

Tessier Buildings
342,346,348 Lafayette Street
Baton Rouge
East Baton Rouge Parish
Louisiana

HABS No. LA-1139

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. LA-1139

THE TESSIER BUILDINGS

Location: 342, 346, 348 Lafayette Street, Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana. USGS Baton Rouge West Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 15.673910.3369830.

Present Owner/
Occupant: Jules F. and Frances L. Landry.

Present Use: Law Office (348 Lafayette St.) and art gallery (342 and 346 Lafayette Street).

Significance: The Tessier Buildings are examples of the urban row house style, which once characterized much of urban Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa 1820-1850.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners:

a. No. 348:

Legal description of property: A certain lot or parcel of ground together with all the buildings and improvements, thereon, situated in that part of the City of Baton Rouge...known as Devall Town and measuring 41'-11" front on Lafayette Street by a depth between parallel lines of 128 feet, said lot or parcel of ground herein conveyed being designated as Lot X or Square 3 or 81."

Conveyance Book "JH," folio 375, bundle 390, January 18, 1820, Lydia Cline to Charles Tessier.

Conveyance Book "JT", folio 37, May 15, 1845
Adjudication of community between Charles Tessier and Catharine Tessier, deceased, to Charles Tessier.
Shows property as separate property of Charles Tessier.

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Conveyance Book "D", folio 311, January 18, 1854,
Succession of Charles Tessier to Simon Bear,
Sherriff's Sale.

Conveyance Book "SM", folio 196, September 1, 1866,
Simon Bear to Mrs. Susanna Bear, Sherriff's Sale.

Conveyance Book "W", folio 133, April 9, 1867, Mrs.
Susannah Hirsch (wife of Simon Bear) to Mrs. Henrietta
H. Henry.

Conveyance Book 4, folio 393, July 16, 1878, Mrs.
Leontine Keays, et al. (Heirs of Mrs. Henrietta
Keays) to Fergus Mahier.

Conveyance Book 71, folio 91, June 12, 1918, Henry T.
Mahier, et als. (Heirs of Fergus Mahier) to L.U.
Babin, et als.

Conveyance Book 236, folio 60, March 13, 1930, L.U.
Babin, et. al, to Babin and Laycock, Inc.

Conveyance Book 354, folio 193, October 29, 1937,
Babin and Laycock, Inc. to Harry J. Babin.

Conveyance Book 606, folio 370, Probate 4487, 19th
Judicial District Court, June 25, 1945, Succession of
Dr. Harry J. Babin to Estelle B. Hoover.

Original 56, Bundle 2804, Act of Cash Sale, July 3,
1951, Estelle B. Hoover to Jules F. Landry.

b. Nos. 342 and 346:

(1st) A certain lot of ground marked "Z" situated in
that part of the City of Baton Rouge laid out by the
late R. Devall, measuring twenty-four (24) feet on
Lafayette Street running back forty (40) feet and
narrowing down to nineteen (19) feet, thence to the
back line having a depth of one hundred twenty-eight
(128) feet, American measure; and (2nd) Also a lot of
ground marked "Y", situated in the same square, having
a front on Lafayette Street of thirty-two (32) feet
running back forty (40) feet, and widening out
to thirty-seven (37) feet, with a depth on one hundred
twenty-eight (128) feet, American measure;

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Records are unavailable to show the acquisition by Charles Tessier.

Sherriff's Book SH1, folio 13, Sheriff's deed, November 1, 1854, Daniel D. Avery to John M. Henshaw.

Conveyance Book 27, folio 353, February 19, 1900 John M. Henshaw to Emmanuel Kaufman.

Conveyance Book 27, folio 573, April 3, 1902, Emmanuel Kaufman to David M. Reymond.

Conveyance Book 33, folio 539, August 5, 1905, D. Marshall Reymond to Charles C. Bird and Oscar Kondert.

Conveyance Book 38, folio 534, July 13, 1907, Oscar Kondert to Hart-Kondert Realty and Investment Co. Inc.

Conveyance Book 41, folio 64, September 9, 1908, David M. Reymond, Charles C. Bird, et als, to Robert Cothell.

Conveyance Book 75, folio 398, April 2, 1919, Robert Cothell, et al. to Cottlieb and Percy Agency, Ltd.

Conveyance Book 83, folio 333, December 10, 1919, Cottlieb and Percy Agency, Ltd. to Gottlieb and Percy, partnership.

Conveyance Book 260, folio 51, February 9, 1932, Joe Gottlieb, J. Hereford Percy, and Cottlieb and Percy to General Realty Corporation.

Original 59, Bundle 4962, September 1, 1961, General Realty Corporation, Inc. to Jules F. Landry.

4. Original plan and construction: The three buildings were constructed as townhouse residences. No. 348, on the northern end, appears to be the oldest and probably dates from the 1820s. Planned without a hallway, it had two front doors, one leading into the house, and the other through to the rear courtyard where there was an exterior stairway. Its facade is pretty much unchanged.

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Nos. 342 and 346 could have been built in the 1830s or '40s, or even in the 1850s. Their first floor facades have been greatly altered. It is likely, though, that they reflected the fenestration arrangement found on the second floor.

