

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Karnofsky Tailor Shop/Residence, New Orleans, Orleans Parish, LA

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

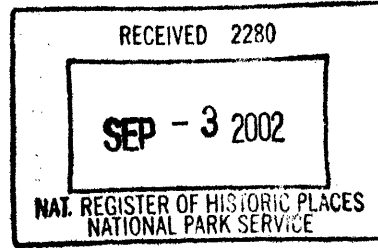
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Karnofsky Tailor Shop/Residence

Other Name/Site Number: Model Tailors

1162



2. LOCATION

Street & Number 427-431 South Rampart St.

Not for publication: NA

City/Town New Orleans

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: Orleans Code: 071

Zip Code: 70112

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: Statewide: Locally: X

Jonathan Fricker, Deputy SHPO, Dept. of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

August 29, 2002

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official/Title

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain):

For Edson H. Beall
Signature of Keeper

10/16/02
Date of Action

5. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property
 Private: X
 Public-Local:
 Public-State:
 Public-Federal:

Category of Property
 Building(s): X
 District:
 Site:
 Structure:
 Object:

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing
1

1

Non contributing
 buildings
 sites
 structures
 objects
0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: NA

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: commerce Sub: specialty store
 domestic Sub: single residence
Current: vacant Sub: vacant

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: no style

Materials:

Foundation: brick
Walls: brick
Roof: other: tar and gravel
Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The two story c. 1910 brick building which once housed the Karnofsky tailor shop and residence (among other uses) is located on South Rampart Street, which is on the edge, or back side, of the New Orleans CBD. This once vibrant African-American commercial and entertainment district is now a sea of surface parking lots punctuated by a few remaining buildings. Parking lots are to each side of the candidate with a swath of modern construction to the rear. The Karnofsky shop is in the 400 block of South Rampart, which has the street's greatest concentration of historic buildings (4, all on one side). Three of the four are being nominated individually for the Register. (The fourth is under separate ownership.) They are being nominated individually because parking lots and a small relatively recent building prevent the block-face from having a cohesive historic character. While 427-431 South Rampart features decorative brick detailing on its facade, it does not make a strong stylistic statement. Hence "no style" will be used for the purposes of this nomination. The long vacant building has suffered from deterioration and a few modifications, but it still easily retains its identity as an early twentieth century commercial building.

427-31 Rampart is a double building which housed two shops at ground level, each with residential space above. The front section of the building is slightly wider than that at the rear (see attached floor plan for footprint). Piers of plain brick at the upper story and rusticated at the lower define each edge and divide the building at the center. Each half at the upper story has paired segmental head openings filled with two over one windows (boarded over recently for protection). A thin decorative brick band reinforces the segmental shape. Below each window is a panel filled with brick laid with the corners protruding outward. Bricks laid in this manner are also found in the parapet, where they form a thin band. The upriver side elevation features segmental head windows, while the downriver side (front section) shared a party wall at one time. Segmental head windows remain on the downriver recessed rear section. While the shopfront has been boarded over, its shape is clearly discernible. The shopfront at 427 retains a glazed tile bulkhead. The recessed entrance displays "The Model Tailors" in tile along with the address. (Model Tailors apparently occupied the space subsequent to the Karnofskys.) There are remnants of painted signs on this side of the building.

Safety issues and extreme darkness made a thorough inspection of the interior difficult. Local supporters of the effort provided the staff of the LA SHPO with the attached floor plans for both stories. As can be seen, each shop retains its original open character. While the upper story was not safe enough to see close-up, it could be ascertained that some mantelpieces survive.

Assessment of Integrity:

As previously observed, the building at 427-31 still retains its identity as an early twentieth century commercial building. Hence it easily helps convey the historic role of South Rampart St. as a flourishing commercial/entertainment district for mainly African-Americans (see Part 8).

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National Register Criteria: A X B_ C_ D_

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): NA
 A_ B_ C_ D_ E_ F_ G_

Areas of Significance: commerce; ethnic heritage: black

Period(s) of Significance: c.1910-1952

Significant Dates: NA

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: unknown

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The building at 427-431 South Rampart is locally significant within the context of New Orleans' African-American history as a rare survivor to represent a once flourishing entertainment/business district which stretched for several blocks along South Rampart, from roughly Canal to Howard. Sadly, the area today is one of surface parking lots, and in some stretches, modern buildings. There are about a dozen historic buildings remaining, sprinkled here and there. Most of these are vacant and have been threatened with demolition over the years. Collectively and individually these buildings have survived against considerable odds. The period of significance spans from c.1910, the date of construction, to the current fifty year cutoff of 1952. (South Rampart's decline as a commercial and entertainment hub began in the late 1950s/early '60s.)

