

## How New Orleans Took Uptown from Jefferson Parish

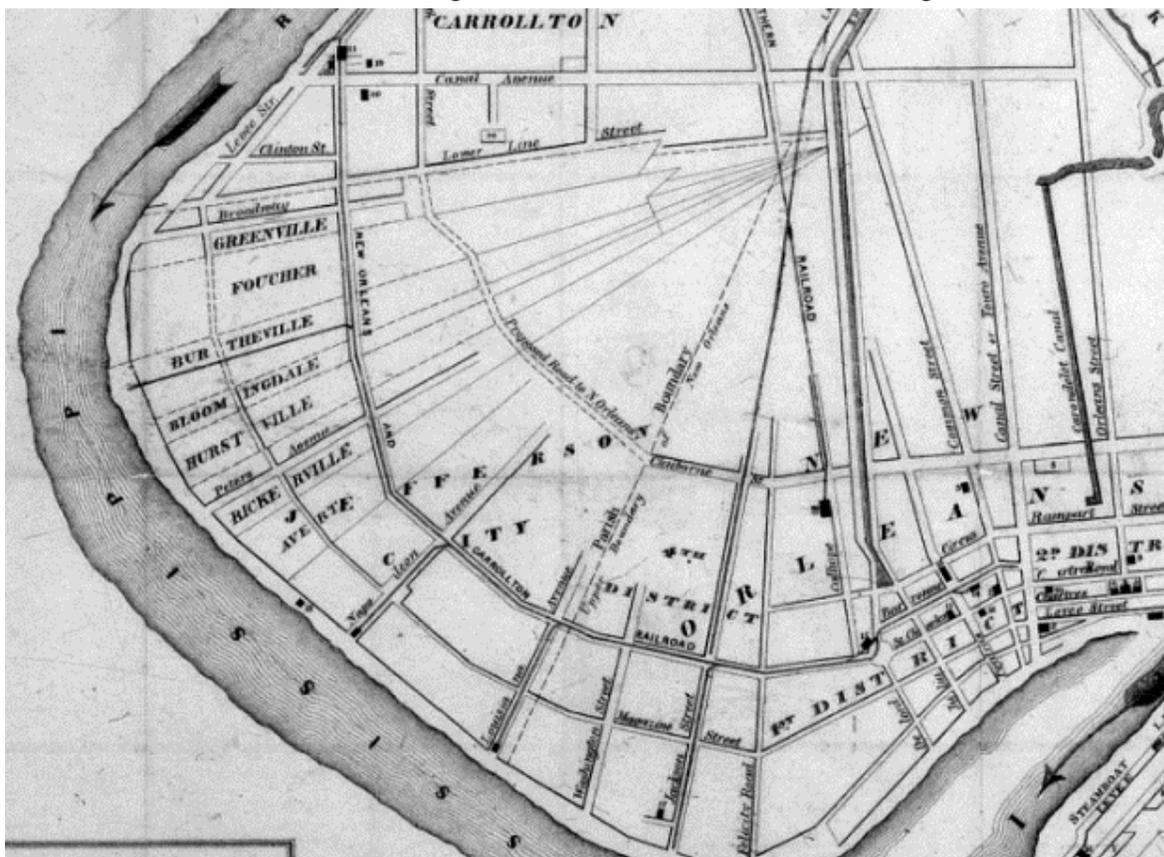
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In last month's *Cityscapes*, we examined the 1852 annexation of Jefferson Parish's City of Lafayette—today's Garden District, the Irish Channel and Central City—to become New Orleans' Fourth Municipal District. That move had some opposition, but most residents on both sides of the parish line (Felicity Street at the time) thought it was a good idea.

Such was not the case 18 years later, when New Orleans enveloped the City of Jefferson, now the heart of Uptown. This was a something of a hostile takeover, and it occurred in rancorous times.

Like Lafayette, Jefferson City materialized piecemeal, as owners of 10 adjoining long-lot plantations, where slaves raised indigo, rice and sugar cane, independently decided to develop their tracts. The resulting subdivisions, laid out mostly between 1834 and 1855, were named with the French term *faubourg* (faubourgs Plaisance, Delachaise, St. Joseph, Bouligny and Avart) or with English geographical suffixes: Rickerville, Hurstville, Bloomingdale, Burtheville, Greenville and Friburg.



