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Get Your Shirts At Moody's! Samuel Nadin Moody: Advertising Genius in New Orleans, 1848 to 1874

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Get Your Shirts At Moody's!
Samuel Nadin Moody: Advertising Genius in New Orleans, 1848 to 1874

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History

by

J. M. Sims Rogan

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My wonderful aunt, Alicia Moody Heard Rogan, deserves acknowledgment for stringing this weft. The oldest living descendant of Samuel Nadin Moody, Alicia is identified as the keeper of the Moody family stories, history, and artifacts. As an amateur historian, Alicia is untrammelled by the ponderous constraints of official historical methodology. Alicia gives her imagination and emotions free rein which allows her to commune and sympathize with our ancestors—she described the scene of Moody's horrific carriage accident with tears in her eyes and confessed to being leery of the intersection to this day—in a way that brings history alive. Alicia should be the envy of all professional historians.

The warp is created by the University of New Orleans, Midlo Center's Dr. Mary Niall Mitchell, my thesis advisor. She is the consummate professional historian, a gifted writer, an excellent editrix, and a fantastic professor. She is one of a few of my teachers—in an academic career I commenced in the early 70's—who understands my unnecessarily complicated thinking and tortured writing. Dr. Mitchell also understood Moody long before I ever did and better than I ever will.

Before I get hauled off-stage, there are a host of other people who I need to thank as well. My family, my three boys, the lights of my life; Nadin Samuel Wolfgang Rogan, Felix Emerson Bird Rogan, and Ollie Darr Sims Rogan. My siblings, sisters; Ama, Alcena, Jessica, and Amanda, and brother Davis. My other aunts, Margaret Darr, and Cara Sims. Alicia's children, Wendell, and Lucy. My father in law, Ron Bird. And all of their spouses, partners, and children who make up my sizable extended family. My thanks to the UNO history department; Dr. Atkinson, Dr. Dupont, Dr. Chamberlain, Dr. Mokibher, Dr. Landry, Dr. Bischof, and Dr. Fitzmorris. All my colleagues and classmates, especially Richard Brunies, for listening to my endless nattering while trying to get his work done. A huge thanks to the staff and archivists of the Earl K. Long Library at UNO, the Louisiana Historical Center, the New Orleans Historic Collection, the New Orleans Public Library, and the Baker Library at Harvard Business School. Gary Van Zante for his assistance and interest in this project. The US Coast Guard and the Department of Veterans Affairs for making this education not exactly free—I exchanged twenty years of leal service—but free of any debt. And lastly all my friends, too numerous to name. I owe all these entities an enormous debt of gratitude for your inspiration, encouragement, and for stifling your yawns as I babbled on about 1800s outdoor advertising.

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Abstract

Mid-nineteenth century immigrant to New Orleans and businessman, Samuel Nadin Moody, leveraged the tools of the market revolution to pioneer advertisement with innovation and flamboyance to sell men's clothing, specifically men's shirts of his own manufacture. Through over-saturation of billboards, a massive, sustained, and creative newspaper advertising campaign, and the invention—and careful curation of—a personal brand, Moody thrived in the era's volatile marketplace. Further still, he achieved these innovations in New Orleans, a Deep South city typically left out of histories of the kind of marketing and communication innovation most often associated with cities in the northeastern U.S. in the mid-nineteenth century. This microhistory peers into this impressive success story enjoyed by a singular individual.

