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## REX FACT SHEET

MARDI GRAS-FEBRUARY 28, 2017

### 2017 Quick Facts

**Mardi Gras 2016: February 28, 2017**

**Rex Parade: Mardi Gras Morning, 10AM, 27 Floats, 450 Riders, 33 Mounted Lieutenants**

**Rex Parade Route: Traditional route, beginning at South Claiborne and Napoleon Avenue**

**Rex Parade Theme:** The 2017 theme, "Carnival Fêtes and Feasts," highlights the varied and colorful ways Carnival is celebrated around the world. The Ancients celebrated the transition from Winter's darkness to Spring's light and promise with feasts and festivals, and with the advent of Christianity Shrove Tuesday marked the last exuberant celebration before Lent's solemnity and fasting began on Ash Wednesday. These diverse and colorful traditions inspire the theme and float designs of the 2017 Rex Procession.

**Rex Arrival and Lundi Gras Festivities:** Spanish Plaza, 6PM, Monday, February 27, 2017: This year marks the 30th Anniversary of the Lundi Gras celebration, and Rex will again arrive by special train.

**2017 Rex Proclamation:** The 2017 Rex Proclamation, created by noted New Orleans artist Cleland Powell, illustrates the "Carnival Fêtes and Feasts," theme with images illustrating Carnival celebrations around the world, but particularly those in Louisiana.

**Rex Website: [www.rexorganization.com](http://www.rexorganization.com)**

## About Rex

### Founding, Official Name and Motto

Rex first ruled over Carnival in New Orleans in 1872. The official name of the Rex Organization is the "School of Design," but it is generally referred to as Rex or the Rex Organization. "Pro Bono Publico," the Rex motto, means "for the public good" and appears on all official Rex documents. Rex places great emphasis on this motto and uses it as a basis for all of its policies, activities, and community initiatives, including the work of the Pro Bono Publico Foundation, formed in 2006.

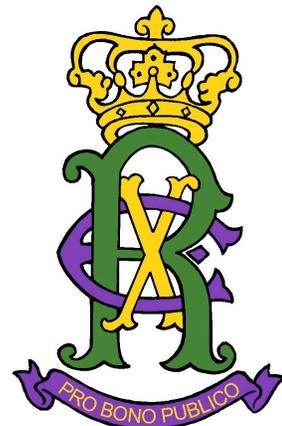
### Rex, The King of Carnival

One of the enduring legacies of Rex founders is the annual selection of a King to rule not only over the Rex Parade and Ball but also to preside over the entire New Orleans Carnival celebration. His Queen is called the "Queen of Carnival," not the "Queen of Rex." "Rex" is the Latin word for "King," so Rex is not called "King Rex," as that would be redundant. He is also referred to as the "Monarch of Merriment."

### Why was Rex Founded?

The first Rex parade in 1872 coincided with the visit of Russia's Grand Duke Alexis, and many popular accounts suggest that the Rex Organization was formed for the purpose of honoring him with a parade. The Grand Duke did, in fact, review the first Rex parade from the official stands at Gallier Hall.

Contemporary research tells us, however, that Rex founders had much more in mind. They saw opportunity in creating an exciting daytime parade, replacing disorderly street celebrations on Mardi Gras day. They hoped this spectacle would attract visitors to New Orleans, building good will and helping to re-establish the strong commercial and cultural connections their city had long enjoyed. Their efforts were successful by any measure, and within a few years New Orleans and its Carnival became a favored destination for travelers.



## Pro Bono Publico Foundation



Rex's founders intended not only to put on a beautiful parade, but also to help their beloved city recover during the difficult years of Reconstruction. The motto they selected, "Pro Bono Publico," ("for the public good"), captured that intent. Rex members returning to New Orleans after Katrina's floods in 2005 saw similar needs, and great opportunities. The Pro Bono Publico Foundation was created to raise funds, primarily from Rex members, and to make grants to support the city's rebuilding efforts. In 2015 and 2016 the Foundation awarded grants totaling \$1,000,000 each year, primarily to support the renewal of New Orleans' public schools. Grants made since 2006 total more than \$5.4 million. More information, and profiles of grant recipients, can be found on the Foundation's website: [www.probonopublicofoundation.org](http://www.probonopublicofoundation.org).

