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## Corner Culture: Corner Stores in the Black Pearl Neighborhood of New Orleans

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Corner Culture:  
Corner Stores in the Black Pearl Neighborhood of New Orleans

A Thesis

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

Master of  
Urban and Regional Planning

By

Andrea McCarthy

B.A. Louisiana State University, 2005

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## **ABSTRACT**

The corner store represents a significant part of New Orleans' history and neighborhoods. From essential grocery providers to bars and restaurants full of local character, these buildings have held a number of roles in the community. These roles have changed in response to development patterns, market pressures, and land-use regulation. A number of these traditional businesses still exist today as neighborhood cultural institutions throughout the city. Many more, however, have faced conversions to residential buildings, abandonment, or demolition. This case study addresses the significance of the corner store, identifies a number of factors leading to its decline, and suggests that a newly revised Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance in the city of New Orleans should reserve a place for these neighborhood businesses.

Historic Preservation, Food Distribution, Land-Use Planning and Zoning, Neighborhood Planning, Master Plan

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

New Orleans is a unique city since much its history can still be witnessed in the everyday lives of its residents. While generations have passed, the buildings and streetscapes have become a timeless background retaining the spirit of a city that is inseparable from its history. At the heart of the city is the neighborhood, which has had a role in both its physical and cultural development. In New Orleans the corner store is a defining feature of many neighborhoods. It is not uncommon to drive through a neighborhood and see a corner store building at the end of nearly every block. Be it a bar, restaurant, or grocer, these buildings house some of the most charming and revealing features of the city.

Today however, it may be more common to see a corner store building abandoned, converted, or only an empty lot where one once stood. What has happened to the neighborhood corner store is uncertain, but a common narrative unfolds across the city--Either the family has been shopping at the same corner store for generations, or they can point out the building where they purchased snacks as kids. It is unclear if a decline in the number of corner businesses is indicative of development and economic pressures, shifts in population, or simply a fading from the role of neighborhood institution. What is clear from the many stories told about neighborhood corner stores is that when these businesses close their doors, a part of the neighborhood story comes to an end. Whether residents welcome this change, or regret it, is uncertain. There is a question as to whether there is a place for the historic corner store within the modernized neighborhoods.

The purpose of this research is to identify trends that have had a role in determining the viability of the corner store. This will largely be accomplished through a review of relevant literature on the history and development patterns of New Orleans, Louisiana. This research will also address the role of the corner store in neighborhood planning and zoning, and what effects Euclidean zoning ordinances (which require a separation of uses) has had on the ability of these neighborhood businesses to operate. A

newly adopted Master Plan in New Orleans will dictate future land-use decisions and guide the revision of the city's zoning ordinance. The social significance of these neighborhood institutions will demonstrate why it is imperative that a revised Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance allows commercial operation within these buildings in order to advance the goals of the Master Plan.

A case study of the corner stores of the *Black Pearl* neighborhood in uptown New Orleans will demonstrate the transformation of the corner store within one neighborhood. This will illustrate the factors and influences that have changed the role of the neighborhood corner store during the twentieth century. Data will reflect whether these buildings have been demolished, left vacant, or converted into more "compatible" uses. A historical database on the businesses operating in the neighborhood at specific periods of time will paint a picture of the neighborhood, providing information on the types and number of corner commercial establishments. This neighborhood, while not necessarily reflective of all neighborhoods in the city of New Orleans, will provide a lens by which to view the relationship between the neighborhood and the corner store. The data provided from within the Black Pearl will suggest why corner stores have faced challenges, and how future planning in New Orleans can address these challenges in a way that would be more sensitive to these socially, historically, and culturally significant buildings.

Research on the corner store is important for the revision of the New Orleans Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance (CZO). The drafting of a revised ordinance, which has officially begun with the adoption of the Master Plan in January of 2010, will focus on advancing the goals of the New Orleans Master Plan. The revision process will be timely and require a number of neighborhood and citywide meetings, but the completed document has the potential to reshape land-use patterns in the city. For decades New Orleans has utilized a Euclidean based zoning system that established large single use districts, keeping separate the diversity of uses that made its neighborhoods unique, culturally rich and filled with local character. The Master Plan is charged with identifying the qualities and characteristics of neighborhoods, and the subsequent CZO



will use the preservation of these characteristics as a guide to drawing up a new zoning map for the city. Understanding the cultural significance of the corner store and its role in defining the character of a neighborhood is an important step in this process, and identifying such neighborhood businesses and their current zoning status, can help to protect the legality of these uses within residential districts.

Apart from providing a sense of awareness to planners and preservationists as to the history and future of these buildings, this study argues that salvation of the corner store can advance the goals of the Master Plan. There are limitations as to what can be determined about the causes of corner store decline and role of the corner store in the neighborhood, as well as, whether zoning changes could successfully protect these neighborhood businesses. In spite of the limitations, this research will paint a picture of a neighborhood in terms of its corner stores. For many residents, corner stores remind them of their childhood growing up in historic New Orleans. For others, they represent how their families were able to support themselves after immigrating to the city. For New Orleans, corner stores represent a part of the city's unique history that should be preserved through the city's Master Plan and Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance.

## CHAPTER 2

### **THE CORNER STORE: FOOD, CULTURE & HISTORY**

Food distribution has a complex history in New Orleans. Public markets were a part of life for New Orleanians until they were made obsolete by the corner store and the commercial availability of ice. Corner stores were able to carry a variety of perishable and non-perishable items in close proximity to residences. These structures demonstrate a unique aspect of New Orleans' early urban development, and the manner in which New Orleans was able to mix residential and commercial uses. Corner store buildings blended with the surrounding residential structures and allowed the commercial pockets to hide well inside the blocks of the city, leaving major avenues and boulevards free for elegant mansions.

Changes in development patterns in the twentieth century affected the corner store, and by the mid-twentieth century corner stores gave way to supermarkets. These massive shopping outlets were popularized during a period of suburbanization, dependence on the automobile, and mass food production. While a number of corner stores have continued to operate, many have closed their doors. Under current zoning ordinances, the majority of these buildings cannot legally open as a business due to their location in residential districts. Since these buildings cannot be used for their intended purpose, they lose some of their intrinsic value and face threats of abandonment or demolition. This research will examine the rise of the corner store in a time when public markets dominated the city, the height of the corner store when markets could no longer compete with their popularity, and finally, the pressures of new supermarkets and zoning ordinances that may have threatened these neighborhood establishments. Regardless of whether they are appropriate today as neighborhood businesses, corner stores have played a significant role in the history and development of the city of New Orleans.

## *A History of New Orleans and its Buildings*

To better understand the role of the corner store building in the history of New Orleans, it is important to briefly look at early City growth and development. Early development in New Orleans was limited to high ground along the rivers and natural ridges (Kelman 2003). As the city grew in population, early planners and developers had to establish streets grids that would be able to support the number of residents attempting to reside on the limited amount of dry land. The resulting patterns were densely packed blocks with narrow lots for modest sized buildings. Development patterns reflected the natural terrain until technology allowed for the back swamps to be drained and new land to be built upon. As development patterns changed, so too did buildings types and styles. New Orleans scholars acknowledge four main building phases in the city. “Each period differed from the ones before and after because each was dominated by the different kinds of people, with different attitudes and different tools at their disposal” (Lewis 2003: 40-41).

The first period, loosely defined as 1718 to 1810, represented a true European city. Buildings were restricted to what we now refer to as the “Vieux Carré” or *French Quarter*. It was during this period that unregulated street vendors gave way to a new public market system. The American Period followed, ushering in a time of urban expansion that lasted until the Civil War. This period, between 1810 and 1865, was defined by the success of sugar and cotton plantations as well as the use of the steamboats to navigate the Mississippi River. The market system expanded during this period. The third period was a time of reconstruction after the Civil war. New Orleans drastically changed as it fell into a period of decline, or “reconstruction”, followed by a short period of prosperity around the turn of the century. At this time, plantation lands were subdivided, providing huge tracts of land for new development. New neighborhoods were dotted with corner stores, which became more popular than the markets during this period. The final period was spurred by post WWII economic conditions and accompanied by technological advances enabling development on newly drained lands. Large supermarkets replaced the small corner stores during this period. A closer look at

these building periods reveals how neighborhoods were born, and the role of the corner store in the development of New Orleans.

### ***Period I: Colonial Era***

In 1718 the French, led by Bienville, arrived in New Orleans and declared it a city, despite the many geological and environmental challenges that were faced. The industrial trade opportunities outweighed the risks for the early settlers of the city. Forty years of French rule transformed a harsh natural environment into a civilization with the development of the Vieux Carré, and left behind a culture and language that would remain in the city long after the French government retreated. Streets were laid out by Adrien de Pauger and focused around a central square, now called *Jackson Square*. This first phase of buildings are all but gone today, largely due to a fire in 1794. In fact, only 2% of the buildings currently standing in the French Quarter were built between 1750 and 1803 (Campanella 2006: 107). Buildings erected after the fires of 1794 and before the American occupation, were built in the Spanish colonial style, which outlasted the actual Spanish occupation from 1762-1804 (Ibid: 106).

For the majority of the colonial period, food was acquired from street vendors, and health concerns became an issue for Spanish administrators around 1770.

'Making Groceries' in 1780s New Orleans meant either arriving at the right time on the levee, or tracking down a peddler in the street. The system benefited neither the buyer, who had to seek out vendors of the desired foods; the vendor, who had to lug perishables exposed to the elements; nor the Spanish city government, which sacrifices a potential revenue stream and hindered its ability to inspect for quality and regulate for price (Campanella 2008: 243).

In an attempt to regulate the production and distribution of food, the city erected its first public stall market in 1780, its second in 1784, and the system continued to expand under American rule (Ibid: 243-245).

## ***Period II: The Americans***

The second major building phase began as the American's moved into the city after the Louisiana Purchase (Campanella 2006). This building boom was preceded by a large number of demolitions. By 1820 the French Quarter or locally called '*The Quarter*' was fully developed and sprawling to nearby lands. However, only 4% of the buildings now standing in the Quarter predate 1820. Likewise, 61% of the buildings standing in the French Quarter were built between 1816 and 1861. These numbers most likely represent a replacement of less resilient structures with stronger, more elaborate buildings. New buildings were needed at this time because in the first seven years after the Louisiana Purchase, the population of New Orleans tripled (Lewis 2003: 43). The American influx dramatically affected the overall feel of the city. "From an under-populated French Colonial capital, New Orleans had suddenly become a big city and it was about to become much bigger" (Ibid: 45).

At this time, the New Orleans economy flourished with the cultivation of sugarcane and cotton. In addition, the French Market was gaining national fame from visitors who were impressed by the ethnic diversity (Campanella 2008: 245). New Orleans and its market system experienced an unprecedented economic gain during the antebellum period, and the city grew dramatically in population, and physically expanded into any available dry land. Early planners were adjusting to the population boom and establishing efficient ways to fit residents, businesses, and industries on the small amount of land available for development. The solution included small lots, narrow, if any, spaces between structures, and businesses incorporated into the neighborhood on the larger corner lots. "One feature of neighborhood land use patterns in nineteenth century New Orleans was the utilization of corner lots for commercial establishments. The corner storehouse that resulted is a combination commercial residential building featuring a commercial area on the ground level and residential space above" (Voigt 2003: 24).

These buildings often housed grocery stores, shops, restaurants, or bars. Corner commercial buildings from this era still line the French Quarter today. Characteristics of these buildings include a wrap balcony supported by collonettes, and a clipped corner entry (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Corner store located at Conti and South Peters in the French Quarter.**

The corner store cottage also appears during this period as a popular housing type. These buildings were generally found further back in the French quarter neighborhood and in the newly developed Faubourgs, or Creole suburbs. The working class population, including immigrants and free people of color, settled these areas. The corner store-cottages were often built on a common intersection all facing each other. The clipped entry projected the action from the building to the center of the intersection rather than towards residential buildings (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Fraddy's Food Store, located at the intersection of Dauphine and Piety Streets in the Bywater neighborhood, is an example of a Creole Cottage corner store.**

Public Markets still provided the majority of food to the public, specifically meats and vegetables which corner stores were not able to provide. The invention of ice production and storage equipment changed this. Ice was brought into New Orleans in 1826. However, fearing that iced drinks would cause tuberculosis, the Mayor, supported by public opinion, dumped the entire cargo of ice into the Mississippi River (Polk 1938: 22). By 1868, ice was less controversial and the Enterprise Co. became one of the first in the nation to successfully manufacture and sell ice. Dr. John Gorrie was granted the first U.S. patent to produce ice. “Year round availability of ice allows corner grocers to carry perishables, previously limited by law (for health reasons) to city controlled markets” (Campanella 2008: 37). Full-scale grocers and meat markets began to appear throughout neighborhoods in corner stores that previously only sold dry goods (Figure 3).



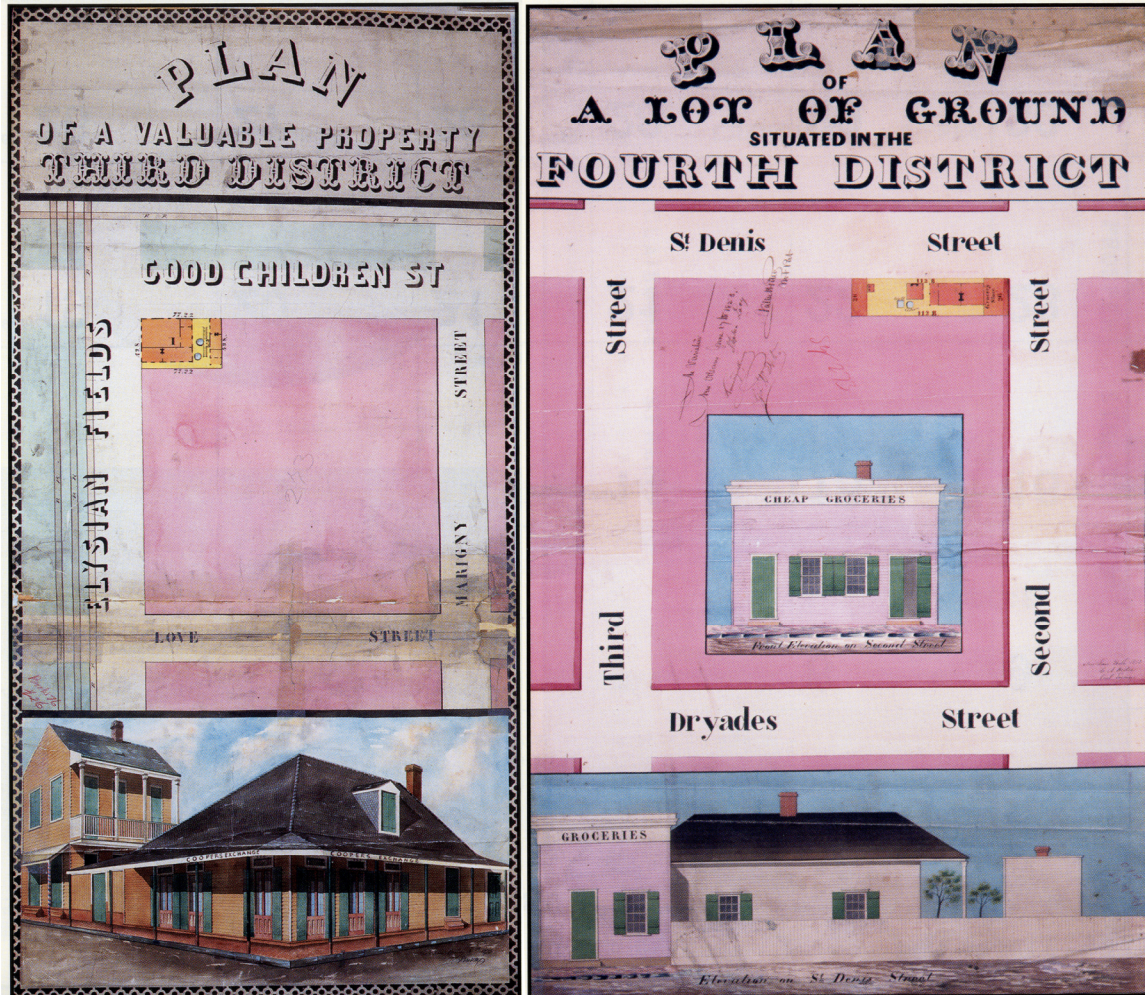


Figure 3. Coopers exchange building, built c. 1860. Exchange was a euphemism for a corner barroom. (New Orleans Notarial Archives, Plan Book 76, Folio 26).

