

**FRENCH SOCIETY OF NEW ORLEANS PAPERS**  
Mss. 318, 1012

Inventory

Compiled by  
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Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections  
Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library  
Louisiana State University Libraries  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University

2011

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**SUMMARY**

<b>Size.</b>	8 items, 4 volumes
<b>Geographic locations.</b>	New Orleans, La.; Jefferson, La.
<b>Inclusive dates.</b>	1851-1947
<b>Bulk dates.</b>	1872-1891
<b>Language.</b>	French, English
<b>Summary.</b>	Incorporated in 1843, La Société Française de Bienfaisance et D'Assistance Mutuelle de la Nouvelle-Orléans (forerunner to L'Athénée Louisianais) was modeled after masonic associations in France and its purpose was to provide support to its members as well as the rest of the French immigrants of New Orleans. Certified copies of meeting minutes of the General Assembly of the French Society of New Orleans (Société Française de Bienfaisance et D'Assistance Mutuelle), minute book of the Committee of Thirty, tomb registers, printed histories and reports.
<b>Restrictions on access.</b>	If microfilm is available, photocopies must be made from microfilm.
<b>Related collections.</b>	Joseph Girod Papers, Mss. 838, 853 Joseph Girod and Family Papers, Mss. 4379
<b>Copyright.</b>	For those materials not in the public domain, copyright is retained by the French Society of New Orleans in accordance with U.S. Copyright law.
<b>Citation.</b>	French Society of New Orleans Papers, Mss. 318, 1012, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.
<b>Stack locations.</b>	U:114, F:8

## BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE

### **La Société Française de Bienfaisance et D'Assistance Mutuelle de la Nouvelle-Orléans**

Incorporated in 1843, La Société Française de Bienfaisance et D'Assistance Mutuelle de la Nouvelle-Orléans (forerunner to L'Athenée Louisianais) was modeled after masonic associations in France and its purpose was to provide support to its members as well as the rest of the French immigrants of New Orleans.

The Society created its first hospital, l'Asile de la Société Française (The French Society Asylum or Home) on May 16, 1844, on Bayou Street. In 1851 it began construction of tombs for its members in St. Louis Cemetery on Basin Street, later obtaining more land in this cemetery on Esplanade Street. After merging with the Société Française de la Ville de Jefferson, Lafayette Cemetery Number 2 was also acquired. A second hospital was later established in 1913 on Orleans Street. Many members of the society were formally recognized by the French government, some receiving the honor of Chevaliers de la Legion D'Honneur for their help during the yellow fever epidemics of the 1840s and 1860s.

### **The Committee of Thirty**

The Committee of Thirty was organized by a group of French patriots in New Orleans who decided to celebrate the July 14 as a public holiday, after it had been declared the national holiday of France by the French government in 1880. This group of French residents of New Orleans presented a petition to the French Consul in New Orleans, calling upon him to convoke a meeting of the French population of that city for the election of a committee charged with organizing the celebration of the national holiday. He complied, and the first meeting was held May 15, 1881, in l'Asile de la Société Française de Bienfaisance et D'Assistance Mutuelle de la Nouvelle-Orléans. As a result of that meeting, a Committee of Thirty was elected. (Names of the first Committee members are given on p. 16 of the Minute book of the Committee of Thirty, 1882-1884.)

There is no indication that the Committee of Thirty and its sub-committees concerned themselves with anything other than the celebration of July 14. A new Committee of Thirty was elected each year by the assembled French residents of the city of New Orleans.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

Papers include certified copies of minutes, printed histories, an annual report, minute books, and tomb registries from the Société Française de Bienfaisance et d'Assistance Mutuelle de la Nouvelle Orléans. The entire collection is in French with the exception of volume 4, which is in English.

Certified copies of minutes document the general assemblies of 1851, 1873, 1876, and 1893. All minutes are signed by the secretary, with the exception of March 2, 1873, signed by then-president, Joseph Girod. Topics range from amendments concerning honorary members to a five hour meeting determining the continuation of the charter in 1873. The minutes from 1893 consist of a description of current coffers and the appointment of a committee to verify these figures. The second copy of minutes from this year consists of a description of admission of an honorary member, Monsieur J. Bayle, who was apparently instrumental in the celebration of the Society's bicentennial.

