

Louisiana National Register Review Committee Meeting

November 20, 2014 1:30pm
Capitol Park Welcome Center
702 North River Road
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Minutes

Chairwoman Dr. Rebecca Saunders called the November 20, 2014 regular meeting of the National Register Review Committee to order at 1:31 p.m. In addition to Dr. Saunders, members present included John Sykes, Mrs. Sue Turner, Mrs. Peggy Lowe, Sam Kincade, Mrs. Martha Saloman, Kelly Rich, Turry Flucker, and Dr. Matthew Savage. Mayor Lynn Lewis and Tarah Arcuri were unable to attend. Dr. Robert Carriker was late after getting stuck in traffic, but made it to the meeting halfway through.

Dr. Saunders asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Martha Saloman so moved, with Sam Kincade seconding. This motion passed unanimously.

Division Director, Nicole Hobson-Morris, welcome the audience and Committee members.

National Register Coordinator Jessica Richardson then introduced all Review Committee members present to the audience.

Dr. Saunders asked for a motion to approve the minutes of April's meeting. Sam Kincade so moved, with Mrs. Turner seconding. This motion passed unanimously.

Under New Business, the Committee considered five National Register nominations.

Hodges Gardens, Sabine Parish

Presented by James Turner, nomination preparer (along with Kim Kelly, park manager)

Hodges Gardens is the result of the passion, vision and financing of oil and timber businessman A.J. Hodges and his wife Nona Trigg Hodges. It was and is a cultural, design, and horticultural venue of its time, mixed with significant accomplishments in forestry and conservation. Located in a few miles southeast of Florien, Sabine Parish, Louisiana, a mere 20 miles or so from the Texas-Louisiana border, Hodges Gardens is now a state park consisting of over 900 acres that includes gardens, roadways, manmade waterfalls, lakes, forests, islands, pavilions, and cabins. The park remains in good condition thanks to continuous care both by the A.J. and Nona Trigg Hodges Foundation and the Louisiana Office of State Parks. The contributing buildings within the park are designed in a mid-century modern style and stand out as such. This formerly over lumbered land was redesigned and reimagined by A.J. Hodges into a beautiful designed landscape and is eligible for listing on the National Register.

Hodges Gardens State Park is locally significant under Criterion A: History in the area of Entertainment/Recreation because it served as a major attraction not only for locals in and around Florien and Sabine Parish, but also as an attraction for people throughout the state and country. It is also significant at the local level under Criterion B for its association with Andrew Jackson Hodges. A.J. Hodges turned the barren wasteland into a sustainable forest which had a tremendous impact on the conservation movement and the local and state economy. He also created the beautiful gardens that were the foundation for the local and statewide tourism industry. Lastly, It is locally significant under Criterion C: Architecture in the areas of architecture and landscape architecture because of its collection of mid-century modern buildings located within the park as well as its mid-century designed landscape. The period of significance ranges from 1950 to 1969. Construction on the park began in 1950 and the last project of was completed in 1969. Over 12,000 people visited the park in the first 8 months that the park was open to the public. Today, the Gardens are visited by approximately 50,000 people annually.

Mr. Kincade had a couple questions about the waterways and if they had been restored. Mr. Turner stated that some are broken (and some have been not functioning for a very long time) and that they would like to restore

them where feasibly possible. The other major item that the Friends of Hodges Gardens are worried about is the conservatory and greenhouses, which are scheduled for demolition.

Mr. Kincade moved that the nomination be recommended to the State Historic Preservation Officer. Ms. Saloman seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

First United Methodist Church, Rapides Parish

Presented by Donna Fricker, nomination preparer

The focus of the First United Methodist Church National Register nomination is a mid-century modern brick church built in 1967. (The plans are dated 1966. The last service in the old church was in August 1967, and the present church was consecrated in June 1968.) It is part of a much larger complex (fellowship hall, classrooms, offices) of the same date. While the church is connected to the complex via a corridor at one corner, the building has a discrete presence. It “reads” as a single composition. The complex is located roughly a mile-and-a-half southwest of downtown on Jackson Avenue, a busy, two-lane thoroughfare traversing an early to mid 20th century residential area. (It was here to the southwest that the city grew in the post-war years.) A small stream called Bayou Robert meanders through the northeast end of the site, just behind the sanctuary. Other than a large addition at the rear, very little has changed at the First United Methodist Church complex since its dedication. Because of its high degree of integrity, the First United Methodist Church remains eligible for listing on the National Register.

