

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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

For HCRS use only
received **AUG 24 1982**
date entered

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

1. Name

historic N/A
and/or common Independence Historic District

2. Location *Roughly bounded by LA 40, 5th St., Anza Lane, and E. and W. Railroad Aves.*
street & number East Railroad Avenue, West Railroad Avenue,
West 4th Street (see map) -N/A not for publication

city, town Independence N/A vicinity of congressional district 6th - Henson Moore
state LA code 22 parish Tangipahoa code 105

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<u>N/A</u> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Multiple

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple ownership
street & number Multiple
city, town Independence N/A vicinity of state LA 70443

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Tangipahoa Parish Courthouse
street & number Mulberry and Bay Streets (no specific address) P. O. Box 667
city, town Amite state LA 70422

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 Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office
city, town Baton Rouge state LA

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date <u>N/A</u>

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The present historic central business district of Independence consists of 38 structures, most of which are brick commercial buildings dating from the period 1913 to c.1930. These 38 structures are located on both sides of the Illinois Central railroad tracks. Independence, which dates back to 1837, blossomed in the early twentieth century due largely to the prosperity generated by Italian immigrant truck farmers. However, all but one of the commercial buildings burned in a disastrous fire in 1913. In spite of this, the prosperity at that time was such that after the fire the downtown area was promptly rebuilt. As a result, most of the district's buildings date from the teens.

The Railroad

The New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern Railroad came through Independence in the early 1850's, and was taken over by Illinois Central in the 1880's. The double railroad line cuts a broad corridor through the town and serves to unite the district. It is appropriate that the railroad corridor should have a strong visual presence in the district because the railroad was the vital artery of transportation which made it possible for the district to have been an economic and agricultural hub. Visual evidence of the historic importance of the railroad is enhanced by the presence of the railroad station, a large rambling brick building which was influenced by the bungalow style (Photos 1 and 2). On the whole, the railroad corridor has an open character in which the commercial buildings (even groups of them) punctuate the space rather than dominate it.

West Railroad Avenue

Most of the district's buildings are located west of the railroad corridor. West Railroad Avenue contains the district's longest and most impressive grouping of historic commercial buildings. (Photo 3) Most are two stories high with commercial space on the lower story and residential space on the upper. This relationship is very typical of small town mercantile development of the period throughout the state.

At the approximate center of this group is the Old Independence Movie Theatre (Photo 4) with its unusual elliptical arch entrance and its elaborate brick parapet. This is undoubtedly the district's most impressive landmark.

Other landmarks include:

1. The railroad station.
2. The Independence Bank (Photo 5) with its full entablature, pediment shaped parapet, fully developed aedicule motif doorway, and three part composition.

Apart from these, the West Railroad Avenue commercial buildings are relatively plain and more or less typical of any rural town center. Nonetheless, they maintain a two story scale for several blocks.

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7. Description (cont'd)

West 4th Street (Photos 6 and 7)

With only one exception, the West 4th Street corridor maintains a single story scale. The buildings are no less elaborate than the two story buildings found in other parts of the district. The only difference is that because there is no second story with sash mounted windows, there is consequently less opportunity for embellishment. One oddity is a frame residence that survived the fire and was subsequently converted for commercial use. No doubt the conversion reflected the urgent need for commercial space after the 1913 fire.

East Railroad Avenue (Photos 8 and 9)

East Railroad Avenue is, and always was, open and largely devoid of commercial buildings. There are two small groups of historic commercial buildings which are separated by about two blocks, although they are united by the presence of the double railroad line. Amongst this group is the district's fourth landmark, the Kluchin Building (c.1905).

The Kluchin Building (Photo 10) is a two story commercial building with a pediment shaped parapet. It is plainer than the district's other landmarks, but is nonetheless important because it is the only commercial building to survive the 1913 fire. The fact that it does differ stylistically from the post-1913 buildings is interesting. It shows the architectural conservatism which influenced the town's rebuilding program after the fire.

