

NEW ORLEANS MUNICIPAL RECORDS

Mss. 719, 721, 726, 734, 737, 742, 759, 792, 795, 805, 824,
852, 902, 908, 1189, 1190, 1198, 1436

Inventory

Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections
Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library
Louisiana State University Libraries
Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University

2016

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SUMMARY

Size.	7.3 linear ft.
Geographic locations.	New Orleans
Inclusive dates.	1765-1898
Bulk dates.	1790-1837
Language.	French, Spanish, English
Summary.	Financial and legal records created by the city governments of New Orleans from 1765-1898.
Restrictions on access.	None.
Related collections.	None.
Copyright.	Physical rights are retained by the LSU Libraries. Copyright of the original materials in this collection has expired and they are therefore in the public domain.
Citation.	New Orleans Municipal Records, Mss. 719, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.
Stack locations.	T:55-60; OS:N

BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE

The first municipal government in colonial New Orleans was the Spanish Cabildo, in place from 1769-1803. Although limited in its authority by other government bodies, the Cabildo served as both a legislative and judicial council, working as a liaison between local interests and Spanish imperial authorities. With the support of other officials, the council was tasked with governance in the areas of taxation, public works, police and market supervision, building regulation, and land distribution.

The Cabildo was abolished in 1803, the same year that the United States took possession of Louisiana. Pierre Clement de Laussat, a French representative, established a form of municipal government more typical to cities throughout the United States. This consisted of a mayor, two deputy mayors, a twelve-person council, and a secretary. The City Council (or Conseil de Ville) divided responsibility for the supervision of street lighting and cleaning, markets, public health, and other areas of civic concern. In 1811, it was determined that the mayor would be elected by the public, with Nicholas Girod serving as the first elected mayor.

During this period, major steps were taken to improve public works, including paving streets and gutters for improved sanitation, digging new canals, and erecting new market buildings. By the 1820s, a large population increase, particularly an influx of English speaking residents, led to conflicts that eventually resulted in the city's division into three separate municipalities in 1836. Although the city remained under the charge of one mayor, each district had its own council, leading to the fragmentation of municipal affairs. The city government reunified in 1852.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The New Orleans Municipal Records date from 1765 to 1898 and consist of financial and legal papers created by the city governments of New Orleans. The papers are primarily the work of the City Council (or Conseil de Ville) and mayor. Although some records date to the Spanish colonial Cabildo, most are from later years, with the bulk of materials dating from 1790 to 1837. A majority of the papers are in French, with a smaller amount in either Spanish or English. Most French and Spanish documents are accompanied by a very brief English language description or summary. These were created internally by library staff.

Financial papers date from 1765-1886 and pertain to public finances, including receipt and disbursement of monies, levy and collection of taxes, collection of fees on vehicles, markets, street peddlers, butcher shops, and city lots, and pay rolls for various public employees such as police and light service. There are bills, treasurer's reports, mandats de payement, and receipts both for the council's newspaper subscriptions and the printing of public notices in local newspapers.

Legal papers are dated 1767-1898. Resolutions and ordinances include records of legal matters settled by the council, and communications between the council and mayor regarding municipal affairs. Contracts and public works records include contracts for sale of property, agreements for the purchase of raw materials for street paving and other projects, and a small amount of material pertaining to the contract and purchase of fire protection equipment and services for the city. License bonds were issued for tavern keepers, boarding house owners, cart or dray drivers, and a small number of cabarets and coffee houses, from 1834-1851.

LIST OF SERIES AND SUBSERIES

Series I. Financial Papers, 1765-1886, undated

Series II. Legal Papers, 1767-1898, undated

Subseries 1. Resolutions and Ordinances, 1767-1846, undated

Subseries 2. Contracts and Public Works Records, 1767-1898, undated

Subseries 3. License Bonds, 1834-1851

SERIES AND SUBSERIES DESCRIPTIONS

Series I. Financial Papers, 1765-1877, undated

Financial papers are arranged chronologically and pertain to public finances, including receipt and disbursement of monies, levy and collection of taxes, collection of fees on vehicles, markets, street peddlers, butcher shops, and city lots, and pay rolls for various public employees such as police and light service. Records consist primarily of bills, receipts, accounts of salaries and rents, mandats de payement, treasurer's reports, and payrolls.

