

**Felix Jonathan Dreyfous:
A Draft for a Scholarly Biography**

By William D. Reeves, August 10, 1994

Commissioned by Ruth J. Dreyfous

The Completed First Two Chapters

Chapter One

THE YOUNG FELIX J. DREYFOUS

Felix J. Dreyfous was born in ante-bellum New Orleans, when the city was at the peak of its historical prosperity. He possessed the great creole quality that birth into a booming established household provided--a positive attitude, good humor, and a remarkable serenity. He was a second generation New Orleanian, whose extended lifetime spanned much of the city's history and helped to shape much of it. Like most nineteenth century youth, he went to work at an early age and calmly put into place block after block a monument to the French family in America.

Felix came from parents born and raised in Europe. His grandfather was Emanuel Dreyfous, a textile manufacturer in the town of Belfort, in Alsace. This fortress town is famous because it alone did not fall to the Germans in the Franca—Prussian war of 1870 and it never became German. His father Abel, born in 1815, was noted for his intelligence and aptitude for study as early as the age of ten. Abel attended a Jesuit school and worked for a notary as a “petit cleric.” Soon after the revolution of 1830 in France he decided to go to the New World in search of adventure. His ship took him to New York, where he worked in a store for a year, but it was not to his liking. He moved to Long Island to concentrate on the study of English preparatory to entering the legal profession. However, he soon learned about the opportunities in New Orleans, a town with a French heritage like his own, and in 1832 Abel Dreyfous departed New York for New Orleans. Knowing something of the soap making business, he teamed up with a friend to open a soap factory that survived for more than twenty years. Abel was determined to succeed and he was noted for his “volunté de fer” or iron will.

His earlier familiarity with French notarial practice soon brought him into the notarial firm of Joseph Cuvillier where he worked as a clerk for many years. Notarial commissions brought a steady income in the rapidly expanding New Orleans economy. His outstanding talents finally brought him a notarial commission from Governor Alexandre Mouton in 1843.¹ Abel then became a partner of Joseph Cuvillier, later the notary for the City of New Orleans, one of the lucrative offices in the city. The office of Dreyfous and Cuvillier became one of the most important in the city.

On the 18 January 1846, at the age of 31 Abel Dreyfous married Alice Dren to Abel. Emile E. was born on 27 July 1851, followed by Amélie on 11 April 1853, Anna on 4 January 1855, Felix, Jules, Rose, and Blanche.

1. Death notice in *Français Louisianais* (n.d.), Dreyfous collection.

Abel lived at a variety of locations during his long life in New Orleans. For a while he lived out Elysian Fields at his soap factory. In 1846 he purchased the lots at the corner of Esplanade and Tonti that came to be his later Esplanade home.² After the Civil War he moved to 368 Esplanade, the house that his son Felix subsequently acquired.³

In 1860 Abel moved his office to 79 Exchange Place, otherwise known as Lawyer's Row. Next door Judah Benjamin, attorney and Confederate Secretary of State, practiced between stints in Washington and Richmond. Abel was one of only a handful of notaries to continue practicing during the Civil War. But in the middle of the war Dreyfous and Cuvillier split their firm and thereafter, Dreyfous practiced on his own, or until his son joined him. After the Civil War, Abel took the oath of loyalty required by the Federal Government of former Confederates, in order to vote. He declared that he had never been disfranchised for rebellion or for violating an oath to support the Constitution of the United States.

Abel was a member of several non-business organizations. His principal circle of friends were French and most were Catholic. As a Frenchman, it seems natural that he was a founding member of the L'Union Française. He belonged to the orthodox congregation known as "Temine Derech" that dated back to 1858 when they purchased their burial grounds near the foot of Canal Street.⁴ Abel also joined the Masonic Mutual Relief Association as a Master Mason. As of June 9, 1869, he was a member of the Foyer Maconique Lodge No. 44.

On March 13, 1857, Abel Dreyfous appeared before Pierre Lacoste, the Recorder of Births, Marriages and Deaths for the Parish of Orleans, to declare that a son was born to him on February 17, 1857. He, the father, stated that he was 42 years old and resided at the corner of Elysian Fields and Marigny Avenue.⁵ This was the location of the soap factory.

Abel's son Felix attended public school at the site of the former Le-Breton Public Market on Bayou Road and Dorgenois. This was the heart of the creole neighborhood. Felix recounted later in life that he absorbed enough Confederate patriotism to refuse to sing the Star Spangled Banner in the fall of 1862 after New Orleans was firmly in the hands of Union General Benjamin Butler. The despised Butler not only sought to crush Confederate sentiments, he also worked avidly to stamp out the French heritage of New Orleans. Felix's refusal to sing led to his dismissal from public school and enrollment in the private French schools of the

2 Sale Abel Dreyfous to Felix J. Dreyfous, 14 June 1879. Charles Victor Foulon, N.P., Act 25, NONA.

3 New Orleans City Directories, Louisiana Collection. Tulane.

4 Sale of Property. Hebrew Association of Temine Derech to Congregation Temine Derech, 23 November 1882. before Felix J. Dreyfous. N.P., Act 64. vol 1, NONA.

5 Copy of Birth Certificate Felix Dreyfous, Dreyfous collection

neighborhood.⁶ In 1865 Felix attended first the primary school of the Mrs. Vignaud on Bayou Road between Galvez and N. Johnson Streets, then the grammar school of Eugene Martin at 299 Bayou Road near Derbigny. His fourth school was Henry Deron's Institution for Boys which had classes in the old Bringier Home at the corner of Esplanade and Prieur.⁷ As a result, Felix acquired an exquisite French vocabulary and accent, so much so that much later in life when he visited Paris the Parisians thought he must have been educated in France. His only slip was to pronounce mosquito as a feminine noun, as it was in Louisiana, where in France it was masculine.⁸

On the first of August 1871 fourteen—year-old Felix joined his father's firm as a clerk. Their office was still located along Lawyer's Row at No. 48 Exchange Alley. At first he apparently worked only for his keep, but his value soon led the two to re-arrange their relationship. By the end of the decade he was earning twenty-five dollars a month.⁹ They became very close, and Abel paid Felix by transferring property to him. He included property on Esplanade, and lots in the rear of town where swamps intruded into the city. The least valuable land transferred to Felix was a square in the Gentilly swamps valued at just \$25.¹⁰ By acquiring these lots, Felix came to understand first hand how much lack of drainage cost the city.

