

REMEMBERING THE FIRST FESTIVAL APRIL 3-5, 1987

New Orleans in the mid-1980s was aching with a financial slump. The oil industry, which had been such a strong part of the city's economy, was no longer a sure thing.

The term "cultural tourism" wasn't yet a phrase in common use. The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival was on the calendar along with the French Quarter Festival. Both focused on music but there wasn't an ongoing event showcasing the city's rich literary heritage.

"The Big Bang Moment came when Beverly Gianna, who worked for the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau, and I discussed a book sale that had been held at the Rivergate, the city's first convention center, recalls Errol Laborde, a Festival co-founder and its first president. At that time Laborde was then the longtime editor of *Gambit*, a weekly newspaper. "Beverly suggested we start a literary festival. We decided to have a lunch planning meeting on Halloween Day, 1986, at Mandina's Restaurant."

"I invited Maureen Detweiler, who was Special Projects and Events Coordinator for the Office of Mayor of the City of New Orleans. We also included Don Marshall, then the head of Le Petit Theatre, since we found out that there would be a production there of *A Cat on A Hot Tin Roof* in March." said Laborde. Also at the lunch was John Jardel, a state tourism executive. Sitting nearby at the bar during the lunch was Maureen's husband Bill, who would become the festival's lawyer and its second president.

According to Laborde, honoring playwright Tennessee Williams served as a spotlight to showcase the literary side of New Orleans. Williams felt that he did some of his best work here and lived in the city off and on throughout his life. He was born on March 26, 1911. In terms of attracting visitors, the weather in late March or early April is most amiable and the quaint French Quarter a perfect setting. The first Festival was held April 3-5, 1987.

The founding board was comprised of Errol Laborde, president; George deVille, vice-president; Maureen Detweiler, secretary and Julian Mutter, treasurer.

DeVille and Mutter's bookstore was a popular gathering place for art and literary events. They put up \$500. Noted local artist George Dureau agreed to design a festival poster.

Board members also included Stuart Barash, Bill Detweiler, Jardel, Peggy Scott Laborde, Kevin McCaffrey and David Tardo. The first executive director was Don Marshall.

With Marshall's offer to host the Festival at Le Petit, a location was set. From the very beginning the Festival has been both a literary and theatre festival. And, while some events are held citywide, most of the almost 100 events take place in the Quarter.

With little money but lots of energy, the Festival board utilized local and national contacts. Lyle Leverich, who wrote Tennessee Williams' authorized biography, gave a lecture at the first festival. The topic of the first literary panel was "New Orleans As A Home for Writers." Panelists included Fredrick Barton, Christopher Blake, Sheila Bosworth, Everette Maddox and Christ Wiltz. It was moderated by Ralph Adamo.

Another highlight during that first festival was an "I Remember Tennessee" panel, the first of many over the years. Sharing their memories were Bill Grey, Jack Fricks, Bob Hines, Anna May Maylie, Dan Mosely, Eric Paulsen and Jere Real.

Kicking off what would be numerous music events through the years was a Jazz Mass in memory of Williams at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church. Through the years part of the Festival schedule on Sunday has been held at the Palm Court Jazz Café. The series of music and music discussion is known of as "Drummer and Smoke."

As for our musical guests over the years—that list includes Vernel Bagneris, Danny Barker, Spencer Bohren, Anais St. John, Tom Sancton, Butch Thompson, Allen Toussaint and Dr. Michael White.

But back to the first Festival. It was especially fitting that during that first weekend a plaque was erected at 632 St. Peter Street, indicating the site where the playwright completed his Pulitzer-Prize winning play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Co-sponsoring the plaque was the Louisiana Landmarks Society.

Solidifying the theatrical mission of the festival during its debut was not only Le Petit's production of *Cat*, but, thanks to producers David Cuthbert and Roy Tagliavore, the appearance of actor Ray Stricklyn, who performed his nationally acclaimed Williams one-man show, *Confessions of a Nightingale*.

A One-Act Play competition from almost the beginning has sparked the career of many a young playwright, including David Lindsay-Abaire, who would go on to win a Pulitzer Prize in Drama. The Festival currently offers literary competitions not only for One-Acts but Fiction, Very Short Fiction and Poetry. The goal is to follow in the spirit of Williams, who was also known for his encouragement of new talent. And also, nice to be named one of the top ten literary festivals in the United States by *USA Today*.

Indelibly etched since those early days are the literary walking tours conducted by Dr. Kenneth Holditch, a noted Williams scholar and first Festival program chair. Also, crystal clear are the memories of founding board member Maureen Detweiler's mint juleps, which slaked a thirst and helped raise money to continue a splendid long weekend each March.

One of the endearing qualities of the Festival is that it's not snooty. Good conversation, food for thought, accessibility—all expected from our panelists. The long list of authors who have appeared at the Festival include Margaret Atwood, Robert Olen Butler, Michael Cunningham, Fannie Flagg, Ernest Gaines, Yusef Komunyakaa, Albert Murray, and Edmund White, to name a very few.

A brief list of actors/ journalists who have starred at the Festival certainly reads like a who's who—Elizabeth Ashley, Alec Baldwin, Zoe Caldwell, Dick Cavett, Patricia Clarkson, John Goodman, Anne Jackson, Patricia Neal, Rex Reed, Carol Sutton and Eli Wallach.

From almost the beginning of the Festival until his death in 2008, Dakin Williams would participate in interviews and performance. The younger brother of Tennessee, he shared his memories and conviviality with festival goers even attending in the early years on his own nickel.

