

A scene from the 1850s at Metairie Race Course | THE TIMES-PICAYUNE ARCHIVE PHOTO

THE COURSE OF HISTORY

Richard Campanella's
GEOGRAPHIES OF
NEW ORLEANS

Before and after segregation, this park near Metairie Road was enjoyed by all New Orleanians



DAILY PICAYUNE ARCHIVE IMAGE
Buffalo Bill ad in the Daily Picayune on Dec. 20, 1884



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Grandstand crowd at the Crescent City Park, adjacent to Oakland Park and New Shell Road, near South Metairie Road, New Orleans

BY RICHARD CAMPANELLA
Contributing writer

From 1866 to 1905, one recreational area in New Orleans stood apart for its variety of uses and diversity of users. Known interchangeably as Oakland Course, Oakland Park or Oakland Riding Park, it occupied an expanse of the Metairie Ridge where present-day City Park Avenue becomes Metairie Road. This narrow upland — formed by an earlier channel of the Mississippi River and later by a distributary known to indigenous groups as Bayou Coupi catcha — enabled access across the swamplands to key geographical features, such as the portage to the riverbend where in 1718 French colonials established New Orleans.

Almost 40 years later, the LeBreton family received a land grant for part of this backswamp ridge, and soon small tenant farms known as *métairie* arose along what settlers now called Bayou de la Métairie. By the early 1800s, the bayou's paralleling chemin (road) came alive every Sunday. "Whoever had a horse or a carriage was on the ... Metairie



PHOTO BY JOHN McCUSKER
Metairie Cemetery was founded in 1872 on the site of Metairie Course, a horse race track. The footprint of the old track is evident in the layout of the cemetery.

"The road was full with an unbroken line of traveling coaches, cabriolets, horses, carts, spectators, and players. ... Strollers dressed in their Sunday finery ..."

PIERRE CLÉMENT DE LAUSSAT, of his 1803 visit along Bayou de la Métairie

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'IT'S REALLY ABOUT THE PEOPLE.'

Strive for connection, not perfection, in hosting

BY CHEYANNE MUMPHREY
Associated Press

Inviting friends and family members over for a celebration, holiday or routine dinner provides an opportunity for connection, but pressure to serve good-tasting food in a clean and welcoming environment can deter many people from hosting or prevent them from being fully present with their guests when they do.

But there are not only ways to reduce the stress of entertaining at home, but strong arguments for throwing a party, planning a game night or bringing guests together over a shared meal, according to mental health experts and experienced hosts. Without in-person social gatherings, adults can become increasingly lonely and isolated, especially as more work is done remotely and conversations take place via text messages.

"Oftentimes, we expect someone else to reach out to us. But if the vast majority of people are expecting someone else to do it, then it's going to become a rare thing," said Julianne Holt-Lunstad, a psychology professor at Brigham Young University and the lead author of a 2023 U.S. surgeon general's report on the widespread health risks of loneliness. Seasoned party-planners say

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An arrangement of crackers, cheeses, meats, fruits and spreads is prepared for guests at a gathering of friends at an apartment in Flagstaff, Ariz., on Feb. 15.

ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO
BY CHEYANNE MUMPHREY

Avoid lingering trash odors

Dear Heloise: Trash cans can develop odors even after you empty them, but a quick step keeps smells under control. Sprinkle a thin layer of baking soda at the bottom of the can before adding a new bag. The baking soda absorbs odors throughout the week. After noticing lingering smells in my kitchen, I added this to my routine, and it made a noticeable difference right away. For extra freshness, wipe the inside of the can occasionally with a mild cleaner. — **Mark E.**, in Columbus, Ohio



Hints from Heloise

Foggy mirrors

Dear Heloise: Foggy bathroom mirrors can slow down your morning routine, so here's a simple trick to keep them clear: Rub a small amount of shaving cream onto the mirror, then wipe it off with a clean cloth, which leaves behind a thin layer that prevents fog from forming. I was tired of wiping the mirror after every shower. Now it stays clear long enough to get ready without interruptions. I repeat the process every few days. — **Dana R.**, in Hartford, Connecticut

Thinking ahead

Dear Heloise: I purchase two half-gallons of milk and freeze one. This saves me the trouble of going to the grocery store when I'm out of milk for my coffee, especially when it's all I need from the store! — **Beth**, in California

Send a hint to heloise@heloise.com.

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press

Today is Tuesday, May 5, the 125th day of 2026. There are 240 days left in the year.

Today in history

On May 5, 1961, astronaut Alan B. Shepard Jr. became America's first space traveler as he made a 15-minute sub-orbital flight aboard Mercury capsule Freedom 7.

Also on this date:

In 1821, Napoleon Bonaparte, 51, died in exile on the South Atlantic island of St. Helena.

