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“A DRAPING OF FASHIONS” PATTERNS OF ARCHITECTURAL STYLE IN THE FRENCH QUARTER

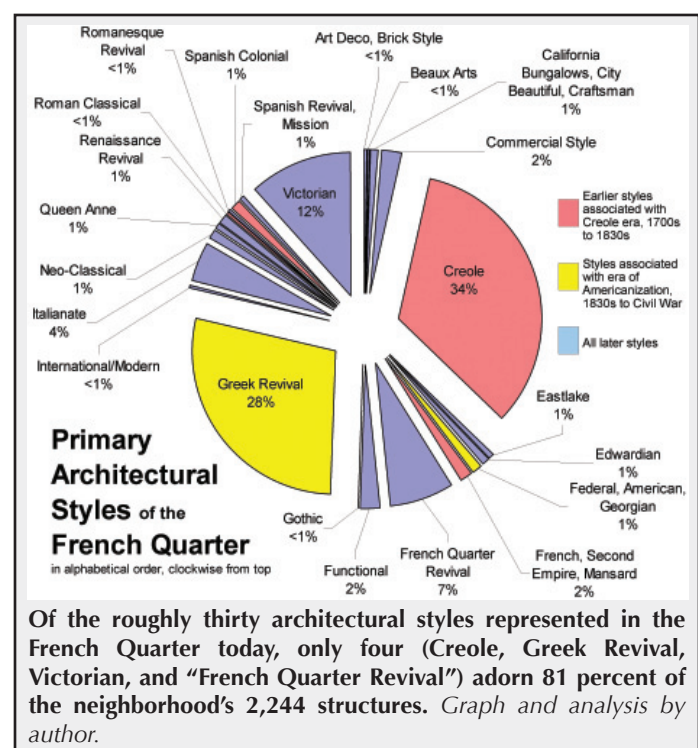
“Architectural styles arrived by ship to this port city, rather like fashions in clothing, to be successively draped on the same persisting and evolving [structural] bodies,”³² wrote the late Malcolm Heard in his 1997 architectural guide *French Quarter Manual*. While Heard contended that Quarter buildings 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 styles³⁵

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.



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

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.

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.

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 Road (Cape Girardeau, MO, 1988), 20-25; and Jay D. Edwards, *Louisiana’s French*



“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-

Vernacular Architecture: A Historical and Social Bibliography (Monticello, IL, 1986), 1-9, and other sources.

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.

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



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.

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.

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 floor, 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.

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 Girard (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* (carriage-way) 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 de-

signed 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.

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.

