Can’t Let it Go:
Neighborhood Change and the Candlelight Lounge in Historic Tremé

A Project Of
Tulane City Center & Cornerstones
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In Collaboration With
Sister Alison McCrary, Soros Justice Advocacy Fellow, and the Candlelight Community
Introduction

The Community: Intersections of Place and Culture

Map of Former Barrooms, Clubs, and Halls in Historic Tremé

Map of Barrooms in Historic Tremé Today

The Place: The Candlelight Experience

The Space and Layout of the Candlelight Lounge

Candlelight Family Tree

Passing It On: Keeping Community and Culture Vibrant

Resources and Future Reading

Acknowledgments

TABLE OF CONTENTS
INTRODUCTION

When they built the park, they separated everybody, all the families and friends. They tore the houses down when they built the park. That started closing the businesses down and things. People we grew up with moved to different neighborhoods, so we lost contact with all the people that come up in the neighborhood. Another time, we used to have a lot of businesses on Claiborne Street. They built the interstate and that took plenty of culture out of the neighborhood. They had bars and lounges and all kinds of black businesses in the neighborhood and when the interstate come through, that separated us more. There used to be plenty of businesses and plenty of clubs all through here. You could walk at any hour of the night and they had live entertainment at different clubs all through the neighborhood. After they tore the houses down and built the interstate, that took everything. What's killing me about it now, is that people moving in the neighborhood, they don't want live entertainment, the culture. They've always had plenty of culture around here – the brass bands, the Mardi Gras Indians, the social aid and pleasure clubs. We've always had that in the neighborhood. The people moving in, they're not familiar with that and they don't want to be a part of the music and the culture. They get their friends to move in and buy houses and they're trying to destroy the music and the culture.

-- Benny Jones Senior, Founder and Leader Tremé Brass Band

Cornerstones is a place documentary initiative that has teamed up with Tulane City Center at Tulane’s School of Architecture on various outreach projects throughout the city. The project both documents and promotes sites that store, facilitate, or perpetuate New Orleans’ history, culture, and sense of place. Tulane City Center and Cornerstones were asked by community members of the Candlelight Lounge in the Historic Tremé neighborhood to document and position the significance of the barroom within the neighborhood and New Orleans, so that efforts to sustain the barroom can be well supported. The Candlelight Lounge is the only longtime barroom and live music venue still open in the Historic Tremé, a community celebrated for its jazz and performance culture. Cornerstones has documented other sites in New Orleans with an uncertain future, such as the Mother-In-Law Lounge after Mrs. Antoinette K-Doe passed away and the Deutsches Haus prior to the demolition of Lower Mid-City for the development of the LSU/VA biomedical complex. The Candlelight Lounge, by comparison, faces slower-moving, quieter threats.

When Mrs. Leona Grandison, known to her friends and family as “Ms. Chine,” opened the Candlelight Lounge in 1985 with her brother Landry Grandison, there were at least 30 other barrooms operating in the Historic Tremé. Many of those barrooms featured live music and most of the musicians were from the neighborhood. Today the Candlelight Lounge is one of only six open barrooms in the Historic Tremé and the only one which is not located on the perimeter of the neighborhood. The Candlelight is also the only long-standing barroom in the community that has live music. Since before Hurricane Katrina, the community has experienced change associated with gentrification, such as increased property values and rental rates and the introduction of more restrictive
commercial and live entertainment zoning ordinances. As a result, many of the Candlelight’s regulars no longer live in the Tremé neighborhood or never returned to the city after Katrina. In addition, the built and cultural landscape that once defined the community has changed significantly in recent years.

Over the last few months, Cornerstones has spent time at the Candlelight Lounge, meeting with and interviewing community members, observing the everyday life of the barroom, and researching the history of the site. The interview passage included here from Benny Jones Senior of the Tremé Brass Band came to reflect the observations and sentiments of the community members we interviewed for this project, and that unified voice served as the backdrop for both our research work and this booklet. Longtime residents of Tremé have experienced much loss and displacement as a result of redevelopment initiatives over the decades, notably whole residential blocks of the community cleared for the creation of the Louis Armstrong Park and the construction of Interstate 10 over top the community's commercial and civic corridor, all losses that still lay close to the surface of residents’ memories even decades later. These disruptions to the neighborhood, as Benny Jones and others describe them, have eroded a tight knit community of people and a place that was unto its own, a community with the needed variety of businesses to carry on from day to day, street life where people walked everywhere and kept an eye out for their neighbors, and a sensual scape of syncopated beats, dancing, and smells of home cooking.

This project, and booklet, is not a comprehensive documentation of these significant changes in the neighborhood since the second half of the twentieth century. A set of historians, anthropologists, and urbanists have carefully documented the impacts to Tremé as a result of the construction of Louis Armstrong Park and Interstate 10. More recent impacts in the neighborhood have related to changes in property ownership and more restrictive zoning ordinances, such as the Residential Diversity Overlay passed in 2010, which prohibits commercial zoning of corner lots as bars, restaurants, or live music venues. The impacts of these developments have been less researched because they are so recent in the history of the community. Journalists so far have produced the most writing on the topic, looking at some prominent events of contention over the new zoning in the community and impacts on street performance traditions, such as jazz funerals and second line parades, and the forced closure of Little People’s Place and similar venues that historically served as hubs for these traditions. Relevant readings related to these issues of redevelopment, neighborhood change, and adaptation in Tremé are listed at the end of this booklet.

