

## WHY WAS A LANDSCAPE PLANNING STUDY NEEDED?

Between 1978 and 1998, Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Tammany Parishes experienced flooding caused by excessive rainfall and outdated drainage facilities. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) paid claims totaling over \$814 million during this time. Especially devastating flooding from torrential rainfalls occurred in May of 1995, which caused flooding and the loss of seven lives; over 35,000 homes and thousands of businesses and public facilities – the estimated flood damage totaled about \$1 billion.

In 1995, Congress authorized the Southeast Louisiana (SELA) Project, through enactment of Section 108 of the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act and Section 533 of the Water Resources Development Act. These acts provided for flood control and improvements to rainfall drainage systems in Jefferson, Orleans, and St. Tammany Parishes.

The US Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District (CEMNV) prepared Environment Assessment (EA) documents to identify any impacts to the natural or manmade environment related to the SELA Project. These documents identified construction impacts located within and immediately adjacent to the proposed projects' rights-of-way. Consultation with the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office was initiated by the CEMNV, since they recognized that portions of the Orleans Parish SELA might affect National Register Historic Districts in Orleans Parish. A Programmatic Agreement was signed between the CEMNV, the SHPO, and the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority in April of 2010. The Sewerage and Water Board (S&WB) of New Orleans also signed the agreement, and the CEMNV invited participation by neighborhood groups, local schools, local historic preservation societies, and the New Orleans City Council.

The Programmatic Agreement recognized several landscape features that could contribute to the National Register Historic Districts along Louisiana Avenue and in Orleans Parish – these included the presence of granite curbing, street name (encaustic) tiles, street lighting, and vegetation.

## WHAT ARE THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY?

The study area defined for this report is comprised of Louisiana Avenue's public ROW from South Claiborne Avenue at its north end to Constance Street at its south. Three tasks were defined for the current study area:

1. Inventory these corridors for the presence, type, and condition of historic curbing, street name (encaustic) tiles, street lighting, and vegetation;

2. Determine the age of these four streetscape elements and assess their historic character; and,
3. Document these existing landscape features for future planning purposes.

This investigation was accomplished in mid-2013 through an integrated program of archival research, intensive field investigation, data analysis, and reporting. The National Park Service's *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports* and the Historic American Landscape Survey (HALS) *Guidelines for Historical Reports* were used to provide an effective and consistent process for generating the report and developing this public brochure.

### Historic Curbing

Historic curbing, installed in the early 1900s and chosen for its durability in high traffic areas, contributes to the historic feel of the study area. Two types of stone dominated historic curbing material in New Orleans; slate and granite. The slate was imported to the city, coming from Wales or northern Germany. Granite was one of the most durable and abundant natural materials available in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and it was well-suited for use as curbing for high traffic areas on urban sidewalks. The main source of granite curbs was likely Stone Mountain in Georgia, which in 1911 leased the quarry to a company owned by the Weiblen family in New Orleans.

Historic granite curbing was situated in the Louisiana Avenue study area between South Robertson and Freret Streets, South Saratoga to Dryades Streets, and Camp to Magazine Streets. Historic slate curbing also was encountered along 11 blocks of Louisiana Avenue, extending from South Saratoga Street to Magazine Streets.

### Encaustic Tile

Once, encaustic tiles could be found all over the city announcing the names of the adjacent streets. Today, many of the original tiles are no longer present. The first encaustic tiles to be installed in the city were imported from Europe during the

1880s and are known as Belgian style tiles. These tiles have either blue or white Gothic lettering, with the contrasting color as the background.

The second type of tile observed during the survey is known as American style tiles. The original American style tiles were manufactured by the American Encaustic Tile Company of Ohio and New York, which operated from 1875 through 1935. These have a white background with blue lettering. As they became damaged, reproductions of these tiles were used and can now be found on dozens of New Orleans street corners today; these date to 2002 or later.

