of significance, 1953, is properly justified as not only the building was finished in that year, but also were Río Rey's murals painted for the *Empresas Ferre*'s building the very same year.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Edificio Empresas Ferré

The **Edificio Empresas Ferré** is located at 834 Eugenio Maria de Hostos Avenue in the urban ward of Playa, two miles south of Ponce's traditional urban center. Built by 1953, the building was designed by US architect Robert M. Little between 1951-1952. The three-story, International Style building, was the house of the administrative offices of *Empresas Ferré* from 1953 until 1986.

The origins of the Ferré family in Puerto Rico date back to the late 1890s, when the dynasty's founder, Antonio Ferré Bacallao, arrived in the island as a young man from Cuba. Established in Ponce by 1896, Ferré Bacallao worked as a self-taught mechanic in an old iron foundry known as *Fundición Graham*. By 1918, the forty-one year old entrepreneur formed his own foundry called *Porto Rico Iron Works* (*PRIW*) which services were directly related to the powerful sugar industry, eventually becoming the largest foundry in the Antilles. The *PRIW* established the capital foundation for the family's business expansion and was the training ground for Ferré Bacallao's four male sons as he brought them into the business: José, with a Business Administration degree; Hermán, a civil engineer; Luis Alberto, an electro-mechanical engineer; and Carlos, a chemical engineer (**Fig. 10**). The PRIW, however, became more than just a large foundry and training ground for the Ferré Bacallao's sons. It became a social and economic laboratory, from which the learned lessons on production's investment and capital/labor relationships were later successfully applied to every other company under *Empresas Ferré*. In 1918, the Porto Rico Iron Works initiated its operations with an authorized capital of one hundred thousand dollars, fifty employees and a six hundred dollar weekly payroll. By 1940, the company was operating with a fifteen million dollar authorized capital, a weekly payroll of eleven thousand dollars and three hundred employees. By the end of the 1930s, the PRIW was not only recognized as the largest foundry in the Caribbean, but also the most socially advanced private company in the island. Based on concepts derived from the welfare capitalism social philosophy, the PRIW's owners established among its employees a progressive program that became a precedent and guiding example among the local private or public corporations. By 1939, as an example, the PRIW offered a one to three thousand dollar life insurance policy to every employee, paid by the company; full medical cover for employees and immediate dependents; in case of sickness, half-salary was paid for an extended period of ten weeks during a year and every worker had two weeks vacations yearly,

with full pay. The company also provided low interests housing loans, allowing his workers the possibility to buy their own house, at a time when the working class was practically excluded from the residential market through regular banking facilities. Scholarships for employees' children were given to study at the Inter American University (a private college established in 1912) and a fifty-percent salary retirement pension was monthly provided for those employees with twenty five years or more of service.[8] All these concessions were offered by the firm as part of its social program and were not the result of collective bargaining or demands required by any worker's union. Considering that by the early 1950s *Empresas Ferré* had over one thousand employees, the impact of the firm's social policies in the improvement of the living standards was highly significant and far reaching.

The progressive measures adopted at the PRIW were truly a pioneer posture in the local context and even preceded the social agenda contained in the New Deal's social policies. The *Empresas Ferré* was highly praised among local reformers and officials. The firm was showed as a Captain of Industry's consortium with a moral conscience, an example to follow.[9] Through their social program, the Ferré Enterprises (and the Ferré family) derived not only an economic status, but just as significant, a social recognition that translated into a political capital. Eventually, all these socially advanced provisions, initiated at the PRIW, were extended to every worker at each of one of the *Empresas Ferré*'s companies.

Another aspect that differentiated Empresas *Ferré* from other local firms was their continuous strive to expand. During the 1940s and 1950s, one of the most frequent complaints of the government officials was the local business' reluctance to actively invest their gains. The capital produced was either been expatriated to pay foreign investors (mostly from the US in the sugar industry) or just idled saved in bank accounts. The comment, however, did not apply or described the Ferré Enterprises.

By the late 1940s, *Empresas Ferré* had developed into a diversified industrial complex, adding to the *PRIW*, the *Ponce Cement Corporation* (1941), the *Puerto Rico Marine Corporation* (1947) and the *Ponce Trucking Corporation* (1947).[10] In 1950, *Empresas Ferré* acquired for 10.5 million dollars, four companies administered by the local government: the *Puerto Rican Cement Company*, the *Puerto Rico Glass Corporation*, the *Puerto Rico Pulp and Paper Corporation and the Puerto Rico Clay Products Corporation*.[11] By the early 1950s, *Empresas Ferré* economic interests had surpassed the local boundaries, owning companies like *Ponce Products Inc.* with offices in Miami; *Ferré Export Corporation* located at 61 Broadway in New York; *Maule Industries*, the largest cement factory in the southern US, with offices located at Biscayne Boulevard in Miami; the *Fábrica Nacional de Vidrio* in Venezuela; and *Cementos Nacionales, S.A.* in Cuba. Such development created the need for *Empresas Ferré* to have a centralized administrative building; and what better place to build such facility than the location where everything began, nearby the *PRIW* at Ponce Playa, where they owned a large track of land. *Empresas Ferré* had not only the available land at Playa, but also the technical know-how to be its own contractor and the right companies to manufacture the materials needed for the building's construction.

