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The Accidental Place: Louis Armstrong Park Out of Place on the North Side

Yvonne Estrade
University of New Orleans

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THE ACCIDENTAL PLACE
LOUIS ARMSTRONG PARK OUT OF PLACE ON THE NORTH SIDE

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
in
The Urban Studies Program

by

Yvonne Ragas Estrade

B.S.G.S., University of New Orleans, 2000

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The failed New Orleans Cultural Center Complex was cultural genocide to an area of the neighborhood known as Treme, where a tribute to the jazz great and native son, Louis Armstrong, was planned as an afterthought. The questions remain, was the planning and building of Louis Armstrong Park responsible for the genocide of the Treme neighborhood, is the park an appropriate use of land, and what are the prospects for the park's future?

This thesis examines the cultural gumbo of New Orleans history, explores the early days of Louis Armstrong and the development of jazz, sets the record straight by vindicating the Louis Armstrong Park as the culprit for demolition in Treme, and takes a look at “the Back ‘o Town” as a tribute to him.

Introduction

In New Orleans, the Faubourg Treme lies north of the Vieux Carre within an area bound by Canal Street, North Broad Street, Saint Bernard Avenue, and North Rampart Street (Figure 1). The section is rich in history, architecture and cultural diversity. It is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the United States to continuously house “free people of color.” For this reason it is said that the “culture of the Creoles and the free persons of color” is rooted, to a large extent, in Treme, which was substantially developed in the late 19th century. Before any of this development occurred, the land was first settled by Chevalier Charles de Morand and acquired by Claude Treme by 1780.



Figure 1 Treme Neighborhood (www.gnocdc.org/orleans/4/42/index.html)

In this thesis I will give a brief history of the cultural and physical development of the area now surrounding the Louis Armstrong Park, Municipal Auditorium, and Congo Square, the events leading to the demolition of houses in this unique neighborhood in the early 1960's, and the disruption of lives in the name of urban renewal in the late 1960's. In so doing, I hope to set the record straight and answer these questions: was the planning and building of Louis Armstrong Park responsible for the demolition in the Treme neighborhood in the early 1960's? Is the park an appropriate use of the land? What are the prospects for the park's future?

Hypotheses:

1. An area of the Treme neighborhood demolished in the 1960's was to accommodate the building of a cultural center complex, which was never built.
2. The building of the Louis Armstrong Park is a viable alternative for use of the city owned prime real estate that has the potential of contributing to local economic development and an asset to the local residents.

Understanding Through History

To better understand the uniqueness of New Orleans as a city and of Treme as a neighborhood, it is critical that the history and the “gumbo” of cultures be discussed. The blending of nationalities from France, Africa, Spain, Ireland, Germany, Italy, Central America, and many Caribbean Islands was a key ingredient of the cultural gumbo, which became uniquely New Orleans. Physical preservation of old neighborhoods in Treme must be maintained to preserve the cultures and family roots of those cultures. Neighborhoods are more than buildings. They are the very fiber of the inhabitants of those buildings, and show intertwining of their lives over time.

As a representative of France in 1682, Robert Cavalier de LaSalle led an expedition entering the Mississippi River from the Illinois River to the Gulf of Mexico. He erected a cross on shore and claimed all the land drained by the Mississippi for France and named the region Louisiana, in honor of King Louis XIV. Later, with the assistance of native Indians, Iberville in 1699 found his way to the present site of New Orleans and also erected a cross. In the spring of 1718 Bienville, with the assistance of Pauger and de la Tour, laid out the streets and founded La Nouvelle Orleans as a trading colony for the Company of the West. New Orleans was re-chartered as a royal colony at that time and a Roman Catholic cathedral built.

Slavery began with the initial colonization in Louisiana. Bienville brought slaves with him to settle the Gulf Coast region. In 1708, Bienville first petitioned the King of France to allow him to import slaves from the West Indies, an established slave trade region.

The king rejected Bienville's request. However, in 1719 John Law's Company of the West brought the first shipment of approximately 500 Africans to the region from Senegal for sale as slaves. Imports continued at a rate of 300-500 per year through the French and Spanish Colonial periods. The need for manpower to cultivate indigo, tobacco, and sugar cane crops kept the slave ships coming.

Not long after the founding of New Orleans in 1718, the French colonists adopted a slave law (the 1724 Code Noir), which forced newly arrived Africans into a lifetime of servitude. By the terms of the Code Noir, a mother's slave condition passed to her newborn infant. Other provisions forbade slaves from owning property, holding office, marrying or cohabiting with whites. Slaves could not obtain their freedom without the permission of the Colony's governing body. In New Orleans, however, the scarcity of European women and the city's early dependency on black soldiers and skilled laborers prevented the Code Noir's strict enforcement. Extramarital relationships between French and African settlers evolved into an accepted social practice. The custom of freeing the children of such unions and a policy of liberating enslaved soldiers and workers for meritorious service led to the rise of a free black population. Through inheritance, military service, and a near monopoly of certain skilled trades, free blacks acquired some degree of wealth and status. A three-tiered racial order developed with whites at the top, free blacks in the middle, and slaves at the bottom. After Spain acquired Louisiana in 1763, the Spanish slave code introduced the practice of coartacion, the right of slaves to purchase their freedom. Coartacion became a crucial means of emancipation. Near the time of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, New Orleans free blacks constituted nearly 20% of the urban population while enslaved Africans and African Americans represented nearly 38% of the city's residents. (Bell, Caryn Cosse, Revolution,

Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718-1869, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996).

According to information furnished by the Hermann-Grima Historic House staff, free blacks owned property, businesses and slaves in New Orleans. Also called “gens de couleur libre,” free blacks were involved in all types of businesses—doctors, artists, craftsmen, tavern keepers, vendors, butchers, moneylenders, brokers, poets, seamstresses, and prostitutes. The 1850 census listed 54 different occupations—only 9.9% were unskilled laborers. Their strongest economic base was in real estate. Their social life meant mixing with other free blacks, slaves, and whites.

Congo Square (Johnson, Jerah. “Congo Square: La Place Publique,” Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities: Winter, 1997-98)

Congo Square, originally known as *Place de Negroes*, at the front of the New Orleans Municipal Auditorium on Rampart Street, is located on the edge of the French Quarter in what has long been called the Treme neighborhood. The musical and non-musical aspects of its history give Congo Square a special importance. Its story traces the growth of the city, its economic development, the formation of its social and ethnic configuration, and the development of jazz and origin of modern American dance. Congo Square has remained different from New Orleans’ other squares because it was never really laid out by the city’s planners as a public square. It took its shape gradually and on its own. For a brief time after the Louisiana Purchase (1803) it was recognized officially as *La Place Publique*. Other names used were Place D’Arms, Circus Square, and Beauregard Square.

Congo Square first originated in the early decades of the French colonial period (1718-1762) as one of the city’s public markets. The famous dancing, playing, and singing

that took place were byproducts of the square's market function. In an effort to make their slaves more self sufficient, planters began to assign slaves individual parcels of land on which to grow their own food, as well as sale crops. The planters began to see advantages for themselves in abiding by article five of the Code Noir, which exempted slaves from forced labor on Sundays and religious holidays. On those "free days" which came to include Saturday afternoons, slaves could hire themselves out for wages or take their surplus products into town and sell them. Slaves in French Louisiana were recognized as having the right to use their free time virtually as they saw fit, with little or no supervision. As the New Orleans population grew, slave vendors increased both their numbers and the regularity of their operations. A number of slave merchants began to gather on Sundays at a certain spot and spread their wares on the open ground, eventually creating a spot of their own. The open ground stretched along the edge of the City Commons at the end of Orleans Street, just beyond the city's limit and primitive defense line. The market may have begun to take shape as early as the late 1730's, but more likely this happened in the late 1740's or the 1750's, by which time New Orleans population approached 2,000.

In 1760, mid-way through the French and Indian War, the resident military engineers strengthened New Orleans' defenses, which affected the market's physical relationship to the city. The whole defense wall was moved several hundred feet into the City Commons. As a result, Rampart Street was cut where the breastworks of the old defense line had run, which brought the market within the city's walls. There the slave merchants continued their market on the spot that more than half a century later would come to be known as New Orleans' Congo Square.

Three years after redesigning the city's defenses, France lost the Seven-Year War with England and with it her entire North American empire. In 1763, by treaty, Spain received the vast Louisiana territories. During the next thirty-five years of Spanish rule the local slave market flourished. In 1792, Spain built Fort St. Ferdinand at the site to strengthen the city's defenses, which displaced the vendors only slightly, and they continued their sales at the foot of the fort. Spain returned the colony to France in 1803, and twenty-one days later France sold it to the United States.

Louisiana Purchase

The Louisiana Purchase inaugurated the second and most important phase of Congo Square's history. The first American governor, William C. C. Claiborne of Virginia, ordered the removal of New Orleans' old fortifications in order to open the city to its adjoining countryside. The slave merchants continued their market on the now enlarged open space created by the demolition of Fort St. Ferdinand. A spot where Fort St. Ferdinand had stood (the block bounded by Rampart, St. Claude, and St. Ann Streets, and the Carondelet Canal turning basin) was reserved for public use. That area was designated as *Place Publique*. The *Place Publique*'s association with the Congo Circus led to the slaves and free people of color referring to the area as Congo Square. The slave and free black vendors continued to set up at Congo Square on Sunday mornings to mingle with the crowds of other slaves and free blacks who gathered on Sunday afternoons for the square's famous African dances.

These African dances had not been seen elsewhere in North America for nearly a century. At Congo Square the African dances continued in the open. The African dances had been performed since the importation of slaves in the 1720's. Because of the area's long-standing role as a market, dancing grew into the way vendors and their friends passed

away the day between their occasional sales. That location became a particular focal point for such dancing. In addition to the various drums, gourds, sounding boxes, and banjo-like instruments, Congo Square musicians blew cow-horn hunting crooks and “quillpipes” made from reeds. Clusters of onlookers, musicians, and dancers in Congo Square represented, in the early decades, tribal groupings (Figure 2).

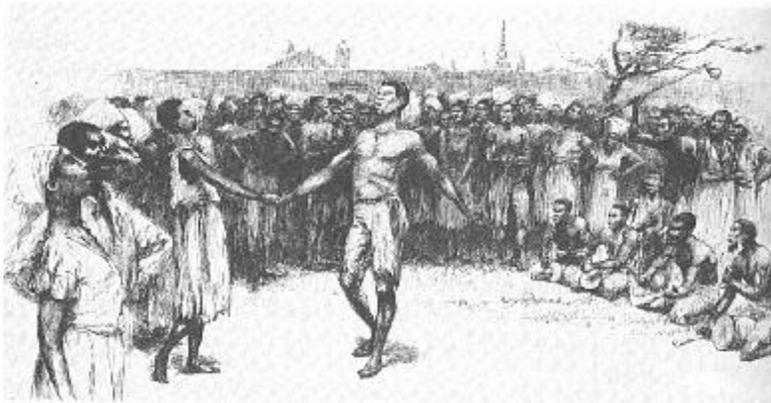


Figure 2 Nineteenth Century Congo Square (photograph courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection)

During the course of the 19th century, the traditional Sunday market activities in Congo Square were seriously and gradually curtailed. The opening first of a centralized vegetable facility in the French Market complex in 1823, and then the Treme Market (Figure 3) in 1839-40 just two blocks away and finally the 1834 construction of a massive parish prison one block away blighted both the old square and its immediate neighborhood.



Figure 3 Treme Market (www.nutrias.org/~nopl/monthly/june98/june982.htm)

The African-American dances in Congo Square continued through the 1830's and 1840's but they came under ever-increasing scrutiny and control of municipal authorities. The dances were finally abandoned during the tremulous days that followed the capture and occupation of New Orleans by Union forces during the Civil War in 1862, and while an occasional gathering was held in reconstruction times, they were never again a regular feature of the black man's life. (Herbert Asbury, *the French Quarter*). The dancing in Congo Square ended gradually as the physical growth and the Americanization of New Orleans crowded out the participants. After the Civil War, the square was renamed Beauregard Square in honor of the confederate General P.G.T. Beauregard (Figures 4 & 5). An 1895 Sanborn map of the area is shown in Appendix A, Figure 23.



Figure 4 Congo Square 1900



Figure 5 Congo Square today

The Municipal Auditorium, 727 Claude Avenue, facing Beauregard Square, was dedicated on May 30, 1930, as a memorial to the dead heroes of World War I. From the *New Orleans City Guide – WPA*, “the auditorium was one of the largest buildings in the city, modern in every aspect, forming a striking contrast to its environs of old buildings and historic sites.” Behind the building on N. Liberty Street, where the pumping station of the Sewerage and Water Board now stands, the riot and lynchings of March 4, 1801, took place and the first Parish Prison stood between 1830 and 1895. The building, of Italian Renaissance architecture, has foundations and walls of rusticated limestone. The three principal entrances on St. Claude Ave., St. Peter and St. Ann Streets have large stone porches with roofs and vaulted ceilings supported by square columns. The façade on St. Claude has high, wide, churchlike windows. At the time of its dedication the auditorium had a large

stage, 130 feet by 50 feet that could be raised or lowered by means of electrically operated screw jacks. The total seating capacity, including balconies, was approximately 12,000. The adjoining exhibition building on N. Liberty Street was serviced with railroad tracks and had a completely equipped kitchen in addition to two concert halls. About 35,00 square feet of the space was available to exhibitors in this building. The dividing walls of the concert rooms could be opened to form a complete unit of the entire second floor. Favrot and Livaudais were the architects. It is now called the Morris F.X. Jeff Auditorium in honor of the city official who helped provide recreation and sports activities for African-American children.

The Municipal Auditorium was built largely to house the many Mardi Gras Balls during the carnival season, and was also the site of many high school graduations and dance recitals. Although the historic use of the site itself predates jazz, it is significant because of the role the square played in New Orleans' musical heritage and as a symbol of the early African-American contributions to the origins of jazz and other musical forms.

Faubourg Treme

The Faubourg Treme lies north of the Vieux Carre within an area generally agreed to lie between Canal Street, North Broad Street, Saint Bernard Avenue, and North Rampart Street. It is considered significant to the history of the United States as one of the oldest neighborhoods in the nation to continuously house "free people of color." For this reason it is said that "the culture of the Creoles and the free persons of color is rooted in Treme."

In 1731 Chevalier Charles de Morand, an employee of the Company of the Indies, established the city's first brickyard in the area of Bayou Road above Claiborne Avenue. Soon afterwards, Morand purchased the brickyard and much of its surrounding land and

developed a large plantation on the grounds, while continuing to manufacture bricks. In 1774 he sold a portion of his land to Pablo Moreau, the remainder of the estate retained by Madame Moreau, who died in 1794, leaving the land to her granddaughter, Julie Moreau. Claude Treme acquired the former Morand Plantation through Julie Moreau's (his wife) inheritance. Treme had little intention of cultivating the old French concession or of running the various brickyards and tile factories on the property. He first tried to make a private subdivision near the house. By early 1798 he had laid out Rue St. Claude, named after his patron saint, perpendicular to Bayou Road and the present Esplanade.

