

Casona Los Torres
Lares, Puerto Rico

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
 - See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
 - See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): _____

[Signature]
 Signature of the Keeper
 Edson B. Beall
 Date of Action
 9-28-06

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing

_____ 1 _____
 _____ 0 _____
 _____ 0 _____
 _____ 0 _____
 _____ 1 _____

Noncontributing

_____ 1 _____	buildings
_____ 0 _____	sites
_____ 0 _____	structures
_____ 0 _____	objects
_____ 1 _____	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

_____ N/A _____

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

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6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Single dwelling

Agriculture/ Processing

Industry/ Manufacturing facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Other

Spanish Colonial and vernacular elements

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation masonry

walls wood- cedar, mahogany and royal palm tree planks

roof corrugated metal

Narrative Description

See continuation sheets.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

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Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Social History

Period of Significance

1846 - 1900

Significant Dates

1846
1868
1880-1900
1898

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

José Maria Torres y Medina

Narrative Statement of Significance

See continuation sheets.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

See continuation sheets.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	<u>19</u>	<u>725031</u>	<u>2024335</u>	3	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

Boundary includes all of the land historically associated with the property as recorded at the Cadastre Registry of Puerto Rico: 159-041-085-23001.

Boundary Justification

Legally recorded lot limits.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Olga de la Rosa Andujar, PRSHPO / Juan Llanes, PRSHPO

organization Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office date July 7, 2006

street & number PO Box 9066581 telephone 787-721-3737

city or town San Juan state Puerto Rico zip code 00936-4267

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Ivelisse Maria Pérez Torres

street & number Urb. Park Gardens O-16 Calle Acadia telephone 787-761-4830

city or town Río Piedras state PR zip code 00926

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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Narrative Description

Built in 1846, **Casona Los Torres** is significant for its type, materials, craftsmanship, and particular assembly planning. The house, which was part of a coffee plantation, was built of native woods (grown within the property), many of which are now considered exotic and extremely hard to find in the island. One of the outstanding details of **Casona Los Torres** is that it still maintains a portion of its exterior walls that was constructed of *Roystonea borinquena* or Puerto Rican Royal Palm—a construction material rarely found or documented in other standing historic properties in the island.

This building has withstood the effects of weather, climatic conditions, political riots, intense use by its occupants, the pressure of urban development and the construction of a new road in the area—an action that has impacted part of the site, almost strangling the building, and has increased the level of pollution by means of the trucks and cars that transit the area.

The property has been used for different purposes including a coffee processing and storage area, a classroom, and more recently, as a commercial space. All these uses occurred on the lower level, while providing housing facilities for its occupants on the upper one. With almost 160 years of history, **Casona Los Torres** is one of the oldest wooden buildings, as well as one of the last coffee plantation houses still standing in Puerto Rico.

Description and Architectural Significance

The property known as **Casona Los Torres** is a three building complex that includes a coach house on its entrance and a two-story house. The house consists of two volumes that interconnect on the second story by means of a closed corridor and an open space on the first floor. A water cistern and a coffee-drying area known as a *glacis* are structures also included as part of the complex. A cyclone fence demarks the property limits over a masonry foundation wall that surrounds its perimeter.

Due to practical and financial reasons, the structures on the property were constructed in phases. Its owner and builder, José María Torres, carefully numbered all of its structural components while preparing and storing the timber grown and cut on site.

