

## NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

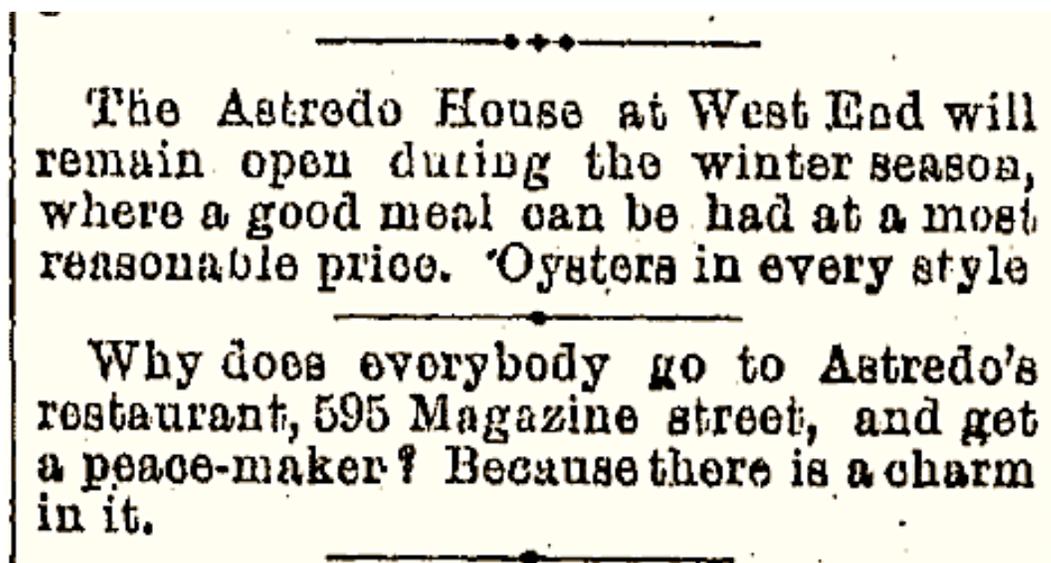
*Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions*

*By Ned Hémard*

### **When Liberty Came To Town**

New Orleans has the po'boy, while other parts of the country have the submarine sandwich (sub), hoagie (Philadelphia), hero (New York), or the grinder (New England). The typical sandwich consists of a long roll of Italian or French bread, either sliced into two pieces or opened in a "v-shape", and filled with a variety of meats and other ingredients. The main difference between po' boys and the other sandwiches is the use of the city's unique type of French bread: crisp on the outside but soft and fluffy in the center.

New Orleans in the 1800s served "oyster loaves" (a term still in use) and "*La Médiatrice*" or the "peace-maker", so called because tipsy husbands brought them home as peace offerings to their wives, who were waiting to reprimand them for their misdeeds. This was long before Benny and Clovis Martin coined the term "po'boy" in 1929 during the New Orleans streetcar motormen and conductors strike.



*1880 Astredo's "peace-maker" ad, The New Orleans Daily City Item*

Besides the hoagie, Philadelphia also has the Philly cheesesteak, which

was created there in the 1930s. The sandwich is made by taking thinly shaved beef, grilling with onions until crisp and curled (frizzled), and serving on a small loaf of bread. The addition of provolone cheese was a later addition. The bread used is either an Amoroso or Vilotti-Pisanelli roll, and today a proper cheesesteak may consist of Cheez Whiz or American cheese slathered on instead of provolone. A truly authentic version (with all fresh ingredients) became available in New Orleans in 2012 when Liberty Cheesesteaks opened at 5031 Freret Street. Mike and Joe, the founders, have been best friends since Tulane, and Mike was born and bred in Philadelphia. Their slogan is "Philly grown, NOLA home", and their logo is the Liberty Bell with a fleur-de-lis. But this wasn't the first time, the Liberty Bell found its way to the Crescent City.



*Liberty Cheesesteaks at 5031 Freret Street*

In April 1884, Joseph Valsin Guillotte became Mayor of New Orleans as plans were underway for the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition. The Fair was to celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of cotton's first appearance in international trade (1784), when a shipment of six bags of cotton, amounting to about one bale, was sent out from Charleston, South Carolina, to a foreign port. Mayor Guillotte was motivated to make the Exposition a great success, so he decided to write the mayor of Philadelphia in order to make a special request: The Liberty Bell.

