

LANDMARKS' PRESERVATION



THE JOURNAL OF THE LOUISIANA LANDMARKS SOCIETY

Preservationist Spotlight

Q&A with local preservationist William de Marigny Hyland

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James Wade, Editor

By Casey Stuart

For more than 35 years, William de Marigny Hyland has worked on preserving historic treasures in New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish as well as shaping state legislation to protect them. He has served on the commission commemorating the 175th and the bicentennial anniversaries of the Battle of New Orleans, has had his writing on local history extensively published and was instrumental in establishing the Council for the Development of Spanish in Louisiana. We asked him for some insight into his passion for celebrating and protecting our local history.

What sparked your interest in historic preservation?

I lived with my maternal grandparents and my mother from the age of six years until their deaths. My mother was always intrigued by our family history and the cultural diversity of the area, but never took the time to conduct research. She always encouraged my passion for history. My grandmother was very petite, but possessed a penetrating wit and fiery disposition. My maternal grandfather was gracious and publicly quiet, though he was very charming. They were both wonderful raconteurs and represented nine generations of their families in New Or-



Local preservationist, Bill Hyland

leans and Louisiana. My grandfather was fluent in French, Spanish and English and possessed a phenomenal memory.

Through them, I came to know our extended family, most of whom always spoke French punctuated with some Creole colloquial expressions. There were 19th century carte de visite photographs, documents and other items which utterly intrigued me. After my grandfather's death in 1973, several cousins including Marie Jeanne Inez Tremoulet Pascal (1890-1983) and Marie Josephine Cruzat de Verges (1890-1980) continued to cultivate and encourage my interest in our cultural heritage. They were all consumed with worry about the fate of St. Louis Cemeteries Nos. 1 and 2 where

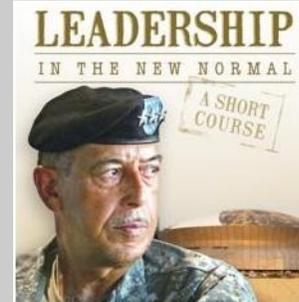
Continued on page 4...

Inside this issue:

Q&A with local preservationist William de Marigny	1
A Message from the President	2
Editor's Notes	2
Le Beau: A Personal View	3

Louisiana Landmarks Society
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Leadership in the New Normal:
Preserving Louisiana's Natural
and Built Environment

Monday, February 24, 7:00 PM

First Unitarian Church
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Reception following

A Message from the President

Dear LLS Friends and Supporters,
2014 is going to be a huge year for us. The diversity of issues, the challenges of the environment, the expansion of our leadership involvement and the whirlwind of architectural building, rebuilding and restoration going on in Louisiana is breathtaking. LLS is in position to provide guidance and discernment to the key players in our preservation community. As you can imagine, this makes me very proud.

I am proud of the work of our brave Advocacy Committee, our imaginative House and Garden Committee, our diligent Finance

Committee, our scholarly Publications Committee, our charming docents, and of course our brilliant and talented office staff. You can read about some of these accomplishments in this edition of *Préservation*. Chances are you will want to pick up your phone and call me immediately - 504 432 4324 - to give me your thoughts and sign up to be involved. I am going to love hearing from you.

Incidentally, I've just spent some time in Seoul and, when I wasn't teaching, I wandered through ancient palaces, gardens and villages. Truly, the South Korean reverence for their beautiful and in-

Editor's Notes

Welcome to the first 2014 Volume of *Préservation*. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the saving of the Pitot House by the Louisiana Landmarks Society.

This year will bring you some changes in how Landmarks sends you the news of the society. Going forward, *Préservation* will be sent monthly in an electronic format. These monthly e-versions will be briefer and also contain more time sensitive announcements. We will continue to print and send a quarterly version of *Préservation* to our members who do not use e-mail, and this printed version will reflect the content from the e-newsletter.

In other news, the preservation community in the New Orleans

area suffered a great loss in the burning of the LeBeau plantation house in Arabi late last year. This was the second major fire at the home in the past twenty years. After the first fire the home was partially restored by the Mereaux Foundation, however the home sat empty and unused for years before being completely destroyed by fire in November 2013. In this issue we are reprinting an article written by Lloyd Sensat after the first fire at LeBeau.

In happier news from St. Bernard Parish, this issue's preservationist's profile features an interview with the parish historian, William de Marigny Hyland.

James Wade



ventive ancient buildings would inspire any preservationist, including yours truly. Trust me, the work we are doing here in Louisiana will be a gift to the whole world. By recognizing the power of our past to inform our future, we are making a gift to ourselves and those who follow us.

Sincerely,

Susan

Call for Nominations!

