

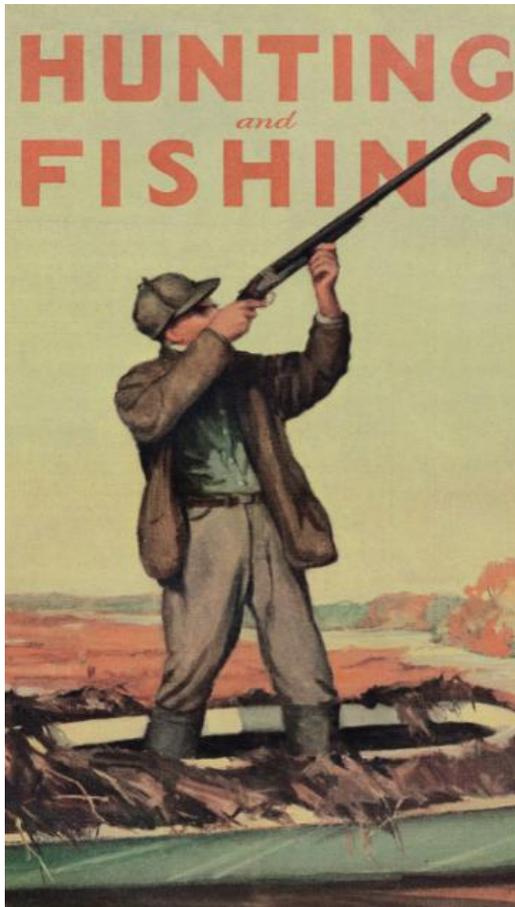
## NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

*Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions*

*By Ned Hémard*

### **Hunting and Fishing (in and around New Orleans), 1900**

Henry Rightor, journalist, author and insurance executive (January 18, 1870 - June 23, 1922), was the founder and first president of the New Orleans Press Club. Born in New Orleans, Mr. Rightor wrote plays and was the author of *Harlequinade* (1900) and *Moons and Marshes* (1905), a book of poems. He was also the editor of the *Standard History of New Orleans* (1900), which was quite thorough in giving "a description of the natural advantages, natural history, settlement, Indians, Creoles, municipal and military history, mercantile and commercial interests, banking, transportation, struggles against high water, the Press" and, of course, "Hunting and Fishing".

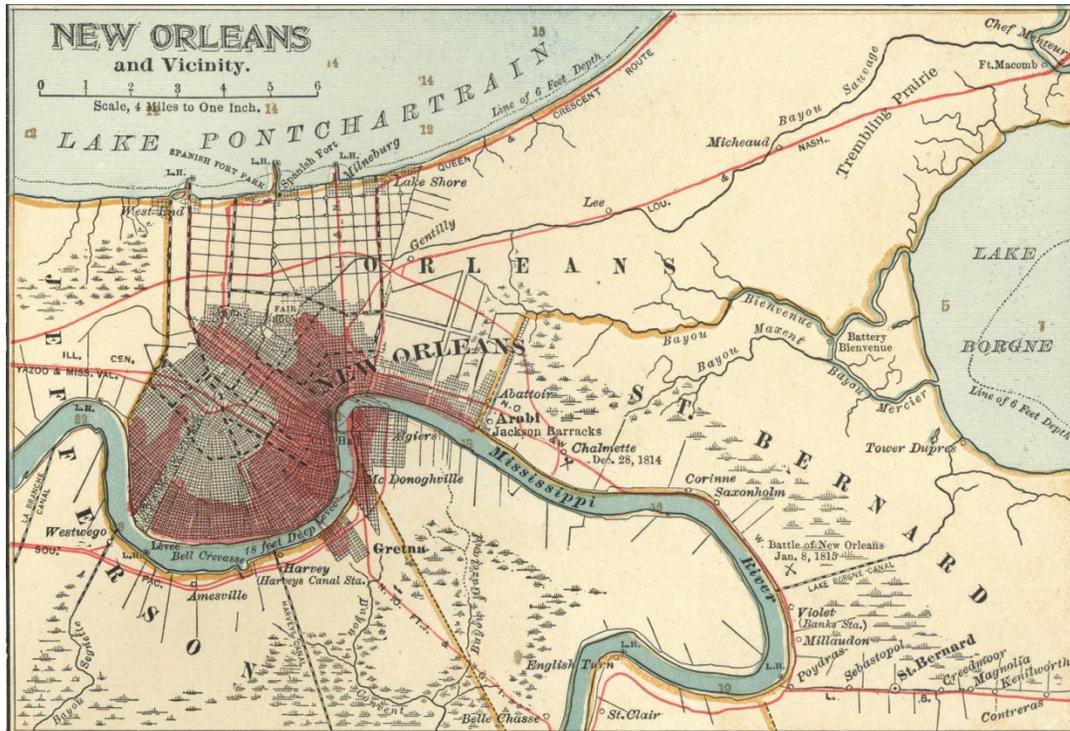


According to Rightor's *Standard History*, here's what the hunting and fishing scene was like in and around the Crescent City over a century ago:

### "Hunting and Fishing

On account of its situation, surrounded as it is by water and with bayous and lakes all over the country, and its neighborhood, no city in the country is more favorably situated than New Orleans for all sorts of sport. The hunting is principally of ducks and snipe, but all kinds of fish, fresh water and salt, are caught in the immediate vicinity. There are many hunting and fishing clubs near the city of New Orleans, many of them within the city limits, though not within the built-up portion, as the city limits of New Orleans stretch to the Rigolets, from the Jefferson line, a distance of forty odd miles. Every sportsman has his particular hunting and fishing grounds, but the whole country is good. There are hunting clubs at English Look-out, at the Rigolets, the Chef Menteur, at Miller's Bayou, Lake Catherine, and at Chandeleur Islands. All of these places are good for fishing also. Many of the sportsmen have elaborate outfits of canoes, pirogues and hunting suits – which must be yellow, the color of marsh grass – and decoys, and innumerable paraphernalia for the amateur sportsman. The snipe shooting is good, but hunting duck is considered the nobler sport. The variety of ducks that may be shot in Louisiana is innumerable. The experts will name many more kinds than are found in the treatises of the ornithologists. The French duck is generally conceded to be the finest duck with regard to appearance and for the table. The Louisiana ducks, it is claimed, fly faster than the ducks in any other part of the world, but nevertheless very many are killed, both by the regular pot hunters and by amateur hunters. Many of the hunters are expert shots and will calculate to a nicety the exact angle at which the gun is to be held and the exact distance ahead of the duck that it must be pointed. The hunting trains during the hunting season over the Louisville and Nashville Road, are always crowded with the regular hunters and their friends, whom they are taking over, and when they return Sunday night the amount of game that is brought in is something extraordinary. Over every seat is hung a bunch of ducks, and the baggage car, besides, is loaded full. To hunt ducks in Louisiana is not like hunting game in any other part of the country, where an afternoon can be devoted to the sport. It is a regular expedition. It is necessary to go to the hunting grounds so as to remain over night and get up an hour before daybreak and row or paddle in a small canoe or pirogue (riding in a Louisiana pirogue has been described by a visiting Englishman as floating in the water on a match) to the hunting grounds, where the blind is made and the hunters lay concealed until daybreak, when the ducks are expected to come. The coldest weather is considered the best for the sport, which, with a long pull before daybreak, makes the amount of hardship that is endured necessarily considerable. The marshes are damp, and when

the ducks do come, you have to be very quick in handling the gun, as single ducks or whole flocks will fly by with the rapidity of a rifle bullet. Nevertheless, the game seems to be worth the candle, as when the ducks are flying the bags that are secured are considerable, and the Louisiana ducks are the finest in the world.



*New Orleans and Vicinity, circa 1900*

All sorts of fish are caught in the waters of South Louisiana. Trout, black fish, perch, bass, croker, sheep-head, Spanish mackerel, pompano, mullet, plaice, red-fish and cat-fish. The cat-fish usually trouble the amateur fisherman, as they abound everywhere in great quantities. To catch small shark at Grand Isle with a rope for line and immense hooks is considered a very enjoyable sport on account of the dangers from the bite of the fish. The sport is not finished when the fish is caught, as, with the sharks it is necessary to kill it. The favorite way is to chop off its tail with a hatchet. While the fisherman is chasing the shark to "decapitate" its tail, if an Irish bull may be used, the shark is very often chasing the fisherman. Sharks are caught at the end of the Island and they are usually small shark, three to three and one-half feet long. Green trout is considered one of the finest fish that can be caught, and in all the bayous and lagoons during the summer they abound.

The sportsmen's stores in New Orleans keep in stock all sorts of rods and tackle and flies, where fishermen's outfits and paraphernalia can be had, and the trade is very considerable, as many men in New Orleans are enthusiastic fishermen, and some of them very expert. Green trout are usually caught with live bait, shrimp being used,

though some believe in a bit of red flannel to attract the trout. There is always doubt about the red flannel, but it is supposed to appeal to the picturesque taste of the fish. There is no doubt about the shrimp. They will bite at shrimp, and the Radian fishermen, who are always experts in all sorts of fishing, always employ shrimp."

"English Look-out", for those unfamiliar with the location, is today listed on modern nautical charts as "Pearl River Island". It was first designated "*Isle des Pois*" (or "Pea Island") in Iberville's logs, because his crew had lost a sack of peas there on his early expedition to the Mississippi River. It retained that name for many years, and was so named in some of the official British documents involved in preparations to invade New Orleans (culminating in the Battle of New Orleans).

The British did not really consider the island a "look-out" spot, but more of a mid-point transfer location for thousands of soldiers that were to be moved from the large sea-going vessels at Cat Island to Chalmette. This task was accomplished by means of small boats, which took the troops first to the island and then to the mainland. Since sentries were posted there, the name "English Look-out" soon replaced the less interesting "Pea Island".

There are also a few unfamiliar or dated expressions used in this 1900 entry on "Hunting and Fishing".

A "pot hunter" is a person who hunts for food or profit, as opposed to the amateur sportsman.

The phrase "to a nicety" means exactly, or precisely, and its use is attested from 1795.

This expression "worth the candle" is the positive version of "not worth the candle," which relates to endeavors that were thought so lacking in merit that it wasn't worth the expense of a candle to create enough light to engage in them. "Not worth the candle" is ultimately of French origin. It appears in Cotgrave's *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*, 1611, where it is listed in French:

*"Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle."*

"Plaice" is a flatfish like a flounder, and the green trout" referred to in the article is actually the largemouth bass, neither a trout nor a bass, but a member of the sunfish family. Also in the sunfish family is the "crappie," which we call *sac-à-lait* in South Louisiana. That's because the Choctaw word for trout, *sakli*, sounds like *sac-à-lait* (French for "bag for milk").

An "Irish bull" is one of those logically absurd statements unfairly

attributed to the Irish. Yogi Berra and Samuel Goldwyn, neither of them Irish, probably contributed the most memorable examples, such as:

"If I could drop dead right now, I'd be the happiest man alive."

As for "Radian fishermen," this is believed to be a misspelling of "Cadian," which was once a common misspelling of "Acadian." Today "Cajun" is more commonly used.

In the meantime, modern anglers would be wise to use shrimp over red flannel, and (more importantly) refrain from "decapitating" sharks' tails.

## **NED HÉMARD**

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