Undoubtedly, when Bienville founded the settlement that became New Orleans, he made sure that there were French artisans among the other settlers — surviving colonial furniture (which has French influences) might be called the earliest New Orleans art.

One would imagine that later, better-born emigrants brought paintings along with their other possessions but time and two disastrous fires (one in 1788, another in 1794) destroyed any early 18th Century New Orleans art.

The first New Orleans paintings that we have are the Spanish-influenced portraits by Jose de Salazar (and, possibly Francisco de Salazar) and others painting in this style. The 1803 Louisiana Purchase, however, brought in an influx of Americans, including many artists eager to make a few bucks either painting the popular portraits or doing landscapes or other scenes that would sell. Customers came from both French and American elements.

The French preferred French paintings and either made trips to France to have portraits done in Paris or patronized the French-trained artists who came here. Jean Joseph Vaudechamp, a painter in the David tradition, and Jacques Amans were the best of the French artists who made frequent winter trips to the city.

In the American field there was John James Audubon who did rather bad portraits in order to support his major painting interest — birds. Two of the most popular paintings of this period — Bouquetade Woiseri’s 1803 view of the New Orleans harbor and Hyacinthe Lacloette’s “Battle of New Orleans” were made into popular-priced prints.

But the real money was in portraits and many American artists, some very prominent, made winter trips to the city to pick up some change.

Richard Clague, who may or may not have been born in New Orleans, is still considered the first New Orleans artist of note. As the founder of what could be called the Louisiana landscape school, Clague’s influence lingered on into the 20th Century in the works of men like Drysdale and Clarence Millet.

Art became a matter of civic pride when Isaac Delgado made it possible for New Orleans to have its first fine arts museum. When the neo-Greek structure in City Park opened its doors on Dec. 16, 1911, various art groups and private collectors joined forces to fill the fledgling museum.

The Newcomb Art School, under the direction of Ellsworth Woodward, developed a turn-of-the-century craft movement that won international acclaim. It was here that the young ladies of the city created fanciful Art Nouveau designs which are treasured to this day.

The non-profit Arts and Crafts Club, founded in 1920, was the first of the modern art galleries and pioneered in introducing 20th Century art movements to New Orleans. Its demise in the early 1960s created a vacuum that was eventually filled by the present private art galleries.

T he Delgado Museum, which now has three additional wings, has been renamed the New Orleans Museum of Art. It is the oldest American Museum with collections that focus on Art of the Americas but reflects many aspects of world art.

Other local institutions — the Louisiana State Museum, the Historic New Orleans Collection, Gallier House and the Hermann-Grima House, though history-oriented, underlie their messages with art from the Louisiana past. And the art form, which best recalls the history of New Orleans, is the portraiture.