

Surveys in Early American Louisiana: 1804-1806

Barthelemy Lafon

VOLUME II

Edited by Jay Edwards

Translated by Ina Fandrich

PROPERTY OF THE MASONIC GRAND LODGE,
ALEXANDRIA, LOUISIANA



634 Royal Street, New Orleans, designed by Barthelemy Lafon ca. 1795. A Painting by Boyd Cruise

Surveys in Early American Louisiana:

Barthelemy Lafon

Survey Book No. 3, 1804 – 1806.

Translated from the Original French

VOLUME II.

Written and Edited by Jay Edwards,

Written and Translated by Ina Fandrich

A REPORT TO:

THE LOUISIANA DIVISION OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

AND

THE MASONIC GRAND LODGE, ALEXANDRIA, LOUISIANA

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CHAPTER 1.

Barthelemy Lafon (1769 – 1820) -- A Biographical Introduction

Ina J. Fandrich with Jay D. Edwards

Introduction

This *Survey Book No. 3* provides a wonderful window into the life of its author, the great French-born surveyor, engineer, geographer, mathematician, astronomer, ship captain, architect, city planer, theatre impresario, politician, real estate investor, planter, businessman, and sometimes privateer and spy for foreign governments, Barthelemy Lafon. On December 20, 1803, the Louisiana Purchase was ratified in the Cabildo, the colonial governor's mansion, located next to St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans. At that point the vast Louisiana Territory from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico became property of the United States, and the American government. Almost immediately, Louisiana's new rulers bestowed on Lafon a very important assignment. He became the surveyor of the newly established Territory of Orleans, which consisted then of the lands South of Tennessee. This book shows us what Lafon was doing during his first two years in office. At the beginning, we see him copying survey plans of his predecessor, the highly respected Spanish surveyor general, Don Carlos Trudeau, known as Mr. Charles Laveau Trudeau in French. Lafon had big shoes to fill and was obviously eager to continue the work that Trudeau and his predecessors before him had started. Lafon's surveys have striking resemblance with Trudeau's. But, at the same time he also wanted to adapt to the new rules and conditions that the Americans were about to introduce in the city. As he grew more experienced, we see him, more and more, coming into his own. Within a few months Lafon found his own vocabulary. He wrote an entire survey in English (pp. 142-143), but he quickly returned to French as his operative language. A year later, by October 7, 1805, he had developed his own standardized survey form printed bi-lingually, in French (Louisiana's official language) and English (the official language of the United States). The form first appears beginning on pp. 190-92. As becomes evident throughout this volume, Lafon was a busy man, who could hardly catch up with all the demand for land surveying. At times, he commissioned another French-born surveyor,

Jean Baptiste Pène, to assist him. He also hired scribes to write many of his survey “warrants” for him. Hence, much of this book is not written in Lafon’s handwriting, although all the survey plans as well as various additional notes and later inserted plans and warrants from as late as 1819, appear to have been altogether penned by himself. In these early American years, an incredible rush for land unfolded in Louisiana. Much of Lafon’s job as the surveyor consisted not only of verifying land grants, land purchases, and establishing exact borderlines between the large neighboring rural French long lots (meaning plantation properties along the Mississippi or along the numerous nearby bayous) or measuring carefully the borderlines between the narrow urban lots in the city of New Orleans where every inch counted, he was also in charge of evaluating land for its potential usage. In other words, he traveled up and down through Louisiana’s newly established districts to assess which parts of the land were useful for “culture” meaning for cultivation (either suitable for agriculture or for urban development) and which parts were swampy wastelands. Again and again we encounter him ending up in Southern Louisiana’s ubiquitous cypress swamps commenting with apparent frustration “and I had to end my operation because of the waters...”

It is important to note here that the vast lands Lafon was assessing, be it for the American government or for private owners -- be it large rural or small urban lots or undeveloped wilderness which he calls the “prairies” or “vacant land belonging to the State” -- none of it was actually uninhabited wasteland ready for the taking. The Mississippi valley had been densely populated for at least 20,000 years before the first French explorers and settlers had arrived there in the late 17th Century.¹ Sporadically

¹ The explorer René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle, was the first French to arrive in the lower Mississippi valley in 1682. His Native American friends and associates had rowed him all the way down the big river, from the Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, in a small boat. When La Salle reached the coast he claimed the entire “drainage system of the Mississippi” to now be the property of his King, Louis XIV, France’s extravagant “Sun King.” He named it after his King “*la Louisiane*” or “Louisiana” in English, meaning “the land of Louis.” The “drainage system” included all the lands around the big River and the lands around all of its tributary waterways that “drain” into the Mississippi, in other words this territory covered about one third of the North American Continent. The first permanent colony near the mouth of the Mississippi was established in 1699 by two French Canadian-born brothers, Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d’Iberville, a mighty warrior who distinguished himself as a master in sinking British vessels, and Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, a gifted diplomat, together with about fifty hearty settlers, man and women, from Montreal in Canada, then known as “New France.” Thanks to their alliance with the local “*Petites Nations*”

throughout the surveys in this book, Lafon mentions various First Nations (*les sauvages*) of Louisiana, or rather what was left of them at the beginning of the 19th century. They are listed as property-owning neighbors of some of his clients or as former residents of land lots he measures. We hear of the Tchoupitoulas, the Houmas, the Attakapas and other nations. For instance, almost all of what is today's State of Mississippi appears as "the Land of the Choctaws" on Lafon's famous 1806 map of Louisiana. This map was the first precise geographical assessment of what was 6 years later to become the State of Louisiana in 1812. In short, as Louisiana's first American surveyor, Lafon played an instrumental role in the enormous American land-grabbing machine that was about to be unleashed after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. From Louisiana, the great American Westward expansion began that ultimately led to fulfilling Thomas Jefferson's vision of manifest destiny, a United States of America reaching from coast to coast. Who then was this famous and, at times, infamous Lafon that we find in action on the pages of this book, weaponed with his surveyor tools, his compass and *graphometre*, indefatigably measuring the lands, and skillfully drawing up beautiful survey plans accompanied by detailed descriptions of his operations, known as "warrants" (*procès verbal*). Researchers have written prolifically about his illustrious contemporaries and affiliates, from William C.C. Claiborne, Louisiana's often awkward and very young first American governor, to the legendary pirates, the Laffite brothers, the shrewd Baroness of Pontalba, the nationally known lawyer and statesman Edward Livingston, and his fellow French-born, and highly talented engineer/surveyor/architect Arsène LaCarrière Latour. But Lafon himself, it seems, has been all but forgotten. In the following we want to offer a brief biographical overview to introduce the reader to the astounding life of this multi-talented, enormously creative, and yet controversial and ultimately tragic character. This brief biographical overview will be followed by a detailed essay on Lafon's achievements as builder and architect.

Family Background and Early Life

Louisiana's numerous Indigenous First Nations, who fed and supported the fledgling French Louisiana colony, the settlement was able to survive.

Barthelemy Lafon spent his childhood still under the *Ancien Régime*, when Bourbon kings were ruling his native France and life was comfortably predictable for a privileged family like his. However, when he came of age, in 1789, the French Revolution began and brought radical political and social change to his country as well as devastation to his personal life. When heads of French aristocrats were rolling from the guillotine, Lafon fled his home country, never to return again.

The son of Pierre Lafon and Jeanne Roumieux, Barthelemy was born in 1769, the same year as Napoleon Bonaparte, in the small old town of Villepinte in the *Departement de l'Aude*, located along the Canal-du-Midi, France's proud engineering achievement connecting the Mediterranean with the Atlantic. Villepinte was about 15 miles from the beautiful, medieval city of Carcassonne (today a UNESCO World Heritage site), the regional capital of the *Departement de l'Aude*, and part of the larger Languedoc region of Southwestern France. Nestled at the foot of stunning mountains, in the borderland to neighboring Spain, Lafon grew up in one of Europe's most beautiful and longest inhabited regions. He and his ancestors before him were staunch Catholics, but the abandoned castles of former radical heretic groups, the Albigenses and Cathars, were still standing on top of the nearby mountains. They served as permanent silent reminders that resisting Catholicism and following God directly without the mediation of the Church constituted a capital crime in Pre-Revolutionary France. Under the Bourbons, France was a nation state with one religion only and that was Roman Catholicism. Not being Catholic was tantamount to treason against the state and punished by death. No wonder Lafon was quick to insist that he was Catholic throughout his lifetime. Both of his parents stemmed from highly educated local families. They came from the ranks of lower nobility, served frequently as governmental administrators in various positions, and had been residing in Villepinte for centuries. Barthelemy was the second child. He had an older brother named Jean Pierre. When Barthelemy was four years old, his mother died, but his father remarried and had additional children with his second wife. In terms of education, it was customary then to start home tutoring early at preschool age. When he was seven years old he began to attend a boarding school in nearby Carcassonne. From there, he continued with advanced education as a teenager possibly in Toulouse, which was then the largest city in the region and about forty miles from Villepinte. Or maybe

he went to Bordeaux, an even larger major French port city, located at the Atlantic seaboard. During those years of higher learning, regardless where it was, Lafon must have received training in engineering and architecture including land surveying. Since he was also well versed in navigation at high sea and the construction of military fortifications, it is likely that he spent at also some time at one of France's naval military academies. Unfortunately, as of now, we have no information on where he actually went to school and who exactly trained him. We know that his education included mathematics and astronomy, of which he remained particularly fond until his death. His education also included the Humanities. Lafon is said to have spoken fluently four or five languages, French, Spanish, his native Languedoc language, English, and possibly also Basque and Catalan. He could read at least five more, including Latin, Classical Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic. As it was typical for his time, he was also very knowledgeable of Greek mythology and loved the theatre. It is not surprising that, later on in his life, he learned to write code languages as well, which came handy when operating as a spy. He also was known to have a passion for Egyptian hieroglyphics. Given his later connections to Free Masson Lodges, his passionate obsession with ancient Egyptian mysteries is, similarly, not surprising.

The *Canal du Midi*, built during the reign of Louis XIV between 1666 and 1681, was the greatest water engineering achievement of its time. A hundred years later, during Lafon's life time, it remained unrivaled anywhere in Europe. Lafon grew up right next to it, playing at its banks. From Villepinte, one could take a ship either down to the Mediterranean Sea or up to Toulouse and from there continue down on the Garonne River to Bordeaux at the Atlantic Ocean. This canal may have inspired him early on to become an engineer while dreaming that one day, he would make it down to the ocean and explore the world.

When Lafon was 20 years old, that day had come. The Storm of the Bastille in Paris, on July 14, 1789, unleashed the bloody French Revolution, and his family had to flee from Villepinte and the Languedoc region. They completely vanished from the local records. While an unknown young Napoleon Bonaparte, of the same age as Lafon, rose to a spectacular leadership position within this shockingly violent revolutionary uprising, Barthelemy Lafon packed his bags and left France altogether,

probably to escape persecution. We do not know why he choose to relocate to far-away Louisiana and whether he went there via Cuba or via French St. Domingue, which later in 1804 turned into Haiti, the first independent free Black Republic on earth. When he arrived in New Orleans, sometime in 1790, the former vast French Louisiana territory had been transferred the to the King of Spain. It remained a Spanish colony from the 1760s until 1803. That said, everybody continued to speak French there, and Catholicism remained to be mandatory, not optional, for all residents like in all French and Spanish territories worldwide.

New Orleans, the colonial capital of Louisiana, was then just a small outpost at the margins of the expansive Spanish Empire. However, this colorful and charming small town located on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean may have appealed to Lafon because it had in 1790 about the same seize as his native Villepinte and may have reminded him of the place of his childhood where everybody knew everybody else. Furthermore, the timing for his arrival couldn't have been more auspicious. Just two years prior to Lafon stepping on land in New Orleans, eighty percent of the city had been consumed by the catastrophic fire of Good Friday in 1788. It was the perfect time and place for a young man with Lafon's skills in engineering and architecture to settle down and join the rebuilding efforts.

1790s Lafon—the builder during Spanish colonial New Orleans

According to architectural historian, Gilles-Antoine Langlois, Lafon worked on levee repair during his first couple of years in Louisiana. He finished a design for a “magnificent public bath in neoclassical style,” inspired by buildings such as those of the Château de Bénouville in Normandy, constructed in 1770, and designed by the architect Claude-Nicolas Ledoux.² By 1794, Lafon was recorded as a charter member of the Perfect Union Lodge (*Tableaus* of the Perfect Union Lodge), the first Free Masonic Society in Louisiana. This lodge had been established in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the capital of the United States at the time. The founding of this lodge may have required Lafon traveling there. In

² Langlois 2003:387.

December 1784, another big fire broke out in New Orleans. The devastating fire 6 years earlier, on Good Friday of 1788, had destroyed nearly all of the public buildings including St. Louis Cathedral and about 860 individual residences. In 1794, the city had not quite recovered from the first fiery inferno, when an additional 200 structures went up in flames – many of them elegant homes and government buildings located along Levee (Decatur) and Chartres Streets between Bienville and Jackson Square. Lafon moved quickly and decisively into this window of opportunity. The following years, between 1794 and 1810 mark a period of enormous productivity and much success in Lafon's professional life.

He landed the majority of his domestic architecture commissions in the mid to late 1790s. Examples of his work during this period include the Macarty house at the corner of Conti and Decatur Streets, designed in 1794, a home for Jean Baptiste Riviere on the corner of Bienville and Decatur Streets, and possibly the Cornue-Pitot House, built in 1795 at old 9 Royal Street, which is often attributed to him. He designed the Bosque House at 617 Chartres and the Joseph Reynes House on the corner of Chartres and Toulouse Streets. Sam Wilson and others have credited Lafon to have designed the “first skyscraper building” of New Orleans, the Pedesclaux-Le Monnier House at 636-42 Royal Street. It was built ca. 1795. Lafon may not have been able to see the construction of this building to a finish, due a lawsuit. The house was expanded upward in 1811 by Latour and Laclotte. In 1798, Lafon designed the Samuel Moore House, which later became the Orleans Hotel on Chartres and Toulouse Streets. Langlois credits Lafon with the design of the Bank of the United States at 339 Royal Street, now Waldhorn's Antiques. The home of Vincent Rillieux at the corner of Royal and Conti Street, where Lafon had an office space on the ground level, is also attributed to him (see Chapter 2).

The City of New Orleans commissioned Lafon for a number of engineering and architectural jobs in the 1790s. For instance he was asked to repair the city jail in 1794 and 1795, and had a two-year contract to repair and build street gutters to improve drainage in the city from 1797 to 1799. In 1798, the city hired him to construct a new tile-roofed, wood-framed fish market designed by the architect Gilberto Guillemard. Lafon was also chosen to appraise work on the Presbytere building also conducted by Guillemard.

1798-1820 Lafon—the businessman and Real Estate Investor

By the late 1790s, Lafon began to turn to real estate investments and land speculation. Governor Gayoso granted him a tract of land immediately above the city in 1798 for the purpose of establishing a foundry, located near the foot of Canal Street today. A similar concession had been given in 1743 when Governor Vaudreuil granted the tract immediately below the city to contractor Claude Joseph Villars Dubreuil for the purpose of running a sawmill. This arrangement proved to be fruitful, as many of the city's original buildings had been constructed with materials processed at Dubreuil's mill. However, such success did not follow the Lafon grant of 1798. The foundry was never truly functional on a large scale.

Nevertheless, Lafon retained possession of this valuable strip of land for a number of years. In 1801, Lafon purchased the 34,000-acre St. Maxent plantation near Chef Menteur and named it *L'heureuse Folie*, or Happy Folly, which he was able to keep until his death.

In 1804, Lafon purchased from the estate of the late Julie Brion, a wealthy free woman of color, a lot and house located at what would be now 934-36 St. Louis Street located in square 70 of the French Quarter, bounded by St. Louis, Conti, Burgundy and Dauphine Streets. The cottage at this location became his residence. He later subdivided the property, but kept the house, in which he eventually died.

1803 – 1819 Lafon—the land surveyor and cartographer

At the beginning of the 19th Century, by the time of the Louisiana Purchase, Lafon's main professional interests were shifting from architecture to engineering and surveying. Lafon began to advertise himself locally as "*ingénieur géographe*" ("engineer/geographer"). His early commissions in this capacity include an 1803 survey of Galveston (now Galvez, LA near Baton Rouge) for the Spanish, and surveying and mapping New Orleans. In 1804, Lafon was appointed deputy surveyor for the Territory of Orleans, duly commissioned by Isaac T. Briggs, surveyor general of the lands South of Tennessee. Immediately following the Louisiana Purchase, the American authorities had subdivided the immense Louisiana

landmass into a Northern and a Southern portion. The Southern half was called “the lands South of Tennessee.” The Territory of Orleans constituted the Southern-most tip of these “lands South of Tennessee.” Lafon conducted an incredible number of surveys in New Orleans and around the city, as well as throughout the Territory of Orleans, which turned eventually by 1812 into the State of Louisiana.

These hundreds of Lafon’s surveys were eventually collected and bound into three large volumes and became the property of the Grand Masonic Lodge of Louisiana. The Grand Lodge of Louisiana had been established in 1812, the year when Louisiana gained statehood and the War of 1812 began. At some point after 1820, the Perfect Union Lodge turned Lafon’s materials over to the Grand Lodge. The books were not numbered in chronological order. Book No. 1 contains rural surveys from southern Louisiana, beginning about 1807, and running to 1810. Book 2 contains mostly urban surveys from the same time, and Book 3 contains a mixture of rural and urban surveys mostly from 1804 through 1806, with additional surveys from as late as 1819 inserted later as attachments to the same properties Lafon had surveyed during his first two years in office. At some point, parts of the archival collection of the Grand Lodge disappeared. There were items that were either accidentally thrown away or sold, including Volumes 1 and 2 of Lafon’s surveys. The Historic New Orleans Collection was able to acquire these two volumes and save them for posterity. Volume 3 remained in the holdings of the Grand Masonic Lodge, which are today housed in Alexandria, Louisiana. Together, these three volumes display the incredible surveying legacy Lafon left behind.

In 1806, Lafon completed the large map titled “Carte Générale du Territoire d’Orléans Comprenant aussi la Floride Occidentale et une Portion du Territoire de Mississippi,” which was commissioned by the New Orleans city council. This map became his most famous cartographic achievement and constitutes what Lafon is best-known for until today.

Lafon—Personal Life and Family

By the time of the Louisiana Purchase, Lafon had found the love of his life when he met Modeste Foucher. The two had a committed relationship until death parted them, and, if given the chance, they

would have formerly legalized their liaison. They would have married for the sake of their children alone. But the racially oppressive legal system of Louisiana and the United States did not provide them with any possibility of formally acknowledging their relationship. The two maintained a common household, engaged in frequent business collaborations and co-raised their children. The problem was that Modeste Foucher was not legally white. She looked white according to reports of contemporaries, but she was one quarter black, a free quadroon, and because of that not able to legally marry a white French man such as Lafon. According to my research of 2007, Modeste Foucher was the child of the free woman of color, Julie Brion, who was legally classified as a free mulatress, meaning half black and half white, and Joseph Foucher, a member of the white French Creole elite and distinguished officer of the Spanish Army. Brion was the child of her former owner, Rene Brion, whose white wife Marianne Piquery freed her together with her three children gratuitously in 1776.³ By then Julie Brion had two children from a previous relationship, Benedicte and Achille Burel, whose black father had passed away, and a one-year old infant, the natural daughter of Joseph Foucher named Modeste Foucher, who in time became Barthelemy Lafon's partner. Joseph Foucher and Julie Brion moved together as soon as she was freed. She gave birth to their first son, Joseph Foucher, in the same year. The two shared a committed domestic partnership until Foucher's death in 1792. Before he passed away, they had 3 more children, Julie, Josephine, and Rene Bienvenu Foucher, who was only 1 year old at the time of their father's death. Together they had also acquired property in New Orleans that Julie Brion was able to retain until she, too, found an untimely death in 1804. She was only 40 years old. Modeste's four younger siblings were still minors. Their wealthy and influential white uncle Pierre Foucher, Joseph Foucher's younger brother, became their legal guardian. Later on, Modeste and Barthelemy took the youngest, Rene Bienvenu, into their care and Lafon became his legal guardian. Lafon also purchased two pieces of property in the French Quarter from the

³ For further information on Lafon's mixed-race family see Ina Fandrich, "Thomy Lafon--A research report for the Odyssey House Louisiana" an unpublished biographical study commissioned by the Odyssey House New Orleans and submitted to the Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family, copyrighted in 2008; and Ina Fandrich "Thomy Lafon (1810-1893): Remembering the Legendary Creole Philanthropist on His 200th Birthday" in *LA Creole – Journal of the Louisiana Creole Research Association*, Vol. 3, 2010.

estate of the late Julie Brion, his “mother in law.” One was the above-mentioned house on the corner of St. Louis and Burgundy Streets, which served as their main residence. The other was located on Royal Street between Conti and St. Louis Streets. Both properties appear in this Survey Book No. 3 as official survey operations he undertook.⁴

All of which attests to the fact that Lafon took this relationship to Modeste Foucher as seriously as any man possibly could have. Barthelemy and Modeste had five children. Their first-born, Julie, named for her grandmother Julie Brion, died before she was one year old in 1804; the second, Pierre Barthelemy, named for his grandfather Pierre Lafon, alias Edward Lalarde, was born in 1806, the third, Carmelite alias Cecile Lalarde, in 1808, and the last two, Thomy Lafon, alias Pierre Lalarde, in 1810 and Alphee Lafon, alias Celestine Lalarde, in 1812. The priest at St. Louis Cathedral, the legendary Friar Antonio de Sedella, was a close friend of the family and collaborated with Lafon so that all of his children were baptized as white under code identities with the fictive Lalarde family names. They had later the choice of either staying in New Orleans as black Lafon decedents with all the racial discrimination that came with this classification, or leaving New Orleans and passing for white somewhere else starting a new life under their baptismal Lalarde names. All four of them turned out to be financial geniuses and acquired substantial wealth on their own merits over the duration of their considerably long lives.⁵

1806-1810 Lafon’s political aspirations

1806 was an extremely prolific year for Lafon. Early in the year he was commissioned as a First Lieutenant in the Second Regiment of the Louisiana Militia, and soon rose to the rank of Captain. He laid out the streets of the Faubourg Marigny according to the plan made by Nicolas de Finiels the year before, drew a plan for the subdivision of the Delord-Sarpy plantation, and laid out the town of Donaldsonville as well. Lafon also entered politics that year when he ran for a seat in the territorial House of Representatives.

⁴ Barthelemy Lafon, Survey Book No. 3.

⁵ See *ibid.*

Lafon also completed several notable domestic architecture projects in 1806. His style is evident in the Isnard House at 409 Bourbon Street, and he designed the Zeringue House on Bayou St. Jean Road. 1806 was also the year that he designed a house for his plantation below the city and hired contractors for its construction. Lafon purchased a number of enslaved workers at this time, a practice he continued for years.

In 1807, Lafon compiled the *Calendrier de commerce de la Nouvelle-Orléans* to aid the city's economy. He purchased land in Plaquemines Parish, and worked on the city's fortifications with Arsène Lacarrière Latour. That same year, the city accepted Lafon's plan for a meat market located near the arsenal, and Lafon designed the Goodwin house and store at present 508-510 Chartres. He was elected to the New Orleans city council in 1808 and served one two-year term. He also compiled the first city directory *L'Annuaire Louisianais pour l'année 1809*. He also laid out the Faubourg St. John, drew a plan for the subdivision of the Saulet plantation, and purchased land in Opelousas during this period.

1812-1815 Lafon's Military Service during the War of 1812 and the Battle of New Orleans

Nine years after the Louisiana Purchase, the Territory of Orleans was finally recognized by Congress and became officially the State of Louisiana in 1812. Unfortunately, in the same year, the United States entered into a war with Great Britain, the War of 1812. The city of New Orleans played a pivotal role in this conflict that would change world history for centuries to come.

British war vessels kept assaulting American merchant ships at sea and forcibly pressing their sailors into the British Navy. Enraged over these injustices, the American government declared war on Great Britain in 1812. At the beginning of the conflict, England was preoccupied with fighting against Napoleon and his French troops. Once he was defeated and sent into Exile, the British took care of the Americans. In August of 1814, they the British army arrived in Washington and burnt the American capital into the ground. New Orleans was to be next. The whole British fleet gathered in the Atlantic to take over New Orleans and pillage the city. Like everybody else the British knew that who ever takes

New Orleans will have control over the inner-American waterways and will ultimately have control over America. The British were told that they were sure to win, but they didn't count on Andrew Jackson and the Baratarians Pirates, who proved to be formidable opponents. The result would be one of Great Britain's worst defeats in history.

Lafon was promoted to the rank of Major and became Chief Engineer of the Seventh Military District of the United States as soon as the war began. As such he went immediately to work to develop detailed maps and drawings of all the forts in the region and provided recommendations for essential repairs and enforcements that he deemed necessary to the American president and the Secretary of Defense, but nothing happened.

At the time of the Louisiana Purchase, New Orleans had the largest Pirate syndicate of North America. Their head quarter was on Grand Terre in the Baratarian swamp lands, just below the city. They called themselves the Baratarian Privateers and operated under the leadership of the brothers Jean and Pierre Laffite. There were as many as a thousand of these Baratarians and as many as one hundred ships in their possession. They were mainly smugglers who captured ships to provide the city with necessary supplies. Their booty was desperately needed in the city, where they sold it at reasonable prices. Nearly every businessperson of New Orleans was in cahoots with them in one way or another. Lafon had been a close affiliate for a very long time the Laffite brothers. They may have met already as young men in Bordeaux before crossing the Atlantic Ocean, or they may have collaborated during the time of Haitian Revolution and Independence War, shuttling French refugees from the bloody war zone into safety in the United States. During these rescue missions they may have already forged a friendship with the French engineer Arsène Lacarrière Latour, who also had arrived in Haiti toward the end of the War serving as the chief military engineer of General Leclerc, before Leclerc died and the remnants of his army expelled from Haiti. Eventually, the Laffite brothers, Lafon, and Latour, all four joined together in New Orleans and worked closely during the years preceding the War of 1812.

In 1814, Lafon participated in an operation, which led to the capturing of two Spanish vessels. The American officials of New Orleans retaliated and by September of 1814, U.S. naval officers led by

Commodore Patterson launched a surprise attack on Grand Terre and raided the Baratarian stronghold. The American forces were able to capture a large number of Baratarians. Pierre Laffite and Lafon were among them and their star prisoners. They were jailed and charged with piracy in the taking of the Spanish vessels. Three months later, on December 1, 1814, General Andrew Jackson arrives in town to defend the city from an invading British Army. Jackson realized quickly that he could not win this War without the support of the Baratarians who were the only ones in town who had heavy duty artillery and knew how to use it. Jackson and Jean Laffite arranged for a private secret meeting and cut a deal. The Baratarians would support Jackson's efforts in defending the city and in return they would all be pardoned and released from prison. Lafon was released and joined immediately the defense of the city. He was still on the rank of Major, but was no longer the Chief Engineer. That post had been bestowed onto Latour, whose reputation had not been affected by the raid of Barataria, because he was not there on that day. Together, Latour and Lafon work feverishly to support Jackson fortifying the forts, drawing up strategic plans and building the defense breastwork against the British along the Rodrigue Canal in the Chalmette Battlefield. On January 8, 1815 it came to the culminating Battle of New Orleans that decided the outcome of the war. To everybody's surprise, the Americans were able to defeat the British in an amazing victory. The British suffered such horrific casualties that they waved the white flag and asked for a cease-fire. Within less than half an hour they had lost their three major generals including Pakenham himself as well as almost two thousand soldiers. Line Jackson had at the same time less than twenty casualties. The Pirate artillerymen were not playing. They took down as many as 35 British soldiers with a single canon ball. On that day, Lafon's contribution to the victory was to break the levee below the British troops and flood a key portion of the battlefield sinking thus the entire British artillery equipment into muddy waters and making it impossible for them to move ahead.

When it was all over with and the British were gone. Jackson didn't keep his word. The Baratarians did not get their vessels and materials back that had been confiscated during the raid on Grand Terre and remained under constant suspicion and attacks.

1815-1820 Lafon's Final Years as Privateer and Spy for the Spanish Government

Lafon returned briefly to professional life after the war, but his troubles mounted. In February of 1815 the recently installed New Orleans District Attorney, John Dick, re-indicted Lafon, with Dominique You and others, for piracy. He purchased land in Donaldsonville during this period and created a detailed map of New Orleans and its environs, which showcased his fusion of the Delord-Sarpy and Annunciation subdivisions into what is now known as the Lower Garden District. By 1816, however, Lafon was in financial ruin and near bankruptcy. He advertised his services as architect and builder in the *Louisiana Courier* in October of 1816, apparently without much success. Despite all of his experience and ingenious skills, he was unable to find work. Ever since he got caught in Grand Terre in the fall of 1814, his reputation had been tarnished indelibly and permanently for the unforeseeable future. He decided that working with the Laffites as corsair was the only option left to him to survive and make a living.

In 1816, persistent persecution forced the Laffites to vacate Baratavia. They moved Westwards to Texas established themselves on the island of Galveston. Here, a colony of Mexican patriots collaborated with Laffite's pirates to raid Spanish ships under the Mexican flag, and Lafon was involved in this operation. In fact, Lafon's own ship, *La Carmelita*, was captured on the high seas by representatives of Galveston's "government."

Astonishingly, while the Laffites and their men were living in Mexican territory, operating under the Mexican flag, and raiding Spanish ships, they were also working as spies for the Spanish government *against* pro-Mexican constituencies. Lafon was also part of this arrangement. He drew the map "Entrada de la Bahia de Galveston" for the Spanish government and surveyed other areas of the southwest for them as well. Lafon became an official Spanish spying agent in 1817. Like his friend and fellow collaborator in Texas, Arsène Lacarrière Latour, Lafon, may have been working for the Americans simultaneously as a double agent.

