

QUEEN OF THE SOUTH

NEW ORLEANS, 1853-1862

THE JOURNAL OF THOMAS K. WHARTON



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THE JOURNAL OF THOMAS K. WHARTON

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REMEMBERING SAM WILSON
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New Orleans, December 8, 1853.¹

Heavy rains in the night with change of wind to North West. Fine bracing air this morning, cold high wind, and alternate clouds and bright sunshine.

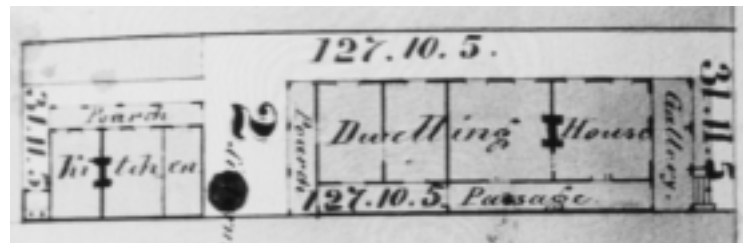
At the Office until 3 P.M. arranging the Documents, accounts, &c. that have accumulated during my absence, then returned home to dinner and passed the evening until 10 P.M. amongst my accounts.

December 9

Lovely weather with clear bracing air, but not quite cold enough to form ice, or even wilt the vines.

We all had a profound night's rest and have already quite got over the fatigue of the journey.

Emily & Mrs. Ladd have been on the wing all the time, and things are quickly reassuming their former pleasant and domestic look.² I like my comfortable cottage better than ever and its locality is unrivaled.³...



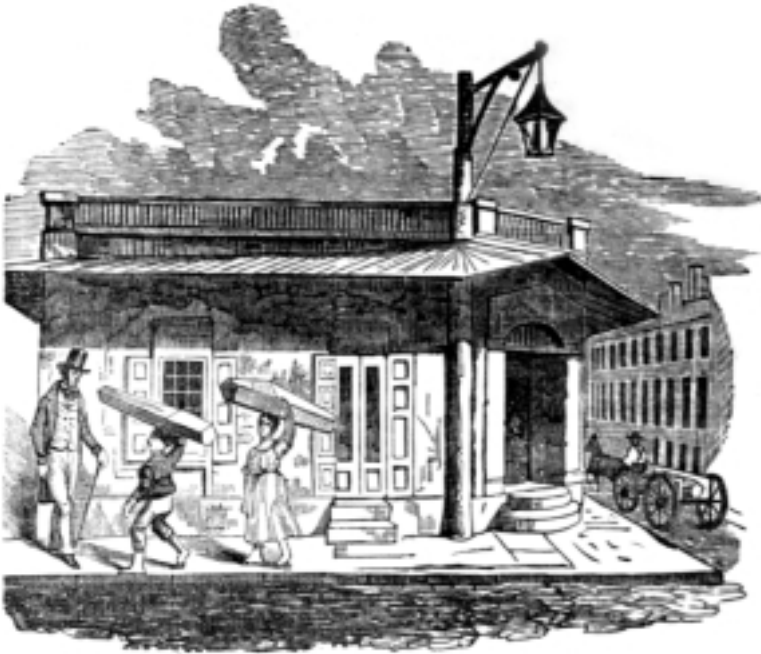
Floor plan of Wharton cottage.

¹ For health reasons, Wharton obtained leave from his position as general superintendent of the new Custom House; he and his family left New Orleans for Boston on June 25, 1853, and returned December 7, 1853.

² Emily Ladd (1835-1932) became Thomas K. Wharton's second wife on December 18, 1851. She was the daughter of Darius Ladd and Emily Prescott Ladd of New Hampshire, who had moved to New Orleans in the early 1830s. After 1838 Darius Ladd removed permanently to Boston. Emily Prescott Ladd (ca. 1810-1889), Wharton's mother-in-law, remained in New Orleans with her daughter's family until her death. Marriage license file, New Orleans Public Library (hereafter NOPL); *Daily Picayune*, Apr. 8, 1889.

³ Thomas K. Wharton rented a one-story frame house at 424 Camp Street between Robin (now Euterpe) and Terpsichore from James Dunn, the proprietor of the Western Verandah Hotel. Wharton's residence (no longer standing) was on a lot 31' by 127'. It was described as a three-room cottage with hall, a gallery front and rear, and a one-story frame kitchen with three rooms and a cistern in the rear. New Orleans Notarial Archives (hereafter NONA), William Monaghan, Nov. 11, 1853, Mar. 18, 1854; Second District Court, Inventory of James Dunn, docket 6906, NOPL.