Tennessee Williams was known for his wicked laugh. The Festival keeps it light with the Stanley and Stella Shouting Contest. "For years, we'd work so hard at the Festival and go home that Sunday evening to discover no television coverage, said Peggy Scott Laborde, festival president for a total of 15 years. "The big feature story at the end of one Festival weekend was the wedding of Dr. John's road manager on a

Harley with a cockatoo on her shoulder! Then I realized the Festival needed to be more visual. Hence the birth of the Stanley and Stella Shouting Contest.”

Since 1996, this event takes place from a Pontalba Apartments balcony facing historic Jackson Square. Twenty-five contestants shout “Stella” below the balcony featuring someone portraying Stella above, recalling the iconic scene from *A Streetcar Named Desire*. By the way, until 1948 the actual streetcar used to waddle down a French Quarter street nearby.

Longtime *Times-Picayune/ New Orleans Advocate* writer John Pope, himself a popular Festival panel moderator, recalls turning his head up toward the contest balcony and seeing honored 1999 Festival guest Kim Hunter. As the original Stella on Broadway and on screen, Hunter looked very amused, Pope recalled.

Gratefully, the years have seen growth. Since 1996, an internationally respected Scholars Conference brings together Williams experts from around the globe. The Conference is under the direction of Dr. Robert Bray. Published in conjunction with the Conference is *The Tennessee Williams Annual Review*, which debuted in 1998. It is the only regularly published journal dedicated to the work and influence of Williams. Dr. Bray is Founding Editor Emeritus, R. Barton Balmer, current editor and Margit Longbrake serves as managing editor. It is published by The Historic New Orleans Collection.

Not even a hurricane could prevent the Festival from happening. After the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, then Festival President Patricia Brady recalled, “We were going to have the Festival even if we had to use flashlights.” Fortunately, we had electricity at Festival time. In 2020, facing the Coronavirus Pandemic, the Festival was cancelled. In 2021 it will be virtual with the fervent hope that the future will allow a return to a literary and theatre celebration that can be enjoyed by locals and visitors in person.

Paul J. Willis started with the Tennessee Williams & New Orleans Festival as a volunteer in 1997. He worked his way up and has been the executive director of the Tennessee Williams & New Orleans Literary Festival since 2004. He is the founder of the Saints and Sinners Literary Festival (established in 2003). Saints and Sinners brings together LGBTQ writers and readers and has become nationally recognized.

Managing Director Tracy Cunningham attended the festival for many years, then began as a volunteer working on special events. In 2013, she joined the board and then the staff in 2015.

Longtime supporters of the Festival include the Louisiana Endowment For The Humanities, The Historic New Orleans Collection, the University of New Orleans and the Ruth U. Fertel Foundation. From the beginning, board members have volunteered countless hours, insuring the Festival's success.

“Enthusiasm is the most important thing in life.” stated Mr. Williams. After 35 years the Tennessee Williams & New Orleans Literary Festival remains steadfast in its enthusiasm for one of the world's greatest writers and someone who was legendary for knowing how to have a good time.

A FESTIVAL TIMELINE OF HIGHLIGHTS

April 3 -- 5, 1987:

- Lecture by Lyle Leverich, authorized biographer of Tennessee Williams.
- Ray Stricklyn performs *Confessions of a Nightingale*, his highly acclaimed one-man show on Williams' life; Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre presents *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
- Plaque dedication on French Quarter building (632 St. Peter Street) where Williams completed *A Streetcar Named Desire*, co-sponsored by the Louisiana Landmarks Society and the Festival.
- Festival presents two panels. First annual “I Remember Tennessee” panel included reminiscences by friends moderated by Kenneth Holditch. Panelists were Jack Fricks, Bob Hines, Lyle Leverich, Anna May Maylie, Dan Mosley, Eric Paulsen, and Jere Real.
- First literary panel: “New Orleans As A Home for the Writers,” featuring Rick Barton, Sheila Bosworth, Christopher Blake, Everette Maddox, and Chris Wiltz. Moderated by Ralph Adamo.
- Jazz mass memorial to Williams held at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church.
- First annual “Tea With Tennessee” celebrating the playwright's birthday held in Le Petit Theatre courtyard.
- Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Award goes to writer Bill Myers.
- First Festival poster by New Orleans artist George Dureau.
- First annual festival literary walking tours and book fair.

March 25 – 27, 1988:

- Performance of works by Williams by his longtime friends Eli Wallach and Anne Jackson, with daughter Katherine.

- Lecture by New Yorker theatre critic John Lahr on “Tennessee Williams and the Kingdom of Self.”
- In addition to Williams-related panels such as a scholars panel, other topics include “Romancing The South,” “Voices of the New South,” and “How to Start Your Own Publishing Company.”
- Film producer Harry Rasky presents and discusses his documentary *Tennessee Williams’ South*.
- Ray Stricklyn returns in Confessions of a Nightingale, festival presents Williams’ one-act play *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion*, and a portrayal of some of Williams’ most famous female characters comprise *Williams’ Women*.
- Staged reading of the winner of the first festival One-Act play competition. (\$500 prize)
- Presentation of *Tennessee Williams in Prose and Poetry*.
- Le Petit Theatre’s production of *The Rose Tattoo*.

