

LANDMARKS' PRÉSERVATION



THE JOURNAL OF THE LOUISIANA LANDMARKS SOCIETY

HABANA OUTPOST:

AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS NOT COME

By Hilary Somerville Irvin, Walter Gallas & Sandra Stokes

Why "No Habana"

For over two and a half years the Vieux Carré Commission (VCC) has reviewed a series of proposals by New York entrepreneur Sean Meenan for redevelopment of several properties on the downriver edge of the French Quarter into a "Habana Outpost," (later, "Café Habana") which would become one in a group of Cuban-themed, open-air restaurants under his ownership. And for two and a half years, there has been strong opposition to the plans.

Objections are varied, but the over-arching argument is that this project is incompatible with the 'quaint and distinctive character of the Vieux Carre' - just what the VCC was created to protect. More pointedly, opponents want to ensure that other measures which protect the Vieux Carré are enforced: that separate lots of record are not re-subdivided to combine them into a larger lot; that the operation in fact will be a "standard restaurant" and not counter service; that the law forbidding the sale of alcohol within 300 feet of a church be obeyed, and more. But probably the most compelling reason for opposing this particular project is that this is one of the last and most cherished residential areas of the French Quarter. With all of the encroaching commercialization in the historic district, this is one of the few areas that remains "livable" in terms of traffic, noise and density of use.

René Fransen, longtime resident of the Quarter, remarks, "I had lived in the

French Quarter since 1978 - always within two blocks of the square. But as that neighborhood became more commercialized, it became impossible to live there because of the noise. Small businesses that serviced the residents and made it a neighborhood were forced out. In 1985, I moved to what I called the suburbs - Esplanade Avenue."

Living just two doors from the proposed business, Fransen continues, "If Café Habana is allowed to be built, living conditions on Esplanade will become untenable, and we will lose this precious residential area due to the impact of what looks suspiciously like a party venue. The residential population is continually declining from just this sort of thing. Now we have less than 4,000. When the residents best interests are being ignored, there is the potential for the whole French Quarter to become Disney-fied. We will quickly lose this livable, walkable, workable historic district."

Meenan's Take

Sean Meenan characterizes his enterprises as environmentally and community conscious; and his Habana Outpost in Brooklyn, New York, was one of the city's first solar-powered restaurants. *New York* magazine described this restaurant as a "hot spot, a flea market by day and rollicking outdoor boîte by night."

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Hilary Somerville Irvin,
Editor

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SAVE THE DATES!

Don't Give Up the Forts!
February 26, 6:00 PM

Awards for Excellence in
Historic Preservation
Reception
April 15, 5:30 PM

Martha Robinson Lecture:
Preservation and Recovery
in New Orleans
April 23, 6:30 PM

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A Message from the President



As we transition to a new year, it is a great honor to report to you some of the things that we have accomplished during 2014:

Equipped with the experience that he gained in working with the National Trust, our Executive Director Walter Gallas brought to fruition an idea that has long been a dream for Louisiana Landmarks Society by creating the **Louisiana Landmarks Society Awards for Excellence in Historic Preservation**. Utilizing valuable input from the Historic District Landmarks Commission, the LLS Awards Committee chaired by Walter selected 15 superb award winners last year for projects completed in 2011-2013. We look forward to the 2015 Awards.

The New Orleans Nine Most Endangered Sites Committee, led by Stephen Chauvin, once again produced an extremely valuable reminder to the community about the ever present dangers of blight, neglect, and malignant development. I am extremely pleased that Stephen has once again agreed to chair this committee in 2015.

A sterling committee of volunteers co-chaired by Mary L Pretz-Lawson and

Sarah Cook and supported by Brook Tesler (a fantastic addition to our office while Meagan was on maternity leave) brought together a very successful gala to celebrate our **50th Anniversary** as the owner and steward of one of the most important houses in New Orleans. Their work was remarkable, and led to a very successful event.

Sandra Stokes, chair of our **Advocacy Committee**, has been working tirelessly with her committee to address many of the most pressing and significant preservation issues facing our city. You can read more about one of their battles- Habana Outpost- in this issue.