Also in 1794, the Baron de Carondelet, the Spanish governor of Louisiana, decided to create a canal from Bayou St. John to the town. This served the dual purpose of draining the marsh and establishing a navigable route from the town to the Bayou and then on to the Gulf through Lake Pontchartrain. By 1796 the canal ended in a square basin at what is currently termed Basin Street. Until the building of the New Basin Canal, this served as the only means of transporting products produced on the north shore of the lake. The canal gave the area commercial viability and added further value to Claude Treme's property

Treme began selling lots along his new streets and Bayou Road in 1798. Enumeration of thirty-seven persons who bought lots in the Faubourg Treme between 1798 and 1810 reveals a pattern of purchases by free people of color, French and Spanish colonial settlers, Creoles recently arrived from Haiti, and recent immigrants, like Claude Treme himself. The lots facing St. Claude were sold to mostly women who were free persons of color. Creole cottages were built by 1807 on sixty-foot lots, and urban cottages suddenly surrounded the large galleried Treme plantation house. (New Orleans Architecture, Vol VI Faubourg Treme). In 1799 Treme began subdividing his remaining property; in 1810 the

remainder of the Treme plantation was sold to the Corporation of New Orleans for \$40,000, which in turn sold smaller subdivided lots for a profit.

The free men of color who resided in Treme were often musicians, craftsmen, and artisans. By the late 18th and early 19th centuries this “suburb” began to establish itself as a unique neighborhood of mixed ethnicities. Although Treme had developed somewhat separately from the rest of the city, it still had not had not gained acceptance as a separate entity. In 1836 it was included with the Vieux Carre within the city’s first municipality. This would begin to change throughout the 1840’s as the neighborhood continued to grow and was augmented by such structures as the Treme market. The city’s fourth largest public market, it operated from 1841 to 1911. St. Augustine Church built in 1841, the city’s third oldest Catholic church, was supported by people of Creole, French, and Spanish descent. By 1883, there were few undeveloped lots left in the area, which was densely populated with predominantly smaller double houses and Creole cottages. Larger dwellings were sited along the major avenues. The Creole cottages were usually simple four room houses with kitchens and servant’s quarters located in two story buildings in the main houses. Neighborhood groceries and bars were characteristic of the area, along with numerous benevolent societies, social and pleasure clubs. According to the 1896 Sanborne Map this was an extensive residential settlement.

History of Jazz

Jazz, a musical form that developed in America during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is America’s most widely recognized indigenous musical art form. New Orleans is widely recognized as a place where jazz originated. Because of its location as a seaport and its multicultural history, New Orleans created an atmosphere in which jazz developed and

flourished. The development of jazz involved the many cultures and conditions that existed in New Orleans during the late- 19th and early 20th centuries. This was, and is, a long and complex process that is not completely understood by the public or by professionals. In many cases the history of jazz is incomplete or unrecorded. Often the roles that various artists, New Orleans families, and communities played in the development of jazz are not clear. For example, the interrelationships between the Mardi Gras Indians, social aid and pleasure clubs, and mutual aid and benevolent societies to jazz history are not fully documented. Jazz parades helped in the development and popularization of early jazz.

Throughout the nineteenth century, diverse ethnic and racial groups, French, Spanish, Creoles, African, Haitian, Italian, German, and Irish, found common cause in their love of music. The rich mix of cultures in New Orleans resulted in considerable cultural exchange. During the 1870's the European classical legacy and the influence of European and African/Caribbean elements were merged with a popular American mainstream. Creoles of color were often well educated. Creoles of color musicians were particularly known for their skill and discipline. Many were educated in France and played in the best orchestras in the city. This combined and adapted old world practices into new music forms deriving from a distinctive regional environment. Just after the beginning of the new century, jazz began to emerge as part of a broad musical revolution, encompassing ragtime, blues, spirituals, marches, and "tin pan alley." It also reflected contributions of people of African heritage to this new and distinctly American music.

Although dancing in Congo Square ended before the Civil War, a related musical tradition surfaced in the African-American neighborhoods by the 1880's. The Mardi Gras and St. Joseph' Indians were black "gangs" whose members "masked" as American Indians

on Mardi Gras and St. Joseph's Day to honor them. Black Mardi Gras Indians felt a spiritual affinity with Native American Indians. On Mardi Gras day gang members roamed their neighborhoods looking to confront other gangs in a show of strength that sometimes turned violent. The demonstrations included drumming and call-and-response chanting that was strongly reminiscent of West African and Caribbean music. Mardi Gras Indian music was part of the environment of early jazz. Several early jazz figures such as Louis Armstrong and Lee Collins described themselves as being greatly affected by Mardi Gras Indian processions as youngsters. Jelly Roll Morton claimed to have been a "spyboy," or scout, for an Indian gang as a teenager.

With the culture being one of Creole, Catholic and French-speaking rather than Protestant and English speaking, a more liberal outlook on life prevailed, together with an appreciation of good food, wine, music, and dancing. The early development of jazz in New Orleans was connected to the community life of the city, as seen in brass band funerals, music for picnics in parks or ball games, Saturday night fish fries, and Sunday camping along the shores of Lake Pontchartrain at Milneburg and Bucktown.

In 1897 Alderman Sidney Story proposed a legal "red-light district" legalizing prostitution within the Treme neighborhood between North Rampart and North Claiborne, Iberville to St. Louis, and North Robertson to North Basin Streets. This 16 square block area, which came to be known as Storyville in "honor" of the alderman, not only housed up to 2000 prostitutes, but was also a haven for jazz. Incidentally, Alderman Story hated this dubious "honor." In the many clubs and saloons jazz greats such as Jelly Roll Morton, Sidney Bechet, Kid Ory, Buddy Bolden, and Paul Barbarin played their music. In 1917 this era ended with the Department of the Navy forcing the mayor to close down the district,

which he said, was distracting to the servicemen. Even though jazz was not “born” in Storyville, it flourished there during this era of New Orleans history (www.nps.gov).

Jazz music has been called an American art, America’s contribution to the arts, and even “an explosion of genius,” according to James, R. Morris, Director, Division of Performing Arts of the Smithsonian Institution. Jazz has also received its share of praise from those whose main concern has been the traditions of Western European concert music. Composer and critic Virgil Thompson has described it as “the most astounding spontaneous musical event to take place anywhere since the Reformation.” Jazz functions as “popular art.” Its players learned from, and built on, the music’s past, somewhat in the manner we now associate with “art music.” Early jazz was usually played by a “band” of five to eight pieces, with a definite instrumental style (The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz).

Louis Armstrong

New Orleans jazz produced many great and influential figures; perhaps the best overall view of its achievements comes through the work of two figures, trumpeter Louis Armstrong and composer-pianist Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton.

Armstrong was an excellent trumpeter, an inventive melodist, and a great blues player. It is impossible to overstate Louis “Satchmo” Armstrong’s importance in jazz. He was one of the most influential artists in the music’s history. Armstrong was one of the first black jazz musicians to be welcomed in the upper echelons of white society. In the early 1920’s he had already become a major influence on jazz musicians and jazz music; he altered the way musicians thought about their instruments and the way that they played them. In his later years as a singer and entertainer Armstrong became a world figure. He was known to tens of millions of people who loved him a way that the kid from the wrong side of the tracks

in turn-of-the century New Orleans could never have imagined

(www.basicmusic.hypermart.net).

Louis Armstrong was born near the current City Hall in the Back o' Town, a poor section of New Orleans in the heart of "The Battlefield" on August 4, 1901, not on Independence Day 1900, as he had been told and believed. It was called The Battlefield because the toughest characters in town used to live there. He was born and raised in and around the black Storyville district off Gravier Street to Mary Ann (Mayann) and William Armstrong. Run-down apartment buildings, many of them converted to brothels, honky-tonks, dance halls and even churches, were his surroundings as a child. Louis spent the first years of his life living with his grandmother, Josephine Armstrong. While still a young boy, he moved to be with his sick mother and baby sister, Beatrice, known as Mama Lucy, near Tulane and Liberty Streets, living in stark poverty. He enrolled at the Fisk School at the corner of Franklin and Perdido Streets, and later sold newspapers to help his mother make ends meet (Figure 4).

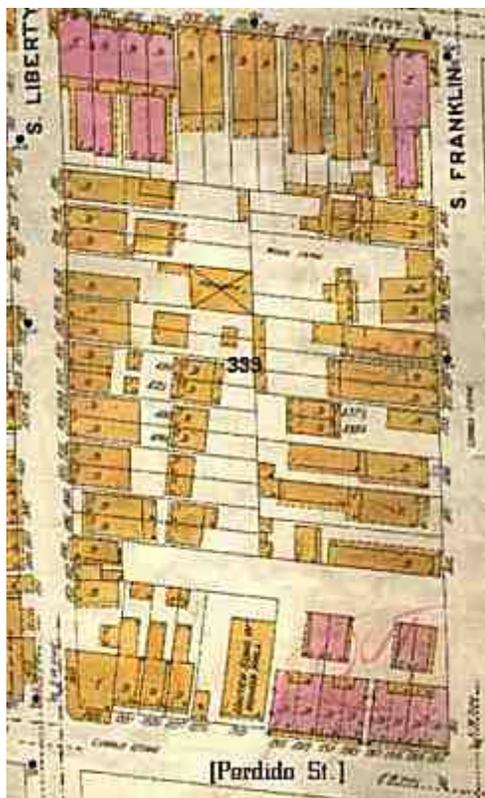


Figure 6 Back O'Town District. Square 333, bounded by Perdido, South Liberty, Gravier, and South Franklin Streets, as it appeared in the 1980 *Sanborn Insurance Map* (vol 3) (www.nutrias.org/exhibits/music6.htm).

In his book *Satchmo, My Life in New Orleans*, (Armstrong, Louis. Satchmo. New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1955) Armstrong documents that it was in this neighborhood at the Funky Butt Hall where he first heard Buddy Bolden play, listening from the sidewalk. As fate would have it, young Armstrong was also exposed to Bunk Johnson, who played with the Eagle Band, and Joe Oliver, who he considered the king of all musicians. Although at the age of five he was not playing, the trumpet “caught his ear.” When he was in church and when he was “second lining,” following brass bands in parades, he started to listen carefully to the different instruments, noticing the things the musicians played and how they played them. At an early age he began singing in a quartet to earn money. The quartet began by walking down Rampart Street between Perdido and

Gravier, signing at random wandering through the streets until someone called to them to sing a few songs. Afterwards they would pass their hats.

It was during the Christmas holidays, while wandering the streets with the quartet, that Louis was arrested for firing a .38 pistol into the air to celebrate. He claimed he was taught to play the trumpet while incarcerated in the Colored Waifs' Home for Boys. It was there that he received musical instructions from band director Peter Davis who eventually became their bandleader first. He was a singer, then percussionist, bugler, and finally cornetist for the band. The Waif's Home band played formal brass band music that placed certain demands upon musicians, not the least of which were precision and an ornate bravura style. When Armstrong combined this musical concept with the ideals of jazz, it resulted in a much more flamboyant and personalized musical form than the ensemble playing of the early New Orleans jazz bands. The band marched in parades, and was engaged by social clubs to play at their functions. Louis was fourteen when he was released from the Waifs' Home, on the condition that he live with his father and stepmother. They lived on Miro and Poydras Streets, right in the heart of The Battlefield.

After awhile he moved back on Liberty and Perdido Streets with his mother and got jobs playing the cornet at Henry Ponce's honky-tonk at night and delivering coal for the Andrews Coal Company during the day. When the war started and all the dance halls and theaters in New Orleans closed, funerals were the only place that Louis had the opportunity to play his music. Later when Louis delivered coal for Morris Karnoffsky, he had the opportunity to go into Storyville where Joe Oliver and his band played at Pete Lala's cabaret. Joe Oliver, considered to be the best cornetist in New Orleans, gave Louis music lessons as pay for running errands for his wife. It was "King" Ory that opened many doors for

Armstrong giving him the chance to take his talent out of the constrictions of one city and into the world.

Louis eventually started to play on the steamboats with the Streckfus Mississippi River Boat Lines. The rest of his career is history. In 1922, he made his first recordings at the Gennett Studios in Richmond, Indiana, as a member of King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band (Figure 7). While the foundation of his music training had been laid in the New Orleans streets and honky-tonks, and at an early age at the Waifs' home, Louis became an international star and good will ambassador to the world. Louis Armstrong died on July 6, 1971.



Figure 7 Louis Armstrong in the early stages of his career
(www.nps.gov/neor/Jazz%History_origins_pre1895.htm)

Twentieth Century New Orleans and Urban Renewal in Treme

It was not until the 20th century that the landscape of the Treme area really began to change. The Carondelet Canal was filled in from 1927-1938 as the New Basin Canal had made the old one obsolete long ago. The waterway and its parallel roads and railroads formed one of three important industrial corridors throughout the 1800's until the 1920's. Also gone are the dozens of lumberyards, mills, charcoal depots, and machinery shops that surrounded the canal at that time. The Treme Market, located on the neutral ground of Orleans Avenue between Marais and North Robertson Streets (two blocks above Congo Square), was built in the 1830's and survived until 1932. It was demolished so that Orleans Avenue could be beautified to serve as an approach to the new Municipal Auditorium. Stall keepers moved into a new Treme Market in the 1500 block of Orleans. In 1940 the remains of Storyville were demolished for the Iberville Housing Project to be built. This was a result of a nationwide urban renewal effort by the government of "clearing slums" and constructing low-income housing projects (Figure 8). In all, 73 two and three story dwelling units were constructed, housing 858 apartments. The Lafitte Housing Project accompanied this and a trend toward converting single-family homes into multi-family homes in the area resulted from the ensuing displacement.

By 1969, significant changes had occurred. Although many of the historic Creole cottages, corner groceries and neighborhood bars remained, the predominately Catholic neighborhood had seen the introduction of several Protestant churches and small apartment

complexes. The demolition of Claiborne Avenue landscaped neutral ground, which had oak trees, and parkland with the construction of the Interstate 10 expressway was another blow.

