

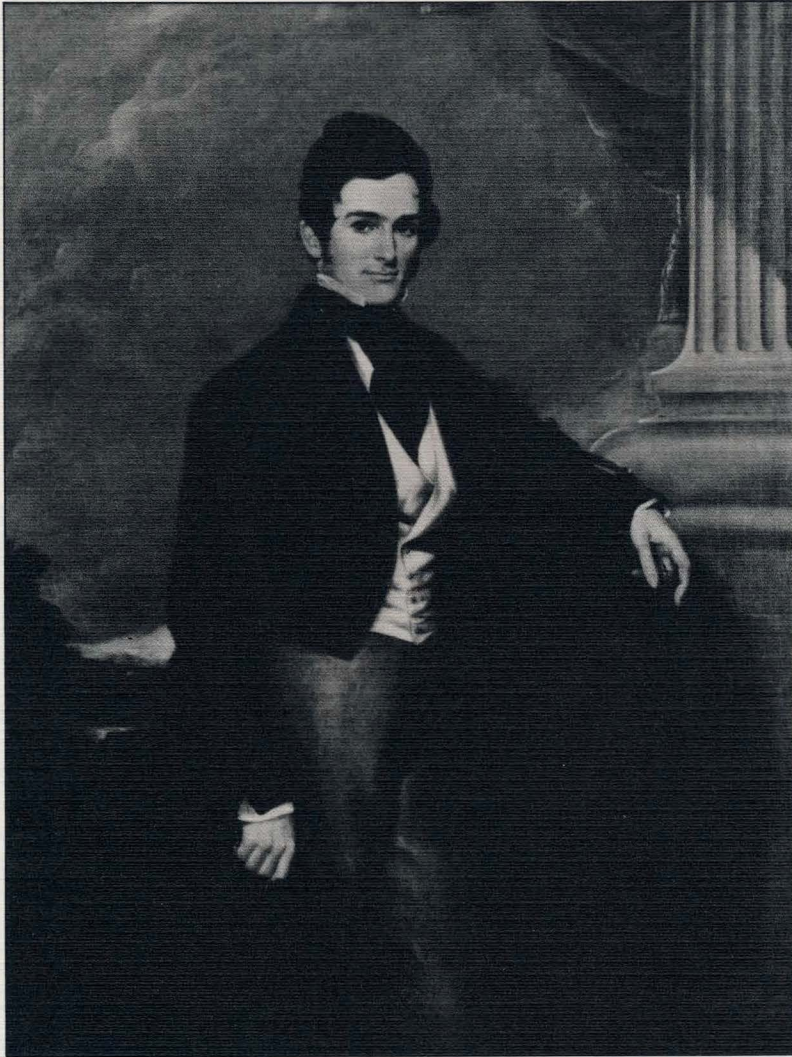


THE HISTORIC NEW ORLEANS COLLECTION NEWSLETTER

Volume IV, Number 1

Winter 1986

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*James Robb by G.P.A. Healy, ca.
1845-46. Courtesy J. Hampden Robb*

ROBB PAPERS DISCOVERED

James Robb, a self-made financial giant of national significance, played a dominant role in the booming mid-19th-century economy of New Orleans. His permanent legacy to the city includes its first interstate railroad, the success of the gaslight company that became New Orleans Public Service, the reunification of a politically divided city, and the remnants of an international art collection in the New Orleans Museum

of Art and in private holdings.

The public aspects of his career could be documented in contemporary newspapers, corporate records, and an early thesis, but information about his private life and personal finances has been sketchy—the subject of speculation and misinformation. Myths are common about his grand Garden District mansion, art collection, and family affairs. (See related story, p. 7.)



Louisa W. Robb and daughters by Thomas Sully, ca. 1845-46. Courtesy J. Hampden Robb

Through a fortuitous combination of acquisitions, the Historic New Orleans Collection has become the major repository of manuscript material on James Robb in the nation. Since July 1985, approximately 2,400 items have been acquired: personal correspondence, a family scrapbook, incoming and outgoing financial correspondence, business records, leases, receipts, and contracts.

The first group of papers was acquired from an unusual source, a gun collector in the Midwest. Two donations quickly followed. James Robb's great-grandson, J. Hampden Robb of Boston, donated 905 items relating to business affairs, an extremely rich collection for a financial study; Mr. Robb also clarified family details and provided photographs of the family portraits which

illustrate this story. Herbert Grey of Framingham, Massachusetts, donated 157 items of particular interest to art historians: letters and receipts detail the acquisition and, later, the sale of the Robb art collection.

A large black tin box with a paper label, marked "James Robb," housed the most recent addition to the Robb collection. Acquired locally, it contained approximately 600 letters and documents, including an invaluable notebook detailing Robb's financial holdings in 1856. This notebook stated that all important financial papers, leases, contracts, and agreements "may be found in my Tin Box."

For sheer drama, James Robb's life was worthy of the stage. At 13, he left home in western Pennsylvania to make his way in the world.

Walking through snow drifts, he arrived in Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia), in January 1827 and quickly got a job as a messenger boy. He wrote to his widowed mother, Mary Robb, "It may be that I may get seventy two or a hundred dollars a year, If I be a good boy And I hope it may be so."

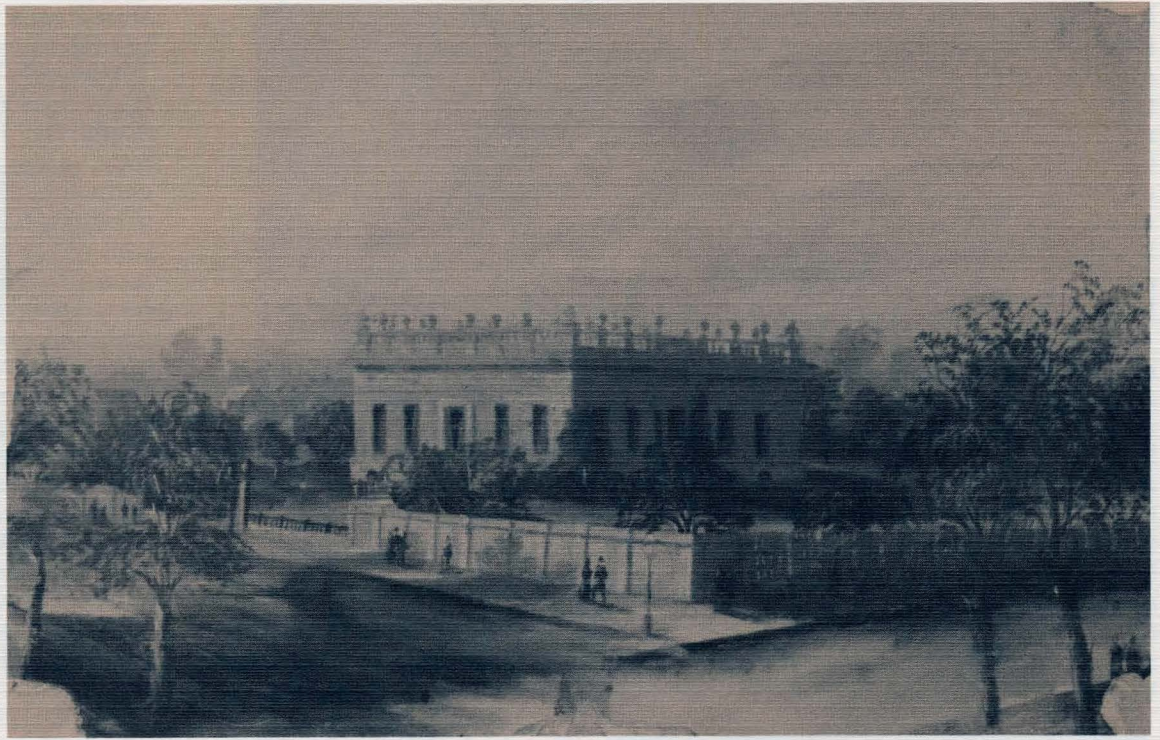
Hard work and a sharp intelligence brought him rapid progress in banking: by 1835 he was successful enough to marry Louisa Werninger, a lady six years his senior. Intent on making a fortune, he scouted other cities for commercial opportunities before deciding that New Orleans offered the best possibility for realizing his ambition. In 1837 he opened a brokerage office and settled his growing family downtown on St. Charles Street.

