

**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT
FOR THE HUMANITIES**

SAMPLE APPLICATION NARRATIVE



Collaborative Research
Institution: University of Chicago (Dawdy)

NEH Application Cover Sheet

Collaborative Research

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INSTITUTION

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APPLICATION INFORMATION

Title: *The Roots of Creole New Orleans: Archaeological Investigations at St. Louis Cathedral and Ursuline Convent*

Application Number: RZ-50992-09

Grant Period: From July 2009 to June 2012

Field of Project: Archaeology

Description of Project: Funding is requested to support a 3-year archaeological research project to investigate the French colonial foundations of New Orleans at two of its most significant historic complexes, St. Louis Cathedral and Ursuline Convent. The proposed work will extend excavations begun in the garden behind the cathedral in 2008 and incorporate the findings into a broader comparative framework that includes new fieldwork at the nearby Ursuline Convent Garden as well as specialized laboratory analyses. The study addresses how African, Native American, and European residents were exchanging knowledge and practices related to architecture, agriculture, cuisine, and medicine, and how these material practices contributed to the creation of New Orleans' unique creole culture. This project represents the first multi-site archaeological research program undertaken in the French Quarter.

BUDGET

Outright Request	\$	Cost Sharing	\$
Matching Request	\$	Total Budget	\$
Total NEH Request	\$		

GRANT ADMINISTRATOR

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1. Statement of significance and impact

Funding is requested to support a collaborative, interdisciplinary archaeological research program over three years to investigate the colonial foundations of New Orleans at two of its most significant historic complexes located in the French Quarter, St. Louis Cathedral and Ursuline Convent. Until recently, researchers have not had an opportunity to expose extensive deposits related to the French colonial period in New Orleans (1717-1768). However, limited excavations behind St. Louis Cathedral in summer 2008 revealed significant deposits and compelling results. This proposal intends to extend those excavations and incorporate the findings into a broader comparative framework that includes new fieldwork at the Ursuline Convent, re-analysis of previous projects, and specialized laboratory analyses.

While St. Louis was the colony's center of religious practice, Ursuline Convent was the center of educational life and medicine. They were two of the most influential institutions in French Louisiana, but there are other factors that together make them a powerful resource for understanding the early roots of New Orleans' famed creole culture. The target of the archaeological investigations will not be the standing structures of the church and convent, but rather their attached garden spaces (St. Anthony's Garden and Ursuline Garden). These gardens and open spaces in the heart of the city were critical sites of encounter -- between colonialists and the environment, and between diverse social groups. Open spaces were flexible meeting grounds adapted for occasions of trade, feasting, and temporary residence. Gardens were places in which knowledge about food and medicinal crops was collected, implemented, and transformed with input from Native American informants, African farmers, and European administrators. The question that frames this project is: *What were the material dynamics -- both ecological and economic -- of the creolization process in New Orleans?* This study seeks to develop a contextual approach to creolization (the formation of a new cultural identity) that emphasizes the material practices under colonialism that gave shape to, and were shaped by, cultural interactions.

The project will make a significant contribution to the *We the People* initiative by studying how this important American city took shape not as an imperial blueprint stamped upon a swampy wilderness, but as a collaboratively built crossroads carved out of a shared cultural space.

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3. List of participants

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Narrative

Substance and context

Many people do not realize that the French Quarter has very little of its French heritage left in architectural form. The Ursuline Convent is the only standing structure from the French period that survives in New Orleans today due to two devastating fires that struck the city in the Spanish colonial period in 1788 and 1794. Therefore, the kind of information that material culture can provide on the processes of colonization and creolization in the French period lies almost entirely below ground in the form of archaeological deposits.

