

National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

This form is used for documenting property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (formerly 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items

New Submission Amended Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

B. Associated Historic Contexts

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1845

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1845-1898

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1898-1960

C. Form Prepared by

name/title Juan Llanes Santos / Historian

organization Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office

date July 19, 2022

street & number PO Box 9066581

telephone 787-721-3737

city or town San Juan

state PR

zip code 00906-6581

e-mail jllanes@prshpo.gobierno.com

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

July 19, 2022

Signature and title of certifying official Carlos A. Rubio/SHPO
Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

Date

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

James Gabbert
Signature of the Keeper

8.31.2022

Date of Action

Table of Contents for Written Narrative

Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in National Register Bulletin *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (formerly 16B). Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below.

	Page Numbers
E. Statement of Historic Contexts	
See continuation Sheets	
Introduction	1 – 5
Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800 - 1845	5 - 16
Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1845 – 1898	17- 32
Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1898 – 1960	32- 79
F. Associated Property Types	
(Provide description, significance, and registration requirements.)	79-86
See continuation Sheets	
G. Geographical Data	
See continuation Sheets	86
H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods	86
(Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.)	
See continuation Sheets	
I. Major Bibliographical References	87- 90
(List major written works and primary location of additional documentation: State Historic Preservation Office, other State agency, Federal agency, local government, university, or other, specifying repository.)	
See continuation Sheets	

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications 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.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, PO Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 1

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960.

Introduction

There are areas in Puerto Rico that deserve special recognition due to their significant historic development. Settlements that have acquire through time their very own distinguishable qualities, standing out within the island’s historic collective memory. Sectors like *Río Piedras* in San Juan, *Ensenada* in the municipality of Guánica, or *Castañer* in the municipality of Lares are among those settlements that have come to represent by themselves significant events in our political, social, economic, and cultural history.

Playa de Ponce is most definitely among those significant wards that had come to distinguish and differentiate themselves from the municipalities to which they belong. The ward is one of the most, if not the most, significant *barrio* within the thirty-one wards in the municipality of Ponce. Using the jurisdictional boundaries established by the Puerto Rico Planning Board in 1955, Playa de Ponce is limited to the west by the Matilde River; to the north, by road PR-2; to the east, by the Bucaná River; and to the south, by the Caribbean Sea (**Fig. 1**).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 2

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



Barrio Playa de Ponce

Ponce, Puerto Rico

1:1,800

0 875 1,750 Feet

Figure 1. Playa de Ponce's boundaries. Above, in red, Playa de Ponce within the municipality of Ponce. Below, an aerial view showing Playa de Ponce's boundaries.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 3

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

The themes addressed in this Multiple Property Documentation Form are associated to a much-reduced area within Playa de Ponce as the one depicted in the previous maps. Based on the research of primary and secondary sources to support this document, the context of this Multiple Property Documentation Form is mostly related to Playa de Ponce’s historic core established during the late years of the 18th century around the port area and its expansion and development through the 19th and the early decades of the 20th century. In other words, the center of attention in this document is the oldest section in the ward (**Figs. 2-3**).

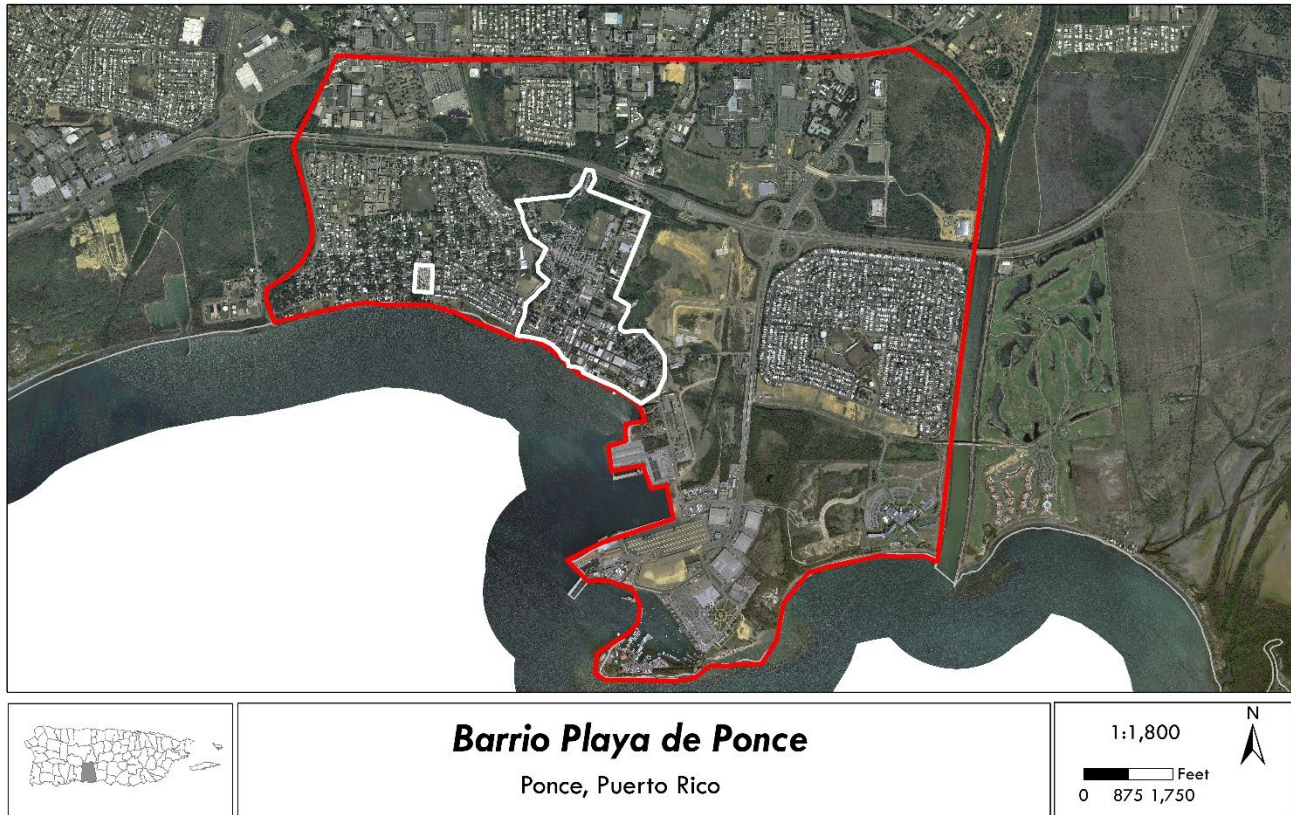


Figure 2. Map showing, within the white boundaries, Playa de Ponce’s oldest settlement. The traditional settlement is located east of the Portugués River. Also relevant for the purpose of this document, is the 1911 cemetery, located west of the old settlement.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 4

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



Figure 3. A closer look at Playa de Ponce's oldest settlement.

Playa de Ponce, established by the end of the 18th century, is as old as Ponce's urban core. During the 19th century, the city of Ponce, known as the *Perla del Sur* (the Pearl of the South), located in the southern coast of Puerto Rico, became the most important city in the region, displacing San Juan as the strongest economic, political, and cultural icon in the island. Like no other ward in the municipality, **Playa de Ponce** reflects the growth and historic

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number E Page 5

development of the locality to which belongs. The barrio possesses physical features and attributes of integrity that convey its association with important historic events, significant aspects of historic design and influential prototypes of 19th century urban planning and development and methods of construction. Just as well, **Playa de Ponce** reflects and brings forward information about important events in transportation, industry, architecture, and most importantly, as a true *barrio obrero*, it represents the material organization of the lifeways of the working class, its dominating social component from the 19th until present time.

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1845

The occupation of what would eventually be known as the Playa de Ponce took place practically at the same time as the settlement of the town’s center. The traditional urban center and Playa de Ponce are the two oldest settlements in the municipality of Ponce. In 1692, with a population of around 352 inhabitants, the urban center developed around a rustic chapel dedicated to the *Virgen de la Guadalupe*.

By the 1770’s, Ponce was already described as one of the oldest towns in the island, with a population crowded around its plaza. Fray Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra described the town in his *Historia Geográfica, Civil y Natural*:

*“A distancia de dos leguas del peñasco está el pueblo de Ponce: es de los más antiguos de la isla; está situado en una gran llanura cubierta de arboleda. El río de su nombre lo ciñe por el Oriente; por el Norte tiene las montañas de Utuado, al Occidente pasa un pequeño arroyo, y a una legua por el Sur tiene el mar; 115 casas forman cuadro dilatadísimo. La iglesia parroquial que es pequeña y deteriorada, lo cierra por un lado: en el centro de él hay una capilla que lo divide, dejando dos plazas menos solitarias que las de los otros pueblos pues en éste y en su circunferencia vive mucha parte de los vecinos que ascienden a 735 con 5,038 almas.”*¹

¹ Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra, *Historia Geográfica, Civil y Natural de la isla de San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico*. Anotada en la parte histórica y continuada en la estadística y económica por José Julián de Acosta y Calbo. Estudio introductorio por Gervasio L. García. Ediciones DOCE CALLES e Historiador Oficial de Puerto Rico, 2002, 326. parte histórica y continuada en la estadística y económica por José Julián de Acosta y Calbo. Estudio introductorio por Gervasio L. García. Ediciones DOCE CALLES e Historiador Oficial de Puerto Rico, 2002, 326. “At a distance of two leagues from the ridge is the town of Ponce: one of the most ancient on the island”, situated on a great plain covered by tree groves. The river of its name hugs it to the East; to the North it has the mountains of Utuado, to the West rests a small stream, and one league towards the South, the ocean; 115 houses form a very distant square. The church, small and deteriorated, to one side: in the center, a chapel that divides it, leaving two plazas, less solitary than those from other towns, as in this one and around its circumference live a great part of the neighbors, about 735 with 5,038 souls.” Translation is ours.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 6

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

The clergyman noticed certain economic activities that eventually gave Ponce preponderance in the region. At the time of Lasierra’s writing, coffee was the main agricultural staple in the area. Contrary to the 19th century experience, the coffee production was concentrated along the coast, not in the high lands. Ponce’s coastline was, “*populated by coffee haciendas.*”² Abbad y Lasierra also stated that sugarcane, wood, cattle, and minor fruits were other important staples in Ponce’s economy.

This production was oriented to the foreign markets, essentially through smuggling, through the region which Lasierra called “*the port of Ponce*”. In a wide scope, the author defined this zone to be between “*the Salina’s point and Gato’s point.*”³ We believe that the area referred to by our first historian is the one comprised today, at its westernmost point, by the Tuque resort, developed in the vicinity of the *Laguna de la Salinas* and at the eastern end by Isla de Gata, where the Club Náutico, built during the 1950's, is currently located. Abbad y Lasierra described this zone as one of great extension, with good depth for ships. Towards the end of the eighteenth-century, the port or *La Marina* was located between these two topographical landmarks. Abbad y Lasierra described the road from the traditional urban center to *La Marina* as a hardly passable forest of royal palm trees. That wooded and mangled road will eventually be known as the *Camino Real* (Eugenio M. de Hostos Avenue or PR-123, today) and in the third decade of the nineteenth century will be considered a First-Class Road.

By the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth-century, local events combined with external factors to promote the socioeconomic development of Ponce and Playa de Ponce. Among these was the visit of Field Marshall Alejandro O’Reilly, sent by the Spanish Crown in 1765 to evaluate Cuba and Puerto Rico’s military defense system. Apart from his military suggestions, O’Reilly made important economic recommendations. Among these, the need to allow the official opening of several ports on the island, in addition to the port of San Juan. According to O’Reilly, the opening of these ports would not only bring more revenues to the treasury in terms of tax collection, but also work as a deterrent to the extensive contraband

² Ibid., 327.

³ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 7

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

trade, which left no profits in the coffers of the central government.⁴

In a wider context, the formation of the republic of the United States, the slave revolt in *Saint Domingue* (Haiti), the immigration into the island because of the wars of independence in Latin America and the political and economic policies provided by the *Real Cédula* (Royal Decree) of 1815, were factors that stimulated the socioeconomic development in Ponce.

On one hand, the ships from the northeastern coast of the new United States of America eagerly set sail to purchase the sugar products of Cuba and Puerto Rico, turning the young nation into one of the main buyers of Ponce's muscovado. The presence of American traders at Ponce's port skyrocketed during the first decades of the nineteenth century. In November 1810, of the twenty-six 26 ships that officially anchored at Playa de Ponce, seven were British and the rest were Spanish.⁵ During the 1830's, however, two hundred and fifty-six (256) ships were logged. Seventy-six (76) of them from the United States.⁶ By mid-nineteenth century, the United States was Ponce's main supplier and buyer. The commerce between the US and Ponce exceeded that between the southern city and Spain.

By 1789, the slave revolution in the French *Saint Domingue* provoked a massive sugar shortage in the world's markets, rapidly raising sugar prices. The situation stimulated the production of Ponce's sugar haciendas. It also brought a significant French migration to the city. Escaping from the social uprising in *Saint Domingue*, French emigrants played a crucial role in the development of the sugar production in Ponce, not only as landlords, but as efficient administrators of large sugar haciendas in Ponce as well.⁷

During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the flow of immigrants increased due to the wars of independence in Latin America. An impressive wave of *Leales* (loyalists) abandoned the new republics and found refuge in Cuba and Puerto Rico, Spain's last two

⁴ *Memoria de D. Alexandro O'Reylly sobre la Isla de Puerto Rico, Año 1765*. Véase, Eugenio Fernández Méndez, *Crónicas de Puerto Rico. Desde la conquista hasta nuestros días (1493-1955)*. Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, 1981, 239-269.

⁵ Archivo General de Puerto Rico (AGPR). Fondo: Gobernadores Españoles Serie: Ponce Caja 526.

⁶ Pedro Tomás de Córdova, *Memorias geográficas, históricas, económicas y estadísticas de la Isla de Puerto Rico*. Tomo II. Año de 1831. Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1968, 256.

⁷ Ivette Pérez Vega, *El Cielo y la tierra en sus manos. Los grandes propietarios de Ponce, 1816-1830*. Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1985. The French migration came not only from Haiti, but also from the French Caribbean, the French Louisiana and from the European continent.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number E Page 8

colonies in the Caribbean. Ponce received a significant amount of these emigrants, particularly from Venezuela.⁸

The emigration to Puerto Rico also grew during the initial years of the nineteenth century as a result of the public policy enacted by the *Real Cédula de Gracia* of 1815. The royal decree, approved on August 10, 1815, by King Fernando VII, authorized Cuba and Puerto Rico to establish commercial relations with any country that had good diplomatic relations with Spain. The decree established that foreigners, as long as they were Catholic, could settle on the islands, with their property and capital, including slaves. On average, as part of the incentives policies of the decree, new residents were offered six acres of land for every family member and three additional acres for every slave. After five years, the new residents could acquire the Spanish citizenship and permanent titles to their lands. Once naturalized, they were also permitted to become traders (an economic activity strictly reserved for *peninsulares*). The *Real Cédula* endorsed free commerce between the islands and other Spanish colonies as well.⁹ In Ponce, these emigrant coupled the highest levels of the social pyramid.¹⁰ The new residents brought their monies, human resources, technical knowledge and commercial connections with the foreign investment capital. These new players were essential in Ponce's insertion into the vortex of the capitalist world commerce.

During the first four decades of the nineteenth-century, Ponce's economy made a definitive turn towards sugar production, with all its implications: dependence in the sugar world market, intensive use of slave labor and the concentration of economic power in the hands of the landlords. Ponce's fertile coastal lands were seised by the *Saccharum Officinarum*. In 1776, as stated by Abbad y Lasierra, sugar production in Ponce was contained in about 250 acres.¹¹ By 1813, 351 acres were dedicated to sugarcane with an output of 25-ton of

⁸ One of the most representative moments of this process occurred on October 15, 1821, when after the surrender of the Loyalists to the Revolutionary forces in Cumaná, Venezuela, a garrison of 4 generals, 666 soldiers and another 599 people arrived Ponce. The majority set up residence in Ponce. Op. Cit., Tomo III, 437.

⁹ AGPR. Documento de la Real Cédula de Gracias de 1815.

¹⁰ Francisco A. Scarano, *Inmigración y estructura de clases: Los hacendados de Ponce, 1815-1845*. Véase, Francisco A. Scarano, editor, *Inmigración y clases sociales en el Puerto Rico del siglo XIX*. Ediciones Huracán, 1981, 21-66.