Keywords: S. N. Moody, New Orleans, Market Revolution, Advertisement, Advertising, Billboards, 19th Century, Civil War, Reconstruction, Business History, Commercial History

In 1861, the June to November issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* published a story in the magazine's humor section, "The Editor's Drawer," relayed to *Harper's* by an unnamed New Orleans newspaperman. *Harper's* defines this tale as "a very clever story, just about good enough to be true." Mr. Ovode, "a gay young blood from Texas" visited New Orleans and took a room at the St. Charles Hotel. He sent his clothes—including some "very nice shirts"—out to be cleaned, and then went out and "enjoyed all the fun usually to be found in New Orleans" including gawking at "glaring signs and waving banners" on Canal St. advertising Moody's Shirts, a bespoke tailor, and haberdashery. The next day he did not receive his shirts, but did receive a letter, addressed to him, with a card informing him to: "Get your shirts at Moody's." Mr. Ovode rushed to Moody's Shirts, across Canal St. from the St. Charles Hotel, looking for his laundry. He asked for Mr. Moody—who *Harper's* introduces as polite, stately, and even "immortal"—who made multiple searches for the visitor's shirts. Moody inquired, in kindly patience, if some mistake had been made.

"No mistake at all," rejoined the Texan, "No mistake at all. Stopped at the St. Charles Hotel, and lost my shirts. There is your own printed note, telling me to go to Moody's and get my shirts. They must be here somewhere!" "What Moody did we know not, but our Texan friend told him to make another search, and that he would call again."¹

As jokes go, this one is pretty tepid. The Texan, unused to the big-city life confused tailoring with laundering and misread Moody's direct marketing campaign. The joke is leveled squarely against a country rube—or its mid-nineteenth-century equivalent, a Texan—the *gauche* greenhorn at a loss in the sophisticated and urbane New Orleans. Indeed, *Harper's* Editor's Drawer section, which occupies about nine pages of the issue, is rife with cringe-inducing, anecdotes passing as humor. Poking fun at the marginalized was *de rigueur* at antebellum

¹ (N.d.); *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Harper's New Monthly Magazine, v. 23 (Harper, 1861) 427.

Harper's Magazine, and unsophisticated countryfolk were not spared. But, beyond the doubtful humor, the story reveals a glimpse into marketing and advertising in mid-nineteenth-century New Orleans. The "glaring signs and waving banners" advertising Moody's Shirts indicate nascent steps in outdoor advertising saturation. The directed and targeted flyer, or "neat little envelope," to the guest of the St. Charles Hotel—a luxurious New Orleans location for the well-heeled traveler—hints at a marketing sophistication on par with current predictive marketing computer algorithms. The story flatters the reader with a conspiratorial wink— "You won't make the same mistake during your visit to New Orleans, at your stay at the St. Charles Hotel, nor when purchasing fine men's clothing, will you?" All this is emblematic of the "immortal Moody" and his pioneering techniques in advertising.

The life of the mid-nineteenth-century New Orleans resident Samuel Nadin Moody is as fascinating as it is unknown. Samuel Nadin Moody—or S. N. Moody as he preferred—lived a life of fame, fortune, immigration, boom, bust, elegance, industry, economics, intrigue, war, carnival, comedy, and tragedy. But he is conspicuously absent from the annals of New Orleans history. His absence is further intriguing, because Moody was a tireless self-promoter and a prolific advertiser, in an era where such commercial activities were in their infancy. Moody harnessed the power of the billboard, embraced the aphorism, "any press is good press" and married networking and technology, all for commercial gain. Moody's story is the history of an economic pioneer in New Orleans. Before, during, and after the American Civil War (the latter a time where conventional histories consider New Orleans to be in the throes of an economic recession) Moody revolutionized marketing in one of the nation's largest port cities and realized a profit.

What follows is the story of a man who retooled the staid newspaper advertisement with storytelling excitement. Moody leveraged the press, outdoor advertisement, civic boosterism, social networking, and the Paris *Exposition Universelle*, all to acquire a fortune. Moody's narrative is a complex and layered account about a man who accomplished all the above, as well as suffered through a civil war, economic privations, career setbacks, civil lawsuits, family tragedy, and a crippling accident which would drive him to suicide at the young age of forty-eight.