The proposed project represents the first effort to execute a multi-site archaeological research plan focused on New Orleans' French colonial founding (1717-1768). Despite its prominence in regional history, the archaeological study of early New Orleans has lagged behind studies of predecessor settlements at Old Mobile (Waselkov et al. 2002, Waselkov 2005), Dauphine Island (Shorter 2002) and more recently, Biloxi (Marie Danforth, personal communication, September 2008). While these studies will provide important comparative and contextual data for the present study, researchers in the area have long been waiting for reciprocal data from Louisiana's long-lived administrative and economic center at New Orleans. The warm-up to the present initiative has been building through several projects undertaken by the Project Director in New Orleans since 1995. The most important of these projects were those at Madame John's Legacy (a National Historic Landmark with deposits dating back to the 1720s [Dawdy 1998]), the Maginnis Cotton Mill (a 1760s indigo plantation [Dawdy and Ibáñez 1997]), and the Rising Sun Hotel (Dawdy et al. 2008). The latter site, among other interesting components, possessed two that are critical to the present project: the first pre-colonial Native American habitation ever identified in the French Quarter (radio carbon dated to circa 1640s-1690s), and a well-preserved French colonial kitchen garden (circa 1720-1750). In addition, in 1995, Dawdy conducted limited shovel testing at Ursuline Convent, one of the two sites of the current proposal, to verify the integrity of the deposits there (Dawdy and Yakubik 1995).

However, the catalyst for the current project is of more recent origin. From June to July 2008, Dawdy headed archaeological field investigations at St. Anthony's Garden, in collaboration with The St. Louis Cathedral, New Orleans Archdiocese. St. Anthony's Garden is the name given to the green space that lies directly behind this iconic cathedral (please see maps and photos provided in Appendix). This archaeological investigation is one component of the planning phase for the restoration of the historic landscape of the garden, which was badly damaged by Hurricane Katrina. The Getty Foundation is supporting an interdisciplinary and international effort to study and redesign the garden, with a projected completion date of January 2010. The intended focus of the Summer 2008 archaeological investigation (and the limits of the Getty funding) concentrated on answering questions regarding former landscape features and the recovery of botanical remains that will inform the restoration. However, during the course of excavation several unexpected and remarkable discoveries related to other (non-garden) aspects of the site's history, and to the colonial founding of New Orleans, were made. The inspiration, and urgency, of the present project is to develop these discoveries to their full scholarly potential before the deposits are disturbed by the renovation and replanting of the garden.

No site quite like St. Anthony's Garden has been excavated in the state of Louisiana. In terms of preservation conditions, archaeological features, and historic import, it is akin to Louisiana's Jamestown or Plymouth Plantation -- two other colonial centers that might be better understood through comparison with this other American foundation story. In just three small areas opened in the 2008 season, the site has exceeded expectations in its ability to reveal how the early city was constructed -- from the form of its earliest temporary architecture and the meals that Governor Bienville's pioneers were eating, to the unexpected influence of Native Americans in the form of hybrid pottery, decorated pipe bowls, and a hut with an axe-hewn rectangular European form and palmetto thatch walls of possible Native American technique.

Both sites served as gardens in the French period (a Capuchin food and experimental crop garden, and the Ursuline nuns' medicinal herb garden). Both sites were also important meeting grounds for the diverse cultures that came together to create Creole New Orleans. The Capuchins used enslaved Africans

to assist in their subsistence activities and worldly affairs. The Ursulines brought African and Native American girls and women into their convent as converts, workers, and students. The green space behind St. Louis Cathedral now known (and hereafter referred to) as St. Anthony's Garden was split between the Capuchin garden and an undeveloped lot that appears to have served as a campsite for visiting Native Americans, and possibly as an open air market sponsored by the church, as evidenced in the archaeological features and artifacts uncovered during initial excavations in Summer 2008. Although the role of frontier missions has been an important subfield in historical archaeology (e.g., Deetz 1978, Farnsworth 1989, McEwan 1991, Lightfoot 2005, Silliman 2001; for a review see Graham 1998), the role of church institutions in urban settings has received relatively little attention, particularly in places like New Orleans where the enslaved comprised a significant percentage of the colonial population.