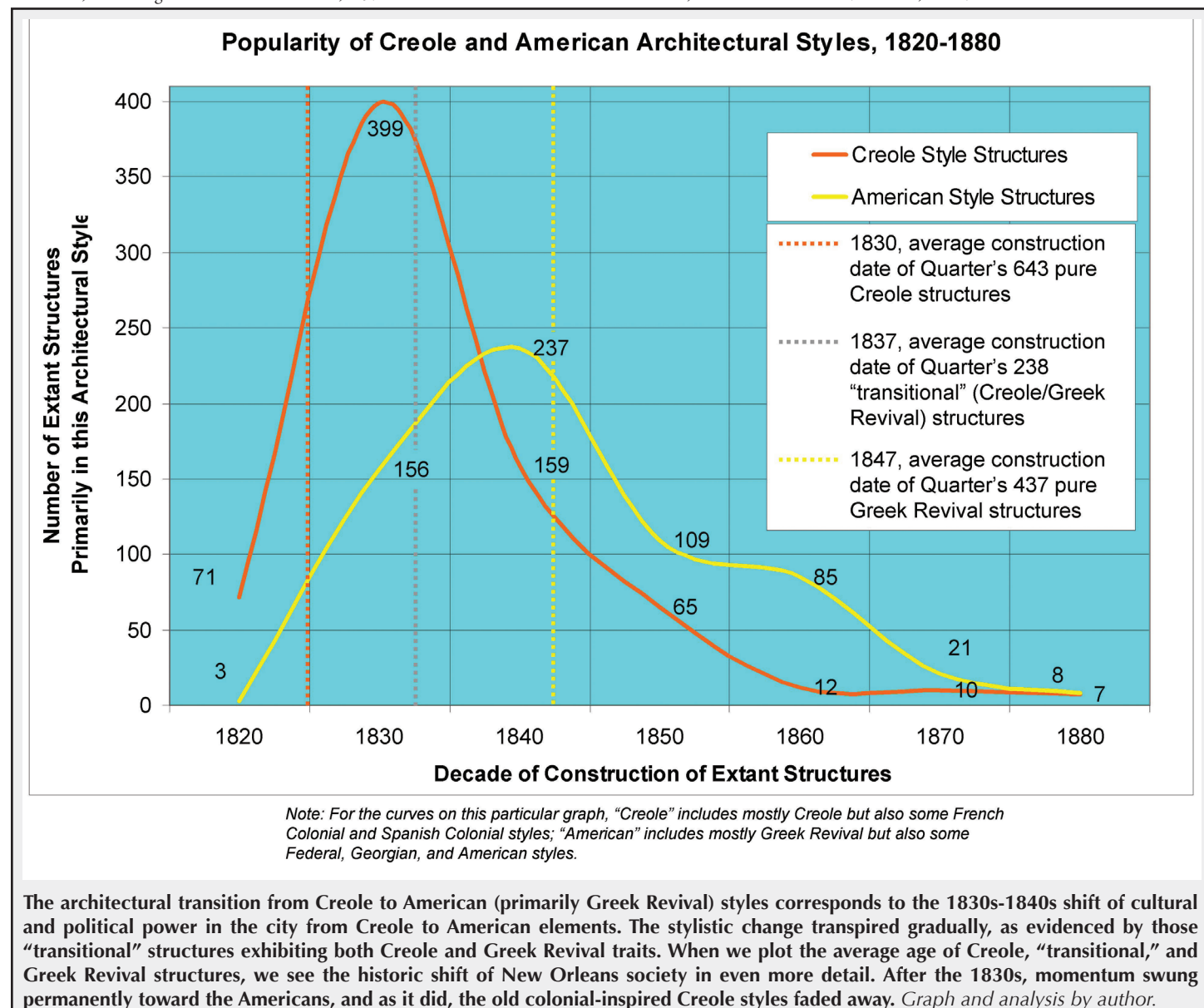
EMERGENCE OF AMERICAN STYLES

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.