This past year we were very pleased to present several very prominent speakers and events as part of our lecture program which traces its roots to our founding 65 years ago. Ted LeClercq, President of the PRC Board of Directors, and former President of the St. Charles Avenue Association made a presentation on the national landmarking of the St. Charles Avenue streetcar line. Lt. General Russel Honoré of Katrina fame spoke about the urgency of preserving the natural environment as well as the built environment. We were honored to present a private showing to our members of the documentary entitled *Big Charity*, which is an exposé of the closing of a New Orleans landmark. Professor Raphael Cassimere presented a lecture at St. James AME Church on the Landmarks of the 1960's Civil Rights movement in New Orleans.

House Committee chair Chuck Berg

continued to attend to one of the three thrusts of the mission of the Society: the stewardship of this 1799 vintage West-Indies style plantation house. Repairs to the gallery railing and stairs, pruning of our trees, and brick relaying in the parterre were accomplished in the summer and fall. Anna Timmermann, a landscaping professional, has taken over care of the garden and grounds of the Pitot House. She is working to insure that something is always blooming, and I encourage you to stop by to see her handiwork.

James Wade, chair of our **Samuel J. Wilson, Jr. Publications Committee**, produced a superb book on the history of the Pitot House. I'd like to also wish James well in his new position with the Pilgrimage Garden Club in Natchez.

It would be great to take a breather, but there is still much to do in the year ahead. A new roof, coat of paint and fence repairs are needed at the Pitot House. We will continue to build on the success of all our programs. And who knows what 2015 will bring to challenge our advocacy committee!

In closing, I would like to recognize the herculean efforts of Walter, Meagan, and the many volunteers that helped them to produce such fine results. We always need talented volunteers to donate their time and energies in helping to accomplish our mission to promote historic preservation through advocacy, education, and the stewardship of the Pitot House.

Sincerely,

Casey



HOST YOUR EVENT AT THE HOUSE

Make Louisiana Landmarks Society's Pitot House the setting for your next event. Whether it is 20 or 300 people, the Pitot House is a unique New Orleans venue for a meeting, a corporate cocktail hour, or a romantic wedding. And your event at the Pitot House will support the worthy cause of historic preservation.



Compliance, Respecting History Need to be Considered at CBD Hotel Site By Sandra Stokes

The following *Letter to the Editor* was published in the February 7th *New Orleans Advocate*.

Referencing the Jan. 12 *Advocate* article "Canal hotel tower plan revived," Louisiana Landmarks Society commends New Orleans City Council member LaToya Cantrell for attempting to take a fresh look a few months ago at Kishore "Mike" Motwani's proposal for a 21-story hotel tower at the foot of Canal at Tchoupitoulas Street.

At that time, the council member had formed a working group to find other solutions. Appropriate redevelopment of this site is of concern to the entire community.

In reading the working group summary, however, we noted that starting points for discussion were that the project needed to be large-scale for a flag hotel, the footprint could not be expanded due to cost and the new designs should not raise the cost over current estimates.

Using these requirements as the basis for the working group's deliberations seems a flawed approach — not a fresh look. The parameters of the discussion seemed tailored to match this particular development.

What if, instead, the starting premise were to incorporate the historic buildings, along with development of new construction on the adjacent surface parking, into an appropriately sized hotel that complied with the Master Plan and Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance?

It should be noted that the current owner bought this property knowing the restrictions upon it and that similar development of the site was denied years ago, before the latest owner's acquisition. It is simply not fair to the prior owners to allow this out-of-scale development now. We also question that such density and height are required to establish a flag hotel.

We would like to see that prime corner of the CBD developed but developed in a way that respects the history and architecture of our city.

It also should be in compliance with the Master Plan and CZO. Certainly, there are any number of economically feasible solutions aside from this 21-story proposal.

We should really take a fresh look at this corner with these thoughts in mind.

