AFFINITY

MOULEDOUX | BLAND
LEGRAND | BRACKETT
ATTORNEYS AT LAW, NEW ORLEANS

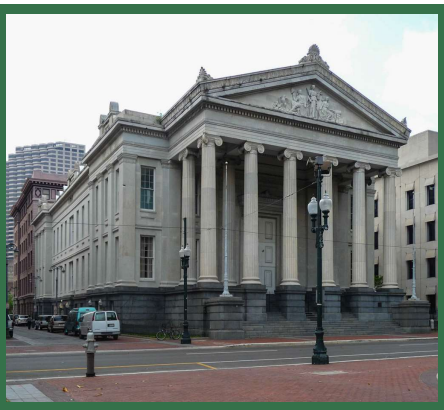
Volume 2, Issue 3 March 17, 2021

By: J. Edward McAuliffe, III

HOLY HIBERNIA! CELEBRATING THE IRISH IN NEW ORLEANS

It is no surprise to anyone living in New Orleans that the Irish have a long and storied history in the Crescent City and Louisiana. Visitors often miss the clear signs and symbols of the Celts around our fair city. But they are there, and the Irish have been as integral to New Orleans as the French and Spanish, if mostly arriving a little later.

Below are just a few examples of the importance of the Irish in New Orleans and the trails of their legacy…



Gallier Hall, gem of 19th C. architecture

JAMES GALLIER is one of New Orleans's most famous and recognizable residents of the 19th century, a renowned architect. While sporting a French surname, he was born in Ireland in 1798. He was a pioneer of modern architectural methods, including the practice of the architect working directly for his client. His most famous works include the still-standing Gallier Hall (New Orleans's City Hall, until moved to the current Soviet-style gulag on Loyola) and the Pontalba Apartments. However, his architectural mark can be seen in other cities as well, such as Mobile, Alabama. The story that his original name was "Gallagher," changed to more easily fit in among the Francophiles of Nouvelle Orleans, is likely apocryphal.

THE IRISH CHANNEL is a New Orleans neighborhood officially bounded by Magazine Street, Jackson Avenue, Delachaise Street, and the Mississippi River. The area received its name from the mass of Irish immigrants who settled in this "portly" area in the 19th century. That's not to say they were the only inhabitants. Turf feuds were not uncommon (think *West Side Story*, but with arguments centering on whether tonight's dinner was called "Bangers 'n Mash" or "Knackwurst und gestampften Kartoffeln"). The neighborhood is filled with New Orleans's unique "shotgun" houses, as these dwellings were affordable for the masses of immigrants fleeing the potato famine in Ireland or otherwise seeking a better life in America.

THE CELTIC CROSS at West End is a monument to Irish laborers who perished while digging the New Basin Canal in the early 19th century. While pre-Civil War New Orleans had many slaves, they were not

utilized in digging the canal. Irish immigrants were cheaper and more "expendable." With little in the way of other work at the time, and fearing to lose their jobs and pay of $1 per day, many of these laborers would appear for work regardless of their health and the work conditions. Diseases, such as yellow fever, cholera, and everything under the sun but COVID-19 (not yet invented) were rampant. Upon falling ill, many workers simply died at the site, being buried in the sides of the canal/levee. Tens of thousands of Irish laborers are believed to have met their final resting place in the canal. The memorial to these laborers was erected in 1990, with the inscription: "In memory of the Irish immigrants who dug the New Basin Canal, 1832-1838, this Celtic cross carved in Ireland has been erected by the Irish Cultural Society of New Orleans." There are currently plans to create a 4-acre park surrounding the cross as a tribute to the history of the Irish in New Orleans.

