

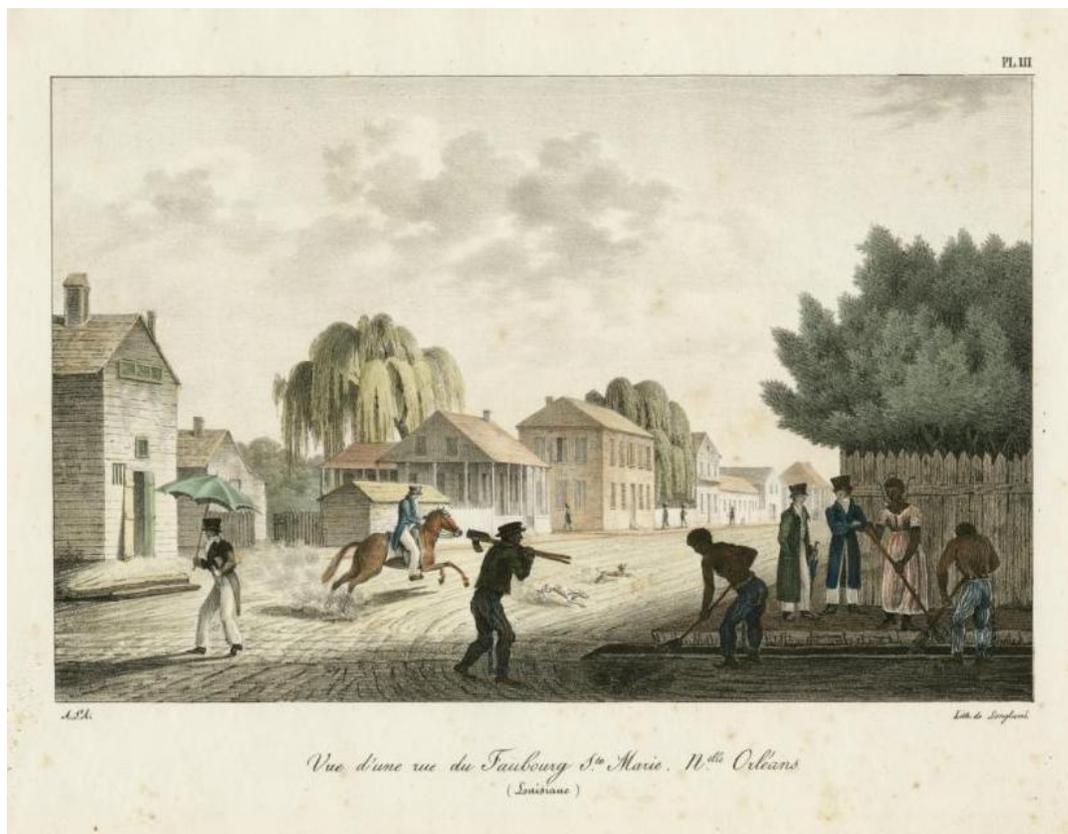
NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Independence Day, 1826

In 1826, our nation was celebrating its fiftieth birthday. New Orleans was a mere 108 years old, only twenty-three years of which were as a part of the United States. Louisiana had become a state only 14 years earlier, and New Orleans earned the honor and respect of the nation in the Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815.

