

May-18



Time Travellers Club

Dear Club Member,

May 7th marks the 300th anniversary of the founding of New Orleans. It was established by Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville on behalf of the French Mississippi Company, and was named after the Duke of Orleans, who was acting as regent of France at that time.

Our fibre this month celebrates the most New Orleans of festivals; Mardi Gras. The culmination of the festival is on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent. Mardi Gras means Fat Tuesday in French. In the UK we're more familiar with it as Shrove Tuesday, or even Pancake Day. Lent in the Christian calendar was meant to be a time of fasting, and it was not permitted to eat certain food stuffs. They therefore had to be used up before Lent began, so Shrove Tuesday, or Mardi Gras ended up being something of a feast!

The origins of the current Mardi Gras parade pre-date the founding of the city. Bienville established a settlement 60- miles to the south on Fat Tuesday in 1699, it was named Pointe du Mardi Gras. Throughout the area a form of Mardi Gras would be celebrated in settlements around the area by the Boeuf Gras Society. Boeuf Gras refers to a fattened calf, which would be eaten on Shrove Tuesday. A Bulls Head would be pushed around on wheels, before people sat down to a pre-Lenten feast.

In New Orleans the first reference to the Mardi Gras carnival appears in 1781, and by the 1830's this has turned in to street processions with masked horse riders and people in carriages. The processions were lit by men carrying dazzling gas-light torches. Processions continued, and became ever more elaborate, with different krewe's forming, and trying to out-do each other to produce the best parade.

In 1872 a group of businessmen invited a King of Carnival called Rex, to reside over the first daytime parade. From this point the Mardi Gras started to use "official" colours of purple, gold and green. Popular legend has it that Rex picked these colours to honour the visiting Russian Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich Romanoff (the 5th child of Alexander II, who was the Grandfather of Nicholas II, the last Tsar of Russia). He ordered that the balconies be decorated in banners of these colours. The legend states that Rex also announced the symbolism of these colours, but there's no evidence to support this. What is true however is that a king and a kingdom need a flag. Most European states have flags containing 3 colours, so it makes sense for Rex to replicate that. Purple has long been the colour most associated with royalty, as is Gold. The final colour is probably simple colour preference. . . out of all the heraldic colours (Red, Blue, Purple, Green & Black) the only one that really "goes" is green. In 1892 a Rex themed parade gave each colour a meaning, and that symbolism has been around ever since. Purple Represents Justice. Green Represents Faith. Gold Represents Power.

Happy Spinning,
Katie

Further Reading-

Mardi Gras New Orleans website, the truth about the Mardi Gras colours-
<http://www.mardigrasneworleans.com/mgcolors.html>

Images from Mardi Gras 2018
<http://www.mardigras.com>

Old Magazine Fashion plates showing Mardi Gras costumes-
<http://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/search/collection/p15324coll12/searchterm/Mardi%20Gras/order/nosort>