

BAYOU ST. JOHN REASON FOR NEW ORLEANS

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Bayou St. John is the reason New Orleans is located where it is. The bayou provided a connection from the Mississippi River overland via an old Indian path to Lake Pontchartrain.

A number of historic landmarks still stand in this neighborhood to remind visitors of the city's heritage.

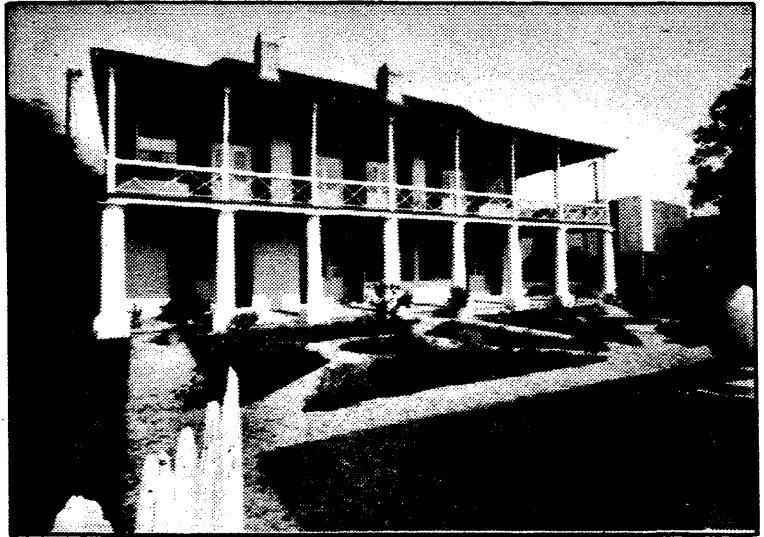
The Old Spanish Custom House, built in 1784 at the corner of Moss Street and Grand Route St. John, is the oldest structure in this neighborhood.

Another renowned home is the Pitot House, named for James Pitot, the second mayor of New Orleans. Built in 1799 at 1370 Moss Street, the Pitot house was later moved a short distance up the bayou to 1440 Moss in 1970.

The Tivoli amusement park once stood where the Pitot House is now. It featured a pavilion, orange trees, and dances were held there on Sundays.

Much of Bayou St. John remained swampy and unable to be developed while the city was attempting to drain the area, which was called "back of town" as early as 1835.

In 1866, the city started using the bayou as a drainage receptacle, and a community of houseboats grew up along it. In 1936, the state House of Representatives declared the bayou a non-navigable stream since the steamboat had been invented by then and had little



The Pitot House on Moss Street and Grand Route St. John

difficulty navigating the river currents.

Fort St. John, where the bayou and lake meet, was originally built as a fortification by the French and later became the most prominent resort area in New Orleans during the 30's. The Old Spanish Fort still stands on this site.

The fort is a modern-day battleground. The Orleans Levee Board has proposed replacing the Lakeshore Drive bridge that spans the bayou at its entrance to the lake with a grade-level crossing using culverts for water to flow back and forth from the lake to the bayou.

Members of the Bayou St. John Improvement Association

have sued the Levee Board to halt construction, arguing that wind moves water currents and that the City Park lagoons which are fed by water from the bayou will soon stagnate. They also contend that closing the mouth of the bayou will damage an important part of the city's historical heritage.

Although the bayou today lacks even the rowing clubs, which were popular in the last century, a drive along its curving shore shows typical Louisiana country homes. It still exists to remind us of New Orleans' earliest beginnings, and why the city was built in a place that seems most improbable to us today.