

SPATIALIZING THE INFLUENCE OF FREE WOMEN OF COLOR IN THE VIEUX CARRÉ

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Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

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Roulhac B. Toledano. A Pattern Book of New Orleans Architecture. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2010, 69.

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Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

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Photograph by Caitlin Rudin Gardenhire

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Photograph by Caitlin Rudin Gardenhire

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Ellsworth Woodward - illustrator, The Historic New Orleans Collection

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Vieux Carré, or French Quarter, established in 1721, is the oldest neighborhood in New Orleans and became the nation's second designated historic district in 1937.¹ The historic district is overseen by the Vieux Carré Commission and was founded to address the preservation of the neighborhood's "quaint traditional architecture."² The Vieux Carré Commission and other preservation interest groups regularly install plaques on buildings and places of interest denoting their historical significance, which are encountered by the millions of visitors who explore the neighborhood. However, not one extant property owned by a free woman of color is publically and physically recognized by a plaque or other means.

The characterization of free women of color living in New Orleans as women who relied on their sensuality to gain status in society has been perpetrated at least since the 1810s and is repeated still today, even though this portrayal has been debunked by historians and the efforts to bring to light untold stories, particularly about women and people of color, that have been gaining momentum in America's social and political consciousness. Despite the racist and misogynistic myth still perpetuated about free women of color in New Orleans, these women were integral members of New Orleans society, business proprietors, and property owners. There is an undeniable significance to vernacular buildings in the Vieux Carré owned by free women of color.

The central question of this thesis is how the identification and recognition of the vital importance of vernacular buildings owned by free women of color in the Vieux Carré between the acquisition of New Orleans as a Spanish colony in 1763 and New Orleans' surrender in the Civil War in 1861 can be demonstrated as part of the preservation narrative.

¹Roulhac B. Toledano, *A Pattern Book of New Orleans Architecture* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2010), 19.

² Vieux Carré Commission (The City of New Orleans, 2020), <https://www.nola.gov/vcc/>.

PLAN DE LA NOUVELLE ORLEANS

- | | | | |
|--|-------------------|---|---|
| A. L'Eglise Paroissiale desservie par les Capucins | E. Corps de Garde | X. Magazins du Roi | V. Corps de Garde des Bourgeois |
| B. Place d'Armes | F. Gouvernement | L. Casernes | Q. Cabanes des Negres qui prennent soin du Moulin |
| C. Couvent des Capucins | G. Intendance | M. Poytes du Roi | R. Poudriere |
| D. Prisons | H. Hopital | N. Moulin a vent et a Cheval | O. Hangar de la Marine sous lequel se trouvent les Nouv ^{es} Maisons des Ursulines |
| | I. Ursulines | O. Hangar de la Marine sous lequel se trouvent les Nouv ^{es} Maisons des Ursulines | |

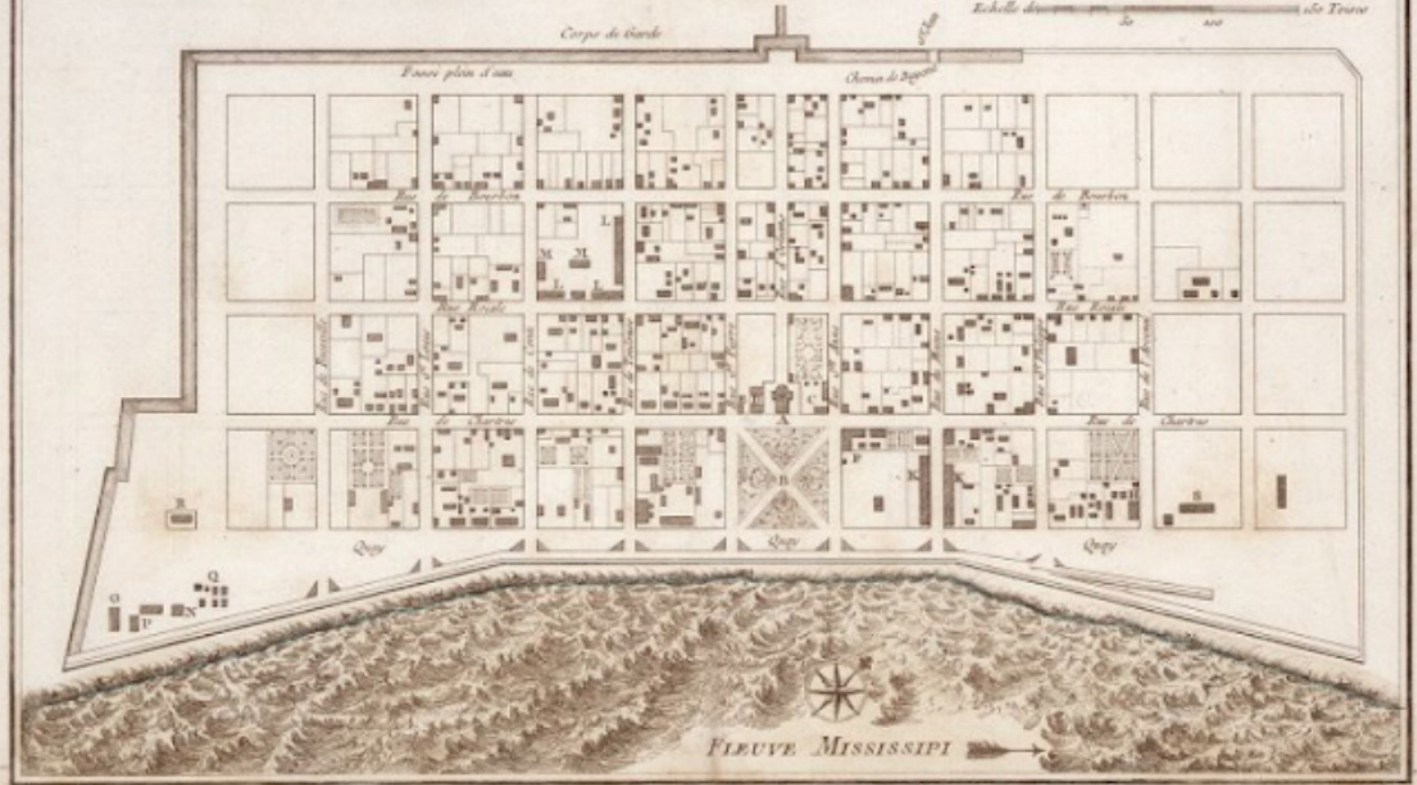


Figure 11: Map of the Vieux Carré (1764)
 Le Petit Atlas Maritime: Tome 1, No. 45., The Historic New Orleans Collection

To answer this question, this thesis employs a multi-phased, mixed-method research design. The four methodological phases are Discourse Analysis, Historical Analysis, Identification of Examples, and the Physical Survey of Examples. Although scholarship dismantling the myth that looks at property ownership by free women of color has been published in the last decade, it remains mostly in the realm of academia. The popular misinterpretation of the history of free women of color in New Orleans is addressed in this thesis by spatializing these women and their stories through the selection of a representative set of buildings owned by them from 1763 to 1861 in the Vieux Carré and by proposing a physical intervention that represents their history in a publically accessible manner.

1.1 Research Limitations

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the methodology for this thesis was adjusted, and each phase was affected. A much greater reliance upon secondary resources was required because of the closure of all New Orleans-area businesses, including archives and advocacy groups. This particularly affected the Historical Analysis and Identification of Properties. Because of the pandemic, in-person site surveys were not possible for all identified properties. It is the intention of the author to revisit and add to the examples in this thesis once archival resources are again made available for research. Given the restrictions, a sincere effort was made to identify and verify the validity of the sites, and the author looks forward to expanding upon the examples set forth in this study.

Chapter 2: Background

2.1 Governance of New Orleans and Free Women of Color's Rights

New Orleans was founded as a for-profit venture by French Canadian Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville and the Company of the Indies in 1719. At the time of its official founding, New Orleans had already been settled, mostly by French Canadians from Acadia, another French colony. In 1724, the Code Noir, or slave law, was implemented. It also defined the legal status of free persons of color in New Orleans.³ The Code Noir prohibited interracial marriages, but the imbalance of white men to white women in the city led to marriages between white men and African and Native American women.⁴ The last act of the Code Noir states,

“We grant to manumitted slaves the same rights, privileges, and immunities which are enjoyed by free-born persons. It is our pleasure that their merit in having acquired their freedom, shall produce in their favor, not only with regard to their persons, but also to their property, the same effects which our other subjects derive from the happy circumstance of their having been born free.”⁵

The Code Noir remained law through the transfer of control of New Orleans from the Company of the Indies to the French crown in 1731, the beginning of the development of the Louisiana colony under King Louis XIV.