Unlike the focus of most urban archaeological projects, these sites were neither private households nor fixed architectural spaces. Due to their flexible uses and their accessibility to a wide variety of colonial participants, they are locales well suited to study cultural interactions. But far from being entirely fluid spaces, the cultural interactions they fostered were mediated by colonialism in the form of supervising Catholic institutions. They have a high potential to inform us about questions related to: environmental and dietary adaptations; architectural and landscape patterns that capture colonial relations in spatial terms; trading connections and materials not privileged in the archival record (smuggled goods or African or Native American produced goods); and the ways in which technological and environmental knowledge may have been circulating among the early colony's African, Native American, and European residents (such as medical knowledge of local plants or African treatments for tropical fevers, architectural techniques, or how to tan a deer hide). In addition, these sites present an unusual perspective in the study of colonialism that considers the role that major religious institutions played in producing new secular economies and sites of social interaction in the setting of an urban port.

While St. Anthony's Garden rests in the shadow of the oldest operating cathedral in the United States, the Ursuline Garden rests in the shadow of the oldest standing structure in the Mississippi Valley, the main convent building, which dates to 1752 (see photos in Appendix). Both institutions, however,

were present and operating at their current sites by the 1720s, using earlier buildings. The social and political significance of the St. Louis Cathedral complex, which formed the visual and spatial centerpiece of the planned town, has often been presumed by historians and others, but most studies on the colonial period have been limited to biographical or ecclesiastical histories, with little investigation of how the church and its operations affected quotidian life (Alberts 1998, Miceli 1979, O'Neill 1966, Vogel 1928). In contrast, historians have argued for the prominent place of the Ursuline Convent in the social and cultural life of French New Orleans (Clark 2007a, Heaney 1993). Still, some specific gaps remain. Although the records are rich with references to the Ursuline's well-maintained herb garden that existed within the walls of their cloister, the actual content and design of the garden and the other ways in which the community may have used the convent's open space to participate in the local economy are topics neglected in the written sources. Archaeologically, the site of the herb garden remains well preserved, with promising potential to answer these questions.

The scope of the research over three years (1 July 2009 - 30 June 2012) will be:

- (1) four weeks of additional, intensive excavation at St. Anthony's Garden;
- (2) four weeks of intensive excavation at Ursuline Convent;
- (3) the laboratory identification, sorting, dating, analysis, cataloging and preparation of all archaeologically recovered remains;
- (4) specialized analyses warranted by the research questions (including small control samples taken from nearby sites) such as phytolith analysis to identify the plants cultivated on the sites, archaeometric analysis of handbuilt pottery types to identify related traditions and possible regional sources, and chemical residue analysis of selected vessels to determine the content of past meals or possibly, of medicinal preparations; and
- (5) public outreach, report writing, and dissemination of results through a website, public talks, and academic conferences and publications.

The source materials used for this project will consist of the artifacts, documented archaeological features, and ecological data directly produced by these new excavations, as well as

comparative data gathered through analysis of samples from previously excavated assemblages. In addition, necessary archival research will be conducted to flesh out any remaining gaps in the property histories, or address specific questions that will aid in the interpretation of the results.

Recovered artifacts and recorded architectural features

The most immediate and significant source material will be the ceramics, glass, metal, personal and miscellaneous objects, architectural features and artifacts, and archaeobotanical and zooarchaeological remains that will be recovered from excavations at the two sites. Judging from the still-pending observational results of the 2008 St. Anthony's excavations, these will include but not be limited to: French faience, Mexican majolica, Native American ceramics, redwares, Saintonge, stonewares, white salt-glazed stoneware, French olive green wine bottle glass, gin or case bottle glass, black glass, smoking pipes (both kaolin and hand-made), coins, jewelry, beads, postholes and poteaux-en-terre features, bousillage, chert scrapers and debitage, possible glass scrapers, fruit stones and burned corn, and a dense and highly variable faunal record that includes turtle, equid, alligator, many freshwater and saltwater fish species, caprine, bovine, raccoon, and rabbit.

Archives

Much of the historical footwork has already been completed through the Vieux Carré Survey (a compilation of maps, archival documents and a chain of title data file maintained for each property in the French Quarter) and through secondary works such as Emily Clark's history of the Ursulines (2007a) and Shannon Lee Dawdy's work on the socio-economic history of French New Orleans (2008) and on food practices in colonial Louisiana (Dawdy in prep, Scott and Dawdy in press). In addition, the Getty Foundation funded a thorough property history and research on gardening practices in New Orleans for the first phase of the St. Anthony Garden, completed by local archivist Sally Reeves (in prep) and by the French historian Gilles Langlois (in prep), a specialist in eighteenth-century French landscapes.

