

NEW ORLEANS HISTORIC DISTRICT LANDMARKS COMMISSION
DESIGNATION REPORT



1539 RELIGIOUS STREET
THOMAIN-BAIRD RESIDENCE
CONSTRUCTED 1810-13

AUGUST 10, 2004

1539 RELIGIOUS STREET
Landmark Designation Report

Architectural Rating:	Blue
Construction Date:	1810-1813
Architect:	Unknown

Site Description

67'10"5" front on Orange Street x 68'8" front on Religious Street b.p.1.
1st Municipal District, 1st Assessment District
Zoning: L-1, Light Industrial
Owner: David Baird

Nomination Information

Date Nominated: May 11, 1999
Recommended by: Lance Hiatt
Nominated by: Walter Willard
Seconded by: Lansen Barrow & Vivienne Blair

The nomination of this property was based upon its architectural and historical significance. Each of the four areas of criteria used in determining whether a property is worthy of or meets the qualifications for landmark status, as outlined in City Ordinance #5992 M.C.S., will be examined.

History of the Property

The land that 1539 Religious Street sits on was at one time part of the Jean Baptiste de Marigny plantation. Following his death in 1805, the property was inherited by his brother, Bernard de Marigny and his sister, Marie Celeste de Marigny, the wife of Jaques Francois Enoul de Livaudais. In 1806, Livaudais bought out Bernard Marigny's share of the property. In 1807, Livaudais sold the lower half of the plantation to Pierre Robin Delogny. Delogny immediately hired engineer and surveyor, Bartholemy Lafon to subdivide the land into the new Faubourg de la Course or Racetrack Suburb. The new Faubourg was bounded by the Mississippi River, Faubourg Saullet on the down river side and by Faubourg Annunciation on the up river side. (Figure 1)

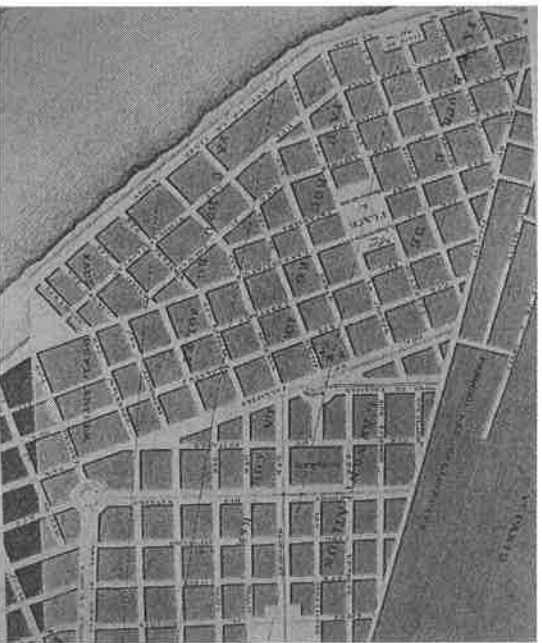


Figure 1. Detail of 1817 Plan by Jaques Tamasse

Five lots of ground, each measuring 60' by 120' on the general plan of the Faubourg (La Course) numbered 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5 forming the corner of Religious, Orange and La Course (Race). The grounds surround a house, brick between post, covered in weatherboards on the exterior and covered in wood shingles, divided in two "apartements" and two rear cabinets flanking a gallery, a kitchen in the courtyard, set on the ground, covered in wood shingles covered in weatherboards, divided into two rooms with a double chimney.

The five lots with their buildings and improvements were appraised at \$4000.

A public auction was held in December of 1810, to sell the properties belonging to the estate of Gabriel Callier.⁵ Lot #5 which included the house was sold to M. Tonard for \$1000. However, for unknown reasons, the five lots came back into the possession of the Caillier heirs and were sold again on in march of 1813, to Louis Viales for \$8000. The properties at the time of this sale were described as

Five lots, situated in Faubourg La Course, numbered 1 through 5 having each 60' front facing Religious by 120 feet in depth and bordered by Religious Street on the front and on the sides by Orange and Race Streets with the two houses and other buildings with their dependencies.

The jump in price from appraisal value of \$4000 for the five lots in the 1810 inventory to a sale price of \$8000 three years later indicates that the property was substantially improved during that period. The house described in the 1810 inventory may have been demolished and the double cottage constructed at the corner of Religious and Orange Streets. It seems likely that the current double cottage is the same building described in the 1813 act of sale. The substantial jump in value of the property, in conjunction with the building's construction type, style, and mortise and tenon joints in the roof structure, indicates that the construction date of 1539 Religious Street could lie between 1810-1813. If this is the case, 1539 Religious Street may be the oldest known structure in New Orleans above Canal Street.

