

Madame John's Legacy

632 Dumaine Street, New Orleans
A Louisiana State Museum Site

Architectural Guide for Teachers

Instructions

This Teacher Guide to Madame John's Legacy has been prepared by the Louisiana State Museum's Education Department in collaboration with the Preservation Resource Center. Please review this material before visiting Madame John's Legacy as it includes both an introduction to the site and a tour outline.

The tour is divided into 4 sections:

1. **Front Façade**
2. **First Floor**
3. **Second Floor**
4. **Courtyard, Kitchen Building & Service Wing**

Each section includes a description of that area, its architectural features and sample questions for students. Photographs should help you recognize certain features which you can ask your students to identify. The Guide also includes suggested follow-up **Activities** and **Architectural Terms**.

Introduction

Madame John's Legacy is a rare surviving example of French colonial architecture in New Orleans. It was built following the great fire of 1788 during the Spanish colonial period and closely resembles an earlier house on the site. The name Madame John's Legacy comes from a short story by the famous nineteenth century author George Washington Cable. In "Tite Poulette," the house was owned and lost by Madame John, a free woman of color.

The architectural complex at Madame John's Legacy consists of three structures: the main house, its original Kitchen Building and a later Service Wing. The buildings are separated by a courtyard with the main house fronting Dumaine Street. In the eighteenth century the property extended to the left and right of the house and included several small buildings. This provided more open space around the house than we see today. The Service Wing and the dormer windows of the main house were added in the nineteenth century.

History of the House

The earliest building on this site was constructed around 1728 by Jean Pascal, a ship captain from Provence, France. After his death in 1729, his widow Elizabeth married her neighbor, Francois Marin. Together, they built a house similar to Madame John's Legacy which operated as an inn for many years.

In 1783 the property was acquired by Manuel DeLanzos, a Spanish military officer who lived here with his wife, Gertrudis Guerrero of Panama, their six daughters and four slaves. In 1788, the house was substantially destroyed by the great fire which swept the city. DeLanzos hired American contractor Robert Jones to reconstruct the building, probably incorporating surviving walls while salvaging the original iron hardware and nails. Thus, the

ca. 1790 house displays the style of an early French colonial structure. The Kitchen Building was also constructed at this time.

During the nineteenth century, several prominent individuals owned Madame John's Legacy including William C.C. Claiborne, son of the first American governor of Louisiana. In the late nineteenth century, however, the French Quarter entered a period of decline and Madame John's Legacy eventually became an apartment house. Its historic significance was not widely appreciated until the 1930s. In 1947 owner Mrs. A.I. Lemann donated the site to the Louisiana State Museum. Now renovated, the building offers a ground floor exhibit on the history of the building and displays the work of self-taught artists on the second floor.

TOUR OUTLINE

I. **Front Façade** - view from across the street

The main house is a one and a half story structure with a raised basement, built on the banquette (sidewalk). The hipped, double-pitched roof has two dormer windows and shelters the wide, second level gallery with its wooden balustrade and slender cypress colonnettes. The walls of the first level are made of brick and covered with stucco. (Brick produced from local soil was soft and porous. It was usually protected from the rain with a layer of stucco.) The second story was constructed of brick-between-posts (briquette-entre-poteaux) and covered with wide clapboards.

Window and door surrounds are simple wood casings with segmental arches. Transoms rest above the French doors. All openings are protected by vertical-board shutters with strap hinges. Notice that the openings are not symmetrical. The exterior surfaces and trim have been painted the original moss green color.

Can your students find or name the following architectural features?



- ② Hipped roof
- ② Wide gallery
- ② Wood balustrade and colonnettes
- ② Exterior stairs
- ② Vertical board shutters with strap hinges
- ② Arched dormer windows
- ② Casement windows and French doors
- ② Wood siding on second floor
- ② Stucco on raised basement



Multi-light French door with segmental arched transom



Vertical-board shutter with strap hinge



Gallery with colonnettes and balustrade

Questions:

1. ***How does the architecture you see reflect adaptation to the environment?*** (The hipped, double-pitched roof protects the house from the rain and direct sun, an essential feature during our hot, humid summers. Not only does the wide gallery offer outdoor shelter during hot and wet weather but windows and doors could also be left open, allowing a breeze to enter the house.)
2. ***When Madame John's was built it was surrounded by more space. Which architectural feature suggests this?*** (The wide, hipped roof implies that the house was originally surrounded by more space. In fact, the property once extended all the way to Royal Street (right) and closer to Chartres (left). The grounds included several small buildings and probably gardens. Look for evidence on colonial maps in the basement exhibit.)

II. First Floor (see exhibit on the history of the building and the site)

The ground floor is a solid masonry basement, built of brick and covered with stucco or plaster on the exterior street surface. It served as a storage area and workspace as well as a foundation for the living area above. The basement consists of three rooms in addition to two *cabinets* on either side of the *loggia* (covered gallery) in the rear. Stairs are located under the front gallery and in the rear *loggia*.