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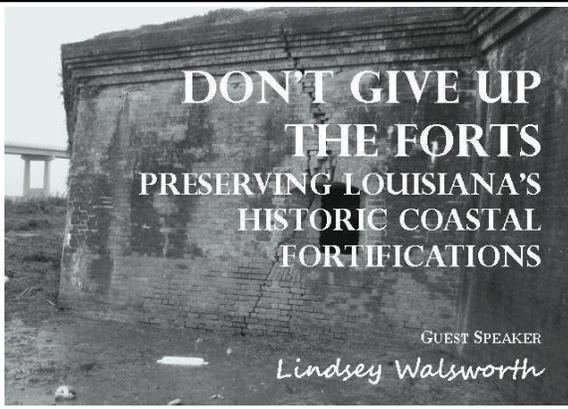
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DON'T GIVE UP THE FORTS
PRESERVING LOUISIANA'S HISTORIC COASTAL FORTIFICATIONS

GUEST SPEAKER
Lindsey Walsworth

Thursday, February 26 at 6:00 PM
Historic New Orleans Collection, 533 Royal Street

Diane DePass Manget (1943-2015)

The Louisiana Landmarks Society and the New Orleans preservation community prematurely lost a close friend and strong supporter on January 11, 2014. Diane DePass Manget (1943-2015) figured prominently in the "second wave" of the city's preservation activists, who in the 1960s and 1970s vigorously reacted to the widespread demolitions that were occurring citywide but more specifically at an alarming rate in the New Orleans Central Business District. "Downtown was threatened with becoming a parking lot between Poydras Street and the Expressway," noted Jack Stewart, LLS Harnett T. Kane Award 2001 recipient. "Diane worked tirelessly to prevent this from happening." Her advocacy was instrumental in the rebirth of the vibrant downtown New Orleans neighborhood that we know today.

Diane served as president of the CBD Improvement Association and executive director of the Historic Faubourg St. Mary Corporation. As noted in the *New Orleans Advocate*, many advances were made during her preservation career including a temporary halt to demolition in 1974 in the CBD; the Preservation Resource Center was established; the Louisiana Facade Servitude Donation law was passed and thirteen of the 19th-century townhouses in Julia Row were purchased and renovated. Happily for LLS, Diane also found time to serve as one of our board member and officers.

Three leaders in the New Orleans preservation community offer their memories of Diane:



I remember Diane as a tireless, effective worker, someone who was quite instrumental in advancing the cause of historic preservation downtown. She was doing this work at a time (in the 1970s) when that was a problematic and controversial cause. She spent many years regularly going to City Council, City Planning and other commission meetings, reading reports and studies, organizing citizens, writing letters, etc. in opposition to the demolition of historic properties downtown, and in support of downtown historic districting. She was a consummate behind-the-scenes player, someone who did the grunt work that would not have gotten done without her. -Michael Duplantier, LLS Harnett T. Kane Award 2014 recipient

I came to know Diane during the early years of the PRC and about the time the Julia Street row houses were beginning to be rehabilitated. At that time, Diane was unquestionably a leader in the preservation community, doing all that she could to insure that the historic buildings in the CBD were

*protected, restored, and often adaptively reused. We kept in touch over the years, discussing the various preservation issues that surfaced, and asking each other what more could be done to encourage citizens to get involved in the effort to protect the unique physical character of New Orleans. Diane was bright; she remained committed to the cause of historic preservation; and she was my friend. I will miss her, and I will miss all that she brought to this community. - William E. Borah, LLS Harnett T. Kane Award 2009 recipient and co-author of *The Second Battle of New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carré Riverfront Expressway Controversy**

Diane had an enthusiasm for and an understanding of preservation that never waned -something that only comes from years in the preservation trenches. In my last conversation with Diane, just weeks before her death, she expressed her deep concerns for the campus of the former New Orleans Adolescent Hospital, recently purchased by Children's Hospital. She was passionate about making sure everyone understood what could happen to the historic buildings on the site, to the bucolic campus, and most of all, the potential impacts on the adjacent neighborhood. She was in the process of rallying all around her to become informed and engaged. That conversation is how I will remember Diane - continuing her life's effort to protect the quaint and distinctive character of New Orleans. - Sandra Stokes, LLS 2nd Vice President and chair of the Advocacy Committee

LOUISIANA LANDMARKS SOCIETY'S

Awards for Excellence

IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Save the Date!

April 15

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From the Executive Director

Walter W. Gallas AICP

The debate continues in New Orleans about the role of historic preservation in maintaining our city's character. I was able to see some other perspectives on this subject at the National Preservation Conference, an annual event organized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This year's meeting was held in Savannah, Georgia, a most appropriate setting.