Death and Inheritance Battle

Lafon came back from Texas to New Orleans in 1818. Disillusioned with his professional prospects in America, he tried to sell everything he owned and wanted to return to his native France, where racial differentiation among people didn't exist. He was tired of privateering and was seeking a radical change in his life. From all we know, he wanted to take his family with him, so that he and Modeste could get married. In his country, all members of his family were simply French citizens regardless of their racial background. But before he could do so, he fell seriously ill. Barthelemy Lafon passed away suddenly of yellow fever on September 29, 1820, at the age of 51. The obituary reads as follows:

Died this A.M. after a short illness, Mr. Barthelemy Lafon, engineer, geographer, and architect, established for a long time in this city. Mr. Lafon takes with him the regrets of many honest men and will be long regretted by all who can appreciate his talents and the good qualities of his heart.

Lafon's mixed-racial family, Modeste Foucher and their four surviving children, were ineligible to inherit a penny of his estate. They struggled for many years after his death and suffered considerable financial hardship. His father, Pierre Lafon, was supposed to become the main beneficiary. He came to New Orleans in 1822 to claim his son's fabulous riches. Lafon's estate included large amounts of real estate, over 50 enslaved field laborers and domestic servants, and a library of over 500 books.

Unfortunately, his elderly father, too, succumbed to yellow fever shortly after his arrival. Then his brother Jean Pierre Lafon and his wife Jeanne Victoire made it to Louisiana from far-away France to claim their inheritance. Yet, they, too, died of yellow fever shortly after their arrival. Finally, their feisty daughter, Jeanne Philippe Lafon, took over and fought the family inheritance battle all the way to the Louisiana

Supreme Court. In the end, in 1826, she won, only to find out that “the succession of Barthelemy Lafon ... was wholly insolvent and unable to pay the legacies and debts.”⁶

⁶ See Harriet Bos, “Barthelemy Lafon,” p. 121.

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CHAPTER 2

NEW ORLEANS URBAN LANDSCAPES AND ITS ARCHITECTURE ON THE EVE OF AMERICANIZATION;

Barthelemy Lafon's Role in Shaping Their Character.

Jay D. Edwards

Our view of New Orleans at the beginning of the Territorial Period (1803-1812) has been shrouded due to the lack of available contemporary records. This is particularly true of its architecture. No broad surveys of the architecture of the city were undertaken during the late Spanish colonial period. Many period maps were based on an out-of-date Spanish colonial plan originally drawn in 1795-1797 by Vincente Sebastián Pintado, surveyor for the Spanish Cabildo. This plan was used as a kind of base map. It was amended by surveyor and cartographer Carlos Trudeau (12/24/1798), and others, to meet various cartographic needs (Figs. 2.1, 2.2). The process of augmenting this plan continued until as late as 1819, and copies were made well into the nineteenth century (Alfred E. Lemmon, et. al., 2003:318-19). The Pintado/Trudeau map appears to have been the base used by Joseph Antoine Vinache for his colorful commemorative map of the city and its surroundings at the end of the colonial era in 1803 (Fig. 2.3). Like the others, this detailed plan locates public buildings but no domestic architecture within the French Quarter, and only basic indications of buildings outside of it.

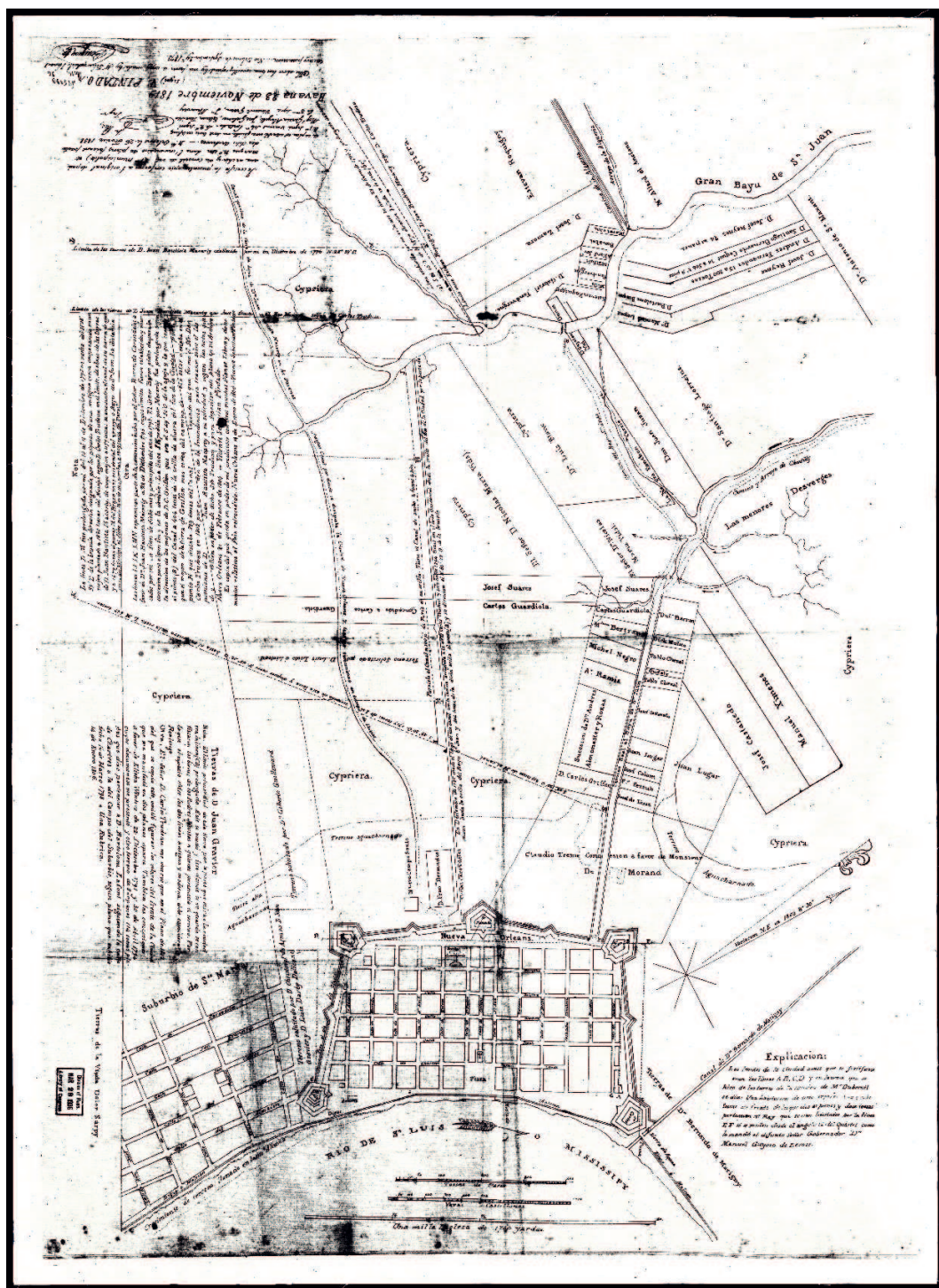


Fig. 2.1. A Spanish Colonial map of New Orleans and surrounding properties, Ca. 1802, and signed by Carlos Trudeau. Courtesy the Library of Congress, Geography and Maps Division. The map has updates and additions dated as late as 1848.

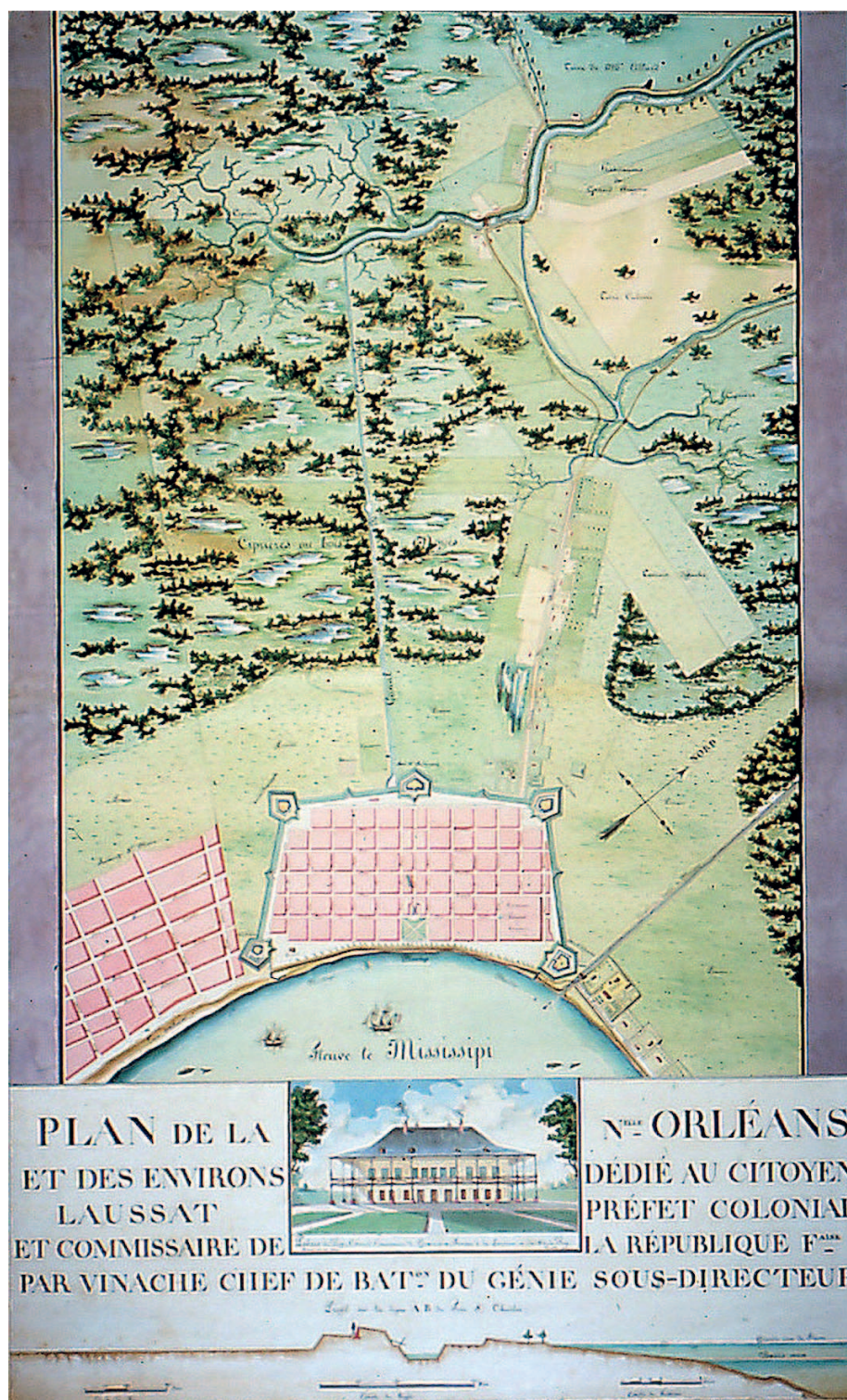


Fig. 2.3. The 1803 Vinache map of New Orleans, commemorating the (very brief) return of Louisiana to the French in 1803. Map courtesy the Historic New Orleans Collection (1987.65 i-iii).

Drawings and sketches by architects of existing domestic architecture ca. 1803 are equally scarce. Carlos Leveau Trudeau conducted property surveys which have indications of buildings on them, but there are too few of these to provide any broad basis for generalizing about New Orleans architecture. So we are left with open questions such as: “Had the gable-sided form of the Creole cottage become popular at this time?” and, “Were properties in the Quarter now sufficiently narrow to encourage the introduction of shotgun-style linear cottages?” These questions are not unimportant. Good answers would point directly to the principal causes of architectural change and innovation at the beginning of the American period.

Luckily, thanks in large part to the recovery of the present manuscript, we have new information which helps to fill in some of these gaps in our knowledge. Barthelemy Lafon became the official surveyor for the Southern District of the Louisiana Territory early in 1804. In this position he conducted property surveys for land owners across southern Louisiana, but mostly in and around New Orleans. Hundreds of his property surveys are bound into three large survey books which he apparently assembled and numbered shortly before his death in 1820. *Books One* and *Two* begin in 1806, and are held by the Historic New Orleans Collection. The present Book, *Book Three*, beginning in early 1804, was moved in 1996 from New Orleans to the library-museum of the Masonic Grand Lodge in Alexandria, Louisiana. It had apparently been passed to the archive of the New Orleans Grand Lodge at some point in the Nineteenth Century from Lafon’s original lodge, The Perfect Union No. 29 (after 1812, Perfect Union No. 1). The reason for its move to the Grand Lodge is unclear.

With the kind assistance of the officers of the Grand Lodge, the entire 302 page book was photographed, first in 2015 by Jay and Anne Edwards, and then in 2018 by professional photographer Eddy Perez, of the LSU Division of Strategic Communications. Through the wonders of Adobe Photoshop, the 214 year old surveys are now restored to something like their original glory (Fig.2.4). They reveal a considerable amount of new information on the appearance of New Orleans at the end of the Colonial Era and the beginning of the American Territorial Period. They also contain a lot of information

on the land-owners of the city and their properties. Much of this is information not (yet) available through the on-line, searchable digital Diboll Vieux Carré Survey.¹

Some of the features of Lafon's early surveys may be seen in his illustration and written description of a single square (block) in the French Quarter which he surveyed on the 6th of September, 1804. In this survey, Lafon has surveyed the lot lines of every property on the square. He also shows the position and roof lines of each structure. He cites the previous legal record for the specific property being surveyed -- an act of sale in which Mr. Joseph Foucher acquired the full-sized 60 Ft. by 120 Ft. lot on the corner of St. Louis and Burgundy Streets on August 31, 1785. Lafon names the previous owner, Julie Brion, and he specifies her race, a Free Mulatress, twice, as if it were an official title. He mentions the two current neighbors whose properties adjoin the lot of Julie Brion. He states that the modest house constructed on this lot is that of a previous owner, Mr. Bernard Chiloe.

Lafon measures the lengths of each side of the square, and adjusts the frontage of each lot based on the "surplus" or "loss" in actual length. That is, he subdivides the street fronts evenly into five whole lots and changes their measurements, based on the difference he finds between the assumed length of a square as 300 *pieds*, and the actual length which he has measured. The existing lots are then diminished or widened based on the greater or lesser difference in the actual measured length of the sides of the square. Measurements are in the old French system, which used "feet of Paris" (*pieds* - 1.067 English feet), "inches" (1/12 of a *pied*) and "lines" (which in Louisiana were one-eighth of a French inch -- a *pouce*). Other information, such as previous official surveys of the properties in question are also taken into account.

Concerning Julie Brion's lot, Lafon expands the present front of the lot to 60 Ft., 9 and ¾ inches. He reduces the depth of the lot to 115 Ft., 6 inches. Julie Brion, having died, the legal guardian of her minor children was Mr. Pierre Foucher. He informed Lafon that he would soon subdivide the lot into two

1

parts (reason for this survey). The front of the lot with the original house was to become 84 Ft. deep. The remaining “surplus” in the back of the lot would then become 31 feet, 6 inches deep (on Burgundy Street).

On that back section, Lafon describes a newer “post-in-the-ground” house—a very inexpensive form of construction. Perhaps it was originally a detached kitchen? On the accompanying graphic plan (Fig. 2.4), Lafon lists Mr. Charles Lavaux, Free Mulatto, as the resident of that abode. Lavaux was closely related to the famous “voodoo queen,” Marie Laveau. The two lots in question are colored in rose. It may be worth mentioning that Lafon lists himself “*arpenteur* (surveyor) Lafon,” as owner of the lot. In other words, Lafon was going to purchase this lot from the estate of Julie Brion when it went up for public auction in 1808. (P. Pedesclaux N.P., Dec. 31, 1810. Vol.61/Fol. 610). The old house at the corner of St. Louis and Burgundy Streets would become his pied-a-terre for many years. Thus, in this one survey we acquire a great deal of information, not only about the owners of the lot being surveyed and the reasons for the survey, but also about the neighbors, and even the processes of lot division and urbanization then under way.

On this particular square 91, at least, the houses are all indicated as hip roofed buildings (Fig. 2.4). In accordance with the Spanish post-fire building ordinances, most of them are built right against the front line of the properties. The Brion-Lafon house stood at what today would be numbered 934-936 Saint Louis Street. The two key lots in this square remain as originally laid out in the French colonial surveys. Mr. Bernard’s corner lot has been expanded by 26 feet on Dauphine Street. The lot of François Boré, M.L. (*Mulatre Libre* - free Mulatto), is an original colonial central-square lot, as designed by Adrien de Pauger in 1723. The other lots have been subdivided into 30 foot wide *demi-terrains* (half lots), or lots less deep than the original standard 120 French feet. When Joseph Pilié conducted his survey of property owners in the French Quarter in 1808, he found that only six of the fifteen named property holders in Square 91 still held the same property they had owned four years earlier in 1804. Lafon is listed at the 936 St. Louis Street address, with the Brion Estate listed as still holding the rear 31.5 foot lot at 430 Burgundy Street. In these turbulent times, property was changing hands at a rapid rate in these back sections of the French Quarter--indeed, throughout the Quarter.

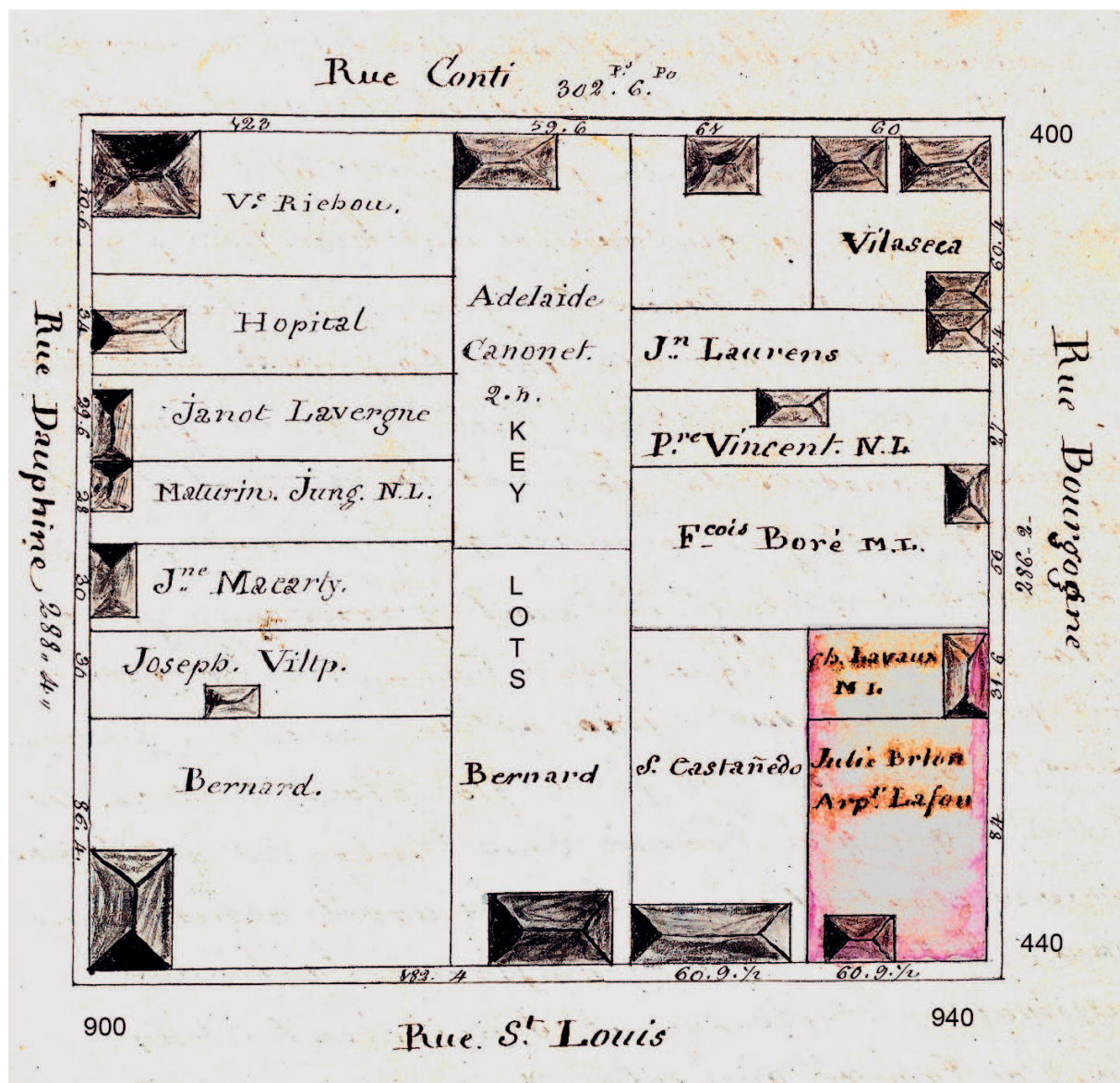


Fig. 2.4. Lafon Survey Book No. 3, p. 46. French Quarter square No. 91, bounded by St. Louis, Conti, Dauphine and Burgundy, as surveyed in September, 1804.

Lafon recorded more than seventy five property surveys in the French Quarter between 1804 and 1810. Of those which survive, twenty-seven are dated 1804-1805, and are found in this volume. The other

forty-eight surveys are to be found in Book No. 2, held by the HNOC. Others, not included in these collections may be discovered attached to notarial acts such as property sales and inheritances.

Patterns of Urbanization in Early American New Orleans: What do these previously unpublished surveys tell us about the architecture of New Orleans that we have not previously appreciated? Actually, quite a lot. For example, we learn something about the ways in which the city was being filled in with buildings: In his insightful little booklet, “The Vieux Carré, A General Statement,” Architectural historian Bernard Lemann stated that “By this time [1803-1825] the street elevations of the Vieux Carré had approached something like their present aspect of almost continuous closure. Only in the outlying squares were open spaces between buildings to be found.”² Lafon’s surveys, while not providing complete coverage of the French Quarter, do provide sufficient sampling to permit generalizations. They encourage us to add specificity to Lemann’s statement.

At the beginning of the American Territorial Period (1804) most squares of the interior of the Quarter were only partially filled-in. Wide spaces separated many of the houses. As Lemann states, those in the remote portions of the quarter, near to Rampart Street and Esplanade Avenue, were less-developed than those within a square or two of the river front. That “back-of-town” section of the Quarter would, in succeeding decades, be referred to as its “Quadroon Quarter.” Much of it remained to be built-up. Some squares still had only a single house on them. Even in those squares within a block or two of the riverfront, open space remained on many lots in 1804.

Near the river front, many squares were now divided between the original colonial full lots of 60 (French) feet across the front (64 feet in English Measure), and post-fire half lots with 30 foot fronts (F.M.; Figs. 2.5-2.6). In many squares, lots have been expanded or contracted in various ways. Some were as large as, say, a lot and a half or a double lot wide (90 to 120 French Feet on the street). Others had been reduced to only 20, 25, 35 or 42 French feet in width. This was particularly true of streets such as Dauphine and Burgundy, where narrow lots with small abodes had become common (Fig. 2.4). In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the riverside and lakeside street fronts of most squares averaged between

five and eight separate lots. The sides of the squares facing up-town or downtown had fewer lots because they originally had in their centers only one single 60 foot wide key lot facing the street (Fig. 2.5). By 1804, some of the squares had already been so completely altered that the key lots were no longer present.



Fig. 2.5. The basic pattern of French Colonial square in New Orleans, as designed by Adrien de Pauger in 1722. Kniffen Lab Sketch by Mary Lee Eggart.

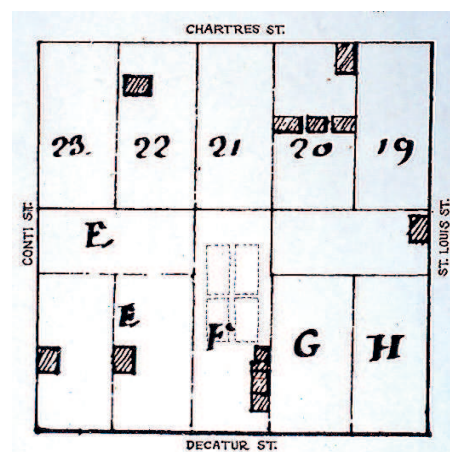


Fig. 2.6. The layout of Square 28 in the French Quarter, as drawn by Gonichon in 1728. *Terrain F* holds the House of the Engineer, de Pauger. His lot is expanded by an extra 60 feet at the expense of both key lots. Lot 23 is the location of Noël Destrehan's future Rising Sun Hotel. Image Courtesy the Library of Congress.

Scattered across the lots were buildings disposed in a number of different patterns. In a many cases buildings were crowded together at the front of the property. This is the post-fire configuration which Lemann describes. However, in 1804, the majority of the squares held houses separated from one-another. The distances between them were the result of different factors. Some of the properties were considerably wider than the buildings the held, leaving ample space beside them. In other cases properties had no buildings upon them, leaving gaps between the built-up lots. As we see in Fig. 2.6, houses were sometimes set back as much as sixty feet from the street front.

Lemann's post-fire pattern is to be seen in Vieux Carré Square 91 (Fig. 2.4). Almost all of the houses are set right up at the street. However, in some cases it appears that houses were rebuilt on their original colonial foundations following the 1788 and even the 1794 fires (Fig. 2.29). In Square 28, for

example, the Joseph Conan house at 434-436 Chartres is set precisely on the spot where a house is shown in Gonichon's 1728 map (Fig. 2.6, Lot 20). Square 28, surrounded by Decatur, Chartres, Conti and St. Louis Streets, has new, post-fire houses which are set back, as well as others located on the front of their lots (Fig. 2.7). This is similar to the colonial pattern depicted on the French Colonial maps by Gonichon and Caillot in 1731-32. Between 1804 and 1818, many of these open lots would experience considerable in-filling with new buildings (Fig. 2.9). This was due to a number of factors: 1) large-scale immigration of French refugees from the Caribbean, 2) successful crystallization of sugar in 1796, and the economic boom resulting from it leading to a building boom, 3), steamboat service on the Mississippi River beginning in 1812, and 4) the continuous influx of Americans pouring into the city, particularly at the time of the War of 1812. The city was experiencing a dramatic growth-spurt which included the doubling of its entire population in a single year due to the arrival of waves of Saint-Domingue refugees from Cuba in 1809.

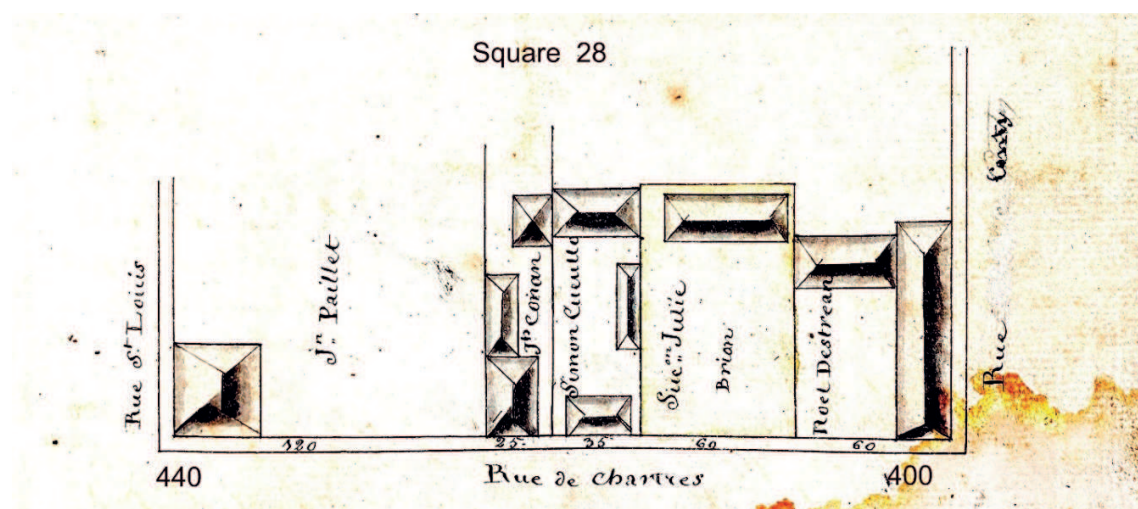


Fig. 2.7. The Buildings along the lake side of Square 28, in the 400 block of Chartres Street, as surveyed in 1804. The river is towards the top. This is Page 052.0 of the Lafon Survey Book No. 3 (VOL. I.). The square number and modern street numbers were added by the editor. The future Rising Sun Hotel building at the corner of Conti and Chartres was actually twice the width shown.

Lafon in Error: Particularly in his early years as a surveyor, Lafon made numerous small mistakes in his surveys and occasional large ones. On Sept. 14, 1804, Lafon was called to survey another property of Julie Brion, f.c.l., in the 400 block of Chartres Street (416-418 Chartres). The property is situated in Square 28,

(Fig. 2.7). In his written description, Lafon (or his office worker) loosely identifies the property as lying between Bienville and St. Louis Streets. Apparently, the writer was not yet sufficiently familiar with the street locations to identify the correct cross street (Conti), and the location of what is now the 400 block of Chartres Street. In the accompanying graphic survey, Lafon assigns to Noël Destrehan, whose property lies at the corner of Conti and Chartres, a 60 foot wide lot facing Chartres (now 400-406 Chartres Streets). In fact, Destrehan's lot was a double lot, 120 feet in width on Chartres. Lafon had measured the length of the entire square on Chartres to be 300 *pieds* (feet of Paris), divided into five equal lots. To make up for the loss of width of the Destrehan property, he incorrectly adds the missing 60 feet to the width of the lot at the other (downtown) end of the 400 block, owned by Jean Piallet. The lots of Julie Brion, Conand and Cucullu are all incorrectly relocated 60 feet uptown. Piallet's lot is expanded from 60 to 120 feet in width on Chartres.

These errors lead to other distortions. For example, the Destrehan rooming house at the corner of Chartres and Conti is rendered far too narrow, as Lafon had to squeeze it onto a lot only half its actual width (compare Figs. 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9). These errors in property widths would be corrected in another survey done by Lafon in 1818, and attached to the earlier survey (Vol. I., survey image p. 052.1). However, there is no explanation for why such a grievous error was made in a legal document created by the authority formally empowered to make such professional surveys. Did Noël Destrehan object? Was there bad blood between Lafon and the Destrehans? Distortions such as these must be taken into account when we set out to understand Lafon's contributions to our knowledge of the architecture of early American New Orleans.