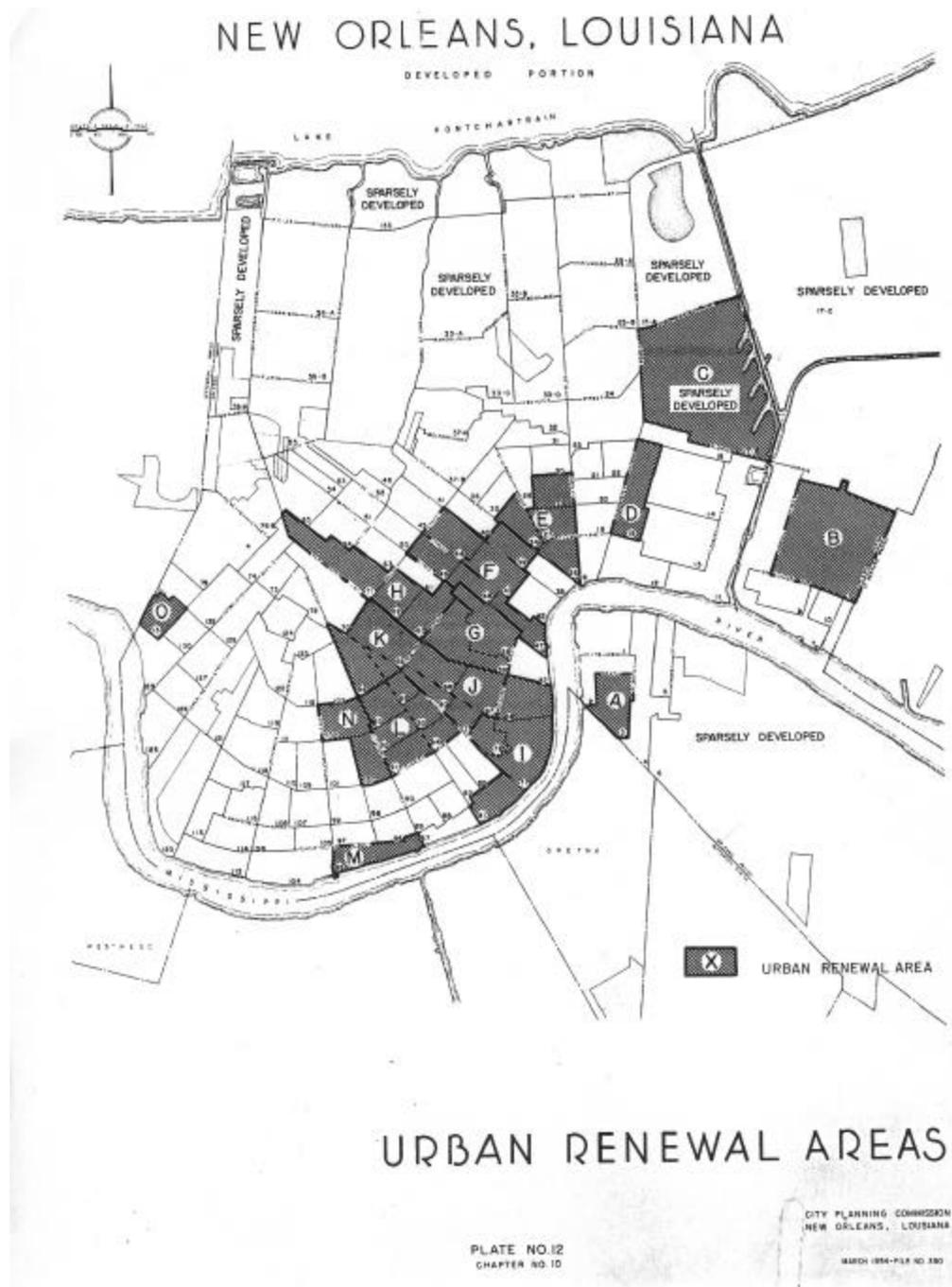


Figure 8 Urban Renewal Area, New Orleans, LA, City Planning Commission, March 1954 File 330, Plate No. 12, Chapter 10)

By the 1970's, the area had become known as a predominantly black, low rent, high crime neighborhood. During this time, the city made several attempts to rehabilitate the area, though most of these attempts, like the planned building of a large cultural complex, were not carried out due to lack of funding. Urban renewal, meant to restructure and help to rebuild the community, was not the answer either. Through the process of urban renewal, structures built within communities that have a destroying effect.

The Cultural Center Complex—History of the Project

The concept of a civic or assembly center was first explored in the early 1920's in a discussion preceding the construction of the Municipal Auditorium. It was already recognized that Gallier Hall would continue as the seat of city government but consideration was given to building a new city hall and grouping it with the projected Municipal Auditorium. Gallier Hall was getting old and overcrowded and projected a tired image for the city. When it became evident that land adjoining Gallier Hall would be available for acquisition and development by the city, it was decided to expand the administrative facilities at Lafayette Square near Gallier Hall, and build only the Municipal Auditorium. The auditorium was actually intended to be the first element in a future assembly or cultural center complex.

Lack of funds in the 1930's and 40's, and the adequacy of the Municipal Auditorium as a public assembly building for two decades dispelled any further discussion of a facility until 1951. Chapter II of the Master Plan for New Orleans – A Preliminary Report on Public Buildings by Harland Bartholomew and Associates, 1957, listed an assembly center at Beauregard Square among the proposed public building groups. The consultants' report

asserted that the Municipal Auditorium should be supplemented by a sports arena, exposition hall and additional exhibit space.

This idea of developing a cultural center for the City of New Orleans was revived in the 1950's during the administration of Mayor Delesseps S. Morrison (1946-1961). Treme was considered a blighted area and thus an obvious target for rehabilitation. The proximity of the Municipal Auditorium and Beaugard Square (Congo Square) made this area an attractive location for such a venture. Acquisition of land was begun in the 1950's. In anticipation of the cultural center project, several residential blocks in Treme were demolished in the late 1960's and early 1970's to make way for buildings designed to house various cultural activities. Limited finances necessitated significant modifications in this grand planning concept, however funding did allow for construction of the Theatre of the Performing Arts on Treme Street near the Municipal Auditorium (now the Mahalia Jackson Theatre), but plans for erecting additional structures had to be abandoned and the concept of Louis Armstrong Park was born. The park, which is today the scene of various cultural festivals, was built adjacent to the Beaugard Square on what was formerly the site of the proposed cultural center project (New Orleans Magazine, 1974).

The Beginning of the End

On June 22, 1954, the City Planning Commission adopted a report on housing as part of the Comprehensive Plan for the City of New Orleans. This plan designated the area of the Municipal Auditorium as being in need of rehabilitation. No mention was made of the planned assembly center in the first annual Capital Program for 1955-59 as recommended by the City Planning Commission. In the 1955 Capital Budget message of the Mayor, it was contended that because of the eminent demolition of the Southern Railway Station, the

widening of Basin Street, the implementation of the Orleans/Basin Major Street Connection, land values in the vicinity of the Municipal Auditorium would rise sharply. Therefore, the administration proposed that \$1 million be appropriated immediately for the purchase of the four squares of land in this area. City Council approved the appropriation and subsequently the City Planning Commission designated four squares to purchase; however, the bond issue was not put to public vote. In its 1956-60 Capital Program the City Planning Commission again recommended the \$1 million for acquisition of land in 1956. The Mayor proposed the reduction of the amount to \$500,000, and the City Council agreed. As a result of changed priorities, the 1957-61 Capital Program omitted any allocations for the assembly center, but land purchases continued in the four squares designated in 1955.

The City Planning Commission's Preliminary Report on Public Buildings was prepared in June 1957, which delineated several public building complexes including the area surrounding the auditorium to accommodate uses related to a center for public assembly. It outlined seven public building complexes, complex "D" being an assembly center at Beauregard Square. This report investigated the need for development in that area, outlined the proposed scope, and suggested a concert hall to supplement the auditorium. The 1958-62 Capital Program mirrored this report but recommended appropriation of \$1 million for site acquisition in 1962, which would allow sufficient time for planning of the development. In the Capital Budget message of 1958 Mayor Chep Morrison recommended, and the Council approved, expenditure of \$200,000 in 1958, and allocation of \$400,000 per year in 1959 and 1960 for the assembly center land purchase. In its 1959 Capital Program recommendations, the City Planning Commission reiterated the lack of a plan for the project, suggested application for federal planning funds, and again recommended the \$1 million for

expenditure in 1962. The mayor, repeating his earlier stand of rising prices, requested \$400,000. After “due advertisements,” the City Planning Commission held a public hearing on October 25, 1960, at which the Commission presented the report designating the site and setting forth land use proposals for the development of a Cultural (Assembly) Center. Members of the City Planning Commission included August Perez, Gervais F. Favrot, Stanley M. Lemarie, J. Mort Walker, Charles E. Dickey, Jr., B. M. Dornblatt, David W. Godat, O. and William Moody, Jr.

Funds for acquisition of the site were allocated in the approved Capital Program. The proponents of the development cited what cities such as Miami, Dallas and Detroit were doing to attract conventions and tourists to their cities. The Municipal Auditorium could not compete with the facilities in those cities; and it was claimed that we would be “erasing a slum area getting rid of sub-standard housing, and substandard buildings, and putting in its place healthy growth.” Mayor “Chep” Morrison told the City Planning Commission that they had three bond issues in which the public endorsed the purchase of land for the construction of the assembly center. They did not have the land yet, and with the completion of the Basin Orleans connection about 50% of the Municipal Auditorium’s parking area was taken away. Morrison further stated

“.... my recommendation to the council and I hope you concur in it, would be to include in the 1961 program a substantial amount of capital bonds, and I’m recommending at least \$250,000 to continue the purchase of land in the Auditorium area and I was a bit surprised when the City Planning Commission did not put in this year’s capital program any purchase of land.”

In its semi-monthly planning meeting of April 11, 1961, the City Planning Commission approved the site and set forth land use proposals for the development of a Cultural Center for the City of New Orleans.

An article in the *States Item* dated June 19, 1961, "City Acts on Culture, Asks U.S. Funds for Center Plans," stated that the city of New Orleans had applied for a \$585,000 advance from the federal government to begin planning a \$30 million cultural center adjacent to Municipal Auditorium. A similar amount was obtained for planning of the City Hall Civic Center on Loyola.

As envisioned by the City Planning Commission, the center would include an opera house, concert hall, museum, theater, exhibition hall and parking garage. The center would provide a complex of buildings for cultural events and recreation, and facilities for large conventions. The first phase, including property acquisition, off-site improvements, renovation and air conditioning of the auditorium and construction of the parking garage would cost approximately \$12 million. The completion of the entire center would take at least 10 years, depending of funding. The money would come from the Housing and Home Financing Agency, an urban renewal agency. The city was unable to participate in urban renewal grants where private property was expropriated, consolidated and resold to private interests as stated and enabling legislation did not pass until 1969. However, the city could expropriate property for public use as it had done for the civic center. Urban renewal funds were available for slum clearance whether the eventual use of the land was public or private. The city had already spent approximately \$1,500,000 to buy land in the auditorium area for the proposed site. The architectural firm of Mathes, Bergman and Associates was retained to prepare the site plans.

In the 1961 Public Building Report of the City Planning Commission, under the administration of Mayor Victor Schiro (1961-1970), the following were recommended to be included in the proposed Cultural Center:

- The existing Municipal Auditorium: alterations and air conditioning, \$850,000;
- An opera house: seating 4,000; 270,000 square feet, \$2 million;
- A concert hall: seating 2,500; 125,000 square feet, \$1 million;
- A legitimate theater: seating 500 – 600; 30,000 square feet, \$420,000;
- A museum for contemporary and New Orleans art: 75,000 square feet, \$1,875,000;
- A community facilities building: 10,000 square feet; \$200,000;
- Parking for 2,000 cars: \$2,400,000;
- Outdoor areas for exhibits, musical presentations and carnival ceremonies: 3 acres, \$400,000;
- Possible Civil Defense shelter beneath Beauregard Square;
- High rise-apartment units, middle and high income (encourage private construction);
- Restaurants, lounges and shops;
- Landscaping, \$200,000;
- Schools, churches, playgrounds and green area will be provided
- Architectural fees, \$643,460.

The report was certified by August Perez, City Planning Commission Chairman, on April 11, 1961 (Figure 9).



Figure 9 Cultural Center Model, Mayor Victor H. Schiro Photo Collection, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library (www.nutrias.org/photos/schiro/vhs81.htm)

On Wednesday, September 13, 1961, WDSU TV presented a feature relative to the Cultural Center Complex, which raised two significant questions. The first was related to the necessity of five separate buildings to house similar functions and the second question, by implication, was the need for all the facilities in view of the planned Rivergate Complex and the planned Domed Stadium. The same questions had been raised in the City Planning Commission's review "Public Buildings Report #2, Cultural-International Centers" adopted by the commission in 1961. It was also stated that reviewing the experience in other major metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, New York, Memphis, and Atlanta, the development of multi-purpose facilities has not been proved successful.

Federal recognition for the project came from Leonard E. Church, Regional Director-Urban Renewal of the Housing and Home Finance Agency as set out in a letter to Mayor Schiro dated October 2, 1962. Recognition was granted "in view of the intention of the locality of New Orleans to undertake the planning of the project with non-federal funds under

the three-fourths capital grant provisions of Title I, Housing Act of 1949, as amended.”

Upon completion of planning, it was anticipated that the City would apply for federal financial assistance in connection with the approved project area. However, in the letter, the area project boundaries were revised reflecting the conclusion that the approximately 7 acres in public use were not appropriate for inclusion in a Title I project. Revisions of the project capital grant reflected:

- The proposed parking garage was not included in the estimate of costs;
- The estimate of land acquisition was reduced by \$400,000 to take into account the elimination of the commercial area west of the auditorium on North Rampart Street;
- Land disposition estimate was increased to offset what appeared to be an under-estimate of the reuse value of the project lands;
- The estimates of site improvements were reduced to equal the estimated land disposition proceeds.

Church further stated that a proposed Urban Renewal Plan and other supporting documentation in compliance with established policies and procedures of the agency must support any proposed application for such Capital Grant funds. The total federal grant approved was \$4,739,331.00, which was a three-fourths federal grant instead of the usual two-thirds grant for such projects.

After completion of survey and planning activities by the city,

“the federal funds would be provided to raze the existing 512 dwelling units in the residential project area. More than half of these dwellings are rated as substandard. After clearance of the area the site will be redeveloped and construction will follow. The families that will be displaced by the site operations will be offered relocation in decent, safe, and sanitary housing.” The capital program set 1966 as the year for the first construction in the center” (New Orleans *States Item*, September 29, 1962).

The public hearing for the proposed Cultural Center Project of July 22, 1965, was to acquaint all property owners as well as occupants of premises in squares 148, 167, and 168 with the plan, and to explain the proposed method for the relocation of families and businesses to be displaced from the project area. They were also to discuss the federal financial assistance to be received for the project pursuant to Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as amended. Approximately 40 persons were present. Bernard B. Levy, Budget Analyst from the Administrative Office staff of the City of New Orleans, explained that two separate independent appraisals were required to determine the value of the property to be acquired, and that property owners would be contacted by licensed, professional real estate negotiators to begin negotiations for sale of the property.

Christopher J. Bellone, Relocation Officer, explained the relocation plan, and that a relocation office would be opened on a full-time basis at 1202 St. Ann Street. A caseworker and a housing inspector would be stationed there to answer all questions concerning relocation. Pamphlets would also be available for those who resided in the area or who have interests there. Several of the residents spoke, including Mr. Mike Cusimano who voiced a complaint as to instructions given to tenants in the area, citing his own rental property as an example. He said that many of his tenants did not comprehend what they were told and consequently moved without receiving any benefits. Since then he had had difficulty in renting his properties.

Construction Begins

It was during the administration of Victor Schiro that the houses in Treme were actually razed and the land cleared for the proposed cultural center (Figure 7). It was during the late 1960's and early 1970's that residences and businesses were appraised, photographed

for city records, and torn down. Examples of those building, floor plans and appraisals are shown in Appendix B, Figures 24 - 32.



