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An Architectural Geography of the French Quarter

Preservationists use the French phrase *tout ensemble* to describe both the object of their interest and the objective of their endeavors. The "total impression" (or, literally, "everything together") created by hundreds of adjacent historical structures, more so than any one historic building, is what captures the ambience of the past; preservationists thus strive to save entire streetscapes—intricate panoplies of rooftops and dormers, shutters and balconies, lampposts and hitching posts—while guarding vigilantly against modern intrusions. *Tout ensemble* has been a guiding principle for the preservation of the French Quarter, resulting in one of the most outstanding historic districts in the nation.

Belying the cluttered heterogeneity of *tout ensemble* are cryptic trends through historical eras and patterns in geographical space. What appears to be a random mix of structures and structural characteristics, all yoked under the adjective "historical," is actually anything but random. Revealing order in this apparent chaos is well worth the effort: the patterns divulge both national and local history, the architectural styles of distant and indigenous influences, and the complex economics and politics of a city once predicted to become one of the world's greatest. They reflect events as accidental as a ferocious blaze on a long-ago night, and as momentous as the transition of New Orleans from its European past to its American present. And above all, they track the centuries-old evolution of distinctive house types and styles found almost nowhere else in such concentrations.

But how to detect these patterns? Luckily, New Orleans is home to one of the oldest and most dedicated preservationist communities in America, producing some of the nation's largest historic districts and utilizing some of the best historical documentation. The major source of primary records is the city's unique and priceless Notarial Archives, storing original documents relating to real estate transactions and the parties involved, from the 1730s to modern times. Chains of property title and the history and architecture of old buildings have been researched most thoroughly for the French Quarter, this being New Orleans' oldest and most famous neighborhood, and the second-oldest legally protected historic district in the nation (1936-1937, after Charleston, South Carolina).[12] The Rosetta Stone of the French Quarter's property history is the Vieux Carré Survey, an immense research effort envisioned by the Louisiana Landmarks Society, funded by the Edward G. Schlieder Foundation, and coordinated by the Tulane University School of Architecture between 1961 and 1966. The survey compiles "an index of every property, square by square, together with all available documentary evidence of the history, especially architectural modifications, of each building and a brief indication of [its] present historic or architectural interest,"[13] and has been updated sporadically in the following decades. It takes one or two three-inch-thick binders per block to store all this information, which, in its entirety, fills a wall of bookshelves in The Historic New Orleans Collection's Williams Research Center, home of the sole original copy. The opening pages of each binder typically contain:

- a map of the Quarter showing the block's location;
- sketches of the four street elevations (building profiles) surrounding the block;
- three to four pages of summary descriptions of each building, including its general type and style, construction date or era, and a color-coded assessment of its value, ranging from the lowly brown (objectionable or of no architectural importance) to the regal purple (of national historical or architectural importance); and
- a series of historical maps of the block, including rudimentary lot delineations from the 1720s and 1730s, Notarial Archive sketches from the nineteenth century, turn-of-the-century Sanborn fire-insurance maps, parcel maps, color-coded architectural evaluation maps, and others if available.[14]

The remaining 95 percent of the binder presents textual and graphical data for every lot on the block, even vacant ones. Historical and recent photographs, newspaper clippings, brochures, and ephemera are integrated with the documentary essence of the survey: the chain of title of the lot, starting with recent transactions and going back as far as evidence permits, "like climbing down the rungs of a ladder into the past."[15] Documented in amazing detail, sometimes back to colonial times, are the transaction date, a reference to the Conveyance Office Book in the Civil District Court Building which documented the transaction, the parties involved, the overseeing notary, and whenever possible, building contracts and structural details. It should be noted, however, that these data primarily describe the property, and only secondarily the building, if at all. Information on structures is sometimes surprisingly scant, and one is sometimes uncertain whether a particular fact refers to an extant structure or a long-demolished one. The original Vieux Carré Survey also contains photographs and other updates from the 1970s to 1990s, but microfilm copies available at other archives do not include these recent addenda. A New Orleans aficionado can spend many hours perusing the binders of "The Survey," fascinated as much by the centuries of history behind familiar sights as by the intriguing black-and-white photographs of Quarter street scenes in the ragged 1960s.

[12] The legal protection of the French Quarter stems from Article XIV, Section 22A, Act 139 of the 1936 Louisiana Constitution, which authorized the city to create a commission for "the preservation of such buildings in the Vieux Carré [that] shall be deemed to have architectural and historic value, and…should be preserved…." It was followed by a municipal ordinance (No. 14,538 C.C.S, March 3, 1937), which protected the Quarter's "quaint and distinctive character" and particularly "those buildings having architectural or historic worth." As quoted by Florence M. Jumonville, *A Guide to the Vieux Carré Survey* (New Orleans, 1990), 14; and Bernard Lemann, *The Vieux Carré—A General Statement* (New Orleans, 1966), 5.

[13] Lemann, *The Vieux Carré—A General Statement*, 5.

[14] Jumonville, *A Guide to the Vieux Carré Survey*, 3-13.

[15] Ibid., 10.

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Cottages from the colonial and antebellum eras were often razed for postbellum frame and shotgun houses. In other cases, the aged units were simply appended. 1201 Bourbon is a good example: the lower floor was once a circa-1840 Creole corner cottage with Greek Revival details, to which Victorian-style upper floors were added in the late 1800s. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

With the goal of mapping out the structural characteristics of the French Quarter, I reviewed the entire Vieux Carré Survey and recorded the address, construction date, architectural style, structure type, original use, and quantity of iron-lace adornment for every extant structure. Conducted during autumn-winter 2001-2002, the process took eighty hours, followed by a roughly equal amount of time to verify and update the data in the streets (much has changed in the Quarter since 1966, despite its protected status), assure consistency and accuracy, and map the addresses to correct geographic locations. Only when all these steps were completed successfully did the interpretation of temporal and spatial patterns begin.

In conducting a study like this, certain problems arise. The first involved construction dates: by this count, only 72 percent of the Quarter's structures' construction dates are known within a margin of two years (for example, 1828-1832); just over half (53 percent) are know within one year; and only 13 percent are known to the year. Among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century structures, only one out of every eleven may be nailed down to a particular year. This uncertainty is explained in part by the fact that construction, renovation, and remodeling often span long periods of time, and by lack of documentation, particularly for older, humbler abodes, which forces researchers to "age" buildings by their characteristics. The task of mapping and quantifying necessitates that decisions be made about these "fuzzy" data, so the earliest possible construction date, the latest, and the most probable date were all recorded. When the survey researchers could do no more than estimate that a particular Creole cottage dated from the 1830s, for example, I recorded 1830 for the "earliest" date, 1839 for the "latest," and 1835 for the "most probable" construction date. It is this last category that appears in the maps and graphs that follow, but readers should be aware that a certain range surrounds most of these dates.

A special problem arose regarding building alteration. About 8 percent of Quarter edifices were noted as having undergone radical remodeling, such as floor additions, large-scale extensions, new façades, and reconstruction. Does an 1820s Creole cottage still deserve that classification if it was expanded with a second floor and encrusted with Victorian ornamentation in the 1890s? Or is it now a Victorian storehouse? If a storehouse dating from the 1790s was completely dismantled and rebuilt in the 1980s, can it still be honestly recorded as a structure dating from the Spanish colonial era? "How do you pinpoint a building that grew like Topsy, with newer walls on old foundations, up-dated fronts, and re-oriented rears?," pondered Edith Elliott Long while confronting the same dilemma for her "Along the Banquette" columns in the 1960s *Vieux Carré Courier*. "The picture is clouded, too, by a mishmash of old legends and oft-told tales."[16] My decision: in the case of minor remodeling, the earlier date would

[16] Edith Elliott Long, "Creole Cottage Blooms Under Scott Touch," *Vieux Carré Courier*, March 17, 1967, 2.

The Vieux Carré Survey described 1028 St. Philip as follows: "Originally this c. 1839 single, long brick cottage was approximately 3' lower in height [than] it is today. A massive c. 1880 renovation, which included a roof change and a possible raising in height transformed the early cottage into a late 19th c. single shotgun." Thus there are two construction dates (1839 and 1880), two styles (arguably Creole and Victorian), and two structure types (cottage and shotgun) manifest in a single building. Note the quarters in the rear, a rarity for shotguns. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

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Roofscapes of the French Quarter. *Photographs by author and Ronnie Cardwell, 2003-2004.*

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be used. For cases of drastic remodeling (such as the oft-encountered Victorianized-cottage example above), the building would be "aged" according to the overall present-day impression it casts upon the streetscape. The above example would thus be recorded with a most-probable date in the 1890s. In the case of rebuilt structures, the *re*construction date would be recorded as the most-probable date. Analyses of building age appear in the chapter, "'Curious Old Houses These:' Patterns of Construction Date in the French Quarter."

Another challenge was even more fundamental: what exactly comprises a single structural entity? Should twin common-wall townhouses on St. Peter Street be considered one structure, or two? Is it reasonable to count both a tiny shotgun house and a block-long, three-story hotel as single structural units? What about dependencies and outbuildings? I decided to restrict the quantification to curbside edifices with addresses, plus set-back buildings which had addresses and were recorded in the Vieux Carré Survey. I felt that it would be perfectly fair to count smaller and larger structures (for example, a tiny cottage and a large townhouse) each as single structural units, but balked at counting these entities on the same scale of, for example, the block-long Royal Orleans Hotel. I decided that when a single structure spanned many adjacent parcels in the form of a row, it would be depicted as a series of structures (represented cartographically as points) lining the block. This seemed like a reasonable compromise between the relevance of structural unity and the significance of unit size. Thus, the Royal Orleans Hotel is shown on the maps as nine points, because it occupies roughly nine parcels wrapping around Royal, St. Louis, and Chartres streets, and is counted as nine structures in the graphs and tabulations, even though, architecturally speaking, it is a single edifice. Only a handful of sites were affected by this issue; nevertheless, it should be kept in mind when viewing the maps and graphs. Larger structures that did not form rows, such as the St. Louis Cathedral, U.S. Mint, and the Civil Courts Building, were depicted as single points, because of their prominent nature and salient positions in the streetscapes.

Bourbon Street example of arched openings, typical of pre-1830s Creole style, renovated into squared openings and a "keyhole" entrance, typical of circa-1840s Greek Revival style. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

How many structures, then, are in the French Quarter? Using the above criteria, this tabulation of the Vieux Carré Survey enumerated 2,244 structures in the area bounded by Iberville Street, North Rampart Street, Esplanade Avenue, and the Mississippi River. (This count does not include the "100 blocks" between Canal and Iberville, which are technically not in the Vieux Carré but are in the Vieux Carré Survey.) In 1982, researcher Ann Barnes counted 1,843 structures in the French Quarter, including the Canal-Iberville blocks and considering rows and larger units as single structures.[17] Barnes' figure may be considered a conservative estimate. The Orleans Parish Assessment Roll records slightly over 2,700 separately owned parcels in the French Quarter, regardless of structural status. If one were to include every servants' quarters, shed, and outbuilding, there are probably close to 3,000 structures in the Quarter today. Indeed, counting buildings in the French Quarter is like counting trees in a forest: one must agree on reasonable and robust criteria of what exactly constitutes a single entity and enforce them consistently, and even then, ten counters will arrive at ten different counts. All data presented here use 2,244 as the total.

Architectural style presented a more predictable problem—expected because classifying buildings' architectural styles is notoriously debatable. What is Spanish Colonial to one person is Creole to another; what is Victorian to another is Victorian Italianate to a third. I relied on the judgements of the Vieux Carré Survey researchers for this assessment; if they confidently described a building as a Creole townhouse with no other stylistic influences, I recorded "Creole" as its primary style, with no secondary style. If a shotgun house was described as Victorian Italianate, "Victorian" was entered as its primary style and "Italianate" as its secondary style, though some may argue that "Victorian" connotes an era while "Italianate" a style. In those few cases where I, a non-architect, had to make a judgement, I relied on venerable sources such as Malcolm Heard's *French Quarter Manual* (1997), Lloyd Vogt's *New Orleans Houses* (1985), and the Friends of the Cabildo *New Orleans Architecture* series for guidance. There is one important exception: all post-World War II constructions, which by law must stylistically maintain the *tout ensemble*, were recorded as "French Quarter Revival," despite their overt style. The reasoning: although a 1960s hotel may have been designed faithfully in the Greek Revival style, or a 1970s house as a Creole cottage, the architect probably intended primarily to emulate the ambience of the French Quarter, rather than to extol those particular historical styles. The late Malcolm Heard described this resulting style as "Vieux Carré Revival," arising "from a feeling that new construction should be essentially scenographic and that it should fill in gaps in the French Quarter fabric as inconspicuously as pos-

[17] Ann Barnes, *The Vieux Carré Survey—Listing of Buildings By Block and Date*, unpublished report July 1982, Miscellaneous binder, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

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sible, leaving the limelight for older buildings."[18] Analysis of styles appears in the chapter, "'A Draping of Fashions:' Patterns of Architectural Style in the French Quarter."

Probably the most straightforward characteristic recorded in this study is one of the least appreciated: *structure type*, or typology, the functional body and shape of a structure, based on culture, economics, use, need, and geography. *Type* is distinguished from s*tyle*, the outward fashion used in the building's construction and embellishment, deriving mostly from cultural factors. Extending the dichotomy to apparel, *type* is to *style* what *shirt* is to *turtleneck*, *pants* is to *jeans*, or *shoes* is to *wingtips*. Styles vary widely (I counted almost thirty) in the French Quarter, from Spanish Colonial to Spanish Revival, from Creole to Greek Revival, but 81 percent of French Quarter structures fall into just four primary types: cottages, shotguns, townhouses, and storehouses. Analysis of typology appears in the chapter, "'A Philosophy of Space:' Patterns of Structural Type in the French Quarter."

Structural use was deceptively simple: residential, residential/commercial, commercial, or institutional were the main categories, based on an assessment of the structure's original purpose. A gray zone emerged for structures that may or may not have once housed a business on its ground floor and residences above. When there was a doubt (which was often), the use was recorded as residential/commercial.

The final category was an assessment of the *iron-lace balconies or galleries* on the structures' façades. While some architectural purists consider these features (particularly galleries) as gaudy blemishes marring beautiful façades, most people view them as the quintessential signature of the French Quarter, and one of the first mental images evoked when the words "New Orleans" are spoken. Balconies, and especially large galleries, dominate the French Quarter streetscape and truly distinguish it from other American downtowns. Iron ornamentation was ranked on a relative scale, mapped out, and analyzed by the structural type to which they were attached. The analysis appears in the chapter, "Signature of the City: Patterns of Iron-Lace Galleries and Balconies in the French Quarter."

A word about the mapping of the data: Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology, the addresses for the 2,244 entries were mapped to U.S. Census Bureau digital street files, containing beginning and ending house addresses for every block in an associated tabular database. This process, called address-matching or geo-coding, is billed as "automatic" but is really semi-automatic, because nuances and generalizations in the files usually necessitate that the operator intervene. In this case, the Census Bureau's cartographic depiction of the streets and the house number on them needed substantial editing and updating. Once the corrections were made, nearly 100 percent of the entries mapped out accurately (the remainder were geocoded manually), but still needed to be adjusted to the correct side of the street. The points on the maps appearing in the next four chapters are sufficiently close to their actual locations for the purposes of this study, but may be one or two doors from absolute locations. Readers searching for information on a particular house should be aware that the goal of these maps is not to depict all details of every structure in its exact location, but rather to reveal overriding historical and geographical patterns and trends.

Or, rather, to find order in *tout ensemble.*

Epilogue: Although Hurricane Katrina's winds caused moderate damage to rooftops and felled a few walls in the French Quarter, the tout ensemble *of the district survived intact, largely because the relatively high elevation of the natural levee kept floodwaters at bay by a block or so. The* grande dame *of the Quarter, the 250-year-old Ursuline Convent, saw its massive chimney collapse into the steep hip roof, but otherwise withstood the storm exceedingly well.*

[18] Malcolm Heard, *French Quarter Manual: An Architectural Guide to New Orleans' Vieux Carré* (New Orleans, 1977), 138.

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“Curious Old Houses These”
Patterns of Construction Date in the French Quarter

How old is the French Quarter? There are a number of reasonable responses. The underlying terrain is about 5,000 years old; its use by Indians as a terminus in the river-to-lake portage is perhaps 500 years old, possibly much older. Europeans under the command of Bienville first cleared its timber in March-April 1718, the time generally recognized as the foundation of New Orleans. The Quarter’s street network, which survives today almost in its entirety, was laid out in 1722. Perhaps this last date is a fair benchmark for marking time in the French Quarter. But it is not the street grid that imparts the strong sense of historical place to this space; it is the streetscape—the *tout ensemble* of tightly clustered buildings crowding narrow streets, enveloped by iron lace, gas lamps, crumbling stucco, weathered brick walls, and steep roofs. How old is *this* French Quarter, the historical built environment we know today? This chapter addresses this question by discerning historical and geographical patterns in the construction dates of extant French Quarter buildings, based on the Vieux Carré Survey analysis described in the previous chapter. But before exploring these trends, it is worthwhile to point out some superlatives among them.

The Old Ursuline Convent (center) is the only major structural vestige of New Orleans’ French colonial era. Designed in 1745 and built between 1749 and 1753, the convent ranks as the oldest documented structure still standing in the Mississippi Valley and deltaic plain, and the most aged in the city by about thirty years. *Photograph by Ronnie Cardwell with author, 2004.*

Sole Surviving French Colonial Era Structure

Only one complete building survives from the first French colonial era: the Old Ursuline Convent at 1112 Chartres Street, designed in 1745 and built in 1749-1753 by Claude Joseph Villars Dubreuil according to designs by Ignace Broutin. The Ursuline Convent is the oldest documented structure still standing in the Mississippi Valley and deltaic plain, and the most aged in the city by a margin of about thirty years.[19] Additionally, a few French colonial era walls remain scattered throughout the Quarter, long since incorporated into later constructions, and plenty of early eighteenth-century building materials (bricks, cypress beams) have been recycled into extant buildings. Remnants of the French colonial *Corps de Garde* are “encased in the walls of the Cabildo,”[20] leading some researchers to count it as another French colonial survivor. The photogenic Lafitte’s Blacksmith Shop at 941 Bourbon Street is reputed to date from the early 1700s but is more likely a product of the 1770s or 1780s. Some claimed that the storehouse at 723 Toulouse was erected in the extraordinarily early year of 1720—before the streets were laid out!—but evidence shows a more likely date of around 1808.[21] Why the lack of French colonial era structures? The fires of 1788 and 1794 destroyed over a thousand of them; others, built of materials and by methods considered flimsy by later standards, where demolished for the more robust constructions of the Spanish colonial era and afterwards. The nearly two-and-a-half centuries that have passed since the end of the French regime have increased the likelihood that fire, storm, demolition, or decay would claim its structural vestiges. A second French colonial era transpired secretly starting in 1800 (the city ostensibly remained in Spanish control) and officially in November 1803, only to conclude permanently a month later, when the Louisiana Purchase was made official and New Orleans transferred to American hands. About twelve extant structures arose during this brief transitional era, but they are conventionally recognized as Spanish colonial era structures, not French.

There also exist a handful of French colonial *style* structures that, while post-dating France’s primary administrative era, nevertheless reflect the old French (and West Indian) ways, for the city retained its Francophone culture for many years afterwards. The most prominent example is the house at 632 Dumaine Street known as “Madame John’s Legacy,” built immediately after the 1788 fire with classic French colonial traits: pavilion-shaped with a steep double-pitched roof, center chimneys, and colonnades upholding an airy gallery, raised high on brick piers. The house’s foundation as well as some of its hardware may date as far back as 1730, having survived the 1788 fire. One can visualize French colonial New Orleans by picturing scores of structures like Madame John’s Legacy, of various sizes, setbacks, and orientations, lining the streets.

[19] A dependency of the convent dating from the same era is counted as a second structure in the graphs.

[20] Edith Elliott Long, “Creole Cottage Blooms Under Scott Touch,” *Vieux Carré Courrier*, March 17, 1967, p. 2.

[21] *The Vieux Carré Survey: A Pictorial Record and a Study of the Land and Buildings in the Vieux Carré*, 130 binders (Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection), Binder 61.

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Rare Spanish Colonial Era Structures

Like "French colonial," the term "Spanish colonial" in New Orleans can imply an architectural style or an historical era. The Spanish colonial style appeared locally in the latter years of Spain's dominion (1762 to 1803), particularly after the 1794 fire, but persisted for a few years after the departure of the Dons, and for decades thence as an influence in related styles. Only thirty-eight of the 2,244 extant French Quarter structures were built during the Spanish colonial era, and of those, twenty-two exhibit Spanish colonial style. Another three structures feature this style but postdate the era by a few years. Edith Elliott Long, architectural historian and keen French Quarter observer for the circa-1960s *Vieux Carré Courier*, wrote that

> out of some 3,000 buildings in the Vieux Carre probably only a score, or at the most 25, actually descend from [the Spanish Colonial era]. Fires razed some. Hurricanes were known to have leveled others. And the great prosperity and business drive that emerged after the American purchase of the Territory accounts for the destruction of the rest.[22]

Some secondary sources imply that eighteenth-century buildings abound in the French Quarter, even suggesting that the neighborhood might be more accurately described as the "Spanish Quarter." While many notable Spanish architectural traits were indeed carried on in subsequent Creole styles,

[22] Edith Elliott Long, "Houses of Spanish Period," *Vieux Carré Courier*, October 1, 1965, "Along the Banquette" column, p. 1. Differences between Long's count and those presented here attest to the "fuzzy" nature of judging the construction date, style, and frequency of historical structures in a district of thousands. See previous chapter for methodological information.

