

An Engineering Study-

New Orleans Lakefront and Lakeshore Improvements, 1700-1960

*Prepared as a project of
The Museum Of Yesterday
and the DeMajo Family Foundation,
Richmond, VA. USA*

In this documentary, we will study the outward migration of New Orleans residents from the French Quarter into the swamps that bounded New Orleans to the North of the City. We will first explore three main lakefront resorts that developed mainly as effects of marine transportation which utilized the shipping access that Lake Pontchartrain provided by way of its connection to Lake Borgne, Lake Catherine and the Gulf.

We will then explore the development of the Lakefront itself, through an industrious project of the WPA that reclaimed land and created a defined shore line along the lake's south shore.

Next, we will look into the use of this new land as a result of World War II and the post-war building boom that followed.

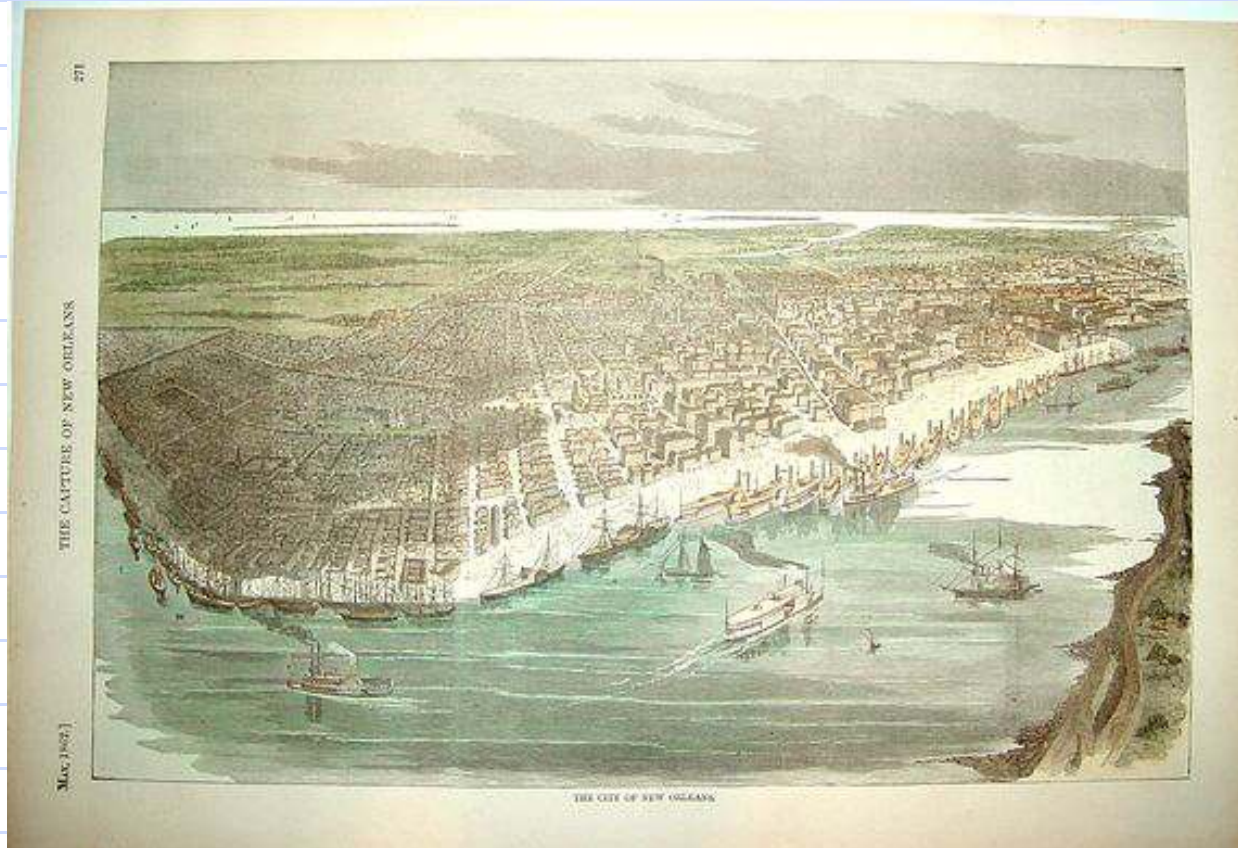
Finally, we will look at the development of New Orleans' post-war neighborhoods that gave rise to the city's greatest period of economic and building prosperity.

We start our journey in 1700, in the land that was to become New Orleans as we trace the history and engineering that built our city.



In the earliest days of the settlement known as New Orleans, the entire town was contained in a small grid along a bend in the Mississippi River in the area known as the present Vieux Carre'. This was due to the fact that flooding from the Mississippi had, over time, deposited fill along the banks, which made the land higher and less susceptible to flooding.

Because most of the land in this area was below sea level, this small tract of land along the Mississippi's banks was the only inhabitable area on which to build the new settlement. The vast land extending back toward Lake Pontchartrain, was swamp and therefore would not support structures of any kind, given the architectural methods available in that era.



In this Civil War era view of the city, as published in Harper's Weekly, the boundaries can be seen to have expanded into what is now the uptown Garden District and Carrollton areas, but land use and development toward Lake Pontchartrain was confined to three tiny over-water resort communities .

It was not until the year 1900 that a successful drainage system was implemented. Only at that point in time, did the city begin its outward expansion toward the lake.

Let us now begin to explore the evolution of the three lakefront resorts that were responsible for introducing New Orleanians to the recreational and economic benefits of life along the Pontchartrain shore.

Bayou St. John and Spanish Fort

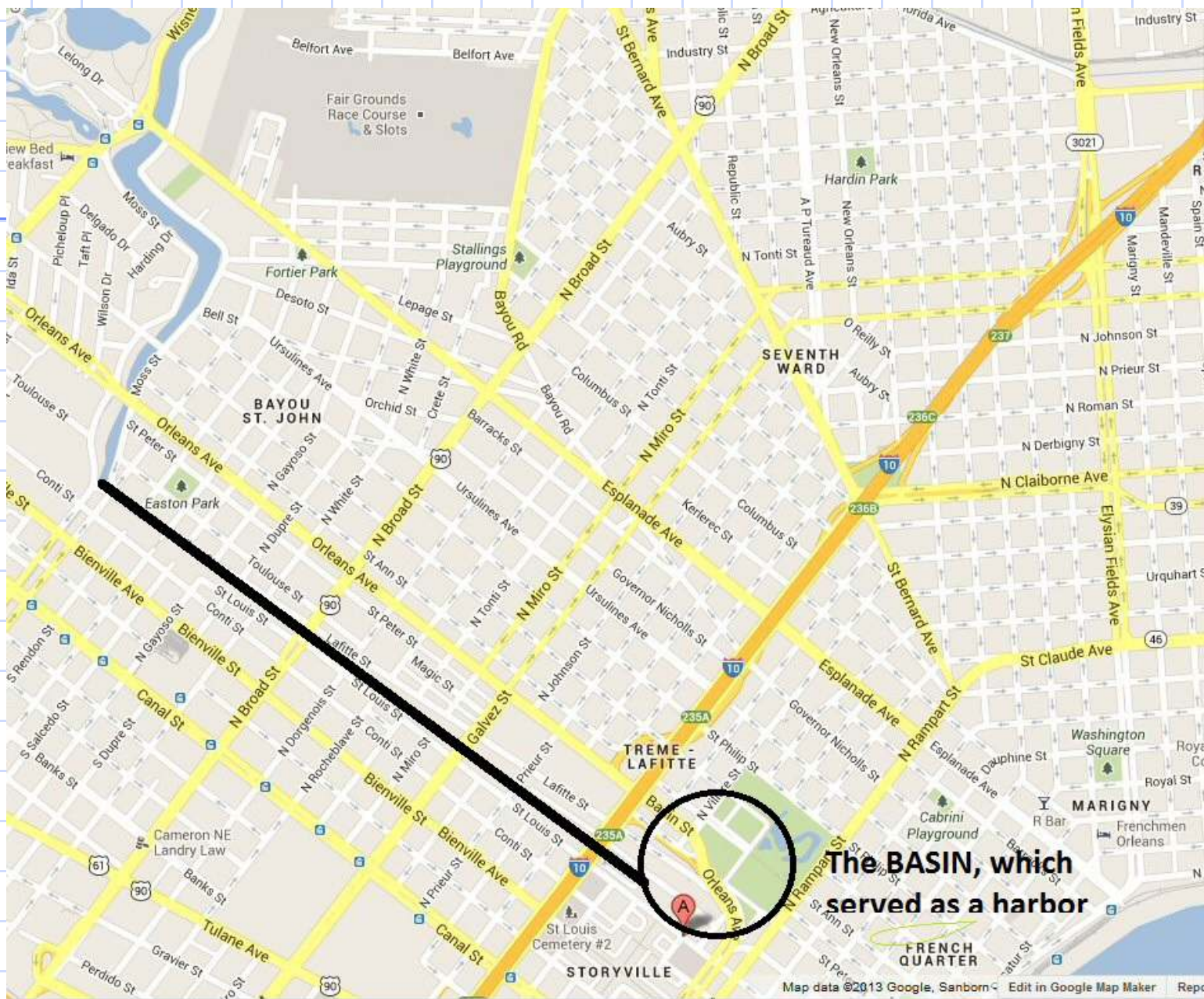
First Established 1701



Almost from the time of the city's inception, Bayou St. John played an important role in the shipping of goods to and from the new settlement. Because the bayou wound its way well inland, it also subjected New Orleans to vulnerabilities both in terms of war and pirating, and of flooding when the lake tides rose. In order to defend the city against attack, a fort was built in 1700, even before the official founding of the city, on the shores of the lake at the mouth of the bayou. For over 100 years, the fort served to protect the city under French, Spanish and finally American rule. In 1823, after Louisiana became part of the United States, the fort was no longer needed. At that time, the government placed the land on the market, and a developer named Harvey Elkins purchased it and proceeded to open a hotel and other amenities, declaring the area a fishing and recreational resort. The area also served as the access to a new shipping route when the Carondelet Canal was opened, in 1796, thereby connecting the Bayou St. John with a maritime basin at the end of the French Quarter.



The photos above depict the extreme ends of the Bayou St. John waterway in the Old Basin era. At left, the banks along the bayou near to Lake Pontchartrain and (right) boats docked at the St. Louis and Rampart street end of the Carondelet Canal extension. The three-story building in the background is the old French hospital that sat on land directly to the left of the present I-10 down ramp on Orleans Avenue.



MAP SHOWING THE PATH OF THE CARONDELET CANAL EXTENSION OF BAYOU ST. JOHN



The only remaining physical evidence of the Carondelet Canal. This section of above-ground open canal, which parallels St. Louis Street in the satellite photo, serves as a drainage viaduct between Bayou St. John and the Broad Street Pumping Station (visible at lower right hand corner).



A turn-of-the-century view of the 800 block of North Claiborne Avenue showing the flood waters that regularly occurred when Lake Pontchartrain rose and caused the Carondelet Canal Basin to overflow into the city. Note long time bicycle dealer Gus Betat's store in the background. Do you remember the old advertising slogan, from the 1950s: "Your great-grandfather bought his bicycle from Gus Betat and Sons."



An early view from the fort looking toward the bayou. The fort had already fallen into ruin by the time this picture was taken in the early 1900's.



Stairs of the 1832 hotel that was built at Spanish Fort by Henry Elkins, a developer who purchased the land once the fort was closed.



By 1877 Spanish Fort had become well established as a resort. Under the ownership of John Slidell and later Moses Schwartz, hotels, bandstands and restaurants were built, and the New Orleans Railroad And Light Company was running trains out to the location.



Follow the Crowds TO SPANISH FORT TODAY

Spacious Picnic Grounds



Spanish Fort is indeed a camping spot for the entire family. Come, bring the kiddies and make yourself at home for the day. Till be of benefit to every member of the family.

Spanish Fort—the finest playground in all the South. Situated on the banks of Lake Pontchartrain—where cooling breezes and beautiful grounds unite to make your visit a true delight. The entire Park has been rejuvenated—everything is up and spanking more delightful than ever.

14,880

people visited the Spanish Fort last Sunday—there was no congestion—and everybody wore a smile. Come today! It's a wonderful recreation.

BAND CONCERT

BY PAOLETTI'S BAND
TO-DAY 5 to 6:30 P. M.

BOATING

and bathing will come in for their share of time and the lover of aquatic sports will find much to interest him here.

GOOD RESTAURANT

Conducted by Terry Trantham, in the pavilion overlooking the lake. Best of foods and service with moderate prices.

5c FARE

Model Dancing Pavilion



The dancing floor at Spanish Fort is sure to be the most beautiful, well lighted, and most comfortable in the South. Come to the dance of well known music by Paoletti's Band.

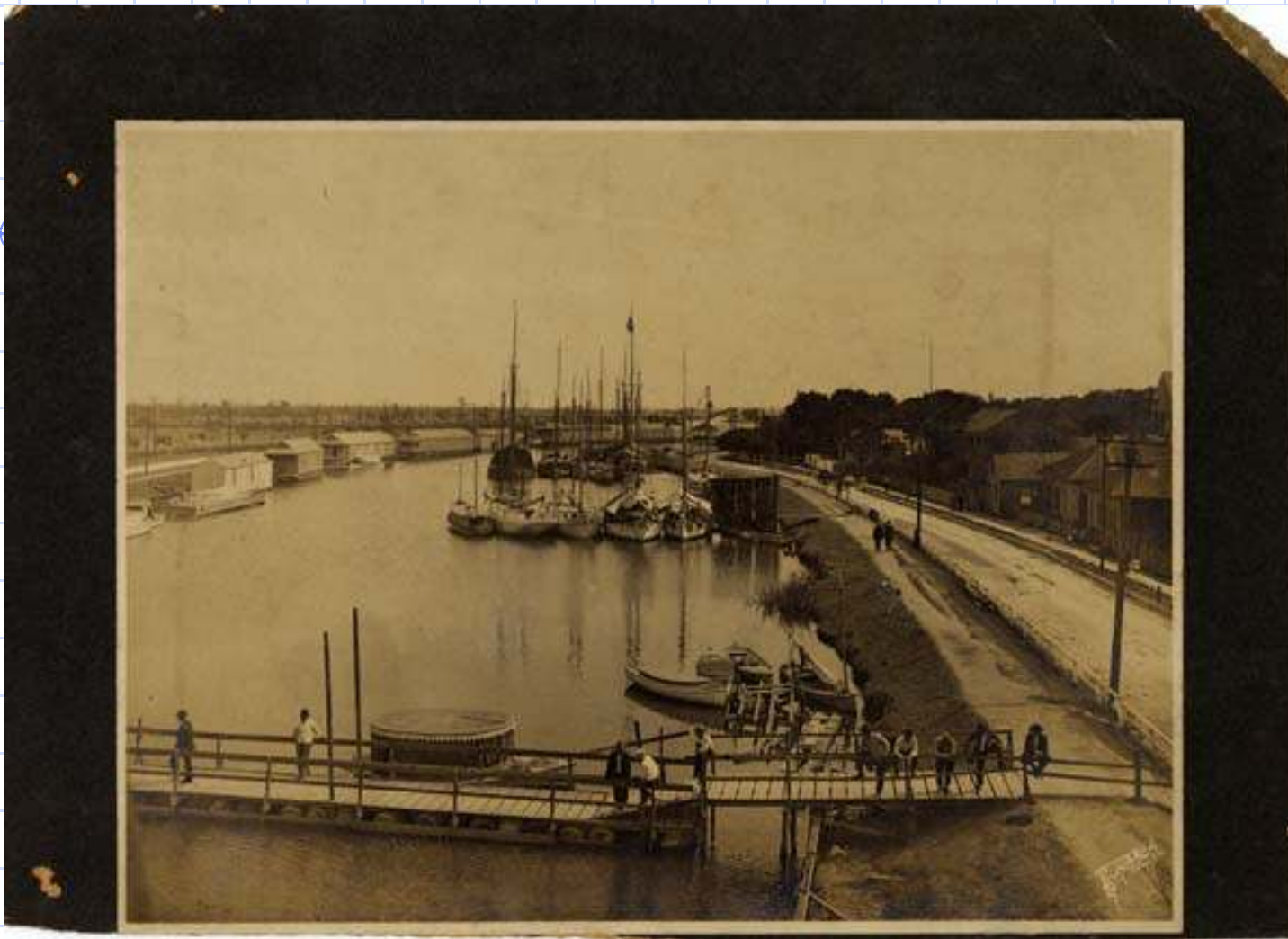
NEW ORLEANS RAILWAY AND LIGHT COMPANY

In 1906, a fire destroyed most of the buildings at the Spanish Fort resort. In 1909, with the advent of steam power and industrialization, new features were added in the way of an amusement park with carousels and other rides that used steam and eventually electricity. In the photos below, taken in the early 1920's, Spanish Fort was at the height of its amusement park stage era. Later, with reclamation of land underway, the amusement area was moved further lakeward onto newly created land.



