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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Welsh-Levy Building, Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, LA

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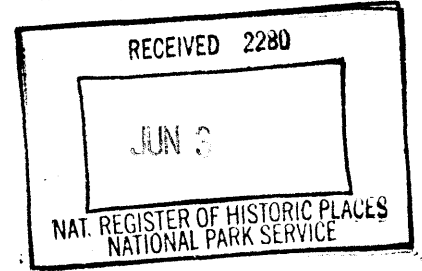
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Welsh-Levy Building

Other Name/Site Number:



2. LOCATION

Street & Number 455-65 Third Street

Not for publication: NA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

Signature of Certifying Official/Title 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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4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

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

Edson H. Beall
Signature of Keeper

8.8.06
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

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 Sub: department 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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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Historically a mercantile emporium, the large, three story, plaster-over-brick Welsh-Levy Building stands at the corner of Third and Main streets in downtown Baton Rouge. It was built in 1887 in the popular and exuberant Italianate style, with an abundance of cast-iron ornamentation. Exterior alterations are confined to the shopfront level and the loss of a few decorative items that once extended above the parapet.

The two elevations (Main and Third streets) of the Welsh-Levy Building feature a different rhythm of bays. Along Third Street, at the second and third stories, the building is divided into more or less even bays by pilasters. Every other bay has a window; alternate bays are blank. The Main Street façade is divided into sharply regular bays by pilasters, with every bay containing a window. The windows are tightly placed within the bays.

Various devices contribute to the building's richly worked character. The numerous pilasters are given additional emphasis via corbelled caps with a cast-iron patera-like floral design at the center. Linking the pilaster tops at the upper story are visually strong bands formed of multiple brick layers (in the manner of corbelling). Superimposed panels link the pilasters at the top of the second story. Above the shopfront level are two sets of horizontal panels, one atop the other.

The building's numerous four-over-four windows feature decorative cast-iron lintels, which is typical of the commercial Italianate. Those on the third story are similar in shape to a Venetian Gothic arch. They are ornamented with incised plant forms and a central roundel with the same patera-like floral design found on the pilasters. The arches are of the "straight-sided" or "stilted" variety, with the arch springing from a point somewhat above the actual impost block. This treatment is a signature of the so-called High Victorian Italianate. The cast-iron lintels on the second story, with their shoulder arch treatment, are particularly prominent. The same floral design found elsewhere on the building appears here in a crowning roundel with a smaller version to each side. Both second and third story windows are further re-enforced by three-dimensional impost blocks.

As is typical in better examples of the commercial Italianate, the Welsh-Levy Building has a prominent decorative cast-iron cornice formed of multiple layers with an overhang accented by brackets. The brackets are ornamented with the previously mentioned patera-like floral design and end in a panel resembling a triglyph. Larger brackets appear singly, in a group, and paired, marking the corner of the building and where rooftop sculpture once appeared (see below). They feature various floral motifs on their front and sides (both cast and incised), including a tulip design. Some of the large brackets on the Main Street elevation are seriously deteriorated.

While the building does not look as if something is missing at the top, a c.1900 photo uncovered for this nomination shows various elements that once protruded above the cornice – a pedimented tablet flanked by sculpture at the center of the Main Street elevation and what appear to be five other pieces of roof top sculpture (the latter on both elevations). All of the sculpture appears to be identical. And while the image is not entirely clear, the rooftop sculptures are quite vertical in character (like an obelisk).

The same picture shows the original shopfront (see attached), which has been almost completely obliterated below the previously mentioned two sets of horizontal panels. (One cast-iron column survives.) A fixed awning once attached to the lower set of panels. The entrance was at the corner, with a free-standing column. The Third Street elevation was taken over almost entirely by a blank wall (rather than windows).

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Display windows flanked the corner entrance, and evenly spaced openings (windows and doors) were found along the Main Street façade.

The interior of the building has been gutted.

Assessment of Integrity

Obviously the notable losses from a stylistic standpoint are the various fanciful elements that rose above the parapet – a treatment found in the most flamboyant commercial Italianate. But even with these features missing, the Welsh-Levy Building is a quite strong stylistic statement – simply because it is so intensively articulated.

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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: Miller & Goodman, Architects
Edward W. Willis (masonry work)

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

The Welsh-Levy 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 particularly good example of the style.

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 Welsh-Levy Building is one of these major landmarks – i.e., a large building that is quite strongly styled. 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, a small one story building immediately adjacent (and being nominated separately), and a two-story corner building a few blocks away from the candidate on Main Street. Collectively these buildings represent the earliest commercial architecture extant in Baton Rouge. Of the three, the Welsh and Levy building is the most intensively styled, leaving the eye little rest.

Historical Note:

In April 1887 John D. Fisher purchased the property in question at sheriff's sale and demolished an older building to make way for a "larger and more commodious building of modern style of architecture." The architects for the new building were Miller and Goodman (a new local firm formed by William R. Miller and Benjamin J. Goodman). Local mason Edward W. Willis did the masonry work. By c.1900, per a photo in a local publication, the building housed the Reymond general mercantile emporium. (John Fisher still owned the property. Obviously he leased it to Reymond.) On November 4, 1913, Fisher sold the building to Joe Gottlieb, and it is still referenced as being occupied by S. I. Reymond Co., Ltd. Jacques Welsh and

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Emanuel Levy purchased the property on April 10, 1915. Welsh and Levy Men's Clothing remained in business in the candidate until the late 1960s. The building is shown as vacant in the 1970 city directory.

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 sometime between 1898 and 1902, based on a picture of the mayor in office at that time.)

Sykes, John. Typscript research report in primary sources (newspapers, conveyance records). Copy in National Register file, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.

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

Acreege of Property: less than an acre

UTM References: **Zone Easting Northing**
 15 673960 3369980

Verbal Boundary Description:

Legal Property Description: A certain piece or parcel of ground, together with all of the buildings and improvements thereon, situated in that part of the City of Baton Rouge, Parish of East Baton Rouge, State of Louisiana, known as Devall Town at the northeast corner of the square bounded by Main Street, Third Street, Laurel Street and Lafayette Street and fronting 65 feet, 9 inches on the south side of Main Street by a depth between parallel lines of 96 feet, more or less, along the west side of Third Street and being composed

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of the eastern portion of Lot 11 and the eastern portion of the north half of Lot 10 of Square 4, Devall Town, being the same property acquired by Jacques Welsh and Emanuel Levy by act dated April 10, 1915, of record in the office of the Clerk and Recorder of the Parish of East Baton Rouge in COB 56, folio 144.

Boundary Justification:

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

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
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Welsh-Levy Building, East Baton Rouge Parish, LA

Circa 1900