March 17 –19, 1989:

- Tennessee Williams’ brother Dakin makes his debut at the Festival, appearing on the “I Remember Tennessee” panel.
- Interview of Anne Rice by Dr. Kenneth Holditch.
- Tribute to John Kennedy Toole with dramatization of scenes from *A Confederacy of Dunces*.
- Three Williams one-acts: *A Perfect Analysis Given By A Parrot*, *27 Wagons Full of Cotton*, and *This Property is Condemned*, performed by the United Theatre Artists of Covington, Louisiana.
- *Sister and Miss Lexie*, actress Brenda Currin’s critically acclaimed off-Broadway tribute to the works of Eudora Welty.
- Seven literary panels including such topics as “Tennessee Williams On Film,” and what New Orleans was like when Williams lived in the city. Biographers panel features Stephen Ambrose, Carol Gelderman, Emily Toth, and Martin Duberman.
- Performance by noted stage actress and Williams’ friend Ruth Ford, with excerpts from plays, prose, poetry, and personal reminiscences.
- Le Petit Theatre’s production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
- Gifted and Talented Program from St. Charles Parish School System present a Williams-inspired performance in which students portray characters from his plays.
- The Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival Writers’ Conference is held, co-sponsored by the Greater New Orleans Tourist and Convention Commission and Southeastern Louisiana University.

March 30 – April 1, 1990:

- Keynote speaker is Ernest Gaines.
- Southern Humorist Fannie Flagg performs.
- Science fiction writer Harlan Ellison gives lecture and participates in discussion with fellow novelist George Alec Effinger.
- Literary panels include such topics as Southern poets, the legacy of Walker Percy, collecting books, a Williams Scholars panel, and a panel focusing on Southern writers that includes novelists Valerie Martin and Beverly Lowry. A Southern Poets panel includes Charlie Bishop, Kay Murphy, and Stan Rice.
- Drama troupe from Sonoma State University performs Williams' one-acts: *This Property is Condemned*. Actors' Warehouse Theatre of New Orleans perform *Talk To Me Like The Rain* and *Let Me Listen*.
- Festival presents a performance of *Mr. Williams and Miss Wood* written by Max Wilk, and based on the memoirs of Williams' literary agent Audrey Wood.
- Encore performance of scenes from *A Confederacy of Dunces*.
- Le Petit Theatre produces *Orpheus Descending*.
- Adjunct events around the city include *Small Craft Warnings* at Theatre Marigny and *Suddenly Last Summer* at Southern Repertory Theatre.
- Festival begins "Visiting Writers In Schools" program.

March 22 – 24, 1991:

- Dakin Williams performs poetry and monologues by his brother Tennessee.
- Novelist Margaret Atwood and her husband novelist Graeme Gibson read from their works.
- Ray Stricklyn returns with *Confessions of a Nightingale*.
- Le Petit Theatre produces *The Glass Menagerie*. Sonoma State University dramatic troupe performs *27 Wagons of Cotton*.
- First "Drummer and Smoke: A Jazz Tribute to Tennessee Williams" held at the Palm Court Jazz Cafe. Features jazz legend Danny Barker and his band, and a birthday tribute to Williams by his brother Dakin.
- Nationally acclaimed novelist Elizabeth Spencer and poet William Jay Smith read selections from their works. Lyle Leverich returns to the Festival for a reading. Novelist Joan Williams, a protege of William Faulkner, reads from her works and reminisces about Faulkner. Topics for the literary panels are "The Poetics of Intimacy;" among those on the panel are Valerie Martin and Rosemary Daniell. Other panel topics include the 1960s New Orleans literary scene, Louisiana politics, the treatment of race relations in novels and numerous panels concerning Williams' life and works.

March 27 – 29, 1992:

- Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Edward Albee gives a lecture on the American theatre. He also conducts play writing and acting workshops.
- Eli Wallach, Anne Jackson, and Katherine Wallach make a return appearance.
- *New Yorker* poetry editor Alice Quinn moderates annual poetry panel.
- Festival panel topics include New Orleans jazz in the 1950s, writing about New Orleans from the inside out, and numerous panels on Tennessee Williams. A panel on sex and violence in literature features writers Sheila Bosworth, James Colbert, Louis Edwards, Barry Gifford, and Valerie Martin.
- Gerald McRaney appears in *Tennessee Williams in Poetry and Song*.
- The festival produces *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Edward Albee's *The Death of Bessie Smith*.
- Sonoma State University dramatic troupe performs *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion* and *A Perfect Analysis Given By A Parrot*.
- Le Petit Theatre produces *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

March 26 – 28, 1993:

- Actress Elizabeth Ashley is interviewed by film scholar Richard Brown on her reminiscences of Tennessee Williams as well as her own career.
- Nationally acclaimed novelist Richard Ford gives lecture on political correctness and political forces on writers.
- Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Taylor Branch discusses writing about race relations.
- Ernest Gaines returns to the Festival and is interviewed by Dr. Michael Sartisky, executive director of the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities.
- Writer Michael Lewis discusses his experiences while writing *Liar's Poker*.
- In addition to panels pertaining to Williams, among the other topics are writing about theatre legends, the Federal Writers Project, the literary legacy of Creoles of Color and a Louisiana based writers panel which includes Andrei Codrescu.
- A staged reading of Anne Rice's novel, *Feast of All Saints*, about the 19th-century New Orleans Creoles of Color community.
- One-Act play competition prize is now \$1000.
- Administration of competition is handled in conjunction with University of New Orleans (UNO) Drama and Communications Department and Creative Writing Program.
- First staged reading under UNO's direction takes place.
- Festival produces *The Glass Menagerie* and *Suddenly Last Summer*, both directed by Carl Walker.
- Luncheon performance of New Orleans in the musical theatre.

