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1884 Beaux Arts beauty in the French Quarter is now a parking lot

BY SUE STRACHAN | STAFF WRITER SEP 12, 2019 - 5:02 PM

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Interior of the Louisiana Sugar and Rice Exchange, New Orleans, in August 1963, before demolition. Photo by Dan Leyrer, as part of a Historic American Buildings Survey. The building was located at N. Front and Bienville Streets. It is now a parking lot.

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Photo by Dan Leyer from Library of Congress

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The histories of sugar and Louisiana have been intertwined since the late 1600s, when it's said Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville planted the first sugar cane in Louisiana.

By the mid-19th century, the sugar industry had a bumpy ride due to weather, pests, mechanization and war. It was still, however, one of the major products of the state.

In 1882, industry leaders decided to create a separate exchange for handling sugar and molasses transactions: buying, selling, grading, regulation and promotion. It was estimated at that time that 1,100 sugar mills operated in Louisiana. (There was already a cotton exchange.)

A charter was granted for the exchange on March 6, 1883, and shortly thereafter construction started.



SUGAR AND RICE EXCHANGE.

Page from disbound book. Image of the Louisiana Sugar and Rice Exchange. Photo from 1895. The building was designed by James Freret.

Provided photo by The Historic New Orleans Collection Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. Develle

The grand building's story is an interesting one, but it unfortunately ends on a sour note for preservationists.

A site was chosen, with the entrance at the corner of N. Front and Bienville Streets. The address was 301 N. Front St.

The location was fitting because it was near riverside sugar warehouses and refineries, in an area that was already becoming known as the

Sugar District, according to the 2018 article in "Preservation in Print" by Richard Campanella.

According to "The Rice, Sugar and Coffee Journal" from April 1936, the land was purchased from Baron Jean Dominique Bruno Amend Chaurend, of Lyons, France, on July 20, 1883. The newly created board of Samuel Delgado, E.M. Scott and R.B. Scudder negotiated for the sum of \$18,000 cash and \$850 a year annually for the Baron for life.

On June 30, 1884, the Baron sold his usufructuary rights to John J. Ward, receiving \$1,000 a month until he passed away. The lot was finally deeded to the Exchange in 1905, with the price as \$12,500.

The architect for the Beaux Arts building was James Freret, known for the Bradish Johnson House (now part of the Louise S. McGehee campus), and the contractor was Joseph R. Turck. Construction started in July 1883, and was completed June 3, 1884.

The exchange was grand: The center dome rose to 65 feet and was supported by four, massive fluted Ionic columns made of solid pine timbers.

The hall proper was 60 feet by 100 feet, and on three sides there were plate glass windows.

The two-story wing building was 120 feet by 33 feet. Acoustics were said to be perfect.

“Furniture was rosewood, mahogany, cypress (and) was made especially for the Exchange,” stated the Journal, which also noted the total cost to construct and buy the land for the exchange was \$74,753.

In December 1888, the exchange began handling rice transactions and was called the Louisiana Sugar and Rice Exchange.

As the sugar and rice industries changed, so did the exchange's fortunes. According to the PIP article by Richard Campanella, in 1941, the exchange was sold to the Construction and General Laborers for \$13,520, after which it was operated as a meeting hall for Laborers Local Union 689.



A parking lot is where the former Louisiana Sugar and Rice Exchange, built in 1883/1884, was until 1963, when it was torn down. It has been a parking lot ever since. The site is bounded by Bienville, N. Front, N. Peters and Conti streets.

Photo by Sue Strachan for the New Orleans Advocate

The building further deteriorated and in 1963 it was sold and was demolished. Although the Vieux Carre Commission, which regulates architecture and development in the French Quarter, was active then, between 1946 and 1964 it did not have jurisdiction over an area bounded by Iberville, Decatur and St. Peter streets and the Mississippi River.

The space is currently a parking lot owned by Jackson Square Investments LLC, of Delaware, according to the New Orleans Assessor's Office.

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