

# LIVING WITH HISTORY IN NEW ORLEANS' NEIGHBORHOODS

## Central Business District



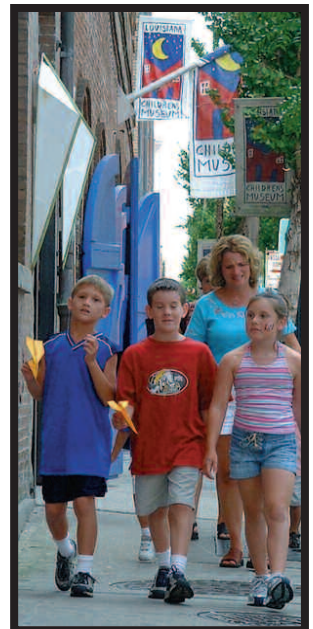
PHOTO: MARY FITZPATRICK



Like so many American urban centers, New Orleans' Central Business District used to be a ghost town after work, but not anymore. Evenings now bring crowds to historic Lafayette Square for free concerts. The Orpheum, home to the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, and numerous smaller theaters and cabarets come to life for nighttime performances. A half dozen world class museums now distinguish the district. Saturday mornings, the Crescent City Farmer's Market draws shoppers from all over the city.

Monthly "First Saturdays" bring hundreds of visitors to Julia and Camp streets for art openings and parties at museums and galleries. Best of all the historic neighborhood has become a hot address for residents who enjoy around-the-clock access to all the city offers. From studios to penthouses, lofts to townhouses, residential property is drawing young professionals, empty nesters, and even families.

Part of the huge plantation allotted to New Orleans founder Jean Baptiste LeMoynesieur de Bienville in 1719, the lands comprising the CBD were sold to the Jesuits in 1723, then divided among several smaller landowners, including Bertrand Gravier and Delord Sarpy, in 1763. Gravier subdivided his lands in 1788, forming New Orleans' first officially incorporated neighborhood,



**PRESERVATION RESOURCE CENTER OF NEW ORLEANS  
INVITES YOU TO EXPLORE THE LOCAL SIDE OF LIFE  
IN THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT, THE FASTEST  
GROWING RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE CITY.**



Faubourg St. Marie. By 1807 Armand Duplantier had purchased the neighboring Delord-Sarpy Plantation and subdivided it into Faubourg Duplantier. With the construction of the First Presbyterian Church, the St. Charles Hotel and the St. Charles Theater, the new "American Sector" (so-called for the Americans who settled here) had begun to challenge the Vieux Carré as New Orleans' financial and cultural center by the 1830s.

In 1900 the CBD was a thriving commercial and retail center, and its growth continued after the Depression. By the 1960s, though, the Industrial Canal had rerouted port activity, and suburban shopping malls had further emptied downtown. Construction of the new Civic Center in the late 1950s destroyed the inland edge of the original Faubourg St. Marie, while highway construction further eroded the remaining residential area. During these years, downtown was kept afloat by its proximity to the preserved French Quarter and stable uptown neighborhoods. In 1963 Poydras Street, once the site of a historic market, was widened to accommodate high-rise office towers. The land speculation that followed saw entire blocks razed for office buildings and parking lots.

Preservationists organized in the 1970s to stop the demolition of 19th and early 20th century homes and theaters and to encourage their renovation. They remain just as vigilant today. The City Council established the Central Business District Historic District Landmarks Commission to govern demolition and new construction in 1978. Since then, much of the \$1.4 billion spent in New Orleans on adapting historic commercial buildings, mostly for residences and hotels, has occurred in the CBD.

# THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

**The Central Business National Register Historic District is comprised of four local historic districts.**

## Canal St. Historic District

Originally part of the military commons surrounding the Vieux Carre, Canal Street was reserved in 1807 for a river-to-lake transportation canal that was never built. Instead it became a prestigious tree-lined avenue where wealthy people built showplaces up to 1858 when Canal became the city's principal business artery. Most of the city's streetcar lines met here as well. Retailing declined from the 1960s, and buses replaced the Canal Streetcar in 1964. Tourism became a major industry in the '90s and many stores were converted to hotels and a few into condominiums. Happily, the Canal Streetcar returns in 2004.



A walk up Canal Street is a tour of post-Louisiana Purchase building along the city's main American artery. The U.S. Custom House (1848-80), 423 Canal St., has one of finest Greek Revival rooms in the country. 622 Canal St. (1859) is a rare surviving cast iron fronted commercial building. Painter Edgar Degas' grandfather, Germain Musson, built 633-35-37 Canal St. (1825), three of the oldest commercial buildings on the street. Coleman E. Adler Jewelers has operated on the site of 718-20 & 22 Canal since 1897. 824 Canal (1844), the last remaining residential building on Canal St., designed by James Gallier, is now home to the private Boston Club. 901 and 923 Canal, the former Maison Blanche (1909) and Kress (1910) department stores, are now part of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. The Saenger Theater (1926), 1101-07 Canal St., is the largest movie house downtown.

## Lafayette Square

Beginning in the 1820s, Lafayette Square attracted fine new homes and important churches, followed by several speculative row house projects. Gallier Hall (1845-50) on the square served as New Orleans' City Hall from 1853-1956. Increasing commercialization drove fashionable residents upriver. With the coming of automobiles, many buildings were destroyed for garages and parking lots. By the 1960s, the formerly ritzy area had become a skid row.



Urban pioneers, including the Preservation Resource Center, began reclaiming historic properties in the 1970s. Today this is part of the city's Arts District and includes both small residential adaptations and large loft conversions.

