

PRISON STORE (WARDEN'S HOUSE)
703 LAUREL STREET
BATON ROUGE
EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH
LOUISIANA

HABS No. LA-1140

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. LA-1140

LOUISIANA STATE PRISON STORE
(Warden's House)

Location: 703 Laurel Street, corner of North 7th Street,
Baton Rouge, Parish of East Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Present Owner: John J. Desmond and Lewis E. Miremont.

Present Use: Architect's office and leased commercial space.

Significance: The Prison Store is the only remaining building of
the state penitentiary complex, located in Baton
Rouge from the late 1830s to the early 1900s.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of erection: 1838-1839.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description of
property:

"That certain property situated on Laurel Street and
St. Anthony St. (which became North 7th Street,
February 20, 1942) in the City of Baton Rouge,
Louisiana and formerly used as a residence for the
State Warden of the penitentiary and more particularly
described as Lot C of Square 68 or 13, Devall Town in
accordance with the official map of Baton Rouge,
Louisiana, compiled by E.E. Pillet, C.E. and adopted
by the common council of said city on October 21,
1930, measuring 64 feet front on the east side of St.
Anthony Street (North 7th Street) by a depth of 128
feet along the north side of Laurel Street."

Notarial Act No. 470, p. 366, November 2, 1836.
William Reding to State of Louisiana for the use of
the penitentiary (authorized by Louisiana Legislature,
Act Number 105, March 13, 1837), \$300.

Conveyance Book 573, Folio 379, August 2, 1944. State
of Louisiana to Nicholson Post, No. 38, American
Legion, \$6,000.

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Conveyance Book 1937, Folio 661, November 2, 1966.
Nicholson Post, No. 38, American Legion to John
Desmond and Edward Miremont, \$72,000.

4. Builder or contractor: Unknown; however, Act Number 105 of the 1837 Louisiana legislature appropriated \$15,000 for construction of the building. The bricks were made by the prisoners.
5. Original plans and construction: The structure was built to accommodate a prison store on the ground floor with living quarters for the prison clerk on the second floor. Items manufactured at the prison were sold at the store. The wing was to include a kitchen, servants' quarters on the second floor, and storage space on the ground floor. The large transom windows on the south and west elevations were necessary for light because of the high walled prison across the street.
6. Alterations and additions: In 1945, A. Hays Town, architect, and L.W. Eaton, contractor for the American Legion, added a mezzanine in the former store room and windows on the back (north) elevation. A door on the west elevation was remodeled into a window. The two-story gallery on the wing was removed, exposing the slate tiles, where the posts were, in the courtyard. A new second-story gallery was added, retaining the character of the original structure.

In 1966, Desmond and Miremont remodeled the interior. The original staircase to the warden's living quarters was rotting and was replaced by a new, modern one. The plaster on the interior was in bad condition and was removed. The brick walls were left exposed, as well as the notched and pegged cypress joists.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

In 1835, the prison was moved from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. Designed to span a two-block area, the complex was completely surrounded by brick walls,

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hence the name, "The Walls." In 1837, Legislative Act #105 authorized "the purchase of additional property for the purpose of erecting and completing a store which would have a dwelling place suitable for the Clerk and his family, and to have the necessary accessories for family use and accommodation such as a kitchen." This new structure, completed in 1839, was located across the street from "The Walls."

The store was intended to function as an outlet for clothing, coarse cotton and wool manufactured at the prison. In an effort to manufacture these more efficiently, "An Act to Provide for the Better Administration at the Louisiana Penitentiary" was passed in 1844, which authorized the lease of the prison; provided for the appointment of a board of directors; defined the obligations of the lessee and the manner in which the convicts should be employed; set forth the obligations of the management; and stipulated, in detail, the conditions of the lease. McHatton and Co. and, later, McHatton, Pike and Co. were the lessees until the Civil War, during which time the entire complex was occupied by the Federal troops.

The State of Louisiana regained ownership in 1865. From 1869 until 1901, the store and manufacturing operation was leased. In 1906, Legislative Act # 189 abolished the prison at Baton Rouge. The store and residence then became the home of the prison's warden, who stayed to process prisoners until 1925. The house became known as the "Warden's House." The state then leased the Warden's House to commercial tenants. In 1944, the American Legion became the lessee, and in 1954 purchased the Warden's House from the state. Today, the Prison Store is the only remnant of the prison in Baton Rouge.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

City of Baton Rouge, Conveyance Records, Centroplex.

"Elks Souvenir of Baton Rouge" (no date or publisher),
Baton Rouge Public Library.

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Louisiana State Legislature Acts, Act No. 105, March 13, 1837, pp. 100-101 and March 14, 1837, pp. 151-155.

Louisiana State University, Louisiana Room, Vertical Files, The Warden's House.

National Register of Historic Places Nomination, listed December 2, 1974.

Shorter, George, "The Grounds at the Warden's House," term paper for course at Louisiana State University, undated.

Wyatt, Lois, "The Warden's House," term paper for course at Louisiana State University, 1966.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Baton Rouge City Planning Commission, Historic Baton Rouge, 1970, revised 1975.

