



# THE NEW WORLD

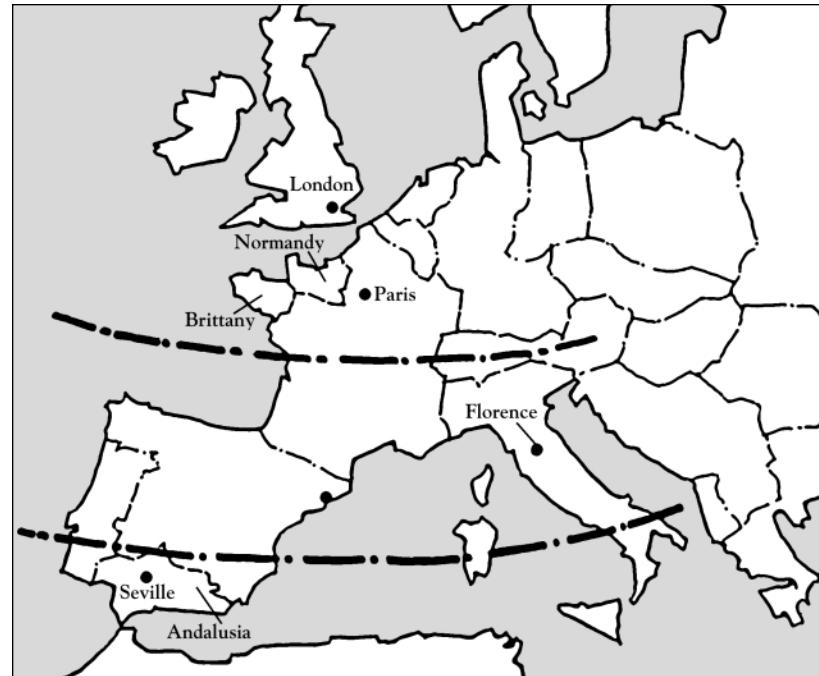
## Exploration & Colonization

NEW ORLEANS, LIKE OTHER EUROPEAN settlements in the New World, can best be understood by understanding the traditions of its founding colonists. In planning and building the city, the settlers of New Orleans utilized an assembly of cultural traditions, primarily from the three principal European powers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: France, Spain, and England. Establishing a clear delineation, or determining which qualities of the city are uniquely French, Spanish, or English, has proven to be difficult. It has also been the source of much of the lively debate and critical discussion among students and historians of New Orleans.

The political boundaries defining the countries of Europe identified the inhabitants with a sovereign power, not necessarily with a homogeneous cultural tradition. Architectural traditions in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe were more aligned by regional geography than political boundaries. Climate and the availability of natural resources for building played a larger role in forming these traditions than did nationality.

Thus, it is more constructive to view the origins of the building traditions imported to the New World in terms of three major regions of western Europe, rather than nations: southern Mediterranean, northern Mediterranean, and central Europe. Many of the building methods of these regions were first introduced by the Romans from 100 B.C. to 300 A.D., and at the time of the discovery and exploration of the New World, the Italian Renaissance was exerting tremendous influence throughout all of Europe.

While the basic forms of traditional housing at this time were similar throughout western Europe, roof pitches, construction materials, and techniques differed considerably from region to region. In the southern Mediterranean, including the hot, arid Andalusian region



of Spain, traditions introduced by the Moors from North Africa included construction with stone or brick, stuccoed and coated with whitewash. The whitewashing tradition was as much functional as aesthetic, as it helped the buildings to reflect the heat of the Mediterranean sun. Roofs were flat and covered with flat clay tiles or slightly pitched, covered with barrel-clay tile.

Moving into the northern Mediterranean region, construction was primarily of stone, but roof pitches gradually increased. On the northeastern coast of Spain, the southern coast of France, and in northern Italy, roofs were typically pitched between twenty and thirty degrees, generally covered with barrel-clay tile. Continuing north into central Europe, stone and brick construction were common, while in villages near forests, timber framing with stone or brick infill also occurred frequently. Farther north, as a technique for shedding



rain and snow, roof pitches gradually increased, reaching approximately sixty degrees in northern France and England. Roofing materials include thatch, wood shingles, slate shingles, as well as clay tile.

All of these building traditions and techniques found a home in

the New World, including New Orleans, where the unique climatic conditions and natural resources resulted in unique solutions and an equally unique architecture.

# THE NEW WORLD COLONIES

The new world explorations of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries originated in a period of unprecedented cultural, political, and social *excitement*.

The medieval era of European history, frequently referred to as the Dark Ages, was coming to an end. The intellectual, artistic, and economic awakening in Italy, which originated in Florence, was, by the fourteenth century, spreading across western Europe, ushering in a period of immense creativity and expanded cultural energy. It was an unprecedented period of growth, development, and innovation in all areas of European life and culture: art, architecture, literature, commerce, and politics. As the newly energized, European political states set out to explore and colonize new territories, it was with a spirit of pride, invincibility, heroism, and intense nationalism.

## The Spanish

On October 12, 1492, after thirty-three days at sea, Christopher Columbus, an Italian under the patronage of Queen Isabella of Spain, made landfall on San Salvador in the West Indies. After coursing through the Bahamas, the northern coasts of eastern Cuba, and Hispaniola, he returned to Spain to announce his discovery of a new route to Asia.

Soon thereafter, Columbus returned to the West Indies to initiate the era of colonization. After a failed attempt in 1493 to establish a settlement on the northern coast of Hispaniola (the Dominican Republic), the first permanent colony, Santo Domingo, was founded on that same island by Columbus's brother Bartolomeo in 1496. In the years following, colonization increased drastically, as Spain set sail further westward to the mainland of the Americas in search of gold, silver, adventure, and a quick route to the Orient.

The Spanish founded colonies on the islands of the Greater Antilles: Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Jamaica. Gold was discovered on all but Jamaica, and a brief gold rush drew thousands of Spaniards. After approximately ten years of furious activity, the gold supply was



exhausted, and colonists moved on in search of other gold deposits, leaving the islands all but abandoned. Since the Lesser Antilles had no gold, they were ignored.

Ignoring the superior harbor at Havana, the Spanish established Santiago on the southeast coast of Cuba as their new center of activity, and the search for wealth continued as they sailed westward, colonizing Mexico and Central and South America. In 1519 they established a port at Vera Cruz, Mexico, from which they traveled inland to capture the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán in 1521, renaming it Mexico City, which was to become the capital of the empire of New Spain. In 1533, they established the port of Cartagena, Colombia, which would become the port of departure for ships leaving from South America. Vera Cruz was the point of departure from Mexico.

In Mexico and Peru, the Spanish finally found the wealth they were searching for, although it was mostly silver rather than gold. The treasure was loaded onto ships and delivered to Spain, increasing the country's wealth immensely. In response to raids by English and French pirates, the Spanish government established a convoy of

Spanish warships to escort the treasure-bearing fleets from the ports of Cartagena and Vera Cruz across the Atlantic to Seville in Andalusia.

While Santo Domingo remained the administrative capital of the Spanish Antilles, by the 1560s, Havana had become the most important port in the Spanish New World. Because of its strategic location in the Gulf Stream, the strongest ocean current in the world, it was the origin of the quickest route to Spain.

As Spain expanded its empire, planning principles were guided by the *Laws of the Indies* (*Recopilacion de Leyes de las Indias*). Developed over a number of years, these principles were codified in 1573, and by 1681, in its final form, the Laws contained approximately 6,400 precepts, arranged in nine books that guided in minute detail the organization, activities, and the physical siting, layout, and design of Spanish colonial municipalities.

The Laws imposed a standard town plan for all new settlements, directing the colonists to integrate regional geographic factors (climate, wind direction, availability of water, soil quality, and suitability for defense) into the Spanish model. The size and shape of a central plaza was fixed, as well as the width and orientation of the streets, location of public buildings, and the division of blocks into lots. Streets were to be laid out in a strict grid pattern, a geometry originating in ancient Greece and first introduced in Spain by the Romans in the first century B.C.

The plan centered around the *plaza mayor*, the main plaza, fronting on which were the principal church, the *cabildo*, and the prison. The plaza created the focal point of the city—the center of political, military, ecclesiastical, commercial, and social activity. Dimensions for plazas were specific: rectangular with four corners aligned with the compass points; the minimum size was set at 200 by 300 feet with one side one-and-one-half times as long as the other. Two streets were to meet at right angles at each corner, and four more were to lead from the center of each side to facilitate an orderly procession of military parades. Buildings facing the plaza were to incorporate *portales*, or shaded arcades, for the convenience of merchants and pedestrians. In addition to housing municipal buildings, private palaces, shops, and market stalls, the plaza also served as a setting for

military parades, fiestas, and public executions (Carley 1997).

The architecture in the Spanish colonies was first guided by engineers sent in to lay out the colony and construct the prominent buildings. At the time, the administrative seat of colonization was Seville in Andalusia (southern Spain). Consequently, the buildings constructed by the engineers were influenced by the traditions of that region, whose hot and arid climate was fortunately similar to that of the West Indies and Mexico. In Santo Domingo, they introduced the Andalusian patio house, combining symmetrical plans with simplified Isabelline and Mudéjar details, focused inward toward a central courtyard, which the Spanish called *patio*—the French courtyard.

The Spanish colonists were also, for the most part, coming from southern Spain. For their residences they constructed simple, two-room structures with stucco walls and thatched roofs. Through time and experimentation, adjusting to climate and geographical conditions and utilizing available natural resources, they began to evolve a vernacular architecture appropriate to the locale. The houses had flat or low-pitched gable roofs, entrances on the long side of the house, paired doors, *rejas* on street windows, inside shutters, side porches, loggias, street balconies, arches, outside stairs, and courtyards.

As the French, English, Dutch, and Danes initiated their colonizing efforts in the West Indies in the early 1600s, they were building on the experience of over a hundred years of Spanish colonization. The Spanish West Indian colonies boasted active ports, thriving economies, and an established agricultural base (primarily sugarcane, tobacco, and cotton). They also had strictly planned settlements with strong architectural and cultural forms and traditions.

Since the Dutch and Danes had little, if any, influence on the Louisiana colony, their contributions will not be included herein.

### **The French**

The first efforts at colonization in the New World by the French were in Canada, a climate to which they were more accustomed than the balmy Caribbean. They founded Quebec in 1608 and Montreal in 1642. In 1648, they ventured into the West Indies and by 1665 had founded St. Barthelemy, Martinique, Guadalupe, St. Martin,

Grenada, St. Lucie, and Saint-Domingue (Haiti).

In the French West Indian settlements, like the Spanish, engineers designed the government buildings and buildings of importance. These buildings were executed in the style of the homeland—specifically, of Paris—predominantly Renaissance and neoclassical. By the time the French began to settle in the Caribbean, the Spanish, colonial, Creole farmhouse, with its broad front galleries, rear cabinets, and open loggia, were common place (Edwards 1988). The early houses of the commoners were simple, two-room rectangular structures. However, over time, the residential architecture of the French colonists began to respond to local environmental conditions and drew upon the building experiences of the earlier Spanish colonists. The evolution of a true Creole vernacular architecture had begun.

### The English

The first colonial efforts of the English were, like the French in Canada, in cooler climates. On the North Atlantic coast, they settled Jamestown in 1607, Plymouth in 1620, and Charleston in 1670. Their West Indies settlements in the seventeenth century included Barbados, Nevis, Antigua,Montserrat, St. Kitts, Jamaica, and St. Vincent.

The English engineers also created buildings reflective of the styles popular in England at the time. Major buildings were strongly inspired by the classical traditions. The houses of the commoners were simple rectangular structures, not unlike those of the French; like the French settlers, the British were also inspired by the older and more established Spanish design and building techniques and joined in the evolution of a cross-cultural Creole vernacular.

### The Africans

Throughout this era of colonization, Africans were brought in great numbers to the New World as slaves. While their labor was primarily directed to agricultural endeavors, they no doubt provided a vast portion of the labor required to construct the New World settlements. Doubtless, their culture influenced the development of the Creole vernacular; the extent of this influence has never been adequately documented or understood.

