

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

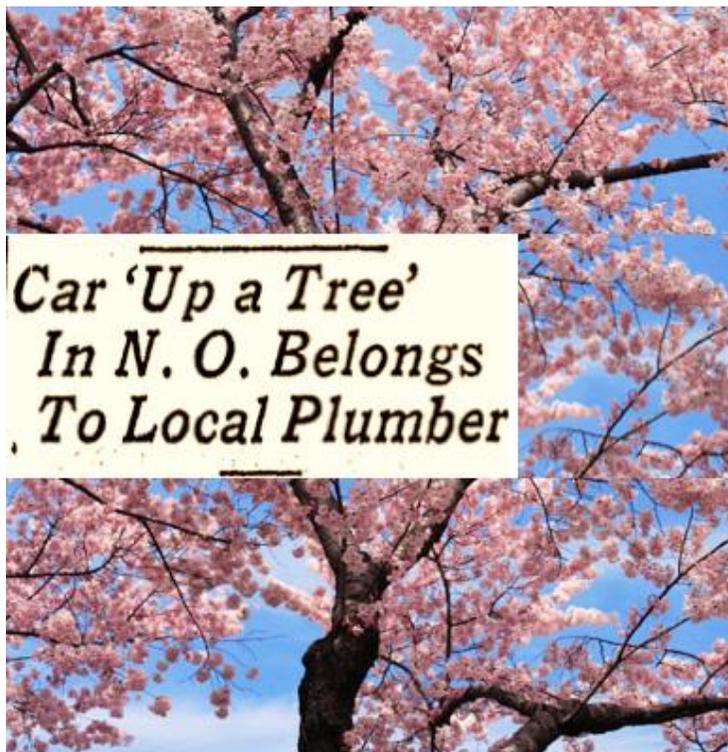
By Ned Hémard

Strange, But True

"I cannot tell a lie. The car's up in the cherry tree!"

Strange, but true nonetheless, a twice-stolen car was found in a New Orleans cherry tree in 1953. A Prytania Street swap shop operator named Ace Russell told police that the vehicle had been taking up too much valuable space in front of his shop, where it had been abandoned. He simply attached a block and tackle to the room-consuming auto and hauled it up into the tree.

The car, belonging to a Baton Rouge plumber named Archie Scott, was first stolen in January 1953 by a man identified as William McCullum, who was booked with auto theft. The car was released to owner Scott, and McCullum was also released.

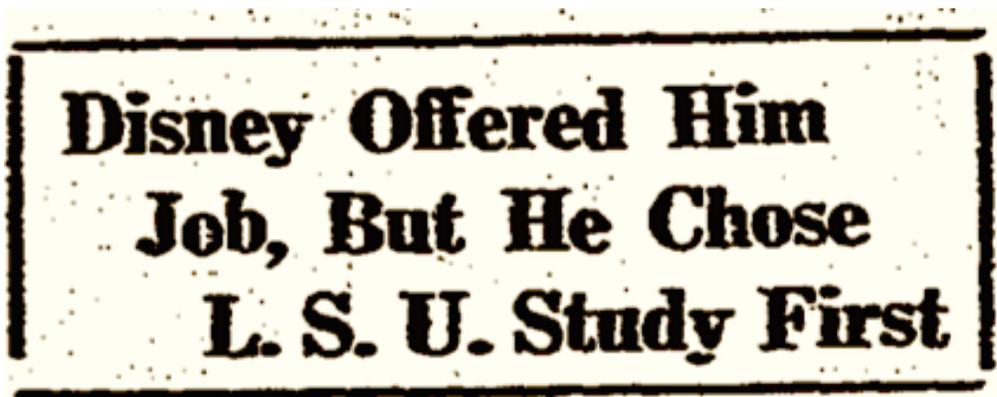


The Baton Rouge State-Times, June 15, 1953

But then the car was stolen a second time, according to the suspicions of the police, by "the very same miscreant," reported the *Times-Picayune*. Neither it nor McCullum were located until Friday, June 12, 1953, when the unusual "fruit" was discovered in, of all places, a Crescent City cherry tree. Strange, but true!

Another strange but true story begins with a seventeen-year-old Warren Easton student name John Patrick Terranova. Born in New Orleans on September 7, 1921, this young man was offered, according to an article in the October 1, 1938, *Baton Rouge State-Times*, a job working for "Walt Disney, father of Mickey Mouse ... in his Hollywood studios."

Instead of the art scholarship offered by LSU, Disney proposed to offer him \$30 a week plus expenses "while he attended a special school sponsored by the famous studios." Heeding his parents advice, John decided to attend LSU instead. The paper stated: "Strange, but true, he had never, until attending the university taken a course or had a lesson in art." Terranova, according to the article, had been assured that he would "be able to fill a much higher position in the studio than if he went directly there" at that time.



