

# PRESERVATION

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Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office



## Historic Mandeville and Covington

### INSIDE:

- Real Time in Tremé
- Meet "Uncle" Lionel Batiste and Benny Jones, Sr.
- Save America's Treasures: Dollar for Dollar Beats Stimulus Package
- Spring Break with Hammer in Hand at PRC's Rebuilding Together

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**OLD COVINGTON AND HISTORIC MANDEVILLE, FAMED 100 YEARS AGO FOR THEIR HEALTHY AIR, ARE NOW HAPPENING PLACES WITH RESTAURANTS, GALLERIES AND SHOPS IN NATIONAL REGISTER-LISTED BUILDINGS.**

North shore shotguns are known for their wrapped porches. © Charles E. Leche

# The Ozone Belt

By Celeste Berteau  
 Photos by Celeste Berteau and Charles E. Leche

IN 1898 a publication referred to the area north of Lake Pontchartrain as “An Ideal Retreat.” At this same time the East Louisiana Railroad proclaimed St. Tammany Parish to be “the immune region,” and a place “where no contagious diseases can exist.” Obviously the second quote has no basis in reality, but even today, despite a gigantic building boom over the last 20 years, I would have to agree with the first. From participating in a formal retreat among the pines at the historic St. Joseph Abbey outside Covington, to spending a leisurely weekend in a cabin on stilts over the lolling lake waves at Fontainebleau State Park, numerous relaxing, entertaining and educational opportunities await the visitor in the “Ozone Belt.”

COVINGTON was established primarily as a commercial center and port at the fork of the Tchefuncte and Bogue Falaya rivers. The town

was founded in 1813 by John Wharton Collins, an Englishman from Philadelphia, who purchased 1600 acres from a New Orleans Creole named Jacques Drieux. Prior to this acquisition he had staked a claim with the Spanish government to all the land between the Tchefuncte and Drieux’s land. This all became the town of Covington. Collins laid his town out in a grid of 27 blocks oriented to the Bogue Falaya. He named this area the Division of St. John, and even though, due to two fires, none of the original buildings exist, the National Register of Historic Places refers to historic Covington as The Division of St. John Historic District. Something in the area of 246 buildings are included in this listing, most built between 1880 and the early 1900s, and reflective of architectural styles ranging from Queen Anne Revival and Eastlake to Craftsman bungalows to a style known as North Shore, described as a shotgun with

a t-shaped addition at the rear. Besides being historically significant for its architecture, Collins’ design of his town is important from an urban planning standpoint. While

shopping at galleries and shops on Columbia and Boston streets over the years, I noticed what reminded me of courtyards behind the buildings, but never gave it



Ruins of Bernard de Marigny’s sugar mill at Fontainebleau State Park in Mandeville

# Blaze

By Alex Lemann

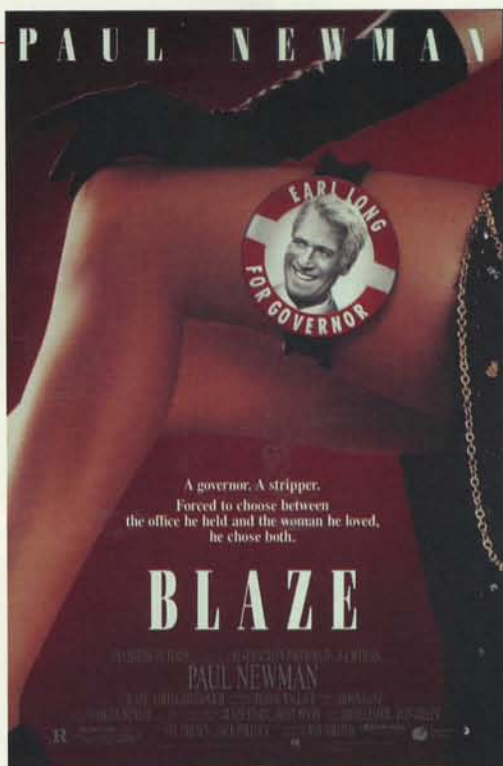
Photo courtesy of the Louisiana State Museum

**BLAZE** (1989) opens around the time of the Korean War, as a young girl from rural Maryland leaves home in her best dress to pursue a career as a singer. Pressed to come up with a snappy stage name, she calls herself Blaze Starr, bursts out on stage, and is crushed to learn that the audience of soldiers would rather just see her take off her clothes than hear her sing. Blaze complies, and her career as a stripper is born. Blaze (Lolita Davidovich) quickly forgets her desire to become a singer, but her ambition remains, and before long she heads for New Orleans because, as she puts it, she "heard there's a better class of people down there, cause of the French and all." Moving to Bourbon Street is certainly good for Blaze; soon she meets and captures the heart of Earl Long, and finds herself catapulted into the world of politics.