In the first half of the twentieth century, South Rampart Street was a happening place lined with drugstores, saloons, barber shops, clubs (live music venues), combination grocery stores/saloons, second-hand stores, pawn shops, etc. Seniors who knew South Rampart first-hand in its heyday used phrases like "hub of black life" or "main street for blacks in New Orleans" when they were interviewed for this nomination. One man remarked "it had everything we needed." In an era of rigid segregation South Rampart was the home of three hotels, the Astoria, the Patterson, and the Page, plus a few rooming houses. [None of the hotels survive.] The Astoria had a cocktail lounge, a restaurant, a gambling hall in the back, and a legendary club, the Tic-Toc, upstairs. (Various greats played the Tic-Toc during the historic period, including Ray Charles and Louis Armstrong.) Particularly prominent was the corner of South Rampart Street and Perdido with its three story Odd Fellows/Masonic Hall complex, with the Eagle Saloon below. (In the 1930s and '40s the ground floor front was occupied first by the Dixie Beer Parlor and then the Main Liquor Store, per city directories.) And as can be imagined, a street with so many entertainment venues and saloons had its share of characters. Interviewees recall "Overall Bill" and "Alabama Slim" - both of whom earned their living gambling.

South Rampart was part of "back of town," one of the city's most important neighborhoods in the development of early jazz. Immortalized with the 1930s tune *South Rampart Street Parade*, the several block long strip was the fairly respectable edge of so-called "black Storyville," a neighborhood immediately to the rear known for its brothels, honkytonks, and violence. The other commercial hub for the city's large African-American population was just upriver, along Dryades Street. But each occupied a special niche. If you wanted manufactured clothes and furniture, you went to the large stores (some chains) along Dryades. South Rampart businesses were more varied and tended to be small mom-and-pop places. The street was particularly known for its numerous tailor shops and entertainment venues. Having a custom-made suit was particularly important -- it was a sign that you had "made it," so-to-speak. In contrast to the welcoming environment along Dryades and South Rampart, blacks could make purchases in the large white-owned stores of New Orleans but they were not allowed to try anything on.

A New Orleans television producer, in a recent retrospective piece, capsulized South Rampart's importance thusly: "They came to shop, they came to promenade, they came dressed up, but for whatever reason they came to South Rampart Street. It was their Canal [shopping] and their Bourbon [entertainment]." The "they" were mostly African-Americans with a healthy mixture of Jews, Italians and Chinese. Many Jews were proprietors of South Rampart's tailor shops and pawn shops. (The latter, known then as "loan offices" and/or "pledge shops," were the favorite haunts of musicians who pawned their instruments between gigs.) Grocery stores tended to be owned and/or operated by Italians.

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An important component of South Rampart's clientele was the "excursion" crowd (as they were termed by interviewees). These were people from nearby rural areas who were drawn like magnets to South Rampart on Friday evening and Saturday, typically arriving by train or bus, and often staying the night in a hotel or rooming house. For country folks coming to town took on a holiday air. As one observer noted, referring to the crowds, "You couldn't get on this street [South Rampart] on Friday evening and Saturday."

Like other traditional shopping areas, South Rampart's decline began in the late 1950s/early '60s. Add to this general trend the street's location on the edge of the New Orleans CBD, making it a natural for parking. The surface parking mania was fueled with the destruction in the late 1950s of "black Storyville" for a municipal complex and other government buildings. Today, of the over 100 brick party wall buildings that once lined a several block stretch, only about a dozen remain, scattered here and there. And, as noted above, almost all are vacant and periodically threatened with outright demolition. (Demolition by neglect is a constant.) The three being nominated in the 400 block are the subject of a cooperative endeavor among three parties: Jerome "PopaGee" Johnson, executive director, New Orleans Music Hall of Fame, Inc, who acquired an exclusive lease/purchase agreement in January 2002; the New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park; and the New Orleans Jazz Commission, whose members are appointed by the Secretary of the Department of the Interior. The latter two are working with Mr. Johnson to formulate plans and secure funding for the buildings' restoration and re-use as educational museums/tourist attractions.