[8] Puerto Rico Ilustrado (Magazine) *Empresas Ferré.* Febrero de 1948.
[9] El Mundo, *Éxito Extraordinario. Iniciativa de la Familia Ferré eleva nivel de vida en Ponce.* 29 de mayo de 1953, 6.
[10] Guillermo A. Baralt, *Desde el mirador de próspero: la vida de Luis A. Ferré, 1904-1968.* Volumen I. El Nuevo Día, 1995.
[11] James L. Dietz, *Historia económica de Puerto Rico.* Ediciones Huracán: San Juan, 1989, 234.

By October 1951, US architect Robert M. Little produced the building's first plans. Little's designation was extremely relevant as, at the time, the architect was working the International Style and its architectural application in Miami, Florida. Little became a relevant figure in what was later defined as *MiMo* (Miami Modern) and a significant contributor in the architectural development of the University of Miami, with several buildings in the main campus, including the *Antonio Ferré Building* (**Fig. 11**).[12]

The **Edificio Empresas Ferré** summarizes the most identifying elements of the International Style: emphasis upon volume; regularity as opposed to symmetry; and the presentation of the intrinsic elegance of the construction materials as opposed to applied ornament.[13] The building's design emphasized the visible articulation of the supporting reinforced concrete skeleton, creating the effect from a distance of a grille of verticals and horizontals. In traditional masonry construction the walls were themselves the supports. However, in the **Empresas Ferré**, following the International Style postures, the walls are subordinate elements fitted like screens between the supports. The building seeks to display the true character of its construction and to express clearly its provision for function.

As Hitchcock and Johnson indicated in their significant essay, the abundant use of certain materials like bricks and terracotta blocks, associated with the traditional ways of construction, could distant the resource from the International Style.[14] In Little's 1951-1952 plans, the **Empresas Ferre**'s West elevation (main façade) was basically composed of exposed stacked bricks. However, the North and South elevation's walls were ought to be covered with stucco. This clearly was not applied, as the terracotta blocks used in both elevations were always left exposed, adding an effect of mass and weight, contrary to the International Style's ideals. This decision more than likely came from the owners and not the architect. However, since bricks and terracotta blocks are more permanent in color and not subject to cracking and streaking, in the long run, they are superior aesthetically to stucco for large scale construction, clearly demonstrated in **Edificio Empresas Ferré**. Fortunately, the exposed construction materials have not been painted. As stated by the above authors, in the International Style, the color of natural surfacing materials and the natural metal color are definitely preferred.

In May 1953, the press reported of the completion of the new **Edificio Empresas Ferré**. It mentioned that "*a new and ultramodern building was just built in Playa Ponce by the Empresas Ferré to house their administrative offices. The beautiful building has air condition, 32,000 square feet of space available and was designed by US architect Robert Little*".[15] Modernity arrived at Playa Ponce through the **Edificio Empresas Ferré.** The International Style, with its absence of historicists' references, provided the perfect showcase to present *Ferré Enterprises* as an economic force that had surpassed the local boundaries.

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[12] City of Miami Beach Planning Department. *Modern Architecture on the Beach, 1945-1965.* Robert M. Little arrived in Miami from Philadelphia in 1925. He worked for Robert A. Taylor (designer of Roney's Spanish Village on Española Way) before forming his own practice in 1933. He rose to prominence as a residential architect in Miami Beach prior to WWII, with many of his buildings in North Beach. After the war, he worked more frequently in Miami and is best known for his works at the University of Miami, like the *Merrick Building*, the *Pick Music Library Building* and the *Antonio Ferré Building*.

[13] Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style*. 1966. Originally published under the title *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

[14] Ibid. 66-67

[15] El Mundo, 29 de mayo de 1953, 35.

For the next thirty years, the building would house the *Empresas*' administrative offices. Eventually, the family would divest themselves of many of their companies. By the late 1970s, the collapse of the sugar industry caused the shut-down of the *PRIW*. The *Empresas Ferré* concentrated their efforts mostly in their cement factories. By the early 1980s, *Empresas Ferré*, while keeping the building's ownership, loaned it to Trinity College.[16] In 2002, it sold its cement factory to CEMEX, a Mexican business complex. The transaction included the building at Playa. Fortunately, CEMEX allowed Trinity College to stay in the building and, in March 2004, officially donated the property (murals included) to *Centros Sor Isolina Ferré Inc.*[17]

The murals

Finished by May 1953, the actual inauguration of the building was scheduled for July. Soon after completing the building's construction, the flamboyant José (Joe) Ferré Aguayo, contacted his close friend, Rafael Ríos Rey, who was at the time in San Juan as the *Teatro Tapia*'s Administrator.[18] Expressing that he had three large empty walls at the new building in Playa, Joe Ferré wanted Ríos Rey to come down to Ponce to "*see what you can do on those walls*".[19] What Ríos Rey did for those empty walls became three of the artist's best murals. For over two months Rey worked feverishly on the murals: *La Fundición* and *La Presa*, that would eloquently adorned the building's entrance lobby, and *Tradiciones Ponceñas*,[20] for the Club House at the third level.

