



Everything New Orleans

Tchefuncte River played major role in Battle of New Orleans: Madisonville Town Talk

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Madisonville's historic figure Brigadier General David Bannister Morgan served as second in command under Andrew Jackson during the Battle of New Orleans.

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While New Orleans unleashed the pounding of cannons and rifles during the reenactment of the Battle of New Orleans recently in celebration of the Bicentennial, the town of Madisonville, situated on the tranquil Tchefuncte River, was peaceful and quiet. But 200 years ago during the Battle of New Orleans, it wasn't peaceful at all.

Donald Sharp of Metairie, a historian and co-author of *The History of Mandeville: From the American Revolution to Bernard de Marigny de Mandeville* said tension on the north shore was very high and many citizens fled the area in anticipation of the British coming down the Tchefuncte River to get to the navy yard. Here's the story Sharp tells:

Between 1807 and 1823, the Tchefuncte River was the home of a United States naval yard, where gunboats could go for repairs and provisions. The location was in a turn of the Tchefuncte River now known as Beau Chene. The area was a prime location because the land sloped into the river making it easier to launch vessels. It was also an area that had a clear view of the river in both directions and was less vulnerable to British attacks than along the Gulf of Mexico.

Prior to the Battle of New Orleans, Captain John Shaw hired master carpenter Francois Pichon of New Orleans to build a flat-bottom frigate measuring 152.9 on deck that could defend New Orleans and the Louisiana coast lines. It was designed specifically to operate in shallow waters.

The block ship Tchifoncta would be equipped to carry 32 heavy cannons, 26 which would be 32 pounders. Construction of the vessel began in March of 1813 with up to 150 people working to build it during peak building times.

When William Jones replaced Paul Hamilton as Secretary of the Navy, he put no value in gunboats or flat bottom frigates. He thought it was simply a waste of money. New Orleans' new commander Captain Daniel Patterson tried to defend the Tchifoncta and wrote that it was 80 percent complete and would be useful to defend New Orleans because of its ability to carry heavy cannons over shallow water. His pleas to complete

the Tchifoncta were not accepted, and in the spring of 1814, Jones ordered the layoff of the workers and had the navy halt construction on the vessel.

Later that year with the impending British attack on New Orleans, Major General Andrew Jackson wrote a letter to the Secretary of War dated December 16, 1814, urging the completion of the Tchifoncta, but it was too late. The Battle of New Orleans broke out Jan. 8, 1815, and the vessel sat nearly complete on its stock.

Many historians felt that if the navy would have completed the Tchifoncta as Shaw had planned, the Battle of Lake Borgne would have ended differently, and the Battle of New Orleans may have never taken place. The boat was the only flat bottom frigate built in the south. It could have stopped the British in Lake Borne from getting their equipment in place for the Battle of New Orleans.

Tension remained high in the town of Madisonville during the Battle of New Orleans. Just before the battle began, Lt. Commander Michael Brown Carroll of Maryland sailed a bomb ketch named Aetna up the Tchefuncte River and blocked all traffic going up or down the river to protect the naval yard and the Tchifoncta from being burned by the British.

David Bannister Morgan of Madisonville was called upon and served as second in command under Andrew Jackson as Brigadier General. He was in charge of commanding the forces on the west bank of the Mississippi. He was poorly equipped with 250 weak and hungry men from Kentucky who had been marching throughout the night.

The group was also poorly armed to fight against the British. Once on the front line, the Kentuckians began to retreat, ignoring Morgan's orders. The British won the west bank. Years later, the incident was investigated, and the defeat was taken off the shoulders of Morgan, and the blame for the defeat was due to Major Paul Arnaud and the Kentuckians. Morgan is buried in the Madisonville cemetery.

Renez Baham of Madisonville also served as a major in the 1st Battalion, 13th regiment of the Louisiana Militia. He was the son of Madisonville first permanent settler, Juan Baptiste Baham.

In the Spring of 1823, the secretary of the Navy closed the Naval Yard. The Tchifoncta was taken apart and the wood sent to other naval yards on the east coast. All the naval equipment was shipped to the new Pensacola Navy facility.

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