

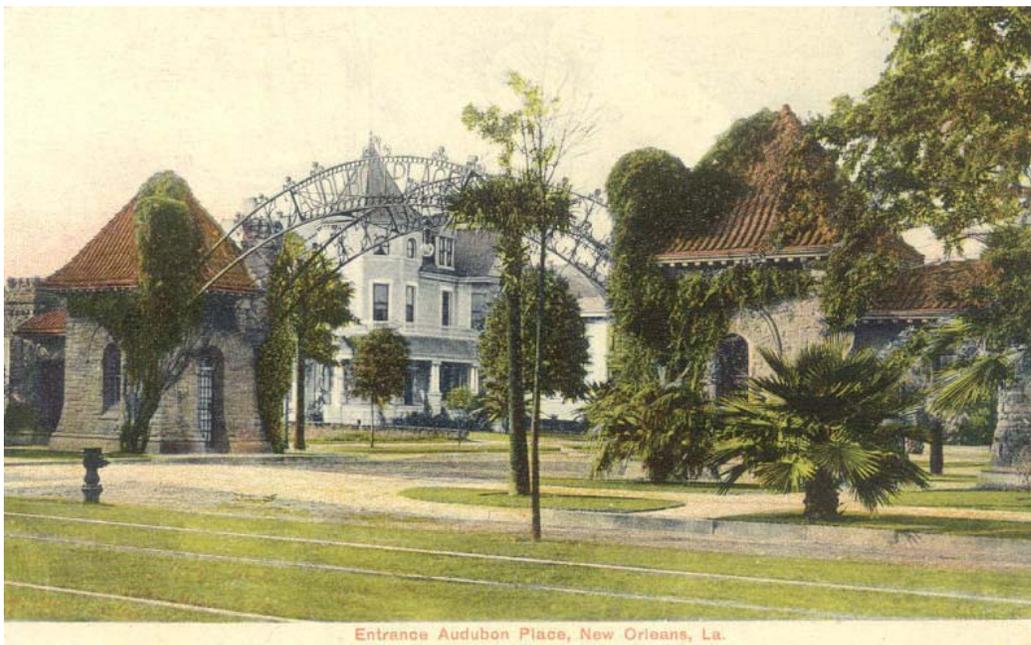
NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

An Ernest Objection

Big things were happening in New Orleans in 1894. The second St. Charles Hotel burned down and the city changed its street numbering system to one that is still in use today. A beautiful Romanesque structure, Gibson Hall, was the first building erected for the new Tulane University. Audubon Place was laid out as the city's latest residential park (Rosa Park was first in 1891). And the Tulane School of Engineering began as "The College of Technology" when it moved from Common Street to the new uptown campus.

