

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY

of

THE OLD FRENCH MARKET

The most historic spot in America's
most interesting City from 1770
to 1937

From original documentary sources

By

CHARLES L. THOMPSON

New Orleans, Louisiana

Copyrighted 194⁵0

SPECIAL NOTICE

This little volume has been compiled from original source material in the writers own library at various times, and is the only accurate information on the subject in print today, not a single word has been copied or rehashed from anything in print in any of the libraries of the past or present.

CRONSON
U.S.A.

4

THE SITE

The site on which the old French Market stands today has a very interesting history, in fact its history goes back to the year 1675 which antedated the erection of a market at this particular site by 95 years, it appears on several early maps in 1675 designated then as the river end of the (portage) or Portage Road, and was inhabited by the Oumas Indians who had several encampments along the river from the Portage Road up to a point about a mile above, or about Julia Street of today, occasionally a few Canadian hunters and traders came down the Mississippi River (River St. Louis) on their way to Beloxi, here at this particular settlement they purchased fresh supplies, and secured guides to take them to their destination, their route was over the Portage Road (Bayou-Road of today) which saved them the long and tiresome journey down the winding river to its mouth, not to mention the time saved, and the fact that they avoided the gulf storms. The river end of the Portage Road had been noted by Bienville and Iberville in 1700 and had been traversed by quite a few of the officers under Bienville at different times, among those to whom this site was well known were M. De Remonville, Jean Barbason de Pailloux, La Seur, Penicant, Mandeville, Bernard Laharpe and others. Many of the officers under Bienville had gone up the river as far as Canada on official business and returned, to them this route was familiar.

Later on after the town was laid out this Portage Road was enlarged and became the most important road leading in and out of New Orleans, due to the fact that many vessels that could not or would not venture up the Mississippi River to the town, came in by Bayou Saint John

from the Gulf of Mexico via-Lake Borgne and Lake Pontchartrain. Their merchandise was hauled to and from the town in carts drawn by mules and oxen, at about halfway between the town and Bayou Saint John there was an encampment of Tchouhouma Indians where they had a small trading post, at a point that is now known to us today as Bayou Road and Broad Streets, this continued to be an indian trading post during the Spanish domination and right on through to the early American days, and is remembered by some of the older inhabitants of this section of New Orleans, as a matter of fact the indians continued to have their open air market here up to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Le Breton Market is standing approximately on this site, and for that reason it is referred to today as the Indian Market. The indians to be found at this trading post in the early days of the colony were of the Tchouhouma tribe. Around 1760 they drifted up the country and became the allies of the Oumas, this trading post was later inhabited by the Chiti-Machas tribe that had several encampments along the shores of Lake Pontchartrain and were also encamped on the lower side of Bayou Saint John.

In the early American days there were several tribes to be found here including indians from Bayou Lacombe as well as indians from several tribes the remnants of which still existed in Mississippi, some of them came right to the French Market with their herbs and roots as well as basketry and beadwork and disposed of their merchandise, they were to be found in the Bazaar Market and also in the Vegetable Market and are remembered by many of the older merchants and inhabitants, as they were still to be seen up until 1910.

FIRST MARKET

The first market to be erected on the site occupied by the markets of today was ordered placed here in 1770 by General Alexander O'Reilly due to the fact that the Recopilacion of the laws of the Indies (Recopilacion de las leyes de las indias) which was the law in all the Spanish colonies, required that in all towns or cities situated near a body of water the market house must be placed between the waters edge and the first row of houses. That is the answer to the question that our present day historians have not been able to get from any source known to them, although thousands have wondered why the market was located so close to the river, with the ever present danger of toppling into the water.

The first market to be erected on this site was a rather small and inconspicuous structure built entirely of cypress lumber produced right here in New Orleans at the hand operated sawmill of Lorenzo Sigur; a nephew of the Count de Sigur of Paris, who had arrived in Louisiana in 1752 and established the first large sawmill near the town. The little market was forty feet in width with an overall length of eighty feet, it had a half pitch roof and resembled some of the boat sheds that were in close proximity, except in size. This market was intended for fish, meat, and poultry; while vegetables and other produce were sold on the levee. The peddlers and retail merchants paid \$1.00 per month for the privilege of doing business on the levee. Their wares were displayed on movable tables and benches with a canopy to shade them from the sun.

