

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Winter's Here

Astronomical Winter in New Orleans begins this year on Monday, December 21, 2015, at 10:49 PM CST. Astronomical seasons, unlike meteorological seasons, are the ones with which most of us are familiar and are based on the position of Earth in relation to the sun. Astronomical Winter is the result of the Earth being tilted its farthest away from the sun, and the sun's light aiming directly at the south latitudes. Meteorological seasons are divided into four three-month groups such that Meteorological Winter begins on December 1.



Occasionally it snows in the Crescent City, as it did in 1895

Winter in New Orleans brings average daily high temperatures of 64 degrees and average lows of 46 degrees, but in the Crescent City it's all about Midwinter. It just sounds better, less harsh, even though it's supposed to be the midway segment of winter itself. Well, actually, it's a bit more confusing than that. The dictionary defines midwinter as "the middle part of winter," but also as "another term for the winter solstice." Since the winter solstice is the astronomical phenomenon

marking the shortest day and the longest night of the year, as well as the moment in time that occurs on the first day of the winter season, it can be a perplexing term. Is it in the middle of or the very beginning of winter?

The New Orleans Mid-Winter Sports Association, formed in late October 1934, has been responsible for New Orleans' famous Sugar Bowl games since the first one held on New Year's Day 1935. Tulane (9-1) played the undefeated Temple University and was down 14-0 before the Wave came back to win the game, 20-14. The upcoming Allstate Sugar Bowl will be held January 1, 2016.



*1830 solid silver British Sugar Bowl trophy,
a gift from the Waldhorn Company*

The Sugar Bowl Regatta, also established in 1934 by the New Orleans Mid-Winter Sports Association as part of a winter sports carnival connected with the Sugar Bowl, has been held on Lake Pontchartrain every year since 1935, with the exception of World War II and immediately after Hurricane Katrina in 2006. The Southern Yacht Club originally conducted the races, but they are currently held in conjunction with the New Orleans Yacht Club.

The SYC actually held its midwinter sailing event in the Fall. The Club once again hosted the USODA Midwinter Championship over Thanksgiving weekend, November 26-28, 2015. USODA is the acronym for the United States Optimist Dinghy Association.

The Mid-Winter Cotillion, which is said to be the oldest continuing

debutante presentation in New Orleans dating back over 150 years, holds a beautiful ball each year. The escorts of the young ladies are members of the Mid-Winter Board of Governors. A cotillion, which is appropriately an Old French word for "petticoat," was an 18th-century French dance based on the *contredanse*. In the United States, it is a formal ball, especially one at which debutantes are presented.

The Mid-Winter Cotillion, or just the Cotillion to those in the know, traditionally holds its presentation of the debutantes of the season during the Christmas holidays (the event is scheduled for Dec. 30 this season).

The Mid-Winter Cotillion announced in the Times-Picayune, 1977

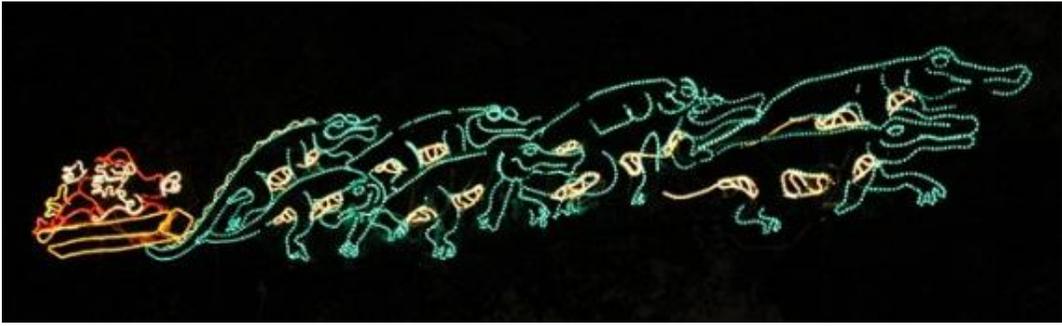
Midwinter is also the time of year New Orleans stages the "Greatest Free Show on Earth," the annual movable feast known as Mardi Gras. But whether it's winter or midwinter, New Orleans is the ideal place to be, as the following poem reveals. And don't forget that winter lasts until the March Equinox, or that March comes in like a lamb and goes out like a lion.

Winter's Here

When December's two-thirds through,
Winter starts as seasons do.
In New Orleans, there's great cheer.
Don't you know that Winter's here?

Family dinners with the folks,
Celebration in the Oaks.
Twinkling lights will soon appear
To let us know that Winter's here.

Christmas shoppers everywhere,
Caroling in Jackson Square.
"It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"
Is what we'll sing when Winter's here.



Light display in City Park

Missing Bingle at MB,
Photos snapped on Santa's knee.
Alligators drive his sleigh
Christmastime is under way.



Political Bingle in this 2012 home Christmas decoration

Cocktail parties, carryin' on,
Feasting at the Réveillon.
Such a special time of year,
Aren't you glad that Winter's here?

Camellias blooming all about,

Roosevelt lobby all decked out,
Cheering at the Sugar Bowl,
Your team just scored another goal.

New Year's Eve, just call me maybe,
Twelfth Night, King Cakes, "Where's the baby?"
Mardi Gras is all too near,
It's all because Mid-Winter's here.



Old postcard view of Mardi Gras in New Orleans

In January, balls begin,
Debutantes and dukes within,
Kings and Queens for just a day,
Wintertime is in full sway.

The Quarter streets are all arrayed
To view the Joan of Arc parade.
Before too long, there's satire, too,
Lamponing by the Krewe du Vieux.

In February Cupid's dart
Is headed for each lover's heart,
A time to tell whom you hold dear
That love's alive when Winter's here.

On Carnival, we're drinkin' wine,
So everybody second line.
In costumes we all disappear.
Throw me somethin' over here.

There's Orpheus and Proteus
And other krewes so dear to us.
Bacchus, Zulu, Krewe d'Etat,
And all "Hail Rex" on Mardi Gras

And like a lamb, March comes to stay,
But like a lion it roars away.
Although it's Lent and time to pray,
There's still St. Pat's and Joseph's Day.

So Winter here has many shades,
A time for fun and street parades,
To have a po-boy, drink a beer,
Such *joie de vivre* when Winter's here.

NED HÉMARD

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