## The Rex Parade

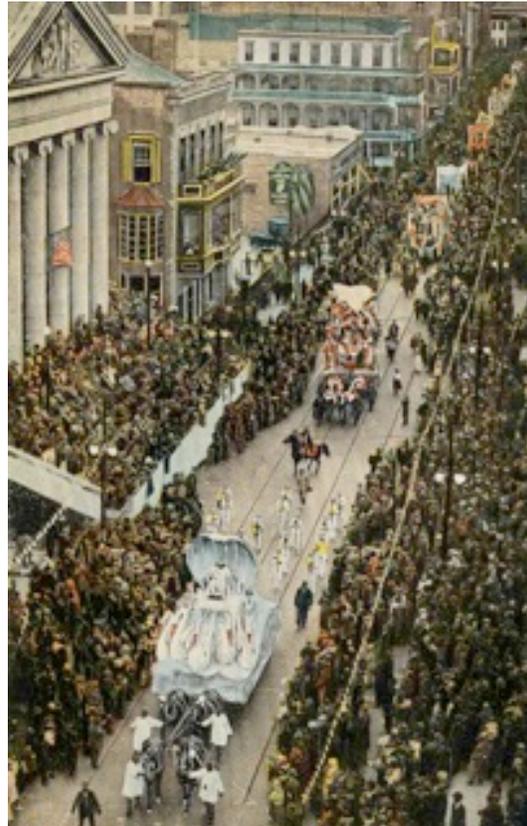
### First Parade

Rex first paraded on Mardi Gras, February 13, 1872. By today's standards it was an unorganized affair several miles long, with Rex leading the parade dressed in a borrowed costume and riding on a bay horse rather than a float. Rex was followed by a live boeuf gras (pronounced *buff-grah*), or fatted ox, the oldest symbol of Carnival. Hundreds of decorated wagons and thousands of revelers joined the parade. Russia's Grand Duke Alexis, visiting New Orleans at the time, joined the Mayor at City Hall to view the parade, becoming Carnival's first (but not last) visiting royalty or celebrity guest.

### Number of Parades

The 2017 Rex parade on Mardi Gras, February 28th, is the 136th parade in Rex's 145-year history. Rex did not parade in these years:

- 1875 (political unrest in the city)
- 1918-19 (World War I)
- 1933 (inclement weather)
- 1942-45 (World War II)
- 1951 (Korean War)
- 1979 (Police Strike)



### The King's Float

Rex rode on horseback until 1876, and in the early years portrayed a different King from ages past. Since 1877 Rex leads his parade atop the King's float, his gilded rolling throne. Other permanent Rex floats include the Jester, Boeuf Gras, the enchanted carriage-like Title Float, Streetcar Named Desire, Royal Barge, the Royal Bandwagon and the Butterfly King, an animated float added in 2012.

### Parade Themes

For the first several years, Rex parades consisted of loosely organized marching groups and decorated wagons, but did not illustrate a theme. That changed in 1877 when Rex floats were designed as a "rolling tableaux" to illustrate the theme "The Military Progress of the World." That tradition continues to this day, with themes selected years in advance. Elegantly designed and decorated floats illustrate a theme drawn from the worlds of literature, history, mythology, and art. The 2017 Rex theme, "Carnival Fêtes and Feasts," illustrates Carnival celebrations around the world, providing rich inspiration for the designs of the twenty theme floats of the 2017 Rex parade.

## Captain and Lieutenants

The year-round leader of the Rex Organization is the Captain, whose identity, by tradition, is not revealed. He is a familiar sight at the head of the Rex Parade astride his white horse. Rex Lieutenants, costumed in purple, green and gold velvet costumes, ride in groups of three throughout the parade.

