

THE LANE COTTON MILLS

4500 through 4610 Tchoupitoulas Street.

Architectural Ratings: 4600 - 4610 Tchoupitoulas St. - Blue
4538 Tchoupitoulas St. - Blue

Dates of Construction: 4610 Tchoupitoulas St. - 1880-81
4606 Tchoupitoulas St. - 1893
4600 Tchoupitoulas St. - c.1904
4538 Tchoupitoulas St. - 1903

Architects: The oldest building of the complex is the four story structure at 4610 Tchoupitoulas St. which was designed by William Fitzner in 1880-81. The architect of the 1893 addition at 4606 Tchoupitoulas St. was Diedrich Einseidel, with builders O'Neil and Koch. Favrot and Livaudais were the architects for the 1903 building at 4600 Tchoupitoulas, the addition of the same year to Mill #3 on square 83, and the 1932 building at 4500 Tchoupitoulas St., (now demolished).

Nomination Information

Date: December 6, 1986

Nominated by: Camille Strachan

Seconded by: John Ernst and Jane Brooks

Site Description

Squares 85, 84, 83 and 83 1/2

Sixth Municipal District, 14th Assessment District

Zoning: H-1

Owners: National Tea Company

Evaluation of Structures

The Lane Cotton Mills are considered the oldest cotton manufacturing facility in the South. During the "Golden Age" of the city of New Orleans, when cotton was king throughout the region, many associated businesses flourished and many fortunes made. Buildings that remain as testimony to the powerful influence cotton had on New Orleans society include the numerous homes of wealthy cotton factors and the Cotton Exchange Building, but there are few industrial structures that can be directly linked to the age when the cotton industry was at its peak.

The Lane Mill began operation in the late 1850's. The Maginnis Cotton Mills, which eventually outgrew the Lane Mills in production capacity, were not established until 1882, according to a Times-Picayune article from April 30, 1900. The 1850 Louisiana census did not mention any cotton mills, however, the 1860 census indicates that two cotton mills were operating by that time. One was the Lane Mill: the name of the other is not known. Its

economic importance during the Civil War is reflected by the fact that it was confiscated on August 8, 1863 and was assessed at that time at \$78,000. The Federal Government eventually returned the property to its owners, according to records in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. At that time, the mill occupied three-quarters of a square of ground and included a three-story mill building, a one-story pickery building and two one-story frame houses.

In attempting to establish the date of construction of the extant buildings, the earliest available Sanborn maps for this area were consulted. The 1885 Sanborn, located on microfilm at the Historic New Orleans Collection, shows the three-story mill building, (known as Mill #1), and the one-story pickery mentioned in the 1863 documents, which were probably built around 1856. They were situated near the center of square 83 in the Sixth Municipal District. Also in the same square fronting on Tchoupitoulas St. is shown a four-story brick structure labeled Mill #2. The first and second floors were used for weaving, the third for carding and the fourth for spinning. A stair tower protruded from the downtown end of the building. Mill #2 was built around 1881, according to a building contract between Lehmann, Abraham and Company, the owners of the Lane Mills, and Ferdinand Reusch, a contractor, which was registered with Joseph Cohn, Notary Public, on August 21, 1880. The contract was for the "Lane Mill Extension," a four-story brick building for cotton manufacturing purposes, that was to cost \$32,725. The architect was William Fitzner. Between Mill #1 and Mill #2 was a one-story hyphen used for the repair shop, warp drawing, carding and more picking. Three breaker pickers and four finisher pickers were located there. The remaining area of the square was occupied by a large lawn and beds of flowers.

An article in the Times-Democrat newspaper from June 1, 1893 describes a new three-story addition to the Lane Mills that was begun that day. Stating that "of late public attention has been called to the many improvements which are going on in the city in the way of modern construction and additions to manufactories already in operation." The article goes on to say that the business at the Lane Mills "has been constantly increasing, and the amount of work in hand and expected during the coming season made it necessary to increase the facilities already existing." The addition was to be three stories high and was estimated to require 500,000 bricks. "There will be no filigree work about the new building, but care will be bestowed to have it strong and substantial in every particular." The architect for the addition was D. Einsiedel and the builders were O'Neil and Koch.