³Samuel Wilson, *New Orleans Architecture Volume IV: The Creole Faubourgs* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2006), 25.

⁴Ina Johanna Fandrich, *The Mysterious Voodoo Queen, Marie Laveaux: a Study of Powerful Female Leadership in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans* (Routledge, New York, 2004) 80.

⁵Le Code Noir ou recueil des reglements rendus jusqu'a present (1724).

As a result of the Seven Years War, New Orleans became a Spanish colony in 1763. Spanish rule did not begin in earnest until 1769, when the Code Noir was replaced with Spanish law. At the time, 99 free persons of color were recorded as residents of New Orleans. Under the French and Spanish, free people of color had legal rights and privileges equal to those of white citizens, particularly in the cases of property rights, contracts, and business transactions. Occasionally, however, these rights could be restricted by local regulations. According to the Code Noir, free persons of color and slaves could not inherit nor receive donations of property, including real estate and slaves, from whites and other free persons of color. This changed when New Orleans became a Spanish colony. Free persons had the right to own and transfer property, which was particularly exercised by free women to guarantee their independence and provide for their families.⁶



Figure 2.1: *Free Woman of Color with Quadroon Daughter*, Artist Unknown
(New Orleans, Late 18th Century)

⁶David Barry Gaspar, Darlene Clark Hine, and Kimberly S. Hanger, “Landlords, Shopkeepers, Farmers, and Slave-Owners: Free Black Female Property-Holders in Colonial New Orleans,” in *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas* (University of Illinois Press, 2004), 220.

After a transfer of power from Spain back to France in 1803, France sold New Orleans to the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase twenty days later. The social structure and culture of New Orleans conflicted with the Anglo-Protestant ideas pervasive in most of the United States, particularly in regards to the liberties held by free persons of color.⁷ Under Governor William C.C. Claiborne laws were changed to disadvantage free persons of color, and free people of color demanded recognition of their unique status from the new American authorities. Americans bucked the approach of assimilation used by France and Spain and adopted policies of exclusion.⁸

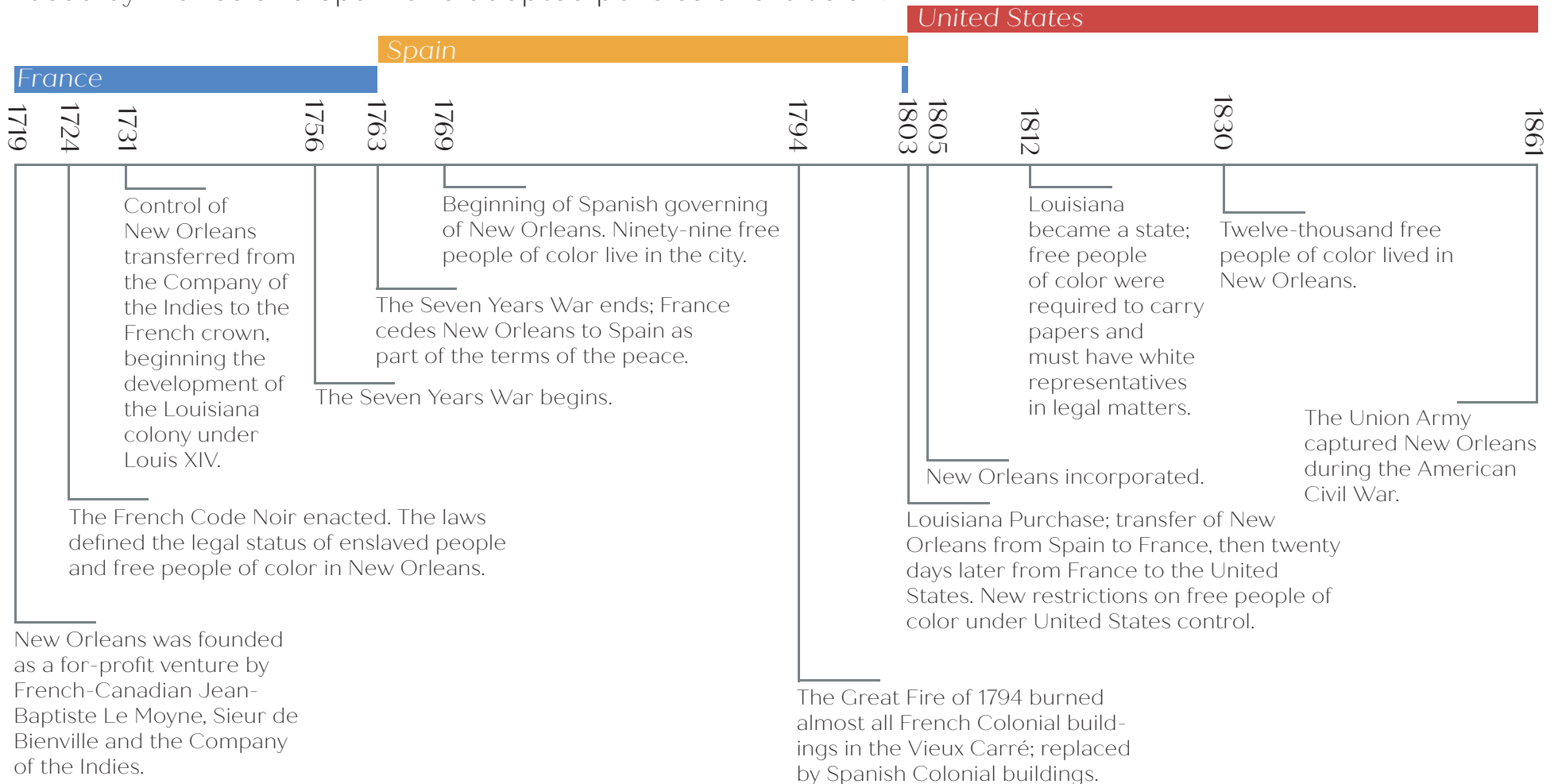


Figure 2.2: Timeline of Historic Moments of Significance to New Orleans between 1719-1861

⁷ Fandrigh, 106.

⁸ Ibid, 107.

By 1830, twelve thousand free persons of color resided in New Orleans, accounting for just over a quarter of the total population of 46,000 people. A law that forced manumitted ex-slaves to leave the country within thirty days of their emancipation and another that restricted the rights of free people of color regarding speech, press, and education were enacted the same year.⁹ A study of fifteen slave-holding urban centers revealed that in New Orleans, free women of color outnumbered free men two-to-one in the Antebellum period. The high rate of women of color, their wealth, education, and a life expectancy which was twice that of white residents between 1800 and 1850 may indicate a high standard of living maintained even through the difficult years after Spanish rule, despite the American efforts to control and diminish the number of free people of color in the city.¹⁰ Increased tensions and discrimination towards free persons escalated in the years leading up to the Civil War. Free persons of color were required to prove their free status by carrying documentation at all times beginning in 1852. Five years later, manumission was outlawed entirely.¹¹

⁹Ibid, 108.

¹⁰Ibid, 110.

¹¹Justin A. Nystrom, "Racial Identity and Reconstruction: New Orleans's Free People of Color and the Dilemma of Emancipation," in *The Great Task Remaining Before Us: Reconstruction as America's Continuing Civil War*, ed. Paul Alan Cimbala and Randall Martin Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 125.

2.2 The Myth

Within the United States, New Orleans has a reputation of exceptionalism and apartness that began with its founding as a French colony in the 18th century. The historical record has been supplied with stories of New Orleans' otherness with the accounts written by travelers and migrants to the city who were shocked by the visibility of enslaved and free people of color in society.¹²

The idea of the New Orleans “quadroon,” a free woman of one-fourth African descent, who relied on her wiles and sensuality to become a married white man's mistress so that she could live a comfortable life has been perpetuated about all free women of color since the early 19th century. According to Emily Clark in *The Strange History of the American Quadroon*,

“sequestering the quadroon figuratively in the Crescent City shaped American identity and historical narrative in subtle but powerful ways, effectively turning New Orleans into a perpetual colonial space in the national imagination. The subjection of eroticised women of color by white men is one of the key mechanisms and metaphors of colonialism.”¹³



Figure 2.3: *Creole Women of Color Taking the Air* by Édouard Marquis (New Orleans, 1867)

¹² Thomas Jessen Adams and Matt Sakakeeny, *Remaking New Orleans: Beyond Exceptionalism and Authenticity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 10.

