

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

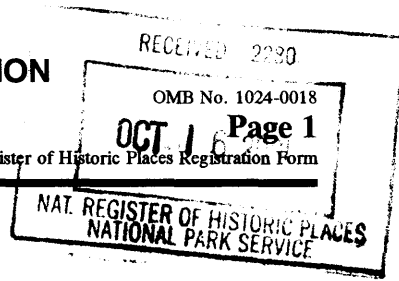
NPS Form 10-900

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

CAIRE, E. J., & CO. STORES, Edgard, St. John the Baptist Parish, LA

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



1268

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Caire, E. J., & Co. Stores

Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number 2403-2407 LA Hwy 18

Not for publication: NA

City/Town Edgard

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: St. John the Baptist Code: 095 Zip Code: 70049

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: Locally: X

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

Date October 10, 2001

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):

Edson H. Beall
Signature of Keeper

11.29.01
Date of Action

5. CLASSIFICATION

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

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

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing
2

Non contributing
buildings
sites
structures
objects
0 Total

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

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: NA

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: c. 1855 building:	Commerce/Trade	Sub:	Department Store
1897 building:	Commerce/Trade	Sub:	Department Store
Current: c. 1855 building:	Vacant	Sub:	Not in Use
1897 building:	Commerce/Trade	Sub:	Specialty Store
	Vacant		Not In Use

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: c.1855 store: Greek Revival
1897 Store: No Style

Materials:	c. 1855	1897
Foundation:	brick	brick
Walls:	brick	clapboard, metal
Roof:	asphalt	asphalt
Other:		

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The E. J. Caire & Co. Stores consist of two buildings on the west bank of the Mississippi River overlooking River Road and the adjacent levee. They stand within several yards of each other at a spot, once known as Caire's Landing, within the village of Edgard. The older and smaller store, constructed c. 1855 and moved a very short distance in 1881, is a vernacular adaptation of the Greek Revival style. It is two-stories tall and of masonry construction. The second building, a one-story, unstyled, frame structure considerably larger than its predecessor, was erected in 1897 slightly downriver from the older edifice. The stores are being nominated together because both were part of a family mercantile business which operated in St. John the Baptist Parish for well over one hundred years. Both buildings look much as they did during the historic period.

c. 1855 Greek Revival Store

A date of c. 1855 has been chosen for this store because surviving business receipts begin in that year. Architectural evidence (in the form of interior moldings) also indicates that this date is likely. Evidence for the 1881 move is found within a cornerstone listing the moving company (a New Orleans concern) and date of the move. The reason for the move was a slight re-routing of River Road. The distance involved was obviously only a few yards, for today the building stands almost flush with the current path of River Road. Thus, the building's relationship to the Mississippi River and to the road which brought its customers is basically unchanged.

The two-story, rectangular, brick building features the following Greek Revival elements:

1. well proportioned front and rear pediments with raking cornices. Lettering which follows the diagonal lines of the front pediment reads "Caire's Landing." Below this sign a crescent shaped vent pierces the pediment. The rear pediment is plain. Both rise slightly above the roofline to form a low parapet wall. The façade's parapet flares slightly at each end, but the rear parapet does not.
2. a brick entablature outlining the roofline on three sides.
3. the store's one-story front Greek Revival style gallery. It is unclear whether this space was added at the time of the 1881 move or pre-dated it. The gallery has boxed columns and pilasters with molded capitals supporting an entablature.

In addition to its simple Greek Revival motifs, the building has a plaster wall on its façade beneath the gallery roof, three front double doors with accompanying shutters, a single rear double door, four windows piercing each side of the second story, one window piercing each side of the first floor near the rear corner, and (the previously mentioned) interior moldings which form a thick cornice encircling the sales room's walls. "E. J. Caire & Co." has been painted on the facade above the gallery roof.

