

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Lake Providence Commercial Historic District encompasses the Lake Street corridor, which was historically the main commercial area of old Lake Providence. The historic corridor extends two and a half blocks back (westward) from the Mississippi River levee, and half a block to the south on Scarborough Street. Boundaries have been carefully drawn to exclude all intrusions in the vicinity.

The district consists of 33 late 19th and early 20th century brick commercial buildings, 30 of which are one story high. The buildings share common party walls. With the exception of three major gaps, they enclose the streetscape. Although most of the buildings are only one story high, they all have a substantial parapet area above the shop front level which is treated with ornamental brickwork. In the earlier buildings, those built prior to 1910, the ornamental brickwork takes the form of multiple corbel tables and inset panels filled with bricks laid with the corners pointing outward. In the later buildings, those built after 1910, the ornamental brickwork generally takes the form of simple inset brick panels and denticular cornices formed of bricks. Several of these later buildings also have cast-iron grills, each set in its own brick frame.

In 12, (approximately 40%) of the buildings, the original shop front columns and fenestration survives. Particularly impressive in this respect are buildings numbers 1 through 7 (see map) which are set between Levee and Sparrow Streets. Here is an almost entire block of buildings, all of which retain their original turn-of-the-century shop fronts. Although some of the glass has been replaced, the ornamental cast-iron columns remain, as do the shop window opening and the panels set below them. The modern aluminum awnings on these buildings could be easily removed. The other original fronts are on the north side of Lake Street in a less concentrated grouping. Two more of the buildings retain their original door and window openings, though they have been partially boarded up. In 19 of the 33 buildings, the shop fronts have been modernized, with large sheets of plate glass, tile, and new brickwork. In only two cases has this modernization affected areas above the shop front level. In both of these cases the facades have been stuccoed over, but only one has lost its cornice.

Some parts of the district are somewhat deteriorated, and in some areas aluminum awnings have been installed. But cosmetic repairs would be sufficient to rectify these problems.

The district is low-scale and relatively open for a downtown center. To the south and west of the district is a newer mixed commercial and residential area in which the buildings are comparatively widely spaced, and there are parking lots. To the north is an open grassy area with small residences beyond.

INVENTORY

1. Masonic Temple - 2-story, 3-bay building with central segmental pedimented gable; cast-iron columns on the ground floor with acanthus console capitals. Building ornamented with bands of exposed brick corners. Ca. 1910.

2. and 3. - Brick 1-story, 9-bay shop with cast-iron columns which have fluting and patera. Building surmounted by corbel table. Ca. 1899

4. Brick 1-story, 2-bay shop surmounted by double corbel table and upper brick panel laid in herringbone pattern. Single cast-iron column (from J. Wall Foundry of Greenville, Miss.) has fluting and a star motif. 1898

5. 3-bay version of #4 with raised central paneled parapet. Iron columns also from J. Wall Foundry Ca. 1900.

* 6. 2-story, 5-bay brick commercial building with 4 brick pilaster strips, segmentally arched upper window, panels of exposed brick corners, a cast-iron shop front with fluted columns and a central free-standing column; ironwork from J. Wall Foundry; original pressed tin ceiling and Georgian style cabinets. Ca. 1897.

7. 3-bay, 1-story cast-iron fronted store with two elaborate columns which have scrollwork bases, fluting, and anthemion capitals. 1897.

8. Modified shop front, brick 1-story building with corbel table. Ca. 1920.

9.,10.,11. Each is a modified shop front, 1-story brick building with denticular cornices, and central segmental arch framed within a raised brick panel, and containing cast-iron scrollwork. #11 has been stuccoed over but still shows ornamentation and cornice. Ca. 1920. 12. 2-story, 5-bay brick building; modified shop front and stuccoed upstairs but has two cast-iron panels similar to #'s 9, 10, and 11. Ca. 1920.

13. 1-story brick, modified shop front, stuccoed upper portion still showing cornice. Ca. 1920's.

14. and 15. Stuccoed 1-story buildings. Ca. 1920.

* 16. Fisher Hotel - Buff brick 2-story building (designed with 3 stories but never completed). bays with quoins, jack arches, double arches, and Cerlian window formed of brick. Cast-iron Doric columns. Ground floor partially modified. 1905.

17. Modified shop front, 1-story commercial building with brick trimmed parapet and 2 grill panels. 1922

18. Modified shop front, brick 1-story building; central portion of parapet raised and trimmed in vertical bricks; grillwork panels. 1916.

19. 2-bay, 1-story brick building with vertical brick cornice and central segmental pediment; has turn-of-the-century Colonial details on shop front. Ca. 1910.

