

ADDENDUM TO:  
FRONT STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)  
Cane River National Heritage Area  
Cane River National Heritage Area Commission  
Natchitoches  
Natchitoches Parish  
Louisiana

HABS No. LA-1319  
*LA-1319*

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20240

ADDENDUM TO:  
FRONT STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)  
Cane River National Heritage Area Commission  
Natchitoches  
Natchitoches Parish  
Louisiana

HABS No. LA-1319  
*LA-1319*

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20240

ADDENDUM TO:  
FRONT STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)  
Cane River National Heritage Area  
Cane River National Heritage Area Commission  
Natchitoches  
Natchitoches Parish  
Louisiana

HABS LA-1319  
*LA-1319*

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### Addendum to FRONT STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)

HABS No. LA-1319

Location: 500-780 Front Street, Natchitoches, Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana.

Built on high ground, and along the west side of Front Street, these buildings overlook Cane River lake. To the east of the water, the structures are residential in character, including the oldest, extant house in Natchitoches (HABS No. LA-1258) on Williams Street and the 1903, George Barber designed, Roselawn (HABS No. LA-1334) several blocks down. As a whole, however, Front Street is a visual anchor to the Historic District and its commercial character a lynchpin to the traditionally rural parish, with its pockets of communities along the river, around it.

Significance: Located in the northwestern corner of Central Louisiana, the town of Natchitoches has for almost three centuries served as a valuable commercial center for Louisiana's agricultural economy and as a site of production for Louisiana's unique cultural and social history. Prior to the arrival of European colonists, Native Americans known as the "Natchitoches" hunted, fished, and farmed in the vicinity of the contemporary parish. The tribe lived in a centralized community or village erected on one of a cluster of small islands in the Red River. This village was the first known population center within the immediate locality of the present-day Natchitoches commercial district.

In 1713, a French military leader, Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, was commissioned to construct and administer a fort to protect French interests on its western border with the Spanish colony of Texas. In 1764, the Spanish acquired the French colony of Louisiana through a diplomatic treaty. Although few Spaniards populated the area around Natchitoches, they were responsible for moving the town a mile to the north possibly in order to construct a new town plan with a plaza and gridiron organization of streets. When the Americans acquired Natchitoches in 1804 the town center had moved north to the area around the new St. Francis church, built by the Spanish in 1788, within the contemporary commercial district. After the American authorities constructed their own fort and other government buildings near the church, the new location of the town was finalized. As cotton production escalated on the plantations along the Red River, the waterfront commercial enterprises that served the cotton economy swelled. These merchant, trade, and warehouse businesses

## FRONT STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)

HABS No. LA-1319

(page 2)

helped make Natchitoches one of the most prosperous river-port towns in Louisiana.

Unfortunately, beginning in 1825 the Red River started to flow more readily along another channel east of Natchitoches. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Red River had changed its course leaving the branch in front of Natchitoches navigable only during flooding. As a consequence, the Red River along the riverfront in Natchitoches became the Cane River and the small town of Grand Ecore a few miles north of Natchitoches became the main port for Natchitoches Parish plantations. Therefore, Front Street and the waterfront commercial district declined in importance as a center of trade, and instead, transformed into the city center of the county seat for Natchitoches Parish. Consequently, no longer the location for housing heavy equipment and warehouses for the steamboat trade, Front Street became the site of hotels, bars, lumberyards, and mercantile shops.

Description: The architectural history on Front Street closely resembles the outline of Louisiana's economic history with most buildings stemming from high economic plateaus. Thus there are three buildings from the late antebellum period that represent the Louisiana vernacular architecture of the plantation era with their multiple asymmetrical French doors, front-gable roofs with setback façades, and second-story porches. Other buildings dating from the 1880s also are characteristic of their epoch. These buildings tend to mirror larger national trends in commercial architecture with their decorated cast-iron facades and tall ornate parapets. There are numerous buildings from the first two decades of the twentieth century that incorporate the stylistic refinement of revival architecture, most notably, a Romanesque Revival three-story building and a one-story Mission Revival. Finally, the strong economy of postwar America left its mark on Front Street through the "modernization" of many ground level commercial spaces along Front Street, occurring in the 1950s and 1960s.

### Project

Information: The documentation of Front Street in Natchitoches, Louisiana, was sponsored by the Cane River National Heritage Area Commission, Robert B. DeBlieux and Saidee Newell, Co chairs, and Nancy I.M. Morgan, Executive Director; the Natchitoches Historic District Development Commission, Roger Williams, Chairman; and the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscapes Survey division of the National Park Service, John A. Burns, Acting Manager, HABS/HAER/HALS, and Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief, HABS. The documentation was undertaken by HABS, under the

direction of Paul D. Dolinsky and Robert R. Arzola, HABS Architect, with assistance from Virginia B. Price, HABS Historian. The National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, Kirk Cordell, Executive Director, supported the HABS field office in Natchitoches, Louisiana, and provided office space to the architects. The project was completed during the summer of 2004 by project supervisor Scott Falvey (Mississippi State University - 1992), and by architectural technicians Thomas Hagensick (University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign) and Zsolt Szénási (ICOMOS/Romania; Technical University of Cluj). The project historian was Jon Lamar Wilson (Tulane University). Photography of Front Street was completed in 2002 by HABS Photographer Jack E. Boucher, with additional views provided by James Rosenthal, HABS Photographer, in spring of 2004.

The project was inspired, in part, by the discussions surrounding a proposal to improve the water lines beneath Front Street; this would have required taking up the historic bricks lining the road which in turn raised fears of altering the character of an streetscape in the historic district. Public works projects, involving Natchitoches's transportation arteries, characterized the dawn of the twentieth century as well. During the 1910s, the *Natchitoches Times* reported on the statewide initiative to pave (or pebble) the parish roads in hopes of linking communities and easing movement around the countryside. Many of Natchitoches's streets received asphalt coating during this time. During the second world war, efforts to update the state's roads and bridges continued, sparking protest in some instances, when the improvements threatened to modernize Front Street. As then, the concerns for the street reflect a broader belief in the preservation of Natchitoches's distinctive architectural character.

## PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Before the French, Spanish, and ultimately, the Americans controlled the town of Natchitoches, Native Americans known as the "Natchitoches" hunted, fished, and farmed in the vicinity of the contemporary parish. Together with their larger federation of Caddoan Native Americans, including the Doustioni, Ouachita, and Yatasi, the Natchitoches and their allies controlled vast areas of territory in what is now northwest Central-Louisiana.<sup>1</sup> The tribe lived in a centralized community or village erected on one

---

<sup>1</sup> Fred B. Kniffen and Hiram F. Gregory, *The Historic Indians Tribes of Louisiana: From 1542 to the Present* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987) 47; and, Germaine Portre-Bobinski, and Clara Mildred Smith, *Natchitoches The Up-to-Date Oldest Town in Louisiana* (New Orleans: Dameron-Pierson Co., 1936) 4. For a survey on the Native American population of Central Louisiana, see Hiram F. Gregory, "The Historic Indians of Natchitoches Parish," in *Natchitoches Parish Cultural and Historical*

of a cluster of small islands in the Red River. This village was the first known population center within the immediate locality of the present-day Natchitoches commercial district.<sup>2</sup>

The site of the Natchitoches village, which would later be the area of colonial and then American Natchitoches, was probably chosen for its geographic location. The small island was within site of the 100-mile long logjam that clogged the Red River preventing travel both north for those moving up the river, and south for those floating down river from above the north.<sup>3</sup> Thus, locating the Natchitoches village on an island at the southern border of the log-jam, allowed the tribe to police all movement on the river from competing tribes and at the same time, allowed them to navigate the southward bound Red River without having to worry about who was behind them. Furthermore, being on an island surrounded by water assured a military advantage to would-be invaders. Although the island village was probably abandoned around 1705 for several years due to flooding, in the early eighteenth century there were roughly two hundred Native Americans of the Natchitoches, Doustioni and Yatasi tribes on the island.<sup>4</sup>

The first contact between the new French colonists in Louisiana and the Natchitoches occurred during their initial expedition up the Red River in 1700 led by co-founder of the Louisiana colony, Pierre LeMoyne d' Iberville. The civility of the preliminary meeting between the French and the Natchitoches procured a beneficiary association for the French who gained both a trade partner and an instructor for the

---

*Resources*, eds., Hiram F. Gregory, James L. McCorkle, and H. K. Curry (Natchitoches: Natchitoches Parish Cultural and Historical Resources); and Fred B. Kniffen and Hiram F. Gregory, *The Historic Indians Tribes of Louisiana: From 1542 to the Present*. For sources examining the interaction of the French and Spanish authorities and the Natchitoches Native Americans, see Jane M. Berry, "The Indian Policy of Spain in the Southwest, 1783-1795," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, III (1917) 462-77; John C. Ewers, "Symbols of Chiefly Authority in Spanish Louisiana," in *The Spanish in the Mississippi Valley 1762-1804*, ed. John Francis McDermott (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974) 272-86; Athanase De Mezieres, *Athanase De Mezieres and the Louisiana- Texas Frontier 1768-1780*, ed. Herbert Eugene Bolton (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1914). For interaction between the Natchitoches and the Americans, see John Sibley, "A Report From Natchitoches in 1807," in *Indian Notes and Monographs*, ed. Annie Heloise Abel (New York: Museum of the American Indian Heye Foundation, 1922).

<sup>2</sup> Portre-Bobinski and Smith, 8.

<sup>3</sup> For information on the log-jam or "great raft," see J.E. Guardia, "Some Results of the Log Jam in the Red River," *The Bulletin of the Geographical Society of Philadelphia* 31 (July 1933); Edwin Adam Davis, *The Rivers and Bayous of Louisiana* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Co., 1968) 53; Henry C. Dethloff, "Paddlewheels and Pioneers on the Red River 1815-1915, Reminiscences of Captain M. C. Scovell," *Louisiana Studies* 1967 6(2): 91-134; Dan L. Flores ed., *Jefferson and Southwestern Exploration* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press) 126-30; and Judy Watson, "Red River Raft," *Texana*, 1967 5(1): 68-76.

<sup>4</sup> On the flooding of the island, see Richard Seale, "The Town of Natchitoches" in *Natchitoches and Louisiana's Timeless Cane River*, Philip Gould, photographer (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002) 9; and Francois-Xavier Martin, *The History of Louisiana*, (1882; reprint, New Orleans: James Gresham Publisher, 1963) 134.

practicalities of everyday life in the hinterland of early eighteenth-century Louisiana.<sup>5</sup> Once merchant Antoine Crozat was decreed the sole proprietor of the Louisiana trade business by Louis XIV in 1712, he sent his lieutenant Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, a soldier on the original Red River exploration with Iberville, to return to the area of the Natchitoches to set up a fort and to instigate trade talks with the Spanish. Departing in 1713 equipped with thirty French soldiers, St. Denis landed on an island in the Red River adjacent to the old Indian village at the mouth of Bayou Amulet just south of the massive logjam. Although St. Denis only stopped briefly at the island on his way into Spanish territory where he was ordered to secure trade relations, he did supervise the construction of two buildings to house a small force of French soldiers to remain at the island.<sup>6</sup> This remote trade outpost would, in 1716, become the French fort, St. Jean Baptiste, which ultimately became the foundation for the town of Natchitoches.

The French like the Natchitoches tribe before them understood the benefits, mentioned above, of placing a settlement at the foot of a 100-mile logjam. Located on the eastern edge of disputed lands with Spain, Fort St. Jean Baptiste was certainly a defensive installation for the French Colony. Yet, while defending the frontier from Spanish aggression was a consideration, the fort was mostly developed to function as a center for trade. According to Natchitoches historian Germaine Porter-Bobinski, “Natchitoches was established first, for commercial reasons. Pelts were to be found in abundance,” and that the location of the city was chosen because “Natchitoches on the Red River, permitted river transportation of Spanish, Indian, and French goods at a cheap rate which favored traffic. Transit business as well as the actual trade must be prosperous, judging from St. Denis’ report to the India Company in 1742.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, not long after its inception, the fort and village at Natchitoches served as an important site on the trade route between the Louisiana Indians and the export ships in the Gulf of Mexico. The most common goods leaving Natchitoches for the trip down the Red River were tobacco, animal pelts, agricultural goods, salt, and other wares obtained through the “lucrative illicit trade with the Spanish in the Northern Provinces of Mexico.”<sup>8</sup>

After several years of enduring floods and other water related problems, the colonists realized that their island location of the fort and settlement at Natchitoches was problematic and that they needed to relocate to the natural levee on the west bank of the Red River near the site of the contemporary American cemetery. After the original wood

---

<sup>5</sup> Richard Seale, “From French Village to American Town: The Development of Natchitoches, Louisiana, 1788-1818,” (MA thesis, Northwestern State University, 1991), 2-3; and Portre-Bobinski and Smith, 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> Seale, “From French Village to American Town: The Development of Natchitoches, Louisiana, 1788-1818,” 3; and Seale, “The Town of Natchitoches” in *Natchitoches and Louisiana’s Timeless Cane River*, 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> Portre-Bobinski and Smith, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Seale, “From French Village to American Town: The Development of Natchitoches, Louisiana, 1788-1818,” 11; and Portre-Bobinski and Smith, 17-18.

fort was destroyed in 1730, during a thwarted attack upon the island installation carried out by the Natchez Indians, the colonists decided to move to the higher ground.<sup>9</sup> The new fort, designed by the French Engineer Ignace Francois Broutin, had numerous buildings all completely enclosed by a wall of large wood stakes roughly 9'0" high. The key for the plan, dated 1732, of the fort notes that the fort had a church, a house for the commandant, a powder magazine, warehouse, barracks, and various "huts" for the "servants and Negroes."<sup>10</sup> In a larger site map also drawn by Broutin in 1732 numerous dwellings and other buildings dot the landscape along the levee. According to Natchitoches historian, Richard Seale, "The physical layout of the post followed the typical linear settlement pattern of crooked streets that followed the waterways seen in most colonial French villages in Louisiana..." and that, "Early Natchitoches consisted of a fort, church, and a line of dwellings atop the natural levees that ran along the braided channels that formed 'Les Isles des Natchitoches.'"<sup>11</sup> Thus the early town plan of Natchitoches grew in a very organic, pre-Renaissance configuration with the fort serving as the spatial nucleus while the town developed in relation to the fort and the natural geography. The small outpost continued to develop, following the above format, throughout most of the eighteenth century with the transition to Spanish sovereignty in 1764 having little effect on the form of early Natchitoches.