The Architecture

On the whole, the district's buildings are typical, if somewhat backward looking, examples of small town brick commercial structures of the early twentieth century. Most have parapet rooflines, brick moldings, plate glass shopfronts, and shallow arch fenestration on the upper story, if there is one (Photo 11). This is important to note because shallow arched fenestration was rapidly going out of fashion during the second decade of the twentieth century when the rebuilding of Independence took place. Many of the commercial buildings have galleries or fixed awnings (Photo 12). A smaller number of two story commercial buildings have balconies on the second story which serve the upper residential space (Photo 13).

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7. Description (cont'd)

Alterations

With almost no exceptions, the only major alteration that the commercial buildings have undergone is at the shopfront level. (This, of course, excludes consideration of the interior.) In a few cases the shopfront remains completely intact including the original plate glass (Photo 14). In many more cases the original fenestration remains, but the glass and the doors have been removed or replaced (Photo 13). In some cases the original shopfront has been replaced with an innocuous modern shopfront (Photo 15). In a few cases the new shopfront is in sharp contrast to the original architectural fabric (Photo 16). Also in a few cases the original balcony has been lost (Photo 17).

Despite these changes, it should be noted that in no case does the modified shopfront dominate the facade. In all cases the original brickwork and ornamentation is more emphatic and more noticeable than the modern shopfront (Photo 17). As a result, it can be said that the buildings of the district still convey the appearance of a prosperous early twentieth century small town commercial area. They could certainly not be mistaken by the casual observer for any other building type or period.

Intrusions

In the preparation of this application the designation of contributing element was limited to commercial buildings and to buildings with historic commercial uses which fall within the district's historic period. This was done because the district is significant because of its role in the commercial history of the parish. It is also significant for its role in the agricultural history of the parish; however, it should be noted that this agricultural significance is linked to the area's commercial history and specifically to the commercial district.

The district's historic period was determined by economic trends in the commercial and agricultural history of the town. The economy was based upon the growth and boom in strawberry production and the influx of Italian immigrants. This influx and the growth of the strawberry industry became an important economic factor in about 1900. The strawberry industry boomed in the 1920's and peaked in 1931. After that it declined rapidly. Hence the historic commercial period of the district was determined to be between 1900 and 1931.

There are 7 buildings which do not fit into the category of contributing elements. Five of these are post-1931 low scale commercial buildings, and 2 are 1920's bungalows which never experienced commercial use.

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7. Description (Continued)

This represents an overall intrusion rate of 18.5%, which is relatively low given other historic central business districts across the state. It should also be noted that all of the intrusions are small, low scale and have minimal intrusive effect (Photo 18). They are easily dominated by the surrounding historic commercial buildings.

Breakdown by Periods

Pre-1913 contributing elements	2 buildings	5%
1913-1931 contributing elements	29 buildings	76.5%
Non-contributing elements	7	18.5%
	<hr/>	
	38 buildings	

In recognition of the superior historic character of the old commercial sector of Independence, the city government declared it a locally zoned historic district. It was this effort that led to the National Register application.

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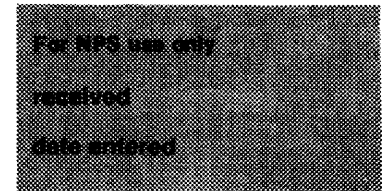
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Independence Historic District Inventory

