

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Dew Drop Social and Benevolent Hall, St. Tammany Parish, LA

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

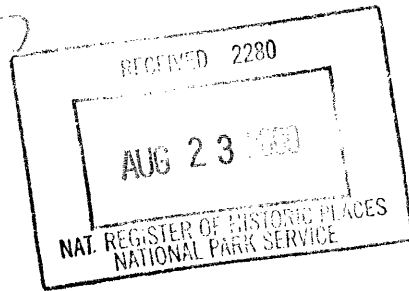
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Dew Drop Social and Benevolent Hall

Other Name/Site Number:

1145



2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 400 block Lamarque Street

Not for publication: NA

City/Town: Mandeville

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: St. Tammany Code: 103

Zip Code: 70448

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

Handwritten signature of Gerri Hobdy

Signature of Certifying Official/Title Gerri Hobdy, LA SHPO

August 17, 2000

Date

Dept. of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

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):

for Edison H. Beall
Signature of Keeper

9/22/00
Date of Action

5. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property
Private:
Public-Local: X
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property
Building(s): X
District:
Site:
Structure:
Object:

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing
1
1

Noncontributing
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:      social  
                  recreation & culture

Sub:      meeting hall  
            music facility

Current:      vacant

Sub:

### 7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: No Style

Materials:

Foundation: brick

Walls: wood (board and batten, weatherboards)

Roof: metal

Other:

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### Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Dew Drop Social and Benevolent Hall is a small wooden building built in 1895 in an African-American neighborhood of Mandeville. Shaded by large live oaks, it survives virtually unaltered.

A cornerstone bears testament to the founding of the "Dew Drop Social and Benevolent No. 2 of Mandeville" on May 5, 1885 by Olivia Eunio and the erection of the group's hall in 1895. The building was the meeting hall for the mutual assistance/social organization, as well as the venue for popular dances (see Part 8).

Much of the Dew Drop's appeal is its simple, unaltered state. Raised a couple of feet above grade on brick piers, the rectangular gable fronted building is sheathed in clapboards on the front and board and batten on the sides and rear. At first it might appear to have never been painted, but close inspection shows the remains of a green stain. Outlining the eaves is a sawtooth vergeboard on the front and a scalloped vergeboard elsewhere. Three large windows are located along each side elevation. The windows remain as they were originally – with no glass and protected by shutters. A large wooden double door pierces the front elevation at the center. An off-center single wooden door is found on the rear elevation.

Amazingly, the interior of the Dew Drop is largely pristine. In fact, the building has never been electrified. There is one large single space with walls of rough vertical boards, an exposed beam ceiling and a wooden floor. At the rear is a simple wooden stage which presumably has been replaced over the years. When the City of Mandeville acquired the building in early 2000, one corner had been partitioned off, which has since been removed. The benches along the side walls were about all gone. The present ones were built based upon what remained. The free-standing benches located in the middle of the room are not original, but are certainly in keeping with the overall simple character of the interior. The painted border with crosses encircling the interior undoubtedly dates from a more recent use of the building for religious purposes.

Certain clues in the Dew Drop's construction – most notably, changes in the floorboards and piers -- have led to speculation that the building originally had an open front porch which was filled in very early. If so, the board and batten and vergeboard were matched exactly – there is no break in either.

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### 8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National

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

Criteria Considerations NA

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

Areas of Significance:       social history; ethnic heritage (black)

Period(s) of Significance:   1895-c.1940

Significant Dates:           1895

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 Dew Drop Social and Benevolent Hall is of local significance as a major center of social life for African-Americans in the Mandeville area. It is also of significance within southern Louisiana as a rare surviving African-American benevolent association hall. Because all available evidence indicates that the building's heyday as a social center and benevolent association hall ended c.1940, that date is being used to end the period of significance.

Piecing together the history of the Dew Drop is hampered by the lack of written documentation and the fact that none of its members survive. Nor do many people who can give first-hand accounts of its early twentieth century heyday as a dance hall. According to newspaper reports, the group officially disbanded in 1980, when there were only five quite elderly members remaining. Fortunately, jazz historian Karl Koenig interviewed, in 1985, one the founders of the club, 94 year old Celeste Lee; her sister Lillian, age 99, the wife of a musician who played at the Dew Drop; and Ella May Payne, age 90. Transcripts from these interviews were reproduced in an article Koenig published. In preparing this nomination, the staff of the Division of Historic Preservation interviewed Regina Gordon, 97, who attended dances at the Dew Drop in its heyday.

Thus far scholarly and public attention has focused on the Dew Drop's dance hall and general social history. And, in fact, the group's name is typically seen in print simply as the Dew Drop Social Club. However, the cornerstone gives the name as the Dew Drop Social and Benevolent Hall, indicating that the organization was a benevolent association of the type found throughout New Orleans and South Louisiana beginning in the late nineteenth century. The history of these mutual assistance groups is yet to be written, but surviving documents and interviews provide the broad outline. Essentially a group of people banded together to provide assistance in times of need, most notably to pay for a proper burial. Charters were drawn up, providing for a dues structure, officers, and various membership requirements. Dues, and money raised from dances and other functions, were used to pay for members' funerals. Surviving charters also indicate a rigorous regimen for sitting up with sick members and attending to their needs (i.e., each member was required to put in so many hours). Benevolent associations operated under a wide variety of names. Among the most interesting are the Do Right in Geismar, Beauty Bright in Gonzales, and True Friends in Donaldsonville. Some were men's groups, some were women only, and others were both. All available evidence (admittedly fragmentary) indicates that the Dew Drop was either all female or heavily female in membership.

