

Archival research may lead to walking tour app

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Leah Saffir, a junior in the School of Liberal Arts studying history and political science, is researching the Dolliole family, who owned several pieces of property throughout the French Quarter in New Orleans, including this house at 933 St. Philip St., as a part of history professor Emily Clark's course on New Orleans Free People of Color. (Photo from Arielle Pentes)

Tulane students in professor [Emily Clark's](#) history class, *New Orleans Free People of Color*, are uncovering the past. Clark has researched and written extensively about New Orleans' French-speaking, mixed-race descendants of enslaved women and their white owners, referred to as free people of color. As late as 1840, they made up 20 percent of the city's population. By diving into 18th- and 19th-century archives under Clark's supervision,

students have the opportunity to research free families of color who owned French Quarter property. At the end of the course, students will each produce an online module and share the stories they discover with the public.

“We have amazing archives here in New Orleans, going back to the very beginning of the 1700s, and they’re rich,” said Clark, the Clement Chambers Benenson Professor in American Colonial History in the [School of Liberal Arts](#).

The students’ discoveries will be shared on New Orleans Historical, a web and mobile platform for sharing stories and scholarship about New Orleans. The site is a collaboration between the Department of Communication at Tulane and the University of New Orleans history department. The ultimate hope is to make the stories come alive through a walking tour (via an app) that will be unveiled at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians, which will take place in New Orleans in April 2017.

Working with the archives, holding an actual document signed by a person long ago, gives the students a “tangible connection to the past,” Clark said. “It’s a reminder that history is ultimately about people. The students in the class aren’t just reading about famous dead people in Tulane’s history courses, they’re reading about actual people who aren’t famous at all. Ordinary people who lived in the past who left traces behind in the archives.”

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