

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

OAKLAND PLANTATION

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Oakland Plantation

Other Name/Site Number: Prud'homme, Jean Pierre Emmanuel, Plantation

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 4386 LA HWY 494

Not for publication: NA

City/Town: Natchez

Vicinity: X

State: Louisiana County: Natchitoches Code: 069

Zip Code: 71456

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: ___
Public-Local: ___
Public-State: ___
Public-Federal: X

Category of Property

Building(s): ___
District: X
Site: ___
Structure: ___
Object: ___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

20
1
4
25

Noncontributing

2 buildings
sites
structures
objects
2 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 25

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: Louisiana's French Creole Architecture

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ Entered in the National Register
- ___ Determined eligible for the National Register
- ___ Determined not eligible for the National Register
- ___ Removed from the National Register
- ___ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: DOMESTIC

AGRICULTURE

Sub: Single dwelling
Secondary structure
Agricultural outbuilding
Animal facility

Current: RECREATION AND CULTURE Sub: Museum

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: other: French Creole (some are no style)

Materials:

Foundation: brick

Walls: weatherboard

Roof: asphalt, tin

Other: *bousillage* (main house, overseer's house, cook's house, two *pigeonniers*, two quarters houses, doctor's house)

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Oakland Plantation is located in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana on Cane River, an oxbow lake of the Red River. The plantation was established by Jean Pierre Emmanuel Prud'homme in the early 1800s, and several generations of his family worked the land and resided there. In 1997, the Prud'homme family sold the forty-two acre site being nominated to the National Park Service for operation as a unit in the Cane River Creole National Historical Park. The Oakland plantation complex includes a French Creole style main house with twenty-three historic dependencies. Almost all of the buildings/structures are nineteenth century. Only two are non-contributing. (For the record, there are no surviving historic buildings outside the NPS acreage.)

OVERALL SETTING AND LAYOUT

Oakland is set in flat cotton-producing country along the serpentine Cane River. The location is overwhelmingly rural and pristine. Despite its many twists and turns, Cane River generally runs north-south, with Oakland situated on its west side. (Please refer to attached map.) In the lower Mississippi Valley plantation buildings tended to be placed either perpendicular to the river bank, with the buildings going back for a considerable distance, or parallel to the river bank. Oakland is an example of the latter, with the buildings laid out along a fairly straight stretch of Cane River and encompassing a considerable amount of acreage. Except for a 1 ½ acre plot which has been planted in cotton, the rest of the acreage beyond the buildings and structures is vacant land covered by grass.

Oakland's layout is very informal. The main house is located at the north end of the property facing east. In its rear yard, facing the house, are a distinctive row of small nineteenth century buildings, including two chicken coops, a fattening pen, a shed, and a wash house. Two *pigeonniers* are located on the south side – one to the front and one to the rear (see map). The overseer's house and two quarters houses are located at the south end of the nominated area. Immediately fronting the highway is a plantation store, which helps "tell the story" of post-Civil War changes to the plantation South. Scattered here and there are various other buildings (barn, cotton seed house, stable, carriage house, etc.).

INVENTORY (proceeding from north to south – see map)

Note: The following descriptions are based upon fieldwork conducted in April 2000 by Jonathan and Donna Fricker of the Louisiana SHPO and an invaluable report on the main house, store, and overseer's house prepared in 1998 by Barbara Yocum, architectural conservator, National Park Service. They supercede the existing National Register nomination (some of which has been found to be incomplete and/or in error now that the buildings have been explored more thoroughly). Note that it is impossible to give anything other than a broad date range for Oakland's utilitarian buildings (for example, mid-nineteenth century). In such buildings, there are only constructional clues, and construction techniques and materials do not change as rapidly as do styles.

Cook's House (contributing, fair condition)

According to family history, the cook's house (mid-nineteenth century) was originally closer to the main house and was moved to its present location (north of the main house) in the twentieth century. It features two squarish *bousillage* rooms of roughly equal size with French joinery (no pegs) and a gallery on three sides. (*Bousillage* is an infill material of mud, Spanish moss and deer hair. French joinery refers to angle braces at a

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steep angle.) The capacious roofline follows the configuration of the galleries with a plain gable on the rear (gallery-less) elevation and a gablet with skirting roof over the front gallery. Rafters are of skinned poles. There is no chimney, which supports the family history about a move. Many of the gallery posts and all of the gallery floorboards are replacements.

New Shed (non-contributing)

Located between the cook's house and the main house, this small shed is labeled as "new" on an NPS map. It appears to have been built with salvaged parts.

Main House (contributing; good condition)

Oakland's main house is set at the head of a short alley of live oaks behind a small formal bottle garden. Although common on nineteenth century French Creole plantations and even on the property of lesser domiciles, the bottle garden at Oakland is believed to be one of only two surviving in the Mississippi Valley. In the case of Oakland, parterres in a variety of shapes are outlined in various kinds of bottles – crock bottles from Scotland, square bitters bottles, round bottom beer bottles from Ireland, torpedo-shaped bottles from England, and wine bottles from France. In May of 2000, historic archaeologist Adriane Neidinger had just begun her investigation of the bottle garden. At this point, she was able to indicate a date range of late eighteenth to early twentieth century for the bottles, with an estimated average date of mid-nineteenth century.

