

*Extract of a Letter [from Mobile]—
It is a prevailing opinion, or at least a common saying, that
a man cannot live in the South unless he drinks brandy—*

Norfolk Democrat, Dedham, MA, March 23, 1839

1839

MARCH

There are several good hotels in the city, among which the Mansion House and the Alabama Hotel have been the most popular, and most resorted to by strangers; but if any one prefers a quiet, orderly house, where ever thing is new, neat and clean ...let him go to the Waverly House, recently opened by Mr. Noyes. I speak from personal knowledge, and can recommend it as the best house for Northerners in the city. Charges are the same as at the other public houses -- \$3 per day.

Norfolk Democrat (Dedham, MA), March 23, 1839

APRIL

FIRES OF 1839



FIRE IN MOBILE.

Extract of a letter received in this city, dated
"MOBILE, April 1.

"Last night we had a great fire which consumed about 1000 bales Cotton, 3 or 400 lbs. Sugar, &c. amounting in value to about \$150,000."

Daily Patriot (Charleston, South Carolina), April 4, 1839

DESTRUCTIVE FIRE IN MOBILE.—We learn from our slips that a most destructive fire took place in Mobile, on the night of the 27th ult. It commenced in a stable on St. Michael street, immediately in the rear of the residence of A. J. Judge, Esq. Soon after the fire broke out, a brisk breeze set in from the south east, which drove the fire with great rapidity across the entire square, destroying every building on three sides, viz. on St. Michael, Conception, and St. Louis streets. The brick kitchens of Mr. Judge and Wm. Jones, jr., together with the south-west wind, preserved their fine dwellings from destruction, and also all the buildings on St. Joseph street. The Chronicle says, "we are not able to state who were the sufferers. The dwelling of F. Sheffield, Esq., Henry P. Ensign, the livery stable on Conception street, and we suppose twenty other buildings, principally private residences, were consumed."



Sun (Baltimore, Maryland), April 6, 1839

May

ANOTHER FIRE IN MOBILE.—On the morning of the 9th, another fire occurred in Mobile, which consumed four frame buildings on Water street, near Dauphin. Loss trifling.

Sun, Baltimore, Maryland, May 16, 1839

OCTOBER 9th

Another great fire at Mobile.

We learn, by a letter from Mobile, that another great fire occurred in that city on the night of the 9th inst., which destroyed the square of buildings on Government & Church street, on which the Theatre stood. Several attempts were made to fire the city in other places. About *seventy* persons were lodged in jail on suspicion.

The Mobile Journal of the 11th instant, in giving an account of the fire in that city on the evening of the 9th, states that the "number of buildings consumed by this fire, was about twelve or fifteen, and the loss probably near \$20,000. All is confusion, excitement, and distress. We are beset by the most fiendish and unrelenting villains, and Heaven alone can determine whether or no our calamities are to end here."



Typical horse-pulled fire engine c. 1840

Extract of a Letter to a gentleman in Washington.

MOBILE, Oct. 9, 1839.

* * * "Night before last thirteen squares, between Conti and St. Michael streets, running back to Franklin street, were destroyed by fire. Last night, the Mansion House, the large new Hotel, Planters' & Merchants' Bank, and the blocks of Mr. Esland, on Royal and Government sts. were burned down! The fire is still burning, though subdued enough to prevent its extending.

* The post-office was in the Mansion House.— The value of the property destroyed by this last (and third) fire, was near *half a million of dollars*—perhaps more."

YELLOW FEVER EPIDEMIC of 1839

Yellow Fever at Mobile—The Mobile papers of the 5th state that the fever for the last few days had assumed a fearfully fatal character. Owing to the alarming increase of the sickness and the impracticability of procuring hands, the several newspapers had entered into an agreement to publish only once a week during the prevalence of the epidemic. The magistrates had given notice that they would not issue any civil process until further notice; and that all processes in the hands of the constables would be recalled.

Norwich Courier (Norwich, Connecticut), September 25, 1839.

Alhambra

There was not much in the way of entertainment by the end of 1839. In addition to the worst Yellow Fever outbreak on record for Mobile, at least one third of the city was in ruins after a series of devastating fires. One of the only buildings left standing for entertainment was the new Alhambra barroom at 52 Dauphin Street, just west of Royal, on the southeast corner of Royal and St. Emmanuel.

Managed by Mr. William Chapman, the second floor above the bar was a private club, sometimes used for gambling but often converted into a theater or ballroom, particularly during the holidays.

The ceilings of the Alhambra were 25 feet high; the dance floor, 90' long and 40' wide.¹¹⁷



Dauphin Street facing east from Bienville Square c. 1900 Detroit Publishing Co., Library of Congress Photographs Division
The Alhambra was to the right in the foreground.

The most elegant establishment of its kind in the South is the Alhambra," of Mobile. It is principally devoted to a very spacious ball and barroom; and a band of colored musicians is connected with it, all of whom dress in Moorish costume. An up-country chap, gazing the other day with open mouth and admiration, cast his eye upon the name painted upon the sign, which bothered his slender notions of orthography, and he forthwith began to spell it aloud. A-l, al, said he; h-a-m, barn, Alham-b-r-a-y, bray. Well now, said he, turning to a bystander, aint that a h-ll of a way to spell Alabama?

Times Picayune, February 12, 1839