VIEUX CARRÉ COMMISSION
FOUNDATION

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PUBLIC GAINS ACCESS TO NEVER-BEFORE-RELEASED FRENCH QUARTER ARCHIVES THROUGH INNOVATIVE RESOURCE ONLINE

NEW ORLEANS, LA — For the first time since it was formally organized in 1936, the Vieux Carré Commission (VCC) is releasing tens of thousands of historic French Quarter archives for free viewing by the public online at **FrenchQuarter.nola.gov** (or VieuxCarre.nola.gov).

The **Vieux Carré Commission Foundation** is announcing the release of the **Vieux Carré Virtual Library** (Virtual Library), a map-based electronic archive of countless VCC images, documents, and records. By providing a digital replica of each of the original archives, the Virtual Library preserves the historic artifacts from wear and tear, and enables them to be properly stored for protection from natural disaster. By linking these digital archives to relevant information and locations within a searchable online map, the Virtual Library connects the public to the inner archives of the French Quarter's historic preservation agency as an integrative educational and planning resource.

VCC Chairman Nicholas S. Musso, A.I.A. lauded the project, saying, "With the advent of the operational Virtual Library, the public is finally allowed to see many of the resources that come into play in preserving this historic district." He continued, "This is a viable living tool, which will continue to expand, and facilitate public participation in preserving and enlivening the future of the Vieux Carré."

The first phase of the Virtual Library included scanning and identifying the contents of more than 44,000 VCC slide images dating back to the 1960s. These images of properties within the Vieux Carré Historic District are instructive for the VCC staff and commissioners as they evaluate applications for exterior changes to properties within the district.

The second phase of the Virtual Library's development was the creation of a complex interactive map of the Vieux Carré Historic District using geographic information system (GIS) technology. This map links all of the digital VCC archives to their relevant locations within the district. It also modernizes the VCC Historic and/or Architectural Importance Color Rating Map, which had not been updated since 1985. The GIS map was then incorporated as the foundation of the Virtual Library database. Each of the structures represented on the GIS map was then identified by street address, city block, building type, current style, and zoning.

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The third phase was the development of a new website dedicated solely to the Virtual Library, providing public access to the GIS map and the 44,000-plus historic images in a searchable format. The completion of this website and its public unveiling at FrenchQuarter.nola.gov (or VieuxCarre.nola.gov) represent a major milestone in this years-long collaborative effort.

The fourth and current phase involves the digital scanning and identification of thousands of historic paper photographs dating back to the beginnings of the VCC. These digital images will be added to the Virtual Library and tagged to their location on the GIS map in the same manner as the existing 44,000 slide images. Also in the works is a process of meta-tagging the archived images with more than five hundred searchable terms ranging from architectural details to property owner keywords. Another future phase will involve scanning each of the typed and handwritten documents in the property files, dating as far back as 1936, and processing them using Optical Character Recognition software, making each document fully searchable online within the Virtual Library.

City Hall has taken an interest in the Library, specifically the VCC and Information Technology departments. As a result, another benefit of the Library will be its integration with other City records, such as property owner information, tax assessments, and zoning.

This monumental and much-needed endeavor will serve as a resource not only for the VCC, but also for architects, property owners, residents, students, and anyone worldwide who is interested in the renowned architecture of the Vieux Carré. A pilot project of sorts, the Virtual Library will also serve as a template for other historic districts to replicate.

The Virtual Library is an ongoing initiative of the nonprofit Vieux Carré Commission Foundation (Foundation), which has been developing and fundraising for it since 2015. The Virtual Library was created in partnership with and under the management of Tesler Preservation Consulting, with website development provided by New Orleans City Hall Information Technology Department; local preservation firm Gambrel & Peak is also assisting with the current phase of development. The Virtual Library has been funded by the Foundation's private donors as well as grants from the Ella West Freeman Foundation and the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation.

Vieux Carré Commission Foundation (Foundation) was organized to support and further the cause and constitutional charge of the Vieux Carré Commission: to preserve and to protect not only the French Quarter's invaluable historic architectural heritage, but also its "tout ensemble", or the sum total effect of its architecture on its quaint and distinctive character and ambiance. Formerly known as Friends of the Vieux Carré, the Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization (Federal Tax ID#90-0424605); contributions are tax-deductible as provided by law.

Tesler Preservation Consulting (Tesler) provides a variety of historic preservation-related services to organizations, governments, individuals and corporate clients. Experience and education in diverse fields allow Tesler Preservation Consulting to serve an array of clients and successfully address a wide range of projects. The goal is to contribute to the protection of built heritage and historic documents while also supporting progress.

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