Changes in the architecture of the French Quarter, 1804 – 1818. Many of the changes occurring in the first decades of the nineteenth century are documented in Lafon's books of surveys. As an example, we may explore some of the changes which occurred in the same 400 block of Chartres Street—fairly typical of the commercial parts of the town close to Levee Street (Decatur) and to the river. If we adopt the lot

numbers used by Gonichon on his 1728 French Colonial map of Square 28, then we can identify the five full colonial lots which faced Chartres Street in 1804, and again in 1818 (see Fig. 2.6). The numbers run consecutively backwards from Destrehan's lot No. 23 at the corner of Conti and Chartres, to the Paillet lot No. 19 at the corner of St. Louis and Chartres.

Architecturally and socially, Square 28 was one of the more important squares in the city. Information on the changes can be traced through several kinds of documents, including inventories, acts of transfer and, plans drawn by surveyors. On the Chartres Street (lakeside) of Square 28, detailed plans were made in 1804 (Lafon), 1818 (Lafon), 1825 (Pilie), and 1876 (Sanborn). Architecturally specific plans continued to be created roughly every decade or so after 1876 by the Sanborn Insurance Company. Thus, thanks to the surveys in the present volume, we can watch the transformations of this square as the buildings on it changed from the earliest years of the nineteenth century through its end.

French Colonial Lot No. 23, 400-408 Chartres: The old house on the corner of Chartres and Conti is renowned in American folklore. It was constructed following the great fire of 1794, and was there in 1804 when Lafon surveyed it with drastically distorted +-measurements. The Destrehan House sat at the location of a series of earlier houses owned by the Mandevilles and other interrelated Creole first families of French colonial New Orleans since 1728. At the time of Lafon's 1804 survey, it was owned by Jean Noël Destrehan. The building was described as a two-story brick-between-posts house measuring 45 feet on Chartres by 75 feet on Conti. It contained three apartments above, four below and a cabinet-loggia gallery in the rear. After 1796 it functioned as a boarding house run by Margaret Clark Chabot. Jean Noël Destrehan acquired the house in 1802 (P. Pedesclaux 3/12/1802, COB 40/178). It would, in the 1810s and 1820s, come to be known as the "Rising Sun Hotel"—its infamy spread nation-wide through a still well-known folk song.³ Descriptions are found in legal documents including the inventory of Widow Mme. Destrehan's properties:

A building in brick of [2] stories, fronting on Chartres Street, and [in the rear of the lot] kitchens of brick and of stories” (refer to Figs. 2.8 - 2.10).

Another edifice brick-built fronting Chartres Street having three rooms upstairs and three rooms or stores below, and another brick [kitchen] building in the yard [behind] having four rooms upstairs and four rooms on the ground floor...” (Fig. 2.9). This entry also refers to the house at 410-414 Chartres Street, now the Williams Research Center.

After Destrehan’s death the double lot passed to his widow, Celeste Robin de Longy Destrehan, who eventually sold it to François Marie Perrilliat. Mme. Destrehan died in 1824, leaving this important inventory of the buildings on Chartres Street. The old boarding house/hotel was demolished ca. 1825 and replaced with the present 7-bay wide Destrehan-Perrilliat House built by Gurlie and Guillot for Mr. Perrilliat. It appears to have been built much in the same style as its predecessor, with arched openings below matched by rectangular openings above which opened onto a narrow balcony. It was recently renovated and now functions as offices, meeting rooms, and a gallery for the Historic New Orleans Collection (Figs. 2.8, 2.10).



Fig. 2.8. The Destrehan-Perrillat store house as expanded ca. 1825 and recently renovated by the Historic New Orleans Collection. Conti Street is to the right, Chartres to the left.

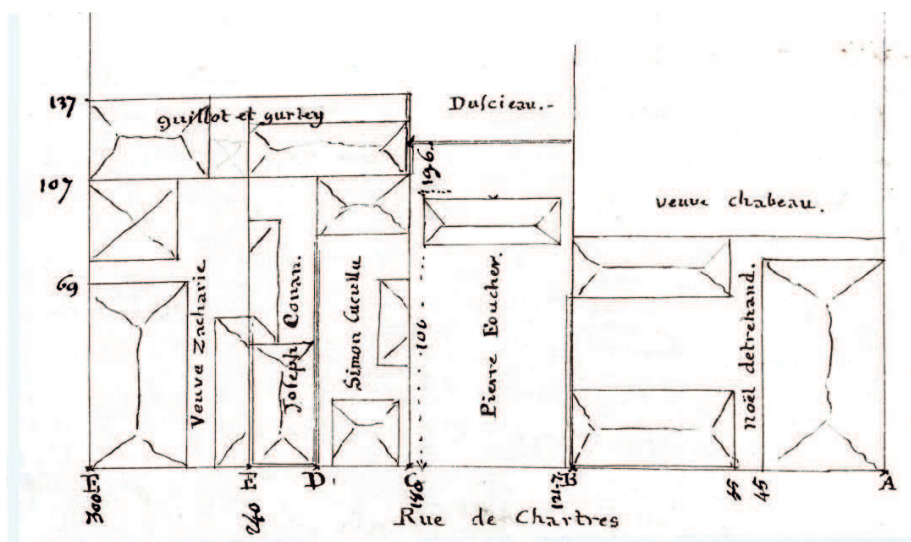


Fig. 2.9. Lafon's resurvey of the 400 block of Chartres Street, 1818 (his *Survey Book No. 3* (VOL. I., p. 051.1). This survey was attached to the one seen in Fig. 2.7. The erroneous lot widths have been corrected. Colonial Lot No. 19, labeled as the property of the "Widow Zacharie," was actually owned by the widow Catherine Villere Paillet. It is not known why its ownership was mislabeled by Lafon. Perhaps it was rented at the time of the survey. Note the location of the Guillot and Gurley offices. This firm built many of the structures which appear in this 1818 resurvey.

French Colonial Lot No. 22, 410-414 Chartres Street. The lot which sat beside the Rising Sun Hotel on the Destrehan property was a second full lot, described in the inventory above as having a two-story structure set back from the street with four rooms above and four below. Sometime, probably shortly after Lafon's 1804 survey, Destrehan had a storehouse built directly in front of this back building. This was a low two-story brick building which appears on both Lafon's 1818 survey and Pilie's 1825 survey. It is described as being 65 feet on the street and 30 feet deep. It was lower than the adjacent Destrehan house, with a simple wrought iron balcony overlooking the street. It contained three [sets of] rooms above, and three stores below. These buildings survived into the twentieth century to be photographed, before being razed in 1914 (Fig. 2.10). At that time they were replaced by the current tall two-story Second Renaissance Revival building which functioned as a criminal court building and a police station. Today it is the Williams Research Center of the Historic New Orleans Collection at 410 Chartres Street (Fig. 2.11).

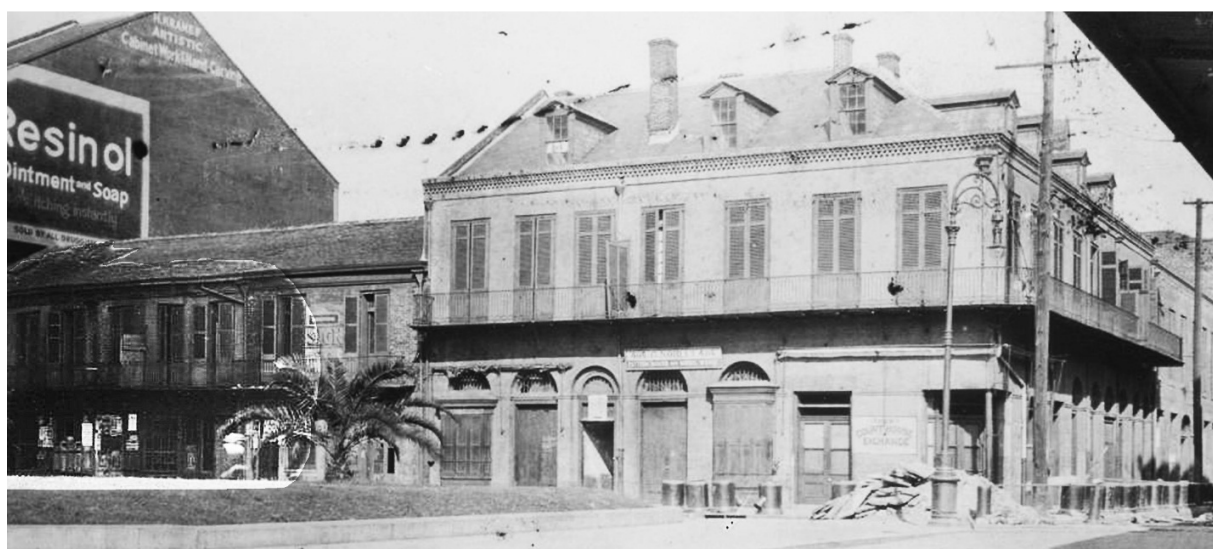


Fig. 2.10. Two buildings on the Noel Destrehan double lot at the corner of Chartres and Conti. The building on the corner is the Destrehan-Perrilliat House, as seen in 1910. It was constructed ca. 1825. Beside it at 410-414 Chartres (Colonial Lot 220) is the low storehouse built by Destrehan ca. 1805. That building was demolished in 1914 and replaced by the building seen in Fig. 2.11. Photo courtesy Special Collections, Tulane University Libraries.



Fig. 2.11. The ca. 1915 Second Renaissance Revival building at 410-414 Chartres Street. This building replaced Destrehan's store house and functions today as the Williams Research Center of the Historic New Orleans Collection. JDE Photo, 2014.

French Colonial Lot No. 21, 416-422 Chartres Street. Next down Chartres Street stood the full lot of Julie Brion, f.c.l. (free woman of color). The lot was set in the middle of the block. The property now holds Chef John Folse's popular K-Paul's restaurant. In 1804, Julie Brion had a house "of stories" here, set back about 80 feet from the street in old French colonial style. Her house measured about 55 feet wide by about 20 feet deep, with a rear gallery. Julie was an educated and enterprising woman and, like many of her free colored sisters, an entrepreneur. As we have seen, she had acquired several properties in the Quarter. She was also, in a sense, a relative of Barthelemy Lafon, being related to Julie's family via Lafon's *placée* (long term companion). Julie had acquired her Chartres Street property before 1786 -- before the two great fires. When she died in 1804, Lafon was called to conduct an official property survey for her estate. That resulted in the flawed survey depicted in Fig. 2.7. Julie's lot was inherited by her daughter, Modeste Foucher, also a Free Woman of Color. Modeste was related by marriage to Pierre Foucher of a wealthy and prominent Creole colonial family, and he acquired Julie's lot on Chartres Street.

In 1834 the property was developed by Philippe Auguste Delachaise. There, three separate 4-story store houses of no particular architectural merit were erected. They were fronted with granite columns on the ground floors, as was the custom of the period for commercial buildings. Around the beginning of the Twentieth Century these buildings were reduced to three and then to two stories. In the mid Twentieth Century the stores at 416 and 418 Chartres were combined and renovated to become K-Paul's Restaurant, a 6-bay two story structure with a front balcony over the sidewalk (Fig. 2.12). Only the third 1834 building survives at 422 Chartres. Today it is a two story, 3-bay brick townhouse much changed from its original form (Fig. 2.13).



Fig. 2.12. K-Paul's Restaurant at 416-418 Chartres Street. This building rests on the former house lot of Julie Brion, f.c.l. and entrepreneur in the late Spanish colonial period. JDE photo, 2014.



Fig. 2.13. 422 Chartres Street -- the last survivor or the three (much changed) 3-bay commercial buildings which were constructed on the lot of Julie Brion in 1834. JDE Photo, 2014.

French Colonial Lot 20, 424-428 and 430-432 Chartres Street. In the year of the Louisiana Purchase, 1803, this full colonial lot was divided unequally into two properties. The first was that of Simon Cucullu. His lot measured 35 feet on the street by either 103 feet (F.M.), or by 108 feet deep (F.M.), according to different acts. Cucullu, a prominent merchant, acquired the lot the year before Lafon's first survey. There, he constructed several houses. In an 1834 inventory they were described as: "a three story brick house, covered with slates [on the street], a kitchen and stores three stories high; and [in back] a one story bakery house covered in terrace [meaning in this case, I believe, covered with an *appentis* shed roof at a low pitch], the whole in brick. The bakery was known as Mr. Bouny's Bakery, valued at \$30,000." (Inventory

from the succession papers of Simon Cucullu, 10/15/1833 and 6/7/1834; the Pilie map of 3/27/1834, attached to Felix Grima, N/P. 9/13/1836). These buildings all appear to have been present by the time of Lafon's 1804 survey (Fig. 2.7).

The small, elegant store house at 430-432 Chartres, sat on the remainder of the Full French colonial lot No. 20. It measured only 25 feet wide on the street. In 1803, this *demi-terrain* was acquired by Joseph Conand, a prominent physician and wealthy land-owner. There he built a house with an attached rear extension and a separate building, probably a kitchen, at the rear of the 108 foot deep lot. There seems to be no good description of this old house, but it may be shown on a plan of three properties at the corner of St. Louis and Chartres, drawn by Etienne Pedesclaux for a sale from Thereze Jourdan to Joseph Pesson, May 31, 1831, and attached to the act of [probably] Pierre Pedesclaux N.P., 8/518. Clearly, it was demolished and replaced by a commercial building, in the mid nineteenth century. In 1966 the two separate half-lots were reunited. The existing buildings were raised and a full 60 foot wide commercial building was built for the Whitney National Bank in the local Creole neoclassical style of the 1820s.

French Colonial Lot 19, 434-436, and 440 Chartres Street: The small, elegant store house at this address was built by the widow of Jean Paillet for members of his family. Paillet died in 1808, leaving the full lot on the corner of St. Louis Street to his widow. The house which stands at 434-436 Chartres today was probably constructed by in-laws Gurlie and Guillot about 1810. Claude Gurlie and Joseph Guillot were married to two sisters who were probably nieces of the Paillets. The house does not appear on Lafon's 1804 survey, but that survey is so flawed that it may simply have been left out. In Lafon's 1818 survey, an *appenti*-roofed structure is shown in this location. That may or may not be the entresol storehouse structure built by Mme. Catherine Villere. Luckily, it is extant (Fig. 2.14). Like most of the other buildings built here in the first decade of the nineteenth century, this small two-story house has arched openings facing the street, with rectangular openings directly above.



Fig. 2.14. The small entresol house of the family of Jean Paillet, located at 434-36 Chartres Street. When Paillet died in 1808, the lot passed to his widow, who probably built this house ca. 1810. The house was almost certainly built by Joseph Guillot and Claude Gurlie, relatives by marriage to Jean Paillet. Their offices lay directly behind this lot.

At the corner of St. Louis Street and 440 Chartres, stands a larger version of the Paillet family home just described. This house dates to ca. 1795, and appears on the 1804 Lafon survey. The owner was Jean Paillet of Marseilles. Besides a residence, it would be used as commercial property with warehouses and a gallery. The house, which also still stands, was also used as an auction house by Joseph Le Carpentier, a tenant in 1838 (Fig. 2.15). Like other buildings in this block, it was probably built by Gurlie and Guillot, who went into business in 1795. The house is shown to be deeper along St. Louis Street in Lafon's second survey, but this possible expansion is questionable due to the suspect nature of that earlier

work. Jean Paillet died in 1808, the property passing to his widow, Catherine Villere Paillet, and then, when she died in 1839, to their son Pierre Noel Paillet. Like its neighbor separated by only a narrow alley, the house was an entresol building. Today it houses Masperos Restaurant, named for an important coffee house and exchange which, from 1814 until 1822, was located diagonally across the streets on property then owned by Gurlie and Guillot, and now occupied by the Omni Royal Orleans Hotel. Lafon's survey images are the first drawings of this historically significant building in their early nineteenth century forms (see below). In French terminology, this is a "two story brick house," but in fact, an entresol level about five feet in height separates the two main floors (Fig. 2.15). More recently the original wrought iron balcony has been augmented by a full-length cast iron balcony facing Chartres Street (right side). The small Paillet family house (Fig. 2.14) is seen at the far right.



Fig. 2.15. 440 Chartres Street, the store house of the widow Jean and Catherine Paillet, built ca. 1795 - 1804. This house was probably constructed by Guillot and Gurlie, who did business from the house further down St. Louis Street (left side). Today it is called Masperos. Photo by Charles L. Franck ca. 1910—1920, courtesy the HNOC.

Lafon's survey drawings of this square are important for several reasons. They illustrate the kind of architecture which dominated the commercial-oriented buildings of this neighborhood in the period of

transition to America and statehood. They also show us the transformations occurring in property holdings and in architecture in the early American period. They tell us about the owners and those buying and selling the properties – information not always available from the contracts and acts of sale housed in the New Orleans Notarial Archives History Section. Many of those acts are incomplete or missing. Without these surveys, we would not be able to tell the full story of this part of New Orleans. In the fourteen years between the two Lafon surveys, three new buildings have been added. Since all of the buildings seen in the 1804 survey were relatively new, postdating the 1794 fire, only one single service building has been removed (in the rear of the Conand *demi-terrain*). A new type of service building is seen in the 1818 survey. These are *appentis*, or shed-roofed structures, one of which is in the location of the Paillet family house at 434-436 Chartres. The other two are service structures placed behind the main houses. In all cases, these structures were two or three stories in height. Our suspicion is that the roofs of the structures in the Conand and Cucullu lots were also, originally *appentis*, but were not accurately recorded in the earlier flawed survey. *Combles en appentis* (shed-roofed) structures became popular following the second fire in 1794. They were used on service structures, but also on single and double-story houses which opened directly onto the street. The house at 631 Bourbon Street, built in 1801 and still standing, is an excellent example of these popular shed-roofed buildings (Fig. 2.16). Many remain, despite the fact that they seem to be ignored almost completely by architectural historians who have commented on old New Orleans.⁴ They do not seem to be considered a type, despite their obvious geometrical similarities.

dormers and chimneys are not sketched in. It may be that in some cases Lafon used the French style hip roof as a standardized symbol for all roofs, even gabled and terrace roofs. We suspect that at least some of the houses surveyed in 1804 had lofts [*mansards*] which were lighted with dormers. Neither is it possible in Lafon's graphic surveys to determine whether a house was raised on a *rez-de-chaussée*, or masonry "basement." The number of stories and other architectural information must be obtained from other sources, which in most cases, are available.

Floorplans.

Determining the precise floorplans of these houses presents another problem. Based on the plans of surviving houses, or those which were surveyed before they were razed, their layouts fall mostly into one of one of several common classes favored by the Creoles and their architects.⁵

Lafon provides measures of the length and width of the lots and the footprint of the buildings upon them. With this information, estimates of the overall dimensions of the buildings may be obtained. The depth of each building places limits on the numbers of rooms and the ranges of rooms across the house from side to side. In general *appartements*, or full sized French/Spanish/Creole rooms, ran roughly 15 to 18 feet in depth – smaller in the houses of the poor. Gallery, loggia, *semi-double*, and cabinet rooms were also near universal. They generally ran 8 to 12 feet deep. So, for example, if a house scales out at 24 feet from front to back, it is insufficiently deep to accommodate two full ranges of *appartements* or French Colonial full-sized rooms. It does not have a double-pile plan. If the house was designed in French Colonial style, its most probable plan would have been a full range of front rooms about 15 to 18 feet in depth, plus a *semi-double* range of rooms behind those. If the house was designed in Caribbean Creole style, then it probably had a rear cabinet-loggia range of rooms 8 to 12 feet in depth, and no *semi-double* rooms. Only the largest of houses combined all of these features in a single plan.

To take an actual example of an interpretation of the ground plan of an 1804 house from Lafon's surveys, examine the Tricou house at 640 Saint Louis Street at the corner of Royal (Fig. 2.17 below - lower right corner). If the surveyor has drawn it to scale, it measures approximately 60 feet wide by 24 feet

deep. It almost certainly has a floorplan containing one range of full-size *appartements*. These have been augmented, either by the addition of a full-length front gallery, or, more likely, a full length rear cabinet-loggia range of rooms, or a rear *semi-double* range of rooms. If the *appartement* rooms are 15 - 16 feet in depth, the cabinet-loggia range of rooms would be roughly 9 feet in depth. Since full front galleries were relatively uncommon on the houses of the rapidly urbanizing Quarter, the chances are greater that a cabinet-loggia or *semi-double* arrangement was used. The 60 foot width of the house would accommodate four 15 foot wide rooms, or, more likely, three full-sized near-square *appartement* rooms about 16 feet wide, plus one more narrow *chambre*-sized bedroom 12 feet in width. Unfortunately, by themselves and without additional information from other sources, there is no way to determine using Lafon's surveys alone, whether these early Vieux Carré domiciles contained purely French floorplans (*semi-doubles*), or whether they were creolized with cabinet-loggias and galleries. Fortunately, information from other sources is often available to fill in the picture.

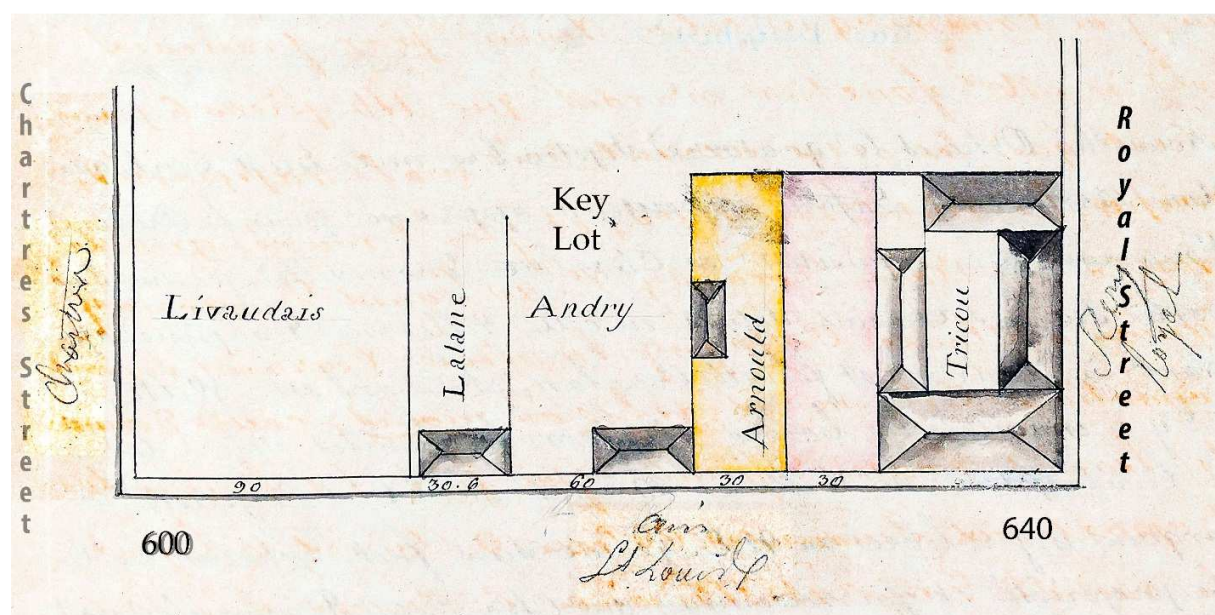


Fig. 2.17. Lafon Survey Book No. 3, p. 45, 1804. Squares No. 39 (right side) and 40 (left side). The Tricou house is in the lower right-hand corner, at what today would be 640 Saint Louis Street. Street names and house number locations have been added to the original Lafon plan, as has an indication of the "key Lot." The lot owned by Mr. Andry would, in the 1830s, be converted into Exchange Alley. In the Twentieth Century the entire square would be used for the home of the Louisiana Supreme Court building.

Today, the 600 block St. Louis is the location of the downtown face of the Louisiana Supreme Court building, facing the Omni Royal Orleans Hotel across St. Louis Street. Canal Street is towards the top of the image (Fig. 2.17). Back in 1804. All of the colonial buildings are depicted with hip roofs, which probably implies that this was the most common roof type. Houses on the Lalane, and Andry properties might have functioned as either residences, or two-story store-houses. If the sketch is accurate, they are about sixteen feet in depth—probably too narrow to have floorplans with either cabinet-loggia or semi-double rooms in the rear.

In 1834, these buildings were demolished in a commercial redevelopment which inserted Exchange Place into the center of the square. This permitted a view of the St. Louis Hotel on Saint Louis Street to pedestrians standing on Canal Street four blocks away. This narrow thoroughfare, the *alley de la bourse*, designed by the French de Pouilly brothers in Neo-Grec style, was lined with financial institutions and lawyer's offices,⁶ The design was based upon the Rue de Rivoli in Paris. Most of the office buildings were three to five stories tall, and some had bridges across the narrow alley (Fig. 2.18). The construction of the alley divided each old colonial square into two parts, now renumbered as Squares 39 (on Royal Street) and Square 40 (facing Chartres Street). After the demolition of these 1830s store-houses in 1903, the entire double square was dedicated as the home of a new ornate building in 1809. It would become eventually the Louisiana Supreme Court building. The 400 block of Exchange Alley was eliminated, but its 100 through 300 blocks still stand, running from Canal Street to Conti Street. Today, in the 400 block, the former location of Exchange Alley is represented by the set-back in the downtown façade of the Supreme Court building.

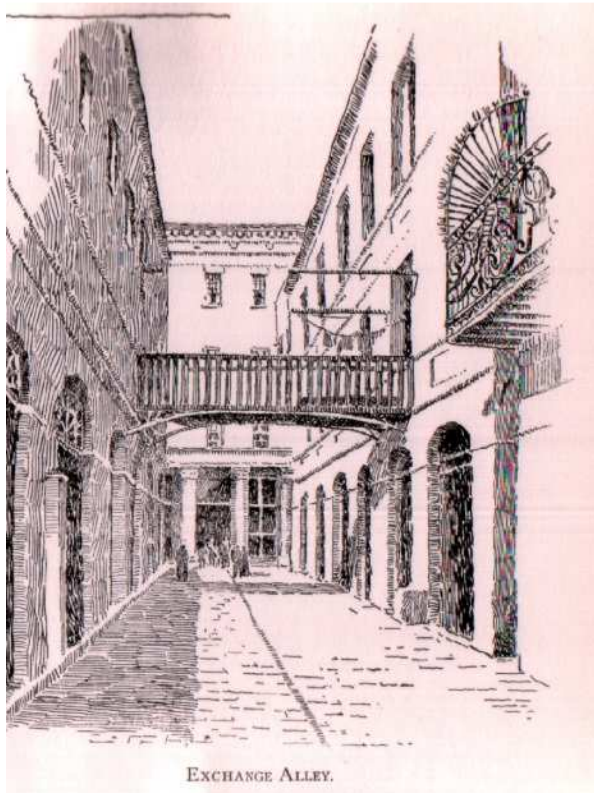


Fig. 2.18. The 400 block of *Alley de la Bourse*, or Exchange Place, looking towards the Saint Louis Hotel ca. 1840, courtesy the Historic New Orleans Collection.

The Cultural Settings for Lafon's Architectural Contributions

The second great New Orleans fire of 1794 provided Barthelemy Lafon and other experienced New Orleans architects with outstanding opportunities. There was an entire city to be rebuilt. Lafon exploited this opportunity with great aplomb. Luckily for New Orleans, the Spanish Crown supported the rebuilding with donations and emergency funding. By 1800, the city was being rapidly modernized. Between 1795 and 1800, Lafon became one of the most successful and productive architect-builders in the city. Curiously, his commissions are not well documented, and he is not widely recognized for his numerous contributions to the built environments of the turn-of-the-nineteenth-century metropolis. Lafon seems to have worked mostly through hand-shake, or oral contracts. Few building contracts have been located. Only a few formal written building contracts survive in the New Orleans Notarial Archives but, a number of his commissions from this period are still standing. Others are documented through inheritance records and

other formal acts such as property sales. Some may be inferred because of his ownership or other close relationship with a piece of property at the time a house was constructed there. We know that certain families favored his architecture, at least for a few years. Lafon developed a certain style, or set of styles, and these can be used to identify some of his “probable” commissions, otherwise undocumented. However, the full extent of his *oeuvre* will probably never be known. NOTE: refer to “Summary of Barthelemy Lafon’s Architectural Contributions” pp. 111 - 115.

Eighteenth Century French Neoclassical. In order to assess Lafon’s architectural contributions, it would be useful to begin with a description of the kinds of buildings that existed in his world, and how they may have influenced him. Little is known about his architectural training in France, but it is clear that he had either a formal or informal induction into an architectural education. According to the French architectural scholar, Gilles-Antoine Langlois, Lafon arrived in New Orleans in 1789. One of his first jobs was to work on repairs to the Mississippi River levees.⁷ In 1797 he drew plans for a magnificent public baths being planned for New Orleans. It was rendered in the fashionable French Neoclassical style -- particularly that of the famous Château of Bénouville in Normandy (1770-1780). This four-story building is considered the masterpiece of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, one of the foremost French architects of the period. The Chateau has contains a projecting rectangular three-story tall classical entrance supported by four monumental Ionic columns and flanking pilasters (no pediment; Fig. 2.19). There is a ground floor (*rez-de-chaussée*), a tall “first floor” (*piano noble*), and a low “second floor” (English third floor) lit by small windows aligned with those below. Surmounting the “second floor” is a full entablature surrounding the entire building, topped by a strongly projecting cornice. Above that is a medium height “third floor” (English fourth floor) with its own, diminished cornice topped with a rectangular balustrade. The windows are set in regularly spaced bays across the wide façade, but the windows are of different heights and they are grouped into three lower and one upper course, separated by the principal cornice. The effect is that of a flat-roofed three story neoclassical house with a matching pent house set on top of it (Fig. 2.19). Lafon’s public baths

project was apparently too grandiose for distant New Orleans, for it was never built, but the style of the Chateau of Bénouville had impressed him even earlier. He appropriated many of the same artistic ideas in his design of the Pedesclaux-Le Monnier “skyscraper” at 636-642 Royal Street, which he designed in 1795 (compare Fig. 2.19 with 2.20). Although the architects Arsène Latour and Jean Laclotte are credited with completing the design of the building, it is clear that its finished state reflects Lafon’s original design based on the Château de Bénouville.