Louis Viales resided in Pointe Coupée, Louisiana at the time he purchased the Caillier properties. Described as a landlord and merchant, Viales moved to Faubourg La Course in New Orleans in 1814. Little is know about Viales but that he served as a "Syndic of the Upper District" sometime between 1812 and 1815. Viales mortgaged the five properties in Square 20 in May of 1817. Between May and September, he had the five lots subdivided into smaller lots measuring approximately 30' by 120', and sold two 30' wide lots fronting on Orange Street and forming the corner of Religious and Orange Streets, now numbered 3 & 4, to Eleazer Ripley⁶. Unfortunately this act was notarized by John Lynd whose records from the year of 1817 have not survived.

⁵Pierre Pedesclaux, June 8, 1811, New Orleans Notarial Archives.

⁶John Lynd, 9/5/1817. Record missing.

Eleazer Ripley, an attorney, is best known for his service in the army a brigadier general, as well as his tenure as a Louisiana Congressman. Mr. Ripley did not reside at 1539 Religious Street, but most likely purchased the property as an investment. Ripley owned the property for fifteen years until 1832 when, as a result of a lawsuit, lot # 4, forming the corner and containing the house and dependencies, was sold at auction by the United States Marshall to Dr. Henry James Cullen in 1832⁷. A survey by Louis Bringier annexed to the act of sale shows ten lots facing Orange and Religious Streets that were sold at auction (Figure 3) The survey shows the current masonry double creole cottage located at the Uptown lakeside corner of the square. An oak tree is indicated in the lot #5. The survey demonstrates that 1539 Religious Street was the main structure of a complex of buildings.

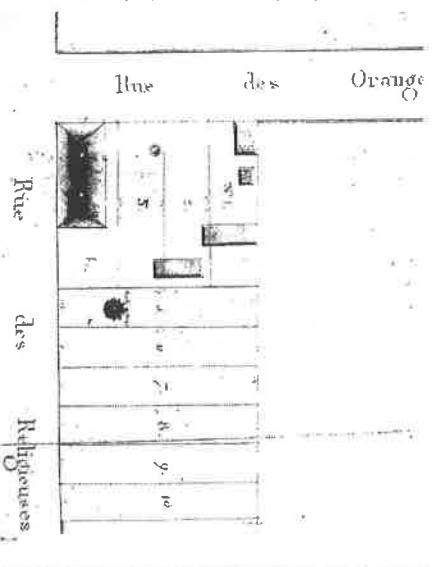


Figure 3. Detail of 1832 Bringier plan

Gilbert Vance purchased the adjacent lot #3 in 1833 from Charles Lee.⁸ Vance, a commission merchant, resided on Chartres Street in the French Quarter. He soon sold the property to Dr. Henry James Cullen in 1835.⁹ Dr. Cullen, who had been a resident of Matamoros in the state of Tamaulipas, Mexico, prior to moving to New Orleans. Dr. Cullen soon sold the two lots # 3 & 4 together to a group of commission merchants known as Godfrey, Blossman & Co in 1836.¹⁰ Four years later, the company sold the property at auction to John Donovan for \$5000. The property description at that time noted that the two lots included “the buildings and improvements...consisting of a brick house, a wood kitchen, curbstones and bankets (sic) fully paid.”¹¹ For the next thirty-three years, the Donovan family would own the building.

John Donovan is listed in city directories as residing at 251 Camp Street. His profession in 1838 is listed as “keeps drays.” During the 1850’s, Dennis Donovan, possibly John’s brother, was listed as a draymaster with a business at the corner of Religious and Orange Streets. However, by 1853, Dennis, though he was listed as a drayman at other locations, no longer resided in the Religious Street property. John Donovan died in 1855 and the property was inherited by his widow Eliza, who held on to it for another twenty years until her death in January of 1873.

⁷William Christy, 3/29/1832, Vol. 11, p.426. New Orleans Notarial Archives.

⁸William Christy, 4/17/1833. New Orleans Notarial Archives.

⁹Jules Mossy, 5/11/1835. New Orleans Notarial Archives.

¹⁰Jules Mossy, 5/2/1836, Vol.12, Act 4. New Orleans Notarial Archives.

¹¹Theodore Seghers, 5/23/1840. Vol. 36, Act 324. New Orleans Notarial Archives.

The Donovan heirs sold the property to Frank Ahern in 1874.¹² Ahern had apparently been renting some or all of the building for at least two years prior to purchasing the property as he is listed in the 1872 city directory as a grocer located at the corner of Religious and Orange streets. Unfortunately, the Ahern family does not appear in obituary records or the 1870 or 1880 census records. However, probate records following the death of Mr. Ahern reflect that his wife Ellen Adams remarried following his death to Frank Marshall, and that her first marriage to Frank Ahern resulted in six children: Annie, Joseph, Catherine, Dennis, Ellen and Mary Frances. Ellen had two more children during her second marriage and is listed in the 1880 census as a grocer living across Orange Street at 51 Religious Street. Following Ahern's death, his heirs sold the building at public auction to John Spencer in 1877. The process verbal or transcript of the sale described the building as "four brick cottages." By this point, the two houses had apparently been split into four residences as seen in the 1885 Sanborn map. (Figure 4)