## CREOLE VERNACULAR

The West Indies has a stormy political history. Continuous struggles, invasions, and wars resulted in frequent changes in the European “ownership” of the island colonies. West Indian port cities such as Havana and Santo Domingo became key points of entry into the New World—where goods from Europe were distributed to the surrounding Caribbean and mainland colonies—and key points of departure—where precious metals and agricultural products were collected and sent back to the European continent. These ports provided increased opportunity for cross-cultural interaction between the Spanish, French, and English. Shared experiences between these cultures resulted in a constant blending of ideas. Each culture borrowed from the others, incorporating into their own settlements and architecture the ideas and elements that had been proven successful and learning from the mistakes of those who had gone before. However, because of the independent nature of each island, distinctions between their architectural character prevailed, even among those islands colonized by the same European culture (Crain 1994). While natural resources played a major role in those distinctions, it was the climate that was the most influential force in creating continuity of the islands’ architecture.

Interaction between the Spanish, French, and English fostered experimentation and the evolution of a vernacular tradition that is neither Spanish, French, nor English; it is *Creole*—a unique blending of traditions originating in Europe and evolved in the West Indies.

It is impossible to understand the cultural and architectural history of New Orleans outside of this Creole vernacular tradition. A port city itself, colonial New Orleans developed later than many of the Caribbean settlements, drawing upon their nearly two hundred years of experience. Like its source in the West Indies, the architecture of New Orleans evolved in response to climatic conditions, natural resources for building, and the traditions of a diverse blend of cultures to produce an architecture, and consequently a lifestyle, that are distinctively New Orleans.

# FRENCH COLONIAL LOUISIANA

## 1699—1762

THE COLONIAL HISTORY OF LOUISIANA begins, for practical purposes, with the French explorations originating from Canada in the

late seventeenth century. Although the Spanish had explored the Louisiana area in search of the Mississippi River as early as the fifteenth century, their first expeditions never resulted in colonial settlements.

In 1682, Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, a French Canadian fur trader, traveled south down the Mississippi from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. Near the mouth of the Mississippi River, he set up a cross bearing the arms of France, claiming all of midcontinental America drained by the Mississippi and its tributaries for King Louis XIV and naming it Louisiane in his honor.



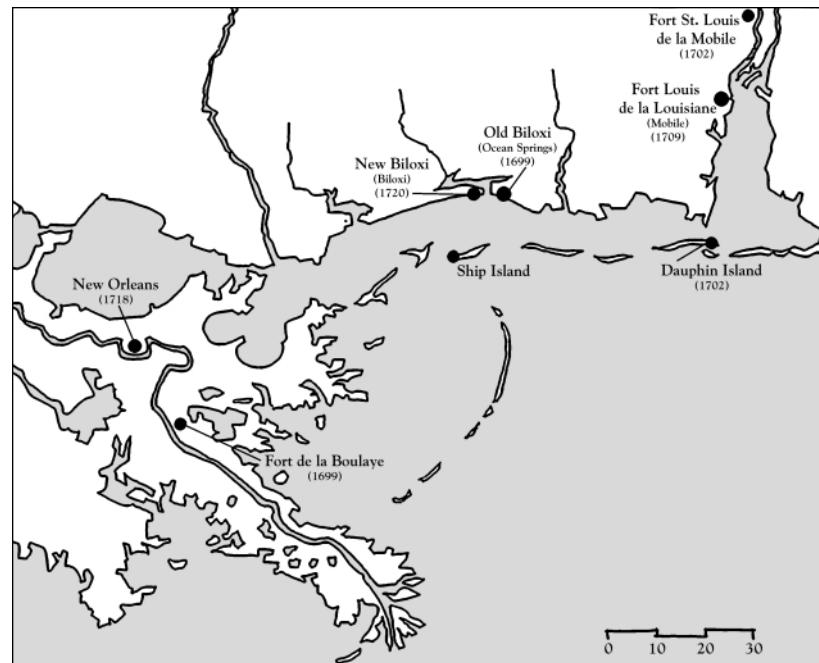
## THE GULF COAST SETTLEMENTS

The goal of Louis XIV was to control the Mississippi Valley fur trade and provide a base of defense against Spanish and English encroachment. In 1698, he commissioned another French Canadian, Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, to lead an expedition in another attempt at establishing a colony near the mouth of the Mississippi. King Louis's instructions were to go to the Mississippi River, select a good site for a town that could easily be defended, and block entry into the river from other nations. Accompanied by his younger brother, Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, Iberville sailed from Brest, France, on October 24, 1698. Three months later, in January of 1699, Iberville and his men reached their destination, exploring the area around present-day Biloxi, Mississippi, before venturing westward around Bay St. Louis and on to the Mississippi River. They returned to the eastern shore of Biloxi Bay, at present-day Ocean Springs, and built Fort Maurepas, thus establishing the first permanent French settlement in the province of Louisiana. They named it Biloxi, after the local Indians.

Settlers soon began arriving at the new settlement, coming from France, French Canada, and the French West Indies. Iberville, following the policies of his Canadian predecessors, immediately began forging peaceful relationships with the local Indian tribes.

In 1702, the colony was moved from Biloxi to a bluff overlooking the Mobile River, a few miles above Mobile Bay. Nine years later, it was relocated to present-day Mobile. Iberville left Bienville in charge and sailed back to France, never to return to Louisiana. He died in Havana in 1706, most likely from a bout with malaria.

Growth in the Gulf Coast settlements was slow in the early years. The 1712 census listed the population in the region from Mobile to New Orleans and up the Mississippi to Natchez at 324. Several problems inhibited growth in the region. The largest hindrance was the shallow water in Mobile Bay and the Mississippi Sound at Biloxi, which inhibited the shipment of goods from the homeland. Frequent tropical storms and occasional destructive hurricanes, sandy soil unfit



for agriculture, mosquitoes, and fever epidemics presented ongoing challenges.

Tense political conflicts in Europe distracted the French government from providing the small, troubled colony of Louisiana with needed support and supplies. Deportation of prisoners to Louisiana became a convenient means of finding settlers for the colony. Convicts had their sentences commuted and were sent to Louisiana to work for three years, after which they were given a part of the land they had cleared and cultivated.

# THE FOUNDING OF NEW ORLEANS

While the fortified settlements at Biloxi and Mobile were important to the colonization efforts of the French, they were also ancillary to the goal of establishing a permanent city to control the Mississippi River Valley. Since the early explorations, the search for a permanent site for the capital of the Louisiana colony was ongoing. It was generally acknowledged that it should be located on the Mississippi River rather than the Gulf of Mexico. A number of sites had been explored and considered from near the mouth of the river to as far north as present-day Baton Rouge, approximately one hundred and fifty miles upstream.

As the search continued, the advantages of locating the city on the crescent of the river, near the Indian portage route to Bayou St. John and Lake Pontchartrain, were becoming increasingly acknowledged. Traveling over the portage route that led from the river, one could reach Bayou St. John and navigate his way to Lake Pontchartrain, on to Lake Bourgne and the open Gulf. This was a much shorter, quicker, and safer route to the Gulf of Mexico and the Gulf Coast settlements.

Early in 1718, three ships arrived at the Mobile colony with men, money, and supplies. Bienville, realizing an opportunity, left with about fifty men and made his way west to the chosen site on the lower Mississippi River, approximately 100 miles inland from its mouth. At a crescent-shaped bend on the east bank of the river, first explored in 1699, which by this time had become generally accepted as the best location for the capital, he commenced clearing for a new settlement.

A small section of wilderness was cleared along the riverfront and temporary housing, crude at best, was constructed. In an effort to protect the settlement from the yearly spring floods, a small levee was built along the riverbank. Bienville named the new capital Nouvelle Orleans, in honor of the Duc d'Orléans who, upon the death of Louis XIV in 1715, had become regent of France.

## Arrival of the Engineers

With a site selected for the colony's capital, trained engineers were sent to prepare a plan for the new city and construct the necessary fortifications. Pierre Leblond de La Tour and his assistants, Sieurs Adrien de Pauger, Chevalier de Boispinel, and Charles Franquet de Chaville, arrived at Old Biloxi in March of 1720. Soon thereafter, the decision was made to relocate the colony to the west side of the bay, at present-day Biloxi. There they began laying out a new settlement that they called New Biloxi. Construction began on Fort Louis. A year later, they decided to move the capital to New Orleans.

Adrien de Pauger arrived in New Orleans in March 1721—his task, to execute the plan that had been developed in Biloxi under La Tour's guidance.

## The Plan of the Quarter

Although Bienville had founded New Orleans some three years prior to Pauger's arrival, very little progress had been made at the site. A small area had been cleared and the direction of a few streets had been established, but only a few crude huts had been constructed.

The earliest known plan of New Orleans, designed by La Tour and Pauger, is unsigned but sent with Pauger's letter to Paris in August of 1721. Historian Sam Wilson writes: "The plan was a simple gridiron, based on the military planning principles of Louis XIV's great military engineer, the Mare'chal de Vauban, and his successor, the Marquis d'Asfeld, in whose Corps of Engineers both Leblond de La Tour and Pauger had served in Europe (Wilson 1987)."

While the plan as executed by the engineers was heavily influenced by Vauban, the origin of the grid is not French but has its roots in Hellenic Greece in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. Driven by their instinct for orderliness, harmony, and beauty, the Greeks set out to create cities deliberately, establishing a plan to guide their growth in an orderly fashion. Their system for ordering this growth was a "gridiron" plan, with straight streets crossing at right angles and centered around a core, the agora (the equivalent of the Spanish *plaza*

mayor, and the modern town square). The Greek plan, introduced into southern Italy, was spread throughout Europe by the Romans as the structure of their military camps. After a temporary eclipse during the Middle Ages, it was revived in Europe in the Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

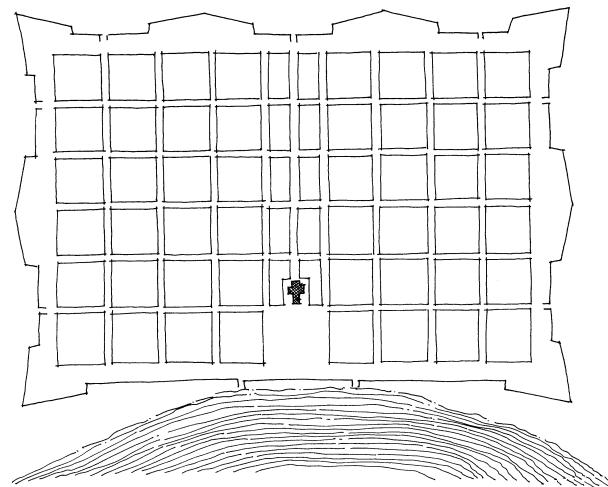
The gridiron plan, introduced to the New World by the Spanish, became the model for colonial fortified towns and can be found in Spanish, French, and English colonial cities. In New Orleans, it was an appropriate solution to many of the problems and concerns facing the new settlement.

The first of these problems was protecting the colonists from attack by hostile Indians, the Spanish, and the English. Consequently, the size of the town was limited by the resources available to construct protective walls around the settlement. While water was abundant, supplied by the Mississippi River and the collection of rainwater in raised cisterns, the food supply was more problematic. Latter-day plantations, capable of sustaining a growing population, were not yet established. Each family was largely responsible for production of its own food, primarily in the rear yards of their residences. Lots were therefore designed large enough for houses as well as gardens, orchards, and yards for chickens and pigs.

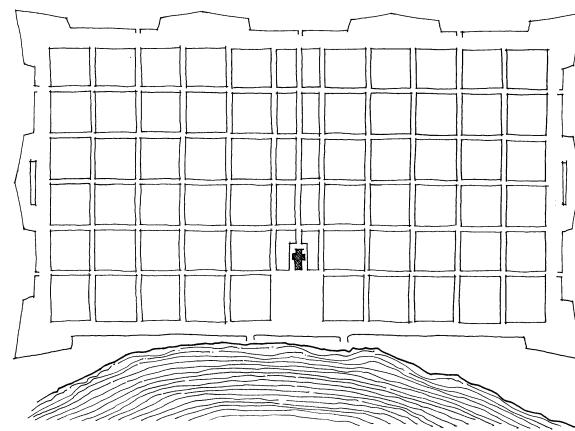
The plan of the French Quarter, similar to those developed by the Spanish in their colonial settlements, centered around the Place d'Armes, the town commons, which served as a gathering place for the general populace and as the venue for military processions and exercises. Located on the riverfront, the Place d'Armes occupied a typical block, measuring approximately 320 feet square. The church, centrally located on the north side facing the river, was flanked by a guardhouse and prison on the left and the *Presbytère*, which was the lodging and offices of the priests, on the right. The south side was open to the river. Government buildings and houses of the aristocrats were placed in prominent locations near the Place d'Armes, while the houses of the commoners were located just beyond.