After the former French colony became subject to Spanish sovereignty in 1764, the Spanish redesigned many towns, including Natchez, Mississippi, in accordance with the *Ordinances*: a royal code for town design in the colonies based on the gridiron plan centered with a plaza upon which the church and municipal buildings were placed. This approach to town planning secured that the royal and ecclesiastical authorities would always remain at the spatial apex of the colonial city. Thus, wherever one was located in the city, that site was measured in relation to the central plaza, which was the starting point of the town grid.<sup>12</sup> It is unclear if the Spanish in Natchitoches were redesigning a new town plan based on the *Ordinances* when they built their new church about a mile up

---

<sup>9</sup> James Alexander Robertson, *Louisiana Under the Rule of Spain, France, and the United States 1785-1807, Volume II* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1911) 153; and George P. Garrison, *Texas; A Contest of Civilization*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903) 81-82.

<sup>10</sup> Images of the original plan drawing and site map are in Samuel Wilson Jr., "Colonial Fortifications and Military Architecture," in *The Architecture of Colonial Louisiana Collected Essays of Samuel Wilson, Jr. FAIA* (Lafayette: The Center for Louisiana Studies, 1987) 60; also in, Katherine Bridges, "The Fort of Natchitoches: Two Maps From Spain."

<sup>11</sup> Seale, "From French Village to American Town: The Development of Natchitoches, Louisiana, 1788-1818," 5. See also George A. Stokes, "Landscape Forms and Patterns of French Origin in the Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, Area," *Louisiana Studies*, 1964 3(1): 105-16.

<sup>12</sup> Gilbert R. Cruz, *Let There Be Towns Spanish Municipal Origins in the American Southwest* (College Station: Texas A & M, 1988); Jon Lamar Wilson, "From State Architecture to Symbol of Suspicion: Creole Design in Colonial and Antebellum Natchez," MA thesis, University of Mississippi, 2000; and Jack Elliot, "City and Empire: The Spanish Origins of Natchez," *Journal of Mississippi History* LIX (1997): 275-321.

river from the fort in 1788.<sup>13</sup> Yet, it is evident that after the new Church of St. Francis was constructed, the center of the town moved to the upriver environs surrounding the church. According to Natchitoches historian Richard Seale,

That year, when the Indian Factory buildings were finally turned over to the community for use as a courthouse, the community brought to completion the town plan that it had begun with the movement of its church to the riverfront in 1788. With its business center established and its town square guarded by representations of both church and state, the village of Natchitoches was firmly established... In just thirty years, from 1788-1818, the town's business center and its streets had been transformed from a French fort and village into a Spanish inspired, nineteenth-century town.<sup>14</sup>

The economy of both French and Spanish Natchitoches tended to rely on trade with the Native Americans and on the their production of tobacco. The small but relatively steady economy changed very little during the transition from French to Spanish rule.<sup>15</sup> Although large land grants were awarded to individual planters beginning in the years when St. Denis was the commander of the fort at Natchitoches, the plantation economy was not substantial in Natchitoches until cotton arrived in the late eighteenth century. When cotton did appear in Natchitoches in the 1790s, it did not take long for the economy to expand exponentially over a short time.

The fort at Natchitoches built by the St. Denis was meant to protect French interests on its western border with the Spanish colony. When the Spanish assumed authority of Louisiana, the fort lost its importance and tended to serve, under Spanish rule, as a sparsely manned regional outpost. By the time the Americans acquired Natchitoches in 1804 the town center had moved north to the area around the church within the contemporary commercial district. Without the immediate threat of invasion, the high-ground site of the old fort placed the town at an unnecessary distance from the river, which was both the symbolic and actual life-blood of the community. Thus, with a burgeoning cotton-based plantation economy and a dissipating threat from outsiders, the move to the riverfront helped to trigger the development of Natchitoches as one of

---

<sup>13</sup> Seale, "From French Village to American Town..." 24. In his essay "The Town of Natchitoches," Seale argues that the movement of the church to Front Street might have been an attempt at forming a traditional Spanish-Colonial plan, see *Natchitoches and Louisiana's Timeless Cane River*, 18. Also, Seale argues that after the Americans acquired Natchitoches, the French citizens tried to halt the Americans from degrading the Spanish-style *plaza*, see, "From French Village to American Town..." 88.

<sup>14</sup> Seale, "From French Village to American Town..." 141.

<sup>15</sup> On tobacco production, see James Alexander Robertson, ed., *Louisiana Under the Rule of Spain, France, and the United States 1785-1807, Volume I* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1911) 156.

Louisiana's most important cotton producing areas.<sup>16</sup> The population of Natchitoches Parish on the eve of the handover to the United States was 1,631 residents.<sup>17</sup>

Under American Rule, the town continued to grow, largely in the area upriver from the St. Francis Church. By 1810 the parish population had swelled to 2,870 people including 1,477 bound-slaves of African descent, 1213 free residents of European lineage, and 180 "free people of color" who were former slaves who at some point negotiated their own freedom or were awarded manumission by their prior owner.<sup>18</sup> Many of the original "free people of color" were the freed offspring from planters who bore children with their slaves. Although the freeing of children born to a planter father and slave mother was characteristic of all slave-based societies, it was particularly common in early Louisiana.<sup>19</sup> The rich and varied history of the Natchitoches "free people of color" developed into a distinct cultural phenomena due to their predicament of being both "non-white" and free. Although they were sometimes planters and slaveholders themselves, the free people of color were excluded from the ruling plantation oligarchy because of the race-based nature of both the colonial and later American systems of plantation slavery.<sup>20</sup> Thus, isolated and dependant on each other, many of the Natchitoches free people of color moved south of the city to an area known as the "Isle Brevelle" or northeast to Campti, where they intermarried for several generations creating a close kinship network that probably helped them to survive between the two dominant classes.

When the Americans assumed authority over Natchitoches in 1804, the mostly French population of the town was nervous and suspicious of the newcomers. Immediately building both "Fort Claiborne" and two other government buildings on what was previously the "commons," the Americans further added to the anxiety of the French population.<sup>21</sup> Yet, after some negotiation, the buildings were moved upriver and the French and their new American attendants began a cooperative relationship based on a

---

<sup>16</sup> Seale, "From French Village to American Town..." 18.

<sup>17</sup> On colonial-era demographics see, Seale, "From French Village to American Town..." and H. Sophie Burton, "Free People of Color in Colonial Natchitoches: Manumission and Dependency on the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1766-1803," *Louisiana History* 2004 45(2): 173-97.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>19</sup> I do not suggest that sexual relationships among slaves and slave-owners was more common in Louisiana, rather, that more of the children, along with their mothers, were freed once born.

<sup>20</sup> For studies on the free people of color see H. Sophie Burton, "Free People of Color in Colonial Natchitoches: Manumission and Dependency on the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1766-1803"; Gary B. Mills, *Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); Daniel H. Usner, Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves: The Spanish Regulation of Slavery in Louisiana, 1763-1803* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999); and Kimberly S. Hangar, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Seale, "From French Village to American Town..." 57-66, and, Seale, "The Town of Natchitoches," 21.

mutual relationship and commitment to slave-based plantation agriculture. Although the two identities were not fully amalgamated until the twentieth century, the French-Creole planters and their American counterparts formed a powerful planter aristocracy that fueled the growth of the commercial district in Natchitoches.

Between 1804 and the mid-1830s the town of Natchitoches continued to grow in both population and economy.<sup>22</sup> The high demand for cotton coupled with Natchitoches's abundance of prime cotton-producing land created a flood of new American arrivals who filled in the unpopulated lands around the parish. In 1820, the population of the parish rose to 2,970.<sup>23</sup> The material and cultural evidence of the economic upsurge in Natchitoches was noticed by the traveling chronicler, Timothy Flint in the late 1820s. According to Flint, "There are many respectable families here; and the opulent planters have houses in the town for the sake of society. These people are excessively fond of balls and dancing. It has a respectable society, and a weekly newspaper, in French and English...It is at present a growing place, and will at one day become the largest town in this country, except New Orleans."<sup>24</sup> By 1830, the census recorded that the parish had more than doubled its population, reaching 7,926.<sup>25</sup> Although agricultural and other trade goods had been shipped down the Red River using flatboats and keelboats since the founding of the town, it was the introduction of the steamboat to Natchitoches that opened up the economy.<sup>26</sup> The first Steamboat line in Natchitoches was started by Issac Wright in 1824 and connected the town to Alexandria 100 miles south down the Red River, while other steamboat lines, including the Hornet, Teche, Kiamichi, Superior, Car of Commerce, Eliza, and the Governor Shelby, connected New Orleans to Natchitoches beginning in the late-1820s.<sup>27</sup> As the river trade and cotton production expanded considerably during the mid-antebellum period, Front Street and the waterfront were transformed by the emergent market activity. Front Street, during the era of its steamboat trade, "became almost a continuous wharf for several blocks. On the landward side of the street looking out across the river, there developed a row of substantial warehouses, general merchandise stores, and a hotel or two. The upper landing, a docking area of steamboats, was situated at the present day location of

---

<sup>22</sup> For a perspective sketch of 1820s Natchitoches, see, Marcotte Map in Cammie G. Henry Archives, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce L. Ardoin, comp., *Louisiana Census Records: Iberville, Natchitoches, Pointe Coupee, and Rapides Parishes-1810 & 1820*, Vol. II (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1972).

<sup>24</sup> Timothy Flint, *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States or the Mississippi Valley (1828)* (1828; reprint, Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1970) 562-63.

<sup>25</sup> Marleta Childs and John Ross, ed., *North Louisiana Census Reports: 1830 & 1840 Schedules of Caddo, Claiborne, and Natchitoches Parishes*, Vol. II (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1977).

<sup>26</sup> Everett L. Baker, "Changes in Sale and Service Foci in Natchitoches Between 1890-1920," MA thesis, Northwestern State University, 1972, 5.

<sup>27</sup> N. Phillip Norman, "The Red River of the South," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXV (April 1942): 401; and Wendy M. Lott, "Natchitoches and the Red River Steamboat Trade," MA thesis, Northwestern State University, 2000, 81.

Washington Street opposite Texas Street just north of the downtown area.”<sup>28</sup> In addition to “the landing,” there was another large wharf near the site of the contemporary Huey P. Long Bridge where steamships were tied up while the supplies they brought upriver were emptied, after which, they were restocked with cotton bales and passengers headed down river.<sup>29</sup> In all, there was, roughly, 1800’ of waterfront in Natchitoches that boats were allowed to tie up on.<sup>30</sup> None of the warehouses, wharfs, or other use-buildings associated with the period when Natchitoches was a thriving port on the Red River are extant today.

During the mid-1830s, the nature of Front Street’s economic activity was radically altered due to the geographic shift of the main current of the Red River to a branch east of Natchitoches, which was at least partially caused by the removal of the “great raft” that clogged the Red River with logs and other debris.<sup>31</sup> Beginning around 1833 near the base of the logjam at “Loggy Bayou” in Campti, a small town a few miles north of Natchitoches, Henry Miller Shreve, the Superintendent of Western Rivers Improvement, began clearing the Red River of all logjams between Natchitoches and present-day Shreveport. Over the next five years Shreve cleared over 160 miles of the Red River allowing steamboat trade between North Louisiana and New Orleans.<sup>32</sup> After Shreve’s and the Army Corps of Engineers’ efforts with the logjams in 1833-38, as well as those in 1841-43 and 1872-73, the Red River changed its course completely leaving the branch in front of Natchitoches only navigable during flooding. As a consequence, the Red River along the riverfront in Natchitoches became the Cane River and the small town of Grand Ecore a few miles north of Natchitoches became the main port for Natchitoches Parish plantations. Therefore, Front Street and the waterfront commercial district declined in importance as a center of trade, becoming instead the city center of the county seat for Natchitoches Parish. Consequently, no longer the location for housing heavy equipment and warehouses for the steamboat trade, Front Street hosted a variety of hotels, bars, lumberyards, and general stores. For some, the post-port period in Natchitoches seemed lackluster compared to the commotion of an active port. One young law student and heir apparent of a wealthy planter dynasty, Lestant Prudhomme, complained that by 1850, “the little town of Natchitoches” had “grown very dull and consequently requires but little amusement to attract the whole public.”<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Lott, 81-82.

<sup>29</sup> *Historic Natchitoches* Parish, Unpublished Scrapbook in Cammie G. Henry Archives, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University, 20.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Hubert Davis Humphreys, “The ‘Great Raft’ of the Red River,” in *North Louisiana Volume One: To 1865*, ed., B. H. Gilley, (Ruston: McGinty Trust Fund, 1984) 73-91.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Lestant Prudhomme, “The Young Man’s Diary,” in Lyle Saxon ed., *Old Louisiana* (New York: The Century Company, 1929) 225.