### *Period III: Reconstruction and New Land*

After the civil war, New Orleans faced a period of economic decline. Plantations were shutting down and free slave labor became outlawed. While New Orleans faced an economic crisis, another change was occurring in the social structure of the city, as slaves were now able to move into their own residences. Plantation land was subdivided and many previous slave-owners built homes for the newly freed slaves who often continued to work as domestic servants. This constituted the next building boom from 1880 to 1920. This period can clearly be seen in the rows of “shotgun” housing that appear in the city to this day. The larger homes remained on their lots, usually situated on avenues



or boulevards, but their land was subdivided, creating a “superblock,” where larger structures bound the perimeter of a multiple block area, with more modest structures towards the interior (Campanella 2006: 302; Lewis 2003: 50-51).

As the city spread upriver along avenues such as St. Charles, social segregation could be seen in the geographic patterns of settlement (Figure 4). “The indispensable domestics commonly were housed in the back streets behind affluent whites, but within walking distance” (Lewis 2003: 50). The boulevards and avenues were reserved for large mansions and the interior blocks housed “small nuclear clusters, and these clusters have survived to this day” (Ibid: 51).

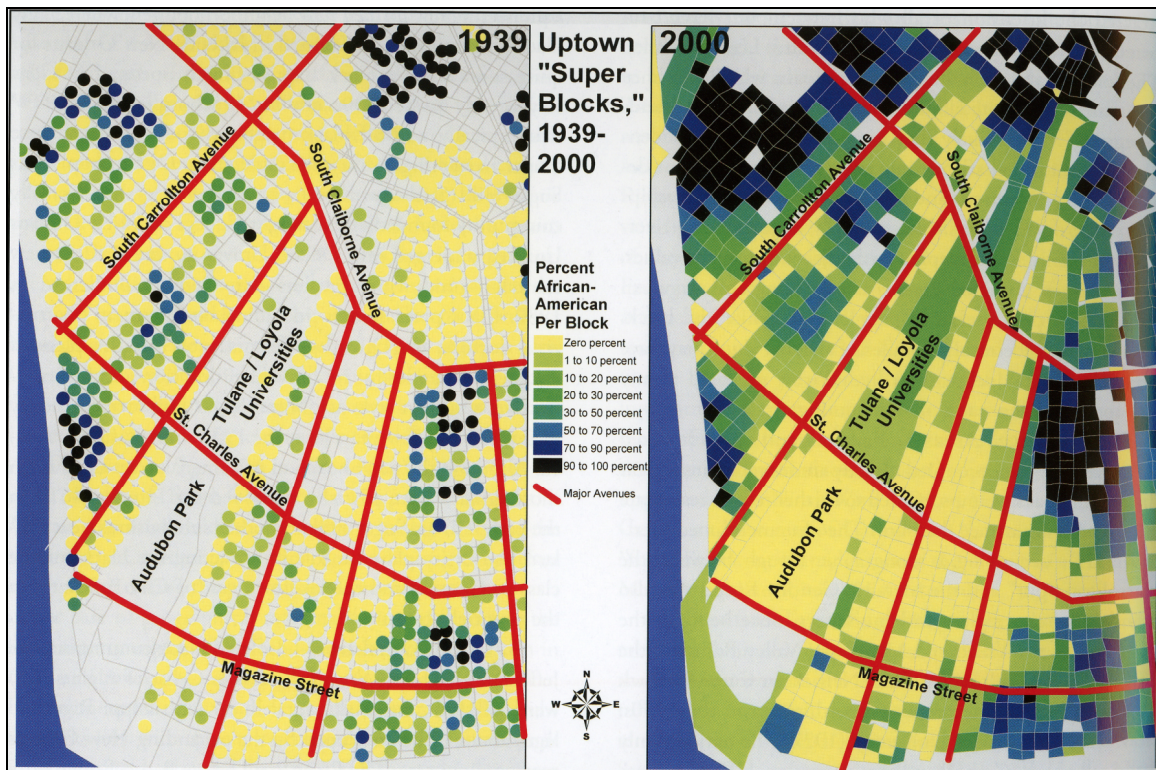


Figure 4. Graphical depiction of a “superblock” created by Richard Campanella using New Orleans Land Use data and 2000 Census data (Campanella 2006: 306).

Exploring superblocks provides a unique view of the history of New Orleans. Within superblocks, the building stock ranges from large extravagant homes, to rows of simple shotguns with vernacular architectural details. Situated towards the center of the “superblock” are the corner stores. The buildings were similar in scale and style to the

surrounding buildings, with slight modifications to accommodate a commercial use. “In these commercial structures extra openings in the rear lead to the living quarters above. Thus the opening arrangement was irregular and the floor plan was altered to suit the commercial needs” (Toldeano et al. 1974: 77). The commercial portion of the building would often be at ground level and the entry would open to the corner.

Corner stores reached their height in popularity and commonality during this era. Many groceries were established by Italians and other immigrants who were able to use these businesses to start a new life in America. “Their intentionally dispersed geography gave the corner grocers a major competitive advantage over centralized markets: convenience” (Campanella 2008: 247). The centralized market system continued to grow, however, and the city quelled the threat to public health from corner groceries by prohibiting them to open within nine blocks of a municipal market (Ibid: 247).

The Great Depression of the 1930’s, followed by World War II, halted new construction from 1930 to 1950 (Campanella 2006: 109). In addition, new laws protecting the French Quarter stopped the demolition that had previously made way for the construction of new buildings inside the historic district. During this time, New Orleans’ infrastructure was improved due to the policies of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). With newly available federal funding, the WPA took on massive renovation and infrastructure projects city wide, including the French Market (Campanella 2008: 47).

#### ***Period IV: Post World War II Era***

At the end of the Second World War, development in the United States began to change dramatically, largely due to positive economic conditions. After 1950, new construction was on a rise, particularly with commercial buildings in the Central Business District and new residential suburbs such as Lakeview and Gentilly. Portions of the Lakefront land were developed in the 1920, and the development provided larger plots of land and “garden suburbs” like Lake Vista, had become one of the wealthiest areas in

metropolitan New Orleans (Lewis 2003: 69). Inspired by the success of the Lakefront development, newly drained lands were developed in suburbs such as Gentilly and Lakeview. Between 1950 and 1975, the developed area of New Orleans doubled in size (Ibid: 76). During this period, New Orleans development was not very different from post-war development in the rest of the country, with large suburbs and commercial districts under construction in undeveloped tracts of land distant from city centers. Residents who no longer desired to reside in the densely packed urban areas of the city were able to relocate to suburban neighborhoods with bigger houses and larger yards. Others moved into the neighboring Jefferson and St. Tammany Parishes, leaving behind the narrow lots, shotgun houses, and the densely populated neighborhoods that had previously defined New Orleans. “New Orleans has become two cities in the last 25 years or so. Within is the compact, old pre-war city; around in all directions is the new exploded tissue of suburbia” (Ibid: 77).

Certain factors prevented corner stores from being built during this expansion period. A population boom and rise in automobile ownership shifted residents away from the city center. New development prompted new, stricter zoning regulations, to guide development patterns. New suburban developments were designated as strictly residential. Now residents were not only growing accustomed to commuting into the city, they were also more accustomed to driving further to reach groceries or other convenience businesses.

This era was also influenced by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which provided housing subsidies through the national mortgage programs that made purchasing homes in new suburban developments affordable. The FHA encouraged the separation of land uses and unconnected developments that strayed from the traditional grid patterns. “There would be no corner groceries; if there were any stores at all, they would be grouped into a single shopping center” (Hanchette 2000:166, Reference to FHA 1936 manual).

Corner store structures were not only losing a battle with zoning, but also in a competition with bigger grocery stores. While corner stores were still allowed to exist in residential neighborhoods under zoning ordinances, they soon felt pressure from a revolutionary new way to buy groceries. In 1946, the first “big-box” grocery store was built in the city, on St. Claude Ave., near Elysian Fields. This, however, was not a typical big box development, but rather an adaptation to a changing environment by one of the most prominent corner stores in the city --Schwegmann’s Grocery and Bar.

Schwegman’s Grocery and Bar was founded in 1869 and housed in a typical New Orleans’ style two story corner storehouse on Piety and Burgundy Streets. Perhaps bracing for a changing environment, the Schwegman family opened a much larger, self-service shopping center with lower prices. In traditional grocery stores, proprietors had to fill orders for customers, but in the new Schwegman stores, customers were encouraged to fill up their own baskets. The new business plan was a success and by 1990 there were 7 Schwegman grocery stores listed in the directory for the city of New Orleans (Polk 1990). According to the website “New Orleans Past” the chain was sold in 1996 and has since closed its doors. In spite of the effects of the larger grocery stores on the more modest corner store, many smaller corner groceries still exist today.

### ***Summary***

In spite of changing development patterns in the second half of the twentieth century, corner stores have remained integral to many New Orleans neighborhoods. If unable to compete with the big box grocery stores, many corner stores remain open as bars, restaurants, or other business types. “In the Creole Faubourgs, the corner storehouse is still very much part of the neighborhood pattern. Corner groceries, skilled craft shops, restaurants and bars are the rule” (Toldeano et al. 1974: 77). How these businesses have survived is unclear, but it demonstrates their significance to the people of New Orleans. It may reflect the notion that not everyone moved away from urban centers during the period of urban flight and suburbanization, and many New Orleanians did not have the transportation needed to frequent the newer, larger grocery stores. Others may have felt attached to their local convenience store. Regardless of the reason, it is

significant that in spite of zoning policy and development patterns that have been threatening the existence of corner stores for the latter half of the twentieth century, many retain a commercial use today.

## CHAPTER 3

### ZONING OUT THE CORNER STORE

During the post-war period and the establishment of zoning to guide new development, older neighborhoods came under zoning ordinances no longer permitting neighborhood corner store buildings to house commercial uses. While a number of corner stores continue to operate as non-conforming uses, many have closed their doors, making it difficult to reopen with commercial uses. Since these buildings cannot be used for their intended purpose, they lose some of their intrinsic value and may face threats of abandonment or demolition.

Modern planning movements have a renewed appreciation for neighborhood businesses. With new planning and zoning revisions currently underway as part of post-Katrina planning in New Orleans, the corner store stands a chance to once again be recognized as an important part of neighborhood planning.

#### *Twentieth Century Planning and Zoning*

“For over a century there was this compatible mixture of residential property, both urban and rural, side-by-side with commercial and heavy industrial complexes. The balance remained relatively undisturbed until WWII; when economics dictated that agricultural and residential property give way to the encroaching demands of commerce (Toledano et al. 1974: 80). The first legal basis for zoning in the State of Louisiana came in 1918, with the passage of Act 27. This Act “allowed municipalities in the state to permit or prohibit the establishment and operation of businesses and trades within designated limits” (1918 LA Act 27; Villavaso 1999: 2). Therefore, this legislation encouraged the separation of business and residences. This prohibits corner stores to open without a zoning variance in areas that have been zoned residential after 1918.

Louisiana adopted a new State Constitution in 1921. This increased local governments’ additional regulatory power over land-use planning. Article 6 declared that

municipalities could "(1) adopt regulations for land use, zoning, and historic preservation, which authority is declared to be a public purpose; (2) create commissions and districts to implement those regulations; (3) review decisions by any such commission; and (4) adopt standards for use, construction, demolition and modification of areas and structures" (LA. CONST. art. VI, § 17; Villavaso 1999: 2).

Zoning was determined to be a legal and constitutional use of police power in 1926, when the U.S. Supreme court accepted the validity of the comprehensive zoning ordinance in the case "City of Euclid, Ohio vs. Ambler Realty Company" (272 U.S. 365, 390 (1926)). When the use of zoning was declared constitutional as an effort to protect the health safety and welfare of citizens, many more cities began adopting the use of land-use regulations.

Since the concept of zoning and land-use planning was new to many municipalities, the United States Department of Commerce created a *Standard State Zoning Enabling Act* in 1926 which provides a zoning model to cities along with a justification of the zoning concept. The act clearly states that zoning could be done in a way that did not violate the rights of property owners. Louisiana adopted a version of this standard act that same year (Villavaso 1999: 3).

One of the main purposes of zoning regulation is to ensure that residential areas remain safe places to live, with a quiet environment that protects the quality of life for the residents. Thus, current zoning laws were enacted, "protecting family spaces and neighborhoods against economic, social, and racial incursions" (Feagin 1989: 73-100). As new zoning was applied to existing neighborhoods, many properties that did not adhere to the new zoning became non-conforming uses. The intent was that by labeling a property as non-conforming, the owner would eventually be pressured to change uses to conform to the district in which the property was located.

### *Non-Conforming Uses*

In order to manage the non-conforming use in the zoning ordinance, some cities attempted to force a property owner to change their use immediately, while others gave a specific time period by which to conform to the use regulation. Overall, however, little was done to actually eliminate non-conforming uses in many newly developed zoning ordinances. “Existing non-conforming uses were left untouched, except by provisions prohibiting their repair after serious damage by fire, their renewal after a certain period of discontinuance, or their enlargement beyond the present building or premises” (Howard et al. 1942: 478).

New Orleans was one of the few cities to enact an “amortization” plan for non-conforming uses. Amortization refers to a plan by which the owner of a non-conforming uses is given a specific period of time in which to eliminate the use (Howard et al. 1942: 480 note 21). New Orleans attached a 15-20 year amortization plan to non-conforming buildings in the 1929 zoning ordinance. By this plan, most non-conforming uses would be phased out by 1949.

The legality of eliminating non-conforming uses was repeatedly challenged in courts nationwide, as many property owners viewed the process as a taking of property rights. Courts justified the process in many cases citing Eminent Domain and the protection of the health, safety and welfare of the community. The issue was addressed in the April 1942 edition of the Chicago Law Review, where amortization was praised as the only viable way to expunge these incompatible uses from the neighborhood. “Professional planners and city officials now recognize, however, that the fundamental problem facing zoning is the inability to eliminate the non-conforming use” (Howard et al. 1942: 479). Many viewed the non-conforming use as a detriment to the neighborhood.

Amortization plans were vulnerable to court challenges. One argument from property owners was that a previously standing non-conforming building which would



now have to be converted into a conforming use, would place financial hardship on the owner and potentially threaten the value of his investment. “The Court then recognized that the enforcement of such ordinances might result in great monetary loss to property owners” (Howard et al. 1942: 483). Similarly, corner store structures forced to conform to residential uses must alter the physical character of the building, potentially placing a hardship on the owner.

