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ILLUSTRATION BY ARTHUR NEAD

Tennessee Williams' grave controversy

I once spent an afternoon in Calvary Cemetery looking for Tennessee Williams' hard-to-find burial site in St. Louis, Missouri, his hometown.



Errol Laborde
STREETCAR

The annual Tennessee Williams and New Orleans Literary Festival is this weekend, March 25-29, marking its 40th anniversary. It brings that day in St. Louis to mind

because of a fiery debate that once ricocheted at the festival.

Since the festival started (full disclosure, I have been on the board) some of Williams' contemporaries have participated in the popular "I Remember Tennessee" panel, where a frequent comment was how much they disliked the playwright's brother, Dakin.

Chief among the grievances was Dakin's decision to bury his brother in St. Louis. Tennessee Williams had not been shy about his opinion of the town where he grew up. "Loathe" was one of the common phrases.

There were many places that Williams relished. New Orleans, where he bought property in the French Quarter, was one of them. Also, Key West and New York City but not strait-laced, industrial, uncolorful St. Louis.

Yet as the surviving sibling, it would be Dakin's decision. The brother was also a frequent attendee at the festival and appeared on panels. His presence gave legitimacy to the event. It also added drama. He was the ultimate antagonist, made more dramatic by his flashy gold jackets, loud pants and entourage which included a security guard because he believed that he was the target of a plot.

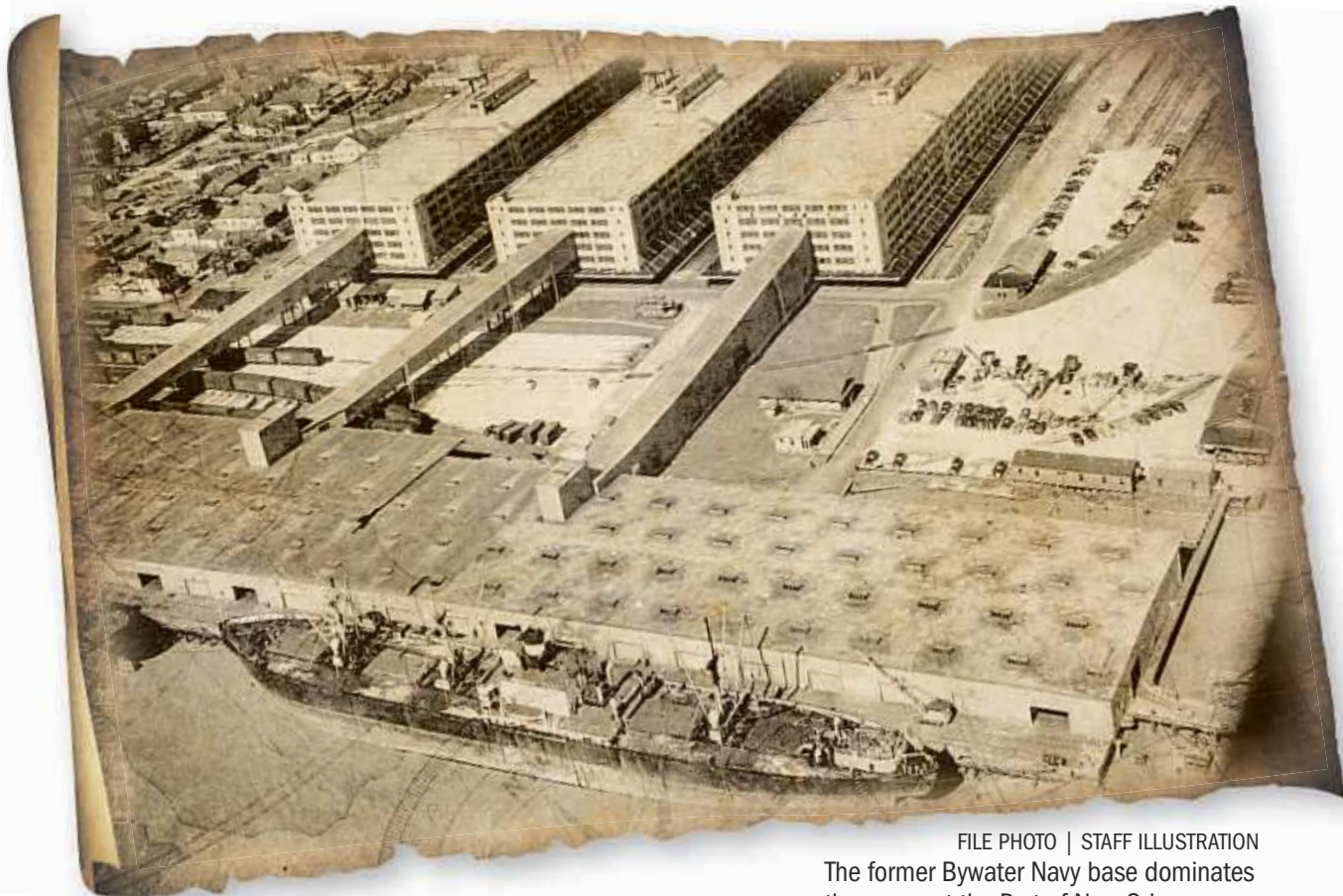
(Another member of the group was a friend of Dakin's whose dad once operated an insurance business in Memphis. His clientele included Elvis. Over dinner one night, the friend recalled wrestling, as a kid, with Presley in the business' front yard while his dad filled out the necessary insurance forms.)