However, although the significance of the Natchitoches port had diminished, the Parish of Natchitoches continued to grow economically. In an agricultural output register published by *Debow's Review*, entitled, "Statement of Cotton Raised in each Parish of the State of Louisiana for the Years 1855-1958," Natchitoches Parish was the fifth largest producer of cotton in Louisiana. Furthermore, in each successive year the amount of cotton produced increased, reaching a total output of 22,603 bales in 1858.<sup>34</sup> Thus, in the years preceding the civil war, the economy of Natchitoches was growing. The history of the riverfront in Natchitoches, up until the mid 1830s, was linked to its role as a port on the Red River where raw goods were collected and then shipped down river to larger markets. After the river changed its course leaving the city of Natchitoches several miles from the main channel of the Red River, Front Street assumed its new role to provide retail goods and service-based businesses to the residents and visitors of Natchitoches. The conversion of Natchitoches from port to center of shopping, was successful because the economy was so strong, which created a condition where some liquid capital circulated through the city at all times. Although the economy never recovered to pre-Civil War heights, Front Street endured as the center of the Natchitoches shopping district until the post-World War II era.

Three buildings on Front Street survive from the late-antebellum era: the Prudhomme Building; the LaCoste Building; and, the Ducournau Building. All three of the buildings are adjacent to one another in the 700-block of Front Street, and they share party walls. The Prudhomme Building, located on the corner of Horn Street and Front Street, is a gable-roofed structure with a setback façade, and was made of load-bearing bricks later covered with stucco. The building was probably constructed by Gabriel Prudhomme in 1853.<sup>35</sup> Other than the ground-floor renovation and partitioning, much of the building is original fabric. The rear of the building has two cast-iron staircases. One of the rear staircases spirals upward from the ground to the second floor exterior walkway. Some believe these staircases were brought from Europe in privately chartered ship.<sup>36</sup> Yet according to the analysis of the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, wherein it was noted that "[t]he cast-iron was probably added during the 1850s. The spiral staircase of the rear gallery matches in detail the elliptical cast-iron staircase at The Elms in Natchez, Mississippi. This stair was probably ordered from the Robert Wood & Co. of Philadelphia or his subsidiary in New Orleans."<sup>37</sup>

Like its neighbor, the Prudhomme Building, the LaCoste Building is covered by a gable roof and characterized by a setback façade. It too was constructed with load-

---

<sup>34</sup> *Debow's Review*, Vol. 28(4) 10/60, 470-71.

<sup>35</sup> Natchitoches Parish Succession Records, book 35, folio 343.

<sup>36</sup> Works Project Administration, *Louisiana Guide* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Library Commission, 1941) 310.

<sup>37</sup> *Historic Standing Structure Survey, 720 Front Street Prudhomme Building, Natchitoches, Louisiana*, surveyed by Mary Miller, 4/20/1986.

bearing bricks. The LaCoste Building was altered to accommodate various commercial tenants, but it retains much of its original fabric as well as the distinctive carriageway leading from Front Street to the rear courtyard. The building was probably erected by T. LaCoste in 1852.

Finally, the Doucournau Building, also located on Front Street between Horn Street and Rue Lafayette, probably was built by Francois Lafont in the 1840s . It was then sold in the next decade to Pierre Lestan Prudhomme and Edward Cloutier to serve as a “Merchants Shop.”<sup>38</sup> Like its contemporaries, this gable-roofed, antebellum-era commercial building was constructed with load-bearing bricks. Besides the structural walls, bay alignment, and cast-iron columns supporting the second-floor exterior walkway, most of the building’s details are recent additions.

The everyday culture of middle antebellum Front Street was a fusion of the various social classes of Southerners, each performing very different activities on Front Street and each having a very different relationship to the various mercantile and general stores and the products therein. According to southern historian Ted Ownby in his study of shopping in Mississippi,

If you entered a Mississippi general store in the nineteenth century, your experience would have a great deal to do with your own identity. If you were a wealthy man or woman, you would judge the selection limited and its quality questionable by the standards you had learned from urban travel and trade with city merchants. If you were a slave, you would take pleasure in a rare opportunity to make choices and enjoy unusual sensation, but you would also be suspicious of and freedoms you seemed to have. If you were a woman in a free farming family, you would notice that most and probably all of the people in a and around the store were men, and many of the men seemed to be there more to enjoy themselves than to buy things. If you were on of those men, you would feel more at home than any other visitors, but you would worry that buying things at the store might be putting you too deeply in debt. And if you owned the store, you would consider yourself an emissary of cosmopolitan culture, and you would be a bit frustrated that too few of the locals wanted to hear your message about the virtues of new goods.<sup>39</sup>

Although Ownby is discussing Mississippi and not Louisiana, the social conditions within each state were very similar to one another: constructs of race, class, and gender

---

<sup>38</sup> Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records, book 51, folio 429.

<sup>39</sup> Ted Ownby, *American Dreams in Mississippi Consumers, Poverty, and Culture 1830-1998* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) 7.

dictated one's relationship to the commercial districts in small towns and cities across the South. After the South was defeated in the American Civil War and plantation slavery halted, a new set of social relations transformed the position of shopping within the post-bellum South.

Natchitoches survived the Civil War with little physical damage.<sup>40</sup> Unlike many small southern towns, which received heavy or catastrophic damage during the war, Natchitoches, luckily, was not on the path of any major military movements. Nonetheless, at the end of the war, the parish and the town of Natchitoches were economically devastated. The nature of the economy of the post-bellum South has been the subject of numerous historical studies.<sup>41</sup> Most studies argued that the planters regained social power after the loss in the Civil War by using debt to force former slaves and poor whites into subservient positions to landowners, who then kept them in semi-peonage.<sup>42</sup> Contemporary studies tend to argue that debt was indeed part of everyday life for many freedmen and working class whites, but that most non-landowners moved between various farms, and therefore the notion that they were tied to a certain landowner seems unlikely.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, while the relationship of former planters to general stores and other commercial businesses continued, albeit under a new set of circumstances, those who were not enfranchised before the Civil War were still alienated from shopping afterwards.

The frustration felt by the former slaves of Natchitoches Parish over the failure of Reconstruction to create any measurable level of equality or new opportunity reached a crisis point as the Reconstruction laws were repealed in the late 1870s. As early as 1868, it was obvious that while the South's economy and, hence, its social conditions were totally realigned due to the end of slavery, its power structure was not changed. In the election of 1868, "not one Republican vote was cast. E. H. Hosner, [Freedmen's] Bureau agent in Natchitoches, claimed that a reign of terror interfered with Negro voting except where troops were stationed, and that freedmen were 'assaulted and hanged until nearly

---

<sup>40</sup> For a study of the economy during the Civil War years in Natchitoches see Richard Seale, "Pine Hills and Plantations Some Social and Economic Views of the Civil War in Natchitoches Parish," *North Louisiana Historical Association Journal*, 1994 25(4): 107-33.

<sup>41</sup> James C. Cobb, "Beyond Planters and Industrialists," in *Redefining Southern Culture* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1999) 5-24.

<sup>42</sup> Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1977); Pete Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972); and Daniel Novak, *The Wheel of Servitude: Black Forced Labor after Slavery* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1978).

<sup>43</sup> Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Gerald Jaynes, *Branches Without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in the American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and William Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991).

dead for carrying Radical voting tickets.”<sup>44</sup> Later, in the 1872 election, Natchitoches elites kept freedmen from participating in politics by making it difficult for them to vote: “in Natchitoches Parish there were normally twelve polling places, but in 1872 there were only four. One of the four was on an island and could be reached only by boat. In the town of Natchitoches where the voters were mainly white, the polling place was easily available.”<sup>45</sup> In the final years of the Reconstruction government, the animosity between the former planters and the Republican regime backed by many former slaves escalated. The so-called “riot of Natchitoches” on 21 September 1878 was undeniably the culmination of the failure of Reconstruction to enfranchise the freedmen. According to witnesses, the Democrats represented by the Natchitoches elite decided to hold their convention on the same date as the Republicans had intended to give their convention. The “citizens of Natchitoches attempted to break up the Republican meeting and a riot followed in which one Negro was reported killed and three wounded....the white Democrats were determined to destroy the leaders of the Negroes.”<sup>46</sup> The next day, “there was an armed band of three hundred negroes. The White Guard met these at the roads leading to Natchitoches and their attack was repulsed.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, while it is indisputable that former slaves gained some freedoms after the Civil War and Reconstruction, the notion that they acquired the agency to visit places of commerce and purchase freely seems false. Rather, free African Americans in Natchitoches were still estranged from the activities of Front Street and would remain so until the late twentieth century.

Between the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of the twentieth century, many of the vacant or derelict lots on Front Street were filled in with new buildings as the post-slavery economy began to take shape in Natchitoches.<sup>48</sup> Several extant buildings from this era continue to function as commercial buildings on the contemporary Front Street. Almost the entire 600 block of Front Street was developed during this era, excluding the building on the southerly corner, which was probably built a few years later in 1900. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were a total of seven retail businesses in the block between Church and St. Denis on Front Street, making it the center of shopping on Front Street.<sup>49</sup> The buildings of this block have been thoroughly “modernized” or redesigned during the second half of the twentieth century, but underneath the layers of newer fabric, the original materials and building form are discernable. Each of the late nineteenth-century buildings on 600 block of Front Street

---

<sup>44</sup> Howard A. White, *The Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1970) 150.

<sup>45</sup> Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974) 239.

<sup>46</sup> Garnie W. McGinty, *Louisiana Redeemed The Overthrow of Carpet-Bag Rule 1876-1880* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1941) 220.

<sup>47</sup> Mary Silverius Karnowski, “Natchitoches During the Civil War and Reconstruction Period,” MA thesis, Northwestern State University, 1949, 85.

<sup>48</sup> A fire in 1881 burned much of Front Street and could account for the multiple unused lots. See Baker, 27.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

are constructed with load-bearing bricks and covered with stucco. On a middle-block building a large decorative pediment-shaped parapet rises above the roofline on the front façade. At 608 Front Street, two small sections of the original cast-iron columns run parallel to one another above the contemporary canopy. These are but small reminders of how cast-iron details were used to decorate houses and commercial buildings throughout the United States during the late nineteenth centuries and early twentieth centuries.

The most elaborate Natchitoches commercial building from the 1890s is the Kaffie building located at 758 Front Street. This late nineteenth-century commercial building was constructed with load-bearing bricks laid in the common bond on the peripheral walls and with secondary columns, probably made of steel, in the interior space. If so, than this would represent the earliest example of steel framing on Front Street. Much of the building's historic fabric remains, although in the 1930s the display windows and interior detailing on the ground-floor were altered. The Front Street facade is notable today for its two recessed doorways, large fixed display windows, the series of three-light transom windows, cast iron pilasters that rise from the ground level to second floor, and a pressed metal parapet with a large central sunburst detail.

While the Kaffie Building is unquestionably an important building for its architectural form, structure, and decoration, it is equally important in regard to its position as a locality of Natchitoches's cultural history: the Kaffie Building was constructed by Harris Kaffie, a Jewish immigrant from Germany. Louisiana was by far the southern state with the largest Jewish population beginning in the antebellum era and continuing into the middle twentieth century.<sup>50</sup> For Jews from southwest Germany and France, which is the region where most of Louisiana's Jews emigrated from, rural hierarchical Louisiana was similar to their homeland. According historian Elliot Ashkenazi, Jews in Louisiana "came predominately from particular rural areas of Europe and worked and lived in isolated villages in small numbers in a society based on landownership and the production of cash crops. Barred from owning land, Jews became traders and merchants in feudal, pre-industrial France and in the German States... Once in the South, Jews took advantage of economic opportunities, performing, as before, bourgeois mercantile and capitalist functions that the dominant local group, the landowners, regarded with disdain or were unable to perform."<sup>51</sup> Most Jewish settlers in the South, before they owned their own mercantile or general stores, began work as peddlers. Thus, the first Jews of Natchitoches loaded up carts with goods purchased on Front Street and then headed out into the parish selling goods to the planters and yeoman

---

<sup>50</sup> Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky, eds., *Turn to the South Essays on Southern Jewry*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979); Samuel Proctor and Louis Schimier, eds., *Jews of the South* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984); Elliot Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews In Louisiana, 1840-1875* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988); and Elliot Goldman, "The Jewish Community of Natchitoches Parish," MA thesis, Northwestern State University, 1968.

<sup>51</sup> Ashkenazi, 3.

farmers. An early Jewish-run Dry Goods store in Natchitoches “did most of its business by sending peddlers off on horseback through the countryside.”<sup>52</sup> Once they saved enough capital, Jewish immigrants opened mercantile and general stores “without exception” on Front Street or Jefferson Street along the Cane River.<sup>53</sup>

After arriving to Natchitoches in 1863, Harris and his brother Adolph, established the H. Kaffie and Brother General Store. Judging from the size and amount of detailing on their new building from the 1890s, it seems reasonable to conclude that the General Store enjoyed a substantial level of success over its first thirty years. The Kaffies belonged to a small but highly influential Jewish population in Natchitoches that ran several important businesses on Front Street. Although most entrepreneurial endeavors were variations of the general store, some were specialty shops supplying the town of Natchitoches with hard to find goods. These shops included grocery stores, clothes stores, saloons, and barbershops. Yet, the majority of Jewish-owned businesses in Natchitoches were general stores. The Jewish owned general store “contained under one roof all manner of merchandise; ranging from dry goods, spirits, groceries, hardware, gunpowder, boots and shoes to crockery, furniture, cotton and country produce.”<sup>54</sup> During the 1920s, all but one store on the 600 block of Front Street was Jewish owned. In fact, Iglehart’s, Winebarg’s, Unter’s, and Levy’s general stores lined the block, one after another, between Church and St. Denis on Front Street.<sup>55</sup> By 1967, only three stores Jewish owned stores in Natchitoches remained: Leopold Levy and Son (general store); Kaffie-Frederick’s (hardware and appliance store); and Liebers (clothing).<sup>56</sup>

In addition to the Jewish-owned general stores, there were many other general and mercantile stores during the antebellum and post bellum eras owned by various Natchitoches residents including the Prudhomme and Cloutier family, the Blanchard family, and the Hughes Family.<sup>57</sup> The general store was tied to the agriculture economy, and hence, relied on credit as a means of payment. Therefore, “Country merchants became active cotton traders, accepting cotton in payment of the bills of their customers and using cotton to liquidate their own debts to the merchants and factors in New Orleans who financed their inventories.”<sup>58</sup> As a result, the general store with its diversity of functions played an important role in the formation and management of the Louisiana economy.