March 24 – 27, 1994:

- Pulitzer Prize-winning author Robert Olen Butler gives the keynote speech.
- National television executive Brandon Tartikoff is interviewed by Rick Barton on “Television’s Influence on the Literary World.”
- Literary panels increase from 10 to 17. In addition to panels on Williams, such as sexuality in his plays, topics include Walker Percy, Elvis Presley as a literary icon, writing about poor white southerners, black literary life in the 1930s, gay ideas and gay identity, the scholarship of jazz, and romance novels. On the “Writing About Women’s Lives” panel is Lee Smith. Among the guest authors presenting at the Festival are Margaret Walker, Greil Marcus, Larry Brown, and Jay Tolson.
- The festival commissions and produces the play *Remembering Tennessee: In His Own Words*, directed by Francine Segal and narrated by Dr. Kenneth Holditch.
- Premiere of fully staged production of previous years One-Act Play winner now in UNO’s drama season schedule, as well as during the Festival.
- The Drama Department of Sonoma State University performs *Night of the Iguana*, directed by Judy Navas.
- The Chicago based *Free Associates* comedy troupe performs *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*, improvisational performances inspired by Williams’ plays.
- Southeastern University presents excerpts from an operatic adaption of Williams’ *Summer and Smoke*.
- “Drummer and Smoke: Poetry of the Blues,” a lecture and performance on blues and a musical presentation of the lyrics of Ira Gershwin is held.
- For the 1994 Festival the board contracts with the Division of Conference Services of Metropolitan College to handle administrative duties. In conjunction with UNO Conference Services Division, the Festival presents a lecture series, “Coffee House Classes,” featuring talks by local writers on a year-round basis.

March 23 – 26, 1995:

- The festival opening night event features playwright Christopher Durang, whose *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You* was an Off-Broadway hit, interviewed by *Times Picayune* theatre critic Richard Dodds. Durang’s spoof of *The Glass Menagerie*, called *For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls*, is presented, directed by Roy Tagliavore.
- Master Classes make their debut, allowing the public an opportunity to learn about the craft of writing from nationally respected writers Richard Ford, Shirley Ann Grau, Robert Olen Butler and Andrei Codrescu. Also returning to give classes and perform at the festival are Eli Wallach and Anne Jackson, with daughter Katharine.

- Literary panels expand to 18. Williams panels include one on the playwright's international reputation. Other panel topics include writing about religion, a sense of place, Louisiana women writers, chronicling New Orleans' Carnival, children's literature, mystery writing, and a Ralph Ellison retrospective. On the Ellison panel is Albert Murray. A festival highlight is an interview with Lindy Boggs. Other guest writers at the Festival include John Gregory Brown, Sheila Bosworth, Will D. Campbell, Tomi de Paola, Shirley Ann Grau, Ann Patchett, and Emily Toth.
- Returning to the Festival and on the "I Remember Tennessee" panel is Lyle Leverich, whose long-awaited biography on Williams is about to be published.
- The Festival commissions and produces two original theatrical productions: *Relative Madness*, a comedy by Phyllis Clemons inspired by Williams characters, and *Essee and Me and Tennessee*, concerning Williams' relationship with Diana Barrymore, written by David Cuthbert.
- The Festival produces a concert version of *Lord Byron's Love Letter*, an opera with libretto by Williams. Another musical presentation is a celebration of lesser-known works by Jerome Kern.
- This year's version of "Drummer and Smoke" is a lecture and performance focusing on Traditional Jazz by Dr. Michael White and his band.
- Dedication of the U. S. Postal Service stamp honoring Tennessee Williams. Unveiling the art work for the ceremony are stamp artist Michael Deas, Dakin Williams, New Orleans Postmaster Phillip Holland, New Orleans photographer and stamp collector Arthur Tong (a longtime advocate for a stamp dedicated to Williams), and Marie Finhold, who was a conductorette on the original Desire streetcar line.
- Coinciding with the Festival, The Historic New Orleans Collection presents an exhibition in conjunction with the Harry Ransom Humanities Center of rare memorabilia depicting Williams' Connections to the Crescent City.

March 28 – 31, 1996:

- The First Tennessee Williams Scholars' Conference is held during the Festival under the direction of Dr. Robert Bray, Middle Tennessee State University.
- Festival expands to 22 panels. Other venues, in addition to Le Petit Theatre, now include the Historic New Orleans Collection, Palm Court Jazz Cafe, the Cabildo and Maxwell's Toulouse Cabaret Theatre.
- Master classes expand to two days.
- The Festival commissions the creation of *A More Congenial Climate*, a dramatic presentation based on Williams' interviews, poetry and short stories. Written by David Cuthbert from a concept by Cuthbert and Francine Segal.
- Ray Stricklyn returns to perform his one-man show *Confessions of a Nightingale*.
- Other theatrical presentations include Christopher Durang's spoof of *A Streetcar Named Desire* – *Desire, Desire, Desire*, and an encore performance of Phyllis Clemons' *Relative Madness*. The North Star Theatre performs three Williams one-acts.

- The debut of the first annual “Stanley and Stella” shouting contest.
- Novelist Doris Betts makes her Festival Debut. Other guest speakers include Yusef Komenyakaa, Susan Ketchin, and Peggy Fox of New Directions Press.

March 20 – 23, 1997:

- Actor Alec Baldwin is interviewed by Fredrick Barton for the first Arthur Q. Davis “Celebrity Conversation” series. Baldwin also performs dramatic readings of essays and poems by Tennessee Williams.
- World premiere screening of the documentary *Storyville: The Naked Dance*.
- The Festival produces *Three Mortal Ladies Possessed*, a dramatization of three short stories by Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, and Eudora Welty.
- Writers Kaye Gibbons, Gloria Wade-Gayles, and Rebecca Wells make their Festival debut, as does noted literary agent Jonathan Dolger.
- Novelist Valerie Martin and historian Dr. Stephen Ambrose return to the Festival.
- An interview with playwright Donald Windham, a longtime friend of Tennessee Williams.
- The Festival produces the rarely seen one-act play, *Submerged*, by Clay Shaw and the well- received Off-Broadway play, *Me and Tennessee*, written by Will Sheffer. The Williams’ play, *Purification*, is performed by the Deep Ellum Ensemble.
- The Festival presents the Duke University Players’ production of *Orpheus Descending*.

