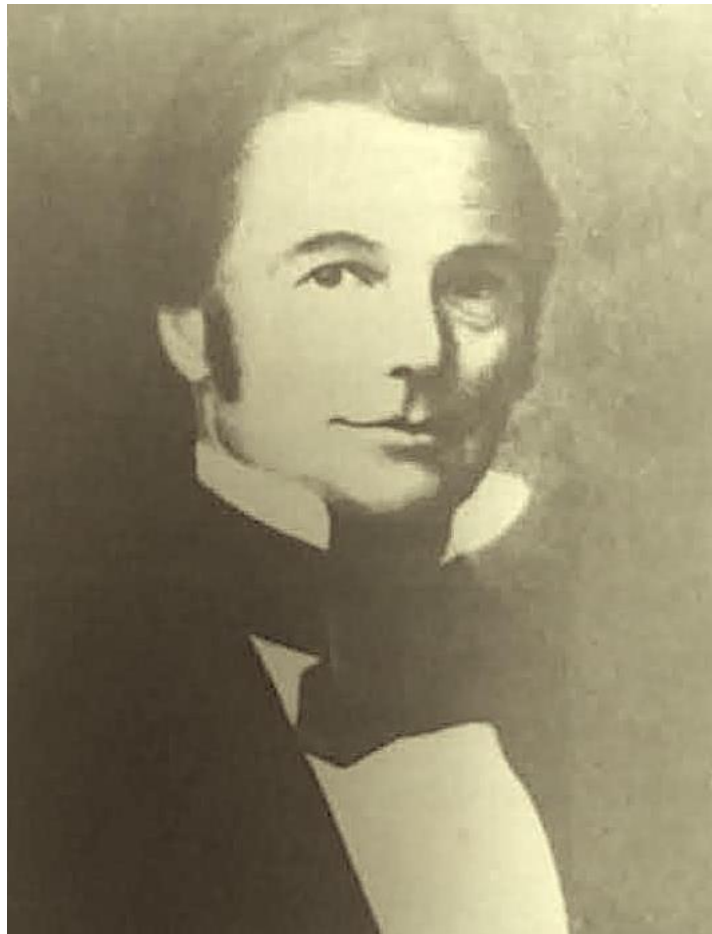


New Orleans Stories

Adam Giffen Finds a Treasure in the Trash

A New Orleans businessman, Adam Giffen served as Captain of the Mistick Krewe of Comus, President of the Pickwick Club and Treasurer for the City of New Orleans. But it is also to him that the city owes a debt of gratitude for his rescuing one of the Crescent City's most noteworthy treasures from the trash heap.



Adam Giffen (circa 1807 – 1881)

Born in New York circa 1807, Mr. Giffen came to Louisiana as a young man of about twenty-four years of age, and lived for several years in St. Martinville. It was there that he started a successful country business store, and in May of 1836 married Miss Emily Fortescue Cummings.

Before long, Mr. Giffen came to New Orleans and became associated with the clothing house of Wm. Alling & Co. as a partner, where he continued for several years prior to 1848. His next career move was becoming a partner in the well known house of Garthwaite, Giffen & Co., where he was a member from 1848 to 1857. He also served as Treasurer for the City of New Orleans and State Treasurer, to which office he was again elected after the close of the Civil War. He engaged in the cotton commission business in the firm of Giffen Smedes & Co., which was dissolved about the beginning of the war.

COPARTNERSHIP.—The undersigned have
this day formed a copartnership, under the
style of **GIFFEN, SMEDES & Co.**, and will
continue the Cotton Factorage and Commission
Business of the late firm of **GEO. SMEDES & Co.**
Office 153 Common street.
ADAM GIFFEN,
E. B. SMEDES,
New Orleans.
CHARLES E. SMEDES,
Vicksburg.
jy3-1m.

When Adam Giffen died in November 1881, the *Picayune* reported that he was "the oldest living member of the Pickwick Club" and a most active trustee of the Orphan Boys' Asylum on St. Charles. For a period of about ten years he also acted as one of the commissioners who superintended the daily drawings of the Louisiana Lottery. According to the paper, "Few men were more popular than Mr. Giffen. Always in a good humor, and ready for any species of innocent amusement, he took no gloomy views of life, but made all about him livelier and happier by his *bonhommie* [*sic*]."