The National Trust has never been reluctant to push the boundaries of what the historic preservation movement should concern itself with. In past decades, the Trust identified urban sprawl as a threat to cultural and historic landscapes. The drive to tear down houses in older neighborhoods to make way for out-of-scale "McMansions" and the threat of big box stores were on the organization's radar years ago, too. Today—and in numerous sessions at the Savannah conference—the realities of climate change and sea level rise are soberly examined, as communities are swept with extreme weather or inundated by storm surges and unprecedented flooding and high tides.

The National Trust conference also offered the opportunity to revisit a topic that had been examined at a gathering twenty years ago—tourism's impact on the nation's most loved cities. Representatives of selected cities came together on a panel in Savannah to take a look at the past issues and talk about where their communities stand today. The cities were Annapolis, New Orleans, Savannah, Charleston, SC; and San Antonio.

In 1995, these were the findings from the tourism forum:

- Maintaining character of a place is essential for success
- The needs of visitors and residents must be balanced
- Tourism success brings economic and cultural benefits
- Tourism success comes with a price
- Different traveler types have different pros and cons

From the findings, the following recommendations were made in 1995:

- Gather better data
- Strengthen communications across all interests
- Undertake formal tourism planning and management
- Adopt and enforce appropriate policies and ordinances

As discussion proceeded at the session in Savannah, it became clear to me that Charleston has the best and most consistent track record of meeting the challenges of tourism and carrying out the recommendations made twenty years ago. Savannah is in second place, in my opinion. Here's why those two cities stand out—

Charleston has been doing tourism management since 1978. Note that I say tourism management, not tourism marketing. The city is on its fourth edition of its tourism management plan, according to Kitty Robinson, president and CEO of the Historic Charleston Foundation. Robinson is one of thirty members of the mayor's tourism management advisory committee, which also includes the mayor, a city council member, business representatives, and residents. The biggest challenge for Charleston, Robinson says, is balancing tourism and residential quality. The advisory committee has sub-committees which address things like transportation and traffic, and special events. In a city in which tourism has grown 70 percent in twenty years, regulations apply to carriages, walking tours, buses, contractor trucks, and cruise ships.

The City of Savannah recently named Bridget Lidy to the newly created position of director of tourism management and ambassadorship. The city has a 13-member tourism advisory committee appointed by the mayor and aldermen and staffed by Lidy's office. Lidy says data is important, and so her office is conducting a tourism survey with the assistance of the University of South Carolina. The city, rising to its self-described role as the "Hostess City of the South," has adopted an open container law for its downtown. At the same time, it has said no to cruise ships and double-decker tour buses. As it moves toward

a tourism management plan, Savannah recognizes that the places that carry tourism should benefit from the revenue they generate.

New Orleans tourism promoters would like to increase the number of annual visitors from the current 9 million to 13 million by 2018. We have a golden opportunity to become another model of careful and inclusive tourism planning and management. Other popular tourist destinations have shown that it can be done, and that the quality of residential life and the quality of the visitor experience can be maintained and cultivated.

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, please email us at info@louisianalandmarks.org or 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. Papers may be submitted to:

info@louisianalandmarks.org.

Habana Outpost continued...

The New Orleans project site includes 1240 Rampart, a long-vacant, Mission-style filling station and 1236 Esplanade, a circa 1900 Edwardian frame building, formerly Villere's Pharmacy. (At one stage, the project also incorporated 1310 North Rampart, but this property is no longer included.) The project entails seeking approval from the City Planning Commission to unite the two lots upon which the two buildings are sited into one lot of record. Opponents of the project point out that Mary's Hardware, a valuable neighborhood asset on North Rampart Street in the French Quarter, attempted to re-subdivide two lots and was refused by the City Planning Commission.

Meenan's buildings are zoned VCC-1, the stated purpose of which in the city's Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance (8.5.1) is "to provide for restricted retail stores and service establishments that will attract and service tourists and local residents and *not adversely affect the character of nearby residences or detract from the historic character of the Vieux Carré*" (emphasis added).

Is the VCC Doing Its Job?

