



REX FACT SHEET

MARDI GRAS

FEBRUARY 21ST, 2023

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2023 QUICK FACTS

MARDI GRAS 2023

Tuesday, February 21

REX PARADE

- Mardi Gras Morning
10:30 AM CST
- 29 Floats
- 450 Riders
- 33 Mounted Lieutenants

REX PARADE ROUTE

Uptown route, beginning on Napoleon Avenue at S. Claiborne Avenue.



REX 2023 PARADE THEME: "PALIO DI SIENA"

Much as Carnival helps define New Orleans, the centuries-old traditions of the *Palio* help define the ancient Tuscan city of Siena. As they have since the Middle Ages, costumed bareback riders representing each of Siena's *contrade*, or neighborhoods, try to stay on their horses as they race around Siena's town square. The winner claims the *palio*, the victor's banner. These colorful traditions and pageantry inspire the 2023 Rex procession, *Palio di Siena*. Hail Rex!

REX ARRIVAL AND LUNDI GRAS FESTIVITIES

Rex will arrive in his Capital City of New Orleans on Monday, February 20, 2023 at 6:00 PM. This year marks the 36th anniversary of the Lundi Gras celebration. Again this year, Rex will continue his tradition of arriving via United States Coast Guard cutter at Spanish Plaza.

2023 REX PROCLAMATION

The 2023 Rex Proclamation, the work of Henry Casselli, a native New Orleanian and nationally respected artist whose work is in many museums, including the National Portrait Gallery, artistically depicts a horse draped in a Carnival banner of purple, gold, and green. Horses have played a central role in every Rex Parade since its founding in 1872, and the 2023 Rex Parade Theme is the centuries-old horse racing tradition *Palio di Siena*. Please see the [Rex Proclamations](#) section below for more information on this year's edition.

REX WEBSITE

www.rexorganization.com

PRO BONO PUBLICO FOUNDATION WEBSITE

www.probonopublicofoundation.org



FOUNDING, INCORPORATED NAME AND MOTTO

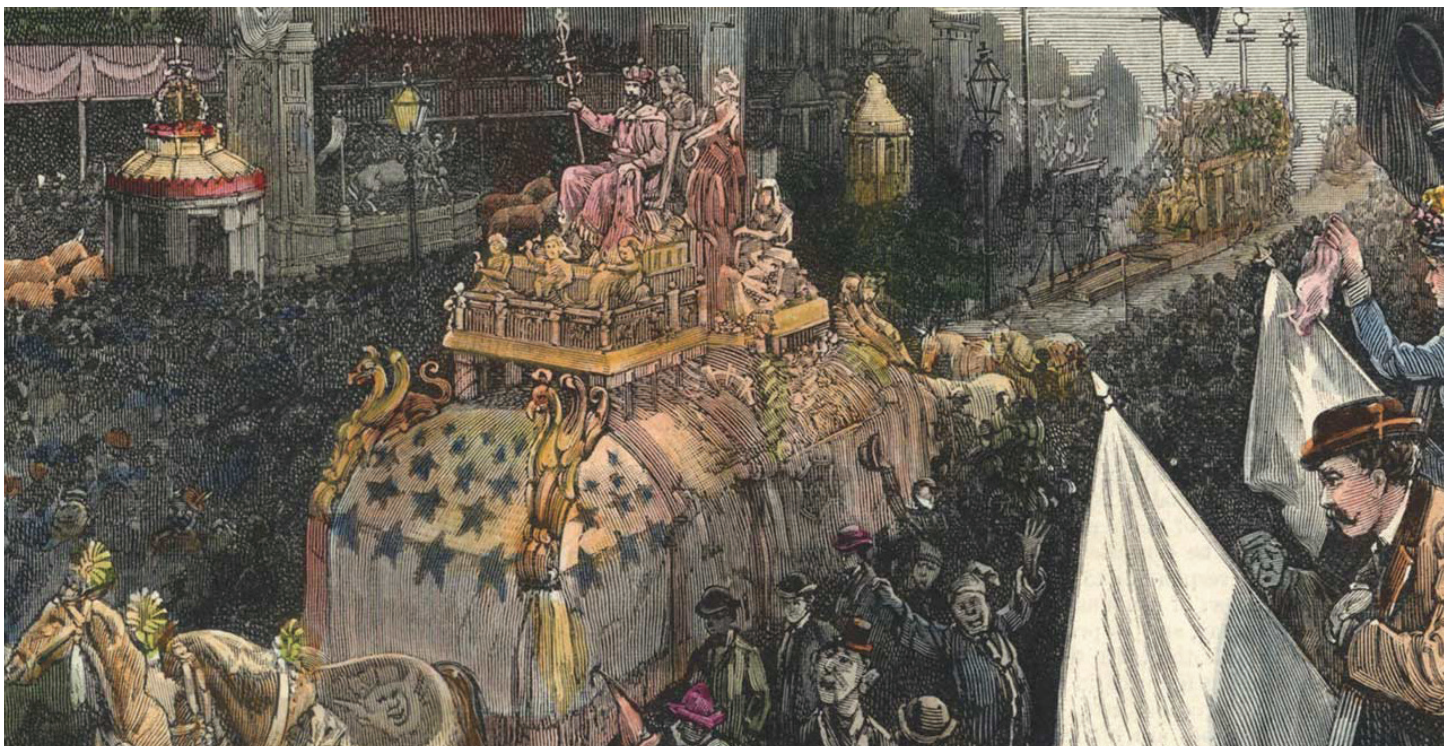
Rex first ruled over Carnival in New Orleans in 1872. The incorporated name of the Rex Organization is the “School of Design,” but it is generally referred to as *Rex* or the *Rex Organization*. “Pro Bono Publico,” the Rex motto, means “for the public good” and appears on all official Rex documents. 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 lives its incorporated name through its focus on education and the arts.