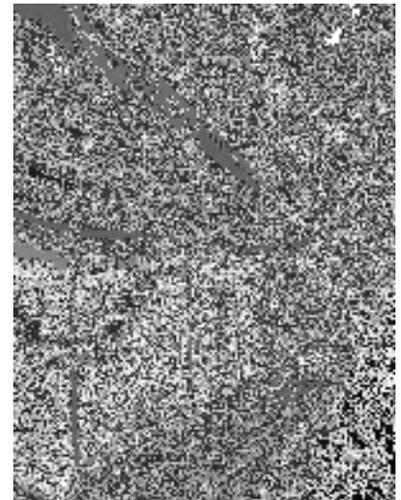


Fig 1. Lower story - main facade

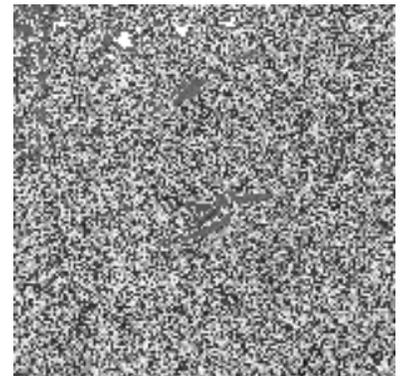


Fig 2. Casona Los Torres



Fig 3. Northeast facade

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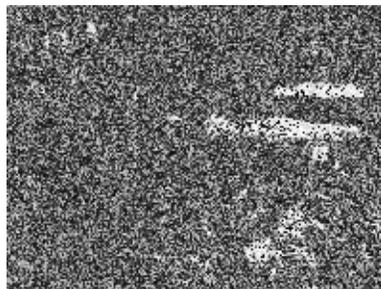
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Fig 4. Mortise and tenon joint identified by roman numbers for its assembly
Fig 5. wood post embedded in concrete columns. Fig 6. Masonry foundation walls



Torres used a system of draw bored mortise and tenon for its joints. (Fig.4)

The oldest buildings foundations are made of stone masonry, but wood posts embedded on concrete columns sustain the elevated room that connects the two main volumes. (Fig. 5&6)

The main volume has a two-gable roof, while the second or service volume has a four-gable roof, both covered with corrugated metal. Originally, these gable roofs were covered with Spanish tiles that were removed and used to cover the roofs of the buildings at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras.¹ Walls and ceilings on the main volume are made of mahogany and cedar planks, some of which are

thirty-inches wide. All the walls are single-sided. The ceiling is approximately twelve-foot height.

The coach house is an individual wooden building covered with corrugated metal and the panels on its sides. This was a common construction method that prevented strong winds from entering the building. This small building has room for two vehicles and a storage area.

Facing southeast, the main façade has three doors on each level of the building - that clearly mark the three bays of its floor plan- with a continuous wooden balustrade balcony projecting from the second level. The lower-left door - which is in axis with the entrance road- was widened and the space inside became a hall. From this hall to the right a door give access to the storage area, to the left to the lateral patio. (Fig. 7 & 8) The other two doors on the first level of the facade provide access from the storage area to the coffee drying *glacis* - located on the front of the facade, beside the entrance road. The entrance hall ends on a wood plank double-door that leads to a small room that contains the stairs to the second story.

The secondary volume or service wing has a rectangular configuration. On the first level it has there is no connection between the main volume and this area.

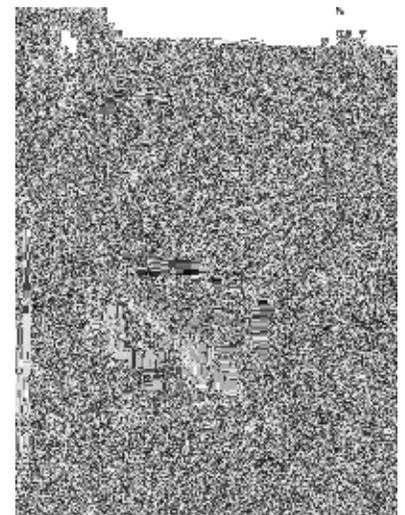


Fig 7 & 8. Left lower widened door on main façade and hall



¹ El Mundo. 23 de septiembre de 1979, p. 15C.

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However, on the second floor both levels are connected, serving as a ceiling for the open space between them. Its first story walls are made of *Roystonea borinquena* or Royal Palm wood –preserved by its owners and it’s in excellent condition- an extremely rare example of craftsmanship and use of material. (Fig 12) Inside, the open area has a mezzanine with a funnel used in the coffee processing to introduce the handpicked coffee beans in the pulping machines and wash them in large water tanks. This process was done to enhance the aroma of the coffee and enhance its flavor qualities. (Fig 13 & 14) Two masonry water basins, which served on the washing process, can still be found at the northeast side of this wing. (Fig 15) The water cistern is located to the southeast, near these water basins.

On the second story, the stairs give access to a hall. This hall separates the private family areas, to the right (on top of the main volume) from the service areas, to the left (on top of the service volume). At the end of the hall a small area with shelves serves as storage. From the hall you can access the private family areas through a gives access to a small room with shelves, to the corridor that takes you to the second volume, and to an antechamber that connects to the living room. Two of the four bedrooms of the property are accessed from this antechamber; the other two bedrooms from the living room. The living room and the last bedroom have access to the balcony, on the main facade. The antechamber has a ceiling door that gives access to the plenum by means of a hand ladder. (Fig 9) The hand ladder, as well as the roof door, is barely noticeable due to the low level of illumination of this area. By the same means, this condition adds drama to the spatial sequence as one enters through it to access the well illuminated twenty-five by twenty-six feet living room area. The floors of this volume are made out of *Cordia alliodora* wood, locally known as *Capá Prieto*.

