

# LANDMARKS' PRÉSERVATION



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## Louisiana Landmarks Society and Concerned Citizens Urge Preservation of Historic Jazz Hall

**Perseverance Hall Must Persevere: You Can Help!**



Hurricane Ida certainly was an equal opportunity storm. No property was spared its punishing and unforgiving winds, and its effect on New Orleans' historic resources is still yet to be fully understood and measured.

Among the more prominent of Ida's casualties was Perseverance Hall on N. Villere Street in the Seventh Ward (not to be confused with historic Perseverance Hall in Armstrong Park), the neighborhood of Jelly Roll Morton and Paul Barbarin, among many other beloved musicians. As detailed by preservationist Fred Starr in his recently published "Urgent Challenge" (link to full article on LLS website), this early jazz landmark suffered near catastrophic damage by hurricane winds, including complete collapse of the rear wall and near collapse of the two side walls and roof. Only the front façade remains intact and upright.

The cultural and social contributions of Perseverance Hall as the home for the creole Perseverance Benevolent Mutual Aid Association, as a performance venue for many of the jazz giants in the early twentieth century and, more recently as a church building for the Church of the Comforter, are well detailed in Starr's clarion call for urgent financial help, a passionate and compelling request that inspired several generous friends of jazz and preservationists to inquire as to how they might help.

*Continued on page 2*

**Vino on the Bayou**  
Thursday, October 28th  
5 pm - 7 pm  
Pitot House

Tickets available  
on our website  
or at the door.  
[www.louisianalandmarks.org](http://www.louisianalandmarks.org)

Perseverance continued from page 1

In response to this call, the board of trustees of Louisiana Landmarks Society has approved the establishment of a Perseverance Hall Preservation fund within the organization's existing Restricted Account at Iberia Bank, to which account will be deposited all funds donated to Louisiana Landmarks Society to the credit of the restoration of Perseverance Hall. While the mechanics of fund disbursement have not yet been fully developed, the board approval provides for the requirement of collaboration with the building's owner, contractor, architect and engineer to devise a process of project oversight that will ensure that funds collected are utilized solely for expenses incurred in the stabilization and reconstruction of Perseverance Hall.

With the complete destruction during Hurricane Ida of Karnovsky's Tailor Shop on South Rampart Street downtown, and the lamentable loss of so many early jazz landmarks over the last several decades, the saving of Perseverance Hall takes on an even more enhanced sense of importance and priority. Jazz emerged from the gritty streets of *fin-de-siècle* New Orleans and resulted in enormous contributions to and profound impacts on the society and culture of post-World War 1 America. The remaining venues associated with the esteemed local musicians who created this original art form must be protected and preserved out of respect for that history and in honor thereof.

**Your financial help is urgently needed. Please consider a timely tax-deductible contribution to Louisiana Landmarks Society in support of this most important initiative. To make a donation visit [www.louisianalandmarks.org](http://www.louisianalandmarks.org) or mail your check to Louisiana Landmarks Society, Inc. at 1440 Moss Street, New Orleans, LA 70119.**

President's Letter  
October 20, 2021

Dear Members,

It will be a challenge to fit all we have to report in this space, most of it concerning the aftermath of Hurricane Ida and the rush of events in the fall. Here is a summary:

In visiting the Pitot House the day after the storm, we found damage to the roof, dislocated shutters, doors blown open, trees and part of the fence down, and litter everywhere. Fortunately, however, nothing on the inside of the house was wet or damaged. Not long afterwards, our roofers installed "water and ice shields" on the compromised sections of the roof, and we are now in the process of filing our insurance claim. Staff and board have contributed countless hours to clean the yard, clear out damaged trees (see our proud debris pile elsewhere in this letter), address the additional hardware needs to stabilize doors and shutters, and clean the garden. Museum furniture items that were in the course of restoration remained unharmed in the conservator's studio and have been redelivered to the house.



Today, October event rentals are proceeding as planned and the garden is in bloom! Weddings and other events are more important to our budget than ever, inasmuch as Nature for two years has seen fit to preclude our ability to host fund raising events at the Pitot House.

In the matter of endangered historic buildings in the city, an important concern is the former Perseverance Hall on North Villere Street, which sustained considerable damage in the storm. We are teaming with the Preservation Resource Center and several building professionals to try to help the church that owns the building. Please see Landmarks treasurer Michael Duplantier's article on this subject.

Halloween is near, and we hope you will join us for a festive Halloween "Vino On the Bayou" on Thursday October 28, 5 to 7 pm. There are few sights as lovely as the view of Bayou St. John from the upper gallery of the Pitot House in fall. Please join us for the fun and don your Halloween best.

Sincerely,

Sally Reeves

## Adding Injury to Insult in Armstrong Park



*Photos courtesy of Leo Watermeier*

The threats to the historic buildings in Louis Armstrong Park, most notably the Municipal Auditorium, had even before Hurricane Ida reached a critical condition of not-so-benign neglect. The merciless winds of Ida served to exacerbate those threats.

Municipal Auditorium, c.1930, designed by Favrot and Livaudais, Architects in the Italian Renaissance style, has been closed since Hurricane Katrina in 2005 flooded its basement with 5 feet of water and destroyed its mechanical and electrical systems. While the difficult condition of the post-storm auditorium attracted attention from a succession of mayors since Katrina, no settlement with FEMA of city claims for repair of the property was ever reached and no permanent utilization of a renovated Auditorium was ever presented to the public for its consideration. As a consequence of the building's low priority and continued neglect by the City of New Orleans, its condition has continued to deteriorate, the price tag for its repair has gone way up, and an assured future for this impressive and beloved facility is even more in doubt. The proposal of Mayor Cantrell to re-purpose the auditorium for a new City Hall understandably ran into a buzz saw of strong opposition from neighbors, concerned citizens, and preservation groups citywide. Hurricane Ida compounded the misery by further damaging the already compromised roof of the Auditorium, a condition which at this writing has not been addressed, even with temporary protection.