During the next 20 years James Robb piled up a fortune through successful private banks, including branches in San Francisco, New York, and Liverpool. He rescued the faltering New Orleans Gas Light and Banking Company (today NOPSI), organized the Spanish Gas Light Company in Havana, and was the moving spirit in building the New Orleans, Jackson, and Great Northern Railroad Company. Correspondence and records from all these enterprises are contained in the Robb Papers.

A leading Whig, he was the intimate of John Slidell and Judah P. Benjamin, who wrote gloomily in 1858, "Poor Jeff Davis is very ill: his recovery is quite doubtful." This collection contains correspondence from these and other political leaders, including President Zachary Taylor.



James Robb's tin box



Robb mansion on Washington Avenue, pastel by Theodore Stark Wilkinson, ca. 1875. Courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Hugh M. Wilkinson, Jr.

**THE HISTORIC
NEW ORLEANS
COLLECTION
NEWSLETTER**

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The Historic New Orleans Collection

The fashionable Garden District, a suburb with imposing mansions built by wealthy American businessmen, was the obvious neighborhood for James Robb's new home. In 1851 he leased his downtown house and moved Mrs. Robb and the children to a large frame house on the corner of Prytania and Third, which he had rented for the interim. The Robb family included four daughters—Isabella Aurelia (Bell), Louisa, Mary (Molly), Charlotte Matilda (Mattie)—and a son, James Hampden (Hammie). The children attended Episcopal schools, and the Robbs bought a pew in Trinity Church on Jackson Avenue, where the rector was Bishop Leonidas Polk, a family friend.

Mr. Robb briefly entered state politics, serving as state senator long enough to guide the reunification of New Orleans, which had been divided into three separate municipalities. As part of that effort, the City of Lafayette, which included the Garden District, was also incorporated into New Orleans in 1852. Meanwhile, James Robb bought a considerable amount of property in the area, including two entire squares of land.

The most conspicuous symbol of his success was to be a grand man-

sion occupying an entire square block on Washington Avenue—at a time when a mansion with gardens customarily occupied a quarter square. Although not conclusively documented, the architect of the house was probably James Gallier, Jr. Robb bought the property in 1852, and on January 22, 1853, it was surveyed at the request of architects Gallier, Turpin & Co. In April 1855 interior details, such as locks and hardware, were being completed, but finishing touches to the exterior of the Italianate palazzo and to the surrounding gardens of semi-tropical plants continued until the fall of 1855. The Robb family moved into their new home sometime during that spring or summer, and the second daughter, Louisa, graduated in June from Miss Hull's (Episcopal) School.

Contrary to fantasies about grand balls and garden parties at the elegant Robb mansion, the Robbs probably did not entertain at all. Ordinarily they would have left the city right after Louisa's graduation to avoid the "sickly season": yellow fever and other diseases regularly attacked New Orleans during the summer, and the Robbs always spent the summer in northern resorts. That year, however, they could not

leave because Mrs. Robb was suffering from an illness, perhaps cancer, that would eventually prove fatal. A friend wrote, "I sincerely regret to learn of Mrs. Robb's continued illness, but hope her health will soon permit leaving your sickly season. which would so greatly relieve your anxiety you must now suffer for her and your unacclimated Daughters."

But Mrs. Robb was too ill to be moved. During the long, hot, terrifying summer of 1855 the family remained in New Orleans while yellow fever raged, causing over 1,000 deaths. One of the victims was Louisa Robb, who died September 26. Mrs. Robb's death followed on October 13. The following afternoon the architect Thomas Wharton noted in his diary the long funeral cortege proceeding "from their 'superb mansion' to the 'chambers of death.'"

A major exhibition is being planned . . .

Apparently devoted to his wife, described by the New Orleans *Democrat* (August 7, 1881) as entering "with thorough sympathy and the co-operation of excellent sense, judgment, and thrift into all his views and aspirations," James Robb decided to make an extended visit in Europe with his surviving children. In the spring of 1856 he turned over his business affairs to Phoenix N. Wood, a trusted business associate, and leased the mansion, where the family had lived such a short time, to Supreme Court Justice Thomas Slidell. By August they were in England, ready to move on to France.

The European trip had disastrous financial and emotional consequences for the Robb family. While the older girls traveled and visited, Hattie was placed in a boarding school conducted by a Lutheran clergyman in Vevey, Switzerland, where he remained until 1858. An early letter from the bewildered little boy to his sister Molly reflects the dramatic changes in his life, "i am thinking of [you] all the time i am very un happy i cri evry night. . . Your only Brother. . ."



At work on the Robb Papers, left to right, Howard Estes, Doug Harmon, Cathy Kahn, Taronda Spencer, and Alix Samuels.

Bell, the eldest daughter, was introduced into French society through her father's acquaintance with the Queen Mother of Spain, with whom he had been associated in the Havana gaslight venture. In November 1856 Bell received a proposal from a Spanish nobleman, who was related to Queen Cristina; they were married in September 1857 at Malmaison, the queen's residence.

However, James Robb was called back to the United States by calamity. A business panic struck the United States in 1857, setting off a depression. In his prolonged absence, some of the Robb banks failed, creating a financial crisis in his affairs. Although not completely ruined, he shouldered a huge amount of debt, which he devoted the next several years of his life to paying, as a matter of personal honor.

His financial situation was worsened because of Louisiana's community property laws. After his wife's death, their children had legal claims on her share of the Robb property; in any attempt to reorganize his affairs he had to satisfy the courts that the interests of his minor children were being protected. In addition, Bell and her husband demanded her promised share of Mrs. Robb's estate, in effect, her dowry. These demands came at the worst possible time for James Robb and embittered his relationship with his daughter for many years, though at the end of his life Bell returned to the United

States, *sans* Spaniard, to live with her father.

Through 1857 and 1858 Mr. Robb traveled back and forth between the United States and Europe, attempting to salvage his investments. By 1859 he determined to sell his New Orleans property, as well as a great part of his art collection. He emerged with some remnant of his fortune intact and with acceptable financial arrangements for his children. He had also become secretly engaged to a widow from Georgia, Elizabeth Craig Church. During the next few years, first in Chicago, and then in New York, James Robb recovered much of his fortune through railroad and banking ventures. He and Mrs. Church subsequently married and apparently were quite happy—despite typical problems with stepchildren on both sides—until her death in 1868.