Two printed volumes document the history of the society. *Abrégé Historique de la Société Française de Bienfaisance et D'Assistance Mutuelle de la Nouvelle-Orléans* (1903) provides lists of the Society's officers, including doctors it employed, as well as a copy of the Society's constitution, rules, and statutes. The statutes include such things as rules regarding the treatment of members at the Society hospital, in addition to a list of all properties owned at that time. *Centenaire Société Française de Bienfaisance et D'Assistance Mutuelle de la Nouvelle-Orléans* (1943), a more extensive history than the first, includes an illustration listing officers at the founding, twenty-fifth, fiftieth, seventy-fifth, ninety-fifth, and centennial anniversaries. Photographs of the president, Henri Bernissant, the treasurer, Maurice Dufour, various officers, and the centennial committee are all included. A third printed volume, the fiscal annual report for 1946-1947, begins with a note from then-president Bernissant explaining that although the hospital's revenue was satisfactory, the augmentation of the cost of living, taxes, and building reparations all imposed additional expenses for that year. This report gives fairly exhaustive detail on the expenditures of the Society, as well as other information regarding their pharmacy and hospital. For example, of the 2,030 patients admitted to the Society's hospital for this year, only 79 were Society members.

### Volume 1, Comité des Trente (Committee of Thirty) Minute Book, 1882-1884

The book of minutes for the Comité des Trente (Committee of Thirty) spans two years, 1882-1884, and consists of around 250 pages of handwritten notes. Minutes include summaries of communications between members, such as excerpts from letters, as well as the meetings themselves. It begins by documenting the previous year's celebration, the formation of the committee, and its appeal to the French Consul for allowance to celebrate. The reasons behind the committee, its goals, and the inner-workings of the planning of Bastille Day in New Orleans are all covered. Included are letters to the French Consul, the regulations and articles of the committee, clippings of celebration announcements and histories, budgets, summaries of speeches, motions, and letters read aloud at meetings.

Volume 2, Tomb Registry for Société Française de la Ville de Jefferson, 1872-1886 and  
Volume 3, Tomb Registry for Société Française de la Ville de Jefferson, 1886-1900

The two volumes of tomb registries for Société Française de la Ville de Jefferson document burials of its members in Lafayette Cemetery No. 2, on Washington Street of New Orleans. The first volume spans 133 pages, while the second fills approximately 30 pages.

Volume 4, P.M.B.A. Tomb Record, 1881-1911

The third tomb registry is listed as the P.M.B.A. (most likely Police Mutual Benevolent Association) Tomb Record and is written in English. Containing a vault plan which numbers each tomb individually, the beginning of the tome has alphabetically tabbed pages. The middle of this registry often has one name per page, and there are several pages towards the end of the book which have a list of names and death dates.

**INDEX TERMS**

Bastille Day--Louisiana--New Orleans.

Cemeteries--Louisiana—New Orleans.

Charities--Louisiana--New Orleans.

Fraternal organizations--Louisiana--New Orleans.

French--Louisiana--New Orleans.

French Americans--Louisiana--New Orleans.

French Society of New Orleans.

Hospitals--Louisiana--New Orleans.

New Orleans (La.)--History.

Police Mutual Benevolent Association of New Orleans.

Société Française de Bienfaisance et D'Assistance Mutuelle.

CONTAINER LIST

<u>Stack</u>			
<u>Location</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folders</u>	<u>Contents</u>
U:114	1	1-3	Certified copies of meeting minutes (1851-1893), printed histories (1903, 1943) and annual report (1947), loose items removed from volumes
F:8	--	--	Volume 1, Committee of Thirty Minute Book, 1882-1884  Volume 2, Tomb Registry for Société Française de la Ville de Jefferson, 1872-1886  Volume 3, Tomb Registry for Société Française de la Ville de Jefferson, 1886-1900  Volume 4, P.M.B.A. Tomb Record, 1881-1911