With the onset of the Depression, the amusement park fell on hard times and its then owner, Lakeshore Amusements, went bankrupt forcing the park to close. The assets were purchased by the park's former ice supplier, Harry Batt, Sr., and in 1933, Batt reopened the park as Pontchartrain Beach. It would operate in that manner until 1939 when it was moved to the area of old Milneburg, which will be discussed later in this documentary. In 1939, the remains of old Spanish Fort amusement park were demolished, leaving only the historic remains of the once military installation.





This is a view of Bayou St. John in the late 1800's as it meandered through the area that is now Esplanade Avenue and the entrance to the Allard Plantation which later became City Park. The area of Esplanade Ridge was one of the first developments to be utilized as construction-worthy land outside of the French Quarter.



When Bayou St. John became an important navigable waterway, this lighthouse was constructed at its entrance to the lake. It was designated as the Bayou St. John light. Although it resembles the West End lighthouse in appearance, it was a separate entity.

During the mid-1800s, lighthouses were built at Port Pontchartrain (replacement of an earlier structure), Bayou St. John, West End and the Rigolets.

At right is a 1940s aerial view of the mouth of Bayou St. John as seen following the reclamation of land that is now Lakeshore Drive. Note the old Coast Guard station visible on the right side of the mouth of the Bayou.





UNO Library

A view of the bridge at Moss Street. The natural portion of the bayou extended just beyond this bridge where, at Hagan Avenue, it joined the Carondelet Canal. This portion of the bayou remained a navigable waterway through the late 1940's.



This 1940s photograph of the bayou shows that fairly large pleasure boats are still able to navigate the waterway.

WEST END

New Orleans second lakefront development.



A second resort area that preceded the lakeward development of New Orleans was the area known first as New Lake End and later renamed West End. The West End resort developed as a result of the New Basin Canal and the placement of a ferry terminal at the western most point of New Orleans. Bernard Marigny, a wealthy plantation owner, began a service that operated two steam powered ferry boats that ran to St. Tammany Parish for the purpose of procuring pine lumber and carrying health conscious tourists to the Ozone Belt. At the same time, the city experienced problems with flooding along the Carondelet Canal as a result of the tides rising several times during the year. The floodwaters would enter Bayou St. John from the Gulf by way of Lakes Borgne and Catherine. Water would push through the bayou into the Carondelet Canal, which inundated the area along Rampart Street, causing damage and breeding mosquitoes which contributed to dreaded disease.

It was determined that the Carondelet Canal was aiding in the spread of Yellow Fever because of regular flooding. A new canal was needed.

The city planners determined that the new canal should have locks and flood protective measures, and that it should terminate in what was a less vulnerable area of town.

In the 1831, a company was formed for the purpose of constructing a new canal to replace the old Carondelet Canal Basin. The New Orleans Canal and Banking Company began construction of a canal near the western extreme of Orleans Parish. Constructed with the labor of mostly Irish immigrants who had come to the United States to escape the Potato Famine in Ireland, many of these workers died as a result of both injury and diseases such as Yellow Fever. After two years of construction however, and the loss of an estimated 20,000 lives, the New Basin Canal began operation.



A view of the New Basin Canal at Lake Pontchartrain in the year 1901. The canal flowed along what is now the route of the Pontchartrain Expressway, ending in a turning basin near what is now Julia Street and Howard Avenue.



The New Camilla, with its twin the Susquehanna, were steam ferries operated by land baron Bernard Marigny. Here the New Camilla is seen docked at the New Basin Canal near Lake Pontchartrain. The far end of the ferry route was Madisonville along the Tchefuncta River on the north side of the lake.

In order to access the ferry landing, a street railway was built from downtown, out through the cemetery district, and onward through the cypress swamp which later became Lakeview. The trains ran along the banks of the New Basin and ended near to the ferry landing. In 1879, the Southern Yacht Club, second oldest sailing club in the United States, moved its headquarters from Mobile, Alabama to New Orleans. The club built its first permanent headquarters along the New Basin just inland of the lakeshore at the West End area.

With these new sources of traffic, and transportation available to the area, it was inevitable that hotels, eating establishments and ultimately an amusement park would be attracted to the area.



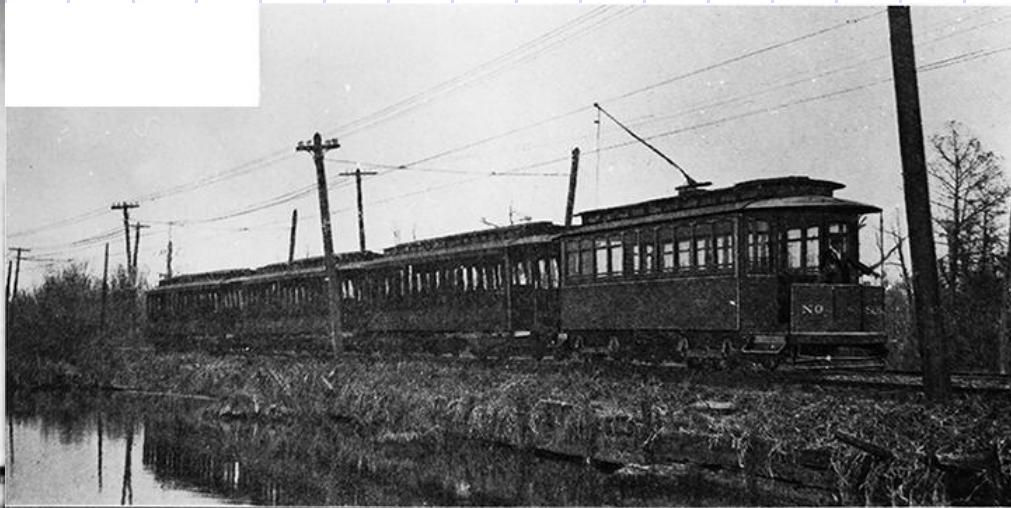
With the construction of the New Basin Canal, a light house was erected at the entrance to the canal by the U.S. Lighthouse Service. The lighthouse remained as a landmark into the 21st Century when it was badly damaged in 2005 by Hurricane Katrina.

In the years between 1835 and 1900, the resort of West End developed as a board-walk park over the swamp that surrounded the New Basin entrance from the lake. In addition to hotels, eating and drinking establishments, the area soon became attractive to recreation seekers who came to the lake in order to board the ferry boats. By 1905, a hotel, dance hall, steam operated amusement rides and an open-air theatre/bandstand had been constructed. Concerts were staged along the boardwalk and Vitascope movies were shown on an open air screen at night.

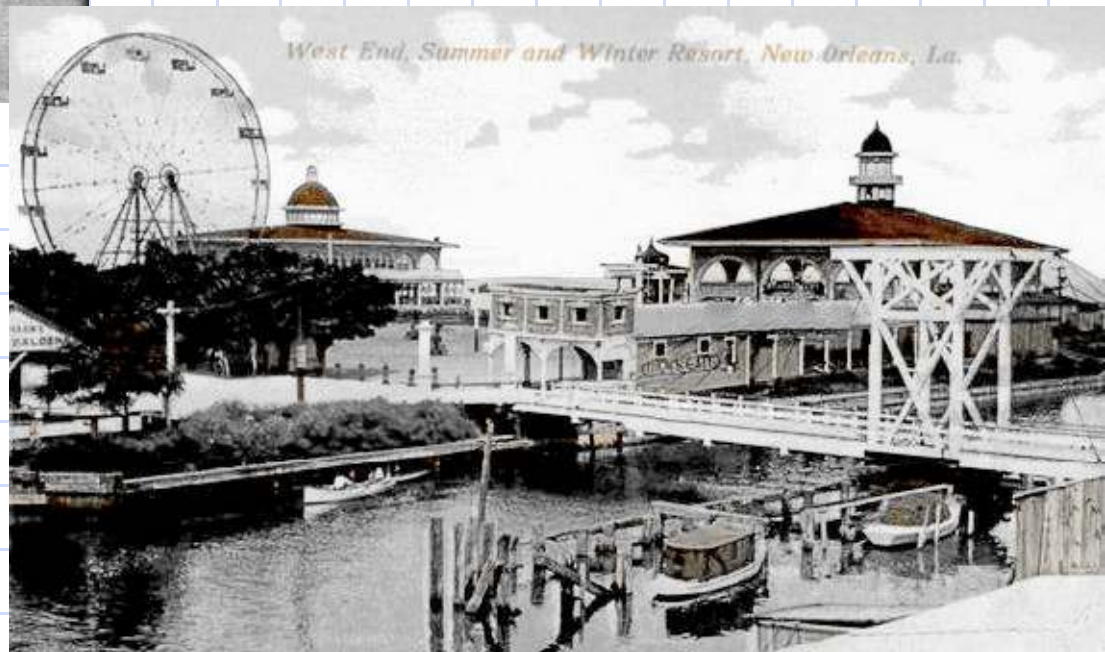


At right, the stone gate that greeted guests entering the West End amusement area. Most of the attractions were on an elevated pier that extended several hundred feet to the west from the western bank of the New Basin Canal. A turning foot bridge allowed persons access to the park from the railroad which ran along the eastern bank of the canal.





Above, the West End Hotel. At right above, the West End train carries passengers along the bank of the New Basin between the lake and Canal Boulevard/City Park Avenue. At right, the West End Amusement Park and bandstand in the late 1800s.





The photo above dates to some time shortly after the completion of the 1923 reclamation of West End Park. Note the bulkhead and the new marina that was created in the foreground. This view predated the construction of the New Orleans Yacht Harbor buildings and boat houses, as well as the breakwater that today has become known as “the Point.”

By the year 1920, the city had begun a north-westward expansion along the banks of the New Basin Canal. Industrial plants began to spring up as a result of the easy access to raw materials that the canal provided. At that time, the City began an ambitious plan to dredge the lake and to fill in the area of the West End boardwalk, thereby making West End a park on dry land. In part, this was due to the 1915 hurricane, which had damaged the West End boardwalk, and partly it was an effort to compete with the Spanish Fort park. With the additional pleasure boat traffic brought to the area by the Southern Yacht Club, a harbor was constructed as part of that same project. The old amusement park was removed, and it was replaced by new park with an open air electric fountain capable of putting on light shows. Concerts continued to be staged in the new park that was constructed on the artificially created land, and eating, drinking and gambling establishments began to spring up along the western end of the new park.

