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Special Exhibition at Xavier University of Louisiana featuring Descendants of Economy Hall

New Orleans, La. - Everyone knows the Economy Hall Tent at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Now, “The Cultural Family of Economy Hall” tells the story of this famous music venue before the creation of jazz at Xavier University of Louisiana.

“The Cultural Family of Economy Hall” is a new exhibition that opened at Xavier University of Louisiana at the end of June on the second floor of Xavier’s University Center, room 205. The collection of photographs, documents, and curios share the music, social, and political activities that took place in the famed jazz venue for more than a century and will be on display for the remainder of the fall semester.

“Xavier’s Art Gallery is honored to host this special exhibition!” said **Anne Collins Smith, Xavier University of Louisiana Art Gallery director**. “Through this visual narrative, we are able to view a raw glimpse into the legacy of not only the Economy Hall itself but also the people who are a part of its history.”

The exhibition shows the range of activities that took place in Economy Hall. Images of journal pages written in French by Economy Society members, photos of band members like the Piron and Peerless Orchestras that played in the hall, and photographs of a recent gathering with members’ great- and great-great-grandchildren taken on Xavier’s campus taken by Girard Mouton and Cedric Ellsworth are included in the display. Two pages from books in the Economy’s library contain a French edition about the first President of Haiti and a world atlas, both published before the Civil War. An image from the 1865 convention of the Friends of Universal Suffrage in the hall documents the formation of the Louisiana Republican party, which led to Reconstruction. Also in the collection is a reproduction of a 19th-century voter registration document signed by an Economy Society secretary.

Visitors will also see the photos of descendants of soldiers from the Battle of New Orleans, 19th-century undertakers, musicians and more. The Cultural Family of Economy Hall doesn’t just include biological descendants but people who carry out the hall’s musical legacy in opera and second lines.

The building, torn down after Hurricane Betsy destroyed most of it, sat at 1422-26 Ursulines, now the Craig schoolyard. Economy members included famous names in education like the Craig family and

Medard Nelson, the arts like Joseph Daniel Warburg, politics like Walter Cohen, and photography like Arthur Bedou.

The exhibition, curated by Fatima Shaik, came from her research for the book “Economy Hall: The Hidden History of a Free Black Brotherhood” (2021). The book received the American Book Award and Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities Book of the Year (2022).

“I did so much research for the book that I couldn’t include everything. There are so many more stories to tell,” **Shaik said**. “The exhibition seemed the most natural way to engage others in the long and important history of Economy Hall. In one way or another, Economy Hall has affected everyone in New Orleans and many people around the world.”.

The exhibition opened June 29. The Cultural Family of Economy Hall is supported by the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation; the Platforms Fund of Antenna, Ashé Cultural Art Center, Junebug Productions and the Andy Warhol Foundation; Xavier University of Louisiana; and the Louisiana Creole Research Association.

Images Courtesy of Fatima Shaik and The Historic New Orleans Collection



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About Xavier University of Louisiana

Xavier University of Louisiana, America’s only historically Black and Catholic University, is ranked among the top three HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities) in the nation. Recognized as a national leader in STEM and health sciences, Xavier produces more African American students who graduate from medical schools each year than any other university in the United States. Additionally, Xavier’s College of Pharmacy is also among the top producers of African American pharmacists in the country.

Established in 1925 by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament as a place for African American and Native Americans to receive quality education, Xavier has since expanded its programs in art, business, education, biological sciences, chemistry, pharmacy and political science. More recent additions in robotics, bioinformatics, engineering, data science, neuroscience and genetics, in addition to new STEM-based master’s programs, have provided Xavier students (3,419 students) an unbeatable combination of traditional classroom study, hands-on research, service-learning opportunities and life experiences. Xavier students collaborate with world-renowned faculty, who are experts in their fields, to produce award-winning research and notable work. The winning Xavier formula provides students with a well-balanced curriculum and an environment that nurtures

their intellect and feeds their souls, thereby facilitating a more just and humane society for all. For more information about Xavier University of Louisiana, visit us online at www.xula.edu or contact Regi Reyes at (504) 520-5240 or xula1925@xula.edu.

About the Xavier University Art Gallery

The Art Collections and Gallery's primary mission is to increase the knowledge and understanding of our diverse global contemporary culture. The Art Collections and Gallery believes in the power of art to change communities. It facilitates this transformation through the organization and production of exhibitions, public programs, and scholarship through study, presentation, preservation and promotion of art by advancing the University's mission to promote a more just and human society.

About Fatima Shaik

*Fatima Shaik is the author of *Economy Hall: The Hidden History of a Free, Black Brotherhood* (The Historic New Orleans Collection, February 2021). She was born in the historic Seventh Ward of New Orleans and bred on the oral histories of Black Creoles told by her family and neighbors. Only after she read the records of the *Economie*—3,000 pages of handwritten French stored in her family's home—did she realize this community's impact. She spent two decades reading the journals and documenting events with real estate records, legal cases, old monographs, and articles. A full-time journalist for more than a decade, Shaik founded the Communication Department at Saint Peter's University and taught as tenured faculty for 25 years. Her freelance articles appeared in *Essence*, *Nikkei Architecture*, *L'Expansion*, *The New York Times*, *In These Times*, and *The Root*. Shaik is a trustee of PEN America and former board member of The Writers Room in NYC. *Economy Hall* is her first work of nonfiction and her seventh book.*