

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC The Cabildo

AND/OR COMMON

The Cabildo

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER 709 Chartres Street

CITY, TOWN

New Orleans

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2nd

STATE

Louisiana

CODE

22

COUNTY

Orleans Parish

CODE

071

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
___ DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	___ AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	___ PRIVATE	___ UNOCCUPIED	___ COMMERCIAL ___ PARK
___ STRUCTURE	___ BOTH	___ WORK IN PROGRESS	___ EDUCATIONAL ___ PRIVATE RESIDENCE
___ SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	___ ENTERTAINMENT ___ RELIGIOUS
___ OBJECT	___ IN PROCESS	___ YES: RESTRICTED	___ GOVERNMENT ___ SCIENTIFIC
	___ BEING CONSIDERED	___ YES: UNRESTRICTED	___ INDUSTRIAL ___ TRANSPORTATION
		___ NO	___ MILITARY ___ OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME State of Louisiana adm. by Louisiana State Museum

STREET & NUMBER

751 Chartres Street

CITY, TOWN

New Orleans

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Louisiana

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Orleans Parish Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

421 Loyola Avenue

CITY, TOWN

New Orleans

STATE

Louisiana

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey (22 sheets, 19 photos 1936  
29 drawings)

DATE

1934, 1936

FEDERAL \_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress/Annex Division of Prints and Photographs

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

Louisiana

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

---

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The site where the Cabildo now stands was set aside for government use in the plan of the new town of New Orleans, laid out in 1721 by the French military engineer, Adrien de Pauger. The present building was begun in 1795, after the two fires of 1788 and 1794 had destroyed the various buildings on the lots. Don Gilberto Guillemard, who had drawn the plans for the Cathedral of St. Louis and the Presbytere after the fire of 1788, was chosen to design the new Cabildo.

As with the Presbytere, Guillemard made as much use as possible of the old brickwork which remained on the site after the two great fires. Evidently there were substantial remains of the massive brick walls of the old French corp de garde of the 1750's which could be utilized on the site and of the old Cabildo. These were combined, rebuilding both as a single structure having nearly the same frontage to the public square as the new Presbytere.

Although numerous plans have been found for the repairs and additions to the prison buildings in back of the new Cabildo, no plans for the main structure itself have been located. Work began on December 4, 1795 under the supervision of Guillemard and according to his plans.

The Cabildo was originally a two story brick building with flat, balaustrated roof, topped by urns. The lower story had an arcaded open galerie with a second story gallery above. The lower arcade formed by slightly elliptical arches which spring from square piers with two Doric pilasters to halt the rhythm at the corners and to add greater support at the ends. The upper story is of similar design but Ionic pilasters are applied to the piers between the glazed arches. A central pediment crowned the center three bays where engaged columns on both levels have been applied to the piers. The pediment once held the arms of the Spanish crown. These were removed in 1804 and replaced with an eagle amidst trophies, arms and flags in 1822, designed by Pietro Cardelli, who had worked on the United States Capitol.

Guillemard was apparently greatly influenced by the ruined walls of the corp de garde. Inside, the two long rooms, separated by a heavy wall with five arches, were restored for the use of the corps de garde. The five windows in the old wall along St. Peter Street established the spacing of the windows of the new council chamber or Sala Capitular, which Guillemard designed to occupy the new second floor space above. Although the fireplace in the lower room was at its Royal Street end, the fireplace in the Sala Capitular was placed at the center of the long inner wall of the room. The old mantel was probably removed in 1825 when the building was remodeled for the Marquis de Lafayette, it then being considered clumsy and old-fashioned. When first made, however, it must have been the most elaborate that could be obtained. The only ones of such elegance surviving from the late 1700's were those from the Bosque House, now in the State Street residence of Mr. Felix Kuntz. These were

(Continued)

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1795-1847

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Gilberto Guillemard

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Cabildo, one of the monumental buildings flanking the Basilica of St. Louis, is one of the most important historic buildings in the United States and certainly the most important surviving monument of the period of Spanish domination in the Louisiana territory. It's name is derived from the Spanish municipal governing body, or Cabildo, set up in 1769 by Don Alexandro O'Reilly, the new Spanish governor, to replace the Superior Council that had governed Louisiana during the French regime. The present Cabildo was begun in 1795, with Gilberto Guillemard as the architect. Originally a massive, two-story structure of stuccoed brick with a flat tile roof, the existing steep mansard roof and cupola, which forms the third story, were added in 1847.

### HISTORY

The first building to occupy the site of the Cabildo was a police station or corp de garde, begun in 1729, one of the first all brick structures in New Orleans. After thirty years of use this decaying building was replaced. The new building was designed by Ignace Broutin and Bernard Deverges, who succeeded him as Engineer-in-Chief of Louisiana. This structure was of brick masonry, about forty-two feet wide, facing the public square and about fifty-eight feet deep along St. Peter Street. Parts of its walls are incorporated in the present Cabildo.

