Oak Alley Plantation	St. James Parish, LA
Name of Property	County and State
United States Department of the Interior	·

# National Park Service **National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register

Bulletin, How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.
1. Name of Property
Historic name: Oak Alley Plantation
Other names/site number:
Name of related multiple property listing:
Louisiana's French Creole Architecture
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing
2. Location Street & number: 3645 LA-18
City or town: State: LA County: St. James Not For Publication: Vicinity:
3. State/Federal Agency Certification
As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this <u>X</u> nomination <u>request</u> 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 propertyX_ meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:
nationalstatewideX_local Applicable National Register Criteria:
ABX_CD
Signature of certifying official/Title: Carrie Broussard, State Historic Preservation Officer Date
Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

	County and State
In my opinion, the property meets does r	not meet the National Register criteria
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title:	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government
4. 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 the Keeper	Date of Action
Signature of the Keeper  5. Classification	Date of Action
-	Date of Action
5. Classification	Date of Action
5. Classification  Ownership of Property  (Check as many boxes as apply.)	Date of Action
5. Classification  Ownership of Property  (Check as many boxes as apply.)  Private:	Date of Action

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(Check only <b>one</b> bo	x.)		
Building(s)			
District	X		
Site			
Structure			
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Object			
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# **Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### **Summary Paragraph**

Oak Alley Plantation is a former sugarcane plantation complex located in Vacherie, St. James Parish, Louisiana. Operating as a historic house museum and site since 1976, the plantation was first established c. 1820 on the Mississippi River as was typical of the state's hundreds of riverside plantations relying on the river for transport. The proposed boundaries comprise the frontmost portion of the original Oak Alley site and consist of approximately 40 acres bordered by the River Road/LA-18 and the Mississippi River to the north, Oak Alley Street to the west, Oak Alley Lane to the south, and Oak Alley Lane to the east. Within the boundaries are three contributing buildings: 1) the two-story Greek Revival peripteral "Big House" (1837-39); 2) the one-story French Creole Overseer's House (c. 1840s); and 3) the one-story French Creole Foundation Office (c. 1820s) with a c. 1910 addition. In addition, there is one non-contributing building, a one-story c. 1925 garage located east of the Big House, and one non-contributing site, a small c. 1940s cemetery located west of the Big House. The site retains its overall rural character as well as an allée of 28 live oaks lining the approach from the river to the Big House. All three contributing buildings retain a high degree of historic integrity, including their defining architectural features and their locations and spatial relationship to each other within the context of the plantation site. Minor modifications to the buildings do not significantly detract from the site's eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

# **Narrative Description**

# Overview and Proposed Boundaries

Oak Alley Plantation was listed in 1974 as a National Historic Landmark with a focus only on the Greek Revival-style "Big" House and the allée of live oaks. While the NHL boundaries technically include the Foundation Office, this resource is not acknowledged in the nomination. This National Register nomination is a new and unrelated nomination to properly acknowledge the property's architectural significance.

The property has been open to the public as a historic house museum and site since 1976 following the creation of the non-profit Oak Alley Foundation in 1966.

The proposed National Register boundary includes the frontmost 40 acres of the historic site closest to River Road and the Mississippi River. The eastern boundary corresponds to an Oak Alley Lane and stand of trees running north-south between Oak Alley Lane and River Road. The north, west, and south boundaries are the batture and Mississippi River to the north, Oak Alley Street to the west, and Oak Alley Lane to the south.

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The Oak Alley Plantation property is located on a historic stretch of River Road/LA-18 in Vacherie, Louisiana, that was once lined with antebellum sugarcane plantations. The road runs along the western bank of the Mississippi River, which is separated from the street by a levee and batture (the land between the river and levee). Today, the surrounding setting remains predominantly rural in character. Adjacent properties to the east and west include the former Bay Tree Plantation to the west, which has been partially developed as a residential neighborhood of trailer homes, and St. Joseph and Felicity Plantations to the east.

The Oak Alley Plantation buildings are set 300 or more yards back from River Road/LA-18. The property's namesake allée of 28 live oak trees, planted between c. 1820 and 1839, remains intact and provides a dramatic approach to the Big House from River Road. (Photo 1) In the 1920s and 1930s, owner Josephine Stewart developed formal gardens to the east of the Big House that are maintained as part of the museum grounds. (Photo 3)

The historic spatial relationship among the resources is also intact. The Big House sits closest to River Road (at a distance of about 300 yards) as the largest and most dominant resource, while the smaller Overseer's House and Foundation Office, both presumed to be historically residential quarters, are set farther back from the road (about 465 yards) and in obvious subordination to the Big House. Both buildings are sited at a diagonal to the rear of the main house so that all three buildings are visible from River Road, yet the Overseer's House and Foundation Office are significantly smaller in footprint and height. As further described in Section 8, the Foundation Office appears to date to c. 1820s, predating the Big House to when the property was first developed as a plantation under different ownership (the Big House replaced an earlier and smaller owner's residence in the same location). It is possible, though not confirmed, that the Foundation Office was the original residential quarters for the overseer. The Overseer's House, which is similar to but larger than the Foundation Office, appears to be near-contemporaneous with the Big House with a construction date of c. 1840s. It is unknown how the Foundation Office was used following the construction of the Overseer's House, but today it houses administrative offices and a ticket booth.

To the east of the Big House is a non-contributing c. 1925 one-story garage separated from the Big House by the formal gardens. (Photo 4)

On the western boundary is a small non-contributing cemetery established c. 1940s by the Stewart family, who purchased the property in 1925. The cemetery is delineated by a low-height wrought-iron fence. (Photo 20)

Throughout the site are mature oaks and crape myrtle trees, flowering shrubs, expansive lawns, gravel and brick vehicular and walking paths, and museum informational plaques and wayfinding signage. (Photos 1-4, 8-10, 14-16, 20) The front and sides of the property are bordered by low-height aluminum picket and painted-wood fencing.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Despite extensive research by many professionals over time, the original use of the Foundation Office remains unknown.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Oak Alley Foundation, Oak Alley: The Historic Guide (Vacherie, LA: Oak Alley Foundation, 2021), 24.

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# 1) Big House (Contributing Building) (Photos 1-7)

#### Overview

The term "Big House" is commonly used to refer to the enslaver's residence on a plantation property, which is typically significantly "bigger" and more high style than the surrounding buildings and serves as a physical and symbolic point of power.

The Big House at Oak Alley Plantation was constructed in 1837-39 as a two-story load-bearing brick masonry residence. It is square in plan with a monumental Tuscan-order peripteral colonnade and a bisecting north-south central hall. The house underwent a restoration in the mid-1920s by its new owners, Josephine and Andrew Stewart, under the direction of New Orleans preservation architect Richard Koch, FAIA. The building had been abandoned and crumbling for several decades, as previous post-Civil War owners focused on turning a profit from the farmland, until the Stewarts restored Oak Alley's reputation as "one of the state's loveliest show places."

In terms of architectural style, the Big House is a distinctive regional blend of French Creole, Federal, and Greek Revival styles (see Section 8).

#### Exterior

The Big House is two stories in height and has an overall square footprint (80'-0" x 80'-0") consistent with Federal and Greek Revival-style residential forms. All distinguishing historic exterior features are extant, including, most notably, the Greek Revival-inspired peripteral monumental Tuscan-order colonnade that encircles the house on all four sides (28 columns in total, which matches the number of live oaks in the allée). The brick columns and exterior walls are covered in smooth plaster. Topping the colonnade is a simply detailed Greek Revival-style painted-wood entablature with paneling on the underside between columns. The steeply pitched French Creole-style hipped roof, which extends over the gallery and is supported by the colonnade, is covered in slate with tall brick chimneys on the southern and northern slopes. The trios of Federal-style gabled dormers with arched windows on each side of the roof and the widow's walk at the roof's peak, with painted-wood lattice railing, date to the 1920s restoration. However, historic photographs dating to the first two decades of the twentieth century indicate that there may have been a platform at the roof peak, and that there were smaller and then larger dormers on at least the south façade, but the original presence and/or design of these features is unconfirmed. (Figures 1-2) These features were not uncommon in similarly scaled and styled plantation houses of the period.

The first floor below the wraparound gallery, another French Creole feature, has a grade-level herringbone-patterned brick floor. The upper gallery level, which is roughly 20' wide on all sides and was used historically as outdoor living space, is bordered by a historic painted-wood railing with a wheat sheaf design. Gallery flooring is replacement tongue and groove composite material and ceilings are plaster and composite material. The majority of openings on both levels and on all sides are symmetrically placed and centered between column bays consistent with the Federal and Greek Revival styles. Central entry doors on both levels of the north and south facades are larger than adjacent openings and are Federal in style with four-panel paired solid wood doors with slender sidelights, fluted columns, and elliptical fanlight transoms. Most secondary openings on both levels

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> "Peggy Passe Partout's Letter," *New Orleans States*, July 26, 1925; and "Famed Avenue of Trees Marks Century-Old Oak Alley," *Morning Advocate*, December 13, 1936.

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have French Creole 10-light-over-panel French doors with multi-light transoms and painted-wood paneled shutters. On the east façade are two 6/6 double-hung wood sash windows, which are consistent with the Federal and Greek Revival styles.

