

## NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

*Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions*

*By Ned Hémard*

### Odds and Ends

**Odds and Ends**  
— AND —  
**Remnants**

From Every Department. Just what you want  
at less than

**1/2**

You Expect to Pay. Only Two More Bargain  
Days After This One.

***D. H. Holmes***  

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**CO., LIMITED.**

D. H. Holmes Company of New Orleans (founded in 1842 by Daniel Henry Holmes), once the largest department store in the South, ran promotions like the one shown above on a regular basis. This particular ad appeared in the *New Orleans Item* August 11, 1904.

Every store and household has them: assorted items, fragments and remnants. The phrase "odds and ends" is Anglo-Saxon in origin with *orts* or *odds* being the Middle English *ords*, fragments (of victuals, etc.). The Anglo-Saxon *ord* signified a point, or beginning, so *odds-and-ends* came to mean etymologically "points and ends," or scraps.

Authors have these odd bits, too, as did Chaucer, who in *The Canterbury Tales* used "word and ende" in corrupt form, with a parasitic w.

With this in mind, this author offers just a few odd bits of cultural and historical information, which the reader might find enlightening.



*A presidential palace named for a Louisiana governor*

In all likelihood, the impressive building shown above will not be recognized by most readers; and the mountains, without a doubt, indicate that it is not situated anywhere near New Orleans or Louisiana. Still, one may find it odd that it was named for an important Louisiana governor. Located in Quito, Ecuador, it is known as the Carondelet Presidential Palace, home to the *Real Audiencia de Quito*, sometimes referred to as *la Presidencia de Quito* or *el Reino de Quito*.

After having served as Spanish Colonial Governor of Louisiana from 1791-1797, the Barón Francisco Luis Héctor de Carondelet became President of the *Real Audiencia de Quito*, supervising territory that included present-day Ecuador, as well as parts of Colombia and Peru. He held that post from 1799 until his death in 1807. The great South American liberator, Simón Bolívar, who was impressed with the elegance and austerity of the building and the taste of Carondelet himself, gave the building the name of Carondelet Palace.

It was under Governor Carondelet that Louisiana's first newspaper, *Le Moniteur*, was established in 1794 by Louis Duclot, a refugee printer from Saint Domingue. The *Barón* also made numerous improvements to the city's infrastructure, including the Carondelet Canal. Connecting with Bayou St. John, it provided a water route from the heart of the city all the way out to Lake Pontchartrain. Carondelet also made provisions for the city's first street lighting, consisting of oil lamps. The thirteen street light tenders, known as *serenos*, served as watchmen and *de facto* municipal police.



*Louisiana governor and namesake of Carondelet Street in New Orleans, the Barón Francisco Luis Héctor de Carondelet*

Another important event during Carondelet's tenure as governor was the signing of the Treaty of San Lorenzo on October 27, 1795, between Spain and the United States. Also known as Pinckney's Treaty, it opened up the Mississippi River to American navigation and permitted western settlers the "right to deposit" their exports in New Orleans and to engage in commercial activity within the city's boundaries. Spain, in turn, under terms of the treaty officially recognized the southern and western boundaries of the U.S. as the 31st parallel and the Mississippi River, thus allowing the fledgling nation to gain access to territory known today as the states of Mississippi and Alabama.

The reader may also find it odd that the words "Shame! shame!

shame!" did not first appear in a classic rhythm and blues hit by Smiley Lewis, but as early as June 6, 1826, in the New York City *Spectator*. It appears that the city of New Orleans was having a problem with street peddlers of all races and nationalities hawking every possible sale article to the detriment of the "decent retail shopkeeper":



"NEW ORLEANS – *the City of Pedlars [sic]* – Black, white, olive, copper, nondescript; Jews, Gentiles, Turks, Hindoos, Spanish, French, Ouachinango, Irish, Dutch, Italian, Russian, Yankee – sour-croust [sic], codfish, garlic, calaloo and gumbo – in chicken-thief, barge, broad-horn, or flat-boat, keel-boat, row-boat, no boat, every thing but a tow-boat. – Shame! shame! shame!"

Who ever said this great port city wasn't cosmopolitan?

To clarify some of the terms used in the 1826 article: *Ouachinango*, or more accurately *Huachinango*, is the name of a city in the state of *Puebla* in central Mexico. The name is derived from a *Nahuatl*, or Aztec, phrase meaning "within a wall of trees". Today, however, *Huachinango* also means red snapper. Prepared with chiles, crushed olives and capers, it has become the signature dish of the state of *Veracruz*.