The floorplan consists of two rooms on each level. On the first floor the salesroom fills more than half the space. Although its counters have been removed, its original shelving, bins, and hooks remain intact, as well as the previously mentioned cornice. The rear room (where the first floor windows are located) is a storage space containing a large ceiling opening through which

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merchandise can be hoisted. The second floor rear storage room is larger than its first floor counterpart. These two spaces are connected by a staircase in one rear corner. The front portion of the upper floor contains a one-room living area with a fireplace for employees of the store.

Alterations to the c. 1855 Caire store include the loss of an exterior staircase and a small second floor porch formerly located on the downriver side of the building, the conversion into a window of a former double door accessing the living quarters from the porch, the loss of the chimney which served the quarters' fireplace, the covering of the formerly open vent within the front pediment with wooden boards, the previously mentioned removal of the first floor counters, the installation of a small bathroom beneath the staircase within the first floor storeroom, and the covering of the windows with boards and the rear opening with metal doors. On the second floor, a few paneled shutters survive behind the coverings but the windows have been lost. The assessment of integrity will be discussed below.

1897 Store

Although its design contains a few decorative elements, the large rectangular 1897 store cannot be classified as any particular style. The facade features a seven bay gallery beneath a gable roof. Boxed columns detailed with necking and simple decorative brackets support an entablature which outlines three sides of the building. The front gable end (pierced by three large louvered vents) is sheathed with pressed metal, while the façade beneath the gallery roof is composed of flush board painted in a two tone color scheme. (The columns also reflect this paint treatment.) Three large entrances with pronounced molded cornices pierce the façade. Each opening contains a set of large French doors surmounted by a transom. Large board shutters can be closed to protect these doors.

The rest of the building is covered in clapboards. The building's upriver side contains one window and a double door protected by a suspended canopy. The downriver side contains no original openings. The gabled rear wall has two doors, two windows, and two window-like louvered vents. The brick foundation contains decorative ventilation grilles.

The interior originally consisted of one extremely large sales room and an elaborately paneled office paralleling the rear wall. The sales room was divided into areas for three different types of merchandise (see Part 8), but the subdivisions must have been created by store fixtures rather than interior walls. The sales room's most interesting original feature is a set of two octagonal openings within the beaded board ceiling. These are located along the mid-line of the building beneath the roof ridge and have covers which can be opened and closed. Although the openings may also have been used to hoist merchandise up and down from the store's attic, a historic photograph reveals that they were used primarily for ventilation. The picture shows two small octagonal cupolas without window glazing rising from the roof ridge. When the covers were open, the movement of air from the large front doors, through the octagonal ceiling openings and out the open areas of the cupola would have kept the store temperature relatively comfortable by late nineteenth century standards. Unfortunately, the cupolas have been removed.

The store office, quite elegant for its time and place, is still very much intact. It consists of one large room for workers, a private office for Etienne J. Caire, and a utilitarian store room. The walls separating the office from the sales room are sub-divided vertically into four parts: a paneled lower

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section, two glazed portions separated by a horizontal wooden member, and additional paneling just below the ceiling. The floors in this area are of better quality than those in the sales area.

Alterations to the building include the previously mentioned loss of the ventilation cupolas and the subdivision of the sales room into three spaces by the Caire family in 1972. Much of the sales space has been covered with inexpensive paneling, extra shelving has been installed in the office, and a bathroom has been placed within a corner of the office's storeroom.

Assessment of Integrity

Although both the c. 1855 and the 1897 stores have received some alterations, the changes are, in fact, relatively minor. The stores look very much as they did in the nineteenth century, especially on the exterior, and there is absolutely no doubt that customers and employees from the historic period would recognize them if they could return to Edgard today. Thus, both buildings meet the litmus test for the eligibility of historical nominations. As rare surviving examples of rural stores in St. John the Baptist Parish, the E. J. Caire & Co. Stores are strong candidates for National Register listing.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National Register Criteria: A X B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A B X C D E F G

Areas of Significance: Commerce

Period(s) of Significance: c. 1855-c. 1940

Significant Dates: c. 1855, 1881, 1897

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Unknown

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

The two E. J. Caire & Co. stores are locally significant in the area of commerce within St. John the Baptist Parish because they are rare surviving examples of rural stores. Rural emporiums such as these played a significant role in meeting the material needs of the general public from before the Civil War until well into the twentieth century. During the post-bellum period, many were plantation stores. Each candidate served as a general mercantile and a plantation store during the Caire family's long career in the mercantile business. The period of significance for this nomination ranges from c. 1855, the approximate date of the first store's opening, through c. 1940, when rural stores generally declined in importance. However, the 1897 facility continued to serve as a rural store, albeit under reduced circumstances, until 1985.

