

The Historic New Orleans Collection Quarterly

VOLUME XXXIX
NUMBER 2

SPRING 2022



TRACK RECORD: 75 Years of Streetcar

EVENT CALENDAR

The ever-changing landscape of the pandemic can result in adjustments to the programming schedule. We strongly encourage visitors to visit www.hnoc.org for regular updates. For additional information, please email events@hnoc.org.

MARDI GRAS TRIVIA NIGHT

Test your knowledge of Carnival lore in a fun-filled competition hosted by NPR journalist Laine Kaplan-Levenson and the entire *Making Mardi Gras* team.

Tuesday, April 5, 7 p.m.

Online via Zoom

Free; visit www.hnoc.org to register.

THE 22ND BILL RUSSELL LECTURE

Sponsored by the Derbes Foundation Dr. Mark Burford and vocalist Andaiye Alimayu explore the legendary life, career, and music of internationally renowned gospel singer and New Orleans native Mahalia Jackson.

Wednesday, April 20, 6 p.m.

In person at 410 Chartres Street and online via Zoom

\$20 for in-person attendees; free to livestream; visit my.hnoc.org to register.

CELEBRATING THE SWEDISH NIGHTINGALE

For this concert, soprano Tessan-Maria Lehmussaari and pianist Silja Levander will re-create music performed by beloved singer Jenny Lind, who visited New Orleans in 1851 to great acclaim.

Saturday, June 18, 2 p.m.

In person at 410 Chartres Street and online via Zoom

Free; visit my.hnoc.org to register.

FOOD FORUM: CELEBRATING THE SEASONS—SPRING

It's festival season! Join us as we sit down with Jazz Fest's food director, Michelle Nugent, to discuss the iconic dishes and vendors who keep us feasting at the fest.

Saturday, May 21

Time and place to be determined. Please visit www.hnoc.org for more information.

RESOURCES ROUND-THE-CLOCK

Missed it the first time? Many of THNOC's most compelling programs are available for download on our **YouTube channel** (www.youtube.com/user/THNOCVIDEO). And don't forget to explore our **First Draft** blog (www.hnoc.org/publications/first-draft) and **History from Home** page (www.hnoc.org/history-home) for good reads and fun activities.



Tennessee Williams, Jackson Square

(detail)

photograph © Christopher R. Harris
1994.143.1

WILLIAMS LECTURE

Mark Cave, curator of *Backstage at "A Streetcar Named Desire,"* presents "Something Wild in the Country: The Fugitive Life of Tennessee Williams," a discussion of the early life of the influential playwright.

Saturday, May 21, 11 a.m.

Online via Zoom

Visit my.hnoc.org to register.

Open to THNOC members only.

To become a member, visit www.hnoc.org/support/membership or return the remittance envelope in this magazine.

GENERAL HOURS

520 Royal Street

Tricentennial Wing, French Quarter Galleries, Café Cour, and The Shop

Tuesday–Saturday, 9:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.;

Sunday, 10:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

533 Royal Street

Louisiana History Galleries, Merieult Courtyard

Tuesday–Saturday, 9:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.;

Sunday, 10:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

410 Chartres Street

Williams Research Center Reading Room

Tuesday–Saturday, 9:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

By appointment only. Appointments must be made at least 24 hours in advance.

Please email reference@hnoc.org or call (504) 523-4662.

EXHIBITIONS & TOURS

All free unless otherwise noted.

CURRENT

Making Mardi Gras

Through May 8, 2022

520 Royal Street

Fit for a King: The Rex Archives at THNOC

Through May 8, 2022

Williams Research Center, 410 Chartres Street

Backstage at "A Streetcar Named Desire"

March 18–July 3, 2020

520 Royal Street

French Quarter Life: People and Places of the Vieux Carré

Through August 2022

520 Royal Street

CONTINUING

History of the French Quarter Galleries

520 Royal Street

Louisiana History Galleries

533 Royal Street

Virtual Field Trips

THNOC's education department works with teachers to create custom virtual presentations for a variety of topics including Reconstruction, Louisiana Indigenous History, Exploring the Archive, and much more. All student programs are free. ASL interpretation is available. More information and recordings of past presentations can be found at www.hnoc.org/programs/virtual-field-trips.

Self-Guided Courtyard Tours and French Quarter Tours App

THNOC's three French Quarter courtyards are currently open to the public. Visitors can learn about the architecture and history of the spaces, then head out for a self-guided tour of the French Quarter using THNOC's French Quarter Tours app. With the app, users can build a customized walking tour or take one of eight themed tours to see significant sites in the historic city center. Themes include Free People of Color, Music, Bourbon and Beyond, Around Jackson Square, and Lower Quarter.

533 Royal Street, 520 Royal Street, and 722 Toulouse Street

App available for download on the Apple App Store and Google Play

Check www.hnoc.org for updates on gallery openings and closures.

UPCOMING

Spanish New Orleans and the Caribbean / La Nueva Orleans y la Caribe españoles

October 20, 2022–January 22, 2023

520 Royal Street



ON THE COVER

Final scene from first Broadway production of *Streetcar*

between 1947 and 1949

Todd Collection at THNOC, 2011.0111.73



FROM THE PRESIDENT

According to Tennessee Williams, “Time is the longest distance between two places.” That line is from *The Glass Menagerie*, but it could apply to many of his plays, not to mention the work we do here at The Historic New Orleans Collection. As stewards of Gulf South history, the geography of our mission is fairly well delineated, but within those borders there is the vast landscape of the past, places in time that we can reach in a variety of ways. For Tennessee Williams, it was theater. For us it might be an exhibition, such as *Backstage at “A Streetcar Named Desire,”* our retrospective on the landmark play, generously sponsored by J. P. Morgan Chase and Co. Or, it might be our scholarly journal, the *Tennessee Williams Annual Review*, which uses multiple disciplines to explore the artist’s themes and their historical contexts.

Sometimes, our work as historians can shorten the distance between the ages. Take, for example, the story of Marie Grissot, first European midwife in the Louisiana colony. The details of her life are scant, but by piecing them together with what we know of her contemporaries, French imperialism, the Catholic Church, and the field of midwifery at the time, we can cross the centuries and gain a closer look at the lives, hopes, and struggles of Louisianians from 320 years ago.

In *Streetcar*, Williams uses distance as a metaphor early in the play, with Blanche’s first line of dialogue: “They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at—Elysian Fields!” The line foreshadows not only her downfall but also the interrelated themes of time and travel—to Blanche and Stella’s Mississippi past, further back to the antebellum South, and even further back to the primitivism represented by Stanley. The complexity and universality of these themes, coupled with the beauty and craft of Williams’s dramaturgy, is what has spread *Streetcar* around the world ever since its debut. It’s what brings the play back to New Orleans for this exhibition, and we hope it’s what will bring audiences to THNOC to see it. Whether it’s an exhibition, essay, program, or our online catalog, we’ll keep working to explore the diverse distances between us and the past. —DANIEL HAMMER

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THNOC celebrates 75 years of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

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“Undoubtedly our artistic climate is going to change through the world situation. . . . I think there is going to be a vast hunger for life after all this death—and for light after all this eclipse. . . . People will want to read, see, feel the living truth and they will revolt against the sing-song Mother Goose book of lies that are being fed to them.”

—Tennessee Williams, November 29, 1941

EXHIBITION

Backstage at “A Streetcar Named Desire”

Sponsored by J. P. Morgan Chase and Co.
 March 18–July 3
 520 Royal Street
 Free

A. Tennessee Williams and Pancho Rodriguez y Gonzalez in Jackson Square
 ca. 1945
 Todd Collection at THNOC, 2003.0228.1.1

B. Irene Selznick
 by Louise Dahl-Wolfe
 courtesy of Tennessee Williams Collection,
 Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas
 at Austin; Louise Dahl-Wolfe Archive,
 © Center for Creative Photography,
 Arizona Board of Regents



Beyond Elysian Fields

Backstage at “A Streetcar Named Desire” is a feast for Tennessee Williams lovers, exploring the play’s journey around the world onstage and onscreen.

A Streetcar Named Desire premiered on Broadway on December 3, 1947, receiving a seven-minute standing ovation. The production went on for a remarkable 855 performances.

The play struck a deep chord in the post–World War II United States, where people struggled to find their places in a rapidly changing social order. Audiences had lived through one of the most violent periods in human history, and to many, the name of the play’s lost ancestral home, Belle Reve—“beautiful dream”—evoked fading prewar notions of morality and societal convention. Viewers were ready to embrace, as Williams had predicted in 1941, “the living truth” of their new era.

In celebration of the 75th anniversary of this seminal drama, The Historic New Orleans Collection presents *Backstage at “A Streetcar Named Desire,”* which combines selections from THNOC’s wide-ranging Tennessee Williams holdings—many of them seldom displayed—with loans from the Harry Ransom Center, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the New York Public Library, and Wesleyan University.