[16] Established during the early 1980s, Trinity College is a post-secondary, non-university facility that provides short-career courses. It was formed as part of the social programs developed by the *Centros Sor Isolina Ferré*. The original *Centro* was founded in Playa Ponce in 1969 by Sor Isolina Ferré, daughter of Antonio Ferré Bacallao. Born in 1914, at the age of twenty-one, Sor Isolina joined the Sisters of the Blessed Trinity in Philadelphia. For thirty years she labored tirelessly to improve the living conditions of the poor in the US, working with the coal miners in West Virginia, Portuguese immigrants in Massachusetts and with the inner city youth in New York. In 1969, Sor Isolina returned to Puerto Rico, ostensibly to retire. However her work was only beginning. Starting with the poor communities in her native Ponce, Sister Isolina eventually developed a network of community actions centers to empower impoverished neighborhoods. For her abnegated lifetime work with the poor, Sor Isolina received much recognition, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom. But the greatest awards have come from the people themselves, who referred to her as "The *Angel of Playa Ponce*" and the "*Mother Teresa of Puerto Rico*". She died in Ponce, in August 3, 2000.

[17] Primera Hora. *CEMEX dona edificio a Centros Sor Isolina*. 19 de marzo de 2004, 27.

[18] National Register of Historic Places. Multiple Property Cover Document, *Rafael Ríos Rey, A Puerto Rican Muralist, 1911-1980*. The relationship between Joe Ferré and Rafael Ríos Rey dated back to the early 1930s, when Joe Ferré acquired the entire collection of Rey's first watercolors exhibition. Later, between 1938 and 1948, Ríos Rey painted eight wonderful murals for Joe Ferré's private residence at La Alhambra, Ponce. Joe Ferré became Rey's most important private sponsor.

[19] El Mundo, *Ríos Rey le pinta murales Edificio Empresas Ferré*, 4 de Julio de 1953.

[20] *Tradiciones Ponceñas* is not included in this nomination as the mural was removed from the Empresas Ferré Building in 1992. When the building became the seat for Trinity College in 1986, the Club House became an unused space. The inappropriate maintenance of the third level for many years created unfavorable conditions for the mural. Luckily, the art piece was donated to the famous Ponce's Museum of Art, established by the Luis A. Ferré Foundation, which removed and restore the mural to its pristine condition. *Tradiciones Ponceñas* is presently display at the *Museo de Arte de Ponce*, one of the best art museums in the US.

***La Fundición* (The Foundry)**

The mural is located at the lobby's most architecturally appealing wall, the curve wall, northeast of the main entrance (**Fig. 12**). The three hundred and twenty (320) square feet (0.46 m x 1.41m) mural, oil on cloth, is adhered to the wall with a special lead based paste, developed by the artist. Even though Ríos Rey was extremely familiar with the fresco techniques, at the time, he was limited in its use, due to lack of local skilled workers trained in how to properly prepare naked walls to be painted on. For his murals at *Empresas Ferré*, Ríos Rey would prepare a canvas support, connecting vertical pieces of cloth. After connecting all pieces, the fabric would be covered with multiple thin layers of a white watery solution. The artist would them paint over the white fabric. Once it was completed, and after waiting a reasonable amount of time, the entire fabric could be rolled up, moved to its designated location, and adhered to the selected wall.

La Fundición is considered by many specialists, one of the most significant murals done by Ríos Rey. It's a visual festivity dedicated to the actual physical and mechanical work daily performed at the *Porto Rico Iron Works*. The mural is organized to present the manufacturing process and the factory's inter-relation with other industries, mainly, the sugar industry, the railroad industry and the construction industry. The mural makes evident the magical presence of the all-powerful fire, the huge scale of the machinery and the diversity of skillful workers.

Ríos Rey dedicated the mural's central area to the main character in a foundry: fire as a building force in the human hands. Four huge hands (a recurring theme in many of Rey's works) are holding instruments and tools related to the foundry's different tasks: a set square, a calibrator, a hexagonal wrench and a heavy hammer. The variety of the tools, suggest Ríos Rey's intention in glorifying the different type of workers that make the industrial process possible: from the managerial to the manual worker. This central part of the painting with its huge working hands makes an unavoidable connection between the mural and the Popular Democratic Party's economic program that was transforming Puerto Rico at that precise time, *Manos a la Obra (*Operation Bootstrap*)*, which literally translate as *Hands at Work*. Art was not the only thing that bonded Rafael Ríos Rey and Joe Ferré. They were both active followers and believers of Luis Muñoz Marín's Popular Democratic Party reformist agenda.

Left of the central volume, the mural recreates key components of the *PRIW* processes: a huge crucible full of molten iron; heavy chains; iron bars; a large structural steel piece; an operator working in what it seems to be a wooden cogwheel model. The sugar cane industry is represented in this section through the many types of mill grinders; the vertical tank with the perforated metal cover could be a *tacho* (molasses boiler) or an evaporator.

To the right of the central volume, Ríos Rey takes us into heavy machinery, gears mechanisms, tanks and chimneys. The industrial landscape depicted in this section reflects more the interior of a *central azucarera* (modern sugarcane factory) than the PRIW's workplace. At the right hand, bottom corner of this section, an inscription reads "*Rafael Ríos Rey, 53*".

