

SAINT CATHERINE STREET

YESTERYEARS AND NOW

It is our hope that this booklet gives you some insight into the rich history of Saint Catherine Street and the people that lived there.



GEORGE F. BOWLES HOUSE: This beautiful old house at 13 Saint Catherine is currently home for Mr. and Mrs. Larry Holmes. Having grown up in the area, Mr. Holmes says he was always curious about the house, but because it was surrounded by a big fence, he couldn't see anything that was going on. He relied on his mother and his grandmother to provide him with information. When he returned home after serving in the military, he was able to purchase the home that he had so admired as a boy.

Mr. Bowles was born a slave in Charleston, South Carolina and acquired his freedom before the start of the Civil War. He studied to become an attorney on his own and practiced in Tennessee and in Natchez. He served as a member of the Mississippi House of Representatives and was the first black chief-of-police in Natchez. He was described as a generous man who would help anyone. It was also said that as a businessman, politician, and activist, he had an interest in communication and giving a voice to the black community. Mr. Bowles had an interest in agriculture as well, and in 1881 he discovered a way to improve production of cotton by eliminating cotton worms.

DR. JOHN BOWMAN BANKS HOUSE-MUSEUM: Dr. John Bowman Banks was the first black doctor to establish a practice in Natchez. Upon graduating from Meharry Medical College in Nashville, he began his practice in 1889. He built the home at 9 Saint Catherine Street around 1892. Dr. Banks was able to recruit a friend of his, Dr. Albert Dumas, and so was responsible for bringing the second black doctor to Natchez. Booker T. Washington, a good friend of Dr. Banks, resided with him on several occasions during visits to Natchez. The Banks House later served as headquarters for the NAACP Organization. During the heights of the Civil Rights Movement in Natchez, the Banks House served as the meeting place for planning and strategizing events. After laying in ruin for many years, Dr. Banks' grandson, Frank Robinson, returned to Natchez in 1997, and restored the home to its previous grandeur. In 2011 Rose Hill Missionary Baptist Church received the home and began operating it as a museum shortly thereafter.



RHYTHM NIGHT CLUB: This is the very site where The Rhythm Night Club Fire occurred in 1940. Over 200 people were burned to death during this horrific event. Many of them had slipped out of the house to attend the dance, and their parents were unaware that they were gone. The site now contains a museum as a memorial to those persons who lost their lives. The museum is owned and operated by Mr. Monroe Sago and Mrs. Betty Sago, who have done a remarkable job of collecting and displaying items related to that tragic event.

MR. WHITEHEAD'S PHOTO SHOP: There's an empty space next to the Rhythm Night Club Site which is where Mr. Whitehead had his photo shop. Most Black persons in Natchez had their photo taken at one time or another by Mr. Whitehead. There is no record to indicate what happened to the many photos taken by Mr. Whitehead.



THREE TOGETHER: Once you crossed Monmouth Street, on the corner of Monmouth and Saint Catherine Street was Mr. Lockett's place. As has been pointed out, the street had numerous establishments such as this. Mr. Lockett sold beer and had a jukebox where records could be played. Around the corner on the Monmouth Street side was a beauty shop that was operated by Mrs. Sophia. This side entrance allowed customers to frequent the beauty shop without having to go through, what was called, the juke joint. Right next to Mr. Lockett's place on Saint Catherine was Mrs. Alice's place. The two buildings were so close that originally they appeared to be joined. They both sold the same things but from all indications they each had their loyal patrons because they were always crowded on the weekends. There was a two room tin house next to Mrs. Alice's place and a lady with several children lived in it. Another identical building was located next to 117 Monmouth Street, right behind Mr. Lockett's place. Thinking back, it is hard to realize that someone could live in such a place, but they did. The only evidence that these buildings existed is bits and pieces of brick, glass and rocks found when you attempt to dig in the soil.

