

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Green Ribbon Backordered

Ladies, is the man in your life confused over the difference between ESPN and EPNS? Is your Romeo clueless that ESPN stands for the *Entertainment and Sports Programming Network*, but *does* know that EPNS stands for the *English Place-Name Society*? What? You haven't heard of that most learned group concerned with the toponymy of England, in other words, the study of place-names? An EPNS member would surely know that *castra* (*castrum* in the singular) was the Latin word for a Roman military camp and fortification in Britain. Today Old English forms of the word (caster, chester, cester and ceter) are incorporated into the names of towns such as Lancaster, Gloucester, Manchester, Worcester, Chester and Exeter.

Perhaps your "Renaissance man" might think of another meaning. Has he been spending too much time at the "As you Like It" Silver Shop on Magazine Street? Nickel silver is a copper alloy with nickel, and oftentimes zinc. The usual composition is 60% copper, 20% nickel and 20% zinc. Named for its silvery appearance, nickel silver actually contains no elemental silver unless plated. Then it is known as EPNS, or electroplated nickel silver. Unless your main squeeze is a polymath (rare these days) and you find he's more familiar with EPNS than ESPN, he just might not be that into sports.

But it seems today's All-American average man, especially in New Orleans, is more concerned with other acronyms – like LSU, NCAA, FBS, SEC and, of course, BCS.

The Bowl Championship Series (BCS) is a system that sets up five bowl match-ups involving ten of the top ranked teams in the NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS), including a chance for the top two to compete in the Allstate BCS National Championship Game. This year's top two teams, Number One LSU and Number Two Alabama meet in the Crescent City this January 9, 2012, 8:30 p.m. at the Super Dome.

The BCS uses a computerized selection process and a combination of polls to determine relative team rankings, and to narrow the field to two teams to play in the BCS National Championship Game held after the other college bowl games. The whole idea of the BCS was to end split championships. In that regard it has failed, as the 2003 NCAA Division 1-A football season ended with a split championship (three major conference teams finishing the regular season with one loss, but only two spots available).

Although flawed, the BCS system has been in place since the 1998 season. Prior to its formation, the AP's number one and two teams met in bowl games only eight times in fifty-six seasons. Not such a great record. But with the BCS, the Number One team has played Number Two twelve years in a row by BCS measurements and nine times according to the Associated Press Poll.

This year, there is great enthusiasm over the match-up between LSU's "Fighting Tigers" and Bama's "Crimson Tide". LSU and Alabama have played every year since the 1960s, with Alabama holding an edge in the series team-ups. How LSU's football team was named the "Tigers" and how the team acquired its purple and gold colors is quite an interesting story.

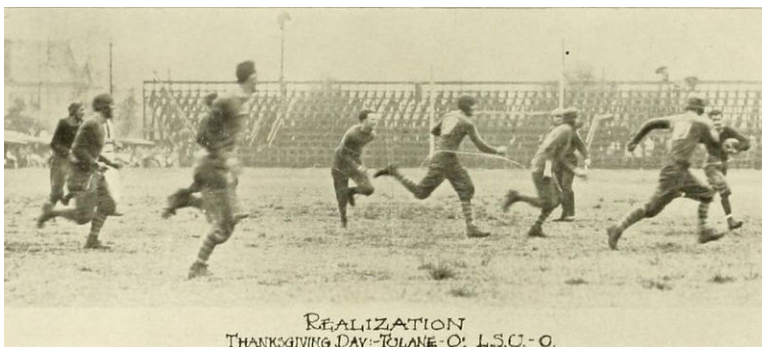
It all began in 1893, when Dr. Charles Edward Coates became chemistry professor and coach of the first LSU football team. When he first arrived at the University in 1893, he found to his surprise "that there was practically no athletics in the student body; no football, no tennis, and only a very little baseball in the spring." Coates had played at Johns Hopkins, where he had received his bachelor's and doctor's degree, though he had never considered himself much of a player. He and Dr. H. A. Morgan, later president of the University of Tennessee, had played some in Canada. Together they endeavored to train two teams to play football. Without uniforms, they nailed cleats on leather shoes and "taught the boys the Leland flying wedge and the turtle back".

Down in New Orleans, Coates and his friend Thomas Levingston Bayne, Jr. (Coates called him "Nervy") established the intercollegiate program at Tulane and Louisiana State University by organizing and coaching the very first Tulane-LSU match-up on November 25, 1893, in New Orleans. Coach Coates realized that the "Old War Skule" (LSU's nickname) "had to have some colors, so Ruff Pleasant, who was later governor of Louisiana, a couple of other men and I went to Reymond's store," related Coates. Reymond's General Mercantile Emporium was a three-story, plaster over brick structure richly detailed with corbelled caps, cast-iron lintels and ornamented brackets, at that time at the corner of Third and Main streets in Baton Rouge.