This Chartres streetscape possesses the city's largest assemblage of Spanish colonial structures. At the corner is the circa-1795 Reynes House, built as a townhouse with traits typical of the Caribbean and Latin America. It adjoins 609-615 Chartres, built contemporaneously. Next is the 1795 Bosque townhouse, with its wrought-iron balcony and Spanish courtyard. (The fires of 1788 and 1794 started near this site, which explains why these buildings generally date to 1795 or thereafter.) At 625-627 Chartres is a *porte cochère* **building with a wooden balcony, built during the last years of Spanish rule. Three other Spanish colonials occupy this same square. In the background is the Cabildo (1799), the city's best-known Spanish colonial structure.** *Photograph by author, 2002.*

The oldest extant structure in the rear of the Quarter is the remarkable Ossorno House. A plantation house by design, origin, and function, it was apparently dismantled from Bayou St. John around 1781 and reassembled at present-day 913 Gov. Nicholls by 1784. Although its original West Indian-style hip roof had been remodeled to a gable by the 1830s, the house is still distinctly rural in appearance, orientation, and setback. It is an amazing exception to the French Quarter cityscape, like an old Dutch farmhouse in New York City or Spanish mission in Los Angeles. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

structures built in pure Spanish colonial styles and/or during the Spanish colonial era are, in fact, quite rare in the French Quarter today, and extremely rare in the rest of the city.[23]

Oldest Structure in Rear of Quarter

The oldest extant structure in the rear of the original city—near Dauphine, Burgundy, and Rampart streets, the last areas to be built up—is the remarkable Ossorno House at 913 Gov. Nicholls. It is over twenty-five years older than any building in the surrounding sixteen blocks, eighty years older than the area's average age, and possibly the only structure ever to occupy its parcel. The Ossorno House is a "pure Bayou St. John plantation house"[24] in its design and probably in origin and function as well: primary documents indicate that it was dismantled from the rural plantation country near Bayou St. John around 1781 and reassembled by 1784 (some secondary sources date the house to 1787). Although its original West Indian plantation-like hip roof had been remodeled to a gable by the 1830s, the house is still distinctly rural in its appearance, orientation, and setback distance. It is an amazing exception in the French Quarter streetscape, like an old Dutch farmhouse in New York City or an aged Spanish mission in modern Los Angeles. While the Ossorno House dates from the Spanish colonial era, it definitely does not represent the Spanish colonial style; rather, it is a French Creole style plantation house that postdates French colonial times. It is one of two plantation-style structures in

[23] A few French Creole style homes built during the Spanish colonial era still stand in the Bayou St. John/Bayou Road area.

[24] Edith Elliott Long, "Discovery: One of Our Oldest Buildings," *Vieux Carré Courier*, "Along the Banquette" column, May 27, 1966, p. 2.

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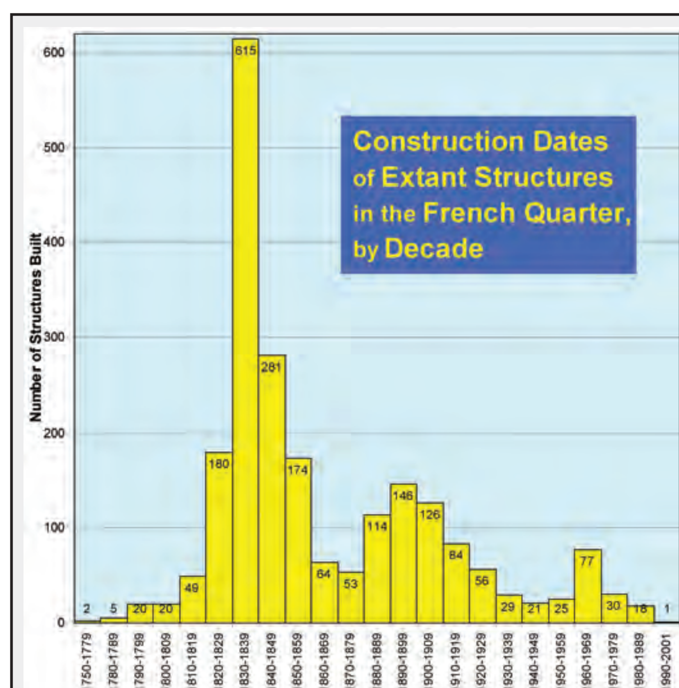
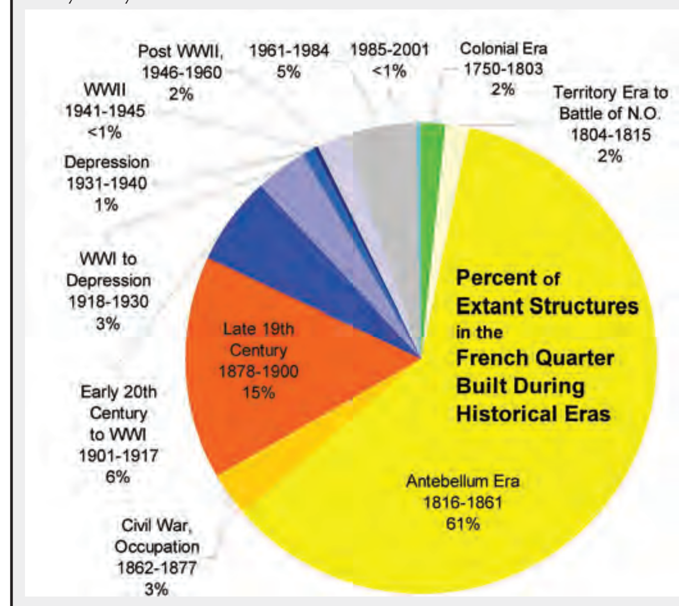
the French Quarter, the other being Madame John's Legacy, but unlike that much more famous building, the Ossorno House once actually stood on a plantation. The structure also boasts an interesting human history, having been the home of prominent New Orleanians and in the possession of only three families from 1795 to recent decades. That the Ossorno House may have literally come down Bayou Road from the Bayou St. John plantation country and ended up on Gov. Nicholls Street, where Bayou Road entered the city, is also of great significance. One may view it as a structural monument to the historic flow of materials and peoples traveling this route from city to bayou. Edith Elliott Long observed in 1966 that this outstanding building had somehow eluded the attention of tourists, artists, and even scholars, who devoted their research to the better-known structures in the heart of the Quarter. That observation remains true today: the Ossorno House almost never appears in popular photographic books or walking tours of the Quarter. Even Malcolm Heard's thorough *French Quarter Manual* missed it.



These graphs show that 61 percent of present-day French Quarter structures arose between the Battle of New Orleans (1815) and the Civil War (1861). About one of every hundred Quarter structures dates to the 1700s; three of four were built in the 1800s; and one of five dates from the 1900s. *Graphs and analysis by author.*



Historical Patterns of Construction Dates

The histogram *Construction Dates of Extant Structures in the French Quarter, by Decade*, and the pie chart *Percent of Extant Structures in the French Quarter Built During Historical Eras*, show that, structurally speaking, today's French Quarter is a decidedly nineteenth-century neighborhood. About one of every hundred structures (1.2 percent) dates to the eighteenth century, while about three of four (77 percent) were built between 1800 and 1899 and one of five (21 percent) date from the twentieth century.[25] Viewed closer, the histogram shows that 61 percent of the entire present-day Quarter arose between the Battle of New Orleans (1815) and the onset of the Civil War (1861), especially between the 1820s and 1850s and in particular the 1830s. The histogram limns four "valleys" (before 1820, 1860-1880, 1930-1960, and after 1980) interspersed among three "peaks" (1820-1860, 1880-1930, and in the 1960s and 1970s) in the construction dates of the French Quarter's extant structures.

First Valley, before 1820

The relatively few (ninety-six) surviving structures predating 1820 do not, of course, represent low levels of construction prior to that year. On the contrary, the Quarter was entirely developed by 1820, so much so that it had spread into a number of adjacent *faubourgs*. Rather, this "valley" reflects the toll of time on centuries-old buildings in a busy, semitropical port city. Parcels opened up by the disappearance of these ancient edifices were usually reoccupied during later "peaks" in construction, which brings up an interesting subtext to the maps and graphs in this section: they depict not only the patterns of extant buildings, but also patterns of demolition of previous ones.

First Peak, circa 1820-1861

The rise of sugar and cotton, the arrival of Northern emigrants and foreign immigrants, the development of the steamboat, and the city's monopoly on Mississippi Valley trade ushered great wealth to New Orleans during this antebellum "golden age." Hundreds of multistory edifices arose to meet the demand, especially in the 1830s, when New Orleans ranked among the wealthiest cities in the nation. Illustrating the prosperity of this era is the fact that, of the 1,294 extant structures built during 1820-1862, over half

[25] Since these figures were computed, the Quarter's first twenty-first-century structure—a townhouse controversial among some neighbors for its above-average height—was constructed on Ursuline Street. It is not included in these maps and graphs.

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(52 percent) were sumptuous townhouses. The French Quarter in these times was an affluent residential neighborhood, as well as a business district (in its upper blocks) and home to a substantial working-class immigrant community (particularly in its lower and rear flanks). These patterns, too, are evident in the data: 21 percent of structures built in this era were storehouses, with commercial use on the ground floor and residences above, and another 20 percent were cottages, where the working class citizens were more likely to dwell. The drop-off in construction in the 1840s and 1850s may be explained by a number of factors: full development of the city's parcels; increasing popularity of uptown and Esplanade Ridge sites for new construction; repercussions of the Panic of 1837; and increasing trade competition in the form of Northern canal and railroad construction.

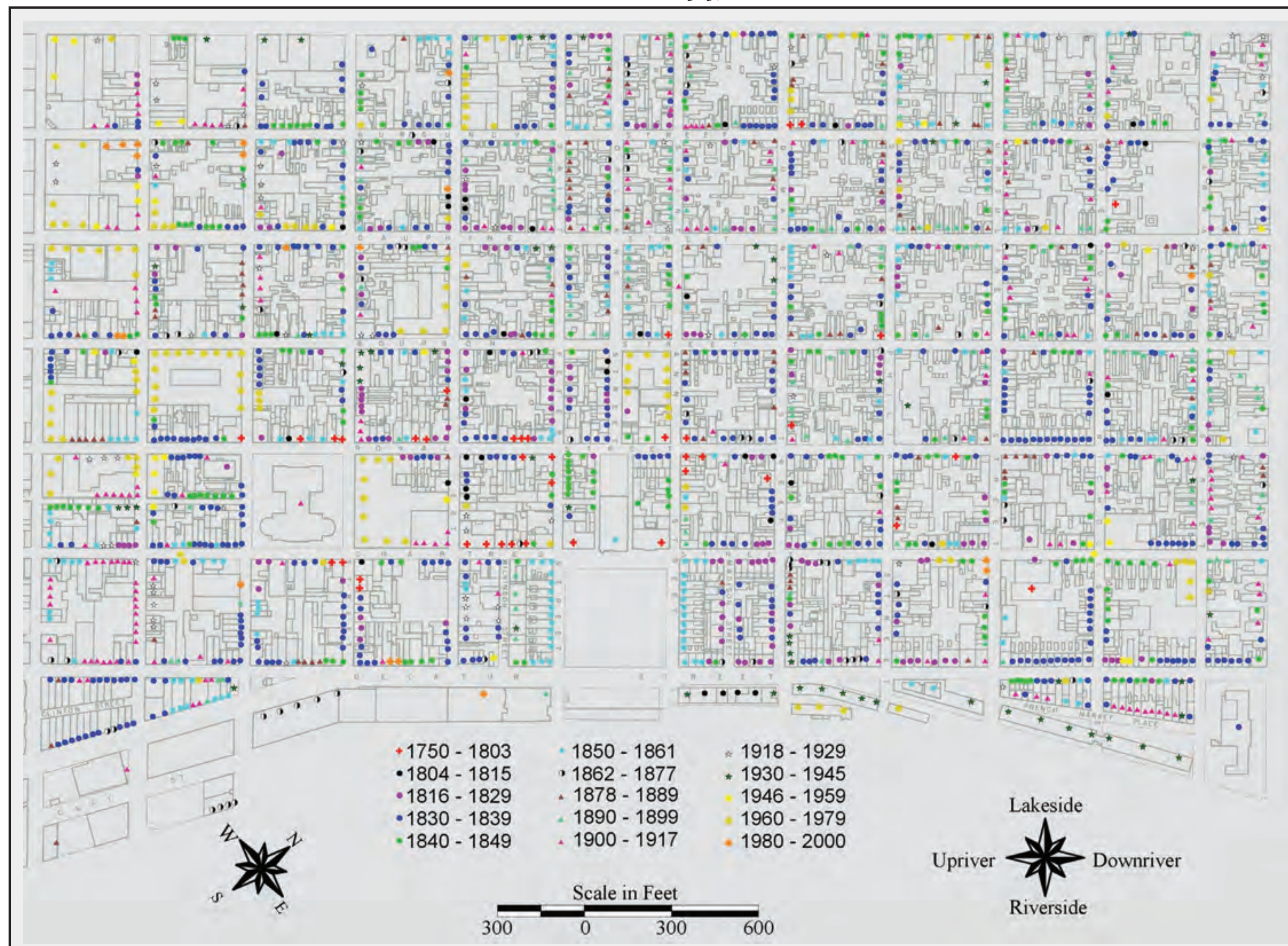
Second Valley, 1862-1877

The dearth of structures dating from these fifteen years directly reflects tumultuous historical events, not just subsequent demolitions. The Civil War, the blockade of the port, federal occupation, and Reconstruction interrupted the city's economic life from New Orleans' quick surrender in 1862 until 1877. Many local and regional businesses (namely plantations) folded, investment dollars were limited, and few buildings went up. Only 3 percent of today's buildings date from this era.

Second Peak, 1880-1920s

New Orleans enjoyed a second (though much more modest) "golden age" in the turn-of-the-century era, which coincided with a minor construction boom in the French Quarter. But while a number of impressive Italianate townhouses and storehouses went up in this "second peak," the new construction consisted mostly of humble wooden abodes for families of modest means. The upper class had by this time departed for uptown or Esplanade Avenue, leaving the French Quarter to the working class, including thousands of indigent immigrants from Sicily and elsewhere in southern Europe, who were accommodated in old mansions subdivided into cheap flats. It was a phenomenon seen in many big cities in this era: "Vacated houses were converted into tenements and rooming houses," observed geographer David Ward regarding national trends, "while vacant lots and rear yards were filled with cheap new structures."[26] In New Orleans, those "cheap new structures" were shotgun houses and bungalows. Of the 196 shotguns and eighteen bungalows now standing in the French Quarter, fully 88 percent were built during 1880s to 1920s. And of the 525 total extant building erected during

[26] David Ward, "The Emergence of Central Immigrant Ghettoes in American Cities: 1840-1820," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 58 (June 1968): 343.



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these four decades, only 8 percent were upscale townhouses for the affluent.

Third Valley, 1930-1950s

A number of factors contributed to the decline in construction in these years. Depression and World War II diverted attention and funds away from real estate investment, while in the midst of that era, designation of the French Quarter as a protected historic district (1936-1937) regulated demolition and new construction. Tourism and conventions during this era were at levels low enough not to encourage new hotel construction. Countering these trends were the extensive renovations of the Works Progress Administration and Public Works Administration in the 1930s, especially in the French Market area, and the gerrymandering of the Vieux Carré Commission's jurisdiction from 1946 to 1964. During that eighteen-year period, certain edges of the Quarter (the Rampart Street frontage, the area riverside of upper North Peters, and the 200 block of Royal) lost their protected status, allowing for a number of demolitions and modern constructions.

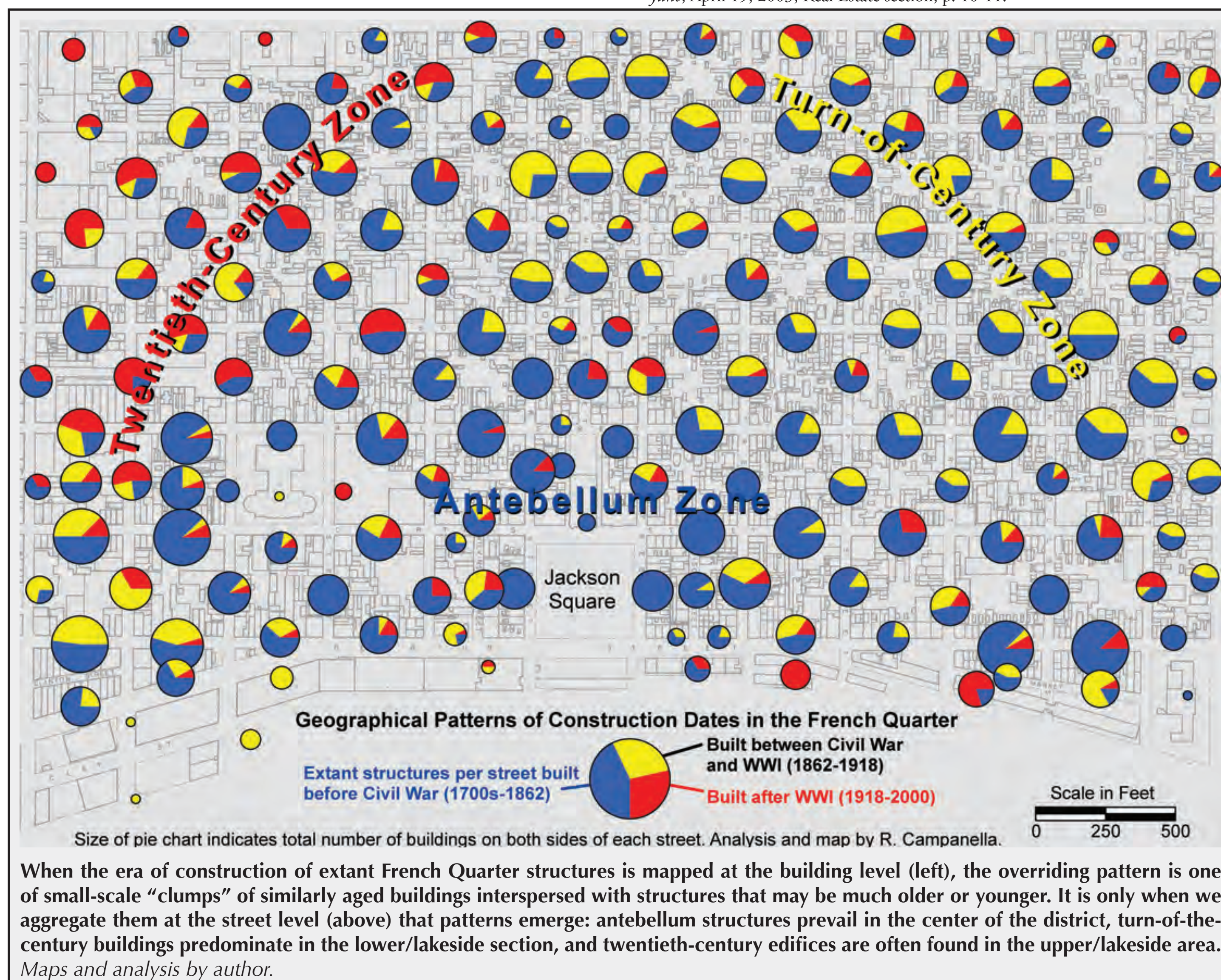
Third Peak, 1950s-1970s

The late 1950s to the mid-1970s saw the final (to date) boom in French Quarter construction. These new structures tended to be large hotels and affiliated structures such as parking garages, built in response to the growth of the tourism economy. Some of these new hotels succeeded in recollecting historic antecedents, such as the Royal Orleans on St. Louis Street, designed after the famous St. Louis Hotel and City Exchange. Others were flagrantly ersatz.

Present Day Valley, 1970s to Present

Since the late 1970s, new construction has tailed off in the French Quarter, a result of prohibition on new Quarter hotels (banned since 1969) and the long, deliberative approval process for new construction. One fine example of new construction according to traditional styles is 841 St. Louis Street, built in 1999 on what was long an empty lot and now blending into the *tout ensemble*. Inside, however, is one dramatic difference: aluminum beams have replaced traditional wood, a response to the very serious threat of Formosan termite infestation.[27]

[27] Mary Foster, "History and 21st Century Collide in Quarter Home," *Times-Picayune*, April 19, 2003, Real Estate section, p. 10-11.



When the era of construction of extant French Quarter structures is mapped at the building level (left), the overriding pattern is one of small-scale "clumps" of similarly aged buildings interspersed with structures that may be much older or younger. It is only when we aggregate them at the street level (above) that patterns emerge: antebellum structures prevail in the center of the district, turn-of-the-century buildings predominate in the lower/lakeside section, and twentieth-century edifices are often found in the upper/lakeside area. *Maps and analysis by author.*

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The Future

Does another building boom loom in the French Quarter's foreseeable future? Barring fires or natural disasters, the only possible site for significant new construction are the "batture blocks" between North Peters and the levee, from Iberville to Toulouse. This terrain began forming decades after the city's founding, when the shifting river deposited sediment along the bank and augmented the downtown land base. The French Quarter batture was home, from the 1870s to the 1930s, to the city's Sugar District, consisting of sheds, refineries, warehouses, offices, and an ornate exchange.[28] This charmless industrial landscape was demolished or burned piecemeal during the 1940s through 1970s, leaving almost nothing but parking lots today. Ambitious plans to develop the area for mixed residential and commercial use have come and gone over the years, though a proposed rezoning of the area in 2004 may eventually lead to extensive new hotel construction.[29]

Geographical Patterns of Construction Dates

While historical patterns of construction dates clearly reflect local and national events, geographical patterns of age in the French Quarter are a bit more complex to unravel. There are no expansive sections occupied entirely by structures of a single era; rather, the overriding pattern is one of small-scale "clumps" of similarly aged buildings interspersed liberally with structures that may be much older or younger. One often sees a row of townhouses built simultaneously, a line of cottages constructed within the same decade, or a series of shotguns all dating from the 1890s. But among or near them may be a rare Federal-style mansion, a massive Commercial style warehouse from the 1910s, or a modern hotel. This pattern of spatial intermixing by age itself is old: "There are still, here and there, the old houses, sandwiched in between those of a later generation—quaint, dilapidated, and picturesque," stated one observer in 1885. Some French Quarter buildings "are rickety, wooden structures, with overhanging porticoes, and with windows and doors all out of perpendicular.... Others are massive stone or brick structures, with great arched doorways, and paved floors...."[30]

This spatial complexity is apparent in the first of the two accompanying maps, which shows construction dates categorized by fifteen historical eras for each and every building. This level of detail obscures overriding patterns. The second map, *Geographical Patterns of Construction Dates in the French Quarter*, resolves this problem by aggregating the information into only three eras (antebellum times, between the Civil War and World War I, and to the present), and amassing it at the street level. That is, all buildings on both sides of each street were summed together by their construction era, which is depicted in the pie charts. The size of the pie chart represents the number of buildings on that street. Amid an abundance of exceptions, three overriding "age zones" emerge in this map.