Early records from the Spanish colonial period include treasurer's reports and other accounts of the city's revenues and expenditures. These documents are signed by city treasurers including Juan de Castanedo, Juan Durel, and Gilberto Leonard, and include accounts of the city treasury for 1771 and 1787; an account of all revenues and expenditures for 1798; and treasury reports from 1765 and 1795. Other papers from this time period include a list of rents paid by small merchants and peddlers holding commercial posts on the levee (Oct 31, 1795), and an expense account for repairs made to the levee in 1799.

Many papers record revenues from the city's numerous markets, as well as expenses paid toward maintaining them. These include an 1801 report of market revenues for the entire year and a list of repairs to the meat market, which was damaged in a hurricane in 1812. There are records regarding the hire and treatment of contract labor, including enslaved workers furnished to the city by land owners. There is also a bill and note from Jean Bouguin, a free person of color, for carpentry work done on a cemetery and Carondelet Canal, including construction of a bridge (September 14, 1796). In addition, a September 1811 report details the poor financial situation at the city's charity hospital.

Papers from the early 1820s consist almost entirely of bills for maintenance work done in New Orleans, including payment owed for shipment of supplies, such as sand and paving stone. These bills are signed by the city surveyor, Joseph Pilié, certifying that the shipments were received. There are also numerous notes regarding levee taxes collected from ships entering the port, and a list of city lots sold in public auction (May 1822).

Also included are receipts for the council's subscriptions to local newspapers, purchased between 1809 and 1877, as well as receipts for payment to those papers for the printing of public notices, resolutions, and proclamations. There are mandats de payement issued in piastres from 1806 through 1830, with the largest number from 1806 to 1810. Payrolls are found intermittently for the years between 1810 and 1849. These documents, many of which are oversize, list city guard and police; carpenters and masons doing repairs to bridges and buildings; and lamp lighters.

Later papers include materials related to the city's fire protection services. There are receipts for initiation fees for the Fireman's Charitable Association (September 2nd 1865), as well as insurance receipts from the Factors and Traders Insurance Company (1882-

1886) and the Firemen's Insurance Co. of New Orleans (December 1879). There are some additional unrelated items from the 1850s through 1870s, including tax forms, a "certificate of redemption of forfeited land," and a receipt for a vault in the St. Vincent De Paul grave yard (August 1851).

Series II. Legal Papers, 1767-1898, undated

Subseries 1. Resolutions and Ordinances, 1767-1846, undated

This subseries is arranged chronologically and includes records of legal matters settled by the city council, as well as communications between the council and mayor regarding municipal affairs. Many of these letters were sent from the council to the mayor outlining deliberations and requesting the mayor take action or issue orders. Other letters contain requests or complaints from citizens and city employees, often including a written record of the council's subsequent resolution. Most papers concern administrative topics such as appointing commissaries to each ward and suburb (March 14, 1805), delineating the powers of the mayor for maintaining the police force (March 11, 1805), and taking steps for prison reform (March 20, 1805).

Specific examples of other types of resolutions and ordinances include the following: An order from the city council dictating the size of panes of glass in the doors of the City Hall (Cabildo). This includes drawings of the doors showing different measurements to be used (February 13, 1813). A resolution requesting the mayor give orders to the police in regard to a house on Carondelet Canal behind the charity hospital that is being used as a refuge by runaway slaves (April 11, 1805).

Resolutions concerning Matthew Flannery's proposal for painting house numbers and street signs in New Orleans and on which corners signs should be placed (April 1805), as well as an official letter from the city council dated July 29, 1805 congratulating new mayor John Watkins on his election. There is also a police order to bury the bodies of hurricane victims found on the banks of the river, as well as to make an inspection of the lighting system damaged by the storm (August 25, 1812).

A resolution calling for the strict enforcement of ordinances governing the plays and dances of slaves includes a stipulation that they should cease entirely (September 24, 1814). Another resolution sets the price of the license for dances held by free people of color and payment of musicians for public concerts (December 4, 1813); and an August 31, 1810 letter to the mayor concerns sick slaves in prison going without medical attention without their masters paying an extra fee.

Also included in this subseries are city council meeting minutes from 1822 and 1823, and a list of parish judges in Louisiana during the 1820s.

