Legend has it that Napoleon Bonaparte was to live in New Orleans after his exile. France’s self-proclaimed emperor never made it to Louisiana, but his physician, Francesco Antommarchi, did and brought with him one of four bronze death masks he crafted from the face of the deceased Napoleon.

That mask left New Orleans for the first time since 1909, arriving Thursday in Baton Rouge to stand as a centerpiece in the Capitol Park Museum's upcoming exhibit, "Revolution! The Atlantic World Reborn."

The exhibit at the Capitol Park Museum, which is part of the Louisiana State Museum system, is a precursor to the State Museum's "Dirty Shirts to Buccaneers: The Battle of New Orleans in American Culture" show on Jan. 11 at the Cabildo.

"And Napoleon’s death mask is the segue between the Baton Rouge exhibit and the New Orleans show," said Mark Tullos, director of the Louisiana State Museum. "It’s so important in telling this story."

The death mask’s home is the Cabildo, where it is one of the most popular pieces among visitors. It was donated to the State Museum in 1909 but came to New Orleans with Antommarchi in 1834.

Napoleon was a British prisoner when he died on May 5, 1821, in exile on the remote island of St. Helena in the southern Atlantic Ocean.

This is where legend factors into the story. It’s said there was a local plot to bring Napoleon to New Orleans and that what’s now the Napoleon House Bar and Grill was built as his prospective residence. But those plans were foiled by the emperor’s death.

Antommarchi documented the death with the mask.

"In those days, it wasn’t unusual for death masks to be made of a famous person’s or leader’s face," said Lt. Gov. Jay Dardenne, who with Mayor-President Kip Holden and others attended the mask’s uncrating Thursday. "This is one of four, and we have it here. People can get an idea of what Napoleon looked like from the casting of this piece."