

# LIVING WITH HISTORY IN NEW ORLEANS' NEIGHBORHOODS

## Mid-City



PHOTO: IAN MCNEULTY



Mid-City is the heart of New Orleans, the area where locals come when they want to remember what makes this city the generous, pleasure-loving, hard-boiled town that it is. Stop by any of the neighborhood eateries here—for elegant dining in a quaint old church at Christian's or at the numerous Formica counter favorites of the locals—and you'll probably find a judge, or an architect, or an Uptown socialite at the table beside you. You'll also find the residents of this solid neighborhood, which developed over the last century as a working and middle class, family-oriented area. Today the sense of old-time community is ever apparent in the wide porches with their metal gliders or hanging wooden swings constantly in motion. The architecture, like the residents, is unpretentious, solid, and pure New Orleans. Mid-City showcases the spirit of a true neighborhood as defined by that unique measure of camaraderie found only in this city: It has its own Mardi Gras parading society. The Krewe of Mid-City, founded in 1933 by a

PRESERVATION RESOURCE CENTER OF NEW ORLEANS  
INVITES YOU TO EXPLORE THE LOCAL SIDE OF  
LIFE IN MID-CITY, WHERE NEW ORLEANIANS GO  
TO REMEMBER THE "WAY IT WAS."





group of area businessmen, is the fifth oldest Carnival marching organization in New Orleans.

In 1913 a young engineer named Albert Baldwin Wood made Mid-City habitable when he developed the screw pump, a device that allowed water to be pumped from land situated below sea level. Before that, this charming neighborhood was poorly drained swampland that was easily prone to flooding and generally swarmed with mosquitoes.

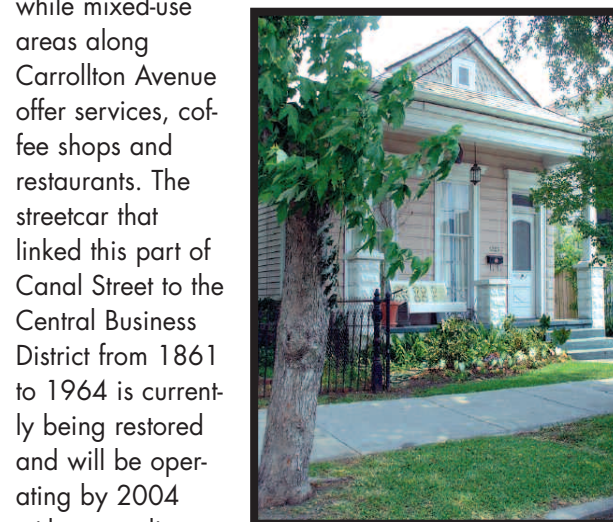
Turpentine works, lumber-yards and other industries flourished along the New Basin Canal, dug in 1832 on the present path of Interstate 10, and along Canal Street.

The whole area was known as “back o’ town” because it was “back of” the natural levees along which the city first developed. The most substantial mid-19th century developments were the cemeteries along the natural high ground at the intersection of Canal Street and present-day City Park Avenue.

Mid-City today has several beautiful oak-lined avenues, including Jefferson Davis Parkway, the sec-