#### Interior

The symmetrical interior plan is an Anglo-American rather than a French Creole feature, with a wide central hall that runs north-south flanked by symmetrical rooms. Finishes are restrained and Classical in nature, more in line with the delicacy of the Federal style than the simple solidity of the Greek Revival. On the first floor are grand formal rooms on either side of the hall: a dining room on the western side and a parlor/living room to the east. All first-floor rooms and the central hall are finished with stained wood floors, high plastered ceilings with substantial crown moldings, and interior chimneys with Federal-style faux-marbled wood mantels and marble hearths. Baseboards are faux-marbled wood. Towards the rear of the central hall is a straight-run stair to the second floor that dates to the 1920s restoration; the original stair was near the southwest corner.<sup>4</sup> Interior doors are eight-panel single and four-panel double wood doors with a stained finish; interior door and window frames are painted wood with Federal-style rosette corner blocks. Openings along the central hall on both floors are deep-set and finished with painted wood paneling. Doors to the exterior are stained on the interior side. The kitchen, located in the southeast corner, was built out in the 1920s restoration; prior to that time, the home was served in the pre-Civil War period by a detached kitchen building to the southeast of the house and later by a detached wood-frame structure (both demolished). The two second-floor bathrooms date to the 1920s restoration as well.

The second floor has a central hall flanked by bedrooms, all of which are finished in similar fashion to the first-floor interiors. The original stair landing area in the southwest corner was converted in 2018 to an Artifact Room with inset wall displays and lighting. The second-floor stair in the central hall leads to the widow's walk.

### 2) Overseer's House (Contributing Building) (Photos 14-19)

### Overview

The Overseer's House was constructed c. 1840s as a residence for the overseer, or plantation manager, and is currently undergoing restoration as part of the Oak Alley Plantation museum site. It has a layout consistent with French Creole architecture as evidenced by the lack of interior hallways and the asymmetrical dimensions of the front and rear rooms; the asymmetrical placement of exterior openings to serve the layout rather than exterior symmetry; and the cabinet/loggia arrangement (a central open loggia with two small rooms on either side) on the rear/south facade. Its form is also consistent with French Creole architecture in its overhanging hip roof that protects wraparound exterior galleries. The use of large brick columns to support the gallery is unusual and most likely either replaced slender wood columns or they were chosen either at the time of construction or at a later date to complement the monumental columns of the Big House. The French Creole features of the Overseer's House overlap with some Anglo-American influences, including the presence of restrained Federal style ornamentation; the use of plaster and wood lath on ceilings (hidden above later beadboard ceilings); and the use of double-hung sash windows instead of French doors. The building's estimated construction date of c. 1840s is based on these factors as well as other physical characteristics, including a mix of earlier sash sawn and later circular sawn framing. See Section 8 of this document for more details.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Oak Alley Foundation, Oak Alley, 20.

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#### Exterior

The Overseer's House is a one-story load-bearing brick masonry building with exterior walls that extend to grade and are finished with plaster. The hip roof extends over a wraparound gallery supported by square brick columns covered in non-historic stucco. On the south and north slopes of the hipped roof are Federal-style pedimented dormers with arched windows, and at the peak is a central brick chimney. The hipped roof and dormers are being replaced in kind due to extensive deterioration and partial collapse. The roof has undergone several generations of repairs over time due primarily to hurricane damage, and much of its framing is non-historic. This includes the framing and sheathing and the dormers, which are consistent stylistically with the house but have been altered or replaced over time. According to physical evidence, the roof was originally covered in wood shingles.

The wraparound gallery, which extends across the north, east, and west facades, was enclosed on the north façade with screening in the twentieth century and has been reopened as part of the restoration. (Figure 3) The south facade of the house originally included an open loggia flanked by two small rooms (*cabinets*); the loggia was enclosed c. 1960s with jalousie windows and is being reopened as part of the restoration. The ceiling of the gallery and loggia are tongue and groove wood (the loggia ceiling was covered with later beadboard until recent demolition revealed the original boards). Exterior doors are eight-light-over-panel painted wood French doors with five-light transoms and exterior paneled-wood shutters, and windows are 6/6 double-hung wood sashes. Openings are asymmetrically arranged on each façade to suit the interior layout.

#### Interior

The layout consists of four principal rooms with no connecting hallways and two small rooms (*cabinets*) flanking an open loggia at the rear. The front two principal rooms (the *salles*) are about 3'-0" deeper than the two rear principal rooms (the *chambres*), which corresponds to their ranking from more formal and public to more informal and private. Each room has a fireplace offset from center that feeds into a central flue. Mantels are painted wood with simple pilasters that are consistent with both the French Creole and Federal styles. Interior doors are four-panel wood. Walls are plastered. Ceilings are non-historic painted beadboard, which conceals the original plaster on wood lath. Floors are wood. All historic features are being salvaged, repaired, and reinstalled as part of the restoration.

### 3) Foundation Office (Contributing Building) (Photos 8-13)

#### Overview

The one-story load-bearing brick masonry building known as the Foundation Office, which houses the Oak Alley Foundation administrative and ticketing offices, was constructed c. 1820s. It served as a residence that is similar in overall design to the Overseer's House but differs in ways that mark it as most likely the earliest building on the property. Like the Overseer's House, it has a layout consistent with French Creole architecture as evidenced by the lack of interior hallways and asymmetrical placement of exterior openings to serve the layout rather than exterior symmetry. Its form is also consistent with French Creole architecture in its overhanging hipped roof that protects wraparound exterior galleries. The original core (minus the twentieth-century additions) has a smaller footprint than the Overseer's House without a rear cabinet/loggia arrangement.

Differences between the Foundation Office and the Overseer's House include the use of slender wood columns as gallery supports instead of brick columns; the original French Creole-style

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exposed-joist ceiling treatment; and the presence of earlier wood framing. Physical evidence in the attic indicates that the finished ceiling was originally exposed ceiling joists and the underside of the tongue-and-groove attic floorboards, all of which shows evidence of limewash, and the tops of the brick walls are plastered above the current tongue-and-groove wood ceiling. (Photo 13) Hand-hewn wood framing is present in the attic that appears to be original (rather than repurposed) to the house and indicates an earlier construction date.

The building's construction date of c. 1820s is based on these factors, as well as the property's history as a working sugarcane plantation established prior to the construction of the Big House in 1837-39 (see Section 8).

#### Exterior

Exterior brick walls are plastered and extend to grade. The hipped roof is covered in asphalt shingle and has a central brick chimney and a Federal-style pedimented dormer with arched window on the north slope. The dormer is not original to the house based on the age of the framing and was likely added at some point in the twentieth century to complement the dormers at the Big House and the Overseer's House. The main roof extends to cover a gallery supported by slender wood box columns on all facades; the raised wood-frame gallery floor has been replaced with a grade-level brick floor, and steps up to openings are brick. Exterior openings are ten-light wood French doors with five-light transoms and eight-light wood casements. All openings have paneled-wood shutters, and door openings also have screen doors and screening over transoms.

A small partial-width rear addition and partial enclosure of the west gallery was completed c. 1910. The addition is wood-frame construction clad in weatherboards with a hipped roof and chimney on its western slope, and the gallery enclosure is done in matching wood weatherboards. In 1984, a small, lower-height extension was added on the south façade to house a ticket booth and a carport was added to the west façade.<sup>5</sup> Windows on the addition are 6/6 wood sash and the door is four-panel wood. These exterior modifications are clearly differentiated from the historic building by the contrast in materials.

#### Interior

The layout consists of four rooms with no connecting hallways. The front two rooms (the *salles*) are about 3'-0" deeper than the two rear rooms (the *chambres*), which corresponds to their ranking from more formal and public to more informal and private. Wood floors are covered in carpet, walls are plastered, and ceilings are painted tongue-and-groove boards. These boards were installed over the original exposed limewashed ceiling joist and tongue-and-groove attic boards typical of French Creole interiors. There is a central chimney with four corner fireplaces. Each fireplace has a simple painted-wood mantel with a French Creole lozenge motif.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> "Oak Alley Office, Rt. 2, Box 70, Vacherie, Louisiana, 47-00273," Historic Standing Structure Survey, Division of Historic Preservation, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, February 1986.

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#### Non-contributing Resources

There are two non-contributing resources within the proposed boundaries:

- 1) Building: a one-story wood-frame garage with side-gable roof located east of the Big House. The garage was constructed c. 1925 by the Stewart family. (Photo 4)
- 2) Site: a c. 1940s cemetery ("Stewart Family Cemetery") to the west of the Big House, where the property's final owners, the Stewarts, are buried. There are five headstones, and the area is delineated by a low-height wrought-iron fence. (Photo 20)

# Assessment of Integrity

Oak Alley Plantation retains a high degree of overall historic integrity. The site remains rural in character and retains its distinctive allée of live oak trees as well as its relationship to historic River Road and the Mississippi River. The Big House, Overseer's House, and Foundation Office all retain a high degree of overall integrity both in their architectural design and in their contextual relationship to the site.

Modifications to the Big House are minor and do not impact its significance as a peripteral plantation house; these modifications are associated with the 1920s restoration and include the addition of Federal-style dormers, relocation of the interior stair, and construction of interior kitchen and bathrooms. There is a limited amount of replacement material on the exterior, e.g., the composite gallery flooring.

