

The Polmer Store (c.1880) is a one story frame structure located near the intersection of Louisiana highways 311 and 309 in a rural portion of Terrebonne Parish known as Central. It is adjacent to Ellendale and Ardoyne plantations and served principally their workers. An example of vernacular architecture, it is being classified as having no style for the purposes of this nomination. The store is very well preserved, both on the exterior and interior. Also included in the nomination are a c.1905 one story frame storekeeper's residence and a nearby c.1890 one story frame tenant cabin. Each has received some alteration since construction but remains eligible for National Register listing.

Sheathed in board and batten siding, the store is rectangular in shape and stands with its large front gable facing the road. Its windows and doors are protected by heavy shutters formed of beaded boards in a diagonal pattern. A shed roof gallery supported by plain posts spans the facade. Square nails are visible in the attic framing, within the sheathing, and within the interior counters. An early addition is appended to the structure's south side. Because it was intended for use as a warehouse, its construction is rougher than that of the store. The gallery's shed roof has been expanded to cover a handicap ramp attached to the warehouse's facade.

A double door leads to the store's large rectangular sales room, which has a beaded board ceiling and walls. Counters and shelving line the room on two sides. One rolling ladder, used to reach stock on the higher shelves, survives on the building's south side; a second ladder formerly located on the opposite wall has been removed but is stored inside the warehouse. A steep, almost ladder-like stair located in a rear corner leads to the attic. A small, narrow office spans half of the store's rear wall. Its partition wall is constructed of two parts: a band of windows and a supporting wall of beaded boards whose gauge is narrower than those on the other walls. For this reason, it is believed that the office is a later but historic addition to the store. Restrooms located near a rear corner of the sales room are a recent addition.

The warehouse is reached through doors located behind one counter. The existence of a thick wooden threshold dividing its floor and the presence of different sized floor boards on each side of the threshold indicate that the warehouse was expanded toward the rear at some point after its initial construction. The entire building is covered by a continuous metal roof which is not original. This roof changes pitch where the store and warehouse meet.

### Contributing Elements

A storekeeper's residence and a nearby tenant cabin are being counted as contributing elements to this nomination because they help to illustrate how the post-bellum plantation system worked. The position of store clerk became increasingly important after the Civil War because clerks kept account records in addition to selling supplies to plantation laborers. Thus, the provision of a house for the storekeeper reflected his status and served as an incentive for keeping a good employee. The c.1905 house standing a few feet north of the Polmer Store is such a residence. Originally built as a separate structure, it was later attached to the store via a frame connector which joins the sales room at a rear corner (see below). The house shows the restrained influence of the Queen Anne Revival style in its wraparound gallery with Eastlake columns and its projecting bay with forty-five degree corner cuts. The middle window formerly in the bay has been replaced by a solid wall. The building originally had clapboard siding on its facade and board and batten sheathing on its other exterior walls. Most of the board and batten was covered by clapboards some time after 1959, leaving only the wall on the side gallery displaying the original siding material. The home's chimneys have been removed above the line of its tripped roof. The interior has been altered through the addition of paneling, carpet, and ceiling tiles and the construction of two bathrooms. However, three mantels remain in the home. A period room divider survives in the room formerly used as the parlor. Composed of posts rising from a low wall, it features a floral design on its entablature as well as upon the bases and capitals of the posts.

The connector joining the store and house was originally in the form of a screened porch. Although its exact construction date is unknown, this porch was in place by c.1920. It is now sheathed in board and batten siding which appears to have been salvaged from other buildings. A ghost mark suggests that at one point after the screened porch's enclosure a gallery extended across the connector's small facade. Openings on its rear elevation appear to have been repeatedly changed and a door leading from the residence's wraparound gallery to the connector has been replaced with a metal storm door and screen. In addition, the connector's interior has been completely remodeled to create a modern kitchen for the home.