This description of the early accumulation of Moody's business acumen is derived from *Jewell's Crescent City Illustrated* and an *exposé* in *The Daily Picayune*.² These two entries constitute the official biographies of Moody although there exists a strong indication that the works were autobiographical, or at least, significantly influenced by Moody himself. Both works exhibit likenesses in language and share other tantalizing tidbits of similarity—specifically Moody's grasp of self-promotion and sophisticated media manipulation—which point to Moody's influence. These two pieces comprise the bulk of primary source material regarding Moody's upbringing and business life.

Jewell's Crescent City Illustrated was a directory of New Orleans businesses, edited by Edwin Jewell. The subtitle to the publication is; *The Commercial, Social, Political, and General History of New Orleans including Bibliographical Sketches of its Distinguished Citizens*. Moody is one of the distinguished citizens Jewell chose for his book. In the introduction, Jewell acknowledges a host of writers and contributors, but no piece is specifically attributed to its

² Edwin L. Jewell. *Jewell's Crescent City Illustrated*. New Orleans: 1874. Archive.org, 220 <https://archive.org/details/jewellsrescenc00jewe/page/76/mode/2up/search/holmes> & "[Messrs. Zenneck; Buckingham; Col. S. N. Moody; Messrs. E. A. Tyler; W. W. Washburn]." *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), February 23, 1873: 12. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

author. The biographical sketch concerning Moody is thorough, covering his early childhood to the publication date, 1874. As Moody died January 1st, 1875, the sketch is about as comprehensive as could be expected. But, as in any biography, there exist omissions. *Jewell's Crescent City Illustrated* is primarily a commercial directory. Its audience was out of town investors and geared towards attracting business. Naturally, the self-promoting Moody has both a full-page advertisement—one of only five full-page advertisements in the book—and a full-page portrait. The sketch provides much of the bibliographical information on Moody—most likely provided to Jewell by Moody himself.

The Daily Picayune biography occupies two full columns of print and a picture of page twelve of the paper's February 23rd, 1873 edition. Again, the piece does not credit an author. The article showcases "...a worthy representative trio of our business community..." albeit "...cursorily and imperfectly penciled."³ It covers three businessmen: Moody and his Canal St. neighbors, who may have been tenants in Moody's building, jeweler E. A. Tyler and photographer and art gallery proprietor, W. W. Washburn. All three merchants receive equal copy in the article, but Moody is portrayed first. The reader is introduced to Moody with the grand opening, "The history of all enterprising men, who make up the material of a city's prosperity, is eloquently written is the success of their undertakings, and the reputation they have achieved."⁴ Biography, autobiography, or collaboration, both *Jewell's* and the newspaper article convey a strong affection and admiration for Moody. Perhaps this is the reason for the obscurity

³ "[Messrs. Zenneck; Buckingham; Col. S. N. Moody; Messrs. E. A. Tyler; W. W. Washburn]." *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), February 23, 1873: 12. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁴ *Ibid.* This succinct and remarkable statement should be the envy of all biographers, and it is heartbreaking to be unable to attribute it to any writer, Moody's implied influence notwithstanding.

regarding authorship. The level of anonymous adoration is skillfully crafted to exalt while keeping Moody's hands clean of pedestrian conceit.

Employing biography as image crafting was a delicate business. Biography's conventions had to be maintained, but each convention was imbued with flattering portents designed to connect the subject's success with reality. This method of selectively picking stories and infusing them with meaning was often applied to notable showmen, like Phineas T. Barnum. Moody's origin story was not exempt from this treatment. Samuel Nadin Moody was born in Manchester, England, November 4th, 1826. He was the first of six children born to George and Nadine Moody.⁵ Moody's early life is rich in significant influences. His early environment contains multiple hints and portents which result in the foundations of an economic genius. The first of which—Moody was born rich. *Jewell's* stated, "His father, George Moody was a flourishing manufacture of stuffs, merinos, &c., with large houses in Manchester, Bradford and London."⁶