For this project, our research focused on the Candlelight Lounge, and our interviews were with people who identify as members of the Candlelight community. The importance of the Candlelight was always explained to us either implicitly or explicitly in reference to these major shifts in the Tremé neighborhood, and the barroom cannot be understood without acknowledging the context that has gradually diminished live music, street performance, public gatherings, and neighborhood businesses and barrooms in the community over time. In light of these factors, our research shows that Mrs. Grandison, the musicians who play at her bar, barroom “regulars,” and some of her neighbors feel that their way of life and community as they remember them are seriously threatened.
This sense of vulnerability becomes particularly poignant in light of the fact that jazz, street parades, “baby dolls,” and cornerstores, among many of the community’s long-time traditions and resources, have become iconic of both Tremé and New Orleans, a selling point for festivals, conventions, major tourist events, and movies and an irony that is not lost on Candlelight community members.

We have divided this booklet into three sections: the community, the place, and passing it on. In the first section of the booklet, we use interviews, archival images, and maps to establish the long-time ties between neighborhood places and social and cultural activity in Historic Tremé. In the second section, we take an intimate look at the space and the social ties and activities that make the Candlelight Lounge a unique neighborhood barroom. In the final section, the connection between the Candlelight Lounge and its sister space, Tuba Fats Square, and the importance for such spaces for the passing on of New Orleans cultural practices is explored.

All the interviews and sections of this booklet overlap and work together to share the particular story of the Candlelight’s efforts and struggles to sustain community and live music in Tremé, but the story of the Candlelight also speaks to issues relevant to the rest of the city and to other urban communities. While in some cases, zoning changes and new businesses or shifts in property ownership can benefit the longtime residents of a community, the changes associated with gentrification in Tremé in recent years are viewed negatively by the Candlelight community, and that storyline is important here. As different communities deal with the tensions that arise between transition and tradition as part of gentrification or neighborhood improvement, this booklet speaks pointedly to the importance of particular spaces and places for sustaining community and culture, particularly in a neighborhood like Tremé where the living heritage is the source of so much pleasure, pride, and even profit for the city.

Barrooms are intensively-used spaces, and they can be viewed as “nuissance” uses in communities, but in New Orleans, barrooms like the Candlelight Lounge have been central to some of the city’s most prominent cultural activities, as well as serving socially fundamental functions, such as providing food to hungry regulars or serving as a gig networking space for local musicians. The Candlelight and similar spaces in the city should not be overlooked for the important functions they play in keeping communities connected, particularly in times of disruption, like Hurricane Katrina, or major change, like gentrification, when residents profoundly need the continuity and comfort of community and tradition.

In the end, this booklet presents a portrait of a place that has served an everyday role in the lives of Tremé residents past and present, and in so doing, it has also sustained a festive spirit and a performance culture that have made the barroom a meaningful place to Candlelight community members in the neighborhood and well beyond.

Bethany Rogers, PhD
Cornerstones Director

Note: We use North Claiborne Avenue, Esplanade Avenue, North Rampart Street, and Orleans Avenue/Basin Street as our boundaries for Historic Tremé, but geographic boundaries defining the community vary. See the Resources section.
Historic Tremé

The Community: Intersections of Place and Culture

This section features interviews with Oswald ‘Bo’ Henry, Patricia McDonald, Aldo Andrews, and Louis ‘June’ Price. These community members have lived in Tremé all or most of their lives, and their rememberances of the community when there was more street and social life are presented. This section highlights the importance of neighborhood spaces, barrooms in particular, in the social and cultural life of Tremé and why today the Candlelight Lounge is celebrated as the only long-standing live music venue left in the neighborhood. Bo, Pat, Aldo, and June are active participants in various community activities and traditions, and they are recognized as cultural caretakers by their friends and neighbors.
When I come up they had a place on Saint Philip called Louis Black. It was a cleaners. You had suppers there and you had bands in the yard. You might start in the evening and go until 1 or 2 in the morning. Nobody said nothing. The people in the neighborhood got along. We had dances at the Saint Augustine Church yard and in the church hall. We had a bunch of club dances there and we had a nice time. We had a place called the Sinner Sinner Club. Etta James would come there and Ray Charles. We had some nice dances there. We had a little hall, the Jeunes Des Amis Club, on Robertson between Columbus and Kerlerec. And then Louis Charbonnet had a hall on Saint Louis and Robertson. People would get married there and have parties. Down on Marais they had a place called the Monkey Puzzle. The Indians would come out there. Mardi Gras time early morning, we’d go see the Indians there – Yellow Pocahontas and Wild Magnolias. All the parade clubs would leave from the old Caldonia on Saint Claude and Saint Philip.

Oswald ‘Bo’ Jones grew up in a musical family and chased barefoot after second line parades in Tremé as a kid. He became a grand marshall as a teenager and ceremoniously led different second line and jazz funeral processions through New Orleans’ downtown neighborhoods. Still a grand marshall, Bo also works at the Candlelight. Married to Leona Grandison’s first cousin, Charlene Henry, Bo has become part of the Candlelight family.
Mama Ruth’s Cozy Corner was on Robertson and Ursulines. Mama Ruth was my stepmother. She was a baby doll and she paraded with the Jolly Bunch and the Square Deal. She was president of the Lady Jolly Bunch and she looked out for the younger parade clubs. At the barroom, she would tell you like it goes. But anything she could do to help you, she’d do it for you. For anybody. The barroom was nice. They’d have church there. The groups would be in the back, say their blessings and prayers every Sunday. They had music there too in the way back, mostly on the weekends.