In 1862, Mexican troops repelled French attacks on the city of Puebla de los Angeles in the Battle of Puebla, also known as the Battle of Cinco de Mayo.

In 1925, high school teacher John T. Scopes was charged in Tennessee with violating a state law that prohibited teaching the theory of evolution. Scopes was found guilty, but his conviction was later set aside.

In 1945, in the only fatal attack on the U.S. mainland during World War II, a Japanese balloon bomb exploded on Gearhart Mountain in Oregon, killing a pregnant woman and five children.

In 1973, Secretariat won the Kentucky Derby, the first of his Triple Crown victories, in a time of 1:59.4 — a record that still stands.

In 1981, Irish Republican Army militant Bobby Sands died at age 27 at the Maze Prison in Northern Ireland on the 66th day of a hunger strike.

In 1994, American teenager Michael Fay was caned at a Singaporean prison for vandalism, a day after his sentence was reduced from six lashes to four in response to an appeal by President Bill Clinton.

In 2016, Lonnie Franklin Jr. was convicted of 10 counts of murder in the "Grim Sleeper" serial killings in Los Angeles that targeted poor, young Black women over two decades.

Today's birthdays: Actor Lance Henriksen is 86. Comedian actor Michael Palin is 83. Actor Richard E. Grant is 69. R&B singer Raheem DeVaughn is 51. Actor Vincent Kartheiser is 47. Actor Danielle Fife is 45. Actor Henry Cavill is 43. Singersongwriter Adele is 38. R&B singer Chris Brown is 37. Tennis player Aryna Sabalenka is 28. Olympic figure skating gold medalist Nathan Chen is 27. Tennis player Carlos Alcaraz is 23.

GEOGRAPHIES

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road," recollected Pierre Clément de Laussat of his 1803 visit. "The road was full with an unbroken line of traveling coaches, cabriolets, horses, carts, spectators, and players. ... Strollers dressed in their Sunday finery, (and) young folks ... challenged each other to raquette," a Choctaw game like lacrosse. "Sprinkled here and there are log cabins and some cultivation" amid forests of "evergreens," magnolias, vines, (and) oaks."

Those oak trees inspired real estate speculators in 1837 to name this section of the ridge "Oakland." Capitalizing on upcoming railroads, they advertised their plans for towns to be called Oakland, Metairieville, Harlaem and Shrewsbury.

A real estate ad in the Picayune extolled Oakland's potential for "pleasure and recreation by the Metairie road," particularly for "the equestrian" or anyone seeking "a delightful retreat ... where domestic felicity under its most pleasing aspect, awaits."

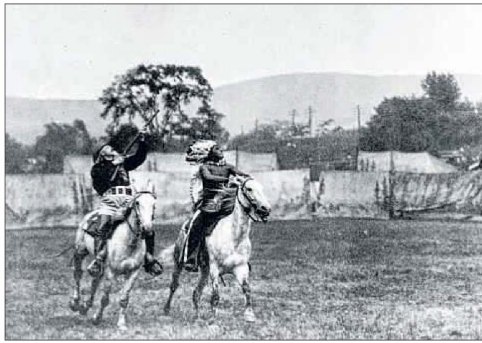
Though the railroad projects failed, three of the envisioned communities eventually came to fruition. Metairieville is today's Old Metairie, while Harlaem (Harlem) and Shrewsbury are neighborhoods in Old Jefferson.

As for Oakland, it became the rear of the Macarty plantation, which in 1831 the New Orleans Canal and Banking Company acquired for the twin purposes of laying out the subdivision of Carrollton and excavating a navigation canal to Lake Pontchartrain. Dubbed the New Basin Canal and fully opened by 1838, the waterway and its levee-top Shell Road made the Metairie Ridge accessible to the 100,000 city dwellers in New Orleans proper, most of whom resided in congested neighborhoods with few opportunities for green space and recreation.

As the urban population grew, the Metairie and Gently ridge system became the perfect place for race courses, parks, fair grounds and cemeteries — that is, big footprint land uses that would have been too costly to be located in the urban core, but perfect for an outlying ridge. Recognizing this geographical advantage, investors in 1838 opened the Metairie Race Course on one part of the ridge system; by 1860, at least four such facilities operated along other parts of the upland, including the original section of City Park.

In 1866, a real estate attorney and horse lover named George Leon Bright bought 88 acres from the New Orleans Canal and Banking Company directly across from the Metairie Course. Aiming to give his neighbor some competition, Bright hired surveyor William H. Williams to design and lay out "Oakland Course," the name ascribed to this spot at least since 1837 which also evoked the famed Oakland Race Course in Louisville, Kentucky.