George provided Samuel with the resources to obtain a good, if not stolidly traditional, early education. These resources also included access to high-ranking individuals. Yet, it was not George's money *per se* that gave Samuel a leg-up—rather, it was the sudden lack of wealth that lofted Samuel to his entrepreneurial heights. After receiving an education at "the best schools in

⁵ Edwin L. Jewell. *Jewell's Crescent City Illustrated*. New Orleans: 1874. Archive.org, 220. His siblings would be; Thomas, Sarah, Susannah, Mary Ann, and Louisa. Whereas in the eyes of parents all their children are equally important, for the purpose of discussing economic innovators in the mid-nineteenth century in New Orleans, and specifically Samuel Moody, his siblings do not really play a role—with the exception of Sarah, his oldest sister. Like Samuel, Sarah would immigrate to New Orleans too. She married Charles Labuzan, a Captain in the Louisiana Legion who achieved the rank of General in the Confederate Army, and from whom Samuel would receive a commission as Colonel and serve as Labuzan's *aide de camp*. Again, not essentially germane to economic innovation, unless the marriage of Sarah and Charles is viewed in terms of Moody's tireless networking and exploiting connections. In reality, most of the early biographical history of Moody is moot unless viewed in these terms—and in terms of an all-important incubator leading to his success.

⁶ Ibid

Manchester..." described as "...one of those sterling English academies..."⁷ Samuel enrolled in a "collegiate course" with a clergyman in Alderley, some twenty miles south of Manchester. But the market crash of 1842 left George "penniless, [and] with a large family" so Samuel decided to abandon his studies and make his own way, or as he puts it, "paddle his own canoe."⁸ *The Daily Picayune* refers to this as "a tide of adverse fate" requiring Moody's "energy and self-reliance [to] rise above the swell of the stormy current."⁹ The nautical imagery spanning both biographies indicates not only the same author, but is a deft usage of analogy showcasing Moody's resourcefulness in the face of trials created through no fault of his own. The sea is a force entirely heedless of human influence. It indiscriminately imposes hardship—and bounty—on humankind leaving the option of foundering or prospering according to the skill of the sailor. Moody indicated his prowess as navigator charting the tempests wrought by an indifferent Neptune. The nautical metaphor is also significant in evoking a chilling aspect of the market revolution: equating financial ruin to death at the hands of a capricious force.

The period in which Moody lived and worked is an era defined by what many historians consider "the market revolution." Crafting the term in 1991, historian Charles Sellers defined an economic turn well underway by the time Moody was taking his first steps. Sellers's work, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America 1815-1846*, proposed that Americans moved from the ethos of the citizen-farmer concerned with both liberty and the pursuit of happiness to a nation of greedy merchants who valued profit over equality. Sellers laments the sublimation of

⁷ Edwin L. Jewell. *Jewell's Crescent City Illustrated*. New Orleans: 1874. Archive.org, 220 & "[Messrs. Zenneck; Buckingham; Col. S. N. Moody; Messrs. E. A. Tyler; W. W. Washburn]." *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), February 23, 1873: 12. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁸ Edwin L. Jewell. *Jewell's Crescent City Illustrated*. New Orleans: 1874. Archive.org, 220.

⁹ "[Messrs. Zenneck; Buckingham; Col. S. N. Moody; Messrs. E. A. Tyler; W. W. Washburn]." *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), February 23, 1873: 12. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

democracy for capitalism and mourns the passage of Revolutionary American/Enlightenment values.¹⁰ Sellers's theory became a flashpoint. Historians developed arguments and counterarguments in describing this "market revolution." Daniel Howe wrote one of the most comprehensive arguments, a lengthy tome titled *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*. Therein, Howe argues that the market revolution was actually merchants responding to the technological revolution of the time. Antebellum America saw tremendous advancements in transportation, communications, and logistics. Merchants, Howe argued, monetized these gains to the dramatic improvement of American lives.¹¹ American culture then heavily valued wealth, success, striving, and innovation—all qualities exhibited by Moody. Historian Jill Lepore sums up the Sellers and Howe disagreement perfectly: "For Sellers, capitalism is the imported kudzu strangling the native pine of democracy. For Howe, capitalism is more like compost, feeding the soil where democracy grows."¹² But much more than botanical association was at stake. The market revolution was a matter of life and death.

