

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received **DEC 29 1982**

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Fort St. John

and/or common same; also known as Spanish Fort

2. Location

street & number on west bank of Bayou St. John, ^{off Robert E Lee Blvd.} @ 500 yards from the ~~mouth~~ N/A not for publication

city, town New Orleans N/A vicinity of

state LA code 22 county Orleans Parish code 071

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<u>N/A</u> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: none

4. Owner of Property

name City of New Orleans, Office of the Mayor

street & number 1300 Perdido Street

city, town New Orleans N/A vicinity of state LA 70112

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Office of Conveyance, New Orleans City Hall

street & number 1300 Perdido Street

city, town New Orleans state LA 70112

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title LA Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1982 federal state county local

depository for survey records LA State Historic Preservation Office

city, town Baton Rouge state LA

7. Description

Condition excellent good fair deteriorated ruins unexposed**Check one** unaltered altered**Check one** original site moveddate N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Fort St. John (1808) is a ruin of a brick bastioned fort located on the west bank of Bayou St. John about 500 yards from the present mouth. Despite considerable deterioration and the loss of its historic setting, the fort remains eligible for the National Register.

Fort St. John was originally built at the mouth of Bayou St. John on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain. However, since the fort's construction, the old lakeshore has been filled (late 1920's-early 1930's). The new shoreline is approximately 500 yards further out, and as a result the present mouth of the bayou is approximately 500 yards downstream from the original mouth. Because of this, the fort's setting has a somewhat more landlocked feeling than it originally had. This has not been the only change in the setting. A levee on the west bank of the bayou has buried part of the fort remains. In addition, live oak trees are planted on top of the levee which prevent a direct view of Lake Pontchartrain from the fort site. However, the fort still retains a visual link with Bayou St. John, and the setting is still essentially semirural despite the presence of nearby suburban developments.

Records show that the present fort was built in 1808 and modified in 1814. Most of the structure dates from 1808, but given the current deteriorated state of the fort, it is not possible to determine which features may have been added in 1814. So, for the purposes of this nomination, the 1808 and 1814 periods will be treated as one.

As originally built, the fort was approximately 50 feet across and held five gun emplacements. Today about 90% of the original fort wall remains. However, much of this is a curved leading wall which is currently buried by the aforementioned levee. Nonetheless, its presence has been verified by archaeological testing. The fort consists of five bastion walls which traverse the levee. Brick steps were installed later in the nineteenth century when the fort site was part of a resort hotel complex and was used as a landscaped garden. All of the fort walls, buried and exposed, are constructed with hard fired surface bricks, a soft inner layer of bricks, and rubble infill. For the most part the existing walls retain their original height. At one time there were buildings within the confines of the fort. The foundations remain below the sod, but have never been mapped.

Assessment of Integrity:

Despite the described deterioration and the loss of the original setting, the exposed ruins still convey the fort's historical associations. The exposed bastion walls are unmistakably the walls of a fortress. Moreover, the fort is still adjacent to the bayou it was built to protect. There is no doubt that the fort ruin vividly recalls its historic role of protecting the bayou, even for the casual observer.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1808 **Builder/Architect** Builder: U.S. Government

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph) Criterion A

The present early nineteenth century ruin of Fort St. John is locally significant in the areas of transportation and military history because it is the only extant tangible manmade evidence of the historic importance of Bayou St. John as an important route from the Gulf of Mexico to New Orleans and points further upriver. Prior to the widespread use of steamboats on the Mississippi River, beginning in about 1820, Bayou St. John, with its portage to the river, was used by smaller craft to reach New Orleans and points beyond because it was easier than traveling up the Mississippi from its mouth. Fort St. John was a direct by-product of the importance of the bayou from a transportational and military standpoint. It was built to protect this valuable route and to defend New Orleans from attack via Lake Pontchartrain. In this regard it is important to note that at the time the American government built the present fort, the Florida Parishes, which are just across the lake, were still under Spanish rule.

Today the fort is the only direct visual link with the bayou's historic importance. The Bayou St. John area is presently completely surrounded by modern development. There are a few houses which date from the period of the fort, but they are merely residences and are consequently not linked as directly with the bayou's transportational and military importance as the fort. Although residences were built along many bayous, the fort represents the specific historical significance of this particular bayou.