That this represents a move toward a "better class of people" is, for Blaze at least, a foregone conclusion. Long (Paul Newman) is at the tail end of his political career, and he is old, grouchy, caustic and gloriously eccentric. Long, it seems, has made a pastime of rolling down Bourbon Street in the governor's limousine, making his way from one strip club to another in search of his next dalliance. All the strippers know him well; they are accustomed to receiving a mink coat for his attentions.

The central appeal of the film is Newman's portrayal of the governor. Long wears cowboy boots in bed "for traction," lives in a tumbledown shack surrounded by rusting car parts, and, during a moment of impotence, chides a certain member of his anatomy for laziness: "you're on the government payroll!" Long is determinedly in love with Blaze, and the growing public scandal, combined with outrage over his progressive attitudes towards desegregation, drives him to the brink of insanity.

Although *Blaze* features no lost architectural treasures, it does offer a portrait of Louisiana politics that is at once quaint and fascinating. Long has hit the term limit for governorships,



so he decides to run for lieutenant governor on a ticket with one of his old cronies as governor. When the crony wins the governorship he will promptly resign, getting Long around the law that forbids him from being "elected" governor. We are therefore treated to scenes of Long's motorcade making its way across the state. Long stops in every town, heads for the general store, and begins buying things and distributing them to the people, growling "vote Long" under his breath. This is politics conducted by overweight men smoking cigars in back rooms, by family dynasties and political machines, and loyalties fortified by steady streams of patronage.

Although the political advisors keep her out of sight, Blaze quickly develops an acute political sense of her own (she even asks her mother to pray for heavy turnout in the middle parishes), and manages to help Long survive the machinations of various plotters. Still, Blaze remains something of a mystery: fiercely loyal, doggedly supportive, but perhaps never truly in love. As the film draws to a close, Blaze leaves Louisiana behind and moves back to Maryland, grown up and perhaps a bit world weary but still without her mink coat.



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# The Hottest Blaze in Burlesque

By John Magill, Curator/Historian, The Historic New Orleans Collection

WHEN LOUISIANA Governor Earl K. Long died of a heart attack in 1960, the first five blocks of Bourbon Street — one of that governor's favorite haunts — was topping out its days as a world-class venue for exotic burlesque shows. While such entertainment was considered risqué then, by today's permissive standards it pales in comparison. Arguably, though, Bourbon Street's modern reputation grew up in the '50s — the time depicted in the film *Blaze* as it recounts the affair between Long and Bourbon Street dancer Blaze Starr.

Blaze Starr arrived on the street in the late 1950s. Fannie Belle Fleming in her earlier life, she was born in 1932 in rural West Virginia to Lora Evans and Goodlow Mullins — the name Fleming was a later addition. In 1948, at age 16, she moved to Washington, D.C., where she met Red Snyder who as her manager encouraged her career as an exotic dancer and helped christen her Blaze Starr. They parted, and Blaze moved to Baltimore where she headlined at the Two O'Clock Club. Her national reputation took off in February 1954 when she was included in an *Esquire* article "B-Belles of Burlesque: You Get Strip Tease with Your Beer in Baltimore." This notoriety prompted her to begin appearing in other cities.

Already a recognized center of exotic dancing Bourbon Street was a logical stop for Blaze. She ended up at Sho-Bar, 226-28 Bourbon St., which might have been destiny, since she and the club shared something in common — she left West Virginia at about the same time Sho-Bar opened.

Sho-Bar's address represents Bourbon Street in another phase of its long history before the nightclub scene. In 1854, when property developer Judah Benjamin sold the property to Miss Harriett E. Hooke, the site was occupied by a one-story six-room Creole structure. Soon it was replaced by a townhouse with a massive two-story cast-iron balcony. At that time upper Bourbon Street was not lined with clubs and bars, but many fine residences. They were not necessarily built in the Creole manner with passageway entrances and ground-floor businesses, but frequently in the Anglo-American style — strictly residential with fine entranceways. Many, like the former Sho-Bar, still survive and today as one glances at the upper floors above the clubs and bars an idea can be had of how the mid-19th-century residential street once looked. In some cases the stately doorways even remain intact, which is not the case at the former Sho-Bar — revealing the elegant beginnings of these large substantial buildings.