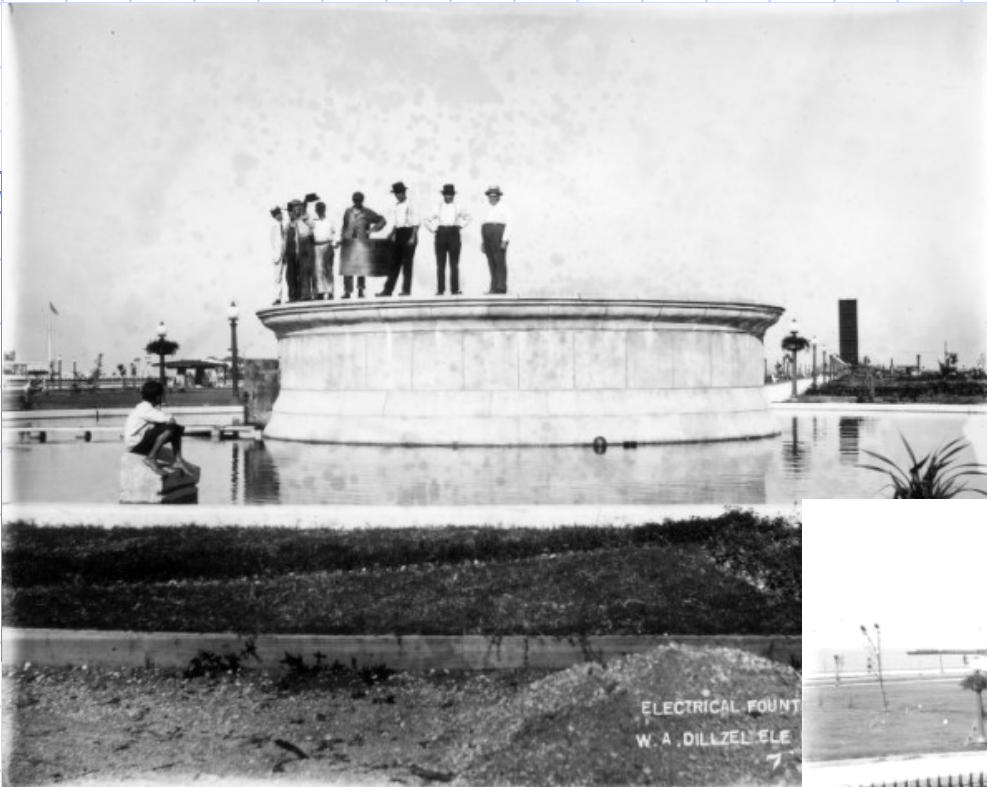


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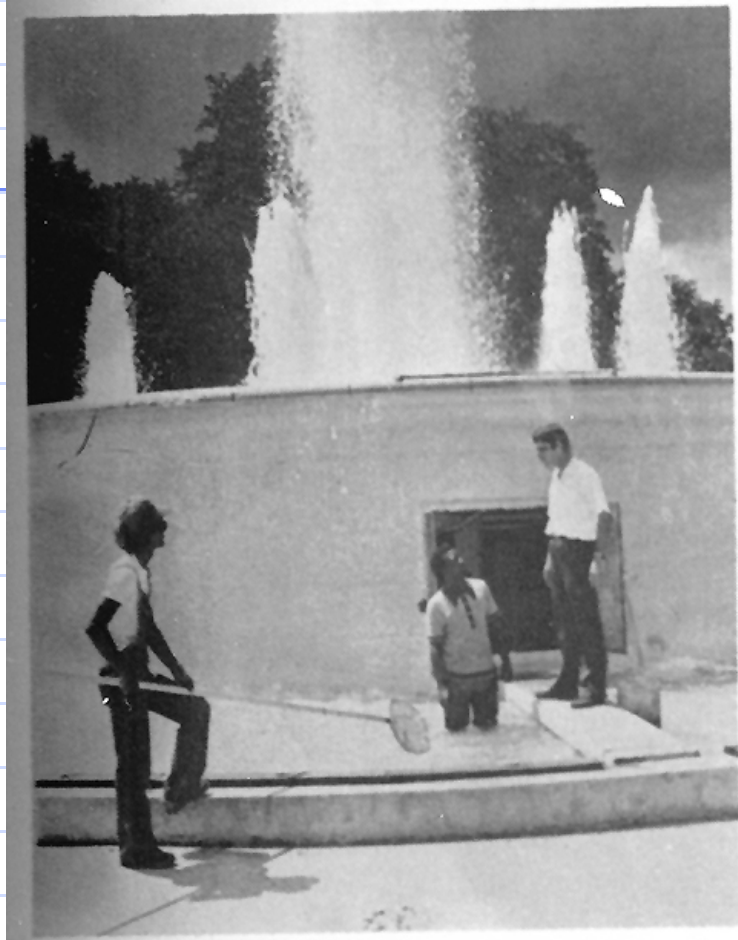
A view pre-dating the 1909-1921 project that converted West End from a boardwalk park to dry land. The other shots are of the 1917 Darlington styled West End fountain, built by the St. Louis Fountain Company and installed by local contractor W.A. Dillzel. The fountain was capable of providing water and light shows which were controlled remotely from a hut located beside the actual water basin. Local bands would often perform concerts in the park with the fountain's water synchronized to the musical performances. At right is a photo of the fountain's control room.





Shown here is the engineering crew responsible for construction of the fountain. At right: another of the fountain's many water patterns. Large plumes of water could be shot over seventy-feet into the air by the fountain's 100 horsepower electric pump. Photo below is the intricate system of piping, nozzles and lights that were installed on the roof of the pump house in the fountain's center.





This 54-year-old fountain at West End Park, which was abandoned in 1948, was recently brought back to life to look, and work, better than ever. "It's one of only two in the world like it," says Property Management's John De Majo (far right), Plant Senior Engineer. John was in charge of everything mechanical and electrical in the fountain. Eric Woods (left), a groundskeeper with Parkway and Park Commission, was part of the crew that handled the fountain's water treatment and lighting, as well as the area landscaping. Property Management's James Bell (center) took a moment to come up out of the engine room, under the fountain.

HALL TALK — August, 1978

Photograph which appeared in the City's "Hall Talk" magazine following the restoration of the fountain in 1978.



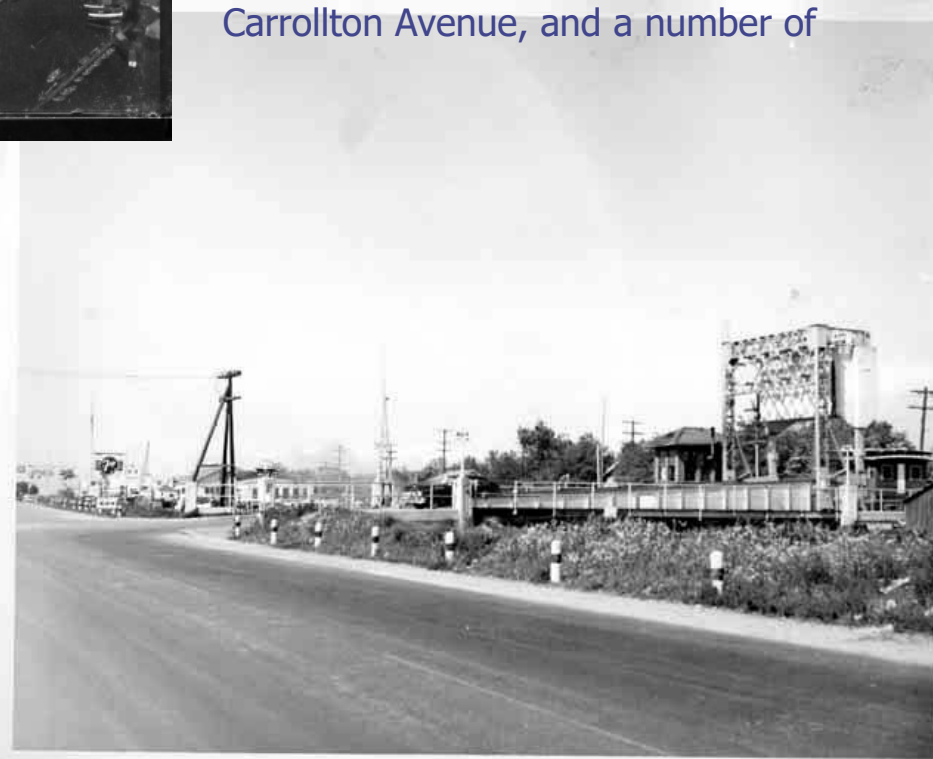
With the construction of the Watts and Williams bridge, followed by the Chef Pass and Rigolets bridges to St. Tammany Parish, ferry service at West End was discontinued in the late 1920's. Rail service to West End, however, continued until the end of WW-II. Shown here are the West End station and two generations of streetcars that served the West End Line.



At right, West End park and the yacht harbor following the 1909-1921 construction project that placed the park on dry land.

With the development of West End as a land based entity, and the advent of the automobile, a number of bridges were constructed to facilitate crossing the New Basin. Two bridges served the actual West End park and harbor, and additional bridges were built at Metairie Road, Carrollton Avenue, and a number of

other crossings along the canal's route into downtown. Most of those bridges remained until the early 1950's when it was determined that the canal had reached the end of its usefulness, and it was filled in and became the bed for the new expressway system that was to be built from Metairie, leading into downtown New Orleans.





Bridges, similar in design to the West End bridges, also crossed the New Basin at other locations along the canal's route. Above left, a view of the bridge at City Park Avenue/Metairie Road crossing. The popular restaurant and ice cream parlor called "The Half-Way House" is visible at the far left on the New Orleans side of the bridge. At right above, the New Basin crossing at South Broad Avenue, and at lower right, the Carrollton Avenue crossing.





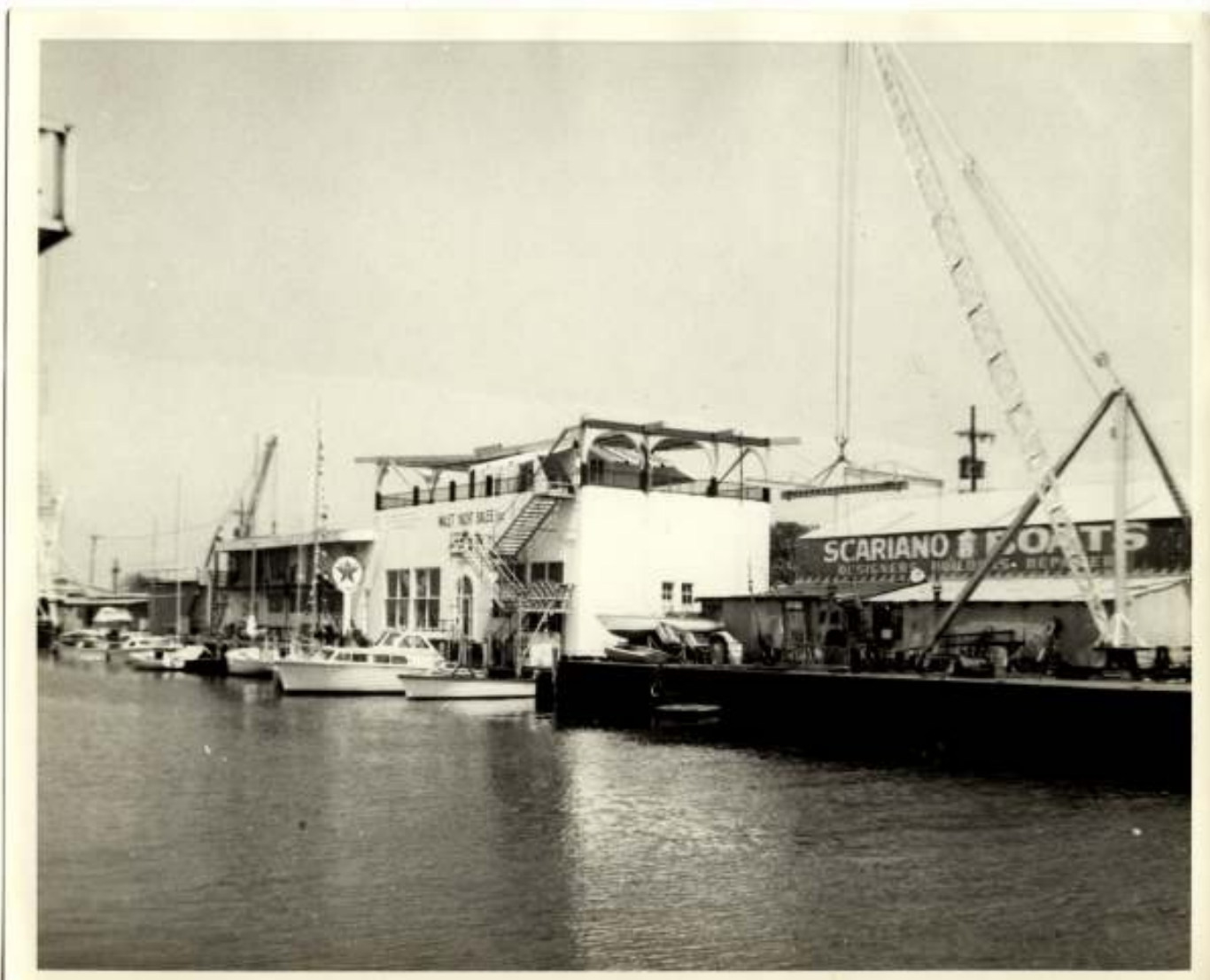
A phenomenon of the development of West End was the opening of seafood restaurants along the new West End Park. The first of the major restaurants to open was Bruning's in 1859. Later, in 1932, it was joined by Fitzgerald's. During the period between 1930 and Hurricane Katrina, West End saw a progression of seafood eateries, some of which boasted world-famous dishes. Below, an early view of Fitzgerald's dining room and the restaurant's familiar exterior that could be seen from the breakwater that protected the Southern Yacht harbor. Swanson's, Fontana's Papa Roselli's and others came along in the period immediately after WW-II.





By the late 1940's West End had become home to a number of pleasure boat manufacturing and maintenance firms. The seafood restaurant business also flourished as the troops returned from the War and housing for new families expanded into the Lakeview, Gentilly, Lake Vista and areas which had previously been developed as military support installations along the lakefront. These late 1940's photos illustrate the various business interests that had sprung up along the canal.





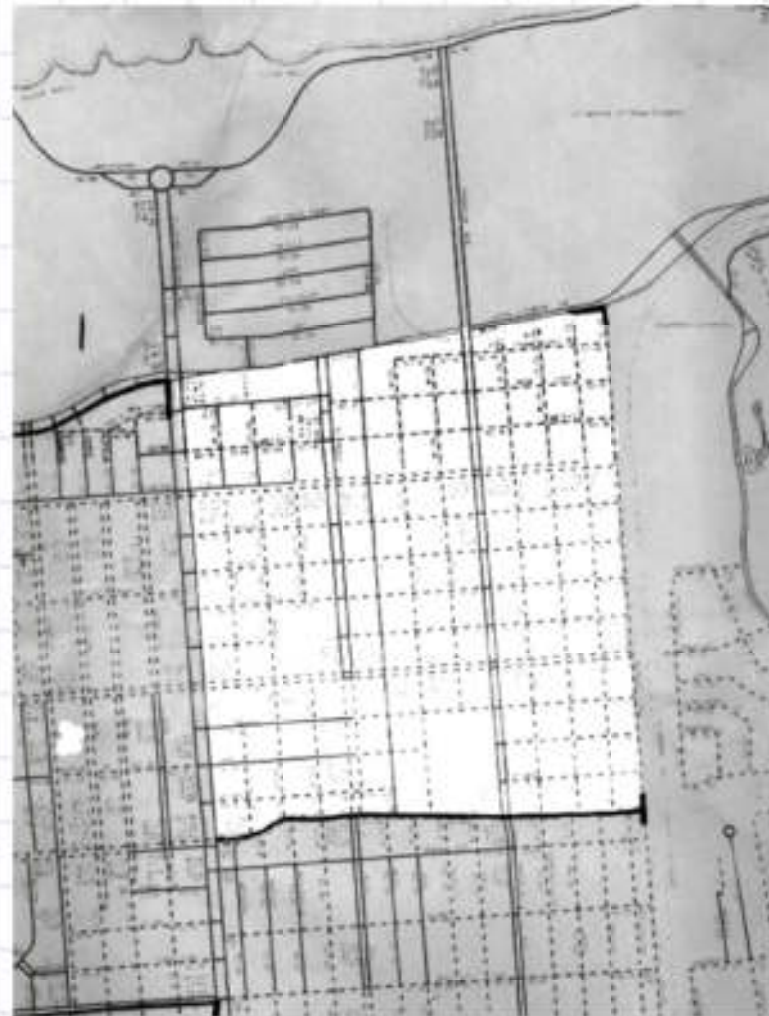
With the closing of the canal beyond the entrance to West End, the area of West End Park became almost exclusively dedicated to the restaurant and pleasure boat service industries. Beyond the 1960's many of these businesses closed or moved to the North Shore. Several subsequent hurricanes also destroyed businesses that once lined the New Basin Canal.