The original plan by La Tour, dated April 23, 1722, shows the

Quarter divided in a grid of fifty-four square blocks. Nine months later in January 1723, the plan was expanded to sixty-six blocks, each approximately 320 feet by 320 feet. Each block was divided into



1722 map

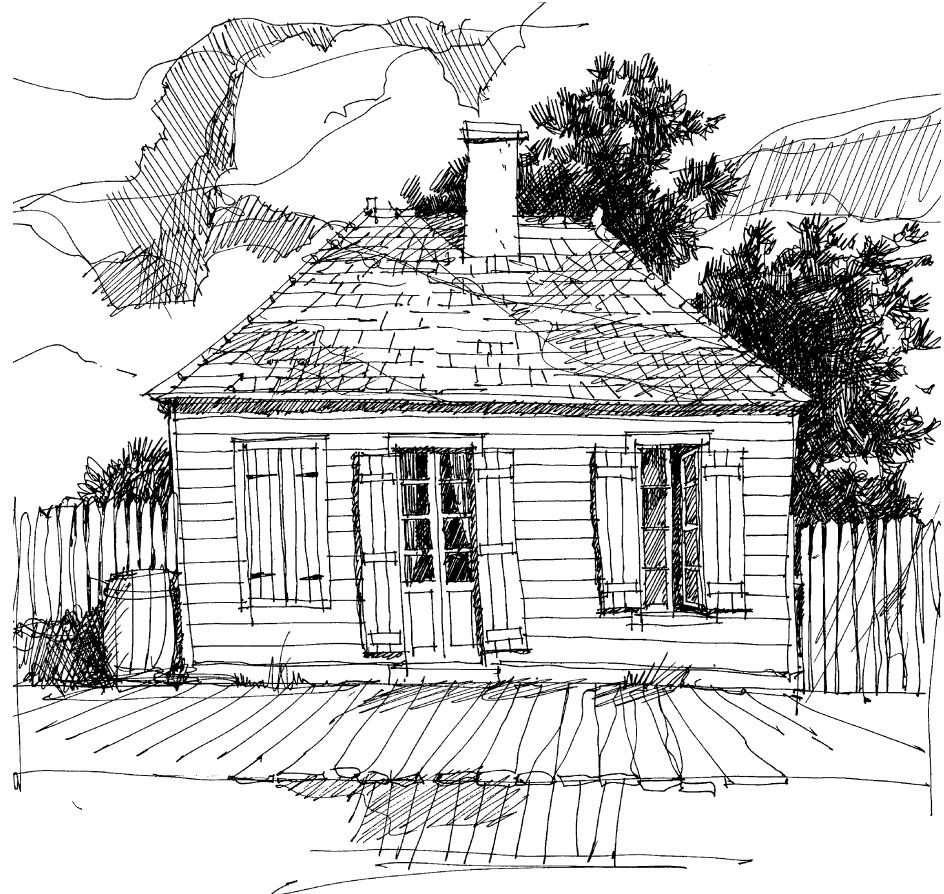


1723 map

twelve lots, with five lots facing the streets parallel to the river and a key lot facing each of the perpendicular streets. The central blocks north of the church were further subdivided, placing the rear of the church on axis with each street, making it a prominent focal point from both the front and rear facades. Located directly on the banks of the river, the city proved to be very vulnerable to flooding. The seriousness of the flooding problem was not realized at the time of its founding but is well documented in records of the early years. A note on a 1719 sketch, attributed to J. M. de Beauvilliers, describes the conditions: "The islands or squares of the inhabitants are surrounded with water for three months of the year because of the overflowing of the waters of the river from the 25 March until the 24 June. In front of the town is a levee and in the rear a ditch and other drains."

Drouot de Valdeterre writes: "New Orleans is established in muddy ground brought on by the waters that overflow twice a year. . . . The waters stagnate there from two to three months and render the air very unhealthy; there are only some wooden huts absolutely beyond condition to serve if they are not repaired after each overflow." From Claude Joseph Villars Dubreuil, a royal commissioner: "The establishment of New Orleans in the beginning was awful, the river when it was high spreading over the whole ground, and in all the houses there were two feet of water, which caused general and mortal diseases."

The battle with the river—a battle which continues to this day in New Orleans—had commenced. It was not until 1790, when levee construction ensued in earnest, that the colonists began to get the flooding problem under control.



## THE EARLY FRENCH TOWN

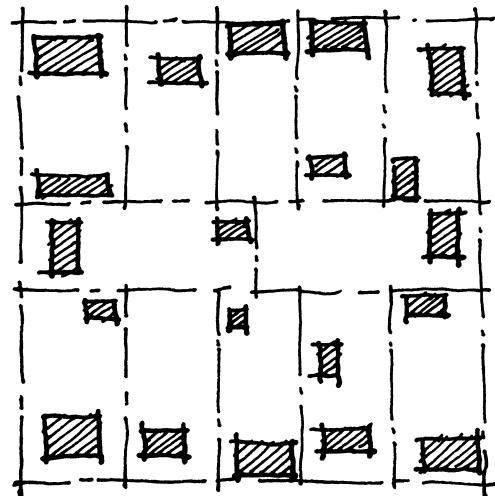
The natural environment posed tremendous challenges to the settlers of the Louisiana colony. Torrential rains, hurricanes, insects, flooding, scorching-hot and humid summers, and soft soils presented great obstacles to development. Although written in 1819, an entry from Benjamin Latrobe's journal describes soil conditions similar to those encountered by the new colonists.

"The Mineralogist is completely baffled in this country . . . It is a pity, as to the mere expense of building that this is a floating city, floating below the surface of the water on a bed of mud. In digging the trench for my Suction pipe, a pick could with difficulty penetrate the crust of the road, so exceedingly hard is the Clay or Mud of which after three or four days dry weather, it is compacted. But two feet six inches below the surface the blunt handle of the pick could easily be pushed down, up to the blade, and the water followed it when drawn out . . . It is very singular however that this Mass of soft stuff does not appear to permit the heavy piers that are every where built upon it, to sink

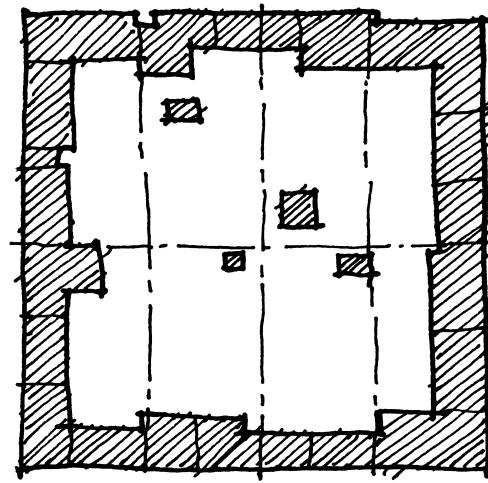
gradually and constantly down. They certainly stay where they are first placed, though you may thrust a pole 20 feet into the foundation."

It was an enormous task to build a city in this kind of wilderness and with these kinds of obstacles. For the settlers, finding building solutions to these challenges came slowly and painfully, but over time, their efforts resulted in a distinctive architecture that responded to the extremities of New Orleans' climate and reflected the tenacity, strength, and creativity of the their perseverance.

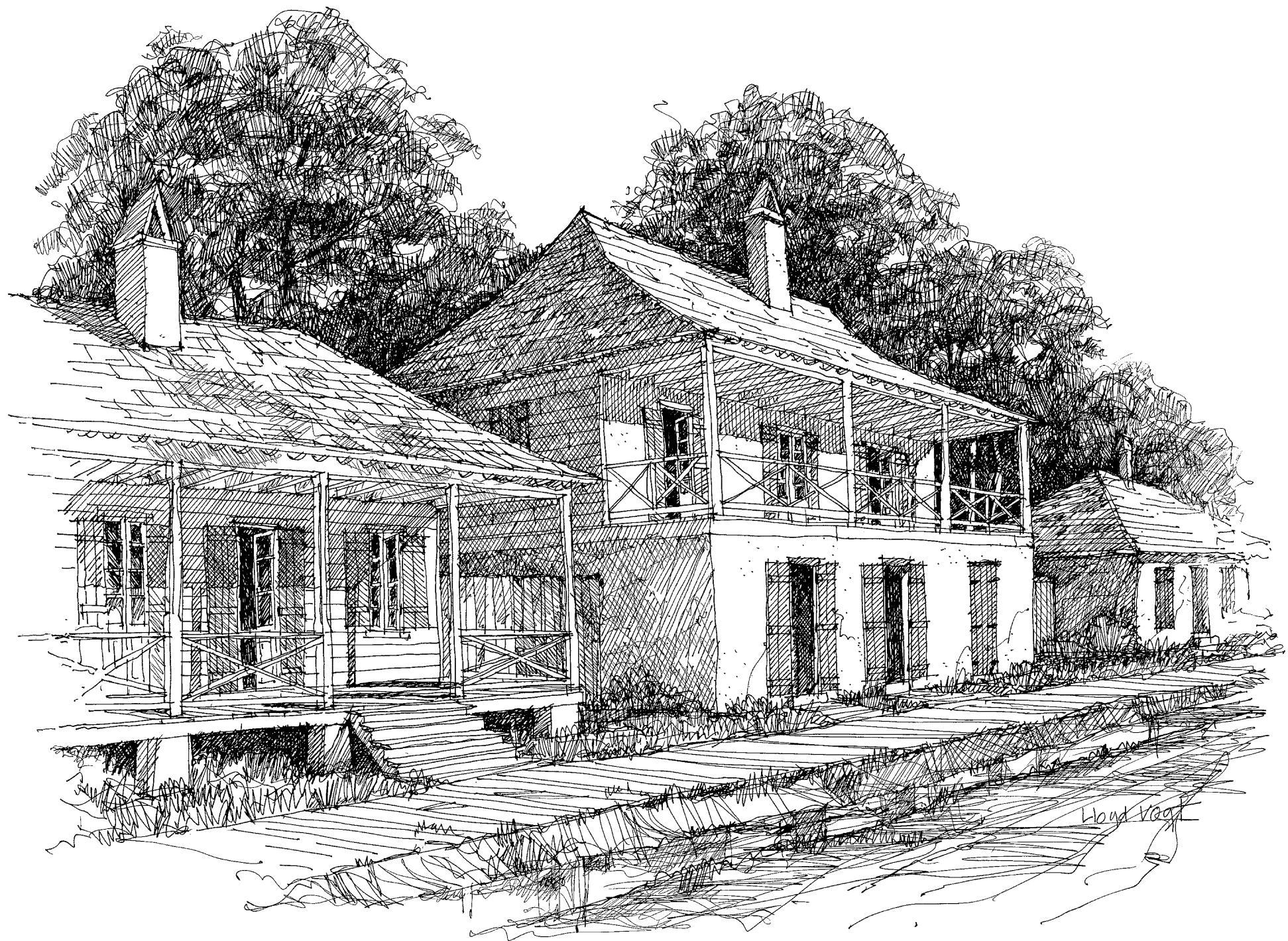
The original French colonial village—the French Quarter—differed from the Spanish colonial settlements in that the houses of the commoners in the Quarter were single-story, detached dwellings, often set back from the front property lines. They were constructed on lots large enough to provide for a small garden and animal raising in the rear yard (fig. 1). By contrast, Spanish colonial villages, although also one story high, were attached structures built directly on the front property line. The houses turned inward and the rear yards were private courtyards (fig. 2).



