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by Pie Dufor

(referring to never dug Canal Street canal)
It all began in 1805 when a group of wealthy Orleanians, headed by James Pitot and Julien Poydras, obtained a charter from the Orleans Territory Legislature for the Orleans Navigation Company.

The plan was to dig the canal in the city commons - the disputed land outside the city - from the river to a point where it would make a right angle turn and contineu to connect with the turning basin of the Carondelet canal, which is now the present parking lot of Municipal Auditorium. The Carondelet canal, dug by Baron de Carondelet in 1794, had become a neglected ditch which needed widening and deepeingin for navigational use.

But the dispute over the commons had to be settled first. The City of New Orleans claimed the commons and so did the government. Finally, on March 3, 1807, Congress conferred the title to the commons on the city, "provided that the corporation shall reserve for the purpose and covey gratuitously for the public benefit, to the company authorized by the Legislature of the Territory... as much of the said commons as shall be necessary to continue the Canal of Carondelet from the present basin to the Mississippi, and shall not dispose of, for the purpose of building thereon, any lot within 60 feet of the space reserved for a canal, which shall forever remain open as a public highway..."

In May, 1808, the canal company president, James Pitot, wrote a long letter to President Thomas Jefferson. The letter, in part, reads:

"We, the Orleans Navigation Company, with the most profound sentiments of respect, beg leave to approach you, to tender our grateful thanks for the munificent grant made us by government, of the lands necessary to the continuing of the canal Carondelet to the River Mississippi through the city commons; and also for the assurances conveyed to us by the Honorable Daniel Clark, that, when the canal shall be so continued, government will defray the expenses of the lock necessary to unite it with the river... Our capital is limited... to the sum of $200,000 divided into 2000 shares of $100 each... We beg leave to state to you that we have not the smallest hope of filling up the subscription among the immediate inhabitants of this territory. We find the greatest difficulty in procuring payment fo the installments call for: and in many instances have been compelled to resort to the force of laws. It is a melancholy truth that nothing but the unwearied exertions of the directors has prevented the whole undertaking from falling to the ground. "

That's exactly what it did and the (Canal St.) canal was never dug, but the maps of the day called the space "Route of the Projected Canal." And as the area built up on both sides of the route of the undug canal, what was more natural for the street with the double roadways to be named Promenade du Canal and then Canal Street?