The Overseer's House remains identifiable as a French Creole building through its overall form, galleries, asymmetrical openings and French doors, and interior plan. Modifications include partial enclosure of the gallery and enclosure of the rear loggia, both of which are currently being reopened as part of a historic restoration effort (utilizing Louisiana historic tax credits). Interior modifications include the construction of the kitchen and bathroom and the installation of beadboard ceilings, all of which are being removed.

The Foundation Office remains identifiable as a French Creole building through its overall form, galleries (although the gallery floor has been removed), asymmetrical openings and French doors, and interior plan. The early and mid-twentieth century exterior additions are clearly differentiated from the original building and are located on the side and rear, and therefore they do not diminish its historic integrity. On the interior, non-historic materials simply cover intact historic features.

The inclusion of two non-contributing resources, the c. 1925 garage and the c. 1940s cemetery, do not detract from the site's integrity due to their location, size, and, in the case of the cemetery, incorporation into the larger landscaped site.

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8.	Stater	ment of Significance		
	rk "x"	e National Register Criteria in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for N	National Register	
	] A.	Property is associated with events that have made a significant obroad patterns of our history.	contribution to the	
	] B.	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in ou	r past.	
Х	] C.	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses his or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose combindividual distinction.	gh artistic values,	
	D.	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important history.	t in prehistory or	
		Considerations in all the boxes that apply.)		
	] A.	Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes		
	] B.	Removed from its original location		
	C.	A birthplace or grave		
	D.	A cemetery		
	E.	A reconstructed building, object, or structure		
	F.	A commemorative property		
	G.	Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past	50 years	

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Areas of Significance	
(Enter categories from instructions.)	
<u>Architecture</u>	
<del></del>	
Period of Significance	
c1820-c1850	
<u></u>	
Significant Dates	
_c1820; c1840s; c1850	
Significant Person	
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)	
Cultural Affiliation	
A 114 (7D 91)	
Architect/Builder	
Swainey, George (contractor – Big House)	

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Big House at Oak Alley Plantation is significant under Criterion C at the state level in the area of architecture as a rare and particularly fine example of a peripteral-style plantation house with a regional blend of the French Colonial, Federal, and Greek Revival features that is unique to south Louisiana. The property's Foundation Office (c. 1820s) and Overseer's House (c. 1840s) are significant under Criterion C at the state level in the area of architecture as rare surviving examples of French Creole architecture in St. James Parish, which at one time had easily over one hundred examples. The Foundation Office and Overseer's House meet the eligibility criteria under the multiple property submission (MPS) entitled "Louisiana's French Creole Architecture." The period of significance begins in c. 1820 and ends c. 1850, encompassing the estimated construction dates of the three buildings.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Historic Context: The Sugarcane Industry in Louisiana and St. James Parish

Sugarcane was first introduced in French colonial Louisiana by Jesuit priests in the mid-eighteenth century, as colonists explored the viability of different cash crops in the region's subtropical climate. In the 1790s, after decades of experimentation, a plantation in what is now Uptown New Orleans (owned by French Creole planter and eventual mayor of New Orleans Jean Etienne de Boré) successfully produced refined sugar that was on par with that from the Caribbean islands. By 1801, there were approximately 75 sugarcane operations in Louisiana.

In the 1830s, sugarcane edged out cotton as the state's most profitable crop due to further advances in the laborious sugar-making process and federal tariff protections against imported sugar from the Caribbean. It was grown primarily in rural areas on large working plantations along the Mississippi River upriver from New Orleans, including St. James Parish. Wealthy enslavers, known as planters, purchased and developed a property through the forced labor of enslaved men and women of African descent. Large tracts of land were put into sugar cane production and large, increasingly industrialized mills were erected and operated by the same enslaved labor force. Sugar production was risky and expensive because of a shortened growing period (nine months per year) and the required capital outlay. For many planters, however, it was a worthwhile enterprise with an average net return of ten percent per year.<sup>9</sup> By 1840 the number of sugarcane plantations in Louisiana had grown to 825.<sup>10</sup> These plantations ranged in size from small operations, with an enslaved workforce of fewer than ten, to large operations with hundreds of enslaved people (among the largest of these,

https://www.lsuagcenter.com/portals/our offices/parishes/st%20james/features/about the parish.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Kenneth Gravois, "Louisiana's Sugarcane Industry," *Louisiana Agriculture* Vol. 44, No. 4 (Fall 2001): 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> "Translation of General Collot's Description of de Bore's Sugar House and Comparison with West India Cane," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, I (April, 1918): 327-29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Christina Riquelmy and Debra Currie, "Sugar at LSU: A Chronology," https://www.lib.lsu.edu/sites/all/files/sc/exhibits/e-exhibits/sugar/contents.html.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Bennet H. Wall et al, eds., *Louisiana: A History,* Sixth Edition (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2014), 157-60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> LSUAgCenter, "About the Parish,"

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Houmas House, had an enslaved workforce of more than seven hundred). <sup>11</sup> The period between c. 1840 and the start of the Civil War is most closely and famously associated with these largest and wealthiest plantations, including Oak Alley.

The industry prospered until the 1860s, when the Civil War upended the industry's slave-based plantation economy. The demand for sugar did not abate, however, and after the war Northern investors as well as local businessmen not previously involved in the industry purchased plantations at auction and began operating them under a wage labor system. The majority of workers on these plantations continued to be African Americans, who had been emancipated but nevertheless still unfairly compensated for their labor. Annual production reached an all-time high of 400,000 tons in 1904, but a mosaic virus virtually decimated the state's crops in the 1920s. Today, following the adoption of disease-resistant cane varieties and the advancement of specialized training and professional organizations, the sugarcane industry remains an important part of Louisiana's agricultural economy.

St. James Parish is located in south Louisiana's Acadiana region approximately 54 miles upriver (WNW) from New Orleans. First settled in the 1760s by French-speaking Acadians (though it had been the home to the Houma and Chitimacha tribes for centuries), the parish was officially established in 1807. The rich alluvial soil along the Mississippi River, which snakes through the parish, attracted numerous plantation enterprises in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most of these grew sugarcane, although some successfully grew tobacco, a crop that failed everywhere else in the state. He by the 1850s, there were more than one hundred plantations in the parish as shown on A. Persac's famous 1858 map, "Chart of the Lower Mississippi River," all of them wedged together in long and narrow strips running perpendicular to the river for critical water access. As in other parishes, these plantations were converted to a wage labor system after the Civil War; some continued to grow sugarcane, while others pivoted to less risky crops such as rice, and still others were carved up into smaller plots.

The economy of St. James Parish remains predominantly industrial and agricultural today, with sugarcane as the most valuable crop followed by soybeans and Perique tobacco.<sup>15</sup> Today, industry is the primary source of employment in the parish as well as the biggest threat to its remaining cultural resources.

### Historic Context: History of Oak Alley Plantation

Oak Alley Plantation was established in 1836 by French Creole planter Jacques Télésphore (J. T.) Roman (1800-1848). However, the property was already a working plantation when Roman acquired it that year from his brother-in-law, French Creole planter Francois Gabriel "Valcour" Aimé (1797-1867), who had been operating the plantation since the 1820s. The property itself was originally

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

https://www.lsuagcenter.com/portals/our\_offices/parishes/st%20james/features/about\_the\_parish.

https://www.google.com/books/edition/Cabanocey/gFn7Rp8VV0cC?hl=en&gbpv=1&bsq=sugar.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> John Bardes, "Plantation Slavery in Antebellem Louisiana," *64 Parishes*, <a href="https://64parishes.org/entry/plantation-slavery-in-antebellum-louisiana">https://64parishes.org/entry/plantation-slavery-in-antebellum-louisiana</a>; and Laura Blokker, "Construction and Construct: Architecture of the Louisiana Plantation," in Laura Kilcer VanHuss, ed., *Charting the Plantation Landscape from Natchez to New Orleans* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2021), 21-22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Christina Riquelmy and Debra Currie, "Sugar at LSU: A Chronology," <a href="https://www.lib.lsu.edu/sites/all/files/sc/exhibits/e-exhibits/sugar/contents.html">https://www.lib.lsu.edu/sites/all/files/sc/exhibits/e-exhibits/sugar/contents.html</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> LSU AgCenter, "About the Parish,"

<sup>15</sup> LSU AgCenter, "St. James Parish Profile,"

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claimed by J. T. Roman's father, Jacques Etienne Roman in the early 1790s, along with other tracts of land in the area. Almé, who married J. T.'s sister Josephine in 1819, is a well-known figure in the history of the Louisiana sugarcane industry. Almé operated sugar plantations in St. James Parish from 1820 through the 1850s and was known as a pioneer in the industrialization of sugar making, experimenting with the latest technologies for sugar refining (particularly related to steam power), traveling to Cuba and elsewhere himself to observe their refining methods and cane fields, and publishing writings about the industry. In

Whether the subject property was an active plantation prior to Aimé's operation is currently unknown, but it was in operation by the early 1820s, when Aimé most likely constructed the Foundation Office (contributing) and Sugar Mill (located approximately 560 yards south of the present-day Big House and demolished c. 1910s). In addition, the first three pairs of oak trees in the allée were likely planted at this time in front of a smaller planter's residence which was demolished for the c. 1837-39 Big House (contributing).

