

533 Royal Street

The Merieult House

Originally built for a merchant and slave trader, the Merieult House now serves as the entrance to a network of buildings and courtyards that make up THNOC's original site. During the early days of the colony, in the 1720s, the block bordered by Royal, St. Louis, Bourbon, and Toulouse Streets belonged to the French Crown and was the site of workmen's barracks and the king's forges.

In 1792 Jean François Merieult purchased the property and, likely with the labor of enslaved people, began construction on the building that would survive the fire of 1794. An inventory taken just after Merieult died in 1818 described his property as a principal house consisting of six stores on the ground floor and living quarters on the floor above, coach house, stable, cellars, pantry, two kitchens, and storehouses for wood.

The house passed through five owners, ranging from international bankers to a saddlemaker to a hotelier, before Kemper and Leila Williams bought it in 1938. When they lived on the property, the ground floor was used commercially. Upstairs, the Merieults' former living quarters provided room for the Williamses' growing collection of historical materials. It opened as THNOC's first museum exhibition space in 1970.



Merieult House; 1993; 1993.38.1

533 Royal Street

The Counting House

The Counting House—the two-story building on the St. Louis Street side of this courtyard—is named for the banking activities conducted on site by the Lizardi Brothers firm in the 19th century. It was originally built as a warehouse by Jean François Merieult in 1794–95.

The Lizardis were a Mexican banking family active in the Gulf region and the Caribbean, as well as in Europe. They played a major role in New Orleans’s real estate, financial, and mercantile markets in the 1830s and early 1840s. When the Lizardis purchased the property in the 1830s, they made major changes to Merieult’s warehouse.

Besides adding a second story and gallery to the building, the firm completely transformed the first floor, creating a grand Greek Revival room for banking, with classical details—pilasters and Ionic columns, a magnificent sunflower ceiling medallion, and thick crown moldings—that remain in place today. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, after business hours, the Lizardi brothers and their wives held balls and receptions here.

Today, the first floor is used for meetings, seminars, and receptions; the second floor houses THNOC administrative offices.



Counting House; 1993; 1993.38.4

520 Royal Street

Seignouret-Brulatour Building and Tricentennial Wing, 520 Royal Street

Across the street from THNOC's original location at 533 Royal Street, our new exhibition center comprises a meticulous renovation of the historic Seignouret-Brulatour Building and courtyard, as well as a brand-new, purpose-built rear structure, the Tricentennial Wing.

The three-story entresol townhouse fronting Royal Street was built in 1816 for French-born furniture maker and wine importer François Seignouret. His "S" monogram is visible in the *garde-de-frise* (decorative barrier) on the third-story wrought iron balcony. Other surviving early features include a second-level cast-iron balcony, two service wings in the rear, and granite columns and lintels (door and window supports).

Pierre Brulatour, another wine importer, purchased the house in 1870, though his ownership was brief. The property changed hands several more times before it was bought by tobacco businessman and philanthropist William Ratcliffe Irby in 1918. In his third-floor residence, Irby installed a luxurious ballroom and an Aeolian player organ, which has been fully restored. Irby allowed the Arts and Crafts Club of New Orleans to operate on the premises from 1922 to 1933. More recently, local television station WDSU broadcast from the site from 1950 until 1996. THNOC acquired the property in 2006.



520 Royal Street; ca. 1945; *The Charles L. Franck Studio Collection*, 1979.325.2154

520 Royal Street

Responsible Restoration of a French Quarter Jewel

After THNOC purchased the 520 Royal Street property in 2006, archaeological and architectural investigations preceded any major work. A well had been hidden beneath courtyard pavers, and various 19th-century artifacts were recovered from that site, including ceramics, bottles, and metal utensils.

Architectural material analyses revealed details such as the building's original color scheme. Restoration began with structural shoring, masonry repair, and the removal of non-historic materials. Character-defining features big and small were carefully preserved, such as the courtyard-adjacent staircase popularized by the Arts and Crafts Club of New Orleans.

More subtle work on the building's brick walls included repairs and plastering with natural hydraulic lime mortar, material similar to what would have been used at the time of the building's original construction. It will help ensure the longevity of the soft, historic bricks in New Orleans's humid environment.

The new Tricentennial Wing at the rear of the property opened in 2019. Designed for precise climate control and secure access, the building can accommodate larger exhibitions. Its frontage incorporates materials that complement the historic courtyard—wood, glass, copper, and stucco—in a thoroughly modern, LEED Silver-certified design that provides a clear transition between the old and the new.



Masonry repair at 520 Royal Street; 2016

520 Royal Street

The Well

From 2013 to 2015, THNOC worked with a New Orleans–based archaeology firm on a series of surveys of the Seignouret-Brulatour property to better understand the site’s early history. Hidden beneath the paving stones of this courtyard was a 19th-century well that provided water for the building’s inhabitants. Careful digging within the well uncovered material culture artifacts and animal bones. These items may have been discarded in the well because they were unwanted or broken.

The recovered artifacts included broken rouge pots, plates, bottles, silverware, a teapot, and an empty can of quail and truffles. Interestingly, the water level in the well rises and falls with the conditions of the city and the river. The original herringbone brick surface, which likely dates to the construction of the main building, is covered over with Pennsylvania blue slate.

Because of multiple layers of construction and accumulated soil, the top of the well sits nearly two feet below the current courtyard’s surface level. The restoration was accomplished with the support of the Azby Fund. We have covered the well with a glass window—yes, you can walk on it!—and added illumination so that visitors can have a firsthand glimpse into the past.



Excavation work on 520 Royal Street well; 2013

718 Toulouse Street

The Williams Residence, 718 Toulouse Street

Surrounded by three courtyards, the Williams Residence is often described as a hidden house. Passersby can catch a glimpse of the building's facade, framed by banana trees and other foliage, through a gated courtyard on Toulouse Street.

The Royal Street side of the residence forms the rear boundary of the Merieult House courtyard.

Built in 1889, the residence is an Italianate, two-story brick townhouse with galleries. It was originally built as the home of Jean Baptiste Trapolin, owner of the Royal House hotel, which occupied the Merieult House in the late 19th century. During the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration ran an art gallery in the building.

Kemper and Leila Williams reunited the Trapolin and Merieult properties by purchase in 1938 and lived at 718 Toulouse Street from 1946 until 1963, when they moved to the Garden District. The furnishings and decor remain as they were in the 1940s and '50s, during the Williamses' period of residence.



Postcard featuring Williams Residence; after 1970; gift of Dottie Gaudet, 2015.0088.1



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