WEST END'S GHOSTS



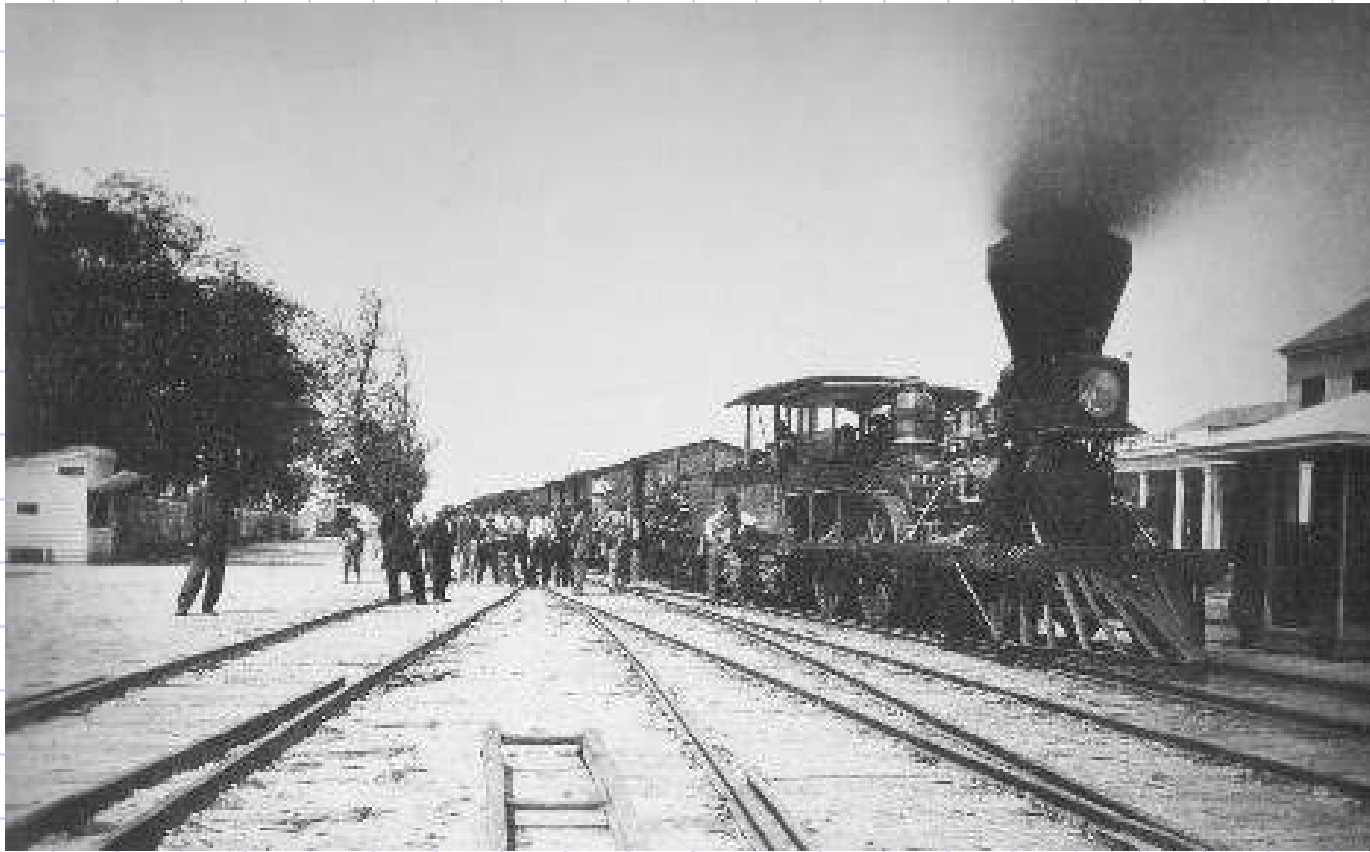
The story of MILNEBURG, the area's third resort community

Named for land owner and founder Alexander Milne, Milneburg (pronounced Mill-in-burg), was actually the first resort/port community to be established along the banks of Lake Pontchartrain. Two major fires in the 1790's had badly damaged most of the buildings and houses in New Orleans. Alexander Milne, was the owner of a hardware business in New Orleans, and he became wealthy over-night, as he supplied materials needed to rebuild the city. In 1800, he purchased land adjacent to Spanish Fort and founded a shipping port called Port Pontchartrain. In the years that followed, the port village became popular with New Orleanians as a fishing resort. It was renamed Milneburg in honor of it's founder. Milneburg did not enjoy the same amusement park status as did Spanish Fort and West End, however, it was a a popular middle-class haven from the mid-1800's until the early part of the Twentieth Century. The landscape consisted mostly of a fishing camp community with a few popular restaurants and bars and a hotel. A racially mixed community, it gave birth to a number of New Orleans Jazz bands and performers who got their start playing at the drinking establishments.





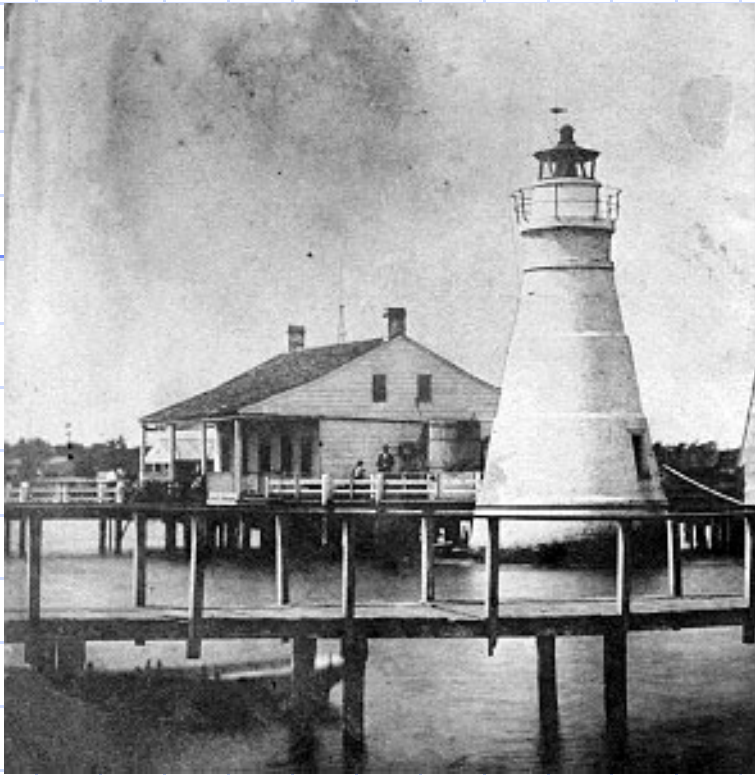
The lake has always been an attraction to New Orleanians. With the development of railroads, there was an even greater interest to get away from the heart of town and to take in the fishing, swimming and relaxation that Lake Pontchartrain offered. In this era, the village of Milneburg began to form.



For the average New Orleans resident, the popularity of Milneburg caught on quickly. Multi-Racial and far less structured than the more upscale West End and Spanish Fort resorts, Milneburg provided a less pretensive middle-class recreation spot. Port Pontchartrain, the settlement's original name, also served to allow the handling of small ocean-going vessels. The newly constructed Pontchartrain Railroad, which was the first railroad west of the Allegheny Mountains, was quick to realize the potential. Originally a horse drawn train, later replaced by steam engines, the railroad line extended between the French Quarter and the lakefront port-village. Here, passengers are seen boarding one of the steam powered "Smoky Mary" trains that made Milneburg conveniently accessible to the New Orleans settlement.



Another view of the Pontchartrain Railroad steam train as it sits at it's lakefront destination on the elevated pier over the lake at the Milneburg Hotel.




As was the case with West End and Spanish Fort, a lighthouse was constructed to allow maritime traffic to locate the new resort community. Camps and over-water runways and piers soon extended out into the lake. In the photo below, fishing and leisure camps quickly sprung up as New Orleanians rushed to claim their piece of the development action.

The physical location of Milneburg was at the end of what later became Elysian Fields Avenue. Prior to the creation of the city's drainage pumping system, the land between the French Quarter and the lake mainly consisted of swamp land. An Indian trail extended from the Lake Catherine area, where the remaining Indian tribes in the area settled, and it served the tribes as a path to bring their wares to the Indian Market which had been built along the Bayou Road.

The first Port Pontchartrain light house was constructed in 1822, was replaced in 1850 by the present historic landmark structure.



With the exception of that Indian trail, the Gentilly area remained mostly undeveloped swamp until the 1920's. It is the Pontchartrain Railroad that eventually brought development to the Gentilly area as well as to Milneburg.



EAT AT THE
Midway
Restaurant and Saloon
 MILNEBURG (On the Pier)
 OPEN DAY AND NIGHT
 DANCING AND ENTERTAINING
 EVERY DAY AND NIGHT
 MIDWAY FAMILY BATH HOUSE
 Regular Bathing Costumes for Ladies,
 Gentlemen and Children.
 ALSO CAMPS TO RENT
 All Trains Stop at the Door
 Phone Hem. 2071. J. QUARRELLA, Prop.

In the heyday of Milneburg, a number of restaurants and bars had been established along the lake shore. One of the most notable was Quarrella's Restaurant and Saloon. Proprietor Joseph Quarrella and his family provided music, beverage, food and rental bathing accessories for the swimmer. As prostitution was legal in New Orleans at that time, it was common knowledge that Milneburg was a place to procure such services.

At left, the Frank Christian Jazz Band, an early purveyor of jazz music, is seen playing on the gallery of Quarrella's saloon. Musicians, both Black and White, gathered at the Milneburg bars and often held contests to outperform each other.





Members of the Quarrella family pose for this photo on the front steps of the Midway.



The Milneburg Hotel can be seen in the center of this photo. It was a popular resting spot for tourists who were relaxing at the lake. Because of the popularity of the area's drinking establishments, a town jail was constructed as a means for holding disorderly offenders. The Smokey Mary was also forced to provide a "jail car" for the purpose of transporting serious offenders of the Law back to New Orleans for booking into the city jail. In the song "Milneburg Joys" composer Ferdinand "Jellyroll" Morton reflected on the experiences of a prisoner who found himself a customer of the Milneburg law enforcement facilities.



*View Looking West From
Milneburg Lighthouse 10-5-27*

O.L.B. - 215

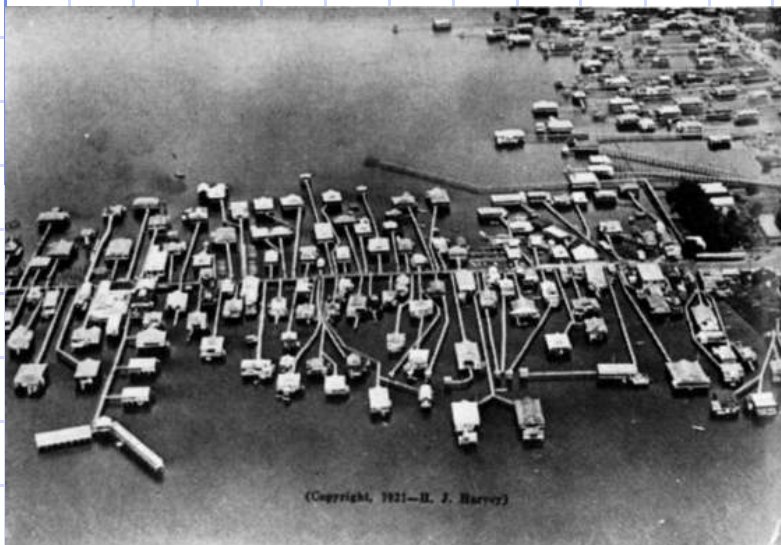
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By the beginning of the 20th Century, it had become rumored that a land reclamation project was planned. With the development of mechanical drainage pumps and levees, and the ever growing popularity of the lakefront, developers speculated that the area could be turned into valuable residential land if the elevation of the swamp was raised above sea level.

By 1921, West End had already been dredged and turned into dry land, with great success. In 1925, the city had begun reclamation of the beach at Spanish Fort, and by 1930, a contract was let for the construction of the present concrete seawall and bulkhead. With the creation of the WPA during the Great Depression, and an influx of Federal money, the city found the resources needed to implement the industrious plan to reclaim the swamp land along a 10 mile stretch of Lake Pontchartrain shore.

Unlike West End and Spanish Fort, which were able to maintain their financial viability into the 20th Century, Milneburg, which depended heavily on prostitution, liquor and camp rentals by working class citizenry, did not fare well. The banning of prostitution, Prohibition, and the bad economy of the early 1920's dealt a death blow to Milneburg. In 1923, a great fire wiped out most of the camps and buildings. One of the few buildings to survive the fire was the old light house, which still exists today as a national landmark.

By the 1930's the reclamation project was in full swing, and Milneburg was but a memory.



The photos above illustrate Milneburg development in the early 1900's contrasted with all that remained of the village after the great fire of 1923. Milneburg, which once had its own political structure, was eventually annexed and became part of New Orleans.



This rare photo, which was taken in the mid-1930s, shows the improvements that were being made to the beach which had been constructed at Milneburg. While some of the original Milneburg structures still existed after the reclamation, construction is nearly complete on the public bath house which was later incorporated into the Levee Board's lease with Harry Batt, Sr. for the new Pontchartrain Beach location.

While many visitors to the beach were under the impression that the beach's concrete structures were built by Batt's Playland Amusements Company as part of the amusement park, the Bath House, Penny Arcade and several other buildings and decorative structures on the grounds were actually constructed as public works projects prior to the relocation of the amusement park from Spanish Fort.

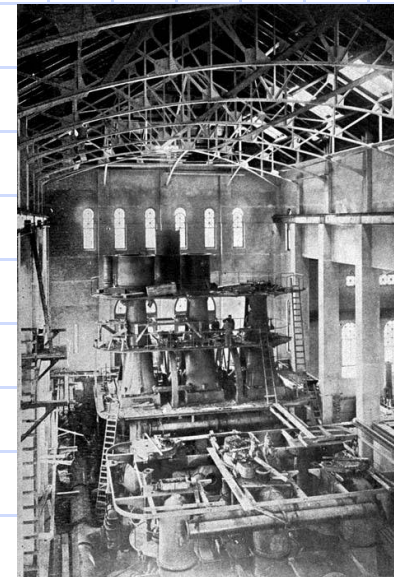
1900 - THE CITY EXPANDS LAKEWARD

The first area of the city to develop outside of the French Quarter, was the American Sector. Upriver from New Orleans, high land along the banks of the river permitted the construction of homes and businesses along what has now become known as the Garden District. Another development, the Faubourg Marigny, was also built along the banks of the Mississippi, just downriver from the French Quarter, and the town of Carrollton extended to the West. Although these new settlements were somewhat vulnerable to the below sea level conditions of New Orleans, they materialized naturally along land that remained dry because of the close proximity to the river and to land that had built up, over the ages, by the overflow of river sand when the river was at flood stage.

Other than settlements along the river above and below New Orleans, it was not until the early 1900's that lakeward land development began. In 1900, the city passed legislation to form the Sewerage and Water Board. A young Tulane engineering graduate was hired for the purpose of designing a system of pumps that would permit the water table to be lowered in sections of the city that were prone to natural flooding. The construction of levees along the drainage canals also allowed this gradual lowering of the water table. One area that was early to develop because of this mechanical draining of land, was the area called Gentilly Terrace.