“This woman had better be good,” noted an annoyed Williams in a telegram to his literary agent, Audrey Wood, in April 1947. He was referring to Irene Mayer Selznick, whom Wood had chosen to produce the play. Selznick was well connected—she was the daughter of movie mogul Louis B. Mayer and the soon-to-be ex-wife of producer David O. Selznick.



Selznick proved herself not only by investing her own money but also by persuading Elia Kazan, the most sought-after Broadway director at the time, to take on the project. Selznick and Kazan put together a legendary cast that made *Streetcar* an iconic contribution to US theater.

The director’s notebook, on display in the exhibition, features extensive, detailed descriptions of the characters as Kazan conceived them—Blanche, for example, is described as “an emblem of a dying civilization, making its last curlicued and romantic exit”—along with notes Williams gave him during rehearsals. Williams himself is a character in the notebook. “Blanche,” Kazan writes, is Williams: “out of place, unappreciated, a stranger in the modern, rough, coarse South.”



Wanting Williams's blessing to cast Marlon Brando as Stanley, Kazan gave Brando, 23 at the time, \$20 to travel to Provincetown to do a reading for the playwright. Instead of using the money to pay for travel, Brando and his girlfriend hitchhiked. The actor arrived a few days late, promptly fixed a plumbing emergency for Williams, and then astonished the playwright with his reading. Williams wrote to Wood, "A new value came out of Brando's reading which was by far the best reading I have ever heard. He seemed to have already created a dimensional character, of the sort that the war has produced among young veterans." Brando's Stanley can be

heard menacing Jessica Tandy's Blanche in a rare recording on exhibit: excerpts of the play produced for radio broadcast. No film exists of Tandy's acclaimed performance, but the recording offers an auditory glimpse of Blanche as Tandy introduced her to the world.

Selznick's Hollywood connections and the popularity of the stage production ensured that the film version of the play quickly took shape, with almost all the original Broadway team. Vivien Leigh replaced Tandy as Blanche at the insistence of Warner Bros.: Leigh had greater box office appeal, having starred in *Gone with the Wind* and in the British stage version of *Streetcar*. Testifying to her success is Leigh's 1952 Best Actress Oscar statue, which traveled across the Atlantic for this exhibition.

Perhaps the biggest challenge in adapting the play for the screen was the script. Guidelines established by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) restricted film content. The MPAA's censors required numerous changes to the script, which included drastically rewriting the ending to show Stanley being punished for his rape and subsequent institutionalization of Blanche. Despite these major revisions, Kazan's film proved as popular as the Broadway production.

Streetcar's reflection of a crumbling social order appealed as much to Latin America, postwar Europe, and beyond as it did to US audiences. Productions in Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico were immediately staged in 1948, and within 10 years, important productions

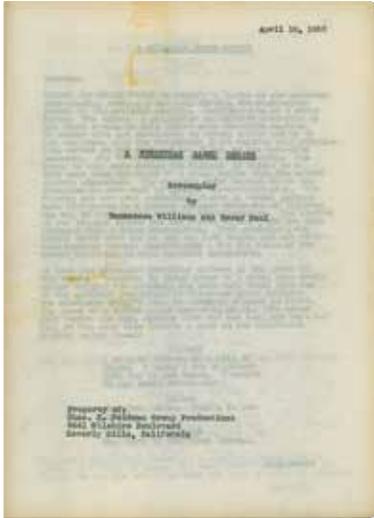


C. Stanley (Marlon Brando) assaults Blanche (Vivien Leigh)

1951
Todd Collection at THNOC, 2001-10-L-1777

D. Page from *Streetcar* scrapbook

1947-49; compiled by Irving Schneider
gift of Faulkner House Books, 2004.0141



had appeared in Greece, Italy, London, Paris, Sweden, Japan, and Korea, and Farsi and Arabic translations were published. The first major Soviet production premiered in 1970, and 1988 saw the first performance of the play in mainland China.

A Streetcar Named Desire has become an icon of the US stage and continues to be translated and performed throughout the world. The play has become a renewable resource in popular culture, inspiring parodies (the exhibition features a clip from an episode of *The Simpsons* entitled “A Streetcar Named Marge”) and experimental productions. Its deep connection to fundamental human struggles has been used to explore issues of class, gender, and race in a wide variety of mediums, including a ballet and an opera.

Every generation of literature and performance scholars finds new facets and materials in the play. *Streetcar* can be read as Williams’s coded exploration of US discomfort with Blackness, World War II veterans, transgressive sexualities (men’s and women’s), and more. Replace “US” with “societal” and the play wrestles with tensions in whatever historical and geographical context a director chooses. The 2022 issue of the *Tennessee Williams Annual Review* features photographs of *Streetcar*’s first productions in Brazil and the Soviet Union, introduced in both countries by some of the 20th century’s most important theater directors. The issue, due out in April, also includes a special image section devoted to THNOC’s exhibition, giving far-flung Williams fans a selection of the rare behind-the-scenes photographs and other archival materials on view. —MARK CAVE

E. Tennessee Williams's copy of the screenplay for *Streetcar*

by Tennessee Williams and Oscar Saul, authors
Beverly Hills, CA: Chas. K. Feldman Group, 1950
Todd Collection at THNOC, 2013.0128.2

F. Typewriter used by Tennessee Williams while writing *Streetcar*

ca. 1928
by Remington Typewriter Co.
2018.0393

G. Stella (Kim Hunter) embraces Stanley (Marlon Brando)

1951
Todd Collection at THNOC, 2001-10-L.1246

H. *Un tramway nommé Désir*

adapted by Jean Cocteau from a French translation by Paule de Beaumont
Paris: Bordas, 1949
Todd Collection at THNOC,
2001-10-L.3715



OFF-SITE

Celebrating a Maven, a Matriarch, and a Meters Alum

Our roundup of holdings that have appeared outside The Collection, either on loan to other institutions or in noteworthy media projects

THNOC provided two previously undigitized Clarence John Laughlin portrait images of Lena Richard to food writer Todd Price for use in his *USA Today* story on this pioneering Black New Orleans chef. Richard, whose cooking show on WDSU-TV debuted in 1949, was one of the first Black TV chefs—potentially the first. Price's article ran in mid-December.



By a Vieux Carré Wall

1940; Kodachrome photograph by Clarence John Laughlin
The Clarence John Laughlin Archive at THNOC, 1983.47.1.2076

In the Oleanders

1940; Kodachrome photograph by Clarence John Laughlin
The Clarence John Laughlin Archive at THNOC, 1983.47.1.2077



Over nine months in 2020–21, THNOC worked with museum design firm Cortina Productions to create *Vue Orleans*, an “interactive, multi-sensory cultural experience” that opened in fall 2021 at the **Four Seasons Hotel New Orleans**. THNOC provided 21 historical images to supplement videos featuring commentary from local artists such as Shannon Powell, Irma Thomas, Wendell Brunious, and Bruce Sunpie Barnes. Visitors to the hotel's rooftop observation deck will be able to tap an interactive city map for more information about THNOC and other French Quarter destinations while taking in the panoramic city views.

La Belle Creole Cigar and Tobacco Company poster

ca. 1885; watercolor with ink and attached color lithograph
1989.84



THNOC worked with guitarist **Leo Nocentelli** of the Meters and his production company to provide album art for Nocentelli's record *Another Side*, released this past November after the original tapes sat in storage for nearly 50 years. The album cover features a photograph from the Michael P. Smith Collection.

Leo Nocentelli playing with the Meters at Jazz Fest

1974
photograph by Michael P. Smith © THNOC, 2007.0103.1.379, 1140-12A



THNOC was honored to provide musician **Troy “Trombone Shorty” Andrews** with an image for display at a charity auction dedicated to his mother. Lois Nelson Andrews, who cofounded the Lady Money Wasters in the 1970s and ran a popular barroom in Tremé, passed away in November at the age of 69. The image will also appear on the cover of a memorial record album and will inspire part of a mural to be painted by Brandon “BMike” Odums in her honor.

Troy “Trombone Shorty” Andrews with his mother, Lois Nelson Andrews, at the funeral parade for David Lastie

1987
photograph by Michael P. Smith © THNOC, 2007.0103.4.389

THNOC provided 20 images to the **Southern Food and Beverage Museum** in New Orleans for an exhibit titled *The Birthplace of Brunch*. The show opened in October and runs through March 2022.

Germaine Cazenave Wells toasting a man in the Richelieu Bar at Arnaud's (detail)

1950; gelatin silver print by Charles L. Franck Photographers
The Charles L. Franck Studio Collection at THNOC, 1979.89.7395





A

A. Jérôme Phélypeaux, comte de Pontchartrain

1727; engraving
courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France

B. Sketch of Old Mobile in 1711, Fort Louis in foreground

from *Mobile of the Five Flags: The Story of the River Basin and Coast about Mobile from the Earliest Times to the Present* (Mobile, AL: Gill Printing Co., 1913) 77-390-RL



B

Cherchez la Sage-femme

Against a backdrop of famine and folly, a pioneering Louisiana midwife served the women and babies of the colony—and became Bienville’s enemy.