March 11 – 15, 1998:

- The Arthur Q. Davis Celebrity Conversation series continues with an interview of noted author and satirist Calvin Trillin conducted by Errol Laborde.
- Novelist Dorothy Allison and Gail Godwin appear on panels. Ann Patchett makes a return visit. Other Festival participants include John Barry, James Lee Burke, Fred Chappell, George Garrett, Winston Groom, Richard Lederer, Wanda Rouzan, Anita Shreve, Julie Smith, and Rebecca Wells.
- The debut of the Tennessee Williams Annual Review, published in conjunction with the Tennessee Williams Scholars Conference. It is the only regularly published journal dedicated to the work and influence of Williams. Dr. Bray is Founding Editor Emeritus, R. Barton Balmer, current editor and Margit Longbrake serves as managing editor. It is published by The Historic New Orleans Collection.
- The debut of “New Orleans Cooks and Books,” a panel discussing culinary topics along with tastings from New Orleans chefs who have written cookbooks.

March 24 – 28, 1999:

- Kim Hunter, the original Stella Kowalski of stage and screen, is interviewed for the Arthur Q. Davis Celebrity Conversation series. Hunter won the Academy Award for her role.
- Writers Hal Crowther, Julia Cameron, Clyde Edgerton, Peter Feibleman, Edmund White, and Lee Smith appear on literary panels.
- Film critic, writer, actor and TV personality Rex Reed debuts at the Festival.
- Actress Janet Shea performs her one-woman show, *Lillian*, based on the life of author and New Orleanian Lillian Hellman.

March 22 – 26, 2000

- The Festival opens with a staged reading of *Night of the Iguana* featuring Alec Baldwin, Elizabeth Ashley, Stephanie Zimbalist, and Kent McCord.
- Kaye Gibbons and Rex Reed return to the Festival, as do John Gregory and Carrie Brown. David Halberstam, and Sue Grafton make their Festival debut.
- The Festival now presents 28 panel discussions. A panel on “Southern Humor” features Robert Harling, Lewis Nordan, James Wilcox, and Julia Reed.
- Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the publication of the novel, *A Confederacy of Dunces*, the Festival presents a panel and a “Happy Birthday Ignatius!” party in conjunction with LSU Press.
- In association With Le Petit Theatre, the Festival produces *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, directed by John Girmsley.
- The New Orleans Opera Association produces Andre Previn’s opera based on Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
- The Festival presents *Roads Not Taken*, a compilation of scenes from *A Streetcar Named Desire* discarded by Tennessee Williams. Narrated by Dan Isaac and featuring Michael Arata, Shelley Poncy, Cassie Worley, and Danny Bowen.
- Also presented during the Festival is *I Can’t Imagine Tomorrow*, a rarely-produced Williams one-act.
- Festival coordinates “Dining Out with Tennessee,” in which more than 20 of New Orleans’ best-known restaurants design special menus celebrating the work and life of Williams.

March 28 – April 1, 2001:

- Actors John Goodman and Stephanie Zimbalist perform readings from Tennessee Williams’ works.
- In association with Le Petit Theatre, The Festival produces *Tiger Tail*, based on the screenplay of Williams’ 1958 film *Baby Doll*. Eli Wallach, who was in the film, returns to the Festival along with his wife, renowned actress Anne Jackson.
- Pulitzer Prize-winner writers Philip Caputo, Michael Cunningham, and Shirley Ann Grau participate in master classes, interviews and panels.

- Booker Prize-winner Barry Unsworth makes his Festival debut, as do best-selling authors Mary Gordon and William Lamb.
- New Orleans natives Valerie Martin and John Biguenet discuss their new books.
- Dr. Kenneth Holditch and Mel Gussow talk about compiling the recently published Library of America collection of the works of Tennessee Williams.
- The popular “Drummer and Smoke” event pays tribute to Louis Armstrong at the Palm Court Jazz Cafe.

March 28 – April 1, 2001:

- Pulitzer Prize-winning authors Michael Cunningham and Philip Caputo make their Festival debut.
- John Goodman and Stephanie Zimbalist perform Works of Tennessee Williams at the Festival gala
- Eli Wallach and Anne Jackson return to the Festival to perform their show that includes reminiscences of Williams and Works by the playwright.
- Ann Patchett, Wally Lamb, Shirley Ann Grau, Mel Gussow, Barry Unsworth, and Elizabeth Spencer participate as panelists during the Festival.
- The Festival presents the rarely-seen Williams plays *Tiger Tail* and *Roads Not Taken*, a presentation of alternate versions of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
- The annual “Drummer and Smoke” musical presentation spotlights the New Orleans years of Louis Armstrong.

March 20 – 24, 2002:

- Actress Patricia Neal and actor Will Lyman perform a staged reading of two of Williams’ one-act plays, *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion* and *Portrait of a Madonna*.
- Actor Richard Thomas reads from the *Collected Letters of Tennessee Williams, Vol. 1* in a stage presentation, *A Distant Country Called Youth*. Directed by Steve Lawson.
- The Festival produces *Sweet Bird of Youth* and *Suddenly Last Summer*.
- Authors Rick Bragg, Roy Blount, Jr., Jonathan Yardley, and Marie Arana make their Festival debut.
- New Orleans Cooks and Books event includes a panel on the history of the cocktail. Panelists include William Grimes, restaurant critic for the *New York Times* and the author of *Straight Up* and *On the Rocks*. Also appearing on the panel are Michael Green, wine consultant for *Gourmet* magazine, and Kerri McCaffety, author of *Obituary Cocktail*.
- The debut of *Tennessee Sips: A Wine and Word Pairing* created and hosted by *Gourmet*’s Michael Green. Hosted by Brennan’s Restaurant.

