

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

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 Evergreen Plantation  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number LA Hwy 18 N/A not for publication  
city, town Wallace  vicinity  
state Louisiana code LA county St. John the Baptist code 095 zip code 70090

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>37</u>	<u>2</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>37</u>	<u>2</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 37

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  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  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official Date

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

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 and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling/secondary structure  
AGRICULTURE/agricultural outbuildings/  
agricultural field

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling/secondary structure  
AGRICULTURE/agricultural outbuildings/  
agricultural field

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Greek RevivalFederalOther: French Creole

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation brickwalls weatherboard, brick, plasterroof slate, tin, asphaltother \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

Evergreen is a plantation complex of thirty-nine buildings, including a grand "big house" with its various dependencies and a double row of twenty-two slave cabins. All but eight of the buildings are antebellum. The plantation is located on the west bank of the Mississippi River in St. John the Baptist Parish on a stretch of the river that is agrarian in character. Only two of the thirty-nine buildings are non-contributing. Although the sugar mill is no longer extant and the buildings have received some alterations over the years, Evergreen remains an amazing image of the South's plantation landscape.

Essentially Evergreen is composed of the main house and its dependencies in a fairly confined area and a double row of slave cabins well to the rear. The layout of the former is rigidly symmetrical. On each side of the main house is a garconniere (guest house) and pigeonnier. To the rear, on axis with the "big house," is a Greek Revival privy. On each side of the rear yard are matching small buildings of undocumented use (known now as a guest house and kitchen). To the rear and side is an impressive Spanish moss laden oak allee about 1300 feet in length. The double row of twenty-two cabins begins about halfway along the allee. To the rear of the cabins are three barns and a large shed from the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. Historically the principal crop at Evergreen during the period of significance was sugarcane, although rice was also grown. The acreage is still planted in cane, with cane fields to either side of the cabins seemingly extending to the horizon.

**Main House**

The main house at Evergreen was created in 1832, when Pierre Clidament Becnel hired John Carver, builder and carpenter, to drastically remodel the two story French Creole residence he had purchased from the estate of his grandmother, Magdelaine Haydel Becnel. The remodeling, as recorded in an extant building contract, was so extensive that the present house should be dated 1832. The roof was demolished and a new one constructed, two rooms were removed, the present Greek Revival gallery with portico was added, etc. The walls and the Creole floorplan (minus two rooms) are all that survive from the earlier house.

**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    NHL criteria: #1

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G    N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

agriculture  
architecture  
NHL theme: XI: Agriculture  
B: Plantation Agriculture

Period of Significance

1832 -- c.1930  
1832

Significant Dates

1832 - c.1930  
1832

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder    1832

John Carver (builder/carpenter)

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Evergreen Plantation is significant in the history of American agriculture as one of the largest and most intact plantation complexes in the South. It enjoys particular distinction among this select group because fully four-fifths of the buildings are antebellum and because of the survival of the double row of twenty-two slave cabins. The plantation system represents a significant chapter in the history of American agriculture. The period of agricultural significance ends c.1930 because at about that time Evergreen ceased to be an agricultural enterprise. The buildings and plantation were abandoned from the beginning of the Depression until 1944, when Matilda Gray purchased the property. The main house is also being nominated on the state level in the area of architecture because it is one of Louisiana's grand Great River Road plantation mansions.

**AGRICULTURE - NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE**

Plantation agriculture has its origins in India in the eighth century. Since that time "plantation regions" have developed in North Africa and various parts of the New World. In the continental United States, our plantation region comprises the old Confederacy plus some adjoining states. Plantations are an important aspect of American agricultural history, being distinct from Jeffersonian yeoman farms, manorial estates of the Hudson River and similar areas, and ranches and missions of the West. A plantation revolves around a cash crop grown on a large scale for profit. A successful plantation region requires: 1) fertile, easily tilled land available in large units; 2) abundant, landless and cheap rural labor; 3) bulk reduction and preliminary processing techniques; 4) abundant, cheap transportation; and 5) a network of factors and factoring houses to market cash crops to other regions of the world. All these were present in the American South during the antebellum period. The plantation system continued to dominate Southern agriculture (in a modified form) in the postbellum period and on into the twentieth century.