After several years of Dakin-bashing, the festival dared to put together a "I Remember Tennessee" panel which included Dakin and some of his

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"I am pleased to say that we were successful in our efforts, which means a great deal to the trade of our city."

M. J. SANDERS, New Orleans Board of Trade president, on securing the supply depot



FILE PHOTO | STAFF ILLUSTRATION
The former Bywater Navy base dominates the scene at the Port of New Orleans.

Anchor Historic Community's Pulse
aweigh GEOGRAPHIES OF NEW ORLEANS

In Bywater, future comes into focus for a facility with many pasts

BY RICHARD CAMPANELLA
Contributing writer

For over a century, the former Bywater Navy base has been a prominent riverfront landmark, and after 92 years of military use and 14 years of uncertainty, its future is finally coming into focus as a mixed-use housing and retail hub anchored by a tech-innovation center.

A place of many names since its completion in 1919, the former Naval Support Activity East Bank is made up of three 600-by-140-foot, six-story depots plus grounds so large it has two addresses (officially at 4400 Dauphine St. and paralleling 600-700 Poland Ave.) and two waterfronts (facing the Mississippi River and flanking the Industrial Canal).

The complicated history of this sprawling facility began rather unexpectedly, at the outbreak of what would become World War I.

In 1914, American military planners quickly learned that, after decades of divesting of inland waterways in favor of railroads, the U.S. lacked the capacity to trans-



STAFF FILE PHOTO BY BRETT DUKE

The Jesse Morrow Trio perform as people gather for a groundbreaking ceremony marking the redevelopment of the former Naval Support Activity site in New Orleans on Jan. 21.

port much-needed supplies and material to coastal ports for shipment to allies across the Atlantic. The Mississippi being the biggest of those waterways; federal authorities scrambled to commandeer private barge companies and develop what would become the Federal Barge Line, which soon

rejuvenated river commerce. New Orleans was the premier seaport on the Mississippi, and maritime advocates realized they had an opportunity to do well for the nation as well as the city. In spring 1917, when the U.S. joined

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MR. NEW ORLEANS, LYLE SAXON

Was La. author ever awarded an honorary LSU degree?

BY ROBIN MILLER
Staff writer



Louisiana author Lyle Saxon once was considered the foremost expert on the state's culture, traditions and history, especially when it came to New Orleans.

In fact, he was nicknamed "Mr. New Orleans" and for good reason. Saxon spearheaded

preservation efforts for the French Quarter in the early 20th century after the city declared it a slum and considered demolishing it. He also headed the Federal Writers Project's documentation of everything Louisiana in the WPA-funded "Louisiana: A Guide to the State."



Saxon

Still, there's one accomplishment Saxon didn't achieve, as pointed out by Alexandria author and historian Michael Wynne.

"He didn't graduate from LSU," Wynne said. "But he came so close."

Usually, Wynne is one of many sources in providing answers to Curious Louisiana questions, but this time around, he

steps into the role of the reader asking the question.

Why no honorary degree?

"I started looking into it, and I found that he was only three hours away from graduating," Wynne said. "So my question is: Why hasn't he been awarded an honorary degree?"

