The cartoon is a simple two-dimensional drawing displaying the features of its subjects in a humorous or exaggerated way, very often in a satirical manner for a newspaper or magazine. A cartoon can make someone laugh, become angry, cry, inform one or motivate one to action. It can be intended for satire, caricature, humor or as a means to better educate its viewer.

“John Bull Before New Orleans” by William Charles, 1815
Britain’s John Bull is dragged by his ears from the swamps outside New Orleans after the Battle of New Orleans:
“Come along you old Rascal, you did not know the brave Americans and their old Hickory___,” says one of Andy Jackson’s Kaintucks.
First used as a word in 1671 (from the Italian *cartone*, for pasteboard), the cartoon began as a preparatory drawing for a piece of art, such as a painting, statue, tapestry, fresco or stained glass window. By the 19th century, it had come to represent a humorous or political illustration in magazines and newspapers. In their day, England’s George Cruikshank (1792 – 1878) and France’s Honoré-Victorin Daumier (1808 – 1879) were famous caricaturists, whose many works offer social commentary and a slant on political life during that period. Some early political cartoons were simply a group of people illustrated beneath at least an equal number of thought balloons.

New Orleans has seen quite a few through the years. The one displayed earlier celebrated Andrew Jackson’s victory in the Battle of New Orleans, but on the way to becoming President and while in office, Old Hickory was the subject of quite a number of negative cartoons as well.

Famous cartoonist Thomas Nast (1840 – 1902), who gave the nation its modern interpretation of Santa Claus and created the political symbol of the elephant for the Republican Party, showed Jackson riding atop a pig. The pig, representing the Spoils System, was depicted as dining on “fraud,” “spoils,” “bribery” and “plunder.”
As one can see, the skill of an effective cartoonist is not merely the ability to draw well. It is the ability to distill a bit of humor or a powerful idea into a few brief words and images.

The American Civil War had its share of cartoons, but it must be remembered that for most of the war New Orleans was under Union occupation.

The cartoon above was drawn by John Tenniel (1820 – 1914), English illustrator and political cartoonist famous for illustrating Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. Like Jack Horner of nursery rhyme fame, President Abe Lincoln “Found under his thumb, a New Orleans Plum, and said, What a Cute Yankee am I!” Flag Officer Farragut had just commanded the Union fleet in its successful capture of New Orleans, and Major General Benjamin Butler occupied the city on May 1, 1862.

On February 16, 1920, another general entered the city. Former
commander of the American Expeditionary Force during World War I, General John J. Pershing visited New Orleans during Mardi Gras. As shown in the cartoon below, Rex, King of Carnival, heartily welcomed the general to his “Royal City” along with a presentation of keys to the city. Prominent cotton man John F. Clark reigned as Rex that year.

In June 1933, the cartoon shown below by renowned Mexican artist and caricaturist Miguel Covarrubias (1904 – 1957) appeared in Vanity Fair Magazine and featured Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler, Russian dictator Josef Stalin, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini and Louisiana statesman Huey Long all dressed as Napoleon Bonaparte. Long, in front, is shown with a toy horse on wheels.

Democrat Huey Pierce Long, Jr. (1893 – 1935), self-nicknamed “The Kingfish”, served as the 40th governor of Louisiana from 1928 to 1932 and in the United States Senate from 1932 until his assassination in 1935. Under his leadership, schools, universities and hospitals were expanded, highways and free bridges were built and textbooks were provided to schoolchildren, but he had both his supporters and detractors. Many in the state loved his “Share the Wealth” and “Every Man a King” platform, while many others decried his dictatorial tactics.
An earlier “Kingfish” found himself in Ripley’s Believe It Or Not in the New Orleans States, dated March 27, 1935. He was the Scottish financier John Law, who was appointed Controller General of Finances of France under Philippe II, Duc d’Orléans, regent for the youthful king, Louis XV. Back then the government of France was deeply in debt and taxes were high. Law, a colorful character who had a passion for women and gambling, convinced the French government to let him open a bank that could issue paper money backed by the exaggerated riches of the Louisiana colony. Thanks to Law, the French word millionaire entered the language, and his Mississippi Company’s rise and fall became known as the Mississippi Bubble.
A cartoon designed to inform

Economics is certainly important, but in New Orleans so is the weather. The *Picayune* in 1894 introduced a frog known as “The Weather Prophet,” who daily proclaimed the forecast. The first frog, an idea of *Picayune* owner Eliza Jane Nicholson, was a simple woodcut, but innovations in printing came along. Drawn by different artists over the years, and not always a feature of the paper, the cartoon of the weather frog below was drawn by artist Louis Benedic.
There were several great editorial cartoonists with careers in New Orleans during the 20th century, perhaps none as beloved as the late John Churchill Chase (1905 – 1986). In addition to being a first-rate newspaper cartoonist, he was a widely acclaimed historian and author whose *Frenchmen, Desire, Good Children … And Other New Orleans Streets!* continues to captivate readers to this day.

Chase knew how to amuse with his art while thoroughly researching the history. After having given more than 100 talks and running it by enough experts, he once snarled, “If anybody wants to argue, we’ll meet under the oaks with typewriters at 20 paces.” Today, one would be hard-pressed to find a typewriter.

For more on Chase and other New Orleans cartoonists, please read *Cartoons Through the Years, Part Two* next week.

**NED HÉMARD**

New Orleans Nostalgia
“Cartoons Through the Years, Part One”
Ned Hémard
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