Figure 10 Cultural Center pile driving ceremonies, 04/ 10, 1970. Mayor Victor H. Schiro seated in pile driver, Councilman Jimmy Fitzmorris first row, third from right. Schiro photo collection, photo by Joseph C. Davi (www.nutrias.org/photos/schiro/vhs129.htm)

Moon Landrieu (1970-78)¹ had begun dealing with the culture center project in the 1960's while on the city council. During Mayor Schiro's administration, only half of the project had been funded. Clearly, this was not enough money to build all that was planned. The first building, earmarked to be the Opera House was completed in 1972. It seated 2,316 patrons and housed orchestra pits, hydraulic works for scenery, winding staircases and rooms for the "stars." The next building scheduled for the complex was the parking garage.

Moon Landrieu had inherited not only the financial problems of the project but also the discontent of the Treme residents and activists. Many of the older houses had been

¹ Interview with Judge Moon Landrieu, July 17, 2003

destroyed and the residents displaced. Jim Hayes ², a Treme activist, had teamed up with Ron Chisom, and the Treme Community Improvement Association (TCIA), to represent residents of the area. TCIA was a group of young and old residents of Treme who worked on efforts to rid their area of unemployment and housing blight. It grew out of an initial cleanup campaign that captured citywide publicity. In an article in *The New Orleans Times Picayune* dated March 5, 1972, Chisom demanded that residents of the Treme community be given at least half of the jobs that would be available in the new cultural complex. The organization in making the demand, protested what they called the injustices being committed by the city against their community through damages caused by the new complex. In the article Jim Hayes said,

“The city, in efforts to build a cultural center has seen fit to destroy and uproot our community...ironically the cultural center is destroying the culture in the Treme community. If Treme closes out, the last remnant of Congo Square might as well go with it.”

Chisom claimed that more than \$100,000 was allocated under a federal grant to the city relocation agency for adequate relocation of residents, but that the money was probably not used and went back to the federal government. They claimed that some 178 families had been relocated by the cultural center but had moved without knowing their rights. City relocation agency spokesmen stated that the reason for this was that many of the tenants “jumped the gun.”

They said they had done all they could to inform residents, but that red tape delayed their efforts. One resident said that she remembered the city talking about the cultural center 12 years before, and that there should have been adequate time since then for the city to take the necessary relocation precautions in dealing with the Treme people. Chisom further stated

² Interview with Jim Hayes, Peoples' Institute, July 16, 2003

that the Treme relocation project was just another case of the tenant abuse against which his organization had been fighting. He vowed to conduct a search for the 178 families that had moved without proper relocation assistance.

In the interview with Moon Landrieu, I asked him if he got involved in placing any of the Treme residents. He said, “I think we did. There were still people being displaced from property owned by the city, but you would not have been able to do it under urban renewal without providing moving subsidy or moving help. I can’t justify someone living in his or her home 20 years and now forced to move. Years ago, if a landlord gives an eviction notice, you’re out of there. This is a different era now, we’re sensitive, we take care of people.”

Lt. Governor Jimmy Fitzmorris³ said that Mayor Chep Morrison was a wonderful visionary, and that he went into the neighborhood. He held many meetings to which the neighborhood was invited for community participation. He was very conscious of the need for input for the project to succeed; he encouraged and facilitated neighborhood residents to attend. Fitzmorris did not know the number of houses torn down—people just moved to other parts of the city with no human cry or protests not to complete the plan.

Jim Hayes tells a different story:

“The residents woke up one morning with notices on houses that they had to leave. Before you know it, bulldozers were hitting. The residents started meetings with housing issues, renters and owners. They found out that they could withhold rent; so they collected rent and escrowed the money—this broke some landlords. It turned violent but the city kept it quiet. The relocation department gave no offer to help until the residents held demonstrations. Vagrancy went to 1% with demolitions uptown, for the construction of the new prison and for (District Attorney) Connick’s office, and housing became a big issue. Owners were not given the worth of their homes, and homeowners became renters. Families and neighborhoods were being broken up not only around the cultural center but also along Claiborne Avenue for the I-10 expansion—326 black businesses were destroyed, now this. After protests, the city put a relocation trailer at Rampart and St. Phillip with 3 black workers to appease them. One night the residents turned it over and burned it—the fight had begun.

³ Interview with Jimmy Fitzmorris April 3, 2003

Every Sunday morning 50 people went to Moon's house on S. Prieur Street. Dutch Morial, then in the State House of Representatives, called him (Hayes). Morial had received a phone call from Moon saying that they were "killing him." After that Moon called me and said he would stop the (further) building of the cultural center."

Judge Landrieu said the cultural center undertook no further development for several reasons. His staff advised him that the parking garage would not work because of the strong environmental movement. People were moving out of the city and there would not be enough support for both the Opera House and Theater. The Viet Nam war was raging; funding had run out, there was no more money to complete the project. It was a "different time." The opera and symphony people came together into the facility now named the Mahalia Jackson Theatre of the Performing Arts. According to Landrieu, a lot of the preservationists were furious because they wanted a formal cultural center, and would even tear down 20 acres of an historic area for a parking garage. "That was the elitist part of the group."

With further building of the cultural center now being deferred, New Orleans and state officials met with residents of the Treme community to discuss what they could do to help them save their neighborhood from the incomplete incursions of the cultural center and adjacent throughways. Harold Katner, director of the City Planning Commission, said that his commission had access to \$250,000 for redevelopment and reuse of land that he said could be used in the Treme area. He also said that space, originally allocated for the cultural center, which the city no longer planned to implement, might also be allotted for the Treme community use (New Orleans *Times Picayune*, February 1973) (Figure 11).



Figure 11 Model of proposed Treme Community Center, 1973. Mayor Moon Landrieu photo collection (www.nutrias.org/photos/landrieu/m1035.htm)

Louis Armstrong Park is Planned

After the death of Louis Armstrong on July 6, 1971, Mayor Moon Landrieu initiated action to build a memorial to him. Landrieu appointed a committee co-chaired by Charlie Ferguson⁴, editor of the *States Item*, and Juvenile Court Judge Dutch Morial to recommend a suitable memorial to Armstrong. Also on the committee was Dave Winston, head of the local musicians union. According to Ferguson, many meetings were held at the musicians' music hall on Esplanade Avenue to solicit ideas from the members as well as the public. A number of ideas were voiced and different recommendations were made. The most appealing to the committee was to create a park in Treme on the land formerly designated for the cultural center. It seemed to be a fitting memorial to Armstrong given the history of Congo Square and Jazz musicians playing their music in the same area. By now the property was fenced and overgrown with weeds. Mayor Landrieu accepted the park idea but required that it be self-sustaining and not impose a burden on the city's operating budget. According to architect Robin Riley⁵, Mayor Landrieu also saw the park as a way of dispersing some of the intense visitor/tourism pressure on the delicate Vieux Carre. He further believed the park would represent a needed family attraction, while providing jobs and improving the economy. He and the committee felt that, by building a park, he would also redeem the Treme neighborhood without desecrating more historic houses and displacing more residents. There was a climate of resentment in the neighborhood because the razing of 31 acres by the Schiro administration for the cultural center "elite." Ferguson said, "We knew this was an

⁴ Interview with Charles Ferguson, July 28, 2003

⁵ Interview with Robin Riley via internet, August 2003

ambitious project, but Moon agreed that he would find the money for the infrastructure.”

After Landrieu announced the decision to build the park, two or three town hall meetings were held. These meetings seemed to focus on the complaints that the Treme residents were not getting the services they needed, including street paving. The mayor appointed a new committee to set policies and to oversee the planning and construction of the park. Charlie Ferguson was again appointed to the committee, but Dutch Morial, who was an important black member, decided not to participate. Robin Riley was awarded the contract as architect to facilitate the plans for the park, working with Harold Katner, Director of the City Planning Commission, Robert Becker, Deputy Director of the City Planning Commission, and Blasie Carriere, Director of Streets Department who attempted to prevent street closures. James Lamantia, local architect and Tulane professor, assisted Riley in the design of the Jazz Complex and fence. The committee wanted an internationally recognized designer to provide plans for the park. Lawrence Halprin, a San Francisco landscape architect and planner was invited to visit New Orleans to meet Mayor Landrieu. Halprin’s firm was retained, and Riley traveled to San Francisco to work with Tom Koenig, their lead architect. The plans were produced and given to Riley and the committee in the summer of 1973 and then presented at a New Orleans City Council hearing (Figure 12). According to Riley, the plans were generally ridiculed at the hearing. Halprin’s office, feeling misled by Riley and very upset at public response, reconfigured the plans in an attempt to rescue their reputation. However, the committee did not want the plans reconfigured. When Halprin refused to accept direction from the committee, the mayor discharged him. Under the oversight of the committee, Riley was appointed project architect and completed the plans (Figure 13).

Monroe Labouisse was appointed architect for the restoration of buildings in the Jazz Complex in the park with Sara Hill as lead architect for the firm.

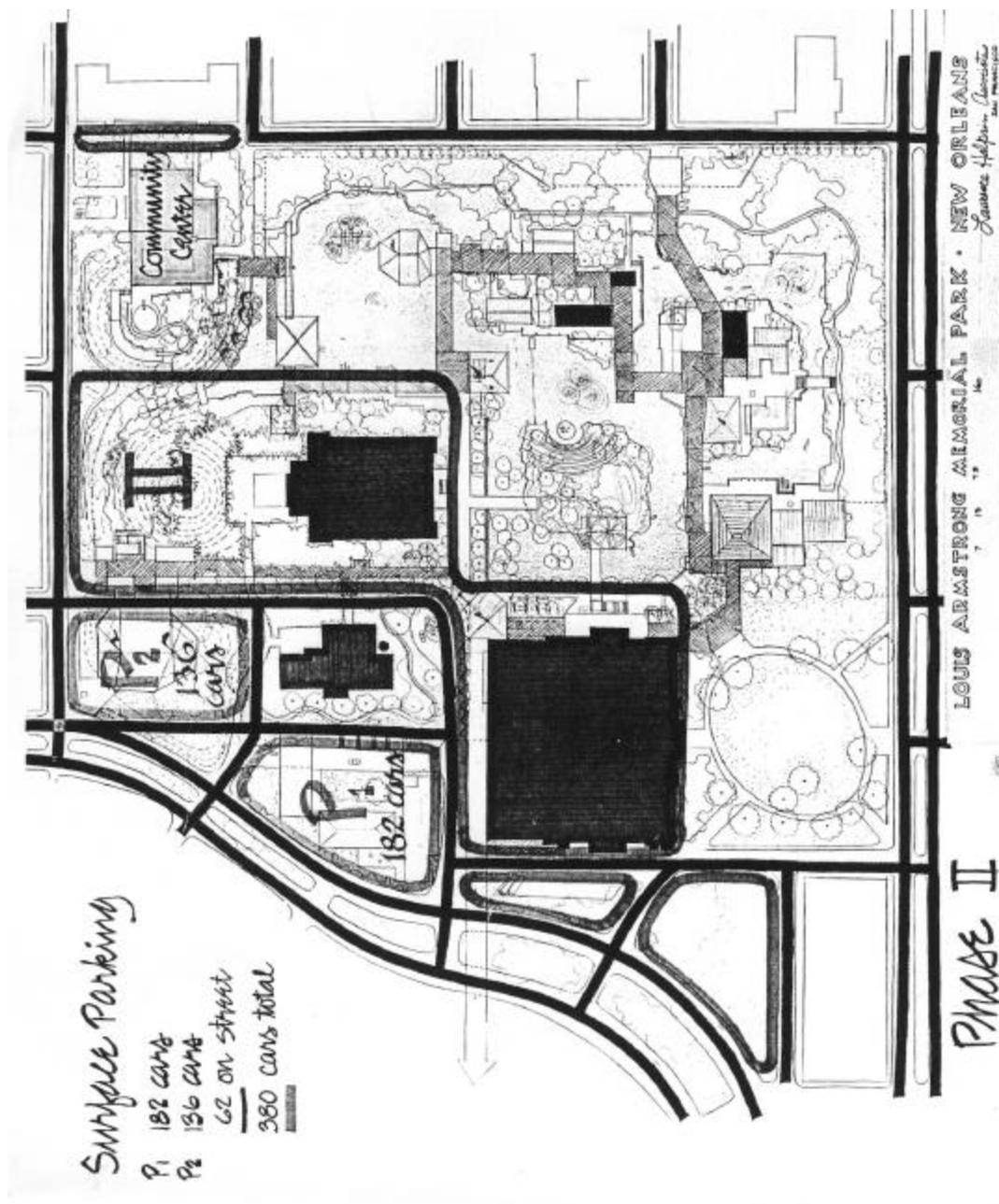


Figure 12 Lawrence Halprin Associates plan of Louis Armstrong Park, Phase II

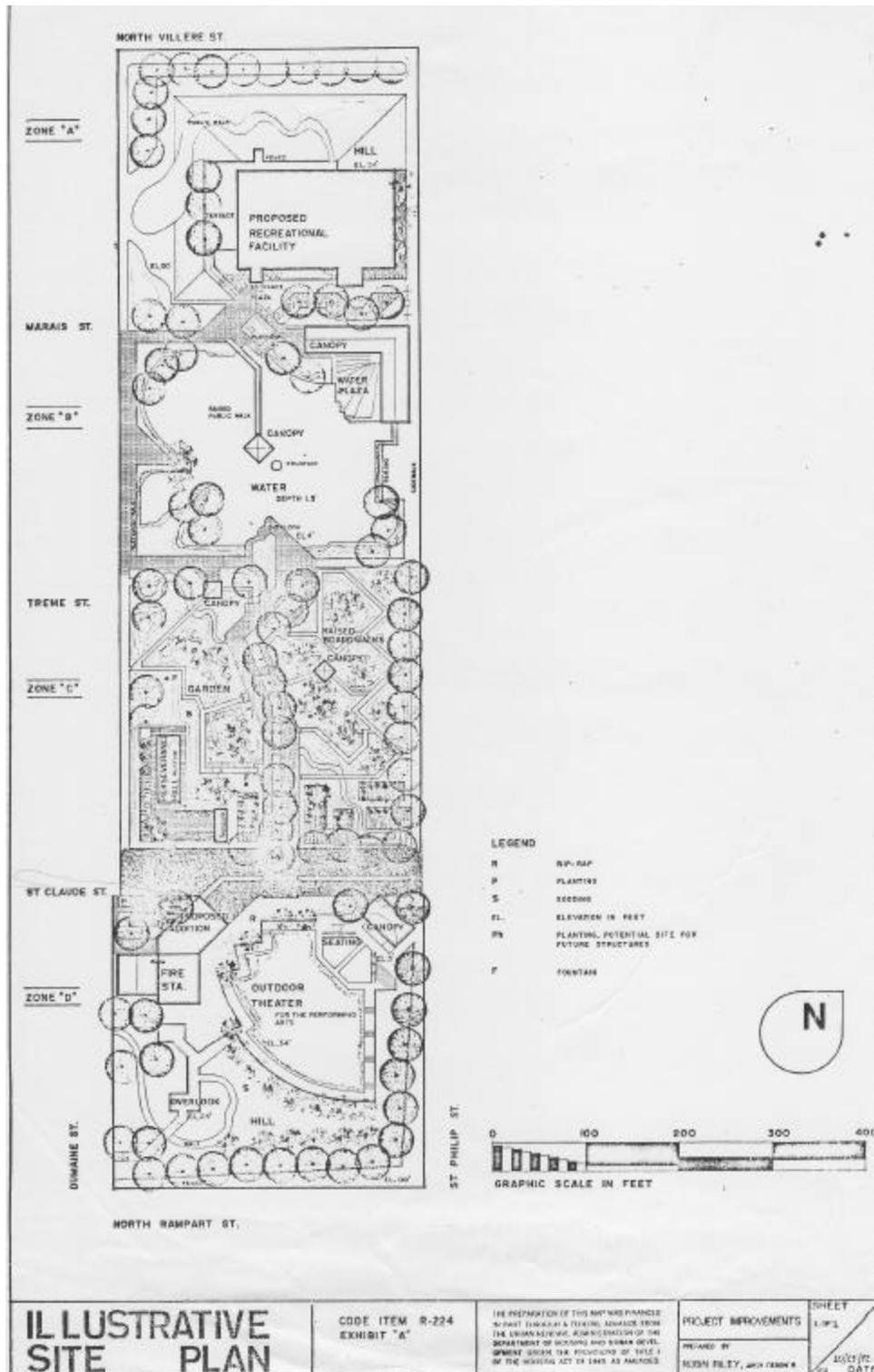


Figure 13 Robin Riley, Architect, Illustrative Site Plan, Armstrong Park, New Orleans, 10/25/72, City Planning Commission Files

Labouisse was given a commission to renovate the buildings that were moved to the rear of the park courtesy of Frank Keever who directed the Community Improvement Agency (Urban Renewal). The buildings were moved to the site from the Central City urban renewal site of the New Orleans Police Department Headquarters building and the Orleans Parish jail. Over 65 separate construction contracts were awarded.