Three days before Christmas in 1718, Marie Grissot lay dying, giving her last will and testament. The 48-year-old *maitresse sage-femme* (master midwife) knew that “there is naught as certain as death and nothing more uncertain than the day and hour thereof,” and nowhere was this truer than the harsh home she had made for 14 years, in the fledgling colonial capital of Mobile. Grissot had spent virtually all of those years as Louisiana’s sole midwife, bringing new lives and new hope into a settlement in dire need of both.

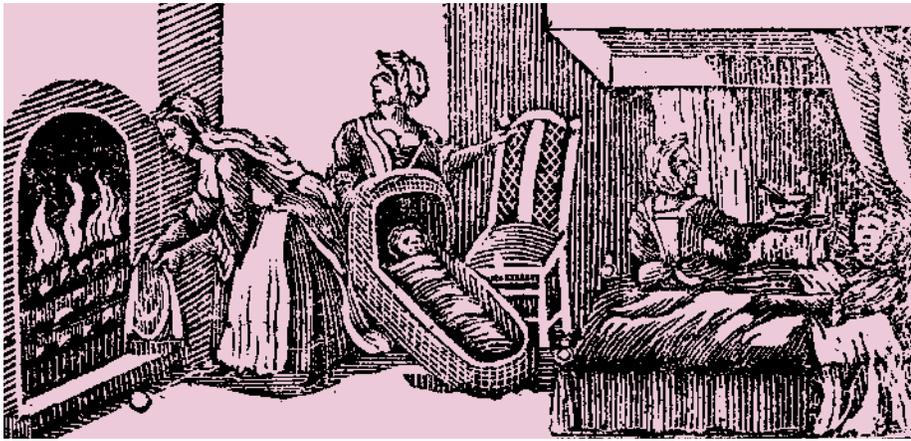
Settling her affairs, she declared herself a devoted Catholic, willed various sums of money to several people, and left the rest of her modest estate to her nephew. The will is formal and standard, with one exception: she took great pains to ensure that her heir’s father, André Pénigault, be “wholly excluded from her succession, without ever being able to pretend to anything whatever.”

Grissot’s bitterness toward Pénigault stemmed from a years-long feud with the young colony’s commandant and de facto ruler, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, sieur de Bienville. Grissot and Bienville had gone head-to-head during the desolate years of Mobile’s early existence, and Pénigault, a carpenter in the colony who had married Grissot’s sister, walked away from the conflict with half of Grissot’s royal salary. It was an offense she took to her grave.

On the surface, the Bienville-Grissot feud was a salary dispute: as royal midwife, Grissot was allotted 400 livres per year. This was a significant sum in as needy an environment as colonial Mobile, and the years leading up to and during the dispute were particularly desperate ones. The colony was cut off for long periods from supplies

and support from France, which was busy hemorrhaging money on wars, and Bienville wanted to reapportion Grissot’s salary elsewhere. But the conflict also called into question the value of Grissot’s work, which centered women and babies. Bienville apparently decided that midwifery presented no appreciable benefit to the colony and attempted to take away her entire salary on the grounds that she was “useless for Louisiana,” according to a 1710 report.

Whether done out of desperation, political malice, misogyny, or a combination of all three, Bienville’s attack on Grissot ran counter to France’s official policies and stated goals for colonial development. Not only was a midwife like Grissot more than useless: the difficult, dangerous business of bearing children was of utmost importance to the young colony.



C. Midwives tending to mother and child engraving frontispiece to *The Compleat Midwife's Companion; or, the Art of Midwifry Improv'd* (London: J. Marshal, 1724) courtesy of Wikicommons

D. "Filles à la cassette"—"casket girls" sent to New Orleans in 1721 to populate the colony wood engraving by L. J. Bridgeman from *The Story of Louisiana* (Boston: D. Lothrop Company, 1888) 1974.25.10.40

The Royal Midwife and the "Future Mothers of Louisiana"

In January 1704, Jérôme Phélypeaux, comte de Pontchartrain—the king's top official in Versailles overseeing the affairs of the colony—wrote to Bienville that a special shipment would be headed to Louisiana. In addition to carrying supplies and soldiers, the *Pélican* was to bring 24 girls "of recognized and irreproachable virtue . . . to be married to the Canadians and others who have begun to make themselves homes on the Mobile in order that this colony may be firmly established." The *Pélican* girls were "the future mothers of Louisiana," writes Jay Higginbotham in his meticulous history *Old Mobile: Fort Louis de la Louisiane, 1702–1711*.

It had been five years since Pierre Le Moyne, sieur d'Iberville, had claimed a vast swath of North America for New France. New Orleans wasn't even a glimmer in Bienville's eye yet; the only settlements in the entire colony were tiny outposts at Ship Island, Fort Maurepas, and Massacre Island (Dauphin Island). In 1702 Iberville had established Mobile, called Fort Louis de la Mobile or Fort Louis de la Louisiane, with the intention of growing it into a large, thriving colonial capital. It was little more than a camp, located at present-day Twenty-Seven Mile Bluff and populated mostly by Canadian fur trappers and French soldiers. (The site of Fort Louis, now referred to as Old Mobile, completely flooded and was abandoned in 1711 for Mobile's present-day location.) Not even a real parish church existed yet; in the same letter about the *Pélican*, Pontchartrain told Bienville he was sending 600 livres to replace or enhance the makeshift structure that had been hastily erected to consecrate the newly created diocese.

God, king, and family were bound together in the logic of New France, with women and children serving a vital role. The Catholic Church was central to France's imperial designs: it was the moral scaffolding by which the French claimed and inhabited a land entirely unknown to them, enslaving many of the Indigenous *sauvages* so as to save their souls while extracting their labor. Devotion to the Holy Family was especially prevalent in Canada; a confraternity (Catholic devotional group) dedicated to the *Sainte-Famille* had been established by the Bishop of Quebec in the late 1660s, and it was popularized over the following decades by the wife of the governor. As bearers of both children and French religion and custom in the home, French women held practical and cultural importance to the Louisiana colony. "The more respectable [families] there are here, the more we shall live in peace and harmony," wrote *ordonnateur* (fiscal officer) Bernard Diron d'Artaguiette.

In Mobile, the resident Canadians, hard-living *coureurs de bois*, were seen as "a heap of the dregs of Canada, jailbirds without subordination for religion and for government," as Antoine





E. *Coueurs de bois* (Canadian trappers) trading furs with Indigenous men

engraving

by William Faden

cartouche from *A Map of the Inhabited Part of Canada from the French Surveys, with the Frontiers of New York and New England* (London: 1777)

courtesy of the Library of Congress

Laumet de La Mothe Cadillac, governor of Louisiana from 1710 to 1716, later described them. Many of the Canadians lived with Native American women; some of these relationships were explicitly forced, through enslavement, while others assumed a more nebulous form, yet the higher-up officials viewed all such arrangements as “shameless dissoluteness,” as Pontchartrain described the situation in 1711. “It is quite contrary to religion and to the increase of the colony.”

The young female conscripts of the *Pélican* were seen as crucial to reversing that trend and to helping both the Canadians and Native Americans adopt European custom. “This will make them very useful to the colony by showing the daughters of the Indians what they can do,” Pontchartrain wrote.

But these new arrivals would need help. “By the same vessel, his Majesty is sending a midwife,” Pontchartrain told Bienville. The midwife in question, however, was not Marie Grissot. It was Catherine Moulois, a master midwife who had trained in Paris. Under the king’s employ, she was granted an annual salary of 400 livres. In comparison, Bienville’s salary was 1,200 livres per year. Grissot, a native of Lorraine, and another unmarried woman, the widow Marie Linant, were hired to look after the health and safety of the girls and assist Moulois as needed.

The *Pélican* completed its three-month transatlantic voyage in July 1704, and “a short time after arriving all the girls married the Canadians and others [French craftsmen and soldiers] who are in a position to support them,” Bienville reported to Pontchartrain.

Bringing Life into a World of Hardship

Not long after the *Pélican*’s arrival, Catherine Moulois died or disappeared—her death is not confirmed in the historical record—and Grissot took over as midwife of the colony, inheriting the job’s 400 livres-per-year salary. As early as October 1704, Grissot is documented as having helped deliver a child into the colony. The first census conducted after the arrival of the *Pélican*, from 1706, lists her as midwife.