Felix worked as a clerk for ten years before he secured the treasured notarial commission from Governor S. D. McEnery in 1881. He was only twenty-four. His schooling during this period was limited to night school at Professor Alcindorf Cordier's at 282 Dumaine Street. (Though the City Directory listed Felix as a full-time student in 1874) The only intermission was a stint of four months in 1876 as a clerk in the dry-goods store of T. Danziger, located on Canal Street near Rampart. He even moved to their branch store at the corner of Royal and St. Philip Streets for a while. But the business was "unsuited to my views and temperament," as he later noted.

What did appeal to Felix Dreyfous was the notarial practice. The New Orleans notary was a highly respected, semi-public office. It involved a good deal of person-to-person dealing at which Felix was particularly able. As the senior member of the Dreyfous firm, Abel watched closely everything that was done and appeared as a witness on all the Felix Dreyfous acts. But this was normal in a two-man notarial office. Felix's first notarial act was to draft a charter for the "First Agricultural Colony of Russian Israelites in America." Much of his early business involved mortgages of rural Louisiana land as farmers sought to obtain crop finance-

6 See also Donald E. Devore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans 1841-1991* (New Orleans, 1991) p. 52.

7 New Orleans City Directories for 1866, 1870, Louisiana Collection, Tulane.

8 Story supplied by Ruth Dreyfous.

9 Note to file, in Abel Dreyfous File, Ruth Dreyfous Collection (hereafter RI)C).

10 Sale of Property. Abel Dreyfous to Felix J. Dreyfous, 14 June 1879 before C. V. Foulon, N.P.. NON

ing in the city. Another early act involved a contract between the Jewish Widows and Orphans Home, located at the corner of Jackson and Chippawa, and the New Orleans Water Company presided over by Albert Baldwin. Baldwin agreed to lay a six-inch water line down Jackson from his main line at Magazine Street.¹¹ Within a few years Dreyfous was leading the reformer's attack on two of Baldwin's enterprises—the lottery and the water company.

Dreyfous knew he needed to learn more, and in 1888 he completed a course of studies in law at Tulane. The same year the Supreme Court admitted him to the practice of law. Once Felix had established himself financially and politically, his thoughts turned to establishing a family. He had known Julia Seaman of Cincinnati for a number of years. Her father George Seaman had brought the family to New Orleans to start a business as a cotton merchant. She grew up to be a tall and popular brunette.

Julia and Felix married on December 12, 1891 at the reform congregation of Temple Sinai. They marched down the aisle to the music of Richard Wagner's Lohengrin. Serving as ushers were the leading young men of the New Orleans Jewish community—Isadore Scooler, H. Heyman, J. Goldsmith, L. J. Schwartz, H. Freidman, Leon Kaufman, Charles Godchaux, Morris Levy, I. Blum, and E. J. Johnson. Scooler was a great Poydras street jeweler, a member of the Boston Club as well as the Proteus carnival organization. Harris Heyman was a cotton merchant, J. Goldsmith a wholesale grocer, and Charles Godchaux became the president of the Whitney Central Bank. The best man in the wedding was Dr. J.D. Bloom, who had married Rose Dreyfous, Felix's sister. The presider was the Rev. Max Heller, the founder of the first Reform Congregation in New Orleans. The reception took place at the Seaman's large house on St. Charles near Jackson.

Felix's mother Caroline Kaufman Dreyfous played an important role in his life. She was born at Ingenheim Rhenich, Bavaria. It was her volunteerism that provided him with that sense of reform politics that put him on the right road in politics. His political career hung on the election of 1888 when he won a seat in the Legislature. That victory was crucially important, because everything that came later flowed from that victory. The victory was due, as he himself declared, to the wonderful reputation of his mother. In 1875 she helped found and served as one of the first directors of the Ladies Aid and Sewing Society, an organization of women who made the bandages and sheets for Touro Hospital. Caroline Kaufman died January 2, 1914.

The reformist ethos imbibed by the young Felix Dreyfous remained central to his life's work. It was the guiding star for his work in the Legislature, Boards, and City Council to which he next turned. The general welfare was never far from his heart.

11 Contract Jewish Widows and Orphans Home and ??

Chapter 2

LEGISLATURE AND COUNCIL

The post-Civil War South was dominated by three political eras—Reconstruction, Post—reconstruction, and Reform. Reconstruction brought overwhelming poverty to New Orleans. Currency became rare and property values plummeted. Even food was comparatively hard to procure. These were the conditions that set Felix Dreyfous firmly on the course of reform, of bringing prosperity back to the City his father had come to and he was born in. It was in the latter era that Felix Dreyfous played such a major role. The reform era led up to that balmy time in American history known as Progressivism, an era that commenced about 1900. By then Felix Dreyfous and the reformers had achieved their goals. Their work in Louisiana took place between 1888 and 1900. The dominant issues were the lottery, flood control, police reform, sewerage and water service, dock reform, and election reform. Felix Dreyfous played a major role in every one of these issues.

