

New Orleans Historic District Landmarks Commission
Landmark Nomination Report
Ruth's Chris Steak House



Meeting Date: November 2, 2022

Property Address: 1100 North Broad Street, 2661 Ursulines Avenue

Owner: Velocity Assets LLC
PO Box 9117
Metairie La 70055

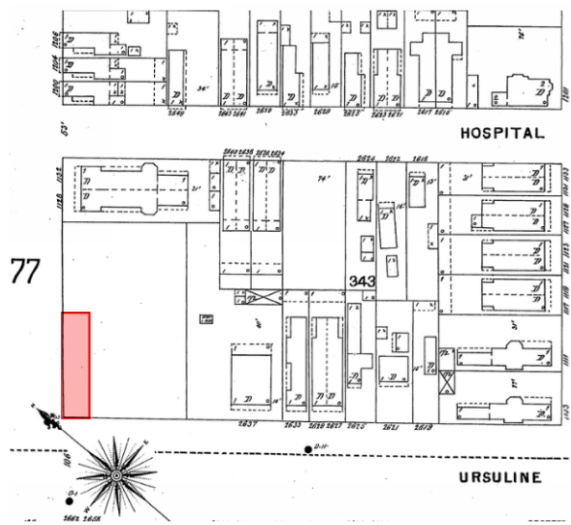
Architect: Unknown

Construction Date: 1896 - 1908

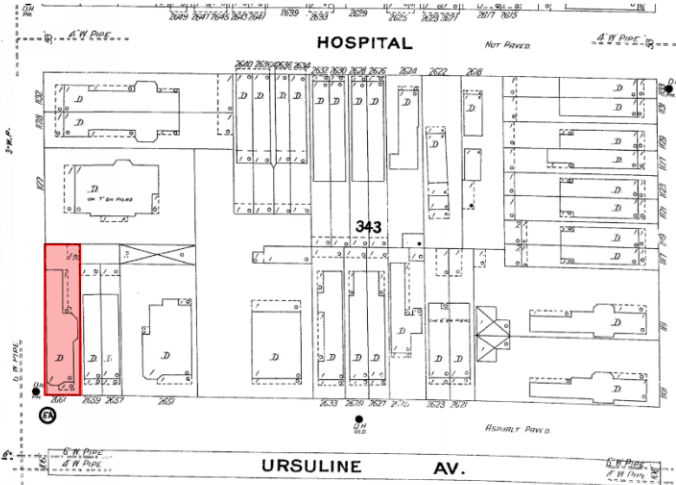
Significance: Cultural, Associated with a Historic Person

Nominated by Nicholas S. Matulich, Jr.

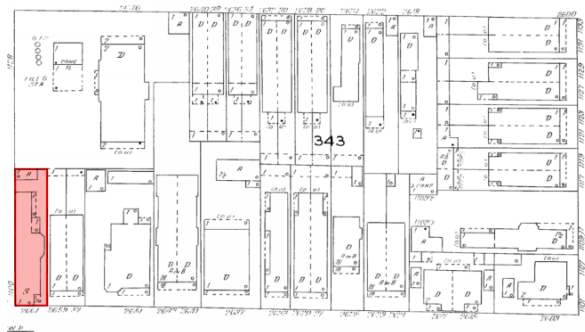
Maps (Figures 1 - 5)



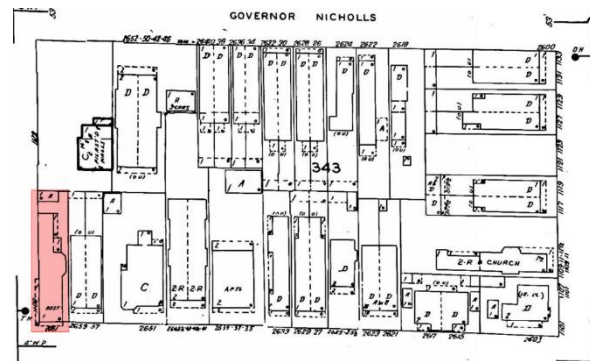
New Orleans 1895-1896 vol. 1 1896, Sheet 61



New Orleans 1908-1909 vol. 2, 1908, Sheet 167



New Orleans 1929-1940 vol. 2, 1940, Sheet 136



New Orleans 1994 vol. 2, 1994, Sheet 136



City of New Orleans Property Viewer, 2022

General History



Figure 6. Chris Steaks, undated (1953 – 1976)