The First United Methodist Church of Alexandria is of exceptional local significance under Criterion C (design) and Criteria Consideration G (properties that have achieved significance within the last 50 years). Its sanctuary is a superlative statement of mid-century modern architecture within the context of the City of Alexandria (population roughly 55,000). Among the hundred or so buildings in the city that display some aspect of mid-century modern architecture, First United Methodist is one of a small number that represent the high-water mark of period design. The period of significance corresponds to the period of design and construction: 1966-68. (See exceptional significance justification below.)

The above assessment is based on research, analysis and fieldwork done by the authors for (1) three other mid-twentieth century properties successfully listed on the National Register for local architectural significance: Alexandria Post-War Suburbs Historic District; Guaranty Bank, Park Avenue Branch; and Gemiluth Chassodim Synagogue; (2) historic context statements on Louisiana Architecture: 1945-65; and (3) additional fieldwork focused on mid-century modern houses of worship in the Alexandria specifically for this nomination.

Several people were in attendance in support of this nomination including Dorman Clayton and seven other members from the church. Reverend Donnie Wilkinson was also in attendance. Mrs. Lowe asked if the features seen in one of the interior pictures were organ pipes. Mr Clayton responded that they are and that originally, they were covered with a fabric. Mrs. Fricker added that the removal of this fabric has been the only interior alteration to the building. Dr. Savage added that he wished that parts of the nomination had equally emphasized the art and its significance. Jessica Richardson added that the artists were discussed as part of the nomination but art as an area of significance was left out. Dr. Savage further added that he would gladly provide a graduate student to help research the significance of the art in this building.

Mr. Sykes then moved that the property be recommended to the State Historic Preservation Officer and Dr. Savage seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Robert “Bob” Hicks House, Washington Parish

Presented by Barbara Hicks-Collins, nomination preparer

The Robert “Bob” Hicks House is located in Bogalusa, Washington Parish, Louisiana, in a town that has historically been centered on a large mill and today is centered around a paper mill. Divided into roughly four quadrants by the central mill and main thoroughfares, the Hicks House is located in southeastern Bogalusa just off South Columbia Street in a residential area. This area was originally designed and planned for African Americans of Bogalusa. Designed in a simple transitional style between the bungalows of the 1930s and 1940s and the ranch houses of the 1950s and constructed in the first half of the 1950s, the Hicks House is a one

story building clad in wood weatherboards and is set on concrete piers and measures 1590 square feet. Also on the same property is an early 20th century mill house that is considered contributing for the purposes of this nomination as it was also used during the civil rights movement for various activities and purposes. The property retains many of its original features from the 1950s including two over two horizontal wood windows, wood siding, a third width front porch, and a carport. The interior of the property has been damaged some by vandalism, but still retains its original floor plan and many original features including a fireplace and mantel. It is easily recognizable to the Hicks family members and to any of the individuals who participated and were actively involved in the Bogalusa Civil Rights Movement during the late 1960s, retains its historic integrity on both the interior and exterior, and remains eligible for listing on the National Register.

The Robert "Bob" Hicks House is locally significant under Criteria A and B, in the area of Ethnic Heritage: Black, for its role during the Civil Rights Movement in Bogalusa and for its association with Robert "Bob" Hicks, a prominent Civil Rights leader in Bogalusa who was known and acknowledged on a local, state, and national level. The period of significance for the house is 1965-1969 to reflect the years that the major contributions to the Bogalusa Civil Rights Movement occurred. The house not only served as a gathering place for Civil Rights activists, but it also served as the headquarters for the Bogalusa Deacons of Defense Chapter and the executive board members of the Bogalusa Civic and Voters League, which Adam Fairclough cites as "perhaps the most dynamic local movement in the entire South."¹ The house is a vital reminder of the Civil Rights Movement in Bogalusa and listing the property on the National Register will chronicle an important chapter in history and will pay homage to the brave people who fought to make better lives a possibility.

Mr. Flucker asked about what the plans for the house are. Mrs. Hicks-Collins state that they want to educate and empower young people and their families and create a civil rights and cultural museum. She added that she believes that a lot of people in Bogalusa are unaware of what happened within their own town. In attendance in addition to Mrs. Hicks-Collins were her mother, Mrs. Valeira Hicks, and two of her brothers, Robert and Charles. Additionally, Mr. Sailor Jackson, Jr, was in attendance and spoke in support of the nomination. Jessica Richardson added that multiple letters of support were submitted for this nomination from senators, representatives, mayors, and parish presidents.

Mr. Flucker moved that the property be recommended and Mr. Kincade seconded that the candidate be recommended to the SHPO, which passed unanimously.

