

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Celebrating Victory

In less than two months, New Orleans will be celebrating the Bicentennial of the American victory at the Battle of New Orleans. January 8, 2015, marks the historic conflict's 200th anniversary, just three years before the Crescent City's Tricentennial of its founding.

There are some fantastic events planned, and locals and visitors alike will have an opportunity to witness battle reenactments unlike any that have been seen before in the area of the Chalmette battlefield. Over 1,500 "soldiers" representing both sides have already signed on to participate in this once-in-a-lifetime grand scale memorial recreation.



War of 1812 American and British period uniforms

The Meraux Foundation is generously providing the acreage for the Louisiana Living History Foundation to stage this and other historical reenactments on a site close to the original battlefield. The property will continue to be available for other festivals and staged historical events, not just ones commemorating the Battle of New Orleans.

Historian and event organizer Timothy Pickles announced at a recent "Call to Arms" gala that the planned reenactment would be the biggest War of 1812 reenactment ever staged. Pickles, the city's British-born authority on the Battle of New Orleans, has served for years as an historical consultant, battle coordinator and costume designer for the film industry. He also stated that the Meraux Foundation land is so important because it literally "takes an act of Congress" to obtain permission to use an actual Federal battlefield for a reenactment.



*Battle of New Orleans,
painted by Jean Hyacinthe Laclotte (1766 - 1829),
Louisiana militiaman who participated in the battle*

But what did earlier Battle of New Orleans victory celebrations have to offer?

The Battle's Quadranscentennial, or twenty-fifth anniversary, in 1840

was an auspicious occasion in that General Jackson, then former President of the United States, visited the city for his third and final time. A grand ceremony was held to commemorate the event, and "Old Hickory" was the city's 72-year-old guest of honor. Arriving by steamer, the aged veteran was met by a barouche with four horses. His procession passed along Canal Street where ladies waved their handkerchiefs from the balconies above. The "Old Soldier" was escorted to the *Place D'Armes*, or Public Square (not called Jackson Square until 1851), and then on to the Cathedral for an oration. Afterwards, he returned to the square, reviewed the troops, and the cannoneers then fired a salute. That evening, President Jackson was entertained at the St. Charles with a comedy followed by the full company singing "Hail Columbia". The twenty-fifth anniversary was clearly a great success by virtue of having the "Hero of New Orleans" there in person for all the festivities.

The fiftieth anniversary, also known as the Semicentennial or the Quinquagenary, on January 8, 1865, was both unique and ironic in that the City of New Orleans was under Union occupation. Flag Officer David Farragut had succeeded where the British had failed, but he did have more advanced firepower. Running past Forts Jackson and St. Philip, as well as the Chalmette batteries, Farragut took New Orleans on April 29, 1862, in a decisive victory.

After enduring the commands of Union Generals Benjamin "Spoons" Butler, aka "Beast," and Nathaniel Banks, and with the end of the war just a few short months away, the City of New Orleans was presented this report in the New Orleans *Times*, dated January 8, 1865:

"To-day is the fiftieth anniversary of the battle of New Orleans, in which Andrew Jackson defeated an army of veteran British soldiers who had gained renown on the battle-fields of Europe, and by overwhelming the invaders under Lieut. Gen. Packenham, 'the hero of Salamanca,' and Gens. Keane and Gibbs, delivered this city from capture and saved the State of Louisiana and the Valley of the Mississippi from conquest.

The battle was remarkable in many respects. It was fought a fortnight after the treaty of peace had been signed at Ghent; but ended the second war with Great Britain in a manner diametrically the reverse of that anticipated by English statesmen, who thought they had the game in their own hands. The British ravages on the Chesapeake, and the taking of Washington during the year of 1814 had given them great hopes."

The *Times* went on to report the remarks of British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Lord Castlereagh, who proclaimed in December of 1814 "with self-reliant exultation":



Lord Castlereagh (1769- 1822)

"I expect at this moment that most of the large seaport towns of America are by this time in ashes; that we are in possession of New Orleans, and have command of all the rivers of the Mississippi Valley and the Lakes, and that the Americans are now little better than prisoners in their own country."

Lord Castlereagh was, of course, mistaken.

The 1865 article went on to laud Andrew Jackson along with Union officers (Army and Navy) "Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, Thomas, Canby, Farragut and Porter, promoted as "heroes" to the occupied New Orleanians, "heroes" who were "inspired by the immortal words" of Jackson himself, "The Union, it must and shall be preserved."

Three days later, the *Times* wrote that "The Eighth of January, not falling on a Jewish Sabbath day, was freely and appropriately celebrated by the Israelites of this city in Masonic Hall on St. Charles street, as the anniversary not only of the battle of New Orleans, but also as the anniversary of the commencement of the siege of Jerusalem, by the King of Babylon, and the foundation of the Home for the Jewish Widows and Orphans, situated at the corner of Jackson and Chippewa streets."



