

Program Summary:

A 19th century courthouse in a historic New Orleans neighborhood sees new life as a senior living home.

Program Statement:

Designed by famed New Orleans architect Henry Howard, this 1855 courthouse has seen many chapters before falling into disrepair. Our firm was hired to restore and renovate the historic building and to design an addition to serve as a senior living and memory care facility. New architecture is designed to complement the old without feigning neoclassical, leaving the courthouse as the prominent architectural figure on the site.

With the full city block to work with, the symmetrical placement of the courthouse offered space for two flanking wings which together house most of the facility's 93 residential units and leave the historic building as a shared commons. Two courtyards between the wings provide shaded outdoor social spaces, and a new entry at the rear offers easy visitor access while concealing the site's required parking.

The courthouse contains social spaces for the residents, including a gracious entry lobby, sitting and entertainment areas, a formal dining room, a cocktail bar, gallery spaces and public toilet rooms. The new wings accommodate the assisted living and memory care units, administrative offices, a kitchen, and various support functions. Together, the historic facility comprises a home for seniors anchored in a deep sense of place, allowing residents to know where they are in the building and in the city.

RR-270.01

Building Area: (sf)
102,000 sf

Cost per Square Foot:
\$287.69

Construction Cost
\$29,344,386

Date of Completion:
February 1, 2023

RR-270.02

A New Life

A stately courthouse sits on a prominent avenue in uptown New Orleans, looking out at the streetcar line from its perch at the heart of the block. Its 165-year history enters a new chapter in 2023 with the opening of a state-of-the-art senior living facility in a building that oozes history and character.