¹¹ Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra, *Historia Geográfica*, 328.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 9

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

muscovado.¹² By 1821, six years after the *Real Cédula de Gracia* was put into effect, more than one thousand (1,000) acres were dedicated to sugar and production reached 1,350 tons.¹³

In his monumental work, *Memorias geográficas, históricas, económicas y estadísticas de la isla de Puerto Rico*, Tomas de Córdova described 1830's Ponce as follows:

*"The land of this region, particularly the lowlands or meadows, are very fertile, to the point of being productive after a year of drought. The progress it has had in agriculture is extraordinary, as almost all its plains are sugarcane plantations, with very good sugar mills, elegant and expensive factories and steam and water engines, which also serve for the cane grinding, as a sawmill, for storage of rice and other grains. This region is far from infancy regarding agriculture."*¹⁴

Ponce' strong economic life during the 19th century translated into a parallel physical development of the urban center. The wealthy citizens, who had dominated the residential space in the urban center since the town's establishment, reconfigured said center from their class perspective. Tomás de Córdova indicated that, *"the neighbors search for comforts, the origin of abundance in many proprietors. The rest and luxury that riches afford are evident and generally the taste for comforts and pleasures can be found among them."*¹⁵ The city's rich commercial activity was oriented towards the export of agricultural commodities produced in Ponce and surrounding municipalities. As Ponce became the center of this commercial network, Playa de Ponce became a significant commercial hub. *La Marina* (Playa de Ponce) went into a process of change and development parallel to the traditional urban center.

In 1804, the Spanish government, following Alejandro O'Reilly' suggestions, authorized the opening of several ports in various coastal towns on the island, Ponce's among them. However, the official port at Playa de Ponce was not operational until 1812. The ward developed two miles south of the town center, connected by a country road, which during the early 19th century began to be called *Camino Real* or *Camino de La Marina*. This road from the town center to La Playa, described by Abbad y Lasierra in 1778 as a very difficult, poorly maintained

¹² AGPR. Fondo: Gobernadores Españoles Serie: Asuntos políticos y civiles Caja 11, "Estado que manifiesta las producciones agrarias del pueblo de Ponce, 1813".

¹³ Francisco A. Scarano, *Inmigración y estructura de clases*, 26.

¹⁴ Pedro Tomás de Córdova, *Memorias geográficas*, Tomo II, 252-253. Translation is ours.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 261.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 10

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

road, transformed by 1828 into “a *delicious transit and comfortable stroll for the people on foot, and a first-rate road for traffic.*”¹⁶ By 1831, as described by Córdoba, “a *colorful settlement was forming at Playa, made up of warehouses and commercial houses, in what will shortly become a new town, barely half a league from the principal town.*”¹⁷

The main port facilities were established in the eastern side of the *río Portugués*’s mouth, as the river met the Caribbean Sea. By the early 1820’s, a settlement had already developed around the port area, as can be seen in the French naturalist Augusto Pleé’s drawing (**Fig. 4**).

18



Le Port sur la ville de Ponce, à Porto-Rico.

Figure 4. The port area in Playa de Ponce, as depicted by the naturalist Augusto Pleé of the port area in Playa de Ponce

¹⁶ Ibid. 253

¹⁷ Ibid. 253.

¹⁸ In February 1821, French naturalist Auguste Plée (1787-1825) arrived in Puerto Rico on a mission sponsored by the Natural History Museum of Paris, the French Navy, and the French Minister of the Interior. After spending a few weeks in Puerto Rico, he left for Philadelphia where he continued his trip along the northeast coast of the United States and part of the Canadian coast. In September of the same year, he was back in Puerto Rico and apparently remained on the island until November. In his notebook, Augusto Plée made at least 59 drawings dedicated to Puerto Rican themes. Of those drawings, 56 are panoramic views of towns or architectural drawings of spaces or urban landmarks of the island.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 11

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Life on the coast of Ponce was hazardous during the early years of the settlement. In 1760, concerned about the safety of life and property, the military authorities built a small fort known as *Fuerte San José*. To defend the township from the incursion of buccaneers and control the frequent contraband, San José Fort had seven cannons mounted in battery, under the care of a detachment of artillerymen and an infantry detachment (**Fig. 5**). Directly facing the Caribbean Sea, the fort was erected at the future intersection of Calle Comercio and Calle *Amargura* (later renamed Calle Alfonso XII) (**Fig. 6**). Towards the end of the eighteenth-century, an urban development grew around the fort.

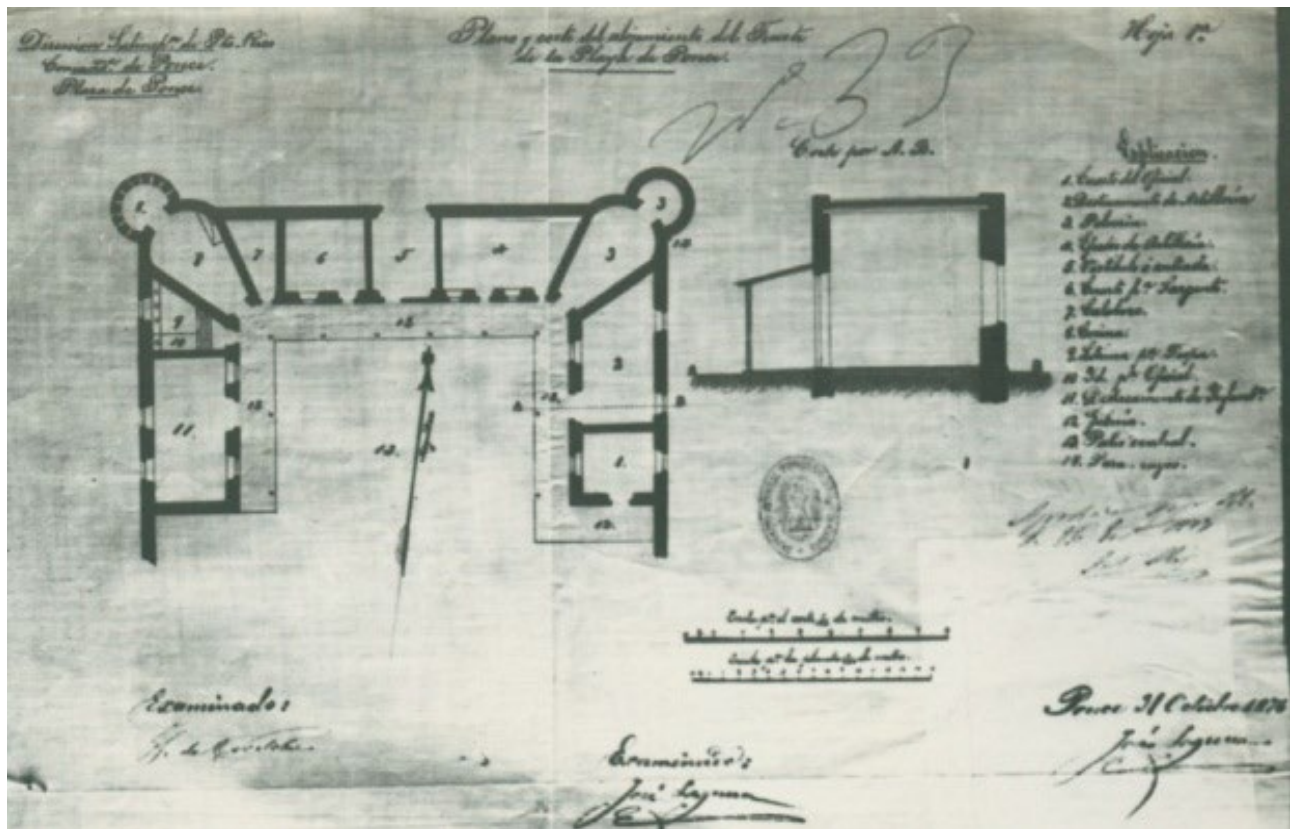


Figure 5. Fuerte San José's plan.¹⁹

¹⁹ AGPR. Archivo Fotográfico. Plano y corte del alojamiento del Fuerte de la Playa de Ponce, 31 Octubre de 1776.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 12

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



Figure 6. Partial view of San José's walls, with U.S. troops in the vicinity, 1898.²⁰

Even with the presence of San José, there are continuous references in historical documents to the dangers encountered by the residents of the sector, in particular, to those who had established their haciendas and living quarters on the coastline.²¹ In 1819, the *Cabildo* (city hall) complained to the central government about problems with buccaneers scavenging, attacking and kidnapping people from the coastal settlements. The *Cabildo* indicated that these pirates operated from the islet of *Caja de Muertos*. Exemplifying the situation, a report on April 27, 1820, stated that, at around three o'clock in the morning, twenty (20) men from the pirate ship called *El Buytre*, disembarked in *Bocachica*, and kidnapped naturalized foreigner Francisco Dijols, his wife, one little girl and three black slaves. Around noon, the pirates threw Dijols and his daughter on land. Sometime in the afternoon they returned Dijols' wife. The

²⁰ The San José Fort was closed before the Spanish withdrawal. As indicated by Eduardo Newmann Gandía, the fort was demolished as ordered by the *Asamblea Legislativa* de Puerto Rico on March 14, 1907, and the land was used to extend and improved the urban grid of *Alfonso XII* Street. Véase, Eduardo Newmann Gandía, *Verdadera y auténtica historia de la ciudad de Ponce desde sus primitivos tiempos hasta la época contemporánea*. Abril de 1913. Foto, AGPR. Archivo Fotográfico.

²¹ AGPR, Fondo: Gobernadores Españoles, Serie: Ponce, Caja 526.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number E Page 13

slaves, as saleable commodities, were not returned. Under these circumstances it's no surprise that many residents settled around the fort.

For many years, the fort was the dominant edification in the area, imposing its name upon the sector. Playa de Ponce was known as *Barrio del Fuerte* way into the 1840s. The oldest drawing showing the ward's layout is precisely from the 19th century's fourth decade (**Fig. 7**). Sketched in 1841, besides the road to the urban center (*Camino del Pueblo*), there are three streets properly identified: *Calle del Comercio*, *Calle de la Virtud* (later named *Padre Noel Avenue*) and *Calle de la Amargura* (later known as *Calle Alfonso XII*).



Figure 7. Barrio del Fuerte, 1841.²²

The 1841 blueprint, prepared by surveyor Bartolomé Turpeaud, also shows certain projected streets, like the future *Colón Street* (west of and parallel to *Calle de la Amargura*) and *Mirasol Street*, running north and parallel to *Calle Comercio*.

²² Archivo Histórico Municipal de Ponce (AHMP). Caja S-383-6, Plano del Barrio del Fuerte, 1841.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 14

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Turpeaud’s outline has been used to sustain the area's underdevelopment. However, an assessment of the neighborhood based solely on the drawing is misleading. Turpeaud’s drawing was commissioned by members of City-Hall, interested in promoting the population growth in *La Marina*. To that effect, they petitioned the central government for authorization to sell public lands to private citizens. The councilmen submitted Turpeaud’ sketch, showing “official” settlers of the *Marina* area. They also submitted a list of people that occupied public land without permission. The lots occupied by this last group do not show in the 1841 sketch. The actual occupation of the area was larger than what the sketch reflected.

According to the town council’s list, there were fifty-eight (58) buildings just around the *San José* Fort. The military authorities asked the council to remove these constructions and to prohibit any buildings, even wood or masonry structures, less than 200 yards from the fort, whose battery contained dangerous explosives.²³

Class interests, official urban planning and commercial logistics combined to conformed Playa de Ponce’s original physical arrangement and lay-out. As word spread of the Cabildo’s development plan for Playa, the city council was flooded with requests from a wide range of Ponce’s social spectrum, from the commercial elite and *hacendados*, to low-income working-class citizens. Applicants like Fernando Overmann, Salvador Arenas, Ramón Farrats, Juan Pratts, Esteban Domenech and others, representatives of the commercial and agricultural interests that already dominated Ponce’s economy, were handed land concessions of commercial and logistic value. These names were associated with the firm’s houses and warehouses that eventually dominated the urban landscape of the port area.

²³ AHMP. Ibid. Documentation revised for this work suggests that the Ponce town council heard the request, and the immediate neighbors of the fort were removed from the vicinity. Towards the end of 1890, some residents requested the return or restitution for the land and property they lost because of being removed from the fort’s area. After 1898, these requests continued to be presented to the new American authorities after they took possession of the island. This same documentation indicates that the prohibition to build in the vicinity of Fort San José was not enforced after 1885, suggesting the latter as the date of the dismantling of the fort’s artillery pieces. See, AGPR, Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Obras Municipales, Caja 290.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 15

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

On the other hand, petitioners like Catalina Rodríguez, who asked to “*purchase a small hut*” to live with her family “*consisting of two small children*” or the widow María González, who had a similar request, were handed plots in the *Salistral* area, a swampy, low-land meadow on the east bank of the uncontrollable *Portugués River*.²⁴

An increase in the port’s commercial activities drove the official authorities to establish a presence in the sector. Nothing was more representative of this overseeing interest than the construction of the *Aduana* building at La Marina (**Fig. 8**). Although the Custom office was officially established in 1813, the administration building remained around the town’s main plaza area, six kilometers away from the port area. The construction of the Custom’s building in Playa clearly spoke of the sector’s increase in significance.



Figure 8. Partial view of the Aduana, the oldest custom building in continuous use in Puerto Rico.

The neoclassic customs’ headquarters (*Edificio de la Aduana*) was built on *Bonaire Street*, directly in front of the wharf that served as official port-call. Finished in 1841, the *Aduana* was a two-level masonry building. The top floor was allotted as a residence for the administrator,

²⁴ AHMP. Caja S-383-6. Véase también, AGPR, Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Propiedad Pública, Sub-serie: Ponce, Caja 179.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number E Page 16

the accountant, the warehouse guards, as well as the house staff. The first floor was divided into seven compartments: office areas, two warehouses for merchandise storage and dispatch, a guardhouse, and a telegraph station. It also had a water well and an interior patio with a latrine.²⁵

In a way, the *Aduana* displaced the *San José* Fort as the iconographic landmark of the region. The barrio was no longer a far-away place, open to pirate attacks and in need of military protection. The re-location of the customs facility from the town center to Playa de Ponce signified the recognition of the ward’s new orientation as a vital place for the growing of Ponce’s commerce. The sector was no longer the *Barrio del Fuerte*, but Playa de Ponce or La Marina de Ponce.

Tragically, the significant development of Playa de Ponce during the first decades of the 19th century came to a sudden stop. In March 1845, four years after the construction of the *Aduana*, a terrible fire lashed through the sector, destroying over 80% of the neighborhood.²⁶ Because of a long drought, strong ocean winds and the absence of a fire department, the fire burned for many days. The incident paralyzed Ponce’s economy and a good part of the commerce in the island’s southern region, since Playa de Ponce was already an important hub for the international export and import for the municipalities in the district. The fire forced the authorities to re-evaluate the urban planning regulations of the important sector. After 1845, new policies were implemented in the neighborhood, with both short and far-reaching consequences.

²⁵ The *Aduana* building was included in the National Register of Historic Places on February 10, 1988.

²⁶ Eduardo Newmann Gandía, *Verdadera y auténtica historia*, 235.

United States Department of the Interior
 National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 17

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1845-1898

The 1845 fire and the loss of more than 80% of the built resources was a crossroads landmark in the urban development of Playa de Ponce. As Newmann Gandía stated in his work, *“all the urban progress attained by La Marina during the third decade of the past century (referring to the nineteenth century) and beginning of the fourth decade, was destroyed in the horrific fire that turned the town to ashes.”*²⁷ The incident motivated an immediate response from the local and state authorities. For example, the central government ordered the establishment of fire departments not only in Playa de Ponce, but also in others port areas like Mayagüez, Aguadilla, Arecibo and Humacao.

More significant was the application upon Playa de Ponce of a new urban plan, that ended-up creating a new grid and a new morphology. The city officials came to realize that Playa’s development could not be left to spontaneous practices. The economic impact on the southern region because of the paralysis of Playa de Ponce due to 1845 fire, showed that the importance of the neighborhood far exceeded its natural limits.

By 1848, a plan was articulated to control Playa de Ponce’s development, making the barrio, more than likely, the first suburban ward in the island to be develop according to an oversighted plan (**Fig. 9**) The Camino Real, running north to south, was used as the main axis to functionally divide the ward into two sections: a residential area and an industrial area. The area west of the Camino Real and east of the Portugués river was designated as the residential zone, while the industrial/commercial district was to be developed east of the very same road. Each section was assigned a building code. In the commercial zone, in particular in the area surrounding the wharf and the surviving building of the Aduana, all constructions, with no exceptions, had to be of solid, long-lasting materials. In the residential area, in accord with the social status and economic means of its residents, wood became the acceptable standard. Any wooden residence that survived the 1845 fire within the now industrial zone, had to be removed to the residential area, west of the Camino Real.²⁸

²⁷ *Ibíd.*

²⁸ Ricardo Miranda Pérez, *Nuevo uso para un viejo centro: Playa Ponce*. Tesis sometida como requisito para optar al grado de Maestría en Arquitectura. Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras, 1996.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 18

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 9. Playa's urban plan, 1848.²⁹



Portugués River

Fuerte San José

Camino Real

The 1848 plan above contains certain elements worth highlighting, such as the rectangular form of the blocks nearby the wharf and along the coastline. The alignment responded both to a functional perspective, as to the topography of the site. The elongated blocks presented a better layout for the construction of large warehouses. Another point to consider is the over-imposition of the block's arrangement on the land occupied by Fort San José, strongly suggesting the interest of the municipal authorities in dismantling the fort to extend the urban grid, an action that took place in the first years of the twentieth century. Also, very important in the drawing is the grid-alignment of the streets, with pre-assigned numbered lots west of the *Camino Real*, the new residential area that was to be occupied mostly by members of the working-class.