Antebellum Zone — Older extant builders tend to cluster in the central heart of the Quarter. The preponderance of antebellum structures on Chartres, Royal, and Bourbon streets, within a few blocks of St. Louis Cathedral, is explained by the wealthy residents who once lived here. Well-off families before the Civil War were more likely to erect townhouses, which, because of their sturdiness, elegance, and value, had better odds of evading the forces of demolition and survive into the preservation era (and thereby show up in our data). The rich tended to live here because other areas were less desirable: those blocks near Canal Street were too commercial, those toward Esplanade and Rampart tended to be overly plebeian and old-world-oriented, and those closer to the river were too noisy, smelly, and bustling with port and market activity.

Numerical data bear out the cartographic patterns. The Quarter street which boasts the oldest average construction date for its structures is, as expected, Royal Street (1850), followed by Gov. Nicholls (1854), and St. Peter and St. Phillip (1855). Three of these four streets penetrate the heart of the Quarter. Those with the youngest average structural construction dates are Bienville (1898), Iberville (1890), and North Rampart (1882), all three of which are outside the district's heart. Pedestrian-level observations also bear this out: a walk down Royal Street is an experience of antebellum splendor; a walk down Iberville is a raffish encounter with architectural hodgepodge.

The densest cluster of *very* old buildings lies in the inner heart of this core, within one block of Royal Street from Conti to Dumaine (especially around the Royal/St. Peter intersection). Of the ninety-six Quarter structures which pre-date 1820, over half occupy this relatively small area. Incorporated in this highly historic area is the 600 block of Chartres (lake side), home to the Quarter's highest concentration of Spanish colonial era structures. Very old buildings have managed to survive around this stretch of Royal because of its distance from demolition-prone peripheral areas, and because of the magnificence and significance of the buildings themselves. This was also the area incinerated by the fires 1788 and 1794, clearing the parcels for the more sturdy constructions mandated by new Spanish colonial building codes.

Turn-of-the-Century Zone — Turn-of-the-century structures, defined generously here as those built between 1862-1918, are more likely to be found in the Quarter's lower/lakeside quadrant. This area, which once abutted the poor Third District (across Esplanade) and Tremé and the

[28] Richard Campanella, *Times and Place in New Orleans: Past Geographies in the Present Day* (Gretna, LA, 2002), 133-46.
[29] Bruce Eggler, "Council Clears Way for Quarter Hotel," *Times-Picayune*, October 23, 2004, A1.
[30] Captain Willard Glazier, *Peculiarities of American Cities* (Philadelphia, PA, 1885), 273.

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swamp (across Rampart), was home to working-class families often residing in cottages, which were often torn down after the Civil War and replaced by inexpensive shotgun houses. Demolition and replacement by shotguns was less likely in high-density commercial areas (toward Canal Street) or in blocks already occupied by spacious townhouses subdivided into apartments.

Twentieth-Century Zone — Buildings post-dating Word War I are more common in the upper and lakeside section of the French Quarter. The modern tourism industry, responsible for most Quarter construction in recent decades, explains this pattern, as hoteliers were limited by both economic and legal factors to the commercial upper Quarter. The lower Quarter remains more residential. The French Market also registers some twentieth-century construction because of the Public Works Administration renovation work there during the Depression.

How old, then, is the French Quarter? From a structural standpoint, it seems reasonable to date the prototypical French Quarter streetscape to the second quarter of the nineteenth century, with a few streetscapes pre-dating this era and a fair number post-dating it. But, as these maps indicate, exceptions are the rule—and gloriously so. The spatial heterogeneity of the French Quarter makes it a Rosetta Stone of local, regional, and national history; a walk down any given street is a rich and rewarding tour of the past and of the processes of change. Wrote the New Orleans Press on transformations in the French Quarter circa 1885,

> Tile roofs have begun to disappear, the cozy little cottage tenements...are fast changing into the newer style of corniced residences.... On all sides, one, who is at all observant, can see how that fickle old fellow, Time, is pushing back the past to make way for the present.... Some of those old Creole houses whose roofs have sparkled and glittered in the spring showers of one hundred years still remain, but they are fast fading away. Curious old houses these.[31]

[31] William H. Coleman, *Historical Sketch Book and Guide to New Orleans and Environs, with Map* (New York, 1885), 65.

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"A Draping of Fashions"

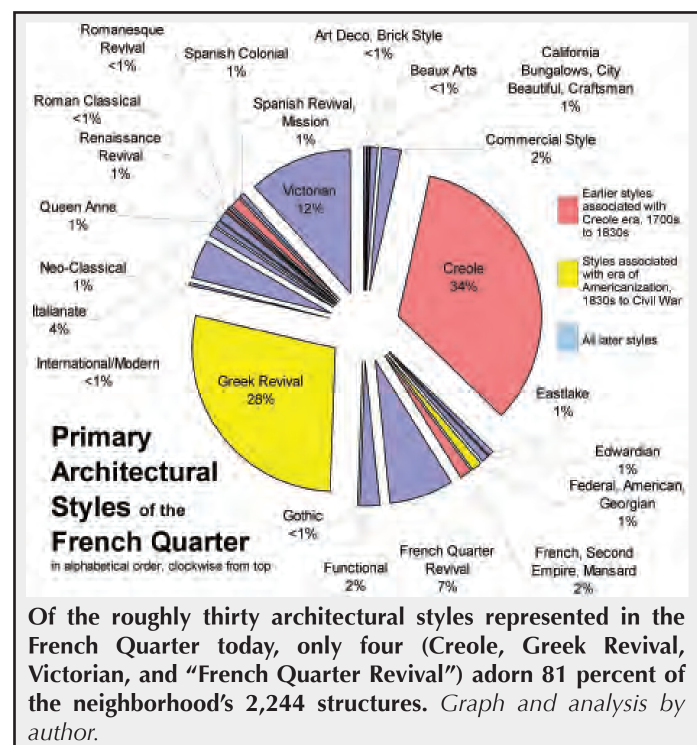
Patterns of Architectural Style in the French Quarter

"Architectural styles arrived by ship to this port city, rather like fashions in clothing, to be successively draped on the same persisting and evolving [structural] bodies,"[32] wrote the late Malcolm Heard in his 1997 architectural guide *French Quarter Manual*. While Heard contended that Quarter buildings are more distinguished for their structural typologies (next chapter) than for their architectural styles, these fashion statements are nevertheless historically significant and richly catalogued in the French Quarter. This chapter seeks historical and geographical patterns behind the 250 years of styles represented in the Quarter today.

Styles phase in and out gradually, through the adoption of some earlier traits, the modification of others, and the introduction of new ones. Demarcating this continuous phenomenon into discrete eras is therefore about as debatable as classifying the styles themselves. In Bernard Lemann's *The Vieux Carré—A General Statement* (1966), historic architectural phases in the French Quarter were identified as Colonial Period (1720-1803), Early Federal Period (1803-1825), Antebellum (1825-1860), Paleotechnic (early industrial age architecture, 1850-1900), and Modern.[33] The architectural historians behind the influential *Plan and Program for the Preservation of Vieux Carré* (1968) delineated the major stylistic eras as French and Spanish Colonial; Transitional Styles (1803-1835); Greek Revival (1835-1850); Antebellum Period (1850-1862); Later Victorian Period (1862-1900); and Twentieth Century.[34] The late Lloyd Vogt, architect and author of *New Orleans Houses: A House-Watcher's Guide* (1985) identified styles popular throughout all New Orleans (not just the French Quarter) by the following periods:

- Colonial Period (1718-1803): French Colonial style
- Postcolonial Period (1803-1830): Creole style
- Antebellum Period (1830-1862): Greek Revival
- Victorian Period (1862-1900): Gothic Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, Eastlake, Bracket, Queen Anne, and Richardson Romanesque styles
- Early Twentieth (1900-1940): Georgian Colonial Revival, Neoclassical Revival, Tudor Revival, Bungalow style, and Spanish Colonial Revival
- Modern Period (1940-Present): International and Suburban Ranch styles[35]

The analysis presented here adds a quantitative perspective to these architectural phases, based on the primary styles of extant French Quarter structures as identified by Vieux Carré Survey researchers.[36] Roughly thirty architectural styles are represented among the 2,244 extant units in the Quarter today, some very similar and others quite rare, others ubiquitous throughout the district but found hardly anywhere else in the nation. The pie chart *Primary Architectural Styles of the French Quarter* shows their relative proportions, colored by the general historical eras in which they were most popular. Note that only four styles are found in substantial numbers: Creole, Greek Revival, Victorian, and "French Quarter Revival," the name given for all structures built after the official protection of the French Quarter, when all new construction was mandated to mimic historical styles. These four stylistic categories, which may be "draped" on cottages, townhouses, shotguns, framehouses, or other structure types, account for 81 percent of all Quarter structures.



Of the roughly thirty architectural styles represented in the French Quarter today, only four (Creole, Greek Revival, Victorian, and "French Quarter Revival") adorn 81 percent of the neighborhood's 2,244 structures. *Graph and analysis by author.*

Colonial-Era Styles

For most of the colonial era, the vast majority of structures in New Orleans exhibited "French Colonial," or "French Creole," styles of architecture. The literature of architectural historians, anthropologists, and cultural geographers records inconsistent use of the terms *French Colonial* and *French Creole* to describe this eighteenth-century style; some save the term *French Colonial* for institutions of state and church, and *French Creole* or simply *Creole* for residences and vernacular structures. This being architecture and not biological taxonomy, one should expect and embrace a certain level of fluidity in terminology. For the purposes of this discussion, we may think of these eighteenth-century Francophone-influenced

[32] Malcolm Heard, *French Quarter Manual: An Architectural Guide to New Orleans' Vieux Carré* (New Orleans, 1997), 119.

[33] Bernard Lemann, *The Vieux Carré—A General Statement* (New Orleans, 1996), 11-30.

[34] Bureau of Government Research, City of New Orleans, *Plan and Program for the Preservation of the Vieux Carré* (New Orleans, 1968), 19-35.

[35] Lloyd Vogt, *New Orleans Houses: A House-Watcher's Guide* (Gretna, LA, 1985), 25-26.

[36] About 500 Quarter structures—about one in every four—exhibit a mix of styles. Both the primary and, if applicable, secondary style of each structure were recorded in this study, but only the primary styles were tabulated in the accompanying graphs and maps. See "An Architectural Geography of the French Quarter" for methodological details.

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styles as "first-generation Creole." While the nomenclature is debatable, the appearance of these structures is unmistakable. Main house characteristics include a single principal story raised upon piers, large double-pitched pavilion-like roof, broad wooden galleries supported with delicate colonnades and balustrades, exterior staircases, and walls made of brick or mud mixed with moss (*bousillage*) set within a load-bearing skeleton of timbers. Center chimneys, French doors and shutters, and a lack of hallways and closets characterized interiors.[37] It was a style more suited to rural or semi-rural conditions, and specimens may still be found scattered throughout former colonial Louisiana, in Missouri and Illinois, in the Natchitoches, Opelousas, and Pointe Coupée regions and on the River Road, Bayou St. John, and Bayou Road. That it also prevailed in the French Quarter attests to the early city's village-like state.

"The connotation [of Creole,]" wrote anthropologist Jay Dearborn Edwards, "is of someone or something from tropical (plantation) America—the Caribbean and eastern Brazil. Southern Louisiana is popularly considered the only Creole region in the United States because of its strong cultural ties to the West Indies" (though the region extends historically all along the coast, from the Texas to the Carolinas). Vernacular Creole architecture, then, may be described as "any architectural tradition genetically descended from a synthesized tropical colonial form."[38] Four interrelated hypotheses have been offered on the genesis of Louisiana's Creole architectural heritage:[39]

[37] Jonathan Fricker, "The Origins of the Creole Raised Plantation House," *Louisiana History* 25 (Spring 1984): 138.
[38] Jay D. Edwards, "The Origins of Creole Architecture," *Winterthur Portfolio: A Journal of American Material Culture* 29 (Summer/Autumn 1994): 157.
[39] Jay D. Edwards, "The Origins of the Louisiana Creole Cottage," in *French and Germans in the Mississippi Valley: Landscape and Cultural Traditions*, ed. Michael Roard (Cape Girardeau, MO, 1988), 20-25; and Jay D. Edwards, *Louisiana's French Vernacular Architecture: A Historical and Social Bibliography* (Monticello, IL, 1986), 1-9, and other sources.

"Madame John's Legacy" (632 Dumaine), built immediately after the 1788 fire, exhibits classic traits of "first-generation" Creole architecture: an oversized double-pitched hip roof, center chimney, colonnades supporting an airy gallery, outdoor staircases and no internal hallways, all raised high on brick piers. One can visualize colonial New Orleans by picturing scores of similar structures, in various sizes, setbacks, and orientations. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

One commonly held proposition is that Creole architecture was essentially "invented" here as a series of rational adaptations to the environment. Houses built in the Creole tradition, wrote one researcher, are "perfectly adapted to the climate, the topography, the taste, and the times of the people who built them.... [T]hey are uniquely original...[evolving] out of need...as complete and honest an expression as the log cabin of the mountaineer, the great bank barn of the Pennsylvania Dutchman, the sod house of the prairie pioneer, and the adobe dwelling of the southwesterner."[40] This environmental-determinism hypothesis is embraced by many for its clear and causative explanations: Heavy rains explain steep roofs. Waterlogged soils cause raised construction. Hot weather leads to breezy galleries.[41] Undoubtedly there is some truth to these relationships, but evidence indicates that, in general, cultural antecedents have weighed more heavily than independent invention in the diffusion of architectural traits. Only later are they modified locally according to environmental and practical limitations. Note, for instance, the counterintuitive presence of galleried houses in frigid French Canada, or the Spanish use of flat roofs in rainy New Orleans. "That full-blown Creole galleried houses...were being built only a dozen or so years after colonization began"[42] also casts doubt on the proposition that the style was invented here. Unless they learn intriguing construction techniques from natives, pioneering settlers in a frontier environment generally do not experiment with risky new housing designs. They are more likely to carry on what their forebears taught them, modifying those traditions to new conditions and taste only in subsequent years.

Another hypothesis views Louisiana Creole architecture as a descendent of Canadian houses derived from the Normandy region of France, modified in the West Indies and Louisiana to reflect local needs. Edwards summarizes the research of a champion of this hypothesis, Charles Peterson, as viewing the Creole house as "a frontier innovation in which a traditional northern houseform was tropicalized to better suit the needs of Canadians in their southward migration."[43] This proposition suggests that Creole architecture diffused *down* the Mississippi Valley.

A related hypothesis emphasizes the derivation of Louisiana Creole houses directly from France, particularly Normandy, ascribing less importance to the modifications made by Canadians and West Indians as the tradition reached Louisiana, and even less to environmental determinism. One researcher, Jonathan Fricker, identified key Creole architectural features—raised construction, steep hip roofs, galleries, exterior staircases, *bousillage*-like material—among centuries-

[40] Edith Elliott Long, "Here is Small Creole Town House in Full Flavor," *Vieux Carré Courier*, May 19-25, 1962, p. 1.
[41] See Fricker, "Origins of Creole Raised Plantation," 142-44, for further discussion of "climatic determinism."
[42] Ibid., 146.
[43] Edwards, "The Origins of the Louisiana Creole Cottage," 20-21.

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old farmhouses in the countryside of France. He concluded that Creole features derived from "the folk building tradition of medieval France. None was invented on this side of the Atlantic; hence, none originated as a response to the climate either of the West Indies or of the Deep South." Indeed, many other architectural styles found in America, including English, Spanish, Dutch, and Flemish, were once thought to have been invented here as environmental adaptations, and only later were acknowledged as "derived largely from European traditions."[44]

A fourth and favored hypothesis sees Creole architecture (particularly its signature gallery) as an extraction from a West Indian cultural milieu, influenced by a wide range of European, African, and indigenous traditions, particularly the Arawak Indian *Bohio* hut. The appearance of galleried houses throughout the Caribbean—not solely in French colonies but in Spanish and British ones as well, as early as 1685—leads advocates of this hypothesis to de-emphasize the French role in the origin of Creole architecture. While underlying French and French Canadian house types were brought to the New Orleans region by former Canadians, the founders and early settlers also brought with them *significant* West Indian contributions and modifications, which were locally altered to taste and need by later generations. This hypothesis suggests that Creole architecture diffused *up* the Mississippi Valley from the Caribbean, rather than down from Canada or directly from France. Edwards viewed this West Indian/Creole influence consequential enough to warrant the inclusion of the Caribbean region as "another major cultural hearth for the domestic architecture of eastern North America," along with England, France, Spain, Germany, Holland, and Scandinavian countries.[45]

French Colonial or French Creole styles prevailed in New Orleans even after Spain took control in 1769, because the inhabitants remained deeply Francophone in their culture and the new Spanish rulers did not aggressively seek to change this. But population growth and urban development increasingly rendered these structures inadequate, wasteful of space—and dangerous. Over a thousand were destroyed by the great conflagrations of 1788 and 1794, and almost all others were lost over the years to decay, demolition, storm, and fire. Only one institutional example survives today from the French colonial era (the Old Ursuline Convent, designed 1745, completed 1752), while perhaps the best example of a French Colonial style residential structure (Madame John's Legacy, built in 1788, after the French dominion), remains at 632 Dumaine Street. The remarkable circa-1780s Ossorno House (913 Gov. Nicholls, see previous chapter) would have been an equally fine example were it not for the modification of its hip roof to a gable. A paucity of extant structures prevents the graphing of the rise and fall of this style in the French Quarter, but if one were to approximate the trend, it would start in the 1720s, peak in the 1750s and 1760s, decline slightly in the 1770s and 1780s, then drop off sharply in the 1790s and all but disappear by the new century. Geographically, French Colonial style structures were found everywhere in the city into the 1780s, but now, save for the aforementioned exceptions, form only the pattern of absence.

The 600 block of Royal Street possesses fine examples of Spanish-influenced "second-generation" Creole architecture. At right is the Ducros-Ducatel House and its additions (1805-1825), exhibiting a stucco entablature with moldings, steep hip roof (not visible here), narrow balcony, arched openings on the ground floor (later squared), and a dependency with wooden railings and colonnades. Next door is 610-614 Royal, a pink three-story townhouse in the "high Creole" style of the 1830s, with a central *porte cochère* and unadorned double-hung windows topped with stucco-covered jack arches. The adjacent units at 616-624 Royal were built in the same era and style. Graceful, smooth simplicity uninterrupted by cluttering detail typifies these Creole styles. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

After the 1794 fire, the Spanish colonial administration decreed new building codes to prevent another catastrophe, and looked to their own traditions to foster the development of a sturdier urban environment. Wood was discouraged in favor of brick; steep roofs went out in favor of flat or gently sloping ones; brick-between-post walls were covered with stucco; wooden shingles were replaced with clay tiles. Other Spanish features unrelated to fire safety came with the new style, such as arched openings on the ground flood, pilasters, balconies, and courtyards. The fenced gardens and wooden galleries of a French village gave way to the stuccoed walls and

[44] Fricker, "Origins of Creole Raised Plantation," 145-52. See Edwards' review of this hypothesis in his "The Origins of the Louisiana Creole Cottage," 24-25.
[45] Edwards, "The Origins of Creole Architecture," 156; and Edwards, "The Origins of the Louisiana Creole Cottage," 21-22.

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wrought-iron balconies of a Spanish city. "As such structures proliferated, the physical character of the Quarter evolved accordingly—the influence of northern French building traditions, transmitted to some degree through the cold Canadian provinces, waned in favor of the more Mediterranean forms of the Spanish."[46] Derivations of those forms are replete throughout the Quarter today, but surviving examples of pure Spanish Colonial Style are not common. Twenty-five edifices—about one of every hundred buildings in the Quarter—exhibit this style, of which twenty-two were built in the Spanish colonial era (all after 1789). Of the three that postdate the Spanish years, two are quite famous: the Old Absinthe House at 240 Bourbon, built in 1806, and the Girod (Napoleon) House at 500 Chartres, built in 1814, with a wing dating to 1797.

