



Danny Heitman
AT RANDOM

Advice for living from a 105-year-old

Julia Hawkins and I have a mutual friend, and after he died some weeks ago, she asked me for a ride to the memorial service.

But our story today will not be a sad one. At 105, Hawkins has learned to accept the death of friends with a certain amount of equanimity. One of the complications of living



Hawkins

more than a century is that you survive your contemporaries.

Our drive to the memorial service was a little less than an hour. It took me awhile to get my head around the mere fact of a road trip with a 105-year-old. When I began working as a reporter more than three decades ago, 100th birthdays for local residents were front-page news.

Reaching 100 is still a big landmark, though it's becoming more common. In 1950, according to the research firm Statista, there were 33,899 people 100 years or older around the world. By 2020, the figure had reached 573,423.

Even by centenarian standards, though, Hawkins is a marvel, competing in running events that have attracted national attention. She took up running at 100 after bicycling got too hard.

Centenarians often get asked how they've managed to live that long. But beyond the quantity of her life, Hawkins yields useful insights about maximizing the quality of life.

A deep and enduring connection with nature seems part of her secret. When I arrived to collect her for our morning together, she asked if we could visit her garden before getting on the road. She still lives in the Baton Rouge home her late husband, Murray "Buddy" Hawkins, built. It's on an acre lot, bought in 1948, that includes 60 trees and a wealth of other treasures.

Our first order of business was removing a blanket Hawkins had placed on a bromeliad the night before to protect it from frost. She uncovered the plant as if unveiling a work of art — a little gesture of revelation that points to how Hawkins lives. She regards even small things with wonder.

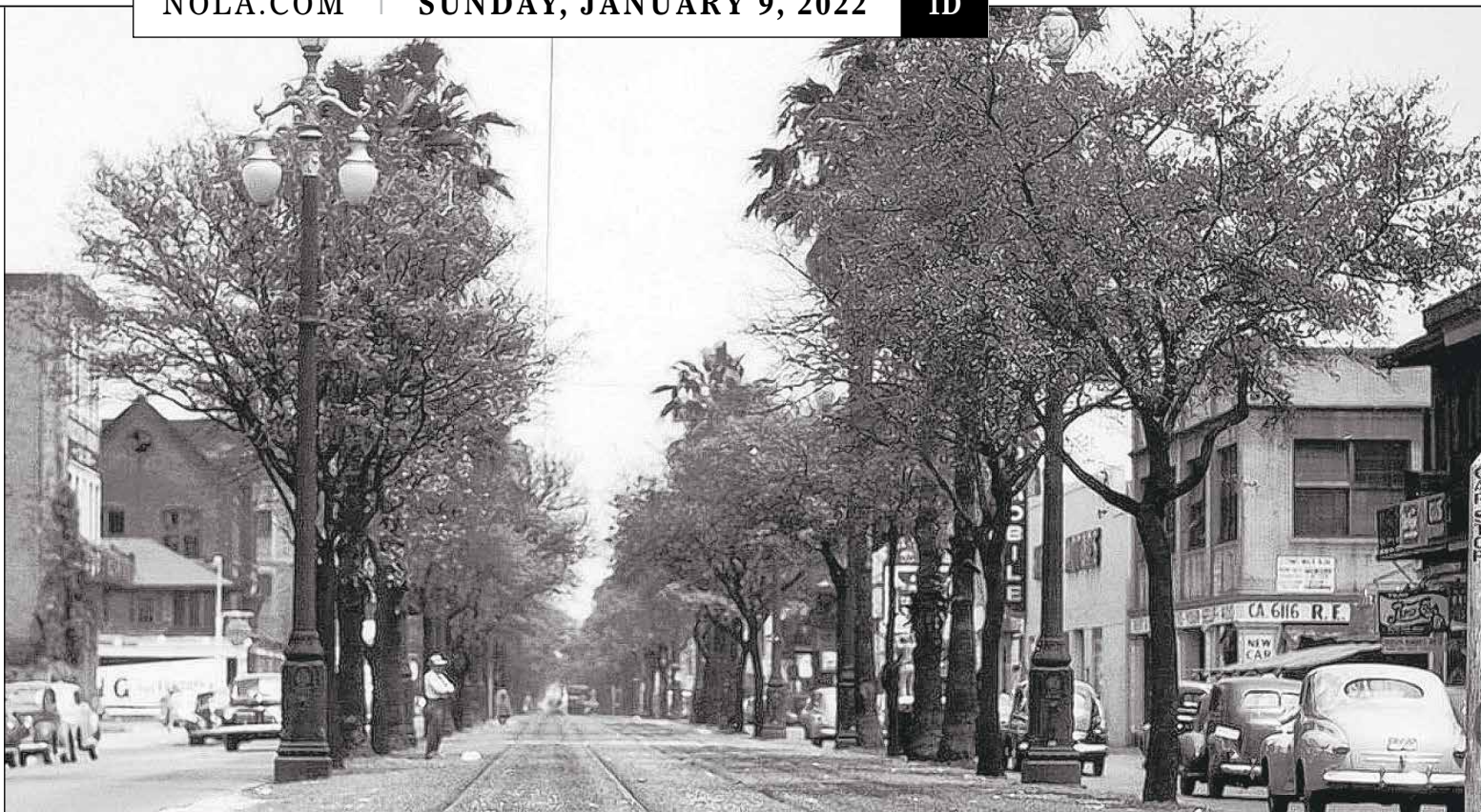
Back inside her house, Hawkins showed me her pitcher plant. "It's my pride and joy," she told me, cupping one of the hollow leaves that allow the plant to trap insects. As we buckled up for the drive, Hawkins pointed out her ginkgo tree, known for its brilliant fall foliage. "It's beautiful," she said.