This first little market had been erected by Robert Jones who had come to New Orleans from Havana with his brother Evan Jones and Oliver Pollock.

The report of the royal treasurer shows that from 1770 to the year of 1780 this market was leased to Maurice LeBlanc, the rent for the entire market was 365 pesos or dollars per year, he in turn rented out space to various individuals. From 1781 to 1790 the market rents were increased to 400 pesos or dollars per year, no record seems to have been kept as to whom the lessee was during this latter period. The market brought in other revenues besides the rents as many commodities were taxed during those days and everyone in the market paid a license.

SECOND MARKET

The second market to be erected on this site was somewhat larger being one hundred feet in length and forty feet in width. It was divided throughout its entire length with a partition. The river side was used as a commodity warehouse and was divided into large and small warerooms that were rented to the wholesale and retail merchants by the month. The contract for the construction of this market was auctioned off at the government house to the lowest bidder, the first bid was \$3,000.00 the next lowest bid was \$2,850.00, the next and final bid was \$2,824.00 the contract was adjudicated to August McCarty, and attested by Pedro Pedesclaux and Francisco Pascalis de la barra and is dated October 4th 1789. This market was for meat, fish, poultry, and general merchandise, and continued in use until 1795.

Due to the fire that occurred in 1795 that destroyed a large portion of the town, the tax on the chimneys was not sufficient to defray the cost of the lighting system, therefore, (Louis Hector) El Baron de Carondelet changed the market somewhat. The commodity side of the market (the river side) was made into the municipal slaughter house and a tax was placed on beef, veal and mutton, as well as a tax of 4 reales on each and every barrel of flour used by the bakers and biscuit makers, this tax was continued into the early American days. The bakers had to make a sworn statement every 30 days as to the amount of flour used, and then and there paid the tax. This market continued in use until the latter part of 1812.

On the 19th and 20th of August a hurricane struck the town and damaged many of the larger houses and in many cases entire roofs were ripped off and carried away by the wind. The storm lasted two days, and among the first buildings to be entirely demolished was the market house, this left the town without a market place. The city council allowed the merchants to use a portion of the Place de Armes until they could rebuild or repair the market, many of the smaller merchants had been located on the levee for years and to them the lack of the market made no difference at all. Some of the market men secured locations on old Levee Street to be able to serve their regular customers. This one year Christmas shopping was done in the public square which resembled the market place of a Spanish or Mexican town, to the many Spaniards this was not a novelty. The town remained without a market for about a year.

THE THIRD MARKET

The third market to occupy this site was the meat market; (Le Halle de Boucheries) the contract for its construction was approved by the city council on April 28th, 1813, and all formalities completed on May the 4th, 1813. The contract was signed by Nicholas Girod the mayor, on behalf of the city of New Orleans, and Gurlie and Guillot the contractors, by whom the plans were drawn. The city council passed an ordinance authorizing the contractors to use a portion of the public square to store tools and material during the time the market was under construction. The public square then was level with the street, the corners however, were marked with decorative wooden cannons made of cypress. The four sides of the square had a plank walk made of flat boat gunnels laid at about three feet from the curb line, which is the outside edge of our sidewalks of today. The contract called for a market 302 feet in length overall by a width of 47 feet overall (French Measure) with 25 arches throughout its length, each arch 9'4" in width, the central arch being 18 feet in width, the side arches were 10 feet 6 inches in width and were uniform in each row throughout the length of the market. The arches at either end of the market were a little smaller; the central arch being 17 feet in width and the side arches being 8 feet in width. However, the height of all the arches was the same, being 12 feet 9 inches. The original plan did not call for a shed over the sidewalk, these were added in latter years; the height from the ground to the eaves was 15 feet 6 inches; the height from the

