

John Slidell

John Slidell was an American politician and diplomat. He was born in New York City in 1793 and attended Columbia College (later Columbia University) and graduated in 1810. Soon after being admitted to the bar in New York City, he moved to New Orleans where he practiced law from 1819 to 1835. In Louisiana, he rose politically and married Mathilde Deslonde, a much younger member of a respected local family. John Slidell was a member of the state House of Representatives. He unsuccessfully ran for Congress in 1828, but held the office of United States District Attorney from 1829 to 1833. He was then elected as a States Rights Democrat to the Twenty-Eighth and Twenty-Ninth United States Congresses and served from March 4, 1843 until his resignation on November 10, 1845.

In 1845, President James K. Polk appointed him Minister to Mexico, but the Mexican government refused to accept Slidell. This helped precipitate the outbreak of the Mexican War in 1846. Slidell was offered the mission to Central America, but he declined.

John Slidell was elected in 1850 to the United States Senate to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Pierre Soule. Slidell was reelected in 1853 and became a major influence in the administration of President James Buchanan between 1857 and 1861. At one point, he was known as "the most powerful man in the United States." Slidell served as a senator until his resignation in January of 1861, upon Louisiana's secession from the Union. Later that summer, Confederate President Jefferson Davis appointed Slidell as special Confederate envoy to France with a mission of seeking diplomatic assistance and procuring war resources. While on his mission from the Confederate states to France, Slidell was taken from the Europe-bound steamer, Trent, which was seized by U.S. seamen. He was confined in Fort Warren, a federal prison in Boston, and was later released. In January 1862, Slidell finally arrived in Paris. Through the banking house of Baron Emile Erlanger in Frankfurt, Paris, and London, Slidell arranged a major Confederate bond issue, his only substantial success in his attempts to obtain recognition of the Confederacy. He remained in Europe after the war and died on July 29, 1871 in Cowes, Isle of Wight, England.

In the course of Slidell's diplomatic and banking transactions, his daughter Mathilde met and married Baron Emile Erlanger's son, Frederick. Frederick Erlanger succeeded his father as Baron and participated in building the New Orleans and Northeastern Railroad and in the creation and naming of the city of Slidell.

Biographical Directory of the American Congress (1774-1961); Fritchie, Jr., Charles J., Notes on Slidell History (1999)

Slidell MUSEUM

Come explore a piece of history.



Slidell Museum
2020 First Street
Slidell, LA 70458
(985) 646-4380

Museum Hours:
Wednesday - Friday, 10 am - 4 pm
Saturdays, 10 am - 2 pm

Free Admission
School and Group Tours welcome

History of the Slidell Museum

Slidell, Louisiana was founded in 1883 during construction of a major new railroad from New Orleans to Meridian, Mississippi. The New Orleans and Northeastern (N.O.N.E.) Railroad established a building camp at the first high ground north of Lake Pontchartrain which eventually grew into the city. Slidell was chartered as a town in 1888 by the Louisiana legislature. The town was named after John Slidell, a prominent state, national and Confederate political figure.

In the thirty or so years after its founding, Slidell developed a creosote plant, one of the country's largest brick manufacturing facilities, a large lumber mill, and a shipyard which contributed significantly to the nation's effort in both world wars. Slidell residents worked in local ship, tank, and airplane construction during World War II.



In 1907, a two-story brick building was erected with five jail cells and a marshal's office on the first floor and the mayor's office and a meeting room on the second floor. The cost was \$3,685.



Although City Hall and the Slidell Police Department have long since taken new residence, the city converted this old town jail into a museum, housing a collection of the history and development of the Camellia City.

The entire building was recently refurbished with new collections and dynamic displays.

Ever wonder who the first mayor of Slidell was or why Olde Towne streets have names like Fremaux, Erlanger, and Bouscaren? Well come for a visit to the Slidell Museum - you'll find the answers lurking downstairs in the old jail cells and on the walls of the marshal's old office. You will see numerous photographs and artifacts dating from Slidell's earliest days to the present.

The old town hall upstairs has been dedicated to a study on the War Between the States from 1861 to 1865, with emphasis on military operations here in Louisiana. This display includes numerous battle flags, portraits of generals and southern leaders, and Confederate and Union Army uniforms and weapons.

A History of the City of Slidell

1852 ~ 1883: Early Settlements

Settlements were established on Bayou Bonfouca by 1852 and the surrounding land was occupied by holders of early Spanish, French, British, and Republic of West Florida land grants and the newer American homesteads. Robert's Landing, on the bayou just behind the present railroad station, was the forerunner to Slidell. Its landing allowed access to New Orleans and the Gulf Coast for the inhabitants who traded forest products, cattle, and wild game for needed supplies.