---

<sup>52</sup> Jacob R. Marcus, *Memoirs of American Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, ca. 1955), 235.

<sup>53</sup> Goldman, 21.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Arthur Babb, *My Sketchbook*, ed. Neill Cameron (Natchitoches: Northwestern State University Press, 1996) 52-53.

<sup>56</sup> Goldman, 41.

<sup>57</sup> Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records, Book 51, folio 429; Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records, Book 216, folio 500; Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records, Book 189, folio 143.

<sup>58</sup> Ashkenazi, 69.

It is unclear how accessible the general stores in Natchitoches were for African Americans. Yet, because the general stores survived by allowing credit based on proposed crop yields and because most black residents of Natchitoches Parish owned little land, it is unlikely that they frequented the stores very often. Possibly, there were black-owned stores in other areas of the parish, but unfortunately there is little scholarship on the topic and few records. More research in this area is needed. According to Ownby, writing about Mississippi, "General Stores were not settings for racial equality. One might expect that the logic of the marketplace would have worked against racial discrimination but storeowners made clear distinctions between black and white customers."<sup>59</sup>

Between the 1880s and 1900, Natchitoches recovered from economic depression brought on by the war and Reconstruction. The single determinant factor in the economic upturn was the introduction of the railroad in 1887. Originally, constructed to serve as a link from Natchitoches to the Texas and Pacific Railway that ran through Grand Ecore to the north and Cypress eleven miles to the south, the short-distance "Natchitoches tap" connected the rural town to markets along the Mississippi and New Orleans. In 1901, the Texas and Pacific Railway purchased the "tap" from Leopold Caspari President of the Natchitoches Railroad Construction Company.<sup>60</sup> With Natchitoches on the main route of the Texas and Pacific Railway, the town's agricultural products were transported much more efficiently. Although the town never regenerated an economy as strong as what it sustained during the antebellum era, Natchitoches was able to sell its cotton and other agricultural products, a condition attested to by the number of general stores lining Front Street.<sup>61</sup>

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, several new buildings were constructed on Front Street. Probably the most unique of the new buildings was the Lecompte Hotel building. Located on the corner of Church Street and Front Street, this three-story hotel and bank building was constructed with load-bearing brick masonry. The novelty of the architecture is that it is one of the only Front Street buildings that was designed using a specific revival "style." It is difficult to assign the building to any one individual style; rather it appears to be an amalgamation of the Romanesque and

---

<sup>59</sup> Ownby, 72.

<sup>60</sup> Jason Lott, "The 'Natchitoches Tap': A History of Natchitoches, Louisiana's own Railroad," *North Louisiana Historical Association Journal*, 1998 29 (2-3): 63.

<sup>61</sup> The Sanborn Maps, dating between 1892 and 1930, illustrate how Front Street grew slowly but consistently. In his MA thesis, "Changes in Sale and Service Foci in Natchitoches Between 1890-1920," Everett Baker argues that the economy started to decline between 1890 and 1920. His argument is based on the fact that little new building in the downtown area occurred during these years and that some older buildings were destroyed and not rebuilt, leaving vacant lots. He is partially correct in that the waterfront area did decline continuously since the change in the course of the Red River until the late 1880s when the railroad was constructed. Looking at the Sanborn Maps between 1892 and 1930, the density of buildings on both Front Street and its vicinity, increases as the years increase.

Renaissance revivals of the early twentieth century. The other interesting example of revival architecture on Front Street is the “Mission” revival building on the northwest corner of Church and Front Street. The building was constructed around 1900, but the mission-theme façade was probably added a few years later.<sup>62</sup>

Another building representative of the early twentieth century in Natchitoches is the “Amuzu” Opera House building constructed between 1919 and 1923. Its predecessor was located on the eastern side of Second Street between Horn and St. Denis Street. It is unclear whether the old building burned down, or whether the owners just wanted to move their business, but the opera house was relocated to what is now the middle of the block between Rue Trudeau and Church Street. This three-story, early twentieth-century opera house was constructed with load-bearing brick masonry. The architecture of the opera house with its decorative details, including an archway set into the façade and a high ornamental parapet, must have added to the theater of the live events performed at the Amuzu. Once the motion picture replaced the live theater and vaudeville acts performed at places like the Amuzu, the building became the primary movie theater in Natchitoches. Like many of the businesses on Front Street, the Amuzu Opera House and later movie theater, was Jewish-owned.

The stock market crash of 1929 and the economic depression that followed it had little effect on Natchitoches.<sup>63</sup> Many small towns throughout the South were, since the Civil War, accustomed to economic slowdowns, and therefore when the markets degenerated in the 1930s, it was hardly noticeable for much of the rural south. Also,

---

<sup>62</sup> Commenting on Natchitoches’s regrowth, the *Times* boasted that the “empty homes [were a] thing of the past; more people were living in their own neat, well kept homes than ever before; shady spots, pretty lawns and flower gardens are abundant – and taken as a whole, our little city puts up a nice appearance.” *Natchitoches Times*, 13 September 1912. Moreover, in an advertisement for a new community (segregated for whites), the Normal Heights developer promoted the area by saying Natchitoches was “famed for the age and strength of its mercantile establishments, [...] number of up-to-date business houses, splendid hotel facilities, two successful and strong banks, two lively weekly newspapers, a progressive building association, brick yard, ice factory, and cotton seed oil mills. It has a handsome government building, modern courthouse and jail, and active congregations and houses of worship of the Catholic, Jewish, Methodist, Baptist, and Episcopal faithful. Plans are now to build a Presbyterian Church.” *Natchitoches Times*, 24 February 1911 and 3 March 1911.

A year earlier, the newspaper reported on the issuance of a contract for sidewalks in June. The sidewalks were to be laid along Front, Jefferson, Washington, and Second streets as well as parts of Third and Fourth streets and all cross streets from Pine to Texas. Initially the contract (59 3/4 cents per linear foot) was granted to G.W. Price & Co. out of Beaumont, Texas, but two weeks later the newspaper reported that R.E. Reynolds was doing the sidewalk work. In the meantime, complaints were made about automobiles in town frightening horses and the beginning of the road improvement projects in the state solicited comments about the need for good thoroughfares. Also, it was noted in April that there were six or seven cars in the parish. *Natchitoches Times*, 21 January, 25 February, 1 April, 10 June, 17 June, and 24 June 1910.

<sup>63</sup> Raymond Edward Carney, “The Depression in Natchitoches Parish, 1930-1934,” MA thesis, Northwestern State University, 1969; and David LaVere, “P-Checks, Sweet Potatoes, and Sack Skirts: A Social History of the Natchitoches Farmer During the Depression,” *North Louisiana Historical Association Journal*, 1989 20(4): 107-33.

because Natchitoches was an agricultural community, food was abundant. What little consequence the depression had was lessened by the jobs created by the WPA in the community.<sup>64</sup> Almost all of contemporary Front Street was constructed by the 1940s, although most of the buildings' commercial spaces were "modernized" later in the twentieth century.

As mentioned above, the African American struggle for equality was resisted by many so-called "white" residents of the Natchitoches. Beginning with the "riot" during Reconstruction, African-Americans in Natchitoches used public acts of defiance to segregation and racial discrimination to exercise their demand for civil rights. Often, these acts took place in the downtown area on or near Front Street. The location of these acts was symbolic in that Front Street was largely off limits for the black community of Natchitoches. During the Louisiana Farmers Union organizing drive in 1940, black sharecroppers and farmers entered the city to join the union in a public act in the downtown area. According to historian Adam Fairclough,

On the day of the meeting, July 27, 1940, about six hundred blacks had arrived in the town 'on mules, horses, in wagons, trucks or jalopies.' Whites believed they were there to demand forty cents an hour for picking cotton and planned to strike if they failed to get it. The mayor warned Clark [the union leader] to leave town lest he wind up floating down the Cane River inside a sack.<sup>65</sup>

Clark was kept in the Natchitoches jail for several weeks with a phone call from the state attorney general demanding that he not be lynched being the only factor that saved his life.<sup>66</sup>

The African American struggle for civil rights in Natchitoches and its relationship to Front Street is a largely unexamined topic that deserves further research. The presence of organizations in Natchitoches to fight for racial equality leads one to believe that the black community was particularly active in the fight for civil rights.<sup>67</sup> After the national Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964 the transition to a desegregated Natchitoches must have caused a bitter conflict. Indeed, although the *Natchitoches Times* mentions little about civil rights during the early and middle 1960s, it does document, rather intensively,

---

<sup>64</sup> Carney, viii.

<sup>65</sup> Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995) 53.

<sup>66</sup> Greta De Jong, *A Different Day: African American Struggles for Justice in Rural Louisiana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) 112.

<sup>67</sup> Natchitoches was one of the first Parishes in Louisiana to form a NAACP branch. The NAACP was organized in Natchitoches in the late 1930s and headed by an African American physician, Dr. E. A. Johnson. See De Jong, *A Different Day*.

the activities of the White Citizens Council, going as far as to advertise their meetings, which took place in the commercial area and at the courthouse. In a 30 January 1964 front-page headline "Citizens' Council Holds Reorganization Meeting," the speaker is quoted as saying, "Integrationists want to take down the white and colored signs,....but what the sign says is not so important as who has the right to put up the sign."<sup>68</sup> A week earlier, the paper reported the burning of four crosses by the Ku Klux Klan near a black community in Natchitoches.<sup>69</sup> Finally, in a hint of the seriousness of maintaining segregation on Front Street, an editorial on the front page of the *Natchitoches Times* in July of 1964, declared, "Incidentally the item in this column a few weeks ago about the Negro and white college students trying to eat an 'integrated meal' here was NOT a joke. It actually happened on Front Street."<sup>70</sup>

The town of Natchitoches has for almost three centuries served as both a valuable commercial center for Louisiana's agricultural economy, and as a site of production for Louisiana's unique cultural and social history. During the colonial period and early American era, Natchitoches was a valuable port on the Red River for cotton shipping. As the Red River changed its course, leaving the branch in front of Natchitoches only navigable during flooding, Front Street and the waterfront commercial district declined in importance as a center of trade. Instead, the Front Street area transformed into a city center for the parish as its warehouses were replaced by hotels and stores. Although most of the architecture dates to the early twentieth century, the spatial characteristics of Front Street in contemporary Natchitoches have changed very little from the nineteenth century. While this study surveyed the formation of the commercial district of Natchitoches on Front Street, it is this writer's hope that it might serve as an outline for further micro-histories on the specifics of the cultural, social, and racial history of Natchitoches.

## PART II: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

### A. Primary Sources

Ardoin, Bruce L., comp. *Louisiana Census Records: Iberville, Natchitoches, Pointe Coupee, and Rapides Parishes-1810 & 1820*. Vol. II. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1972.

Babb, Arthur. *My Sketchbook*. Edited by Neill Cameron. Natchitoches: Northwestern State University Press, 1996.

---

<sup>68</sup> *Natchitoches Times*, 30 January 1964, 1.

<sup>69</sup> *Natchitoches Times*, 24 January 1964, 1.

<sup>70</sup> *Natchitoches Times*, 2 June 1964, 1.

FRONT STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)

HABS No. LA-1319

(page 21)

Childs, Marleta and John Ross, ed. *North Louisiana Census Reports: 1830 & 1840 Schedules of Caddo, Claiborne, and Natchitoches Parishes*. Vol. II, New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1977.

De Mezieres, Athanase. *Athanase De Mezieres and the Louisiana- Texas Frontier 1768-1780*. Edited by Herbert Eugene Bolton. Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1914.

*Debow's Review*.

Flint, Timothy. *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States or the Mississippi Valley (1828)*. 2 vols. 1828. Reprint, Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1970.

Historic Natchitoches Parish. Unpublished Scrapbook, Cammie G. Henry Archives, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University.

Historic Standing Structure Survey, 720 Front Street Prudhomme Building, Natchitoches, Louisiana. Surveyed by Mary Miller, 1986.

Natchitoches Parish Succession Records.

Marcotte Map. Map Collection, Cammie G. Henry Archives, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University.

Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records.

*Natchitoches Times*.

Prudhomme, Lestan. "The Young Man's Diary." In *Old Louisiana*, edited by Lyle Saxon. New York: The Century Company, 1929.

Robertson, James Alexander. *Louisiana Under the Rule of Spain, France, and the United States 1785-1807*. Vol. II. Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1911.

Sanborn Maps, 1892 -1930.

Sibley, John. "A Report From Natchitoches in 1807." In *Indian Notes and Monographs*, edited by Annie Heloise Abel. New York: Museum of the American Indian Heye Foundation, 1922.

B. Secondary Sources

- Ashkenazi, Elliot. *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988.
- Ayers, Edward. *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Baker, Everett L. "Changes in Sale and Service Foci in Natchitoches Between 1890-1920." MA thesis, Northwestern State University, 1972.
- Berry, Jane M. "The Indian Policy of Spain in the Southwest, 1783-1795." *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 3 (1917): 462-77.
- Burton, Sophie H. "Free People of Color in Colonial Natchitoches: Manumission and Dependancy on the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1766-1803." *Louisiana History* 45 (2004): 173-97.
- Carney, Raymond Edward. "The Depression in Natchitoches Parish, 1930-1934." MA thesis, Northwestern State University, 1969.
- Cobb, James C. "Beyond Planters and Industrialists." Chap. in *Redefining Southern Culture*. Athens: University of Georgia, 1999.
- Cohen, William. *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861-1915*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991.
- Cruz, Gilbert R. *Let There Be Towns Spanish Municipal Origins in the American Southwest*. College Station: Texas A & M, 1988.
- Daniel, Pete. *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972.
- Davis, Edwin Adam. *The Rivers and Bayous of Louisiana*. New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Co., 1968.
- Dethloff, Henry C. "Paddlewheels and Pioneers on the Red River 1815-1915, Reminiscences of Captain M. C. Scovell." *Louisiana Studies* 6 (1967): 91-134.
- Din, Gilbert C. *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves: the Spanish Regulation of Slavery in Louisiana, 1763-1803*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999.

