



1431 Royal Street, “R-BAR”

Greg A. Beaman

New Orleans - 1806

In the first years after New Orleans and the Louisiana Territory came into the possession of the United States, Bernard Marigny stood on the gallery of his mansion (at the present-day corner of Elysian Fields and N. Peters) and looked at the thriving plantation stretching before him from the river to the swamp. Marigny found himself faced with a choice – profit or more profit? His agricultural operations made money, though the vagaries of climate and weather put them in jeopardy each year. Believing that the influx of Americans would swell New Orleans well beyond its old boundaries, Marigny chose to subdivide his property into squares and lots suitable for small-time homesteaders and speculators. His gamble paid off handsomely. Within a few years after the official subdivision, in 1805, “Marigny’s Suburb,” as the notarial records styled the new community (the French language records called it *faubourg Marigny ou St. Bernard*), welcomed hundreds of new residents intent on creating a home for themselves and their families.

With the subdivision of Marigny’s Suburb came the creation of new streets, named by Marigny himself, as well as the now-familiar (yet still utterly confusing to the uninitiated) triangular neighborhood between Esplanade Avenue and Elysian Fields Avenue. One would have no luck locating the corner of Royal and Kerlerec back in 1805, however, for the streets went by different names. Royal Street, though in physical reality an extension of the eponymous street in the original city, took the name of Casa Calvo Street at its commencement on the other side of the Esplanade. Named after the Marquis de Casa Calvo, the Spanish military governor who handed the city over to the French in 1803, the street retained its original name until 1852. The original name of Kerlerec Street represented Marigny’s hopeful vision for the future of New Orleans – Peace Street. Although Peace Street officially became Kerlerec in 1852, official documents would continue to refer to Peace Street into the 1890s.

On April 30, 1806, Marigny arrived in the office of Notary Public Narcisse Broutin, where he met William G. Garland to sign the Act of Sale of lots 157 and 158. Marigny collected \$1083 for the property from Garland, a former sheriff of Orleans Parish. According to the original plan of the suburb, lot 158 included the present-day corner of Royal and Kerlerec and measured 60 feet front on Casa Calvo Street and 120 feet in depth and front on Peace Street. Lot 157 measured 60 feet front on Casa Calvo Street and 120 feet “*á la comine*” (“to the commons”, as the “Esplanade” in front of Fort St. Charles was then known.)

William G. Garland owned the two lots for less than two years. He sold both lots to Maurice Bertrand on February 27, 1808. On August 13 of the same year, Bertrand sold both lots to F.H. Labat. By the beginning of 1814, Labat faced financial ruin. Creditors seized the lots, as well as his other property, and sold them at auction. On August 16, 1815, Dr. Lewis Heermann paid \$1305 for the single lot 157. The description of the property conveyed to Dr. Heermann by the Act of Sale contains a key phrase – “with all the buildings and improvements thereon.” For the first time, we find evidence of a structure located at the

corner of Casa Calvo and Peace. Dr. Heermann may have built this structure as part of the Naval Hospital complex. An 1815 letter from Dr. Heermann to the Secretary of the Navy offers clues and even contains a survey – but the documents are available only at the National Archives. *New Orleans Architecture, Volume IV: The Creole Faubourgs* describes the letter and shows a picture of the survey, so we have some idea of the content. Dr. Heermann was stationed in New Orleans to establish a new naval hospital and to act as its official surgeon. He had previously distinguished himself in combat as a member of the crew of the USS *Intrepid* which burned the frigate USS *Philadelphia* in Tripoli Harbor in 1803, during the Barbary Wars. Heerman served under the command of Stephen Decatur, Jr., after whom Decatur Street is named.

Dr. Heermann sold the lots and buildings on December 30, 1821 to Jean Francois Canonge, an attorney and prominent citizen. Canonge paid the extraordinary sum of \$12,000 for the property described in the act of sale as “A lot of ground situated on the other side of the Esplanade, at the north end of Royal Street at the corner of Esplanade and Casa Calvo Street, a part of said lot laying in the faubourg Marigny and the other being a portion of the commons sold by the Corporation of New Orleans.” Before the subdivision of Marigny’s suburb, the “Esplanade” referred to the area in front of Fort St. Charles, approximately at the site of the Old United States Mint. Houses on the Esplanade were not given addresses but, rather, referred to as “the twelfth house from Fort. St. Charles.” In the act of sale, after specifying the exact measurements of the lot, the notary made sure to state that the sale included “the two story brick house, out houses, buildings and improvements and singular the appurtenances to the said lot of ground presently sold.” The two story brick building no doubt referred to the house which once stood at the corner of Esplanade and Royal, now a fenced-in parking lot. Unfortunately, the surveyor did not indicate the location or size of any of the other buildings on his survey so we cannot be certain on which lots the buildings stood.

