



**1819-21 Valence Street
Results of First Stage of Research
May 10, 2014**

1819-21 Valence was constructed ca. 1895 by William D. Seymour. An ad in the *Picayune* of May 27, 1895 for the sale of the home describes it as “the Brand New Double Two-Story Residence.”¹ The home does not appear on the 1883 Robinson Atlas.² It does not appear on the 1885-1893 Sanborn Maps but neither does the entire neighborhood. The 1896 Sanborn Map does indeed depict 1819-21 Valence, however.

The possibility remains that the home predates 1895 but probably not by much. The record of tax assessments attached to the 1899 sale of the property from William D. Seymour to Eliza Loney, widow of Asahel Walker Cooper shows a few changes in the tax assessments.³ Between 1889 and 1890, during the ownership tenure of Henry T. Vennard, the value of the land rose from \$1500 to \$2500. Between 1892 and 1893 the value rose again, to \$3500. Finally, between 1894 and 1895, the value rose significant, to \$6500. Curiously, the value decreased between 1897 and 1898 to \$6200. The sheet attached to the 1899 sale, before notary Bernard Titcher, is only a summary of the assessments, however. The actual assessment sheets may contain more detailed information to explain the changes in property value.

Seymour claimed the distinction of being the first person to build facing Valence Street on that block. My next round of research will focus on William D. Seymour, specifically sorting him out from all of the other William Seymour’s hanging around turn-of-the-20th-century New Orleans. I will also examine the detailed tax assessment record and building permits to confirm the 1895 date of construction.

Prior to the area’s development, Henry T. Vennard owned many lots in the neighborhood. Vennard made quite a mark on the business community of New Orleans, a rare feat for a Northerner who never shied away from his anti-secessionist feelings even at the height of the Civil War.⁴ At the time of his death, Vennard owned “the entire front on Valence Street between Baronne and Dryades.”⁵

On October 21, 1899, Eliza A. Loney, widow of Asahel Walker Cooper, purchased the property from Seymour. Mrs. Cooper occupied the 1821 side while renting out the 1819 side, according to an ad placed in the November 18, 1900 *Picayune*.⁶ In 1910, the elder Mrs. Cooper passed away but the Valence Street

¹ 1895-05-27 Brand New Home 1819-21 Valence

² Robinson15

³ B Titcher V7 Act 38 tax

⁴ 1892-02-04 Death of Henry T. Vennard

⁵ 1893-03-22 Vennard Succession 'Entire Front'

⁶ 1900-11-18 New House 1819 Valence

house stayed in the family until 1978. City Surveyor Delbert Brosnan produced a survey of the property in conjunction with Loney's 1899 purchase.⁷

In 1916, Asahel Walker Cooper, son of Asahel Walker Cooper (but never referred to as "Junior" or "II") moved into the 1819 side of the house.⁸ Cooper shared the house with his wife, Doceleha Trolle, whom he married in 1915, and eventually two children, A.W. Cooper, Jr., and Elizabeth Cooper. According to his obituary, "Mr. Cooper was a member of the Boston Club and several Carnival organizations."⁹ Typically, membership in the Boston Club denotes membership in the Krewe of Rex.

During the late 1910s, the Ricau family occupied the 1821 side. Mrs. Edna Flotte Ricau, an established concert pianist, gave piano lessons from the home.¹⁰ Mr. Lionel M. Ricau, a real estate agent, went to prison in 1921 for forgery and embezzlement. The saga of his crime and subsequent attempts to escape carried the attention of the Gulf South for many months in the in the fall of 1919. Ricau, a real estate auctioneer, managed a number of accounts for out-of-town clients with rental interests in New Orleans. While attempting to secure a personal loan, Ricau pledged thousands of dollars of "rent notes" as collateral. Although the bank accepted the notes as collateral, the clients eventually found out and sued Ricau and the banks to regain possession of their paper.¹¹ Before he was found out, however, Ricau fled to Mobile, Alabama, where was either robbed by a gang or slipped and fell on hard pavement. Ricau claimed he had been robbed but a night watchman alleged he had only fallen.¹² Subsequent events suggest that Ricau may have trying to commit suicide; he led police on a wild goose chase¹³ for several days before ultimately jumping out of the 2nd story window of his hospital room.¹⁴ When the jump did not kill him, he started bashing his head against a stone pillar in an attempt to finish himself.

The Ricau's son, Lionel M. Ricau, Jr., became locally famous as a voice artist, beginning as an impersonator of "Amos 'N' Andy" on the radio before settling into a busy career as an emcee. He earned national notoriety as a performer on CBS Radio and as the Announcer on the 1949 television show "Say It With Acting."¹⁵

I spent some time examining the records of Building Permits and the records of Tax Assessments in an attempt to date the construction of 1819-21 Valence. While I did not locate a building permit, the Tax Assessment records of the Sixth District show that the value of Lots 1-2 and 20-24 (inclusive) in Square 452 was assessed at \$3500 in 1894. The next year, the assessed value of Lots 20-21 by themselves increased to \$6500. Further, the assessor noted the increase in value due to the Residence occupied by Mrs. M.R. Born at #1819 Valence and of Mr. William D. Seymour at #1821 Valence. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that construction on 1819-21 Valence was completed in 1895. The first residents were Seymour, the owner, and his renter, Mrs. M.R. Born. I will also add that your home was the first one on the block!

⁷ B Titche V7 Act 38 plan

⁸ 1916-01-23 To Occupy Residence col 3

⁹ 1935-06-17 Atty Asahel Cooper col 2

¹⁰ 1960-07-03 Mrs Ricau Obit- Concert Pianist; 1918-04-14 Piano Lessons - Mrs. Ricau far col

¹¹ 1919-10-15 TP Ricau Case Detailed; 1919-10-17 Third Ricau Suit Filed; 1919-10-29 Forgery Charges Filed col 1 ITEM; 1920-02-19 LM Ricau in Prison; 1920-02-24 Ricau Convicted col 4 NO STATES; 1920-02-25 Ricau Embezzled from Lewis Estate TP.

¹² 1919-10-09 Ricau Near Death in Mobile col 7 STATES

¹³ 1919-10-12 Ricau Positive He Was Struck col 4 STATES

¹⁴ 1919-10-29 Ricau Attempts Self Harm, Confined to Hospital

¹⁵ 1934-10-16 Lionel Ricau Jr - Orleans Youth on CBS; <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0723130/>