I’ve always lived in the neighborhood and I’ve been coming to Candlelight ever since Chine [Leona] had the place. I work at the barroom and I keep the lot cut at Tuba Fats Square. We used to have parties there. Kermit [Ruffins] would fix a little barbeque and we’d get on the lot and enjoy ourselves for holidays or for Tuba Fats’ birthday. If we had a community member that passed, we’d do something for them. We used to have live music. They’re kind of stopping us with it. You got to have a permit now. So we understand that.

Here at the bar, when I was in a club we used to come here after our second line parades or have our birthday parties here and everybody just enjoyed themselves so well. And my son, Corey Henry, plays here and my brother Benny Jones plays with the Tremé Brass Band here every Wednesday. Everybody comes to listen to them. This is where the enjoyment is at. This is where the heart of it comes from.
Patricia McDonald, Cook and Vendor

I came to New Orleans with my kids from Arkansas in 1974. I first lived at 1500 St Philip Street. That’s when I learned how to cook. My husband told me, “If you know how to season food, you can cook anything.” He taught me the rice and beans and I just went with it from there. I started vending food in the neighborhood around different bars, like the Caldonia, Joe’s Cozy Corner, and Kermit’s. I would set up on the corner lot at Robertson and St Philip [Tuba Fats Square], because there were so many parades through the neighborhood back then and it was easy to make a dollar. I sold burgers, pork chops, smoked sausage and hot sausage, yaka mein, and gumbo. I’ve helped take care of that corner with Bo Jones over the years, because that’s where everybody comes together.

It used to be when you walked through Tremé, you could smell food everywhere. Especially holidays. You could smell the turkey, the hen, the cornbread stuffing, and the pies. You would get hungry walking through the neighborhood. But not anymore. It started changing before Katrina, but after Katrina the smells went away. There used to be lots of us vending food too, but people have been messing with us, saying we need permits to sell on special events. But we don’t have special events here. The music and food goes with everything we do.
Aldo Andrews
(center in hat) with his family at a Bayou Steppers parade

I grew up on St Philip Street. It was my mom and dad and ten kids. My mom, Amy Andrews, used to really like to follow the second lines, and my family, we always went to parades together. Me and my older brothers Matthew, Big Glen, and Twelve (James) paraded with the Tremé Sports and Sixth Ward Diamond clubs. My sister Effie was queen of the Yellow Jackets Mardi Gras Indian tribe. I got introduced to Indian practice by going to see her on Sundays at a club on Claiborne Avenue. Before Armstrong Park went up, there were bars in that area and five to six Indian gangs from Tremé would practice there. The White Cloud Hunters used to hold their practices at the Candlelight in the 1980s. In the ‘70s and ‘80s, we would circle around the neighborhood from one live music place to another and watch Indian practice and soak in the music. I knew everyone in the neighborhood by name and the culture was thick and tight.

Louis ‘June’ Price, Shoeshiner

I grew up on Saint Ann Street. I’ve been a part of the parade culture in Tremé all my life. I started parading with the Sixth Ward Highsteppers in the ’50s. We had second line parades in the community every Sunday. Back then we didn’t have routes or even permits, we’d just start at about 10 in the morning and parade until about 6 or 7 at night. Second liners had to follow the parade on the sidewalk, and they didn’t have ropes for sectioning off the club. We’d stop at different barrooms in the community to take breaks. We used to have a lot of clubs from the neighborhood -- the Sixth Ward High Steppers, the Square Deal, Tremé Sports, the Bucket Men, Sixth Ward Diamonds, and the Po’ Boys. They had a lady club, the Calendar Girls. They came out of the old Caldonia, like a lot of clubs. We came out of Wally’s barroom on Claiborne and Dumaine. It’s gone now, like all the other second line clubs. The Candlelight is the only one left.
1. Kilroy
2. Palm Club -> Foxy B's
3. Joe Props
4. Sidney Brown
5. Seamon #1
6. Basin Street Lounge
7. Duke's
8. Hilda's Bar
9. Snowflake
10. Payne's Lounge / Johnny Come Lately
11. Clater-Crystal Lounge
12. J's Lounge
13. Mim's Place
14. Walter's -> Warren's Vieux Carre Lounge
15. Lucas -> John L's
16. Seamon #3
17. Club Seville -> Club Birdland -> Cheri's Orchard Lounge
18. Peck's Steak House
19. Coconut Bar -> Prout's Main Brace
20. Joe Washington
21. Green-O-Liquor
22. Wally's
23. Clara's Bar
24. Rooty Dooty Club
25. Stella's
26. Struggle Inn -> LuLu Belles -> Cafe le Roux
27. Brown Derby -> Gypsy Tea Room #1 -> High Hat -> Velvet Lounge
28. Sinner Sinner -> 5 - 4 Club
29. Hollywood Bar
30. Auditorium Bar
31. Les Jeunes Amis / Equity Hall
32. Mel's #2 (Mel's #1 Basin/Orleans Ave & Robertson)
33. Kelph's -> Jackie and George's
34. Keno
35. Tucky's Dome
36. Off Limits
37. Blood Bar
38. Club 52
39. Seamon #2 -> Havana Cuba -> Henry's 3 Ways
40. Candlelight Lounge
41. Roland's Funmaker -> Petroleum Lounge
42. Economy Hall
43. Lucky Star -> Big Mary's
44. Hope's Hall; also: Co-operative Hall
45. Perserverance Hall #4
46. Japanese Tea Garden -> Gypsy Tea Room #2 -> Caldonia #1.
47. Perfect Union Hall
48. Toni Heisser's
49. Orange Liquor Store
50. Leroy Honey Hush
51. Charbonnet Hall / Society of Inseperable Friends Hall
52. Caldonia -> Trombone Shorty's
53. My Blue Heaven
54. Mama Bert's
55. Tip Top
56. Three Brother's Bar
57. Abe's
58. Try-Me Hall
59. Picou's -> Delaoise -> Treme Music Hall
60. Ruth's Cozy Corner -> Joe's
61. Sam's Tavern
62. Big Shirley's
63. St Cere Hall
64. St Ann Hall
65. Junior's Lace -> Little People's Place
66. Dot's
City directories and archival sources were consulted to develop this map (see the Resources section). Many Tremé clubs and barrooms were not listed businesses or formally documented, so longtime neighborhood residents assisted in this mapping project. Exact locations of these sites and the evolution of ownership/club names were sometimes hard to precisely determine, but this map displays that information as accurately as possible for readers’ reference.