The reform era was a reaction, too, against the extreme corruption of politics in the late 19th century New Orleans. The State Treasurer ran off to Mexico with a million dollars of State funds. In 1881 the Criminal Sheriff of New Orleans likewise departed with a substantial sum from the city treasury. In New Orleans every city job holder was a political appointee committed to the status-quo. The all-time highest tax rate in New Orleans occurred in 1883 when it reached 317 1/2 mills on assessed valuation. A man next in line to be Mayor was convicted of organizing the murder of a political opponent. In December, 1885, the grand jury reported “hoodlumism rampant throughout the city by day and burglars plying their avocation throughout the night, the city is in a deplorable condition, and every citizen’s house is liable to be entered at any hour of the day or night, his family insulted, and his house robbed, unless there is a male protector on the premises ready and armed for resistance.”¹

The first signs of reform appeared with the formation of a committee of 100 in 1885. Soon more and more adherents flocked to the banner of reform. Young men like Felix Dreyfous were coming of age determined to improve their native city of New Orleans. They were not held back by fears of northern political power or enmity to the capitalistic forces shaping the American economy. They wanted New Orleans to be part of what Henry Grady, the Atlanta journalist, had la

1 John Smith Kendall. History of New Orleans (Chicago, 1922). I. 454.

beled three years earlier the “New South.” The peculiar genius of Felix Dreyfous was his ability to focus on the basics underlying the capitalistic economy. He and others saw that what New Orleans needed were not “quick fixes” like a lottery, but the construction of an infrastructure that would enable population and business to grow and prosper.

The last political remnant of Reconstruction, indeed of Post—Reconstruction, was the Louisiana Lottery. Originally chartered in 1868, in 1895 it must go out of business unless it could be re-chartered in the Legislature elected in 1888. This prospect galvanized the young men of the Democratic Party, men whose ideals abhorred profiting from the public treasury. Prior to the primary election of 1888 the young men of the Democratic Party organized the Young Men’s Democratic League, presided over by W.S. Parkerson, with John M. Parker, the later Governor, as secretary. State—wide, the Democratic party nominated former Governor Francis T. Nichols, a man long dedicated to the overthrow of the lottery. Meanwhile the regular Democrats nominated staunch “ring” men for office. Their candidate for mayor, R. C. Davey, along with John Fitzpatrick, Patrick Meally and Tom Duffy, were the powers behind the local regular Democrats. The reformers found the Regular’s councilmanic candidates unacceptable, and they called a mass meeting of the YMDL at the Washington Artillery Hall on March 28. Enthusiasm ran rampant, and the assembled reformers selected a complete city ticket, headed by ex-Mayor Joseph A. Shakespeare. Selected to speak for the reformers in the Legislature, Felix Dreyfous ran for the seat from the Sixth Ward. The *Picayune* came out against the ticket, prompted by a fear that a split in the local Democratic Party would hurt Nichols chances state—wide. The campaign committee of the YMDL included Ashton Phelps, H. Dickson Bruns, E. T. Manning, J. H. Lafaye and others.

The YMDL platform listed many reforms long needed in the city. It favored clean streets, good pavements, and “the best of levee and drainage facilities, to save the city from the overflows which made lakes of lands in the rear of the city. . .” It opposed political deadheads and pledged to remodel the police force. On April 15, 1888 even the Republicans endorsed the ticket and platform of the Young Men’s Democratic Association. However, the Republicans nominated their own members for the state legislature.

The election came off quietly on April 18, 1888, with the Nichols faction winning state-wide and the YMDL city-wide. Another perhaps even more important victory was scored by Edward Douglas White, who assumed the U.S. Senate seat. As a reformer, White was a friend of Felix Dreyfous and remained one to his death. He carried the anti-lottery fight to Capitol Hill.

Felix Dreyfous won election from the Sixth district and took his seat in the first session that ran from April to July, 1888.² He introduced a dozen bills, three of which became law. All three were reform legislation. One tightened the law on embezzlement. Another clarified how tenants could be evicted. The most important provided for a reorganization of the New Orleans police department. The legislation he introduced that didn't pass is also interesting. He had a bill to tighten law on bribery, on how to sell state property, and prohibiting the gift, sale or exchange of certain dangerous weapons. He also introduced bills pertaining to Notary Publics, and another amending the Code of Practice. He also filed a bill to create a New Orleans Fire Department, a cause the reformers were just starting to champion.

Felix Dreyfous wrote the Police Board bill, his major piece of legislation in the 1888 session.³ Long a football of politics, New Orleans police had declined in quality for decades. The reformer's attitude toward the police department was well expressed in a letter Attorney Ashton Phelps wrote to Dreyfous early in June, soon after the bill was introduced. He noted, "I have followed your Police Bill with much interest as a step toward permanently rescuing our city from the domination of the hoodlum politician."⁴ The reformer's solution was to make the police department professional, rather than political. Felix's legislation made the police department operate under essentially civil service rules. The bill created a management board of six individuals selected by the city council to serve without pay. The board had the power to make rules and to dismiss. The act also established a police pension fund. Appointments to the police force had to come from an eligible list approved by the Civil Service Board of Examiners. This board introduced the concept of civil service standards, and paved the way for the later introduction of civil service principles city-wide. The law also provided that every position must be filled from the rank just below, and that all policeman had to have resided in New Orleans for two years. There was no tolerance for the idea of a policeman living outside of the city.

The act also contained phraseology later associated with the "Little Hatch Act" that prohibited policemen from engaging in politics. Fellow reformer and attorney Ashton Phelps complimented Dreyfous for his leadership,

2 The second session met April to July, 1890. That was the extent of legislative meetings at this time.

3 An Act Creating a Police Board for the City of New Orleans.... No. 63, approved July 11, 1888.

4 Autograph Letter Ashton Phelps to Hon. F. J. Dreyfous. June 8, 1888. Dreyfous Collection.

“Accept my hearty congratulations on the final passage of your Police Bill. The enactment of this measure marks a new era in the history of this city and you have earned the gratitude of our people. .”⁵

In the short term the act caused a split in the reformers for Mayor Shakespeare did not approve of an act that diminished his authority. In 1889 he got in a squabble with the Police Board that led to a year-long dispute, paralyzing the effectiveness of the Board.

