

CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT HISTORIC DISTRICT LANDMARKS COMMISSION

RUBENSTEIN ROW  
622, 624, 630, 634, 638-40 Canal Street  
and 102 St. Charles Avenue

Architectural Rating: Blue  
Construction Dates: 622 Canal: 1859  
624 Canal: 1872, remodeled 1899  
630 Canal: 1900  
634 Canal: 1883  
638-40 Canal: 1824  
102 St. Charles: 1841  
Architects: 622 Canal: William A. Freret  
624 Canal: Unknown  
630 Canal: Unknown  
634 Canal: William Fitzner  
638-40 Canal: William Brand  
102 St. Charles: Unknown

Nomination Information

Date: May 25, 1978  
Nominated by: Laurance Eustis, III  
Seconded by: Andre Rubenstein, Diane Manget, Imre Hegedus  
Recommended by: CBD Study Committee and Staff

Site Description

Square 170, Lots 1 and R  
1st M.D., 5th A.D.  
Zoning: CBD-3

Lot Size: 622 Canal, Lot 1 - 23' X 100' X 20'5" X 102'8"  
624, 630, 634, 638-40 Canal and 102 St. Charles,  
Lot R - 92'2" X 112'4"1" X 82'11"7" X 102'8"

Current Use: Retail Commercial for all structures.

History of Property

622 Canal

Current Owner: Canarles Realty Corp.  
Date of Acquisition: September 5, 1969  
Purchase Price: \$260,000

624 Canal

Current Owner: Canarles Realty Corp.  
Date of Acquisition: September 1, 1978  
Purchase Price: \$400,000

630 Canal

Current Owner: Canarles Realty Corp.  
Date of Acquisition: September 10, 1946  
Purchase Price: \$97,810

634 Canal

Current Owner: Canarles Realty Corp.  
Date of Acquisition: July 28, 1969  
Purchase Price: \$330,000

638-40 Canal and 102 St. Charles

Current Owner: Canarles Realty Corp.  
Date of Acquisition: July 31, 1940  
Purchase Price: \$90,000

The nomination of these buildings was based upon their architectural significance and their association with significant architects. Each of the four areas of criteria used in determining landmark qualification and outlined in City Ordinance No. 6699 MCS, will be examined on an individual basis in order to provide information upon which a final decision will be made whether or not to designate the properties.

#### Architectural Significance

The six buildings which occupy the river corner of Canal Street and St. Charles Avenue provide a visual record of building activity in the Central Business District from 1824 to 1900, and form the most intact group of 19th century structures still standing on Canal Street.

According to records in the Notarial Archives, William Brand purchased a large portion of the square bounded by Canal, Common, Camp and St. Charles from Louis Philippe de Roffignac, Mayor of the City of New Orleans. Prior to this sale, which took place on September 4, 1820, the land was part of the City Commons. The Commons separated the Faubourg St. Mary from the city proper, the area known today as the French Quarter. In 1810 the surveyor Jacques Tanesse subdivided this property, laying out Canal Street and Common Street, which took its name from the former title of the property. As Mayor, Roffignac was acting as the government's agent in selling off the former Commons, including the parcel acquired by William Brand.

#### 638-40 Canal

By occupation a builder and architect, William Brand purchased this property for development. Although no contract has been located for the construction of the five two bay structures Brand erected facing Canal Street, we know that the buildings were standing by early 1825 when Brand mortgaged the three nearest to St. Charles Avenue to the Bank of Louisiana. The April 25, 1825 mortgage notes that the property included "the three story Brick Dwelling Houses and Stores by him (Brand) lately erected there on." Such a reference strongly implies that the buildings had been completed by that date. According to a survey prepared in 1839 prior to Brand's selling of the property at auction in 1840, each of the five three story buildings facing Canal Street featured a detached kitchen building on the rear of each lot. The ground floor plans indicate that separate entrances to the upper two floors of each building was provided by a narrow staircase which opened onto Canal Street. This separated the commercial tenants at ground level and the residential tenants above, much in the manner associated with many structures in the French Quarter.