A broad-horn, or broadhorn, is the name by which the flat-boats on the Mississippi and other American rivers were formerly known. A chicken-thief was also a type of rivercraft. According to *The History and Geography of the Mississippi Valley* by Timothy Flint (1833),

"Besides the numerous perioques, or singular looking Spanish and French trading retail boats, commonly called 'chicken-thieves,' which scour the rivers within an hundred leagues of New Orleans, there are on all the waters of the West, retail trading boats. They are often fitted up with no inconsiderable ingenuity and show. The goods are fancifully arranged on shelves."

Calaloo, more often callaloo, is a popular Caribbean dish with West African origins. The *grande dame* of Creole cuisine, Leah Chase, is of the opinion that her "*gumbo z'herbes*" is derived from "what they call callaloo in the islands." Callaloo itself is a green leaf vegetable that is often supplemented by the addition of okra. Jamaican cooks tend to use only steamed callaloo leaves with salt, onions and scallions. In New Orleans, according to Leah, the greens and the okra are chopped up together and sometimes crab is added for that extra "bang".



*Callaloo*

As for Smiley Lewis, his recording of "Shame, Shame, Shame" was featured in the soundtrack for the Warner Brothers film *Baby Doll* in 1956. Starring Karl Malden, Eli Wallach and Carroll Baker, and directed by Elia Kazan, it was adapted from Tennessee Williams' own one-act play entitled *27 Wagons Full of Cotton*.

Filmed in the Mississippi Delta, Malden played the part of a middle-aged cotton gin owner married to the 19-year-old "Baby Doll" (played by Carroll Baker), who still sleeps in a crib, wearing shorty-nightgowns and sucking her thumb. The film was controversial when it was released, with an effort to ban it waged by the Roman Catholic National Legion of Decency. It was even banned in Sweden. Still, the film received numerous nominations for major awards and Kazan won the Golden Globe for Best Director. Not only that, the "babydoll nightgown" became an ever-popular costume choice for Mardi Gras - and more intimate celebrations.



Almost 120 years earlier, however, one may have encountered a different array of odd costumes at Carnival in the Crescent City.

According to the *Daily Picayune*, Mardi Gras 1837 was a plethora of disorganized and oddly dressed masqueraders in “grotesque and outlandish habiliments. Some said they were Seminoles; some said it was the Zoological Institute come to town; some that it was Brown’s Circus – while others said nothing, and very likely knew nothing at all about it.”

But the following year (1838), the city put together a truly organized Carnival parade, described by the *Picayune* as a “grand cavalcade” with a crowd that “preceded, accompanied and followed them” much “like a vast river.” Historian Robert Tallant explained, “Until then maskers had formed lines and chains and walked and run through the streets on Mardi Gras to the amusement or disgust of the spectators, but without real organization or plan. They romped and shouted and behaved as foolishly as possible, but those taking part were usually considered wild young men at best. Perhaps a few groups had also ridden about in carriages and wagons, but there was no semblance of order.”



*A parading Chanticleer or a poised Punchinello, oddities one might have seen in New Orleans in 1838*

This time, reported the *Picayune* on February 28, 1838, "A large number of young gentlemen, principally Creoles of the first respectability, went to no little expense with their preparations." The paper also stated that it was "very proper" that those "last few hours" before Lent be "allowed to jollification" and "are improved with all the energy of which a mirth-loving people are capable."

The scene was one of great creativity and variety: "In the procession were several carriages, superbly ornamented – bands of music, horses richly caparisoned – personations of knights, cavaliers, heroes, demigods, chanticleers, punchinellos, &c. &c. all mounted. Many of them were dressed in female attire, and acted the lady with no small degree of grace. Nearly all of them had their features concealed with masks."

Caparisoned means (when speaking of horses) to be decked out in rich decorative coverings.



*Smiley Lewis*

Smiley Lewis (1913 – 1966), who was born Overton Amos Lemos in DeQuincy, Louisiana, was a great New Orleans R & B singer whose singles never sold more than 100,000 copies, but the cover versions of his songs were immense commercial successes for other artists. "I Hear You Knocking" was a pop chart smash hit for Gale Storm, and Elvis Presley's cover of Smiley's "One Night (of Sin)" was number 4 on the Billboard charts in the U.S. and number 1 in the UK. Elvis, besides providing a beautiful rendition of the song, left out the word "sin". "Blue Monday" was recorded by Smiley in 1954 only to have Fats Domino's version become the hit two years later. Welsh Rocker Dave Edmunds recorded "I Hear You Knocking" in 1970. It reached number 1 in the UK and number 4 in the U.S.

Smiley never really got the big break he deserved, but he will be fondly remembered.



*Carondelet Presidential Palace in Quito, Ecuador, present-day photo*

Now, my dear reader, I am confident that you will not find it odd that this collection of "Odds and Ends" must indeed come to an end.

## **NED HÉMARD**

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