NEW ORLEANS 300 TRICENTENNIAL 1718 ~ 2018

From *Bienville* to *Bourbon Street* to *bounce.* 300 moments that make New Orleans unique.

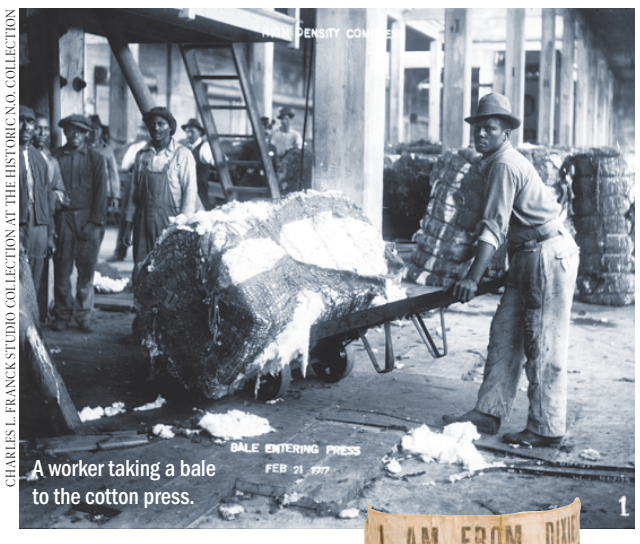
WHAT HAPPENED

In 1871, the Cotton Exchange was constructed.

An advertisement for Singer Sewing Machines between 1880 and 1925 showing a group of African-Americans picking and weighing cotton.

THE HISTORIC NEW ORLEANS COLLECTION

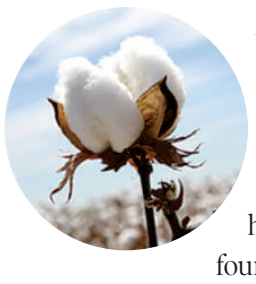
The second Cotton Exchange building was at the corner of Gravier and Carondelet streets from 1883 until 1920. It was demolished because of structural problems.



A worker taking a bale to the cotton press.

CHARLES L. FRANCK STUDIO COLLECTION AT THE HISTORIC N.O. COLLECTION

Cotton fueled New Orleans' antebellum golden age.



After cotton was made profitable by the invention of the cotton gin, the amount of cotton grown by slaves on plantations from Natchez south and shipped out of New Orleans grew exponentially in the early 19th century. By 1834, Louisiana was producing 62 million pounds of cotton. New Orleans served as the nation's marketing hub and processing center for cotton. By 1840, New Orleans was the fourth busiest port in the world, only behind London, Liverpool and New York. The value of cotton dwarfed other commodities that came through the port. In 1846, cotton accounted for more than three-fifths of the ports' receipts. And the value kept rising — from $12 million in 1841 to $92 million in 1859. In 1850, cotton factors and merchants created a cotton district along Carondelet Street. The cotton market crash of 1837 bankrupted some of New Orleans' prominent cotton manufacturers, and the industry also suffered during and after the Civil War. Yet in 1871, cotton was still dominant and cotton merchants built an ornate Cotton Exchange building at Gravier and Carondelet streets. The exchange closed in 1964 after federal subsidies eliminated the need for the futures market for cotton. Cotton is still moved through the port, but at relatively small quantities.

Cotton bales ready for export from New Orleans.

GIFT OF MR. JIM JOHNSON / THE HISTORIC N.O. COLLECTION

BALE OF COTTON (ABOVE): GIFT OF MICHAEL PATRYKUS AND SHARON ROBINSON / THE HISTORIC N.O. COLLECTION

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Engineers began dynamiting levees at Caernarvon on April 29, 1927.

The Mississippi River at flood stage on April 27, 1927, between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

GIFT OF MRS. CELIA SEIFERTH KORNFELD AND MR. ROBERT KORNFELD / THNOC

One of the explosions set off by the Army Corps of Engineers on April 29, 1927, to blast a section of the levee of the Mississippi River near Caernarvon.

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The Great Flood of 1927 altered the lives of the thousands who were forced from their homes and forever changed Louisiana's politics and demographics.

Even before the swollen Mississippi River reached New Orleans, citizens had been flooded by torrential rain in the Good Friday rainfall on April 15, 1927. Street flooding is shown here at St. Dupre and Baudin streets.

GIFT OF MRS. BRANDON B. WOOLLEY / THNOC

The flood began with rains upriver in the summer of 1926 that were followed by heavy spring rains in 1927. Mississippi tributaries, including the White and Little Red rivers, broke through levees in Arkansas in February and on March 29. the first Mississippi River levees broke. A break in Greenville, Miss., on April 24 killed dozens.

As water surged downstream, record rainfall in New Orleans led to panic. Business leaders in New Orleans convinced Gov. Oramel H. Simpson to allow levees downstream to be dynamited to relieve pressure on the city's levees. Engineers blew a hole in the levee at Caernarvon on April 29, releasing 250,000 cubic feet of water per second at the site, and flooding 10,000 residents in Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes. An additional 60,000 residents were flooded as the water swept through Southern Louisiana, including St. Martin and St. Landry parishes.

The flood forced the federal government to rethink its levees-only flood control policy and build spillways to relieve pressure in the event of future floods. The flood prompted hundreds, if not thousands, of African-Americans to join the great migration to the north, and it laid the groundwork for populist Huey P. Long to become governor in 1928.