

PH# 365084

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	OCT 18 1976
DATE ENTERED	APR 13 1977

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

**

HISTORIC Palo Alto Plantation

AND/OR COMMON
Palo Alto

2 LOCATION Wof Donaldsonville on LA 1

STREET & NUMBER Highway 1 at the junction of Highway 944
3 miles south of Donaldsonville

CITY, TOWN	Donaldsonville	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> VICINITY OF	8th - Gillis Long
STATE	Louisiana	CODE	22
		COUNTY	Ascension
		CODE	005

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Arthur A. Lemann, Jr.

STREET & NUMBER P. O. Box 30

CITY, TOWN Donaldsonville VICINITY OF Louisiana

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Ascension Parish Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER Houmas Street

CITY, TOWN Donaldsonville STATE Louisiana

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE None known

DATE
— FEDERAL — STATE — COUNTY — LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Palo Alto House faces in an easterly direction toward Bayou Lafourche and is set about two hundred feet back from the highway, the property extending to the bayou bank. It stands near the center of about seven acres of informally landscaped grounds, which include many large live oak, pecan, magnolia, cypress and other trees, a sturdily structured, well preserved nineteenth century stable and various garden features.

The main house is a one and a half story structure raised about four feet above grade on brick piers with a chain wall along the front. It is gabled at the side, with two dormers on either slope of the roof. A twelve foot wide "front gallery" or porch is recessed beneath the gabled roof. It's deep entablature returns along the depth of the gallery. Two chimneys, each with four flues, are set at the peak of the gable. The roof, originally cypress shingled, is now v-jointed metal. The side walls are cypress clapboarded over framing of cypress timber, filled with brick. The interior walls are also of brick, probably with similar wood framing. This structural scheme, a survival from early French colonial practices, was known locally as briquetè-entre-poteaux. The front wall, originally plastered as was the porch ceiling, was covered with clapboards at some unknown time and is now again plastered. The one time plastered porch ceiling has been left in its revised state, tongue and grooved boarding.

An accessory structure or service wing, similarly roofed and also with a recessed porch is placed about twenty-five feet to the south of the main house. An extension of its front porch made an open, roofed connection with the main house, but this is now enclosed and made into a kitchen.

The style of the house might be called "Carpenter's Greek Revival". Six box columns across the front, slightly tapered and panelled, are detailed with heavy moldings of severe rather flattened profile. Similar moldings prevail throughout.

A central platform projecting beyond the porch with symmetrical stairs is a restoration of the original front stair arrangement. The main doorway and the flanking openings, two on each side, are framed in the characteristic Greek Revival manner with a laterally projecting cross member at the top and a corresponding break in the surrounding molding. The central door has a single panel and is surrounded by clear glazed lights, octagonally shaped both in the transom and side lights. The flanking openings are transomed with glazed and panelled French doors opening inward and batten blinds that are panelled on their inner faces. Similar blinds protect the first and second floor side windows, double hung sash with twelve over twelve lights on the first floor and nine lights on the second floor.

Near the rear of the north side of the house is a projecting gabled box-like entry into a cellar space, its small openings in brick walling secured with iron bars.

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The first floor has four 19.5 ft. x 19.5 ft. rooms flanking a 12 foot wide central hall. Ceilings are 14 feet high. Flooring, in random widths, and other woodwork are of cypress. All four rooms have identical mantelpieces, massive and of simple design, similar in character to the front door frames, tapered at the sides with a jog in the molding near the top.

Cornice and ceiling plaster work is unusually rich for an otherwise severely detailed house. The central hall has a cornice ornamented with Greek palmettes, below which is a cove filled with a rinceau motif in high relief and below this the frieze is punctuated with spaced rosettes. Identical rinceaux are in the two front rooms, which also have a knotted rope decoration around the ceiling. All four rooms have leafed medallions at the center of the ceiling. There are two leafed medallions in the central hall.

Three openings, one leading from the rear end of the central hall and one from each of the flanking rooms, have glazed French doors similar to those at the front of the house. They confirm the assumption that the twelve foot wide rear space was once an open "gallery". A window and shutter sealed up in a wall at the south end of this space and revealed during a renovation suggest that the rear "gallery" had been at one time flanked by two small spaces called cabinets in the typical plan of the French Colonial house type, a type that continued into the first two decades of the nineteenth century until the introduction of central halls. If this were the case here, such an arrangement would be a survival in a later house type. The longitudinal space across the rear of the house, at one time enclosed with tongue and groove walling and sash windows, was reworked in 1955, in a manner more compatible with the character of the house, with three wide transomed and glazed openings with French doors leading into the rear yard. At this time the stair at the north end of this space was restored, its original walnut baluster and newel put back in place. The wall that had separated the stair from the once opened gallery was removed at this time, making the stair a visible part of the longitudinal rear space of the house.

Four upstairs rooms 15 ft. x 24 ft. are placed four-square without a corridor. Mantelpieces and doors are plain. In each room a door leads to an alcove-like space with two steps up to each dormer window. Deteriorated plaster walls were completely replastered in 1955 and three bathrooms were accommodated under the roof slope at the corners of the house.

A walnut stairway dismantled from a Donaldsonville building of 1877 by James Freret, architect, was introduced in the first of the four upstairs rooms to give easy access to the attic space. In style it is similar to the stair from the first to second floor. Windows were introduced in the attic space near the peak of each gable.

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The service wing has six chamfered posts at the front and two major rooms, each with large fireplace openings, high shallow mantelpiece shelves and brick hearths, one which extends seven feet into the flooring. Partitions of rough boarding were removed when spaces were rearranged for living purposes. This wing was at one time a kitchen structure. When walls were replastered, old insulating material of mud and moss was unavoidably lost.