Blaze Starr had a lot of company on Bourbon, since during the '50s and '60s there were a number of dancers. Among the names were Linda Brigett, Alouette Lebbnc the Tassel Twirler, Rita Alexander the Champagne Girl,

Oyster Girl, Kalantan the Heavenly Body and Saloma the Turkish Delight who was an earlier Sho-Bar veteran. Bourbon was a glittering neon strip where tourists and locals alike put on their Sunday best to visit a nightclub district that stretched about five blocks from Iberville Street beyond the backdoors of Canal Street's department stores. Advertisements for clubs appeared not only in tourist guides but also in the weekend amusement pages of *The Times-Picayune*, and afternoon *States-Item*.

Bourbon Street as we know it was born out of Prohibition. By the mid-1920s, raids shuttered speakeasies and the old honky-tonk Tango Belt around Iberville Street faded away. With the end of Prohibition in 1933, Bourbon Street was already emerging as the new nightclub center with clubs that served entertainment and food like Count Arnaud's Maxim's — which dated to 1925 — El Toro and La Lune among others. With World War II, New Orleans became as a major military center, and servicemen were drawn to the bright neon world of Bourbon Street.

Bourbon Street flourished, becoming a bit tawdry, a bit risqué, a bit flashy, but a lot of fun. It was no less a product of its day, as other cities had similar areas, including Washington, D.C., and Baltimore where Blaze got her start. The acts may have been considered risqué but were not X-rated and the best of the performers were considered artists.

There were always gimmicks, and Blaze Starr with her red hair, voluptuous body and enthusiasm had her own from the start. She danced with a panther that helped remove her clothes, but when the panther died, she took on its role getting down on all fours and snarling at the audience. She was nicknamed "Miss Spontaneous Combustion," and "The Hottest Blaze in Burlesque" undoubtedly prompted by her act that included a prop couch rigged up to smolder and burst into flames while she stripped. In 1956 this sofa was used in the film *Buxom Beautease*. In 1960 she appeared in the flick *Blaze Starr Goes Wild* — half a century before Bourbon Street gained adverse notoriety as a site for *Girls Gone Wild* videos. Blaze Starr's fame along with that of Bourbon Street spread far and wide as her involvement with Earl Long became known. It was press fodder and entered the living rooms of America through the pages of widely read magazines like *Life*, and via nascent network television newscasts.

Blaze soon left the Crescent City returning to Baltimore to eventually buy the Two O'Clock Club. She retired in the 1980s and for a while took up designing and selling jewelry.

Bourbon Street had a seamier and steamier side peopled by B-drinkers, prostitutes, pimps and petty criminals. In the

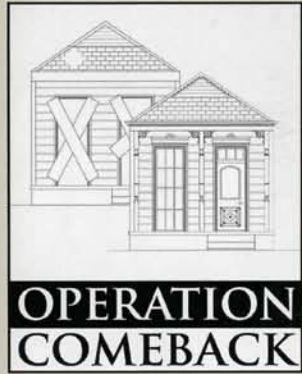


Clockwise from top left on opposite page: from top left on opposite page: Sho-Bar, 226-28 Bourbon St. circa 1950s (HNOC Vieux Carré Survey); La Lune on Bourbon at St. Ann was a post-Prohibition nightclub with a Latin beat. It was later Pete Fountain's club, and since about 1970 has served as various gay clubs including today's OZ. (HNOC Vieux Carré Survey); Bourbon Street at Bienville circa 1950s looking toward Canal Street (HNOC # 1979.325.4873)

intent on cleaning this up resulting in raids and arrests in the high profile vice campaign. Soon the world beyond Bourbon was changing with looser sexual morays and expanding X-rated entertainment. The Quarter was also changing, as college students on break and hippies became common fixtures. New clubs featured Go-Go girls in white vinyl boots dancing in cages while places serving pitchers of beer catered to the college crowd. Burlesque and exotic dancing were a dying breed on Bourbon Street and have come to look quaint and old fashioned when compared to today's nude clubs.

