Experience

New Orleans’ Historic Neighborhoods

Irish Channel, Garden District & Central City

Preservation Resource Center Architectural Guide
What’s going down around here?

SPRING

St. Patrick’s Day parade on Magazine Street
Irish Channel Neighborhood Association Irish Festival
St. Patrick’s Day Block Party at Parasol’s Garden District Association Garden Tours
Super Sunday in Central City

WINTER

Central City Festival on O. C. Haley Blvd
Preservation Resource Center Holiday Home Tour
Holiday on the Boulevard (O. C. Haley)
Mardi Gras parades along St. Charles Ave
Zulu parade begins on Jackson Avenue on Mardi Gras Day

GO DEEPER

For details on these and other great New Orleans events year-round, see NewOrleansOnline.com/calendar
WE ASKED LOCALS

What is your favorite spot in the city?

HOWARD CONYERS
ENGINEER

Growing up in the country back in South Carolina, the only thing I heard was the neighbor’s chickens...and it was very irritating. Today, the sweetest sound I hear in the air once Carnival approaches is the practicing of the Mardi Gras Indian Tribes on Dryades Street in Central City.

ELENA RICCI
PHOTOGRAPHER

I was elated when I walked into my first NOLA apartment (we moved in sight unseen) in the Irish Channel. From the soaring ceilings to the colorful paint job to the antique fixtures, a New Orleans home is unlike any other.

KATHERINE & TONY GELDERMAN
DEVELOPERS

Strolling on Magazine Street on a beautiful day...stopping along the way for a meal and just seeing where the day takes us. We inevitably find a new shop. It’s best with hours in front of us.

JOHN GOODMAN
FILM AND TV ACTOR

One of our favorite things in New Orleans is strolling our neighborhood, the Garden District, at dusk. The air bears wonderful scents and, whether it’s a trick of the lighting at that time of day or voodoo, we always notice something we’ve never seen before, no matter how many times we’ve been down the same path.

ELLIS JOUBERT
MASTER SILVERSMITH

Still Perkin’ in the Garden District is unique in a city of many coffee shops. Familiar faces mingle with the ordinary and the famous.

ANN HESLIN
HOUSE RENOVATOR

The Carnival parade route — from people getting their ice chests and ladders situated to the police trucks leading the parade and then, finally, the floats turning the corner. It’s an exhilarating feeling.

Quotes from New Orleans: Days and Nights in the Dreamy City by Mary Fitzpatrick.
Cover Photo— Liz Jurey
The Irish Channel historically has been, and is still today, a diverse neighborhood filled with a charming array of residences that boast the beauty and bright colors of New Orleans architecture. Established as the riverfront of the American city of Lafayette in the 1830s, the Irish Channel Historic District blossomed into a busy area of wharves surrounded by lumberyards and cotton presses. Humbler buildings pushed out grand early residences as the waterfront became increasingly busy, although you can still find a mansion or two among the charming rows of smaller frame homes. Construction of the New Basin Canal brought many immigrants to the region, a population of whom helped settle this neighborhood in the 1830s, and the great Irish Potato Famine of the 1840s brought even more. Residents were mostly working-class Irish, Germans, Italians, Americans and Free People of Color during the mid-19th century.

The neighborhood has significant ties to the development of jazz in the city. According to the National Register’s listing of the Irish Channel as a Historic District in 1976, “The area gains its significance in music from the fact that many jazz musicians of German, French, Irish and Italian descent were born and reared here. All the members of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, the first jazz band to make a phonographic record and the first to go to Europe, were from the Irish Channel. They were…jazz immortals who helped spread jazz throughout the world.”

The Irish Channel has been the center of the city’s St. Patrick’s Day celebration since 1809. Marchers parade between floats while riders toss cabbages, carrots, potatoes and onions into the crowd — all the ingredients revelers need to make a stew. After the parade, people linger all day in the neighborhood’s bars, which have always been a part of life here, in good times and bad.

The Irish Channel was hit hard after World War II when FHA-insured mortgages were basically restricted to the new suburbs. Vast urban sections of American cities were quietly redlined, destined to decay. “Twenty thousand men went to war from the Irish Channel, but when the war ended, they couldn’t get the financing to move back in,” a property assessor once told preservation activist Camille Strachan. In the 1970s, young do-it-yourself renovators discovered the neighborhood, but the oil crash of the ’80s ended that short boom. Happily, neighborhood revitalization picked back up again in the 1990s, thanks to determined residents and organizations like the Preservation Resource Center, whose Operation Comeback and Rebuilding Together New Orleans departments rehabilitated neglected homes, helped find homebuyers for blighted structures and assisted low-income and elderly homeowners with much-needed home repairs in the area. Today the Irish Channel is hot — it’s an incredibly desirable place to live and a fun place to relax with numerous restaurants and retail along Magazine Street.

