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The toll of freedom

In World War II Museum's final exhibits, the bitter costs of war temper the triumph of victory

BY JOHN POPE
Contributing writer

Twenty-three years after the debut of its first building, The National WWII Museum finished the development of its 6-acre site in the Warehouse District with the opening on Friday of the Liberation Pavilion.

To be sure, the three-story structure that shows life beyond World War II displays plenty of celebration befitting the conflict's end, with pictures of ecstatic men and women brandishing newspapers whose jumbo-size headlines proclaim the defeat of America's enemies.

Museumgoers who climb the staircase to the second floor can feel as if they were in the middle of a tickertape parade as shreds of paper float by on screens flanking the steps while red, white and blue lights flash. Other galleries show off the blessings of postwar life, with primitive television sets and home computers with tiny screens and keyboards.

But it's not all glee inside the \$47 million building, which is designed to show the war's legacy and the necessity of appreciating the cost of victory and the responsibility of shaping a postwar world to avoid the mistakes made after World War I that helped propel the rise of Adolf Hitler.

'Let's get to work'

Michael S. Bell, who supervised the final steps of the pavilion's creation, summed up its mission: "We won the war. Now let's get to work."

This earnest tone starts as soon as visitors enter the building because they walk through a corridor reminding them of Americans' service and sacrifice. Along one side are 10,000 dog tags bearing the names of real people to represent the 16.4 million Americans who fought in the war; on the opposite side are photographs of some of the 414,920 U.S. casualties.

"We're trying to think of the cost of victory not in financial terms but in human terms," said Bell, who holds a doctorate

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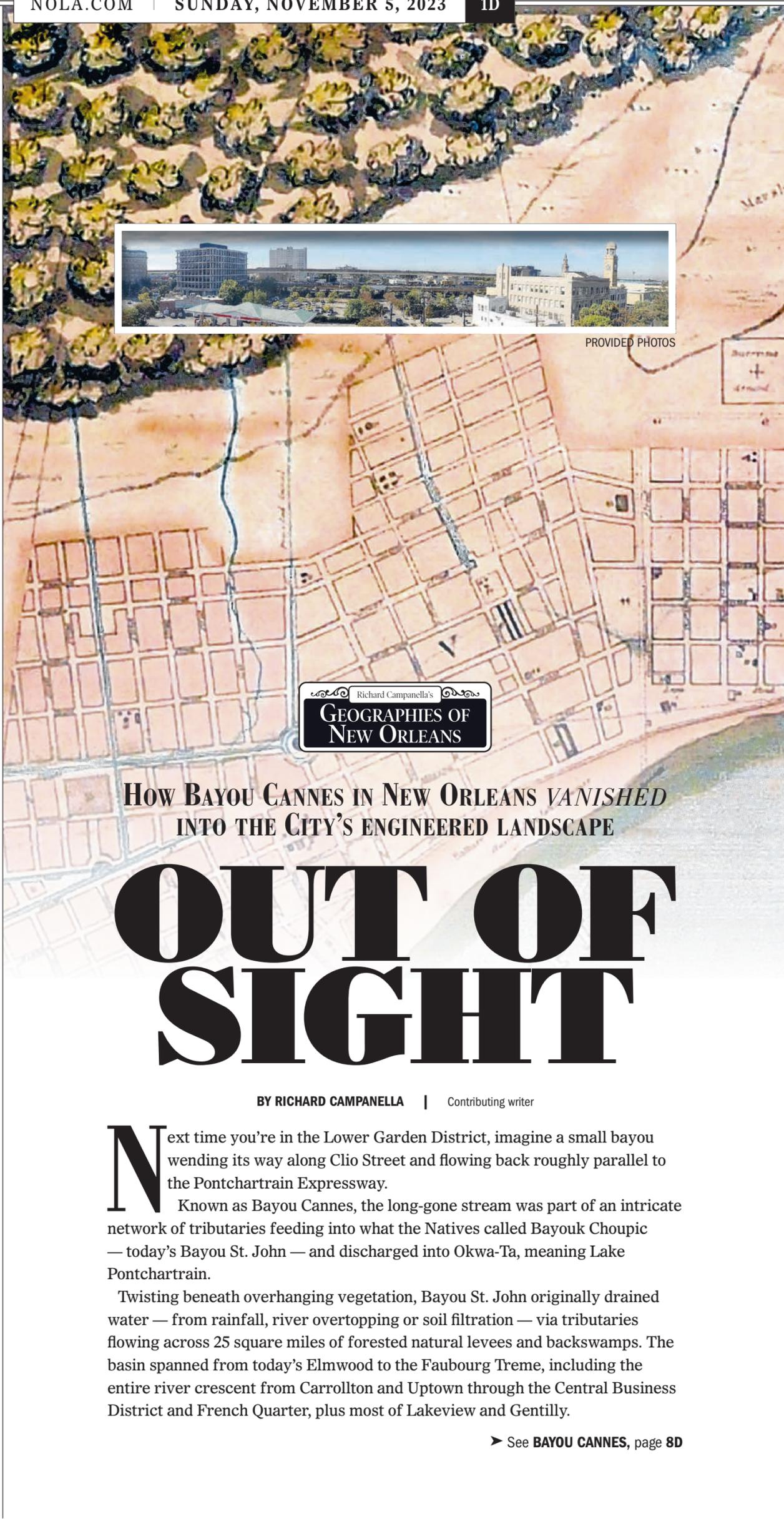


