

## NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

*Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions*

*By Ned Hémard*

### 1825-1826

To most New Orleanians, the numbers 1825 and 1826 hold a special place in their psyches. They signify two significant addresses from their cultural past.

Ever since the 1950s, older Crescent City couch potatoes have been aware that 1825 Tulane was the address of Rosenberg's Furniture Store. It was back then that four-year-old Betsy Elliot first recorded a radio commercial for her parents who were in the advertising business. Television and billboard spots soon followed, and the simple jingle resonated with the public:

"Rosenberg's, Rosenberg's. 1825 Tu-Lane!"

One number higher was 1826, the place to go for crawfish, shrimp and all manner of aquatic bounty. Al Scramuzza appeared in his own television ads promoting "Seafood City", "very pretty" and located at "1826 North Broad".

But 1825 and 1826 were not just addresses, but milestone years, in the history of the greater New Orleans area.

Our story begins on a lazy bayou older than New Orleans itself. Native Americans, who canoed this waterway since pre-Columbian times, called it *Bayouk Choupic* for the mudfish along its banks. Along the Mississippi, Tchoupitoulas Street shares a similar etymology. The French and Spanish called the bayou "St. John", and so it is today. They also built fortifications at its mouth, and Fort St. John is today known as Old Spanish Fort. Its ruins hold a lively and interesting history.

On January 21, 1825, an esteemed traveler made his way to Bayou St. John. His Highness, Duke Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, was entertained at Spanish Fort's Pontchartrain Hotel (constructed by Harvey Elkins, who had purchased Fort St. John in 1823). It had a beautiful formal gardens and a splendid gallery overlooking Lake Pontchartrain. Back then the hotel was at the mouth of the bayou and the lake, experiencing those cool lake breezes, since Lake Vista and Lake Terrace had not yet been created. The Duke recorded his experiences in his "Travels in North America". He also described the St. Philip Theatre as "a den of ruffians" after a fight in which twenty people were injured.

On February 11, 1825, newly elected Governor Henry S. Johnson signed legislation creating the Parish of Jefferson out of the Third Senatorial District. It is, of course, named for President Thomas Jefferson (so instrumental in the Louisiana Purchase). Duke Bernhard visited the University of Virginia and Monticello in November of 1825, noting especially the President's art collection. Jefferson and John Adams would each die on the same day, July 4th the following year. The passing of these two great statesmen was duly observed in the Crescent City, that "one single spot" on "the Globe" to which Jefferson referred. Samuel H. Harper delivered "An Eulogium on the late Thos. Jefferson & Jno. Adams, Pronounced in New Orleans, Aug. 16, 1826". Adams' son, John Quincy Adams, was then President of the United States.

In 1825, New Orleans imports and exports were valued at \$17 million, but changes were under way. The Erie Canal opened that same year connecting Lake Erie with New York City, effectively cutting the freight time from three weeks to one between the Great Lakes and

Gotham and quickening the growth of settlements, towns and cities along the way. By 1832, the additional opening of the Ohio Canal, linking the Ohio River to Lake Erie, established an easy, short and safe route between the Ohio Valley and the Atlantic Coast, as well as Europe. The previous journey via New Orleans was longer and more dangerous and required passage through the Gulf of Mexico and around Florida before sailing across the Atlantic.

Louis Casimir Moreau-Lislet and James Brown penned the Civil Code that was formally adopted by the territorial legislature before Louisiana became a state. Moreau-Lislet, Pierre Derbigny and Edward Livingston were asked to draft the revised Louisiana Civil Code that became law in 1825, based largely on the Napoleonic Code. Edward Livingston, prominent jurist and statesman, would later serve as the nation's eleventh Secretary of State from 1831-1833.

April of 1825 brought another famous visitor (and American Revolutionary War Hero) to New Orleans, the Marquis de Lafayette. His appearance was met with resounding hurrahs, this man who had declined an invitation to become Louisiana's first governor following the Louisiana Purchase. After the French general's visit, the downtown park square known as Place Gravier would forever be known as Lafayette Square.

