

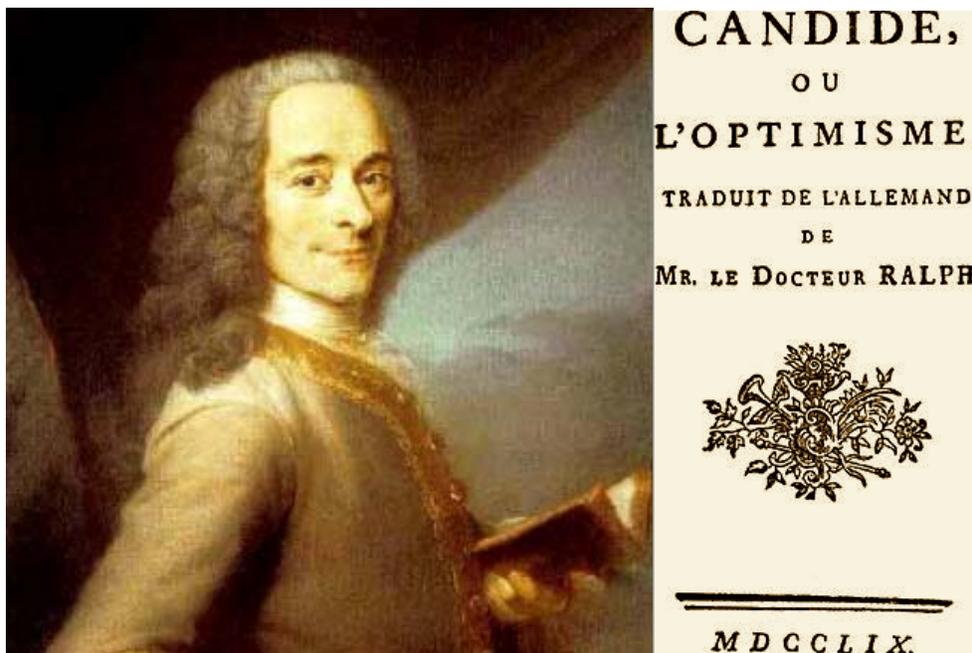
NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Optimism, Beauty and Talent

The philosophical work *Candide* is the best-known work by Voltaire, in which he savagely and humorously denounces the optimism of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. *Candide* recites his mantra: “*Tout est pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes possibles.*” Voltaire throughout his novel demonstrates that “the best of all possible worlds” is not always so great.



Voltaire pictured to the left of the frontpiece of his magnum opus, the 1759 edition published by Sirène in Paris, entitled “Candide, or Optimism, translated from the German of Dr. Ralph”

But Voltaire *was* optimistic about something. He was optimistic about Louisiana. He seems to have believed that Louisiana was “the best of all possible worlds” when he wrote: “I declare to you that if I were young, in good health and had not built Ferney, I would go and establish myself in Louisiana.” (Ferney was his beautiful estate).

Voltaire lamented the loss of Louisiana to Spain (in 1762), saying that he could not conceive how Frenchmen could abandon "the most beautiful climate of the earth, from which one may have tobacco, silk, indigo, a thousand useful products."

One wonders what Voltaire would've thought about Shirley Temple, the essence of optimism for a nation struggling its way through the Great Depression. With psychological potholes ahead, she sang: "Don't you be a grumpy. When the road gets bumpy, just smile." In his time, Voltaire wrote, "Illusion is the first of all pleasures." And what better vehicle for illusion is there than the motion picture?

One of Shirley's first movies was the Damon Runyon classic "Little Miss Marker" in 1934 with Adolphe Menjou (as *Sorrowful Jones*, the bookie turned adoptive father) and New Orleans raised Dorothy Dell (as *Bangles Carson*). Dell was born Dorothy Dell Goff and earned the title of Miss New Orleans in 1930. She joined the Ziegfield Follies the next year and in 1933 signed with Paramount. She was slated to star in another Shirley Temple movie in 1934 opposite Gary Cooper, but a tragic automobile accident took her life. Carole Lombard took over her role in "Now and Forever".



Dorothy Dell shown with Shirley Temple in "Little Miss Marker"

Dorothy Dell Goff was instrumental in convincing her close friend, Mary Leta Dorothy Slaton (stepdaughter of Carlo Lambour), to enter the

Miss New Orleans contest the year after her win. From a variation in the spelling of Lambour, Dorothy Lamour won the pageant in 1931 ("Dedicated to Beautiful Girlhood"), but was disqualified for Miss USA when a judge detected a scant trace of lipstick. Cosmetics were *verboden* in those days.



Lamour's silk sarong (created by Oscar-winning designer Edith Head), which she only wore in six films, is now in the Smithsonian.

