

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

For NPS use only

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

received JUL 10 1986
date entered 8-13-86

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

1. Name

historic Trees City Office and Bank Building

and or common Same

2. Location

street & number 207 Land Avenue N/A not for publication

city, town Oil City N/A vicinity of

state LA code 22 ~~county~~ ^{parish} Caddo code 017

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Caddo-Pine Island Oil and Historical Society, Inc.

street & number P. O. Box 897 318-995-6845

city, town Oil City N/A vicinity of state LA 71061

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Caddo Parish Courthouse

street & number 500 Texas Street Room 103 - Courthouse

city, town Shreveport state LA 71101

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

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

date 1986 federal state county local

depository for survey records LA State Historic Preservation Office

city, town Baton Rouge state LA

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved date 1983
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Trees City Office and Bank Building (1910) is a one story frame structure located adjacent to the railroad tracks in the small town of Oil City. It was moved there from nearby Trees in 1983 and is now part of a three building museum complex administered by the Caddo-Pine Island Oil and Historical Society. The building is almost unaltered and hence easily represents the period of its historical significance.

Although the building historically housed offices and a bank, it has a decidedly domestic look. The plan consists of three rooms in a "T" formation with an encircling Eastlake gallery under a skirting roof. This is surmounted by a system of pitched roofs with three hip gables. The building is sheathed in narrow gauge clapboarding and the windows are one over one plate glass sash. The interior is fairly plain with dark varnished woodwork and cheesecloth-covered walls.

In about 1912 the building took on a banking function, which necessitated the installation of a paneled oak screen with a single teller's cage. This vaguely classical screen also features etched glass, decorative rolled metal bars, and a marble counter top.

Alterations:

- (1) In about 1925 the old chimney was lost.
- (2) In about 1935 a small half bath was installed.

In our opinion, these changes should be regarded as minor. They certainly do not affect one's perception of the building's historic appearance.

The Move:

In 1983 the building was moved fifteen miles from its original rural location to a small town. Although this changed the character of the setting, it should be emphasized that the building was originally in a town. It subsequently acquired a rural setting because of the decay of the Trees community. Moreover, the move was necessary in order to save the building. The previous owners had no plans for rehabilitating the structure and agreed to sell it to the Caddo-Pine Island Oil and Historical Society if it were moved off the property. Had the building not been moved, it would have been in danger of demolition by neglect. In any event, the Trees Office and Bank Building represents the entire Caddo Field oil boom, and thus it has not been moved out of the area which is the context for its historical significance.

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 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 type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1910 **Builder/Architect** Builder; Trees Oil Company/Stiles-Cunningham Partnership

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph) Criterion A

The Trees City Office and Bank Building is locally significant in the area of industry because of its close association with the Caddo Field oil boom of the early twentieth century. During this period the building served as the headquarters and bank for the oil company town of Trees City.

Mike Benedum and Joe Trees, the founders of Trees City, were pioneers in opening up the Caddo Field and owned a large portion of the leased area. An oil well had been drilled in the area as early as 1904; however, full-scale production was hamstrung by the presence of too much natural gas. Despite this problem the field was producing 4,560 barrels of oil annually by 1906, although oil men realized that the region's great natural gas pressure prevented optimum production.

Benedum and Trees arrived in the field in late 1908, leased 130,000 acres and began experimentation. After some unsuccessful attempts, they decided that the key to Caddo was to drill deeper. Their next well was sunk six feet deeper than any previous well in the pool. When the well blew in, gas roared out of the drill hole, but with the gas came oil, one hundred barrels an hour at first. The well eventually stabilized at three thousand barrels a day. They had "solved the puzzle of tapping Caddo's riches," conclude oil historians Kenny A. Franks and Paul F. Lambert.

In addition to maximum exploitation of dry-land leases, there were also untold possibilities in Caddo Lake. The first well was completed there in May 1911. Production in the Caddo Field peaked in 1918 when 11,144,000 barrels of oil were pumped. (The significance of this figure becomes apparent when one remembers that production in 1906 was 4,560 barrels.) After the banner year of 1918, production began a slow but steady decline, although oil continues to be a major industry in the area today.

It is definitely an understatement to say that the oil boom had an immense impact upon Caddo Parish. Shreveport, the nearest city to the field, benefitted considerably, becoming the principal headquarters of a number of oil companies. Oil City, Vivian and Mooringsport became boom towns virtually overnight.

