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DRYADES STREET NEIGHBORHOOD AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF JEWISH NEW ORLEANS

With each major wave of immigration to New Orleans came a small percentage of Jewish peoples. Those arriving with the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century influx from the Francophone, Hispanic, and American worlds encountered the ethnic geography of early New Orleans society, as described in the Creole chapter, and settled accordingly in and near the crowded French Quarter. Those arriving with the great antebellum wave from northern Europe settled in dispersed distributions throughout the semi-rural periphery of New Orleans, as described in previous chapters on the Irish and Germans. Those who came with the smaller late nineteenth-century wave from southern and eastern Europe settled in very different geographical patterns, as we shall see in upcoming chapters. The geography of Jewish New Orleans is particularly interesting because this group, united by religion across a variety of nationalities, traverses many immigration waves and their corresponding residential patterns, allowing us to compare their differing geographies through time. On a national scale, the Jewish community of New Orleans differs from its counterparts in other American cities for its prevailing Reformist heritage, and its long history, dating back to the dawn of the colonial era.²³⁴

In 1719, two young men, Jacob and Romain David from La Rochefoucault, France, may have been the first Jewish persons (judging solely by surnames) to set foot in Louisiana.²³⁵ André Pénicaut, carpenter and chronicler of early French Louisiana, mentioned some Jews among the 4,000 French and German settlers arriving to colonial Louisiana in 1720, possibly including the Jewish business manager of John Law's Company of the West.²³⁶ But the *Code Noir*, the colonial law in effect from 1724 to 1803 mostly aimed at regulating slavery, banned Jews from the colony in the first of its fifty-five articles, and expulsions at the beginning of the Spanish regime further dissuaded Jewish immigration to Louisiana. One researcher cited evidence for no more than a dozen or so probable Jewish individuals or families, with surnames such as David, Jacobs, and Solomon, arriving to New Orleans sometime between the city's founding in 1718 and the end of the colonial era in 1803.²³⁷ According to Bertram Wallace Korn, researchers "have found no evidence to justify a very late report that Jewish services were conducted in New Orleans in 1750; indeed, we have not located any Jews in

²³⁴ Leonard Reissman, "The New Orleans Jewish Community," in *Jews in the South*, eds. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson (Baton Rouge, 1973), 288-91.

²³⁵ Samuel Proctor, "Jewish Life in New Orleans, 1718-1860," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 40 (1947): 111.

²³⁶ J. Hanno Deiler, *The Settlement of the German Coast of Louisiana and The Creoles of German Descent* (Philadelphia, 1909), 21.

²³⁷ Benjamin Kaplan, *The Eternal Stranger: A Study of Jewish Life in the Small Community* (New York, 1957), 39-40. See also Louisiana Historical Records Survey, *Inventory of the Church and Synagogue Archives of Louisiana: Jewish Congregations and Organizations* (Baton Rouge, 1941), 1-2.

the town [with documentary evidence] until 1757-58, and there is not the slightest hint...that they attempted to meet for worship."²³⁸ One may conclude that while there likely was a small "Jewish Creole" presence in colonial Louisiana, a Jewish community was absent.

EARLY JEWISH SOCIETY: 1803-1830S

Lucrative economic opportunities drew tens of thousands to New Orleans in the early nineteenth century, making the new American city the nation's number-two immigration destination. A small fraction, perhaps around 1 percent, of these foreign immigrants and American emigrants were Jewish, primarily Sephardic, hailing originally from France, Spain, Portugal, and the Low Countries. French and German Ashkenazic Jews made up the remainder.²³⁹ Because these early arrivals were small in number, rapidly assimilated, and not particularly religious, no Jewish community, much less a Jewish neighborhood, developed during the first two decades of American dominion. Indeed, it took "much longer to found a synagogue in New Orleans than in any comparable location"²⁴⁰—perhaps because the high-risk/high-reward opportunities of this dynamic port city attracted the sort of ambitious, individualist pioneers who tend to eschew the sanctuary of ancient religious and social traditions.

This changed as the Jewish population grew to include more civic-minded individuals and families in the following decades, as evidenced by the founding of the first congregations in the 1820s. One assembly is said to have been found-

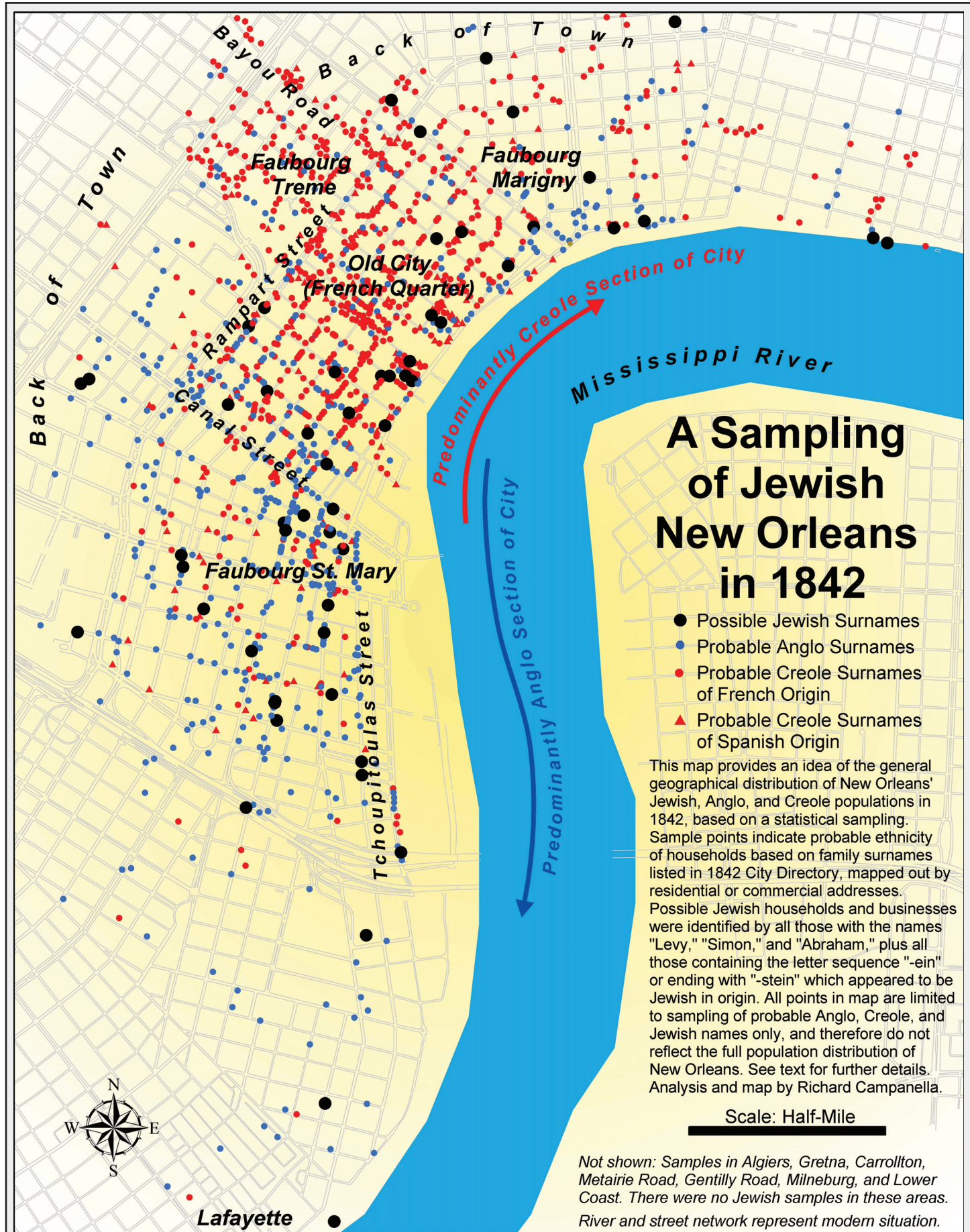
²³⁸ Bertram Wallace Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans* (Waltham, 1969), 192.

²³⁹ Irwin Lachoff, "A Historical Introduction," in *Jews of New Orleans: An Archival Guide*, ed. Lester Sullivan (New Orleans, 1998), 12. The most prominent among these early Jewish immigrants was Judah Touro, a Sephardic Jew born in Newport, Rhode Island, who arrived in New Orleans in 1802 by way of Havana, fought in the Battle of New Orleans, and eventually made his millions as a commission merchant. His philanthropy later in life still benefits New Orleans today.

²⁴⁰ Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans*, 209-11.



Visiting New Yorker Jacob da Silva Solis founded the Congregation Shangari Chasset (Gates of Mercy) in 1827 or 1828, the first permanent Jewish congregation in New Orleans and outside the original thirteen colonies. The congregation, predecessor of today's Touro Synagogue, built an impressive synagogue with Corinthian columns and two Byzantine steeples at this site on North Rampart Street in 1851. It was sold in 1882, demolished in the 1920s, and recently commemorated with this historic landmark sign. Photograph by author, 2003.



Early Jewish settlement in New Orleans favored the more Americanized areas of the upper French Quarter and upriver districts. This map shows that of fifty-five probable Jewish surnames found in the 1842 city directory, 71 percent resided above the *Place d'Armes* in the central French Quarter. The city's first Jewish congregation, Gates of Mercy (1828), first worshipped on Toulouse Street and later built a synagogue at 420 North Rampart, both located within the more Americanized upper French Quarter. Map and analysis by author.

ed in 1824 by twelve men, but the evidence behind it may simply represent a misprint.²⁴¹ Most sources credit the effort of 1827-1828, when the visiting New Yorker Jacob da Silva Solis founded the Congregation Shangari Chassed (Gates of Mercy) by state charter, as the first permanent Jewish congregation in New Orleans and outside the original thirteen colonies. Although this congregation, predecessor of today's Touro Synagogue, comprised members mostly of Ashkenazic background, it nevertheless practiced Portuguese rituals in its services (as dictated by its by-laws, written in English and French) and generally reflected Sephardic culture, perhaps in deference to the local French Judaic environment.²⁴² Gates of Mercy struggled in its first few years in the Crescent City, with scant membership, no rabbi, no Torah, and an upper room on Toulouse Street as a place of worship.²⁴³ Rural backswamp land for the city's first Jewish burial ground, the original Hebrew Rest Cemetery at Jackson and South White, was also acquired in the year 1828.²⁴⁴

An analysis of the officers and members of the original Gates of Mercy congregation (1828) sheds light on the commercial activity and ethnic geography of this community. The city directory contained entries for sixteen of the thirty-four names; assuming these entries were indeed the men of the congregation, several patterns emerge for the early 1830s:

- 79 percent (eleven of the fourteen whose occupation was listed) operated retail stores. The others included a carpenter, a ship broker, and a surgeon-dentist.
- 64 percent were specifically involved in the dry-goods and/or soft goods (clothing and hats) trade.
- 81 percent of the sixteen men worked (and possibly lived) in the old city, but mostly in its upper blocks, particularly Levee and New Levee Street (present-day Decatur and North Peter), where eight members operated dry goods and clothing stores, some of them adjacent to each other. Only one—the ship broker—worked in the predominately Creole, lower part of the old city, on 12 Main (that is, Dumaine Street), close to the river.²⁴⁵

Research from later in the antebellum era generally corroborates these findings. Wrote historian Elliott Ashkenazi, “of the approximately 245 Jewish business firms...identified in New Orleans between 1841 and the Civil War, more than 50 percent traded in clothing or dry goods. Jews also sold jewelry, tobacco, and fancy imported goods [while others]

became cotton merchants or general commission merchants supplying several items at the wholesale level to urban and rural customers.” Geographically, “Jewish businesses in New Orleans tended to locate near one another,”²⁴⁶ be they in pushcarts or stalls near the levee or in shops along Chartres Street, which Ashkenazi determined to have the most Jewish businesses. One significant Jewish-owned enterprise on Chartres was Benjamin Levy's printing and publishing operation, which played an important role in distributing literature and business news to the city and in helping form something of a “newspaper district” on Chartres Street.²⁴⁷ More prosperous Jews lived and worked on the Faubourg St. Mary streets of Camp, Magazine, and Tchoupitoulas. Comparing these patterns to those of Anglos and Creoles, a general trend emerges: Jews generally settled in the upper, more Americanized section of the city. The map, *A Sampling of Jewish New Orleans in 1842*, shows that of fifty-five probable Jewish surnames found in the 1842 City Directory, thirty-nine resided above the *Place d'Arms* (now Jackson Square in the central French Quarter) and only sixteen resided below it.²⁴⁸ But Jewish households could be found throughout New Orleans, including the lower area, for a long time. In 1808, for example, the Abraham family owned a parcel on the corner of present-day Chartres and St. Philip, on the Creole side of the city, with likely Creole neighbors named Alpuente, Lavilleboeuf, Foucher, and Landreau. Possible Jewish surnames such as Benjamin and Simon owned other old-city parcels that year.²⁴⁹ The English traveler G.W. Featherstonhaugh noted during his 1835 visit, in the typically caustic terms of the day, “a few anxious Jewish-looking faces going up and down the narrow streets” of the Creole part of town, “looking at you inquiringly, as if they would willingly transact some sort of business with you....”²⁵⁰ An 1843 account of Madison Street, near the market in the Creole area, described it as “a sort of Congress of Nations,” where you would find

a Swiss clockmaker...a French tailor...a Spanish harness maker...the store of a Jew peddler...a Dutch knife grinder...a negro barber...then to a French restaurant, where professional musicians and others eat *gombo*....²⁵¹

