



# HISTORIC PORTALS TO THE PAST

## A WALKING TOUR OF THE HISTORIC CITY OF DONALDSONVILLE

2021 FINAL REPORT

JULY 6, 2021

### **Background: Virtual Tour of Historic Wayside Exhibit / Walking Tour**

On November 19, of 2019, The Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser and the Office of Culture, Recreational, and Tourism, The Ascension Parish Tourism Commission, Senior Planner David Guiney of Interpretive Direction LLC (ID), and the City of Donaldsonville released the City of Donaldsonville Historic Portals to the Past Wayside Exhibit Walking Tour as part of the Strategic Plan to generate needed tourism in Ascension Parish. The goal of the project was to research and survey historical facts to be displayed in a series of walking tour panels in and around the Historic District. Once completed, 7 historic sites were identified and featured a number of subjects in and around the area of their locations. The locations include the following sites: Historic Fort Butler, the Mississippi River (2), Crescent Park/B. Lemann & Brothers Mercantile Store, Ascension Parish Courthouse, Dr. Lowery's First Medical Office, Jewish Synagogue, location of the State of Louisiana's Capital House, Residence of Governor Francis T. Nichols, Ascension Catholic Church/Daughter's of Charity Convent/Ascension Catholic School-St. Joseph's Institute, and River Road African American Historic Complex (Museum, Rosenwald School, and True Friends Hall).

The panels were installed based on National Park Service standard and with approval of the Donaldsonville Historic District Commission, blended well with town street furniture such as benches, light poles, and trash can structures. Panels are held in place with tamperproof fasteners, and panels are entrapped on all four sides to prevent panel removal. Bases have heavy metal backing plates which provide extra panel strength and prevent any attempt at puncturing, bending, or removing graphic panels.

### **Virtual Walking Tour Supplement to the Historic Portals of the Past Walking Interpretive Tour**

To accent the panels, a virtual walking tour was created to allow for visitors to safely learn more about Donaldsonville's rich culture, significant people and places, geography, and architecture.

The virtual tour included research of potential stories to tell, individuals of interest to interview, and them captured story-telling and folklore recordings that supplement the already existing walking tour panels. The videos also aided in creating a visual historical archive of storytelling that can be used for a number of future tools to support historic preservation, the arts, culture preservation, and tourism.

## Connection to Strategic Priorities

The project related to the following goals of the Office of Cultural Development's priorities including:

### Goal 1: Expand Existing Partnerships and Collaborations and Establish New...

- Creating webinars, story boards, and virtual tours
- Documenting local musicians, restaurants, food halls, dance halls, bars, etc.
- Transcribing or collecting oral histories

### Goal 2: Emphasize the Importance of Education and Public Knowledge

- Creating or enhancing digital databases, maps and websites
- Digitization of documents and collections that relate to the built environment for online publications

The launch has not yet officially taken place because the Visitdonaldsonville.org website is not yet complete. When it is completed, a press conference and product launch will take place.

Work completed included a research analysis and copy to be created by the Principal Investigator Lee Melancon and historian Dee Dee DiBenedetto. Pre and post production was subcontracted to HardatIt! Studios, a proven video production firm that has already worked with Ascension Parish Tourism Commission and the Donaldsonville Area Foundation, as well as the City of Donaldsonville on top quality video production. Web connection and application was subcontracted to Dezins Interactive, the City's current web designer, who is not only working on the coding for the page where the videos will be accessible to the public, but the entire tourism-based website.

## Deliverables

The project completed the following:

1 introduction / conclusion video clip to introduce and conclude each interview.

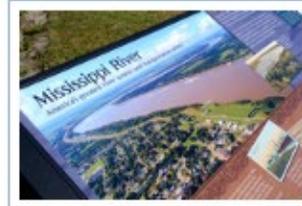
Fully produced video interviews per walking tour panel with local historians, family members related to the historic portals, political figures, etc. to provide story telling.

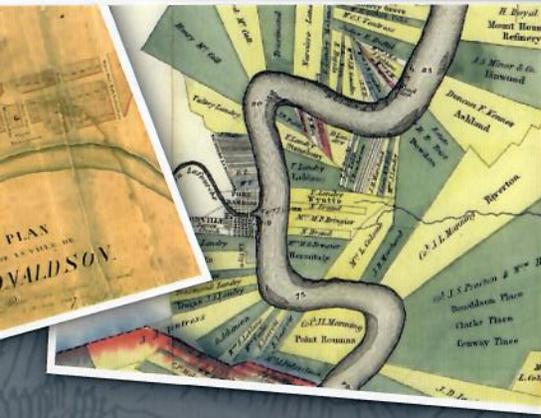
Graphics to brand the Historic Portals to the Past Walking Tour Virtual Tour.

Website link to page where videos will be accessed: [visitdonaldsonville.org](http://visitdonaldsonville.org).

Walking tour companion (brochure).

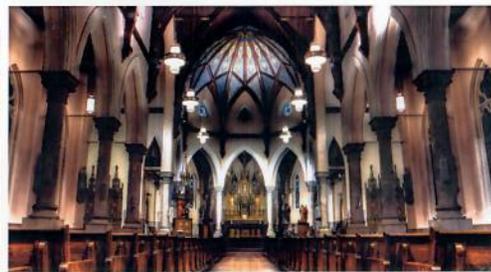






the Mississippi River in the 1800s show plantations lining the river, but only one established between New Orleans and Baton Rouge - Donaldsonville.

Women up and down the River journeyed to buy, sell, trade, worship, conduct business, attend affairs, attack enemies, or hide from pursuers. Today, Donaldsonville features the collection of historic structures in any of the Mississippi River parishes above New Orleans. It is a journey through time to a place that has been a magnet for Indians, explorers, planters, soldiers, and pirates. Fascinating remnants of a rich past await you!



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# Donaldsonville's HISTORIC PORTAL

— TO THE PAST —



# Historic Portal Map

## HISTORIC DONALDSONVILLE

Home to a magnet for Indians, explorers, planters, merchants, and pirates. **Location: 305 Mississippi Street**

## MISSISSIPPI RIVER

America's greatest river system and transportation artery. **Location: 305 Mississippi Street**

## CRESCENT PARK

A portal into the heart of historic Donaldsonville. **Location: 314 Mississippi Street**

## FORT BUTLER

Defenders thwarted a bold Confederate assault here. **Location: 169 Highway 18**

## LOUISIANA SQUARE

Center of government for more than 200 years. **Location: 321 Houmas Street**

## AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE

Home of African Americans in the rural communities of South Louisiana. **Location: 511 Williams Street**

## ASCENSION CATHOLIC CHURCH

A sacred place on the river for more than 250 years. **Location: 716 Mississippi Street**



## HISTORIC DISTRICT

- KEY**
- Handicapped Ramp
  - Mississippi River
  - Portal Panel



## Donaldsonville's Historic Portals

Create your own unique experience in one of Louisiana's oldest cities. Enjoy learning about the history of Donaldsonville at your own pace by visiting seven self-guided portals in the Historic District. The portal map will guide you to each numbered portal location but feel free to start at any number. The route is approximately 2.5 miles and is perfect for walking, biking or by car. As you find your way through the charming city, explore many hidden treasures along the way including the River Road African American Museum and folk artist Alvin Batiste at Framer Dave's frame shop. Take a leisurely stroll on the Mississippi River levee top and take