(Fig. 1) French-colonial block



(Fig. 2) Spanish-colonial block



# THE BUILDING TRADITIONS

The early buildings in New Orleans and the surrounding Louisiana colony derived from a number of traditions. The principal formative influences were the French Canadian explorers who guided the colony in its early years; the European French, led by the engineers; and the French, West Indian Creoles. From the very earliest days of colonization, almost every ship leaving France stopped at the port of Cap François (later Cap-Haïtien) on its way to the Louisiana colony. This stopover introduced both the French Canadians and European French to the West Indian Creole building traditions and would eventually influence their traditions.

Colonial dwellings in the Louisiana colony derive their basic form and plan from two sources: the asymmetrical “Norman plan,” inspired by the vernacular architecture of northwestern France, and the symmetrical “Italo-Spanish West Indian Creole house.” The Norman plan, a simple rectangular core most typically comprised of a living room and a smaller bedroom, was embellished with outdoor living spaces (galleries) on at least one side, but often on all four. The Italo-Spanish plan, also a basic rectangular core, consisted of a central living room flanked on each side by smaller bedrooms, also with peripheral galleries (Edwards 1999).

## The French Canadians

Aided by a tradition of exploration and settlement along the Mississippi River, the French Canadian settlers of Louisiana paved the way for much of the early development in the colony. They first constructed temporary shelters, and after stabilizing the settlement, followed with more permanent structures. The latter buildings were rectangular in shape with steeply pitched hipped roofs, similar to those found in French Quebec and Normandy at that time. The earliest construction method used by the French Canadians is called *poteaux-en-terre* (post-in-ground). Close-set vertical posts were set into the ground and extended up to form the frame of the building; the walls were held together at the top by wall plates, which supported the roof rafters.

Another method, less common in Louisiana, was called *pièce-sur-pièce*, consisting of logs laid horizontally and interlocked with dovetail notching at the corners. This method originated in ancient Europe and was carried to the New World by the French.

## The European French

The early European French settlers, coming primarily from Nantes, La Rochelle, and St. Malo in northern and western France, brought many of their building techniques and traditions with them. Most of their early houses were inspired by French farmhouses.

The French military engineers, with the task of designing the essential military and government buildings (as well as many non-governmental structures), were more influential in the development of the architecture than were the commoners. While few buildings remain from the early French colonial period, numerous drawings prepared by the French engineers have been preserved, and they clearly illustrate the character of these structures. Since these drawings were primarily structural illustrations, they do not show how the completed buildings actually looked—doors, windows, and exterior cladding are not depicted. Fortunately, there is sufficient historical documentation to piece together a more accurate description.

Strongly influenced by the neoclassical principles in vogue at the time in Paris, the engineers constructed buildings in a simplified French Renaissance style, although the building materials and labor resources at their disposal in the new colony severely limited their ability to match the achievements in France. Although they were exposed to Creole building traditions in the West Indian ports they visited, they ignored much of the observed vernacular wisdom in their early efforts. They constructed buildings with few features designed to deal with the local climate and geographic conditions, and as a result, many of their early building efforts were serious failures.

In basic form, the buildings of the engineers were similar to those of the commoners—rectangular with high-pitched hipped roofs. They were distinguished, however, by added embellishments in detailing and ornament, such as French medieval segmental arches over doors and windows. They were symmetrically designed, with a

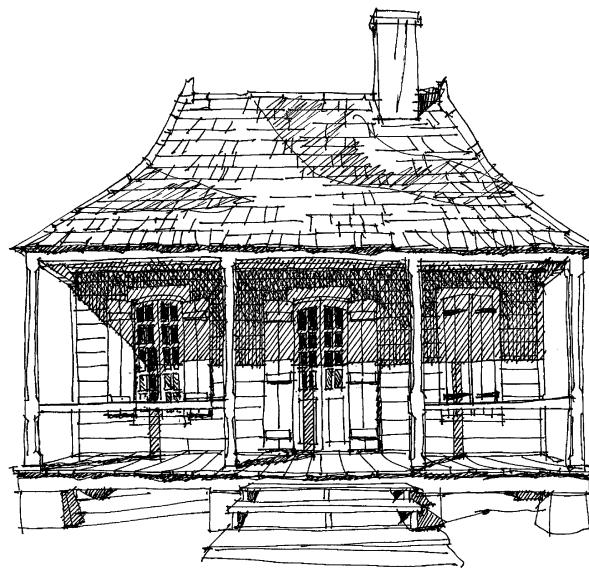
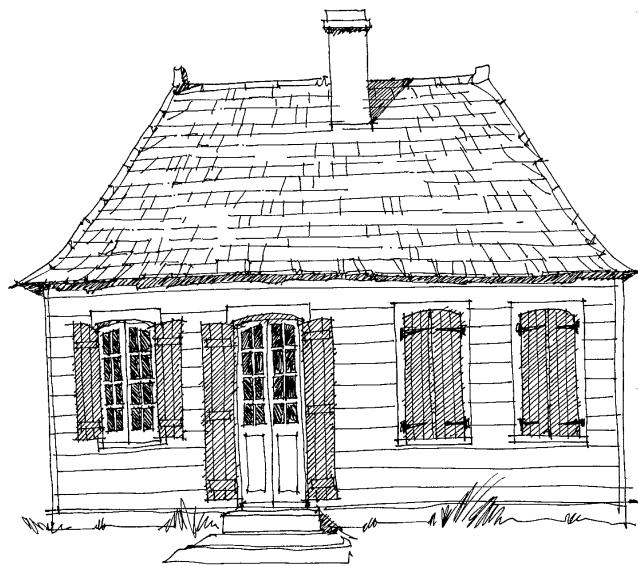
centrally located entrance. Other European French traditions included shutters, French doors, casement windows, buildings constructed low to the ground, and fireplaces.

Construction of the early buildings of the engineers was of a technique called *poteaux-sur-solle*, (posts-on-a-sill), an improvement over *poteaux-en-terre*. It consisted of the placement of vertical timbers on a heavy timber sill resting directly on the ground. In some cases a double sill was utilized, with one buried directly below grade. The exterior walls were covered with weatherboard siding. Another method was *colombage*, a half-timber construction technique common at the time in Normandy and elsewhere in western Europe where wood was available for construction. It consisted of widely spaced, vertically squared timbers with the space between filled with various materials. In Normandy this infill, called nogging, was most often broken-clay tile or cut stone; in Louisiana, *brique-entre-poteaux* (brick-between-posts) and *bousillage* (a combination of mud, lime, and a binder such as Spanish moss or horsehair) were used. The exte-

rior walls were covered with weatherboard siding or stucco to provide protection from the torrential rains that were a common occurrence in the colony.

### West Indian Creoles

A constant flow of people and commerce existed between Saint Domingue, the French jewel of the Caribbean, and the Louisiana colony from the time of its founding. While the early colonists, including the French Canadians and the European French engineers, were influenced by Creole vernacular architecture developed in the West Indies, it was the West Indian Creoles coming to Louisiana from the Caribbean, primarily Saint-Domingue, who popularized its traditions. Having had the experience of almost a century of building in the tropical climate of the islands, as well as learning from the even longer experience of the Spanish, the Creoles were much better prepared for the Louisiana environment than were the European French or the French Canadians.



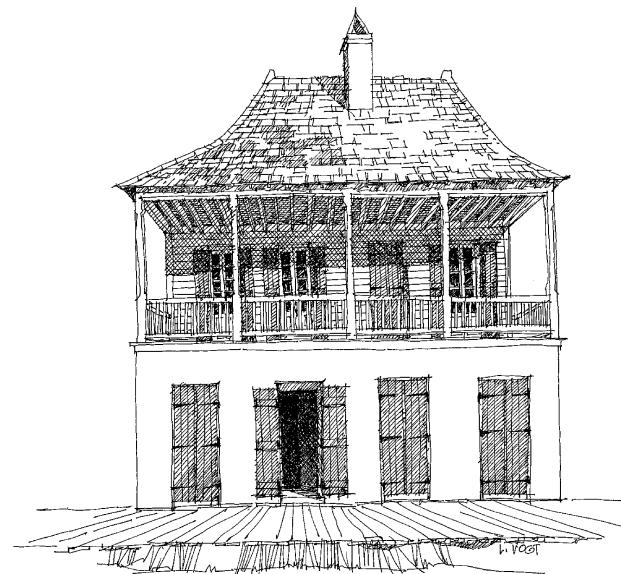
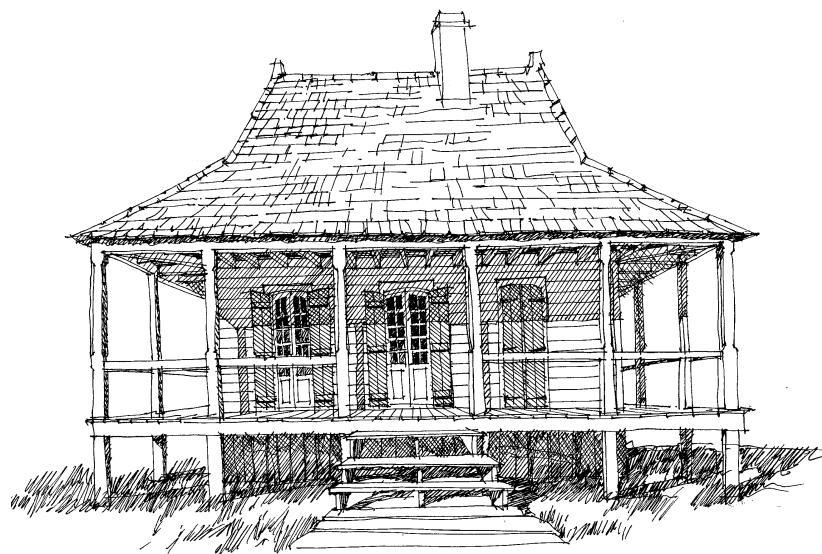
The Creole vernacular architecture that the Creoles brought to Louisiana was a blending of Spanish and French influences. The typical house was a simple rectangular module consisting of three rooms arranged symmetrically (bedroom-living room-bedroom) with three openings on the front facade—a door in the center, flanked by a window on each side. Attached to this basic core, houses often had *cabinets* and *loggias*.

The most permanent building traditions brought to colonial Louisiana by the West Indian Creoles were buildings raised above the ground, galleries, two-story structures with masonry on the first floor and wood frame above, and broken pitch roofs. Houses were generally one room deep to allow for cross ventilation, with multiple French doors opening onto expansive galleries supported by slender, turned, or chamfered columns. They had high-pitched hipped roofs, broken by a shallower pitch that extended over the surrounding galleries. The roofs were covered with bark, thin boards, or wooden shingles.

Houses were generally raised two or three feet above the ground (resting on cypress stumps spaced approximately six feet apart or on solid brick foundations). This tradition evolved in response to damp soil conditions and periodic flooding.

However, the custom can also be traced to developments in the sugarcane industry in the seventeenth-century Caribbean. As the industry grew, houses for African slaves were often prefabricated and shipped to new plantation sites where they could be quickly assembled. Over time, as the fertility of the soil was depleted, the entire plantation, including the slave dwellings, was relocated. Raising the buildings facilitated the relocation process.

Houses raised a full story (eight to ten feet above the ground) were also common. Constructed along the Gulf Coast as early as the 1720s, the houses' ground levels were used for storage and workspace, and the living areas were located on the upper level. The lower floor was generally constructed of brick with a coat of plaster, and the second level of colombage with weatherboard siding. The raised house provided



protection from flooding, dampness, snakes and other wildlife, and also made the second-floor living space more accessible to cooling breezes in the summer. This building type, though brought to Louisiana by the Creoles, was common on farms throughout Europe.

Galleries, a major characteristic of Creole vernacular architecture, were introduced in the Louisiana colony in the early 1700s. Galleries were incorporated on one or more sides and frequently on all four. They were supported by massive columns, round or square, at the first level and by slender colonnettes, turned or chamfered, on the upper level.

While the galleries of Louisiana have their historical source in the traditions of the West Indian Creoles, according to Jay Edwards, there was a discernible African influence.

“African slaves were imported indirectly to Hispaniola beginning in 1510, and directly (from the Guinea coast) after 1517 . . . If the pattern in Hispaniola is parallel to that of other Caribbean colonies, the newly arrived slaves were afforded considerable freedom in the design, construction, and modification of their rural houses until late in the seventeenth century.