In order to understand the role the two Caire Stores played in the economy of St. John Parish, it is helpful to understand the circumstances under which rural stores conducted business and the types of goods they provided. Only mercantiles serving the general public operated before 1865, as planters were responsible for providing the needs of their enslaved workers. However, several types of rural stores, differentiated by type of ownership and customer, operated in Louisiana after the Civil War.

In areas where plantation agriculture dominated the economy, the plantation store was the norm. With the end of the Civil War and the loss of slave labor, planters were forced to find other means to get their crops planted and harvested. In Louisiana's cotton growing parishes, the plantation system shifted to a practice known as share-cropping in which a landless farmer worked a portion of the planter's land for a share of the crop, generally one-third. However, this system was not suited to sugar growing parishes. There, planters hired gangs of laborers who were given housing on the plantation and a small weekly or monthly wage. The amount of this wage depended upon whether or not the planter also provided food for the worker. In both the cotton and sugar parishes, planters usually paid workers' wages in script or credit vouchers redeemable at the plantation store. Because the planters feared that their laborers might leave before the crop was in, they often withheld part of these wages until the end of the year.

The timber industry, which came to Louisiana in the 1880s, brought a different kind of rural store to the state. This was the company-owned and controlled commissary, located within a company-built town. Many times its customers were a captive audience, for workers were often paid in script which could be redeemed only at the company store. In both plantation and timber company stores, the businesses seldom sold merchandise to persons outside the influence of the plantation or the timber company.

The final type of rural store was that run by entrepreneurs serving whatever population happened to live nearby. Thus, both agricultural workers and members of the general public frequented these businesses. Despite the type of ownership involved, all of these stores provided a wide variety of goods, ranging from manufactured clothes to foodstuffs to tools to patent medicines -- in short, everything the rural householder could want.

The Caire family's connection with mercantile endeavors began between 1840 and 1850, when Jean Baptiste Caire migrated to Louisiana from France. After his arrival, Caire worked as a

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marchand, or peddler, along the River Road in the St. John Parish area. Serious competition to Caire's business began around 1855 when J. L. Aubert opened a general merchandise store (the brick candidate) in Edgard. Although Caire's descendants are unsure of the exact date of the agreement, Caire and Aubert became partners; and the two men agreed that Caire would purchase Aubert's half of the company in five years. The buy-out was completed by or before 1865. The two-story store contained a sales room and smaller storage space on its first floor. The second floor housed a larger storage room and a single room where the store's clerks lived. Merchandise arrived at the store via steamboats which tied up at the store's landing. The business apparently operated on a combination cash and credit system, for old records preserved by the Caire family indicate that customers were allowed to charge purchases. This practice continued for the general public after the Civil War. Caire operated the store successfully until his death in 1879.

Jean Baptiste's Caire's son Etienne was only nine years old when his father died, so his mother, Felicie Burcard Caire, operated the business until Etienne graduated from Jefferson College c. 1885 at the age of seventeen. Felicie was probably assisted by Camille J. B. Graugnard, her husband's nephew, who had previously worked for his uncle in the store. After 1885 Etienne J. Caire apparently controlled the business, assisted by his mother.

It is unclear exactly when the store began serving plantation workers. Jean Baptiste Caire owned land in St. John Parish, but it was not a plantation. In fact, the family owned no plantations until Felicie began purchasing land in the 1870s. She married Camille J. B. Graugnard in 1885 and the couple eventually owned five plantations. However, workers from only two – Columbia and Church Place -- traded at her son's store. The Graugnards paid their workers in a combination of cash and coupons which could be redeemed only at the business now called E. J. Caire & Co.