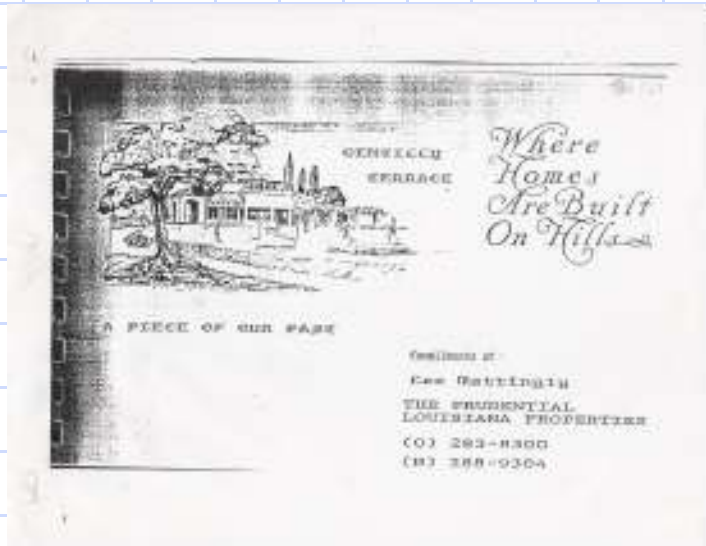


Large electrically driven pumps, designed by S&WB Engineer A. Baldwin Wood, and capable of pumping millions of gallons of water per hour, were installed at strategic locations around the city. These pumps removed water and dumped it into Lake Pontchartrain and the river, thereby making previously water logged land inhabitable.





Above, Gentilly Terrace School located at 4720 Painters St. in Gentilly Terrace, was completed in 1914 to serve the new residential development. Below: a prospectus for land in Gentilly Terrace



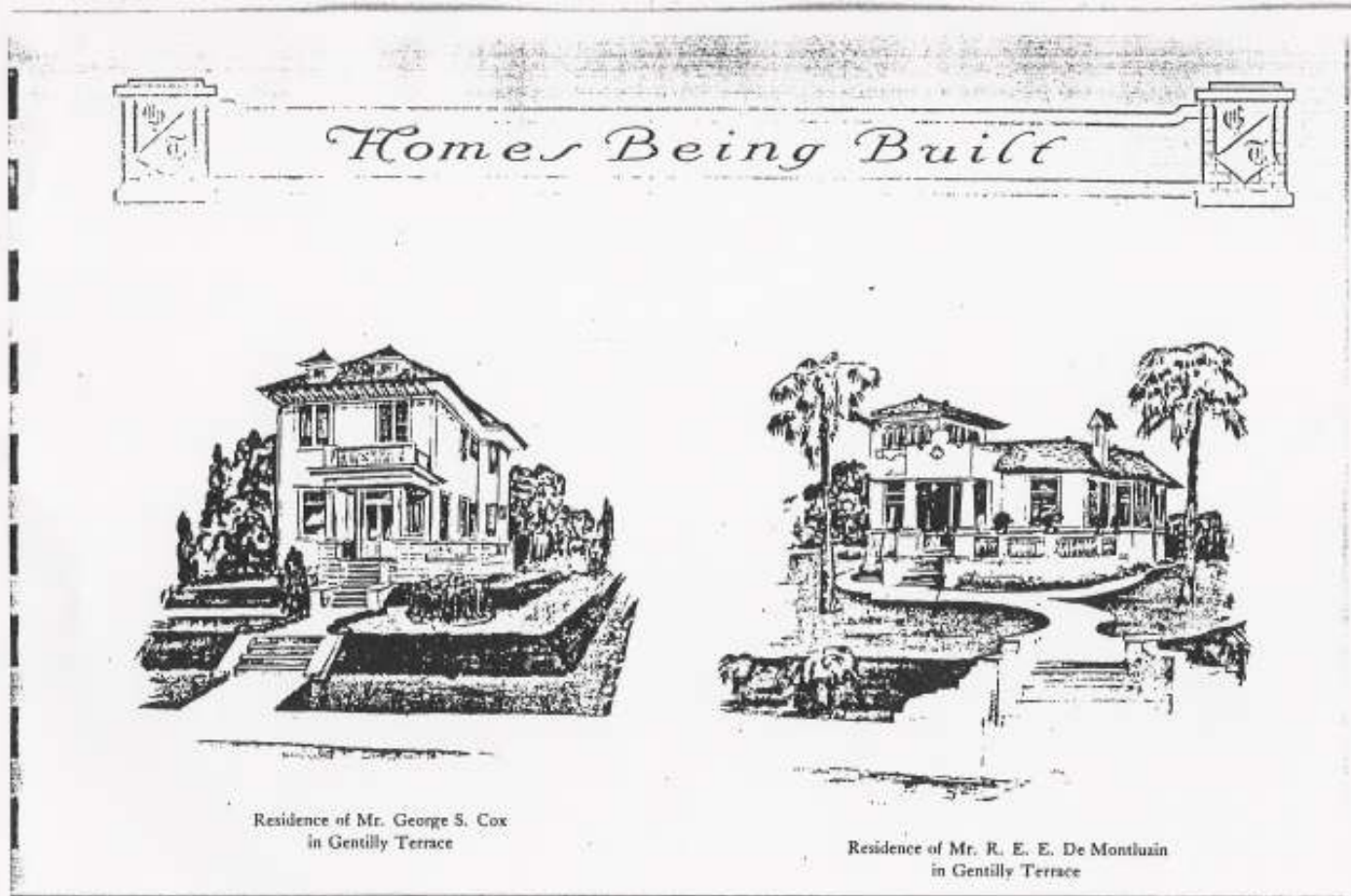
Gentilly Terrace, the city's first pre-WW-II expansion out beyond the high ground of the river banks and the Esplanade Ridge, actually began its development in 1910. Planned and executed by developer and city real estate manager Edward E. Lafaye, the new area was situated on man-made terraced land and bounded by the old Indian Trail which had become Gentilly Road, the Pontchartrain Railroad tracks on what is now Elysian Fields Ave., the People's Avenue Canal and Southern Rail Road tracks, and Filmore Avenue on the lake side.

The new development was touted as the only place in New Orleans where lots were above sea level.

A public school was constructed in 1914, as were several early mansions mainly for the developers themselves. The average homes in Gentilly Terrace were in the form of Craftsman architecture single and double houses, built on pier foundations, and set atop garden landscaped terraced lots.

While Gentilly Terrace became a popular place to live in the 1920's, development was curtailed by the onset of the Great Depression, and then by World-War II. It was not until the need for housing arose, in order to house workers for the various plants and military installations along the lake and Industrial Canal, that Gentilly Terrace began to realize its potential as the city's newest vista.

At the same time, development began along Canal Street toward Metairie Road. This was all made possible by the draining of the outlying city.



The prospectus for the sale of Gentilly Terrace lots illustrated premium residences under construction.



The Gentilly Terrace home of developer Edward E. Lafaye, who was on the Gentilly Terrace board of directors, and also served as the City's Commissioner of Public Property, built in the 1920's, it has since been demolished.



Even though the development of Gentilly was curtailed somewhat by the Depression and WW-II, the sharp contrast can be seen by the photos on this page. At right is an early 1930's view of the corner of Gentilly Boulevard and Elysian Fields Avenue. The other photos show the same intersection, from the ground and an aerial view, approximately 15 years later following World War II. Gentilly was the first great expansion vista of New Orleans, in the direction of the lake, and access through the new Elysian Fields corridor set the framework for development that would follow.



At the same time, drainage of the area between downtown and the City Park and Cemeteries had permitted development along Canal Street between the old Carondelet Canal and the New Basin Canal.



Canal Street at Salcedo looking lake bound in the early 1900s. The steeple visible at left is the original Sacred Heart Of Jesus Church which was located just to the right of the present church. The entire upper section of the steeple was lost in the 1915 hurricane, and shortly after that, the church was replaced with the present structure.

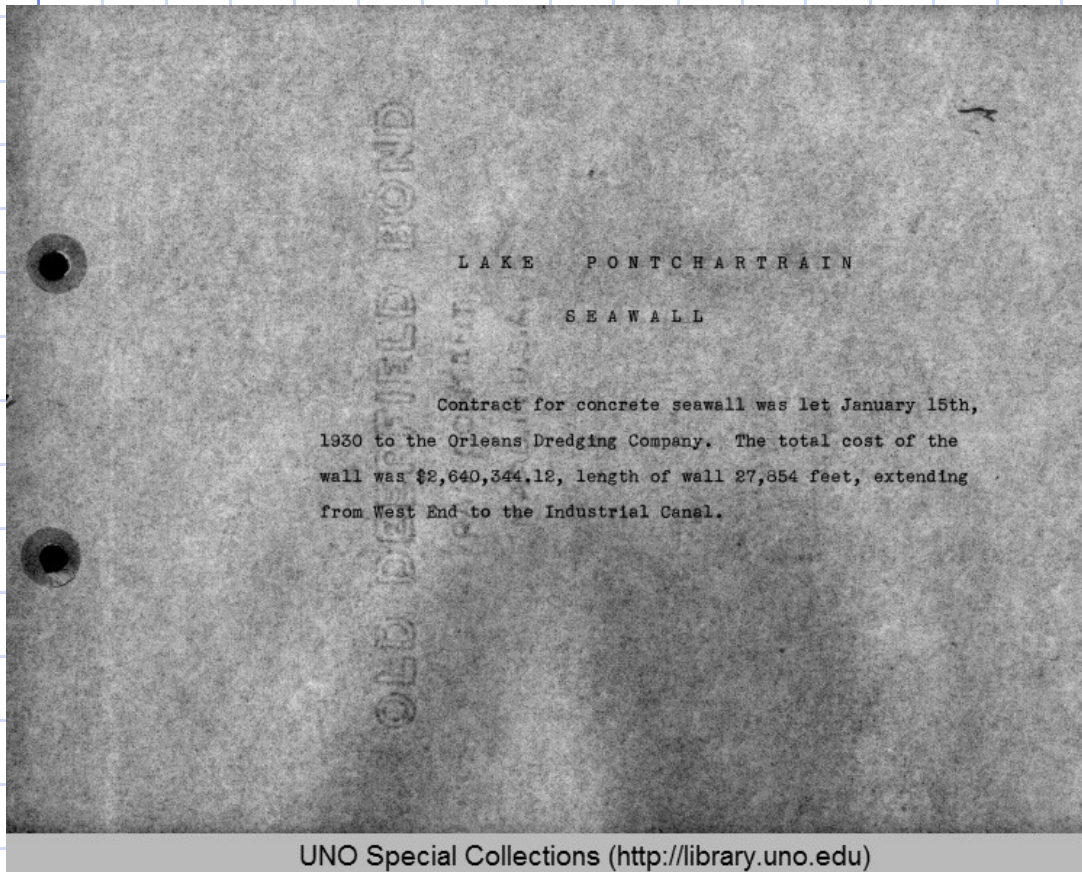


St. Anthony Of Padua Church, the original Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, the Centanni Home, and the E.J. Richard home, all on Canal Street between Broad and Metairie Road/City Park Avenue, are early 1900s examples of development that resulted from the draining of New Orleans beginning at the turn-of-the-century.



THE RECLAMATION ERA

The development of Spanish Fort, West End and Milneburg had set the stage for an obvious population movement northward toward the lake. Within a few years, the removal of the Pontchartrain Railroad and construction of Gentilly Terrace and the Elysian Fields Corridor, opened the door for the next step, which was development of land along the lakeshore.



In 1930, a contract was signed for the construction of a concrete bulkhead along the shore of Lake Pontchartrain, extending from the eastern bank of the New Basin Canal to the western bank of the Industrial Canal.

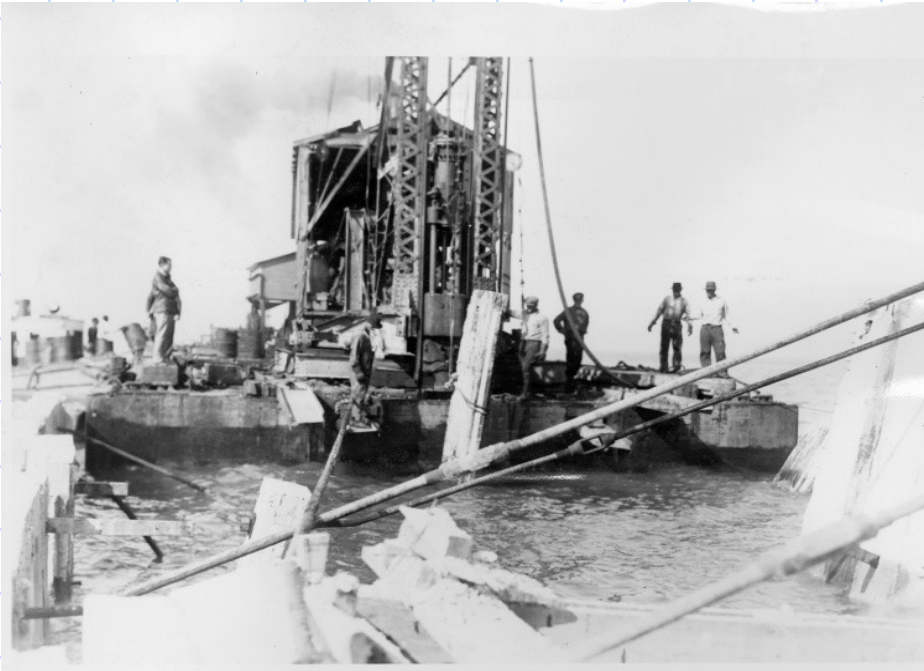
Dredges were set up and sand was pumped from the lake bottom in order to create new land between the new seawall and the original shoreline of the lake. Locks were also built on Bayou St. John and the New Basin Canal to curtail flooding.

What had previously been unusable swamp, was positioned to become some of New Orleans' most valuable real estate. The development that followed, shaped New Orleans history for the next half-century.

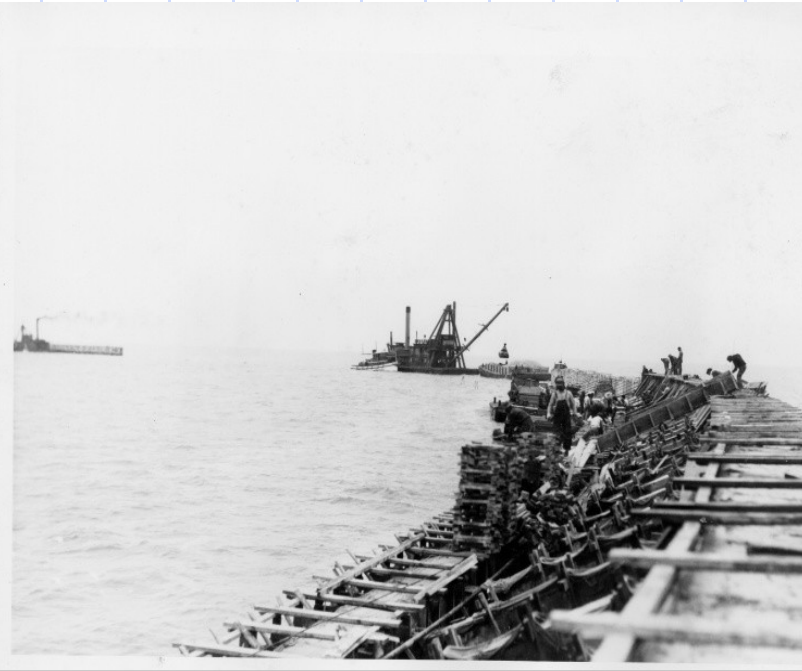


UNO Special Collections (<http://library.uno.edu>)

At the onset of the lakefront reclamation project, hundreds of dilapidated shanties and fishing camps were demolished.