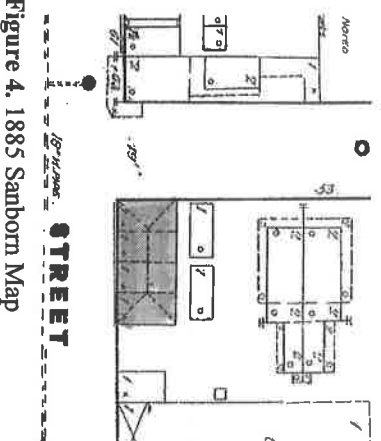


Figure 4. 1885 Sanborn Map

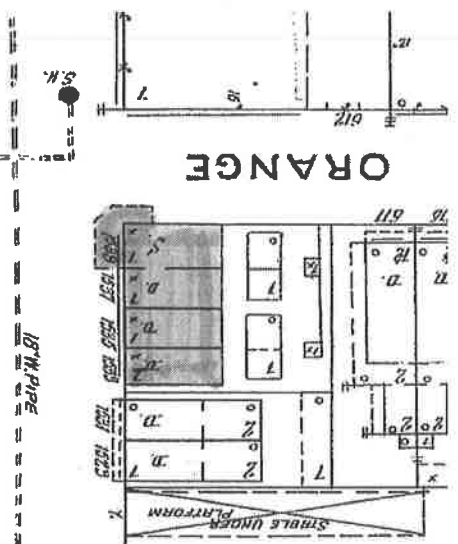


Figure 5. 1895 Sanborn Map

Mr. Spencer owned the building for fourteen years until his death. However, due to a lack of obituary records, little is known about him. The city directory between the years 1891-1915 list several John Spencers living in the city, none of whom resided on Religious Street. The 1895 Sanborn map shows the footprint of the building during his period of ownership. At that time, the building contained three residences, one of which connected to commercial space created at the corner. By 1895 a wrap-around overhang, a typical feature of corner stores, had been attached to the building. Two, one-story accessory buildings and two privies were located in the rear. (Figure 5) The building was most likely purchased by Mr. Spencer for investment as rental property.

In 1891, following the death of John Spencer, his heirs had lots #3 & 4 re-subdivided into lots A & B. Lot "A" measuring 67'10" five " front on Orange Street and 68' 8" front on Religious Street along with the masonry building; lot B comprised the remainder of the land. John Mahoney purchased both lots A & B.¹³ John Mahoney is listed in the 1900 census as a day laborer residing with his wife Margaret, three sons and niece at 623 Orange Street. The building remained in the possession of James Mahoney and his decedents until 1945.

¹²William Castell, 4/29/1874, Vol 42, Act 7772. New Orleans Notarial Archives.

¹³James Barnett, 9/17/1891, Vol. 5, Act 232. New Orleans Notarial Archives.

Architectural Significance

The structure is comprised of two Creole cottages under one massive hip roof. The Religious Street elevation includes four door openings and four window openings. (figure 6) The brick masonry has been finished in a heavily textured stucco on the exterior. Batten shutters affixed with strap hinges protect the openings. The Orange Street elevation consists of two window openings. Two chimneys remain in the front rooms. The interior, although severely altered, retains some original elements. Three original door casings remain, reflecting the original interior floor plan. The ceiling features the original beaded ceiling joists with wide ceiling boards. If the building dates from between 1810 and 1813, then 1539 Religious Street would be the oldest known structure remaining above Canal Street.

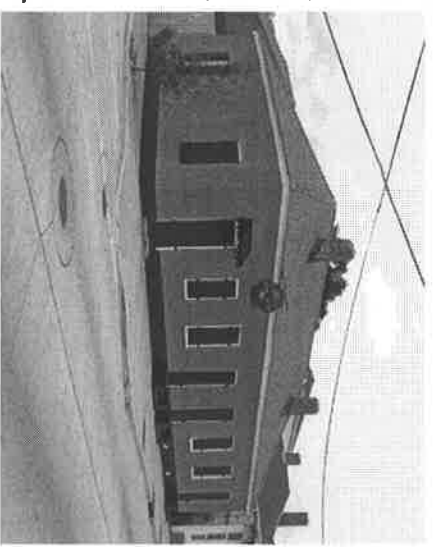


Figure 6. 1539 Religious Street

Architect

Unknown

Historic Personages

none

Social, Economic and Political History

The building's early construction date renders it an artifact from the earliest period of development above Canal Street following the Louisiana Purchase. The building reflects the initial pattern of urban development following the subdivision of uptown plantations. Because the Religious and Tchoupitoulas Street corridor, along with the St. Thomas Housing project have experienced several shifts in use and development ranging from early nineteenth century rural development to late nineteenth century industrial and large scale low income housing developments, the area retains very few cohesive streetscapes. This building is of particular significance due to the fact that no buildings dating from prior to 1830 have survived in the uptown area.

Staff Recommendation

The staff highly recommends that this building be designated as a landmark based on its architectural and historical significance.

Report prepared by:

Eleanor Burke

Senior Architectural Historian

Historic District Landmarks Commission

830 Julia Street

New Orleans, LA 70113