In 1866 James Robb attempted to regain his position in New Orleans, founding the Louisiana National Bank. However, as a Union supporter, he met cold shoulders from his former friends; he sold his interest in the bank in 1869 and returned to the North.

James Robb's marriage in 1869 to a Virginia belle, Mrs. Martha Standard, was the mistake that soured the last years of his life. This third marriage was terribly unhappy, and the couple separated. Mr. Robb retired to his mother's Gothic villa outside Cincinnati. He consoled himself with his books and his art collection, which included a Rubens. He died in 1881 after a long illness.

His career is so significant in New Orleans history that the staff of the manuscripts division made the processing and inventory of these documents their top priority. According to cataloger Taronda Spencer, the James Robb Papers have been given a preliminary arrangement; cataloging is under way with a finding aid soon to be produced. The collection will be available to researchers in spring 1986.

A major exhibition on James Robb is already being planned at the Collection. Curators hope to assemble a portion of the Robb art collection, in addition to a display of artifacts, portraits, documents, photographs, and house plans.

—Patricia Brady Schmit



I'm sorry I never got to see James Robb's opulent 19th-century mansion. It was a palatial residence in the prevailing Italian style and the largest property in an area known for its imposing homes, the Garden District. The next best thing to a tour of Robb's palazzo, which at one time housed Newcomb College, is the outstanding collection of papers that have come our way and serve to recreate the life and business ventures of a great New Orleans entrepreneur.

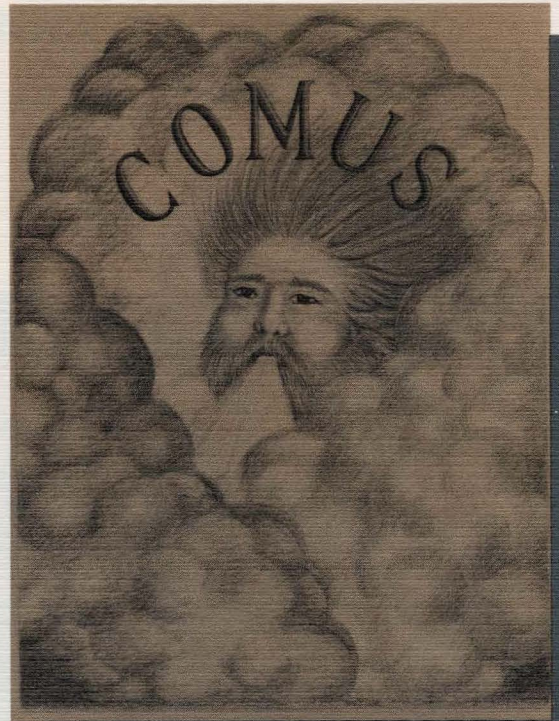
I had always heard about Robb's art collection. Now, thanks to a donation of letters and sales vouchers, all of us concerned with history and art can discover what he collected. Some of his art remained at home, such as the New Orleans Museum of Art's *Toilet of Psyche* by Natoire. Other items were scattered. And some pieces are probably in New Orleans's homes, with the owners unaware of the provenance. Take a look at the list from the Robb art collection sale on page 13—you may discover a painting or sculpture originally owned by the legendary Mr. Robb.

The Robb collection is not only an impressive resource; it also underscores the importance of donating papers, family or otherwise, to an institution dedicated to preserving them. Most of us have a musty drawer, a stuffy attic, or a damp storeroom filled with papers which deserve better treatment and a wider audience. Donations are the lifeblood of THNOC, and both sizeable collections and single-item gifts are greatly appreciated. Such donations are invaluable in reconstructing events of the past.

Robb's mansion, once grand on Washington Avenue, was demolished in the 1950s. But items in our manuscripts division can still yield the man and his times.

—S.F.

1984 Comus invitation
(1984.26.6)



The Mistick Krewe

On view in the Williams Gallery through March 21 is the exhibition, *The Mistick Krewe: 130 Years of Comus*, organized by curator John H. Lawrence. Comus, founded in 1857 by six New Orleanians, is the oldest of the carnival organizations in New Orleans and is responsible for the celebration of Mardi Gras as it is practiced today. The richness of the Mistick Krewe's history and the continuity that it has provided for the carnival season are the themes of the exhibition.

Working closely with members of the organization, the float builders, and costumer, and drawing from collections around the city and from its own extensive Mardi Gras holdings, the Collection has assembled an array of items covering many facets of Comus. Colorful invitations to the ball on Mardi Gras night, original artwork for invitations of recent years, and designs used in the preparation of costumes and floats are on display. Float ornamentation, costumes, and the queen's gown and jewels from 1972 are exhibited, as well as other costume accessories from earlier in this century. Visitors may observe closely the work on the floats, which often pass too rapidly

to be appreciated, as well as details of the clothing worn by members of the court.

One section of the exhibition focuses on the ball and meeting of the courts of Rex and Comus. One of the oldest traditions and expressions of pageantry, the visitation by Rex and his queen to Comus and his queen, is the climax of the Mardi Gras season.

Mardi Gras, which is celebrated on a public level, is also an individual experience. Mementos of the ball, including krewe pins and krewe favors, are found in another section of the gallery. Sometimes these items, often colorful and decorative, are inspired by the theme of the ball.

The exhibit contains a list of the themes from each year that Comus paraded. These themes, challenging to the observer's knowledge, are often drawn from mythology and exotic literature.

Although the identity of krewe members is secret, the exhibition provides both visitor and experienced carnival-goer a glimpse at the many aspects of this distinguished carnival krewe.

Laughlin Seminar



Panelists Abraham Davidson, Jonathan Williams, and Peter Morrin

On October 26, 1985, the Historic New Orleans Collection hosted a seminar on the work of photographer and writer Clarence John Laughlin (1905–1985). Many of the 75 people in attendance were also registered at the Southeast College Art Conference, which was meeting in New Orleans.

Entitled “Clarence John Laughlin: Critical Commentaries,” the seminar included presentations by scholars Abraham Davidson, professor of art history at the Tyler School of Art at Temple University; Peter Morrin, curator of 20th-century art at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta; and Jonathan Williams, poet, critic, and director of the Jargon Society Publishing Company. The panel was organized and moderated by curator John H. Lawrence.

The purpose of the seminar was to spur interest in the serious consideration of Mr. Laughlin’s photographic legacy, “a far richer model than even he knew,” according to Mr. Morrin.

“Laughlin,” explained Jonathan Williams, “explored the territory of ‘The Strange’ like some people might go to something called ‘The Country’ for the weekend.” As the repository for the Laughlin archive, the Collection will be a major source for research on this artist.



