

# The Louisiana State Archives Building – The Historical Panels

The five-panel facade on the Louisiana State Archives building in Baton Rouge is one of the most interesting features of the building. These five panels, sculpted by noted Baton Rouge artist Al Lavergne, offer a panoramic "study in stone" of Louisiana's unique history both as a colony and as a state.



Each panel measures 10' x 20' and weighs in excess of 12 tons. Lavergne prepared for the project by reading several histories of Louisiana and by studying numerous photographs, lithographs and paintings of historical figures and events. Each panel was sculpted from four tons of wet clay, divided into three sections and shipped via truck to Jackson, Mississippi, where it was set in stone by Jackson Stone Company, Inc.



The first panel depicts the major events and personalities of the French colonial period. Some of the historical figures included here are LaSalle, Bienville, Iberville, DeSoto and Tonti, an Italian explorer who sailed with LaSalle and who sported an iron hand after he lost his right hand in battle. The fort is Fort St. John Baptiste de Natchitoches, which was built by Louis St. Denis to stop Spanish settlement at the Sabine River. This panel also reflects the role the Catholic Church played in Louisiana as well as the numerous Indian tribes which inhabited the land.

The second panel is dedicated to the Spanish colonial period of Louisiana's history and to the prominent events of that period. The Spanish governor O'Reilly is depicted holding a proclamation of amnesty for the rebelling Frenchmen. Also shown are a Spanish execution squad, John Law, the Cabildo, iron workers, the Spanish flag, Evangeline and the Oak and the infamous slave trade of that era.



The theme of the third panel is the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 when the Louisiana Territory was purchased from France by the United States. The original map of that territory is shown on the scales as are three figures prominent in the negotiations to obtain this large land mass: Robert Livingston, Thomas Jefferson and Napoleon. Also depicted are William C. C. Claiborne, the first colonial governor of Louisiana, and Andrew Jackson, the hero of the Battle of New Orleans. The two flags shown are the American and the French National.

In the fourth panel the pelican, the Louisiana state bird, and the American eagle are symbolized ripping apart the American flag indicating Louisiana's secession from the Union. The Old State Capitol is shown as well as symbols of the antebellum south depicted in the palatial mansion, rustic cabin and southern girl in the bell-shaped dress. Governor P. B. S. Pinchback is in the center of the panel. He was governor during reconstruction and was the only black to hold that office.



Panel five offers insight into contemporary Louisiana. The scene centers on Huey Long, the most famous of Louisiana's governors. The oil, sugarcane and seafood industries are treated generously here as are two of our largest universities, Louisiana State University and Southern University, one of the largest black educational institutions in the United States. The present state capitol building, the tallest in America, is depicted along with the Louisiana Superdome, one of the first indoor sports facilities in the country. Also symbolized is the music and culinary heritage of Louisiana.