1. NOT IN DISTRICT: West Railroad Avenue. City Hall. C.1960. One-story brick structure. Originally this building was located in the corner of the district. The boundaries were originally drawn to include it for the sake of a squared-off end to the district on Fifth Street. However, upon subsequent reflection, the State Historic Preservation Office decided to redraw the boundaries to exclude this peripheral intrusion.
2. West Railroad Avenue. Dr. Genovese's residence and office. C.1920. Contributing element. Large one-story rusticated concrete block bungalow. Residence with doctor's office in front reflects one aspect of small town life.
3. West Railroad Avenue. Dilardo's Grocery. C.1915. Contributing element. Two-story brick commercial building with residence upstairs. Shallow brick arches and bungalow style roof. First floor facade reworked and balcony/gallery removed c.1960.
4. West Railroad Avenue. Cuccharia's Pharmacy. C.1914. Contributing element. Two-story brick commercial building with residence upstairs. Shaped parapet and original first floor facade. Second floor door bricked in and balcony removed c.1950.
5. West Railroad Avenue. Dileo's Barber Shop. C.1914. Contributing element. Two-story brick commercial building with residence upstairs. Flat parapet. Building stuccoed c.1930.
6. West Railroad Avenue. C.1915. Contributing element. Two-story brick commercial building with residence upstairs. Double recessed storefront entry on first floor. Five bay second story with jack arch windows and partial balcony.
7. West Railroad Avenue. Lupo Building. C.1914. Contributing element. Two-story brick commercial building with residence upstairs. Double storefront on first floor. Double second story balconies. Simple molding along cornice line. Most windows and doors replaced c.1970. Double gable roof built over original parapet in 1960's.
8. West Railroad Avenue. The Independence Bank. C.1915. Contributing element. Two-story brick commercial building with full entablature, pediment shaped parapet, and fully developed aedicule motif doorway. First floor windows bricked in c.1965.
9. West Railroad Avenue. Liberty Bell Theatre. C.1914. Contributing element. Two-story brick commercial building with unusual stuccoed elliptical arch entrance and elaborate second story brickwork, including shallow arched fenestration.

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Independence Historic District Inventory (Continued)

10. West Railroad Avenue. C.1915. Contributing element. Two-story brick commercial building with residence upstairs. Features shallow arched fenestration, molded brick cornice, and double shopfront. First floor facade altered and second story balcony removed c.1955.
11. West Railroad Avenue. C.1915. Contributing element. Two-story brick commercial building with residence upstairs. Ornamental balustrade on balcony. First floor storefront entry has altered facade which dates from the 1960's.
12. West Railroad Avenue. C.1935. Non-contributing element. One-story brick stuccoed commercial building with double shopfront.
13. West Railroad Avenue. Old Bank. C.1914. Contributing element. Two-story brick commercial building. Full brick entablature with brick modillions and paneled brick parapet, Flemish bond brickwork, and arched windows on lower story. Railroad Avenue shopfront altered c.1935.
14. West 4th Street. Sinagra's Store. C.1935. Non-contributing element. One-story frame commercial building with stepped parapet and gallery.
15. West 4th Street. C.1890. Contributing element. 1½ story frame cottage converted to commercial use c.1915 with appended front frame wing and shopfront.
16. West 4th Street. C.1914. Contributing element. Two-story frame commercial building with residence upstairs. Building has hip gable roof and a balcony/gallery. Lower windows replaced c.1955.
17. West 4th Street. C.1915. Contributing element. One-story brick commercial building with stuccoed brick panel.
18. West 4th Street. C.1915. Contributing element. Triple one-story brick commercial building with pediment shaped parapets and cast cement trim. Two original recessed storefront entries; the third altered c.1965.
19. West 4th Street. C.1915. Contributing element. One-story brick commercial building with shaped parapet. Storefront altered c.1960.
20. West 4th Street. C.1915. Contributing element. One-story concrete block commercial building with concrete molded cornice. Storefront altered c.1960.
21. West 4th Street. C.1915. Contributing element. One-story brick commercial building with pediment shaped parapet and original shopfront.
22. West 4th Street. C.1915. Contributing element. One-story frame commercial building.

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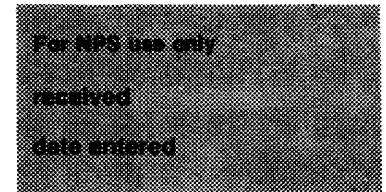
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Independence Historic District Inventory (Continued)