According to the next available Sanborn map, dated 1909, the addition described in the 1893 newspaper article was located on the

same square as the original buildings and was attached to the rear of Mill # 2 and extended across the whole square to Cadiz St.

Mill #1 was still shown on this map but the original one-story Pickery building had been replaced by the 1893 addition. A brick office is shown near the corner of Tchoupitoulas and Cadiz Streets, which still exists. The office was probably completed between 1893 and 1904.

The volume of business had evidently continued to increase for the Lane Mills because an even larger two-story structure also appears on the 1909 map. This building is located across Cadiz St. from the original facilities, on part of square 84. Tax Assessment Records for the Sixth Municipal District indicate that the Lane Mills had begun acquiring lots in square 84 in 1892, when they purchased lots 3, 4, A and C at a total investment of \$3750. By 1903 they owned lots 1-10, valued at \$6000, and purchased another lot A and lot H for \$5800. The architectural firm of Favrot and Livaudais designed the new building according to the August 31, 1903 edition of the Daily States. It was described as an "entirely new mill...of the most modern construction" that measured 177 feet by 308 feet and was to cost \$70,000. These facts were repeated in the Daily Picayune, September 1, 1903. The building was evidently completed within a year because the assessment for 1904 estimated the value of the property in square 84 to have increased to \$60,000.

Notations on the 1909 Sanborn map drawings indicate that the facades of the new building facing Tchoupitoulas and S. Front, (the latter having also been known as Water St. and Leake Ave.), were pilastered and the roof featured a "sawtooth" configuration with glass skylights admitting natural light into the second floor weaving spaces. This was considered advanced industrial design at the time. The first floor was used for spinning, slashing, spooling and warping.

In 1903, the same year that the new mill building was erected, Favrot and Livaudais designed an addition to the existing buildings on square 83. According to the August 31, 1903 edition of the Daily States, this addition was made to Mill #3. It extends back from that 1893 building to the property line on S. Front St., (formerly Leake Ave.).

Of the buildings that appear on the 1909 Sanborn map, all are still standing with the exception of the original antebellum Mill #1. The four-story red brick Mill #2, designed by William Fitzner in 1880-81, remains as do the 1893 three-story addition, (Mill #3), the 1903 addition to the riverside of Mill #3 and the 1903 two-story building on square 84. Numerous other additions were made during the years of expansion including another Favrot and Livaudais-designed building from 1932 which was similar in size and appearance to their 1903 design. According to the Times-Picayune of June 8, 1932, this addition doubled the number of jobs at the mill. It was described as adjoining the earlier plant, two stories

in height and, with its completion, "the Lane Mills plant ... extend[ed] from Valence St. to Napoleon Ave., fronting on Tchoupitoulas." Previously the mill's address had been listed as 434 Cadiz St. This 1932 Favrot and Livaudais-designed structure was demolished in 1990, a Certificate of Appropriateness having been issued on June 4, 1990.

From the standpoint of design, this complex of buildings is well-unified. The earliest structure, Mill #2, at 4610 Tchoupitoulas, obviously influenced the design of the later ones in its use of segmental-arched windows arranged in a very regular geometric pattern with an emphasis on the vertical divisions between them. The corners of Mill #2 are anchored by colossal pilasters rising through four stories and capped with molded brick capitals. A strong brick cornice featuring corbelled brick modillions crowns the Tchoupitoulas St. elevation. Similar corbellings ornament the low gable behind the stair tower on the downtown facade. The upper section of the tower is elaborated with square and circular brick panels.