Of this important row, only one member remains, 638-40 Canal Street, at the St. Charles end of the row. With the exception of the ground floor, which has been remodeled for display windows, the structure is remarkably intact. Using Marie Adrien Persac's drawings of Canal Street of 1871-73 and a lithograph by B. Simon of the same period as sources, the second floor fenestration, with its curious combination of double hung six over six lite sash along side glazed French doors with transoms, has survived intact. The third story fenestration also appears to be original to the structure. The present iron balconies at the second and third floors have modern installations. It should be noted, however, that in 1832 Brand had iron galleries installed at the building. By the 1870's, a full cast-iron gallery with canopy was in place on the corner structure, so a solid historic precedent for the present iron work exists. 638-40 Canal, with its likely construction date of 1824, is the oldest substantially intact structure in Canal Street, and an important survivor of one of the earliest building projects on the street.

#### 102 St. Charles

On December 30, 1840, Brand sold 638-40 Canal to Jacob Florence. On January 28, 1841, before Adolphe Mazureau, Notary Public, Florence signed a building contract with Ambrose C. Fulton for the erection of a three story structure to take the place of the small kitchen building erected by Brand. The nine bay structure at 102 St. Charles Avenue is the result of this document. Designed in the then enormously popular Greek Revival style, the structure features the characteristic dentiled cornice so often seen on buildings of this date and style. One of the full length window openings on both the second and third floors has been bricked in, and some of the other openings have lost their original double hung sash.

#### 622 Canal

In December of 1853, the Merchants Mutual Insurance Company purchased the building at the Camp Street end of Brand's 1824 row, now 622 Canal Street. By 1859, the firm had evidently found the three story structure inadequate for their needs,

and proceeded to construct a larger building on the site. According to The Daily Picayune of August 21, 1859, the company's new home was nearing completion and represented the work of the architect William A. Freret. The new three and half story structure featured a cast-iron facade, which the Picayune described as "highly ornamented, and the design, of a quite novel model, is very tasteful." Fortunately, Freret's "highly ornamented" facade still stands, and is considered one of the finest and most original cast-iron facades in the United States, and one of only two such fronts remaining in New Orleans. As is characteristic of 19th century structures on Canal Street, the original ground floor facade destroyed in this century for the installation of the display window space. The shafts of two of the original four cast-iron Corinthian columns were exposed in a recent remodeling. Above the ground floor, the only alteration to the original design is the loss of a heavy cast-iron balcony at the second floor level.

The extreme three dimensionality of the facade is most apparent on the second floor. The three bay front is divided by four Solomonic columns which are nearly face standing. So called because of the belief that such twisted columns were used in the great Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, this column form was widely used in Renaissance and Baroque church architecture, most notably on the baldachino, or canopy above the high altar of St. Peter's in Rome. Capped by somewhat stunted Composite capitals, each of the four columns stands on a paneled base. The sinuous twisting of the columns is emphasized by the application of a rope molding which winds its way up the columns shaft. Three full length round arched openings are set between the columns. The arched upper section of each opening features a large transom set above glazed French doors which originally opened onto the second floor balcony. The outline of the openings are highlighted by a band of rope molding like that noted earlier on the column shafts. A slightly recessed panel with oak leaf decorative insets is set above each of these openings. The second story front is topped by an entablature, the underside of which is cut by three segmental arches to fit over the arched openings below. The cornice consists of an unbroken line of acanthus leaf decoration.

The highly original character of Freret's design increases as you reach the third floor facade. The fenestration is virtually identical to that of the second floor, but is somewhat lower. The four free standing columns which frame this floor's facade are absolutely unique, and must be considered as a product of Freret's creative imagination. Set atop square paneled bases, the column shafts are divided into two separate and distinct sections by a combination of decorative rings and grooves around the column shaft. The lower segment of the shafts are paneled in a manner usually associated with Gothic architecture. The upper segment of the shafts are fluted. The column capitals are of the foliated type used in Gothic architecture. The space above each window is decorated by a recessed panel with stylized foliage. The height of the third story is defined by a series of three segmentally arched hood moldings which spring from the column capitals.