²⁹ AGPR. Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Obras Municipales, Ponce. Caja 292, Legajo 54-G.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 19

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

In the following years, the authorities used this plan to regulate not only the large constructions in the wharf area, but also the humble dwellings in the residential zone. A very illustrative example that shows the consistency in the use of the 1848 urban plan can be seen when in 1863, Miguel Pastor Marquez requested permission to build a house on what was already known as Colón Street in Playa de Ponce. The application was approved, with certain municipal indications that prove revealing. During construction, the main façade could not stray from the one already approved by the Municipality. The house was to be located precisely in the lot assigned to the new resident, in accord with the 1848 plan. The house could not be set back creating a front yard, but properly aligned with the sidewalk and the houses on either side. The new resident was responsible for the construction of the sidewalk in front of his house, and it had to be leveled in such a way that it did not form a step with the adjacent sidewalk. Because of the house proximity to the sidewalk, nothing could protrude more than six inches from its alignment on the house’s first floor. In addition, the slope of the roof had to incline towards the house’s rear or side, so the water from the roof would not spill into the street, but into the side or backyard.³⁰

These 19th century polices left a distinctive legacy in Playa de Ponce. For example, rows of modest wooden houses, lacking front yards, perfectly aligned with the next-door houses, with roofs inclined toward the side or rear, still a common sight in the residential area, west of Camino Real.

On the eastern side of the old Camino Real (today’s PR-123) or Avenida Eugenio Maria de Hostos, (the commercial/industrial zone) the 1848’s codes left a similar legacy. Rows of large, nineteen and early twentieth century, brick, masonry, stones and concrete, industrial and commercial type warehouses, fully occupying the elongated lots formed by the 1848 plan, along the old wharf area (**Fig. 10**).

³⁰ AGPR. Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Obras Municipales, Sub-serie: Ponce, Caja 290.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 20

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



Figure 10. Partial view of the residential (above) and industrial zones. The resources show the construction materials and alignment in accord with the 1848 plan. (Photos: Juan Llanes Santos)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number E Page 21

The application of these policies in Playa de Ponce show that the municipal authorities considered the ward, even though it was six kilometers away, an important extension of the main town. After the 1845's fire, due to the importance of the ward to the southern commerce, armed with a new plan for its development, the rehabilitation of the barrio took a fast pace. Even with the decline of sugar production in 1850, the commercial houses in Ponce maintained a very profitable economic activity as they capitalize on the rise of the coffee industry, which came to dominate the national production during the 19th century last decades. A substantial part of the coffee produced in the southern region was channeled to the international market through the port at *la Marina*. By 1888, Ponce exported 8,654,482 pounds of coffee; Mayagüez, 5,864,984; San Juan, 5,271,541 and Aguadilla, 1,774,874.³¹ A few years later, Ponce displaced San Juan as the main export hub on the island. In 1890, 33.2 percent of the national production was exported through la Playa port, while San Juan exported 21.2 percent.³²

The economic growth of Ponce's commerce reflected upon Playa de Ponce in many ways, pushing the area ahead of other sectors in the municipality. By 1876, the well-known writer Ramon Marín defined Playa de Ponce as, "*the most important barrio or district of those outside the main town.*"³³ The editorials of the nineteenth-century reporter, published in Ponce's newspaper "*La Crónica*" during 1877-78 allows us to picture Playa de Ponce during this period. The barrio was connected to the town center by the Camino Real, now a first-class road as part of the mighty Carretera Central, which served as an umbilical cord between the two urban focal points. Along this road, a constant flow of merchandise and passengers would travel to and from the port, using a private company that had about sixty transports for rent for daily passenger transport, besides the common traffic of more than one hundred and forty private vehicles. During this time, along the Camino Real, a residential development emerged, with

³¹ Nuria Mercado Ávila, *Plan de revitalización para la zona histórica del poblado de la Playa de Ponce*. Proyecto presentado a la Escuela Graduada de Planificación para la obtención del grado de Maestría en Planificación, 1997, 29-30.

³² AGPR. Gobierno de Puerto Rico. Estadística general del comercio exterior o balances mercantiles. 1895.

³³ Ramón Marín, *La Villa de Ponce considerada en tres distintas épocas. Estudio histórico, descriptivo y estadístico, hasta finales del año 1876*. Editoriales publicados en el periódico "La Crónica", por su Director Ramón Marín. Ponce, Establecimiento Tipográfico "El Vapor", 1877. See, Ramón Marín, *Obras Completas*, Ponce, Puerto Rico, 1989, 346.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number E Page 22

beautiful mansions with gardens and fences adorning their façades.

By 1876, the population of La Playa was approximately 2,207 people and the district had nine built roads, four in the process of opening and about four alleys. The area also had about 163 buildings distributed as follows: 18 single-story warehouses, 5 houses (lower floors of masonry and upper wooden floors), 7 wooden two-story houses and 133 one-story wood homes.³⁴ The large warehouses dominated the port’s landscape. These were built of brick and masonry, as was required by municipal regulations. The roofs, however, were made from wood and undulated metal (zinc).

By 1876, the year Marín made his description, Playa was an effervescent hub of international economic activity. During that year, two hundred and thirteen (213) ships, two hundred (200) cabotage ships, one hundred and forty-five (145) steam vessels and 1,755 passengers were registered as entering the port. Playa de Ponce was a fixed destination in the itinerary of foreign ships serving as postal carriers between the foreign countries and their local representatives. The Spanish postal steam transport arrived at Playa three times a month; the British mail boat, four times a month; the German mailboat, twice a month and the U. S. postal vessel would visit once a month. Playa was also an important communications center, with two submarine telegraph lines. One of these lines, inaugurated on January 20, 1873, connected Ponce to the British colony of Jamaica; the second cable, which started transmissions on May 16, 1875, was a direct line to the Danish Island of St. Croix.

Ponce and its Marina were the vortexes of a commercial import/export hub that definitively placed the island within the global capitalist system. In the year described by Ramón Marín, the value of Ponce’s commercial imports was \$954,977 with the United States; \$748,443 with England; \$745,982 with Spain; \$152,370 with Germany and \$107,210 with France, among other markets. On the other hand, the commercial exports value was \$596,740 with the United States; \$194,719 with England; \$379,685 with the British colonies and \$13,711 with Spain,

³⁴ Ibid., 348. The data offered by Marín as to the number of residential units built seems to correspond to those reported in the census of wealth that the authorities used to impose taxes. These census usually did not indicate the buildings such as huts or similar structures that did not contribute to the treasury, which makes the number of residential units in La Playa much larger than the one indicated by the reporter.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 23

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

among others.³⁵

The lucrative commercial activity in Ponce brought forth an increase in the vigilant presence of the state and municipal commands in La Playa, which translated into a greater output of official buildings. The state presence was already evident in the *Aduana* building (1841) and in the currently underused *San José* Fort. In 1861, another official edifice was added: the Harbor Master Building. The need to build a sturdy building to house the Harbor Master's offices was first addressed in 1857. That year, the engineer Timoteo Lubelza, presented a letter to the town council indicating that, "*in important maritime populations it is indispensable to give the Marine Authority the greatest respect, much more if the port is busy with foreign vessels, like the one in Ponce.*"³⁶

The Harbor Master Building, started in 1860, and formally delivered to the authorities in 1862, was located west of the *Aduana* (**Fig. 11**). It was a brick and masonry, two-story building, with two facades, one facing Comercio Street and one towards the bay, built at a cost of 6,000 pesos. It had its own dock, with a lighthouse 44 feet high and visible for seven (7) miles.

Figure 11. Harbor Master's Building and its dock, Playa de Ponce, c.1898.



³⁵ Ramón Marín, *La Villa de Ponce considerada en tres distintas épocas*, 412-413.

³⁶ AGPR. Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Edificios Públicos, Caja 598a, Legajo 55. Timoteo Lubelza was the author of the original design of the Captaincy building.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 24

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Another official building related to state supervision at Playa was the *tinglado*. Built in 1866, the *tinglado* was the official warehouse where all the imported and exported merchandise was stocked, before its delivery to local businesses or loaded on ships for export. The *tinglado* was near the *Aduana* building, precisely where the *Casa del Veterano* is located today. It was built over a masonry base, with a double brick rowlock and a hydraulic mortar. Sixteen all-iron columns sustained the roof of the same metal, supported over granite ashlar. The concrete floor had Hamburg tiles (**Fig. 12**).³⁷

Figure 12. Partial view of the *tinglado* (left) adjacent to the *Aduana*. Note the activity on *Comercio* Street and the row of masonry warehouses on the northern side of the road, c. 1898.³⁸



³⁷ Ramón Marín, *La Villa de Ponce considerada en tres distintas épocas*, 369.

³⁸ AGPR. Archivo Fotográfico. Foto: C.P. 928, Tinglado Playa de Ponce, 1898. The building that today occupies the area of the *tinglado*, the *Casa del Veterano*, has a structural similarity to the original building. In conversations with member of the *Casa del Veterano*, it was indicated that during intervention processes they have found materials from the old *tinglado* structure.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 25

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

The same commercial activity that promoted the increase in official government oversight, also encouraged a growth in the working class, as seaport work demanded abundant manpower. The port in Ponce lacked sufficient depth to allow large vessels to anchor directly at the pier. Ships anchored at sea and were loaded and unloaded using barges. This created the need for skilled laborers, from longshoremen to barge operators, even workers specialized in the repair of wooden vessels, carpenters, and many others (**Fig. 13**). Also, the lack of a mechanized transportation system between the city and La Playa, until the 1880's, made it necessary to use wagon drivers to move supplies (and passengers) to and from *La Marina*.



Figure 13. Dock at *La Marina*, directly in front of the *Aduana*, with ships anchored at distance, 1898.³⁹

³⁹ AGPR. Archivo Fotográfico. Fotos: C.P 925/ 926/ 1505.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 26

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Besides the work directly related to maritime activity, Playa closed the nineteenth century with an impressive diversify economy that demanded a constant presence of labor. Even with the decline of sugar prices in the international markets during the last decades of the nineteenth century, the sweet plant was a constant and immediate reality for the people at Playa. Viewed from any cardinal perspective, the sugarcane fields were the dominant presence in the landscape, as it shows in the 1884 Spanish Army Topographical Commission' sketch (**Fig. 14**). Besides, the proximity of the great Caribbean provided the opportunity in developing a labor force associated to the fishing industry.

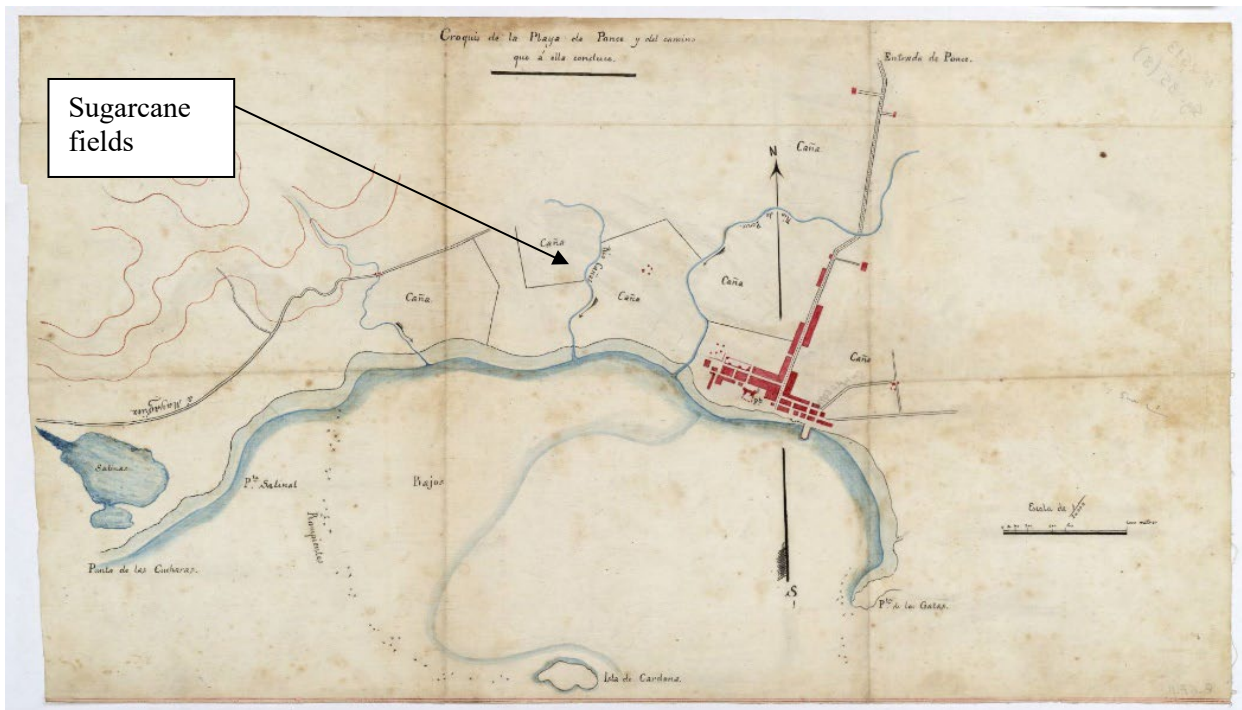


Figure 14. Sketch of la Playa, 1884.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Documentación de Puerto Rico en el Archivo Cartográfico y de Estudios Geográficos del Centro Geográfico del Ejército. Croquis y datos estadísticos del pueblo de Ponce y su Playa. Código de Referencia: 8.67.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 27

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

The Topographical Commission’s sketches are revealing. The drawings show an urban growth superior to the one described by Ramón Marín in 1876. The 1884 drawing shows a clear alignment of about 15 streets. The blocks’ organization and the street’s alignment were consonant with the 1848 plan, showing the consistency in policy in maintaining the established reticule. The blocks surrounding the wharf maintained the elongated layout. The *Camino Real* also presented significant construction along its route, creating a lineal neighborhood, lacking depth.

By the close of the 19th century, official buildings and large warehouses dominated the built landscape in the port area. From being simple, open, utilitarian buildings, the warehouses of the turn of the century began to be designed in the neoclassical style. This did not only reproduce the official style in vogue. It also showed an interest in applying an aesthetic vision to an extremely industrial and utilitarian space. The iconic landscape of the great warehouses from late 19th century and early 20th century continues to be the dominant backdrop in the old harbor area today. Many of these warehouses are still in use, as seen in the following images (Fig. 15).



Figure 15. Left, 1910 photo of a warehouse in the vicinity of the Custom building. Right, same building used a private business known as *la Cueva del Pirata*, 2021.⁴¹

⁴¹ AGPR, Archivo Fotográfico, C.P. 930. The building’s cartographical footprint is identifiable since 1858. See, AHMP, Caja S-389-03.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 28

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

The rise of Playa de Ponce in importance, meant that the ecclesiastical officialdom also wanted a permanent representation in *La Marina*. The catholic temples, as part of Puerto Rico’s traditional development, were usually located within the main urban centers. From here, the clergy, mostly *peninsulares* with very little *criollo* representation, provided their spiritual services to the near-by parishioners. For those farther away, services were sporadic and usually reserved for special occasions when the parishioners would travel “to the town”. The fact that Playa had its own parochial church, even though relatively close to the urban center and with good ground transportation, shows the area’s significance within the municipal, state and religious officiality.

The construction of the Catholic temple in Playa, dedicated to the *Virgen del Carmen* (patron saint of the sea and sailors), took place on a plot donated by a private citizen, Guillermo Cabrera. The plans and the construction work itself were directed by architect Juan Bértoly. The building, begun in 1876, was inaugurated on March 8, 1883 (**Fig. 16**).⁴²

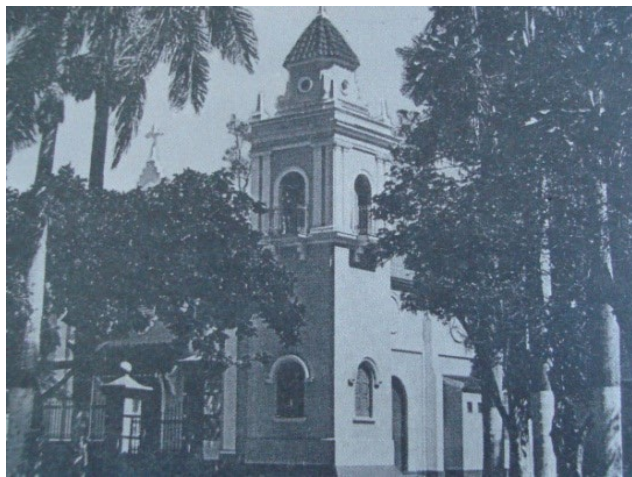


Figure 16. *Iglesia del Carmen*, Playa Ponce, 1940.