See continuation sheet

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Photos of Evergreen taken by Richard Koch in 1936. Copies and negatives at Koch and Wilson, New Orleans.

Pre-restoration photos in possession of owner, Matilda Gray Stream.

Richard Koch's drawings for the 1940s restoration. On file at Koch and Wilson, New Orleans.

Wilson, Samuel. "Evergreen Plantation." This fifty-nine page unpublished research paper is based on primary sources such as conveyance records.

Wilson, Samuel. "The Building Contract for Evergreen Plantation, 1832." Louisiana History, Winter 1990. (contract reprinted in full)

Mississippi River Commission Maps, 1876.

Phone interviews with State Historic Preservation Offices in the South to assess significance of Evergreen.

See continuation sheet

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

previously listed in the National Register 9/25/91

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:

Koch and Wilson, Architects, New Orleans, LA

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property @ 575 acres

### UTM References

A 

1	5	7	2	7	3	2	0	3	3	2	4	3	4	0
Zone	Easting	Northing												

C 

1	5	7	2	7	0	4	0	3	3	2	1	7	2	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

B 

1	5	7	2	7	8	0	0	3	3	2	3	8	4	0
Zone	Easting	Northing												

D 

1	5	7	2	5	8	4	0	3	3	2	2	4	6	0
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See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

Please refer to USGS map, per instructions in Bulletin 16 for rural properties with large acreage.

See continuation sheet

### Boundary Justification

The present boundaries of Evergreen Plantation were selected because they are historic (as confirmed by the U. S. government in 1812 to the Becnel family), and the plantation's vast acreage is still planted in sugarcane, which was the principal crop during the period of significance. Given the foregoing and the fact that Evergreen's chief significance is in the history of agriculture, it seemed appropriate to nominate the entire acreage. This decision was made in consultation with NPS staff.  See continuation sheet

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Donna Fricker, National Register Coordinator

organization Division of Historic Preservation

date May 1991

street & number P. O. Box 44247

telephone (504) 342-8160

city or town Baton Rouge

state Louisiana zip code 70804

Owner: Mrs. Matilda Gray Stream  
P. O. Box 40  
Lake Charles, LA 70602

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Evergreen's plan is one room deep and three rooms wide, with cabinets extending to the side beyond the core (see plan). Between the cabinets is what was once an open loggia, or gallery. The surviving plan at Evergreen, taken with instructions in the building contract to remove "the rooms at each end of the house," indicates that Evergreen's original plan was identical to that of neighboring Whitney (see attached plan). (The probable builder of the original Evergreen was Christophe Haydel, the brother of the probable builder of Whitney, Jean Jacques Haydel.)

The remodeled 1832 Evergreen has almost as much gallery as it does house, and, in fact, the gallery is out of proportion to the house. This is not noticeable from the front, but is quite evident in a side view (see plan also). The colossal order Tuscan gallery encompasses the front and extends down the sides to join the cabinets. A matching gallery is located to the rear between the cabinets. The front gallery culminates in a narrow projecting portico with a winding stair on each side.

The present stairs were erected during an extensive restoration undertaken by Matilda Gray, who purchased the sadly neglected Evergreen in 1944. The architect for the project from 1944 to 1948 was Richard Koch of New Orleans. Work was completed in the late 1940s/early 1950s by Wolf and Freret of New Orleans. (It was the latter firm that designed the present stairs.)

Photographs taken by Koch in 1936 show only one stair, but the building contract called for two "winding stairs," and one finds it hard to believe that both were not built, given the rage for symmetry evident at Evergreen. The deteriorated stair shown in the photos gives every indication of being original, although it is not exactly to the specifications of the building contract. This stair was removed during the restoration, and a new set built in a similar design. The original stair descended in a quarter circle to a square platform and continued to the ground in a straight run parallel to the front of the house. The present stairs, while presenting the general appearance of the originals, curve down in a sweeping fashion without a landing. This and the enclosure of the rear loggia are the principal changes made to the exterior during the 1940s restoration.

