In 2017, the people of New Orleans were excited to hear that Saints-Pelicans owner Tom Benson was bringing Dixie Beer back to the city after buying the 110-year-old iconic brand. He and his wife Gayle Benson announced that they had purchased a majority ownership in Dixie Brewing Co. LLC, with longtime owners Joseph and Kendra Bruno retaining a minority interest. Tom died the following March, but his dream lives on. The new Dixie Brewery will take over the former MacFrugal’s distribution center in New Orleans East. Occupying an 80,000-square foot portion of the building, the brewing facility will produce Dixie, Dixie Light and Dixie Blackened Voodoo Lager. There will also be a taproom and a recreational green area.

But in the past, one of the brewery’s great advertising campaigns revolved around:

**Dixie Doodles**

On September 9, 1913, in New York City, composer Josef Ruben got Jerome H. Remick to publish a rag he had written. He called his ragtime composition *Dixie Doodles*.
A half a century earlier, *Dixie Doodle* was the title of a popular parody of *Yankee Doodle* in the South at the time of the American Civil War. It was written in 1862 by Margaret Weir, published in New Orleans by Philip P. Werlein & Halsey, and dedicated to “our dear Soldiers on the Battle Field”. One of the verses was:

“Louisiana, bold and brave,  
Renowned for Creole beauty,  
Your champions will bear in mind  
The watchword, grace and booty!”

* Dixie ad, the New Orleans Item, June 10, 1938
Since 1991, the energetic style of hip-hop known as the New Orleans Bounce has given a totally new meaning to the phrase, “grace and booty”. That came with the release of Where Dey At by MC T. Tucker and DJ Irv. There was booty bouncin’ everywhere. In 2010, the Ogden Museum of Southern Art examined Bounce’s origins, growth and influence with an exhibition entitled “Where They At: New Orleans Bounce and Hip-Hop in Words and Pictures” (but they just had to correct the spelling: “They” instead of “Dey”).

April 2005, this author had the pleasure of enjoying Link Wray and his Ray Men at the 4th annual Ponderosa Stomp at the old location of Rock ‘N’ Bowl on South Carrollton in New Orleans. Wray pumped up the crowd, “Are you ready to RUMBLE?” A huge scream came back from the audience. Rumble (1958), featured in numerous films, including Pulp Fiction, is considered one of the greatest rock instrumentals ever, utilizing then-unexplored techniques like feedback and distortion. The song is the only instrumental banned from the radio because some thought the title somehow glorified juvenile

In between these times, however, _Dixie Doodles_ comprised a clever advertising campaign to promote the beer of a great local brewery.

![Dixie Doodle Contest ad, Times-Picayune, April 11, 1944](image)

The Dixie Brewery is almost the last bit of living history the city has of its once prolific brewing past (not to undermine the Shops at Jackson Brewery or the revitalized Falstaff Weather Ball and Tower). Dixie Beer’s operations began in 1907 when the brewery opened on Tulane
Avenue with Indiana-born Valentine Merz at the helm as president. By World War One, the New Orleans brewing industry would undergo serious changes. Although the nation’s largest immigrant base, Germans were the ones American doughboys were fighting “Over There”. Many of the city’s breweries, run primarily by Germans, shut down. And Berlin Street uptown was renamed General Pershing. Dixie Brewery, however, held on.

Prohibition was another challenge, yet Dixie rose again. Tough competition among other national beer companies in later decades would force other local breweries to close. In the 90s came the success of Dixie’s Blackened Voodoo, spawning later creations such as Crimson Voodoo, Jazz Amber Light and a dessert beer called White Moose. But then came the mighty power of nature.

Having been severely damaged after Hurricane Katrina, then looted of most of its equipment, only Dixie’s original building façade remains after being transformed into a multi-million dollar state-of-the-art research facility, the latest addition to the massive Veterans Affairs hospital complex in Mid-City.