John Szarkowski, curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, and John H. Lawrence

Puzzler



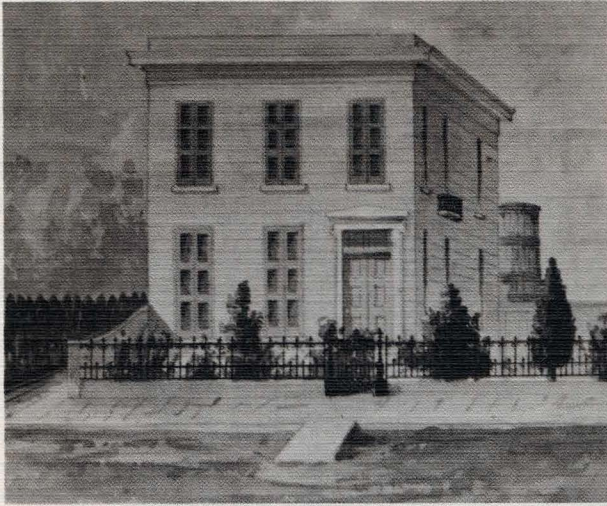
Photograph by Charles L. Franck (1979.325.6435)

Some of the most enjoyable photographs in the curatorial division are old aerial views of the city. Like the one pictured here, these views may be familiar to longtime residents of New Orleans. This site has

changed dramatically since the photograph was taken in October 1922. Can you identify this transportation corridor, then and now?

Answer on p. 15.

New Evidence: Robb's Twin Houses



One of twin houses,
*Notarial Archives Plan
Book, 1860*
(1979.227.64.44)

Myths—glamorous, exciting, macabre—surround the Garden District of New Orleans. James H. Robb, the banking and railroad tycoon whose papers the Collection has recently acquired, is the object of many of these romantic tales because of his great wealth, grand mansion, and immense art collection. A case in point: it has long been reported that Mr. Robb built two identical classic Greek Revival mansions on Washington Avenue as homes for his daughters.

James Robb purchased quantities of rental and speculative property in New Orleans, but the centerpiece of his extensive real estate holdings was the square block, bounded by Washington, Chestnut, Camp, and Sixth, on which he built an Italianate palazzo as the family home. In 1854 he purchased two lots across from this square on the corner of Washington and Chestnut and three lots to the side of the square on the corner of Washington and Camp. There he had built the houses which have been popularly reported to be his daughters'. Censuses, city directories, and inventories, however, cast doubt on the likelihood of this story; clearly none of the daughters had ever actually lived there. Now, new evidence in the Robb Papers makes it possible to speak with some certainty about the history of these houses.

Design and construction of the houses did not begin until the spring of 1856 when the Robb family was devastated and in mourning. The previous fall Mrs. Robb and one

daughter had died. Mr. Robb began making plans in the months following her death to take his surviving children, an 11-year-old son and three daughters, aged 18, 14, and 7, to Europe for an indefinite stay. Mr. Robb put his financial affairs in order and entrusted them to his longtime business associate and confidant, Phoenix N. Wood. He prepared an extensive notebook of information and instructions on all his property for the guidance of Mr. Wood during this protracted absence.

As part of his financial stock-taking prior to leaving New Orleans, James Robb arranged with the architectural firm of Gallier, Turpin & Co. to build the two identical houses, apparently intending them from the beginning for rental property. Elevations are dated May 1, 1856; specifications of the same date described the houses in detail and included the requirement that they be finished by October 15, 1856. The *Daily Crescent* (October 21, 1856) reported that the houses had been completed. In his notebook of instructions, Mr. Robb indicated the



Same house today. Photograph by Tina Freeman, 1985, for THNOC

means by which the builders were to be paid in his absence and instructed Mr. Wood to "Advertise the Houses for Rent on the 1st November," specifying the amounts to be received.

In the summer of 1856, while the houses were under construction, the Robb family went to Europe; there the eldest daughter, Isabella, married and remained with her husband. The younger children did not marry until the 1860s; they continued to reside with their father, except when they were at boarding school. None of the Robb children ever lived in these houses.

From 1856 until 1860 the house at Camp and Washington was leased to Henry R. Alsobrook, a dry goods merchant; the house at Chestnut and Washington was leased to Emile Marqueze, a boot and shoe merchant, certainly from 1857, and probably from 1856, until 1860. Financial records in the Robb collection and city directories show that Mr. Robb's instructions about renting the houses had been faithfully followed.

A financial crisis caused James Robb to sell the two houses, along with the rest of his Garden District real estate. Advertised in 1859, they were sold in January 1860. For \$15,300 Henry Alsobrook purchased the house he had been renting, and the other was bought by Edmund W. Wailes for \$12,000.

The myth of the two elegant Robb young ladies and their husbands living near the family mansion in residences provided by their father is attractive. However, the facts—that these houses were designed and used as revenue-producing property—are less romantic but more representative of the values of a hardheaded entrepreneur in nineteenth-century New Orleans.

—Patricia Brady Schmit
and Lynn D. Adams

Sources: James Robb Papers, New Orleans City Directories 1854-60; U.S. Census (1850) Louisiana; N.A., Walter H. Peters, January 30, 1860 (vol. 7:14), February 1, 1860 (vol. 7:15); THNOC 1951.16.5 i-iii; New Orleans *Daily Crescent* (October 21, 1856); Inventory and Appraisal, Estate of Mistress James Robb, N.A., Walter H. Peters, May 8, 1856 (vol. 3:136).

Epidemics, Sanitation, and the Crescent City



CANAL-STREET, NEW ORLEANS, DURING THE INUNDATION.—(See page 503.)

“Canal-Street, New Orleans, During the Inundation,” illustration from *Hearth and Home*, July 1, 1871 (1982.177)

Between 1878 and 1900 public awareness of unsatisfactory health standards in New Orleans brought much-needed improvements in the sanitation system. Progress, however, was slow: in 1884 the *Daily Picayune* quoted a visitor who described the city as filthier than Cairo or Constantinople. In speaking of degradation, the visitor added, he needed merely to say that “it stank in the nostrils like Clio Street.”

Before the 20th century, the pedestrian was often confronted with offensive sights and smells. The city’s gutters, drainage canals, and streets—of which 80% were unpaved in 1880—were littered with refuse; dirty, stagnant water could be found everywhere. Although the Department of Public Works was

responsible for maintaining drainage, workers cleaned the gutters and canals by shoveling muck onto the streets only to have it wash back during the next rain.

By 1880 most big cities had installed some sort of sewerage system, but New Orleans still depended almost entirely on privies. Even houses and commercial buildings with the luxury of plumbing had to connect pipes to a privy or a gutter. Drinking water came from cisterns since well water was unsanitary and city water from the New Orleans Waterworks Co. was dispensed straight from the Mississippi River.

Enormous strides were made nationally in city services after the Civil War, but in New Orleans these

changes were not evident. Topography and climate made improvements expensive; city government was often mismanaged with little money to spare; and the public remained largely unconcerned. One report said that “Insalubrity was flatly denied, or disbelieved . . .,” and many people maintained “the nonexistence of the most dreadful evils.”

New Orleans was a city of epidemics. Yellow fever was the worst, with annual outbreaks after 1825; mistakenly, it was thought to be caused by humid air acting on filthy, undrained soil. The fever, actually carried by mosquitoes, made the city’s haphazard drainage system a perfect breeding ground for the insects.

In 1878 the community was shocked out of its lethargy when a devastating yellow fever epidemic started in New Orleans and spread as far as Memphis, decimating that city. Upriver towns imposed a quarantine on New Orleans, closing its trade at the first hint of disease, and in 1884 the federal government expanded this quarantine to include any fever-stricken vessel in a U. S. port. While helping to reduce drastically the number of yellow fever deaths in New Orleans until 1897, these actions had the potential of proving costly to business.