With the trade of both plantation workers and the general public, Etienne Caire's store prospered so much that a major expansion eventually became necessary. A new frame building, located several yards downriver from the older store, opened in 1897. After that, the brick store was used primarily for storage, although the second floor workers' living space remained in use. It became the home of a watchman who was required to check the property hourly at night.

The new store was huge in comparison with its predecessor. Organized into four areas, it housed groceries on one side of the building. Notions and household goods were sold in the center; and clothing, fabric and shoes were displayed on the other side. A handsome paneled office containing at least three rooms stretched across the rear. The attic was used for storage.

The business continued to prosper as a rural mercantile well into the twentieth century -- even after the system of paying workers in coupons or script was finally abandoned. Although he hired managers to run the store while he took care of other business enterprises, E. J. Caire remained the sole owner until his death in 1955. Family members continued to run the store unchanged for three more years. Then they modernized the interior and re-opened it as a self-service establishment. The store operated in this form until its temporary closure in 1972. In that years brothers Walten and Warren Caire opened a smaller grocery store in part of the building and rented part to the local library and, later, a senior citizens group. However, a large portion of the store at the rear remained vacant. The brothers finally closed the business in 1985. Since that time parts of the building have been rented on occasion. A dry cleaning establishment occupies the small front section where the library was once located, but the rest of the 1897 building is vacant. The c. 1855 building continues

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to be used for storage.

In assessing the significance of stores such as E. J. Caire & Co., it should be noted that both plantation stores and rural general merchandise stores serving a wider population are now extremely rare. The end of the sharecropping and gang labor systems and the increasing popularity of the automobile (which allowed its owner to acquire goods in nearby towns) brought about their decline during the 1940s. Through the years, the majority of rural stores have either been demolished, allowed to deteriorate and fall down, or in some cases removed from the property. Those which survive are usually closed, vacant, deteriorated and face an uncertain future. There is no way to determine how many rural stores once existed, but it is possible to estimate the number of plantation stores which formerly occupied the landscape. Almost every plantation of any size either had one or was served by one such as Caire. If an average of 50 to 100 large plantations per parish is accepted, it can be seen that such stores were once numerous within the countryside. The St. John the Baptist Parish Standing Structures Survey records only four buildings which could be positively identified as rural stores. These were the two Caire facilities, Whitney (c.1890), and Terre Haute (c. 1880); and Terre Haute looked as if it was about to fall down as the survey was completed. Thus, the c. 1855 E. J. Caire & Co. store is an extremely rare example of a rural store dating from before the late nineteenth century, and both stores are rare survivors representing the rural mercantile store phenomenon in their parish. As such, they are worthy additions to the National Register.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Division of Historic Preservation. Historic Structures Survey of St. John the Baptist Parish.

Historic photo of both Caire stores, in St. John the Baptist Development Board, *St. John The Baptist Parish Resources and Facilities*. Department of Public Works Planning Division, c. 1956, p. 78.

Interview with Warren Caire, descendant of Jean Baptiste Caire and Etienne J. Caire and current owner of Caire stores, August 3, 2001, Edgard, Louisiana. All information on Caire family history and operation of the stores came from this interview.

Site visit by National Register staff

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

- 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: #
- 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: .4 acre

UTM References: **Zone Easting Northing**
 15 735260 3326190

Verbal Boundary Description: See attached sketch map.

Boundary Justification: Boundaries are drawn to encompass the yard historically associated with the two stores. They follow property lines on the north, east and west. The southern boundary follows the fence that separates the stores' yard from the rest of the Caire family's homestead.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register staff

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

Telephone: (225) 342-8160

Date: August 2001

PROPERTY OWNERS

Warren F. Caire
P. O. Box 195
Edgard, Louisiana 70049
(985) 497-3282

E. J. CAIRE & CO. STORES

Edgard, St. John the Baptist Parish, LA

LEGEND

#1 1897 Store

#2 c. 1855 Store

Scale: 1" = 50'

Boundary: - - - -

