

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in "Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms" (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name STEWART STORES  
other names/site number CALDWELL STORES/PORTAL COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

**2. Location**

street & number Railroad St.  
city, town Portal (N/A) vicinity of  
county Bulloch code GA 031  
state Georgia code GA zip code 30450

(N/A) not for publication

**3. 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:**

	<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Noncontributing</u>
buildings	4	0
sites	0	0
structures	0	0
objects	0	0
total	4	0

Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination 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 meets the National Register criteria. ( ) See continuation sheet.

Elizabeth A. Lyon  
Signature of certifying official

4/15/93  
Date

Elizabeth A. Lyon  
State Historic Preservation Officer,  
Georgia Department of Natural Resources

In my opinion, the property ( ) meets ( ) does not meet the National Register criteria. ( ) See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency or bureau

**5. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

Entered in the  
National Register

entered in the National Register

Delores Byers 5/20/93

determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other, explain:

see continuation sheet

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature, Keeper of the National Register

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

---

## 6. Function or Use

---

### Historic Functions:

COMMERCE/TRADE/professional  
COMMERCE/TRADE/department store

### Current Functions:

RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum

---

## 7. Description

---

### Architectural Classification:

OTHER

### Materials:

foundation	brick
walls	wood
roof	tin
other	N/A

### Description of present and historic physical appearance:

The Stewart Stores are located at the commercial and transportation center of Portal, a small town in Bulloch County. The terrain is generally flat.

The district consists of four one-story, wood-framed buildings which date from 1908 to 1909: a doctor's office/drug store/pharmacy, the two Caldwell Stores including a storage building and a general store, and a commissary/utility building at the rear of the property. All four are vernacular in design and very utilitarian in scope, being just enough to be functional, with very few frills. The drug store is particularly distinctive because it has remained unchanged since its design and construction.

The stores are located at the intersection of Grady Street and Mullet Road (now Railroad Street) on a corner lot. The stores face Mullet Road and the old railroad bed.

The streets of Portal are laid out in a block pattern, and the lots within the proposed district are roughly rectangular in shape. U.S. 80 runs parallel to Mullet Road (Railroad St.) through Portal between Statesboro and Swainsboro.

The three stores have original unpainted weatherboard siding and shutters. The two on the ends have gabled roofs; the one in the middle (the storage building) has a flat roof. All original roofs are of tin. Historic oil and gas pumps survive in front of the stores. The stores retain decorative vent work, hardware, and doors. A chimney has been restored on the drug store.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7

---

On the interior, the stores retain their original interiors. All service features, shelving/drug store counters were parallel to the walls or the front entrance. All of these interior features remain. The drug store, on the corner of the lot, retains original store facilities inside including the marble soda fountain, doctor's office with its desk and books and medical bottles, and safe. The general store (far right or southeast) retains its original built-in shelving and stove. The commissary or rear utility building is used for storage. All retain their original flooring and walls.

All of the buildings are adjacent to one another. The drug store and the commissary are detached structures; the two other stores share a common wall. The stores sit directly on Mullet Road (now Railroad St.).

All the structures are modest, vernacular buildings. Constructed of heart pine by local carpenter-builders, these buildings feature machine-cut materials.

The stores have no landscaping whatsoever except grass in the rear yard.

Changes to these four buildings are very minimal. A small addition to the commissary is noted on the 1917 Sanborn Map, but is no longer standing. The chimney on the drug store was rebuilt recently. The only exception is in the middle store/storage building, where one of the windows on the main facade has been converted to a door.

---

**8. Statement of Significance**

---

**Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:**

nationally     statewide     locally

**Applicable National Register Criteria:**

A     B     C     D

**Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):**     N/A

A     B     C     D     E     F     G

**Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):**

ARCHITECTURE  
COMMERCE  
HEALTH/MEDICINE

**Period of Significance:**

ca. 1908-1943

**Significant Dates:**

ca. 1908-1909

**Significant Person(s):**

Stewart, Dr. James A.