Iglesia del Carmen, 2021.⁴³

⁴² Luis Fortuño Janeiro, *Álbum histórico de Ponce*. Ponce, Puerto Rico, 1963.

⁴³ In the 2021 photo, part or the parish house (extreme right) can be seen. Well known Architect Francisco Porrata Doria designed the parish in 1928. AHMP, Sección de Planos, Plano 107-1928.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 29

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

A plaza built around the church seemed to have the social and architectural intention of becoming the center of the ward, recreating the historical pattern initiated in Puerto Rico during the sixteen century, when the churches and the town squares were located and dominated the very center of the urban core. Immediately, the *Iglesia de la Virgen del Carmen* became one of the dominant landmarks in the sector, just like Fort San José and the Aduana, becoming the last piece representing the trilogy of power in Playa de Ponce: the State, the Military and the Catholic Church.

Meanwhile, the construction in the residential zone occupied by the working class, reflected the socio-economic condition of the group. The use of wood and corrugated metal for the roofs (at the best) was the constant in these houses. Due to the Portugués River’s destructive force and frequent floods, combined with the natural humidity of the soil, the houses were elevated on stilts for their protection. The residential buildings constructed by the working class towards the end of the nineteenth century marked an architectural tradition still visible in the neighborhood today. If we could designate a style as Vernacular, it would be the one developed in Playa de Ponce.

As previously stated, many construction patterns found in the residential area today are part of the 19th and early 20th century building legacy. An example can be found in the traditional use of a simple front parapet as part of the house’s main facade. This parapet, usually of bricks and masonry, provided a mean to align the houses, creating an appearance of continuity. Considering the frequent floods cause by the Portugués River, the structural element could also had served as a containment wall. As the houses were elevated on stilts, the wall shields passersby from looking into the empty space between the houses’ floors and the bare soil, providing a homogeneous esthetic among the dwellings. This structural component continued to be a common element visible in many houses in Playa de Ponce (**Fig. 17**).

Figure 17

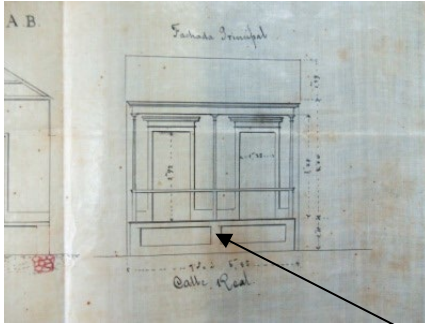
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

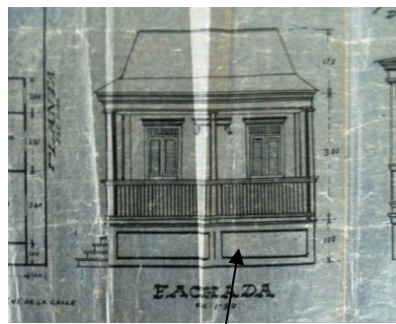
Section number E Page 30

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Plan for a house in Playa, 1889. ⁴⁴



Plan for a house in Playa, 1924. ⁴⁵



House in Playa, 2021.



Front wall

By the end of the 19th century, Playa de Ponce reached a significant socio-economic development, which translated into a parallel urban development. In 1895, author Ramón Morel Campos described Playa de Ponce:

“La Marina, important town located about one league from the city, has an area populated by elegant and pleasant constructions, most of them masonry depositories that serve as fruit storage, and where the high commerce gathers. It has a parish house, with jurisdiction in other barrios in the city; the Master Harbor, the Royal Customs, a fort or battery, the Society for the Rescue of the Shipwrecked, its beautiful tinglado and the permanent residence of the authorities of the ocean. The topography is beautiful, the streets are well aligned, and the avenues are lovely.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ AHMP. Sección de Planos. Plano 02-1889.

⁴⁵ AHMP. Sección de Planos. Plano 21-1924.

⁴⁶ Ramón Morel Campos. *Guía local de comercio de la ciudad de Ponce. Apuntes referentes a la fundación de la misma, datos sobre su administración y noticias importantes, seguido de un ramillete literario y anuncios recomendados.* Ponce, Imprenta “El Telégrafo”, 1895, 25.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 31

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

The port facilities, combined with the agricultural and manufacturing activities, created within Playa de Ponce the conditions where the social aspirations and contradictions of the State, the Church, the bourgeois sector and the working class, on whose shoulders all the previous scaffolding was sustained, converged.

Daily life, in the hours of agricultural, industrial and port activity, must have been bustling. The continuous presence of foreign ships in the port must have caused a deafening linguistic multiplicity in the area, with shouts of orders to load and unload goods were given in different languages.

Playa de Ponce closed the 19th century with a solid commercial and industrial infrastructure. The neighborhood had wholesale and retail grocery stores, pharmacies, bakeries, factories of various kinds, two telegraph stations and a post office. The neighborhood also had a whole complex that provided social services to its residents in various forms: church, cemetery, schools and a workers' cooperative. The social development was also accompanied by the offerings of the pleasure industry, with services ranging from taverns to brothels.⁴⁷

In summary, towards the end of the nineteenth century Playa de Ponce achieved a dynamic urban development, unparalleled by any other wards in Ponce. With a unique urban plan developed just for Playa de Ponce, the barrio was functionally divided with clearly identified zones. On one side was the port area, with its large warehouses made of stone, bricks and masonry, with wood allowed as roofing material, designed mostly in a neoclassical style. On the other hand, the residential zone, dominated by dwellings associated with the working class. A lineal residential area linked to Ponce's bourgeoisie also developed along the *Camino Real*, between Playa de Ponce and the urban center.

The closing of the century found in Ponce a cosmopolitan city, with a social amalgamation of wealthy Creole, peninsular and naturalized foreign families, intertwined through commercial and matrimonial networks. These groups imposed their class character upon the city, both in its political structure and in its social representation, with the city's

⁴⁷ AGPR. Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Obras Municipales, Ponce. Caja 92, Legajo 127. *Reglamento de higiene de la prostitución para Ponce y Mayagüez*, 1895. Chapter II, article V of this ruling indicates the officially designated location of all the brothels in the municipality. Playa de Ponce's brothel was in a sector known as *Punta Brava*.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 32

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

architecture being one of its most impressive class representations. Parallel to this, the end of the 19th century found a *Marina* that surpassed San Juan in export business, with a worker’s district embedded in its vicinity. This sector imparted its dominant character to the social nature of the region, including its architectural style, construction materials and structural development.

Both groups, however, were about to change, both in character and class representation, with the changes that shook the island as a result of the Spanish-American War of 1898.

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1898-1960

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the city of Ponce enjoyed a privileged position on the island, considered by many the “alternate capital” of Puerto Rico. A powerful bourgeoisie formed in the city, projecting their dominant class character in diverse ways, including their architectural representation. During the same period, La Playa or *Marina*, center of the maritime activities in Ponce, had generated its own class idiosyncrasy, in accordance with the dominant presence of the working class.

The morphology of the neighborhood was characterized by a functional organization where on the one hand there were the elongated lots occupied by the large warehouses of the port area and a residential area dominated by the working class. There was also a variety of resources associated with the municipal and state administrative branch, the ecclesiastical power and the military apparatus.

Additionally, towards the end of the nineteenth century, an unorganized settlement of a sector in the barrio, later known as Puerto Viejo, was formed by workers and their families, developing a residential area outside the official reticle. Just like in the traditional residential area, Puerto Viejo featured the “vernacular” wooden houses, raised on stilts to prevent the soil’s natural humidity (**Fig. 18**)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 33

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

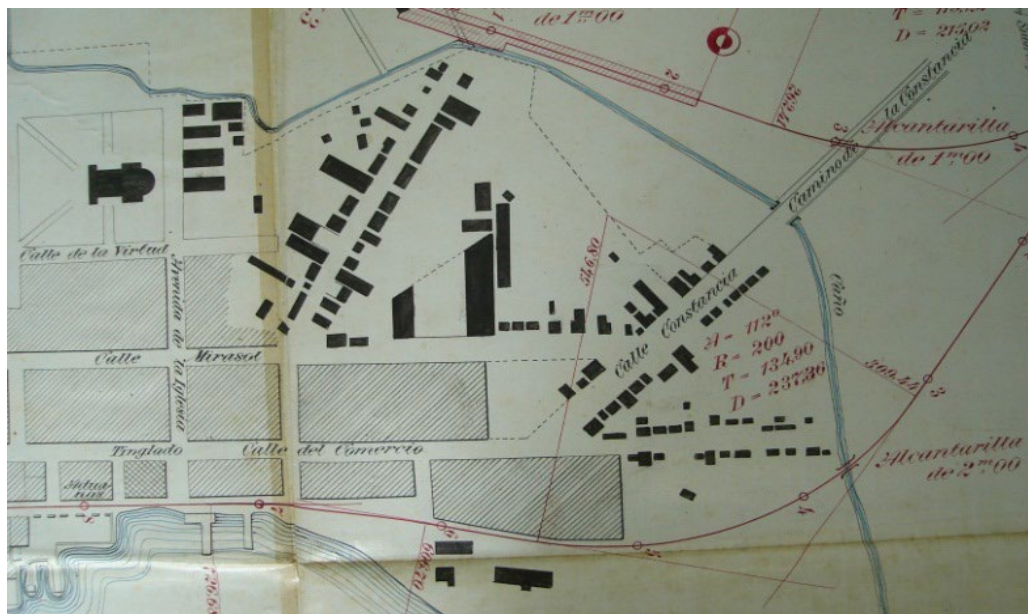


Figure 18. An 1891 map showing Playa's development. The image above shows the occupied blocks (shaded gray), highlighting the Catholic Church and its plaza, San Jose Fort with its immediate housing and the lineal residential area formed along the Camino Real. The image below shows the area around the wharf (tinglado, Aduana), highlighting the unorganized settlement at Puerto Viejo.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ AGPR. Fondo: Obras Públicas, Sub-fondo: Ferrocarriles y tranvías Serie: Proyectos de construcción, Plano 196-1.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 34

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

With the transfer of the island to the United States, because of the Spanish-American War of 1898, the *Ciudad Señorial* and its *Marina* entered a new historical path. Within a few years, the new administrators achieved what the old walled city could not attain in 400 years: centralize the decisional power in the capital, controlling all administrative tasks from San Juan. The new metropolis also brought the “*cañaverización*” of the local economy, turning sugarcane into *Sugar King*. The new economic powers re-organized the island’s production structure under new corporate orders, making way for the modernization of the local economic organization, while inserting the agricultural regime of Puerto Rico into the well-advanced US capitalist mode of production.

The new Anglo-Saxon administrators also brought with them a whole ideological apparatus intended to reproduce in the local context the moral, religious and educational values of the new metropolitan power. These socioeconomic postures came equally accompanied by an active policy to increase infrastructure and to better public health, educational levels and housing conditions. One way or another, these new tendencies found their way into Playa de Ponce, creating not only new social conditions and arrangements, but also adding a new layer into the barrio’s architectural representation and morphology.

In 1898, precisely during the Spanish American War, the United States established an immediate presence in Playa de Ponce. After San Juan’s bombardment in May 12, 1898, and the city’s port blockade, the attention of the US’ strategists turned towards the southwest, the most productive and the least militarily built section of the island. On July 25, 1898, the military occupation of Guánica took place. Two days later, three battleships departed from Guánica towards Ponce, arriving at the city’s port on July 27, 1898, with ground troops setting foot ashore in Playa de Ponce during the early hours of July 28. The Aduana building became General Nelson Miles’s headquarters, while the plaza around the Catholic church, became the site for the U.S. troops tent-city.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 35

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

As part of the agreements between Spain and the U.S., all Spanish military and government properties were transferred to the US military and federal agencies. The Custom House, the Harbor Master Building and the remains of San Jose's fort, symbols of the Spanish government in Playa de Ponce, became the immediate representation of the new metropolis, with the US colors flying in front of each one.

Besides the political institutions, another two areas on which the new American administrators made their construction mark early on in Playa de Ponce were in the very significant areas of education and religion. Even though the island was four hundred years under its control, Spain did not leave a legacy of schoolhouses in Puerto Rico. The construction of buildings purposely designed as schoolhouses was not part of the Spanish tradition. The practice was for the government to rent existing buildings and used them as educational facilities. On many occasions, the teachers themselves would use their homes as schoolhouses. According to the 1899 census, at the time that Puerto Rico was transferred to the U.S., the island had 500 schools and an illiteracy rate between 79 and 85 percent.⁴⁹

By the end of the nineteenth century, the only important school in Playa de Ponce was the private school founded by educator Santiago González in 1875.⁵⁰ An all-boys school, it was located on the *Camino Real*, in a rented building, with a capacity for two hundred students. The large number of pupils strongly suggest that Gonzalez employed other teachers. In that way, the school was a source of labor.

The first building constructed in Playa de Ponce specifically as a schoolhouse was the *Escuela Elemental Segundo Ruiz Belvis*, built in 1908, under the direction of the Department of the Interior, government agency responsible for the design and construction of all public building under the new US administration. (**Fig. 19**).

⁴⁹ Report of the Military Governor of Porto Rico on Civil Affairs. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902, 121.

⁵⁰ Luis Fortuño Janeiro. *Álbum histórico de Ponce*, 1963. Ponce, Puerto Rico. Véase los planos en AHP, Sección de Planos, 04-1928.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 36

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



Figure 19. Original building of the Escuela Segundo Ruiz Belvis, 1908.⁵¹

The arrival in Playa de Ponce of institutional buildings, especially schoolhouses, associated with the new American administrators must be understood in a wider context. The new American administration tried to amend serious faults in the Spanish educational system, imposing several important measures. Among them: teachers could not give classes in private homes; charging for education was prohibited; the separation of classes by genre was suspended and a grade division was imposed. However, the new administration did try to impose group divisions by race and English was forcibly implanted as the main educational language.

Buildings like the schoolhouse Segundo Ruiz Belvis were the physical representation of the social, political, and ideological project of the new metropolis for its new territory in the Caribbean. As Martin G. Brumbaugh, first Education Commissioner under the civil administration of the Foraker act of 1900, expressed:

“Almost every school in the island has an American flag. In almost every city of the island, and at many rural schools, the children meet and salute the flag as it is flung to the breeze. The raising of the flag is the signal that school has commenced, and the flag floats during the entire sessions. The pupils then sing “America”, “Hail Columbia”, “Star Spangled Banner”, and other patriotic songs. The marvel is that they sing these in English. The first English many of them know is the English of our national songs. The influence of this is far-reaching.”⁵²

⁵¹ Escuela Segundo Ruiz Belvis, 1908. Colección A. Moscioni.

⁵² Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1901. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901, 361.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 37

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Another typology of institutional building representing the early arrival of the New Empire in Playa was the Protestant temple. On June 20, 1898, soon after the entrance of the United States into the conflict between Cuba and Spain, the World Council of Churches of the Presbyterian Church held a meeting with the leaders of the main protestant sects. In that assembly, they planned to unite efforts to accomplish their evangelization goals in Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico, which the council correctly anticipated would fall under the United States' jurisdiction.⁵³

By March 1899, eight months after the occupation of Puerto Rico, executives from the Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Episcopal churches, among others, met in New York to divide the island into areas of influence. Municipalities with more than 25,000 inhabitants were open to the free competition among all designations.

Recognizing the ward's social importance, Playa de Ponce became an early target in the Protestant's campaign. By 1903, a Methodist congregation was already established in Playa de Ponce, in a rented house on Calle Virtud (now Padre Noel Avenue).⁵⁴ By 1906, thanks to a donation of \$400.00 by Bishop Charles McCabe, the congregation purchased a plot of land, advantageously facing the *Camino Real*. In that plot, designed by renowned architect Antonín Nechodoma and built by Nechodoma's business partner, Frank. B. Hatch, the *McCabe Memorial Church* was inaugurated in 1908 (**Fig. 20**). The building is popularly called by everyone in La Marina as the *Iglesia Metodista de la Playa de Ponce*.

⁵³ The Missionary Review of the World, XII (January 1899): 53; XII: 377-378, "Plans for Cuba and Puerto Rico".

⁵⁴ The Protestant presence in Ponce precedes the 1898 US occupation. Since 1869, the urban center of Ponce had a limited Protestant congregation that provided spiritual services to the affluent British and American communities established in the city. See, Luis Martínez Fernández, *Protestantism and Political Conflict in the Nineteenth Century Hispanic Caribbean*. New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2002.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 38

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



Figure 20. La Iglesia Metodista de la Playa de Ponce, c.1910.⁵⁵

The location of the temple is significant. When built in 1908, you could physically see the Catholic *Iglesia de la Virgen del Carmen* from the steps of the Methodist Church. The construction represented a challenge to the four hundred years of catholic religious monopoly, the religious openness of the new regime and the battle for the public exposition and the public conscience in Playa.