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. He is referred to as the “King of Carnival”; His Queen is called the “Queen of Carnival,” rather than 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 sometimes called 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 a larger civic purpose in mind. They saw an opportunity to help the city by creating an exciting daytime parade, replacing disorderly street celebrations on Mardi Gras day. They also hoped this spectacle would attract visitors to New Orleans, building goodwill and helping to reestablish 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 create 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 to help the city's recovery. 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 2023, the Foundation awarded grants totaling more than \$1,000,000 for the eighth consecutive year, primarily to support the renewal of New Orleans' public schools. Grants made since 2006 total more than \$13 million. More information, and profiles of grant recipients, can be found on the Foundation's website: www.probonopublicofoundation.org.



THE REX PARADE

THE 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 2023 Rex parade on Mardi Gras, February 21st, is the 143rd parade in Rex's 151-year history. Rex did not parade in these years:

- 1875** Political unrest in the city
- 1918-1919** World War I
- 1933** Inclement weather
- 1942-1945** World War II
- 1951** Korean War
- 1979** Police Strike
- 2021** Covid Pandemic

THE KING'S FLOAT AND OTHER ICONIC REX FLOATS

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. Last year, in 2022, 150 years after its founding, Rex introduced a special riderless float bearing the Rex coat of arms to celebrate the organization's special anniversary and longevity. This float, inspired by a similar float in the 1892 Rex parade, *Symbolism of Colors*, will again precede the King's float.

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. Rex's floats are considered rolling works of art. Elegantly designed and decorated floats illustrate a theme drawn from the worlds of culture, history, mythology, literature, nature, geography, and the arts. "Palio di Siena," the 2023 Rex Procession, pays tribute to the centuries-old horseracing tradition *Palio di Siena*.



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, gold, and green velvet costumes, ride in groups of three throughout the parade.

THROWS

In 1960, Rex introduced the doubloon to Mardi Gras. In 2013, Rex introduced a new throw: riders on each float threw unique beads bearing the likeness of the figures on that float. Look for colorful throws corresponding to 26 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.

Beginning in 2020, Rex has made a major commitment to making Carnival more environmentally friendly and sustainable by partnering with ARC of New Orleans to include recycled beads in each rider's parade package. Metal cups, more likely to be saved and used, are also part of Rex's "green" initiative.



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 his 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. For the last 31 years, the Queen of Carnival and the Rex Court have viewed the Rex parade from the Hotel InterContinental's stands, located just steps away from where Rex founders first met at the St. Charles Hotel (now Place St. Charles) to plan the first Rex parade during the weeks prior to Mardi Gras 1872.

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 and restaging of Rex's arrival by boat at the foot of Canal Street on the Monday before Carnival

1980 Rex proclamation returns

1987 Lundi Gras Celebration initiated, including Rex's arrival by boat on the day before Carnival, now at the foot of Poydras Street

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

2015 Rex arrives for Lundi Gras celebration by vintage train car

2020 Royal Artists' first Rex parade "Omens and Auguries"

2020 Rex goes "green" with recycled beads and stainless steel cups

2022 Rex's Sesquicentennial celebrating 150 years since its founding; mule-drawn, riderless 150th Anniversary float and Viareggio walking figures added to parade

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 to the public 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, the Queen of Carnival, and their Court, including eight Dukes, eight Maids, and two Pages. At 10:00 PM the Rex Court departs to visit the Comus ball 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-mâché figure surrounded by white-coated butchers.

