FROM THE CABILDO TO THE CREOLE COTTAGE
Historic Architecture in the French Quarter of New Orleans

The LaLaurie mansion on the corner of Royal and Governor Nicholls streets. Built in 1831, the house is a fine example of the Creole townhome style which is found throughout the French Quarter. Infamous for its connection to Delphine LaLaurie, whose cruelty to her slaves earned her a place among the most infamous murderers of New Orleans, the LaLaurie mansion also exemplifies the period in which it was built and serves as a symbol of the transition period that the city underwent in the early nineteenth century. Not only does the building display hallmarks of Creole architectural styles, but it also shows signs of the budding American influence in New Orleans in the Neoclassical motifs that appear throughout the structure.

The prison itself appeared to be a fair sized two-story building, which was surrounded by two other buildings of similar size and height. The prison was originally built in 1794, the previous structure being destroyed (along with much of the city) in a colossal fire. The current structure features a central bell tower designed by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, completed shortly before his death in 1820.

The Presbytere or the Casa Casial as it was known at its construction in 1791, was built to be the home of the Capuchin monks in New Orleans. The presbytere, despite its name and intended function, never actually housed any clergy or ever saw any other religious use. The building, designed by Guilhemard like the Cabildo, took much longer to complete than the Cabildo, construction finally ending in 1813. Before the additions to the structure by the Baroness de Pontalba in the 1840s, the presbytere, like the Cabildo, was two stories, built of brick, with a flat, hipped roof, decorated with urns.

The French Quarter of New Orleans is home to some of the most fascinating and beautiful historic architecture in the American South. The variety of styles and buildings is as varied, colorful, and numerous as the people who have made the city what it is today. From the origins as a flimsy huddled colonial outpost of the French empire, to its role as a Spanish city, to its absorption into the United States, each period and people have left their mark on the city, specifically what is known as the French Quarter or the Vieux Carré. It has become a global mecca to discover New Orleans as a “jewels,” but this comparison teleologically holds a great amount of truth to it, as the food, language, music, and especially the architecture can attest to it. The influences of France, Spain, the Caribbean, the American South, and the west coast of Africa have mingled and blended in the city’s buildings. Spanish Colonial buildings, Creole townhouses and cottages, shotgun houses, and Neoclassical American homes stand in colorful array up and down the streets of the French Quarter. The historic architecture of the French Quarter has also been defined by two great forces which engulfed the city in the late eighteenth century, the arrival of different peoples, the rise and fall of the sugar and cotton industries, and early nineteenth century politics all had their hand in shaping the city, literally and figuratively.

Justin C. Oakley
Dr. Perky Beisel

Micaela Almonester, Baroness de Pontalba (1795-1874)
The Baroness is greatly responsible for the way that Jackson Square appears today.

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