

A Spirited “Rendezvous”

The New Orleans Elks Lodge paid the debt on City Park in 1919

By Seale Paterson



ON JULY 4, 1919, THE NEW ORLEANS ELKS Lodge No. 30 held a fundraiser to pay off the remaining debt on City Park. “The Elks’ Rendezvous” celebrated the history of New Orleans, the Fourth of July and the recent signing of the Treaty of Versailles in one grand pageant.

A 5-cent admission provided access to a wealth of entertainment and spectacle. There were replicas of an Indian Village, the Old French Market and Congo Square, complete with mysterious Voodoo seeresses. Tulane University presented a historical pageant that had Sister St. Augustin, Evangeline, Jean Lafitte, Marquis de Lafayette, John Audubon, Casket Girls, the Baroness de Pontalba and more wandering around in unlikely pairs.

The old Louisiana game of racquets, the “gentlemen’s roughhouse” sport – described as a combination of lacrosse, tennis and

golf – was exhibited. The audience seemed unsure of the game, described thusly: “There is a ball and everyone tries to hit it at once, failing which he slams the man nearest to him, and is satisfied.”

The “Corps de Pompiers de l’Opera Francais,” a volunteer firemen group formed in 1859 to help protect the French Opera House, set and put out “postage stamp-sized” fires throughout the day.

Food was provided by then-famous restaurants, including Café des Refugees, Café Maumus and the Restaurant des Chenes Vertes. The Old Absinthe House was present, serving “the mildest absinthe on record.” This complimented the beer of “such an innocuous and innocent strength” that it resembled beer mostly in appearance only.

An evening water pageant in the lagoon told the story of New Orleans through

watercraft, featuring women in period fashions being transported by 25 rowboats and 13 canoes, lit by 300 electric Japanese lanterns and three spotlights.

The “Rendezvous” was called a grand success, described as “a dozen Mardi Gras rolled into one, with a Christmas, New Year’s, Thanksgiving and Fourth of July celebration added.” The Elks raised \$25,000, which was more than enough to pay the City Park debt.

**All quotes from The Times-Picayune, 1919 ■*

Even though the Police Superintendent issued an ultimatum that no exhibition dueling would take place (for fear that “the call of old custom may be too strong” and some might take advantage of the opportunity to settle old scores for real), there were staged duels about every five minutes under the Dueling Oaks, with historic pistols and rapiers provided by the Louisiana State Museum. Nobody was injured, even though the battles were spirited.