Bright's facility featured a one-mile track for trotting, carriage driving and harness racing, plus stables, stands and a pavilion known as the Public House. Patrons ("subscribers") would enter Oakland via the Half-Way House, a stopover for travelers on the



Buffalo Bill Cody and an unidentified Native American in his Wild West Show perform a shooting demonstration. Over the winter of 1884-85, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show performed at Oakland Park on the grounds of what is now New Orleans Country Club.

PHOTO FROM THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Shell Road or New Basin Canal midway between the city and what would soon become the lake-front resort of West End.

In an 1867 Picayune ad for Oakland, manager John Marshall declared "the highest portion of the Metairie Ridge" will make "the elegant riding and driving track ... attractive to lovers of outdoor sports." Paying subscribers soon arrived for family picnics, private events, scheduled races and even hot-air balloon launches.

Despite racial tensions in the years following the Civil War, Louisiana's biracial government during the Reconstruction era meant that public facilities were not yet strictly segregated by race. White and Black patrons alike made use of Oakland Course (Park), sometimes for separate events in separate spaces for the same events, and at times intermingled. Even after segregation became the law of the land, Oakland catered to the full social spectrum of local society.

The year 1872 became pivotal for Oakland, however, as the adjacent Metairie Course closed to be converted to today's Metairie Cemetery, the Fair Grounds Race Course opened further east along the upland on the Gently Ridge, and would soon attract wealthier patrons. Oakland became the park for the proletariat.

Typical events at Oakland included the 1868 Grand Catholic Festival on the Fourth of July, featuring horse and mule races as well as foot and sack competitions; an 1880 picnic of an Irish-American soldiers association attended by famed writer Lafcadio Hearn; a June 1881 picnic of the Daughters of Israelite Tabernacle No. 6; and later that summer, a commemoration of the Emancipation Proclamation featuring a performance by the Excelsior Brass Band, which would become influential in the development of jazz. In 1887, according to *The Weekly Pelican*, "a large number of our colored fellow-citizens (celebrated) the fortieth anniversary of the freedom of the African Republic ... of Liberia ... at Oakland park."

Perhaps the most influential event at Oakland was Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, for which Bright erected a 15,000-seat amphitheater. Timed to coincide with the 1884-85 World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition at present-day Audubon Park, famed empresario William F. Cody — "Buffalo Bill, the Spahn of the Prairie" — and his troupe

staged frontier battles, stage-coach robberies and feats of equestrian marksmanship.

His ads in the Picayune promised "two hundred Indians, Scouts, Mexicans, (and) Cowboys," along with a hundred horses and some bison, performing over a period of four months.

Despite persistent rains, the Wild West Show did "a very fine business at Oakland Park," according to the New York Dramatic Mirror. Famed sharpshooter Annie Oakley took part in the shows, which at one point included a pyrotechnical reenactment of the Battle of New Orleans, with Cody playing Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson. The most lasting influence may have occurred when performers took leave of their Oakland residency and headed into the neighborhoods of New Orleans.

In a 1990 article, the late photographer and historian Michael P. Smith noted there were "some fifty to sixty Plains Indians, including four chiefs ... on the street in New Orleans in the native dress during Mardi Gras of 1885." According to the oral tradition of the present-day Indians, Smith continued, some Black New Orleanians "joined with them to mask as Indians," revitalizing a tradition from antebellum times with a new frontier flair. "The oral history of the modern Mardi Gras Indian groups begins in that year," Smith posited, "the first tribe calling itself the 'Creole Wild West.'"

While picnics, banquets and ball games continued at Oakland, horse racing struggled in the face of competition with the Fair Grounds and other venues. Bright ended leasing out his track as pasture for cattle, horses and mules.

"Mr. Bright's proposition failed to produce big profits," recounted a later *Times-Picayune* article. But Oakland endured "as a private track. He spent big sums to gratify his interest in horses, which was his chief hobby."

By the early 1900s, the swamp-land lakeside of the Metairie Ridge had been drained, and by the 1910s, city dwellers were driving automobiles out to fashionable new subdivisions in Lakeview and Metairie. No longer cheap real estate on the metropolitan fringe, Oakland took on new value for a different land use — a new community of users. Golf had become popular nationwide, and as cities became

industrialized, urban gentry yearned for a sort of manicured version of nature — a "country club" that was close to home yet far from congestion. As early as 1900, golfers eyed Oakland as a potential course, and five years later, George Bright sold Oakland Park to an intermediary named Edward G. Schlieder for \$140,000.

Famed local golfer George Turpie then teamed with country-club investor Charles B. Thorn to form the Oakland Park Land Company, which, following complex transactions pieced together by the late historian Charles L. Dufour, finally acquired the Oakland tract from Schlieder in 1913. That autumn, members officially formed the New Orleans Country Club, and "on April 23, 1914," wrote Dufour in his 1988 book on the history of the organization, "the Oakland Park Land Company sold Oakland Park to the New Orleans Country Club for the same price it had paid, \$200,500."

