

New Orleans—"The City That Care Forgot" and Other Nicknames

A Preliminary Investigation

People have been calling New Orleans "The City that Care Forgot" since at least 1938, when the sobriquet appeared in the *New Orleans City Guide* produced by the Federal Writers' Project. That volume suggests that New Orleans is "traditionally the city that care forgot," *id.* at xx, but does not say who coined the term, or when. A search^[1] of guide books and other works describing New Orleans published from 1879 through 1936^[2] did not reveal an earlier use of the term. But, the search did show that writers have used lots of other terms for New Orleans.

In one writer's estimation, New Orleans was the "Queen City of the Inland Sea." ^[3] Many authors noted "her famous sobriquet—that of 'The Crescent City,'" ^[4] or her "appellation of the 'Crescent City.'" ^[5] Another called her "among cities, the most feminine of women . . ." ^[6] Somewhat prosaically, one group called New Orleans "'The Gateway to the Mississippi Valley.'" ^[7]

Some early authors might have avoided the "City that Care Forgot" formulation even if they knew of it in light of their purposes, usually advertising New Orleans as a good place for business and industry. Good burghers might have felt uncomfortable with such a louche image. Nonetheless, things had loosened up a bit by the turn of the century, at least for journalists. In 1902, *The Picayune* published its *New Orleans, Louisiana, The Crescent City*, a volume intended *inter alia* "to acquaint the world with the city's attractions as a place of residence . . ." *id.* at 3. The authors were not shy about mentioning the city's "Latin gayety and hey-dey" and its lack of "sumptuary restrictions." *id.* at 14. Still, in the end they could come up with nothing more catchy than: "New Orleans is the liveliest and freest city in the Land." *id.* The *Picayune* also averred, again in quotes, that "'There Is But One New Orleans.'" *id.* at 1. Doubtless true, then as now, but what about forgetting care? The omission of the term from this volume suggests that it had not found wide use by 1902.

Other terms continued to crop up in guide books. New Orleans had already become "America's Most Interesting City" by the 1920's. ^[8] Someone else at that time thought of calling New Orleans "The Paris of America." ^[9] This same person called the city "'The Winter Capital of America.'" ^[10] Another author thought New Orleans "Debonair." ^[11] The editors of *The New Orleanian* referred to "the city where cookery is king." ^[12] And of course there's "The Big Easy," a term that according to one local historian derived from an early jazz music hall, but did not come into wide use until the 1970s. ^[13]

Still, no printed mention of the city that care forgot. Even a leading history of Mardi Gras from the 1930s omits the term, noting that "New Orleans had a gay name, and had earned it," and adds that the city was for a time "[a]ccounted the most wicked city of its day," ^[14] but makes no reference to the city that care forgot.

As noted above, the Federal Writers' Project authors also of the 1930s thought New Orleans was "traditionally" known as the City that Care Forgot, but they didn't say when the tradition started. Similarly, in 1953, another leading chronicler noted that New Orleans "earned the title of 'The City that care forgot,'" ^[15] but he didn't say when she earned it. At this writing, the derivation of the term remains obscure.

Even so, the City that Care Forgot is inspiring yet other newer and more colorful sobriquets. To pick but one: as t-shirts that began appearing during a still sweltering summer in the late 1990s will attest, New Orleans also qualifies as The City that Air Forgot.

^[1] Most of the works consulted have introductions setting out the purposes of the publication and giving some background information about the city. The author of this essay perused them with an eye toward discovering use of the term.

^[2] In addition to works otherwise mentioned, the following works were consulted.

Visitors' Guide to New Orleans, New Orleans, Waldo, ca. 1879

Historical Sketch Book Guide to New Orleans Illustrated, Exposition Edition, New York, Will H. Coleman, 1885

Hansell's Illustrated New Orleans Guide, New Orleans, F.F. Hansell & Bro., 1893

Strangers' Guide to Mardi Gras, New Orleans, H.H. Solomon, 1893

The Picayune's Guide to New Orleans, New Orleans, 1908, 1910, 1924

New Orleans: What to See and How to See It, New Orleans, New Orleans Progressive Union, 1909

The Double Dealer, v.1 no. 1, January 1921; v.1, no. 7, July 1921

Guy Manners, *Atmosphere*, New Orleans, Rob't H. True Co., 1922

New Orleans, "The Crescent City," New Orleans, Southern Pacific Lines, 1924

Stephen Curtis West, *French Quarter Guide*, New Orleans, 1929

City Guide and Commercial Directory, New Orleans, S.E. Surgi, 1927?

W.G. MacFarlane, *The Charm of New Orleans*, Chicago, American Autochrome Co., 1928

New Orleans To-Day, New Orleans, Wetzel, 1938

Mardi Gras Souvenir Program 1938, New Orleans, Denis Flynn, 1938

- [3] Jno. E. Land, *Pen Illustrations of New Orleans*, New Orleans, Jno. E. Land (1882)
- [4] *New Orleans, "The Crescent City,"* New Orleans, Southern Pacific Lines, 1922?
- [5] *Souvenir of New Orleans*, New Orleans, F.M. Kirby & Co., 19??.
- [6] Grace King, *New Orleans, The Place and the People*, New York, MacMillan (1915), p. xvi.
- [7] *New Orleans, Louisiana, Metropolis of the South, Gateway to the Mississippi Valley*, New Orleans, Press Club, 1916.
- [8] *New Orleans, America's Most Interesting City*, New Orleans, Federation of Clubs, 1928; see also *The New Orleanian*, Sept. 20, 1930, at 18; *New Orleans City Directory*, New Orleans, Soards Directory Co., 1928
- [9] *New Orleans, The Paris of America*, New Orleans, The St. Charles Hotel, 1927
- [10] *id.* at 5; the Gulf Coast was the "Riviera of America." *id.*
- [11] T.A. Walters, *Historic-Old New Orleans, La.*, Milwaukee, Wis., E.C. Kropp Co, 1931
- [12] *The New Orleanian*, Sept. 6, 1931, at 14.
- [13] New Orleans Know-it-All by Blake Pontchartrain, *Gambit*, Aug. 9-15, 1998 at 2; see also "Big Easy: A nickname from the Dawn of Jazz," N.O. *Times-Picayune*, Aug. 27, 1987 at A1.
- [14] Perry Young, *The Mystic Krewe, Chronicles of Comus and His Kin*, New Orleans, 1931, at 8; see also Herbert Asbury, *The French Quarter*, 1936, reprinted St. Simons Island GA, Mockingbird Press, 198, at 264 (New Orleans famed as "the gayest place on the North American continent . . .").
- [15] Edward Larocque Tinker, *Creole City The Past and its People* New York, Longmans, Green & Co. 1953, p. 347.

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