Former Barrooms, Clubs, and Dance Halls in Historic Tremé

1. Kilroy
2. Palm Club -> Foxy B’s
3. Joe Provenzano / Joe Props
4. Sidney Brown
5. Seamon #1
6. Basin Street Lounge
7. Duke’s
8. Hildá’s Bar
9. Snowflake
10. Payne’s Lounge / Johnny Come Lately
11. Clater -> Crystal Lounge
12. J’s Lounge
13. Mim’s Place
14. Walter’s -> Warren’s Vieux Carre Lounge
15. Lucas -> John L’s
16. Seamon #3
17. Club Seville -> Club Birdland
   -> Cheri’s Orchard Lounge
18. Peck’s Steak House
19. Coconut Bar -> Prout’s Main Brace
20. Joe Washington
21. Green-O-Liquor
22. Wally’s
23. Clara’s Bar
24. Rooty Dooty Club
25. Stella’s
26. Struggle Inn -> LuLu Belles -> Cafe le Roux
27. Brown Derby -> Gypsy Tea Room #1
   -> High Hat -> Velvet Lounge
28. Sinner Sinner -> Club 54
29. Hollywood Bar
30. Auditorium Bar
31. Les Jeunes Amis / Equity Hall
32. Mel’s #2 (Mel’s #1 Basin/Orleans Ave & Robertson)
33. Kelph’s -> Jackie and George’s
34. Keno
35. Tucky’s Dome
36. Off Limits
37. Blood Bar
38. Club 52
39. Seamon #2 -> Havana Cuba -> Henry’s 3 Ways
40. Grease’s Lounge -> Candlelight Lounge
41. Roland’s Funmaker -> Petroleum Lounge
42. Economy Hall
43. Lucky Star -> Big Mary’s
44. Hope’s Hall, also: Co-operative Hall
45. Perserverance Hall #4
46. Japanese Tea Garden -> Gypsy Tea Room #2
   -> Caldonia #1
47. Perfect Union Hall
48. Toni Heisser’s
49. Orange Liquor Store
50. Leroy Honey Hush
51. Charbonnet Hall / Society of Inseperable Friends Hall
52. Wilson’s -> Caldonia #2 -> Trombone Shorty’s
53. My Blue Heaven
54. Mama Bert’s
55. Tip Top
56. Three Brother’s Bar
57. Abe’s
58. Try-Me Hall
59. Picou’s -> Delaoise -> Treme Music Hall
60. Ruth’s Cozy Corner -> Joe’s Cozy Corner
61. Sam’s Tavern
62. Big Shirley’s
63. St Cere Hall
64. St Ann Hall
65. Junior’s Place -> Little People’s Place
66. Dot’s
Gypsy Tea Room No. 2, at the corner of St Philip and St Claude, in 1942. Prior to World War II, this jazz club was named the Japanese Tea Garden, and distinguished local musicians, such as Avery 'Kid' Howard, Herald Dejan, Kid Rena, and Wendell Brunious, performed there. This Creole Cottage was later home to Caldonia No. 1, a live music venue and club house for many Sixth Ward second line clubs. The Caldonia was demolished in the early '70s to build Louis Armstrong Park, and the community held a jazz funeral for the loss of this important corner barroom and performance space. Photo from the William Russell Collection and courtesy of the Tulane University Hogan Jazz Archive.
1. Basin St Lounge
2. Kermit's Speakeasy
3. Robertson's Vieux Carre Lounge
4. Bertha's Bar and Restaurant
5. Jackie and George's
6. Candlelight Lounge

Barrooms in Historic Tremé Today
The Place: 
The Candlelight Lounge Experience

In this section, four of the central figures of the Candlelight Lounge are featured: “Uncle” Lionel Batiste, Leona Grandison known as “Ms Chine,” LeCole Alexander, and Benny Jones, Senior. All four are family to one another through blood relations, marriage, and the community of the Candlelight. The interviews and accompanying drawings and pictures speak to the experience of the Candlelight Lounge -- the intimacy of the simple stage and small space, the role of food, festivities, and a gathering space for building a tight-knit community, and the deep family ties that have sustained the barroom over the years.