23. West 4th Street. C.1945. Non-contributing element. One-story frame commercial building.
24. West 4th Street. C.1945. Non-contributing element. One-story brick commercial building.
25. West Railroad Avenue. C.1914. Contributing element. Two-story painted brick commercial building with residence upstairs and corner entrance. Second story windows replaced c.1955.
26. West Railroad Avenue. C.1915. Contributing element. Two-story commercial building with upstairs residence and single story wing. Building has cement cornices, double windows, and Flemish bond brick. Lower facade altered c.1965.
27. West Railroad Avenue. Non-contributing element. C.1920 one-story brick bungalow with Flemish bond brick pattern, tile roof, heavy brackets, porte-cochère, and false half-timbering in gables. Non-contributing because never knew commercial use.
28. West Railroad Avenue. C.1915. Contributing element. Two-story rock-face concrete block commercial building with upstairs residence.
29. West Railroad Avenue. C.1930. Contributing element. One-story concrete and stucco Mission style gas station with peaked parapet and tile roof.
30. West Railroad Avenue. C.1930. Non-contributing element. One-story brick bungalow with porch which was screened in c.1960. Non-contributing because it was never a commercial building.
31. West Railroad Avenue. C.1970. Non-contributing element. Modern one-story brick bank building.
32. West Railroad Avenue. C.1930. Contributing element. One-story brick bus station with original shopfront and porte-cochère.
33. East Railroad Avenue. C.1925. Contributing element. Two-story brick hipped roof commercial building with residence upstairs and bungalow style windows.
34. East Railroad Avenue. C.1915. Contributing element. Two-story concrete block commercial building with central entrance. Exterior has rock-faced finish.
35. East Railroad Avenue. Kluchin's. C.1905. Contributing element. Two-story brick commercial building with pediment shaped parapet trimmed in cement and cornice with concrete molding. Lower facade somewhat altered in 1970's.

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Independence Historic District Inventory (Continued)

- 36. East Railroad Avenue. Knights of Columbus Hall with commercial wing. C.1915. Contributing element. One-story plain brick commercial style building with pressed tin side panels on side facade. Knights of Columbus are historically an integral part of Independence's Italian heritage.
- 37. East Railroad Avenue. Railroad Depot. C.1914. Contributing element. One-story brick depot with battered pilasters and false half-timbering in the gables. Cast-iron columns on loading dock area.
- 38. East Railroad Avenue. C.1914. Contributing element. One-story metal sided frame machine shop.
- *39. East Railroad Avenue. C.1914. Contributing element. Falcone's Grocery. Two-story brick commercial building with altered lower facade. Most of the original details remain as do the upstairs living quarters.

*NB: There are actually only 38 buildings within the district's boundaries. As noted above, building #1 was deleted because it was a peripheral intrusion.

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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Ethnic History
	<input type="checkbox"/> invention			

Specific dates N/A Builder/Architect N/A

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph) Criterion A

The Independence Historic District is significant on the parish level in the areas of agriculture, commerce and ethnic history. The district represents two important intertwined elements in the history of Tangipahoa Parish from 1890 to 1931. One is the meteoric rise of the strawberry industry in which "King Cotton" is completely supplanted. The other is the phenomenal achievement by Italian immigrants of economic prosperity not only for themselves but for much of the parish as a whole.

The Importance of the Italian Immigrants to Tangipahoa Parish

The historian C. Vann Woodward has stated: "Considering the amount of effort put into the immigration movement, the results were insignificant. The floodtide of European immigration (1899-1910) swept past the South leaving it almost untouched." This generalization does not apply to Tangipahoa Parish where Italian immigration was a very significant economic factor.

For example:

1. Italian immigrants quadrupled land values in the parish as a whole.
2. They turned vast areas of "worthless" swamp into productive farmland.
3. They were largely responsible for the replacement of cotton with strawberries as the leading cash crop in the parish.

Importance of the Strawberry Industry

The rise of the strawberry industry is of outstanding importance in the agricultural and commercial history of Tangipahoa Parish. In the 1880's Tangipahoa Parish was considered one of the state's most economically depressed parishes. Strawberries had been grown there since before the Civil War, but at that time strawberry production was not significant and cotton production dominated the parish as it did most of the state, (The rest of the state was dominated by sugar production.) It should be noted that in the late nineteenth century "King Cotton" was plagued by perennial low prices.

It was against this background of a depressed state and a particularly depressed parish that strawberry production began to flourish. Its development was more or less limited to Tangipahoa Parish. It began to become an important economic factor in about 1900, and by 1910 it had displaced cotton as the "money crop" of the

9. Major Bibliographical References

Baiamonte, John V., Jr. "Immigrants in Rural America; A Study of the Italians of Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana." Doctoral dissertation, Mississippi State University, 1972.