The Classic Revival mansions and charming cottages of the Garden District are famous, known and recognizable around the world. What visitors rarely see, though, is the close-knit neighborhood that keeps this historic district alive and thriving. Neighbors here know and look after one another. They see familiar faces as they stroll under the live oaks near Lafayette Cemetery No. 1 in the early morning, or when they’re walking along Prytania Street at dusk. The same faces pop up daily in the Garden District’s coffee shops, and at the Rink, a circa 1884 skating rink that was converted a century later into a shopping arcade. Locals and visitors can dine at world-
famous Commander’s Palace, or a number of diverse eateries along Magazine Street.

Settled by American businessmen, most of them “Yankees” eager to escape the Creole-dominated politics of New Orleans, the Garden District was laid out in 1832 and incorporated as the City of Lafayette in 1834. Cotton brokers, agents and financiers built fortunes in the boom years leading up the Civil War, then established their families in elegant homes on the new city’s spacious lots. By the time New Orleans annexed the area as its fourth district in 1852, travel writers had already dubbed it the “Garden District” for its spacious, showy gardens. Many of the homes were designed by renowned architects such as Henry Howard and James Freret.

In 1939, residents formed the Garden District Association, a formidable force for preservation of the residential integrity and quality of life of the neighborhood. The Garden District was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971 and today is a dynamic community grounded in a strong sense of tradition, with block upon block of stunning, and well maintained, historic architecture lining the streets.

The Central City neighborhood has a storied history, much of which is honored on the streets. Part of the Central City National Register Historic District (designated in 1982) was originally included in the fashionable 1806 development by Barthelemy Lafon now known as the Lower Garden District. The swampy lands further from the river were first occupied by laborers who came to build the nearby New Basin Canal in the 1830s. Irish and German immigrants were joined by Italians, African Americans and Eastern European Jews as the 19th century progressed. By the time jazz great Buddy Bolden lived here at the turn of the century, the neighborhood was a mix of shopkeepers, porters and laborers, almost all of whom lived in shotgun cottages built expressly as rental housing, with palatial homes and townhomes nearby. Dryades Street, renamed Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard in the 1980s after the civil rights leader of that name, was a thriving shopping area with more than 200 businesses at its peak that catered to the area’s ethnic populations and was anchored by the Dryades Market, one of over 50 city-operated, public fresh food markets.

Central City harbors landmarks for nearly every ethnic group that made up 19th century New Orleans. St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, designed for an Irish congregation by German architect Albert Diettel in 1869, stands down the street from a shopping district that was the site of a key civil rights protest by African Americans in 1960s. Carondelet Street boasts several historic orthodox synagogues, some of which do service now as Christian churches. First African Baptist Church (1903) at 2216 Third St. became legendary after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke here in 1957.

In Central City, grand mansions sit next to empty lots; restored shotguns line streets that also hold mid-20th-century apartment complexes; new, modern infill housing and modern restaurants bring 21st century style to one of New Orleans’ most historic neighborhoods. Some areas of Central City are undergoing a renaissance while others await further investment, but its history is powerful — as is its future.
HISTORIC SITES OF INTEREST

1. FORMER HOME OF NICK LAROCCA
   2016 Constance St.
   House of past significance as the former home of the original mandolin player.

2. FORMER CITY OF LAFAYETTE COURT HOUSE
   1904 Washington Ave.
   The last example of the Egyptian Revival style in New Orleans.

3. PARASOL
   4533 Constance St.
   A neighborhood favorite for po'boys and celebrating.

4. ROBART-LEE HOUSE
   1501 Fourth St.
   This grand Second Empire home is full of life as part of the art\'s McGhee School.

5. MCCLELLAN-SANCHER HOUSE
   1504 Washington Ave.
   Designed by E.A. Chrest and restored in 2016 as a public museum and office space.

6. JOHN TURFING HOME
   1200 Canal St.
   Originally part of the historic Dryades Market, the building was connected to the other half of the market by a brick arcade.