A. Oakey Hall (1847) described among the peddlers approaching docked steamboats, the “Yankee with his curious kick-knacks,” and “the Jew...with his hundred-bladed penknives, sponges, and metallic tablets.”²⁵²

²⁴¹ Legend holds that a *Minyan* (quorum) of Sephardic Jews formed in New Orleans as early as 1775-1780. Bertram Wallace Korn dismissed all of this for lack of documentary evidence, suggesting that the supposed 1824 congregation was “probably a misprint or a slip of the pen” on the part of Rabbi James K. Gutheim in 1850. *Ibid.*, 192; Julian B. Feibelman, *A Social and Economic Study of the New Orleans Jewish Community* (Philadelphia, 1941), 70; W.E. Myers, *The Israelites of Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1905), 40.

²⁴² Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans*, 197.

²⁴³ Lachoff, “A Historical Introduction,” 14.

²⁴⁴ This below-ground graveyard, later named Gates of Mercy Congregation Cemetery, was relocated in 1957 to present-day Hebrew Rest Cemetery on Elysian Fields in Gentilly. Kaplan, *The Eternal Stranger: A Study of Jewish Life in the Small Community*, 40.

²⁴⁵ Gates of Mercy founding officers and members from Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans*, 197-98. Analysis by author using primarily the New Orleans City Directory of 1832; one name was found in the New Orleans City Directory of 1822.

²⁴⁶ Elliott Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875* (Tuscaloosa and London, 1988), 13.

²⁴⁷ Richard Campanella, *Time and Place in New Orleans: Past Geographies in the Present Day* (Gretna, 2002), 147-54.

²⁴⁸ Sampling by author using surnames of *Levy, Simon, Abraham*, plus all those containing *-ein* which appeared Jewish, as listed in the City Directory of 1842.

²⁴⁹ Gilbert J. Pilié, *Plan de la Ville de la Nouvelle Orléans Avec les noms des propriétaires*, New Orleans, August 18, 1808.

²⁵⁰ G.W. Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion Through the Slave States, From Washington on the Potomac to the Frontier of Mexico* (New York, 1968), 140.

²⁵¹ “A Kaleidoscopic View of New Orleans,” *Daily Picayune*, September 23, 1843, p. 2, col. 3.

²⁵² A. Oakey Hall, *The Manhattaner in New Orleans; or Phases of “Crescent City” Life* (New York, 1851), 175.

JEWISH ENCLAVES IN DOWNTOWN AND UPTOWN, CIRCA 1850

Political instability in central Europe sent to America a trickle of Germanic peoples from various cities and states, starting in 1818 and increasing dramatically from the 1830s to the Civil War. Most German immigrants disembarked at major ports of the Mid-Atlantic states, but many sailed further toward the fine agricultural lands of the Mississippi Valley, landing first at New Orleans, through which passed 255,718 Germans (recorded) between 1831 and 1859.²⁵³ Roughly one in five who disembarked at New Orleans settled there, forming a German-born community numbering up to 7,000 by the 1830s, and around 35,000 by the Civil War. Among them was a small percentage of Ashkenazic Jews from rural agricultural areas in Bavaria, Alsace, and neighboring regions. The exact percentage is unknown, but estimates of the Jewish population in antebellum New Orleans range from 125 families in 1843, to 600 “aggregate accommodations of Jewish churches” in 1850, to 1,250 “accommodations” in 1860.²⁵⁴ Making some loose assumptions, we may estimate that perhaps 1 or 2 percent of New Orleans’ German immigrants were Ashkenazic Jews of German ethnicity.

Enthusiastic participation by these recently arrived German Ashkenazics in the older, Sephardic-tradition Gates of Mercy congregation led to the replacement of its Portuguese customs with German ones, and the tightening of its mild by-laws with stricter religious interpretations. A tension developed between the two groups. In the 1840s, the Sephardic-tradition faithful abandoned their effort “to unite all mem-

²⁵³ A.A. Conway, “New Orleans as a Port of Immigration, 1820-1860” (M.A. thesis, University of London, 1949), Appendix C.

²⁵⁴ “United States Historical Census Data Browser,” University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census> (accessed 1998).



The foot of Jackson Avenue was home to a small but tightly knit community of Ashkenazic Jewish immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s, when the great wave of German immigration arrived to New Orleans and settled in what was then known as Lafayette. Most moved uptown forty or fifty years later. Attesting to their former presence on Jackson Avenue is the Gates of Prayer congregation’s now-empty Lafayette Shul, built between 1857 and 1867 and now the oldest surviving major structural landmark of Jewish New Orleans. Photograph by author, 2004.

bers of the community into a Sephardic Congregation”²⁵⁵ and broke off to found their own Congregation Nefutsoth Yehudah (Dispersed of Judah, 1846), leaving Gates of Mercy to the new Germans Ashkenazics. Judah Touro, the famed self-made millionaire and philanthropist, helped ensure the future of the Dispersed of Judah when he donated to it the former Second Christ Church,²⁵⁶ a prominent temple commanding the centrally located corner of Canal and Bourbon streets. This became New Orleans’ first dedicated synagogue (1847), but it soon proved too small for the growing congregation, which built a larger temple of similar design (incorporating architectural elements of the predecessor) on Carondelet between Julia and St. Joseph in 1854, also with monies bequeathed by Touro.²⁵⁷ The locations of these two community focal points reiterate that this segment of the Jewish community generally resided and worked in the upper French Quarter and Faubourg St. Mary. Still, their total numbers were very small and the population density of this area was high, so by no means could this community nor any for the next half-century be accurately characterized as forming a “Jewish neighborhood.”

Meanwhile, the most recent wave of German Ashkenazic immigrants, many Bavarian and Alsatian, began to establish a presence in uptown and in the Jefferson Parish city of Lafayette (present-day Lower Garden District, Irish Channel, and Garden District), culturally and geographically apart from the Dispersed of Judah and Gates of Mercy. What attracted immigrants in general to these semi-rural upriver outskirts were the unskilled work opportunities afforded by the flatboat and steamboat traffic lining the levee (as opposed to the New Orleans riverfront, which handled international traffic). These interior vessels brought livestock, grains, lumber, coal, and other agricultural and raw materials to Lafayette’s wharves, requiring handling and processing—primarily butchering and tanning—and thus providing employment.²⁵⁸ These sprawling, malodorous, shipping-dependent activities needed to be on the outskirts of town and by the river, and were as dependent on low-priced real estate as were poor immigrants for their housing. Thousands of laborers in turn created demand for local merchants, grocers, peddlers, tailors, butchers, and other professions traditionally associated with the

²⁵⁵ Feibelman, *A Social and Economic Study of the New Orleans Jewish Community*, 71.

²⁵⁶ The Second Christ Church was a massive Greek Ionic-style temple designed by James Gallier and Charles Dakin and built in 1835-1837. Protestants worshipped there until Judah Touro acquired and donated the structure to the Dispersed of Judah in 1847. The synagogue was soon demolished to make way for Touro Row, twelve three-level stores built during the 1850s. A few units survive at the Royal Street end of the block. Friends of the Cabildo, *New Orleans Architecture*, 8 vols. (Gretna, 1972), 2:22-23.

²⁵⁷ The Louisiana Historical Records Survey states that business encroachment forced the relocation of the synagogue at Canal and Bourbon, a reasonable explanation given the booming commercial activity on Canal Street in the 1850s. “Part of the façade, the columns and capitals, were moved from the original site for use in the new building,” constructed starting in May 1856 and dedicated in April 1857. Louisiana Historical Records Survey, *Inventory of the Church and Synagogue Archives*, 21.

²⁵⁸ Bobbie Malone, “New Orleans Uptown Jewish Immigrants: The Community of Congregation Gates of Prayer, 1850-1860,” *Louisiana History* 8 (Summer 1991): 243.

Jewish community. The gravitation to this area of Irish and German immigrants, including Jews among the Germans, was natural.²⁵⁹ As early as the mid-1830s, a *Chevra* (society) was formed in Lafayette by these newcomers, though further documented organizational efforts would not occur until the late 1840s.²⁶⁰ In 1849 or 1850, the Ashkenazics formed the Jewish Benevolent Society of Lafayette and the Congregation Shangarai Tefiloh (Gates of Prayer, January 1850), and bought land on the rural outskirts (present-day Joseph Street) for their cemetery.

Immigrants were also attracted to the Faubourg Marigny, at the opposite end of town, for the same reasons that made Lafayette appealing. Germans, among them a small percentage of Jews, settled in this old Creole neighborhood starting in the 1830s, when the area became the city's Third Municipality through the system adopted in 1836. The *Daily Orleanian*, the newspaper of this multi-ethnic area, spoke of Third Municipality aldermen who might be "Creoles or Anglo-Saxons, Celts or Hebrews...."²⁶¹ Yet Jewish institutions were lacking from this Creole area, indicating that the Jewish population, while present, was small, scattered, and not organized. The map, *A Sampling of Jewish New Orleans in 1842*, shows a relatively small but not inconsiderable number of probable Jewish names residing or working in the predominantly Creole lower city. A number of hypotheses might explain this apparent Jewish avoidance of lower New Orleans, if indeed this is the case. On the "pull" side, many Jews were emigrants from other American cities and naturally settled among other Americans, who predominated uptown. Many were English-speakers before they were French-speakers, and gravitated to those blocks where English tongues and English signs proliferated. For well-established Jews, most commercial activity—the banks of lower Royal Street, the retailers and publishers of Chartres Street, the professional offices of Gravier Street—transpired in these same upper areas, drawing Jewish merchants and businessmen to the busiest part of the inner city. For recently arrived, poorer Jews, Lafayette's large immigrant population and wharf-side economy offered more opportunities for retailing, skilled professions, and other traditional Jewish-specialty trades than did the lower city. On the "push" side, many Jews, as newcomers, might have avoided this Creole side of town for its provincial Old World culture, French language, and relative lack of economic development (the Third Municipality was known as the "Poor Third"). Creoles, on their part, deriving from the same colonial-era influences which produced the *Code Noir*, may not have been as accepting of Jewish neighbors and business competitors

as those on the more cosmopolitan American side of town, though this is certainly subject to debate. Largely absent from the lower city, Jews in antebellum New Orleans thus formed two scattered, low-density concentrations: the older, established Sephardic and Ashkenazic community in downtown (the upper French Quarter and lower Faubourg St. Mary), and the recently arrived Ashkenazims in uptown (upper Faubourg St. Mary and Lafayette). To this day, Jewish institutions of both the past and present are almost entirely lacking from the lower, eastern half of the metropolitan area.

The uptown Ashkenazic community, comprising recent working-class immigrants of limited means, attempted to consolidate with the "Ashkenazicized" Gates of Mercy congregation, sharing as they did a German heritage and language. But Gates of Mercy members, longer established and socially and economically more secure than the uptown immigrants, responded with silence.²⁶² Snubbing of newcomers by established peoples of similar origins is a common phenomenon, reflecting at times the latter's insecurity, or its sense of threat by the "less-educated masses who might fan the flames of the ever-present nativism."²⁶³ The rejection reflected "the gulf separating Downtown and Uptown Jews"²⁶⁴ in the late antebellum era; a similar downtown/uptown ethnic-geographical gulf would form again, though with different ethnic components, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Gates of Mercy did, however, respond to the Dispersed of Judah's new synagogue, by building and dedicating its own new house of worship on a lot on North Rampart Street between Conti and St. Louis (present-day 410-420 North Rampart) in 1851.²⁶⁵ Known as the *Deutsche Shule* ("German

²⁶² Lachoff, "A Historical Introduction," 16.