Structural elements such as the cypress joists of the floor above and the heavy, arched brick supports of the upper fireplaces are seen in the basement. Brick walls built close to the ground would have helped keep this level cool and damp.

This floor houses an exhibit on the history of Madame John's Legacy. It includes information on its owners and the enslaved population as well as maps of the site and artifacts obtained during archaeological excavations.

Can your students find or name the following architectural features?

- ② Brick supports for upper floor fireplaces
- ② Brick construction of basement walls



Brick support for second story fireplaces



Brick foundation walls in basement

Questions:

1. ***Why did early settlers raise the living area of the house up one story? Do you think the ground level would have provided a comfortable living space?*** (Raised basements protected the living spaces from dampness and flooding.)
2. ***How was this area used? What goods do you think were stored here?*** (See the basement exhibit on archaeological finds for some hints.)

III. Second Floor (exhibit of works of self-taught artists)

Living quarters were situated on the raised second floor. This floor consists of six rooms and two small *cabinets* on either side of the rear gallery. Like most French colonial structures, Madame John's Legacy does not have a hallway so rooms open directly on to each other. The galleries serve several functions. They offer protected outdoor space, covered passageways between rooms, and access to the staircases.

Both floors and ceilings are made of wide cypress boards with the floors left unfinished. Wall surfaces have been plastered and painted in the soft earth colors available in whitewashes of the late eighteenth century. Decorative elements consist of simple paneled doors and large box fireplaces in each room. Wrought iron hardware and "mustache" (s-shaped) hinges provide elegant decorative elements to the doors and windows. The mantelpieces are examples of neoclassical design popular in New Orleans in the early nineteenth century.

Casement windows and French doors allowed for cross ventilation while high ceilings enabled hot air to rise (heavier, cooler air will settle). Although the attic was unfinished, the dormer windows (added in the nineteenth century) provided ventilation, allowing hot air to escape from the house.

The high roof is supported by a colonial-style structure of pegged beams and trusses. The walls were built of brick-between-posts (*brique-entre-poteaux*) and protected from the weather by wide clapboards. Be sure to locate the section of the brick-between-post construction that has been left exposed in the rear right *cabinet*.

Can your students find or name the following architectural features?

- ② Multi-light French doors and casement windows
- ② Brick-between-post construction
- ② Box (wrap-around) mantles with large, wood burning fireplaces
- ② Paneled doors
- ② Mustache hinges



Box mantle



Paneled doors



Mustache hinge

Questions:

1. **Why did colonists build wide, deep galleries?** (In hot or rainy weather and in evening light, the raised sheltered gallery would have provided a cooling breeze and offered more light than in the house. It probably served as both a place of leisure and work.) **Can you name some activities that might have taken place on the gallery?**
2. This floor consists of six large rooms and two small *cabinets* on either side of the rear gallery. **How do you think the different rooms were used in the eighteenth century?** (*Cabinets* were often used for storage or as a stairwell to the attic.) **Can you identify other house types here in New Orleans that do not have hallways?**
3. Compare this living space to your own. **What amenities and features are missing from the house which we rely on today?** (Electricity, gas, indoor plumbing which make possible air-conditioning, artificial light, bathrooms with toilets, showers and sinks, stoves, televisions, etc.)
4. Is there anything you would especially like about living in this house?

IV. Courtyard, Kitchen Building & Service Wing (buildings are closed to the public)
Today, the L-shaped courtyard includes the Kitchen Building and Service Wing. Both buildings have steeply pitched roofs and narrow galleries. The two-story Kitchen Building, located in the rear left corner, was probably constructed at the same time as the main house. It has a deep fireplace used for cooking and quarters for the cook located above.

The Service Wing is located directly opposite the main house. It was built in 1827 to serve multiple functions. The ground floor housed a new kitchen and a coach-house. The stable for two horses may have been an attached shed in the rear. An arched alcove leads to the second floor, divided into three apartments with one fireplace.

The narrow courtyard reflects the increasing urban density of the Spanish colonial period. It probably served as both a garden and work area. (In the earlier French colonial period, urban residences were often surrounded by formal flower gardens and orchards, as space allowed.) The DeLanzos family may have used the courtyard as an outdoor room, a Spanish adaptation to the heat. Activities such as preparing food, obtaining water, sewing, washing and drying clothes would have taken place here. A cistern (container that collected rainwater from roof gutters), a well and privies (outhouse) would have been located here. Household waste was often deposited into privies or the street.

Can your students find or name the following architectural feature?