The Spanish Colonial style in its pure form rose in the French Quarter probably during the 1780s, peaked in the 1790s, and fell off steadily in the decade after Americanization. Geographically, these twenty-five surviving historical gems are loosely clustered within two blocks of the intersection of Toulouse and Royal streets. The lake side of the 600 block of Chartres Street possesses the largest concentration of Spanish Colonial structures (both in era and style), and may well be the city's oldest surviving street scene, despite numerous façade alterations over the past two centuries. At the corner (601-607 Chartres) is the circa-1795 Reynes House, originally a townhouse highly evocative of Spanish architecture in the Caribbean and Latin America, converted to a storehouse in the 1830s, used as Victor's Grocery from 1896 to 1962, and now a bar. It is attached to 609-615 Chartres, built at the same time as the corner building and now stripped of its details, but still retaining a Spanish appearance.[47] Next is the famous Bosque House at 617-619 Chartres, a 1795 townhouse with exemplary Spanish traits such as a courtyard and wrought-iron balcony, though its origin arched openings and flat, tiled terrace roof were later remodeled in a non-Spanish fashion. (The Good Friday fire of March 21, 1788, began at this site, and the December 8, 1794, fire started just behind it, which explains why these buildings mostly tend to date from 1795.) At 625-627 Chartres is a *porte cochère* (carriageway) building with a wooden balcony (reminiscent of Old San Juan, Puerto Rico) also later modified into a storehouse, erected during the last years of Spanish rule. Until 1962, the Spanish streetscape of 600 Chartres climaxed with the Orue-Pontalba Building at the corner of St. Peter, probably designed by Gilberto Guillemard and built between 1789 and 1796. But structural decay, including old damage inflicted by the 1794 fire, led to its condemnation and controversial demolition in May 1962. Architects Koch and Wilson designed a fine reproduction of this beautiful building in its original 1789 form, which was constructed in 1963 and now houses Le Petit Théâtre. Three other Spanish colonials occupy this same square, bounded by Chartres, St. Peter, Royal, and Toulouse.[48] Continuing downriver on Chartres are the city's twin jewels of the Spanish Colonial Style, the Cabildo (1799), seat of the Spanish government, and the Presbytère (1791-1813), originally designed as a rectory. Without their mid-nineteenth century Mansard roofs, the Cabildo and Presbytère appear lifted out of an old Mexican *zócalo* or an Andean *plaza central*.

Spain would control New Orleans for less than a decade after its architectural style finally gained a local foothold. After Spanish officials departed in 1803 but before Anglo-American culture came to predominate, New Orleanians found themselves with an amalgam of architectural traditions and buildings skills, some by way of France, some by way of Spain, others by Canada, the West Indies, Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere. From this admixture emerged what may be called "second-generation" Creole style.

Emergence of Creole Style

While only two or three specimens of eighteenth-century "first-generation Creole" structures survive in the French Quarter, hundreds—740 by this count, about one of every three structures—exhibit architectural styles that are also called Creole. This style was "draped" on cottages, townhouses, or storehouses built mostly between 1800 and 1840, the period when once-prevalent colonial influences waned and once-absent American culture waxed. These were structures with an indigenous New Orleans look and design, one which harks back to colonial (particularly Spanish) antecedents, but with local modifications and variations that may be thought of, for the purposes of this discussion, as "second-generation" Creole. What is the ancestral origin of these Creole buildings?

Edwards states that while the pure eighteenth-century Creole tradition survived intact through the Spanish era in both rural and urban areas, it was diluted by new European and Anglo-American influences infiltrating the Gulf Coast around the dawn of the nineteenth century. The result was not a replacement of Creole traits—that would take another half-century—but a fusion with new ones. Hence, the Creole cottages we know in today's French Quarter bear a resemblance in structure and orientation to the raised, pitched-roof, gallery houses found in the eighteenth century, but usually lack the galleries, have a less-inclined roof, and are only a foot or so raised above the ground. By the 1830s, "Creole architecture had undergone a profound syncretism with Anglo forms. Georgian geometry, with its emphasis on symmetry and axiality, was substituted for the Creole love of asymmetry

[46] Heard, *French Quarter Manual*, 4.

[47] In 2003, the Vieux Carré Commission permitted the reconstruction of a large Victorian gingerbread gallery on the façade of this otherwise plain building. While the gallery *per se* is perfectly appealing, and a similar one had existed there a century ago, it distracts from what could have been enhanced into the Quarter's best example of a Spanish colonial streetscape.

[48] *The Vieux Carré Survey: A Pictorial Record and a Study of the Land and Buildings in the Vieux Carré*, 130 binders (Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection), Binder 42.

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and hierarchy."[49] So too did roofs, façades, and room arrangement change from old Creole ways, though enough remained the same to warrant the continued use of the term "Creole architecture"—only here, *Creole* primarily implies *native to New Orleans*, and secondarily *"descended from a synthesized tropical colonial form."*[50] Most of the Creole cottages and Creole townhouses in the French Quarter today (and mapped and graphed as such in these pages) manifest this early nineteenth-century variation of Creole style, rather than the pure eighteenth-century tradition that is rare today both in the French Quarter and throughout former New France. These second-generation Creole structures were modified again in the 1830s and 1840s ("transitionals," described later) and were finally replaced, once and for all, by the Anglo Americans' favored Greek Revival and Italianate styles. By the 1850s and certainly by the Civil War, the Creole architectural tradition—derived from Medieval France, diffused and altered via Canada and especially the West Indies, and modified for local needs on the plantations of the lower Mississippi Valley and in the streets of New Orleans—was dead. "The truly significant period of New Orleans architecture was brought into jeopardy by the [Louisiana] Purchase and brought to an end by the Civil War," wrote James Marston Fitch in his outstanding article on the rise and fall of the Creole tradition. "The Americanization of the Crescent City has long been completed, at least architecturally; and the whole nation is the poorer for it."[51] We are fortunate indeed, and deeply indebted to pioneer preservationists, to keep within our stewardship the nation's largest concentration of this unique and beautiful tradition.

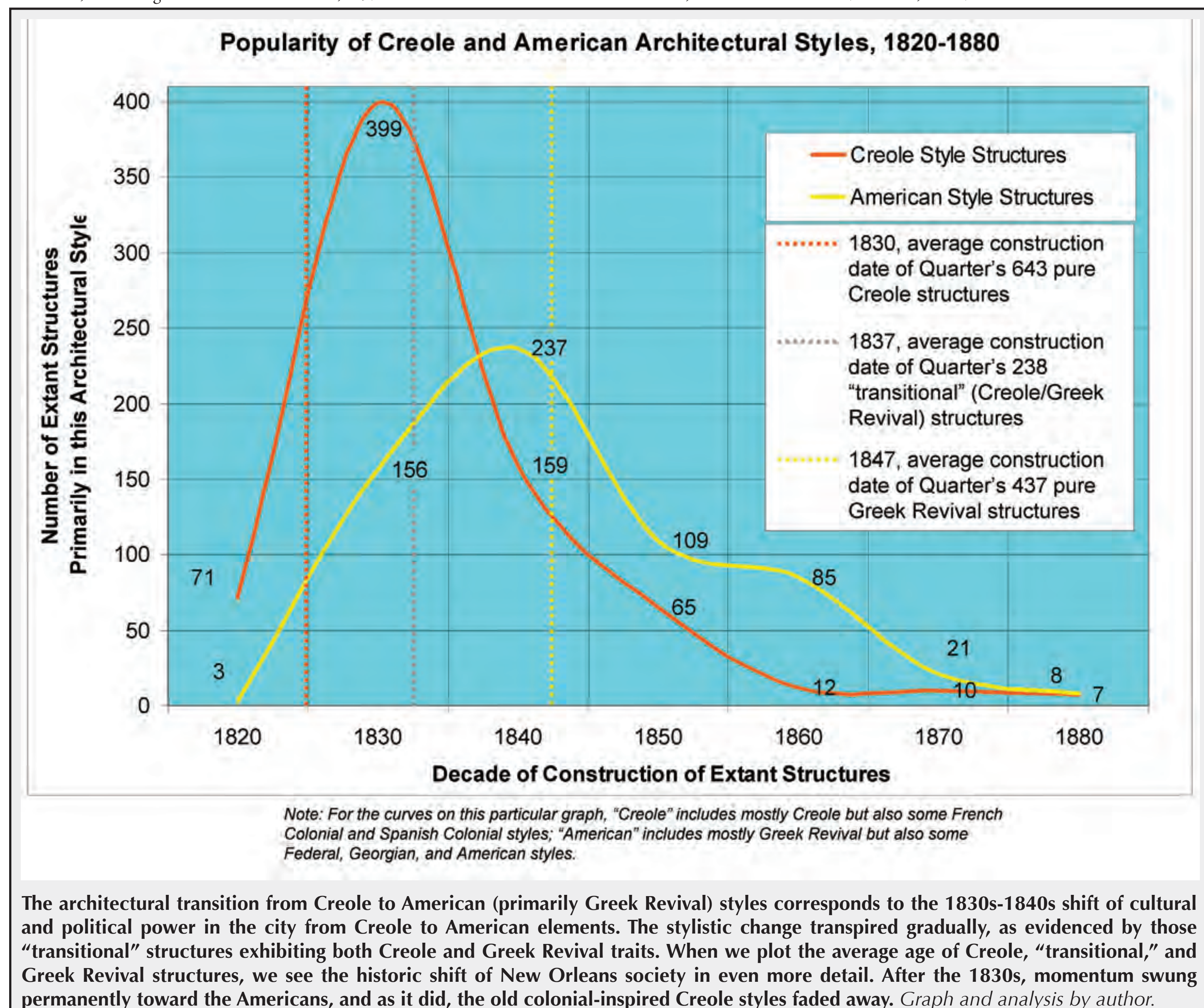
Emergence of American Styles

The Anglo Americans trickling into New Orleans after the Louisiana Purchase at first conformed to these local architectural traditions, having little choice but to move into existing structures or hire local builders to build what they knew. Some adjusted and modified their structures, as de-

[49] Edwards, "The Origins of the Louisiana Creole Cottage," 9-10. See also James Marston Fitch, "Creole Architecture 1718-1860: The Rise and Fall of a Great Tradition," in *The Past as Prelude: New Orleans 1718-1968*, ed. Hodding Carter (New Orleans, 1968), 79-80; and Edwards, "The Origins of Creole Architecture," 183.

[50] Edwards, "The Origins of Creole Architecture," 157.

[51] Fitch, "Creole Architecture 1718-1860," 86-87.



The architectural transition from Creole to American (primarily Greek Revival) styles corresponds to the 1830s-1840s shift of cultural and political power in the city from Creole to American elements. The stylistic change transpired gradually, as evidenced by those "transitional" structures exhibiting both Creole and Greek Revival traits. When we plot the average age of Creole, "transitional," and Greek Revival structures, we see the historic shift of New Orleans society in even more detail. After the 1830s, momentum swung permanently toward the Americans, and as it did, the old colonial-inspired Creole styles faded away. *Graph and analysis by author.*

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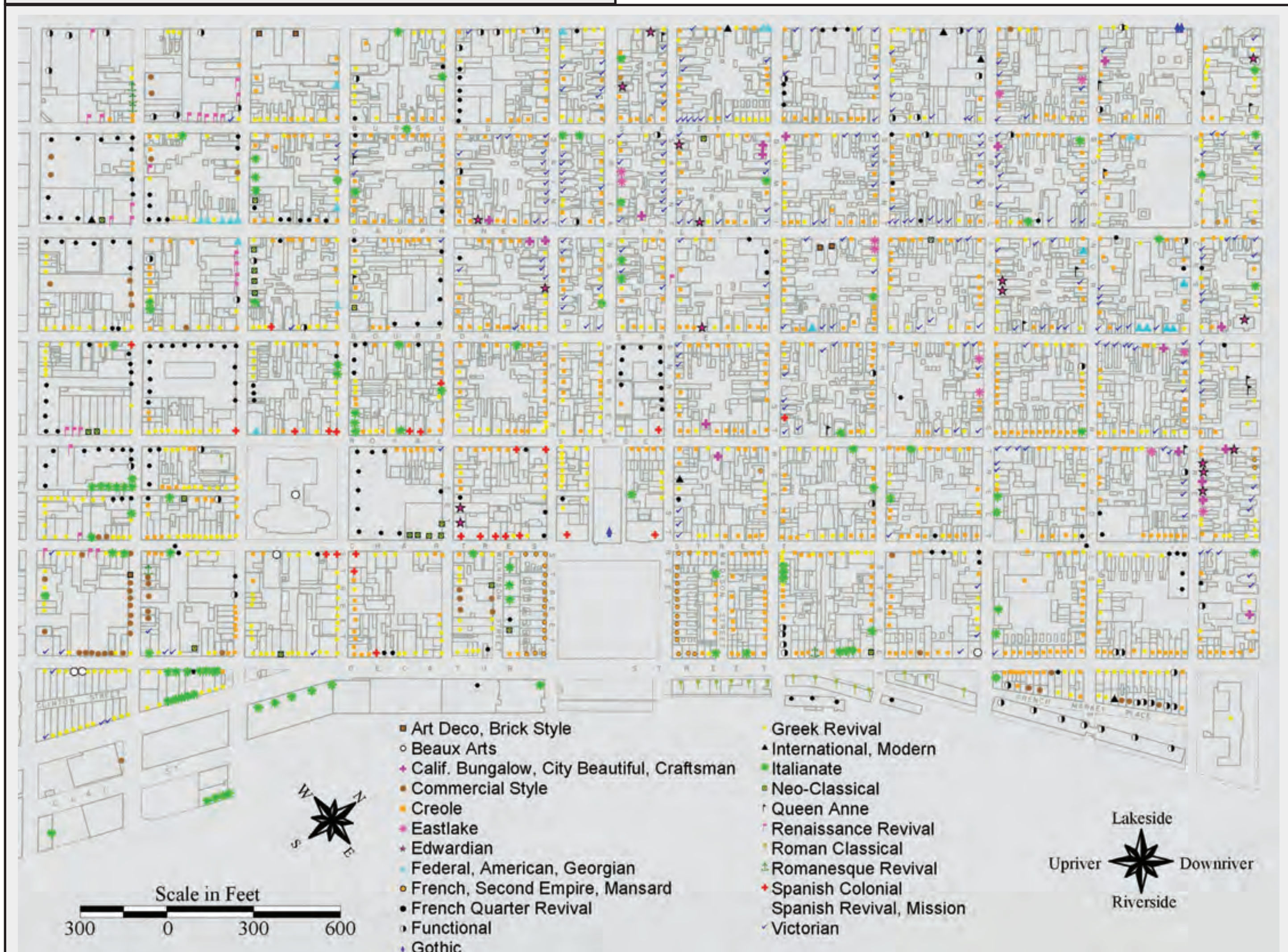
This row of "transitionals"—structures with both Creole and Greek Revival traits—at 335-341 Chartres dates from the 1830s, when political power shifted from Creoles to Anglos. Creole traits include the narrow balcony, jack arches above windows, and narrow passages between adjoining units; Greek Revival characteristics include the denticulated cornice, squared openings, and massive granite pillars. *Photograph by author, 2002.*

scribed above. But when the trickle grew to a torrent in the years after the Battle of New Orleans (1815), the Americans increasingly brushed aside local architectural traits in favor of their own imported concepts—and their own architects. Had they arrived a generation or so earlier, they might have brought with them the classical styles that were all the rage in the North and Upper South in the 1700s, such as Georgian, Federal, and what is now called Jeffersonian Classicism.[52] But arriving as they did in the early 1800s, the Americans imported primarily the latest architectural styles sweeping the Northeast: those of ancient Greece.

The earliest known surviving structure in Louisiana with prominent Greek Revival traits is the Thierry House at 721 Gov. Nicholls Street, designed by Henry Latrobe (the young son of famed architect Benjamin Latrobe, designer of the U.S. Capitol and an emissary of Greek Revival style) and Arsène Lacarrière Latour. Built in 1814, the Thierry House is notable for its unusual setback distance, shape, and Greek Revival portico. The Doric columns and graceful curves of the porch were hidden for decades until their re-discovery by

[52] Vogt, *New Orleans Houses,* 63.



No clear spatial pattern appears in the map above, where architectural styles are plotted at the building level. But when we look at only Creole and Greek Revival styles aggregated at the street level (right), we see that Greek Revival specimens outnumber Creole examples in the "Americanized" upper blocks, while the reverse is true in the more Francophone lower city. This architectural pattern reflects the ethnic geography of nineteenth-century New Orleans, when Anglo Americans predominated in the upper city and Creoles in the lower area. *Maps and analysis by author.*

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Richard Koch and Samuel Wilson, who restored the house in 1940. Architectural historians trace Greek Revival architecture in the lower Mississippi Valley—a place that would make it famous through its iconic plantation mansions—to this unpretentious little home.[53] Within a few years, the Greek Revival style spread in the city and region, to plantation houses, townhouses, storehouses, and cottages. It formed the first major American architectural contribution to New Orleans, one that may be seen today by the hundreds in the French Quarter and by the thousands throughout the city.[54] Georgian, Federal, and Jeffersonian Classicism, on the other hand, are rare in the Quarter and citywide, as are Gothic and other Northeastern styles that "missed" the major wave of Anglo settlement in Louisiana. Only eighteen extant structures in the Quarter exhibit Federal, Georgian, or Gothic styles. The Greek Revival style, on the other hand, adorns 614 structures, more than one in every four Quarter buildings. American history, and Louisiana's place in it, is written into these patterns.

History is also inscribed in the patterns of Creole versus American styles. The graph entitled *Popularity of Creole and American Architectural Styles, 1820-1880*[55] shows that Creole styles peaked in the 1830s then fell off precipitously, while Greek Revival peaked a decade later and fell off more gradually. This architectural transition from Creole to Greek Revival corresponds to the 1830s and 1840s shift of cultural and political power in the city from Creole to American elements.[56] The trend was noticed by a visitor as early as 1828:

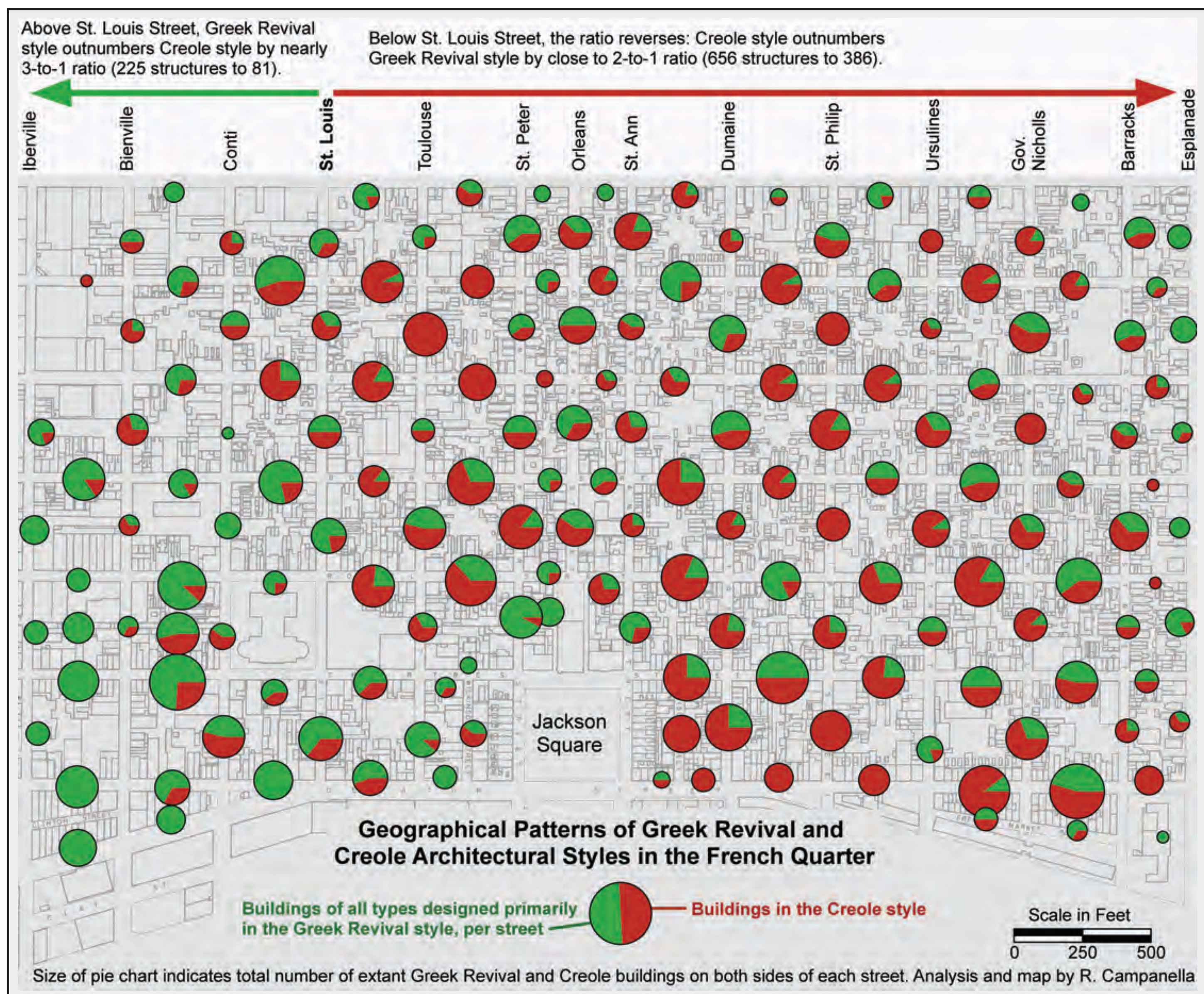
> The houses are rapidly changing from the uncouth Spanish style, to more elegant forms. The new houses are mostly three stories high, with balconies, and a summer-room with

[53] Edith Elliott Long, "Rare in Vieux Carre, Classic House with a Porch," *Vieux Carré Courier*, May 12-18, 1962, p. 1-4.

[54] Observed James Marston Fitch, "The architectural language [of the American *nouveaux riches* in the New Orleans region] was of Graeco-Roman origin, most convenient ideologically because it reflected Southern identification with Imperial Rome [and] Periclean Greece…. This reactionary use of the Classic idiom…regarded human slavery as the basis of Classic culture instead of being merely its blemish." While Fitch was referring primarily to Classical-style plantation mansions, his characterization may also apply to affluent new urban dwellings. Fitch, "Creole Architecture 1718-1860," 82.

[55] In this graph, "Creole" includes Creole, French Colonial, and Spanish Colonial Styles, and "American" implies Greek Revival, Federal, Georgian, and American styles, as recorded by the Vieux Carré Survey. Recall that only extant structures are included in this analysis, not all structures that ever existed in the Quarter.