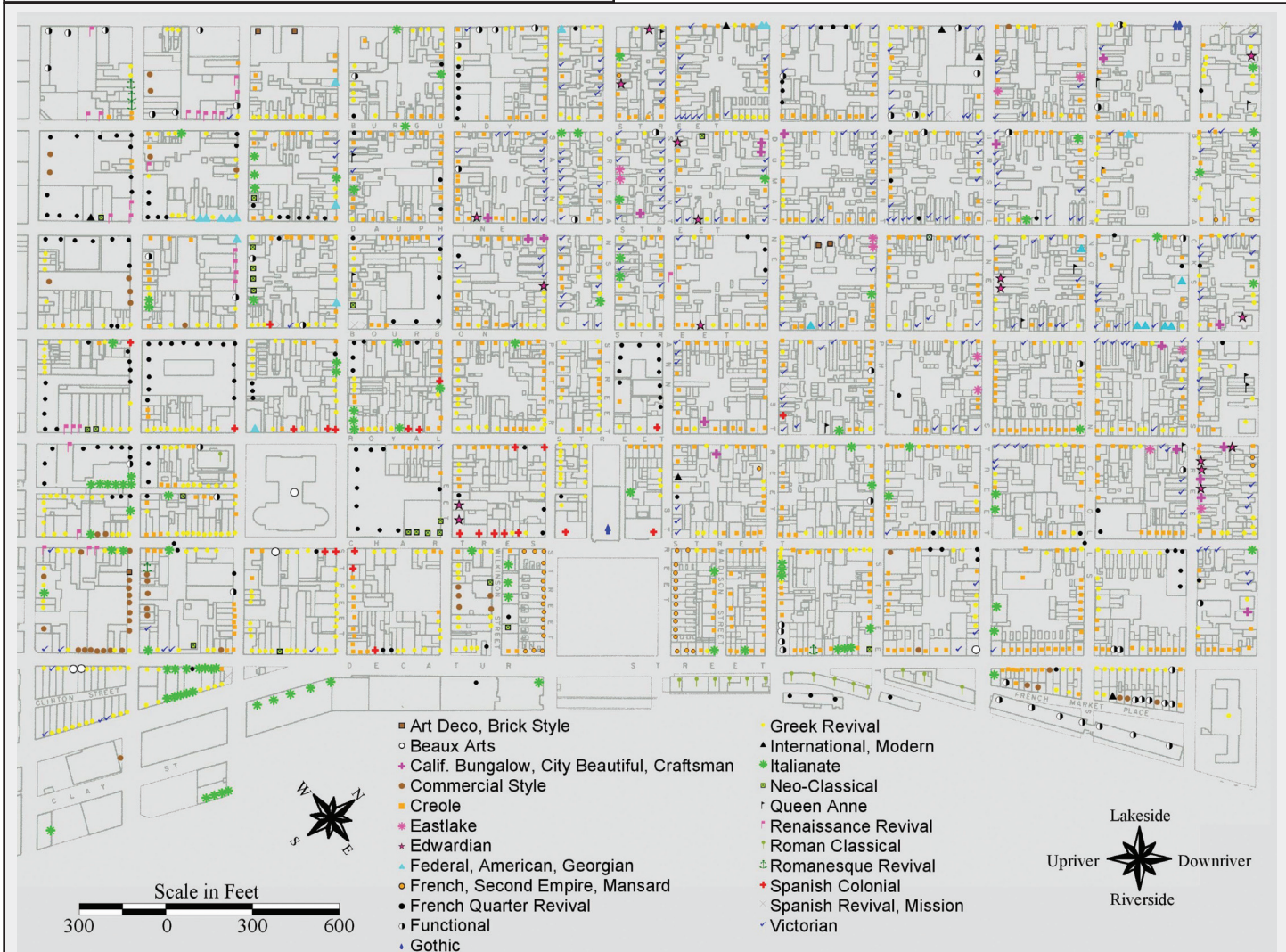


This row of “transitionals”—structures with both Creole and Greek Revival traits—at 335-341 Chartres dates from the 1830s, when political power shifted from Creoles to Anglos. Creole traits include the narrow balcony, jack arches above windows, and narrow passages between adjoining units; Greek Revival 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.

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 struc-

tures 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:

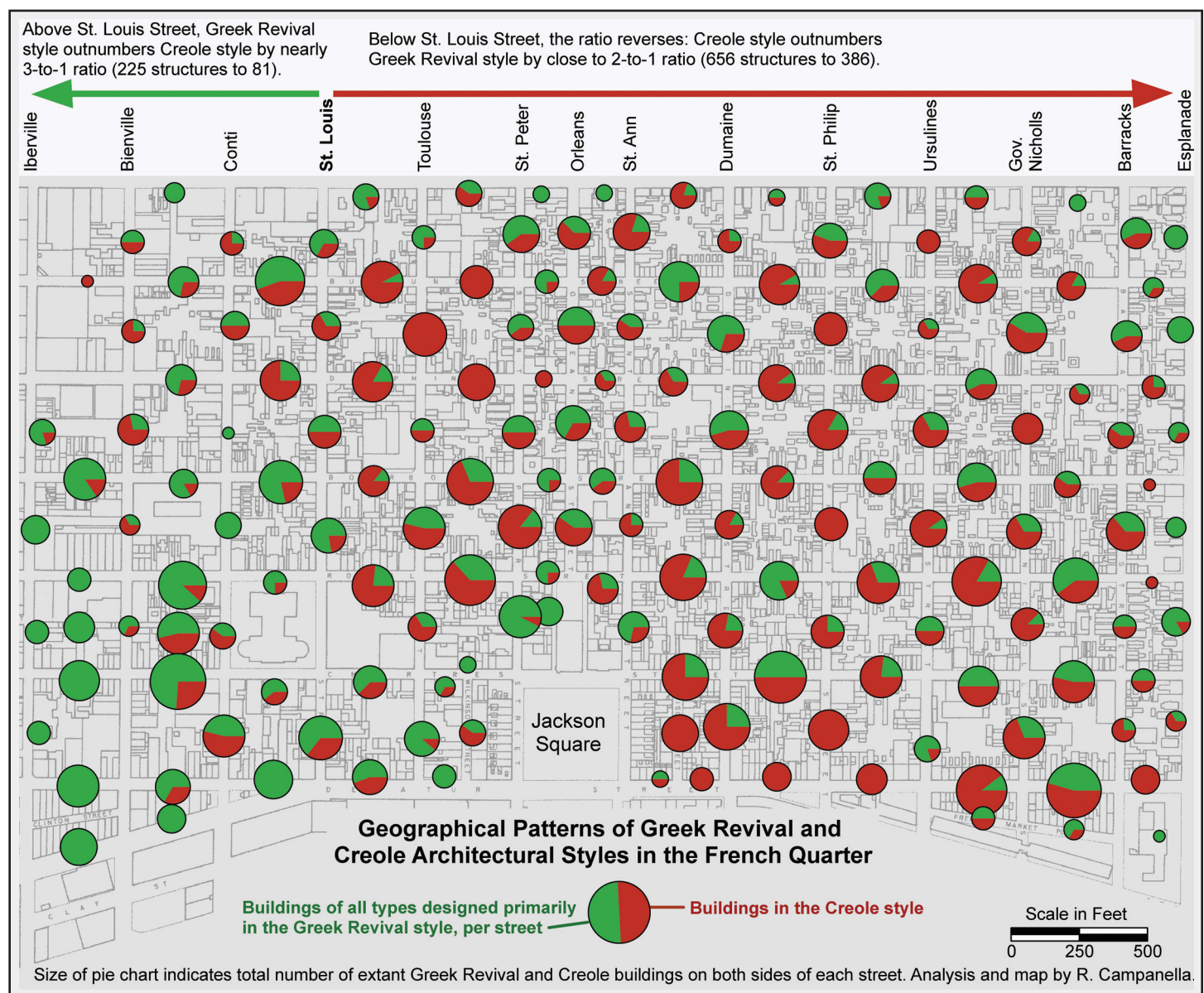
The houses are rapidly changing from the uncouth Spanish style, to more elegant forms. The new houses are mostly three stories high, with balconies, and a summer-room with

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.





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

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.

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

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.



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.

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.”