* 20.,21.,22. 1-story dark red brick, modified shop front buildings with small decorative panels of brick and concrete; denticular cornices and partially raised parapets capped with concrete. 1926.

23.,24.,25. 1-story, 3-bays each with fluted wood columns made to imitate the cast-iron columns in other parts of town; buildings capped by corbel table. 1898.

26. Brick, 1-story, wood shop front with corbel table and egg and dart molding. 1902.

27. Modified shop front, wide, 1-story brick building; stuccoed upper portion. 1906.

28. Modified shop front with upper part containing brick panel, corbel table and segmental arch vent. 1905.

29. 1-story brick building, elaborate upper portion containing panels of bricks laid with exposed corners, corbel table and grill vents. Though brick has been laid between them the original cast-iron columns still show at the shop front level. They were cast at the Chickasaw Iron Works in Memphis, Tenn. 1915.

30. Wood, shop fronted, 1-story brick building. 3 bays with simple brick molding and ladder work in the upper portion. 1915.

* 31. 3-bay, 1-story brick building with modified shop front; & exceptionally fine brick work in upper portion, including a row of diagonally laid bricks, a frieze containing straight-sided pointed arches, and molded cornice with a row of bricks laid with corners exposed. 1910.

* 32. Brick 3-bay, 1-story building with deeply molded upper panel. 1920.

33. Small 1-bay, 1-story brick building with upper panel containing vertically laid bricks. 1920.

* indicates photograph of individual building

SPECIFIC DATES	N/A
BUILDER/ARCHITECT	N/A

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Lake Providence Commercial Historic District is significant for its architecture and for its social and commercial importance.

The district is a relatively well preserved turn-of-the-century commercial area. Whereas most comparable districts have only a few of the original shop fronts remaining, in Lake Providence a full 40% of them survive, including almost an entire block of pre-1900 buildings, all with the original shop fronts. In addition, Lake Providence has an unusually rich and varied collection of commercial brickwork from the c.1900 corbel tables and inset panels to the ca 1920 recessed panels and simple cornices. In fact, Lake Providence can be said to contain a history of small town commercial architecture from the inception of masonry buildings in about 1895 to the first touches of modernism in the Levy Building (1926).

At the turn of the century, the old downtown area of Lake Providence was the place where the people of East Carroll Parish came to purchase needed goods and foodstuffs. People also came from parts of Mississippi by ferry. By all accounts ferry business was brisk. For example, in 1920, John Edwards operated a ferry which made four runs a day between Lake Providence and Ben Lomond, Mississippi. The Maguire and Schneider ferry which operated in 1907, also owned one of the town's three landings. Three other ferries also-operated during this period. Knowledgeable old residents of the town report that Lake Providence was, indeed, the place where people came to shop. Newspaper advertisements from the turn of the century confirm this. For example, they list clothing stores such as T.J. Powell's, Nemo White's, Max Levy, S W. Green, and Hill Bros. They list drug stores such as Guenard Drugs, City Drugs, and the Levee Street Drug Store. They also list coal for sale at Maguire and Schneider's landing, and foodstuffs for sale at S.A. McNeil Grocery Store. In addition, there was fish market, a lumber mill, a cotton seed oil mill, several dry goods stores, and several hardware stores. The fact that the town's business supported so many stores and manufacturing concerns indicates the importance of Lake Providence as a commercial focal point for the area.

Lake Providence was also a place to come for amusement and diversion at the turn of the century. Old residents report that gambling was a daily activity in the back rooms of the commercial area from the late nineteenth century until the early 1950's, when the practice was broken up by Sheriff "Red" Gilbert. At any given time, there were ten to twelve saloons operating in the town. An example was the Phil McQuire Billiards and Pool Hall, which was advertised as the sole distributor for the Live Oak Distillery Company of Cincinnati, Ohio. Another example was Van's Saloon, just back of the levee, which was frequented by blacks and had a reputation for rowdiness.

There was an opera house which gave regular musical performances. But even if there were no planned event such as a circus or musical, people still came to Lake Providence to meet friends and "watch the people." Old residents have reported that Saturday was a significant day in old Lake Providence. It was the day when families from the surrounding plantations came to town to shop. But more than a shopping trip, it was also a social occasion in which people mingled, received news of other families, picked up the mail, attended a movie or musical performance, and simply sat and watched passers-by.

Major Bibliographical References

File of old newspapers, especially East Carroll Democrat, ca. 1890-1920, in possession of Elizabeth Reed.

Interviews with Maude McPhate Van Fossen, Local historian, and Samuel Maggio, owner of the local barbershop since 1913.

Pinkston, Georgia D.P., A Place to Remember: East Carroll Parish, LA, 1832-1976 (Baton Rouge: Claitor's Publishing Division, 1977), especially chapter 4.