BIRTHDAY PARTY AT THE CANDLELIGHT LOUNGE
photo courtesy of the Grandison-Alexander Family
I was born at 1404 Saint Phillip Street, the 11th of 12 kids. I went to Craig School, where they taught sewing, brick work, music, and car maintenance at that time. My father was a baker and blacksmith. My mother and sisters were seamstresses, and because of them I became a tailor and that was my profession before I became a drummer. My son Lionel Junior is also a drummer and iron worker. As a kid, he used to dance around in his diapers and beat on boxes with my kazoo band when we had house parties.

I remember lots of things about the neighborhood when I was young. I remember we used to always have Saturday night fish fries. People would make red lamps and put them out in front of their doors, which meant come in for supper. Anyone could come and get fried fish or chicken for dinner. We also had ‘Blue Mondays.’ Longshoremen didn’t work on Mondays and they’d have picnics or people would pay you a visit. Everybody drank beer and ate red beans. We had buckets of beer. We’d take our wagons and go to Jax or Regal Brewery and fill up our barrels.

I spent a lot of time on Robertson Street coming up. We used to play on the street as kids. There was a broken pipe that shot out water and we’d play in it and lay out oyster shells. The High Box Musicians would come down the street and they would stop and play for people on their front porches. Over the years, the Candlelight has been a lot of different things. I remember it being a poultry shop. Then there was an upholstery shop and after that a mattress store -- the guy would make you a mattress in there or repair one. We had a lot of different shops in the neighborhood back then. Now the Candlelight is one of the only places for us to come together and enjoy ourselves.

Note: With Uncle Lionel’s passing in July 2012, Lionel Batiste Junior was consulted for final edits to this interview and booklet.
The Candlelight Lounge site includes two historic lots -- 919 and 923-25 North Robertson. Historic maps show the site of the barroom was once a double Creole Cottage, and the adjacent lot did house a poultry factory during the 1920s and ‘30s as Lionel Batiste recalls in his interview. According to newspaper real estate advertisements, the current Candlelight building was built in the early ‘50s as a “modern” apartment building, and later served as a storefront, including a neighborhood grocery and mattress store, before being converted into a barroom.
Leona “Ms Chine” Grandison was born and grew up in the Tremé neighborhood. One of her favorite memories of growing up in Tremé is all the stores, restaurants, and barrooms she could walk to in the neighborhood. With the support of her brother, Landry Grandison, she learned that her cooking, sociability, and business skills suited the neighborhood barroom business. She opened up the Candlelight Lounge with Landry in 1985. She has worked hard with her family since Katrina to keep the Candlelight open and be a long-standing business in the Tremé like those she remembers that made her neighborhood a special place to live, work, and play.

It was cold one night and right across from where I lived on Saint Ann Street they had a little pool hall. So I went in one night, sitting down talking to the people of the neighborhood, getting to know them. And the lady that owned the place, Ms. West, was in her 60s. I had lived back there a while before that and then I moved to Clouet Street. And I told her, “Well Mom,” – we used to call her Mom – “I’m moving and I guess I’ll come back and see you every now and then.” And then the following week she called me up. She said, “How would you feel about taking this place over?” She trusted me. She told me, “I know nobody can do something with this place the way you could. You know everybody and can cook.” I said, “Oh no, Mae West, my children are small. I can’t do it.” I came out and talked to my brother. I said, “I don’t know anything about this kind of business.” My brother, his name was Landry Grandison, told me, “Well, why don’t you give it a try and see if you like it.” And so I opened it up with him and we had a game room and kitchen and we sold food out of there. I got to enjoy it. Met a lot of people. I stayed there for 12 years.
I used to come out on Sundays and meet my brother right in this same bar. It was Grease’s place at that time, Grease’s Lounge. One Sunday a guy told me, “Grease is going to give up the bar. He’s not going to renew his lease. Why don’t you try and get this place?” So I called the owner, Mr. Dale. He said, “I’ve got another lady I’m talking to, but I’ll keep you in mind.” And he did that. He called me and said, “You can have the place.” And I opened here on January 8th, 1985 with my brother. I changed the name to Candlelight Lounge. The name was something that just came to me. I bought the bar room over a period of time. The lady, Ms. Dale, had decided she was going to sell it and she called me up and asked me if I’d be interested in buying this building. And I told her, “It’s my dream. It looks like God is giving it to me.”

From the start, we had a lot of entertainment, always had live music. We had a lot of blues singers back then. And they still had second lines too and that was more like musicians coming through and playing and you always had somebody singing. Then they started putting all these different bands together. We had music on the weekend. Back then you had a lot of people that were hanging out then, even without the music, and people would come in and entertain. You had the bar maids. They had their friends come in. People would just come out.

After the storm, a lot of people didn’t come back. A lot of people that’s from the community didn’t return. The economy’s bad. People don’t have the money to come out like they used to. And thank the bands, those guys are keeping me afloat. Without that I’d really be struggling. They work and do what they can to help people and that’s what we need in this community. The musicians in this neighborhood have been playing music, some of them, all their lives. We need that. We need the music for them to work and we need the music for them to play for some of these businesses to make money.