The murder of D. C. Hennessy, chief of police, in 1890 revealed a serious flaw in the reformers mentality. For ten years Hennessy had waged an effective war against an Italian “mafia” organization. His murder the night of October 15, 1890 was quickly traced to the Mafia and a dozen suspects were arrested and tried. The trial led to a hung jury, however, and the following day the “better” element of the community organized and armed themselves to enforce justice. A crowd of armed men seized parish prison and summarily executed eleven Italians. The leader of this movement was none other than W. S. Parkerson, the president of the Young Men’s Democratic League. Others involved included J. C. Wickliffe and Walter Denegre, but not Felix Dreyfous. Not coincidentally, 1890 also was the year the reformers were able to pass the first act to segregate Blacks and Whites. Again, Dreyfous was in opposition.

In the 1890 session Dreyfous again introduced about a dozen bills, though only one became law. That act required the Comptroller to list all delinquent taxes on real property in the Mortgage Office of New Orleans. It was undoubtedly intended to increase the state’s tax revenue. He again introduced his bill to create a New Orleans fire department, as well a strange bill to protect the property of owners of bottles used in the sale of soda water. His reform bills included one “to guard the purity of elections,” another to regulate the duties of coroner, and a third to regulate public printing. But he was not the lead author on the two acts that affected his life in that session—the Levee Board and anti-lottery.

The issue that galvanized reform in New Orleans, indeed, Louisiana, was the lottery. The Louisiana Legislature chartered the Lottery in 1868 at the instance of a number of individuals from Texas, Alabama, and Louisiana. Associated then with Reconstruction government, when the anti—Reconstruction reformers led by Francis T. Nichols came to power they removed the charter in 1879.

5 Autograph Letter Ashton Phelps to Hon. F. J. Dreyfous, July 6. 1888. Dreyfous Collection.

Skillful use of money and promises, especially the promise the lottery would close in 1895, led to the insertion of a clause in the Louisiana Constitution of 1880 legalizing the Louisiana Lottery until 1895.

The Louisiana Lottery was a private corporation that drew its income from two sources. The main source was the monthly drawings that yielded each month more than 3,000 winners. Early on the Lottery Company established a reputation for honest drawings by using Confederate Generals and an elaborate mechanical system to insure fairness. In its almost forty years, the largest winner was a New Orleans barber who collected \$300,000 in one draw. At those times they did not pay off over twenty years as do the modern lotteries. The second source of income, and the one that drew the most reform ire, was the policy drawings.

Policy drawings were three numbers pulled twice daily. Guessing the right numbers yielded a return on a small bet. The lottery company opened more than a hundred policy shops across the city in the 1880s. They were thronged by the masses, and it was the sight of large numbers of the poor gambling that fueled the fire of the reform impulse. As one historian noted, there were “policy booths in front of laundries, barrooms, groceries and markets.”⁶ New Orleans was policy mad.

With its apparently enormous profits, the Lottery became a patron of politicians and charities. Astutely they supported relief efforts after floods, and subscribed to every fund raiser in the City and State. But the 1880s witnessed the first anti-monopolistic movement in American history and in 1890 the Sherman Anti-Trust Act passed Congress. Reform public opinion quickly jelled in opposition to the power of large private combines, irrespective of their moral worth. The anti-lottery effort, however, drew additional strength from the Protestant Churches whose pastors regularly preached against gambling.

With the charter of the lottery company set to expire in 1894, the year 1890 was chosen as the time to amend the State constitution so as to permit the continuation of the lottery. It offered to pay the state \$1,000,000 a year, more than twenty times what it had been paying.

The Anti—Lottery League was organized on February 28, 1890 at the offices of Charles Parlange. One of the outgrowths of the league was the formation of a new newspaper, the *New Delta*. Since the established press supported the

6 John Smith Kendall. *History of New Orleans* (3 vols., Chicago, 1922) II, 487.

lottery because of its advertising dollar, the new League felt it essential to have its own organ.⁷

The reformers plunged into the grassroots work of campaigning. Personal interviews and letter writing were important tools at which Dreyfous excelled. A law school mate, John Marks, wrote to Felix on April 25, 1890, warning him to send a letter to Dossat in order to strengthen his anti—lottery sentiment. Marks wanted Felix to do it because “in the time I attended the law school with you I learned to respect your reliability in any thing you ever advanced.”⁸

In spite of the efforts of the anti—lottery faction, a substantial majority of the legislature approved putting a constitutional amendment on the ballot in 1892 to re-charter the lottery. Only three members of the select committee of the house in charge of the lottery bill opposed the lottery--J. M. Kennedy, H.P. Wells of Richiand Parish, and Felix Dreyfous. Five members of the legislature from Orleans opposed the lottery--Senator JosephH. Duggan, and Representatives Euclid Borland, Felix J. Dreyfous, Joseph G. Gilmore, and Frank Marquez.

The constitutional amendment sailed through the legislature, but the veto by Governor Francis T. Nichols could not be overridden in the Senate. This led to claims of victory by the antis. The Grand Ratification meeting of the anti-lottery forces met on July 16, 1890 at the Grunewald Hall, also known as the Grunewald Opera House. It was the largest meeting site in New Orleans, and it was januned. Hundreds were turned away. Large banners on each side of the stage named, on the right, Governor Francis T. Nicholls, Lieutenant Governor James Jeffries, and Attorney General Walter H. Rogers, and on the left, Senator Jos. H. Duggan, Euclid Borland, Felix J. Dreyfous, Jos. C. Gilmore, and Frank Marquez. Letters were read, and addresses received. Charles Parlange delivered the first major speech, followed by Samuel Gilmore.

The jubilation of July soon turned to dismay as the lottery forces persuaded the majority in the legislature to declare that such an amendment did not require the Governor’s signature. All that would be necessary was for the Secretary of State to promulgate the act. But the Secretary of State refused to promolgate the act, a potentially fatal move for the lottery forces. But on December 15, 1890, J. C. Morris on behalf of the lottery company, moved to obtain a writ of mandamus

7 Berthold C. Alwes. “The History of the Louisiana State Lottery Company” in *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly* XXVII (October, 1944), 1058.

8 Letter John Marks to FJD, April 25, 1890. Dreyfous files. Legislature.

against the Secretary of State. The district judge ruled against the lottery company, but the Supreme Court majority, made up of Bermudez, McEnery and Watkins reversed the district judge. This put the amendment on the ballot for April, 1892. This election coincided with the state—wide governors race. Thus the struggle switched to a fight for control of the state Democratic party.