Some historians have asserted that the presence of Bayou St. John was a major factor in deciding the location of the city of New Orleans. In any event, the bayou quickly became a major traffic artery to and from the city. Its importance, both as a transportation route and a possible invasion route, was recognized early by the French colonial authorities. A fort was constructed at the mouth of the bayou as early as the first decade of the eighteenth century. During the course of the colonial period this original log fort was replaced successively by a series of improved and enlarged forts.

The route through Lakes Borgne and Pontchartrain and up Bayou St. John was, for smaller craft, the shortest and safest way to travel by water from Mobile and the east to New Orleans and points further up the Mississippi. It remained important until well into the nineteenth century, despite the recurring sandbar at the bayou's mouth. When this occurred, cargo would be lightered off onto flatboats, maneuvered over the shallows, and up the bayou to the portage. Bayou St. John was also the funnel for transportation from and to the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain and into the interior beyond. The bayou's importance increased with the construction of the Carondelet Canal in 1796. It linked the waters of the bayou directly to New Orleans at Toulouse Street. (The canal had originally been conceived by Governor Carondelet in 1793 as a drainage facility, which has always been a major problem in New Orleans.) A docking and turning basin at the head of the canal helped increase ship traffic through the bayou by providing ships direct access to the city itself.

CONTINUED

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .15 acre

Quadrangle name Spanish Fort, LA

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	5	7	8	1	3	2	0	3	3	2	4	6	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

Please refer to Item 10 continuation sheet, Item 7, and sketch map.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Division of Historic Preservation, National Register Staff

organization State of Louisiana

date October 1982

street & number P. O. Box 44247

telephone 504-342-6682

city or town Baton Rouge

state LA 70804

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Robert B. DeBlieux

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date December 17, 1982

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Keeper of the National Register

date 2/11/83

Attest:
Chief of Registration

date 2/9/83

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Continuation sheet Fort St. John

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8. Significance (continued)

Bayou St. John was at the height of its importance as a transportation artery in 1808 when the present fort was built. Fort St. John and the bayou shared this importance until the third decade of the nineteenth century. By that time the Spanish were gone from the Florida Parishes and the bayou's importance as a transportation route had declined. In 1823 the fort was decommissioned and sold to resort developers in the area.

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Continuation sheet Fort St. John

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9. Bibliography

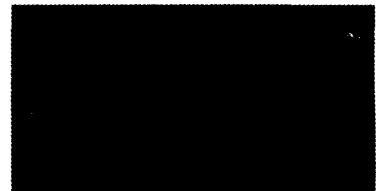
Fort St. John Nomination Form Prepared by Mrs. Victor H. Schiro. Based upon extensive research in primary and secondary sources much too numerous to mention. Complete bibliography in Fort St. John National Register file.

Personal communication with Dr. Richard Shenkel, University of New Orleans. Dr. Shenkel supervised excavations of Fort St. John conducted in the summer of 1976.

Personal communication with Leonard Huber, New Orleans. Mr. Huber is a specialist on the history of steamboating on the Mississippi.

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Continuation sheet Fort St. John