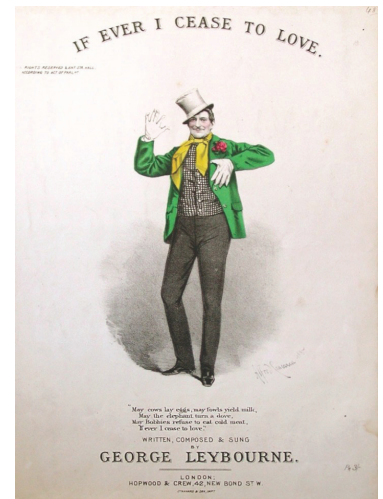
REX FLAG AND COLORS

Rex founders chose the colors purple, gold, and green 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, gold for power, and green for faith. 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.

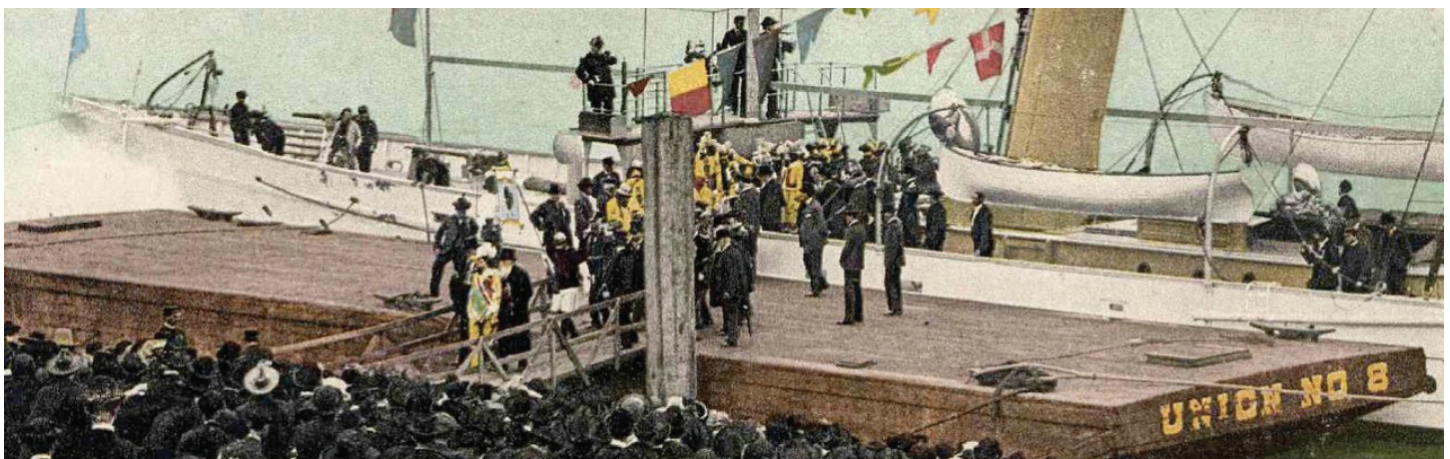


LUNDI GRAS

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 shortened Monday parade to City Hall, where he proclaimed Carnival and received the key to the city from the Mayor. In 1971, the Rex Monday 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. In 2023, Rex will arrive at Spanish Plaza at 6:00 PM, greet the Mayor and other officials, receive the key to the city, and proclaim Carnival to crowds of revelers. This year marks the 36th 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 2022 Rex returned to arriving by river aboard a Coast Guard cutter, Rex’s “Royal Yacht.” Rex will do so again in 2023.



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. 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 always carry the notation "Rex Proclaims Carnival."

Rex's 2023 Proclamation is by New Orleans artist Henry Casselli, a nationally respected New Orleans native whose work includes well-known portraits of Muhammad Ali, President Ronald Reagan, and NASA astronaut John Glenn. At the age of 21, he was deployed to Vietnam, where he served as a United States Marine Corps combat artist. Mr. Casselli is a full Academician of the National Academy of Art, and a Gold Medalist and Honorary Lifetime Member of the American Watercolor Society. His paintings are in many private, public, and museum collections both abroad and in the United States, including the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, DC.

Horses have played a central role in every Rex Parade since its founding in 1872, and the 2023 Rex Parade Theme is the centuries-old horse racing tradition Palio di Siena. Mr. Casselli's 2023 Proclamation artistically depicts a horse draped in a Carnival banner of purple, gold, and green. Mr. Casselli has expressed to the Rex Organization, that, as a native New Orleansian, he feels honored to have been asked to paint this piece.



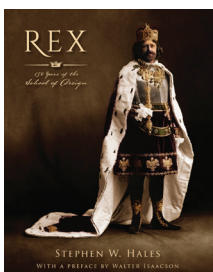
REX EDICTS AND INVITATIONS

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 expansive 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 Edict," inviting all to gather to New Orleans and join in the "Great Carnival Celebration." This document, incorporating art and text from more than 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—150 YEARS OF THE SCHOOL OF DESIGN

Published in 2022 to celebrate the Rex Organization's 150th Anniversary, *Rex—150 Years of the School of Design* provides a decade-by-decade account of a century and a half of colorful Rex history. This limited-edition book, written by Rex Historian Emeritus Stephen Hales, with a preface by noted New Orleans author Walter Isaacson, is available for purchase on the [Rex website](#) and at select bookstores. It also accompanies a two-year-long exhibition at the Louisiana State Museum at the Presbytère celebrating 150 years of Rex artistry.