This 1855 map detail by William H Williams depicts Jefferson City between New Orleans (right) and Carrollton (top).  
Courtesy Library of Congress.

These lands initially pertained to Orleans Parish until the state in 1825 created Jefferson Parish above Felicity Street. Known as the “upper banlieue” (outskirts), these subdivisions boasted riverfront industries, such as livestock slaughtering and rendering, as well as market gardening.

Residential development, meanwhile, got a boost with the 1833 opening of the St. Charles and Carrollton Railroad, today’s streetcar line, which made it convenient to live “up-town” and work “down-town” (both neologisms, courtesy of New York City, and usually hyphenated). That same year, residents of Jefferson Parish’s lowermost faubourgs incorporated themselves as Lafayette, which enabled them to govern their own affairs.

Similarly motivated, residents living upriver sought to incorporate their domain. In 1846, they convinced the state to create the Borough of Freeport, from Toledano Street up to roughly Eleonore. Use of the English term “borough,” a rarity in Louisiana, reflected the area’s prevailing Anglo-American population, while “Freeport” bespoke a proposal to eliminate wharfage fees to attract shipping traffic away from New Orleans.

Four years later, on March 9, 1850, the state repealed Freeport’s incorporation in favor of a new and enlarged city to be named Jefferson. Spanning from Toledano Street to Lowerline Street, Jefferson City comprised everything between Lafayette and yet another separate city, Carrollton, going back to the New Basin Canal (now Interstate 10).

Over the next 20 years, Jefferson City would grow from a patchwork quilt of agrarian parcels and low-density housing to something resembling today’s Uptown. Shops and offices clustered around Magazine Street and Napoleon Avenue, and the twin parks known as Lawrence Square formed the city’s central plaza. Jefferson also had its own newspaper, gas company, markets, levees and cemeteries.



*Napoleon Avenue formed Jefferson City’s main axis. Photo by Richard Campanella.*

New Orleans struggled economically after the Civil War, but Jefferson did surprisingly well. It enjoyed a building boom, thanks to cheap lumber plus high demand for housing for families fleeing New Orleans. Jefferson leaders sought to capitalize on the boom by proposing a “Ship Island Canal” linking their riverfront to Lake Pontchartrain and the Gulf, while also building shell roads to facilitate internal transportation.

All this talk of improvements worried powerbrokers in New Orleans, who had long nursed an appetite for their neighbor’s fine real estate. A new canal and roads could bolster Jefferson’s competitiveness at New Orleans’ expense, while also driving up Jefferson’s debts. If New Orleans were to overcome its postbellum

malaise through real estate development, Jefferson was the perfect place to do so, and the perfect time was now, before those improvements might complicate matters.

Jeffersonians eyed suspiciously their neighbor's wringing hands. But it was state politics that turned that suspicion into violence and laid the groundwork for Jefferson's demise.

Jefferson had been stridently pro-Confederate during the Civil War, and its white residents continued to resist the federal occupation and the Reconstructionist state government afterwards. That defiance irritated Republican Gov. Henry Clay Warmoth, who retaliated by vacating Jefferson's city council in favor of his own appointees.

Toward that end, the governor dispatched the Metropolitan Police, an integrated force created by the state to, among other things, counter the postwar intimidation of black voters. The Metropolitan Police were granted authority throughout the New Orleans area, despite that some jurisdictions, including Jefferson, had their own constabularies.

In May 1869, Jefferson City found itself with two opposing sets of officials, each claiming legitimacy and each backed by their own armed militias. Those on the city side were white, mostly Democratic, and former Confederates. Those on the state side were racially integrated, Republican and federally backed.

On the night of May 18, 1869, about 350 Metropolitan Police marched on the Magazine Street police station to take control of Jefferson City. Local police and citizens intercepted them; shots rang out, and a bloody melee ensued. The Metropolitan Police withdrew.

But they returned the next day, this time with heavily armed federal troops joined by Gov. Warmoth himself. More violence followed, killing at least two and wounding nearly two dozen. When the smoke settled, Jefferson was an occupied city, and Warmoth's appointees took power.

