

East Biloxi African American and Civil Rights Historic Resources Survey 2017



Prepared for:

Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Historic Preservation Division
and
City of Biloxi

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Project Description

The scope of this project included the intensive-level survey of 23 resources in the historically African-American section of East Biloxi and the National Register nomination of the medical office of civil rights leader, Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, located within that same area. For several decades, east Biloxi has experienced the loss of numerous African American historic resources, beginning with the urban renewal movement and continuing through the destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina. The objective of this project was to compile historic documentation in order to support renewed community and City efforts to recognize the significance of and preserve remaining resources.



Figure 1: Map of surveyed 23 survey properties prepared by MDAH.

Survey Background and Methodology

Per the project request for proposals:

On December 15, 2015, a community meeting was held by the City of Biloxi to gauge local interest in this project. Other stakeholders present included the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio, the East Biloxi Community Collaborative, and the Biloxi chapter of the NAACP. The purpose of the meeting was to solicit citizen input in order to begin the process of identifying African American resources of local significance. From this meeting, a list of potential resources was compiled.

The consultant was originally contacted by Bill Raymond, City of Biloxi Historical Administrator regarding the possibility of creating a multiple property documentation form for the identified resources a map produced by the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio for the December 15, 2015 community forum. After review by MDAH, this list was expanded to the 23 resources included in the project scope of work.

Work on the project officially began with a public meeting on January 12, 2017 organized by Bill Raymond, City of Biloxi and held at Our Mother of Sorrows School at 800 Division Street. Attendance at the meeting was far less than hoped and included just three residents who had grown up in the community and had historic knowledge of the resources. Other attendees included affiliates of the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio (GCCDS), the Biloxi D'Iberville Press Newspaper, and the event was covered simultaneously on a local news channel. The full list of attendees in addition to Bill Raymond, City of Biloxi; Eric Reisman, MDAH; and Laura Blokker, project consultant was as follows: Cheryl "Bunny" Thompson (Our Mother of Sorrows), Kay Horne, Tracey Smith, David Perkes (GCCDS), Elizabeth Englebretson (GCCDS), Jeff Rosenberg, Nathan Foust (GCCDS), and Keith Wilson (D'Iberville Press).

Prior to the meeting, the consultant spent the day at the Biloxi Public Library conducting background research on the area in the genealogy section. Work on the project continued on February 3, 2017 at which time the consultant met with Cheryl "Bunny" Thompson at Our Mother of Sorrows School and Church and interviewed her regarding her knowledge of the resources. It was agreed that a larger community gathering was needed/and or the consultant needed to be put in contact with key people for individual meetings. The consultant spent the remainder of February 3rd walking almost the entire survey area and photographing every resource from the exterior. Following this fieldwork, survey forms were completed to the fullest extent possible with some additional research and submitted for preliminary review to MDAH in anticipation that further historical information would be gathered. In the meantime, research and writing for the National Register nomination of the Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office proceeded.

On April 17, 2017, the consultant met with Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Jr., David Perkes (GCCDS), Nathan Foust (GCCDS), and longtime area resident, Clemon Jimerson. This meeting focused in part on Dr. Mason's medical office – the subject of the National Register nomination – as well as the broader list of resources. After touring the medical office, Mr. Jimerson provided a driving tour of the area. Mr. Jimerson proved to be a tremendous resource because of the significant civil rights events and musical heritage in which he played a part, his memory of those events, and his interest in further documenting and preserving area history. He also showed a binder full of research he had compiled for forms documenting sites associated with the Civil Rights movement in Mississippi. Finalizing of the survey forms and National Register nomination followed this meeting.

Historical Summary and Context

Development of Biloxi

French Colonial explorer and founder of the colony of Louisiana, Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville landed on the Biloxi Peninsula in 1699. In 1720, the Company of the Indies sent employees to establish a fortified town of Nouveau Biloxi and over the next decade a small number of free people and slaves settled at the site. The Treaty of Paris, signed in 1763 at the end of the French and Indian/Seven Years' War between France and England made Biloxi part of the English colonies. It was reported at that time that inhabitants were raising livestock and producing pitch and tar.¹ During the next nearly two decades of British rule, Biloxi remained an isolated place and the residents mostly of French descent.² Another change of rule occurred in 1783 when Biloxi, as part of British west Florida, came under Spanish control via the Peace of Paris. The Spanish encouraged settlement by Americans and offered generous land grants, but this does not seem to have produced an influx of residents. In 1806, three years after the Louisiana Purchase rendered territory just north of Biloxi over the 31st parallel American, just twelve French-speaking families were reported as living on the Biloxi peninsula.³

Biloxi finally became a part of the United States after the 1810 revolt of residents in present-day Louisiana led to the establishment of the Commonwealth of West Florida. American flags were raised at Biloxi and other Mississippi Gulf coast towns in 1811 when Dr. William Flood came to survey the area for Governor Claiborne of Louisiana. He estimated the population of Biloxi Parish from the Pearl River to Biloxi Bay to be 420 "chiefly French and Creole."⁴ There were few overland roads along the coast and the settlement was planned with French long lot based on the arpenter system that provided narrow frontages balanced by great depth.

After the War of 1812, some people from Georgia and the Carolinas migrated to the area, but the Gulf Coast towns remained more closely tied to New Orleans. This relationship was enhanced in the 1820s and 1830s when New Orleans businessmen seeking summer escapes to coastal breezes began building summer homes in Biloxi. Railroad and overland roads expanded in the antebellum period while transportation by water too improved. Steamboat transportation furthered the resort appeal of the area and many hotels were constructed. In 1838, Biloxi was chartered as a town with a population of nearly 600 concentrated in an area approximately a mile wide and several blocks deep midway along the south side of the peninsula.⁵ In the 1840s, Catholic, Episcopalian, and Baptist congregations were established. Industry also grew in the 1840s with sawmills, brick yards, and boat yards along the Back Bay. An 1848-53 coast survey shows a high density of buildings with Lameuse Street as the main thoroughfare and Bellman and Caillavet Streets as the east and west limits.⁶

By 1860, Biloxi was a town of few brick buildings, with primitive roads, and a population of approximately 900. Of that about 28% were foreign born (mostly from Germany, Ireland, and France, but also Spain, Switzerland, Italy, England, Scotland, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Mexico, Russia, Canada, and Norway). One quarter of the population came from other states: primarily Louisiana

1 Thomas Hutchins, *An Historical Narrative and Topographical Description of Louisiana and West Florida* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1968 reprint) in Val Husley, *Biloxi: 300 Years* (Virginia Beach: The Dunning Co. Publishers, 1998), 17.

2 Val Husley, *Biloxi: 300 Years* (Virginia Beach: The Dunning Co. Publishers, 1998), 17.

3 Husley, 23.

4 Mississippi Territory Archive, Claiborne Letter Book, in Francis Philbrick, *The Rise of the West, 1754-1830* (New York: Harper Row, 1965) in Husley, 24.

5 Husley, 28.

6 Ibid., 32.

and Alabama.⁷ The secession of Mississippi in 1861 officially embroiled Biloxi in the Civil War and in 1862, it was captured – reportedly without a shot fired.⁸ The end of the decade saw a recovery of the timber industry and return of steamboat service, but the economy was slow to rebound. New Orleanians had little economic capacity for the vacations they enjoyed in Biloxi before the war. New impetus for growth came in 1869 with the construction of a new freight and passenger railroad line from New Orleans to Mobile. The depot was constructed between Reynoir and Caillavet. That year, about 3,000 people lived in the city.⁹ Perhaps most significant for Biloxi among the jobs and business enabled by the railroad was the seafood industry. The manufacture of ice in New Orleans in the 1870s made it possible to preserve fresh seafood for shipment by rail. Many seafood companies were established and in 1887 Biloxi got its own ice company.¹⁰ By the 1890s, Biloxi proclaimed itself "Seafood Capitol of the World" and its seafood canneries employed almost 2,500 workers.¹¹ That number is more than twice the population of the town recorded in 1860 and five-sixths of that in 1869. People came from all directions to Biloxi's Back Bay to fill those jobs: Bohemians, Poles, and Austrians from Baltimore; Cajuns from Louisiana; and Yugoslavians.¹² Some stayed only seasonally, while others became permanent residents.

East Biloxi / Back-of-town

It was in this same period around the turn of the twentieth century that the area of East Biloxi on which this survey focused was developed. The lumber industry which flourished alongside the seafood industry at the base of streets of the Back Bay in the early twentieth century employed many African Americans. The lumber industry grew exponentially between 1870 and 1910 in the US and became a key to economic independence and agency for many Americans across the Gulf Coast. "Whereas other industrial employers marginalized or excluded black workers, African American men formed the majority of the southern lumber workforce."¹³ By 1909, several mills were in operation along Railroad between Reynoir and Lemeuse in East Biloxi.¹⁴ Reynoir, Lameuse, and Main Streets near Division Street (which runs east to west with the Back Bay to the north and the railroad to the south) became the center of a thriving community where many African American families bought property, built homes, and established businesses.¹⁵ This neighborhood was known historically as "back-of-town", a term used along the Gulf Coast to refer to the lower areas behind the more elevated water frontage. As the lumber and naval stores industries declined, neighborhood residents went to work at beach hotels, in domestic services, in the boat building industry, and in the lake trade, which employed many African Americans as ship captains.¹⁶

An example of one of the early families to establish themselves back-of-town is the Reeds. George Reed, who was born a slave in Perry County, Mississippi, came to Biloxi in 1869 and three years later, three different members of the Reed family paid taxes in town.¹⁷ His younger brother, Pleasant Reed

7 Ibid., 33.

8 Ibid.

9 Pleasant Reed House National Register of Historic Places nomination, 1979.

10 Ibid., 42.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 William P. Jones, *The Tribe of Black Ulysses: African American Lumber Workers in the Jim Crow South* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2005), 1.

14 Sanborn Insurance Map, Biloxi, MS, June, 1909, p. 2.

15 *The Buildings of Biloxi*, 2010 Post-Katrina edition (Biloxi: City of Biloxi, 2010), 107.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 110 and Pleasant Reed House National Register of Historic Places nomination, 1979.

constructed a house at 306 Elmer Street (one street west of Main and just north of Division) c. 1887.¹⁸ Pleasant Reed worked at a sawmill, possibly H. W. Latimer on the Back Bay and Lameuse Street.¹⁹ By 1908 when Benjamin Reed – the father of George and Pleasant – passed away, his death was noted in the *Daily Herald* with recognition of his great age and the size of his family. Members of that large family were participants in every important sector of the local economy including fishing, lumber, the railroad, tourism, and fuel (charcoal).²⁰

The Reeds have become the best known of the early African American families of Biloxi, but they are far from unique in their involvement and success with the local industries from seafood to lumber. The family of community leader, Delmar Robinson also exemplifies the early settlers of east Biloxi. As he reported in an oral history interview in 1999, his father was born in 1911 on Fayard Street and his father's mother was also born on Fayard in 1892. His mother's mother was born on Lameuse Street in 1875. Both of his grandfathers came from elsewhere and were presumably drawn to economic opportunities in Biloxi. His mother's father, Hudson Johnson, came from Dauphin Island, Alabama around 1890 and began working in the seafood industry. Eventually, he was the owner of three schooners, which he sailed between Biloxi and Sabine Pass, Texas, and Robinson noted "he made a nice income off of it."²¹ His paternal grandfather was from New Orleans and worked for the L & N Railroad with the express office which Robinson was told was a good job that his grandfather was able to get because he had a high school education. He also had his own drayage business which he used to convey trunks for tourists from the trains to the hotels and to bring ice to the hotels from the ice houses. The Reeds, Johnsons, and Robinsons represent the kinds of families who purchased property and started businesses in the back-of-town neighborhood around the turn of the century. Not every resident would have been as entrepreneurial as them, but the local industries nevertheless provided economic sustenance for generations of homeowners and renters alike. Footprints of dwellings in the area on 1909, 1914, and 1925 Sanborn maps indicate a variety of residential types from shotguns, to bungalows, to Folk Victorian cottages. Some are double dwellings, but most are single family homes with wider plans than a shotgun, and deeper than a two-room, single pile type.

The 1914 Sanborn maps show only limited portion of the "back-of-town" neighborhood, but they reveal the emergence of community religious and social anchors amid the dwellings. Main Street Baptist Church was organized in 1905 at the same Main Street location north of Division Street where it stands today. Bethel Baptist Church was organized in 1909 and its first building constructed in 1909 or 1910 on the same site where it too stands today, on Main Street south of Division. Adjacent to Bethel Baptist Church on the north side stood the Odd Fellows Hall and further south on Division was another Lodge Hall. On Railroad Avenue at Baptist Alley, stood the neighborhood's First Baptist Church. Although it does not appear on the 1914 Sanborn map, Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic Church was built on Division Street that year, becoming the city's first African American Catholic Church. Preceding all of these, though not covered by Sanborn maps until 1925 was Greater St. John AME Church, which was organized on Lameuse Street in 1880 and claims the title of Biloxi's first black church. Thus "back-of-town" was very well-served by churches early in its development.

Amidst this environment of residences and religion, schools also emerged. In 1900, it was declared in the *Daily Herald* that one of the greatest needs in the city was a new school house for colored children

18 This house was move to the site of the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum, destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, and subsequently rebuilt.

19 "The Pleasant Reed House: 1892-2008," Biloxi Homes! Biloxi Historical Society, <http://biloxihistoricalsociety.org/biloxi-homes> (accessed June 21, 2017).

20 Pleasant Reed House National Register of Historic Places nomination, 1979.

21 Delmar Robinson, interviewed by Worth Long for the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, University of Southern Mississippi: Biloxi, 1999.

and it was recommended that one should be erected on property owned by the colored community.²² Biloxi Colored School was constructed c.1909 on Nixon Street just south of Division and by 1916 offered classes through the ninth grade.²³ It was two stories built of wood frame.²⁴ A Catholic school was begun in Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic Church by 1917 and by 1925 had its own building on Reynoir just north of Division.²⁵ In 1945, the Biloxi Colored School was renamed Nichols and relocated to a new building east on Division Street. By the mid-twentieth century, between Nichols and Our Mother of Sorrows were the “center points of the black universe” in Biloxi.²⁶

The Miley Hotel seems to have been one of the first businesses along what would become the very busy commercial strip of Main Street south of Division. The *Daily Herald* documented the construction of a hotel on Main Street in 1906 by one Ben F. Miley, who the paper described as “one of the most respected men of his race.”²⁷ When the hotel burned in 1917, it was noted that it had functioned as a restaurant and dance hall as well as hotel.²⁸ By the 1940s, many more businesses had opened along Main Street and by the 1950s and 60s, it was so lined with businesses, as resident Vernon Jackson recalled “you had to walk elbow-to-elbow down Main Street because you can go from club to club, club to club.” He noted that his uncle, Ed Smith, who operated the popular Blue Note club, attributed the growth of his businesses in part to Keesler Air Force Base and the fact that black soldiers couldn’t go to white businesses, so they all came to Main Street.²⁹ As stated on the Biloxi Blues historical marker on Main Street, “While most venues were reserved for whites, this stretch of Main Street catered to the African American trade, and especially during the boom years during and after World War II, dozens of clubs and cafes here rocked to the sounds of blues, jazz, and rhythm & blues.” In addition to the Blue Note, popular clubs that older residents today remember were the Kitty Kat, the Little Apple, and the Paradise. The Harlem Theatre on Main Street showed movies. Saturday night football games at Nicholl’s High also drew people to come and stay and enjoy entertainment on Main Street.³⁰ *The Negro Motorist Green Book/ The Negro Travelers’ Green Book*, a guide that helped African American travelers negotiate the segregated United States surprisingly does not list the many business of Main Street, but does have several listings for “tourist homes” in Biloxi from 1939 to 1961. Tourist homes were private residences in which people could stay in lieu of available hotel accommodations. Mrs. A. Alcina and Mrs. L. Scott listed their Washington Street homes, while Mrs. G. Bess and Mrs. M. Pickens offered their homes on Main Street.

Although the great musical entertainment at the clubs is often the first thing mentioned of Main Street’s heyday, the corridor was by no means just a place for night life. Through the years, there were also grocery stores, restaurants, a shoe store, a pharmacy, laundry, and many barber shops.³¹ This same popular stretch of Main Street became a target following a 1960 “wade-in” led by Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. in protest of Harrison County’s restriction of blacks from the beaches. The Twilight, Kitty Kat, and Little

22 Marshall and Fannie Nichols House Mississippi Landmark Application.

23 Robinson, 4; *The Biloxi Schools - 1924-2001*, 27.

24 Robinson, 4; Sanborn Insurance Map, Biloxi, MS, 1925, Sheet 19.

25 *The Buildings of Biloxi* (2010 edition), 109; Sanborn Insurance Map, Biloxi, MS, 1925, 18.

26 Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Jr. interview with author, Biloxi, MS, April 11, 2017.

27 *Daily Herald*, April 7, 1906, p. 8.

28 *Daily Herald*, May 23, 1917, p. 1.

29 Oral history with Mr. Vernon Jackson, F341.5 .M57 vol. 747, pt. 1, Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage at the University of Southern Mississippi (<http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/spcol/coh/cohjacksonv.html>, accessed January 11, 2017).

30 Gilbert R. Mason, Jr. interview with author, Biloxi, MS, April 11, 2017.

31 Clemon Jimerson, interview with author, Biloxi, MS, April 11, 2017.

Apple were all shot up by gangs of whites who responded to the peaceful protest with violence.³² This day – April 24, 1960 – became known as “Bloody Sunday” and would prove pivotal for civil rights and the neighborhood. After “Bloody Sunday”, “in the throes of unprecedented violence and intimidation, the black community back-of-town in Biloxi, Mississippi, held up its head and found a new identity, a new pride, and a new spirit.”³³ A Biloxi chapter of the NAACP was started, a boycott targeted persecuting white businesses, and a voter registration movement began. Voter registration produced political results and following the 1961 election of Mayor Guice, the first black police officers began walking the streets back-of-town. “A vibrant black community in Biloxi, Mississippi, had awakened to the opportunity to empower itself through voter registration. A new level of civic involvement and influence came as a result.”³⁴

The Biloxi schools were desegregated starting in 1963; the Harrison County beaches were officially desegregated in 1968; and with the signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, public accommodations were required to desegregate. This last fact would have perhaps the greatest impact on the physical fabric of the African American community of East Biloxi, particularly Main Street. Asked when Main Street started dying, Vernon Jackson explained that it was in the 1970s after desegregation, because people suddenly had choices of where to go and no longer came only to Main Street. He concluded, “So, integration helped us in a way, and it hurt us in a way.”³⁵ Lounge owner, Inez Thomas, who also recalled the bustle of Main Street in the 1950s and 60s attributed its decline to a type of urban renewal, saying “between ‘75 and ‘78 . . . the administration started cleanin’ up. Then they started changin’. They started closin’ down business . . . Some of the people they’d passed on, they’d deceased. And they kids were in other places, so they just sold the property or lost it.”³⁶ The decline of businesses described by both continued through the 1980s and 1990s. When Hurricane Katrina arrived in 2005, the surge of water that poured through the neighborhood delivered a devastating blow that resulted in the demolition of many of the neighborhood’s buildings. Yet, in spite of this, East Biloxi retains a number of significant historic structures, as the following sections detail; and even where no buildings remain the community is filled with an exceptional history that will always be.



Figure 2: The west side of Main Street just below Division Street c. 1960s showing the Southern Kitchen and the Harlem Theater. As printed in the *Buildings of Biloxi*, 2010 edition courtesy of Community Bridges.

32 Mason and Smith, 74.

33 Ibid., 84.

34 Ibid., 123.

35 Jackson.

36 Inez Thomas, interview by Kelly McLain, Biloxi, Mississippi, October 10, 2011, Oral Histories from the Houston History Project, University of Houston Libraries, accessed July 10, 2017, <http://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/houhistory/item/>.

Survey Findings

This survey examined twenty-three properties, which can be divided into three categories based on the survey findings: historically significant, future historic, and no historic significance for the African-American community discovered. The first category includes individual resources and districts that have clear historic significance whether or not they retain enough integrity to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The second category includes resources that are less than fifty years of age, but have significance for the community that should be recognized. The last category includes properties that either have no known historic significance, or gained association with the African-American community at such a late date that it cannot be categorized as historic. Below are the lists of resources in each category with brief explanations of their designations as well as the historic information which may also be found on the individual survey forms.

Historically Significant

Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic Church and Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic School (803 and 800 Division Street)

Both of these properties have clear historic significance and retain good integrity of design, materials, craftsmanship, feeling, association, location, and setting. They both have potential individual National Register eligibility, or could potentially be combined with the rectory, which was not documented, as a district. The former convent at 810 Division, which was documented, served as home to the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament who ran the Our Mother of Sorrows School from 1917 until 1967. After 1967, it was closed and at the time of a 1976 survey, it was recorded as owned by the Church of Christ. Sometime after that the present front gable addition was built and it is now used by Marshall Funeral Home of 825 Division St. The addition is quite substantial as to make it unrecognizable as the convent and disqualify it from National Register eligibility.



Figures 3 & 4: Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic Church, 2017 by author. Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic Church and Rectory, historic image, collection of OMS and hanging in OMS Catholic School.

During the nineteenth century, Biloxi's black Catholic families worshipped in the Cathedral of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Families such as the Bertrands, Seymours, Johnsons, Pradoses, Coopers, and Bousquetos, who were from Port-au-Prince, were among the earliest recorded (Muller). Segregation within the Catholic church became more prevalent in the Catholic church in the late nineteenth century and increasingly in the twentieth century with more separate parishes and schools being established and constructed in this period. In 1914, with a finding that there were a sufficient number of parishioners for a separate African American church, Our Mother of Sorrows was built under the direction of Father Kelly on land donated by John Kennedy, Sr. (Muller). Father Kelly suffered an injury during installation of the bell and the Reverend Carl Shappert, a Josephite from Baltimore instead became the first priest of Our Mother of Sorrows.

Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic School began in the church of the same name (see next survey file) under the leadership of Mother Katherine Drexel of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament (The Buildings of Biloxi). By 1925 as shown by the Sanborn map of that year, the school had moved into a building a block and half away on the west side of Reynoir, north of Division. A high school department began in 1932 and its first class graduated in 1936 (The Buildings of Biloxi). In 1941, the Josephite Priests organized construction of the present building, which offered "adequate", light-filled classrooms, science labs, and a library. In this period of segregated schools, Biloxi's public schools for African Americans struggled for good facilities and resources like lab equipment (Mason, 144-45), the Josephite Priests and Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament endeavored to provide the best resources they could and the school drew students not just from Biloxi, but from many surrounding communities (Thompson). The school was closed in 1967, the same year that courts ordered the Biloxi public school system complete desegregation in its entirety. Today, none of the buildings that housed Biloxi's public "colored" schools remain. Our Mother of Sorrows alone represents the city's separate school system.



Figures 5 & 6: Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic School, 2017 by author.

Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office (670 Division Street)

This property has clear significance and integrity. As part of this project, it was nominated to the National Register at the statewide level under Criteria B for its association with physician and civil rights leader, Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. and under Criteria A for its association with medicine and with civil rights history in Mississippi. The period of significance extends from the construction of the office in 1966 until 1980 when Dr. Mason was nominated and confirmed to the Mississippi State Board of Medical Licensure, a defining mark of his achievement as both a medical doctor and a civil rights leader. The nomination was presented to the Mississippi National Register Review Board on July 20, 2017.



Figure 7: Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office, 2017 by author.

Main Street Missionary Baptist Church (321 Main Street)

Main Street Missionary Baptist Church has clear historic significance for the community of one of its oldest churches. It was organized in 1905 at its present site (church history, Sanborns, cornerstones). In 1947, a new block building was constructed and in 1968, this building was remodeled in the present style (church history, cornerstones). Further research would be necessary to clarify the exact timeline of the building development, its historical integrity, and all of its associated history, but it has potential for National Register listing.



Figure 8: Main Street Missionary Baptist Church, 2017 by author.

251-282 Main Street

As described in the historical summary section, Main Street between Railroad and Division was the black business district of Biloxi and the heart of the African American community in East Biloxi. As also described in the historical summary and context, beginning in the 1970s, it suffered a decline and ultimately lost many buildings. A very important section, however survives that well-represents the cross-section of religious, residential, commercial, and entertainment that made the area so vibrant. Not only this, but this surviving center of Main Street has associations with particularly significant people and events. When FEMA completed a survey of the area following Hurricane Katrina, the report concluded that this section was a potential National Register District and this report concurs with that finding and recommends the following seven properties for inclusion in a Main Street district.



Blue Note, 246 Main St - This property was not included in the scope of this project, but should be documented and researched for inclusion in a potential district because its significance as one of the last surviving of the well-known clubs. Aside from its reputation as a music venue, it was also a popular place to for social meetings. Civil rights leader, Dr. and Mrs. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. regularly met their friends and fellow civic activists, Dr. and Mrs. Felix Dunn there for Sunday meals. He noted that the Blue Note "was at that time a first-rate black cafe".³⁷ He also went there with Medgar Evers when Evers was in town.³⁸ While there have certainly been alterations to the building since the historic period, it is definitely recognizable as a historic building and would likely be identifiable to someone from the historic period.



Jolly Jackson Cafe, 251 Main St - This is one of the only surviving commercial buildings on this once busy thoroughfare and one of the few surviving examples of a black-owned business in the neighborhood. It housed a grocery in the middle, restaurant on the left and the Central Beauty shop on the right. It would have been witness to and potentially victim of the riots that followed Bloody Sunday Wade-in.



New Bethel Baptist Church, 255 Main St - Bethel Baptist Church was organized in 1909 and its first building was constructed in 1909 or 1910 on the same site. In 1942, a new building was constructed and in 1949, an annex was added. Further work was completed in 1959 to enlarge the education center and "beautify" the church at a cost of \$21,000. Hurricanes Camille and Elena both damaged the church and Hurricane Katrina brought in nine feet of water, after which it was rehabilitated again. Many

Figures 9-11: Blue Note, image from Facebook by Leroy Scarborough. Jolly Jackson and New Bethel Baptist Church, 2017 by author.

³⁷ Mason and Smith, *Beaches, Blood, and Ballots* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2000), 73.

³⁸ Michael Vinson Williams. *Medgar Evers: Mississippi Martyr* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 2011).

organizing activities of the civil rights movement in Biloxi occurred at or in association with New Bethel Baptist Church, meetings in preparation for wade-ins and after Bloody Sunday.³⁹ The civil rights leader Dr. Gilbert R. Mason described it as "the largest African American church in Biloxi at that time."⁴⁰

Jordan, Schwan, and Harrison Building, 260 Main Street This building replaced several earlier individual store buildings and it opened with Diaz Drugstore, Curet Flower Shop, Mickey Poulos' Buy-and-Sell Shop, and the Deluxe Shoe Shop owned by Roosevelt Williams.

"Located in the heart of the colored section of Biloxi" the 36 hotel rooms were for African Americans (Daily Herald May 15 and August 8 1952). The ownership of the building and stores seems to be a mix of white and black with only Roosevelt Williams noted as "colored." Other tenants through the years right to left included the Coconut Club at former 700, then what possibly served as the storeroom for Williams Shoe Store at 702 and in recent history served as the NAACP office, then Williams Shoe Store at 704, then a laundromat run by P.I. Green and Dr. Mason and on the far left, for a couple years was the Modern Drug Store operated by Dr. and Mrs. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Following Bloody Sunday, the Masons "got some unfriendly pressure from [their] white landlord about the rent for the drugstore."⁴¹



Marshall and Fannie Nichols House, 270 Main St - This Mississippi Landmark was the home of Marshall and Fannie Nichols who were leaders in education for African Americans in Biloxi. Mr. Nichols became principal of Biloxi Colored school in 1916 and Mrs. Nichols taught at the school. Under Nichols leadership, the curriculum was expanded from nine to twelve years and vocational training was added. After Mr. Nichols death in 1945, Mrs. Fannie Nichols became principal of Nichols High School. She was also a strong advocate for civil rights, so much so that "anyone attending a PTA meeting at Nichols High School when Mrs. Nichols was principal would have thought they had mistakenly dropped in on an NAACP meeting, so vigorous was her advocacy and concern for freedom."⁴²



Figures 12-14: Jordan, Schwan, and Harrison Building, Nichols House, and 274 Main Street, 2017 by author.

House, 274 Main Street - Further research is needed on this house to discover any possible historic association of its owners or residents, but it is a decently intact example of residential architecture in the neighborhood that contributes to the feeling of the block. It is a one-story, three-bay (W; D; D) cottage with gable-on-hip roof and engaged porch. The only stylistic flourish is the scalloped shingles

39 Mason and Smith, 61, 71.

40 Ibid., 71.

41 Ibid., 83.

42 Mason and Smith, 100.

in the gable. It originated as a double. The windows have been replaced with two-over-two aluminum sash and the doors are six-panel replacements. The roof is covered in corrugated metal and the house is clad in plain wood weatherboards except the porch apron, which is covered with wood novelty siding. The house is raised on piers and has concrete steps with brick cheek walls.



Myrtle Davis House, 282 Main St - This house has a low degree of physical historic integrity in terms of design and materials, but it has a strong association with Mrs. Myrtle Davis, a seamstress and an active advocate for civil rights. She is mentioned several times in Dr. Gilbert R. Mason's autobiography *Beaches, Blood, and Ballots*. He joked that she was the "prettiest BAM" referring to the group of friends who called themselves "Black Angry Men" and provided protection for him day and night.⁴³ She was witness to the shooting up of businesses on Main Street the night of the

Bloody Wade-In and became a local NAACP officer along with Mr. Charles Davis.⁴⁴ Next to the Davis house was a small building (now demolished) that was used by COFO c. 1961-63 for Voter Registration.⁴⁵ This house would be on a boundary of the proposed district and due to its low degree of physical historic integrity, more research would likely be necessary to justify it as recognizable to someone from the historic period and important for its association with Myrtle Davis.



Biloxi Federal Building (135 Main Street) - This building is significant as the place where Judge Mize proceeded over the prolonged and repeatedly delayed case for beach desegregation and subsequently school desegregation presented by Gilbert R. Mason and other plaintiffs. Clemon Jimerson testified in this building.



Biloxi Little Theater (220 Lee Street) - This building is significant for its part in the voter registration drive of Biloxi's African American community.⁴⁶ The 1952 Sanborn map shows this as the Central Assembly of God. That church was moved to the present Great St. James AME building and later to Cedar Lake Road and became Cedar Lake Christian Assembly. After its move to Division Street, the building became the Meaut Community House. The Biloxi Daily herald lists socials and music events taking place at the Meaut Community House from 1956-1963. In the 1960s, the Biloxi Little Theatre began using the basement for building and storing stage sets. In the 1970s, the theatre was able to lease the building and perform its plays on the upper level with the agreement that a room downstairs could still be

Figures 15-17: Myrtle Davis House, Biloxi Federal Building, and Biloxi Little Theater, 2017 by author.

used for community meetings and a voting precinct and bingo could be held upstairs.⁴⁷

43 Ibid., 59.

44 Ibid., 74.

45 Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Jr. and Clemon Jimerson, interview with author, Biloxi, MS, April 11, 2017.

46 Clemon Jimerson, interview with author, Biloxi, MS, April 11, 2017.

47 "Biloxi Little Theater" (4blt.org).

Future Historic

Lighthouse Tabernacle Baptist Church (New Community Missionary Baptist Church, 325 Nixon Street) - Tabernacle Baptist Church celebrated 75 years in 2010. The Rev. A. A. Dickey, who was active in the civil rights movement became pastor in 1968. This building was constructed in 1972.



Henry Beck Masonic Lodge #307 (342 Main Street) - John Henry Beck was instrumental in the 1960 voter registration campaign. He personally drove registrants back and forth between Biloxi and Gulfport. He was Worshipful Master of Acme Lodge No. 307, Prince Hall Affiliation, Scottish Rite. The lodge and park on Division were later named after him. This site does not appear as a lodge in the last Sanborn of the area (1952). The present building was constructed in 1972.



Nance Temple (311 Main Street) - The primary building is of recent vintage, but a smaller building at the rear appears to be older. More research is needed to discover the construction date of this building. The last Sanborn map of this area from 1952 shows this corner as occupied by a store. Local memory corroborates there was a white-owned grocery at this location historically before the Nance Temple was built. Bishop Robert Nance of the Church of God put up bail money for demonstrators of the June 23, 1963 wade-in.⁴⁸



Inez Lounge (294 Main Street) - This building is unquestionably a neighborhood landmark. This was the location of a restaurant on the ground floor with the "Paradise Garden" upstairs, where such greats as Bo Didley, Bobby Rush, Al Green, and others played.⁴⁹ The current building is reported to retain its historic configuration however its footprint does not align with the four separate store, dwelling, and apartment buildings that occupied the lot in 1952 as shown on the Sanborn map. Its present appearance is also more in keeping with the 1970s. The space was leased starting with the lounge part by Ms. Inez Thomas and Mr. Proby beginning in c. 1984.⁵⁰ When they first leased the space, there was a pool hall on the other side of the first floor and they were simultaneously operating the Southern Kitchen restaurant across the street next to Tyrone's barber shop (Southern Kitchen building demolished after Katrina). Ms. Thomas first moved to Biloxi in the early 1960s and worked for the Biloxi Laundry at Porter and Howard. Later they moved the Southern Kitchen operations into the present building. More research is needed to fully understand the changes to this building over time, but it seems that even if it would not qualify for National Register recognition today, it should certainly be recognized for its local significance and potential future historic designation.



Figures 18-21: Lighthouse Tabernacle Baptist Church, Henry Beck Masonic Lodge #307, Nance Temple, and Inez Lounge, 2017 by author.

48 Mason and Smith, 132.

49 Ibid.

50 Inez Thomas, interview by Kelly McLain, Biloxi, Mississippi, October 10, 2011, Oral Histories from the Houston History Project, University of Houston Libraries, accessed July 10, 2017, <http://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/houhistory/item/>.

No Significant Historical Association with the African-American Community Discovered



United Novelty Company (Lighthouse Apostolic Church,

769 Division Street) - Originally, this building stood out as one of the few examples of the Art Deco style in Biloxi (The Buildings of Biloxi). It had the signature curved openings and corners of the style with a roof hidden by a parapet. No significant association for the community was discovered during the course of fieldwork.



Moore Community House (684 Walker Street) - Moore has clear historic significance in the Back Bay community, but it was primarily associated with European immigrants until the 1970s. Moore Community House and the Epworth M.E. Church South were established by Rev. Waldo W. Moore and his wife Myrtie in 1924 to 1925. The original location as shown on Sanborn maps was across Davis Street from the present location. This was the end of a street of "laborer's shacks" for workers in the Back Bay seafood plants. Many of these workers were European immigrants. The Moore's saw a need for childcare for those working in the industry and established the community house for such. Myrtie Moore also established a night school for workers. According to the cornerstone, the church was rebuilt and expanded in 1954 which must correlate with the move from its previous location, but may have reused materials like the windows. By 1959, Moore had one of the few accredited kindergartens in Biloxi with 32 children and served approximately 150 children per week through its various services.⁵¹ In the 1970s, with a new federal funding program, the demographic served by Moore switched from mostly white to mostly black. Moore continues its mission today with expanded programs, utilizing all of the sanctuary as part of the community house as well.



Restaurant, 560 Division Street - The 1952 Sanborn map shows this building as a restaurant with a porch or awning extending onto Division Street. Clemon Jimerson confirmed that this building was indeed a restaurant and was white-owned. He knew of no significant historic associations with the African-American community or civil rights.



Figures 22-25: United Novelty Company, Moore Community House, Restaurant, Greater St. John AME Church, 2017 by author.

Greater St. John AME Church (551 Division Street) - This institution is very significant to the community and claims the title of first black church in Biloxi, however it did not move to this location until the 1980s. St. John AME was organized in 1880 on Lameuse Street and in 1944, it moved to 432 E Division (former address system). Reverend Orange Harris of

51 "Moore Community House" (moorecommunityhouse.org/history).

St. John AME was a local champion of civil rights and its 432 E Division St location, which is now Henry Beck Park, was a gathering place for many Civil Rights activities.⁵² In 1982, it relocated once again to the present building and became Greater St. John AME. The 551 (formerly 608) Division Street building was constructed for the Central Assembly of God and opened its doors on May 1, 1955 under the direction of the Reverend Douglas Carroll (Daily Herald, May 2, 1955, p. 15). The Central Assembly of God was previously located in what is now the Biloxi Little Theater. The congregation gave their Division Street building to Greater St. John AME when they relocated again to Cedar Lake Road and became Cedar Lake Christian Assembly.⁵³

Apartments at 684 Division Street - This building has no known historical associations, but on the lot immediately to the north stood the Pleasant Reed House (see NR nomination - moved and later destroyed by Hurricane Katrina) possibly leading to identification of this as a significant site. On this actual site was a store.



Blessed Francis (former St. John's Church, 360 Lameuse Street) - The original St. Johns was established on Bay View Avenue in the store of the Gorenflo Packing Company and served workers in the seafood industry, many of whom were European immigrants. The remodeled building was dedicated in 1921. In 1940, the church moved to the present location, but this building was torn down and replaced in 1959. In 1981, this building was badly damaged by fire and was subsequently restored to its present appearance. The church was renamed after the merging of St. John and St. Louis Parishes following Hurricane Katrina. Reverend Areogood and Reverend Gallagher of Back Bay Mission on Chartres and Fayard Streets participated in the June 23, 1963 wade-in and welcomed the ministers' session of the first state NAACP meeting on the Gulf Coast in their building (non-extant). A mob attacked the building breaking the glass and etc.⁵⁴ Such a civil rights connection was not discovered for St. John's though perhaps there is one.



Figures 26 & 27: Apartments and St. John's Church, 2017 by author.

Survey Products and Documentation

The products for this survey were two copies of 23 MDAH Historic Resource Inventory (HRI) survey forms printed on acid free card stock with color photographs adhered with acid free mounting glue. Forms were created using the MDAH "Consultant Inventory" Microsoft Access database. Hand drawn site plans were scan and inserted in the PDFs of the forms prior to printing. Digital photographs for all properties were organized in individual folders and labeled with addresses or property name. The final product for the survey is this report.

52 Mason and Smith, 11.

53 Clemon Jimerson, interview with author, Biloxi, MS, April 11, 2017.

54 Mason and Smith, 111.

Recommendations for Further Research, Documentation, and Registration

Priority 1: National Register Nominations

National Register nominations for the Our Mother of Sorrows properties and 251-282 Main Street should be a priority because they are significant resources for the neighborhood which are deserving of the honorific recognition of National Register of Historic Places listing. Additionally, the Main Street properties could benefit from the federal tax incentives for rehabilitation of historic properties enabled by NRHP listing. Creation of these two National Register districts would strengthen the historic identity and importance of both as neighborhood anchors. Nomination of these districts will also require further research and evaluation of the OMS parsonage and the Blue Note building as discussed in the survey findings.



Figures 28 & 29: Views of Main Street, 2017 by author.

Priority 2: Documentation and Further Research

There are three specific buildings in addition to those noted above which were indicated by community members and historic references as important historic resources which should be documented.

Documentation of these three buildings could easily be combined with either priority 1 or priority 3.



Figure 30: Standard Service Station, image from GoogleEarth.

Standard Service Station (640 Division Street) - This service station was directly across the street from Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr.'s original office and thereby played a role in the civil rights activities in the neighborhood. In his autobiography, Dr. Mason explained, when he was at work in his office during the height of threats against him, BAM (Black Angry Men) "kept vigil from a gas station across the street."⁵⁵ After Bloody Sunday three of its windows were shot out.⁵⁶ It was also very important as a black-owned business and was where the first black-owned taxi business in town was begun.⁵⁷ Dr. Felix Dunn bought it in an unspecified year.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Mason and Smith, 59.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 74.

⁵⁷ Jimerson.

⁵⁸ Mason and Smith, 81.

Vernon Gilbert Elks Lodge #576 (636 Esters Boulevard -
This lodge building does not at first appear historic, but
community members attest that it remains the same historic
building and is significant as the site of many community
meetings, organizing, and events.

Shalamar (306 Main Street) - Like the Vernon Gilbert Lodge,
the Shalamar does not readily appear as a historic building,
but is said to be the same historic venue that hosted many
music legends and is one of the few remaining of Main
Street's once many clubs.

Priority 3: Residential Streets

Although a significant social history is clearly represented in the mixed institutional/ commercial/ and residential districts proposed above, it is also embedded in the purely residential parts of the area. As described in the historical context section, the residential development of this area reveals much about the socio-economic opportunities of Biloxi at the turn of the century and particularly how African-American families built equity in the area. Presently, the reconstructed Pleasant Reed House at the Ohr-O'Keefe museum is used to tell the story of one representative family of the area. While it is often compelling to focus on a single well-documented individual or family to relate a historical narrative, this approach risks creating an impression of singularity. Research of the many other families and individuals who established their residences in the area would create a more holistic image of black community building, independence, and social and economic success beginning in the late 19th century. Additionally, further research into the residential streets would shed light on the historic microneighborhoods within this larger area, such as "Creole Town" where people of Haitian ancestry settled around Fayard Street.⁵⁹

Priority 4: Future Historic

Further research and documentation should be planned for those buildings that will be reaching fifty-years of age in five-plus years. These properties are described in the survey findings section above.



Figures 31-33: Vernon Gilbert Elks Lodge #576, Shalamar, residence at 210 Main Street, images from GoogleEarth.

Recommendations for Resource Preservation

One of the great assets for preservation in East Biloxi – a primary factor leading to this project – is community interest. Although, perhaps due to timing, community involvement in this project fell short of expectations, the interest in and collective of knowledge of the past is very much present. Feeling for local history in East Biloxi is enhanced by the return of sons and daughters of the community who went elsewhere in the country to pursue education and jobs, and have now returned. An appreciation for one's own home, its history, and its special qualities is often focused by travel and this certainly seems to be true for many from East Biloxi. The capacity to develop community interest into productive action in East Biloxi is further bolstered by the presences of strong institutions and organizations, such as the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio (GCCDS), the East Biloxi Community Collaborative, and the Biloxi chapter of the NAACP. GCCDS has been active in studying the historic fabric of the neighborhood as it existed by the 1960s and today. In 2009, GCCDS completed a Main Street Neighborhood Planning Study and more recently, they have been working with a 1960s aerial image to map and delineate the neighborhood as it existed then.

The greatest challenge for resource preservation in East Biloxi is the loss of historic fabric already suffered. Some of the loss has come recently, with Hurricane Katrina and the decade plus since, while other building removals came with earlier changes in the neighborhood. Some losses are individual, single cavities among standing buildings while others form collective voids. One of the distinct lacunas in the historic streetscape is the area now occupied by John Henry Beck Park. Through the first half of the twentieth-century, this block on the south side of Division Street between Elmer and Nixon Streets



Figure 34: Image overlay of 1952 Sanborn Map on current GoogleEarth view of John Henry Beck Park and the surrounding block.

was home to many significant institutions for the community as well as residences. Biloxi Colored School, was the first institution within this square block though it faced Nixon Street. In 1944, St. John AME Church, Biloxi's oldest black church, moved from its Lameuse Street location to the center of this block facing Division Street. By 1948, there was a Colored Trade School just to the east of St. John AME Church.⁶⁰ Another significant location here by the 1960s was the USO (United Service Organization), which was the only local center for black military men and women, such as those from Biloxi's Keesler Air Force Base.⁶¹ Here too was the UBA (United Benevolent Association) Hall where many civil rights organizing meetings took place. Across the street was the office of civil rights leader, Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. (both his original office at the corner of Nixon and new office built in 1966 in the center of the block). In 1959, W. B. McDaniel established a funeral home on the east side of St. John AME Church and the UBA Hall at 438 Division Street. Just like St. John AME and the UBA Hall, it became a hub for civil rights activities. In the 1980s, Jesse B. Richmond relocated the funeral business to Main Street. In 1982, Greater St. John AME Church relocated to a newer building east on Division Street. It and the other buildings and residences on this south side of Division Street have all since been demolished. Whereas, in 1966, the medical office of Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. looked across the street at a powerful collective of black institutions, it now looks onto a park. The park is named for John Henry Beck, a civil rights activist and Worshipful Master of Acme Lodge #307, Prince Hall Affiliation, Scottish Rite, but the passerby would little suspect the significant collection of buildings once stood here.

There are many familiar approaches for the preservation of standing resources, but how do we preserve what is no longer there? Reflecting on a 2014 panel focused on disappearing African American landscapes at a conference of the Vernacular Architecture Forum, Skidmore College Assistant Professor of American Studies, Amber Wiley wrote:

. . . the vestiges of time have changed the way we talk about communities that were once considered extremely important and exceptional. These are communities that have felt the impact of emancipation, desegregation and urbanization. They were born out of necessity, and then rendered ineffective.

She described this as a national trend, recalling a visit to Austin, Texas and an African American history and culture tour, which "was mainly an investigation of the invisible." She remembered, "Some tour participants became agitated: 'Where are the *buildings*?!' they asked. . ." From such experiences and the findings shared by the panel, Wiley concluded:

We take comfort in the visual aspects of preservation. The tangible. This is why it is of utmost importance to investigate and engage new modes of inquiry and representation such as GIS and artistic photography. These are processes by which we make visible what has been lost, and re-inscribe meaning on the landscape in a very visual manner. These creative re-presentations can lead to new ways of framing the conversation and engaging the public. Artistic re-interpretations of the past are valid: photography, murals, and interactive site development. These methods promote learning and push inquiry into the future of vanished or vanishing landscapes.⁶²

60 Sanborn Insurance Map, Biloxi, MS, 1948.

61 Clemon Jimerson, interview with author, Biloxi, MS, April 11, 2017.

62 Amber Wiley, "Panelists Explore Intangible Vernacular Spaces at the 2014 VAF Conference," Vernacular Architecture Forum, 2014 (<http://vafnewsletter.blogspot.com/2014/07/panelists-explore-intangible-verna.html>).

Wiley's words resonate with the realities and challenges of significance and loss in East Biloxi. They also point to the potentials to bring new life to the neighborhood's story through alternative mediums and methods. Additionally, it is worth reconsidering how we understand tangible and intangible heritage.

In 2003, Dawson Munjeri, former ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) Vice President highlighted the contradictions between notions of intangible and tangible heritage across the world stating:

The very concept of "built heritage" is based on the relationship between a site and an event, but the illustrated cases do show that this is not necessarily so in some African societies. In those societies, cultural heritage is singularly more about values than edifices. These values need not be judged on the basis of physical properties and not even on the basis of an interactive matrix of cultural and physical properties. That is the problem with linking intangible heritage to "built up heritage" because it superimposes an inappropriate morphological typology. Let it never be forgotten that what distinguishes "living traditions" from all others, is the fact that existence overrides visibility.

Munjeri provided multiple examples of the way living traditions maintained and celebrated seemingly non-extant heritage and concluded, "The rest of us, we mourn the collapse of the physical fabric. Yes, we continue to deify a 'built heritage' devoid of the real message: Soko risina musuro (a tale without a theme)."⁶³

Lest we lose sight of the real message, we must push boundaries of how we understand and practice preservation to truly preserve places; particularly places that have lost much tangible heritage. This is not to discount the tangible - being able to place one's hands on a building is an invaluable way to connect to the past and why "preservation" as we have traditionally known it in the United States is so important. However, the intangible is essential too. Preservation should perhaps be reframed with the terms "living" and "tradition", for these two words speak to what many long-time residents seem to want for the neighborhood. While we may not have the kind of living traditions that Munjeri studied, we do have the potential to pass traditions from one person to another and keep them alive. Therefore, a people-focused approach to preservation, combined with the mixed methodologies and creative representations referenced by Wiley is recommended for East Biloxi. Fortunately, this is also an approach that is well-served by types of assets which East Biloxi has: community interest and strong institutions and organizations.

Specific Opportunities and Considerations for Preservation

Opportunities for Community Involvement

- This Place Matters Campaign
- My Historic East Biloxi Initiative

"This Place Matters" is a campaign of the National Trust for Historic Preservation that encourages people to celebrate the places that are meaningful to them and their communities. One of the popular parts of the campaign is the sharing of photographs



Figure 35: Author and friends showing love for Campti, LA with "This Place Matters" signs. Image courtesy of Donna Isaacs.

⁶³ Dawson Munjeri, "Intangible Heritage in Africa: Could it Be a Case of 'Much - Ado - About Nothing'?" ICOMOS (https://www.icomos.org/victoriafalls2003/munjjeri_eng.htm).

showing people with "This Place Matters" signs in front of their loved historic buildings, but there are many other aspects of the campaign to help people get recognition and support for their important places. More Information can be found here: <https://savingplaces.org/this-place-matters#>

The National Trust offers this advice:

Before diving in, take a second to think about the goal of your *This Place Matters* campaign. Answering the following questions will help you determine both a core message and a game plan.

- What's your elevator speech? Why is this place important to you and to your community?
- Is this place threatened? If so, are you trying to save it and what challenges do you think you'll face in doing so?
- Who is your audience? A property owner? A local elected official? People who might donate to your cause?
- What is the best way to tell the story of your place visually?

Whatever your message is, clarity and specificity will help you build your campaign and get your point across.

Many cities and towns are recognizing the value of citizen input to inform understanding and decision making regarding the historic significance of properties. While architectural significance can be recognized by the trained eye, it requires local knowledge to recognize other types of significance. One such model project is "MyHistoricLA" organized by the Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources. As described below, this program was designed to gather community input and foster community involvement in historic designations:

The MyHistoricLA Guide is organized in three sections: "MyNeighborhood", "MyStory" and "MyPlace", each containing step-by-step instructions on how to organize community activities that will contribute directly to the survey.

In the "MyNeighborhood" section, the Guide contains detailed instructions on how your community can organize a "Neighborhood Walkabout" - a fun event that can gather and energize neighbors to help identify significant individual resources or potential historic districts in your area. Your community might also organize a "Community Photo Collection Day" to collect and scan old photos of extant historic resources, or neighborhood real estate advertisements that could help provide valuable information for the survey teams.

"MyStory" aims to capture the stories associated with places in your neighborhood, particularly seeking to capture the social, historic, and cultural significance that may not be immediately obvious to the survey professionals documenting the visible architectural history of your neighborhood. This activity involves one-on-one interviews with long-time residents who have important information to share.

"MyPlace" builds upon the information collected in "MyNeighborhood" and "MyStory" activities by seeking to collect more detailed information on specific buildings or neighborhoods. This

involves property-specific or neighborhood-specific research, by collecting information from the LA Public Library, historical LA Times archives, Sanborn insurance maps, and city directories. The "MyHistoricLA" Guide provides a standardized format for community members to enter this information for the OHR, so that the information obtained can go directly into the SurveyLA database for use by the survey team.

More information and an example online form can be found at these links:

<http://preservation.lacity.org/node/457>

<http://preservation.lacity.org/survey/myhistoricla-historic-resource-identification-form>

Some of the approaches described in these guides could work well for East Biloxi, while others like the "Community Photo Collection Day" may not be appropriate. Since so many residents of East Biloxi lost any treasured historic photographs in the flooding associated with Hurricane Katrina, alternative techniques like an online photograph drive might be better. A website or Facebook page could be used to solicit photographs from East Biloxi natives who have long lived elsewhere. There are many other creative ways to engage all of the community, young and old, in the local history, but MyHistoricLA offers a helpful starting framework of ideas.

Opportunities for Interpretation

- Henry Beck Park
- Main Street Mural
- Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office
- Pleasant Reed House

To make the historic significance of East Biloxi more visible, there are many potentials for visual interpretative displays. As described above, Henry Beck Park is a site where many very significant activities took place, though the buildings that housed them no longer stand. This, combined with the fact that it is a public park, make it an excellent candidate for outdoor interpretative art and installations. One model that has some commonalities in terms of civil rights significance and existence as a public park is Kelly Ingram Park in Birmingham. The following link to the 2013 competition for a monument to foot soldiers of the movement details much of the design intent and mission behind Kelly Ingram Park: <http://www.revrbirmingham.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/FINAL-COMPETITION-PDF-7.pdf>

At the public meeting which commenced this project, resident Tracey Smith suggested he would like to see a mural on the side of the Jordan, Schwan, and Harrison Building at 260 Main Street. This commercial building at the heart of the proposed Main Street National Register historic district would indeed be a prime candidate as a canvas for interpretation of the once busy Main Street. Such murals



Figure 36: Mural on Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard, New Orleans. Author's collection, by Charles Lesher.

provide artistic vitality to their streetscapes as well as a type of historic interpretation.

Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Jr. has proposed that the Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. Medical Office will be leased to a community organization so that it will remain a vital and functional space, but also that room will be retained to display photographs, artifacts, and interpretative material related to Dr. Mason, Sr. This also is a logical and optimal scenario to incorporate important community heritage into the daily life of the community.

The Pleasant Reed House at the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum already has an interpretative function and expansion of the interpretation has been proposed. As described in the Recommendations for Further Research section, it would be wonderful if in-depth research on more contemporaries of the Reeds and their descendants could be developed and shared to establish a holistic image of the neighborhood's history.

In all but the last of the above proposals, historic interpretation would be available to tourists, but more importantly, very much embedded in the fabric and function of the community.

Opportunities for Community Reinvestment

- Main Street Program
- Tax Incentives

Main Street America (<http://www.mainstreet.org/mainstreetamerica/themovement>) is a program of the nonprofit National Main Street Center, Inc., a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation that serves as the "leading voice for preservation-based economic development and community revitalization across the country." For 35 years, it has been working with communities to revitalize their "Main Streets" and downtowns. The fact that East Biloxi's Main Street was a thriving commercial corridor makes it precisely the type of place the Main Street program has sought to assist. "Main Street empowers communities to set their own destinies. While revitalization is challenging work, the Main Street program offers a road-map for local-owned, locally-driven prosperity. Across the country, thousands of communities have used the Main Street Approach to set transform their economies, leverage local leadership, improve overall quality of life." Biloxi already has a Main Street program (<http://mainstreetbiloxi.com/organization/>) focused on a district that extends from Porter Avenue at the Historic Biloxi Lighthouse to Bellman Street, and from Highway 90 to the railroad on Esters Blvd. plus the Caillavet Street corridor. An extension of the district to follow Main Street up to Division Street seems like a logical step to gain recognition and resources for the community. An example of a Main Street success story is O. C. Haley Boulevard in New Orleans that like East Biloxi's Main Street, O.C. Haley Blvd. was the heart of a thriving African-American commercial district in the early twentieth century, but by the late twentieth century, was full of vacant buildings. The success of O.C. Haley organizations in preserving community heritage while providing for current community needs made it a winner of the 2017 Great American Main Street.

If the proposed Main Street historic district is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, historically contributing properties that are used for income-producing purposes will be eligible for potential use of the 20% federal income tax for approved rehabilitations. "The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program encourages private sector investment in the rehabilitation

and re-use of historic buildings. It creates jobs and is one of the nation's most successful and cost-effective community revitalization programs. It has leveraged over \$84 billion in private investment to preserve 42,293 historic properties since 1976. The National Park Service and the Internal Revenue Service administer the program in partnership with State Historic Preservation Offices." (<https://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives.htm>) NR listing also enables the potential eligibility for a state 25% rehabilitation tax credit. (<http://www.mdah.ms.gov/new/preserve/tax-credits/>)

Civil Rights Framework

"In 2000, Congress directed the National Park Service to prepare a nationwide study of the story of American civil rights. Completed in January 2002 (rev. 2008), *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites*, represents the first chapter in a larger study on the history of civil rights that will help the National Park Service evaluate proposals for new units in the park system. The National Park Service is proceeding with more detailed studies of additional chapters in the civil rights story by evaluating the long history of issues regarding equal access to public accommodations, housing, employment, and voting rights."

<https://www.nps.gov/nhl/learn/civilrights.htm>

https://www.nps.gov/nhl/learn/themes/CivilRights_Framework.pdf

The recent interest in civil rights history at the local, state, and federal levels is advantageous in achieving recognition for associated sites. However, recognition doesn't always ensure preservation of resources nor restoration of their function as community assets and part of a living tradition. Alabama's civil rights sites have seen much of the positives and negatives of recognition in their communities. Stakeholders from Birmingham, Selma, and Montgomery, Alabama could provide useful insights to negotiating these pluses and minuses should greater recognition of East Biloxi's civil rights heritage be sought. The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (<http://www.bcri.org/index.html>) and the Selma Redevelopment Authority (<https://www.selmadowntown.org>) are two potential points of contact.

In summary East Biloxi has many historic assets and opportunities for preservation. From the significance of its past could yet be derived an exceptional future.

Appendix A: Work Program

Scope of Work

This project consists of two components: An intensive-level, comprehensive survey, and a National Register Nomination.

Phase I: Completion of the survey of twenty-three (23) resources defined in Attachments B & C. Comprehensive, intensive survey of all buildings will be required. As the majority of structures derive their significance from historic people and/or events, extensive research will be required for each structure. This includes, but is not limited to, establishing exact dates of construction, ownership (chain of title), as well as elaborating on what historic events took place in association with each structure, a timeframe for said events, and their correlation with regional or national events or movements. The consultant is expected to collaborate with the City's Historic Administrator, and to actively engage the local community to supplement the documentary record through oral histories or informal interviews. Upon completion of the survey, the Consultant shall complete a survey report, following the format specified in the attached Survey Standards. All survey materials must be submitted and approved by MDAH prior to initiating the National Register phase of the project.

Phase II: Completion of a National Register Nomination for the Dr. Gilbert R. Mason Office, located at 670 Division Street.

Survey materials will be submitted to MDAH Survey Manager, and be copied to the City of Biloxi according to the following schedule:

The Consultant shall submit all research materials, survey forms, and digital photographs on portable media for review by the Historic Preservation Division, MDAH. January 6, 2017.

The Consultant shall submit a final draft of the Survey Report for review by February 17, 2017.

The Consultant shall submit draft National Register materials, including a draft nomination, required photos and maps for review and comment by April 7, 2017.

The Consultant shall submit final National Register materials, incorporating changes requested by MDAH, by April 28, 2017.

The Consultant shall present the historic district nomination to the Mississippi National Register Review Board meeting in Jackson, Mississippi, currently scheduled for July 20, 2017.

Materials from each review will be returned by MDAH for revision in a timely manner, and this project will not be considered complete until changes requested by MDAH have been made and the finished product has been received by both MDAH and the City of Biloxi.

Survey Phase

The Consultant shall conduct a survey of twenty-three (23) resources as defined in Attachments B & C.

A. Survey Inclusion Criteria

1. All properties within the proposed survey area (Attachments B & C) shall be recorded on Historic Resources Inventory forms.
2. Subsidiary buildings such as garages and storage sheds will not normally be recorded on individual Historic Resources Inventory forms, but instead on the form for the building to which they are subsidiary. However, an individually notable subsidiary building, such as a carriage house or barn, should be recorded individually.
3. A vacant lot or a site where a building no longer stands will not normally be recorded on a Historic Resources Inventory form, except when the building previously there was of importance in understanding the historical or architectural development of the community and when sufficient information (such as photos or Sanborn maps) exist to justify the preparation of an inventory form.

B. Survey Documentation

The survey shall consist of at least three phases: archival research, fieldwork, and compilation onto Historic Resources Inventory forms. Archival research will primarily take place at the local library, and should include Sanborn map research, whether undertaken online or in a local collection. Fieldwork will take place principally on foot and includes a digital photograph of each major structure on a property and field notes about the building including a site plan drawn on the scene. Compilation of the archival research and field notes and photos will result in a completed survey form for each major building within the survey boundary.

The survey shall be recorded on Historic Resources Inventory forms which will be provided by the HPD, or a computer-based equivalent approved by HPD. The forms shall be completed according to the instructions provided by HPD and to the standards adopted by HPD in its "Survey Standards" (Attachment C). Original survey forms with attached photo shall be provided to MDAH as part of the final project materials and a second set provided to the City of Biloxi.

C. Digital Photography

1. At least one, clear, sharp digital image must be taken of all elevations visible from the public right of way.
2. Digital images must be six megapixels or greater (2000x3000 pixel image at 300 dpi), and be in compliance with NPS Photo Policy standards for National Register properties and National Historic Landmarks. This information can be found at the following line.

<http://www.nps.gov/nR/publications/bulletins/photopolicy/index.htm>

3. Digital photographs are expected to be high-quality--not blurry, washed-out, or grainy--showing the complete facade of the building or the most significant part of a landscape, structure, or other resource. Digital photographs that do not provide adequate

representations of resources will be sent back to the consultant and must be re-shot before the survey will be approved by the Survey Manager.

4. Significant outbuildings, such as carriage houses, kitchen dependencies, etc. should be photographed and surveyed on a separate survey form.

5. Copies of digital images for each surveyed property must be submitted on a CD or other acceptable forms of portable media such as flash drives.
 - ❑ Each image must be labeled with the address of the property, number followed by street.
 - ❑ Digital images may be in .JPEG or .TIFF formats.
 - ❑ Images must be organized in folders according to street name.
 - ❑ CD or portable media must be labeled with the Consultant's name, project name, and date (month/year) of photos. When multiple CDs are needed, discs should be numbered sequentially.

D. Printing Digital Photographs

All digital photographs are to be printed out on professional quality photo paper in 4x6 format at 300 dpi and attached to the HRI form using archival glue (see Attachment C for full printing standards). Photographs stapled to the HRI form will not be accepted by the Survey Manager.

E. Maps

- a. The location of all surveyed properties shall be indicated on large-scale maps, keyed to the survey sequence number. Copies of city engineering maps or the county property ownership maps are normally sufficient for this purpose.
- b. Originals of all maps will be given to MDAH. A second original or a high-quality copy of each map will be made and deposited with the City of Biloxi.

F. Survey Report:

A survey report shall be prepared discussing the project objectives, historical research, methodology, and findings. A copy of the report will be submitted in draft form for review by the survey manager, Historic Preservation Division (HPD).

National Register Phase

The Consultant will also prepare a National Register nomination for the Dr. Gilbert R. Mason office at 670 Division Street. The National Register nomination will be prepared according to the guidelines promulgated by the National Register office and in the format specified by the Historic Preservation Division, according to the above schedule.

Any corrections or additional information required by the Mississippi National Register Review Board or the National Park Service (NPS) shall be provided by the Consultant in a timely manner.

A. National Register Materials

1. An original, fully completed electronic version (preferably created in MS Word) of the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (NPS form 10-900, October 1990) for the nominated property. All documentation must be in conformance with standards established by the National Register office and set forth in National Register Bulletin 16-A.
2. Two 5" x 7" color photographic prints and a digital image are required for each view submitted. All

exterior elevations, and representative interior views should be included in the photographic coverage. Photographs should also clearly depict the current condition of the property, as well as any historically significant features and alterations that may have adversely affected the property's historic integrity. Photographs should be labeled as specified by the National Register Office and the Historic Preservation Division. Photographs and digital images should adhere to the following National Register photo standards as outlined by the National Park Service.

http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/photopolicy/Photo_Policy_update_2013_05_15.pdf

3. Floorplans illustrating all occupied floors. Floorplans should be to scale, and shall include dimensions of the major rooms, but need not be formal display drawings.

B. Review Board Presentation

The consultant shall be available to make a presentation about any nominations completed under this contract to the Mississippi National Register Review Board at its next scheduled meeting that falls more than sixty-five days after the receipt of the final nomination by the Historic Preservation Division. In the case of this contract, the presentation of the district nomination should occur at the National Register Review Board meeting currently scheduled for July 20, 2017.