REX AND THE MILITARY



From its founding, the Rex Organization has always honored the military. Rex arrives at Lundi Gras via a Coast Guard cutter. Traditionally, prior to the parade, Rex conducts a flag raising ceremony with a military color guard and the Marine Forces Reserve Band during which veterans are honored. The participation of organized military units became an increasingly important part of both the Monday parade celebrating Rex's arrival and, of course, of his Grand Procession on Mardi Gras. Military bands and marching units have always played an essential and colorful role in the Rex parade, and Navy and Coast Guard vessels regularly visit New Orleans during Carnival. Each year military guests are invited to join Rex members on floats and to attend the Grand Ball, a highlight of which is the performance of the Marine Forces Reserve Band. Rex may also award special honors to his military guests.

RECONCILIATION AND BANNERS

In 1881, in the spirit of reconciliation during the difficult Reconstruction years, Rex invited several military units from Northern states, including the New York National Guard regiment, to march in the Rex parade. The visit was a great success—the former adversaries were received with great hospitality and enthusiasm. Prior to the NYNG regiment's departure, Rex officials presented a special commemorative banner to the unit's commanders. As part of the celebration of Rex's 150th Anniversary, that commemorative banner was re-created, a reminder of the power of Carnival to unite and heal.



ECONOMIC IMPACT OF MARDI GRAS FOR NEW ORLEANS



From 1872, when Rex was founded and first encouraged visitors to come to New Orleans through today, Mardi Gras has grown to have enormously positive economic and brand impacts for New Orleans that yield year-round dividends. The most recent study of the economic impacts of Mardi Gras performed by Tulane University professor Toni Weiss nine years ago, in 2014, found its total impact – direct and indirect – on the New Orleans economy to be in excess of \$465 million. That study also found that, while the city incurred \$5.9 million in government expenditures attributable to Mardi Gras, Carnival-related tax revenues flowing to city entities totaled \$17.6 million, which translates to \$2.98 in tax revenue for every \$1.00 in governmental expenditure, a nearly three-to-one return on investment for local government. Clearly, Mardi Gras is a good investment for New Orleans.

REX IN THE CLASSROOM



The “School of Design,” the incorporated name of the Rex Organization, highlights Rex’s commitment to education. Historically, the themes and individual float titles chosen for each year’s parade have been drawn from the worlds of culture, history, mythology, literature, nature, geography, and the arts. Each year’s Rex parade brings to colorful life a wonderful and interesting world, a world that invites exploration in our classrooms. Rex in the Classroom materials, including notes on each parade’s theme and float titles, can be found in the Education area of the Rex website. The Rex Organization also hosts school visits by appointment at the den, allowing hundreds of schoolchildren annually to see the Rex floats up close and learn about Rex and Carnival history.

REX ON THE WEB

REX WEBSITE

The official web site for Rex is found at 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.

Member Login

[Tradition](#) | [The Parade](#) | [Ball and Courts](#) | [Merchandise](#) | [Education](#) | [Foundation](#)






150TH ANNIVERSARY BOOK, PROCLAMATION AVAILABLE

Commemorating the Rex Organization's 150th Anniversary, Rex Historian Dr. Stephen Hales' book, *Rex: 150 Years of the School of Design* provides a decade-by-decade account of a century and a half of colorful Rex history. The 2022 Rex Proclamation art print, by Royal Lithographer Matthew Hales, is also available for sale to the public. [Purchase Now](#)

CARNIVAL UPDATES

All news...

-  **REX FOUNDATION AWARDS 2023 GRANTS**
\$1.6 million in grants and commitments benefit New Orleans Schools ([Read All](#))
-  **REX PROCLAIMS CARNIVAL**
2023 Proclamation Unveiled at Mayor's Mardi Gras Kickoff Event ([Read All](#))

SINCE THE FOUNDING OF THE REX ORGANIZATION IN 1872 ITS TRADITIONS HAVE HELPED DEFINE MARDI GRAS. REX'S PROCLAMATION INVITES HIS SUBJECTS TO THE GRAND CELEBRATION OF CARNIVAL. HIS ROYAL COLORS OF PURPLE, GREEN, AND GOLD ARE TO THIS DAY THE COLORS OF MARDI GRAS, AND THE SONG PLAYED IN THE FIRST REX PARADE, "IF EVER I CEASE TO LOVE," HAS BECOME CARNIVAL'S ANTHEM. REX AND HIS QUEEN PRESIDE OVER THE REX BALL, CARNIVAL'S GLITTERING CONCLUSION.

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