## Dobloons and Other Throws



In the early decades of Carnival, visitors did not expect anything other than to witness a beautiful parade. That changed in 1923 when Rex riders threw beads and other trinkets to the crowd, beginning a tradition that has added a whole new dimension to Carnival parades.

In 1960, Rex introduced the doubloon, a silver dollar-sized anodized aluminum coin bearing the image of Rex, the King of Carnival, on one side and an illustration of the parade theme on the reverse. The Rex doubloon was an immediate and overwhelming success--more than 25 million doubloons have been thrown to happy crowds.

In 2013 Rex introduced a new throw: for the first time riders threw unique beads bearing the likeness of the figures on their individual floats. Look for colorful figures corresponding to twenty individual float designs. Rex members will also throw close to one million doubloons this year, as well as countless Rex beads, cups and other throws.

## Official Reviewing Stand

The Queen of Carnival and her royal court of eight Maids and eight Dukes await the float bearing the King of Carnival and two youthful Pages on reviewing stands erected by the Hotel InterContinental on St. Charles Avenue. Here old traditions are honored, as Rex offers a special toast to the Queen of Carnival and recognizes the Rex Court. Until 1992, the Queen of Carnival and the Rex Court viewed the parade from stands erected outside the Boston Club on Canal Street. Following changes in municipal ordinances affecting both Carnival organizations and private clubs, the Hotel InterContinental invited the Rex Court to view the Rex parade from its stands.

## Rex Parade Innovations and Milestones

Over the decades Rex's leadership role as King of Carnival has led to many changes in parades as well as innovations that have become part of the entire Carnival celebration.

- 1950 Tractors replace mules to pull Rex floats
- 1958 Rex floats are animated with moving figures
- 1959 Boeuf Gras returns to the Rex Parade
- 1960 First Rex Doubloon minted
- 1964 Rex Bandwagon float added
- 1969 His Majesty's Calliope float added
- 1971 Rex Centennial—restaging of Rex's arrival by boat at the foot of Canal Street on the Monday before Carnival
- 1987 Lundi Gras Celebration initiated, including Rex's arrival by boat on the day before Carnival, now at the foot of Poydras Street.
- 1980 Rex Proclamation returns
- 2002 Rex Parade Bulletin returns
- 2003 "Rex in the Classroom" Education Project launched
- 2006 Pro Bono Publico Foundation founded
- 2012 Butterfly King float added to parade lineup, first new permanent float in decades
- 2013 Float-specific beads introduced

## The Rex Ball

Rex's Grand Ball is held annually on Mardi Gras evening. A private event for Rex members and invited guests, it is broadcast live by local PBS affiliate WYES-TV. Underscoring the symbolic and traditional ties between Rex and the United States military, the ball begins with a stirring performance by the Marine Forces Reserve Band, followed by the presentation of Rex decorations to visiting U.S. military officials and other dignitaries. The highlight of the ball is the presentation and procession of Rex, his Queen and their Court, including eight Dukes, eight Maids and two Pages. At 10:00 PM, the ball ends in time for the Rex entourage to join Comus for the traditional "Meeting of the Courts," the official culmination of Mardi Gras each year.

## Rex Customs and Traditions

### Boeuf Gras

The Boeuf Gras, symbol of the last meat to be eaten before Lent, has been a symbol of Carnival (from the Latin "farewell to flesh") since the Middle Ages. A live Boeuf Gras was part of every Rex Parade from 1872 through 1900, when it was retired. In 1959, the Boeuf Gras reclaimed its place as a Mardi Gras icon, returning to the parade as a papier mache' figure surrounded by white-coated butchers.



