

For the first two decades of the twentieth century, the City of Mobile was highly decorated in celebration of Mardi Gras.

- The intersection of Royal and Government (MMGT Site : Duncan Place)
- and Bienville Square (MMGT Site: Bienville Square @ Athelstan Club)
- The landing at the foot of Government Street (MMGT Site : The Landing),

were each the scene of illuminated archways and canopies, constructed especially for the occasion.

The following descriptions are from the *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 15, 1904

Never before in the history of the City of Joy and Mirth has there been seen such gorgeous decorations. The business people seemed to vie with each other in the lavish display of bunting and carnival colors. But the grandest sight of all is the illumination. Visitors from the largest cities of the East and North declare they were as grand as any witnessed at the festivals in their homes and far exceeding anything they had hoped for. Night has been transformed into day and on all sides arches and strings of electric lights of varied hues, together with mammoth designs and arc lights heightened the effect.

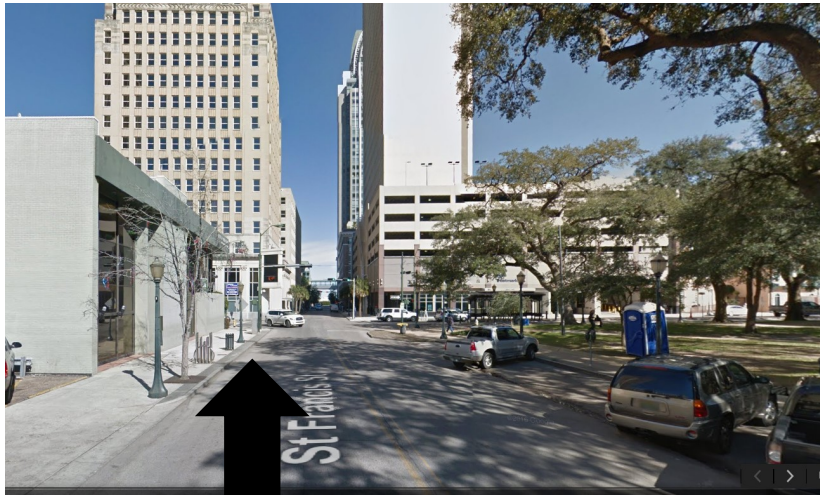
Immediately at the foot of the street where the Imperial party will land, is a magnificent arch of 'Welcome,' illuminated with electric lights.

For two miles out Government Way, the Boulevard of the Imperial City, the majestic oaks and magnolias stood out in bold relief so great is the light. Palatial residences are illuminated and decorated. The stately signal pole in Duncan Place is a blaze of light. The majestic Hall of Justice is resplendent in its brightness.

The intersection of Government Way and Royal Road is a display of magnificence: Ropes of light cross and intertwine each other and the handsome design is a marvel. Up Royal Road... at the intersections of Dauphin and St Francis are designs such as only artists could design. An immense crown, beautiful to look upon, with streamers of fire, can be seen at the last named intersection and the Hotel de Battle is a blaze of light, reflecting the happy countenances of the royal subjects gathered there.

Magnificent Square de Bienville, the lovely park is aglow with fiery flames, the grand fountain playing as if for very joy at the coming of the Emperor. Its waters are being made radiant with electric lights. The Hotel de Bienville, just across the way, the Club Athelstan, and the Club Manassas, the Place of Pythias and other stately buildings are respondent in their beautiful decorations. The public and private buildings in the vicinity are arrayed in holiday attire.

1904



temporarily.

Soon the procession will form and the march to the grand Square de Bienville be made. Here the golden gates will be unlocked and the keys to the Imperial City given into the keeping of His Imperial Majesty. Immediately after expressing his gratitude at the most cordial and loyal welcome accorded him and giving vent to his feelings at the gorgeousness of the decorations to be seen everywhere, the Imperial edict will be read, declaring that for a period of two days and until midnight of the second day, Joy and Mirth shall prevail. His Imperial Majesty will retire for a season into his palace, there to remain until the shades of evening, when he will, so he declares, witness the first of the series of parades in his honor and immediately thereafter name his queen and crown her in the presence of his faithful subjects in the grand ball room of the palace of Total Abstinence.

At the intersection of St. Joseph and St. Francis streets, suspended from ropes extending from the Hotel Bienville to the People's Bank, is a figure well worthy of especial note. A juggler, eighteen feet tall, hangs in mid air, balancing a fiery ball on the tip of his nose. This ball is ten feet in circumference. This figure has 1,200 24-candle power lights.