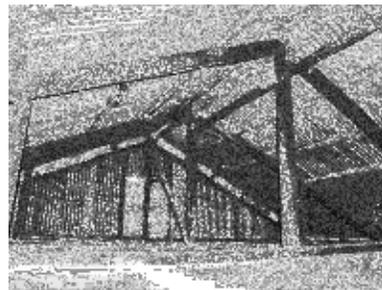


Fig 9. Antechamber
Fig 10. Living room
Fig 11. Roof Structure

All the doors surrounding the living room, and those with the wooden breast work at the side of the building, are made out of hand carved *Zanthoxylum flavum* or Vahl yellow-sander wood. (Fig 10) Each bedroom has double-door wooden windows. All the wooden floors on this level were covered with native hydraulic cement tiles by mid 20th century.

The service area consists of the bathroom, the kitchen, the dining room, a small dining area for the plantation workers, and a balcony. These are all placed on the northwestern portion of the second floor, along one side of a corridor. According to physical evidence on the wood finish of the exterior wall of this corridor, this area seemed to be an open balcony that was converted into a closed corridor during the first half of the XX century.

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A former house resident stated the use of panels wooden awning windows with fixed jalousies at the bottom half, on the same place where you now find aluminum jalousie windows. The current owner states that the structural system of the wood columns and balustrade of the original balcony are still enclosed in the wall. From the kitchen you can access the dining room, to the balcony, and to the bathroom.

The kitchen still has two original built-in wooden cupboards on its corners. This portion of the house is exposed to State Road 111 and State Road 129 and has suffered serious deterioration due to pollution and the loss of a natural buffer-zone barrier for its protection. **(Fig 17)** This condition has become aggravated by the presence of termites in some of its structural members. Prompt preservation measures are required on this wing of the building.

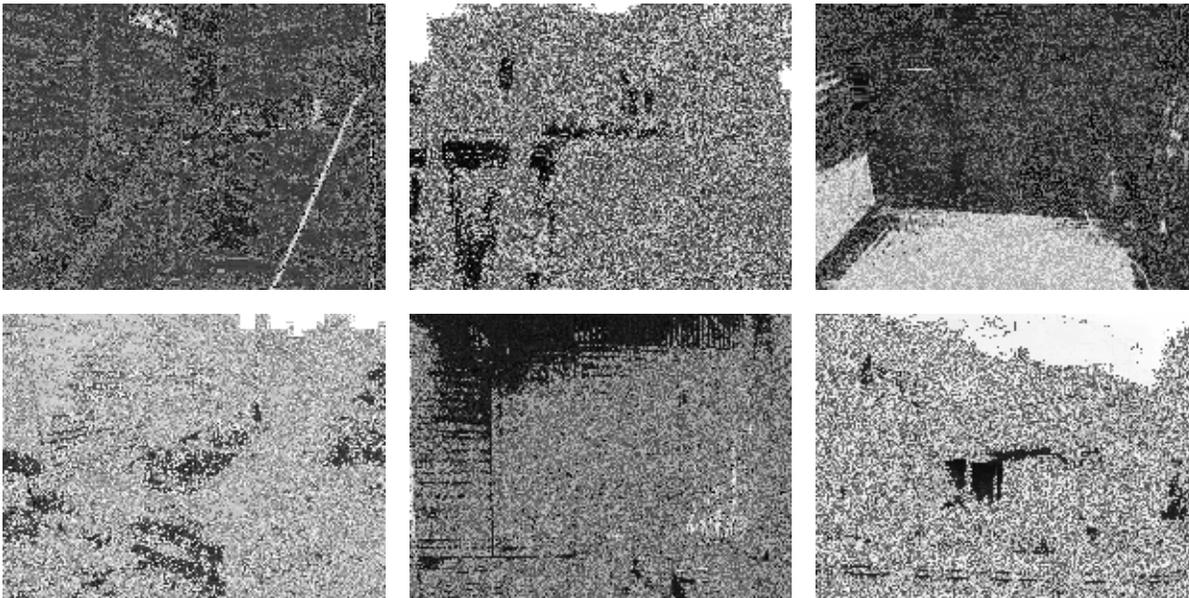


Fig 12. Secondary or service volume

Fig 13 Mezzanine

Fig 14 Funnel for coffee cherries

Fig 15 Masonry water basins

Fig 16. Royal Palm wood planks wall

Fig 17. Volume exposed to highways and pollution

Casona Los Torres is representative of a nineteenth century coffee plantation house and still preserves most of the materials, construction techniques and craftsmanship that makes it unique and significant.