Tangipahoa Crossings: Excursions Into Tangipahoa History. Baton Rouge: Moran Publishing Corporation, 1979

10. Geographical Data

(CONTINUED)

Acreeage of nominated property @ 20 acres

Quadrangle name Hammond and Amite (on 2 quads)

Quadrangle scale 1=625000

UMT References

A

1	5	7	3	9	6	5	0	3	3	9	1	9	5	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

B

1	5	7	3	9	7	5	0	3	3	9	1	5	0	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

C

1	5	7	3	9	4	0	0	3	3	9	1	4	0	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

D

1	5	7	3	9	3	0	0	3	3	9	1	3	5	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

E

Zone				Easting				Northing						

F

Zone				Easting				Northing						

G

Zone				Easting				Northing						

H

Zone				Easting				Northing						

Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet and 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 National Register Staff

Assisted by Independence Historic District Committee, Frank Anzalone, Chairman

organization Div. of Historic Preservation, State of LA date

March 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 X 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Robert B. DeBlieux
Robert B. DeBlieux

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date August 18, 1982

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

Anna L. Sy...

date 10/5/82

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: *Patrick Andrews*

date 9/30/82

Chief of Registration

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8. Significance (cont'd)

parish. For example, in 1909 Tangipahoa Parish's cotton crop was valued at only \$60,000, while the strawberry crop was valued at over \$1.1 million. In the late teens and early '20's, strawberry production precipitated an economic boom in the parish. During this period Tangipahoa Parish strawberries supplied the entire midwestern market. Despite the fact that production was largely limited to one parish, Tangipahoa Parish's strawberries enabled Louisiana to become the nation's leading strawberry producing state for most of the 1920's.

This had an impressive local effect. Average land values in the parish quadrupled during this period. Vast areas of swamp and "worthless" cutover timberland were improved and made productive. Hundreds of miles of drainage canals were dug. Support industries such as strawberry crate manufacturing, canning, and ice production were spawned and made to flourish. Local banks were established and mercantile businesses prospered as never before.

Strawberry production peaked in 1931 and thereafter declined rapidly. After World War II it lost its nationwide scope and became strictly a local operation.

Independence as a Center of
Strawberry Production

The towns of Hammond, Ponchatoula and Independence have at one time or another claimed to be the center of strawberry production in Tangipahoa Parish. Of these, for the period 1900-1931, the claim of Independence is probably the strongest.

The historic period of growth and prosperity in the strawberry industry of the parish was between about 1900 and 1931. From the beginning of that time until 1925 Independence was the largest strawberry producer in the parish. (This is roughly 3/4 of the historic period.)

In addition, Independence was the center of Italian settlement in the parish, and is therefore most closely associated with the group which is often credited with bringing the local strawberry industry to its peak.

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8. Significance (cont'd)

Independence as an Italian Center

There is no doubt that with the waves of Italian immigration into Tangipahoa Parish in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Independence became the center of Italian settlement and culture. Indeed in later years it became known as "Little Italy."

In 1881 Louisiana's Sugar Planters' Association appointed a committee to consider using Italian labor in the canefields. As a result of their efforts many Italians came to the New Orleans area in hopes of finding work. In the later 1880's, some Italian families began to forsake work in the canefields for work in the strawberry patches of Tangipahoa Parish where there was the prospect of eventually owning land. Independence was where they first settled and where they began to concentrate. Although they settled in other towns, some places such as Ponchatoula resisted their presence and made it clear that they were not welcome. Independence became the area with by far the greatest concentration of Italian immigrants. For five miles up and down the Illinois Central railroad tracks and for two miles either side there developed an area which became the Independence Italian farming community. By 1909, 75% of the population in this area was Italian and 80% of the land was owned by Italians. Most of the businesses in Independence were owned by Italians as well. It should be noted that this was at a time when only 6% of the total population of the parish was Italian. Italian dominance of Independence became complete during the second decade of the twentieth century with the election of the first Italian municipal officials.

The Role of the Italians in the Strawberry Industry

The contribution of Italian immigrants to the growth and boom of the strawberry industry in Tangipahoa Parish was considerable. Indeed, according to a recent doctoral dissertation, Italian immigrants were the most important force behind the ascent of "King Strawberry."

