



WHAT'S COOKING: How New Orleans helped shape modern American dining **2D**

entertainment LIVING

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An aerial photograph of Dillard University can be seen in a book on display at the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University.



Kathe Hambrick and Lisa Moore look through a collection of the Louisiana Weekly in the archives at the Amistad Research Center.



STAFF PHOTOS BY ENAN CHEDIAK

Lisa Moore, head of research services at the Amistad Research Center, shows visitors a book from the archives at Tulane University in New Orleans..

Still sailing

*Amistad Research Center
celebrates 60 years
preserving Black history*

BY VIOLET BUCARO | Staff writer

The doors to the archive are locked when



Kathe Hambrick, the executive director of the Amistad Research Center, holds a copy of the book 'Bulbancha is Still a Place: Indigenous Culture of New Orleans' at the archives.

you arrive, opening only by appointment. Rare, historic collections are shelved on each wall, some locked glass cases, others curated by hand, sprawled open on tables.

It may look like an entrance to a library, but it is the world's largest independent archive of Black history, tucked in Uptown New Orleans.

For 60 years now, scholars searching for overlooked histories of African Americans and other minorities have found their way to the Amistad Research Center.



A visitor points to some handwritten letters from the archives at the Amistad Research Center.

The nonprofit, located in Tilton Hall at Tulane University, is home to an estimated 15 million pages, 1,000 fine artworks, 400 oral histories and 33,000 books.

Some notable materials include papers by John O'Neal's records of the Federation of Southern Cooperative, Helen Keller's handwritten inscription from her book "The World I Live In," George Herri-man's "Krazy Kat" newspaper comics and a recent acquisition of papers by American-Mexican artist Elizabeth Catlett.

"Without the Amistad Research Center, many documents from the African American experience would end up in

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"I sincerely **NEVER THOUGHT** they would have this much or many materials I could use for the research. The staff has been helping a lot; **IT'S BEEN A BLESSING**. I will have to keep coming back every day."

TAIWO BELLO, Ph.D., a professor who teaches African history at Oklahoma State University said of the Amistad Research Center



PROVIDED BY THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

A detail of a 1776 map by Antonio Paredes showing New Orleans at the upper left and Mobile at the upper right

A CITY BEFORE A NATION

What was New Orleans like in 1776? Take a look back for America's 250th birthday

BY RICHARD CAMPANELLA
Contributing writer

It is a steamy July morning in 1776, and you have just landed at "La Nueva Orleans," capital of the Spanish colony of "Luisiana."

If river conditions allowed, your brigantine or frigate may have sailed directly up from the Gulf.

But in this era, shoals or contrary winds often impeded entry into the Mississippi, forcing passengers and cargo to transfer to long-boats at the remote garrison of La Baliza for the grueling journey upriver.

Your first steps ashore at New Orleans would have been on a wooden muelle (dock) just off

today's North Peters and Decatur streets, a few hundred feet inland from the present-day riverfront. The muelle connected with a meager plank-covered levee, where dockworkers handled freight such as "deer and bear skins, beaver

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LOOK BACK

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furs, cotton, lumber, rice and various other articles ... produced on the plantations,” according to a visitor in this era.

Behind the quai (wharf) circulated food vendors offering, according to Cabildo records, “salt meats of all grades, oil, suet and pork lard ... rice, corn, peas, beans ... chickens and turkeys,” and other foodstuffs to homemakers.

No one in this remote outpost of some 3,000 people would have known that, a thousand miles away, American patriots had just declared their independence from British rule. That’s not to say locals were unaware of the unrest in the 13 colonies; as French Creoles under Spanish rule, they too scorned the British.

But outside of the halls of government and military garrisons, you would have heard little about the American Revolution in circa-1776 New Orleans.

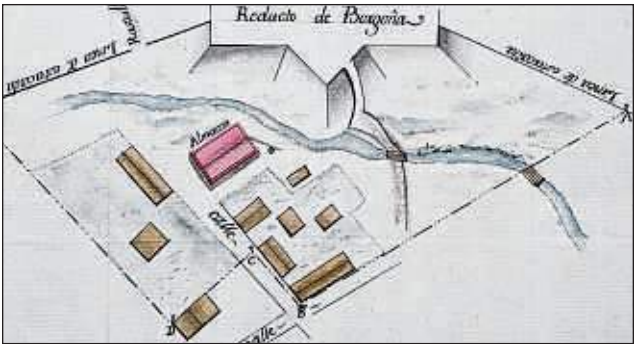
Crossing the muddy Camino Real (or Calle de Muelle, today’s Decatur Street) would bring you to the Plaza de Armas, now Jackson Square. Little more than a barren parade ground strewn with cannons, the unfenced plaza proliferated with peddlers and vendors, including hunters and fishmongers who, according to Cabildo records, sold their catch “in the heat of the sun” and dumped “blood, gills and other waste” wherever convenient. Meat spoiled, produce rotted, flies buzzed everywhere and noxious odors wafted in the sub-tropical humidity.