Hawkins also stays engaged by embracing causes that stir her passion. Recently, she's been trying to get more people interested in the legacy of Margaret Stones, an Australian botanical artist who made lovely pictures of Louisiana flora. Hawkins became friends with Stones during her visits to the state.

Like Stones, who died in 2018, Hawkins is deeply curious, which has kept her long life interesting. "Have many passions," Hawkins once told The New York Times. "And look for magic moments."

If there's better advice to carry into this new year, I haven't found it.

Email Danny Heitman at danny@dannyheitman.com.



PROVIDED PHOTO FROM THE HISTORIC NEW ORLEANS COLLECTION/CHARLES FRANCK COLLECTION
Streetcar tracks once passed between rows of trees along North Rampart Street in 1947.



PRICE OF PROGRESS

Years before Claiborne clearcutting, Rampart Street lost its trees — and streetcars

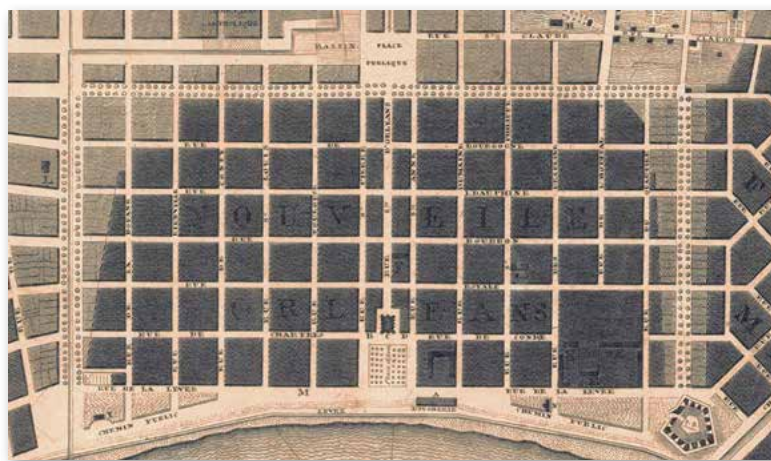
BY RICHARD CAMPANELLA
Contributing writer

Mention beautiful trees sacrificed for progress, and many locals think of the famed "Claiborne oaks," which were removed in 1966 for the installation of the elevated Interstate 10 expressway through the Faubourg Tremé.

The drivers and consequences of that decision have been debated ever since, as has the future of North Claiborne Avenue's overpass, which has been highlighted by the Biden administration in its infrastructure spending plan.

Notorious as the North Claiborne transformation has become, it was not the first downtown artery to be shorn of its foliage in the name of transportation expediency.