The upper half story front is the most remarkable section of the facade. Instead of the columns one would expect to find dividing this area into bays, the architect chose instead to use four very large and richly detailed console brackets, resting atop square bases which are seemingly supported by the third story columns. The windows of the half story are fully round, the lower halves of which are decorated by cast iron grillwork. The very deep entablature which rests on the console brackets has segmental arches cut into its underside so as to fit above these round windows. The building's cornice detailing consists of a course of dentils and one of modillions. A parapet tops the design, and features symbols associated with commerce and insurance, such as the roof of a house, a fire plug, and the prow of a ship. Such a symbolic device atop the building amounted to a very subtle form of advertising.

#### 624 Canal

In March of 1857 the three story structure at 624 Canal was acquired by Nathaniel Dickey. According to Real Estate Assessment records, Dickey leased the building to a variety of tenants until 1873, when the Mutual National Bank occupied the entire structure. Assessments indicate a substantial upward revaluation of the property in 1872, indicating that remodeling was undertaken to suit the needs of the new tenant. This remodeling is confirmed by an illustration in Jewell's Crescent City Illustrated, published in 1873, which shows the new home of the Mutual National Bank.

The structure was given an entirely new facade, designed in the then fashionable Italianate style. According to the 1876 Sanborn Insurance Maps, the interior must have also been redesigned, for the building then only had two stories, instead of the original three. Of the 1872 facade, only the present third floor remains. Segmentally arched window openings, characteristic of the Italianate style, are used at this level. The center bay is the widest of the three bay wide front, and frames a pair of double hung sash windows. The third floor opening at the Camp Street end has been walled in. The elaborate entablature with its dentilled and bracketed cornice, surmounted by a parapet, survives unaltered.

The present second floor facade is the result of an 1899 remodeling, carried out by Urban Koehn, who had purchased the property from the Bank. Noted on both the Assessment records for that year and The Daily Picayune of September 1, 1899, this remodeling resulted in the building being restored to the three story form which had existed prior to the 1872 conversion to a banking house. The fenestration used on the second floor is interesting in that the round arched window openings are set within larger openings framed by three shouldered arches. The wide central bay holds two double hung windows, as was the case with the third floor. The openings at the Camp Street end of this floor has been walled in. The present ground floor, a product of a 1980 renovation, follows the lines of the upper stories through its use of segmental arches to frame the three openings.

#### 634 Canal

In February of 1867, 634 Canal was purchased by Peter O'Donnell. According to the circa 1872, sketches of Canal Street by Adrien Persac, the structure O'Donnell acquired had undergone virtually no modifications since William Brand erected it in 1824. By 1883, however, O'Donnell evidently had decided that a more modern structure should be constructed. In an act passed by W. J. Castell, N. P. on June 18, 1883, O'Donnell constructed with the builder Edward Murray for the construction of a new building on the site, according to plans prepared by the architect William Fitzner.

While the original ground floor design has long since been destroyed, the upper floors of Fitzner's elaborately detailed Italianate style facade are extant and in excellent condition. Three bays in width, the second floor facade is divided by four heavy paneled pilasters. From the caps of these pilasters spring the stucco hood moldings which frame each of the three round arched window openings. Each of these arches features an elaborate keystone.

The third floor facade is framed at the corners by paneled pilasters. The three round arched window openings are framed by elaborate stucco moldings, which are embellished by stylized floral panels and keystones. The building's entablature features a paneled frieze and a modillion cornice. The parapet which tops the facade is a remarkable piece of design with three finials, the central one being raised up on an elaborate base.

#### 630 Canal

In June of 1885, Dr. Stamford E. Chaille acquired 630 Canal from his daughter. At that date, the structure on the site had undergone no significant changes since its construction in 1824 by William Brand. Chaille chose to leave the structure as it was until 1900, when the September 1 issue of The Daily Picayune reported that the building had been remodeled earlier in the year. No architect is noted.