Elliot, Jack. "City and Empire: The Spanish Origins of Natchez," *Journal of Mississippi History* 59 (1997): 275-321.

Ewers, John C. "Symbols of Chiefly Authority in Spanish Louisiana." In *The Spanish in the Mississippi Valley, 1762-1804*, edited by John Francis McDermott, 272-86. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974.

Fairclough, Adam. *Race and Democracy The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995.

Flores, Dan L., ed. *Jefferson and Southwestern Exploration*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Garrison, George P. *Texas: A Contest of Civilization*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903.

Goldman, Elliot. "The Jewish Community of Natchitoches Parish." MA thesis, Northwestern State University, 1968.

Gregory, Hiram F., "The Historic Indians of Natchitoches Parish." In *Natchitoches Parish Cultural and Historical Resources*, edited by Hiram F. Gregory, James L. McCorkle, and H. K. Curry. Natchitoches: Natchitoches Parish Cultural and Historical Resources.

Greta, de Jong. *A Different Day: African American Struggles for Justice in Rural Louisiana*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

Guardia, J. E. "Some Results of the Log Jam in the Red River." *The Bulletin of the Geographical Society of Philadelphia* 31 (1933).

Hangar, Kimberly S. *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

Humphreys, Hubert Davis. "The 'Great Raft' of the Red River." In *North Louisiana Volume One: To 1865*, edited by B. H. Gilley. Ruston: McGinty Trust Fund, 1984.

Jaynes, Gerald. *Branches Without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in the American South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Kaganoff, Nathan M., and Melvin I. Urofsky, eds. *Turn to the South Essays on Southern Jewry*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979.

- Karnowski, Mary Silverius. "Natchitoches During the Civil War and Reconstruction Period." MA thesis, Northwestern State University, 1949.
- Kniffen, Fred B., and Hiram F. Gregory. *The Historic Indians Tribes of Louisiana: From 1542 to the Present*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987.
- LaVere, David. "P-Checks, Sweet Potatoes, and Sack Skirts: A Social History of the Natchitoches Farmer During the Depression." *North Louisiana Historical Association Journal* 20 (1989): 107-33.
- Lott, Jason. "The 'Natchitoches Tap': A History of Natchitoches, Louisiana's Own." *North Louisiana Historical Association Journal* 29 (1998).
- Lott, Wendy M. "Natchitoches and the Red River Steamboat Trade." MA thesis, Northwestern State University, 2000.
- Martin, Francois-Xavier. *The History of Louisiana*. 1882; Reprint, New Orleans: James Gresham Publisher, 1963.
- McGinty, Garnie W. *Louisiana Redeemed The Overthrow of Carpet-Bag Rule 1876-1880*. New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1941.
- Mills, Gary B. *Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977.
- Norman, Phillip N. "The Red River of the South." *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 25 (1942): 401.
- Novak, Daniel. *The Wheel of Servitude: Black Forced Labor after Slavery*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1978.
- Ownby, Ted. *American Dreams in Mississippi Consumers, Poverty, and Culture 1830-1998*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Portre-Bobinski, Germaine and Clara Mildred Smith. *Natchitoches The Up-to-Date Oldest Town in Louisiana*. New Orleans: Dameron-Pierson Co., 1936.
- Proctor, Samuel, and Louis Schimier, eds. *Jews of the South*. Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984.
- Ransom, Roger, and Richard Sutch. *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1977.

FRONT STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)

HABS No. LA-1319

(page 25)

Seale, Richard. "The Town of Natchitoches." In *Natchitoches and Louisiana's Timeless Cane River*, photography by Philip Gould. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002.

Seale, Richard. "Pine Hills and Plantations Some Social and Economic Views of the Civil War in Natchitoches Parish." *North Louisiana Historical Association Journal* 25 (1994): 107-33.

Seale, Richard. "From French Village to American Town: The Development of Natchitoches, Louisiana, 1788-1818." MA thesis, Northwestern State University, 1991.

Stokes, George A. "Landscape Forms and Patterns of French Origin in the Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, Area." *Louisiana Studies* 3 (1964): 105-16.

Taylor, Joe Gray. *Louisiana Reconstructed*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974.

Usner, Jr., Daniel H. *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

Watson, Judy. "Red River Raft." *Texana* 5 (1967): 68-76.

White, Howard A. *The Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1970.

Wilson Jr., Samuel. "Colonial Fortifications and Military Architecture." In *The Architecture of Colonial Louisiana Collected Essays of Samuel Wilson, Jr. FAIA*. Lafayette: The Center for Louisiana Studies, 1987.

Wilson, Jon Lamar. "From State Architecture to Symbol of Suspicion: Creole Design in Colonial and Antebellum Natchez." MA thesis, University of Mississippi, 2000.

Works Project Administration. *Louisiana Guide*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana Library Commission, 1941.

PART III: BUILDING DESCRIPTIONS

**Block 1: 500 to 530 Front Street, Natchitoches Historic District**

This block is representative of early, twentieth-century commercial architecture as expressed in Natchitoches. There are three structures, each of which is described below.

500-16 Front Street, between Rue Touline and Rue Trudeau.

Architectural description: Located on the corner of Rue Touline and Front Street, this early twentieth-century, single-story structure extends for 123' on Front Street and is divided into six separate commercial rental spaces. There is little visible original fabric in the building overall other than the load-bearing brick walls and continuous stepped parapet. The pressed-metal ceilings in the two northern-most commercial rentals are likely original as well. The exterior brickwork, recently covered with tan paint, incorporates the common bond pattern and appears to be in fair condition.

The (six) partitioned rental spaces are part of a renovation and, therefore, do not reflect the original configuration. Each of the six rental spaces has a central doorway opening either directly off the sidewalk or recessed several feet from it. The four southern-most spaces (Nos. 500-06) each have a four-panel door abutting on the sidewalk. The doors all have the same contemporary manufactured surrounds that are made of wood and painted white. Each portal is flanked by a large, fixed window that is divided into two sections by a large mullion. The two north rental spaces (Nos. 512-16) are recessed several feet off the Front Street walkway and, while not identical, each have a single, glass door and display windows consisting of single, fixed sash, that conform to the path leading from the sidewalk to the entranceway. The door surrounds of the two spaces are connected by a wood panel and are of the same type of contemporary manufactured detailing as the other four. All six spaces share a common cornice molding and height.

A recently added block-long porch with a decorative metal balustrade protrudes outward from the exterior façade and extends across the top of the building, but several feet below the parapet. Because the building is only one-story, there is no access to the porch from inside. The porch is supported by round steel columns placed at the edge of the street and the sidewalk, thereby creating a covered sidewalk.

Conveyance: Ambrose J. Hertzog et al. and Mrs. Fannie Hertzog Chopin sell to Harris and Louis Joffa the "lot of land" on the corner of Trudeau and Front Streets on July 20, 1903. (Conveyance Book 110 (A), 572-73).

The lot was developed by the Joffa brothers and sold by their heirs to W.F. Johnson on January 2, 1919. (Conveyance Book 144, 104-05, 243).

After the death of W.F. Johnson, the building was sold to J.F. Pierson and W.H. Pierson by the heirs of Johnson on September 7, 1956. (Conveyance Book 183, 446).

J.F. Pierson willed his portion of the property to his wife, Lucille D' Aquin Pierson and two sons, James Francis Jr. and Robert Griffen Pierson on November 29, 1954, giving his wife one half of his share and his sons each one-fourth of his interest in the building. (Conveyance Book 250, 533).

Lucille D' Aquin Pierson and her two sons, Robert and Griffen Pierson, sold their share of the land to W.H. Pierson for \$158,000 on December 1, 1962, making him the sole proprietor. (Conveyance Book 250, 709).

W.H. Pierson sold the building to Pierson Realty on December 3, 1962 for several hundred shares of stock in Pierson Realty. (Conveyance 250, 713).

Sources:

Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records, Books 110, 144, 183, 250.

Natchitoches Parish Maps and Land Surveys, Map Book 1, p. 266, Slide 79 A.

520-24 Front Street, between Rue Touline and Rue Trudeau.

Architectural description: Located between the two corner sites and extending for 69' along Front Street, this two-story, early twentieth-century building is constructed with load-bearing bricks laid in common bond. Although the ground floor was subdivided into two commercial spaces, the second-story has been altered very little. On the ground floor, the exterior of the south commercial rental space (No. 520) is designed using the same windows and door surrounds as the adjacent rental spaces to the south (Nos. 500-16) and so created a continuous ground-level façade pattern from the corner of Rue Touline to roughly the midpoint of the ground level of 520-24 Front Street. The rental space is recessed several feet off the Front Street walkway and has display windows that conform to the curvilinear path from the sidewalk to the door front. Each of the windows has a single fixed sash.

Similar to the commercial space described above, the storefront of the adjacent commercial space (No. 524) is characterized by large windows glazed solely by large, fixed sash and accessed through modern, glass doors. Here the entrance is

set several feet off the Front Street sidewalk; both doors have a single-light transom and they are separated by a brick column. The columnar support upholds the girder that spans the entranceway. The interior of the commercial space has an elevated walkway used for storage, which is cantilevered from the perimeter walls and further structured by tension cables that connect from the second-story floor framing to the balusters.

Before the recent construction of the block-long, second-story porch, the second story had eight windows. Yet, because there was no available access to the porch, the owners of the building converted two of the windows into casement doors. The remaining windows are glazed with nine-over-one lights in operable, double-hung sash. Above each window is a segmental arch; these lintels are made of brick.. The recently added block-long porch with a decorative metal balustrade protrudes outward from the exterior façade of the building at the floor of the second-story. The porch is supported with steel tubing columns with decorative brackets placed at the edge of the street and the sidewalk, making a covered sidewalk. The metal columns connect to a protruding canopy a few feet above the second-story windows and a few feet below the exterior roofline.

Conveyance: Eliza Prudhomme, J. Alphonse Prudhomme, and Mrs. Fanny Guillot sell lot to P.S Prudhomme on December 3, 1918. (Conveyance Book 144 5-6).

P.S. Prudhomme and wife Antoinette Janin sell to Jeff DeBlieux the lot on December 6, 1918. (Conveyance Book 144, 20-21).

Jeff DeBlieux and wife Madge Walmsley sell “a certain vacant lot” to W.F. Johnson, on February 15, 1919, who develops the lot. (Conveyance Book 144, 243-44).

After the death of W.F Johnson, the building was sold to J.F. Pierson and W.H. Pierson by the heirs of Johnson on September 7, 1956. (Conveyance Book 183, 446).

J.F. Pierson willed his portion of the property to his wife, Lucille D’ Aquin Pierson and two sons, James Francis Jr. Pierson, and Robert Griffen Pierson on November 29, 1954, giving his wife one-half of his share and his sons each one-fourth of his interest in the building. (Conveyance Book 250, 533).

Lucille D’ Aquin Pierson and her two sons, Robert and Griffen Pierson, sell their share of the land to W.H. Pierson for \$158,000 on December 1, 1962, making him the sole proprietor. (Conveyance Book 250, 709).

W.H. Pierson sells the building to Pierson Realty on December 3, 1962, for several hundred shares of stock in Pierson Realty. (Conveyance 250, 713).

Sources:

Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records, Books 144, 183, 250.

Natchitoches Parish Maps and Land Surveys, Map Book 1, p. 266, Slide 79 A.

530 Front Street, between Rue Toulaine and Rue Lafayette. (J & A Prudhomme Building).

Architectural description: Located on the corner of Rue Trudeau and Front Street and extending for 69' along Front Street, this early-to-middle twentieth-century, commercial building is constructed with load-bearing bricks laid in common bond and painted white on the north (Rue Lafayette) façade and plastered over on the front façade. The ground floor of the two-story building was later subdivided to make two commercial spaces. Recently, however, the Front Street level of the building was restored to its original configuration, again serving as one continuous commercial space (the Landing Restaurant). The ground floor is entered through two doors recessed a few feet from the Front Street sidewalk. The doors are each glazed with eight lights set in over wood panel. In the center of the doorway, next to the sidewalk, a column covered with wood panels supports the girder spanning the doorway. Large, fixed single-sash windows divided by thick mullions repeat from each side of the building and turn inward towards the doors following the geometry of the doorway. To the south end of the facade, there is a glass door with a transom light above. It provides access to a single-run stair, presumably leading up to the second floor, and the door itself labeled "banquet and meeting room."

The second story has three bays: the center bay has casement doors and each peripheral bay has a double window with operable double-hung sash glazed with six-over-six lights.

The recently added block-long porch with a decorative metal balustrade protrudes outward from the exterior façade of the building at the floor level of the second-story. The porch is supported by round steel columns with decorative brackets placed at the edge of the street and the sidewalk, creating a covered sidewalk. The metal columns connect to a protruding canopy a few feet above the second-story windows and a few feet below the apex of the parapet.

Conveyance: Clothilde Prudhomme Hughes acquired the lot and building through various wills and successions.

C. P. Hughes acquired the undivided interest of P. U. B. Prudhomme , J. J. Prudhomme, and J. A. Prudhomme by deed on July 27, 1932. (Conveyance Book 168, 213).

C. P. Hughes acquired the undivided interest of P. W. Prudhomme by deed on July 27, 1944. (Conveyance 194, 380).

C. P. Hughes acquired the undivided interest of Julie Prudhomme by deed dated May 14, 1962. (Conveyance Book 247, 540).

The heirs of Clothilde Prudhomme Hughes sell to Edward P. Hughes the lot and building on February 15, 1983. (Conveyance Book 384, 238).

The heirs of Edward P. Hughes sell the building and lot to Kent Gresham on July 29, 1992. (Conveyance Book 476, 683).

