

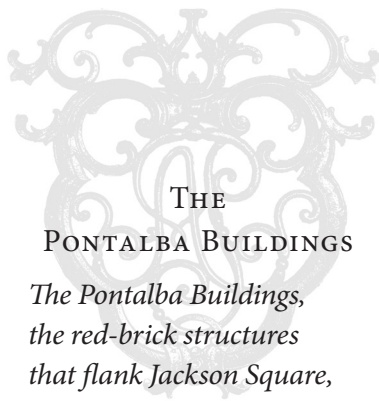


1850 HOUSE

A LOUISIANA STATE MUSEUM



*Welcome to the
Louisiana State Museum's 1850 House.
Enjoy your visit!*



THE PONTALBA BUILDINGS

The Pontalba Buildings, the red-brick structures that flank Jackson Square, were built between 1849 and 1851. They are named after Micaela Almonester de Pontalba, who directed their design and construction. In doing so, she was following in the footsteps of her father, Andrés Almonester y Roxas, a Spanish colonial official and philanthropist who financed the construction of the Cabildo, St. Louis Cathedral, and the Presbytère in the late 1700s. Inspired by the imposing Parisian architecture the Baroness Pontalba favored, the distinctive rowhouses were intended to serve as elegant residences and fine retail establishments.

➤ *Please enter through the first door to your right off the patio.*

Entrance Corridor

Behind the door opposite the stairs is a long corridor (closed to the public) through which residents entered this house, #8 St. Ann. This was a passageway rather than a formal entryway, with wastewater draining from the courtyard out to the street. Each house was equipped with a water hydrant that connected to the city's waterworks, gas lines, water closets at the rear, and storage closets near the bedrooms.

➤ *Go upstairs to the parlor, located at the end of the hall on the second floor.*

Parlor

Because residents were tenants who lived here for a few years at a time, the 1850 House does not represent any single family. Rather, it reflects mid-nineteenth-century prosperity, taste, and daily life in New Orleans. Much of the furniture originated in or around New Orleans. The house contains several revival styles that were popular in the 1850s. The favored rococo revival style featured carved floral designs, curves, and asymmetry. The earlier Empire, Gothic revival, and later Louis XVI revival styles also shaped household decorative arts during this period.

Families gathered in the parlor to entertain guests and enjoy music, card games, fancy needlework, and stereograph viewing. The central table came from Irish-born William McCracken's furniture shop on Royal Street, and much of the parlor furniture belonged to a French Quarter family in the 1850s.

➤ *Walk back toward the stairwell, stopping at the next room on your left.*

The Dining Room

Look at the Old Paris porcelain and New Orleans silver on the dining room table and imagine a dinner illuminated by candlelight and gasolier. Enslaved or immigrant servants brought food from the kitchen at the rear of the courtyard below, through the back gallery, and into the dining room.

➤ *Take the stairs to the third-floor landing, enter the hallway, and go to the first bedroom on the right.*

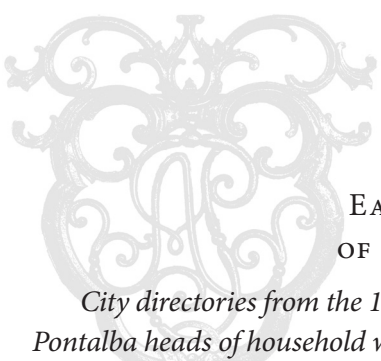


Bedrooms

The arrangement of these rooms roughly corresponds to the composition of the second family to live in this house, from 1853 to 1856, the Cammacks. Amelia Zacharie Saul Cammack might have enjoyed the largest of the three bedrooms at the back of the house, where she could have observed work in the courtyard below. The large half-tester bed in the main bedroom is an example of the wares sold in Prudent Mallard's shop on Royal Street. The rosewood bed was originally owned by Mrs. Magin Puig, whose portrait hangs above the mantel. Decorated with lemonwood accents, the bed is the focal point of a six-piece set.

➤ *Continue to the small bedroom located at the end of the hall.*

The next room, the nursery, contains toys, a child's walker, and a dresser and half-tester bed made by cabinetmaker William McCracken.



EARLY RESIDENTS OF THE 1850 HOUSE

City directories from the 1850s and the 1860 census show that many Pontalba heads of household were merchants who were affluent enough to afford rent in one of New Orleans's most fashionable locations. Children, slaves, and servants completed the Pontalba households. An average of nine residents occupied each dwelling.

Isaac and Hetty Soria and their grown children Augustus and Eugenia were the first tenants of this house. Like many Pontalba residents, the Sorias were merchants who came to New Orleans from elsewhere (in this case New York) to take advantage of the city's vast economic opportunities. Like the majority of Pontalba residents, the Sorias were slave owners, their slaves numbering between five and eight over time.

Widow Amelia Zacharie Saul Cammack moved into this house early in 1853, just a few months after the death of her husband, Horace Claiborne Cammack, a commission merchant and former treasurer of the U.S. Mint in New Orleans. Her son, Thomas Dixon Cammack, and three of her four daughters, Gertrude, Kate, and Amelia, lived with her. The family owned between three and seven slaves during their Pontalba residency. After leaving the 1850 House, they relocated to another house in the Lower Pontalba, where they lived until 1862.