Historical background on 427-31 South Rampart:

The exact construction date of the building at 427-31 South Rampart has not been documented. A different building is in its location on the 1908 Sanborn map. The next map for New Orleans is not until 1935, by which time, of course, the candidate has appeared. Given the architectural character of the building, the LA SHPO staff has dated it early in that range (c.1910). While it has had various occupants over the years, the most famous in local jazz circles are the Karnofskys, a Jewish family that has attained almost mythical status for befriending a young Louis Armstrong, who was born and grew up in violence and vice-ridden "black Storyville."

Armstrong relates in unpublished memoirs that as a youngster he worked for Louis Karnofsky's junk business. He recalls quite lovingly the nurturing atmosphere of the Karnofsky home, where he was made welcome, asked to stay for dinner, etc. Very importantly, he writes of blowing a "small tin horn" as he worked on the Karnofsky wagon and the Karnofskys loaning him money on his salary to buy a "real horn" he'd seen in a pawn shop window. As tempting as it is to link these compelling remembrances to the candidate, it cannot be documented. In fact, the home that provided Armstrong such nurturing could just as easily have been a previous Karnofsky residence. The Karnofskys lived in a tenement on Girod Street, a few blocks from Armstrong's own home, until 1913, when they moved to 427 South Rampart (as documented in city directories). By this time Armstrong was 12. He spent the better part of 1913 and 1914 in the Colored Waifs Home. Presumably he renewed his friendship with the Karnofskys at their new home, for he kept up with them during his career, but a strong Armstrong connection with the candidate cannot be documented at present. In particular the LA SHPO is aware of no documentation for the suggestion that Armstrong worked for the Karnofskys in their business at 427 South Rampart.

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City directories show that while living upstairs, the Karnofskys operated at least two businesses out of 427 South Rampart. The 1919 directory shows Mrs. Louis Karnofsky as proprietor of a secondhand store at that address (apparently now a widow). For various years in the 1920s, 427 South Rampart is listed in city directories as son Alexander's tailor shop and the residence for the Karnofskys. By 1927 the large family had moved to South Carrollton Avenue, but Alexander still had a tailor shop at 427 South Rampart.

It has been suggested that Morris Karnofsky operated Morris Music, an early jazz record store catering to African-Americans, from 427 Rampart, but this is not borne out in city directories. (Other addresses on South Rampart are given for this business through the years.)

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Jones, Tad. "Property History - 427 South Rampart Street." Unpublished typescript, copy in National Register file, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation. Mr. Jones' paper quotes from an unpublished autobiography Armstrong wrote in 1969 found in the Louis Armstrong Archive, Queens College, Long Island, New York.

Interviews conducted by Donna Fricker, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, with James Nelson, Lawrence Sanders, and Albert Fall (Battiste), all of whom experienced South Rampart in its heyday.

New Orleans City Directories, various years between 1910 and 1950.

Sanborn Insurance Company Maps, New Orleans, 1908 and 1935.

Simmons, Corbett, producer. "Music of South Rampart St." This short documentary, in two segments, appeared on WYES TV in New Orleans. It is replete with vintage photos and interviews depicting the heyday of South Rampart as an entertainment/business mecca.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register. (partially)
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository):

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreege of Property: less than an acre

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	15	782320	3316740

Verbal Boundary Description:

Legal Property Description: Lots 7 and 8, Square No. 297, First District of the City of New Orleans, LA

Boundary Justification: Boundary lines follow the property lines of the parcel of land historically associated with the candidate.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register staff

Address: Division of Historic Preservation, P. O. Box 44247, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Telephone: (225) 342-8160