5. Alterations and additions:

In the late nineteenth century, most of the interior walls of Nos. 342 and 346 were removed to accommodate a theater. The pressed tin ceiling, installed at that time, still remains. In the first half of the twentieth century, the ground floors of the three buildings housed a variety of shops while the upper floors were apartments. At that time, the narrow doorway on the front of No. 348 became a stairway door, giving access to the upper story, and the other two buildings probably had a similar arrangement.

After the Landrys acquired the buildings in 1951, they altered the fenestration on the ground floors of Nos. 342 and 346. Two doors became windows, and a window was changed to the present double door (Mrs. Landry does not remember what exactly was where).

No. 348 was converted to a law office. The exterior rear stairway was removed and an addition built. A stairway on the interior was added, as the stairway to the sidewalk is no longer used. The fenestration on the front facade of No. 348 remained unchanged.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected With the Structure:

It is generally thought that Charles R. Tessier, a wealthy, prominent citizen of Baton Rouge, built and owned these three buildings. According to the present owner, Tessier lived at No. 348. Tessier had the distinction of being Baton Rouge's first probate judge. His importance is indicated by the fact that in 1825, he officially greeted the Marquis de Lafayette for the city. In the late nineteenth century, these buildings were converted to commercial use on the first floor, including a small theater and various shops, with apartments on the second floor.

C. Sources of Information

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Conveyance Records, East Baton Rouge Parish
Centroplex.

National Register of Historic Places Nomination for
"Tessier Buildings," listed March 16, 1978.

Telephone interview with Mrs. Jules Landry, owner,
November 20, 1979.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Capital Region Planning Commission, Historical
Landmarks of the Capital Region, Land Use Report
2A, July, 1973.

Prepared by Sibyl McCormac Croff
Project Supervisor
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer, 1978

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Tessier Buildings are a group of cast-iron galleried row houses, significant as survivors of a prevalent architectural type which once characterized Baton Rouge and New Orleans.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent. They have recently been converted into a law office and an art gallery. The exterior was restored at the same time.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The three two-story buildings measure 90' x 30', but there is also a rear wing on the northern house, No. 348. In all, there are nine bays.

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2. Foundation: Brick.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The bearing walls are made from soft clay bricks and are covered with sandy yellow stucco.
4. Structural system, framing: The buildings were built between the 1820s and 1850s. No. 348, which appears to be the oldest building, has exposed beaded cypress beams and a mortise and tenon attic roof frame. The two other structures are framed with nails. In all three, there is a consistent lack of ridge board.
5. Porches: A two-story cast-iron gallery extends across the entire facade with one interruption. The lower story of attenuated fluted columns has foliated capitals with amulet rings and abacus blocks. The ironwork on the upper story has a fluid pattern of vine and grape motifs. These are fashioned from stock cast-iron members which can be seen in other Louisiana buildings of the period. There is also a rear, two-story gallery with turned wooden columns on the middle and southernmost buildings. This is possibly a late nineteenth century addition.
6. Chimneys: There are six brick chimneys at the roof ridge.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Four sets of French doors are on the second floor of the front gallery. A fifth, more conventional door surrounded by sidelights is also on the second floor gallery. There are four doors on the ground floor. The northern building has two square headed doors which are encompassed by stucco patterns resembling quoining. One is the front door and the other opens onto a stairway leading to the second floor. The middle building has a panelled fan-lit door. The southern section has a transomed double-door with round-headed glass panes over decoratively panelled bottoms.
 - b. Windows: The windows have six-over-six lights; however, the ones in the northern, and possibly

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oldest, section are a bit smaller than in either of the other two sections. The window frames are simple and the wooden shutters have movable louvers.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The gable roofs are covered with asphalt shingles. The ridge line of No. 342 is noticeably lower than the other two. Low stuccoed gable parapets rise above the end and party walls.
- b. Dormers: The only dormer is located on No. 348. The louvered front dormer is framed in an aedicule with a segmental pediment.

C. Description of Interior:

The interiors of the three buildings have been changed significantly and therefore do not retain their historic fabric. The buildings are two rooms deep. There are no original stairways. One stairway leads from the street to the second floor of No. 348. In the 1950s, an interior stairway was added in No. 348. The stairway in the center building has a heavy turned newel post and balusters.

When Nos. 342 and 346 were converted into a theater, a pressed tin ceiling with panels and coved molding was added. No. 346 has two fireplaces, one upstairs and one downstairs, with cast-iron fireplace covers.

D. Site and Surroundings:

The Tessier Buildings face west and look over the Mississippi River, a few blocks away. They are located in the middle of downtown Baton Rouge where they are surrounded primarily by parking lots. The buildings are flush to the street. Behind No. 342 there is a pleasant patio.

Prepared by Jonathan Fricker
Architectural Historian
State of Louisiana
Sibyl McCormac Groff
Project Supervisor
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer, 1978

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was jointly sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the City of Baton Rouge, Parish of East Baton Rouge, Department of Public Works, Division of Community Development. Under the auspices of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and Kenneth Anderson, Principal Architect, the project was completed in the summer of 1978 at the HABS field office, Department of Architecture, Louisiana State University. The team was comprised of Sibyl McCormac Groff (Columbia University), project supervisor/historian; Timothy Allanbrook (Rhode Island School of Design), project foreman; architect Kate Johns (Arizona State University); and student architects William J. Graham (University of Maryland), Robert D. Louton (University of Arkansas), and George W. Steinrock, Jr. (University of Detroit).

ADDENDUM TO
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