[56] Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., "Creoles and Americans," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, eds. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge and London, 1992), 152-57.



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Contrasting nineteenth-century styles at 913-915 Decatur: at left is a circa-1830s Creole-style storehouse; at right is a Roman Revival-style façade dating from the 1890s. *Photograph by author, 2002.*

> blinds. In the lower suburbs, frame houses, with Spanish roofs, are still prevalent.[57]

The stylistic change transpired not as a drastic, sudden switch but as a gradual, piecemeal transformation. The Vieux Carré Survey refers to those structures (usually townhouses) exhibiting both Creole and Greek Revival attributes as "transitionals." When we plot separately the average age of Creole, "transitional," and Greek Revival structures, we see the historic shift of New Orleans society in even more detail: the "transitionals" appeared almost exactly when the Creole and American rivalry was at its peak (late 1830s). Afterwards, momentum swung permanently toward the Americans, and as it did, the old colonial-inspired Creole styles declined and Greek Revival and other new American styles caught on. These data seem to corroborate architect Malcolm Heard's observation that "[t]he conflicted process by which Creoles assimilated American influence became architecturally manifest in the large number of Creole townhouses built in the French Quarter during the 1830s."[58]

[57] Charles Sealsfield, *The Americans As They Are; Described in a Tour Through the Valley of the Mississippi* (London, 1828), 154. In this quotation, "Spanish" probably refers to what I am calling Spanish Colonial or second-generation Creole. The reference to "elegant forms" of "three stories" probably means American-style townhouses, and "frame houses, with Spanish roofs" likely describes Creole cottages.

Another contrasting pair at 1027-1035 Decatur: at left is a Creole-style structure in a row of three built around 1829; at right is a Victorian Italianate commercial building built in 1883. Note the simple, clean lines of the earlier, indigenous style compared to the fancy traits of the late nineteenth-century imported style. *Photograph by author, 2002.*

The geography of Creoles and Americans is also written in brick. As described in the chapter "Creole New Orleans: The Geography of a Controversial Ethnicity," Creole culture in antebellum times was by no means strictly limited to the confines of the French Quarter, nor did Anglo Americans reside exclusively above Canal Street, as legend has it. In fact, both ethnic groups (plus many others) could be found throughout the Quarter, with Creoles predominating in the lower area and Anglos in the upper blocks, closer to Canal Street. The pattern was observed by a number of nineteenth-century travelers to the city, among them Frederick Law Olmsted, who in 1854 described the cityscape during a cab ride up Decatur Street from the foot of Elysian Fields Avenue to

The Greek Revival style, as manifested in these circa-1840s townhouses at 308-314 North Rampart, arrived to the French Quarter from the Northeast in the 1810s, peaked in popularity in the 1840s, and declined steadily over the next thirty to forty years. About 28 percent of the extant structures in the French Quarter exhibit Greek Revival as their primary architectural style. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

the St. Charles Hotel. In the lower area, Olmsted witnessed "narrow dirty streets, among grimy old stuccoed walls; high arched windows and doors, balconies and entresols, and French noises and French smells, French signs, ten to one of English." In the upper streets, but still within the Quarter, he wrote "now the signs became English, and the new brick buildings American." Upon crossing Canal and heading up St. Charles Avenue, he saw "French, Spanish, and English signs, the latter predominating."[59] Architectural styles to this day bear out this historical pattern: while Creole (which Olmsted would call "French") and Greek Revival ("American") styles may be found today on practically any selected block, the map entitled *Geographical Patterns of Greek Revival and Creole Architectural Styles in the French Quarter* shows that

[58] Heard, *French Quarter Manual*, 41.

[59] Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveler's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States*, 2 vols. (New York and London, 1861), 1:291-92.

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Almost 800 townhouses line the streets of the Quarter, but only a few bear wooden double galleries. These Greek Revival examples on Chartres Street, built mostly in 1846 according to designs by J.N.B. de Pouilly, form a street scene more typical of the Lower Garden District than the French Quarter. *Photograph by author, 2002.*

This townhouse at 1025 St. Louis Street is one of the finest examples of the Greek Revival style in the Quarter. Built in 1840-1842 for two free men of color, the 7,600-square-foot mansion's Greek key doorway, side hall, squared openings, heavy lintels, attic windows, and dentils are classic traits of this antebellum style. *Photo by author, 2002.*

while the reverse is true in the "French" blocks below that street. St. Louis Street is significant because, in 1822, the famous Creole aristocrat Bernard Marigny identified it as a *de facto* dividing line between American and Creole interests.[60] Broken down to the block-by-block level, the trend is even more dramatic. In the heavily Americanized blocks between Iberville and Bienville streets, which recall Manhattan or Boston more so than the lower Quarter, Greek Revival buildings outnumber Creoles by an eleven-to-one ratio. But from St. Ann to Gov. Nicholls Street, an area that resembles a southern European or Caribbean village, Creole structures outnumber Greek Revivals by more than a two-and-a-half-to-one ratio. This architectural geography, though subtle and not overwhelming numerically, is a direct descendent of the ethnic geographies of nineteenth-century New Orleans, when the city underwent its historic and sometimes painful transition to an American future.

Trends Through Modern Times

Architectural styles continue to reflect New Orleans history when we extend the timeline out to 1750 to 2000 (see graph, *Historical Architectural Eras Represented in Today's French Quarter*). Absent from this graph (because they are absent from the streetscape) are most colonial-style buildings, which spanned all of the eighteenth century. We start to see the previously described rise and fall of Creole styles in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, followed by

[60] Tregle, "Creoles and Americans," 155.

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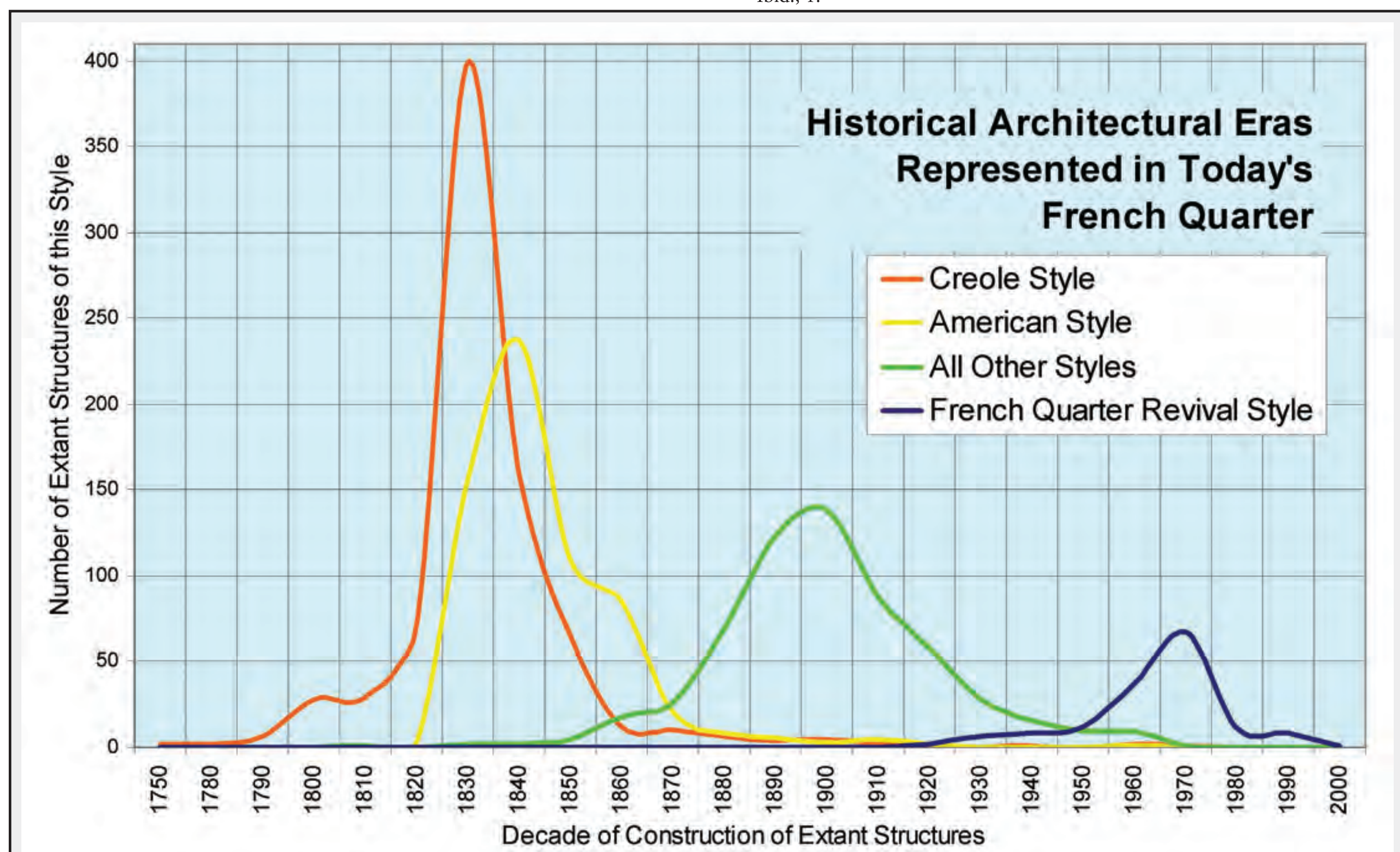
the peaking of American styles, namely Greek Revival, in the 1840s. Both Creole and Greek Revival fell almost completely out of fashion during the Civil War and Reconstruction years, when new construction in the French Quarter came almost to a halt. The turn-of-the-century preference for exotic new styles—Italianate, Victorian, Queen Anne, Edwardian, Neo-Classical, and others—is captured with a modest peak around 1900, which petered out by the Depression and World War II. Finally, the "French Quarter Revival" style, mandated by preservation laws to maintain French Quarter scenography, peaked during the hotel construction boom of the 1960s. Prohibition on new hotels and more stringent preservationist oversight led to a drop-off in new construction during the 1980s-2000. The few new buildings that have arisen in those years continue to revive the French Quarter "look."

A closer look reveals New Orleans' adoption and abandonment of other Western architectural trends. Note the gradual introduction of the Italianate style just before the Civil War, and its modest popularity (see graph, *Rise and Fall of Two Major Postbellum Styles*) afterwards. An outgrowth of the "Picturesque" movement and a nineteenth-century fascination with the Renaissance, the Italianate style was introduced to America by way of England in 1839-1841, addressing the increasing American interest in the "aesthetic of luxury" and "artistic values,"[61] particularly in the urban South. Fanciful Italianate features such as decorative parapets, segmented arches, quoins, and cornices supported by paired brackets were "applied like an overlay to traditional building types within the city,"[62] effectively replacing the more staid Greek Revival style while maintaining the underlying townhouse/storehouse structural typology. According to art historian Joan G. Caldwell, "the Italianate style was the dominant taste in domestic architecture in New Orleans from 1850 to 1880," a citywide assessment that agrees perfectly with this numerical analysis of the French Quarter. Caldwell also notes that Italianate fashions in New Orleans "form a small part of a larger picture of Victorian architecture," which developed from them, as illustrated in the graph. Many of the Victorian structures classified here are more accurately described as "Victorian Italianate," which boomed primarily in the 1890s. Typologically, most of the ninety-seven Victorian structures dating from this vibrant decade are shotgun houses, joined by thousands others in adjacent neighborhoods in the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth wards.

The graph *Popularity of Later Architectural Style in the French Quarter, by Decade* tracks the rise and fall of some less

[61] Joan G. Caldwell, "Italianate Domestic Architecture in New Orleans 1850-1880" (Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University, 1975), 229.
[62] Ibid., 1.



Plotting the construction dates of extant Quarter structures shows the rise and fall of Creole styles, followed by the peaking of American styles, namely Greek Revival. Both Creole and Greek Revival fell out of fashion around the Civil War, when new construction all but halted. The turn-of-the-century preference for exotic new styles—Victorian Italianate, Queen Anne, Edwardian, Neo-Classical, and others—is captured with a modest peak around 1900, which petered out by the Depression and World War II. "French Quarter Revival," mandated by preservation laws, peaked during the tourism-driven construction boom of the 1960s and 1970s. Prohibition on new hotels and more stringent preservationist oversight led to a drop-off in new construction at the end of the century. *Graph and analysis by author.*

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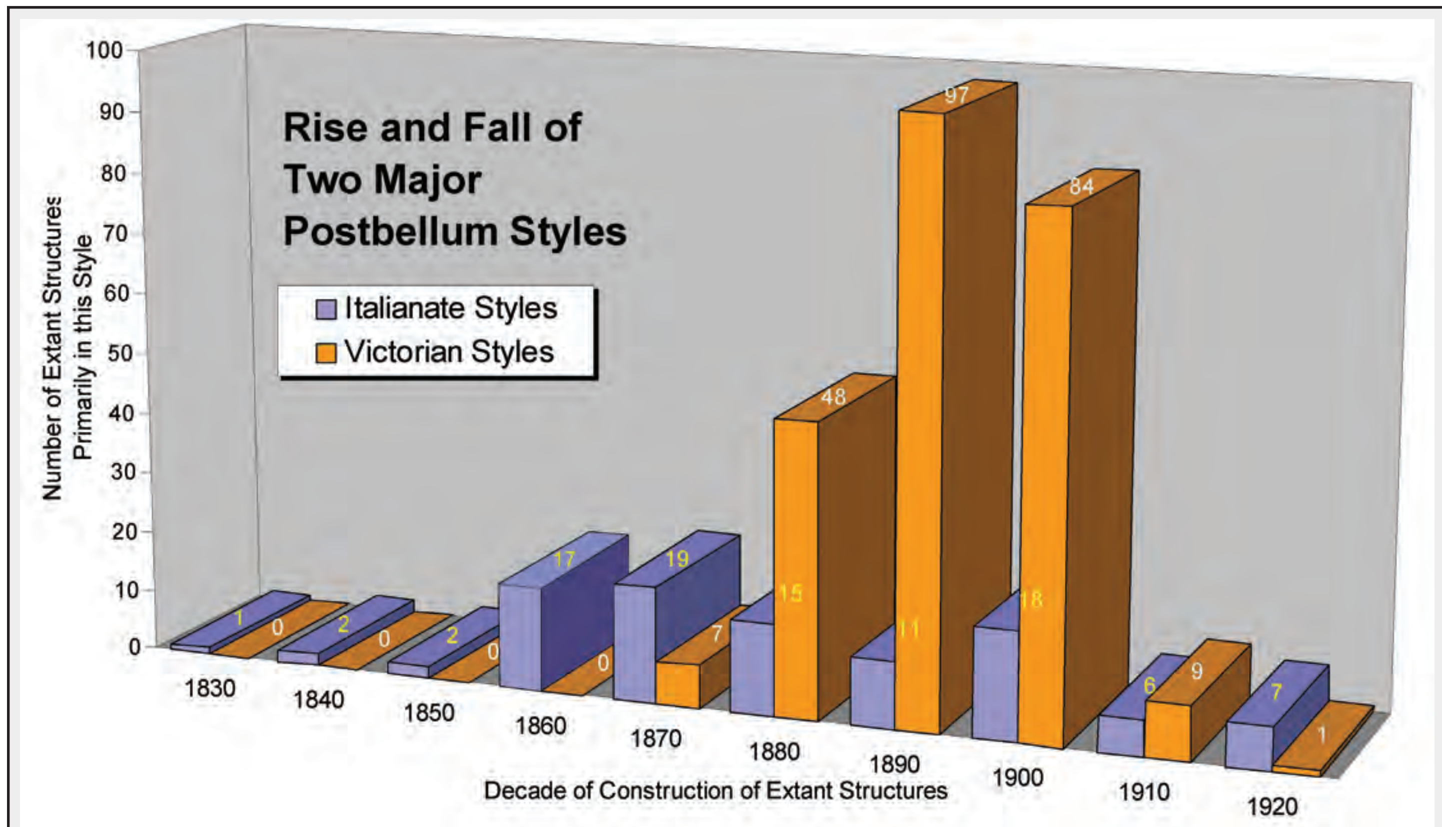

The Italianate style grew out of the "Picturesque" movement, introduced to America from England around 1840. It arrived to the French Quarter prior to the Civil War and achieved modest popularity after the conflict, replacing the antebellum Greek Revival style. Victorian styles came into vogue by century's end, mostly adorning shotgun houses built primarily in the lower Quarter as working-class homes. Their styles are often described as Victorian Italianate. (The term *Victorian* **denotes an era as well as a style.)** *Graph and analysis by author.*

common styles represented in extant French Quarter structures. Note the:

- turn-of-the-century preference for European styles such as Renaissance Revival, Queen Anne, Neo-Classical, and Beaux Arts;
- early twentieth century popularity of Edwardian and Spanish Revival (not to be confused with Spanish Colonial) styles;
- surge in Commercial style around 1900, reflecting the conversion of some blocks in the upper Quarter and French Market area from retail and profession to industrial and warehousing;
- post-Victorian emergence of City Beautiful and Craftsman-style bungalows;
- frequency of "functional" structures (sheds, garages, etc.) built in the decades prior to legal protection, when the Quarter was a run-down neighborhood prone to demolition and functional usage;
- rarity of International or Modern styles, which came in vogue after the preservation era and are all but forbidden in the Quarter today.

Many representatives of these late nineteenth and early twentieth-century styles occur in the lower, lakeside quadrant of the Quarter, for reasons that are related to patterns of structure age (previous chapter) and structure typology (next chapter). This area was historically more residential and less

This late-1850s townhouse at 934 Royal illustrates the transition from Greek Revival to Italianate. The heavy lintels above the side windows are Greek Revival traits, while the decorative parapet and segmented arches on the façade are Italianate. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

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affluent than the Quarter's central heart, and was more likely to host cottages occupied by the working class. Cottages, which did not efficiently utilize parcel space, were more likely to be razed in the postbellum era (unlike large townhouses and storehouses, which were often subdivided into apartments). The demolished cottages were usually replaced by shotgun houses or bungalows, which, with their elongated shapes, made better use of parcel dimensions. Because this transformation occurred at a time when Victorian-Italianate style was fashionable, we see this and other circa-1900 styles predominating through the lower the Quarter. But exceptions are the rule, and, just as one may find eighteenth-century and twenty-one-century buildings practically on the same block in this veritable outdoor museum of architecture, one may also encounter a Spanish Colonial style near a Spanish Revival style, or a building in the style of ancient Greece near a bungalow fashioned like those in California.

Religious institutions in the Quarter exhibit almost as wide a range of styles as commercial and residential edifices. The Old Ursuline Convent is French Colonial, while the St. Louis Cathedral reflects Greek Revival influences. Here, on the North Rampart edge of the district, is a rare example of Gothic style in the Center for Jesus the Lord Church (center), and Spanish Revival style in St. Marks' Methodist Church at right. *Photograph by Ronnie Cardwell with author, 2004.*

Popularity of Later Architectural Styles in the French Quarter, by Decade

Excludes Creole, Greek Revival, and Other Earlier Styles

Number of Extant Structures

Victorian, Spanish Revival, Mission, Romanesque Revival, Roman Classical, Renaissance Revival, Queen Anne, Neo-Classical, Italianate, International, Modern, Gothic, Functional (No Style), Edwardian, Eastlake, Commercial Style, Bungalows, City Beautiful, Craftsman, Beaux Arts, Art Deco, Brick Style

1810, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930

This graph tracks the rise and fall of less-common styles in the French Quarter. Note the turn-of-the-century preference for European styles such as Renaissance Revival, Queen Anne, Neo-Classical, and Beaux Arts; the early twentieth-century popularity of Edwardian and Spanish Revival; the surge in Commercial style around 1900 (reflecting new industrial and warehousing activities); and the rarity of International or Modern styles, which came in vogue after the preservation era and are all but forbidden in the Quarter today. *Graph and analysis by author.*

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“A Philosophy of Space”

Patterns of Structure Type in the French Quarter

Structural typology, more so than architectural style, shapes the French Quarter’s built environment and distinguishes it from the urban American norm. *Typology*, or *type* is the underlying form, shape, orientation, and layout of a building. While styles are informed by ever-changing tastes and draped upon structures rather interchangeably, type reflects the needs, wants, and means of its builders and owners, representing “a philosophy of space, a culturally-determined sense of dimension.”[63] Cultures that value privacy would probably not build their houses without hallways, such that rooms can be accessed only from other rooms, while gregarious societies may be more inclined to embrace such an arrangement. Individuals with abundant means, and a desire to display it, may opt for a townhouse; those with limited means may have no choice but settle for a cottage or shotgun. Style in these scenarios is not inconsequential, but it is secondary.

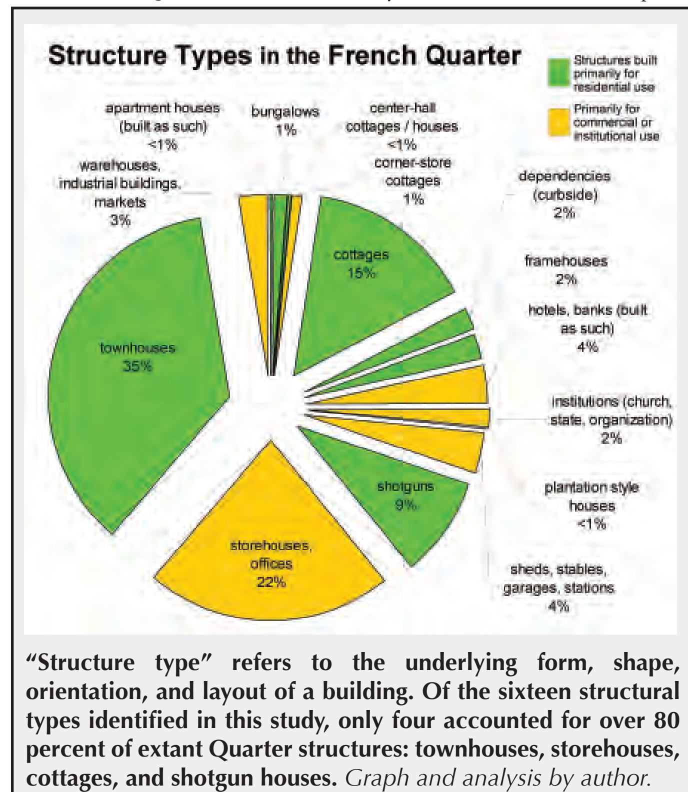
Structure types, like styles, sometimes resist easy categorization. The line between type and function for entities such as banks and hotels can be blurry, as is distinguishing between two related types, such as shotguns and certain bungalows. It is also debatable whether a “Creole cottage” is type *per se*, or a Creole *style* applied to the cottage *type* (as I have handled them).[64] But the major distinctions are the important ones, and of the sixteen types identified in this study (see pie chart *Structure Types in the French Quarter*),[65] only four accounted for 81 percent of the 2,244 buildings in the Quarter: the townhouse (35 percent), the mixed commercial/residential-use storehouse (22 percent), the cottage (15 percent), and the shotgun (9 percent).

