

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Eagle Saloon Building, Orleans Parish, LA

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

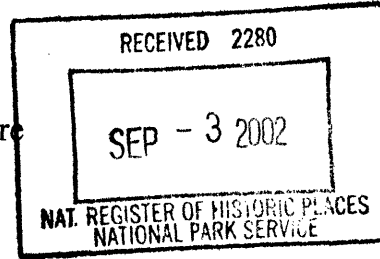
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1160

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Eagle Saloon Building

Other Name/Site Number: Dixie Beer Parlor; Main Liquor Store



2. LOCATION

Street & Number 401-403 South Rampart

Not for publication: NA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

Signature of Certifying Official/Title Laurel Wyckoff, LA SHPO, Dept. of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

Date 8/28/02

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

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Eagle Saloon Building, Orleans Parish, LA

Page 2

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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):

Signature of Keeper: [Handwritten Signature]

Date of Action: 10/16/2002

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

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

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Eagle Saloon Building, Orleans Parish, LA

Page 3

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: commerce/trade

Sub: restaurant

Current: vacant

Sub: vacant

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Classical Revival

Materials:

Foundation: brick

Walls: plaster/brick

Roof: other: tar and gravel

Other:

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Eagle Saloon Building, Orleans Parish, LA

Page 4

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The three-story, plaster-over-brick Eagle Saloon Building fronts onto South Rampart, at the corner of Perdido, at the back edge of the New Orleans CBD. South Rampart, once a vibrant African-American commercial and entertainment district, is now a sea of surface parking lots punctuated by a few remaining buildings. The Eagle Saloon Building is in the 400 block, 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. A parking lot is immediately to one side of the candidate, where a historic party wall building once stood. The candidate's Classical Revival detailing and certain other features date from a 1920s remodeling of an earlier building. With the exception of shopfront level modifications, the building looks much as it did after the remodeling.

The history of the building at 401-03 South Rampart – its physical evolution and occupants – is not documented completely. While much has been gleaned from primary sources for this nomination, the picture is far from crystal clear. A three story masonry building of the right height and footprint has been on the corner in question from at least 1885 (the date of the first Sanborn map for New Orleans). Its history is entwined with that of a three story building once to the rear, set at roughly a right angle (see Sanborn map). In the late nineteenth century the buildings housed a furniture business (1885 and 1895 Sanborn maps). By the turn of the twentieth century the rear building was occupied by the newly formed Masons and Odd Fellows Association, as was the third floor of the candidate (see Part 8 historical note for details). The Eagle Saloon, which is quite legendary among jazz enthusiasts and historians, was located at ground level from 1908 until at least 1916.

The first available photo, from 1922, shows the candidate and the back building (since demolished) to be identical in detailing – i.e., looking much like one sprawling building (see photo). Much to the surprise of the National Register staff, the detailing is not that of the present Classical Revival building. The photo, although somewhat blurry, clearly shows a quite different parapet treatment and some difference in the fenestration pattern. The parapet as of 1922 featured prominent shaped gables at the front and corner of the candidate reminiscent of the Jacobean Revival style, complete with what appear to be spiky finials (possibly urns). It is clearly however the candidate – i.e., a three story building roughly four times longer than it is wide. In addition to the parapet change, the three openings on the façade's third story were lengthened to match those immediately below and more openings were cut into the long side elevation. (It is impossible to be more precise on the latter. The image is particularly blurry here.) By 1928, per a photo of that date, the candidate had received its present Classical Revival parapet. (The photo shows the façade only and at some distance.)

The building as remodeled sometime between 1922 and 1928 features a handsome cast concrete parapet composed of sections of openwork Italian-looking balustrade punctuated by solid panels with ornamental bas relief. On the façade a central panel with a swag is flanked by a section of balustrade ending in a panel with a shield design. The same shield design is repeated numerous times down the side elevation. Toward the rear of the side elevation is the entrance to the upper floors, marked by a large stone cartouche and very Italian looking curving stone brackets. (How the upper floors were accessed prior to the remodeling is not absolutely certain.) The candidate's "new look" was continued with jack arches over the windows. The plaster is scored to resemble cut stone. (Whether this treatment existed prior to the remodeling is unknown, although the building shown in 1922 does appear to be plastered rather than exposed brick.) Most

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Eagle Saloon Building, Orleans Parish, LA

Page 5

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

openings on the second and third floors are filled with one over one windows. The exceptions are three sets of French doors on the third story façade (the previously mentioned lengthened openings) and a doorway accessing a fire escape on the side elevation. The latter is a rather wide composition, with double doors framed by wide multi-pane sidelights and multi-pane transoms.