Coates continued, "We told them we wanted quite a lot of ribbon for colors, but no one knew what our colors were. It happened that the store was stocking ribbon for the coming Carnival season and had a large supply of purple and gold. The green had not yet come in. So we adopted the purple and old gold, bought out the stock, and made it into rosettes and badges. Purple and old gold made a good combination and we have stuck to it ever since."

There are alternate narratives on the choice those colors. In one it is claimed that they were worn for the first time by an LSU team in the spring of 1893 when the LSU baseball squad beat Tulane. Team Captain E. B. Young reportedly hand-selected those colors for the LSU squad. This, of course, contradicts Dr. Coates' story. Another account, untrue if you believe Dr. Coates, is that the colors were chosen in 1893 when the shops in New Orleans (not Baton Rouge) had stocked up on purple, green, and gold for Mardi Gras. LSU decided to buy up all the purple and gold colors, leaving Tulane the only remainder color, green. Trouble is, Tulane's colors are olive and blue. And Coates even names the store and its location.

Tulane won their first football encounter in 1893, beating LSU 34-0. There was no game in 1894, but LSU won five of the next seven jousts. The last of ninety-eight games was played in 2009, with LSU leading the series 69-22-7. 1973, 1979, 1981 and 1982 were the last winning years for the Green Wave. The winner of the Wave-Tigers games took away a trophy flag known as the "Tiger Rag" at LSU and the Victory Flag at Tulane. The "Rag" derived its name from the classic jazz song, originally performed on disc by the *Original Dixieland Jass Band* in 1917. Tulane vs. LSU, Thanksgiving Day, 1914 (below) ended in a 0-0 tie.



Coates described that first game in 1893:

"They gave us a very good beating, to the intense indignation of many of our local followers. Ruff Pleasant got a small cut on the forehead which bled a little bit and he was borne from the field." Ruffin Golson Pleasant went on to become the 37th Governor of Louisiana.

Curiously, the LSU colors were originally blue and white, chosen by David French Boyd, who had been president of the University from 1865 to 1880 and again from 1884 to 1886. When he returned to the University later on he was rather startled to discover that purple and gold were now the school colors. By that time the colors were firmly established and nothing was ever going to be done about it.

The tiger mascot originated with the famous Washington Artillery of New Orleans. A very old militia unit that traces its history to 1838 (or earlier), the Washington Artillery had a logo that featured a snarling tiger's head. It received its regimental flag in 1846 after serving under Zachary Taylor in the Mexican-American War. In 1861 the Unit entered into the American Civil War with four companies serving Lee in the Army of Northern Virginia. A fifth was in the Army of Tennessee. Elements of the Washington Artillery participated in over sixty major actions.

Company B, 1st Special Battalion (Major Roberdeau Wheat's) Louisiana Volunteers were known as the "Tiger Rifles". They became famous because of their flashy Zouave uniforms, their heroic battalion commander and their bravery at the Battle of First Manassas. Their nickname, "Tigers", became attached, first to the battalion, and then to all Louisiana troops serving in the Army of Northern Virginia. Zouave rhymes with "suave," and that's just what the Zouaves of the War Between the States (on both sides) thought they were. Modeled after the fierce and colorful fighters of the French Army who served in Algeria and Morocco, their name came from the *Zouaoua* tribe in the hills of Algeria.



Wheat's Louisiana Tiger Zouave (above), wearing short open-front jacket, voluminous striped trousers, red sash and cap

David French Boyd, first president of LSU after the Civil War, had initially fought in the 9th Louisiana Infantry, a regiment that was part of the famed Louisiana Tigers of the Army of Northern Virginia. He knew well the reputation of the "Tigers" and "Tiger Rifles".

Here's how the LSU "Tigers" came into being, according to Coates:

"It was the custom at the time, for some occult reason, to call football

teams by the names of vicious animals; the Yale Bulldogs and the Princeton Tigers, for example. This is still the vogue. It struck me that purple and gold looked Tigerish enough and I suggested that we choose 'Louisiana Tigers,' all in conference with the boys. The Louisiana Tigers had represented the state in the Civil War and had been known for their hard fighting. This name was applied collectively to the New Orleans Zouaves, the Donaldsonville Cannoniers, and to a number of other Louisiana companies sent to Virginia, who seemed to have the faculty of getting into the hardest part of the fighting and staying there, most of them permanently. One company I knew of went in 200 strong; only 28 returned and many of these were wounded."

According to the University, "Way back in the fall of 1896, coach A. W. Jeardeau's LSU football team posted a perfect 6-0-0 record, and it was in that pigskin campaign that LSU first adopted its nickname, Tigers."

And it wasn't until 1955 that the LSU "fourth-quarter ball club" helped "Tigers" grow into its current and more fearsome sobriquet, "Fighting Tigers".

"So," said Dr. Coates, "'Louisiana Tigers' went into the New Orleans paper and became our permanent possession." But they are seldom, if ever, "paper tigers".

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