

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

March 30, 1956

New Orleans

This old-new city at the gateway of the great Mississippi Valley, brimming with romance and reminiscence of more than 200 years, merits the distinction of being called one of America's most interesting cities.

It is our first visit here and we are not disappointed but will declare that it is the most difficult city to drive in that we have ever experienced. Southern hospitality is forgotten by all automobilists it appears and even pedestrians are forgotten. So, we took the sightseeing bus and relaxed on a three-hour trip throughout the historic city.

The old French section is worth the trip across the continent to visit. We were interested in a news story which appeared this week in a New Orleans newspaper. An ordinance providing for exemption from municipal taxes for owners of Vieux Carre property who renovate, restore, or make substantial repairs to such property was introduced this past week at a city council meeting.

The ordinance provides that any owner of Vieux Carre property who makes improvement to his property costing not less than \$2,000 with the approval of the Vieux Carre commission "is entitled to and shall receive exemption from municipal taxes to begin the 'year following its certification by the Vieux Carre Commission and to continue for a period not exceeding nine additional years or until the property has received an aggregate exemption of \$2,000 in municipal taxes, whichever comes first."

The ordinance provides that the tax exemption shall apply only on "that part of the property collected by the City of New Orleans for its own use and shall not include school board, sewerage and water board, board of liquidation taxes or any other constitutionally dedicated taxes collected by the city."

The ordinance's preamble states that the city council "is dedicated to the preservation of the Vieux Carre with "its old-world atmosphere, its quaint typical architecture and its historic buildings." How much that statement sounds like it belonged in Monterey!

It also states that the Vieux Carre "has proven an increasingly popular mecca for tourists and accordingly the entire citizenry New Orleans has benefited and will continue to benefit from the preservation of the Vieux

Carre section as a whole, which can be done only through the maintenance land restoration of its buildings.

The ordinance also stipulates that "the repairs, preservation, and restoration of these buildings is for the benefit of all tax payers in this city, the owners of said buildings have heretofore borne the entire expense of maintenance of this historic shrine without any financial assistance or relief from the municipality" and that many dilapidated buildings in the Vieux Carre could be restored if their owners were given an "incentive."

The ordinance provides that: If the building to be renovated or repaired is of architectural or historical value or if it preservation shall contribute to the preservation of the Vieux Carre section, the commission shall certify this property to be eligible for tax exemption."

In return the property owner must agree "to maintain the exterior of the building in a sound, water-proof condition during the life of the exemption and that the said structure or building shall never be altered or demolished without the approval of the Vieux Carre,"

New Orleans was founded in 1717 by Jean Baptiste LeMoyne, Sieur de Bienville, and the city was christened Nouvelle-Orleans in honor of His Highness, the then regent of France, Louis Philippe, duc d'Orleans. We learned from the tour guide yesterday that now there are many more Italians living in the French quarter than any other nationality.

In the heart of the village is Jackson Square, formerly called the Place d'Arms. now a "pleasant park where General Jackson sits forever on his bronze horse." Around and beyond Jackson Square the narrow old streets and alleys wander away into the pathways of romantic history. Lovely patios and courtyards, intricate iron lace balconies lining the narrow streets, and the shops all appeal to visitors, and all the natives bid good-bye to you with "Hope you come back."