ground to the top of the column was 8 feet 6 inches; all columns were 2 feet 6 inches, excepting the four corner columns which were 48 inches square. The market was paved with a material in general use in those days, flagstones. The butchers chopping blocks were made of dogwood, while the stalls and stands were made of cypress. The market was heavily framed and had a slate roof which has been replaced several times during the past hundred and twenty five years of its existence. The interior of the market was changed in 1915 at which time a pressed steel ceiling was installed and the arches were enclosed with glazed brick and copper screens as per orders of the state board of health; except those arches that were designated as doorways, these arches had double screen doors to keep out flies etc. The main arches at either end had double doors, and the first section of either end was made into a vestibule. No change was made in the market until the early part of 1936 when the Works Progress Administration began their project which included repairing and renovating the meat market and demolishing several other units of the market, and erecting a modern farmers market, extending down as far as Barracks Street. The meat and fish sections of the market are now under one roof in the oldest unit of the group, usually referred to as the French Market. The most important change in this market is the addition of round tapering columns such as were to be seen only in the lower market known as the wholesale market, however, the interior has been modernized and includes up to date sanitary display cases. In fact, the best that money can buy.

THE VEGETABLE MARKET

The first vegetable market to be erected in New Orleans was a little market located between old Levee Street and the Public Road it measured 87 feet on old Levee Street; 90 feet on the Public Road (North Peters Street of today) 24 feet 6 inches on Saint Philip Street end; and 48 feet 3 inches at its lower end which faced the front of the water works. Plans and specifications were drawn by Joseph Pelie, the then city engineer, and are dated May 11th 1826. This little market was constructed of cypress throughout and was continued in use until 1830 when the second section of the wholesale market was completed. It was ^{then} demolished and reconstructed of brick to correspond with the two sections of the wholesale market. The wholesale market was erected in two sections; the first section was completed in 1828 and the second section in 1830. The total length of the two sections was 322 feet on the Public Road; the same on old Levee Street. The width was 53 feet American measure on Ursuline Street, the same on the upper end at Saint Philip Street, it had a 65 degree angle and a 35 degree angle at opposite corners. It was an open market of a very low and squatty appearance and this peculiar type of construction has misled many people into believing this to be the oldest of the markets in the group known to us today as the French Market. The roof of this market was supported by three rows of round brick columns twenty-one in each row a total of sixty-three in all, each column being 24 inches in diameter at the base and tapering to 18 inches at the top of plate or ceiling. The columns were 12 feet in height from the pavement to the top of plate. It had a one-third pitch roof which joined up with a

the small market along side of it and also with the fish market by means of a series of skylights and ventilators erected in later years. This market and the smaller market lying paralell with Decatur Street have been reconstructed and renovated by the Works Progress Administration during the past year. One little change that was made consisted in raising the plate by making the columns a little longer, thereby giving more head room and ventilation which is an improvement long needed.

FRUIT MARKET

The first retail fruit market to be erected here dates back to 1840, it was located on old Levee Street running up from Saint Philip Street towards Dumaine Street, it was 160 feet in length and measured 49 feet at Saint Philip Street and only eight feet at the upper end towards Dumaine Street. The main roof was supported by fourteen cast iron fluted columns, eight inches in diameter and sixteen feet in height, having a sidewalk and a shed supported by six inch fluted cast iron columns on each of its three sides. This market although intended for fruit only, was used by many of the dealers in live and dressed poultry and continued in use up until the latter part of 1937 when the New Market was erected; just below the meat and fish sections by the Works Progress Administration.

The first fish market was erected in 1840 and was for sea food only. However, it became overcrowded and when the new market was erected by Cummings and Holden at Ursuline and Old Levee Streets, and originally intended for a vegetable market, was given over to the fish dealers, to relieve the congestion. This change occurred in 1850. From that period on the little fish market was transformed into a Bazaar; in fact it became known as the Bazaar Market, and from that time on it was occupied by numerous dealers in drygoods, notions, etc., as well as a number of novelty dealers - in fact it resembled a mid-way ~~plaisance~~ of a fair or Carnival. There you would find several groups of Indians of various tribes who came ^{to} ~~the~~ town dressed in their crude tribal costumes to sell their wares which consisted of herbs, roots as well as Indian bead work and baskets. They also sold Indian handmade pottery and did very well. In addition in this market, and between it and the meat market you could always find a few travelling dentists and medicine men selling their herb compound and what have you.

