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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-96a

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

ST. JOSEPH PLANTATION HOUSE, ST. JAMES 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: St. Joseph Plantation House

JUL 29 2005

Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number 3535 LA HWY 18

Not for publication: NA

City/Town Vacherie

Vicinity: X

State: Louisiana

Code: LA

County: St. James

Code: 093

Zip Code: 70090

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: X Locally:

Jonathan Fricker

July 28, 2005

Signature of Certifying Official/Title Jonathan Fricker Deputy SHPO, Dept of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

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
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain): _____

For Edson H. Beall
Signature of Keeper

9/6/05
Date of Action

5. CLASSIFICATION

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

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

Number of Resources within Property
 Contributing
2

Non contributing
3 buildings
 _____ sites
 _____ structures
 _____ objects
 _____ Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: Louisiana's French Creole Architecture

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Domestic Sub: Single Dwelling
Current: Recreation and Culture Sub: Museum

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Other: French Creole; Greek Revival

Materials:

Foundation: Brick
Walls: Brick, Weatherboard
Roof: Metal
Other:

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

One of the major plantation houses on the Great River Road between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, St. Joseph (c. 1840) stands on the Mississippi's west bank above Vacherie in St. James Parish. A large raised Creole plantation house with Greek Revival detailing, the two-story house features *brique-entre-poteaux* (brick-between-posts) construction. Its architectural integrity has not been compromised by the post-mid-nineteenth century alterations it has received.

St. Joseph is the largest type of French Creole plantation house built in Louisiana. The *premier etage* (principal living space) is a full story above grade. The brick basement story is enclosed. A double gallery spans the façade, while the rear has the typical *cabinet-loggia* range on each level. The floor plan of the *premiere etage* is unusual for a French Creole plantation house. It is symmetrical, containing a central hall with a four-room suite on each side. Each suite consists of two rooms facing the front and two facing the rear.

According to Dr. Jay Edwards of Louisiana State University, who has made a study of the methods Creoles used to enlarge their houses, dwellings as large as St. Joseph and with similar room configurations are often the result of expansions involving the enclosure of side galleries. However, the architectural evidence indicates that the upper story was built all of a piece. The detailing is similar throughout and the side rooms are too wide for the areas to have previously been galleries.

Creole architectural features found within St. Joseph include:

1. a Class III hipped umbrella roof (see Louisiana's French Creole Architecture Multiple Property nomination form).

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2. elevation of the *premier etage* (primary living space) a full story above ground level.
3. a fourteen inch thick, common bond brick basement story which is mainly utilitarian in finish and appearance. The front rooms feature fireplaces and some indication that they were intended for human habitation. The rear range of rooms merely feature chimney supports and were obviously always utilitarian. The exterior of the basement has been painted for at least 50 years. A few of the lower floor's interior brick walls, although old, look as if they might have been added after the original construction.
4. *brique-entre-poteaux* upper floor walls eight inches thick.
5. the previously mentioned rear *cabinet/loggia ranges* on both levels. The downriver *cabinet* contains a winding staircase that ascends from the ground story to the unfinished attic. This may have been the home's only staircase originally.
6. gallery and *loggia* columns reflecting the Creole tradition of using slender upper story wooden columns and thick lower story brick piers. (Corner pilasters on the upper level match the second story columns.)
7. wooden rods to support privacy curtains on the upper gallery, indicating use of this area as an outdoor living space.
8. exposed ceiling beams on the downstairs gallery and in one downstairs room.
9. French doors accompanied by transoms. Each door on the upper level contains three lights above a molded panel. Also paneled, the French doors on the lower floor contain six lights (three large and three small). Although not a Creole feature, all the French doors are accompanied by paneled shutters.

In addition to the previously mentioned central hall floor plan and accompanying symmetrical façade, the influence of Anglo-American architecture on St. Joseph is seen in its Greek Revival features. These include:

1. the treatment of the upper floor columns and corner pilasters on the front gallery and rear *cabinet/loggia* range. These are boxed -- the vernacular builder's version of a classical column. They rise from bases and feature necking below molded capitals mimicking the Doric order.
2. elaborate exterior door surrounds encasing the double doors of the front and rear central entrances on the upper story. In each, an inner surround is composed of pilasters with simple bases, necking, and capitals identical to those decorating the gallery and *loggia* columns. The pilaster capitals support a molded entablature that, in turn, underlies a four-pane transom. An outer surround consists of larger pilasters with decoratively molded outer edges. These bear a shoulder-molded lintel. Three pane sidelights above a molded wooden base fill the spaces between the inner and outer pilasters. A low pediment above the shoulder-molded lintel finishes the design.

