

LANDMARKS' PRESERVATION



THE JOURNAL OF THE LOUISIANA LANDMARKS SOCIETY

Preservationist Spotlight

Q&A with local preservationist Ann Masson

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James Wade, Editor

By Elizabeth Stuart Centanni

For more than 35 years, Ann Masson has devoted her professional life to historic preservation and promoting tourism in Louisiana. Ann has had her research published in numerous journals and books, lectured extensively, serves as a consultant on projects, and most recently, served as the assistant director of the Master of Preservation Studies at Tulane University. We asked her about her passion to preserve our history and culture.



Local preservationist, Ann Masson

What sparked your interest in historic preservation and at what age did you begin actively working to save threatened architecture or landmarks?

When I was five, we visited Williamsburg on the way to my grandmother's family home. I didn't know the words historic preservation, but I remember being entranced by the buildings, costumes, and gingerbread. Every summer we stopped at battlefields, museums, and historic houses, and all the relatives lived in old buildings, so being surrounded by the past seemed natural. But it wasn't until the early 1970s that I became active in historic preservation, in part inspired by the examples of Sam Wilson and Jessie Poesch. The first campaign in which I participated was the 1974 attempt to

save the Art Deco General Laundry building, then owned by the US Postal Service, which resulted in a partial victory, in that the impressive façade still exists, but in poor condition. It was named to the New Orleans Nine list in 2010.

Why is historic preservation important to you?

Architectural preservation makes the past tangible and the present beautiful. Old buildings, especially when assembled as neighborhoods, enrich modern life by providing a sense of place and continuity, and by inspiring imagination and creativity. The highly-valued unique culture and atmosphere of New Orleans are based in the city's extraordinary collection of useful and

Continued on page 3...

Inside this issue:

Q&A with local preservationist Ann Masson	1
Preservation in Madisonville	2
Editor's Note	3
Charles Alexandre Lesueur	4
Le Marché des Fêtes	4
Raise a Glass for the Pitot House	5
A New Acquisition	5

Louisiana Landmarks Society
2013-2014 Lecture Series Presents

*Rebuilding Faubourg
Lafayette,
One House at a Time*

GUEST SPEAKER
Colleen Evans Lusignan

MONDAY OCTOBER 21, 2013, 6:00 pm
6330 St. Charles Ave. New Orleans, LA
Reception Following

A Message from the President

Good work gardeners and do- cents. We are lucky to have talented hands at the helm. Mercedes Whitecloud, the guru of our House and Garden, is now Chair of the House Committee and chief advisor to Debbie de la Houssaye, who orchestrates the garden and lawn. Additionally, Diana Smith assures me all will be ready for the December 7th holiday event, the market we call *Le Marché des Fêtes*. Neighbors from far and wide will come to do their holiday shopping, find gourmet lunch items, hear the music and see the dancing. Don't miss it!

Reading these pages will impress you with the health and fitness of Louisiana Landmarks Society. Advocacy and Education continues to ramp up. Sandra Stokes is the perfect advocacy leader for our efforts to both charm and bully the reluctant, and differentiate between progress and preservation. Both characterize our efforts. Sandra knows that we can progress as a community without losing our valuable historic built environment and she is going to make certain that message is broadcasted. Her Advocacy Committee is strong and committed.

The 2013 Fall Vino on the Bayou series is going to be even more impressive than ever. Ann Heslin and Taylor Schmidt Pospisil, along with IBERIABANK and Pearl Wine Co. - are making innovations you will appreciate. I can only encourage you to come by at sunset on those Fridays and see. It's a place to learn something about wines, without letting the educational aspect get in the way of meeting friends and feeling the glow of the occasion. There are not many spots in the city that lend themselves as well to an hour or so of togetherness.

Sincerely,

Susan

Preservation in Madisonville

By James Wade



LLS Member Gail Perry presents Mayor Peter Gitz with a letter from LLS President Kierr.

In Madisonville, the former library building has been acquired by the city, with plans for it to be preserved. The building was acquired through a deal that gave a parcel of city owned land to the St. Tammany Parish Library Board in return for the historic structure. The Old Library was constructed around 1900 as a simple frame commercial building. The ornate façade that currently graces the building was added in 1911. Before being used as a library, the building served as a bank and as a hospital but was closed after being flooded during Hurricane Katrina. Louisiana Landmarks Society President Susan Kierr praised Mayor Peter Gitz for his role in the preservation of the structure saying that his actions perfectly embodied the mission statement of

The Landmarks Society by promoting preservation, advocacy, and education. No decision has been reached on how the building will be employed by the city of Madisonville.



The Old Madisonville Library

Ann Masson (Continued)...

livable architecture. It mystifies me that this is not better understood and appreciated. There are only so many of these unique structures, yet we permit demolition of entire historic areas and tolerate constant attrition by poor renovations and lack of knowledge about proper techniques and materials. Even today, fine cypress shutters from the early 19th century are found in French Quarter dumpsters, and modern intrusions compromise virtually every building. How much authentic architecture will remain in 20 years? Without her historic buildings, New Orleans would be just another sea of homogenized, character-less boxes, so I see historic preservation as a core value that the city and its residents should hold.

How would you like to see preservationists be more innovative

in raising awareness in young people?

For decades, preservationists have reached children via history programs, art projects, and visits to historic places. As successful as these worthy efforts have been, they were rarely properly funded or given prominence in curricula. The digital world presents an entirely new and exciting way of reaching children and young adults, but like most "mature" adults, I have little understanding of how this could work. We are just at the beginning of using apps, social media, and new means of digital presentation to foster an appreciation of the past. Fortunately, the next generation of preservationists is exploring this new world with the goal of reaching a much wider audience in ever-more relevant ways.