Sho-Bar still survives as a strip club. In the 1980s it moved to 325 Bourbon St., the former Gunga Den, and more recently moved to the 500 block of Bourbon. 226-28 Bourbon is now Déjà Vu Showgirls.

Blaze, and its era of half a century ago, represents a time in the evolution of upper Bourbon Street. It has become one of the most legendary and best-known streets in the world. Named for the French ruling family at the time of the city's founding — not American whiskey as many visitors mistakenly think, although it might fit the street's present image — Bourbon has indeed been a street of steady change. Many of its 19th-century buildings survive, but their uses have changed dramatically. Before the Civil War it was a rich and fashionable residential street. A century later it was a bright neon strip noted for fleshy entertainment. A half-century after that its reputation is exaggeratedly that of one of the most X-rated spots in America. Upper Bourbon accounts for less than half of the narrow street's length, since beyond the clubs Bourbon quickly becomes a more pristine and quiet residential street harking back to its earlier days.



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Originally built in the early 1900s, this unique renovation designed by Wayne Troyer can be yours. Enter through a private courtyard, and with a 30' x 104' lot you still have a back yard for entertaining. This two-bedroom, two-bath, 1,200-square-foot home is located in historic Holy Cross and has all the modern conveniences of a brand new home, but with the charm and character of old New Orleans. By purchasing this wonderful renovation, you can be a part of bringing back our city. 405 St. Maurice is being offered at \$150,000.



### Grant Money Available

Why pay rent when you can own a home in an historic neighborhood? A qualified buyer can get up to \$35,000 in grant money toward the purchase of a qualified property in two of New Orleans' historic neighborhoods. Operation Comeback has more than 20 properties to be renovated in either Holy Cross or Tremé. Several floor plans are available for single-family homes and doubles. Plans will include historical features with modern conveniences such as central heat and air, new plumbing and electrical, tiled bathroom floors, roomy kitchens and wood floors wherever possible. You can *Live in a Landmark* and your monthly payment may be less than rent.



### 6215 Dauphine St.

Move into this 1,331-square-foot, two-bedroom, two-bath home that has been rebuilt with many of the materials salvaged from the original collapsed structure. Sitting on a 30' x 113' lot, this wonderful reconstruction by Operation Comeback offers lots of space to entertain with a back porch and a side gallery. Located in historic Holy Cross, this house feels like an old home that's new again. All of this can be yours at \$174,500.



### 217 N. Salcedo

This 1,260-square-foot single shotgun Arts and Crafts house, on a 26' x 102' lot, is waiting for renovation. It has two bedrooms and one bath, with lots of room for entertaining. There's a large kitchen/dining room area, and a very large room that can be used as either a den or third bedroom. The house features indoor laundry, plenty of storage, a fenced yard and is close to public transportation. If you are a first-time homebuyer, you may qualify for an FHA renovation loan. This property is being offered at \$50,000.



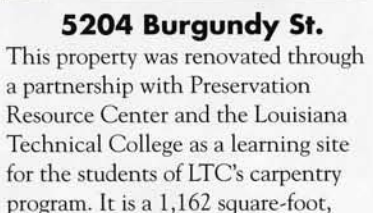
### 1338-40 Arts St.

There is approximately 4,000-square feet of space in this building, prominently situated on a corner in the New Marigny neighborhood. With vision and tender loving care this property can be returned to its original beauty, and can be used as a residence, a business or both since it contains commercial as well as living areas. Many of its shutters and other original architectural exterior features are still intact, and is offered at \$95,000.



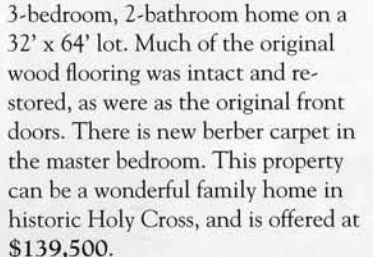
### 938 Lizardi St.

Come home to this wonderfully renovated shotgun with off-street parking and an outer building that can be used for storage or as a garage. This Arts and Crafts-style shotgun is a 720-square-foot home with 1 bedroom and 1 bathroom on a 30' x 114' lot. Many properties on this block are being renovated with the assistance of Preservation Resource Center. This perfect starter home may have grant money attached, and it is being offered at \$110,000.