²⁶³ Malone, "New Orleans Uptown Jewish Immigrants," 246.

²⁶⁴ *Idib.*, 247.

²⁶⁵ Gates of Mercy purchased a small building on North Rampart Street between St. Louis and Conti for \$4,200 in 1845 and converted it to a synagogue. This structure, replaced by 1851, was identified as "the first permanent Jewish house of worship in the State of Louisiana" on a commemorative plaque recently erected by the Jewish American Society for Historical Preservation. The 1850 City Directory records two synagogues as "Hebrew (German) Rampart, [between] St. Louis and Conti," and "Hebrew (Portuguese) [corner of] Canal and Bourbon." *Cohen's New Orleans and*



Diagonally across from the Lafayette Shul was the home for the Association for the Relief of Jewish Widows, Orphans, and Half-Orphans (1855-1856), the first Jewish orphanage in the nation, on Jackson Avenue at Chippewa. It relocated uptown in the 1880s. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University.*

²⁵⁹ A sampling of the 1850 Jefferson Parish census revealed a Lafayette society that was about 40 percent German-born, 20 percent American, 19 percent Irish-born, 9 percent French-born, 7 percent Creole (Louisiana born) and 6 percent other. Immigrants thus comprised nearly three-fourths of Lafayette's population; German immigrants formed the largest group in all five of Lafayette's wards. John Leslie Kolp, "Suburbanization in Uptown New Orleans. Lafayette City, 1833-1852" (M.A. thesis, University of New Orleans, 1975), 80.

²⁶⁰ Myers, *The Israelites of Louisiana*, 42.

²⁶¹ *Daily Orleanian*, May 2, 1849, p. 2, col. 1.

Synagogue”), Gates of Mercy’s new home was an impressive old-city landmark with Corinthian columns and two Byzantine steeples towering over humble Creole cottages and classic French Quarter townhouses—a picturesque example of ethnic diversity manifested in architecture. The location of this new synagogue further testifies to the geography of the older New Orleans Jewish population.

Physical landmarks of the uptown Ashkenazic Gates of Prayer congregation arose in the 1850s throughout the modern-day neighborhoods of the Lower Garden District and Irish Channel. These community focal points, now mostly gone, included a benevolent society at Washington and Constance, later at Fifth and Chippewa; a rented store at Seventh and Tchoupitoulas used for services; and the first purchased property, an old wooden school at Fulton and St. Mary, used as a synagogue starting in 1855. A home for the Association for the Relief of Jewish Widows, Orphans, and Half-Orphans—the first Jewish orphanage in the nation—was built on Jackson at Chippewa in 1855-1856, just before a larger synagogue, known as the Lafayette Shul and later the Jackson Avenue Shul, was built diagonally across the intersection in 1857-1867.²⁶⁶ The reasons for the clustering of Jewish institutions in Lafayette were threefold. First and foremost was the aforementioned attraction of German immigrants to this area. Second, the social and economic gulf between the Lafayette immigrant Jews and the established Jewish community downtown led the immigrants to create their own cultural environment (a benevolent society, a burial ground, synagogues, schools, orphanages, etc.) locally. Third, and relatedly, the geographical distance between Lafayette and the downtown Jewish population encouraged the creation of conveniently located institutions. Land for a new Lafayette synagogue (eventually Gates of Prayer), for example, was originally sought in 1848 by “forty families who were formerly *compelled to attend synagogue in New Orleans, at a distance of two miles from the center of Lafayette.*”²⁶⁷ The streetcar spur on Jackson Avenue, connecting with the New Orleans & Carrollton Rail Road and leading into the city, was of no use to those Lafayette Jews who refrained from using mechanized transportation on the Sabbath. The tendency of local Jews to organize within political demarcations such as city limits and municipal districts was also noted in the circa-1905 *The Israelites of Louisiana*: “New Orleans, even eighty years ago, had its lines of demarcation [within which] special *Minyanim* [quorums] were organized, each in turn becoming later the nucleus...of the congregations. Among the venerable Israelites of the city, reminiscences are treasured of the ‘Old Lafayette,’ as the upper district of that era in and about Jackson avenue was denominated.”²⁶⁸ The cluster of Jewish

institutions at the foot of Jackson Avenue was accompanied by a concentration of Gates of Prayer members’ businesses along streets such as Tchoupitoulas and New Levee.²⁶⁹

Not all Jewish immigrants settled in the Lafayette area. The 1850s saw the arrival of some Prussian Ashkenazic Jews from eastern Germany and western Poland, who established the Congregation Temime Derech (Right Way) in 1857, and bought land and built a synagogue on Carondelet and Lafayette Street, behind City Hall at the time. Right Way, known colloquially as “the Polish group,” remained downtown until it disbanded in 1903; the synagogue was demolished for an extension of City Hall, and many former members later joined Congregation Beth Israel.²⁷⁰ For reasons that are partly coincidental, Carondelet Street, from Canal Street to Louisiana Avenue, was the address for a large number of significant Jewish landmarks, from the 1850s to the present.

ASIDE: JEWISH POPULATIONS OF AMERICA, LOUISIANA, AND NEW ORLEANS

Approximately 150,000 Jewish people lived in the United States in 1860. Of them, about 33,200, or 22 percent, lived in the South and border states. As large as this percentage may seem, one source estimates that, forty years earlier, about *half* of American Jews lived in the South, roughly 1,350 to 2,500 people. Louisiana in 1860 was home to far more Jews (8,000) than any other Southern or border state; Maryland was second with 5,000 and all others had between 1,000 and 3,000 each.²⁷¹ Within Louisiana, New Orleans undoubtedly had the largest population that year, at least 1,250 religiously active individuals but probably less than the 4,000-5,000 total population estimated by one researcher.²⁷² The disproportionately high concentration of Jews in Louisiana and thence in New Orleans suggests that the state and city offered certain attractive attributes to Jewish immigrants. In the case of the state, it may have been the high number of tiny towns and settlements, creating numerous opportunities for a favorite Jewish line of business: shop-keeping.²⁷³ Or it may have been the availability of arable land. In the case of the city, it was probably the myriad economic opportunities spawned by a robust shipping-based economy. The cosmopolitan, tolerant atmosphere of this highly multicultural city also played a role.

Estimations of the Jewish population of the United States and of New Orleans over time vary widely, because of intermarriage, congregational inactivity, conversion, and the lack of consistent census data on religion affiliation (questions relating to religion are not asked in modern censuses.)

Lafayette Directory for 1850, 197; Louisiana Historical Records Survey, *Inventory of Church and Synagogue Archives*, 19.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-25; Lachoff, “A Historical Introduction,” 16-17; and Joseph Magner, *The Story of the Jewish Orphans Home of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1905), 13.

²⁶⁷ As quoted in Rabbi Max Heller, *Jubilee Souvenir of Temple Sinai, 1872-1922* (New Orleans, 1922), 6 (emphasis added).

²⁶⁸ Myers, *The Israelites of Louisiana*, 42.

²⁶⁹ Malone, “New Orleans Uptown Jewish Immigrants,” 244, 261 and 275-77.

²⁷⁰ Louisiana Historical Records Survey, *Inventory of Church and Synagogue Archives*, 27-28.

²⁷¹ Data summarized from a number of sources cited in Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875*, 8-13.

²⁷² Malone, “New Orleans Uptown Jewish Immigrants,” 242.

²⁷³ Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875*, 11.

Following are estimates from various official and secondary sources:

| Estimates of the Jewish Population of the United States | | Estimates of the Jewish Population of New Orleans | |
|---|------------------------|---|--------------|
| Colonial | ~1000 | Colonial | Probably <50 |
| 1818 | 3,000 | 1843 | 125 families |
| 1824 | 6,000 | 1850 | 600* |
| 1840 | 15,000 | 1854 | 2,000** |
| 1850 | 50,000 | 1860 | 1,250* |
| 1860 | 150,000 | 1870 | 1,950* |
| 1880 | 230,000 | 1890 | 2,750*** |
| 1897 | 937,800 | 1906 | 935 families |
| 1905 | 1,508,435 | 1916 | 2,653 |
| 1907 | 1,777,185 | 1926 | 9,000 |
| 1914 | 2,933,374 | 1936 | 8,700 |
| 1917 | 3,300,000 | 1938 | 6,472 |
| 2000-2002 | 5,200,000 to 6,141,325 | 1953 | 9,100 |
| | | 2002 | 13,000**** |
| <small>National estimates from Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, <i>Religious Bodies 1916: Part II</i>, 320. See also Ashkenazi, <i>Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875</i>, 9; Proctor, "Jewish Life in New Orleans, 1718-1860," 110; and United Jewish Communities, viii. City estimates based on 1850 and 1860 Census; U.S. Department of Commerce-Bureau of the Census <i>Religious Bodies</i> statistics from 1916, 1926, and 1936; Feibelman, <i>A Social and Economic Study of the New Orleans Jewish Community</i>, 71; and Benjamin Goldman's research from 1953, as quoted in Lachoff, "A Historical Introduction," 30. *These figures represent "accommodations," or seating capacity of existing synagogues. **Magner, <i>Story of the Jewish Orphans Homes of New Orleans</i>, 5. ***Stern, "Origins of Reform Judaism in New Orleans," 108. ****Figure for greater New Orleans quoted from Bruce Nolan, "N.O. Catholic Membership Falls," <i>Times-Picayune</i>, September 28, 2002.</small> | | | |

REFORMISM IN NEW ORLEANS

Around the time of the Civil War, a new bifurcation developed in the New Orleans Jewish community, reflecting an international Reformist movement among German Jews that gained popularity in America during the mid-nineteenth century.²⁷⁴ In 1861, an ordained Orthodox rabbi—the first in a community known for its lax interpretation of Jewish law—by the name of Dr. Bernard Illoway lectured the Gates of Mercy congregation on the righteousness of Orthodoxy over the Reform movement. "Ironically," wrote Irwin Lachoff, "these sermons made New Orleans Jews aware of the possibility of reforming the traditional practices and became the catalyst for the creation of a Reform temple in the city."²⁷⁵ In response, the Rev. James Koppel Gutheim, spiritual leader of the Gates of Mercy in the early 1850s, founded the city's first Reform congregation, Temple Sinai (1870), consisting of many Gates of Mercy members. With the "cultivation and

spread of enlightened religious sentiment"²⁷⁶ as its mission, Temple Sinai bought a lot on Carondelet Street (near its present-day intersection with the Pontchartrain Expressway) in 1871, and had a magnificent new temple erected upon it. Temple Sinai cost \$104,000, seated 1,500 people, boasted a \$6,000 organ and one thousand gas jets for illumination, and broke the skyline with twin 115-foot-high towers of Roman-Byzantine style and two-tone striped coloration visible throughout the city. When it was completed in 1872, it was the most prominent Jewish landmark the mostly Catholic city had ever known.²⁷⁷ Practically every photograph of the Lee Circle area from the 1870s to the 1970s could not help but include the Temple Sinai.

The Civil War, summertime yellow fever epidemics, and the Panic of 1873 beleaguered both the German-congregation Gates of Mercy and the Portuguese-congregation Dispersed of Judah. As both groups traced their heritage back to the original 1828 Gates of Mercy, the suggestion was made in 1878 that the two congregations merge. The amalgamation was at first rejected but finally accepted and effected in 1881, incorporating as the Shangari Chassed Linfuzoth Yehudah (Gates of Mercy of the Dispersed of Judah) and meeting at the older congregation's circa-1854 synagogue on Carondelet near Julia. The union rendered surplus Gates of Mercy's *Deutsche Shule* on North Rampart Street in the old city, which was sold off in 1882, used by the Troy Laundry Company at the turn-of-the-century, and demolished thereafter. The new amalgamated congregation soon adopted the present-day name of Touro Synagogue, though this did not become official until 1937.²⁷⁸

ORTHODOXY IN NEW ORLEANS

Just as the Ashkenazic immigrants diversified the mostly Sephardic-tradition Jewish community of New Orleans in the early nineteenth century, a new trend developed in the late 1800s that would counter the Reform movement and render more complex New Orleans' ethnic and religious mosaic. Though immigration was low in the post-war years, a steady number of mostly Orthodox, eastern European Jews (primarily Russians and Poles) arrived to the Crescent City, and, wanting no part of Reformism, organized their own Orthodox congregations. Polish Jews predominated in the founding of the Society of Men for the Glory of Israel (1871), which rented quarters in the 500 block of Carondelet; Baltic-region Jews were among those who organized the Society for the Hope of Israel (1864), meeting variously at two addresses on Carondelet and one on Dryades Street. The Society of the Psalms organized in 1875 and congregated near the Poydras Street Market, where many worked. Russian, Polish, and Galacian Jews formed the United Brotherhood of the Sephardic Rite (Anshe Sfarad) in 1896 and met at 209 South Rampart,

²⁷⁴ Feibelman, *A Social and Economic Study of the New Orleans Jewish Community*, 64.