Even with all the changes and the new power brokers, Playa de Ponce grew strong during the first decades of the 20th century, adapting to the new economic trends and patterns. Even with the dramatic decline of the coffee industry at the turn of the century, main export product of the last decades of the nineteenth-century, Ponce's port continued its intense workload as sugar became the lifeline of the southern region.⁵⁶ The maritime activity, along with

⁵⁵ The *McCabe Memorial Church* was included in the National Register of Historic Places on April 11, 2008. For the historic photo, see, Aníbal Sepúlveda Rivera, *Puerto Rico Urbano. Atlas histórico de la ciudad puertorriqueña*. Volumen III, Carimar, 2004, 314.

⁵⁶ Sugar cane production could have had a bigger impact on the port activities, but the large American sugar factories that monopolized the industry, created their own private maritime facilities near their processing factories. This was the case with the two largest sugar factories in the island, whose powerful claws extended to Ponce from other municipalities: *Central Guánica* and *Central Aguirre*. *Central Guánica*, for example, controlled the land west

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 39

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

the huge increase of sugar production, became the main sources of employment in the ward promoting a growth in its population. The 1897 census reported 3,497 residents in the Playa; two years later the number rose to 4,660; by 1910, the population was estimated as 5,159 inhabitants.⁵⁷

By 1913, the year Newmann Gandía published his work, La Playa had fifteen streets. The main ones were: *Palito, Guadalupe, Virtud, Mirasol, Isabel, Comercio, Ferrocarril, León, Alfonso XII, Colón, Real, Buen Gusto* and *Puerto Viejo*. The longest ones were *Comercio, la Virtud* and the *Camino Real*.

La Playa also had its municipal building, a new cemetery (inaugurated in 1911), fire station, slaughterhouse, two Protestant churches (Methodist and Baptist), one spiritualist center (*Hijos de la Fe*) and one lodge (*Faro de la Marina*).⁵⁸ The economic activity in the area encouraged Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Haiti to establish their diplomatic headquarters there.

By 1913, representatives from the main commercial firms in Ponce, like *Armstrong & Co., Fritze, Lundt & Co., Bonnin & Co., Sucesión de Gillet & Arce*, among others, had their main offices in Playa. Commission agency houses like *Dooley, Smith & Co.* and the *Casa Antonio Mayoral*, bankers *Carlos Armstrong e Hijos, Mayol Hermanos & Co., Ramón Cortada & Co.*, and others, all shared facilities in the area. Commercial houses like *Fritze, Cortada, Armstrong* and *Wantzelius*, the main buyers and sellers of coffee, had offices in Playa. The firms that specialized in supplying gas and gasoline like *West India Oil Company, the Texas Company, H.W. Grosch* and *Fritze, Lundt & Co.* were located at the Marina. All the companies that deal with boats and barge construction and management like *Ponce Lighter Co., F. González & Co., Felipe Vaillant y Morales & Co.*, had their offices at Playa de Ponce.

of the *Portugués* River, immediately adjacent to the traditional Playa center. Eventually these plots were invaded and became the slums known as *San Tomas, las Latas and los Potes*. A similar pattern happened with *Central Aguirre*, which eventually controlled the sugar cane plantations of an old Ponce hacienda *La Constancia*, in land adjacent to Playa. In the 1960's, this land was used for the development of *Villa del Carmen* residential project.

⁵⁷ Eduardo Newmann Gandía, *Verdadera y autentica historia*, 86-88.

⁵⁸ The *Faro de la Marina* lodge is still around today, located in the old municipal building in Playa.

United States Department of the Interior
 National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number E Page 40

Playa also developed a vibrant bustle of smaller businesses during the first decades of the 20th century as active as the large commercial enterprises: Leonardo Torres’ and Lao Fernández’s barber shops; Jaime Vives’ rum distillery; Francisco Rodriguez’s pharmacy; the milk deposit owned by Catalina Rivera in *Salsipuedes*, along with those belonging to Enriqueta Lacot and Esteban de León; José Toro’s cigar factory; P.J. Lehman & Brothers’ leather and shoe supply store; the pasta store and factories owned by *Anguera y Co* and another by Manuel Mayoral; “*Sucursal El Louvre*” hat store; Rafael Salazar’s barrel making business; the shoe repair shop owned by Ignacio Pacheco; José Álvarez’s bakery and another thirty something small shops were operating in Playa de Ponce.⁵⁹

Playa remained a meeting point between the local and foreign markets, as well as an important transfer site for passengers and merchandise destined to locations in the old and new world. In 1913, the Barcelona Transatlantic Company docked its steam ship at Playa once a month, serving passengers heading to the Canary Islands, Cadiz, Barcelona, Marseille, and Genoa. The same company carried merchandise from Ponce to the markets in Spain, Marseille, Genoa, and Trieste. The *Empresa de Vapores Cubanos* arrived every twenty-one days, servicing passengers to Havana, Santiago de Cuba, Santo Domingo and Macorís. The *New York and Porto Rico Steamship* brought cargo and passengers to Playa in a weekly basis. The *Red D Line of Steamships* connected Playa with New York, Curacao, and Venezuela. The *Hamburg-American Line* did it with Jamaica, Haiti, Santo Domingo, and Saint Thomas.⁶⁰

Due to the volume of the maritime activity, the authorities saw the need to expand the port facilities. In 1911, the central government gave permission to build a new port. The *Peñoncillo* area, suggested since the nineteenth century, was the site approved for the new port. With great plans and ambitions, the new port facilities were inaugurated in 1914. The date was very relevant. The Panama Canal was inaugurated that very same year. Ponce’s administration presented the new dock as the best and closer oceanic route on the entire island towards the new wonder route in Central America. The opening and inauguration of both facilities, however, was overshadowed by the start of the hostilities in Europe and the beginning

⁵⁹ Liga Progresista de Ponce. *Álbum-Guía de Ponce*. Tipografía, “La Defensa”, Ponce, P.R. 1913.

⁶⁰ *Ibíd.*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 41

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

of World War I.

During the first decades of the twentieth-century, new industrial companies emerged at Playa’s commercial life, providing the material foundation for the formation of a local industrial proletariat. Some of these industrial companies develop around the new port facilities at Peñoncillo. That was the case of the cement factory managed by Fritze, Lundt & Co., *Bonnin & Co.* and the *Ponce Agricultural and Industrial Co.* The foundry *Porto Rico Iron Works (PRIW)*, formed in 1918, established its workshops across the street from Iglesia Metodista de la Playa de Ponce in the Camino Real, and remained in that location until the 1980s, becoming one of the main sources of industrial labor in Playa for many years.⁶¹

The new port had a significant impact on the old wharf at Playa de Ponce. After 1914, the maritime activities moved to *Peñoncillo*, causing the decline and eventual abandonment of the facilities at the old port. The new port promoted the settlement of a sector of the population along the road towards the *Peñoncillo* Port, creating *Santo Domingo and Haiti*, two “spontaneous” communities that, like *Puerto Viejo*, were off the official 19th century-grid, composed mostly of port laborers (**Fig. 21**). The transfer of operations to *Peñoncillo* was also a hindrance for the old administrative buildings in charge of managing the sea activities. After 1914, the *Aduana* and the Harbor Master buildings were not in the immediate area of port activity. The old warehouses were also left behind, distanced from the productive tasks that created them.

⁶¹ The well-known architect Alfredo Braulio Wiechers did the initial design for the PRIW workshops, including the concrete and metal fence facing *Hostos* Avenue. The PRIW, southern competition of the *Fundición Abarca*, had its heyday during the sugar industry years. The company specialized in the production of parts and equipment for the great sugar complexes, including the complete refurbishing of sugar processing plants. They also did heavy works for the railroad’s companies all over the island. The PRIW had a relevant participation in other fields as well, becoming the main consulting engineers of the municipal government. Few elements remain of the original resources at the Playa’s abandoned site: the fence and some small structures. The 1948 Art Deco façade, that became the architectural signature of the PRIW for many years was demolished few years ago.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 42

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



Figure 21. Port at Peñoncillo. The road built to reach it, had it railroad and trolleys connections⁶²

The population at Playa de Ponce grew alongside the economic activities. As previously mentioned, the inhabitants had grown from 4,660 people in 1899 to 5,139 in 1910. The 1920 census showed a reduction to 4,717 inhabitants, rising again in 1930 to 6,172.

Until the late 1920s, Playa’s development had been mostly contained within the traditional grid. The ward was still surrounded by land used for grazing and sugar cane. The *Portugués* River still was the western border of the urban settlement, with the 1890 cemetery as the only significant built resource west of the river (**Fig. 22**). However, the increase of population pushed the occupation of land that, until the beginning of the twentieth century, was vacant due to poor topographical conditions or because it belonged to private owners.

⁶² Photo is from Luis Fortuño Janeiro, *Álbum histórico de Ponce*.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 43

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 22. Playa de Ponce, 1903.⁶³



1890 Cemetery

Portugués River

Traditional Residential Area

Old Port / Industrial area

Camino Real

⁶³ AHMP. Plano 07-1903. The 1903 map clarifies a common error among Playa's written works. The map presents the existence of a dock at the southern end of the *Camino Real*. Works like Luis Fortuño Janiero's indicate that a dock was built in this location in 1906, to service the ship that brought President Theodor Roosevelt to Puerto Rico in 1906. Evidently, the dock was built years before the historic presidential visit.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 44

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Many of the new residents that settled in Playa during the early decades of the 20th century built their humble houses near the Portugués River’s northeast bank (known by that time as the Salistral sector) and on the river’s southeast estuary, known as *La Boca*. In both sectors the topography was poorly suited for construction purposes. These were lowlands, humid, swampy, and completely exposed to the destructive floods of the *Portugués* River. These settlements, formed outside of the old official reticle, created disorganized neighborhoods, where construction options were determined by available space, with no clear alignment goals or specific lot criteria (**Fig. 23**).



Figure 23. Postcard reflects the type of settlements developed on the banks of the *Portugués* River, with wooden houses raised in stilts, in a non-organized pattern. ⁶⁴

⁶⁴ AGPR. Tarjetas postales en la Colección Robert Junghanns

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 45

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

The 1936 aerial photo, a tool not available before, shows Playa’s traditional settlement and the initial expansion beyond its historic limits (**Fig. 24**). When the aerial photo was taken, what will eventually be known as *San Tomas* Sector was starting to take shape on the west bank of the Portugués River. The photo shows the swampy area made by the ingress of the ocean during high tide. This space was occupied during the next few years by forcefully filling it with compacted dirt and wastes, opening the way for the eventual expansion of *San Tomas* and other settlements (las Latas, Los Potes, among others). The slum known as La Boca was already formed by this time, on the lowlands in the southeast bank of the Portugués, along with another slum pocket in Salistral, at the river’s northeast bank. The set of buildings west of San Tomas, was the slaughterhouse (**Fig. 25**). Built in 1908, the municipal owned facility was designed by well-known engineer Blas Silva.⁶⁵ Demolished during the late 1960s, the shadow line that extends into the sea from the slaughterhouse was the drainage pipe that deposited solid waste and blood right into the Caribbean, creating a shark infested zone near the traditional fishing and swimming area in Playa.

By 1936, the land north of Calle Virtud (today Avenida Padre Noe) was mostly vacant as it was owned by the powerful sugar factory, *Central Guánica*. In the photo, the 1890 cemetery footprint was still visible, although it has been replaced since 1911, by a new one farther west. The 1918 industrial complex of the Porto Rico Iron Works (PRIW), one of the most significant sources of employment in Playa, was fully developed. The 1873 Catholic Church still had its original plaza, but a new town square had developed during the early years of the 20th century, providing a social space without religious attachments. Just across from the town square (today known as the 65th Infantry Regiment Town Square) another social space was added during the early years, the Cine Miramar, a movie-house built around 1917. Such an early construction of a cinema at Playa shows the significance of the ward, as these types of resources were normally located in the main urban centers, not in a workers’ ward. Additionally, the 1908 Segundo Ruiz Belvis and 1928 Santiago Gonzalez schoolhouses were providing their services to the young population at Playa.

⁶⁵ AHMP. Sección de Planos, Plano 04-1908.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 46

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

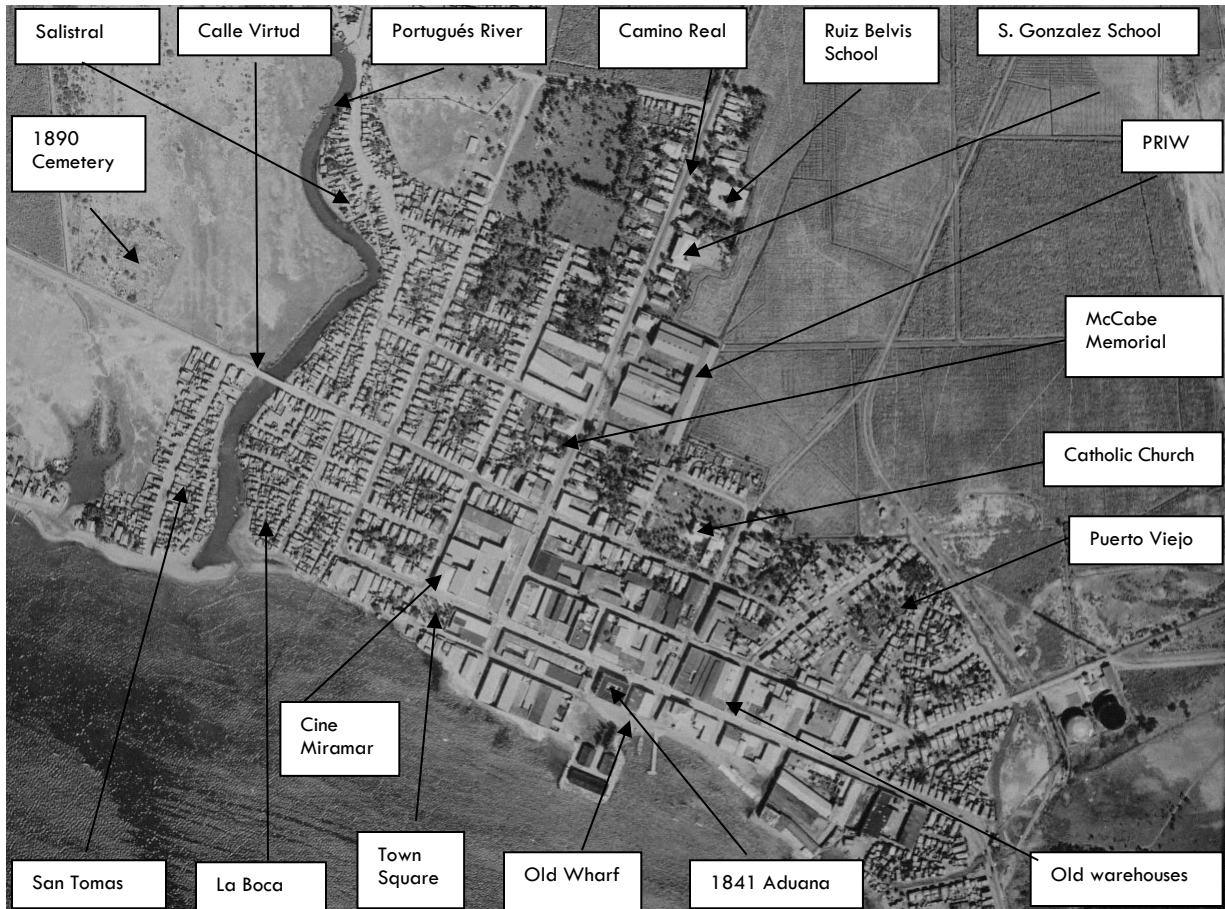


Figure 24. Ponce Playa, 1936.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Departamento de Transportación y Obras Públicas. Sección de Fotometría.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 47

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



Figure 25. Partial view of the 1936 photo, showing occupancy of lands west of the Portugués River and south of Calle Virtud, along the Caribbean shoreline.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 49

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

- PONCE PLAYA -		
IMPORTANT BUILDINGS AND PLACES		
1	AQUANA BUILDING	COMERCIO ST.
2	MUELLE MUNICIPAL	END OF MUELLE ROAD
3	WEST INDIA OIL TANKS	PUERTO VIEJO ST.
4	PORTO RICO IRON WORKS INC.	ROAD TO PLAYA (REAL ST)
5	IGLESIA DE LA PLAYA	BLOCK BETWEEN VIRTUD + EAST ST.
6	MATADERO MUNICIPAL	SAN THOMAS SLUM
7	ASILO DE MENDIGOS	ROAD TO PLAYA
8	FIRE STATION "	ALFONSO III SQ. VIRTUD
9	CENTRAL AZUCARERA LA CONSTANCIA	ROAD TO "LA CONSTANCIA"
10	PLAZA DE RECREO	ALFONSO III SQ. BONAIRE
11	TEATRO MIRAMAR	ALFONSO III SQ. VIRTUD ST.
12	MUNICIPAL CEMETERY	ROAD TO "LOS MEROS"
(A)	"CARIBE" SETTLEMENT	COLÓN ST. (NORTH)

Fig. 27. The 1938 drawing was accompanied by a legend, identifying what it was mentioned as the most significant buildings and sites in Playa.