**Cultural Affiliation:**

N/A

**Architect(s)/Builder(s):**

Unknown

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

**Significance of property, justification of criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above:**

**Narrative statement of significance (areas of significance)**

The Stewart Stores are significant in architecture because they are good examples of early 20th century vernacular commercial properties which have remained virtually unchanged in their functional, utilitarian style. They retain their characteristic overall forms, wood-frame construction, and original roofs and floor plans. They were built with direct, walk-in service in mind and thus all built-in features were easily visible by patrons. All service features, shelving/drug store counters were parallel to the walls or the front entrance. All of these interior features remain. Dr. Stewart's office and drug store is particularly notable for its state of preservation. The Stewart Drug Company, built in 1908-09 as a pharmacy and doctor's office, was the first doctor's office in the town. In 1909-10, Dr. J. A. Stewart installed the marble soda fountain in the store. With the exception of the wood shingle roof which was replaced with tin in 1933 and the chimney and foundation piers which were repaired in 1990, the building materials have undergone no change. While the exterior paint has almost worn off, the interior paint remains original, the soda fountain and the counters are still in place, and Dr. Stewart's books and medical equipment remain just where he left them upon his death in 1952. The other two stores, also known as the Caldwell Stores (1909), remain much the same as they were designed. The only exception is in the middle store, where one of the windows on the main facade has been converted to a door. These stores retain their original tin roofs. The commissary, most likely the temporary location of Dr. Stewart's office until his drug store was completed, is in the least preserved state. A small lean-to addition, supposedly used as an icehouse at one time, has either fallen off or been removed. This structure was re-roofed with tin in 1933.

The nomination is significant in commerce because of the three stores and the interiors of two of them: the general store with its surviving shelving and more importantly the drug store/doctor's office with its original soda fountain and medical equipment. According to all available sources, the office/drugstore is the oldest surviving historic medical facility and soda fountain in this region of the state. There are very few other examples in Georgia of stores from this era with so many intact features. These stores also represent virtually the entire historic central business district of this small town.

The properties are also significant in health/medicine because of the owner/builder, Dr. J. A. Stewart (1880-1952), who moved to the

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section 8

---

newly reconstituted town of Portal after the turn of the century and became its most important citizen. A recent medical college graduate, he began his practice in this area. Soon after marrying a local woman, he built his house (being nominated to the National Register separately) and his drugstore and office. The adjacent stores were built by his uncle whom Dr. Stewart persuaded to come to Portal and acquired by Dr. Stewart in 1943 toward the end of his career. Dr. Stewart was significant as the town's doctor, city council member, and all around civic leader, as well as a major land owner.

**National Register Criteria**

The nominated property meets National Register Criterion A because of the role Dr. J. A. Stewart, the owner/occupier of these properties, played in many aspects of broad patterns of Portal's history. The stores he owned or operated served as his medical office and pharmacy, a central point for medical treatment in this crossroads community. Another one of the buildings served as a general store. This type of store served as a rural example of the later department store carrying everything needed from birth to death, including coffins. These two key buildings within this district place it as the central core of this small town.

The property meets Criterion B because the stores represent the major life work of the town of Portal's most important citizen, Dr. J. A. Stewart. From his arrival in the town at the onset of the 20th century, he was involved in every aspect of the town's growth and development from the city council to fraternal organizations. As the first doctor and one of the earliest settlers of Portal, Dr. Stewart played a significant role in the town's civic and economic development. Stewart was responsible for the relocation of his parents, brothers, and other family members from Crawfordville to Portal. His uncle, C. W. Caldwell built the two additional stores in this block in 1909. Stewart himself introduced a first to Portal in 1909-10 when he started his drug store operation. The marble soda fountain which he installed is still intact and featured eight pumps with carbonation produced by a bicycle pump. This fountain became a popular gathering spot in the community for both ice cream and gossip.

When Portal was incorporated in 1914, Dr. Stewart served on the first town council. He was an early member (1911) of the Portal Baptist Church, where he served as a deacon and church officer. He was a stockholder in the locally owned Portal Telephone Company, chartered in 1915. The doctor was a mason at the lodge in neighboring Aaron and also belonged to Portal's chapter of the Knights of Pythias. He was active in the trade and training of trotting horses between 1917 and 1925. When Portal's railroad was threatened by receivership

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**Section 8**

---

proceedings in 1924, Stewart joined with other townspeople in a successful effort to raise funds necessary to continue railway service to the community.