Around the projected curve in the wall, the mural brings back the history of the PRIW with Antonio Ferré Bacallao's portray at the top, the PRIW triangular logo and the 1918 PRIW's building main façade, honoring the founder of the Ferré's family and the company that was the seed of *Empresas Ferré* (**Fig. 13**). A set of railroad tracks going into the building remind us of the PRIW connections with the railroad industry. The PRIW rail branch was connected to the main line of the American Railroad Company of Puerto Rico, which ended at Playa's port facilities.

***La Presa* (The Dam)**

The mural, oil in cloth adhered directly into the wall, of two hundred and four (204) square feet (0.48 m x 0.95 m), is located at the lobby's eastern wall between the elevator entrance and the stairs running up to the second floor **(Fig. 14).** The art piece continues the theme of the industrial workers, not performed in a private company as in *La Fundición*, but in what it seems a public enterprise. It recreates the construction of a dam, been the anonymous workers the main characters. Heavy machinery (iron hooks attach to unseen cranes, structural steel pieces, chains) and the built landscape appear, but everything seems secondary to the workers physical strength and technical ability. There are specialized technicians like the men in the left, one measuring the wooden construction's verticality with a plumb line and another using a theodolite. However, Rios Rey's social discourse rests in the central figures: the four men pushing and pulling over great obstacles, the enormous cogwheel. By this time (1953), the huge cogwheel was definitely recognized as a symbol of *Fomento Industrial*, the PDP's government agency responsible for the island's life-changing industrialization program.[21]

In both murals, the chromatic range is composed of earthy colors, just like the building's exterior, where the white of the canvas and the applied black, are used to emphasize and differentiate alternated focal planes. Art specialists have found Mexican features in the faces of the figures in both murals, without a doubt, as consequence of the influence of the Mexican muralist school upon Ríos Rey.[22]

There is a unified theme in the murals. Rafael Ríos Rey wanted to glorify men's will and creative effort as the guiding force in human progress through the industrial process; the very same industrial process that was changing the island at the time. In these murals there is no class struggle, but the recognition that every class member is equally important in the process of social improvement: from the owners of the means of production down to the manual labor. The class harmony predicated by the PDP's reformist agenda is strongly presented in *La Fundición* and *La Presa.* Ríos Rey subjectively combined in his painting art, decoration and propaganda.

In a way, Rafael Rios Rey's 1950s murals at **Edificio Empresas Ferré** represent some of the best legacy of the New Deal's Federal Art Project and the Works Progress Administration philosophy. The muralists working under both federal programs were highly influenced by the Mexican School. However, by the late 1940s, abstract expressionism became the main tendency in the US painting community. Even though Ríos Rey was aware of the new trend, he remained within the framework of social realism, a more adequate tool to transmit his agenda and to capture Puerto Rico's economic, social and cultural idiosyncrasy.

La Fundición and *La Presa* are two very significant art pieces from the most significant Puerto Rican muralist. The act of decorating the interior of a private building became, in the hands of Rafael Rios Rey, a mean to capture a historic moment and an opportunity to make a social statement. Just like the building itself, the murals brought subjectively the discourse of modernity.

The **Edificio Empresas Ferré** is of statewide significance under Criterion C in the area of Art, as the resource is the custodian and recipient of two of Rafael Rios Rey's most accomplished murals, designed exclusively for the building. The art pieces are historically integrated into the building's

[21] National Register of Historic Places. Multiple Property Cover Document, *Rafael Ríos Rey, A Puerto Rican Muralist, 1911-1980.*

[22] Néstor Murray Irizarry, editor, *Rafael Ríos Rey y el muralismo en Puerto Rico.* Casa Paoli del Centro de Investigaciones Folklóricas de Puerto Rico, Inc., 2005, 69.

contextual fabric. The building retains a high level of integrity and its ability to convey its relationship with the art pieces. The property is also statewide significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture, as the building represents one of the best early applications of the International Style in the private construction field in the island. In addition, the building is of statewide significance under Criterion A in the area of Social History as the property served for over thirty years as the administrative offices of one of Puerto Rico's most important industrial consortiums.

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (Insert bibliography here – cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Archivo Histórico Luis A. Ferré. Foto Edificio Empresas Ferré. 1962.

Baralt, Guillermo A. *Desde el mirador de próspero: la vida de Luis A. Ferré, 1904-1968*. Volumen I. El Nuevo Día, 1995.

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Porto Rico Iron Works, la primera "Empresa Ferré". 29 de mayo de 1953.
Éxito Extraordinario. Iniciativa de la Familia Ferré eleva nivel de vida en Ponce. 29 de mayo de 1953.
Ríos Rey le pinta murales Edificio Empresas Ferré, 4 de Julio de 1953.

Empresas Ferré. Robert M. Little, AIA, Architect. Plans and Elevations. Empresas Ferré Building. 1951-1952.

Hitchcock, Henry-Russell and Philip Johnson, *The International Style*. 1966. Originally published under the title *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Murray Irizarry, Néstor, editor, *Rafael Ríos Rey y el muralismo en Puerto Rico*. Casa Paoli del Centro de Investigaciones Folklóricas de Puerto Rico, Inc., 2005.

National Register of Historic Places Multiple Properties Cover Document, *Rafael Rios Rey, A Puerto Rican Muralist, 1911-1980.* June 2012.

Primera Hora (Newspaper) *CEMEX dona edificio a Centros Sor Isolina*. 19 de marzo de 2004.