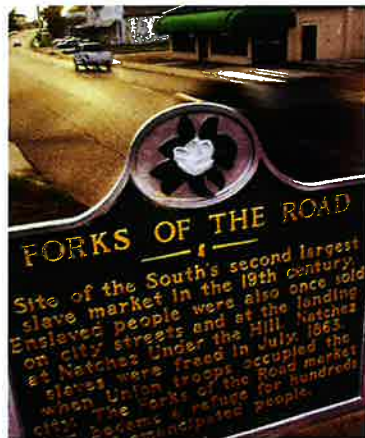
KNOXALL'S GROCERY: The house at 210 Saint Catherine Street along with the one at 216 Saint Catherine are two of the few houses with their original numbered address. Most of the other dwellings are no longer in existence. With the restructuring of Saint Catherine St. the numbers were changed. The store at 209 Saint Catherine was called Knoxall's Grocery. The store was not named for the white gentleman who lived there and ran the store; it was named for the original store owner. When this man left a white couple took over and remained there until the store closed. You could purchase a coke for six cents. The grocery store was in the front with living quarters in the rear.

THE ICEMAN: Continuing west, on the right side next to Knoxall's Grocery was a large two-story house where several families lived. Some lived in the downstairs and some families lived upstairs. To the right of this two-story house was a beautiful old gray house. This house contained some beautiful pieces of furniture. The house sat back on the property and in front of it was a metal building where 'the Iceman' (as some of the children referred to him) stored his ice. "Each morning he would go to the ice house downtown on Jefferson Street and load his wagon with ice. The ice would be covered with burlap (croaker) sacks to help keep it from melting. It would then be brought and put in the metal building that was in the front yard so it would stay frozen. When it was time to deliver ice to a family, he would lift it out with a huge pair of tongs and deliver it to whatever house had ordered it. The house remained on the site for many years and was eventually torn down by a gentleman who had purchased it. It was such a beautiful old house and it was sad to see it torn down.

Those who grew up in the Saint Catherine Street area remember it as a two-way street with traffic coming and going. It was the main artery leading into the city of Natchez and leaving out of the city. The people living in the Saint Catherine Street area were a very close knit group of people. Blacks, Italians and Jews all at one time lived in the area together, with very little, if any problems. When you talk to people who lived in the Saint Catherine Street area in times gone by, you usually get some of the same sentiments: "We all looked out for each other, we shared what we had, People believed in having a good time" these were just some of the repeated comments you'd hear. Saint Catherine Street was known for its entertainment area. There were a number of clubs in the area and on any given weekend you might find Hezekiah Early and The House Rockers, Mr. Rowan on his trumpet, Alexander "Papa George" Lightfoot with his harmonica, or Jimmy "Soul Man" Lee Anderson spinning records. There was also Elmo Williams, YZ Ealey, and James Rowan. This was the way people relaxed after a long hard week of work.

Going to church was a big part of the community, also. There were several churches in the area and on any given Sunday you would see people walking in groups, going to church. Each of the churches held their major service on a different Sunday night so people in the community were able to attend each one.

This booklet was generated because as conversations were discussed, the realization that a great deal of the Black History of Natchez centered on the Saint Catherine Street area. As talk continued, it was proposed that some of the information being discussed about Saint Catherine Street be shared with others; and so, it was done.



FORKS of the ROAD: For many years most of the people who lived on Saint Catherine Street did not realize the significance of this site. To many of them it was just known as the site where Old Washington Road and Liberty Road converged. It was only when Sir Boxley began to discuss this as the site of the former slave market, that this important piece of history was really revealed.

BOB LEE's CLEANERS: This facility was located at 209 Saint Catherine Street and was owned by Mr. Robert Lee (Bob Lee) Williams and his wife. It was one of two black-owned cleaners in this immediate area.

