

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Knox Building, Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, LA

Page 1

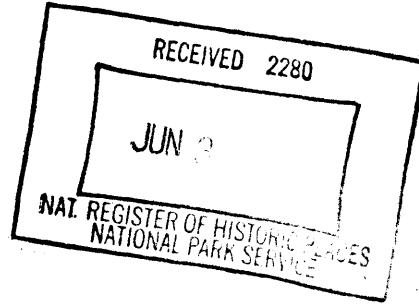
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Knox Building

Other Name/Site Number:



2. LOCATION

Street & Number 447 Third St.

Not for publication: NA

City/Town Baton Rouge

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: East Baton Rouge Code: 033

Zip Code: 70802

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

Jonathan Fricker, Deputy SHPO, Dept of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

June 29, 2006 Date

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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Knox Building, Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, LA

Page 2

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
Determined eligible for the National Register
Determined not eligible for the National Register
Removed from the National Register
Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper: [Handwritten Signature]

Date of Action: 8-8-06

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

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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OMB No. 1024-0018

## **Knox Building, Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, LA**

**Page 3**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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### **6. FUNCTION OR USE**

Historic: commerce                      Sub: specialty store  
Current: vacant                              Sub:

### **7. DESCRIPTION**

Architectural Classification: Italianate

Materials:

Foundation: brick  
Walls: plaster (over brick)  
Roof: other: tar and gravel  
Other: cast iron

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**Knox Building, Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, LA**

**Page 4**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

## **Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**

The Knox Building (1887) is a two-story, three-bay, plaster over brick Italianate building with notable cast-iron details. Located in downtown Baton Rouge, it shares a party wall on each side. (The adjacent party wall buildings, one Italianate and one Art Deco, are being nominated separately.) Despite the complete loss of the shopfront level and window replacement on the second story, the building has a strong Italianate character, which is the source of its local architectural significance.

As is typical of the commercial Italianate, cast-iron is the medium of choice for ornamentation. The central window on the second story is capped by a strongly articulated decorative lintel in the shape of a segmental arch. It has a broad keystone with a patera-like design at the center flanked by panels. The impost blocks feature boldly projecting molding and end in a design similar to a triglyph. The cast-iron lintels on the two flanking windows are square head with a patera-like design at each corner. The impost blocks below have two incised vertical lines, a projecting molding, and a small patera-like design.

The building's most important Italianate feature is easily its quite prominent cast-iron cornice, complete with a crowning rooftop pediment. The cornice projects boldly from the main wall plane and is punctuated by large paneled brackets bearing an anthemion design. The two on each end culminate in geometrical sculpture that extends perhaps a foot above the bracket. At the center of the cornice, two rows of panels mark the location of a wide, richly worked, pedimented tablet that rises perhaps two feet above the cornice. The pediment rests upon short piers with incised vertical lines (resembling triglyphs). Between the piers is a layer of panels. A scroll volute accents each pier at the side. The pediment is given great visual weight by a projecting, overscaled cornice. Although not as visually strong, but nonetheless quite prominent, is the raking cornice with its layers of molding. Inside the tympanum is the date 1887 and "Knox Building." A small geometrical element crowns the pediment.

As noted previously, the Knox Building is completely modern at the shopfront level, and the three windows on the façade have been replaced with tinted glass. Finally, the long vacant building is completed gutted. All that remains are exposed brick party walls.

### Assessment of Integrity:

Although the loss of the shopfront prevents the building from conveying the entirety of its historic appearance, it is not a major stylistic loss. Here Italianate styling most likely would have been confined to cast-iron pilasters. What is more important is what the building retains: its second story, where almost all of the Italianate styling would have been found. And here the Italianate details are intact, including a quite prominent cornice with a pedimented tablet. In short, the cast-iron Italianate details are strong enough and plentiful enough to "hold their own" against the alterations. As a rare and particularly important example of the Italianate taste within downtown Baton Rouge, the Knox Building is a strong Register candidate for its local architectural value.

