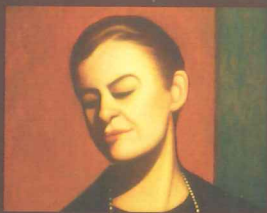




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THE QUARTERLY

THE HISTORIC NEW ORLEANS COLLECTION



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INSIDE

Take a Peek . . .

Inside The Collection's Newest Addition



Room to *Grow*

The Collection Celebrates Its Newest

When guests visit The Historic New Orleans Collection, they see our exhibitions, the Williams residence, our quietly lovely courtyard, the reading room at the Williams Research Center (WRC), or the Boyd Cruise Room. What they don't see might surprise them: 87 staff members in nearly 20 departments—from the cataloguers and registrars who process new acquisitions, to the curators who develop those acquisitions into exhibition material, to the preparators who ready items for public view. All work together behind the scenes to make The Collection a success.

There are a lot of moving parts to an enterprise like ours, and over the past 46 years The Collection has been fortunate enough to grow, necessitating more space for staff, holdings, and exhibitions. We started with the complex of buildings fronted by the Merieult House at 533 Royal Street, which remains home to our primary exhibition space. In 1996 we opened the WRC at 410 Chartres Street, and in June 2007 we expanded that site to include gallery space, a lecture hall, and three floors of archival storage. Now we have a new addition to our architectural family: in June, several departments relocated to a newly renovated three-story townhouse directly adjacent to the WRC.

Known informally as the Perrilliat House, so named for François Marie Perrilliat, who built the structure in 1825, the

property at 400 Chartres Street will function as an expansion of the WRC. Within its brick walls is a bevy of additions for visitors, staff, and the board: new gallery space, named for donor and longtime friend of The Collection Laura Simon Nelson [see accompanying story on p. 6]; new office space for executive, research, collections, and curatorial staff; a stately board room and conference room overlooking Chartres Street; a new photography lab; and carefully restored or recreated architectural details based on the original 1825 structure.

"We have grown so much, and we needed additional office space, because at some point, people were sort of falling all over one another, stuffed into nooks and crannies in historic buildings," says Executive Director Priscilla Lawrence. "This building gave us an opportunity to round out the complex of the Williams Research Center and provide for some extra exhibition space.

"It means a lot, too, because we were able to renovate an extremely important historic building [see accompanying story on p. 5] and fold it into the complex. This is a landmark achievement for The Collection."

Above: The newly renovated Perrilliat House, at the corner of Chartres and Conti Streets, is The Collection's newest facility and functions as part of the Williams Research Center. Cover: A large sunburst transom in the Perrilliat House entresol looks out on the courtyard.



A before-and-after view of the stately Destrehan Board Room, so named for the family that owned the parcel at 400–408 Chartres Street in the early 19th century. The board room is a generous gift of the Azby Fund.

Addition, *the Perrilliat House*

As staff members settled into their new offices over the summer and the long-awaited extra space became a working reality, a collective sigh of relief emerged from the ranks. Before the Perrilliat House renovation, if new acquisitions needed to be photographed, the items had to be carefully transferred from the storage facility at the WRC to the former photo lab at Royal Street. Moving historically significant items several blocks across the French Quarter is fraught with potential pitfalls, so the transfers took place only once a week. It was a choreographed undertaking that minimized risk as much as possible, but it consumed a lot of time and left deadline-driven staff members at the mercy of its strict schedule.

“It would take five people half a day to transfer collections items from Williams to Royal,” recalls Alfred E. Lemmon, director of the WRC.

Now that the photography department has its own office and studio in the Perrilliat House, just two floors below the storage facility, “when we need something for a special request, we don’t have to wait for Friday transfers anymore,” says Keely Merritt, head of photography. “The new system has been way quicker and smoother.”

In all, 18 employees from the Royal Street complex and five from the WRC moved into the new building. Before, The Collection’s curators were split between the Royal and Chartres Street facilities. Now, the department has one central home in the Perrilliat House. And with so many staff moving to



Perrilliat, office space has opened up in other locations. Previously dispersed cataloging staff, for instance, now share a dedicated work space in the WRC. “It’s the first time we’ve had the opportunity to have curators, registrars, cataloguers, and photography in close proximity,” Lemmon says.

For Lawrence, who, along with Executive Assistant Cora Noorda, moved into spacious new offices overlooking Chartres Street, the change has yielded a more peaceful and efficient working environment. Lawrence’s previous office on Royal Street doubled as a conference room from time to time, and it had multiple entrances, which resulted in a steady stream of traffic through the space. “It was like a fishbowl with revolving doors,” she recalls.

Now, Lawrence can enjoy the view of the towering magnolia tree outside the state courthouse across the street. Sometimes a street musician sets up shop outside. Most of all, she and the rest of The Collection’s staff can work knowing that, finally, everyone and everything is in its right place.

—Molly Reid

DIGGING HISTORY

Beneath the Perrilliat House



To Andrea White, trash is treasure—as long as it's 3 feet underground at a historic site.

