



CITY OF NEW ORLEANS Historic District Landmarks Commission **Canal Street Historic District**



*Designated 1984
Jurisdiction: Central
Business District
Historic District
Landmarks
Commission
The Canal Street
Historic District
extends from S.
Saratoga/Crozat
Street on the lake
side, down the
center of Iberville
Street to N. Peters/
Tchoupitoulas
Street on the river
side, and includes
all lots fronting on
the downriver and
uptown sides of
Canal Street except
for the uptown lots
between Camp and
Magazine Streets.*

Canal Street, long considered the retail merchandising heart of the city, began its life in the early 19th century along the path of a planned, but never constructed, canal. The great width of the street—171 feet—is the result of land set aside for the canal by the federal government. With the influx of Americans after the Louisiana Purchase, Canal Street became the primary separation line between Creole New Orleans downriver and the growing American Sector above Canal. It is commonly held that Canal Street's status as a "neutral ground" between these two sometimes hostile groups is the origin of the New Orleans term "neutral ground" referring to street medians city wide.

Between 1820 and 1850, the street saw a mixture of residential and commercial construction, including several major residences. In the years leading up to the Civil War, commercial building intensified, with a number of cast-iron fronted buildings constructed on both sides of the street. As time progressed, residential uses moved further uptown, and by the outbreak of the war, Canal Street had been transformed into a vibrant commercial center.

In the second half of the 19th century, construction continued, with more ornately detailed buildings in the popular Italianate style. Both sides of the 600 block of Canal contain fine examples of buildings of this period. As the 20th century unfolded, a new building type was introduced: the tall office building, such as the Maison Blanche Building at 901-921 Canal in 1909. The largest historic commercial building in the District, the Maison Blanche Building combined a large department store with an office block in a single, classically ornamented design.

As the 20th century progressed, new building types such as theaters were constructed, and a number of earlier structures were remodeled so as to modernize their exterior appearance. While the historic character of Iberville Street is less intact than that of Canal Street, it illustrates the transition between the architectural character of Canal Street and the earlier buildings of the Vieux Carré.¹

¹ Information taken from the HDLC's publications and *New Orleans Architecture, Volume II: The American Sector.*



The Beaux Arts style Maison Blanche Building was built in 1908



The Montgomery-Katz-Gordon Buildings represent early commercial architecture



This Moderne-style Walgreens was built c. 1938

LOCAL CULTURE

- The Maison Blanche Building (1908) housed a department store that was a New Orleans shopping institution from 1897 to 1998
- The Montgomery-Katz-Gordon Buildings, (c. 1848,) are a good example of early commercial architecture
- The Pinson-Pieta Building is the oldest surviving building on Canal Street

- The Merchants Mutual Insurance Co. Building, designed by William A. Freret and built in 1857, is a good example of a cast-iron front building
- A residence designed by James Gallier, Sr. for Dr. Newton Mercer in 1844, has been occupied by the Boston Club since 1884
- The 1938 Walgreens Building is a good example of the Moderne style



Most buildings in the District are between 20 and 40 feet in width



Canal Street is a broad thoroughfare occupied in part by streetcar tracks



Buildings are constructed along the sidewalk in a continuous streetscape

URBAN FORM

Setting/Landscape

- Canal Street was historically considered the retail merchandising heart of the city and includes wide sidewalks
- All District buildings are built on the front property line, creating a continuous streetscape along the sidewalk
- Most of the buildings in the District stand on lots that are between 20 and 40 feet in width
- Both sides of Canal Street can be utilized for on-street parking
- Off-street parking is available at garages just off Canal Street or attached to hotels, with some surface lots

Massing/Form

- The visual character of the Canal Street Historic District is defined by multi-story structures of masonry or masonry-clad steel frame construction

- With the exception of a handful of large 20th century buildings, most buildings are 4 to 6 stories in height
- Historically some buildings had galleries and balconies that did not extend to the sidewalk edge

Styles/Types

- The historic architecture of the District shows influences from Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate, Beaux Arts, Art Deco and Moderne styles
- Beginning in the 1930s, façade redesign projects were popular on Canal Street with the installation of new metal façades or remodeled shop fronts
- Many corner buildings on Canal Street were designed with two primary facades, one facing Canal Street and the other along the cross street towards Iberville or Common Street

Commercial/Industrial

- Ground floor retail can be found in many buildings along Canal Street

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