The evolution of the shopfront area is not known completely, although it is clear from the interior and other evidence that there were two businesses across the façade at some point in the building's history (later made into one space by removing a wall). By 1937 (per a Sanborn map) the present configuration at the rear of the side elevation was in place – small shops, each with their own entrance. Today the shopfront across the façade is boarded over, but its configuration is the same as that shown in a circa 1940 photo.

The interior of the building retains much of its historic character, although it will never be known with certainty which, if any, sections retain their pre-remodeling appearance. The space across the front has pressed metal ceilings of two different designs, with the demarcation running down the middle, where presumably there was once a wall. One side wall features exposed brick, where presumably a bar once stood, with sections of pressed metal above, extending to the ceiling. The walls on the other side are entirely sheathed in press metal. This front space, or half of it, is the location of the famed Eagle Saloon. One suspects, but cannot be for certain, that the pressed metal ceilings and walls of this space date from the early years of the twentieth century – i.e., the Eagle Saloon period – rather than the mid-1920s remodeling.

The second and third floors consisted of two large spaces separated by the enclosed stair and a large opening. On both floors the large front space has been divided into two spaces via a new wall with a simple squared-off doorway at the center. At some point, perhaps during the historic period, bathrooms were built across the rear of the second and third floors. Both upper stories have diagonally laid floor boards. The second floor has plastered walls and a tongue and groove board ceiling. The third floor has plastered walls and a ceiling of sheetrock that begins immediately above the window level. A hole in the sheetrock reveals an unfinished wood ceiling about a foot above the sheetrock and a section of exposed brick wall. Presumably this is the original treatment of the third floor from the days it served as a furniture warehouse. One suspects that the third floor was finished off when the Masons and Odd Fellows Association leased the space, beginning in late 1897 (although the present sheetrock, of course, is a more recent treatment).

Assessment of Integrity:

Under National Register guidelines, the candidate does not retain enough of its appearance from c.1900-c.1910 to convey its locally famous and important associations with South Rampart Street's early jazz history, due to the c.1925 remodeling explained above. However, the building is also important as a rare survivor to represent the heyday of South Rampart Street as a major African-African entertainment/commercial district. This period of significance lasted into the 1950s. Hence the building as remodeled c.1925 conveys some twenty-five years or so of that period.

Note: Eagle Saloon Building is being given as the primary historic name because it the name by which the building is known among old-timers familiar with South Rampart's heyday. Although Dixie Beer Parlor and Main Liquor Store are given as the occupants in 1930s and '40s city directories, no one interviewed for this nomination recalled these names. Perhaps it has always been known as the Eagle Saloon, regardless of the proprietor or leaseholder's name.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Eagle Saloon Building, Orleans Parish, LA

Page 6

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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; entertainment; ethnic heritage: black

Period(s) of Significance: c.1925-1952

Significant Dates: NA

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: unknown

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Eagle Saloon Building, Orleans Parish, LA

Page 7

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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

The building at 401-403 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.1925, when the building assumed its present appearance, 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 uptown, 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

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Eagle Saloon Building, Orleans Parish, LA

Page 8

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

instruments between gigs.) Grocery stores tended to be owned and/or operated by Italians.

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:

As previously mentioned, the candidate is well known in local circles as the home of the Eagle Saloon, a favorite haunt of early jazz musicians, in a city generally regarded as the birthplace of this distinctly American art form. City directory research conducted for this nomination, as well as some important primary resources already known, yielded the following partial chronology. By way of background, city directory research for this early period is less than ideal because directories for New Orleans are not indexed by street address until the 1930s. Hence, you cannot trace the occupants of a building readily. You have to know the name of the business, or its proprietor.