White is the director of the Greater New Orleans Archaeology Program at the University of New Orleans. She assisted Earth Search Inc., a local archaeology firm, in leading an excavation of the ground underneath The Historic New Orleans Collection's newest facility, the Perrilliat House. Accomplished over two solid weeks of 12-hour workdays, the archaeological dig unearthed an assortment of artifacts—much of it trash from the 18th and 19th centuries—that illuminate how New Orleanians lived in the Spanish and French colonial eras.

The Perrilliat House has endured plenty of cosmetic changes over the years, but the core building has stood at 400–408 Chartres Street since its construction in 1825. “The building sort of put a cap on the ground,” White explains. “It provided a nice, undisturbed—what we call closed—context. Everything under the ground predates 1825. We go all the way back to the beginnings of the colonies.”

The team prepared for the excavation by digging small holes called shovel tests throughout the property. Based on the results, they dug seven larger pits in various rooms, each one 3 to 4 feet deep. “We dig down until we hit what we call sterile subsoil, which basically means we’re not finding any more artifacts—it’s just gray clay with iron oxide in it and nothing else.”

One of the most artifact-rich layers of soil unearthed by the team was a midden, or a layer of compacted domestic waste. “It’s a fancy name for a living surface and a layer of trash,” White explains. “Think about Jazz Fest after the festival’s over and you have all this debris scattered across the ground, and

think about if nobody cleaned it up year after year and it just got mashed into the ground.”

The midden yielded organic material, such as bones and burned seeds, as well as household items—buttons, a shoe buckle, nails—and large chunks of coral, which had been added to the soil as a calcium-enhancing fertilizer. The team found locally produced earthenware that researchers believe was made by Native Americans, as well as fragments of European ceramics. They were able to partially reconstruct a hand-painted pearlware bowl with a Chinoiserie design, a popular late 18th-century style modeled after Chinese ceramics.

Trash pits, or repositories dug specifically for waste, provided the excavation team with clues about colonial residents’ diets. “One particular trash pit was really rich with lots of bones, which is useful because there were drastic changes in diets during the colonial era,” White says. She hypothesizes that, during the 18th and early 19th centuries, people were incorporating more indigenous animals into their Old World diets. The trash pits also yielded wine bottles and more ceramics.

After completing the dig, UNO photographed and catalogued the artifacts, which are currently undergoing further analysis by a private firm. Once the analysis is complete the artifacts will return home to The Collection and become part of our institutional holdings.

—Molly Reid

Above, background: A partially excavated trash pit reveals two bottles, a French faience plate, bits of bone, and broken ceramics. Above, foreground: Archaeologists partially reconstructed a hand-painted ceramic bowl from the late 18th century. Photos courtesy of the Greater New Orleans Archaeology Program.

HISTORY *in the* ReMAKING

Renovating the Perrilliat House



When The Historic New Orleans Collection bought the four connected row houses that make up the Perrilliat House in 1999, the organization joined a line of property owners stretching back to the first days of the French Quarter. Though the current building was erected in 1825, researchers believe a structure has sat at the riverside, downtown corner of Chartres and Conti Streets virtually since the founding of New Orleans.

Architect Robby Cangelosi was more than aware of the building's significant history in preparing to renovate it for The Collection. Starting in 2006 Cangelosi and his firm, Koch and Wilson, conducted extensive research into all phases of the building's original construction and past renovation. The result was a historic structure report that became the text for the following five years and 14,000 square feet of renovation work.

"You can choose to renovate to any time in a building's history," Cangelosi says. "We decided we were going to go back to the original time frame, to 1825, wherever possible."

To start, the place had to be gutted almost entirely. The main and back buildings had been "chopped up" to accommodate as many units as possible, Cangelosi says. The ground floor was home to retail space, including the Tally-Ho, a hole-in-the-wall diner beloved by locals, and the attic had been converted into third-floor apartments. Some of the building's tenants, however, left it worse for wear.

"There was a student who kept clogging up the downspouts and the gutters with beer cans, so that every time it rained, the water would just pour into the building," Cangelosi says. "There was a woman on the second floor . . . when I got out of [her] place I was covered with fleas."

Despite the fleas and decades of wear and tear, the Perrilliat House wasn't devoid of good existing material. On the second floor, in what is now the board room, almost all the original French doors leading to the balcony, topped by eye-catching

transoms in an overlapping-arches pattern, remained. So did the original Creole-style mantels throughout the house.

In some cases, Cangelosi, working with contractor Barry Siegel, used existing materials to inform the renovation. They extended the original winding staircase *[above]*, which ascends to the second floor at the back of the house, to go up to the third floor. In the entresol—a low-ceilinged level between the first and second floors that boasts a huge sunburst transom—the original wide-plank pine floors became the model for most of the flooring throughout the house.

"They're resawn pine timbers—recycled," he says.