Through the 1770s, Spanish authorities tried various ways to improve food retail and ultimately decided that centralization would enable inspection and sanitation. In 1780, they erected the city’s first public market, a 60-by-22-foot wooden butchers’ pavilion, the predecessor of today’s French Market.

An unimpressive cityscape

Buildings surrounding the plaza mostly date to the French regime, which had fully withdrawn by 1769. English Capt. Philip Pittman, who spied on Spanish New Orleans around that time, reported that “the church dedicated to St. Louis (was) a very poor building, framed with wood; it is in so ruinous a condition that divine service has not been performed in it since the year 1766, one of the king’s storehouses being at present used for that purpose.”

To the right of the empty church, where the Presbytère now stands, was the “very handsome and commodious brick house” of the Capuchin priests, “which is



ARCHIVO GENERAL DE LAS INDIAS

Spanish diagram showing how runoff flowed at what is now North Rampart at Canal streets in the late 1700s

totally deserted and gone to ruin.” To the left “is the prison and guardhouse which are very strong and good buildings.” The flanks of the plaza were home to the intendant’s house, the king’s storehouse and an artillery yard.

Walking through the calles (streets) was a messy slog. Dirt surfaces were prone to eroding and puddling, thanks to constant hoof beats, stray livestock and torrential rains. The year 1776 brought an uptick in tropical activity, such that six hurricanes would strike the region in the next six years.

All urban drainage was gravitational; engineers could only remove stormwater by digging gutters to steer the runoff toward the backswamp. Ditches were so deep they made the blocks appear like “isles,” each surrounded by “corrupted and stagnant waters” into which residents dumped their bedpans.

Officials strove to improve urban conditions by building puentes (bridges) over the ditches, introducing sanitation services, regrading street surfaces, installing oil lamps for nocturnal illumination and relocating the fetid old burial grounds to outside the city limits, today’s St. Louis Cemetery No. 1. But all these improvements came one to two decades later; New Orleans circa-1776 more resembled a bucolic village than the sturdy city it would later become.

The only praise Pittman could offer New Orleans regarded its orderly design. “All the streets are perfectly straight,” he noted, “and cross each other at right angles, (which) divide the town into sixty-six squares, eleven in length ... and six in depth; the sides of these squares are one hundred yards each, and are divided into twelve lots.” Except for some split squares and peripheral blocks, what Pittman wrote closely describes today’s French Quarter.

The city’s 700 to 800 houses hardly looked like the French Quarter buildings of today, most of which date to the 1820s through 1850s. Rather, they resembled extant buildings such as Lafitte’s Blacksmith Shop at 941 Bourbon (probably built in the 1770s), the Hotel St. Pierre at 901 Burgundy and Madame John’s Legacy

at 632 Dumaine (both dating to the 1780s).

“The general plan of building,” wrote Pittman of local architecture, “is with timber frames filled up with brick; and most of the houses are but of one floor, raised about eight feet from the ground, with large galleries round them.” Houses varied by size, orientation and setback distance, but most were Creole in design, with hipped roofs and center chimneys, and usually surrounded by picket-fenced gardens.

Only one extant edifice definitely stood in 1776, the Old Ursuline Convent at 1112 Chartres St., by this time already 24 years old. “The convent of the Ursulines and general hospital, which is attended by the nuns, occupy two ... squares facing the river,” wrote Pittman. “These buildings are strong and plain, well answering the purposes for which they were designed.”

Most residents lived in the heart of the city; the undeveloped blocks along the fringes “are mostly laid out in gardens (with) orange-trees.” Neither Canal Street nor Rampart nor Esplanade Avenue yet existed; each were open commons fronting primitive fortifications, beyond which were enslaved plantations, with impenetrable swamps to the rear. New Orleans in 1776 had no faubourgs (suburbs), no access to Lake Pontchartrain except for Bayou Road and Bayou St. John, and no urbanization on the West Bank.

A Creole society

Walking through the populated blocks, you would have noticed a roughly even split of White and Black faces. Regardless of race, most folks were Creole, meaning locally born. French was the dominant language, and Roman Catholicism was the primary religion.

Though now Spanish subjects, residents of European descent hailed predominantly from France, French Canada or the French Caribbean, else Spain and its colonies or greater Germany and other regions. Despite the enmity with Britain, English merchants, as well as those from France, Spain and their colonies, dominated the shipping trade and brought a multinational air

to this otherwise provincial city. Smuggling abounded to the point that nearly everyone partook of the illicit economy.