7. COTTON DAVENPORT HOUSE
   1040 O. C. Haley Blvd.
   Forming the centerpiece of a mixed-use complex.

8. TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND SCHOOL
   1200 Canal St.
   Built in 1851.

9. BRADSHAW JOHNSTON HOUSE
   2730 Prytania St.
   The house is a glimpse into the past, showcasing the area's history.

10. TOBY WESTFLOTT HOUSE
    2620 Prytania St.
    Thought to be the oldest extant building in the Garden District.

11. THE DAVIS HOUSE
    2620 Prytania St.
    Home to The Woman's Guild of the New Orleans Opera Association.

12. THE BINK
    1839
    Originally built as Crescent City Skating Rink, it converted into a movie theater in the 1940s.

13. COMMANDER'S PALACE
    1615 Washington Ave.
    Open since 1898 and the recipient of six James Beard Foundation Awards.

14. LAFAYETTE CEMETERY NO. 1
    1237
    Opened in 1827 as the former home of the seven municipal cemeteries with a variety of styles from over 26 different countries and races of life.

15. CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL
    1892
    Formed by the City of Lafayette at 2200 Rosalie St., a "very unpretentiously built" example of the Egyptian Revival style in the New Orleans area.

16. MAGNOLIA MANSION
    2107 Prytania St.
   Originally built in 1851 as the former home of the Robert Smiley Mansion.

17. ST. JOHN THE BISHOP HOUSE
    1306 O. C. Haley Blvd.
  Conversion into a shopping arcade in the 1980s.

18. IRISH CHANNEL
    FORMER PROTESTANT ORPHANS HOME
    1847
    Designed by H. C. and restored in 2016 as a public museum and office space.

19. IRISH CHANNEL
    MYRTLE BANKS SCHOOL
    1870 O.C. Haley Blvd.
   Forming the center of a mixed-use complex.

20. PEOPLE'S HEALTH NEW ORLEANS JAZZ MARKET
    2003 Carondelet St.
   Originally part of the historic Dryades Market, the building was connected to the other half of the market by a brick arcade.

21. SOUTHERN FOOD AND BEVERAGE MUSEUM
    1005 O.C. Haley Blvd.
   Converted into a museum in the 1980s.

22. ASHE CULTURAL ARTS CENTER
    1720 O.C. Haley Blvd.
   Forming the center of a mixed-use complex.

23. EDWARD "KID" DORVY'S HOME
    5200 Canal St.
   Originally part of the historic Dryades Market, the building was connected to the other half of the market by a brick arcade.

24. LEATHER-BUCK HOUSE
    5201 Canal St.
   Originally part of the historic Dryades Market, the building was connected to the other half of the market by a brick arcade.

25. HOME OF HENRY BYRD (PROFESSOR LONKADOOR)
    5170 Prytania St.
   Originally part of the historic Dryades Market, the building was connected to the other half of the market by a brick arcade.

26. THE GEORGE AND LEAH MCKNENNA MUSEUM OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ART
    5033 Canal St.
   Originally part of the historic Dryades Market, the building was connected to the other half of the market by a brick arcade.

27. DRYADES Y.M.C.A.
    5021 Third Canal Blvd.
   Originally converted into a movie theater in the 1940s.

28. BUDDY GOLSON HOME
    6200 Music St.
   Originally part of the historic Dryades Market, the building was connected to the other half of the market by a brick arcade.

29. LAFAYETTE CEMETERY NO. 3
    5092 Washington Ave.
   Originally part of the historic Dryades Market, the building was connected to the other half of the market by a brick arcade.

30. ST. JOSEPH CEMETERY
    1517 O.C. Haley Blvd.
   Originally part of the historic Dryades Market, the building was connected to the other half of the market by a brick arcade.
EXPLORE

HISTORIC DISTRICTS—
1 Vieux Carré and Algiers Point
2 New Marigny, Gentilly Terrace and Edgwood Park
3 Upper & Lower Central Business District and Lower Garden District
4 Irish Channel, Garden District and Central City
5 Faubourg Marigny, Bywater and Holy Cross
6 Mid-City, Parkview, Esplanade Ridge and South Lakeview
7 Broadmoor, Carrollton and Uptown
8 New Orleans’ National Register Historic Districts

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The mission of the Preservation Resource Center—
To promote the preservation, restoration, and revitalization of New Orleans’ historic architecture and neighborhoods.

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New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation (NOTMC) is a private economic development corporation created under Louisiana State Law to foster jobs and economic growth by developing the tourism industry in New Orleans.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY—
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