

# Landmarks' Préservation



## The Newsletter of the Louisiana Landmarks Society

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### WHAT WAS OLD IS NOW NEW - PRÉSERVATION HAS A NEW LOOK

After decades in printed form, the board of Louisiana Landmarks has voted to upgrade its quarterly membership newsletter to an online format. This new presentation will save thousands of dollars in annual print and distribution costs, and will permit a more timely and effective presentation of content. Over time, it will also enable expansion of that content to include feature articles, more original research material and better and more extensive use of color photography. We are continuing to search for the best online format to capture the spirit of the former print version, and seeking to expand our writing and research capabilities.

We would appreciate any thoughts or ideas that you may have on the new presentation. Direct any comments to [info@louisianalandmarks.org](mailto:info@louisianalandmarks.org).

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# Message from the President

## *The Idle Days of Spring*

The Duke of Gloucester, in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, finds in the winter of his discontent "no delight to pass away the time" engaging in "the idle pleasures of these days". For all of us who are confined to our quarters, the days weigh heavily on us. There are no longer any weekends. Idle pleasures are scant comfort when friends and family are threatened by the awful scourge, and staring at fish-eyed computer screen visages is but a weak substitute for real human interaction.

Watching TV is no good alternative, filled as it is with a full program menu of infection rates, death and finger-pointing. We learned this lesson after Katrina, didn't we? Sitting in the comfortable den of a friend's cabin in the hills of South Carolina, I could not watch the New Orleans news reports back then, as it was akin to attending your own funeral. I immediately rejected the friend's sensible advice to divert my worries with a round of golf, as the thought of engaging in carefree recreation during a crisis seemed strange and offensive.

Working a long-ignored "to do" list with the current newly-found free time offers little attraction. Neither does the opportunity to finally read those unopened books cluttering your bookshelf. Even otherwise laudable volunteer work can be a dubious option for those of us in the high risk category where the "awful daring of a moment's surrender", as T.S. Eliot described it, could result in a medical consequence for "which an age of prudence can never retract".

The challenge now is to seek to find *relevancy* in these idle days, activities that are not mere make work but that seek to prepare for life after the pestilence has become a terrible, searing memory. The compulsion to learn from a tragic experience and to make something constructive of it drove many New Orleanians in the fall of 2005, and resulted in reformative public policies that benefit us to this day. So, too, may it be with this dreadful virus. Our painful losses still have to be emotionally reckoned with, and avenged with improved social, cultural and medical adaptations that better prepare us to deal with future threats while also seeking to perpetuate and reinforce the best of who we are, what we do and how we do it. Unlike Gloucester's sad decision during his idle days to merely "spy my shadow in the sun", we are charged to emerge from the shadow of inactivity with positive determination and a stronger resolve.



Michael Duplantier  
President

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**NOTICE.**  
**PREVENTIVES OF**  
**CHOLERA!**

Published by order of the Sanitary Committee, under the sanction of the Medical Council.

**BE TEMPERATE IN EATING & DRINKING!**

*Avoid Raw Vegetables and Unripe Fruit!*

Abstain from **COLD WATER**, when heated, and above all from *Ardent Spirits*, and if habit have rendered them indispensable, take much less than usual.

## New Orleans' Cholera Epidemic

*In its long history, New Orleans has experienced many public health crises. The local newspapers reported extensively on the events of the winter of 1848-49.*

In late December of 1848, cholera, described a century later as “America’s greatest scourge”, made a return visit to the fast-growing city of New Orleans, sixteen years after the “brief, but destructive” epidemic of 1832. This visit, which “paralyzed business and left the city in shambles” was attributed to the arrival of a passenger ship from Liverpool and Le Havre with 1000 immigrants on December 22 of 1848, despite that the first local death from cholera had been reported on December 13 of that year. This “quick but destructive” outbreak claimed the lives of 3,000 residents of New Orleans in two months.

