

## Saint Patrick's Day in New Orleans, 1805

Saint Patrick's Day was "observed by the Irish inhabitants" of New Orleans on March 17, 1805, reported the *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser* on March 23rd of that year. A "day of festivity and joy," the celebrants "assembled at the house of Mr. M'Laren, where, at the usual hour, they partook of a dinner prepared for the occasion."



Among the guests at the Saint Patrick's Day banquet were "their excellencies," two Louisiana governors: William Charles Cole Claiborne, then Governor of the Territory of Orleans (and later the first Governor of the state of Louisiana) and the Marquis de Casa Calvo, who was appointed interim governor of Louisiana on September 18, 1799, following the death of Governor Manuel Gayoso de Lemos y Amarin from yellow fever. Casa Calvo's term was extended until 1801, because illness delayed the arrival of his successor, Juan Manuel de Salcedo.

So why was Casa Calvo celebrating Saint Patrick's Day in 1805? His full name, Sebastián Nicolás de Bari Calvo de la Puerta y O'Farrill, Marqués de Casa Calvo, offers a hint as to this Spanish military officer's parentage. He was born in Havana, Cuba, on August 11, 1751, to a wealthy Cuban family, the son of Pedro Calvo de la Puerta and Catalina de O'Farrill, who was of Irish ancestry.

Casa Calvo had earlier participated in the “reconquest” expedition to New Orleans in 1769, with General Alejandro “Bloody” O’Reilly, an Irishman in the service of Spain (who also served as Spanish Colonial Governor of Louisiana). Casa Calvo was involved in other military operations, such as the siege of Mobile in 1780. In 1786, he acquired his title of nobility and was knighted in the Order of Santiago. In 1794, his warships successfully engaged the French enemy in Saint Domingue. And on April 10, 1803, together with Governor Salcedo, Casa Calvo delivered Louisiana to the French from Spain, before its official transfer to the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase.



*Miniature portrait of William Charles Cole Claiborne, 1805, by Ambrose Duval*

But in 1805, after a festive dinner that March 17th, the participants in the Irish feast, including those two governors, drank the following seventeen toasts:

“1. The day we celebrate – ushered in with festivity, and concluded with harmony.

2. The president of the United States (Thomas Jefferson, who had just been sworn in for his second term on March 4th).

3. His catholic majesty – may peace and harmony long subsist between him and the United States. (That’s Charles IV, King of Spain, they’re toasting.)



*Carlos IV, rey de España, by Francisco Goya*

4. The memory of General Washington. (Interesting that they didn’t refer to his title of President.)

5. The Irish in Louisiana – may they look on the country they have left with affection, and with gratitude on that which has received them. (By 1850, on a par with Boston, one in five residents of New Orleans

were from Ireland. The Crescent City had a larger Irish population per capita than Philadelphia and Baltimore.)

6. Ireland – may every return of this day, find her in the enjoyment of peace and happiness.

7. America – may her prosperity equal her extent – and her virtues equal her resources. (Louisiana was still a territory in 1805, and would not become a state until 1812.)

8. The harp of Hibernia – may it always be in tune.



*The harp of Hibernia on an 1805 penny*

9. The Government of the United States – may every Irishman who enjoys its protection, be ready to bleed in its defence.

10. The sons of St. Patrick, and St. Tammany – may they often dance to the tune of Yankee Doodle, played on an Irish harp. (The Sons of St. Tammany did indeed control politics in New York, and played a major role in helping the Irish rise up in American politics.)

11. The Government of Louisiana – may her Irish inhabitants, yield to no others in zeal for her support.

12. The memory of our brave countrymen who fell in defence of the liberties of America.

13. The soil of Louisiana – may it prove congenial to the Irish shamrock.

14. Merry and Wise – may the sons of Shillelah be merry on this day and wise the rest of the year. (A shillelagh is a thick stick of oak or blackthorn used in Ireland, typically as a weapon.)

