

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

J. Supple's Sons Mercantile Company, Ltd., Iberville Parish, LA

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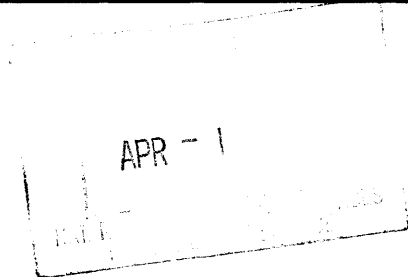
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: J. Supple's Sons Mercantile Company, Ltd.

Other Name/Site Number:



2. LOCATION

Street & Number 29830 LA Hwy 405

Not for publication: NA

City/Town Bayou Goula

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: Iberville Code: 047 Zip Code: 70788

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

Signature of Certifying Official/Title Jonathan Fricker Deputy SHPO, Dept of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

Date March 31, 2005

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):

Edson H. Beall 5/10/05

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

5. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

- Private: x
Public-Local:
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property

- Building(s): x
District:
Site:
Structure:
Object:

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

- 1
-
-
-
1

Non contributing

- buildings
sites
structures
objects
0 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: Department Store
Current: Commerce/Trade Sub: Department Store

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: No Style

Materials:

Foundation: Concrete
Walls: Brick
Roof: Metal
Other:

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

J. Supple's Sons Mercantile was built in 1929 after levee construction caused the loss of an earlier Supple store. It and its predecessor were primarily plantation stores, providing a myriad of goods to workers on the various Supple sugarcane plantations. The large one story brick store is located in the hamlet of Bayou Goula, facing the Mississippi River. The one notable alteration is the addition of a new pitched roof on top of the old roof system which ended in a shaped parapet on the façade. Nonetheless, there is no question that the building still easily conveys its identity as a rural store.

The Supple store has a quite large footprint, spanning seventy-two feet along Highway 405 by a depth of eighty-five feet. At the rear is a lower (and much smaller) block containing the office and related spaces. On the interior the store is divided into two spaces, with the dividing wall running from front to back. These two spaces register on the façade as an asymmetrical pattern of openings. The general sales area occupies about two-thirds of the space, reading on the façade as the window-door-window pattern seen on the right. Storage and the "meat room" (see Part 8) occupied the long and narrow space on the left. Here the window-door-window rhythm is compressed into a smaller plane and each element is smaller than that found for the main sales area.

Most fortunately, the façade retains the original paneled window shutters and doors. The shutters for the sales area correspond to inset display windows which survive intact. The double door opening into the sales area features horizontal panels, while the shutters have thin vertical panels. On the downriver side elevation (corresponding to the storage section) is an original double door with applied panels formed of diagonally placed strips of wood. Both side elevations retain their character-defining small windows with bars – located almost at the very top to allow for shelving. Other openings include a paneled double door at the rear of the display area and six-over-six windows in the office wing with their original wooden shutters formed of diagonally placed strips of wood. A fairly large vault with two free-standing safes registers on the office wing with no windows. The door leading into the office wing features rounded panes of glass in the Italianate manner. The doors must be salvaged material.

The sales area remains one vast undivided space, looking larger than it did historically because almost all of the counters and shelves are gone. (A few shelves survive in a rear corner.) The side and rear walls are finished in plaster while the front wall is of exposed brick. A row of thin metal utilitarian posts runs down the middle. As noted previously, there are two display windows recessed into the building. The openings for each space (from inside the store) survive. At the top is a double row of windows (much in the manner of a transom) and below is a small door to provide access into

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the display area.

There is no electricity at present in the portion of the store containing storage and the "meat room," and the small windows at the top are covered. Hence, with pitch-black conditions, photography was impossible.

The office wing survives largely unaltered on the interior. It consists of an L-shaped office space with a vault at one end, a storage room with original shelving for supplies and records, and a small room of unknown original use (perhaps the store manager's office). At the top of the vault door is "J. Supple's Sons Mercantile Co., Ltd." in decorative paint. Along two walls of the storage room are bookcase-like shelves with half-round columns and a cornice. The tops and bottoms of the columns feature an incised motif. Around the top of the room are deep shelves resting on bungalow-like brackets. Store records remain in place on these upper shelves.