In the case of *Jones v City Of Los Angeles*, the court referenced such hardships. The case involved an existing sanitarium that had been zoned residential. The amortization plan in Los Angeles required Jones, the property owner, to shut down a sanitarium housed in his building, forcing him to either to sell or convert it to a residence. The use of the building as a mental institution was not compatible with the new zoning ordinance. The court acknowledged the difference between the “future value being reduced as a result of the necessities of city planning,” as opposed to the discountenance of an existing use (Jones V. State of California: 1930)

The findings of the Jones Case were as follows:

The court reversed the superior court's order that denied relief in an action by plaintiffs, owners of institutions that provided for the treatment of mental patients, which sought to enjoin enforcement of a city zoning ordinance that prohibited the operation of a sanitarium that cared for mental patients because the ordinance caused substantial injury and attempted to prohibit the operation of a business which did not constitute a nuisance. (L. A. No. 10654, Supreme Court of California, 211 Cal. 304; 295 P. 14; 1930 Cal. LEXIS 334: 1930)

This suggests that if operational businesses are forced to discontinue operations based on a zoning ordinance prohibiting such use, a hardship is placed upon the property owner. The existing use was not considered a nuisance by the court; therefore, the business was allowed to operate in spite of the zoning ordinance. This case has been cited in many cases involving the constitutionality of amortization plans which attempt to apply new

zoning to buildings previously allowed to operate with a certain use. In historic neighborhoods, the concepts of amortization and non-conforming uses are particularly pertinent because many structures were built prior to any zoning ordinances. The Jones case is important in that it involved a building built for a particular use, threatened to be unable to utilize the building for that use.

The owners were utilizing nonconforming buildings-sanitariums-for non-conforming uses. If the city had been allowed to suppress the use of an existing sanitarium, a portion the owner's investment in the structure would have been lost. The building could not be used for any other purpose permitted by the zoning ordinance-as a residence without major alterations. (Stanford Law Review 1955: 417; Jones v. California)

Similarly, corner stores were built for a particular commercial use, a use that is considered non-conforming or illegal in many of the neighborhoods in which they are located. A property owner who wishes to purchase or develop a corner store building may face significant hardships in conforming to a residential structure. This can have two effects: either the property owner cannot afford such alterations and therefore the property may lay vacant or be placed back on the market, or the property owner can invest in the building, possibly resulting in damaging the historic integrity of the structure. Because a number of these buildings are located within historic districts, inappropriate alterations can not only strip a property of its contribution to the district, but also negatively affect the integrity of the district as a whole. Therefore, it would be advantageous to the entire district to protect the historic integrity of these buildings. The best way to accomplish this may be through a zoning ordinance that protects the historic uses of these buildings.

### ***New Orleans Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance***

The comprehensive zoning ordinance currently in use for the city of New Orleans dates back to 1926. A revision in 1970 resulted in a Euclidean zoning ordinance, where use districts were designed to separate all incompatible uses. While this ordinance

ended the amortization that had been a part of the city's original CZO, it also threatened the corner store's ability to operate by establishing residential districts over many historic neighborhoods. The ordinance has caused many corner stores to be designated as a zoning classification of non-conforming use, and regulated these businesses as a way to ensure that neighborhoods remain "stable, safe, and with a high quality of life" (New Orleans CZO). The general rule states, "No building or land shall hereafter be used, and no building or part thereof shall be erected, reconstructed, converted, moved or structurally altered unless in conformity with regulations as set forth in this Ordinance, except as hereinafter provided (New Orleans CZO: Sec.13.1.1.). The main threat to any business functioning as a non-conforming use is the "*vacancy as discontinuance rule*".

No nonconforming building or portion thereof, or land used in whole or in part for nonconforming purposes, which hereafter becomes and remains vacant for a continuous period of six (6) calendar months shall again be used except in conformity with the regulations of the district in which such building or land is situated. The intent of the owner or other person to use a building or land for nonconforming purposes shall not be determinative of whether such building or land was vacant (New Orleans CZO: 13.2.1.)

If for whatever reason a business closes for a period of six months, that property can no longer operate with a non-conforming status. This was particularly significant after Hurricane Katrina, where many small business owners struggled to re-open after the disaster. There was an extension of non-conforming status from 6 months to two years to accommodate for these business owners, however many still were not able to meet the deadline and those properties were no longer allowed to operate as the non-conforming use without applying for a zoning variance.

For a business to re-open as a non-conforming use after having been closed beyond the time limit, the property owner would have to apply to the City Council for the zoning variance. According to the New Orleans Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance:

The City Council shall approve the application only upon determining that the proposed nonconforming use:

1. Is a legal nonconforming use as verified by the Department of Safety and Permits;
2. Is not more intensive than the prior nonconforming use;
3. Is consistent with the character of the neighborhood in which it is located; and
4. Will provide a needed service to the neighborhood in which it is located.

(Ord. 18,573 § 1 (part), adopted 1/8/98)

Legal non-conforming uses are determined based on the zoning district and approval from the Office Safety and Permits. For instance, an industrial use located within a residential district may cause harm to nearby residents and therefore would not be considered a legal non-conforming use. The second stipulation states that approved non-conforming uses may not be more intensive than the prior use. If a building was used for a commercial use in a residential district, it should not get approval to operate as a more intensive use, such as an industrial use.

The last two aspects of this ordinance bring to light the more political and subjective issues surrounding non-conforming uses. Determining the “character” of the neighborhood and whether or not it is a service is “needed” leaves room for decisions to be made without appropriate justification. Thereby, “local officials and neighborhood groups can intimidate owners of small commercial properties or lead to zoning changes being voted down” (DePasquale 2007). Neighborhood organizations can be very influential in zoning changes. Parking, alcohol, and noise complaints can prevent a commercial establishment from appearing in or near a residential district.

Decisions involving zoning variances may not necessarily reflect what is best for the quality of life in a community; rather they can be based on neighbors self interest and neighborhood feuds. “The dubious use-value concerns of affluent suburban homeowners have been enshrined in land law” (Feagin 1989: 84). This type of zoning separates not only uses, but also residents of different economic status. This can be complicated in

cities like New Orleans where neighborhoods include a diverse mix of residents, particularly in terms of race and income.

A zoning ordinance is an essential part of a well-planned city. The corner store is an example of the effects a traditional ordinance can have on the preservation of a city that developed prior the onset of zoning regulations. Conversion of use can have negative affects on the historic integrity of the building. Since alterations must be made in order to convert the use of the structure, a landowner may find it more effective to demolish the building and replace it with a residential structure. Buildings left vacant or abandoned may pose a risk to the surrounding neighborhood. “In addition to the dangers they pose, vacant and abandoned buildings often are signals of a neighborhood in distress or that is not a fit place to live. Such signals, in turn, discourage private investment, thereby stunting community growth” (USCM 2006: 10).



**Figure 5. A corner store at 939 Hillary Street being renovated into a residential structure.**

In spite of the negative effects an abandoned corner store can have on a neighborhood, corner store buildings have the potential to support stable, mixed-use neighborhoods attractive to new residents. They may also provide the stability to retain long times residents. The use of these buildings plays an important role in neighborhood

dynamics and helps to support a diverse urban environment. Although development after the WWII created neighborhoods built as single-use districts, the concept of mixing uses has resurged in the twenty-first century. This is advantageous for historic neighborhoods already built to house the mix of uses that are once again desirable.

### ***Mixing Uses in Twenty-first Century Planning***

The result of the city's long history is an urban mix not easy to analyze. However, the mixed uses present in every block are a major factor; the changes and adaptations the use goes through, shape the block much the same as land division and building changes may do. One can find a similarity in the shapes of blocks, esp. in their relative size, but it is the mixture of a church, a government office plus some apartments that is the striking quality here (Cohen 2001:302).

Historically, when transportation options were limited, it was imperative to have a mix of commercial and residential uses in order to sustain a business and provide for residents. This need can still be identified in the historic neighborhoods of New Orleans. The onset of an automobile oriented society set the stage for redeveloping land-uses as uniformly residential or commercial. "Once walkable and filled with small homes, downtowns were redesigned for driving and parking, and not living, so people who spent money in the shops under their apartments moved away" (DePasuale 2007). This spurred an economic decline in downtown areas and boom in suburban commercial strips. City zoning ordinances reflected this trend by establishing single-use districts for both new development and existing neighborhoods.

Some cities have begun a move away from strictly Euclidean zoning ordinances towards more specialized districts that allow diversity of uses. Overlay districts can work within an existing zoning ordinance, but allow exceptions for approved uses within the district. When used in historic neighborhoods, these districts have the ability of preserving character of neighborhoods that might not fit into the Euclidean zoning system. For example, the city of Solon, Ohio, for instance uses a C-1 Historic Commercial (HC) status in order to provide a "unique pedestrian friendly area that

advances community character master plan goals through the preservation and commercial use of existing historically significant structures” (The Zoning Code for The City of Solon. 83. 1275.01). For New Orleans, the application of a zoning classification similar to the C-1 district in Solon, could be a way to preserve the corner store buildings as commercial uses, and may result in better preservation of the character of these neighborhoods. This classification could be applied to businesses operating in historic buildings like corner stores. In addition, property owners of traditionally commercial buildings wishing to establish a business could request this zoning classification through an application process.

New Orleans adopted a similar zoning overlay district in 2002, the Residential Diversity Overlay District (RDO), designed to “allow a limited number of commercial activities and higher density residential uses in existing buildings” (New Orleans CZO: Ord. 20,692 § 1 (part), adopted 5/02/02). Aside from allowing increased residential density, the district also allows for coffee shops, food and grocery stores, small health service businesses, offices, and a variety of retail shops. These use exceptions are applied only to existing structures meeting four standards; the first three requiring the building be located on a corner lot, and the fourth being that it is clearly a non-residential building that historically housed a commercial use.

An RDO district can be applied to historic neighborhoods or areas of six blocks or greater. The district is considered a zoning amendment, applied to the Zoning District Map, and can only be established through an initiation by the City Council ((New Orleans CZO: Ord. 20,692 § Sec. 10.12.6). This means that a property owner or neighborhood association alone cannot initiate a zoning change that would allow for a diversity of uses in a residential district; the requirement of initiation by City Council limits the opportunities for use of this overlay district. In order to be more effective in creating mixed-use neighborhoods, the process of applying a RDO district should be less dependant on the City Council, and allow property owners and neighborhood associations to initiate the process.

A city like New Orleans has an advantage in already having these types of mixed-uses in older neighborhoods. Allowing the existing corner store buildings to house a business may help recreate the diverse and sustainable neighborhoods that existed prior to the sprawling development patterns of the post WWII era. Beyond the economic advantage, a corner store business can aid in restoring the social dynamics of neighborhood. The catastrophic effects of Hurricane Katrina disrupted many neighborhoods, and the corner store may have a role in the recovery and redevelopment of the city post-Katrina.

### ***Recovery Planning: Re-Mixing Uses in Historic Urban Neighborhoods***

Post-Katrina New Orleans has experienced a number of planning ventures focused on revitalizing damaged neighborhoods and remaking the city. In November of 2008, a historic citywide vote approved a change in the New Orleans city charter. The amendment gave the city Master Plan precedence in any development or land-use decision presented to the City Council. The creation of a Master Plan has been an enormous undertaking, and it is unprecedented in the history of planning in New Orleans due to the voter approval and the emphasis on community participation. The Master Plan was officially adopted by the city of New Orleans on January 26, 2010. The executive summary of the plan provides data on who has returned to the city, what they want in a neighborhood, and how local policies can shape the urban environment.

“New Orleans will be one of the most livable cities in America”, states the January 2010 version of the Master Plan. “Not by accident will New Orleans have become one of America’s most walkable, culturally rich, and intriguing cities (January 2010: 17). The master plan recommends capitalizing on recent trends that have made historic cities and neighborhoods more desirable to live in than the suburbs popular in the past, with the number of jobs and households in these areas steadily increasing, potentially resulting in a rise in population in urban New Orleans. “Instead of people following jobs, a reverse pattern emerged. Mixed-use, walkable environments claimed significant market premiums for housing, office, retail and other uses” (Ibid: 27). This is



compounded by “increasing national awareness of the health benefits of living in walkable communities; and a long-term increase in transportation energy costs” (Ibid: 27).

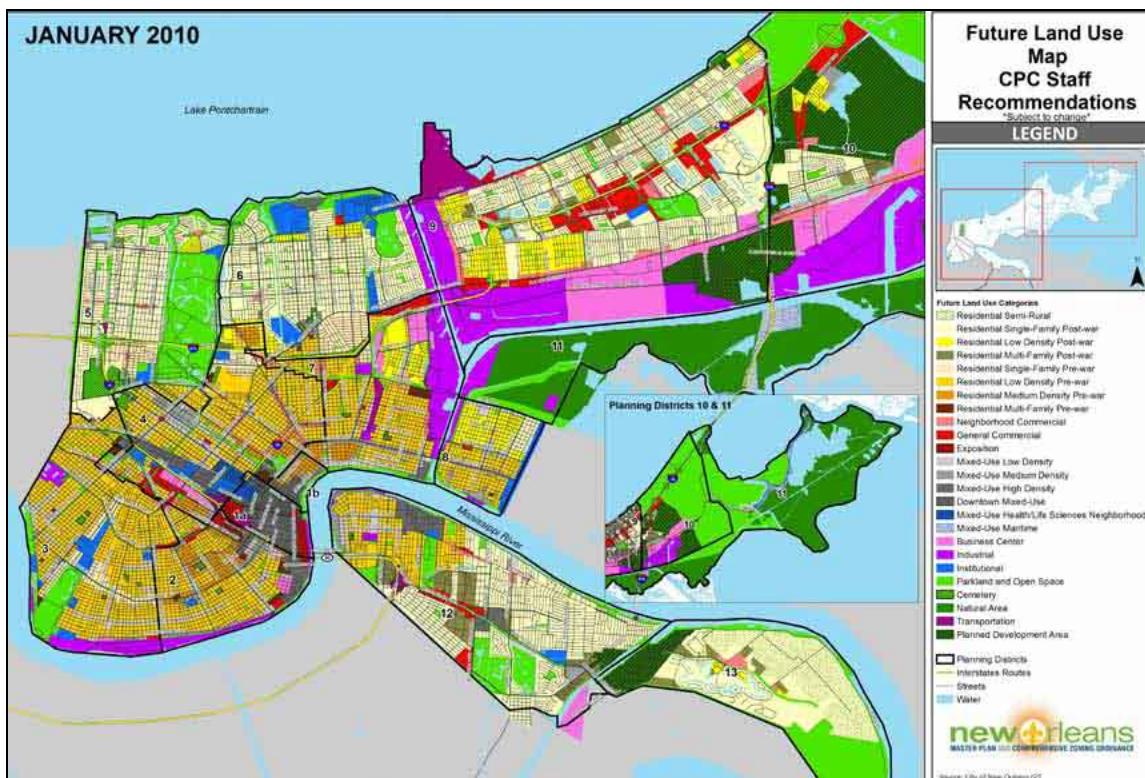
New Orleans faces a number of challenges in the revitalization of the city, however, with the Master Planning the city is well positioned to capitalize on recent shifts towards older, more diverse and pedestrian friendly neighborhoods. “Like other older American cities, the number of households in the city and jobs in the region is poised to increase significantly over the next two decades. This reversal of fortune is due to new demographic trends that favor historic cities and diverse communities” (Ibid: 19). The corner store is a large part of this dynamic. The key to accomplishing this goal is to create a policy framework that encourages this type of neighborhood, rather than prohibiting mixing uses based on an outdated zoning ordinance.