Following his 1836 acquisition, J. T. Roman undertook a major expansion effort that included purchases of adjacent land to expand operations; construction of the grand Big House (to replace the more modest residence); construction of the Overseer's House (contributing); construction of other ancillary buildings including two *garconnières*, smaller residences intended for single male family members or visitors, to the east and west of the Big House (demolished c. 1920s); renovation of the Sugar Mill (demolished); and extension of the live oak allée to the present 28 trees. The architect of the Big House was possibly Roman's father-in-law, New Orleans city surveyor Gilbert Joseph Pilié, but it is equally possible that the house is Roman's own take of popular design trends, articulated in various forms in other area Big Houses of the same period. Work was executed by slave labor under the direction of contractor George Swainey.

Roman added to existing slave quarters as he expanded his enslaved work force. These dwellings ran in parallel lines between the Big House and Sugar Mill and were demolished c. 1920s. The land on which the majority of the demolished cabins and the Sugar Mill were located is outside of the proposed boundary to the south.

Under J. T. Roman's leadership, which spanned from 1836 until his early death due to illness in 1848, Oak Alley Plantation operated as a typical large-scale lucrative sugarcane plantation, producing about 300 hogsheads a year on the backs of nearly two hundred enslaved people. His widow, Célina, with the support of various managers, took over the plantation's management in the late 1840s but gradually descended into debt. Around 1860 she transferred ownership to her 20-year-old son, Henri, who became sole proprietor and took on even more debt in the process. When Union troops seized New Orleans in April 1862, the enslaved people of Oak Alley seized their freedom and fled the premises, and Henri was forced to lease the property. The leasing document is the first time the property is referred to in historical records as "Oak Alley."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Oak Alley Foundation, 43-44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Roulhac B. Toledano, "Louisiana's Golden Age: Valcour Aime in St. James Parish," *Louisiana History* Vol 10, No. 3) Summer 1969: 216-17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> P. A. Champomier, *Statement of the Sugar Crop Made in Louisiana in 1845-46* (New Orleans: Cook, Young, & Co., 1846), np. The exact measurement of one hogshead varies, but Champomier put it at about 1,000 pounds.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Oak Alley Foundation, 50-51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Oak Alley Foundation, 52-53.

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In 1866, when the Romans finally auctioned off the property in the aftermath of the Civil War, the plantation became the speculative venture of Irish immigrant and New Orleans foundry owner John Armstrong. Armstrong, who sold his shares in the property to partners in 1875, marked the first in a long string of owners (about seven in total between 1866 and 1925) attempting to turn a profit on the wage labor system. During this period, Oak Alley grew sugarcane, then rice, and, from 1917 to 1925, ventures diversified to include cattle and chicken farming. The residential buildings gradually fell into disrepair.

In 1925, New Orleans cotton broker Andrew Stewart and his wife, Josephine, the daughter of a Texas cattle rancher, purchased Oak Alley to restore it as a private estate for their retirement. The Stewarts hired New Orleans preservation architect Richard Koch, FAIA, to renovate and modernize the deteriorated Big House, and Josephine, an avid gardener, developed formal gardens around the house, including an orchard and rose garden. In 1936, the *Morning Advocate* reported that "[Oak Alley] is one of the most imposing spectacles in the state, not only because of its celebrated oaks (these are a rare sight in themselves) but because here is a plantation allowed to go to ruin and then reclaimed and restored to perfection rivaling its original grandeur."<sup>21</sup> The c. 1925 garage and the c. 1940s cemetery located withing the proposed boundaries date to this period.

In addition to giving tours to visiting artists, writers, historians and others, the Stewarts also raised cattle and chickens and grew fruits and vegetables.<sup>22</sup> Upon Andrew's death in 1946, Josephine began hosting tours of the house and grounds, and in 1966 she created Oak Alley Foundation, a 501(c)(3) public non-profit to ensure that the property would continue to be open to the public as a museum and educational center upon her death. Josephine died in 1972 and is buried with her husband in the cemetery.<sup>23</sup> Oak Alley Plantation officially opened to the public in 1976.

Today, Oak Alley Foundation continues to manage the property as a museum that draws hundreds of thousands of visitors per year, making it the most visited plantation property in Louisiana.<sup>24</sup> Numerous buildings were constructed or demolished outside of the proposed boundaries between the 1970s and the 2010s to support these efforts, and several buildings were erected on the southern part of the site as part of a modern sugarcane farm operation.

# **Criterion C: Architecture**

The Big House (1837-39), Overseer's House (c. 1840s), and Foundation Office (c. 1820s) are architecturally significant under Criterion C at the state level. The Big House is significant as a rare and particularly fine example of a peripteral-style plantation house, which is associated with an important regional variation of the Greek Revival style (combined with French Creole and Federal-style features) that developed in Louisiana's plantation house architecture beginning in the 1830s. The Overseer's House and Foundation Office are significant as rare surviving examples of French Creole architecture in St. James Parish per the eligibility requirements in the MPS "Louisiana's French Creole Architecture." Furthermore, the three buildings together convey the common use of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> "Famed Avenue of Trees Marks Century-Old Oak Alley on River," *Morning Advocate*, December 13, 1936.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> "Famed Avenue of Trees Marks Century-Old Oak Alley on River," *Morning Advocate*, December 13, 1936;
 "Tick Eradication Opening New Paths Towards Prosperity," *Times-Picayune New Orleans States*, September 24, 1933; and "Plantation Home Offered to State," *New Orleans States-Item*, November 10, 1965.
 <sup>23</sup> Oak Alley Foundation, 75-78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> The Cultural Landscape Foundation, "Oak Alley Plantation; Mute Victims of Katrina: Four Louisiana Landscapes at Risk," https://www.tclf.org/sites/default/files/landslide/2006/oak\_alley/site\_profile.pdf.

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the regional Greek Revival style for the Big House and a more vernacular French Creole style for secondary buildings at antebellum plantation sites constructed in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup>

### Plantation House Architecture at Oak Alley: The Big House

The Greek Revival Style in Louisiana

The Greek Revival style arrived in the United States from England in the early nineteenth century, when the adolescent nation was developing its democratic identity. Until the rediscovery of ancient Greek architecture by British architect James Stuart and British amateur architect Nicholas Revett in the 1750s, followed by the publication of their multi-volume series *Antiquities of Athens*, Western architects had been working in the ancient Roman form of neoclassicism (e.g., Georgian and Federal architecture). Dismissed at first as too primitive, ancient Greek architecture gradually emerged as a more stripped-down, sober, and monumental alternative to Roman forms. In America, starting c. 1825, Greek Revival supplanted the Federal style as *de rigueur* for the nation's most important buildings until about 1860, when it ceded to the more ornate Italianate and other eclectic styles.

Greek Revival's pervasiveness in the United States for nearly a half-century is partially due to an affinity for the democratic philosophies of ancient Greece. Numerous cities and towns were named for illustrious Greek places and figures, such as Ithaca, New York; Olympia, Washington; and the towns of Homer and Athens in Louisiana. Architecturally, the strength and solidity of the Greek Revival style was ideal for a nation trying to prove itself, and it was used for countless new buildings, from city halls and courthouses to churches, banks, and residences.<sup>26</sup>

Character-defining features of the Greek Revival style include a classic Greek temple form or a boxy form reminiscent of a temple; temple fronts or temple-like fronts composed of a portico and columns in one of the Greek orders (Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian); flat-headed (rather than arched) openings; multi-paned sash windows; flat-headed aedicule openings (i.e., an opening with a column on each side supporting an entablature); shoulder-molded and pedimented openings; and ornamental motifs such as acanthus leaves, anthemion/palmettes, and patera.<sup>27</sup>

In Louisiana, the Greek Revival style first appeared in the 1830s and persisted through the 1860s. While it was perhaps not as pervasive as in other American cities, the style still made an impact. Important Greek Revival-style public buildings in New Orleans, which has the greatest concentration of examples, include the United States Mint (1835; William Strickland, architect) and Gallier Hall (1853; James Gallier Sr., architect). Throughout the state are examples of the style as applied to a range of residential architecture, from modest Creole cottages and townhouses to splendid mansions (see, for example, Shadows-on-the Teche, an 1831-34 residence in Iberia Parish) as well as much of the state's major plantation architecture.

Greek Revival Influence on Louisiana's Plantation Architecture

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Christopher G. Bates, *The Early Republic and Antebellum America: An Encyclopedia of Social, Political, Cultural, and Economic History* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Jonathan Fricker et al, *Louisiana Architecture: A Handbook on Styles* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 1998), 12-13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Fricker et al, *Louisiana Architecture: A Handbook on Styles*), 12-13; and Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, "The Greek Revival Style,"

https://www.crt.state.la.us/Assets/OCD/hp/nationalregister/historic\_contexts/greekrevivalrevised.pdf.