15. The Army and Navy of the United States.

16. The American flag – may it be seen to wave on every coast, and be welcomed wherever it is seen.



*The American flag had fifteen stars and fifteen stripes in 1805.*

17. May America know peace by experience, and war only by report."

The following Saint Patrick's Day, 1806, another excellent dinner was given by the "Irish Gentlemen" of New Orleans, at which Governor Claiborne, the "Secretary of State, the Judges, Col. Freeman, and several officers of the government and other gentlemen were guests." Once again, seventeen "toasts were drank [sic]", reported the *Gazette*.

Many of the toasts were similar to those made the year before, but there were some additions: "The Venerable Clergy"; "The Territory of Orleans – may its inhabitants soon enjoy all the privileges of American citizens"; and, best of all, a toast to "The three C's of Louisiana – Cane, Cotton, and Corn!" I'm guessing that the "Corn" was of the liquid variety.

You'll notice that the Marquis de Casa Calvo was *not* present for the 1806 Irish celebration. In fact, he was a *persona non grata*, having become a thorn in the side of Governor Claiborne. In October 1805, he traveled from New Orleans to the old Spanish post of Los Adaes, near Natchitoches, Louisiana. Claiborne believed Casa Calvo was involved in stirring up dissension among the Spanish inhabitants in the western part of the territory, so he dispatched officers to keep an eye on his movements. Upon returning to Natchitoches, Claiborne delivered the former Spanish governor (on January 25, 1806) a polite, but stern, ultimatum, stating:

"I esteem it a duty to remind you that the departure from the territory of yourself and ones attached to your department will be expected in the course of the present month."

A photograph of a handwritten signature in brown ink on aged, yellowish paper. The signature is written in a cursive style and reads "Marq. de Casa Calvo". Below the main signature, there is a large, stylized flourish or initial that resembles a capital letter 'C'.

*Signature of the Marquis de Casa Calvo*

Casa Calvo returned to New Orleans on February 4th, and on the 12th Governor Claiborne delivered him a passport, with "best wishes for his health and happiness," but adding that his presence was no longer acceptable. Indignant, Casa Calvo left the state, never to return.

Of all the Spanish governors, he was there at the beginning of Spanish rule when O'Reilly executed the French rebels – or patriots, depending

on your viewpoint; at Gálvez's victories against the British during the American Revolution; and, at the end, with the transfer of the colony from Spain to France to the United States.

So incensed was he by his expulsion by Claiborne, Casa Calvo, after arriving in Pensacola, wrote to Madrid requesting permission to mount a military expedition to take back Louisiana for Spain. His reconquest request was never realized. Back in Spain, he was on the side of Joseph Bonaparte, Napoleon's elder brother, who was on the throne from 1808 to 1813. He was made a lieutenant general in the king's army, but upon Bonaparte's fall from power, Casa Calvo left Spain in disgrace and was exiled in Paris, dependent on financial help from his daughters in Havana. He died in Paris May 27, 1820.



*Joseph Bonaparte, King of Spain 1808 – 1813, abdicated and returned to France after French forces were defeated by a British-led coalition at the Battle of Vitoria*

Also in 1805, in New Orleans, Bernard de Marigny undertook the subdivision of his plantation, creating the historic Faubourg Marigny, the first suburb below the original city. One of the streets Marigny named was *Rue de Casa Calvo*, in honor of the Spanish governor, but years later it was renamed as an extension of Royal Street. On the same day, a street in Algiers (Nelson Street) was renamed Casa Calvo, and so it remains today.



*Resting place of Casa Calvo, Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris, France*

New Orleans has witnessed countless Saint Patrick's Day celebrations (and parades) since those gala Gaelic dinners over two hundred years ago, but the city's large and vital Irish population continues to have a little fun each year when March 17th rolls around.

May yours, like those Saint Patrick's Days of old, be "Merry and Wise".

## **NED HÉMARD**

New Orleans Nostalgia  
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Ned Hémard  
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