As *sage-femme*, Grissot and others that followed her held a level of authority and independence uncommon for most women of the time. In addition to earning a sizeable royal salary, she was able to “enter any home, and could travel at all hours throughout the colony,” according to K. Hanley, who curated *Midwifery and Obstetrics in Louisiana*, a 2017–18 exhibition mounted by the New Orleans Pharmacy Museum. In addition to receiving a salary, Grissot held enslaved people in her service: in 1708 she presented for baptism a man named André, listed as belonging to her, and one census documents four enslaved Native Americans (three male and one female) belonging to her and Linant.

Grissot held religious authority, as well: she was able to perform home baptisms in cases where the newborn was not expected to live. Baptismal records of the Archdiocese of Mobile show Grissot carrying out this sad service a number of times. On October 22, 1704, Grissot baptized a boy born to François and Anne Le May—the second child of European settlers to be born in the entire colony. (The first, it appears, arrived two weeks prior: Jean-François Le Camp was born October 4, 1704, and the 1706 census describes him as the “first child born in the colony,” leaving aside the obvious primacy of Native Americans.) The Le May child, however, was not to join the first generation of Louisiana

Creoles: the baby died and was buried the same day it was born.

The following winter, of 1705, was especially fatal for the infants of the colony. Accounts differ, but it's estimated that at least three newborns died. Accusations flew about who was to blame—Bienville accused the parish curé, Henri Roulleaux de La Vente, of baptizing the children naked in winter, and one family complained that Bienville did not allow them a ration of milk during the infant's illness—but the record does not show Grissot's level of care being called into question. At the time, even in the palaces of Europe, childbirth presented life-threatening risks to mothers and babies. No one in the colony would have been unfamiliar with the reality of infant mortality.

The miserable conditions in Louisiana made survival difficult for everyone, young and old. "There is nothing so sad as the situation of this poor colony," began one report in 1708. Yellow fever had already torn through the settlement in 1704, arriving with the *Pélican* from the ship's stop in Havana and killing approximately 40 people. A tropical storm ("violent squall") blew down Mobile's warehouse and several other structures in August 1708. Livestock was scarce, and supply ships often suffered long delays.

The colonists' attempts to grow wheat and corn as subsistence crops failed utterly: none of them were skilled agricultural workers, and few were desirous of becoming so. Sandy soil and flooding killed many of the plants, and what little grain survived to harvest was quickly spoiled by pests. The agricultural tribes around Mobile successfully grew corn and traded maize with the colonists, but excessive flooding killed some of their crops in 1710—when the colony had not seen a French supply ship since 1708.

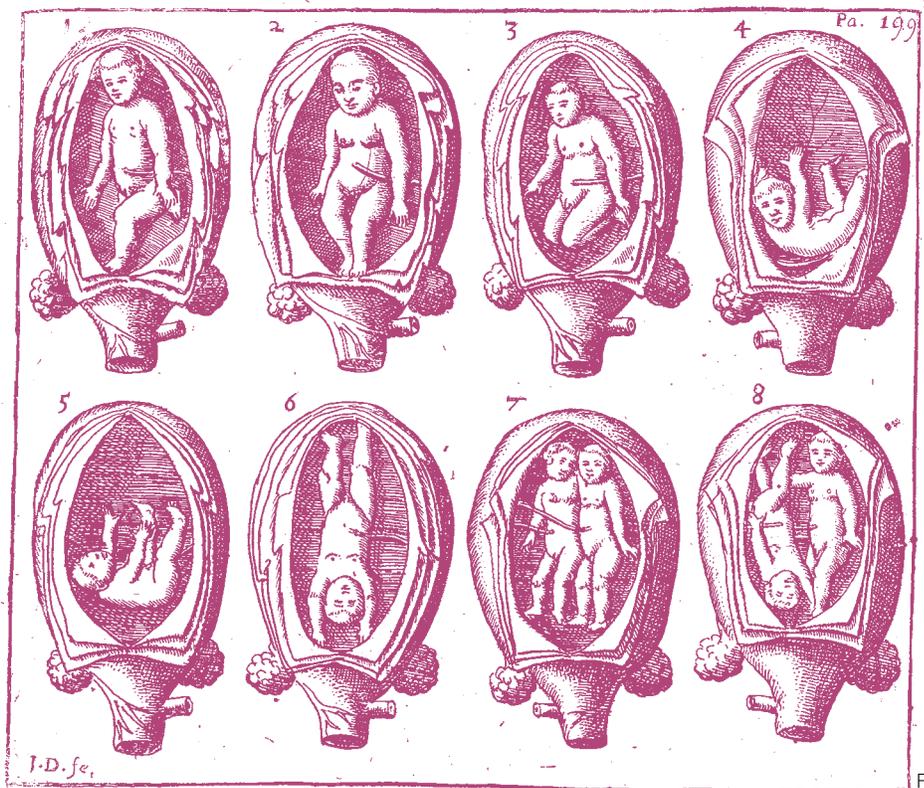
More than once, conditions were so dire and famine so imminent that Bienville sent groups of soldiers to live with allied tribes for the winter, because the colony could not provide for them.

Bienville's Gambit

Bienville's plans for Louisiana were failing, as was his health. Over 1707 and 1708 he lobbied, unsuccessfully, to make a return trip to France, believing that it would cure his "sciatic rheumatism . . . hepatic colic and gout." In short, he was desperate, and it was around this time that he attempted to relieve Marie Grissot of her salary.

Grissot immediately shot back, complaining to Pontchartrain through Nicolas de La Salle, who related the midwife's testimony in a 1709 letter to Versailles. La Salle, the colony's *commissaire* (supply chief), was a veteran bureaucrat 30 years Bienville's senior, and he had recently launched a raft of mismanagement allegations against the young leader, dividing the loyalties of the colonists. Grissot said she had refused to back Bienville and that ever since, he had "authorized whatever evil he wished upon her, by making the argument that a midwife is useless in this Colony, where, he says, the women can give birth on their own."

Grissot pointed to several "accidents" that had happened prior to her and Moulouis's arrival as evidence to the contrary. "She hopes that in consideration of her zeal and her



F. Examples of fetal malpresentation

engraving from *The Midwives Book; or, the Whole Art of Midwifery Discovered* (London: Simon Miller, 1671) courtesy of Wikicommons

G. Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, sieur de Bienville

between 1743 and 1753; oil on canvas acquisition made possible by the Clarisse Claiborne Grima Fund, 1990.49





H

H. Bernard Diron d'Artaguiette

1710

by Alexis Grimou, painter
courtesy of Wikimedia

I. Testimony of Marie Grissot sent in a report from La Salle to Pontchartrain

May 12, 1709

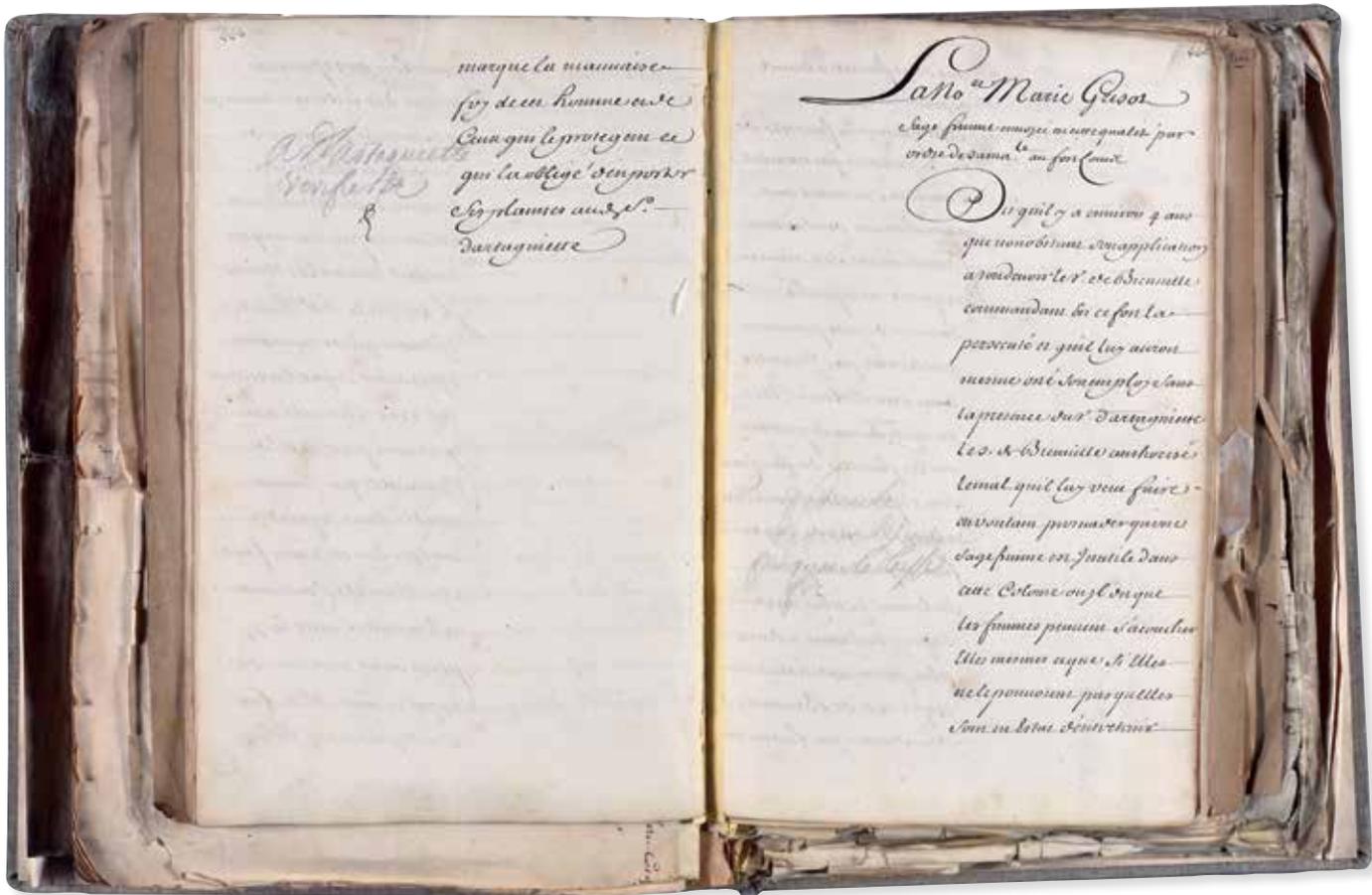
courtesy of the Archives nationales
d'outre-mer