A privilege of membership in LLS is our ability to nominate recipients for the annual awards. We invite you to submit nominations for one or all of our three awards:

The **Harnett T. Kane Award** was established and endowed in 1965 by founding LLS member Harnett T. Kane. This award is given in recognition of an individual or organization for significant lifetime contributions to historic preservation, locally or regionally. This award can be given to a member of LLS or to someone who is NOT a member.

The **Louisiana Landmarks Service Award** was created by the LLS Board in 2002 to honor a member who has shown exceptional dedication to LLS and its work. (Current officers and trustees are not eligible until they have been off the Board for at least two years following the Annual Meeting when their term expired).

To nominate, send a letter of support to LLS, 1440 Moss Street, New Orleans, LA, 70119 by **March 15th**.

LLS is issuing a call for submission of papers for the **Eugene D. Cizek Award for Student Achievement in Preservation Research**. The award is open to current students and recent graduates in the fields of history, cultural studies, preservation and related subjects. Papers should be at least 15 pages, and must be in MLA format with endnotes. Deadline for submissions is **March 22** and submission conveys consent to have the paper published.

Le Beau: A Personal View

First published in *Préservation*, Vol. 29, No. 2, August 1986

By Lloyd Sensat

In 1979 I was commissioned by the St. Bernard Parish Police Jury to create a portfolio of drawings to commemorate the Parish's 200th anniversary. To accomplish the assignment I covered with sketch pad and camera every section of the parish from Arabi to the Chandeleur Islands. Before beginning the assignment my main focus in St. Bernard had been my concern for and fascination with the decaying LeBeau Plantation. I realized that it held the distinction of being the last grand scale River Road plantation within the New Orleans vicinity. It was a unique example of the monumental Creole plantation house with overall styling of the Greek Revival period. Its combination of wrought and cast iron galleries, spiral stairways, plaster and millwork details, and octagonal cupola combined to make it one of the most significant architectural statements in the state.

I drew the house (page 5) with the works "Cardone Hotel" faded and almost invisible as they were in the early 80's because they added to the mystery and intrigue of the LeBeau House. It was obvious that this building was not originally a hotel but the center of a fine southern plantation. It was the type of building that tourists visualize whenever "Plantation Home" is mentioned. Almost nothing had been written about the LeBeau House. According to family tradition it had been built in 1854 by Francois Barthelemy LeBeau.

Architecturally, the house was similar in scale and feeling to the famous "Waverly Plantation" near Columbus, Mississippi. Like Waverly, LeBeau had a huge octagonal cupola serving as a lookout and fourth floor. From this cupola was visible the entire working plantation, the Mississippi River and the City of New Orleans. This great River Road plantation house had twin facades with two-story galleries. The details of the columns, doors, and windows were all in the Greek Revival style and the house reflected the grandeur of the late antebellum period.

Francois Berthelemy LeBeau had acquired the property on which the house stood in 1850 from G. & N. Treme. A plan and site drawing of the original Treme house has been located in the New Orleans Notarial Archives. Francois built the LeBeau House for his wife replacing the early Treme House. It is apparent that the new mansion was designed for lavish entertaining. In fact, legend has it that when a visitor came to the LeBeau House the family would stop the pendulum on the hall clock, telling their guest that their visit was so pleasant that time stood still. Unfortunately, Francois did not live to enjoy his fine house, but died soon after its completion.

In 1905, Louis Edouard LeBeau sold the house to the Friscoville Realty Company. This marked the

Continued on page 5...

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William de Marigny Hyland (Continued)...

so many of our ancestors are buried.

Many Sundays during my childhood and adolescence, I would accompany my grandfather and other relatives to the St. Louis Cemeteries where they told many stories about the families who had built the tombs. Later, my maternal grandfather brought me to the Louisiana State Museum Library and the Louisiana Division of the New Orleans Public Library to learn to conduct research. His knowledge of the French language was important as he began to interpret the documents for me. After his death, Tante Inez Pascal, Marie de Verges and another relative, Odette Bienvenu, helped me with the most archaic and colloquial uses of French.

I remember going to St. Louis Cemetery No. 2 one Sunday in 1976 with another elderly relative and discovering that the tomb of Annette Morales de Marigny had been demolished. I told Tante Inez about my sad discovery and, on her advice and instructions I returned the following day to the cemetery, clad in a seersucker suit (I had other appointments), borrowed a wheel barrow which the sexton of St. Louis Cemetery No. 1, Buddy Anspacher insisted I take, wheeled it down St. Louis Street and retrieved the headstones which had been tossed on

a garbage heap. Buddy crossed the street to Our Lady of Gaude-loupe Church, called Tante Inez who arrived with her daughter, Yvonne, who was driving. I placed the broken headstones in the trunk of their car and still have them!