On December 28, 1825, controversial soldier and statesman James Wilkinson, died. Wilkinson had served under Benedict Arnold during the Revolutionary War, and was later appointed governor of the Louisiana Territory in 1805. But it was in 1787 that he undertook a controversial trip to New Orleans, then part of Colonial Spain. He cut a deal with Spanish governor, Esteban Miró, giving Kentucky a trading monopoly on the Mississippi. He and his supporters were also granted 60,000 acres at the junction of the Yazoo and Mississippi Rivers, near present-day Vicksburg. This was to be a refuge should they have to flee the United States for their actions. There were public accusations and congressional inquiries into Wilkinson's intrigues. President Madison ordered his court-martial, but he was found not guilty. One historian called him "a general who never won a battle nor lost a court-martial". His second wife was Celestine Laveau Trudeau of New Orleans.

1826 saw the construction of two historic structures of architectural significance. The Old Mortuary Chapel on North Rampart Street (originally St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church) was built to hold burial services for yellow fever victims. Known to most New Orleanians as Our Lady of Guadalupe (with its International Shrine of St. Jude), it is today the official chapel of the New Orleans Fire and Police Departments.

Some of the most highly regarded architects of the day competed to build this historic church, but architect-builders Gurlie and Guillot won the contract. Francois Correjolles competed, too, but he obtained work on another noteworthy project. In 1826, he designed a fine home in the 1100 block of Chartres Street for Joseph Le Carpentier on a lot obtained from the Ursuline nuns. It would come to be known as the Beaugard-Keyes House.

Le Carpentier made it rich as an auctioneer handling Baratarian contraband from the likes of Jean Lafitte and René Beluche. Son of a wigmaker, René (or Renato) Beluche was the privateer compatriot of the Lafittes, veteran of the Battle of New Orleans, admiral in the Venezuelan Revolutionary Navy and a favorite of Simon Bolivar. Le Carpentier's daughter (Louis Thérèse Félicité Telcide Le Carpentier) married Alonzo Morphy, and their child Paul gained international renown as perhaps the greatest chess player of all time.

The Greek Revival townhouse with its broad gallery and stairs at each end exemplifies a blending of traditional local techniques and styles with then modern American ideals. The home changed hands in 1841 when Josephine Laveau Trudeau, sister of Celestine Laveau Trudeau Wilkinson and widow of Manuel Andry, purchased the Le Carpentier residence. It was during her ownership that the home was rented out to General Pierre G. T. Beaugard and his wife Caroline Deslonde as a "honeymoon cottage". Beaugard lived there after the war, as well.

John A. Merle, Consul of Switzerland, and his wife, Anais Philippon, purchased the adjacent lot

from Correjolles and constructed a formal garden there around 1839. This side parterre garden had grill windows in the brick fence so passersby could view the flowering magnolias, azaleas and pomegranates within.

In the early 1900s, Corrado Giancona's family bought the Beauregard-Keyes House. Posing as wine importers, the family was in fact running an illegal tax-free liquor business out of the house. The "Black Hand" was extorting the Giaconas and demanded payment. An invitation to a dinner party at the house in 1909 to discuss settlement resulted in the Giaconas striking first, killing three and severely wounded a fourth "guest". After many years of disrepair and that mafia shooting on the house's front gallery, the home acquired a new owner in the 1920s who threatened to bulldoze everything to make way for a macaroni factory.

Fortunately, in the 1950s, well-known novelist Frances Parkinson Keyes restored the house and reclaimed the stunning side-yard floral oasis. She replicated the garden walls and grill windows back to the days of Madame Merle. A peek inside the late romantic novelist's garden is an intriguing glimpse back to the days of chess players, generals, lovers and lawbreakers.

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