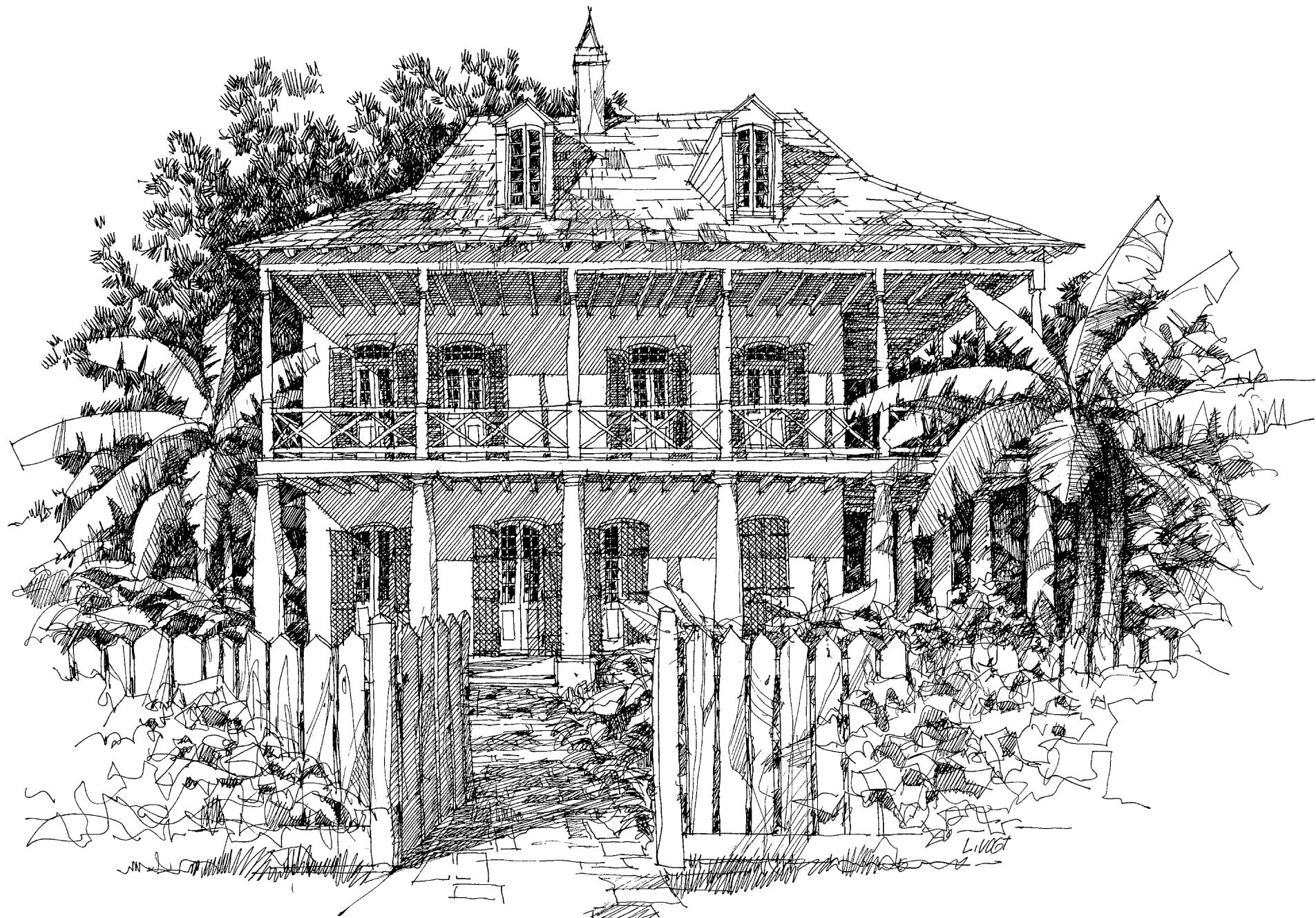
Africans . . . commonly used full length front galleries as the principal daytime living spaces in their indigenous houses. In tropical forest areas, galleries often symbolized authority and prestige and were a prominent feature of the great houses of many African chiefs and kings. Because most of the newly arriving slaves had come from these same coastal areas, the conclusion that Africans helped to introduce this tropical architectural adaption into the American environment seems inescapable, particularly in the case of the smaller country houses.”

However, galleries were also used for the manor houses in Normandy, France, built in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. As described by Régis Faucon in *Manor Houses in Normandy*: “The upper gallery is a motif frequently found in *logis* [manor houses] built in the Pays d’Auge [Normandy] between the late 15th and mid 16th centuries. Accessed from the staircase turret, mostly open, and covered

by a roof supported by a row of narrow posts, the gallery could either project fully or rest on projecting beams over the timber portico situated on the ground floor.”

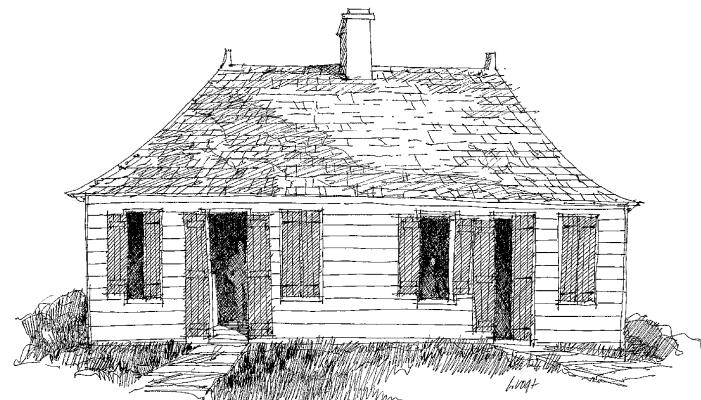
The use of galleries greatly influenced the evolution of vernacular roof forms. As galleries were added to the basic rectangular modules, roof forms evolved from a simple lean-to attachment to a double-pitched roof, and eventually, to the single-pitched “umbrella roof,” which covered the main body of the house as well as the galleries. (Edwards 1988)

While French Creole vernacular architecture can be found in French settlements throughout the West Indies, it was in the great sugar colonies of Saint-Domingue, Cayenne (French Guiana), and Louisiana that the French constructed houses with all of the Creole features as described above (Edwards 1994).

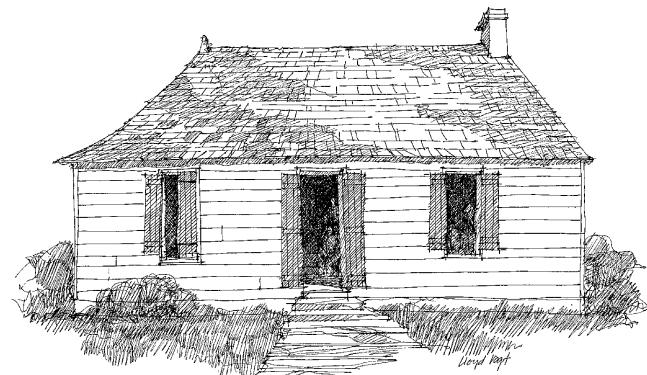


## THE COLONY GROWS

After temporary shelters were constructed and the settlement stabilized, more permanent structures had to be built. The first buildings of importance in the French Quarter, constructed by the engineers, were the director's house (fig. 3 and opposite page)—designed by La Tour in 1722—carpenters' barracks (fig. 4), and the hospital (fig. 5). Rectangular structures of heavy timber framing, they were constructed

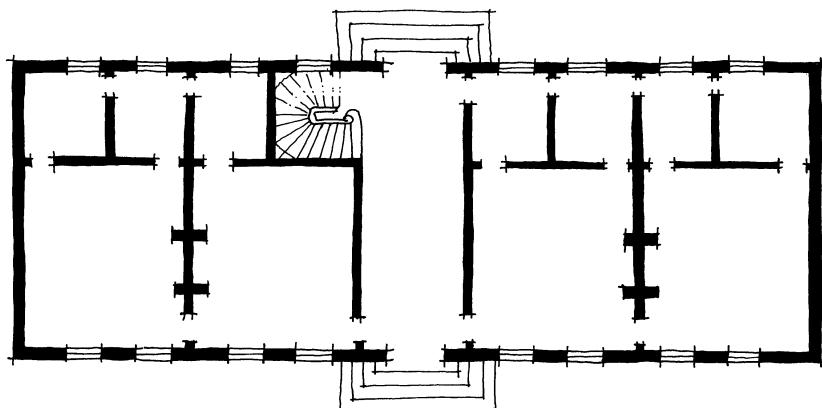


(Fig. 4)

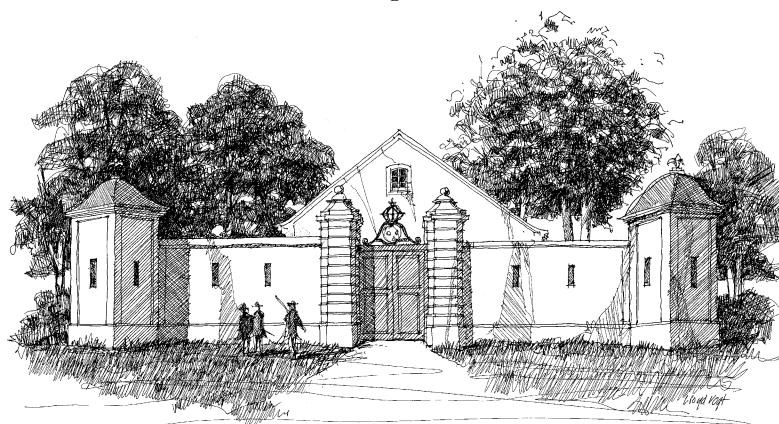


(Fig. 5)

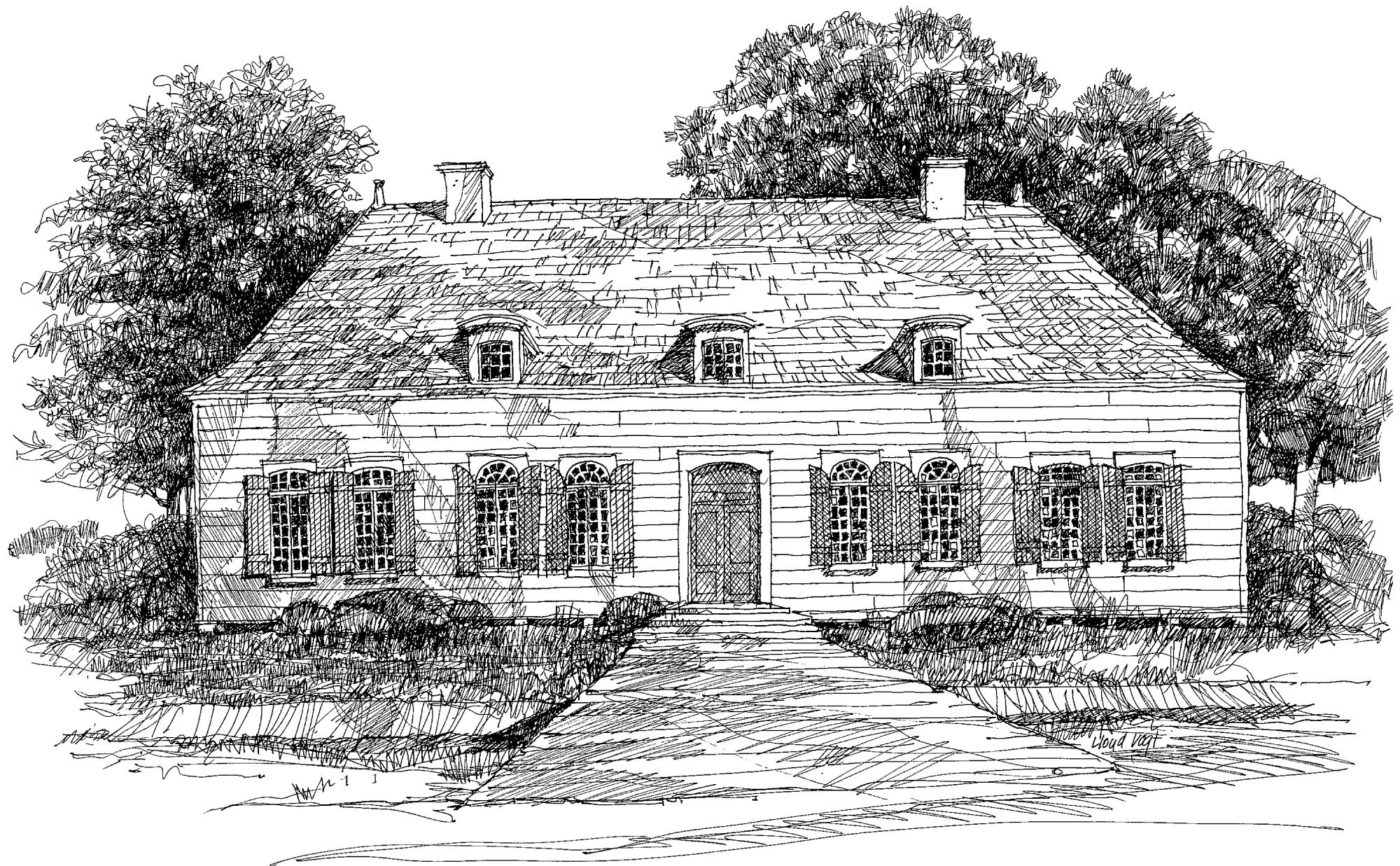
on timber sills laid directly on the ground. The exterior walls were covered with wide boards and roofed with wooden shingles or strips of bark. The director's house, located on the corner of Decatur and Toulouse Streets, was designed as the administrative building for the directors of the Company of the Indies. It was described by Pauger as “the most beautiful house that has yet been seen in the colonies, and an example to the settlers in building their own houses (Wilson 1987).”