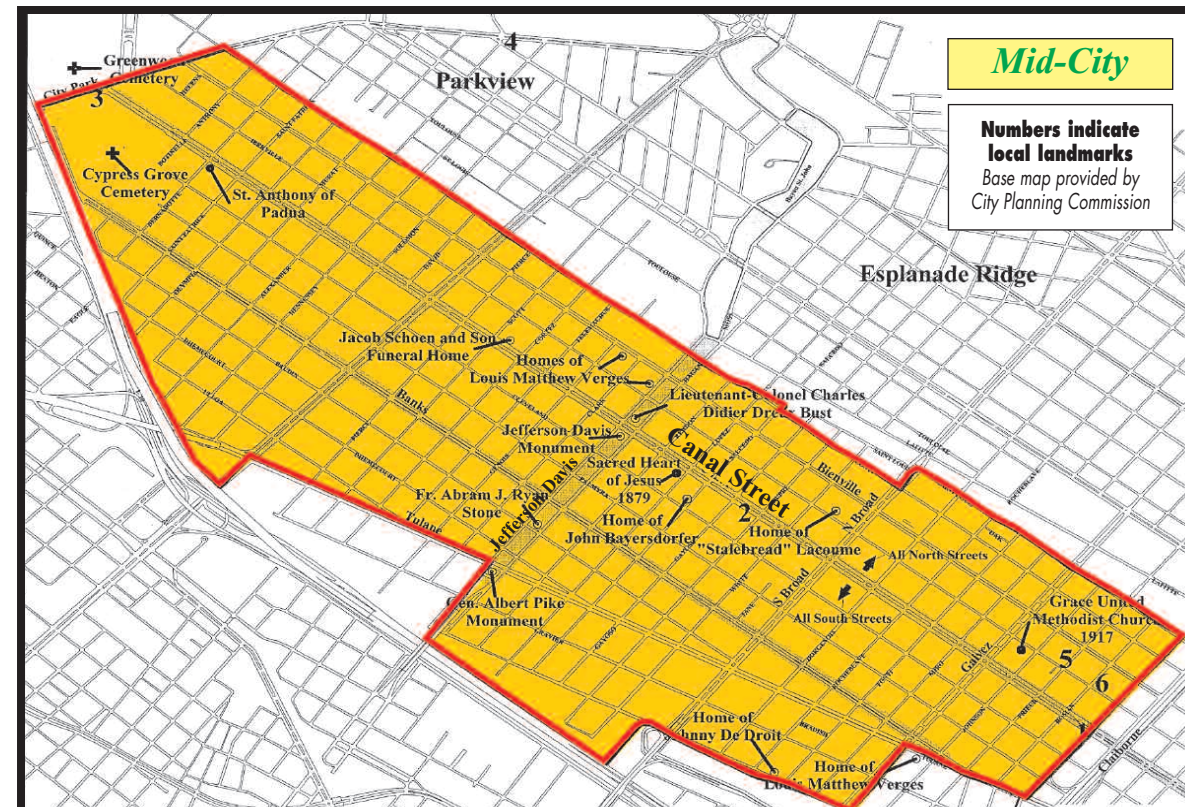


ond widest street in the city. Because the area developed largely after 1900, it offers a wonderfully coherent collection of shotgun houses. It is a multicultural area with some moderately priced homes and plenty of rentals. Commercial areas along Tulane Avenue and Canal Street make shopping convenient, while mixed-use areas along Carrollton Avenue offer services, coffee shops and restaurants. The streetcar that linked this part of Canal Street to the Central Business District from 1861 to 1964 is currently being restored and will be operating by 2004 with a spur line connecting Canal Street to nearby City Park. Its fixed rail lines will certainly prove an incentive for more residents and businesses to discover this convenient district in the heart of the city.



Neighbors here feel strongly about their historic architecture. Recently, when developers suggested demolishing buildings on Canal Street for a gas station, a group of residents banded together to buy the properties and renovate them. The Mid-City Neighborhood Association organizes regular cleanups, polices blight and stays in touch with members through newsletters and an internet site.

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## HIGHLIGHTS

*We encourage you to use good judgment and common sense in touring the neighborhood.*

A. B. Wood’s invention of the screw pump increased dry land in New Orleans sevenfold, making it possible for the first time to build from the Mississippi River to the shores of Lake Pontchartrain. Factories and government agencies rushed to build on new in-town locations. One outstanding building project was the Criminal Courts Building, now on the National Register of Historic Places, constructed at Tulane and Broad streets in 1929. The area just behind the court building and parish prison was once Jane Alley, a street of modest houses. It was here that Louis “Satchmo” Armstrong was born on August 4, 1901, in the home of his maternal grandmother. A plaque marks the approximate location of the building.

**Walk or bike** the stretch of Jeff Davis between Tulane and Bayou St. John, taking a good look up lovely tree-shaded Banks Street and Bienville Street as you pass. Jefferson Davis Parkway honors the former president of the Confederacy, whose statue stands near the intersection of Jeff Davis and Canal. It also honors 19th-century Cuban revolutionary Jose Marti, whose statue near Tulane Avenue was erected in 1996 in honor of New Orleans’ support of Cuba’s fight against Spanish colonial government in the 1800s.





- 1718 Bienville founds city of Nouvelle Orleans, now the Vieux Carré
- 1803 Louisiana Purchase
- 1807 U.S Act of Congress gives city of New Orleans title to military commons, part of which becomes lower Canal Street
- 1816 Mississippi River breaks levee and floods much of city
- 1832 New Basin Canal opens
- 1849 (May 3) Flooding through Sauve's crevasse (river ridge) inundates Mid-City and parts of French Quarter
- 1861 Streetcars installed on Canal Street
- 1899 Sewerage and Water Board established to implement drainage program that would make wet parts of city, especially Mid-City, habitable
- 1913 Albert Baldwin Wood invents screw pump, vastly improving drainage in low-lying parts of city
- 1937 Turning basin of New Basin Canal filled
- 1938 New Basin Canal from S. Rampart to Claiborne Avenue covered
- 1970s Pontchartrain Expressway constructed atop bed of New Basin Canal
- 1993 Mid-City named National Register Historic District

## Annual Neighborhood Events

- February: "A Chocolate Affair"
- August: Night Out Against Crime
- December: Mid-City Festival of Lights

## Neighborhood Organizations

- Mid-City Neighborhood Association  
([www.mcno.org](http://www.mcno.org))
- Mid-City Community Development Corporation

*Christian's Restaurant*




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*Since 1974 the Preservation Resource Center has promoted the preservation, restoration and revitalization of New Orleans' historic neighborhoods and architecture.*



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