The house is a classic example of a French Colonial style (or French Creole) raised plantation house. French Creole houses in the Mississippi Valley were typically of half-timber construction, but with framing and in-fill material markedly different from English half-timber houses. Framing members feature a steep angle brace (hereinafter referred to as French joinery), and the in-fill material is either *bousillage*, a mixture of clay, Spanish moss and sometimes animal hair, or *briquelette entre poteaux*, bricks between posts. The latter is seldom seen outside New Orleans, while *bousillage* is typical of rural areas. Oakland's infill is *bousillage*, a material which can also be seen in seven of the dependencies.

Oakland's main house represents the largest rural house in the French Creole tradition in the Mississippi Valley – a large wood frame house raised a full story (or almost -- in this case about 6 feet) above grade on a high brick basement with a broad hip "umbrella roof" encompassing rooms and galleries on three or four sides – in the Mississippi River valley. In such houses, the upper story was the main living space. Rooms communicated with the gallery via French doors. Creole houses untouched by Anglo tradition were hall-less.

Prud'homme family history indicates that construction began in 1818, a date that is consistent with the architectural evidence. The evidence indicates that the house had achieved most of its present size and shape by the late 1820s.

The house has a very complex history of construction. (See floor plans.) The southern portion is the oldest. As initially built in 1818, the house consisted of four rooms completely surrounded by a gallery. This was surmounted by an umbrella-like hip roof with moderately complex joinery and two dormers in the front and two in the rear. Remnants of this roofline can still be seen in the attic. Between each pair of rooms was a chimney providing for a total of four fireplaces. No doubt this house had other standard Creole features such as French doors and wraparound mantels (mantels that wrap around the chimney flue in the French manner). All available evidence indicates that the house remained in this manner for only a very short time.

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According to family history, shortly after Jean Pierre Emmanuel Prud'homme built his house, he began to modify it. Between the early 1820s and the late 1820s the house was enlarged. The architectural evidence strongly indicates that this enlargement project occurred in two distinct phases – first to the north and then to the west. The north addition consisted of a range of three rooms. The gallery and hip roof were extended to encompass these new rooms and a third dormer was added front and rear. The evidence that this house stood for a time prior to the western (rear) addition is as follows: The framing of the earliest part of the house and the northern addition is completely discrete from that of the western addition. All of the framing for the enlarged hip roof which encompassed the earliest part of the house plus the northern addition can still be seen in the attic. The old rafters in the rear of this roofline still have the nail holes where roofing purlins would have been attached. Finally, remnants of the framing of the three dormers this rear roofline once contained can still be seen.

Most likely the western addition was in place by the late 1820s. This work consisted of adding a new room in the northwest corner behind the previously added range of three rooms on the north side. In addition, the two rear rooms of the earliest part of the house were extended to the west. Once again, the surrounding gallery and hip roof were extended. The hip roof was enlarged by adding new longer rafters to the existing roofline in the rear. This created an overall hip roof whose pitch is steeper and shorter in the front than in the rear. Family history and the architectural evidence indicates that the house remained in this appearance from the late 1820s until after the Civil War.

Oakland, despite some later changes, still looks much as it did c.1830. Among the many notable early details is the great elliptical archway between the front salon and the rear dining room. It features an elegant fanlight, reeded pilasters and four-part folding doors. Two Federal style wraparound mantels survive in the northern addition. Numerous handsome Federal style door and window surrounds remain. Of particular interest is the Federal style chair rail on the gallery. This is noteworthy because in Creole houses galleries often functioned as living rooms and were furnished and appointed as though they were interior rooms. The gallery is also noteworthy for its elegant columns with lamb's tongue chamfering.

In the post-Civil War years Jacques Alphonse Prud'homme (1838-1919) made a number of alterations. These were part of a general campaign undertaken c.1880, according to family history. A recently completed finishes analysis indicates that at least one of the alterations – the so-called “dressing room” addition created by enclosing the southwest corner of the rear gallery – occurred in the 1870s.

The 1880s work included the addition of a kitchen wing at the northwest corner of the house with a gallery of its own connecting to the main gallery. A portion of the north gallery was enclosed for a so-called “stranger's room” – an unheated bedroom for unexpected travelers accessible only from the gallery. Interestingly, the sloping gallery floor was shimmed to provide a flat floor in this room. A narrow hallway was created using space on the edge of the north range of rooms. As a result, the once symmetrically placed fireplaces are now off center. A new opening fitted with an Italianate door was cut in the front façade to provide access to the hall. This most likely was an enlargement of an existing French door opening. French doors that once opened into the salon/parlor were replaced with larger openings containing unusual triple-hung floor-length sash windows. The parlor also received a new wooden Gothic Revival mantel. (The overall wraparound configuration of the mantel box was retained.) Paint tests reveal that the three other Greek Revival-looking wooden mantels in the south part of the house date from this period as well. *Retardataire* in both style and configuration, these mantels also wrap around the chimney flue. The majority of the 1880s work was done using old or salvaged buildings parts (windows, doors, door surrounds, etc.).