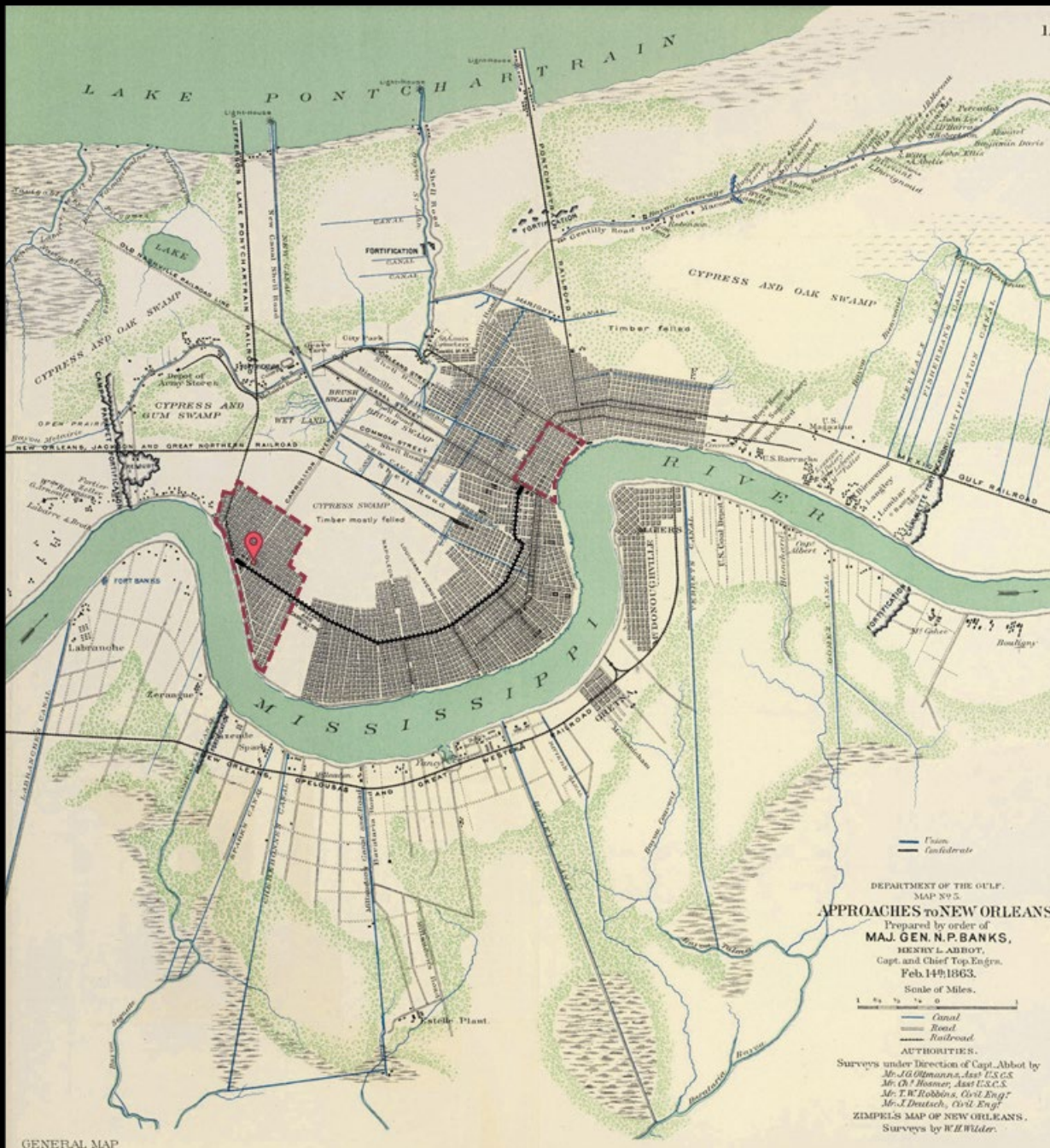


RR-270.03

The Town of Carrollton

In the 1850's, Carrollton was an independent town distinct from the growing city of New Orleans, separated from downtown by 5 miles of railroad on Saint Charles Avenue. A country town in those days, Carrollton served as the county seat of Jefferson Parish and needed a courthouse to match. A site in the town core, close to the rail line, was designed by Irish emigre and famed New Orleans architect Henry Howard.

This Civil War-era map, drawn for General Banks of the Union Army in 1863 (eight years after the courthouse's completion), shows New Orleans, Carrollton, and their surroundings. Upriver from New Orleans, the town of Carrollton was the farthest exurb from the city and the county seat of Jefferson Parish.

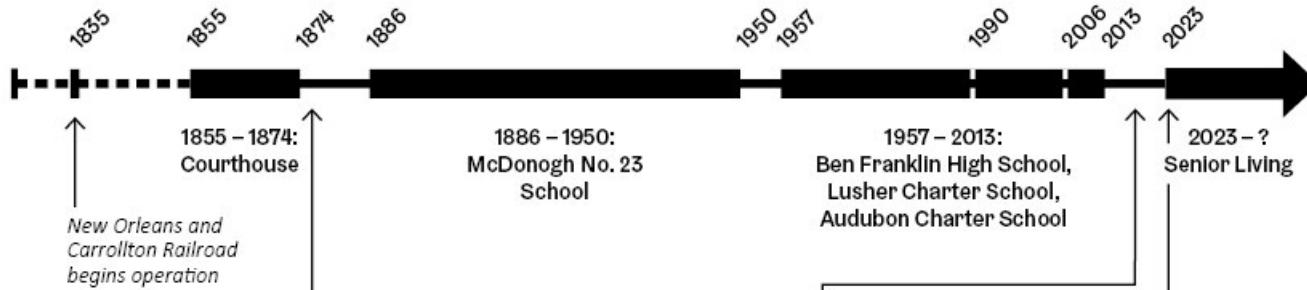


RR-270.04

A History of Reinvention

After its completion in 1855, the courthouse served the city of Carrollton until its annexation to New Orleans in 1874. As legal affairs moved downtown and the courthouse was vacated, the building and site then played host to a long lineage of schools until the last finally vacated in 2013.

Concerned with public outcry over the building's deteriorated state, the City struck a deal with a developer to renovate the site into senior housing, restoring and protecting the courthouse and adding a sensitive addition. After the construction of two new wings, the courthouse sees new life as an elegant senior living facility. Today, some of those who once attended Ben Franklin High School in this very building may soon return to it to live out their golden years.



One of the oldest known photographs of the courthouse, shortly after its initial closure, circa 1875, now public domain.



The run-down courthouse before renovations, late 2010's.



Finished renovations to the courthouse, flanked by new additions, in Spring 2023.



RR-270.05

A Subtle Complement

Flanking the courthouse, the two new wings house the majority of the facility's residential units. These wings are designed to complement the old without being neoclassical or faux-historicist, their whitewashed brick and simple form deferential to the elegant courthouse's grand colonnade. Steel balconies nod to the typology common on New Orleans's avenues and balance the composition of the front elevation.