Felix had been speaking out against the lottery all through the years 1890 and 1891. In an address to the Convention following the session of 1890, he begged the audience's indulgence because, "I am not accustomed to speaking in public. I do a great deal of thinking, but seldom ever speak." Yet he went on to speak of his opposition to the lottery to repeated applause. He portrayed the fight as one between patriotism and money. True love of country and family required that the lottery be tamed. He aptly portrayed the lottery as embodied in Albert Baldwin, John A. Morris and P. B. S. Pinchback, all good Democrats. He told the Convention they had threatened him with never being elected to another public office. He then went on the blast the newspapers, all in the hire of the lottery, as well as their reporters.

In the fall of 1891 anti-lottery meetings were held in all of the wards of the City to lay the groundwork for beating the lottery at the polls. At the Fifth Ward convention the anti-lottery speakers let loose a barrage of attacks on the lottery. The one newspaper that was commended was *The New Delta* for its anti-lottery attitude. The regular Democrats enlisted the support of Samuel D. McEnery, the State Supreme Court judge who had just voted for the lottery company in its appeal for a writ of mandamus. They mustered control of the Democratic Convention that met on December 15, 1891. The anti-lottery faction bolted, called their own convention, and reached an agreement with the Farmers' Alliance. They selected Murphy Foster for Governor, Charles Parlange for Lieutenant Governor, all staunch opponents of the lottery.

The election in April, 1892, led to the victory of the regular Democrats, but the lottery amendment lost overwhelmingly. The future of the lottery had already been sealed by actions of the Federal Government. On September 19, 1890 Congress passed a measure prohibiting lottery solicitations or tickets from the mails. Prosecutions of those violating the law followed. In 1895 the Louisiana Lottery moved to Honduras and became the Honduras National Lottery.

Dreyfous' anti-lottery vote in 1890 brought him instant fame and made him a leader of the reformers. As a leader he came to play a major role in what the reformers considered the campaign for public works, what we call today

the infrastructure. These public works comprised drainage, flood protection, municipally supplied pure water, and the removal of sewerage. One of Felix Dreyfous' earliest concerns was flood protection and drainage. Certainly his experience as a notary made him well acquainted with the terrific loss of value the city suffered in its back lands.

Early in April, 1888, Dreyfous ran an advertisement in a newspaper seeking anyone with a plan for the drainage of the city. The one reply preserved in Dreyfous' records was from W.W. Howe, of the firm of Howe & Prentiss. "Noticing your advertisement of a plan of drainage I beg to say that I would be glad to consult you in regards to the matter which I have been discussing for some time with leading sanitarians and engineers of our City."⁹ The reformers bill failed in the 1888 session, and they regrouped in 1890. A. Brittin, Howe, Major Harrod, E. C. Fenner and Senator Alfred Goldthwaite asked Felix to take a direct role in writing the bill for the 1890 session.¹⁰ Dreyfous served as the floor leader in the House for the measure. There Dreyfous put amendments on the measure to begin collecting taxes in 1890, thus demonstrating a go-get-um attitude that characterized his administration of the Levee and Park boards.¹¹

Once the measure became law, Governor Nichols had a choice of only two men to run the new board——Dreyfous or Borland. Both were his close reformer allies. Borland, however, wanted to stay in elective office, while Dreyfous saw the big need for an active Levee Board. Act 93 formed the Parish of Orleans into a public levee district. The Board of Levee Commissioners were to be seven, appointed by the Governor, from each of the seven municipal districts. The Mayor and the Commissioner of Public Works were to serve *ex officio*. The term of office was six years. The legislature empowered the Board to levy a one mill tax that would be due in 1890, the very year of the passage of the act. The new Board also had the power to expropriate land necessary for levees, either in New Orleans or the surrounding parishes. This act also renamed the City Surveyor as City Engineer, and designated him the chief engineer for the Board. Felix Dreyfous took his oath to serve as Commissioner from the Second District on August 4, 1890. The Commissioners then elected him President. The newspapers' initial attitude was positive, and at least one paper defended the one mill tax by pointing out that once the levees were put in proper order, it could be reduced.

9 Autograph letter, W. W. Howe to Felix Dreyfous, April 23. 1888, Dreyfous papers.

10 Autograph letter. A. Brittin to Felix Dreyfous. April 23, 1914, Dreyfous papers.

11 Official Journal of the House of Representatives, State of Louisiana, for the year 1890. p. 3

Events were perilous. The City had just survived the high water of 1890, one of the most serious floods of the century. Many areas north of New Orleans, especially around Convent, LA, suffered from deep floods. The river broke through the levee along the West Bank of Jefferson Parish, making the Ames crevasse on Missouri and Pacific Railroad property. Complicating the matter was the first struggle between the Levee Board and the wharf lessees, who took the position that they controlled the levees where they had wharves leased. This temporarily stopped the Levee Board from working in the First, Second and Fourth Districts.

Their initial work went into Algiers because the Ames crevasse channeled water around to the rear of Algiers. Under the direction of Major Harrod, the Board constructed the rear levee over the winter 1890-91. It cost \$14,000 paid for in one year by the one mill tax.

By the spring of 1892, the Board had built 21.15 miles of levees using 314,257 cubic yards of earth. All the levees along both river fronts as well as the Old and New Basin Canals were expected to be completed in 1892. The levees used the most up to date engineering data, calling for a 3 on 1 slope, with an 8 foot crown. In the Third, Upper part of the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Districts the levee was built to three feet above high water of 1890. In the lower part of Algiers and the First, Second, and Fourth the levee extended 18 inches above high water. The levees have been reveted employing 927,043 board feet of cypress lumber.

Dreyfous did not hesitate to oppose powerful industrial forces in order to secure the city from floods. One of his first steps as chairman of the Levee Board was to institute suit against the New Orleans and Northeastern Railroad Company to compel it to build a levee along Florida Walk. The Board received a favorable decision in the local court and the Supreme Court turned down the railroad's appeal. Dreyfous also reported on the failure of the city to force the wharf lessees to build the levee before their wharves to the height required in their lease.