Fig. 2.19. Chateau de Bénouville, Normandy, built 1769-1780, and designed by Charles-Nicolas Ledoux. Barthélemy Lafon was inspired by this new French neoclassical style of architecture and applied its elements to several of his commissions, particularly the Pedesclaux-Le Monnier house, 636-642 Royal Street in 1795.



Fig. 2.20. The Pedesclaux-Le Monnier House, 636-642 Royal Street. This building was designed by Lafon in 1795. In 1805 he advertised that his offices were located here. The window treatments and projecting cornice-like belt courses are strongly reminiscent of the Chateau de Bénouville, though Lafon has added flat band window surrounds. JDE Photo, 2014. Note that the window openings in the *rez-de-chaussée* (the yellow floor) have been changed for commercial purposes.

Eighteenth Century Spanish Colonial Neoclassical. No sooner had Lafon begun to design and construct buildings in New Orleans than he fell under the influence of the best of local high-style architecture.

Perhaps the most imitated was an architect who had worked for the Spanish military for many years before arriving in Spanish New Orleans in 1770. Gilberto Guillemard is thought to have designed an unusual center *porte-cochère* house for Dr. Joseph Montegut (Fig. 2.21). Guillemard's signed plans for a six-room single-story "wing" survive. It was designed in the same style but built in 1790. Montegut was one of the

wealthier citizens of the city at this time. He was the Surgeon General of the Royal Hospital of New Orleans. His house, 729-733 Royal Street, was designed in the latest fashion – Spanish neoclassical. It was probably designed and built in the late 1780s following the first fire (1788) and probably also by Guillemard. This portion of Royal Street was consumed in the first fire, but not by the second, which burned only as far as Orleans Avenue. The style of this house is very similar to that of two other late eighteenth or early nineteenth houses still standing in New Orleans.⁸

Guillemard was experienced in Spanish colonial architecture. He is known to have worked in Spanish Pensacola, post-revolutionary Mobile, and at La Balise post near the mouth of the Mississippi River, before arriving in New Orleans (Langlois 2018:387). Though Guillemard was born in France, he held the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Spanish army. In 1792 he designed and constructed the five forts which stood at the corners of the enceinte or heavy palisade which the Spanish Governor, Carondelet, had ordered built to protect New Orleans from a rumored invasion by the Americans, and perhaps from potential attacks of slave uprisings such as that occurring in Santo-Domingo (Wilson 1968:45-48). Guillemard brought Spanish colonial neoclassical forms to the very center of New Orleans when he was commissioned to design and rebuild the Cabildo (1799) and the Presbytere (1813), as well as the St. Louis church on Jackson Square.



Fig. 2.21. The Joseph Montegut house, 729-733 Royal Street, built ca. 1788. This house is dressed in Spanish neoclassical style. It was probably designed by Gilberto Guillemard. The house originally had a flat, Spanish style terrace roof, later covered over by a steeply pitched gable roof. The sketch is by Albert Woad, 1871: HNOG (1965.15). Guillemard's 1790 expansion of the house is to the right (refer also to Fig. 2.22).

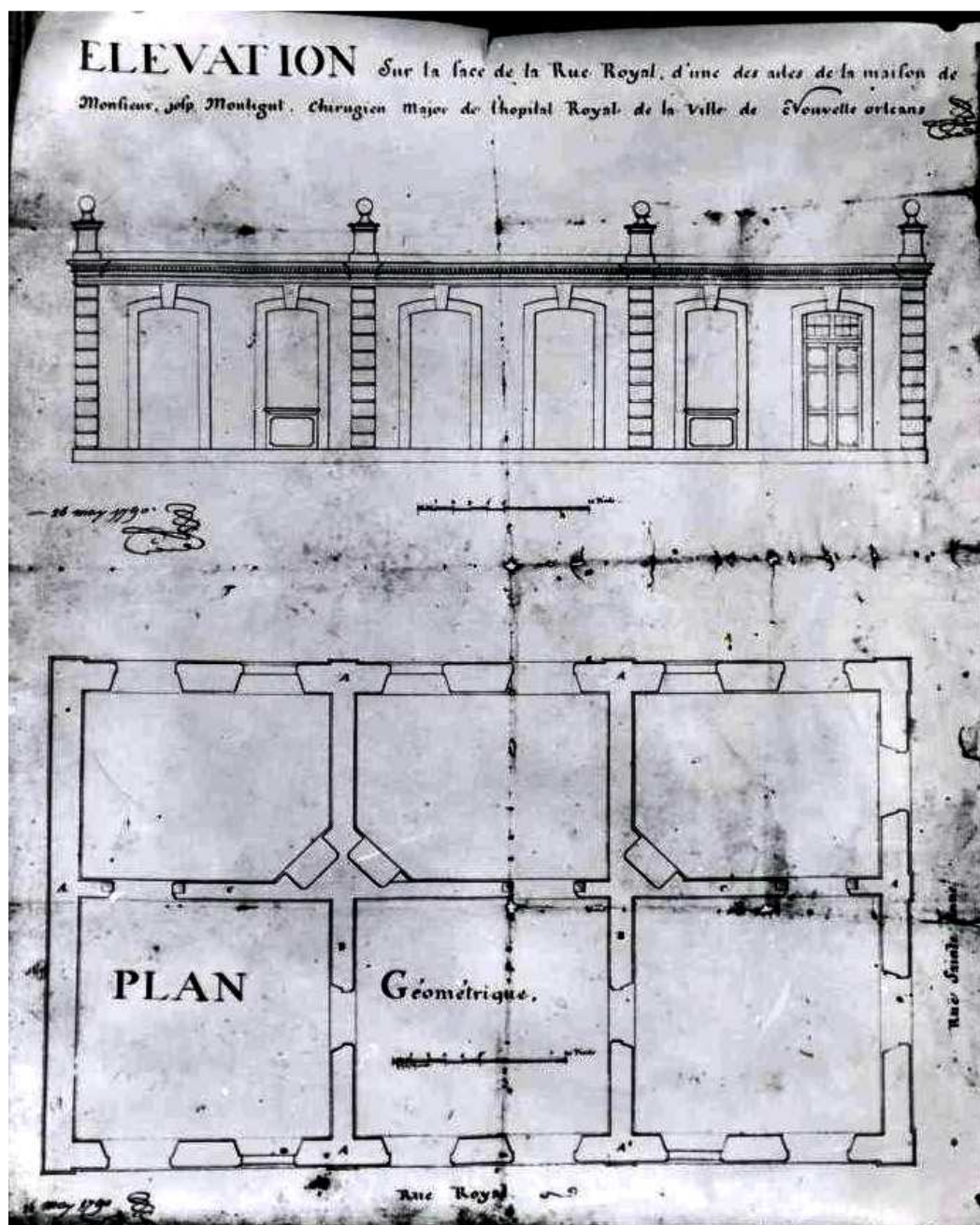


Fig. 2.22. 735-741 Royal Street. A plan for an expansion of the The Joseph Montegut house at the corner of Royal and St. Anne Streets. This plan is signed by Gilberto Guillemard, experienced in Spanish colonial neoclassical styles. A portion of the façade of this annex is seen on the right side of the image in Fig. 2.21.

Guillemard also designed the Orue-Pontalba house (1796), which stood at the corner of the Place d'Armes at the intersection of St. Peter and Chartres Streets (633-643 Chartres Street). These buildings were late

eighteenth century Spanish colonial neoclassical and might have as easily been found in Santo Domingo City or in Havana at the same time (Fig. 2.23).

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Spanish colonial neoclassical was characterized by certain distinctive features. These included low-pitched *azotera* (terrace) roofs, and strong horizontal banding with projecting entablatures or “cornices” running across the facades of the buildings. Even on the grandest buildings, architects employed simplified classical elements such as porticos, columns, and more often, pilasters with Ionic, Doric or Tuscan capitals. Decoration was restrained -- the effect sometimes approaching a kind of post-modern classical. Pilasters were often rendered as stacked rusticated quoins, particularly on the corners of the facades (Figs. 2.22, 2.23). Spacing between bays was regular, with tall rectangular windows and doors. Some facades employed tripartite-symmetry with a central element bounded by mirror-image units on either side. On larger facades, engaged pediments were sometimes placed above central entranceways, such as on the Orue-Pontalba house (Fig. 2.24 – left side).

Cantilevered balconies on the upper floors were decorated with wrought iron balustrades, sometimes highly elaborate, as in the work of the Spanish master craftsman, Marcelino Hernandez (similar decorative balconies and rusticated quoins were also to be found in French neoclassical architecture of this period). Heavy masonry balustrades surrounded the edges of the roofs, often with decorative urns (*copas*) or pedestal-like elements mounted at regular intervals across the balustrade. These were capped with balls or floral displays. On the ground or service levels, and/or on the living floors above, openings were capped with *demi-lune* (semi-circular) transom lights, or with segmental arches. Arcades were widely popular on grander buildings, particularly in Cuba. In New Orleans their principal expression is found on Guillemard’s Cabildo and Presbytere facing Jackson Square.

A highly distinctive feature of Spanish colonial neoclassical architecture was the use of flat-band “architrave” surrounds on the doors and windows of the ground and/or the upper floors. It was this element which Lafon borrowed into his own designs from the Spanish colonial styles, creating a kind of creolized French/Spanish neoclassical all his own (Figs. 2.20, 2.22, 2.24, 2.27, 2.28). It is possible to identify several of his undocumented commissions from his unique combination of stylistic elements.

Another popular Spanish neoclassical feature was the *platibanda*. This is another form of flat band which surrounds the entire ground floor façade of the building, and sometimes the upper floors as well. It is common in the vernacularized Creole neoclassical architecture of Cuba, and particularly in the city of Santiago, and more widely in the Oriente (eastern Cuba) where numerous refugees from the Haitian Revolution settled before coming to New Orleans in 1804 and 1809. The earliest expression of a *platibanda* like feature which I know of is to be found on the Antoine Cavelier storehouse at 627-31 Royal Street, built ca. 1789. Cavelier was an associate of Joseph Montegut, and, building their two houses at about the same time and near to one-another, they may have used the same architect, though his name was not recorded. Like the Montegut house, this one has a central carriageway running through to the rear patio. It also employs stacked rusticated pilasters on the edges of the façade connected by a flat architrave band across the top of the elevated “first floor.” The building is also extant. It may have helped to set the style for the New Orleans Creole *platabanda*, which, in the coming three decades would become enormously popular. This is sometimes referred to as “raised stucco banding” by local New Orleans architectural historians.



Fig. 2.23. The Antoine Cavelier store-house at 627-31 Royal Street, built following the first fire ca. 1789. This house may well have been designed by Gilberto Guillemard, and it may have introduced the Spanish colonial *platibanda*, or façade architrave style into New Orleans. The painting is by William Woodward, ca. 1904, courtesy the New Orleans Museum of Art.



Fig. 2.24. The Orue-Pontabla house at the corner of St. Peter and Chartres Streets. The house was designed by Gilberto Guillemard in 1796. It is entirely within the mode of Spanish colonial neoclassical. This image is a painting by Boyd Cruise, copied from a ca. 1900 photograph of the original building, which has now been rebuilt several times.

The Montegut house annex provides an example of the kinds of floorplan and façade geometry being employed in professional architecture of the Lafon period. Luckily, a highly detailed plan of this wing of the Montegut house rendered by Gilberto Guillemard in 1790 survives (Fig. 2.22). The floorplan is a *semi-double*. The three principal *appartements* (main front rooms) each measure 14.5 feet wide by 13.5 feet deep (F.M.). Near-square rooms of this size may be taken as typical of the more elegant houses of the day. Each of the front rooms is matched by a *semi-double* immediately behind it. These measure 11.0 feet deep by the same width. The exterior walls are 1.5 feet thick, built in brick. Some of the interior walls are 1.0 foot in thickness. Curiously, only the semi-double rooms are served by fireplaces. This is, perhaps, an indication that the front rooms of this portion of the house were intended for commercial purposes.

Another clue to commercialization of this portion of the house is the fact that some of the windows facing the street of both the wing and the main house are protected with projecting bay windows reminiscent of

the popular *guardapolvo* (dust-protector) window covers so popular in Cuba at this time. In New Orleans in later decades, these would be known as *vitrines* (Heard 1997:64). In New Orleans they functioned as display windows for merchandise (refer to A. R. Waud illustration, 1871, Fig. 2.21).

We can compare the geometry of Guillemard's elegant commission for Dr. Montegut in 1790 with Barthelemy Lafon's plans for a similarly elite lady of New Orleans, Mlle. Jeanne Macarty. Lafon was commissioned to rebuild the Macarty house in 1794. He designed a storehouse with a semi-double floorplan, fronted with a balcony over the street, and backed by a cabinet-loggia range of rooms. Curiously, Lafon used a scale unit of two *pieds* (feet) in length on his plans. The *appartement* rooms of the new Macarty house were 15.4 *pieds* deep by 13.6 *pieds* wide. The semi-double rooms behind them were 13.6 French feet deep. The ratio of the depth of semi-double rooms to the front rooms in the Montegut annex was 0.82, while that in the Macarty house was 0.88 (rear rooms were deeper - Fig. 2.25).

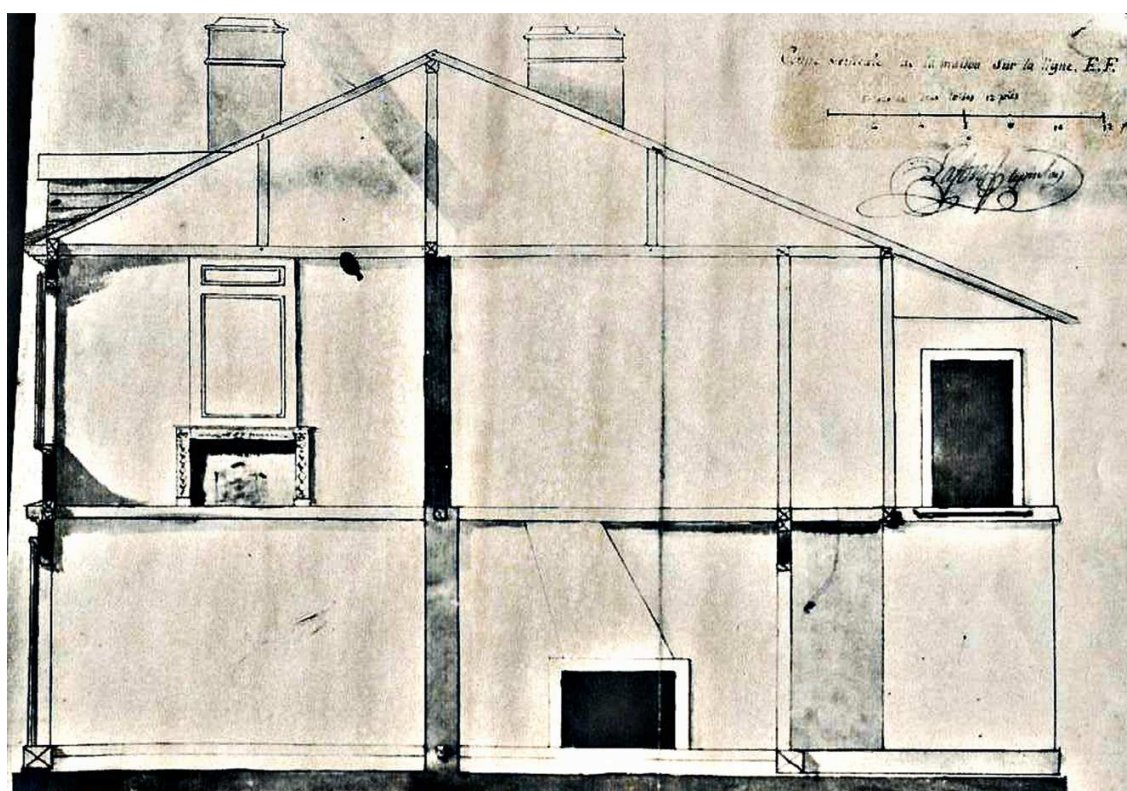


Fig. 2.25a. Section View: Lafon's plan for the Mlle. Macarty house, to be built at 401 Decatur Street, corner Conti, in 1795. This was a timber frame house raised on brick posts, with front balcony and rear cabinet and loggia rooms. Plan from the Louisiana State Museum, Spanish Colonial Records No. 3361.

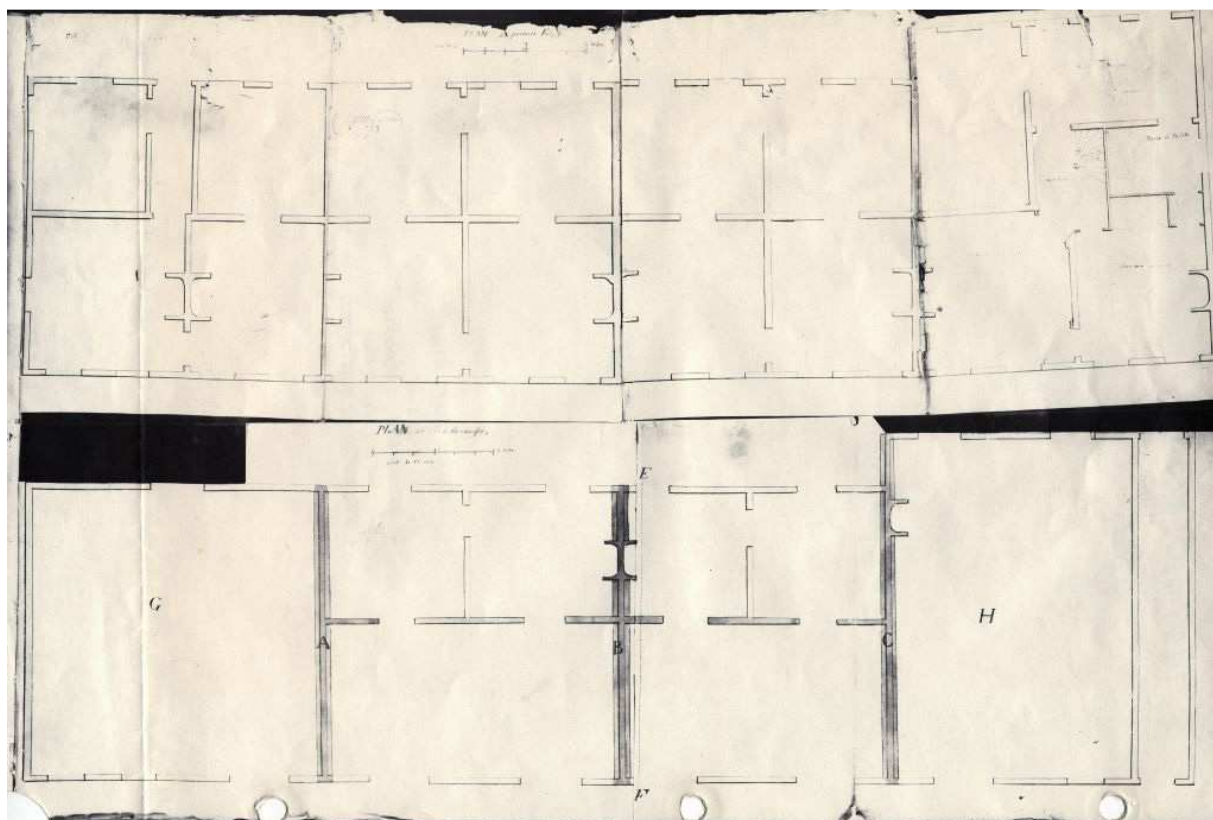


Fig. 2.25b. Florplans by Barthelemy Lafon for a house for Mlle. Macarty, to be built at 401 Decatur Street (corner Conti), in 1794. The lower set of rooms are for the ground floor shops, while the upper set are the living rooms of the house set on the second level. The plan is subtly semi-double. Courtesy the Louisiana State Museum, Spanish Colonial Records No. 3361.

Much is often made of the fact that the patio was the central part of the Spanish colonial house, and that following the great fires, many townhouses and storehouses in New Orleans were designed with rear patios. There are, however, problems with the idea that the Andalusian-derived Cuban or Dominican patio was copied directly into New Orleans architecture. One of these is that these houses were almost all designed by French architects. Another is that in the mid-eighteenth century, many French town houses were *porte-cochère* (carriageway) houses which opened into rear patios. The abundant eighteenth century town houses and small hotels of Paris were examples of this style of house. The floorplan geometry of most of the New Orleans *porte-cochère* store-houses is far closer to those of France than it is to the colonial houses of the Spanish in the Caribbean.⁹ In other words, despite the Spanish colonial influence of

Gilberto Guillemard, the typical New Orleans patio house is geometrically more of a French urban townhouse than it is an Andalusian patio house.

Barthelemy Lafon amalgamated the basic geometry and prominent cornice treatments of late eighteenth century French neoclassical facades with the quoining, flat-band window and door surrounds (“architraves”), segmental arch-headed fenestrations, cantilevered balconies, elaborate wrought-iron balustrades, and barrel tile roofs of Spanish colonial neoclassical architecture. He also adopted the popular Cuban *entre suelo*, or *entresol* -- diminutive second floor level -- into several of his notable town houses. Lafon occasionally added pilasters with simplified Tuscan or Ionic capitals to his facades. The result was his own personal genre of high style architecture. The Tremoulet-Pavie Storehouse at the corner of Royal and Saint Louis Streets is an excellent example of Lafon’s work. All the ground floor openings are headed with semi-lunate transom lights which open into an *entresol*. The upper “first” floor is surrounded on the street sides with a cantilevered wooden balcony. The house was built ca. 1795, and was recorded for an auction sale in 1842 by Benjamin Buisson, surveyor. The wooden balcony is supported by S shaped wrought iron brackets. The building still stands in changed form. Lafon is known to have engaged in business dealings with Bernard Tremoulet in 1792.

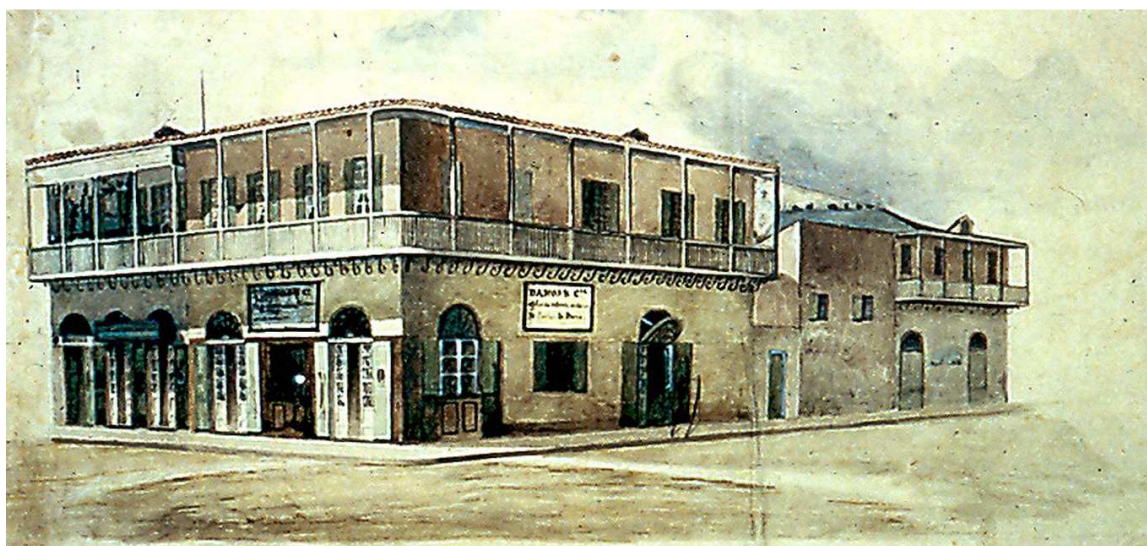


Fig. 2.26. The Bernard Tremoulet/Josef Pavie entresol Storehouse at 437-441 Royal Street, corner St. Louis Street, ca. 1795. NONA 055.029.



Fig. 2.27. The Joseph Vincent Rillieux Storehouse at 335-341 Royal Street, 1795-1800. Vieux Carré Survey photo, JDE, 2014.

The Rillieux house in creolized Spanish/French neoclassical style was built between 1795 and 1800 (Fig. 2.27). It is exactly one block away from the Tremoulet House on Royal Street. It represents, perhaps, Lafon's finest neoclassical work. The façade is somewhat similar to another Lafon commission, the Bosque house in the 600 block of Chartres Street (Fig. 2.28). It also bears considerable resemblance the storehouse at 513-515 Decatur Street, also designed by Lafon (Fig. 2.29). Although, like the Tremoulet house, the Rillieux house makes use of *demi-lune* ground floor openings, it is not an entresol house. This house has some of the finest examples of "Spanish" wrought-iron balustrades which survive in New Orleans. The original balustrade was, according to Sam Wilson Jr., the work of Marcelino Hernandez, a Spanish iron monger of great artistic skill.¹⁰ Marcelino's company was also responsible for creating the balustrades on the Cabildo on Jackson Square, which also survive.

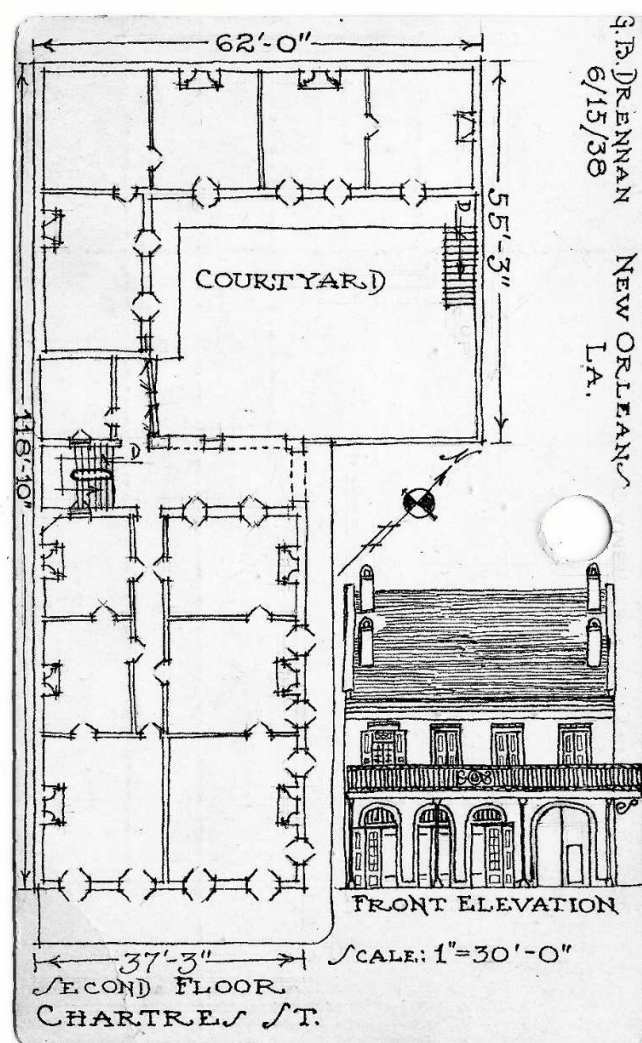


Fig. 2.28. The ca. 1795 Bosque House, at 617-619 Chartres Street, attributed to Barthelemy Lafon. The plan is a “double-semi-double.” This card verso from the 1938 Historic American Buildings Survey of Louisiana, drawing by G.B. Drennan, courtesy the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress.

The Bartholome Bosque house is located in the middle of the 600 block of Chartres Street. It stands in Square 42 – the “bad luck square” surrounded by Chartres, Royal, Toulouse and St. Peter Streets. Despite the fact that this house is one of the oldest standing houses in New Orleans, it is, in fact, the fourth house to be located on the same lot. The first house was constructed in 1722 by cabinet maker Pierre Thomelin, and like many French Colonial houses of that day, it was set back about sixteen feet from the front line of the lot according to the 1731 map of Square 42 by Gonichon. The second house, also set back,

was built in 1734 in the Creole style. It was a timber frame house bricked between posts and raised eight feet high on a *rez-de-chaussée*, or brick-walled “basement.” Like Madam John’s Legacy, it had both front and rear galleries, and measured 52 feet wide by 36 feet deep. The “basement” held shops and *bodegas* (store rooms). Governor Galvez, the governor of the Spanish Louisiana Colony, lived there between 1781 and 1784. By 1788 the Royal Treasurer of the province Don Vincent José Nuñez was living there, and it was in his house that the disastrous fire of that year was started. According to Governor Miro’s account, 856 structures were destroyed together with most of its old French colonial architecture of the city (Fig. 2.29).¹¹

In 1789 Nuñez began the construction of a new house, but he sold it unfinished to Joseph Xavier de Pontalba, who was probably the wealthiest man in the city at that time. Pontalba completed the house, but in 1794 another fire began in the house of Mr. Mayronnes on Royal Street in the same square 42. That fire re-burned Square 42 and jumped across St. Peter Street to burn the new Cabildo and threaten the new St. Louis church then under construction. But then, a blessed miracle. The wind shifted and the fire turned uptown towards the future Canal Street, destroying those surviving French colonial residences between Royal and Chartres Streets and the levee which had not been consumed in 1788.