Seventeen years earlier, and seven or so blocks closer to the river, nearly the same stretch of North Rampart Street came to a similar fate. It lost a foliated arcade framing dual streetcar tracks, which together made parts of the French Quarter-bordering corridor look a bit like leafy St. Charles Avenue.



PROVIDED IMAGE FROM THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
Jacques Tanesse's 1815 map shows the arcade of trees to be planted on Rampart, at top.

Militarized origins

North Rampart Street originated rather opportunistically, as the 1803 American acquisition of the Louisiana colony catalyzed urban expansion and put developmental pressure on the obsolete fortifications surrounding the French Quarter.

Within a decade, all three fort lines and their fronting esplanades

(grassy commons) had been subdivided with new streets and blocks, becoming today's Canal Street and Esplanade Avenue along the upper and lower fort lines, and, along the angled rear fort lines, today's North Rampart Street.

North Rampart was first envisioned by city surveyor Jacques

► See **RAMPART**, page 5D

The American Kennel Club announced that the Mudi and Russian Toy, right, have received full recognition, and are eligible to compete in the Herding Group and Toy Group, respectively. These additions bring the number of AKC-recognized breeds to 199.



ASSOCIATED PRESS PROVIDED BY
AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB

'MUDI'? TRY A TOY American Kennel Club recognizes 2 dog breeds

BY JENNIFER PELTZ
Associated Press

NEW YORK — An athletic Hungarian farm dog and a tiny pet of bygone Russian aristocrats are the latest breeds in the American Kennel Club's purebred lineup.

The club announced Tuesday that it's recognizing the Russian toy and the mudi. That means they're eli-

gible to compete for best in show at many U.S. dog shows, including the AKC's big annual championship and the prestigious Westminster Kennel Club show.

The mudi (whose American fans pronounce its name like "moody," although the vowel sound in Hungarian is closer to the "u" in "pudding")

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RAM PART

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Tanasse, who in 1810 laid out streets on the land adjoining the Bayou Road (now Gov. Nicholls Street), which the city had purchased from Claude Tremé.

That subdivision became the Faubourg Tremé, and in an 1812 map, Tanesse initially labeled the former fortification's right of way as a promenade projetée (projected promenade), suggesting he had in mind a landscaped walkway as well as a city street.

A detailed map later sketched by Tanesse, which he described as based on "an actual survey made in 1815," shows all three fortifications-turned-streets laid out with arcades of trees, two abreast, 12 per block, nearly 300 in all. The street in the rear of the city gained the aptly name Rue Rampart, today's North Rampart Street.

Typical New Orleans

In the century ahead, Rampart from Canal to Esplanade became a quintessential city transect, redolent of everyone and everything that comprised New Orleans. It had the architecture of the French Quarter, yet the larger lots and commerce of Canal or Claiborne; its structures spanned from cottages to mansions; and its populace was diverse in race, class and ethnicity, though predominantly Creole in culture and French in language.

In addition to residences and businesses, Rampart between the French Quarter and the Faubourg Tremé was home to a Catholic mortuary chapel, a monastery, a Jewish synagogue, L'Union Française (the French Union), a Methodist church, and Congo Square, where populations who were enslaved in antebellum times rendezvoused on Sundays and performed African music and dance.

With further urban growth, engineers extended Rampart upriver, designating it “South” as it crossed Canal, the original stretch becoming “North” Rampart and extending downriver, eventually into Arabi.

As streetcar tracks were lengthened later in the 1800s, a number of lines



PROVIDED PHOTO FROM NPSI-ENTERGY/RICHARD CAMPANELLA COLLECTION

Trees and the streetcar tracks are removed from North Rampart Street on Jan. 5, 1949.

capitalized on the axial convenience of North Rampart, among them the Canal Belt, the Esplanade Belt and the Dauphine Line.

In the 1910s, North Rampart's upper blocks gained the nickname "the Tango Belt" for their cabarets and clubs, a sort of antecedent to Bourbon Street, making it all the more quintessentially New Orleans.

North Rampart's neutral ground spanned over one-third the street's 85-foot width, and had two streetcar track beds with electrical poles and grassy strips alongside, much like St. Charles Avenue. Placed at regular intervals on both sides of the tracks were ornamental lampposts and plenty of trees — well over 200 oaks, palms and other species by 1940, judging from an aerial photo taken that year.