Though Saxon is best known for his New Orleans affiliation, he

was born in Baton Rouge in 1891, though some historians dispute the location. Still, it's certain that he grew up in the capital city, which was where he was buried after his death at age 54 in 1946.

His gravesite is found in the city's historic Magnolia Cemetery on North 19th St.

Saxon attended LSU from 1907

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FACILITY

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the conflict in Europe, the New Orleans Board of Trade sent delegates to Washington to make the case that the Army's Quartermaster Supply Depot ought to be located at the Port of New Orleans.

A quartermaster is the military's chief logistician, responsible for getting everything needed in the war effort from the homeland to the front with maximum efficiency. A quartermaster supply depot, then, is a strategically situated transshipment, storage and distribution center for military operations.

With its strategic maritime position and network of interior rail lines, New Orleans had a winning argument to secure the federal asset.

"I am pleased to say that we were successful in our efforts," wrote board president M. J. Sanders, "which means a great deal to the trade of our city." Brooklyn and Boston landed the other two army depots, putting New Orleans in good company.

Where to site the quartermaster depot? Clearly it had to be along the Mississippi, and all the better if it also accessed the soon-to-be-dug Inner Harbor Navigation (Industrial) Canal. Envisioned for nearly two centuries and finally approved in 1914, this river-to-lake shipping channel aimed to create a protected harbor with stable water stages and ample wharf space for freight, shipbuilding and value-added industry.

It would cut through the 9th Ward, in part because this was the least-populated section of the city, and in part because the Ursuline Nuns, who had operated their convent and school here since 1824, had lost half their compound to a 1912 levee realignment, and had since decamped for Uptown.

As the downriver half of the Ursuline parcel would host the mouth of the canal, the upriver half sat adjacent to the Lambou & Noel Lumberyard, spanning from Dauphine to the levee. Add in the two city blocks up to Poland Avenue, home to two dozen households and small businesses, and there would be enough space for the three massive warehouses totaling 1.5 million square feet.

Numbered 1 to 3 going upriver, the first warehouse would be built by the Port of New Orleans to store commodities, and the other two would be added by the Army for military supplies. All would be built of steel-reinforced concrete and designed with a purely utilitarian, almost modernist look, with minimal adornment, flat roofs and an overall horizontal massing.

Railroad spur lines would run between the buildings and along the Poland Street Wharf, where river barges and cargo ships could dock. Total cost: \$13,548,000.

The new Quartermaster Depot on Dauphine Street represented an enlargement of the Army presence in the 9th Ward, which began in 1835 with regiments stationed at nearby Jackson Barracks. The facility also matched a naval presence across the river in Algiers, which dated to an 1849 land acquisition and grew in the 1890s with the opening of a Marine Corps barracks and dry dock at Naval Station New Orleans.

The three operations continued a century-long military legacy that led historian Codman Parkerson to describe New Orleans as "America's most fortified city."

Expropriations and demolitions on the Dauphine site occurred in late 1917, followed by pile-driving and foundational work early the next year. In June, excavation began on the lake end of Industrial Canal and proceeded toward the river. Shortly thereafter, as many as 7,000 laborers began building the three depots fronting the Mississippi.

According to a 2016 U.S. Department of the Interior



PROVIDED IMAGE FROM RICHARD CAMPANELLA

Army Quartermaster Supply Depot, as seen on July 10, 1922, three years after completion.

report, "each warehouse was built using 31,700 piles; 480,000 cubic yards of sand; 93,000 cubic yards of gravel; 162,000 barrels of cement; 108,000 cubic yards of concrete; 7500 tons of reinforced steel; 9,000,000 feet of form lumber; 113,000 square feet of steel sash; and 252,000 square feet of roofing." Each edifice would have 18 elevators, most of them for freight.

Racing with wartime urgency, workers neared completion in late 1918 — just as news broke that an armistice would go into effect on Nov. 11, bringing an end to WWI.

It would be the first of three times in which world history would upend site plans.

In the 1920s, the Dauphine Street facility continued as the U.S. Army Supply Base, but because military needs had plummeted, the Army entered into various leasing agreements with the port to use space for standard warehousing needs. For years to come, port managers leased space to private interests such as International Harvester, burlap and cotton bag manufacturers, and the Douglas storage company,

among many others.

The abundant space allowed for some innovative uses. Now that the war had reinvigorated river commerce and the postwar economy hummed, local boosters during 1926-31 organized an annual International Trade Exhibit at one of the warehouses.