New Orleans had suffered more severe epidemics in the past, but once the danger was over, the public seemed unconcerned. By 1878, the world was beginning to understand the importance of sanitation, if not the cause of yellow fever, and quarantine meant that New Orleans had to improve conditions.

The Board of Health and the Howard Association, both of which were formed to deal with earlier bouts of yellow fever, had for years been trying to educate the public about the city's shameful condition. Now they were joined by business and social leaders demanding changes. Some large businesses, such as D. H. Holmes and the St. Charles Hotel, even constructed

their own sewer lines to the river, while prominent New Orleanians formed organizations to decide how to solve the problems. Their answers ranged from cleaning up the gutters to cleaning up the government. With the general public still apathetic, most of the groups soon disbanded.

One group that survived was the Auxiliary Sanitary Association formed in 1879, financed entirely by private contributions. Few donations, however, came from the more modest neighborhoods below Canal Street; furthermore, so many wealthy people failed to contribute that the *Times* threatened to print their names. Despite these difficulties, the association improved drainage canals, donated garbage barges to the city, and repaired city-owned equipment. Its most successful endeavor was a system of gutter flushing that cleaned up many streets.

The Association and the Board of Health, even with their common goals, were at constant odds. A court confrontation resulted in favor of the Board of Health, and the Auxiliary Sanitary Association had to disband.

By the 1890s education was finally beginning to increase overall public awareness. When yellow fe-



Advertisement (1974.25.1.71)

ver struck in 1897, officials and the population alike were frightened into action, and voters at last approved a drainage and sewerage system that would permanently clean up the city.

In 1901 the cause of yellow fever was discovered; when the disease broke out in 1905, citizens were ordered to eliminate any stagnant water and to cover their cisterns, thus preventing breeding areas for mosquitoes. The time to call New Orleans "America's most plague-ridden city" was over.

—John Magill

Sources: John Magill, "Municipal Improvements in New Orleans in the 1880s" (M.A. thesis, University of New Orleans, 1972); Joy J. Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Politics and Urban Progress, 1880-1896* (Baton Rouge, 1969).

"The Desolation of Canal Street, The Broadway of New Orleans—Victims of the Fever Being Conveyed to the Cemeteries," illustration from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, September 28, 1878 (1981.216i)





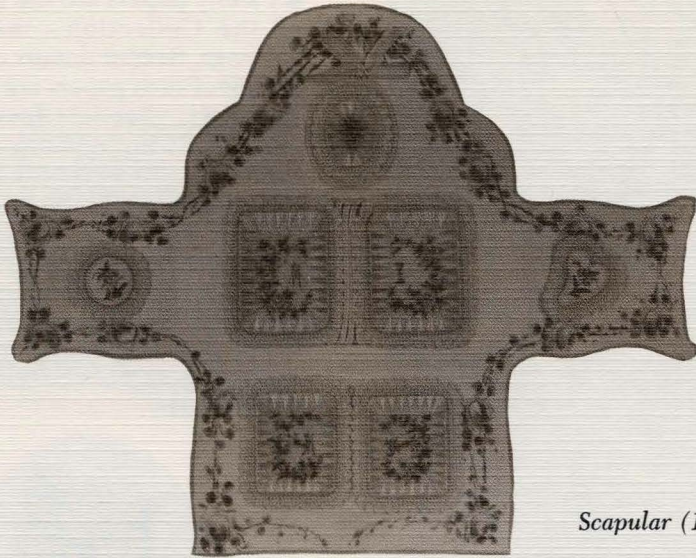
The Historic New Orleans Collection acquires thousands of items through purchase and donation during the course of each year. Only a few recent acquisitions can be noted here.

A recently acquired oil portrait of a woman of color by François Fleischbein, signed and dated 1837, is one of the few known portraits of black women predating the Civil War. The sitter's identity poses an interesting question. She has been identified as the infamous Marie Laveau for some years; however, art historian George Jordan has presented strong evidence, based on Fleischbein's sketchbook and interviews with his descendants, that she was the Fleischbein family servant,

Betsy. Her elaborate gold tignon, pleated lace collar, and delicate jewelry provide important historical documentation of the period's clothing types and social classes. The artist, German-born Franz Joseph Fleischbein, came to New Orleans in 1833, at which time he apparently gallicized his name. He is said to have studied in Munich and then in Paris, before establishing a career in New Orleans as a portrait painter and later as a daguerreotypist and ambrotypist as well.



Woman of Color by François Fleischbein, 1837 (1985.212)



Scapular (1985.180)

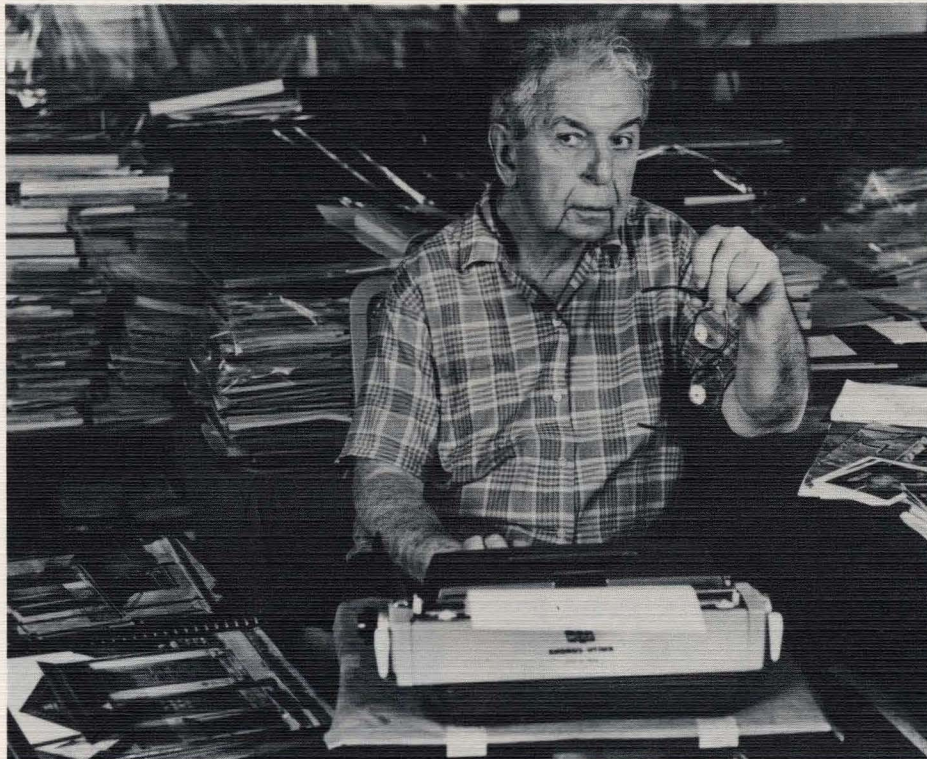
■ Lloyd Sensat and Eugene Cizek have donated a large group of material related to their "education through historic preservation" projects. The material includes invitations and posters, as well as an original poster of THNOC's Merieult House done by the school children of St. Charles Parish.

■ A handmade scapular has been given by Mrs. Gladys C. Maginnis. The scapular was made by Mother St. Hélène Forstall, an Ursuline nun. It was handpainted on paper, fabric,

and leather and presented to Mrs. Maginnis "In Remembrance Of Her Solemn Communion and Confirmation."