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Louisiana's plantations of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were modest buildings constructed in the French Creole style (see next section for a discussion of French Creole architecture) which evolved in response to the state's subtropical climate. The plantation "Big House," known as une habitation, was itself a modest dwelling, though typically the largest residence on the site, and featured a raised principal floor with brick pillars across the front and a broad, hipped main roof extending over a gallery that wrapped most if not all sides of the house. Galleries were extensions of indoor living space and were simply detailed with features such as slender turned wood colonettes and exposed beaded ceiling joists. Interior plans were hall-less and asymmetrical with corresponding asymmetrically placed exterior doors and windows. Exterior openings were typically French doors protected by board-and-batten shutters. Interior detailing was minimal and included features such as simply detailed wraparound mantels, perhaps with a diamond-shaped French "lozenge" motif, and exposed beaded-joist ceilings. Construction materials were locally sourced and typically consisted of bricks made on site and wood framing infilled with either bousillage (mud and Spanish moss) or brick (colombage), which was plastered on both the exterior and interior, or protected by wood siding on the exterior. Very few pristine examples of this earliest period survive today; many have been destroyed, and the majority of those that remain were later updated with Federal and/or Greek Revival remodels. Perhaps the best intact example is Homeplace Plantation in Hahnville (1787-91; NHL, 1970).<sup>28</sup>

As the size and complexity of plantation operations increased in the early nineteenth century, so did the size of plantation houses, which became a signal of the planter's wealth and influence. In the period of roughly c. 1805-c.1835, new and remodeled plantation houses typically blended French Creole with Anglo-American inspired Federal-style features, such as arched openings (e.g., fanlight transoms and dormer windows), delicately detailed mantels and moldings, perhaps with rosettes and fluting, and ceilings finished with plaster rather than beaded exposed joists. Interior plans transitioned to symmetrical rooms with central halls. Parlange Plantation in New Roads (1750/1830s; NHL, 1970) is a good example of this regional blending of styles.

The era spanning the 1830s until the start of the Civil War marks the height of Louisiana's antebellum plantation economy and the construction of its most iconic "Big House" plantation residences, which symbolized the economic dominance of the state's sugar and cotton planters. These Big Houses were predominantly designed in the newly fashionable Greek Revival style, although many of them, particularly those dating to the 1830s and 1840s, blended it with French Creole features to create a truly distinctive regional variation of Greek Revival architecture. As Louisiana photographer Clarence J. Laughlin wrote in the June 1947 edition of *Architectural Review*:

By 1840 [Greek Revival's] influence had become predominant. However, in many cases it was curiously modified by the characteristics of the more indigenous style which had preceded it, and especially, by the differences in the nature of the local materials of Louisiana, which continued to predominate [brick and wood rather than iron and stone]. It was due to these factors that Greek Revival in Louisiana acquired a markedly different flavor from the Greek Revival in the north.<sup>29</sup>

Architectural historian Laura Blokker theorizes that the Greek Revival style was most likely selected for plantation houses during this period not for its association with ancient democratic principles but for its adaptability and stateliness: "[I]t seems likely that the ease with which the columns of the style could be applied to existing plantation house forms and the imposing presence they created

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Louisiana Architecture, 1-9; Clarence J. Laughlin, "Plantation Architecture in Louisiana," Architectural Review, June 1947: 215-221.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Clarence J. Laughlin, "Plantation Architecture in Louisiana," 215.

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influenced design choices more so than philosophical linkages....[B]oth enslaved and free observers of the new Greek Revival edifices certainly took away an impression not of democracy but of undeniable wealth and power."<sup>30</sup> Either way, a version of the Greek Revival style became synonymous with Louisiana's plantation architecture during this period.

The intensity and variation of the style as applied to plantation houses ranged widely and depended in part on whether the planter was of Anglo-American or French Creole descent, whether they worked with an American or French architect, and also the size and scale of the plantation. For instance, there are many examples of small to mid-sized plantation houses that are traditional cottage forms with a Greek Revival treatment for the front gallery and the use of sash rather than casement windows (e.g., Asphodel Plantation near Jackson, built 1820/c1833). An example of a more "pure" Greek Revival plantation house, designed by American architect Henry Howard, is the temple-front Madewood Plantation in Napoleonville (1840-48; NRHP, 1973). However, the grandest and most distinctive examples of Greek Revival plantation architecture in Louisiana, which include Oak Alley's Big House, are known as "peripteral" plantation houses. The Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation's historic context for Greek Revival architecture states that:

Probably the most impressive local variation [of Greek Revival] is what architectural historian Henry Russell Hitchcock labeled the 'peripteral mode.' This is a Grecian two-story building, most often a plantation house, without pediments, surrounded by colossal order columns. Typically, the grand white columns are on all four sides....Peripteral houses are related to the grand two-story Creole plantation house of previous generations, with their encircling galleries.31

Peripteral plantation houses merge the architectural languages of the French Creole and Greek Revival styles in a manner that uniquely embodies the time and place in which they were constructed. Their massive colonnades, constructed of plastered local brick rather than stone, are imposing and visually distinctive while allowing for the incorporation of traditional galleries, a climatic necessity.

It is worth noting that the many secondary buildings on plantation sites, such as offices, overseers' residences, hospitals, slave quarters, garconnieres, pigeonnieres, kitchens, and sugar mills continued to be built in the vernacular French Creole style, perhaps combined with Federal-style elements such as at Oak Alley's Overseer's House (c. 1840s), or they were designed in a more Classical language to complement the Greek Revival style of the Big House (see, for instance the Evergreen Plantation complex in Edgard [NRHP, 1991]). Aside from style, these buildings were more intentionally, and often more symmetrically, arranged during this period in relation to the Big House as a way of introducing order and symmetry as well as underscoring the dominance of the Big House within the landscape.<sup>32</sup>

The Greek Revival Style at Oak Alley Plantation

The Big House at Oak Alley Plantation, with its 28 monumental plastered-brick Tuscan columns encircling the house, is a rare and particularly fine surviving example of a Greek Revival-style peripteral plantation house in Louisiana. According to author Richard Anthony Lewis, Oak Alley's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Blokker, "Construction and Construct: Architecture of the Louisiana Plantation," 22-23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, "The Greek Revival Style," 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Blokker, 22-23.

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"[Tuscan] columns, classical proportions, and a wide gallery mark it as a quintessential Louisiana plantation house [and] one of the finest peripteral plantation houses in the lower Mississippi Valley."33

The peripteral colonnade is combined with a broad hipped roof, galleries, and French doors to create the distinctive regional variation of Greek Revival architecture that makes these plantation houses so architecturally significant. In his *Source Book of American Architecture: 500 Notable Buildings from the 10th Century to the Present*, architect George Everard Kidder Smith writes that "Oak Alley...is a superbly logical, semi-Greek Revival answer to the imperatives of its environment.... An enormous (70 feet square) parasol of a hip roof, supported by twenty-eight two-story Tuscan columns, protects the house from the merciless sun and lashing rains. Its double galleries are so wide that windows can be kept open almost all of the time, while in fair weather each veranda forms an open-air living room."

The Big House, particularly the interior, also has several Federal-style features, including the elliptical fanlight transoms, carved rosette corner blocks and fluting at interior casings, and delicately carved Classical motifs (dentils, fluting, and paneling) on the aedicule-style faux-marbled mantels, which do not wrap the chimneys in French Creole fashion. The construction of two full stories (rather than a raised main floor), prominent central entries (front and rear), central-hall plan, and the symmetry of exterior openings are Anglo-American characteristics associated with both the Federal and Greek Revival styles.

Comparative Analysis of Extant Peripteral Plantation Houses in Louisiana

In addition to Oak Alley's Big House, there are three other known extant peripteral plantation houses in Louisiana. All of them are architecturally significant for the same reasons as Oak Alley, but they differ from each other in important ways:

- 1. Oak Alley Plantation (the subject property)
- 2. Houmas House, 40136 LA-942, Darrow, LA (NRHP, 1980). Houmas House was constructed c. 1800 as a French Creole plantation house that was remodeled and expanded in 1840 to its present appearance, which includes fourteen monumental Tuscan columns on three of the four facades corresponding to galleries; a wide central hall; and sash windows. The glass belvedere at the roof's peak is a mid-Atlantic feature introduced by the plantation's South Carolina owners during the midcentury remodel. Houmas House differs from the subject property because it is a remodel rather than a purpose-built peripteral plantation house; its colonnade extends to three rather than all four facades, and it has no French doors.<sup>35</sup>
- 3. <u>Ashland-Belle Helene Plantation, 8000 LA-3251, near Geismar, Iberville Parish, LA (NRHP, 1979)</u>. Ashland-Belle Helene Plantation was constructed in 1839-41 as a

<sup>33</sup> Richard Anthony Lewis, *Robert W. Tebbs: Photographer to Architects – Louisiana Plantations in 1926* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> George Everard Kidder Smith, FAIA, *Source Book of American Architecture: 500 Notable Buildings from the 10<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 197.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Lewis, *Robert W. Tebbs*, 46-47; and Brian H. Oviedo, "Houmas House, Burnside, Ascension Parish, Louisiana," National Register of Historic Places, 1980. The exact chronology of Houmas House remains unknown. According to the Houmas House website, the house originated in the eighteenth century as a French Creole house, then was expanded with a center-hall cottage in 1803, and finally expanded to its present footprint in the 1830s.

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peripteral plantation house with 28 square (rather than Tuscan) monumental columns supporting an enormous entablature. The house is generally attributed to American architect James H. Dakin and is described as "one of the purest expressions of Greek Revival architectural style in Louisiana." While it incorporates wraparound galleries in the French Creole tradition, the house differs from the subject property because it is otherwise entirely Greek Revival in design. The entablature hides the hipped roof, the stucco exterior is scored to resemble stone, windows throughout are sash rather than French doors, and the centered entries are done in the aedicule motif. The two-story interior has a wide central-hall plan.