Prepared by Sibyl McCormac Groff
Project Supervisor
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer, 1978

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Dating from 1838-1839, the Prison Store is one of the few classically inspired brick buildings of that period in Baton Rouge. Although this is not particularly reflected in the detailing, it is quite evident in the proportions.

2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

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1. Over-all dimensions: The two-story house measures 64' (five-bay front) x 33' and has a wing on the side, 35'-6" (five-bay front) x 18'-8" with gallery.
2. Foundations: Brick.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: Brick in common bond, ranging in color from soft red to orange, made by the prisoners. The wood trim is painted white with dark green louvered shutters and lunettes.
4. Structural system: The load-bearing walls are brick. The framing is notched and pegged cypress.
5. Porches: The wing has a second-story gallery with four turned posts and a plain balustrade, dating from the 1954 renovation.
6. Chimneys: All chimneys have been removed from the house; however, the wing has two brick chimneys with molded caps at each end of the ridge line.
7. Openings: The principal windows and doors are recessed and have plain moldings and flat brick arches.
 - a. Doorways and doors: The principal entrance (facing south) has two double doors with large transoms providing access to what was the store area. Each of the double doors has a row of three large lights surrounded by twelve smaller lights and a recessed wooden panel below. The transoms have four lights surrounded by eight smaller ones. Denticulated moldings separate the doors from the transoms.

A smaller single door on the east end of the principal elevation provides access to the two-story entrance hall. This original cypress door has recessed panels, applied "buttons", a rich patina and its original hardware. Two scrolled brackets flank its eight-light transom.

The west elevation of the house has one double door with a transom, identical to those on the south elevation.

The ground floor of the north elevation has two plain doors that were additions.

On the east elevation, a door with sidelights and a transom has been converted into a window. A second-story door with tracery connects the house with the second-story gallery of the wing. The wing, which also faces south, has one door on each floor.

- b. Windows and shutters: The south elevation has two windows with six-over-six-light double-hung sashes with transoms on the ground floor between the two double doors. The second floor has five evenly spaced six-over-six-light double-hung sash windows with louvered shutters.

The west elevation has one double-hung sash window with transom on the ground floor, and two windows with six-over-six lights in double-hung sashes on the second floor. The rear (north) elevation has one six-over-six-light double-hung sash window on the ground floor. During the 1954 renovation, the rear elevation was given three eight-over-eight-light double-hung sashes and one double-casement window on the mezzanine level. The second floor has two six-over-six-light double-hung sash windows.

The north side of the wing has one six-over-six-light double-hung sash window on the ground floor and two modern single pane windows on the second floor. The first floor of the south elevation of the wing has three six-over-six-light double-hung sash windows and one eight-over-eight light. The second floor has four six-over-six-light windows.

The east elevation of the main building has one six-over-six-light window on the second floor.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The Warden's House has a gable roof covered with slate and with decorative brick parapets. The wing also has a slate gable roof.

b. Cornice: There is a continuous corbeled brick course under the gutters.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The interior has been altered significantly to serve modern office requirements. The former prison store is rented to a commercial tenant. Architects' offices comprise the rest of the building. The former entrance and hallway to the living quarters now contain the reception area. The second floor has another reception area, a partner's office, a conference room and a drafting room extending across the front (south). The ground floor of the wing contains another drafting room and the second floor holds the other partner's office.
2. Stairways: A two part modern staircase connects the ground and second floors.
3. Flooring: The flooring consists of carpeted cypress boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The brick walls were cleaned and are exposed. The north wall is plastered and painted white. The pegged joists are also exposed.
5. Doors: The cypress doors with two tiers of double vertical panels and one central horizontal panel are original. Some have been kept in their original location while others were utilized in the new partitions.
6. Decorative features and trim: The windows have original architrave trim and cypress lintels. The three fireplace mantles and their cast iron covers have been retained.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. General setting: The only remaining building from the Baton Rouge prison complex is now in the downtown area and stands out amidst nondescript buildings and parking lots.

2. Historic landscape design: The brick wall which originally surrounded the courtyard around the wing. In the northeast corner of the yard, the circular brick foundations for the cistern remain.

The brick pavement in the courtyard is also original.

Prepared by Sibyl McCormac Groff
Project Supervisor
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer, 1978

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was jointly sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the City of Baton Rouge, Parish of East Baton Rouge, Department of Public Works, Division of Community Development. Under the auspices of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and Kenneth Anderson, Principal Architect, the project was completed in the summer of 1978 at the HABS field office, Department of Architecture, Louisiana State University. The team was comprised of Sibyl McCormac Groff (Columbia University), project supervisor/historian; Timothy Allanbrook (Rhode Island School of Design), project foreman; architect Kate Johns (Arizona State University); and student architects William J. Graham (University of Maryland), Robert D. Louton (University of Arkansas), and George W. Steinrock, Jr. (University of Detroit).

ADDENDUM TO
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703 Laurel Street
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Louisiana

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