■ Photographer Michael P. Smith has donated several of his portraits of the late Clarence John Laughlin. These photographs, taken around 1973, reflect the many aspects of Laughlin's personality. THNOC's extensive collection of Laughlin's work is enhanced by these thoughtful portraits.

—Priscilla O'Reilly



Clarence John Laughlin in his library at the Upper Pontalba Building. © Michael P. Smith (1985.181.2)

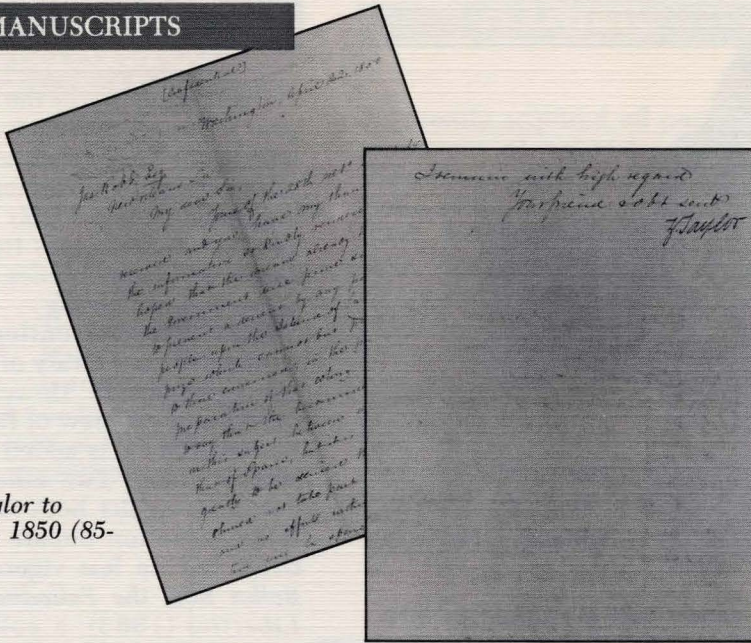
"O that some power the gift would give / The plunderers in our midst who live, / To see themselves as we all see them, / Corrupting men, debauching women." This "new version" of Burns comes from *Upside Down, An Original Philosophical and Mythological Comedy . . .* (1871) by "Peter Sparks, Gentleman" (according to the Library of Congress, a pseudonym of S. Howell). A copy of this satirical view of Reconstruction recently was added to the research library. Two other new acquisitions depict both sides of the Reconstruction debate less creatively but no less vigorously: *The Ballot Box, the Palladium of Our Liberties* (1863), a collection of newspaper editorials by Jacob Barker which appeared in the anti-slavery *National Advocate*, and *The Black Ghost; or, Radicalism in the United States* (1868) by Charles Delery, a work critical of Republican political leaders.

■ Other 19th-century publications include several volumes of *Acts of the Louisiana legislature*, catalogues of the medical department of the University of Louisiana (later to become Tulane University), and Henry T. Johns's beautifully written firsthand account of *Life with the Forty-Ninth Massachusetts Volunteers* (1864), a regiment which was garrisoned in Louisiana for nearly all of its Civil War duty.

■ Recent gifts include two entertaining speeches of Judge W. W. Westerfield, "The Einstein Theory of Relativity" (1932) and "To the Ladies" (1942), presented by Mrs. Clayton N. Frazar; exhibition catalogues from the Arthur Roger Gallery and the Peabody Museum of Salem; and a variety of recent publications, including *Audubon Park: An Urban Eden* (1985) by L. Ronald Forman, Joseph Logsdon, and John Wilds; *Random Readings—The Jefferson Parish Yearly Review* (1985), compiled and edited by Msgr. Henry C. Bezou; and *Women and New Orleans* (1985) by Mary Gehman.

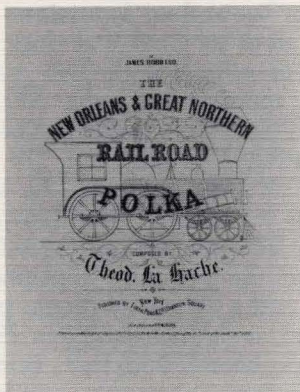
—Florence M. Jumonville

MANUSCRIPTS



Zachary Taylor to James Robb, 1850 (85-68-L)

The major acquisitions of the manuscripts division in the fall have been the three additions to the James Robb Collection described in a feature story in this issue. So swiftly has THNOC become the lodestone attracting large quantities of the scattered papers relating to James Robb's financial empire and family life that the manuscripts staff has undertaken an intensive research effort to become the "Robb Center" for the United States. It is hoped that much more material will find its way here.



Sheet music dedicated to James Robb (51-14-L)

■ Dr. Merrill O. Hines, former medical director of the Ochsner Medical Foundation, has donated his papers, those of the foundation, and research notes of Dr. Alton Ochsner. This is an important addition to the very large holdings of the Ochsner Papers at the Collection.

■ The 10th Colored Artillery, as it became known, was organized in New Orleans as the 1st Regiment Corps d'Afrique in November 1862; it represented an experiment by federal commanders in enlisting former slaves in the Union army. One unit of the regiment, which participated in the battle of Pass Manchac, was posted at Fort Macomb late in 1865. The quartermaster's records of this unit, just acquired, provide interesting details of black soldiers' daily life.

■ Mr. and Mrs. John Drury Tallant have donated 66 copies, dating from 1838 to 1892, of *L'Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orléans*, the distinguished bilingual newspaper published here from 1827 to 1923. Although Mr. Tallant is a grandson of James Marius Augustin, an editor of the paper in the early 20th century, these issues were actually found by a family member at a garage sale.

■ James Milne Muggah and his young son were among the many who lost their lives on Last Island, off the Louisiana coast, in the great storm of 1856. Letters between family members, which tell the sad tale of tragedy and courage, are the gifts of Mrs. Ellis Johann Bultman and Mr. and Mrs. Karl R. Eward, Jr.

■ *The Cottonbaler* was the official publication in Korea of the 7th United States Infantry, a unit which originated during the Battle of New Orleans. Five issues of the publication (1954-55) were a gift of its co-editor, Roger C. Nelson.

■ Family papers are the foundation of the Collection's manuscripts holdings. Recent donors of valuable groups of such papers are Mrs. Leon Irwin, Jr. (Bartlett family); Mrs. James P. Ewin, Jr. (Colcock family); J. Phares O'Kelly (Marie Celeste de Mandeville de Marigny de Livaudais); H. C. Chamberline (William C. Harrison); and Mrs. William J. Berridge (Richardson family).

■ A small collection of the work of Mollie Moore Davis, a popular 19th-century poet, is the gift of Mrs. Roger Darby.



Mollie Moore Davis (85-65-L)

■ Additions to the microfilm/fiche holdings include *The Historic American Buildings Survey* for Louisiana, *Music and Some Highly Musical People*, the *New Orleans Times* (1863-1881), and the *New Orleans Democrat* (1875-1881).