Puerto Rico Ilustrado (Magazine) *Empresas Ferré.* Febrero de 1948.

Edificio Empresas Ferré | Ponce, Puerto Rico
Name of Property | **County and State**

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

___ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
___ previously listed in the National Register
___ previously determined eligible by the National Register
___ designated a National Historic Landmark
___ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
___ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #
___ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #

Primary location of additional data:

___ State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State agency
___ Federal agency
___ Local government
___ University
___ Other (Name of repository)

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one acre USGS Quadrangle Playa Ponce

(Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates. Delete the other.)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84:

1. Latitude Longitude
2. Latitude Longitude
3. Latitude Longitude
4. Latitude Longitude

OR

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

___ NAD 1927 or ___ NAD 1983

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1.	19Q	752045	1989793
2.			
3.			
4.			

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Lot of three thousand three hundred and eleven (3311) square meters, as recorded at the Centro de Recaudaciones de Ingresos Municipales (CRIM) under the numbers 412-051-585-02, 412-051-585-09 and 412-051-585-10.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nominated property includes the entire lot historically associated with the building.

Edificio Empresas Ferré | Ponce, Puerto Rico
Name of Property | **County and State**

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Juan Llanes Santos, Historian
organization Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office date June 19, 2013
street & number PO Box 9023935 telephone 787-721-3737
city or town San Juan state PR zip code 00902-3935
email jllanes@prshpo.gobierno.pr

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property **Edificio Empresas Ferré**

City or Vicinity Playa Ponce County Ponce State Puerto Rico

Photographer Juan Llanes Santos Date Photographed March 19, 2013

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera.

1. North and west elevations; looking southeast.
2. South and west elevations; looking northeast.
3. Main (west) façade; looking southeast.
4. The murals *La Fundición* and *La Presa* at the main lobby; looking east.
5. La *Fundición*; looking north.
6. La Fundición; looking north.
7. *La Fundición*; looking northwest.
8. Detail of La Fundición around the curved wall; looking northwest.
9. La Presa; looking southeast.
10. La Presa; looking southeast.

Edificio Empresas Ferré | Ponce, Puerto Rico
Name of Property | **County and State**

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Edificio Empresas Ferré
Name of Property Ponce, PR
County and State Rafael Ríos Rey, A Puerto Rican Muralist 1911-1980
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 7 Page 1

Fig.1. Edificio Empresas Ferre's main façade and partial view of South elevation.

Fig.2 From top: South and North Elevations.

Fig. 3 Swinging gates at the *Avenida de Hostos* entrance with the Porto Rico Iron Woks initials.

Fig.4. View of the murals at the lobby, directly from the entrance, looking east.

Fig. 5. Part of the area from the old warehouse rehabilitated to make space for classrooms, service rooms and lunch area in the first floor. The entire intervention was done in the space behind the walls where the murals are located.

Fig.6. Even though the building has not been associated to the *Empresas Ferré* since the early 1980s, the original doors at the second floor's offices still carry the names of the old owners. From left to right: Joe Ferré, the founder Antonio Ferré Bacallao and Luis A. Ferré.

Fig.7. In 1951, many of the empty bays at the second floor were proposed as offices. These rooms are now used as classrooms. They have kept the original spatial layout, the set of glass windows and the clay brick pier. These spaces, as indicated in Little's plans, were to have acoustical tiles in the ceiling, vinyl tiles flooring, and cement plastered walls, which they still have.

Fig. 8. In 1951, this section of the second floor was planned and layout as future offices. Today they are use as classrooms. The corridor has the original terrazzo floor, and the ceiling still made of acoustical panels, as planned. Two original skylights allow for direct sunlight into the corridor.

Fig.9 A view at the 1962 picture (top) and the 2013 (bottom) shows the remarkable level of integrity of the property. (Source of 1962 photo: *Archivo Histórico Luis A. Ferré*)