The Master Plan Executive Summary (2010) outlines 10 priorities for the city, with the first being the “Creation of a land use plan that preserves and enhances the quality and character of every neighborhood and district”(20). The Land-Use plan will lay the groundwork for a revised Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance (CZO) drafted for the city. “The Master Plan documents the defining qualities that characterize the city’s neighborhoods as the basis for design and development standards that will be drawn up during preparation of the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance” (Ibid: 31).

The Master Plan requires consistency in future land-use decisions based on the Land Use element. In other words, land-use decisions will have to be justified by referencing the master plan and must either reinforce or not interfere with the goals and policies established in the plan. “In practice this means that land use actions must reflect the distribution of land use categories, densities and intensities on the Future Land Use Map and be informed by the land use, urban design, and zoning principles in the Land Use Plan” (New Orleans Master Plan 2010: 31).

One of the main objectives of the Master Plan is to preserve the character of

neighborhoods, and an operating corner store may be a large part of this character. The Future Land Use Map that has already been drafted as part of the Land Use element does not provide any special zoning for corner businesses. Neighborhood commercial zones are business corridors located within or near residential neighborhoods (Figure 6). However, the executive summary does state that “community facilities, such as schools and houses of worship, are included within residential neighborhoods, and corner businesses that meet criteria can continue to operate” (37). The criteria for an approved neighborhood business would likely be similar to what is outlined in the RD-O district: food and beverage, health services, offices, limited retail. If allowed to operate within the zoning ordinance, these businesses would not have to operate as non-conforming uses, a status that can create difficulty if a property is sold, or for some other reason halts operations for 6 months or more.



**Figure 6. Future Land Use Map. Map by Goody Clancy for the Working Draft of the New Orleans Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance.**

The revision of the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance began with a number of public meetings held shortly after the Master Plan was officially adopted in January of

2010. A city-wide public meeting, followed by individual district meetings during the summer months of 2010, will give the CZO drafting team an idea of what residents want from a zoning ordinance, what kinds of businesses should be allowed to operate within neighborhoods, and how zoning variances should be treated when affecting a residential district. The timing may be perfect to create a CZO that reflects the changing desires of residents from single-use suburban developments, to more walkable, dense, and diverse neighborhoods.

What this means for New Orleans is that the city ordinance will finally move away from a Euclidean system that has guided development and land-use decisions for the latter part of the twentieth century. This could provide a new “lease on life” for the corners store. However, movements against neighborhood businesses that sell alcohol and processed foods, along with market pressures that have threatened the economic viability of small grocery stores, may lead to new types of businesses to operate within these buildings. If the neighborhood grocer cannot compete with the supermarkets and super centers common today, then developers of these buildings may look to businesses more compatible with modern neighborhoods. For instance, specialty shops, art galleries, bicycle shops, or a coffee house may be more appropriate neighborhood businesses in the modern era.

### ***Summary***

Corner stores were an important part of early development patterns of New Orleans. Limited mobility required that residents reside near businesses and other uses which are currently considered to be “incompatible.” Zoning began to be utilized in cities across the nation as a tool to protect the quality of life of residents. Louisiana adopted the 1926 Zoning Enabling Legislation, and New Orleans quickly adopted a zoning ordinance. The economy boomed after WWII and the city of New Orleans doubled in the amount of developed land. Zoning codes were used to guide new development, resulting in a segregation of uses in post-war neighborhoods. Historic districts, however, retained their neighborhood businesses under a zoning provision

called “legal non-conforming use”. As populations moved out of historic parts of town, neighborhood businesses could no longer compete with larger supermarkets and strip commercial developments. The automobile changed the way people traveled, where they lived and how they shopped, and these changes were reflected in zoning ordinances. New Orleans has had a zoning ordinance since 1926, and when it was revised in 1970, the city adopted a true Euclidean style CZO that separated uses into large districts.

Twenty-first century planning has developed a new focus on mixing-uses within neighborhoods. In 2002, New Orleans adopted a new zoning overlay district that would permit certain commercial uses in existing structures that were traditionally not residential, but located within residential districts. While this is an important step towards moving away from strictly separate use districts of the Euclidean System, its use is not widespread and establishing such a district can be a complicated and arduous process. The New Orleans Master Plan, adopted in January of 2010, will finally move the city towards preserving character of its historic neighborhoods by promoting walkability and a diverse mix of uses, a concept to be acknowledged by planners and promoted through development and land-use policy. The Master Plan will be charged with guiding land-use decisions, and this will largely be accomplished through the revision of the city’s Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance. While the corner grocer may no longer be a viable neighborhood business in a time where super markets dominate the grocery market, these buildings may be able to move towards a new type of neighborhood business, such as specialty shops, restaurants, or retail establishments, and will hopefully have a place to operate within the new zoning code.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CORNER STORE: SOCIAL INSTITUTION OR NEIGHBORHOOD MENACE?

The social significance of corner stores within neighborhoods has been recognized across the city of New Orleans. Many of these businesses have been owned by the same family for generations. Bars and nightclubs often sponsor local social clubs and provide a meeting place for neighborhood organizations. Historically, these stores provided entrepreneurial opportunities for small business owners, many of whom were new to the city. Today, however, corner stores may be viewed as a threat to the health and safety of nearby residents. It is important for planners to understand the social significance of these buildings and the neighborhood institutions they house.

#### *Neighborhoods*

New Orleanians identify with their neighborhoods to an extent unmatched in any other American city. More than three-quarters of the attendees at the 2005 Governor's Conference on Recovery and Rebuilding represented the fourth or later generation of their families to live in New Orleans, and many lived in the same neighborhood as their grandparents. The character of these neighborhoods defines the character of most of the city. (New Orleans Master Plan Executive Summary 2010: 31)

Corner stores have played a special role in the development of New Orleans. Many neighborhoods are identified by their local corner establishments. In 2010, the *Neighborhood Story Project* documented these local *Cornerstones*, through interviews and building documentation (Breunlin et al. 2008). Inspired by the role of these local institutions in reuniting people during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Rachel Breunlin, Abram Himmelstein and Bethany Rogers started the *Cornerstones* project. The project highlights the social significance of buildings, many of which house restaurants, bars, community centers, or other social institutions. While *cornerstones* are not limited to corner store buildings, many are housed in these structures. Those who frequent such establishments may remember how the buildings changed throughout the years.

Regardless of the type of business they have a uniting effect on the neighborhood. One such example is *Liuzza's by the Track*, a restaurant and bar housed in a corner store.

Abram Himmelstein interviewed Jimmy Lemarie, the co-owner of *Liuzza's*, about the building for the Cornerstones project.

This building is 80 years old. It was originally a grocery store, then a bar room. It was a restaurant off and on between the 70's and 80's, but the Liuzza family has always owned it. It represents a traditional neighborhood restaurant that used to be on most corners of the city (Breunlin et al. 2008: 28).

*Sportsman's Corner*, at the corner of Second and Dryades in Central City, is another cornerstone, which represents the role of local establishments in preserving the tradition of the *Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs* in New Orleans. These clubs were born out of a need for social insurance in black communities, many of which were denied access to traditional insurance. The groups pooled money together to help fellow members when they fell upon hard times. Corner stores and bars would often sponsor these groups and provide meeting places for members. Bethany Rogers interviewed Alfred "Bucket" Carter of the *Young Men Olympian's Social Aid and Pleasure Club* for the project. He spoke of the Sportsman's Corner and the role it played in his life and in the existence of the club. When asked if he thought Sportsman's corner was important to Young Men Olympian, Carter replied "I think it's really important...Weekends you see all the members around here. You can go around there and call role. Most of them will be there" (Breunlin et al, 2008: 23). Carter went on to credit *Sportsman's Corner* in helping to keep the parading tradition alive; for many of the clubs this was a usual stop on the parade route. These are only two of the seven cornerstones examined in the first volume of the series. All but two are situated on corner lots, and all represent the "intersections of people and places that make New Orleans great" (Breunlin et al. 2008).

Corner stores also played a unique role for many other cultural groups in the city. Due to its role as a port city, New Orleans hosted a number of immigrants from diverse

backgrounds. Some came to New Orleans ready to begin a new life by opening their own business establishment. Certain immigrant groups became successful opening operating businesses houses in corner stores. In particular, the Italian population commonly opened dry goods grocery stores and restaurants. “By 1937, over 76 percent of the 740 Italian-American-owned business in New Orleans dealt with the preparation, retailing, or wholesaling of food or beverage” (Campanella 2006: 332).

Likewise, other immigrant populations made their niche in the New Orleans small business world. “As hand laundering businesses helped distribute Chinatown denizens throughout New Orleans, corner grocery stores played the same role for Sicilians in Little Palermo” (Campanella 2006: 328). These populations contributed to the diverse culture of New Orleans and helped to define the local neighborhoods.

### ***Convenience and Safety***

Aside from social significance, corner store establishments play an important physical role in a neighborhood. Corner lots were ideal for a mixed-use property with a larger area abutting the street allowing for more entries. The placement allows for a transition from block to block, and successfully draws the focus from four separate blocks to a single intersection. Such intersections could range from housing a single corner store to four separate establishments. This phenomenon is not merely a New Orleans one, since it seems that locating a commercial establishment on a corner makes good planning sense. Jane Jacobs observed in her native New York City, “Bookstores, dressmakers, and restaurants have inserted themselves usually, but not always, near the corners” (Jacobs 1961:240). These corner lots receive foot traffic from various directions, potentially creating more opportunity for sales. In turn, these businesses can provide a security feature to the neighborhood. Jacobs argues that sidewalk safety is directly related to abundance of foot traffic. Additionally, business owners act as impromptu security guards by having their eyes on the street at all hours of the day. “Stores, bars and restaurants, as the chief examples, work in several different and complex ways to abet sidewalk safety” (Jacobs 1961: 46).

Corner stores also provide a convenient location to shop, eat or drink, while simultaneously fostering a personal relationship with residents and their neighborhood. When residents are forced to travel long distances, they may lose that personal relationship with the establishments they frequent. “When distance inconvenience sets in, the small, the vivacious, and personal wither away” (Jacobs 1961:192).

Some planners argue that a well-planned neighborhood should provide an option for residents to access basic necessities. This creates a sense of safety, convenience, and a personal relationship with the neighborhood. Proximity increases availability of basic necessities without the use of the automobile. “Residents should be able to reach supermarkets, drugstores, and cleaners without struggling through traffic. Better yet, they should be able to walk. Every trip to a store should not be a major expedition” (Miller and Orfield 1998: 249).

### ***What Makes a Neighborhood?***

The post WWI economy in the United States sparked decades of increased reliance on the automobiles creating neighborhoods planned without the slightest concern for being able to walk anywhere. The automobile began to rule post-war development and therefore the need for the corner store has all but disappeared. In the 1960’s, Jane Jacobs took a close look at American cities and the effects of automobiles and suburban development on both the built and social environments of the city. Along with her contempt for the idea of Euclidean zoning, Jacobs believed that planners were successfully killing our cities by creating new developments with no regard to what makes a neighborhood a positive functioning entity. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs preached four main aspects to effective neighborhood planning:

1. Foster lively interesting streets;
2. Make streets a continuous network;
3. Use parks, squares, and public buildings;
4. Emphasize a functional identity.



Planners and developers, according to Jacobs, were ignoring these aspects of a neighborhood, thereby failing to create a positive living environment. Instead, neighborhoods were designed for vehicular traffic, with large blocks and dead end streets, preventing inter-connectivity. Public spaces were often left out of the development process entirely. Jacobs emphasized the importance of a functional identity, which could be fostered by mixing primary uses.

The district, and indeed as many of its internal parts as possible, must serve more than one primary function; preferably more than two. These must insure the presence of people who go outdoors on different schedules and are in the place for different purposes, but who are able to use many facilities in common. (Jacobs 1961:198)

Primary uses include stores, restaurants, barbershops, etc., many of the uses housed in a traditional corner store building. Therefore, reviving the corner store may assist to foster effective and functional neighborhoods. However, Jacobs was quick to dispute the idea that including a corner store would save a neighborhood. When confronted with projects from planners who interpreted her theory of commercial diversity as reserving room in neighborhood developments for the corner grocery, she refers to this as the “corner-grocery gimmick.” This is a “patronizing conception of city diversity, possibly suited to a village of the last century, but hardly to a vital city district of today” (Jacobs 1961:248). While the corner-store may not be the secret to revitalizing a neighborhood, the traditional corner store in New Orleans has proven to be a part of the rich history of the city and the fabric of its historic neighborhoods. Planners and preservationist in the city should be aware of the significance of these buildings and their role in neighborhood preservation. By not allowing them to operate, New Orleans runs the risk of abandoning one of its important cultural and historical traditions.

### *Corner store Critiques*

In spite of the social significance of the corner store, not all residents may enjoy corner bars and liquor stores. Corner stores can be associated with neighborhood crime and face legitimate arguments that they negatively impact the quality of life of a neighborhood.

## *Crime*

There are residents adamantly against the corner store because of the associated safety risks. A 2006 survey conducted by Tulane University of 1,073 residents examined neighborhood recovery priorities. Residents rated twenty-four neighborhood traits, and those that were the most desirable were given a five (5). “Preventing crime, providing street lighting, creating good schools and making neighborhoods more pedestrian-friendly are among the priorities of New Orleans residents” (Warner, Times Picayune: July 2006). Grocery stores were important, ranking 4.11, however, with an average score of 3.16, corner stores were considered by residents to be a less desirable neighborhood trait.

Corner stores can be viewed as a haven for drug dealing, underage drinking, and other criminal activities. A corner grocery in the west Carrollton neighborhood, *Jake’s Corner Grocery*, has been at the center of one such debate. Jakes is located at the corner of Spruce and Dante Streets that sells many items including dry goods, cigarettes, and alcohol. The neighborhood has become attractive to middle class residents who have found historic New Orleans homes at relatively affordable prices. However, crime in the area has increased and many residents are worried about their safety.

An article in the Times Picayune on May 1 2007, describes an incident where a man was critically wounded while in his vehicle outside of Jake’s Corner Grocery (Charpentier 2007). The culprits were two young black men on bikes, who neighbors attest to having seen ride away from the store immediately after gunshots were fired. For the residents of this part of the Carrollton neighborhood, Jakes is the problem. A post in response to the article stated that a resurgence of crime in the neighborhood corresponded with the reopening of the store after Hurricane Katrina. Crime associated with Jake’s is not only a post Katrina occurrence. Residents reported that similar problems existed before the storm, but these were taken care of when the owner hired a security guard for the premises. Other residents, however, were careful not to blame the corner store itself,

arguing that the area has little access to food stores and an attempt to close down the business would not solve the problem, and may have other unintended consequences.

Having a safe neighborhood is a priority for most residents. However, how to accomplish this may contradict other neighborhood interests. In spite of the perception that corner stores feed criminal activity, fighting crime in a neighborhood starts with putting eyes on the street. According to Tom Farley of the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, "Other features that may reduce crime rates are designs that bring responsible adults onto the street, such as sidewalks, or that bring them into eye contact with the street, such as placing transit stops in front of busy retail stores" (Warner 2006). Preservation of the corner store would preserve the walkability and pedestrian atmosphere many residents of historic neighborhood desire.

### ***Healthy Corner Store Initiatives***

Another critique of the corner store is that their presence encourages unhealthy diets as many corner stores only carry processed foods, alcohol and tobacco. Historically in New Orleans, corner stores were only permitted to sell dry goods; fresh produce and meats were sold at local markets.

In 1853 cheap groceries meant something different from today's notion of it. The idea that a corner store could undersell its larger competitors was based on its distinction from the public marketplace. The city reserved a monopoly on the sale of perishables for its public markets nearly to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A corner store could sell only the "groceries" which meant dried, canned, bottled, and otherwise preserved foodstuffs. These were still less costly than the farmed rents and fixed prices of the fresh vegetables, fruits and meats at the public markets (New Orleans Notarial Archives Plan Book 64, Folio 10).