Some of them put on a very good come-on Vaudeville Act or performed a few card tricks to get the crowd interested. There was keen competition in order to see who could draw the largest crowd. This section between the two markets was used by many of the flower venders and it was with difficulty you made your way through the crowds.

The first Bazaar market was a very heavy building, well constructed of pine and cypress lumber with a slate roof and it was in use up to 1862, when news reached the City that Admiral Farragut had passed the forts (Forts Jackson and St. Philip) and was on

his way up the river, to take possession of the city. The market was destroyed by the flames that consumed untold quantities of merchandise all along the levee. Warehouses were emptied and the contents were either thrown into the river, or saturated with oil and burned to keep them from falling into the hands of the yankees. The loss ran into millions. The site was cleared in the early part of 1863 and remained vacant until 1870, when the new Bazaar Market was erected.

The new Bazaar Market was 100 feet in length and 60 feet in width. The roof was supported by cast iron fluted columns, and was enclosed with an iron grill from the pavement to the eaves, and all the way around, it also had iron grill gates that were closed at night by the watchmen. It had a half pitch slate roof surmounted by three octagon shaped belvederes with louvre blinds and glazed sash alternating. The tops of the belvederes were covered with copper, and one of them contained a bell that was used by the commissary of the markets to announce the closing hour. This market was destroyed by the storm that did so much damage to the city of New Orleans and vicinity, which occurred on September 29th, 1915. The site was later occupied by crude sheds that were used up until ^{they were} ~~they were~~ demolished to make room for the new vegetable market that was completed in the early part of 1938. This new market also occupies the site of the (Red Store)

See chapter on Marine Hotel. (Navy Hotel)

THE FISH MARKET OF 1850

The fish market was erected by Cummings & Holden upon the site of the first waterworks system when the old pump house was dismantled. It was a very substantial structure having a double or twin roof supported by 24 foot cast iron columns 16 inches in diameter; and each column supported by a granite footing *20 inches square* and *40 inches in height*, with ventilators as well as skylights that joined up with the wholesale market and the smaller market just above it; and was used right on through from 1850 to 1937 as a fish market, although it had originally been intended for a vegetable market, this market was discontinued in September 1937 when the fish section of the newly reconstructed and renovated combination fish and meat market was completed by the Works Progress Administration. The old fish market has been entirely demolished and at present the site is level with the Street. It is at present being used as a parking lot.

NOTE:

The pump house of the old waterworks system mentioned above was not used to supply water to the inhabitants of the city after 1833, but was merely used as a sanitary pump, and the water was used to flush the gutters running from the river back to the woods. Some of these sanitary pumps along the river front were in use up until 1906 when the present subsurface drainage system was put into operation.

HISTORIC SURROUNDINGS

The French Market is surrounded on all sides by outstanding landmarks. On the lower end of the Wholesale Vegetable Market, is the site of the first park named in honor of Andrew Jackson, and was known as Jackson Place from 1815 to the time that the ground was laid out into city lots, conforming to the official plans of the city. (In 1753, Kerlerec at that time governor of the province, ^{had} designated this particular spot as the drill ground when he caused to be erected,) The New Barracks, (on Barracks Street). At that time he ordered Conde Street to be closed from the Rue del Arsenal (Ursuline Street of today) down to the lower limits of the town. He also ordered Hospital Street from Royal to old Levee Street (Decatur Street of today) to be closed. This Quadruple square measured 638 feet on each of its four sides and remained thusly up until 1812 when the streets were opened by orders of the War Department. Seven years later the Barracks properties were sold to John McDonogh and all other lots were sold at public auction, at which McDonogh purchased ten lots numbered from three to twelve on the plan drawn by Gabriel Winters and dated May 15th, 1819. These lots together with the Barracks buildings were sold by John McDonogh to the first municipality in 1836.

In this quadruple square there had been three different hospitals erected at different dates. The First Charity Hospital, had been erected with funds left by Jean Louis, a French sailor, who died in 1733 and left the equivalent of \$2000.00 to establish a Charity Hospital in New Orleans. (however this was not the first hospital in New Orleans, but the first on the property

of the Ursulines. The second hospital on these grounds was erected by orders of governor Kerlerec, when he ordered a new Barracks erected on this site in 1753.

