



**Chris Walker**  
*and*  
**The Pedigree Five**  
*present*

**MARDI GRAS  
MEMORIES**

**The Story of Mardi Gras  
In  
New Orleans**

The name "Mardi Gras" comes from the French for Fat Tuesday or, as we say, Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday each year. The term refers to eating and drinking all the surplus food before fasting during Lent and leading up to Easter Sunday. Mardi Gras is believed to have arrived in North America on March 3, 1699, when the French-Canadian explorer Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville camped about 60 miles downriver from the future site of New Orleans.

Knowing it was Fat Tuesday back in France, d'Iberville named the spot, Point du Mardi Gras, and held a small gala. A few years later, French soldiers and settlers feasted and wore masks as part of Mardi Gras festivities in the newly founded city. From there the celebrations grew and, in typical New Orleans Style, they stretched the Mardi Gras period from 12th Night to Shrove Tuesday, which is how long the celebrations last these days.

The first recorded Mardi Gras street parade in New Orleans took place in 1837, by which time the city had transformed from a small backwater into a major metropolis. Twenty years later, six men organised a secret society called the Mistick Krewe of Comus. They held a parade with the theme of "The Demon Actors in Milton's Paradise Lost," along with a lavish grand ball. Comus reversed the declining popularity of Mardi Gras and helped establish New Orleans as its clear epicentre in the United States. Each year, more than one million visitors are expected to attend.

In 1872 the Krewe of Rex and the Knights of Momus began paying for parades and balls of their own. They were followed a decade later by the Krewe of Proteus. Since these early societies were exclusively male and white, women and Black residents formed their own groups, such as Les Mysterieuses and the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club.



Dozens of Krewes of all types have proliferated since then, including the science fiction-themed Intergalactic Krewe of Chewbacchus, who was the Roman God of Wine.

Since Comus ushered in the modern era of Mardi Gras in 1857, the New Orleans festivities have only been cancelled about a dozen times. Most of those cancellations came during the Civil War, World War I and World War II, though revellers also stayed home during an 1870s yellow fever outbreak. A scaled-down version even took place in 2006, just months after Hurricane Katrina flooded the Gulf Coast and killed over 1,800 people. Many in-person celebrations and parades in New Orleans in 2021 were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Krewe (pronounced "crew") is a social organisation that stages parades and or balls for the Carnival season. The term is best known for its association with Mardi Gras celebrations in New Orleans but is also used in other Carnival celebrations throughout South Louisiana.

The word is thought to have been coined in the early 19th century by a New Orleans based organisation calling themselves Ye Mistick Krewe of Comus. With time, it became the most common term for a New Orleans Carnival organisation.

Today, most Krewes date their origins to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Krewe members are assessed fees to pay for the parade or ball. Fees can range from thousands of dollars a year per person for the most elaborate parades, to as little as \$20 a year for smaller clubs.

Criteria for Krewe membership vary similarly, ranging from exclusive organisations largely limited to relatives of previous members to other organisations open to anyone able to pay the membership fee.

Krewes with low membership fees may also require members to work to help build and decorate the parade floats and make their own costumes, higher-priced Krewes hire professionals to do this work.

At Mardi Gras World daily tours are showing the work on some of the floats. Parading Krewe members are usually responsible for buying their own throws such as beads and coins, which are thrown to parade spectators according to tradition.

Due to the unique history of New Orleans, the City became a melting pot for a wide variety of music styles, and it still is today. Work songs and spirituals from the cotton plantations to classical European harmonies and Military Band music all went into that melting pot.

Instruments left over from the break-up of Army bands at the end of the Civil War were mixed with Native African Rhythms from the freed slaves to produce the improvised music we call now JAZZ.

Louis Armstrong joined the Zulu Social Aid & Pleasure Club in 1932 and one of his proudest moments was in 1949 when he was crowned "King Of The Zulus" and rode on their float in the Mardi Gras Parade that year. He was then made a lifelong honorary member. In 1928 his then-wife, pianist Lil Harding, wrote the tune "King of the Zulus" which is in our Mardi Gras repertoire.

**Contact the**

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