1100 North Broad Street is a contributing-rated building, located on Lot 21 of Municipal Square 343, in the Esplanade Ridge National Register Historic District. The building faces Ursulines Avenue, is backed by Governor Nicholls Street (late Hospital Street, name changed 1909), and is bound by North Broad Street and North Dorgenois Street. The chamfered corner entrance faces the intersection of Ursulines Avenue and North Broad Street. As per the 2007 FEMA Historic District Survey, the building was constructed in 1890, however this is not

consistent with research; while the lot was surveyed on a sketch annexed to an act before the notary, M.T. Ducros, on September 19, 1895, no building appears in the 1896 Sanborn.¹ The building first appears on the 1908 Sanborn Map, so a construction date of 1896 to 1908 would be more accurate.

On March 10, 1926, Leo Spangenberg purchased the building from Thomas J. Connolly, for \$8200, and opened a radio store.² The shop expanded, adding a "White-Knight" soda fountain, and a lunch counter.³ Spangenberg passed away on November 7, 1927, and the building went to Sheriff's Sale, on June 19, 1930.⁴ At that time, the building was listed as a "Commanding Commercial-Residential Single Cottage...containing store, four rooms, kitchenet and two baths."⁵ Levin's Auction Exchange held an estate sale to liquidate fixtures and assets.⁶

¹ (Judgement of Possession 1984)

² (Real Estate Transfers 1926), (Radio Dealer Dies Suddenly 1927), (Sale by Civil Sheriff 1930)

³ (Soda Fountain Added to Radio at A. Leo Spangenberg's Store to Serve Community Patrons 1927)

⁴ (Sale by Civil Sheriff 1930)

⁵ (Sale by Civil Sheriff 1930)

⁶ (By Levin's Auction Exchange 1930)



Figure 7. Chris Steaks, undated

Chris Matulich bought the building on July 29, 1930.⁷ Matulich cycled through several businesses at the address – The Broad Inn Restaurant, Anthony’s Steak House run by Anthony Fraischevich, and Chris Restaurant - before becoming Chris Steak House in 1953.⁸ Matulich had some steak experience; he was originally business partners with John Vojkovich; the two had opened Crescent City Steakhouse, at 1001 North Broad Street, in 1934.⁹

Matulich listed the business for sale in 1965.¹⁰ Ruth Fertel, a lab technician at Tulane, mortgaged her house on Seville Drive to buy the business - but not the building - for \$18,000; the bank convinced her to take out an extra \$4000 for working capital.¹¹ She took

over the business on May 24, 1965.¹² Just four months later, Hurricane Betsy hit and Fertel fed victims and relief workers free meals, endearing her and the restaurant to the community.¹³ Fertel recounted the event in an interview in 1990, “I had \$2800 of steaks in the freezer, and in those days that was a hell of a lot of meat. I got all the cooks together and we cooked them took them down to St. Bernard Parish. People could come out to St. Bernard, but no one could go in.” Fertel’s brother met her at took the steaks to Plaquemines Parish, where his restaurant, Sig’s, was being “used as a headquarters for insurance adjusters, he fed the steaks to whoever came in looking for food.... And you know what? I think God blessed me for it. After Betsy, there were construction crews working ‘round the clock with unlimited expense accounts. I got a lot of business from them. Then to top of off, the archbishop said you eat meat on Friday. Friday became one of our biggest nights, and still is.”¹⁴

In his 2011 family memoir, Ruth Fertel’s son, Randy Fertel, described the interior of the original Ruth’s Chris:

The “front” of the restaurant had the mahogany-sided and white marble-topped bar that probably dated from the day Chris opened in 1927.¹⁵ Here people with reservations leaned, nursing their drink as they waited in line for a table, entertained (or aggravated)

⁷ (Six Shots Fired Into Orleans Bar 1951), (Chris’ Steakhouse, 1100 N. Broad, Serves Juicy Steaks Exclusively 1954), (Dixie Beer Finer Than Ever 1940)