Today, however, public markets are not as common as in the mid-nineteenth century and groceries have come to mean more than preserved food. Corner-grocers and convenience stores are being criticized for not offering healthy food options. The Rand

Corporation conducted a study on a neighborhood in Los Angeles, one where convenience stores are much more prevalent than standard grocery stores. The study found there was a link between obesity and the number of convenience stores in a neighborhood. The study results suggest that these stores only carry “junk” foods and foster bad nutritional habits. In 2009 the city of Los Angeles considered limiting the number of convenience stores allowed to operate in the city’s neighborhoods (PRI 2009).

A study published in 2009 by the Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics was the first of its kind to document the types of food inner city children purchased at the corner grocery stores in proximity to their schools. A five-month observation period followed by analysis of the data concluded “purchases made in corner stores contribute significantly to energy intake among urban school children” (Borradaile et al. 2009).

However, the New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee is working towards come up with a solution. The committee is comprised of non-profits and research institutions and focus on improving access to fresh and health foods for all residents of New Orleans. Since corner stores are more prevalent in lower income areas, and many residents rely on their existence to purchase food and basic necessities, the city should encourage these stores to carry healthier food rather than simply force them to close their doors.

Neighborhood corner stores are a frequent point of food purchase for low-income New Orleans residents. If these stores sell only alcohol, tobacco, and calorie dense snack foods, they detract from the health of their surrounding neighborhoods. But if they stock ample amounts of healthy foods, particularly fresh fruits and vegetable, they can contribute to their communities in positive way. Providing these operators with incentives and support to carry more fresh fruits and vegetable and other healthy foods makes sense for the health, and economic viability of the surrounding community (NOLA Food Advisory Committee 2007: 9).

Another recommendation made by the committee is to prioritize security for supermarkets and grocery stores. The Committee recommends creating a Food Retail Crime Prevention District to address security issues food retailers face (Ibid: 13). If the corner stores were to expand food options to promote healthier diets, they could become a part of the security district, which may help to reduce associated crime.

Nationally, there is also a movement to encourage healthier food in corner stores. The *Healthy Corner Store Initiative* (HCSI) is a national initiative sponsored by a non-profit, *The Food Trust*, whose goal is to both educate students about making healthy snack choices, and to partner with corner store owners to increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables (The Food Trust 2004). Encouraging corner stores to carry fresh, healthy foods may help to not only improve the image of these businesses to residents, but also to make corner stores an important part of stable, diverse, and attractive historic neighborhoods.

### ***Summary***

There are a number of reasons why New Orleans should consider preserving the corner store. These buildings are a part of the neighborhood character that should be maintained through planning and land-use rather than made non-conforming by an outdated zoning ordinance. Additionally modern planning practitioners promote the concept of neighborhood businesses and their role in creating sustainable and walkable communities.

The Urban Mix component we call “use”, is meant to be an indicator of the way people use their cities, and at what comparative intensity...Uses have a tendency of a comparative high rate of change. They are the easiest to be influenced by municipal by-laws and regulations. It is clear, however, that the use by people is the life quality of a place, and its asset in many respects. Nonetheless, it is also tied to land and to buildings. (Cohen 2001:300)

Use is often tied to a building just as that building is connected to a neighborhood. The New Orleans corner store is significant to the city both physically and culturally. If these buildings cannot be used for their intended purpose, they face an immense threat of irreversible alterations or complete demolition. This not only strips the buildings of their social and physical significance, but it also damages a part of the neighborhood fabric that made New Orleans a unique and diverse city.

New Orleans residents have shown great respect for their historic neighborhoods, and many tourists visit the city attracted by these unique enclaves. The corner store is a significant part of the social fabric of these neighborhoods. There are a number of reasons why these buildings have been abandoned, converted to residences, or demolished; changing social environments of the twentieth century including population shifts and new ways of grocery shopping made possible by automobile ownership made residents less dependant on the corner grocer, and zoning ordinances compounded these trends by establishing single-use districts, often in historic neighborhoods which had traditionally had a mix-of uses. In spite of the forces that threatened the viability of the corner store, and the common critiques, many neighborhood businesses retain a social significance to neighborhood residents. Today corner stores can either be seen as a signal of neighborhood stability, or sign of criminal activity. The perception of the corner store has changed in the twentieth century; however, corner stores may be able to be redefined if allowed to operate within New Orleans' updated CZO, and can become an attraction to residents who desire more walkable, livable, and diverse neighborhoods.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESEARCH DESIGN

An examination of the history of New Orleans development, its zoning ordinances, and the social significance of the corner store, has shown that citywide trends have affected these neighborhood businesses. A case study of the Black Pearl in Uptown New Orleans will provide detailed data on the corner store in order to illustrate these influences within a neighborhood. The study addresses when and at what rate these businesses began to decline, the types of businesses operating in the neighborhood at certain points in time, and how this corresponds with the larger trends outlined in the former chapters. The case study begins with a history of the Black Pearl neighborhood followed by basic demographic data to identify shifts in population, socio-economic status, and race. The research then focuses on the corner businesses, using historic Sanborne maps to identify buildings and their use periodically from the end of the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. City directory information provides data on the type of neighborhood businesses that existed in the Black Pearl. Then a brief history of each corner store building currently standing demonstrates how their function and relationship to the neighborhood has changed.

The Decennial Census provides demographic information for the neighborhood. This data is available at the tract level on the Census website, and also through the website *Social Explorer*. This information is useful in determining trends such as population shifts or gentrification within the neighborhood. It is important to analyze this data alongside the trends in corner store establishments to understand if there is a relationship between the demographics of the neighborhood and the number of operational corner store businesses. The Sanborne maps will help to identify during which time periods corner stores were prevalent and approximately when these buildings changed uses or were demolished. These maps are useful because they identify addresses and uses of structures and show a detailed footprint of each structure.

City directories from specific years can provide more detailed information as to the types of businesses housed in the corner stores of the neighborhood. Soard's trade directories were published early on in the city's history, and organized listing by business types. Polk City Directories were published yearly, and by 1938 are cross-listed by address. Addresses are listed in order by street so listings for every building in the Black Pearl are easily assessable. Polk Directory data will be used on approximate ten-year intervals to see the changes in businesses or listings of the corner store buildings.

Following the historic research, a survey of the neighborhood today identifies exiting corner store buildings, whether they are vacant, residential, or utilized as a neighborhood business. Tax assessor's data will provide additional data on property values, dates of sale, and zoning classification, assisting in determining if property values are stable.

This research is intended to identify historical and current trends in the existence or redevelopment of corner store buildings in the Black Pearl, and connect what happened in this specific neighborhood to what was occurring citywide. Looking at demographics, building and use histories, and property data on extant corner stores may identify these trends more, and how they have changed role of these buildings within the neighborhood, and potentially the entire city. The result is to suggest that corner stores be made more of a priority in neighborhood preservation, and can be an advancement towards the Master Plan's goal of New Orleans becoming one of "America's most walkable, culturally rich, and intriguing cities" (Master Plan 2010: 17).



## CHAPTER 6

### FINDINGS

The findings of this case study tell the story of the Black Pearl neighborhood of New Orleans, and how the transformation of the corner store within the neighborhood corresponds to citywide development trends. It begins with its history of diverse working class residents, to its unique building stock, and the frequency of corner lots on which sit a corner store. Demographic data shows how the neighborhood has changed during the twentieth century in terms of population, race, housing tenure, and income. A series of snapshots in time of the Black Pearl neighborhood identify the number and type of corner store establishments that existed historically. This section is based on data collected from the Polk City Directories and Sanborne Fire Insurance maps. Finally, the existing corner store buildings of the Black Pearl are highlighted through a brief history of the businesses housed in these buildings, and what their current uses are. The descriptions of the buildings include when they were built, how their uses changed, and their exiting condition.

#### *The Neighborhood*

The Black Pearl neighborhood is bounded by St. Charles Avenue, Lowerline Avenue, and the Mississippi River and is part of the Carrollton National Register Historic District (Figure 7). It was an area settled by servants of the nearby St. Charles mansions and plantation homes (Figure 8). The neighborhood is typical of early development in New Orleans. As wealthier residents moved upriver along St. Charles Avenue, lower and middle class residents moved towards the interior blocks of the neighborhood.

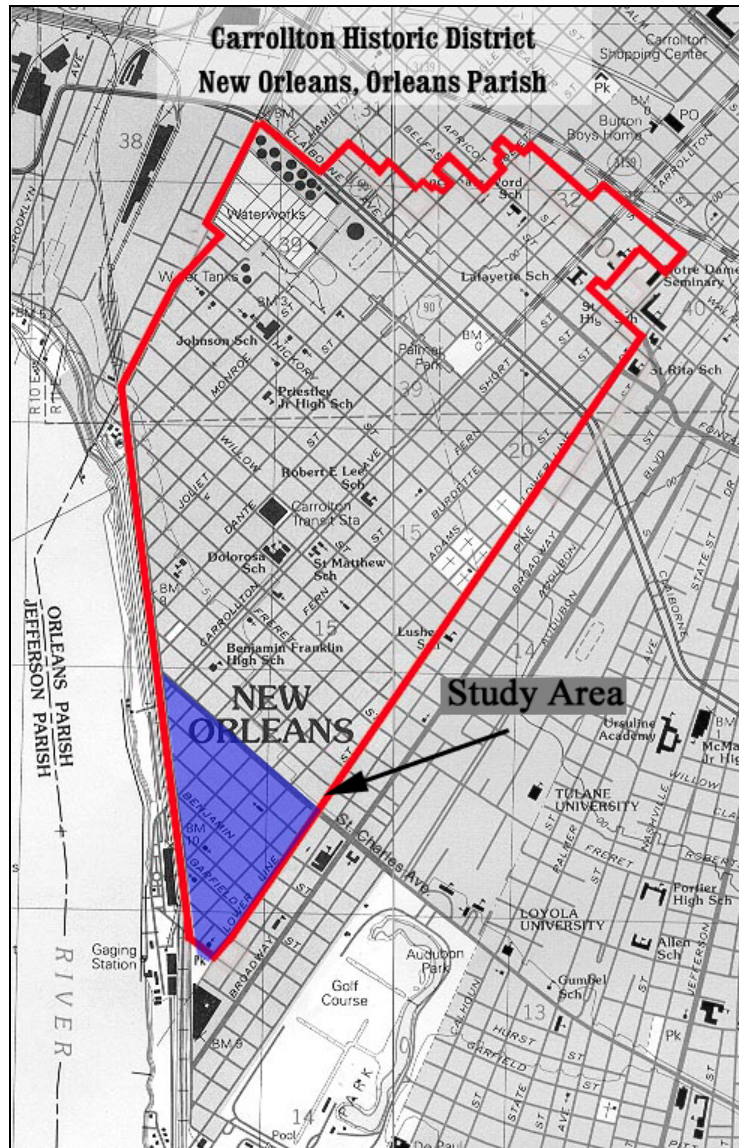


Figure 7. Black Pearl Study area on Carrollton NRHD Boundary map (NRHP 1998).

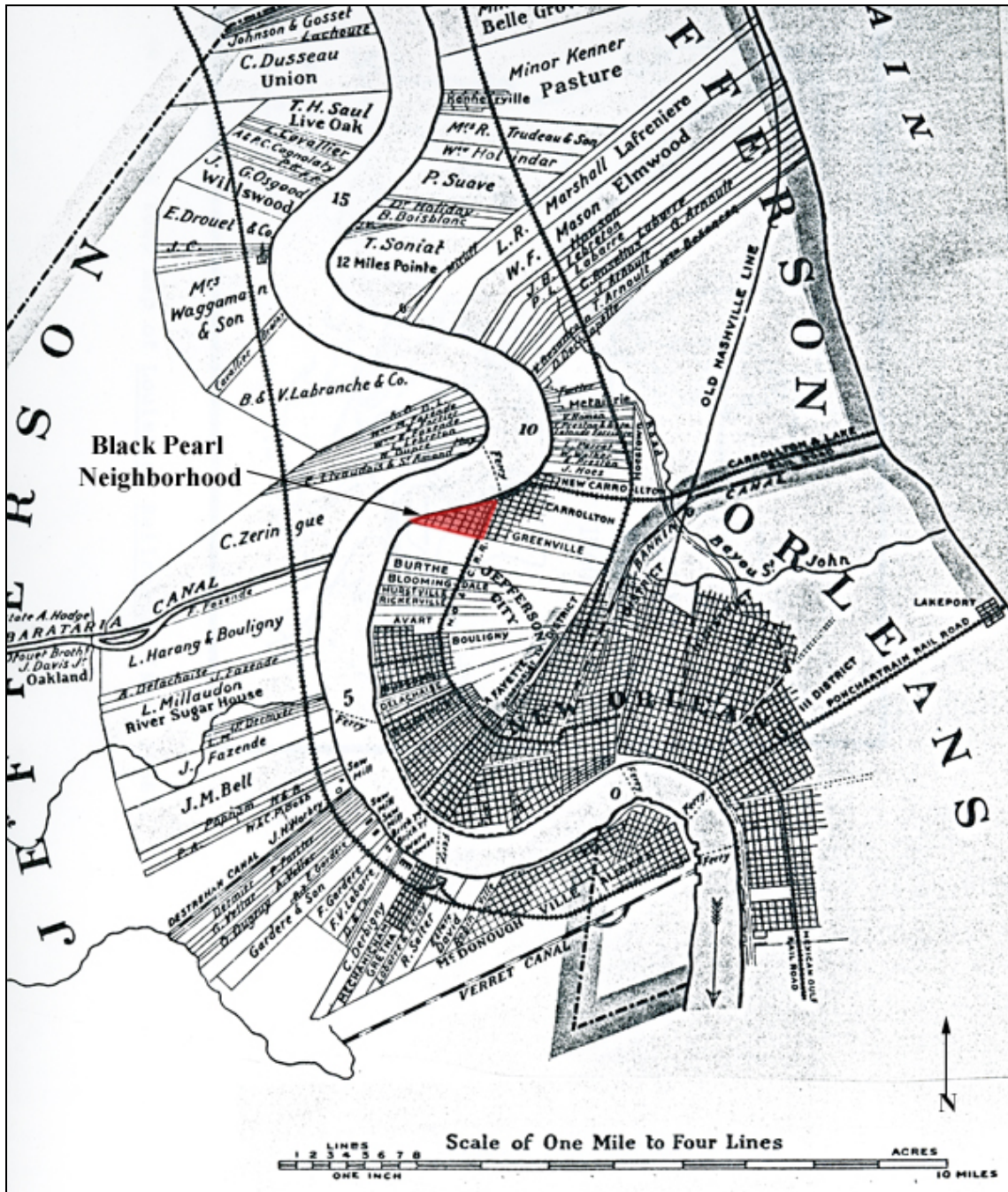


Figure 8. Excerpt form Norman's 1858 *Plantations on the Mississippi River From Natchez to New Orleans*. Black Pearl neighborhood and North arrow added.

This neighborhood is situated along the upper most section of the St. Charles Avenue, at the river bend where Carrollton and Saint Charles Avenue meet (Figure 8). Known as “the River Bend”, this is the location of the old town of Carrollton. Carrollton consisted mainly of plantations and dairies during the nineteenth century. However, with



the rise in population weighing on the space of New Orleans, Carrollton became a getaway for wealthy landowners, especially during the hot summers. With the utilization of the streetcar, anyone could make the trip to the new town of Carrollton. By 1870, New Orleans had annexed Carrollton and it subsequently became a very affluent suburb. Servants moved along with their wealthy employers and had to live close by. The Black Pearl represents one of these “cores” of low-income working class people located inside the modern boundaries of the National Register Historic District (NRHP 1998).