The Baton Rouge State-Times, October 1, 1938

Terranova gained notice from the Disney studios when he submitted his own sketches of famous Disney characters to Donald Duck's originator. Walt Disney himself considered the young man's work outstanding due to "the unusual and strong sense of humor" which his sketches portrayed. The young artist attributed his perfection in drawing to long hours and "constant practice".

As fate would have it, World War II interrupted Terranova's studies at LSU, and he served in the United States Coast Guard in Mobile, Alabama, where he met his future wife, Lillian. Instead of going to work for Disney, he had a long career with Metzger's Men's Store in Mobile, beginning in October 1945 and ending upon his retirement in

1986. John died October 13, 2014, at age 93, and his obituary mentioned his artistic talent.

It stated: "John's other great love was his art. He was a classically trained artist, specializing in cartoons. He was known throughout Mobile for his cartoon work and his very special brand of calligraphy. If the old saying is true that every man's life can be summed up in one phrase, then the expression that described John Terranova was quite simple: He was a good man."



Press Register photo by Victor Calhoun

Mobile Press Register photo of John P. Terranova upon retirement

Traveling back a little further in time, a most bizarre robbery attempt was thwarted on September 4, 1912. A lone highwayman named Howard E. Edwards of Jupiter, Florida, held up the northbound New York Express of the Louisville & Nashville railroad near Michoud, but was knocked senseless by a blow to the head by Engineer Baer with a heavy brass torch.

What made the robbery attempt "strange, but true" was the fact that the bandit only took money from the men and did not rob the women passengers. Armed with two revolvers and a valise containing dynamite and nitroglycerine, the would-be thief was very serious, but he also had a curious moral code. "He secured several hundred dollars," but, reported the *Cleburne Review*, Cleburne, Texas, "he declined to take jewelry and did not bother the women."



The old Louisville & Nashville Train Station, New Orleans

Not only that, with an attitude toward the passengers described by one of the Pullman porters as “very polite,” he “only got \$2” from some. “A lady sitting near the door was writing and a preacher was reading his Testament,” continued the paper, but when the robber “threw his guns into the face of the preacher,” he said: “Oh, you’re a parson, ain’t you?” and passed on.

The robber recovered from his fractured skull, although he “remained at the Charity Hospital between life and death for several days,” reported the *Picayune*, and was later sentenced (after having entered a guilty plea) to “twenty-five years”. He was sent off to Atlanta, “a shadow of his former self” to serve his time. A strange episode, but true!

What’s the “wurst” disaster you can think of that was “weiner” related? According to an article in the *New Orleans Daily Item* dated March 13, 1894, it was when two young men hired to sell “weinerwursts” for Mrs. C. Barry of No. 117 St. Ann Street made off with her profits. The two men “were each furnished with a license to peddle, and a tin can containing the sausage-sandwiches which are highly prized by the hungry rounders,” reported the paper. A rounder, it must be noted, is a person who frequents bars and is often drunk. There’s nothing like a good “wienerwurst” sandwich to moderate alcohol consumption.

Sad to say, “Mrs. Barry found the empty cans in the alley to the side of her residence” and the hired peddlers were also missing with the money. “The weinerwursts were worth \$5 and the license \$10.”

Weinerwurst Peddlers

Decamp with Their Employer's Money.

1894 Picayune headline covering local 19th century Weinergate

In the 1950s, only six people reached the summit of Mount Everest, the very first two recorded being Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay on May 29, 1953. In the 1960s, 18 people successfully summited the highest mountain in the world. The number today is over 4,000 total to date. Approximately 280 people have perished attempting to ascend its peak, and in the last few decades, fatalities have occurred every year (mostly due to avalanches).

The average elevation of the city of New Orleans is currently between one and two feet below sea level. It may seem strange, therefore, given this topography, that a New Orleans mother of three, Monica Kalozdi (in her late 40s) conquered the summit of Mount Everest (rising 29,029 feet above sea level) on June 4, 2005, not knowing whether she would live or die. "Exhaustion" is what she believed would be the thing that could take your life.

Besides the personal satisfaction in achieving her goal, Monica also climbed Everest to raise money for Teen Life Counts (TLC), a suicide prevention program coordinated by Jewish Family Service (JFS).

Kalozdi fell in love with mountaineering after first summiting the Matterhorn (14,692 feet), the mountain of the Alps straddling the border between Switzerland and Italy. Since then, Monica went on to stand victoriously upon the summits of Mont Blanc, Kilimanjaro, Cho Oyu, Mount Vinson, Aconcagua, Denali, in addition to other mountains in the Alps. These successes pushed Monica to achieve her sport's ultimate goal, climbing the Seven Summits, the highest mountains on each continent. She puts most of our bucket lists to shame.