Subseries 2. Contracts and Public Works Records, 1767-1898 undated

This subseries is arranged chronologically and includes contracts for sale of property, agreements for the purchase of raw materials for street paving and other building projects, and a small amount of material pertaining to fire protection equipment and services. Other legal papers consist of sworn statements, estate documents, and insurance contracts.

Records concerning sale of property include contracts for land purchases and transfers, as well as surveyors' documents. Among the latter is an October 28, 1767 description of a land tract on the right bank of the Mississippi River, with boundaries set by the Royal Surveyor. There is also a copy of a 1785 document in which Francisco Poussett and Daniel Ross agreed to a division of their land in Baton Rouge, with both receiving a title in New Orleans in the same year; and a copy of a 1791 document from the Royal Surveyor in Cuba, Vicente Sebastian Pintado, discussing land in New Orleans that was granted to a local citizen by the governor.

Also included is an 1832 copy of an original document concerning the sale of land belonging to the Chitimacha tribe of Native Americans (June 18, 1802); and paper work for the mortgage of an estate in Rapides Parish, dated March 6, 1838, that lists the names and ages of slaves.

Records documenting public works consist of contracts with builders and companies for the construction of sidewalks, benches, and gutters, as well as agreements for the supply of sand and paving stone; and instructions for cleaning and clearing common lands. There are also a series of reports from the city surveyor, Joseph Pilié, to the mayor, in 1824, 1828, and 1829; an August 5, 1830 contract for the construction of new fencing around Jackson Square; and an October 28, 1808 letter to the mayor from the French architect, Arsène Lacarrière Latour, discussing extra bracing for the outer section of the city's meat market.

A series of reports and recommendations regarding the safety and condition of a house at Jefferson and Levee streets, belonging to Joseph Chardon and intended for use as a public ballroom, state that it is not built to city specifications and is recommended for demolition (October and November 1820). Another file, compiled in May 1813, contains a collection of papers concerning the new meat market (*halle des boucheries*) that was constructed in 1813 by architects Gurlie & Guillot from plans drawn by city surveyor Jacques Tanesse. Some older records are included: *procès-verbals* from 1807 and 1810 discuss the close of the market for the year. Records from 1813 include a February ordinance giving approval for Gurlie & Guillot to build the market, as well as information on the plans, and prices for building materials.

A small amount of the public works papers pertains to fire protection equipment and services. This includes insurance contracts for homes in the city (1861 and 1874), as well as contracts and letters written during the city's efforts to obtain new fire pumps and

other equipment in 1843 and 1844. There is also a set of regulations for the Louisiana Mutual Aid Fire Indemnity Society (1898); sheet music for "The Fireman's Funeral March," composed by Theodore de la Hache and dedicated to the Fire Department of New Orleans; and two photographs featuring images of the Orleans Company No. 21, taken in 1884.

Earlier records from the Spanish colonial period consist of a variety of papers such as a birth and baptism certificate, rendered by Josefina Valdes, from 1770; an estate document from 1803, in Spanish, involving the merchant Gilbert Antoine de St. Maxent; and a translation of a royal decree from December 21, 1797, regarding safety and lighting in Havana and New Orleans, as well as land for planting vegetables and other food crops.

Other legal papers in this subseries concern law enforcement. A letter to mayor Joseph Roffignac from the customs office describes the discovery of a group of possible pirates and the confiscation of muskets (October 15, 1821). There are a number of sworn statements, mainly from the 1820s, including one describing a fatal altercation.

In addition, there are several probate court documents from February 11, 1836, appointing a tutorship and undertutor for two children in New Orleans following their mother's death; and two 1840 petitions from farmers at St. Mary's Market, recommending that William Carter be reappointed as commissary, due to financial losses sustained in his absence.

Subseries 3. License Bonds, 1834-1851

This subseries is arranged chronologically by type of bond. All bonds list the name of owner or operator, and address of establishment, where applicable.

- Whole license bonds for tavern keepers (1834-1837)
- Dray license bonds (1836, January 1841)
- Private cart license bonds (1837)
- Boarding house bonds, including for private, sailors, eating house (October 1836, 1837-1838)
- Four coffee-house license bonds (1845)
- Two cabaret license bonds (1845, 1851)

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CONTAINER LIST

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