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Narrative Statement of Significance

Casona Los Torres is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C as it is a unique example of mid-nineteen century coffee-plantation construction in the central region of the island. Also, it possesses construction methods, techniques and features of exotic woods that are extremely rare. It is also eligible under Criterion A because the property is associated with significant social and political events in the history of Puerto Rico: the Golden Age of the coffee industry, the “*Grito de Lares*” insurrection and the Spanish American War.

Historic Statement of Significance

Fig. 18 Hacienda Torres, 1937.



Casona Los Torres was built ca1846 as part of a large coffee plantation established by Jose Maria Torres Medina, on the outskirts of the town of Lares. Although **Casona Los Torres** now includes only the residential and part of the agricultural functions of the old coffee-plantation, the building embodies the typological and architectural characteristics typical of the plantation great houses associated with coffee haciendas built during the mid nineteenth century in Puerto Rico (**Fig. 18**). But the building represents more than just an architectural typology. **Casona Los Torres** is a historical document that speaks of local economical development, class conflicts, political struggles

and collective memories kept and preserved until present times.

Fig. 19. Lares



The town of Lares is located within the central mountain area of Puerto Rico at twelve hundred meters above sea level (**Fig. 19**). Lares started as a ward of the town of San Sebastian del Pepino. By the 1820s the site had the required amount of inhabitants to request its formation as a separate municipality.

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While the settlers of Lares in the 1820s were all “*criollos*”, by the end of the 1860s, the “*peninsulares*” and the immigrants were the new social force in control of most of the land and the commercial and lending-houses in town.⁷ The Creoles landowners became their economical dependants and political subordinates. This conflictive situation was not a local phenomenon. It was highly visible island-wide in all major commercial towns as part of the policy of favoritism imposed by the Spanish government upon its colony. This posture, practiced through all the Spanish Empire and highly resented by the Creole bourgeoisie and the landowners, created the political and ideological bases for the revolutionary movements through Latin America in the early 1800s. It had that very same effect in Puerto Rico in the 1860s, promoting a revolutionary insurgence locally known as the “*Grito de Lares*” (Lares’ Revolt) of 1868.

The “*Grito de Lares*” was Puerto Rico’s first cry for Independence. On September 23, 1868, between 600 and 1000 men, mostly Puerto Rican born and from the western part of the Island, revolted for independence from Spain. On the evening of the twenty-third the insurgents met at the coffee plantation of the local leader, landowner Manuel Rojas, in Pezuelas, a ward of Lares. This group was able to take Lares without much resistance before the Spaniards officials and soldiers became aware of the revolt. The group proceeded to form a provisional government declaring the independence and the establishment of the Puerto Rican Republic. The following day, the revolutionaries marched to the town of San Sebastian, where the Spanish militia awaited them. Within twenty-four hours the Spanish government defeated the revolt.⁸

The revolt was not a total loss. Shortly after the insurgency Spain gave the Island many liberal reforms. Puerto Rico received provincial status and the Spanish Citizenship was granted to the “*Criollos*”. The Puerto Ricans were allowed to participate in special elections and to organize themselves into officially recognized political parties. Abolition of slavery began slowly in 1869 and was completed by 1873, giving freedom to some thirty-two thousand slaves. Although these reforms were the result of a long political struggle, there is no doubt that they were accelerated by the Spanish government’s preoccupation with the insurgent movement.

⁷ Archivo General de Puerto Rico. Fondo: Municipio de Lares. Caja 30. Legajo: “Lares, Relación general que comprende todos los individuos que ejercen profesión, industria o comercio en este pueblo, compuesto de 14,404 habitantes o vecinos hasta 1,500 metros desde la última casa de su casto.” 31 de octubre de 1867.

⁸ Francisco Moscoso. *La Revolución Puertorriqueña de 1868: el Grito de Lares*. Cuadernos de Cultura. Número 11. Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 2003. The revolutionaries in Lares were not an isolated group. They were part of a wider movement. The Lares’ revolutionary cell (Centro Bravo 1) was just one of at least twenty groups united through an underground organization to promote and fight for the independence of Puerto Rico. The September’s actions were hastily done due to the fall of documents with vital information (names and dates) in the hands of the Spanish authorities. Centro Bravo 1 (Lares’ cell) decided to advance the date of the general attack without the proper synchronization with the other cells.