⁸ (Two Taken After Bandits Assault, Rob Delivery Boy 1931), (Dixie Beer Finer Than Ever 1940), (3 Firms Cited For Cut Prices 1941), (White Waitress Wanted 1944), (Application is Being Made 1945), (Anthony’s Steak House 1952), (Experienced Waitress Wanted 1952), (Chris’ Steakhouse 1953), (Bloor 2007)

⁹ (Bourg 1989)

¹⁰ (Established Steak House 1965)

¹¹ (Fox 1988), (Fertel, *The Empire of Sizzzzzzle: Mom Buys a Steakhouse* 2011), (Furdyk 2022)

¹² (Fertel, *The Empire of Sizzzzzzle: Mom Buys a Steakhouse* 2011)

¹³ (Bloor 2007), (Fertel, *The Gorilla Man and the Empress of Steak: A New Orleans Family Memoir* 2011)

¹⁴ (Jensen 1990)

¹⁵ Multiple contemporary sources claim that Chris Steakhouse opened at 1100 N. Broad St. on Ruth Fertel’s birthday, February 5, 1927, but this is not supported by primary source documentation. Leo Spangenberg was still operating a radio shop at the location, until his death on November 7, 1927.

by the TV that almost always droned on. Tables up front were less desirable, unless you wanted to catch the news or a ball game. The two main dining rooms, separated by a varnished plywood partition, held only 17 tables.

Around the main dining room hung nostalgic renderings of gargantuan Hereford steers that seemed about to burst the picture frames. The partition was stained by years of nicotine and airborne butter thrown off by the sizzling steaks as they were hurried to table. In a large nook toward the rear of the main room, one large table sat eight or squeezed 10. Above it later hung rows of caricatures of her best customers. A third dining room for overflow or private parties was attained through the kitchen's swinging door and up a short flight of stairs.¹⁶

The act of sale stipulated she could use the name Chris Steak House only as long as she was at that location.¹⁷ In 1969, she opened a second location, Chris II, at 1000 Stephens Street, in Gretna.¹⁸ Matulich sued Fertel for using the name at a new location; Fertel won the lawsuit since she was still operating at the Broad Street location.¹⁹ In 1974, a fire at the Broad Street restaurant



Figure 8. Ruth's Chris Steaks rendering, undated

spurred a move to 711 N. Broad Street, necessitating a name change; Ruth added her name to the front, and the restaurant became Ruth's Chris Steakhouse.²⁰

The first franchise of Ruth's Chris opened in 1976 in Baton Rouge.²¹ The 1100 North Broad Street location closed on March 31, 1983; by which point, Fertel had nine other locations in the State.²² The closure was an occasion; as reported in the Times-Picayune, the next day, "A memorial

¹⁶ (Fertel, *The Gorilla Man and the Empress of Steak: A New Orleans Family Memoir* 2011)

¹⁷ (Names 1991)

¹⁸ Ibid, (Collin 1972)

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., (Faircloth 1998)

²¹ (Pope 2002), (Lodge 2015)

²² (Ruth's Chris Steak and Lobster House 1983), (Ruth's Chris Steak House 1983), (Kaber 1983)

wreath hung on the wall, black arm bands sat on the bar, and the regulars crowded through the door in a rowdy requiem for Ruth's Chris Steak and Lobster House at 1100 N. Broad Ave.... A yellowed list of the first charge-account customers still hangs on the wall, including names such as Al Hirt, Sidney Bestoff, L.H. Perez III, John Schwegmann, and others."²³

In 1999, Fertel sold the business, and in 2005, the company's headquarters moved to Florida, and went public, trading on the Nasdaq Stock Market under RUTH.²⁴ The business rebranded in 2008 as the Ruth Hospitality Group; there are over 100 locations in the US, and in 11 countries, as of 2022.²⁵

The building at 1100 North Broad Street has been out of commerce since 1983. It was owned by the Matulich family until 2021, when it was sold to Velocity Assests LLC for \$300,000.

