Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC
New Orleans Cotton Exchange Building

AND/OR COMMON
New Orleans Cotton Exchange Building

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
231 Carondelet Street — NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN
New Orleans — VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
2

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
Louisiana	22	Orleans	071

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	__PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
X BUILDING(S)	X PRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	X COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	__YES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Lowe Investments (Contact: Mr. C. Guy Lowe, Jr.)

STREET & NUMBER
231 Carondelet Street

CITY, TOWN
New Orleans — VICINITY OF

STATE
Louisiana

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Conveyance Office, Civil Courts Building, City Hall Complex

STREET & NUMBER
Loyola and Poydras Streets

CITY, TOWN
New Orleans

STATE
Louisiana

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
None

DATE

__FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
__EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	__UNALTERED	X_ORIGINAL SITE
XGOOD	__RUINS	X_ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
__FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Since 1921 this eight-story, steel-framed, stone structure has headquartered the New Orleans Cotton Exchange. Located at 231 Carondelet Street, in the heart of the city's business district, this edifice occupies the site of an earlier cotton exchange building in use from 1883 to 1920. Not only is it the only extant cotton exchange structure in New Orleans, but it is the only known edifice associated with Henry G. Hester, its long-time secretary.

When the New Orleans Cotton Exchange was organized in 1871, it was located in a few rented rooms in a building on Carondelet Street. Because these quarters were cramped, the exchange soon contracted with John Hawkins to build an office building at Gravier Street and Theater Alley and agreed to rent it from him for $4,000 per year. By the early 1880's, the exchange again was hampered by a shortage of space, and the members decided to purchase land and construct their own building.

Soon, a site at the corner of Carondelet and Gravier had been purchased, and construction was underway on a new office. By 1883 the new building had been completed and was so ornate that it was soon dubbed the "Cotton Palace." Although this five-story structure was adequate for the exchange's trading activities, it eventually developed serious structural problems. Constructed before pile foundations had come into general use, the heavy building's walls eventually began to crack. Later, when the city established an underground drainage system, the situation worsened, rendering the exchange building unsafe.

Shortly after World War I, the members of the exchange decided to construct a new building on the site. The New Orleans architectural firm of Favrot and Livaudais, Limited, was hired to design a suitable replacement structure. Originally a 16-story edifice was planned, but apparently the unsettled economic conditions of the early 1920's caused a change in plans. At any rate, the old exchange building was razed in 1920, and construction was started on the present structure by the Selden-Breck Construction Company. While the new building was being completed, the exchange found temporary quarters on Common Street near Baronne Street. Finally, in 1921 the new building, constructed at a cost of $1,222,520, was ready for occupancy. The exchange continued to own and operate the building until the early 1960's when the cotton futures market virtually dried up. In 1962 the membership decided to sell it, and shortly afterward it was sold to outside interests. The New Orleans Cotton Exchange still maintains its office here, however.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	X AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	__ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
X 1800-1899	X COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
X 1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES Site: 1882-present
Building: 1921-present

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Selden-Breck Construction Co.
Favrot & Livaudais Limited

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of the New Orleans Cotton Exchange is threefold. First, from the 1870's until well into the 1920's, it was, according to historian L. Tuffly Ellis, "the principal spot market of the world and . . . a leading futures market, outranked only by Liverpool and New York."[1] Because most of the cotton sold on the New Orleans Cotton Exchange was stored in the city and ready for immediate delivery, it made New Orleans, says economic historian James E. Boyle, "the great primary market of the world" and the Nation's leading cotton port.[2]

Second, the exchange is significant because of its long-time association with Henry G. Hester. Beginning in the 1870's Hester, says Ellis, "used his position as secretary to develop a system of gathering crop information that became internationally accepted in areas trading in American cotton and resulted in his being recognized as the "'Father of Cotton Statistics."'[3] This information greatly helped to reduce risks, and according to Boyle, it is in this area "that the New Orleans Cotton Exchange has made its greatest contribution to the marketing of cotton."[4] For many years, Hester published a newspaper column, "The Hester Report," which was carried in several hundred newspapers in the United States as well as papers in Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Italy, Egypt, India, and Japan.

(continued)

[1]L. Tuffly Ellis, "The New Orleans Cotton Exchange: The Formative Years, 1871-1880," Journal of Southern History, XXXIX (November, 1973), 547.

[2]James E. Boyle, Cotton and the New Orleans Cotton Exchange: A Century of Commercial Evolution (Garden City, 1934), 23.

[3]Ellis, "The New Orleans Cotton Exchange," Journal of Southern History, XXXIX (November, 1973), 548.