In September 1972, Moon Landrieu, Charlie Ferguson, and Robin Riley had visited Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen to consider modeling the Louis Armstrong Park after Tivoli. Similar in acreage and concept, Tivoli Gardens seemed to be the perfect model to use for the Louis Armstrong Park. It would include water parks, restaurants, and areas for family entertainment and concerts. An admission fee would provide money for maintenance of the park. Tivoli Gardens (Figure 14) demonstrated important lessons for the park planners: a park could be financially self-sustaining, the existing performing arts center would complement park activities, and the combination of music and food in an outdoor setting was a powerful attraction for locals and visitors alike, that could create “urban magic.”



Figure 14 Entrance to Tivoli Gardens, Copenhagen, Denmark
([www.tivoli.dkk/media\(291,1030\)/Hovedindg_72.jpg](http://www.tivoli.dkk/media(291,1030)/Hovedindg_72.jpg))

The mayor and staff of the City Planning Commission prepared an information sheet presented at a public meeting. The meeting was conducted by the city council so they could hear citizens' comments in reference to the proposed first phase development of the Louis Armstrong Park. The park would consist of three unifying elements or characteristics: a lake or waterway, a system of covered walkways, and an extensively planted garden of indigenous plants and trees. It would be a place to listen to music both indoors and outdoors and visit existing and proposed cultural facilities. If approved at the conclusion of the hearing, the first phase would be completed in seven to eight months. The first stage would consist of the planting of trees and plants, street improvements on St. Philip Street, renovation of Perseverance Hall for arts related uses, and the installation of utilities. It would involve a million dollars in urban renewal and local funds and had to be completed quickly to comply with HUD requirements. The second stage of the first phase would involve more planting, street improvements, the installation of a lake with sculptural fountains, extensive lighting, decorative fencing and new and upgraded parking facilities. This stage would begin approximately May 1, 1974. Fourteen hundred (1,400) cars would be accommodated in parking, and the city administration was negotiating with landowners to acquire a site for 2,000 – 5,000 car parking garage for the park in the future.

The city also was considering proposals for a 400-seat theater, a jazz museum and outdoor performing areas. A feasibility study with the New Orleans School Board to study the inclusion of a major creative arts high school was proposed. The first phase was projected to cost 3.2 million dollars, much of which would come from federal tax dollars in the form of revenue sharing and urban renewal.

The most hotly contested issue of the park was the proposed construction of the fence. The Treme residents were not happy with this idea. According to Landrieu there were many “confrontations and screaming matches” about it. Jim Hayes and Ron Chisom were badgering city officials about the fence cutting off their neighborhood and the symphony supporters hated the fence cutting them off from the walk from the theatre to popular North Rampart Street restaurants. The fence did indeed lead to the decline of the strip of restaurants and their eventual closure. To compensate the neighbors, Landrieu offered to build a community center carved out of the back portion of the property with no fence and whatever they wanted built. The activists agreed to this compromise. The city already owned the property, but the issue became the funding of the two to four million-dollar community center. According to Ferguson, conflict with Chisom and Hayes temporarily abated with the agreement to build the center, which was the Treme Community Center. The next issue became designating jobs to Treme residents.

The planners and city officials felt strongly that the perimeter fence was needed for several reasons: for security and maintenance, to help regulate automobile traffic, and to provide an esthetic definition and defined points of entry and departures to control the sequence of events visitors would perceive. If there was to be an admission fee similar to Tivoli Gardens, a fence was an absolute necessity. In my interview with him, I specifically questioned Judge Landrieu about the controversy of the fence. He believed very strongly that the fence was, and still is necessary, for several reasons:

“In the 1970’s if you didn’t have a facility that could be locked and controlled, you would have people sleeping and defecating all over the park. There is also the matter of safety and security—people feel safer with a fence. There is a fence around Jackson Square and in the park across from the Convention Center—those fences work. The fences were not designed to insult the people of Treme. The Treme people had a big input into this thing” (Landrieu, 2003).

The city council approved the first phase of the park and construction began. The park was not completed during the Landrieu administration.

Ernest “Dutch” N. Morial took office as mayor of New Orleans in May 1978. Louis Armstrong Park was dedicated at opening day April 15, 1980 (Figure 15).



Figure 15 Statue of Louis Armstrong in Armstrong Park
(www.nps.gov/neor/mission.html)

Charlie Ferguson remembers that Morial put the Louis Armstrong Park project on the back burner and did not retain the commission to oversee the project. Ferguson’s affiliation with the committee ended in 1979. According to Robin Riley, working with Steven Villavaso through Dr. Anthony Mumphy, Executive Assistant to the Mayor, he attempted to find a private developer to take over the completion and operation of the park. Tommy Walker and the Osmond family agreed to become the developer. Walker who was a friend of Louis Armstrong was excited about the project and spent considerable time talking with the Treme residents and leaders. Riley prepared the bid documents and three groups bid to become the park developer: one headed by Tommy Walker, a second by Leon Irwin, and a third by Stephen Kaplow. Arnold Broussard, Executive Assistant to the Mayor, left city government to assist Kaplow, whose bid was the highest and who was tentatively awarded

the contract by Morial. However, the city council rejected the award and attempts to find a developer ceased.

Robin Riley, still under a personal services contract with the city, worked to secure a Worlds Fair designation for New Orleans from the Bureau of International Expositions. His strategy was for the Armstrong Park to be one of two or three linked sites during the 1984 Louisiana Exposition to allow for additional funds to be made available for the completion of the park. This connection with the park never materialized. However, Riley, a board member of WWOZ Radio Station, also secured a location for the station in the Jazz Complex of renovated buildings, and the station remains a tenant there. Robin Riley and his family moved to New Zealand in June 1986, and he is a resident there to date.

Sidney J. Barthelemy⁶, who was elected mayor in May 1986, took a renewed interest in designing and modeling Louis Armstrong Park after Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, Denmark. Even though the park had already been built, he attempted to find something to add to the park that would attract visitors and tourists. Mayor Barthelemy visited Tivoli Gardens and met with the manager of the park, Mr. Keiser, who had a great fondness for Louis Armstrong. He was very interested in participating in the new venture with New Orleans because of the similarities between the parks. Because the mayor wanted to involve the Treme residents, neighborhood activists Chisom and Hayes also had the opportunity to visit Tivoli, along with Leo Watermeier, the park manager from 1992-1995.

Tivoli dates back to 1843, when Denmark was still an absolute monarchy, and Copenhagen was a fortified city with tall ramparts and a deep moat surrounding the capital.

⁶ Interview with Sidney Barthelemy on August 12, 2003

Within these boundaries, 120,000 people lived.⁷ Tivoli's founder, Georg Carstensen (1812-57) had seen pleasure gardens on his journeys through Europe, and in 1841 he applied to King Christian VIII for permission to establish and run his "Tivoli & Vauxhall" for five years. Tivoli gained instant success when the magic gardens opened its gates to a world of exotic designs and elegant entertainment. The gardens were carefully thought out. The area, almost exactly the size of Armstrong Park, has about 3 million visitors that walk through the park during 5 months every year. There is something for everyone. The Copenhagen local authorities dictate conditions of use to preserve old trees and the park like appearance. There is plenty of activity packed into a relatively small space. There are rides and restaurants that are kept separate from the Miniature Gardens, a concert hall, and an open air stage called Plaenen (the Lawn). This is, in many respects, the power center of Tivoli, where world class artists perform daily along with talented amateurs, including music, dance and gymnastics. There is an annual Jazz Festival in Tivoli and for years Louis Armstrong opened the park for the season. Tivoli Lake remains in the center of the park as a reminder of the old days. Tivoli introduced season tickets in 1845, and in 2003 has more than 200,000 season ticket holders.

The development of a Tivoli Gardens-like park was never to be for Armstrong Park. According to Barthelemy, the political faction of Donald Mintz who opposed him in the next mayoral race, caused confrontations about the park whenever public hearings were held. Mayor Barthelemy suspects, although he cannot prove, that Mintz paid members of the opposition group to cause conflict. Barthelemy had received a commitment of \$3 million from the federal government to help Treme residents fix-up their property. However, the

⁷ www.tivoli.dk

Mintz group caused so much conflict that plans for a Tivoli-like park were scrapped during Barthelemy's second term.

In June 1992, the Louisiana State Legislature voted to allow a large land-based casino in New Orleans and in August 1993 the casino board voted to give Harrah's Jazz preliminary approval to operate a casino at the Rivergate in New Orleans. Until their new building could be built, Harrah's Jazz operated a temporary casino at the old Municipal Auditorium. On May 1, 1995, the long delayed temporary land-based casino opened in the auditorium but revenues were far lower than predicted. Harrah's spent \$41 million to transform the Municipal Auditorium into a facility of 76,000 square feet with 3,096 slot machines, and 90 gambling tables. Predictions were that the casino would have 10,000 daily gamblers, with \$395 million earnings for the first 12 months; \$33 million a month gross gambling revenue. There would be 3,100 employees.⁸ On November 21, 1995 Harrah's closed the temporary casino at the auditorium and halted all construction on the permanent casino at the Rivergate site. Harrah's then filed for bankruptcy. During the period of operation of the temporary casino at the auditorium, the Treme neighborhood group did have a voice, and were dedicated a substantial number of the jobs, according to Jim Hayes.

National Park Service Becomes Involved

Public Law 103-433 dated October 31, 1994, established the New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park and called upon the Department of the Interior, National Park Service to prepare a *General Management Plan / Environment Impact Statement* for the park⁹. These plans generally provide guidance for the National Park Service managers for a period of 10 to 15 years regarding how to protect a park's cultural and natural resources

⁸ www.rivergate.tulane.edu

⁹ Draft of General Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement, October 1998

while providing opportunities for visitors to understand, enjoy and appreciate the reasons for which the park unit was established. This plan represents the efforts of the National Park Service and the New Orleans Jazz Commission, in consultation with representatives of the City of New Orleans, the parish of Orleans, the state of Louisiana, and the people from these jurisdictions and elsewhere who contributed through response forms and who participated in public meetings.

The New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park, affectionately referred to as “Jazz” within the National Park Service, was created by Congress to celebrate the origins and evolution of the uniquely indigenous American art form of jazz. Park administrative headquarters were temporarily located on Canal Street, and are now located in the National Park Service office building on Decatur Street until they permanently move to the park site. The park seeks to preserve jazz resources and disseminate information about the history, development, and progression of jazz and its many contributions for societies locally, regionally, nationally, and around the world. As the widely recognized cradle of jazz, New Orleans also represents the coalescence of singular cultural attributes that foster the creation and early evolution of that music form, and it is this reality that is reflected in the establishment of this unique park.

In 1993, the National Park Service produced the *New Orleans Jazz Special Resource Study* which provided a summary of the significant history of jazz in New Orleans, a description of commercial districts and neighborhoods associated with jazz in New Orleans, description of current New Orleans programs that preserve and interpret jazz history, and an evaluation of historic sites associated with the origins and early history of jazz. Through the legislation, the park is authorized to enter into cooperative agreements with the owners of

properties that are designated as national historic landmarks and that provide outstanding educational and interpretive opportunities relating to the evolution of jazz in New Orleans. Programs are intended to promote a broad range of educational activities relating to jazz and its history, and to assist appropriate entities in the development of an information base including archival material, audiovisual records, and objects that relate to the history of jazz. The legislation also authorizes the establishment of the 17-member New Orleans Jazz Commission to act as an independent advisory board.

The purpose of the New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park is to:

- Preserve resources and information that are associated with the origins and early development of jazz in New Orleans;
- Enhance opportunities for visitors to experience and appreciate the sights and sounds of early jazz and the places where early jazz evolved;
- Interpret the origins, history, and progression of jazz;
- Promote and assist the education of students in various forms of jazz in order to perpetuate its continued evolution as a true American art form.

After years of planning by the National Park Service, Mayor Marc Morial signed a lease in August 1999, giving the federal agency control of a complex of buildings on the St. Philip Street side of city-owned Armstrong Park.¹⁰ Since then, the National Park Service has been working on a plan to shape a physical presence for the park, which was officially created in 1994 but so far has existed mostly on paper. However, according to Councilwoman Jackie Clarkson, all parties involved agree that the 99 year leases that Morial signed three days before leaving office are not valid. Mayor Nagin must now address the

¹⁰ www.nps.gov

leases. Gayle Hazelwood, superintendent of the park until last year, presented the plan to the New Orleans Jazz Commission and to the Vieux Carre Property Owners, Residents and Associates organization. The plan includes a visitor center oriented toward North Rampart Street, described as a gateway to the park, and a 1948 reconstruction of an historic firehouse. From the visitor center visitors would be directed to a cluster of buildings housing the performance hall, an education center, administrative offices, security building and a resource center. The center would showcase oral histories of New Orleans musicians and direct visitors to other local jazz landmarks and exhibits. WWOZ radio station would be responsible for building itself a new 6,000 square foot facility at an estimated cost of \$1.35 million. The nonprofit community “roots music” station’s current building is one that the city leased to the National Park Service. According to WWOZ general manager David Freedman, an estimated 250,000 people around the world listen to the station via the internet, with the weekly broadcast audience at an additional 50,000. Space would also be provided for park rangers, who now conduct jazz tours and dispense information from a temporary visitor’s center in the French Market. The intersection of St. Claude and Dumaine Streets was identified as a traditional meeting place for Mardi Gras Indians now obscured by the park, as a focal point to be marked with a monument. Statues of trumpeter Louis Armstrong and clarinetist Sidney Bechet would remain in place. A restored 177-year-old Masonic lodge would become the educational facility. People attending the meeting were receptive to the WWOZ plans but the plan to open the park’s St. Phillip Street gates during operating hours drew some criticism.