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Dredges and construction equipment soon appeared along the lakefront as construction of the new concrete staired bulkhead began. Millions of tons of sand were pumped from the lake bottom in order to create new land behind the ten mile long bulkhead that bordered almost the entire Orleans Parish south shore of the lake. In conjunction with the project, a new airport was built on the eastern end of the new seawall. The project also included several new bridges to span not only the mouth of Bayou St. John at Spanish Fort, but also two new drainage outfall canals which had been built as part of the New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board's ambitious drainage project that was intended to drain the cypress swamps of Gentilly and Lakeview, and render the land usable for development. At the completion of the project, it was possible to drive, unobstructed on concrete roadway, from the Industrial Canal to West End.



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Early in the project, sheet piling was driven to allow for the casting of concrete steps which fronted the concrete bulkhead that would ultimately block the lake waters and allow for creation of almost three-quarters of a mile of new land between the wall and the lake's original shoreline. This photo shows the dramatic difference in wave action striking the staired bulkhead as compared with the flat structure in the background.

No Virginia, the stairs on the seawall were not put there to provide a seat for fishermen!



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A photo of the New Basin Canal locks which were located just past Adams Avenue between West End and the old Southern Pacific Railroad “Black Bridge” crossing just west of Metairie Road.

The bayou and New Basin locks were constructed years after those waterways began handling marine traffic, and were part of the city’s flood control plans required in order to drain Lakeview and Gentilly.

One of the benefits of the new lakeshore was the control of flooding from the lake’s natural and wind driven tidal changes. In order to affect the goal of draining the lakeward outlining areas of the city, it was necessary to control the age-old problem of the flow of lake water into Bayou St. John and the New Basin Canal. The WPA therefore constructed locks of steel and concrete at the lake end of the bayou, and on the New Basin between West End and Metairie Road. The Bayou locks, which existed through the early 1950s, were positioned just south of Hibernia Avenue. When Hibernia Avenue and Adams Avenue (Robert E. Lee Boulevard) were tied in with the construction of a bridge across Bayou St. John, the Hibernia section of the road assumed the Robert E. Lee Avenue name. Shortly thereafter, the locks were removed and the bayou was effectively cut off from Lake Pontchartrain.



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When the construction of the seawall was completed, and the newly pumped land had drained sufficiently, a project was undertaken to construct a modern roadway from the new airport to West End. Here, we see workers constructing the concrete road that was to become Lakeshore Drive.



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In this photo, we see the remains of Milneburg. The lighthouse, which once sat several hundred feet into the lake, now stands on dry land well behind Lakeshore Drive. Further work in the area was to include creation of a sand beach in front of the seawall, and the construction of several public buildings including a bath house and public gathering building. Within a few years of this photo, Harry Batt, Sr. leased this stretch of the lakeshore and moved the Pontchartrain Beach Amusement Park, from Spanish Fort to this location, which opened in 1939.



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Lakeshore drive was soon re-routed around the outskirts of the amusement park, which allowed it to remain contiguous for the entire Orleans Parish shoreline. One issue in the plan was the fact that Bayou St. John was still used for marine traffic up until the early 1950's. In order to facilitate passage of boats into the bayou, an elevated overpass had to be constructed across the Lake/bayou connection. Here, (left) we see the Bayou St. John overpass under construction.

The photo at right shows the lake shore between the Industrial Canal and the town of Littlewoods at the extreme eastern end of the parish. As an unrelated part of the levee project, an earthen levee was constructed, and the Southern railroad track was relocated atop this levee. This stretch of levee, along Hayne Boulevard, formed the flood protection for the new airport and the land extending eastward toward the village known as Littlewoods. Eventually, a segregated amusement park and beach, serving African-Americans, was built along this stretch of Hayne Boulevard.

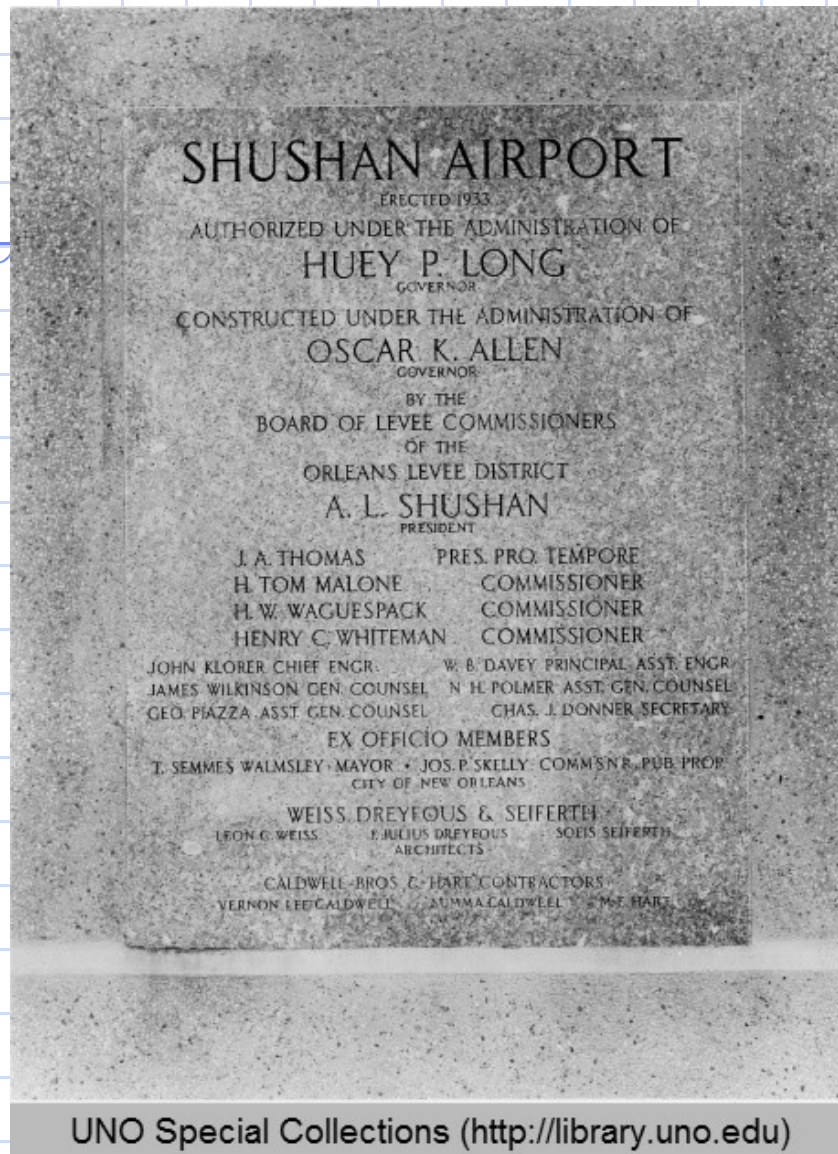


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At right, a 1940's aerial view of the newly developing lakefront. Development was slow through the end of the Depression, however, the advent of World War II brought about overnight development with both military and war plant employee housing, as well as several military installations which included Camp Leroy Johnson, the U.S. Naval Air base on the land now occupied by the University of New Orleans, the Consolidated Vultee Aircraft plant at Franklin Avenue, and two large military hospitals located on Canal Boulevard between Adams Avenue and the lake.

Meanwhile, bridges were also being constructed at the London Avenue and Orleans outfall canals. These bridges were remained in place until the late 1990's when they were replaced with bridges that are designed to minimize flooding from rising water. In the earlier days of Lakeshore Drive, these bridges provided not only street access, but also a great place for shrimpers and fishermen to cast their lines and nets into the seafood rich lake.





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The Shushan Lakefront Airport was part of the ambitious lakefront reclamation project of the 1930s. It opened for business in 1934.



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Like many Louisiana construction projects over time, the Lakefront Airport was riddled with scandal. Abe Shushan, commissioner of the Orleans Levee Board, an agency formed to maintain the new lakefront land development funded by the WPA, was eventually sentenced to the Federal Penitentiary for his role in construction scandals. The airport, which bore his name, was renamed the New Orleans Lakefront Airport, at great expense for the removal of his name and initials from the building in such embedded locations as floor tiles, door knobs and plumbing fixtures.



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The marker commemorating the construction of the new airport. At right, a front exterior view of the art deco terminal building



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The new terminal included an upscale restaurant called The Walnut Room.
Upper right: a full view of the terminal.
Lower right: a 1960's night view of the runways and airfield.

THE EVOLUTION OF PONTCHARTRAIN BEACH



In this 1936 photo, the WPA contractors are hard at work completing the bath house on what was to become the new public beach at Milneburg. Sand had already been pumped in to provide a public beach and swimming area. Around this same period, Playland Amusements had made known its intention to move Pontchartrain Beach from the old Spanish Fort site, to a new location that would provide an expanded mile-long park and concession area.



Many of the “Art Deco” structures that graced the property were actually public works projects constructed in order to enhance what was to be a public bathing beach. Most of the permanent infrastructure was already in place when Playland Amusements leased the land and made plans to relocate the amusement rides.



Photo of the Spanish Fort Amusement park (above) and the rides shortly before the park was moved to the end of Elysian Fields Avenue. At upper right, the new midway, which stretched along a one-mile segment of Lakeshore Drive at Milneburg. Below, the Zephyr as viewed from the end of Elysian Fields Avenue.

After the park's move to Elysian Fields, Spanish Fort remained as a historic landmark with remains of the original fort still present.





Lakefront. During the War, Beach operator Harry Batt, Sr. left his post as general manager to serve in the South Pacific. Upon returning, he undertook an unprecedented program to upgrade the Beach. He introduced live circus acts, beauty contests, band concerts and constantly brought in new and exciting rides from European and American manufacturers. When questions arose about the safety of the lake waters, he constructed two huge swimming pools for those who did not want to chance swimming in the questionable lake waters.

From the 1929, when the Batt Family, operators of one of the city's first ice and cold storage companies, bought the assets of the Spanish Fort amusement park, it steadily gained in popularity. Throughout the fifty-year span of its operation, the beach constantly was improved with the latest new rides and attractions, especially after the move to the Milneburg site. During World War II, it became a popular recreation spot for the military personnel stationed at the various bases and facilities along the





Above left: War-time view of the Pontchartrain Beach Midway. Military uniforms are in abundance. Below, one of the extremely popular Miss New Orleans beauty contests held on the beach stage. At right, a familiar site to New Orleans baby boomers, the animated 7up sign that marked the entrance to the park.





By the early 1960's the Beach had reached the height of its popularity and earning potential. In 1964, Federal Civil Rights laws mandated that the formerly segregated beach would be integrated. The Batt family at first fought the directive by attempting to sell the park to the City. Unable to do so, they retaliated by fencing the property and instituting an admission fee that was designed to discourage Negro families and groups non-paying youngsters from accessing the property. In the process, however, many of the beach's regular patrons resented the long lines at the admission gates, and also feared possible racial problems in the park. This, coupled with the popularity indoor entertainment, caused the Beach to suffer it's worst years from 1964-1969.

DECEMBER

7

1941

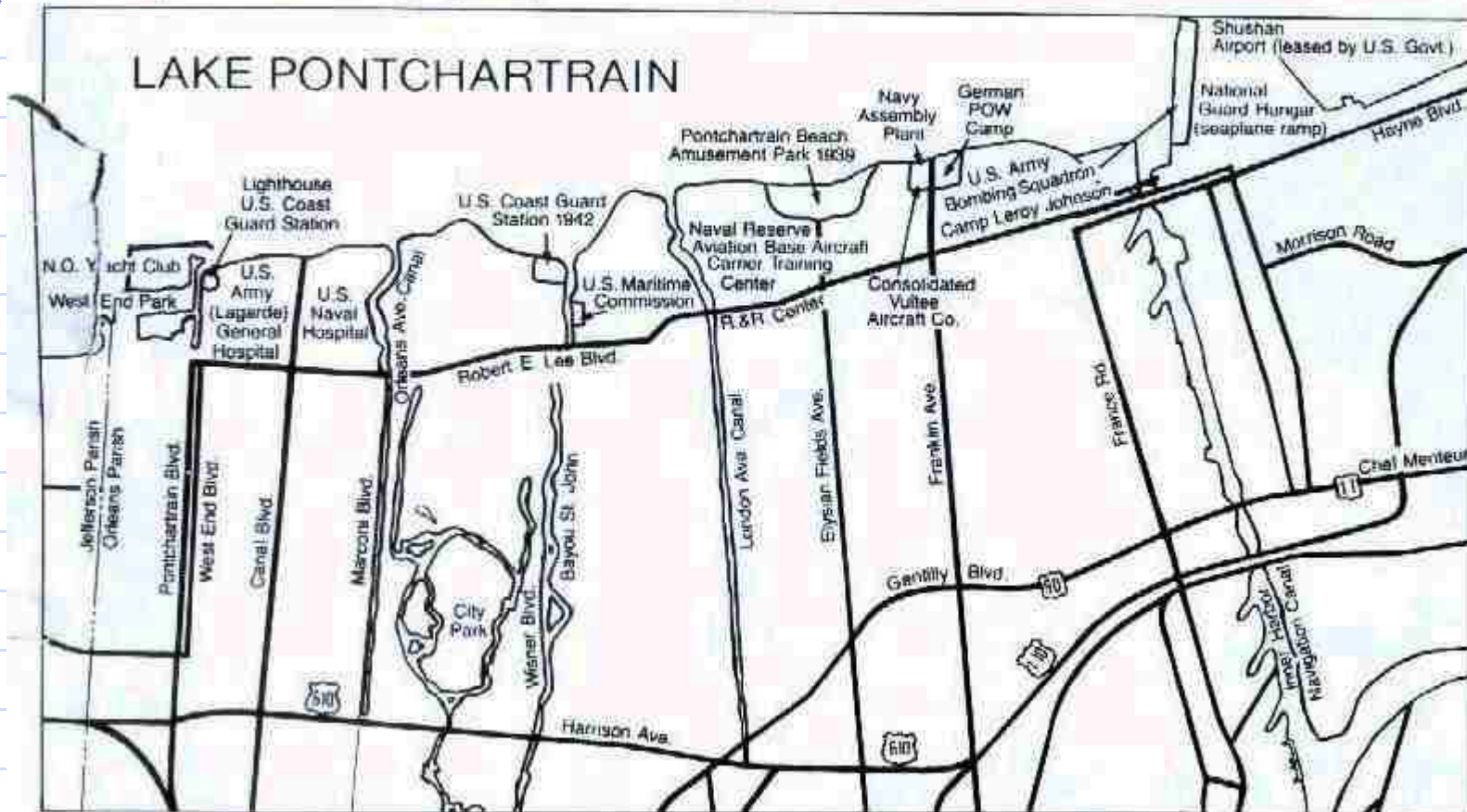
THE IMPACT OF WORLD WAR II ON
NEW ORLEANS LAKEFRONT DEVELOPMENT



The War years saw an unprecedented use of the newly available lakefront land. A naval air base, was constructed at the end of Elysian Fields Avenue just across Lake Shore Drive from Pontchartrain Beach. The base operated well into the 1950's when the advent of jet aircraft mandated moving it to a larger tract of land in Belle Chase, Louisiana. The land, which had been leased by the Navy, was donated to the newly formed LSU school to be built in New Orleans. The tract remains the site of LSUNO, which later changed its name to The University Of New Orleans. Today, only the smokestack from the base's original boiler plant, remains as a reminder of the wartime use of the property.