1853



Children carrying coffins during the yellow fever epidemic of 1853, from History of the Yellow Fever (Philadelphia, 1854) (1974.25.11.130).

December 11

Sunday. Sunny and genial like the month of May, but as we need a good rest we did not go to church (except Mrs. Ladd) and I went no where in the morning except to market in Magazine Street, which I found greatly improved since last year.⁴ The stalls clean and the whole house well arranged, and supply abundant, and of excellent quality, plenty of game, venison, wild ducks and teal, very fine beef and vegetables, tomatoes, green peas and okra, &c. &c. and prices moderate. I took our new cook with me and was pleased to find that she understood the choice of meats, &c. which is an important quality and difficult to find among the Irish. My little boy and his nurse came a square or two to meet me.⁵ The streets around here are so neat and quiet and spacious, and so many trees, and so much green grass, and then the gardens, that it is as good as the country for him, and he really seems to enjoy it.

I spent the morning in reading and reviewing early papers &c.

The epidemic of the summer has made a marked difference in the appearance of the city, even the business streets are not by any means

so thronged and noisy as is usual at this season of the year, and in my neighborhood, and towards the suburbs it is positively village-like, which the increased stringency of the sanitary and other municipal regulations, growing out of the late mortality has given an air of superior neatness and cleanliness which contrasts very favorably with the appearances of the city in former years.⁶ A good deal, too, has been accomplished in building, both public and private, so that the general aspect of things is far more inviting than I have ever known it. There are certain spots, however, which tho' beautiful in themselves, from their connection with the appalling fatality of the summer, cannot be passed without depressing and painful feelings amongst the rest. The sweet, pretty place which belonged to the large family of the "Groves" a square above me. I remember seeing them all out in the garden one fine evening last June watering and trimming their beautiful plants, and now they are all but three swept away and the place when I went by this morning looked closed up and very desolate.⁷

At noon William Freret called and sat awhile giving me a sketch of his summer tour after we left him at Niagara. He and his father's family got back in October.⁸ After dinner I was again immersed in papers, and looking thro' the records of years long since past until surprised by the falling shadows. Nothing could exceed the beauty of the moonlight which followed, and the mellow strains of a brass band in the neighborhood were wafted thro' the calm night air.

⁴ The Magazine Market occupied the triangle formed by Sophie Wright Place, St. Mary, and Magazine.

⁵ Thomas Prescott Wharton (1852-1910), the Whartons' only child, was born September 23, 1852, in New Orleans. He was associated for a number of years with Isaac S. West, Jr., a dry goods merchant on Magazine Street. After moving to New York City, Wharton married Louisa P. Cameron. He died in New York and is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery. Genealogy of the family of Wharton, Miscellaneous Papers in the Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

⁶ The yellow fever epidemic of 1853 was one of the most virulent ever to attack New Orleans. Nearly 9,000 people in the city died of the fever between May and October 1853. John Duffy, *Sword of Pestilence: The New Orleans Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1853* (Baton Rouge, 1966).

⁷ John B. Groves, a merchant from Tennessee, and his family lived on Camp Street at the corner of Race. Four daughters died between August 13 and August 28, 1853, and Groves died September 1, all of yellow fever. *Daily Picayune*, Sept. 3, 1853.

⁸ William Alfred Freret (1833-1911), the son of New Orleans Mayor William Freret (1804-1864) and Fanny Salkeld Freret, was trained in engineering and architecture in England. He designed several major buildings in New Orleans in the late 1850s. After the Civil War, Freret designed the reconstruction of the old state capitol in Baton Rouge and numerous public schools, courthouses, post offices, and federal buildings. *Dictionary of Louisiana Biography*, ed. Glenn R. Conrad (Lafayette, 1988) (hereafter *DLB*).



William Freret, 1856 (1994.83.3), gift of Suzanne Wynne Friedrichs; St. Ann[a]'s Asylum, ca. 1873-1874 (1951.41.38).



December 17

After soaking rains in the night the wind changed to North West and today we have a sharp bracing air and bright sun. The cold increased and the wind rose considerably after dark.