dedication to her duties, and because she left her country to come to this Colony, orders shall be given to maintain her in her employment against the persecution of Sieur de Bienville.”

Bienville’s justification was that Grissot was neglecting her duties: he claimed she was supposed to be tending to the sick of the entire population, as well as laundering the soldiers’ linens. “Mr. d’Artaguiette and I thought that it was useless to have a salary given to a person for no service at all,” he wrote. Grissot said there had been no such scope of work over the preceding years of her service, and moreover, mixing with potentially infectious patients amounted to medical malpractice: in a letter of support from Governor Cadillac to Pontchartrain, she argued that “the care of the sick was contrary to her profession; that the majority of the soldiers were subject to scurvy”—mistakenly believed to be contagious—and that thus after having cared for the scurvy patients she could not at all touch the women in childbed or even the children at birth without running the risk of communicating the disease to them.”

The slashing of royal salaries was not uncommon during these years, both in Louisiana and France. Draining money on war with the English and financing other colonial operations abroad, the mother country was running up debts. Many of the soldiers at Mobile who were promised pay never received more than their basic rations. However, though the circumstances may have warranted a cut, Bienville broke rank by doing so summarily, and Pontchartrain was animated by Bienville’s presumption.

The *ministère* sent a succinct rebuke to Bienville: “I have been informed that you have treated badly the woman named Marie Grissot [*sic*], a midwife, and that you attempted to prevent her from performing the duties for which she was appointed. . . . I must tell you that since this woman was sent there by the King’s order, His Majesty’s intention is that she should remain there, that she should serve there, and that you should be careful not to give her any bad treatment.”



I

In 1711, after receiving Pontchartrain's orders, Bienville and d'Artaquiette presented what they considered a compromise: reinstating Grissot's salary at 50 percent, taking it from 400 to 200 livres. The other 200 livres they gave to Pénigault, the carpenter, "who is much more useful," they argued.

For Pénigault (alternately spelled Pénicaud, Pénigaut, and Perricaud), it helped that he was cut from the same cloth as Bienville. He had worked as a shipbuilder and accompanied Iberville in 1699 on the captain's first exploration of the Mississippi Valley, during which time he began keeping a journal. Like Bienville, he traveled extensively and sojourned with the Natchez, Acolapissa, and Natchitoches peoples, learning some of their languages and customs. After he returned to France in 1721, he compiled his journals and recollections into a narrative, the first full-length account of the French in Louisiana. Neither Grissot nor her services are mentioned anywhere in the document. Just as she excised him from her will, Pénigault omitted her from his story, which was published in English in 1953 as *Fleur de Lys and Calumet: Being the Pénicaud Narrative of French Adventure in Louisiana*.

Louisiana after Marie Grissot

The exact date of Grissot's death is not known, but presumably it occurred not long after she made her will that Christmas of 1718. Her name disappears from the Mobile baptismal register after June 1717. At the time Grissot died, Louisiana was in a period of transition: in August 1717 France handed control of the colony to the Company of the West, the brainchild of Scottish gambler and financier John Law. In less than three years' time it would cause a massive financial boom and bust.

Bienville turned his attention elsewhere, to a new site for the colonial capital located 140 miles to the west. By June 1718, months before Grissot died, Bienville's team was clearing land for what would become New Orleans. Three years later, Grissot's first official successor arrived: Jeanne Sulmon Dauvillé, a master midwife from Paris, was sent to New Orleans under an annual salary of 1,200 livres—a far cry from Grissot's pay even at its fullest. She would remain the colony's only official midwife until 1749.

Grissot and the women and children she served endured unimaginable hardship and loss, facing steep odds to fulfill the reproductive roles France had assigned them. Despite the greater failure of Mobile as a colonial capital and economic engine, Grissot and her patients played an essential role in populating the young colony. Each successful birth must have infused the downtrodden settlement with a dose of the mirth and hope that only new life can bring.

Commissaire Nicolas de La Salle had lost his first wife and youngest son within two years of arriving in Louisiana, but on March 22, 1708, he and his new *Pélican* bride, Jeanne-Catherine de Berenhardt, welcomed a baby boy, christened Henri. He was 53; she was between 18 and 22 and had been specially selected for La Salle by a duchess in Paris, sealing her fate. The child would be orphaned two years later, and La Salle's five-year-old son from his first wife died as well, but for a short while, they were a family.

Such was the dream and folly of colonial imperialism: filling distant shores not only with French forts, plantations, and statesmen but also French families, so that the glory of France could spread around the world. —MOLLY REID CLEAVER



J. Site of Old Mobile, looking toward the Mobile River

1974; photograph by John Martin Freeman from *Old Mobile: Fort Louis de la Louisiane, 1702–1711* (Mobile, AL: Museum of the City of Mobile, 1977) gift of the Williams Prize Committee, 78-429-RL

Special thanks to THNOC Curator Howard Margot for his generous assistance with the French archival documents referenced in this story.

ON THE JOB

Let the Records Show

THNOC's cataloging team has spent the pandemic enhancing thousands of records that previously contained little information about their subjects. Here, four staffers describe the massive undertaking to make sure these pieces of history can be found easily online, through our public catalog.

Michael M. Redmann

POSITION: Manuscripts cataloger, on staff since 2009



Before the pandemic, Becky [Rebecca Smith, head of reader services and technical processing] and Lindsey [Barnes, database manager] had identified about 12,000 records with only some basic information for the title, perhaps a maker or date, and an image displayed with the record online, but nothing in the “description” field. Working from home during lockdown, catalogers could view the images online in the public catalog, research more about the item, and then write descriptions. The descriptions were entered into a spreadsheet, and then Lindsey would load them into the catalog database. This was one of my main projects during lockdown, and I wrote approximately 3,500 descriptions between March 2020 and September 2021.

This work was possible because of online tools that catalogers didn't have decades ago when we first acquired some of these items. Google Maps facilitated hundreds of identifications of buildings and places; using the Street View setting allowed us to confirm a place name when Google's search results came up short. Google Books and various newspaper databases provided new information about many holdings, or allowed us to confirm the existing information in our records. Sometimes, we found that people, places, or events depicted in images had been misidentified or needed corrections.

For example, one record for a photograph was titled “Unidentified school.” The date range between 1955 and 1957 gave me one piece of information to work from, and the acquisition record for the whole group of photographs in this accession pointed me toward the architectural firm Andry & Feitel. Searching NewsBank's *Times-Picayune* archives for references to Andry & Feitel and a new school in that date range, I found a reference to a proposed “New Orleans Negro Trade School.”

The illustration accompanying the 1956 article looked like it could be a match for my photograph. The caption explained that several phases of construction were planned, and it looked like the photograph had captured the first phase. Further newspaper research led me to the school's official name, the Orleans Area Vocational and Technical School, and it also provided an address, 3727 Louisa Street. Looking at an old version of Google Maps Street View, from 2008, I located the then-extant building and learned that its name had changed to Louisiana Technical College Sidney N. Collier Campus. I had seen Collier's name in newspaper reports and knew he was the founding director of the 1950s trade school, so I ran another NewsBank search using his name and found a 1959 article confirming the date of the school's completion and opening.

With all the key names and information in place, I created the new title record for the photograph (“Orleans Area Vocational and Technical School,” the school's name at the time the image was taken) and summarized my findings in the description. I also tagged the record to relevant collection themes about education and segregation.

