

## NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

*Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions*

*By Ned Hémard*

### **Dixie Doodles**

On September 9, 1913, in New York City, composer Josef Ruben got Jerome H. Remick to publish a rag he had written. He called his ragtime composition *Dixie Doodles*.

A half a century earlier, *Dixie Doodle* was the title of a popular parody of *Yankee Doodle* in the South at the time of the American Civil War. It was written in 1862 by Margaret Weir, published in New Orleans by Philip P. Werlein & Halsey, and dedicated to "our dear Soldiers on the Battle Field". One of the verses was:

"Louisiana, bold and brave,  
Renowned for Creole beauty,  
Your champions will bear in mind  
The watchword, grace and booty!"

Since 1991, the energetic style of hip-hop known as the New Orleans Bounce has given a totally new meaning to the phrase, "grace and booty". That came with the release of *Where Dey At* by MC T. Tucker and DJ Irv. There was booty bouncin' everywhere. In 2010, the Ogden Museum of Southern Art examined Bounce's origins, growth and influence with an exhibition entitled "Where They At: New Orleans Bounce and Hip-Hop in Words and Pictures" (but they just had to correct the spelling: "They" instead of "Dey").

April 2005, this author had the pleasure of enjoying Link Wray and his Ray Men at the 4th annual Ponderosa Stomp at the old location of Rock 'N' Bowl on South Carrollton in New Orleans. Wray pumped up the crowd, "Are you ready to RUMBLE?" A huge scream came back from the audience. *Rumble* (1958), featured in numerous films, including *Pulp Fiction*, is considered one of the greatest rock instrumentals ever, utilizing then-unexplored techniques like feedback and distortion. The song is the only instrumental banned from the radio because some thought the title somehow glorified juvenile violence. January 1959, Link Wray recorded an instrumental entitled *Dixie-Doodle*. November 2005, Wray went to Rock 'N' Roll Heaven.

In between these times, however, *Dixie Doodles* comprised a clever advertising campaign to promote the beer of a great local brewery.

The Dixie Brewery is almost the last bit of living history the city has of its once prolific brewing past (not to undermine the Shops at Jackson Brewery or the long-awaited, revitalized Falstaff Weather Ball and Tower). Dixie Beer's operations began in 1907 when the brewery opened on Tulane Avenue with Valentine Merz at the helm as president. By World War One, the New Orleans brewing industry would undergo serious changes. Although the nation's largest immigrant base, Germans were the ones American doughboys were fighting "Over There". Many of the city's breweries, run primarily by Germans, shut down. And Berlin Street uptown was renamed General Pershing. Dixie Brewery, however, held on.

Prohibition was another challenge, yet Dixie rose again. Tough competition among other national beer companies in later decades would force other local breweries to close. In the 90s came the success of Dixie's Blackened Voodoo, spawning later creations such as Crimson Voodoo, Jazz Amber Light and a dessert beer called White Moose. But then came the mighty power of nature.

Dixie's original building still stands on the site, but barely, having been severely damaged after Hurricane Katrina, then looted of most of its equipment. It is today situated right in the midst of the demolition and future construction site of the LSU/VA hospital complex. But back in happier times, after the end of Prohibition and two world wars, came a brilliant ad campaign. Cute cartoons would appear in the paper with clever captions touting the joy of Dixie Beer. The art would be in the form of stick figures, and the artists and caption writers for the cartoons would be the newspaper readers themselves (whether beer drinkers or not). They would be paid a small but welcome amount for their entries, and if theirs was clever enough, it ended up on a billboard (with an increased monetary reward).

The campaign attracted artists of all ages, and influenced some very young ones. Popular New Orleans artist and lovable anti-modernist George Schmidt (born in New Orleans on November 14, 1944) took great delight in imitating the drawings of these stick men, known as *Dixie Doodles*, from the crowd-pleasing Dixie Beer ad campaign of the time. Doting mother Josephine Schmidt found joy, as well, convinced that little George was a child prodigy. His first drawing was at the age of three in his parents' receipt book at the Lauralee Guest House on St. Charles Avenue. He continued his drawing lessons, under the watchful eye of Mrs. Dempster, at the Sam Barthe School for Boys, located back then in City Park. This author arrived at Sam's City Park campus five years after George, under the tutelage of art instructor Betty Christovich. As for *Dixie Doodles*, my dad was a regular contributor.

He had many *Doodles* that were featured, but the one I most remember was a sketch of two stick figures each wearing a conical Chinese hat on his head (called a *dǔli*). These two extremely skinny stick figures of the Far East were each lifting up a frosty mug of Dixie Beer, and the caption read something like this: "Coo-Ling and Quen-Ching!" This gives the reader an idea of what the cartoons were like.

Author Marvin Perrett in his book, "More Nostalgia" offered a copy of his entry: a running stick man with his hat flying off his head and stating, "I'd Run A Mile For A Dixie!" He then asks the reader, "Did your entry make the Billboard?"

Brewing fine beer isn't the only thing for which we have the Germans to thank. The word *doodle*, in fact, comes from the German language. It first appeared in the early seventeenth century to mean a fool or simpleton. It derives from the German word *dudeln*, to play (originally, to play the bagpipe or *dudel*). Obviously, only a fool would do this. German variants include *dudeltopf*, *dudentopf*, *dudenkopf*, *dude* and *dödel*. "Fool or simpleton" was the intended meaning in the song *Yankee Doodle*, originally sung by British colonial troops before the Revolutionary War. This is also the origin of the early eighteenth century verb to *doodle*, meaning "to swindle or to make a fool of".

The modern meaning of *doodle* as a lazy, unfocused drawing or scribble emerged in the 1930s either from the "swindle or to make a fool" meaning or from the verb "to dawdle", which has had the meaning of wasting time or being lazy since the seventeenth century. The movie *Mr. Deeds Goes To Town* makes much ado about *doodles*, as an eccentric habit that helps people think.

And did you know, the English word "dude" may be a derivation of *doodle*. As in "Dude, where's my beer?"

## **NED HÉMARD**

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