Building Description



Figure 9. 1100 N. Broad St., 2007

1100 N. Broad Street is a two-story, wood-frame, chamfered cornerstore building, with an irregular footprint, and a continuous brick foundation. There is a projecting storefront at the Ursulines Avenue facing elevation. There are entrances at the corner, which lies at the intersection of North Broad Street and Ursulines Avenue, and on the North Broad Street facing elevation. Both North Broad Street facing doors are topped with transoms. The building has an open gable

roof, clad in asbestos shingles, with a decorative terracotta finial at the ridge. There are fish scale shingles and an off-center 12-lite window at the gable. Windows are present at both the North Broad Street and Ursulines Avenue facing elevations: two 12-lite wood windows are at the Ursulines Avenue facing elevation, two 12-lite wood windows, one 7-lite wood window, one 5-lite wood window, two 2/2 wood windows, one 1/1 aluminum window, and one overlapping horizontally sliding sash aluminum window are present at the North Broad Street facing elevation. Storefront windows at the North Broad Street facing elevation, visible in historic photos, are currently covered, and it cannot be determined if they are extant. A damaged canopy, supported by curved corbels, wraps around the storefront.

²³ (Kaber 1983)

²⁴ (It All Starts With Ruth 2022)

²⁵ (Ruth's Chris Vying to Change Name 2008), (Ruth's Chris 2022)

Statement of Significance and Staff Recommendation

The Historic District Landmarks Commission evaluates the significance of a structure based on the four criteria as established by Section 84.22 of the City Code, any one of which can make a building eligible for nomination.

Landmark or landmark site means an unimproved parcel of ground (landmark site) or such parcel with improvements or such improvements without grounds (landmark), wheresoever located in the city, subject to the jurisdiction of the historic district landmarks commission, of particular historic, architectural, or cultural significance, which parcel plus its improvements, if any:

- (1) Exemplify or reflect the broad cultural, political, economic, or social history of the nation, state, or community;
- (2) Are identified with historic personages or with important events in national, state, or local history;
- (3) Embody distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or of indigenous materials or craftsmanship; or
- (4) Are representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual ability has been recognized.

In New Orleans, Ruth's Chris "achieved mythic status;" it was a popular spot for politicians - Former US Senator Mary Landrieu said "Everything I learned about politics (was) through my years of dining at Ruth's Chris. In New Orleans, Ruth's Chris has become not only a place of business but also a way of life."²⁶ In 1983, the Times-Picayune reported that once, "former Governor Edwin Edwards was standing near the door and a couple asked him to seat them, thinking he was the maître d'. He took their order and poured the wine."²⁷

Fertel is still known as "The First Lady of American Restaurants," and won numerous awards throughout her career, including "the 2001 Ella Brennan Savoir Faire Award, the Restaurant Business High Performance Leadership Award, the DiRoNA Hall of Fame Award, Executive of the Year from Restaurants and Institutions Magazine, the Horatio Alger Award and the 1999 Lafcadio Hearn Award presented by the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute."²⁸ Fertel is arguably, the most successful female restaurateur in the United States.

Ruth's Chris is inextricably linked to Ruth Fertel and is an undeniably an emblem of the City's culinary heritage. For these reasons, the staff recommends that the building be nominated for study as a landmark.

Works Cited

2013. "About Ruth." *Fertel.com*. Accessed September 13, 2022. http://www.fertel.com/images/about_ruth.pdf.
- Bourg, Gene. 1989. "Crescent City Steaks Its Claim." *Times-Picayune*, September 8: L31.
- Business First*. 2008. "Ruth's Chris Vying to Change Name." March 27. <https://www.bizjournals.com/columbus/stories/2008/03/24daily28.html?ana=yfcpc>.
- Collin, Richard H. 1972. "'Junior' Every Bit As Good as 'Dad'." *New Orleans States-Item*, November 11: 42.
- Faircloth, Anne. 1998. "So Just What Does 'Ruth's Chris' Mean." *Fortune Magazine*, July 6.
- Fertel, Randy. 2011. "The Empire of Sizzzzzzle: Mom Buys a Steakhouse." *New Orleans Magazine*, October. Accessed September 13, 2022. <https://www.myneworleans.com/the-empire-of->

²⁶ (Pope 2002)

²⁷ (Kaber 1983)

²⁸ (Bloor 2007), (About Ruth 2013)