²⁷⁵ Lachoff, "A Historical Introduction," 18.

²⁷⁶ As quoted in Louisiana Historical Records Survey, *Inventory of Church and Synagogue Archives*, 36.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 22, and Lachoff, "A Historical Introduction," 19.

then South Rampart at Julia, and later at 1309 South Rampart.²⁷⁹ These and other Orthodox Jews from eastern Europe comprised about one-quarter to one-third of New Orleans Jewry in the turn-of-the-century era; culturally and economically, they contrasted with the established Reform community, of which German Ashkenazics were the majority. In 1890, roughly 550 Orthodox Jewish communicants worshipped in seven small congregations with a total property value of \$20,000, while 2,200 Reformists worshipped in two massive congregations (Temple Sinai and Touro Synagogue) valued at \$215,000.²⁸⁰ As is often the case in the strained relations between established communities and immigrant brethren, elements within the older German Jewish community dissuaded eastern European Jewish immigration to the city, and as a result, fewer came to New Orleans than did to other American cities in the early twentieth century. Those who did “remained unorganized and unheard among the city’s population,”²⁸¹ scattered among smaller congregations. In 1904, a number of Orthodox groups merged as the Congregation Beth Israel (House of Israel), which acquired the home of former Mayor Joseph Shakespeare at 1616 Carondelet and converted it to a place of worship serving 175 families by 1908. Around this time, another Orthodox congregation, Anshe Sfar, also moved to the area—1300 South Rampart—“reflecting the concentration of East Europeans in the Dryades Street neighborhood. This area, roughly bound by St. Charles Avenue, Claiborne Avenue, Julia Street, and First Street, became the focus of such [a] settlement when small merchants and peddlers began moving uptown, out of the Poydras Market area (Poydras and Dryades Streets) around 1890.”²⁸²

DRYADES STREET NEIGHBORHOOD AND THE NEW DOWNTOWN/ UPTOWN ENCLAVES

Dryades Street near the Melpomene intersection emerged from a semi-rural state in the 1840s, particularly after the influential Irish businessman Patrick Irwin opened the Dryades Street Market in January 1849. “The erection of the present market in the Second Ward will...prove highly advantageous to our up-town population, and largely increase the value of property in the vicinity,” predicted the *Daily Picayune*.²⁸³ With the market in place, the Melpomene Canal (which flowed under the market) draining off surface water, and churches and schools constructed in the 1850s, the Dryades Street area was deemed by the 1860s “an agreeable dwelling place” and “socially, morally and religiously a desirable

²⁷⁹ Louisiana Historical Records Survey, *Inventory of Church and Synagogue Archives*, 52; and Lachoff, “A Historical Introduction,” 20.

²⁸⁰ Harriet Kohn Stern, “Origins of Reform Judaism in New Orleans” (M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 1977), 108, based on survey compiled by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations for the 1890 census.

²⁸¹ Lachoff, “A Historical Introduction,” 23.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁸³ “Opening of the Dryades Street Market,” *Daily Picayune*, January 11, 1849, p. 2, col. 6.

portion of the city.”²⁸⁴ A retail community started forming on Dryades Street in the 1850s and was long established by 1903, when merchants, most of them Jewish, took out a full-page ad in the *States* to promote their businesses:

Lined along both sides of Dryades street from Clio to Philip streets, is a succession of stores where every article of necessity or luxury may be found in great profusion; indeed, no part of the city offers a wider opportunity for the supply of every desire. From the palatial establishment of the Chas. A. Kaufman Company to the unpretentious little store of the humble trader, all cater for trade and invite the public to become traders.²⁸⁵

In that charming Victorian diction, the advertisement introduced a litany of Jewish merchants: Hochstein, “the popular young grocer;” Baurhenn the jeweler; Bradburn, “one of the most polite men you ever met;” Silverstein and his china and glass shop; Schilkoffskey, the furniture dealer; Hunsinger’s game and poultry stall in the market; and Kaufman’s, “the greatest place on the street,” where shoppers were gently warned that “it would be well not to leave your purchase until the great [Christmas] rush is on.”²⁸⁶ Despite the preponderance of Jewish names in the Dryades Street business district, a thorough ethnic mixture prevailed on Dryades and in the surrounding neighborhood. Next door to Jewish retailers in the heart of the commercial strip stood, in the late nineteenth century, St. Mary’s Dominican Convent, the Christian Brother’s College, St. John’s Parochial School, and the German Presbyterian Church.²⁸⁷ Thousands of poor blacks, many of them emigrants from Louisiana plantations following emancipation, settled on the “woods side” of the street. Dryades became the number-two retail district in the city, second only to Canal, and the number-one street for black shoppers.

Jewish-owned shops could be found not just on Dryades but along nearby South Rampart Street (described in the 1930s as “the Harlem of New Orleans”²⁸⁸), where a string of tailors, jewelers, and other racially integrated businesses served a predominantly black clientele. Representative of this Orthodox Jewish-owned integrated commercial presence was Karnofsky’s Music Store at 427 South Rampart, where a young Louis Armstrong worked in 1908 and which, later as Morris Music, became “the first jazz music store catering to African-Americans.”²⁸⁹ Racial-composition maps made by the WPA in the 1930s show that Jewish retailing along South Rampart and Dryades formed a commercial interface between the white front-of-town (including the CBD and residential areas) and the black residential back-of-town. Dryades Street

²⁸⁴ “Melpomenia is looking up,” *New Orleans Times*, April 3, 1866, p. 2, col. 4.

²⁸⁵ “Dryades St. and Market,” *Sunday States (New Orleans States)*, December 20, 1903, p. 20.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-21. Roughly half the names in the Dryades Street advertisements accompanying this article were of probable Jewish heritage.

²⁸⁷ Elisha Robinson and Roger H. Pidgeon, *Robinson’s Atlas of the City of New Orleans, Louisiana* (New York, 1883), Plate 3, “Part of 1st Dist., New Orleans.”

²⁸⁸ Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration, *New Orleans City Guide* (Boston, 1938), 343.

²⁸⁹ Greg Thomas, “Saving the Music,” *Times-Picayune*, December 29, 2002, Money section, p. 1.

itself formed an integrated retail district for African Americans living almost exclusively behind Dryades, and for ethnic whites living almost as exclusively riverside of Dryades.²⁹⁰ It was this latter section, loosely known as “the Dryades Street neighborhood,” that became New Orleans’ only universally recognized “Jewish neighborhood.” The WPA New Orleans City Guide of 1938 described adjacent “Carondelet Street, from Jackson to Louisiana Avenue, [as] the street of the Orthodox Jews.”²⁹¹

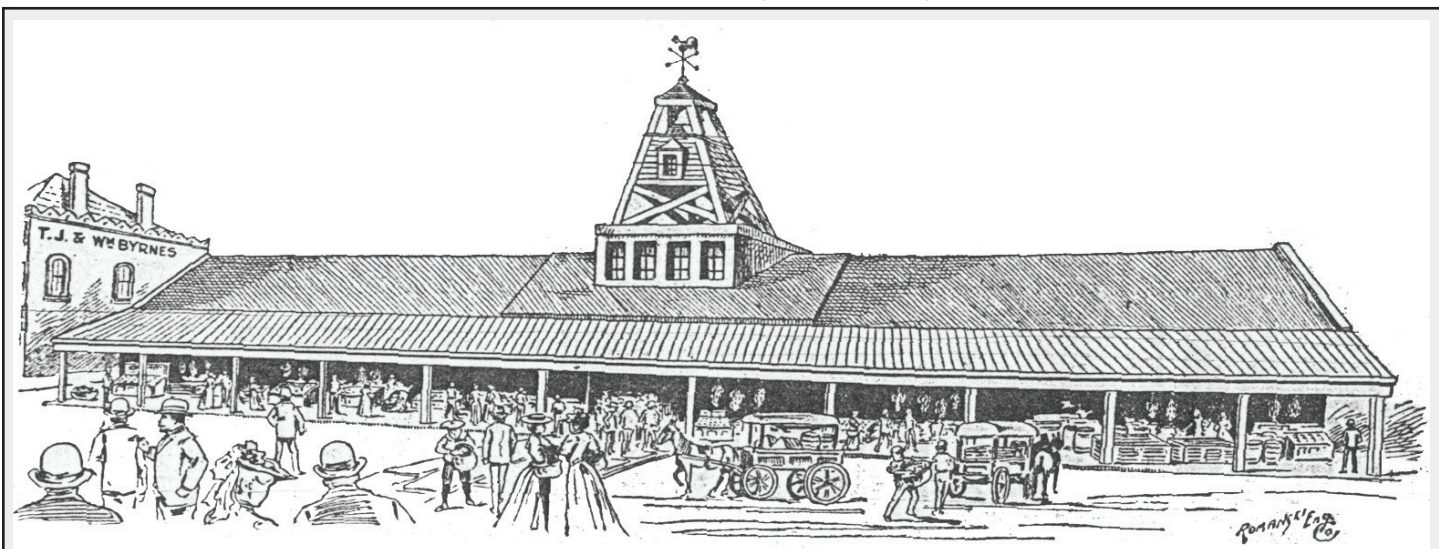
Why did Orthodox Jews live, work, and worship in a more clustered spatial pattern than previous generations of Jews in New Orleans, and why in this particular location? Distinctiveness in terms of ethnicity, language, social and eco-

nomics status, and religious interpretation largely explains the pattern. That they were not particularly welcome by some established members of the old Reform congregations probably added to the Orthodox clustering tendency.²⁹² There is also a pragmatic cultural reason explaining the concentration: by religious law, Orthodox Jews cannot ride mechanized transportation to attend synagogue on the Sabbath. They therefore must live within a reasonable walking distance from their

²⁹⁰ Based on Sam R. Carter, *A Report on Survey of Metropolitan New Orleans Land Use, Real Property, and Low Income Housing Area* (New Orleans, 1941), fold-out maps following page 136. See chapter on African Americans for details.

²⁹¹ Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration, *New Orleans City Guide*, 44.

²⁹² In a piece published in the now-defunct *New Orleans Ethnic Cultures* journal, Nikki Stiller reported that these tensions were alive and well in 1978, when her attempts to include the uptown Jewish community in a discourse on ethnicity in New Orleans were met with “coldness” and “lack of interest.” The uptown Jews of “nineteenth century Western European stock,” opined Stiller, “have no desire to identify or affiliate themselves with Yiddish-speaking, pickle-eating, and economically insecure Eastern European Jews” who were “stranded in the city and in the wilds of Metairie.” Though other anecdotal evidence suggests that the tensions were perhaps not this strained, the correlation between the cultural chasm and the geographical distance once separating the groups is clear. Nikki Stiller, “The New Orleans Jewish Community and the Russian Jews,” in *New Orleans Ethnic Cultures*, ed. John Cooke (New Orleans, 1978), 60-61.



Orthodox Jewish immigrants gravitated to the Dryades area in large part for its municipal market, which provided easy-entry job opportunities and conveniences to working-class immigrants. Opened in 1849, the picturesque Dryades Street Market straddled the Melpomene intersection and was served with streetcar lines connecting with the Poydras Street Market, another source of immigrant employment. The wooden market, shown here in a 1903 newspaper ad and compared to the same place today, was replaced in the early twentieth century with a brick Spanish Revival structure, which still stands (below) on Martin Luther King Boulevard. The market closed around 1950. Photographs by author, 2003-2004; drawing from the *Sunday States*, December 20, 1903.