Often, though, Cangelosi used detective work to design the renovation. For the white exposed-joists ceiling—"a typical way it would have been done at the time," he says—Cangelosi plotted the spacing of the joists based on evidence of the original joinery. For the plaster medallions on the second floor *[center]*, set in an acanthus-leaf pattern and made by master plasterer Jeff Poree, Cangelosi worked from a sketch of the original design; he found it in the notes of architect and preservationist Richard Koch (1889–1971), who renovated the Perrilliat House in 1939.

Cangelosi based the color palette on the imported northern brick that composed the original facade, painting the stucco in a similar red hue. The Paris-green shutters and white trim are "typical of the time frame," he says.

Not everything, however, harkens back to 1825. In addition to working within 21st-century code requirements, Cangelosi incorporated modern, green technology at the request of The Collection. Geothermal wells installed 250 feet under the property provide eco-friendly heating and cooling, and motion sensors on energy-efficient LED lights help curb electricity use.

In the end, though, the driving force behind the renovation was fidelity to the 1825 design. "The historic structure report—it's almost like a CSI TV show," Cangelosi says. "The clues are all there; you just need to know where to look."

—Molly Reid



The Laura Simon Nelson Galleries for Louisiana Art

In 1995 The Historic New Orleans Collection significantly increased its visual-art holdings with the acquisition of Laura Simon Nelson's remarkable, lovingly assembled collection of Louisiana art. Composed of more than 350 paintings and objects, the acquisition served as a merging of missions for Nelson and The Collection. Just as Kemper and Leila Williams, founders of The Collection, wanted their historically significant materials to be available to future generations, "Laura wanted her collection to stay together," says Executive Director Priscilla Lawrence. "We were proud to give it a permanent home."

Thanks to the newly renovated Perrilliat House, now part of the Williams Research Center, Nelson's generosity will be permanently honored in three rooms of exhibition space collectively known as the Laura Simon Nelson Galleries for Louisiana Art. The galleries, scheduled to open this fall, will have rotating exhibitions that draw from Nelson's collection and other holdings.

To understand the significance of Nelson's donation and the galleries named for her, simply read her essay in *Complementary Visions of Louisiana Life*, the book released in 1996 to celebrate the acquisition of her collection.

"I consider the paintings to be my children—part of my family," she wrote. "I wanted them to be in a safe place where they would be well taken care of, be exhibited, and would help the people of Louisiana to realize what a wonderful heritage we have in Louisiana art."

In describing her philosophy of art appreciation, she is egalitarian, generous, and even poetic. "Art is not for a select few, but for everyone, and those who acquire and possess it are only the custodians, and then they pass it on," Nelson wrote. "Therefore, art is forever alive, a fitting tribute to man's creative genius."

Nelson's collection comprises one of the largest single groups of paintings by the important Louisiana artists Ellsworth and William Woodward, as well as pieces by Robert Rucker and Laurence Edwardson [*who painted the portrait of Nelson, above*]. She also amassed approximately 70 pieces of Newcomb pottery. All those works of art will serve as inspiration for the exhibitions at the Laura Simon Nelson Galleries for Louisiana Art.

"Laura's gift will be forever alive at The Historic New Orleans Collection," Lawrence says.

—Molly Reid



ON MAY 15, 1980, I first entered The Historic New Orleans Collection at 533 Royal Street. It was a heady experience taking in the morning sights and sounds of the French Quarter; I felt both thrilled with my new job as assistant registrar for this fascinating museum and apprehensive about working in such a highly visible and heavily trafficked location as the French Quarter. "Surely this will get old," I thought. Fortunately, I was wrong!

It is well known that The Collection's mission, set forth by Kemper and Leila Williams, is to preserve primary-source documentation of New Orleans's history. What many people may not realize, though, is that the Williamses also sought to preserve the historic French Quarter structures that house those documents and artifacts. Their wills directed that the buildings "be maintained as specimens of the historic architecture and mode of living in the French Quarter of New Orleans in bygone days, and that these be made available to the public." The Collection is proud to carry out that particular mandate, thereby upholding the remarkable sense of history and pride of place that has made the French Quarter so beloved to locals and tourists alike.

In June The Collection began moving staff into a newly renovated historic building adjacent to the Williams Research Center. Known informally as the Perrilliat House, this 1825 three-story townhouse now has a bright future with The Collection. The renovation hewed closely to the structure's original design, and the final product provides us with improved workspace for our growing staff, stately meeting rooms—including the Destrehan Board Room, which was a generous gift of the Azby Fund—and exhibition space named for Laura Simon Nelson, who provided the largest single donation of art in The Collection's history.

The facilities at 533 Royal Street, anchored by the 1792 Merieult House, now have room to breathe. The former board room and director's office will become part of our famous Louisiana History Galleries, providing additional exhibition space.

All of you who have followed our growth, attended our programs, and generously donated both collections and monetary support are part of this effort. Thank you for supporting our mission and making it possible to reach out to the public in an even more significant way.

—Priscilla Lawrence