



CITY OF NEW ORLEANS Historic District Landmarks Commission

Bywater Historic District



*Designated 1993
Jurisdiction: New Orleans
Historic District Landmarks
Commission
The Bywater Historic
District is an urban area of
approximately 120 blocks
and over two thousand
buildings. The boundaries
of the district are roughly
the Mississippi River from
Press Street to Poland
Avenue, continuing
downriver to Manuel from
Dauphine Street and back
along St. Claude Avenue.
The irregular northern
(lakeside) boundary takes
in several blocks on the
lakeside of St. Claude and
returns to the river at
Montegut Street.*

The streets, parks and architecture of the Bywater Historic District still strongly suggest its historic origins as an area where residential, agricultural and industrial uses co-existed. It remains a quiet neighborhood of small-scale residences peppered with corner stores, bars and restaurants catering primarily to locals. Industrial buildings in the blocks closest to the Mississippi River reflect the historical interdependence of New Orleans on the River. They currently house both long-established businesses and newer art studios and community non-profits. The eclectic architecture of the neighborhood is dominated by shotguns and Creole cottages. The District also includes the Lombard House, a glimpse into the area’s early 19th century character of small suburban farms.

The Bywater’s early inhabitants were much like those of other downriver Creole Faubourgs—free people of color, working class creoles, families who took refuge in New Orleans from the violence in Saint-Domingue (Haiti) and immigrants from Europe, many from Ireland and Germany.

The relatively small, close-set residences that form the fabric of the neighborhood reflect the modest means of most original residents.

The Bywater area was originally called Faubourg Washington, and was nicknamed “Little Saxony” after an influx of German immigrants in the mid 19th century. The area was popularly referred to simply as a part of the Ninth Ward until the 1920s and the construction of the Industrial Canal. The origins of the name “Bywater” have been variously attributed to the telephone exchange (BYwater), the name of the local post office and a competition among local schoolchildren to establish a neighborhood name sponsored by local businessmen in 1948.¹

¹ Information taken from the Bywater National Register of Historic Places Nomination publications of the HDLC, and *New Orleans Then and Now* by Richard and Marina Campanella.



The Lombard Plantation House was built before Bywater was subdivided



St. Vincent de Paul/Blessed Father X. Seelos Church, built in 1866



The Victory Arch commemorates residents who served in World War I.

LOCAL CULTURE

- The West Indian style Lombard House, built in 1826, is characteristic of the early days of the area, when a handful of small working plantations occupied the land
- The red brick St. Vincent de Paul church (now the Blessed Father X. Seelos Church) was built in 1866 as a place of worship for the French speaking population of the Bywater

- The Victory Arch, located on Burgundy Street between Alvar and Pauline Streets on the edge of what was Macarty Square, was erected after World War I in honor of 9th Ward residents who served or died in the war
- While the Bywater does not have any grand squares or public places, Markey Park, a children’s playground and unofficial dog park on Royal Street, is a center of community activity that also serves as a space for arts markets, festivals and community gatherings



Commercial buildings often include corner entries and galleries



Shotguns on narrow lots represent the predominant building type



Creole cottages are scattered throughout the District

URBAN FORM

Setting/Landscape

- Most buildings are set directly on the street; front yards, when they occur, are typically shallow and bordered by a low wrought iron fencing
- Side yard setbacks tend to be narrow, with houses or other buildings sitting close to their neighbors
- Most properties rely on street parking

Massing/Form

- Residences are predominantly single story, wood framed with gabled or hipped roofs

Styles/Types

- Styles commonly found in the District include Greek Revival, Italianate, Eastlake and Arts and Crafts
- The most common building types are single and double shotguns
- Creole cottages are scattered throughout the District
- Small numbers of double gallery type residences are located throughout the District

Commercial/Industrial

- Industrial and warehouse buildings are usually of decorative brick or corrugated metal, some over 20 feet in height, adding diversity to the District’s composition
- Neighborhood stores, restaurants and bars tend to be located in 1- to 2-story corner buildings, often with a gallery, sheltering awning or canopy
- St. Claude Avenue is the area’s primary commercial corridor, lined with mixed use and 20th century commercial buildings, as well as residential buildings converted fully or partly for commercial use
- 20th century commercial buildings along St. Claude Avenue are usually 1-story, of masonry or frame construction and cladding, with large shop windows and no front setback
- The riverside edge of the District is clearly delineated by the Mississippi River levee and floodwall, railroad tracks, associated industrial buildings and the floodwall

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