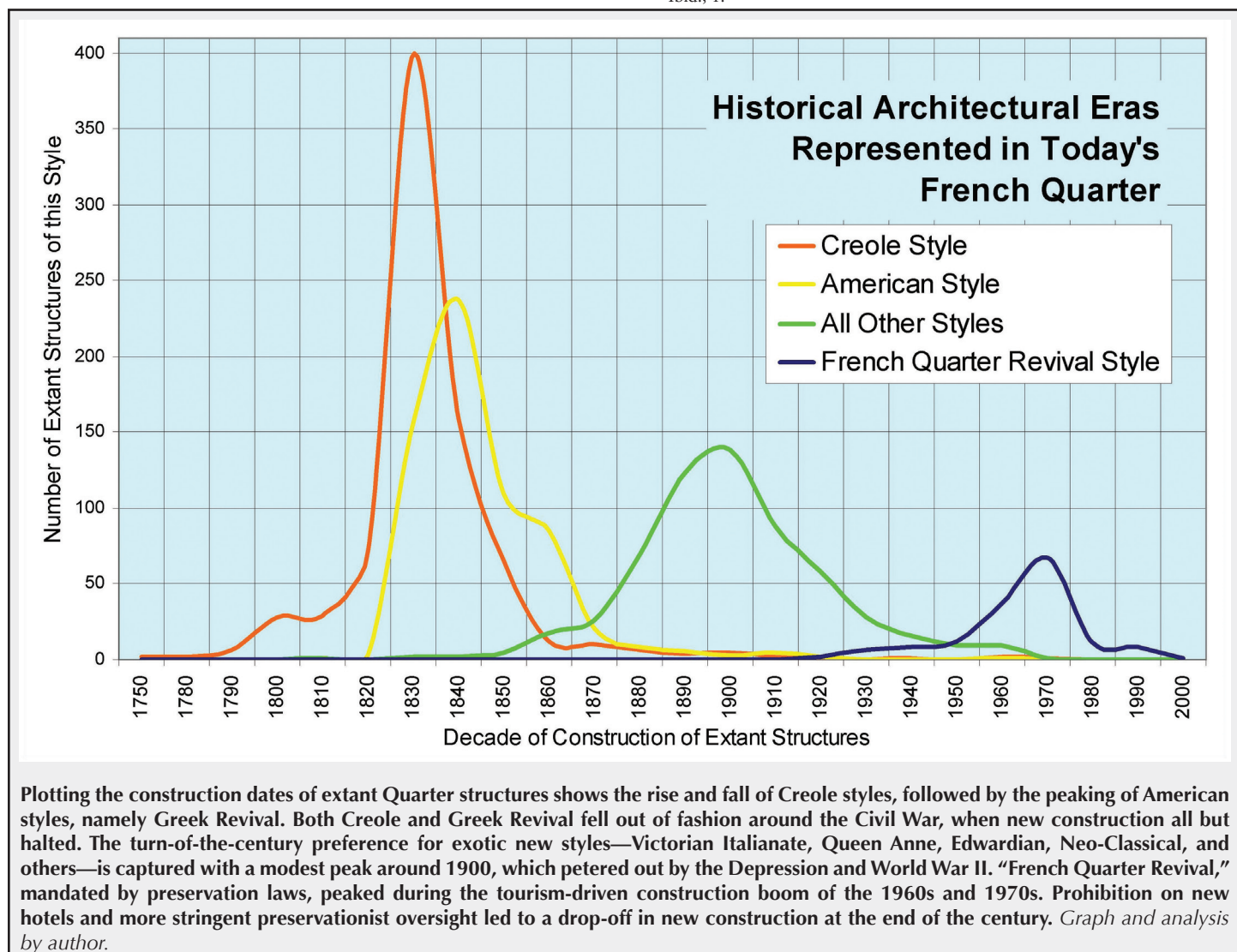
A closer look reveals New Orleans’ adoption and abandonment of other Western architectural trends. Note the gradual introduction of the Italianate style just before the Civil War, and its modest popularity (see graph, *Rise and Fall of Two Major Postbellum Styles*) afterwards. An outgrowth of the “Picturesque” 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