¹³ Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 9.

The fictionalized literary and commercial tropes about all free women of color represented the idea of New Orleans as an exotic locale full of sexual taboo.¹⁴ These sensationalized ideas of “otherness” pervaded popular history, and the mischaracterization of free women of color living in New Orleans is repeated even today, ingrained in the American imagination after over a century of repetition in media and by scholars and tour guides.



Figure 2.4: Poster for the movie Quadroon (1972)

¹⁴ Thomas Jessen Adams and Matt Sakakeeny, 9.

2.3 Free Women of Color and the Built Environment

Free women of color bought, sold, and leased land and houses in New Orleans. After The Great Fire of 1788, claims for damaged buildings and furnishings were submitted across the city. An analysis of the claims reveals one tenth of the claimants were free women of color, while free men of color submitted only about four percent of the claims. The average loss claimed by free women was also greater than that claimed of free men but much lower than white claimants.¹⁵ Another fire in 1794 destroyed almost all remaining French Colonial structures, and Spanish Colonial buildings were constructed in their place. The most common residential building types were Creole cottages and Creole townhouses, which are defined in Chapter 5, Section 1. The identified buildings in this study are in the vernacular New Orleans Spanish Colonial style and are examples of the Creole cottage and Creole townhouse building typologies.

According to property records on display at Le Musee de f.p.c. in New Orleans, one-third of the Vieux Carré was owned by free people of color.¹⁶ In the 1796 census, free women of color owned more than a quarter of the houses in the Third District, the neighborhood directly bordering the Vieux Carré on the other side of Canal Street. This statistic is made particularly interesting because free women of color made up one in seven of all residents and one in five free persons of color in the district. White women owned fewer than half the amount of property that was owned by free women of color in the Third District.¹⁷

¹⁵ Gaspar, Hine and Hanger, 220.

¹⁶ Katy Reckdahl. "Descendants Tell Stories of Free People of Color," *The New York Times*, March 12, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/12/arts/free-people-of-color-museum-new-orleans.html>.

¹⁷ Gaspar, Hine and Hanger, 220.

This thesis demonstrates a more accurate history of free women of color as integral members of the community, business proprietors, and property owners by identifying and physically recognizing vernacular buildings owned by free women of color between 1763 and 1861 in the Vieux Carré historic district and seeks to dismantle the misogynistic and racist myths surrounding free women of color by integrating sites they owned in the preservation narrative. Through the identification of extant buildings in the Vieux Carré that were owned by free women of color between the acquisition of New Orleans as a Spanish colony and the capture of New Orleans by the U.S. Army forces in the Civil War and a recommendation for physical recognition of these sites, the underrepresented histories of this group who were and remain intrinsic to New Orleans society will join the preservation discourse locally and on a larger scale.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Free people of color undeniably influenced the history of New Orleans and characteristics of the city that still exist today. However, the majority of scholarly literature has either left out the role of women when discussing the impacts this population made or has perpetuated harmful and untrue myths about free women in New Orleans. An effort by scholars in recent years to correct the record by identifying these myths and overturn them, relying on in-depth research based largely on primary sources, combats the stories that have been told about free women of color since the early 19th century. These stories appear not only in scholarship, but have become ingrained in popular discourse as well.

Little scholarly literature exists that ties free women of color to the city's built environment, and particularly to its extant fabric. An understanding of the study area's vernacular architecture as it relates to buildings constructed and owned by free women of color is used in this thesis to spatialize the underrepresented histories belonging to this population. This literature review explores the history and treatment of free women of color and New Orleans vernacular architecture in an attempt to illustrate a larger historical context.

3.1 *Maintaining the Myth*

Scholarly literature published at least as early as the 1990s has identified and dismantled popular myths surrounding free women of color in New Orleans.¹⁸ Misogynistic and racist inaccuracies certainly still abound in the popular American imagination, having been perpetuated in media representation and by tour guides, and have been woven into the identity of New Orleans as a place of “otherness.” Despite the existence of scholarly literature debunking tropes about this already historically under and misrepresented population, the myth continues to appear in contemporary scholarly works.

One such example is in the 2004 book *The Mysterious Voodoo Queen, Marie Laveaux: a Study of Powerful Female Leadership in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*. The author Ina Johanna Fandrich identifies the key concern of the work to “explain the emergence of powerful female leadership in

¹⁸ Kimberly S. Hanger. *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

New Orleans Voodoo” and explain how free women of color assumed “roles of power and economic independence unique to them.”¹⁹ However, Fandrigh spends the four paragraphs previous to this claim perpetuating racist and sexist myths about free women of color, basing her descriptions of free women of color on sensationalized 18th-century travel accounts. In addition to statements that the attention afforded to free women of color by white men angered white women and that white men were drawn to their “exotic and mysterious eroticism,”²⁰ Fandrigh makes the incorrect and exaggerated claim that “almost every wealthy white man who could afford it had two sets of families, one with a legally married wife of European descent and, to the chagrin of his official spouse, another one with a mistress of African descent.”²¹

3.2 Combating the Myth

Beginning with early 19th-century travel accounts written by typically white, Protestant, British or American visitors to New Orleans, the myth of the “erotic colored mistress became an elaborate literary and commercial trope” that took hold of the American imagination.²² Travel descriptions and journals are often-cited primary sources in historical research, and accounts of visitors to New Orleans hold a wealth of information in their descriptions . However, accounts characterizing free women of color as prostitutes and mistresses did not acknowledge there were other free women who owned businesses and were the spouses at least in name if not by law of white men, free men of color, and enslaved men. The most exaggerated accounts became the most popular and widely-read across the United States and Britain. In *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World*, Emily Clark explains and dismantles the myths that dictated the lives of free women of color in New Orleans and elsewhere. In researching the topic of free women of color for this thesis, the author found that scholarly sources published after Clark’s book make reference to her work. This suggests a movement away from perpetuating the myth, a recognition of its inaccuracy, and a reevaluation of the stories told about free women of color living in New Orleans in academic circles.

¹⁹ Fandrigh, 72.

²⁰ Ibid, 70.

²¹ Fandrigh, 71.

²² Clark, 3.

3.3 New Orleans' Vernacular Architecture

Beyond *A Pattern Book of New Orleans Architecture* by Roulhac B. Toledano and the *New Orleans Architecture* series produced by the Friends of the Cabildo, limited scholarly resources on New Orleans' vernacular architecture exist. This is surprising, taking into consideration that New Orleans is known for its unique blend of influences upon its vernacular architecture, as it is similarly known for its food, music, and other beloved characteristics. Even more limited are studies with a focus on vernacular architecture of the Vieux Carré, the oldest part of the city.

A Pattern Book of New Orleans Architecture relies upon drawings from the New Orleans Notarial Archives to illustrate vernacular building types and define their influences. Particularly valuable are the examples of each house type popular from the late 18th century into the 20th century. Toledano identifies and defines each building type with illustrations, text descriptions, and typical historic plans. This resource makes it possible not only to identify what type of buildings free women of color purchased and built, but also how they may have functioned.²³ *A Pattern Book for New Orleans Architecture* provides historical context in describing the evolution of architectural styles but does not tie it to the histories of any particular populations.

The *New Orleans Architecture* series is a six-volume production with each volume focusing on a different geographical area of the city; however, none specifically delve into the history of the Vieux Carré. *Volume IV: The Creole Faubourgs* and *Volume V: The Esplanade Ridge* each identify several buildings owned and constructed by free people of color in the 18th and 19th centuries, which is unsurprising because large numbers of this notable population lived and worked in the neighborhoods surrounding the Vieux Carré.

Volume IV: The Creole Faubourgs includes the history and documentation of six “suburbs” below (or downriver from) the Vieux Carré.²⁴ The history of the development of Esplanade Avenue from the

²³ Roulhac B. Toledano. *A Pattern Book of New Orleans Architecture*. (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2010).

²⁴ Samuel Wilson, Roulhac Toledano, Sally Kittredge Evans, and Mary Louise Christovich. *New Orleans Architecture Volume IV: The Creole Faubourgs*. (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2006).