In their presentation before the Vieux Carré Commission on January 7, attorneys Sonny Shields and Stuart Smith, representing some French Quarter residents, pushed for adherence to the current Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance Article 8, Section 8.1, which states:

Where any change in exterior appearance is contemplated, the Vieux Carré Commission shall hold a hearing, and if it approves such change, it shall issue a special permit to continue the same use, or for any other use not otherwise prohibited in this district, subject to the following conditions and safeguards:

- *The historic character of the Vieux Carré shall not be injuriously affected.*
- *Signs which are garish or otherwise out of keeping with the character of the Vieux Carré shall not be permitted.*
- *Building designs shall be in harmony with the traditional architectural character of the Vieux Carré.*
- *The value of the Vieux Carré as a place of unique interest and character shall not be impaired.*

(Note: Advocacy groups have been greatly concerned over the omission of the 8.1 clause in both the draft CZO and in the draft of the VCC Design Guidelines, now undergoing revision.)

Shields and Smith further argued that the VCC in the past has acknowledged its duty to disallow uses that could be detrimental to the district, as stated in its 1986 *Design Guidelines*: "The Vieux Carré Commission is not bound to allow every permitted use to be accommodated in every building." Allowing the Habana Outpost to move forward in its present configuration would be an abnegation of the VCC's constitutionally mandated responsibility as well. The development would lead to erosion of the neighborhood's historic quality of life; its design is out of scale and character with the remainder of the district; and the proposed open space does not meet the CZO minimum requirements. Finally, with the proposed business operating not as a standard restaurant but as an event space/drinking spot with the emphasis on alcohol sales, it would run afoul of Section 10-236 of the CZO which prohibits alcohol sales within 300 feet of a church, in this case the Center of Jesus the Lord on North Rampart Street.

Habana developer Meenan insisted that the use will be as a *standard restaurant* and that people seem to oppose what "they think he may do rather than what he plans to do." He has been less than forthcoming about the details of his plans, however.

No Habana!

The site is a prominent gateway to the Quarter, but undeveloped for years. Nevertheless, the "Habana Outpost" reviews before the VCC have been accompanied by impassioned opposition from many French Quarter residents and a wide spectrum of advocacy groups including the Citizens' Action Committee, Faubourg Marigny Improvement Association, French Quarter Citizens, Louisiana Landmarks Society (LLS), The Foundation for Historical Louisiana and Vieux Carré Property Owners, Residents and Associates.

On January 7, despite clearly delineating its position and placing its opposition within the broader context of historic and cultural preservation on the world-wide stage, the "No Habana!" contingent failed to gain sufficient support from the commissioners, and the change of use to allow the proposed restaurant was recommended for approval by the VCC, with a minimum majority vote of 4-2.

Speaking for all the above-named advocacy groups, Sandra Stokes, LLS second vice-president and chairman of its advocacy committee, stressed that the Café Habana project is not just a neighborhood issue as has been portrayed, but instead a "citywide, statewide, and indeed – a national issue – as it affects one of the most, if not THE most cherished and revered historic districts in the US." Specifically addressing the proposed combining of the two subject lots, Stokes urged the commissioners:

"In right conscious, your job is to protect the historic character of this precious district. Just the idea of consolidation of these lots would be a breach of that tenet. Why do we need to consolidate these lots for a corner restaurant – unless it is really a party venue? And with that consolidation we are no longer talking about upholding the quaint and distinctive character of this neighborhood, which you are obligated to protect. These organizations, and the thousands they represent, want this prized gateway to the Vieux Carré redeveloped. But we want it developed in keeping with the guidelines that this commission is obligated to uphold. The lots should remain individual lots. The development should be in scale. What is developed here should help to enhance the neighborhood – not erode it. This is the prized, quiet, residential side of the Vieux Carré. This is what the commission is supposed to protect."

Venice-like Syndrome

In a letter addressed to the VCC Anthony Tung, noted professor of international urban preservation at MIT and Columbia University and author of *Preserving the World's Great Cities: The Destruction and Renewal of the Historic Metropolis*, wrote: "Given that the eastern portion of the French Quarter remains a generally quiet place of residential occupancy, and that the eastern boundary of the Vieux Carré (Esplanade Avenue), is remarkably idyllic, allowing an open-air restaurant at 1036 Esplanade and 1040 Esplanade courts the demise of residential habitation." The "heightened ambient noise" from the open-air restaurant, Tung continued, can lead to a "violent escalation of clamor, making residential occupancy a nightmare" and "like in Venice, Bruges, and other historic cities in

Europe and North America, a negative syndrome of decline can follow," and "one by one in a domino effect, various residential occupants are driven out."

What's Next for Café Habana?