- ② Detached Kitchen Building
- ② Arched openings in the Service Wing
- ② *Loggia* with two cabinets in rear of main house



18th Century
Kitchen Building



19th Century
Service Wing



Rear façade of MJL
(cabinets to left)

Questions:

1. ***Why was the kitchen building placed far away from the main house?*** (The kitchen was a dangerous and uncomfortable place due to the heat produced by cooking and the risk of fire associated with it.)
2. ***Can you guess some of the activities that took place in the courtyard?*** (Food preparation, washing and drying clothes, sewing and other activities took place here. A cistern, well and privies were also located in the courtyard).
3. ***How can you tell that the outbuildings were intended to be used by enslaved workers?*** Compare them to the main building in terms of spaciousness, design, comfort and access to the street. ***How do you imagine the interior spaces look?***
4. ***After viewing the entire property, do you think Madame John's Legacy is similar to a Creole cottage? Explain.*** (Madame John's Legacy and many Creole cottages share certain features such as a pitched roof with a protective overhang, shutters, no hallway, and a *loggia* encased between two *cabinets* in the rear. The courtyard of a Creole Cottage would have included a kitchen building and slaves' quarters.)

Suggested Student Activities

1. Drawing exercise (materials: pencils and blank paper)
 - ② During your tour, hand out pencils and paper to each student. Instruct students to draw one section of the building, such as the front façade, or individual elements like the “mustache” hinge.
 - ② After returning to the classroom, ask your students to label the architectural elements in their drawings using the attached Architectural Terms. The finished drawings can be displayed at school or in the classroom.
2. Research life in New Orleans during the Spanish colonial period
 - ② It is interesting to note that Madame John’s Legacy was built in the Spanish colonial period by an American contractor (Robert Jones) for a Spanish owner in a French colonial style. The Spanish military officer, Manuel DeLanzos, lived here with his wife, Gertrudis Guerrero of Panama, their six daughters and four slaves of African descent. Around this time, 1789, Louisiana was predominately French in culture and language. The population of New Orleans in 1788 was recorded as 5,388 people - 50% were whites, 35% enslaved blacks and 15% free people of color.
 - ② Madame John’s Legacy was built following the great fire of 1788, using salvaged materials from the earlier building. Have your students research life in New Orleans around the time of the fire. Ask them to imagine they are one member of the diverse DeLanzos household, slave or free. Instruct your students to write a letter to a friend or relative in another country, describing that day in 1788 when the city burned. Where were they when the alarm was made? What activities were they engaged in? How did they feel? Where did they go for safety? Students should describe the city, its people and buildings, so that their readers can envision New Orleans in this period.
 - ② Or, ask them to write a letter to a friend or relative describing their daily life in the household. As the cook, what are your responsibilities? Where do you go to obtain food? What dishes do you prepare and how? As the mistress of the household, what activities must you oversee each day? Do the children work or play during the day? Do they go to church?
 - ② Ask students to share their letters with the class as an oral presentation.

Architectural Terms

Balustrade: A railing (such as a porch railing) made up of rails, balusters and posts.

Brique-entre-poteaux (brick-between-posts): A construction method for walls using brick as infill between heavy timber posts.

Cabinet: A small room situated in the rear outer corner of certain house types, primarily French colonial, Creole cottages.

Casement window: A window that opens on hinges like a door.

Colonnets: Slender, turned wooden columns.

Dormer: A projection from a wall or roof structure.

Façade: The front wall of a building.

French doors: A pair of hinged doors, generally with glass lights.

Gallery: An exterior space under the main roof of a house.
Garconniere: A building near a main house for the young men of the household.
Hipped roof: A roof with four uniformly sloped sides.
Light: A glass pane in a window or door.
Loggia: A roofed open gallery recessed into a structure, usually at the rear.
Segmental-arch head: The uppermost part of a door or window constructed in the shape of a segment of a circle.
Strap hinge: Hinges, used primarily on shutters and gates that are attached to the face instead of the side. Used primarily in the colonial and postcolonial periods.
Stucco: Exterior plaster.
Transom: A glazed opening over a door or window.
Shutter: A hinged movable cover, usually of wood, for a window or door.
Wrought iron: Iron worked into shape by manual effort.
Taken from New Orleans Houses: A House-Watcher's Guide by Lloyd Vogt, Pelican Publishing Company, Gretna, 1997

Other Sites of Interest Nearby

825 Chartres: 3 ½ story *porte-cochere* brick townhouse with dormer windows, French doors, wrought iron gallery and balconies.
834 Chartres: 3 ½ story Creole townhouse with arched openings and fanlight transoms on the ground floor, vertical board shutters and a side passageway to the courtyard. Upper floors include wrought iron balconies and French doors.
615-629 Dumaine: Row of Creole cottages with pitched roofs and side gables. Built low to the ground and close to the banquette, most display a stucco exterior, vertical-board shutters, French doors and the roof overhang called an *abat-vent*.
622 Dumaine: 2 ½ story Greek Revival brick townhouse with Greek Key side entrance. Details include the wrought iron balcony, shutters, sash windows and a frieze band with dentils (surrounding the 3rd floor windows).