Surveyors for the New Orleans and Northeastern Railroad reached the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain in 1881. The construction which followed brought the rail line from Meridian, Mississippi to the site of present day Slidell. A great number of men were employed on the rail line and trestle across the lake. A creosote plant was built to treat the great logs used in the trestle construction. Pine logs, as much as ninety feet long, were pressure creosoted and driven into the lake bottom to carry the rail line.

In 1882, a town site was surveyed and mapped by the railroad surveyors. It was named Slidell Station by Baron Erlanger, a

railroad financier, in honor of his father-in-law, the renowned John Slidell. On October 15, 1883, the first train from Meridian completed the transit to New Orleans.

1884: Early Communication

A post office was established at Slidell Station on January 7, 1884, with Jacob F. Hufft as postmaster. Two years prior, the first telegraph line, running between Slidell, New Orleans, Meridian and further points, was finished. A branch line was built in 1884 adding Mandeville, Covington and Abita Springs. The first telephone conversation was between General Moorman in Mandeville and John E. Guzman in Slidell Station. The Cumberland Telephone Company installed the first telephones in Slidell, opening on May 13, 1905 with 49 subscribers.

1886: Commercial Enterprises

A hand brick works was established by Fritz Salmen in 1886 on the site of the Textron Marine on Front Street. As the business prospered, Fritz Salmen was joined by his brothers, Jacob and

Albert. Lumber and shipbuilding operations were added to the company and a store was opened on Front Street at Cleveland Avenue. The Schneider family, owners of St. Joe Brick Works, acquired the plant in 1931 and renamed it Schneider Brick and Tile, Inc.

1888: First Town Officials

On November 13, 1888, the Town of Slidell was incorporated by charter. The first mayor was Seth H. Decker and the Board of Aldermen included H. Mandin, Oscar L. Dittmar, A.C. Prevost, Fritz Salmen, and Charles McMahon. The first marshal was Edgar P. Robert, appointed on December 19, 1888. In the first Council meeting, a committee was appointed to look into the construction of a jail. A small jail and mayor's office was built in 1889 (the current Museum building). It was moved and a more permanent structure was erected on the site in 1907. This was a brick, two-story building with five jail cells, a marshal's office on the first floor, and the mayor's office and a meeting room on the second floor.

1900: Schools

The first public school in Slidell met in the Knights of Pythias Hall. Six grades were taught in two cubicles formed by draping a curtain across the meeting room. Previously, schools were private and met in homes and privately owned buildings. The Parish School Board purchased land with a four room building in 1900 and added a high school curriculum to the elementary program in 1905. The first graduation was held in 1909 with four graduates. A three story brick building replaced the wooden structure in 1911, accommodating over 300 students. When a new high school was built on Third Street between Maine and Pennsylvania Avenues in 1924, the original building became an elementary school again.

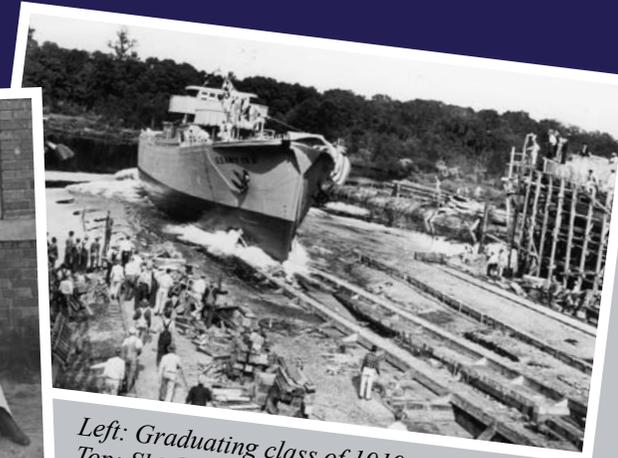
1901: Early Growth

In 1901, Slidell experienced a period of rapid growth, with saloons, hotels, and stores filling the area near the railroad station and the corners of Front Street and Fremaux Avenue. Stores selling furniture, clothing, food, tools, hardware, medicines, and general merchandise filled the area around Carey and Cousin Streets.

An article in a weekly newspaper in Covington, *The St. Tammany Farmer*, noted that Slidell had six churches, three schools, a sawmill, five saloons, six stores, two brickyards, three barbershops, four fruit stands, and several other things too numerous to mention.

1914: Shipbuilding

The small shipyard, started by the Salmen family, became the Slidell Shipbuilding Company in 1914. Under government supervision, it became the Louisiana Shipbuilding Corporation in 1916. A 229-foot wooden ocean-going ship was built there in 1917. The yard was acquired by the Canulettes, renamed The Canulette Shipbuilding Company, and moved down the bayou in 1920.