Three-quarters of those of African ancestry were enslaved, their ancestors having arrived when French slavers in the 1720s abducted over 5,000 people of the Bambara, Mandingo, Wolof, Susu and Ibo nations from the Senegambia region of West Africa.

Most Native people had already been displaced from New Orleans proper. The nearest sizable encampments were those of the Choctaw across Lake Pontchartrain; the Biloxi and Pascagoula in the Manchac area; and the Alibamon, Houma and Chitimacha farther up the Camino Real, or River Road.

By the 1770s, Spain had ended the enslavement of Native people and launched a policy called “coartación,” which gave people in bondage some opportunities for manumission (freedom). But in the 1780s, Spain also reopened the transatlantic slave trade to Louisiana, this time mostly from the Congo region.

Seeking to Hispanize the colony, Spain also recruited their own people to migrate to Louisiana. In 1777, Spanish subjects from Málaga and Granada made their way to New Orleans, followed by Canary Islanders starting in 1779. They eventually settled in New Iberia, Gálveztown and the San Bernardo region, now St. Bernard Parish, where descendants of Isleños live today.

War with the British

As in the 13 Colonies, defense against British troops was a major concern among Spanish leaders in New Orleans. Eying Redcoats just across Lake Pontchartrain, Gov. Luis de Unzaga in 1775 organized the Battalion of New Orleans, and in 1776 Col. Bernardo de Gálvez took command of the Louisiana Infantry Battalion, shortly before becoming governor himself.

As battles raged in the American Revolution, Spain found common cause with the patriots, and in June 1779 declared war on Great Britain. In Louisiana, Gov. Bernardo de Gálvez led attacks on British West and East Florida.

Over the next two years, Gálvez and his troops won decisive victories at Baton Rouge, Natchez, Mobile and Pensacola. Their triumphs freed American patriots to focus on engagements along the Eastern Seaboard, where they achieved victory in 1783.

A new world order

None of this, of course, could have been foreseen in New Orleans on that undistinguished July morning in 1776. But the outcome of the events in Philadelphia that same day would have

profound impacts on New Orleans, to say the least.

For one, all British claims east of Baton Rouge became Spanish. Americans migrating westward into the Ohio and Mississippi valleys, meanwhile, became dependent on transshipping their cargo at New Orleans. Spanish authorities began to resent the encroachment of these Anglo-Americans, much as they had the British previously.

What ensued were a series of capriciously ambivalent policies made by Spanish officials through the 1780s and 1790s, culminating with the 1802 revocation of Americans’ right to deposit at New Orleans. That news became all the more alarming to Americans when it came to light that, two years earlier, Napoleon Bonaparte had secretly persuaded Spain to retrocede Louisiana to France.

Many predicted war over New Orleans, “through which the produce of three-eighths of our territory must pass,” wrote President Thomas Jefferson, “the possessor of which is our natural and habitual enemy.”

Hoping for a peaceful solution, Jefferson in 1803 dispatched diplomats to Paris to persuade Napoleon to sell New Orleans to the U.S., so that the city could become an American transshipment port surrounded by European possessions. In a way, it already was. One eyewitness counted 120 ships at New Orleans one morning: “French, Spanish, and mostly Anglo-American — spread far out like a floating forest ... a prospect worthy of the busiest regions of the earth.”

If Napoleon seemed distracted when the Americans paid their visit, it might have been on account of news arriving from Saint-Domingue, the invaluable sugar island in the Caribbean to which French troops had been dispatched to quash a major slave insurrection. Instead, disease and fierce resistance ultimately led to their defeat, resulting in the independence of Haiti.

Losing Saint-Domingue forced Napoleon to weight his ambition of reclaiming

Louisiana against fighting Britain’s dominance through military actions in Europe.

He agonized with his decision and finally opted for the latter. As one French aide later recalled, Napoleon declared to his cabinet, “Irresolution and deliberation are no longer in season. I renounce Louisiana. It is not only New Orleans that I will cede. It is the whole colony without any reservation, (but) with the greatest regret.”

Shortly thereafter, the aide posed a momentous question to the American diplomats: “Would the United States be interested in buying all of Louisiana?”

Louisiana Purchase

Following some puzzlement, the Americans lunged at the offer. They eventually negotiated the Louisiana Purchase for \$15 million plus interest and the assumption of some minor debts, totaling \$27,267,621 for what turned out to be 828,000 square miles.

The news spread across the Atlantic, into the Gulf and up the Mississippi.

On Nov. 30, 1803, the Spanish flag came down over New Orleans, replaced by the French tricolor. Twenty days later, in an elaborate ceremony at what is now Jackson Square, “the French colors were lowered and the American flag was raised,” recounted French prefect Pierre Clément de Laus sat. “When they reached the same level, both banners paused for a moment,” after which the Stars and Stripes rose to the top.

Much had indeed changed since that July morning in 1776 — in New Orleans, in the United States and in the world.

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