

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Evolution of the Parkway

A parkway is defined as a broad, open, landscaped thoroughfare, often a roadway within a park or one connecting to a park. The first in the United States were those developed during the late 19th century by landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Beatrix Farrand. As Olmsted acknowledged late in his career, "The root of all my good work is an early respect for, regard and enjoyment of scenery ... and extraordinary opportunities for cultivating susceptibility to the power of scenery." In New Orleans, according to an article in the *Picayune* dated June 9, 1904, a proposal called for "a speedway connecting Audubon and City Parks."

HAGAN AVENUE SPEEDWAY WITHOUT COST TO CITY.

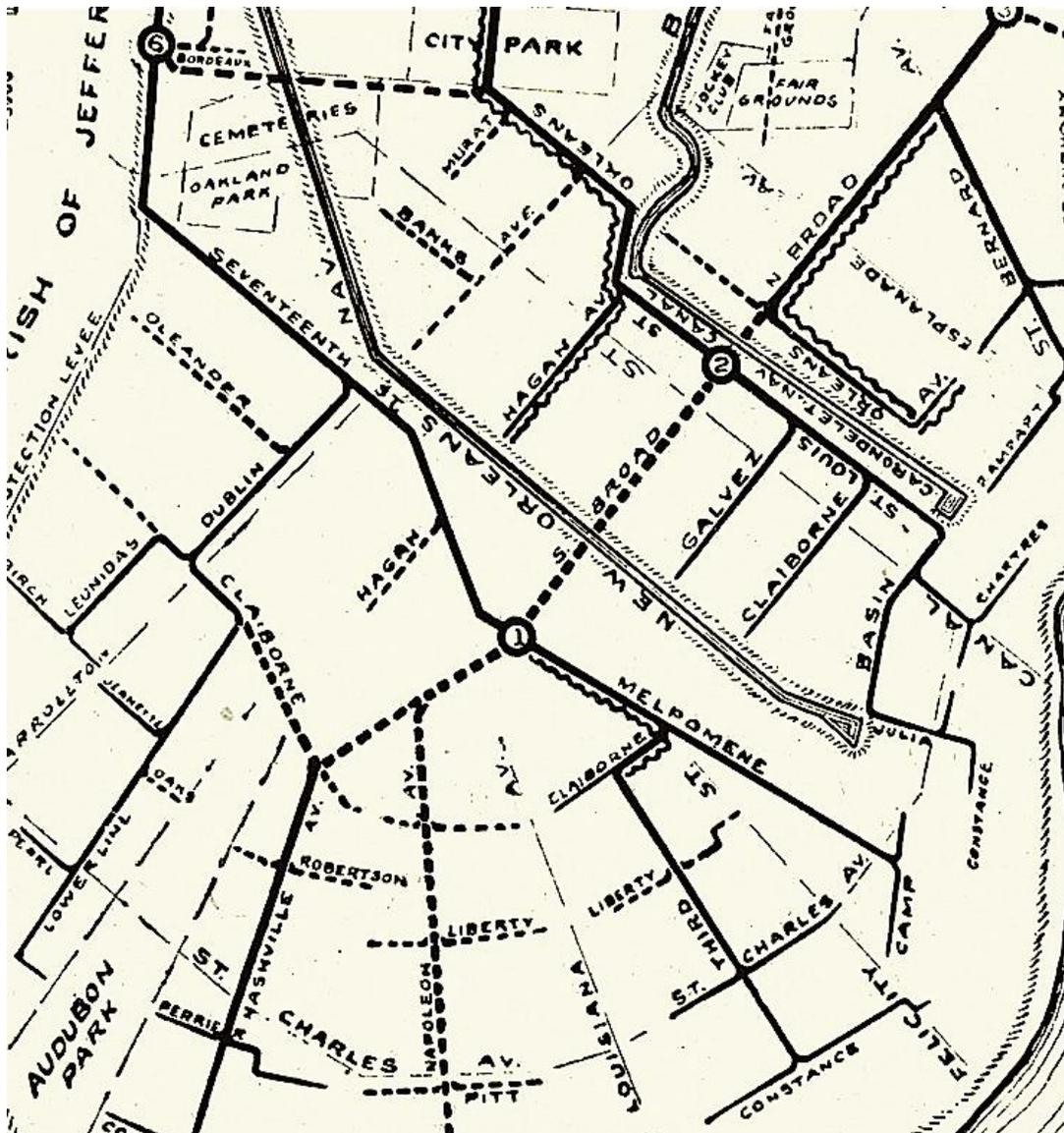
**Will Make a Two Miles Straightaway Over Two
Hundred Feet Wide—Voluntary Aid
Expected.**

A way to connect the city's two major parks

"Hagan Avenue," according to the report, "one of the widest streets" in the country, would be changed to "one of the most beautiful" with its name "changed from the unmellifluous 'Hagan' to 'Parkway,' and ... a thing of beauty and a joy forever."