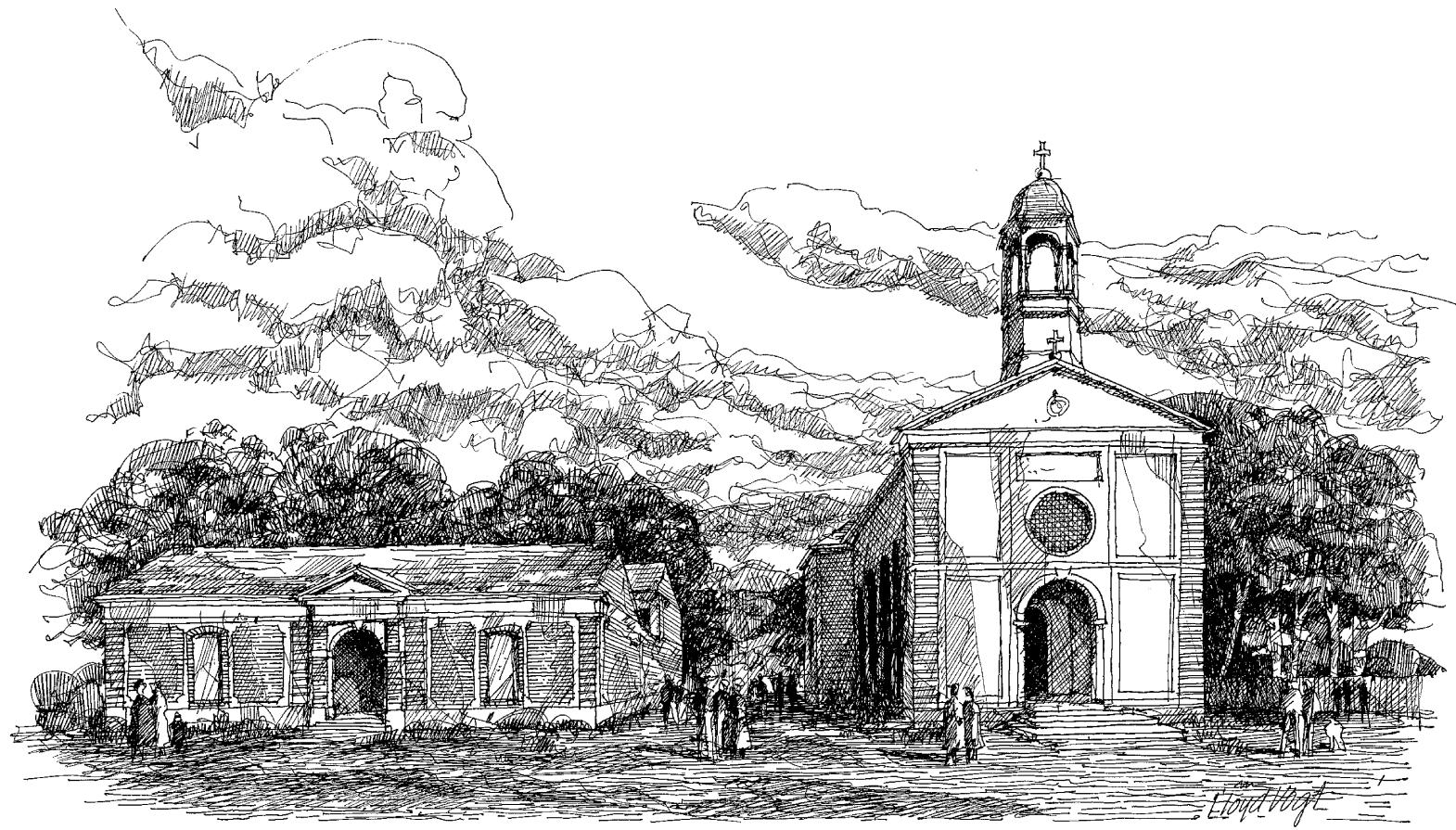


(Fig. 3)



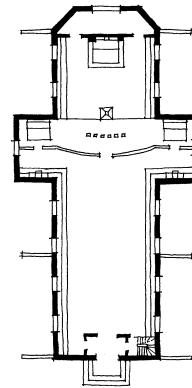
Powder Magazine





Upon La Tour's death in 1723, Adrien de Pauger was appointed chief engineer. He immediately began work on a new warehouse, powder magazine, and wing for the hospital, and in 1724, he designed the parish church (fig. 6) on the same site where the St. Louis Cathedral is located today. In 1726, Pauger died and upon his request was buried beneath the church, which was under construction at the time. Ignace François Broutin, a military captain who had come to the colony with La Tour in 1720, assumed the role of chief engineer and oversaw the completion of the church.

As the colony grew, construction problems began to appear. The early colonial wooden structures built on ground sills experienced rapid decay in the humid climate and continual subsidence in the soft soils, prompting a search for more appropriate construction methods.

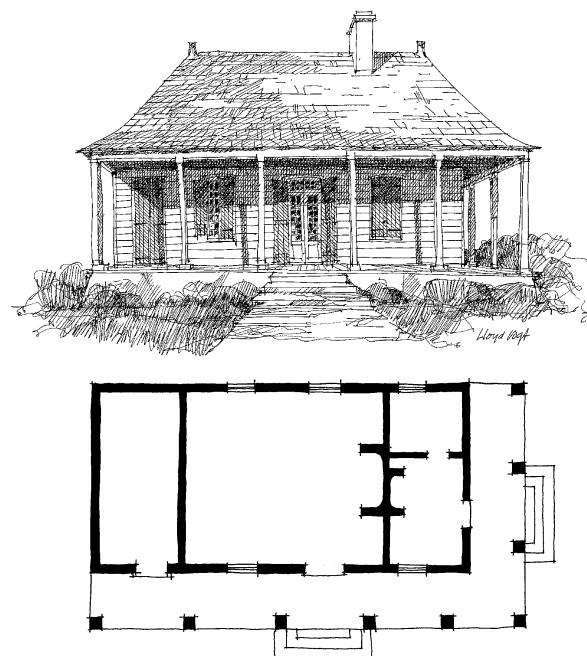


(Fig. 6)

Under the direction of Pierre Baron, a technique of half-timber construction with the timbers and brickwork left exposed was introduced. Although common in France at the time, in the French Quarter, because of the porous nature of the local brick and the subtropical rains, exposed brick construction resulted in rapid deterioration—all the buildings so constructed had to be rebuilt within a few years.

In 1726 the first brickyard was established on Bayou St. John. In a letter dated May 6, 1727, Broutin asked that more brick masons be sent to the colony “in order to be able to do all the proposed buildings in brick and on piles so that they may be works to remain and endure (McDermott-Wilson 1969).” In 1731, Baron, presiding as chief engineer, designed a prison beside the parish church, facing the Place d’Armes, the site now occupied by the Cabildo. It was the first all-brick structure recorded in New Orleans.

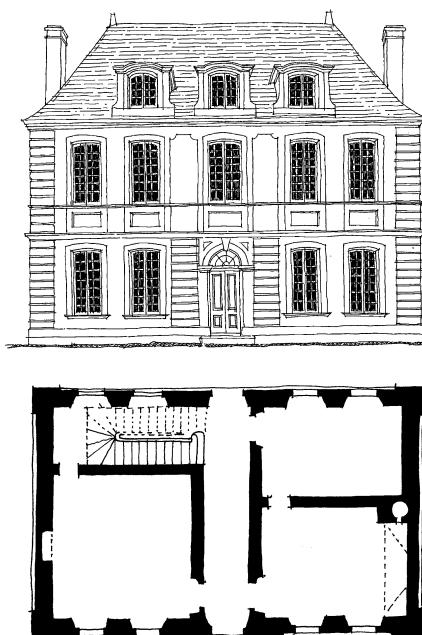
The guardhouse and prison (proposed to be constructed at the Basile



(Fig. 7)

located at the mouth of the Mississippi River from drawings signed by the military engineer Bernard de Deverges and dated February 28, 1734) illustrates the influence of the West Indian vernacular tradition on the young colony with the incorporation of galleries (fig. 7). Its appearance contrasts with the buildings of the French engineers.

The Doctor’s House (fig. 8), designed by Broutin in 1735, was a small two-story house with a steeply pitched, hipped roof and dormers. Fenestrations were on the front and rear facades, with the side walls supporting fireplaces and chimneys. Windows had segmental arch tops and the entrance incorporated a fanlight transom above the door. The house was ornamented with quoins and belt courses, and stucco bands accentuated the openings. The overall appearance borrowed much of its inspiration from Paris, France. Research indicates that the house was never constructed; however, it is a good example of the design sensibilities of the early colonial period.



(Fig. 8)

Building upon experience, the engineers continued to experiment with different construction techniques. Their buildings rotted, sunk into the soil, were devoured by termites, and blown down by hurricanes. Eventually, a combination of two construction methods, brick on the first level and *colombage* on the second, proved to be a viable solution and became the typical method of construction from about the mid-1700s to the late 1700s.

With an established capital at New Orleans, there was a slow but steady influx of immigrants to the colony. Almost all of the Louisiana settlements were located on waterways, and most settlers traveled to nearby villages in some kind of boat—most often a pirogue, a small flat-bottomed boat resembling a canoe. The Mississippi River, with its tributaries, was Louisiana's great means of commerce, and trade with France and the French and Spanish West Indies, its lifeblood.

In the 1720s, the Company of the Indies brought several thousand German and Swiss farmers into the colony to satisfy the food shortage. They settled approximately forty miles upriver from New Orleans, in what is now Des Allemands and proved to be an important factor in saving the colony from starvation during its early years.

In order to meet the need for labor to construct the new towns and support the agricultural economy, African slaves were imported to the colony. Coming first from the West Indies, then directly from Africa, almost all the slaves brought to Louisiana under French rule, approximately 5,700, arrived between 1718 and 1731. The majority came from a single region of Africa, the Senegal River Basin, bringing with them an already formed Bambara culture. By the 1730s, the slave population was approximately twice that of the whites. Aided by the increased labor force, larger farms began to evolve. As the colony grew, commerce increased; from the Louisiana ports of New Orleans, Biloxi, and Mobile skins and hides, indigo, tobacco, myrtle wax, bear's oil, pitching tar, and lumber were shipped. From the French ports of La Rochelle, Brest, and Bordeaux, and from the West Indian ports of Havana, Port-au-Prince, Santo Domingo, and Cap-Haitien came food, flowers, wine, clothing, spices, utensils, and other goods.

