

Ms. Suzie Terrell
Louisiana State Museum Board Chairperson
20 Pelham Drive
Metairie, LA 70005-4454

Thursday, December 8, 2022

Dear Ms. Terrell,

In anticipation of the December 12th meeting of the Louisiana State Museum Board, we are contacting you regarding the ongoing work at Madame John's Legacy at 632 Dumaine Street. This National Historic Landmark is of critical importance to the *tout ensemble* of the Vieux Carré National Register Historic District. According to a 1995 *Times Picayune* article, Dr. Eugene Cizek is quoted as saying:

"Of all the historic houses in New Orleans, this is the only one we have that really explains first-generation urban Creole architecture. It's important; this was the typical French Quarter house before the fire of 1788. It's the only example we have of what the Quarter looked like in the 18th century."

Earlier renovations and deferred maintenance have resulted in severe deterioration, a situation that has been assessed for nearly a decade by building conservation specialists in multiple studies. Unfortunately, the resulting technical reports are now being ignored by those directing the work. Through public and private meetings, as well as discussions with the architect and contractor, we have found that the current work is being executed without a defined methodology, crucial documentation, or expert advice, all to the detriment of the property. In addition, the architect and contractor have specifically stated that they have dismissed the advice and expertise of the State Historic Preservation Office and are not following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

We, the preservation community, find this unacceptable. The alterations underway have the potential to be so harmful that they may risk the national historic rating and landmark status of this extraordinary property. We strongly advise that all changes to this structure be halted until a clear methodology is produced, with documentary input by leading conservation and preservation experts familiar with the property, to include at minimum:

- An Historic Structures Report
- SHPO oversight and VCC guidance
- Adherence to the Secretary of Interior Standards
- Transparency with stakeholders

As the designated custodians of this irreplaceable national treasure, it is imperative that you ensure that any and all renovation, conservation, and maintenance efforts retain the historical integrity of this unique example of 18th century architecture. Prior to the continuance of any work, it is crucial that a clear methodology for a historically accurate and unified restoration plan be implemented.

We look forward to working with you to ensure the historic authenticity of this significant site.

Sincerely,

French Quarter Citizens
Friends of the Cabildo
Louisiana Landmarks Society
Preservation Resource Center
Vieux Carré Commission
Vieux Carré Commission Foundation
Vieux Carré Property Owners, Residents & Associates

CC:

Billy Nungesser, Lieutenant Governor
Jay Dardenne, Commissioner of Administration
Mark Moses, Assistant Commissioner, Facility Planning & Control
Jay Batt, LSM Board Vice-Chair
Malcolm Hodnett, LSM Board Chair of Architectural Preservation Committee
Julio Guichard, Office of Lieutenant Governor
Susan Maclay, LSM Interim Director
Michael McKnight, LSM Deputy Director
Nicole Hobson-Morris, Executive Director, SHPO
Bryan Block, Executive Director, VCC
Angelena Jones, LSM Administrative Assistant to the Interim Director