Sources:

Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records, Books 168, 194, 247, 384, 476.

Natchitoches Parish Maps and Land Surveys, Map Book 1, p. 266, Slide 79 A.

**Block 2: 550 to 584 Front Street, Natchitoches Historic District**

Three structures also make up this block along Front Street. The first, at 550-60 Front Street is an example of turn of the century commercial architecture while the central building was an opera house/theater form dating to the early twentieth century. That building (No. 570) has been gutted, although a shell still stands and renovations are underway. The last edifice, located at 584 Front Street, is also a commercial architectural example from the early twentieth century. It incorporates details from the Renaissance and Romanesque revival periods, combining them with the Louisiana vernacular to create an eclectic and unusual aesthetic.

550-60 Front Street between Rue Trudeau and Church Street. (DeBlieux Ready to Wear, DeBlieux Drug Store)

Architectural description: Located on the corner of Rue Trudeau and Front Street, this single-story, commercial structure dating from the late nineteenth, or very early twentieth, century is constructed with load-bearing brick masonry laid in common bond. The building has been partitioned several times with the current configuration having three addresses (550, 558, 560). The Front Street façade with its decorative pressed metal parapet in the form of an entablature, with wood paneling wainscot below the storefront windows, and with wood molding in the form of pilasters between the windows, makes this building one of the best examples of turn of the century commercial architecture in

FRONT STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)  
HABS No. LA-1319  
(page 31)

Natchitoches Historic District. The largest of partitioned spaces, on the corner of Rue Trudeau, is entered through a recessed double door. The middle partition is entered through a single door abutting the sidewalk of Front Street. A series of fixed windows glazed with two-over-two lights is positioned above the display windows and the doors; these windows are painted above the first partition (No. 550) while the middle partition (No. 558) uses them to light the interior space. The third partition (No. 560) has been remodeled. Beneath the original parapet that runs the length of the building, No. 560 is characterized by a clapboard façade and what is essentially a shed roof covered in shingles. The first two partitions have a lean-to, wood frame roof that covers the sidewalk and is supported with steel columns on the edge of the sidewalk and Front Street whereas the third has the decorative, shed roof extending out over a section of the Front Street sidewalk.<sup>71</sup>

Conveyance: Jeff DeBlieux and Mrs. Eloise DeBlieux et al. partition lot and building into two lots after E. V. DeBlieux died. Lot 1 became the property of Jeff DeBlieux and Lot 2 remained with Eloise DeBlieux on March 25, 1907. (Conveyance Book 120, 416-18).

Lot 2 was partitioned into a north property (24'3" on Front Street) deeded to Lotis DeBlieux and a south property (12'5" on Front Street) deeded to J.L. DeBlieux on November 6, 1937. (Conveyance Book 179, 313-14).<sup>72</sup>

Lot 2 (north partition) was sold by Lotis DeBlieux to Barry Freeman DeBlieux and Don David DeBlieux on October 1, 1976 for \$20,000. (Conveyance Book 331, 886-87).

---

<sup>71</sup> In August of 1946 the *Natchitoches Times* reported that DeBlieux's new store would open at 406 Front Street; it stated that the front of the building was designed by Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company in the "most decorative fashion." A sketch was pictured in the newspaper and showed the entrance in tones of black and white, with darker tones characterizing the ceiling of the recessed entryway and baseboards, gray tones for the surround, and a grid along the floor of entryway. The grid likely referred to tilework. Large plate glass, store-front windows dominated the opening. The recessed entryway led back to double doors, each made of one piece of plate glass. However, by the time of the 1930 Sanborn map the street had been re-numbered - the original 406 becoming 612 - making the location of 406 somewhat of a puzzle without later directories to pinpoint merchant locations. DeBlieux's building referenced in the text appeared by the time of the 1904 map and was partitioned at various junctures into three and four stores (Nos. 300-06) before becoming Nos. 554-62 in the 1930 Sanborn. It is possible that the Pittsburgh company's remodeling was covered up by the clapboards of No. 560, since this part of the building looks so different than the rest, or the pair of triple windows, each sash glazed with six lights, represents the former location of the double doors. These windows are adjacent to No. 558. Perhaps, too, the renovations occurred at No. 550, which retains a pair of recessed doors, or the store advertised in the newspaper was located in another block altogether.

<sup>72</sup> This conveyance corrected the earlier judgement of possession dated 5 April 1934 and recorded in Conveyance Book 170, 411. This document also corrects the previous right of passage deed; moreover, there was a party wall agreement recorded in April of 1960. See Conveyance Record 233, 157.

Lot 2 (south partition) was willed to Eloise Adkins DeBlieux and Lotis Deblieux on December 3, 1980. (Conveyance Book 366, 331-37).

Both the south and north partitions of Lot 2 are sold to William J. Long and Patricia Long from Eloise Adkins DeBlieux, D. David DeBlieux, Molly Smith, and Freddie Deblieux Harris on April 4, 1984. (Conveyance Book 394, 805-06).

Long et al sold both partitions of Lot 2 to W. Norman and Fay Norman on February 15, 1985.<sup>73</sup>

W. Norman and Fay Norman sold both partitions of Lot 2 to Cane Heritage Realty, Incorporated, in June 3, 1987. (Conveyance Book 427, 720-21).

Lot 1 is willed to from Jeff DeBlieux to his son Jeff DeBlieux Jr., and daughter Lucille DeBlieux who then willed Lot 1 to their heirs. The heirs sold Lot 1 to DeBlieux and Kelley, Incorporated for \$180,000 on May 26, 1989. (Conveyance Book 446, 600-04).

Sources:

Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records Books 120, 179, 331, 366, 394, 427, and 446.

Natchitoches Parish Maps and Land Surveys, Slide 288 B.

570 Front Street, between Rue Trudeau and Church Street. (Amuzu Opera House/Movie Theatre).

Architectural description: Constructed between 1919 and 1923 the “Amuzu” Opera House building is representative of the early twentieth-century, theater architecture. It is located in the middle of the block between Rue Trudeau and Church Street, this three-story, early twentieth-century opera house was constructed with load-bearing brick masonry laid in common bond. All that remains of the original fabric is the front façade and the perimeter walls on the south and west sides. The Amuzu shared a party wall with the building immediately to the north, and that building is extant. Thus, all that is left of the opera house is the four perimeter walls. The ground floor façade of the former theater has large display windows much like the other commercial storefronts in the Historic District with a multi-door recessed entry.

---

<sup>73</sup> This sale is referenced in Conveyance Book 427, 720-21, establishing the Normans ownership in 1985 and by extension the provenance allowing them to convey the property to Cane Heritage Realty in 1987.

FRONT STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)

HABS No. LA-1319

(page 33)

Above the doorway and display windows, a canopy held up with four decorative steel cables; these cables, in tension, attach the canopy to the facade. Above the canopy, the front façade rises to three stories and culminates with a shaped parapet with various steps and bandings. There are four second-floor windows with protruding sills and topped with a thin band that moves above the apertures making several dips between the windows. The third floor is marked by four smaller windows with protruding sills. The banding on this floor forms vertically aligned rectangles with protruding sills to each side of the windows. Between the inner pair of windows, a covered window opening outlined with the thin banding is topped with a decorative arch.

Conveyance: Natchitoches Hotel Company sold lot to Natchitoches Opera House Company owned by Levy and Suddath on June 6, 1916. (Conveyance Book 140, 43).

Edgar Levy sold his share of the Natchitoches Opera House Company to D. L. Suddath on June 18, 1931. (Conveyance Book 166, 189).

D. L. Suddath sold the Natchitoches Opera House Company to Amuzu Theatre Incorporated on August 28, 1933. (Conveyance Book 169, 393).

Amuzu Theatre Incorporated sold the theatre to Suddath and Suddath on November 20, 1934. (Conveyance Book 171, p. 156).

Maugerite H. Suddath acquired the theatre through the will of Suddath.

Maugerite H. Suddath sold the property and building to SM Theatre Corporation on December 15, 1960. (Conveyance Book 241, 428).

SM Theatre sold the property to Don Theatre. (Conveyance Book 512, 710).

Sources:

Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records Books 140, 166, 169, 171, 241, and 512.

Natchitoches Parish Maps and Land Surveys, Slide 288 B.

584 Front Street, between Rue Lafayette and Church Street. (Lecompte Hotel, Nakatosh Hotel).

Architectural description: In the first three decades of the twentieth century, several new buildings were constructed on Front Street, and probably the most unique was the Lecompte Hotel; its corner location and decorated archway

entrances continue to create an impression of dissimilarity from the rest of Front Street's orthogonal facades and apertures. In July of 1941, improvements to the "Hotel Nakatosh" were reported in the *Natchitoches Times*; at this time, ventilation was added to both floors by Hunter Fan and Ventilating Company.<sup>74</sup>

Located on the corner of Church Street and Front Street, this three-story, early twentieth-century hotel and bank building was constructed with load-bearing brick masonry laid in running bond. Recently, an exterior walkway was added along the outside of the both the Front Street and Church Street façades; this walkway is supported by steel columns rising from the ground at the edge of the sidewalk and Front Street. The walkways have both decorative balustrades and brackets of the same floral motif. The eave of the building's hipped roof connects to the walkway columns.

On the first story of the corner partition, which originally served as a bank, brick banded pilasters are topped with a decorative capital and footed with a similar base. Between the pilasters, recessed banded archways form the two entryways as well as multiple windows. The corner partition on the second-floor was recently remodeled with decorative banded pilasters placed at certain points on the exterior façade. Above the windows, doorways, and pilasters, an entablature decorated with dentils and *fleur-de-lis* connects the spaced pilasters under one continuous and unifying detail. The third story of the corner partition has only the load-bearing brick masonry walls with the various doorways and windows lining the exterior walkway.

The Front Street section is subdivided into two commercial rental spaces on the ground floor. Both have contemporary storefront, fixed, single-sash double windows divided by a large mullion. The recessed doorway has a fixed, single-sash window to each side of a single glass door. The Front Street façade, on the ground floor, has a brick veneer covering the load-bearing wall. The second floor resembles the second floor of the corner partition, excluding the decorative pilasters and entablature, and is connected to it by the exterior walkway. The third floor is identical to the third floor of the corner partition and is connected to it by the exterior walkway.

Conveyance: Eliza Prudhomme and Fanny Chopin sell portion of what is now 584 Front Street to Natchitoches Hotel Company on May 6, 1906. (Conveyance Book 118, 335).

---

<sup>74</sup> *Natchitoches Times*, 4 July 1941.

William P. Wemp sold the property to James J. Johnson on February 17, 1925.  
(Conveyance Book 154, 177).

James Johnson sold one half of the property to L. H. Johnson on June 6, 1925.  
(Conveyance Book 154, 459).

People's Bank and Trust sold property to L. H. Johnson on November 21, 1961.  
(Conveyance Book 245, 383).

L. H. Johnson, et al sold property to L. H. Johnson Realty Corporation on July 1,  
1964. (Conveyance Book 257, 783).

L. H. Johnson Realty Corporation sold property to Henry Cook Taylor on January  
14, 1975. (Conveyance Book 321, 829).

Noreco Incorporated sold property to Henry Cook Taylor on April 30, 1987.  
(Conveyance Book 426, 659-67).

Henry Cook Taylor to Dale Blocker Hill, trustee. (Conveyance Book 442, 409).<sup>75</sup>

Sheriff's sale of Dale Blocker Hill's property to Trinity Gas Corporation on  
August 13, 1993. (Conveyance Book 488, 263-66).<sup>76</sup>

Trinity Gas Corporation sold property to Nakatosh Hotel Incorporated on May 21,  
1996. (Conveyance Book 512, 707-10).

Sources:

Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records Books 154, 245, 257, 321, 426, 442,  
488, and 512.

Natchitoches Parish Maps and Land Surveys, Slide 288 B.

**Block 3: 600 to 628 Front Street, Natchitoches Historic District**

The footprint of this block was largely in place by the turn of twentieth century, with most structures located on the 1892 and 1899 Sanborn maps, although the block itself was identified as Nos. 303-08 Front Street at the time. No. 306, later 408-10 and then 616-20, was built between the 1892 and 1899 mapping endeavors, but all of the existing

---

<sup>75</sup> The property was subject to a mortgage in the amount of \$300,000; see Mortgage Book 339, 493.

<sup>76</sup> Notice of the sale was posted in the newspaper on 2 September 1993 and again on 7 October; it was similarly added to the public record in Mortgage Book 575, 401. The sale included both tracts - the Nakatosh Hotel property and the old Dranquet Home property.

buildings had accretions to the rear by 1904. By the time of the 1930 Sanborn, Nos. 616-20 had almost doubled in depth. Moreover, the distinctive parapet added to the building at the corner of Front and Church streets (No. 600) is illustrative of Mission-revival architecture, an aesthetic popular in the first part of the twentieth century.

600 and 604 Front Street between Church Street and Rue St. Denis. (McClung's Drugstore)

Architectural description: Located on the corner of Church and Front streets, this one-story structure was constructed by 1899 with load-bearing bricks that were later covered with stucco.<sup>77</sup> The building's dominant characteristic is its large "Mission Revival" style parapet, but this feature is likely an early twentieth-century addition. Beneath the distinctive Mission Revival-style parapet, No. 600 resembles its northern neighbor at No. 604, as both are characterized by storefront, or fixed, plate glass, windows divided merely by a mullion. They also both have recessed doorways. A canvas canopy shades the front of both Nos. 600 and 604 although the canopy varies to further distinguish one (No. 600) from the other (No. 604).