SHORT STREET

RR-270.06

Framing the Courthouse

The symmetry of the courthouse at the center of the block was a key driver in the massing of the project. The new wings frame the historic structure without overwhelming it, leaving the courthouse as the dominant architectural figure both from the front on Carrollton Avenue and from the rear on Short Street.

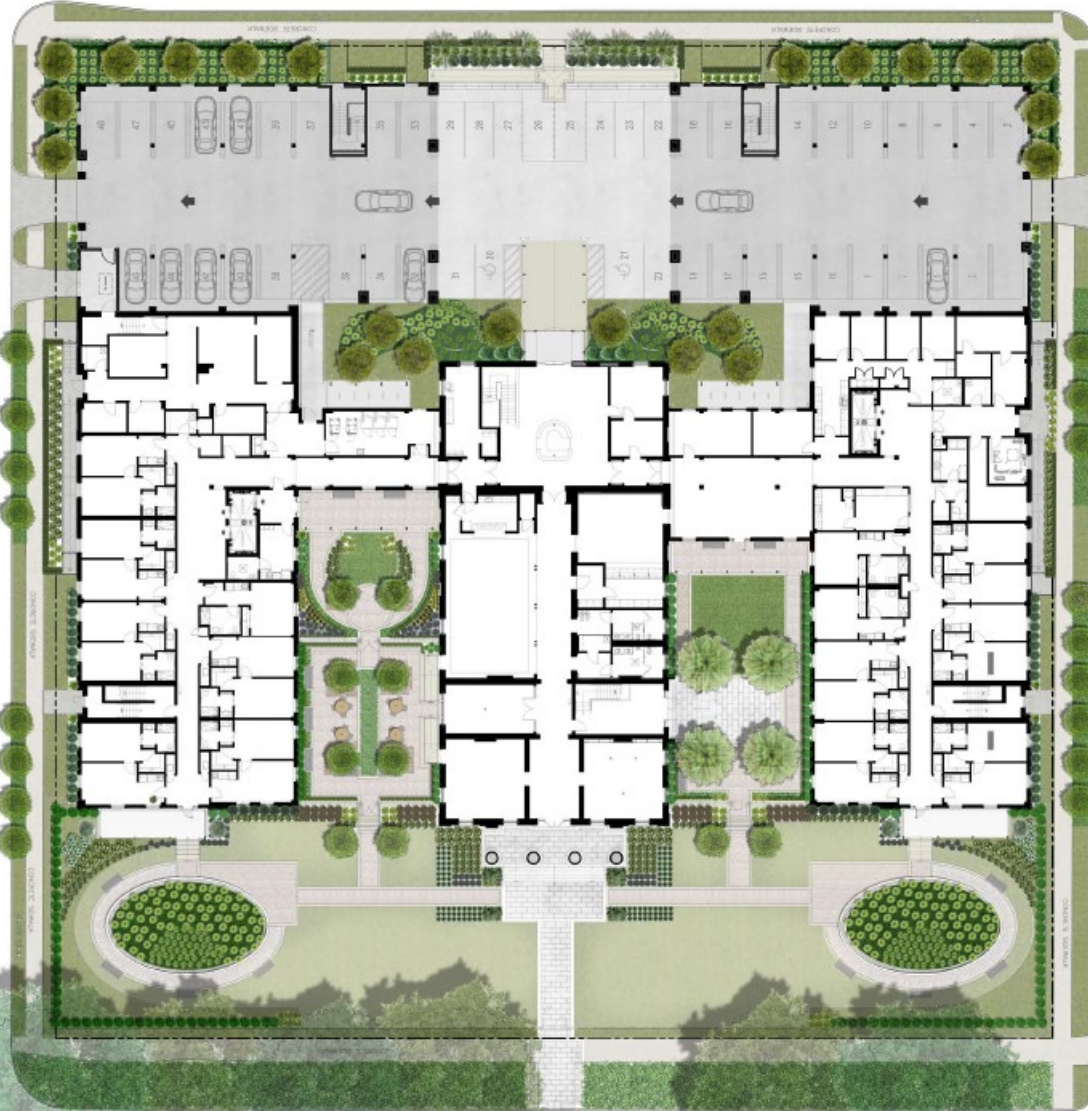
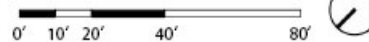
In the front gardens, a pair of sculptural stormwater ponds capture runoff from the building. Shaped to blend into the landscape these ponds frame the front elevation and help to hold 100% of the block's rainfall on site.