Italians first settled in the Independence area in the 1880's. At that time strawberries were grown in Tangipahoa Parish on a small scale. In 1890 a strawberry farmer brought in a family of Italian immigrants to pick his crop. Wages were low but good by Italian standards of the time. The Illinois Central Railroad attempted to attract Italian immigrants to the parish in hopes that they would supply local labor. However, this was only marginally successful.

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8. Significance (cont'd)

According to the aforementioned dissertation, the most important factor in encouraging Italian immigrants to come to Tangipahoa Parish was the volume of letters written home by the Italian laborers who were already working in the parish. They wrote to their relatives in Italy and in New Orleans and told them of the good wages and the prospect of owning a farm in just a few years. Ultimately Italian immigrants provided slightly over half of the labor involved in producing the parish's strawberries.

The Italians, however, were not content to be laborers, but wanted to own their own farms. As more and more Italian families came, the pattern was always the same. The whole family, children included, would work in the strawberry patches for a few years, live as cheaply as possible, and save as much money as they could. Then they would make a down payment on some land--any land they could get their hands on. Often they bought swampland or cutover timberland which was cheap. Native farmers of the area considered this land worthless for farming and were happy to sell it. The family would pull the stumps, drain the swamps, dig canals, and turn the land over to strawberry production. Later they would try to buy more and better land nearer the railroad. It was this trend which was responsible for the quadrupling of land values in the parish in the early twentieth century.

Although there were non-Italian strawberry growers in the area, they were in the minority after 1910. In any case, most native farmers in the parish were suspicious of strawberry farming and preferred to stay with the risky "King Cotton." Italian ownership of strawberry farms increased phenomenally in the first decade of the twentieth century. For example, in 1904, 40% of the farmland in the Independence area was owned by Italian berry growers. By 1909 that figure had risen to 80%.

As Italian ownership of strawberry farms in Independence increased dramatically so did productivity (a fact with which even hostile observers agreed). An agricultural study commission of the period noted that the economy and productivity of the Italian farmer in the area "stands out in contrast to the more or less shiftless, thriftless southern methods." The phenomenal productivity of the Italian berry farmer was responsible for Independence, the center of Italian settlement, leading the parish in strawberry production and sales until 1924 (well into the boom years). In one year alone for which statistics are available (1905), 275 railroad carloads of strawberries were shipped from Independence. After 1924, Independence dropped to a close second in strawberry production. Thus from 1900-1924 Italian farmers dominated the production of strawberries in Tangipahoa Parish.

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8. Significance (cont'd)

The Central Business District as a Representative
Cultural Resource of the Strawberry Industry and
Italian Prosperity

The old central business district in Independence is undoubtedly the most representative cultural resource of both the production and marketing of strawberries and the Italian immigrants' upward mobility.

The only possible rival to the central business district as a possible landscape feature representing the prosperity of the Italian strawberry farmer is the vast area of fields and drainage canals in the vicinity of Independence. However, to a very large extent this tremendous agrarian resource no longer exists. The land has not been cultivated for many years, and today it is largely overgrown with pine forest. The reason for this agricultural decline (some would say abandonment) was that, after the Great Depression, the rising second generation of young Italians no longer wanted to work in the strawberry fields. They sought white collar work instead.

The Independence central business district was the center of the Italian community. It performed this role as a social focal point, as a meeting place for the town, an entertainment focal point, and as the hub of marketing for the area's cash crop.

Unlike many other "money crops," strawberry production owed its very existence to a nearby marketing and shipping center. It was a highly perishable crop which needed to be marketed, sold, and shipped quickly. All of this took place in the commercial area of Independence. Prior to 1915 farmers would bring their freshly picked strawberries to town and either arrange to ship them via the Illinois Central Railroad to northern consignment buyers or else sell them on the spot to local merchants. This latter practice was known as "curb selling." Both methods of marketing had their problems. If the farmer shipped his crop to northern consignment merchants and it arrived damaged the crop was worthless but the farmer still had to pay shipping costs. Curb selling the crop to local merchants seemed the answer to this problem for a time, but many farmers complained that at harvest time local merchants agreed among themselves in advance on prices to be offered for the strawberries.