STAFF PHOTO BY BRETT DUKE

The new Liberation Pavilion is seen at The National WWII Museum in New Orleans.

"We're trying to think of the cost of victory not in financial terms but in human terms. Rather than start with the triumph of the war, we start with the cost of the war."

MICHAEL S. BELL,
supervisor to The
National WWII
Museum



PROVIDED PHOTOS

Richard Campanella's
**GEOGRAPHIES OF
NEW ORLEANS**

HOW BAYOU CANNES IN NEW ORLEANS VANISHED INTO THE CITY'S ENGINEERED LANDSCAPE

OUT OF SIGHT

BY RICHARD CAMPANELLA | Contributing writer

Next time you're in the Lower Garden District, imagine a small bayou winding its way along Clio Street and flowing back roughly parallel to the Pontchartrain Expressway.

Known as Bayou Cannes, the long-gone stream was part of an intricate network of tributaries feeding into what the Natives called Bayouk Choupic — today's Bayou St. John — and discharged into Okwa-Ta, meaning Lake Pontchartrain.

Twisting beneath overhanging vegetation, Bayou St. John originally drained water — from rainfall, river overtopping or soil filtration — via tributaries flowing across 25 square miles of forested natural levees and backswamps. The basin spanned from today's Elmwood to the Faubourg Tremé, including the entire river crescent from Carrollton and Uptown through the Central Business District and French Quarter, plus most of Lakeview and Gentilly.

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Did Carnival start in New Orleans or Mobile?

BY DOUG MacCASH
Staff writer



The question of where Mardi Gras began pops up again and again among those curious about Louisiana culture. We'd be delighted to report that the first North American Carnival celebration definitely took place in New Orleans.

The trouble is, Mobile has a

comes down to whether you believe a New Year's Day parade can be called a Carnival parade.

Carnival, the pre-Lenten "farewell to meat" festival, goes back hundreds of years in Catholic Europe. The tradition came to the New World with various colonists.

The first mention of Carnival

The French-Canadian explorer Iberville noted in his journal that he and his little brother Bienville spent Mardi Gras 1699 resting on the bank of the Mississippi River before paddling onward to Baton Rouge. But it doesn't sound like they partied it up much.

There's no mention of light-up beads, Popeye's fried chicken,

king cake vodka or the 610 Stompers. Nonetheless, Iberville dubbed their muddy stopping spot Mardi Gras Point.

So, for the next three centuries, we in New Orleans clung to that fact whenever attempting to validate our claim as the birthplace of Mardi Gras. But it's a stretch. Not only did Iberville and Bienville not

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STAFF FILE PHOTO BY ELIOT KAMENITZ

Revelers call out for throws as Rex parades with his krewe in 2013.

BAYOU CANNES

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(Not among the tributaries were the well-known historic waterways of Bayou Metairie and Bayou Gentilly, which were actually a distributary system branching off from the Mississippi. Paralleling today's Metairie Road, City Park Avenue, and Gentilly Boulevard, this upraised feature did not collect surface water, but did partly shape the basin discharging out Bayou St. John.)