Left: Graduating class of 1919.
Top: Shipbuilding in Slidell.

1928 ~ 1938: Depression Era

Slidell's first community water and sewerage systems were completed in 1928. In the same year, Slidell's first road connection to New Orleans opened when the Watson-Williams toll bridge, later U.S. 11, was inaugurated. The Rigolets bridge, later U.S. 190, was opened as a free bridge on June 9, 1930.

Several blocks of brick sidewalks were completed in 1934, the beginning of nine miles sponsored through the CWA program. Later that year, Slidell's new drinking fountain and public well at Town Hall were opened. This made the 1928 waterworks available to all residents. Also, all concrete streets within about two blocks of Front Street, from Pennsylvania to Jacob, were paved as part of a WPA depression-fighting program. They were opened to traffic by January 1938.

1962: Population Boom

Slidell's greatest growth began in 1962 when NASA located a computer facility in existing structures in Slidell and built a new test facility twenty miles away in Mississippi. The Mississippi Test Facility became operational on August 29, 1965 and the employees of NASA and its contractors began to move into the surrounding area. Population spurted from 6,356 in 1960 to 16,101 in 1970, to approximately 30,000 in 2010.

2005: Hurricane Katrina

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit Slidell. The eye of the storm passed directly over the city, with winds up to 190 miles per hour and a storm surge of over 20 feet. Approximately 8,500 of the 10,500 homes in Slidell were damaged and about 4,500 suffered extensive flood damages. City Hall and most city building were flooded. Thankfully no lives were lost during the hurricane.

After Katrina, City Hall and city offices were relocated to FEMA trailers on Bayou Lane. City Hall was renovated and reopened in July 2009. The Slidell City Council and Administrative Center opened in March 2010 and the Slidell Technology and Cultural Arts Center opened in April 2011.

Slidell, Louisiana was founded in 1882 during construction of a major new railroad from New Orleans to Meridian, Mississippi, connecting there with Cincinnati, Ohio and eventually with New York, NY. The New Orleans and Northeastern (N.O.N.E.) Railroad established a building camp at first high ground north of Lake Pontchartrain which eventually grew into the city. Slidell was chartered as a town in 1888 by the Louisiana legislature.

Sometime prior to Slidell's formal incorporation in 1888, its first streets were laid out in a grid pattern, mostly east of the railroad, running three blocks along the road by four blocks deep. Bonfouca Street, now Bayou Lane, lay in the short stretch between the railroad and the bayou. East of the tracks, the north-south streets were Bayou (now Front), First, Second, Third and Fourth. The east-west streets were Fremaux, Erlanger, Bouscaren and Cousin.

Erlanger, slightly wider than the others and designated as an avenue, was named by Baron Frederick Erlanger, head of the banking syndicate which financed the railway. Baron Erlanger named the town for his deceased father-in-law, John Slidell, who had been a prominent state, national and Confederate political figure. Col. Leon J. Fremaux, a prominent Louisiana engineer and planner, drew the original plans for Slidell and named Fremaux Avenue for himself. Bouscaren Street was named for G. Bouscaren, the chief engineering officer of the railroad. Cousin Street took its name from the locally prominent Cousin family.

In the thirty or so years after its founding, Slidell developed a creosote plant, one of the country's largest brick manufacturing facilities, a large lumber mill and a shipyard. The Slidell shipyard contributed significantly to the national effort in both world wars. Slidell residents worked in New Orleans ship, tank and airplane construction during World War II.

In the 1960's, Slidell began to assume its modern profile as the middle of three local sites in NASA's Lunar Landing Program: Michoud Assembly Facility in New Orleans, the computer facility in Slidell, and the Mississippi Test Facility in Hancock County, Mississippi. The city continues to seek economic growth by encouraging commercial enterprises. North Shore Square, a shopping mall with five hub stores, was built November 1985; Home Depot/Super WalMart/Sam's Club complex opened in 1999; the Slidell Stirling Center/Target complex opened in March 2003; and the Main Street Centre opened in 2008.

Slidell is located at the southeastern tip of St. Tammany Parish in Louisiana's famous "Ozone Belt." It is about three miles from the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain and is surrounded by rivers and bayous. The largest municipality in the parish, Slidell has grown from a population of 364 in 1890 to over 30,000 in 2010. Today, Slidell continues to deal with urban planning and growth, of preserving a sense of place and past, while accommodating an ever increasing number of residents.

Notes on Slidell History, Charles J. Fritchie, Jr. 1999