In 1908 the Independence Farmers Association was founded as a marketing corporation. It purchased all farmers' crops and auctioned them off at the railroad terminal. By 1915 the Association had totally supplanted the old marketing systems. The effect of this was to stabilize prices and to improve the lot of the farmers. Strawberries were delivered to the Association each day and the farmers were paid by check through the local bank. Each day railroad cars were iced down and freshly picked strawberries were loaded in. At about five o'clock each afternoon berry trains bound for the Midwest would pull out of Independence. At this point all the strawberries on board were still owned by the Independence Farmers Association.

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8. Significance (cont'd)

That night the berries were auctioned off to brokers and consignment buyers. As the berries were sold, the Association would wire ahead of the trains to different switching points and divert the berries to various destinations. This method of marketing continued throughout the strawberry boom years.

In addition to direct marketing, there were other ties between the central business district and berry production. Many of the crops were financed by local merchants (who owned commercial buildings in the district) through the crop lien system. Moreover, the Independence Chamber of Commerce instituted numerous programs to help local farmers improve their yields. Finally, many of the mercantile businesses were side ventures owned by some of the more prosperous Italian berry farmers.

Most of the district's buildings were built between 1905 and 1931 and consequently the district is a direct visual link to the period of prosperity for "King Strawberry" and for the Italian strawberry farmers.

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9. Bibliography (cont'd)

Sanborn Insurance Map, Independence, January 1929.

Nichols, Howard. Oral Interview. March 29, 1982. Mr. Nichols is a history professor at the University of Southeastern Louisiana. One of his specialities is Tangipahoa Parish history.