4. L'Hermitage Plantation, 38308 HWY 942, Darrow, Ascension Parish (NRHP, 1973). L'Hermitage Plantation was originally constructed c. 1816 as a French Creole plantation house with brick-between-posts (*colombage*) construction for the raised principal floor. The peripteral Tuscan colonnade (24 total) was added in the 1830s along with the denticulated entablature and pedimented dormer windows. The house retains many of its French Creole characteristics, including the broad hipped roof over the wraparound galleries, French doors, and asymmetrical exterior openings (although the interior has an Anglo-American symmetrical center-hall plan).<sup>37</sup> Like Houmas House, L'Hermitage differs from the subject property because it is a remodeled French Creole house rather than a purpose-built peripteral house.

There are at least eight known peripteral plantation houses that have been lost to demolition, fire, or other means. These include Lula Plantation (Assumption Parish); Saulet Plantation (Orleans Parish); Three Oaks Plantation (St. Bernard Parish); Belair Plantation (Plaquemines Parish); Avondale Plantation (Jefferson Parish); le Petit Versailles Plantation (St. James Parish); Greenwood Plantation (West Feliciana Parish; the current house is a 1980s reconstruction); and Seven Oaks Plantation (Jefferson Parish).<sup>38</sup>

In summary, Oak Alley Plantation's Big House is a rare surviving example of a peripteral plantation house in Louisiana, which once flourished throughout the state, and represents an architecturally significant regional sub-variation of the Greek Revival style.

French Creole Architecture at Oak Alley: Foundation Office and Overseer's House

Oak Alley Plantation is significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the state level under the multiple property submission (MPS) entitled "Louisiana's French Creole Architecture." Its two surviving examples of French Creole architecture, the c. 1820s Foundation Office and the c. 1840s Overseer's House, exhibit different variations on the architectural tradition. Both buildings meet the registration requirements as outlined in the MPS.

The MPS defines the architectural significance of Louisiana's French Creole architecture as follows:

The Creole tradition is nationally significant in the area of architecture....Creole architecture is rare, both within the context of the United States as a whole and within the context of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Lewis, 109; Karen Kingsley, *Buildings of Louisiana* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 186.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Kingsley, *Buildings of Louisiana*, 185; and Dr. and Mrs. Robert C. Judice, "The Hermitage, Ascension Parish, Louisiana," National Register of Historic Places, 1973.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Fred Daspit, *Louisiana Architecture: 1820-1840* (Lafayette, LA: The Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2005); Fred Daspit, *Louisiana Architecture: 1840-1860* (Lafayette, LA: The Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2006); and Lewis, *Robert W. Tebbs.* 

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state of Louisiana....[T]he number of Creole homes surviving in Louisiana is small in comparison with the vast numbers which once existed in the nation. It is also small in relation to the number which once must have existed in the state itself. Although there is no way to estimate the exact number of Creole houses once found in Louisiana, it is certain that the vast majority of the antebellum homes built in the 26-parish area covered by this submission [including St. James Parish] would have been Creole. However, only a relatively small number of buildings displaying the features which can be associated with the Creole style survive in these parishes today. These buildings are far outnumbered by houses illustrating post-war Victorian and early twentieth century decorative styles. Even in parishes in which significant numbers of antebellum houses remain, most of these homes are in the Greek Revival style. Thus, in many areas of Louisiana, Creole architecture is almost as rare as it is on the regional level....In addition to its rarity, the architecture of Creole Louisiana is also significant because it represents the principal non-British colonial and postcolonial building tradition of the eastern half of the United States....Taken together, its multi-state distribution, stylistic uniqueness, age, and increasing scarcity of surviving examples make Creole architecture a major national tradition within the repertoire of American styles.39

The MPS registration requirements state that an eligible property under the MPS must be established "as a legitimate expression of Creole architecture":

- 1. It must conform to the geometric standards for Creole architecture as specified in Section F. II of this document (floorplan and shape, Figures 3-5)
- 2. It must have some of the stylistic features described in Section F. II
- 3. It may display authentic traditional French timber frame technology.<sup>40</sup>

The Foundation Office and Overseer's House are both modestly scaled and finished Creole houses that meet this definition. They each meet the first two criteria, and the Foundation Office appears to meet the optional third criteria.

The Foundation Office has a typical Creole floorplan (rectangular, hall-less, with two *salles* and two smaller *chambres*), a typical hipped roof form extending over a wraparound gallery, and an asymmetrical fenestration pattern. Creole stylistic features include slender wood gallery columns; mantels with plain pilasters and a French lozenge (diamond shaped parallelogram); and previously exposed limewashed ceiling joists (covered by later beadboard but intact). The Foundation Office appears to meet the optional third criteria of displaying authentic traditional French timber frame technology with hand-hewn rafters forming what is likely a Class IIIB full umbrella roof (as illustrated in Figure 5 of the MPS). However, additional analysis of the framing would be required to confirm that this is the case.

The Overseer's House also has a typical but expanded rectangular, hall-less Creole floorplan, with two *salles*, two smaller *chambres*, and a pair of *cabinets* flanking an open loggia at the rear. It also has a typical hipped roof form extending over a wraparound gallery and an asymmetrical fenestration pattern. Creole stylistic features include eight-light paneled French doors on all facades (some now enclosed on the interior by gallery infill). The Overseer's House also illustrates Anglo-American influence on Creole architecture (as described in the MPDF's Section F II, "The Period of Transition, 1790-1860") in the use of 6/6 double-hung sash windows instead of French doors or

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Dr. Jay Edwards, "Louisiana's French Creole Architecture," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, March 8, 1991, Section F III pp. 1-2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Edwards, "Louisiana's French Creole Architecture," Section F IV p. 1.

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casement windows, plaster-on-lath ceilings (rather than exposed ceiling joists), and simple Federal-style interior moldings.<sup>41</sup> The plain pilastered mantels fit with both the French Creole and Federal styles. The two Federal-style dormers are consistent with the building's other stylistic features and age but appear to have been altered, and potentially replaced, over time based on the age of the framing and sheathing.

In addition, the MPS states that an eligible property must be architecturally significant under Criterion C at the local, state, or national level. The Foundation Office and Overseer's House meet one of the six provided examples:

1. A rare surviving example of a Creole house in a parish once dominated by the building tradition.<sup>42</sup>

The Foundation Office and Overseer's House are rare surviving examples of French Creole architecture in St. James Parish, which at one time had easily 150 examples based on the fact that there were once over one hundred plantations there in the 1850s, and French Creoles were the dominant group to settle the area in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (including Oak Alley Plantation owners Jacques Etienne Roman and Valcour Aimé). Based on a survey of the National Register database, there are only ten extant plantation properties (including the subject property) in St. James Parish with extant French Creole buildings:

- 1. Desire Plantation House, Vacherie, 1835 (NRHP, 1986)
- 2. Felicité Plantation, Vacherie, 1846 (NRHP, 2010)
- 3. Graugnard Farms Plantation House, St. James, 1790-1850 (NRHP, 1992)
- 4. Lambert House, Convent, St. 1810 (NRHP, 2005)
- 5. Laura Plantation, Vacherie, 1820-1942 (NRHP, 1993)
- 6. Little Texas, 1840, Paulina, (NRHP, 1992)
- 7. Mather House, 1811/1820-30, Convent (NRHP, 2001)
- 8. Millet House, c1830, Gramercy (NRHP, 1999)
- 9. Oak Alley Plantation, Vacherie, c. 1820 (the subject property) (NHL, 1974)
- 10. St. Joseph Plantation, Vacherie, c. 1840 (NRHP, 2005)

This list is not exhaustive but does indicate two important trends: 1) the scarcity of this oncepredominant building tradition in St. James Parish and the state, and 2) its former predominance in the parish (i.e., nearly all of the known surviving plantation properties in the parish include some French Creole buildings).

Finally, the MPS states that a building must possess sufficient architectural integrity. While both the Foundation Office and Overseer's House have undergone some changes over time, they both remain clearly recognizable as French Creole buildings based on the above-described characteristics.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Edwards, Section F II p. 6.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Edwards, "Louisiana's French Creole Architecture," Section F IV p. 1.

Oak Alley Plantation	St. James Parish, LA	
Name of Property	County and State	

# Conclusion

Oak Alley Plantation in Vacherie, Louisiana, comprises three antebellum plantation buildings—the Big House (1837-39), the Foundation Office (c. 1820s), and the Overseer's House (c. 1840)—that are architecturally significant under Criterion C at the state level. Individually, they are significant for their various architectural styles (French Creole, Federal, and Greek Revival) that represent architectural traditions unique to Louisiana. Together, they convey the common use of the regional Greek Revival style for a mid-nineteenth century Big House combined with the more vernacular French Creole style for secondary buildings. Furthermore, the Big House is significant as a rare surviving example of a peripteral-style plantation house, and the Foundation Office and Overseer's House are rare surviving examples of French Creole architecture in St. James Parish, where examples were at one time plentiful. Therefore, Oak Alley Plantation is eligible for listing the National Register of Historic Places.

