

# LIVING WITH HISTORY IN NEW ORLEANS' NEIGHBORHOODS

## Irish Channel



PHOTO: MELANIE MIRANDA

PRESERVATION RESOURCE CENTER OF NEW ORLEANS  
INVITES YOU TO EXPLORE THE IRISH CHANNEL,  
A NEIGHBORHOOD BORDERING ECLECTIC MAGAZINE  
STREET AND EXPERIENCING AN EXCITING REBIRTH.



The Irish Channel has experienced an exciting growth spurt. The blighted houses that filled the district in the early 1990s are finding new buyers who often renovate them for their own homes, instead of rentals, which has helped to strengthen the area. Newly invigorated neighborhood groups working with Preservation Resource Center's Rebuilding Together program have painted and repaired homes of elderly owners, and in doing so have helped to keep the neighborhood's memory intact and its diversity alive.

The suggestion that Irish immigrants lived in a defined zone is a bit misleading. The Irish Channel Historic District was actually an extremely diverse neighborhood of working class Irish, Germans, Italians, Americans and free people of color during the mid-19th century.

Established as the riverfront of the American city of Lafayette, the Irish Channel mushroomed into a busy area of wharves surrounded by lumberyards and cotton presses. Soapmaking and tanning factories were supplied by stockyards directly across the river in Gretna. Free of the political control of New Orleans' conservative Creoles, residents of independent Lafayette voted taxes for the improvement of wharves and roads. Humbler buildings pushed out grand early residences as the waterfront became increasingly busy (although you can still find a mansion or two among the charming rows of smaller frame homes.)

This neighborhood has significant ties to the development of jazz in the city. According to the National Register report, "The Irish Channel area gains its significance in music from the fact that many jazz musicians of German, French, Irish and Italian descent were born





and reared here. All the members of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, the first jazz band to make a phonographic record and the first to go to Europe, were from the Irish Channel. Tom Brown, George Brunies and his brothers, Tony Spargo, Nick LaRocca, Harry Shields and Eddie Edwards are some of the jazz immortals who came from the Irish Channel and helped spread jazz throughout the world."

The Irish Channel has been the center of the St. Patrick's Day celebration since 1809. Marchers parade between floats while riders toss cabbages, carrots, potatoes and onions to the crowd. New Orleanians often boil the vegetables in a stew. Revelers gather all day in the corner bars that have always been part of this neighborhood's fabric, in good times and bad.

The Irish Channel was hard hit after World War II when FHA-insured mortgages were basically restricted to the new suburbs. Vast sections of American cities were quietly redlined, destined to decay. "Twenty thousand men went to war from the Irish Channel, but when the war ended, they couldn't get the financing to move back in," a property assessor once told preservation activist Camille Strachan. In the 1970s, young do-it-yourself renovators rediscovered the neighborhood, but the oil crash of the '80s ended that short boom period.

Now the neighborhood is looking up again. The past ten years have been good. Today's Irish Channel is a vibrant inner city neighborhood coming back to life by the vigilant attention of its residents. And shoppers from around the world flock to the design emporiums, spas and boutiques that increasingly choose to locate on Magazine Street.

# TOURS

*We encourage you to use good judgment and common sense in taking these tours.*

## TOUR A

### Jackson Avenue to Washington Avenue (walk/bike)

While technically the Magazine St. corridor is outside the Irish Channel National Register Historic District, the street is the heart of the neighborhood and its main commercial thoroughfare. The Magazine St. bus (#11) takes this route, but it's more fun to walk and experience the shops and houses up close. From Jackson to Washington, Magazine is primarily residential, with a smattering of sandwich shops and galleries. The townhouse at 1100 Jackson Ave., corner Magazine Street, houses the offices of Koch and Wilson architects, whose late principals, Richard Koch and Samuel Wilson, were instrumental in the early preservation of New Orleans' historic neighborhoods. Detour left on Philip St. and left on Constance St. to visit the former home of Nick LaRocca, bandleader for the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, at 2218 Constance Street. Return to 2319 Magazine St. (ca 1853), which London-born architect John Turpin built as his private home when he was a partner in the architectural firm of Gallier, Turpin and Company. Continue up Magazine St. and veer left on Third St. to visit Parasol's (est. 1950; 2533 Constance St.), a neighborhood favorite for po-boys and cocktails and a citywide favorite for celebrating St. Patrick's Day. Note the newly renovated shotgun houses in the 2600 block of Constance St., catycorner from the bar. Veer right to the Bogart-Lee House at 1020 Fourth St. (ca 1949). Check out the fine details of this Greek Revival style home and the unusual feature of a side gallery entered through the front door.