Mississippi River all the way to the Bayou St. John is documented in *Volume V: The Esplanade Ridge*.²⁵ Seven blocks of Esplanade Avenue are included in the Vieux Carré Historic District. Scholarly literature about free people of color in New Orleans has focused on those who live in these areas, due to more notable free men of color residing in the neighborhoods below the Vieux Carré. *The Creole Faubourgs* and *The Esplanade Ridge* cover the history of the development of these neighborhoods, often as they relate to changes taking place within the Vieux Carré, and sometimes include free people of color in their analyses. These volumes provide helpful information regarding the physical development of New Orleans by tying it to historic events and individual actors.

3.4 *Situating this Thesis*

This thesis intends to represent the overlooked history of free women of color in New Orleans, relate it to the built fabric of the Vieux Carré, and convince preservation actors that they should embrace and support the telling of this untold history through the recognition of its related sites. The goal of this thesis is not to disprove the myths about free women of color, as other scholars have already succeeded in doing so. Its aim is to use preservation tools to connect the important histories of free women of color to the extant fabric of the city, making the stories of this underrepresented population more visible and accessible. Acts of preservation can bring to the fore the untold stories of free women of color that are not unique to New Orleans or even to this neighborhood, and highlight examples of historic vernacular architecture.

²⁵ Mary Louise Christovich, Roulhac Toledano, and Sally Kittredge Evans. *New Orleans Architecture Volume V: The Esplanade Ridge*. (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2013).

Chapter 4: Method

As previously noted, the four phases explored in this study are Discourse Analysis, Historical Analysis, Identification of Examples, and the Physical Survey of Examples. It follows a multi-phased, mixed-method research design. Discourse Analysis and Historical Analysis both rely on data collection as a first step, which was conducted primarily through online archives and secondary sources. Discourse Analysis is based on historic accounts, newspaper articles, scholarly works, and historic images. Historical Analysis was conducted through archival research, scholarly articles, books, historic maps, and historic photographs. Identification of Properties was achieved through a combination of archival research and reliance on secondary sources. The final phase, Physical Survey of Properties, was achieved by in-person visits and documentation and, later, supported by online documentation.

The method of this research sought to answer specific research objectives, which are:

1. Identify free women of color who owned property in the Vieux Carré (or French Quarter) between 1763 and 1861
2. Identify sites that are extant and related to this history
3. Understand the role of free women of color in New Orleans society and economy
4. Explain the myth about free women of color and its particular connection to New Orleans
5. Characterize vernacular architecture in the Vieux Carré historic district of New Orleans

This thesis seeks to make a corrected version of history visible and accessible through preservation tools.

4.1 Discourse Analysis

This study relies upon historic resources and contemporary scholarship to answer questions regarding the characterization of free women of color from the 18th century to the present. The first step is defining the stories told about this population in popular travel accounts, newspapers and periodicals, and histories of New Orleans.

This is followed by understanding what factors contributed to the perpetuation of these stories, and recognizing contemporary scholarly efforts to correct the stories told about free women of color in New Orleans. This is key to understanding the overarching goal of this thesis, which is exploring how the recognition of the corrections to the myth may be achieved through preservation.

4.2 *Historical Analysis*

An understanding of New Orleans and Louisiana history and the role of free women of color in the society and economy of New Orleans during the period defined by the study is essential to debunking the sexist and racist myths about free women of color. Using historical records rather than travelers accounts, sensationalized periodical articles, and works of history that characterized free women of color based on those primary sources allows for a more accurate account of the activities and influence of free women of color in New Orleans. The history of free women of color in New Orleans is better understood by reliance on archives and historical records including the Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, the Historic New Orleans Collection, the New Orleans Notarial Archives, the New Orleans Public Library City Archives and Records and Deliberations of the Cabildo, the and the New Orleans Public Library Louisiana Division Records of the Louisiana Court of Probates. These repositories of primary sources offer information about births, deaths, baptisms, marriages, property ownership, property transfer, and civil court cases that involve free women of color. The data gleaned from the archives has been used in this thesis and by other scholars to counter other published primary sources, such as newspapers and periodicals and books and pamphlets, particularly travel accounts from the early 19th century, upon which writers and the popular imagination have continued to base their false claims about free women of color.

In representing the overlooked history of free women of color in New Orleans and their importance to the social and built fabric of the Vieux Carré, an understanding of New Orleans vernacular architecture and building types that characterize the neighborhood is essential. Resources on vernacular architecture used for this thesis are *A Pattern Book of New Orleans Architecture* written by Roulhac B. Toledano and illustrated with drawings from the New Orleans Notarial Archives and books from the *New Orleans Architecture Series* commissioned and compiled by The Friends of the Cabildo.

2. The structure was owned or built by free women of color between 1769 and 1861.
3. The building is standing today.

The selection of the above criteria is based upon a need to define a study area and an interest in focusing on properties in the Vieux Carré. More extensive research has been conducted on the ownership of real estate by free women of color in other New Orleans neighborhoods, including the adjacent Treme, Marigny and Esplanade Ridge. Less research and identification has been done on properties owned by free women of color within the French Quarter, New Orleans' oldest and arguably most iconic neighborhood. The French Quarter remains a tight-knit community of permanent residents while also hosting an estimated 94% of the city's 18.5 million annual visitors, and both residents and tourists alike will benefit from exposure to a corrected version of any already underrepresented history of a group that was instrumental in defining New Orleans history as well as its contemporary built fabric.²⁷

The time period defined for this study is between 1769 and 1861 because these are the years during which free women of color had the most rights in New Orleans, particularly compared to their counterparts in other parts of what is now the United States. Although authority over New Orleans was officially transferred from France to Spain in 1763, Spanish rule did not begin in earnest until 1769, when the French Code Noir was overturned by Spanish laws that provided more liberties for free women of color, particularly in the realms of property ownership and transfer. In 1800, France regained ownership of Louisiana from Spain; Napoleon intended to reestablish French dominance in the New World. The French continued to allow enslaved people to purchase their freedom and acquire property, and the number of free people of color in New Orleans grew rapidly with the influx of thousands from Saint-Domingue, now Haiti, another French colony.

With the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, ownership was yet again transferred, this time from France to the United States. At the time, free people of color constituted about one fifth of the population of New Orleans. New Orleans continued to grow rapidly, with the migration of free people of color adding

²⁷ New Orleans Tourism Visitation and Visitor Spending Break Records in 2018. (2019, November 22). Retrieved from <https://www.neworleans.com/articles/post/new-orleans-tourism-visitation-and-visitor-spending-break-records-in-2018/>.

²⁸ Reckdahl, "Descendants Tell Stories of Free People of Color." *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/12/arts/free-people-of-color-museum-new-orleans.html>.

to the influx of new residents. Certain legal and cultural freedoms, particularly regarding property ownership, continued to be held by free women of color in New Orleans, which was primarily governed on the local and state level beginning with the granting of statehood in 1812. The end of the period of the study in 1861 coincides with the capture of New Orleans by Union forces, and a change in laws and governance post-Civil War.

The examples put forth in this thesis were chosen with historical timelines, contemporary scholarship, and potential impact in mind. The selected sites are a few extant buildings that represent a broader history of free women of color and their impact on New Orleans, allowing for a generalization of the specific stories they can tell.

4.4 Survey of the Sites

When possible, the author physically visited the identified four examples and documented the sites using photographs, videos, and drawings. The sites physically visited include all those on St. Ann Street owned by the Cazelar sisters. In the cases when an in-person survey was not possible, the author depended upon online documentation, including Google Maps and archival photographs.

Chapter 5: Sites

“Within their own lifetimes or over generations some free black women amassed sizable estates which, although they were generally much smaller than those recorded for wealthy white New Orleanians, were nevertheless larger on average than those of libre [free] men...Their struggles to protect their rights within a society that exploited them as nonwhites and as women, but also gave them some advantages over slaves and even white women, are apparent from the records.”²⁹

Free women of color rose to economic and social prominence in New Orleans during the era of Spanish rule, from 1769 to 1803, by benefiting from contemporary legal, demographic, economic, and political conditions. Even after possession of the city was transferred to the United States and more restrictive laws enacted, free women continued to hold influential roles in society, notably as successful businesswomen. Contrary to the myths that free women of color sought romantic partnerships with wealthy white men to provide for them and their children, free women of color made up a hardworking population that saw success during the years of Spanish rule and after by investing in real estate, including residential and retail properties, working as landlords, farming, and engaging in entrepreneurial ventures such as tavern ownership and foodstuffs traders.³⁰

5.1 Building Types

The four identified sites were all constructed during the Spanish Colonial Period. Three of the buildings are a building type known as the Creole cottage and one is a Creole townhouse. Creole cottages and townhouses are the most common residential building types in the Vieux Carré. Urban Creole cottages were the most affordable residential building type and can be detached, semi detached, and common-wall rowhouses. A typical Creole cottage is a one- or one-and-a-half story four-bay building set at the sidewalk with a Norman truss roof system and walls of *brique-entre-poteaux* construction covered

²⁹ Hanger, 231.