[4]Boyle, Cotton and the New Orleans Cotton Exchange, 7.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See continuation sheet.)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	15	782670	3311690	B			
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary of the nominated property coincides with the boundary of the legal lot known as 231 Carondelet Street, New Orleans, Louisiana.

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

Ralph J. Christian, Historian, Historic Landmarks Project

ORGANIZATION — DATE

American Association for State and Local History — June 1977

STREET & NUMBER — TELEPHONE

1400 Eighth Avenue South — 615/242-5583

CITY OR TOWN — STATE

Nashville, — Tennessee 37203

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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE — DATE

104

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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Designed in a somewhat restrained Commercial style, this southeastwardly facing, steel-framed, stone structure follows the traditional Renaissance division of a building into base, body, and top. The three-story base rests on wood pilings and features a full basement with most of its original mechanical equipment still intact. The first story of the base is dressed with rusticated granite and has rectangular-shaped window and door openings. What was formerly the main entrance at the corner of Carondelet and Gravier features architrave trim, is decorated with stone carvings, and is capped with a triangular pediment. A decorated stone course separates the first and second stories. The second and third floor cotton trading area is set off by the use of a heavy stone entablature at the base of the fourth story and by large rounded arches separated by smooth-faced stone pilasters, which not only provide window openings but create an arcaded effect as well.

Stories four through six comprise the body of the building. Exterior ornamentation in this section, which is dressed with smooth-faced stone, is minimal except for carved and decorated slipsills. The double-hung windows are of the one-over-one wood sash variety and are set in rectangular surrounds. The vertical piers of this section rise uninterrupted to the top of the sixth floor where they culminate in a heavy stone entablature.

The crown consists of stories seven and eight. In this section, the arcaded effect of the trading floor area is repeated again, probably because of the architect's desire to emphasize the great importance of the eighth floor cotton grading area. Ornamentation is provided by fanlighted windows, decorated spandrels, and a gigantic, overhanging, ornately decorated copper cornice which crowns the roofline. The concrete slab roof is covered with tar and gravel and features skylights which provide additional lighting to the cotton grading area.

Inside, the building has been altered extensively. Only the fourth floor cotton exchange office, in which Hester labored some 15 years, has undergone little change and still features marble wainscoting and dark woodwork. The exchange's board room with its Dresden China ceiling, marble fireplace, mahogany-covered walls, ornate chandelier, and original furnishings appears almost exactly as it did during the exchange's heyday. Almost all traces of the

original trading area have been obliterated, and the cotton grading area on the upper level is presently being converted into executive offices and living quarters.

The present owner is now in the process of spending approximately $1.6 million to upgrade the structure's interior and make it more suitable for tenants. The exchange board room on the fourth floor, however, will be left alone and allowed to serve as a fitting memorial to the building's original purpose. The structure's exterior appears to be virtually unchanged except for the addition of metal window frames in some first floor areas. Overall, the structure's condition is very good, and it is well maintained.

Finally, the New Orleans Cotton Exchange is a representative manifestation of the New South movement, whereby commercially-minded Southerners sought to adapt themselves to the economic changes wrought by Civil War and Reconstruction in the hope of bringing their region into the national mainstream. By the 1870's cotton traders and merchants, aware that the old trade patterns were gone, "began organizing themselves," says Ellis, "to control as well as possible the cotton areas tributary to their markets. By far the most important and successful of the new commercial institutions developed in the South to accomodate the traders in the changing economic order was the New Orleans Cotton Exchange."[5]

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History

Although the New Orleans Cotton Exchange was not organized until 1871, cotton had been the leading commodity traded in the city for many years. As early as 1800, as much as 200,000 pounds of the fiber were being exported annually, and with the spread of cotton cultivation into the southwest early in the nineteenth century, this trickle became a flood. Between 1840 and 1860 New Orleans, says historian Audrey Sherman, was "unrivaled as a cotton market," and between 800,000 and 1 million bales were exported annually through its port facilities.[6] During this period, the actual buying and selling of cotton was conducted by factors or commission merchants who not only handled cotton transactions but often acted as financial agents for individual planters.

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[5]Ellis, "The New Orleans Cotton Exchange," Journal of Southern History, XXXIX (November, 1973), 546-47.

[6]Audrey Sherman, "The History of the New Orleans Cotton Exchange, 1871-1914," M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1934.

The Civil War and its aftermath disrupted these marketing arrangements, bringing financial ruin to many of the city's leading cotton factors. Also, construction of railroads in the interior began to take general trade away from New Orleans as well. At the same time, the city's reputation was being blackened by an increasing chorus of complaints on the part of planters and farmers about fraudulent weighing practices, the damaging of cotton after its arrival, and outright theft. By the early 1870's, the New Orleans cotton market was clearly deteriorating.