A townhouse is a multi-story brick structure set in a row, often with shared walls, designed originally for the residential occupancy of its affluent owners. Townhouses in the French Quarter were usually mansions. A storehouse is outwardly similar but serves a commercial purpose on the ground floor, and may afford either residential or commercial (including storage) use on the upper floors. Both townhouses and storehouses in the Quarter were usually built with three bays on each of two to three floors. Conversion over the years between townhouses and storehouses, and from mixed-use to solely commercial use, accounts for some gray zones between these two types. But there is no confusing them with cottages and shotguns. Cottages are rectangular or square residential structures (unless they be on corners, where they often serve retail functions as well), usually one to one-and-a-half stories plus an attic, whose roofline is parallel with the abutting street. Shotgun houses are elongated linear structures oriented perpendicularly to the street, described in detail below. Variations abound within these prevailing types: townhouses and storehouses may have steep or flat roofs, balconies or galleries, or arched or square openings; cottages and shotguns may have hip or gable roofs, brick or wooden walls, or single or double bays.

Historical Trends of Structure Type

The graph *Historical Trends in Structure Type Represented in Today’s French Quarter*, shows that cottages, townhouses, and storehouses were all popular during the building boom of the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Townhouses were especially popular, but because these data represent *extant* buildings, this peak may reflect the greater likelihood that costly and architecturally significant townhouses were more likely to survive to the present day. Shotguns, on the other hand, were extremely scarce in the early 1800s, though not entirely absent. Construction of all types came to near-total halt during the Civil War, and returned at minimal levels during federal occupation.

Once the city got back on its feet in the late 1870s and 1880s, a new built environment arose in the French Quarter. Gone, with few exceptions, was new townhouse construction: the wealthy by this time had departed the no-longer-fashionable old city for uptown and Esplanade Avenue, a trend that had actually started before the Civil War. Others had lost their fortunes to the conflict. Storehouses also overtook town-



“Structure type” refers to the underlying form, shape, orientation, and layout of a building. Of the sixteen structural types identified in this study, only four accounted for over 80 percent of extant Quarter structures: townhouses, storehouses, cottages, and shotgun houses. *Graph and analysis by author.*

[63] John Michael Vlach, “Sources of the Shotgun House: African and Caribbean Antecedents for Afro-American Architecture” (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1975), 164.

[64] Not all cottages in the Quarter are Creole cottages. Some are “dressed” in the Greek Revival, Queen Anne, or Italianate styles. There is even one rare Spanish colonial cottage, both in style and era of construction.

[65] Based on an analysis of the Vieux Carré Survey. See the chapter, “An Architectural Geography of the French Quarter” for methodological details.

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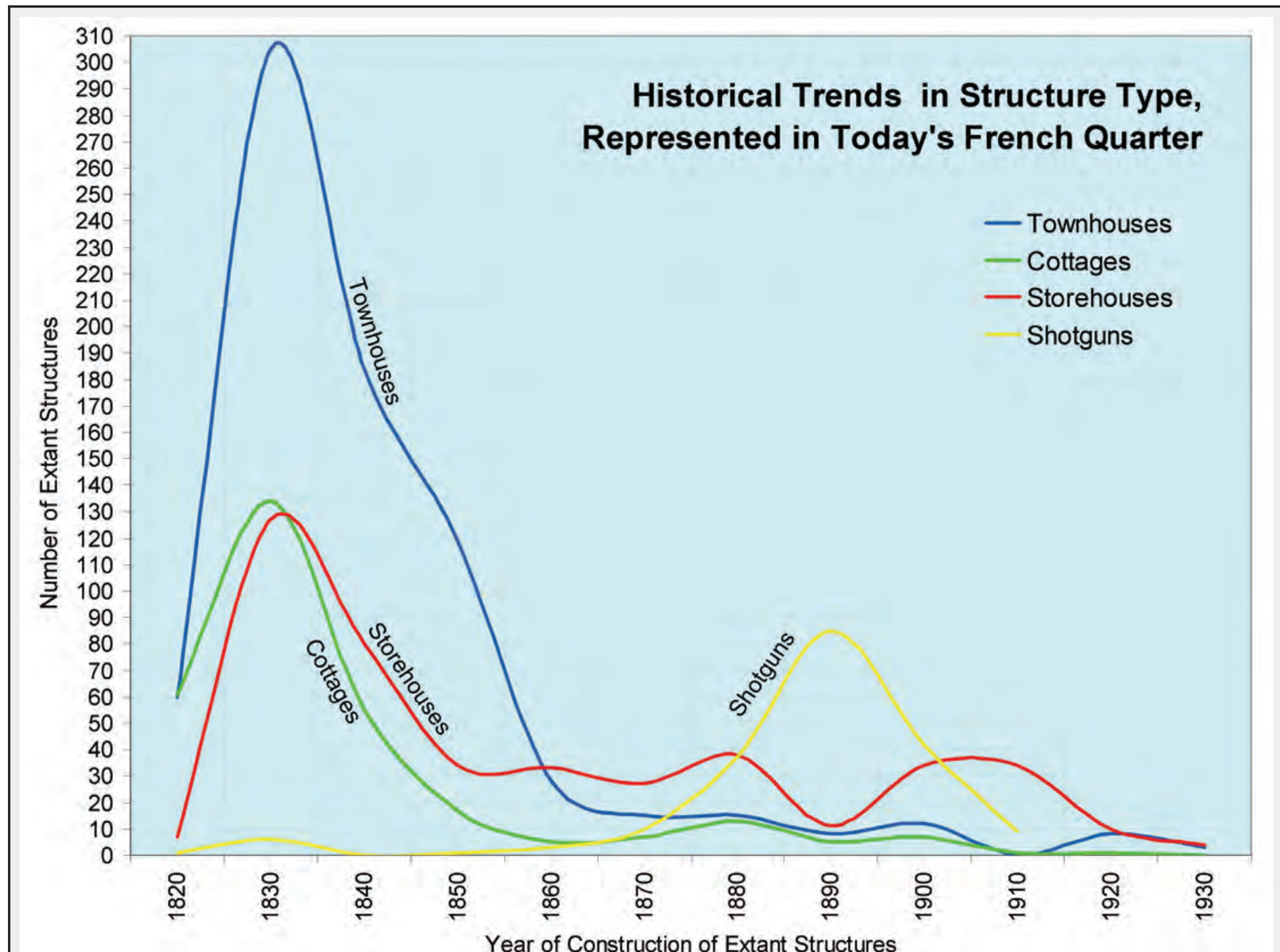

Cottages, townhouses, and storehouses were all popular during antebellum times. After the Civil War, the French Quarter changed. New townhouse construction declined as the wealthy departed for uptown and Esplanade Avenue. Storehouses overtook townhouses, further indicating that what was once a commercial/residential neighborhood with both affluent and working-class populations had transformed to a gritty district for the working-class and poor. Most significantly, shotguns surged in popularity, at the expense of cottages, which had declined steadily after their 1830s peak and never really returned. *Graph and analysis by author.*

Most of these houses, which exhibit Greek Revival or Creole styles draped on the cottage typology, date from the 1830s and 1840s. The 500 block of Burgundy provides an idea of rear-Quarter residential streetscapes from the mid-nineteenth century, prior to the boom in shotgun house construction a half-century later. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

This rare flat-roof Spanish colonial cottage at 707 Dumaine, circa 1799, demonstrates that cultural tradition often trumps environmental consideration in housing: a flat roof works better in arid Spain than in humid New Orleans, yet colonists nevertheless continued this and other traditions in their new environs, adapting them to local factors only afterwards. Until around 1890, a similar cottage stood to the left of this one; as was often the case, it was razed for a Victorian Italianate shotgun double, visible here. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

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This handsome house at 929 St. Louis is a cottage type adorned in the Queen Anne style, popular in the turn-of-the-century era, particularly uptown. There are only eleven representatives of the Queen Anne style in the French Quarter. *Photograph by author, 2002.*

houses, a reversal of the antebellum trend, further indicating that what was once a commercial/residential neighborhood with both affluent and working-class populations had transformed to a gritty industrial/commercial/residential district with only a working-class population. Note, however, the dip in storehouse construction in the 1890s, possibly caused by the big new industrial buildings and warehouses erected in the upper and riverside blocks in that decade.

Perhaps the most fascinating postbellum trend is the surge in popularity of the shotgun house, at the expense of the cottage, which had declined steadily in the Quarter after its 1830s peak and never really came back. What explains this switch? First, some background on the famous shotgun house.

These spectacular Greek Revival-style townhouses at 532-542 North Rampart date from around 1850. Townhouses, originally built as city homes for wealthy families, are the most common structure type in the French Quarter, reflecting its mid-1800s prosperity. When the Quarter declined, many were subdivided into cheap apartments. Today, after decades of gentrification, many old townhouses have been subdivided again, this time as condominiums, though some still retain their antique interiors. These particular units have seen better days. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

Origins of the Shotgun House

The shotgun house is the most ubiquitous traditional vernacular house type in the South and particularly in New Orleans. Its simplicity, distinctive appearance, conspicuous name, and association with poverty make the shotgun a quintessential component of the Southern landscape, one that outsiders revel in discovering, for it seems to fulfill expectations of rough-edged Southern authenticity. Folklore holds that the utterly non-euphemistic name derives from the ability to fire a shotgun through the front door and out the rear without touching a wall. Another story claims that the house's shape recalls a single-barrel shotgun, a duplex thus resembling a double-barrel shotgun. The name, at least in New Orleans, seems to have been applied retroactively: architect Robert Cangelosi has found the term *shotgun house* in print only after 1910, a decade or two after the shotguns' peak popularity; earlier references described them as box houses, tenements, or cottages.[66] The name makes one thing clear: rooms in a shotgun house are adjoined consecutively, forming a long, narrow structure. Folklorist John Michael Vlach defined the typology of the shotgun as "a one-room wide, one-story high building with two or more rooms, oriented perpendicularly to the road with its front door in the gable end," but added that "other aspects such as size, proportion, roofing, porches, appendages, foundations, trim, and decoration have been so variable that the shotgun is sometimes difficult to identify."[67] Its outstanding exterior characteristic is its elongated shape, sometimes in length-to-width ratios approaching ten-to-one. Inside, what is salient is the lack of hallways: residents and visitors need to pass through rooms—including private bedrooms—to get to other rooms.

Scholarly interest in the shotgun house dates from geographer Fred B. Kniffen's research in the 1930s on Louisiana folk housing, which explored structure typology as a means to delineate cultural regions.[68] Debate has since continued among cultural geographers, architectural historians, and anthropologists as to the shotgun's origins, form and function, and diffusion. New Orleans shotguns present a special problem, for nowhere else are they so common and so varied. A number of hypotheses on the origin of the shotgun house have been offered:

Native American Origins — Geographer William B. Knipmeyer saw parallels between the shotgun house and the Native Louisianian "palmetto house," pointing out its rectangular shape and "high pitched gable roof...oriented with its

[66] As quoted by Judy Walker, "Shotgun Appreciation," *Times-Picayune*, March 1, 2002, Living section, p. 1. A computer-based search of nearly one million pages of books and journals from 1840-1900 revealed not a single use of the term "shotgun house" or its variations. "Creole cottage," on the other hand, yielded eight usages, mostly by well-known "local color" writers such as George Washington Cable and Lafcadio Hearn. Search on Cornell University's "Making of America" database (http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/moa/index.html) conducted on August 25, 2004.
[67] Vlach, "Sources of the Shotgun House," 29.
[68] Fred B. Kniffen, "Louisiana House Types," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 26 (December 1936): 186-91.

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greatest length perpendicular to the bayou, path, or road."[69] Knipmeyer traced a lineage from the structural form of pre-European Choctaw huts to indigenous palmetto houses to wooden frame camps and eventually to the shotgun, which he viewed as a fairly late development, enabled by the lumbering of the late 1800s.[70] But another scholar argued that indigenous building types and techniques in North America, unlike those of other continents, proved "totally inadequate for even the lowest levels of European requirements," and were largely ignored by colonizers beyond the most rudimentary settlements.[71]

Haitian/African Origins — John Michael Vlach also disagreed with the Native American hypothesis in his 1975 dissertation on shotgun houses, noting the abundance of shotgun-like houses throughout present-day Haiti. Vlach traced the essential shotgun typology to the eighteenth-century enslaved populations of Haiti, formerly Saint-Domingue, who had been removed by slavers from the coastal and forested peri-coastal areas of the western and central African regions known at the time as Guinea and Angola. Vlach described a gable-roofed housing stock indigenous to the western coastal regions of modern sub-Saharan Africa, specifically those of the Yoruba peoples, and linked them to similar structures in modern Haiti, with comparable characteristics such as rectangular shape, room juxtaposition, and ceiling height (although perpendicular orientation varied). In many cases, "all that is required to convert the Yoruba hut into a morphologically completed shotgun is a shift of doorway.... [T]he Haitian shotgun may be considered a product of a continuing process of African architectural modification."[72] Vlach concentrated on tracing Haitian shotguns to their possible African antecedents more so than connecting either to New Orleans, but his general premise is that the exodus of Haitians to New Orleans after the insurrection of 1791-1804 brought this vernacular house type to the banks of the lower Mississippi. "Haitian emigres had only to continue in Louisiana the same life they had known in St. Domingue. The shotgun house of Port-au-Prince became, quite directly, the shotgun house of New Orleans."[73] The Vieux Carré Survey, which estimates construction dates of 1810 to 1823 for three extant shotgun-like houses, seems to support Vlach's timeline, since the main wave of Haitian refugees arrived in New Orleans in 1809. But this may be tautological: the researchers may have presumed that Haitians built these houses and approximated their construction dates accordingly. The circa-1810 shotgun-like house at 819 Burgundy Street—the oldest according to the survey—in fact probably dates to 1840. Other early shotgun-like "long houses" appeared in the residential blocks of the Quarter, according to Notarial Archives documents, in the 1830s, of which six, according to the survey, still exist.[74] Despite the apparent absence of very early shotguns, the Haitian/African origin hypothesis for New Orleans shotguns is favored by many scholars. One strand of indirect support comes from the distribution of shotgun houses throughout Louisiana, as mapped by geographer Fred Kniffen in the 1930s. Kniffen showed that this house type was generally found along the waterways and bayous of southeastern Louisiana as well as the Red, Ouachita, and Mississippi riverine areas in the northern part of the state.[75] These areas tended to be, and remain, more Francophone in their culture, higher in their proportions of people of African and Creole ancestry, and older in their historical development. Beyond state boundaries, shotguns are found throughout the riverine areas of the lower Mississippi Valley, spatially correlated with antebellum plantation regions and with areas that, historically and currently, host large black populations.[76] If in fact the shotgun diffused from Africa, to Haiti, through New Orleans and up the Mississippi Valley, this is the North American distribution we would expect to see. But there are economic variables at play here as well, and they may trump cultural factors in explaining the spatial distribution of the shotgun.

Some researchers have hypothesized Haitian, African, and Native American origins of the shotgun house; others suggest it was "invented" based on practical constraints, such as narrow lots. Shotguns are found throughout the lower Mississippi River region, particularly in areas with high black populations. These shotguns "on the wrong side of the tracks" in Vicksburg, Mississippi, illustrate that this house type is still closely associated with Southern poverty. Note the "Vicksburg pierced columns," an architectural trait unique to this river city. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

69 William Bernard Knipmeyer, "Settlement Succession in Eastern French Louisiana" (Ph.D. dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1956), 75.

70 Ibid., 81-87. Knipmeyer's dissertation primarily addressed settlement succession, rather than the origin of house types.

71 James Marston Fitch, "Creole Architecture 1718-1860: The Rise and Fall of a Great Tradition," in *The Past as Prelude: New Orleans 1718-1968*, ed. Hodding Carter (New Orleans, 1968), 72.

72 Vlach, "Sources of the Shotgun House," 80-155; quotes from 154-55.

73 Ibid., 80-155; quote from 189.

74 Some architectural historians question whether any true shotgun house predates 1840. But a simple shotgun-like structure appears in the lower right corner of John L. Boqueta de Woiseri's 1803 painting, *A View of New Orleans Taken from the Plantation of Marigny*, suggesting that this basic form was not unknown to the city in the late colonial era. A detail of this painting appears in the chapter on Elysian Fields Avenue.

75 Kniffen, "Louisiana House Types," 191-92. See Vlach's response on 38-41 of Vlach's dissertation.

76 Among cities, Louisville, Kentucky, has been described as second only to New Orleans in its number of shotguns.

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Independent Invention Based on Practical Constraints — Others speculate that while the shotgun resembles house types of other cultures, its manifestation in New Orleans and the South is related to them only because its ease of construction and conservation of resources (building materials, labor, space) made it equally attractive in many areas. One may reason that, given a mild climate, a builder need not rely on the wisdom of ancestors to design a rudimentary edifice that accommodates a narrow street-side or bayou-side lot while minimizing materials and labor. A shotgun, according to this theory, is simply a least-cost solution that any rational individual would invent independently, given certain limited resources. (Only a lean-to is simpler, and, alas, there are some very old shotguns in the Quarter with "leaning" roofs.) Advocates of this theory point to the traditionally narrow housing parcels on New Orleans blocks and the slender *arpent* lots following waterways in Louisiana as other causative agents for construction of elongated structures. "The reason there are shotguns," stated a *Times-Picayune* article, is because "they were an efficient way to house a lot of people on limited land in skinny 30-by-120-foot lots," like New York City's "railroad flats" or Philadelphia's "trinity" houses.[77] Lending some apparent support for the invention hypothesis is the activity of Roberts & Company, a New Orleans sash and door fabricator formed in 1856 that developed prefabricated shotgun-like houses in the 1860s and 1870s and even won awards for them at international expositions, where they were billed as the *Maison Portative de la Louisiane*. Whether Robert & Company truly invented the design or simply "capitalize[d] on a local traditional form"[78] is the key question. Others have suggested that shotguns were invented in response to a city real estate tax code which pegged taxation to street frontage rather than total area (though no one seems to be able to identity the exact code). But the invention hypothesis does not explain why the shotgun is not always found wherever narrow lots or frontage-based taxes exist, yet *is* found when these conditions do not exist, such as along the wide-open roadsides of the Mississippi Delta plantation country or the woodlands of the Felicianas. Nor does it explain why the shotgun failed to catch on until many years *after* the delineation of narrow lots. Additionally, it could be argued that common-wall row tenements utilize space more effectively than shotguns on urban blocks, yet we rarely see these structures in New Orleans. Could cultural factors outweigh local invention in the development of the shotgun? Jay Dearborn Edwards points out, "anthropologists have long realized that independent invention is rare in human cultural development. People are far better at borrowing the ideas of their neighbors than they are at inventing their own out of whole cloth."[79]

The "Spirit House" sculpture on St. Bernard Avenue in the Creole-associated Seventh Ward commemorates the shotgun house as an African contribution to America, by way of the Caribbean and New Orleans. The flying buttresses pay homage to the Catholic French and Spanish influences in early Louisiana history, and in the Creole legacy. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

The working-class rear Quarter possessed numerous "long houses" in the early nineteenth century. Only a handful still stand, possibly representing the nation's oldest surviving precedents to the shotgun house. The one above, built in 1823 for free woman of color Helene Le Page, is located at 1024 Gov. Nicholls Street. Note the hip roof covered with flat tiles, masonry construction, and staid exterior of banded stucco. Another is the so-called Baker Cottage at 819 Burgundy (yellow structure below), once thought to date to around 1810 but more likely 1840. Both were nearly in ruins in the 1960s but have since been beautifully restored. *Photographs by author, 2004.*

[77] Judy Walker, "Shotgun Appreciation," *Times-Picayune*, March 1, 2002, Living section, p. 1.
[78] Vlach, "Sources of the Shotgun House," 60-63.
[79] Jay Dearborn Edwards, "The Origins of Creole Architecture," *Winterthur Portfo-*