RED HORSE: This was a very popular two-story night club located at 226 Saint Catherine Street. This establishment was frequented by the residents of the area mostly on

Friday and Saturday nights. The upstairs portion was rented to out-of-town truck drivers. There was also a gambling room where many of them (along with some of the locals) tried their luck. The downstairs in addition to selling and serving food, contained a bar and a dance floor that provided entertainment on the weekends.



TEXACO SERVICE STATION: At the corner of Saint Catherine and D'Evereux was a Texaco Service Station that was owned and operated by Mr. Pink C. Smith, Sr. and his wife Mrs. Sadie Smith; the same two people who owned the establishment on Perrault St. The two of them worked here side-by-side, serving the community, until they were no longer able to do so.

O'BRIEN HOUSE: This house is not on Saint Catherine Street; instead it is located at 17 Old

Devereux Street and was built as the home of Frank O'Brien. Mr. O'Brien owned and operated a brickyard that was located east on Saint Catherine Street. The house was later purchased by Dr. Herman A. Stephens, a black doctor, who made it into a small hospital and clinic.

HOLY FAMILY CATHOLIC CHURCH and SAINT FRANCIS HIGH SCHOOL: Holy Family Catholic Church is a magnificent edifice. It is the place of worship that was built for the African Americans who practiced the Catholic faith in the area. Many of these parishioners also sent their children to Catholic School. The elementary school was called by the name of the church and was located directly behind the church. The high school however, was in a completely different location and had a totally different name. It was known as Saint Francis High School and was located across the railroad tracks on Lumber Street. The high school closed in the 1960s and a group of senior citizen apartments are now where the school once stood.

MS. SADIE V. THOMPSON: This house at 26 Saint Catherine Street was the home of Mrs. Sadie V. Thompson. The former high school that was built especially for Black students was named in her honor. A portion of that building, which is located on N. Union Street, now serves as the site for some of the Head Start Programs in the area.

COMMUNITY MARKET: The Community Market Grocery Store came into existence during the boycott of the Civil Rights movement when African American citizens would not shop at white-owned establishments. This store provided an alternate place for them to shop for grocery for their family. It was located at 37 Saint Catherine Street. The store prospered for a while but was eventually torn down.

ACE THEATER: The city of Natchez had three movie theaters located downtown, however they were priced out of reach for most of the Black children. The Ace Theater was built especially for the Black children here in Natchez. It was located at 39 Saint Catherine Street but all that remains of that site now is a grassy lawn. The former theater is where a lot of the Black kids saw their first picture show.

WHITE ROOSTER: This, like 'The Red Horse' was an odd name for a building, yet, that's exactly what it was called. It too was a café on the left side of Saint Catherine Street. If nothing else, Saint Catherine had a variety of cafes with some unique names. On the weekends, especially, Mrs. Edna, who loved to dance, would put on a show in the White Rooster. She didn't need a partner, she danced all by herself. People who lived in the 'alleys' off Saint Catherine Street never bothered to say, "I live in this alley or I live in that alley"; everybody lived 'on' Saint Catherine Street.

HOT TAMALES: 196 Saint Catherine Street was the address for Mr. Jabo Johnson and his family. The property was a hill with two houses on it. The name sometimes used to reference the property was 'raised cottage'. At other times the house to the front of the property was called 'the big house' and there was a smaller house behind it. At the bottom of the hill was a small building on the right which served as a store and to the left was a shoe-shine stand. This family could be considered true entrepreneurs. Mr. Jabo drove a Jeep truck that was used to sell ice cream from and two of his daughters were known for making and selling the best hot tamales in Natchez. It is not known if their recipe was ever shared with anyone.

MR. JOE'S STORE: Mr. Joe Anderson and his wife Mrs. Mary Ruth purchased the store located at 182 Saint Catherine Street. Before buying this larger building, they had a little snowball stand across the street. Upon obtaining the larger facility, they sold just about everything; from hand cut deli meats to feed for chickens. The store was extremely popular because you could run a tab for items you needed and pay the tab when your check arrived at the beginning of the month. This practice continued until the opening of Nossers City Shopping Center where the Jitney Jungle Grocery Store was located.