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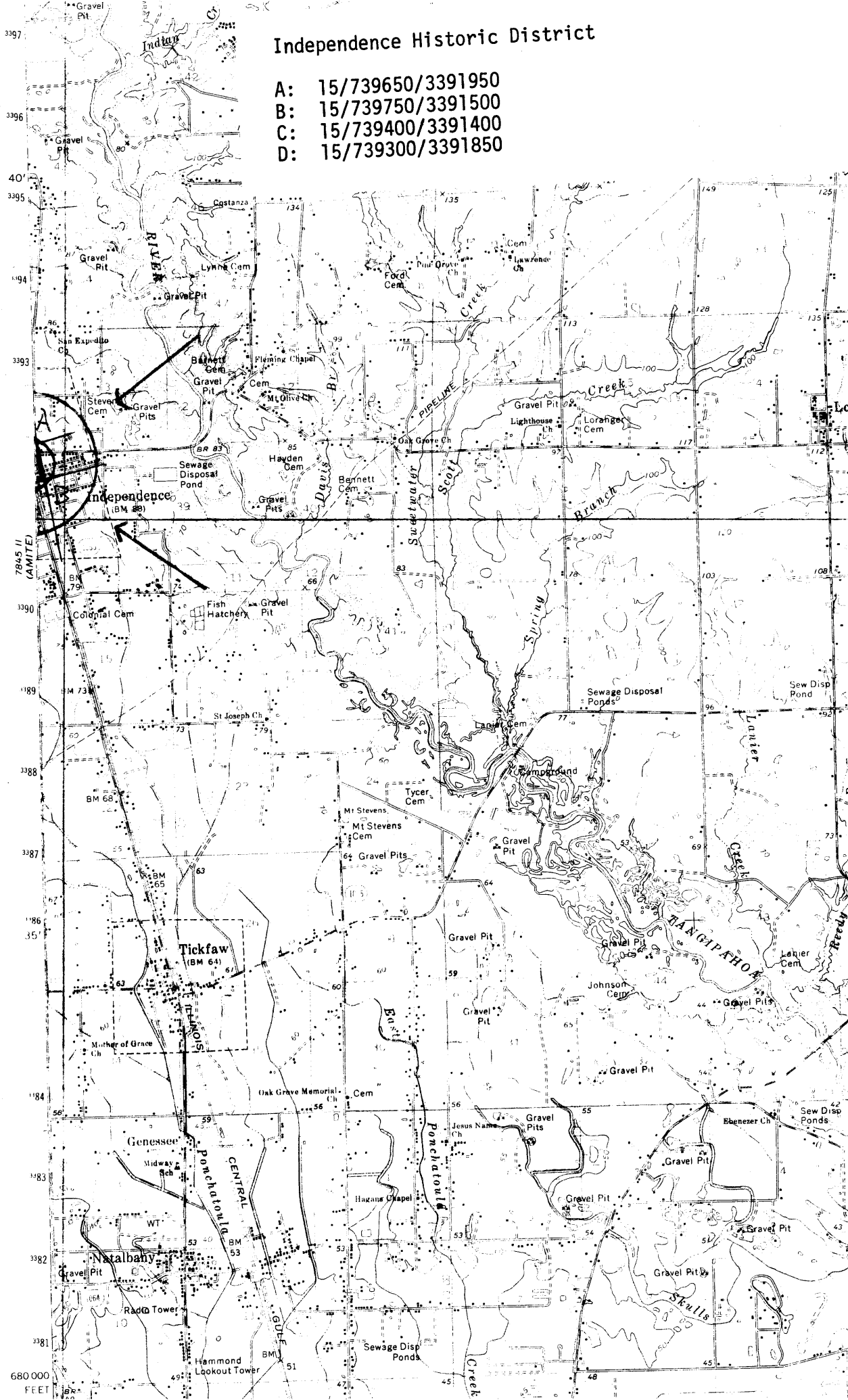
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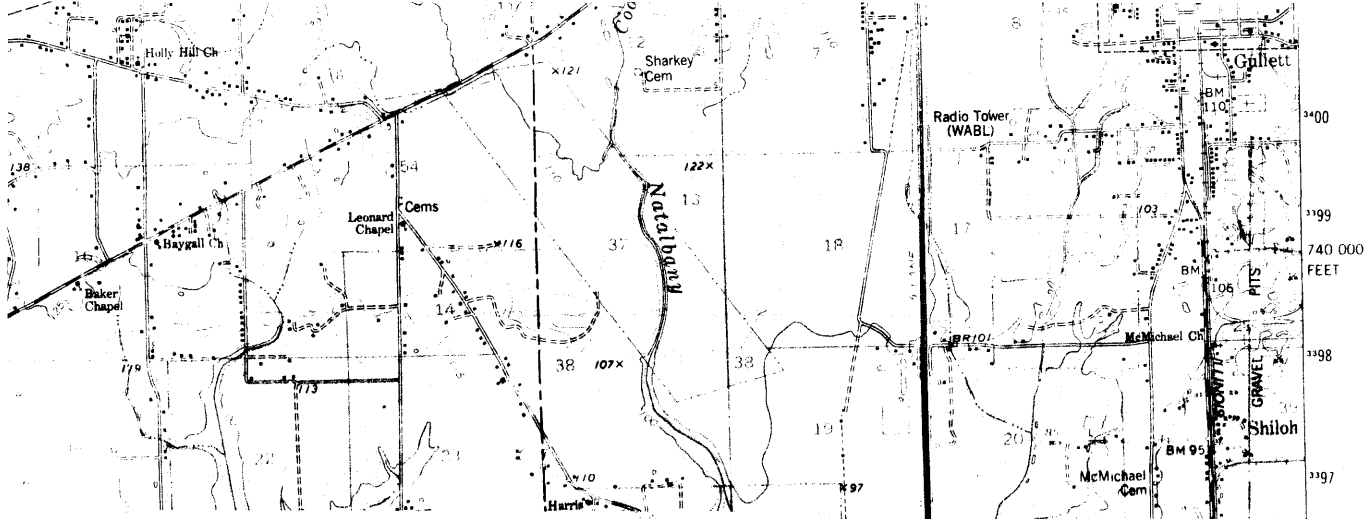
10. Boundary Justification

The boundaries were drawn to encompass the 31 historic structures which contribute to the district's historical significance as described in Item 8. These form a cohesive group because they are within easy sight of each other and because they are unified by the railroad corridor. There are no pre-1932 commercial or commerce related buildings outside of the district boundaries.

Independence Historic District

- A: 15/739650/3391950
- B: 15/739750/3391500
- C: 15/739400/3391400
- D: 15/739300/3391850





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