With a "keen wit" and anecdotes that "were always appreciated", Mr. Giffen, as mentioned above, was responsible for seeing to it that a famous artifact was not lost to the scrapheap of history - literally. The saved item was none other than the famous bronze death mask of Napoleon Bonaparte taken by Dr. Francesco Carlo Antommarchi at St. Helena and afterwards presented to the city of New Orleans, through Mayor Denis Prieur, in 1834.



The bronze had been housed in the City Hall (today's Gallier Hall) for many years but had been thrown away with many other articles of furniture and fixtures, during a process of renovation in 1866. Mr. Giffen spotted the historic relic in a pile of rubbish, which was at that moment being carted away by a junk dealer. He secured the death mask from the junk man and carried it home, where it rested for a number of years on a small stand in the parlor of the Giffen household.

Mr. Giffen later gave the mask as a gift to his son, Robert Cade Giffen, which ultimately went to Robert's wife, Rosine Elizabeth Raoul. Around the year 1890, it was purchased by her brother, Captain William Greene Raoul, president of the Mexican National Railroad, living in Atlanta, Georgia. After the city finally learned of the whereabouts of the missing curio, Captain Raoul graciously agreed to donate the famous bronze to the city of New Orleans in 1909, and Mayor Martin Behrman transferred the mask to the Louisiana State Museum that same year.

Robert and Rosine's daughter (Adam Giffen's granddaughter), Robbie, was married in 1899 to sugar refiner Benjamin Alexander Oxnard (for whose family Oxnard, California, is named). Mr. Oxnard (president of the Adeline Sugar Company from 1892 to 1921, president of the

Savannah Sugar Company from 1916 until his death in 1924 and president of the Boston Club in New Orleans) reigned as Rex, King of Carnival, in 1894.

Hon. Adam Giffen's obituary in the *Picayune* referred to him as "a thoroughly upright and honorable man" and "constant in his religious duties" at Trinity Church. A gentleman associate called him "the most conscientious business man I ever knew." And when running for State Treasurer in 1865, the *New Orleans Times* reported, "If his experience as City Treasurer be any recommendation, the nomination of Mr. Giffen cannot fail to be a popular one. The city never had a better or more trustworthy Treasurer, and the State will be fortunate if it secures the services of so efficient a gentleman."

In addition to his son Robert, Adam Giffen had three other sons: William, Forester and James.

As for Napoleon's death mask, now over a century after its return, we can still view this historic artifact at the Cabildo, where it is one of the most popular pieces on display at the Louisiana State Museum.

New Orleans in 1726



Veüe et Perspective de la Nouvelle Orleans, 1726, Jean-Pierre Lassus, Centre des archives d'outre-mer, France

New Orleans was only eight-years-old in 1726 when artist-surveyor Jean-Pierre Lassus executed the watercolor view (shown above) of Bienville's fledgling city. If one looks closely at the details of the painting, one can observe enslaved Africans (in the foreground) felling trees on property belonging to the Company of the Indies. Another slave man is shown spearing a rather large alligator. A wooden

pallisade, at that time, offered the frontier city only limited protection from enemy forces. France's colonial rule of Louisiana would end in less than forty years, and Spain's would begin.

Bienville had served as French colonial governor of Louisiana three times before 1726, but Pierre Dugué de Boisbriand (Bienville's cousin) replaced the city's founder in 1724 and continued to hold that office into 1726.

Grace King wrote in the *Creole Families of New Orleans* (1921), "By this time the city had become the capital of the province, and the seat of government, with the legal institution of a Superior Council, whose first Councillors were sent from France. A convent of Capuchins had also been established for the service of the Cathedral."

Grace King also wrote that in 1726, the year the first census of the city was taken, "the population numbered 880, of which 65 were servants and 129 slaves." And, she said, "there were only ten horses."

Imagine Royal Street at that time: It was there that "the trades people seemed to cluster – carpenters, cabinet makers, a wig maker, a shoemaker, a wagon maker, a 'chandelier' (candle maker), armorers." "On Chartres Street was the house occupied by the Jesuits" and on St. Philip Street "lived Chesseau, the 'cannonier' of the town." Every town needs a big shot.