The jazz park plan was developed through a series of sessions sponsored by the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects under the direction of architect Creed Brierre

(Figure 16). Participants included Tulane School of Architect students, National Park Service staff members, nearby residents and representatives of the City's Parks and Parkways Department. Hazelwood said that the park Service made sure that the plan would honor the Treme historic street grid much of which was destroyed when Armstrong Park was created. Buildings in the park managed by the Park Service include:¹¹

- Reimann House constructed in the 1880's and relocated to Armstrong Park from the Treme neighborhood in the mid 1970's. It will be used for the park's administrative facility.
- Perseverance Hall No. 4, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was a white-built and managed Masonic lodge erected between 1819 and 1820. It is the oldest Masonic temple in Louisiana and is significant in the areas of religion, philosophy, and Masonic historic places. Its historic significance is based on its use for dances, where black jazz performers and bands reportedly played for black or white audiences. Although the building was used for social functions such as weddings and balls where jazz musicians performed, these uses have only been occasionally documented because many pertinent Masonic records have been destroyed. During the early 1900's some bands, such as the Golden Rule Band, were bared from appearing at Perseverance Hall No. 4 apparently because management considered them too undignified for the place. The building also served as a terminal point for Labor Day parades involving white and

¹¹ www.nps.gov

black bands. During the 1920's and 1930's, well past the formative years of jazz, various jazz bands played there (Figure 17).

- Jean Louis Rabassa House, listed on the National Register of Historic Places and relocated from Treme, was constructed between 1825 and 1833 and is locally significant as a raised cottage structure. It is one of the few surviving structures of this type in New Orleans. The Rabassa House will become the education and resource center for the park during the final phase of renovation (Figure 18).

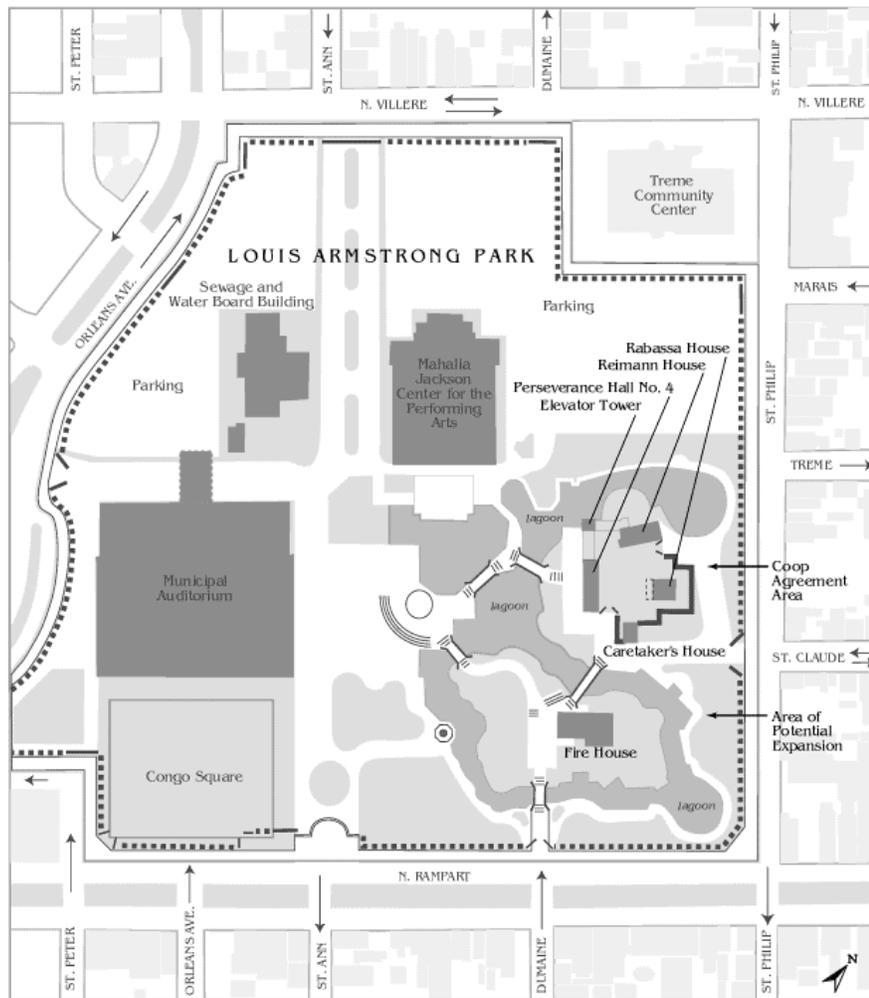


Figure 16 Louis Armstrong Park map (www.nps.gov/nea/Armstrong%20Park_map_history.htm)



Figure 17 Perseverance Hall, Armstrong Park



Figure 18 Rabassa House, Louis Armstrong Park

In an article in the *Times Picayune* staff writer Greg Thomas wrote on April 28, 2002, that after years of delays and false starts, the Armstrong Park appeared to be on the verge of

being transformed into a showcase for the city's jazz heritage, thanks to the National Park Service.¹²

In an interview, Bruce Barnes,¹³ Acting Chief Interpreter for the Jazz Park, indicated that the park's main function should be a community park with green space. This area has great potential to bring the city together in the downtown area but must first bring back a sense of community to the Treme neighborhood. The organizers of the annual Louis Armstrong Festival are considering moving the festival from the U. S. Mint to the park, where there is more space and potential for expansion. Mr. Barnes believes that the park is a fitting tribute to Louis Armstrong. The visitor numbers are not as large as it could be, but many neighborhood residents do use the park. "There is a lot of positive energy there and it looks nice." However, it is complex to find out what is really going on in the park, like all of New Orleans, a "City of Masks." Why the park is there to begin with is politically masked, what has happened to the neighborhood, gentrification, and housing developments are all "masked" from the general public. Physically it is a very nice, pleasant park but the perception of people who live around the park, visit the park, and that do business in and around the park, especially hotels in the French Quarter, have given it the "tag" of being a problem park. One murder took place there over 14 years ago, and even though murders take place all over the city, that is the one that people are constantly being reminded of. To get over the reputation there needs to be an effort from the public and private citizens.

There is also a misconception at the National Park Service manages the entire park. The National Park Service is in charge of only the historic buildings located in the park. The City of New Orleans, Property Management Division is responsible for maintaining the

¹² *The Times Picayune*, New Orleans, LA, April 28, 2002

¹³ Interview with Bruce Barnes on August 20, 2003

property in the park, i.e. park benches, light bulbs, etc. The city's Parkway Commission maintains the all greenery--plants and cutting of the grass, and picking up the trash. A private management company that also manages the Louisiana Superdome, SMG, Inc., manages the Municipal Auditorium and the Mahalia Jackson Cultural Center buildings. Park security is also under private contract. There is no park director to oversee the general management of the park to coordinate efforts from the separate responsible entities.

Before the National Park Service's *Jazz* moves its headquarters to the park, the current controversy with WWOZ Radio Station must be resolved.



Figure 19 WWOZ Radio Station

WWOZ¹⁴ currently has a 1,214 square foot studio in the Kitchen Building in Armstrong Park with its administrative offices just outside the park (Figure 19). The station wants to consolidate its operations into a park maintenance building that would be transformed into a 15,120 square facility, and reduce the park's green space by at least 5,524 square feet. Leo Watermeier, who planted grapefruit, Satsuma, orange and tangelo over a decade ago and still maintains the antique rose garden, heads the citizens' group called the

¹⁴ New Orleans *Times Picayune*, "WWOZ trumpets spacious park plan," 09/17/2003.

Friends of Armstrong Park. That organization is opposed to any design that would reduce the park's green space. A revised plan to build a long-term home for the station in the park was submitted to the city and the National Park Service on August 19, 2003, David Freedman, general manager of WWOZ said. According to the *Times Picayune* article, Mayor Ray Nagin's administration did not like an earlier plan that would have filled in sections of the park's lagoons. The city and the National Park Service, partners in developing seven of the park's 32 acres into the New Orleans Jazz National Historic Park, must approve the radio stations' plan before they can proceed. Cynthia Sylvain-Lear, a deputy chief administrative officer of the city, said the Nagin administration is reviewing the development proposal and will have no official comment until the review is completed. There is not a set date for this act. The National Park Service has completed its review. The acting regional director of the southeast region, Patricia A. Hooks, responded to David Freedman, general manager of WWOZ FM in a letter dated September 23, 2003. In her letter Ms. Hooks lists items that need correction or further coordination before the Park Service can approve the WWOZ FM plans for its new facility. Those items include misleading labeling on the site plan drawing of a "Park Island"; a new bridge labeled "Second Line Bridge" has a primary function of the new bridge would be vehicular traffic—vehicular and pedestrian pathways should be separated for pedestrian safety; the spatial requirements have increased from 12,942 square feet to 15,120 square feet; there is no schematic of the exterior appearance of the building and no elevations of the design; insufficient size of concession area; and concerns with the excessive amount of paving with limited greenery, parking and driveway concerns.

The National Park Service, with the blessing of Mayor Ray Nagin's administration, plans to proceed with the noncontroversial parts of a plan to develop a national jazz park along the northeast section of Armstrong Park. Marta Kelly said the park service has \$2.3 million that can be used to renovate Armstrong's historic buildings and improve lighting, benches, fences, walkways and landscaping as well as install fountains and construct public restrooms. During a "raucous" two-hour public meeting on November 10, 2003 where more than 100 people were in attendance, the proposal to expand WWOZ FM's facility in the park met opposition (*Times Picayune*, Jazz park renovations set to start in 2004, official says, 11/12/2003, page B3). In his outburst, Babtunji Ahmed said he was speaking on behalf of his ancestors while officials discussed the future of WWOZ. Ahmed spoke with emotion when consider in the historic context of Interstate 10 routing through their neighborhood, as if it was yesterday. Treme residents remember that there were homes and people and businesses and lives on the ground that was cleared to make way for Armstrong Park—the voices of Treme residents didn't matter then.

Marta Kelly, Park Superintendent, resigned from her position effective November 17, 2003. The National Park Service is recruiting to fill the position and is accepting applications through December 8 (www.usajobs.gov).

The Jazz Connection: Louis Armstrong Park and the Back o'Town/South Side of Rampart

Back o'Town, also known at the time as the Battlefield or the "colored red light district," was a tough area. Louis Armstrong grew up in this area. Back o'Town included illicit gambling and prostitution houses as well as residences. The adjacent South Rampart Street corridor contained more respectable African American businesses and legitimate

places of entertainment. From the turn of the century through the 1920's, Back o'Town had a concentration of saloons, social halls, dance clubs, and vaudeville theaters where early jazz was played. Most of the area has been redeveloped for government offices, parking area, high-rise office buildings, and the Superdome (Figure 20).

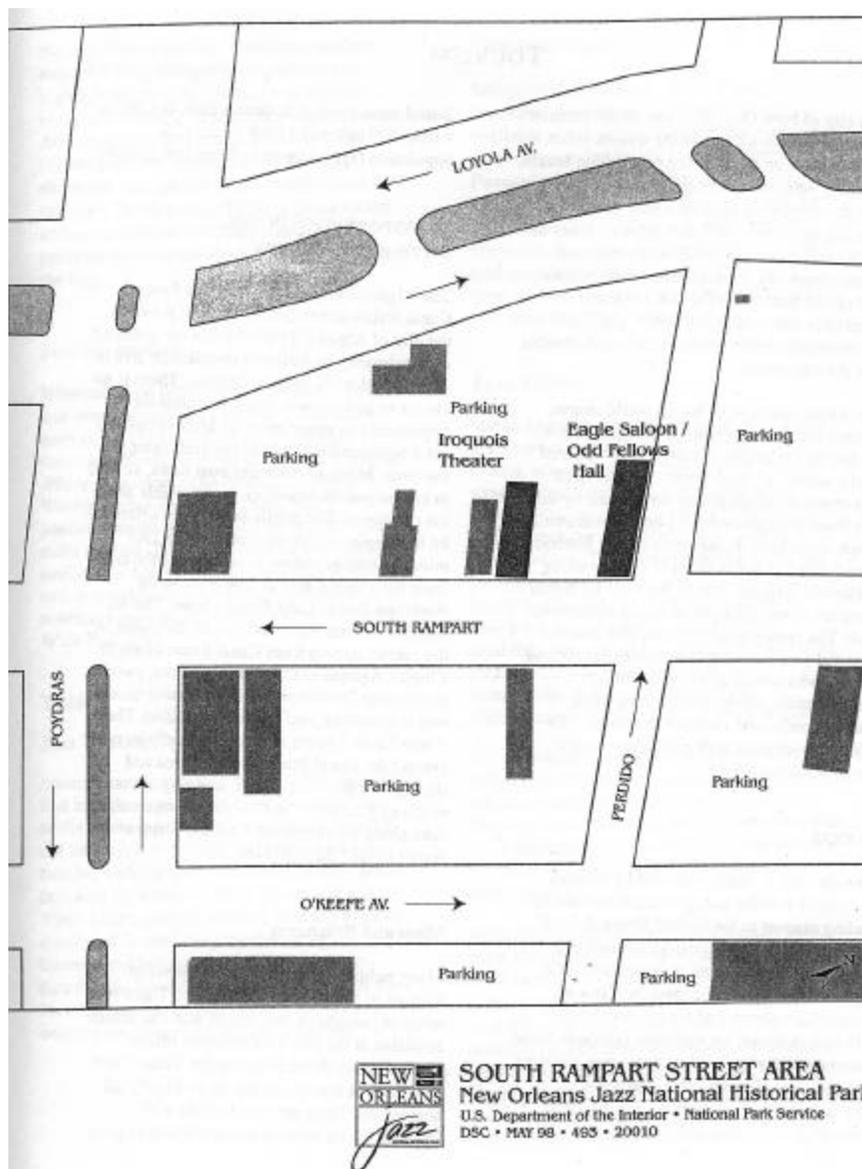


Figure 20 Back O'Town, South Rampart St. area (National Park Service New Orleans Jazz General Management Plan, October 1998)

In the 1993 *Special Resource Study* the National Park Service began to identify early jazz sites and structures in New Orleans. Few scholarly efforts had concentrated on the physical areas where jazz musicians lived and played, and published research had often focused on either the music or the personalities of the people involved in jazz. Much jazz history is of an anecdotal nature or written by uncritical devotees of the music. The 1993 study made a concerted effort to gather, consolidate, and analyze the information. This effort included preparing an inventory of sites and structures in the New Orleans area, as well as consulting existing written sources, the National Register of Historic Places, jazz experts, the general public, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Preservation of Jazz Advisory Commission. The process resulted in the compilation of 48 historic sites. One area of special significance is South Rampart Street. This area, consisting of the 400 block of South Rampart Street, contains several historic properties. Frank Doroux's "Little Gem" Saloon and Louis Karnofsky's store, date to the period of early jazz development. As documented in the 1998 *General Management Plan*, in the research undertaken by the National Park Service to nominate sites associated with jazz in New Orleans as national historic landmarks, two structures on South Rampart Street – the Eagle Saloon / Odd Fellows Hall and the Iroquois Theater—have been determined to be significant to the story of early jazz history in New Orleans. The Eagle Saloon / Odd Fellows Hall was a community social hall often used by various musical groups during the formative period of New Orleans jazz (ca. 1900-1910). Located on the top story of a three-story building, the hall was used by Buddy Bolden between 1896 and 1906. Bolden is acknowledged as one of the first and major innovators and practitioners of the improvisational music that coalesced into jazz. His association with the building gives it exceptional significance in the early history of jazz. The Odd Fellows

Hall is clearly associated with the establishment of New Orleans jazz as a unique music that has contributed significantly to the broad patterns of American history and culture. The two-story Iroquois theater, an African-American vaudeville and motion picture house built in 1911, became a venue for the performance of jazz in New Orleans between 1912 and 1920. The Iroquois' early period of use (ca. 1912-17) corresponded with the evolution of jazz in New Orleans. The many performers who appeared on the Iroquois stage included blues and jazz vocalists and musicians; among them artists whose appearances at the theater often marked a commercial beginning for their crafts. Performers included many of those who likewise played cabarets in the New Orleans sector known as Storyville. It is significant in the context of the evolution of New Orleans Jazz during the early decades of the 20th century. Because New Orleans Jazz became a national phenomenon during the period that followed, the Iroquois, as a promotional and commercial vehicle for early jazz, represents the evolving form of a music that became popular throughout the nation and is nationally significant in the context of jazz history.