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3. the decoration of the six dormers (three in front and three at the rear) piercing the hipped umbrella roof. Each displays pilasters with necking and molded capitals, the latter supporting a pediment with raking cornice. (The louvers in the windows aid in ventilating the attic and are removable.)
4. the interior woodwork, including molded and beaded door and window surrounds, molded baseboards, and simple upper floor mantels. These consist of pilasters with molded bases and unmolded capitals. The latter support unadorned entablatures.

As previously mentioned, St. Joseph has experienced some alteration since the mid-nineteenth century. The most important of the changes is the recent construction of a new staircase (part of a rehabilitation project) accessing the rear upper *loggia*. For many years twin stairs located on the lower *loggia* serviced this area. However, architectural evidence in the form of brick foundations showed that at one time a central stair rose from the ground beyond the lower *loggia* to the second level. Yet, central staircases are not part of the Creole building tradition and were generally added to raised plantation houses around the turn of the twentieth century. After consultation with an archaeologist and an architectural historian from the State Historic Preservation Office, St. Joseph's owners removed the under-*loggia* stairs and extended the central portion of the upper *loggia* outward to form a landing. They then constructed stairs rising to the landing from both sides.

Other changes since c. 1840 include:

1. insertion of coal inserts into all fire boxes,
2. replacement of one upper floor Greek Revival mantel with a late nineteenth century Italianate mantel,
3. subdivision of the rear upper and lower-floor rooms adjacent to the hall on the downriver side to provide for interior stairs. According to a member of the family, this alteration took place in the 1920s. The stairs are obviously constructed of salvaged parts.
4. placement of a bathroom in the second floor upriver *cabinet*, the construction of a small additional water closet on the upper *loggia* next to the converted *cabinet/bath*,
5. insertion of a bathroom and kitchen facilities in a downstairs rear room,
6. addition of screen to all the exterior doors,
7. faux painting of the second floor interior's woodwork c. 1995 when a movie was filmed at the house.
8. cutting down of the first story French doors and associated frames near the bottom. This most likely occurred in the mid-twentieth century when a three-inch thick concrete floor was installed over the original floor.
9. replacement of a few rotten posts in the frame.

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As previously mentioned, the post-1840 changes to St. Joseph have had little impact on the architectural integrity of the house. Although the construction of the new rear landing and staircases cannot be proven to replicate the configuration that once existed, the work certainly reflects what was typical for the time and place. As one of the small number of surviving grand antebellum plantation houses gracing Louisiana's River Road, and as a landmark example of a raised Creole plantation house, St. Joseph is an outstanding candidate for National Register listing.

Additional buildings within nominated acreage:

Two buildings are located close to St. Joseph's main house on the upriver side, and two even closer on the downriver side. Oral tradition indicates that buildings were moved around on the property over the years (which is typical). One suspects that the two buildings standing very close to the front corner of the house (numbers 1 and 2 below) are not in original locations.

- (1) late nineteenth/early twentieth century kitchen. This small wood frame building has an ell-shaped gallery and exposed walls on the interior. Oral tradition indicates that it was a kitchen. Because the location at the front corner of the main house is most unusual, one suspects that the building was moved here. For this reason, it is being counted as non-contributing for the purposes of this nomination.
- (2) This tiny one-room wood frame cottage is located very close to the above named kitchen. It too appears to have been moved to this location and is being counted as non-contributing.
- (3) This medium size wood frame shed with two doors is of unknown use. Clearly historic but of indeterminable date, it is being counted as a contributing element because it is illustrative of the type of dependencies that were once common around plantation houses.
- (4) non-contributing garage.

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: c. 1840

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Significant Dates: c. 1840

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Unknown

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

St. Joseph Plantation House is significant at the state level in the area of architecture because it is a rare surviving example of the grand antebellum plantation homes which one lined Louisiana's Great River Road between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. It is also significant at the state level as a landmark example of the raised Creole plantation house, which was the ultimate expression of French architecture in Louisiana. Finally, St. Joseph is significant at the state level because of its particularly rare floor plan showing the influence of the Anglo-American upon the French architectural tradition.