### ***Demographics***

The earliest available demographic data at the census tract level is from 1940. Prior to 1940, the Black Pearl was part of a larger census tract; therefore the data is not specific to the neighborhood. Census tract 125 outlines the Black Pearl neighborhood, bounded by St. Charles Avenue, Lowerline Street, and the Mississippi River. In 1940, the total population of the Black Pearl was 3,062 (Table 1). The neighborhood was majority black at the time with 51.7% of the population. There were a total of 948 housing units with a vacancy rate of 3.7% (1940 U.S. Census Comprehensive Report, *Social Explorer*). The owner occupancy rate was of 18.8%, well below the state’s average of 36.9%. By 1960, the population of the Black Pearl rose slightly to 3,354. The percentage of black residents also rose slightly, to 62.2%. There were 1,145 housing units with a vacancy rate of 4.1%.

By 1990 there was a shift in the demographics of the neighborhood that reflect the move into new suburbs, change in household size, and the city’s troubled economy. The city’s economy struggled due to the fact that “New Orleans did not diversify and entered the 1980s more dependent than most American cities on federal aid. The dual impact of the oil and gas bust and declining federal funding devastated the city’s economy after 1985. (Master Plan 2010: 24). The population of the Black Pearl fell dramatically between 1960 and 1990, to only 1,781 residents. “While New Orleans’ population had declined from its 1960 peak and some of this loss stemmed from “white flight,” much of the decline reflected shrinking household sizes rather than an absolute drop in numbers of households” (Master Plan 2010: 25). The percentage of black versus white residents in

the neighborhoods was nearly even, with 49.1% and 49.5% respectively. As would be expected with such a population decline, the vacancy rate of the Black Pearl rose to 16.31%. However, the percentage of owner occupied housing was 30.6%. Income level data is available for this census tract, and in 1990, the median household income in the black pearl was \$15,742. In 2010 dollars, this is equivalent to a yearly income of \$27,891. Citywide trends between 1980 and 1990 reflect a decline in the number of households in the decade between 1980 and 1990 and “median family income fell by more than 12% in comparison to median income for the United States as a whole. The vacancy, blight, and poverty that evoked so much concern before Katrina stemmed largely from this decade of stagnation” (Ibid: 25).

In 2000, the population stayed near 1990 levels, with 1,772 residents living in the neighborhood. There was an increase in the percentage of white residents, from 49.5 percent in 1990 to 58.07% in 2000. Only 37.30% of the neighborhood population identified themselves as black in the Census. The owner occupancy rate rose again to 33.12%, and the vacancy rate declined to 12.96%. Income data for the neighborhood reflects a median household income of \$28,370, equivalent to \$36,597 in 2010 dollars.

The demographic shifts in the neighborhood may suggest that the Black Pearl lost a lot of its population between 1940 and 1960. Lower population levels may affect the viability of neighborhood businesses, as there were simply fewer people to act as consumers. However, an increase in median household income between 1990 and 2000 may suggest that there is an increase in expendable income to support more local businesses. There has also been an increase in the percentage of white residents in the neighborhood historically identified as a predominately African American. The neighborhood did not experience flooding during Hurricane Katrina, however, the effects the storm had on the population of the neighborhood cannot be determined until data from the 2010 Census is released.

**Table 1: Black Pearl Demographic Data: Census Tract 125**

	1940		1960		1990		2000	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<b>Total Population</b>	3062		3354		1781		1772	
<b>White</b>	1478	48.30%	1,258	37.51%	882	49.52%	1029	58.07%
<b>Black</b>	1584	51.70%	2,087	62.20%	873	49.02%	661	37.30%
<b>Total housing units</b>	948		1,142		1054		1,111	
<b>Owner Occupied</b>	178	18.80%	(no data)		323	30.64%	368	33.12%
<b>Vacant</b>	35	3.69%	47	4.10%	172	16.31%	144	12.96%
<b>Median Household Income (2010 dollars)</b>	(no data)		(no data)		\$27,891		\$36,597	

Compiled by author base on:

1940 and 1960 data from Social Explorer, Comprehensive population report, New Orleans Census Tract 125.

1990 and 2000 data from Decennial Census, SF1 and STF 1, tables P1 population, P3 Race, H1 housing, H3 occupancy, H4 tenure, and income data from SF3 table P53.

Due to its location on the Mississippi River's natural levee, the neighborhood experienced no flooding during Hurricane Katrina; therefore the population of Black Pearl should be more stable neighborhood between 2005 and 2010 than a neighborhood that faced flooding during the storm. There is one corner store still operating, which will provide insight as to how residents view its role in the neighborhood. A close look at the corner stores in the neighborhood between 1895 and today Black Pearl will provide an insight into how corner store buildings have changed throughout the twentieth century and whether these are circumstances of changing neighborhood priorities, a population shift, or a product of government land regulation.

### ***The Black Pearl: 1895-1920***

The period from 1895 to 1920 represented the rise of the corner store in New Orleans, as they began to take the grocery market from the public marketplaces, capitalizing on the development of ice and the ability to sell perishable goods. During this period there were nine corner stores on the nineteen squares that comprise the Black Pearl neighborhood (Figure 9, Table 2). Two stores were located on St. Charles Avenue, but none were located on Lowerline Street. The majority of the stores or other commercial establishments were located in the interior blocks. These stores and bars were likely frequented by the working-class community who lived in the backstreets, beyond the mansions of St. Charles.

The citywide trend from markets to small neighborhood grocers is reflected in the increase in corner stores throughout the period. The 1908-09 Sanborne maps depict 13 stores, including two mixed-use buildings and a drug store (Figure 10). The 1920 Soard's Trade Directory lists four of these stores as grocers, including two at the intersection of Cherokee and Garfield (Anne) Streets, Peter Hoffarth's Grocery and Elliot Comeaux's Grocery. Also Percy Backes Grocery at Burdette and Pearl, and Frederick Neibaner at 401 Adams's street. While not located on a corner, Albert Tuchon's Meats was located at 7461 Benjamin Street contributing to the diversity of uses in the neighborhood. Meat stores like this one were only able to exist because of the production of ice, and the location of corner grocers and meat markets made them a more convenient than the geographically dispersed municipal markets.

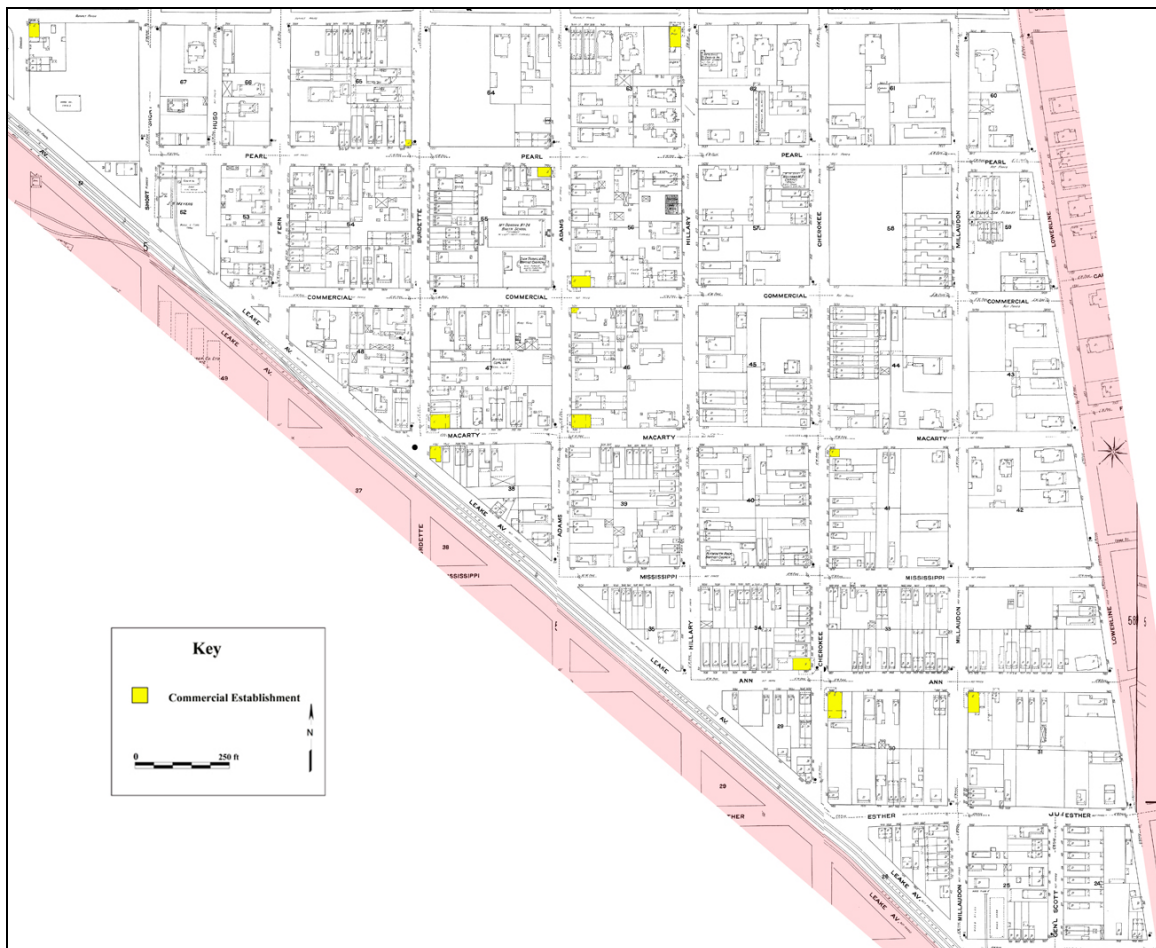


**Figure 9. 1895-96 Sanborne Map showing 7 corner grocers and 1 drug store (ProQuest 2008).**



**Table 2: Summary of Corner Store Buildings and Uses**

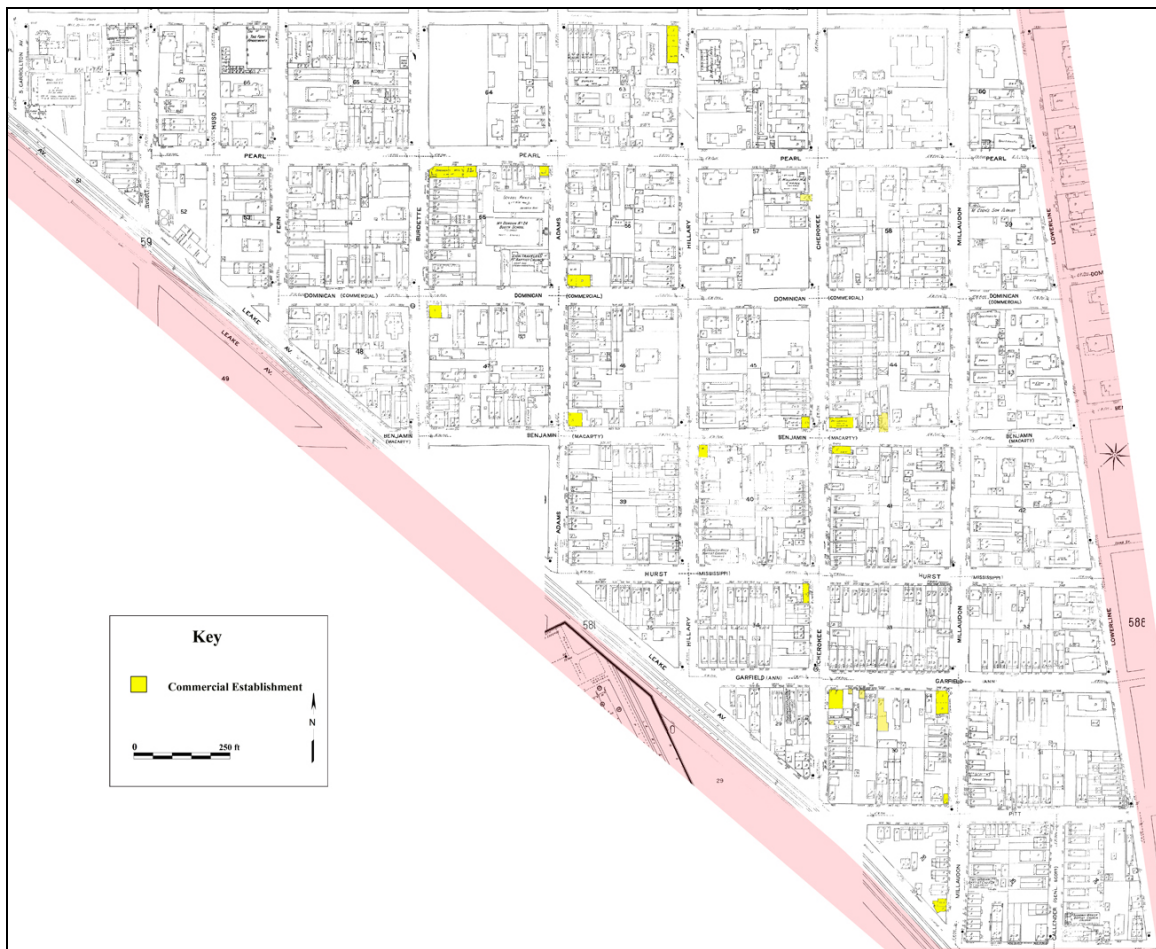
Number	Street	1895 (Sanborne)	1908-09 (Sanborne)	1920 (Soard's)	1930 (Soards)	1937-51 (Sanborne)	1940 (Polk)	1949 (Polk)	1958 (Polk)	1969 (Polk)	1980 (City Directory)	1990 (City Directory)	2005 (July Directory)	2010 (Survey)
301	Adams St.	Vacant	Store	No data	No data	Mixed-Use: store/dwelling	Theresa Meier Dry Goods	Residential	No listing	Residential	Residential	Residential	Residential	Residential
401	Adams St.	Store	Store	Nienaber Frederick grocery	Liuzza Jasper Grocery	Mixed-Use: store/dwelling	Herbst Harold M drugs	Cardinale Wm Grocery	Bill's Grocery	Bill's Grocery	Bill's Grocery	James Grocery	James Grocery	Vacant
436	Adams St.	Store	Store	No data	Cali Michl grocery	Mixed-Use: store/dwelling	Rofer Fred Grocery and Meats	Cassard Chas Grocery	Mary Ellen's Food Store	No listing	No listing	No listing	No listing	demolished for school
301-03	Burdette St.	Store	Store	No data	No data	Old building- dwelling	Residential	Residential	Residential	Vacant	Residential	Residential. (303-no return)	No listing	Residential
335-37	Burdette St.	Old building- dwelling	Old building- dwelling	No data	Zinser Emilie Grocery	Store	Firman Ilbert Grocery	Residential. Gagliano Jas	Gagliano Jas grocery	Vacant	Residential	No listing	No listing	new Residential structure
435-39	Burdette St.	Store	Old building- dwelling	Backes Percy R grocery	Backes Percy R grocery	Condiments Manufacture	Backes Percy R Grocery	Residential	Vend-o-matic vending machines	No listing	No listing	No listing	No listing	demolished for school
159	Cherokee St.	Old building- dwelling	Store	No data	Paternostro Luke Grocery	Store	Dixie Tavern Liquors	Dixie Tavern	Dixie tavern beer (owner butler)	Dixie tavern	Dixie Tavern	Residential	No listing	new Residential structure
200	Cherokee St.	Old building- dwelling	Store	No data	No data	Vacant	no listing	No listing	Residential	Residential	Residential	Residential	Residential	Residential
277	Cherokee St.	Store	Store	No data	Lapuyade Louis jr. Meats	Store	Lapuyade Louis jr. Meats	Lapuyade Louis jr. Meats	Triangle Tavern	Mitchell's Bar	Jade Lounge	Vacant	Residential	Residential
300	Cherokee St.	Old building- dwelling	Old building- dwelling	Peter Hoffarth Grocery	No data	Store	John Fandel Grocery	Fandel John A grocery	Cherokee Cash Grocery	Vacant	Magnolia and Elie's Lounge	Sexton Lounge	Residential	Residential
301	Cherokee St.	Old building- dwelling	Old building- dwelling	Comeaux Elliot L Grocery	Hill G H Inc. Grocer	Dry Cleaning	Hill G H Inc. Grocer	Earl's Cleaners	Earl's Cleaners	Broadway Cleaners	Self Service Laundromat	Self Service Laundromat	No listing	Lot
428	Cherokee St.	Old building- dwelling	Store	No data	No data	Store	Solito Dominick Shoe Repair	Solito Dominick Shoe Repair	Cherokee Shoe Shop repairs	Cherokee Shoe Shop	Residential	Apartments	Residential	Residential
265	Hillary St.	Old building- dwelling	Old building- dwelling	No data	No data	Store	Milazzo Salvatora Grocery	Milazzo Salvatora Grocery	Milazzo's Food Store	Milazzo Food Store	No listing	No listing	No listing	Lot
7600	St. Charles Ave.	Old building- dwelling	Drug Store	No data	No data	Mixed Use- store/dwelling	Hartman Chaz E Grocery & LaFargue Cleve A Meats	Breen's Rexall Drug Store	Lorenza Rexall Drugs	No listing	No listing	John Jay Beauty Salon	John Jay	John Jay Beauty Salon
140	Millaudon St.	Store	Old building- dwelling	No data	No data	Store	No listing	Pat's Liquor Store	Pat's Package Liquor	Butler's Bar and restaurant	Butler's Bar and restaurant	Butler's Bar	No listing	Vacant-for sale
200	Millaudon St.	Old building- dwelling	Old building- dwelling	No data	No data	Store	No listing	No listing	No listing	No listing	No listing	No listing	No listing	Residential
7446-48	Garfield St.	Old building- dwelling	Old building- dwelling	No data	Frank Gannuch grocery	Mixed Use- store/dwelling	Didier Franics L Grocery	Didier Franics L Grocery	Didier's Food Store	Didier Food Store	Singleton's Mini-Mart and Grocery	No listing	No listing	Singleton's Mini-Mart and Grocery
237	Millaudon St.	Vacant	Store	No data	No data	Old building- dwelling	No listing	Richard Miller Contractor	Residential	No listing	No listing	No listing	Residential	new Residential structure
7443	Pitt Street	Vacant	Old building- dwelling	No data	No data	Store	Landry John Grocery	Landry John Grocery	Braud's Food Store and grocery	Vacant	Vacant	Ms Z Beauty Salon	Residential	Residential
8040	St. Charles Ave.	Store	no data	No data	No data	Gas Station	Harmeyer Service Station	Harmeyer Service Station	Harmeyer service station	Esso gas station	No listing	park place Exxon station	St Charles Vision	New commercial building



