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The Mayors of New Orleans

BY STELLA L. LAZARD



ETIENNE DE BORE
1803-1894

Here is the beginning of a series which will deal intimately with the mayors of the City of New Orleans, ever since this city was corporately founded. The information in them has been secured by much research in authentic sources. The time that Etienne de Bore saved the city's future as a sugar center; the message Charles Genois uttered to the people—these incidents, and many others in the series to follow, make highly interesting reading. A second article will be published next week.

instrumental in regulating the police force, street conditions, tax on vehicles and the reduction of the number of "averns" in this city.

The bakers were important individuals in New Orleans in the early days under the Spanish rule there was a tax of a picayune (6 1/2 cents) per pound on bread. De Bore discontinued this tax and made rules regulating the price on bread, henceforward a precedent that was followed for many years.

The administration of Etienne de Bore, says Mr. John Smith Kendall in his recent "History of New Orleans," "was eclipsed by the authority of the governor. His approval was required practically in all cases where important legislation was proposed."

This policy brought about friction and on May 26, 1804, De Bore resigned from the office of mayor on the ground that his private affairs required his attention.

JAMES PITOT
1804-1805

JAMES PITOT built one of the first cotton presses in New Orleans. It stood at the corner of Toulouse and Burgundy streets. He is spoken of as a gentleman of "respectability and talent." On June 2, 1804, he was elected second mayor of New Orleans.

His career is signalled by the incorporation of the city municipal council, and the taking of the first steps toward the substitution of an elective magistracy for the appointive one.

Pitot took especial interest in the police; he enforced an ordinance subsequently created, with Pierre Achille Rivery at its head, under the title of "commissioner general of police in the city and suburbs of New Orleans." The wretched pay received by its members attracted only the riff-raff, and this ordinance provided for the employment of mulattoes to fill the ranks and stipulated the officers must be white men.

The utter inefficiency of this organization occasioned general complaint, and in 1804 was supplemented by a patrol of citizens, drawn from the militia and under the command of Colonel Belle Chasse. It received no pay.

In 1805 Pitot made a further reform by reconstituting the "gendarmes" as a mounted corps. The mayor was made chief of the corps in a resolution of May 6, 1805.

The new system worked fairly well and the militia patrol became popular chiefly be-

cause it made considerable demands upon the leisure of the citizens.

During Pitot's mayoralty Congress divided, March 25, 1804, the province of Louisiana into two parts, the upper being annexed to the Indiana territory, and the lower part, which corresponds in boundaries to what is now the state of Louisiana, was erected into the territory of Orleans. New Orleans was made the port of entry and delivery.

On October 1 the new government went into operation. Claiborne was retained as governor. He took the oath before Mayor Pitot and then delivered an oration in English, afterward translated into flowery French. Governor Claiborne in his voluminous correspondence never lets his pen run over the name of Pitot without a commendation of him.

In early March the territorial council furnished the city with a charter. With the adoption of its nineteen sections, determining the area of municipalities, the real history of New Orleans as distinguished from

ELIXIR

BY A. B. CURTIS

PAUL was furiously embarrassed.

He had just dropped a pint bottle, and it smashed to smithereens right on crowded Canal street. And it was precisely in the rush of the shopping hour. The surging crowds formed a semi-circle about him and the liquid splashing down the banquettes.

"One woman uttered. All smiled significantly. Another drew in a long delicious breath.

"Ah," she dreamily murmured, "it is the elixir of life. The joy of living."

Presently they all drew in wonderful breaths of the fallen stream edging its way to the curb.

At that moment two urchins wedged their way within the charmed circle, spattering their hands with the liquid, and smearing the stuff on their coat lapels, their neckties, their shirts.

"Ah, ah," they cried, delighted, "Perfume, perfume!"

Paul had dropped a bottle of Black Narcissus.

the remainder of the province is said to have begun. The language used in this comprehensive document is the style incorporated by many officials today in their addresses and is a type clear and comprehensive.

Pitot resigned his office in July, 1805. In his message of resignation he said:

My own affairs, not allowing me to fulfill the functions of mayor, I send the governor my resignation. Appreciating all the marks of kindness and of confidence which I have received at your hands, I beg you to accept my acknowledgments. Give me your esteem and believe me deeply grateful.

Yours, (Signed) JAMES PITOT.

JOHN WATKINS
1805

IN SELECTING Watkins for the vacancy of mayor, Claiborne was governed by the fact that he had served as recorder under Pitot and was next in line for promotion.

He was a physician by profession.

The principal interesting events covering the two years over which his administration extended were the establishment of the first Protestant church in New Orleans, the incorporation of the College of Orleans and the visit of Aaron Burr.

Two important matters he urged were the improvement of the Spanish market erected in 1791, and the extension of the streets of the Vieux Carre into new regions.

He wanted the removal of the Davis rope walk, which blocked the access from the "Old Square" for a considerable distance along Canal street, but the opposition of the Creole against the American prevented its being carried out.

He took great interest in the city police, the force known as the "garde de ville" created in 1800.

Under Watkins the problem of fire prevention, so urgent in the early history of the city, was commented.

The growing tendency seemed to be to use solid brick for building, consequently there had been no repetition of the big fires of 1788 and 1794, but many of the dwellings of the city were still of inflammable material and consequently the peril of serious fires always was feared. The regulation prohibiting the use of shingle roofs and careful inspection of chimneys did much to help conditions.

The period of Watkins' administration was of no small anxiety for Claiborne, the mayor

and the territorial government, for the ownership of West Florida aroused ill-feeling between the Spanish and the Americans.

During Mayor Watkins' term there was a strong sentiment in New Orleans in favor of independence for Mexico, and he was a leading spirit to promote the idea. Aaron Burr met Watkins and through the latter's influence secured the endorsement of the organization.

Watkins adorned his retirement with flowery words in which he stated: "If I have been so happy as to have served the public usefully, it has been due to the assistance which you have given me and to the wisdom of the measures you have adopted. I beg you to receive the offer of my gratitude and the assurance that if there is anything which can add to the satisfaction furnished by a pure conscience, in my retirement, it will be found in the hope that you will honor me with your esteem."

JAMES MATHER
1807-1812

JAMES MATHER was appointed mayor by Claiborne on March 7, 1807, and served till October 8, 1812. An Englishman by birth, but upon the acquisition of the province of Louisiana by the United States he identified himself entirely with the American cause.

When in 1804 De Bore, Belle Chasse, Jones and Clark refused to serve under territorial council, he took their place.

The principal events during his administration were the arrival of the West Indian immigrants. Scarcely had Mayor James Mather taken his seat of office when he was informed that Aaron Burr's friends, in the city were conspiring with the Spanish to deliver New Orleans into their hands.

In November, 1809, a negro insurrection not far from New Orleans caused much loss for the newly-formed militia.

In August, 1812, a severe storm did extensive damage in the city; buildings sustained damages amounting to \$200,000.

In 1809 the population of New Orleans, then 12,000, rose in the next four years to 24,500. This was due to the influx of several thousand soldiers from the island of Santo Domingo, who had been driven from the place by war.

Mayor Mather was called upon to face a serious situation, which arose from Edward Livingston's attempt to get possession of the "nature" or sandy deposits made by the Mississippi river; this led to "riot" and only prompt action by the mayor averted serious consequences.

The closing years of Mather's administration brought him much criticism, as he was said to have failed to vote unwisely measures of the city council.

James Mather was followed by Nicholas Girod, the first mayor appointed under the new charter by the people of New Orleans.

Later Mayors of New Orleans, in Chronological Order, Will Be Given in Next Week's Article.