

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Two Gifted Guides

Take a trip back in time to over a century ago. You are anxious to engage in a bit of fishing and hunting, but you need someone experienced to show you where and how. Where are the best spots? What should you bring? Is there a place where you can stay?

So who do you call?

There were two excellent choices.

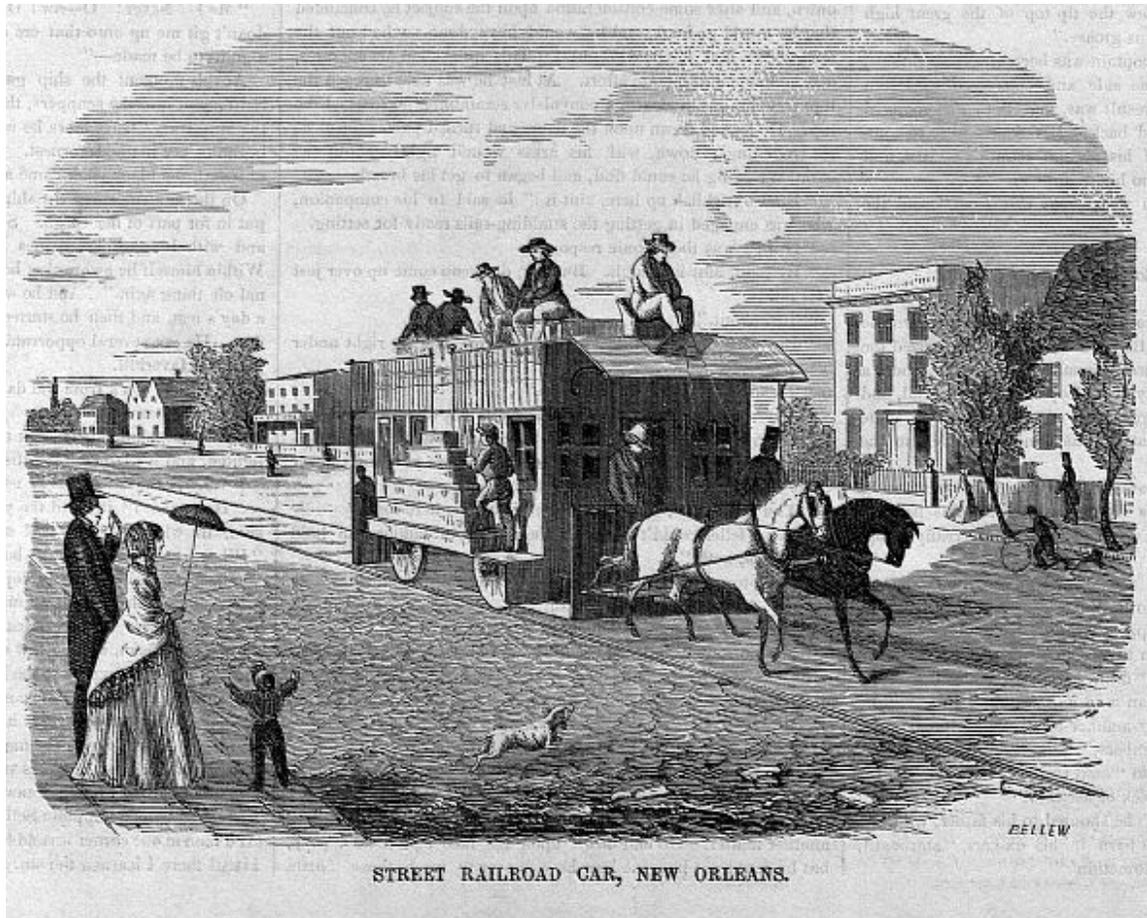
“Old Nick” Schaneville

One such person was Nick Schaneville (March 10, 1834 - December 29, 1901), native of Paris, France, resident and “veritable landmark” of Chef Menteur, expert angler, hunter and guide. The *Picayune* called him “the best-known of all professional hunters who operate camps,” and he moved to that “marshland section of Louisiana” when a man of 38 years. He was also known as “the most skillful paddler at the Chef,” knowing “every spot where the fishing was best.”