Alterations/Assessment of Integrity:

As noted previously, a pitched roof was placed atop the store's original parapet roof. This created a gable on the façade (above the original shaped parapet) and one on the rear. These spaces are sheathed in wide composition boards as are the spaces between the top of the old walls and the new roof along the side elevations. The rear office wing received a new pitched roof done in the same manner. Other changes include the loss of almost all of the shelving and counters, the boarding over of the small windows along one side elevation, and the modernization of a room in the office section.

Admittedly, the new roofline has had a notable visual impact. However, the building still emphatically "says" rural store, even with this change. This alteration has added to the building rather than subtracted from the original character-defining features. The elements that convey the building's identity as a rural store include its overall form, the pattern of openings on the façade (including two display windows), the signature small windows along the tops of the side elevations, and the large sales space that remains undivided. Adding to the authenticity are the vault and the records/storage area, the latter with its original shelving.

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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: 1929-1955

Significant Dates: NA

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 J. Supple's Sons Mercantile Company, Ltd. is locally significant in the area of commerce within Iberville Parish as a rare surviving example of a plantation store. Rural emporiums played a significant role in meeting the material needs of the general public from before the Civil War until well into the twentieth century. During the post-bellum period, many were plantation stores. The candidate served as a plantation store during part of the Supple family's century-long career in the mercantile and planting businesses. The period of significance for this nomination ranges from 1929, the date of construction for the present store, through 1955. Although rural stores in general began to decline in importance in the 1940s, it is clear that Supple's remained a major focus of commerce up to and past the Register's fifty-year cutoff (at present 1955). The facility continued to serve as a rural store, albeit eventually under reduced circumstances, until 1979.

In order to understand the role the Supple Store played in the economy of Bayou Goula and Iberville Parish, it is helpful to understand the circumstances under which rural stores conducted business and the types of goods they provided. Only mercantiles serving the general public operated before the Civil War, as planters were responsible for providing the needs of their enslaved workers. However, several types of rural stores, differentiated by type of ownership and customer, operated in Louisiana after the Civil War.

In areas where plantation agriculture dominated the economy, the plantation store was the norm. With the end of the Civil War and the loss of slave labor, planters were forced to find other means to get their crops planted and harvested. In Louisiana's cotton growing parishes, the plantation system shifted to a practice known as share-cropping in which a landless farmer worked a portion of the planter's land for a share of the crop, generally one-third. However, this system was not suited to sugar growing parishes. There, planters hired gangs of laborers who were given housing on the plantation and a small weekly or monthly wage. The amount of this wage depended upon whether or not the planter also provided food for the worker. In both the cotton and sugar parishes, planters usually paid workers' wages in script or credit vouchers redeemable at the plantation store. Because the planters feared that their laborers might leave before the crop was in, they often withheld part of these wages until the end of the year.

The timber industry, which came to Louisiana in the 1880s, brought a different kind of rural store to the state. This was the company-owned and controlled commissary, located within a company-built town. Many times its customers were a captive audience, for workers were often paid in script which could be redeemed only at the company store. In both plantation and timber company stores, the businesses seldom sold merchandise to persons outside the influence of the plantation or the timber company.

The final type of rural store was that run by entrepreneurs serving whatever population happened to live nearby. Thus, both agricultural workers and members of the general public frequented these businesses. Despite the type of ownership involved, all of these stores provided a wide variety of goods, ranging from manufactured clothes to foodstuffs to tools to patent medicines -- in short, everything the rural householder could want.

A native of Kinsale, Ireland, Jeremiah Supple came to South Louisiana with his wife Catherine in 1852. Once in Louisiana, according to family history, Supple worked as a plasterer until the Civil War. Because the building trade was depressed after the war, Supple needed a new start. The move to Bayou Goula, which occurred in 1865, was apparently due to Catherine Supple's influence.