³⁰ Hanger, 219.

in weatherboard or plaster.³¹ The most popular construction method of Creole cottages in New Orleans in the Spanish Colonial period was *briquetté-entre-poteaux*, or brick-between-posts. Built with a rot-resistant cypress frame and infilled with local brick then plastered, a variation of this construction technique is still used locally and can be found in neighborhoods across the greater New Orleans area.³² Called “brick nogging” or “beam filling” in English, this building technique was prevalent in the English building tradition as well. It can be found in other parts of the United States, particularly in former British colonies, as early as the 17th century and persisted into the 19th century.³³ Pitched gable or hipped roofs made large attic spaces available, which were used for storage instead of living.

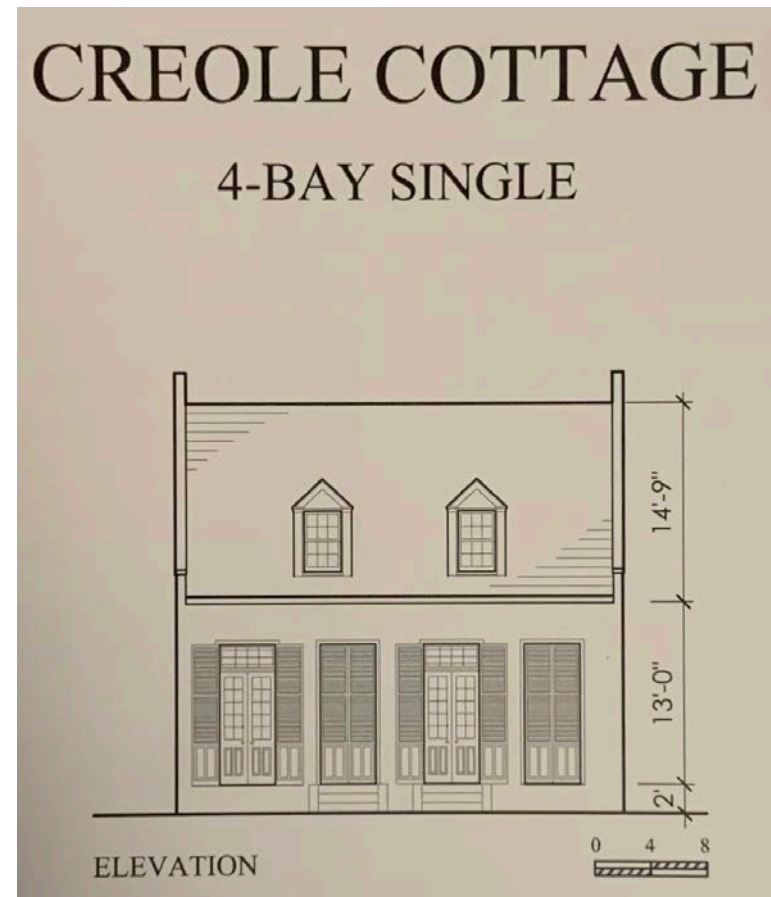


Figure 5.1: Elevation of a typical four-bay Creole cottage
*Roulhac B. Toledano. A Pattern Book of New Orleans
Architecture. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company,
2010, 69.*

³¹ Toledano, 41.

³² Toledano, 159.

³³ D. F. Laefer. “Emergence, Development, and Prevalence of Brick Nogging in American Vernacular Structures,” in *Structural Analysis of Historical Constructions* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 191.

A typical Creole cottage floor plan lacked hallways and consisted of a front gallery paralleled by a parlor and a bedroom next to it; some larger houses had multiple bedrooms across the front of the house. Most Creole houses had a central open area flanked by each room at the corner called a loggia or rear cabinet. The kitchen was in a dependency in the rear courtyard along with other dependencies of one or two stories.³⁴

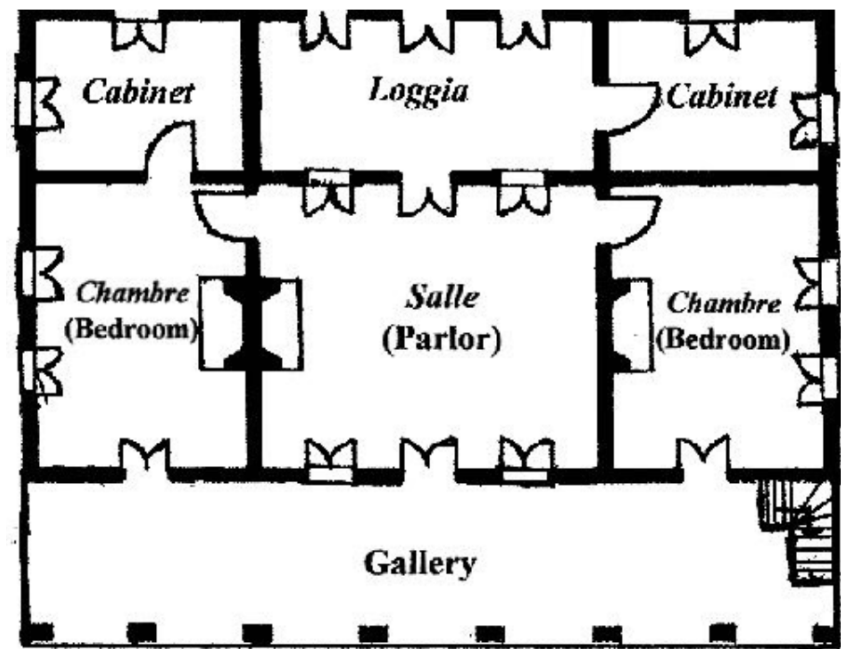


Figure 5.2: Floorplan of a typical Creole cottage built during the Spanish Colonial period.
Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

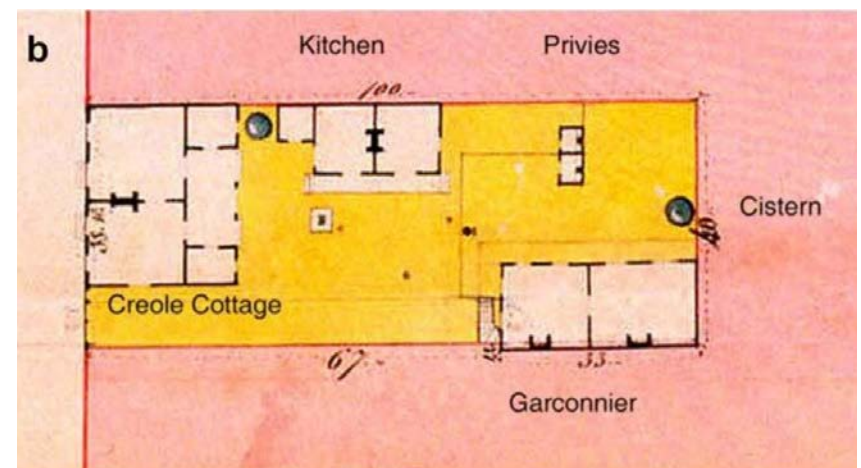


Figure 5.3: Site plan of a Creole cottage built during the Spanish Colonial period.
New Orleans Notarial Archives, 006.077; captions added

³⁴ Patricia L. Duncan, "French Creole: Louisiana Architecture – A Handbook On Styles," Division of Historic Preservation Education (Louisiana Office of Cultural Development).

Creole townhouses were popular in New Orleans during the Spanish Colonial period, and are essentially a two-story variation of the Creole cottage.³⁵ Like the Creole cottage, the Creole townhouse was built flush with the sidewalk using the same construction methods. Wooden or iron second-level galleries were originally supported by cypress colonnettes. These wood colonnettes were replaced with cast iron after 1840. Wrought iron work is an architectural detail typical of the Spanish Colonial period due to the large number of skilled ironworkers living in New Orleans, and often is displayed on the balustrades of townhouse balconies. Creole townhouses had pitched or flat roofs, the latter due to the influence of the Spanish who had adopted it from the Moors. Flat roofs also allowed for additional living space on top of the townhouse. The floorplan of a typical Creole townhouse is similar to that of a Creole cottage, but two stories.

