

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

A Broken Engagement

On August 22, 1893, it was announced that Annie Turner Howard was engaged to be married ... but not just to anybody. Her intended was the Mayor of Chicago, Carter Henry Harrison.

Nor was her father just anybody. Born in Baltimore, Maryland, he was Charles Turner Howard (March 4, 1832 – May 31, 1885) , notable for organizing and becoming First President of the Louisiana State Lottery Company in 1869. Amassing a huge fortune, he had a beautiful home in New Orleans on St. Charles with a garden described as the 'finest in the city". He reigned as Rex in 1877. He and his wife, Florestile Boullemet, had three sons and one daughter (Annie). He died in 1885 at age 53 after a fall from a carriage in Dobbs Ferry, New York.



CHARLES T. HOWARD.

The whole family was Rex royalty. Annie, the youngest and only daughter (born 1864), reigned as Queen of Carnival in 1884, while her brother Harry became Rex in 1888. Brother Frank T. Howard became Rex in 1895 and married his queen, Miss Lydia Fairchild, in 1899 (the only time in Rex Mardi Gras history that this occurred). Frank T. Howard's philanthropy included money for two public schools, Trinity Episcopal Church and the Kingsley House. For this and other civic activities, he was the first recipient of *The Times-Picayune's* Loving Cup.

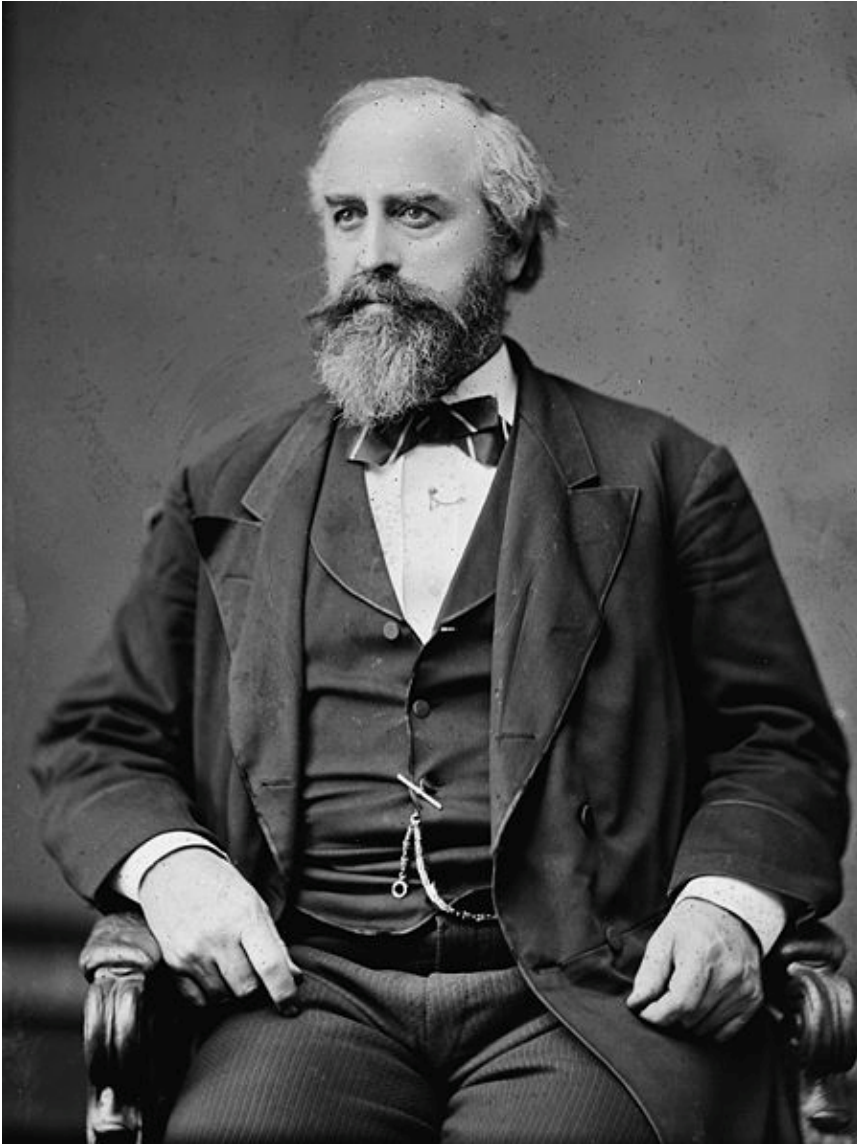
Usually reported as an unsubstantiated legend, the *New York Times* found the story true enough to repeat it on April 15, 1907:

Charles T. Howard, the Baltimore born patriarch of the Howard family, "was blackballed when he applied for membership in the Jockey Club, which operated the famous Metairie race track. He swore that he would convert the track into a cemetery, and to-day the Howard family tomb stands on the site." Mr. Howard was not a man to make idle threats and two years after his snub, on July 2, 1872, the site of the famous match race between Lexington and Lecomte became what is now known as Metairie Cemetery. The configuration of the track can be observed today in the layout of the cemetery.

As for Annie's engagement to Mayor Carter Harrison of Chicago (February 15, 1825 – October 28, 1893), everything seemed to be going along smoothly. Harrison, born in Lexington, Kentucky, was a Yale graduate and (after earning a law degree from Transylvania College in 1855) had served two terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. First cousin twice removed of President of the United States William Henry Harrison, Carter Harrison had served as mayor of Chicago from 1879 until 1887 and was subsequently elected to a fifth term in 1893 (just in time for the World's Columbian Exposition). He was very enthusiastic about displaying his city to the world.