These boom towns were pretty rough and tumble places, with saloons, gambling dens, and brothels everywhere. Working conditions left a great deal to be desired. The oil field workers slept wherever they could find space (farmhouses, tents, shacks, barns), and both food and water were in short supply. Tents and shacks appeared near the wells, offering gambling, liquor and women. Violence was quite commonplace.

It is against this background that Trees City was founded in 1909 by Trees Oil Company to house its workers and protect them from disruptive influences. The company was owned by Benedum and Trees. Frame houses were erected for workers, and

CONTINUED

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property @ 1/6th of an acre

Quadrangle name Mooringsport, LA

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 15 409100 3622800
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 enclosed sketch map. Boundaries were drawn to encompass only the significant resource. The building being nominated was moved to its present location; hence there is no historic setting to recognize.

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 OWNER
Division of Historic Preservation

organization State of Louisiana date June 1986

street & number P. O. Box 44247 telephone (504) 922-0358

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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Robert B. DeBlieux

title State Historic Preservation Officer date July 1, 1986

For NPS use only

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

entered in the National Register

date 8/13/86

Keeper of the National Register

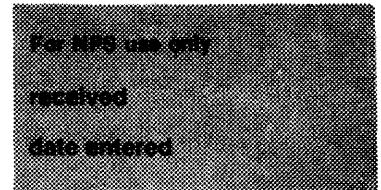
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
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Continuation sheet Trees City Office & Bank Bldg Item number 8

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Caddo Parish, LA
8. Significance (cont'd)

machine shops were constructed to service the leases. Within the next couple or so years a complete community had been established, boasting a store, hotel, pool hall, school, church, dance pavilion, post office, doctor's office, and the Trees Office Building and Bank. No saloons or gambling dens were allowed.

Benedum and Trees' oil leases and Trees City were located on land leased to them by the Stiles-Cunningham partnership. Although founded by Trees Oil Company as a company town for its workers, Trees City was actually owned by Stiles and Cunningham and apparently run by them on a day-to-day basis on behalf of Trees Oil Company. Stiles owned a sawmill nearby and oversaw construction of the various buildings. In 1911 Standard Oil bought Benedum and Trees' oil leases, and Trees City became its company town.

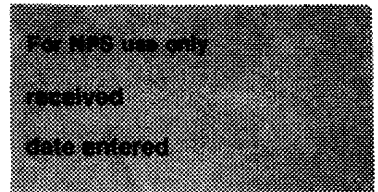
The Trees City Office and Bank Building was originally constructed as offices for Stiles and Cunningham. In effect, the town was run from this building. In about 1912-15 a bank was opened in the front of the building and remained there until the Depression. The building also served as the town's polling place and as offices for the justice of peace and notary public. It was clearly the small community's focal point or headquarters.

Present-day Trees is a remote small clearing in the woods with seven widely scattered worker's cottages in various stages of integrity, a church, and Stiles' house, which has been bricked over. The Trees Post Office was also moved to Oil City by the Caddo-Pine Island Oil and Historical Society in order to save it. However, the building has been altered a good deal.

Given the Trees City Office and Bank Building's special status in the town, it is clearly the most significant remaining structure from Trees. The fact that it is no longer in Trees is regrettable, but the move was necessary in order to save the building. In any event, the building is significant within a larger context than Trees. In many respects, it is one of the best surviving reminders of the Caddo oil boom because its association is so close. After all, it was the principal building in the field's only oil company town. Historic photos show that the oil boom towns of Mooringsport, Vivian, and Oil City were characterized during their heyday by frame false front buildings, giving them a Wild West-frontier town look. Today they are largely characterized by 1920's-1930's nondescript brick commercial buildings, many of which are fairly altered. Were it not for the integrity issue, one could perhaps argue that these central business districts are byproducts of oil prosperity, although they do not represent the 1909-1918 boom period. By contrast, the virtually unaltered Trees Office and Bank Building most definitely represents the early period. The only other resource to be considered is Shreveport, whose central business district and impressive early twentieth century neighborhoods are byproducts of the prosperity generated by the nearby Caddo Field. In addition, there are probably extant buildings in the city that housed the offices of various oil companies.