Before the storm we also had food here all the time. I might come here in the morning and go to making homemade biscuits and pancakes. Sometimes the guys would be sitting out here and they would tell me, “Girl you just don’t get food like this anymore – homemade biscuits.” We call it shortcake, but people from the country come in and say do you make “homemade bread?” They’re like biscuits, but they’re made out of dough and you sit them in the frying pan and cook on each side. That is good.
And I cook beans on Wednesday nights. Everybody’s looking for the beans. One guy said, “I think she cooks the best beans in the whole city.” I have the beans for people that come to the show. I cook it at home and bring it here. I used to do it here, but since Katrina I don’t have the facilities, so hopefully we can get things together. That kitchen was a blessing for many people that were hungry, cause you could come by the Candlelight and always get you a plate of food.

But you’ve got to thank God for your friends and your customers. I have some customers that’s been around since I’ve been here. One of my customers just died and she was 98. When you come to the Candlelight you may meet all kinds of people, people that enjoy each other. We have people that come from all over the world here. All of them enjoy themselves and when they leave I get a lot of postcards. People from England or Vermont will tell me when they come in, “My friend was here and they told me when I come to New Orleans, if it’s a Wednesday night, make sure to get to the Candlelight.”
The Space and Layout of the Candlelight Lounge
There has always been a long wooden bar and chairs and tables for customers to sit, visit, and eat the food served up at the back table by the kitchen (left). The kitchen has been out of operation since Hurricane Katrina, but the family wants to repair it soon to have food back as part of the everyday business of the barroom.

With a low-roof and cinderblock walls, the interior of the Candlelight is modest, but intimate. Originally inside there were green walls and two stages, but now the only stage sits just off the floor in the front left corner of the barroom (right).

floor plan drawing by Cameron Ringness
photos and collage by Sarah Satterlee
LeCole Alexander, Leona’s Daughter and Bar Manager

I didn’t grow up around the bar. Sometimes I stopped by to check in with my mom or Uncle B [Landry Grandison] after school, but my first memory is coming to a party when I was around 18. I thought to myself, “What is that?” I couldn’t believe all the people that were out. Then I started coming to the bar to help my mom. I’d help with the orders and she started teaching me how to work the cash register when no one was around.
My mom and my uncle did everything together at the bar - they were 50/50. They made all the decisions about the business together and they both made drinks and worked the cash register and cooked. Their mom cooked a lot and they were in the kitchen with her all the time growing up and learning how to cook. Uncle B was the older brother and he was always looking out for everybody. He’d check in with me all the time and say, “I just cooked gumbo, come over and get this.” Since they did everything together it was hard for my mom to loose Uncle B, especially coming back after Katrina.

My sister Leah and brother Leroy never came up to the bar like I did and by me always being around, it just fell in place that I would be the one to take the barroom over. This is something that I’m gonna keep. For holidays my mom used to have open doors. Like on New Years Eve she’d cook up all kinds of food and have an open bar and pay back her customers for patronizing her all year long. It’s been too hard on her to do that since Katrina, but I want to bring that back. I want to help her get the kitchen working again and get better a/c for the baroom. I’m gonna try to keep it going strong.

This drawing shows some of the significant family ties in the Candlelight community. It is limited to family members presented or discussed in this booklet.
Benny Jones Senior was born in a musical family. His father, Chester Jones, played drums in the Preservation Hall Jazz Band and he married into the Batiste family. He has played in and assembled some of the city’s most acclaimed jazz bands -- Olympia Brass Band, Dirty Dozen Brass Band, and the Tremé Brass Band. He is the band leader of the Tremé Brass Band, which plays every Wednesday at the Candlelight Lounge, pulling in a large crowd and holding down the only regular live music show in the Historic Tremé.

When I was a kid, I was a student at Joseph Craig School. That’s right over on Saint Philip and North Villere. And sometimes during the weekdays jazz funerals would be passing while we were in school. And they’d let us go to the window and peep at the jazz funeral going down the street. I always wanted to be involved in something like that, be a musician and be a part of that one day. So another time there was one jazz funeral coming by and everybody went to the window. I went downstairs like I was going to the bathroom and went out there and followed the parade. And when I got back, school was closed. So the next day when I went to school, the teacher didn’t say anything and I thought I got away with it. When school let out, she said, “Come here. Where were you yesterday? You left my classroom.”
I said, “Well, I was feeling bad. I went home.” She said, “No, you must’ve went by that jazz funeral out there.” So I was punished for a couple hours after school. She knew I went out to find that music. I never was a bad kid in school. The music brought me out of school that day.

I was always involved with the social aid and pleasure clubs. I walked on the side lines and watched my father and all the drummers. Watching what they were doing and paying attention. That really got me involved and wanting to be a drummer. Plus my brother was a drummer. His name was Eugene Jones. He was a drummer with Clarence Frogman Henry years ago. He’s one of my oldest brothers. Then I have a younger brother who used to play with the brass bands. Michael used to play bass drum with Olympia. Michael George. And my brother Bo has always been a grand marshal with the bands.

One of my first professional gigs was the Olympia Brass Band. I first started off grand marshall with the band. I was grand marshall a couple years. Then Mr. Harold Dejan Milton Batiste knew I could play bass drum, so they put me on bass drum. They had band one and band two. So I played bass drum in the number two band with the Olympia for many years. Then they switched me over to snare drum, and I played snare drum with the Olympia. Sometimes my little brother Michael would play the bass drum and I played the snare.

From there, my uncle had the Dirty Dozen Kazoo Band, Uncle Lionel. The Batiste family are my relatives. So they had the Dirty Dozen Kazoo Band. They had the kazoo, ukulele, and we always had a wash board. A big wash tub was used. We weren’t real professional at the time. We knew the songs and we’d go around and play for people at house parties. Halloween night or Saint Joseph’s night we would strike up the band and go on a route through the neighborhood. I was with my uncle and them for 7 or 8 years, with the kazoo band.