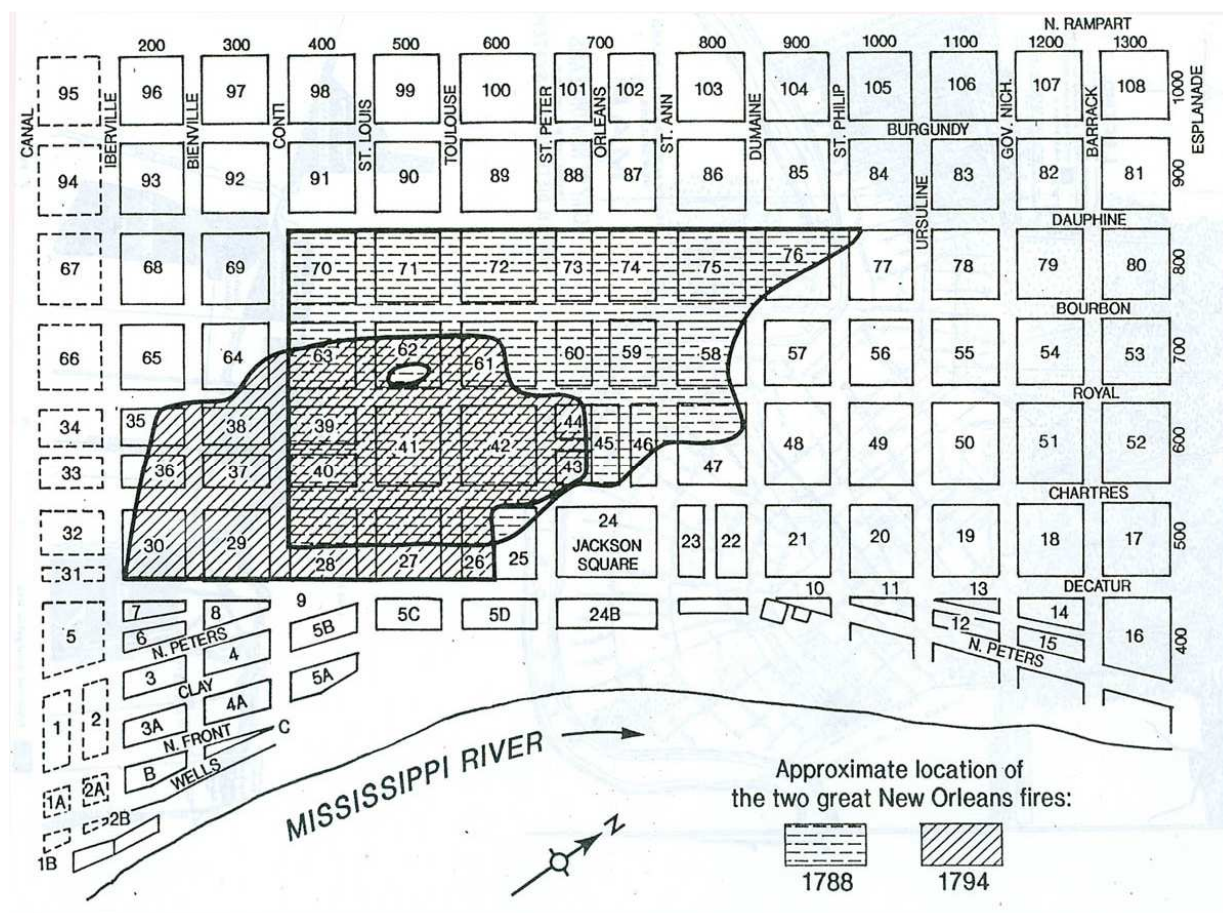


Fig. 2.29. The Squares of the French Quarter of New Orleans with street names, square numbers, and the extent of the two great fires indicated. Map by Jay Edwards and Mary Lee Eggart.

Pontalba sold the ruined property to Bartholome Bosque, a wealthy merchant and native of Majorica. Architectural historian Edith Long wrote that Bosque's new house was built by Barthelemy Lafon in 1795, using the bricks of the burned buildings.¹² The new house was described as "a beautiful house... situated on Chartres Street, built of brick, roofed *en terasse*," having a courtyard and a back yard. The front portion is divided in two by a corridor (*porte-cochère*)." One notable surviving feature of the house is the original wrought-iron balustrade, probably also specially fabricated by Marcellino Hernandez, with its own central crest of interlocked letter Bs (for Barthelome Bosque).

The Bosque house was owned by a number of other notables including Bernard Marigny, who purchased it in 1825. It was his plantation just downstream from the lower colonial ramparts which was

subdivided beginning c. 1805 to become Faubourg Marigny, a process in which Barthelemy Lafon was involved. The Barthelome Bosque house was the subject of a set of measured HABS drawings in 1937. It still stands, although it was severely renovated in the twentieth century.

The Lafon style remained popular for a while in late Spanish and early American New Orleans. Some twenty-five buildings are reasonably attributed to him, and there were probably others which remain unrecognized (refer to the summary “Barthelemy Lafon’s Architectural Contributions”). Below are additional examples of Lafon’s style which either survive, or which survived long enough to be documented by the legal recording artists of the nineteenth century for the purposes of auction sales. At least four of these buildings were on Squares 27 and 28 (the 500 and 400 blocks of Decatur Street). Besides the Mme. Macarthy house at the corner of Decatur and Conti Streets, three store-houses are attributed to Lafon in the 500 block of Decatur.

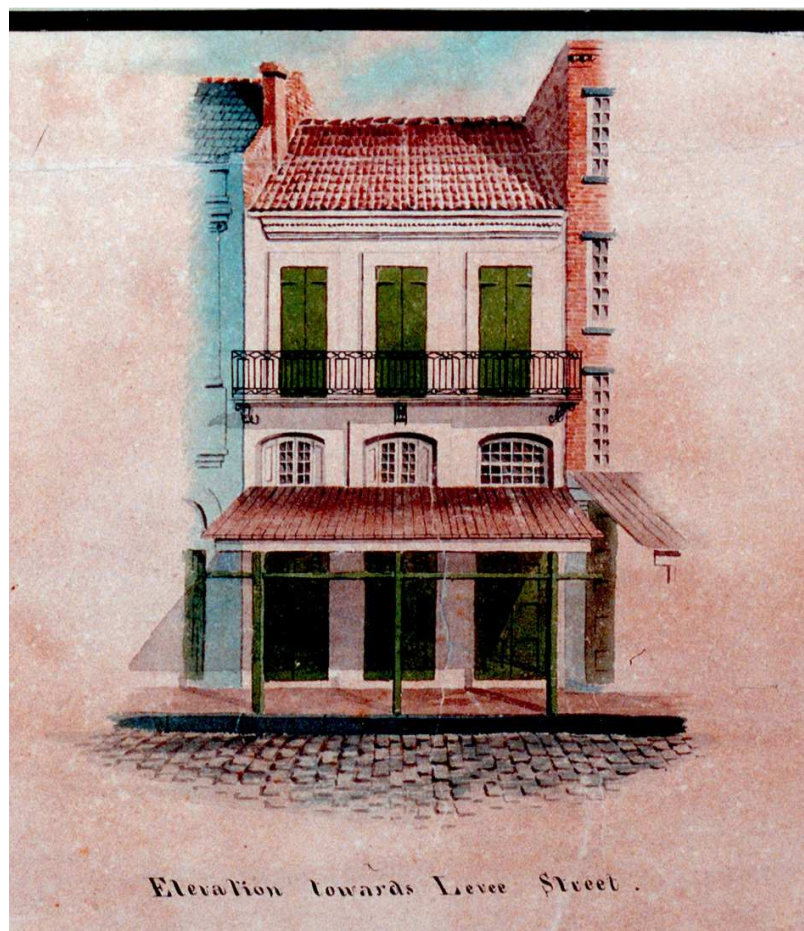


Fig. 2.30. The Miguel Fortier House, An entresol store-house at 517 Decatur, built ca. 1795 by Barthelemy Lafon. Painting by Charles A. de Armas, Architect (1852). NONA plan book 044.023.

The Miguel Fortier Storehouse at 517 Decatur Street survives (Fig. 2.30). It was “Most likely designed by Lafon” (Diboll Vieux Carré survey). Built by Joseph Duguet, Master Mason, according to the building contract of Nov. 7, 1795, filed with Pierre Pedesclaux. Miguel Fortier sold the building to Bartholomew Campanel, h.c.l., in 1811. Campanel died a rich man in Paris in 1853. His son, Barthelemy Campanel (also a free man of color) owned the properties at the corner of Toulouse and Dauphine Streets (Fig. 2.46). He was a well-to-do hardware shop owner who owned several properties in the Quarter. A portion of the building at 513-515 Decatur, also by Lafon, may be seen on the left edge of this image. Note the pilaster with Ionic capital. It might be termed Lafon’s creolized Spanish neoclassical façade.



Fig. 2.31. The Etienne Debon store-house at 507-511 Decatur Street. It was designed and constructed by Lafon in 1798. Illustration by Charles de Armas (1862). NONA 006.111. The building on the right side at 313-315 Decatur was also designed by Lafon.

The Etienne Debon storehouse is another example of a three-bay store-house set in the same block as the two buildings mentioned above (Fig. 2.31). Lafon purchased contiguous properties in Square 27 on what is now Decatur Street for the purposes of commercial development in the 1790s. Here, Lafon's design includes stacked rusticated quoins in the form of pilasters at the edges of the façade. They are much like those heavier quoins designed by Guillmard for the expansion of the Montegut house (Fig. 2.22). Unlike most commercial storehouses, Lafon's roof projects out over the banquette in Caribbean Creole style, covering the balcony on the second floor without supporting posts. The same building which was seen on the left side of Fig. 2.30, may also be seen on the right side of Fig. 2.31. In the ten years since the earlier image, Lafon's middle building at 513-515 Decatur seems to have been modernized in the Greek Revival style, its old pilasters removed and a low attic room now lighted by frieze windows. All of these Lafon buildings retain flat band surrounds for the windows and doors (Fig. 2.27).

New Orleans Vernacular Architecture, and Lafon's Relations with It.

High-style in the latest fashion was not the only type of architecture which characterized New Orleans in the 1795-1805 decade. Indeed, it was far from the most common. Most residents of the city were not sufficiently wealthy to be able to afford architect-designed houses. The vast majority resorted to vernacular forms, mostly built in cypress. Today, we refer to the styles of this built landscape as Creole vernacular. For many visitors, however, the Creole vernacular was an invisible phenomenon.

Most travelers to the city extolled the elegance of the grand houses and businesses which crowded Decatur, Chartres and Royal Streets. Take, for example, the description of Doctor John Sibley, who visited New Orleans in 1802. Here are some quotes from his journal:¹³

The town is large, regularly lay'd off and well built, many of the houses elegant, cost in building 40 or 50,000 dollars, mostly brick or stone covered with tile and plastered, outside & in the fronts generally painted white & look well & full of people. [There were no stone houses in New Orleans, but some had pseudo-ashlar scoring on the plastered fronts.]

The streets are lay'd parallel with the river, are about 40 feet wide, intersected by streets at right angles, paved with tile along one foot way, the middle unpav'd, a gutter between the foot way made by three pieces of timber, the top being even with the pavement is usually walked on.

[Sibley seems to be describing what was called a *contra-banquette* in New Orleans – a lining of wooden timbers for the wall of a drainage ditch which also supported the front sides of the wooden plank sidewalks (*banquettes*).

The houses are all small & very deer, a house that in North Carolina might be bought for \$100 would sell here for \$250.

The ground floor of all the houses are occupied by stores & shops, the families live on the second floor, the back yards and alleys are all til'd with hard square tile 6 inches square.

The street or road that leads from the town to the buyo is all the way built on within 50 or 100 yards, several handsome places with orange groves and gardens, the ground a very strong clay soil sworded over with beautiful fine grass and clover... At the bayo are about 50 houses and some appearance of business. Some brick and tile yards, blacksmiths, etc. [Here, Sibley refers to Bayou St. John and the Bayou Road].

The greatest number of the houses, particularly those newly built, are flat roofed. They first lay on strong beams, a little sloping think plank, then plaister of lime, earth & tar, then brick tile lay'd in lime, over all & rough coat of tar, lime & oyster shells that in length of time become like solid rock & never leak a drop, a balustrade round ornamented with urns, balls, etc., and the tops of houses are as their back yards, the women wash, iron, sit to work & the men walk on them & go from the top of one house to the top of another & visit their neighbours without having any thing to do with the streets below. Many have shrubs and flowers on their houses--no wood shingles are

used, either cement, slate, or tile. ... a great proportion of the buildings are very expensive, durable & handsome.

The problem is that Dr. Sibley seems not to have visited those portions of the city away from the built-up commercial and governmental zone next to the river. Most short-time visitors saw only the more elegant parts of town. The larger sections stretching out to Rampart Street and down river towards Barracks (Quartier) and Hospital (Gov. Nicholls) Streets were populated with single-story or minimally-decorated two-story buildings which could not be seen as elegant. Indeed, residences ranged from the crude self-built folk houses which had been thrown up following the great fire of 1788, to presentable houses built of wood, but whose facades were plastered over with stucco in accordance with the 1795 building ordinances of the Cabildo.

Even some of the best architectural minds in the country concurred with this more sentimental image of New Orleans, neglecting its rougher-hewn neighborhoods. When Benjamin Latrobe arrived in 1808, he wrote that it was the most beautiful city in the United States. To Latrobe, the Parisian architects Arsène Lacarrière Latour and Hyacinthe Laclotte had set the style of New Orleans French architecture. It was unlikely to be submerged under Anglo-American taste for a long time to come.¹⁴ Latrobe extolls the French style of the La Monnier house, but he fails to mention its original designer/ builder, Barthelemy Lafon.

But occasionally we also come across a few more balanced and less laudatory descriptions of New Orleans in this period. Also in 1802 the French visitor Berquin-Duvallon wrote the following descriptions of the houses of New Orleans.¹⁵

(Visitors tend to see) the beautiful houses which are on the Mississippi and the believe that the citizens enjoy great wealth, but with the exception of a few solidly built modern houses one sees, there are many others whose construction and roofs show a depth of poverty which is surprising (pp. 65-66).

There are some solid and less risky buildings that have been built along the riverbanks, and in the first streets in the front of the town. These are constructed of fired brick, a few being two stories high with narrow front galleries on the front of the ground floors. In the other parts of the city and the neighborhood, one sees nothing but hovels and huts (*baraques* – perhaps referring to *poteaux-en-terre* – earthfast construction; pp. 167-68).

One half of the city has not been built up following the two fires. There are streets where scarce twenty houses can be counted (p. 71).

The number of houses may be computed at about fourteen hundred, and the area of the city, about three hundred acres; the whole of which however, is not built over, as many of the squares at the north-west end [sic., western or northern corner] are totally void of houses. The principal buildings are as near the river as the plan of the city will admit, and houses situated near this spot are of more value than those situated further back from the Mississippi.¹⁶

The last governor [Claiborne] forbid houses to have wooden roofs, but this is not obeyed. (p. 93).

The greater part of the houses are constructed of wood, raised on a *rez-de-chaussée* – on a kind of support pillar and a foundation of brick. They are covered with shingles. All are very combustible cypress. Also, this city was accidentally burned two times over an interval of a few years, in March 1788 and in December of 1794. Despite this, they build again every day for reasons of economy a kind of large booth (*échoppes*) in the center of the town and on the residential lots of the old burned buildings, without giving thought to the dangerous consequences of this sort of construction. Everything is in cypress with the exception of the foundations, and what I assume are the fire places.

The [commercial store] houses are raised about seven or eight feet from the earth to make room for the cellars, which are on a level with the ground; for no business can be carried on below its surface on account of the surrounding waters.

The streets are well laid out, and tolerably spacious, but that is all. Bordered by a foot-way of four or five feet [wide], and throughout unpaved, walking is inconvenient; but what is more incommodious [for] the foot-passenger is the projecting flight of steps before every door (p. 24).

There are many stairways on the banquettes, reducing the passage by one-half [This indicates that then, as now, the floors of most cottages were raised 1-2 feet above grade, and had to be accessed by short stairways placed on the banquette, itself.]

Eyewitness accounts such as these indicate that at the end of the Spanish colonial period the architectural scene in New Orleans was dominated by a smaller number of stylish multi-story store houses distributed along the levee front, Chartres and Royal Streets, while the vast majority of houses were low and built of wood, though perhaps plastered on their facades and painted white or with pastel colors. We see something of the amazing adaptability of Barthelemy Lafon when we discover that he also contributed to the forms of New Orleans Creole vernacular architecture.

The Environment of Creativity in New Orleans

The situation in which Lafon worked was one of almost unbelievable turmoil – political, social and legal. Many nagging unresolved issues stymied the Spanish colonial government in the last decades of the eighteenth century. For example, there was no agreement on the problem of who was in control of the public and private lands within the city, and who could tax, sell, dispose of, or condemn lots and buildings. Like the French before them, the Spanish had established a multi-headed form of colonial government with less-than-clear lines of authority. The idea was that if the various branches did not agree, unresolved issues

would be forwarded up to the King for his decision. Ultimately, the King owned all public lands and only he could determine land grants, either through his personal council, or through an appointed local official.

In fact, the branches of government often disagreed, even on vitally important issues such as the building codes for rebuilding New Orleans following the great destructive fires. The Cabildo – the city council – theoretically embodied the right to control lands within the city in order to further to development and secure good order. Beginning with Governor O'Reilly, however, the governors exercised actual power over the control of royal lands.¹⁷ The Cabildo remained timid in exercising control over decisions concerning who should obtain public lands for the good of the community, and whether buildings ought to be condemned if they were fire hazards. Disputes between the Cabildo and the Governor were often submitted to the King, requiring several years to resolve.

This was particularly true for building codes. After the fire of 1788, Governor Carondelet asked the Cabildo to establish a building code which would stop the construction of large wooden structures because of their potential as fire hazards. In 1795 this was done; rules requiring that fireproof buildings be built were published.¹⁸ Unfortunately, the new building codes were largely ignored because they required much greater expense of materials--beyond the affordability of most residents. Brick was expensive. Good brick and tile was made on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain and better "hard" brick was imported from Philadelphia. Slate and tile were also imported by ship, multiplying the cost of a house.

When the Cabildo attempted to enforce the codes by razing a number of small temporary and highly flammable houses, successive Governors Gayoso, Casa-Calvo, and Vidal (Carondelet's successors), refused to enforce the edicts, and even argued that poor people should be exempted from the prohibition on building wooden houses. Governor Vidal, particularly, overrode the Cabildo, leaving the matter of enforcement unresolved. It had still not been resolved in 1803 when Spain relinquished its sovereignty over Louisiana.

However, despite their inability to enforce the new anti-fire regulations, the 1795 acts of the Cabildo did have a general effect on the vernacular architecture of New Orleans. People did plaster the fronts of their houses, often leaving the sides sheathed in exposed clapboards. Chimneys grew very tall,

lessening the chance of sparks igniting a neighbor's roof. Shingles gave way to *merrains*, also called *pieux* (Figs. 2.28, 2.41, 2.42). These were shingle-like slabs of cypress or oak six to eight feet in length. They were so heavy that they could not be lifted by the updrafts of a house fire and transported onto neighboring structures, spreading the fire in a high wind. In addition, the regulations against building larger wooden structures facing the street meant that houses less than 30 feet in width but of considerable depth became increasingly popular. These were mostly one room wide and two to five rooms in depth, with two front doors opening directly onto the street – in other words, linear cottages. *Appentis* (shed-roofed) linear cottages appeared almost immediately. More slowly but with ever-increasing acceptance, shotgun-like houses in the forms used in Saint-Domingue appeared in growing numbers (Figs. 2.33, 2.40 – 2.42). The first shotguns appear in the graphic record in 1803. Lafon was recording them, both in town and in the countryside in 1804.¹⁹ They were popular with free people of color, many of whom had come from Saint-Domingue, particularly beginning in 1804.

Secret political plots in favor of the establishment of new nations or new states (Mexico, Texas, West Florida), or in favor of the United States or European countries capturing former Spanish colonies, arose. Several of the prominent architects of New Orleans became deeply enmeshed in them. Arsene Lacarrier Latour, and Barthelemy Lafon were among them. Both spied for the Spanish Crown. Many of their brother French Masons of New Orleans were involved in political intrigues, together with the American Masons including Arron Burr, General James Wilkinson, Governor Claiborne, and even the Spanish popular priest, Padre Antoine Sedella. He ran an espionage network for the Spanish which in 1815-1817 included Latour, Lafon and the Laffite brothers.²⁰ Lafon actually had his own 007 spy number, No. 045.

The privateers sometimes worked with letters of mark from newly “independent” South American nations, and more often not. The problem was that the Spanish government, like the French government before it, had run its colonies on a strict mercantilist policy. Foreign trade was severely restricted. It was not possible to become a wealthy trader and at the same time follow the formal rules of commerce. This meant that dozens of people with the means and daring and skills became smugglers, privateers, and

pirates. The Laffites ran a vast trading network, landing captured goods and slaves at Barataria and transporting them through the bayous into New Orleans or other locations where they were sold. The Americans were slow to catch on to the breadth and tenacity of this form of commercial activity, but when they finally did, they discovered that even surveyors and architects such as Lafon had long been active privateers with their own armed corsairs. At different times Lafon commanded at least four armed raiders whose names have been recorded. A very substantial proportion of the commerce of New Orleans depended on such illegal activities, and it would not be forfeited easily. This, Lafon did while maintaining his engineering, architectural, and cartographic occupations – it is hard to imagine how.

Global historical events also stimulated turmoil on the local scene. The European nations were at war with one-another and with the newly minted United States. France underwent its revolution only a few years after the successful American Revolution, splitting the loyalties of the New Orleans Creoles. Napoleon rose in France, and was soon fighting Britain, then Spain. Central and South American colonies, including Mexico, were beginning the struggle for independence from Spain. Spain was losing its power to control its colonies in North and South America, and England and the United States competed to see who would next control these vast lands. The key to much of this lay in and around New Orleans, where the war of 1812 finally arrived, launching the city onto the world stage in a most dramatic way, and paving the way for a new president for the United States. This occurred just a few years after the Haitian Revolution reached its crescendo sending forty to fifty thousand French refugees to other parts of the Atlantic World, including Baltimore, Philadelphia and Charleston. New Orleans would not be far behind. In 1802 and 1803, Lafon helped to transport some of these refugees from war-torn Saint-Domingue.

Then, there were technological advances such as the development of the steam engine. Robert Fulton's first successful steamboat, the "New Orleans," reached New Orleans from Pittsburgh in 1811.

The steamboat alone would revolutionize the commerce and multiply the wealth of New Orleanians, attracting vast numbers of Anglo-Americans who pored into the city to seek their fortunes. The crystallization of sugar (1796) and the development of the cotton gin (1794) transformed the agriculture of the state into a wealth-producing powerhouse, requiring new institutions such as banking houses, commercial exchanges, auction houses, slave auctions, newspapers and coffee houses. Hotels would soon rise up, but before that, the demand for rooming houses and hostels would revolutionize the economy of the middle classes including the very large population of free people of color. All of this and much more meant that New Orleans held, in these years, the most dynamic society in the United States. Such transformations in concert could not help but exert a powerful influence on the changing architectural scene.

Vernacular Architecture of New Orleans in the Early American Republic

But what, exactly, do we know about the architecture of New Orleans at the very end of the Spanish colonial period and thereafter? No one has, to our knowledge, published an authoritative study of the architecture of New Orleans between 1795 and 1810. Sam Wilson, Jr. wrote several histories of New Orleans architecture which dealt, largely, with the larger and more elegant aspects of the built environment, but without much comment on the vernacular.²¹ The vernacular consisted mostly of smaller single-story wooden houses or those with walls of brick or *bousillage* (mud mixed with Spanish moss) between heavy timber posts. There was considerable diversity. Much of this reflected the various traditions of the settlers and immigrants. Luckily, we have a considerable amount of information about the cultural landscape of New Orleans in the critical decade of 1795-1805. An estimated two dozen structures still stand in New Orleans from that period, though most have undergone substantial changes from their original appearance. In addition, a greater number of Spanish colonial buildings survived to be drawn, photographed and otherwise recorded in the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth centuries. New

Orleans is unique in having the plan book plans which record in great detail many hundreds buildings being publically auctioned throughout the nineteenth century. Some 1600 illustrations are found in the New Orleans Notarial Archives. Some of these record not only the plans but the elevations of buildings constructed in our target decade of 1795 to 1805.

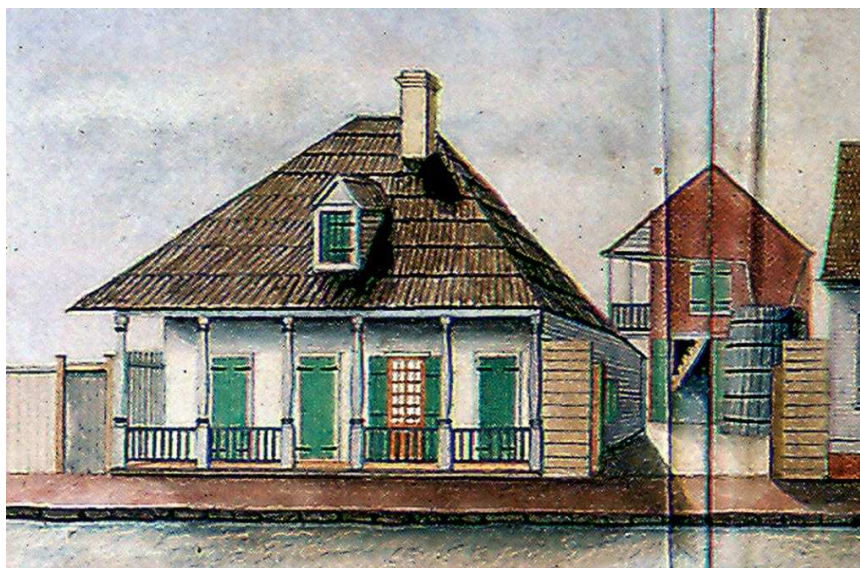


Fig. 2.32. A pavilion-roofed Creole Cottage on Race Street in the Lower Garden District. The estimated date of construction is 1790 (the New Orleans Notarial Archive). The roof is covered in *merrains*. The Creole style borrows heavily from the West Indies. NONA 044.041.

The population of New Orleans was extremely diverse, coming from a wide variety of circumatlantic locations. Its vernacular architecture reflected in many ways the diversity of this Atlantic-wide population. Influences can be seen coming from France and Spain, but also from Cap Haïtien, Santiago and Havana, Cuba, Mexico, and even coastal West Africa and places as far removed as colonial Brazil.

Lafon's surveys reveal many aspects of this architecture, but they must be combined with other information to reveal a full portrait of each building. Because the sketches of buildings on these property surveys are mere indications, rather than architectural drawings, many open questions remain. There is no way to tell exactly how each of these buildings functioned. We drew conclusions about function based upon those better surveys conducted for legal property transfers. The *affiches*, or posters, which advertised

the sale of a property contain far more information and make clear which buildings are functioning as residences, as doubles, or as commercial enterprises. Unfortunately, only a few of these more complete surveys were made prior to 1804. Nevertheless, we are fortunate to have been able to add to the store of knowledge about the architecture of New Orleans at the beginning of the territorial period. This is a body of data which will, no doubt, be expanded in the future. The total of Lafon's property surveys in New Orleans are being combined into a map of the surveys, constructed by Gabriele Richardson.²²

The Types of Vernacular Architecture in New Orleans 1795 – 1810. Outside of the commercial area, New Orleans had a wide variety of cottage and commercial types, giving the street scene a complex, ever-changing appearance. This general *tout ensemble* is brought home through a later nineteenth sketch by A. R. Woad (Fig. 2.33).



Fig. 2.33. “Quartier Français,” 1867, by A.R. Woad. Image courtesy the Historic New Orleans Collection (1965.73). Houses in the foreground are of types common to the first twenty years of the nineteenth century.

In order to simplify a complex story, we divide the forms of New Orleans vernacular architecture into several basic classes:

1) French Colonial Vernacular Cottages. Since the founding of the city in 1718, French settlers had often constructed unmodified French style country and town houses in Louisiana. These have all but disappeared from the New Orleans landscape, but there remain good illustrations of several houses which could have been put down in any village in western France without raising comment. Vernacular cottages are distinguished by both their overall form and by the geometry of their floorplans. In the case of 18th century cottages from Western France, they were mostly characterized by the local medieval plan -- the *salle-et-chambre*. It combined a near square all-purpose main room (*salle*) with a narrow master bedroom (*chamber*). This places the chimney off-center. French cottages did not originally have a rear cabinet-loggia range of rooms, but of course, that is something which might easily be added at a later time.



Fig. 2.33. A French style cottage at house at 740 Esplanade Ave., corner Bourbon. This sketch by A. R. Waud was drafted in 1871, Courtesy the Historic New Orleans Collection. The plan is *salle-et-chambre*, very popular in French vernacular architecture.

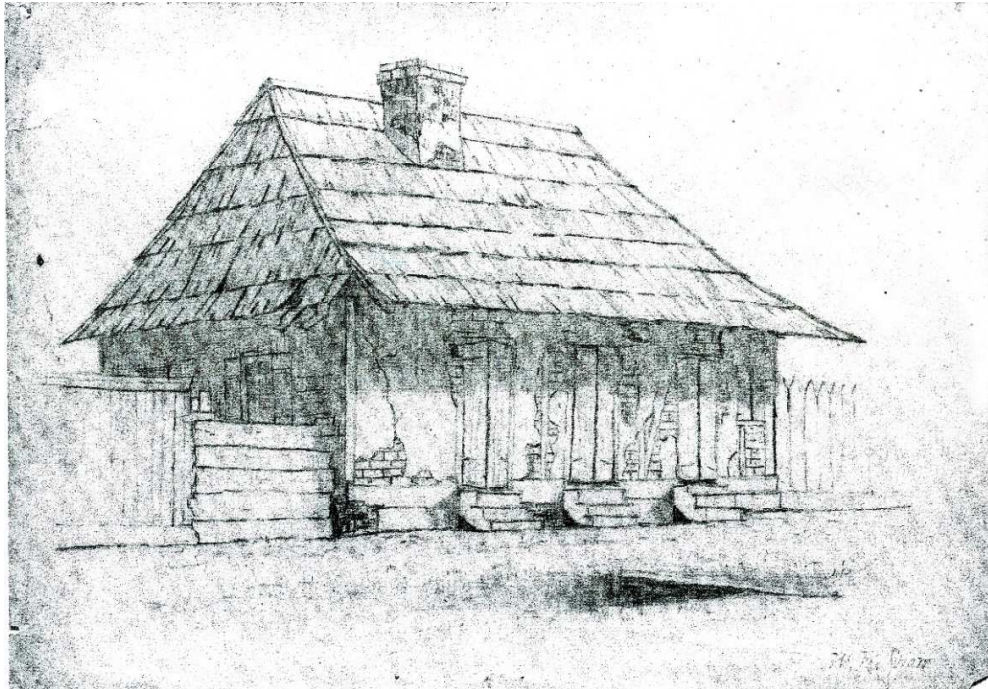


Fig. 2.34. A sketch of a 3-bay *salle-et-chambre* cottage on "Washington," perhaps St. Roch Ave., by W.R. Shaw in the nineteenth century. Image courtesy HNOC (1983:170:10).

