

# Mardi Gras 1868

Yesterday was a new era in the mythical, mystical, poetic, romantic, and artistic history of Mobile. The mystic societies of New Year's Eve have long since become celebrated, but the last day of the Carnival had heretofore been unnoted in our local calendar. The "Order of Myths" have changed all this, and henceforward, no doubt, *Mardi-Gras* will be looked forward to with an anxiety as eager as that which attends upon New Year's Eve.

Public expectation had already been somewhat excited by vague intimations which had leaked out, to the effect that something worth seeing was in prospect.

*Mobile Register*, Ash Wednesday 1868

## ***Mobile Evening News, Mardi Gras, 1868:***

*the L.C.'s, an impromptu society, came forth, producing much merriment by the ludicrous figure they cut. Flour was thrown upon passersby without stint, ruining their clothing, and a slight rain falling at the time which had the effect of dissolving the flour into paste.*

During the day, Cain’s minstrel group, the light-hearted “Lost Cause Minstrels,” were the humorous entertainment before the more formal presentation of the O.O.M’s at night. “They presented,” the newspaper reported, “a most ludicrous and laughable sight.” By contrast, the *Mobile Register* predicted the O.O.M. parade would be “grand and brilliant” and said “of course everybody and his family will be on the streets to witness it.”

*“The Minstrels were reportedly dressed as monkeys and rode on a dilapidated wagon.”*

Costumes were one of the most important parts of the nineteenth century Mardi Gras. Newspaper reports always included descriptions, sometimes very detailed. In no year however, were the Lost Cause Minstrels or Joe Cain himself, when parading on Mardi Gras, ever described to be wearing Native American costumes.

They played “wild and discordant music” because they were minstrels; they were supposed to be funny, to be satirical. Everything they did was intended to poke fun at someone or something, including the name they adopted. If a group of minstrels calls themselves the “Lost Cause Minstrels” you can be sure they are not supporters of that, somewhat controversial, ideology. Because it was controversial, the term “Lost Cause” was prevalent in the news and a subject of debate at the time that the Minstrels decided to turn the otherwise serious political matter into something comical, subtly ridiculing the more radical defenders of the Confederacy...not at all an act of defiance against Union troops, as Julian Rayford romantically imagined.

The Lost Cause Minstrels were the first men to parade in Mobile on a Mardi Gras day and the first in Mobile to bring comedy and laughter to the experience of a parade.

Before they were finished they played a special, and still comically unpleasant, song in front of the Mobile Press Register office on the corner of Royal and St. Michael.

The Minstrels were also not described as riding a coal wagon necessarily, just a wagon.



# The Order of Myths Parade

At 8:30 p.m. the O.O.M. parade appeared far down Royal, farther away than any New Year's Eve parade had started. Banners, float decorations and costumes all reflected the theme, *Lalla Rookha*, a story by Thomas Moore, the British author of the Late Renaissance.

Themes like *Lalla Rookha* solidified the imaginary world of the mystic parade in which parade participants were portrayed as being of far superior knowledge and education than the commoner on the street. That ideology was supported by the press and even the rest of society, who willingly played their role to perpetuate the entertainment, the

As described in the press, the O.O.M. members rode "partly on horseback and partly on open cars or vans," and even at night that year there were still "crowds of men and boys" in costume, "masked and most fantastically dressed." When they finished parading, they marched into **Temperance Hall** where they first performed their tableau.

The theme *Lalla Rookha* was repeated again in later years and was even used that same year, 1868, by the Krewe of Comus in New Orleans. It was a love story originally published in the Mogul Empire. In the English version, written by Thomas Moore, a Persian princess falls in love with a quiet poet who turns out to be the king to whom she was unwillingly betrothed. The mysterious Eastern setting made it a favorite theme in Masonic Lodges and many of the names used for Masonic Lodges later in the century were derived from *Lalla Rookha*.

But it was also obscure enough so that only an exceptionally well-educated person would have any real knowledge of the characters and plot illustrated in the parade.