Caving along the Carrollton bank turned out to be the Board's biggest problem in its first two years. A big chunk of the bank collapsed in 1890 in front of Cambronne Street, and after several studies, it was decided to build a new levee 300 feet back. Naturally, landowners along the route protested, especially in the light of the state law that would not provide compensation for the loss of land. However, Dreyfous persuaded the Board that only a 200 feet setback was really needed, and that ways to compensate the unlucky landowners could be found. In the Legislature of 1891 he secured a bill authorizing up to 7/8 of a mill tax to

compensate landowners. However, Dreyfous pointed out that the frugality of the Levee Board had made only 1/2 a mill of the tax necessary. Caves continued along Carroll—ton, and in 1893 Dreyfous launched a campaign for Federal Government aid to protect the bank or the Levee Board would be compelled to expropriate additional property.

Dreyfous and the professional staff of the Board recognized that higher and higher levees were needed because of the successful levee work up river. As fewer crevasses occurred upstream, the volume and height of water reaching New Orleans was expected to increase. Clearly, successful Levee Board work in the upriver parishes necessitated further action in New Orleans. Dreyfous had the board construct the first levee between Jefferson and Orleans Parishes for the purpose of preventing Jefferson crevasses from flowing into the backlands of Orleans. This levee led to a legal fight between Jefferson and Orleans. The Upper Protection Levee was deemed too low in 1892 when crevasses in Jefferson were flooding parts of that parish. Residents of Jefferson secured an injunction from a parish judge to prevent Orleans from raising the levee, but the Orleans Levee Board went ahead and raised it. The Judge then secured a rule of contempt, and the entire Board had to troop to Gretna for two days, pay a \$150 fine, and narrowly escape imprisonment.

Another step taken by Dreyfous was to send Mr. Ed Eisenhauer to report on the dykes and levees of Holland. He was the Commissioner from the Sixth District. His report discussed the various important dykes and the required slopes. On those exposed to the fury of the North Sea a slope of 1 to 20 was normal.

Almost from the beginning Dreyfous urged the Levee Board to enter into development work. In his report for 1893 he noted that the swamps at the rear of the city should be drained from a double point of view——”the improvement of the salubrity of the City and the increase of taxable values.” Dreyfous then pointed out that the Levee Board had strongly promoted a bill in the legislature to authorize it to drain the swamps, but the best that could be secured was an act to permit it to build one pumping station. Likewise, all the muscle of the Levee Board could not make the City Council pass an ordinance setting up a Drainage Commission. It did, however, build levees along the Bayou St. John and compel the New Orleans and Northeastern Railroad to complete its levee along Florida Walk.

In 1892 the Legislature passed Act No. 79 to amend Section 6 of the Act No. 93 of 1890. This amendment dramatically increased the Levee Board’s power. First, it gave the Levee Board new authority over drainage. The Board now had the duty “to provide, by the best method for the thorough protection of said dis-

strict against overflow, and, to this end, said Board shall have full power and authority to put up and erect, in connection with its levee system such pumps, flood gates and other appliances as may become necessary.” Second, even more important, in the initial act the Levee Board had to get the approval of the State Board of Engineers as to location, construction, and repair of all levees. In this 1892 amendment, the Levee Board was released from the duty to consult the State Board of Engineers from all levees except those along the river. Thus, there was no longer a state oversight of where the Levee Board chose to put the new levees it wanted to build along the lakefront.¹³

By the end of his term as chairman of the Levee Board, an admiring newspaper reader sent his letter to the editor and described the levee board as “competent and honorable” and referred to as the “Dreyfous Orleans Levee Board.”¹⁴ Decades later Felix told his daughter Ruth that after the Levee Board had constructed the river levees there had never again been a flood from the river.

As Dreyfous’ term on the Levee Board neared its end, he surveyed his work and found that the principal obstacle to completing the ambitious drainage program for the City came from the City Council. He decided to run for the City Council, so that he could directly push his program for the city’s development. The reformers happily selected him for their Citizens League Ticket from the Tenth Ward. Headed by Murphy J. Foster of St. Mary Parish for Governor and Walter C. Flower for Mayor, it scored an immense victory. The Dreyfous files contain an original “ballot” from this election prepared especially for the 10th Ward. It was to this ward that Dreyfous and Julia had moved after their marriage. An important side-light to this election was the growing sentiment among reformers to disfranchise Black voters. But in Dreyfous’s campaign for the City Council he made a point of telling the newspapers that he had opposed the Jim Crow law of 1890 segregating the races on railroads.¹⁵

The first step of the Flower administration was to draft a new city charter, one approved immediately by the legislature in 1896. The new charter was thoroughly “reform” and provided for the first real civil service system.¹⁶ At the

13 Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners, Orleans Levee District. 1893. (New Orleans. 1893). 27-28.

14 Letter from Edward Booth to Mayor Walter Flower, dated May. 1896, newspaper clipping with no attribution. Dreyfous files.

15 Undated and unascrbed newspaper clipping, c. 1896, Dreyfous files

16 L. Vaughan Howard, Civil Service Development in Louisiana (New Orleans, 1956)

next election the city council was to be cut from twenty seven to seventeen members, thus increasing the influence of each member. The new Council members also received \$20 a month, an innovation. The new charter followed the recommendations of the Municipal Reform League and enhanced the power of the Mayor. He now appointed most department heads. The Board of Police Commissioners, created in Dreyfous's Police Board Act of 1888, and the Board of Fire Commissioners created in 1894, were also continued. The key members of the new Council took over the important committee chairmanships. Dreyfous was chairman of the Committee on Public Order, known as Committee No. 1. A. Brittin was chair of Committee No. 2 dealing with finance. Charles F. Claiborne chaired Committee No. 3 for budget and assessments. Charles Anderson was chair of Committee No. 4 on public health.