Per an announcement carried in the local paper, the grand opening of the "New Eagle Saloon" at the corner of South Rampart and Perdido, took place on January 6, 1908. Its proprietor was Frank Douroux, who also operated a saloon at the other corner of the block (at Poydras). The saloon is identified in the article as occupying Jake Itzkovitch's Eagle Loan Office "old stand." Itzkovitch was one of various Jews who operated "pledge" or "loan" offices (pawnshops) on South Rampart. Itzkovitch operated the Eagle Loan Office in the candidate from at least 1904 through 1907 (per city directories). By 1908, the year the Eagle Saloon opened, the Eagle Loan Office, with Itzkovitch as proprietor, is shown at an address on Canal St. Hence it appears that one replaced the other, rather than them existing simultaneously (one in each front space, as some have thought).

The Eagle name is generally regarded by jazz historians as progressing from the pawnshop, to the saloon, to the famous Eagle Band, the successor to Buddy Bolden's band. (Buddy Bolden, among the earliest to play jazz, some say "the father of jazz," was institutionalized in 1907. The Eagle Band was essentially the Buddy Bolden band without Bolden.) It is believed that the band took its name from the Eagle Saloon,

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Eagle Saloon Building, Orleans Parish, LA

Page 9

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

presumably a favorite haunt. In a newspaper reference from 1916, all inquiries about booking the Eagle Band are asked to be directed to the Eagle Saloon. Because of the previously mentioned impossibility of tracking by address in early city directories, it is not known how long the Eagle Saloon remained in the candidate. By at least 1938, Dixie Beer Parlor is the occupant (per a city directory). (A sign reading Dixie Beer Parlor is shown on the side of the building in a circa 1940 photo.) A 1947 city directory lists Main Liquor Store at 401 South Rampart.

The candidate is also known locally, or at least its third floor, as the location of the famed Odd Fellows ballroom, a very important early jazz venue where greats such as Buddy Bolden and the Robichaux Orchestra played the then still emerging form. While this is entirely possible, to date it cannot be documented with absolute certainty (and not to National Register requirements). The Masons and Odd Fellows Association was chartered in May 1897 and later that year entered into a ten-year agreement to sublease the third floor of the candidate and the entirety of the now demolished building behind it. The issue is whether the legendary ballroom was in the now demolished building or the third floor of the candidate. The only original source uncovered to date that sheds any light on the matter is open to interpretation. In an advertisement for a "grand masquerade ball" to be given by the Father and Son Social Club on November 29, 1906, with music by Robichaux's Orchestra, the location is given as "Masonic-Odd Fellows hall, Rampart at Perdido." The street corner reference certainly points to the candidate, but then again it appears that the two-building complex was known collectively as the Masonic-Odd Fellows Hall, and we do not know where in the hall the dance was being held. Regrettably, this puzzle cannot be solved from first-hand testimony – the heyday of the ballroom was simply too long ago. One hopes that additional primary source research will some day be able to document the local tradition.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Eagle Saloon Building, Orleans Parish, LA

Page 10

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Advertisement for "Grand Masquerade Ball," Masonic-Odd Fellows Hall, Rampart at Perdido, November 29, 1906.

Historic New Orleans Collection. Photographs (1922, 1928, circa 1940) showing candidate. Xeroxed copies in National Register file, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.

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.

Marquis, Donald M. *In Search of Buddy Bolden: First Man of Jazz*. Louisiana State University, 1978. (Marquis quotes from 1897 sublease to Masons and Odd Fellows Association.)

"Mr. Frank Douroux's New Eagle Saloon." Undated newspaper announcement of opening of saloon, "next Monday evening, January 6, 1908."

New Orleans City Directories, various years between 1904 and 1950.

Sanborn Insurance Company Maps, New Orleans, 1885, 1895, 1908, 1937.

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):

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Eagle Saloon Building, Orleans Parish, LA

Page 11

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: less than an acre

UTM References: **Zone Easting Northing**
 15 782320 3316820

Verbal Boundary Description:

Legal property description: Lot 23, Square 297, First District of the City of New Orleans, Louisiana.

Boundary Justification: Boundaries follow property lines of the lot historically associated with the building.

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: July 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



1922 photo of Eagle Saloon Building (prior to remodeling)

Eagle Saloon
Orleans Parish, LA