Oak Alley Plantation	
Name of Property	

St. James Parish, LA County and State

Figure 1. Big House, c. 1916 (Courtesy of Oak Alley Foundation)

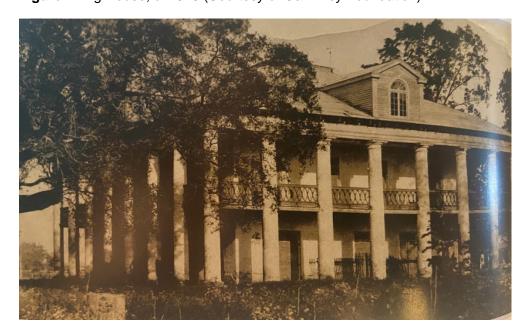


Oak Alley	Plantation

Name of Property

St. James Parish, LA County and State

Figure 2. Big House, c. 1920 (Courtesy of Oak Alley Foundation)



Oak Alley Plantation	
Name of Property	

St. James Parish, LA County and State

Figure 3. Overseer's House, c. 1916 (Courtesy of Oak Alley Foundation)



Oak Alley Plantation	St. James Parish, LA
Name of Property	County and State

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3. Latitude: 30.002532°	Longitude: -90.7783	327°
4. Latitude: 30.004922°	Longitude: -90.7789	927°

Oak Alley Plantation Name of Property			St. James Parish, LA County and State
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Oak Alley Plantation

Name of Property

St. James Parish, LA County and State

### **Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- Additional items: (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

# **Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

# **Photo Log**

Name of Property: Oak Alley Plantation

City or Vicinity: Vacherie

County: St. James State: LA

Photographer: Gabrielle Begue; Laura Blokker

Date Photographed: 2022/July 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 20. Big House, primary/north façade, and oak allée, camera facing S

2 of 20. Big House, west façade and gardens, camera facing SE

3 of 20. Big House, rear and east facades, camera facing NW

4 of 20. Big House, east façade and gardens; c. 1925 garage at right, camera facing NW

5 of 20. Big house interior, first floor, central hall, camera facing S

Oak Alley Plantation

Name of Property

St. James Parish, LA

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- 6 of 20. Big house interior, first floor, dining room, camera facing N
- 7 of 20. Big house interior, second floor, bedroom, camera facing S
- 8 of 20. General view of grounds, Foundation Office in background, camera facing S
- 9 of 20. Foundation Office, south facade, camera facing NW
- 10 of 20. Foundation Office, west facade, camera facing E
- 11 of 20. Foundation Office, interior, office, camera facing N
- 12 of 20. Foundation Office, interior, office, camera facing SW
- 13 of 20. Foundation Office, interior, attic, camera direction unknown
- 14 of 20. Overseer's House, north façade, camera facing SW
- 15 of 20. Overseer's House, west façade, camera facing E
- 16 of 20. Overseer's House, east façade, camera facing W
- 17 of 20. Overseer's House, interior, bedroom 2, camera facing E
- 18 of 20. Overseer's House, interior, dining/living area, camera facing E
- 19 of 20. Overseer's House, interior, office looking towards master bedroom, camera facing N
- 20 of 20. Cemetery, camera facing W

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement**: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

