

# EXPLORING NEW ORLEANS

John Magill (Historic New Orleans Collection), 2013 Host Committee

New Orleans landmarks like the French Quarter and Bourbon Street may be the best-known spots in the city, but many neighborhoods worth exploring are nestled within city limits. While the city's hotspots certainly merit a visit, the neighborhoods are also steeped in history and rife with the quintessential sights of the Crescent City. Much of the city's late-nineteenth-century architecture is included in its historic districts, and the city boasts one of the largest percentages of intact pre-World War II buildings of any American city.

Here are a few areas to discover when you can venture away from the conference hotel at the CoSA/SAA Joint Annual Meeting this August.

## The French Quarter

Founded in 1718 by the French on the site of today's French Quarter, *La Nouvelle Orléans* (New Orleans) protected the southern tip of Louisiana from other European powers and was situated near Lake Pontchartrain and Bayou St. John, which provided a shorter, safer route to the Gulf of Mexico than the Mississippi River.

The former Ursuline Convent is the only French colonial building still standing in the Quarter. Completed in 1753, the building was used as a convent, bishopric, school, meeting place for the Louisiana legislature, archives, and now a museum. Louisiana fell under Spanish rule in 1762, and when New Orleans was reconstructed after fires leveled the city in 1788 and 1794, it took on a distinctive Spanish appearance. New buildings featured horizontal lines, arches, plastered brick and timber walls, slate or tile roofs, courtyards, and hand-wrought iron.

The bulk of French Quarter buildings, however, were built after the United States bought Louisiana in 1803. Beginning in the 1830s, buildings featured mass-produced cast iron. By 1900, the area had become ramshackle—considered by many to be a slum—and was threatened with demolition, but a strong preservation movement helped save it from destruction.

## Exploring the Neighborhoods

In 1788, Faubourg St. Mary—now the Central Business District—was established, followed by Faubourg Marigny downriver from the French Quarter in 1806 and Faubourg Tremé north of the Quarter in 1810 (*faubourg* is French for *suburb*). Marigny extends downriver to Press Street, commemorating a long-gone cotton press on the riverfront. While some houses in the neighborhood date back to the 1810s, today Marigny's Frenchman Street features thriving restaurants and music clubs. Early on, nearby Tremé had a sizable

population of free people of color and is regarded as the United States' earliest distinctly African American neighborhood.

## Uptown

The Crescent City's main growth area throughout most of the nineteenth century was upriver from Canal Street. Called Uptown (as opposed to Downtown, which is downriver from Canal Street), it's a sprawling area that was once composed of plantations along the river, which were subdivided by owners to accommodate the city's rapid growth in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Historically, Uptown near the river was a modest, working-class area. The most affluent areas were between Magazine Street and just beyond St. Charles Avenue; the less-affluent area was the low-lying area once called "Back O' Town" that was home to many German and Irish immigrants.

Now divided into smaller neighborhoods, Uptown is less flood-prone than Downtown, with land above sea level to safely accommodate housing. Home to some of the loveliest residential architecture in the city, Uptown houses are set back in large gardens.

The term *garden district* once referred to the tree-lined Uptown streets; today the Garden District is an area within Uptown between Magazine Street and St. Charles, Jackson, and Louisiana avenues. Here, houses range from 1830s raised cottages to Greek revival and Queen Anne mansions. The earliest neighborhood—although not named until the early 1960s—is the Lower Garden District, just upriver from the business district. Subdivided between 1807 and 1810, its streets were named for classical deities and muses.

St. Charles Avenue, with its miles of live oaks, mansions, houses of worship, schools, and universities, has been the site of the St. Charles Streetcar line since 1835. Originally more of a railroad, the line connected the Uptown neighborhood Carrollton to Canal Street, helping to tie Uptown neighborhoods together.

Magazine Street, which parallels St. Charles for a few blocks toward the river, was once said to separate working class neighborhoods near the river from wealthier ones near St. Charles Avenue. Nineteenth-century Magazine Street had several public markets and business areas. Today, it's Uptown's chief shopping street, where numerous Victorian houses have been converted to upscale shops.

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New Orleans's rich history is on display at many turns. This August, tour one—or more—of the scenic neighborhoods to immerse yourself in the diversity and culture that make New Orleans a city like no other. ■





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1. Photoprint between 1900 and 1908 of St. Peter Street in New Orleans's French Quarter. Published by F.F. Hansell & Brother, Limited. *Courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection.*



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2. St. Charles Avenue from 6000 block. Photoprint by Charles L. Franck Photographers, circa 1924. *Courtesy of the Charles L. Franck Studio Collection at the Historic New Orleans Collection.*



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3. Moss Street at Bayou St. John. Photoprint by John Tibule Mendes, circa. 1921. Gift of Waldemar S. Nelson. *Courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection.*

4. St. Augustine Church, 1210 Governor Nicholls Street, Tremé. Photoprint by George François Mugnier after original, circa 1885. *Courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection.*

5. Desire Streetcar on Bourbon Street, 1940s. *Courtesy of the Charles L. Franck Studio Collection at The Historic New Orleans Collection.*

6. Algiers Ferry Boat. Photoprint by Charles L. Franck Photographers, 1949. *Courtesy of the Charles L. Franck Studio Collection at The Historic New Orleans Collection.*

7. Up Magazine at Valance [sic.] Street. Photoprint by Charles L. Franck Photographers, September 30, 1955. *Courtesy of the Charles L. Franck Studio Collection at The Historic New Orleans Collection.*



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