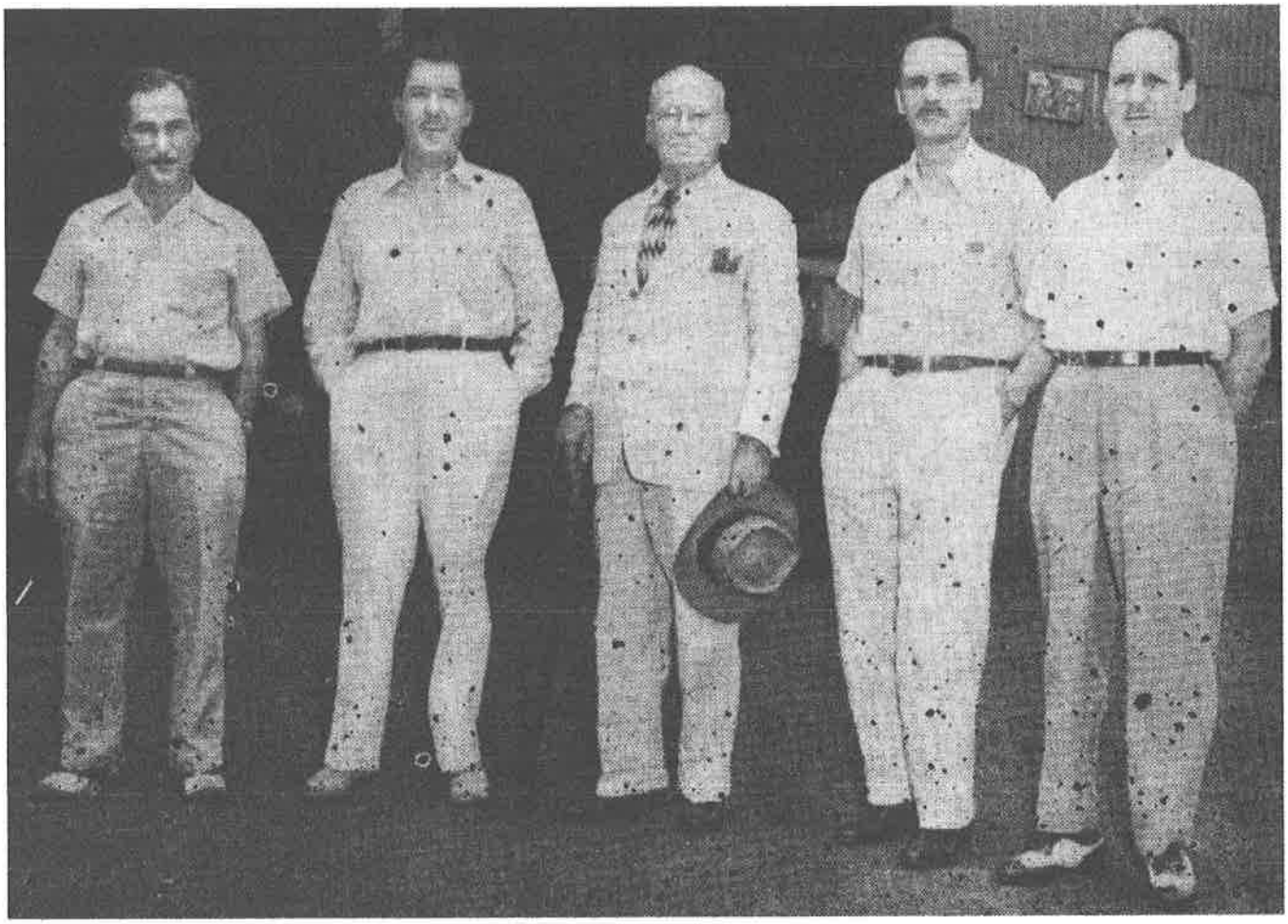


Fig.10. From left to right: Hermán Ferré Aguayo, José (Joe) Ferré Aguayo, Antonio Ferré Bacallao, Luis A. Ferré Aguayo (Governor of Puerto Rico, 1968-1972) and Carlos Ferré Aguayo. Source: *Puerto Rico Ilustrado*, February 1948.

Fig. 11. Robert M. Little's works at the University of Miami. From top left: the 1948 Merrick Building, the Pick Music Library Building and the 1958 Antonio Ferré Building.