The market revolution, Sellers argued, was a struggle for the very soul of America. In such a struggle, there will always be causalities. Historian Scott Sandage catalogs these causalities in his work, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America*. Therein, Sandage tells story upon story of failed merchants, and how America—indeed the entire capitalistic world—began to associate fiduciary failures with failures in character, or failure at life itself. Redemption took enormous moral and ethical turpitude, just as navigating a storm takes considerable

¹⁰ Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (Oxford University Press, 1994)

¹¹ Daniel Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, Oxford History of the United States (Oxford University Press, 2007)

¹² Jill Lepore, "Vast Designs," *The New Yorker*, accessed March 26, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/10/29/vast-designs>.

seamanship. Moody and biographers evoked this nautical imagery to show that even as a victim of fate, Moody possessed the skills and drive to stay afloat.¹³

The description of Moody's schooling interrupted by his father's financial failure casts Moody well and argues his skills at self-promotion. "Best schools," a "sterling English academy," and "collegiate courses" with a presumably well-known reverend, point to an upper-class upbringing. Moody's subtle blending of aristocratic origins and everyman bootstrap elevation is a perfect appeal to the American business community who worshiped both Old-World classism and New-World determinism.

The economic events of Manchester in the early-nineteenth century—Moody's father's troubles included—would prove to be a useful education in the fortunes of business for Moody. In the 1800s, Manchester was a global manufacturing powerhouse. With most of its industry dedicated to textiles, Manchester was given the sobriquet "Cottonopolis" in deference to cotton, its major import. By the mid-nineteenth century, Mancunians found themselves flush with money.¹⁴ So much so, "...that about a dozen gentlemen conceived the idea of establishing a Stock Exchange in Manchester." A sixteen-year-old Moody left college and took his first job as an office-boy in the temporary offices of this nascent exchange. Excess cash coupled with "...gigantic strides of speculation..." spurred the growth of the exchange "...with a rapidity equaled only by Wall Street ...almost as it were by a magical spell..." Moody advanced along with the market, from office-boy to Secretary of the exchange. He later obtained a position at the George Carr & Co. house, Carr being one of the original dozen Manchester market founders.

¹³ S.A. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* (Harvard University Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Stuart Jones, "The Cotton Industry and Joint-Stock Banking in Manchester 1825–1850," *Business History* 20, no. 2 (July 1978): 178, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00076797800000025>.

Moody became the head of the brokerage, "... and subsequently he became its successor." at the age of nineteen. However, Moody's fleet advancement was checked by, "... the dread railway panic of 1846-47."¹⁵

The Railway Panic—also known as the Railway Mania—was Moody's greatest financial trial. The Railway Panic was a case of a classic market speculative bubble collapse. Shares in railway companies—actual companies or speculative ones—increased. This generated interest, driving share prices higher. Investors, galvanized with the fear of missing out, purchased more railroad shares, which circled back to a share price increase. When the bubble burst, brokerage houses such as George Carr & Co. were left holding vast amounts of worthless shares.¹⁶ The hagiographic *Jewell's* sketch is quick to point out that, despite being ruined, Moody paid his investors back in full. "Staggered, humiliated, crest-fallen, but not dishonored, a ray of hope beamed upon him in an offer from an uncle to try his fortune in the New World."¹⁷ In 1848, Moody, at the age of twenty-two and having already experienced mercurial busts and booms, immigrated to New Orleans, Louisiana, where he would make another fortune.

