

New Orleans

In New Orleans' 250 years, seven flags have flown over the city that Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville founded in 1718.

The first flag bore the device of the fleur de lis of Bourbon France and in succession the flags of Bourbon Spain, the French Republic, the American flag, the Pelican flag of Independent Louisiana, the lone-star, multi-striped Louisiana flag, and the Stars and Bars of the Confederate States of America.

Although Spanish conquistadors passed by the city of New Orleans, Europeans did not attempt to settle the region under René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle came down the Mississippi in 1682 and on April 9 claimed all the territory drained by the great river for France's Sun King, Louis XIV.

After an abortive attempt by La Salle to settle Louisiana in 1684, an ill-starred expedition which ended in La Salle's murder, France did nothing to colonize Louisiana until 1698. In that year Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, led an expedition from France to Louisiana. Early in 1699, Iberville reached the Mississippi and, after exploring it for about 200 miles, he established the first post in Louisiana at what is now Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

It was not until 1718, however, that Iberville's brother, Bienville, established New Orleans on what he described as "one of the most beautiful crescents of the river". Frenchmen had already settled by 1708 on nearby Bayou St. John, but the growth of the new settlement was not spectacular.

In 1721, what is now called the *Vieux Carré*, was laid out by the engineer, Adrien de Pauger, and New Orleans began its slow but steady growth.

France held Louisiana until 1762, when Louis XV gave the colony to Spanish cousin, Charles III.

Under Spain, which ruled Louisiana until November 30, 1803, Louisiana thrived as it had not under France. Spanish Governors, notably Bernardo de Gálvez, Esteban Miró and Baron de Carondelet, had outstanding administrations.

By the secret Treaty of San Ildefonso in 1800, Spain retroceded Louisiana to

France in exchange for Napoleon's promise to establish the House of Parma in the Kingdom of Etruria in Italy. Napoleon planned to revive French Colonial power in Santo Domingo and Louisiana, but the decimation of French army in Santo Domingo, by battle attrition and yellow fever, together with the approaching new outbreak of war with England, determined him to sell Louisiana to the United States.

And so, through the efforts of Robert R. Livingston, supported by James Monroe, the United States on April 30, 1803 purchased a mid-continental wilderness empire for \$15,000,000. The United States envoys had been authorized to purchase only New Orleans for \$2,000,000 by they ended by purchasing all of Louisiana west of the Mississippi as well as New Orleans. Out of the Louisiana Purchase 15 states, in whole or part, were later created.

After the American flag went up over New Orleans in December 20, 1803, people flocked to New Orleans, and the city of about 8,000 jumped to more than 40,000 by 1820. The city's greatest growth came between 1830 and 1840, when the population soared from not quite 50,000 to 102,000. New Orleans in 1840 became the third American city, after New York and Baltimore, to reach 100,000 population.

From the beginning, New Orleans was an international city. On the eve of the Civil War, in 1860, the city had a white population of 155,000 and of that number 41 per cent were foreign born, with the Irish leading with 25,000 followed by Germans numbering more than 20,000.

New Orleans has been beset by hurricanes, floods, disease — the yellow fever epidemic of 1853 was the worst epidemic in American history with nearly 8,000 deaths and 27,000 cases war and occupation. But New Orleans has survived.

New Orleans is a city of contradictions, old and new, and its personality stems from the multiplicity of peoples who have contributed to its growth and to the many flags that have flown over it.

Charles L. Dufour
Editorial Columnist,
New Orleans States Item