Bayou Goula had thrived over the years. Farmers with small farmsteads were the first to settle in that area of Iberville Parish. By 1820 they had been replaced by sugar planters, and the area supported many large and prosperous plantations. Gradually a village began to develop, with a post office opening in 1837. By the 1840s Bayou Goula had become an important steamboat landing. The community had a hotel by 1850; and the census for that year recorded merchants, bakers, clerks, blacksmiths, carpenters, tailors, cooks, barbers, saddlers, and common laborers in residence there. By 1857 there were two hotels, three groceries and four other stores. An 1860 traveler's description portrays Bayou Goula as it must have looked only a few years later when the Supples arrived. The traveler called it "... a pleasant looking but very loosely settled place. It looks as if it had been fired off at random and scattered along the

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coast. There are several well stocked stores there; some nice looking residences, and two hotels of considerable dimensions, The post-office at Bayou Goula is an exceedingly neat and well appointed establishment."

Jeremiah and Catherine purchased land in Bayou Goula and by 1866 had built and opened a general mercantile store. The family's residence was located next door. When the business prospered, the couple began buying land as small parcels became available. Their first large purchase occurred in 1872, when they acquired a 500 acre sugar plantation named Teresa; Supple quickly renamed this property Kinsale. Eventually, his descendants would own five plantations (totaling about 2,800 acres) and a sugar mill in the Bayou Goula area. Supple also acquired or built the post office and the Knights of Pythias Lodge hall, both located adjacent to the store.

Although the store continued to serve the general public once the Supples became sugar cane planters, it was only natural that they should expand the mercantile business to include their plantation workers as customers. Little is known about the day-to-day operation of the store at this time, yet it is obvious that the business prospered. However, in 1882 a bad flood killed all the crops on the family's plantations and hurt other planters so much that they could not pay their debts to the store. Jeremiah died the following year (1883). Catherine saved the businesses and began bringing her sons into the management of the plantations and the store. In 1897, with her health failing, she had the two businesses incorporated. The merchandising component became J. Supple's Sons Mercantile Company, Ltd. The plantations were placed in a separate company. Catherine Supple died in 1898.

Board of State Engineers levee maps show that the mercantile continued to grow after Catherine's death, but business was not without challenges for merchants whose stores were located near the Mississippi River. The biggest problem was repeated flooding, which occasionally led to the relocation of the levee and the buildings that paralleled it. The same maps that record the growth of Supple's Store indicate that the levee and the store had already been moved three times before the great flood of 1927. The company, by this time managed by a son and grandson of Jeremiah and Catherine, decided to replace its old store with a new facility when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built the new and much higher levee completed in 1929.

After the relocation, Supple's continued its primary role as a plantation store. The new facility (the candidate) contained a large sales room, a warehouse, a meat room used by the store's own butcher, and offices for the planting and mercantile businesses. By this time Supple's served people living as far as three or four miles away, was the largest store in town, and had the best and most varied merchandise. The latter included, but was not limited to, furniture, household wares, ready-to-wear clothing, packaged liquor, medicines, and groceries. The warehouse held items (for example, nails and wire) not displayed in the main sales area. The store purchased items in bulk, then packaged them individually according to the amount a customer wished to purchase. Salesmen would often spend a whole day at Supple's trying to convince the managers to add their lines to the store's wares. Some would buy cold drinks for the clerks when the store placed a large order.

Although the store was open to the general public, most of its customers were employees at Supple plantations. Bosses transported their workers to the store in wagons or trucks. Once at the emporium, they picked up their pay from one of the offices in the back of the building. Whether the planting company ever paid in script redeemable only at the Supple Store is unclear, but by the 1940s all Supple workers were paid in cash. Although they were free to make purchases anywhere (and at this point Bayou Goula still had three other stores selling mostly groceries), most of the workers shopped at Supple's. Each Supple plantation had an assigned monthly payday (usually one of the Saturdays in the month) when its workers were supposed to be able to make purchases without competition from other shoppers. However, people generally ignored this rule and shopped whenever they wanted or needed something. As a result, the store was so crowded on Saturday paydays that clerks worked long hours and the company hired extra workers. Shoplifting was apparently a serious problem; so guards were hired for the busy days. Eventually, business became so great that the company opened the store for half a day on Sunday. This practice ended with the advent of World War II.

Due to the habit of making advance purchases on credit, most workers seldom cleared any money after picking up their wages and making their purchases. However, the store often gave them a bonus known in South Louisiana as *lagniappe* (a little something extra) – in this case, a small token of appreciation for a sale that had been completed. Clerks also distributed tickets redeemable for merchandise such as kitchen utensils and dishes.