Moody was not the only traveler to New Orleans from the British Isles in 1848. That year, New Orleans also admitted thousands of Irish migrants, fleeing Ireland to escape abject poverty, famine, and persecution. Many of these immigrants also possessed determination, a strong work ethic, and ingenuity. But due to their low station at birth and limited network outside their own economically depressed circle, these migrants faced a stacked deck on their road to success. Many Irish men worked as laborers and Irish women worked "domestic" jobs such as

¹⁵ Edwin L. Jewell. *Jewell's Crescent City Illustrated*. New Orleans: 1874. Archive.org, 220.

¹⁶ Christian Wolmar. *Fire & Steam: A New History of the Railways in Britain*. (London: Atlantic, 2007.)

¹⁷ Edwin L. Jewell. *Jewell's Crescent City Illustrated*. New Orleans: 1874. Archive.org, 220.

cooking, cleaning, laundering, and garment making. Any success eventually enjoyed by the Irish was hard-won and contingent on tremendous fortitude with a large helping of luck. In stark contrast, Moody, well connected and educated, found his path to fortune significantly smoother than most *émigrés* to New Orleans at the time. It is probable that this security gave Moody the latitude to innovate.¹⁸

Advantages or no, Moody “... commenced the world anew, at the bottom round of the ladder, as a clerk... in the Gentlemen’s Furnishing Goods business.” This business belonged to Charles Leighton, the same uncle who offered the aforementioned ray of hope. At C. Leighton & Co., Moody earned about thirty dollars a month—slightly less than \$1,000 in 2020 money. In his 1960s book *Fit for Men: A Study of New York’s Clothing Trade*, Egal Feldman describes the men’s clothing business model of the mid-nineteenth century. In Chapter IV, “Trade with the South,” Feldman explains how men’s clothes were acquired in the South. Feldman writes “New Orleans was the chief target of the majority of the New York clothiers”¹⁹ Merchants opened outlets in New Orleans, housed large inventories, and sold clothing *prêt-à-porter*. For custom clothing, particularly dress shirts—notoriously finicky garments requiring precise tailoring—customers gave their measurements to an outlet where an agent traveled with said measurements to New York, had the garment made and returned to the customer in New Orleans. Outlets solicited orders *en masse* and traveled to New York to obtain the product, sometimes taking months to complete the cycle. For example, Norris and Way clothiers advertised “NOTICE—Our customers and others, who would like to have their clothing for next fall... will please call at

¹⁸ Laura D. Kelley, *The Irish in New Orleans* (University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2014), and Earl F. Niehaus, *The Irish in New Orleans, 1800-1860*, The Irish Americans (Arno Press, 1976).

¹⁹ E. Feldman, *Fit for Men: A Study of New York’s Clothing Trade* (Public Affairs Press, 1960) 41.

our store before the 1st of July next.”²⁰ Norris and Way justified sending a sales agent to conduct quality control and supervise the manufacture. C. Leighton & Co. was less scrupulous, but rather took customer's shirt measurements and mailed them to New York City. Seamstresses constructed the garment, returned it to New Orleans, where it was delivered to the customer.

With his typical humblebrag showmanship, Moody professed to be unaware of this business model, even the very basics regarding clothing altogether. *The Daily Picayune* article states “...with his last shilling in his pocket, [Moody] assumed a clerkship in the gentlemen’s furnishing business, profoundly ignorant of its character...”²¹ According to *Jewell’s*, “At the time, he did not know linen from cotton, and had never sold a dollar’s worth of goods in his life.”²² This at first appears as a throwaway quip, designed to emphasize or color the notion that Moody was able to build a fortune out of the unfamiliar, but with closer consideration, the statement is understood to be a deliberate and self-serving falsehood. To begin with, any one of the mid-nineteenth century Mancunian Cottonopolis textile powerhouse would know the difference between cotton and linen. Almost any person of pre-synthetic fabric mid-nineteenth century knew cotton from linen. Lastly, the child of “a flourishing manufacture of stuffs, merinos, &c....”²³ ought to have known the difference.²⁴ Secondly, Moody must have sold thousands of pounds worth of stocks, and whereas technically, pounds are not dollars, nor stocks

²⁰ E. Feldman, *Fit for Men: A Study of New York’s Clothing Trade* (Public Affairs Press, 1960) 46.