On November 22, 1884, William Burns Smith, mayor of Philadelphia, received Guillotte's request for the loan of the Liberty Bell, for the duration of the World's Fair. This letter, submitted along with Mayor Smith's answer in the affirmative, was delivered to the Philadelphia Councils of Municipality on December 4, 1884. On December 23 permission was officially granted, as a gesture of goodwill and

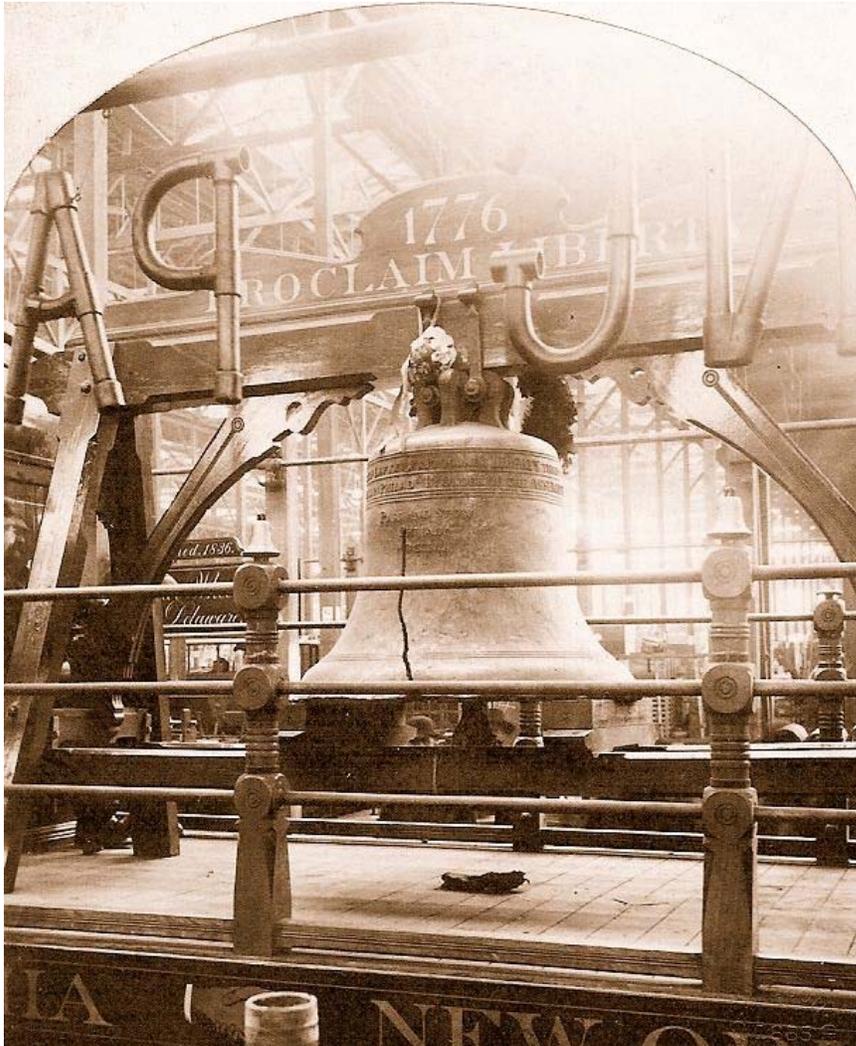
solidarity from the "City of Brotherly Love", for the historic old bell to travel on loan to New Orleans. The 2,080-pound bell made its journey southward mounted upon a specially designed railroad car, provided by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. The venerable symbol of our nation's freedom was safely accompanied and guarded by a contingent of police officers of the City of Philadelphia. The old-time uniforms, beards and moustaches were thrown in for *lagniappe*.



*Hands clasped in friendship, the Liberty Bell heads for New Orleans*

An enclosed section made up one side of the rail car (for use by the police escorts), and the open-platform (where the Liberty Bell would be displayed) made up the other section of the railroad car. On the morning of January 23, 1885, the bell was taken down from Independence Hall and carried to the train which for its excursion to Louisiana. The Liberty Bell was cheerfully greeted in eleven cities

along the route, and arrived in New Orleans three days later on Monday, January 26. It even stopped at Biloxi, Mississippi, where former President of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, came to speak and urged national unity. At last in the Crescent City, it was received with great pomp and circumstance before its arrival at the exposition grounds, where it was displayed in the northern section of Machinery Hall, within the 33-acre Main Building.