"Not one cent" was to be asked from the city, but from property owners eagerly giving consent for the new parkway "to run through their property," where the street was "not already opened," and they "also offered financial aid in support of the project." Also being asked to contribute were "the Automobile Club, the Good Roads Club, the Progressive Union, the Horse Show Association and other "civic bodies interested in street improvement."

Deemed "a most magnificent place for a speedway," it was described as 236 feet wide, running straight as an arrow for considerably more than two miles." The original plans called for its beginning "near the apex of that mighty triangle formed by the streets converging from the great bend in the river, at the edge of the Tulane University lands." From there the Parkway was to "run through the University lands for a mile or so, then into Hagan Avenue, out to the Old Basin Canal, along it into City Park." This drive was to be "asphalted or shelled" and then "planted with shade trees and palms," eventually creating "one of the most beautiful streets in the world."



Hagan Avenue shown on this 1906 Sewerage and Water Board Drainage Map, not quite connecting Audubon Park and City Park

One must remember that at the time that this "speedway" was announced, the Crescent City had very few automobiles. The number of cars in New Orleans reached "just fifty owned and operated" on

February 29th, according to an article in the *Picayune* dated March 1, 1904. The steam powered ones were known as "white devils" and cost \$2,500. Cheapest on the street were the \$450 "sort of runabout". Earlier that year on May 28th, the *New Orleans Item* reported a recommendation that the speed limit be regulated to eight miles an hour on the Shell Road along the New Basin Canal and that the "reckless driving of automobiles" was frowned upon. Those were truly fast times.

So who was this "unmellifluous" Mr. Hagan for whom the parkway was named? New Orleans historian John Smith Kendall wrote in his *History of New Orleans* (1922) that John Hagan was a rich land speculator of the 1840s, "who laid out the Faubourg Hagan of transient importance in the development of the city." A successful entrepreneur, he was also one of the largest cotton commission merchants in New Orleans. According to his obituary in the *Picayune*, dated October 17, 1857, he arrived in the city in 1803 and was one of its "gallant defenders" under General Jackson, in 1815. His cotton yard stood on the spot where the first St. Charles Hotel was erected. "He presented the old St. Charles with the marble statue of Washington that ornamented the main entrance, and which was destroyed by the fire that consumed that edifice in January, 1851." Mr. Hagan, who died in St. Germain, near Paris, France, at seventy-three years of age, the paper said, "was an unostentatious, liberal, and useful citizen, and was highly respected by all who knew him." He was also a real estate partner with none other than the Marquis de Lafayette.

The United States government wanted to see to it that the Marquis was rewarded for his assistance to the country during the American Revolution, so Congress provided a gift in the form of real estate. The debt-laden Lafayette, with the help of Thomas Jefferson, sought his grant of land in the city of New Orleans. According to John Chase, "This amounted to giving to Lafayette all the land on both sides of present-day Canal street as far over as Common street on one side and Iberville on the other; all the lake side of North Rampart street between Tulane and Lafitte (the Carondelet Canal) as far back as about North Galvez."

But there was "a mighty squawk," as Chase put it.

There were claims by the Corporation of the City of New Orleans and others until the acreage was later reduced to 520 acres, two-thirds of which Lafayette sold to a British baronet, Sir John Coghill. When the baronet died, the land was inherited by Sir John's nephew who discovered that he owned a two-thirds interest in a 520-acre tract that now measured just over 114 acres. He was still able to sell his interest for a profit to John Hagan for \$26,640. As for the other one-third, Hagan became Lafayette's partner, offering to subdivide Lafayette's one-third with Hagan's two-thirds. After the Marquis died,

Hagan purchased the interests of Lafayette's two daughters, but a son declined to sell his share. Developed lots in the resulting Faubourg Hagan went on the market and were sold out during 1840-1841, at which time the son received his share of the profits.

On July 29, 1910, an announcement was printed in the *Picayune* that "Hagan Avenue" would be renamed "Jefferson Davis Parkway" and that a statue of Jefferson Davis, "which was to have been placed in Audubon Park, facing Tulane University," would now "be placed in Hagan Avenue on the neutral ground facing Canal Street on the upper side." City engineer Captain Hardee "urged that the Canal street site was much better for the monument than Audubon Park."

**JEFFERSON DAVIS PARKWAY;
STATUE AT CANAL STREET.**

Hagan Avenue Name to Be Changed and Monument Intended for Audubon Park to Grace New Boulevard.

Headline in the Picayune, July 29, 1910

"Then," said the paper, "all that part of the avenue between Canal Street and Cleveland Avenue" was "to be given over to the Jefferson Davis Monument Association," formed April, 1898. At first, there was to be a similar arrangement that existed at Lee Circle, placing "the monument on top of a high mound at the intersection of Canal and Hagan Avenue, but the Railway Company objected." They didn't want to curve the streetcar tracks around the mound. Mayor Martin Behrman approved the final plan and hoped it would soon be law.

So how was Audubon Park first considered as the location for the late President of the Confederacy? Actually, it wasn't the first selection.