The property also meets criterion C because all four buildings are excellent examples of commercial vernacular architecture, and they show evidence of the work of local builders/carpenters who used their skills to construct utilitarian commercial buildings whose straightforward floorplans were designed to meet the public's needs quickly. There are some details on the drug store such as the vent and the front doors which show further craftsmanship. These buildings retain their original siding and roof and interior furnishings, both built-in and movable. As a whole they are very representative of a small downtown commercial block from the turn of the century.

**Criteria Considerations (if applicable)**

N/A

**Period of significance (justification)**

The period of significance runs from the construction of the first store until 1943, the end of the historic period, and also the year in which Dr. Stewart acquired and operated all four buildings in the district. The stores continued to operate into the mid-20th century.

**Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if necessary)**

All four resources are considered contributing structures, since all were built, used, and owned by Dr. Stewart during the historic period.

**Developmental history/historic context (if applicable)**

The earliest settlement in Portal occurred about 1890 when G.W. and E.E. Foy of Effingham County purchased a 755-acre tract in northwest Bulloch County to harvest pine timber. They established the E. E. Foy Manufacturing Company and built a private railroad line from Rocky Ford to Portal with spur lines extending from the main line into the timber harvesting areas. The company store as well as housing for the company employees were located at Portal. Timber was shipped from Portal by rail to Rocky Ford and then on to Egypt (in Effingham County), Georgia, where the Foy sawmill was located. During this

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

period, the Foy operation was one of the largest timber concerns in the state. In 1893, J. E. McCroan, who operated the store, applied to the United States Post Office Department for a post office. That application was the first written record which specifically mentioned Portal by name.

The closest school to Portal was located two miles away in Bradwell. There were no churches in Portal, but residents attended services at Pleasant Hill Methodist Church, Upper Lotts Creek Primitive Baptist and Poplar Springs Baptist Church, all of which were located within approximately five miles of town. By 1904, the Foy Company had harvested all of the timber in the area, and they parceled and sold off their holdings. Portal as such ceased to exist.

The specific origin of Portal's name is not clear; however, local residents offer a commonly accepted explanation. When the Foys established their rail line into northwest Bulloch County, they expected a large settlement to follow. For that reason, "Portal", would serve as a gateway between the more rural areas of the county and Statesboro. Several years after the early Portal settlement declined, the name would be resurrected for a new town.

That same year, rumors began circulating that a rail line was to be constructed between Statesboro and Swainsboro, county seat of the adjoining county. Two lines were chartered: the Savannah, Statesboro and Northern, and the Statesboro and Wrightsville. Neither company actually laid any track. In 1907, however, the Savannah, Augusta and Northern Railroad announced plans to complete a line from Statesboro to Wrightsville. In anticipation of this announcement, Alice Hendrix Daughtry and Elizabeth Hendrix entered into an agreement with the Georgia Realty Company of Statesboro to develop a station on the proposed rail line. This stop would be called "Portal" after the older dead town three miles to the north.

According to the agreement, the land for the new station and community consisted of 35 acres, with one portion to the south of the railroad and another portion to the north. Georgia Realty president J. A. Brannan and secretary Hinton Booth agreed to have the land surveyed into business and residence lots with intervening streets. Georgia Realty gained ownership of odd numbered lots 1 through 75 and all of the lots numbered 101 through 146. The Hendrix sisters retained ownership of even numbered lots 2 through 76. R. H. Cone drew up the original survey. Because of errors made in this survey, the parties had J. E. Rushing draw up a corrected plat in August 1910.

A newspaper account in the Bulloch Times for April 15, 1908 informed readers of an "auction sale of lots" to be conducted at the "new town" of Portal, with the S, A, & N Railroad (by then under

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

construction from Statesboro to Wrightsville) carrying "free of charge those who wish to attend." The Times described Portal as "the second station out from Statesboro, twelve miles distant, ... located in good farming country. There is a strong probability that a thriving town will soon be established at that place." That same article also announced a similar sale of lots at Aaron, seventeen miles west of Statesboro for the week prior to the Portal sale.

Auctions such as those advertised at Portal and Aaron attracted citizens from many locations including rural Bulloch County. One such citizen was Dr. James A. Stewart. Born in Crawfordville, Georgia, in 1880, Stewart had attended the Medical College of Georgia. After graduating in 1906, Stewart moved to Bulloch County where he heard there was a need for rural doctors. He lived first with J. B. Jones, who had moved to Bulloch County from Crawfordville. There he practiced medicine from an office behind Jones' house. Later he moved into Old Portal. By late 1907, he began boarding with the Kitchings family, who lived not far from the Jones. He established his office across the road from the Kitchings' house. While living with the Kitchings, he met and became engaged to their daughter Sarah Kitchings.