The new city council in 1896 started off with a lot of disagreement. Felix proposed spending \$500,000 on a new courthouse, a proposal originating with the Young Men's Business League, the Bar Association of New Orleans, and the Law Association in 1894. They memorialized the City Council requesting a new building for the better accommodation of jurors and the protection of the invaluable public records. "The rooms for the care of the records on which depend the titles to all the property of New Orleans, consist of timber boxes of fat resinous dry pine-wood, and it is criminal negligence to expose such valuable papers to such a risk." Other members of the Council did not agree with Felix. Mr. Lafaye blasted the idea because it would absorb all the available money. Mr. Herberger agreed, saying money was needed for police and for laborers on the streets. The courthouse was a luxury for the judges and a few lawyers. Dreyfous responded that he thought the state was going to move the Supreme Court to Baton Rouge if something was not done. Furthermore, the tourists who go to the populous European cities go to see great buildings. If we would build greatly, the number of tourists coming here would increase. This courthouse was eventually built in 1912 and now is being rebuilt to house the Supreme Court a second time. The reasons for the second rebuilding echo those first arguments that Felix used in 1896--the fear the court would move and the attractiveness of a grand building for the tourist industry.

Another initiative of Felix's was the board of prison and asylum commissioners. In 1897 the Council created the 15 member board to oversee the numerous jails and workhouses under the control of the City. No elected official or one who has ever run for office within two years was eligible to serve. This was to be a blue—ribbon board. Its purpose was to recommend to the City Council what reforms were necessary in the management of these various institutions.¹⁸

18 Ordinance No. 13,489, Council Series, clipping in Dreyfous archives.

In the spring of 1896 Felix also went to work drafting a Drainage Commission Act for the Louisiana Legislature to adopt. Such an agency could not be created by simple ordinance of the City Council. The original draft of Act 114 remains in his papers. The act established the nine-member Drainage Commission of New Orleans composed of the Mayor, the chairman of the council committees of Finance, Budget and Water and Drainage, the President of the Board of Levee Commissioners of the Orleans Levee District, two other members selected by the Levee Board, the President of the Board of Liquidation, and one other member selected by the Board of Liquidation. The heart of the act was to be the clause transferring to its control the funds collected by the Board of Liquidation under the provisions of sections 6 and 10 of Act No. 110 adopted in 1890 for public works. Secondly, the act would require the City of New Orleans to turn over all revenues from the sale of street rail road franchise to the Commission for drainage purposes.

Clearly there was some logic in this clause since the street railroads would benefit from the extension of drained lands. The act then continued that the Commission would control the drainage of the City, and could implement the resolution of the Council adopted July 10, 1895, No. 10,991, Council Series, but would have the authority to amend the plan. The work of the Commission was not to favor any one locality. To pay for the work, the Commission had the authority to issue up to \$5,000,000 in bonds. It had the power to expropriate and to put its works in the right of way of all city or state lands. No Commissioner was to be paid or have any interest in any contract of the Commission. Finally, the act continued the power of the Levee Board to levy its one mill tax as provided originally in 1890. The Drainage Commission accomplished some work, but in 1899 the Legislature provided that the new Sewerage and Water Board would take over its duties and construction.

To the drainage question was added the problem of supplying the city with a supply of pure water and the removal of sewerage. Throughout the nineteenth century New Orleans had been conspicuous for its shortage of potable water and lack of sewerage systems. For two decades two companies had been working at a water and sewerage system. But both the New Orleans Waterworks Company and the New Orleans Sewerage Company were demonstrable failures by the arrival of the twentieth century. There were only 5,000 subscribers to the water system out of a population of 290,000.

The turning point in the Sewerage and Water struggle came in 1898. *The Daily States* reported that talk of ways to improve the city had become so feverish it had almost become utopian. The government had no money, and the scope of a sewerage system was simply too great for private companies. Besides, their motives were universally suspect. The President of the City Council, Britton, finally came up with the idea that if the government didn't have the money, the effort would have to go to the people. He proposed a 2 1/2 mill tax, estimated to yield \$250,000, to fund a bond issue sufficient to pay for the entire system at once. On November 16 President Britton called the Council to meet in the Mayor's parlor [at Gallier Hall] to discuss the plan. He provided the agenda for the meeting, attended by Mayor Flower, City Attorney Gilmore, Assistant City Attorney J.J. McLaughlin, and Councilmen Dreyfous, Marmouget, Guillaud, Story, Leahy, Pfister, Lochte, Pedersen, Tosso, Clark, Ricks, Anderson, Claiborne and Brophy. Britton estimated that the sewerage system could be laid for \$2,000,000, and the present water work purchased for \$2,000,000. The whole project might not cost more than \$5,500,00

The implementation of the plan required five levels of votes. First was the Council resolution calling for the election in the City of New Orleans to approve the necessary taxes. Second came the election itself. Third was another Councilmanic resolution laying out the details of the operation of the system and petitioning the legislature for permission. The legislature then had to approve a constitutional amendment. That amendment finally had to be voted on by the people of the entire state. In this election, women would vote for the first time in Louisiana as property holders. The City Council then created a Special Committee on Water, Sewerage and Drainage, on which they placed the four most important members——Britton, its chairman, Claiborne, Dreyfous, and Sidney Story.

In 1899 the struggle over sewerage and water reached a crescendo. Just before the city tax election, Felix gave an interview discussing again the need for the tax. He noted first that the death rate was again the highest in the nation at 28 per 1000 for the white population. Cutting the death rate would bring immigration, then capital, then real estate development. The only opposition came from the ill-informed small property owner. First, some of them did not realize that the amount of the tax was proportional to their assessments, not to their front feet, as was the system for roads. They would receive, furthermore, free sewerage system and free water to operate it. The only operating charge would be for water consumed for drinking. Since the tax was proportional to assessments, the small outlying property owner would still get sewerage and water, even though the cost of delivering it would be much greater than the cost of delivering the service to the expensive properties in the heart of the city. Dreyfous noted the case of the St.