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After World War II business at the store continued as outlined above. According to family members, the only notable change in practice was the move from obtaining food supplies in bulk to purchasing pre-packaged foods. Even the decline of Bayou Goula, which began with the 1929 levee relocation, did not seriously affect the store at first. However, the impact of modern technology on the sugar industry and new lifestyle choices eventually caught up with Supple's. By the 1970s the family's sugar mill had closed and mechanization had reduced the number of workers needed to grow sugar cane. At the same time, "fancy" supermarkets in nearby towns could sell the same products as Supple's at lower prices. Many people moved away, and it became difficult to find store clerks as well as customers. J. Supple's Sons Merchandising Co. downsized, then changed to a self-service format in an effort to remain open. The store finally closed its doors on January 22, 1979. Today the offices at the building's rear remain the headquarters for J. Supple's and Sons Planting Co. Ltd., but the former sales room and warehouse are vacant.

In assessing the significance of stores such as Supple's, it should be noted that both plantation stores and rural general merchandise stores serving a wider population are now extremely rare. The end of the sharecropping and gang labor systems and the increasing popularity of the automobile, combined with improved roads, brought about their decline during the 1940s. Through the years, the majority of rural stores have either been demolished, allowed to deteriorate and fall down, or in some cases removed from the property. Those which survive are usually closed, vacant, deteriorated and face an uncertain future. There is no way to determine how many rural stores once existed, but it is possible to estimate the number of plantation stores which formerly occupied the landscape. Almost every plantation of any size either had one like Supple's or was served by one. If an average of 50 to 100 large plantations per parish is accepted, it can be seen that such stores were once numerous within the countryside. However, the Iberville Parish survey of historic structures records only the candidate and one other building that can definitely be identified as plantation stores. Two more of the almost 1100 buildings shown in the survey may have served that role. Additionally, the survey includes nine other stores that apparently served rural populations. These were most likely grocery stores rather than general mercantiles carrying a variety of merchandise. And it is quite likely that some of the thirteen structures identified as rural stores have been lost since the survey was completed twenty years ago. Thus, J. Supple's Sons Mercantile Company, Ltd. is an extremely rare example of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century phenomenon of the plantation store. As such, it is a worthy addition to the National Register.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Berthelot, Joe. *Memories of Bayou Goula*. Sunshine, LA: The Hollows Publishing Company, 1999.

Division of Historic Preservation, Historic Standing Structures Survey of Iberville Parish.

Interview with Herb Babin, great grandson of Jeremiah Supple, November 10, 2004.

Interview with Jack Chadwick, great grandson of Jeremiah Supple, November 10, 2004.

Ohlmeyer, Mercedes Postell. *Who Stole Grandma's Picture? . . . and other Tales of the Supples of Bayou Goula*. Baton Rouge, LA: Moran Printing, Inc., 1998.

Pearson, Charles E. and Guevin, Bryan L. *Archaeological Investigations at the White Castle Gap Revetment, (M-196-R) Iberville Parish, Louisiana*, New Orleans: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1984.

Site visit by National Register staff.

Letter from the Board of Commissioners, Atchafalaya Basin Levee District, to J. Supple's Sons Mercantile Co., Ltd. , April 16, 1929.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

Previously Listed in the National Register. (partially)

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):

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreeage of Property: less than an acre

UTM References: **Zone Easting Northing**
 15 676160 3343020

Verbal Boundary Description: The boundary is shown as a broken line on the attached sketch map.

Boundary Justification: There are no appropriate historic property lines to recognize because the store was (and is) part of larger Supple acreage. Hence boundary lines were chosen that discretely encompass the nominated resource.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register Staff

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

Telephone: (225) 342-8160

Date: February 2005

PROPERTY OWNERS

J. Supple's Sons Planting Co., Ltd.
29830 HWY 405
Bayou Goula, Louisiana 70788
(225) 545-8417

J. Supple's Sons
Mercantile Company, Ltd.
Iberville Parish, Louisiana

N →
Scale 1" = 50'
--- BOUNDARY

