UNITED NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

1. NAME

COMMON:
Pontalba Buildings

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
St. Ann and St. Peter Streets facing Jackson Square

CITY OR TOWN:
New Orleans

STATE:
Louisiana

CONEGESSIONAL DISTRICT:
2

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)
☐ District ☑ Building
☐ Site ☐ Structure ☐ Object

OWNERSHIP
☐ Public ☑ Private ☐ Both

STATUS
☐ Occupied ☑ Unoccupied ☐ Preservation work in progress

ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
☐ Yes: ☐ Restricted ☐ Unrestricted ☐ No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)
☐ Agricultural ☐ Government ☐ Park
☐ Commercial ☐ Industrial ☑ Private Residence
☐ Educational ☐ Military ☐ Religious
☐ Entertainment ☑ Museum ☐ Scientific
☐ Other (Specify)

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
see continuation sheet

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

STATE:

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
Conveyance Office, Civil Courts Building, Orleans Parish

STREET AND NUMBER:
421 Loyola Avenue

CITY OR TOWN:
New Orleans

STATE:
Louisiana

CODE:
22

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:

DATE OF SURVEY:

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
☐ Federal ☐ State ☐ County ☐ Local

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

STATE:

CODE:
These identical residential blocks with shops on the ground floor face each other across Jackson Square and are contemporary with the rebuilding of St. Louis Cathedral on the Chartres Street side of the square. Of red Philadelphia pressed brick, three-and-one-half stories high, their facades have pedimented central and end pavilions. At the ground level is a continuous colonnade of square stone piers; the openings are filled with glazed doors painted green, some leading into shops and others into passages to the households occupying the upper floors. When first constructed, each building was divided by brick party walls into 16 houses. Each house had a flagged passageway from the street to the principal stairway, a courtyard and service area at the rear of the ground floor; the principal floor had a salon at the front, a connecting dining room, and kitchen and service rooms in the rear; bedrooms occupied the next floor; and the commodious attic provided servants' rooms and storage space. The cast-iron galleries and ornament are reputed to be the first of a New Orleans tradition. Cylindrical cast-iron columns support the gallery in utilitarian contrast to the lacy railings with their pattern of tendrils and AP monogram. A continuous balcony at the bedroom level uses the same railing design; the construction is somewhat awkward by not combining the gallery roof and the balcony floor. Matching cast-iron grills fill the rectangular windows at the attic level and the octagons in the pediments.

When the Baroness de Pontalba proposed this construction project in 1846, it was her announced intention to create an architectural composition giving the Place d'Armes, (now Jackson Square), the character of the Place des Vosges in Paris. There the arcaded walk is recessed in the building mass as at the Cabildo and Presbytère flanking St. Louis Cathedral. As completed, the Pontalba buildings have projecting cast-iron galleries which shelter the walk. The difference was a pretext for the city to rescind a 20-year city tax exemption agreed to in recognition of her civic improvements.

Micaëla Almonester-Pontalba was a client whose difficulties with architects and builders arose from a low opinion of their economic worth to her. As a result the Pontalba Buildings are based on drawings and specifications of James Gallier, with whom she failed to enter a contract, and drawings of Henry Howard, to whom she would pay only a $120 drafting fee for developing her own designs. The builder, Samuel Stewart, ran into immediate difficulties when Gallier's specifications, Howard's drawings, the Baroness' opinions and actual site conditions were incompatible. Under the circumstances it is surprising that the result was so successful. Construction began in 1849, the Upper Pontalba Building, on St. Peter Street, was completed in the fall of 1850 and the Lower Pontalba Building, on St. Ann Street, was finished in 1851. In 1851 the city improved the Place d'Armes with the iron fence and flagstone walks still in use.
### Period (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- [ ] Pre-Columbian
- [ ] 16th Century
- [X] 19th Century

### Specific Dates (If Applicable and Known)

- 1849-51

### Areas of Significance (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- [X] Architecture
- [ ] Prehistoric
- [ ] Historic
- [ ] Agriculture
- [ ] Art
- [ ] Commerce
- [ ] Communications
- [ ] Conservation
- [ ] Education
- [ ] Engineering
- [ ] Industry
- [ ] Invention
- [ ] Landscape
- [ ] Literature
- [ ] Military
- [ ] Music
- [ ] Political
- [ ] Religion/Philosophy
- [ ] Science
- [ ] Sculpture
- [ ] Social/Humanitarian
- [ ] Theater
- [ ] Transportation
- [ ] Urban Planning

### Statement of Significance

A pacesetting example of urban amenity, the Pontalba Buildings combined fine residences and quality shops in buildings designed to unify the architectural composition of Jackson Square. From their influence, ornamental cast-iron galleries became an identifying characteristic of New Orleans architecture. Built in 1849-51 they were the fruition of a project proposed as early as 1836 by Madame de Pontalba for the sites acquired by her father, Don Andrés Almonester y Roxas, between 1777 and 1781. Elements of the design may be attributed to architects James Gallier and Henry Howard as well as the builder, Samuel Stewart, but they were assembled to suit the baroness, herself. She selected every detail, checked every expenditure, supervised construction, and designed the ornamental cast-iron scroll work.

Because Jackson Square was the historic administrative center of New Orleans and Louisiana, it is appropriate that the Upper Pontalba Building is now owned by the city and the Lower Pontalba Building is owned by the State.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY

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<tr>
<th>CORNER</th>
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LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES

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APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 2 acres (1 acre each building)

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

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Paul Goeldner, Architect, Historic Sites Survey

ORGANIZATION: Division of Historic and Architectural Surveys, National Park Service

STREET AND NUMBER: 1100 L Street NW.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

12. STATE LIASON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National [ ] State [ ] Local [ ]

Name ____________________________

Title ____________________________

Date ____________________________

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

________________________________________
Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date ____________________________

ATTEST:

________________________________________
Keeper of The National Register

Date ____________________________
7. Description (page 1) Pontalba Buildings

In the immediate post-Civil War years, desirable tenants moved out leaving most of the houses vacant; by 1900 poor tenants were crowded in slum squalor. While restoration has removed evidences of tenement conditions, most of the houses remain divided into apartments. One, known as the 1850 house, is a part of the Louisiana State Museum and is complete and furnished as it might have been when new.

4. Owner's Name:

The Upper Pontalba Building (St. Peter Street between Chartres and Decatur Streets) belongs to:

The City of New Orleans
City Hall, 1300 Perdido Street
New Orleans, Louisiana 70112

The Lower Pontalba Building (St. Ann Street between Chartres and Decatur Streets) belongs to:

The State of Louisiana
Department of Art, Historical and Cultural Preservation
P. O. Box 2458
New Orleans, Louisiana 70130
7. Description

Pontalba Buildings
New Orleans, Louisiana

Lower Pontalba Building

Ground Floor Plan