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## **“Drinking” about the Past: Bar Culture in Antebellum New Orleans**

Mindy M. Jarrett  
*University of New Orleans*, [mjarrett@uno.edu](mailto:mjarrett@uno.edu)

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“Drinking” about the Past: Bar Culture in Antebellum New Orleans

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
History

by

Mindy Jarrett

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## **Abstract**

Women in antebellum New Orleans have often been memorialized as Voudou queens, slave-torturing madams of haunted houses, prostitutes, and light-skinned concubines to wealthy, white men. This study focuses on women's contribution to New Orleans's economy through the hospitality industry as bar owners from 1830-1861. In addition, it provides an overview of the role that alcohol and beverage consumption patterns played among men and women of all races, classes, and cultural backgrounds in antebellum New Orleans. Antebellum tourists, in addition to cotton and sugar, were an important source of income for many New Orleanians before the Civil War. As bar owners, these women profited from male-dominated spaces while providing for themselves, and in some cases, their families. A study of hospitality and tourism in antebellum New Orleans is essential to those studying both economic and social histories of the city during the antebellum era.

Keywords: Coffeehouses; Cabarets; Taverns; Saloons; Exchanges; Hospitality and tourism; working women; gendered spaces

## Introduction

The fact is, that drinking in New-Orleans is purely a business transaction. It is either the crowning incident of a great cotton operation, or the binding link of a covenant between lawyer and client: it is the consolidating clause to every contract; the Alpha and the Omega, the overture and the finale to every transaction where the jarring chord of conflicting interests is intended to be put in proper tune.

— Louis F. Tasitro, *Random Shots and Southern Breezes*, 1842

On his visit to New Orleans in November 1840, Louis Taistro noticed three “remarkable” traits about its citizens: First, alcohol did not seem to affect the people of New Orleans as it affected people in other parts of the United States. Second, New Orleanians consumed an “enormous” amount of liquor—enough “to supply the demands of any Northern city for a whole month.” Finally, they drank for every occasion, and everyone drank. They drank at lunch, before dinner, with dinner, at night, at the theater, after business transactions, while entertaining guests; they drank “for the commemoration of some extraordinary event” and at parties. They drank to recollect memories lost from “the adventures of the night before.” Women drank. “Men of acknowledged sobriety and moral character” drank. Merchants, clerks, and “motley groups” drank. They drank among strangers and comrades, in rooms of “four to five hundred persons,” and “in all the known languages under the sun.” And it all happened in “a place exorcised of all bad spirits, except licensed ones”: the bar.<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

To be sure, New Orleans has always been a good-time town, but throughout the antebellum period, the Crescent City was an extremely important location for business. The first steamboat to sail on the Mississippi River had arrived in New Orleans in January of 1812, after a

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Fitzgerald Taistro, *Random Shots and Southern Breezes* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1842), 1:67-68, <https://archive.org/details/randomshotssouth01tasi/page/66>.

three-month voyage from Philadelphia. This era of steam opened the doors for New Orleans to capitalize on its location as an international port; and with the cotton boom of the 1820s, the port of New Orleans had become the country's chief export site, second only to New York, which it briefly overtook during the 1830s, during which it was the country's second-largest immigration port. In 1840, the port of New Orleans was the fourth-busiest commercial port in the world. According to Richard Tansey, by the 1850s, sailors and riverboat workers alone counted for 60,000 yearly visitors.<sup>2</sup> "This, considering the character of the climate, and the fact that only about six months of each year are devoted to active business, is very extraordinary," wrote the United States Secretary of the Treasury in 1853.<sup>3</sup>

Disease, heat, and humidity caused the city's pace to slow during the summer months, but from November through April, business was booming. One historian estimates that over ninety percent of slaves imported to New Orleans were sold each year during this six-month period.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the Crescent City developed a transient population. "Strangers are flocking here in crowds," wrote Lillian Foster in December of 1855.<sup>5</sup> These prewar visitors – seasonal residents conducting business, immigrants from all corners of the earth, or travelers visiting the Crescent City for pleasure – set in motion an industry on which New Orleanians would capitalize

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Tansey, "Prostitution and Politics in Antebellum New Orleans," in *History of Women in the United States: Historical Articles on Women's Lives and Activities* ed. Nancy F. Cott (Boston, MA: De Gruyter, Inc., 1993), 9:46.

<sup>3</sup> Israel D. Andrews, *Communication from the Secretary of the Treasury* (Washington, D. C.: Robert Armstrong, 1853), 753, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/011635981>.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 49.

<sup>5</sup> Lillian Foster, *Way-Side Glimpses, North and South* (New York: Rudd and Carleton, 1860), 150, <https://archive.org/details/waysideglimpsesn00fost/page/150>.

for the next two hundred years: hospitality and tourism. At the center of this industry were the barrooms and the men *and* women who kept them going.

\* \* \* \* \*

The public sphere bears the greatest example of what historian Mary P. Ryan calls “gender asymmetry”: the division of things, or in this case, spaces, into male and female, “creating two worlds of meaning that do not line up flush with one another.”<sup>6</sup> Bars, which operate within a strange dichotomy between the public and private worlds, have tended to follow this pattern of gender asymmetry (even today – well into the twenty-first century), and have been designated, throughout most of history, as male-dominated spaces. Madelon Powers, who has written extensively on late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century bars, explains that “nearly every feature of the saloon’s interior seemed designed to promote an aura of freewheeling masculinity”: from their spittoons to their provocative artwork – some even featured urination troughs running along the front of the main bar – all assuring these were spaces reserved for male patrons.<sup>7</sup>

Yet the past is never simply black or white. Archaeologist Ryan Gray explains that “lines between Victorian respectability and disreputability blurred in these zones of ambiguous identities, and there is no reason to believe that women did not take advantage of this fact as

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<sup>6</sup> Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 8; Mary P. Ryan, *Mysteries of Sex: Tracing Women and Men through American History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Madelon Powers, *Faces Along the Bar: Lore and Order in the Workingman’s Saloon, 1870-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 30; an article in the *New-Orleans Weekly Delta* explains that while coffeeshouses featured pencil drawings and paintings of “naked angels and the nude daughters of those who are ‘but little lower than the angels,’” cabarets tended to feature “vulgar prints of ladies with scanty wardrobes.” “Biology Outdone: Or, the Inebriate Sobered Without the Aid of Science,” *New-Orleans Weekly Delta*, May 13, 1850.

well.”<sup>8</sup> License records, city directories, and contemporary newspapers reveal that both men and women patronized *and* profited from the antebellum city’s drinking houses.

### Historiography

From the climate and the great prevalence of light wines, there was less drunkenness than in most southern towns; and if other vices prevailed to any great extent they were either gracefully hidden, or so sanctioned by custom as to cause no remark, except by straight-laced strangers.

—T. C. DeLeon, *Four Years in Rebel Capitals*, 1890

It remains a wonder that a city such as New Orleans has no scholarship specifically dedicated to bars. While scholars of antebellum New Orleans almost always mention the boardinghouse-lined river and its various venues of entertainment and spectacle for sailors and visitors alike, they rarely devote more than a page to this particular social aspect of antebellum visitors’ experiences. Many non-scholarly works, such as a cluster of Pat O’Brien’s-sponsored books and others like it, have traced the history of their individual properties; however, historical insight to this culture has been largely ignored by scholars of New Orleans. Elizabeth M. Williams, founder of the National Food and Beverage Foundation, has co-authored a book with local bartender Chris McMillian that focuses on cocktail culture in New Orleans. Unfortunately, though, the book provides little source material, and the few primary sources listed are mainly travel narratives from the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> In addition, geographer Richard Campanella has

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<sup>8</sup> D. Ryan Gray, “Incorrigible Vagabonds and Suspicious Spaces in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans,” *Historical Archaeology* 45, no. 3 (2011), 69.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth M. Williams and Chris McMillian, *Lift Your Spirits: A Celebratory History of Cocktail Culture in New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016).

written an historical overview of Bourbon Street—though the bar-dominated street, as we know it today, was primarily residential until the second-half of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup>

In *Slavery's Metropolis*, Rashauna Johnson devotes a section to neighborhood taverns and their role as spaces of “opportunity and exploitation” for enslaved persons—a seemingly impossible feat, as the majority of legislation pertaining to antebellum New Orleans’s drinking houses focused on excluding slaves from these spaces, altogether. Johnson relies heavily on court cases to prove that enslaved men and women patronized these places, despite contemporary legislation. “A culture of drinking tied them into a diverse if hierarchic fraternity,” writes Johnson.<sup>11</sup> Her work follows in Richard Wade’s footsteps, though Wade’s *Slavery in the Cities* focuses on the entire South, whereas Johnson focuses explicitly on New Orleans.

There are, of course, historical works dedicated to America’s watering holes—many of which focus on colonial America. Christine Sismondo’s “spirited history” of taverns relies heavily on travel narratives to tell the story of a grassroots movement that developed between strangers, which eventually became a revolution for independence.<sup>12</sup> Elise Lathrop’s *Early American Inns and Taverns* discusses the importance of taverns for eighteenth-century travelers.<sup>13</sup> In addition, many of the country’s larger cities, such as Chicago, Boston, and New

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Campanella, *Bourbon Street: A History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Rashauna Johnson, *Slavery's Metropolis: Unfree Labor in New Orleans during the Age of Revolutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 105. See also Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

<sup>12</sup> Christine Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar: A Spirited History of Taverns and Saloons, Speakeasies and Grog Shops* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). See also: David Weir Conroy, *In Public Houses: Drink and the Revolution of Authority in Colonial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Kym Rice, *Early American Taverns: For the Entertainment of Friends and Strangers* (Chicago, IL: Regnery Gateway, 1983); Sharon V. Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch and Revolution: Taverngoing and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Elise Lathrop, *Early American Inns and Taverns* (New York: Arno Press, 1977).

