

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Former Occupations

The nation's unemployment rate hit 10 percent in October, and there are good reasons to believe that relief will be slow in coming. In late 2009, the average duration of unemployment surpassed six months for the first time since 1948, when the Bureau of Labor Statistics began tracking that number. For large segments of society - young adults, men and minorities - that figure was much higher (among teenagers, for example, even the narrowest measure of unemployment stood at roughly 27 percent).

Locally, several of New Orleans' greatest "export" industries (those sold to customers outside the region) have declined in recent decades, including oil and gas, and shipping. Knowledge-based "export" industries, however, such as higher education, insurance agencies and legal services are growing locally. Total "export" jobs have decreased since 1980, such that the New Orleans regional economy is one percent smaller than it was then (as measured by total employment). Still, the Greater New Orleans area has considerable assets that can help the city grow into the future.

2010 has had its ups and downs. The Saints captured its first-ever Super Bowl just as the city elected Mitch Landrieu as mayor (with significant support across racial and demographic lines). The BP Deepwater Horizon rig disaster in April and subsequent moratorium has idled commercial and sport fishing operations, oil and gas related employment and a myriad of other jobs.

Young entrepreneurs are at work creating new jobs for the future, jobs with names and descriptions not yet heard of. If one were to take a time machine back to 1848-1849 New Orleans, one would discover job titles and occupations equally strange. Some of these jobs are perhaps still in existence, but quite rare in today's modern world.

In 1840, New Orleans was rated "the fourth port in point of commerce in the world, exceeded only by London, Liverpool, and New York." In May 1848, George Henry Yewell and a friend, Samuel D. Hayward,

landed in New Orleans. The city was hot and dusty with drays being driven in all directions. Meanwhile the French were firing cannon in jubilee at hearing of the dethronement of Louis Phillippe. Yewell sketched street scenes, and recorded these and his observations of itinerant workers in his notebooks:

"We strolled wherever fancy led, finding amusement in an itinerant Highland piper" or "an organ grinder and his monkey." There was "the razor-strop man who entertained ... with quotations from Shakespeare. In the dusk of evening, it was amusing to hear the Negroes crying ice cream as they traversed the city with the freezers on their heads." It was "then with a prolonged roll would come the cry, 'ICE CRRrreeeam!' loud enough to startle the neighborhood."

A drayman was the occupational name for the driver of a dray, a low, flat-bed wagon without sides. Generally pulled by horses or mules, drays were used for transport of all manner of goods. The term "drayman" is often used in important port cities for the drivers who deliver containers to and from the port. New Orleans' 1849 City Directory names quite a few: John Boekett on Levee Street (Decatur), Richard Kelly on Tchoupitoulas, Auguste Chatilon on Clouet and Humphrey Flynn (on Conti between Derbigny and Claiborne). James Colder was listed as "master-drayman" on St. Mary's between Religious and Rousseau.

Associated trades were those of wheelwright, one who made or repaired the wheels on carriages and drays. P. Boisson and Edward Fitzgerald could carry out these tasks in 1849. John Fitzpatrick, Patrick Kelly and Peter Burr were blacksmiths. George Bleakley and Patrick McAffagan were coachmakers, and Edward Mullony was a coach driver. And to make the barrels or staved containers that were carried on the drays, one needed a cooper (or barrelmaker). Keen Richard on Common, Stephen B. Bogart on Girod and Owen Kelly on Orange Street (between Religious and Tchoupitoulas) were just a few of the coopers listed in 1849.

If a drayman were to get hungry, he may visit a victualer, which was a tavern keeper, or one who provides a ship with food supplies. Philip Kemmer is listed in the 1849 City Directory under this occupation, located on Race Street between Constance and Annunciation.

One occupation thankfully no longer in existence is that of slave trader, which was the 1849 listing for E. Locket at 6 Moreau Street.

1849 saw a number of listings for "fancy store", or *magasin de nouveautés*. A fancy store is one where articles of fancy and ornament are sold. Fancy goods include fabrics of various colors, patterns, etc., such as ribbons, silks and laces, in distinction from those of a simple or plain color or make. J. H. Fassy on Chartres, A. M. Plotez on

Robertson and Bernard Kemmling on Old Levee Street all operated New Orleans "fancy stores" in 1849.

Slaters were the names for roofers in those days. In 1849, J. H. Lyon, George H. Minott and Peter A. Tongulet were so employed.

Fernando Caballero had a paper and cigar manufactory at 51 Goodchildren (now St. Claude Avenue). James and J. M. Caballero were also in the cigar trade, as were Joseph and Jules Domingo. Angel Martin was a cigarmaker on Esplanade, and George Zickendrath was the importer of Havana cigars in 1849.

Stevedores were dock laborers who unloaded the ships. From the phonetic spelling of *estivador* in Portuguese or *estibador* in Spanish, it is translated as "a man who stuffs, or loads". John Land was a stevedore on Love Street in the Marigny, as was Philip Boivet at 77 Port.

John Farren was a steamboat mate. Gaser Tondker was an axe-handle maker. J. J. Husson ran a "bird shop" on Dauphine Street. Henry Tolbert was proprietor of a nonpareil refreshment saloon, and a Mr. Salles operated the Pontchartrain Railroad Ballroom at the corner of Elysian Fields and Moreau, where Old "Smoky Mary" began her run. J. Minister provided "plantation stores" at 126 Old Levee Street. F. Sambola operated a vermicelli and chocolate manufactory also on Old Levee Street.

M. Dodman was a white washer living at 311 Burgundy. Perhaps he did only one kind of painting. A. Delesparre was listed as tallow manufacturer, or chandler, on Dauphine Street. He made candles. Harmon Doane was assistant operator of the People's Telegraph Office. E. Colfax served as impost clerk at the Customhouse, and Thomas Berey was overseer at the U.S. Mint. W. P. Coleman operated undulating steam mills on Poeyfarre Street, between Foucher and Magazine streets. This is today the location of the Cotton Mill Condos.

The cotton industry also required countless cotton factors, or commission merchants, in the City of New Orleans in 1849. A commission merchant was one to whom goods were sent for sale, and who charged a certain percent on the price of the goods sold for his service. Temple Dodsworth, John S. Kelso, John Toole and George Pollard were just a few of the 1849 commission merchants.

A turner is a person who turns wood on a lathe into spindles. J. Felix on Toulouse Street had that occupation in 1849. Saddlers, who made, repaired or sold saddles and other furnishings for horses, were in abundance in 1849 New Orleans. Joseph Bleme was a saddler at 183 Customhouse Street (Iberville).

There were *beaucoup* oyster houses in New Orleans in 1849, such as those run by James Omadudu, G. Fernandez, B. Omila and S. Trapain.

Today, Louisiana's beloved oyster industry has been severely impacted by the oil spill and moratorium. Also businesses that serve the fishing industry have similarly been affected. Among them are restaurants, truckers, net makers, bait and tackle shops, gas stations, marinas, seafood processors and distributors. The Greater New Orleans area looks forward to the removal of the moratorium and the creation of new and unimagined jobs in the future. A look back to the past reminds us of the multitude of occupations that once were, and those that are yet to come.

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