Off to Chicago in 1932, the future Sarong Girl was deemed "so wrong" for the movies. A Chicago radio station said she had "bad singing style, will never be an actress. Doubtful prospect." Yet in her sarong, she went on to earn Paramount \$10,000,000 in a number of South Sea epics. After that, she proved to be a talented comedienne and "straight-man" between Bob Hope and Bing Crosby in nine highly successful *Road* pictures. Hope once said those *Road* movies were "like a tennis game with Dottie in the middle watching." She once described her role as "a wonderful sandwich, a slice of white bread between two slices of ham." She was among the most popular actresses in Hollywood from 1936 to 1952, and her songs were also hits. "Moonlight and Shadows" topped the Hit Parade. She was glamorous but without pretension. With her great sense of humor she mused, "Glamour is just sex that got civilized." Lamour, who didn't see the actual South Seas until she was nearly 70, died in 1996.

Dorothy proved to be a winning name for the title of Miss New Orleans in 1930 and 1931. In 1935, Mary was the "grand old name". Mary Healy was only sixteen when she landed a secretarial job in the Lionel

Favret Construction office for \$17.50 per week. A new beer was being launched from the Irish Channel, 4 X Beer from a brewery on Jackson Avenue. Mr. Burke, the owner, and his wife Audrey wanted to sponsor Mary in the Miss New Orleans contest. Audrey Burke helped Mary select a white silk jersey swimsuit with a red, white and blue sash and patriotic sandals to complete the ensemble. She won the Miss New Orleans pageant at Pontchartrain Beach and it was off to California with her mother. But success did not come right away.

N. O. Brewing Co., Inc.

4-X Beer

As a special attraction to New Orleanians who have not as yet seen Miss New Orleans of 1935, Miss Mary "Babe" Healy, in person, the New Orleans Brewing Company manufacturers of 4-X beer and sponsors of Miss Healy in the contest which made her Miss New Orleans at Pontchartrain Beach last Thursday night, are presenting Miss New Orleans again at the beach, that those who have not yet seen her may see her and wish her well before she leaves for San Diego later in the month to represent this city in national competition. This may be the last opportunity to see Miss New Orleans in person publicly before she leaves for the contest.

A clipping from the Times-Picayune, July 3, 1935

Back in New Orleans, Mary was singing in the Fountain Room of the Roosevelt Hotel in 1938 when Ivan Kahn (sent to the South by Selznick to search for *Scarlett O'Hara*) discovered Mary's potential. Off on the train for the west coast with a brass band send off, Mary was joined by Linda Darnell (Tyrone Power's special señorita in 1940's "The Mark of Zorro"). Mary was under contract to Fox, appeared in several films from 1938-1942 including Irving Berlin's "Second Fiddle", and soon met Peter Lind Hayes, another talented entertainer. His mother, Grace Hayes, was a vaudeville performer married to Charlie Foy (one of Eddie Foy's Seven Little Foyes). The Foyes played at the Orpheum in New Orleans and all over the entire United States. Mary and Peter were married and, together an accomplished duo, eventually starred in their own television shows during the 50s and 60s. They would go on

to appear in the cult classic "The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T" in 1953. Peter died in 1998, but (at this writing, September 16, 2014) Mary Healy (born April 14, 1918) is still a retired actress, singer and variety entertainer.



Mary Healy with Rudy Vallée in "Second Fiddle"

In 1957, another Dorothy won the Miss New Orleans title. Dorothy Smith was born in Pride, Louisiana, and raised in Baywood, both on the outskirts of Baton Rouge. With the stage name, Donna Douglas, she became famous as *Elly May Clampett* in "The Beverly Hillbillies". With her rope belt around her waist, *Elly May* was always optimistic as long as she had her menagerie of "critters" by the "cement pond".



Donna Douglas with Elvis in "Frankie and Johnny," 1966

Another New Orleans resident and local beauty won a role on "The Beverly Hillbillies" in their ninth and final season. In one of the most popular episodes, Louellen Berger (nee Aden) was supposed to be Jethro's homely childhood sweetheart, Louellen. Instead she turned out to be a gorgeous knockout in the episode entitled "Elly, the Secretary". Not to dampen his optimistic outlook, she probably distracted Jethro from thinking about becoming a "double-aught spy".



Louellen Aden "betwixt" Jed and Granny in "Elly, the Secretary"

On a personal note, my mom (Clare Brady, before marrying my dad) was friends with Mary Healy and visited her in California when Mary was the fresh new talent in Hollywood. Mom got to meet a few movie stars and talked to none other than Howard Hughes on the telephone. Hughes had called and asked, "Which one of the you-alls is you?"

NED HÉMARD

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