- 2) **Spanish Colonial Vernacular Cottages.** Following the two fires, the new architecture ordinances of the Cabildo required that roofs be covered with tile or slate. The Spanish-influenced architects such as Guillemard, and those Spanish colonial officials and businessmen who designed their own houses, built them much in the style of Spanish cottages from other parts of Latin America. There were two basic types. The first was the *azotea*, or terrace roof house. These were once very common, though only two survive today in the French Quarter. Barthelemy Lafon designed several of them in the 1790s when he purchased land in the 700 block of Dumaine Street. Dr. John Sibley described the abundance of terrace roofed cottages and houses in his diary, quoted above (p. __49).



Fig. 2.35. Two terrace-roofed cottages at 707-709 and 711- Dumaine Street (far right side of image). These were probably designed and built by Barthelemy Lafon in 1799. The cottage at the far right, the de la Torre house, survives. The cottage in the left-middle of the image also originally had a terrace roof which was covered over with a pitched roof at some later time, probably in the first decade of the 19th century. Sketch by Joseph Pennell.

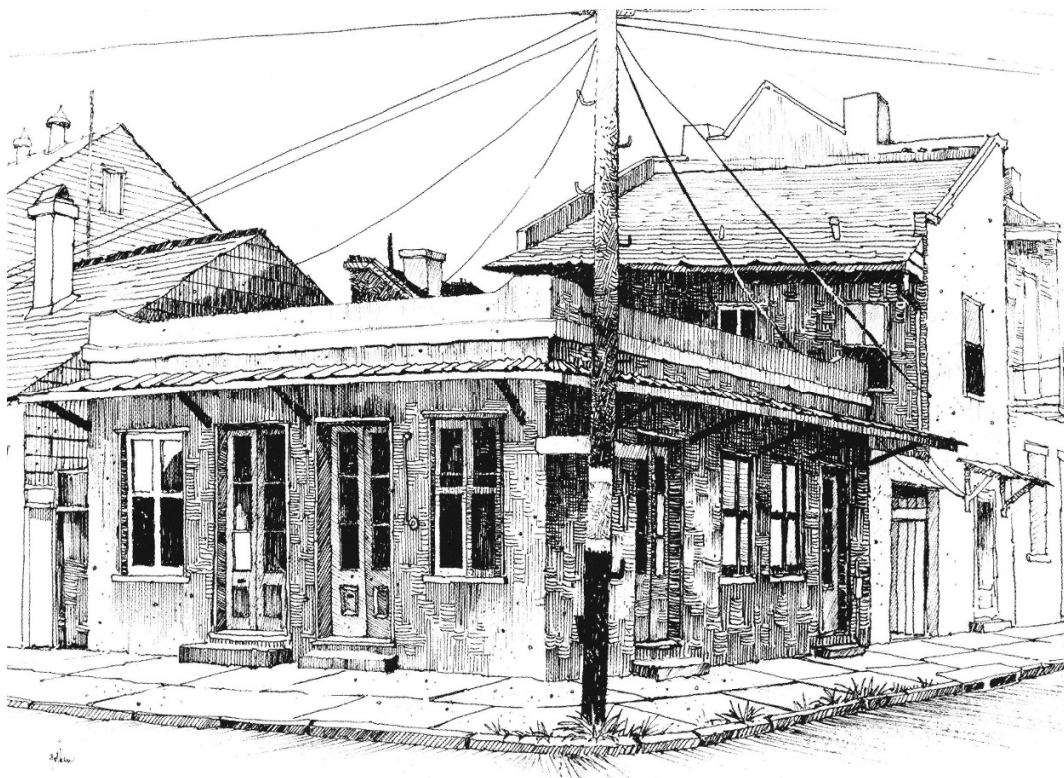


Fig. 2.36. Terraced-roofed Cottage Antoine (Abat), 838-840 Governor Nicholls Street, corner Dauphine. House built for Franchonette Decoudreau, f.c.l., by Carlos Decondreaux, Captain of the regiment at the Plaza de Armas.²³

Some of the Spanish style cottages were creolized, either originally or later, through the addition of a cabinet-loggia range of rooms. That is the plan of the Cottage Antoine (Fig. 2.36).

The second form of Spanish cottage was one which typically had four bays on the street, and a semi-double or a four-square room plan. Some were larger and used for commercial purposes. These cottages often had low-pitched hip or gable roofs, but a few had steeper roofs like those of the French Creole cottages. Many were recorded in the nineteenth century.

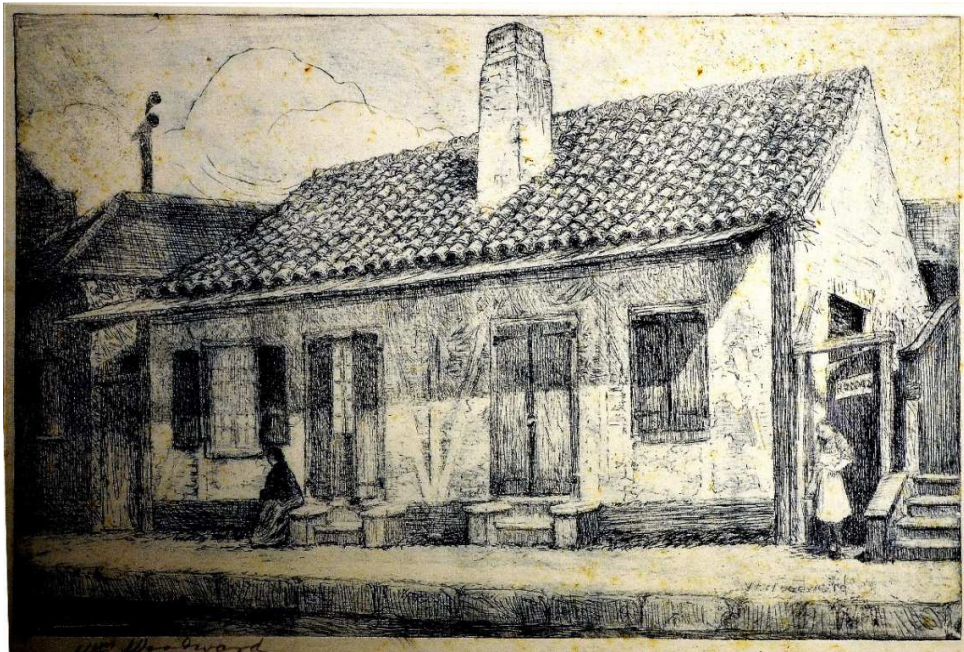


Fig. 2.37. A Spanish colonial gable-sided cottage on Dumaine Street. Sketch by Wm Woodward, ca. 1904. Image courtesy New Orleans Museum of Art (61.16).

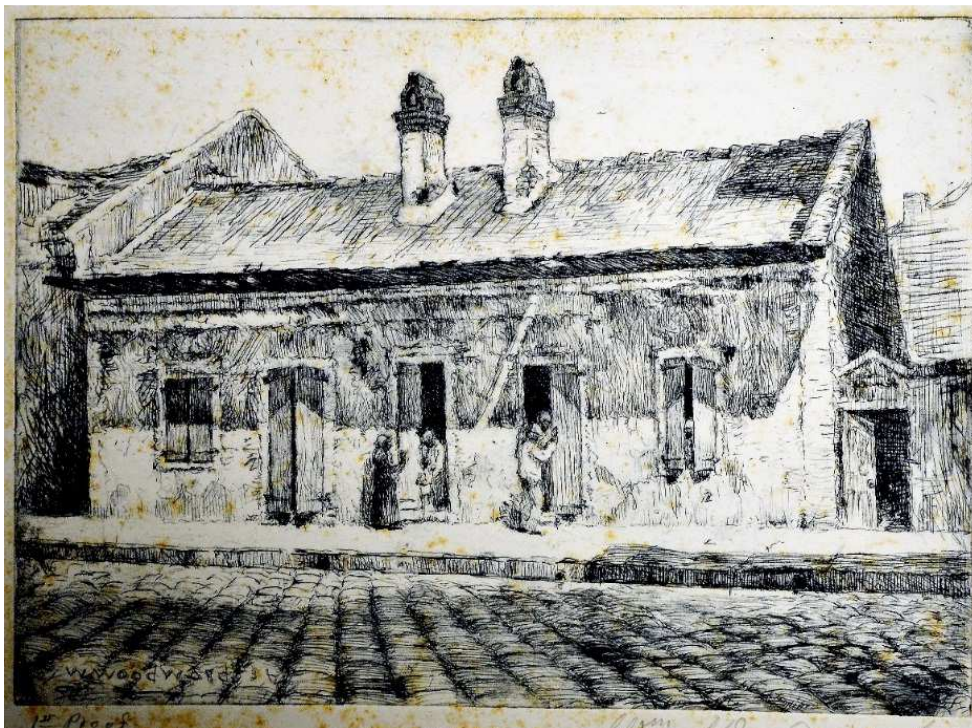


Fig. 2.37. A double cottage with platibanda. Sketch by Wm Woodward, 1904 (NOMA 39.31). The location was not recorded, and the cottage no longer exists.



Fig. 2. 38. The brick-walled Spanish house at 1038-40 Chartres Street at the corner of Ursulines. This cottage which survived well into the twentieth century was a commercial form of the Spanish cottage. Photo taken in 1917. Image courtesy the Vieux Carre Survey (1020NO724).

- 3) **Linear Cottages.** No less than three separate kinds of linear cottages existed in the 1795 – 1805 decade. These were Spanish style *appentis* cottages, rotated French cottages with their narrow ends towards the street, and *ti kay*, or shotgun houses in the style of Saint-Domingue.

Let's begin with Lafon's survey of the La Rionda cottage at 535 Saint Philip Street in 1808: "A house of 18 feet front, brick in front and brick between posts on the sides and rear, tile roof, four *appartements* plus a [freestanding] kitchen, pigeon house and well." All of the structures are apparent in Lafon's survey (Fig. 2.39). The 1812 written description of this property was penned when it was sold by José Antone La Rionda. It indicates that the linear cottage house is of a single story in height. Raised houses are always described as such (*à étage*). This house was s demolished ca. 1833.

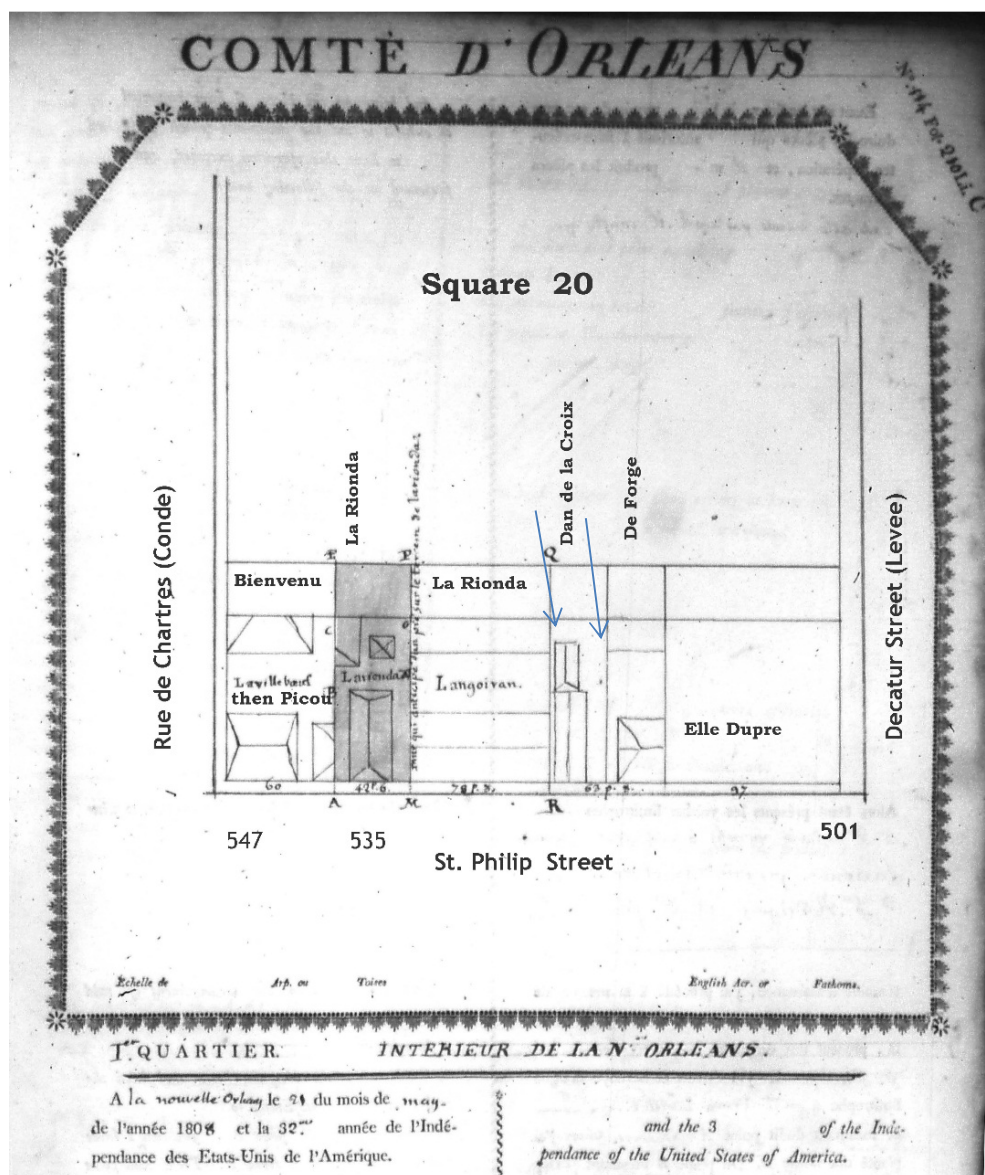


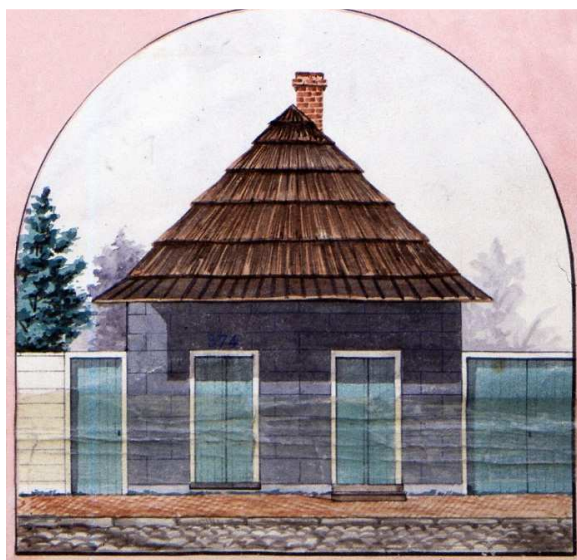
Fig. 2.39. Lafon Survey Book No. 2 (No. 114, Fol. 210). May, 1808. The uptown portion of Square 20 bounded by St. Philip, Decatur and Chartres Streets, backed by Ursulines. This is the 500 block of St. Philip Street. HNOC, Lafon Survey Book No. 2. Street names, square and address numbers, and names of subsequent owners added by the Editor.

The La Rionda Linear cottage is at the front of a lot 42.5 French feet wide. It almost certainly had matching front doors, like the cottage in the left side of Fig. 2.33. We know the building was a residence from the description given four years later when the house was sold.

Linear cottages came in both single and double widths, particularly after ca. 1805. They would have been covered with *merrains* (huge shingles), which gave their roofs a distinctive appearance. The rooms of many were relatively small, only 12-14 feet wide. They were often crowded together on very narrow lots and mixed with tiny Creole Cottages and other forms.



Fig. 2.40. A set of small, early Territorial Period cottages crowded together in the 600 block of Burgundy Street (Square 89). They are, from left to right, 1) an *appentis* cottage (paired with another), 2) a *ti-kay* linear cottage, and 3) a tiny creole cottage covered with *merrains*. Detail of NONA image 006.110.



Figs. 2.41 and 2.42. Examples of two forms of early linear cottage, both covered with *merrains*. The single wide cottage on the left was built by Pierre Roup, a Saint-Domingue refugee and builder who arrived in New Orleans ca. 1805. This house was located at 1744 N. Rampart Street, and is no longer standing (NONA 089.024). The cottage on the right is the ca. 1810 Phillipon Cottage, which still stands on Dauphine Street in a somewhat changed appearance (NONA 044.035).

Just how did these cottages unite into a streetscape? That differed in different parts of the city. In the city center, for example, it was often older French style cottages rotated with their narrow ends towards the street on narrow lots which were interspersed with small hip-roofed cottages.

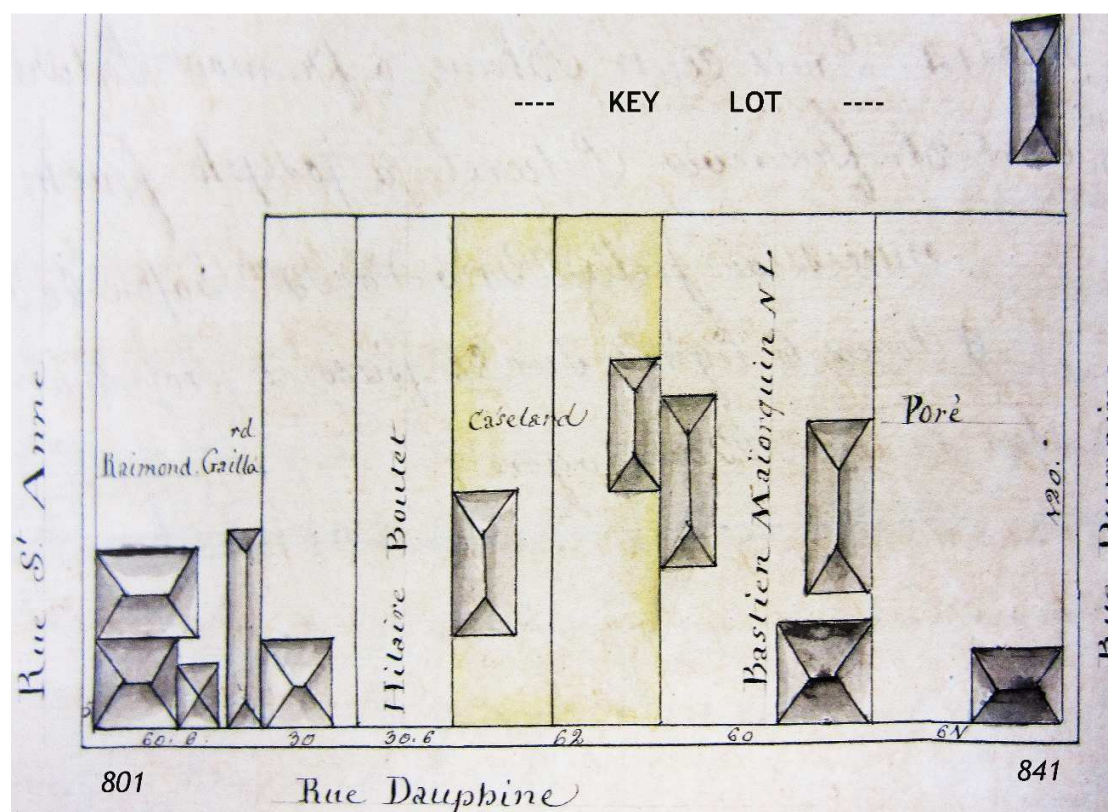


Fig. 2.43. Barthelemy Lafon's 1804 survey of the 800 block of Dauphine (Vol. 1, page 49). Here we see linear cottages mixed together with Creole cottages, mostly set on 30 foot wide half lots. Mr. Hilaire Boutté was a famous French architect in the Territorial Period. He probably purchased this property as an investment.

Square 86, seen in this Lafon survey, appears not to have burned in either of the fires. Some of the buildings standing here might predate 1788, but most probably do not because this was not a built-up area of the city in that year. Three of the properties are original 60 foot wide lots, while the other two have been subdivided into *demi-terrains*. The linear cottages may have the floorplans of French style cottages turned sideways to better accommodate the increasingly narrow lots. Five of the cottages in this survey appear to have either four-square floorplans or *semi-double* plans, similar to other post-fire cottages. The elongated structure on the lot of Raimond Gaillard appears to be a service structure, rather than a shotgun house.

The other form of linear cottage popular from Spanish colonial times was the *appentis*, or shed roofed cottage (Fig. 2.16). Appentis cottages were, historically, dependencies. Even in the post fire years when they have been brought up to the street and fitted out as linear cottages, they are often still connected with larger houses (Fig. 2.44).



Fig. 2.44. A nineteenth century Joseph Pennell sketch of “Madame Delphine’s cottage” in the 1200 block of Royal Street. Here the Creole cottage at 1220 Royal is conjoined with a Spanish style gable-fronted *appentis* linear cottage (1216 Royal). The tall chimneys are reminiscent of the first decade of American Louisiana. The cottage was described in a George Washington Cable short story “Madame Delphine,” in *Old Creole Days*. New Orleans Museum of Art (91.440).

There are indications that larger streetscape units were becoming important in these years. That is, houses were designed with their locations in mind in order to create an overall effect more pleasing to the eye, and more convenient to pedestrians. There appears to be several possible explanations for the common curiosity of low cottages with roofs which combine a hip on one end with a gable on the other end. The hip roof ends almost always appear at the ends of a block. These curious rooflines are associated

with houses set on corner lots. It is as if someone has passed a rule that hip-roofs occur at the corners, and gabled roofs where houses adjoin one-another in the middle of a square. One example occurs at both ends of the 1200 block of Bourbon between Governor Nicholls (then *Rue de l'Hôpital*) and Barracks (*Rue de Quartier*). The gable roof was meant to align with the close-set gable-roofed cottages on the adjoining properties, usually on half lots. This is precisely what they do in Lafon's 1804 survey. In all, the lakeside of Bourbon Street (Square 79 -- 1200 block) has three gabled roof cottages in the interior of the block, plus a half-gabled cottage at each end of the block (Fig. 2.44). This is all the more curious in that these are all small houses built on half-lots. Poor people generally do not coordinate the architecture of their houses with their neighbors. Perhaps what we are witnessing is the hand of a developer who has purchased most of an entire block (or square), divided it into multiple lots and designed houses which conform to an overall plan. The conforming houses are all roughly the same sizes, while two houses which do not conform are of different depths, and clearly part of a different philosophy of architectural integration – a more highly individualistic one befitting an earlier state of urbanization.²⁴ Modern street numbers have been added by the authors. Image courtesy the Historic New Orleans Collection.

Another explanation for this phenomenon is the *abat vent* theory -- gable-roofed buildings set right at the edge of the banquette on corner properties would not as conveniently offer roof extensions over the banquette on both street sides as hip roofs do (Fig. 2.45).

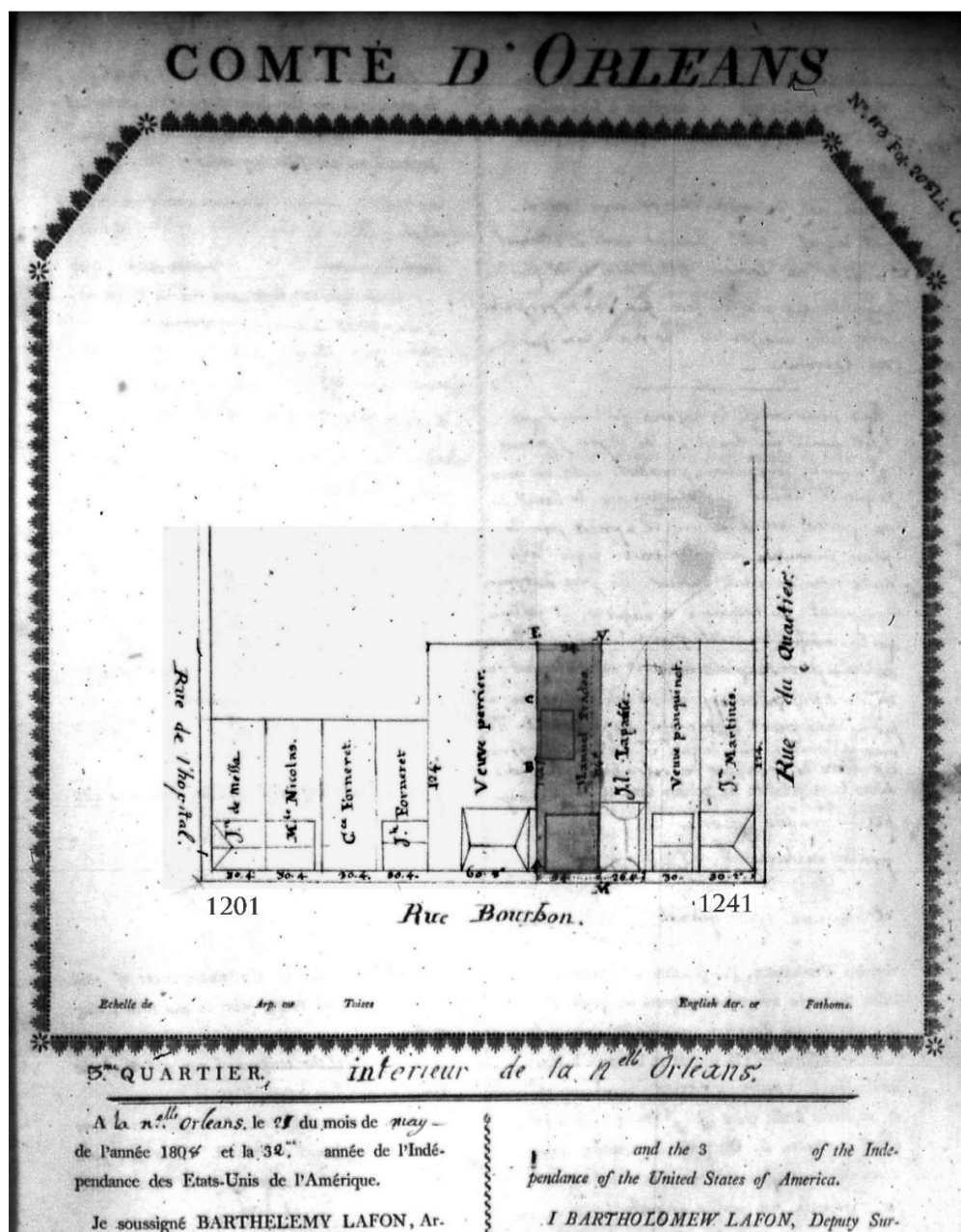


Fig. 2.44 A Lafon Survey of Square 79 and the 1200 block of Bourbon, taken May 2, 1808. Survey Book No. 2 (HNOC No. 113, Fol. 208). The corner cottages have gabled roofs facing the adjoining cottages, which are, themselves, gabled roof cottages.



Fig. 2.45. 739-741 Bourbon, a half-hip, half-gabled roof corner cottage at the intersection of Bourbon and St. Ann Streets. 739 Bourbon Street functions as a corner store. The *abat vent* wraps around the corner. Many other corner cottages have a similar configuration JDE Photo 2014.

- 4) **Creole Cottages and Creolized Cottages.** The building types just described are all “pure” types, relatively unmodified from their previously established origins in France and colonial Spanish America. Even the *appentis* linear cottages are direct descendants of the rear shed-roofed service buildings of Parisian town houses. However, the nature of vernacular architecture in New Orleans was changing rapidly in this period. By 1804, and much more-so by 1815, the majority of vernacular buildings were no longer old colonial types. Creole architecture had become dominant, and even small vernacular buildings were undergoing creolization. This was almost certainly due to the enormous influx of refugees streaming out of both Saint-Domingue and other French colonies, and from Cuba. Temporary architecture, impermanent architecture, the architecture of poverty, and refugee architecture were ubiquitous and dramatically variable. Most houses were not based directly on previously established types. Rather, they were thrown up quickly by people in need of shelter but without much money. Few artists were attracted by this humble and chaotic form of architecture, though it was surely abundant.

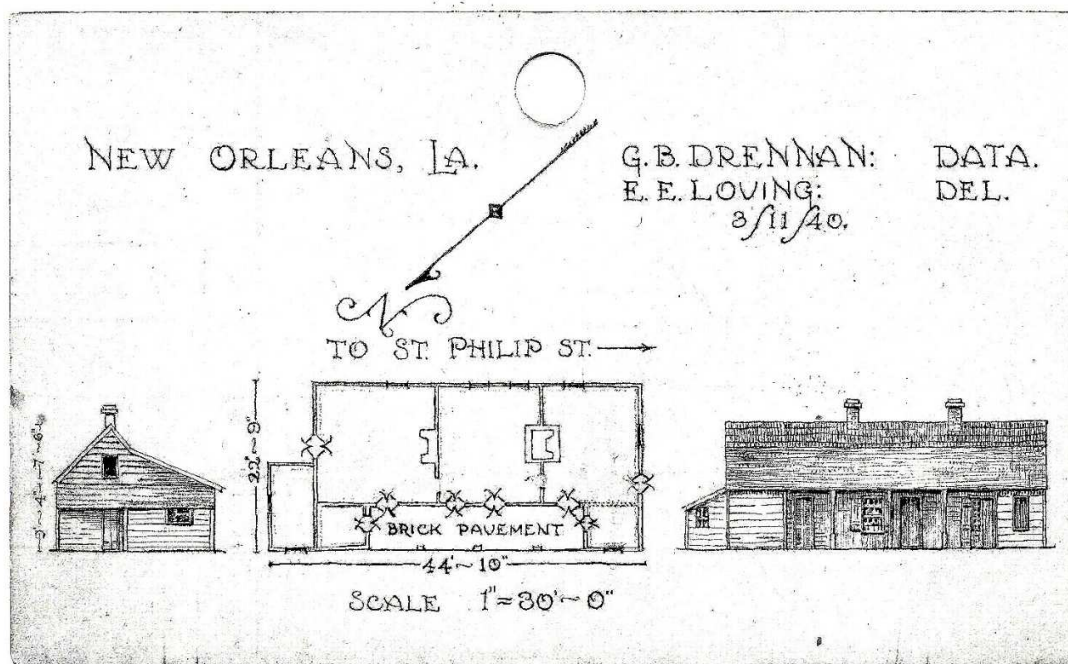


Fig. 2.46. Troxler Cottage, 919 St. Philip Street. This is small creolized cottage which has had a cabinet-loggia added to one side, creating an asymmetrical profile. The core of the house was built in 1782. The house survived because it was outside of the fire zone. The rooms are about 16 feet square. Image courtesy the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress: HABS card (verso) sketches by E. E. Loving, 1940.