Before that and just after the Civil War, Nick was employed as a conductor with the horse-drawn streetcar line that once ran on Jackson Avenue. In those days, it was “one of the old-time double-decker cars.” Schaneville’s job as conductor was to assist passengers getting on and off the streetcar, collect their fares and signal the driver when everyone was on board and the streetcar was safe to proceed. He operated this signal by pulling on a rope attached to a bell at the opposite end of the car that the driver could hear.

But Nick had lost his health completely. The verdict of his doctors was that he was rapidly becoming a victim of consumption (an archaic term for tuberculosis) “and could not live in a crowded city.” His physicians recommended a life in the open woods, where he would have plenty of

sunshine and exercise. The good news was that he was a natural-born hunter and loved real sport.



Double-decker street railroad car, New Orleans

The area in and around Chef Menteur Pass, one of two waterways connecting Lake Borgne and Lake Pontchartrain, was just what the doctors ordered. A veritable "sportsmen's paradise," it was there that Nick "established himself in a cabin on the shore of the outlet, and there remained for over thirty years." He was the first to set up such a place out there, at first just a public camp operated in a modest way. But over time he established a stag hotel out in that wild prairie, and at the time of his death Nick had "the largest and best-equipped camp in the state."

Nick had the distinction of being a great hunter even before he moved out to the Chef. His hunting ground? The old "first field," which was the area located in the area of Louisiana Avenue and Baronne Street. There were no houses there back then, and "snipe and plovers made the lowlands back of the avenue their home."

Schaneville's health rapidly improved after acclimating himself to an open-air life at the Chef, and it wasn't very long before he made a

complete recovery from the illness that the physicians believed was soon to kill him. Unlike the majority of other professional guides, the *Picayune* stated, "He was a sportsman at heart, and believed in giving game and fish a fighting chance for life." Nick also "never used a gill net in his life and never violated the recognized law of shooting birds after nightfall." His stellar reputation and influence "for years kept the Chef free of pirates," those who would illegally seize by force fish and game honestly won by others.



*Sarah Bernhardt, who hunted with Nick Schaneville,
painting by Georges Clairin*

The *Picayune* reported there was no better-known man to sportsmen than "Old Nick," who "always remained faithful to his dear Paris." He and the internationally renowned actress Sarah Bernhardt "had met years before and were good friends." So when she visited New Orleans, it was only natural that she would make a hunting trip at the Chef. "Nick was one of the foremost in looking out for the famous actress' interests." The "Divine Sarah," smartly attired in sealskin, participated in her first alligator hunt the very year "Old Nick" died, just within a half mile of Lake Pontchartrain. It was a slow and tedious journey along the Viavant canal, only ten feet wide with high rushes and water moccasins. But before long and with help, Miss Bernhardt held the rope while a triple loop was placed around the jaw of a huge six-foot gator after he emerged from his hole. Old Mr. Henry Viavant offered *madame* a bouquet of roses from his garden, and the adventurous actress thanked him after her successful hunt.



Sarah snags a surprised six-foot saurian

Nick Schaneville breathed his last breath at the Chef on December 29, 1901, and his death was a "severe blow to the sportsmen, for the old professional had a world of sincere friends. All of the old-time hunters and fishermen were associated with Nick at some time during their career, and they all liked his free-and-easy manner and appreciated his big heartedness." On the night that this great hunter and trapper died, according to the *Picayune*, "the members of the Tally-Ho Club volunteered their services and rendered every aid in their power."

The Famous Old Hunter, Dies, at Chef Mentour.

After Nick's death, his son, Joe Schaneville, who also had been employed as a streetcar conductor in New Orleans, left his job to continue his father's business as hunting and fishing guide. Like his father before him, Joe also had quite a distinguished career as a fisherman and hunter. Nick's other son, Anthony, was quite accomplished, as well. Tony shot "eighty-four ducks in one day" in 1904, and his obituary in 1909 recognized him as "One of the Best-Known Southern Sportsmen" and "one of the best-known fishermen in the Parish of Orleans." Nick's wife, nee Caroline Ruth, lived until 1909, who (according to her obituary in the *Picayune*) "aside from her noble character was known as a famous cook all along the coast."



