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Readers chime in with memories of old Parkway building at City Park Avenue and Dumaine Street

BY SUE STRACHAN | STAFF WRITER SEP 5, 2019 - 12:30 PM

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The Parkway Bar, at the corner of City Park Avenue and Dumaine Street, year and photographer unknown.

Provided photo by Frances Hornung

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When Ralph's on the Park opened in 2003 at 900 City Park Ave., it was continuing the building's history as a festive place for New Orleanians to gather.

Some of its history was chronicled in an InsideOut article on July 20.

The original building was constructed in 1860 as a coffeehouse, and then it held a series of restaurants until 1917. But in doing research about the building, there was a gap in information for about 70 years, from 1917 to 1985, though Ralph's on the Park proprietor Ralph Brennan remembered a bar there in the 1970s and early '80s.

Readers who saw the July article wrote in about the bar, too, but there was a debate on Facebook about its name: Was it Parkway or Parkview?

That question was answered recently when a batch of emails came in saying it was definitely Parkway. The confusion possibly came because it was located in the Parkview neighborhood,

plus there was another local bar named Parkview Tavern, located on North Carrollton Avenue.

Readers helped fill in other parts of the information gap as well.

Mary Kathryn Elmer recalls her friend Steve Slumber as a DJ, and she would limbo under a pool cue during the late '70s and early '80s.

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The most detailed account came from Charles Murret, who said in a letter that he lived only one block away from 900 City Park Ave. for almost 70 years.

According to Murret, the building was shuttered from 1929 to 1935. It then was broken up into sections with different addresses: For example, 904 City Park Ave. was the address for the second floor, which had been divided into four apartments in 1935.

He recalled that at 906 City Park Ave., the last section of the building going toward Bayou St. John, there were several businesses: Park Bar and Restaurant (1935 to 1937); Vinson Cleaners and Laundry (1935 to 1938), a florist (1949 to 1953), Comeaux Furniture and Appliance (1954 to 1959) and the City Park Tennis Shop (1965 to 1983).

From 1938 to 1946, the main part of the building was an H.G. Hill Grocery Store, which then became Parkway Beer Parlor, serving basic food and beverages, in particular to Andrew Higgins and his employees when the Higgins boat factory and production center was located nearby.

In 1949, the restaurant and bar had a slight name change, Parkway Beer Parlor and Restaurant, noting its expanded food offerings.

Frances Hornung was the granddaughter of Josephine and Anthony Vicari, who purchased the building just after World War II, calling it Parkway Bar, and it still served refreshments, beer and food.

The location proved popular with New Orleanians. “The bar was enjoyed by tennis, baseball and golf players after their outings in City Park, and as respite stops for the Dumaine and City Park bus lines,” Hornung wrote. “Numerous families lived in apartments above the bar, including myself.”

In an email, Brian Schneider remembers visiting his grandparents, who lived in a building next door during the summer of 1962, and that the building was a bar with a small grocery.

“My grandfather sent me there to get him a six-pack of root beer. I brought back Nehi. He was furious,” Schneider said. “Ever since then I know that root beer means Barq’s. He made me return it and get real root beer.”

Doug Moreau, who was one of the bar’s DJs, wrote in to say that Pete Barbarich and Tommy McConnell bought the bar business and leased the site July 1, 1977, to June 30, 1985. Moreau was the subject of a Times-Picayune Dixie magazine profile in 1982 about his stint as a DJ, as the “Oldies Apprentice.” The bar had also been renamed the Parkway Tavern.

According to a Times-Picayune article dated May 21, 1978, the building was purchased from the Vicari estate by Maury Herman and Martha and Jack Sands, who opened Tavern on the Park in 1986. In 2003, Ralph Brennan purchased the property, opening Ralph's on the Park.

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