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The “*Grito de Lares*” is now immortalized in the collective memory of the Puerto Ricans. In the 1930s, the new independence movement ideologically recovered the significance of the event and the town. Lares became the site for the annual commemoration of the 1868 insurgent actions. Every September 23, the quiet town of Lares noisily comes alive with the presence of today’s militants of the independence movement. Lares rightly acquired the name of the “Birthplace of the Nation”.

Today, a walk through the town place the visitor in contact with local remainders of the 1868’s events: the Lares’ flag (designed in 1868 as symbol of the revolution and the first Puerto Rican flag) is everywhere; several murals depict the faces of the revolutionary leaders and the town square is known as *Plaza de la Revolución* (the Square of the Revolution). Among these symbols of the town’s economic and political past stands **Casona Los Torres**.

Casona Los Torres

Fig. 21



José Maria Torres y Medina, a Creole landlord, built the house in 1846.⁹ The construction date of **Casona Los Torres** makes the house possibly the oldest residence still standing in Lares. Torres y Medina was listed in 1849 as the second largest landowner in town.¹⁰ Although the official date of the house’ construction is 1846, Torres y Medina had years before collected the wooden pieces for the structure, cutting and classifying them, like a giant puzzle that he would eventually erect. Each piece was given a Roman numeral, which can still be appreciated, and some areas where assembled without any nails or screws (**Fig 21**).

The residence faithfully reflects the construction techniques of mid nineteenth century coffee entrepreneurs in the heavily forested, mountainous regions of the island. The **Casona Los Torres** residential building was built of native tropical hardwoods, taking advantage of the excellent building materials available in the

thick mountain forest.

⁹ Registro de Propiedad. Tomo 22. Folio 209. Ayuntamiento de Lares.

¹⁰ Archivo General de Puerto Rico. Fondo: Municipio de Lares. Caja 22. Lares: 1849. Expediente: “Padrón de tierras de este municipio de dicho año.”

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Despite the deterioration expected in a one hundred and fifty year-old wooden house in humid-tropic climate, the conditions of the residence, especially in the interiors, are exceptional. The exposed, oiled, interior wooden surfaces have never been painted, thus conserving the rich, wooden colors of the original interior environment, an extremely rare condition today (**Figs. 22-23**). Aside from minor repairs and practical adaptations to the present, the building retains the features and character that it had when Don José Maria Torres constructed it.

Fig. 22

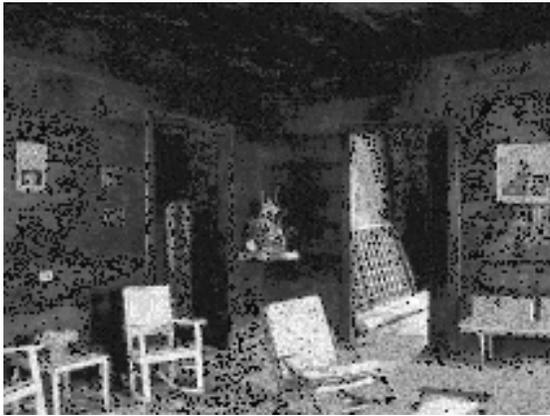


Fig. 23



Fig. 24



But beyond its architectural value, **Casona Los Torres** is also significant because of its association with two of the most important events in the nineteenth century political history of Puerto Rico: the “*Grito de Lares*” and the Spanish American War. José Maria Torres y Medina was married to Maria Isidora Pol y Segarra (**Fig. 24**), daughter of the first Majorcan immigrant established in Lares, Pablo Francisco Pol Vidal. Two of Maria Isidora’s brothers (Andrés and Bernabé Pol y Segarra) were leaders of the 1868 revolutionary movement in town. Bernabé Pol was even designated Secretary of the Provisional government formed on September 23, 1868 in Lares.¹¹ After the unsuccessful attempt, the attic of the residence became the hiding place of the two brothers while Spanish officials searched for those involved in the insurgency.¹²

¹¹ Olga Jiménez de Wagenheim, *El Grito de Lares. Sus hombres y sus causas*. Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1985.

¹² This fact has been orally transmitted through family members and the locals in the neighborhood. Interview with Ivelisse Pérez Torres, present owner and direct descendant of José Maria Torres y Medina.

