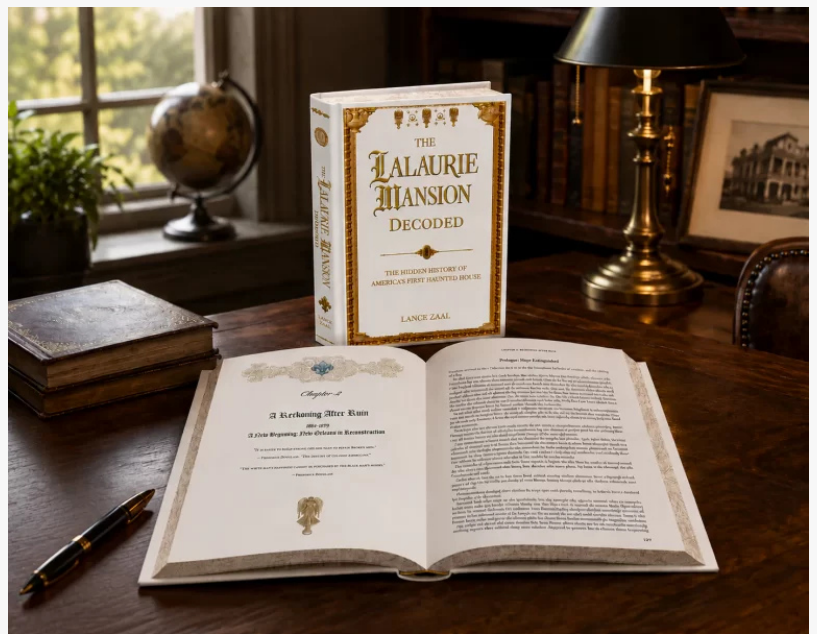


First Desegregated Public School in the South Operated at New Orleans' Lalaurie Mansion During Reconstruction

New research documents the overlooked history of the Lower Girls' School at 1140 Royal Street and its place in Lance Zaal's forthcoming book

NEW ORLEANS, LA, UNITED STATES, August 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Historical records document that the Lower Girls' School operated at 1140 Royal Street, now known as the Lalaurie Mansion, beginning Nov. 21, 1870, during Reconstruction.

Research led by Lalaurie Mansion owner and resident Lance Zaal identifies the school as the first desegregated public school in the South and documents its role in New Orleans' early integrated public education system.



The Lalaurie Mansion Decoded is available now for pre-order at 1140Royal.com.

The findings are part of Zaal's two-year historical research project and are featured in his forthcoming historical nonfiction book, [The Lalaurie Mansion Decoded](#).

“

This home is not a haunted site that should be feared and reviled - it is a deeply historic site whose stories need to be remembered, and lessons understood.”

Lance Zaal, author, The Lalaurie Mansion Decoded

More than 150 years ago, young girls of several different racial identities in the lower district attended public school together for the first time in the South, inside one of New Orleans' most recognizable buildings: what is today located at 1140 Royal Street, now known as the Lalaurie Mansion.

Historical records document that the Lower Girls' School (LGS) opened at the corner of what was Hospital and Royal

Streets on Nov. 21, 1870, during the Reconstruction era and later hosted functions for the Peabody Normal School in 1877 and 1878 before relocating. Research into the property identifies it as the first racially integrated public school in the South. While the precise date students began attending integrated classes has not been established, records document nearly 120 students learning together each session at the Royal Street school.

The school's history has been referenced by historians before. But it remains largely unknown to the public and has rarely been part of the story told about a property overwhelmingly associated with Delphine Lalaurie and the events of 1834, which have been sensationalized for horror books dating back to 1946 or the more recent American Horror Story television series.

For the past two years, current owner and resident Lance Zaal has worked with historians, researchers and archivists to more fully document the full history of what he believes is New Orleans' most historic residence as part of an extensive examination through two centuries. The findings are included in his forthcoming historical nonfiction book, *The Lalaurie Mansion Decoded*.

The school's attempt at integrated education faced violent resistance. In December 1874, amid the White League's campaign against Reconstruction government, mobs targeted integrated schools across New Orleans, removing students who appeared to be not purely white, while intimidating school officials. The Lower Girls' School was among those targeted. Much like the New Orleans Four in 1960, white parents opposed to racial equality protested by removing their



Owner and resident of the Lalaurie Mansion Lance Zaal spent more than two years working with historians, researchers, and archivists to more fully document the full history of New Orleans' most historic residence.



The Lalaurie Mansion Decoded is a historical non-fiction book written by owner and resident of the Mansion, Lance Zaal.

children from the school.

"This building is more than what is portrayed on television and on walking tours. Unfortunately, the true and full history of the house and its cultural significance has been drowned out by a focus on celebrities who owned it, and the horror television and books that have sensationalised it for shock value and entertainment," Zaal said.

"I intend to reveal to the public not only what has been deliberately hidden, but why, by whom, and when. The original frieze of 36 angels along one of the rooms where the girls of the Lower Girls School once stood while facing their attackers remains today. This home is not a haunted site that should be feared and reviled - it is a deeply historic site whose stories need to be remembered, and lessons understood."

"Let us say the names of the enslaved that were here and what really happened to them after 1834, as we need to remember the girls of the LGS, their courage, their persistence, and why integration failed during reconstruction. They must be remembered as real people, rather than ghosts for entertainment. If we're going to tell the history of the Lalaurie Mansion, we owe it to both those who have come before us, as well as our posterity, to tell the full and true story."

The school is one of numerous chapters uncovered or more fully documented through Zaal's research into the property. The work also traces 1140 Royal Street's use as housing for women serving in the WAVES during World War II, referred to as "Rosie the Riveters", along with historic artwork hidden inside the house and other periods of history with ties to the home explored in the book.

The research has drawn from university collections, professors, Louisiana notarial records, Catholic parish records, cemetery records and thousands of period newspapers. Primary-source documentation supporting the research will be made available to journalists for review.

Zaal's interest in telling the story grew in part from his involvement with the Let Freedom Ring Foundation, which stewards the First Baptist Church and the Bray School in Williamsburg, Virginia, which opened in 1760 and is recognized as the first school in the nation dedicated to the education of free and enslaved Black children.

Zaal has since established the 1140 Royal Reconciliation and Preservation Initiative to continue researching, preserving and sharing the broader history of the property.

The Lalaurie Mansion Decoded will be published in October 2026 and is currently available for pre-order at 1140Royal.com.

ABOUT THE Lalaurie MANSION DECODED

The Lalaurie Mansion Decoded is a historical nonfiction book by Lance Zaal examining nearly two centuries of documented history at 1140 Royal Street in New Orleans. Based on more than

two years of archival and historical research, the book explores the people, institutions and events connected to the property beyond the folklore and legends.

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