The hipped roof is crowned by a widow's walk, which according to the building contract, was to have an Oriental pavilion. It is not known whether this unusual feature was ever constructed. Elegant dormers with segmental heads and fluted pilasters pierce the side and rear elevations. The builder's superb craftsmanship is particularly evident in the elaborate front doorways (upstairs and down) in the Federal style, per the extremely detailed instructions in the building contract. Each set of doors has side lights framed by fluted pilasters with the whole composition crowned by an elaborate entablature and fanlight.

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The side lights have an intricate interlacing pattern of glazing bars and a richly molded panel below. The graceful fanlight has glazing bars in a radial pattern and panels inside the surround.

Various alterations were made to the interior of Evergreen during the 1940s restoration. As was the case with the exterior, only major changes will be noted in this nomination. Marble floors were installed downstairs, and inappropriate marble mantels were placed in the upriver rooms on the first and second floors and the downriver cabinet on the first floor. The latter is placed on the back wall of the cabinet underneath a single pane window intended to provide a view of the rear gardens. Four original mantels survive at Evergreen. The one in the upstairs central room is the most elaborate, featuring engaged Ionic columns and a molded entablature with a central horizontal panel and side vertical panels. It is made of black marble and painted slate. The other three (gray marble) have a similar entablature but without engaged columns.

It appears that cornices were replaced in four of the six principal rooms during the restoration. While they resemble 1830s cornices, one suspects they are modern because of their flat perspective. The two central rooms retain their elaborate deeply cut cornices.

The interior door surrounds at Evergreen vary. Two rooms have intricately molded surrounds with plain cornerblocks, while two rooms feature similar surrounds but with a very unusual, boldly three-dimensional oak leaf and acorn design in the cornerblock. The downstairs downriver cabinet also has this design, but Koch's drawings reveal that it was added during the restoration. One wonders how much of this acorn design woodwork is original and how much is replicated, given the knowledge that it was replicated in one room. In any event, the design is known to be original to the house because it appears in Koch's 1936 photographs (in the central room downstairs). Other interior changes made during the restoration include converting the two upstairs cabinets to bathrooms, converting the downstairs upriver cabinet to a kitchen, and adding a flat leaf design to the cornerblocks in the upstairs downriver room (as well as the bathroom).

Two originally exterior staircases are located on the rear loggia. One curves gracefully to the second floor, and the other provides access to the attic.

Pigeonniers (2)

These square two story brick structures flank the main house, as previously noted. They are specified in the 1832 building contract. The circular window on

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the front is most unusual for a building of this type. Alterations to the upriver pigeonnier include a brick floor, an added stair, removal of the nesting boxes, and replacement of the finial. The downriver pigeonnier has had a concrete floor installed and the finial replaced. Both have exposed beams downstairs.

Privy

This delightful Greek Revival building is also specified in the building contract. Made of brick and stuccoed and scored to look like stone, the diminutive building has gable parapets and a pedimented front with four pilasters featuring capitals formed of three bold bands. The interior is divided into two compartments. Each is a "two holer," although the holes have been removed.

Garconnières (2)

Although these two identical buildings and the two buildings to the rear of the house do not correspond to the specifications of the "four back buildings" (exclusive of privy and pigeon houses) mentioned in the building contract, they are of the period, and it is clear that the complex is all of a piece. The garconnières are five bay galleried cottages constructed of brique entre poteaux (bricks between posts) and covered with clapboards on the side and rear and stuccoed and scored on the facade. The houses originally only had two rooms with a central chimney. During the restoration cabinet-like rooms were added to the rear with a gallery between. This meant, of course, changing the rear roof slope. The native French Creole tradition can be seen in the two room-interior chimney form, the exposed beams on the gallery and interior, and the fact that the mantels wrap around the chimney flue. The mantels feature pilasters and paneled sides. The ones in the upriver garconniere are a bit more elaborate, with a curving rather than straight shelf.

Kitchen

This building was labeled a kitchen during the 1940s restoration and restored as one. Whether it was built as a kitchen is not known. It is a two bay brick building with three Tuscan columns. The rear was extended to accommodate a new huge chimney and hearth. The interior has been completely redone, including a tile floor and the new hearth. The gallery also features exposed beams.