York, have had the history of their bars studied; Thomas J. Noel's study of Denver's saloons during the second-half of the nineteenth century is particularly beneficial.<sup>14</sup> W. J. Rorabaugh's *Alcoholic Republic* skirts the edges of sociology, psychology, and economics to better understand the place of alcohol in American society from 1790 to 1830, a period during which, according to Rorabaugh, Americans "drank more alcoholic beverages per capita than ever before or since." The fact that this range ends in 1830—roughly the beginning of the antebellum period—proves that there was, clearly, a social shift that marks the difference between drink culture in the early republic and drink culture during the antebellum period.<sup>15</sup>

New Orleans's importance as a port city has been noted by several historians. Scott P. Marler has deemed antebellum New Orleans "The Merchants' Capital," where a conservative trader community developed as a result of the country's dependence on Mississippi River trade, which dominated for thirteen years, until the Erie Canal's opening in 1825.<sup>16</sup> Still, the river remained one of the fastest and cheapest ways of transporting goods and people throughout most of the antebellum era—until railroads proved a more efficient means of transportation in the 1850s.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas J. Noel, *The City and the Saloon: Denver, 1858-1916* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982). See also, Elliott West, *The Saloon on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979); W. Harrison Bayles, *Old Taverns of New York* (New York: Frank Allaben Genealogical Company, 1915).

<sup>15</sup> W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

<sup>16</sup> Scott P. Marler, *The Merchants' Capital: New Orleans and the Political Economy of the Nineteenth-Century South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 27. New Orleans fell fourth in line behind London, Liverpool, and New York.

<sup>17</sup> Merl E. Reed has written several works on Louisiana's railroads: "Louisiana's Transportation Revolution: The Railroads, 1830-1850" (master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 1957); "Government Investment and Economic Growth: Louisiana's Ante Bellum Railroads," *The Journal of Southern History* 28, no. 2 (May 1962): 183-201; *New Orleans and the Railroads: The Struggle for Commercial Empire, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966).

John Frederick Nau's *The German People of New Orleans* explores the cultural changes experienced by the Crescent City as a result of a massive wave of German migrants during the nineteenth century. Nau estimates that more than five million Germans emigrated to the United States during this hundred-year span; and prior to the Civil War, many of these individuals would have landed in New Orleans. In 1853 alone, New Orleans saw 36,000 Germans arrive in its port. New Orleans's beer industry, which was virtually non-existent prior to this mid-nineteenth century influx of Germans, is one example of the process of acculturation.<sup>18</sup> Emily Clark also addresses acculturation in New Orleans—through the massive influx of San Domingue refugees who arrived in New Orleans in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Though mixed-race women were well-represented in nineteenth-century America, a fascination with the lighter-skinned, female refugees developed, and ultimately turned these women—deemed *quadroons*—into a fantasy: “the foreign female of color who migrated to the United States from the blood-soaked shores of Haiti,” Clark explains, who “could be mastered and controlled by white American men.”<sup>19</sup>

This romanticized image of the sex-charged woman is a common theme of nineteenth-century New Orleans, and its famous red-light district, Storyville, has left scholars with no shortage of research material. Al Rose's 1978 work on Storyville is frequently cited as the first of many scholarly works to focus on the city's long history of prostitution.<sup>20</sup> Alecia Long's *The*

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<sup>18</sup> John Fredrick Nau, *The German People of New Orleans, 1850-1900* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1958), 4-9.

<sup>19</sup> Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 6. For additional studies on nineteenth-century obsession with racial identity, see Carol Wilson, *The Two Lives of Sally Miller: A Case of Mistaken Racial Identity in Antebellum New Orleans* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Al Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans: Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red Light District* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1978).

*Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans 1865-1920* is a more recent example of these works, and in analyzing the history of Storyville, Long looks at gender roles and the city's economy following the Civil War. She argues that the tourism industry, which today is the city's main economic engine, was first exploited in the post-war years. New Orleans's "reputation for choosing sensuality over seriousness" might have originated from outsiders, but it was exploited from within.<sup>21</sup>

While Long's work covers the latter half of the nineteenth century, Judith Kelleher Schafer's *Brothels, Depravity and Abandoned Women* addresses the antebellum city in a similar manner. Schafer's study shows that white and black women, free and enslaved, worked as prostitutes, many of whom owned or, especially in the case of enslaved women, managed brothels for someone else. The so-called "oldest profession" was so rampant in antebellum New Orleans that, in 1857, the city sought to capitalize on it, therein becoming the first in the nation to license the sex trade. Schafer equates the license fees as "a tax on sin," which women were willing to pay in order to lead a life of economic independence. "Becoming a woman of the town was at once a social and economic choice – a means of supporting oneself and a way of bargaining with men at a time when few other strategies existed for economic subsistence." She relies heavily on records from the First District Court of New Orleans, which handled criminal cases from 1846 until 1862. These cases also shed light on the great number of men who had a financial stake in this industry. "The sex trade's highest profits went into the pockets of the wealthiest land owners and merchants, many of whom were judges, physicians, merchants, attorneys, and city officials," explains Schafer. The extent to which prostitution was tolerated in

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<sup>21</sup> Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 1.

antebellum New Orleans depended heavily on politicians, which Robert Tansey discusses in an essay on New Orleans's reform campaigns of the 1850s.<sup>22</sup>

Women in antebellum New Orleans were wary of the ways in which they maneuvered in public spaces, and the separate spheres so derivative of Victorian culture only enhanced this paranoia. Historian Mary P. Ryan has led the way for scholars researching women in public spaces in three cities during the nineteenth century: New Orleans, New York, and San Francisco. Ryan questions the paradoxical language and attitudes that differentiate the word "public" when applied to men and women: "The same adjective that denoted civic honor when applied to men labeled females as sexual pariahs."<sup>23</sup> Such attitudes definitely had an effect on women's leisure activities in pre-war New Orleans, and in order to cater to Victorian attitudes, we see the development of ladies' entrances in certain establishments. Madelon Powers has analyzed the creation of these separate entrances for social-drinking women during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. "Their aim was sociability, not social equality," Powers explains, "and their stepping out did not include stepping into bar areas where they were not welcome." Cities such as Boston and New Orleans, which contained a large portion of Irish immigrants, saw women flock to barrooms without fear of destroying their reputations. These mixed-company parties of women, Powers argues, joined each other at the bar for free lunches, socialization, and playing cards.<sup>24</sup> Powers has also addressed American drinking culture in her book, *Faces Along*

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<sup>22</sup> Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Brothels, Depravity, and Abandoned Women: Illegal Sex in Antebellum New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009) 12-13; Tansey, "Prostitution and Politics in Antebellum New Orleans."

<sup>23</sup> Ryan, *Women in Public*, 67.

<sup>24</sup> Madelon Powers, "Women and Public Drinking, 1890-1920," *History Today* 45, no. 2 (February 1995): 46, 49.

*the Bar*, though she focuses, primarily, on the importance of drinking establishments to working-class men, a group among whom women were rarely found.<sup>25</sup>

Women in antebellum Louisiana obtained legal privileges, due to the state's French and Spanish heritage, that those in other parts of the country did not enjoy. Mark F. Fernandez discusses Louisiana's transition from the colonial to the antebellum era, where a civil law system combined with aspects of common law to create a unique judiciary environment.<sup>26</sup> Civil law, unlike the English common-law system, provided for forced heirship, which allowed legitimate heirs, regardless of gender, the right to equal inheritance. Sara Brooks Sundberg has compared antebellum-era women in both Louisiana and Mississippi in order to denote the advantages of the civil-law tradition. Sundberg finds that Mississippi's women, who were governed by common law, did not benefit as economically as their Louisiana neighbors.<sup>27</sup> The difference in legal rights, therefore, resulted in more female property holders in New Orleans.

Property rights are one thing, though; capital to start a business is another story. Long explains that many women took up "domestic work" as boardinghouse keepers, coffeehouse owners, and the like: roles that men would not challenge due to their association with feminine characteristics. Mary Gehman has also explored entrepreneurial women from New Orleans's colonial days through the late twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> These women, who filled various entrepreneurial positions in antebellum New Orleans, shed light on a new narrative of women

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<sup>25</sup> Powers, *Faces Along the Bar*.

<sup>26</sup> Mark F. Fernandez, *From Chaos to Continuity: The Evolution of Louisiana's Judicial System, 1712-1862* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Sara Brooks Sundberg, "Women and Property in Early Louisiana: Legal Systems at Odds," *Journal of the Early Republic* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 638.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Gehman, *Women and New Orleans* (New Orleans, LA: Margaret Media, Inc., 1985).

involved in hospitality and tourism— that challenges the recycled story of women involved in the prostitution industry.<sup>29</sup>

As source material becomes more widely available to the public, historians have been able to shed light on the behavior of the so-called ordinary men and women of the past, whose daily lives have brought a widespread interest to the general public. “Historians have portrayed the impact of drink culture in a largely negative light,” Powers explains, “as an obstacle and a drag on organizing efforts. Drink meant fuzzy brains, disorderly meetings, and a poor public image.”<sup>30</sup> Bars, Robert Popham points out, are not simply “commercial establishment[s] for the sale of alcoholic beverages, but a[re] social center[s].”<sup>31</sup> Their role in the chaotic environment of antebellum New Orleans is an important part of social history that deserves to be told.

### **Origins of the Antebellum Barroom**

There is perhaps no city in this country where the bar-rooms are constructed upon so extensive a scale as in New Orleans. They are scattered about in all directions, in every quarter of the city, and are of all sorts . . . It is worth the while of a stranger to take a peep into one of these extensive establishments of an evening in order to obtain a glimpse of the elephant.

—*The Daily Picayune*, December 25, 1848

The eighteenth-century tavern was much more than just a drinking house; it was “an institution whose chief characteristics can be anticipated and depended on by those who have need of it.”<sup>32</sup> Taverns were utilized as spaces for government affairs, religious ceremonies, and

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<sup>29</sup> Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 22.

<sup>30</sup> Powers, *Faces Along the Bar*, 132.

<sup>31</sup> Robert E. Popham, “The Social History of the Tavern,” in *Research Advances in Alcohol and Drug Problems 4*, eds. Yedy Israel, Frederick B. Glaser, Harold Kalant, Robert E. Popham, Wolfgang Schmidt, and Reginald G. Smart (New York: Plenum Press, 1978), 226.

<sup>32</sup> Seymour Dunbar, *A History of Travel in America* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1937), 1:208, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112070976417;view=1up;seq=274>.

other community activities; in other words, they were public spaces, or *public houses*, as they were often called. The eighteenth-century tavern was so important to colonial life, in fact, that certain colonies legally required each town to contain at least one tavern. According to Christine Sismondo, two Massachusetts towns were fined in the 1660s for not containing taverns.<sup>33</sup>

It appears that colonial New Orleans neither had nor required such a law; rather, the legislation of New Orleans's taverns, or *cabarets*, as the French-speaking city called them, focused on restricting the number of drinking establishments by supplying a limited number of licenses to be auctioned. In 1746, Governor Vaudreuil licensed two military "canteens" (one for French troops, the other, for Swiss troops) and six cabarets.<sup>34</sup> The number of licensed cabarets had doubled by 1769, under Spanish Governor Alexander O'Reilly, and by 1775, that number had doubled, again. Jack D. L. Holmes demonstrates that license limiting quickly led to price gauging, and in 1789, "94 individuals paid over \$2,000 for the privilege of selling liquor."<sup>35</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, according to Kimberly Hanger, "New Orleans could boast one tavern keeper for every 71 inhabitants."<sup>36</sup>

Eighteenth-century taverns also doubled as inns for travelers, who might be in town on business. The common room, which also happened to contain a bar, served as a meeting space for work-related affairs. Taverns, therefore, became centers for news and business

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<sup>33</sup> Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Henry P. Dart, "Cabarets of New Orleans in the French Colonial Period," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (July 1936): 580, 582.

<sup>35</sup> Jack D. L. Holmes, "O'Reilly's Regulations on Booze, Boarding Houses, and Billiards," *Louisiana History* 6, no. 3 (Summer 1965): 296n5.

<sup>36</sup> Kimberly S. Hanger, "Landlords, Shopkeepers, Farmers, and Slave-Owners: Free Black Female Property-Holders in Colonial New Orleans," in *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas*, eds. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 223.

correspondence from other parts of the country. It became custom, even among local businessmen, to arrange their meetings in taverns; and those establishments dedicated, exclusively, to market affairs were deemed *exchanges*. New Orleans's first exchange opened in 1806 on Conti between Decatur and Chartres streets and was called the Exchange Coffee House. Samuel Wilson, Jr. explains that in this first "New Orleans exchange, the practice of combining business functions with those of a coffee house began and continued for many years." Creditors' meetings, elections, auctions, and sheriff sales took place at the Exchange, which, according to Wilson, remained the only establishment of its kind in the city until 1814.<sup>37</sup>

Thirty years later, Joseph Holt Ingraham visited this location, which by then was renamed Hewlett's Exchange. Our eyes were dazzled by the noon-day brightness shed from innumerable chandeliers," wrote Ingraham of his midnight visit to Hewlett's in the early 1830s. "We were stunned by the noise of the multitude, who were talking in an endless variety of languages, clattering upon the ear at once, and making 'confusion worse confounded.'" <sup>38</sup> Another visitor commented on the daytime activities of the Exchange: "From 10 A.M. to 3 P.M. it is a scene of tumultuous confusion, in which all the business and professional men of the City engage. It seems to be the Soul of New Orleans. He [who] does not visit it cannot see all of New Orleans."<sup>39</sup>

The term *saloon* was utilized in various ways throughout the early nineteenth century, most often in combination with a modifier. Antebellum New Orleans boasted music saloons,

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<sup>37</sup> Samuel Wilson, Jr., "Maspero's Exchange: Its Predecessors and Successors," *Louisiana History* 30, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 192-195.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The South-West*. Volume 1 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835), 126, <https://archive.org/details/southwest01ingrial/page/n5>.

<sup>39</sup> Kellar, Herbert A., ed. "A Journey through the South in 1836: Diary of James D. Davidson." *Journal of Southern History* 1, no. 3 (1935): 358.

eating saloons, billiard saloons, and oyster saloons. The word derives from the French word, *salon*, meaning a spacious hall. It is only after the Civil War that the term would come to be associated, exclusively, with drinking establishments, a tactic utilized by temperance advocates to project their anti-vice campaigns.<sup>40</sup>

In antebellum New Orleans, the most commonly used terms for bars were *cabaret* and *coffeehouse*. The French term *cabaret*, Bertrand Dargelos explains, “first appeared around the late thirteenth century,” and these spaces were “dedicated to relaxing and entertaining the lower middle class living in towns.” In addition to serving liquor, these nineteenth-century versions of what today would be deemed dive bars also served wines, cordials, beer, and absinthe.<sup>41</sup> In May of 1850, the *New-Orleans Weekly Delta* described cabarets as “low places” where “colors and characters are blended.”<sup>42</sup> According to *The Daily Picayune*, “cabarets vary . . . according to their locality and the class of people by whom they are patronized. Each cabaret has its own peculiar set of customers, who are for the most part from the same country as the keeper of the establishment.”<sup>43</sup>

Coffeehouses also had their origins in Europe, though European coffeehouses sold more coffee than their American counterparts. While New Orleans’s coffeehouses did, indeed, serve coffee, their primary sales were alcohol. Joseph Holt Ingraham, who visited the Crescent City in

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<sup>40</sup> Madelon Powers defines the fifty-year period from 1870 to 1920 as the “saloon period” in *Faces Along the Bar*, 1; see also Raymond Calkins, *Substitutes for the Saloon* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1901), <https://archive.org/details/substitutesfors01probgoog>.

<sup>41</sup> Bertrand Dargelos, “Cabaret (France),” in *Alcohol and Temperance in Modern History: An International Encyclopedia*, eds. Jack S. Blocker, David M. Fahey, and Ian R. Tyrell (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 100.

<sup>42</sup> “Biology Outdone: Or, the Inebriate Sobered Without the Aid of Science,” *New-Orleans Weekly Delta*, May 13, 1850.

<sup>43</sup> “Coffee-Houses and Cabarets,” *The Daily Picayune*, May 3, 1850.

the early 1830s, denotes the term's ambiguity: "Though their usual denomination is 'coffee-house,' they have no earthly, whatever may be their spiritual, right to such a distinction; it is merely a '*nomme de profession*,' assumed, I know not for what object."<sup>44</sup> Upscale coffeehouses charged a dime per drink; however, the majority of New Orleans's coffeehouses charged half that amount, and therefore were referred to as *picayune* coffeehouses. Exchanges and coffeehouses functioned very much like eighteenth-century taverns had—in the sense that they combined the elements of social, political, and business life in one room. Tom Standage compares coffeehouses to "the Internet in the Age of Reason," meaning that a patron could expect his or her drink with a side of news.

The increase of exchanges and similar semipublic spaces was a result of rapid urban growth in the early nineteenth century. According to geographer Peirce Lewis, New Orleans exemplified this growth more so than any other American city; and he refers to the period from 1810 to 1840 as the city's "golden age."<sup>45</sup> In 1840, New Orleans became the country's third-largest city behind New York and Baltimore; in fact, it was only 120 individuals shy of tying for second place.<sup>46</sup> As American cities grew in size and number, taverns could no longer accommodate all aspects of the city's needs. Public institutions catering to specific functions, such as exchanges, replaced the one-stop-shop public houses, bringing an end to the tavern as it had been known. By the 1830s, the urban tavern was void of its original purposes, except one: the supply of liquor to drink on premises. Though the term *tavern* would continue to stick around

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<sup>44</sup> Ingraham, *The South-West*, 112-113, <https://archive.org/details/southwest01ingriala/page/n5>.

<sup>45</sup> Peirce F. Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1976), 37.

<sup>46</sup> US Bureau of the Census, Population Division, *Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990*, by Campbell Gibson (Washington, DC: June 1998), <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/twps0027.html>.

in legal reference, it became outdated by the 1830s. It also no longer truly applied to these specialized antebellum establishments, which had been stripped of all purposes except as a house of entertainment. The difference in terminology, then, would be partly based on any additional functions the establishment might serve, and partly a determination of the ethnicity or class of customers to be found inside.

### The License System

This seems to be a city of bar and billiard rooms, of bowling and pistol alleys. Bar, billiards, and bowling are the three Bs of New Orleans. There is no room in the hotel so large as that wherein the liquor is dispensed.

—Milton J. Mackie, *From Cape Cod to Dixie and the Tropics*, 1864

The regulation of barrooms was based, entirely, on the licensing system, and any person operating a bar without a license was doing so illegally. The 1805 city charter gave the mayor the power to license taverns, and it forbade any person from serving liquor to the public without first obtaining a license.<sup>47</sup> A license requirement was nothing new to New Orleanians, who had experienced similar laws under both Spanish and French rule. This time, though, there were no restrictions on the number of licenses permitted; so, for a yearly, \$100 license tax, any Louisianian – male *or* female – could legally serve alcoholic beverages by the glass.<sup>48</sup> In fact, Louisiana’s 1808 code even included bar-owning women in its text: “If any person so licensed shall knowingly suffer any disorder, fighting, or drunkenness in his, her, or their public house or

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<sup>47</sup> An Act to Incorporate the City of New-Orleans, *Acts Passed at the First Session of the Legislative Council of the Territory of Orleans* (New Orleans, LA: James M. Bradford, 1805), 60-62, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/010502506>.

<sup>48</sup> An ordinance concerning the Police of Inns, public Boarding-Houses, Coffee-Houses, Billard-Houses, Taverns and other places of entertainment within the City, Suburbs and Liberties of the City of New-Orleans, art. 4, *Police Code, or Collection of the Ordinances of Police Made by the City Council of New-Orleans* (New Orleans, LA: J. Renard, 1808), 216.

houses, he, she, or they shall for every such offence forfeit and pay to the treasury of the district the sum of two dollars.”<sup>49</sup>

The licensing system served two purposes: to accrue municipal funding and to regulate licensed drinking establishments. “There are but few persons who have an idea of the great number of drinking houses in this city; the amount of revenue that they pay each year into the treasury; or the large amount of capital invested and profits made,” *The Daily Picayune* wrote in 1850.<sup>50</sup> Of course, not all tavern keepers operated legally. Henry Graham purchased two glasses of gin from Eliza Davis at her beer shop on Philippa street on May 25, 1846. While Eliza might have had a license to retail beer, she needed an additional and more expensive license to retail liquor. Eliza pleaded not guilty, and she was sent before the criminal court with her bail set at \$500. “Eliza must be terribly out of *spirits* at finding herself brought before the public on such an unenviable charge,” commented *The Daily Delta*, wryly.<sup>51</sup> In 1852, the chief of police reported 1,326 establishments selling liquor by the glass—502 of which did so without license.<sup>52</sup> Contemporary newspapers are full of similar reports: Elizabeth Wilson in 1846; Sarah Dulaney, Mary Ann Miller, Mary Ann Cox, Alice Grace, and Mrs. Mary Flynn in 1848.<sup>53</sup> On June 15, William Stephenson paid five cents for a glass of gin at Mary Flynn’s coffeehouse on Girod street. According to his affidavit, Stevenson apparently had “good reasons” for believing Flynn

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<sup>49</sup> An Act to License and Regulate Taverns, *The Laws of the Territory of Louisiana Comprising All Those Which Are Now Actually in Force within the Same* (St. Louis, MO: Joseph Charless, 1808), 42, [https://archive.org/details/GR\\_2540](https://archive.org/details/GR_2540).

<sup>50</sup> *Daily Picayune*, May 3, 1850.

<sup>51</sup> *State of Louisiana v. Eliza Davis*, no. 49, First District Court of New Orleans, 1846; “Selling Liquor Without License,” *The Daily Delta*, May 29, 1846.

<sup>52</sup> “Semi-Annual Report of the Chief of Police,” *The Daily Picayune*, December 8, 1852.

<sup>53</sup> “First District Court,” *The Daily Picayune*, July 11, 1846; “First District Court,” *The Daily Picayune*, February 1, 1848; “Selling Liquor without a License,” *The Daily Picayune*, March 26, 1848; “Selling without License,” *New Orleans Crescent*, June 23, 1848; “No License,” *New Orleans Crescent*, June 24, 1848.

was retailing without a license; his hunch was correct, and Flynn was fined \$500.<sup>54</sup> On October 1, 1852, D. L. Holliday accused Olivia Higgins of selling without a license and with “keeping a disorderly and riotous tipling shop,” though by the time the case was brought before the recorder, two weeks later, Mrs. Higgins had obtained a license and her case was dismissed. She was accused of the same crime in 1856.<sup>55</sup> Michael Hussey had Mrs. Fitzpatrick arrested in 1853 for violent threats and for selling liquor without a license.<sup>56</sup> In addition, Mary Mulholland, Julia Ratcliffe, Mrs. McLaughlin, and Mary S. Gillen were also arrested in 1853, and each was fined \$25.<sup>57</sup> Bridget O’Neil and Madame Turk were arrested on two counts in 1853: for selling liquor without a license and for keeping a disorderly house.<sup>58</sup> Mrs. Ward, Elizabeth Johnson, and Mrs. Murphy were all arrested in 1854 for retailing liquor without licenses.<sup>59</sup>

In March of 1855, Street Commissioner August Phelps ordered a census to be taken of all businesses requiring licenses. The following month, after only one-fourth of the census had been completed, Phelps found that 1,500 New Orleanians had not paid for licenses, which led him to believe that “there will be found in the whole city about 6,000 persons who are liable to pay for licenses, but have neglected to do so.”<sup>60</sup> The individuals’ names and business locations

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<sup>54</sup> *State of Louisiana v. Mrs. Flynn*, no. 2,512, First District Court of New Orleans, 1848.

<sup>55</sup> “Disorderly House,” *The Daily Picayune*, October 1, 1852; “License or No License,” *The Daily Picayune*, October 14, 1852; City of New Orleans, Office of the Mayor, Complaint Book, 1856-1859, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Collection.

<sup>56</sup> “Selling Liquor without License,” *The Daily Picayune*, June 26, 1853.

<sup>57</sup> “No License,” *The Daily Picayune*, July 19, 1853; “Liquor Cases,” *The Daily Picayune*, July 21, 1853; *The Daily Picayune*, July 15, 1853.

<sup>58</sup> “Selling Liquor without License,” *The Daily Picayune*, July 2, 1853; “Brothel,” *The Daily Picayune*, July 6, 1853.

<sup>59</sup> *New Orleans Crescent*, May 27, 1854; “One More,” *New Orleans Crescent*, December 16, 1854; “No Licenses,” *The Daily Picayune*, December 21, 1854.

<sup>60</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 13, 1855.

were listed in *The Daily Picayune*; and, according to this list, almost four hundred coffeehouse keepers throughout the city's ten wards were operating without a license (table 1). The majority of non-licensed bars were located in New Orleans's commercial district, or the second and third wards, where 156 coffeehouse keepers operated without licenses (figure 1).<sup>61</sup>

**Table 1. Non-licensed establishments selling liquor by the glass, 1855**

Ward	Number of non-licensed
First	27
Second	49
Third	107
Fourth	45
Fifth	41
Sixth	39
Seventh	16
Eighth and Ninth	32
Tenth and Eleventh	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>395</b>

*Source:* City of New Orleans, Street Commissioner's Office, Census of Merchants, 1855, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Collection; *The Daily Picayune*, April 29, 1855.

<sup>61</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 29, 1855; City of New Orleans, Street Commissioner's Office, Census of Merchants, 1855, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Collection.



**Figure 1.** This map of New Orleans’s Second and Third Wards shows the location of unlicensed coffeehouses according to an 1855 census. The majority were in the Third Ward (right), bounded by Julia Street, the Mississippi River, and Canal Street.

The extent to which people were blatantly disregarding the law was apparently greater than the city had expected. “There is probably no other city in the Union in which the existing

laws are so grossly neglected as they are in New Orleans,” an editor of *The Daily Picayune* commented on the situation. “There are . . . many hundreds of liquor sellers, and others, *notoriously doing business without a license*, yet no effort seems to be made to exact payment from them, notwithstanding the deplorable condition of our city finances.”<sup>62</sup> Those four-hundred coffeehouse keepers who failed to acquire \$300 licenses deprived the city of \$120,000 in tax money. Rather than proceed with lawsuits as city ordinances called for, a five-person special committee was created to resolve the catch-22. “Experience has fully demonstrated that it is useless to lay so heavy a tax as three hundred dollars for the privilege of selling liquor,” stated the committee’s formal report, which was published in November of 1855. “Besides, they are fully satisfied that it is quite impossible to collect three hundred dollars from all the coffeehouses, cabarets and grog-shops, a great number not having stock and fixtures to one-fourth the amount of the present price of the license.”<sup>63</sup> The hundred-dollar license tax first established in 1808 remained stagnant for almost twenty years – until 1826 – when prices increased to \$150. Though the city had generally ignored the license requirement since its first days as an American territory, it continued to pursue legislation to increase coffeehouse-license taxes, which fluctuated throughout the antebellum period (table 2).

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<sup>62</sup> “Contempt for the Laws,” *The Daily Picayune*, August 17, 1855.

<sup>63</sup> “Farming out Coffee-House Revenues,” *The Daily Picayune*, November 3, 1855.

**Table 2. License Prices, 1808–1861**

Year	Cost of License	License Class
1808–1825	\$100	
1826–1836	\$150	
1837–1839	\$200	
1840–1843	\$300	
1844–1850	\$200	
1851	\$300	
1852	\$250	
1853	\$500	First class
	\$300	Second class
	\$150	Third class
1854	\$300	First class
	\$150	Second class
1855	\$300	
1856	\$150	
1857–1861	\$175	

*Source:* City of New Orleans, Comptroller’s Office, Annual and Semi-Annual Reports, 1852-1861, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Collection.

*Note:* In 1853, the Board of Assistant Aldermen divided retailers of liquor by the glass into three categories: first-class retailers were those whose gross receipts exceeded \$10,000; second-class retailers were those whose gross receipts were more than \$5,000 and less than \$10,000; third-class retailers were those whose gross receipts were less than \$5,000. The following year, retailers were split into two categories: first-class retailers were those who charged ten cents per drink, while second-class retailers charged five cents per drink. *Source:* *New-Orleans Crescent*, December 13, 1852; *Daily Delta*, January 3, 1854.

It appears that, as that tax increased, fewer bar owners made attempts to acquire a license. The 1855 committee proposed a rational solution: reduce the cost of coffeehouse licenses. The plan apparently worked: According to the comptroller’s reports, for the year 1855, when

coffeehouse licenses were \$300, the city collected a total of \$39,700; however, the following year, when those license taxes were reduced by one-half, the city collected a total of \$89,390 (table 3).<sup>64</sup>

**Table 3. Amount received from coffeehouse licenses, 1852–1861**

Year	Cost of License	Amount Received
April–December 1852	\$125	\$46,512.90
1853	\$500, \$300, or \$150	\$47,102.15
1854	\$300 or \$150	\$42,470.00
1855	\$300	\$39,700.00
1856	\$150	\$89,390.00
1857	\$175	\$99,281.05
1858	\$175	\$93,877.04
1859	\$175	\$98,397.38
1860	\$175	\$102,145.25
1861	\$175	\$96,086.00

*Source:* City of New Orleans, Comptroller’s Office, Annual and Semi-Annual Reports, 1852-1861, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Collection.

*Note:* After 1853, state law mandated that the comptroller be in charge of organizing the city’s finances and publish, a book of the city’s receipts. According to the reports, the city collected an average of about \$44,000 per year in taxes from barroom licenses from 1852 through 1855. The year after Phelps’s census was taken, when license prices dropped to one-half of what they had been, that figure more than doubled – to an average of about \$97,000 per year in taxes from barroom licenses.

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<sup>64</sup> City of New Orleans, Comptroller’s Office, Annual and Semi-Annual Reports, 1852-1861, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Collection.

## Regulation

You are new to the city, sir? We all drink; must do it. Nothing like keeping up a heat within, to counteract the heat without.

—Henry Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 1845

As semipublic spaces, barrooms were constantly subject to surveillance by public officials. All licensed drinking houses were to abide by city ordinances and state laws “for the prevention of disorders and mischiefs which may happen by a multiplicity of public houses of entertainment,” as the territory put it in 1808, or else their owners risked fines, imprisonment, or loss of license.

New Orleans’s earliest tavern regulations required bar owners to publicly identify their profession by hanging a sign above the door of their establishments. Fighting was strictly prohibited, and any rowdy behavior was to be immediately reported to the mayor’s office.<sup>65</sup> “To those who presumed that they had the right to mold society’s institutions,” W. J. Rorabaugh explains, the unregulated tavern’s independence, like the growing independence of the lower classes, was a sign of chaos and disorder.”<sup>66</sup> Business hours were also regulated by the city: from September 15 to March 15, bars were required to close from 8:00 p.m. until 5:00 a.m.; and from March 15 to September 15, bars were required to close from 9:00 p.m. until 4:00 a.m.<sup>67</sup> By 1854,

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<sup>65</sup> An Act to License and Regulate Taverns, *The Laws of the Territory of Louisiana*, 41-42, [https://archive.org/details/GR\\_2540](https://archive.org/details/GR_2540).

<sup>66</sup> Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, 34.

<sup>67</sup> An ordinance concerning the Police of Inns, public Boarding-Houses, Coffee-Houses, Billiard-Houses, Taverns and other places of entertainment within the City, Suburbs and Liberties of the City of New-Orleans, *Police Code*, 218-222; An ordinance concerning Inns, Boarding-houses, Coffee-houses, Billiard-houses, Taverns and other public houses within the city of New-Orleans, art. 13, *Ordinances Ordained and Established by the Mayor and City Council, of the City of New-Orleans* (New Orleans, LA: J. C. de St. Romes, 1817), 152.

the closing time had extended to 11 p.m.; and it was extended to midnight the year after.<sup>68</sup> Adulteration of liquor was strictly prohibited, and after 1854, so was music and dancing.<sup>69</sup> In addition, tavern keepers were responsible for their employees' behavior by law. In 1837, *The Daily Picayune* complained about a man who was so drunkenly impaired that he spent the night on the street. "What a villain the bar-keeper is! If he doesn't take care, we shall report him."<sup>70</sup>

No regulation of bars attracted more attention than those pertaining to persons of color. Alcohol was a "social lubricant," as Rashauna Johnson puts it—a common interest among New Orleans's vast society, regardless of gender, color, or legal status.<sup>71</sup> Free women of color, unlike white women, faced restrictions as patrons *and* as proprietors. "The difficulties of control, the persistence of the problems, and continued public criticism prompted public officials to recast their legislative framework many times in the ante-bellum period," writes Richard Wade.<sup>72</sup> Any proprietor who allowed slaves to assemble in her establishment was fined \$100; and any free persons of color found mingling with enslaved persons in a cabaret were also fined \$100. In addition, any games played in bars—cards, dominoes, and the like—could only be played between patrons of the same racial and legal status. In other words, free persons of color could only play games with other free persons of color, white persons only with other white persons. For this, the proprietor and the patron suffered: Proprietors were fined \$50 for the first offense

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<sup>68</sup> "An ordinance regulating the time of opening and closing bar-rooms, coffee houses, &c.," *The Daily Picayune*, July 6, 1854.

<sup>69</sup> Henry J. Leovy, *The Laws and General Ordinances of the City of New Orleans, Together with the Acts of the Legislature, Decisions of the Supreme Court, and Constitutional Provisions, Relating to the City Government* (New Orleans, LA: E. C. Wharton, 1857), 45, <https://archive.org/details/lawsgeneralordin00neworich/page/44>.

<sup>70</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 8, 1837.

<sup>71</sup> Johnson, *Slavery's Metropolis*, 105.

<sup>72</sup> Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 326, 329. Robert C. Reinders discusses legal restraints on free persons of color in the 1850s in "The Decline of the New Orleans Free Negro in the Decade before the Civil War," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 24, no. 2 (April 1962): 88-98.

and \$100 for any additional offenses, and three offenses resulted in loss of license; free white and black patrons were fined \$100, and enslaved persons received fifteen lashes.<sup>73</sup>

“Free colored persons of Louisiana formed a class of superior ability and education,” writes Annie Stahl; and license records indicate that many free women of color owned or operated bars.<sup>74</sup> Marie Rose Voltaire operated a tavern at the corner of St. Philip and Royal streets. In 1830, she signed a security bond at the mayor’s office—another requirement of bar owners—which “jointly held and firmly bound” another individual in the event that the bar owner did not comply with the city’s ordinances. Voltaire’s husband, Mathurain Rivaros, signed as her security. Rosana Foster’s tavern, in 1834, was located on the infamous Gallatin street – a two-block stretch of land, near the French Market, that was overflowing with bars, boardinghouses, and brothels.<sup>75</sup> Charlotte Arnauld, who operated a tavern at No. 20 St. Philip street, signed a security bond in 1843.<sup>76</sup> Additional records show a great number of free women of color operated stores retailing liquor in quantities greater than a pint.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Leovy, *The Laws and General Ordinances of the City of New Orleans*, 259-260.

<sup>74</sup> Annie Lee West Stahl, “The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum Louisiana,” *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (1942): 304.

<sup>75</sup> City of New Orleans, Office of the Mayor, Bonding Statement for Tavernkeeper Rosanna Foster, July 1, 1834, Xavier University of Louisiana, Charles F. Heartman Manuscripts of Slavery Collection, Box 9, Folder 2, Part 2, 1833-1844, <https://cdm16948.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16948coll6/id/6273/rec/2>.

<sup>76</sup> City of New Orleans, Office of the Mayor, Oaths and bonds for city licenses on taverns, coffee houses, hotels, boarding houses, and other establishments, 1828-1863, #AA257t (1843 1st Mun.), Security bonds for having a tavern in the First Municipality, January 2, 1843-November 29, 1843, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Collection.

<sup>77</sup> Anna Ross at Moreau and Mandeville streets; Emilie Doche on Philippa street; Elizabeth Faille at Casacalvo and Peace streets; Eulalie Doriocourt on Bayou Road; Marianne Dubois at Love and Union streets; Marguerite Guillaume on Bayou Road; Marie Louise LeBreton at Lake Pontchartrain; Widow Paris (aka Marie Laveaux) on Greatmen street. New Orleans, Office of the Mayor, Oaths and bonds for city licenses on taverns, coffee houses, hotels, boarding houses, and other establishments, 1828-1863, #AA257t (1828-1832), Security bonds for having a tavern, volume 3: January 1, 1830-December 1830, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Collection.

In 1830, free people of color consisted of almost thirty percent of New Orleans's population. Of those 8,041 free persons of color, sixty percent were women. That percentage remained relatively stagnant in the decades leading up to the civil war. "As a result," explains Jane Dabel, "many black women fulfilled the role of primary wage-earner for their households." In her analysis of the Register of Free Persons of Color for 1840-1857, Dabel found that free women of color generally earned income through jobs that were "extensions of their household duties."<sup>78</sup> This trend of "gender-specific" occupational roles had existed among free women of color since colonial days. "It is clear that the transient nature of the white population made rental property, boarding houses, and the letting of rooms a lucrative business and that free women of color took advantage of that opportunity whenever they could," explains Virginia Gould.<sup>79</sup> Kimberly Hanger found that while colonial New Orleans's white tavernkeepers were generally men, its black tavernkeepers were generally women.<sup>80</sup> This trend continued through the antebellum period: Historian Robert C. Reinders found that from 1850-1860, "real estate was owned by free Negro women to a far greater extent than among their white sisters."<sup>81</sup>

While free women of color remained a dominant group among property holders, their representation as bar owners virtually disappeared by the 1850s. "The racially charged atmosphere of the 1850s," explains Ira Berlin, "incited Southern lawmakers to devise new laws to limit free Negro mobility, punish their crimes more severely, tax them heavily, extract their

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<sup>78</sup> Jane E. Dabel, "'My Ma Went to Work Early Every Mornin': Color, Gender, and Occupation in New Orleans, 1840-1860," *Louisiana History* 41, no. 2 (2000): 219, 224.

<sup>79</sup> Virginia Meacham Gould, "Free Women of Color and Property Holding in New Orleans," (paper presented at the Conference of the Association of Caribbean Historians, Martinique, April 1997), 14.

<sup>80</sup> Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997): 60.

<sup>81</sup> Robert C. Reinders, "The Free Negro in the New Orleans Economy, 1850-1860," *Louisiana History* 6, no. 3 (1965): 281.

labor, and generally equate them with slaves.”<sup>82</sup> As early as 1830, Newspaper editorials had mentioned the “very great evils produced by permitting colored persons to keep cabarets.”<sup>83</sup> *The Daily Delta* echoed a similar sentiment in 1854: “Should a servile outbreak ever occur in the city of New Orleans, we will have to thank the keeper of these negro cabarets and club houses for it, within the precincts of whose damned halls, at the dead hour of midnight, heaven only knows what plots are hatched against our peace.”<sup>84</sup> Two years after the *Delta*’s comment, the city of New Orleans placed its first occupational restriction on free people of color when it forbade the issuing of licenses to retail liquor by the glass to “colored persons.”<sup>85</sup> In March of 1859, the state of Louisiana enacted similar legislation.<sup>86</sup>

These occupational restrictions placed on free people of color were deliberately aimed at semipublic spaces where alcohol might influence a person’s behavior. The barroom was a gathering place where “the broad demarcation between races that characterized slavery was attenuated; the distinction between free and enslaved blacks, always difficult to maintain, broke down, and, fleetingly, even lesser differences melted away,” explains Richard Wade. “Such meetings imperiled not only the system of slavery but even the historic sense of racial order as well.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: The New Press, 1974), 349.

<sup>83</sup> *Bee*, September 30, 1830.

<sup>84</sup> “Cabarets,” *The Daily Delta*, September 10, 1854.

<sup>85</sup> Leovy, *The Laws and General Ordinances of the City of New Orleans*, 44.

<sup>86</sup> An act to prohibit the issuing of licenses to free negroes and free persons of color, for the purpose of keeping billiard tables, coffee houses and retail stores where spirituous liquors are sold, *Acts Passed by the Fourth Legislature of the State of Louisiana, at Its Second Session* (Baton Rouge, LA: J. M. Taylor, 1859), 18, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=iau.31858018014211;view=1up;seq=540>.

<sup>87</sup> Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 157.

Regulations against selling liquor to enslaved persons had been in legislation since at least 1746, and these laws were preserved through New Orleans's transfer to the United States.<sup>88</sup> The American city's earliest ordinances prohibited bar owners from selling liquor to Indians, as well as slaves and soldiers without written permission from their masters and commanders. The *Code Noir* required enslaved persons to carry—for at least fifteen days—“for their justification,” written permission from their masters in order to be sold liquor.<sup>89</sup> “It was widely accepted that it was natural for slaves to desire liquor and that they should not be denied modest quantities,” explains Thomas Ingersoll, “but woe to the man who gave or sold liquor to *other* men's slaves.”<sup>90</sup> According to *The Daily Delta*, though, “the law against selling liquor to slaves [was] broken oftener than any other.”<sup>91</sup> Several racist complaints were made public in New Orleans newspapers regarding the intermingling of black and white and free and enslaved persons in bars. “Why do cabaret keepers persist in selling liquor to slaves?” asked *The Daily Picayune* in 1840. “Much, if not all the vices of our slaves are to be traced to those cabaret-keepers, who, contrary to law, have been in the habit of clandestinely furnishing them with liquor, and laying thereby the foundation of all their vices.”<sup>92</sup> Johnson explains that “tavern keepers had every incentive to let market demand, not laws or racist ideologies, govern their trade,”<sup>93</sup> and

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<sup>88</sup> An ordinance concerning the Police of Inns, public Boarding-Houses, Coffee-Houses, Billiard-Houses, Taverns and other places of entertainment within the City, Suburbs and Liberties of the City of New-Orleans, *Police Code*, 218-222; Dart, “Cabarets in New Orleans in the French Colonial Period,” 582.

<sup>89</sup> “Black Code,” in *Acts Passed at the First Session of the First Legislature of the Territory of Orleans* (New Orleans, LA: Bradford and Anderson, 1807), 164-166, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.35112203962842;view=1up;seq=174>.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas N. Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718-1819* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 302.

<sup>91</sup> “Selling Liquor to Slaves,” *The Daily Delta*, November 19, 1853.

<sup>92</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 24, 1840 and November 21, 1841.

<sup>93</sup> Johnson, *Slavery's Metropolis*, 105.

newspaper reports and court records support her claim. In 1857, both Louise Schoeffler and Mrs. Montardon were found guilty of selling liquor to slaves; the latter was only ordered to pay a fine of twenty-five dollars, while former was ordered to pay a fine of fifty dollars, half of which went to the informer.<sup>94</sup> In 1854, Mary Gardner was found guilty of selling a pint of brandy to Flinn, an enslaved man. Mary was sentenced to forfeit her license “and be forever deprived of the right” of obtaining one again, and to pay a fine of \$400, or to spend six months in prison. By error of the court, the case was thrown out.<sup>95</sup> Gardner was found guilty of the same offense one year later, and she was ordered to pay a fine of \$200 or spend three months in jail.<sup>96</sup>

### **Bar-Owning Women**

This practice of almost constant drinking through the day, pervades all classes of society. Not only the male portion, with scarcely an exception, but the *ladies*, or a large majority of them, indulge in the daily use of intoxicating drinks. Under all circumstances, in the social relations, in the interchange of civilities, wines and liquors of all kinds constitute the principal offerings in the courtesies of every day life.

—A Resident, *New Orleans as It Is*, 1849

License records from the antebellum period reveal that men and women contributed to the city’s economy as barowners. Sarah Ann Alloway, Jeanne Martin Barbot, Catherine Beaton, Susana Biller, Myrtille Celestine Cannon, Amelia Gordon, Anna Maria Helper, Maria Jones, Catherine Leahy, Marguerite Mansfield, Mrs. Norton, Margaret Sedgewick, Ann Stevens, Marie Rose Voltoire, and Maria Zamora paid the \$150 license fee in 1830. The same year, eight

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<sup>94</sup> “Before Recorder Fabre,” *The Daily Picayune*, March 8, 1857; *The Daily Picayune*, March 10, 1857.

<sup>95</sup> *State of Louisiana v. Adam Gardner and His Wife*, First District Court, No. 9607.

<sup>96</sup> “Sentences Yesterday,” *The Daily Picayune*, March 4, 1855.

women paid a fifty-dollar tax to serve liquor to guests in their boardinghouses, and eighteen women paid sixty dollars to serve liquor by the pint and greater quantities.<sup>97</sup>

The extent to which these women participated in the daily activities of their establishments cannot be obtained from license records alone; as semipublic spaces, at least some portion of barroom activity remained behind its doors. Were these women a presence among their customers, or were they simply a silent party whose business activities were run by men?

The answer, of course, varies; a woman of color would have had a very different experience than a white woman. In Lucy Ann Hunt's case, the death of her first husband in 1832 resulted in the young widow taking control of the three-month-old establishment, which she would keep in business for the next twenty-five years.

Hunt was born in Massachusetts around 1800. In 1826, she became L. A. Caldwell – the name she would sign for the rest of her life – when she married Thomas Caldwell in New Orleans. Thomas, a native of Sheffield, England, was ten years her senior. He had run the Louisiana Coffee-House, at the corner of Camp and Canal streets, for a few years prior to their marriage.<sup>98</sup> In August of 1832, Thomas paid \$1,320 for the contents of François Tessier's coffeehouse and signed a year-long lease of Tessier's property at the corner of Elysian Fields and Victory (present-day Decatur) streets.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> City of New Orleans, Office of the Mayor, Oaths and bonds for city licenses on taverns, coffee houses, hotels, boarding houses, and other establishments, 1828-1863, Security bonds for having a tavern, vol. 3, January 1, 1830-December 1830, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Collection. Included among the names for retailers by the pint and up is a license for Widow Paris, who operated on "Grands-hommes," or Good Children street (present-day St. Claude Avenue). Charles Laveau, her father, signed as her security.

<sup>98</sup> *Louisiana State Gazette*, November 11, 1825.

<sup>99</sup> Sale to Thomas Caldwell from François Tessier, August 14, 1832, Acts of William Boswell, New Orleans Notarial Archives.

Thomas Caldwell wouldn't live long enough to see his Third-District business, which he named Franklin Hall, thrive: he died in November of 1832, just three months after opening the Franklin.<sup>100</sup> His thirty-four-year-old widow was left to carry on the coffeehouse business on her own. Lucy and Thomas were financially prepared for the event, though: According to a contract made prior to their marriage, Thomas agreed, "in the event of his decease previous to that of the said intended wife," to bequeath his widow with ten thousand dollars, "in addition to the rights and claims of said wife for dotal property, and her half in the community of gains."<sup>101</sup> Lucy continued to run the business throughout the term of the lease, and at its expiration, she signed on for another three years.<sup>102</sup> Financial security, without a doubt, contributed to Franklin Hall's early success; but its prominent location absolutely guaranteed its success. The Third-District property was two blocks from the levee and directly across the street from the Pontchartrain Railroad depot.

The Pontchartrain was Louisiana's – and the South's – first railroad. Its nearly five miles of track spanned the Elysian Fields median to carry passengers from Lake Pontchartrain to the Mississippi River. After a year of construction, it opened to passengers on April 23, 1831. "It was now possible," affirms one scholar, "to stand on the Mississippi River bank, look across the 150 foot wide avenue of the Pontchartrain railroad, and see lake vessels sailing past the opening in the forest."<sup>103</sup> Joseph Ingraham, in September of 1832, called the railway "an avenue of wealth," and his description of the nineteen-minute ride from the Elysian Fields depot—

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<sup>100</sup> "Died," *Louisiana Courier*, November 22, 1832.

<sup>101</sup> Marriage contract of Lucy Hunt and Thomas Caldwell, July 6, 1826, Acts of Carlile Pollock, New Orleans Notarial Archives.

<sup>102</sup> Lease to Widow Caldwell from François Tessier, September 20, 1833, Acts of William Boswell, New Orleans Notarial Archives.

<sup>103</sup> Reed, "Louisiana's Transportation Revolution," 127.

officially called Pontchartrain Junction—to Port Pontchartrain emphasizes the transportation breakthrough to New Orleanians: “A mile from the Levee we had left the city and all dwellings behind us, and were flying through the fenceless, uninhabited marshes, where nothing meets the eye but dwarf trees, rank, luxuriant undergrowth, tall, coarse grass, and vines, twisting and winding their long, serpentine folds around the trunks of the trees like huge, loathsome water-snakes.”<sup>104</sup> Charles Lyell arrived at Port Pontchartrain in 1846; after his ride to Pontchartrain Junction, one of the first things he saw was “a tavern called the ‘Elysian Fields Coffee House.’”<sup>105</sup> A picture drawn by G. W. Sully in 1836 shows the Pontchartrain’s Mississippi River terminal (figure 2).<sup>106</sup> From its opening on December 1, 1831, the railroad carried over fifty thousand passengers – all of whom either arrived or departed from the depot directly in front of what would, in August of 1832, become Franklin Hall.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> W. Adolphe Roberts, *Lake Pontchartrain* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1946), 245, [https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b727585;view=1up;seq=267](https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b727585;view=1up;seq=267); Ingraham, *The South-West*, 173, <https://archive.org/details/southwest01ingrinala/page/172>.

<sup>105</sup> Sir Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to the United States of North America*, vol. 5 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1850), 90, [https://archive.org/details/cihm\\_51737/page/n1](https://archive.org/details/cihm_51737/page/n1).

<sup>106</sup> George Washington Sully, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA, 70118.

<sup>107</sup> Reed, “Louisiana’s Transportation Revolution,” 137.



**Figure 2.** In this portion of an 1836 panorama of New Orleans, the Franklin Exchange can be seen just above the Pontchartrain Railroad’s red car. The watercolor was painted by George Washington Sully, and it is the earliest-known panorama of New Orleans. Note the Bosque plantation on the right. *View of New Orleans in 1836.* Drawing by George Washington Sully. Sully panorama of New Orleans, 1836, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA, 70118.

Franklin Hall served many roles. In the 1830s, it was a prize office, where Lucy sold lottery tickets; she also advertised an exchange for the purpose of buying and selling “uncurrent money.”<sup>108</sup> For several years, her establishment served as the polling location for the Third Municipality’s Second-Ward voters, despite the fact that Lucy was not eligible to participate because of her gender.<sup>109</sup> Toward the end of the 1830s, Lucy began to expand her business and invest in real estate. In 1837, she purchased the lot adjoining her coffeehouse.<sup>110</sup> A year later, Lucy signed a four-year lease to a barroom at the corner of New Levee and St. Mary’s Market – this one, she called the Franklin House.<sup>111</sup> In 1842, she signed a five-year lease for two

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<sup>108</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 28 and March 17 1838.

<sup>109</sup> *New-Orleans Commercial Bulletin*, April 26, 1836 and November 4, 1844.

<sup>110</sup> Sale to Lucy A. Caldwell from William Zebriska, f. m. c, July 5, 1837, Acts of William Boswell, New Orleans Notarial Archives.

<sup>111</sup> *Cunningham v. Caldwell*, no. 5,204, Supreme Court of Louisiana, 1843.

properties adjacent to her Third-District coffeehouse.<sup>112</sup> Caldwell continued to purchase real estate in the 1840s. She purchased all four of the lots that held the Franklin establishments, and by November of 1847, she owned six lots on the square bounded by Elysian Fields, Victory, Marigny, and Moreau streets: five fronting Elysian Fields, and one fronting Victory.<sup>113</sup>

In March of 1846, Caldwell opened, next door to Franklin Hall, a new bar, called the Franklin Exchange, “for the public sale of property, the transaction of business, and as a general resort.”<sup>114</sup> The exchange featured weekly auctions of property, including human property; it was also utilized as a place for men to cast their votes for elections. Therefore, the Franklin Exchange, more than the Franklin Hall, would have been a primarily male-dominated environment. In August of 1848, members of the New Orleans Branch of the American League met at Caldwell’s exchange to form the Third Municipality Branch of the American League of the Friends of Ireland. *The Madam*, as the papers often referred to her, was appointed treasurer of the branch; she was the only female on the eight-person committee.<sup>115</sup>

The Phoenix Fire Company No. 8, like the American League, also displayed a particular reverence to the Madam, who was their neighbor in the Third District. On March 4, 1846, Caldwell donated a fire engine to the company for their one-year anniversary. “This day shall ever remain one of the brightest in the memory of your humble but sincere friend,” she stated.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Lease to Lucy Caldwell from Mrs. E. A. Ducros, April 12, 1842, Acts of Charles Boudousquié, New Orleans Notarial Archives.

<sup>113</sup> Sale to Lucy A. Caldwell from Mrs. E. A. Ducros, wife of G. E. Villerié, March 6, 1845, Acts of Felix Grima, New Orleans Notarial Archives; sale to Mrs. Lucy Ann Hunt from Mr. Louis Barthólemy Macarty, May 31, 1845, Acts of Octave de Armas, New Orleans Notarial Archives; sale to Mrs. L. A. Caldwell from Mrs. A. Grailhe, November 17, 1847, Acts of Theodore Guyol, New Orleans Notarial Archives.

<sup>114</sup> “A New Exchange,” *The Daily Picayune*, March 25, 1846.

<sup>115</sup> “Formation of a Branch of the American League in the Third Municipality,” *The Daily Delta*, August 10, 1848.

<sup>116</sup> “Correspondence,” *The Daily Delta*, March 29, 1846.

The engine had to be made in Philadelphia, then delivered to New Orleans; according to Thomas O'Connor, the first engine built in New Orleans was not until 1849.<sup>117</sup> On March 4, 1846, Caldwell presented the engine to the Phoenix. Three days later, *The Daily Picayune* printed a six-stanza poem titled, "Lines Addressed to the Phoenix Fire Engine Company, No. 8," which included a stanza addressing Caldwell's donation:

Kind Patroness! to thee the Muse doth breathe  
Thanks most fervent - while o'er thy brow we wreath  
A chaplet suit for woman's generous fame,  
And with a blessing bind thine old, familiar name!  
Many may envy—but how few can share  
The placid joy thy noble heart must wear!  
The mem'ry now that makes our bosom swell,  
Is the echo of *thy name*—Lucy Ann Caldwell!<sup>118</sup>

Lucy's bar also housed a Keno table, billiard tables, and nine bowling alleys – three lanes for each floor. In the novella, *Marie; or The Gambler of the Mississippi*, the author, Jack Brace, describes a night at Caldwell's:

It was the Sabbath evening, and then, the rooms at Madame Caldwell's were crowded. The principal part of the guests were creoles, who, generally temperate in everything else, were chatting away gracefully and gaily in the excess of volubility. Some were in the bar-room, others in the billiard-saloon or nine-pin alley, but most were in the apartment devoted to the all-engrossing game of kino [sic].

The author continues his description: first of the game, then of its players. He then describes his hostess:

Just as we enter, a fine looking woman, of some forty years old, rather too much bedizened with finery, but with unmistakable kindness and good humor in her countenance, was presiding at the game. Generous, warm-hearted Madame Caldwell! How many recollect her with kindly feelings. She was neither a saint nor an anchorite; but, despite her weaknesses, there are many worse persons in this world, at whom the finger of reproach never pointed, and by many a generous and noble act did she deserve a large enough corner of the mantle of charity to cover her sins.

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<sup>117</sup> Thomas O'Connor, ed., *History of the Fire Department of New Orleans* (New Orleans, LA: n.p., 1895), 78, [https://archive.org/details/ldpd\\_8627108\\_000](https://archive.org/details/ldpd_8627108_000).

<sup>118</sup> "Lines Addressed to the Phoenix Fire Engine Company, No. 8," *The Daily Picayune*, March 7, 1846.

The “jolly goddess of fortune,” Brace notes, was “busy at her vocation.”<sup>119</sup>

Unfortunately, Lucy’s vocation sometimes brought her trouble: On December 18, 1847, she was arrested for keeping a gambling house. The judge of the first district court ordered Lucy to pay a fine of \$2,500 for “being an evil disposed person, and not minding to gain her living by honest labor.” In 1835, the state of Louisiana had made it a crime to keep a banking house or game; despite state law, however, New Orleans’s Third Municipality continued to issue licenses for gaming houses.<sup>120</sup> Caldwell, who had a license from the Third Municipality that permitted her to operate a gaming house, appealed the case on this basis, and lost.<sup>121</sup>

Toward the end of the 1840s, Caldwell became ill, and she began to lease the larger portion of her property. In January of 1852, Caldwell agreed to lease the Franklin Exchange to Thomas A. Snow and John McLean for ten years at a yearly rate of \$2,200 for the first five years and \$1,800 the remaining five years.<sup>122</sup> McLean and Snow renamed the property the United States Hotel, and the two made renovations to Caldwell’s property. On August 9, 1852, Thomas Little, who had been hired by McLean to repair the gutters, took a dinner break, leaving his tools—including a furnace—on the roof, where he had been working. The hotel caught fire.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Jack Brace, *Marie; or, The Gambler of the Mississippi* (New York: E. D. Long and Company, 1861), 14-15.

<sup>120</sup> An Act to Prevent Gambling, *Acts Passed at the First Session of the Twelfth Legislature of the State of Louisiana* (New Orleans, LA: Jerome Bayon, 1835), 134-136, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.a0001917962;view=1up;seq=270>.

<sup>121</sup> *State of Louisiana v. Caldwell*, no. 5,204, Supreme Court of Louisiana, 1848.

<sup>122</sup> Lease to Thomas A. Snow and John McLean from L. A. Caldwell, January 13, 1852, Acts of Achille Chiapella, New Orleans Notarial Archives.

<sup>123</sup> *Lucy A. Caldwell v. Thomas A. Snow and John McLean*, no. 4,878, Third District Court of New Orleans, 1852.

Caldwell's finances, no doubt, allowed her business to thrive for twenty-five years; but her sense for business also helped. She employed a number of men to assist her in her business, two of whom she married: John Shelter in 1843, and Samuel Gourley in 1849. The success of Lucy's business is evident based on her finances at the time of her second marriage: their marriage contract shows that while Shelter brought nothing to the marriage, Lucy, on the other hand, claimed \$79,575 to her personal property. In addition to the two lots she purchased in 1837, Lucy claimed fourteen additional properties: eleven in the Second District, one in the Third District, and two in the City of Lafayette.<sup>124</sup> When they married, Shelter changed *his* name to Caldwell – by legislative act.<sup>125</sup> The marriage did not last long. According to Lucy, “serious difficulties and bad understanding” had existed between the two shortly after their marriage, and in December of 1846, she petitioned the Fifth District Court for a separation from bed and board and from property with Shelter.<sup>126</sup> One year later, the court granted them a divorce.<sup>127</sup> She married Gourley in October of 1849 and petitioned the court for a divorce three months later.<sup>128</sup>

In 1852, Caldwell received a letter warning her that two of her employees had been stealing from her. One of the men named in the letter was Julius Fulda, a man whom she had employed since 1839. Fulda became aware of the letter and took it from Caldwell's locked desk. The next day, Caldwell confronted Fulda, demanding the stolen letter. Fulda told her “not to be

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<sup>124</sup> Marriage contract of Mrs. Widow Thomas Hunt and Mrs. John Shelter, August 31, 1843, Acts of Louis T. Caire, New Orleans Notarial Archives.

<sup>125</sup> An act to authorize John Shelter, of the city of New Orleans, to change his said name to that of John Shelter Caldwell, *Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Sixteenth Legislature of the State of Louisiana* (New Orleans, LA: Alexander C. Bullitt, 1844), 21.  
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=iau.31858018021547;view=1up;seq=1384;size=150>.

<sup>126</sup> *Lucy Ann Hunt, wife of John S. Caldwell, v. Her Husband*, no. 365, Fifth District Court of New Orleans, 1846.

<sup>127</sup> *Lucy Ann Hunt, wife of John Shelter Caldwell, v. Her Husband*, no. 903, Fifth District Court of New Orleans, 1848.

<sup>128</sup> *L. A. Caldwell v. S. Gourley, Her Husband*, no. 3153, Fifth District Court of New Orleans, 1850.

uneasy” and that he would return the letter as soon as he discovered its author. Caldwell told Fulda he had “no right to take a letter of hers from her room,” to which Fulda replied, “I took it because I saw my name on it.” Caldwell called Fulda a liar, and, according to one of Caldwell’s bartenders, “Fulda commenced to swear, and called the Madam three or four times a god damned thief and liar, and put his hands in her face, and said to her if she was a man he would whip her now.” One of Caldwell’s clerks apparently grabbed Fulda by the collar and threw him out.<sup>129</sup>

Fulda wasn’t finished: He and his buddies decided to have a drink at Caldwell’s later that evening. William Harvey, who was drinking at the bar at the time, said that Caldwell ordered Fulda to leave. Fulda “began to talk saucy to the Madam, and he would not go out,” said Harvey. “He paid his way and would come in.”<sup>130</sup>

Fulda had recently been elected Police Commissary of the Port Market for the Third Municipality, and he believed that the letter was written to hurt his character in the election. Because Fulda could not find the source of the letter, he went after Caldwell for slander. “The Madam was a damned bitch to do the like of these things,” Fulda told James Kealey.<sup>131</sup> The Fifth District Court of New Orleans ruled in favor of Caldwell, and Fulda appealed. The case made it as high as the Louisiana Supreme Court, where the judge threw it out. “It is not fit that such cases as this record presents,” wrote the judge, “should be brought before the courts. Better far would it have been for the credit of the parties and the cause of justice, if the matters disclosed had been permitted to remain only in the knowledge of the bye-standers, than to have blazoned them on the records of the tribunals.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> *Julius Fulda v. L. A. Caldwell and Samuel Gourley, Her Husband*, no. 5,281, Fifth District Court of New Orleans, 1854.

<sup>130</sup> *Fulda v. Caldwell*.

<sup>131</sup> *Fulda v. Caldwell*.

<sup>132</sup> *Fulda v. Caldwell*.

## Conclusion

These halls and corridors are full of echoes, and thronged with shadows; echoes of mirth; echoes of sorrow; shadows of human life; their original essence and substance, part of the past, and perhaps an injunction for the present, to remember.

—A. Oakey Hall, *The Manhattaner in New Orleans*, 1851

The rise of urban centers, like New Orleans, during the antebellum period saw an increase in concern regarding public behavior: a foreshadowing of the Victorian culture that would dominate American culture following the Civil War. But as Mary Ryan explains, “Contrary to common assumptions that women’s place in nineteenth-century America was in the home, it is not difficult to locate Victorian women, even Southern ladies, in the public arena.”<sup>133</sup> Luckily for us, Caldwell’s case was blazoned on the records of the tribunals. Many of the women whose names have survived on licenses from almost two hundred years ago have no additional evidence of their place in New Orleans’s antebellum bars. Many others do not even have that.

Following the Civil War, politicians continued to enact legislative control over the Crescent City’s bars. In 1884, for example, the state officially set the legal age of drinking at eighteen—a law that would remain stagnant until 1996, when it was raised to twenty-one. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, these laws increased in number. They also took on a temperance discourse that had affected most of the country decades before. After 1897, no Louisiana bar was allowed to operate within three hundred feet of a church or school; two years later, bar owners were prohibited from providing outside seating to patrons. The most dramatic of these laws went into effect in 1908, when the state of Louisiana passed an act commonly known as the Gay-Shattuck Law, which forbade women from entering bars, entirely; it also

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<sup>133</sup> Ryan, *Women in Public*, 3.

prohibited women from receiving licenses to retail liquor by the glass.<sup>134</sup> On January 16, 1920, a nationwide ban on the sale of liquor, by way of the eighteenth amendment to the Constitution, officially went into effect.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 181; Emily Epstein Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 165-166.

<sup>135</sup> Joy Jackson, "Prohibition in New Orleans: The Unlikeliest Crusade," *Louisiana History* 19, no. 3 (1978): 266.

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## Vita

Mindy Jarrett is a native of New Orleans. Her interest in bar history stems from her service-industry background. Mindy received a bachelor of arts in English at the University of New Orleans, where she served a year-long position as copyeditor for the university's newspaper, *Driftwood*. She is currently the editorial assistant for *The Journal of African American History*, and she also works at the Ethel and Herman L. Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies. In addition, Mindy has worked under Dr. Mary Niall Mitchell for *Freedom on the Move*, a collaborative project which aims to compile, digitalize, and transcribe the hundreds of thousands of fugitive-slave advertisements from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century newspapers.