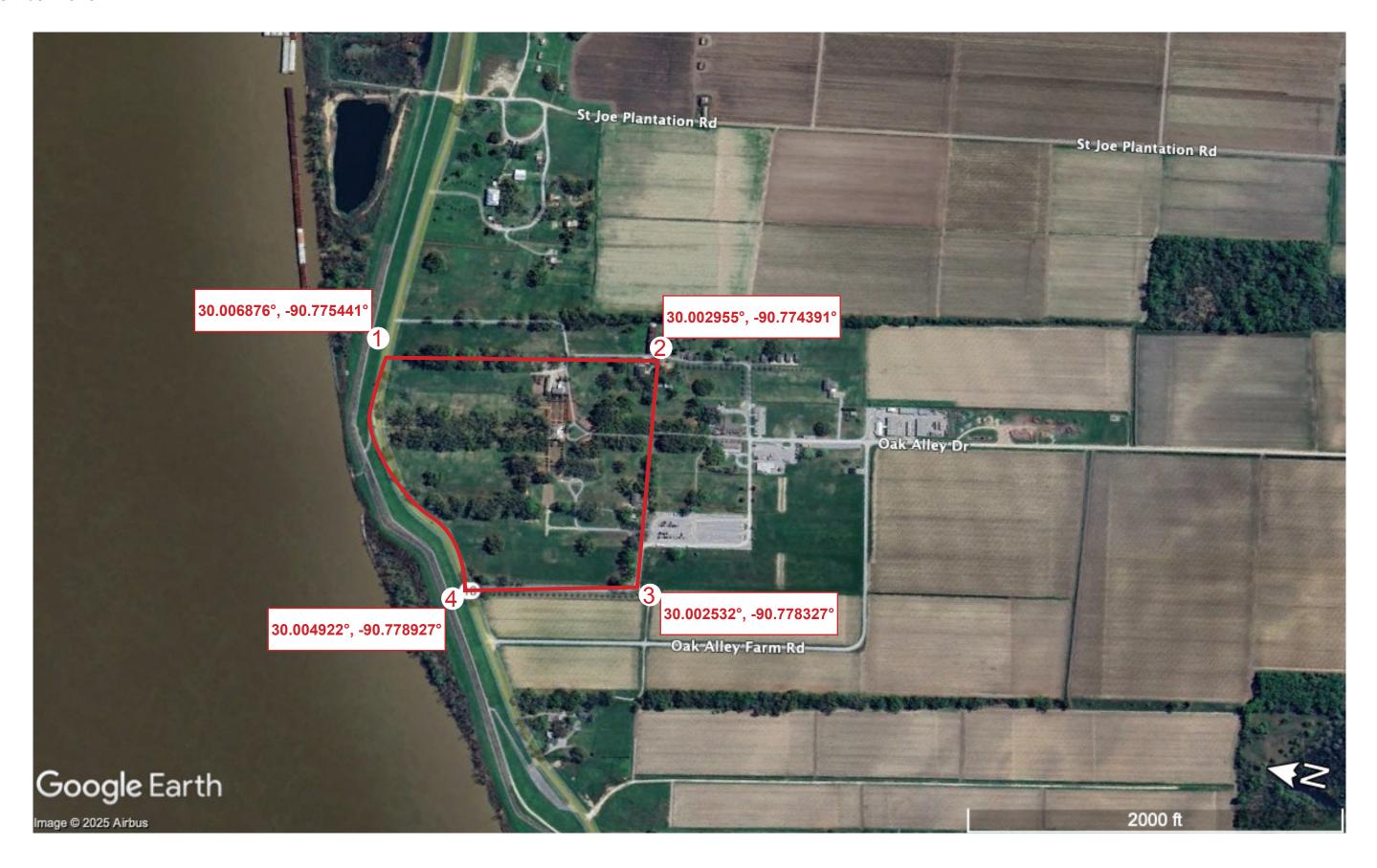
Tier 1 - 60-100 hours

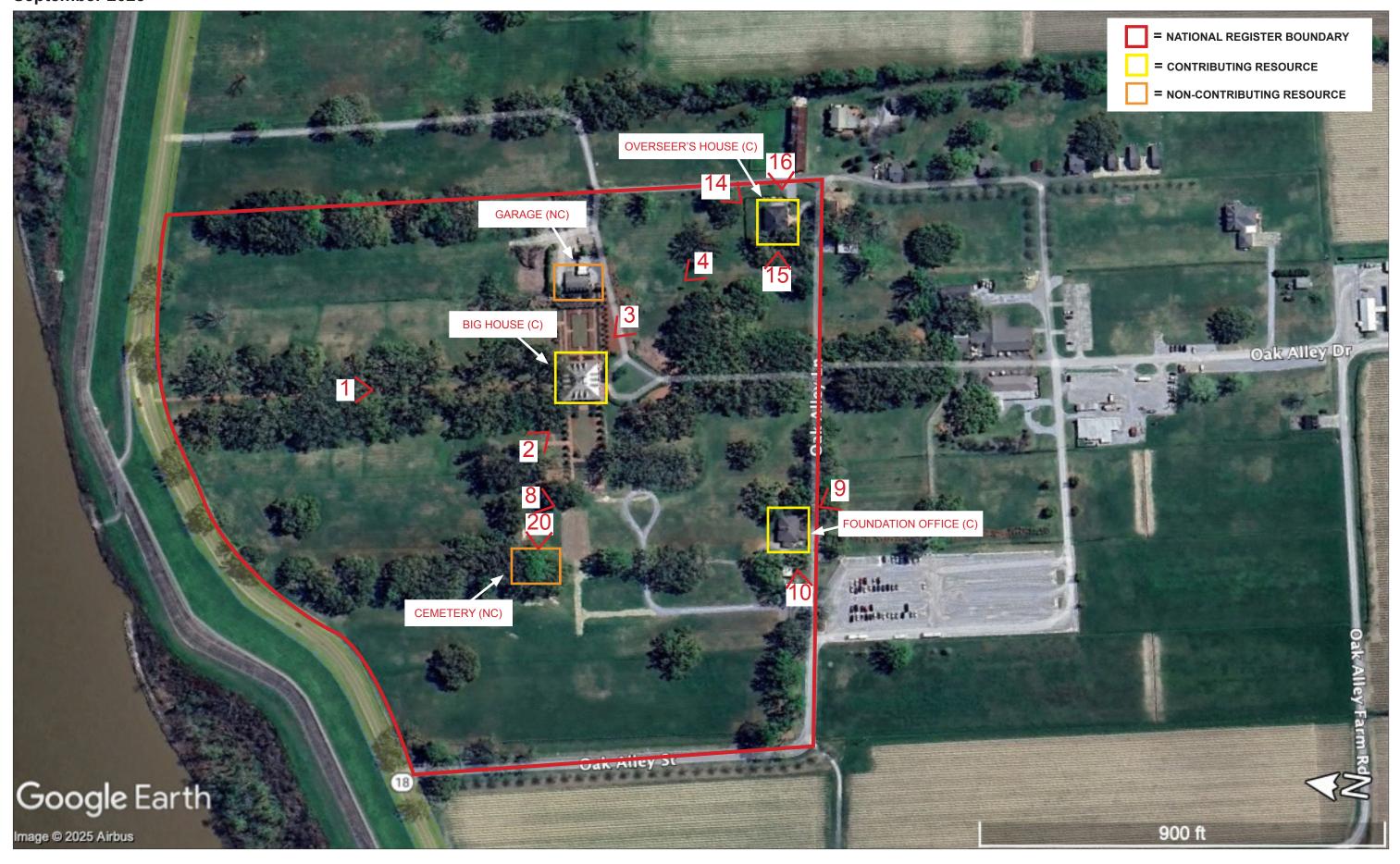
Tier 2 - 120 hours

Tier 3 - 230 hours

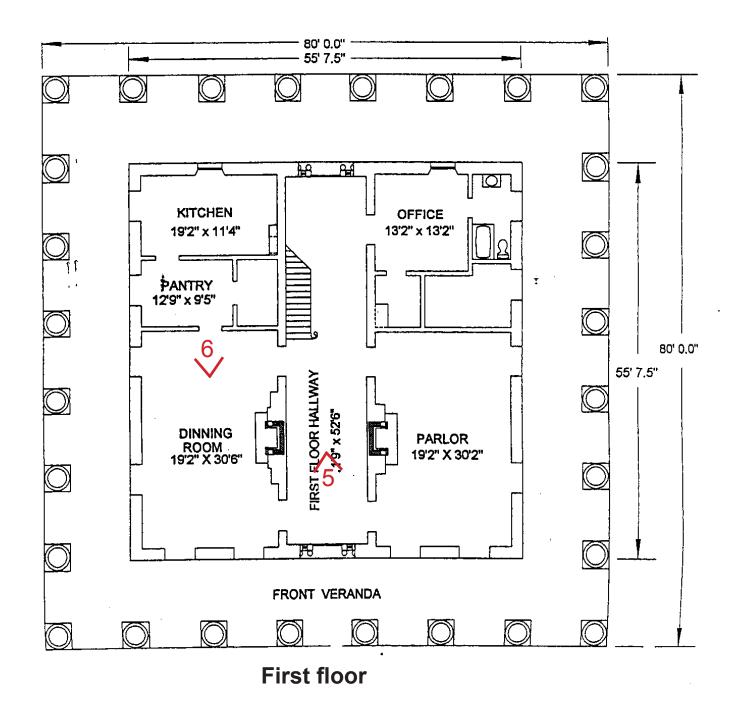
Tier 4 - 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.





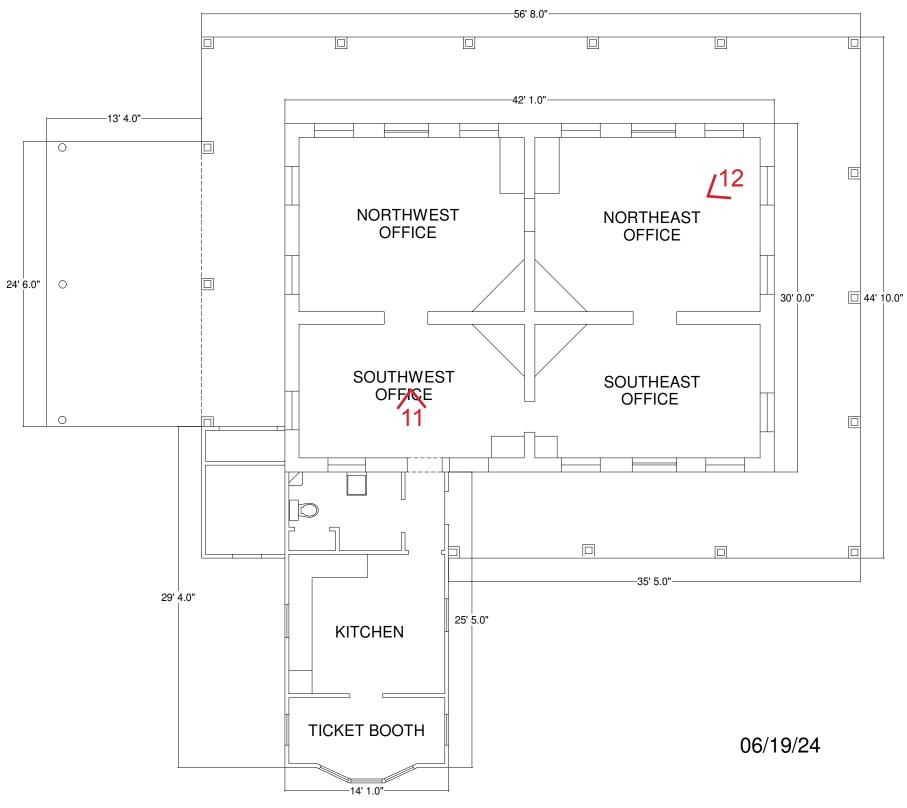
## **BIG HOUSE**



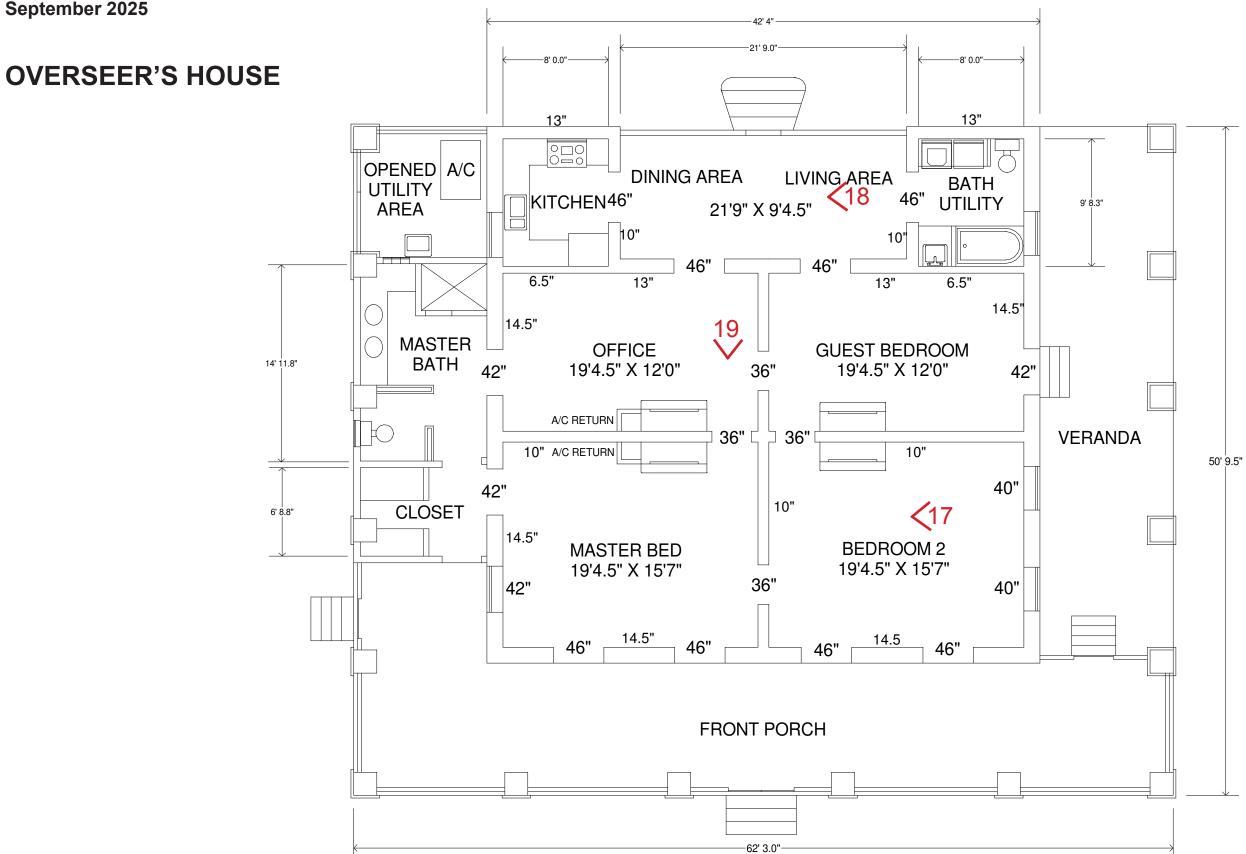
MOURNING ROOM CHILDEN'S ROOM 19'7" X 17'2" 19'7" X 18'1" 76' 11.5" 55' 7.5' PURPLE ROOM MASTER BED 19'7" X 20'9" 19'7" X 25'11" FRONT GALLERY **Second floor** 

## **FOUNDATION OFFICE**

13 - attic(precise location unknown)



First floor



First floor









