But back in happier times, after the end of Prohibition and the beginning of a second world war, came a brilliant ad campaign. Cute cartoons would appear in the paper with clever captions touting the
joy of Dixie 45 Beer. The art would be in the form of stick figures, and the artists and caption writers for the cartoons would be the newspaper readers themselves (whether beer drinkers or not). They would be paid a small but welcome amount for their entries, and if theirs was clever enough, it ended up on a billboard (with an increased monetary reward).

![Dixie Doodle winner, Times-Picayune, May 7, 1943](image)

The campaign attracted artists of all ages, and influenced some very young ones. Popular New Orleans artist and lovable anti-modernist George Schmidt (born in New Orleans on November 14, 1944) took great delight in imitating the drawings of these stick men, known as *Dixie Doodles*, from the crowd-pleasing Dixie Beer ad campaign of the time. Doting mother Josephine Schmidt found joy, as well, convinced that little George was a child prodigy. His first drawing was at the age of three in his parents’ receipt book at the Lauralee Guest House on St. Charles Avenue. He continued his drawing lessons, under the watchful eye of Mrs. Dempster, at the Sam Barthe School for Boys, located back then in City Park. This author arrived at Sam’s City Park campus five years after George, under the tutelage of art instructor Betty Christovich. As for *Dixie Doodles*, my dad was a regular contributor.

He had a number of *Doodles* that were featured, but the one I most remember was his sketch of a Chinese couple toasting their good fortune. These two happy customers were each lifting up a frosty mug
of Dixie 45 Beer, and the caption read as follows: “Coo-Ling ... Quen-Ching!” This gives the reader an idea of what the cartoons were like.

![Image of a doodle cartoon](image)

*My dad received a war bond with this Doodle from July 1945.*

Author Marvin Perrett in his book, *More Nostalgia* offered a copy of his entry: a running stick man with his hat flying off his head and stating, “I’d Run A Mile For A Dixie!” He then asks the reader, “Did your entry make the Billboard?”

Brewing fine beer isn’t the only thing for which we have the Germans to thank. The word *doodle*, in fact, comes from the German language. It first appeared in the early seventeenth century to mean a fool or simpleton. It derives from the German word *dudeln*, to play (originally, to play the bagpipe or *dude*). Obviously, only a fool would do this. German variants include *dudeltopf*, *dudentopf*, *dudenkopf*, *dude* and *dödel*. “Fool or simpleton” was the intended meaning in the song *Yankee Doodle*, originally sung by British colonial troops before the Revolutionary War. This is also the origin of the early eighteenth century verb to *doodle*, meaning “to swindle or to make a fool of”.

With apologies to Cole Porter, Doodle featured May 2, 1944

Doodle appearing August 4, 1949

The modern meaning of *doodle* as a lazy, unfocused drawing or scribble emerged in the 1930s either from the “swindle or to make a
“Fool” meaning or from the verb “to dawdle”, which has had the meaning of wasting time or being lazy since the seventeenth century. The movie *Mr. Deeds Goes To Town* makes much ado about *doodles*, as an eccentric habit that helps people think.

The movie *Mr. Deeds Goes To Town* makes much ado about *doodles*, as an eccentric habit that helps people think.

And did you know, the English word “dude” may be a derivation of *doodle*. As in “Dude, where’s my beer?”

But where, you might ask did the “45” brand name come from?

One story goes like this: Just after Prohibition, Nicholas G. Castrogiovanni opened Nick’s Big Train Bar at 2400 Tulane Avenue, just across the street from the Dixie Brewery at 2401 Tulane Avenue. Legend has it that Nick remarked that Dixie Beer had a kick like a .45 pistol. But it is unlikely that Nick’s comment could have been made to Valentine Merz, who died in 1929 (before the end of Prohibition). It is possible that Nick’s “compliment” was communicated to some later
executive at the brewery, since it appears that the company began advertising the Dixie “45” brand in the late 1930s.