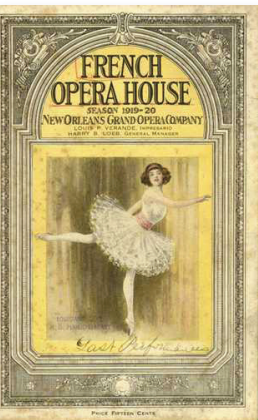




WHAT HAPPENED

The French Opera House opened on Dec. 1, 1859, with a performance of "Guillaume Tell."

The **French Opera House** was, by most accounts, the glue that held the French Creole and French Quarter society together for 60 years.



The French Opera House was the site of not only opera, but Carnival and debutante balls, concerts and plays.

The first opera of the season at the French Opera House marked the start of the New Orleans social season.

The massive 80-foot tall opera house, which opened in 1859 at the corner of Bourbon and Toulouse streets, was designed by architect James Gallier Jr., and featured orchestra seating, four horseshoe-shaped balconies, and seating for more than 2,000. The building, constructed in less than a year, cost \$118,000.

The city's love of opera came long before the French Opera House. The first opera, "Sylvain," was performed in the city in 1796. Between 1819 and 1859, the Théâtre d'Orléans was the home of French opera until a dispute with the owners caused the director of the opera company, Charles Boudousquie, to commission the French Opera House.

In 1913, the opera house was forced into receivership and was purchased by William Radcliffe Irby, who donated it to Tulane University.

In a great tragedy to high society and the French Quarter, the opera house burned down in 1919. Despite several efforts to convince Tulane or others to rebuild the opera house, it was 10 years before a new home for the opera, the Municipal Auditorium, was built, and Creole society was never the same.

The site of the opera house was a wrecking yard, a parking lot and was finally developed into a hotel in 1964.



The French Opera House was built with an indent along Bourbon Street to allow carriages to pull up in front of the building.



A fire started in the opera house on Dec. 3, 1919, and by the next morning the building was a pile of ashes and timbers.



The interior of the French Opera House, showing people seated in the galleries, loggias, box seats and a partial view of the orchestra pit. The building could seat 2,000.