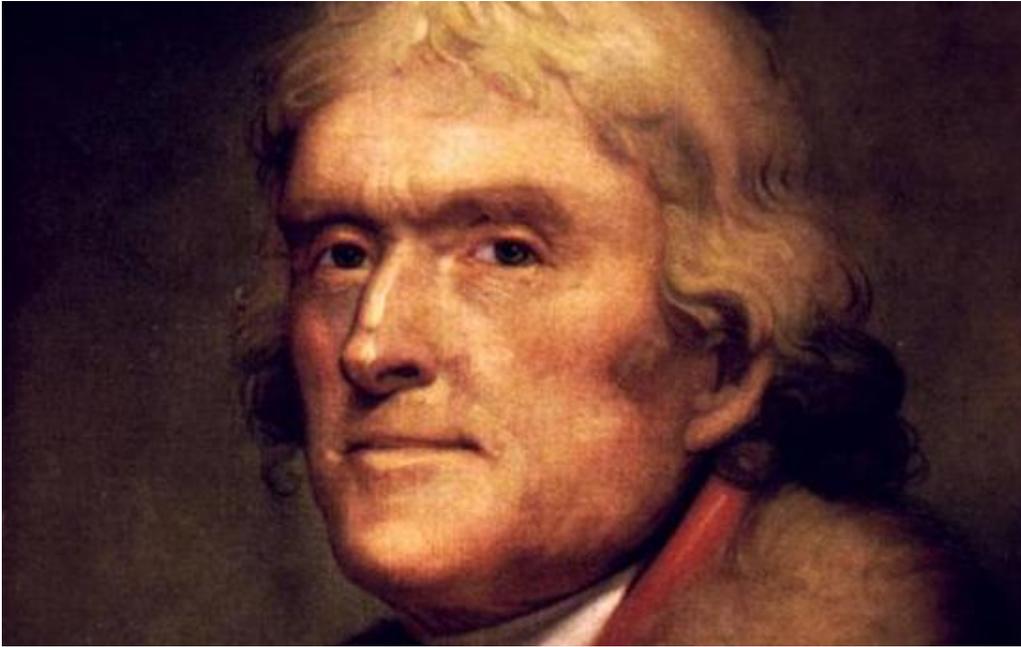


View of the Faubourg Ste. Marie in 1820s New Orleans

But back when the Declaration of Independence was being written in 1776, New Orleans was a Spanish colonial possession of New Spain, and Luis de Unzaga y Amezaga (1721 – 1790) was governor. The Spanish Crown, later that year, issued a royal order on September 19, 1776, instructing Bernardo de Gálvez (1746 – 1786) to replace

Unzaga. Then only thirty-one years of age, Gálvez officially assumed the governorship on January 1, 1777, and played a vital part in aiding the United States during the American Revolutionary War.

Gálvez assisted the American Thirteen Colonies in their desire for independence by leading Spanish forces against Britain and defeating them at the Siege of Pensacola (1781) and conquering West Florida. Also, Gálvez worked with American patriot Oliver Pollock, to ship supplies, such as uniforms, gunpowder, muskets and medicine to the American insurgents.



Jefferson, Founding Father, President and a Louisiana Parish

Thomas Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence (complete with changes made by John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, as well as Jefferson's notes of changes made by Congress) is preserved today at the Library of Congress. The version regarded as the official document is the signed copy on display at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Passed on July 2nd and ratified on July 4th of 1776, the Declaration was a formal explanation of why Congress had voted to declare its independence from Great Britain, more than a year after the actual start of the American Revolution. But the Declaration did so much more. The first line of the second paragraph is the most known and most revered:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Fifty years later, what, one might ask, was happening in the Crescent

City? On February 11th, 1825, the year before, newly elected Governor Henry S. Johnson, signed legislation honoring the author of the Declaration of Independence and the man behind the Louisiana Purchase, President Thomas Jefferson. The legislation created the Parish of Jefferson out of the Third Senatorial District.

Another great man was honored that year, as well. American Revolutionary War hero, Marie Joseph Paul Ives Roch Gilbert Du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, visited New Orleans April 9-15.



Marie Joseph Paul Ives Roch Gilbert Du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette

The city's representatives collected Lafayette at Mobile on the original steamer *Natchez* and brought him to New Orleans after first stopping at the Chalmette Battlefield. Upon his landing, Bernard de Marigny expressed, in a short but affecting address, the city's love and gratitude to the hero of Brandywine and Yorktown. It was raining in torrents upon the General's arrival, but that did not deter the crowds. During his visit to the city, his popularity was proven by resounding

cheers of "Vive Lafayette!" The second floor of the Cabildo, the *Sala Capitular*, served as his residence during his stay. Elevated in the middle of the great square before him was a *faux marbre* upon canvas Triumphant Arch over six stories high. It was designed by Joseph Pilié and painted by Antonio Fogliardi, and was festooned with banners bearing patriotic slogans. Ninety Choctaw warriors, late allies in the Seminole War, were among those paying homage, as well a contingent of free men of color, militia veterans of the Battle of New Orleans, who were warmly welcomed and praised by Lafayette. The great hero's visit underscored the fact that Louisiana was no longer some foreign territory, but truly red, white and blue.