On August 18, 1769, Don Alexandro O'Reilly took formal possession of the colony for Spain. One of his first official acts as governor was to establish a Spanish Cabildo for the government of the city and to order the construction of a new town hall on the site of the prison of the corps de garde. The new town hall was built on the foundations of the old structure, but was only of brick between post or colomage construction, instead of the masonry of the older corp de garde.

By the beginning of 1787, the building had begun to show signs of decay so common to buildings of this type of construction. While plans for a new structure were proceeding, the old Cabildo and a large part of the town were destroyed by fire. On the site a corps de garde, prison, and jailers quarters were erected but these were again burned in the 1794 fire.

(Continued)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Huber, Leonard V. and Wilson, Samuel, Jr., The Cabildo, New Orleans, 1970.  
 Morrison, Hugh, Early American Architecture, New York, 1952.  
New Orleans City Guide, American Guide Series, Boston, 1938.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .3 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	15	783340	3317500	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See Continuation Sheet)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Patricia Heintzelman, Architectural Historian, Landmark Review Project

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

6/30/75

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C. 20240

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS: Designated: Oct 9, 1960 date

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

date

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

*Boundary Certified*  
*June 13, 1977*

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

*6/28/77*

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

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used as the basis for the design of the new one, donated by The Friends of the Cabildo for the restoration of the Sala Capitular in 1969.

The wrought-iron work of the railings of the upper gallery and the railings in front of the windows of the Sala Capitular are perhaps the finest Spanish colonial wrought-iron work to be found in New Orleans. Most, if not all of it was created by Marcelino Hernandez, a skillful craftsman, native of the Canary Islands.

The original flat tiled roof of the Cabildo was never very satisfactory, needing frequent repairs. In 1847 a steep mansard roof with scrolled dormers was added, probably influenced by the planned design for the Baroness Pontalba's extensions to her buildings. The City Council was so pleased with the design of Louis Surgi, that they successfully encouraged the Cathedral wardens, owners of the Presbytere, to similarly alter their building. In 1850 the building was refinished with brown stucco and new wrought iron entrance gates. They are still in place today.

While the new Cabildo building was under construction, repairs were again being made to the royal jail behind it. From the time the first buildings had been placed on this side of the square they always formed a complex of prison, corps de garde and governmental structures. Guillemard was also chosen to design the additions to the jail. These drawings show, in addition to the new two floor prison, the plans of the old prison and council chamber and part of the new Cabildo added to it. During the restoration, when the plaster was shifted from the wall of the small second floor room between the Sala Capitular and the Arsenal, the roof line of the old prison could be seen along the Arsenal wall, indicating that parts of the building had stood after the Arsenal was constructed in 1839. Most of the old prison, however, was demolished at that time for the construction of the Arsenal and various private buildings. When the rear portion of the calaboose or jail was demolished, some cells joining the Cabildo remained and were used as a police jail. In 1850, Louis Pilie designed a block of six new cells three stories high. These are still part of the present structure. In 1969 the exterior of these cells was restored as faithfully as possible in accordance with the original drawings although some of the upper ones are used as restrooms and for air-conditioning equipment.

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In 1966 extensive research was undertaken prior to the restoration of the Cabildo. Maxwell and Le Breton were appointed as architects with the firm of Richard Koch and Samuel Wilson, Jr., as associates. As a result of these investigations it was determined beyond doubt that most of the old walls of the French corps de garde had survived the fires of 1788 and 1794 and had been incorporated into the present Cabildo building. The actual floor of the French colonial structure of bricks on edge as described in documents from the period was found under layers of later flooring. It was then decided that this oldest part of the building should be restored to its approximate appearance at the time the Cabildo was completed in 1799. This included the replacing of the small French casement windows along the St. Peter Street side and the reconstruction of the large open fireplaces on their original foundations at the end of the room. The central arcade was also restored with one of the piers that had probably been removed when the museum was first established, being rebuilt on its old foundation.

A plan to provide circulation through all the buildings of the Cabildo complex was developed, including the Arsenal and the so-called Jackson and Creole houses. A new stair and elevator were provided to serve the various floors levels. The links between these two structures (Cabildo and Arsenal) built for the most part after the Arsenal, were utilized for this purpose with the Cabildo's mansard roof being extended over it to conceal the elevators and provide access to the third floor of the Cabildo.

It was decided to restore the rooms on the second floor to their appearance at the time of the Louisiana Transfer in 1803. This restoration was based on research, including early plans and structural evidence. Perhaps the most interesting discovery was the location of doors opening from the front rooms to the upper gallery. Pediments, like the one surviving example, had been removed from above these doors, but their size, shape and location were clearly visible in the brickwork. These were restored to the one remaining, located on the end door of the gallery nearest the Cathedral. The originals were sculptured by Cristobal Le Prevost in 1799.

The third story, having been added at a much later date was to be set up for exhibition purposes. The other two stories were considered more as restored historic rooms than as exhibition spaces.

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In the course of the work many additional structural facts were discovered. In what had once been the lamplighter's room on the ground floor nearest the Cathedral, an ancient floor of bricks was found, each about eight inches square and two inches thick. A floor of clay tile of approximately the same size and color was used to replace it. The room had retained its original beamed ceiling and casement windows. Its fireplace was restored based on the clear indications on the wall and ceiling.