Architecturally, Louisiana is known for its fine collection of large and impressive antebellum plantation homes. The majority of these are located on the historic River Road between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. They represent the absolute apex of the plantation culture in Louisiana. Some date to the colonial era and others to the thirty years prior to the Civil War when sugar cane cultivation generated immense wealth. Although found in the French Creole, Greek Revival and Italianate styles, all share two characteristics. The first is their sheer size – all are monumental two-story buildings which dominate their settings. The second shared feature is the presence of broad, pillared double galleries which sometimes encircle the house. The columns may be monumental, in which case they rise to the roofline in one continuous shaft, or a separate series of columns may be found on each level. No one will ever know the exact number of these houses which once existed on the River Road. However, an 1858 map of Mississippi River land holdings and historic photographs of now lost examples suggest that many more once existed than have survived. Today, only fifteen of these majestic River Road landmarks remain -- five in the French Creole style, two in the Italianate, and eight in the Greek Revival. St. Joseph Plantation House is one of these rare examples.

St. Joseph's state-level architectural significance also rests upon its configuration as a raised Creole plantation house. Although Creole dwellings once dominated the rural landscape of central and southern Louisiana, today perhaps only 300 - 400 examples of these buildings remain standing outside New Orleans. Of these, the majority are small or moderately sized one-story houses, while only approximately thirty (including St. Joseph) are members of the distinct group of substantial raised plantation houses regarded as the apex of the Creole style. And, St. Joseph is special among this rare group because of the size of its principal story, the *premier etage*. From the owner's standpoint, this area ranked as the most important place. It was here that the family lived. It was also the focus of whatever architectural refinement the house may have had. As far as the State

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Historic Preservation Office is aware, there are only 11 *premier etages* in the state of anywhere near comparable size, with St. Joseph and Austerlitz (National Register) ranking as the largest of these. In addition, St. Joseph's *premier etage* was built all of a piece, as was that of Austerlitz. This is unusual, for most over-large *premier etages* were the result of one or more expansions of the home. Thus, St. Joseph is important for its sheer magnitude as an example of the Creole raised plantation house tradition.

Finally, St. Joseph is important at the state level because it is a rare illustration of the influence of Anglo-American architecture upon the Creole building tradition. Although one-story Anglo-French houses with transitional floor plans focused upon central hallways exist in Louisiana, raised Creole plantation houses constructed with central hallways are quite rare. In this instance, Austerlitz, Lakeside (National Register), and St. Joseph are the only known examples.

Historical Note

Dr. Cazimir Bernard Mericq purchased a one-arpent tract (which would later be part of St. Joseph Plantation) from the Scioneaux family c. 1840. This land included a "*maison principale*." (Whether it was the candidate or an earlier house cannot be documented.) Mericq died in 1855, and in 1857 or 1858 Alexis Ferry, II and his wife Josephine became St. Joseph's third known owners. Josephine Ferry was the daughter of well-known Louisiana Creole planter Valcour Aime, whose famous plantation, known as *Petit Versailles*, stood a short distance downriver from St. Joseph. Oral tradition suggests that Ferry enclosed the dwelling's lower level, but his detailed four-volume journal (housed at Tulane University's manuscript library) lacks mention of any major changes to the house, nor does the architectural evidence support the notion of an open lower floor (see Part 7). The Ferrys expanded the plantation, but debt forced them to sell in 1873. Since 1877 the home and land have belonged to the Waguespack family. Their family corporation, St. Joseph Planting and Manufacturing, Inc., grows sugar cane on the plantation. Family members recently rehabilitated the house, which is now open for tours.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Fricker, Jonathan. "In Memoriam: The Lost River Road." *Preservation In Print*, April 1992.

Historic American Buildings Survey drawings of St. Joseph Plantation, 1996; LA1268.

Historic photographs of now-lost plantation homes, St. James Parish Historical Museum, Litcher, LA.

History of St. Joseph Plantation submitted by property owners; copy in National Register file.

Site visit by National Register staff.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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: # LA1268
- 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

Acreage of Property: 1.1 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	15	714880	3321360

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary is shown as a broken line on the enclosed sketch map.