March 26 – 30, 2003:

- Author/historian Douglas Brinkley interviews author George Plimpton.
- Novelists Dorothy Allison, Valerie Martin, and Rick Bragg, along with science fiction writer David Gerrold, are among the participants in literary panels during the Festival.
- Movie critic Rex Reed interviews Dick Cavett and his wife, actress Carrie Nye.
- Cavett, Nye, and actress Lois Chiles share their memories of Tennessee Williams during the “I Remember Tennessee” panel.
- The Festival produces *Rose Tattoo* and *Vieux Carre*. In conjunction with Mesa Productions, there is also a production of *Small Craft Warnings*.

March 24 – 28, 2004:

- The Festival produces the Williams classic *A Glass Menagerie* and the rarely seen *A House Not Meant To Stand*.
- Authors Robert Morgan, Michelle Tea, Sarah Vowell, Michael Perry, and Sister Helen Prejean make their Festival debut.
- Food experts Sara Moulton and John T. Edge are interviewed by Randy Fertel for the annual “Words to Eat By: New Orleans Cooks and Books” panel.
- Jelly Roll Morton experts Butch Thompson, Dr. Michael White and Howard Reich pay tribute to the New Orleans-born jazz pioneer at the Festival’s “Drummer and Smoke” event held at the Palm Court Jazz Cafe.
- CBS News anchor Bob Schieffer is interviewed by Errol Laborde concerning his career and reflections on the current political and media scenes.
- *New Yorker* film critic David Denby makes his Festival debut.

March 30 – April 2, 2005:

- Actor Jeremy Lawrence makes his Festival debut in his one-man show, *Talking Tennessee*.
- Author and columnist Steve Roberts and his mother-in-law, former U.S. Rep. and Ambassador to the Vatican Lindy Boggs, discuss the current political scene and reflect on their famous family.
- John “Spud” McConnell performs as Ignatius Reilly in a staged reading of John Kennedy’s Toole’s *A Confederacy of Dunces*.
- Authors Dave Eggers and Ellen Gilchrist make their Festival debut.
- Novelist Kay Gibbons and Biographer/novelist Gavin Lambert return to the Festival.
- The Tennessee Williams Scholars’ Conference celebrates its 10th Anniversary. Chairman is Dr. Robert Bray.

March 29-April 1 2006

- The Festival in March is the first major event in New Orleans, aside from Mardi Gras, in the post-Hurricane Katrina city.
- Hollywood film star Tab Hunter gives a reading from Williams' works and discusses his autobiography, *Tab Hunter Confidential: The Making of a Movie Star*.
- Authors Robert Crais and Mark Kurlansky make their Festival debut.
- Actress Stephanie Zimbalist returns to the Festival, as does Richard Thomas in the one-man show *Blanche and Beyond: The Selected Letters of Tennessee Williams Vol. II 1945-1957*.
- Actor Jeremy Lawrence performs in his one-man show *Talking Tennessee*. Lawrence has performed at the Festival many times over the years.
- Dakin Williams (1919-2008) makes his final appearance at the Festival.

March 28- April 1, 2007

- Filmmaker and author John Waters delights audiences discussing Tennessee Williams' *Memoirs*.
- Novelist Barry Gifford appears at the Festival for the first time.
- Former Time Magazine Paris Bureau Chief and jazz clarinetist Tom Sancton discusses his memoir *Song for My Fathers: A New Orleans Story in Black and White* during the Festival's "Drummer and Smoke" music series.
- Playwright Gregg Barrios presents his play *Rancho Pancho*, based on the relationship between Tennessee Williams and Pancho Rodriguez.
- Chef John Besh discusses his new cookbook *New Orleans Program: Eat, Exercise, and Enjoy Life* and gives a cooking demonstration.

March 26-30, 2008

- Noted Broadway actress Marian Seldes makes her Festival debut in "A Conversation With" conducted by four-time Tony Award-winning playwright Terrence McNally.
- As part of the Festival's "Drummer and Smoke" music series, guitarist Spencer Bohren performs and discusses the history of traditional American music. Held at the Palm Court Jazz Café.
- Victor Gold, author, speechwriter and senior advisor to President George H. W. Bush, makes his Festival debut.
- "Tennessee's Got Talent," a theatrical talent competition that consists of the performance of scenes from Williams plays, is presented and well-received.

- Broadway producer/director Gregory Mosher makes his Festival debut. Mosher has directed many Williams plays, including the Broadway production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, starring Jessica Lange and Alec Baldwin.
- Wright King, who was in the film version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, appears at the Festival.
- Mitch Douglas, who was a literary agent for Tennessee Williams, shares stories.
- PEN-Library of Congress Award-winning author Al Young makes his Festival debut.

March 27-29 2009

- Noted Broadway actress Zoe Caldwell and Frances Sternhagen perform readings by Tennessee Williams and participate in a panel about their Broadway experiences.
- Playwright John Guare, a member of the Theater Hall of Fame, discusses his life on Broadway and talks about Williams and his legacy.
- Daniel Menaker, author and former executive editor-in-chief of Random House Publishing Group, discusses current trends in publishing industry.
- For this year's Drummer and Smoke presentation, Vernel Bagneris performs songs from his one-man show based on the life of Jelly Roll Morton and his musical *One Mo' Time*. Held at the Palm Court Jazz Café.
- Actor Doug Tompos performs *Beat To The Flame*, his one-man show about Tennessee Williams and his devotion to the poet, Hart Crane.
- Pulitzer Prize-winning author Richard Ford serves as judge for the first year of the Festival's Fiction Contest.