In 1731, the Company of the Indies, failing to make an economic success of the Louisiana venture, ceded control of the colony back to

the Crown and ceased the shipment of supplies. The planters, realizing the advantages of a stable slave society but now, in many instances, no longer able to care for and feed their slaves, no longer required them to work on Sundays and religious holidays. On these days, they were allowed to leave the plantations and take on jobs for pay. They also began to work their own gardens and to hunt, fish, and trap or gather fruit, nuts, and firewood, which they would take into town to sell. Soon, they were given Saturday afternoons off and assigned plots of land on which to grow their own food, as well as barns and bins in which to store it. Eventually, many of the slaves became self-supporting, participating in the New Orleans market economy (Hirsch 1992). By the end of the French period, slaves were holding Sunday market on the edge of the Quarter at the end of Orleans Street, an area that became known as Congo Square.

Under a series of French colonial governors guided by Bienville, the colony slowly grew. The Gonichon plan of New Orleans, drawn in 1731, depicts a city of buildings with high hip roofs, some with galleries, and most set from ten to fifteen feet from the front property line. They were detached structures, and in the rear yards were gardens, orchards, arbors, and service buildings such as kitchens, privies, storehouses, stables, and slave quarters.

The increasing activity added to the boisterous character of the colonists. When the Marquis de Vaudreuil, the son of a former governor of Canada, came to town in 1743, he was horrified, as his earlier predecessor Governor Cadillac had been, at the rowdiness of the colony's population. Like Cadillac, he resolved to civilize the people (Hirsch 1992).

The fall of French Quebec to the English in 1759 left the Mississippi Valley vulnerable to British invasion. The fortified protection of New Orleans was greatly lacking, consisting of only forts at Bayou St. John and Lake Pontchartrain and partial palisades on the border of the city. This new threat prompted the French courts to immediately upgrade the fortification by constructing five redoubts connected by ramparts with a surrounding ditch (Parkerson 1991).

Although the colony was experiencing growth (during the 1750s nearly a hundred houses were constructed in the Quarter), it continued

to fail as an economic venture, so France began directing more and more support and resources to saving its West Indian colonies, eventually ignoring the costly and unsuccessful Louisiana colony. Despite the lack of French support, a population of approximately 3,000—made up of French, French Canadians, West Indians, Creoles, Germans, Swiss, African and mulatto slaves, and free men of color—continued to battle the elements. Through Benjamin Latrobe's relation of the conditions in 1819, his description of the relentless pest, the mosquito, would have been similar to that encountered by the colonists during this period.

"But the pest inseparable from the locality of New Orleans which no human effort can extirpate, are the Muskitoes, the *Marangouins*. A few are found, every warm day throughout the Year, but from June to the Middle of October or beginning of November, their swarms are incredible. The Muskitoes are so important a body of enemies, that they furnish a considerable part of the conversation of every day, and of every body; they regulate many family arrangements, they prescribe the employment and distribution of time, and most essentially affect the comfort and enjoyment of every individual in the country.

As soon as the sun sets, the Muskitoes appear in Clouds, and fill every room in the house, as well as the open Air. Their noise is so loud, as to startle a stranger to its daily recurrence. It fills the air, and there is a character of occasionally depression and elevation in it, like that of a concert of frogs in a Marsh. There may also be distinguished, I think, four or five leading voices that are occasionally swelled and intermittent; in fact the whole music has the effect of being performed by unanimous concert. This Noise and the activity of these pestiferous animals lasts about an hour, when it abates and almost ceases. The buzzing may however be heard through' the whole night, until daybreak, when the general Outcry again begins, more loudly, I think, than in the evening, and continued till the Sun has risen, when it ceases, and no more is heard, and little felt, till the approach of the night.

The numbers, the minuteness, and the activity of these enemies to repose, render any warfare against them that is not merely defensive impossible. But a defensive war is very practicable and may be in a great measure successful. The business of the greatest importance is to secure yourself against their attacks during sleep. The common Muskito bar effects this most completely. It consists of Curtains reaching from the

Tester nearly to the floor, which surround the bed in one piece, connected by a cover or top piece, so that the Muskito bar is a kind of box without a bottom. The best kind of Muskito bar, is furnished all round the top with rings. The rings slide as in a common set of curtains upon light Iron rods on each side of the bed . . . and there is an indescribably pleasant sense of serenity in hearing their clamor on the outside without the possibility of being annoyed by them. The bars are made either of coarse open canvass, French lino (which are the best), Silk, open and figured Gauze (which are the most handsome), and most frequently of check Muslin."

While the Louisiana colony had never been of great interest to French commerce because it had neither sugar nor coffee and because its export products could be found in greater quantities in the other colonies, it was, however, of great interest to Saint-Domingue. Having quickly depleted their limited supply of timber while experiencing growth in both cities and plantations, the island was badly in need of wood for construction and casks, and firewood for the furnaces of its sugar mills. The forests of the Louisiana colony, with excellent timber supplies, satisfied these needs. As described by Le Page du Pratz, a director of the Company of the Indies plantation at New Orleans in the early 1700s: "From Louisiana, they took to the islands squared cypress beams suitable for building. Houses, completely marked and cut, ready to assemble upon arrival at their destination, were often transported; brick; essentes (flat wood shingles) used to cover homes and barns." It appears that an evolving Creole vernacular architecture was flowing from New Orleans to the Caribbean, as well as from the Caribbean to New Orleans.

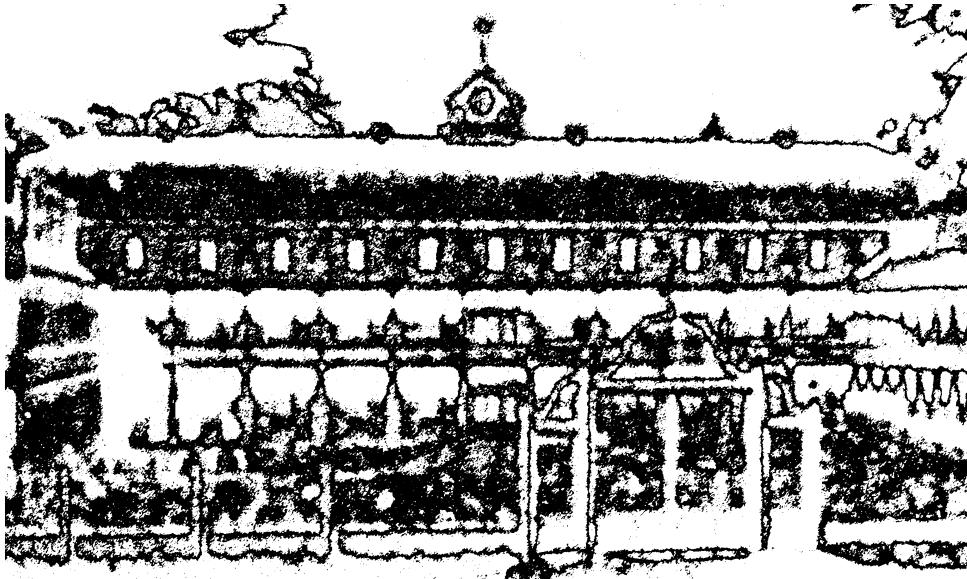
By 1760, as the French regime was coming to an end, much of the Quarter was still unimproved. Only the first four streets from the river were fully developed and the large majority of the houses were simple, wooden, one-story structures—the better houses were two stories with galleries. Most of the important buildings constructed by the French had disappeared. It had been a period of tremendous hardship encountered with great perseverance—the colonists demonstrating great ingenuity in merely surviving. France had tried, but had never been able, to make Louisiana a profitable venture.

## URSULINE CONVENT

1114 Chartres Street

1745-1750

National Historic Landmark

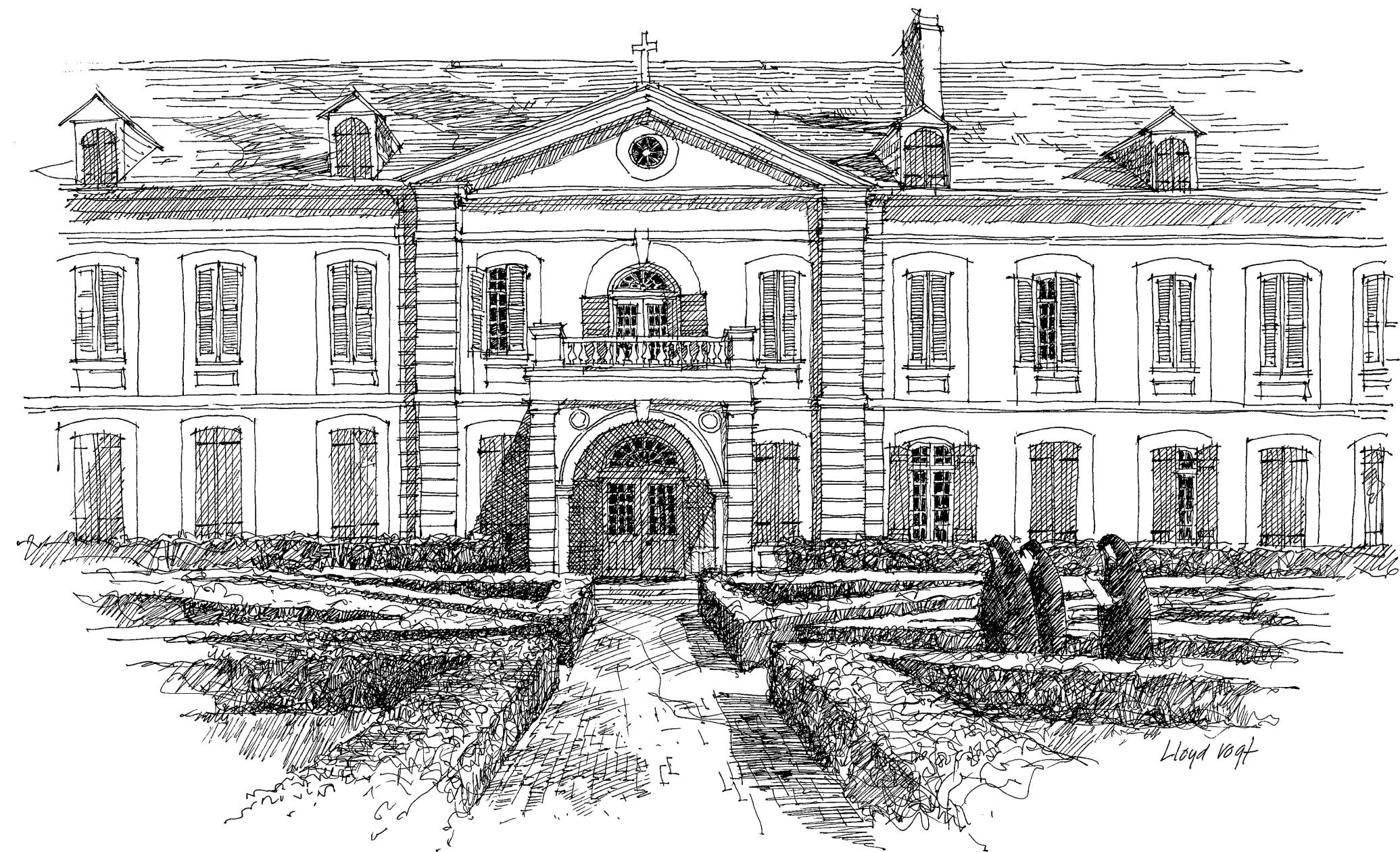


Arriving from Rouen, France in 1727, the Ursuline nuns came to New Orleans to run a hospital, orphanage, and school and were a very affluent and influential force in the city. The original convent was designed by Ignace François Broutin in 1727 and in his absence modified by Pierre Baron. The building took seven years to construct due to various delays. During its construction, the exterior walls had not been properly protected from the climate, and by the time the nuns moved into the building in 1734, it was already beginning to rot badly. In 1745 Broutin prepared a design for a new convent to replace the old one, incorporating parts of the old building into the plan. This building is the convent that we see today. Broutin died before its completion and the construction was overseen by his successor, Bernard de Deverges. The convent was completed in 1750 by builder Claude Joseph Villars Dubreuil.