Karnofsky's store was where the 7-year old Armstrong worked in 1908 (Figure 21). He gravitated to the store run by the Russian Jewish family who adopted him for several years. The Karnofsky's "could see he had natural soul and wanted him to be something in life." It later became Morris Music, the first jazz music store catering to African-Americans.



Figure 21 Karnofsky Tailor Shop and House, Courtesy of State of La. Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism (www.cr.nps.gov/nr/feature/afam/2003/entertainment.htm).

The Eagle Saloon Building (Figure 22) at 401-403 South Rampart Street (Building #02001160), as known as the Dixie Beer Parlor, was added in 2002 to the National Register of Historic Places; the Iroquois Theater at 413-415 South Rampart Street (Building #02001161) added in 2003; and Karnofsky's Tailor Shop at 424-431 South Rampart Street (Building #80001744) added in 2002.¹⁵



Figure 22 Abandoned Eagle Saloon building at S. Rampart and Perdido

Bruce Barnes said that the National Park Service could possibly get involved with the historical buildings in the area of South Rampart Street related to jazz. The properties are privately owned and there are ongoing negotiations on their renovations. He said that European visitors looking for the roots of jazz in New Orleans are always disappointed that

¹⁵ www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/LA/Orleans/vacant.html

there is no historical “jazz district.” He feels that music and entertainment are a great natural resource of New Orleans that should be protected and guarded—that’s what the city is known for and what people come here for.

Four structures among the last architectural remnants of the early 20th century neighborhood include the Eagle Saloon, Iroquois Theater, Karnofsky’s Store, and Little Gem Saloon. The Park Service, the New Orleans Jazz Commission, the Trust for Public Land, Mayor Ray Nagin, and Jerome “PopAgee” Johnson’s nonprofit group, the New Orleans Music Hall of Fame, all want the buildings renovated and converted into a block-long stretch of historical venues, exhibits and educational.¹⁶ According to the *Times Picayune* article, Johnson’s group is trying to renovate the buildings. A \$200,000 grant from the city to Johnson’s nonprofit group has been withheld. The money was awarded to Johnson by the Morial administration amid much fanfare in 2001 but the Nagin administration is reviewing the award. Johnson wants to buy the buildings from a St. Bernard heiress who has a \$100 million real estate fortune. The heiress, Arlene Meraux, 79, was declared unfit to manage her personal and business affairs by a St. Bernard Parish judge in October 2002, leaving Johnson’s lease-purchase agreement in limbo. Joseph Canizaro, local businessman and real estate pioneer, owns the fourth and most visible building at the corner of Poydras and Rampart. Through the commercial real estate brokerage firm Corporate Realty, Canizaro has had the building and accompanying parking lot listed for sale for an asking price of \$3.5 million.

Presently, the acquisition of the buildings from the Meraux estate is at a standstill. Until there is a sale or transfer of the properties owned by Ms. Meraux, nothing can be done

¹⁶ New Orleans *Times Picayune*, “Saving the Music”.12/20/2002. Thomas, Greg

to neither renovate the buildings, nor transfer funds or award grants. In the meantime, the buildings are undergoing a “demolition by neglect,” with collapsing roofs and walls, and water leakage. Organizations and private donors who have contributed large amounts of money to Johnson for the project; Canizaro’s building has been stabilized and remains for sale on the real estate market. As they deteriorate, the future remains uncertain for these historic treasures amidst law suites, ownership and real estate sales. The prospect of the development of a Jazz District is dismal at best. A well-researched and carefully planned restoration of the buildings on South Rampart could establish a mini music district akin to the art-gallery circuit along Julia Street a few blocks away. Downtown business and industrial districts in old neighborhoods are making a comeback in cities across America. New Orleans never leads in such progress, but it does sometimes manage to follow. A revitalized 400 block of South Rampart would form the point of an entertainment triangle linking the French Quarter and the Warehouse District. It would be a big pump of adrenalin for the CBD and the musical economy.¹⁷

¹⁷ www.publications.neworleans.com/no_magazine, June 2000, Vol. 34, Issue 9, page 28

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the decades the Treme neighborhood has undergone major transformations. It has evolved from Congo Square, a gathering place of slaves and free people of color, the building of the Spanish Fort. St. Ferdinand, the American built Municipal Auditorium, Mahalia Jackson Cultural Center, and the Louis Armstrong Park. This evolution has been under the direction of the French, Spanish, and American governments. The Louisiana Purchase in 1803 inaugurated the second phase of the area's history under Governor William C. C. Claiborne. Dances in Congo Square were abandoned after the 1840's, especially during the occupation of New Orleans by Union forces during the Civil War.

The Municipal Auditorium was built in 1930 during a period of city growth and the impending need for larger civic and cultural facilities. However, lack of funds in the 1930's and 1940's delayed further planning until 1951 under the city administration of Chep Morrison. During the same era in 1920, Louis Armstrong made his first recording and jazz developed into an art form of its own.

As the needs of the post World War II New Orleans changed, the idea of developing a cultural center was revived. Chep Morrison acquired funding to purchase the land claiming that the city would be erasing slum areas. The new facilities would also allow New Orleans to compete with other cities for tourism. Land was cleared and construction began in the 1960's under the administration of Mayor Victor Schiro. Schiro had half the funding needed to complete the project. During the 1960's the mood of the country changed. The Viet Nam War raged, a new drug culture developed, and the mood of the country changed. Cities

across the country, including New Orleans, lost more and more of its population to the suburbs and with it a large percentage of its tax base.

In 1970 when Mayor Moon Landrieu took office not only did he inherit a lack of funds for the project, but also the discontent of the Treme residents. The optimistic 50's had evolved into an era of discontent and one of economic and demographic changes. The best-laid plans of previous decades no longer met the needs of the 70's. The plans for the cultural center complex were never completed.

The building of the Louis Armstrong Park was a viable alternative to the city-owned prime real estate. The administrations and political agendas of Dutch Morial, Sidney Barthelemy, and Marc Morial each made their own impact on the operation of the park. The park opened during Dutch Morial's administration, but it was Barthelemy who tried to revive an interest in a Tivoli Park style park at Armstrong, which never materialized. The present city council will have to vote again on approving a new lease with WWOZ Radio and the National Park Service because all parties now agree that the 99 year leases signed by Marc Morial three days before the end of his term are invalid.

The cultural center complex plans and the Louis Armstrong Park are classic examples that what might work at one point in time does not necessarily transpose well to another. The economy, population and demographics of New Orleans have changed dramatically since Mayor Chep Morrison proposed the cultural center complex plan, and Mayor Victor Schiro started demolition of the Treme neighborhood. In the 1950's, urban renewal swept through many of the United States older cities. A Louisiana state law, which was later changed, prohibited the city from taking part in the program. City planners were able to enact similar "slum clearance programs" through public works projects like highways and the civic and

cultural centers.¹⁸ Demolishing large tracts of old buildings and relocating massive numbers of working-class and poor urban residents has now been discredited as an approach to revitalizing cities.¹⁹

The first hypothesis, that the area of the Treme neighborhood demolished in the 1960's was to accommodate the building of a cultural center complex, which was never built, has been proven.

To determine if the park is an appropriate use of the land on which Louis Armstrong Park stands, and the prospects for the park's future, an economic development analysis must first be made. Questions such as, "where is the money coming from?" and "will the park be supported by the community?" must be answered. A successful economic development program can dramatically improve the quality of life in urban or rural areas by increasing the tax base, helping existing businesses flourish, and attracting new businesses. To attain success, economic development agents must be facilitators, information and assistance providers. They must understand how to monitor and evaluate a local economy and respond proactively to meet a variety of needs. Economic developers must know how to develop a strategic plan, utilize the implementation tools available to them and be in a position to monitor and evaluate a program's success. It is an ongoing continuous process.²⁰

According to Blair, three main goals must be achieved by the community, its government, its businesses, and other community stakeholders:

(1) Improve the economic well-being and quality of life within a community by providing jobs and increasing the tax base;

¹⁸ www.endsound.com/nopf/socialcomment/gentrificationcbd.htm

¹⁹ www.uno.edu/~rthayer/wb4002.401/messages/281.html

²⁰ Blair, John P. Local Economic Development Analysis and Practice. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications 1995.

(2) Improve the community's value through infrastructure improvements and raise the standard of living for residents;

(3) Accelerate the value of real estate.

The second hypothesis, the building of the Louis Armstrong Park is a viable alternative for use of the city owned prime real estate that has the potential of contributing to local economic development and an asset to the local residents, is dependent on the completion of the above itemized goals. To complete any project it is necessary to have a well-defined project plan including goals and levels of responsibility for each of those goals. Involvement from the city, state, and federal governments, and private businesses willing to invest in the project, is imperative for success. A strong incentive package should be offered to make the project more inviting to private businesses. Business should include those in the French Quarter and surrounding area, and especially local, regional, and international tourism officials to promote and market the park.

The international jazz community has been virtually untapped. Each year many international visitors come to New Orleans in search of Jazz history. The city should take this "golden opportunity" to renovate the Jazz District in the area of South Rampart and Perdido Streets, linking it with Louis Armstrong Park and developing a jazz history program. In addition, the Satchmo Fest held annually at the U. S. Mint should be moved to Louis Armstrong Park.

The local community, especially the residents of Treme, must be actively involved in the planning and accomplishment of the project. Their support is critical. The park is about Congo Square and the cultural heritage born there. Treme residents remember all too well the disruption of their lives in the demolition of their neighborhood in the 1960's and 70's.

The Treme residents should reap the benefits of park development such as jobs, improvements to their neighborhood, and cultural events paying tribute to their history and heritage. Widely advertised public meetings should be held at either the Municipal Auditorium or the Mahalia Jackson Cultural Center for the convenience of the community. Meetings must be convenient to encourage and maximize community participation.

For success, there must also be a management structure for the operation of the park and facilities, and a strong partnership between the City of New Orleans, National Park Service, WWOZ-FM, and the Friends of Armstrong Park. This structure should be similar in organization to City Park, to include a park director with appropriate authority. Marketing plans and strategies to promote use of the park including schools, tourism officials, businesses, and festival coordinators should maximize success.

The future of Louis Armstrong Park is unclear, many questions remain to be answered, and work to be done. However, with the involvement of the National Park Service and the City of New Orleans, there are great possibilities.

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Appendix A

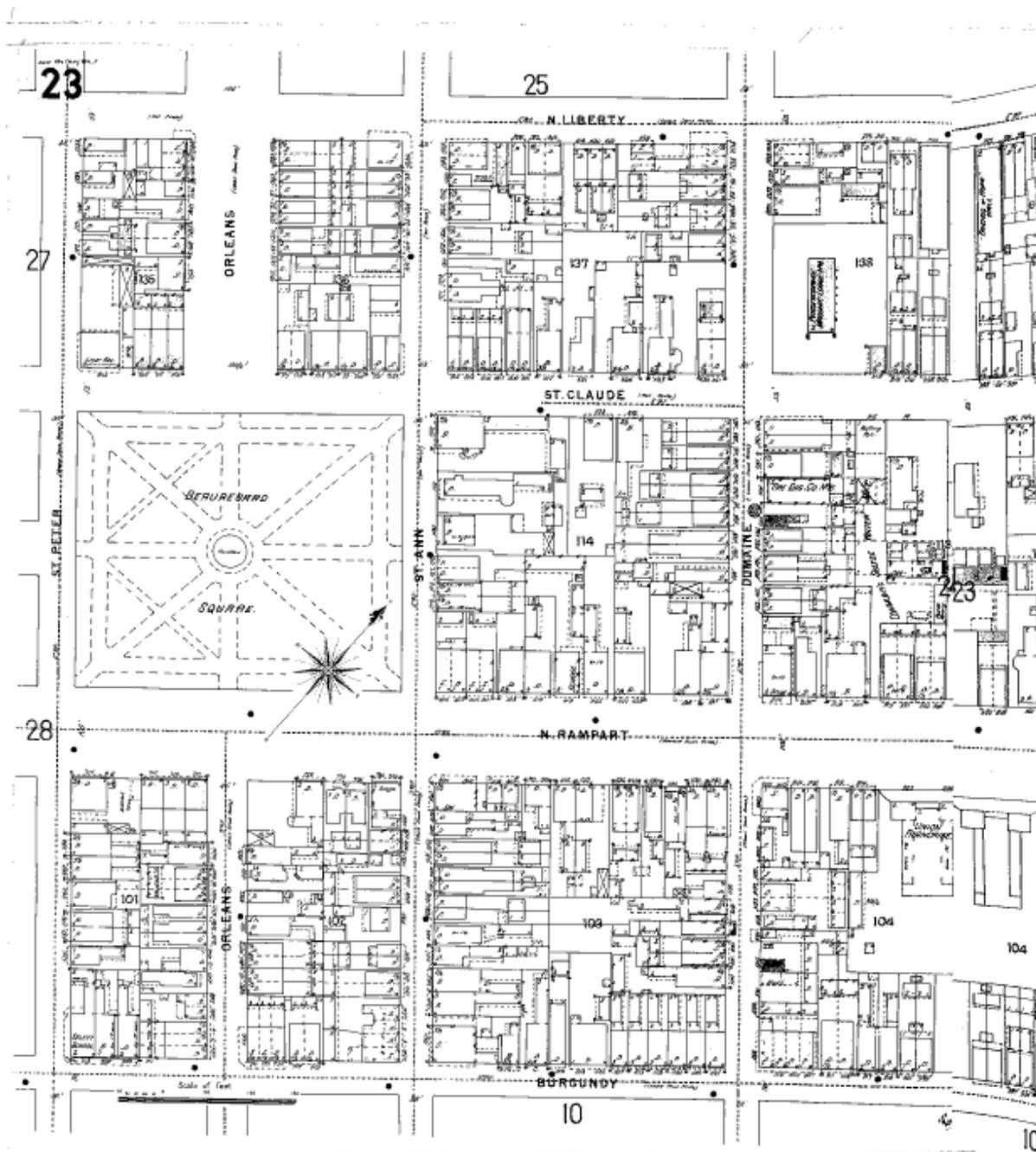


Figure 23 Sanborn Map

Appendix B



Parcel No. 14

Figure 24 Dorothy's Beauty Nook, N. Liberty Street. This is an example of a neighborhood business demolished for the planned cultural center complex.