In later years, I branched off and started the Dirty Dozen Brass Band. I’m a founding member. They used to play baseball every Thursday at Hardin Park in the Seventh Ward and we’d go in to the grandstand and we’d play music for the neighborhood people. Then at the end of the game we’d parade from Hardin Park to Darryl’s Lounge on Saint Ann Street. That used to be on a Thursday night.
This guy knew me Uptown by the Glass House, called Gate. He knew me from parades. He came down to Darryl's and said, “I want y'all to help me build up my club.” So we started playing on Monday nights. We started up there for about 10, 11 years on a Monday night at the Glass House on Saratoga Street. This was the late '80s going in to the ’90s.

Tremé Brass Band came on in the later years, like ’98 or ’99. How that band started, friend of mine, Mr. Barnell Washington was the owner of Sydney’s Saloon on Saint Claude and Saint Bernard Avenue. They used to serve seafood on Tuesday nights, so I asked him about getting a band to perform on Tuesday nights when they were doing seafood. I said, “We’ll come in next week and we’ll audition.” So the following Tuesday I told all the cats we’re going to have a little jam session at Sydney’s Saloon on a Tuesday night. I think like 15, 20 musicians came on down there. So we played, and I said, “We’re gonna come back next week,” and, all the cats, they came back again. We played there maybe 3 or 4 months. That’s where the Tremé really got built up. The guys, we played in other bands together. We had performed with different groups together, like Olympia Brass Band, Majestic Brass Band, and Tuxedo Brass Band. So I picked out different cats who wanted to be a part of the band. We took our time. We started rehearsing and decided we’d start working on a cd. Since I was born in Tremé and being I was from out of the neighborhood, I figured I'd name the band the Tremé Brass Band.

We’ve been here at the Candlelight, maybe three to four years. What happened, a bunch of people moved out of the neighborhood. Our business was going down. I know the family. I come up with the family, Ms. Chine’s brothers and uncles. We have a family thing. So our business was going down, and I said, “I’ll bring the band over on a Wednesday night to help y’all, help keep your doors open.” It started off slow. I said, “It’ll take time, but it’ll catch on.” We started spreading the word, passed out flyers, went to the radio stations and different clubs and told people. Before you knew it, we had a little crowd. It caught on.

This is only club in the Tremé left with live entertainment, and it’s very important to come and support the club and the musicians at the Candlelight. This is the last go round. If she close down today or tomorrow, they’re not going to have any more music in the neighborhood.

Note: This interview was conducted in the winter of 2011 when the Candlelight Lounge was the only live music venue open for regular business in the Historic Tremé.
Passing It On: Keeping Community and Culture Vibrant

In this section, we have interviews from Corey Henry, a young professional musician who grew up in Tremé, and Merline Kimble, a sixth generation Tremé resident and community cultural bearer and activist. The interviews here look more closely at how the Candlelight Lounge and the public space of Tuba Fats Square next door have been an important part of sharing music, food, and other activities with friends and family over the years, so that the community’s cultural traditions have been shared with and supported by residents. These interviews speak to the importance of the Candlelight Lounge, its sister space Tuba Fats Square, and similar neighborhood places for passing on culture and sustaining a sense of community in Tremé, New Orleans, and elsewhere.
Corey Henry was the first professional horn player in his family. He was inspired not just by the musical legacy of his family, but the rhythms and melodies of Tremé and the many talented musicians that came out of his neighborhood. Corey has played with the Lil’ Rascals Brass Band, Rebirth Brass Band, Kermit Ruffins and the Barbeque Swingers, and Galactic. His own band, the Corey Henry Sextet, sometimes plays the Sunday night slot at the Candlelight. Corey is viewed by his family and friends at the barroom as the young musician keeping the live music tradition going in their community. His daughter, Jazz Henry, plays trumpet with the Pinettes Brass Band and his son, Corey James, is a keyboardist, both stepping up as the next generation of musicians in the extended Candlelight family.

I was born and raised in the Tremé, a couple houses down from Little People’s Place. I remember when I was a kid coming out and Kermit was playing at Little People’s when that whole scene was going on. I was probably about 14 or 15. There were a lot of bars around here, one on just about every corner from what I can remember. It was pretty live. A lot of people hanging out and a lot of bands playing. There were social aid and pleasure club gatherings, second lines, birthday parties, jazz funerals, and different kinds of musical celebrations. We had Indians too. Stand right here at the Candlelight and everything came through Mardi Gras day. It was a pretty vibrant musical area right here.
They also had baseball games. Each bar had their own team. The Candlelight would have their team and play against the Caldonia. It was mostly older folks. All the kids, we’d hang out too and check it out. It was a lot of fun. I was happy to be there with my family and my friends, hanging out in the neighborhood, all the people I knew from around here. There was a lot of that going on.

I started playing music when I was 7 or 8. I started out on drums. Everybody in my family was drummers. Benny Jones, the bass drummer for Tremé Brass Band, is my uncle. He founded the Tremé Brass Band. My grandfather was a drummer too. His name was Chester Jones and he was a drummer with Preservation Hall. He played the drum kit and he also played bass drum with brass bands. Then my dad was grand marshall.