The Times-Picayune reported relentlessly on these events, the growth of which confounded the newspaper, given its report on January 1 of 1849 that cholera “yields readily to medical treatment”. The New Orleans Weekly Delta on the same day explained the origins of the epidemic as “traceable to bad habits, unhealthy food, insufficient clothing and inattention during the incipient stages of the disease”, the newspaper being completely unaware of poor sanitation and the water-borne bacteria *Vibrio cholerae* as the primary disease vector.

In the first 17 days, 739 residents given to what was reported as “irregular habits” perished from the pestilence. 67 cholera victims were buried on December 31, making for a busy New Year’s Eve for the local cemeteries, with 22 of the dead from Ireland, 6 from Germany, 3 from England, and one each from Spain, Prussia, France and Switzerland.

Despite so much loss of life, the Daily Crescent reported on January 1 that the city was eager to resume “briskness in business and gayety in amusement”. As a result, the American Theater on January 1 was “crowded to excess” by citizens who were “careless of cholera or almost ignorant of its existence”. As well, the St. Charles theater was “full and fashionable” for its performance that evening of the *Taming of the Shrew*.

Hart’s New Orleans Shirt Depot declared in an advertisement on January 2 that cholera was decreasing due to “Hart’s Cholera Preventive”, a remedy consisting of nothing more than wearing woolen undershirts, drawers and socks. Hart’s also offered “advice gratis” urging everyone to avoid wearing linen shirts during the epidemic, probably good advice on January 2 of any year. Taking even more credit for a cure were the

purveyors of Dr. Billing's Carmentive and Astringent Syrup which "has never been known to fail" according to the advertisements.

The TP took issue with the entire epidemic, editorializing that persons of "exposed life" became the victims, along with a few residents of "comfortable circumstances" who earned their fate through "neglect of the first symptoms....or imprudence during the progress of the disease". The newspaper concluded that had the Board of Health been more forthcoming, then the city would not have had to "..... stampede the legislature....and scare our winter population out of the city and their seven senses all at once". The newspaper's complaint was that the board could have made more clear the fault of its victims, a declaration which would have "encouraged the temperate and warned the reckless", instead of suggesting a "universality of distemper". It concluded that the disease was a "mere panic-breeder" which prevented fearful "fortunate members of society" from doing "more for the succor of others". The Times-Picayune seemed to be more chagrined by the breakdown of the traditional roles of *noblesse oblige* than of the tragic consequences of the epidemic.

By early February, the disease had mostly run its course. But, among many others, it was too late for Charles Yancy, a 32 year old man of "generous impulses and sound principles" who died on February 9, leaving behind a widow and orphans to lament his "reckless" decision to come to the city on business during the later stages of the outbreak.

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## Landmarks Welcomes a New Staff Member

A long-time arts administrator and arts advocate in New Orleans, Karen Kern recently joined the Louisiana Landmarks staff as a part-time grants coordinator and program assistant. A pioneer of independent video, Karen joined the staff of the New Orleans Video Access Center in 1977 and served as its director from 1982 – 1989, securing its first NEA funding as a Media Arts Center, creating the La. Video Shorts Festival, and playing an active role in developing New Orleans' first cable access system and video training program. She was a founding board member of the New Orleans Film Society and its festival and served on its board for many years. In 1997, Karen began working at the Arts Council of N. O. where she served as a grants officer for 16 years, helping artists and organizations develop projects and proposals; she also provided local and statewide advocacy leadership to grow public support for the cultural sector. As a freelancer since then, Karen has worked as a grant writer, event liaison for the Pitot House, gardener and vintage retailer. An ardent follower of local culture and history,



## **Pitot House Treasure: The Steckler Family Photo and Memorializing the Dead**

By Jenny Dyer

The Pitot House holds many historic treasures some of which are obvious and well-known such as the Jacques Amans portrait of Sophie Pitot that hangs in the winter bedroom. The house also holds lesser known treasures such as the unassuming black and white photograph of the Steckler family hanging in the salon. Behind the simple period photo of the Stecklers and their nine children is a captivating story of how families memorialized their loved ones after death at the turn of the last century.