Orleans Area Vocational and Technical School

between 1955 and 1957; photograph by Industrial Photos 1984.74.22



Emily Perkins

POSITION: Curatorial cataloger, on staff since 2017

This magazine illustration from 1881, by Thomas Nash and entitled *The Way the Contrabands Met the Yankee Soldiers*, is representative of the way that Black people in the American South were depicted and referred to in the national press after the Civil War. For the item's catalog record, additional research and great care went into crafting a description that would place the racist imagery and subtext of the illustration in its historical context.

Racism and white supremacy are present in American and New Orleans history, supported by ample evidence in the historical record, including in our holdings. To truthfully present our past, we must not hide or avoid these materials, and one thing I can do as a cataloger is provide context and choose language that restores humanity to marginalized groups.

In our profession we use controlled vocabularies to consistently describe collections across the United States. These thesauri include language surrounding racial and ethnic identities, physical and mental disabilities, and the LGBTQ community. Language related to enslavement has been developed by the National Park Service, whose recommended terms “freedom seekers” (rather than “escaped slaves”) and “enslavers” (rather than “slave owners”) I used in this description: “The term ‘contrabands’ was used to describe freedom seekers during the Civil War who fled the Confederacy to Union lines hoping to receive protection. Prior to emancipation, most of these freedom seekers were returned to their enslavers, while some were employed as laborers.”

To improve our records for other holdings as well as incoming acquisitions, the cataloging department has been developing a set of house guidelines on descriptive language where race, ethnicity, disabilities, and sexuality are relevant to the historical object.

Working with Michael M. Redmann, Lindsey Barnes, and Becky Smith, we compiled resources from groups like the National Park Service, Missouri State University, the Human Rights Campaign, the Society for American Archivists, and Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia. One result of this collaboration has been the “THNOC Statement on Harmful and Offensive Language,” which appears on the catalog's homepage as well as on individual records to which it pertains. It explains why offensive or challenging themes, terms, tropes, and imagery may be present in our online collections. It also addresses that this work is ongoing and that we welcome feedback from the public to help us update records to reflect our values as an institution.



The Way the Contrabands Met the Yankee Soldiers

1881; wood engraving
by Thomas Nash
1979.115





Catie Sampson

POSITION: Collections processor, on staff since 2020

When Jude Solomon, former curator, retired in 2020, she handed off to me an important project related to the Jules Cahn Collection. Cahn’s 16 mm films and still images of second line parades, jazz funerals, and other New Orleans cultural practices are some of our most-accessed holdings, but many of the catalog records for them have remained incomplete over the years.

Such is the case for the film *Bourbon House No. 1*, which shows a mock jazz funeral for the beloved French Quarter establishment led by grand marshal Matthew “Fats” Houston and accompanied by Dejan’s Olympia Brass Band on September 30, 1964. The old catalog record had Cahn’s title and the date but no description of the event or the people in it. With newspaper and book research, I found the story of the restaurant’s history, closure, and the resulting funeral parade—“Bourbon House Declared Dead,” the *Times-Picayune* headline reads—which also featured musician Alcide “Slow Drag” Pavageau, a fake priest, and French Quarter scenester Barbara Reid dressed in black and lying in a coffin.

Located at the corner of Bourbon and St. Peter Streets, Bourbon House first opened in 1936 and became a favorite restaurant and bar that attracted notables and regular New Orleanians alike. Tennessee Williams, Burl Ives, Noel Rockmore, Lyle Saxon, and William Faulkner all frequented the establishment, but its loss was particularly grievous to locals “because it maintained its neighborhood atmosphere on a street that on the whole went commercial,” according to a 1964 *Times-Picayune* article covering the venue’s closure.

It has been really rewarding to study Cahn’s still- and moving-image materials and add to our understanding of them, making the corresponding catalog records more informative and discoverable for the public. And I’ve learned so much about brass bands and second line culture in the process!

Bourbon House No. 1

1964; 16 mm film

by Jules Cahn

Jules Cahn Collection at THNOC, 2000.78.4.270



Vasser Howorth

POSITION: Manuscripts cataloger, on staff since 2013

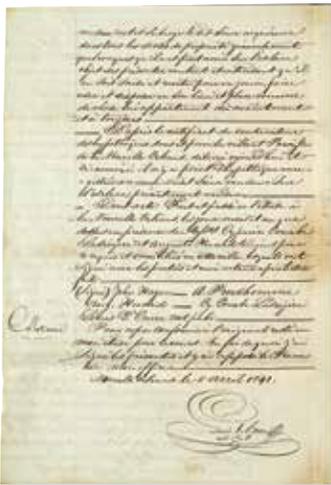
As part of this project to update or complete the titles and descriptions in our catalog, Lindsey sent us a spreadsheet identifying records that contained the word “slave” in either the title or the description. Many of the records were for bills of sale and successions, and quickly I realized that most of the descriptions were lacking any kind of detail about the people whose lives were being recorded in those documents. Most of the descriptions simply said something like “William Tazwell of Richmond, Virginia, sells a slave to George Willis, St. Helena Parish.”

After speaking with Becky and some of my colleagues in the cataloging department, I made it a priority to dig through the documents themselves and find the names of the enslaved people being bought and sold, rather than just changing “slave” to “enslaved person.” After some discussion, we also decided to refer to the men (and women) doing

the buying and selling as “enslavers” or “slaveholders.”

Three collections in particular took a good bit of time and energy in this regard: MSS 44, Slavery in Louisiana; MSS 182, Cane River Collection; and MSS 597, Prudhomme Family Papers. Cane River was a challenge because it is a large collection and the majority of it is in French, a language in which I am not at all fluent—not to mention the fact that early 19th-century handwriting can be difficult to read even in English. The Prudhomme Family Papers are fully digitized, which allowed me to zoom in on the images of the documents to decipher names.

Now, after nearly two years of work, hundreds of names and other pieces of information about these documents no longer exist solely in the images on our catalog; they’re fully searchable as part of the database, allowing researchers to more easily find people, places, and events connected to their areas of study. Whereas the old descriptions tended to ignore the identity of the enslaved people mentioned in the documents, a person looking at our descriptions of these records is now more likely to see something like “Bill of sale for Eliza and Charlotte to enslaver Antoine Prudhomme” (99-109-L.82).



Bill of sale of Jannette to slaveholder Antoine Prudhomme

1841
99-109-L.95

STAFF NEWS

New Staff

In November The Collection welcomed **Heather L. Hodges**, THNOC’s first-ever director of internal and external relations. Hodges comes to The Collection with many years of professional, legal, and community work behind her. Most recently she served as executive director of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, a federal National Heritage Area headquartered on Johns Island, South Carolina. In that role, she was charged with raising public awareness of Gullah Geechee history and culture in addition to working to preserve Gullah Geechee land ownership and their unique, Creole language.

A graduate of American University in Washington, DC, as well as the Tulane University School of Law, Hodges has practiced law in both the private and nonprofit sectors. She has served on numerous boards and is currently a member of the Board of Trustees of the American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress. She also sits on the advisory board of the Joyner Institute for Gullah and African Diaspora Studies at Coastal Carolina University. Hodges also frequently gives talks and writes broadly about African American history and culture in the South.

In her new role at THNOC, Hodges will oversee both the Communications and



Heather L. Hodges

Development departments in addition to helping to foster initiatives related to IDEA principles (inclusivity, diversity, equity, and accessibility). She will be responsible for developing collaborations to maximize public awareness of THNOC and for broadening local community engagement with the institution.

Title Changes

Sarah Duggan is now Decorative Arts of the Gulf South project manager. **Rachel Gaudry** is now curator of education.

In the Community

Senior curator **Mark Cave** served on the Local Arrangements Committee for the annual conference of the American Historical Association, which was held in New Orleans January 6–9. Cave also participated in two panel discussions, one on the COVID-19 pandemic in New Orleans and another on historical storytelling.

On February 26 **Heather L. Hodges**, director of internal and external relations, presented a talk at the International Gullah Geechee and African Diaspora Conference at Coastal Carolina University. The title of the talk was “‘I Heard the Angels Singing’: Archival Sound Recordings of the Gullah Geechee People Who Inspired Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*.”

CRM Specialist **Anne M. Robichaux** was named co-chair of two user groups related to Tessitura, THNOC’s customer relationship management system—one locally based and the other a national group dedicated to data analysis.

Publications

Judith H. Bonner, senior curator and curator of art, published an article on the artist John Clemmer in the winter 2022 issue of *Tulanian* magazine.

Heather L. Hodges has an essay, “Freedom’s Eve to Jubilee: Race, Reconciliation, and Atonement in the Gullah Geechee Watch Night Tradition,” that appears in the work *Ukweli: Searching for Healing Truth | South Carolina Writers and Poets Explore American Racism* (Evening Post Books, February 2022).