Later in 1976, the rear wall of St. Louis No. 1, facing Treme Street in the Protestant Section, collapsed. Once again, receiving an alert from Buddy Anspacher by telephone, Tante Inez and her daughter Yvonne drove me to another destination, the main office of *The Times-Picayune*. I spoke with reporter Vince Lee, whom I met later that day in the cemetery. He came with a photographer and I toured them through St. Louis No. 1. An article appeared in *The Times-Picayune* and thus began my public advocacy of preservation in this region.

Why do you feel historic preservation is important?

In its most basic incarnation, preservation is a component of the study of who we were, why we are as we are, and how our past molds our destiny. The historic built environment of this region is a manifestation of the manner in which early Western European colonists and African slaves adapted to this new, foreign environment.

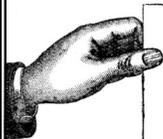
The evolution of that architecture reveals the impact of successive

waves of influence by Americans and others who settled in the area. Preservation is about the birth and rebirth of our cultural identity. Preservation, to quote from the late Bernard Lemann, Ph.D., is about "a quality of life that is distinctly human."

How do we get young people interested in historic preservation?

My personal experience has taught me that the best, most direct way to interest youth in preservation is to expose them to historic architecture by on-site visits. Once they have experienced the opportunity of seeing and touching historic architecture with knowledgeable people interpreting what they are experiencing, they never fail to be intrigued.

I first witnessed this phenomenon with Eugene Cizek and Lloyd Sensat in their Education through Historic Preservation program. In subsequent years, I have enjoyed the opportunity to work with Chalmette High School students in my capacity as parish historian of St. Bernard Parish. The Chalmette students never fail to be thrilled by the opportunity to visit Los Islenos Museum Complex with its collection of historic structures and nature trails, early 19th century plantation homes, St. Bernard Catholic Cemetery and other historic sites in St. Bernard Parish.



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Le Beau: A Personal View (continued)...

beginning of the decline. The house was never again to be a home. The family that had built the place and given it their name was leaving it forever. With this act of sale, LeBeau became the Friscoville Hotel and the grounds surrounding the home, known as the Friscoville Park, were frequently used for large festivals during the early 20th century. The Friscoville Realty Company sold Le Beau in 1926, and the property changed hands six times between then and 1967. The house was even used as part of the Jai Alai Gambling Casino Complex in the 1940's. The proud lady had become shady.

Since 1967, LeBeau continued to decline steadily. I drew the house empty and forlorn in its garden of weeds. I try to use my art to teach, inform and entertain. It was my naive hope that its owner, Joseph Meraux, a banker and real estate developer, would restore the house as a bicentennial celebration gift for the Parish of St. Bernard and the State of Louisiana. If this were not possible, perhaps he would donate or sell the house to interested St. Bernard citizens who would organize to save the landmark from ultimate oblivion. Hadn't St. Charles Parish citizens banded together to save and restore Destrehan Manor? Perhaps the same course could be implemented by St. Bernardians to preserve this great house for posterity. I continued to have hopes and wrote articles about the endangered house for *Preservation Press* (Vol. 6, No. 7, Jan. 1979) and the *St. Bernard Voice* (Vol. 90, No. 47, Nov. 30, 1979) while the landmark contin-

ued to decline, although Meraux did make roof repairs.

In the early morning hours of June 26, 1986, arsonists dealt a final blow to the antebellum mansion. Glenn Lauga, Chief of the St. Bernard Fire Department, stated that the house was definitely torched. The evidence of arson was clear because there were two blazes burning simultaneously on both floors and a 3-foot homemade torch was found in a second story bedroom. The building had not been rented in several months, but there was evidence that vagrants had been camping in the house. The building suffered heavy damage with the entire magnificent roof and cupola collapsing through to the second floor.

Most recently Dr. Eugene Cizek of the Tulane School of Architecture

approached LeBeau's owner to produce HABS drawings of the house at no cost to him. Mr. Meraux refused to give the Tulane team permission to measure the house. In light of the recent tragedy, the HABS drawing would have documented for posterity this major historic landmark, as well as an invaluable record in rebuilding the house.

Unfortunately, with St. Bernard Parish's track record concerning preservation and LeBeau's past history, Louisiana has probably lost forever another irreplaceable landmark. LeBeau was located near what is now Friscoville Avenue and North Peters Street in Arabi. (Editor's note: Portions of the exterior of the house were rebuilt after the 1986 fire, but the 2013 fire completely destroyed the structure.)



LE BEAU PLANTATION 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.