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Continuation sheet Trees City Office & Bank Bldg Item number 9

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Caddo Parish, LA

9. Bibliography

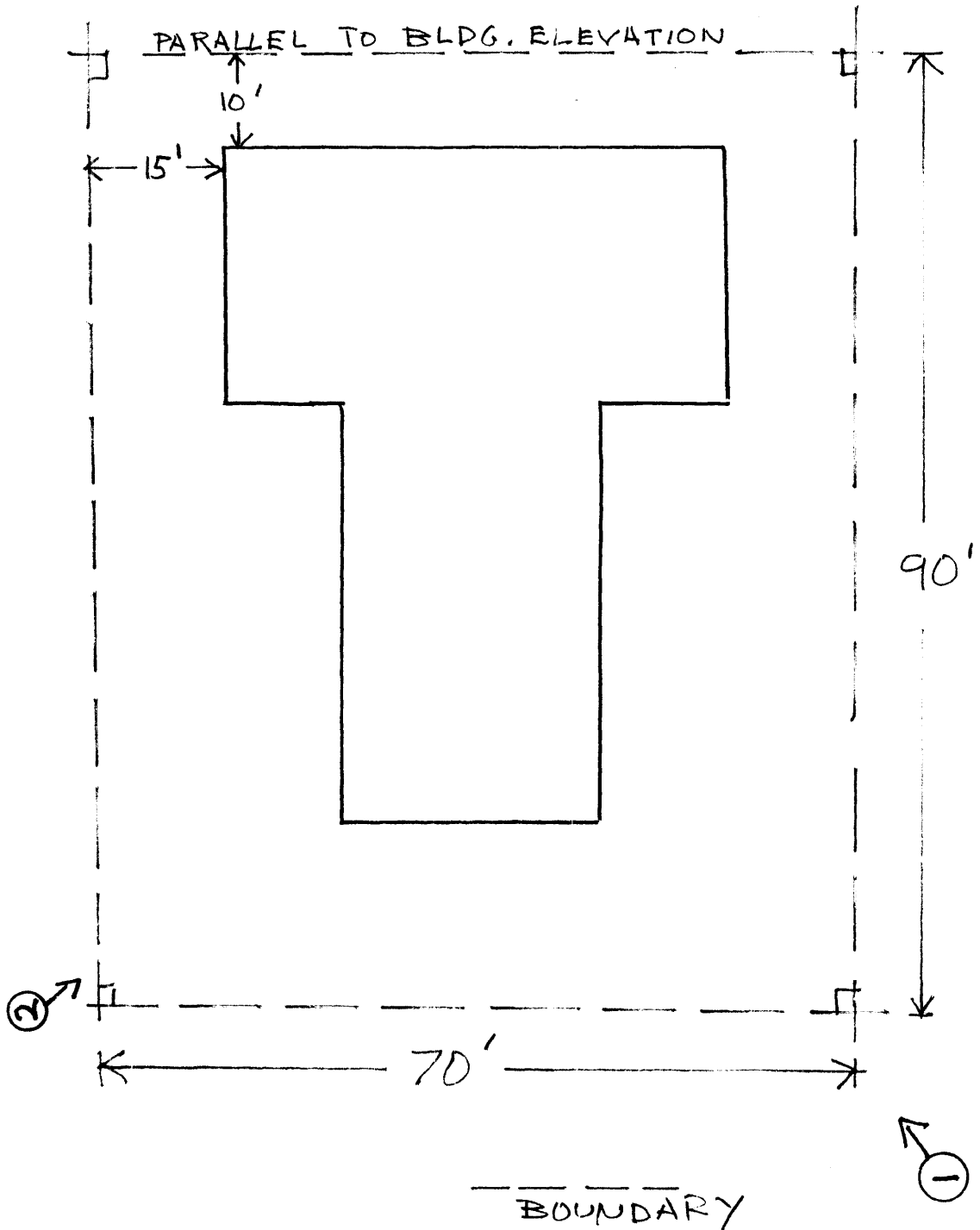
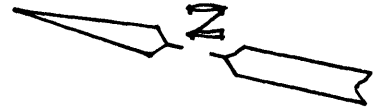
Franks, Kenny A. and Lambert, Paul F. Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil, A Photographic History, 1901-1946. Texas A & M University Press, 1982.

Mallison, Sam. The Great Wildcatter: The Story of Mike Benedum. Charleston, West Virginia: Educational Foundation of West Virginia, Inc., 1953.

Old photographs of Trees, Oil City, Vivian and Mooringsport, many in possession of Caddo-Pine Island Oil and Historical Society.

Interviews of former Trees residents and members of the Stiles and Cunningham families. Conducted by Caddo-Pine Island Oil and Historical Society.

TREES CITY OFFICE &
BANK BLDG.
CADDO PARISH, LA.



(NOT TO SCALE)