**Figure 10. 1908-09 Sanborne Map now depicting 9 corner grocers and 1 drug store**

### ***Black Pearl: 1920-1950***

The trend towards neighborhood grocers continued at the beginning of the period, but society faced a number of challenges as the city witnessed the effects of two world wars and a great depression. During this period, the number of corner stores in the neighborhood peaked. The Sanborne map for this period spans from 1937-1951 (Figure 11). Between 1937 and 1950, the map depicts 21 commercial buildings in the neighborhood, 17 of which are situated on the corner of the street. Of these 21 commercial buildings, 18 are identified as “stores”, one being a drug store, and there is also a Laundromat, gas station, and condiments manufacturer.



**Figure 11. 1937-51 Sanborne map showing 14 corner grocers, 1 gas station, and 1 Laundromat.**

More detailed data is available from this period from city directories that list entries by address rather than business type or name. The 1940 Polk City Directory provides a thorough list of all businesses in the neighborhood during that year (Table 3). The directory lists nine groceries, a drug store, a shoe repair shop, a meat store, and a gas station. This period saw the addition of a liquor store, Dixie Tavern Liquors at Cherokee and Garfield, and Julia Soniats' Restaurant. Most of the grocers were small businesses owned by individuals illustrated by the names of the establishments: Theresa Meier's Dry Goods, Harold Herbest Drugs, Ilbert Firman's Grocery, and Salvatora Millazzo's Grocery.

<b>Table 3: Polk Data Summary Table</b>							
	<b>1940</b>	<b>1949</b>	<b>1958</b>	<b>1969</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2005</b>
<b>Grocery</b>	10	6	7	3	2	1	2
<b>Drug Store</b>	1	1	1	--	--	--	--
<b>Liquor Store</b>	1	1	1	--	--	--	--
<b>Restaurant</b>	--	--	--	1	1	--	--
<b>Bar/Lounge</b>	--	1	2	2	3	2	--
<b>Other</b>	3	4	4	3	1	4	2
<b>Lot Converted to Residential</b>	1	5	3	2	5	5	7
<b>Unlisted/Vacant</b>	4	2	2	9	8	8	10

Data From New Orleans Polk City Directory

In 1940 there is one grocer that stands apart from the others, H.G. Hill, Inc., a corporation with 94 corner groceries throughout the city (Polk Directory 1949). This signifies a new trend from family owned corner grocers, where the rear of the buildings was utilized as a residence for the owner's family, to corporately owned businesses. These corporations were likely able to supply groceries at cheaper prices if by purchasing in bulk, threatening the small-scale grocer. In 1949, there are only 6 grocers listed in the city directory, and one drug store, but a total of 16 commercial buildings, including two liquor stores (Table 3). Mrs. Rebecca Clark's Restaurant had replaced Julia Sonitas' by this year. The cleaner and shoe repair, gas station, and meat store remained. The H.G. Hill store no longer existed in the neighborhood by 1940, but the trend towards new corporate grocery stores was only beginning. The dominant grocery market was taken over by Piggly Wiggly Bros., of which there were seven in the city of New Orleans. H.G. Hill was either sold to Piggly Wiggly, or there was a joint ownership of the company, as the headquarters, listed at 1001 S. Broad Street, bore the name of both companies at the time. These stores were a new type of big box grocery store, and one located at 7457 St. Charles, just across the St. Charles neutral ground from the Black Pearl neighborhood, appears in the 1949 Polk City Directory. This coincides with post-war period, where population boomed, the economy was strong, and people were moving into suburbs and relying more and more on the automobile. This bigger grocery

store may have played a role in the declining number of corner groceries located in the neighborhood, as residents were now able to drive to supermarkets and return home by car with a large amount of inexpensive groceries.

### ***Black Pearl: 1950-1980***

This period saw a dramatic shift in urban and economic development throughout New Orleans. It was also during this time that a few grocers began to dominate the market and build larger and fewer self-service grocery stores. The result is a declining number of corner grocers and shift in the types of neighborhood businesses. The directory from 1958 provided data for this period, as '59 and '60 data were not available. In 1958 there were seven grocers listed in the city directory, along with one drug store, two liquor stores, and Pearl's restaurant at 7474 Garfield Street (Table 3). By 1969, there are only three grocers listed in the city directory in the Black Pearl neighborhood. Bill's Grocery was located at 401 Adams' Street, a location continually housing grocers since 1895, and the Millazzo food store was still operating at 265 Hillary St. Francis Didier's food store was also still in operation, located at 7446 Garfield. Other commercial establishments in the neighborhood included four bars or lounges, a laundry mat, and Williams' Place restaurant at 7474 Garfield St.

In 1970, that New Orleans completed the first revision of its Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance. The ordinance, which is still in effect 2010, was tailored to the new lifestyles and development patterns of the post-war era. Separation of uses was the rule when developing this Euclidean based zoning document, and large single use districts were established over many historic neighborhoods including the Black Pearl. Now considered non-conforming uses, many corner stores faced threats of losing commercial use permits if there was a discontinuance of use. In addition, the zoning restrictions created a difficult environment for any future development of these buildings as commercial businesses.

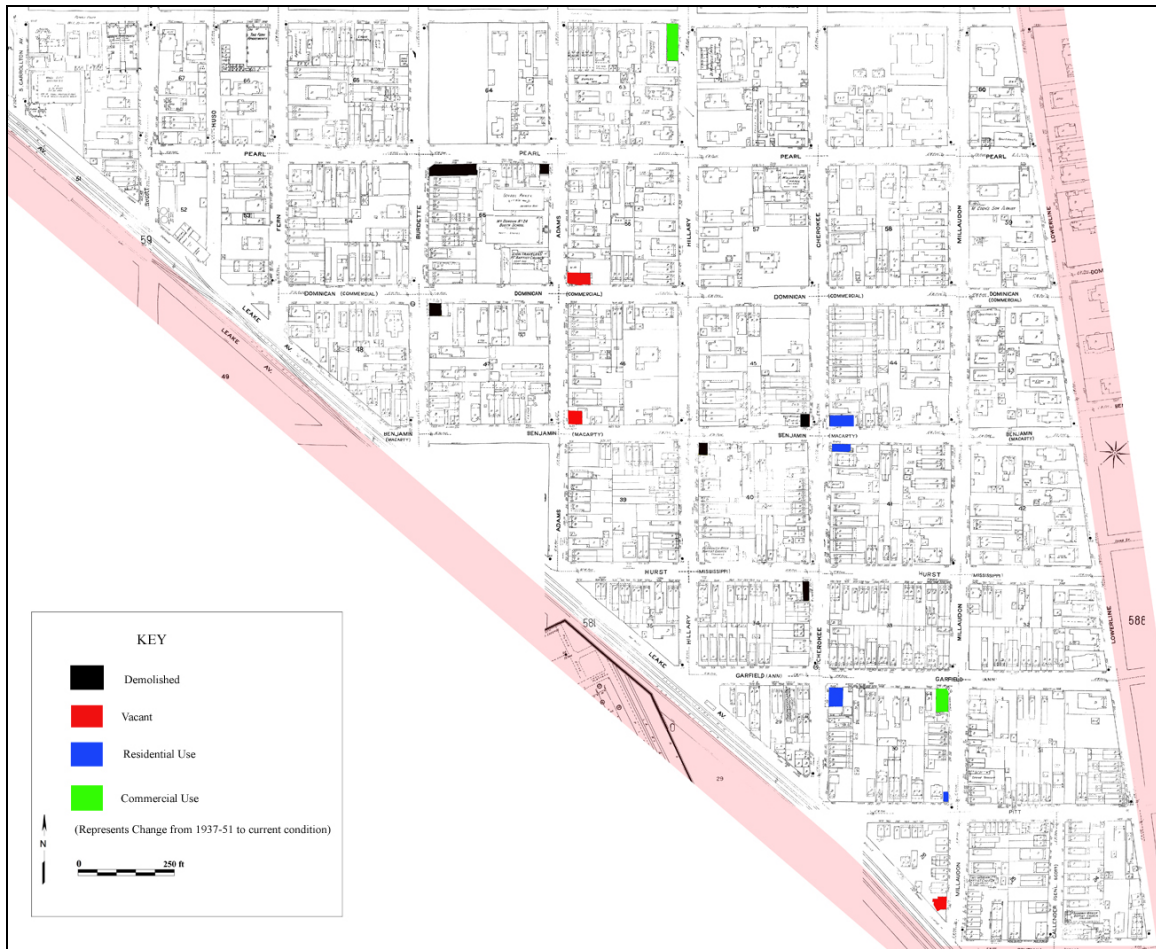
### ***Black Pearl: 1980-2005***

Trends threatening the corner store have continued during this period, and these buildings still face uncertainty as to their ability to operate commercially within the zoning ordinance. By 1980 there were only two remaining corner grocers in the Black Pearl, Bill's Grocery at 401 Adam's St., and Singleton's Mini-mart, located in the old Didier Food Store at 7446 Garfield Street. Both of buildings had housed operating grocers since the buildings were constructed c. 1920. Also appearing in the 1980 directory is one restaurant, three bars, and a dry cleaning business. Five of the lots had been converted to a residential use and eight are unlisted in the city directory for 1980. By 1990, there is only one corner grocer listed in the directory, James' Grocery at 401 Adam's St. At the time, the neighborhood had two bars, and four other commercial uses. The number of residential corner lots and unlisted lots remains the same as in the 1980 directory. By 2005, there remains only one grocer listed, James' Grocery. By July of 2005, seven of the lots had been converted to residences and ten lots were unlisted or vacant.

During this period, the majority of corner grocers had closed their doors and other businesses were in decline. The existing corner grocers may have survived by shifting their business towards "po-boys" sandwiches or other prepared foods that big box grocers did not provide. Other surviving businesses also changed to fill new markets, such as the bars, restaurants, and a beauty salon.

### ***Black Pearl: Today***

In 2010, only one commercial corner store remains in operation in the Black Pearl neighborhood, Singleton's Mini-mart at 7446 Garfield Street. Five of the remaining corner store buildings are now used as residences. Two are for sale and currently vacant. Of the 17 corner stores identified on the 1937-51 Sanborn map, 6 have been demolished and left either as empty lots or replaced by new residential structure.



**Figure 12. Existing conditions of corner stores that appeared on the 1937-51 Sanborn, showing that 2 are operational, 3 vacant, 4 converted to residential, 2 empty lots, and 6 demolished and redeveloped residences.**

The remaining corner grocer has likely survived because it offers something the super markets cannot: convenient location, prepared foods with local flair, and a social connection to the neighborhood. Residents may frequent the store multiple times a day for cold drinks, hot food, or simply to connect with their neighbors. This one remaining corner grocer can strengthen the sense of community in the neighborhood by providing a sense of diversity, walkability, and livability that the newly adopted Master Plan recommends. While there are existing zoning tools which could potentially permit more of these types of businesses, like the Residential Diversity Overlay zoned used elsewhere in the city, the Black Pearl neighborhood does not currently have that zoning privilege.

A revised Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance, however, has the potential to solidify a place for these businesses within the neighborhood.

### ***The Buildings***

There are currently eight existing corner store buildings in the Black Pearl neighborhood. The following section details the story of each of these structures, from when they were built, what businesses were housed, also whether they became vacant, or converted to residences, or, in the case of one, still a thriving corner store business. Information on each building was obtained from the Orleans Parish Assessors Office (OPAO), which provides the legal description of the buildings along with property vales, dates of sale, and owner information.

These buildings are classified within a, RD-2, or two-family residential, zoning district (Figure 13). An analysis of the corner store buildings and their current use will reveal whether these buildings have conformed to the zoning district in which they reside, or are operating as non-conforming uses. Zoning regulations may have had an effect on the ability of the neighborhood businesses that historically existed in the Black Pearl to continue operations in the second half of the twentieth century.