The change in the weather has made me feel quite well and elastic again, so that I got along rapidly with my classification and entry of back accounts and records at the Office. By the end of another week I hope to have all fully written up, and attend to the current business besides. Today I remained at my desk until near 4 P.M. Emily and Mrs. Ladd who had been shopping called at the Office for me and we rode up together to dinner. Towards evening I took a brisk walk thro' the principal streets in my neighborhood and part of Lafayette, and found but little change except the completion of some buildings commenced

before I left.⁹ The re-painting and general beautification of others, and some few structures in brick begun during the summer and now in progress, of which the most conspicuous is the fine large building intended for the Widows "Home" on the corner of Prytania and St. Mary Streets.¹⁰ The principal improvements of the summer have been confined to the business parts of town. The increase in the number of dwelling houses appears to be but trifling, desirable ones

⁹ The City of Lafayette, the area of New Orleans in Jefferson Parish from Felicite Street to Toledano, was incorporated in 1833; Lafayette was the seat of the parish government until 1852 when it was annexed to the City of New Orleans as the Fourth District. It included the area of New Orleans now known as the Garden District.

¹⁰ St. Anna's Asylum for the Relief of Destitute Females and Their Helpless Children of All Religious Denominations was erected in 1853 by Little and Middlemiss, builders. Located at 1823 Prytania Street, it still serves as a home for the elderly.

scarce, and rents proportionably high. Mine is raised from \$420 to \$480. Flour and some other articles of domestic consumption are high owing to the scant water in the Western Rivers, and fuel exorbitant for New Orleans. Coal I am buying at \$1.25 per Barrel, (Pittsburg) and wood \$7.50 per Cord, against 75¢ and \$5.50 last year. Provisions for the table, however, in general are reasonable, very plentiful, and choice in quality, so that as to living we are at no loss for a good dinner, and an excellent cook to prepare it withal.

December 18

Sunday. Frost sprinkled over every thing this morning and a pure, bracing air from the north west. Bright sky and genial sunshine as lovely a Sabbath as ever dawned upon the world.

We have been married two years today, two pleasant, very, very pleasant years, a little abatement only from occasional ill-health, but even that has passed away and every thing looks bright and smiling both without and within, and our dear little treasure of a boy is animated with unusual glee, running and dancing around the room, and performing a variety of intricate evolutions to the infinite delight of his admiring parents.

We went to church in the morning, and I was glad at heart to sit in our old pew again, and sincerely thankful when I recollected that the last time I occupied it I was taken so unwell that I had to leave in the middle of the service. This was early in the spring, and now I am so strong and well, and so thoroughly restored, that the contrast filled me with gratitude, and Mr. Preston's plain discourse on "The peace of God which passeth all understanding" fell pleasantly on my heart, and I felt how deeply I was indebted to that God for unnumbered sources of happiness which have flowed in upon me since I was last within these walls, and for our exemption, too, from that terrible fatality, of which we were forcibly reminded by the deep mourning which appeared in different parts of the church, and especially in a pew very near us, which contained all that are left of the once numerous family of the "Groves", but most of the familiar faces were still in place, so that livelier thoughts were on the ascendant, and the church itself had been so thoroughly repaired, painted and re-furnished during the summer that it looked quite pleasant and cheerful.¹¹

¹¹ The Episcopal Church of the Annunciation was built in 1845 at the corner of Orange and Pacanier (now Chippewa). It burned in 1858. Nathaniel Ogden Preston (d. 1866), the first rector, lived at the corner of Race and Constance streets. Herbert Cope Duncan, *The Diocese of Louisiana: Some of Its History, 1838-1888* (New Orleans, 1888), 129.

In the afternoon I took a wider circuit thro' Lafayette than yesterday, and in broad daylight, enabling me to judge more correctly of the suburban improvements of the summer. Indeed I find several very handsome new private residences, especially on Nayades Street [now St. Charles Avenue] and between it and Magazine, and the gardens in this neighbourhood are still very beautiful, the leaves cling lovingly to the deciduous trees, and some, as the Weeping Willows &c., are in full foliage, while numerous Live Oaks, and abundance of glossy evergreen shrubs, give richness and mass to the general verdure, and the rose trees are covered with splendid blooms from the purest white, to the rich damask scarlet. Indeed but for the keen racy air, there is nothing here to remind one of Winter, blossoms, green leaves and sunshine every where.

Mr. Young spent the evening with us, and after he left, Emily and I sat awhile by a bright fireside before retiring, just as we did on our wedding night, and looking round saw no change except for the better, increased comforts, increased health, very much the same sort of night too, the keen, biting air outside giving an additional charm to the ruddy, blazing hearth, and well lighted parlour.¹² It was nearly 11 when we went to our chamber.