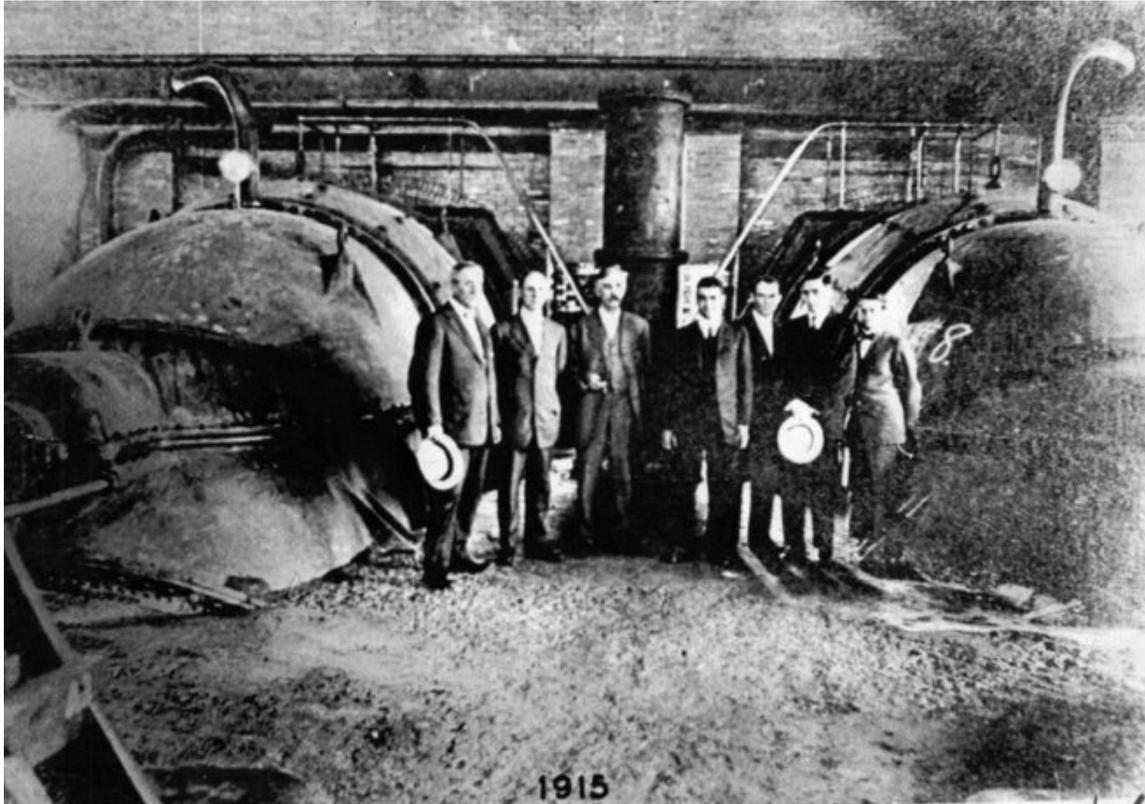


Entrance Audubon Place, New Orleans, La.

Audubon Place, old postcard view

Tulane's engineering graduates of the 1890s would be impressive and make a profound mark on their city and the world. William Monroe White worked on the design and building of many of the world's most important hydroelectric projects including the one at Niagara Falls. Arsène Perrilliat constructed the Mississippi River levees from Baton Rouge to Vicksburg. To improve the city's drainage, the New Orleans

Sewerage & Water Board promptly hired a gifted engineer named Albert Baldwin Wood (December 1, 1879 – May 10, 1956). When not sailing in his beloved sailboat *Nydia*, Wood invented extremely efficient high volume low maintenance pumps such as the “Wood Screw Pump”. In use for decades in New Orleans, Wood’s pumps have been implemented around the globe. He consulted on projects in China, India, Egypt and on the reclamation of the Zuider Zee in the Netherlands.



Baldwin Wood (center) at a New Orleans pumping station, 1915

Wood graduated with a Mechanical Engineering degree from Tulane in 1899, as did fellow classmate and New Orleans native Ernest Lee Jahncke (October 13, 1877 – November 16, 1960). Jahncke’s father, Fritz Jahncke, had come to New Orleans from Hamburg, Germany, in 1870. Finding clay and sand along the northern shore of Lake Pontchartrain, the elder Jahncke formed a prosperous cement business. In order to transport these products, a shipping line was formed, and this in turn led to a shipyard in Madisonville. Ernest (nee Ernst) became prominent as president of both the Jahncke Dry Dock Corporation and the Jahncke Service Corporation, a director of the Canal Bank & Trust and a member of the administrative council of the Atlantic Coast Ship Builders Association of Philadelphia. He was Commodore of the Southern Yacht Club (1914 – 1916), and in 1915 he reigned as Rex, King of Carnival. Miss Sadie Downman was Rex’s queen that year. War had broken out in Europe, but America’s entry was still two years away. Soon this family business, begun by German

Americans, was awarded contracts to build ships for the war against Germany.

During the war, Ernest served the government as gulf director in charge of the Sea Service Bureau and navigation schools of the U.S. Shipping Board. Being a successful naval architect, he belonged to many engineering societies and numerous civic organizations. Eventually he became Assistant Secretary of the Navy during Herbert Hoover's administration and a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) from which he was removed. But his expulsion was not without honor, far from it.



Ernest Lee Jahncke of New Orleans

If one visits the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., he will encounter a photograph of Ernest Lee Jahncke (provided by the Historic New Orleans Collection) and a tribute below, which reads:

"Ernst Lee Jahncke, a former assistant secretary of the Navy, of German Protestant descent, was expelled from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in July 1936 after taking a strong public stand against the Berlin Games. The IOC pointedly elected Avery Brundage to fill Jahncke's seat. Jahncke is the only member in the 100-year history of the IOC to be ejected.