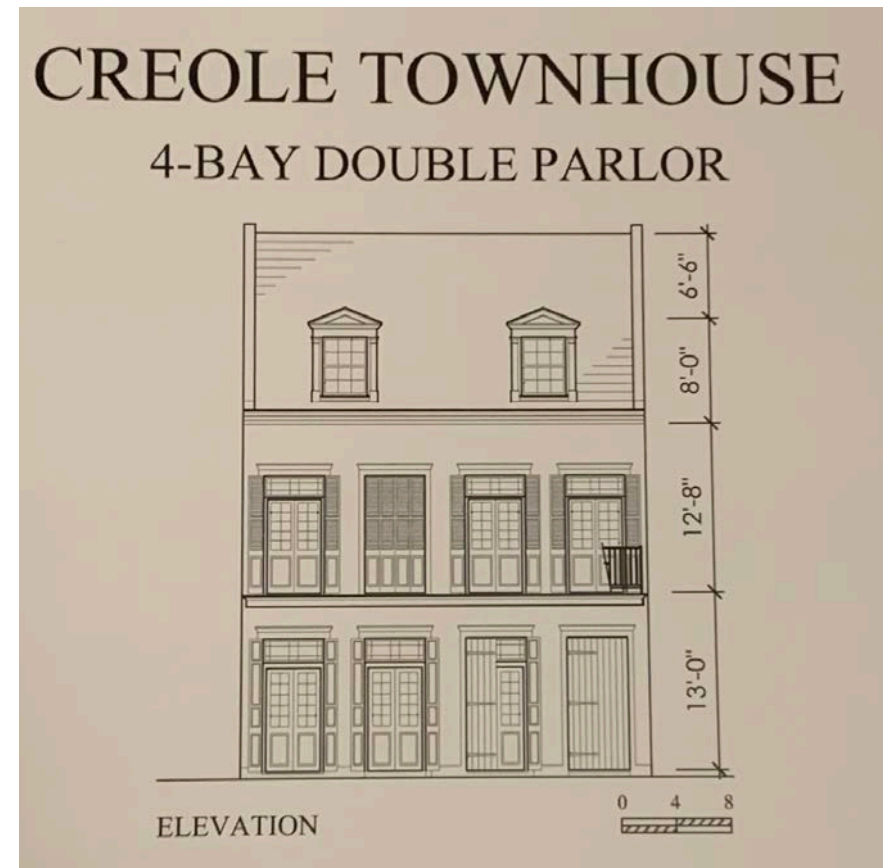


Figure 5.4: Elevation of a typical four-bay Creole townhouse, Roulhac B. Toledano. *A Pattern Book of New Orleans Architecture*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2010, 69.

³⁵ Toledano, 77.

Typically, Creole townhouses had either a narrow outdoor passageway separating it from the neighboring building or was built as a rowhouse. The first floor was often used for storage or business, and the second floor for living. Sometimes, a storage area known as an entresol existed at the mezzanine level between the two main floors. Dependencies were usually attached to the townhouse to create an L-shaped structure.³⁶

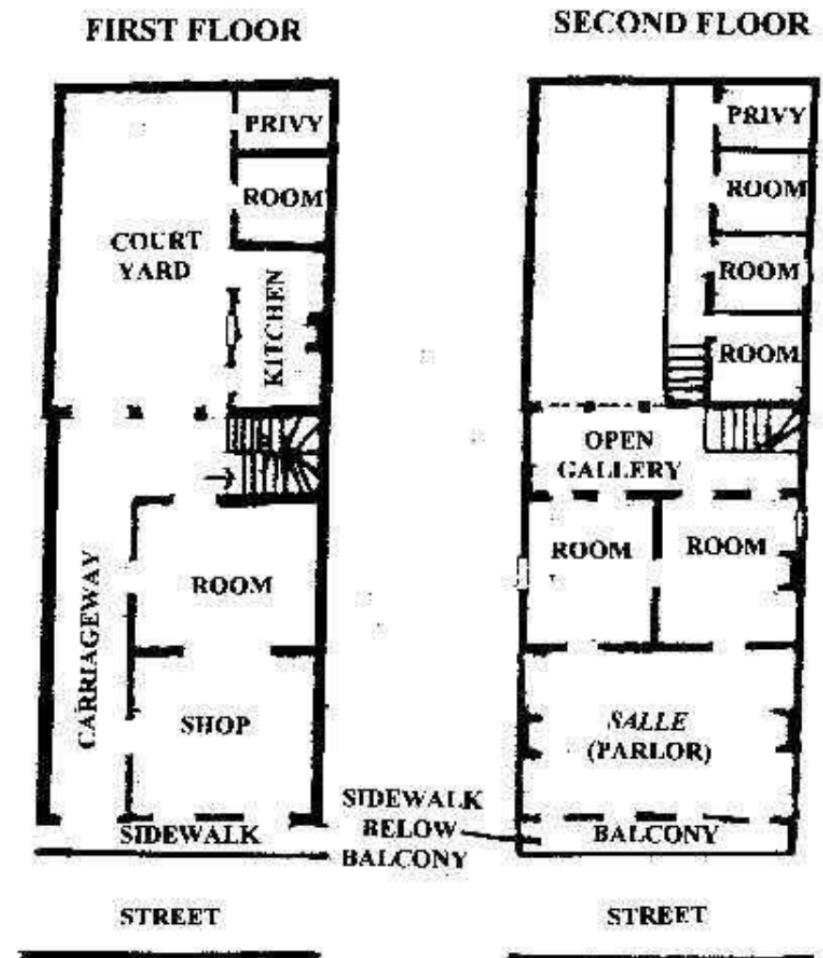


Figure 5.5: Floorplan of a typical Creole townhouse built during the Spanish Colonial period. Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

³⁶ Duncan, "French Creole: Louisiana Architecture – A Handbook On Styles."

5.2 817 Saint Ann Street (Square 75, Lot Number 18790)

The one-and-a-half story Creole cottage at 817 Saint Ann Street and the Creole townhouse next door at number 813 were constructed by the Cazelar sisters. The Cazelar family was a wealthy family of note. The father, Jean Pierre Cazelar, was a white plantation owner of French descent who was in a committed lifelong partnership with free woman of color Charlotte Wiltz. Together, they had four daughters and one son. Cazelar never married, and guaranteed his paternity was part of the public record by signing his name on the baptismal records of all of his children, who were considered by law to be free persons of color. The daughters were named Marie Felicite, Marie Louise “Tonton,” Isabel Pouponne, and Adelaide. The Cazelars are credited with contributing to the early development of the French Quarter, where they owned several properties.³⁷ On March 3, 1806, Jean Pierre Cazelar purchased the lot that now comprises 813-823 Saint Ann Street. Five years later, he sold the lot to three of his daughters: Marie Felicite, Tonton, and Isabel Pouponne. The sisters built the Creole cottage shortly after acquiring the lot in 1811, and partitioned the lot on June 30, 1836. What is now 817 Saint Ann Street belonged to Marie Louise. She lived in the home with her lifelong partner, a white man named Emile Sainet, and their children.³⁸



Figure 5.6: 817 Saint Ann Street (2020)
Photograph by Caitlin Rudin Gardenhire

³⁷ The Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carré Digital Survey, Historic New Orleans Collection, 817-819 St. Ann St. Vieux Carré Commission Evaluation.

³⁸ New Orleans Notarial Archives, Acts of Notary Felix de Armas, Jean Pierre Cazelar Acts of Succession.

According to the Vieux Carré Digital Survey, a project of The Historic New Orleans Collection, the four-bay Creole cottage is of the typical masonry construction.³⁹ The house at 817 Saint Anne Street is a good example of a four-bay Creole cottage with its “short story above the overhang in front pierced by four windows and the same in the rear.”⁴⁰ Two, two-story brick dependencies are located at the rear of the lot.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 161.

⁴¹ The Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carré Digital Survey, Historic New Orleans Collection, 817-819 St. Ann St. Vieux Carré Commission Evaluation.