On January 13, 2015, the City Planning Commission reviewed the proposed re-subdivision of the two lots upon which 1236 and 1240 Esplanade are sited into one lot of record, because the properties will operate as one combined use. The CPC staff recommended approval. The No Habana! group pointed out that the creation of large lots can lead to large-scale projects. After lengthy discussion, the commission voted to defer the motion until February 24, 2015. As Commissioner Robert Steeg noted, the proposed re-subdivision did not exist in a vacuum, and he would feel more comfortable learning more before making a final decision. Considering the number of people who turned out to speak in opposition to the project, the commissioners generally wanted more time to study all aspects of the proposal.

Clearly the Café Habana project is not yet out of the woods. Any action of the Vieux Carré Commission can be appealed to the City Council by any citizen, so this battle will soon land in the Councilmembers' laps. Louisiana Landmarks will continue to work with the neighbors and neighborhood advocates to protect the city's most important historic resource, the French Quarter.

Technical Experts Weigh In

On behalf of the opponents to the Café Habana project, the following individuals outlined some of their findings:

Robert Miller, an architect formerly with the Louisiana State Fire Marshall's office, noted that from the plans as submitted he was unable to accurately determine load calculations but expressed concerns including 1) the commercial kitchen exhaust's proximity to the open patio of the adjacent residence (1032 Esplanade); 2) the inadequacy of proposed means of egress; 3) patio areas which do not conform to international building codes; and 4) structural issues regarding the canopy dining area. Miller concluded that, in his opinion, no further approvals should be given without full submittal to state and local authorities and receipt of documents indicating compliance with all code and standards requirements.

Arno S. Bommer, acoustics consultant certified by the Institute of Noise Control Engineering, expressed concerns about the noise levels emitted by both patron activity, especially from the outdoor areas with a standing room capacity of over 400 people, and ground-level and rooftop mechanical equipment. He noted that the ground-level equipment is located adjacent to a gap through which noise can travel to the neighboring residences. Bommer concluded, "The proposed establishment would significantly alter the soundscape in the adjacent residential areas, adversely affecting "quaintness and the tout ensemble of the Vieux Carré."

Richard Brackin, environmental quality consultant retired from Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ), summarized that 1) a significant amount of hazardous substances remains on the site; 2) insufficient air testing as well as groundwater and soil sampling were undertaken; and 3) the LDEQ was not advised of the proposed change of use and the evaluation was made for industrial not commercial use.

A Preservationist Pondering Progress

By Susan Kierr

Wandering along Water Street in Madisonville, Louisiana is one of the pleasures of life. Friendly breezes, big sky, dramatic clouds, graceful oaks, ribbons of Spanish moss, and the lapping sound of the Tchefuncte River are often mesmerizing. Benches look out across the water, testimony to the Town's awareness of what it has to offer. Each bench says, silently, "Sit down a while; how's your Momma and them."

The land side of Water Street is also a pleasure to study, though not without mixed feelings. The street originally evolved along the river when the community began as a settlement of shipbuilders needing access to the cypress growing in the neighboring swamps. Early buildings were ship yards and housing for the craftsmen who worked in those yards. The cottages that sprung up in the village were built by the carpenters who were there to work on the ships. Many of these early homes have been researched and documented for the town's bicentennial by archivist Sally Reeves and historian Bill Reeves.



It is still possible to spy the bones of the early cottages on Water Street, though ship building has given way to other commercial endeavors. One delicious example of such a cottage is the Water Street Bistro (above). There one finds a dozen tables cov-

ered by white linen, carefully spaced in what would have been the two original double parlor front rooms. The Bistro honors its origins and its current commercial use permits the preservation of one of the original cottages that housed the ship builders.

A block away is an example of what happens when honor is not given to the originals. The Town Hall was built on the site of an earlier ship building yard. Pictured below is the current building, with its canyons and flag pole, its flat roof and its ground level foundation. The new building is useful for administration, town meetings and Mardi Gras balls, but at the same time it is a missed opportunity to rise up above the random floods and unfortunate face of mid twentieth century aesthetic. Mayor Gitz operates a tight ship within, running a community that he loves probably as much as the community loves him, but he would agree that the building has problems.



