

= New Orleans Mint =

The New Orleans Mint ( French : Monnaie de La Nouvelle @-@ Orléans ) operated in New Orleans , Louisiana , as a branch mint of the United States Mint from 1838 to 1861 and from 1879 to 1909 . During its years of operation , it produced over 427 million gold and silver coins of nearly every American denomination , with a total face value of over US \$ 307 million . It was closed during most of the American Civil War and Reconstruction .

After it was decommissioned as a mint , the building has served a variety of purposes , including as an assay office , a United States Coast Guard storage facility , and a fallout shelter .

Since 1981 it has served as a branch of the Louisiana State Museum . Damaged by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 , after over two years of repairs and renovations , the museum reopened in October 2007 .

As of April 2015 , the museum 's music exhibits include instruments used by some of New Orleans ' notable jazz musicians , photographs , and posters , and are planned to open as the Louisiana Music Museum . The site is also a performance venue for jazz concerts , in partnership with the New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park and the private " Music at the Mint " organization .

The Louisiana Historical Center is located on the third floor of the building . The center includes collections of colonial @-@ era manuscripts and maps , and primary and secondary source materials in a wide range of media . It is open to anyone with an interest in Louisiana history and culture .

The New Orleans Mint has been designated a National Historic Landmark , and it is the oldest extant structure to have served as a U.S. Mint . Along with the Charlotte Mint , it is one of two former mint facilities in the U.S. to house an art gallery .

= = History = =

= = = Antebellum period , 1835 ? 1861 = = =

= = = = Background = = = =

The rapidly growing United States in the early 1830s experienced a shortage of coins . It is estimated that in 1830 there was one small silver coin ( quarter , dime or half dime ) per person . Also , production of silver dollars was suspended in 1804 because they were being exchanged for underweight Spanish coins in the West Indies . That left the half @-@ dollar as the largest denomination of circulating coin being minted in the U. S. Foreign coins were being circulated in the U. S. to alleviate the shortage . The Philadelphia Mint had been the only U. S. mint until 1838 , when operations began at the first branch mints .

In 1832 President Andrew Jackson had vetoed a rechartering of the Second Bank of the United States , an institution which he felt extended credit to northeastern commercial tycoons at the expense of the ordinary frontiersmen of the Old Southwest , a region with which Jackson , a Tennessean , strongly identified . In 1836 Jackson had issued an executive order called the Specie Circular which demanded that all land transactions in the United States be conducted in cash . Both of these actions , combined with the economic depression following the Panic of 1837 ( caused partly by Jackson 's fiscal policies ) increased the domestic need for minted money .

As a result , in 1835 the U.S. Federal Government established three branch mints : the Charlotte Mint in North Carolina , the Dahlonega Mint in Georgia and the New Orleans Mint . Dahlonega and Charlotte were in gold mining regions and these mints produced only gold coins . New Orleans was selected because of the city 's strategic location along the Mississippi River which made it a vitally important center for commercial activity , including the export of cotton from the area 's plantations . Large quantities of gold from Mexico also passed through its port annually .

In the early 19th century , New Orleans , which was the fifth @-@ largest city in the United States

until the Civil War , conducted more foreign trade than any other city in the nation . It was also located relatively near to gold deposits recently discovered in Alabama . While the Philadelphia Mint produced a substantial quantity of coinage , in the early 19th century it could not disperse the money swiftly to the far regions of the new nation , particularly the South and West . In contrast to the other two Southern branch mints , which only minted gold coinage , the New Orleans Mint produced both gold and silver coins , and in much greater quantities and total value , which marked it as the most important branch mint in the country until the San Francisco Mint began minting a large monetary value of gold coins in the mid 1850s .

The Mint 's location occupies a prominent place in civic history . It sits at one of the two River corners of the French Quarter , which had been the entire city , or Vieux Carré , of New Orleans . Under French and Spanish rule this location was home to one of the city 's defensive fortifications . In 1792 the Spanish governor , Francisco Luis Héctor de Carondelet , erected Fort San Carlos ( later Fort St. Charles ) here . The fort was demolished in 1821 ; and the nearby area was later named Jackson Square in honor of Andrew Jackson . As a general in the United States Army , Jackson 's leadership had saved the city from invading British forces during December 1814 and through January 8 , 1815 , the date of the famous Battle of New Orleans , the last significant battle of the War of 1812 .

= = = = Architectural history = = = =

= = = = = Design and construction = = = = =

The Mint building , which was constructed in red brick , was designed by architect William Strickland in the Greek Revival style , like most 19th @-@ century public buildings in the United States . Strickland was a student of the architect Benjamin Latrobe , a disciple of Neoclassicism who had helped design the United States Capitol building in Washington , D.C. Strickland himself , based in Philadelphia , had already designed the Philadelphia Mint building and the Second Bank of the United States , and would design the Charlotte and Dahlonga facilities , making him the architect of the first four U.S. mint buildings . Martin Gordon supervised the building 's construction , which was undertaken by Benjamin F. Fox , the master carpenter and joiner , and John Mitchell , the master stonemason and builder .

