

# LIVING WITH HISTORY IN NEW ORLEANS' NEIGHBORHOODS

## Lower Garden District



PHOTO: MARY FITZPATRICK

PRESERVATION RESOURCE CENTER OF NEW ORLEANS  
INVITES YOU TO EXPLORE THE LOCAL SIDE  
OF LIFE IN THE LOWER GARDEN DISTRICT,  
A CLASSICAL NEIGHBORHOOD REBORN  
IN THE 1970S AND STILL GROWING.



Stroll under the oaks of Coliseum Square or any of the smaller parks in the Lower Garden District and you're likely to find locals playing with their dogs or reading on the grass. Annual neighborhood festivities include a Christmas party for the police and fire fighters, Easter egg hunts, a Halloween party and a Spring House Tour and Festival. Walk down lower Magazine Street, the neighborhood's commercial center, and feel the energy as antique shops give way to contemporary design studios, offbeat clothing stores, neighborhood art galleries, restaurants, grocery stores, and even an old-world barber shop operated by Irish barber Aidan Gill, who offers Guinness and whiskey with his hot towel shaves. Those who live on the second or third floors of Magazine Street's commercial buildings can see the skyline of the Central Business District and the lights of the Mississippi River Bridge just a few blocks away.

Laid out in 1806-07 by Barthelemy Lafon as an open, semi-urban system of interrelated parks with basins, fountains and canals, the Lower Garden District was "one of the earliest expressions of the





Greek Revival to appear in New Orleans,” according to noted architect, the late Samuel Wilson, Jr. The streets still bear the names of the nine muses of Greek mythology, and many of the mid-19th-century Greek Revival and Italianate homes built in this classical setting remain. During the Depression, many of the mansions turned into boarding houses and apartments. The neighborhood declined further as residents moved to the suburbs after WWII to take advantage of lower government insured mortgage interest rates that were not available to most inner city homebuyers. The construction of the Mississippi River Bridge in 1956 fostered still more decline, as parkland became bridge ramps and commuter traffic clogged the streets.

In 1970 young “urban pioneers” moved into the neighborhood, attracted by potentially fine homes in a park setting. When the State of Louisiana announced plans for a second bridge between Race and Felicite streets, these pioneers fought the proposal, placed the neighborhood on the National Register of Historic Places, and defeated the second span. Thanks to their untiring efforts, the Camp Street bridge ramp was finally removed in 1994.

Newcomers continue to work to preserve this rare example of an intact Greek Revival neighborhood. The 2000 Census showed that the Lower Garden District grew in population between 1990 and 2000. Many of the new arrivals were young first time homeowners, drawn by affordable houses and the proximity to downtown.