The lakefront during World War II. Most military installations existed from 1942 until the end of the decade. (Map by Mary Lou Widmer)





In order to test the PBY planes that were built at the Consolidated-Vultee plant, this ramp was constructed at the Franklin Avenue intersection with Lake Pontchartrain. The ramp was also used by Higgins Industries as part of the practice for use of their landing craft prior to the invasion of Normandy.

The photo below is a rare detailed shot of the US Coast Guard facility that was located at Lakeshore Drive and Bayou St. John. In the late 1960s, the building was sold to a country club in Slidell and it was shipped by barge across the lake to its new home along Highway 11 at the end of the Maestri Bridge.



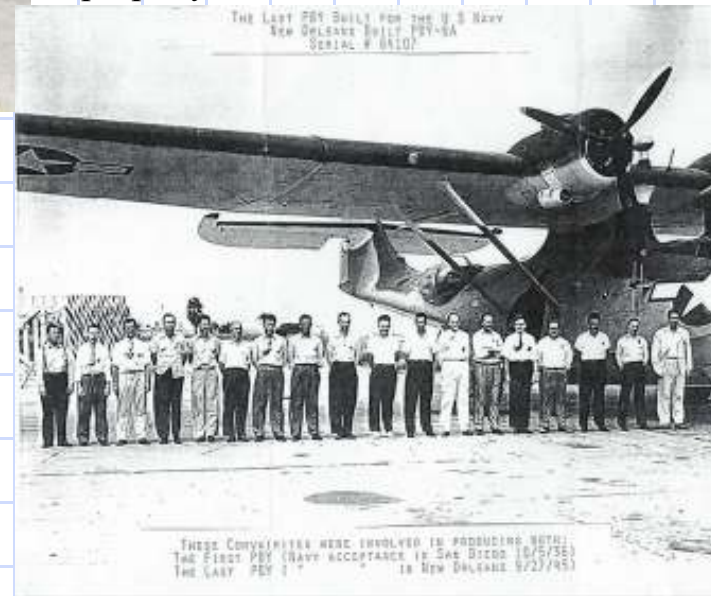
Photo of Coast Guard Station courtesy of U.S. Coast Guard official archives.



Left: airmen scramble at the Naval Air Station on Elysian Fields. Above, a recreational area for military personnel was adjacent to the Pontchartrain Beach property.

Military scenes from the New Orleans Lakefront in the 1940's.

At right, Consolidated Vultee workers pose beside PBY aircraft which was built at the Franklin Avenue plant during WW-II.





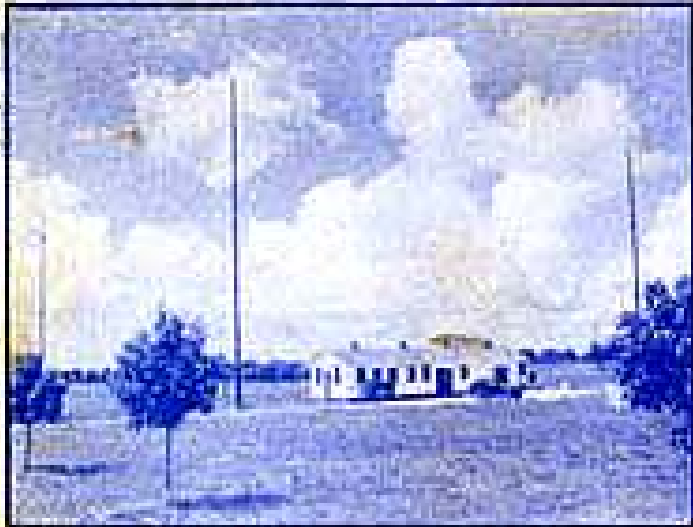
Aerial view of Consolidated Aircraft plant (upper row of buildings along Franklin Avenue) along with German prisoner detention center directly across Franklin Avenue at western end of Camp Leroy Johnson.

The Consolidated plant produced its last plane in September of 1945, and the facility later became a plumbing fixture factory. The original building was ultimately destroyed in a 1980 fire.

Other wartime facilities included a prisoner-of-war camp, the Camp Leroy Johnson training center, National Guard training facilities, and the LaGarde Military Hospital. Shown below is the LaGarde campus which occupied the land between West End, the lakefront, Canal Boulevard and Robert E. Lee. A second hospital was also located directly across Canal Boulevard and was operated by the US Navy. The hospital was dismantled in the late 1940s, and the land, along with land that had been used as a drive-in theatre, became one of New Orleans' prime post-war real estate developments.



NAVY CALL NDF



TRANSMITTERS
Marconi Drive and Robert E. Lee Blvd.

**U.S. NAVAL RESERVE
EIGHTH NAVAL DISTRICT
MASTER CONTROL STATION**



847 Federal Bldg. New Orleans, La.

Another familiar site to those who frequented the New Orleans Lakefront prior to 1960, was the U.S. Naval Reserve radio station W5USN which was located along the eastern bank of the Orleans Outfall Canal at the intersection of Robert E. Lee Boulevard and Marconi Drive.. During the mid-1950's levee upgrade, the station was moved to the site of the former Camp Leroy Johnson, where it remained until it was decommissioned in the 1990's. Marconi Drive received it's name primarily because it was the site of several radio transmitting plants including the powerful United Fruit Company ship-to-shore station which was located on the western side of Marconi Drive at Navarre Street.

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Golden Boy

Rich in the stuff of
humanity...Clinging
to emotional nerve
...A sensational story
of tragic conflict...

BARBARA STANWYCK ADOLPH MEX JOO HOLDEN

A Columbia Picture



The Lakeshore Drive-In Theater, one of New Orleans' first drive-in theaters, was located at the corner of Canal Boulevard and Robert E. Lee. It shared that tract of land with the Legarde Military Hospital. A concrete monument, shown in the photo below, replaced the original Art-Deco gate which formed the theater's entrance. The present marker, only one of which is standing, is a much less elaborate representation of the original Lake Vista subdivision marker designed by artist Enrique Alfarez. Lake Vista was begun in 1939, however, the construction of most of the homes was delayed until after the War.



Aerial view of Camp Leroy Johnson which occupied land along the New Orleans Lakefront between Franklin Avenue east toward the Industrial Canal. The base was decommissioned in 1964 and the land was turned over to the Orleans Levee Board and the University of New Orleans.



State Library of Louisiana (<http://www.state.lib.la.us>)

AUGUST

15

1945

1945 BRINGS PEACE

As the war was ending, it became increasingly obvious that New Orleans was not yet ready to accept the explosion of population that peace time would bring.

Military facilities were closing, land was being freed for housing and commercial development, and the troops and war-time civilian workers were returning home to seek modern housing and to start new families.

The city needed a massive infusion of money for new modern infrastructure, and a plan to expand and develop new neighborhoods in an astonishingly short time period.



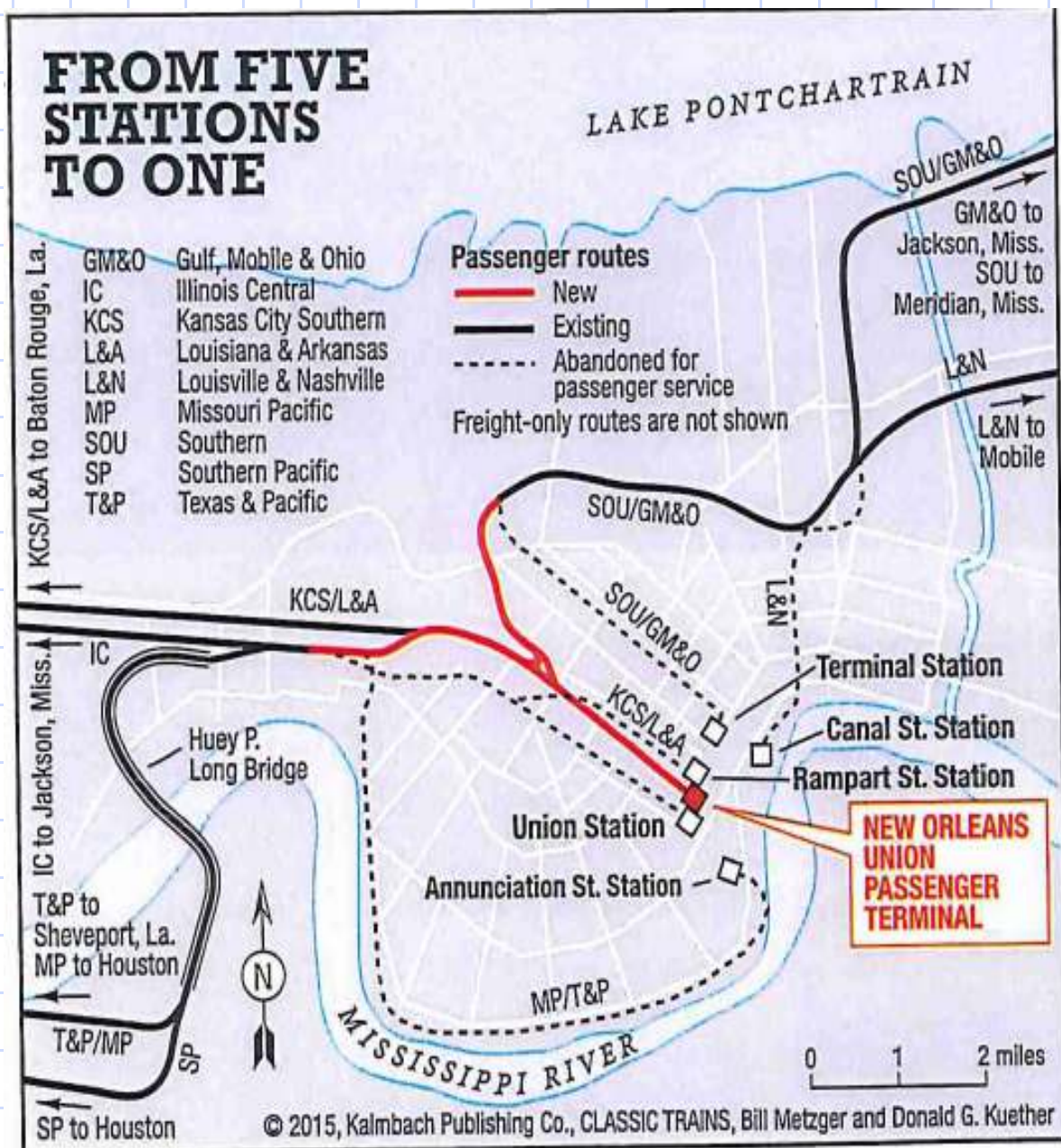
The development of the Lakefront fostered further development in the surrounding area. In addition to the commercial, military and residential growth that resulted from the drainage of the city and the creation of the Lakefront and Lakeshore Drive, land to the south of the lakeshore also saw huge development during and after World War II. The U.S. Department Of Agriculture Regional Research Laboratory was one of the first facilities to speed the growth of the Lake Terrace area. As Paris Avenue and St. Bernard Avenue were extended toward the lake, this growth increased exponentially.

Lakeview, an area which had previously been a cypress swamp, was developed as a result of the need for post-war housing. Destined to become one of New Orleans' most desirable neighborhoods of the 1950s and 60s, Lakeview also saw exponential growth.

Gentilly, and the corridor along Elysian Fields Avenue also saw major development immediately following the War. As the city's former swamps and landfills became inhabitable land, houses and commercial establishments again began to spring up in Gentilly Terrace, an area which began to develop in the late 1920s, but which was delayed primarily by the Great Depression and then World War II. In the post-war era, most of the available real estate in the area was utilized for new homes and businesses.

In the late 1940s, as the city grew in response to the upward spiraling post-war economy. An agreement between the City and the railroads which ran through New Orleans, resulted in the construction of a series of overpasses and underpasses that further promoted street improvements and extension of roadways into previously undeveloped land areas between downtown and the lakefront.

With the decommission and dismantling of LaGarde Hospital, Lake Vista and West Lakeshore developed, and some of New Orleans finest and most desirable post-War homes were constructed in the area between Bayou St. John and West End.



In 1945, the status of railroad track in New Orleans was such that the city was literally divided in half by the main-line track that served the Southern and L&N Railroads running East, and the Missouri Pacific and Southern Pacific Railroads running West.

In addition the Florida Avenue drainage canal paralleled a large section of the tracks, and this provided an additional road block to efficient movement toward the North and the Lake.

In almost every neighborhood, there were unprotected grade crossings serving the major railroads, and the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad.

In order for New Orleans to develop Lakeward, these bottlenecks had to be eliminated along major thoroughfares leading toward the lake such as Elysian Fields Avenue, Orleans Avenue, West End and Pontchartrain Boulevards, and North Broad, Paris and St. Bernard Avenues.

By the start of 1946, New Orleans was poised for a developmental explosion. Military personnel were returning from the war, a new political era was dawning with the election of reform mayor “Chep” Morrison, and land that had been cultivated for development first by the WPA and then by the War effort, now stood as an inviting new frontier for those seeking modern housing. One problem, however, remained to be overcome. That is the state of the infrastructure that would be needed to carry the traffic generated by this new population of New Orleans.



In order to reach Gentilly, Lakeview, of the newer housing neighborhoods in the city, motorists had to pass through a series of “bottle necks” that resulted from crossing the Florida Avenue Canal on one-lane rickety wooden bridges, and from a network of railroad grade crossings featuring an abundance of slow-moving freight trains. Motorists often waited 20 minutes or longer while trains switched cars in the middle of critical grade crossings.