The map provides an opportunity to mentioned some of the built resources in Playa de Ponce, a construction legacy of the 20th century first four decades. As previously stated, the 1908 *matadero municipal* (slaughterhouse) was demolished during the late 1960s. The *asilo de mendigos* is a property that also has been lost. The Central Azucarera Constancia, strongly present within the collective memory at Playa, is just that, a memory. In the 1970's, a modern residential complex (Villa del Carmen) was built at the site of the old sugar factory. After closing in 1980, the industrial facilities associated with the Porto Rico Iron Works have been mostly lost due to demolition and abandonment, although the site is easily identifiable, with some extant secondary resources.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 50

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

However, other resources identified in the 1938 map still present. Some of them have already been addressed: the 1841 Custom House (Aduana), or Juan Bertoly’s 1873 Catholic Church, for example. The building identified as a Fire Station (#8 in the map), was originally designed as a multipurpose facility: police station, jailhouse, infirmary, and fire station. Designed in 1903 by well-known engineer Manuel Domenech, the building was finished by 1905. With the official name of “Edificio Municipal de la Playa de Ponce”, it became known among the locals as the “*Alcaldía de la Playa de Ponce*”(Playa de Ponce City Hall) (**Fig. 28**).



Fig. 28. Edificio Municipal de la Playa de Ponce.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ The *Edificio Municipal de la Playa de Ponce* was included in the NRHP on August 27, 2013.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 51

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

The Teatro or Cine Miramar is also an extant resource, but not precisely the one referred to in the 1938 map. Ponce’s Historic Archives contained the drawings for an approved movie house at Playa de Ponce, dated 1909. A close look at the 1936 aerial photo seems to show the hipped roof pattern of the 1909 building below (**Fig. 29**). However, the Cine Miramar remembered by the locals’ attendees is the 1940’s Art Deco building at the bottom, located in the very same corner as the one identified in the 1938 map.

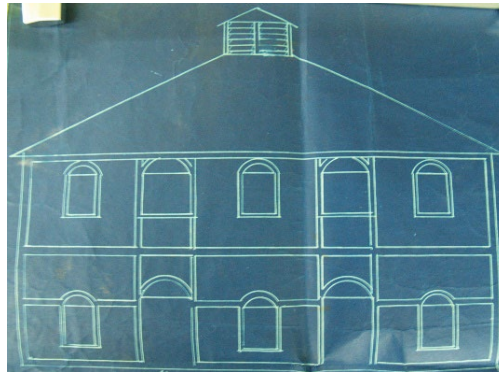


Figure 29. Teatro / Cine Miramar. ⁶⁹

⁶⁹ For the historic drawing, see AHMP. Sección de Planos. Plano 12-1909. The 1940’s movie house building is used today by the Unión de Trabajadores de Muelle (Dock Workers Union).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 52

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

A new and expanded burial site for Playa was also required as part of the services provided by the municipal authorities to the growing population. The resource designated as the “Old Cemetery”, identified (but not numbered) in the 1938 map, and with a footprint still identifiable in the 1936 aerial photograph, was the first official cemetery in Playa de Ponce, consecrated in 1890. As the settlement expanded west of Portugués River, the health policies required the relocation of the cemetery farther from the residential zone. Today the 1890 burial site is entirely covered with residential and commercial buildings. It seems that not all the human remains were removed and transferred to the new cemetery, as with little effort evidence of the sector’s old function still come to the surface. Among the residents, with a certain sense of humor, the area is known as *Huesitos* (Little Bones). The new cemetery, built in 1911, (#12 in the 1938 map) was located southwest of the old one, in closer proximity to the coastline (**Fig. 30**). The *Cementerio de la Playa* has been the final resting place for the locals for the last one hundred and eleven (111) years. The integrity of the property is remarkable in all its elements, easily noticeable through a quick comparison between the 1911 propose architectural design for the entrance, and today’s extant structure (**Fig. 31**).



Figure 30. The 1911 Cementerio de la Playa de Ponce.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 53

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



Figure 31. Above, the propose works for the 1911 entrance. Below, today's entrance.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ For the cemetery's historic drawings, see AHMP. Sección de Planos. Plano 29-1911.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number E Page 54

Another construction of social importance was Playa’s town square (#10 in the 1938 map), known today as *Plaza 65th de Infantería*. The Plaza de Recreo was mentioned in documents from the early year of the twentieth century.⁷¹ The early square was annexed to a nineteenth-century masonry building (**Fig. 32**). In 1950, the building was acquired and demolished by the municipality, extending the plaza to its current size (**Fig. 33**).

Figure 32. Playa’s Plaza, 1917, 1920, 2022. ⁷²

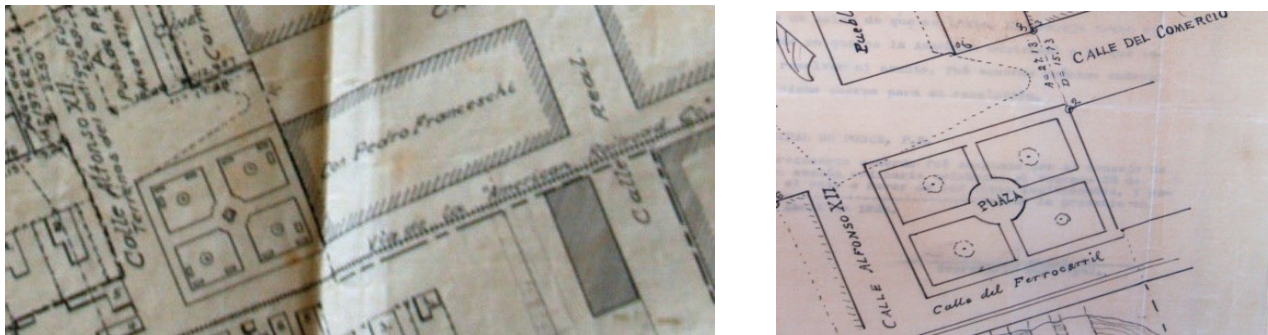


Figure 33. The Plaza 65th de Infantería sits near the site of the 1760 Fuerte San José. Unfortunately, the fort was demolished in 1907, to allow the expansion of the surrounding grounds.

⁷¹ In the *Memoria constructiva de 1903 del Edificio Municipal*, a mention is made of the possible construction of the building on a corner of the plaza in Playa, but it was relocated to *Alfonso XII* Street.

⁷² For the 1917 drawing see AGPR, Mapoteca, Plano 266. For the 1920, see AHMP, Caja S-385-40 (Plano 1920).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number E Page 55

As the population grew during these first decades of the 20th century an enormous pressure was placed on the social services offered by the municipal authorities. One of the most relevant infrastructure projects during this time was the establishment of an electric trolley between Ponce’s center and Playa de Ponce. The trolley, inaugurated on April 19, 1902, was established by the *Ponce Railway and Light Company*. It started its route in the *Plaza de la Abolición*, opposite the old *Hotel Francés*, then it arrived at the urban center, bordered the plaza, returned to the hotel and from there to its final stop on *Comercio* Street in Playa, via *Hostos* Avenue (Camino Real).⁷³ In 1913, Eduardo Newmann Gandía described the transportation experience and the ward the following way:

“La Marina is an important urban housing project in the city of Ponce, where the main provision warehouses, mercantile offices of all kinds, commissions’ houses, export and import houses, etc., are located. It is more than two miles from the center of Ponce and constitutes a real town, with a larger census of people and better urban conditions than many others on the island. It’s connected to the city by electric cars that minute-by-minute travel the route separating both places. Travelling the trajectory from the city to the port, one can only admire the progress that has emerged on Hostos Avenue, with its fine chalets and architectural villas that offer health and leisure.”⁷⁴ (Fig.34)



Figure 34. Post card shows the view described by Gandia in 1913 along the Hostos Avenue in Playa.⁷⁵

⁷³ Liga Progresista de Ponce, *Álbum-Guía de Ponce*. Tipografía, La Defensa, Ponce, P.R., 1913, 62. The trolley provided passenger and cargo services. The cost was five cents, with a special discount for students. When it inaugurated, the trolley had 4 cars, later adding two more. The passenger’s cars were open, thirty-four feet in length and six feet wide, with a capacity of sixty passengers. The facilities to store and maintain the cars were on the *Camino Real*, at the corner of *Hostos* Avenue and *Las Américas* Avenue. Manuel Domenech designed the maintenance building. The trolley ended operations in 1927. See, Roger Aponte Pargas, *El desarrollo histórico del tranvía eléctrico de Ponce: 1898-1927*. Tesis presentada para la obtención del Grado de Maestría en Artes en Estudios Puertorriqueños, Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, 1987.

⁷⁴ Eduardo Newmann Gandía, *Verdadera y auténtica historia*, 234.

⁷⁵ AGPR. Tarjetas postales en la Colección Robert Junghanns.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 56

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Another service that had to be provided due to population growth was additional educational facilities. The space provided by the 1908 *Escuela Segundo Ruiz Belvis* was not enough. In 1928 a new schoolhouse, designed by the renowned architect Rafael Carmoega, was built at the very same location occupied by the 19th century all-boys school building rented by Professor Santiago González, previously mentioned. In honor of the old educator, the new building was named *Escuela Santiago González* (**Fig. 35**).



Figure 35. The 1928 Escuela Santiago González. The building’s plan was done by Rafael Carmoega Morales, State Architect from the Puerto Rico Department of the Interior. ⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Original plans for the Santiago González School are located at AHMP, Sección de Planos, 04-1928.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 57

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

During the 1940's, the municipal authorities became more than just a service's facilitator or regulator, but an active agent in Playa de Ponce's development, providing new residential spaces and constructing residential projects. Two of the most significant projects along those lines were the formation of the *Parcelas Amalia Marín* and the construction of the *Residencial Caribe*.

In April 12, 1941, as part of the agrarian reform promised in the political campaigns of the *Partido Popular Democrático* (PDP), the *Ley de Tierras* was signed by Governor Guy J. Swope. One of the innovations of this law was the creation of a legal mechanism that allowed the distribution of plots of land. Using the new law, the central government acquired a large part of the land north of Calle Virtud and in the sector known as Los Meros, east of Matilde River, the western boundary of Playa de Ponce. Up to its acquisition, this large plot was under the control of Guánica Central. Once acquired, dozens of lots were distributed, forming the sector eventually known as *Parcelas Amalia Marín* (**Fig. 36**). The lots distribution in *Parcelas Amalia Marín* was not accompanied by a construction code, as it was the case for the centennial settlement on the eastern side of the Portugués River. But as it grew, the authorities provided the required infrastructure for the area's proper function.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 58

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



Figure 36. Above, the 1936 aerial photo of Los Meros. Below, a Google map of the same area. The photos show the occupation of Los Meros started as part of the 1940's policies of land distribution. Matilde River (on the left) is Playa de Ponce's official western boundary since 1955. The 1911 Cemetery shows on both pictures on the extreme right. The row of houses in the 1936 photo, were front-beach-villas of some of Ponce's bourgeoisie, no longer at the site.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 59

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

The second project mentioned that had a substantial impact upon Playa de Ponce’s residential arrangement was the construction of *Caserío del Caribe*, a public housing project developed between 1940-1941. With the assistance of the Federal Works Agency and the US Housing Authority, the *Autoridad Sobre Hogares de Ponce* developed *Caserío del Caribe*, one of the earliest public housing projects that represented the central government’s strategy to battle and eliminate the development of slums. The area designated for the new residential project had apparently started to be settled during the late 1930’s. Although the aerial photo of 1936 does not show any development in the area, the 1938 map mentioned the *Caribe* Settlement as an important site in Playa de Ponce.

The *Caserío del Caribe* was designed by William Schimmelpfennig, Chief Architect of the Ponce Housing Authority, with the *Porto Rico Iron Works (PRIW)* as contractor (**Fig. 37**). With its foundry located at Playa de Ponce since 1918, by the 1940s the PRIW was Ponce’s main construction consulting firm. The public housing project introduced the architectural language of modernism in Playa de Ponce. Completely different from other public housing projects in the island during this period, *Caserío del Caribe* was not a vertical construction, but one hundred and twenty-eight (128) ground-level units that maintained the visual appearance of individual residences, not altering the wards traditional height and volumetry. The housing units were purely rectangular in shape (small boxes), with no allusion to the styles in fashion at the time and with no historicist symbolism. *Caserío del Caribe* preceded many other icons of modernism in the island.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 60

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

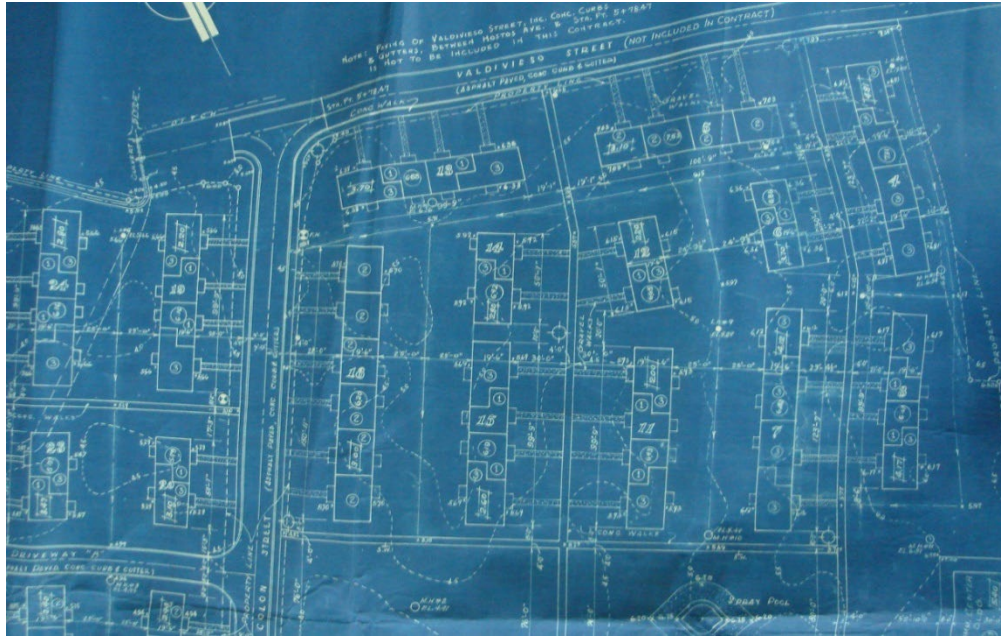


Figure 37. Above, partial view of William Schimmelpfennig's plan for Caserío del Caribe. Below, partial view of the public housing project in Playa de Ponce.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ AHMP. Sección de Planos. Plano 1940.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 61

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Another relevant factor in the urban development of Playa de Ponce during the first decades of the twentieth century was the presence of construction projects associated with renowned engineers and architects. Many of the names tied to the great architecture that have given so much recognition to Ponce’s traditional urban center are found in the built landscape of Playa de Ponce. In the barrio’s context, however, their production was determined by the historical functionality of the neighborhood. In other words, the works at Playa de Ponce of characters such as Blas Silva, Manuel Domenech, Alfredo Braulio Wiechers, Francisco Porrata Doria, William Schimmelpfennig, Rafael Carmoega Morales, Francisco Vals, Victor Aufant, Rafael Nones, among others, were not of ostentatious mansions or magnificent banks, but of meat and grocery stores, machine shops, schools, public housing projects, bridges, parishes, administrative buildings, and other typologies associated with the world of production, typical of Playa de Ponce. In addition to local engineers and architects associated with Ponce’s built legacy, very significant works at Playa had been done by others well-known architects. As previously mentioned, the 1908 McCabe Memorial was designed by Antonín Nechodoma, the renowned architect from Czechoslovakia who came to Puerto Rico during the early years of twentieth century and left an impressive legacy throughout the island. Playa de Ponce has also the impressive *Edificio Empresas Ferré* designed by the American architect Robert M. Little in 1951 (built in 1953) as an administrative building for the founders and owners of the 1918 *PRIW*.

Beyond their functionality as stores, warehouses, office buildings and machine shops, in accord with Playa’s commercial and industrial life, the works of these engineers and architects brought new architectural languages and design patterns, in vogue in Ponce’s urban center, but new to Playa. Blas Silva brought the *corte de chaflán* to the corners of Playa de Ponce with his 1911 warehouse at the intersection of the Camino Real and Calle Virtud. Something similar was done by Alfredo B. Wiechers in 1914 with its meat and milk warehouse at the corners of Calle Virtud and Calle Alfonso XII. Wiechers also brought his mixture of Neoclassical and Art Nouveau with its 1917 two-story building at Calle Comercio. Francisco Porrata Doria reinforced the dominating language of the neoclassical of the buildings at the wharf area with his 1922 warehouse but used the Spanish Revival at his 1928 parish-house, annexed to the 1873 Catholic Church. William Schimmelpfennig brought the Modern Style with his design for the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 62

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Caserío del Caribe. For his part, Robert M. Little brought into Playa de language of the International Style. Little was a relevant figure in what is defined as *MiMo* (Miami Modern). (Figs. 38-43).



