

Louisiana National Register Review Committee Meeting

May 16, 2012, 2:30 p.m.
Louisiana State Museum, Baton Rouge, 660 4th Street
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Minutes

Chairperson Glenna Kramer called the May 16, 2012 meeting of the National Register Review Committee to order at 2:30 p.m. In addition to Mrs. Kramer, members present included John Sykes, Mrs. Mary Louise Christovich, Mrs. Ann Williams, Lynn Lewis, Gary Cooper, and Dr. John Hall. Mrs. Sue Turner, Dr. Philip Cook, Wayne Coco, Lestar Martin, and Dr. Rebecca Saunders were absent.

At the request of Dr. Hall, the Committee voted to amend the agenda to allow him to read a verbal resolution of condolence to Mrs. Christovich, who lost her husband in April. After reading the resolution, Dr. Hall moved and Mr. Lewis seconded, that the resolution be approved. It passed unanimously.

After this formality, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer and Division of Historic Preservation Director Nicole Hobson-Morris welcomed the audience and thanked the Committee members for changing their meeting date to coincide with the Office of Cultural Development's Cultural Connection activities. She then discussed various legislative measures in Congress and the State Legislature that address historic preservation.

Following Ms. Hobson-Morris' remarks, National Register Coordinator Patricia Duncan introduced the Committee members present. The Committee then addressed the minutes of the November 17, 2011 meeting. Mr. Cooper made the motion for approval of the minutes and Mr. Lewis seconded this motion, which passed without opposition.

Under Old Business, State Historic Preservation Officer Pam Breaux updated the Committee on the status of the New Orleans Levee Breaches nomination, which they considered at their last meeting. Ms. Breaux thanked the Committee for its consideration of this highly complex nomination, which the majority declined to recommend because of their concerns over the large amount of information provided, the presence in the document of language indicating blame, and their own lack of expertise about levees. After the meeting, Ms. Breaux discussed the future of the nomination with the Division's National Register and administrative staff. All agreed that, for reasons specific to the National Register eligibility criteria, the nomination deserved to move forward in the process. (Although SHPOs usually follow the advice of their Review Committees, each state's SHPO does have the right to move a candidate forward in the process without the Committee's endorsement.) Because one of the breach sites is owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, regulations required the Division to forward the nomination to that Federal agency for review and comment. The regulations also called for this comment occur within a specific timeframe. However, the Corp's Federal Preservation Officer failed to meet the deadline, possibly due to ongoing litigation concerning the 2005 Katrina flood. At this point, the National Park Service (NPS) advised the SHPO to inform the applicant (Levees.org) of its

right to appeal directly to NPS. As part of the appeal process, NPS asked for confirmation of the SHPO's opinion on eligibility as well as for copies of all pertinent documentation. The Corps of Engineers received a similar request. Our office provided this material promptly. At this point, the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation no longer has any authority in the matter, as the outcome is in the hands of the Keeper of the National Register.

After Ms. Breaux's presentation, Patricia Duncan reported that there appeared to have been no progress in addressing the issue of fair insurance coverage for National Register-listed properties.

Under New Business, the Committee turned to the review of nominations.

Ponchatoula Historic District Boundary Increase, Boundary Decrease, Additional Documentation
Tangipahoa Parish, LA

Presented by Donna Fricker

The Ponchatoula Commercial Historic District was listed on the National Register on October 5, 1982. The goals of this update are to adjust the boundaries to reflect the current reality in downtown Ponchatoula, provide up-to-date descriptive information on a district now almost 30 years old, and adjust the statement of significance to remove the references to the strawberry processing industry and add commerce.

