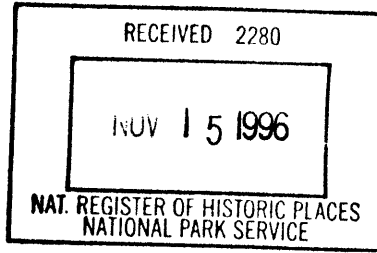


1491

NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 10-90)



OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

1. Name of Property

historic name: **Casa Alonso**

other names/site number:

2. Location

street & number: **34 Betances Street**

city or town: **Vega Baja**

state: **Puerto Rico**

code: **PR**

county: **Vega Baja**

code: **145**

___ not for publication

vicinity ___

zip code: **00763**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 ___ nationally X statewide ___ locally. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Melanie J. del...

Nov. 6, 1996

Signature of certifying official

Date

Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register
See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the
National Register

See continuation sheet.
determined not eligible for the
National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain):

Elson H. Beall

12.13.00

Entered in the
National Register

bot

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property:

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property:

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	buildings
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	sites
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	structures
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	objects
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

Cat: **Domestic**

Sub: **Single dwelling**

Current Functions:

Cat: **Recreation and Culture**

Sub: **Museum**

7. Description

Architectural Classification: **Colonial/Spanish Colonial**

Materials

foundation: **masonry**

roof: **wood/brick/corrugated steel**

walls: **masonry/stucco/wood**

other: **cast iron**

Narrative Description: **See continuation sheet**

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria:

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.

C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, possesses high artistic values.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations:

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: **Architecture**

Period of Significance: **Second half 19th century-First half 20th century**

Significant Dates: **N/A**

Significant Person: **N/A**

Cultural Affiliation: **N/A**

Architect/Builder: **Unknown**

Narrative Statement of Significance: **See continuation sheet**

9. Major Bibliographical References

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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other **Archivo General de Puerto Rico. Fondo Municipal de Vega Baja**

Planilla de Riqueza Urbana, Legajo 1850, Serie Actas Municipales, sesión del 21 de marzo de 1841

Name of repository: **Casa Alonso Museum, Vega Baja, Puerto Rico**

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: **Less than one acre**

UTM References:

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	19	776030	2041420	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

_____ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: **See continuation sheet**

Boundary Justification: **See continuation sheet**

11. Form Prepared By

first original nomination draft: **Leonardo Santana Rabell/Luis de la Rosa/Héctor Abreu**

revised, rewritten and edited by: **Karen González Jensen/Staff Architect**

organization: **Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office**

date: **August 5, 1996**

street & number: **Cuartel Ballajá 3th floor**

telephone: **(787) 721-3737**

city or town: **San Juan** state: **PR**

zip code: **00901**

Property Owner

name: **Municipality of Vega Baja**

street & number: **P.O. Box 455**

telephone: **(787) 855-1364**

city or town: **Vega Baja** state: **PR**

zip code: **00763**

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 7 Page 1

**Casa Alonso
Vega Baja, Puerto Rico**

Narrative Description

The Alonso Residence or *Casa Alonso* is a two story wood and masonry building which dates from the second half of the 19th century. The residence was built in the neoclassical vernacular style and occupies two lots facing opposite streets in the traditional urban center of the town of Vega Baja. This particular condition gives the building two facades: an elegant main facade (facing Betances street) and an austere service facade (facing Acosta street.)

The main facade (photo No.1) consist of two levels symmetrically arranged in the classical manner of *pianterrero* and *piano nobile*. Each level has four door openings. The *pianterrero* has a simple design with few decorative elements (plain moldings surround the double wooden plank doors.) The *piano nobile* was given a more elegant treatment as it contained the formal living spaces of the family (double wooden louvered doors, decorative moldings, a cornice over each door, and a balcony.) The wood and ornamental cast-iron roofed balcony spans the entire width of the facade. The balcony is covered by a roof of corrugated metal sheets and its floor with gray and white marble tiles. The facade composition terminates with a continuous cornice.

The secondary facade consist mainly of one plane. It is unpretentious and simple, except for a trellised terrace, a double wooden plank door (which opens to a storage area), a simple iron gate (which opens to the coach house), and a window (which marks the end of the second floor gallery.)

The roof of the building uses the traditional Spanish colonial technique of parallel *ausubo* (bullet wood) beams, perpendicularly closed by *alfargías* (light wood slats) and perpendicularly crossed by three alternate courses of flat bricks. From the inside, the beams, slats, and first brick course are exposed as functional and decorative architectural elements. The exterior walls are composed of *mamposteria* (rubble masonry) with a lime plaster finish.