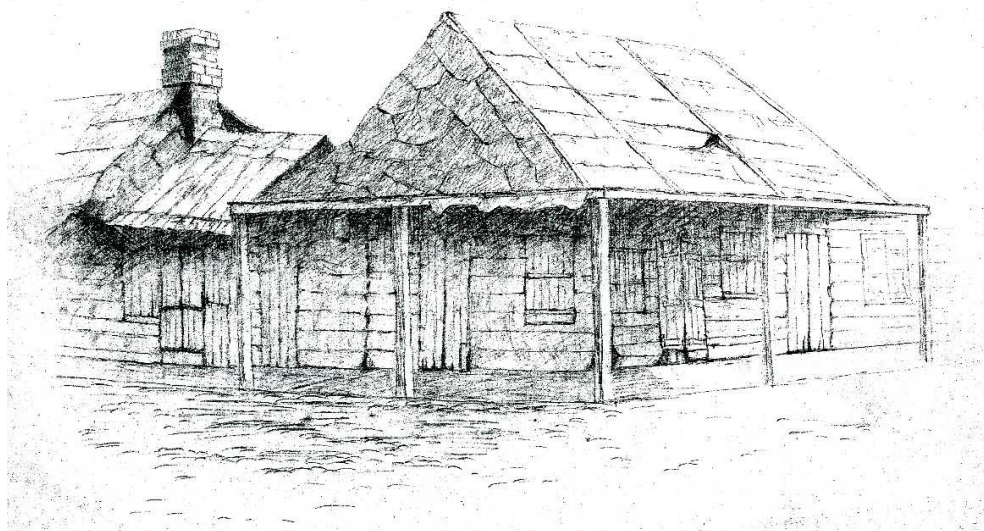


Fig. 2.47. A small corner cottage located at the corner of St. Ann and Burgundy streets. The roofs are covered with sheets of bark. 19th century sketch by W.R. Shaw, courtesy Historic New Orleans Collection (1983.170.7).

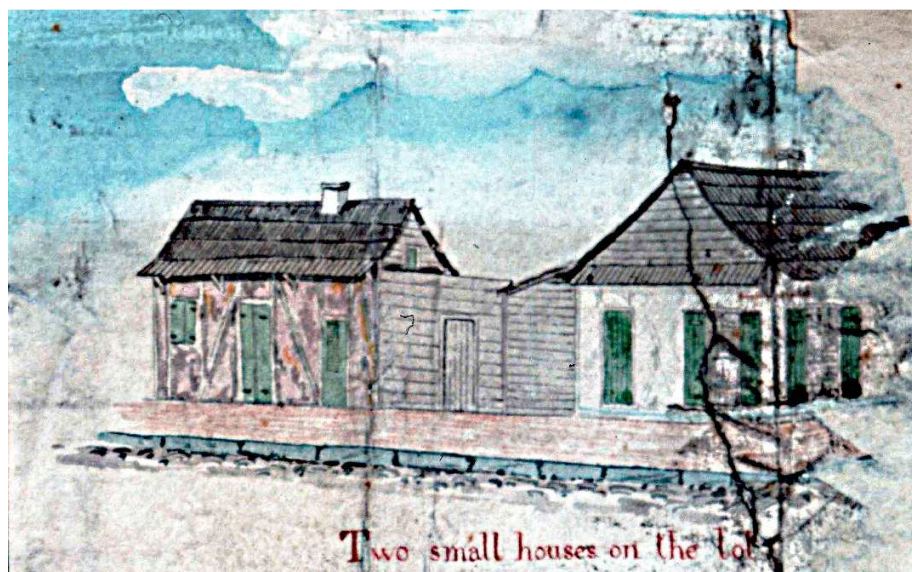


Fig. 2.48. Small cottages at 941 Governor Nicholls corner Burgundy Street on a very small lot. The smaller cabin is built with *bousillage entre poteaux* (mud and moss between posts). The roofs are covered with *merrains*. HABS 094.044.

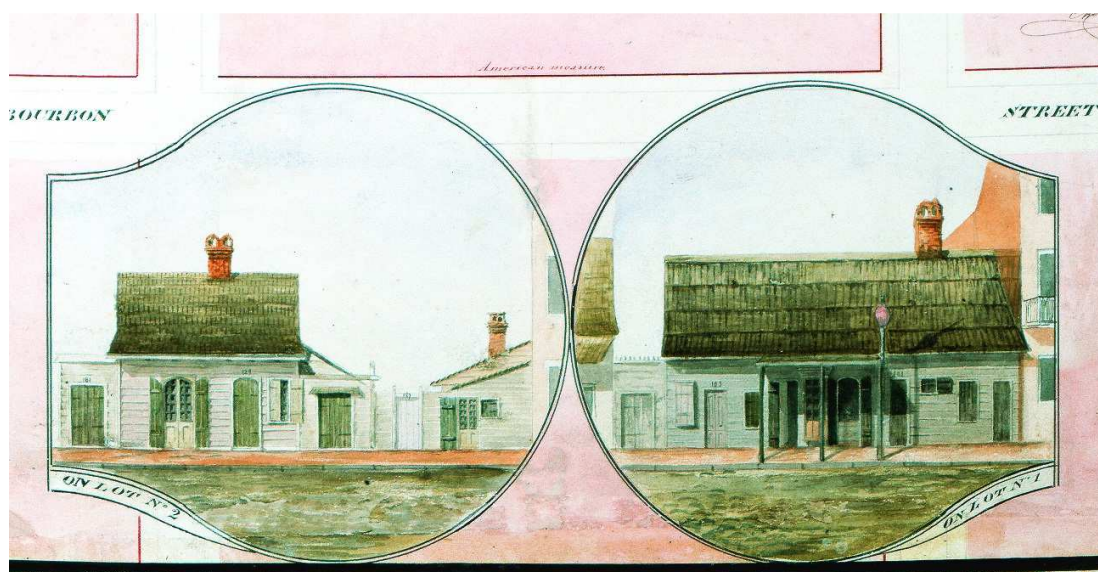


Fig. 2.49. A pair of Spanish or early American period cottages in the 700 block of Conti Street. Glass windows and curved window and door tops indicate a more sophisticated influence on these small cottages of the Territorial Period. HABS 035.057.

Houses such as these would have been seen throughout the back of town areas of New Orleans in the first decade of the American period. Most conformed to no definite tradition and no established

plan types, but through time they were gradually expanded and creolized with galleries and cabinet-loggia rooms.

The sources of much of the patterns of creolization are plain. Very high levels of seaborne communication occurred between Spanish Latin America, the French West Indian colonies, and New Orleans. When the American military finally got around to raiding the Barataria base of the Laffite brothers and their associates in 1814, they captured no less than twenty-two armed brigs and schooners which had been actively engaged in smuggling and privateering across the Gulf and the Caribbean, and that does not include the ones that got away.²⁵ This event speaks to the high levels of interaction occurring between New Orleans and the circumcaribbean.

Between 1803 and 1815, the population of New Orleans roughly tripled, with a very high proportion of the increase coming from long-established Creole plantation societies in the West Indies. Because the colonies of Saint-Domingue and Cuba were colonized some two centuries before the Gulf Coast, they had successfully adapted their lifeways and their architecture to the peculiarities of the climate. Levels of cultural interchange between places such as Jamaica, Saint-Domingue, Cuba, Spanish Santo Domingo, and the islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Saint Christopher exceeded in many ways the amount of cultural influence exerted by their European mother countries. It would not be an exaggeration to refer to a large body of synthesized and established architectural practice as an Atlantic World Creole tradition. Of course, in the hands of individual nations -- the French, the Spanish, the Portuguese the Dutch, and the British -- this shared body of practice was modified in the direction of locally established heritages. Carpentry techniques, for example, remained within the tradition of each mother country while architectural forms adapted to local needs, so they diffused freely across national boundaries.

It is now clear that adaptive architectural innovations introduced from the colonies of one nation diffused rapidly to most other tropical colonial places in the Atlantic World. Everyone everywhere aspired to the latest styles. Architectural innovations such as raising houses several feet above ground level to improve through-ventilation, or the use of broad living galleries as all-

purpose living and reception rooms – these ideas spread throughout the entire West Indies within a decade or so of their introduction. This was especially true of the decades of the 1640s and 1650s, when sugar technology and industrial-level slavery were combined, resulting in the enormous growth of large-scale plantation enterprises in the colonies of the European nations. As ever-increasing waves of skilled and knowledgeable people from the West Indian sugar colonies descended upon Louisiana in the period between the American Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, they transported with them all of the wisdom of centuries of shared West Indian experience – in a word, Creole culture.

As early as 1804, that influence had already transformed much of the built environment of New Orleans, and that was only the beginning. Creole traditions made their impact on New Orleans in several ways. The forms and geometries of several successful West Indian vernacular houses were imported directly into New Orleans. Creole cottages and shotgun houses were among the most successful transplants. These, we would term, Creole architectural forms. Even more widespread, however, were newly borrowed decorative features and geometric forms. West Indian patterns were reformulated and reimagined into new adaptive elements of design which promoted higher levels of comfort and newly relevant symbolic associations. We refer to the borrowing of old patterns into new formulations as the creolization of established forms. Both processes operated simultaneously. Selected popular West Indian houses were adopted as complete forms more easily into Louisiana because they shared commonalities with previously established colonial forms long familiar to the local Creoles. The shotgun house (*ti-kay* of Saint-Domingue) was more easily adopted because the *appentis* shed roofed linear cottage was already established after the second great fire. Individual features, too, deriving from the West Indies, were inserted into older colonial and newer Creole forms in New Orleans, establishing locally relevant architectural styles which played new roles for the residents. The *abat vent* (extended front roof) had been popular in the houses of colonial Cap Haïtien. Pilasters at the edges of the façade were employed in the same town to help buttress the walls of vernacular houses against the frequent

earthquakes, before they were adopted in New Orleans as framing devices for the platibanda. All of this was occurring as Barthelemy Lafon was engaged in active architectural practice, and he was much influenced by it, adopting Creole features into his commissions. Rather than simply borrowing forms from high style architecture, Lafon broadened his perspective and engaged, as did most other local builders, in the vernacular creolization process.

Beginning about 1804 we see the introduction of a new form of urban cottage into New Orleans. As Wilson pointed out, it consisted of a four-square room floorplan with a cabinet-loggia range of rooms behind. Only occasionally was a full width front gallery added to the front of this house type. Rather, the *abat vent* substituted as both sun-shade and rain-shade. In its early years the loft of the Creole cottage would not be used as living space. Beginning in the late eighteenth teens we find these cottages adopting taller roofs with dormer windows for lofts. In the past. Single story urban cottages had been mostly of the standard French *semi-double* floorplan, or they were one single *appartement* room deep, with, perhaps a front gallery (Fig. 2.46). The roofs were low-pitched and the lofts were not used for living space. Now entirely new floorplans were becoming popular.

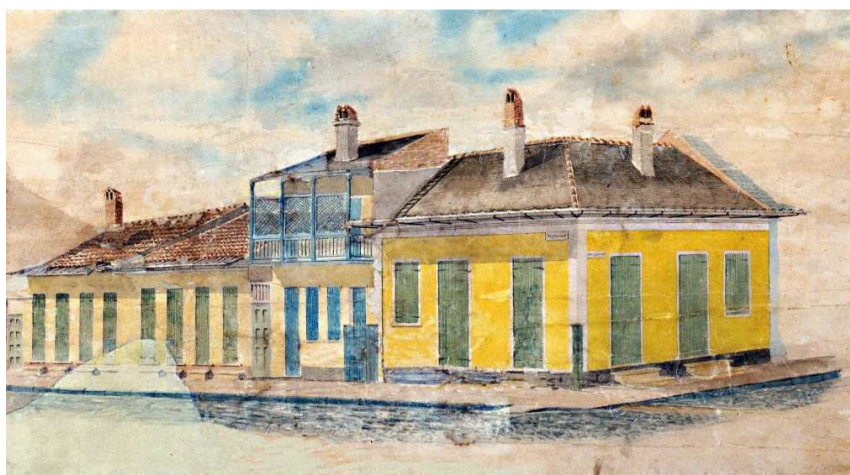


Fig. 2.50. A view of 901-915 Toulouse Street seen from the corner of Dauphine Street, Square 89, ca 1806-1811. Note the corner cottage with its hip roof and double *abat vents*. It also has a platibanda. Further up Toulouse stands a two-story kitchen building and two gable-sided Creole cottages with semi-double floor plans, low-pitched tile roofs and tall chimneys. NONA image 045.034.

Although it was painted in May of 1852 by Charles A. de Armas, this corner of Toulouse and Dauphine streets bears all the appearance of the first decade of the nineteenth century (Fig. 2.50). The corner store, built for Barthelemy Campanel, h.c.l., might have been constructed as early as 1806, when he acquired the property. All of these buildings are extant and pretty much in their original forms, except that the corner store has lost its tall chimneys and the cottage at 909-911 Toulouse has had its façade replaced with concrete blocks. A two story kitchen building at 905-907 Toulouse accompanies the corner cottage. Beyond that are two classic Creole cottages with symmetrical semi-double floorplans. The price of the two corner properties rose from \$3,500.00 in 1806 to \$10,000.00 in 1811, when Campanel sold them (temporarily) to Barthelemy Duverge. The houses were built brick between posts and covered with tiles.²⁶ Lafon's 1804 survey of Square 89 shows no buildings standing on any of the four *terrains* (lots) which contain the present buildings. The owner of the two corner lots is listed as Jacob Moquin.²⁷



Fig. 2.51. The Barthelemy Campanel cottage No. 2, at 913-915 Toulouse. This cottage was built between 1806 and 1811. It is an example of a Hispanicized French Colonial style cottage. These two houses rest on half lots, and so measure about 27 French feet in width, each.

What these buildings show is the configuration of typical Hispanicized colonial urban cottages just prior to the time when the impact of strong influences from the vernacular architecture of Saint-Domingue were becoming manifest. The cottages are built brick-between-posts. Their main front rooms of most are comparatively small by later standards, measuring roughly 13 Ft. wide by 12 or 13 feet deep. The rear semi-double rooms are only 9 to 10 feet deep. The two cottages exhibit features which would continue to be found on hundreds of later Creole cottages in New Orleans. They both originally had four doors opening onto the street. This improved the through-ventilation of the house. The floorplans were rigidly symmetrical. Symmetry in a floorplan is a sign that renaissance ideas were being adopted into the vernacular. This occurred in the colony of Saint-Domingue early, and it was then being adopted into the cottages of New Orleans. But, there was no cabinet loggia arrangement behind the semi-double rooms, indicating that local European rather than West Indian Creole aesthetic was dominant.

Only a few years later and just around the corner from the Barthelemy Campanel properties stood the Arsène Latour *atelier* (workshop), at 625-27 Rue Dauphine. Latour was a close associate of Barthelemy Lafon, and trained with him for several years between 1804 and 1806, when Latour parted from him. Between 1808 and 1812, the property was the office of Arsène Lacarrière Latour (architect, engineer), and Jean Hyacinthe Laclotte (architect, builder). They purchased it in 1811. Claude Gurlie (builder) acquired the property in 1813, following the dissolution of the Latour-Laclotte partnership. This cottage is an early example of all of the features of the classic West Indian derived Creole cottage. It is decorated with a platibanda, surmounted by a cymantia (cornice with complex curvilinear profile) and an *abat vent*. In New Orleans, these elements had begun to symbolize (French) Creole identity, as against Anglo-American allegiance. The roof of the small cottage was now sufficiently steep to enclose a sleeping loft, lighted by twin dormer windows. The floorplan is exactly that described by Sam Wilson Jr., for the classic Creole Cottage.

The majority of the houses erected during this post-colonial period were of the type that has come to be called the “Creole cottage.” Although the one story cottage was not a new idea, the typical square plan divided into four rooms by intersecting partitions, with a recessed rear gallery flanked by small rooms called “cabinets”, seems to have come into general use during this period [1803-1820]. The ceiling heights were fairly low so that the wide overhanging roof or separate awning-like projection protected the sidewalk and the front wall of the house from sun and rain. The fairly steep roofs covered with tiles or shingles, rarely with slate, were constructed with a straight ridge parallel to the street, gables at either end. Kitchen and servants’ quarters were in detached buildings, often of two stories, in the rear.... The plan may have been introduced by refugees from San Domingo (Haiti), for houses of this type on that island are described in Moreau de St. Mery’s “Partie Française de Saint-Domingue.”²⁸

Cabinet-loggia arrangements were introduced into the Island of Hispañola as early as 1510 by Diego Colon, the second son of Christopher. They appear in smaller Spanish Caribbean Creole houses such as the House Where Mila Lives (Matanzas, Cuba), and the Broussard-Laguehaye House (Plaine du nord, Haiti), both ca. 1600. They only appear in Louisiana in plantation style houses such as the Pitot House on Bayou St. John in the late 1790s.²⁹ In Hispañola, the loggia – open towards the rear – was used as a substitute dining room in the hot months. As in Louisiana, the kitchen was located in a detached building behind the main house.

These geometrical (and social) features of Louisiana’s Creole architecture derived mostly from Saint-Domingue, some by way of Cuba. There, in the Oriente, thousands of French refugees from the Haitian Revolution fled and settled between 1792 and 1809, before moving on to New Orleans in May to August, 1809. We should not forget, however, that trade and migration occurred continuously at very high levels between the West Indies and Louisiana, even when revolution and war was not the principal stimulant.

Sam Wilson, Jr., was prescient in this description. The introduction of the cabinet-loggia range of rooms into smaller New Orleans Creole cottages occurred late. Our earliest evidence of the appearance of this new form of cottage takes place following the arrival of the second wave of Saint-Domingue refugees in 1804-05. Many of these unfortunates settled between Bourbon Street and Rampart Street, and also in Faubourgs Marigny and Tremé, and along the Bayou Road. An example of an early Creole cottage in Dauphine Street is found in an auction poster survey from 1838.³⁰



Fig. 2.52a. The Arsène Latour *atalier*, 625-627 Dauphine Street, dating from 1808 - 1813. This is a platibanda cottage with a cymantia cornice and an unusual asymmetrical façade. A sleeping loft has been added under the steeply pitched roof. The chimneys are lower than on cottages of the first decade. The color scheme is among the most popular on Creole cottages 1804 – 1825. The image has been modified in Photoshop to conform to the geometry of the surviving façade.

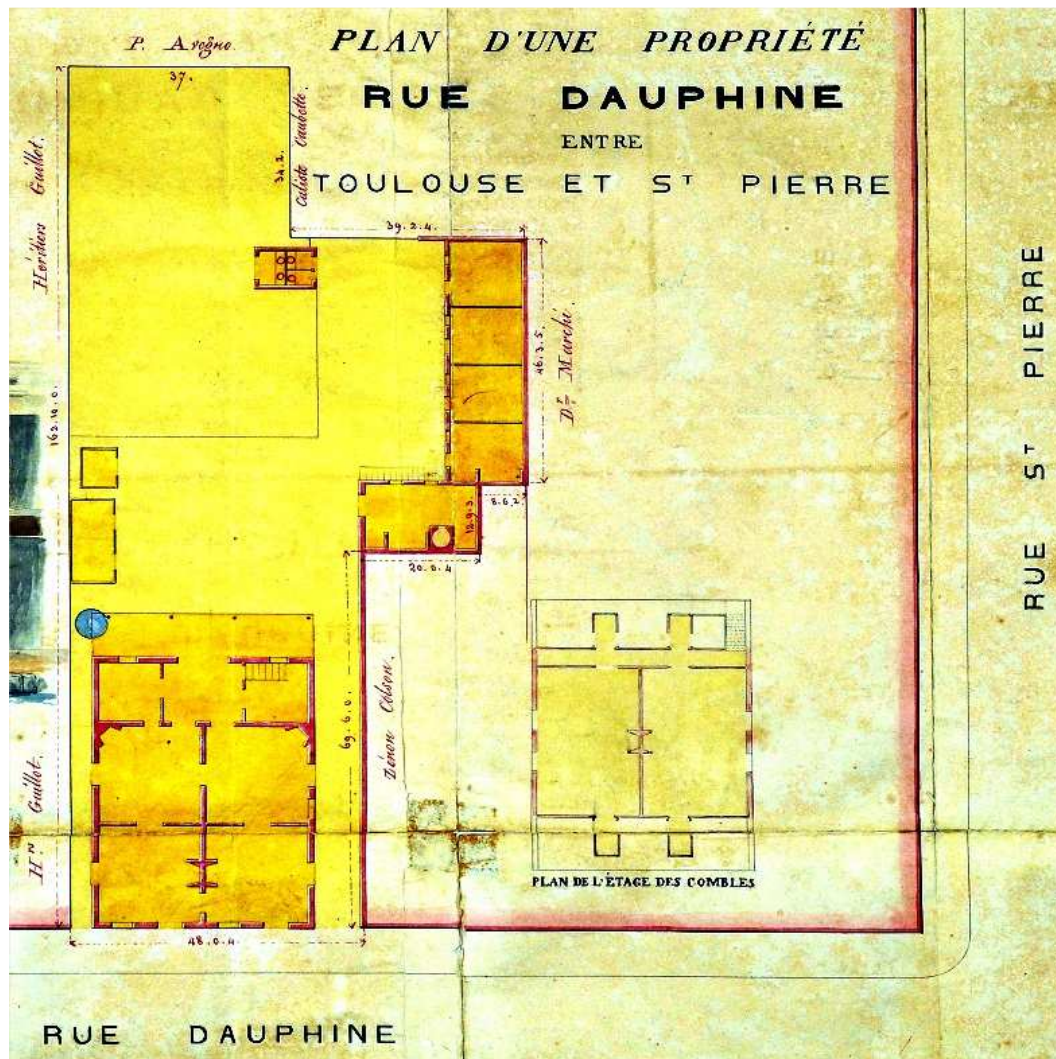


Fig. 2.52b. Plan of the cottage at 625-627 Dauphine Street, attached to T. Seghers, N.P., 11/23/1838. The plan shows the rigidly symmetrical four-square plan. The loft is reached by a winder stair in the rear right cabinet. The plan of the loft rooms is inserted at the right (light yellow). The kitchen has a large bread oven attached, and there are eight smaller 11' x 13 *piéd* rooms in a detached two-story dependency for servants or for room rental. The cottage, which survives, measures 37 feet 6.5 inches wide. The *appartement* rooms are about 17 feet wide by about 15 feet deep.

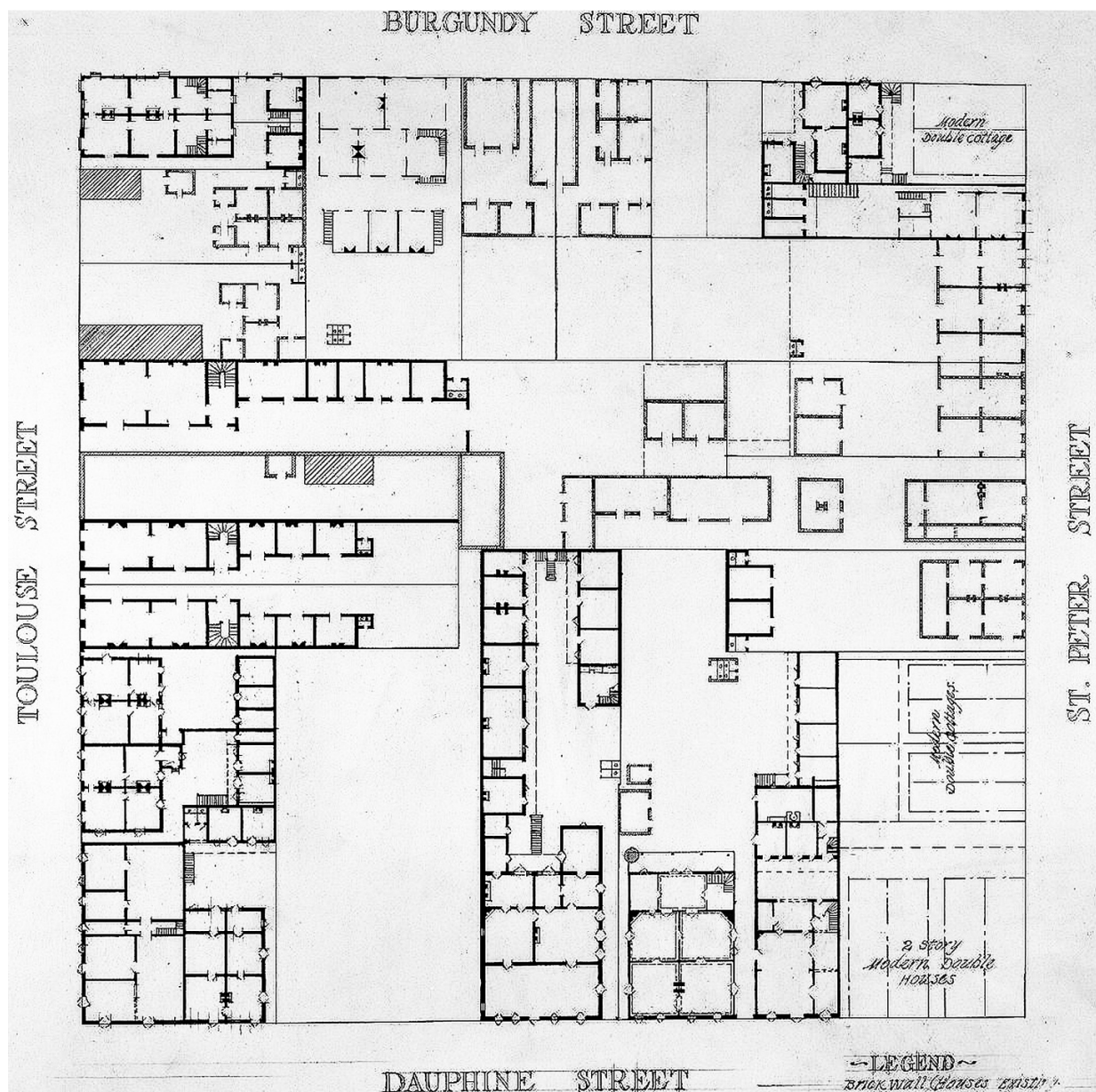


Fig. 2.53. A Historic American Building Survey of the plans of the historic buildings in Square 89, ca. 1940. The two Barthelemy Campenel cottages are the third and fourth houses above the lower left corner on Toulouse Street. They both have semi-double plans. The Arsène Latour *atalier*, is at 625-627 Dauphine Street, slightly right of the middle of the block. It is one of five houses in this square with the Creole Cottage floorplan described by Sam Wilson, Jr. The plan is courtesy the Louisiana History Center of the Louisiana State Museum.

Now we are in a position to gage one of Barthelemy Lafon's most important contributions to the vernacular architecture of New Orleans. Lafon designed small houses as well as larger houses raised on tall basements. Probably, most of his vernacular style works remain undocumented, but a few examples

have survived. About 1795, Lafon sketched the plan for a four bay half Creole cottage with a front gallery and rear cabinet-loggia range of rooms. The house plan is rigidly symmetrical. It differs from the classic Creole cottage only in that it has one single range of *appartement* rooms, and it has a hip roof with a short ridge running front to back, rather than the gable roof of the typical urban Creole cottage. This house was built in 1806 on what is today the Chef Menteur Highway.

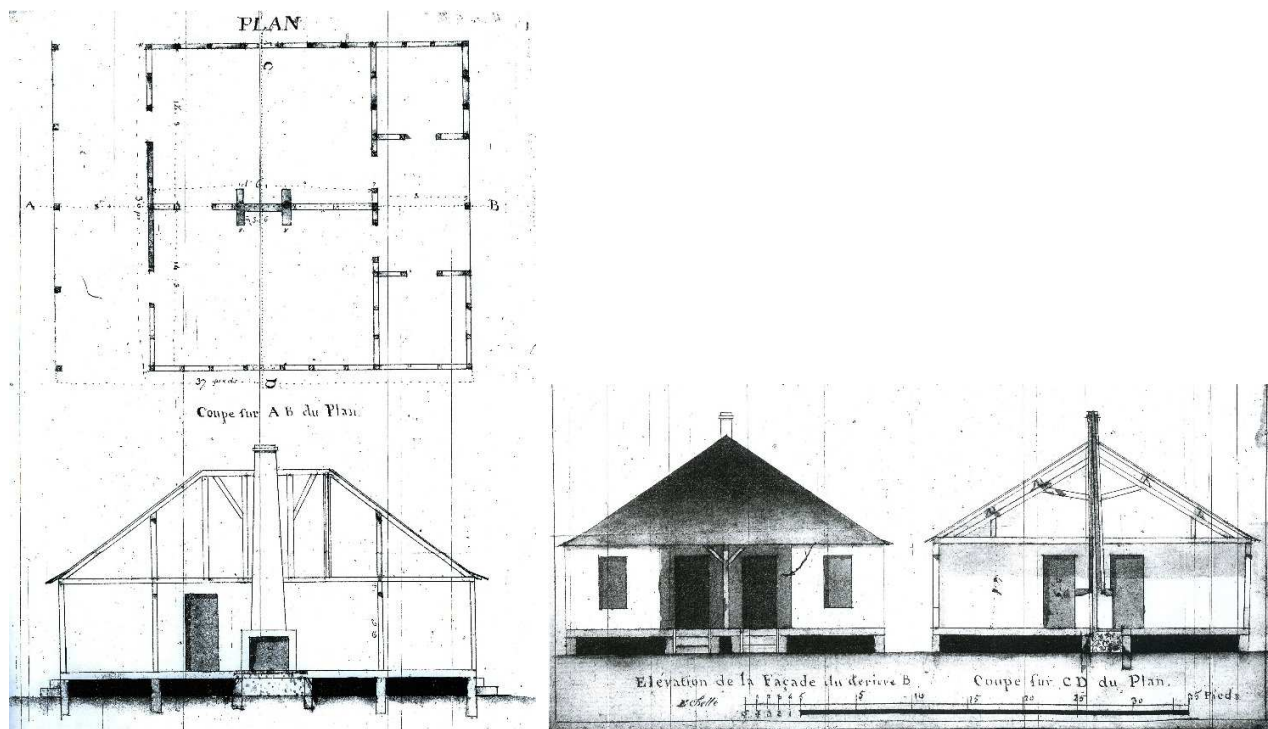


Fig. 2.54. Barthelemy Lafon's plans for his own house in Chef Menteur. The house was constructed in 1806. It lies fully within the Creole Cottage tradition. Images courtesy the Historic New Orleans Collection.