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Ironically, the residence that served as refuge for revolutionaries in 1868, served as the site for the transfer of power from the Spanish officials to the American authorities thirty-years later. On September 21, 1898, the last Spanish Mayor of Lares, Don Pablo Vilella Pol, used **Casona Los Torres** as the meeting site to officially surrender the town to the American troops, as part of the island occupation during the Spanish American War.¹³

Don José Maria Torres y Medina died in 1895. The large coffee-plantation was divided among his descendants. The division of the farm came about the time of the beginning in the decline of the coffee production in Puerto Rico. By the end of the 19th century the coffee industry received two strong hits. One of them was the 1899 San Ciriaco hurricane that devastated the island on August 8, 1899. The powerful storm brought rain for twenty-eight hours and winds of over one hundred miles per hour. San Ciriaco paralyzed the entire coffee industry. Over sixty percent of the coffee trees were destroyed and the entire crop for that year was lost.¹⁴ The other devastating crush to the industry was a political one: the transfer of the island to the United States in 1898. The American investing capital that followed the troops was interested in the sugar production. The coffee industry did not receive the same incentives and subsidies as the sugar industry. Because of the insertion of Puerto Rico into the United States tariff system, the coffee industry lost its European markets. At the same time, the local coffee couldn't compete with the third-class rated, but cheap, Brazilian coffee that monopolized the United States market and taste since the 1870s. The coffee industry, and the regions depending on it, never recovered from the combination of these two blows.

Casona Los Torres was furthermore affected when the government expropriated a large part of the land in the 1960s and 1980s to build two major roads along the residence (**Fig. 25**).

¹³ La Correspondencia. 15 de Octubre de 1899. Volumen VIII.

¹⁴ Francisco A. Scarano Fiol. Puerto Rico. Cinco siglos de historia. Mexico: McGraw-Hill, 2000. p. 649.

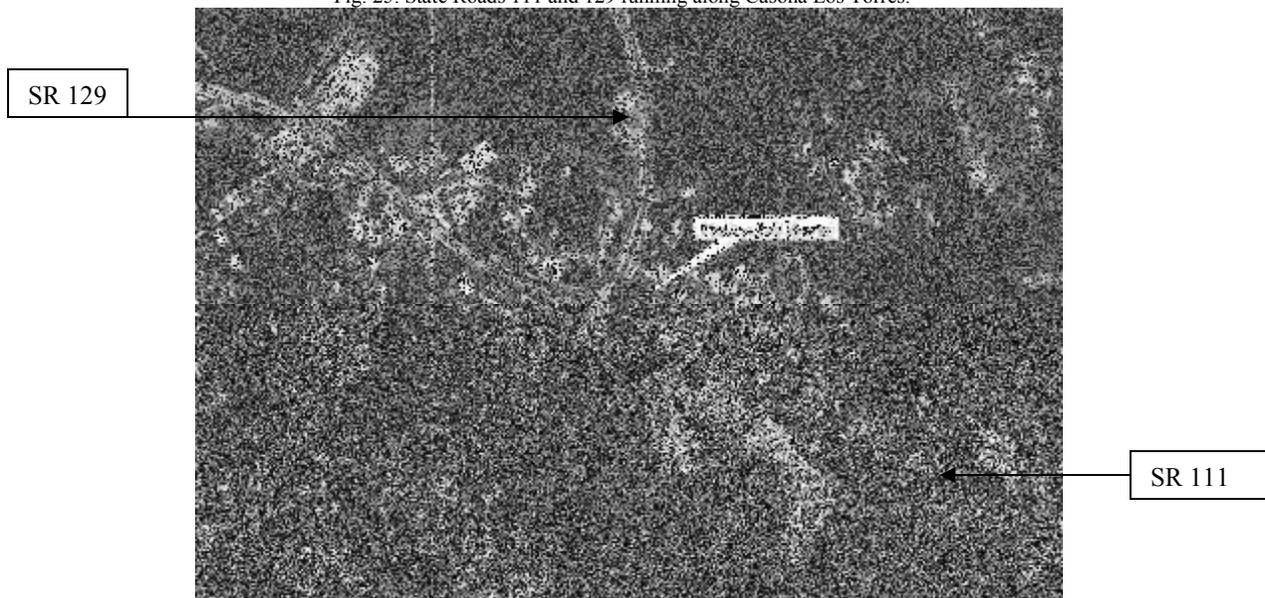
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Fig. 25. State Roads 111 and 129 running along Casona Los Torres.¹⁵



The location of the house at the entrance of the town had made **Casona Los Torres** a “symbolic gate” to the town’s past.