Date: June 2002

PROPERTY OWNERS

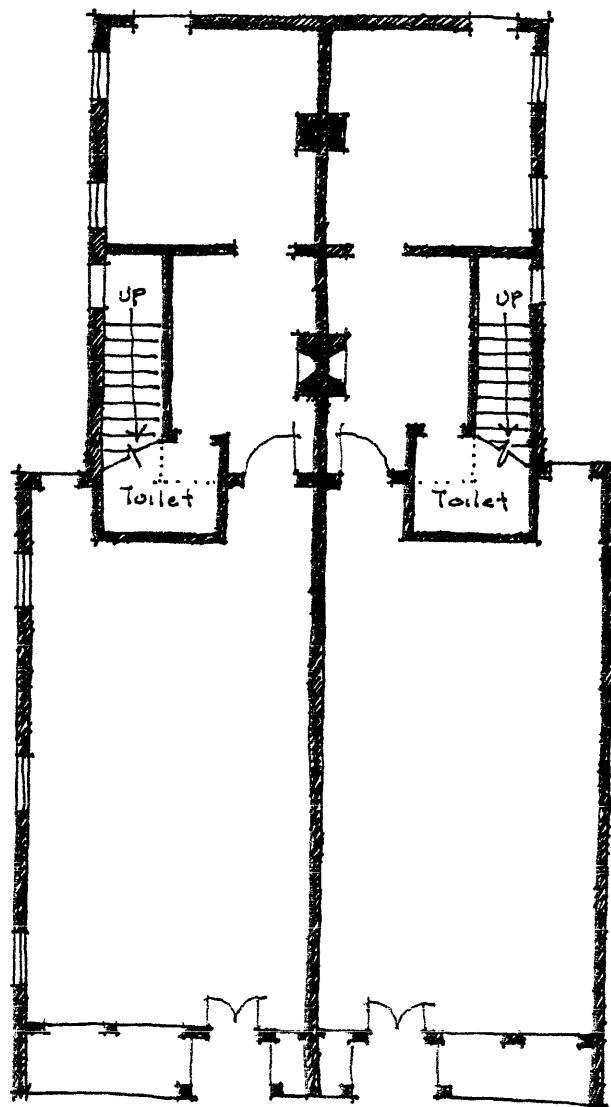
Owner:

A. V. Meraux, Inc. (c/o Alan Abadie, Attorney at Law, Gulf Coast Bank & Trust, 8216 W. Judge Perez Drive, Chalmette, LA 70043)

Holder of lease/purchase agreement:

Jerome PopaGee Johnson, Executive Director
New Orleans Music Hall of Fame, Inc.
344 South Rampart St.
New Orleans, LA 70112

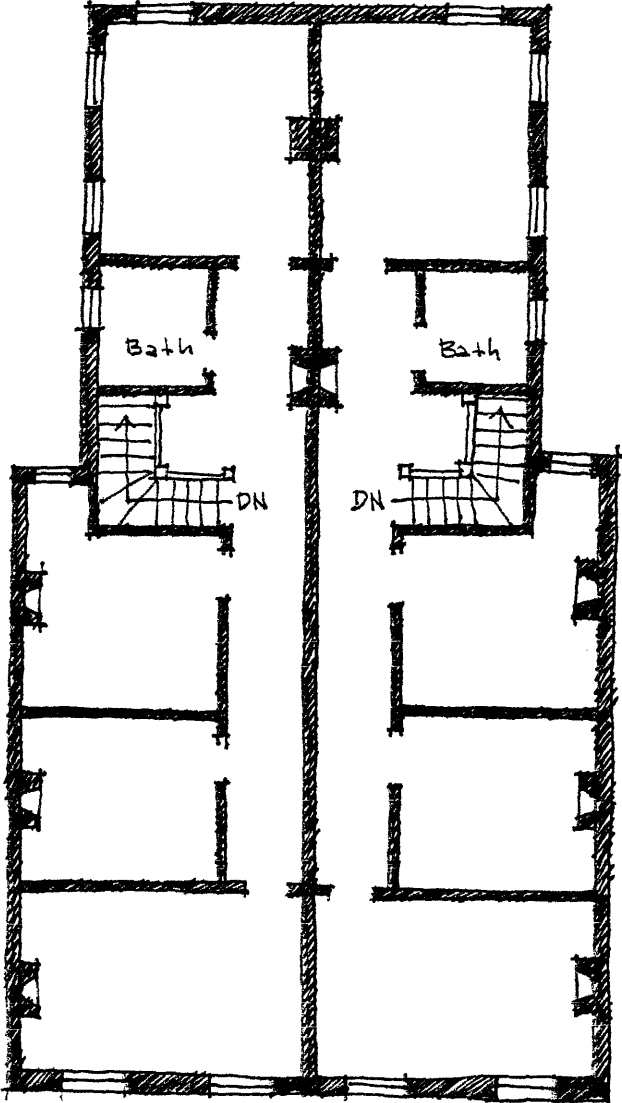
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Orleans Parish, LA



1ST FLOOR
N T S

427/431 SOUTH RAMPART

Karnofsky Tailor Shop/Residence
Orleans Parish, LA



2ND FLOOR
NTS

427/431 SOUTH RAMPART