

Walking Tour

Site 1: Mobile River North

Mobile was first established as a colony of the French, founded in 1702 by the explorer Pierre LeMoyné d'Iberville, whose statue here faces Havana, where he is buried. Mobile remained a site of trade for the French until the second half of the eighteenth century when it came first under British and then Spanish rule before it became a United States territory in 1813. Mobile's cultural traditions, such as Mardi Gras, represent a unique blend of influences from around the world. The Native American, French, Spanish, Caribbean, African, and British cultures all laid their roots here in the eighteenth century.

Site 2: Mobile River South

Due to its strategic location, providing access to both the country's great river systems and the Gulf of Mexico, Mobile prospered in the nineteenth century as a center of trade and commerce and a wave of American businessmen migrated to the Gulf Coast from the industrial northeast. It was near this spot around the year 1830, Michael Krafft, a young merchant from Pennsylvania, gathered together a group of friends for some holiday revelry. To organize their annual celebration, Krafft and his friends created a fraternal society with rituals and a structure based on the patterns of Freemasonry. The organization of public holiday festivity by an exclusive and secretive brotherhood made them unique. Calling themselves the Cowbellion de Rakin Society, they had unknowingly originated the first mystic parading society, which would later become a major feature of the American Mardi Gras celebration.

In the early twentieth century, this became the location at which the mythical royal court of Mobile's Carnival Association would make their official entrance into the city on the day before Mardi Gras, symbolically coming through the port as did those who began the first mystic parades.

Site 3: Corner Government and Royal Streets

All of Mobile's mystic parades passed this location. Toward the end of the century, the Mobile courthouse was relocated to the southwestern side of this corner and in front of the courthouse, the mythical king of Mobile's Mardi Gras traditionally presented a toast to the mayor and received the official key to the city, allowing revelry to rule for the day.

The block extending to the east was once known as Duncan Place, for Col. William Butler Duncan, instrumental in bringing the success of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad.

In the early twentieth century, this was one of the locations where Carnival festivities included public concerts on the days before Mardi Gras. On this block was also located the workshop of artist Gus Hines. First revealing his talents in the ornamentation of fire engines for the annual firemen's parades, Hines then designed some of the earliest parade floats. It was through Hines that the national craze in firemen's parades influenced the artistry of carnival.

Site 4: Corner Royal and Dauphin Streets

This corner was the starting point for many of Mobile's early mystic parades and surrounding this corner are the sites of their balls and banquets. Groups such as the Cowbellions, Order of Doves, Lost Cause Minstrel Band, and the Knights of Revelry all appeared to the public on Royal Street, emerging from this location, which still remains on the route for many parades that pass through Mobile during the Mardi Gras season.

Site 5: Corner Royal and St. Michael Streets

On this corner at the offices of the *Mobile Register*, Mardi Gras' comical marching groups such as Joe Cain's Lost Cause Minstrels, traditionally halting in front of their offices and taunted them with loud music.

One block to the south, on St. Francis Street, the Cowbellions were entertained on the night of their parade in the 1840's, when the Waverly Hotel took up that corner.

In 1852, the Battle House Hotel was constructed and quickly became the most prestigious location for Mardi Gras balls and other social events in the city. The Order of Myths for example, the first major mystic parade to organize after the Civil War, traditionally held their balls there.

During the Antebellum Period, the city's main theater was located one block to the north, on St. Louis Street. Many parades ended there to perform their tableau before the commencement of the ball. After the Civil War, when new mystic parades appeared in Mobile on Mardi Gras, in addition to New Year's Eve, some of the newer organizations, such as the Order of Myths, began their march from St. Louis Street to accommodate the growing number of spectators.



Guided Walking Tours available

Monday—Thursday

8:30—9:45 a.m.

4:00—5:15 p.m.

Sunday

2:00—3:15

3:30—4:45

Happy Hour History

Wednesday and Friday

4:00—5:15 p.m.

For more on the history of Mobile's Mardi Gras,
for self-guided tour information
or to register for a guided tour:

Mobilemardigrastrail.com

Site 6: St. Francis Street between Government and Conception

By the 1850's Mobile's population had surged due to the cotton trade.

The mystic parades of New Year's Eve followed a longer route to greet more spectators by circling Bienville Square, the central park area established in Mobile in the eighteenth century. Later in the century, Bienville Square became a focal point for carnival activities. Stretching the celebration out over a three-day period, the Mobile Carnival Association hosted many activities such as concerts, games and contests here in the days leading up to Mardi gras.

This site also looks across St. Francis to the current location of the Athelstan Club. After the Civil War, the Athelstan Club emerged as one of the most popular private venues for carnival celebrations among Mobile's elite. The custom in which the Mobile Carnival Association's king stops the parade to recognize his queen with an official toast, was moved to the stands of the Athelstan Club in 1922 and that tradition still continues each Mardi Gras at this location.

Site 7: 206 Dauphin Street

As the parade route extended, Dauphin Street became just a crowded with spectators as Royal Street had once been. This location was once the home of Dave Levi, founder of the Comic Cowboys in 1884.

Driving Tour

Site 1: Mobile River and Dauphin Street

Soon after Alabama achieved statehood, Mobile became a center for trade and commerce, where cultural influences from around the world mingled. At the end of the nineteenth century, this spot was the first the location where the mythical royal court of Mobile's Carnival Association began the custom of making an official entrance into the city on the day before Mardi Gras.

Site 2: Corner Royal and Theater Streets

The early colony. In 1824 this became the site of Mobile's first theater. This is also believed to be the oldest architecture in the city.

Site 3: Corner Government and Royal Streets

See walking tour Site 3

Site 4: Corner Royal and Dauphin Streets

See walking tour Site 4

Site 5: St. Francis Street between Government and Conception

By the 1850's Mobile's population had surged due to the cotton trade. Mystic parades became more popular than ever and followed a longer route to greet more spectators, circling Bienville Square. The tradition began after the Civil War of stopping the Mobile Carnival Association's parade here in order for their king, "Felix II," to toast his queen in the stands of the Athelstan Club across the street.

Site 6: 650 N. Dearborn Street

This site was the home of John A. Pope, founder of the Excelsior Band in 1883.

Site 7: 305 N. Washington Street

This site is the location of the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association Headquarters.

Site 8: 1664 Spring Hill Avenue

Located in the Historic Dauphin Way District, this site was the home of Benjamin and Ann Church Vincent, sister and brother-in-law of Michael Krafft, in the 1820's and 1830's

Site 8: Augusta Street between Broad and Marine Streets

Located in the Historic Oakleigh Garden District, this site was the home of Joe and Elizabeth Cain in the 1850's and 1860's

Site 9: 355 Government St.

This site is the location of the Mobile Carnival Association Headquarters and Mobile Carnival Association Museum.

Site 10: 206 Dauphin Street

This location on Dauphin Street was the home of Dave Levi, founder of the Comic Cowboys in 1884.

Site 10: Royal Street between Government and Church

At the turn of the century, the mythical royal court appointed to rule over Mobile's Mardi Gras festivities traditionally stopped here, in front of the courthouse, where the "king" and his "court" offered a toast to the mayor of the city. The mayor in turn surrendered the key to the city, allowing mystic revelry to take over for one day of the year.