### 4804 Dauphine St.

Imagine moving into a completely renovated 3-bedroom, 2-bathroom historic home with over 1,500 square feet of space, right where the Industrial Canal meets the "Mighty Mississippi." This home sits on a double 62' x 101' lot. Enjoy the beautiful view of the river, canal and downtown. Watch the sun rise and set at the levee. The house, fondly called the "tree house" has an interesting story to tell. This is a must-see! Once you visit, you'll be in love! All of this and more is offered at \$199,000.



### 5204 Burgundy St.

This property was renovated through a partnership with Preservation Resource Center and the Louisiana Technical College as a learning site for the students of LTC's carpentry program. It is a 1,162 square-foot, 3-bedroom, 2-bathroom home on a 32' x 64' lot. Much of the original wood flooring was intact and restored, as were as the original front doors. There is new berber carpet in the master bedroom. This property can be a wonderful family home in historic Holy Cross, and is offered at \$139,500.

Please contact Lisa Ross at (504) 636-3078 or [lross@prcno.org](mailto:lross@prcno.org) for information on these and other exciting historic homes offered by Preservation Resource Center. PRC is located at 923 Tchoupitoulas St. in New Orleans' Warehouse District.

# Alternative Spring Break Brings College Kids to Help Rebuild

By Alyssa Provencio

IMAGINE LYING on a beach, enjoying a cool drink and working on your tan, surrounded by open-air bars, clubs and amazing parties. This is the vision that many college students would describe as the perfect spring break vacation. However, this year, over 900 students will volunteer with PRC's Rebuilding Together New Orleans (RTNO) and receive an entirely different experience.

For Jacob Murdock, a student at University of Nevada-Las Vegas, volunteering during his spring break was something he didn't have to think about twice: "I feel that my time can be better spent in another community, making a difference. We can often become sheltered and it is good to learn about the world around us."

Thousands of college students across the country are opting out of the traditional (or perhaps stereotypical) sunny trips to the beach, and instead are joining the growing Alternative Spring Break trend. Alternative Spring Breaks are volunteer trips organized

by colleges, universities, charitable organizations and religious organizations. These trips give college students the opportunity to participate in organized public service and relief efforts.

While New Orleans has always been a popular tourist destination for students, Hurricane Katrina gave them a new reason to visit: to lend a hand. Not only do visitors get the benefits of the cultural experiences that New Orleans has to offer, they are also able to give back to a community in need. Students participate in philanthropic activities such as tutoring children, working with the elderly, teaching English to immigrants or registering voters. Perhaps the most popular Alternative Spring Break activities in New Orleans are those that involve manual labor, such as repairing houses and schools and clearing away debris from storm-damaged neighborhoods.

They are so popular, in fact, that RTNO started booking groups a year in advance for spring break



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and were full by January. There are no official numbers on how many spring breakers have spent their vacations in New Orleans since the storm, but we know that without them we would not have accomplished as much as we have thus far. While services such as plumbing and electric are done by licensed professionals, a majority of work done on completed homes by RTNO has been by volunteers. From painting and landscaping to carpentry and flooring, there are many ways for volunteers to share their talents.

For Jon Skvarka, RTNO program manager, his college spring break was life changing.

"My story is a good example of how a spring break service week in New Orleans can impact your life. I came down in the spring of 2006 and saw the devastation first hand. That experience is why I have lived in and worked for New Orleans the past three years," says Skvarka.

While PRC has hosted spring break volunteers for many years, the program really took off in 2006. Since then, Rebuilding Together has hosted many repeat volunteers. "My sophomore year of college, I wanted to come help rebuild because I wanted to be active in post-Katrina reconstruction. It was as real as you could get — a natural disaster on U.S. soil that the U.S. government wasn't adequately addressing," says Anastasia Korolkova, a City University of New York senior. "Looking back, however, I think New Orleans helped me more than the other way around. I am still inspired by the teamwork that made it happen. I am very grateful to New Orleans."

Korolkova isn't the only volunteer who claims that New Orleans has had a profound effect on them. Although the city's distinct food and music are certainly memorable, it's the personal stories of tragedy and triumph that inspire the students to keep coming back.

Michelle Lackie, associate director of Immersion Experiences at Hillel, the Foundation for Jewish Campus Life says, "The spirit of New Orleans is incredible. Year after year we see New Orleanians proud of their home, even when frustrated, but committed to bringing it back. The energy is infectious."