The 1893 building, designed by Diedrich Einseidel, matches the earlier one in brick color and design. It exhibits the same segmental arched windows and a similar molded brick cornice with the addition of strongly vertical piers between the windows. Although the 1893 description of the building stated that it would not have any sort of "filigree work," it is handsomely detailed and, certainly, "strong and substantial in every particular."

The turn-of-the-century office building at 4600 Tchoupitoulas St. is also made of red brick. Although it is only one story in height, it also possesses segmental arches and ornamental brickwork. Its central entrance faces Cadiz St. and is slightly recessed between flanking wings.

The surviving early twentieth century building is of a lighter color of brick than its predecessors yet continued the earlier use of the segmental arch and full-height pilaster/pier motifs. In 1992 the National Tea company completed an adaptive use project on this building transforming it into the Real Uptown Superstore. All structural work on the project has been completed and been approved by the staff.

Alterations have been made to many of the windows on all of these buildings, however, their original forms remain discernible. The changes include the replacement of the original arched sash of the older structures with square-headed metal sash and the bricking up of some openings on the later buildings. Several of the openings of the 1903 building have been closed, however, applied paneled doors suggest the original voids. The impact of these changes to the fenestration is not considered severely detrimental to the integrity of the overall design. A restoration of the original design or a similarly acceptable design which expresses its

Original pattern would be easily accomplished.

The Lane Mills buildings are representative of a genre that is becoming better appreciated as this century draws to a close. As illustrated by the new Real Uptown Superstore, early industrial structures which reflect an important era in our history have proven good candidates for adaptive reuse.

History of the Mill

The Lane Cotton Mill was founded by Napoleon Lafayette Lane in the 1850's. Although 1856 has come to be the accepted date of the mill's establishment, a May 22, 1946 article in the Times-Picayune gives a date of 1852. It may be as late as 1859. Despite this uncertainty of dates, the mill was probably the oldest in the South. The ownership changed several times in the later nineteenth century, belonging to Lehmann and Abraham by 1884, then back to Lane Mills on May 9, 1885, although control of the mill remained with the cotton factors Lehmann, Stern and Company. Beginning in 1886, the mill was headed by Sigmund Odenheimer who first served as manager and, later, as the president. On April 30, 1900, a Daily Picayune article entitled, "Louisiana's Story of Cotton Mills," asserted that the mill had "only reached a state of assured prosperity when it passed into the hands of its present owners ... Mr. Odenheimer has been with the concern in the capacity of manager for a number of years, and under his admirable management the mill has prospered materially." This period of prosperity was quite clearly reflected in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century burst of building activity at the mill.

The later expansion of the 1930's doubled the number of mill employees. Mr. Odenheimer was, by then, the company president. An article in the May 30, 1937 edition of the Morning Tribune stated that "in the Lane Cotton Mills cotton is spun into thread and the thread is then woven into cloth. The plant employs several hundred persons and is the only mill of its type in New Orleans. Experience at the Lane Cotton Mills has proven, according to Sigmund Odenheimer, President, that the climate in New Orleans is better suited for the operation of cotton mills than any other spot in America." During World War II, seventy soldiers who were textile workers in civilian life were sent to New Orleans to work in the Lane Cotton Mills. (Times-Picayune, December 29, 1944.)

In 1946 the controlling interest of the Lane Mills was acquired by a new group that also operated other facilities in the South, including the Pomona Manufacturing Company in Greensboro, North Carolina and the Hyde Park Mills in Covington, Tennessee. In 1948 the mill was sold to a New York firm which initiated a program of expansion and modernization. By 1956, when its centennial was

officially observed, the plant was worth six million dollars and employed about fourteen hundred people.