—Catherine C. Kahn

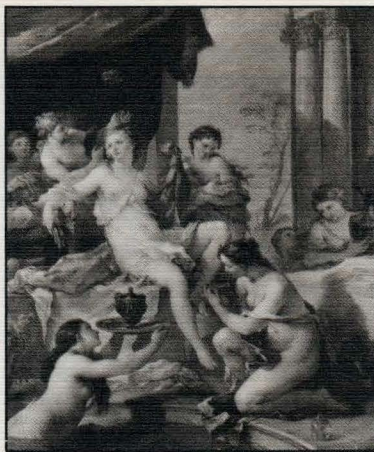
James A. Stouse

James Amedee Stouse, friend and donor to the Collection, died October 21, 1985, at the age of 89 years. He was a bank executive for over 40 years and was active in many charitable organizations in the city. His donation of personal and military papers from 1854 to 1976 consists of 817 items. The collection includes early family records, correspondence of the Ducros and Stouse families, World War I military papers, and a manuscript, "Recollections of a Creole in 20th Century New Orleans."

PHOTO CREDITS

Claire de la Vergne
Judy Tarantino
Jan White

Robb Art Sale



The Toilet of Psyche by Charles Joseph Natoire, 1745. Courtesy New Orleans Museum of Art

Charles Galvani, a local art dealer, sold much of James Robb's art collection in March 1859. Copies of 23 numbered "tickets," or sales vouchers, are included in the Robb Papers. Many of these items were bought by New Orleanians and may still be owned by their descendants.

Names of purchasers appear in

boldface. Each name is followed by a list of items bought at the sale. Each item is described as it was in the sale catalogue.

Do you recognize a name or one of the objects? Please get in touch with the curatorial division if you own a piece you think was formerly owned by James Robb.

A. Smedes: Panthers, Wild Boars (bronzes).
W. H. Johnson: bronze clock.

J. Greenleaf: painting of Boy and Girl; volumes of engravings from the Gallery of Munich, Gallery of Dresden, Musée Royale; 2 Sèvres porcelain vases on pivots; Venus and Cupid (bronze).

Edward Hobart: Beatrice Cenci (after Guido).

Mes. O'Brien: Madonna del Sisto (after Raphael).

C. Foster: Boy Extracting a Thorn from his Foot, Rinald and Armida, Mercury (bronzes); Playing Children (after Vanderwerp); Chinese porcelain seats (Clevinger); 2 antique vases (snake handles, Pompeian figures); 2 serpentine vases.

S. H. Kennedy: 2 globes; 2 porcelain vases (after Cuyp).

W. H. Letchford: Horse, Galino and Horse, Amazon, Lion Fighter (bronzes); Diana, Fidelity (marbles).

Wallis: Voltaire, Rousseau (bronzes).

Bishop Polk: Bohemian vases.

Arch[ibald] Montgomery: alabaster vase; 2 china vases.

Mrs. Larue: rosewood & marqueterie table (Rubens & Snyders).

L. C. Jurey: Esperanza (after Guido); Large Stag (bronze).

R. S. Morse: serpentine pedestals with Esmeralda & Bacchante, serpentine marble pedestal with thermometer and compass (bronzes by Luca Giordano); 2 porcelain vases (Rubens & Snyders; view of Palace of Sans Souci); 2 Bohemian glass vases (white ground, painted flowers); 2 Bohemian glass vases (red & gold ground); Boy with a Dish, Girl with a Dish, 2 figures, Arabian Horses (bronzes); Iconoclasts, or the Plunder of a Catholic

Church in Time of Cromwell (Leutze); Jacob's Dream (Edward Terry); porcelain vase (Rubens & Snyders, blue ground).

[J. T. R. Stone ?]: The Concert (after Netscher); Holy Family (after Raphael).

[J. J. ?] McHall: Halt of Cavalry (Van Gaellen).

R. J. Cochran: Dresden vases (painted with figures & flowers), artists bronze vases medallion (Luca Giordano); Louis XVI clock (5 cupids, dead gold and bronze).

Dr. W. N. Mercer: Spanish Flower Girls, Spanish Beggar Boys, Spanish Peasant Boys, Spanish Virgin and Child, (watercolors after Murillo); Mercury, Venus and Cupid (watercolors after Correggio); Still Life (after Wenix).

G. Smedes: Dutch Market by Candlelight (Van Schendel); Herodias (Allori); Fisherman's Fireside (Englehardt).

J. Burnside: Cleopatra (Albini); 2 landscapes of morning and evening (Durand); Bacchus and Ariadne (Luca Giordano); Portrait of a Circassian Beauty (Kellogg); View of the Bay of Naples, View of the Falls of Terne (Denis); Visitation of St. Mary Elizabeth (Sebastian del Piombo); Toilet of Psyche (Natoire); Communion of the Sick, Imprisonment of the Early Christians at Rome (Huntingdon); View of the Cathedral of Burgos (Roberts); Narcissus at the Bath (Biliverti); 2 Sèvres porcelain vases on pivots; Donkey and Sheep (Robbe); Storm at Sea (Bonfield); Landscape (Doughty); Forgive us our Trespasses (Leutze); Louis XVI corbeille (2 cupids, bronze and gold); 2 vases to match corbeille (bronze, gold, malachite).

C. Galvani: 2 volumes with drawings by Hogarth; Horses and wolves (bronze); rosewood stand and portfolio for prints.

Postscripts

Two articles from the Summer 1985 Newsletter elicited some fascinating facts and an amusing anecdote from readers.

John Magill's "Early Skyscrapers" mentioned a fire that gutted the Morris, now Cigali, Building, prompting A. J. Cigali to provide some details of the blaze.

Mr. Cigali reports that fire entered the fifth floor of the seven-story structure and damaged mainly the fourth, fifth, and sixth floors. The archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, housed on the fourth floor, were saved. The fire chief credited mule-drawn pumps with saving the building. New, horseless pumps were tried, but could not match the 100-foot height attainable by the old pumps.

Though the elevator shaft remained intact, a new lift was installed at the back of the building after the fire. The original, central shaft was abandoned.

A letter from Pat Rittiner added an interesting bit of lore to Richard Marvin's account of the Sullivan-Ryan prizefight of 1882.

Mrs. Rittiner's grandfather, Carleton Fillmore Pool, was sent by the New Orleans Times-Democrat to cover the fight in Mississippi City. Arriving at the train depot, Mr. Pool found the passenger cars full, but took his seat on a flatcar along with "prominent and well-dressed business and professional men, including bankers wearing silk hats."

Only one telegraph line, owned by a lumbermill, was available at the site of the bout for the reporters' blow-by-blow accounts. It had been decided that, since all reporters could not be accommodated, none would be allowed to use the line.

But Mr. Pool, apparently made of sterner stuff, proved enterprising. Mrs. Rittiner writes, "He took off his coat, fortunately black, put on his shirt backward . . . he persuaded the lumbermill operator that he was a clergyman and wished to send some Bible quotations" via telegraph and scooped the other reporters.

The editors look forward to more commentary from newsletter readers in the future.

Staff

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Time-Life Books recently wrote to THNOC expressing appreciation to **Patricia McWhorter**, associate curator, and to photographers **Jan White**, **Judy Tarantino**, and **Claire de la Vergne** for assisting the staff of their Civil War series . . . this is the second year of recognition . . .



Jan White and Patricia McWhorter



Judy Tarantino and Claire de la Vergne

Miss White and Mrs. Tarantino served as judges for the annual exhibition of the St. Bernard Photographic Society . . . some of Mrs. Tarantino's photographs were included in the 1986 Right to Life calendar.