The Portal auction, conducted April 18, 1908, "resulted in the sale of quite a good many lots ... all bringing good prices. The sale was conducted by the Georgia Realty Company, which furnished free transportation via the S. A. & N. railway for a hundred or more persons from this place." It seems evident that Dr. Stewart attended this auction because in May of that year, he filed a deed for "one-half acre of land lying in the town of Portal" conveyed from Alice H. Daughtry and Elizabeth Hendrix. This lot is the site on Grady Street where Dr. Stewart built his house by the end of that year. Four months later, he augmented his lot with an additional purchase of property located behind the original purchase. This entire lot was near the center of the developing business district, next to the site of W. E. Parsons' house and near Parsons' cotton gin.

Portal grew quickly that first year. A bank was constructed, with a school on the second floor. The Baptist Church organized at the house of W. E. Parsons, and both the Baptists and the Methodists met in Parsons' gin house for some time. As trade in the area increased, the gin house became increasingly difficult to utilize as a church. Parsons had been constructing a general merchandise store and had already roofed it. In an effort to accommodate the churches, however, he removed the roof and added a second story meeting room over the store. This served as the church until both denominations completed their own structures in 1911 and 1912 on land donated by the Georgia Realty Company.

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

The Bulloch Times for July 15, 1908 reported the successful growth of both Portal and its neighbor Aaron:

The new towns of Portal and Aaron, on the S. A. & N. railway, are said to be lively specimens of thrift and enterprise, with new buildings going up all about. At Aarons [sic] there are three store buildings, and at Portal two stores, a big ginnery and a number of residences. New depots are almost completed at both of these towns.

That same year, Dr. Stewart purchased another lot in the business district of Portal. He received from W.E. Parsons "one lot in the town of Portal...size 20 ft. front and 100 ft. in depth, bounded north by lands of W. E. Parsons, east by lands of W. E. Parsons, bounded south by railroad, bounded west by lands of Grady Street." It was on this lot that Dr. Stewart constructed his drug store and office.

In February 1909, an anonymous poem, "A Trip To Portal," appeared in The Statesboro News. This verse specifically mentions six stores and three residences and includes a note on "clever Dr. Stewart who cures the peoples ills has all kinds of medicines, the very best of pills." An April newspaper issue commented on the continuing growth of the town:

Portal is one of those good little towns which is destined to grow into a good big town. ... A score or more new houses, built within the past few months, denote the progress of the place, and its surrounding farms insure its continued growth. Portal is going to be a town, and a good one, because a good class of people are building the place.

That same article specifically mentioned Dr. Stewart's residence as well as those of several other citizens. The November 30, 1909, issue of The Bulloch Times describes Portal itself as "one of the coming towns of Bulloch County. A few months ago it was a cotton patch, now a booming town with 10 stores and handsome residences."

Dr. Stewart convinced both his brother C. A. Stewart and his uncle C. W. Caldwell to move from Crawfordville to Portal. In 1909, Caldwell purchased the lot next to Stewart's drug store and built two stores on the property. In 1911, Dr. Stewart transferred a half interest in the drug store lot to his brother, but the interest was transferred back to Dr. Stewart the following year.

Portal was incorporated in 1914, and Dr. Stewart served on the first town council. The first ordinances adopted by the council addressed disorderly conduct such as "hooping," throwing trash or

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**Section 8**

---

garbage in the streets, possession of whiskey, firearms or shooting in town, and selling on Sunday. Public dances, whether charged for or not, were forbidden. The Portal Telephone Company was chartered in 1915, with Dr. Stewart as a stockholder. Sometime after 1915, the town began electrical services to structures by means of a Delco generator, and city water was installed in 1921.

In 1915, the S. A. & N. railway was purchased by the Midland Railroad. By 1917, the Midland experienced financial difficulties and went into receivership. The railroad was sold at auction in Savannah that same year. Service continued on the line through Portal until November 20, 1922. In December 1923, one year after rail service to Portal had ceased, the citizens met to discuss ways to reestablish rail traffic between their town and Statesboro. Several residents, including Dr. Stewart, raised a total of \$10,000 and were given 90 days to raise \$22,000 more to purchase the irons and other property on the right-of-way of the railroad. This became unnecessary, however, because in February 1924, the line was purchased out of its second receivership by the Georgia and Florida Railroad, and service from Statesboro was restored.