New Orleans in the 1820s

So, on Tuesday, July 4, 1826, John Quincy Adams was President of the United States, and New Orleans was an American city mindful of the historic anniversary, although the *Louisiana State Gazette* on that date stated that not much in the way of celebration was going on in New Orleans:

"This day being the fourth of July, our journeymen feel disposed to hold it as a jubilee. Hearing of no celebration in our city, but such as they are disposed to observe, we have consented that no Gazette shall be published tomorrow."

On a brighter note, the paper noted that they were "happy to state that the alarm spread" the morning before "of yellow fever being" in

the city was “not well founded.” There were several cases “of a very high grade of billious fever” but the hospital authorities were stating that “no case of yellow fever” had become evident in the institution. Still, the paper warned: “However, we think prudence requires that strangers should hasten their departure from the city.”

Ads posted in the *Gazette* on the 4th demonstrated the enormous amount of commerce taking place in the Crescent City. In 1825, New Orleans imports and exports were valued at \$17 million (over \$410 million in today’s dollars). L & M Commagère, commission merchants, had several postings offering such goods as cocoa (received by the brig *Good Return*), log-wood and pork by the barrel, and “One Hundred Doubloons” (not the Mardi Gras variety). Commission merchants often gathered to conduct their business dealings at the city’s numerous coffee houses, exchanges and hotels. They provided an array of services that helped make planters’, shippers’ and merchants’ commercial dealings more profitable and less risky.

Also advertised on the 4th was a Notice of the “Succession of Thomas Durnford, deceased” by prosperous merchant and city benefactor, John McDonough. Durnford, a white merchant, and Rosaline Mercier, a free woman of color, were the parents of Andrew Durnford (1800-1859), himself a free person of color and owner of the St. Rosalie Plantation in Plaquemines Parish as well as seventy-seven slaves. When Thomas died, as the notice in the *Gazette* demonstrates, the curatorship of his estate fell to his friend, John McDonough, who subsequently served as Andrew’s business associate, mentor and friend.

David O. Whitten, professor of economics in the College of Business at Auburn University, wrote a book on this subject: *Andrew Durnford: A Black Sugar Planter in the Antebellum South, 2nd updated edition*, December 31, 1995.

And, although Jefferson declared “all men are created equal,” slavery was still very much a part of daily life in New Orleans, even if there were free men of color owning slaves. An additional advertisement in the *Gazette* on July 4th was a notice that on Saturday, the 29th of July “at the Exchange Coffee House, at the corner of Chartres and St. Louis streets” a “negro woman slave, named Nancy” was to be “exposed for sale.”

BANK OF ORLEANS.

New-Orleans, 3d July, 1820.

A DIVIDEND of two and a half per cent. on the Capital Stock paid in this Institution, has this day been declared payable to the stockholders or their representatives, on and after Monday the 10th inst.

By order of the Board.

July 4

WM. M'F. SAUL, Cashier.

LOST on the Evening of Saturday last, a TERRIER DOG, coloured black and spotted. Any person returning same to No. 39, Chartres street, will receive the sum of seven dollars.

July 4

DR. J. C. NESBITT.

Other notices and ads in the Louisiana State Gazette, July 4, 1826

Of course, the biggest news that 4th of July, which did not reach New Orleans until later in the month, was that two Presidents and Founding Fathers, who each had a part in the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, had died on the very same day. Once fellow patriots, then adversaries, then friends, they died within five hours of each other.

The election of 1800 had been a bitter one, and Jefferson emerged victorious. It appeared that the former allies would be eternal enemies. But over time both men expressed to third parties their respect for the other and their desire to renew their friendship. Adams broke the silence by sending Jefferson a letter in 1812, in which he wished Jefferson many happy years to come. Jefferson's response was a fond recollection of their time as fellow laborers in the same cause. The former patriots resumed their friendship, which included over fourteen years of correspondence in their waning years.

July 4th, 1826, John Adams, age 90, lay on his deathbed. His last words were "Thomas Jefferson survives." He was mistaken: Jefferson had died five hours before at Monticello at the age of 82.