FOCUS ON PHILANTHROPY

Caitlin and Sean Cherry

On a typical evening, you can find Caitlin and Sean Cherry in their Gentilly home with their infant daughter, Margaret. Perhaps they're planning or attending an event as co-chairs of the Caillot Circle, THNOC's member organization for young professionals. But come summer, there's one place they'll be every Sunday: the kickball field.

Both Caitlin and Sean are longtime members of Kickball of Crescent City, the legendary league that predates Hurricane Katrina and currently boasts 18 teams with names like the Beat-Alls (Caitlin's team) and the Pie-Holes (Sean's). Caitlin is from Metairie, Sean from Slidell, and the kickball community has provided the Cherrys a fun, funky way to put down roots in New Orleans together. "One of Sean's old teammates helped deliver our baby," Caitlin said. "You can text any number of them [teammates and league friends] if you need help."

Sean and Caitlin met working at Reginelli's Pizzeria in the Central Business District—"a long winding pizza road," Caitlin joked of their courtship—and they are now franchise co-owners of a Reginelli's in Mandeville. Sean manages the Uptown location, and Caitlin works as a paralegal for Perrier and Lacoste, LLC.

Sean's family is originally from Staten Island, New York, and though he remains a Knicks basketball fan, there's room for only one football team in the Cherry household. "I'm a through-and-through Saints fan," Caitlin said. Caitlin's hometown pride is so strong, she hesitated to evacuate to Houston for Hurricane Ida, at the end of August, for fear that the baby would be born out of state. "I was 36 weeks, and when they said [Ida was] Category 4 I was like, 'Ok, let's go,' but I cried the whole way," she said. "It was very important for me to have her here. When we crossed over into Lake Charles driving

back after two weeks in Houston, I said, 'Ok you can come out.' Just being back in Louisiana, I felt relieved." Margaret was born 10 days later.

Caitlin's love of South Louisiana inspired her interest in its history, which took off in college at the University of New Orleans. "One of my favorite classes was on the history of New Orleans," she said. "One of the books we read was *The World That Made New Orleans*, by Ned Sublette, and it really piqued my interest, because New Orleans was basically a swamp and was almost uninhabitable. Then with the French and the Spanish, we became colonized, and you can definitely see the influences from everyone who had a part in building New Orleans. It's really diverse history and it's expansive history and very interesting to me."

Caitlin and Sean are bringing their experience with history, community, and fun to their roles as Caillot Circle co-chairs. They first joined in 2020, and though the pandemic had taken in-person gatherings off the table, they were charmed by The Collection's ways of connecting despite the challenges. For a virtual discussion about the exhibition and book *Dancing in the Streets: Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs of New Orleans*, THNOC provided attendees with ya-ka-mein from Linda Green, "The Ya-Ka-Mein Lady," for pickup to eat at home. The virtual program featured a brass band and Bernard Robertson of Sudan Social and Pleasure Club. The clubs, Caitlin said, "really embody the spirit of New Orleans, coming together as a community and having fun while doing it."

Having a ball while strengthening social ties and providing mutual aid is what keeps the Cherrys in New Orleans, they said. "It's about family and community," said Caitlin. "When something bad happens to us, we bounce back. It's really encouraging to see that, especially with a baby now. It's encouraging to see how resilient as a whole New Orleans is, whether it be a hurricane, COVID, anything—I always feel that it's home for everyone, and they'll fight for it. They're proud to call it home." —MOLLY REID CLEAVER

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October–December 2021

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Left and below: Bruce Sunpie Barnes of the North Side Skull and Bone Gang displays and discusses elements of his costume for a video series related to the exhibition *Making Mardi Gras*.

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ON THE SCENE

Camera Talk and a Carnival Toast



In November The Collection debuted a new annual lecture series honoring recently retired Head of Museum Programs John H. Lawrence, whose curatorial expertise shaped THNOC's photographic holdings over the course of a four-decade career. Internationally renowned artist Dawoud Bey presented the **Jules L. Cahn Annual John H. Lawrence Photography Lecture** as the keynote of PhotoNOLA, the city's annual photography festival. Bey's work *In This Here Place* was on view at THNOC through January 23 as part of the art triennial Prospect.5.

- A. Fred Husserl and Owen Murphy
- B. Judy Cooper, Tom Bennett, and Charles Lovell
- C. Front row, left–right: Daniel Hammer, James Cahn, Marie Cahn, and John H. Lawrence. Back row: Eric Augustin and Elise Cahn
- D. L. Kasimu Harris and Allison Young
- E. Joseph Moran and Lynn Eisha
- F. Vikesh Kapoor and Brian Piper
- G. Naima J. Keith and Dawoud Bey

On January 6 the **Krewe de Jeanne d'Arc** paraded through the French Quarter to kick off the Carnival season. As has become tradition, THNOC gave a toast to the history-themed krewe as the revelers passed in front of the Williams Research Center.

H. New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell, President and CEO Daniel Hammer, and Nathalie Beras, consul general of France in Louisiana, toast Joan of Arc from the balcony of the Perrilliat House (THNOC offices) on Chartres Street.

I. Karley Frankic, Cara Lambert, and Fritz Kern

J. Lisa D. Alexis, Mayor LaToya Cantrell, and Alana Harris

K. Nathalie Beras, Daniel Hammer, and Margarita Bergen



Related Holdings



714 Governor Nicholls Street

1925
The Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carré Digital Survey,
a project of THNOC, N-1067



Baling Cotton

by C. Cullen, after Alfred R. Waud
January 14, 1871; wood engraving with
watercolor
from Harper's Weekly
The L. Kemper and Leila Moore Williams
Founders Collection, 1966.23



Cotton Pressing in Louisiana

1856; wood engraving
by A. Hill, delineator
gift of Harold Schilke and Boyd Cruise,
1959.159.33

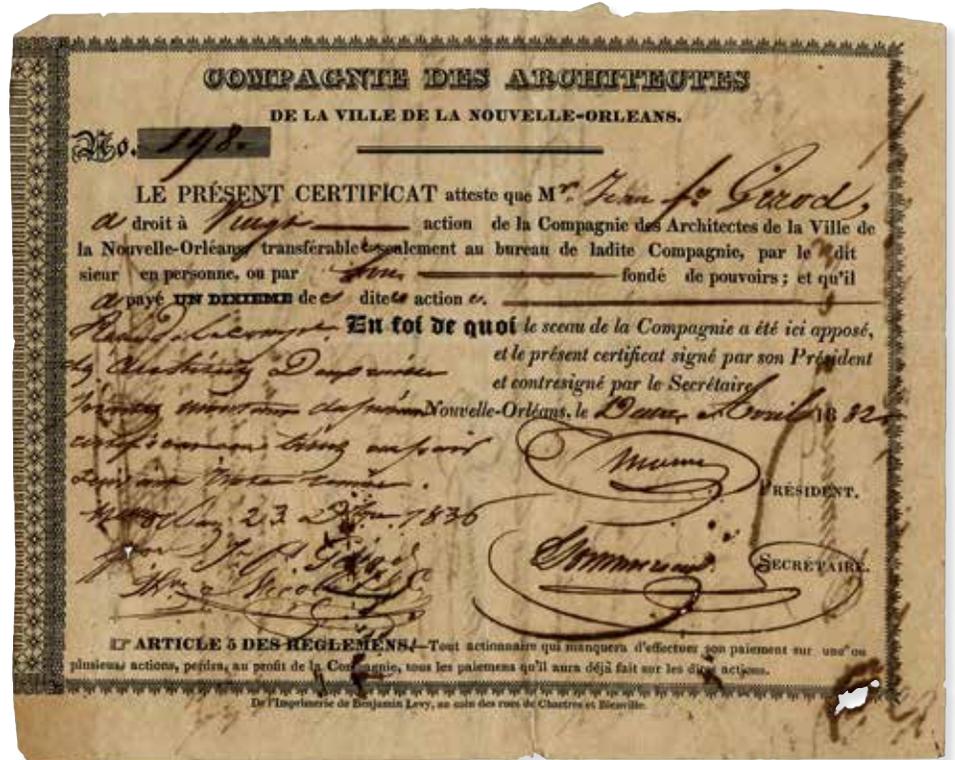


Loading Steamboats at New Orleans

ca. 1860; albumen print
by Jay Dearborn Edwards
1985.238

ACQUISITION SPOTLIGHT

In High Cotton, a Building Boom



Company of Architects stock certificate
2021.0167.2

Founded in 1828, the Company of Architects (la Compagnie des Architectes) made a lasting impact on French Quarter architecture. Twenty-one townhouses it constructed between 1831 and 1834 still stand: 12 comprising one entire side of the 1100 block of Royal Street, five on the 1200 block of Decatur Street, three on the 700 block of Governor Nicholls Street, and one at 715 Ursulines Avenue.