Spearheaded by German-born cotton manufacturer Sigmund Odenheimer and modeled after the famous Leipzig Trade Fair, the exhibit featured hundreds of domestic and international wholesalers seeking to make deals with importers and exporters. The idea of intersecting city hospitality with port commerce would later help spawn the International House, the International Trade Mart and World Trade Center — and it all began at Dauphine Street.

When political tensions mounted in Europe again in the late 1930s, the Dauphine facility returned to its quartermaster role, at-the-ready to supply allies. When war seemed imminent in 1941, the Army canceled the port leases and designated the facility to also serve as a Port of Embarkation for troops heading to the front, a status at the time

shared only with New York, San Francisco, Seattle and Charleston.

During the next four years, 174,651 troops were processed through the Dauphine Street Port of Embarkation, some heading for action in the Pacific, others to defensive positions in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Additionally, 7,954,767 tons of cargo shipped from New Orleans to both theaters of war, much of it transshipping at the Dauphine depots via thousands of local longshoremen.

Peacetime brought another round of change. The role of quartermaster depot ended in 1945, but because the draft remained in place, military personnel continued to move through the buildings, which became officially known as the New Orleans Port of Embarkation. In 1955, the facility was renamed the New Orleans Army Terminal, and in 1965 as the New Orleans Army Base.

By then, the exigencies of the Cold War, including the expanding U.S. engagement in Vietnam, led to an augmented naval presence. In 1966, the Army transferred control of the Dauphine Street facility to the Navy,

which eventually designated it as Naval Support Activity (NSA) East Bank, matching a facility of the same status (but without the depots) in Algiers.

NSA East Bank also became the national headquarters for the Navy Reserve and Marine Corps Reserve, making the complex a major source of employment in the neighborhood that by now had named itself "Bywater." The jobs mitigated the loss of the tropical fruit industry, whose cargo ships had discharged bananas and pineapples along what is now Crescent Park, until labor disputes in the 1960s triggered its departure for Gulfport, Mississippi.

In 1975, the former depot along Poland Avenue became the F. Edward Hébert Defense Complex, hosting various Navy and Marine administrative services. Combined with NSA West Bank, the dual complexes spanned 230 acres and housed as many as 50 agencies within the Department of Defense. By 2000, some 1,390 active-duty military personnel worked at NSA East Bank, along with 775 reservists and over 1,500 civilians. They collectively pumped around \$155 million into the regional economy.

By the new century, however, global geopolitics had transformed again. The Cold War had ended; the War on Terror called for entirely new strategies; and budgetary reprioritizations in Washington demanded changes in military investments.

In 2005, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission recommended to close the Dauphine Street facility, relocate its Marine Forces Reserve headquarters to what would become Federal City in Algiers and move most other naval operations to sites all over the nation, including Belle Chasse.

It was a terrible blow for New Orleans, particularly the Bywater. The Dauphine Street facility finally closed on

Sept. 15, 2011.

The next decade brought a litany of plans, promises, budgetary reallocations, neighborhood frustrations and interminable delays, during which time the warehouses fell into squalor. The Bywater, meanwhile, ascended economically, as its population gentrified, property values rose and amenities such as Crescent Park opened.

Circumstances finally aligned in the 2020s for real estate interests to make a move. Brian Gibbs Development, LLC assembled a team to piece together complicated financing and devise what Louisiana Economic Development described as "a center for innovation, housing, and neighborhood-serving spaces ... delivering tangible community benefits and long-term economic growth."

Known as the NSA East Apartments, the adaptive-reuse project will transform the warehouses into 294 affordable housing units and 30,000 square feet of retail space anchored by the Newlab innovation hub for climate and energy technology startups, plus public green space on the two waterfronts.

A groundbreaking ceremony on Jan. 21 commenced the next chapter of a space that had transformed by three wars, with at least seven names and as many uses and occupants, across eleven decades.

When the NSA East Apartments opens in 2028, it will become something entirely new: home.

Richard Campanella, a geographer and associate dean for research at the Tulane School of Architecture and Built Environment, is the author of "Draining New Orleans;" "Crossroads, Cutoffs, and Confluences;" "Bienville's Dilemma;" and other books from LSU Press. He may be reached at richcampanella.com, rcampane@tulane.edu, or @nolacampanella on X.