Guesthouse (original use unknown)

The Tuscan columns, size and shape are the same as the kitchen. Koch's 1936 photos show it with a brick-between-posts facade, brick sides and frame gable

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ends. During the restoration the facade was stuccoed, the gables were changed to brick, and the rear was extended. The work was done with salvaged bricks and is not that easy to detect. Of course, the roof slope was changed to accommodate the rear addition. The present simple wooden mantels and doors were installed during the restoration.

Overseer's House

Located upriver from the main house and closer to the road, this house is referred to as the overseer's house, but this use is not documented. One wonders if a house of this size and refinement (in effect, a medium size plantation house) would have been an overseer's house. One would also have expected an overseer's house to be closer to the cabins and sugar mill, although overseer houses located close to the main house are not unknown.

The seven bay, galleried, hip roof house in the French Creole style appears to date from the same period as the main house and dependencies (1832). Its dormers are like those found on the main house, except the pilasters are not fluted. The interior features exposed beaded beams and five wraparound mantels with pilasters and paneled sides. The house was originally three rooms wide with a rear linear room flanked by cabinets. A 1936 photo shows that the house had received a pitched roof addition across the back. During the restoration the roofline of the addition was reworked to continue that of the house. The siding was completely replaced and a side entrance and two small windows above it to either side were added. The rear addition consists of two cabinets with an open loggia between.

Slave Cabins (22)

As noted previously, this double row of cabins begins about halfway down an oak alley. They are spaced at regular intervals fifty feet apart. Twenty are two room cabins, while in the middle of each row is a four room unit. All are of frame construction with wide drop siding on the facade, interior chimneys, and exposed beams on the gallery and interior. Some of the cabins retain pegged frames and corner bracing on the interior. (The cabins apparently never had an interior wall finish; hence the framing is visible on the interior.) A majority of the cabins retain their very simple wraparound mantels. Some of the cabins have wooden bars in the transoms.

There is very little documentation on these buildings, although it is clear that they are indeed antebellum (i.e., slave quarters). The 1860 census lists Lezin Becnel and his brother (the then owners of the plantation) as having 103 slaves in 48 dwellings. The only known historic map of the plantation is the Mississippi River Commission map of 1876, which shows twenty-two cabins in the same configuration and location.

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As might be expected in buildings of this type and age, the slave quarters at Evergreen have had much of the original fabric replaced over the years. For the record, they were not a part of the 1940s restoration. In addition to normal wear and tear and deterioration, it is known that the cabins were damaged by Hurricane Betsy in 1965 and subsequently repaired. The hurricane apparently ripped off some of the roofs and caused walls to lean and sag. Most of the side and rear clapboards have been replaced and patched over the years, and a few of the cabins have had the decoratively cut boards replaced on the facade. None of the gallery posts are original, although they are like what would have been there originally. While some of the cabins retain their original pegged corner braced framing, others have been rebuilt over the years with replaced studs and corner braces. But despite what must be described as considerable replacement of fabric, the cabins' historic appearance has been carefully maintained.

Miscellaneous Contributing Buildings

Other historic buildings on the plantation include:

- a deteriorated late nineteenth century cottage with crude wraparound mantels
- a four room, hipped roof, frame cottage with the roof ridge running front to back; four crude wraparound mantels; possibly c.1870 (located between the overseer's house and the oak allee leading to the quarters)
- three frame barns and one large frame shed; late nineteenth/early twentieth century (located to the rear of the quarters)

Non-Contributing Elements

There are two non-contributing elements at Evergreen. One is a frame garage apparently built during the restoration from salvaged wood. The other, labeled on the map as "stables," was formed by altering and linking two historic buildings. (The two buildings are shown in the 1936 photos with narrow gauge clapboarding in the gable and board and batten elsewhere. They were completely resided during the restoration in drop siding and linked via a long stable block. Also, the fenestration was changed.)