We do have cause to believe, however, that the Canonge purchase included a building at the corner of Casa Calvo and Peace streets. *Paxton’s New Orleans Directory* for the year 1822 contains two listings of special interest in the present case, both for groceries located at the intersection of Casa Calvo and Peace. The first, for one Peter Viaut, shows him at “22 Casa Calvo, cor. Peace.” A few pages later, we find the listing for Maurice Vallée, also a grocer, at “21 Casa Calvo, cor. Peace.” Since the street numbering system which prevailed in old New Orleans remains somewhat indecipherable, we cannot be sure which corner of the intersection Viaut and Vallée had their grocery stores.¹ Combined with the knowledge that Canonge’s 1821 purchase included buildings and improvements, however, it would not be unreasonable to presume that one of the groceries stood at the site of 1431 Royal.

The tax assessment records show that Canonge brought the property into the community he shared with his wife, Jeanne Amelie Mercier. The Third Municipality tax records list her as owning property valued at \$2000 in the square. Mercier died in 1843, opening the way for her family to engage in a long legal struggle over the distribution of her property. Finally, on July 12, 1845, the lot, “together with the buildings thereon,” sold at auction for \$1975. The winner of the auction arrived in the office of Theodore Guyol on September 24, 1845 to pass the requisite act of sale, to which the notary attached the first survey we have the lot showing a building thereon

¹ http://richcampanella.com/assets/pdf/article_Campanella_Preservation-in-Print_2012_Oct_Addressing%20Urban%20Order.pdf

History remembers Jean Francois Canonge as one of the chief witnesses of the infamous brutality of Madame LaLaurie, whose cruelty toward her slaves shocked even the jaded planter classes of antebellum New Orleans. On the morning of April 10, 1834, Judge Canonge raced from his home at the corner of Esplanade and Casa Calvo and joined the crowd who rescued the tortured slaves from their shackles as fire raged at the Lalaurie mansion at Royal and Hospital (now Governor Nicholls) streets.² Henry Castellanos, in *New Orleans As It Was: Episodes of Louisiana Life*, described Judge Canonge as “a man of strict integrity and sound judgement.” Castellanos relates that, on the night of the fire, Canonge “had not escaped the insults of the enraged populace...and while in the act of expostulating with them upon the impropriety of their course several pistols had been leveled at his head.”³ The mobs believed the city authorities allowed Madame Lalaurie to escape, even though Canonge was doing his part to ease the suffering of the tortured slaves.

The winner of the 1845 auction was Mathilde Clotilde Simon, an unmarried free woman of color. As Sally Kittredge Evans demonstrates in her indispensable essay, “Free Persons of Color,” in *New Orleans Architecture Vol. IV: The Creole Faubourgs*, “Marigny was particularly attractive to [free people of color] because the lots there were of appropriate size to the small homeowner.”⁴ Evans elucidates a pattern of settlement in Marigny by free people of color, women in particular, that Mathilde Clotilde Simon does not fit. While history shows that many free women were set up in Marigny as part of *placage* arrangements, we have no evidence about Mathilde Clotilde Simon to make such an assertion. Simon does not appear in city directories or census records. She made only “her mark” on the Act of Sale, meaning she could not write. The records of Simon’s life that do survive, however, show that she owned property and paid her taxes.

Not too long after at Simon bought the corner building, the *Daily Picayune* reported on a complaint of larceny lodged before Third Municipality Recorder Pierre Seuzeneau. According to the paper, Jean Ollie complained to the judge that William McGuineys stole “two pieces of jaconet muslin of the value of \$7...from a store at the corner of Casacalvo and Peace streets.” The paper shows that “McGuineys was arrested, examined and committed for trial...[he] is a notorious character and has already served one term in the penitentiary.”⁵

After only three years, Simon sold the corner lot to Eugene Grambois, a druggist, for \$3000, including the building. Grambois would serve as landlord to a number of tenants but does not appear to have ever occupied the building for himself. City Directories and census records reveal that Grambois kept his pharmacy at location on Esplanade Avenue further towards the lake, at old No. 121. At the beginning of Grambois’ tenure of ownership, activity at the corner of Royal and Peace streets came before Recorder Seuzeneau again. “Four women were yesterday arrested in the Third District for keeping a brothel at the corner of Royal and Peace streets, at which place dangerous and suspicious characters resort,” read the March 12, 1853 *Picayune*.⁶ A few years before Grambois sold the property, another item made the paper,

² Henry C. Castellanos, *New Orleans As It Was: Episodes of Louisiana Life*, New Orleans: L. Graham Co., Ltd, 1905. 53.

³ Castellanos, *New Orleans As It Was*, 57.