In the twentieth century the house received various minor changes. Most notable was the enclosure of a portion of the rear gallery at the northwest corner. Also, a wall (between two rooms) was taken out in the north side of

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the house, and a door was cut providing interior access to the “stranger’s room.” Finally, the kitchen was renovated and bathrooms installed.

Oakland’s basement story has some open spaces (with dirt floors) and some enclosed for rooms which are accessible from above. A trap door in the hall leads to the wine cellar, while a trap door from a bedroom leads to what was known traditionally as the “mammy’s room.”

Store/Post Office (contributing, fair condition)

Stores such as the one at Oakland are an important character-defining feature of the post-Civil War plantation. The Civil War and Reconstruction left the region's agricultural economy severely depressed, but they did not destroy the plantation system. By 1900, Louisiana had more plantations and fewer small farms than it did before the war. On cotton plantations such as Oakland, slave labor was replaced with a system known as sharecropping in which a landless farmer would work a portion of the planter's land for a share of the crop. Hand in hand with sharecropping was a credit system known as crop lien, wherein a sharecropper (in need of food and provisions for his family) pledged his crop to a store in return for a line of credit. Country stores of this type were either set up by the planter on the plantation (such as Oakland) or were run by independent mercantile interests. The crop-lien system often led to virtual peonage because many sharecroppers found that when the cotton was finally in, their store purchases exceeded the value of their share of the crop.

According to family history, Oakland shifted to sharecropping in 1868. Based upon a ledger entry, a store is known to have been on the plantation by 1874. An 1878 photograph shows the store as a narrow gable fronted wood frame building with a shed-roof porch, a central entrance (no transom) and two six-over-six windows flanking the entrance. According to a 1998 report prepared by NPS architectural conservator Barbara Yocum, “the store did not retain this appearance for long, being enlarged in several stages to meet the demands for additional space. . . . While no written or photographic documentation is known of this work, examination of the building itself suggests the following evolution. The earliest additions lengthened the main building to the rear, extended the pedimented roof on the front side (replacing the existing porch roof), and provided a small shed addition on the north side. This was followed by a widening of the north shed, and its subsequent lengthening at some later date. All of this work was of frame construction using machine-cut nails, suggesting a construction date sometime before 1900. The last major addition to the store was made circa 1900 and covered the entire south elevation; wire nails were used in its construction.”

The store/post office has changed little since circa 1900, except for some deterioration. The interior retains most of its original shelving, counters, etc.

Carriage House (contributing, fair condition)

The three-bay gable-fronted carriage house appears to have been framed up with salvaged lumber. The main frame features the remnants of French joinery. The three sets of double doors have forty-five degree angle corner cuts at the top. These are formed of multiple planks clinched with square nails. These doors may

have been reused from another structure because virtually all of the clapboards on the carriage house are fastened with later (post c.1880) round head nails. In addition to the main structure, there is a small shed extension on each side.

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Pigeonniers (2) (contributing, deteriorated condition)

On Creole plantations *pigeonniers* were often located near the main house to connote prestige and identify the owner as a member of the “gentry” (see Part 8). There was no set pattern; their placement varied. Sometimes a set of *pigeonniers* framed the main view of the house, while sometimes there was only a single *pigeonnier* on the property.

Similar but not identical, the two *pigeonniers* at Oakland (c.1830-c.1850) are set to the south side of the main house – one to the front and one to the rear. Each is a squarish two story tower under a pyramidal roof. Also, as was common, the upper story, which contains the roosting space and nesting boxes, is less than full height. Both feature *bousillage* construction on the lower story, and both have pigeon access holes on just one side. There are some differences between the two. The east *pigeonnier* is slightly taller than its western counterpart. Also, the east *pigeonnier* features French joinery in the framing, while the west one does not. Overall, about 75% of the original clapboard siding remains. Both were in a deteriorated condition when NPS acquired Oakland, and they are at present completely encased in plywood protective structures as a temporary preservation measure.¹

Little Chicken Coop/Big Chicken Coop/Storage Shed/Fattening Pen/Wash House

(all contributing and all in fair condition)

These small wood frame buildings are located in a row immediately behind and facing the main house. All appear to be mid-nineteenth century; square nails are used throughout.

The little chicken coop is a gable-fronted structure containing large ladder-like perches on the interior. The lower portion is finished in flush boards, while the upper portions has horizontal slats.

The big chicken coop is similar in form and configuration. The only difference is its size and a rear lean-to.

The storage shed is a small side gable building with French joinery in the framing and horizontal flat boards for siding.