Assessment of Integrity:

While the changes detailed above are numerous, Evergreen still easily conveys its identity as an amazingly intact plantation complex and hence its National Historic Landmark eligibility. The principal missing component is the

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sugar mill and its ancillary buildings, as shown on the 1876 Mississippi River Commission map. Fortunately, new construction has not marred the overall image. Sugar, the main historical crop, is still cultivated and adds to the integrity of the plantation.

The most serious loss of integrity to Evergreen as a plantation complex is the extensive fabric replacement evident in the slave quarters. There are some noteworthy original features such as chimneys, mantels, drop siding on the front, shutters, doors, and transoms with bars. In addition, some of the cabins retain their pegged frames. But the cabins are also the result of 140 years of patching, repairs, and reconstruction. However, what is surprising is that the buildings have survived at all, not the amount of replacement. While there were once literally thousands upon thousands of slave quarters across the South, very few survive today, as detailed in Part 8. Despite the replacement, the cabins retain their historic appearance, and very importantly, their original double row configuration. There is no question that someone from the historic period would recognize the quarters area. It remains an incredibly evocative image of the plantation South.

The plantation mansion is being nominated for its architectural significance, and there is no serious integrity problem here either. While the work done during the 1940s restoration was extensive, it did not have a substantial impact upon the exterior of the house, which is the source of its architectural significance. While one wishes the deteriorated stair had been repaired and used as the model for the missing stair, at least the new composition is similar in overall appearance to the original.

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Although the phrase "southern plantation" conjures up all sorts of images, the truth of the matter is that little remains to provide a true picture of what one was like. Plantations were noted for their large number of buildings--in effect, a world within a world, or a self-contained community. As one traveler noted, "the planter has a building for everything." However, in the overwhelming majority of cases, only the great house survives today. Plantation complexes with a significant complement of outbuildings are rare, especially when one considers the thousands that once existed. Phone interviews with senior State Historic Preservation Office staff members in other southern states revealed that the typical complex, where it exists, might have six to ten buildings. By contrast, Evergreen has thirty-seven historic buildings, including its "big house," what may be its overseer's house, two pigeonniers, two garconnières, two substantial brick cottages of unknown use, a privy, and a double row of twenty-two slave cabins. It and a handful of other good-size complexes are all that is left to show someone what a plantation looked like. Evergreen enjoys particular distinction among the few surviving large plantation complexes in the South because of its large number of antebellum buildings. Almost all of the few large complexes that do survive are late nineteenth century. Finally, Evergreen is particularly distinguished by its double row of twenty-two slave cabins. While thousands upon thousands of these buildings once existed across the South, they are today exceedingly rare. Typically, a state might have maybe six or so surviving examples, with one on one plantation, two on another, etc. The standard row arrangement seen at Evergreen, while once the norm across the South, is virtually unheard of today. Only about nine plantations retain what could be considered a slave row. Of these, all are in the five to ten house range except for Evergreen.

## ARCHITECTURE - STATE SIGNIFICANCE

Evergreen is significant in the area of architecture at the state level because it is one of Louisiana's grand Great River Road plantation mansions. These "Gone With the Wind" houses lined the River Road on the eve of the Civil War, but more have been lost over the years than have survived.

Architecturally Louisiana is best known for its fine collection of French Creole houses and grand Greek Revival plantation houses. The state's most famous and recognizable group of monumental Greek Revival plantation "big houses" is found on the historic River Road. These homes, built by immensely wealthy sugar planters, were the absolute apex of the Greek Revival style in Louisiana. They may be briefly characterized as two story mansions with broad double galleries (sometimes encircling the house) and monumental columns or pillars which rise to the roofline in one continuous shaft. No one will ever know the exact number of