⁴ Sally Kittredge Evans, “Free Persons of Color” in *New Orleans Architecture, Volume IV: The Creole Faubourgs*, Gretna: Pelican Publishing, 2006.

⁵ *Daily Picayune*, June 9, 1849.

⁶ *Daily Picayune*, March 12, 1853.

this time concerning a “woman in distress” and Corporal Conrad, a heroic bluecoat. “Yesterday morning, at about 4 o’clock,” the piece reads,

Corporal Conrad, of the Third Precinct, was attracted to the corner of Peace and Royal streets by cries as of a woman in distress. When he reached the corner he found two men assaulting a woman, but when the officer showed himself the men ran off. The woman informed the Corporal that her name was Mrs. Maumus, and she kept a stand in the French Market, whither she was going when set upon by the two men. She further stated that she had been robbed of forty dollars, as that amount was missing from the pocket in which she had placed it. In another pocket she had two dollars, which the robbers, who were white men, failed to secure.⁷

Corporal Conrad was Felix J. Conrad, new to the force in 1878. Conrad would become infamous on the New Orleans police force over the next thirty years for a variety of ‘misdeeds and mishaps’, though his reputation was surely bolstered following the above related incident.

For at least the last decade of Grambois’ ownership, city directories list members of the Rekart/Rekhardt/Reckart family at old No. 343 Royal. The Rekart’s most likely lived on the second floor while the first floor remained commercial. The Rekart family made their living in the hat business. Edward Rekart first appears in the 1870 directory as a hat maker with a shop at old No. 86 Baronne and a residence at old No. 343 Royal. In 1874, brother Charles Rekart appears as a hat cleaner at 343 Royal, while Edward now listed only his Baronne street address. Edward and Charles Rekart would appear in the directories until 1885, by which time Eugene Grambois had moved back to France and entrusted the property into the hands of Joseph Cuvillier, a notary and business agent. Cuvillier transferred the property to Theodore Morano for the frighteningly low price of \$700. The low price implies that Cuvillier simply sub-contracted Morano to dispose of the property. Since Morano had found a buyer in one Etienne Frechou by January 21, 1881, we have no doubt that Morano only owned the property on paper.

Although Etienne Frechou passed away just over two years after buying the property, his widow, Marie Dutrey, and his son, Charles Mathurin Frechou, inherited it. Charles Frechou would ultimately be the one responsible for enlarging the building to two stories, bringing it one step closer to its present condition. Frechou also married Augustine Reckart, the daughter of the Reckart family who operated a hat shop at 343 Royal. If Charles Frechou and Augustine Reckart were not already acquainted from the neighborhood, they met, no doubt, very soon after Etienne Frechou came to own the building at Royal and Peace. One can easily imagine love blossoming between the 24 year old Frechou and the 17 year old Reckart, a happy courtship during which the families came to know one another as more than landlord and tenant, and the union of the two in marriage on August 28, 1886.

As mentioned above, Charles Frechou enlarged the building at the corner of Royal and Kerlerec from one story to two stories. The 1885 Sanborn map shows a one story square building at the corner and a 2 story galleried residence with stairs leading up to its entryway facing on Peace Street. The next edition of Sanborn maps, published in 1896, show a two-story building with measurements approximating those of the building today. The tax assessment records show an increase from \$2200 in 1892 to \$3250 in 1893,

⁷ *Daily Picayune*, March 17, 1878.

indicating building activity in the interim between assessments and suggesting that the building came closer to its present form in 1893. There is no way of knowing, unfortunately, whether Charles Frechou demolished the building in favor of a brand new structure or simply made additions to the existing building. The tax assessment holds a tantalizing clue in a hard-to-read scribble made next to the property value. The assessor wrote “2 story h.a.f. \$2500.” So while we know that Frechou improved the property in that year at a cost of \$2500, we do not know what the assessor meant by “h.a.f.” That the assessor valued the improvements at \$2500 but only increased the assessment by \$1050 suggests that Frechou started from scratch, that is, he demolished the original building and started over. Nonetheless, we are left only with evidence that points alternately to new construction or to an addition. We cannot make a definitive conclusion.

The earliest surveys of the lot that contain a building indication do not give enough information to come to a conclusion. The survey displays measures for only the width of the building at its front on Casa Calvo Street. The survey, referred to in notarial documents as “one signed by the heirs of Cannonge [*sic*], annexed to an act before Theodore Guyol, Notary Public,” gives a measurement of 45 feet, 11 inches for the lot frontage. Using the scale on the Sanborn maps, it appears that both the older building and the newer building fronted on Royal Street at a width of approximately 30 feet. The frontage of the lot and building on Royal Street today are the same – 29 feet, 11 inches, 6 lines.