The fattening pen is a long, low, pitched roof structure containing three chambers whose walls are formed of vertical slats. The pen was used to fatten chickens prior to slaughter.

The wash house is a plain gable-fronted building with clapboard siding.

Carpenter's Shop (contributing, fair condition)

Although known by this name by the Prud-homme family, the original use of this mid-nineteenth century

¹Photos are being submitted showing the *pigeonniers* as they looked in 1996 when the Southeast Regional Office of NPS did NHL fieldwork and as they appear today.

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building is not documented. It is a small single room building about twice as deep as it is wide with a simple gable roof whose ridge runs perpendicular to the front. Rafters are of skinned poles. Its log walls are unusually finely made with half dovetail notching and logs fitting closely together. The building rests on rocks. The shed roof front porch gives way to the entrance, which is covered by a single leaf, heavy, multi-layer plank door mounted on strap hinges. Each side elevation has a single window opening covered by a similarly made shutter. There is no opening at the rear. All framing features square nails.

Stable (contributing, fair condition)

This mid-nineteenth century, heavy timber, pegged building consists mainly of holding pens for animals. There is also a wide transverse corridor running north-south with a great open-work slated gate at each end. Structurally the stable consists of a large two-story central frame crib with single story sheds all around. The hip roof ridge runs east-west with a gablet at each end. Originally virtually all of the siding and the interior dividing walls between the pens consisted of horizontal slats spaced about three inches apart. The heavy studs were cut and chiseled out to accommodate these slats. Most of this work remains but some has been lost and some has been replaced by board and batten siding. Many of the pens retain their feeding troughs. The stable has square nails throughout, including the board and batten siding and many of the feeding troughs.

Tractor Shed (contributing, deteriorated condition)

To the rear of the main house, behind the row of dependencies previously described, is a long, low shed-roofed open-fronted tractor shed constructed of salvaged timbers (some ancient). It is presumed to be over fifty years old.

Doctor's House (contributing, good to fair condition)

According to Prud-homme family history, this house already existed when Dr. J. A. Leveque (1832-1893) came to occupy it rent free in 1866. Apparently he enlarged the house to the south and west and added a small doctor's office on the front gallery. It is difficult to assess the house because the columns are modern (although in the style of the original), the exterior is sheathed in substitute siding, and the interior walls are completely covered. Many of the clues are not available.

It is a rambling galleried cottage, two rooms deep, that appears to have been enlarged more than once. The use of salvaged or re-used materials is much in evidence. The attic structure in the older portion of the house (to the north) is fairly complex, suggesting a date that may be contemporaneous with the main house. This portion features *bousillage* construction and simple mantels with late Federal-looking moldings. Its extant windows are six-over-six with fixed upper sashes, which would indicate a mid-nineteenth century date or earlier. The only other noteworthy clue is the front gallery wall of the older section, which features two simple Greek Revival pilasters. Further investigation is needed on this building to determine its exact history of construction. It appears to be an early to mid-nineteenth century house that grew to its present size by the late nineteenth century.

Doctor's House Garage (contributing, fair condition)

Immediately north of the doctor's house is a small gable fronted garage with a pair of plank doors and corrugated metal siding. The roof has exposed rafter tails. The garage presumably dates from the 1920s/'30s.

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Doctor's House Shed (contributing, good condition)

To the rear of the doctor's house is a building resembling a privy. It is a small side-gable storage shed with clapboard siding and a single leaf plank door. It has square nail construction, indicating a date from before roughly 1880. Approximately fifty percent of the siding was replaced in a recent restoration project.

Doctor's House Barn (non-contributing)

This once historic building is considered non-contributing because most of its fabric was replaced in a recent restoration.

Barn (contributing, fair condition)

A large log barn (mid-nineteenth century) is set at the rear of the property. At its center is a two story crib featuring peeled logs with rough saddle notching. The crib rests on stuccoed brick blocks and has a board floor set about four feet off the ground. Access to the crib is via a single opening which is pegged into the surrounding log structure. This is covered by a single leaf multi-layer heavy plank door mounted on strap hinges. The crib culminates in a gable roof with an appended skirting roof completely surrounding the core structure. The skirting roof is anchored by hewn struts that slot into the log structure at about the mid point. Various portions of the area covered by the skirting roof have been enclosed over the years. The present enclosure, though of some age, is assembled with round nails.

Cistern (contributing, fair condition)

Immediately adjacent to the barn is an enormous buried jug-like brick cistern (mid-nineteenth century) which was used for water storage. Its upper portion protrudes from the earth like a great brick dome. The cistern is topped by a round brick and stucco neck open to the elements.

Corral Shed (contributing, fair condition)

Located near the overseer's house and adjacent to a former corral, this small gable-fronted wood frame shed appears to have been used for storage. Its plank walls are attached with round nails, indicating a date from after roughly 1880. Perhaps 40% of the building's fabric has been replaced.