Toile and *Les Toilettes*

"Toile", which comes from the French word meaning "linen cloth" or "canvas", entered the English language as far back as the 12th century.

The "toile" most of us are familiar with today, however, is that timeless fabric that usually features a printed design depicting a scene or activity of some kind. It is shortened from "*toile de Jouy*," which literally means "cloth from Jouy" (a French town where it originated). The design or scene, which is repeated across the fabric, often depicts a rural subject and is typically printed upon woven cotton or chintz. While its popularity has ebbed and flowed as most design styles do over time, toile in this sense has been around in some form or another since the late 18th century. But toile doesn't always have to display pastoral scenes, as Bryan Batt and Tom Cianfichi have so aptly proven.



Hazelnut's "New Orleans Toile" is not your ordinary toile.

Co-owners of their imaginative décor and furnishings shop, Hazelnut, on Magazine Street, Bryan Batt and Tom Cianfichi offer a wonderful "New Orleans toile" (with scenes of the Crescent City instead of the traditional French countryside landscapes), which is available on everything from waste paper baskets and picture frames to COVID masks. The store and its concepts have been featured in *Architectural Digest*, *The New York Times*, *House Beautiful* and *People Magazine*, among other prestigious publications.

Actor and New Orleans native son Bryan Batt, among his many acting achievements, has won two Screen Actors Guild Awards for his portrayal of Salvatore Romano on AMC's award-winning dramatic series *Mad Men*. And Tom Cianfichi, Bryan's long-time partner (they wed in 2014) was a New York actor, director and retail talent, in charge of buying and visuals for one of Madison Avenue's most exclusive gift and home accessories stores.



Toile fabric (which rhymes with Chagall and Stendahl) is traditionally monochromatic, created with one color printed upon a white or ivory background, but multicolored toiles can also be found.



Christophe-Philippe Oberkampf invented the first machine for printing wallpaper (1785), later designs on cotton fabric at his factory in Jouy-en-Josas, France (near Versailles), hence the name "toile de Jouy".

And in New Orleans, where nothing is really surprising, toile can be found in *les toilettes*. That's French for the restroom. Please note that the toilet is plural in French. Many English speakers make the mistake of asking "where is the bathroom", or "*où est la salle de bain*", but in France "*la salle de bain*" is home to a bath tub and/or shower, and

may not have a toilet (which often has a room of its own). So if you have to go, always ask "*où sont les toilettes*" – not for "*la salle de bain*".

So where then can one find toile in *les toilettes*?

At the famed New Orleans restaurant *Antoine's*, of course.