Still, some specific questions remain regarding Native American visits and activities in the French Quarter that might be tied to these sites through a more directed search of colonial correspondence and civic records. In addition, a detail property history of the Ursuline Convent is needed, as well as a

available to other researchers through this project will make a significant contribution to the region, and to comparative studies of colonialism.

In terms of a **contribution to general audiences in the humanities**, this discovery of the colonial foundations of a major American city promises to enrich public understandings of the roots, not only of Creole New Orleans, but of the American Republic. With the Louisiana Purchase, the United States doubled in size, but rather than representing the annexation of a wilderness, as is often depicted in popular accounts, the country gained an already colonized land and a complex society formed by over 100 years of interactions among Indians, Africans, and Europeans. Thus, the project brings to light, and adds specific dimensions to, the culturally diverse roots of America, and a colonial past quite different from the familiar stories of New England Puritans and Virginia Cavaliers. Public interest in the St. Anthony Garden project is already running high, as evidenced by the daily visitors at the site, the more than 300 visitors during an open house, and numerous newspaper, television, and radio reports. A website has recently been launched which provides updates on the project and links to media coverage (<http://home.uchicago.edu/~sdawdy>). The visibility of St. Louis Cathedral and the Ursuline Convent (two of the most visited sites in the city) will ensure that a ready public of tourists, locals, and general followers of Louisiana culture and history will be reached.

History and duration of the project

St. Anthony's Garden

An excavation directed by the Project Director in the summer of 2008 in the garden behind the Cathedral exposed remarkably well preserved deposits associated with two early structures, one of which predates the street grid and almost certainly represents an early hut established by one of the pioneers in the land-clearing phase (1717-1726). It is the earliest and only such structure ever encountered in an excavation in New Orleans. The site is also characterized by rich deposits of artifacts stratigraphically well separated by identifiable features, such as a roadbed known to have been laid in 1726 and the fire level of 1788. What is particularly important about the artifactual remains is that the 2008 excavations

suggest that Native Americans played a much more prominent role in the early founding years than has been previously appreciated, or than is presented in the archival record. The deposits from the early French strata appear to be comprised almost 50/50 of European and Native American material culture (with the latter represented by hand-built ceramics, hide scrapers, decorated clay pipes, and lithics).

Nine University of Chicago students and over 15 local volunteers assisted with the excavation between June 15 and July 10, 2008. The project consisted of archaeological investigations of the green space located on the northwest side of St. Louis Cathedral known as St. Anthony's Garden (see site map and photos in the Appendix). Project members recorded features, recovered artifacts, and collected soil samples to aid in the reconstruction of planting practices in the space from the French colonial period through to the mid-20th century. The space overlaps or encompasses at least four historic gardens: an early 1700s food garden cultivated by the French Capuchins, the kitchen garden of Pere Antoine dating ca. 1780-1820, a landscaped public park dating to the antebellum period that featured an ice cream pavilion and flower mart, and the cathedral's formal garden which took over this same space in the 1860s. While deposits and features likely associated with each of these garden episodes on the site were identified during the 2008 excavations, several unexpected discoveries relating to other aspects of the site's use bear further investigation.

Highlights of these findings include:

- *The earliest architectural structure ever identified in New Orleans*, a ca. 1717-1726 simple rectangular hut with square posts and probable palmetto thatch walls. A second well-preserved poteaux-en-terre structure dating to ca. 1726-1750 was also uncovered.
- *A high incidence of Native American material culture*, including a predominating red-filmed pottery provisionally nicknamed "New Orleans Red." Along with the ceramics were hide scrapers and non-local debitage (the closest chert sources are located in north Louisiana), a decorated Indian pipe, and ubiquitous wild animal food remains.
- *The original street surface, ditch, and banquette (elevated sidewalk) of Orleans Street (ca. 1726-1830s)* which cut through the space before it was converted to a public park. The ditch associated