Subtle variations in the symmetry allowed for unique spaces in the courtyards between the wings and in the common areas of the historic building. The code minimum 48 parking spaces are sensitively hidden under the new wings by masonry walls that maintain the integrity and rhythm of the building above.

MAPLE STREET

HAMPSON STREET

S. CARROLLTON AVENUE





RR-270.07

The Arrival Court

The day-to-day entry of the facility takes place at the back of the site. Here, the two new wings shape an arrival court at the back of the courthouse. The site's parking, designed to be code-minimum and nothing more, is accommodated mostly at the bottom level of the new wings, preserving the building massing across the site and avoiding any dead-space parking lots. As a home for the elderly, universal accessibility priorities led to ramps extending to both sides of the sidewalk.

The rear entrance sequence takes residents and visitors through a modern portico that pays homage to the front colonnade. To differentiate the existing from the additions, this entry was not neotraditional but self-consciously modern and new. The light steel framing of the canopy plays nice with the old, and dark gray transitions on either side of the courthouse amplify the distinction between the courthouse and the newly built wings.

RR-270.08

Arrival and Orientation

Just inside the main entry, a spacious lobby greets and orients visitors. A custom desk is the focus of the space, while light from above connects residents to the commons on the second floor and a skylight above. Here the two axes of the building come together, as the symmetrical courthouse is bisected by the corridor that directs residents and visitors across the project's three wings.

The lobby is complemented by wood reclaimed from the courthouse beams, most of which had to be replaced due to termite damage. The beams were resawn and made into stair treads, finish cabinetry, and the desk at the heart of the lobby. This salvaged wood, a reminder of the building's past, connects public spaces throughout the building.





RR-270.09

Space to Relax

As important as the interiors are the two courtyards between the wings. Comfortably proportioned and each with a different character, they provide outdoor rooms for residents to gather and socialize out of the heat of the sun. Each courtyard backs up to a porch with a modern colonnade and has views to the tree canopy and the passers-by on Carrollton Avenue.

In the heart of the courthouse sits an elegant dining room, used for events and day-to-day socializing. Adjacent to the central axis, in the space once occupied by the courtroom itself, it is a lively extension of the main corridors of the building.

RR-270.10

Movement and Material

Careful selection of materials allows the courthouse to shine as an elegant, important building at the heart of the site. On the main axis, the front door and lobby spill out into an array of common spaces for residents. The main stair connects to the courtyard and features brass handrails and salvaged wood treads.





RR-270.11

The Courthouse as Commons

With most of the 93 residences in the two new wings, the grand spaces of the historic structure function largely as a shared commons. As a memory care facility, distinct materials help those with ailing memories to know where they are. Connection to trees, the street, and to others offers the aging comfortable places to socialize. Rooms are open and light, taking advantage of the courthouse's tall windows and soft bricks to shape rooms that are both cozy and airy.



RR-270.12

Views and Connections

Throughout the facility, material changes and views to the outside let residents know where they are. Beyond the courthouse, the north and south wings accommodate the assisted living and memory care units, administrative offices, a kitchen, and support functions. The shared spaces of these new wings are designed to connect residents to amenities and to orient them within the site.

Common spaces overlook the rear arrival court and the surrounding neighborhood. Where the new wings connect to the courthouse, a clear cross-axis takes residents across all three wings of the building. Changes in material and color let residents know when they've entered the old courthouse.



RR-270.13

A Landmark Reimagined

An important civic building for 150 years, the courthouse narrowly survived the threat of demolition to be reborn as a dignified senior living home. Its three-wing layout, with the distinctive courthouse at the heart, offers a novel approach to placemaking for those with ailing memories: less long and winding corridors, more connections and sense of place. As postindustrial cities across the country continue to sell off historic buildings once used for schools, we suggest they consider senior living and memory care operators and not just high-end condos. As a home for the elderly and a model for adaptive reuse, the courthouse now looks both back in time and towards the future, a stately landmark in its neighborhood for decades to come.