The Ursulines occupied the convent until 1824. Since that time, it has been used as a bishopric, schoolhouse, state capital, and seminary. The building is now being used as the archives of the archdiocese.

The convent is surrounded by a high, masonry wall forming a front courtyard with a large formally planted garden. The courtyard is entered from a central gateway on axis with the building's entrance, recalling the seventeenth-century *hotels* of Paris. The building is designed in a simple elegant Louis IV style, reflective of the architectural traditions common in Paris at the time. In 1846, J. N. B. dePouilly designed the adjacent church, Notre Dame des Victoires, to complement the convent.

The Ursuline Convent is the oldest surviving building in New Orleans, as well as in the Mississippi Valley.



Lloyd Vagt

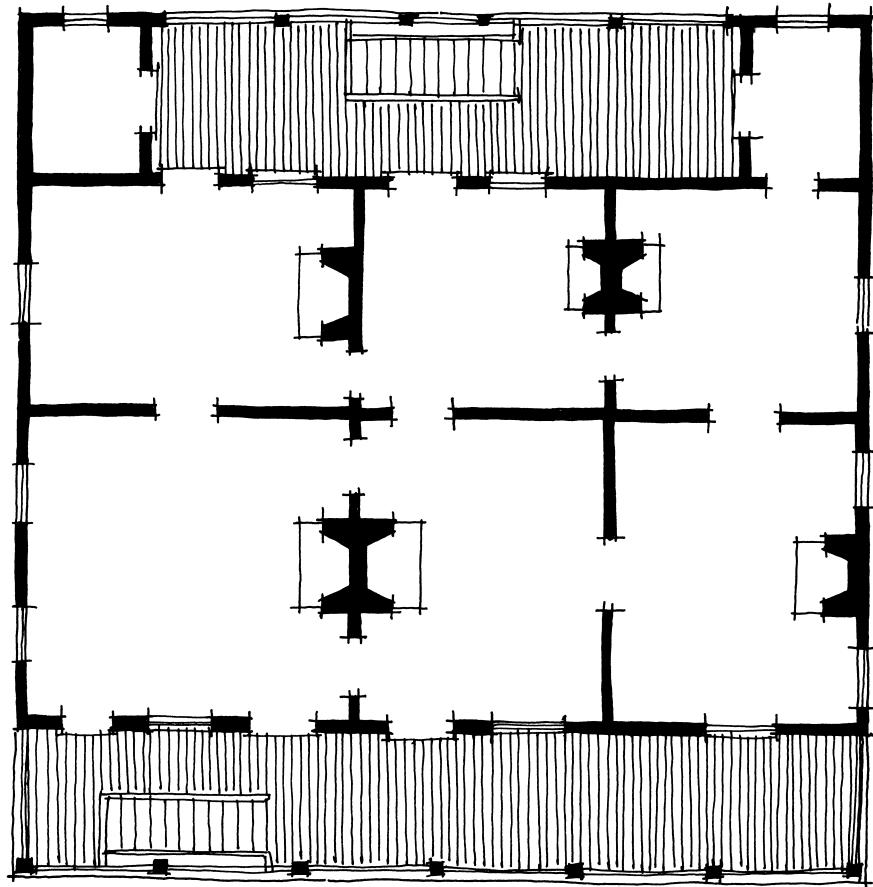
## MADAME JOHN'S LEGACY

*The Manuel Lanzos House*

628-632 Dumaine Street

Circa 1788

National Historic Landmark

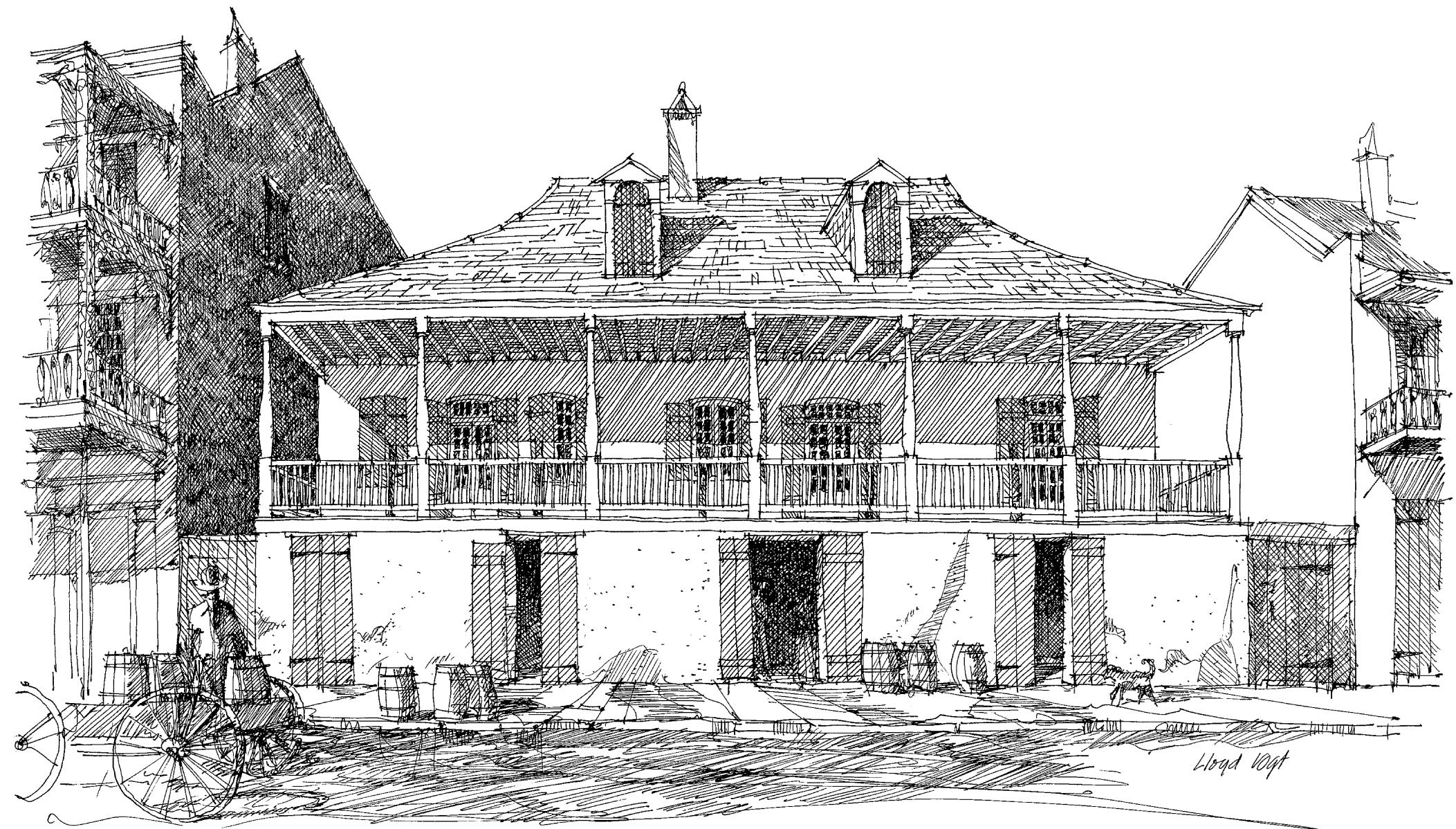


Although Madame John's was constructed after the fire of 1788, it is more appropriately included in the pre-fire era, since it was basically a reconstruction of a house type common during that time. Shortly after the fire, its owner, Don Manuel de Lanzos, a Spanish officer, contracted with Robert Jones, an American builder who had recently come to New Orleans from the new United States, to construct a house very similar to the one that had burned.

Madame John's Legacy, which derives its name from a reference in George W. Cable's story "Tite Poulette", is a very important example of colonial architecture in New Orleans. The original site extended to the corner of Royal and Dumaine Streets and was granted to the first owner shortly after the founding of the city in 1718. A map of the city drawn in 1731 indicates a building very similar in size to the present building, with the exception of the porches.

In 1777, the house was sold to Renato Beluche who, as Rene Beluche, has become associated with Lafayette the Pirate and the battle of New Orleans. Beluche sold the property the following year. Although there is speculation that the house escaped the fire that destroyed much of the Quarter in 1788, current research indicates that the building most likely burned and was rebuilt in a manner very similar to the house lost in fire.

The house is one of the few remaining examples of a type common in the Quarter in the French colonial period. The main living area of half-timber construction is raised above a first-floor storage-work area constructed of brick. A gallery spans the front of the house at the second level. The house was donated to the Louisiana State Museum by Mrs. I. I. Lemann, assuring the preservation of this extremely important landmark.



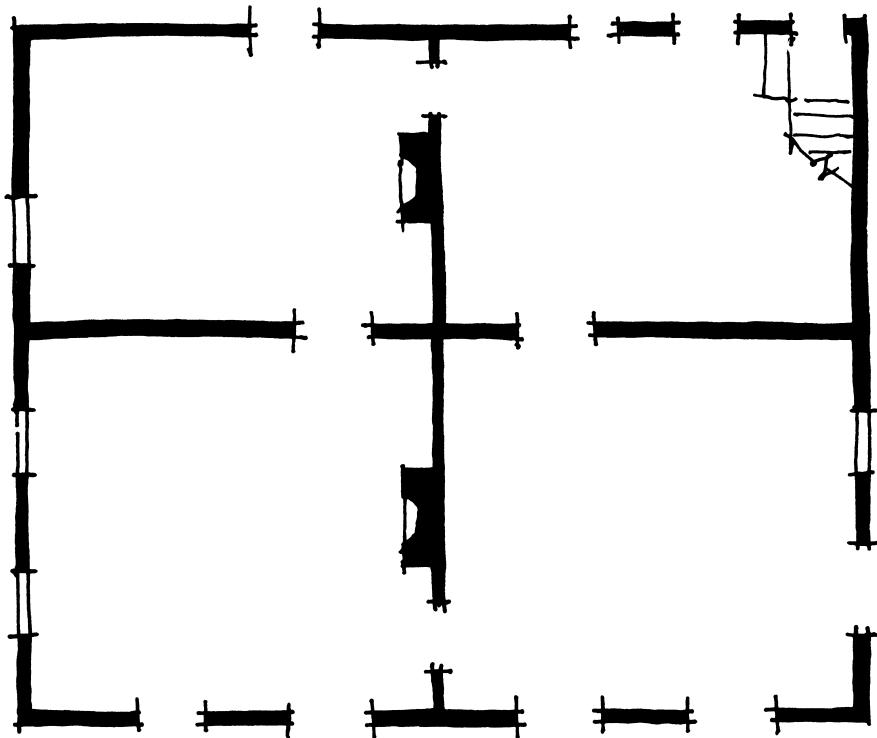
## DUROCHE CASTILLON HOUSE

*Jean Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop*

*941 Bourbon Street*

*Circa 1795*

*National Historic Landmark*



Most likely constructed around 1795, the Duroche Castillon House, romantically referred to in New Orleans as Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop, is one of the few surviving examples of a Norman cottage in the Quarter. Streets in the early French and Spanish colonial town were lined with small free-standing cottages built right up to the street with secluded gardens behind, similar to the Duroche Castillon House. Most of these houses burned during the great fires of 1788 and 1794. Those that survived were demolished and replaced.

Simon Duroche, a castellan for whom this house is named, married Margerite Robert, whose father owned property but later gave it to the couple in 1781. Duroche's widow held onto the house for over seventy years. At the time of her death in 1833, she was living in Faubourg Marigny and the house was left to the tenants. It was at this time that the infamous Lafitte brothers, pirates Jean and Pierre, allegedly occupied the house.

The plan of the house is basically square, divided into four rooms with double fireplaces between the two front and two rear rooms. The house is constructed of *colombage* and *brique-entre-poteaux*. The timbers are hand hewn and the marks are still in evidence. The building has been modified somewhat through time; it has lost its overhanging roof and dormers have been added. The exterior stucco has been removed in various locations to expose some of the brick-between-post construction.

The legend of the Lafittes operating a blacksmith shop out of the house as a cover for their smuggling activities was established by George Washington Cable in his "Pirates of Barataria"; however, there are no records to substantiate this claim.

