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Vieux Carré Historic Commission

ew visitors enjoying the historic charm and lively, bohemian street scene of New Orleans' French Quarter realize they are benefiting from the second oldest historic preservation district program in the United States—the Vieux Carré Commission.

The Vieux Carré is the site of the original French colonial settlement, Nouvelle Orleans. In 1937, as a consequence of a special state constitutional amendment, the city established the commission to protect the area from demolition and haphazard development. The French Quarter covers 90 blocks and includes 2000 buildings and is one of the largest historic districts in America to have maintained its distinctive architectural character with little major change.

Architecture defines the Quarter's character. Built flush to the street, the attached, two-to-four story buildings are distinctly urban; many have shops on the ground floor with residential quarters above. Interior patios are often used today as restaurant dining areas. The most distinctive features are the highly ornate, overhanging, iron balconies.

With the establishment of the commission, historic preservation achieved its foothold in the public's conscious as a legitimate public concern. The earliest preservation legislation protected archaeological

sites. A simultaneous movement developed among civic groups organized to protect national shrines such as Mount Vernon. However, it was the creation of the historic district and its oversight commission that established one of the most important foundations for preservation. Living, working environments were deemed a public value and worthy of governmental intervention.

Today's commission is composed of nine volunteer members appointed by the mayor with the consent of the city council. All serve a four-year term. The commission issues permits for all exterior changes on buildings in the district. To assist permit applicants, the commission has adopted design guidelines covering all aspects of a building's appearance, from awnings to paving.

Read more about the Vieux Carré at: <http://www.cityofno.com/portal.aspx?portal=59> □



The Historic New Orleans Collection, accession no. 079.935.3444



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