The fighting, as well as corruption scandals and other contretemps, came to be known as "the Jefferson imbroglio." Jefferson City was in turmoil, and now it had enemies in high places.

Then there was the controversy of the slaughterhouses. Livestock in those days arrived at Jefferson City's riverfront, whereupon the animals were driven to abattoirs dispersed citywide, thus allowing butchers to slaughter as needed and sell the fresh meat promptly to local clientele. But the dispersion of abattoirs also meant wandering livestock and hoof-torn muddy streets, not to mention excrement, entrails and carcasses everywhere. Residents petitioned authorities to intervene.

The state legislature complied in 1869 with a draconian solution: centralize all slaughterhouses under a government-regulated monopoly. Neighbors applauded, but butchers fumed, as did Jefferson City, which stood to lose its livestock landing. Lawsuits were filed, and the case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, resulting in an influential 1873 ruling affirming the centralization.

The controversial "Slaughterhouse Cases" are still debated by legal scholars today. But from Jefferson's standpoint, the original law had already dislodged its livestock landing to a site far downriver in New Orleans—yet another reason for Jeffersonians to resent their neighbor. The little city was also seeing its market gardens disappear for new house construction.

Jefferson thus found itself at loggerheads with both New Orleans and Louisiana state government, whereas New Orleans had better relations with the state and a covetous eye for Jefferson's land. The governor, meanwhile, sought to rebuke defiant municipalities toward consolidating his power statewide, and one way to do that was to subsume them into their neighbors. Jefferson topped the list.



*Jefferson City's police station and market occupied these two lots, and while both have since been demolished, their spaces today also host a circa-1896 police station and former market (circa 1917) named Jefferson. Photograph by Richard Campanella.*

The opportunity arose in 1870 when the state legislature debated re-structuring New Orleans' government. A measure was tacked on to the bill to consolidate Jefferson City, as well as unincorporated Algiers and the City of Carrollton, with New Orleans.

Jefferson City representatives howled in protest, for the aforementioned grievances as well as New Orleans' higher taxes and debt. "I say, sir," one Jefferson congressman declared to the Speaker of the House, "that the people—the masses—do not want to be forced to pay an additional 2½ per cent tax.... There are not 150 people in Jefferson who would vote for consolidation." Small farmers particularly objected to the plan.

The bill passed the House, but not before some compromises were made. Carrollton, for example, was dropped from the version that went to Gov. Warmoth's desk. Reasons are unclear, but I posit two likely explanations. For one, Carrollton did not fight the Warmoth's Metropolitan Police, and thus did not earn his wrath. Carrollton also would have added many Democratic voters to the city's electorate. Jefferson City did the same, but legislators were able to counterbalance that number by annexing Algiers, whose

black voters—this was prior to the rise of Jim Crow—were likely to vote Republican. Ergo, Carrollton was dropped from the annexation bill.

On March 16, 1870, the bill became law, and the City of Jefferson ceased to exist. Its land became New Orleans' 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> wards and Sixth Municipal District, while Algiers became the 15<sup>th</sup> Ward and Fifth Municipal District. They remain so today.

The grace and beauty of today's Uptown belies the disharmony of 1870, and references to the lost city may be found throughout. The words "Jefferson Market," for example, appear above the circa-1917 pavilion at 4301 Magazine St., next to the police station which replaced the one attacked in 1869. A block away is the old fire station that now houses Shaya Restaurant. Business clusters on Magazine, meanwhile, mark Jefferson's old markets, and adjacent residential neighborhoods reflect the disappearance of Jefferson's industry after the slaughterhouse consolidation. Peters Avenue was renamed Jefferson in 1924, and the Valence Street Cemetery entombs many of Jefferson's deceased.

Cheerfully parading among the living, meanwhile, are the Jefferson City Buzzards, "the world's oldest Mardi Gras marching club," formed in 1890 and named for the original members' childhood home.



*Among the oldest surviving houses of upper old Jefferson is the c1830s Overseer's House (above) on Tchoupitoulas and Henry Clay, and the Roselius House on Broadway, dating to the 1840s. Photographs by Richard Campanella.*



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