

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

FEB 6 1989

# 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 Hacienda de Carlos Vasallo

other names/site number Casa Hacienda de Dn. Oscar Nevárez; Hacienda de Río Nuevo

### 2. Location

street & number State Road #693 Km. 0 Hm. 4  not for publication n/a

city, town Dorado  vicinity n/a

state Puerto Rico code PR county Dorado code 051 zip code 00646

### 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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
n/a

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 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.

Mariano G. Coronas Castro May 12, 1988  
Signature of certifying official Date

Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office  
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:) \_\_\_\_\_

Amy Schlazel

3/22/89

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 dwellingSundry Structure/Sugar Mill

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Single dwellingBusiness/Storage

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Other/Vernacular Mode

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brickswalls Wood

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roof zinc metal sheetsother cement floor tilesconcrete balaustrade on balcony

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

The house floor plan is an L-shaped one, organized by a rectangle-like structure (containing five large rooms and a small one) and a wing which contains five more living units. This type of architectural arrangement is, sometimes, called a martillo (hammer) arrangement. This hammer-part which forms the "L" contains the kitchen area and the bathroom facilities. This feature was characteristic of most well-to-do Puerto Rican houses during the 19th century and very early 20th century.

A balcony encircles the house, on all but two sides. Most rooms in the house are located en enfilade, one opening unto the other, and all opening unto the balcony. We must note that no internal corridor as such exists, the balcony functions as an external corridor. This arrangement saved space and materials, providing multiple functions for the balcony in an era with a different concept of privacy to our own. Both entrances to the house, the main entrance and the back entrance, face the balcony. The main entrance sports a curved brick staircase (curved on both sides), called in Spanish escalera de rizo. This staircase is centralized in terms of the main facade, while the back staircase (sporting only one curved side) is not centralized with regards to the facade it faces. Both entrances, the formal one connecting the house with the outside world and the back one, connecting the house with the work area, establish the balcony as a most important area: a working, storage and entertainment area, as well as an architectural instrument of protection against the glaring sun and tropical rains.

The main entrance opens unto the balcony and the living and dining room. These two areas are separated formally by a mediopunto, a screen-like element that individualizes yet does not formally separate these two areas. A strong axis is thus created by this special arrangement. Bedrooms and other rooms are located on both sides of this combination. The axis (staircase-balcony-living room-dining room) ends in the back balcony. The house is, then, in terms of visual effects fully integrated to its context, being an architectural solution to the ever busy type of life an hacienda such as this faced.

The rectangular part (made out of wood) is covered by a hip zinc metal sheet roof; while the martillo (also made out of wood) is covered by a glazed zinc sheet roof.

**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)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture  
Industry  
Agriculture

Period of Significance

19th century

Significant Dates

1849

1861

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Significant Person

n/a

Architect/Builder

n/a

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

The buildings (main and secondary) of this hacienda are located on the area known as Río Nuevo, close to the so-called "chorro de agua". The area is documented since 1511, when Don Juan Ponce de León settled here, if only temporarily. A few years later, one Don Andrés López settled here, establishing a finca. According to local tradition, it was also to this area that Don Juan González, interpreter to the Spanish during the 1520's, came when wounded by the Indians (by no less than 36 arrows!).

The area, known also as the Toa region, became an early enclave of Spanish power. By 1515, the fabled Finca de los Reyes Católicos was already established on this region, producing domesticated goods for the rest of the Island. By 1519, there were 17 haciendas or fincas located here, prior even to the settlement of San Juan, the Capital of Puerto Rico. Besides having a great climate and fertile lands, the area was centrally-located, in terms of the transportation route created by the Toa River, which connected San Juan, Palo Seco to the interior of the Island.

The Toa or Plata River valley's terrain, where this plantation is located, is comprehended within the low, alluvial lands of the northern coastal valley where soil formations are due to seasonal floodings that carry rich mineral deposits from the Central Mountain Ranged washed down by the largest rivers found in Puerto Rico. La Plata or Toa is one of these.

Since the early days of Spanish colonization (15th century) the area of Toa was mentioned as agriculturally rich. It was originally inhabited by Taino Indians whose mandioc and corn fields and fruit trees caught the attention of the conquistadors. After the collapse of the first colonial policy--gold mining carried out by the indians--by mid-1500's, the Spaniards resorted to subsistence agriculture, while the colonial capital of San Juan was turned into a formidable military bastion in order to protect Spanish trading routes and Spanish Main. Nevertheless,

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

- Abad y Lasierra, Fray Iñigo. Historia geográfica y natural de la Isla de San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico (Río Piedras, P.R.: Ediciones UPR, 1959).
- Archivo General de Puerto Rico, Asuntos Políticos y Civiles, Sub-serie Visitas, Caja #187.
- Archivo General de Puerto Rico, Fondo de los Gobernadores, Toa Baja, Caja #587.
- Archivo General de Puerto Rico, Diputación Provincial, Serie Dorado, 1849-76, Caja #160.