Figure 25 Residence at 815-17 N. Liberty St. is an example of a residence demolished for the planned cultural center complex.



Parcel No. 12

Rear and side Rear Building

815-17 N. Liberty St.

259

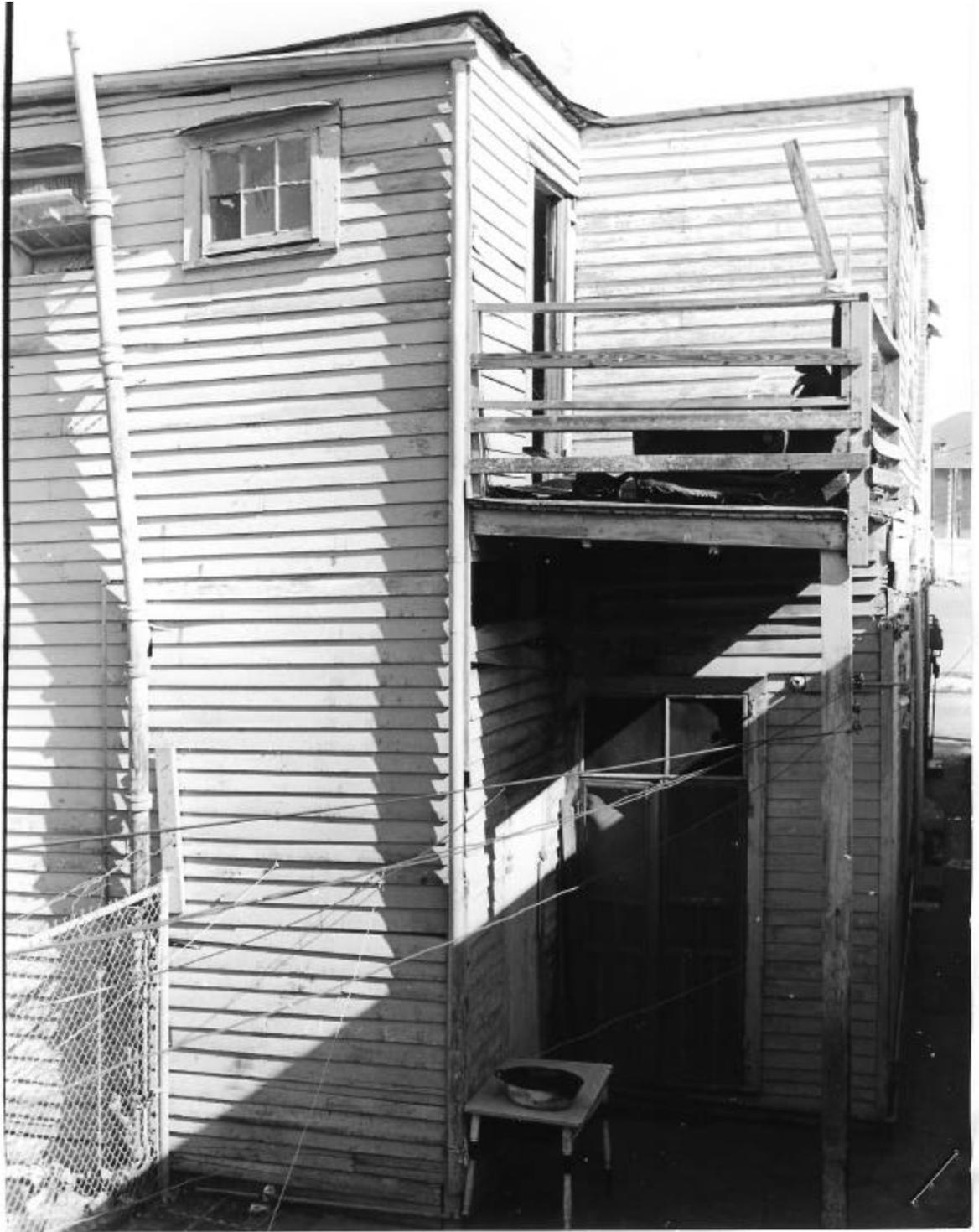
Figure 26 Rear and side rear building, 815-17 N. Liberty St.



Parcel No. 12

Front of Rear Building

Figure 27 Front of rear building, 815-17 N. Liberty St.



Parcel No. 12

Rear 815-17 N. Liberty St.

Figure 28 Rear of 815-17 N. Liberty St.



Figure 29 Residence at 815-17 N. Liberty St.

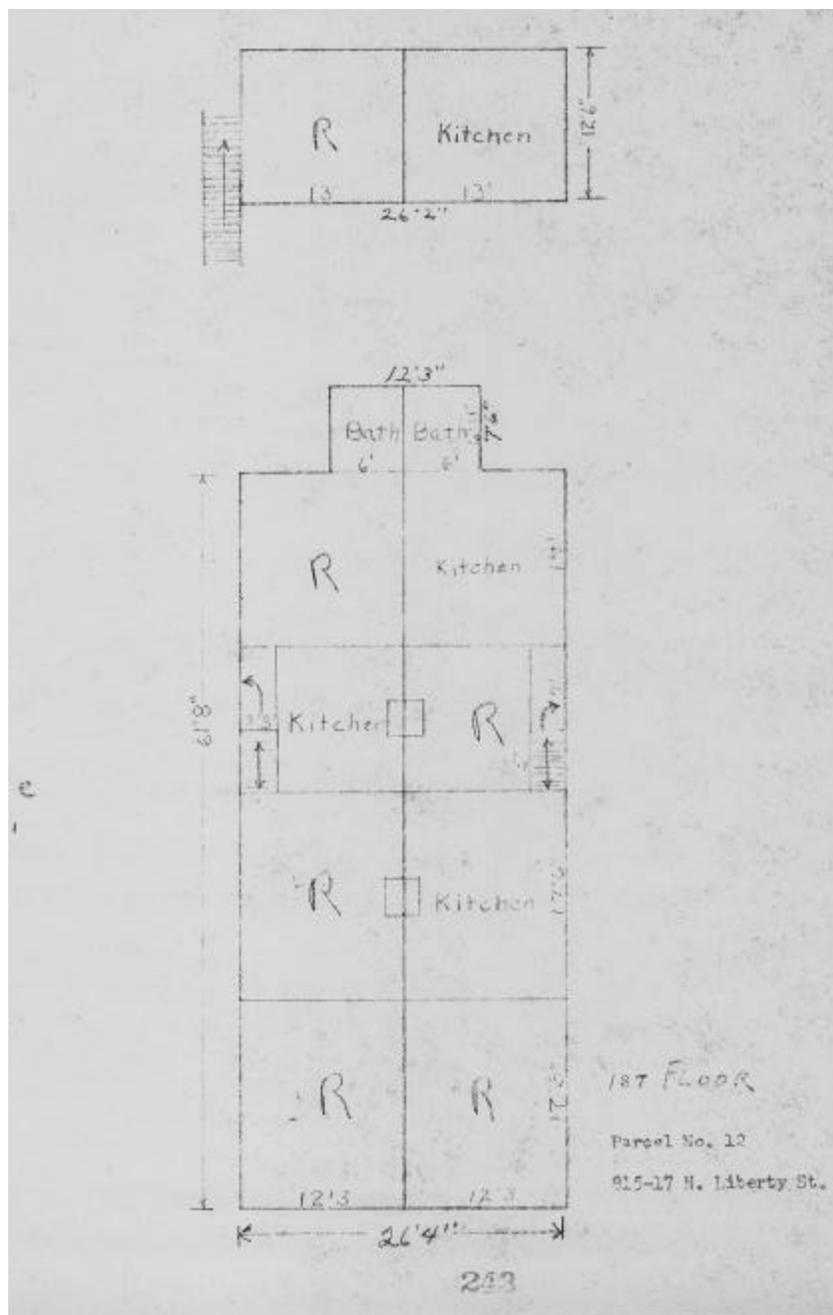


Figure 30 First floor plan, 815-17 N. Liberty St.

A P P R A I S A L
for
City of New Orleans

Parcel No. 12

Address of Property Appraised: 815-17 N. Liberty

Name and Address of Owner: Mrs. Lenore and Mrs. Elizabeth Kingsbury
635 St. Ann St.

Legal Description: 2nd District, Sq. 148, Lot 6
b.b. Dussine, St. Ann, Marais, N. Liberty

Land Dimension: 31'7"4" X 105 Land Area: 3,332.7 Sq. Ft.

Acquired by Present Owner: Date 10/29/52 C.O.B. 584 Folio 394

Consideration in Act of Sale \$9,000.00 Cash

Assessed Value: Land \$ 500.00 Improvements \$ 4,500.00 Total \$ 5,000.00

Zoning Classification: "D" Multiple Family District

On What Premise Is Appraisal Made: Market Value

Remarks: _____

CERTIFICATION

New Orleans, La.

I hereby certify to City of New Orleans

that I have thoroughly inspected the property herein described; that to the best of my knowledge and belief, the information contained in the report, including the description of the improvements attached hereto, is correct. This appraisal to be used in whole and not in part. No part of it shall be used in conjunction with another appraisal; that I have no personal interest, present or prospective, directly or indirectly, in the property referred to; that I have applied accepted methods and standards of real estate appraisal practice, and this appraisal has been made in accordance with the rules of Professional Ethics of the American Institute of Real Estate Appraisers of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, and do hereby estimate the present market value of the property to be:

Twenty-Three Thousand, Eight Hundred and Fifty and no/100 ~~-----~~ Dollars
(\$ 23,850.00)

This appraisal is based upon the legal description and other information furnished by you, which I have accepted as being correct.

Appraiser: J. Wallace Paletou, MAI
413 Baronne St.

Appraiser: E. J. Paletou, CPM
413 Baronne St.

Date March 1, 19 65

Figure 31 Appraisal of 815-17 N. Liberty St.

Parcel No. <u>12</u>	Project _____
Address of Property <u>815-17 North Liberty Street</u>	
Square: <u>148</u>	Lot No. <u>6</u>
Lot Size <u>31'7"4" x 105'</u>	Corner <u>No</u> Inside <u>Yes</u>

DESCRIPTION OF IMPROVEMENTS

Function <u>Dwelling</u> (Dwelling - Retail - Church - Etc.)	Water: <u>yes</u> Gas: <u>yes</u> Elect: <u>yes</u>
Type <u>2-story double with annex</u>	Sewerage <u>yes</u> Septic Tank <u>no</u>
Construction <u>Frame</u>	Curb and Gutter <u>yes</u> Sidewalk <u>yes</u>
Number of Stories <u>two</u>	Street Surface <u>asphalt</u> No Baths <u>four</u>
Ceiling Heights <u>11'10"</u>	Bathtub <u>4</u> Shower <u>no</u> Shower Stall <u>no</u>
Elevator <u>no</u>	Floor of Bath <u>wood</u> Wainscoating <u>plaster &</u>
Number of Units <u>4</u>	Lavatory <u>4</u> Toilet <u>4 celotex</u>
Number of Rooms <u>17 - 4 baths</u>	Hot Water Heater <u>no</u> Laundry Trays <u>no</u>
Furnished <u>no</u> Unfurnished <u>yes</u>	Kitchen Equipment: Sink; Floor; Wainscoating
Roof <u>asbestos shingle</u>	<u>Sink; Floor wood, Wainscotting plaster</u>
Roof Gutters <u>yes</u>	<u>& celotex Board</u>
Foundation <u>brick chain wall & piers</u>	Other Plumbing: <u>Annex</u>
Exterior Walls <u>Brick & weather board</u>	
Interior Walls <u>Plaster, Celotex board</u>	
Floors <u>wood</u>	Condition Exterior <u>Fair</u>
Approx. Age <u>Over 50 y-rs</u>	Condition Interior <u>Fair</u>
If Remodeled, When _____	Garage <u>no</u> Condition <u>---</u>
Heat <u>gas outlets</u>	Driveway <u>no</u> Shrubbery <u>no</u>
Air Condition <u>no</u>	
Attic Fan <u>no</u>	
Minor Auxiliary Buildings: (Sheds, Fences, Etc.) <u>Approximately 210 lineal feet of wood fence,</u>	
<u>Approximately 25 feet of link chain fence.</u>	
Original Cost of Improvements (if available) \$ _____	Est. Reproduction Cost \$ _____
Distance from Transportation: <u>1 block</u>	Grade School <u>1 block</u>
High School <u>6 blocks</u>	
Type of Neighborhood: _____	
Utilities Furnished by Owner <u>water</u>	Monthly Rental (Actual) \$ _____
Includes _____	
Leased <u>no</u> Date of Expiration <u>---</u>	Options _____
Estimated Fair Monthly Rental \$ _____	Includes _____
Remarks: _____	

Figure 32 Description of Improvements 815-17 N. Liberty St.

VITA

Yvonne Ragas Estrade was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. She received her Bachelor of Science of General Studies degree from the University of New Orleans in the disciplines of Business Administration, Sociology and Urban Studies. Mrs. Estrade was an active member of Sigma Kappa Sorority, Epsilon Beta Chapter, and now serves on the Advisory Board. She is employed full time as a Program Analyst with the United States Department of Agriculture, National Finance Center in New Orleans, and has completed 23 years of federal service. She is also a licensed tour guide in the city of New Orleans and a volunteer with the Boy Scouts of America. Mrs. Estrade is married and the mother of three sons.

Because of her interest in historic preservation, and the history and culture of New Orleans, she plans to continue her volunteer work with the Friends of the Cabildo and her interest in the development of programs at Louis Armstrong Park.



MASTER'S EXAMINATION REPORT
Thesis

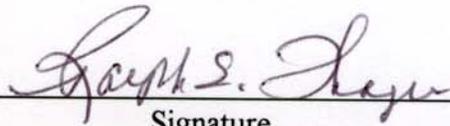
CANDIDATE: Yvonne R. Estrade

MAJOR PROGRAM: Master of Science in Urban Studies

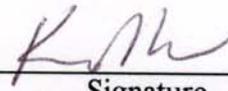
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LOUIS ARMSTRONG PARK OUT OF PLACE ON THE NORTH SIDE

APPROVED

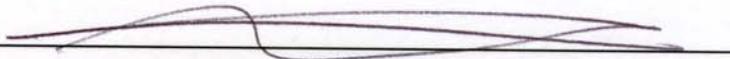
Ralph Thayer
Major Professor (typed)


Signature

Kenneth Lacho
Committee Member (typed)


Signature

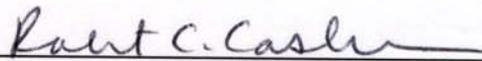
Wayne Babovich
Committee Member (typed)


Signature

Committee Member (typed)

Signature

Robert C. Cashner
Dean of the Graduate School


Signature

DATE OF EXAMINATION:

11/21/2003