

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Bernard, L. J., Hardware Store, Westwego, Jefferson Parish, LA

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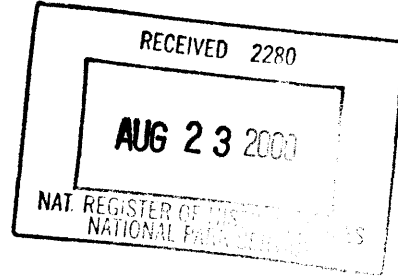
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Bernard, L. J., Hardware Store

Other Name/Site Number:



2144

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 275 Sala Avenue

Not for publication: NA

City/Town: Westwego

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana

Code: LA

County: Jefferson

Code: 051

Zip Code: 70094

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: Statewide: Locally: X

Gerri Hobdy

August 17, 2000

Signature of Certifying Official/Title Gerri Hobdy, LA SHPO

Date

Dept. of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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

Signature of Commenting or Other Official/Title

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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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):

Signature of Keeper: [Handwritten Signature]

Date of Action: 9/22/03

5. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property
Private:
Public-Local: X
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property
Building(s): X
District:
Site:
Structure:
Object:

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing
2
Noncontributing
0 buildings
sites
structures
objects
2 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: NA

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Commerce/Trade Sub: Specialty Store

Current: Recreation and Culture Sub: Museum

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: No style

Materials:

Foundation: Concrete

Walls: Weatherboard

Roof: Asphalt

Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The L. J. Bernard Hardware Store is a frame commercial building located in the Jefferson Parish community of Westwego. It stands on a corner lot approximately two blocks from the west bank of the Mississippi River on a mixed commercial and residential street which historically served as Westwego's commercial core. The building's original portion, consisting of two stories, was constructed in 1907 and received a one-story wing in the 1940s. Although the store displays slight decorative detailing on its upper level, it is being classified as having no style for the purposes of this nomination. Despite recent additions at the rear, the building easily retains its historic integrity and National Register eligibility.

The original portion of the clapboarded building is comprised of a rectangular mass with two of its elevations facing adjacent streets. The only decoration present consists of a punch-work balustrade which outlines a balcony wrapping around two sides of the building, large second story Italianate brackets beneath an overhanging roof, and a small dormer pierced by a three part opening. A historic picture of the store included in *Westwego: From Cheniere to Canal* (a local history by William D. Reeves) shows that this dormer once contained Queen Anne style windows and was decorated by fishscale shingles. (The windows have been replaced by vents, and the shingles are now covered by clapboards.) With the exception of this limited decoration, all elevations are relatively plain. Canopies (supported by thick wooden posts) attached to the street-side elevations protect customers from the elements. One canopy has a metal shed roof; the other is formed by the previously mentioned wooden balcony. First floor fenestration consists of a corner entrance, an additional entrance on each of the street-facing sides, a narrow rear door surmounted by a decorative hood, and large windows. The latter are obviously meant to display goods but are not arranged to form storefronts. Except for the rear door, all of the doors and windows on this level have transoms. Second floor windows are six-over-six. Single leaf French doors on this level (with transoms above) are obviously not original.

The first floor interior contains one large sales room whose ceiling and walls are composed of beaded board. The original shelves and counters remain intact. (Interestingly, a significant amount of the goods and equipment displayed on the shelves is also original.) In the 1940s the owners added a one-story, flat-roofed concrete-block warehouse space to one side of the sales area. It contains one large room; part of a former exterior wall was removed to provide access between the sales and storage areas. The second floor originally contained six rooms which served as the storekeeper's living quarters. Until the 1920s the family used an exterior stair to reach this area. At that time they installed an interior stair which culminates in the dining room and also subdivided one of the rear rooms to create a bath. With the exception of an Italianate style mantel in the dining room, all of the woodwork on this level (including wooden floors found in four rooms) is quite simple.

With the exceptions of the above outlined changes made during the historic period, the hardware store experienced no further alteration until its recent restoration by the Westwego Historical Society. Changes made during this project include:

- 1) the closing of the interior stair (required by the state Fire Marshall's office).
- 2) the addition of a new entrance, small office, and restroom to one side of the warehouse space. (The original exterior entrances to the sales area are kept closed but remain in place.)
- 3) the construction of an elevator shaft and a new exterior staircase. These are located on a rear corner

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of the 1907 portion of the building. Both connect to the balcony, which has been extended slightly to one side to meet them.

- 4) the covering of the 1940s concrete block addition with clapboard.

None of these alterations is significant enough to negatively impact the building's historic character, and there is absolutely no doubt that customers and retailers from the historic period would easily recognize the structure. As one of very few surviving examples of Westwego's commercial history (see Part 8), the L. J. Bernard Hardware Store is a strong candidate for National Register listing.

Contributing Element

A one-story, "L"-shaped metal storage building stands on the property. It appears to date to the teens or 1920s and, thus, was present during the store's period of significance.

NOTE: The building immediately to the right of the storage shed in the photograph of the storage building does not stand within the boundaries of this National Register nomination.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National Register Criteria: A X B__ C__ D__

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): NA
 A__ B__ C__ D__ E__ F__ G__

Areas of Significance: Commerce

Period(s) of Significance: 1907-1950

Significant Dates: 1907

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Unknown

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The L. J. Bernard Hardware Store is locally significant in the area of commerce because it is one of few resources surviving to illustrate the commercial history of Westwego. Its period of significance spans from 1907, the date of construction, until 1950, the required fifty year cutoff. In actuality, the store continued in operation until 1997.