Along Louisiana Avenue, historic encaustic tiles were present on 18 street corners between South Liberty Street and St. Charles Avenue and then from Camp to Magazine Streets. Belgian-made encaustic tiles were restricted to 13 corners from South Liberty to St. Charles Avenue, and then from Magazine to Constance Streets. In comparison, American style and later-reproduction American style tiles were present only from Camp to Magazine Streets.

### Lighting

Two types of lighting elements can be found within the study area. The least common is the original decorative Type 1916 Standard, which were constructed by King Luminere and installed between 1916 and 1929. These iconic lighting units were once prevalent throughout the Uptown Historic District. On



Type 1916 Standard Lighting

Louisiana Avenue, a single older style lighting unit from the first half of the twentieth century (1916 to 1929) is represented in the neutral ground between Camp and Magazine Streets. Modern lighting units, primarily cobra units and LEDs, are found in all of the remaining areas; these modern lighting standards do not provide the same historic feeling as the earlier units.



Modern LED Lighting

### Vegetation

A limited mix of vegetation, comprised of 16 species, was identified within the neutral ground and between the sidewalk and curb, with Southern live oak trees forming the most numerous species, followed by crape myrtles. Of the 56 trees in the neutral ground, the majority were crape myrtles followed by Japanese yew, Southern magnolia, and Southern live oak. Based on tree age estimates, almost 82% of the live oaks identified during this inventory appear to have been present within the Louisiana Avenue corridor between the late 1930s to the late 1950s; however, only two live oaks and a single bald cypress from this period were located within the neutral ground. The live oaks trunks and long branches provide a partially shaded canopy over pedestrian pathways. This vegetation is a unifying landscape element whose mature existence resembles their earlier character.



Streetscape – Coliseum Street at Louisiana Avenue (looking north)



## HISTORICAL SETTING

The Louisiana Avenue study area is surrounded and located within four historic districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places: the New Orleans Uptown Historic District, the Central City Historic District, the Garden District, and the Irish Channel Area Architectural District. In addition to this, the NRHP listed Magnolia Street Housing Project and Flint-Goodridge Hospital of Dillard University are located adjacent to the northern portion of the study area, while the St. Charles Line street car crosses Louisiana Avenue.

The Louisiana Avenue study area was originally part of the former Faubourg Plaisance, established in 1807. Plaisance was originally part of a large plantation grant given in 1719 to Jean Baptiste LeMoyne, Sieur de Bienville. This land was later purchased by Joseph Wiltz in 1800. Seven years after purchasing the property, Wiltz hired the native French architect Jean-Hyacinthe Laclotte, to devise a subdivision plan for the land. The Faubourg Plaisance was bisected by the Grand Cours Wiltz, a wide main avenue that would become known as Louisiana Avenue in the mid-nineteenth century.

In 1846, Faubourg Plaisance was incorporated into the Borough of Freeport. Due to its inability to properly enforce its laws, Freeport was short lived, and its successor, Jefferson City, was incorporated in 1850. Faubourg Plaisance was the center of a thriving butchering industry located at the southern terminus of Louisiana Avenue, where a stockyard landing was present on the Mississippi River. Up through the time that it was annexed to New Orleans in 1870, Jefferson City served as a food and building materials supplier, as well as a waste disposal area for New Orleans.

Open green space along the Louisiana Avenue study area was limited during the early 20th century to the neutral ground. Maps for the study area do not indicate the presence of the neutral ground along Louisiana Avenue as of 1896. By 1909, a neutral ground is identified running from South Claiborne Avenue all the way through to Annunciation Street. Currently, the neutral ground terminates south of the study area boundary at Tchoupitoulas Avenue.

Louisiana Avenue now extends northwest-southeast through Orleans Parish approximately 1.75 miles from its southern terminus at Tchoupitoulas Street at the Mississippi River, bracketed by the Irish Channel, the Garden District, Uptown, and Central City neighborhoods and terminates at its intersection with South Claiborne Avenue.