On the north façade the mint building features a central projecting Ionic portico , supported by four monumental columns that are flanked at the ends by square pillars . The top of the portico contains a simple entablature , crowned by a flat roof in front of a simple , unadorned pediment . This entrance , which sits on top of a basement story , fronts the rectangular central core of the facility and is flanked by two large wings of multiple bays of rectangular windows . These wings wrap around the central rectangular core to form a " W " -shaped structure with two square courtyards at the rear . Balconies framed by iron railings and posts adorn the sections of the building 's south façade that adjoin the courtyards . Architectural historian Talbot Hamlin described it thus : " it has those graceful , original proportions so characteristic of Strickland 's work . Even today [ 1944 ] , condemned to a use so different from that for which it was designed , it remains one of the most distinguished of the earlier buildings of New Orleans . "

On the interior , Strickland placed the grand staircase that connects the three levels immediately behind the portico in the central core of the structure . The floor system is composed of fired @-@ clay jack arches supported on steel I @-@ beams , a common feature of warehouses and other long @-@ span structures . On the second floor , many of the larger rooms , which were used for coining and melting , contain ceilings with beautiful high arches supported by the walls and freestanding piers . The smaller rectangular rooms on the second level ( and the basement ) , such as the former superintendent 's office , also contain these arched ceilings with a single groin vault . The basement formerly contained the boilers inside a brick cage , but now contain museum exhibits devoted to the minting processes as well as the Coin Vault at the Mint , a coin shop .

#### ===== Structural problems and repairs =====

Strickland did not take into account the swampy lowland and high water table that characterizes the terrain around New Orleans , and so during its career the New Orleans Mint building has encountered numerous structural problems from the shifting soil beneath its foundation . In the 1840s the building was reinforced with iron rods inserted between the floors . In 1854 , the federal government hired West Point engineering graduate ( and Louisiana native ) Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard to fireproof the building , rebuild the arches supporting the basement ceiling and install masonry flooring . Beauregard completed the work in conjunction with Captain Johnson K. Duncan by 1859 . During this period , the Mint 's heavy machinery was converted to steam power so a smokestack ( since demolished ) was built at the rear of the structure to carry away the fumes .

Less than two years later , Beauregard would rise to national fame as the Confederate general who ordered the April 1861 assault on Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor , South Carolina , thus beginning the American Civil War . It was during the war that Beauregard would secure his place in American history as one of the Confederacy 's most capable generals .

#### ===== Early coining operations =====

Like any other mint the New Orleans Mint was a factory to make coins . Operations at the New Orleans Mint began on March 8 , 1838 , with the deposit of the first Mexican gold bullion . The first coins , 30 dimes , were struck on May 7 . Until it was taken over by the Confederacy in 1861 it produced many different denominations , all of which were either silver or gold : silver three @-@ cent pieces ( 1851 only ) , half dimes , dimes , quarters , half dollars , silver dollars , gold dollars , \$ 2 @.@ 50 quarter eagles , three @-@ dollar pieces , \$ 5 half @-@ eagles , \$ 10 eagles , and \$ 20 double eagles .

Many interesting characters served at the Mint during the early years of operation . One was John Leonard Riddell , who served as melter and refiner at the Mint from 1839 to 1848 , and , outside of his job , pursued interests in botany , medicine , chemistry , geology , and physics . He invented the binocular microscope . He also wrote on numismatics , publishing in 1845 a book entitled *Monograph of the Silver Dollar , Good and Bad , Illustrated With Facsimile Figures* , and two years later an article by him appeared in *DeBow 's Review* called " The Mint at New Orleans ? Processes Pursued of Working the Precious Metals ? Statistics of Coinage , etc . " Riddell was not held in high esteem by everyone , however : his conflicts with other Mint employees were well @-@ documented , and at one point he was accused of being unable to properly conduct a gold melt .

Throughout the 19th century the New Orleans Mint was frequently featured in magazines , newspapers and other print publications . Articles discussing and images picturing the Mint , in addition to the one by Riddell noted above , were featured in *Ballou 's Pictorial Drawing @-@ Room Companion* , published in Boston , and the widely circulated *Harper 's Weekly* .