In addition, open drainage canals provided breeding grounds for mosquitoes, snakes and other un-desirable creatures, as well as odors from stagnant water, and narrow gravel and mud roads increased the risk of accidents involving cars running into canals, as well as a number of drowning cases of children playing too close to the unstable banks of these waterways. New Orleans needed an immediate plan to eliminate these deterrents to progress.



Elysian Fields Avenue evolves: 1929 through 1948 opening of the overpass at Florida Avenue





Left: WPA workers complete the layout and shell bed for what would eventually become the traffic circle at the end of Elysian Fields Avenue at the entrance to Pontchartrain Beach.

Prior to the War, the WPA had already started laying out new infrastructure which would make these new neighborhoods accessible.

Right: The final stage of improvements to Elysian Fields Avenue. At the time that the Naval Air Station was closed, the drainage canal, which had originally been part of Bayou Sauvage, is piped underground in order to permit the eventual development of Lake Oaks. While the roads had been planned, the completion of wide concrete paved thoroughfares had been delayed because of the war.





Near to the end of World War II, land along Elysian Fields Avenue still experienced periodic methane fires as a result of decomposition of coffee grounds which had been used to fill the land. In order to prepare for the advent of housing on this land, the City was required to construct a Gentilly fire station on Elysian Fields at the lake side of Gentilly Road. An identical station was also constructed on Harrison Avenue across from the newly constructed Lakeview Theater.

Periodic underground burns along Elysian Fields Avenue were still being experienced as late as 1947.

As late as the early 1950s, houses along Elysian Fields Avenue, between Gentilly Boulevard and the present Filmore Avenue, had their addresses listed on Western Street rather than Elysian Fields. When Gentilly Terrace was laid out in the early 1900s, Elysian Fields Avenue did not exist, and the land was at that time the road bed for the Pontchartrain Railroad. Because of that, Gentilly Terrace boundaries were set as ending at Western Street on the west side of the tract. As Elysian Fields became the main thoroughfare at the end of World War II, the Gentilly Terrace Improvement Association bitterly fought against recognition of Elysian Fields as the west boundary. By 1955, the US Post Office had begun delivering mail on Elysian Fields, and the city began recognition of the Elysian Fields municipal addresses to identify houses along the corridor.

The DeMajo home at 4639 Elysian Fields Avenue, which was built in late 1945, was officially listed as having the address 4638 Western Street at the time it was built. In 1953, tax and postal records were adjusted, and the owner was instructed to post the address marker 4639 on the front of the house, and to provide a mailbox at the Elysian Fields Avenue front door location.



A view of post-war homes built in Gentilly Terrace. At right, the DeMajo home, at 4639 Elysian Fields Avenue, was the first post-war house to be built on the stretch of Elysian Fields Avenue between Gentilly Road and the lake. Photo on the left shows homes directly across Western Street, which was the main street up until the 1950s.





During the war, this wooden chapel, located next to the Naval Air Station on Elysian Fields, became a mission parish known as St. Raphael The Archangel. After the war, a new temporary church was built on Prentiss Avenue just off the corner of Elysian Fields. Within five years, the parish grew to the point where a new church was needed.





In 1945, the Fox Theater opened as one of the first businesses to locate on Elysian Fields beyond Gentilly Road. It was followed, four years later, by the Pitt.

Other notable businesses that located on early post-war Elysian Fields, included George's Plumbing, Lawrence's Bakery, Cabibi's Pharmacy, and Lala's Hardware Store

In the 1960s, Steer-Inn Restaurant was a fixture along Elysian Fields Avenue, just before Pontchartrain Beach.



THE ROLE OF THE RAILROADS IN THE EXPANSION OF THE LAKEFRONT.

Because of the fact that the main line tracks of several major railroads extended outward from downtown, New Orleans was traversed by rail road tracks and rail crossings at many major intersections that were in the path of northward development. The Southern Pacific's path out along Canal Boulevard and over to the New Basin Canal and westward into Jefferson Parish, the Southern's route directly through Gentilly and out over the lake toward the East, and the L&N's path out Elysian Fields Avenue to Florida Avenue and onward across the Industrial Canal, meant that the city was traversed by railroad track and rail crossings. As the city began development, first with the War, and then with post-war housing and formation of new neighborhoods, the old grade crossings became a hindrance to development and the expeditious movement of traffic.

In the late 1940's the election of a new progressive city administration, under Mayor DeLesseps "Chep" Morrison, made possible a deal between the railroads and the city whereby the railroads' passenger operations would be consolidated at one train depot. Along with this consolidation, the plan included replacement of several grade crossings, along developing strategic thoroughfares, with modern underpasses and overpasses. The railroads agreed to pick up a large portion of the cost of these projects, and the city, in turn, agreed to widen and resurface streets, and to extend several roadways, such as Paris Avenue, St. Bernard Avenue, Canal Boulevard, and Wisner Boulevard out to the newly developing lakeshore. This easing of traffic congestion and bottlenecking, caused by the railroad crossings and previously inadequate bridges over drainage canals, made real estate along the lakefront, and the streets leading to the lake, much more desirable. That, coupled with ever increasing improvement in drainage, set the stage for further development, across the entire city on land north of Florida Avenue. In the period between the end of World War-II and the mid-1950's, the city saw an unprecedented expansion of businesses and residential real estate into areas which were not previously considered as fit for construction of new homes.



These photos serve to indicate the scale with which New Orleans' neighborhoods, north of Florida Avenue, were transformed in the post-war years. Rail crossings were eliminated, tracks were removed, mosquito and disease breeding drainage ditches were replaced with modern sub-surface drainage, all of which contributed to the outward expansion of New Orleans in the direction of the lake.



Bottle neck rail grade crossings gave way to modern underpasses and overpasses in the 1950's.

The city's multitude of individual railroad stations, along with their associated networks of trackage winding through the streets of New Orleans, were removed and consolidated into a single facility with minimum trackage.



The opening of Union Passenger Terminal allowed all inbound and outbound trains to pass through the city on one set of tracks, thereby allowing the construction of underpasses on all major thoroughfares traversed by the railroad.





At the same time, water crossings along the New Basin Canal were eliminated with the late 1940s closing of the canal. A few years thereafter, the construction of the Pontchartrain Expressway had effectively shortened travel between the lakefront and downtown from an hour to a matter of minutes, and construction of an Interstate highway through New Orleans would soon be in the works.

Just a few years after the closing of the New Basin, the former West End Country Club and the Woodland Club, which originally were built on the old Pontchartrain Shell Road, were demolished to make way for the I-610 bypass





New neighborhoods and businesses began to spring up along the newly created Robert E. Lee, Harrison and West End Boulevard corridors. The entire community known as Lakeview, developed in the short span between the end of World War-II and the mid-1950s. Elysian Fields Avenue similarly saw development from an area of goat farms in the 1930's to a fully developed residential thoroughfare by the mid 1950's. Much of that growth is attributable to the creation of the Lakefront, first as an area of military activity, and later as a desirable residential community.



1940s development in Lakeview saw many new Harrison Avenue projects. The Lakeview and Beacon Theaters, and St. Dominick's Catholic Church, were early anchors for construction in the area along Harrison Avenue between Argonne and Canal Boulevard. Just as was the case with St. Raphael's Church in Gentilly, St. Dominic's parish grew with new post-war development of Lakeview. The mid-1940 church shown here, was replaced with a much larger church less than 15 years later.



Some sense of the drastic development that occurred in New Orleans between 1946 and 1960 can be seen in these photos of Harrison Avenue near Canal Boulevard. The photo at left was taken in the mid 1940's and the photo at right dates to the early 1960s. As new residential areas toward Lake Pontchartrain were developed, many key streets in New Orleans underwent this same kind of revitalization during that period of exponential growth.

Popular eating establishments in the early post War years were Rockery Inn on Canal Boulevard and Adams Avenue (now Robert E. Lee), and L'enfants Restaurant, another Lakeview dining and entertainment landmark on Canal Boulevard.

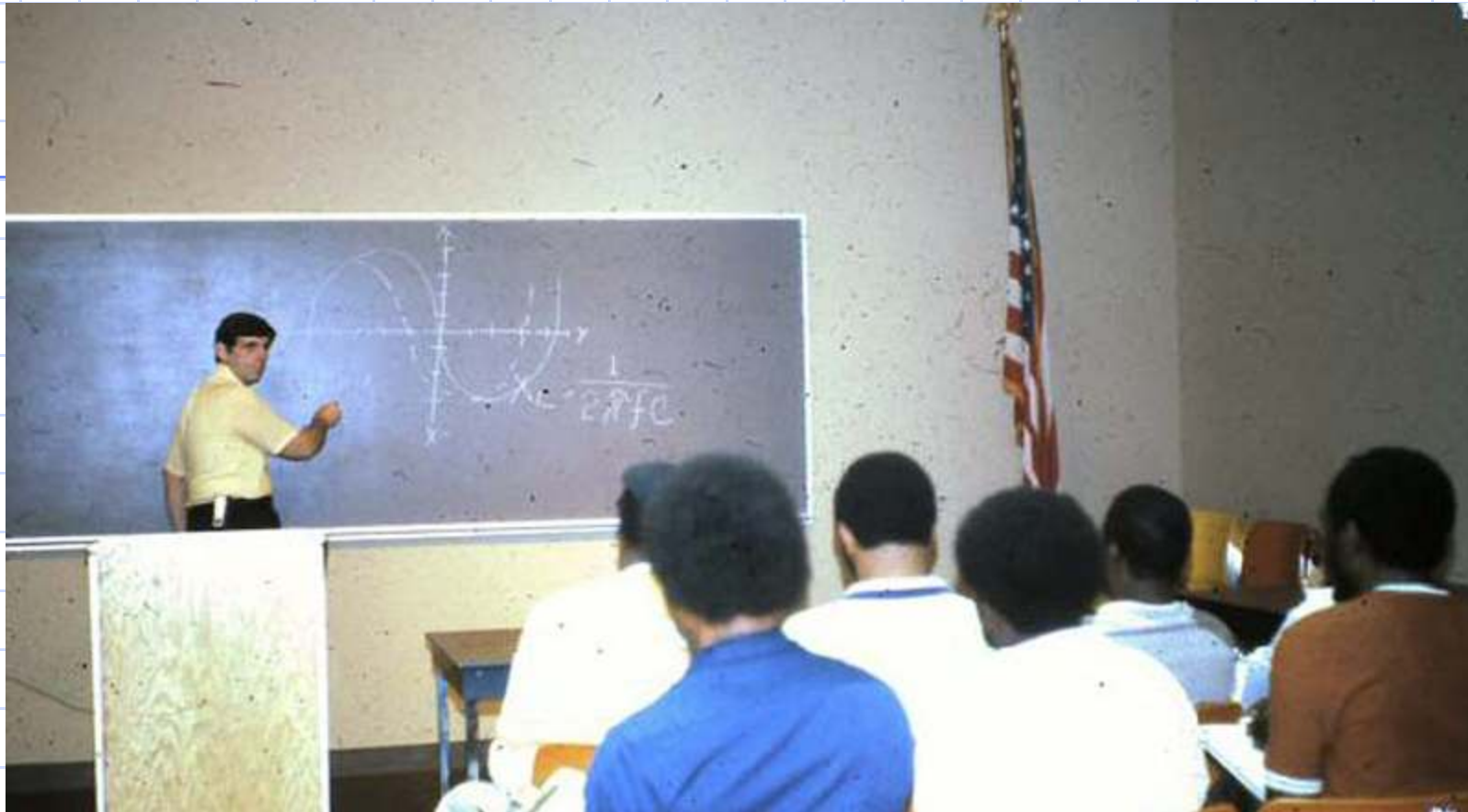


In 1962, the City opened the New Orleans Civil Defense Shelter. Underground bomb shelters were popular around the country at that point in time, and it was thought that an underground shelter in New Orleans's water logged soil was impossible. As a compromise, this two story concrete underground building, proved that a water-tight structure could be built underground in New Orleans. The shelter sits on the site of the former New Basin Canal, just before Robert E. Lee Boulevard and West End.





These are some photos of the New Orleans Civil Defense Shelter in the heyday of its operation.



1982 photograph of R.E.T.A. electrical engineering class being taught in the conference room of the Civil Defense Shelter on West End Blvd. Instructor is John DeMajo



And these shots were taken around 2011 after the building had been abandoned for 20 years.

EPILOGUE

For those of us who were fortunate enough to have grown up in the Post-War era in New Orleans, we all share many fond memories of life along the New Orleans Lakefront. The profusion of websites attesting to the quality of life in New Orleans in the 1950's through the 1970's, attests to this premise.

Unfortunately, the land outside of New Orleans French Quarter is, and will always remain below sea level. In their wisdom, our city fathers saw fit to enable the development of New Orleans outlining areas through the use of levees and the artificial mechanical means of draining land that had remained as a natural swamp for thousands of years. While we all became complacent and secure in our ignorance of Nature and the ability of these man made means of allowing land utilization, Hurricane Katrina tested our resources. Our security was swiftly put into perspective as these man made means all failed during Hurricane Katrina, and for months New Orleans reverted to her former status as a below sea level swamp.



In the wake of Katrina's destruction, much of the West End, Gentilly, Lakeview and lakefront area were destroyed by wind and flood water that resulted from a number of levee failures. New Orleans has recovered somewhat in the years following the 2005 storm, but New Orleans as we, the generations of the 40's 50's and 60's, knew it, is gone never to return. Today, it is home to a new generation of pioneers and young seekers of bargain real estate, oblivious to the dangers that still exist in a city that resides in a virtual saucer, and which requires vulnerable machinery to drain away even the smallest collection of rain water. Whether this new generation of residents can sustain their future against the forces of Nature, remains to be seen. But for those of us who spent our childhood and young adult years enjoying the long-gone pleasures of Pontchartrain Beach, the neighborhood theatres, and restaurants like Steer-Inn, Rockery Inn and L'enfants, our New Orleans is gone forever. We do, however, have the satisfaction of being able to boast that we lived in New Orleans during its greatest developmental period in history.



New Orleans Lakefront- An Engineering Study, was produced by The Museum Of Yesterday under the direction of John DeMajo.

The following sources were used or consulted in the assembly of this presentation:

A History Of Louisiana- Charles Gayarre'

New Orleans in the 1900s-1950s by Mary Lou Widmer

The archives of the New Orleans Times Picayune

The LOUIS Digital Library, including the archives of the New Orleans Public Library and the University of New Orleans.

The writings of Leonard V. Huber, New Orleans historian

The writings of Roger Baudier, KSG, late historian for the Archdiocese of New Orleans

The photo collection of the DeMajo Family Foundation

And numerous documents and photographs supplied from the personal notes and memoirs of John DeMajo, as well as persons who contributed to the various historic web sites operated by the DeMajo Family Foundation.

Rene Brunet and Jack Stewart's "There's One In Your Neighborhood" book of New Orleans movie houses.

Notes and personal recollections of Paul Yaccich and Charlie Matkin, former WDSU-TV personnel.

Peggy Scott Laborde's series of books and videos detailing New Orleans history.