## Infrastructure Improvements / Transportation

In response to the 1878 Yellow Fever epidemic which was fueled by unsanitary conditions throughout the city, the Louisiana State Legislature created the New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board in 1899, and drainage improvements throughout the city soon followed. Between 1898 and the early 1910s/1920s, waterlines and drainage systems were constructed throughout the study area; by the early 1940s (at least), all of Louisiana Avenue had been paved as well.

Transportation in the Uptown area during its early period was dominated by streetcar service, with the St. Charles Streetcar line established in 1835 by the New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad Company, which began servicing the study area around 1850. The Louisiana Avenue streetcar line ran from 1850 through to 1878; in 1877 the Chicago, St. Louis & New Orleans Railroad Company constructed a freight line down Louisiana Avenue beside the existing passenger line. The Illinois Central proceeded to purchase the passenger line that same year. Once the freight line began operation, the original Louisiana Avenue streetcar line was closed. Over the years, up to 16 streetcar lines have crossed through the Louisiana Avenue study area. The overhead electric utilities and associated infrastructure for all of these streetcar lines would have been running down the center of the neutral ground. These utilities would have been removed from the study area after 1934, after the closure of these remaining streetcar lines.

Post World War II New Orleans saw an increasingly mobile public turning to automobile transportation and relying less on public transportation. Louisiana Avenue is a historic urban thoroughfare defined by paired north-south travel lanes separated by a grassy neutral ground (or median). In the traditional fashion for Uptown New Orleans, a canopy of Southern live oaks lines both sides of this avenue between the sidewalk and curb, enriching the visual qualities of the streetscape and providing much needed shade.

Architecturally, the sections of Louisiana Avenue from South Claiborne Avenue to Constance Street offer a wide representation of historic building types and styles. Generally, these span in time from the mid-to-late nineteenth century to the first quarter of the twentieth century. At present, one- and two-story wood-frame residential architecture remains the predominant expression of building stock along Louisiana Avenue. These domestic examples of historic architecture are complemented by a diverse mix of scholastic, commercial, and religious buildings, many of which are sited at prominent street intersections. The historic architectural streetscape of Louisiana Avenue represents a myriad of historic architectural types and styles that add to the architectural diversity and richness of Uptown New Orleans.

## SUMMARY

This study has determined that the SELA New Orleans Louisiana Avenue public right-of-way, from South Claiborne Avenue to Constance Street shows evidence of disturbance and deterioration by natural and human forces. These forces have affected the area's historic character since the mid-nineteenth century, but elements that still contribute to the historic feeling of its place in the district still exist.

The once bustling neutral ground along Louisiana Avenue now primarily serves as a divider for the four-lane roadway section and it has evolved from utilitarian use to green space. The neutral ground's linear green space is still a unifying element that connects the study areas with South Claiborne, St. Charles, Magazine, and other primary New Orleans streets. The study determined that the sidewalk side landscape has changed comparatively little over the past century. Southern live oak trees, which form the dominant species along Louisiana Avenue, provide a shaded canopy over the adjacent pedestrian pathways. The study area's neutral ground has seen the most change in its historic use and viewshed, primarily due to the removal of streetcar transit services. The sidewalk side vegetation still contributes to the overall historic feel and character of the Louisiana Avenue neighborhood, maintaining the typical New Orleans vernacular landscape.

Historic granite and slate curbing was identified along the Louisiana Avenue study area generally between South Robertson and Magazine Streets, while historic encaustic tile street names were present on 18 street corners between South Liberty Street and St. Charles Avenue and then from Camp to Magazine Streets.

Finally, only a single lighting unit, from the first half of the twentieth century, remains in the neutral ground between Camp and Magazine Streets.

The above vegetation, curbing, tiles and lighting are associated with the historic character of the Louisiana Avenue study area. The neutral ground's linear green space is a unifying element that connects the study area with St. Charles, South Claiborne, Magazine, and other major New Orleans streets.

# Southeast Louisiana (SELA) Louisiana Avenue and Orleans Parish Landscape Planning Study

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