

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Hillary Clinton Visits New Orleans...in the 1800s?

New Orleans has always displayed its rich history through its street names as so superbly explored in John Churchill Chase's "Frenchmen, Desire Good Children...and Other Streets of New Orleans!" But there is one interesting coincidence on the New Orleans maps of the mid-nineteenth century that John Chase was around too early to have discovered.

Driving along St. Charles Avenue from Broadway to the bend in the river, one can view many of the familiar cross-streets: Lowerline (which was the lower boundary line of the City of Carrollton), Cherokee, Hillary, Adams (named for the president), Burdette and so on down the line. Although quite a number of Carrollton streets were named for presidents, most names were changed when the City of Carrollton was annexed in 1874 by the City of New Orleans (which already had some of these presidential street names).

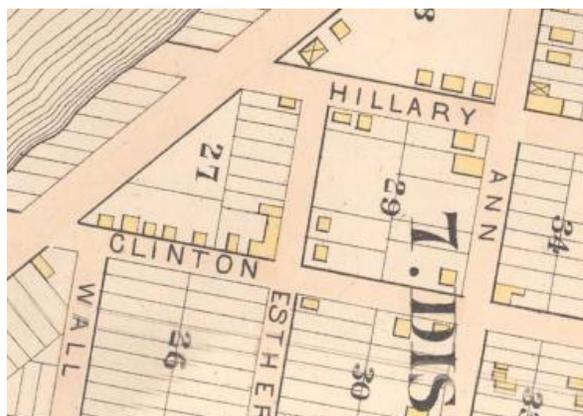


Carrollton Historic Marker

One street, however, turned out to have the same name as a president of the future, our forty-second chief executive. Clinton Street was the former name of Cherokee Street and it was directly before and running parallel to Hillary Street. It's in plain view on old maps of the city with the names Hillary and Clinton side-by-side, running mates of a very different kind. But there already existed a Clinton Street downtown, only a block long behind the Customhouse, so one of the Clintons had to go. Hillary stayed.



Hillary and Clinton, once side-by-side in New Orleans



According to John Chase, the Clinton Street downtown was probably named for New York Governor De Witt Clinton (the motivating force behind the Erie Canal) or his uncle, George (both celebrated New York politicians). The Erie Canal, however, was competition for the Crescent City and therefore detrimental to New Orleans' commercial growth, so it is a mystery why the city would have chosen De Witt

Clinton as namesake for a street in the first place.

The Erie Canal (also known as “Clinton’s Ditch”) helped New York City increase its trade position and develop it into the world’s dominant commercial center. In the years before the canal, the majority of the agricultural products from the Old Northwest and the Ohio Valley (with the exception of those from Northern Ohio) traveled south, down the Mississippi River to the port of New Orleans. In the 1830s, however, with a canal now connecting these areas to the Atlantic, trade began to go east, with the tonnage of staples more than doubling between 1826 and 1835. Even Clinton, Louisiana, the parish seat of East Feliciana Parish, was also named for De Witt Clinton.

Of course, there’s always the later George Clinton. Not De Witt’s uncle, but the funky George Clinton of Parliament, who in 1975 first sang a song called “Chocolate City.”



De Witt Clinton



George Clinton

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