Historically there were hundreds of these groups in southern Louisiana, whether in New Orleans, in small towns, or serving a rural hamlet. Their halls ranged from large two story buildings (like True Friends in Donaldsonville) to small ones like the Dew Drop. Apparently benevolent associations, or societies, began their decline in the 1930s and '40s as the need for burial insurance was met by African-American owned insurance firms. As the old generation died, so went the benevolent associations. Today, relatively little survives to represent this immensely important institution in African-American life. The number of surviving halls in New Orleans is unknown. Elsewhere in South Louisiana there are only four known African-American benevolent association halls remaining: the Dew Drop in Mandeville, True Friends in Donaldsonville, Willow Grove in Wallace, and Do Right. The long abandoned Do-Right, in a "move it or lose it" situation in its original Geismar location, was relocated within the last few years by the River Road

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African-American Museum.

Benevolent association history aside, the Dew Drop is best known as a popular social venue for African-Americans in the Mandeville area. As early member Celeste Lee recalled, "The hall was the center of our social life." She continued: "Many things went on in that hall. It was used for anniversaries, entertainments, and concerts. The most popular event were [sic] the balls and dances. . . . I remember the dances. They were my favorite. . . . The bands in those days played all kinds of music; waltzes and everything, but my favorites were the lively jazz numbers. I liked to dance to them. We even gave 'penny parties' to help the society."

Lee's sister, 99 at the time of the interview, recalled other social events:

"The dances at the dance hall were fun times. There was all kinds of fun . . . . There was an event that was called a Tamarama, a musical vaudeville revue like a local talent show. It was real popular. Four of us girls would make look-alike dresses and wear them to the hall. I remember one was pink with frills and laces. My parents made sure that us young girls left the hall by midnight, even though the dance would always last until almost daylight. I remember the delicious gumbo and cakes we served at the dances."

Ella May Payne, born in 1895, reiterated Celeste Lee's comments about the Dew Drop being "the social center for blacks in Mandeville." She continued: "The Negroes were very social minded and the Dew Drop was always having some kind of affair. In 1928 it was going strong and very active." In recollecting some of the bands that played in the area, she observed that black bands played a "different style" for white audiences. "Then when they played at the Dew Drop they played 'hot'— you could really dance to that music."

Regina Gordon, 97, who was interviewed for this nomination, revealed that the Dew Drop had a wider audience than just Mandeville. As a teenager and young adult (late teens/1920s), while living in nearby Covington, she and a group of friends delighted in renting a flivver to make the trip to Mandeville and dance the night away at the Dew Drop. When asked if there was a similar facility in Covington, she said yes. When asked, "Then why the Dew Drop?" she gleefully replied that it was the thrill of a trip in what was then not a common item – the automobile. In short, piling into a car with a gang of friends and going to the Dew Drop was a special outing.

Additional research remains to be done to fully document the jazz history of the Dew Drop, although pioneering work has been done by Karl Koenig, as mentioned above. The building hosted jazz luminaries such as Buddy Petit and his band, famous trombonist Bunk Johnson, and Kid Ory, among others. Some were locals and others crossed Lake Pontchartrain from New Orleans to play various venues on the North Shore.

When the Dew Drop ceased being a dance hall is unknown. Its heyday apparently was the 1920s and '30s. As noted above, the organization formally disbanded in 1980, with only five members. As Celeste Lee, among the original members, recalled: "The social club just dwindled away and the young people weren't interested in those kinds of activities – we couldn't even get a quorum for meetings."

Emma Cade Badie, Celeste Lee's niece, bought the building in 1981. In 1993 Jacqueline Vidrine purchased it from Ms. Badie's succession. In recent years the Dew Drop's future was less than secure.

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Various people were interested in buying the building, but seemingly always with relocation and new uses in mind. Happily, the City of Mandeville purchased the Dew Drop in early 2000 and is committed to leaving it in the old neighborhood and retaining its original character. Plans for its use have not crystallized.

Jazz was played at the Dew Drop for the first time in probably over 50 years when in April 2000 a four-hour recording session was held there under the sponsorship of the National Park Service, the New Orleans Jazz Commission, and the George Buck Foundation. As Richard Boyd wrote in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, the spirits of former jazz greats who played the Dew Drop “were probably in abundance as the all-star band opened with ‘Walking Through the Streets of the City.’ ” In attendance were about 100 European jazz musicians and enthusiasts, who danced and second-lined. The Dew Drop was once again rocking.



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### 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Sanborn Insurance Company maps, Mandeville, 1926, 1941.

Gordon, Regina. Interview with Donna Fricker, LA Division of Historic Preservation, May 31, 2000.

Hambrick, Kathe. Interview with Donna Fricker, June 2000. Ms. Hambrick is director of the River Road African-American Museum and has various benevolent association items in her collection.

Koenig, Karl. "Dew Drop Dance Hall." Originally appearing in the winter 1986 issue of *The Second Line*, the publication of the New Orleans Jazz Club, this invaluable article with interview excerpts, is reprinted in *Mandeville on the Lake: A Sesquicentennial Album, 1840-1990*, edited by Howard Nicholls, published by the St. Tammany Historical Society, Inc., 1990.

Boyd, Richard. "Jazz project revives spirit of Dew Drop." *The Times-Picayune*, April 19, 2000.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

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

Previously Listed in the National Register.

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     782400   3361660

Verbal Boundary Description:

Legal Property Description: Lot 8, square 16, City of Mandeville, Louisiana, said lot measuring 64 feet wide by a depth of 202 feet.

Boundary Justification:

Boundaries follow the property lines of the lot historically associated with the building.

### 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: June 2000

### PROPERTY OWNERS

City of Mandeville  
3101 East Causeway Approach  
Mandeville, LA 70448

504-626-3144