

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

A Slice of “Old Metairie”

An excellent wine dealer and caterer with locations both in New Orleans and Metairie, Martin's Wine Cellar carries a diverse and abundant stock of wines and other spirits. The gourmet deli counter at the Metairie location, 714 Elmeer Drive right off Veterans, is an ever-popular place to eat lunch. The ample dining area is constantly bustling with satisfied patrons, selecting from a large variety of freshly made sandwiches and salads.

Perhaps the most popular salad served there is Martin's “Sena Salad”, which features pulled oven-roasted chicken, golden raisins and field greens with crumbled bleu cheese, pecans and Tabasco pepper jelly vinaigrette. Truly local ingredients come together to make this dish one of the Cellar's best sellers.

But where does the mysterious name “Sena” come from?

Well, it is true that Martin's Wine Cellar occupies the site of the former location of the Sena Mall Movie Theatre. Located between Elmeer Avenue and Sena Drive, it is across from the Sena Mall Shopping Center (with tenants CVS, JoAnn Fabrics and H&R Block). While Martin's is famous for providing great New Orleans sandwiches, salads and plate lunches, the Sena Mall Movie Theatre was known for “Meat Loaf”. The rock singer, that is. Not the dish.

Maybe back in the 80s, dear readers, one or more of you made a midnight visit to the Sena Mall for a showing of “Rocky Horror Picture Show”. Many a Metairie monster made the scene dressed in costume for the event. There's even a “Sena Mall Rocky Horror Picture Show” site on *Facebook*. One can view or post photographs from those nights gone by.

Hopefully it was your ex-boyfriend, and not your current husband, who dressed like Tim Curry in drag. The film begins with a newly engaged couple, Susan Sarandon and Barry Bostwick, having a flat tire near the bizarre residence of mad scientist Dr. Frank-N-Furter, played by Curry. Curry's big moment in the movie was when he removed his cape to

reveal his "Sweet Transvestite" corset, stockings and pumps. "Meat Loaf" plays the part of Eddie, an ex-delivery boy and partial brain donor to Rocky, the mad doctor's blond and tanned creation.

"Rocky Horror" has the longest-running theatrical release in film history and was the first film from a major Hollywood studio to hit the midnight movie market. It gained its cult following as a midnight movie event back in 1977 when audiences started participating with the film in various theatres across the country. Sena Mall became the greater New Orleans area's midnight venue for "Rocky Horror".

But what, or who, gave Sena Drive, Sena Mall and Sena Salad their names?

It has nothing to do with Saint Catherine of Siena Catholic Church, which is nearby on land donated by the Codifer family in 1924, hence the name Codifer Blvd.

No, the answer is to be found in Aalborg, Denmark, where on June 28, 1894, Fred S. Simonson was born. The young Simonson came to New Orleans and married Mamie Frances Montz, a young lady with deep Louisiana roots. The couple had four sons (Fred, Alvin, Arthur and Peter) and a daughter named Sena Elizabeth Simonson.

"Sena" is not in fact a very unusual name in Denmark. Many Danish girls have this name, meaning "blessed". Mr. Simonson was a builder-developer, and it was only natural to name his new street for the girl in the family. Catherine Campanella, in her book on Metairie, mentions Simonson and fellow Metairie builders such as Max Ferran, Neyrey, Tolmas, Lauricella, Gelpi, Sunrise, Osborn and others.

Mr. Simonson built in that area of "Old Metairie" that had years before been owned by a free woman of color named Angélique Aury. She had inherited this property owned by free man of color Pierre Langliche. Langliche was given title to the acreage where Sena Drive is today on October 1, 1787, by Don Andres Almonester y Roxas, Spanish *escribano publico* of New Orleans, remembered for his numerous charitable gifts to the city. Almonester at one time owned forty if not fifty arpents of "Old Metairie" lands fronting on both sides of Metairie Bayou, from at least the Labarre tract (near present-day Homestead Avenue) to Canal Blvd. in New Orleans.

Charles A. Jacobs purchased seventeen arpents on the North side of Metairie Bayou from Angélique Aury on March 22, 1836. Jacobs conveyed the land to Hypolite de Courval, Henri Bonnabel and others. De Courval purchased in June of that year the Labarre lands lying, at the upper part, between those of free man of color L'Esprit and, at the lower part, those of Aury (Langliche) and François J. Dorville. French-born pharmacist Henri Bonnabel (who'd come to New Orleans

in 1825 and set up his business on the corner of Natchez and Tchoupitoulas streets) bought a considerable tract of land on Metairie Ridge from Hypolite de Courval. His holdings amounted to some twelve arpents fronting on each side of Metairie Bayou, with about eleven arpents deep toward the river and on the Northern side extending all the way to Lake Pontchartrain.

Bonnabel worked with J. A. d'Hemecourt to draw up plans for a town to be called Bath, after the old Roman town in England, but the developer/pharmacist died in Paris in 1854 before his plans could see fruition. His son Alfred (one of nine children) loved travelling to Metairie by carriage as a child. Later he took up where his father left off, turning land his father owned into Bath #1 and Bath #2 (Bonnabel Place and Old Homestead, the location of the old Bonnabel homestead). These were the first two residential areas in Metairie, dating to 1914. Alfred's son, also named Alfred, continued the work, soliciting his wife's help in naming the streets. A lover of the classics, Luella Van Vracken Bonnabel chose street names from mythology. She selected Phosphor (Morning Star), Aurora (Goddess of the Dawn), Orion (the constellation of the hunter with his starry belt) Helios (the Sun God) and Hesper (Evening Star). These and other streets running parallel with Bonnabel Boulevard (Sena Drive, Elmeer Place, Brockenbraugh Court, and Homestead Avenue) were all carved out of Bonnabel lands. Brockenbraugh was named for the wife of Alfred Bonnabel, Sr., Laura Brockenbraugh Rappleye.

Even the crossing streets have a classical theme. Since at least the time of Herodotus (Histories, 2.53), Homer and Hesiod have generally been considered the earliest Greek poets whose work has survived, and they are often paired. They are paired again in Metairie's street nomenclature.

The Persigo dairy, today East and West William David Parkways, had once been part of the property of Baden-Baden immigrant Nicholas Betz, who settled on the Metairie Ridge in 1839 and owned everything between East William David Parkway and Sena Drive, where the lands of Alfred Bonnabel began.

The De Limon family owned the land between Ingleside Heights and that of John Betz, son of Nicholas Betz. John's property extended from Metairie Road to the lake and East William David Parkway on the West. By the 1870s, the Betz family owned practically all the property once held by Angélique Aury, on both sides of Metairie Road. And, yes, there is a Betz Place in Metairie. The 1960s brought the Do Drive-In to the De Limon tract, a piece of land that had served as a greyhound track during the 1920s, and is today De Limon Place townhomes and condominiums. Developed by John L. Crosby's Crosby Development Corporation, De Limon Place has been completed since 1994.

Rosa Avenue was named after the wife of John Betz, Rosa Noessei. The Betz home on Rosa Avenue facing Metairie Road, first constructed around 1840, was razed in 1955. This deprived the community of what was then probably Metairie's oldest building.

From land ownership by free persons of color to a foresighted pharmacist named Bonnabel, with names from classical antiquity to a daughter with a Danish name, this slice of "Old Metairie" has many an interesting story to tell.

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