'Neither Americans nor the representatives of other countries can take

part in the Games in Nazi Germany without at least acquiescing in the contempt of the Nazis for fair play and their sordid exploitation of the Games.'

— Ernst Lee Jahncke, American member of the IOC, in a letter to Count Henri Baillet-Latour, President IOC, November 25, 1935"

Jahncke stood up to Hitler and called American participation in the games a "calamity". In the end, Ireland was the only country to boycott the 1936 Olympics. America went on to participate in "the Games" with Jesse Owens winning four gold medals. There were other ways to make a point.

In 1942, Rear Admiral Ernest Lee Jahncke was the one to break the news to New Orleanians that there would be no Mardi Gras that year. "The holding of Carnival balls or parades would not be consistent with the present status of the nation," he announced.

Jahncke's great nephew, Barton Jahncke (along with Shelby "Buddy" Friedrichs and Gerard "Slick" Schreck) would go on to win gold medals in sailing in the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City (Dragon class).



U.S. Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton

Ernest Lee Jahncke was married to Cora Van Voorhis Stanton, granddaughter of Lincoln's Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton. It is interesting how people and events come together in history in most unusual ways. Jacob Van Wickle was a New Jersey judge married to Catherine Morgan. Morgan's brother went to Pointe Coupée Parish, Louisiana, where the town of Morganza was named for him. Judge Van Wickle and his wife had two great granddaughters that married sons of Civil War Secretaries of War. Kate Laura Slawson wed William C. Seddon, son of James A. Seddon, Secretary of War for the Confederacy. Adele Cephise Townsend married Lewis H. Stanton, son of the long-bearded Union Secretary of War. The Lewis H. Stantons were Cora's parents, and she would marry an accomplished New Orleans engineer with strong and honorable convictions.

Other Tulane University Engineering Graduates of Note:

Major-General Edward Sedly Bres (September 15, 1888 – September 24, 1967), Engineering 1910, masters in Civil Engineering '37, executive for reserves on General Eisenhower's staff, received the Legion of Merit for his work with engineers and supply services during World War II in Australia. President Kennedy appointed him to the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Committee, for which he served as chairman.

William Joseph Mouton, Jr. (June 21, 1931 – June 30, 2001), Engineering '53, was a pioneering structural engineer and emeritus professor of architecture at Tulane who, according to the *New York Times*, "provided the physical underpinnings for the growth of the New Orleans skyline." He developed a technique for driving deep pilings through soft ground and anchoring them in the hard ground deep below. That gave New Orleans its first true skyscraper, the 45-story Plaza Tower Building. Constructed by Mr. Mouton in the early 1960s, it was much taller than the 30 floors or so to which previous buildings there had been limited.

Col. Albert J. "Red" Wetzel (December 29, 1917 – December 26, 2009), Engineering '39, was a space and missile pioneer known for his innovative work with the Titan Missile Program (1957 - 1961), earning him the nickname "Mr. Titan." After 26 years in the Army Air Corps and its successor, the Air Force, including service at the Pentagon, Colonel Wetzel began a 25-year career at Tulane University, where he was vice president for development, vice president for alumni affairs and adviser to President Eamon Kelly. In 2003 he was inducted into the United States Air Force Space Hall of Fame.

Mark Tillman (1958 -), Engineering '79, commanded Air Force One as pilot for President George W. Bush. The President made over 1,675 flights during his eight years in office and, on nearly all of those trips, Colonel Mark Tillman was at the controls of Air Force One. He protected the President and his staff on September 11, 2001, by evading many potential threats. And Colonel Tillman flew the President to every state in the Union except Vermont, as well as on 49 foreign trips to 75 countries, many of them more than once.



Colonel Mark Tillman

David Filo (April 20, 1966 -), Engineering '88, co-founder with Jerry Yang of Yahoo! Inc., served as Yahoo!'s key technologist and developed the Filo Server Program.

NED HÉMARD

New Orleans Nostalgia
"An Ernest Objection"
Ned Hémard
Copyright 2007 and 2015