As early as 1867, an attempt was made to remedy the situation with the establishment of a Merchant's Exchange. It failed, however, because it was made up of representatives of all the city's commercial interests and lacked purpose. On January 17, 1871, 18 of the city's leading cotton merchants met and decided to create a New Orleans Cotton Exchange. Although they had only vague ideas about how such an institution should function, they met one week later and adopted a constitution. On February 6, the members elected officers, and two weeks later it formally opened for business.

"The emergence of the New Orleans Cotton Exchange to a position of preeminence among southern commercial institutions," according to Ellis, "was due in no small way to its first superintendent and long-time secretary Henry G. Hester."[7] Hester, who was only 25 when he became the exchange's chief administrative officer, had already won distinction as a financial reporter for two New Orleans newspapers, the Price Current and the Daily Picayune, and for some time had been urging the creation of such an organization in the city. At the outset, Hester set three goals for the new exchange. First, it was to become the leading center for market information and statistics; second, it was to be an exchange where spot and future trading went hand-in-hand; and finally, it was to spearhead a movement for better grades and standards.

Hester achieved his greatest success in the achievement of his first goal. He developed "a system of gathering crop information," says Ellis, "that became internationally accepted in areas trading in American cotton and resulted in his being recognized as the "'Father of Cotton Statistics."'[8] Hester's

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[7]Ellis, "The New Orleans Cotton Exchange," Journal of Southern History, XXXIX (November, 1973), 548.

[8]Ibid.

information helped reduce risks, and according to Boyle, it is in this area of endeavor "that the New Orleans Cotton Exchange has made its greatest contribution to the marketing of cotton."[9] For many years, Hester published a newspaper column, "The Hester Report," which was carried in several hundred newspapers in the United States as well as papers in Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Italy, Egypt, India, and Japan.

Hester was also successful in making the exchange a place where spot and futures trading went hand-in-hand. From the 1870's until well into the 1920's, says Ellis, it was "the principal spot market of the world and . . . a leading futures market, outranked only by Liverpool and New York."[10] Because most of the cotton sold on the New Orleans Cotton Exchange was stored in the city and ready for immediate delivery, it made New Orleans, according to Boyle, "the great primary market of the world" and the Nation's leading cotton port.[11]

Hester met with somewhat less success with his movement for better grades and standards for cotton. Although he was able to get the New Orleans Cotton Exchange to adopt rather rigorous rules in this area, he failed to convince other exchanges to follow in his stead. Uniform standards would not be imposed until the passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1916, and it covered only cotton sold in futures trading.

By the time Hester retired in 1933, after a 62-year tenure as secretary, the New Orleans Cotton Exchange had begun a slow but steady decline. Spot trading decreased due to competition from Houston and Galveston which were closer to the westwardly shifting cotton growing area. Although the exchange continued to rank next to New York and Liverpool in cotton futures trading for some years, by the late 1950's the cotton futures market

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[9]Boyle, Cotton and the New Orleans Cotton Exchange, 7.

[10]Ellis, "The New Orleans Cotton Exchange," Journal of Southern History, XXXIX (November, 1973), 547.

[11]Boyle, Cotton and the New Orleans Cotton Exchange, 23.

had virtually dried up due to the efforts of the Federal Government to stabilize the price of cotton. In 1962 the exchange sold its building, and 2 years later became inactive. Today the exchange operates in a small suite of rented offices in its former building, providing information to its members but conducting no trading. At present there has been some discussion of reactivating the exchange, but talks apparently have not gotten beyond the preliminary stage.

Continuation Sheet New Orleans Cotton Item No. 9 Page one

Boyle, James E., Cotton and the New Orleans Cotton Exchange: A Century of Commercial Evolution (Garden City: Country Life Press, 1934).

Ellis, L. Tuffly, "The New Orleans Cotton Exchange: The Formative Years, 1871-1880," Journal of Southern History, XXXIX (November, 1973), 545-64.

Engelhardt, George W., New Orleans Louisiana: The Crescent City (New Orleans:George W. Engelhardt, 1904).

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Kendall, John S., History of New Orleans, Vol. II (Chicago and New York, 1922).

New Orleans Cotton Exchange, New Orleans Cotton Exchange (New Orleans: New Orleans Cotton Exchange, undated).

New Orleans States-Item, March 14, 1962.

New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 25, 1937.

Sherman, Audrey, "The History of the New Orleans Cotton Exchange, 1871-1914," M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1934.