Dr. Patricia B. Schmit, director of publications, contributed an article, "Spanish Land Documents at the Historic New Orleans Collection," to the fall issue of *Manuscripts* . . . curator **Rosanne McCaffrey** spoke on THNOC's computer system at the Museum Computer Network meeting in Mexico City . . . the Collection will

host the Network's 1986 meeting . . . Miss McCaffrey also was appointed liaison to the Committee on Cataloging for the picture division of the Special Libraries Association.

Elsa Schneider, curator of education, presented a paper, "Using Primary Source Material in the Social Studies Classroom," at the annual meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies in Chicago . . . an article by **Charles S. Buchanan**, "Academicism and Radicalism in 19th-Century French Art," appeared in the fall issue of *The New Orleans Art Review*.

Dr. Alfred E. Lemmon, coordinator of special projects, serves as secretary of the Friends of the Archives of Louisiana . . . he recently spoke on Guatemalan colonial music at a conference sponsored by the European Economic Community in Brussels. **John Magill**, chief curatorial cataloger, was interviewed by WLAE-TV for their documentary "Thy Will Be Done: Histories of Five New Orleans Priests."

CHANGES

The new curatorial assistant is **Kitty Farley** . . . Miss Farley (B. A., Michigan State University) is pursuing an M. A. degree in art history at Tulane University . . . **Alix Samuels**, manuscripts assistant, entered graduate school at the University of Texas in January.



Kitty Farley

EDUCATION

John A. Mahé II attended a symposium for museum directors and curators presented by the Intermuseum Conservation Association at Oberlin College . . . **Jan White**, head of photography, traveled to Washington for a workshop at the Smithsonian Institution . . . and photographer **Judy Tarantino** recently completed an editing course in video programming with the New Orleans Video Access Corporation.

MEETINGS

Director **Stanton Frazar** attended the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Austin, Texas, in October . . . THNOC staff members who attended the 1985 Southeast College Art Conference in October were **Pamela Arceneaux**, **Carolyn Dong**, **John H. Lawrence**, **Kellye Magee**, **John Magill**, **Patricia McWhorter**, **Kathy Wall**, and **Jan White**.

INTERN PROGRAM

THNOC's museum intern program, in cooperation with Tulane University, Loyola University, and the University of New Orleans, is coordinated by **Dr. Patricia B. Schmit**, director of publications . . . student research helps with various on-going projects.



Interns Foster Blair, Doug Harmon, Susan Leal, with Stanton Frazar

SPEAKERS BUREAU

Staff members have recently made presentations to the following organizations: **John H. Lawrence**, West Bank Camera Club . . . **Alfred E. Lemmon**, Northwestern State University and Hispanidad '85 lecture series . . . **John Magill**, Orleans Club . . . **Patricia McWhorter**, Amateur Radio and Computer Fest . . . **Patricia B. Schmit**, Spring Fiesta docent series . . . **Elsa Schneider**, Sherwood Forest School . . . and **Judy Tarantino**, Hugh O'Brien Youth Foundation Seminar.

CORPORATE CUP

The following people represented THNOC in the Corporate Cup race: **Lynn Adams**, **Pamela Arceneaux**, **Roberta Berry**, **Mimi Calhoun**, **Jeanie Clinton**, **Howard Estes**, **Stanton Frazar**, **Don Gaylord**, **Louise Hoffman**, **Cathy Kahn**, **Joan Lennox**, **Barbara McMahan**, **Melvin Noah**, **Alix Samuels**, **Elsa Schneider**, **Fred Smith**, **Joan Sowell**, **Taronda Spencer**, and **Jessica Travis**.

The Shop



"Ophelia's World of Bears," the Shop's fourth annual Christmas festival, celebrated the 82nd birthday of the American teddy bear.

Historians will be interested in a book, available in the Shop, which chronicles in great detail events in French Louisiana from 1721–1723. Marcel Giraud, professor emeritus of the Collège de France and a leading specialist in the history of the development of North America, is the author of *La Louisiane après le système de Law*, volume 4 in his work, *Histoire de la Louisiane Française*. Research for the 455-page volume comes from archives in France, Italy, England, and the United States. In French.

A THNOC publication, *Observations on the Colony of Louisiana From 1796 to 1802*, was recently reviewed by Jacques Portes in the

French quarterly, *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer*. James Pitot's observations, translated with an introduction by descendant Henry C. Pitot, were written by a man who came to New Orleans in 1796 and became mayor of the city in 1804.

The review, which finds the memoir "revealing," states that "all through his observations Pitot shows, more or less spontaneously, that Louisiana's prosperity depended upon its becoming a part of the North American ensemble [United States] And with these observations one can better understand why Napoleon sold a colony in which France's interest was fast receding, and where a certain number of inhabitants, James Pitot included, were adjusting quite well to the American presence. . . ."

Puzzler

Answer

The photograph shows the New Basin Canal, now the area of the Carrollton interchange along Interstate 10.

Across the top is Carrollton Avenue, with its wide neutral ground narrowing into a small bridge over the canal. Below Carrollton is Pelican Stadium, the home of New Orleans's minor league baseball team, here converted for the fall football season.

The 60-foot-wide canal was dug in the 1830s and brought sand, gravel, and shells from Lake Pontchartrain to a basin near the Union Passenger Terminal on Loyola Avenue. The west side of the canal all the way to West End was built up with the mud from the excavation as a foundation for a shell road for riders, carriages, and, later, automobiles.

Parts of the canal near the basin end were filled in the 1940s, and its entire course was covered by the early 1950s. Its wide, barren route through the city was the natural choice for part of the Pontchartrain Expressway because it would not require leveling buildings or disturbing neighborhoods. Now, cars and trucks follow the former waterway for barges and boats along that part of I-10 that was once the New Basin Canal.

—John A. Mahé II

Please send

Histoire de la Louisiane Française: La Louisiane après le système de Law at \$38.00, softcover, (30% discount) \$26.60 _____

Observations on the Colony of Louisiana at \$14.95 _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Check or Money Order Visa Mastercard

Acct. No. _____ Postage and Handling, \$1.50 _____

Exp. Date _____ 4% tax, La. residents _____

Signature _____ 9% tax, New Orleans residents _____

TOTAL AMOUNT DUE _____

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

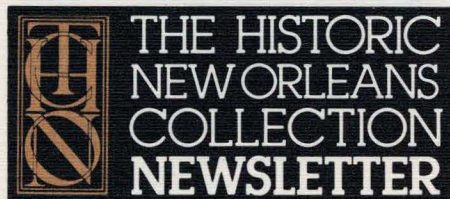
THNOC is looking for committed volunteers to help with several large research and cataloging projects. Anyone interested in helping should call Jeanie Clinton in the administrative office, 523-4662.

130 Years of Comus



Far left, invitation to the ball at the French Opera House, 1914 (1960.14.23a) and dance card, 1898 (1961.48.3)

Since the mid-19th century, Comus has issued highly decorative invitations to the organization's ball on Mardi Gras night. Invitations and other memorabilia are included in the current exhibition in the Williams Gallery, *The Mistick Krewe: 130 Years of Comus*, a look at carnival's oldest organization. The exhibition will run through March. (See p. 5.)



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