Figure 38. The 1911 warehouse designed by Blas Silva with its “corte de chaflán”, at the corner of the Camino Real and Calle Virtud.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 63

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



Figure 39. Two buildings designed by A. B. Wiechers in Playa. Above, the 1914 meat and milk depot at the corner of Calle Virtud and Alfonso XII. Below, the 1917 warehouse at Calle Comercio.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 64

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



Figure 40. Two of Francisco Porrata Doria's works at Playa de Ponce: a 1922 warehouse and the 1928 parish-house. ⁷⁸

⁷⁸ For the historic drawings of buildings at figures 33, 34 and 35, see AHMP. Sección de Planos. Blas Silva, Plano 19-1911; A. B. Wiechers, almacén de carnes y leche, Plano 16-1914 y almacén de dos pisos, Plano 04-1917; Francisco Porrata Doria, Casa Parroquial, Plano 117-1928.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 65

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



Figure 41. Nechodoma's 1908 McCabe Memorial (Iglesia Metodista de la Playa de Ponce)



Figure 42. Robert M. Little 's 1953 Edificio Empresas Ferré.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 66

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



Figure 43. Partial view of Playa de Ponce, showing the location of some of the mentioned buildings associated with well-known architects and engineers. Red lettering identify properties included in the National Register of Historic Places.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 67

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

During the first six decades of the twentieth century, except for the massive use of concrete in the Caserío Caribe, the construction of wooden-single-family units, with zinc roofs and lifted on wooden and/or concrete stilts, continued to be the dominant typology in Playa's traditional residential area and in the new occupied sectors as well (Fig. 44).

Figure 44. Plans for houses submitted to be built in Playa between 1920-1940 and a sample of today's resources that reflect the traditional building legacy in Playa de Ponce.



**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number E Page 68

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 69

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



By 1950, the official and unofficial urban expansion added a total of thirty blocks to the urban growth of the barrio. During the first decades of the 1960's, the development of spontaneous settlements south of *Virtud* Street was completed, as it was the construction of the *Parcelas Amalia Marín* (Fig. 45)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 70

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 45. Aerial views of Playa de Ponce, 1962.⁷⁹



By the time these aerial photos were taken, the dense human concentration in *San Tomas* and its immediate area to the west was already visible. The swamp that appeared in the 1936 photo has been forcibly filled and the sector was occupied by a large and disorganized group of houses. The lack of urban organization is evident when comparing this development to the one north of *Virtud* Street, in the *Parcelas Amalia Marín* or in the traditional center of La Playa, formed in the nineteenth century.

⁷⁹ AHMP. Sección de Fotos, Fotos aéreas de la Playa, 1962.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 71

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

The formation of slums at Playa de Ponce, already evident by the late 1930's, was not an isolated phenomenon unique to the barrio, but evident in other areas of the municipality. By 1960, Ponce had a population of 145,586 people, with seventy-eight (78%) percent residing in areas defined as urban. A great deal of pressure was placed upon the municipal government to satisfy the services and residential needs of this population. By the closing of the 1970 fiscal year, the housing inventory in the urban zone of Ponce (including Playa) was calculated at 37,400 units. Of these, forty-four (44.1%) percent were classified as adequate, while forty-six (46.5%) percent were identified as inadequate (**Fig. 46**).⁸⁰



Figure 46. Partial view of *La Boca* slum, 1968.⁸¹

The families living on those harsh conditions had very few options. By the end of the 1960's, a family needed an annual income of \$8,000 dollars to buy a house in Ponce's private market. The government, on the other hand, only built sixty-five 65 housing units in Ponce during the ten years between 1960 and 1970. The *Corporación de Renovación Urbana y Vivienda* (CRUV), the government agency responsible for public housing, had two projects for low-income families: low-cost housing units and moderate cost housing units. However, to

⁸⁰ Juan Llanes Santos, *Desafiando al Poder. Las invasiones de tierra en Puerto Rico, 1967-1972*. Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 2001, 182-183.

⁸¹ Revista *El Playero*, 1968, 3.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 72

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

qualify for the first program a family had to have a minimum income of \$6,500 annually and \$3,800 annually for the second. With about 18,636 families (of a total of 32,323) under the poverty line in 1970 in Ponce, the CRUV's programs were not viable for a great number of families in the municipality. It is no surprise that, given the situation, Ponce was one of the municipalities with the most clandestine land occupations in the island, a great deal of these land invasions in Playa.

In 1971, one thousand three hundred and twenty-eight (1,328) acres of land were illegally occupied in Ponce by dispossessed families. Even plots of land owned by then Governor Luis A. Ferré, a Ponce's native and member of the powerful family founder of the PRIW, were illegally seized by poor families in the *Tabaiba* sector in Playa. Another occupation in Playa de Ponce took place in *La Flaca*, an old sugar farm where the CRUV was building low-income residences and a public housing project later named *Lirios del Sur*.

During the early 1970's, the government's sponsored slums removal program, arrived in full force in Playa de Ponce. By mid-1970s, *Lirios del Sur* became the new residential site for hundreds of families removed from *San Tomas*, *La Boca* and other slums in Playa. The old wooden homes south of Calle Virtud and in the Portugués River eastern mouth were demolished to make way for the current *Urbanización San Tomas* and the *Villa Pesquera* (**Fig. 47**).⁸²

⁸² Op. Cit., 98-99.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 73

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico
County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 47. During the mid-1970s, the early 20th century wooden houses in San Tomas, La Boca and other slums south of Calle Virtud were demolished. Many of the residents were moved to either the low-cost houses or the public housing project at La Flaca (Lirios del Sur). A new residential project was built in San Tomas, while La Boca became the site for the Villa Pesquera.



San Tomas and La Boca Sectors

1970's San Tomas

La Boca / Villa Pesquera

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 74

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Conclusion

Facing the Caribbean, **Playa de Ponce** served as the center of Ponce’s rich commercial activity. The barrio’s morphology was defined precisely by its function. Three arrangements of urban layout are still identifiable in the original settlement. East of the Camino Real (today PR-123), there is an orthogonal layout that covers most of the old port area, with large, elongated lots, oriented in a southeast-northeast direction. Here are the large masonry and concrete warehouses of the 19th and early 20th century. In the residential zone of the original settlement of **Playa de Ponce**, comprise west of the old Camino Real and east of the Portugués River, there are two distinct morphological arrangements. On the one hand, there is a residential alignment that responded to planning guidelines developed using an officially imposed grid. There is also an irregular layout shaped by the topography of areas due to the spontaneous occupation of single-family units.

Since mid-19th century, Playa de Ponce was the beneficiary of a construction bonanza related to the storage, distribution and auditing of the mercantile activity. This activity included the import of foreign products, as well as the export of Ponce’s local production and of the production of the neighboring municipalities, who achieved access to the international markets through the commercial houses in Ponce and the city’s port. During the last two thirds of the nineteenth century, the large commercial firms, managed mainly by *Peninsulares* (from the Spanish Peninsula) and foreign naturalized citizens, also with a strong presence of the *Creole* (born in Puerto Rico) bourgeoisie, instituted their offices and warehouses in the neighborhood, mostly nearby the port facilities. While this commercial bourgeoisie built elegant residences in the urban center of Ponce, imparting the city with a social and architectural character still present today, Playa de Ponce was the center of the every-day commercial activity that facilitated such material and cultural wealth.

The symbiotic relationship between the urban center and *barrio*, contributed to the latter’s enjoyment of a privileged position regarding political, administrative and economic matters, on occasion resented by other wards in the municipality. In 1880, the first telephone lines established in Ponce ran between the urban center and Playa; the tracks of the first railway built in Ponce, went from the urban center to *La Marina* (another historic name applied to Playa

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 75

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

de Ponce); the route of the first electric train developed in the municipality left the *Plaza de Las Delicias* (Ponce’s main town square) and ended, after travelling two miles south through the *Camino Real*, at the seaport of Playa de Ponce.

The commercial activity in Playa de Ponce during the nineteenth century was the force behind the considerable increase in population in the ward, particularly of the working class. The economic forces that came to form the character of the neighborhood like the maritime activities, and the agricultural and industrial production, all rested upon the shoulders of the working class. The strong presence of this group imparted a *barrio obrero* character to the neighborhood represented in ways that ranged from the lay-out of certain areas in the ward, to construction materials, architectural styles and the barrio’s lifeways.

The same commercial activity that promoted the presence of the labor force, also promoted the presence of the institutional apparatus interested in facilitating and controlling the lucrative maritime trade. This institutionalization of La Playa entailed an iconographic architectural production still standing today: customs and harbor master’s buildings, State, municipal and private warehouses, municipal administrative buildings, among others. Even the military apparatus had a presence in the sector with the construction of an artillery battery for the port’s defense. Built during the 1760’s, the fortified emplacement was the most important icon in the area for many years.

The dynamic economic life of La Playa, the presence of a permanent population in the sector and the creation of a local administrative structure, generated a socio-economic net that promoted the infrastructural development unique to La Playa. As the nineteenth century ended, Playa already boasted its own schools, church, plaza, cemetery, slaughterhouse, first class roads, means of public transportation, telegraphic communications system, electric lighting, doctor’s and lawyer’s offices, pharmacies, and industrial factories. All these aligned in an urban reticle organized by the official municipal authorities. These authorities transferred to *La Playa* the same urban planning directives employed for the urban center. Even the Playa’ street designations were copied from the names of the city streets.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 76

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

The twentieth century brought changes to the sociopolitical structure of the island that had a particular impact on Ponce and its Playa sector. The new American elite, who managed the destinies of Puerto Rico after 1898, effectively concentrated the political and economic decisional power in the capital (San Juan). The policy of the new power brokers to concentrate all the political and economic decisions in the capital weakened the efforts and the political praxis of strong, semi-autonomy municipalities like Ponce.

The new organization and policies created the conditions for an exodus of commercial firms and even civic and cultural organizations, to San Juan. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the maritime commerce that contributed so much to the development of the Pearl of the South and its Marina, also relocated to San Juan. By 1890, Ponce exported 33.2% of the national production, while San Juan was responsible for 21.2%. By 1920, San Juan managed 36.8%, while Ponce only had 16.4%.⁸³

One of the significant changes that resulted from the so-called “sovereignty transfer” was the imposition of new economic tasks. The investment capital of the U.S. concentrated on the sugar production industry. The changes in production led to changes in the social order. The local bourgeoisie that controlled the economic and social life during the 19th century became intermediary groups, subordinated to the new industrial-commercial capital from the US.

Even with these setbacks, during the first six decades of the twentieth-century, Playa maintained a solid economic and social life. The rise of the kingdom of Sugar King kept a continuous demand for labor in the ward. The creation of competitive and better maritime facilities in *Peñoncillo* after 1914, the development of industrial hubs like the *Porto Rico Iron Works*, the barrel making factories for the sugar and rum industries, the leather factories and the establishment of the tuna canning facilities, prompted the establishment of a truly industrial workers’ barrio, with a proletariat character stronger than during the 19th century.

The population growth during the first six decades caused the settlement to expand beyond the boundaries of the traditional 19th century neighborhood. During the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, slums like *San Tomas*, *Las Latas*, *Los Potes*, *Haiti* were formed, joining *Puerto*

⁸³ Cámara de Comercio de Puerto Rico. *Guía general de Puerto Rico 1931-32*, San Juan, 1932, 23-98.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 77

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Viejo, already in existence since the nineteenth century. In the best of cases, the simple wood construction, with zinc roofs, erected on stilts to avoid the floods of the Portuguese river or the rising tides, became the dominant construction landscape in the residential area of the neighborhood. During the 1940s, along the development of non-official settlements, the central and municipal government promoted the creation of two important residential projects: the *Parcelas Amalia Marín* (named after Luis Muñoz Marín’s mother, who was born in Ponce) and the *Caserío Caribe*, both projects developed during the 1940’s. Besides providing new residential spaces, the government also was active in facilitating the physical and social infrastructure needed to support the increase in population: land transportation, water and sewer services, schools, medical facilities, and places of social recreation like town squares, passive parks and even a local baseball field built during the 1940’s. During the first six decades of the twentieth century, the private sector was also an important contributor to Playa’s built landscape, not only in terms of quantity, but also in styles. The private sector was the main builder of the old maritime center, with its grand nineteenth-century neoclassic warehouses.

However, from mid-20th century, because of new economic patterns, Playa’s economic and social development, went into a decline. During the 1950s, the program known as *Manos a la Obra*, with its rapid industrialization agenda, reorganized the productive forces throughout the island. Its economic policies and trends, however, were not kind with Playa de Ponce. Operation Bootstrap stimulated a population exodus from Playa de Ponce to other zones around new production hubs, as new factories were established in industrial parks away from Playa.

Manos a la Obra’s lack of attention towards agriculture pushed the decline of the sugar industry even further. The fall of the sugar industry reduced the employment opportunities for a large portion of the population in Playa. In 1980, despite a great attempt to stay afloat, but pulled down by the collapse of the sugar industry, the Porto Rico Iron Works (PRIW), important source of employment in the barrio, closed its facilities permanently.

The centralization of the maritime activity in San Juan greatly reduced the traditional commercial activity in Playa, causing the eventual disappearance of the commercial houses from the local context and practically shutting down the industrial production related to the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 78

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

maritime activity. Changes in warehousing and supply methods made the nineteenth and early twentieth century masonry warehouses obsolete. Most of these became rental properties for temporary commercial endeavors that respond to market fluctuations. Others were just abandoned having today their structural integrity compromised.

As a result of the weakened economic scaffolding that had sustained the development of Playa de Ponce for so many years, the population initiated a migration process that has not ended. In 1980, Playa de Ponce reached its maximum number of inhabitants with 20,253. This number declined to 18,027 in 1990; 16,926 in 2000; 14,077 in 2010; and 11,215 in 2020.⁸⁴ According to the last census, the income per capita of the residents in Playa was lower than that of Ponce’s and of Puerto Rico’s as a whole. More than 70% of the ward’s population is living below the poverty line.

To the decline in the job’s market, the reduction of educational opportunities must be added. Playa de Ponce closed the 1980’s with five public schools and two private schools providing services throughout all grades. Today, besides the two private schools, only one public school, the 1950’s primary grades *Escuela Lucy Grillasca* remained in service. In 1998 the *Alfredo M. Aguayo* School, the only high school in La Playa, was closed, forcing the students to transfer to other schools, away from Playa, possibly promoting the migration of the whole family unit.

Extremely significant, Playa de Ponce has suffered an exodus of both males and females between the ages of 21 and 50. The extreme reduction of this productive group in Playa’s human resources had created a negative chain reaction. Besides being a vital economic loss, the marriage market has lost its essential vitality. Today, Playa de Ponce shows a neighborhood of generational extremes, with a large population of young people, along a large aging population.

⁸⁴ Junta de Planificación de Puerto Rico. Oficina del Censo.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E-F Page 79

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

However, despite all its socio-economic difficulties, Playa de Ponce maintains an *esprit de corps*, a sense of pride and belonging, rarely found in other neighborhoods in Puerto Rico. There is a persistent collective memory where the comprehension of their significant past collides and syncretizes with their realization of an uncertain future.

F- Associated Property Types

The property types defined in this Multiple Property Documentation Form are the product of a reconnaissance survey that identified different individual properties and potential districts which associative attributes tied them to the historic context presented in this cover document. All these properties derive significance from their association with the pattern of historic events, namely, the development of Playa de Ponce from the mid-19th, until the late 1960's. These properties embody the significant historic trends and patterns that make the distinctive characteristics of Playa de Ponce: the ward's layout plan based in a purposely sense of functionality; the methods of construction assigned to each sector (residential and industrial) in accordance with construction code; the ability of the resources to represent the lifeways of the working class; properties that embody the arrival of new social paradigm brought by US administration upon the Island after 1898; among others historic patterns and trends. Criterion A and C are the principal National Register Criterion applied in this Multiple Property Documentation Form cover document.

The preliminary survey was intended to identify those properties capable of transmitting the associative attributes of the historic context developed in this cover document. The survey was not conducted to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. This survey verified the existence and location of properties with interpretative potential. This initial selection does not preclude that other property types could be identified in future efforts.

This Multiple Property Documentation Form is organized in one general context, Development of Playa de Ponce, 1800 – 1960, subdivided in three sections: Development of Playa de Ponce, 1800 – 1845; Development of Playa de Ponce, 1845 - 1898; Development of Playa de Ponce, 1898 – 1960, with an Introduction and a Conclusion. Historic properties associated with the mentioned context are mostly divided in the following types/ categories:

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number F Page 80

Domestic; Commerce/Trade; Education; Government; Religion; Funerary; and Recreation and Culture. Future efforts can develop other property types/categories underrepresented in this cover document.