December 22

Thanksgiving day, by appointment of Govr. Hebert.¹³

Works at the New Custom House suspended. I got up before daylight and went with my cook to market, animated with the customary ambition of honoring the day with a carefully selected dinner.

Several housekeepers of my acquaintance were already there, some of them politicians, who rarely neglect the opportunity of dropping a few insinuating remarks to the sturdy voters of the "Stalls" while laying in their supply. This latter end was easily attained, every thing good and abundant...

There was no going out so we spent a real pleasant domestic day at home. Drawing, reading, talking, the Piano, and the "infant phenomenon" all contributed to our entertainment, and all in full

¹² George B. Young, Jr., (ca. 1805-1879) of Cook, Young & Co., publisher of the *Price Current*. His residence was on St. Charles Avenue near Tivoli Circle. NOCD 1853, 1857; *Daily Picayune*, Aug. 6, 1879.

¹³ Paul O. Hébert (1818-1880) was governor of Louisiana from 1853 to 1856. On November 16, 1853, he proclaimed the celebration of Thanksgiving Day for the state. A national Thanksgiving, with a consistent date, was not declared until 1863. *Daily Picayune*, Dec. 8, 1853.

health and spirits, with a Thousand Things to be thankful for, the pleasantest Thanksgiving day I ever spent.

December 23

...A good deal of firing and other demonstrations today in honor of the engagement of Decr. 23, 1814 about 6 miles below New Orleans, which saved the city and paved the way for the decisive action of January 8th. 1815.¹⁴

December 24

Cold and gloomy, raw air from North East to North West, dripping rains set in at 2 P.M. with therm. down to 50°.

Our usual visit to the brilliantly lighted and decorated stores of Royal & Chartres Street on Christmas Eve was out of the Question (large Q!) in such dreary weather, so I strayed away from the Office for a short time in the morning and made my Christmas purchases, and carried the parcels home, when I returned to dinner, under my capacious cloak, so that no one suspected I had anything for them until towards dark when I incidentally, as it were, produced them one by one. Nothing could exceed the rapture with which the little boy fastened on a box of ninepins which I had intended for Ellen but he seemed resolved to appropriate them, and spent the rest of the evening in arranging and rearranging them with untiring delight.¹⁵ His tactics are most unmistakably boyish, and he very quietly passed over to Ellen a gaily decked Persian tambourine player which I meant for him. He already enunciates some short words very distinctly, such as "house, box, Papa, horse &c.", and clearly understands their meaning...

December 25

Sunday and Christmas day —

So raw damp and chilly and such an "eager air" from the North East that we thought it best not to go to church but spend our Christmas quietly at home. The tendencies were decidedly towards

¹⁴ Before the news of the end of the War of 1812 reached America, British troops under the command of Gen. Edward Pakenham attempted to take New Orleans. The first engagement occurred on December 23, 1814, on the plantation of Jacques Philippe Villeré, below New Orleans.

¹⁵ Ellen Ladd (b. 1845), Emily Ladd Wharton's sister, lived with her mother and the Whartons; she later married Henry W. Clark. *Daily Picayune*, Apr. 8, 1889.

the fireside, and as to outdoors, I contented myself with an early walk to market to choose the Christmas turkey, and then a promenade with the little boy before dinner to bring the colour to his cheeks, and air his new cloak of mazarin blue of which he is not a little proud.

December 29

White frost in the night. Beautiful, sunny day mild air from North West to South East. Therm[omete]r. at even 57°.

The Commissioners received today specific and minute instructions from the Honorable Secretary of the Treasury for the future conduct of the work at the New Custom House, in its business details, forms, and duties of employees etc.¹⁶ They differ in some particulars from those heretofore observed by the introduction of certain features from the regulations which govern the works under the control of the Engineer Department, but the general distribution of duties, and plan of operations, will remain unaltered.

After dinner finished my gardening operations and put every thing, round the house, in nice order. The rest were availing themselves of the lovely evening to do some shopping &c., so that we all sat down to a good hot supper with a keen relish, indeed, it tastes even better than usual as Emily had received her New Year's present of Silver from the jeweller's where it had been left to be marked, and was used this evening for the first time.

¹⁶ James Guthrie (1792-1869) of Kentucky was appointed secretary of the treasury in 1853 by President Franklin Pierce; he retired in 1857. *Dictionary of American Biography* (hereafter *DAB*).



North side of Canal Street, 400-600 blocks, showing the Custom House under construction, surrounded by scaffolding, Jay Dearborn Edwards, photographer; between 1857 and 1860 (1982.32.2).



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