At a spot where North Tonti Street crosses Esplanade and the Bayou Road in Tremé, there once stood a fine raised house belonging to Joseph Zeringue. Notary Narcisse Broutin sold this piece of property to Zeringue in 1805. He commissioned Barthelemy Lafon to design an appropriate country house, which was built in 1806. Zeringue lived in the house until 1814, when it was sold. It served as a school, the Collège d'Orleans, for some years, and was finally razed in 1856 to make way for the present house, called the Benachi-Torre House.³¹ The address is 2257 Bayou Road. Lafon's design for the house has much in

common with the design for his own house (Fig. 2.50). The floorplan is essentially identical, with broad front gallery and a rear cabinet-loggia range of rooms with 12 foot square cabinets. Only two equal-sized main rooms existed, and perhaps that is one reason that the house did not serve its well-to-do owners longer. The principal difference was that the Zeringue house is raised a full story on heavy pillars. The location of the stairway is not indicated on Lafon's plan, but if other similar houses dating to the same period are any indication, it must have been set under the front gallery.

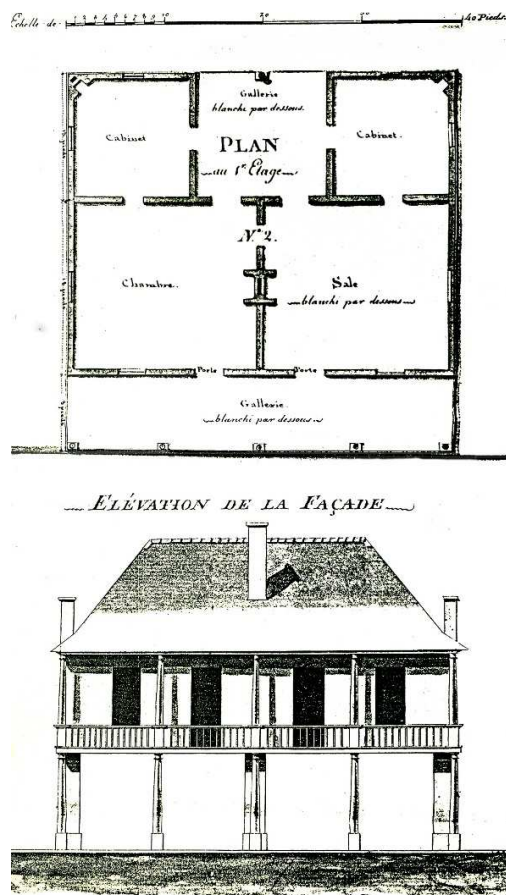


Fig. 2.55. Barthelémy Lafon's plans for the Joseph Zeringue house, built at 2257 Bayou Road in 1806. Image courtesy the Historic New Orleans Collection.

Conclusion



Fig. 2.56. The Louis Cornue *porte-cochère* House, 630-634 Royal Street, designed and built by Lafon ca. 1795 in French neoclassical style. Painting by Boyd Cruise, courtesy the Louisiana State Museum and the HABS. The exposed red brick is unusual for New Orleans, being popularized at the time by in-coming North American architects such as Benjamin H. Latrobe, with whom Lafon associated. This was for a time the home of James Pitot, the Mayor of New Orleans. The house was razed in the 1930s. Today, it is the location of the M. S. Rau Antique Store.

Not only was Barthelemy Lafon skilled in the design of the latest neoclassical styles (Fig. 2.56), he also seems to have participated fully in adapting West Indian Creole vernacular architecture to Louisiana. We cannot be surprised to learn that Lafon traveled to Hispañola, and perhaps transported refugees between the horrors of the slave revolt and the cities of the American eastern seaboard on one of his several sailing vessels. Lafon's Zeringue house, particularly, could be set down in the colony of Saint-Domingue in the late middle eighteenth century without attracting any notice whatsoever (excepting its chimneys, which are not used in West Indian Creole houses; Fig. 2.51). Its tall hip roofline with the bellcast eaves speaks of eighteenth century France, while the wide front gallery, the elevation on an open *rez-de-chaussée* (under-story), and its cabinet-loggia range of rooms, all reflect the wealthy sugar colony of Saint-Domingue. This was French West Indian Creole architecture at its best. Of course, Lafon was also commissioned to design commercial store-houses and Spanish style *azotera* (terrace-roofed) cottages (Fig. 2.35). I, for one, would be very surprised if Lafon did not also design classic Creole cottages, but which have remained unrecorded. His versatility was notable.

From a perspective more than two centuries removed, it is almost as hard to summarize Lafon's contributions to architecture and to the cultural landscapes of Louisiana as it is to capture his inordinately chaotic career and life style. He was as full of seeming contradictions as anyone I have ever heard of – a restless soul who broke barriers, played rough in his business dealings, and made both brilliant and terrible decisions which affected his entire life. He was widely read, well-educated, and as close to the ideal of the Renaissance man as we might hope to find in the New World. He had many powerful friends, and he made enemies often. A clear and thorough documentary record does not flow easily out of such a life style, and Lafon's accomplishments are imperfectly recorded. Perhaps the most fitting summary of his architectural and other achievements is to provide a preliminary overview of those which can be documented and those which are at least strongly suspected as flowing from his restless oeuvre.

NOTES

1. <https://www.hnoc.org/vcs/>. Much of the specific information on the histories of individual Vieux Carré properties was obtained from this most valuable web site.
2. Lemann, Bernard. 1966. *The Vieux Carré – A General Statement*. New Orleans: The School of Architecture, Tulane University.
3. Dawdy, Shannon Lee. Jill-Karen Yakubik and Ryan Gray. 2008. *Archaeological Investigations at the Rising Sun Hotel Site (16OR225)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Department of Anthropology. Dawdy, Shannon Lee and Richard Weyhing. 2008. "Beneath the Rising Sun: 'Frenchness' and the Archaeology of Desire." *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 12. 370-387. McConnaughey, Janet. "In the French Quarter, Unearthing the Rising Sun." *The Washington Post*, 10 Apr. 2005.
4. Heard, Malcolm 1997. *French Quarter Manual*. New Orleans: Tulane School of Architecture, p. 26; Vogt, Lloyd. 2002. *Historic Buildings of the French Quarter*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing. Pp. 39-129.
5. Every culture defines its own favored system of geometric layout, including the terminology for the different kinds of rooms which are commonly recognized. Most variations are simply elaborations of different kinds on one or another of the fundamental plans of that time and culture. For a discussion of the kinds of floorplans of French Colonial and French Creole houses, 1700 – 1900, refer to Edwards, Jay, 2015. *Creole Cottage Vignette No. 2, Cottage Plan Types and Components in Evolutionary Perspective*, in *The New Orleans Creole Cottage*. A Report to the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, pp. 211-219.
6. Wilson, Samuel Jr. 1968e. History and Architecture of the Vieux Carré. In, *Plan and Program for the Preservation of the Vieux Carré*, p. 16.
7. Langlois, Gilles Antoine. 2008. *Des Villes pour la Louisiane Française*. Paris: L'Harmattan, p. 367.

8. One is the Jean Baptiste Cottin house, said to have been designed and built by Gurlie and Guillot, though the house is listed as being present in 1804, and perhaps earlier (Pierre Pedesclaux, N.P. 6/1/1804. COB 47/725). The house is in the style of Guillemard. The second building is the rear extension of the Girod house at 500 Chartres Street. The first portion of the house was the building at 437 St. Louis Street, built in 1798 by Claude François Girod, the Mayor's brother. The façade may have been added later and is in the style of Guillemard, with vernacularized Ionic pilasters.
9. Edwards, Jay. 1993. Cultural Identifications in Architecture: The Case of the New Orleans Townhouse. *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*. 5(1):17-32.
10. *New Orleans States*; 1/1/1953.
11. Wilson 1968e, p. 12.
12. *Vieux Carré Courier*; 9/23/1964.
13. Whittington, G. P., 1927. Dr. John Sibley of Natchitoches, 1757-1840. *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 10 (4):478-487.
14. Garrigoux, Jean, 2017: A Visionary Adventurer, Arsene Lacarriere Latour, 1778-1837. Lafayette, LA: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press. p. 74.
15. Berquin-Duvallon. *Vue de la colonie espagnole du Mississippi, ou des provinces de Louisiana et Floride Occidentale*, 1803. Paris: Pp. 25-26.
16. A note from the volume translated by John Davis. 1806. *Travels in Louisiana*, New York: L. Riley & Co., p. 23. This note apparently added by the translator. Accessed at:
http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_product=EAIX&p_theme=eai&p_nbid=R5EI4DRGMTUyOTc3MTc2NC44NzIwNTU6MT0xND0xMzAuMzkuMTg4LjEyOA&p_action=doc&p_queryname=1&p_docref=v2:0F2B1FCB879B099B@EAIX-10440450847D7D88@9959-108355C48D8B1638@1].
17. Din and Harkins 1996:259-274; Chandler 1977. Life in New Orleans in 1798. *Revue de Louisiane* 6(2):181-82.

18. Edwards, Jay, 2015. Acts of the Cabildo, 1800/06/14. In Creole Cottage Vignette No. 8, Post-fires Zoning Ordinances in New Orleans 1795-1818. Edwards, *The New Orleans Creole Cottage: America's Atlantic-World House*. A Report to the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation. Pp. 272-274.
19. Lafon, Barthelemy Surveys, Volume 3. pp. 49, 54, 170, 178, 193.
20. Garrigoux, 2017: 5, 98, 107.
21. Wilson 1968a: 99-129; 1968e: 9-38.
22. When information is missing from the survey, it is sometimes possible to obtain a better description from the chain of title. Many "suits of succession" for the Quarter have been posted on line in the Tulane/Diboll Vieux Carré Digital Survey administered by the Historic New Orleans Collection. An enormous amount of work has been invested in this invaluable resource. Detailed descriptions from these and other contemporary documents remove any doubts about the nature of the house and the number of its floors, rooms, and service structures.
23. Edith Long. *Along the Banquette* 2004: 92.
24. The Lafon survey in Fig. 2.44 shows the distribution of cottage types on this street. There are eight *demi-terrains* with a single full 60 foot lot in the center of the block. The two end lots have Creole cottages with hip roofs facing the intersecting streets (Governor Nicholls (*l'Hôpital*) and Barracks (*du Quartier*). The Jacques Martinez Jr. house at the corner of Bourbon and *Quartier* measures exactly 30 feet on bourbon Street and 33 feet deep on the 70 foot deep lot on *Quartier*. The interior properties hold three gabled roof cottages, one hip roof cottage, one hip roof linear cottage, and one building which appears to be a terrace roof cottage. It was, at the time, the house of Manuel Prados. It is described as "a small house measuring 30 feet, wood and brick with four rooms and a double chimney..."
25. Garrigoux 2017: 113.
26. Pierre Pedesclaux, N.P., 8/23/1811, COB 63/359.

27. Lafon Vol. I, p. 41.
28. Wilson 1968a: 109.
29. Edwards, Jay. 2008. Unheralded Contributions across the Atlantic World. *Material Culture* 5(2): 161-202.
30. Attached to Theodore Seghers, N.P. Nov. 23, 1838. Vol. 27, Fol. 875.
31. Friends of the Cabildo, 1980. *New Orleans Architecture Vol. VI, Faubourg Tremé and the Bayou Road*, pp. 33, 146.

CHAPTER 3:
HOW TO USE THE TRANSLATIONS:
KEYS AND COMMENTARY

Ina Fandrich with Jay Edwards

NAMES

Lafon was a child of his time. He spelled names at times phonetically and always with enormous variations. The spelling of a name frequently varies within one paragraph or even within the same sentence. The idea that a name has to be spelled consistently the same way certainly didn't occur to him. This was typical for his time, but creates a nightmare for us today. Also it was not unusual to translate both first and last names when switching into another language. For instance, “Don Carlos Trudo” in Spanish is the same person as “Mr. Charles Trudeau” in French, but, surprisingly, Lafon refers to him more often than not as “Mr. Laveau,” which is neither. Laveau was Trudeau’s official middle name since birth, but had also become his nickname by which he was ubiquitously known throughout his lifetime. Lafon’s survey book demonstrates that even in official documents his contemporaries preferred to call him by his nickname, probably in order to distinguish him from his three Trudeau brothers, who also lived in the city at the same time. To give another example, Lafon spells Edward Livingston, the prominent lawyer and politician of early 19th-Century America and one of his clients, in the French way, “Edouard Livingston,” because he wrote in French.

Furthermore, Lafon uses at times abbreviations for public figures that we are no longer familiar with. For instance, Lafon seems to assume that everybody knows what “S. M. C.” means. It refers to “Sa Majesté Catholique” and means in English “His Catholic Majesty” the King of Spain. The surveys in this book stem from the time immediately following the Louisiana Purchase, beginning in July 1804 and ending in March 1806, with some occasional property updates added in by Lafon in later years. They showcase Lafon’s work during his first 2 years in office as the “surveyor approved for the Territory of Louisiana South of Tennessee.” However, before the Americans arrived, Louisiana had been a Spanish colony for about 40 years, ruled by “His Catholic

Majesty” and yes, just about everybody in Louisiana at the time would have known how to refer to their former king.

In this translation, we have spelled the names of well-known public figures consistently the same, no matter how Lafon felt like spelling the respective names at the moment of writing, names such as Charles Laveau Trudeau (the last Spanish surveyor general, Lafon’s predecessor, and prominent city politician of New Orleans during the first two decades of American rule), Gilberto Guillemard (important French-born architect and builder in New Orleans of the Spanish colonial and early American era), Hilaire Boutté (another important builder and fellow Baratarian corsair of Jean Laffite), Jean Noël Destrehan (a leading politician and wealthy planter in late 18th and early 19th-century Louisiana), Edward Livingston, and others.

SURVEYOR’ S TOOLS

La boussole: A compass (when used on land for land measurements)

Le graphomètre: A graphometer, a surveyor’s instrument; a sighting device with compass for measuring angles from a designated magnetic direction. Degrees were read off from the semicircular scale from an indicator on the rotating sight. A basic surveying instrument of the 17th and 18th centuries, it would be mounted on a tripod, leveled, and rotated to the desired line of sight before directions were taken and recorded.



Figure 1.1. An 18th century French graphomètre, Clerget, Louis XV.

MEASUREMENTS

Lafon used old French measurements, meaning measurements used by the *Ancien Régime* -- the French Monarchy before the French Revolution. They were not exactly the same as the equivalent American measurements. We have left the original French terms untranslated, as they appear in the surveys. If we were to translate Lafon's terms, the following equivalent terms would have been used:

Lieue/lieux: A league "the arpent league." In Louisiana, a unit of length measuring 84 linear arpents = 16,114.1 English feet, or 3.0519 English miles.

Arpent (linear) "arpent de face:" A linear unit 180 *pieds du roi* in length = 191.835 English feet.

Arpent (superficiel): A square of land 180 *pieds du roi* on a side = 0.8448 English acres.

Toise: A fathom. 6 *pied du roi* = 6.395 English feet.

Pied (du roi; de Paris): A foot, 12 *pouces* = 1.06575 English feet.

Pouce: An inch. 1/12 of a *pied du roi* = 1.066 English inches.

Ligne: A line. (In Louisiana), 1/8 of a *pouce* = 0.133 English inches.

Chaîne d'arpenteur: In colonial Louisiana surveyors continued to use the French chain of 36 *pieds de Paris*, or 2 *perches* in length = 38.367 English feet. Later, in the Territorial period the surveyor's chain was standardized at the American length of 66 English feet. Lafon continued to use French Measure (F.M.) through the Territorial Period, unless specified as E.M.

TREES

Lafon placed plaques or marks representing property lines on a variety of trees:

copalme = gumtree, sweet gumtree, or American gumtree

chêne = oak; ***chêne vert*** = live oak.

saule = willow

cypre = cypress

mûrier = mulberry tree

cèdre = cedar

érable = maple

frêne = ash tree

liard = cottonwood tree

mantonet = mantel tree

TERMS USES FOR BORDERLINE MARKERS

bois – any piece of wood including a stick.

borne = wooden borderline stake or boundary marker (mostly made of cypress).

berme = berm, the elevated bank of a canal, bayou or river.

piquet = wooden stub or stick. These were typically 2 – 4 inches in diameter

talon = wooden stub or stick

jalon = mile stone

chicot = short wooden stick. This refers to a stump in French.

plaque = mark or sign placed on a tree to mark the borderline, for example: XXXX.

pavillon = A boundary marker, literally a tent. Perhaps refers to the typical Norman gate post capped by a small pyramidal roof, though it is unknown whether such roofs were employed in Louisiana.

FREQUENTLY USED EXPRESSIONS

concession. A grant of land from the government or the king, refers to a sizable piece of rural land.

These were often in the form of Long Lots, and measured according to “*arpents de front*,” or

“*arpents de face*,” that is, the width of the property along the curving bank of the bayou or river.

batture. The shoreline and strip of land above it.

limitrophe. Adjacent (e.g. a contiguous neighbor).

borné par. Bounded by.

procès verbal. Warrant. The record of a land survey witnessed by a local authority and/or by interested parties such as contiguous neighbors.

en foi de quoi. In witness whereof.

esquarressant 7/8. Squared 7 by 8 inches. Lafon uses this expression to describe his hewn boundary markers, made with an axe on the site, often out of cypress. He is often very precise in describing the dimensions of these markers.

requérant. The “claimant” or “applicant” meaning the requesting party.

rive gauche/rive droit. The left-hand side of the river or bayou /the right-hand side of the river or bayou, looking downstream. For the Mississippi River, the *rive droit* is the west bank.

îlet. A city block or square.

air de vent. The direction.

greffe. A notary public – an official maker and keeper of public records such as contracts. Literally “registrar” or “scribe” but under Spanish colonial rule the role of an “*escrivano publico*” in Spanish, meaning “*greffe publique*” in French, and “public registrar” or “public scribe.”

du globe* or *du monde. On the global scale. Magnetic Declination, referring to measurements taken on his compass and corrected for the local declination from magnetic north. True north, for example, might vary by several degrees from magnetic north, depending on the exact location.

RACIAL CLASSIFICATIONS

nègre libre (N.L.). A free African or free black person [referring to a dark-skinned person with African features].

negresse libre. A free black woman or free negress.

mulâtre libre (M.L.). A free mulatto [meaning light-skinned and bi-racial looking].

mulâtresse libre. A free mulatress.

quarteron/ne. A Quadroon, a person with three white grandparents and one black grandparent, or otherwise genetically $\frac{3}{4}$ European and $\frac{1}{4}$ African. This term was often generalized to refer to light-skinned people of color.

griffe. This term could refer to either (1), the child of a *mulâtre* and a *nègre* meaning genetically three-quarters black, or (2), a person who is the child of a *nègre* and a *sauvage* (Native American). Lafon uses this term only once in this book and we don't know which of the two popular definitions he espoused.

griffe libre. A free griffe.

Sauvage. A native American (literally “the wild ones” or “savages”). In Spanish and early American Louisiana there is no category for “*sauvages libres*,” Under the Spanish Law of the Indies, indigenous people could not be enslaved (criminals and war captives might be transported to be sold as slaves). Native people were presumed free. De facto that was of course not the case.

Legal vs. social categories: Under pre-Civil laws of the Southern states, people were divided according to a binary system. Black persons were assumed to be enslaved, unless they could prove otherwise. In Louisiana and the Caribbean colonies, however, a tripartite system was the norm. To most Anglo-Americans, the concepts of “free people of color,” and “Creoles,” were alien liminal categories which destabilized and threatened the traditional American binary system of human classification. They would strive over the next fifty years to delegitimize the Louisiana system. That

process was clearly already underway as Barthelemy Lafon took up his duties as head surveyor for the Southern District of Louisiana (south of Tennessee). The struggle had begun:

Lafon's surveys were important legal documents – cadastral documents standing as legal proof of ownership, basic to any civilized nation, including both those governed by Common Law codes (United States) or by Civil law codes (Louisiana). Cadastral documents comprise the foundation for fundamental governmental processes such as the right to control and to make a profit from one's properties and, even more importantly, the right of the government to tax landholders according to the class and extent of their landed properties.

Thus, in a climate of the ever-growing threat of delegalization of the rights of Louisiana's free people of color, Lafon exercised an extraordinary duty. He had to indicate that his non-white land-owners were now and forever fully entitled as legal holders of their properties. Before anything else, he had to indicate that he was working at the request of "free people of color." In French, they were called *les gens de couleur libre* meaning collectively all legally free persons not classified as white, regardless how dark or light they looked, or how un-powerful, impoverished, or uneducated they might be. Under American law, enslaved persons were not permitted to own land, since they didn't even own their own bodies. To many of these outsiders, free people of color looked like slaves. Hence, Lafon had to stress always that the darker-skinned person whose lands he was measuring was indeed free and fully entitled to the rights of a free citizen.

Today we do not see Lafon's clients standing in front of us. All we have is their names on paper. Hence, we might assume that Lafon classified "free people of color" with one of the above listed racial terms in order to distinguish them socially from "white" people. To our twenty-first century mores, such racial classifications appear degrading and offensive, but Lafon didn't have much choice in the matter. He was legally required to identify a free person of color as such in any official, legally-binding document. People, who were visibly not white, needed to be racially classified on paper in order to acknowledge that they were indeed free from bondage and therefore free to own property. It is clear that Lafon never asked them to exhibit the titles to their own bodies

(sometimes called *cedulas* of manumission or “freedom papers”), in order to proof their status as free people.

Besides marking “n.l.” (nègre libre) or “m.l.” (mulâtre libre) behind their names, which he was legally required to do, he apparently treated them with the same respect as his white clients, especially if they were wealthy sophisticated city dwellers like himself. However, there were relatively poor black people who settled on small, newly acquired land lots clustered in communities on the outskirts of the city. Lafon surveyed one such a community in the District of English Turn, and another on the Metairie Ridge. In these we detect a more condescending approach to his clients and their process verbal warrants. The only *incomplete* plans and warrants in this survey book are the lots of such free people of color. Lafon took the appropriate field notes when conducting his survey operation as he did for everybody else, but he then added his preliminary field notes directly into the book of surveys, rather than taking the time to draft the elaborate, often beautifully colored plans for these warrants. Those, he provided mostly for his well-to-do white clients. For many free people of color, we only find empty spaces in the places where the finished maps belong -- left blank, perhaps, in order to accommodate the appropriate finished plans at a later date.

From the surveys in this book we also learn that Lafon did not appreciate the complex racial hierarchies of the Spanish, nor did he like the even more draconian “one drop rule” of the Antebellum American South. His life partner, Modeste Foucher, and his children, were mixed-race. His Catholic Church congregation at St. Louis Cathedral was racially integrated during his life time. Even the Baratarians with whom he participated extensively were multi-racial (a substantial syndicate of smuggling privateers led by the brothers Jean and Pierre Laffite). In short, Lafon lived in a fully racially integrated world in his private life and complied with the increasingly racist American regulations when he had to.

Duly sworn in as the official “surveyor approved for the Territory of Orleans South of Tennessee” Lafon held a high-ranking position within the early American government of Louisiana. As such he was obliged to include official American bureaucratic language into this age-old French documentary boilerplate legalize, known as “*le formule*.” Accordingly, Lafon’s survey warrants always begin with a location, the respective date, and then list the anniversary year of the American Independence, meaning, within the

American bureaucracy time began officially in 1776, not with the birth of Christ. In similar manner, he was obliged to classify non-white persons according to American standards. For instance, when formerly addressing a free person of color in his surveys, he eschews the titles “Mr.” or “Mrs.” Those were reserved for white people, or those accepted as having honorary white status. In addition, he was supposed to add the designations “N.L.” or “M.L.” behind their names, though occasionally he appears to forget. When we consider with whom he was affiliated with in his private life, Lafon must have understood that these racializing bureaucratic practices carried the potential to be offensive and degrading. However, he clearly enjoyed the prestigious job that was bestowed upon him by the American authorities and hence, given the circumstances, he complied with the rules that came with his assignment when creating this extensive compendium of survey plans and warrants.

HOW TO USE THESE TRANSLATIONS

The pages in the section which follows are not always continuous. We have omitted blank pages which were inserted into the original manuscript, and those which were omitted entirely, so you will notice gaps in the sequence of numbers. On pages which hold only graphic plans or maps, we include the pages but mention only the identification and place of the survey. In one or two surveys, no place is given and we were unable to determine the probable location with any degree of assurance. Using contemporary maps and other maps such as USGS Topographical Sheets, we were able to determine their locations despite the lack of information and the use of antique place names no longer in memory (*Point de Saint Antoine*). See, for example, p.29. If a location is bounded by a water body, we specify that information and the appropriate side of the river or bayou, without suggesting more specific location. We use the French manner of designation of the side of the river or bayou. That is, looking down-stream, the French name the sides, “left bank” (*rive gauche*) and right bank” (*rive droit*). Because these are the designations used by Lafon and the other surveyors, we maintain their usage. The graphic surveys almost always place an arrow on the water body, pointing down-stream.

In many cases, the officials of the Office of Surveys inserted new information and new sheets into the sequence of pages which had been established earlier. In these cases, we designate the new pages with decimals. Following the original Page 028, we would add pages 028.1 and 028.2, for example. In some cases the persons who assembled the book placed the inserted pages out of order. In this volume, we have numbered the pages in the way in which we believe they should have appeared in the original *Lafon Survey Book No. 3*, manuscript. As a result, some of our page numbers will not be in the same order as those in the copy of the manuscript. We have added notes: “continued on p. ___”, and ‘continued from p. ____’ to the translation texts. You may need to check around through a few pages in order to locate the correct page numbers.

Two different sets of photographs were used in making these books. The first was photographed at the Grand Lodge by Jay and Andrea Edwards in 2015. This set was used by Ina Fandrich for the English translations. Those photographs were processed in Adobe Photoshop by Jim Zeitz. They are identified in our digital names for each photograph by the marker DSC_1000, etc. The second set of photographs were taken and processed by Eddy Perez in 2018. They were used in creating the pages which appear in VOLUME I. Their individual numbers are identified by the marker eP_1000, etc., in the digital name for each image. They are ordered by page number in VOLUME I.

Regarding the names of the digital files which accompany the translations in VOLUME II, the initial unit of information is the page number, always in 100s. This, pp. 005, 051, or 288. They may be coordinated with the page numbers written by Lafon on the pages of his manuscript. However, of the page numbers were omitted, so you will have to be careful in finding the correct matches.

We organized the names of the digital files according to a syntax for easier sorting. The page number is followed by the volume number (VOL.I – photographic copies of the original pages), and VOL.II. – LafonTranslations. For the photographic images of the original *Lafon Survey Book No. 3*, there will be two page numbers for each: the French original in VOL.I, and its English translation in VOL.II. Thus, if you wish to work on a specific survey, simply sort the two folders in numerical order, selecting the same page

number out of each. Both the original and its translation will download. Remember that the images of pages in VOL.I. are .jpg images; those of the pages of the translations are Microsoft WORD files, ending in .docx.

The page numbers used in the Translation Section which follows (below) are not volume II page numbers, but rather the page numbers which appeared on (or should have appeared on) the original *Lafon Survey Book No. 3*. The digital images in Vol. I are .jpegs. They may be viewed in any photo viewer or in .pdf format. The pages in Vol. II, and the front material in Vol. I are MICROSOFT WORD .docx files. If you should wish to know the VOL. II page numbers for the translations which follow below, simply add the number 128 to the number on the upper right hand of each page.

Uses of This Study

Some readers will use search these pages for specific information. Their interests may run towards family history and the history of a specific community. Historians will profit from a broader approach. Read widely. There are many new and often unusual tidbits of information scattered throughout these pages. Herein you will meet a substantial proportion of the important and powerful men of the time – and you will meet them from new orientations – as land holders and speculators, as business associates, neighbors or social friends of Barthelemy Lafon. He worked closely some of the movers and shakers of his time. The graphic surveys hold many facts previously unknown or unappreciated. Herein you will find one of the boundaries of the Red Shoe Indians on Bayou Teche. You will see the outline of slave quarters and of the communities of Free People of Color, who often tended to congregate in their own communities and locations. You will also discover how civil law procedures such as the *process verbal* actually worked – how neighbors came to agreements on the boundaries between their properties, and how people bought and sold properties to one-another. You will discover the actual layout of their farms, plantations and town houses.

Although an enormous amount of work was expended on the creation of this two volume report, you will still find occasional errors or places which might have been translated or edited in a better way. Please appreciate that this was a multi-year labor of love for both Dr. Fandrich and Dr. Edwards. Without the collaboration of their individual knowledge bases, the invaluable historical information held in these reports

would probably not have seen the light of day. Getting this material out was more important than spending an additional year in editing and rewriting. In this, we owe a great debt of gratitude to the officers and members of the Masonic Grand Lodge of Alexandria, Louisiana. Their dedication to preserving the history of their illustrious historic forbears has provided us with significant insights into Louisiana's past.

**ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE FRENCH SURVEYS
OF BARTHELEMY LAFON:**

LOUISIANA SURVEY BOOK NO. 3

1804 -- 1806 (with additions until 1819).

By INA FANDRICH

**Original manuscript housed in the Library/Museum of the Masonic Grand Lodge,
Alexandria, Louisiana**