

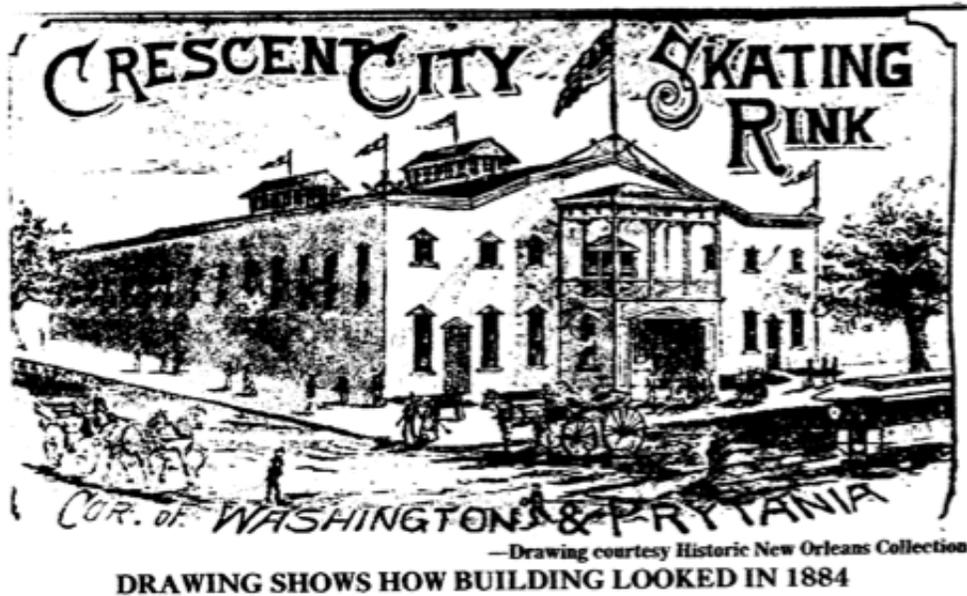
NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Skating Through History

A 1978 article in the *Times-Picayune* described the condition of an old “barn-like building with protruding skylights on the downtown corner of Washington Avenue and Prytania Street in the Garden District”: “Shabby and rundown, its original facade has been obscured by tacky additions and alterations over the years.” The article continued, “But behind the messy veneer hides a forgotten historic building, the Crescent City Skating Rink, built in 1884 as an attraction in connection with the Cotton Centennial Exhibition.”



From 1978 Times-Picayune article showing Rink's original façade

The sorrowful description was preparing the readers for the upcoming renovation of “the rink’s might wooden structure to its original state as housing for a group of select shops,” a shopping complex known today as “The Rink”. Restoring this structure to its former glory was the thirteen-year dream of Realtor Martha Ann Samuel. She, along with architect Barry M. Fox, Realtor George S. Farnsworth, Jr., and their

spouses were planning the makeover for "this fine old building," which they completed the following year (1979). All Garden District residents themselves at the time, the three principals purchased the property from William Perry Brown, Robert Newman and Eugen Aschafenburg, who had owned the building since 1944.

The skating rink site was originally a marble yard serving Lafayette Cemetery #1, situated diagonally across the intersection (on the uptown-river corner). The construction of the 105 by 141 feet wooden building was hastily erected in order to be ready in time for the Exhibition. The flooring was of kiln-dried maple with a skating surface of 70 by 119 feet "laid beveled and smooth to afford easy and noiseless skating" (reported the *Picayune* on the last day of December, 1884). The owner, businesswoman Clara Hagan, built this state-of-the-art structure with the help of architect John F. Braun. The rink's manager was Professor Ira W. Daniels of New York. The facility could accommodate 500 skaters and had a seating capacity of 600-1000 people.

The 1880s were the sport's boom period in America, a time when roller skates were being mass-produced in this country. The toe stop was first patented in 1876, and in 1884 there was a patent for the use of steel ball bearings in skate wheels to reduce friction. This allowed skaters to increase their speed with minimal effort. Micajah C. Henley of Indiana, known as "The Roller Skate King," produced thousands of skates per week during that period. Granted patents for roller skate improvements in 1880 and 1881, it was Henley who sold Wilbur Wright his first bicycle for \$10 (money borrowed from his brother Orville).

THE GRAND OPENING
—OF THE—
Crescent City Roller Skating Rink,
CORNER WASHINGTON AND PRYTANIA STREETS,
Will Take Place on **MONDAY EVENING, JAN. 12, 1885,** at 7:30 o'clock.
The Manager has gone to a large expense to secure the services of Profs. **CARD** and **DENNIS** (considered the Champion Roller Skaters of the World), who will give exhibitions of Fancy, Scientific and Aerobic Skating.
The World-Renowned and Celebrated **BICYCLISTS**, the **STIRK FAMILY**, have also been engaged. There will also be
TWO FINE BRASS BANDS,
Leaving No Intermission During the Entire Evening.
The Skating Floor is of hard wood (maple), with a clear surface of 130 by 75 feet. The celebrated Star Skate will be used, and visitors will find every comfort and convenience.
Special attention paid to children or any ladies and gentlemen desirous of acquiring the art of Roller Skating, as competent instructors have been engaged for that purpose. Jail—111stp

The grand opening was announced for January 12, 1885.