This detail of a rare aerial photograph, captured in the late 1910s, shows Dryades Street as the second thoroughfare from the left, and St. Charles Avenue at right. Notice the circa-1872 Temple Sinai one block to the left of Lee Circle (upper right), and the Dryades Market at lower left, straddling Melpomene. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University.*

places of worship, which accordingly must be established within the general residential distribution of their members. But why in the Dryades Street area, and not elsewhere? Several likely factors emerge:

- Many community members originally worked as vendors, peddlers, and merchants at the Poydras Market, located in the neutral ground of Poydras Street between Penn and South Rampart. Through the middle of this market—in fact, directly under its cupola—ran perpendicular Dryades Street, and on parts of it ran a streetcar line communicating with the Dryades Street neighborhood. On Dryades at the Melpomene intersection stood another municipal market, the 325-stall Dryades Market, also convenient to the streetcar line and local shoppers and vendors. The Dryades Street line, opened in 1866 and electrified in 1896, provided a convenient transportation connection between the residents' neighborhood, workplaces, and shopping destinations.²⁹³
- The position of Dryades Street (as well South Rampart, closer to the CBD) as an interface between the white front-of-town and the black back-of-town availed to merchants on these corridors a substantial retail clientele on both sides of the racial divide. Jewish merchants, tailors, and jewelers catered in particular to the black community, which was excluded from most other downtown stores through Jim Crow laws. The abandonment of this source of economic demand by mainstream New Orleans left open a niche for immigrant storekeepers to fill, a niche potentially located wherever predominantly black neighborhoods abutted mostly white areas. The Dryades/South Rampart corridor best fit this bill.
- The Dryades Street neighborhood at the turn of the century was a working-class area of functional cottages

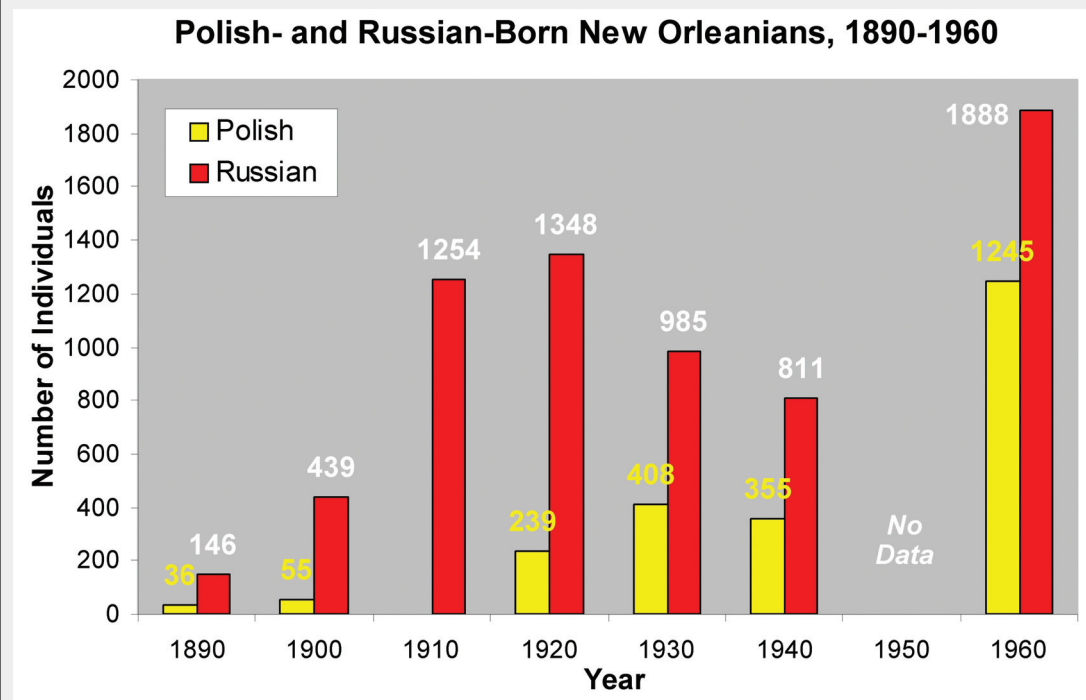
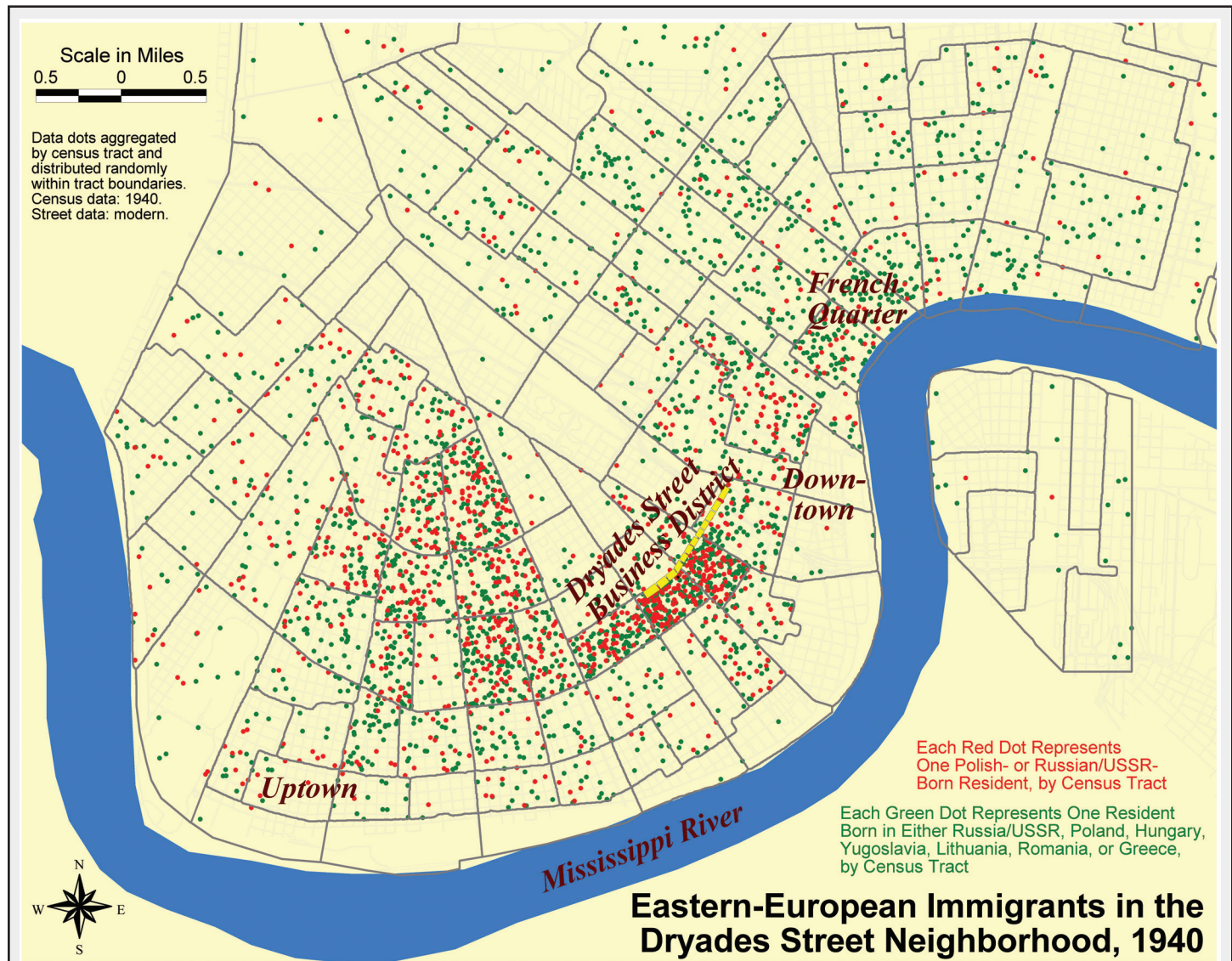
and frame houses. Rent and land were reasonable, yet accessible to the Central Business District and the job opportunities it afforded. The nuisance of living near the congested CBD was counterbalanced by the convenience. The Dryades Street area thus fell within that hardened yet advantageous commercial-residential zone immediately surrounding the Central Business District (“the immigrant belt;” see chapter, “An Ethnic Geography of New Orleans”), a zone that was also home to Chinatown, Little Palermo, and other ethnic enclaves at the turn of the twentieth century.

Once a critical mass of Orthodox Jews assembled in the Dryades Street neighborhood and religious institutions arose, more brethren naturally gravitated to the area because of the existing cultural infrastructure. They were joined by Sicilians, Irish, Germans, eastern Europeans, African Americans, and others who worked and dwelled in this exceedingly diverse neighborhood. In 1938, for example, just on the 1400 block of Dryades, Luca DiMaggio sold fruit and Charles Siracusanano cut hair next door to Harry Finkelstein's second-hand clothing store and across from Benjamin Goldstein's shoe store. The Barton Kosher Delicatessen was located a few doors from the Masonic Lodge, Bert Silverman's poultry, and Hibernia Bank's Dryades Street Branch. A block past the Dryades Market (where butchers Joseph Labadot, Jacob Grisoli, Jacob Koretzky, and René Freche offered meats for dinner) was dessert at the Pearlman Bakery, and spirits at Palermo Murphy Liquors.²⁹⁴ At its post-World War II peak, approximately seventy households, twenty institutions, and 200 businesses—stores with names like Kaufman's, Levigne's, Cohen's, and Weiner's, as well as professional offices and market stalls—lined the twelve blocks of Dryades Street from Howard Avenue to Philip Street.²⁹⁵ The sights, sounds, and

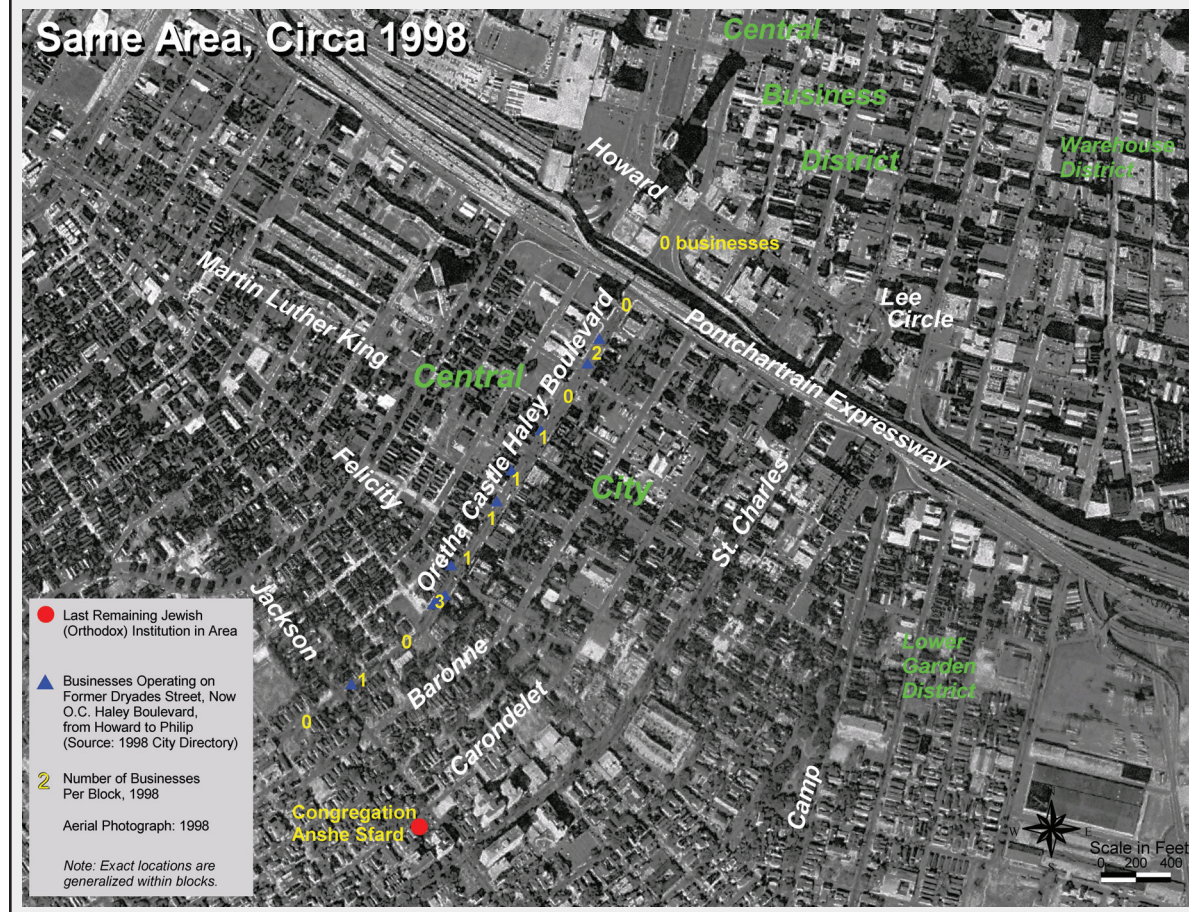
²⁹³ Louis C. Hennick and E. Harper Charlton, *The Streetcars of New Orleans* (Gretna, 2000), 81.