Bayou St. John remained the main drainage outfall for most of New Orleans through the late 1800s. In the early 1900s, engineers began installing the mechanized system we have today. Soon, powerful pumps removed swamp water; subsurface pipes drew down soil water; and that intricate network of tributaries became interconnected pipes and canals.

Which leaves us to wonder, where were those now-gone tributary bayous?

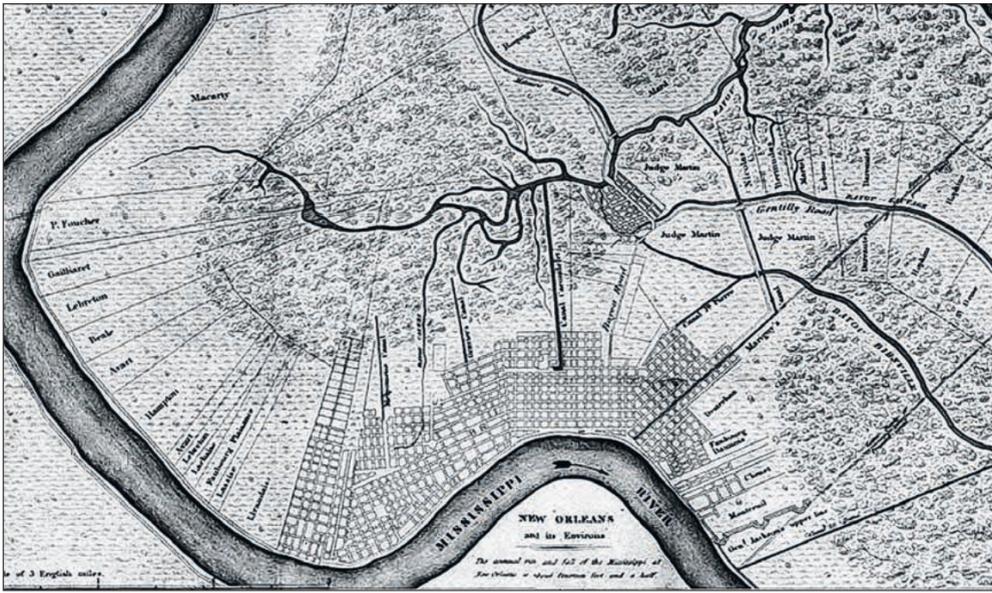
Old maps, old bayous

Their channels appear on only a few reliable historical maps. Some were informally named for landowners, such as Bayou de la Cote des Lapreux and Bayou des Laveuses. Most were not navigable except by pirogue, and many were intermittent, depending on rainfall and river stage. Still others were tributaries of tributaries — short, squiggly first-order streams, small enough to wade across.

The longest of the tributaries extended clear across the crescent, originating in the Carrollton area, and at one point widened to hundreds of feet. If you've heard rumors of a lake in Broadmoor, it was probably La Mare à Boré, a pond on a tributary flowing roughly along today's Fontainebleau Drive and Broad Street before joining Bayou St. John.

The second-longest tributary flowed close enough to populated areas to earn a name: Bayou Cannes (Bayou des Cannes), a reference to its bankside canes (reeds). Bayou Cannes' natural headwaters formed somewhere in today's Lower Garden District, among dense hardwood forests growing upon the upraised natural levee, and for its first mile or two, it was probably only a dozen or so feet wide.

Starting in 1726, the Jesuits began to acquire this area from city



1829 map by Francis P. Ogden shows the intricate system of tributaries, including Bayou Cannes at left center, flowing into Bayou St. John at upper right.

founder Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, and proceeded to direct enslaved workers to clear the vegetation and dig drainage ditches to prepare the soil for agriculture.

Such ditches had the effect of rerouting and concentrating surface runoff at the rear edge of the natural levee. In this case, the ditches reconfigured upper Bayou Cannes into a more rectified channel.

Enter the engineer Lafon

In 1763, after the Jesuits were exiled from the colony, the incoming Spanish administration had their former plantation divided into six smaller holdings. Two were subdivided in 1788 to become the Faubourg Ste. Marie (today's Central Business District), and the other four were subdivided during 1806-1810 to become today's Lower Garden District.

The man commissioned to design that second subdivision was Barthélemy Lafon, a French-born engineer-geographer whose Classical training and Baroque flair produced a visionary plan replete with public spaces, colorful names, and sound water management.