The third hospital erected on this site was the San Carlos Hospital erected by funds furnished by Andres Almonester, Y, Roxas. In other words, three hospitals had been erected on the properties of the Ursulines, and was supervised and serviced by them. The hospital erected in 1733 ran parallel with Hospital Street.

In this quadruple square were executed five of the leaders of the insurrection of 1768,

They were executed in September 1769. The death sentence was read to them in the Place de Armes by Jean Garic; they were then marched down Conde Street, under guard, and were executed by a firing squad in the yard behind the Barracks. General Alexander O'Reilly had taken possession of the colony in the name of his Catholic Majesty on the 18th of August 1769, the ceremonies took place in the Place de Armes at which time the tri colors of France were lowered and the flag of Spain hoisted in its place.

When the Baron de Carondelet rebuilt the fortification on a larger scale, he caused to be erected five forts, one at each corner of the town, and a much larger one in the rear of the town on the site of the Auditorium and Beauregard Square of today.

One of these forts was located on the site that was later used for the erection of the United States Mint (The Federal Jail of today.) This little fort, San Carlos, was ^{the} a scene of many

interesting events in the early American days. It was here that General Andrew Jackson reviewed the troops on their way to the battlefield of Chalmette, to participate in the battle of New Orleans. In fact during the time that Jackson was in New Orleans he made frequent trips to the fort, as his staff was quartered there, he naturally had to pass the market on his way to and from Fort San Carlos. Here in front of Fort San Carlos, Jackson reviewed the Baratarians under command of Jean and Pierre Lafitte as well as the Orleans Rifles under command of Captain Thomas Beale. This command was composed of some very important men in all walks of life. Their muster roll contained the names of Benjamin Story, Dennis Prieur, Etienne Boree, Peter McGilvary, Geo. Pollock, John McDonogh, Tobias Bickel, John Lynd, Robert Montgomery Beverly Chew and many others.

During the Spanish Domination the markets were operated by the government and an official of the tax collectors office supervised all rentals and collections, El Baron de Carondelet changed the method of operating the market as business was increasing, he therefore appointed Andres Almonester Y Roxas commissary of the market. He made monthly returns to the city treasurer and also made annual reports regarding the operation of the market; this method continued right on up to the time of the transfer in 1803. In the early American days this was changed, and the revenue of the market was farmed out to the highest bidder. The auction was held in the Mayors parlor in the month of December, the bidder paid one-twelfth down at the time of adjudication in addition to having a security bond signed by two responsible persons. This same method was used in farming out all public utilities such as the revenue of cabarets, taverns and grog shops, as well as the

revenue of flat boats and pirogues, and a little later revenue on steamboats. It included oyster shops which were required by law to be located on the levee only.

LEASES

MEAT MARKET (LE HALLE DE BOUCHERIES)

1805	leased to	Thomas Soulet	at	\$5000.00 per year
1810	"	" E. Peyroux	"	18,000.00 " "
1815	"	" Francois Boutin	"	20,400.00 " "
1820	"	" Nicholas Bertoli	"	18,200.00 " "
1825	"	" Eugene Meunier	"	27,500.00 " "
1830	"	" Joaquin Viosca	"	33,000.00
1835	"	" Eugene Meunier	"	34,400.00 " "

HOTEL DE LA MARINE (NAVY HOTEL)

Historians and writers of the past, and many of the writers of the present, have tried to establish the location of the spot, but, it has been somewhat difficult for them so far. As a matter of fact, a half dozen different sites have been pointed out to the strangers and tourists by some of our so-called guides, and from time to time, the various newspapers carry historic articles regarding the above mentioned Marine Hotel, written by some of well meaning, but uninformed or misinformed writers, whose only sources seem to be the free libraries where most of the rehashing that is supposed to be research work is done. Therefore, this will be quite a surprize to any and everyone interested in the true history of the Vieux Carre (Old French Quarter).

The Hotel de La Marine was erected in 1831, on a lot measuring 79 feet 6 inches on the Public Road and 80 feet on the front or river side, the other two sides measured 46 feet, American measure. This parcel of ground figured in a very important and long drawn out law-suit, between the Mayor, Alderman, and the inhabitants of New Orleans vs The United States, and the Mayor Alderman, and inhabitants of New Orleans vs Christoval G. DeArmas and Manuel Simon Cucullu. This lot had been enclosed with a picket fence and a small house had been erected by Thomas Bertrand, who had secured permission from Governor Stephen Miro, to use this lot for that purpose in March 1788. Bertrand having lost all his property in the great fire that destroyed two-thirds of the town.