5.3 813 Saint Ann Street (Square 75, Lot 18791)

This lot was part of the property purchased by three of the Cazelar sisters in 1811, and the two-story four-bay Greek-revival Creole townhouse was constructed by Isabel Pouponne Cazelar in 1853.⁴² Being from a later period than the cottage next door, the townhouse is constructed of a harder imported exposed brick and has a post-supported cast-iron gallery. The brick kitchen at the rear of the lot dates from when the Cazelars purchased the lot about forty years before the townhouse was constructed.⁴³ Like 817 Saint Ann Street, the townhouse has been categorized as “significant” in the Vieux Carré Architectural Survey, which classifies all the buildings in the Vieux Carré Historic District. The highest level of recognition for an individual building in the Historic District is landmarking. 813 Saint Ann Street is a fine example of New Orleans vernacular architecture as a two-and-a-half-story four-bay double-parlor Creole townhouse with a side passage. The four-bay double-parlor style was popular in the Spanish Colonial period as a two-story variation of the Creole cottage. The side passageway is designed to allow residents access to the rear courtyard because “all French, Spanish, and Creole houses are oriented to the privacy of the rear of the property.”⁴⁴



Figure 5.7: 813 Saint Ann Street (2020)
Photograph by Caitlin Rudin Gardenhire

⁴² New Orleans Notarial Archives, Acts of Notary Felix de Armas, Jean Pierre Cazelar Acts of Succession.

⁴³ The Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carré Digital Survey, Historic New Orleans Collection, 813-815 St. Ann St. Vieux Carré Commission Evaluation.



Figure 5.8: 800 block of Saint Ann Street; 817 Saint Ann Street, 813 Saint Ann Street, 801 Bourbon Street (c. late 1940s-1950s)
Special Collections Division, Tulane University Libraries



Figure 5.9: 800 block of Saint Ann Street; 817 Saint Ann Street, 813 Saint Ann Street, 801 Bourbon Street (2020)
Photograph by Caitlin Rudin Gardenhire

The building standing on the other side of 817 Saint Ann Street, number 823, was not constructed by the Cazelars. The lot belonged to Marie Felicite, and she paid for the construction of the original house and its dependent buildings. The structures have since been destroyed and replaced with a brick school building constructed in 1900.⁴⁵

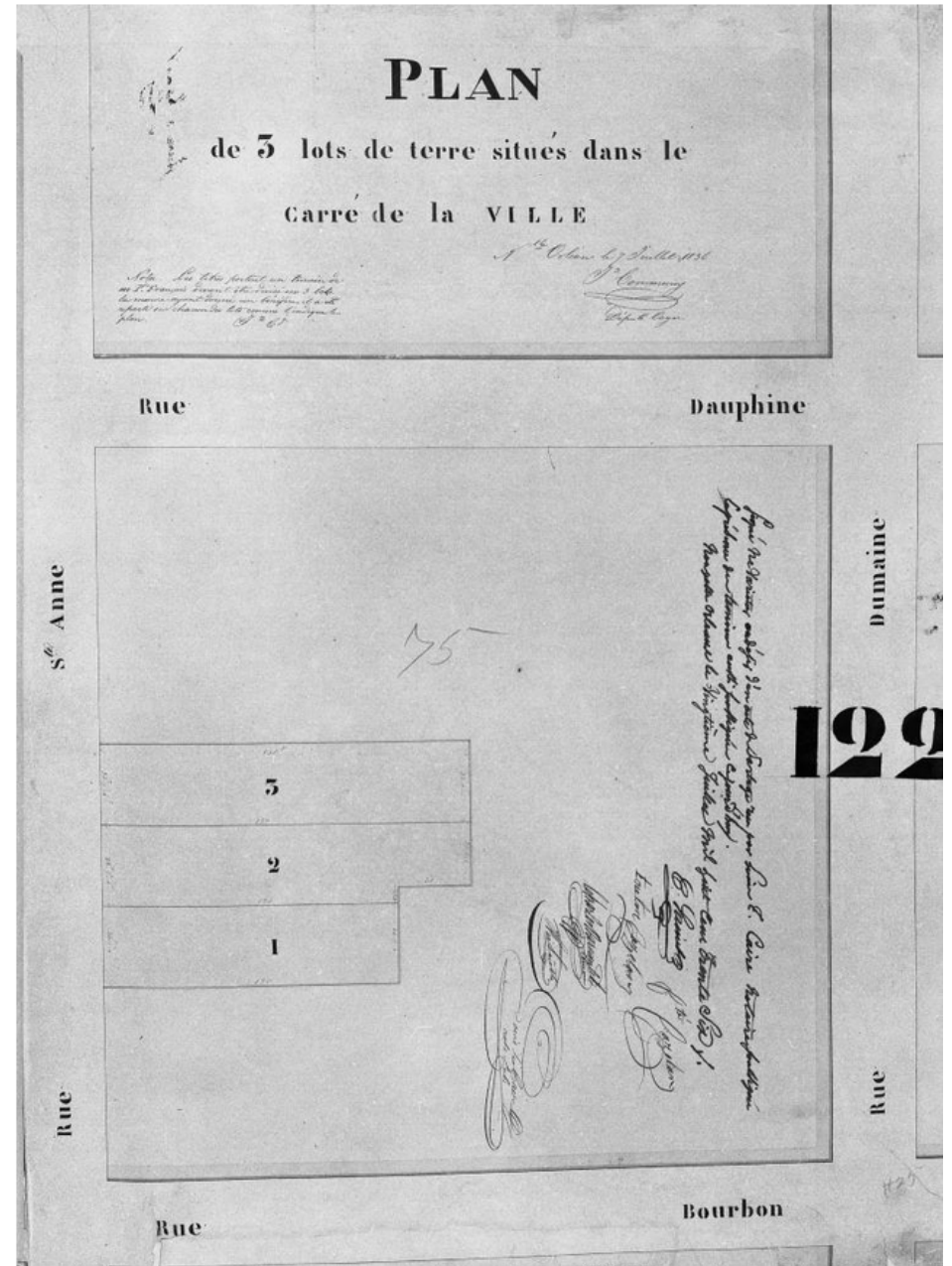


Figure 5.10: Survey of Partitioned Lots owned by the Cazelar sisters drawn by Deputy Surveyor Jean Communy (1836)

⁴⁵ The Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carré Digital Survey, Historic New Orleans Collection, 823 St. Ann St. Vieux Carré Commission Evaluation.

5.4 831 Dauphine Street (Square 86, Lot 18888)

The Creole cottage located at 831 Dauphine was also constructed by the Cazelars between 1815 and 1820. The Historic New Orleans Collection describes the cottage as “finely detailed” and notes its two detached one-story kitchens in the rear of the lot.⁴⁶ The two-story four-bay Creole cottage is a plastered *briquetté-entre-poteaux* construction.



Figure 5.11: 813 Dauphine Street, 2019
Google Maps

⁴⁶ The Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carré Digital Survey, Historic New Orleans Collection, 831-833 Dauphine St. Vieux Carré Commission Evaluation.

About a hundred steps away, just around the corner, were properties already owned by Adelaide and Marie Felicite Cazelar and the sisters' mother Charlotte Wiltz. Charlotte purchased 821 Dauphine and the daughters purchased 823 Dauphine in 1804. The buildings commissioned by the women on those lots are no longer standing, but Figure 5.10 is an illustration of the block drawn between 1869 and 1921 by Ellsworth Woodward that features the buildings that belonged to the Cazelar sisters.



Figure 5.12: Dauphine Street near Dumaine Street [811, 815, 821, 823 Dauphine Street], between 1869 and 1921
Ellsworth Woodward - illustrator, The Historic New Orleans Collection

⁴⁷ The Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carré Digital Survey, Historic New Orleans Collection, 821 Dauphine St. and 823-827 Dauphine St. Vieux Carré Commission Evaluations.

5.5 933 Saint Philip Street (Square 84, Lot 23112)

The one-and-a-half story four-bay semi-detached masonry Creole cottage at 933 Saint Philip Street was built at the beginning of the 19th century. The home was owned by Genevieve Larronde, a free woman of color who was in a long-term romantic partnership with Frenchman Louis Dolliole. Prior to her partnership with Dolliole, Larronde had three daughters who inherited some of her property when she died in 1828.⁴⁸ She had four more children with Louis Dolliole, including the renowned architect-builder Jean-Louis Dolliole. The Dollioles were a prominent free family of color, known for being prolific builders and owners of no fewer than thirty-six properties. Larronde wielded an influential role as a businesswoman and as the Dolliole matriarch. She made her mark on the Vieux Carré and a living by buying, selling, and leasing properties all over the neighborhood. Larronde purchased the family home at 933 Saint Philip Street in 1801. Over the fifty-three years the family lived in the house, the title switched between Larronde and her husband several times, which was not unusual due to ever-changing laws that specified who was legally allowed to own property. Sometimes, it was easier to hold onto property if it was in her partner's name due to restrictions placed on free women of color.⁴⁹ At the time of the purchase of 933 Saint Philip Street, Larronde owned one adjacent lot and Dolliole owned the other. The family continued to acquire property adjacent to 933 Saint Philip, where they built a total of five homes for their grown children and their families.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Succession of Genevieve Dolliole, notary Carlile Pollock, Volume 62, 24 July 1840. Courtesy of Dale N. Atkins, Clerk of Civil District Court, Parish of Orleans.