*Liberty, with its crack proudly shown, on display in New Orleans*

Thousands of visitors viewed the Liberty Bell Exhibit during the four months it was presented at the fair. Numerous souvenirs were available for sale, including a commemorative doubloon with the Liberty Bell upon its obverse. There was also a wood-handled brass Liberty Bell (three-inch high) with the inscription: "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All The Land 1776 – 1885" and an illustrated pamphlet covering the bell's history.

The Liberty Bell (made of 70% copper, 25% tin, and small amounts of lead, zinc, arsenic, gold and silver), after a highly successful run at the Exposition in New Orleans, began its return trip to Philadelphia on June

13, 1885.

The *Picayune* ran the following article on January 27, 1886, on how Mayor Guillotte "and Aldermen" saw to it that the Philadelphia officials were "handsomely entertained" when they were in New Orleans.

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## **CITY HALL.**

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### **Philadelphia Guests.**

**The Philadelphia officials now visiting the city are handsomely entertained by their hosts, the Mayor and Aldermen. Sunday they visited the French Market, breakfasted at Astredo's, West End; attended the exhibition at the Louisiana Cockpit in the afternoon, and visited the French Opera House in the evening. Yesterday they went to Chef Mentaur with the Mayor and other city officials, and were dined at the Tally Ho club house, returning on the evening train.**

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They visited the French Market and had breakfast at Astredo's, a popular restaurant at West End.

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### **A Symposium.**

**Capt. John Astredo's famous restaurant at West End is still open, and a fish breakfast, a superb dinner or a cosy supper can be had under the most pleasant conditions. Fresh fish, game and oysters a specialty.**

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**ASTREDO'S HOUSE AT WEST END.—**  
Every pleasure resort has its favorite hotel or restaurant where the visitors replenish the inner man with more satisfaction and less pecuniary outlay. Such a place may be found at the West End in the "Astredo House," a nice and cozy restaurant where everything the market affords can be had at the most reasonable prices. The house has been fixed up for winter accommodation—glass doors having been added to the saloon, which has been enlarged. Mr. Astredo has also opened his well-known restaurant at No. 595 Magazine street, where peace-makers can be had as usual.

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To complete their very full itinerary, they viewed cockfighting that afternoon at the Louisiana Cockpit on Dumaine Street, followed by a trip to French Opera House on Bourbon Street that evening. The Philadelphia guests (along with the mayor and other city officials) were provided a sumptuous meal that night at the "Tally Ho club house" at the Chef Pass. That was on Monday, January 25, 1886. Club cook and keeper Felix Fagouet related in an article in the New Orleans *Item* "with great pride of the dinner he prepared at the Tally-Ho club ... when the Philadelphia delegation came South with the old liberty bell, and was entertained by the club."

Felix also prided "himself upon the fact that he is 'a pure Creole.' His ancestors came from the island of Hayti," and were "free people", he said. Felix, who the paper described as "one of the most unique and interesting characters identified with fishing and hunting camps along the gulf coast" later went on to be keeper of the Rigolets club.

After dining at the Tally-Ho club, the Philadelphia delegation departed on the evening train.

Between 1885 and 1915, the Liberty Bell made seven trips to various celebrations and expositions, but New Orleans was the first to get the famous bell. The generous loan by the City of Philadelphia was largely instrumental in healing the wounds of Reconstruction. Curiously, even Philadelphia did not have the Liberty Bell on the grounds of its own Exposition in 1876. Still, a huge number of Philadelphia Exposition

visitors went to visit the bell, and its image was on every souvenir.

Following World War II, and after considerable controversy, the City of Philadelphia agreed that it would transfer custody of Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell, while still retaining ownership, to the federal government. Today, in very much the same way that the French Quarter Visitor Center in New Orleans and the Chalmette Battlefield are part of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, the National Park Service is now responsible for maintaining and displaying the Liberty Bell.

For now, if you wish to view that iconic symbol of American independence, you must travel to Philadelphia. It was there in 1751 that the Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly ordered a new bell for the Pennsylvania State House (today called Independence Hall). On the famous bell are the words "Proclaim LIBERTY throughout all the Land unto all the inhabitants thereof" (Leviticus 25:10). The bell rang out numerous times for public announcements, but by 1846 a thin crack was affecting the bell's sound. The bell was repaired that year and rang for a George Washington birthday celebration, but it cracked once again and has not been rung since. It is a mystery why the bell cracked either time.

But, if you can't make it to Philly, try a delicious reminder at Liberty Cheesesteak on Freret.

## **NED HÉMARD**

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"When Liberty Came To Town"  
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