

VIEUX CARRÉ COMMISSION
FOUNDATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 18, 2019

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FRENCH QUARTER ARCHIVE PROJECT WINS "SPECIAL AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE"

To be honored by Louisiana Landmarks Society's 2019 Excellence in Historic Preservation Awards

NEW ORLEANS, LA — The newly released [Vieux Carré Virtual Library](#) archive project has been selected by [Louisiana Landmarks Society](#) to receive a "Special Award for Excellence" at the 2019 Awards for Excellence in Historic Preservation. The awards will be presented at a ceremony and reception on Wednesday, May 15 at 6 p.m. at [Hotel Peter & Paul](#), 2317 Burgundy St.

The team of award honorees who funded and created the Virtual Library includes the Vieux Carré Commission Foundation, Tesler Preservation Consulting, Vieux Carré Commission, New Orleans City Hall's Information Technology Department, and Gambrel & Peak.

Every year, the Louisiana Landmarks Society Awards for Excellence in Historic Preservation honors projects completed in Orleans Parish that represent outstanding examples of restoration or rehabilitation of historic buildings and new construction. Participation in the competition for the preservation awards this year was extremely high, and the creation of a Special Award for a non-structural project such as the Virtual Library is a rare and meaningful honor.

LLS announced the award in Preservation Resource Center's [Preservation in Print](#), April 2019 edition, describing the project as follows:

Vieuxcarre.nola.gov is the portal to a map-based electronic archive of countless Vieux Carré images, documents and records, due to the work of a talented team of archivists, researchers and technicians determined to not only preserve these artifacts from deterioration and natural disaster but to make this valuable history readily available to the general public. **This exciting, new website merges these historic records with cutting-edge technology so as to permit what was described as "a peer into the past of New Orleans' most historic neighborhood," and serves as an integrative educational and planning resource of national and international significance and importance** [emphasis added].

The Virtual Library is an ongoing initiative of the nonprofit [Vieux Carré Commission 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](#), using archives of the [Vieux Carré Commission](#), 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.

First published online in December 2018, the Virtual Library offers tens of thousands of historic French Quarter archives for free viewing by the public online at FrenchQuarter.nola.gov (or VieuxCarre.nola.gov).

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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.

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.

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 in 1936. 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, and processing them using Optical Character Recognition software, making each document fully searchable online within the Virtual Library.

This monumental and much-needed endeavor serves 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.

Vieux Carré Commission 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 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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