The *pianterrero* was used for commercial purposes as the original owner, Don Pablo Soliveras, was a very important businessman. Three doors on the facade give access to the commercial area which consisted of a large open space supported by three *ausubo* wood columns. The main entrance to the house is through the fourth door, which gives access to the *zaguán* (traditional hall-like space typical of the Spanish colonial architecture.) The *zaguán* was used by persons and animals as access to the house or patio, thus serving as a transitional space between the exterior and the interior. The other rooms on this level were the service areas of the house (servants quarters, *fogón* (fire box), storage areas, coach house.) These areas have direct access to the enclosed patio through an open gallery. Its octagonal wooden columns and beams support the second floor gallery. The roof and patio were designed to collect rainwater which was stored in an 20 feet deep cistern (like a roman *impluvium*). The well of the cistern is located at the entrance from the *zaguán*. A modern concrete stairway was introduced during the rehabilitation project to

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 7/8 Page 2

**Casa Alonso
Vega Baja, Puerto Rico**

unify the entrance level and the patio and give access to the trellised terrace. This structure substituted two non contributing 1950's concrete stairways. The design of this new element is totally compatible with the noble design of the house and the space (photo No.2).

From the *zagúan* a wooden hardwood and marble stairway leads to the second floor gallery. The *piano nobile* contains the formal living spaces of the family. The "L" shaped gallery (photo No.3) has gray and white marble tiles on its floor. This interior-exterior space forms a transition between the interior spaces and the patio. A wooden wall with window openings enclose this gallery. Hand-hewn planks and louvered windows of *ausubo* wood were used to build the wall. This space was used both for recreational and working purposes (an office area exists on this area) and helped to ventilate the interior spaces. The main living rooms of the house, which face the balcony, show the traditional residential arrangement of symmetrically distributed *en enfilade* rooms. The main living rooms are located in the center with two bedrooms at each side. These spaces are subdivided by wooden partitions. Some of these partitions have hand-hewn wooden supports or studs covered by mortise and tenon wood slabs (panelling). The service spaces extend along the side of the gallery (library-dining room-kitchen-bathroom). At the end of this gallery, the later added bathroom contains its original porcelain legged bathtub and fixtures. You can also access the trellised terrace which connects to the patio by means of the added stairway. The interior floors still contain the original wood planks. All the doors of the house have wooden fanlight transoms with nature-inspired motifs which help to ventilate the house.

Integrity Statement

In 1984 the Municipality of Vega Baja began the restoration of the house, which was purchased from the Alonso family. Abandoned since the 1970's, this family had own the house since 1912. The structure was surveyed in its as-found state. All windows, doors and significant architectural detail were individually photographed and classified before any restoration work began. The interior volume was found to be largely intact, except for a few wooden partitions from the 1960's. These partitions were removed, opening the space to its original configuration. In the first floor, three square columns with wood paneling were found supporting the ceiling. Upon removing the paneling, three massive hand hewn *ausubo* columns were found. These columns reached the second floor up to the roof. Over 40 feet high, these are probably the tallest documented *ausubo* columns still existing in Puerto Rico. These columns, fully restored, are functional structural elements. The first floor ceiling was composed of 71 *ausubo* beams. Of these, only 24 were found to be severely deteriorated and were eventually replaced.

An informal preliminary study suggests that they may be archaeological materials on the enclosed patio. We should This patio contained a dilapidated, yet functional, well which was connected to the cistern. This cistern was restored

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 3

**Casa Alonso
Vega Baja, Puerto Rico**

and made functional again (currently, rainwater is collected from the roofs and the interior patio.) A hand-carved stone sink was found partially buried in the patio; this was later identified as being part of the second floor kitchen and was returned to its original location (photo No.4).

The second floor enclosed gallery has walls of wooden studs and paneling. Upon cleaning, the walls were found to be of local native wood with panels 15" in width, which is wider than traditional board sizes. These unique boards were restored and replaced, when necessary, by hand-cut pieces with the original dimensions. The window frames in the gallery were found to be made of *ausubo*, this is highly unusual since this wood is fairly expensive and extremely hard and heavy for this application. These were carefully cleaned and restored *in situ*.