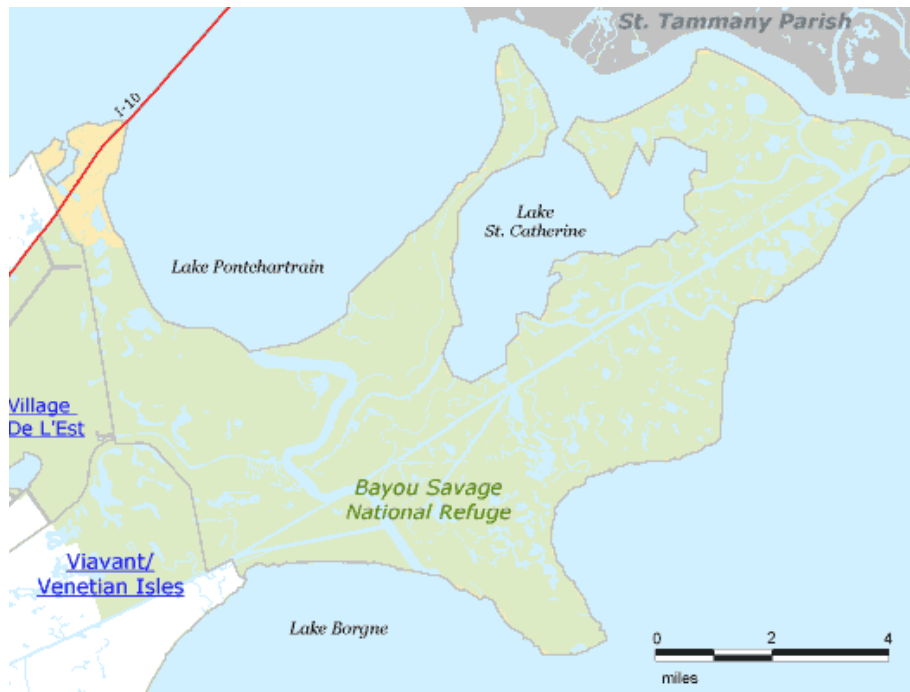


Toile in Les Toilettes at Antoine's

And always remember not to confuse *toile* with *tulle*, which is a French netting fabric. *Tulle* is often found in tutus – which some may find as too, too much information.

The Story of Lake St. Catherine

Lake St. Catherine, as most of you may know, is the brackish lake that lies between Lake Pontchartrain and Lake Borgne and is located within a roughly nine-mile long island known as the New Orleans East Landbridge. Years ago there was a town named Lake Catherine on the island situated between Unknown Pass and Miller's Ditch, which was settled for railroad workers, trappers, hunters and fishermen, but the 1915 Hurricane wiped out the town and took the lives of the thirty-five people who decided to stay in the storm's path.



But how did Lake St. Catherine get its name? "Oh, that's easy," you might say. "It was named for St. Catherine." Yes, but that doesn't really answer the question. Streets and bodies of water were named back in those days in honor of a person's patron saint. Saint Charles Avenue, for example, was actually named in honor of King Charles III of Spain, as well as St. Charles Borromeo.

And there's more than one Saint Catherine, as Catholic parishioners in Metairie will attest. But St. Catherine of Siena is not the St. Catherine for which our nearby lake is named.

Although there are no surviving primary sources attesting to her existence, Saint Catherine of Alexandria is believed to have been martyred around the year 305 in Alexandria, Egypt, after rebuking the cruelty of the Emperor Maxentius. He summoned 50 pagan philosophers with whom she debated and amazed by her wisdom and debating skills. They became Christians — as did members of the emperor's own family. Catherine, of noble birth, was then arrested by order of the emperor and tortured, but she did not abandon her faith. He then ordered her to be executed on the brutal spiked breaking wheel, but she miraculously caused the wheel to shatter. Unable to kill her by the wheel, the emperor simply had her beheaded.



St. Catherine of Alexandria French Catherinettes in 1958

Venerated as one of the great virgin saints, she was one of the most important saints during medieval times, and her feast day is November 25th. She is the patron saint of students, philosophers, librarians, lawyers, milliners, seamstresses and unmarried women.

It is customary in France on St. Catherine's Day for these unmarried ladies to take to the streets. Called Catherinettes (pronounced kat-reen-ettes in French), they parade through Paris showing off their unusual handmade chapeaux, which by tradition use two signature colors, yellow (signifying faith) and green for wisdom. The hats can be elegant, silly, pretty or downright outlandish. In New Orleans, for over a decade now, and inspired by the annual event of the same name in Paris, a St. Catherine's Hat Day Parade is held each year in November.

But that still doesn't reveal the identity of the lady named Catherine who Bienville decided to honor by naming a brackish lake in eastern Orleans Parish. That honor belongs to an English noblewoman named Catherine Knollys (pronounced Nōlz). Trust me, that's how it's pronounced.



So who was she and why would Bienville, who convinced an English Captain to turn around at English Turn, name a lake after an English woman who was the great-great-granddaughter (at least on paper) of Anne Boleyn's sister?



John Law, Gambler, Financier and Bienville's benefactor

Catherine Knollys was in fact the wife of John Law, the Scottish financier, rogue, gambler, economist and adventurer who convinced

the regent of France, Philippe d'Orléans, that he could liquidate the government's debt by a system of credit founded on paper money and backed by the future riches of the Louisiana colony. Law's Mississippi Bubble went bust in 1720 and he had to hightail it out of Paris, leaving Madame Law behind. She never saw her husband again. He died in Venice in 1729 a poor man, but it was he who helped finance the establishment of Bienville's city, founded in 1718 and world-renowned for its history, cuisine and music, known the world over as New Orleans.



St. Catherine's Day Hat Parade in New Orleans

NED HÉMARD

New Orleans Nostalgia
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