# WALKING TOURS

**We encourage you to use good judgment and common sense in taking these tours.**

## TOUR A

### Magazine Street (drive/bike/bus)

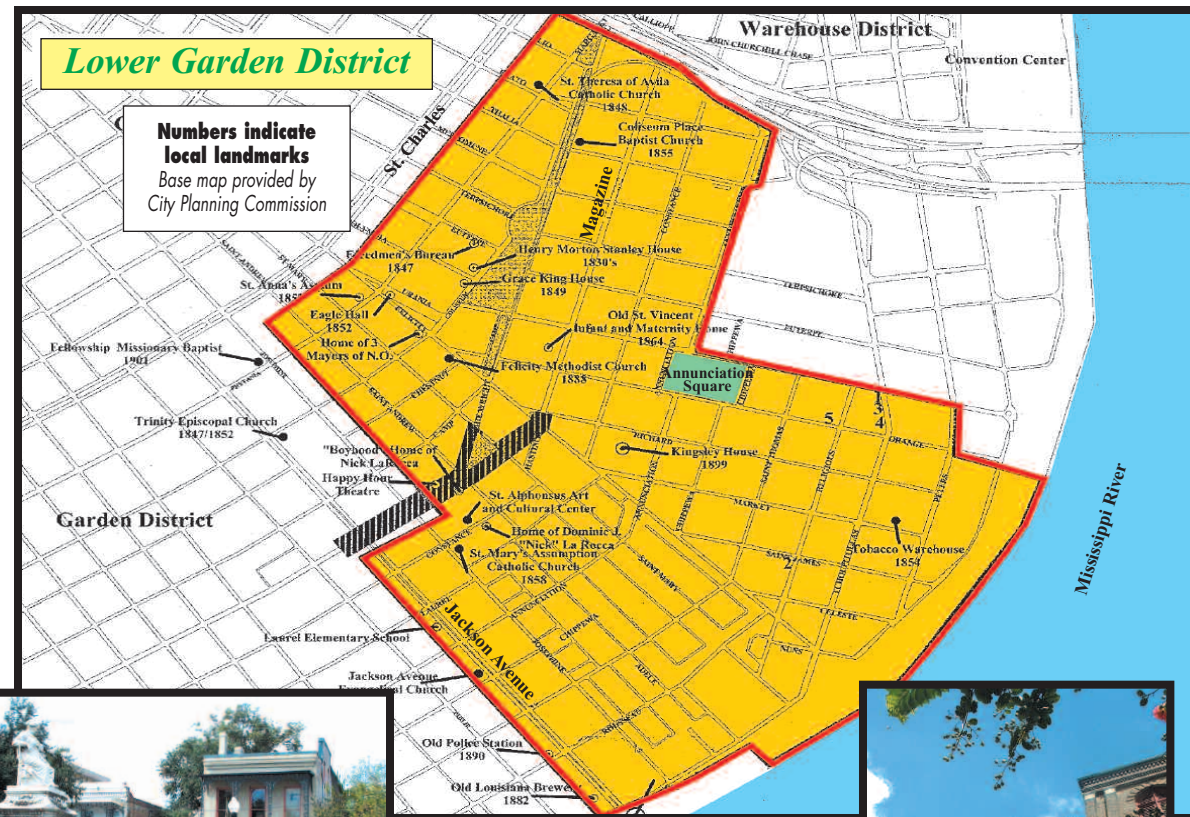
Riding the Magazine St. bus (#11) from Poydras St. to Felicite St. is an excellent way to understand the relationship between the Lower Garden District and the slightly older Central Business District. In the 1200-1400 blocks, you'll pass through an area of Greek Revival buildings with second story galleries typical of the 1850s and 1860s. The massive brick St. Vincent's Orphan Asylum (1501 Magazine St.), built in 1864, is a reminder that scores of children in the mid-19th century were orphaned, first by diseases like yellow fever and then by the Civil War. Two blocks further on, at Felicite St., you're at the start of a shopping district that national travel writers have rated as one of America's “hippest.” Veer right along Magazine, where you'll find several galleries, Aidan Gill's vintage tonorial emporium, home design stores, an award-winning jewelry designer, a florist, several antique stores, a used furniture market and a bodega. Today's living pattern here, with stores on the first floor of buildings and residences on the second and third floors, reflects the classic 19th-century arrangement.



## TOUR B

### Coliseum Square and promenade from Margaret's Place to Felicite St. and back (walk/bike/drive)

Begin your tour at Margaret's Place, a triangular park on Coliseum St. in the shadow of the expressway. The small park honors the generosity of immigrant Margaret Haughey (1813-1888) to the poor Irish who lived in this area. Walk away from the expressway up Camp St. where the promenade was restored to its 1806 design in the mid-1990s, erasing all signs of the unsightly ramp leading to the Mississippi River Bridge. You may recognize the Coliseum Theater at the corner of Erato St. from the 1994 film *Interview with a Vampire*. The streets named for Greek muses were part of the original classically oriented scheme.