²⁹⁴ *Polk's New Orleans City Directory 1938* (New Orleans, 1938), 1269-1270.

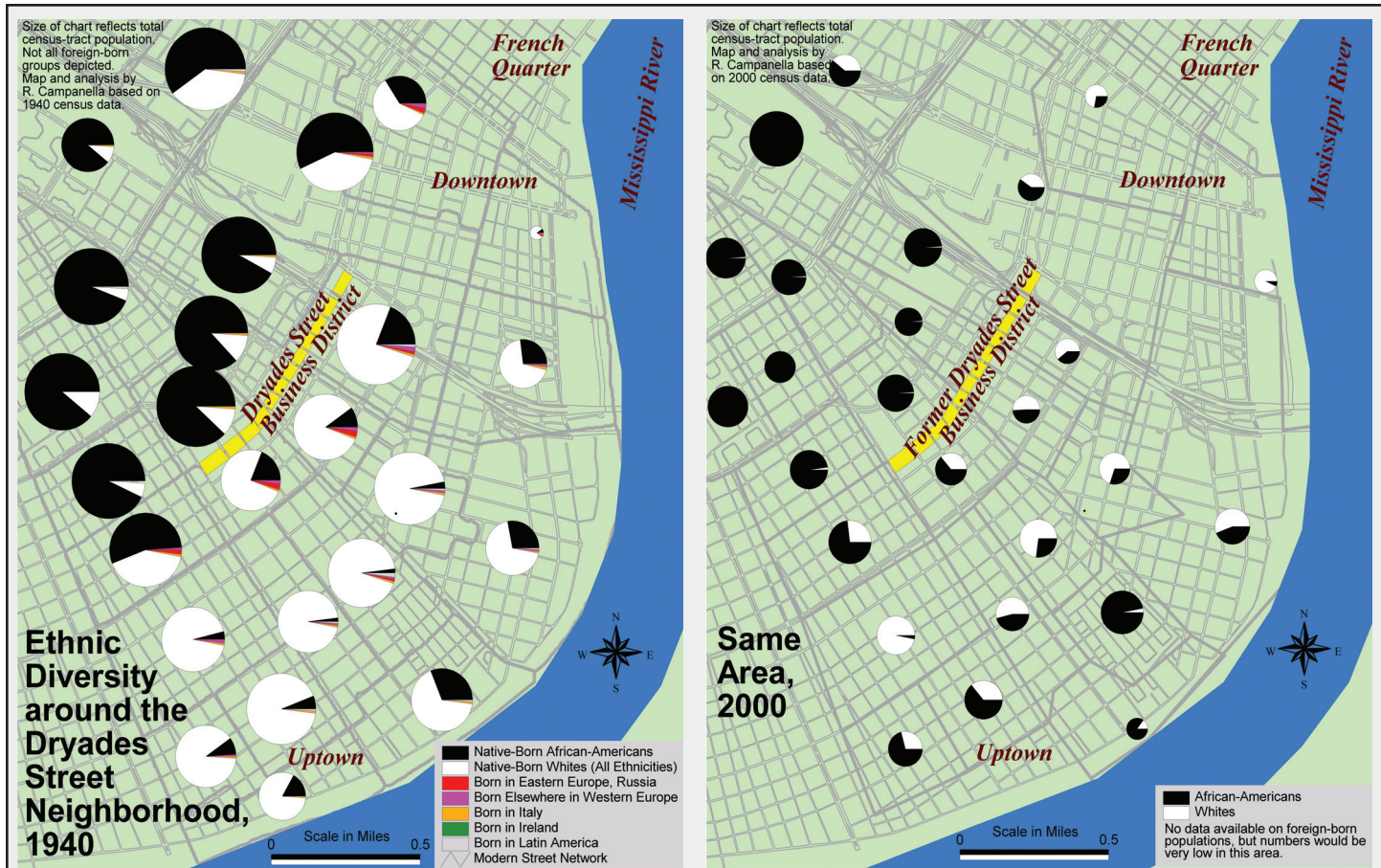
²⁹⁵ Data rounded from *Ibid.*, 1947, 94 of pink section.



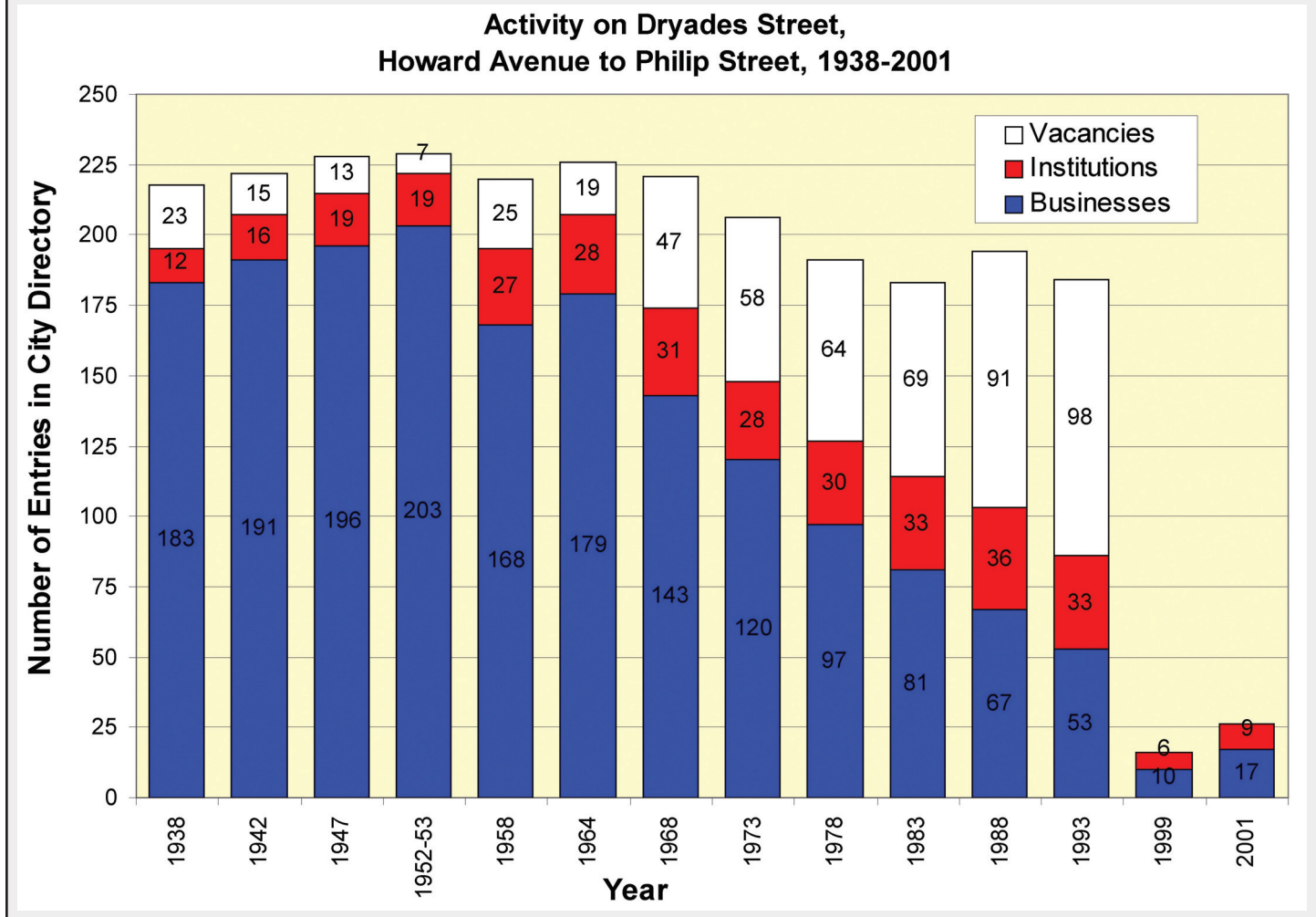
As the Reform community moved uptown in the late 1800s, incoming Orthodox immigrants from Russia, Poland, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe arrived and settled downtown, primarily between Dryades Street and St. Charles Avenue, from Howard to Louisiana. The “Dryades Street neighborhood” was highly multiethnic; Orthodox Jews probably comprised about 20 to 25 percent of the population. Many operated businesses on Dryades proper, catering to both black and white customers in the days of segregation. Others ran shops on South Rampart for a similar clientele. Map, graph, and analysis by author based on 1890-1960 censuses.



Religious law helps explain the Dryades Street neighborhood: Orthodox Jews cannot ride mechanized transportation to attend synagogue on the Sabbath, and therefore must live within walking distance from their places of worship. Shown here are those synagogues, as well as other Jewish institutions and businesses, in 1940, and the same area in 1998, after the suburban exodus radically transformed the area. The Reform community generally does not adhere to this tradition and settled uptown in a more dispersed pattern. Maps and analysis by author based on 1941 Louisiana Historical Records Survey and 1938 City Directory.



Social transformations in the 1960s brought an end to the Orthodox Jewish community of Dryades Street. The graph at right tracks Dryades' decline by counting entries in city directories from 1938 to 2001. The maps above show ethnic diversity in the area in 1940 and 2000, based on census data. Maps, graph, and analysis by author.



smells of the neighborhood exuded elements of European cities crossed with a New Orleans aesthetic, a community culturally closer to Brooklyn or Manhattan than to Carrollton or Algiers.

As the Orthodox community settled in the Dryades Street area, the Reformists migrated from the “old uptown” of upper Faubourg St. Mary and Lafayette to the garden suburbs of “new uptown:” upper St. Charles Avenue toward Audubon Park. Their institutions followed. Touro Synagogue—that is, the amalgamated Gates of Mercy of the Dispersed of Judah congregation—moved from their antebellum synagogue at Carondelet near Julia to a new Byzantine-style building at 4200 St. Charles Avenue on January 1, 1909.²⁹⁶ Gates of Prayer, the Lafayette-based Ashkenazic congregation formed during the German immigration era, relocated from its antebellum site on Jackson Avenue to the comfortable new environs of 1139 Napoleon in 1920. Its main reason for departure was the deterioration of the neighborhood.²⁹⁷ (The Jewish Widows’ and Orphans’ Home, built in old Lafayette in the same era by the same congregation, had relocated uptown in the late 1880s, when the enormous Jewish Orphans’ Home was completed on St. Charles Avenue at the present-day Jefferson intersection, then called Peters Avenue. Now long gone, it was the most prominent landmark of uptown New Orleans for many years.) In 1925, Temple Sinai continued the uptown migration of Reform congregations when it too decided to relocate. It held its last service in the circa-1872 temple on Carondelet Street in 1926, started building a new Byzantine-style synagogue at 6227 St. Charles Avenue in 1927, and occupied the new site in 1928.²⁹⁸ For many decades, a geographical, economic, and cultural chasm prevailed between these wealthier, older, more Germanic, totally assimilated, and highly influential “St. Charles Avenue Jews”²⁹⁹ of the uptown Reform congregations, and the working-class, eastern-European-immigrant “Dryades Street Jews” of the downtown Orthodox congregations. In this regard, the geography of Jewish New Orleans mimicked that of New York City, where wealthier German Jews resided in the affluent Upper East Side, far from the lower-class Russian Jewish immigrants amassed in the Lower East Side.³⁰⁰ Neither population predominated in their neighborhoods; in fact, both were numerical minorities. The uptown Reform community outnumbered the Orthodox by roughly a two-to-one margin, and was more influential in New Orleans business and society by a wide margin. But it was not as culturally distinctive and geographically concentrated as the Orthodox, in part

²⁹⁶ Louisiana Historical Records Survey, *Inventory of Church and Synagogue Archives*, 22.

²⁹⁷ “History of Congregation Gates of Prayer,” Gates of Prayer Congregation, <http://uahcweb.org/la/gop/history.html> (accessed April 2002 and May 2004).

²⁹⁸ The majestic old synagogue on Carondelet was sold off, remodeled, and used alternately as offices, storage space, a community theater, and studios before being demolished in 1977. Its site is now an empty lot near WDSU Channel 6’s office.