PERRAULT STREET: At the corner of Saint Catherine and Perrault, to the right, was a service station. Back then you could go to the service station and purchase coal-oil or kerosene for fifteen cents. Even though the homes had electricity, many families still kept oil lamps handy in case of bad weather. Directly behind the service station to the right was Mr. Burrel Sanders' Shoe Shop. The smell of shoe wax and shoe polish was always present. Mr. Sanders made all sort of repairs to shoes: half sole, full sole, caps, taps, heels replaced, tares sewn, anything that needed to be done. There was a little display case where the shoes that had been repaired would be placed. Across from Mr. Sanders shoe repair shop was a snack shop and restaurant. It was owned by Mr. Pink C. Smith, Sr. and his wife, Mrs. Sadie Smith. This black couple owned several pieces of property on Perrault Street.

Murray Temple and Shiloh Baptist Church are two of several churches located in the Saint Catherine Street area. Both were on Perrault Street. Murray Temple was to the right on Perrault next to Mr. Burrel Sanders' shoe shop; Shiloh was on the left side close to the end of Perrault Street. Both of these churches, along with the others in the area, would have large gatherings of children on Sunday.

GEORGE'S ALLEY: Allen Furniture Company was located at the corner of Saint Catherine and Perrault Street. To the left of the furniture store was an alley called George's Alley and to the left of George's Alley was several additional houses. When the street was redesigned, all of the houses in George's Alley as well as the ones directly on Saint Catherine were torn down except one. The recently renovated white house now facing Saint Catherine was at one time located in George's Alley. It was the home of Mrs. Susie Davis and her husband. It was moved when the restructuring of the street occurred. The curb to the right of this house is all that's left to indicate where Georgia's Alley was located.

CHURCHES: People in the area didn't have to worry about religious facilities to attend; they had several to choose from. On Sunday, you would see groups of people walking to church together. Of course, Baptist Churches outnumbered all of the others. There were four black Baptist churches all within walking distance of each other; Pleasant Green, Shiloh, Greater Mount Sinai, and China Grove (now . Holy Family Catholic Church was the only black Catholic Church for blacks in the city. It was located further up Saint Catherine on the corner of Fourth Street and Saint Catherine Street.



BROWN'S VELVET ICE CREAM: The other Mr. Johnson (Mr. Robert) and his wife, Liza, lived at 172-174 Saint Catherine Street. Mr. Johnson sold ice cream from his truck as well, but he had a Brown's Velvet Ice Cream Truck. The small building in front was at one time Cut Rate Liquor Store. It was often frequented by residents as well as non-residents of the area.

OTHER ENTREPRENEURS: The following was three other very important places on Saint Catherine Street: Mr. Otis Shoe Shop, Mrs. Dorothy's Café and Mrs. Lessena's Café. They were located in the area where DeMarco Square is now along with a few other buildings. These establishments were little tin, shotgun buildings, each built directly on the street and as usual, behind them was a bunch of houses in the area known as DeMarco Alley. Each of these entrepreneurs provided a valuable service to the community. Mr. Otis had one leg that was longer than the other, but he never let that stop him. He, like Mr. Burrel Sanders, repaired shoes in his shop and he was always there. Ms. Lessena and Ms. Dorothy both had restaurants. They were good cooks and never seemed to want for customers. When Ms. Lessena left this location, she moved to where Natchez Midtown is currently located on the corner of Martin Luther King, Jr. Street and Pine Street.

SNOW WHITE CLEANERS: The City Credit Union now occupies the space where Snow White Cleaners was located. This business provided jobs for many of the ladies in the area just as Natchez Steam Laundry did later on.