March 24-28, 2010

- Edward Albee returns to the Festival for a "Conversation With" event and participates in the "I Remember Tennessee" panel with noted actress Lois Smith.
- Eric Overmyer, David Simon, David Mills, Tom Piazza, and Lolis Eric Elie provide a behind-the-scenes look at the HBO series *Treme*.
- James Carville, political commentator and consultant, is interviewed by Errol Laborde.
- Writer/editor Dave Eggers participates in a "Conversation With" event and participates in WriteNow, the Festival's educational outreach program for high school students.
- Novelist Jill McCorkle gives a Master Class on the short story and judges the second annual Fiction Contest.
- Thomas Keith of New Directions Publishing interviews John Patrick Shanley, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright of *Doubt* and the writer/director of the film *Moonstruck*.

- The University of New Orleans Drama Department, in conjunction with the Festival, presents *The Night of the Iguana*.
- Fifteenth anniversary of the Stanley and Stella Shouting Contest.

March 23-March 27 2011:

- Actress Zoe Caldwell hosted “Bright, Beautiful Things: A World Premiere of Tennessee Williams One-Acts,” including three never produced before: “The Pretty Trap: A Comedy in One-Act,” “The Magic Tower,” and “Every Twenty Minutes.”
- Celebrated musician and cultural ambassador Irvin Mayfield reads from his new book and CD entitled A Love letter to New Orleans.
- Alabama writer Winston Groom, author of *Forrest Gump*, is interviewed about his life and works, including his latest novel about Alabama football, *The Crimson Tide*.
- A star-studded celebration of Tennessee Williams’ 100th birthday included an evening of readings and remembrances to toast Williams’ iconic career and his connection to the Crescent City. Participants included Dorothy Allison, Carroll Baker, Darrell Bourque, Robert Olen Butler, Janet Daley Duval, David Hoover, Shirley Knight, Jeremy Lawrence, Christian LeBlanc, Armistead Maupin, Mona Lisa Saloy, John Waters, and Grace Zabriskie. A special champagne toast and birthday cake capped off the evening.
- Novelist Armistead Maupin discussed his works and what it’s like being a writer tied to a city’s identity.

March 21-March 25, 2012:

- Noted New Orleans chef and restaurateur John Besh shared stories and recipes from his cookbook *My Family Table* during a cooking demonstration and tasting.
- Pitchapalooza contestants had one -minute to pitch their idea “American Idol” style to the Book Doctors, Arielle Eckstut and David Henry Sterry, who help aspiring writers get published. The winner received representation from them.
- Actors Spud McConnell, Becky Allen, and an all-New Orleans cast were featured in *The Glass Mandacity*, an uproarious stage send-up featuring characters from some of Williams’ most beloved plays.
- The Wednesday night gala at the Old U.S. Mint featured an exhibit and performance of *Song for My Fathers* by author/jazz clarinetist Tom Sancton and Preservation Hall Jazz Band.
- Academy Award Nominee Piper Laurie, author of *Learning to Live Out Loud: A Memoir*, and actress who portrayed Williams’ women in critical acclaim, was interviewed by Foster Hirsch in a discussion of Williams’ fabulous, flawed, unforgettable female characters.

March 20-March 24, 2013:

- Author Kit Wohl and mixologist Hadi Kitiri-Idrissi teamed up to create cocktails and conversation at the world-famous Arnaud's French 75 Bar for "Sipping on a New Orleans Afternoon."
- Those Rare Electrical Things Between People, an intimate reading of Tennessee Williams one-act plays starred Cristine McMurdo-Wallis, Nell Nolan, Harry Shearer, Alison Fraser, and Bryan Batt.
- A Tennessee Williams Songbook: Only a Paper Moon, a compilation of hit songs from Tennessee Williams' plays performed by Tony-nominated Alison Fraser, enjoyed sell-out performances at the historic U. S. Mint.
- Novelist Zachary Lazar discussed the tools needed to combine scenes from different time periods and places in a master class titled "A Sense of Time and Place in Literary Fiction."
- Michael Cunningham was interviewed by Amy Stolls concerning his path to literary success, and John Patrick Shanley led a master class for screenwriters.

March 19-March 23, 2014:

- Theater offerings included Vivien, starring Judith Chapman as Vivien Leigh, as well as Southern Repertory Theatre's production of Tennessee Williams' The Night of the Iguana, and NOLA Project's Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.
- Dani Shapiro, Roxane Gay, Kiese Laymon, and John Freemand discussed "The Return of the Essay."
- Our Breakfast Book Club focused on The Glass Menagerie, as readers celebrated the 70th anniversary of this landmark Williams play.
- The Festival partnered with the Hermann-Grima House, one of New Orleans' most historic house museums and formerly a boarding house. The House provided the setting for the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival's production of The Hotel Plays.

March 25-March 29, 2015:

- John Waters entertained standing room only crowds with his show "John Waters: This Filthy World: Filthier and Dirtier" at the Joy Theater and "Good Morning, Baltimore: An Interview with John Waters."
- "Tennessee and Toussaint: Soul of New Orleans" was opening gala. Held at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, which presented an exhibit of Williams' paintings, was a concert starring New Orleans musical icon, Allen Toussaint.
- Actor Keir Dullea makes his Festival debut.