Rault Center, Orleans Parish

Presented by Lisa DeKerlegand, nomination preparer

The Rault Center, originally named the Continental Center Building based on plans filed in 1965 with the City of New Orleans, consists of a 16-story high-rise structure with a rooftop penthouse located at the northwest corner of Gravier Street and South Rampart Street in the Central Business District of New Orleans, bearing the municipal address of 1111 Gravier Street. The building is not within the boundaries of the Lower Central Business District National Register District and was left out of the most recent update to the district done in 2006. The building has a gross building area of 113,956 square feet. The building was built of steel and reinforced concrete with the floors being poured in place concrete of about 4 inches thick. The exterior walls were mostly ¼ inch plate glass separated by concrete spandrels and uprights. Exterior features were a combination of aluminum and concrete panels, stucco, plate glass, marble veneer, and elements of porcelain enamel. The building was designed to reflect the Mid Century Modern aesthetics including the use of large pieces of plate glass alternating with aluminum and concrete panels to create distinct vertical elements on its elevations. The Rault Center suffered a tragic fire in 1972, severely damaging the building both through fire damage and subsequent water damage. Renovations of the building removed much of the original material, but today, the building still presents itself as a tall, concrete frame building with some other exterior remnants from the building's 1972 fire remaining to display sufficient integrity to convey the building's significance in changing state and local fire safety laws and remains eligible for the National Register.

The Rault Center, a 16-story hi-rise structure located in the Central Business District of New Orleans, is eligible for listing at the local and state level under Criterion A: History, in the area of Politics/Government. The building

¹ Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, pg xx.

falls under Criteria Consideration G as it was constructed in 1967 and is less than 50 years old. However, its significance as a site that was a catalyst in changing local and state fire safety laws following a tragic 1972 fire qualifies as exceptional significance. Prior to the fire, the building was the first mixed use high rise building in downtown New Orleans with offices, residential apartments, and the top three floors occupied by the Roof Top Club, a members-only women and men's club featuring the Old Lamplighter's restaurant/lounge, a roof-top pool and sun-deck, a putting green, a spa for women, and a health club for men. The period of significance for the building is 1972, the year of the fire for which it is significant.

Mr. Sykes asked if the building ever had any other names as he noted that in the nomination, it was originally called something else. Ms. DeKerlegand added that while it was named something else on the plans, it was opened as the Rault Center. Ms. Saloman added that not only did the fire at the Rault Center change fire safety laws with sprinkler rules, it also influenced how architects designed exit stairs and other various safety codes (she is the lone practicing architect on the review committee). She further added that many current architecture students don't know that this fire is what caused these rules to be part of the code.

Ms. Saloman then moved that the candidate be recommended to the SHPO and Dr. Saunders seconded. There were 5 yeas and one abstention from Mrs. Turner.

Lower Central Business District (Boundary Increase II), Orleans Parish

Presented by Gina LaMacchia and Wayne Troyer, nomination preparer and architect

This submission will increase the existing National Register boundaries of the Lower Central Business District Historic District, listed on the Register in 1991 and updated and expanded in 2006. There is one area of boundary increase and the total number of buildings and structures in the proposed expansion is 16. Contributing elements range from c. 1830 through 1964, except for one building, dating from 1967. This building is being counted as contributing because it reflects the design ethos of a significant component of the district and is almost fifty years old. Styles in the district include Greek Revival, Italianate Classical Revival, Moderne, New Formalism, and International Style. In terms of building use, the increased boundaries encompass a variety of commercial and the buildings range in height from 2 stories up to tall buildings and skyscrapers. This district retains integrity of location, setting, materials, design, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The Lower Central Business District is of statewide significance in the area of architecture because it and the Upper Central Business District are Louisiana's finest collections of historic commercial buildings. The Lower CBD achieves this distinction due to several factors, including an early building stock, the quality of its commercial Italianate architecture, its unparalleled collection of skyscrapers and Mid-Century Modern architecture, and the large number of landmarks (often architect designed) from various periods. The period of significance ranges from 1830 to 1964 (the fifty year cutoff). The Lower CBD, like other New Orleans districts, should be regarded as a *toute ensemble* of many styles and periods as well as building types. This document does not aim to change the significance of the district, but rather to explain how the area of boundary increase relates to the district's overall architectural significance.

There were no questions from the audience or Review Committee. Dr. Savage moved that the nomination be recommended to the SHPO and Mrs. Lowe seconded. There were 5 yeas and one abstention from Mrs. Turner.

Jessica Richardson had a few short announcements. Of the 5 nominations sent up to NPS from the April meeting, 3 have been listed. The Iberville Public Housing Development and Shreveport Commercial Historic District Update were returned for revisions, which are underway. She reminded the Review Committee that ethics training needs to be done before the end of the year.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:28p.m.