Overseer's House (contributing, fair to deteriorated condition)

The overseer's house is a single story Creole house of *bousillage* construction raised about four feet above grade on brick piers. It is surmounted by a capacious hip roof. With a documented date of 1861 (courtesy of the plantation journal entries of overseer Seneca Pace), the house features late Greek Revival details including a

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shallow entablature and plank columns with fairly heavily molded capitals. Window and door surrounds also feature moldings considered typical of the Greek Revival era. There is a large central room with a smaller narrower room to the south; both feature *bousillage* construction. The rear of the house has a *cabinet* and loggia range typical of Creole floorplans. (*Cabinets* are small rooms set at each end of what is typically an open loggia.) Interestingly, the *cabinets* are original but are not of *bousillage* construction. Their wood frame walls are not covered in any manner; the structure is left exposed. A single off-center chimney provides for fireplaces in the two principal rooms. It is not known if these ever featured mantels; none are extant. Originally the front gallery extended around the north side of the house as far as the *cabinet*. This old north gallery was enclosed in the twentieth century. Other twentieth century changes include the replacement of much of the wood siding, the subsequent installation of tar paper siding and the enclosure of the rear loggia. Within the last couple of years the north corner of the front gallery was severely damaged in a storm and had to be repaired/rebuilt. Only one of the gallery columns survives in place. One is lying on the gallery. Some of the exterior has been covered with protective plywood panels as a temporary preservation measure.

Quarters Houses (2) (contributing, deteriorated condition)

Two plantation quarters houses survive, albeit in very deteriorated condition, at the southern end of the property. In 2000, one was completely encased in a protective plywood structure as a temporary preservation measure, and one was partially covered. Because the buildings were largely inaccessible, it was not possible to examine them closely, other than being able to observe that they are of *bousillage* construction. Each is a two room house with a central chimney and front gallery and a one room rear extension. HABS documentation suggests that they are slave quarters (one slave family per room) that were reconfigured in the post-bellum era for sharecropper use (i.e., the rear extension and cutting of doors between the rooms for single family use). Like the doctor's house, further investigation of these buildings is needed.

Cotton Seed House (contributing, good condition)

Located at the south end of the property, to the rear, is a heavy timber frame building used for the storage and handling of cotton seed. (Cotton seed was used not only for re-planting but for commercial products such as cotton seed oil.) The seed house is a long, low, gabled building with multiple openings and shed roof overhangs resting on struts. The interior contains a historic hopper and shute. Square nails indicate a construction date from before roughly 1880. The building was badly deteriorated when NPS acquired Oakland. It was restored recently, and approximately 50% of the siding is new.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT OAKLAND

Archaeological investigations were conducted at Oakland in the summer of 1997 under the direction of Dr. Bennie C. Keel, Regional Archaeologist, Southeast Archaeological Center, National Park Service. In low-use areas a total of 296 auger tests were excavated at 50-foot intervals, and in high use areas, the tests were done at 25-foot intervals, yielding a total of 1,364. The tests were approximately one foot in diameter. Soils removed from the auger tests were sifted through 1/4 inch mesh screen. In twenty-eight percent of the auger tests no cultural material was recovered. The number of specimens recovered was 12,642, which does not include the brick, mortar, and slate that was weighed and discarded.

Twenty-seven, or 2.3 percent, of the positive auger tests contained enough data to warrant the assignment of a

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feature number. These features were broken down into the following: in-situ structural remains (5), construction rubble (14), midden (7), and post mold (1). The 12,642 artifacts were divided into various categories by the nature of their association (food, structures, personal, industrial, agriculture, etc.).

Archaeological investigations at Oakland are particularly important because the earliest map of the property dates from as recently as 1947. And while much of the plantation layout can be determined from the numerous surviving buildings, it will take archaeological investigations to document the location of missing, or largely missing, components – most notably the quarters area, the cotton gins (the latter from two different areas), the original mule barn, and the blacksmith shop. Some of these were located in the investigations described above, while further investigation will be necessary to locate others.

The investigations conducted to date have enabled archaeologists to pinpoint a cotton gin's location south of the seed house (due to a high artifact concentration and an in situ structural feature) and a blacksmith shop (the presence of charcoal, slag and bar iron). Oral history indicates that a cotton gin once stood north of the main house, but was burned either before or during the Civil War. Area E (see attached) may indicate the gin's location, but further archaeological investigation is warranted. Arguably the most intriguing research questions yet to be answered from archaeological investigations concern the quarters area – its configuration, location, number of cabins, etc.²

ASSESSMENT OF INTEGRITY

When NPS acquired Oakland the principal integrity issue was the advanced deterioration of some of the buildings – most notably, the *pigeonniers*, cotton seed house, overseer's house, and the two quarters houses. The *pigeonniers* and quarters houses, as noted above, have been encased in protective structures until work can begin. Despite deterioration, they retain enough of their appearance and historic fabric to remain contributing elements. Restoration work has been completed on the cotton seed house. Unfortunately, this involved replacing roughly fifty percent of the original siding. Nonetheless, because the building retains important historic fabric -- most importantly, that which identifies its use -- it should be counted as a contributing element.