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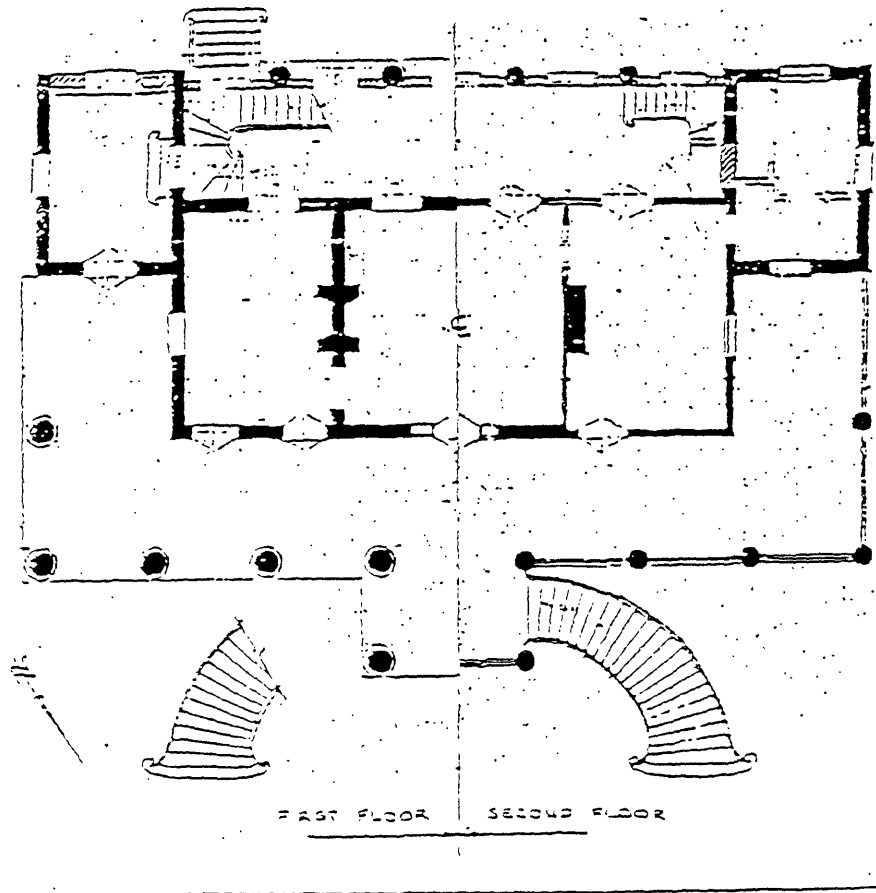
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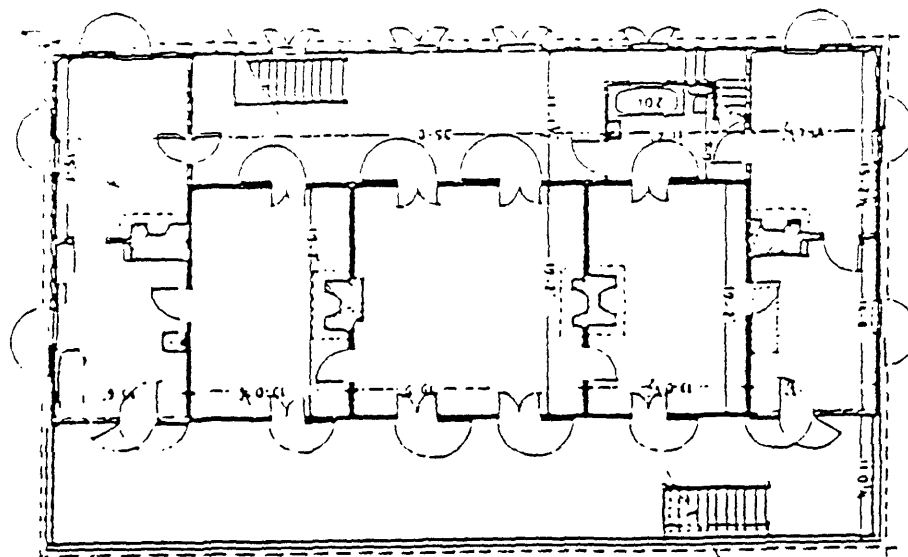
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these houses that were built, but available evidence demonstrates that they once were quite numerous. Many of the grandest examples were destroyed in the twentieth century and are well documented in photographs. Today, only eight major Greek Revival plantations remain on the River Road.

Evergreen Plantation, St. John Parish, LA



EVERGREEN



WHITNEY