Annie, born in Biloxi, Mississippi, was nevertheless New Orleans Carnival royalty and the daughter of a very wealthy family. Illness during her youth prevented her attending any of the large colleges, but she was carefully educated by governesses at her father's other home on the Hudson River in New York State. She was described as "a bright and companionable woman" by the *New York Times*. On his death, her father left Annie (in addition to her share of his estate) a portrait of him that hung in the parlor of his residence at No. 121 St. Charles, all the silverware in the vault of the Louisiana Lottery Company, as well as the box of imported chinaware, plaques and other assorted items.

And now she was to be married. Sure, her husband-to-be was sixty-eight years of age and she was not quite thirty, but May-December romances were not that unusual. Yet, on the eve of their marriage, on October 28, 1893, two days before the close of the Exposition, disaster struck. Harrison was assassinated in his home by Patrick Eugene Prendergast, a disgruntled office seeker. Harrison would not complete his fifth term, and he would not marry Annie.



Matthew Brady photograph of Mayor Carter H. Harrison

To build a library and donate it to the City of New Orleans to honor her father, Annie purchased the site on the corner of Camp and Delord streets on November 30, 1886, and the work was announced in the local papers on January 30, 1887. Delord Street was named for Delord Sarpy, but (with the new library project) Delord Street was renamed Howard Avenue. The Howard Memorial Library (today miles away on the campus of Tulane University) is actually a revised and enlarged version of a design prepared by renowned architect Henry Hobson Richardson's office for the Hoyt Memorial Library in East Saginaw, Michigan. Richardson, who lived for a time in New Orleans not far away on Julia Street, did not win the Saginaw competition and died in 1886. A surviving letter, however, revealed how very much involved he was in the project. Construction on the "Richardsonian Romanesque" structure began in 1887, and the library was dedicated March 3, 1889. The *New York Times* referred to it as "the last work designed by Architect Richardson" and that Annie and her family also "erected the Louisiana Historical Annex, adjoining the library, which

contains perhaps the finest collection of Confederate archives and mementoes in the South." "In this building," Memorial Hall, they wrote "are the private and state papers of President Davis."



Section above the entrance to Memorial Hall, the Confederate Museum at 929 Camp Street in New Orleans

Annie Turner Howard was not to be deprived of a trip to the altar. On November 12, 1896, she was married in an Anglican church, near the center of London, England. Many famous names are associated with the St. James Parish Church, Paddington: Oscar Wilde, Alexander Fleming, Robert Baden-Powell and J. M. Barrie (creator of Peter Pan), to name but a few. It was there that Annie married Mr. Walter Parrott of the firm of Parrott Brothers, prominent members of the London Exchange. She'd met him the year before while traveling in Egypt. Her New York wedding announcement mentioned her donation "of the splendid Howard Memorial Library to the City of New Orleans" and that she "was reputed to be the richest woman in that city. She owned an elegant mansion there and another on the Hudson River."

As for Mayor Carter Henry Harrison of Chicago, he was not the only five term mayor of Chicago nor was he the only one to be assassinated.

Mayor Anton Cermak of Chicago, while shaking hands with President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt at Bayfront Park in Miami, Florida, on February 15, 1933, was shot in the lung and gravely wounded by Giuseppe Zangara, who at that time was believed to have been aiming at Roosevelt instead of Cermak (but whose aim was deflected at the

critical moment by a doctor's wife, who hit the assassin's arm with her purse). Zangara confessed to the police that he hated people who were rich and powerful, but not Roosevelt personally. Later rumors circulated that it was indeed Cermak who was the intended target, set up by members of organized crime. We may never know the actual truth. Cermak died March 6, 1933, partly because of his wounds, but the primary cause of death (according to his personal physician) was ulcerative colitis.

It may be a made-up bit of history, but a plaque honoring Mayor Cermak can still be seen at the site of the assassination in Miami. It has the mayor's alleged words to FDR after he was shot, "I'm glad it was me instead of you."

Eventually Mayor Carter Henry Harrison's son, Carter Henry Harrison, Jr., was also elected mayor five times. Harrison Sr. had been married with children before his engagement to Annie T. Howard. Harrison Jr., the city's 30th mayor, was actually the first to be born in Chicago.

And now I offer a brief mention of Delord Sarpy, who constructed his home in 1818 on present-day Howard Avenue. The house was built facing the river, customary at that time, and the street eventually came to run alongside the stately residence. Sarpy's edifice stood there for 139 years, but by the 1950s plans were underway to construct the Mississippi River Bridge, and the ravages of neglect and time had taken its toll on the home's previous grandeur. Sam Wilson, Jr., and the Louisiana Landmarks Society battled to save the house from demolition - but to no avail. They presented a plan to reposition the Howard Avenue-Camp Street exit ramp so that the historic home would be spared. But their entreaties were ignored, and down it came in 1957.

The Howard Memorial Library received a gold medal in 1904 from the jury on historical displays, at the World's Fair at St. Louis, Missouri (also known as the Louisiana Purchase Exposition), and a silver medal on the same collection viewed as liberal arts.

That same year (on October 21, 1904), Annie Howard Parrott (1864 – 1904) died at a relatively young age at her home in London, England. The New Orleans newspapers, as well as the Biloxi Daily Herald, paid a great tribute of praise for her many contributions.

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