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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
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #           n/a
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #           n/a

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

          n/a          

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property 6.18 acres

UTM References

A 

1	9	7	8	9	0	7	5	2	0	3	7	7	9	5
Zone			Easting					Northing						

C 

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B 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

D 

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

To the North and East the property is bounded by the Río Nuevo and to the South and West by Road #693.

See enclosed plan.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the house, chimney and sugar-processing mill ruins that were, historically, a part of the hacienda. It includes all the land surrounded by the river and the road.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

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organization Municipality of Dorado date September, 1987

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The structure rests on brick posts, a most unusual architectural response in Puerto Rico in terms of material. Usually wood was used; in the 20th century posts such as these were built of reinforced concrete. The house, as is proven by its size and proportions must have strived to create an air of casual, vernacular elegance. Excepts for the posts upon which it rests and the concrete balcony all the interior floors, exterior and interior walls are made of wood.

There is evidence that the house has suffered changed. In particular, it is significant to note that the "mediopunto" screen, might have been added to the original structure during the early 20th century when they became fashionable. The concrete balcony is also an early 20th century addition which replaced the original wooden one. These changes, however, have not altered the basic integrity of the house for they are the historic and architectural response to new materials and ways of adapting a 19th century house to new ways of living.

The structure complex is composed of the ruins of the sugar mills fireplace, the so called "tren jamaquino" and the chimneya, basic components in the sugar production process. All parts are built of brick and there are remains of the stucco which covered this material. The chimney funnels upwards until it reaches its imposing height (in comparison to the main house structure).

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The structures are located in a 6.8 acre property clearly defined by the rivers which marks the northern and eastern part of the land and by road #693, which bounds the property to the west and south.

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the Toa valley became a major "hato" or cattle grazing ranch under the direct supervision of Spanish royal officers.

In a report commissioned by Emperor Philip II in 1582, the Toa lands were described as very fertile in which there were established three sugar mills (one hydraulic and two horse-driven). It was pointed out that besides sugar, ginger was a major commodity widely cultivated by the rural inhabitants. Thus, as a result of its demand in contemporary European markets, ginger would partially become the core of agricultural production side by side with leather production ( a well established trade since early 1500's since it was extensively used by the Spanish imperial troops in the main continent). (1)

The expanding ginger cultivation infringed upon agricultural subsistence production. In 1613 the Capital's Town Hall Aldermen filed a report in the Colonial Governor's Office which complained about the "harm done (to the land) by excessive ginger cultivation". The report also mentioned that the Toa's sugar planters had large tracts of land dedicated to cattle grazing. The brief document gives the impression that the area seemed to have been rather well developed for its times and relatively wealthy since it was requested from the Governor that an "Alcalde Mayor" or Senior Mayor be appointed to punish and detain the wave "of frequent misdemeanors and thefts that are committed in the village by the Bayamón and Toa river banks". (2)

By mid-1600's ginger, sugar, and leather were the most important items produce by the colonial planter. Sugar production in the vicinity of San Juan was centered in 7 plantations by 1647: 4 on the Bayamón River, 2 at the Toa and 1 in Loysa. Therefore, out of 3 sugar mills or "trapiches" that existed in Toa in 1582, only 2 survived at the beginning of the second half of the 17th century, the Santa Elena (determined eligible for inclusion 07-22-83) and the Río Nuevo Hacienda (now being nominated).

Between 1650's and 1750's the region excelled in sugar, ginger, cattle grazing, and leather production. But the absence of socio-economic integration and planning policy caused by the old Spanish imperial military policy directed to strictly maintain the Island as a passive/protective stronghold against foreign intervention or threat, impaired maximum agricultural development. At the beginning of the 18th century the War of Spanish Succession toppled the aging Habsburgs policies and were replaced by the enlightened French Bourbonic Dynasty. The French physiocratic thought and practice, for example, found its way into Spanish reformism and had its repercussions in Puerto Rico. In 1757 a

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land reform began to take place as a direct consequence of a Royal charter which established the Barcelona Trading Co. as a new exchange trading mechanism between Spain and its colonies. The reform had special significance for the region surrounding the old City Capital since its port was commissioned as the major trading post for the Barcelona Co.