THE BUSH HOUSE: Mrs. Bush and her husband lived next door to the Millers at 214 Saint Catherine. The house had fallen into severe disrepair and just recently was torn down. Mrs. Bush was a former school teacher in Natchez. The big oak tree in the front yard here along with the one in front of the Miller's house was used each summer to sell watermelons, and other fruit under. This is where most people came to buy their watermelons, peaches, and whatever else. In the backyard of the Bush's house was a huge chinaberry tree. Children

spent many hours climbing that tree and using the chinaberries they would gather in their popguns, shooting them at each other.



GROCERY STORE, ETC.: A portion of the blue painted building at 173 Saint Catherine Street was at one time a grocery store operated by a white family. The family lived in the apartment above the store. When they left, Mr. Bob Lee Williams and Mr. John Henry Jackson made it into a recreation center for children in the area. These two men always had something going on for the children. Each summer they would take a group of kids to an out of town professional baseball game. This was something to remember for the majority of the children who went and something they never forgot. These two men devoted a lot of their adult life trying to make a

difference in the lives of the children. After serving as a recreation center, the building served as a Laundromat and several different families operated it as such.

MONMOUTH STREET: Most of the dwellings on this street are original to the street. The white house to the left at 118 Monmouth was the home of the Bacon Family. For many years Mrs. Bacon provided music lessons to children whose parents could afford to pay for them. On the right at 121 Monmouth Street was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Filmore. The Filmore's had the second dry-cleaning business in the area. The building that served as the cleaners was there for many years and the slab on which it sat, remains in the back yard still.

SHOTGUN HOUSES: The four brick houses on the right side of the street, from 149 to 155 were built with the reconstruction of Saint Catherine Street. In the street's original design, there were several houses called shotgun houses. The dwellings were given this name because it was said you could shoot a shotgun through the front door and it would go all the way through and out of the back door without hitting anything. These shotgun houses were destroyed with the redesigning of the street.

DONUT SHOP: This donut shop was located somewhere in the area where Ebony Barber Shop is on Saint Catherine Street, and they sold all kinds of pastries. The favorite of many people, who remember it, was the lemon sticks. A lot of the time children walking to Brumfield School would stop and spend their lunch money at the Donut Shop.



EBONY BARBER SHOP: The barbers in this barber shop have been cutting the hair of black males and females for over 60 years. There are not many men in the area that as little boys did not get a haircut at Ebony. The building still displays the original sign out front.

FUNERAL HOMES: There were five funeral homes located in the Saint Catherine Street area. Each of these was blacked owned and operated. Curtis

Funeral Home was officially on East Franklin Street, but because it was in the Saint Catherine Street area, it was a part of the overall group. Webb Funeral Home and William & Williams were the two funeral homes located directly on Saint Catherine Street. Mackel & Sons as well as George F. West were both located on what was then Pine Street (now Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Street), but again, their close proximity to the Saint Catherine Street area afforded them the honor of being included with the other three. Only three of the five remain in business today.



ZION CHAPEL AME CHURCH and PARSONAGE: Following the burning of the Church Zion Chapel had purchased on Union Street between Main and Franklin Streets, the congregation bought the building built in 1858 as the Second Presbyterian Church. At the time, Hiram Revels was serving as pastor. He served in the Mississippi Legislature, which elected him to the US Senate. This made him the first black man to serve in either house of Congress. Mr. Revels also served as the first president of Alcorn College (Alcorn State University). During the Rhythm Night Club Fire, Zion Chapel served as headquarters for

the Red Cross. The Parsonage is located at 15 Saint Catherine Street, across from Holy Family Church. This house is owned by the church and was originally bought for \$800. It has served as the parsonage for over 100 years.



BRUMFIELD SCHOOL: Brumfield was originally built as a high school for the black children, however; later residents attended it as an elementary school. Children in the Saint Catherine area walked to and from school. Some years there was so many students at Brumfield that half-day sessions for certain grade levels were held. When Anchorage Junior High School (Robert Lewis Middle School) was built, this helped to relieve much of the overcrowding at Brumfield. During the summer the city recreation department sponsored recreational activities at

Brumfield for the children in the area. Even with a concrete yard as a playing area, this is where most of the children went, especially the guys. They learned the fundamentals of basketball playing with each other at Brumfield. This was their life-line to recreation.