²⁹⁹ As quoted by Elizabeth Mullener, “Genesis and Exodus,” *Times-Picayune*, May 25, 1997, Living Section, E1

³⁰⁰ Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven and London, 2001), 3.

because of the Reformists’ greater wealth, establishment, and assimilation in the community, and for the aforementioned Sabbath tradition. Not compelled to live within walking distance of their places of worship, the Reform community was and remains fairly dispersed within the spacious confines of uptown. Nor was there ever a particular strip of Reform-owned businesses in uptown; their business enterprises were the great department stores and professional offices of Canal Street and the CBD. For these reasons, it is the picturesque Dryades Street scene of the Orthodox community that generations of New Orleanians warmly remember as “the Jewish neighborhood.”

ASIDE: JEWISH NEW ORLEANS IN 1938

A Social and Economic Study of the New Orleans Jewish Community, conducted in 1938 by Julian B. Feibelman and published in 1941, revealed the following information:

- There were 6,472 Jews in New Orleans in 1938, or 1.4 percent of the city’s 1930 population of 458,762. This figure fell below an earlier estimate of 9,000, and equated to a smaller percentage than sixty-eight other American cities with populations over 100,000, in which the average Jewish percentage per city was slightly over 11 percent.
- The average size of the 1,921 Jewish families in New Orleans was 3.03 people, significantly less than the New Orleans average of 3.81 and the Louisiana mean of 4.09. Three-quarters of this population was over age twenty-one.
- In 1938, 47 percent of Jewish families belonged to Reform congregations, 25 percent were Orthodox, and the remainder were unaffiliated. By 1953, 57 percent identified themselves as Reform, while 30 percent claimed Orthodox.
- The community was well-educated on 1938 standards: “one-third have public school education; nearly one-half has some or complete high school; and more than one-quarter has some or complete college training.”³⁰¹ Almost 77 percent of Jewish children received regular religious education.
- 81 percent of New Orleans’ 6,472 Jews in 1938 were native-born (that is, possessing U.S. citizenship), a year when 95 percent of New Orleans was native-born. The foreign-born contingent included 985 from Russia and 408 from Poland. During and after World War II, local Orthodox Jews helped settle a contingent of Jewish refugees from war-torn Europe, sharing as they did the Yiddish language. Many among this last significant influx of Jews to New Orleans resided for a while in the Dryades area.
- Among the 2,590 people gainfully employed, the occupation of manager-executive was the most common

³⁰¹ Feibelman, *A Social and Economic Study of the New Orleans Jewish Community*, 56.



These former Jewish religious buildings in the Dryades neighborhood are now used by African American Protestant congregations. Photographs by author, 2002-2003.



(41 percent), followed by salesman-buyer (24 percent), and clerical worker (15 percent). Doctors and lawyers comprised 7 percent of the work force.

- Regarding intermarriage and assimilation, incomplete but nevertheless interesting data from the 1938 survey showed that “more non-Jewish women marry Jewish men, than do Jewish women marry non-Jewish men. One in 17 Jewish families has a non-Jewish member.”³⁰²

EXODUS TO THE SUBURBS

The middle-class exodus from New Orleans to the suburbs during the 1950s-1990s had a limited impact on the uptown Reform community. For one, uptown remained prosperous and relatively safe during the crime waves of recent decades. Secondly, most Reform congregations incorporated in the nineteenth century under charters that bound them to Orleans Parish. An exception was Gates of Prayer, founded in 1850 in the Jefferson Parish suburb of Lafayette, two years before it was annexed into New Orleans. After about seventy years on Jackson Avenue and another half-century at 1139 Napoleon Avenue, Gates of Prayer decided to depart New Orleans starting in 1966 and moved incrementally over the next decade, finally dedicating a new suburban temple

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 54.

in 1975. Members decided to move because of neighborhood deterioration, rumors of a Mississippi River bridge on Napoleon Avenue, and because many members were already relocating to the suburbs.³⁰³ Once again, Gates of Prayer was the first synagogue in suburban New Orleans, albeit briefly. Today, Gates of Prayer operates a world away from the vacant circa-1860s Jackson Avenue Shul, at 4000 West Esplanade Avenue, the locus of nine Jewish religious and educational institutions strung out along this suburban Jefferson Parish boulevard.

A generation after the Reform community moved uptown, the Orthodox community began to leave Dryades Street, for the same “pull” and “push” factors that sent millions of middle-class urban Americans to the suburbs after World War II.³⁰⁴ Unlike the Reform community, which relocated from the inner city to uptown decades earlier, the Orthodox had more geographical options from which to choose, because the metropolitan area had by the mid-twentieth century expanded considerably toward the lake and into Jefferson Parish. Also unlike the uptown Reform community, the Orthodox Jews of Dryades Street lived in racially mixed residential blocks adjacent to the city’s most expansive African American neighborhoods. These areas were on the front lines of the social changes of the 1950s and 1960s, and witnessed occasional racial tensions. In 1960, civil rights activists had observed that blacks accounted for roughly three-quarters of the clientele at Dryades Street stores, but only one-third of their workforce and one-eighth of the better jobs. “Upwards of two thousand blacks staged the first civil rights march in

³⁰³ “History of Congregation Gates of Prayer,” Gates of Prayer Congregation, <http://uahc.org/la/la006/index.html> (accessed April 2002 and May 2004).

³⁰⁴ A 1958 sociological study reported that “pull” factors weighed heavier than “push” factors among those who left New Orleans in the previous five years: 31 percent moved for more house space, 14 percent for business reasons, 12 percent to buy a home, and 10 percent because of a decrease in family size. Less than one in ten explained their move as leaving an undesirable neighborhood. Leonard Reissman, *Profile of a Community: A Sociological Study of the New Orleans Jewish Community* (New Orleans, 1958), 40-41.



This former home of Chevra Thilim, built in 1927 at 826 Lafayette Street in the CBD, is the farthest-downriver extant structural landmark of historic Jewish New Orleans. The congregation relocated uptown in 1949 and later to Metairie. Photograph by author, 2003.



Only Anshe Sfarde (2230 Carondelet Street) remains in operation near the old Dryades area, the last institutional element of New Orleans' only popularly recognized Jewish neighborhood. Photograph by author, 2003.

New Orleans in living memory,³⁰⁵ and a boycott followed. Concessions were made by the merchants and tensions eased, but in the wake of the incident, many long-time merchants began to see their future in uptown or the suburbs. Integration played an even greater, though unintended, role in the decline of Dryades Street: the fall of Jim Crow opened up retail options, once limited to Dryades, South Rampart, and few other places, for thousands of African American shoppers. As they took their business to Canal Street, enterprises on Dryades folded, storefronts were shuttered, and Jewish families departed. The residential exodus was followed by the relocation or closure of the neighborhood's Jewish institutions, which in turn triggered the departure of remaining residents. Concurrently, Orthodox congregations throughout the city lost membership to out-migration, secularization of youth, and internal divisions. In the 1950s, a faction of Chevra Thilim, which had moved from its Central Business District location (826 Lafayette Street) to uptown South Claiborne Avenue in 1949, broke off to form the city's first Conservative synagogue. After a while on Magazine Street near Napoleon, it moved in 1978 to Jefferson Parish, under the name Tikvat Shalom (Hope of Peace). Chevra Thilim itself became Conservative in 1988.³⁰⁶ The Orthodox Beth Israel, bound by its charter to Orleans Parish, relocated in 1971 to the Lakefront area at Canal and Robert E. Lee Boulevard. It and Anshe Sfarde "strive to keep Orthodox Jewish traditions alive in New Orleans"³⁰⁷ today. Only this latter congregation, located at 2230 Carondelet Street, survives in the Dryades Street area, the last trace of this once-vibrant and unique New Orleans neighborhood.³⁰⁸ A neighborhood still exists here, of course,

³⁰⁵ Liva Baker, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: The Hundred-Year Struggle to Integrate the Schools* (New York, 1996), 326.

³⁰⁶ Lachoff, "A Historical Introduction," 32-33.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁰⁸ Anshe Sfarde Synagogue is located at the extreme uptown edge of the Dryades Street neighborhood, on a shady and pleasant street close to St. Charles Avenue and the Garden District. Proximity to prosperous areas may partially explain Anshe Sfarde's survival. Many members live in the suburbs.

filled with its own hopes and dreams, but crime and despair taunt those aspirations and seem, at times, to prevail.

Today, the former Dryades Street neighborhood is a ghost of its former self: the Orthodox Jews have departed, the shops have closed, the aromas of delicatessens have drifted away, and the ethnic diversity is gone. Even the names are changed. In 1977, Melpomene from Baronne Street to Earhart Boulevard, including its prominent intersection with Dryades, was renamed Martin Luther King Boulevard. Twelve years later, Dryades Street from Howard Avenue to Philip Street was renamed Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard, in honor of a



Dryades Street, now Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard, and Melpomene Street (now Martin Luther King, at right), today. Photographs by author, 2002-2003.



Now-closed Jewish-owned department stores on former Dryades Street: Kaufman's, at left, was completely renovated a few years ago as a community art gallery, which has since become the locus of the renewed neighborhood spirit on the new Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard. Handelman's is currently undergoing a similar adaptive reuse. Photographs by author, 2003.



local civil rights leader. What was once unofficially but universally known as “the Dryades Street neighborhood” is now officially called Central City. All businesses from the earlier generation are now disappeared, including the large, multi-story department stores dating from the nineteenth century. Those few enterprises launched in recent decades tended to be corner grocery stores, beauty shops, and the like, often with hand-painted signs. Trash, weeds, and immobile old cars predominated in the blocks around Oretha Castle Haley in the last years of the twentieth century.

The graph on page 275, *Activity on Dryades Street: Howard Avenue to Philip Street, 1938-2001*, developed from city directory listings, tracks the decline of the Dryades business community in the late twentieth century. Certain telltale signs of neighborhood decline start to appear as one peruses directory listings for multiple years. Buildings, for example, are often subdivided into apartments and boarding houses. Substantial businesses are replaced with tiny ones, if at all. The old Dryades Market was closed around 1950 after a century of service, as automobiles carried its clientele out to new suburban supermarkets. Vacancies increase, to the point that directories in the 1990s no longer bothered to list them. The words “Not Verified” start to appear in the listings. The Masonic Temple and the myriad organizations that met there all disappeared. The number of social-welfare organizations for the poverty-stricken began to increase. There was even a “Get ‘Em & Hit ‘Em” Liquor Store at 2136 Dryades in 1978—which apparently did well, because by 1988 it opened up a bar and expanded into a neighboring lot.