¹⁵ Satellite image. Gobierno de Puerto Rico. IKONOS, 2002.

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Bibliography

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Fondo: Municipio de Lares. Caja 30. Legajo: "Lares, Relación general que comprende todos los individuos que ejercen profesión, industria o comercio en este pueblo, compuesto de 14,404 habitantes o vecinos hasta 1,500 metros desde la última casa de su casco". 31 de octubre de 1867.

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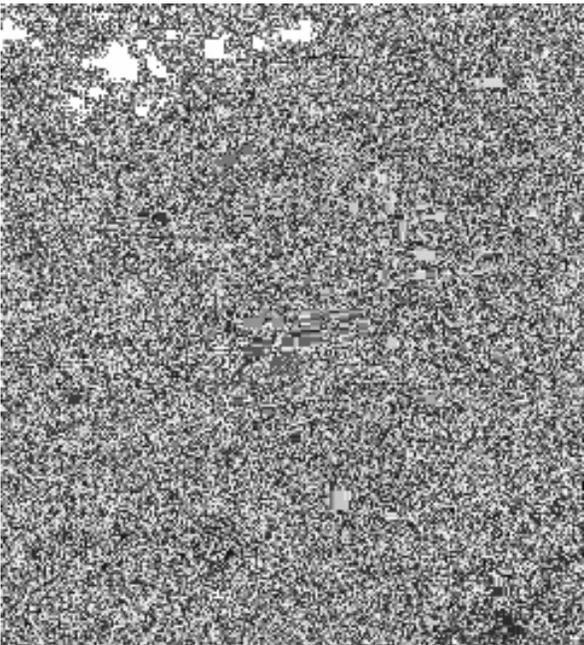
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Partial views



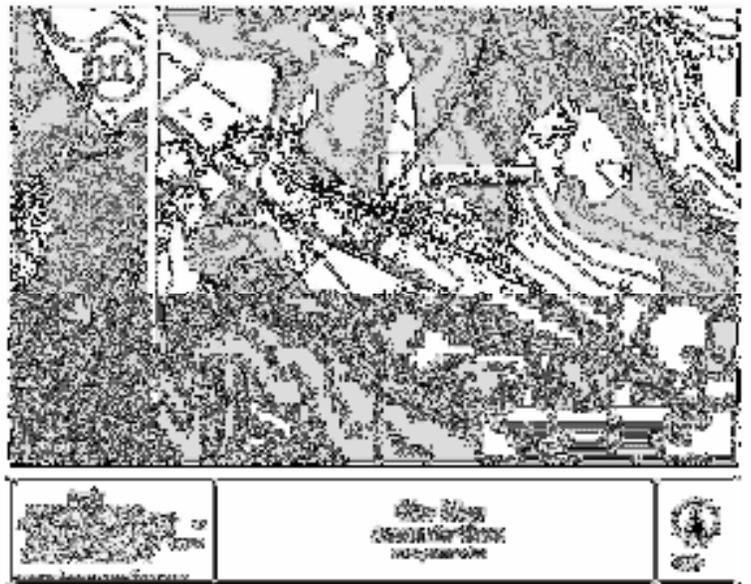
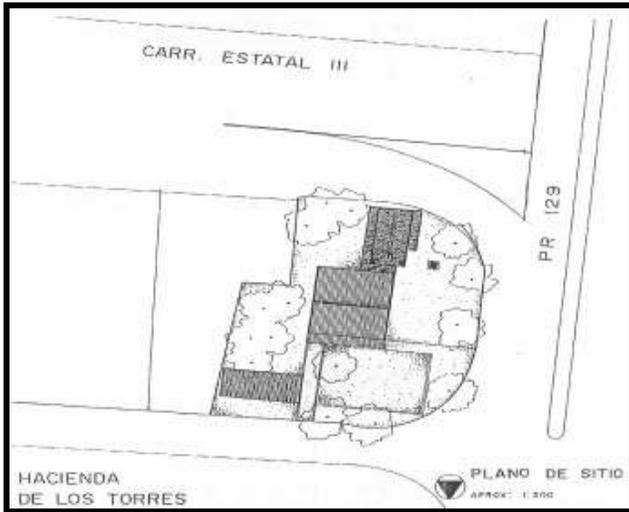
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Lares, Puerto Rico