Charles Hotel, assessed at \$500,000. The Sewerage & Water Board estimated that over 30 years the hotel would pay about \$47,500 in taxes. But there were many properties in the back of town of like dimensions assessed at \$3,000, whose payments over the duration of the tax would only amount to \$225.20

Dreyfous eloquently described the broad principle that all citizens should observe. “Anything which benefits the masses should prevail over every other selfish consideration. If by any act of ours the prosperity of our city is fostered and the happiness of its people secured we should not hesitate to perform it, for although we may not perceive any actual benefit for ourselves, still indirectly we share in the general welfare.” This principle was at the heart of the reform impulse that Dreyfous so energetically promoted.

A detail of the city tax election led to the production of an editorial cartoon that characterized the important role Dreyfous played in the creation of the Sewerage and Water Board. To call the tax election required a monster taxpayer petition, and the principal officers of the city were charged with getting the necessary signatures. Some business supporters offered a medal to the city official who raised the most signatures. The editors wrote, “This has been a two weeks’ go—as—you—please race for signatures. . .and it has been no merry joke.” The contestants for the medal were E. H. Farrar, assisted by Mayor Flower, City Attorney Samuel L. Gilmore “on that speedy traveler, ‘Briefs’ “, City Treasurer George B. Penrose, Tommy Nolan, and Felix J. Dreyfous, who had the lead but whose bicycle suffered a puncture and had to be abandoned.²¹

The New Orleans voters approved the sewerage and drainage tax of two mills on June 6, 1899. This led the City Council to draft an extensive ordinance providing for the implementation of the water, sewerage, and drainage system.²²

The tax ordinance levied the tax for the year 1899 and subsequently for 43 years. Bonds were to be issued with a duration of 50 years, subject to the ratification of the legislature and then another popular vote on a constitutional amendment. The bonds and the tax were to be in the hands of the Board of

19 The Daily States. November 17, 1898.

20 “Dreyfous on Sewerage”, undated clipping, Dreyfous collection.

21 Clipping in Dreyfous collection, n.d.

22 Common Council of the city of New Orleans, Ordinance No. 15,391, CS., June 22, 1899.

Liquidation of City Debt. Terms of members of the Sewerage and Water Board extended from 2 to 14 years, so that the Mayor could only replace a member every 2 years.

Among the many clauses of this long act is one now familiar: contractors on work for the Sewerage & Water Board shall only employ residents of the City of New Orleans. All permanent employees of the Board shall pass Civil Service and be residents of New Orleans. The act provided that the previously enacted drainage bonds of 1896 shall be retired from the first proceeds of the new bond issue, so that the surplus of the 1 per cent debt tax can be devoted entirely to the new issue.

The Sewerage and Water Board consisted of the entire Drainage Commission plus one taxpayer from each of the seven districts of the City. Dreyfous added some language that no bondholder of a sewerage or waterworks company would be eligible to serve. No member of the Board was to receive compensation. All meetings of the Board were to be open to the public. All contracts were to be let at sealed public bid. Its central power was the power to compel all premises in the City of New Orleans to hook up to the Sewerage and Water system. The approval of this institution was the crowning achievement of ten years of work for the improvement of the City of New Orleans.

Yet another major innovation of the last years of the 19th century was the reform of the administration of the wharves. As president of the Levee Board he had seen how pernicious the wharf operators were. Until the Civil War the City of New Orleans had built and operated the wharves. Following the war, shortage of money forced the City to lease the wharves to a private company that would charge what it could and be responsible for the construction and maintenance of the wharves. But they did not maintain the wharves well, nor did they maintain the levees adequately. On the City Council Dreyfous worked industriously to have the City purchase the wharf lease so as to operate the wharves in another fashion. He campaigning led the State Legislature to step in and create the New Orleans Dock Board, the public agency that has operated the docks throughout the twentieth century.

Felix Dreyfous completed his service as an elected public servant on May 1, 1900 at the last session of the reform City Council elected in 1896. This Council had been so dynamic and progressive that thousands of citizens turned out for its last meeting. And that meeting well characterized the entire Council's tenure as it was punctuated by vigorous discussion of a resolution to insure pure milk in the City. Councilman A. Brittin, President of the New Orleans Cotton Exchange

and a fellow reformer of Dreyfous, made an extensive speech discussing the importance of pure milk, comparing its importance to those other great issues that the City Council had tackled--namely drainage and sewerage. The penultimate motion was by Charles Claiborne appointing Brittin, Claiborne and Dreyfous as a committee to wait on and welcome the new councilmen the following week. It well expressed the esteem that the entire Council held Felix Dreyfous.²³

The complimentary citizens occupied the majority of the last Council meeting. They were led by W. S. Parkerson, John M. Parker, Judge John St. Paul, B. W. Bowling, J. W. Hearn, Hon. C.J. Boatner, R. B. Montgomery, and W. C. Dufour. Parkerson said, "We have watched these servants of the people well and carefully. We of us who have the welfare of the city at heart, whose welfare is wrapped up in the welfare of the city, whose prosperity depends upon the prosperity of the City. . . ." Mr. Parker continued, "I could not help thinking of the wonderful contrast between the last Council and the present. For four long years that Council dragged the fair name of this city in the mud, and it was openly said abroad that by money one could come here and get anything. I think we can let the mantle of charity fall upon that black record. The record of this Council has blotted it out of existence. . .not a single newspaper in this city has ever made a single insinuation against its honesty. Before, it had gotten so that all one could hear was 'job, job,' until it got so that a man was ashamed to say that he came from New Orleans."²⁴

Another Judge then spoke, the distinguished Judge John St. Paul. After extensive statements of gratitude to the Council, he reached the climax of his oration with the words: "Yes, such names as Brittin, Claiborne, Dreyfous, Sherrouse, Cucullu and Story will ever shed a luster around the high and responsible office [of Councilman]."

23 Undated clipping in Dreyfous collection.

24 Official Proceedings of the City Council, May 1, 1900, in Dreyfous files

William D. Reeves, August 10, 1994