²¹ “[Messrs. Zenneck; Buckingham; Col. S. N. Moody; Messrs. E. A. Tyler; W. W. Washburn].” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), February 23, 1873: 12. *Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²² Edwin L. Jewell. *Jewell’s Crescent City Illustrated*. New Orleans: 1874. Archive.org, 220.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Cotton fabric is derived from the cotton plant, Linen from the flax plant, and merinos are fabrics from the wool of the merino breed of sheep. I had to look some of this up, but I still maintain that Moody and anyone else from the pre-synthetic clothing era would know the difference.

tangible retail goods, the fact remains that he was very accustomed to sales. So why the obfuscation? Most likely, it was a stab at image creation. Moody not only knew how to sell shirts, but also how to successfully craft and sell his image.

This scenario is nothing less than another illustration of Moody's genius in self-promotion. He took great pains to cultivate the image of a person who, to whatever he put his hand to, prospered. The—overly lengthy—sentence following this in *Jewell's* helps to explain this fib of image building. “His uniform courtesy, however, shrewd business capacity and indomitable perseverance, coupled with the encouragement of assured success in a new sphere of action in a new world, secured his advancement and soon gained him a place amongst our merchants.”²⁵ Herein lies the explanation. It is unimaginable to think that Jewell might have preceded this sentence with the truth—something along the lines of ‘Moody, who knew gentlemen's clothing and was good at sales, was bound to succeed.’ Moody would have never authorized it nor would it have well fit the criteria of *Jewell's* subtitle—*Bibliographical Sketches of its Distinguished Citizens*. In Moody's eyes, distinguishment was incumbent upon accomplishment, and accomplishment relied upon innovation. *Jewell's* and Moody suspected that admitting he was already an adept might damage his brand.

Moody used his natural talents and rose in his uncle's business. In 1851, Moody married a rich widow, Isabella Clark Raynes, he adopted her daughter, and the couple began having children of their own. In 1853, Leighton divested of his clothing company and according to credit reporting agency, R. G. Dun, “S Moody being the strongest party, has kept the bus[iness] ever since + has made money.”²⁶

²⁵ Edwin L. Jewell. *Jewell's Crescent City Illustrated*. New Orleans: 1874. Archive.org, 220.

²⁶ R.G. Dun & Company, “R.G. Dun & Company Credit Report Volumes” volume Louisiana 11 (n.d.) 334.

Moody renamed the store New Orleans Shirt Emporium and sold shirts, naturally, and also cravats, undershirts, gloves, collars, socks, drawers, boys' clothing, and neckties—but shirts were his specialty. He opened his store and announced the sale of "SHIRTS AND GENTLEMEN'S FURNISHING GOODS, likewise advantages hitherto confined to the Northern cities, viz: A HOME MANUFACTORY for Under Garments, Collars, Neck Ties and every description of needlework..."²⁷ He wrote in his newspaper advertisement, "In announcing his commencement in business solely on his own account, begs respectfully to inform HIS FRIENDS that he is now prepared to receive them at NEW ORLEANS SHIRT EMPORIUM... and hopes, by determination to begin with LOW PRICES, Rich Goods and Polite Attention, they will rally around him as heretofore."²⁸ Moody made good on his advertised promises—he did offer low prices, his shirts and other inventory were high quality, and his customer service was legendary.