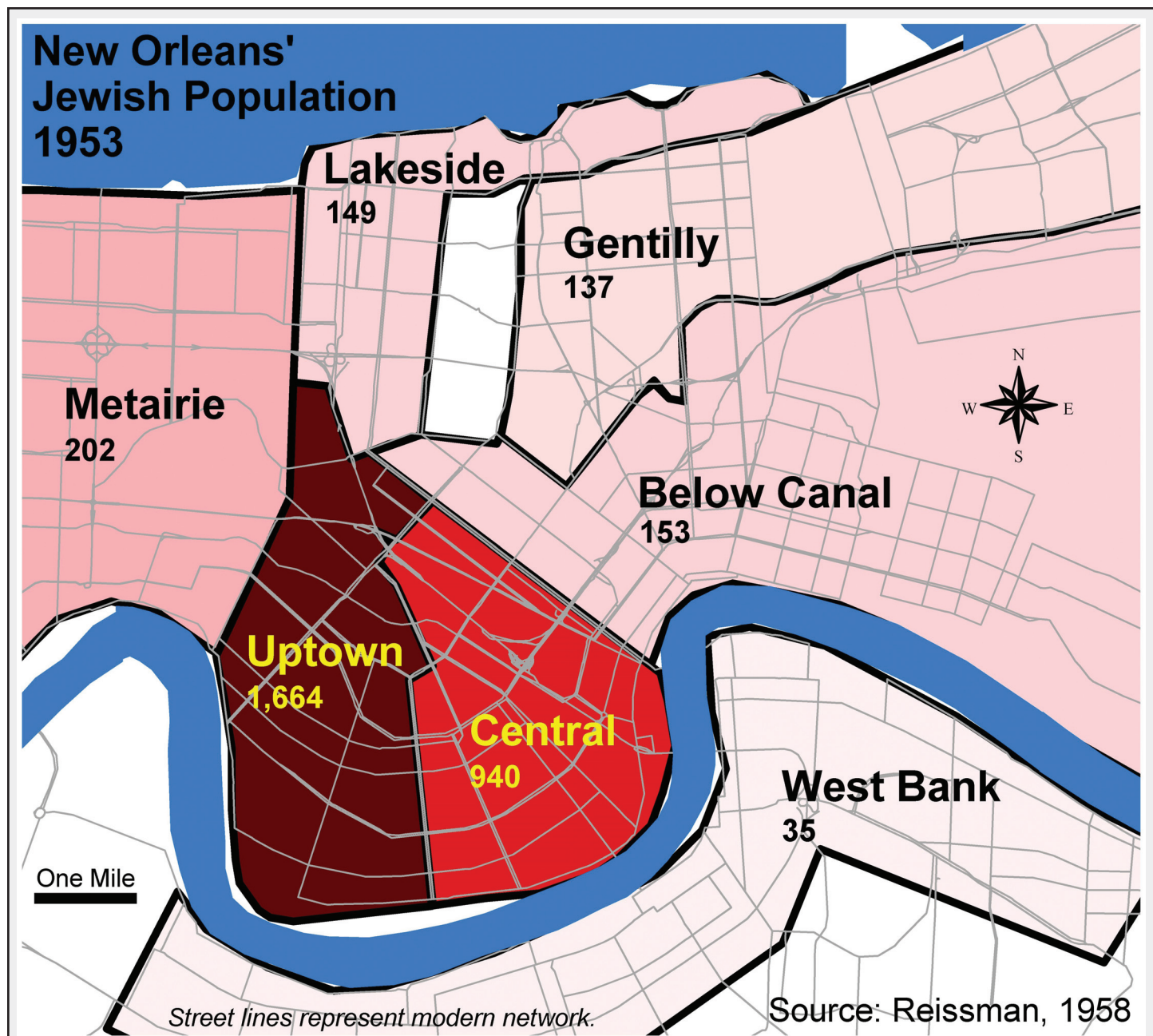
The only traces of Dryades Street’s former vibrancy today are fading palimpsests on decaying buildings along what was once the second busiest commercial stretch in the city. But change is on the horizon: urban activists and the preservationist community have teamed with local residents in revitalizing the area with architectural restoration, new construction, house relocation, and conversion of former department stores and shops to art galleries and community centers. Colorful murals celebrating New Orleans culture and

commemorating the civil rights legacy of the area now cover bare brick walls, across the street from the popular Café Reconcile, a restaurant providing job training for at-risk youth. Initial discussions of a civil rights museum on Oretha Castle Haley, seen by some as the birthplace of the city’s civil rights movement, are currently underway. By late 2004, seven new business and community entities had been established on the boulevard, including the first financial institution in decades. The street once associated with the Jewish community now thoroughly and proudly reflects a black identity. Said one activist, “we need to make sure we keep investing in this street, that *an African-American street* has our time, investment, and money.”³⁰⁹ With the same hard work that lifted the Orthodox immigrants from their stalls in the Poydras Market to their present-day prosperity, Central City may also rise again.

³⁰⁹ Mark Schleifstein, “Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard,” *Times-Picayune*, December 11, 2004, A1-A16 (emphasis added); Bruce Egger, “Civil Rights Museum Is Revived by Senator,” *Times-Picayune*, May 31, 2004, Metro section, B1-2.



As the street name changed from Dryades to Oretha Castle Haley, so too shifted the street’s sense of ethnic place, from Orthodox Jewish to African American. Here, a Katz Furniture advertisement fades behind a freshly painted mural of Martin Luther King releasing a dove over the troubled neighborhood, which is depicted cartographically at center. Photograph by author, Mardi Gras 2005.



While there are no “Jewish neighborhoods” in modern New Orleans, one overriding spatial pattern has persisted since antebellum times: a Jewish preference for the upper reaches of the city and the western half of the metropolis, as illustrated in these 1953 data. Jewish institutions, landscape features, and households are scarce in areas below the French Quarter or east of City Park. This pattern can be traced to the historical Anglo/Creole ethnic geography of the early nineteenth century, in which Jewish families generally settled among the Anglos, toward uptown. Map by author based on data collected by Leonard Reissman.

GEOGRAPHY OF JEWISH NEW ORLEANS, 1800S-2000S

Present as Jewish peoples were within New Orleans' various waves of immigration, we see in the geography of Jewish New Orleans reflections of the patterns of numerous other groups. Those few Jews who lived in colonial New Orleans resided in cultural anonymity dispersed throughout the French Quarter, replicating the pattern of many minority groups settling in the Creole city. Those Sephardim and Ashkenazim who arrived in the early 1800s also dispersed citywide, but showed a predilection for the Americanized blocks of the upper French Quarter and Faubourg St. Mary, where the first Jewish congregations were established. This downtown pattern correlated with that of Anglo emigrants who also gener-

ally avoided the Creole lower half of the city. The German Ashkenazic Jewish immigrants who arrived in the mid-1800s settled largely uptown in Lafayette, reflecting the tendency of poor immigrants of the day to disperse in the semi-urban periphery, where unskilled employment and cheap land made life tenable. With the more prosperous Jewish establishment living downtown and the poor Jewish immigrant community living uptown, the antebellum geography of Jewish New Orleans echoed the city's socio-economic geography: *the wealthier classes were found in the inner city; the working-class immigrant classes resided in the outskirts*. This trend has been observed in many antebellum American cities.

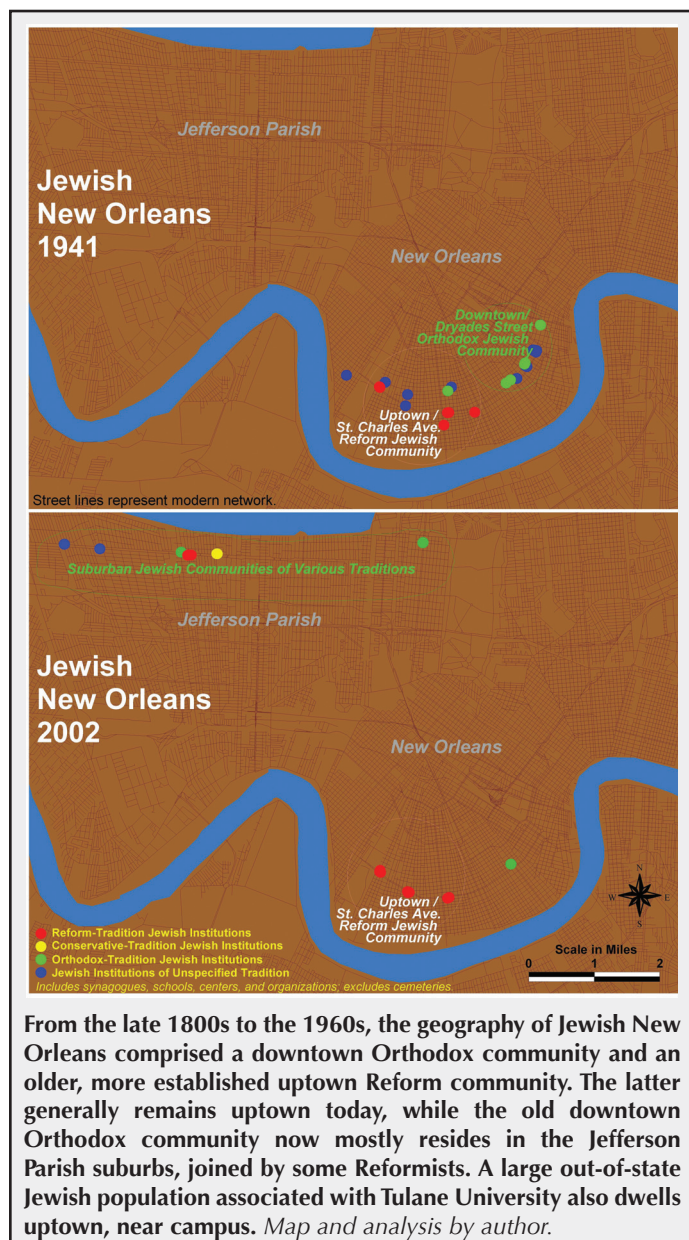
In the decades following the Civil War, the trend reversed. Wealthier classes evacuated the inner city and headed to the

uptown garden suburbs, opening up housing opportunities downtown for the working-class poor, where unskilled job opportunities now lay. Orthodox Jewish immigrants arriving in the late nineteenth century from eastern Europe thus settled downtown, in the gritty Dryades Street area, while the prosperous descendants of the older Jewish families—who now worshipped in Reform congregations—relocated far uptown, in the leafy neighborhoods around upper St. Charles Avenue. “Dryades Street Jews” and “St. Charles Jews” would come into the local lexicon to describe this ethnic, economic, and geographical gulf. This trend, too—of postbellum immigrants settling downtown as established populations moved outward—has been observed in many American cities.

Finally, once again in parallel with other groups and other cities, the downtown Orthodox Jewish community departed for the Jefferson Parish suburbs during the decline of the inner city in the 1960s, while the Reform community generally stayed put in uptown. The Jewish community of the greater New Orleans metropolitan area today resides mostly in the western half; with the possible exception of the French Quar-



Congregation Shangarai Tefilah (Gates of Prayer) cemetery is located uptown at Joseph and Garfield streets, near Langenstein’s corner grocery, founded in 1922. Despite the citywide tradition of above-ground burials, introduced by the Spanish and often explained as a response to high water tables, all Jewish cemeteries in the city are below-ground, in accordance with Jewish tradition. This demonstrates that burial customs in New Orleans primarily reflect cultural rather than geographical factors. Photograph by author, 2004.



ter,³¹⁰ very few Jews live in the downtown, eastern, or southern (West Bank) portions of the metropolis. Except for a few cemeteries on Elysian Fields Avenue, Jewish institutions and other landscape elements, past or present, are almost wholly absent from these areas. This pattern can be traced back to the historical American/Creole ethnic geography of early nineteenth-century New Orleans. Maps of the Jewish and Creole communities today indicate that the two groups continue to reside apart from each other, one uptown and west,

³¹⁰ The 2002 Orleans Parish Assessment Roll records a significant number of probable Jewish surnames among the parcel owners of the French Quarter. It is difficult to ascertain, however, how many owners actually reside in the Quarter.



The Jewish Widows’ and Orphans’ Home in old Lafayette relocated uptown in the late 1880s to this impressive edifice on St. Charles Avenue at the present-day Jefferson intersection, then called Peters Avenue. It was the most prominent landmark of uptown New Orleans for many years. The site is now occupied by “the JCC”—the Jewish Community Center. Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University.



Touro Synagogue and Temple Sinai form the two major landmarks of the uptown Reform community along St. Charles Avenue. Photographs by author, 2003-2004.

one downtown and east. In one curious spot, however, do they symbolically unite: at the Creole Kosher Restaurant on 115 Chartres Street.

Evidence of past Jewish geographies can be found enconced in the modern-day cityscape. A few crumbling remnants of the Gates of Prayer congregation remain at the foot of Jackson Avenue, most notably the former Lafayette Shul, the oldest surviving major structural vestige of Jewish New Orleans. The Jewish retailers have mostly departed the CBD, although Rubenstein's (since 1924) and Meyer the Hatter

(since 1894), among the last old-line soft-goods stores downtown, still operate on St. Charles Avenue, and Fischer's Jewelry still survives on South Rampart. Abundant evidence may be found in the former Dryades Street neighborhood, where most synagogues, institutions, and homes from the Orthodox era still stand, where business signs such as *Handelman* and *Levigne* still are visible, and where one synagogue, Anshe Sfard, miraculously still functions. Jewish New Orleans is most evident during the high holy days along uptown St. Charles Avenue, when hundreds of faithful walk from their homes to Temple Sinai and Touro Synagogue, the two descendants of western America's first Jewish congregation, founded in the French Quarter almost two centuries earlier.



Creole Kosher Kitchen on Chartres Street. Photograph by author, 2004.



The Dryades area is replete with clues to its former Orthodox Jewish association. Photograph by author, 2003.



Haberdasheries, dry-goods stores, jewelers, tailors, and other Jewish-owned businesses once lined South Rampart Street and other downtown thoroughfares. A few remain (visible in upper photos), last representatives of a long line of downtown merchants, dating in some cases to the early nineteenth century. Clues such as old signs and doorway mosaics attest to their former presence. Photographs by author, 2003-2004.