The first choice for the Jefferson Davis Monument site was Coliseum Square. In fact, it was reported in the *Picayune* on February 9, 1904, that at a meeting of Chapter No. 72 of the Daughters of the Confederacy at Memorial Hall the day before, "it was stated that Captain Dinkins had asked the assistance of the Chapter in changing the name of Coliseum Square to Jefferson Davis Place." Eventually, the St. Charles Avenue entrance to Audubon Park became the desired new location for the Jefferson Davis statue, which was a result of Mrs. W. J. Behan's becoming president of the Jefferson Davis Monument Association in 1906.

This change was the focus of the celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the late Confederate's birth, June 3, 1908, at an 11 o'clock dedication. The *Picayune* reported that the observance "kept

the Confederate veterans and ladies and sons and daughters all busy" that day. Judge Charles E. Fenner delivered the keynote address. The Governor, Mayor and other dignitaries were on hand, along with large delegations of school children. Groundbreaking for the monument was by Master Isaac Davis Stamps Farrar, a young relative of Jefferson Davis. The site of the intended future monument was marked by a simple stone, donated by the Park Commissioners, which was accepted by Mrs. Behan, President of the Jefferson Davis Monument Association.



Crowds gather for the 1911 unveiling of the monument

Two years after the one-hundredth birthday festivities at Audubon Park came the announcement of the monument's new target location at Canal Street and Hagan Avenue. The statue of Jefferson Davis was bronze on a granite base, completed by the sculptor Edward Virginus Valentine and erected in 1911 at a cost of \$20,000. This time the unveiling took place on February 22nd, George Washington's birthday, in the parkway recently honored with his name. School children formed a "living Confederate flag" for the event. It was a different time and place.



Happy consumers and affordable 1930s prices at Parkway

Also in 1911, Parkway Bakery and Tavern first opened for business. It was owned and operated by a German baker named Charles Goering, Sr., who built Parkway on the corner of Hagan Avenue and Toulouse Street just off Bayou St. John. He ran the bakery until 1922, when Henry Timothy bought the business, intent on continuing its operation as a neighborhood bakery shop. After selling quality bakery products for the next seven years, Timothy learned in 1929 that across town Bennie and Clovis Martin were feeding striking streetcar workers with their "Poor Boy" sandwiches. Timothy followed suit and added the "Poor Boy" shop to Parkway that very year, feeding union members and conductors in solidarity. Parkway also began selling "Poor Boy" sandwiches to the workers at the American Can Company, just across the bayou. At 538 Hagan Avenue, Parkway Bakery reminds us that Hagan Avenue still exists as the narrower extension of the wider parkway.

This author used to enjoy poor boys at Parkway beginning in the 1960s, but by 1993 Parkway Bakery closed its doors. Timothy's two sons, Henry, Jr. and Jake, put it up for sale, and an enterprising Jay Nix bought Parkway in 1995 for \$45,000 and turned it into an iconic New Orleans dining institution – but not without hard times. Hurricane Katrina inundated the business in 2005, but Jay put it back into shape better than ever. Customers love all the New Orleans memorabilia upon the walls and the delicious sandwiches. Jay's slogan for the new Parkway was "Parkway for Poor Boys," but it attracts folks of all socio-

economic levels and job categories. This was especially true in 2010 with a visit by President Obama and his family.



Parkway Bakery today, in hues of mustard, lettuce and tomato

The President and the First Lady each had shrimp poor boys with regular fries, not sweet potato, although available. Daughters Michelle and Malia ordered hamburgers, and the President also had an order of turkey-alligator gumbo.

The entrance to Audubon Park across from Tulane is today home to the beautiful Gumbel Memorial Fountain, a generous gift of Mrs. Cora Moses of New Orleans and Mrs. Eli Joseph of New York, in memory of their parents, Sophie and Simon Gumbel. It was dedicated on March 19, 1919. The bronze fountain was sculpted by Isidore Konti and represents the meeting of Air and Water. Audubon Park (in its present layout) largely follows a design drafted by John Charles Olmsted, nephew and adopted son of Frederick Law Olmsted, of the architectural firm of the Olmsted Brothers, Brookline, Massachusetts, who were required to approve the fountain.

Today, the Lafitte Greenway intersects Jefferson Davis Parkway very close to Parkway Bakery and the staging area of the annual Mid-City Bayou Boogaloo, recently held May 19-21, 2017. A festival of art, food, music and fun, it is held each year along the banks of Bayou St. John between Dumaine Street and N. Jefferson Davis Parkway.



The Jefferson Davis Monument, before its removal

Just a few days earlier, on May 11, 2017, the statue of Jefferson Davis was removed from its pedestal by crews hired by the city to carry out the decision by the Mayor and City Council to remove four Confederate war monuments. The statue of Jefferson Davis, which the *Picayune* once wrote "would be one of the ornaments of upper St. Charles Avenue," was now gone from its neutral ground location. Beauregard and Lee followed him this month on his departure. To many, these bronze Confederates were symbolic of the evils of slavery. To many others, they are a part of the city's history that should be preserved.

The Marquis de Lafayette, a real estate entrepreneur named Hagan, the President of the Confederacy and the President of the United States - all have spent some time along the Parkway.

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