Boundary Justification:

The nominated acreage was chosen to focus on the significant resource, the plantation house, and its immediate setting. The boundaries recognize the house's orientation to LA 18 (River Road). Four small buildings close to the main house were included (three non-contributing and one contributing). There are historic buildings (in varying stages of integrity) on St. Joseph Plantation that are not being included in the present nominated acreage. As mentioned in Part 7, there is a strong tradition of moving historic buildings on the plantation. Until the provenance of the buildings in question can be determined, the Division of Historic Preservation thought it best to not include them with this nomination.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register Staff

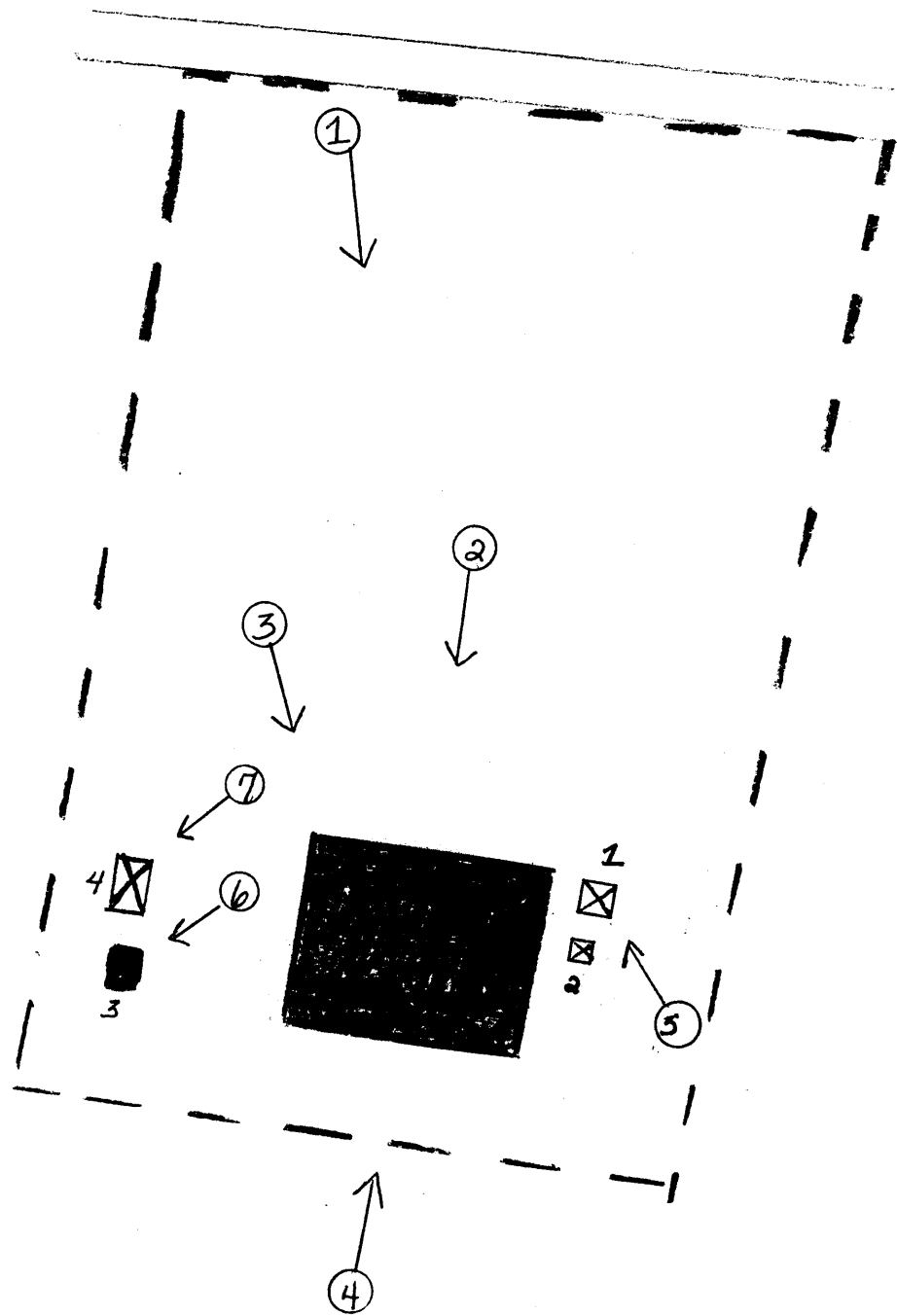
Address: Division of Historic Preservation, P. O. Box 44247, Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Telephone: (225) 342-8160

Date: Spring 2005

PROPERTY OWNERS

ATTN: Joan Boudreaux, Secretary Treasurer
St. Joseph Planting and Manufacturing Company, Limited
3535 LA HWY 18
Vacherie, LA 70090
(225) 265-4078



LA HWY 18

St. Joseph
Plantation House

St. James Parish
Louisiana

1" = 50'

- contributing
- ⊗ non-contributing

#s refer to
Part 7 narrative