Among the other historic buildings in Armstrong Park, the Kitchen Building (c. 1830) suffered the most damage. The rear wall of the building exploded out and down and is now resting precariously on the ground while still attached to the building. No repairs to this property have commenced as of this writing. Perseverance Hall (c. 1820) had its windows blown out and its shutters destroyed. The Rabassa House (c. 1820) was also damaged, with the extent of the damage yet undetermined, though the downed tree that fell against it has been trimmed.

Complicated and expensive as it may be, it is long past time for public officials to act responsibly and undertake the necessary repairs to the Municipal Auditorium, consistent with its long-standing service to the New Orleans community. The damage occasioned by Hurricane Ida has once again called attention to this lamentable condition of not only the Municipal Auditorium but also the other historic buildings in Armstrong Park. Private property in a demolition by neglect condition is subject to being cited by public authorities. Public buildings should be held to the same standard and subject to the same level of rebuke by an engaged and demanding citizenry. The clock is ticking on these historic properties.

## Hurricane Ida: Pitot House Survives Another Storm



Louisiana Landmarks Board Members and Volunteers



Pitot House Marker on Bayou St. John

The Pitot House has been through many hurricanes throughout its lifetime. The house continues to withstand the test of time with only the loss of the roof during hurricane Betsy in 1965. Most recently, Hurricane Ida proved less damaging but still left her mark. We had minimal exterior damage but there was vegetative debris all over the campus. Two mid-sized trees in the meadow were uprooted, along with the large pots upended and several shrubs lying over. Our house chairperson, Rene Fransen, is making efforts to save one of the trees which was a lovely magnolia. We were pleased to see that there was no interior damage to furniture.

As for the downed trees, branches, shrubbery, and debris, a crew of volunteers including Rene Fransen, Michael Duplantier, Nathan Lott, Karen Snyder, Kirk Ruark (our wonderful garden volunteer), Bill and Sally Reeves spent one Saturday morning cutting up downed trees, cutting up shrubbery and collecting branches and piles of leaves. They hauled it all out to the curb for the city debris pickup creating a massive pile. We conducted a garden-clean up this week to tackle our regular maintenance of the parterre beds. How fortunate we are to have such an active and generous board!

With the return of the repaired and restored furniture, the house and property are now in stable condition. The historic marker across the street on the bayou was also repaired and restored. After a month of hard work we are ready to host our many weddings scheduled for the fall of this year. We look forward to a successful end of the year and wish everyone the best as they recover from Hurricane Ida.

  
Visit the Pitot House for your wedding or event!  
504-482-0312

# LANDMARKS SPOTLIGHT

IF YOU'RE GOING TO SAN FRANCISCO (THE PLANTATION HOUSE, THAT IS)

By Michael Duplantier



Photo credits: Left; *Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Carnegie Survey of the South, Francis B. Johnson, Photographer 1938*  
Right; [www.sanfranciscoplantation.org](http://www.sanfranciscoplantation.org)

If you're going to San Francisco Plantation to visit, you're too late. The c.1855 Great River Road plantation home in Garyville, La., closed its doors for public visitation on August 28. While the house plans to host scheduled events through the end of 2021, public tours of the home have been permanently discontinued. Marathon Petroleum Corp., the longtime owner of the property and operator of the adjacent refinery, announced the closure in June of this year and indicated that future utilization of the home will be as the site for educational programs for children in St. John the Baptist Parish.

The origins of the unusual name for the house may or may not be apocryphal, but either way it makes for a fine story. The home was named not for the city by the bay but for the putative financial status of the Valsin Marmillion family, a family that during the challenging Civil War era in the south found themselves *sans frusquin* due to inherited debt from the estate of Valsin's father, Edmond Marmillion, the builder of the large and impressive house. That metaphorical and clever phrasing of their situation led to its subsequent naming as St. Frusquin Plantation, a name that was altered to the more easily pronounceable "San Francisco" in 1879 by its then owner, Achille Bougere.

The opulent architecture of San Francisco plantation home is described on its website as a "galleried house, of the Creole open suite style". That description understates the *grandeur* of its exceptional detailing as well as of its brilliant coloration and visual exuberance. The house presents a notable example of the peculiarly southern vernacular style aptly named, described and celebrated as "Steamboat Gothic", the style representing an elaborate architectural expression favored by certain of the southern *nouveau riche*, mostly sugar barons, the flamboyant planter class eager to showcase their status, wealth and refined taste.

Unlike other surviving nineteenth century Louisiana plantation houses set back from the highway by an *all e* of mature oaks, San Francisco has long been sited perilously close to Highway 44, having lost its extensive front yard and gardens to a 1932 Mississippi River levee expansion, the house barely avoiding the lamentable fate of so many other houses lost as a result of early nineteenth century flood control levee realignments.

That the near future of San Francisco appears to be as an educational facility for children is encouraging but its permanent closing to the public can be said to generate some concern for its long term preservation. Refining oil and operating a historic house side-by-side is an unusual and complicated alchemy, and Marathon Petroleum deserves much credit for its decades of stewardship and its considerable financial investment. While San Francisco continues in its educational mission, the historic importance of this National Register property also warrants development of a circumspect preservation plan to ensure the permanent protection of this extraordinary and irreplaceable house.

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Louisiana Landmarks Society

**Mission Statement**

*The Louisiana Landmarks Society promotes historic preservation through education, advocacy, and operation of the Pitot House*

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