WINSTON HILL: Louis Winston was born in Adams County. His father was a prominent white planter and his mother was enslaved. Winston served in many capacities during his lifetime including assisting in the financing of homes in the area known as Woodlawn. His home is located on what is known as Winston Hill, across the street from what was formerly Brumfield School. Mr. Winston is buried in the Natchez City Cemetery and his tombstone is the only one that has a bronze bust on top of it. The house where he lived no longer exists. There was a fire and it was eventually torn down.



69 SAINT CATHERINE STREET: When you look across the street from Brumfield School, you can readily see that at one time there were three houses in this area. The three lots that these houses were built on were originally purchased by John R. Lynch. One of the lots was purchased by Mr. Minor Davis and his wife Mary, and they in turn built a house on it. The Davis' later sold the house to Mr. and Mrs. Miller. The house was later purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Dumas-thus the name; Davis-Miller-Dumas house.

COMBO RESTAURANT: Located at 224 Saint Catherine St., the Combo was known for its hamburgers. Younger people living in the area were allowed to go in to buy food during the daytime but it was totally off limits to them at night.



CEDAR'S ALLEY (STREET): Almost all of the houses here were shotgun houses filled with children. You could always find children playing together outside. It was true during that day and time that the children belonged to everyone in the 'alley'. Any adult could correct a child and the elderly was always very well respected. Many of these children grew up to be life-long friends, often referring to each other as 'kin'.

JUNKIN STREET: Junkin Street is where another large group of children lived. One of the residents on this street was Mr. Bilbo, the original owner of Bilbo's Fish Market. Naturally, children traveled between houses and buildings to visit from one street to another. Mr. McShane's Barber Shop was located on this street as well. Another person who was very familiar to this street was 'the lottery lady'. She sold lottery tickets all over town. One side of the lottery tickets had red numbers and the numbers on the other side were blue. It must have been very lucrative for her to walk all over town like she did.



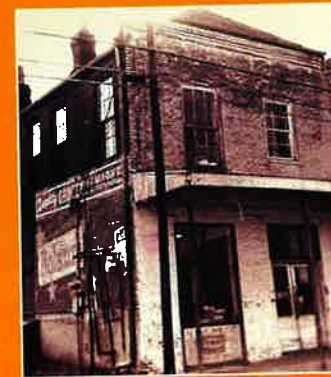
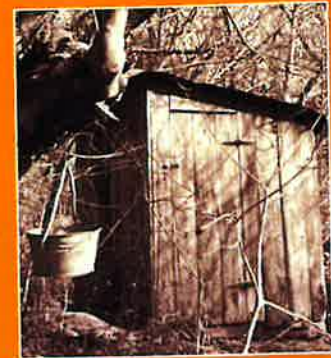
REMBERT STREET: Rembert Street was not located back then where it is now. It was changed when Saint Catherine became a one way street. The original street was located on the right side of Saint Catherine between what is now number Saint Catherine and 173 Saint Catherine. It was a quiet street which was inhabited mostly by elderly people. Most of the houses original to this street no longer exist.

MR. FRAZEE MILLER: Mr. Frazee Miller and his wife (Dearest) lived in the house located at 216 Saint Catherine Street. It was one of the nicest houses on the street. Mr. Frazee owned a little snack shop that stood to the side of the house. The knoll where the shop once stood is still visible. In the back of the shop was a little room that served as an office. On Friday or Saturday evening the group who sold lottery tickets would meet in this little room to 'pull' the numbers of the winners.



These are brief descriptions of some of the sites that were located on and around Saint Catherine during its prime. It was a vibrant community, filled with businesses owned by black, white, and Jewish citizens.

Though many of the places no longer exist, the contribution they made to the growth of the city of Natchez can never be completely erased.



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