PIE'S A LA MODE

NO Christmases of Long Ago Traced

By PIE DUFOUR

New Orleans will celebrate its 249th Christmas tomorrow and The Times-Picayune has chronicled more than half of them.

The first Christmas noted by The Picayune, the lineal ancestor of The Times-Picayune — The Times and The Democrat merged to become The Times-Democrat and The Picayune and The Times-Democrat merged in 1914 to create The Times-Picayune — was in 1837, as the newspaper's first year's existence.

On Dec. 27, 1837, The Picayune took cognizance of the festive day: "Christmas was ushered in, as usual, with the tolling of bells, the firing of guns, the spattering of crackers, the throng of the market; etc. . . . The day was delightful. Never did we experience a more inviting morning than that of Christmas, 1837. The sun rose upon it without a cloud, and there was just how frosty enough remaining in spots two hours after his appearance to give zest to the eating which prevailed at the different firesides about that time. These Christmas frolics recall the most sacred remembrances. They are associated with all that is endearing in the name of brother and sister and cousin. If the festival be even a folly, it is one of those follies which no heart, possessed of common sensibility, would wish to see abolished."

New Orleans had accomplished only 113 years of its 258 years existence when The Picayune came into being. For 130 years The Picayune has recorded the city's growth and development; its struggles against hurricanes and high water, against pestilence and corruption; its ups and downs in war, occupation and political rehabilitation.

The colorful two and a half centuries of New Orleans present a multitude of facts which can — and will, no doubt — be touched upon during the next week. The Christmas season is well suited to the purpose. The life here is gay — or should be.(Oct, 7)"

1794 — New Orleans had little to celebrate at Christmas this year, for on Dec. 8 occurred the second of two devastating fires in half a dozen years. A fearful blaze had swept the city in 1786 and just about what if left, the fire of 1794 carried off. So at Christmas 1794, New Orleans was a city in ruins.

1803 — Christmas came this year just five days after the American flag went up in the Place d'Armes. For the Creoles, was it a happy one? One may well doubt it, but Americans in New Orleans no doubt made merry on the occasion.

1814 — The British invasion cast its shadow across New Orleans Christmas, 1814. A preliminary battle on the Viller Plantation and vicinity had been fought on the night of Dec. 23 and on Christmas Eve, Gen. Andrew Jackson had fortified a line behind the Rodney Canal to await the British assault. New Orleans was fearful that Christmas Day, with the city's fate depending upon Jackson's ragtag army.

1820 — Secession was on almost every tongue in New Orleans at Christmas. South Carolina had already jumped the gun by seceding unilaterally on Dec. 20, and almost everyone expected the other deep Southern states to follow. Louisiana took itself out of the Union on Jan. 21, 1861.

1861 — This was New Orleans' first and last Christmas under the Confederate flag. The following April the city was Farragut and was occupied by Federal troops for the next 14 years.

1884 — The Cotton Centennial Exposition in Audubon Park, having recently opened, was a conversation piece in New Orleans at Christmas events this year.

1875 — Christmas was a happy one, especially for families with sons in the American Army in Europe, for a month and a half before Christmas the Armistice came on Nov. 11.

1919 — This was, for many older New Orleanians a sad one, for three weeks earlier on Dec. 4, the Old French Opera burned to its destruction. It still hasn't been rebuilt.

This was just a sample of significant Christmas dates in New Orleans' long and colorful past.