Other accessory structures on the grounds are of more recent date. These include servants quarters built in 1955 (located 50 feet south of the old kitchen) and a barn or stable which was built sometime during the second half of the 19th century (located between the 1955 servants quarters and the old kitchen, but to the rear of these structures). Accompanying photographs show the relationship of these buildings to each other and to the main house.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Palo Alto House is a characteristic example of the type of large cottage or substantial but relatively small plantation residence prevalent throughout the lower south, and particularly in Louisiana in the decade preceding the Civil War. It is among very few surviving examples that are represented in topographical views of rural buildings by a local artist of that period, Adrien Persac. The house has remained in continuous occupancy and in good repair, with few modifications.

No record of the builder or the exact date of construction has been found. A reasonable approximation, shortly before or after 1850, would be suggested by a combination of the building style, family and courthouse records, the Persac painting, all slightly supported by a hint in the place name.

The property was acquired on March 13, 1852 by Pierre Oscar Ayraud and his wife, nee Rosalie Rodriguez, from the succession of Mathias Rodriguez, the latter's father. The official document does not describe the dwelling that is mentioned among improvements on the land. It might have been built by Mathias Rodreguez or it might have been built by Ayraud after acquiring the land. When the plantation was mortgaged by Ayraud on February 21, 1860, to Jacob Lemann, the dwelling house is specifically listed, and is later described with measurements, type roof, etc. and therefore identified.

The style of architectural detailing, especially as seen in the character of molding profiles, has a heavy, emphatic and planar quality that developed following the refinement and delicacy in scale of the early phase of Greek Revival in Louisiana in the 1830's. Although the heavy character definitely suggests the 1840's, the elaborations of interior plaster work seem to anticipate the victorianisms of later phases of the Greek Revival in the 1850's. The absence of coal grates, cast iron, and rococo revival detail points to a time anterior to their popularity in the late 1850's. Also, there is no Italianate detail that sometimes accompanied the very late Greek Revival places in Louisiana.

Adrien Persac (1823-1873), a native of France, active (circa 1850-1873) as an architect, engineer, cartographer, lithographer and artist, is remembered best for his engraved chart of all properties along the Mississippi River from Natchez to New Orleans, dated 1858, as well as for his fifteen or twenty surviving paintings of antebellum sites.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Bacot, H. Parrott (ed.). The Louisiana Landscape 1800-1869 (exhibition catalogue).
Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1969, nos. 8,9 (text on
Persac) and no. 2 of "Decorative Arts."
Lemann, Bernard (ed.). The Lemann Family of Louisiana. Donaldsonville, La.:
1965, pp. 37-42.
Marchand, Sidney A. The Story of Ascension Parish. Donaldsonville, La.:
1931, p. 67

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 7 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A

1	5
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6	8	9	7	5	0
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3	3	3	0	3	5	0
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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Bernard, Peter and Arthur A. Lemann, Jr.

ORGANIZATION

DATE

August 1976

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

P. O. Box 30

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Donaldsonville

Louisiana

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

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.

~~REPRESENTATIVE~~ SIGNATURE

Ruth S. DeCompte

TITLE Asst. SHPO

DATE October 11, 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

CHIEF

DATE

4/13/77

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

30.18.77

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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The scale figures in his typical gouache painting of Palo Alto, which are cut-out engravings pasted on according to his custom, are costumed in the style that was fashionable in Paris about 1855. This detail helps to confirm the tentative dating based on architectural style. The painting is presently in Palo Alto house, inherited by the present owner via his mother, a grand-daughter of Pierre Oscar Ayraud. Only in one other known instance, "Shadows-on-the-Teche" - a National Trust property, is a Persac original located inside the corresponding house.

An odd circumstance of the place name may be worthy of mention as possibly bearing out the presumed dating. The Spanish language is in conspicuous contrast to the Indian, French or very English titles of Louisiana rural names such as the "Oaks", "Elms", "Magnolias", or the "Belles", this or that. This Spanish name could have been influenced by the battle in the Mexican War, May 8, 1846, where militia from Louisiana and Texas were led by General Zachary Taylor. Only two other Spanish plantation names, other than family names, are noted in Louisiana, Buena Vista and Contreras. All three names figure in the series of Carl Nebel's color lithographs of Mexican War Battles, issued in Paris in 1851.

Palo Alto and the adjacent plantation St. Emma, were the site of a Civil War episode, part of a series of engagements in which 465 Union men were lost. St. Emma was a property of Charles Koch. Sidney A. Marchand in his "Story of Ascension Parish" quotes from a report of Col. J. M. Millan, dated September 25, 1862, in which the Colonel describes a series of skirmishes in the Donaldsonville-Bayou Lafourche vicinity, and mentions the billeting of men at sugar warehouses of "Aro and Cox". (Misspelling of Ayraud and Koch).

Palo Alto plantation has varied in size from about 440 to 3300 acres and is now administered corporately exclusive of the main residence and grounds. It is associated with agricultural developments in the State, in that it was one of about ten properties in single ownership (see map) cultivating and processing sugar--one of the two or three largest such combinations in the period between the Civil War and World War I.

Because Palo Alto is one of the finest examples of the classical cottage with holdovers from the French Colonial period, because it is one of the few remaining houses documented in a Persac painting, and because of the plantation's role in the sugar industry, it has significance for the state of Louisiana as a whole.

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PAGE 2

Notarial Archives, Ascension Parish Courthouse, Donaldsonville, Louisiana.

The Daily Comet, Thibodaux, Louisiana, October 21, 1970, p. 4.

The Donaldsonville Chief, Donaldsonville, Louisiana, August 17, 1972, p. 11C.