The remodeling of this building is rather curious in that it produced a facade that owes a great deal of its character to the Italianate style which had passed out of general use in the 1880's. As noted with the other structures in this row, the ground floor of this building had been remodeled for display window space. The second floor front is divided into three bays by four rusticated pilasters. The two outer bays feature full length segmentally arched windows.

The center bay, which is twice the width of those flanking it, holds a pair of square headed full length windows. The second and third floors are separated a heavy beltcourse of stucco moldings.

The fenestration of the third floor front follows the bay arrangement used on the second floor. The outer window openings on this floor are round arched, while a broad segmental arch frames the double windows at the center bay. These bays are separated by fluted and paneled stucco pilasters. The building's entablature includes a frieze decorated with swags and garlands and a modillion

cornice fabricated in pressed metal. A triangular parapet is set above the center bay at roof level.

#### Architects

##### 638-40 Canal Street

William Brand, the designer and builder of 638-40 Canal Street, was one of most important figures in New Orleans architecture during the early 1800's. According to surviving building contracts, Brand served as both architect and builder for a large number of buildings, most located in the Faubourg St. Mary. Unfortunately, the great majority of his work in this area has not survived. The two most significant buildings in this group were the Orleans Theatre, built in 1810, and the First Congregational Church of 1819. Brand's talent as a designer was most clearly displayed in his two great residential commissions, Avondale Plantation, a fine Greek Revival style house built in 1839, lost to the Mississippi, and the house built in 1831-32 for Samuel Hermann, which still stands at 820 St. Louis Street. Now known to us the Hermann-Grima House, this structure is recognized as one of the finest 19th century residences in New Orleans. Brand died in 1849, and was buried in the Girod Street Cemetery, which held several tombs built and designed by him.

##### 622 Canal Street

William A. Freret, the son of Mayor William Freret, was born in 1833. By the time of the Civil War, he had established himself as an important architect in terms of both residential and commercial buildings. He designed two major extant rows of houses, 1703-1719 Second Street, and 2700-2726 Coliseum Street, erected in 1860-61. In 1859, Freret received four important commissions for commercial buildings in the CBD. Significantly, all of these buildings featured cast-iron facades. This group included the now destroyed Frois Building and the Slocomb Baldwin Company, both of which stood on Canal Street. The largest of these designs was the incredible Moresque Building at Camp and Poydras. Not completed until after the Civil War, this building featured four identical iron fronts and was one of the most significant iron-fronted structures ever built in this country. Tragically, it was destroyed by fire in 1897. The only surviving example of Freret's genius in the use of cast-iron is the design of the former Merchants Mutual Insurance Company Building at 622 Canal.

In 1870, Freret received the commission for the design of the 20 public schools to be built with money from the great bequest of John McDonough. Designed in a number of architectural styles, many of these schools have been demolished and replaced by larger, more modern buildings. Fortunately, several still stand, including McDonough Number 6 at 923 Napoleon Avenue and McDonough Number 7 at 1111 Milan Street, both designed in the Gothic Revival style. McDonough Number 10, designed in the Italianate style, still stands at 2409 Baronne Street. In 1887 Freret was appointed to the prestigious position of Supervising Architect of the U. S. Treasury. This post entails the design and construction of Federal courthouses, customhouses, and post offices throughout the country. Freret died in New Orleans in 1911.

##### 634 Canal Street

William Fitzner, the designer of 634 Canal, was one of the city's most active architects in the 1870's and 1880's. Judging by his surviving works, Fitzner had a special fondness for the Italianate style. The fine raised villa at 1435 Jackson Avenue, built in 1883, and the townhouse for Andrew Johnston at 547 Esplanade Avenue, built in 1879, are among the best examples of Italianate style houses in New Orleans. Fitzner's largest surviving work, and one of the largest construction projects of the 1880's, is the Louisiana Brewing Company complex at Jackson Avenue and Tchoupitoulas Street. Although slightly altered, this ensemble features some of the finest late 19th century brickwork detailing in New Orleans.

#### Historic Personages

None

#### Cultural, Political, Economic and Social History

None