JUDAH TOURO

Mr. David Goldman spoke eloquently of the importance of charity and praised the benevolence of the late great Judah Touro, who was himself "a participant of the battle of New Orleans, where the atrocious war cry, 'beauty and booty,' given by a large army, had to succumb to the earnest defence of a lesser but patriotic army, under their great leader, Andrew Jackson, of glorious memory."

Moving ahead to 1915 and the Centenary of the Battle of New Orleans, the Louisiana Historical Society was now in charge of the numerous ceremonies. War had once again erupted in Europe, but the United States would not enter World War I until two years later. The "Official Programme" proudly boasted "100 Years of Peace," and proclaimed that the Centenary would not only commemorate the Battle of New Orleans but the "Completion of One Hundred Years of Peace Between the United Kingdom and the United States of America."

One never saw so many committees: "Battlefield Committee," "Banquet Committee," "Chorus and Singing," "Decorations," "River Parade," "Committee on Resident Britishers," "Ursulines Convent Ceremonial" Committee, "Colonial Dames Reception," "International Affairs," "Insignias, Badges and Medals," and many, many more.

Along with the firing of "Congreve Rockets," there were speeches, orations, historic tableaux, period dances in costume and, of course, music, including "Stars and Stripes Forever," "Yankee Doodle," "Home, Sweet Home" and "Listen to the Mockingbird".

The following day, on Saturday, January 9, 1915, after a grand military parade, wreaths were placed on the statue of Andrew Jackson in Jackson Square and upon the statue of Henry Clay in Lafayette Square. Clay was one of the signers of the Treaty of Ghent, who is said to have expressed the belief that, if Jackson had been defeated at New Orleans, the British would not have hesitated to nullify the treaty.

On Sunday, young ladies dressed as goddesses (such as the Goddesses of Liberty and Justice) and as States. The modeling Misses bore familiar New Orleans names, such as Minor, Wogan, Brierre, Claiborne, Sarpy, Crozat, Arnauld and Avery.

The Sesquicentennial, or 150th anniversary, was commemorated in 1965. The Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate* reported that "Commander William T. T. Pakenham of the Royal Navy kept a stiff upper lip" as he explained why his ancestor lost the Battle of New Orleans. The lean Commander Pakenham was attending "a reception for the battle's Sesquicentennial and guests at the Governor's Mansion."

The Sesquicentennial Commission was on hand to rededicate the Chalmette National Historical Park, and present for the ceremonies in Jackson Square were Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall and Postmaster General John A. Gronouski. The pipe smoking Postmaster General was there to present a commemorative stamp honoring the Battle of New Orleans.



1965 Commemorative Stamp

Although the battle was fought after the Treaty of Ghent, word of the peace had not yet reached New Orleans. Pakenham's descendant said the battle "sealed the peace treaty and established America in the eyes of Europe as a valuable nation." He also said, "It took a thumping great victory like this for Europe to realize that America had come of age."

Major General Edward Sedley Bres (ret.), chairman of the Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Commission, was Grand Marshal of a military parade featuring a composite color guard of United States, Canadian and British troops. In 1946, General Bres was named executive for reserves on General Dwight D. Eisenhower's staff.

Martha G. Robinson, who was instrumental in stopping the Vieux Carré Riverfront Expressway, served as commission vice-chairman.

Efforts by the above chairmen secured the involvement of the Department of the Interior in the installation of permanent fixtures on the Chalmette battlefield, such as cannon, salients, redoubts and markers indicating positions of each unit participating in the battle. All of this, Mayor Victor Schiro stated, would serve as "a strong tourist attraction" for years to come.

Another interesting story related in the *Times-Picayune* on January 7, 1965, is how there may not have been an official medal for the Sesquicentennial. Nationally acclaimed New Orleans sculptor Angela Bres Gregory said, "I put too many stars on the 1815 United States flag, and the planned departure had to be postponed while I corrected the mistake."



*Sesquicentennial medal
by Angela Gregory*

If her work had been perfect the first time out, it would have been on a plane that crashed in Lake Pontchartrain. If that had happened, "I wouldn't have had time to do it over," she mused.

Her Sesquicentennial Battle of New Orleans medal, struck in silver and bronze, can also be seen on the 1965 U.S. commemorative stamp.

The Battle of New Orleans was the last major battle of the War of 1812. The British never recognized Napoleon as a legitimate ruler and therefore considered his sale of the vast Louisiana territory to the United States to be fraudulent. Louisiana, they believed, must be returned to the former owner Spain, Britain's ally. And if Spain was too weak after the conflicts in Europe to administer again what was once the Louisiana Purchase, the territory should then be given over to Britain. After conquering New Orleans, the British planned to head up

the Mississippi Valley to join troops descending from Canada. None of these contingencies ever materialized.

The decisive American victory at New Orleans restored confidence in the Americans' new republic and made Andy Jackson a national hero and later President. For the fledgling State of Louisiana it was a great source of pride and honor. It is only fitting that New Orleans and the entire nation commemorate this battle each year, and especially on its significant anniversaries, such as the upcoming 200th.

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