The company's birth coincided with the start of the cotton boom, which would make New Orleans the third-largest city in the US by 1840. Enterprising locals, especially the free people of color who

dominated the building trades in this era, had been successfully erecting houses and “flipping” property for decades, but the Company of Architects represented a new level of real estate investment and construction in response to the cotton money beginning to flow through the city. Technological advances in textile manufacturing in England were making cotton-based consumer goods widely available and affordable; through the extractive system of slavery, American cotton growers met the increasing demand for raw material, creating unheard-of wealth for both the Southern planter aristocracy and a new, increasingly non-native group of investors.

As more money and more moneyed people flooded into the city, the market

swelled for bigger, fancier homes. Grander Creole townhouses (for traditionalists) and Greek Revival American townhouses (for newcomers) were what the nouveau riche wanted—not so much the relatively modest Creole cottages that had been favored by most locals prior to the 1830s. The earliest architectural firms in the city—Latour & Laclotte, Gurlie & Guillot—worked primarily on commission for individual homebuyers, but the Company of Architects existed more as a speculative investment firm than as an architectural service per se.

In December 1828 the company purchased the lots in the 1100 block of Royal and, three months later, sold the extant buildings at auction. (The buyers did not purchase the lot, only the structure; they were responsible for moving it, either intact or disassembled.) In the winter of 1831–32 the company erected the 12 elegant rowhouses that stand today, selling them and their corresponding lots at auction.

This certificate for 20 shares of stock, recently acquired by THNOC, was purchased on April 2, 1832, by Jean-François Girod, younger brother and business partner of New Orleans mayor Nicholas Girod. It's signed by the company's president, notary public Jules Mossy. One of the firm's noted architects was Alexander T. Wood, designer of the red-brick Julia Street rowhouses known as the Thirteen Sisters (built 1832–33), as well as the US Custom House (built 1848–81).

The certificate states that Girod paid only one-tenth the price of the shares up front, and that if he (or any stockholder) failed to meet payments, he would lose his investment. The verso was used as a ledger for Girod's installments, countersigned by the company's treasurer. The last entry is dated 1840.

This document is a fine illustration of New Orleans business and family interests in the booming 1830s, and how a local company, many of whose houses would be purchased by newcomers to the city, could attract noteworthy local investors. —HOWARD MARGOT

RECENT ADDITIONS

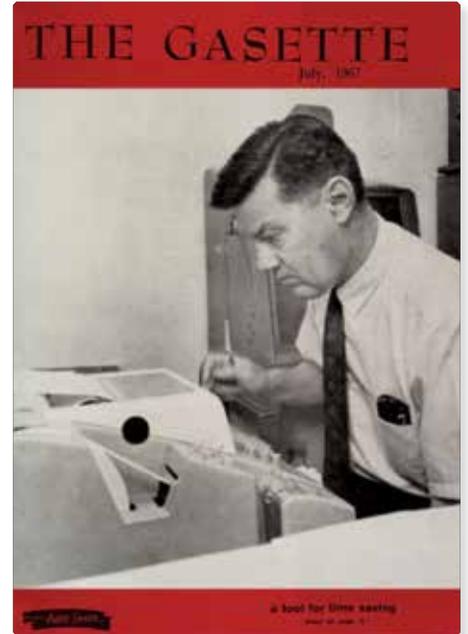
NOPSI Rags and a Ninth Ward Landmark

New Orleans Public Service Inc. house organs

gift of George W. Gula, 2021.0170

The Historic New Orleans Collection recently acquired many volumes of NOPSI internal magazines covering 1951–57 and parts of the 1960s.

New Orleans Public Services Inc. was the forerunner of Entergy New Orleans. Formed in the 1920s as a public-private partnership consolidating the jumble of commercial utilities that had developed over the course of the 19th century, NOPSI provided gas and electric services and ran the city's public transportation until the formation of the Regional Transit Authority in 1983. Its many divisions are represented in these publications: *Transit Service*, house organ for the Transit Department; *With Power*, house organ for the Power Division; *The Gasette*, house organ for the Gas Department; *Electric Distribution News*, house organ for the Distribution Division; and *The Spur*, the publication of the NOPSI Women's Committee, which represented NOPSI's



female employees in various departments such as the Credit and Collection Division and Accounting.

House organs are magazines published by companies for their employees, typically containing news about company projects, employee activities, and HR policies. They were extremely popular in the mid-20th century with the growth of corporations and large metropolitan utility companies following World War II. Though there were separate house organs for different divisions of NOPSI, much of the content is shared across the publications.

New Orleans experienced exponential growth during the United States' post-war economic boom, and NOPSI's house organs kept its thousands of employees up-to-date on the status of major infrastructure projects underway. The extension of gas services to Gentilly Woods in 1951 and then to the Venetian Isles in 1967 are both written about in detail in these magazines, as are updates to the Carrollton substation in 1951 and the erection of the Michoud Unit 3 gas generator in 1967.

ACQUISITIONS

Though NOPSI operated in partnership with city government, it was a commercial entity; for many years it was part of a large subsidiary owned by General Electric. Many issues of the house organs feature antisocialist and anti-big government propaganda on the back cover.

The publications also include news about employees and their families, including births, marriages, and deaths. There were columns where employees could submit their personal news, such as vacations taken, homes purchased, and children's graduations or dance performances. New employees were welcomed in every issue and veteran employees congratulated for work anniversaries or retirement.

These magazines offer not just a look at the history of New Orleans public services—they also give us a glimpse into the lives of so many people who made those services possible. —NINA BOZAK

Club Desire illustrated history and documentary

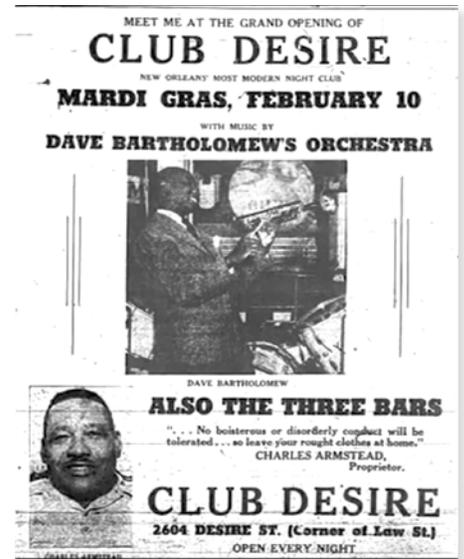
gift of Jeramé J. Cramer, 2021.0003.1.1;
gift of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2022.0002

Club Desire, a mainstay of the city's mid-20th century club scene, opened in 1948 at 2604 Desire Street in the Ninth Ward and operated as a nightclub and music venue through the 1980s. Its heyday in the 1950s and early '60s corresponded with the rise of rhythm and blues in New Orleans, during which time segregation laws defined it as an African American club. During that era, both Dave Bartholomew and Fats Domino had residencies at Club Desire. Sadly, damage following Hurricane Katrina eventually led to the demolition of the historic building. As part of that process, FEMA undertook an extensive recordation project, which produced an illustrated history of the venue and an accompanying documentary; copies of both were recently donated to THNOC.

The illustrated history comprises a print pamphlet and digital photographs, and the donation also includes the raw interview

footage and interview notes produced during the documentary filmmaking process.

The finished film, about 45 minutes long, includes memories of the club from musicians such as Bobby Love, Deacon John, Little Freddie King, and Roger Lewis, interspersed with clippings from the *Louisiana Weekly*. Also featured are Dana Royster-Buefort, granddaughter of original owner Charles Armstead, and Marguerite Doyle Johnston, who grew up next to the club and fought to preserve it. Veteran music journalist and historian



Rick Coleman helps place the club within the context of New Orleans music culture and the emergence of rhythm and blues at the time.

Together, the illustrated history, documentary, and raw footage capture the life and story of Club Desire—how it rose to a place of prominence in the city's mid-century music scene and played a role in both the rise of rock 'n' roll and the lives of the downtown residents who frequented it. The material substantively adds to THNOC's holdings related to 20th-century popular music, midcentury Black life in New Orleans, and the Ninth Ward neighborhood. —ERIC SEIFERTH





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The Historic New Orleans Collection is a nonprofit institution dedicated to the stewardship of the history and culture of New Orleans and the Gulf South. Founded in 1966 through the Kemper and Leila Williams Foundation, The Collection operates as a museum, research center, and publisher in the heart of the French Quarter.



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Desire streetcar (detail)

1947 or 1948

by Joseph Woodson "Pops" Whitesell

1999.44.3

The Kemper and Leila Williams Foundation

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FROM THE SHOP



Let your Fest flag fly

Celebrate the long-awaited return of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival with this Professor Longhair flag, available exclusively at The Shop at The Collection. No Jazz Fest would be complete without a taste of Michael P. Smith's photographs of New Orleans music icons, and once again The Shop will be set up near the Louisiana Folklife Village offering ready-to-frame prints. Come by and say hello!

Professor Longhair flag, 28" x 40"
Etta James; 1979; *photograph by Michael P. Smith*
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