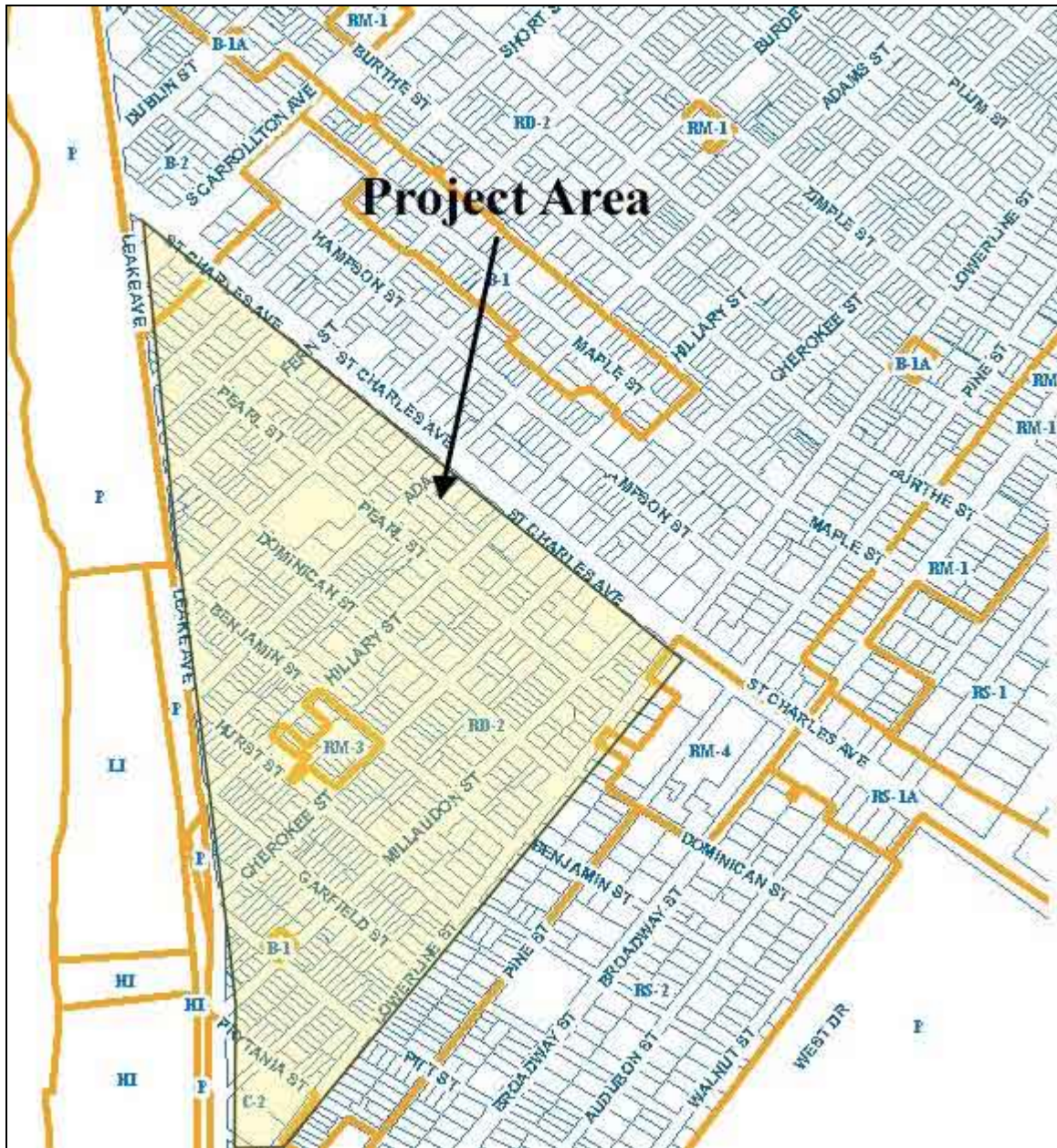


Figure 13. Project area on City of New Orleans zoning map (Source GNOCDC).



**Figure 13: Residential corner store buildings at 300 Cherokee Street.**

Built c. 1920, the building at 300 Cherokee Street was first listed in the 1920 Soard's directory as Peter Hoffarth's Grocery (Figure 13). It does not appear on Sanborne maps from 1895-96 or 1908-09. In both the 1940 and 1949 Polk directories, it is listed as John Fandel's grocery. By 1958, the name of the store changed to Cherokee Cash Grocery. In 1969, the building is listed in the directory as vacant, but was reopened by 1980 as Magnolia and Ellie's Lounge. In 1990 it was listed as Sexton's Lounge, but by July of 2005, it had been changed to a residential use. It was sold in July of 2005 to Artisan, Design and Build, LLC for \$319,000 and remains residential today (OPAO 2010).





**Figure 14: Residential corner store building at 7443 Pitt Street.**

The building located at 7443 Pitt Street originally appears as a store in the 1937-51 Sanborne maps (Figure 14). In the 1940 and 1949 editions of the City Directory, the building is listed as John Landry's Grocery. By 1969 the building is listed as vacant, and remained vacant through 1980. In 2007, the building was sold for \$313,000 (OPAO 2010). With a residential zoning status, it has been converted into a rental property. The property had lost value, based on property assessment, each year since the purchase in 2007 (OPAO 2010).



**Figure 15. Residential corner store building at 277 Cherokee Street.**

Most likely built c. 1920, the building at 277 Cherokee Street first appears on the 1937-51 Sanborne maps (Figure 15). In the 1930 city directory, the building is listed as Louis Lapayade Jr.'s Meats. This business remained open through the 1949, but by 1969 has been converted to Mitchell's Bar. In 1980, the building is listed as Jade's Lounge. In 1990, it was listed as vacant, and in July 2005 was listed as a residential building. In spite of its conversion to a residence, the building retains its clip entry and wrap awning, an important architectural detail of historic corner stores. However, with replacement windows and other non-historic elements, it is unclear whether the building can be considered a contributing element to the historic district.



**Figure 16: Vacant corner store at 140 Millaudon Street.**

The building at 140 Millaudon Street was likely erected c. 1930, the building first appears as a store in the 1937-51 Sanborne map (Figure 16). In the 1940 City Directory, the building housed Pat's Liquor store. By 1969, the building was Butler's Bar. The bar was open until approximately 2003, and has been vacant since. ADGA Management Enterprises purchased LLC the property in 2007, for a price of \$0 (OPAO 2010). The property is again listed at an asking price of \$164,000 (mls # 77065). The condition of the building is poor, and a number of alterations affect its eligibility within the historic district. Nearly all of the original wood clapboarding has been replaced with more modern plywood, and the side addition certainly affects the historic integrity.





**Figure 17: Residential corner store building at 157-159 Cherokee Street.**

The structure at 157-159 Cherokee Street was likely built c. 1900, and first appears on the 1908-09 Sanborn maps as a store (Figure 17). In the 1930 Soard's directory, the building is listed as Luke Pasternostro Grocery. By 1940, the business changed to Dixie Tavern Liquors, remaining Dixie Tavern until at least 1980. The property was sold in 2003 for \$47,000 (OPAO 2010). Between 2008 and 2009, the value of the property nearly tripled, from \$58,900 to \$145,300 and it is being utilized as a residence. In spite of its conversion into a residential structure, this building retains many of its architectural details: the wrap balcony, full-length windows on the second floor, and the cornice over the main doorway. While the windows appear to be replacements, this building likely to retain enough of its historic integrity to be a contributing element to the historic district.



**Figure 18. Residential corner store building at 301 Adams Street.**

This corner store cottage located at 301 Adams Street first appears as a store on the 1908-09 Sanborne map (Figure 18). It is listed in the 1938 Polk directory as Meier Theresa's Dry Goods. By 1949, the building was listed as residential, and remains that use today. It was last sold in 2002 for \$51,360, and currently has an assessed value of \$125,000 (OPAO 2010). This building is in poor condition, and has undergone alterations threatening its historic integrity. However, a number of original windows remain, and the original wood cladding is visible beneath the aluminum siding. With some restoration, this building could easily ensure its status as a contributing element to the historic district.





**Figure 19. Vacant corner store at 401 Adams Street.**

A commercial building appears at 401 Adams Street as far back as the 1895 Sanborne maps (Figure 19). In 1920 it was listed as Frederick Nienaber's Grocery. In the 1930's Soard's, it is listed as Jasper Liuzza's Grocery. It was either rebuilt or altered between 1909 and 1937, as the structure in the early Sanborne maps appeared to have been a cottage with a wrap awning. On the 1937-51 Sanborne, it is listed as a mixed-use store with a dwelling in the rear. The 1940 Polk directory lists the building as Harold Heberst's Drugs. The 1949 listing is William Cardinale's Grocery. By 1958, it became Bill's Grocery and remained that through 1980. The 1990 city directory lists James' Grocery, which it was still listed as in July of 2005. The store did not return after Katrina and was sold in November of 2006 for \$170,000 dollars (OPAO 2010). The property remains vacant in 2010. The building may be considered a contributing element to the historic district since few alterations have been made since it was used as a corner store. The building is in poor condition and the windows have been altered, however, restoration of the store would likely ensure its contributing status.





**Figure 20. Singleton's Mini-Mart at 7446 Garfield St.**

Built c. 1925, 7446 Garfield Street has been listed as a store since the 1930 Soard's directory when it was Frank F Gannuch's Grocery (Figure 20). The 1940 Polk Directory lists this building as Francis Didier's Grocery, which it remained, but later as Didier's Food Store. In 1980 the store was first listed by its current name of Singleton's Mini-Mart. However, the building is unlisted in the 1990 and 2005 city directory. It was sold in 2004 for \$52,500 to its current owner (OPAO 2010). Singleton's Mini-mart is still in operation today and the building is now valued at \$250,000, as a mixed-use, commercial and residential structure, but is officially zoned residential. While this building is the only remaining corner grocer in the neighborhood, the physical characteristics of the building have been altered and it may no longer retain its historic integrity. However, it still represents an important part of the neighborhood, as the store is popular and frequently visited by local residents.

## *Summary*

Corner Stores began to appear in the Black Pearl neighborhood since 1895. These corner commercial establishments were located towards the interior of the neighborhood, often multiple at one intersection. Early businesses only sold dry goods until the development of ice at the turn of the century. The number of corner grocers increased during the first half of the twentieth century, with a peak of thirteen corner stores identified on the 1937-51 Sanborne Map. The 1940 Polk Directory lists ten corner grocers, but these numbers begin to decline between 1950 and 1958, with other uses such as liquor stores and bars becoming more prevalent. The first gas station appears in the neighborhood around 1940, and is no longer listed by 1980. Also disappearing by 1980 are a number of the businesses in the neighborhood, with only 2 grocers listed and a total of only 7 commercial buildings. This trend continued through 2005.

This decline in the number of businesses corresponds with the demographic data that suggests the neighborhood saw great population loss between 1960 and 1990. Coincidentally, this era was when the gas station was in operation, signaling what may have been a cause of the population decline. During this period many residents relocated from historic neighborhoods of New Orleans into new developments like Gentilly, Lakeview, and New Orleans East. Many others relocated to nearby Jefferson, St. Bernard, and St. Tammany Parishes. Household size may have decreased at the time as well, adding to the decline in population that may have affected the ability of corner stores to retain enough business to operate.

Today, two of the existing corner store buildings remain vacant and for sale, eight have been converted to residential buildings, and 6 have been demolished. Vacant buildings may negatively affect the surrounding property values, and buildings converted to residential uses potentially causing them to lose their contributing status to the Carrollton National Register Historic District. Only one of the eight buildings reviewed is undoubtedly a contributing element to the historic district. The other seven have undergone alterations, threatening their historic integrity, and jeopardizing their contributing status to the Historic District.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to illustrate trends in New Orleans that affected the viability of neighborhood corner stores. Changing development patterns shifts in population, and the emergence of big box grocery stores all affected the ability of the corner store to operate within neighborhoods. Corner commercial lots were an important part of early planning in New Orleans, as they were an efficient way to utilize the city's limited high ground. They served the commercial needs of multiple blocks, concentrated activity onto intersections rather than residential blocks, and left the avenues free for lavish residential structures. While corner stores became popular with the production of cheap ice, allowing consumers to rely less on public markets, they faced decline in the second half of the twentieth century. This is likely due to a combination of market pressures from bigger supermarkets, zoning restrictions separating residential from commercial structures, and population shifts out of historic neighborhoods into suburbs. It may also be a result of a changing perception of how the corner businesses fit into the neighborhood fabric. Fears that corner stores bring crime and promote unhealthy diets have prompted neighborhood residents to oppose zoning variances that may allow these businesses to operate. In spite of these negative perceptions, many locals identify with particular corner stores as social institutions, and it is clear that the social significance of these buildings is far from gone, even as the numbers decline. Corner stores still represent cornerstones, reflecting the character of a neighborhood and its inhabitants.

A case study of the corner stores located within the Black Pearl was conducted as part of this research in order to illustrate how and why the prevalence of the corner store changed in New Orleans. Research suggests that corner stores have existed in the Black Pearl neighborhood at least as early as 1895. Historic maps and directories show that corner grocers were the most common use for these buildings, but the number of grocers began declining in the post war era. Bars, liquor stores, and restaurants become more common after 1950, but by 2010 there were only three businesses in the Black Pearl, only

one of which is housed in a traditional corner store. Demographic data suggests a steep decline in population between 1960 and 1990, creating a challenging environment for corner stores who rely on a stable population to support business. At this time the population shifted from majority black to majority white. Between 1990 and 2000, median incomes of households in the neighborhood rose along with the owner occupancy rate. This could mean that existing residents have more income that could be spent in neighborhood businesses.

As the neighborhood changes, the role of these corner store buildings may once again change. After a series of post-Katrina recovery plans, New Orleans has adopted a Master Plan for the city. In November of 2008, citizens voted to approve giving the Master Plan the legal power to guide land-use and development decisions in the city. A draft of the Master Plan was completed after a series of citywide and neighborhood meetings. The plan sets forth a number of goals for the city, including promoting mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods. Revitalizing the corner store as a viable neighborhood business can be a step towards accomplishing this goal. Part of the planning process is a revision of the city's Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance. The updated CZO will reflect the goals of the master plan, and the new zoning classifications will hopefully acknowledge the significance of the corner commercial building to the neighborhood.

There is currently no place in the zoning ordinance for the corner store, and it has for decades been classified as a non-conforming use. In 2002 a Residential Diversity Overlay district was added to the zoning tools for the ordinance, allowing for certain businesses to operate in historically commercial structures. However, this overlay zone can only be applied to multiple city blocks and must be initiated by a city-council member. Streamlining the process for neighborhoods and allowing for other avenues to initiate the establishment of such a district would One way to preserve the corner commercial use through the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance would be to consider a new zoning category, like Historic Commercial (HC), which could be utilized for specific lots and be initiated by a property owner rather than a city-council member. This could

encourage investors to purchase vacant or abandoned corner stores and revitalize them as neighborhood commercial establishments.

While the Black Pearl is in many ways a typical New Orleans neighborhood, this research does not necessarily reflect what has occurred elsewhere in the city. However, citywide trends in development, population, and changing shopping habits have affected the ability of the corner store to operate in the Black Pearl, and it is likely that these trends similarly affected other neighborhoods in the city. Future research could examine corner stores in other New Orleans neighborhoods, particularly those that utilize zoning tools such as the Residential Diversity Overlay District, to see if zoning tools have been effective in preserving the use of these neighborhood businesses.

Revitalizing the traditional corner store can restore a sense of pride and identity to historic neighborhoods that traditionally housed a number of businesses and services. Corner stores have played an important role in the history and development of New Orleans' neighborhoods. Even as the number of these commercial businesses declined in the twentieth century, many of the buildings have remained. While a few have survived as operational businesses, others have been converted to residential uses. Many others remain vacant and face threats of abandonment. In a city that takes pride in preservation of its historic buildings, it is imperative that New Orleans retain this part of its' the historically built environment and rich cultural history.

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