

# Mardi Gras!

**Mardi Gras!** Starts the weekend before Ash Wednesday, which happens to be March 6<sup>th</sup> this year.

Some fun facts about the history of Mardi Gras, from the official website of New Orleans:

Mardi Gras is about floats, picnics, music parades and excitement. What's a Mardi Gras party without a King Cake? According to the Christian faith, Jesus first showed himself to the three wise men and to the world on January 6<sup>th</sup>, also known as Twelfth Night or the Epiphany. This is the day Mardi Gras Season – also king cake season starts.

Each king cake has a tiny baby inside, now plastic, but in the past the baby might be made of porcelain or other precious metals). At different times, a person might have found other items instead of a baby, like a coin, pecan or pea within the king cake. Traditionally, whomever finds the token within their slice of cake has the next king cake party.

The origins of Mardi Gras can be traced to medieval Europe, passing through Rome and Venice in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries to the French House of the Bourbons. From here, the traditional revelry of "Boeuf Gras," or fatted calf, followed France to her colonies.

On March 2, 1699, French-Canadian explorer Jean Baptiste Le Moyne Sieur de Bienville arrived at a ploy of ground 60 miles directly south of New Orleans, and named it "Ponte du Mardi Gras" when his men realized it was the eve of the festive holiday. Bienville also established "Fort Louis de la Mobile celebrated America's very first Mardi Gras.

New Orleans was established in 1718 by Bienville. By the 1730s, Mardi Gras was celebrated openly in New Orleans, but not with the parades we know today. In the early 1740s, Louisianan's governor, the Marquis de Vaudreuil, established elegant society balls, which became the model for the New Orleans Mardi Gras balls of today.

1872 was the year that a group of businessmen invented a King of Carnival, Rex, to preside over the first daytime parade. To honor the visiting Russian Grand Duke Alexis Romanoff, the businessmen introduced Romanoff's family colors of purple, green and gold as Carnival's official colors. Purple stand for justice, gold for power, and green for faith. This was also the Mardi Gras season that Carnival's improbable anthem, "If Ever I Cease to Love." Was cemented, due in part to the Duke's fondness for the tune.