The only real integrity issue with the main house -- specifically, the only thing that detracts from its "Creoleness" -- is the narrow hall cut in the 1880s. Even with this "Anglo" convention, the house is overwhelmingly French Creole in character.

OVERVIEW OF CONTRIBUTING/NON-CONTRIBUTING ELEMENTS

Contributing buildings:

cook's house, main house, store/post office, carriage house, 2 *pigeonniers*, storage shed behind main house, wash house, carpenter's shop, stable, tractor shed, doctor's house, doctor's house garage, doctor's house shed, barn(log), corral shed, overseer's house, 2 quarters houses, cotton seed house

²As excerpted and summarized in *Oakland Plantation: A Comprehensive Subsurface Investigation*, by Christina E. Miller and Susan E. Wood, Southeast Regional Archeological Center, National Park Service, 2000.

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Contributing structures:

2 chicken coops, fattening pen, cistern

Contributing site:

Including the bottle garden and alle

Non-contributing buildings:

shed (between main house and cook's house); doctor's house barn

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally:

X Statewide: __ Locally: __

Applicable National

Register Criteria: A X B __ C X D __

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Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions): A_ B_ C_ D_ E_ F_ G_

NHL Criteria: 1, 4 & 5

NHL Theme: V. Developing the American Economy
1. extraction and productionIII. Expressing Cultural Values
5. architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design

Areas of Significance: agriculture, architecture

Period(s) of Significance: 1818-1950 (agriculture)
1818-mid-19th century (architecture)

Significant Dates: NA

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: unknown

Historic contexts: XI. Agriculture
B. Plantation Agriculture
C. The Plantation Breaks Up, Sharecropping and Tenant Farming

XVI. Architecture
A. Colonial

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Oakland Plantation is of national significance in the areas of architecture and agriculture. It is of architectural significance as one of the nation's most complete expressions of the rural French Creole building tradition. It is significant in the history of American agriculture as one of a very limited number of large plantation complexes remaining in the South.

The period of significance under agriculture spans from 1818, the date of the original portion of the main house, to 1950, the Register's current fifty year cutoff. (Oakland continued to operate as a cotton plantation up to and past this date.) The period of significance under architecture spans from 1818, the date the main house began, until the mid-nineteenth century, the date of the youngest buildings contributing to the property's French Creole character.

FRENCH CREOLE ARCHITECTURE³

French Creole (or French Colonial style) architecture is one of the nation's three major colonial architectural traditions. It takes its place alongside British Colonial, as exemplified by the saltbox houses of New England and a later generation of "Georgian" houses, and Spanish Colonial, as seen in the missions of California and the Southwest. The French Creole building tradition appeared in "New France" – i.e., in the United States, the Mississippi Valley. Because the region was sparsely settled at the time, very little French Creole architecture was built outside Louisiana. Today Louisiana is home to the overwhelming majority of surviving examples. (Other French settlement sites, such as Mobile, Alabama and St. Genevieve, Missouri, have only a scattering of examples.)

There is much scholarly dispute as to the origins of the French Creole building tradition. Some have noted distinct similarities to buildings in France while others emphasize the evolution the tradition underwent in the New World, principally the Caribbean. Regardless of its origins, it is a distinctive building tradition characteristic of French America.

The typical rural French Creole house can be described as follows. Its most important features include 1) generous galleries, 2) a broad spreading roofline, 3) gallery roofs supported by light wooden colonnettes, 4) placement of the principal rooms well above grade (sometimes a full story), 5) a form of construction utilizing a heavy timber frame combined with an infill made of brick (*briquette entre poteaux*) or a mixture of mud, moss and animal hair called *bousillage*, 6) multiple French doors, and 7) French wraparound mantels. The previously mentioned timber frame incorporated French joinery – i.e., angle braces that are extremely steep, running all the way from sill to plate, in contrast to English joinery where the angle brace is almost at a forty-five degree angle.

Urban examples shared most of these characteristics but often lacked commodious galleries. The quintessential Creole cottage in New Orleans stands flush with the front property line and has no gallery. Also, urban areas had what is known as a Creole townhouse.

Creole floorplans are distinctive in the following respects. They tend to be asymmetrical and always lack

³For a fuller statement on French Creole architecture, see Dr. Jay Edwards' National Register multiple property cover submission titled "Louisiana's French Creole Architecture."

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interior hallways. Openings are placed solely for the convenience of the interior, and without any regard for a pleasing architectural effect on the exterior (i.e., producing an irregular schedule of openings). Often the rear range of rooms consists of an open loggia with a small room at each end known as a *cabinet*.