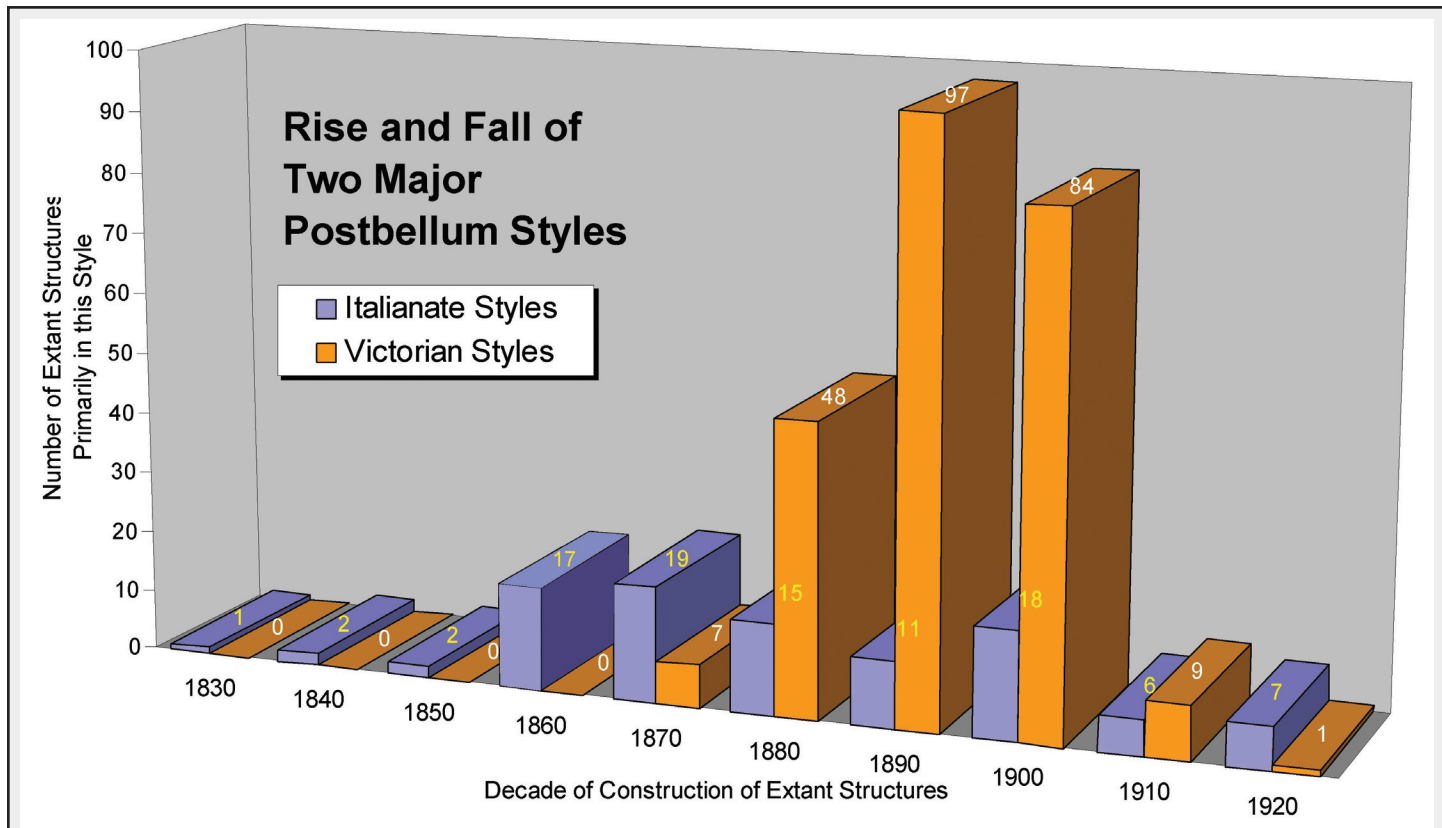
of luxury” and “artistic values,”⁶¹ particularly in the urban South. Fanciful Italianate features such as decorative parapets, segmented arches, quoins, and cornices supported by paired brackets were “applied like an overlay to traditional building types within the city,”⁶² effectively replacing the more staid Greek Revival style while maintaining the underlying town-house/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.





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.

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 Re-
vival 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.