#### ===== Civil War and recommissioning , 1861 ? 79 =====

#### ===== Secession and Confederate seizure =====

The New Orleans Mint operated continuously from 1838 until January 26 , 1861 , when Louisiana seceded from the United States . On January 29 , the Secession Convention reconvened at New Orleans ( it had earlier met in Baton Rouge ) and passed an ordinance that allowed Federal employees to remain in their posts , but as employees of the state of Louisiana . On February 5 , 1861 , during the proceedings of the Convention of the State of Louisiana in New Orleans , the committee appointed by the Convention to take an inventory on February 1 , 1861 , of public property in the hands of the officers of ' the late ' Federal government reported that the Sub @-@ Treasurer 's vault at the mint contained \$ 483 @,@ 983 in gold and silver coins . The National Archives records in Rockville , Maryland , indicate the \$ 483 @,@ 983 consisted of \$ 308 @,@ 771

in gold coins and \$ 175 @, @ 212 @. @ 08 in silver coins . The only gold coin produced in January , 1861 was the \$ 20 gold double @-@ eagle . This means 15 @, @ 438 \$ 20 gold coins were minted by the New Orleans Mint during January , 1861 . Mint coinage records for the \$ 20 1861 @-@ O gold double @-@ eagle indicate only 5 @, @ 000 \$ 20 gold pieces were minted by the Federal Government in January , 1861 . This discrepancy is explained in a Numismatist Journal article .

In March 1861 , Louisiana accepted the Confederate States Constitution and the Confederate government retained all the mint officers . They used it briefly as their own coinage facility . The Confederates struck 962 @, @ 633 of the 2 @, @ 532 @, @ 633 New Orleans half @-@ dollar coins dated 1861 . Research suggests that 1861 @-@ O half dollars bearing a bisected date die crack ( " WB @-@ 103 " ) and 1861 @-@ O half @-@ dollars with a " speared olive bud " anomaly ( " WB @-@ 104 " ) on the reverse had been minted under authority of the Confederacy . Confederate officials designed alternate reverse dies which they used to strike their own half @-@ dollars in New Orleans ( see image ) . The exact number of the half @-@ dollar coins struck by the Confederate mint with the alternate reverse is unknown ; but only four are known to exist today . One of them , which was sold at auction for a large sum , had once been owned by Jefferson Davis , the only President of the C.S.A.

Confederate minting operations continued from April 1 until the bullion ran out later that month . The staff remained on duty until May 31 , 1861 . After that the mint was used for quartering Confederate troops , until it was recaptured along with the rest of the city the following year , largely by Union naval forces under the command of Admiral David Farragut .

= = = Occupation by Union forces = = =

For many Southern sympathizers , the Mint soon became a symbol of their hatred for the Union occupation . After U.S. Marines under Farragut had raised the U.S. flag on the roof of the Mint in April 1862 , a professional steamboat gambler named William Bruce Mumford ascended the roof and tore the flag down . He ripped the banner into shreds , and defiantly stuffed pieces of it into his shirt to wear as souvenirs . Union General Benjamin Franklin Butler , the military governor of New Orleans ( who was soon to be derisively nicknamed " Spoons " for allegedly pocketing the silverware of New Orleans citizens arrested for treason against the United States ) , ordered Mumford executed in retaliation . And so , Mumford was hanged from a flagstaff projecting horizontally from the building on June 7 , 1862 . Mumford 's hanging made national headlines . Jefferson Davis demanded that Butler immediately be executed if captured . The event stuck in the minds of many New Orleanians : eleven years later , in 1873 , a visitor to the city named Edward King mentioned it in his description of the structure .

The mint reopened as an assay office in 1876 . Its machinery was evidently damaged during the war , but because of its importance , unlike the mints at Charlotte and Dahlonega , in 1877 U.S. Mint agent James R. Snowden asked the superintendent of the office , Dr. M. F. Bonzano , to report on the condition of the facility for minting . Upon receipt of Bonzano 's report , new minting equipment was shipped to New Orleans . The building was refurbished and put back into active minting service in 1879 , producing mainly silver coinage , including the famed Morgan silver dollar from 1879 to 1904 .

= = = A second chance , 1879 ? 1909 = = =

= = = New Orleans coinage = = =

The refurbishment and recommissioning of the New Orleans Mint was due partly to the fact that in 1878 the Federal government in Washington , D.C. had passed the Bland ? Allison Act , which mandated the purchase and coining of a large quantity of silver yearly . The Treasury Department needed additional facilities to do so . It reopened the New Orleans facility primarily to coin large quantities of silver dollars , most of which were simply stored in the building instead of circulated .

President Rutherford B. Hayes appointed former Mississippi Senator and governor Henry S. Foote the new superintendent of the mint .