Editor's Notes

This issue sees some changes for Landmarks' *Préservation*. The most important of which is that we are going back on a regular, quarterly schedule with issues coming out the first weeks of January, April, July, and October. Another noticeable change is our new format which will give Landmarks a more uniform appearance for both its print and web based publications. Fear not, we are not abandoning the traditional printed copies of Landmarks' *Préservation*, rather we wish to give our readers an option as to which form they would like to use. The

design genius behind our new look is Pitot House Coordinator, Meagan Pryor. I, for one would like to give Meagan a big hand for all her work.

If you have something you would like to see in Landmarks' *Préservation*, feel free to contact me by email at iacobus1@mac.com. If you would like to submit an article, please send it to that address. The deadline for each issue is the 15th of the month preceding the release date.

James Wade

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Charles Alexandre Lesueur

by James Wade

It is well known that one of the important guideposts in the restoration of the Pitot House was the sketch of the house made in the 1830's by Charles Alexandre Lesueur. What is less remarked on is Lesueur's lengthy career as a naturalist and illustrator in both the United States and France. Charles Lesueur was born in January 1778 in the French port city of Le Havre. His professional career as a naturalist began in 1800 when he took part in the French expedition that set out to explore the coasts of Australia and catalog the wildlife found on that continent. Lesueur was employed on this task for over 10 years and produced many scientific illustrations of the animals the expedition encountered. In 1815 Lesueur left France again, this time bound for the West Indies, and traveling with the geologist William Maclure. In 1816 Lesueur arrived in the United States where he spent a year travelling around New England before finally settling

in Philadelphia in 1817.

In Philadelphia Lesueur worked as a curator at the Academy of Natural Sciences, a position which he held until 1825. Also while in Philadelphia, Lesueur created a number of engravings from his previous scientific illustrations, as well as being an instructor in painting and drawing. In 1825 Lesueur moved to New Harmony, Indiana, where he created engravings from the scientific illustra-



Charles Alexandre Lesueur

tions made by the conchologist Thomas Say. During his period working with Say, Lesueur supplemented his income by continuing to teach art and drawing. He also took time out to make several trips to the Upper South and New Orleans. On one of his trips to New Orleans he stayed at the home of the French Consul to the city, Mr. Albin Michel where he made a series of sketches of the environs of the house. A copy of one of them can be seen today in the yellow bedroom at the Pitot House.

In 1837 Charles Lesueur returned to his native Le Havre where he became the director of the Museum of Natural History where he remained until his death on December 12, 1846. The bulk of Charles Lesueur's papers are held by the Museum of Natural History in Le Havre, save for two sketchbooks which are held by the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Le Marché des Fêtes Saturday, December 7, 9am - 4pm

Please participate in Louisiana Landmarks Society's 4th Annual Le Marché des Fêtes at the Pitot House. This unique holiday boutique will be held **Saturday, December 7 from 9 AM to 4 PM** to support the Pitot House and gardens. Up to 30 juried vendors of hand-crafted wares will be on site selling and demonstrating their crafts along with live music, performances, and delicious treats. Authors from Pelican Publishing will attend and sign their works. And

Papa Noel will preside over all the festivities.

Le Marché des Fêtes is a chance to do some holiday shopping and learn about Creole holiday traditions- all while supporting the endeavors of LLS. The entrance fee is \$5, but is waived for Louisiana Landmarks Society members. Proceeds from this celebration will help Landmarks promote and preserve the c.1799 Pitot House and its gardens.



Raise a Glass for the Pitot House

by Ann Heslin & Taylor Schmidt Pospisil, 2013-2014 Vino on the Bayou Chairmen

The Vino on the Bayou presented by IBERIABANK is off to a magnificent start. Landmarks welcomed guests on Friday, September 27 for an evening of fine wine from the Pearl Wine Company and cuisine by the Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group. Alex Bosworth added an upbeat atmosphere to the event.

The next Vino on the Bayou presented by IBERIABANK will be held from 5:30-7:00 on the evening of Friday, October 25. The Courtyard

Kings will provide the entertainment, Pearl Wine Company will offer its fabulous wine, and Café Degas will offer a taste of its cuisine. To purchase your tickets, please click on the "Vino on the Bayou" link on the Landmarks homepage. Spread the word and invite your friends. For \$10, members receive two glasses of wine, hors d'oeuvres and entertainment against the beautiful backdrop of the Pitot House.

Louisiana Landmarks Society is grateful for the generous financial support it has received from its Vino on the Bayou presenting sponsor, IBERIABANK. We also acknowledge Pearl Wine Company, Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group, Cafe Degas and the New Orleans Musicians Assistance Foundation's Gig Fund for their support.

We hope to see you on October 25th!



A New Acquisition

by James Wade

On Friday, September 13, the Pitot House was visited by two descendents of former house owner Joseph Steckler. Mr. Steckler, who was the last private owner of the Pitot House, purchased the property in partnership with his brother in October 1899 and sold it to the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart in 1904. His great-granddaughter, Mrs. Betty Steckler Barnes donated two family photographs to the Pitot House Museum collection, one a portrait of Joseph Steckler as a young man and the other a photographic portrait of his entire family. The family portrait is currently on display in the parlor of the Pitot House as part of our exhibit on 19th century mourning customs. The Steckler family portrait has an image of the family's previously deceased son inserted into the



upper left hand side of the picture among the still living children. The dead child, Frotcher, then had his name given to the baby visible on his mother's lap. No plans have been made for the permanent display of these images, but you can view them from now until November at the Pitot House.



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WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

As always, if any of our members have an item of interest or an idea for something they would like to see in *Préservation*, please let us know! Leave a message at the Pitot House, email info@louisianalandmarks.org, or email our editor James Wade at iacobus1@mac.com.