History: Nos. 600 and 604 Front Street were erected near the site of the first Catholic church in Natchitoches (St. Francis); that church building burned in 1823. Commerce settled in by 1899, with a drug store in No. 600 and a telegraph office to the north (No. 604). The telegraph office gave way to a bank and then a millery and shop. The mission-revival façade was applied to only No. 600, however. This stylistic update was likely completed between 1919 and 1920, and was photographed - without the stucco - by Marion Post Wolcott in June of 1940 for the Farm Security Administration. In 1940, there was an entrance at the corner and three plate glass windows lighting the interior of the drug store.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> On the 1899 Sanborn map, the buildings identified as 303-06 Front Street served as a drugstore (303), telephone office (303 ½), grocery & hardware, and "D.G." [dry goods?]. St. Francis Church is situated behind it, at the corner of Church and Second streets. This church was renamed between 1909 and 1914; see HABS No. LA-2-4.

<sup>78</sup> In January of 1946 the *Natchitoches Times* reported the discovery of some "antique documents, old papers [that] shed light on old days in Natchitoches" namely the fire of 1881. Two structures that escaped the blaze were Lecompte's dwelling at the corner of Front and Church streets and the Prudhomme Building still on the corner of Front and Horn. Not as lucky was the structure housing J.A. Ducournau & Sons; it burned. This building was located where McClung's was in 1946. In November of 1941 the newspaper sponsored a contest "how well do you know Natchitoches" to encourage its readership to buy locally. According to the newspaper, McClung's was established in 1890 by E.L. McClung, Sr., yet the Sanborn maps date the structure's appearance to between 1892 and 1899. The elder McClung must have started his business in a different location. Regarding Wolcott's image, see FSA Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (negative #54710-D and 54697-D).

608 Front Street, between Church Street and Rue St. Denis.

Architectural description: Located between Church Street and Rue St. Denis on Front Street, this single-story, late nineteenth-century commercial building was constructed of load-bearing brick masonry that was then covered with stucco. The smooth, stuccoed facade is interrupted by a three-bay inset consisting of display windows and a centrally located double door recessed off of Front Street and a striped canvas canopy running above the windows and doorway. Above the canopy are two cast iron columns, dividing the space into three equal parts. Beneath the canopy, the display windows of the side bays are fixed, divided by large mullions, and the recessed entrance lit by a series of similar windows.

The building runs for 31' on Front Street. It is home to "Mama's" Restaurant today. Original fabric consists of the exterior or structural walls and the cast iron elements visible above the canopy on the front facade.

Conveyance: J. S. Stephens Sr. purchased building from D. C. Scarborough on June 13, 1890. (Conveyance 88, 294).

Camille Parker Hancock received the building from J. S. Stephens Jr. on January 24, 1966. (Conveyance 267, 464).

Clay Mayeaux and Bill Daniels purchased the building from C. P. Hancock and subdivide it. (Map 445, B).

612 Front Street, between Church Street and Rue St. Denis.

Architectural description: Located between Church Street and Rue St. Denis on Front Street, this late nineteenth-century commercial building was constructed with load-bearing brick masonry covered with stucco. Other than the structural walls there is no noticeable original fabric.

As does No. 608, this structure runs for 31' on Front Street, but its Front Street elevation is defined by a large, pediment-shaped parapet protruding above the shared roofline. Decorative, fluted pilasters flank the central doorway and mark the outside boundaries of the first-floor fenestration. There are also four, evenly spaced, decorated columns holding up the building's lean-to canopy.

To each side of the doorway is one, large fixed window sectioned into three parts divided by large mullions and filled with two rows of three vertically aligned

lights. Within the recessed doorway on each side of the walkway, there is a single double-row of vertically aligned lights. The door itself is glazed with nine lights. Below the windows and on the lower portion of the front door, there is decorative wood paneling. Above the canopy is a louvered opening, reminiscent of an oxe-eye window; it is circular in shape and defined by a surround and keystone.

616 Front Street, between Church Street and Rue St. Denis.

Architectural description: Located between Church Street and Rue St. Denis on Front Street, this two-story, late nineteenth-century commercial building was constructed between 1892 and 1899 with load-bearing bricks that were then covered with stucco.<sup>79</sup> It runs for 45' along Front Street. Other than the structural masonry, no original fabric is noticeable. Initially, the building was only a one-story structure.

The building has a pediment-shaped parapet with four mini-turrets rising above the roofline. The second-floor fenestration consists of a double door flanked by fixed double windows with a large mullion and set above a wainscoting of wood paneling. Each leaf of the double door is paneled, and the double door opens onto an exterior walkway. The ground floor is punctuated by five sets of fixed double windows, each divided by a large mullion and placed above a wainscoting of wood paneling. Three of the window pairs are located to the south of the front doorway, and the remaining two to the portal's north. The entrance consists of a double door beneath a transom light. The leafs each have four panels and the surround mimics that of the windows with their pilasters and corner blocks.

Conveyance: Herman Lichtenstein purchased building from Dranguet on May 5, 1874. (Conveyance 70, 111).

Charles and Joe Unter received the building from the heirs of Herman Lichtenstein. (Conveyance 151, 206).

Mrs. Sarah Unter received the building from Charles Unter on January 19, 1927. (Conveyance 257, 680).

---

<sup>79</sup> Not shown on the 1892 Sanborn map, the structure appears on the 1899 map as occupying No. 306 and 306 ½ Front Street. No 306 was a millery and the adjacent space "DG" likely referring to a dry goods store. The spaces were not evenly partitioned, with the millery perhaps 1/3 the square footage. Between 1904 and 1909, the building ceases to serve two businesses, becoming one dry goods store but still noted as 408 and 410 Front Street. Between 1923 and 1930, the building was expanded to the rear. By 1930, it received its current address at 616 and 620 Front Street as well.

Exchange Bank and Trust received building from Suzette Unter. (Conveyance 342, 85).

Watson Realty purchased the building from Exchange Bank and Trust. (Conveyance 358, 813).

Daniel T. Murdock purchased the building from Watson Realty Co. on February 8, 1980. (Conveyance 358, 879).

624-28 Front Street, between Church Street and Rue St. Denis.

Architectural description: Located on the corner of St. Denis and Front streets, this single-story, late nineteenth-century commercial building was constructed with load-bearing brick masonry that was then covered with stucco.<sup>80</sup> It runs for 58' along Front Street. Other than the structural walls, there is no noticeable original fabric. Furthermore, the building has been partitioned into three different commercial spaces (Nos. 624, 626, 628), each with a different secondary façade placed over or in front of the primary, stuccoed structure.

The south partition, constructed in the 1950s, has one large protruding display window on each side of the central doorway creating, in effect, a recessed entry. Covering the entry is a flat roof notable for its cornice molding and iron cresting. The windows on the façade connect to the windows in the recessed doorway creating a seamless corner of glass. Large aluminum moldings surround the window openings. Above and below these windows, synthetic white panels covered with glass form a glossy finish on the front façade and within the recessed entrance. Placed above the glazed single door is a large fixed-glass window that allows light to enter the commercial space.

The middle partition (No. 626) is characterized by a large plate glass window, divided by a mullion into four sections, and a recessed doorway on its Front Street façade. Recessed to the line of the stuccoed wall of the building, the

---

<sup>80</sup> Designated as Nos. 307 and 308 on the 1892 Sanborn map, this structure served as a “w.ho.” [wash house] and general store. The corner of the building at Front and St. Denis streets was angled. By the 1899, the wash house was replaced by a hardware store. In 1904, there was a warehouse addition running the full width of the building but accessed only from the general store. The 1909 Sanborn noted that this appendage had iron cladding on its exterior wall. In the twentieth century, the address changed to Nos. 412 and 414 Front Street and by 1914, the businesses changed to a grocery (412) and drug store (414) with the rear addition divided and accessible from each shop. There also is noted “iron” in front of the structure and a dashed line wrapping around the corner to St. Denis, which is no longer angled, which implies that the iron balcony feature covering the sidewalk was added by that time. By 1930 the building was subdivided into three stores (Nos. 624, 625, 628) and the dashed line suggestive of a sidewalk covering in the earlier map interrupted.

entrance to No. 626 is softened by a window similar to that seen on the front and by a fixed double-window to the north of the glazed, single door. A lean-to canopy supported by steel columns located at the edge of the Front Street sidewalk and curb, covers the front façade and the sidewalk of both the middle and north partitions. A contemporary, metal decoration – roof cresting identical to that seen at No. 624 – has been placed on the edge of this canopy.

The north partition (No. 628) has large single-pane display windows on its front façade that connect to windows within the recessed doorway without a mullion, forming a seamless connection. There is, however, a mullion on the corner of Front and St. Denis streets connecting the windows facing onto the two streets. Beneath the windows, several rows of mixed brick are placed as a decorative detail. The entranceway has a single glass-door.

#### **Block 4: 720-780 Front Street, Natchitoches Historic District**

This block contains the three antebellum-era structures still extant on Front Street; they are the so-called Prudhomme Building (No. 720), the LaCoste Building, and Ducournau Square (No. 750), or the Ducournau Building.<sup>81</sup> In addition to the antebellum-era commercial structures, this block also holds the Kaffie Frederick Mercantile (No. 758-59) which is housed in a nineteenth-century structure. The hardware store retains more architectural integrity than others from the nineteenth century do; however, there is a small, one-story addition to the north (No. 760) dating to the second quarter of the twentieth century. The last building on Front Street, a car dealership, is a nicely detailed, twentieth-century product fashioned from three earlier structures.

720 Front Street between Horn Street and Rue Lafayette. (Prudhomme Building; Hughes Building)

Architectural description: Located on the corner of Horn and Front streets, this antebellum-era, commercial building was constructed with load-bearing bricks that were then covered with stucco. The building frontage extends for 64' along

---

<sup>81</sup> The ground-floor of the Ducournau Building, or Ducournau Square, is occupied currently by “Just Friends” restaurant; whereas the LaCoste Building is home to various proprietors. The addresses of the latter range from 732 to 746 or 754, depending on where Cora’s Gift Shop is listed. The Prudhomme Building, like Ducournau at No. 750, has remained No. 720 fairly consistently in the later part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. At the time of the 1930 Sanborn map, the Prudhomme Building was recorded as one interior space, rather than the three as it had been between 1892 and 1923, and identified as Nos. 720-24. The adjacent structure, the LaCoste Building was identified as Nos. 732-40 in 1930, and subdivided into three spaces, the northern most labeled as “club rooms.” A “drive” separated the end rooms/stores from one another. The northern one was a general store in 1892, becoming a shoe store by 1904, back to a general store in 1909 and then converted to a club. The Ducournau Building, placed at 317 Front Street in 1892, occupied the 740s by 1930 and served as a “Lodge Hall” on its second floor.

FRONT STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)

HABS No. LA-1319

(page 41)

Front Street; it is covered by a side gable roof that runs from north-to-south. The south gable end, visible from Horn Street, is notable for the three, shuttered windows at the second-floor level and two louvered windows in the gable. All five window openings have sills and lintels. There are porches appended to the front and back of the building. Moreover, besides the ground-floor renovation and partitioning, much of the building is original fabric.

On the south edge of the ground-floor, a glass door (No. 720) set into a brick facade opens off the sidewalk of Front Street and into an interior staircase leading to the second floor. The ground-floor has been partitioned into two commercial spaces. The south partition has four large fixed display windows divided by mullions: one on the south side of the doorway and three to the north. The recessed doorway is raised one step above the sidewalk and has one large display window on each side drawing the customer back to the double door store entrance. Each leaf of the double door is glazed with four lights and paneled below the lock rail. A rectangular band of single-pane windows rests above the display windows and doors of the entire ground-floor, much like a continuous transom light; beneath the store front windows are several courses of brick, providing a visual anchor to the entire ground-level facade. The other partition is noted by a single display window on the north side of the recessed doorway, which like the one to the south also leads back to a double door. Each leaf is glazed with four lights over a panel, like that seen in the south entrance. The two doorways are also marked by lanterns hung from the ceiling of the recessed entries.

The second story consists of six bays of alternating doors and windows. Both the doors and windows are covered with French-style wood shutters with a protruding lintel above the individual apertures. A lean-to exterior walkway (porch) on the second-floor is supported by nineteenth-century, cast-iron columns connected to the ground level at the edge of the Front Street sidewalk and the curb, which effectively creates a covered walkway in front of the building. The porch on the second-floor is connected to the eave of the roof by cast-iron decorative supports with brackets rising from the decorative balustrade.

The rear of the building has two cast-iron staircases. One of the rear staircases spirals from the ground to the second-floor, exterior walkway.

Conveyance: The Prudhomme Building was probably constructed by Gabriel Prudhomme in 1853.

J. E. Prudhomme receives, from Gabriel St. Ann Prudhomme succession, the building on November 14, 1865. (Succession 35, 343).

FRONT STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)

HABS No. LA-1319

(page 42)

The family of J. E. Prudhomme and St. Ann Prudhomme receive partitioned shares of the building from succession on May 8, 1888. (Succession 40, 108).

Henry Hughes purchases the building from a Sheriff's sale ordered upon the order of a judge upon his decision of the case J. B. Prudhomme v. Antoinette Prudhomme on November 17, 1900. (Conveyance 104, 225).

H. L. Hughes receives the building from Henry Hughes in succession on February 12, 1942. (Conveyance 384, 238).

Patricia Hughes et al receives building from succession of Clothilde Prudhomme Hughes and Henry Lester Hughes on February 15, 1983. (Conveyance 384, 238).

Charles Patrick Johnson purchases the building from Patricia Hughes et al on November 5, 1999. (Conveyance 543, 316).

LAMA Enterprises purchases the building from C. P. Johnson on August 5, 2003. (Conveyance 574, 85.)

Sources:

Works Project Administration. *Louisiana Guide*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana Library Commission, 1941. (p. 310).

*Historic Standing Structure Survey, 720 Front Street Prudhomme Building, Natchitoches, Louisiana*, surveyed by Mary Miller, 4/20/1986.

Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records, Books 104, 384, 543, 574.

Natchitoches Parish Secession Records, Books 35, 40.