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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Applicable National Register Criteria: A\_\_ B\_\_ C X D\_\_

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): NA A\_\_ B\_\_ C\_\_ D\_\_ E\_\_ F\_\_ G\_\_

Areas of Significance: architecture

Period(s) of Significance: 1887

Significant Dates: 1887

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: unknown

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## **Knox Building, Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, LA**

**Page 6**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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

The Knox Building is of local architectural significance as a rare surviving Italianate commercial building within downtown Baton Rouge, which regrettably has suffered much loss and alteration. Rarity aside, it is a notable survivor within its local context.

Baton Rouge is a quite old city, tracing its founding to the early eighteenth century. The small river town (population 2,269 in 1840) was designated the state capital in 1846. Although population growth in the late nineteenth century was steady, Baton Rouge remained a fairly small town, only a few blocks deep from the river, into the first years of the twentieth century. The population in 1900 was 11,269. Rapid growth occurred in the 1910s and '20s, with the population doubling between 1910 and 1930. Among the most important players in the economy (if not the most) was Standard Oil Company of Louisiana. Incorporated in the state in 1907, Standard Oil soon built a large refinery and launched Baton Rouge as a major petro-chemical center.

Unfortunately for historic buildings, Baton Rouge's petro-chemical driven economy remained prosperous through the mid-twentieth century. And in a drama played out all over America, the old downtown, with its once splendid buildings, suffered significant demolition and alteration. The extent of the loss is documented in old photographs, oral accounts, and Sanborn maps. Among the 50-60 surviving historic commercial buildings, the vast majority are c.1900 to c.1950 vernacular structures that would be termed "no style" or simply styled. There are no commercial buildings that pre-date the Italianate. Many of the 50-60 survivors have been altered significantly (metal panels covering the façade, for example). In addition, the Central Business District contains many new buildings and parking lots where historic buildings once stood.

Against this background, perhaps a dozen commercial buildings of real architectural quality remain (strongly styled). The Knox Building is one of these landmarks. The commercial Italianate was the look of American towns and cities in the second half of the nineteenth century, and Baton Rouge was no exception. While it is impossible to know how many Italianate commercial buildings existed at one time, historic photos show that they were once major players in the downtown, generally being large and/or quite flamboyantly styled. Today there are only three: the candidate and two large corner buildings (the three-story Welsh-Levy Building immediately adjacent and a two story building a couple of blocks away). These three collectively represent the earliest commercial architecture remaining in Baton Rouge.

While quite small in comparison to the other two, the Knox Building has rooftop features that they have lost – most notably, a crowning rooftop pediment, and secondarily, geometrical sculpture at each corner. Old pictures show Baton Rouge's most elaborate Italianate buildings with this very type of fanciful rooftop treatment. All of these have been lost except for the Knox Building. Its completely intact cornice with a strongly articulated rooftop pediment survives to show someone an architectural signature of downtown Baton Rouge at the turn of the twentieth century.

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NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

## **Knox Building, Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, LA**

**Page 7**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

### **9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Carleton, Mark T. *River Capital: An Illustrated History of Baton Rouge*, American Historical Press, 1996.

*Elks' Souvenir of Baton Rouge*, c.1900. This "booster" publication is quite valuable for its many photographs of buildings that no longer exist. (The book was published somewhere between 1898 and 1902, based on a picture of the mayor in office at the time.)

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):

### **10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property: Less than an acre

UTM References:     **Zone Easting Northing**  
                          15 673960 3369960

Verbal Boundary Description:

Legal property description: South half of Lot 10 and the north half of Lot 9, Square 4, Devall Town, Baton Rouge, Parish of East Baton Rouge, State of Louisiana.

Boundary Justification: Boundaries follow property lines of parcel of land historically associated with the candidate.

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NPS Form 10-900

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OMB No. 1024-0018

**Knox Building, Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, LA**

**Page 8**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

Name/Title: National Register staff

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

Telephone: (225) 342-8160

Date: May 2006

**PROPERTY OWNERS**

The Cyntreniks Group, LLC

Attn: Brace B. Godfrey, Jr.

406 North 4<sup>th</sup> St.

Baton Rouge, LA 70802