Monica Kalozdi

The ever-challenging Mount Everest

Although the average elevation of the Crescent City is below sea level, as mentioned earlier, more than half the city is still above sea level. It may seem strange, but it's true.

Also in June 1953, the same month the stolen car ended up in the cherry tree, a "strange duel" was fought at Tulane Avenue and South Broad. As the *Times-Picayune* described it, "They didn't swing at one another – at least not in the early stages of the bout. Nor did they attack with weapons. They simply fought with their cars." The *Baton Rouge State-Times* called it a "Bumper Duel," with "two automobiles colliding head on, backing off and colliding again, then one of them swerving and the other coming at it broadside."

Strange Duel Is Fought on Busy Street Intersection--Weapons: Autos

"Strange Duel" was 1953 Times-Picayune headline

Some 200 people showed up to witness this duel on wheels between Mattie Oatis and Douglas Melancon. Perhaps the bickering duo got the idea for their June 28th altercation from a similar duel fought in Memphis four days earlier. A divorced woman in Memphis, reported the *Times-Picayune* on June 25, 1953, "noticed her former husband sitting in his parked car ... and rammed him headon."

The New Orleans pair were arrested and booked with "reckless driving and causing damage, and with disturbing the peace by fighting." That's what happened after they got out of their cars. Strange, but true – a duel fought with automobiles!

On April 16, 1916, the Sunday Morning *New Orleans States* reported

another New Orleans woman's accomplishment. It wasn't Mount Everest, but it was a significant climb nonetheless.

"From office assistant in the D.H. Holmes department store ten years ago to efficiency expert for Uncle Sam is the rapid climb of Mrs. E.P. Johnson-Clark, who very few persons in this neighborhood know is a New Orleans product."

Mrs. Johnson-Clark, One-Time Clerk Here, Now Directs Big National Work

1916 New Orleans States headline

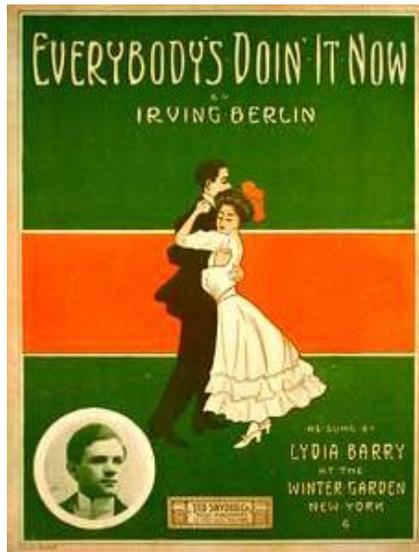
From a local department store to the New York customhouse, she earned a position "directing a large force of efficiency workers and drawing an excellent salary." Her system was put into action "among the larger cities in the country," including New Orleans, "New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Boston and Chicago."

There were "strange" rules back then, and even glass ceilings. Mrs. Johnson-Clark efficiently broke many of them. Two years prior to the newspaper article Mrs. Clark, then Miss Johnson decided to wed. Under the government rules back then, "no women in the department" were "permitted to marry and retain their position, but an exemption was made in her case." And she decided to hyphenate her name.

Three years earlier on January 12, 1913, the *Picayune* announced in the opening paragraph of the Society page that the New Orleans "Carnival organizations" were officially forbidding "at their balls the 'Turkey Trot,' 'The Bear' and 'The Bunny Hug,' or similar dances."

These "animal" dance crazes, which emerged around 1909 and later, were performed in ragtime rhythm in which the dancers hold each other closely. These tunes were both popular and scandalous at the early part of the 20th century.

On the evening of April 3, 1912, Newport News, Virginia, police arrested a song-and-dance troupe leader and his six dancing girls for performing the "too hot" Irving Berlin hit *Everybody's Doing It Now*, with the girls dancing the racy "Turkey Trot," the first dance of this genre to catch on nationwide.



Dancin' close together, that's what they were doin'

Although the dances imitated to some extent the movements of the animals for which they were named, what really caused such a stir in polite society was that the animal dances were danced face-to-face, with the female partner held closely around the waist (called hugging). This was all too new, too fast and, to many, downright indecent.

The *Biloxi Daily Herald* Band, however, played Berlin's *Everybody's Doin' It Now* at their August 1, 2012 evening concert at the City Park in Biloxi, Mississippi. But the New Orleans Carnival balls would have to wait a little longer.

It is officially announced that the Carnival organizations will not permit at their balls the "Turkey Trot," "The Bear" and "The Bunny Hug," or similar dances.

1913 Picayune Society Page Edict

And did you know, strange as it may seem, that rubbing the inside of a banana peel on mosquito bites can help stop the itching. It's a great homemade remedy for the ill effects of that bothersome insect.

And strange, but true, all good things must come to an end – including this confounding compendium of bizarre trivia.

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New Orleans Nostalgia
"Strange But True"
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