- sizzzzzzle-mom-buys-a-steakhouse/.
- . 2011. *The Gorilla Man and the Empress of Steak: A New Orleans Family Memoir*. Oxford: University of Mississippi Press.
- Fox, Tom. 1988. "Lady From Happy Jack Ruth's Ready For A Game Of." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 30: A23.
- Furdyk, Brent. 2022. "The Untold Story of Ruth's Chris Steak House." *Mashed*, February 9. Accessed September 1, 2022. <https://www.mashed.com/204435/the-untold-truth-of-ruths-chris-steak-house/>.
- International Directory of Company Histories. 1999. "Ruth's Chris Steak House History." Vers. Vol 28. *Funding Universe*. St James Press.
2022. *It All Starts With Ruth*. Accessed October 10, 2022. <https://www.ruthschris.com/our-story/>.
- Judgement of Possession*. 1984. 84-8137 (Civil District Court For The Parish of Orleans, July 21).
- Kaber, Rick. 1983. "Customers Pay Requests At Restaurant's Last Meal." *Times-Picayune*, April 1: 13.
- Lodge, Bill. 2015. ""Philanthropist, founder of TJ Ribs, Ruffino's restaurants T.J. Moran dies at age 84, family friend says: Restaurateur funded medical outreach"." *Baton Rouge Advocate*, May 19. https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/article_ded5de87-b51f-5239-9c83-a44baed334cb.html.
- New Orleans Item*. 1930. "Sale by Civil Sheriff." June 2: 19.
- New Orleans States*. 1941. "3 Firms Cited For Cut Prices ." August 21: 10.
- New Orleans States*. 1952. "Anthony's Steak House." September 27: 12.
- New Orleans States*. 1945. "Application is Being Made." January 19: 14.
- New Orleans States*. 1940. "Dixie Beer Finer Than Ever." June 7: 16.
- Pope, John. 2002. "Steakhouse Giant Dies." *The Times-Picayune*, April 17: 1.
2022. *Ruth's Chris*. Accessed September 2022. <https://www.ruthschris.com/>.
- The Times-Picayune*. 1954. "Chris' Steakhouse, 1100 N. Broad, Serves Juicy Steaks Exclusively." January 14: 20.
- The Times-Picayune*. 1965. "Established Steak House." May 8: 38.
- The Times-Picayune*. 1991. "Names." July 26: 162.
- The Times-Picayune*. 1927. "Radio Dealer Dies Suddenly." November 7: 2.
- The Times-Picayune*. 1926. "Real Estate Transfers." March 28: 18.
- The Times-Picayune*. 1951. "Six Shots Fired Into Orleans Bar." August 5: 22.
- The Times-Picayune*. 1927. "Soda Fountain Added to Radio at A. Leo Spangenberg's Store to Serve Community Patrons." January 30: 39.
- Times-Picayune*. 1930. "By Levin's Auction Exchange." July 15: 27.
- Times-Picayune*. 1953. "Chris' Steakhouse." August 28: 24.
- Times-Picayune*. 1952. "Experienced Waitress Wanted." July 24: 48.
- Times-Picayune*. 1888. "Fire On First Street." December 10: 8.
- Times-Picayune*. 1983. "Ruth's Chris Steak House." April 14: 79.
- Times-Picayune*. 1983. "Ruth's Chris Streak and Lobster House." April 1: 2.
- Times-Picayune*. 1931. "Two Taken After Bandits Assault, Rob Delivery Boy." December 3: 6.
- Times-Picayune*. 1944. "White Waitress Wanted." December 3: 38.

Figure Attribution

Cover Image: Author's Own, 2022

Figure 1. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, New Orleans 1895-1896 vol. 1 1896, Sheet 61

Figure 2. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, New Orleans 1908-1909 vol. 2, 1908, Sheet 167

Figure 3. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, New Orleans 1929-1940 vol. 2, 1940, Sheet 136

Figure 4. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, New Orleans 1994-1995 vol. 2, 1994, Sheet 136

Figure 5. City of New Orleans Property Viewer, 2022. <https://property.nola.gov/>

Figure 6. Chris Steaks, undated (1953 – 1976), www.backofthemenu.com

Figure 7. Chris Steaks, undated. <https://mobile.twitter.com/ruthschrisnyc>

Figure 8. Rendering, undated. <http://mjpfaux.com/2014/01/19/mural-painting-by-connecticut-artist-marc-potocsky-at-ruths-chris/>

Figure 9. 1100 N. Broad St., 2007. FEMA Standing Structures Survey, HP Cultural Resources Map, <https://laocd.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d6b1d2a16f214aaf9339064bc0f26312>