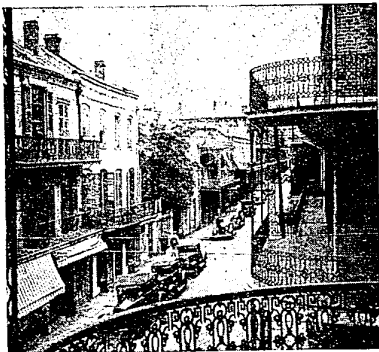


Vacation Highlights by The Old AAA Traveler



Delicate "iron lace" is a highlight in old New Orleans, and here you have a glimpse of narrow and intriguing Royal Street. Originally called Rue Royal-Bourbon, Bienville, founder of the city, changed the name to Rue Royale. Architecture is typically French and Spanish.

I once heard a great man describe New Orleans as a city which never grew up and I'm inclined to like his description. For New Orleans has a light-heartedness that you find nowhere else. It's a merry, fun-loving, music-

loving town — music from the buxant majesty of grand opera to the ragged but intriguing tunes of a group of ebou youngsters extract from pots and pans and bottles and homemade banjos.

Mardi Gras in New Orleans goes back more than 200 years to a Shrove Tuesday when young French gentlemen, longams for the galey of Paris, staged an impromptu parade in costume and sang the songs they had sung before their coming to the New World.

That was the birth of Mardi Gras which means Fat Tuesday, the final day before the faithful don the sackcloth and ashes of Lent and from that day the carnival has grown bigger and bigger from year to year . . . until now the celebration starts on the Thursday before Shrove Tuesday and continues almost day and night until midnight on Tuesday when the bells on ancient St. Louis Cathedral strike the hour. Then the city steps from merrymaking into the solemnity of the next 40 days.

New Orleans was founded in 1718 by Bienville, although there has been a thriving settlement there before that time. Forty-four years later all of Louisiana was ceded to Spain and still another 40 years later saw it receded to France, receded just a few short days before the entire territory was transferred to the United States in the Louisiana Purchase.

Jackson Square in the very heart of the Old French Quarter was the scene of that historic transfer, just as Jackson Square has been the scene of other historic events, including the great reception for Andrew Jackson after his victory over the British at Chalmette in 1815.

Jackson Square is one of the beauty spots of New Orleans, flanked on two sides by the long red-brick Pontalba Buildings, the first apartment houses in the world, a

third side by world famous St. Louis Cathedral and the Cabildo and on the fourth side by the docks along the Mississippi River. That old square is a mass of flowers and, with its magnificent equestrian statue of "Old Hickory", it is one of the highlights in a visit to New Orleans.

Yes, New Orleans is an entrancing old town, from its old cemeteries, with the tombs built high above ground — "ovens", they call 'em in New Orleans — to its narrow streets of the Quarter, with their jalousied balconies and their heavy ironwork, from the Duelling Oaks in Old City Park to the "Haunted House of Madame LaLaurie".

That old mansion, once the home of notorious Madame LaLaurie, is one of the things the visitor must see, for in that house was unfolded one of the wildest dramas of this country. Madame LaLaurie, reputedly the most beautiful woman in New Orleans, lived in that old mansion. She ranked high in society and entertained visiting royalty lavishly.

She was, in fact, just about the leader in the society of that day. Early one morning wisps of smoke were seen rising from the roof of the mansion, the house was afire. Neighbors rushed into the mansion, arousing the still sleeping Madame LaLaurie, and climbed the stairs into the upper floor and on to the attic.

And there was a scene worthy of the best in horror-writing for chained to the walls were a half-dozen slaves, near death from starvation, mere skin and bones and the skeletons of two who had died

long months before. Well, some of the chained slaves were freed but several perished before the flames were quenched.

And those freed told an almost unbelievable story, for they revealed that Madame LaLaurie was a fiend and that daily she came to the attic with a long whip and beat one or more of the chained slaves into unconsciousness.

Madame LaLaurie? Well, in the excitement of the fire she had her horses hitched to her elaborate carriage and disappeared in the direction of Lake Pontchartrain, never to be seen again. And through all the years it has been claimed that late at night, in the stillness of the narrow streets, may be heard the awful wail of the whiplash and the screams of the suffering slaves.

Too, here is the great mansion which was built to house Napoleon when he had been released from his island prison. The young French, you know, planned to free Napoleon by force and bring him back to rule as emperor of the New France. Well, the old house still stands, with its cupola entirely glassed in that the emperor might look out over his new domain.

Down in the Barataria country, the land of the pirates, they'll tell you that a double of Napoleon was smuggled ashore on St. Helena by John and Pierre Lafitte, that the real Napoleon was sneaked aboard a pirate sloop and started back for Louisiana, and that he died during the voyage and that he was buried beside Bayou Barataria in the little fishing village of Lafitte.

New Orleans is filled to the very gunwales with strange tales and

intriguing places. Take the famous Suicide Oak, for example. That ancient tree stands in City Park, one of the South's great beauty spots. Long years ago the park was the Allard Plantation, owned by the influential and wealthy Allard family. Well, the last of the Allards was a poet with little of business acumen, and he saw the plantation being dissipated. Finally he offered the plantation to the city with the understanding that when he died he would be buried beneath a certain oak around which

he had played as a child. He did die in time and he was buried beneath the spreading oak, a simple tomb the resting place for his bones. And through the years the oak has come to be known as Suicide Oak because of the great number of persons who have taken their lives within the shade of its widespread limbs.

In old St. Louis No. 2 cemetery sleeps Dominique You, who commanded the Lafitte pirates in the Battle of New Orleans. After the

battle he settled in New Orleans and became a prominent citizen. When death called him he was buried with a great civil funeral . . . his epitaph calls him "a second Bayard without fear on land or sea" . . . and into the gray granite

of his tomb is cut the Masonic square and compass. Dominique You was a magnificent fighting man and he'll never be forgotten in Louisiana.

So — see New Orleans!



From where I sit... by Joe Marsh

Nicest Compliment I've Had

One of the nicest comments I've received about this column was from an editor in the Middle West I called on. And while I don't like to give myself orchids, I think it illustrates a point.

"Joe," he said, "it so happens I don't agree with everything you say, but I always like to run your column. Because it gets down to earth and talks about the right to disagree. And it only asks for tolerance towards the other person's point of view."

He went on to explain, by way

of illustration, that he never had happened to have a taste for ale or beer. But that when I spoke of the right to enjoy a moderate beverage like beer, well, he was right there with me!

And from where I sit, that's the important thing: not whether you share another person's tastes or point of view—but whether you recognize his right to exercise a free choice in a free land.

Joe Marsh

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