Across from Town Hall is a plaque dedicated to the history of Madisonville. It reminds us that the town was originally called "Cokie" from the French word Coquille because of the abundance of shells in the area. The town was renamed, the sign reminds us, for President James Madison, c1811. According to the legend engraved on the plaque, General Andrew Jackson stopped at this very spot, enroute to New Orleans in November 1814, and met General David B. Morgan, who lived a few steps away.



Another block along the street shows us what happens when tradition is more highly regarded. The ship builders had a saloon, naturally, probably big enough for men to rent rooms, get a meal and find some entertainment. Though we are no longer privileged to see the occasional freshly gutted deer stretched up to cure on the front porch, we can still find some entertainment and drink at the Riverside Tavern (below). The variety of entertainment is wide, from the traditional chicken drop contest, held once in a while, and Tiger and Saints football games on a big screen, seen as often as possible. This version of the saloon was designed and built by Ronnie Arnoult, whose respect for history is legendary in the community.



Next to the saloon is clearly an "oops." Somehow a bungalow that doesn't belong was built mid twentieth century. It will probably not be here too

Save the Date for the Martha Robinson Lecture

Preservation and Recovery in New Orleans: The Intersection of Lead, Crime, Health and Community

Presented by Howard W. Mielke, Ph.D.,
Department of Pharmacology, Tulane University School of Medicine

Thursday, April 23, 6:30 pm
New Orleans Museum of Art Auditorium, City Park
Refreshments to follow
Free and open to the public

This year's Martha Robinson Lecture features excerpts from the documentary film *MisLEAD: America's Secret Epidemic*, presented by Dr. Howard Mielke. We are affected daily by the legacy of millions of tons of lead in our environment, whether in the paint of our old buildings or in the fuel that was used in our motor vehicles. The film establishes the medical underpinning about health damage caused by children's exposure to lead-based paint. In addition, the rise and fall of fuel lead additives are described for New Orleans. *MisLEAD* shows that legacy lead has an ongoing effect on New Orleans through its impact not just on physical health, but on societal health and behavior. Finally, the film depicts efforts to decrease legacy lead, and ensure the recovery and preservation of New Orleans communities for future generations.



This year's Martha Robinson Lecture features excerpts from the documentary film *MisLEAD: America's Secret Epidemic*, presented by Dr. Howard Mielke. We are affected daily by the legacy of millions of tons of lead in our environment, whether in the paint of our old buildings or in the fuel that was used in our motor vehicles. The film establishes the medical underpinning about health damage caused by children's exposure to lead-based paint. In addition, the rise and fall of fuel lead additives are described for New Orleans. *MisLEAD* shows that legacy lead has an ongoing effect on New Orleans through its impact not just on physical health, but on societal health and behavior. Finally, the film depicts efforts to decrease legacy lead, and ensure the recovery and preservation of New Orleans communities for future generations.



much longer, though undoubtedly the house has been a good home for some decades. That time is past. Living along the Tchefuncte River isn't about one family houses anymore.

Mr. Arnoult designed and built another building along Water Street, also in the style that would have been original to the community. Going past it one would never think of it as a new or modern building, but that is actually what it is. The lines of the building (right) are so well integrated with the landscape that the street scene is

compatible with both the past and the present life of Madisonville. Ronnie and Amy Arnoult designed it as their home, and named it Coquille Cottage, a decade ago, using century old fireplace mantles, doors and windows that Ronnie collected from buildings in the French Quarter, in New Orleans. As the commercial value of waterfront property rose, it was probably inevitable that the home became more valuable as a business site. Fortunately for the Madisonville community, it is now The Abita Roasting Company Coffee



Shop, and we all meet on its wide verandas, hear neighbors play music on Friday nights, and appreciate that there's a place for out of town visitors to stay overnight, in the back.

Preservation is about respect for the past and willingness to adapt to change. Madisonville has managed to accomplish this without adopting a city plan or a designated historic district. Maybe luck or maybe Mayor Gitz or maybe the instinct of residents to hold on to what they love has preserved this town. Except for the weekend of the annual Wooden Boat Festival, the town is quiet, content to maintain respect for the past. The secret to the success of a small town that has adapted to the present without losing its past just may be stubborn loyalty and knowledge of what a treasure they possess.



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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 at 504.482.0312, email info@louisianalandmarks.org, or email our editor Hilary Somerville Irvin at hilaryirvin@gmail.com.

