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Rex, the King of Carnival, Commemorated the 325th Anniversary of the First Celebration of Mardi Gras in What Would Become the United States of America

Rex Message: May We All Never Cease to Love Celebrating Mardi Gras

(Buras, Louisiana) Yesterday, at Fort Jackson in Buras, Louisiana, across the Mississippi River from Pointe du Mardi Gras, where Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville and his crew of fellow explorers on Shrove Tuesday, March 3, 1699 held the first celebration of Mardi Gras in what would become the United States of America, the Rex Organization commemorated the 325th anniversary of this historic occasion with a ceremony and expressed a wish that we all never cease to love celebrating Mardi Gras.

Twenty-five years ago, on March 3, 1999, to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the first celebration of Mardi Gras in what would become the United States of America, the Rex Organization dedicated a historic marker at Fort Jackson.

Yesterday, on March 3, 2024, to commemorate the 325th anniversary, Rex officials met at that historic marker and were joined by Monsignor Christopher Nalty and France's Consul General in New Orleans Rodolphe Sambou to commemorate this important milestone anniversary.

The Rex Organization's Executive Vice President James J. Reiss III said, "We stand here today on the shoulders of those French explorers who, across the river from here 325 years ago, first celebrated Mardi Gras in what would become the United States. Today, the cultural and economic impacts of Mardi Gras are enormous. For the next 325 years and beyond, we hope Mardi Gras is still being celebrated in New Orleans, throughout Louisiana, in Mobile, in Memphis, and by all who love celebrating it wherever they are on this planet and beyond. May we all never cease to love celebrating Mardi Gras."

"Never cease to love" is a reference to the anthem of New Orleans' Carnival "If Ever I Cease to Love," which was played during the inaugural Rex Parade in 1872.

Monsignor Christopher Nalty said, “Iberville found the Mississippi, and when he arrived on March 2, Father Anastase Douay said, ‘This is the spot. This is the main pass of the Mississippi.’ The next day, they came up the river to Pointe du Mardi Gras, which they named the first non-Indian name of anywhere in the Louisiana Territory.”

France’s Consul General in New Orleans Rodolphe Sambou said, “I am very grateful for your organizing this event and celebrating what is a very strong symbol of the friendship between France and the United States.”

Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry provided an official proclamation that concluded, “Now, therefore, I, Jeff Landry, Governor of the State of Louisiana, do hereby proclaim March 3, 2024 to be the 325th anniversary of the first celebration of Mardi Gras in what would become the United States of America.”

Louisiana Lieutenant Governor Billy Nungesser provided an official proclamation that concluded, “Now therefore, The Office of the Lieutenant Governor of the State of Louisiana applauds The Rex Organization for leading the effort to commemorate the historic occasion of the first celebration of Mardi Gras on territory that would become the State of Louisiana and Plaquemines Parish.”

Plaquemines Parish President Keith Hinkley, joined by Parish Councilman Mark “Hobbo” Cognevich and several Plaquemines Parish festival queens, provided an official proclamation commemorating the 325th anniversary of Mardi Gras in the Parish of Plaquemines and stating, “Therefore, Tuesday, March 3, 1699 was the first celebration of Mardi Gras in what would eventually become the United States of America.”

Video from the event can be seen at <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/lpx1liz1eubar7ly2r43v/Bayou-Mardi-Gras.mp4?rlkey=r0pk16no71viemy8kuweb1hkw&dl=0>. The speakers in the video are, in order, Rex Executive Vice President James J. Reiss III, Monsignor Christopher Nalty, French Consul General Rodolphe Sambou, and Rex Public Relations Chairman Ben Dupuy.

Historical Background Regarding Celebration of Mardi Gras on Tuesday, March 3, 1699

- During the reign of Louis XIV, the King of France known as the “Sun King,” encouraged his nation’s exploration of the New World. In 1682, René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, the first European to travel the length of the Mississippi River, claimed possession of the vast region, encompassing the entire Mississippi watershed for France and named it *Louisiane*, or Louis’ Land.
- Seventeen years later, while heading upriver during exploration of a section of the Mississippi River between the Gulf of Mexico and what would become New Orleans nineteen years later, at the point where French explorers Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville; his brother Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville; Father Anastase Douay; and their fellow sailors were on the eastern bank at 7:00 AM on Shrove Tuesday, March 3, 1699, they celebrated the holiday of Mardi Gras, held a Mass, named the place “Pointe du Mardi Gras,” and named the adjacent tributary “Bayou Mardi Gras.”
- Therefore, Tuesday, March 3, 1699 was the first celebration of Mardi Gras in what would eventually become the United States of America.

- The site – approximately 70 miles downriver from where New Orleans would be founded – was where Fort St. Philip was later constructed in 1792, across the Mississippi River from Fort Jackson, which was constructed on the western bank in 1822.
- According to Carnival historian Arthur Hardy, “Pointe du Mardi Gras” and “Bayou Mardi Gras” are the oldest known place names of non-Indian origin in the entire Mississippi River Valley.
- Twenty-five years ago, on March 3, 1999, which was the 300th anniversary of the celebration of the first Mardi Gras in what would become the United States of America, a delegation of Rex officials visited the historic Pointe du Mardi Gras site and dedicated a historic marker.
- Because the Pointe du Mardi Gras historic site at Fort St. Philip on the eastern bank would be inaccessible except by boat, the historic marker was placed across the Mississippi River, on the western bank, at Fort Jackson.
- Sunday, March 3, 2024 is the 325th anniversary of the first celebration of Mardi Gras in what would eventually become the United States of America.
- The Wikipedia entry for “Mardi Gras in Mobile, Alabama” says, “The first record of the holiday being marked in America is on March 3, 1699, at a camp site along the Mississippi River delta.”

About the Rex Organization: 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, gold, and green 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, the King of Carnival, and his consort, the Queen of Carnival, preside over the Rex Ball, Carnival's glittering conclusion. www.rexorganization.com

About the Pro Bono Publico Foundation: The Pro Bono Publico Foundation (“PBPF”) is the Rex Organization’s public education philanthropy association. Since its founding in 2006, the PBPF has donated more than \$14 million, including more than \$1 million annually for the past nine years, and committed nearly \$1.3 million in 2024 to support New Orleans public school education, primarily charter schools, charter management organizations, and school support entities such as New Schools for New Orleans and Teach for America. Most of the PBPF’s philanthropic funds are raised from annual donations from members of the Rex Organization. www.probonopublicofoundation.org