William G. Hewes was the third head of household at #8 St. Ann. He moved here in 1856 with his two daughters, Caroline and Anna, and five slaves. Hewes was president of a bank and the New Orleans, Opelousas, and Great Western Railroad, with offices on the river-facing corner of the Lower Pontalba Building. By 1860 Hewes no longer owned slaves and instead hired two live-in Irish servants.

➤ *Go to the third bedroom, to the right of the nursery.*

Thomas Dixon Cammack was at least twenty-one at the time of his father's death and the family's relocation to #8 St. Ann. He maintained his father's commission merchant business in the business district for several years before enlisting as a Confederate soldier. This room has been decorated for a man and contains furniture of the older Empire style that would have been less fashionable by the 1850s. Note the portrait of Jenny Lind that hangs between the two windows. Lind, a famous Swedish vocalist, stayed in an Upper Pontalba rowhouse across the square for one month during her 1851 American tour. Always the shrewd businesswoman, the Baroness Pontalba not only gave her a place to stay to call attention to the newly built houses, but after Lind's departure, she also auctioned off the house's furnishings.

➤ *Return to the stairway landing and exit through the door on the left.*

The Service Wing

Called the "kitchen building" in the builder's contract, this back wing served a variety of purposes, including storage, additional workspace, and housing for slaves or servants. Originally, two rooms on each floor opened onto the galleries.

➤ *Continue down the back stairway to the second floor.*

According to the 1860 census, the Pontalba Buildings contained 18 households and 171 persons. Nearly half of these residents were slaves or servants. The



majority (11) of the households owned slaves, and half (9) hired live-in servants, mostly Irish women. All three tenants of the 1850 House (#8 St. Ann) owned slaves, ranging in number from three to eight.



➤ *Continue to the first floor to see the kitchen, courtyard, and store.*

The Courtyard

The courtyard served as an additional work space for the adjacent kitchen and laundry. Note the flagstones covering the gutter, which drained wastewater out to the street. The current flagstones replicate the originals.

The Kitchen

Enslaved or immigrant cooks prepared food in this room for many hours each day, beginning as early as 5:00 a.m. They likely visited the nearby French Market to procure fresh foods. The cook for the second family to live in the 1850 House, the Cammacks, was George, a thirty-year-old enslaved man.

The Store

The first floor of the Pontalba Buildings housed businesses, including dry goods stores, clothing stores, law offices, and even a bank and railroad company. In general, tenants other than those residing in the rowhouses rented out the first-floor shops. Adolphe Lanauze, a French immigrant, ran a hardware store in this space during the 1850s.

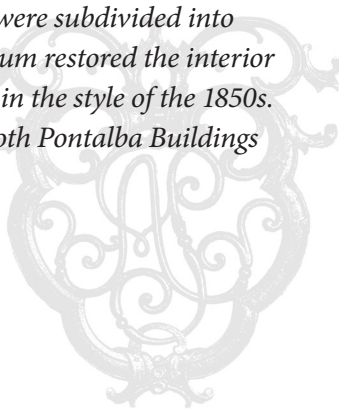
➤ *Exit through the museum shop.*



BEYOND THE 1850S

The French Quarter and the Pontalba rowhouses declined with the economic upheaval that accompanied the Civil War and its aftermath. After the Baroness Pontalba's death in 1874, ownership passed to heirs who felt little connection to the New Orleans property. By the turn of the twentieth century, the buildings had fallen into disrepair and become home to impoverished Sicilian immigrants.

William Ratcliffe Irby, a New Orleans cigar manufacturer and philanthropist, pioneered the preservation of historic French Quarter landmarks. After purchasing the Lower Pontalba in 1921, he willed it to the Louisiana State Museum, which took possession of the building in 1927. (The city of New Orleans owns the Upper Pontalba Building.) During the 1930s the Works Progress Administration, a federal jobs program, employed workers to do extensive restoration work on both Pontalba Buildings, and the townhouses were subdivided into apartments. In 1955 the Louisiana State Museum restored the interior of this building and furnished the upper floors in the style of the 1850s. As with many older buildings, restoration of both Pontalba Buildings is an ongoing project.



Continued on back.

FURTHER READING

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- Grier, Katherine C. *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850–1930*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997.
- Harter, John Burton, and Mary Louise Tucker. *The Louisiana Portrait Gallery*. New Orleans: Louisiana State Museum, 1979.
- Huber, Leonard Victor, and Samuel Wilson Jr. *Baroness Pontalba's Buildings: Their Site and the Remarkable Woman Who Built Them*. New Orleans: New Orleans Chapter of the Louisiana Landmarks Society, 1964.
- Vella, Christina. *Intimate Enemies: The Two Worlds of the Baroness de Pontalba*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997.



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www.crt.state.la.us/museum

Tuesdays – Sundays, 10 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Adults \$3; Students, Seniors, Military \$2; Children 12 and Under Free