Dauphin Way is festooned from Water

gathered there. At the Palace of Commerce the decorations are also grand, and so it is elsewhere. Magnificent Square de Bienville, the lovely park, is aglow with fiery flames, the grand fountain playing as if for very joy at the coming of the Emperor. Its waters are being made radiant with electric lights. The magnificent Temple of Masonry has lovely designs, emblematic of the degrees of the sacred order, each calling forth praise. The Hotel de Bienville, just across the way, the Club Athelstan and the Club Manassas, the Palace of Pythias and other stately buildings, are resplendent in their beautiful decorations. Other public and private buildings in the vicinity are arrayed

Montgomery Advertiser, February 15, 1904

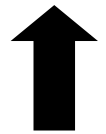


In this damaged photo from 1904 you can just barely make out the figure of a juggler and ball balancing on a tightrope suspended up high above the crowd, as described in the Montgomery news. Photo courtesy of the Historic Mobile Preservation Society

Here's just a start on your history of Mardi Gras in Bienville Square!



Photo Courtesy of Historic Mobile Preservation Society



1905 parade
traveling down
St. Francis
Street .

*In this year the
Athelstan Club
was located at
151 St. Francis
Street, about a
block east of its
current location.
Notice the arches
and columns
erected as city
decorations for
Mardi Gras*



Until 1922 Emperor Felix toasted his
queen here, at the Manassas Club.

More from Mardi Gras, 1905

The Hotel Cawthorne will be a modern structure of 205 rooms, steam heated, and with electric lights, long and short distance phones in each room, hot and cold baths, and, in fact, every modern improvement designed for the comfort of the travelling public. The usual complement of reception rooms, wide halls, palm gardens, Turkish bath-rooms and verandas will add to the beauty of the building, and, as a whole, it will be a beautiful structure, complete in every detail.

Times Picayune, January 16, 1905

Seen in the upper left of the previous picture



The carnival will open tomorrow evening with a grand illumination and in Bienville Square with a concert by Drago's Orchestra. The Montgomery City Band will begin daily concerts Monday morning in Duncan Place.

Montgomery Advertiser, March 5, 1905

The Athelstan and Manassas Clubs both kept open house today and were filled with visitors to witness the arrival of Felix and the first public recognition of the Queen. Miss Clarke and her maids of honor occupied the place of honor on the gallery of the Manassas Club.

Montgomery Advertiser, March 7, 1905

Band Concerts, Etc.

From 6 to 7 and from 8 to 10 o'clock this evening Drago's band rendered concerts in Bienville square where were assembled great throngs. At 6:30 o'clock promptly the electrical effects began to show and the business district of the city was as light as day. From 7 to 9 tonight a moving picture exhibition was given in Bienville Square.

Montgomery Advertiser, March 6, 1905

1907

MOBILE FAIRLY THROGGED WITH MERRY SIGHTSEERS

Unfavorable Weather of Sunday and Monday Didn't Dampen Carnival Spirit

Special to The Advertiser
MOBILE, ALA., Feb. 3.—The inclement weather of Sunday afternoon and early Monday morning did not dampen the carnival spirit of the people of Mobile and the many thousand visitors in the city. The real Mardi Gras began this afternoon with the arrival of Felix III, Emperor of Joy, accompanied by his royal court.

Previous to the arrival of his royal majesty, a concert was given in Bienville Square by Drago's Imperial band, to which several thousand people listened from 10 o'clock until high noon.

At least 2,000 people arrived in the city Sunday afternoon and night by rail and boat. The special train from Birmingham reached the Gulf City early and with at least 100 people. The river steamers American, City of Mobile and Mary S. Bleas came in on Sunday with many passengers, and despite the inclement weather there was a large crowd on the river front to meet them.

"Previous to the arrival of his royal majesty, a concert was given in Bienville Square by Drago's imperial band, to which several thousand people listened from 10 o'clock until high noon.

At least 5,000 people arrived in the city Sunday afternoon and night by rail and boat."

Montgomery Advertiser, April 12, 1907

Mobile Society

Royalty at the Athelstan Club.

* The scene shifted today from the Manassas to the Athelstan Club, where the Queen and her maids awaited the passing of the King.

The Queen and her maids, in their pretty and becoming gowns of light colors, formed a lovely group of young women, worthy of the homage paid them by the King and his loyal subjects.

After the parades were ended, the King and his Knights returned to the club, where dancing and merry-making filled the hours.

Mr. Luce entertained again most royally today at luncheon at the Athelstan Club for the Queen and the members of their court.

Informal dancing, luncheon and a general round of rejoicing made today a merry one at the Athelstan, Manassas and Elks Clubs.

This year they grouped themselves into tableaux, illustrating costumes and characters of more modern history. Every national peculiarity had its representative, and as the motley crowd filed into the great Hall of the Alhambra, or with less ceremony gathered round the board of hospitable entertainers, in another part of our city, one might fancy them a delegation from all nations, an assemblage from all quarters of the earth, which representing truly the peculiarities of each people, made a fantastical ...

Alexandria Gazette, January 15, 1842

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|

Decription in *Picayune*, December, 1840



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