Westwego is located along a now-filled canal built by local planters before 1800 to connect the Mississippi River to Bayou Segnette, the Barataria Estuary and New Orleans. In the mid-nineteenth century persons of French descent moved there from the Bayou Lafourche and Barataria areas. At first the settlement was called Salaville after Pablo Sala, who is regarded as the town's founder. Later it became known as Westwego in honor of the thousands of travelers who crossed to the west bank of the Mississippi River at that point before continuing their westward journeys. The area's small population was somewhat increased in 1893 by an influx of refugees from the hurricane-devastated Cheniere Caminada (near Barataria Bay and the Gulf of Mexico). Despite the presence of the canal, serious economic development did not occur until near the end of the nineteenth century, by which time the railroad had arrived. A fire destroyed the four blocks of the community nearest the river in 1907, but rebuilding began immediately.

The settlement received its village charter in 1919. Only a short time later it was declared a town after a locally sponsored census proved the population to be greater than 1000. Led by appointed mayor Conrad Buchler, town officials spent the first two years of Westwego's official existence establishing laws (including tax laws for much-needed revenue), organizing and supplying the town government, repairing roads and building gravel sidewalks, improving drainage and ferry service, and obtaining a safe water supply and electrical power. Vic Pitre, the town's first elected mayor, continued the improvements. Under his leadership the town obtained fire protection, "modern schools," natural gas service, a children's playground, an improved water supply, paved streets and sidewalk improvements. During his administration (1921-1941), the town's population quadrupled. Part of this increase was due to depression era economics, which drove many rural families toward urban areas. Although other businesses existed, the community's economy was (and still is) centered upon the seafood and boat building/repair industries.

Westwego's most prosperous era was the 1940s, when at least two of the town's five local canneries furnished seafood to the armed services. Unfortunately, no documents exist which specifically record the number and types of businesses operating at that time or earlier. However, reminiscences of local residents included in *Westwego: From Cheniere To Canal* give some indication. In addition to the canneries, businesses mentioned in this book include hardware, general merchandise, clothing and grocery stores; butcher shops; dance halls, bars, and distilleries (including three which operated "secretly" during prohibition); cafes; movie theaters; doctor's and dentist's offices; a pharmacy; and a post office. A railroad depot and a ferry landing also existed. Author Reeves describes Sala Avenue, Westwego's historic mixed commercial and residential row, as a real "urban strip" during the period in question.

By the 1940s, however, the town's decline had already been set in motion. Concerned with preventing flood waters from reaching New Orleans, the Corps of Engineers condemned and closed the locks connecting the Westwego Canal to the Mississippi River in 1939. Silt gradually filled the waterway. In 1954 the State Highway Department purchased the canal from its private owners. Between that year and 1962, the state filled the canal, built an expressway across part, and sold the rest of the newly created land as individual lots. Without the canal, Westwego's commerce quickly declined. Today is it difficult to visualize

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the town's past commercial life, for Sala Avenue is only a ghost of its former self. The streetscape continues to consist of houses mixed among business establishments. Almost all of the latter are either post-1950 buildings or structures altered to the extent that their ages cannot be determined. Only five can be accurately identified as historic because they are obviously fifty or more years of age and retain their integrity and character. These include a brick seafood factory (1943), a two story combination bank and office building (teens or 1920s), two small brick structures dating to the 1930s or 1940s, and the candidate.

The L. J. Bernard Hardware Store is one of these clearly historic commercial structures. The building was erected after the 1907 Westwego fire for Duroc Terrebonne. In 1917, L. J. Bernard purchased it and opened his hardware store. Bernard's descendants operated the business until 1997, when they closed the store and sold the building to the City of Westwego. At that point members of the Westwego Historical Society began negotiations to convert the store into a museum. These talks ended successfully, and the museum was established in 1999. The society administers the museum; the building remains under municipal ownership. As a rare and significant reminder of Westwego's commercial past, the L. J. Bernard Hardware Store is a legitimate candidate for National Register listing.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Reeves, William D. *Westwego: From Cheniere To Canal*. Jefferson Parish Historical Series Monograph 14. Westwego, LA: Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Alario, Sr., 1996.

Site visit by National Register staff.

Swanson, Betsy. *Historic Jefferson Parish: From Shore to Shore*. Gretna, LA: Pelican, 1975.

Windshield survey of Westwego, Louisiana by National Register staff.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

- 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: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreeage of Property: Less than an acre

UTM References: **Zone Easting Northing**
 15 775820 3312480

Verbal Boundary Description:

Lots 19 and 1/2 of 18, Square B, Whitehouse [now Westwego], Louisiana.

Boundary Justification:

Boundaries follow historic property lines of the store and its accompanying service yard.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register Staff

Address: Division of Historic Preservation, P. O. Box 44247, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Telephone: (225) 342-8160

Date: June 2000

PROPERTY OWNERS

City of Westwego
419 Avenue A
Westwego, Louisiana 70094
(504) 347-5745