The cabin is being counted as a contributing element because it appears to be the only surviving example of the once numerous homes which sheltered the Polmer Store's many customers (see Part 8). It is a rare survivor of a former group of at least sixty-three which once housed the workers of nearby Ellendale Plantation. Featuring board and batten walls and doors, it stands slightly up the road from the store and residence. Its plan contains a moderately sized front room connected to two smaller rooms at the rear. In addition, a badly deteriorated front gallery also stands beneath the mass of the cabin's gable end roof. The mantel and chimney have been lost. The resulting opening is covered by metal, as are several other openings. The interior has been altered by the addition of sheetrock and baseboards in the front room and the construction of a closet in one rear room. Holes in the ceiling reveal wooden shingles beneath the building's metal roof.

#### Assessment of Integrity

Because the Polmer Store is so well preserved, former customers would have no problem recognizing it if they were to return to this portion of Terrebonne Parish today. And, although the house and nearby tenant cabin have experienced alteration, both also would be easily recognized by their former residents.

Significant dates	N/A
Architect/Builder	unknown
Criterion A	

The Polmer Store is locally significant in the area of commerce within Terrebonne Parish because it is a rare example of a plantation store. General mercantile emporiums such as the Polmer Store played a vital role in the system of plantation agriculture from the postbellum years until well into the twentieth century. This store's period of significance ranges from c.1880 through 1946, the fifty year cutoff. It continued to serve as a plantation store in the manner described below into the post-World War II era.

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 such as Terrebonne. Instead, 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. Although wages were occasionally paid in cash, script and credit vouchers redeemable at the plantation store were

often used. 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.

Like share-cropping and paid gang labor, plantation stores were a phenomenon of the post-bellum period. They 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. Although many were owned by the planters themselves, some were owned by businessmen merchants who cooperated with nearby planters yet were independent of them. The Polmer Store was such an enterprise.

Very little is known of the early history of the Polmer Store. It was chosen as the post office for nearby Ellendale Plantation in 1882. According to Rai Porche Pellegrin, her father, Vital Porche, went to work there as clerk in 1915. Although Raoul Toups actually owned the store at that time, it was Porche and his family who lived in the residence. Toups apparently sold the store to Samuel and Leon Polmer, brothers who established a chain of four stores in Terrebonne Parish during the 1920s. The facility primarily served the workers on nearby Ardoyne and Ellendale plantations, although the presence of a delivery truck in a historic photograph indicates that the store also had a wider clientele. Documents in the possession of the current owner indicate that Ellendale's owners paid their workers with credit vouchers. After making their purchases, the shoppers received change in the form of store tokens which could be used to purchase additional merchandise but were of no use outside the store.

Although most plantation stores declined after the 1930s, the Polmer store remained in operation in the above described manner until after World War II. Then it became a general mercantile store. The Polmers sold the business to employee Vital Porche around 1940. He retired and sold the emporium to Whitney Arceneaux in 1959. Arceneaux and his family also resided in the former clerk's house. Arceneaux closed the store in 1984 and sold it to his son Gary in 1994. The store is now leased to a tenant who operates an antique and gift shop; the clerk's house is rented to a local family not associated with the store.

In assessing the significance of plantation stores, it should be noted that almost every plantation of any size either had one or was served by one such as the Polmer Store. If an average of 50 to 100 large plantations per parish is accepted, it can be seen that they were once numerous within the rural landscape. However, the Division of Historic Preservation's Historic Standing Structures Survey of Terrebonne Parish and staff knowledge indicate that the Polmer Store is the only remaining plantation store. In addition, the store is particularly important because it is so remarkably well preserved.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Division of Historic Preservation, Historic Standing Structures Survey of Terrebonne Parish.

Credit voucher and tokens in possession of owner.

Hair, William Ivy, Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics 1877-1900. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969.

Interview with Rai Porche Pellegrin.

Wurzlow, Helen Emmeline. I Dug Up Houma Terrebonne, Vol VI. Published by the author: 1984-1986 (includes historic photograph of Polmer Store).