The rural French Creole building tradition is also known for the use of *pigeonniers* to ornament the plantation. Domestic pigeons had value not only as a delicacy but as a source of fertilizer. However, as noted by Louisiana plantation specialist Barbara Bacot, “it was less a taste for squab than for status that exalted the *pigeonnier*.” Bacot, in *Louisiana Buildings, 1720-1940*, notes that in France only landowners had the right to keep pigeons under the Old Regime, and some of the landed gentry chose to frame their houses with pairs of dovecotes. In Louisiana *pigeonniers* used in the form of monumental towers set near the main house continued as a fashion well into the nineteenth century. By contrast, on English plantations, where birds were sometimes kept, the roost or dovecote would typically have been little more than nesting boxes set in the gable of the barn.

In Louisiana today – and by extension, the Mississippi valley – the greatest concentrations of rural French Creole architecture are in Pointe Coupee Parish and the Cane River country of Natchitoches Parish. (New Orleans with its wealth of small Creole cottages and townhouses exemplifies the urban permutations of the Creole building tradition. Both rural and urban collections are equally important to an overall understanding of French Creole architecture.)

Within the context of surviving rural expressions of the French Creole building tradition, Oakland Plantation is easily among the most compelling. In fact, the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office knows of only three or four other plantations that exemplify the Creole tradition to this extent, and they are not as complete as Oakland. Parlange (NHL, 1974) is a stellar example, with its large main house framed by a pair of octagonal brick *pigeonniers*; however, all of the plantation’s other early dependencies are long gone. Homeplace (NHL, 1970), St. Charles Parish, has an impressive French Creole house and one *pigeonnier*.

Among this very small and select group Oakland is conspicuous because of the sheer number of buildings in the French Creole tradition that survive in one place. Not only is there a classic French Creole plantation house of the largest size built in the Mississippi valley and two rare surviving *pigeonniers*, there are a total of eight buildings featuring *bousillage* construction, one of the hallmarks of rural Creole architecture. *Bousillage*, related to English wattle and daub construction, was commonplace in rural Louisiana in the colonial period and well into the nineteenth century. In all of the state today, Oakland, with eight, has by far the largest number of *bousillage* buildings at any single property. In fact, it is the only rural Creole property known to retain more than one *bousillage* building. In addition, the overseer’s house makes an important contribution to Oakland’s “Creoleness.” Creole features include its hipped roof, galleried form; its floorplan; French joinery; and its central chimney (not to mention its *bousillage* construction). The cook’s house also has the broad galleried form and French joinery associated with Creole architecture.

Certain Creole buildings at Oakland are of particular national importance – namely the main house and the two *pigeonniers*. As previously noted, the main house is a textbook example of the largest size of French Creole plantation house built in Louisiana. Although the rural Creole tradition embraces various house sizes and permutations, it finds its ultimate expression in plantation houses such as Oakland, Parlange, and Homeplace – large residences raised a fully story above grade with encircling galleries and a huge umbrella-like roof. It is impossible to determine the number of these “great houses” that once existed in the French areas of rural Louisiana, although they must have numbered a 100 or more. Early written accounts as well as other documentation (photographs, paintings and 1930s HABS drawings) record numerous examples that are no longer extant. Today, there are only 15-20 (depending on how precise the definition). Some of these have had their Creole character severely impacted by later modifications (Greek Revival makeovers, Eastlake galleries,

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etc.). One is a late example with Italianate detailing.

Oakland's *pigeonniers* are also rare survivors. As noted previously, these ornamental towers were quite the fashion on large Creole plantations. They too are documented in period paintings, travel accounts, and 1930s HABS drawings. Of the hundreds that must have existed at one time, only 18 remain today. These very rare survivors are critical to "telling the story" of the rural Creole landscape.

AGRICULTURE

The plantation system represents a significant chapter in the history of American agriculture. It has its origins in India in the eighth century. Since that time "plantation regions" (i.e, regions where the plantation is the dominant form of agriculture) have developed in North Africa and various parts of the New World. In the continental United States, the plantation region comprises the former Confederate states plus some adjoining states. Plantations are an important aspect of American agricultural history, being distinct from Jeffersonian yeoman farms, manorial estates of the Hudson River and similar areas, and ranches and missions of the West. A plantation revolves around a cash crop grown on a large scale for profit. A successful plantation region requires: (1) fertile, easily tilled land available in large units; (2) abundant, landless, and cheap rural labor; (3) bulk reduction and preliminary processing techniques; (4) abundant, cheap transportation; and (5) a network of factors and factoring houses to market cash crops to other regions of the world. All these were present in the American South during the antebellum period. The plantation system continued to dominate Southern agriculture, albeit in a modified form, in the postbellum period and on into the twentieth century.