⁴⁹ Inventory for the estate of Louis Dolliole, notary Carlile Pollock, Volume 8, 22 Feb 1822. Courtesy of Dale N. Atkins, Clerk of Civil District Court, Parish of Orleans.

⁵⁰ Vieux Carré Survey, Joseph Pilie, 1808.



Figure 5.13: 933 Saint Philip Street
*John Watson Riley, The Historic New Orleans
Collection*

5.6 Lost Sites

Free women of color owned hundreds of properties in the Vieux Carré between the beginning of Spanish rule and the Civil War. Although the Vieux Carré historic district's buildings are now protected, the vast majority of the structures built or owned by free women of color in the Vieux Carré have since been torn down and replaced. The French Quarter has always been a popular and competitive real estate market, with a history of rapid destruction and construction due to both personal style preferences and natural disasters.

There are countless cases of buildings owned by free women of color that have been replaced, with little to no recognition of the history of ownership by free women. One such example is the Tiblier-Cazenave House, an impressive building compound at 544 Esplanade. It is the former site of a building complex owned by multiple free women of color; however, this part of its history is left out in most accounts of the succession of the site's prominent white owners. Free woman of color Roosalie Chesnau owned the lot at 1014 Esplanade, where the Freeman Annable House now stands, from 1819 until 1822. Again, there is no recognition of Chesnau at the site.⁵¹

The author believes additional examples of extant buildings owned by free women of color exist in the Vieux Carré, and, with renewed access to archival resources, they may be identified. By recognizing the examples set forth in this study, the history of free women of color in the French Quarter and their significant impact on the social and built fabric of New Orleans can be made both visible and accessible.

⁵¹ Christovich, Toledano, and Evans, 48-51.

Chapter 6: Interventions

The National Register of Historic Places, Orleans Parish Landmarks Commission, Vieux Carré Commission, The Historic New Orleans Collection, and even private foundations produce and install plaques on historic properties in the Vieux Carré. Plaques indicate sites of importance based on their relationship with history and architectural significance. Recipients of “Restoration Honor Awards,” awarded by The Vieux Carré Commission, also receive plaques.

In 2002, the Orleans Parish Landmarks Commission installed a plaque at the “Dolliole Cottage,” a Creole cottage built by Jean-Louis Dolliole in 1820 at 1440 Pauger Street. The plaque recognizes Jean-Louis as a free man of color, veteran of the Battle of New Orleans, architect-builder, entrepreneur, and civic leader who lived in the house until 1858. There is no recognition of Genevieve Larronde, his mother, the successful businesswoman at her Creole cottage at 933 Saint Philip Street. As an owner of many Vieux Carré properties during her lifetime, Larronde deserves recognition for her impact on the neighborhood’s fabric as well.

The buildings identified in this thesis certainly meet the standards to be recognized by the installation of plaques, both for their ties to the history of free women of color in New Orleans and as examples of vernacular Spanish Colonial architecture. The installation of plaques would bring these sites to a level of recognition with hundreds of other structures in the neighborhood, but further public recognition is required due to the ubiquity of plaques in the French Quarter. The author has suggested a short text for a plaque at each identified site.

817 Saint Ann Street

Creole cottage built in 1811 by Marie Louise Cazelar, Marie Felicite Cazelar, and Isabel Pouponne Cazelar, sister and free women of color who purchased this lot and 817-823 St Ann Street in 1811. They were the daughters of planter Jean Pierre Cazelar and free woman of color Charlotte Wiltz.

813 Saint Ann Street

Creole townhouse built in 1853 by Isabel Pouponne Cazelar, a free woman of color who purchased this lot and 817-823 St Ann Street with her sisters in 1811. They were the daughters of planter Jean Pierre Cazelar and free woman of color Charlotte Wiltz.

831 Dauphine Street

Creole cottage constructed between 1815-1820 by the Cazelar sisters, free women of color who owned several properties on the surrounding blocks.

933 Saint Philip Street

Creole cottage built c. 1800 and purchased by Genevieve Larronde in 1801. Larronde was a free woman of color and matriarch of the influential Dolliole Family, who were known as landlords and builders. The Larronde-Dolliole family lived in this house for 53 years.

Another preservation tool to build upon is the New Orleans Historical App. The free mobile app features an interactive map and series of virtual tours that bring “fascinating, lesser-known events from New Orleans History alive for city locals and visitors alike.”⁵² The creation of a tour of the sites identified in this thesis that can be experienced virtually or physically is another public and accessible way to use place-based storytelling to tell a fuller history of free women of color. The open yet scholarly nature of the app allows for additions to the tours, so more sites can be added as they are identified.

Dozens of tour companies operate in the Vieux Carré, with themes including architecture, voodoo, and ghosts. It is not uncommon to hear damaging myths about free women of color repeated by tour guides, who are in part responsible for the contemporary spread of misrepresentation to locals and visitors. There are groups like The Historic New Orleans Collection, however, that base their scripts and themes on historical fact rather than legend. The Historic New Orleans Collection produced a series of Black History Month tours in February 2020 that claimed to explore the history of free people of color in New Orleans.⁵³ The tours took place at The Historic New Orleans Collection in their Louisiana History Galleries. This thesis proposes that in forthcoming years, the tours venture beyond the walls of the museum and include sites of significance to the history, culture, and influence of free people of color in New Orleans. Walking tours can be organized by theme or interest, with a tour focused on the contributions of free women of color to New Orleans history. The tours should not be limited to the month of February, but the initial programming may gain wider publicity if it coincides with the series of Black History Month tours.

The final intervention proposed by this thesis is a temporary event that highlights the stories of free women of color with projections, a lesser-used preservation tool. Luna Fête is a “free and open to the public festival of light, art, and technology celebrates New Orleans creative industries and provides a memorable experience for diverse event attendees.”⁵⁴ It is produced by the Arts Council of New Orleans each December with the mission to demonstrate the power of art to transform communities by combining the city’s historic architecture with contemporary light and video mapping technology, sound installation, and motion graphics. During the festival, the buildings identified in this thesis

⁵² “About,” New Orleans Historical, 2020, <https://neworleanshistorical.org/about/>.

⁵³ “Special Tour: Free People of Color in New Orleans,” The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2020, <https://www.hnoc.org/events/special-tour-free-people-color-new-orleans>.

⁵⁴ “Mission,” Luna Fête, 2020, <https://www.neworleans.com/event/luna-f%C3%A4te/3227/>.

could become canvases on which to project the histories of free women of color, and recognize their contributions to New Orleans in a novel way. Luna Fête offers training in projection mapping and animation to local artists, providing an opportunity to engage with local artists who identify with the histories and stories of free women of color.

A larger audience with multiple interests could become engaged with the history of free women of color in the Vieux Carré by coordinating the installation of plaques, walking tours, and Luna Fête light installations. By coordinating the programming, the celebration of the history and influences of free women of color could be celebrated over the course of several weeks and be accessible to a greater number of people, as events would occur on multiple days and multiple times of day. Plaque unveilings and walking tours typically take place in daylight hours, while the enjoyment of light projection installations must take place after dark. Through recognition of properties owned by free women of color in the Vieux Carré between the Spanish Colonial period and the Civil War using preservation tools, the public will both have improved access to and understanding of the historic importance of free women of color and their contributions to the social and built fabric of New Orleans.

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St. Louis Cathedral Marriages, 1821-1830

Historic New Orleans Collection

Ste. Gême Papers

This collection of Henri Ste Gême's correspondence includes observations and accounts of life in New Orleans.

The Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carré Digital Survey

The Survey includes historical maps of the French Quarter, Chain of Title for properties in the Quarter, and property information. Using the survey, I was able to identify and trace the ownership of properties owned by free women of color in the French Quarter over generations. The historical maps are useful to identify blocks and streets with concentrations of free families of color.

New Orleans Notarial Archives

Acts of Felix de Armas

Notary Felix de Armas recorded Acts of Succession and sales of real estate and slaves of the Cazelar family. Within these records are Jean Pierre Cazelar's will and records of sales to, from and within the Cazelar family.

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