On August 8, 1826, the City Council of New Orleans "resolved that the ceremonies in honour of the memory of Thos. Jefferson and John Adams should be celebrated at the same time and place." An oration in English to honor Adams was to be made by William Christy, Esq.,

and in French by Jean François Canonge, Esquire. Samuel H. Harper was to deliver the English oration on Mr. Jefferson and Louisiana Secretary of State Pierre Derbigny, Esq., was to do the same in French. Pierre Derbigny was one of the principal drafters of the 1825 Civil Code of Louisiana, along with Louis Moreau-Lislet, Edward Livingston and François Xavier Martin. Derbigny had also delivered the first Fourth of July oration in the Louisiana Territory back in 1804. Although Mr. Derbigny was selected by the City Council over Bernard de Marigny by two votes, Marigny's eulogy on Thomas Jefferson was printed in the *Gazette* on August 19, 1826. Here is an excerpt:

"FELLOW CITIZENS: This respectful and imposing silence announces to us that a man of wisdom and virtue, the philosopher of the age, the father of his country, THOMAS JEFFERSON, has terminated his glorious career: he died on the fourth of July last about one o'clock in the afternoon. For some time before he had felt the hand of age pinching life at its source – he was on the verge of his seventeenth lustre. The return of the anniversary of American independence, that day so glorious for him and his country and affording so great an example to the whole world, occasioned emotion too strong for his shattered frame to resist. Yes, my fellow-citizens, the patriarch of liberty, Thomas Jefferson, is dead – he fell not under the attacks of disease – he succumbed under the vivid sensations which his mind experienced on the day so memorable for him, so fortunate for his country. Let me endeavor, my fellow-citizens, in the midst of the grief in which this sad event has plunged our minds, to depict the virtues and to recite the services of him whose death has put in mourning ten millions of people; of him whom the world loves and admires on account of his labors for the benefit of mankind."

Marigny continued to praise Jefferson for the Louisiana Purchase and to point out "on the fiftieth anniversary of our independence, that his spirit took its flight towards the mansions of the blest ... proud to contain within its bosom the body of one of the greatest and most virtuous of mortals."



Pierre Derbigny, Esq., of Louisiana

Two years after that 1826 Fourth of July, Pierre Derbigny ran for Governor of Louisiana against Bernard de Marigny and others, and won. Part of his platform was the construction and repair of levees. On October 3, 1829, after only ten months in office, Governor Derbigny was thrown from a (horse-drawn) carriage and died three days later, in Gretna, Louisiana.

Thomas Jefferson's relationship with slavery continues to be a complex issue. Although he wrote, "all men are created equal" and worked passionately to gradually end the practice of slavery, he personally owned hundreds of African-American slaves throughout his adult life.

In his writings on American grievances justifying the Revolution, Jefferson attacked the British for sponsoring the slave trade in the colonies. Under Jefferson's leadership, the importation of slaves was banned in Virginia in 1778, one of the first jurisdictions worldwide to do so. Jefferson consistently opposed slavery, calling it a "moral depravity" and a "hideous blot", yet he found it difficult financially or otherwise to free his own slaves during his lifetime.

To further complicate matters, after DNA testing, historians now widely accept that after the death of his wife Martha, Jefferson had a relationship with her half-sister, Sally Hemings, a slave at Monticello, resulting in children, many of whose descendants are alive today. In 2007, the DAR (Daughters of the Revolution) honored Sally's sister, Mary Hemings Bell, because she had been taken as a prisoner of war during the Revolutionary War, as a Patriot, making her female descendants eligible for membership.



Jefferson's Monticello

Four of Sally's six children grew to adulthood. Jefferson freed all the Hemings children, the only slave family to all go free from Monticello. Two were allowed to "escape" in 1822, even though Jefferson was by then struggling financially and would be \$100,000 (over \$2 million today) in debt at his death. Upon Jefferson's death, his will provided freedom to the younger brothers Madison and Eston Hemings. Jefferson had to petition the state legislature of Virginia to obtain special permission for them to stay in that state with their families.

Another President, John F. Kennedy, in his "Remarks at a Dinner Honoring Nobel Prize Winners of the Western Hemisphere" on April 29, 1962, said, "Someone once said that Thomas Jefferson was a gentleman of 32 who could calculate an eclipse, survey an estate, tie an artery, plan an edifice, try a cause, break a horse, and dance the minuet." He was indeed an accomplished, yet complex, individual.

Jefferson's death, as well as Adams', transpired less than two hundred years ago. Our nation as a whole, as well as the city of New Orleans, has experienced much change since that time, most of it for the best.

Have a safe and happy Fourth of July.

NED HÉMARD

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