Mr. Cameron of Lancaster, Pa., a contractor shipped to New Orleans during the fall some 180 canal diggers, mostly Irish, as a portion of his forces, to excavate a sailing vessel canal known as the New Basin Canal, between the city and Lake Pontchartrain. This cypress-swamp canal was a forerunner sample of the M. de Lesseps Panama Canal in deaths and money outlay, as the combined attack of yellow fever and cholera placed over 200 of Mr. Cameron's workmen in untimely graves.
- Diary of Ambrose Cowperthwaite Fulton, who sailed to New Orleans in 1831.

MARGARET HAUGHERY, a name sometimes forgotten today, was once akin to the Mother Theresa of New Orleans. Margaret was a poor Irish immigrant, orphaned in Baltimore by age 9. Eventually, she settled in New Orleans. She married Charles Haughery and had a child, but both died early. She was first a menial laborer who eventually saved enough money to start a dairy, beginning with only two cows. She was successful, eventually expanding into the baking business and becoming a full-blown businesswoman and philanthropist. Margaret Haughery & Co. was the first steam bakery in the South. She used her wealth and products for many charitable purposes, most notably the establishment, funding, and feeding of orphanages—much needed institutions in this disease-ridden swamp. Her efforts and caring earned her the titles "Mother of Orphans" and "Our Margaret," among other popular names. On her death, she left her entire fortune to charity. Margaret's funerary procession to St. Patrick's Church (see below), led by the archbishop and mayor, was a large, city-wide event, with mourners lining the streets and packing the Church. Within two years of her death, a statue, entitled simply "Margaret," was erected at Camp and Prytania Streets, where it stands to this day. This monument was the second to a woman in the entire United States, and was refurbished/beautified by admirers within the past several years.

"Margaret" at Prytania and I-10.

Press photo of Judge Vetters Levy

ANNA JUDGE VETTERS LEVY, an accomplished attorney of Irish stock (and relative of your author through the Judge family) was the first female judge in the State of Louisiana—earning her the family moniker "Judge Anna Judge." She presided in the Juvenile Court for the Parish of Orleans. She is mostly known

today for her critically-acclaimed book, *Other People's Children*. First published in 1956, the work details the often-misunderstood nature of juvenile delinquency and its roots.

Main Altar at St. Patrick's

ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH, dating to 1840, was the great Church of the "American" sector of New Orleans, now the Central Business District, and the first church built outside the Vieux Carré. The original parish was established in 1833, with a small, wooden church building for Irish migrants. These new-comers to NOLA were relegated to the rear of New Orleans's cathedral and did not understand the native French. The Archbishop decided they needed their own parish, which was soon full to the brim. The Irish began pooling their resources, meager by themselves, to erect a Church that would rival the Cathedral. Built in the neo-Gothic style, they accomplished their task. The parishioners had the full support of their countryman, James Gallier, who took over as architect upon his arrival in New Orleans and after several issues with initial construction. Amazingly, he set a new foundation to the building without removal of any already-existing walls! In recognition of the importance of this Church, it is designated as the cathedral "pro tempore" for the Archdiocese of New Orleans; should anything befall the Cathedral-Basilica of St. Louis, King of France, the archbishop's throne is automatically transferred to St. Patrick's. The Church draws attendees not just during the CBD lunch hour, but at all Mass times and from around the Greater New Orleans area (as well as visitors "in the know"). Attend St. Patrick's at 9:30 a.m. on Sundays (or, better yet, midnight on Christmas) for Mass in the Old Rite (*i.e.*, "extraordinary form of the Roman Rite")—Latin and all. *Dominus vobiscum*.

IRISH FEST is one of New Orleans's newest festivals. It occurred a few times pre-pandemic, being held on the grounds of Kingsley House. The festival featured Irish food, music, dance competition, horse-riding, and all sorts of family-friendly fun. Here's hoping this fledgling festival finds its wings post-pandemic! Until then, you'll have to go to Parasol's, Tracey's, Finn McCool's, or the like (O'Flaherty's is sadly no more) for your healthy heaping of Hibernia, your daily dose of Dublin, or your taste of Tara. Sláinte!