The new boundaries of the adjusted Ponchatoula Commercial Historic District (Tangipahoa Parish) encompass 72 buildings, 31% of which are non-contributing. (The listed district encompasses 67 buildings, with a 28% non-contributing rate.) Contributing elements range in date from circa 1900 through 1960. There are three proposed small areas of boundary increases. These reflect the fact that additional buildings in downtown Ponchatoula are now 50 years old or older and contribute to the significance of the district. The largest, with a total of eleven buildings, is located to the north of the existing district (see map). This area reflects the post-World War II expansion of the commercial district referenced above. Six of the buildings are contributing; five are non-contributing. The other two proposed expansions (one building each) are as follows: a free-standing post-World War II building (presumably built as a professional office, inventory #46) near the southeast corner South 5th and Oak and a free-standing post-World War II commercial building (#39) on East Pine east of South 5th. The submission also includes a boundary decrease of 4 buildings (in the district's southwest corner) due to redevelopment since the district was listed. None of the buildings demolished in this area were notable.

One of the buildings included in the boundary increase, the First Guarantee Bank (1960, John Desmond, architect), is individually eligible for the Register under Criterion C. Its accomplished design displays skillful interplay of mass, voids and wall planes. Offices are expressed as black clad shiny masses. The lobby, located near the center of the building, is expressed with a recessed glass curtain wall and three finely made barrel vaults above. Additional complexity is derived from an overhang that spans the main façade. Its slender supports have a classic, austere elegance. The bank is a first-rate example of mid-century modern commercial architecture at the state level. Furthermore, it is a rare landmark of a "high-art" modern commercial-professional building in small town Louisiana.

The bank is currently endangered because its owner wants to demolish and replace it with a new banking facility. Thus, the bank's corporate ownership has officially objected to the inclusion of the building in the historic district update and expansion. Because a Federal license will be required for this new branch to operate, the building has become a focus of a Section 106 review which has involved the Advisory Council as well as the FDIC. On May 10, the SHPO learned that the bank has sold the building to a private developer who also plans to demolish it. This new owner has also submitted an official letter of objection to the listing. Ms. Duncan clarified that the Committee has access to the objection letter from the previous and current owners.

Attorney Duncan Kemp represented the bank's new owner at the meeting. Alton Lewis of First Guaranty Bank (the former owner) and Ponchatoula Mayor Robert Zabbia also attended. All three opposed the nomination. Ponchatoula Main Street Manager and Certified Local Government staff member Charlene Daniels also attended but did not speak. (The historic district expansion was originally requested on behalf of the Ponchatoula Main Street and CLG programs.) Carolyn Bennett of the Foundation for Historical Louisiana and Melanie Ricketts, a resident of the parish where the bank is located, attended in support of including the bank in the historic district.

Due to the complexity of the discussion which followed Mrs. Fricker's presentation, a transcript of this portion of the meeting is attached to these minutes. It should be considered part of the official record. Thus, the entire discussion will not be summarized here. However, the following important points should be noted:

- Mr. Kemp explained that he had only been retained the day before the meeting and had had very little time to familiarize himself with the situation.
- Mr. Kemp did not understand that Section 106 review and the National Register are two separate programs with separate processes. Thus, he expressed anger that documents submitted by First Guaranty Bank as part of the 106 process had not been shared with the Review Committee.
- Mr. Kemp did not understand the difference between an individual listing of a building and its inclusion as a contributing element in a National Register historic district.
- Mr. Kemp interpreted the state's instructions for filing an objection (a document previously approved by the National Park Service [NPS]) to say that one property owner's objection could stop the listing of an entire historic district.
- Mr. Kemp found the state's notification letter, which has also previously been approved by NPS, to be vague and not issued in good faith. He believed that due process had not been followed because one of the notification letters was sent to the bank building's former address rather than the current one. (Nevertheless, the bank did submit three objection letters over an eight-month period. The new owner submitted one as well. All letters are attached to these minutes.)

After discussion ended, three votes were taken: one to approve the boundary increase, one to approve the boundary decrease, and one to approve additional documentation. All votes passed without objection.