### Rex Flag and Colors

Rex founders chose the colors green, gold and purple for the standard of the King of Carnival, and those colors have become, by tradition, the colors of the entire New Orleans Carnival. While many explanations for this choice have been offered, the design of the flag conforms to the rules of heraldry, appropriate for the "Monarch of Merriment." The 1892 Rex parade, "Symbolism of Colors" suggested other meanings: purple for justice, green for faith, and gold for power. The official Rex flag has a gold bar from upper left to lower right, in the center of which is a crown with the letter "R" superimposed. The portion above the gold band is green; the band below is purple. The official flag may be flown by former Kings and Queens of Carnival during the Mardi Gras season, and the year of their reigns appears in the banner's corner.



### Rex Anthem: "If Ever I Cease to Love"

This charming song was popular at the time of Rex's founding, and each band performed it as they passed the official reviewing stand at Gallier Hall. Lydia Thompson, a famous British singer, was visiting New Orleans at the time and often sang the song. She was also rumored to have enjoyed a romantic relationship with another Carnival visitor, the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia. While it now seems clear they did not enjoy each other's company in 1872, they, and the song, will always be associated in Carnival lore.

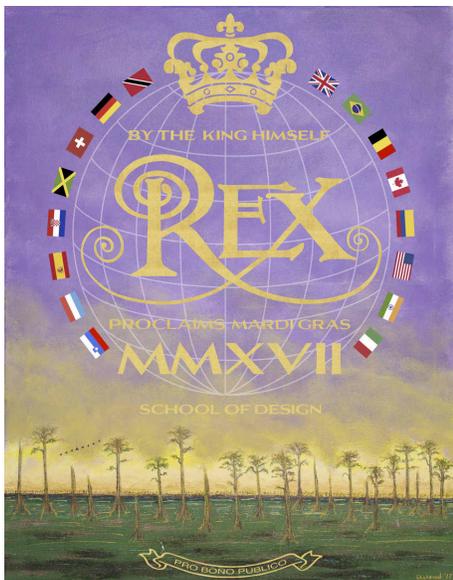
"If Ever I Cease to Love" became the anthem both of Rex and of Carnival in New Orleans. "If Ever I Cease to Love" accompanies Rex on the parade route, and, arranged as a Grand March, is played as Rex and the Queen of Carnival lead the Rex Court into the Grand Ball.

## Lundi Gras

Until WWI, Rex arrived in his "Capital City," usually by river, on Monday, the day before Carnival, to be greeted by enthusiastic crowds gathered at the foot of Canal Street. Rex then led a parade to City Hall, where he proclaimed Carnival and received the key to the city. In 1971 the Rex Arrival was recreated one time in honor of the Rex Centennial.

Rex's Monday Arrival is again a major celebration, called Lundi Gras. In 1987, Mardi Gras historian Errol Laborde joined with Rex officials, business leaders and tourism officials to create a new Monday Arrival celebration, and named it after the French description of the day before Carnival. Rex arrives at 6:00 PM, greets the Mayor and other officials, receives the key to the city, and proclaims Carnival to the crowds of revelers gathered near the Riverwalk Marketplace and Spanish Plaza at the foot of Poydras Street. 2017 marks the 29<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of this special celebration.

In 2015 Rex revived an old tradition and arrived in a festively decorated antique Public Belt Railway passenger coach. In 2017 Rex will again arrive by train.



## Rex Art, Publications, and Websites

### Rex Proclamations

Historically Rex has issued a proclamation declaring the date of the Carnival celebration and commanding his subjects to gather and join in the festivities. When Rex began his reign over Mardi Gras in 1872, New Orleans was struggling through the years of Reconstruction, and civic leaders wanted to attract more visitors to the city. Proclamations were posted in train depots around the country, and Mardi Gras in New Orleans became a major tourist destination. Such proclamations were not issued after WWII.

In 1980 the tradition was revived, and each year an artist selected by the Rex Organization creates an original Rex Proclamation art print highlighting the year's theme or one of the iconic images of Rex and Carnival. These sought-after collectors' items may be signed by the artist and by the King of Carnival, and always carry the notation "Rex Proclaims Carnival."