Site Map



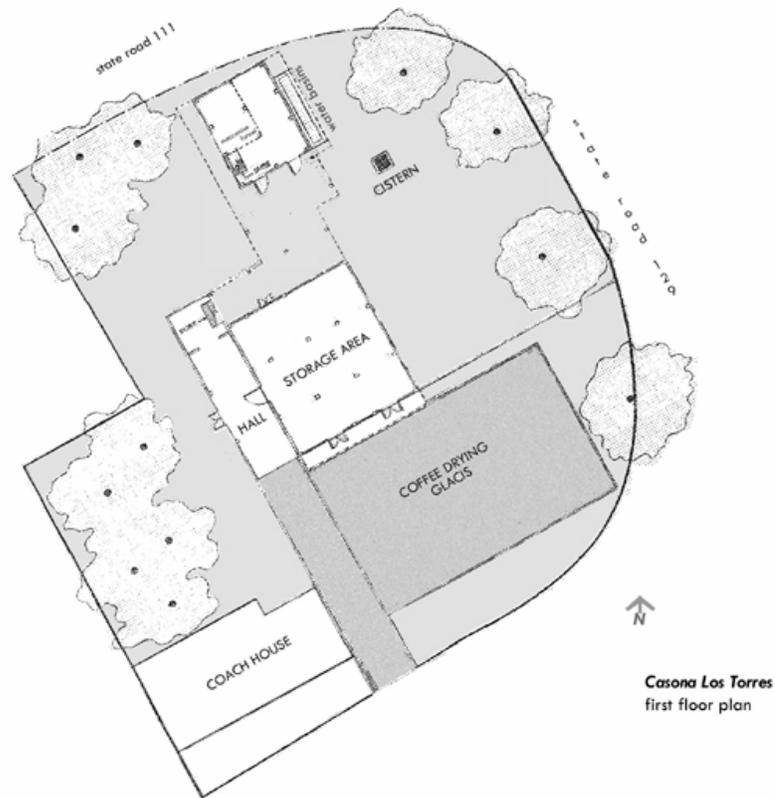
**United States Department of the Interior
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**National Register of Historic Places
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Floor Plans



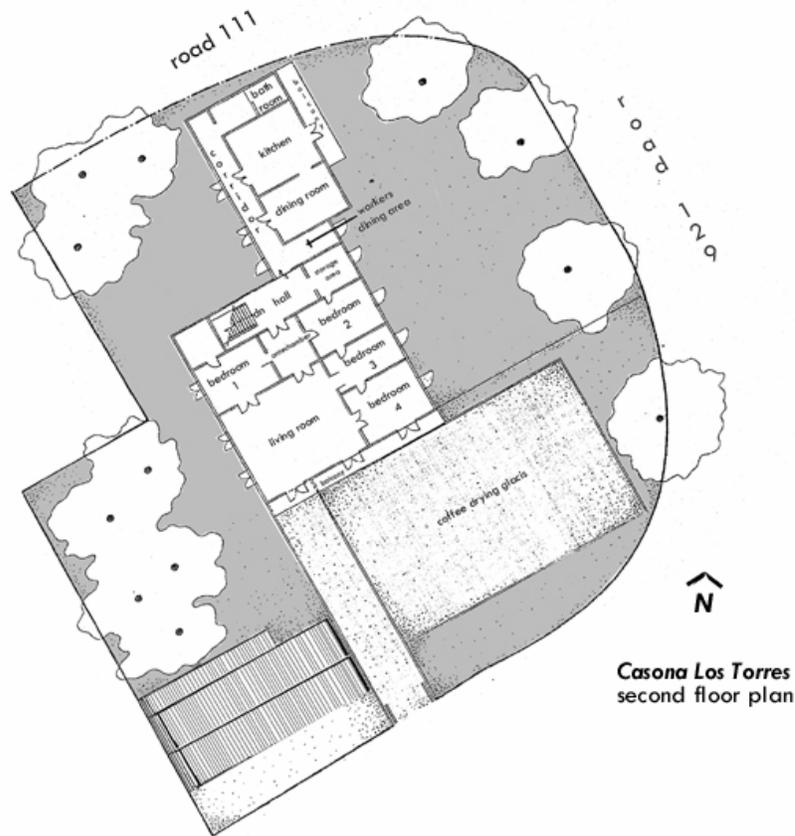
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Floor Plans



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Roof Plan