A new door was added on the inner wall to provide a rear access under the stair to the corps de garde. The two small rooms adjacent to this, originally used as the office of the notary and secretary of the Cabildo, were adapted for a staff office and public restrooms.

The main stair was left unchanged, with the exception of an arch beneath it to the courtyard which was restored with another arch added to provide a view and access to the courtyard under the stair. Old, segmental-headed doorways found in some of the old walls in this area were reopened. In the courtyard the rear stair was enclosed in glass and louvers to provide air-conditioned access to the rear buildings. One of the former cells was used for air-condition equipment.

On the second floor, the gallery, with its doors and over-door pediments, was restored, as was the Sala Capitular. Two mantels, installed in the Presbytere when its second story was completed in 1813 and removed in the 1971 renovations, were used in the small private office and anteroom adjacent to the Mayor's parlor. These two rooms and parts of the stair hall were the only areas on this floor to retain their original beamed ceilings. The original beams had apparently rotted and been replaced and plastered when the mansard roof was added in 1847. New beams were added to the ceiling below the structural timber in these areas to restore the original appearance.

On the third story it was found that the walls had been sheathed with hugh flatboat timbers, covered with split cypress laths and plastered. All the old crumbling plaster was removed and in most cases the flatboat timbers were left exposed for the finished wall, together with most of the truss members, because of their unusual interest.

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In the upper part of the stairhall these timbers were left on the walls, untouched except for cleaning, but were reset when necessary. The great roof trusses in the large room nearest the cathedral were left exposed to reveal their mortise and tenion peg construction of 1847. The old stairway leading to the cupola was left in place and extended up to a small balcony from which the trusses can be examined. The cupola, which is not open to the public, was repaired and the two rear attic rooms with original 1847 mantels were replastered in the same manner as the entire attic had been originally.

Because of decreased appropriations, work on the Arsenal and the Jackson and Creole houses was not included. The project was completed in June, 1969.



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Between the two fires, the Cabildo had held their meetings, first in the Government House, which had escaped the fire, and then in a rented house. After the second fire had practically destroyed the old French corps de garde and the prison on the site of the old Cabildo building, the assembly finally decided to take steps to construct a suitable building for itself. After attending to the most urgent problems of repairing the jail, attention was focused on the Cabildo building. Don Andres Almonester y **Roxas** offered and was chosen to rebuild the Cabildo structure.

Soon after the fire of 1788, Almonester had agreed to rebuild the Cathedral and the Presbytere. The plans for both of these were drawn by Don Gilberto Guillemard, a Frenchman by birth, who for years had been in Spain's military service. He was selected to make the plans for the new Cabildo as well. Work on the building began in December, 1795 under Guillemard's supervision and was sufficiently completed to be occupied by the Cabildo on May 10, 1799.

In 1803, within twenty-days the action of the formal cession from Spain to France and from France to the United States took place in the Sala Capitular of the Cabildo. During the brief period of French rule, from November 30 to December 20, 1803, the building was known as Maison de Ville, or Town Hall. In the Cabildo, on December 20, 1803, the final transfer of sovereignty of the Louisiana Territory from France to the United States took place.

From the time of the transfer, a detachment of United States troops was housed in the lower floor of the Cabildo. In 1805, at the mayor's request, the troops were withdrawn and replaced by the local police.

By 1806, the Cabildo housed the mayor, city council, superior court and its clerk, the county judge and the city notary. When the charity hospital burned in 1809, the upper gallery of the Cabildo was used as an emergency hospital. Then during the 1830's it was used as a banquet hall for the Grenadiers and other companies of the Louisiana Legion.

Through the years the Cabildo has also housed several libraries, including that of the New Orleans Library Association in 1819, the Law Association Library from 1847 to 1910 and a public school library from 1857. The Cabildo continued to be used for public offices until 1911, when it became the Louisiana State Museum. It was at this time that the Supreme Court moved to a new building. The lower floor of the Cabildo which was occupied by the police station and the Second City Criminal Court, was not turned over to the Museum until 1914.

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No major renovations of the Cabildo had been undertaken by the Louisiana State Museum with the exception of extensive repairs done by the WPA in the 1930's. In 1960 money was appropriated for the restoration of The Cabildo and the Presbytere. The later building seemed in more urgent need and received the major portion of the funds. Then in 1965 a separate appropriation was given to The Cabildo. Extensive structural research was undertaken and the project completed in 1969. The reopening of the Museum was set for April 30, 1970, the anniversary of the signing of the Louisiana Purchase Treaty with France in 1803.

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Beginning at the north corner where the Cabildo abuts the Arsenal on Orleans Alley, proceed south along the west curb of Orleans Alley to its intersection with Chartres Street, thensouthwest along the north curb of Chartres Street to its intersection with St. Peter's Street, then north to the point where the Cabildo abuts the Arsenal, then northeast along the rear of the Cabildo at the wall of the Arsenal to the point of beginning, as shown on the map of the block designated as sketch Map A.