The 2017 Rex Proclamation, created by well-known New Orleans artist Cleland Powell, references Carnival celebrations around the beautiful landscape of Rex's Winter Capital, Louisiana. Information about the Rex Proclamation can be found on the Rex Organization's website.

## Rex Edicts and Invitations

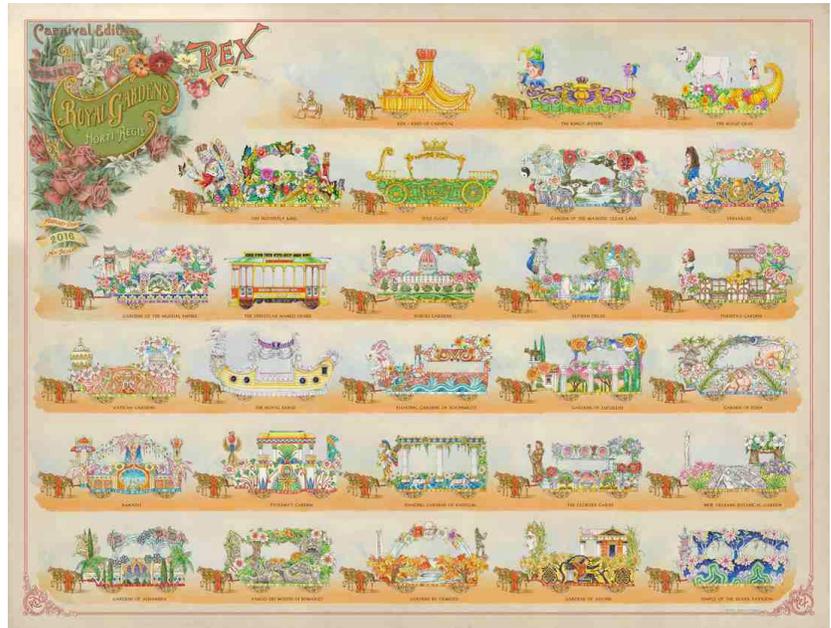
In 1872, one of the first acts of the newly crowned King of Carnival was to issue edicts commanding his subjects to gather in New Orleans to celebrate Mardi Gras, and these edicts were published in newspapers across the nation. Since that time tens of millions of happy visitors have accepted his invitation to visit the Crescent City and participate in Carnival activities far more broad than Rex founders could have imagined.

In past years, at the request of tourism officials, Rex has returned to that early tradition of formally extending his "Royal Invitation," inviting all to gather to New Orleans and join in the "Great Carnival Celebration." This document, incorporating art and text from a century ago, has become part of ceremonies opening the Mardi Gras season and is used by the tourism industry to warmly welcome our Carnival visitors.



## Rex Parade Bulletins

Revived in 2002 from an earlier era, the Rex Bulletin presents the entire colorful Rex float procession of each year's elaborately themed parade. In the past, local newspapers published the bulletin along with a detailed description of the parade theme and each float—these old bulletins have become important resources in documenting early parades. Modern parade bulletins are also given to classrooms participating in the “Rex in the Classroom” education project.



## Rex Website

The official web site for Rex is found at [www.rexorganization.com](http://www.rexorganization.com). The web site contains beautiful photos of the Rex parade and Grand Ball, images of the Rex Proclamation and Bulletin, and general information about the organization, its history and noteworthy traditions. Archives display images of past Rex parades as well as documentation of past Rex Courts. The Rex website has also become a favorite resource for those wanting information about the history of Mardi Gras in New Orleans. As New Orleans' oldest continuing parading organization Rex is in a unique position to describe the early history and traditions of Carnival. A large Education Area is used by hundreds of classrooms worldwide as they participate in “Rex in the Classroom,” the Rex education program. The website displays lesson plans, study materials, and archived student work from past years.



[www.rexorganization.com](http://www.rexorganization.com)



[www.probonopublicofoundation.org](http://www.probonopublicofoundation.org)