Nick Schaneville's camp in the 1950s

José "Joe" Mayans

Nick Schaneville had a colorful past, but when it came to experience, Joe Mayans (circa 1847 - September 20, 1915), hunter, fisherman and chef, had a most impressive resumé. As a youth, the *Times-Picayune* recounted, Joe rode for the "pony express in the Far West" and "raced with savage Indians, his own scalp as the prize." He even allowed the famous Buffalo Bill "to imitate William Tell, and shoot apples off his head." Mayans lived to become famous as a cook in New Orleans, and gained a reputation as a huntsman along the Gulf Coast.

When Joe died, his obit in the *Times-Picayune*, proclaimed, "Every epicure in New Orleans, that is, the epicures of a generation ago, knew Joe Mayans. Joe – everybody called him Joe – was a true artist of the spit, and he could give a dish a flavor that no other master of the kitchen had the skill to even imitate."



"Joe" Mayans,
Hunter, fisherman and chef, who died at Chef
Mentour.

"a true artist of the spit"

Joe was born in Spain and came to the United States in the 1860s when still a young man. The romantic lure of the West attracted him and for several years he was on the plains of Nebraska, the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico and the mountains of Colorado.

Although Joe was "a plain-spoken man, given to laconic expression," as described by the *Picayune*, he was also quite the raconteur. His stories would captivate those standing around his stove or spit. With ladle in hand, he would relate tales of the times the Pawnees pursued him across the open plains, or that wonderful story of Buffalo Bill Cody inducing Joe to stand as a target while the famous scout displayed his marksmanship.

"Buffalo Bill could shoot straight, and me, I was not afraid," said soft-spoken Joe in the slightest of Spanish accents. "He would put the apple on my head. Bim! his gun would say, and the apple, him would fly in half, and me, I was not hurt."



Buffalo Bill Cody

Joe first arrived in New Orleans in the "stirring days" of the 1870s and opened a restaurant and saloon on Toulouse Street, near Burgundy, in the French Quarter. His establishment became popular with men "whose jaded palates needed the tonic effect of some new and delicious dish."

In 1880, he opened a new place at Tulane Avenue and Basin Street, and it was there that Joe achieved his widest local fame. When the Police Headquarters moved to the corner opposite Joe's place, the men of the department had many a banquet there, including one arranged for Police Chief David Hennessy. Hennessy's assassination in 1890, the reader may remember, brought about a mob lynching of 11 Italians and an International incident.

Joe Mayans kept other saloons and restaurants, the last being at Howard and Gravier streets. In 1899, he went over to the Chef to take charge of the Tally-Ho Club. He was extremely successful in this endeavor, but following some disagreement, it was not long before Joe built a camp of his own. By 1903, Joe was managing the affairs of the *Nepenthe* Club that in June 1904 announced that it would broaden out considerably by building a new home adjoining Joe's camp. The *Nepenthe* Club was founded by Charles P. Richardson (and named after his winning yacht of the same name). The word *nepenthe*, an elixir that frees one from all sorrow, first appears in Homer's *Odyssey*. The *Nepenthe* Club was located near to the Tally-Ho at the Chef.

Joe was an excellent shot himself and was an active member of the Louisiana Gun Club. He was remembered as one of the best marksmen in the city. The *Times-Picayune* reported, "He won his spurs in the lake country as a huntsman, and during the winter season his place was always crowded with parties from the city, and visitors from the North who wanted the assistance and direction of an experienced guide."

Joe had been on a hunting trip in the marshes the day he died, but as he returned home he was stricken with paralysis and died shortly afterward. Joe was married to Caroline Gunckel, who died twenty years before. There was one daughter, Mrs. Joseph E. Fogarty, and a granddaughter, Carmelita Fogarty.

JOE MAYANS, NOTED HUNTER AND CHEF, DIES AT CLUBHOUSE

Nick Schaneville and Joe Mayans, two successful, beloved and experienced guides, both died where they made their fame – out on the Chef.

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