While they lacked the grandeur of the Claiborne oaks, North Rampart's trees made up for it in their arcade-like linearity, forming in sections a sort of verdant tunnel through two of the city's densest, oldest neighborhoods.

Transit modernization

Times were changing, and few things evidenced it more than transportation technology. Since the late 1920s, the city and its newly formed planning commission had been steadily ceding more street space to autos and trucks, prioritized for their speedy passage, as well as accessibility and parking.

In 1927, for example, North Rampart's merge with St. Claude Avenue was streamlined with a curve named McShane Place for better

traffic flow along that corridor, parts of which would later be designated La. 46.

Concurrently, New Orleans Public Service Inc., the electrical utility which also ran the streetcar lines, looked to upgrade public transit. Streetcars were picturesque but inefficient, being married to rails, on which a single impedance could halt a whole line.

Transportation became even more of a priority after World War II, when plans were advanced for new expressways, a consolidated train station, new shipping facilities, a downtown Mississippi River bridge, and a new airport.

All these upgrades would take years, but streetcar lines were a different story; they could be replaced rather swiftly by electric trolleys with rubber tires ("trolley coaches") or gas-powered buses.

That's exactly what the

city did in the late 1940s. The Freret streetcar line was terminated in 1946, and the Jackson line in 1947, followed by the Magazine, Gentilly, and Desire lines in 1948 (just one year after Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire" made the last of those internationally famous). Each was replaced by a trolley coach or bus under the same route name.

On Aug. 13, 1948, the city passed an ordinance "to discontinue operations on and remove the existing double track on N. Rampart Street to Esplanade Avenue," which had been originally approved in 1893 and extended downriver in 1903 and 1925. In its place would be installed "a system of electric trolley coach transportation ... on N. Rampart to and through McShane Place to St. Claude Avenue."

Known as the St. Claude Line at the time of its demise, traditional streetcars

last rolled along North Rampart on January 1, 1949. Days later, workers began bulldozing the neutral ground and widening the auto lanes. Trolley coaches needed overhead wires, but they shared ordinary traffic lanes with other vehicles, so there was no more need for rails on a wide neutral ground. Its removal meant the removal of hundreds of beautiful trees.

Surely some neighbors lamented the loss of the emerald shade of North Rampart's "promenade," as Jacques Tanessee first envisioned it in 1812. But most folks probably saw the change as one of many such projects around town in this era, all the price of progress, so they said, and hardly any protests appeared in the local press.

Within a few years, trolley coaches were switched to gas-powered buses citywide, while motorists increasingly shifted onto the newly streamlined arteries, as they usually do, thus negating their initial advantage. Congestion won the day, while pedestrians and trees had lost. Progress.

In the decades ahead, the French Quarter blocks on the river side of North Rampart gentrified, while neighborhoods on the lake side, including the Iberville housing development and Tremé, went into decline.

North Rampart became one of those tense urban divides, with great social disparity on either side, each correlating to racialized settlement patterns. Tourists were discreetly warned not to cross North Rampart, which itself became seedy

and bleak, its multiple lanes
sun-drenched in day and
stark at night.

It was a far cry from the verdant arcade of times past.

The new North Rampart

Now, generations later, new views on urbanism have brought more change to North Rampart, including the reinstallation of a streetcar line, an impressive line of ornamental lampposts and trees along the redesigned neutral ground, bike lanes and crosswalks, and new programming at Louis Armstrong Park.

All this has greatly increased pedestrian movement across North Rampart, as well as property values and rental rates, and likely furthered the gentrification of Treme.

The recent investments on North Rampart present something of a testbed for what interventions may be made — and with what impact — on North Claiborne, as the city rethinks the price of progress it paid on both these quintessentially New Orleans arteries over a half-century ago.

Richard Campanella, a geographer with the Tulane School of Architecture, is the author of “The West Bank of Greater New Orleans” (LSU Press), “Bourbon Street: A History,” “Bienville’s Dilemma,” and other books. He may be reached at rcampane@tulane.edu, richcampanella.com, or [nolacampanella](https://twitter.com/nolacampanella) on Twitter.



September 18, 1948 Looking down North Rampart from Dumaine, courtesy NOPSI-Entergy/Richard Campanella Collection