

The Mobile Mardi Gras Trail

is a non-profit initiative, created to increase public access to Mobile's history and the arts.

The Mardi Gras Trail a series of prominent historic markers which tell Mobile's history chronologically and also tell the real story of the first 100 years of mystic parades in Mobile. All together, they reveal the connection between Mobile's Mardi Gras and its rich history as a theatrical and economically thriving port city.

The first series of historical markers extends from the river to Royal Street and then to Bienville Square. Each historic marker will be surrounded with an installation of commemorative bricks, replacing the sidewalk at these locations. The result will enhance the look of downtown overall and provide the public and visitors with more knowledge about Mobile's past and the real story of Mardi Gras' origins.

Guided tours will be provided daily, the only guided walking tours in the city.

But, to complete the sidewalk installation and provide educational programs to the public,
we need your support.

The installation of bricks and historic markers, the educational brochures and the materials provided for students in the classroom and available to the public, are all funded entirely through the sale of commemorative personalized bricks and through individual and corporate donations.

We are hoping you will consider sponsoring a brick or becoming a signature sponsor for the historic plaque at one of the sites marked along the Trail. Your support will be permanently etched into Mobile's history, to be seen permanently and in a prominent location, valued by generations to come. Hopefully the brick you sponsor now will be seen by your grandchildren's grandchildren.

More information about each site and about the goals of the Mobile Mardi Gras Trail are on the website:

mobilemardigrastail.com

Donations are accepted there too and any amount is always appreciated.

The Mobile Mardi Gras Trail is a non-profit organization, sharing 501 C3 status through its association with the Historic Mobile Preservation Society. So all contributions are tax-deductible.

More About the Mobile Mardi Gras Trail

The Need:

- An uninformed public is disconnected and ambivalent. But an informed public is engaged, excited and proud to share information about their city with visitors. In order for Mobilians to have pride in their city's heritage and feel confident communicating it to others, they need to be better informed about the city's history.
- In order for Mobile to maintain its historic identity, attract new businesses and take advantage of the tourism boost it will get from Carnival Cruises, it must provide easy access to the arts and culture as well as a professional and consistent interpretation of the city's history that is interesting and exciting and to residents and to tourists.
- Mobile's culture and history have too long been put behind economic development or considered non-essential in the community's growth, when in fact the two should work together to propel the city forward. The Mobile Mardi Gras Trail will pull together the business sector with the non-profit community to inspire new partnerships and new possibilities.
- Mobile's carnival tradition is an opportunity for Mobile's unique identity to be firmly established in the public mind. It not only showcases the city's important role in American social, cultural and economic development but also unites a variety of artistic disciplines with the Mobile's history.
- Mobile needs a focused and well-defined strategic plan for historical and cultural development. The city's cultural entities must coordinate their efforts and support one another in order to succeed. In the twenty-first century, collaboration is essential to accelerating advancement instead of inertia. The Mobile Mardi Gras Trail will reach out and involve all artistic and cultural entities, helping to define goals and create effective solutions that benefit the entire community.

Resources:

[Arts and the Economy: Using the Arts and Culture to Stimulate Economic Development, published by the National Governor's Association.](#)

[Culture, Historic Preservation and Economic Development in the 21st Century](#)

[How the Arts and Culture Sector Catalyzes Economic Vitality](#)

[The Economics of Uniqueness: Embracing Cultural Heritage](#)

Background

The Mardi Gras Trail is not just about Mardi Gras. It is not about exclusive organizations.

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It is about celebrating Mobile's unique contribution to the country's history: the origin of the mystic parading tradition and all the customs associated with it.

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It is about using the celebratory theme of Mardi Gras to show how important the port of Mobile was in the growth of the country's culture and economy.

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It is about exploring how Mobile's important role in the global economy of the nineteenth century brought people to Mobile from all over the world, resulting in a culturally diverse atmosphere in which the country's most creative and festive public presentation was created.

Though they began as casual revelry in the 1830, Mobile's New Year's Eve parades soon became theatrical, educational presentations that moved through the streets in a way that was musical, engaging and artistic. Each theme was illustrated with detailed and elaborate costumes and a theme, played out at the end with a tableau and ball. Nothing else like it existed in the country, or in the world. This custom originated in Mobile among young cotton brokers who came from the urban industrial northeast down to the remote Gulf Coast on America's great rivers.

Mobile's greatest period of population growth coincided with the early development of the mystic parades and all the unique customs that are now commonly associated with Mardi Gras, such as balls, tableaux and secret societies developed here. At that time the city was a nexus of trade that attracted merchants from around the world. Before the Civil War, the port of Mobile became the second largest exporter of cotton in the country but it was also a center of the slave trade and its frequent outbreaks of Yellow Fever had a great impact on the American economy.

But Mobile was also a center of the arts and culture. Known for the quality of its theaters, the city welcomed some of the country's greatest actors each fall and winter. Mobile's early mystic parades were considered works of art, theatrical sets and living tableaux, moving through the city for the public to view before the performance in the theater itself.

Throughout the 1800's, Mobile was particularly renowned across the country for its mystic parading tradition. Mobile's parades drew tourists from far away, by steamship and later by railroad. After the Civil War, Mobile extended its mystic parades to Mardi Gras, or "Fat Tuesday." Soon after, a Carnival Association was formed which aggressively marketed Mobile's Mardi Gras as a community festival and using it to attract tourists to the city. Mobilians had always taken great pride in their New Year's Eve parades and these new efforts helped rebuild both the city's spirit and economy by the end of the century.