The 1757 reform was based on the transformation of land proprietary rights. Since the colonization times land was the Crown's sole property and through royal concessions and conditions could an individual cultivate it. The property rights began to be transferred to individuals as long as they would work the lands producing those goods and staples beneficial to the Crown, the Company and the Colony. Therefore, for the exchange of proprietary rights taxes were to be paid and certain dues would be given to colonial officers. Land was seen, then, as productive property in its modern meaning. Thus, for the first time land was fenced in according to official dispositions: the old wide opened cattle grazing grounds were confined to protect the new land to be cultivated in "sugar, tobacco, cotton, cocoa, coffee, ginger, and other minor products". (4) The Toa Valley was singularly affected by this new development since it was located within the limits--administrative, economic, and judicial--of the Capital City.

This early stage of reformism could be labeled as "transitional in as much the nomadism of the cattle grazing industry was intermingled with agriculture to give way, later on, to the appearance and development of sedentary agriculture". The so-called transitional period took up speed and momentum during the course of the century's last three decades which signified the conversion of Puerto Rico into a major sugar "bowl". (5)

It also became evident that besides Bourbonic reformism, capital was needed to develop the land. The King's confidant Field Marshall Alejandro O'Reilly stressed in 1765 that it was of outmost importance for any future development in the Colony to increase the reform's pace, but added that "I consider indispensable that men of means establish themselves in order to build up sugar mills". (6) This idea was echoed in 1775 by Fernando Miyares when he wrote that the lands of Toa were "very appropriate for sugar cane" production. Their quality and fertility, he argued, were so high that with little capital "considerable number of sugar plantations could be establish".

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The independence wars of Haití and Venezuela during the early XIX century together with a royal decree allowing foreigners and refugees to settle in Puerto Rico ( Cédula de Gracia) and giving them incentives to develop agriculture were determinant factors in the development of the Toa valley.

Don Carlos Vasallo's family was most certainly one of the new settlers who came to the island motivated by the incentives of the Cédula de Gracia.

The Vasallo family, according to local tradition, acquired the old dilapidated sugar plantation and began to develop it. Under Don Carlos Vasallo it became one of the most important plantations of the valley, surpassed only by the Hacienda Santa Elena on the other eastern bank of the town river. Using the latest techniques, Don Carlos built a then modern sugar mill in 1849. Of this mill only the fireplace and part of the "tren jamaiquino" remain.

This sugar mill continued to function until 1916 when tobacco and later milk industry took root.

In all probability, the basic house structure still standing today was built for Don Carlos Vasallo. Particular elements such as the brick posts upon which the house rest, the curved brick staircases and the morphological arrangement of the floor plan point out to a type of house, characteristic of 19th century architecture in Puerto Rico. As of today however, no written evidence has been found as to the exact age of this building.

Morphologically, the house presents an arrangement suited perfectly to the life of a 19th century hacienda and to its rural context. For example, the elegant brick posts upon which the house rests are also functional elements used as a protection against the ever occurring floods that constantly threaten the area. Two entrances, one facing the river with a view of the bridge and aqueduct of the Reyes Católicos over the Toa river or Río La Plata, and the second one located towards the back of the building, provide easy access to the balcony, that symbolic and functional core of each hacienda. The main entrances, facing the river and the road (sources of power and transportation) establishes a strong hierarchical axis between the house proper and these two very important connections with the outside world. It should also be remembered that the river was a source of beauty. The elegant yet simple structure strikes us as a complement to its context, a symbol of a long-

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gone way of life. The fact that the ruins of the sugar mills are still standing reinforces the importance of the site as an agricultural cum architectural entity.

Very few haciendas such as this exist in Puerto Rico, and none in the Municipality of Dorado. Architecturally speaking, the materials, methods of construction employed, the form of the building and its relationship to the site are of great historic importance to the region and the island.

Since 1511 the area and this site have been associated to well known historic figures such as Don Juan Ponce de León, the island's first settler and discoverer of Florida, who established in this area the first experimental agricultural station in 1511. The hacienda is also part of Dorado's folklore as the site of the still hidden treasure of the fabled Niña del Plata, a 19th century heiress who supposedly lived the house. According to the legend, she died of love after knowing of the death of her lover. The legends of her ghost and the historic data on the experimental plantation prove the importance of this river valley and its relationship to the historic context of the town of Dorado.