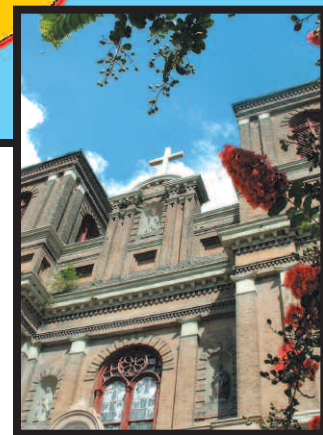
Bear right along Coliseum Square and follow Coliseum St., which splits from Camp Street. Follow the perimeter of the park, noting the Greek Revival mansions. The circa 1850 residence at 1717 Coliseum became an important player in the area's reclamation in the 1970s when it was purchased by vigilant preservation activists who raised five children here and have welcomed other young families to the neighborhood ever since. Walk one block past the Race St. end of the square to discover stone-paved Felicite St., the downriver boundary of New Orleans and Orleans Parish until 1852. The charming house at 1309 Felicite was built by architect James Freret for his family in 1880, back-to-back with the house that architect Henry Howard built for Freret's father-in-law, John T. Moore, at 1228 Race St. in 1867. Return via Camp Street.

## TOUR C

### Redemptorist complex (walk, bike)

The Redemptorist Fathers came to New Orleans in 1842 to minister to the poor German and Irish immigrants who were flooding into New Orleans. The Albert Diettel-designed buildings in the 2000-2001 block of Constance St. are a monument to the polyglot working-class community that lived here for nearly a century. St. Alphonsus Church, with its elaborate interior, served the Irish population, and it is now a community center. Across

the way, German masons used their craft to literally sculpt the surfaces of St. Mary's Assumption (1852), which housed the German congregation. The Redemptorist complex at 2030 Constance houses the Seelos Center, dedicated to Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos, a candidate for sainthood who died of yellow fever in 1867 while ministering to the poor here. Notre Dame de Bon Secours, serving French Catholics, formerly stood nearby at the corner of Jackson Ave. and Constance St., and the orthodox Jewish Shaaraei Fifulah congregation occupied the nearby 1857 building at 709 Jackson Avenue, making this the second oldest synagogue in the city. Hope House, 916 St. Andrew St., and Kingsley House, the oldest settlement house in the South (established 1896), 1600 Constance St., carry on the tradition of caring. (This area is currently under construction, so use extreme caution.)





**Aidan Gill For Men**

- 1806-07 **Barthelemy Lafon lays out plan to extend the city upriver**
- 1809 **Nuns Faubourg developed**
- 1830s **Wealthy citizens build homes in faubourg**
- 1833 **New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad chartered; begins operating in 1835**
- 1840s **German and Irish immigrants change neighborhood character**
- 1842 **Redemptorist Fathers arrive to minister to poor**
- 1850-1870 **Redemptorist complex constructed**
- 1858 **St. Mary's Assumption Church built for German Catholics**
- 1939 & 1947 **St. Thomas Housing Project constructed**
- 1959 **Mississippi River Bridge constructed with access through district**
- 1971 ***New Orleans Architecture: Vol. 1, The Lower Garden District* raises interest in area**
- 1972 **Coliseum Square Association established**
- 1974 **Lower Garden District National Register Historic District established; Coliseum Square restored; new bridge proposal defeated; St. Mary's Assumption Church named a National Historic Landmark**
- 1976 **Historic District Landmarks Commission given jurisdiction over neighborhood**
- 1978 **Magazine St. bridge ramp diverts traffic from district; U.S. Coast Guard confirms "no second bridge" and concurs with others that Camp and Dryades St. ramps should ultimately be removed**
- 1988 **PRC's Operation Comeback begins revitalization campaign**
- 1997 **Camp St. bridge ramp removed; City Council adopts resident supported Lower Garden District Strategic Renaissance Plan**
- 2000 - 2001 **Margaret's Place and areas occupied by Camp St. bridge ramp re-landscaped according to Lafon's original plan**
- 2001 **St. Thomas Housing Project demolished for HOPE VI redevelopment**
- 2002 **Wallace-Readers Digest Fund funds restoration of Annunciation Square**

## Annual Neighborhood Events

- January: Coliseum Square Association annual meeting
- January or February: Mardi Gras Breakfast for police
- March: St. Patrick's Day Parade on Magazine St.
- March or April: Spring House Tour
- August: Night Out Against Crime
- December: Neighborhood Holiday Party for fire and police personnel

## Neighborhood Organizations

- Coliseum Square Association
- Friends of St. Alphonsus
- St. Charles Ave. Merchants Association

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# AIDAN

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# GILL

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