I. Name of Property Type: Domestic (single dwelling/ institutional housing)

Description

Many of the historic properties associated with the context "Development of Playa de Ponce, 1800 – 1960" are residential in character. As shown in the context, since mid-1800s, Playa de Ponce had a planned residential community that through events and associations achieved a cohesive identity. Responding to an 1848 urban plan and mostly organized in single dwelling units, these residential buildings have similar characteristics in design, construction materials, layout and alignment patterns. View as separated units or organized in rowhouses, Playa de Ponce has dozens of dwellings with the ability to transmit the character, identity and historic development of the locality through their architectural design and/ or method of construction. The traditional residential community in Playa de Ponce, as identified in the mentioned context, contained also the subcategory of institutional housing extraordinarily represented in the 1940's *Caserío del Caribe*. With justification of individual significance, many of these resources may qualify for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Most domestic resources, including *Caserío del Caribe*, are more likely to be eligible as historic districts comprising multiple examples of geographically and thematically related buildings.

II. Name of Property Type: Commerce / Trade (business/ warehouse)

Description

As shown in the historic context prepared for this Multiple Property Documentation Form, since mid-1800s, Playa de Ponce had a planned commerce/industrial section developed in proximity within the wharf area, with buildings organized in elongated subdivided lots,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number F Page 81.

properly aligned to each other. The 1848 Plan enforced a construction code for this area in Playa de Ponce, making mandatory the used of solid materials like stone, masonry, or hydraulic concrete (specially for the buildings walls and foundations) as construction material for the buildings in this area, allowing metal plates as roofing material. Since then, the type of property that dominates in this part of the ward, representing the character, identity, and historic development of this area, are the 19th century and early 20th century warehouses and commercial storage buildings. With justification of individual significance, these resources may qualify for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Concentrations of related buildings such as warehouses may be aggregated into eligible districts.

III. Name of Property Type: Government (correctional facility/ fire station / government office / custom house)

Description

Many nonresidential resources located within Playa de Ponce contribute to the significance of the neighborhood by design, plan, or association to historic patterns or trends representing the population lifeways, supporting, and enhancing Playa de Ponce’s domestic life. Playa de Ponce counts with purposely designed buildings to be used as correctional facilities, fire houses, government offices and custom houses, built during the period of significance covered by this Multiple Property Documentation Form. With justification of individual significance, these resources may qualify for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

IV. Name of Property Type: Education (school / library)

Description

Many nonresidential resources located within Playa de Ponce contribute to the significance of the neighborhood by design, plan, or association to historic patterns or trends representing the population lifeways, supporting, and enhancing Playa de Ponce’s domestic life. Schoolhouses are among these significant nonresidential resources. Playa

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number F Page 82

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

de Ponce counts with two private schools' facilities from the 1940s (Colegio del Carmen, Colegio Metodista Robinson); one 1908 public school (Escuela Segundo Ruiz Belvis); one 1928 public school (Escuela Santiago Gonzalez); two 1950s public schools (Escuela Lucy Grillasca and Escuela Eugenio Maria de Hostos) and one 1960s public school (Escuela Dr. Alfredo M. Aguayo). Five of the mentioned schoolhouses are located within the traditional Playa de Ponce settlement, to which the historic context in this Multiple Property Documentation Form is directly related. With justification of individual significance, these resources may qualify for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

V. Name of Property Type: Religion (religious facility)

Description

The historic context prepared for this Multiple Property Documentation Form document supports the significance reached by Playa de Ponce within the municipality of Ponce and the southern region in the economic, social, and cultural areas. Factions from different religious designations showed an early interest in establishing a presence in the ward, from the 19th catholic presence, up to the new factions from the US after 1898, arriving with their religious, political, and cultural agenda. Resources representing these religious trends have enhanced Playa de Ponce's built legacy with buildings like the 1873 Iglesia de la Virgen del Carmen, the 1908 McCabe Memorial and the 1940s Iglesia Bautista de la Playa de Ponce. Some of these are associated with the production of notable masters. All the religious facilities mentioned are located within Playa de Ponce's traditional boundaries. With justification of individual significance, these resources may qualify for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number F Page 83

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

VI. Name of Property Type: Funerary (cemetery)

Description

Nonresidential resources located within or adjacent to a historic neighborhood may contribute to significance if they are integrally related the neighborhood by design, plan, or association. This is true with the 1911 Cementerio de la Playa de Ponce, which has served as the final resting place for the locals for the last one hundred and eleven years. The resource can provide insight to the cultural values of preceding generations. With a significant level of integrity, the property has a great potential in providing information as to the lifeways of a barrio obrero. With justification of individual significance, this resource may qualify for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

As previously stated, future efforts can develop other property types/categories underrepresented in this cover document.

VII. Significance

As indicated in the National Register Bulletin "*Historic Residential Suburbs*" suburbanization is the process of land development on or near the edge of an existing city. Usually developed as residential areas, the type of resources associated with these suburban settlements are mostly dwellings. The settlements are classified based on the transportation technology that provides the physical connection to the main city to which they belong. These suburban neighborhoods develop due to the overpopulation of their central city and grew as dependents appendixes from the nearby city.

However, Playa de Ponce's settlement was not established or developed in response to the overpopulation of the immediate city. The ward is as old as the city of Ponce. The relation between Playa de Ponce and the main city (Ponce) was symbiotic. The ward became a stronghold on its own as command center of Ponce's economic activity and a commercial hub

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number F Page 84

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

for the entire southern region. The ward developed a self-sufficient community, with all the needed resources to function as a separate entity: dwellings, schools, shops, factories, churches, social services facilities, cemeteries, movie-houses, town squares, etc. As these types of resources could probably be expected in main cities or today’s small towns, Playa de Ponce counted with these resources since the 19th century, emphasizing the early and unique importance of the neighborhood. Also significant is the fact that, very uncommon at the time, Playa de Ponce was a neighborhood organized around an early 19th century urban plan, that purposely divided the ward in two distinguishable sections by pure functionality, with a clearly identifiable residential zone and a commercial/industrial area, each section with its own construction code. This 19th century urban plan left a design pattern still distinguishable in the neighborhood. On the other hand, the construction codes enforced during many years since mid-19th century upon the residential area and the commercial/industrial area left a significant built legacy still recognizable in Playa de Ponce. Just as well, since the 19th century, Playa de Ponce has been the recipient of many construction works associated with well-known architects and engineers. During the 1940s, Playa de Ponce developed a public housing project that, besides being an early proposal for the betterment of living conditions, was also an offering of modern public housing that sensibly respected the ward’s historic appearance and volumetry.

As such, Playa de Ponce is significant under Criterion A in Commerce as the ward represents the rise of a port city’s prominence in trade and commerce. Developed as a worker’s ward, Playa de Ponce is significant under Criterion A in Social History as the barrio represents the history and lifeways of its social group. Playa de Ponce is also significant under Criterion A in Social history because of its contribution to the improvement of living conditions through the introduction of innovative living arrangements characterized by its type of housing, the neighborhood planning principles and the social services provided.

Playa de Ponce is significant under Criterion C in Architecture as many of its resources embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, style, and method of construction. The ward is also significant under Criterion C in Architecture for the many works associated to masters’ engineers and architects. Playa de Ponce is also significant under Criterion C in

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number F Page 85

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Community Planning and Development for its contribution in introducing an early and unique concept of community planning.

VIII. Registration Requirements

To qualify for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under this Multiple Property Documentation Form, the resources must be associated with the historic development of the traditional settlement of Playa de Ponce. Their construction period should fall within the period of significance (or previous time) associated to Playa de Ponce’s historic development, that is, between 1800 and 1960, as supported by the context developed for this Multiple Property Documentation Form. All eligible resources, regardless of types, must meet if not all, most of the elements of integrity: location, design, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association. Those resources eligible under Criterion A should be able to convey their association to the patterns and trends been social, commercial, industrial, urban planning, or ideological, that ultimately determined Playa de Ponce’s urban development and left a legacy in the wards’-built landscape. Properties could also be eligible under Criterion A if they properly represent the interests, lifeways, and worldviews of the social groups (i.e., working class, commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, etc.) that had a main role in shaping Playa de Ponce’s development, as presented in the historic context that support this Multiple Property Documentation Form.

Those properties eligible under Criterion C should embody the distinctive characteristics of the types listed in the section “*Associated Property Types*”. The properties eligible under Criterion C should be able to transmit their significance as a contributing resource to Playa de Ponce’s historic character through their period, method of construction, and/or its ability to represent the ward’s urban planning and design. Properties with alterations in design and materials could be evaluated under Criterion C and eligible to listing in the NRHP if they retain or properly replicate most of their original construction material (for example, wooden dwellings or masonry warehouses), and their general design, such as volumetry, street alignment, roof patterns, among other character defining features, represent Playa de Ponce’s historical urban plan, construction codes and unique division by functionality. Properties could also be evaluated

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number F-G-H Page 86

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

under Criterion C and eligible to the NRHP if the resources are associated to the works of renown’s architects, engineers, master carpenters or significant contractor firms.

Historic districts, whether residential or commercial, will have strong visual cohesion and will be thematically united. Alterations to individual resources, including changes for siding or openings, may not affect the contributing status of individual resources within the district boundaries. Important factors of integrity that must remain include association, feeling, setting, and design. Buildings should retain original massing and fenestration patterns. The setting must not be compromised by loss of buildings or new construction to the extent that the streetscape has lost its character and feeling.

G. Geographical Data

Playa de Ponce Ward, Ponce, Puerto Rico.

H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

The historic context included in this Multiple Property Documentation Form was the result of a research mostly based in primary sources consulted at locations such as the Archivo General de Puerto Rico (AGPR); the Archivo Histórico Municipal de Ponce (AHMP), among other depositories. Colección Puertorriqueña, at the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus, was also depository to review also primary sources as books, articles, newspapers, and official reports dated from the period of significance. In addition, secondary sources such as general history books, thesis, newspapers, and magazines articles, among others, were also reviewed.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 1 Page 87

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

I. Bibliography

Primary Sources

Abbad y Lasierra, Iñigo. *Historia Geográfica, Civil y Natural de la isla de San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico*. Anotada en la parte histórica y continuada en la estadística y económica por Jose Julián de Acosta y Calbo. Estudio introductorio por Gervasio L. García. Ediciones DOCE CALLES e Historiador Oficial de Puerto Rico, 2002.

Aponte Pargas, Roger. *El desarrollo histórico del tranvía eléctrico de Ponce: 1898-1927*. Tesis presentada para la obtención del grado de Maestría en Artes en Estudios Puertorriqueños, Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, 1987.

Archivo General de Puerto Rico (AGPR).

Fondo: Gobernadores Españoles. Serie: Ponce Caja 526.

Documento de la Real Cédula de Gracias de 1815.

Fondo: Gobernadores Españoles. Serie: Asuntos políticos y civiles Caja 11. Estado que manifiesta las producciones agrarias del pueblo de Ponce, 1813.

Fondo: Gobernadores Españoles, Serie: Ponce, Caja 526.

Archivo Fotográfico, C.P. 930; C.P. 928; C.P. 925; C.P. 926; C.P. 1505.

Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Edificios Públicos, Caja 598a, Legajo 55.

Fondo: Obras Públicas. Subfondo: Ferrocarriles y tranvías. Serie: Proyectos de construcción, Plano 196-1.

Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Obras Municipales, Ponce. Caja 92, Legajo 127. *Reglamento de higiene de la prostitución para Ponce y Mayagüez*, 1895.

Tarjetas postales en la Colección Robert Junghanns
Gobierno de Puerto Rico. Estadística general del comercio exterior o balances mercantiles. 1895.

Mapoteca, Plano de deslinde de terrenos públicos en la Playa de Ponce. Plano 266.

Archivo Fotográfico. Plano y corte del alojamiento del Fuerte de la Playa de Ponce, 31

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960
----- Name of Property
Ponce, Puerto Rico
----- County and State
----- Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 1 Page 88

Octubre de 1876.

Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Obras Municipales, Caja 290.

Fondo: Obras Públicas. Serie: Obras Municipales. Caja 290, Legajo 54.
Mapoteca, Plano 266.

Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Propiedad Pública, Sub-serie: Ponce, Caja 179.

Fondo: Obras Públicas. Serie: Obras Municipales, Ponce. Caja 292, Legajo 54-G.

Archivo Histórico Municipal de Ponce (AHMP).

Caja S-383-6, Plano del Barrio del Fuerte, 1841.

Caja S-385-40 (Plano 1920)

Caja S-352-8

Caja S-389-03

Caja S-383-6

Caja S-329-19. Croquis de la Calle Virtud, 1864.

Sección de Planos.

07-1928.

04-1898

17-1900

05-1902

02-1889

21-1924

04-1928

08-1893

27-1943

12-1909

04-1908

04-1950

24-1920

04-1928

24-1920

07-1903

117-1928

19-1911

16-1914

04-1917

08-1938

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 1 Page 89.

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN). Sección de Ultramar. Plano No. 5a-102-103. Reproducido en *Perfiles de Ponce, exposición de mapas y planos antiguos*. Oficina Estatal de Preservación Histórica, 1986.

Cámara de Comercio de Puerto Rico. *Guía general de Puerto Rico 1931-32*, San Juan, 1932.

Departamento de Transportación y Obras Públicas. Sección de Fotometría.

Documentación de Puerto Rico en el Archivo Cartográfico y de Estudios Geográficos del Centro Geográfico del Ejército.

Fernández Méndez, Eugenio. *Crónicas de Puerto Rico. Desde la conquista hasta nuestros días (1493-1955)*. Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, 1981, 239-269. Memoria de D. Alexandro O'Reilly sobre la Isla de Puerto Rico, Año 1765.

Junta de Planificación de Puerto Rico. Oficina del Censo.

Liga Progresista de Ponce, *Álbum- Guía de Ponce*. Tipografía, La Defensa, Ponce, P.R., 1913.

Marín, Ramón. *La Villa de Ponce considerada en tres distintas épocas. Estudio histórico, descriptivo y estadístico, hasta finales del año 1876*. Editoriales publicados en el periódico "La Crónica", por su Director Ramón Marín. Ponce, Establecimiento Tipográfico "El Vapor", 1877. Véase, Ramón Marín, *Obras Completas*, Ponce, Puerto Rico, 1989.

Morel Campos, Ramón. *Guía local de comercio de la ciudad de Ponce. Apuntes referentes a la fundación de la misma, datos sobre su administración y noticias importantes, seguido de un ramillete literario y anuncios recomendados*. Ponce, Imprenta "El Telégrafo", 1895.

Newmann Gandía, Eduardo. *Verdadera y auténtica historia de la ciudad de Ponce desde sus primitivos tiempos hasta la época contemporánea*. Abril de 1913.

Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1901. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901.

Report of the Military Governor of Porto Rico on Civil Affairs. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902.

Revista *El Playero*, 1968.

The Missionary Review of the World, XII (January, 1899): 53; XII: 377-378, "Plans for Cuba and Puerto Rico".

Tomás de Córdova, Pedro. *Memorias geográficas, históricas, económicas y estadísticas de la*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number I Page 90

Development of Playa de Ponce Ward, 1800-1960

Name of Property

Ponce, Puerto Rico

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Isla de Puerto Rico. Tomo II. Año de 1831. Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1968.

Universidad de Puerto Rico. Colección Puertorriqueña. Colección A. Moscioni.

Secondary Sources

Fortuño Janeiro, Luis. *Álbum histórico de Ponce*. Ponce, Puerto Rico, 1963.

Llanes Santos, Juan. *Desafiando al Poder. Las invasiones de tierra en Puerto Rico, 1967- 1972*. Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 2001.

Martínez Fernández, Luis. *Protestantism and Political Conflict in the Nineteenth Century Hispanic Caribbean*. New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2002.

Mercado Ávila, Nuria. *Plan de revitalización para la zona histórica del poblado de la Playa de Ponce*. Proyecto presentado a la Escuela Graduada de Planificación para la obtención del grado de Maestría en Planificación, 1997.

Miranda Pérez, Ricardo. *Nuevo uso para un viejo centro: Playa Ponce*. Tesis sometida como requisito para optar al grado de Maestría en Arquitectura. Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras, 1996.

National Register Bulletin. *Historic Residential Suburbs*. Guidelines for Evaluation and Documentation for The National Register of Historic Places. September 2002. U.S. Department of the Interior. National Park Service. National Register of Historic Places.

National Register Bulletin. *How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form*. U.S. Department of the Interior. National Park Service. National Register of Historic Places. Revised 1999. Originally Published 1991.

Pérez Vega, Ivette. *El Cielo y la tierra en sus manos. Los grandes propietarios de Ponce, 1816-1830*. Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1985.

Scarano, Francisco A. Inmigración y estructura de clases: Los hacendados de Ponce, 1815-1845. Véase, Francisco A. Scarano, editor, *Inmigración y clases sociales en el Puerto Rico del siglo XIX*. Ediciones Huracán, 1981.

Sepúlveda Rivera, Aníbal. *Puerto Rico Urbano. Atlas histórico de la ciudad puertorriqueña*. Volumen III, Carimar, 2004.