732-46 or 732-54 Front Street, between Horn Street and Rue Lafayette. (LaCoste Building; also known as the Blanchard Building, Elks Club, City Billard Saloon)

Architectural description: Located on Front Street between Horn Street and Rue Lafayette in the middle of the block, this too is an antebellum-era commercial building. It was constructed with load-bearing bricks laid in common bond and stands two stories beneath a side-gable roof running north-to-south. It extends for 61' along Front Street and retains some integrity in its building fabric.

At the ground-floor, the façade is divided into two distinct sections by the original carriageway leading from Front Street to the rear courtyard. The commercial space to the south has one large fixed display window on each side of a recessed entranceway. The recessed entry is raised one step above the sidewalk; display

windows line the space created for the entrance and lead back to a single door, glazed with one light, and hung from butt hinges. Beneath the store front windows of the facade and entrance area are several courses of brick. Above the windows and door is a transom light, here a series or band of rectangular, single-light windows that are currently blocked with blinds. The fenestration for the northern half of the building consists of five sets of double doors; the only operable doors are the southern-most pair however. Each leaf is glazed with four lights above a recessed panel and the operable doors are hung on butt hinges. The door surrounds are simple, unadorned elements.

Immediately to the south of the carriageway is another door; this portal (No. 740) provides access to the second-floor. The single door is paneled beneath the lock rail and set into a tall, narrow surround. Above the door is a transom window, glazed with three lights, topped by a protruding lintel. This feature is reminiscent of a pediment but one that is truncated because of spatial considerations.

The second-floor has three sash windows on each side of a central exterior entranceway. The sash is glazed with six-over-nine lights and capped by a protruding lintel. The central entranceway contains a double door flanked by sidelights and topped by a two-light transom window, all set within a gently arching surround. A lean-to exterior walkway (porch) on the second-floor is supported by cast-iron columns dating to the nineteenth century. These columns extend upward from the ground level at the edge of the Front Street sidewalk and the curb to support the porch or second-floor walkway. The porch on the second-floor is connected to the eave of the roof by cast-iron decorative supports with brackets rising from the decorative balustrade.

Conveyance: The building was probably constructed by T. LaCoste in 1852. In the late nineteenth century, the building was used as the site of the “City Billard Saloon.” In a newspaper advertisement dated 1875, the establishment was described as “being the best furnished and finished hall with more conveniences, it is the resort of the elite of the city. A fine bar is attached to the Billiard Parlor where the best and purest wines and liquors can be obtained.”<sup>82</sup> The building also served as the Elks Club and as a general store.

T. Lacoste purchased the lot from Catherine F. Buard on February 27, 1854. (Conveyance 48, 289).

Leopold Caspari purchased the building from T. Lacoste on June 26, 1876. (Conveyance 67, 166).

---

<sup>82</sup> *People's Vindicator*, 2 January 1875, 2.

Jules Ducasse purchased the building from Leopold Caspari et al on February 7, 1952.

J. Hardy Blanchard purchased the building from Victorine Ducasse (who inherited it from her husband Jules) on December 27, 1928. (Conveyance 162, 59).

J. Hardy Blanchard, Jr. et al received the building from J. Hardy Blanchard Sr. on June 7, 1952. (Conveyance 216, 500).

Raul Levy purchased the building from J. H. Blanchard Jr. et al on April 15, 1974. (Conveyance 317, 318).

Peter Cloutier purchased the building from Raul Levy. (Conveyance 333, 599).

Ricky Nowlins purchased the building from P. Cloutier (Ducournau Square Inc.) on February 16, 1998. (Conveyance 527, 771).

Sources:

Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records, Books 216, 317, 333, 527

750 Front Street, between Horn Street and Rue Lafayette. (Ducournau Building; also known by The Knights of Columbus, Prudhomme and Cloutier Merchants)

Architectural description: This two and one-half story, antebellum-era commercial building was constructed with load-bearing bricks laid in common bond. It is covered by a gable roof that runs north-to-south and is punctuated by two gable dormer windows. The building frontage along the Front Street is 55' and the facade is organized into seven bays. The second floor fenestration consists of a central, casement door flanked by three paired French or casement doors with louvered shutters. The ground floor is notable for a series of doors set between pilasters and a carriageway.

The southern-most opening onto Front Street contains a double door that connects to an interior staircase that, in turn, leads up to the second-floor. Each leaf of the double door is paneled, with four panels above the lock rail and two below. The double door is flanked by decorative pilasters. To the north of this entrance, the commercial space on the ground floor has five, French or casement, doors opening off of Front Street. Only one pair works, however. The casement doors have paneling below the lock rail and are flanked by pilasters, most of which are also paneled. North of the casement doors is the original carriage-way leading to the rear courtyard. The original cast-iron columns, connected to the ground at the edge of the Front Street sidewalk and the curb, support a lean-to exterior walkway

FRONT STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)

HABS No. LA-1319

(page 45)

on the second-floor and a second set of identical columns connect the second-floor walkway to the eave of the roof.

Conveyance: The Doucournau Building was probably built by Francois Lafont in the 1840s and then sold to Pierre Lestan Prudhomme and Edward Cloutier in the 1850s to serve as a “Merchants Shop.”<sup>83</sup>

Francois Edward Cloutier and Pierre Lestan Prudhomme bought building from Adele Dagerot on June 7, 1858. (Conveyance 51, 429).

Victor Durand purchased building from Cloutier and Prudhomme on March 9, 1863. (Conveyance 55, 591).

M. H. Carver purchased building from estate of Victor Durand on January 19, 1869. (Conveyance 59, 453).

J. W. Comersham purchased the building from M. H. Carver on August 20, 1878. (Conveyance 74, 621).

J. A. Ducournau purchased the building from Comersham on May 30, 1881. (Conveyance 74, 621).

J. A. Ducournau Sr. and Jr. form a partnership for mercantile and dry goods named, “J. A. Ducournau and son,” on April 14, 1886. (Conveyance 83, 360.)

J. A. Ducournau Jr. receives one-half of building partition while Mrs P. E. Becket, Louis Ducournau, Leslie Ducournau, Adolph Ducournau, Paul Ducournau, Alfred Ducournau, and Jack Ducournau dividing the other one-half partition from secession of J. A. Ducournau Sr. on March, 23, 1909. (Conveyance 120, 104).

Paul A. Ducournau purchased from relatives all partitions of buildings on December 31, 1906. (Conveyance 154, 427).

Jackson Ducournau, June Strahan, and Camille Raggion receive one-third each of the building from Paul Ducournau secession on April 16, 1956. (Conveyance 226, 417).

---

<sup>83</sup> Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records, Book 51, folio 429. The Sanborn maps record this structure in situ by 1892 and note it served as a general store in 1899 and again in 1904. By 1909 it was vacant. At that time, the address was Nos. 612 and 614 (carriageway). In 1914, the structure was again occupied, and by a general store; it had been expanded to the rear with a porch. A decade later (1923), the general store was confined to the first or ground floor and lodging the second. This arrangement held fast in 1930 although the street addresses had been altered by then.

John Ducournau receives one twenty-fourth of building from Jackson Ducournau on April 28, 1957. (Conveyance 233, 275).

A.L. Ducournau et al (Lelia Cade, Daisy Ducournau, June Ducournau, Strahan, and Camille Ragio) purchase from John Ducournau one twenty-fourth of the building on August 14, 1970. (Conveyance 293, 105).

Robert Smith and James Hearron purchase the building from A.L. Ducournau et al on February 4, 1974. (Conveyance 316, 157).

P. E. Cloutier Jr. purchases the building from Smith and Hearron on December 31, 1976. (Conveyance 333, 601).

Ducournau Square Inc. purchases the building from Peter Cloutier Jr. and Carolyn Cloutier on July 28, 1991. (Conveyance 372, 101).

Ricky Louis Nowlin purchases the building from Ducournau Square Inc. on February 16, 1998. (Conveyance 527, 771).

Sources:

Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records, Books 51, 55, 59, 74, 83, 120, 154, 226, 233, 293, 316, 333, 372, 527.

758-59 Front Street, between Horn Street and Rue Lafayette. (Kaffie Building).

Architectural description: Located on Front Street between Horn Street and Rue Lafayette in the middle of the block, this late nineteenth-century, two-story commercial building was constructed with load-bearing bricks laid in 5:1 common bond, while the interior was supported by steel columns. Much of the building retains its integrity with most alterations confined to a renovation of the ground-floor display windows.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> The 1892 Sanborn map notes that the existing structure was going to be torn-down and a two-story, [-]0' x 150' store erected in its stead. By 1899, the general store is in place. The building footprint remains unchanged until the 1909 map wherein the interior was partitioned, the majority of the building remaining a dry goods store and a small portion a general store. The small partition (No. 618) did not extend the full depth of the structure. In 1914 there was an office behind the former small store space and the cartographic notation that the walls and ceilings were sheathed. Also recorded was the presence of wood posts inside the larger room (No. 616). This arrangement stayed through the 1923 map, but by 1930 the interior was again one large open area. The existence of the interior wood posts was duly recorded, as was the building's use for "paints" presumably an early incarnation of the present hardware store.

FRONT STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)

HABS No. LA-1319

(page 47)

The six-bay, ground-floor has two recessed doorways that are divided by large fixed display windows. Each entrance has a double door, with each leaf essentially a glass door, with a transom. Display windows, one per side, look into the recessed entryway. Flanking the doorways and marking the corners of the building are six cast iron pilasters. These pilasters rise to the apex of the ground-floor. The display windows at the ends of the building consist of one pane of glass, while the center two bays have glazing divided by a mullion. Above the two entrances and display windows there is a canopy held up with tension cables connecting it to the wall behind. A band of square windows, three per bay, run along the façade above the display windows, doorways, and canopy forming individual transom windows.

On the second-floor of the Front Street façade, the fenestration consists of six windows with closed, louvered shutters and wood sills; each opening has a decorated lintel capped by a sunburst. A pressed metal parapet, composed of a variation of a classical entablature, with a large central sunburst detail tops the building.

The interior reflects a 1930s-era renovation. An operable custom-made freight elevator, various countertops, display cases, signage, and other details are all traceable to this period. The metal columns in the interior of the building are covered with wood paneling. The original skylights are covered, but their wells are still visible in the ceilings.

Conveyance: The Kaffie Building was constructed by Harris Kaffie, a Jewish immigrant from Germany. The Kaffie Building stayed in the Kaffie family until Sydney Kaffie willed it to his partner, J. Titus Frederick (Conveyance 301, 522). Since the transfer of property rights to J. T. Frederick, the building has remained in the Frederick family.

769-80 Front Street, between Horn Street and Rue Lafayette. (Natchitoches Motor Company).

Architectural description: Located on the corner of Rue Lafayette and Front Street, this structure is actually the amalgamation of three buildings renovated

into one car dealership in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>85</sup> The Motor Car Company building runs for 175' on Front Street.

The two southern-most structural bays are covered, drive-through garages constructed with load-bearing bricks and now sharing a party wall with the adjacent building to the south (No. 760). The central section of the building has load-bearing brick masonry walls and is covered with stucco on its Front Street facade. It is distinguished by a large pediment-shaped parapet decorated with various banding, decorative arches, and two flanking mini-turrets. North of the large parapet, a smaller stepped parapet decorated with dentils and other details tops the building all the way to its edge on Rue Lafayette. There is a recessed display area, with ceiling-to-floor display windows divided by mullions, south of the Front Street entrance. The entry contains a French (or casement) door with a seven-light transom window. To the north of the entranceway, there is a floor-to-ceiling display window. Finally, the last structural bay is a covered drive-through area connecting Front Street to Rue Lafayette.

Conveyance: Herman Lichtenstein purchased the building from Jacob Payne and Henry Walmsley on November 5, 1881. (Conveyance 77, 71).

---

<sup>85</sup> At the time of the 1892 Sanborn map, there were three separate buildings on the site (Nos. 322, 323, 324) and all three were operated as general stores. No. 322 was two and one-half stories and had a bank on its first floor. It also had a porch. No. 323 was actually a grocery store, while No. 324 a two and one-half story store. By 1899 these structures had given way to three other buildings, sharing party walls and extending all the way to Lafayette Street. The first, Nos. 321-22, was home to two stores, a grocer and a dry goods shop; Nos. 323-24 evenly split into two stores; and the third divided into three commercial entities, a grocer, drug store, and dry goods store. The footprint of these structures remained constant through the 1909 map; however, the stores at No. 622 (the northern half of the first building mentioned above) and the Nos. 624-26 (the second building) were vacant. By 1914 the middle structure was a carriage repository and the last a livery and garage. By the time of the 1923 map the Natchitoches Motor Co. was in place, extending the last building along Lafayette Street. The adjacent building, formerly the carriage repository, was a skating rink while the southern-most structure (originally Nos. 321-22, now Nos. 620-22) continued to house commercial endeavors, then a shop and a warehouse. At this time it was noted the walls and ceilings of Nos. 620-22 were sheathed and the presence of wood posts in No. 622. The Motor Co. had two small offices along Front Street at the corner with a garage, garage and repairing, auto storage, and implement shed areas occupying the residual space in the building along Lafayette Street. There was a concrete floor running throughout. By 1930 the two offices had given way to one small space at the corner; construction details were noted as plastered walls, steel columns and beams, concrete floor, and "full of W.G. skyl[igh]ts." It is likely that this corner space is the covered drive-through as the cartographer dashed a line along this end of the building - where it is open today - and noted the presence of three columns, features also present today. The footprint of two structures adjacent to it (to the south on Front Street) remained the same. These were subsumed into the current Motor Car Company premises, although it is not clear from the map if that had taken place yet. The middle structure (originally Nos. 323-24, then 624-26) is likely the front-gabled section with a pediment-shaped parapet, turrets, and decorative brickwork or dentil band. The structure to the south (originally Nos. 321-22) is now a shell, left open for parking.

FRONT STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)  
HABS No. LA-1319  
(page 49)

Natchitoches Motor Company purchased the building from the heirs of Herman Lichtenstein on February 1, 1923. (Conveyance 151, 82).