St. Bernard Market, Orleans Parish, LA
Presented by John Williams and Mary Lane Carleton

The St. Bernard Market is large, highly styled building located adjacent to the elevated I-10 interstate at the edge of the Esplanade Ridge National Register Historic District of New Orleans. The building that stands today was built in 1932, which was outside the period of significance when the district was added to the Register in 1980. However, the building is locally significant in the area of commerce under Criterion A because it is one of the few existing New Orleans Municipal Public Markets from the period of significance, 1932-1941 that survives with its integrity largely intact. In its market capacity, it provided residents a community grocery, as well as numerous other community based services including a dentist, doctor, pharmacy and banking. The State Historic Preservation Office believes that each of the most intact New Orleans Public Markets should be listed on the National Register. Magazine Street and the Suburban Market have achieved that status, but the St. Bernard Market has not. The market is also locally significant in the area of architecture under Criterion C because, as a textbook example, it embodies the distinctive characteristics of or features common to the Spanish Colonial Revival style. It is also eligible under Criterion C because it is a rare and important New Orleans example of the style as used in a commercial building. Its most outstanding architectural features are its arcade, tower, and cupola. The store's owner did not attend the meeting.

After the presentation, Mrs. Kramer asked for clarification of the building's location within or outside of the Esplanade Ridge Historic District. Mr. Williams and Ms. Carleton explained that the building is a non-contributing element within the boundaries of the district because its period of construction and design fell outside the district's period of significance. Mrs. Kramer then indicated her understanding of the request for individual listing for the building. Mr. Sykes asked if the name of the architectural firm that designed the building was once Stone and Stone; Mr. Williams answered in the affirmative and briefly listed a few other buildings designed by Samuel Payne Stone, Jr. Mr. Lewis commented that the building's entrance looks Japanese to him and asked if it is original. Mr. Williams again answered in the affirmative and explained that the original drawings exist in the Tulane Southeast Architectural Archives. Mr. Cooper then moved to recommend the nomination to the State Historic Preservation Officer and Mr. Lewis seconded. The motion passed without objection.

Myrtlewood, Rapides Parish, LA
Presented by Paul Smith

Myrtlewood is a relatively large, masonry and frame, two-story residence circa 1925 built in the Classical Revival style. Set on a high point on a large landscaped lot in Pineville, Rapides Parish, the house and its setting combine to make an impressive architectural statement. Significant features include a grand two-story front portico and a smaller side portico. Myrtlewood is locally significant under Criterion C: Design in the area of architecture. It is a textbook example of an early twentieth century Classical Revival style house displaying most of the elements of that style. It may be the only example of an early twentieth century residence in the Classical Revival style in the area. When evaluating Myrtlewood, it is important to remember the provincial nature of the area in question. It was always remote from larger urban areas and as such tastes and fashions were not as grand as in other more developed areas. This is evidenced even from an earlier time if one compares the expression of a rare surviving local early nineteenth century plantation house with, for instance, the much grander plantation houses of the River Road or the most stylish local urban homes of the early twentieth century with those

of New Orleans from the same era. For this reason Myrtlewood is nominated as being locally significant.

After the presentation, Mr. Sykes asked for the date of the historic photos which had been shown. Mr. Smith explained that they were taken c. 1925, shortly after the home's construction. Mrs. Williams inquired about the building's current use. Mr. Smith answered that it has always been a private residence. He then clarified that Gloria Hearn, the third and current owner, has owned the property since 1990. Mrs. Hearn attended the meeting and also addressed the Committee. She explained that the building was deteriorated when she and her husband purchased it and expanded slightly upon Mr. Smith's discussion of the home's expansive grounds. Mr. Lewis moved that the Committee recommend the candidate to the State Historic Preservation Officer and Mr. Sykes seconded. The motion passed without objection.

Under Announcements, Ms. Duncan explained the recent ruling that members of boards and commissions must complete a short ethics training course and advised them how to access the materials. Mr. Lewis affirmed how honored he feels to serve and thanks Jonathan and Donna Fricker for extending the invitation to him.

There being no further business, Mr. Cooper moved that the meeting adjourn and Mr. Lewis. It passed unanimously, thus adjourning the meeting at 4 p.m.