- Playwright John Patrick Shanley and author/biographer John Lahr returned to the Festival.
- Actors Bryan Batt and Joel Vig perform in one-man shows at the Festival. Batt as Tennessee Williams and Vig as Truman Capote.

March 30-April 3, 2016 (30th Anniversary):

- Academy Award winning actress Estelle Parsons is interviewed by Foster Hirsch.
- Author Rick Bragg interviews actress Mary Badham, who played the role of “Scout” in the film version of “To Kill A Mockingbird.”
- Poppy Tooker discusses her Tujague’s Restaurant cookbook, focusing on one of America’s oldest restaurants.
- Talk Show host Dick Cavett is interviewed by author/critic/columnist Rex Reed.
- A fundraising dinner is held featuring cookbook author/chef Caroline Randall Williams, discussing her cookbook “Soul Food Love.” She also shares her wisdom and memories during a panel based on her book.
- Le Petit Theatre presents A Glass Menagerie and Southern Repertory Theatre stages Orpheus Descending.
- The Festival presents Something Unspoken, a Williams one-act, featuring Brenda Currin, Beth Bartley and Irene Glezos.
- Authors Dorothy Allison and John Lahr return to the Festival. Playwright Beth Henley and author Kiese Laymon makes her festival debut.
- Bruce “Sunpie” Barnes and his band The Sunspots focus on the musical legacy of the Mississippi River as part of the Drummer and Smoke series at the Palm Court Jazz Café.
- LSU Football star Billy Cannon discusses his memoir.

March 22-26, 2017:

- The Opening Night Gala is a musical and historical tribute to Storyville, New Orleans’ infamous legalized red-light district that flourished between 1897-1917.
- Theatre productions include The Milk Train Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore, produced by the Tennessee Williams Theatre Company and Sweet Bird of Youth by the Southern Repertory Theatre. Jeremy Lawrence, who has portrayed Williams over the years in many presentations, returns to the Festival.
- Authors Rick Bragg, Roy Blount, Jr. and Julia Reed return to the Festival.
- Biographer Patricia Bosworth makes her Festival debut.
- Actors Robert Wagner and Jill St. John are interviewed by Foster Hirsch.

- Panel topics include the Gay History of New Orleans and the local history of Prohibition.
- Peggy Scott Laborde interviews Dick Cavett, who shares video excerpts of his famed 1974 interview with Tennessee Williams.
- Last Stop: Desire, a dance adaptation of A Streetcar Named Desire, makes its debut. Created by Nicole Colbert.
- Dr. Kim Vaz-Deville interviews documentarian Vashni Belleste who shows her documentary on “The Baby Dolls: Preserving Culture in New Orleans.”
- Authors Jericho Brown, Kiese Laymon, Bernice McFadden and Kalamu Ya Salaam participate in the panel, “A Conversation About Race: Finding Strength For The Struggle In Great Writing.” Moderated by Maurice Carlos Ruffin.
- Pulitzer Prize Finalist and Obie Award winner Lisa D’Amour makes her Festival debut.

March 21-25, 2018:

- Theatre offerings include One Arm produced by the Tennessee Williams Theatre Company and Vieux Carre produced by the Allways Lounge and the Festival. The Festival produces the one-act play The Unsatisfactory Supper.
- Le Petit Theatre produces A Streetcar Named Desire. Southern Repertory Theatre presents the rarely-seen Williams play And Tell Sad Stories Of The Death Of Queens.
- Among the panels this year is one paying tribute to the life and work of New Orleans based writer Tom Dent.
- Martin Sherman, the award-winning playwright, makes his Festival debut. Sherman’s body of work includes Bent and The Boy From Oz as well as the screenplay for the 2003 film adaptation of Williams’ novel, The Roman Spring Of Mrs. Stone.
- Political consultant and author Donna Brazile makes her Festival debut.
- Errol Laborde moderates a panel on the Tricentennial of New Orleans featuring Patricia Brady, Dr. Raphael Cassimere, John Kemp and Ian McNulty.
- Novelist Richard Ford, author/essayist Calvin Trillin and historian Douglas Brinkley return to the Festival.
- WWL-TV Morning News co-host Sheba Turk interviews restaurant owner and civic activist Leah Chase.
- Actor Bryan Batt presents Dear Mr. Williams, a compilation of poems, letters, stories and essays by Williams about New Orleans.
- WWL-TV Morning News co-host Eric Paulsen shares his memories with Peggy Scott Laborde of the interview he did with Tennessee Williams in 1981. The documentary, “A Conversation With Tennessee Williams In New Orleans,” produced by Laborde, is screened at the Festival.

March 27-31, 2019:

- A Confederacy of Dunces: Off The Page Onto The Stage, a theatrical adaptation of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by John Kennedy Toole. Adapted by Dr. Kenneth Holditch and directed by Francine Segal.
- “An Interview With Patricia Clarkson” conducted by actor and her longtime friend Bryan Batt.
- Singer Anais St. John, accompanied by pianist Harry Mayronne, brings to life the story of Lulu White, a prominent “Madam” from the Storyville Red Light District, open in New Orleans between 1898-1919.
- Festival co-founder Errol Laborde interviews historian Dr. Douglas Brinkley.
- Writers Julia Reed and Roy Blount, Jr. discuss the unique aspects of Southern culture. Moderated by John Pope.
- Theater offerings also include productions of Suddenly Last Summer by the Tennessee Williams Theater Festival and Baby Doll by Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre.

March 25-29, 2020:

Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, the Festival was cancelled.

March 19-21 and March 24-28, 2021:

Our 2021 program is currently on our website.