Visitors come to Mobile today expecting to experience these aspects of the city's culture. Evidence of these subjects still exists in Mobile's downtown areas but is largely ignored. The traditions of Mardi Gras are not only interesting for visitors but they are intertwined with many other important themes in Mobile's history and should be utilized to the city's advantage.

The history of Mobile's carnival also reveals the pattern of Mobile's growth in the Antebellum Period. The lives of the men who organized the world's first mystic parades were centered around the city's commercial port. In the 1830's, they simply marched up and down Royal Street as thousands of spectators jammed in to see them between Government and St. Francis St. Parade routes later expanded to St. Louis Street before eventually extending around Bienville Square and other blocks in Mobile's historic downtown. As parades grew in size and expense and as their routes expanded geographically, so did Mobile. Post-war events related to Mardi Gras show the city's growth toward the west, all the way to the homes of men like Gus Hines and Joe Cain in the Broad Street area. The driving route of the Mobile Mardi Gras Trail highlights and promotes all of Mobile's historic districts.

After the Civil War, more and more of Mobile's financial resources were put toward the Carnival celebration and the Mobile Carnival Association successfully promoted Mardi Gras as a draw to tourists, proving its benefit to the city's economy. In the early twentieth century, visitors continued to fill the streets and hotels of Mobile on Mardi Gras but the elaborate preparations for each year's carnival, including public concerts, contests, decorations of the main streets and public squares, etc., were scaled back as the Mobile Carnival Association came under new leadership and refined its public activities.

By the late 1930's, however, Mardi Gras associations proliferated among all segments of the community. Although the late nineteenth century organization, the Order of Doves, had been the first example of African-American parades, the 1930's saw the formation of the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association and the first women's parading associations as well.

The Mobile Mardi Gras Trail is focused on these first approximately 100 Years of the city's mystic parading tradition, from its multi-cultural beginning to its full integration within the community, a symbol of the city's heritage, an integral part of civic identity and the basis of its social traditions.

Mission

- To provide vibrant and compelling educational resources on Mobile's social and cultural history.
- To create and execute performances and events that stimulate awareness and appreciation for Mobile's social history and culture.
- To provide the public with the greatest possible access to historic and cultural information and events.
- To promote a cross-disciplinary approach to arts education
- To establish a forum around which cultural organizations can meet regularly explore their interconnections and establish cooperative programs.

Purpose

To create compelling resources and programs that will showcase :

- Mobile's influential role in the development American culture and economy
- Mobile's strategic location for worldwide commerce, accessing both the country's river systems and the Gulf of Mexico and the impact of that geography on its economic, social and cultural development.
- the diversity of Mobile's ethnic heritage
- the significance of Mobile's unique parading tradition, which brought history, literature, visual and performing arts together, captivating the American imagination in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and transforming America's public culture.

Functions

Provide Basic, Easily Accessible Information:

- Use the theme of carnival and Mardi Gras as a unique identity to showcase Mobile's history of cultural and scientific innovation.
- Identify approximately 10 sites in Mobile which represent important moments in Mobile's social and cultural history and the development of Mobile's mystic parading tradition

- Mark each site with a sidewalk plaque and brick borders or brick-lined trails from one site to the next, creating a strong visual and conspicuous history of the city.
- Create opportunities for the public to experience Mobile's history in a way that is entertaining, engaging and historically accurate.
- Distribute information to the public with an illustrated map of site locations and intriguing facts about the significance of each site.
- Create a website which can be used as an educational resource, including history and also providing easy access to public events.

Assure a Consistent Historic Interpretation:

- Distribute a Self-Guided Walking Tour of Sites in the walkable downtown area, expanding upon the city's architectural and military history to reflect the lives of important individuals and moments in the city's social and cultural history.
- Distribute a Self-Guided Driving Tour of All Sites including the same social and cultural background related to each site.
- Make Self-Guided Tour brochures and website information available at a wide variety of public locations.
- Make On-site presentations, information booklets and guided tours available to schools, community organizations, and tourist groups
- Develop a mobile application that offers a visual and informative guide to the sites of the Mobile Mardi Gras Trail.
- Host regular opportunities for the public but particularly for city officials, tourism officials, community organizations and historic neighborhood representatives to regularly communicate with representatives of Mobile's historic and cultural entities so that Mobile's cultural development is a civic priority.
- Facilitate the sharing of ideas and information, ensuring a consistent interpretation of the city's history and greater awareness of the city's cultural opportunities.

Plan and Coordinate Public Events/ Provide Opportunities for Community Access:

- Provide on-going guided tours, lectures, performances, and exhibits.
- Coordinate events among a variety of local historic and cultural organizations as well as businesses which serve the public.
- Coordinate with for-profit and non-profit entities to create packaged incentives for tourists and residents to experience Mobile's culture and history first-hand...leading to long-term partnerships.
- Create a website including all resources listed above available as downloadable PDF's and promote to tourists, schools and community organizations.
- Work with museums and community organizations to create and execute educational exhibitions and public performances around the theme of carnival.