Item number 10

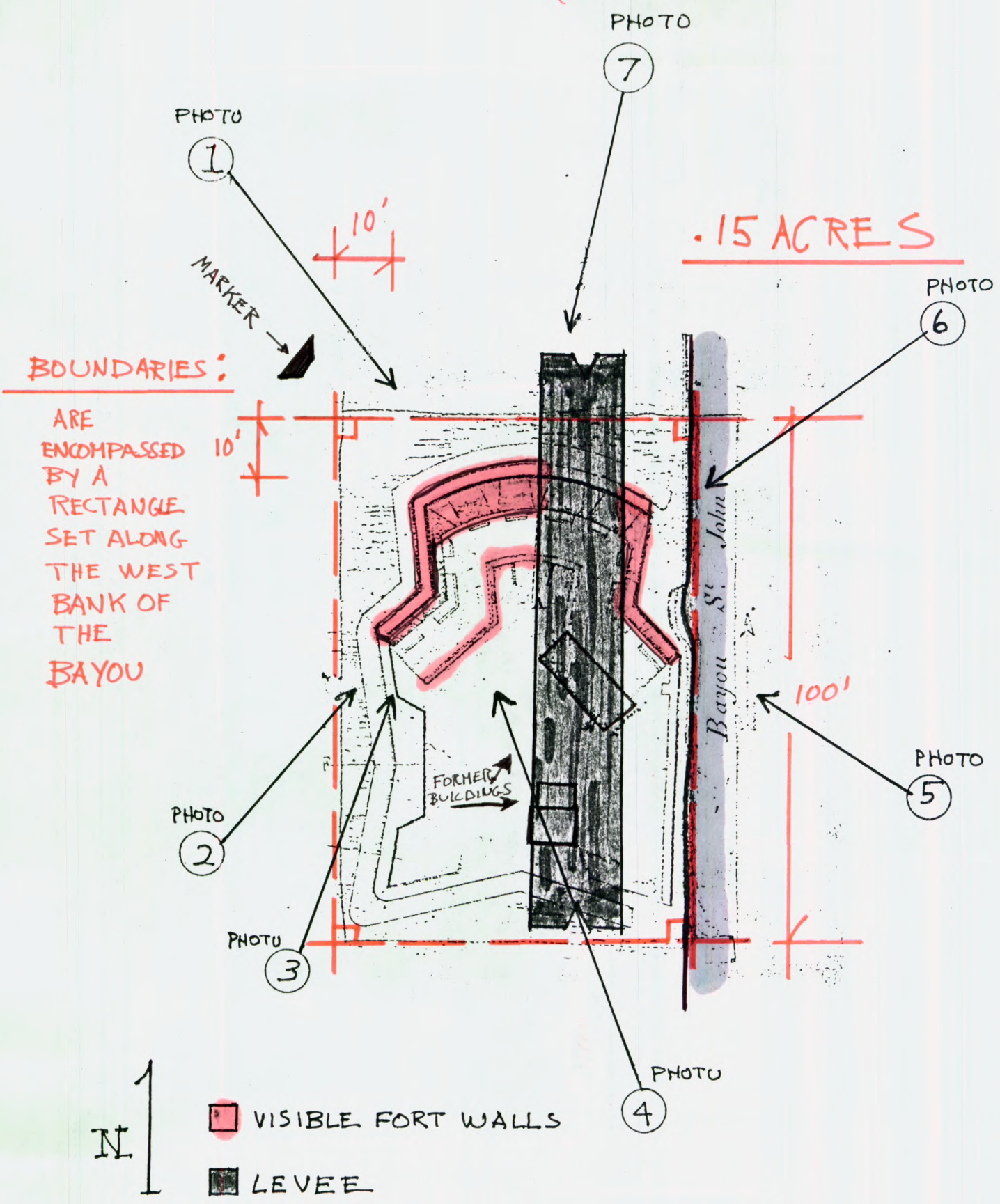
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10. Boundary Description and Justification

Boundaries were drawn to encompass the visible remains of the fort as well as the land to the south where an old map indicates that earthworks and fort related buildings once stood. The foundations of these buildings are probably still extant below the sod.

No additional land was included for the setting for two reasons:

- (1) The setting has been compromised, as described in Item 7.
- (2) There are four unrelated edifices in the vicinity. These include a modern brick shed, a state historic marker, a foot bridge which does not date from the historic period of the 1808 fort, and a grave. The exact contents of the grave are not entirely clear and are shrouded in legend. Hence it is difficult to show any direct connection between the grave and the 1808 fort's period of historical significance.



BOUNDARIES:

ARE ENCOMPASSED BY A RECTANGLE SET ALONG THE WEST BANK OF THE BAYOU

.15 ACRES

- VISIBLE FORT WALLS
- LEVEE

TAKEN FROM A PLAN DATED 1817, LINES SOUTH OF PINK COLORED FORT WALLS INDICATE EARTHWORKS WHICH ARE NO LONGER EXTANT