



May 8, 2023

New Orleans City Council
1300 Perdido Street
New Orleans, LA 70112

Dear City Councilmembers,

I am writing in support of the Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans's and Faubourg Marigny Neighborhood Association's opposition to the proposed rooftop demolition and addition at 502 Frenchmen Street/1407 Decatur Street. I am an assistant professor in the University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture where I teach courses in architectural history and historic preservation, specializing in the nineteenth-century US and contributions of marginalized communities. In addition to my work as a scholar, I have engaged in a 20-year career as a historic preservation consultant and am the current Chair of the National Register of Historic Places State Board of Review (Texas). As the author of *Building Antebellum New Orleans: Free People of Color and Their Influence* (UT Press, 2021), I can specifically speak to the significance of 502 Frenchmen Street/1407 Decatur Street as a historic resource that attests to the individual and communal history, persistence, and perseverance of New Orleans' antebellum *gens de couleur libres* community. Although the Historic District Landmarks Commission (HDLC) and Architectural Review Committee (ARC) have previously denied alteration to the rooftop of the building, I add my appeal to you to deny this third attempt for work that ignores the architectural integrity and historical importance of this building.

The complex at 502 Frenchmen Street/1407 Decatur Street housed the residence and business of free man of color Julien Adolphe Lacroix and remained in the Lacroix family for over fifty years. François Lacroix (ca. 1806–1876) and Julien Adolphe Lacroix (ca. 1808–1868), the sons of free woman of color Anne “Popotte” Batecave and Frenchman Paul Lacroix, were born in Cuba. Their parents probably fled there from Saint Domingue (present-day Haiti) around 1803 during the insurrection led by enslaved persons when France failed to regain control of the former colony. In 1809, refugees in Cuba were deported to Jamaica and New Orleans; the Lacroix family probably entered New Orleans at that time. Jean Lacroix and his family were listed as living in New Orleans on Garrison Street (present-day Barracks Street) at the 1810 census; Popotte and their young sons were enumerated as being white. Jean Lacroix possibly died or left New Orleans shortly after as scholars and historians have not relocated him in the historic record after that date.

When they came of age, the Lacroix brothers owned and developed many properties throughout New Orleans. While tailor François Lacroix is the more well-known of the pair, Julien was also a prolific developer and businessman. Like his brother and many other free persons of color, Julien was an entrepreneur; in addition to engaging in real estate he was a well-established grocer. Julien acquired the property at present-day 502 Frenchmen Street (inclusive of nos. 504 and 506 and the adjacent nine-foot section facing Decatur Street) in 1838. There, he commissioned a *maison hautes en briques* (tall brick house) to serve as a combination store-residence. Julien and his family resided on the upper level while he operated his grocery below. By the 1840s, Julien was one of the five largest landowners of color in New



Orleans. In 1853 and 1856, Julien acquired adjacent lots at present-day 1407-1411 Decatur Street and constructed two additional store-house buildings for rental income. He also acquired and developed several other adjacent lots to expand his complex of landholdings in the block formed by Decatur, Frenchmen, and Chartres Streets and Esplanade Avenue (present-day 501-505 and 511 Esplanade Avenue) in 1855. Lacroix purchased and developed many other properties, particularly in Faubourg Marigny, in the antebellum era. According to *The New Orleans Tribune*, Julien “owned properties totaling one sixth of all free, Black-owned real estate in the city by 1860” (<https://theneworleanstribune.com/2018/01/24/300-in-black/>).

Julien Lacroix died on February 26, 1868. The building at 502 Frenchmen Street/1407 Decatur Street was depicted along with adjacent Lacroix properties on an attached plan drawn by C. A. de Armas to accompany Lacroix’s estate inventory. The Lacroix residence and store, and their contents, were appraised at \$24,500. His widow Ursule Peant Lacroix inherited the property; she and her sons continued operation of the grocery and family business until 1891.

Today, the buildings at 502 Frenchmen Street/1407 Decatur Street and 501 Esplanade Avenue are the only two buildings depicted on the 1868 plan that are extant. Unlike 501 Esplanade Avenue which was altered with addition of a mansard roof and removal of its galleries in the late 1800s, the Lacroix building at 502 Frenchmen Street/1407 Decatur Street retains its architectural integrity and Creole features, including the historically appropriate hipped roofs. The building also still contributes to the neighborhood effect of its antebellum setting with the galleries and covered walkway along the length of the façade. Retention of the entrepreneurial spirit and agency of Julien Lacroix, his family, and New Orleans’ antebellum free persons of color community is integral to the preservation of the original form and style of the building. The proposed addition to 502 Frenchmen Street/1407 Decatur Street will degrade the integrity of the building as well as the adjacent cityscape. Every effort should be made to find alternate design solutions for the needs of the applicant.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any additional questions regarding the historical and architectural significance of the Julien Adolphe Lacroix building at 502 Frenchmen Street/1407 Decatur Street.

Respectfully yours,

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