I played drums for about 5 years, and then I jumped over to trombone. I’m the first horn player in family. I was attracted to the sound of the trombone and a couple cats that played on trombone were inspiring to me, horn players from Tremé like Freddie Lonzo and Wolf and other cats that played with the brass bands, like Rebirth, Olympia, and the Dirty Dozen. A lot of the New Orleans players who were out there when I was young were a big part of the reason I was inspired to play the trombone. And also I listened to a lot of Fred Wesley. He’s my favorite I’d have to say.

The first time I played at the Candlelight I know it was a big deal, but I can’t remember when it was because it was years ago. I always wanted to play in there, watching the different bands play. All kinds of bands. Chosen Few played in there. Rebirth from time to time. Junk Yard Band was in there. They’ve had some musicians step through there. Then my time finally came. I’ve played in there a lot of times for different occasions. With the Sunday night gig at the Candlelight, I’m following in the footsteps of the Tremé Brass Band. My uncle and them really spearheaded this whole thing, and we’re trying to keep the live music going in Tremé and make sure we don’t lose it.

The Candlelight is also a place where a lot of musicians come out and connect with one another outside of work and get comfortable. You might not feel like performing. You might want to be part of the audience and have fun and dance and listen to someone else play. It’s a known place for musicians to pass through, a gathering, social type thing. It’s like our home base.
Merline Kimble is the sixth generation of her family to live on Dumaine Street between North Rampart Street and Claiborne Avenue in Tremé. A mother figure in the neighborhood, she has provided foster care and guidance to many young men and women in the community. Like others in this booklet, she looks after Tuba Fats Square, the open lot next to the Candlelight used as a public gathering space for decades that was once owned by the Charbonnet family. Since its purchase by Candlelight neighbor and musician John Richardson in 2003, the lot was named after one of Treme’s most popular and adored musicians -- Anthony “Tuba Fats” Lacen.

When I was a kid in the ’50s and ’60s we lived in this community with Italians. They owned all the stores in the neighborhood and the kids went to different schools than we did, but when we came home from school we played together. If we went to the movies, they sat downstairs and we sat in the balcony, but we went home together after and ate dinner. We’d get fussed at by our friends’ moms in Italian and have no idea what for.

My family used to all live on Dumaine Street. My father owned a trucking company and he paid his workers well -- a lot of them came from this neighborhood. I could walk down one block and smell red beans and not feel like it and smell cabbage and cornbread in the next block and not feel like it and smell porkchops in the next block and go knock on the door. Since the family was always friends with my parents or grandparents, they’d say, “Sit down and let me feed you.” We looked after each other. If we left the neighborhood to go to the lake for a picnic, it was like we were leaving the city.
Music was always around -- Rufus Thomas, Earl Palmer, Lil Buddy John, Tuba Fats. Tuba was like family to everybody in the neighborhood. He would always play the tuba for the kids and get them to dance and he would teach them how to play. He gave Trombone Shorty his old tuba when Shorty was like four or five years old. That tuba had a 1000 dents in it and Shorty’s brothers would have to pick it up for him, because he was too small to carry it. They’d set it down on the porch steps and Shorty would put his legs through the tuba and blow that horn.

Those kids had a second line band. They’d use a big wheel as the tuba and they might use sticks or bottles as trumpets and boxes as drums. They’d take their instruments and march around and around the block. There’s four of those kids from that box band traveling the world playing music today.

We used to call Tuba Fats Square “the lot” or “the neutral ground.” There was a double shotgun house there and Ms. Julia lived there and she had lots of kids. The house burned down around the late ’70s or early ’80s and the community took it and made it a neutral ground. Charbonnet owned the lot, but he let the community use it, because it was so important to us. We had balls for kids to play there, everybody brought food and we’d just hang out. Sometimes musicians would just come and play music. We had a shed in the back of that lot that Pat [McDonald] took care of. We called it “the barn,” because it’s where Charbonnet used to keep his horses. The barn was like a magic hat, it always had what you needed -- cups for a picnic, jump rope for the kids, even a kitchen table for someone in the community in need. They tore that building down after the storm and there were people that cried when we lost the barn.

Sometimes us older folks would be at the lot and start fussing about something and the young people would tell us, “You can’t stand on this ground and fuss. Take it some place else.” That lot has been a place where we can come together, bring our kids, and be safe. One day there were some men playing cards on the lot, and a car pulled up and shot one of them and blood hit that ground. This was after Katrina and the new community is trying to say it’s an unsafe and unholy place, but they don’t understand about the importance of that lot to our community. We have to work hard now to have gatherings and music there and we have to document everything we do because that one negative is seen as bigger than all those years of positive.

I feel like I can’t let the new people in the commmunity run me off from my neighborhood, but it’s hard to stay. My familly is scattered all over since Katrina, most of them couldn’t move back or didn’t want to. The clubs are all closed. And the food and the music are almost gone. If it wasn’t for Chine and the Candlelight and now Kermit trying to start something on Basin Street, we wouldn’t hear an instrument in the area. It’s really nice to wake up to the sound of birds, but it’s also nice to wake up in the morning to a saxophone playing a soft jazz tune and the smells of good home-cooking. That’s why we can’t let it go.
TUBA FATS TUESDAY 2012
Treme Rollers with Trombone Shorty outside the Candlelight (above),
Onlookers mingling at Tuba Fats Square (right)
RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING


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We would like to dedicate this booklet to Lionel Batiste Senior’s legacy as a tailor, debonair dresser, musician, performer, community historian, and avid Candlelight goer. Rest in peace Uncle Lionel.