## TOUR B

### Magazine St. from Washington Ave. to Louisiana Ave. (ride/walk)

A few chain stores have crept in, but this fun stretch of the city remains mostly locally owned small shops. Start your tour just off Magazine St. at the McClellan-Schanzer House (1006 Washington Ave., circa 1868, corner Constance St.), one of the last peripteral galleried houses built in New Orleans. Note the carriage house to the rear of this Greek Revival home. Return to Magazine St. and take a left to visit several local businesses located in commercial conversions of shotgun houses. This is a good way to get inside New Orleans' most predominate type of housing and see the basic floorplan constantly adapted to modern lifestyles. 3000 Magazine St. (corner Seventh St.), built in 1887 by the architectural firm of Thomas Sully & Co., was formerly a Protestant Orphans Home. In the 1990s it was converted into residential



and retail space. The addition of such a concentration of residents did much to liven up the neighboring blocks. Across the street, Joey K's restaurant is a neighborhood fixture. The next two blocks hold a variety of shops selling everything from cigars and locks to replacement silver, and the left-hand side of the 3200 and 3300 blocks offers a range of casual and ethnic restaurants. Continue as far as Louisiana Avenue to sample some of the street's more eclectic stores and galleries, or veer off to the left on Louisiana Ave. to discover some of the fine old houses built when this edge of the Irish Channel was developed as Faubourg Plaisance in 1807.



## TOUR C

### Neighborhood highlights (drive)

Parasol's Bar at 2533 Constance St. is the epicenter of the neighborhood's St. Patrick's day festivities, and the adjacent blocks of Constance St. give a good idea of the neighborhood's ongoing renaissance.

Around the corner, note the row of late classic double shotgun houses at 2353-2363 Laurel Street. 2219 Rousseau St. is a "rare and undoubtedly best example of the Egyptian Revival style in the New Orleans area," according to late architect Sam Wilson. This former courthouse of the City of Lafayette was built

in 1836 by Benjamin Buisson and remodeled in 1843 by James Gallier, Sr. The Egyptian Temple features were added when the courthouse was again remodeled by Richard Fletcher in the 1890s; the winged solar disks above the door and windows are the Egyptian symbol of protection. The 1835 galleried cottage built for Mary Ann Grigson at 436 Seventh Street, near the site of the now-defunct Livadais Plantation house, is worth seeing, as is the elegant small Bogart-Lee House (1849-50) at 1020 Fourth St.







- 1721 French engineers lay out Vieux Carré
- 1800 Spanish secretly transfer colony to France
- 1803 Formal transfer of Louisiana from Spain to France
- 1803 Louisiana Purchase
- 1806 Barthelemy Lafon lays out plan to subdivide plantations and extend the city's faubourgs upriver to present-day Felicite St.
- 07
- 1832 Samuel Jarvis Peters buys Livaudais Plantation and hires Benjamin Buisson to lay out a simple street grid with large lots for houses
- 1832 New Basin Canal opens; construction employs many immigrants
- 1833 New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad (later the St. Charles Avenue Streetcar) chartered; begins operating in 1835
- 1834 Peters' suburb incorporated as the independent city of Lafayette
- 1836 New Orleans divides into three municipalities
- 1837 Banking panic crushes local economy until mid-1840s
- 1840s Irish Potato Famine spurs emigration; many immigrate to New Orleans
- 1852 City of Lafayette annexed to newly unified New Orleans; becomes city's Fourth District
- 1923 Industrial Canal opens, providing alternate shipping routes
- 1950s Pontchartrain Expressway built atop bed of New Basin Canal
- 1968 Defeat of proposed Riverfront Expressway that would have run along Irish Channel riverfront
- 1970s Resurgence of interest in restoring historic Irish Channel homes
- 1976 Irish Channel established as National Register Historic District
- 2001 Irish Channel established as local historic district under jurisdiction of Historic District Landmarks Commission

## Annual Neighborhood Events

- March: St. Patrick's Day Parade, Irish Channel Neighborhood Association Irish Festival, St. Patrick's Day Block Party at Parasol's
- August: Night Out Against Crime
- December: Merriment on Magazine
- Monthly: First Saturday gallery openings

## Neighborhood Organizations

- Irish Channel Neighborhood Association
- Irish Channel Action Foundation, Inc.
- Irish Channel Crime Watch



Home of New Orleans Favorite  
Roast Beef Po-Boy  
and  
St. Patrick's Celebration at the corner  
of Third and Constance streets  
in the Irish Channel

Bar: 897-5413 • Restaurant 899-2054



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