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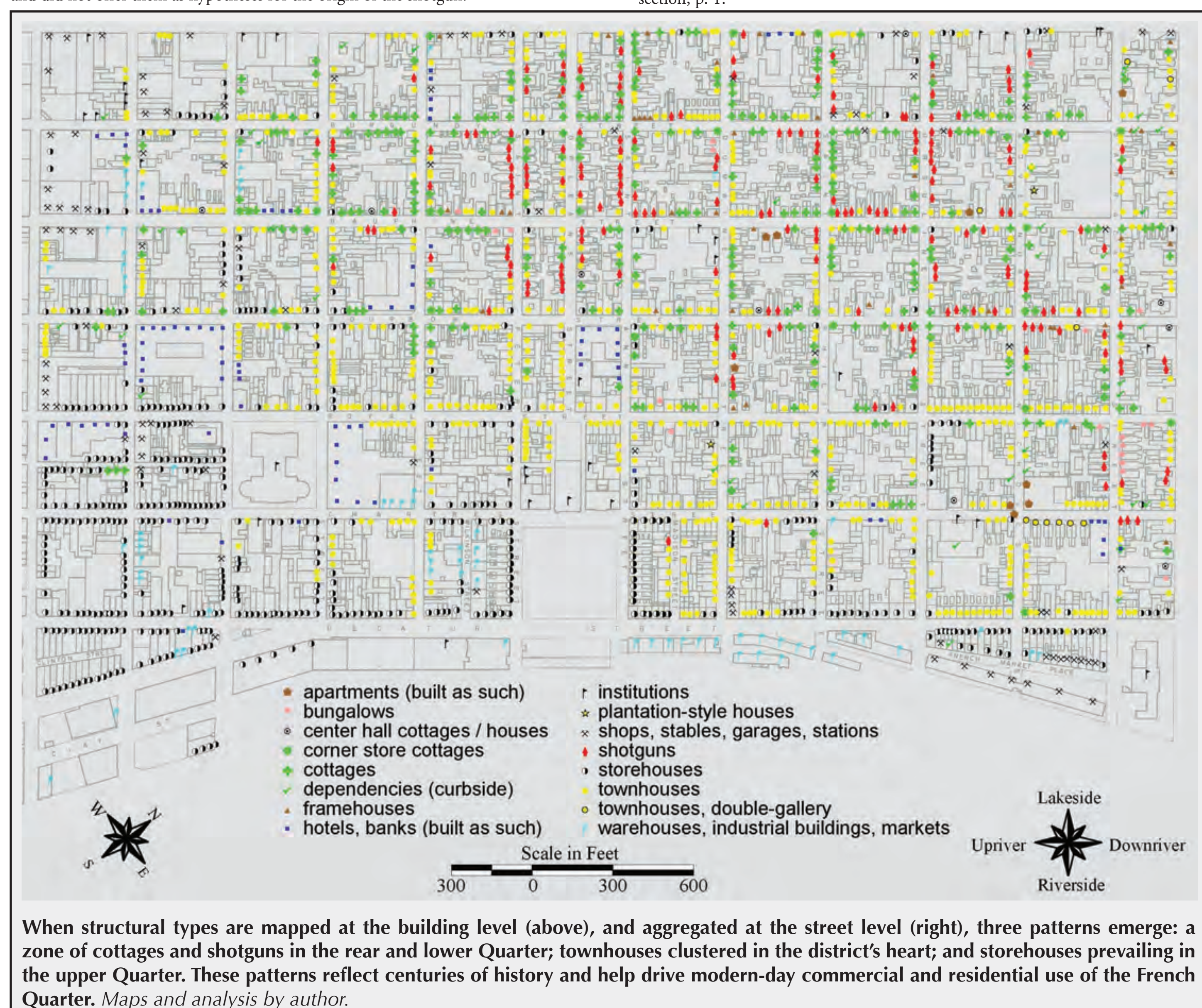
Some scholars note the presence of linear house types with interconnecting rooms in eighteenth-cenury France, raising the possibility of a European link, while others suggest that this vernacular house type may simply represent a modification of the Creole cottage (which also had interconnecting rooms with no hallways) to narrow lots.[80] Empirical evidence shows that, in the Quarter and citywide, the shotgun indeed filled the niche left open by the demise of the cottage. Shotgun singles and doubles came to dominate the turn-of-the-century rental-housing stock of New Orleans' working-class and poor neighborhoods, yet they were also erected as owned-occupied homes in middle- and upper-middle-class areas. New Orleans shotguns exhibited numerous locally inspired variations: with hip, gable, or "apron" roofs; with "camelbacks" to increase living space; with hallways for privacy; with grand Greek Revival and Neo-Classical porticos; with elaborate Victorian gingerbread; and, finally, as "bungalows," arguably the final variation of the shotgun.[81] Their relative numbers by neighborhood reflect when that area was developed: shotguns comprise only 9 percent of French Quarter structures, because the district was entirely developed by the time shotguns came into fashion; Mid-City, on the other hand, developed precisely during the shotgun's turn-of-the-century heyday, and its housing stock is nearly 50 percent shotgun.[82] Though some predate the Civil War by a number of years, and others postdate World War I, most local shotguns were built within a decade of the 1890s, when they were erected to standardized designs and decorated with jigsaw ornamentation sold through such sources as the Roberts & Company catalog. The fanciful gingerbread encrusting the cheerful pastel-colored façade of a typical New Orleans shotgun house masked the fact that the structure and the family life behind it were usually plain, frugal, and cramped.

lio: A Journal of American Material Culture 29 (Summer/Autumn 1994): 155.

[80] Ellen Weiss, "City and Country, 1880-1915: New Impulses and New Tastes," in *Louisiana Buildings 1720-1940*, eds. Jessie Poesch and Barbara SoRelle Bacot (Baton Rouge and London, 1997), 281-82; and Joan G. Caldwell, "Urban Growth, 1815-1880: Diverse Tastes—Greek, gothic, and Italianate," in *Louisiana Buildings 1720-1940*, eds. Jessie Poesch and Barbara SoRelle Bacot (Baton Rouge and London, 1997), 178. Note: the cited researchers mentioned these characteristics in passing and did not offer them as hypotheses for the origin of the shotgun.

[81] Vlach, "Sources of the Shotgun House," 190-92.

[82] According to Robert Cangelosi, shotguns comprise 46 percent of the housing stock in Mid-City, while side-hall shotguns make up another 3 percent. As quoted by Judy Walker, "Shotgun Appreciation," *Times-Picayune*, March 1, 2002, Living section, p. 1.



When structural types are mapped at the building level (above), and aggregated at the street level (right), three patterns emerge: a zone of cottages and shotguns in the rear and lower Quarter; townhouses clustered in the district's heart; and storehouses prevailing in the upper Quarter. These patterns reflect centuries of history and help drive modern-day commercial and residential use of the French Quarter. *Maps and analysis by author.*

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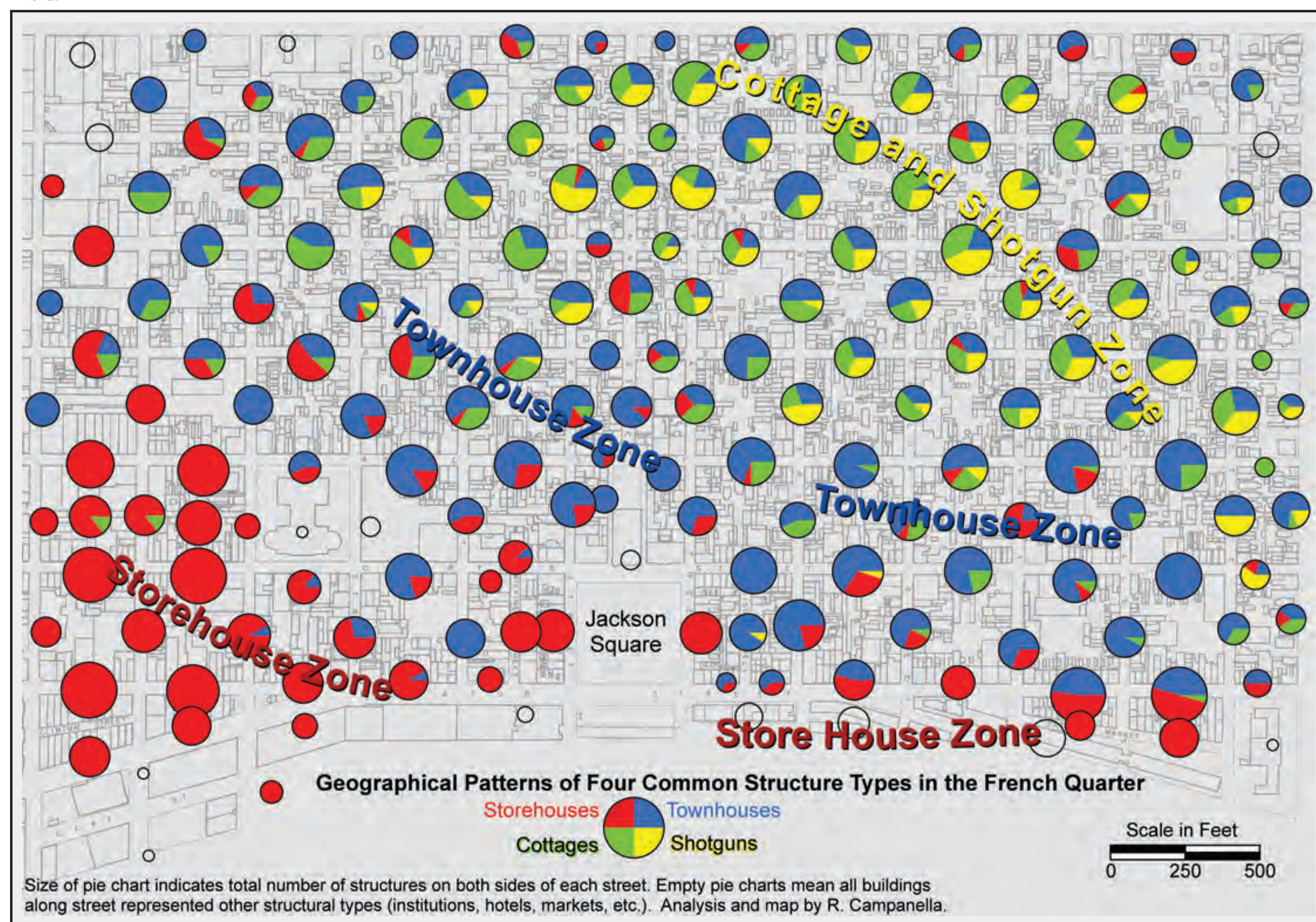
Shotguns were replaced citywide by the California bungalow in the 1920s and 1930s and, after World War II, by the ranch house, as the "default" house type for new construction in the city. For years, architectural historians rolled their eyes at the run-of-the-mill 1890s Victorian Italianate shotgun houses lining street after street after street, and did not protest their demolition, even in the French Quarter, as late as the 1960s. In recent decades, however, many New Orleanians have come to appreciate the sturdy construction and exuberant embellishments of the classic shotgun, and today they are a cherished part of New Orleans culture and a favorite target for historical restoration. The Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans dedicates an entire month (March) to the shotgun, during which tours, restoration workshops, art displays, lectures, and even a "shotgun summit" are held to survey and encourage the many ways in which New Orleanians treasure their oddly sized, oddly named abodes.[83] Throughout the rural South, shotguns remain a symbol of poverty and are hardly cherished by those who reside in them. When lined up along barely paved streets on the wrong sides of towns like Donaldsonville, St. Francisville, Natchez, and Vicksburg, they form both picturesque vistas of Southern life and poignant reminders of a troubled past.

What, then, explains the rise of shotguns in the postbellum Quarter, at the expense of cottages? One hypothesis—my own—is that emancipation and postwar economic decline rendered obsolete the servants' quarters that were traditionally appended to the rear of city structures. We see far fewer of these slant-roofed dependencies built after the war, because slaves had been freed and the luxury of a live-in servant became less affordable. Many antebellum cottages had such quarters or other dependencies (such as kitchens and outhouses) behind them, overlooking a courtyard that occupied the rest of the parcel. With such external quarters no longer necessary, the logical adjustment would be to fill the entire rectangular lot with rentable structural space, rather than squandering it on obsolete dependencies and vacant courtyards. Technology by this time allowed kitchens and, later, toilets, to come inside the house, again meaning less need for courtyard space and greater need for interior space. The idea of a long, linear house type had already been introduced to New Orleans decades earlier, but remained fairly dormant. Now it offered the perfect solution as a more efficient utilization of limited parcel space: the demolition of a typical cottage availed space for two shotgun singles or one shotgun double. Add to this the cost efficiency of mechanized mass-production that went into turn-of-the-century shotguns, versus the slower, individualized construction of a traditional cottage, and the logic of switching from cottages to shotguns seems compelling. If this hypothesis is correct, then the cottage-shotgun shift in the late nineteenth-century French Quarter may represent a structural response to the

[83] Ibid.



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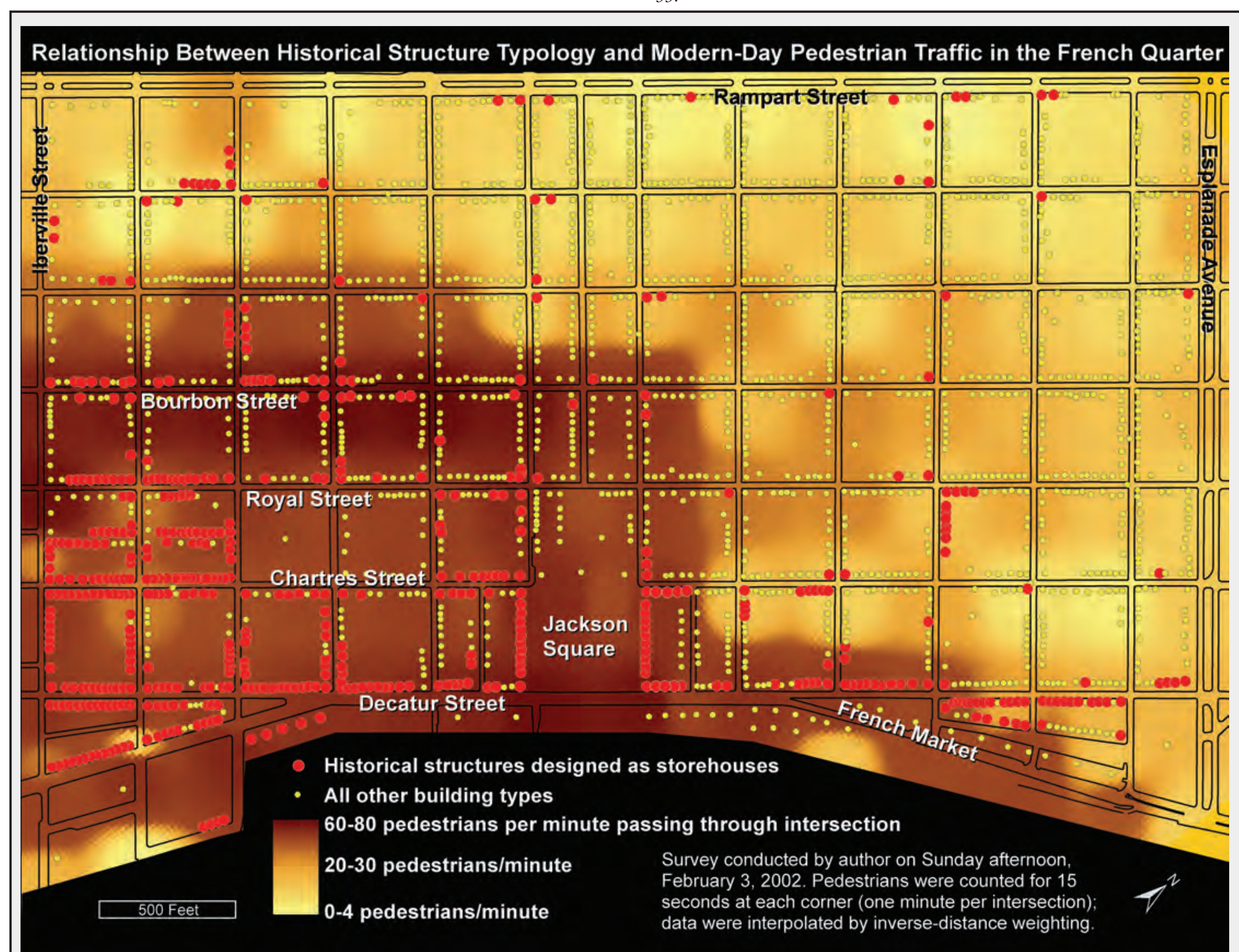
momentous historical and economic transformations occasioned by the Civil War.

Geographical Patterns of Structural Type

The spatial distributions for all sixteen structural types are shown at the building level in the accompanying map, and for the four most common types at the street level (*Geographical Patterns of Four Common Structure Types in the French Quarter*). We see that cottages and shotguns both predominate in the lower, lakeside quadrant of the Quarter. Of the 565 cottages (of all styles) and shotguns (including bungalows) in the French Quarter, almost 90 percent occur north of a diagonal line drawn across the Quarter, from the Canal/Rampart intersection to the foot of Esplanade. Shotguns in particular are extremely scarce south of this line. Reasons for this preponderance relate to economics and land use: the lower, lakeside (northern) section of the Quarter was, from the mid-eighteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, the working-class section of the neighborhood, hence the relative scarcity of townhouses and abundance of humbler abodes. Additionally, this was, and remains, the more residential section of the district, thus the preponderance of residential structures over commercial ones (shotguns are all but incompatible with commercial use). That cottages and shotguns both prevail in the same area lends some credence to the hypothesis suggested above. The pattern seems to corroborate the *Plan and Program for the Preservation of the Vieux Carré*'s observation that shotguns "replaced numerous earlier cottages, mostly in the fringe areas of the Quarter and were crowded onto narrow lots with narrow walkways on either side."[84]

[84] Bureau of Governmental Research, New Orleans, *Plan and Program for the Preservation of the Vieux Carré: Historic District Demonstration Study* (New Orleans, 1968), 33.



As this survey indicates, most pedestrian traffic in the Quarter flows in a dogleg-shaped pattern from upper Bourbon, Royal, Chartres, and Decatur streets, through Jackson Square, to the French Market, and back. The reason is simple: this is where tourist-friendly restaurants, galleries, bars, hotels, and shops predominate. But why are *they* here? One reason is the concentration of storehouses in this area (red points), a historical structural typology that today best accommodates tourism-related businesses. Townhouses, cottages, and even shotgun houses are also used for commercial purposes, but none are as suited for commerce as storehouses. The circumstances that led to their construction in this area in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries thus help form the French Quarter experience of millions of tourists in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. *Pedestrian survey conducted by author on February 3, 2002 (Super Bowl Sunday afternoon) by counting pedestrians for fifteen seconds at every corner (one minute per intersection). Analysis and map by author.*

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The "townhouse zone" is situated in the central heart of the Quarter, where mansions were built in large numbers in the antebellum era for wealthy families. Both townhouses and storehouses are more likely than other structural types to dominate entire streets, because, as row buildings, they were often constructed in multiple units.

The upper and riverside tiers of the Quarter, labeled "storehouse zone" in the map, have for centuries hosted the lion's share of commercial activity in the Quarter, and continue to do so today. Most tourists experience the French Quarter by strolling the upper blocks of Bourbon, Royal, Chartres, and Decatur, funneling through Jackson Square, then heading to the French Market and back. Why this doglegged swath? Because this is where scores of old storehouses have enabled the establishment of businesses, restaurants, and clubs to sell the visitors the "New Orleans experience." True, many residential townhouses and cottages have been converted to tourist shops, and many businesses simply followed the tourists, rather than vice versa. But, in general, millions of tourists spend most of their time here simply because this is where the structural type needed to serve them is found in the largest concentrations.

A street-level view of the French Quarter bestows many rare and striking sights to the observant pedestrian: buildings older than entire American cities; architectural styles drawn from the world over; ironwork exhibiting the literal hammerblows of eighteenth-century artisans. But the weightiest factor in forming these streetscapes—structural typologies—can be missed at the pedestrian level, as forests are missed for the trees. To appreciate fully the panoply of types assembled here, a lofty perch from a nearby high-rise is recommended. In the complex, angular, jagged, multifaceted, glistening roofscape that unfurls below, cottages intermingle with townhouses, shotguns iterate parallel lines, storehouses intermix with industrial buildings, oversized government institutions loom stoically, and church steeples and cupolas punctuate the skyline. It is a rare sight in modern America.

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Signature of the City
Patterns of Iron-Lace Galleries and Balconies in the French Quarter

Few images evoke *New Orleans* in the mental eye of the world like the city's iron-lace galleries and balconies. Countless iconic references to the city—photographs in generic "American the Beautiful" calendars, destination ads in airport waiting rooms, casino motifs in the seedier sections of Las Vegas—depict the frilly swirls of iron lace crowding narrow French Quarter streets. Television commercials wield wide-angle shots of iron lace to associate their product with a New Orleans they invariably portray as "funky," yet authentic. Movies pan down the viney railings to set the location and mood of a scene. Newcomers' expectations are fulfilled when they see for themselves that the classic iron-lace streetscapes, complete with ferns spilling from hanging gardens and aloof eccentrics leaning in French doorways, do indeed exist, and in great numbers.

The frilly designs of cast-iron galleries form internationally recognized iconic imagery for New Orleans in general, and the French Quarter in particular. This specimen adorns the oft-photographed Labranche House on the corner of Royal and St. Peter. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

While architectural ironwork is intimately associated with New Orleans in general and the French Quarter in particular, the iconic iron lace of the calendar photographs was a late addition to the street scene. Ironwork "wrought" by hand may be traced back to the earliest days of the colony, attributed to black artisans and French and Spanish influences. Wrought iron, containing about 0.04-0.2 percent carbon, formed a "malleable substance which may be shaped by hammering, stretching, or rolling"[85] into "geometric or curvilinear designs,"[86] producing a strong, durable, relatively flexible finished product with a distinctively austere texture. It was costly in terms of labor and material, and therefore did not dominate the streetscape. Elegant but simple wrought-iron balconies, spanning half the width of the banquette (sidewalk) and supported not by columns but cantilevers, were traditional to Spanish colonial-era structures, and may be seen today on eighteen of the twenty-five such structures that remain. Another two Spanish colonial buildings, the Cabildo (1799) and Presbytère (1791-1813), retain their simple wrought-iron railings. Even as these surviving specimens were being installed two hundred years ago, the craft was about to be rendered obsolete by the Industrial Age and the economies of mass production.