Turpie subsequently designed the golf course among majestic live oaks, some of which are listed on the Live Oak Society Registry of the Louisiana Garden Club Federation.

Today, I-10 overlays the former bed of the New Basin Canal, and Zea's Restaurant on Metairie Road occupies the space of the old Half-Way House. Bayou Metairie has been filled in, and Metairie Road hums with the sort of traffic that would have been unthinkably to those circa-1803 "strollers in Sunday finery."

But if you squint a bit at an aerial image, you can still discern Oakland's oval track, and the links of the New Orleans Country Club, whose entrance aligns precisely with that of old Oakland. First coined in 1837, that name remains on the modern map in the form of an adjacent residential street named Oakland Drive.

As for George L. Bright, he died in 1917 at age 66 and is entombed today on a former race course, now Metairie Cemetery.

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that striving to create meaningful interactions instead of for perfection alleviates some of the stress of hosting. Organizing activities that give guests a way to settle in or mingle, planning a simple menu and asking for help are some of the strategies they use to create an event that everyone, even the host, can participate in and enjoy, they say.

"When we are more socially connected, we are not only happier, but we're healthier and live longer," Holt-Lunstad said.

Gatherings not just for the guest

Madeline Johnson, 24, posts recipes, decoration tips and ideas for backyard parties on social media under the name Madeline May. She said she got into hosting because she wanted to be prepared in advance. "As an only child, I always wanted company," said Johnson, who hosted about a dozen large events with friends and at least five smaller gatherings with family members last year. "I started to realize if I wanted that village around me that I would have to build it on my own."

Now, she wants to help other people build the courage to invite guests over and facilitate bonds between them.

"There's just way too much unnecessary pressure that makes

people feel like the bar to host is up here when it's much lower," Johnson said.

As someone who is more naturally reserved, she likes planning an activity for her gatherings, such as painting a flower vase or answering trivia questions, to reduce the initial anxiety of socializing, especially when the group includes people who don't know each other and asking guests to bring different foods or assigning them shared tasks like setting the table also can spark conversations and reduce work for the host, Holt-Lunstad said. "In the U.S., we are so time deprived and have overscheduled everything that it is difficult to sit down and be present, but a meal allows us to do that. We should not underestimate the power of what food can do," she said.

Kitchen shortcuts for hosts

Shared appetizers like charcuterie and grazing boards, and meals that can be prepared in advance such as casseroles, soups and other dishes, are simplifying how people host, reducing time in the kitchen on the day of and making serving and cleanup easier.

Oregon-based chef and cookbook author Josh McDaden, who is known for turning seasonal ingredients into approachable, shareable dishes, talks in one of his books about grazing-style eating having roots in communal farm tables.

Butter boards, which involve spreading soft or whipped butter

on a platter topped with honey, herbs or spices and dipped into with bread and crackers, are a modern interpretation that have gained popularity.

"You can put a lot of variety and textures and different flavors into things in an easier way, showing off the seasonality of the food. It becomes a mobile meal," McFadden said in an interview with The Associated Press. "It also creates conversation, and it's just a fun way to eat."

Serving food arranged for picking from a platter is a quick way to serve guests, he said. McFadden also suggests incorporating stored or bought specific dishes that guests can take home as other ways hosts can lighten their loads.

Katie Eu, 26, who lives in New Hampshire, says she loves a "bring your own" type of gathering, especially since hosting can get expensive if it's not a potluck or friends don't take turns playing host, like she and hers do. "It is pretty low pressure because what you are providing is not the food, but the space for people to gather," Eu said.

Supporting the host as the guest

Providing a setting for social connection matters more than how great the food is, what the decor looks like or how spacious a home is, said Richard Slatcher, a social psychology professor at the University of Georgia.

"The other stuff is a bonus,"

Slatcher said. "It's really about the people."

Inviting people into your home for the first time nevertheless creates a feeling of vulnerability since guests can learn a lot about the host's taste, interests and beliefs through the color scheme, the books on the shelves, and the art work and mementos on display. Try to remember that vulnerability is also an essential element in fostering authentic human connections, said Slatcher, who co-led research with Holt-Lunstad on how attending live events can combat loneliness.

Guests also have a responsibility when it comes to making a social event fulfilling for themselves and their host, Holt-Lunstad said.

"If you're passively being an attendee, you are not going to feel connected," she said.

For Johnson, guests not confirming their attendance, showing up late or not showing up at all are a major source of stress. "I put my heart and soul into everything," she said. "If you want to truly be a good guest, put the invitation on your calendar, don't double book yourself and try to show up on time."

Guests also show consideration for their host by cleaning up after themselves to the extent possible and not overstaying their welcome, according to Eu.

"Hosting is hard, so being aware of space that you're coming into and space you're taking up" matters, she said.