After his death, his widow Catherine Gonzales retained possession of the property, although her title was not completed until June 30th, 1831 when an injunction of the President of the United States was made perpetual by the United States Supreme Court.

The three-story brick building erected on this site was completed November 15, 1831 from plans that had been prepared six years earlier (1825) It faced the river and immediately became the meeting place of the mariners and seafaring men, many of whose vessels were within sight at all times. The main source of revenue of the Marine Hotel were the crews of the various gunboats of the United States Navy, as well as the mechanics employed at the Navy Yards, at that time located at the foot of Mandeville Street. At this period in the history of New Orleans, you could find in the harbor one hundred sailing vessels to every steamboat, as steam propelled vessels were still a novelty.

The business of the Marine Hotel grew by leaps and bounds for several reasons. Many of the most important shipping masters and agents were to be found there on business, and among the crowds you could always count on finding some of the important ship owners and dealers in ship chandlery, such as John McDonogh, Judah Touro, Stephen Henderson, William Kenner, Peter Eaidlow, Maunsel White, R.D. Shepherd and many others too numerous to mention. William Kenner was the accredited agent of Stephen Girard in New Orleans up until 1826, when he retired from active business.

The Marine Hotel changed hands several times, but it always seemed to prosper. In 1834 it was operated by William H. Cornwell who paid a license of \$150.00 per year, in addition to posting a thousand dollar bond to guarantee the fulfillment of his obligation. In 1835 the hotel was operated by Michael R. McCrackin, he paying \$150.00 per year, as well as posting the usual bond.

In 1837 it was operated by Frank Proctor, he paying \$200.00 per year license and posting a thousand dollar bond as required of all tavern and hotel keepers in those days.

The hotel continued in business until 1840 at which time it became a general store dealing in ship chandlery and ship supplies as well as staple groceries of the period. Of course this was before the days of canned goods, and Heinz 57 varieties. The Red Store, under which name it was known at this time, continued to do a good business, although the atmosphere had changed considerably. Notwithstanding the fact that the building was damaged by fire in 1862 when Farragut anchored his fleet in the harbor and took possession of New Orleans, the damage was repaired and the store opened for what little business there was in 1863, and continued under various managements until 1865. From then on it was leased to Pedro Salas, whose lease did not expire until 1870; it was then leased to A. Alexander. He in turn leased to a Mr. Caruso who operated a wholesale and retail grocery in one-half of the building, formerly known as the Red Store, up until the time the building was demolished to make room for the new retail vegetable market that was recently dedicated with appropriate ceremonies.

Although the building—~~was~~^{was} leased to fifty or more individuals during the 106 years of its existence, for various types of business which included a hotel, coffee-house, tavern, as well as ship chandler, wholesale and retail grocers and liquor dealers, the ownership was changed only four times as follows.

1831 Catherine Gonzales to Cucullu and DeArmas

1840 Cucullu and De Armas to Pierre B. Jourdan

1869 Rosalie Deslonde (widow of Jourdan) to Dr.E.D.Louis of Cincinnati, Ohio.

1890 Dr.E.D.Louis to J.Caruso.

1937 Caruso to French Market Corporation of New Orleans.

Sources - re-1770 date

Date on bronze plaque in front of morning cere-popper stand reads - market erected 1791, as per decree of subido dated 1784

Recopilation of the laws of the Indies any edition.

Reports of the Royal Treasurer for the years 1771 on - through to 1786

contract for the market that was completed in 1790

reports of the commissary from 1795 on to 1803

contract for the meat market (Le Halle de Boucherie) completed sept 20 1813

contracts for sections 1 and 2 of wholesale vegetable markets 1828-1830

Contract for Retail Keg market 1826

License Bonds for the Hotel de la marine (maritime Hotel) for several years -

notes of fish market from architect's drawing in notarial records.

nearly all these sources are in the authors own Library, in the only form in which they exist original documents.