Lafon proposed to capture surface runoff with an open canal along Camp Street and steer the flow down Melpomene Street to Nayades Street — named for the water nymphs of Greek mythology, and now St. Charles Avenue.

Some runoff would continue

down Melpomene to the swamp; some would be directed around Tivoli (now Harmony) Circle to flow out Cours des Tritons (today's Howard Avenue), and the rest would continue to discharge naturally out the reminding wild section of Bayou Cannes.

Lafon's 1816 Plan of the City and Environs of New Orleans shows Bayou Cannes materializing around today's Clio Street off St. Charles Avenue, at which point it disappears off into green hachures drawn by Lafon to mark the wooded backswamp.

Our next source is an 1829 inset map by Francis P. Ogden titled New Orleans and Its Environs, which corroborates Lafon's 1816 map and spells out the name "Bayou Cannes."

Our best source comes from a circa-1830 map made by Guillaume Tell Poussin, titled Plan du Canal de junction du Mississippi au Lac Pontchartrain, which traces Bayou Cannes all the way to Bayou St. John.

What jumps out from Poussin's map is that the two bayous, taken together, seem to form one integral 6-mile-long waterway, such that you'd be able to paddle a pirogue from today's Lower Garden District to Lake Vista.

A new canal is dug

The fate of Bayou Cannes began in 1832, when workers began digging the New Basin Canal to enable vessels to sail from Lake

Pontchartrain into today's Central Business District.

The navigation channel and its guide levees cut Bayou Cannes in two, and as the runoff it once carried now got handled by drainage ditches, the bayou's upper reaches dried out and got filled in.

Shortened in length and reduced in volume, what remained of Bayou Cannes appeared unnamed in an 1834 map drafted by Charles Zimpel, and in an even more diminished stated on the 1839 Springbett and Pilie map.

The New Basin Canal did more than disrupt Bayou Cannes. It also severed that longer tributary flowing across modern-day Fontainebleau and Broadmoor, while its guide levees—which were essentially manmade topographic ridges—effectively divided the once-vast backswamp basin into two smaller hydrological bowls.

The effort coincided with a time when steam-engine technology was being fitted to pumps to experiment with mechanized drainage. Now with the backswamp reduced to manageable portions, steam-powered paddle pumps could be installed along Bayou St. John to speed the discharge of runoff out Lake Pontchartrain. Doing so could "reclaim" swampland for development, which could be sold to pay for the project and yield a profit.

Draining the swamps

In 1835, the State Legislature

granted a 20-year charter to the New Orleans Drainage Company to do just that. Capitalized at \$640,000 and equipped with two steam engines, company engineers endeavored to "drain the swamps between the city and Lake Pontchartrain," recorded an 1837 almanac, "on the same plan that is adopted by Holland, by hydraulic machines. The profits are derived from the increased value of the lands drained."

The primitive paddle pumps were not equal to the task, and when the company's charter expired in 1855, the city took over the meager mechanical dewatering. Though the backswamp would persist for another fifty years, those early pumps did succeed in drying out the uppermost perimeter of the swamplands, allowing urbanization to spread into places like Central City in the uptown wards, and out to Broad Street and Florida Avenue in the downtown wards.

By the late 1800s, Bayou Cannes had all but disappeared from maps, and by the early 1900s, when the modern system was installed, the old bayou's hydrological energy got fully rechanneled into the rectilinear drainage canals of today.

Plotting out the channel of long-gone Bayou Cannes is possible by digitally registering the circa-1830 Poussin Map to a modern-day map of the city. Following the route by car or bike or foot, however, is another matter.

You'd start in the Lower Garden District, curve along the edge of Central City down the Clio and Thalia streets, and cross Interstate 10 (formerly the New Basin Canal) near the Broad Street overpass.

You'd then go right through the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office, draw parallel with Norman C. Francis Parkway, and finally join Bayou St. John where the Lafitte Greenway now passes.

From there, finally, you can put your pirogue into Bayouk Choupic, and paddle out to Okwa-Ta.

Richard Campanella, a geographer with the Tulane School of Architecture, is the author of "Draining New Orleans; The West Bank of Greater New Orleans," "Bienville's Dilemma," and "Bourbon Street: A History." Campanella may be reached at <http://richcampanella.com>, rcampane@tulane.edu, or [@nolacampanella](https://twitter.com/nolacampanella) on X.