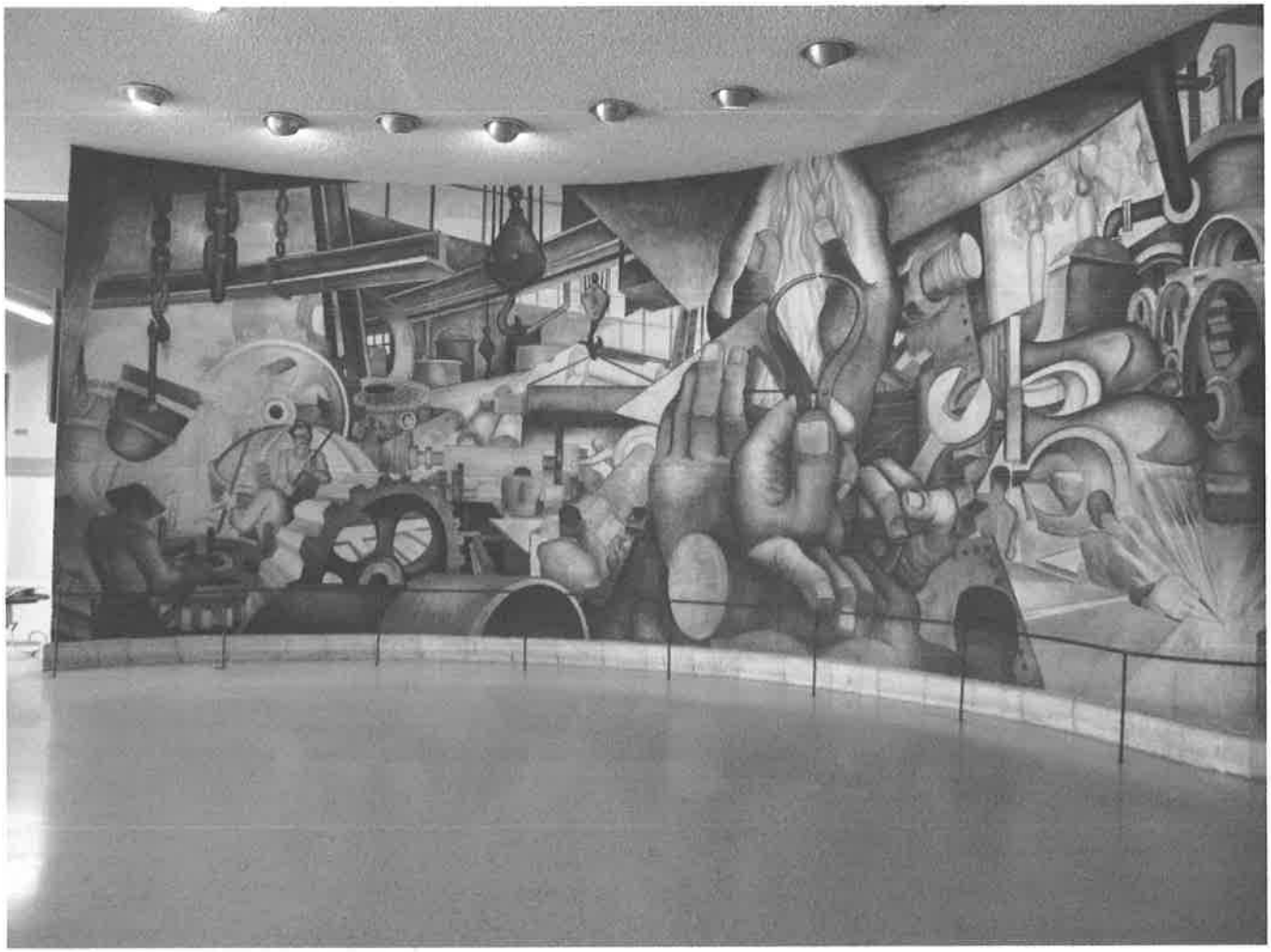


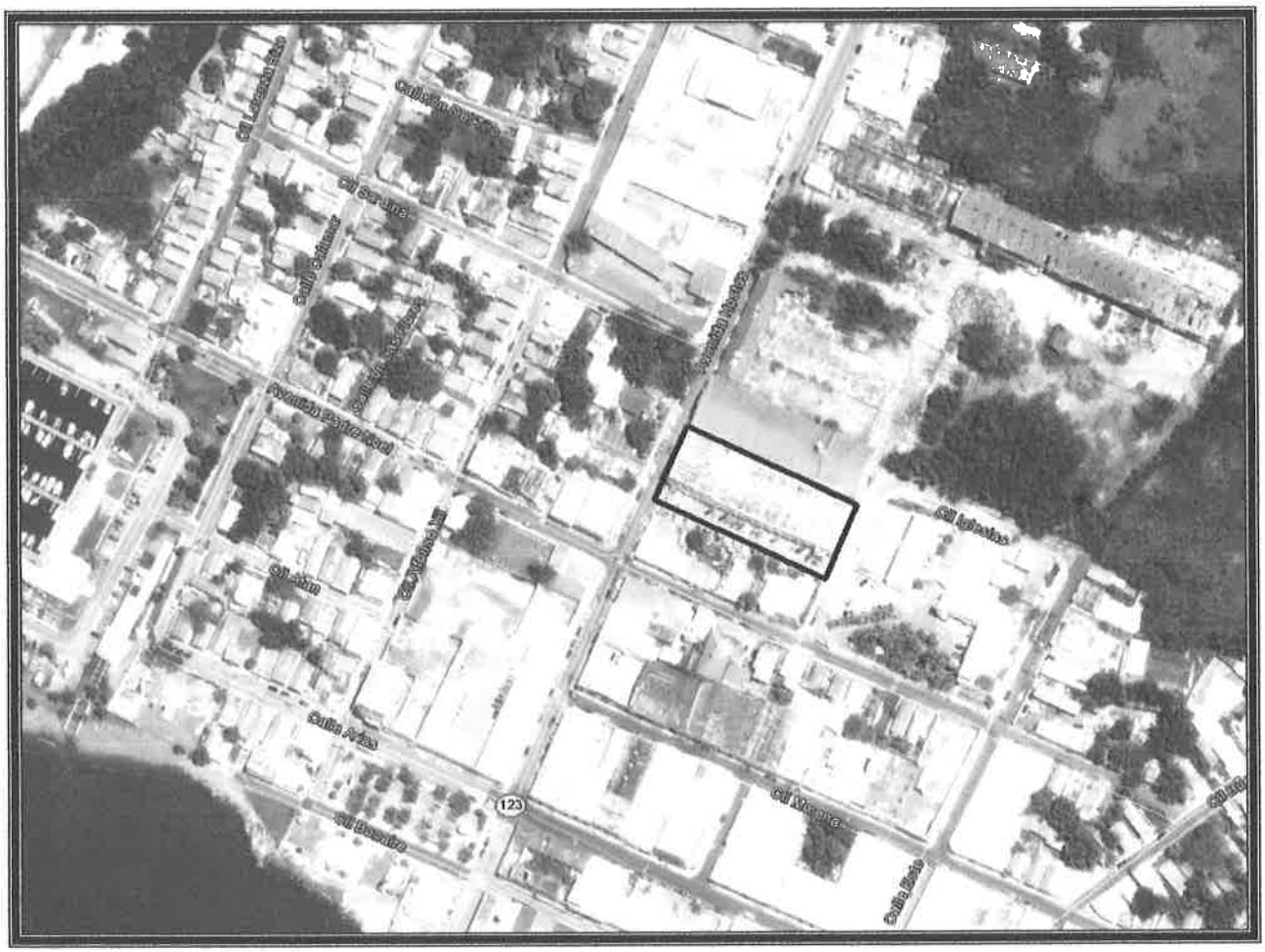
Fig. 12. The 1953 mural *La Fundición* (The Foundry).