The upper floors of the many art galleries and retail spaces along Julia St. are often living spaces. The "Thirteen Sisters" (1833) in the 600 block of Julia form a distinctive row of townhouses. In the mid '70s, the Preservation Resource Center restored 604 Julia St., where the organization headquartered until 2001, and other progressive individuals converted the block of flophouses into homes and shops. Many law firms have relocated to this area in the past 25 years, including Deutsch Kerrigan & Stiles LLP, who renovated the 1882 La Belle Creole Cigar Factory at 755 Magazine St. The Lafayette Hotel (1916) at 600 St. Charles is a good example of one of the many boutique hotels that have helped revive this part of downtown.

## Picayune Place

Now a hot area for condo conversions, as witnessed by the recent success of 416 Common Street, Picayune Place Historic District is still the financial heart of the city. Residences were originally built here in the early 19th century, but the area quickly shifted to commerce and finance. Certain businesses established their own districts and even exchanges. In the 1830s Magazine St. became "banker's row," then coffee roasters and packers set up along Magazine and Tchoupitoulas as the banking institutions shifted towards Camp. By the 1850s Carondelet had become the center of cotton trading, a heritage still marked by Factor's Row (802 - 822 Perdido, 1858). Picayune Place, for which the district was named, was lined with newspaper offices and printers. Poydras St. specialized in bagging and rope and its 1000 block was also the site of the Poydras Market, one of the city's busiest European-style municipal markets. The Exchange Hotel (1835), later the St. Charles Hotel (1897) at 211 St. Charles St. (both demolished) functioned as a social center for the entire city. At the turn of the century, construction began



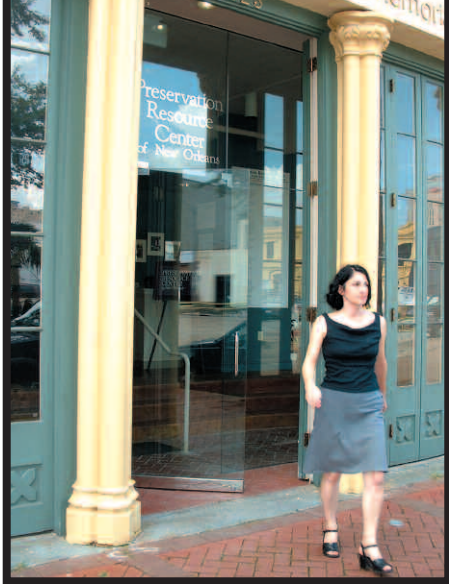
on several high-rise buildings. 201-211 Carondelet (1895), now the Latter and Blum building, rose to ten stories but was dwarfed by the 23-story Hibernia Bank Building (Union at Gravier, 1921).

The magnificent Moorish-style Jesuit church at 132 Baronne had to be rebuilt after piles driven for the neighboring Pere Marquette Building (1925) disrupted the original 1857 church. At 123 Baronne St. stands the Fairmont Hotel (1906). This was New Orleans' fashionable Roosevelt Hotel for decades. Huey Long had a suite here, and its Blue Room has hosted Ella Fitzgerald, Pearl Bailey, Sonny and Cher and Bette Midler, among others.

The 400 block of N. Rampart might not look like much today but the Smithsonian has proclaimed it the most important stretch of jazz venues in America. The Eagle Saloon (401-03) Iroquois Theater (413-15) and former Karnofsky home and tailoring shop (427), where Louis Armstrong found employment and friendship as a child, need to be restored and recognized for their musical legacy.

## Warehouse District

The area between Magazine St. and the Mississippi River developed in direct response to riverfront shipping, so the most prevalent historic structures here are commodities warehouses, retail and wholesale stores, and turn-of-the-century factories. In 1840 the river batture area



(present-day Commerce St to Convention Center Blvd.) was opened for development, adding to the already burgeoning district. The 1984 Louisiana World Exposition prompted the conversion of warehouse and factory buildings to mixed use for residences, galleries, small businesses and clubs. Today this is part of the city's Arts District. The Preservation Resource Center restored 923 Tchoupitoulas St. (1852), a rare Gothic-style commercial building, in 2001 as its new home. Throughout the neighborhood are excellent examples of warehouse conversions.

The 400 block of N. Rampart might not look like much today but the Smithsonian has proclaimed it the most important stretch of jazz heritage in America. The Eagle Saloon (401-03), Iroquois Theater (413-15) and former Karnofsky home and tailoring shop (427), where Louis Armstrong found employment and friendship as a child, need to be restored and recognized for their musical legacy.



## Annual Neighborhood Events

- Spring: DDD concerts
- July: Bastille Day
- August: Night Out Against Crime  
White Linen Night

## Neighborhood Organizations

- Riverfront Civic Association
- Downtown Development District
- Lafayette Square Association
- Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans
- Warehouse District Arts Association
- Warehouse Area Business Alliance, Inc.

DEUTSCH, KERRIGAN & STILES, L.L.P.

755 MAGAZINE STREET  
NEW ORLEANS, LA 70130

TELEPHONE 504-581-5141

WWW.DKSLAW.COM

SERVING OUR CLIENTS AND COMMUNITY SINCE 1926



**Published by**  
**PRESERVATION RESOURCE CENTER**  
**OF NEW ORLEANS**  
**923 TCHOUPITOULAS STREET**  
**NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA 70130**  
**504/581-7032**  
**www.prcno.org**

*Since 1974 the Preservation Resource Center has promoted the preservation, restoration and revitalization of New Orleans' historic neighborhoods and architecture.*



This brochure is made possible by a generous grant from the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities