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Old Mama Rosa's meets new-school design: A peek at big changes for a New Orleans landmark

BY SUE STRACHAN | STAFF WRITER SEP 19, 2019 - 7:01 AM

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MamaRosa's Slice of Italy, 614 -618 N. Rampart St. Year unknown.

Photo by John Watson Riley/courtesy of the Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carre Digital Survey at The Historic New Orleans Collection.

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Many fondly remember Mama Rosa's Slice of Italy on North Rampart Street. Its heyday began in 1982 when People magazine reported it had some of the best pizza in the country. The building was an anomaly in the French Quarter, with a midcentury modern façade.

Now it's even more of a contrast. With a new contemporary façade and interior, the main building has been converted into three upscale residential condominiums, along with first-floor commercial space and a new detached unit in the back. The condos start at \$925,000.

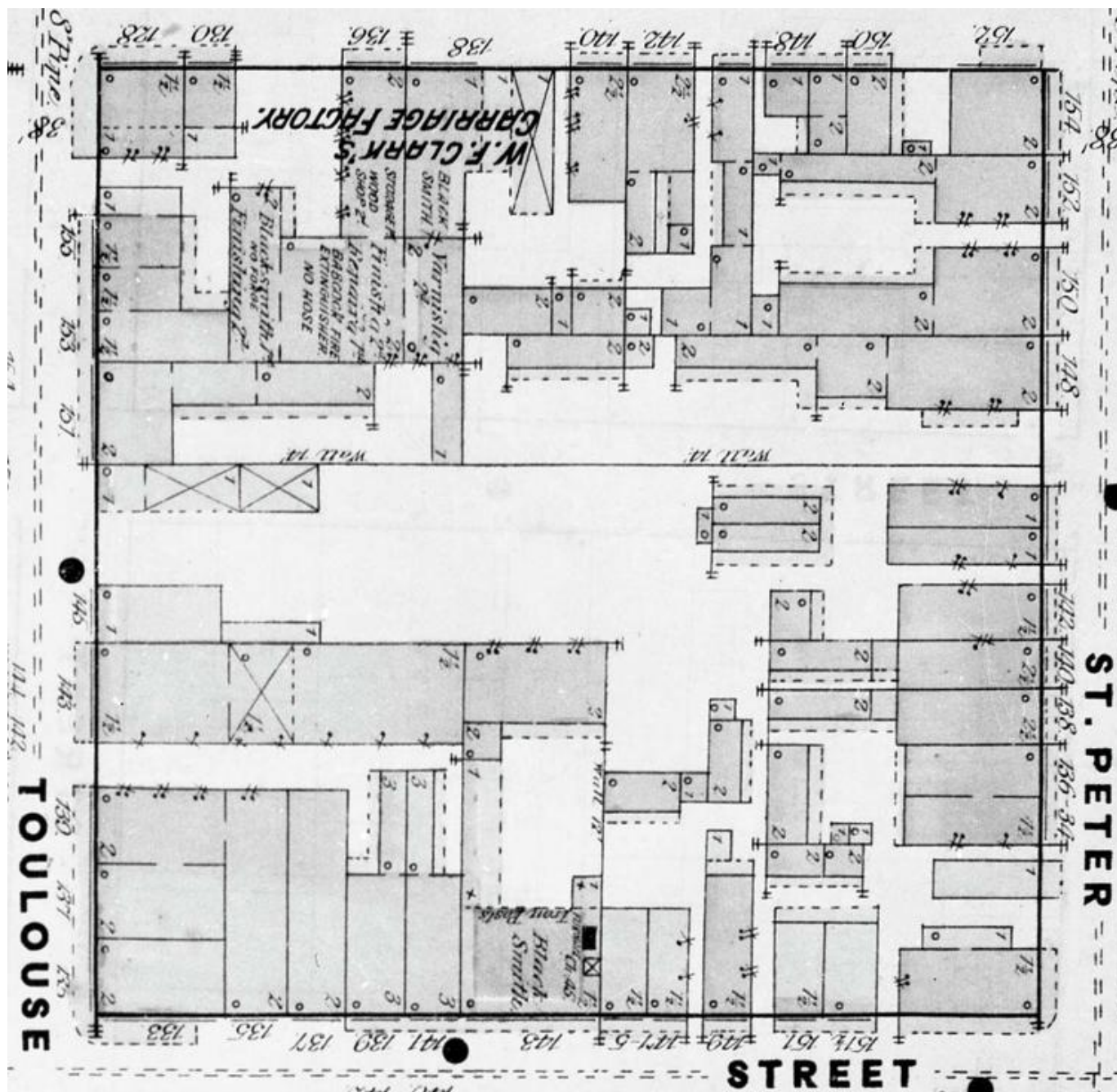
The old brick side walls were incorporated into the new building.

The property is owned by Rampart 618 LLC; Harold Gaspard is listed as agent and Elit Group LLC is listed as an officer, according to Louisiana Secretary of State records. The Elit Group has George Akirtava and Javier Barrera, who is the building architect, as registered agents, according to state of Florida records.

Records dating up to 2011 can be found online in the Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carre Digital Survey, showing that the property has been through even more dramatic changes. The first description of the land, in 1722, was as a cemetery. On Aug. 10, 1801, the Spanish government ordered the city to sell the parcel of land bordered by North Rampart, Toulouse, St. Peter and Burgundy streets, dividing and selling it to seven people.

The cemetery was moved, starting on Aug. 19, 1801, according to a plan drawn up by Carlos Laveau Trudeau, surveyor general of the Spanish government. Trudeau already had designed Lafayette Square in 1788 and went on to serve as acting mayor of New Orleans in 1812 when Louisiana became a state.

The property changed hands 15 times in the 19th century. In 1876, a Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows that it may have been part of the W.F. Clark Carriage factory.



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, April 1876. It appears that 614-618 N. Rampart St. may have been party fo the W.F. Clark Carriage Factory.

Provided photo by The Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carre Digital Survey at The Historic New Orleans Collection

The ownership of the building changed hands a few more times in the 20th century. Records about when the more modern building was constructed could not be found.

In 1956, though, Gibby's Pizza was located at 616 N. Rampart St. Author Lane Casteix, in his *Catahoula Chronicles*, penned an "Ode to Gibby's Pizza," writing that he would watch, "Gibby toss the spinning dough into the air before gently laying it down to receive the succulent sauce, spicy pepperoni, anise-flavored Italian sausage, fresh mushrooms, and its topping with cheese."

WWOM (Wonderful World of Music) radio station hit the airwaves in the location in 1960, at one point featuring actor John Larroquette as DJ Brother Judas. The first floor housed Fallo-VanOs Floral Co. and Electrolux appliance store. (Fallo-VanOs Floral Co. was founded in 1869 and is now located in Metairie.)

Sometime in the 1970s, Gibby's closed and Mama Rosa's Slice of Italy opened, offering \$5 pizzas and late-night delivery, according to an article by Missy Wilkinson in *Curbed*. She also wrote that "by the early 2000s, the restaurant's reputation had declined, and its upstairs launched a second life as a venue for live music, circuit parties and raves."

The new use as luxury condos has, in the span of about five decades, brought the building full circle, from being home to a "Slice of Italy" to housing the upper crust.



New luxury condominiums replaced the building where Mama Rosa's Slice of Italy was located on N. Rampart Street.

NOLA.com staff photo

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