In 1928-29, U.S. Highway 80 was constructed through Portal. This route connected Portal to towns not serviced by the railroad. This new transportation route could not revitalize the local economy, however, which had been severely damaged due to boll weevil infestations in the cotton crop. The poor business climate was dealt a death blow by the Depression. Many residents left the town in search of a better living. In 1950, rail service was discontinued and the rails taken up. Even under these conditions, local landowners repeatedly fought industrial interest in the area. Consequently, businesses operating in and around Portal today are almost all agriculturally related.

For reasons which remain unexplained, Dr. Stewart's uncle, C. W. Caldwell, lost his remaining parcel of land and it had to be sold at auction by the sheriff. It was purchased at auction in 1912. Soon after the purchase, the present stores were constructed under the ownership of Parrish and Hendrix. Parrish either leased or operated personally both stores as retail establishments until his death. His son, Charles E. Parrish inherited the property from his mother, Datha Parrish, and sold the entire parcel to Dr. Stewart on July 2, 1943. Stewart purchased the property because it had been held by family members for most of Portal's history and because he wanted to insure the stability of the business corner where his drugstore stood. His son operated a grocery store in the center building, and Dr. Stewart leased the other store for various retail operations until his death.

Dr. James Stewart died in 1952, and his office was closed and the drugstore/office locked up by the family. The old Caldwell stores

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**Section 8**

---

which he owned continued to operate for several years afterward. In recent years, however, all of the commercial stores have been vacant. Mrs. Stewart died, and eventually the house was left vacant when none of the heirs chose to live there.

About 1981, the Portal Heritage Society began seeking tourist interest in their area and established the annual Turpentine Festival to highlight the historic and continued activity in naval stores. Their efforts fostered an appreciation for Portal's past. The Stewart family felt very strongly that Dr. Stewart's legacy should be preserved, and in 1990, his heirs deeded the stores and the house to the Portal Heritage Society for use as museum facilities.

---

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

---

Groce, Julie C. " Dr. J. A. Stewart District, Portal, Georgia"  
Historic Property Information Form, October, 1990. Copy on file at the  
Office of Historic Preservation, Georgia Department of Natural  
Resources, Atlanta, GA.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): ( ) N/A

- ( ) 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:

- (X) State historic preservation office
- ( ) Other State Agency
- ( ) Federal agency
- ( ) Local government
- ( ) University
- ( ) Other, Specify Repository:

Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

---

**10. Geographical Data**

---

**Acreage of Property** less than one acre

**UTM References**

A) Zone 17 Easting 412500 Northing 3600280

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated property is marked on the enclosed plat dated 1990 for the J. A. Stewart Estate.

**Boundary Justification**

The nominated property includes the legal boundaries for the parcel of land which includes these four historic properties. It is all that remains associated with them and probably all that ever was associated with them.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

---

**name/title** Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., Historian  
**organization** Office of Historic Preservation, Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
**street & number** 205 Butler Street, S.E., Suite 1462  
**city or town** Atlanta **state** Georgia **zip code** 30334  
**telephone** (404) 656-2840 **date** April 5, 1993

(HPS form version 10-29-91)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**Photographs**

---

**Name of Property:** Stewart Stores  
**City or Vicinity:** Portal  
**County:** Bulloch  
**State:** Georgia  
**Photographer:** James R. Lockhart  
**Negative Filed:** Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
**Date Photographed:** June, 1992

**Description of Photograph(s):**

- 1 of 7: View of all four properties and flagpole; photographer facing northeast.
- 2 of 7: Side view of all four properties; photographer facing southeast.
- 3 of 7: Front facades of three main properties, Doctor's office on the left; photographer facing northeast.
- 4 of 7: Interior of Doctor's office/pharmacy with museum displays; photographer facing northeast.
- 5 of 7: Interior of Doctor's office/pharmacy; photographer facing south.
- 6 of 7: Interior, rear of Doctor's office/pharmacy showing fixed desk and fireplace; photographer facing northwest.
- 7 of 7: Interior of General Store (Caldwell Store); photographer facing northeast.