M. Lowenstein and Sons, Inc. of New York, the mill's parent company continued to publicize its plan for additional expansion of the mill until 1956, nevertheless, by September 1957, they announced the closing of the facilities. This closure was probably due, in part, to competition from the synthetic materials industry. New Orleans Mayor Vincent Schiro appealed to Donald Tansill, president of M. Lowenstein and Sons to reconsider the closing but without success. On September 14, 1959, M. Lowenstein and Sons sold all of squares 82 1/2, 83, 84 and a large portion of 85 to Moreland H. Hogan, President of International Park Corporation, for \$800,000. Hogan sold all of square 84 and most of 85, (except lots 9 and 17-22), to United China and Glass Company on March 20, 1961 for \$700,000. On March 14, 1971, Hogan sold lots 82 1/2 and 83 to United China for \$525,000. In 1974 United China bought that portion of Valence St. between Tchoupitoulas St. and Leake Ave. from the City of New Orleans for \$25,000. Then, in May 1976, the company acquired lots 9 and 17-22 in square 85 from the Reklaw Company for \$80,000.

Architects

William Fitzner was the architect of the 1880-81 four-story brick building at 4610 Tchoupitoulas St. He is considered to be one of the more important architects who worked in New Orleans during the second half of the nineteenth century. His designs included the Rice and Borne Building of 1883, a now-demolished Italianate commercial building, the main building at Dominican College dating from about 1880, and the Thorn-Morgan House at 1435 Jackson Ave., (a local landmark). Also, according to the artist files of the Historic New Orleans Collection, Fitzner designed the Lanoux House at the corner of Esplanade and Chartres Streets, a building for the Touro Infirmary, 547 Esplanade, a residence on Prytania between Philip and First. His other designs of industrial buildings included the Rice Mill on Elysian Fields, the Lafayette Brewing Company on the corner of 9th and Tchoupitoulas and the Southern, Weckerling and Standard Breweries.

The architect for the 1893 addition to 4610 Tchoupitoulas St., (now bearing the address 4606 Tchoupitoulas St.), was Diedrich Einseidel.

Favrot and Livaudais designed both of the light-colored brick buildings in the 4500 block of Tchoupitoulas St. They worked extensively in New Orleans from the 1890's to the 1920's. Their designs included the 1921 Cotton Exchange Building. Many of their original drawings are available at the Mathes Group.

Historic Personages

Sigmund Odenheimer, who headed the Lane Mills for about sixty years, and the cotton factors Lehmann, Abraham and Stern were all renowned locally as outstanding members of the New Orleans business community.

Social, Economic and Political Significance

The Lane Mills are very significant in the economic history of the South as well as that of city of New Orleans because of the position they occupy as the oldest cotton mills of the region. They were in operation on this site for over one hundred years employing between six hundred and fourteen hundred people. The Lane Mills exemplify the type of business conducted along the Tchoupitoulas St. "industrial corridor" and the typical building forms generated by this commercial activity. Their closing in 1957 reflected the changing social and economic conditions influenced by improvements in technology and new consumer trends in the later twentieth century.

Staff Recommendation

Based on its architectural significance, association with recognized architects and historic and economic significance, the staff recommends the designation of the entire former Lane Mills site. This designation would include squares 85, 84, 83 and 83 1/2. Those buildings worthy of landmarking include all of the red brick buildings bearing the numbers 4600-4610 Tchoupitoulas St. plus the c.1904 Favrot and Livaudais addition in the same square 83 and the c.1904 light-colored brick building at the corner of Cadiz and Tchoupitoulas Streets in square 84, bearing the number 4538 Tchoupitoulas St. Accessory structures at the rear of square 83 and 83 1/2 are not to be considered.

By designating the entire site, the Commission retains for itself the right to control any future development in those squares and assures itself and the community that possible demolitions of those buildings not individually worthy of landmark status will affect the landmark buildings as little as possible. WE RECOMMEND THAT THE MOTION BE FOR DESIGNATION OF THE SITE, SPECIFICALLY SQUARES 85, 84, 83 AND 83 1/2, INCLUDING ALL STRUCTURES THEREON, EXCLUDING ACCESSORY BUILDINGS AT THE REAR OF SQUARE 83 AND 83 1/2.