Although the phrase "southern plantation" conjures up all sorts of images, particularly the grand white-columned mansion, the truth of the matter is that little remains to provide a true picture of what one was like. Plantations were noted for their large number of buildings – in effect, a world within a world, or a self-contained community. As one nineteenth century traveler noted, "the planter has a building for everything." However, in the overwhelming majority of cases, only the great house survives today. Plantation complexes with a significant complement of outbuildings are rare, especially when one considers the thousands that once existed. This was documented by the LA SHPO in 1991 when preparing the NHL nomination for Evergreen Plantation in St. John the Baptist Parish. Phone interviews with senior SHPO members in other Southern states revealed that the typical complex, where it exists, might have six to ten buildings. By contrast, Oakland has twenty-four historic buildings/structures. It and a handful of other good-size complexes (most late nineteenth century) are all that are left to show someone the look of a plantation in the southern United States. Although Oakland lacks its production component (the cotton gin) and has only two quarters houses left, it is nonetheless a remarkable survivor to illustrate the Southern plantation landscape as it looked historically – with the planter having "a building for everything." There is a row of utilitarian dependencies in the back yard, a barn, a stable, a cotton seed house, an overseer's house, a carriage house, cook's house, and a store. The later survives to represent an important character-defining feature of the postbellum plantation.

PRUD'HOMME FAMILY HISTORY

The land that would become Oakland Plantation was granted to Jean Pierre Emmanuel Prud'homme in 1789 by the Spanish crown. A surveyor's plat from 1816 reveals that Prud'homme owned both Section 104 and Section

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44 of Township 8 north range 6 west. The Red River (later the Cane River) ran between these two sections. The site of today's plantation complex is Section 104 on the west side of the river.

Jean Pierre represented his family's second generation born in Louisiana. His grandfather, Jean Prud'homme, had gone to Louisiana from France in the early eighteenth century. In the 1810 census, "Emanl" Prud'homme is listed as head of a household which included his wife, three children under ten years of age and 53 slaves. Apparently his agricultural enterprises prospered, since by 1820 the number of slaves had grown to 74; by 1830 the slaves numbered 96; and by 1840, when Emmanuel Prud'homme was 78, they numbered 104. Emmanuel's son was Pierre Phanor Prud'homme (1807-56), who, according to family tradition, took over management of the plantation in about 1835. The 1840 census lists Phanor as the owner of 40 slaves in his own right. With his father's death in 1845, complete control of the plantation passed to him. According to the 1850 census, he owned \$170,000 worth of real estate and a total of 1,800 acres, of which 800 acres were improved. The previous year, his plantation had produced 250 bales of ginned cotton (400-pound bales) and 4,500 bushels of corn. He owned 124 slaves. By 1860, he owned 3,400 acres, of which 1,000 were improved, and 145 slaves, who lived in 30 dwellings. The year before, his lands had yielded 698 bales of cotton and 7,000 bushels of corn.

Phanor had two sons who figure prominently in the history of the family plantation – Jacques Alphonse Prud'homme and Pierre Emmanuel Prud'homme. According to family tradition, the two brothers and their wives returned to the family plantation after the Civil War, trying to get the farming operations going again. Late in 1865, their father Phanor died. In 1867, the two brothers agreed to divide the family holdings, with Jacques Alphonse retaining that portion west of the river – where the nominated complex is located. Jacques Alphonse named his portion "Oakland," while his brother named his portion on the other side of the river "Atahoe."

The 1870 agricultural census reveals that by that time, Jacques Alphonse, residing in the old home, was doing rather well. He owned 1,400 acres of land, of which 500 were improved. The previous year, his land had produced 70 bales of cotton (450-pound bales) and 1,200 bushels of corn.

The plantation's owner after Jacques Alphonse Prud'homme's death in 1919 was his son Pierre Phanor Prud'homme II (1865-1948). In 1942, he sold it to his eldest son James Alphonse Prud'homme II (1896-1991). After James Alphonse's death in 1991 and his wife's a few years later, their heirs sold the nominated 42-acre parcel to the National Park Service in 1997.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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Cizek, Eugene. "Beginnings: Creole Architecture for the Louisiana Setting." *Louisiana Buildings*, LSU Press, 1997.

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Fricker, Donna. Evergreen Plantation NHL nomination. Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, May 1991.

Miller, Christina E., and Susan E. Wood. *Oakland Plantation: A Comprehensive Subsurface Investigation*, Southeast Regional Archeological Center, National Park Service, 2000.

Yocum, Barbara A. *Oakland Plantation: Overseer's House, Store and Post Office, and Main House, Materials Analysis and Physical Investigation*. Building Conservation Branch, Northeast Cultural Resources Center, Northeast Field Office, National Park Service, June 1998.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

Previously Listed in the National Register.

Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.

Designated a National Historic Landmark.

Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # LA 1192

Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State Agency

Federal Agency

Local Government

University

Other (Specify Repository):

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 42 acres

UTM References:		Zone	Easting	Northing
A	15		499740	3503420
B		15	499930	3503280
C		15	499780	3502860
D		15	499585	3502820
E	15		499420	3503000

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary is shown as a broken line on the attached plat map.

Boundary Justification:

Boundaries follow the legal property lines of the 42 acre parcel owned by the National Park Service. These boundaries are appropriate because they encompass all of the surviving buildings/structures at Oakland and the acreage is sufficient to convey the property's setting. None of the NPS property is in actual agricultural production, although a one-and-a-half acre parcel recently has been planted in cotton as a beginning step in the development of a living history program.

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