Fig. 13. The section of *La Fundición*, around the projected curve wall.

Fig. 14. The mural *La Presa* (the Dam), at the eastern wall.

10. Geographical Data

Edificio Empresas Ferré Site Map



The nominated property includes the entire lot outlined of 3,311 square meters as recorded at the Centro de Recaudaciones de Ingresos Municipales (CRIM), under numbers 412-051-585-02, 412-051-585-09 and 412-051-585-10.

E-752045

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC WORKS

PLAYA DE PONCE QUADRANGLE
PUERTO RICO
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

1222 II NW (PENUELAS)

1222 II NW (RIO DESCALABRADO)

66°37′30″ 18°00′

66°30′ 18°00′

752000mE 753 755 35′ 756 757 758 1222 II NE (PONCE) 759 760 32′30″ 761 762 763 144 000 METERS 764 764000mE

1991000mN 1990 1989 1988 1987 1986 1985 1984 1983 55′ 1982 1981 1980 6 000 METERS 1979 1978

N 1969793

16 000 METERS 1990 1989 1988 1987 1986 1985 1984 1983 55′ 1982 1981 1980 1979000mN

17°52′30″ 66°37′30″ 17°52′30″ 66°30′

PONCE (PLAZA DEGETAU) 1.5 KM. 1 KM. A C. I PONCE 11 KM. PONCE Y GUAYAMA LOS PAMPANOS 1 KM. PASTILLO 1.5 KM. SANTA ISABEL 11 KM.

CAÑAS URBANO SAN ANTON CINTRONA

Antena de Radio (WLEC) Agua Armería Antena de Radio (WPRP) Portalupes Río Calle Eglon Policía Plaza Faro Playa de Ponce Antena de Radio (WLEO) Punta Peñoncillo Muelle de Ponce Punta Carenero Isla De Gata Roca Ahogado Punta Cabullones Isla De Jueyes Arenal Santa Cruz Río Bucaná LIMITE DE LA CIUDAD DE PONCE Esperanza Cintrona Segunda Río Inchon Arenal Quinta Esperanza Cayo Desgraciado Isla del Frio Fortuna Unión Buyones MUNICIPIO DE PONCE MUNICIPIO DE JUANA DIAZ Río Jacaguas Tiburones Manzanillo Galicias Faro Serrano Boca Chica Baño de Mares

P L A Y A

B U C A N A

V A Y A S

C A P I T A N E J O

C A P I T A N E J O

CALETA DE CABULLONS

M A R C A R I B E

Isla Caja de Muertos Fuente Faro La Hamaca Cerro Morrillo Isla Morrillito

(PUNTA CUCHARAS) 1222 II SW

(SANTA ISABEL) 1222 III SW

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA

Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1941. Field checked 1942 Revised from aerial photographs taken 1967. Field checked 1970

Selected hydrographic data compiled from NOS charts 902 (1970) 926 and 927 (1968). This information is not intended for navigational purposes

Polyconic projection. Puerto Rico Datum, 1940 adjustment
2000-meter grid ticks based on Puerto Rico coordinate system
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 19

Barrio and municipality boundaries by the Puerto Rico Planning Board

Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown

Kilometric reference distances shown in red

MN GN 9½° 169 MILS 0°45′ 13 MILS

UTM GRID AND 1982 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

Revisions shown in purple and woodland compiled from aerial photographs taken 1977 and other sources. This information not field checked. Map edited 1982

Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas

SCALE 1:20000

1 MILE 1 0 1/2 1

1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 FEET

1 .5 0 1 KILOMETER

CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 METERS
DASHED LINES REPRESENT 5-METER CONTOURS
DOTTED LINES REPRESENT 1-METER CONTOURS
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929
DEPTH CURVES AND SOUNDINGS IN FEET—DATUM IS MEAN LOW WATER
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO DATUMS IS VARIABLE
SHORELINE SHOWN REPRESENTS THE APPROXIMATE LINE OF MEAN HIGH WATER
THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY 0.3 METER

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS

FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
AND DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC WORKS, SAN JUAN, P. R. 00910
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

PUERTO RICO

QUADRANGLE LOCATION

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, all weather, hard surface

Secondary highway, all weather, hard surface

Light-duty road, all weather, improved surface

Unimproved road, fair or dry weather

Insular Route

Edificio Empresas Ferré
E-752045
N-1969793

000108

PLAYA DE PONCE, P. R.
17066-H5-TM-020

1970
PHOTOREVISED 1982
DMA 1222 II SE—SERIES E835

INTERIOR—GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA—1988

CENTRO SOR ISOLINA FERRE INC.
A.D.M. CENTRAL
EMPRESAS FERRÉ
NORTE
123

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A.D.M. CENTRAL
EMPRESAS FERRÉ
ESTACIONAMIENTO
PRIVADO
RESERVADO PARA
ADMINISTRACIÓN Y
ESTUDIANTES

CENTRO SOR ISOLINA FERRE INC.
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EMPRESAS FERRÉ

SEGURIDAD
EXIT

IRONWORKS