Exhibition skaters, such as the team of Stillman and Lever, as well as acrobats, bicyclists and other performers, put on shows for the crowds. But after some time, interest dwindled in the rink and it was converted

to other uses. It became a livery stable, a mortuary and later a harness and carriage establishment.

Eventually, with the advent of the horseless carriage, the building became home to the Steiner Brothers garage and Texaco service station. Other portions of the building were rented out to a variety of tenants over the years, including a laundrette, barber shop, super market, beauty shop, picture framing establishment and a shoe repair shop (to name but a few). But the Steiner Brothers, Fritz and Gideon, ran the business most old-timers remember, in those years before "The Rink" became the shopping center it is today.

I remember going to a dance with a live band held in the garage New Year's Eve, 1966, and I also remember the Steiners' pet dog, Nick, who always had something clever or humorous to say (or at least that was the Steiners' story). They posted the philosophical pooch's perspectives in the window facing Prytania, and drivers passing by would slow down to enjoy the entertaining musings of "NICK SAYS".



The Steiner Brothers' in 1978, "A VISUAL MESS" said the Picayune

"Nick," the Steiners explained, "was a Cloptonshire terrier" with "distinctive parachute ears". The reader need not try to investigate the story behind this breed, for it is a "mythical" one. This was the amusing way the Steiners had of informing us that Nick was a mutt.

What follows are a few of Nick's gems, often quoted over the years in Howard Jacobs' *Remoulade* column in the *Picayune*:

"Want to get rid of those junk cars – put 'em on a parade route."

"School's out, so watch out for the kids (some of 'em have cars)."

Another time, Nick (after reading in the paper "that there are three rats for every person in New Orleans") wanted to know "if anybody wants his three."

Nick's political wisecrack of 1946 was widely quoted during the whiskey shortage on the day Chep Morrison was elected mayor. "Due to circumstances beyond our control," said Nick, "the following brands are no longer available: Old ..., Old ..., and Old Regular." The *Picayune* omitted the names, but Nick probably barked out "Old Grand Dad" and "Old Crow". "Old Regular" was a humorous reference to the Regular Democratic Organization, aka the "Old Regulars". Chep's election as a reform candidate marked an end to the hegemony of the RDO.

TEXACO DEALERS	
ALBERT'S SERVICE STATION Carrollton Ave. and Bienville	EMILE KOLLIN 4532 Constance St.
ALLEMAND SERVICE STATION 3300 Carondelet St.	MELE SERVICE STATION Bread and Canal Sts.
BETTER SERVICE STATION 3435 S. Carrollton Ave.	O'SHAUGHNESSY SERVICE STATION Jefferson Highway
BOUDREAUX SERVICE STATION Dryades and Jena	ROBIE'S SERVICE STATION Canal and Galvez
BROADWAY SERVICE STATION 2904 Broadway	ROUSSEL SERVICE STATION S. Rampart and Julia
CASTON MOTORS, INC. 1768 St. Charles Ave.	SAFETY SERVICE STATION Maple and Fern
CORCORAN & ALEXIUS Baronne and Jackson	JOSEPH SPARACINO 519 Frenchmen St.
DAD'S SERVICE 4301 S. Claiborne Ave.	STEINER BROTHERS Washington and Prytania
FOURROUX SERVICE STATION Jefferson Highway and Labarre Rd.	TEAGUE MOTOR COMPANY 800 Baronne St.
FRERET SERVICE STATION Freret and Robert	THE TEXAS COMPANY St. Charles and Lee Circle
	VIOSCA SERVICE STATION 5050 Canal St.

September, 16, 1938 Texaco Dealers ad in the Times-Picayune

Nick placed an ad with the *Picayune's* Want-Ad Reporter in 1950 pleading for the return of the garage's pet raccoon, Amos. Nick said, "This coon hasn't a nickel with him to phone me and tell me where he is at." The ad worked. Three young boys found Amos at Upperline and Constance streets, a "fur piece from our location," said Fritz and Gid. The boys received "a case of cokes as reward."

"The Rink" at 2727 Prytania is today an active spot for Garden District residents and others to visit. "Still Perkin" is a popular coffee shop and gift shop "Judy at the Rink" has been there since 1996. "The

Garden District Book Shop" carries a large collection of local and regional titles, as well as signed first editions and limited editions by highly acclaimed authors.

Nick is no longer with us, but - if he were - he might make a cogent comment like the one below.

NICK SAYS: "Fascinating history is found by em-BARKING on a life of discovery."

NED HÉMARD

New Orleans Nostalgia
"Skating Through History"
Ned Hémard
Copyright 2014