All the original wooden doors, window shutters and frames of the house were carefully cleaned to remove heavy paint layers. They were found to be of *caoba* (mahogany). These were restored and missing elements were reproduced with similar materials and dimensions. The original hardware was found intact in some places. These were restored by local metal artisans and re-attached to the doors and windows. The *capuchino* hinges (dunce cap-like hinges characteristic of Spanish Colonial architecture), that once existed on doors and windows, were replicated and are functional elements of the structure. The house also exhibits remnants of early 20th century electrical installations. The wiring and fixtures were left *in situ* and have become an integral part of the morphological development of the house. This is one of the few known examples of this type of residential installation that still exist in the island.

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Alonso House in Vega Baja is a significant building as it represents a particularly elegant vernacular solution to an urban 19th century house design. The architecture of the house is the result of the succession of bourgeois families that had lived in it (Soliveras, Otero, and Alonso). These influential families acquired their affluence from the powerful sugar industry that flourished in the island. The northern region of the island was an economic center for the sugar production industry. The house presents elements that once characterized Puerto Rican architecture, such as the *martillo* plan, *en enfilade* rooms, galleries that were used as both living and office spaces, enclosed patios, window arrangements and elements designed for climate control, among many others. These elements are the result of the domestic development of the bourgeois Puerto Rican home. In 1984, the architect and conservationist Otto Reyes Casanova meticulously restored the building. The extensive research and eventual restoration used the original materials and construction techniques to preserve the authenticity of the building. As a result, the house retains its architectural and historic integrity, as well as its character.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 4

**Casa Alonso
Vega Baja, Puerto Rico**

Though the exact construction date of the house is unknown, Pablo Soliveras paid taxes for this property since 1850. The building occupies two traditional lots facing opposite streets in the traditional urban center of the town of Vega Baja. This site gives the building the unusual characteristic of possessing two facades: an elegant main facade and an austere service facade. Originally, the house had the traditional "L" shaped plan known locally as *martillo* (hammer). The main facade and main spaces were located, symmetrically, on the shorter side and the bedrooms were located, *en enfilade*, on the longer side. *En enfilade* rooms create cross ventilation patterns, transoms help hot air move into the upper parts of the spaces and the elevation of the noble spaces (located in the second floor) guaranteed better views as well as cooler breezes. Traditionally the *fogón* and the latrine were located at the rear end of the patio, separated from the main building. Through its history, the economic resources of its owners propitiated the addition of new commodities and the renovation of obsolete facilities (we must remember that the town houses were the image important families presented to the world; they were truly the most obvious of all the family's status symbols.) This is shown in the substitution of the *fogón* by the construction of the kitchen, the addition of the bathrooms, and coach house which extended the longer side and eventually enclosed the patio. As a result, the morphology of the house was transformed from the original "L" shaped plan to incorporate the new amenities which conform the actual "C" shape plan. This house is a wonderful example of historic architectural adaptations and transformation that generated a type of artifact extinct by now in the island, just as the way of life it represented. The use of noble floor finishes such as gray/white marble and *losa canaria* (Canary flagstone), precious woods such as *ausubo* and *caoba*, and the wrought iron filigree balcony show a desire to impart beauty, elegance, and presence to the family areas of the house, emphasizing the social level of its occupants.

For all of the above reasons, the Alonso House is eligible for inclusion to the National Register, under Criterion C, as it embodies distinctive characteristics of a type and period not only for Vega Baja but, for Puerto Rico. At present time, the building is used as a museum and cultural center for the history of Vega Baja.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 9/10 Page 5

**Casa Alonso
Vega Baja, Puerto Rico**

Major Bibliographical References

de la Rosa, Luis. *Vega Baja: Notas para su historia.* s.e. San Juan, 1983.

Gobierno Municipal de Vega Baja. *Vega Baja, su historia y su cultura.* Editores Sefa y Omega. República Dominicana, 1987.

Jopling, Carol F. *Puerto Rican Homes in Sociological Perspective.* The University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1988.

Ortiz Aponte, Luis. *Historia de la Estructura denominada Casa Alonso.* Patrimonio. Boletín de la Oficina Estatal de Preservación Histórica, Vol. I, Num. 8,5.

Ortiz Aponte, Luis. Prospecto Interpretativo para el Museo de Arte, Historia y Cultura del Municipio de Vega Baja, Puerto Rico, 1990.

Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundaries of the property are: Acosta St. along the north property line; Betances St. along the south property line; boundaries with urban lot #18 and #16 of block #25 along the west property line; boundaries with urban lot #3 and #15 of block #25 along the east property line.

Boundary Justification :

The boundaries correspond to the urban lot #2 of block #25, historically associated with the building.