Joseph and Pauline Steckler moved into the Pitot House in 1899. They had six children during their residence at the house, three of whom were probably born there. Several years after they moved in their seven year old son, Frotscher, fell ill. A newspaper article dated April 17, 1904 mentions that Mr. Steckler missed a business meeting because of an illness in the family. According to a mortuary notice placed in *The Times-Picayune*, Frotscher died shortly after on April 21, his death certificate noting his place of death as 1372 Moss Street (The Pitot House). It is more than likely that Frotscher died of Rheumatic Fever. The primary cause of death on his death certificate was noted as inflammation of the heart which was commonly associated with Rheumatic Fever.

It must have been a painful experience for his parents and siblings to lose a son and brother so quickly and unexpectedly. The photograph of the family is evidence that Frotscher was gone but not forgotten. His fuzzy, angelic image, complete with a white sailor top, looks back at us from behind the family group. As photography became more advanced, families asked photographers to use techniques to include deceased family members by superimposing them into photographs. Joseph and Pauline clearly felt that the photograph would not be complete without Frotscher and had him added in the background. Many Pitot House staff members have assumed that the boy was recently deceased in the photograph. However it was taken in 1909, five years after his death, so Frotscher is shown with siblings he never met in life! In fact, the baby in the photo was named after him.



During this time of uncertainty, it is a comfort to know that over a hundred years ago families went to great lengths to honor and memorialize their loved ones. Frotscher's image among his family members in the photograph is a poignant example of it. It was a treasure to his family in 1909 and remains a tangible treasured piece of history of the Pitot House.

*Jenny Dyer is the Historic House Manager of the Pitot House and also provides administrative support for the Louisiana Landmarks Society. She has been a staff member for several years and has a background in public history, historic site management, education, and interpretation.*

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## **In the National Trust We Trust**

By Karen Kern

In the face of our unprecedented public health and economic crisis, the National Trust for Historic Preservation is doing an extraordinary job monitoring legislative developments and actively engaging lawmakers and partners to sustain the work of preservation organizations like the Louisiana Landmarks Society.

Through its Preservation Leadership Forum (PLF) program, the Trust is conducting a series of free archived webinars to provide information, tools, and strategies for preservation organizations, a resource that Louisiana Landmarks has already utilized.

The first webinar covered the host of relief programs under the new CARES Act, concentrating on the much-reported Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loan. Nonprofits and businesses have been grappling with both rescue offerings since their launch of April 3. Despite that both programs seek to provide needed life support to nonprofits and their workers, the haste with which they were put together represents a challenge for those trying to sort through the reporting requirements. To that reporting challenge has now been added the issue of the depletion of the initial funds allocated by Congress for those programs.

Included in the CARES Act are appropriations of \$75 million each for the NEA and the NEH for grants and administration. Forty percent of the funding will go to state and regional arts agencies and state humanities councils for local re-granting and 60 percent will go to direct grants made by the federal agencies. The direct NEA/NEH grants will support jobs and operations of nonprofit arts organizations and at-risk humanities positions and projects at museums, libraries and archives, historic sites, colleges and universities and other cultural nonprofits. Another \$50 million was allocated to the Institute of Museum and Library Services which will make grants to "prevent, prepare for and respond to the coronavirus". Grant funding will be fast-tracked and will cover the period through September 30, 2021.

CARES also created a new “above the line” (non-itemizer) deduction allowing *all taxpayers* to deduct up to \$300 for charitable contributions made in 2020. It also lifted the annual contribution cap for individuals who itemize their deductions, raising it from 60 percent of adjusted gross income to 100 percent. CARES also raised the annual contribution limit for corporations from 10 percent to 25 percent.

The National Trust anticipates that a fourth stimulus bill will be considered in the coming weeks - this means more opportunities for advocacy such as for an enhanced charitable giving deduction. The Trust plans to continue its federal advocacy to ensure that the voice of the preservation community is heard. It also promises to continue to share resources as policy provisions are developed that support the preservation community, historic sites, and cultural and historic institutions. The work of the National Trust during this crisis has been a timely and valuable aid to local non-profits like the Louisiana Landmarks Society.



## Renew Your Membership Today!

Your membership helps Louisiana Landmarks Society promote historic preservation through education, advocacy and operation of the Pitot House.

[RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP HERE](#)

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