During this second period of operation , the Mint also struck dimes , quarters , half dollars , \$ 5 half eagles , \$ 10 eagles and , in 1879 only , 2 @, @ 325 double eagles . It should also be noted that the New Orleans Mint was used by the Federal authorities in 1907 to coin over five and a half million silver twenty @-@ centavo pieces for the Mexican government as part of the American government 's program of producing foreign coinage . The New Orleans Mint , whose coins can be identified by the " O " mint mark found on the reverse of its coinage , earned a reputation for producing coins of a mediocre quality ; their luster is usually not as brilliant as those of other mints , and center areas tend to be flattened and not sharply struck . Thus , well @-@ struck New Orleanian coinage is prized in the numismatic world today .

= = = = Social history = = = =

Men made up the majority of the workers at the mint . They worked such jobs as coiners , melters , pressers , cutters , and rollers . The mint was overseen by a superintendent , who was always male . He was a political appointee whose term usually did not last much longer than the party which held the presidency remained in power .

But it was also during the mint 's second tour of duty that women began to find work at the New Orleans Mint . Several women workers were sent from the Philadelphia Mint to teach those in New Orleans how to adjust money . About this time , the mint employed forty @-@ four women . Thirty @-@ nine worked as adjusters ? employees who weighed the unstamped coin planchets to make sure they were the proper weight before coining . These women would sit at long narrow tables , filing the planchets down to the proper weight , wearing special aprons with pouches attached to the sleeves and the waist to catch the excess dust . Five women served as counters and packers before the coins were shipped to Washington , D.C. Some women were eventually employed at the coining presses .

The women worked from 8 : 30 a.m. to 3 : 30 p.m. daily ? not long hours ? but the working conditions were probably unbearable by modern standards . New Orleans has a warm , wet climate . The process of adjusting , however , required the utmost attention to the scales ' balance , and the slightest draft could upset it . The draft could also carry off the silver dust from the coin planchets the women would file . For these reasons the windows and doors were almost always kept shut , resulting in a very hot working environment . Workers relied on water coolers to provide relief from the heat and avoid dehydration . The women mint employees were judged to enjoy better working conditions than many other American women workers in the late nineteenth century .

= = = The mint in the 20th & 21st centuries = = =

= = = = Closure = = = =

By the early twentieth century , the U.S. Treasury had mints operating in New Orleans , Denver , San Francisco , and the main center in Philadelphia , which more than met the demand for minted money . In 1904 , the government ceased the minting of the silver dollar , which accounted for the bulk of the coinage the New Orleans branch had been producing since 1879 . In 1909 Treasury officials declined to appropriate funds for the mint 's operation , effectively halting subsequent minting activity in New Orleans . In 1911 , the New Orleans Mint was formally decommissioned and the machinery was transferred to the main U. S. Mint facility in Philadelphia , .

Twenty years later , in 1930 , Governor Huey Long would rail against this loss when he ran for the office of U.S. Senator against incumbent Joseph E. Ransdell . In a circular distributed by his campaign to the citizens of New Orleans , Long listed the loss of the Mint as the very first of many complaints against Ransdell 's lengthy service record in the Senate . Long went on to win the election , although he did not take office until his term as governor expired in 1932 . At some point ,

however , the original New Orleans machinery was lost , and , at present , has not been located .

= = = Transformation = = =

After the mint closed , it performed a variety of functions for the Federal government . It was first downgraded to an assay office for the U.S. Treasury as it had been from 1876 to 1879 . Then , in 1932 , the assay office closed and the building was converted into a Federal prison , in which capacity it served until 1943 . The Coast Guard then took over the building as a nominal storage facility , though in truth the structure was largely abandoned and left to decay until it was transferred to the state of Louisiana in 1965 . During the Cold War , when many believed there to be a high risk of nuclear war , the old Mint was considered to be the best fallout shelter in the city .

The state agreed to save the structure from demolition on the condition that it be renovated and converted to some new purpose within fifteen years . Between 1978 and 1980 this goal was met . Since 1981 , the Mint building has functioned as a museum of its coin production history . Additional exhibitions housed in the facility have been devoted to New Orleans Mardi Gras ( since moved to the Presbytere building on Jackson Square ) , jazz music ( a large exhibit and research materials previously in the New Orleans Jazz Museum ? donated by the N.O. Jazz Club ) , and Newcomb Pottery . All three phenomena have contributed to New Orleans ' fame .

On the third floor , the Mint houses an archive of maps and documents , including French and Spanish colonial records . Along with the Cabildo , the Presbytere , the 1850 House , and Madame John 's Legacy , this facility is one of five branches of the Louisiana State Museum in the French Quarter .

The Mint building is located at 400 Esplanade Avenue , not far from the Mississippi River .

= = = Katrina aftermath = = =

The mint building suffered significant roof damage from the hurricane . Water entered the building and came into contact with approximately 3 % of the New Orleans Jazz collection , portions of which were removed and cared for at Louisiana State University , the University of Louisiana at Lafayette , and the Louisiana State Archives .

= = Coinage produced = =

= = = Silver coins = = =

= = = Gold coins = = =