While it is impossible to make a conclusive statement as to whether Frechou enlarged the older building or built a new one, we can narrow down a few possibilities. The first possibility is that Frechou did, in fact, demolish the older structure and erect a brand new building in 1892. A survey by George de Armas, Deputy City Surveyor, dated July 6, 1892, gives perhaps the best image we have of the state of the buildings in the late 19th century. De Armas’ sketch shows three large buildings on the lot along with two outbuildings. We can recognize the house at the extreme rear of the lot as the creole cottage that today bears municipal number 710 Kerlerec. A two story building with a gallery and center stairs stands in the middle of the lot, facing Peace Street but set back to the Esplanade Avenue side of the lot. Standing at the corner appears to be a 3-room shotgun double. Based on De Armas’ drawing, the second possibility is that Frechou moved the two story building in the middle of the lot to the back of the corner building and added a second floor to the corner building.

Charles Frechou sold the property to Anthony Battistella on September 10, 1904, signaling the ascendancy of Italian families in the neighborhood. The lasting legacy of Anthony Battistella on Royal Street has two components. First, he partitioned the corner lot so that 710 Kerlerec and 1425 Royal were no longer part of the same lot as 1431 Royal. Second, he built the large houses between 1431 Royal and Esplanade Avenue, establishing the streetscape we know today. Battistella never lived or worked at 1431, however, leasing the downstairs space to a series of Italian grocers and the upstairs space to a predominantly Italian group of tenants. In 1924, Battistella sold the corner lot to Peter Briuglio. Briuglio and his wife, Sarah, ran their own grocery at the location until at least 1937, after which they leased it to other grocers. The Briuglio family stayed at 1431 Royal until 1944, when they sold the property to Charles and Marguerite Coscino. A survey by Gilbert and Kelly, dated August 18, 1944, shows that the corner entrance had been added. On July 18, 1963, Coscino conveyed the property to Katherine Ulmer Pumilia. A survey by J.J. Krebs and Sons shows that the building had been expanded to its present size.

In 1945, the year after the Coscino's bought the land, the city directory lists Roger Lucchesi at the property selling statues. By 1952, however, we find Howard Fayard operating a "retail liquor establishment," that is, a bar. Every grocery store worth its inventory in New Orleans in the 19th century and first decades of the 20th century sold liquor and beer by the glass to its patrons. In fact, we find a listing for a liquor permit at 1431 Royal as far back as 1906.⁸

The property has operated as a dedicated bar since the 1950s, in a variety of incarnations. Classified ads from the 1950s advertised positions for "barmaids" at "Ann and Howard's", while regular columnists took note of the "self-appointed ivory ticklers" who took their turns entertaining the restaurant and bar crowds on the house piano. When Charles Coscino sold the property to Katherine Ulmer Pumilia on July 18, 1963, the Fayard's moved out, as well. By December 1963, the M&J Corporation had leased the business from Mrs. Pumilia and applied for a retail liquor permit under the name B&B Bar. Only a year later, the bar got itself in trouble by offering cash prizes on the pinball machines and had its liquor license suspended.⁹ Following the pinball incident, the bar became Charlie's Beer Tavern in 1965. In 1966, the place transformed into Peyton Place.

Peyton Place lasted barely a year, converting into Mike's Bar in 1967. Unfortunately, Mike's Bar went the way of the B&B Bar after police raided the property and arrested five people on gambling charges. "At Mike's Bar," the paper reads, "vice officers said they walked in on the five arrested men as they were taking bets over the telephone..."

*A ticker tape machine recording baseball scores, baseball and horse racing forms, several decks of cards and a baseball scoreboard were seized as evidence...Det. Erwin Magri, who headed the Mike's Bar raid, said that [bar owner John] Santucci, in the past four years, 'has been arrested for gambling over 15 times.'*¹⁰

The bad luck continued at 1431 Royal for a few more years. After Mike's Bar closed shop, the place became Al's Bar. The *Times-Picayune* of May 31, 1969 tells us that three men robbed the bar at gunpoint of \$200 and got away with an extra \$75 taken from the bartender and patrons. Later that month, police arrested two teenagers and connected them to a string of armed robberies around the city.¹¹ In the first years of the 1970s, police raided Casey's Lounge No. 2, once again for making payoffs on the pinball machines. Quickly, the bar changed appearances to become Miss T's Bar, only to be robbed on June 29, 1975. The robbery must have driven Miss T. away because, before the end of the year, Griffin's Final Edition Lounge moved in.

⁸ *Times-Picayune*, September 22, 1906.

⁹ *Times-Picayune*, December 16 & 18, 1964.

¹⁰ *Times-Picayune*, July 20, 1968.

¹¹ *Times-Picayune*, June 14, 1969.