Cast iron, a technology developed over centuries and refined in the early 1800s, was first introduced to New Orleans by the Leeds Iron Foundry in 1825.[87] Cast iron contained from ten to 150 times more carbon than wrought iron, making it brittle, weaker, rougher, and more prone to rust, but also conducive to pouring into lacey, detailed molds. The end result: a fancier (though not necessarily superior) product, available faster and cheaper. Soon, balconies with a mix of wrought- and cast-iron railings were seen fronting the hundreds of townhouses that arose in the 1830s, a "transitional" decade in New Orleans ironwork as well as in society and in architectural style.[88] Wrote Marcus Christian, "the Victorian taste for the ornate; the increasing demand created by the sugar, cotton, and business wealth; and the advent of the foundry system coupled with the heavy influx of white ironworkers that made cheap ironwork possible accounted for the change from wrought- to cast-iron ornamentation that overcame New Orleans after the 1830s."[89] Reflecting the increased demand fostered by casting, nationwide iron produc-

[85] Ann M. Masson and Lydia H. Schmalz, *Cast Iron and the Crescent City* (New Orleans, 1995), 5.

[86] Ibid., 5, and Marcus Christian, *Negro Ironworkers of Louisiana, 1718-1900* (Gretna, LA, 1972), 3.

[87] Masson and Schmalz, *Cast Iron and the Crescent City*, 3.

[88] See chapter, "'A Draping of Fashions:' Patterns of Architectural Style" for details on the transitional era of the 1830s.

[89] Christian, *Negro Ironworkers of Louisiana*, 31.

This Dumaine streetscene presents three ways in which New Orleanians have buffered the private space of the house with the public space of the street: with a narrow balcony (early nineteenth century, foreground); with a spacious wooden gallery under an oversized roof (center, late eighteenth century), and with a three-story cast-iron gallery as wide as the sidewalk (mid-nineteenth century). *Photograph by author, 2004.*

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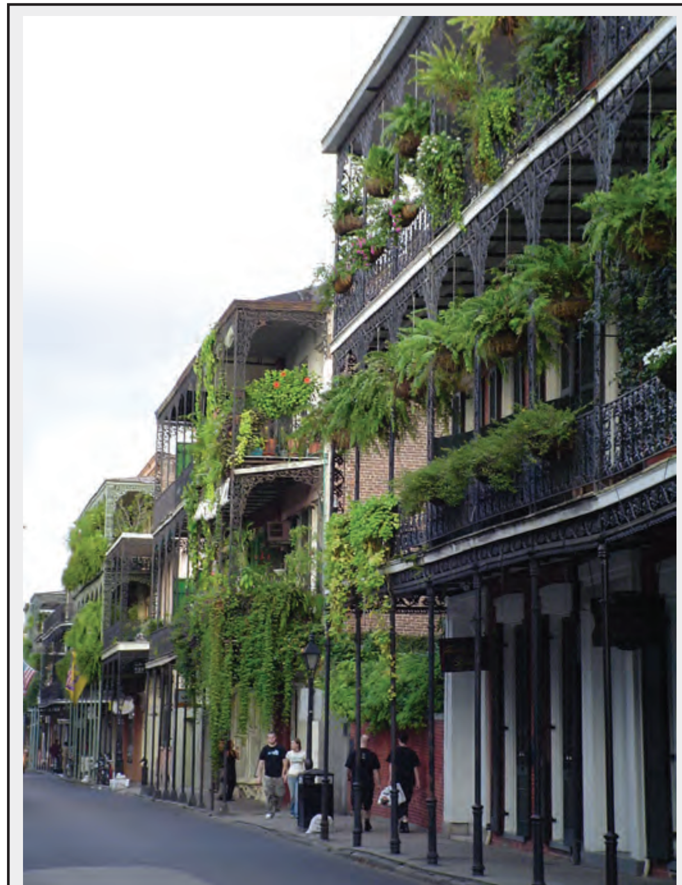
tion rose from about 20,000 tons in 1820, to 315,000 tons in 1840, to 1,000,000 tons by 1855.[90]

Multi-story cast iron galleries, supported with columns and covering the entire banquette, started to appear in the wealthier blocks of the French Quarter and faubourgs around 1850. "One who has not seen New Orleans since two years ago," wrote the *Daily Picayune* in July 1852, "could not fail to be impressed with the extent and importance of the improvements during that time,"[91] among them the new penchant for ornamental iron. Unlike balconies, which were designed for little more than a perch and breath of fresh air, these new galleries were spacious, shaded platforms halfway between public and private space, the perfect re-articulation of a porch or front yard in an urban environment too congested for either. Conceptually, galleries were nothing new to Louisiana buildings: in function, they were typical to eighteenth-century French Creole architecture, though the earlier versions differed greatly in form (usually a wrap-around front porch unified under a single roof) and in material (exclusively wood, with colonnades for supports and balustrades for railings). Madame John's Legacy at 632 Dumaine Street is the last best example of an original French Creole gallery in the French Quarter. One wonders if the circa-1850 popularity of iron-lace galleries may be linked to the cultural predilection for semi-private outdoor space among eighteenth-century New Orleanians, which had been forced into the patio (literally) by Spanish building codes and urban densification, only to return years later when technology (iron casting) offered a new and affordable way.

[90] J.B. Wickersham, *Victorian Ironwork: A Catalogue* (Philadelphia, PA, 1977), 4.
[91] *Daily Picayune,* July 7, 1852, "City Intelligence" column (article cited by Masson and Schmalz).



New Orleans is the only American city where iron-lace galleries dominate extensive streetscapes and affect the character of entire neighborhoods. Why? Perhaps the city had just the right mix of population density, climate, cultural heritage, wealth, port accessibility, and appropriate housing stock, plus a "golden age" that coincided with the age of cast-iron ornamentation. This "galleryscape" on Royal Street is among the most spectacular. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

Many sources credit the Baroness Micaela Almonester de Pontalba and her twin rows of elegant apartments and stores (1849-1851) bordering Jackson Square, for introducing full-blown iron-lace galleries to the city. Every unit of both the Baroness' buildings is lined with a full-width canopied verandah—"probably the earliest in the city"[92]—and an equally ornate third-floor balcony with graceful cast-iron initialed patterns, not to mention window grilles and sturdy iron columns. Such a notable resident and such an ambitious, centrally located project may well have popularized large iron-lace galleries among wealthy peers.[93] Madam Pontalba's effort was joined by that of another prominent New Orleanian, businessman and philanthropist Judah Touro. Just beyond the French Quarter, Touro helped popularize ornamental iron with his six-unit "Touro Row" (1851) on the 300 block of St. Charles and twelve-unit "Touro Row" occupying the entire Canal Street block between Royal and Bourbon (built in increments between 1852 and 1856). While the St. Charles row had (and still retains) a fancy canopied balcony of iron, the Touro Row on Canal Street boasted a magnificent two-level covered iron-lace gallery spanning the entire block. Another row of business buildings at Carondelet and Common, built for H.C. Cammack in 1851, had similar ironwork. A *Daily Picayune* column on July 7, 1852, praised the increasing popularity of these features on the new building stock of the booming city:

> Each month witnesses the commencement or completion of some handsome family residences or stores, and every new building that has been lately erected, shows that our property holders are not unmindful of ornament.... One of the most admirable innovations upon the old system of building tall, staring structures for business purposes, is the plan which we are glad to see is generally coming in use, of erecting galleries and verandahs of ornamental iron work.... [Instances include] the new row of houses erected on St. Charles street for Judah Touro, and several others of a similar style on Carondelet street, in the vicinity of Common.[94]

Two wealthy, distinguished citizens thus seemed to play important roles in transforming the New Orleans streetscape in the late antebellum years, by erecting massive iron galleries at two prominent locations at roughly the same time. Others copied them, and city streets changed forever. Architect Malcolm Heard of the Quarter wrote, after Pontalba's instal-

[92] Masson and Schmalz, *Cast Iron and the Crescent City*, 17.
[93] One observer was not particularly impressed with the new feature, stating that the upper Pontalba building, completed by November 1850, presented "a much more striking and massive appearance" before "the heavy roofed balconies were erected." "Pontalba Buildings," *Daily Picayune*, November 2, 1850.
[94] *Daily Picayune,* July 7, 1852, "City Intelligence" column.

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lation of ornamental iron in 1850, "building owners replaced their wooden and wrought-iron railings with new cast iron, frequently enlarging their balconies into post-supported galleries extending the full width of the sidewalk. The transformation of Quarter streets with filigree in the decades after 1850 must have been dramatic."[95] Depictions of city street scenes from before the 1850s show mostly "tall, staring"[96] building façades with little more than the occasional balcony. But those dating from the late 1850s and afterwards, including sketches made by correspondents during the Civil War and occupation[97] and the 1866-1867 photographs of Theodore Lilienthal, are replete with the same full-fledged iron-lace galleries portrayed today in the calendar photographs and postcards.

For all their fame, some intriguing questions about New Orleans' iron-lace galleries remain unanswered. Where is ornamental iron distributed within the French Quarter, and why there? When were iron-adorned edifices erected, and how does this compare with the previously cited historical evidence? And why does New Orleans and not other American cities exhibit this distinguishing characteristic?

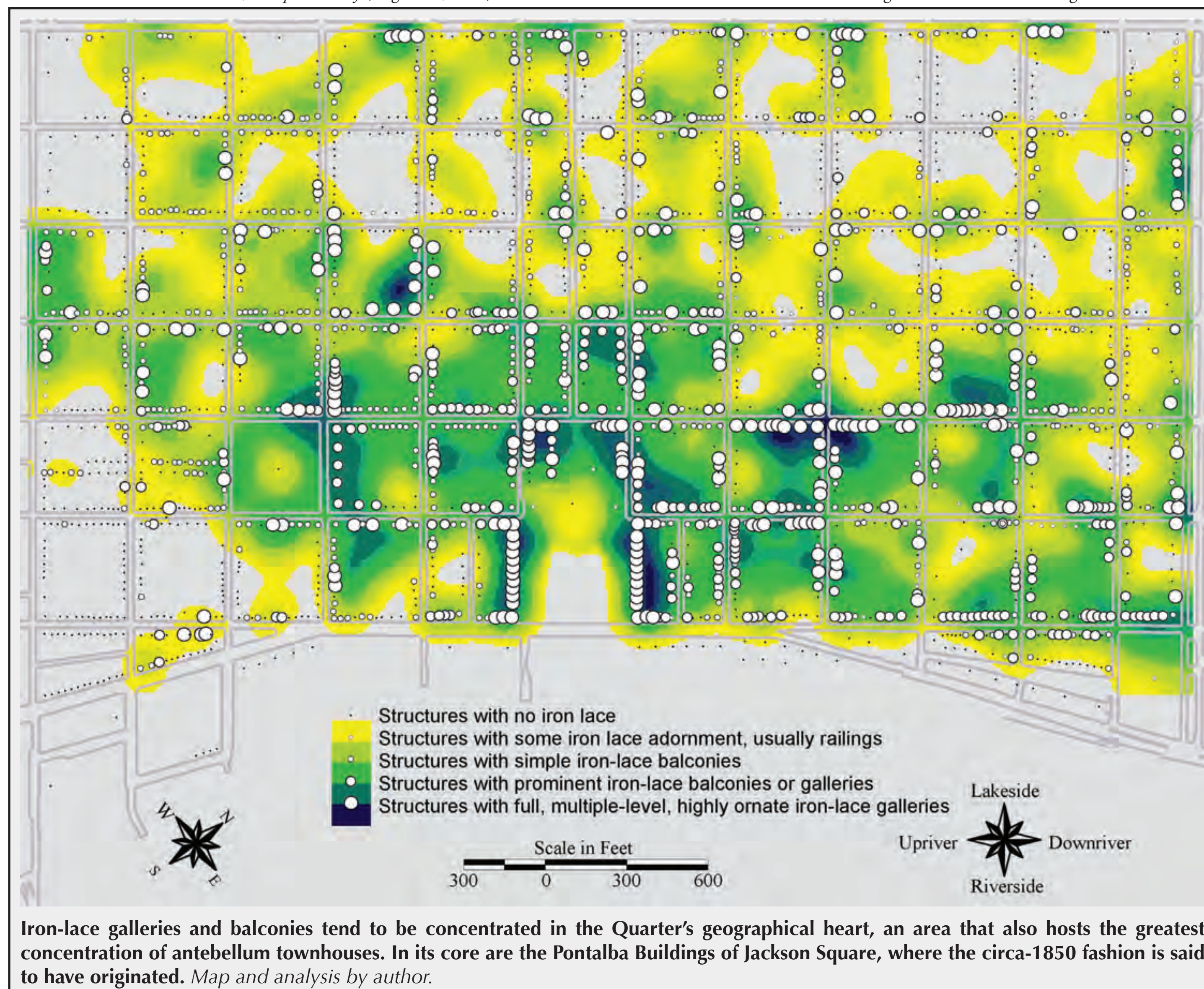
To address these questions, photographs of every building in the circa-1960s Vieux Carré Survey were reviewed, verified, and updated in the streets during late 2001, to quantify levels of iron-lace adornment. Each structure was ranked on an ordinal zero-to-four scale, where "0" indicated no iron whatsoever; "1" meant a minimal amount, usually a simple window grille; "2" implied simple, cantilevered balconies; "3" meant sizable galleries or multi-level balconies; and "4" was reserved for full-blown, highly ornate, multi-level, iron-lace galleries.[98] The results were mapped out for every building in the Quarter, according to the methodology described in the chapter, "An Architectural Geography of the French Quarter." To accentuate the underlying patterns, the building-level data were interpolated into a continuous surface and color-coded from yellow (little iron), to green, to blue (classic iron-lace streetscapes), which appears in the accompanying map.

[95] Malcolm Heard, *French Quarter Manual: An Architectural Guide to New Orleans' Vieux Carré* (New Orleans, 1977), 96.

[96] *Daily Picayune,* July 7, 1852, "City Intelligence" column.

[97] For example, see Alfred R. Waud's 1866 sketch, "The Excitement in New Orleans—View on St. Charles Street," *Harper's Weekly* (August 18, 1866): 516.

[98] I did not distinguish between wrought and cast iron (most wrought-iron balconies fell in the "2" category), nor did I eliminate recently installed galleries, from the tabulation. Wooden balconies and galleries were excluded altogether.



Iron-lace galleries and balconies tend to be concentrated in the Quarter's geographical heart, an area that also hosts the greatest concentration of antebellum townhouses. In its core are the Pontalba Buildings of Jackson Square, where the circa-1850 fashion is said to have originated. *Map and analysis by author.*

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The map shows that ornamental iron may be found at varying levels on almost every block of the French Quarter. But the distribution is not random: it tends to be concentrated in the district's geographical heart—those dozen or so blocks layered two deep around Jackson Square—then peters out toward the edges of the Quarter. Among the most magnificent iron-lace streetscapes are Royal from St. Peter to Gov. Nicholls, St. Peter and St. Ann from Royal to Decatur, and the blocks around the Chartres/Dumaine intersection. This pattern seems to correlate spatially to the hypothesis that the Pontalba galleries instigated the fashion, as they are located in the crux of this cluster. But while the Pontalba Buildings probably explain the stylistic trend, do they explain the cluster? In other words, did neighbors "keep up with the Pontalbas" and adopt the fashion because of spatial proximity? There might have been some element of neighborly competition, if not here than in nearby blocks, where mismatched galleries may be seen on adjacent separate buildings. More likely, the pattern simply reflects economic geography: this central area formed the wealthy residential blocks of the French Quarter, where scores of magnificent residential townhouses arose during the 1830s through 1850s. It is a pattern reiterated in terms of structural age, style, and type, visible in the maps of the previous three chapters. Of the 803 townhouses counted in the Vieux Carré Survey for this analysis, 51 percent had substantial or full-blown galleries, while only 11 percent had no iron galleries or balconies at all. Wealthy townhouse-owners may have been impressed with Pontalba's bold new fashion statement, saw its aesthetic and utilitarian value, had the financial wherewithal to copy it, and did so, either by adding them to extant buildings or including them with new ones. When the Pontalba Buildings were completed in 1851, the *Daily Delta* lauded "that spirited and patriotic lady, Madam Pontalba," commenting, "seldom do we see members, however rich, of our community, tax their fortunes to such a degree for the...place of their nativity, and when such generosity is evinced, it is worth noting, as *encouragement to other wealthy individuals*."[99] Encouraged they were: the appearance of iron-lace galleries on prosperous Esplanade Avenue, in the Garden District, and in other noncontiguous wealthy areas in the 1850s indicate that this trend diffused hierarchically, wherever affluent New Orleanians resided, rather than contagiously outward from a point of origin. The sparser iron concentrations in the lower, lakeside (northern) quadrant of the Quarter can be explained by the historically lower per capita income of this area, which produced a humbler housing stock (cottages and shotgun houses) that was not conducive to such adornment anyway. The dearth of iron in the upper Quarter is also explained by economic geography: this was the more commercial end of the district, where storehouses and commercial structures outnumber domestic buildings. Galleries and balconies being primarily for the leisurely use of people and not the storage or sale of merchandise, we would expect to see less of them in commercial areas. The Vieux Carré Survey data support this premise: of the 472 storehouses counted, 53 percent had no iron galleries or balconies at all; 26 percent had simple balconies, and only 7 percent had full, multi-story, ornate iron galleries.

The Vieux Carré Survey data also shed light on when iron galleries arose, though they fall short of answering the question directly. Since ornamental iron was often added to extant buildings—a trend that continues to this day—the construction date (which is recorded in the survey) is often not the best guide to the gallery date (which is not recorded.) The average construction date of those structures with no or little iron lace was computed at 1875, reflecting the many turn-of-the-century shotgun houses and other later buildings unsuitable for such adornment. But for all other levels of iron lace the mean construction dates of the host structures were 1853 ("2"), 1855 ("3"), and 1855 ("4"). These figures generally substantiate the historical evidence for a circa-1850s origin to this feature, and concur with Ann M. Masson's and Lydia H. Schmalz's survey of prominent ornamental ironworkers and iron business, whose operations often dated from the 1850s.[100]

This leaves us with perhaps the most intriguing question about New Orleans' iron-lace galleries: why here? Why is New Orleans alone among American cities in its association with this feature? It is certainly not the only city with iron-lace galleries. Other coastal and river cities that experienced nineteenth-century economic booms expressed their wealth through flamboyant ornamental iron, sometimes executed exactly like a New Orleans-style gallery. Examples may be found in Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, Baton Rouge, Natchez, Vicksburg, St. Louis, Natchitoches, and Galveston, to name a few. But New Orleans is the only American city where iron-lace galleries fill streetscapes, dominate extensive vistas, and affect the character of entire neighborhoods. Explaining why is a challenge. The popular hypothesis views galleries as an airy, spacious response to a dense and crowded urban environment in a hot, humid, rainy climate. Indeed, galleries are not usually seen in rural towns in frigid climates, but this hypothesis fails to explain why we do not see galleries throughout all crowded cities in warm climates. Cultural factors may be at work as well: perhaps those semitropical or tropical cities imbued with French and Spanish influences are more likely to exhibit the trait. (The semi-public domestic space afforded by galleries is more in line with southern European notions of privacy than with those of northern Anglo-Saxons.) Perhaps the presence of skilled African, Spanish, French, and Creole craftsmen enabled the tradition to take root. Economic factors may be involved: iron may have been cheaper in certain areas—port cities, for example—and the upper class may have had to be sufficiently large and moneyed before a cityscape of iron-lace developed. The cities' build-

[99] "The Place D'Armes," *Daily Delta*, January 3, 1851, p. 2 (emphasis added).

[100] Masson and Schmalz, *Cast Iron and the Crescent City*, 45-50.

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Balconies span half the width of the banquette (sidewalk) and are usually supported by cantilevers; earlier examples in the French Quarter incorporate wrought iron and tend to be simple and strong. Galleries cover the entire banquette, are supported by cast-iron columns and lace, and form semi-enclosed, semi-private space. They became popular around 1850, permanently transforming the New Orleans cityscape. In these photographs, balconies appear in the foreground, and galleries in the rear. *Photographs by author, 2004.*

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ing stock would have to harbor a certain structural typology, namely brick townhouses, to host the features. "Probably the durability and permanence of the material, in an atmosphere where wood is often quickly destroyed...had something to do with it."[101] Finally, cities would have had to manifest all the relevant variables precisely at the time when cast iron became cheap, available, and in national vogue, to become salient in this regard. Perhaps New Orleans had just the right mix of density, climate, cultural heritage, wealth, port accessibility, and housing stock, plus a "golden age" that coincided with an age of cast-iron ornamentation, to produce these splendid streetscapes. The question warrants further investigation.

That iron-lace galleries have become the iconic signature of New Orleans, then, may derive from a genuinely unique abundance. It may also arise from the worldwide mythologization of New Orleans, to foster a nostalgic and romantic ambience for the sale of products and experiences, for which pictographic references to iron lace offer convenient imagery. There are probably no Milwaukee-style restaurants in Japan or Atlanta-theme casinos in Las Vegas, hence no need to lift attributes from those cities to "brand" the offerings. New Orleans, on the other hand, is used incessantly to infuse allure to commercial products and services, from foods to cars to alcohol to music to gambling, not to mention to sell the city itself. A truly distinguishing aspect of New Orleans' material culture thus provides an opportune symbol to help consumers connect the city's mystique with the product at hand. The aesthetic appeal of the swirling patterns of iron lace, and its easy adaptation to restaurant décor, menu borders, jambalaya mix cartons, CD labels, television studio sets, theatrical stages, and "A Night in New Orleans" theme parties, cinches the arrangement. Madam Pontalba would marvel at how far her fashion has spread.

[101] Nathaniel Cortlandt Curtis, *New Orleans: Its Old Houses, Shops, and Public Buildings* (Philadelphia and London, 1933), 144. Yet we see plenty of wooden balconies in steamy San Juan, Puerto Rico.

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