Supporting the veracity of Moody's claim of low prices is difficult. In theory, comparison shopping the clothing merchant's advertisements adjacent to Moody's suggests a solution, but it fails in practice. Moody's competitors rarely listed prices with the same frequency as he did. Feldman writes in *Fit for Men* "...S. N. Moody, a wholesaler and retailer of shirts manufactured at his plant at 381 Broadway in New York. Constantly priding himself on his huge stock, Moody was prepared to sell shirts of any quality, any pattern, any size, any price."²⁹ The implication of "any price" is understood as "any low price." His competitors—except his uncle—would adjust their prices base on the usual market drivers; supply, demand, scarcity, raw material prices, labor

²⁷ *The Daily Picayune* November 6, 1853

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ E. Feldman, *Fit for Men: A Study of New York's Clothing Trade* (Public Affairs Press, 1960) 47. Moody's "any..." quote is found in *The Daily Picayune* November 25, 1860.

costs, etcetera. Moody augmented Leighton’s “one-price” practice by having a set price, and then frequently lowering this price. In 1853, Moody sold six shirts for \$9.00, this decreased to \$7.00 during the war, and by 1867, Moody sold a half dozen shirts for as many dollars.³⁰ A fixed, no-haggle price represented only one aspect of his business acumen. Moody gained a small edge over his competitors by fixing—and publishing—his prices. Fixed pricing provides consistency, convivence, and surety, all three vital background factors in creating a culture of exceptional customer service, or, as Moody phrased it, “polite attention”.

Moody, by all reports, excelled at customer service. The *Harper’s* joke establishes the Texan as an ill-informed, presumptuous, and frustrated classic bad customer while juxtaposing “the immortal Moody”³¹ as attentive, polite, and willing to do anything to assist the Texan and help solve the problem of the missing shirts. Again, *Jewell’s* speaks of Moody’s “uniform courtesy.”³² Moody promoted these virtues in the newspapers as well. Articles about Moody in *The Daily Picayune*, *The Delta*, and *The New Orleans Crescent*, all describe him as being courtly, considerate, compassionate, and dignified. *The Daily Picayune*, portrayed him as “a liberal, large hearted and munificent patron of the press, the newspapers of the country speak trumpet-tongued... [about Moody].”³³ Moody’s talent at self-promotion ensured he capitalized on these accolades, and he included “polite attention” or some such equivalent was often included in his newspaper advertisements. Moody carefully preserved this reputation, not only with the consumer and the press but with his creditors as well. Any company that drew large amounts of

³⁰ Various newspaper advertisements in *The Daily Picayune*, *The Delta*, and *The New Orleans Crescent*.

³¹ (N.d.); *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, Harper’s New Monthly Magazine, v. 23 (Harper, 1861) 427.

³² Edwin L. Jewell. *Jewell’s Crescent City Illustrated*. New Orleans: 1874. Archive.org, 220.

³³ [Messrs. Zenneck; Buckingham; Col. S. N. Moody; Messrs. E. A. Tyler; W. W. Washburn] *The Daily Picayune* February 23, 1873

credit caught the attention of R. G. Dun & Company, a New York firm established in 1847 that employed a nation-wide army "of correspondents that would function as a source of reliable, consistent and objective credit information."³⁴ These correspondents would gauge the financial fitness of companies, and filed reports back to New York. These reports were less objective than frank, and R. G. Dun & Company agents praised or criticized without fear or favor. Moody's Shirts was no exception, but whereas many other credited entities received damning aspersions on their financial health—and personal and professional character in general—Moody received praise, curt and to the point commendation, but praise, nonetheless. Dun's agent's entries included; "He is indus.[trious], sober + enterprising," "...prompt + polite," "He stands well in the community," and at his death "[He was a] good businessman. Honest."³⁵ This praise appeared in contrast to entries regarding debtors deemed unworthy. In *Born Losers*, Sandage recorded some of these poor assessments, citing the agency used such language as "worthless & contemptible."³⁶ The R. G. Dun & Company agents made almost three dozen valuations of Moody's Shirts, all positive. Moody worked with these auditors and diligently opened his business and books to their scrutiny. He also applied the Moody self-promotional and image perseverance touch to these laconic agents. On September 9, 1854—at Moody's urging—an agent included a parenthetical note on their report; "He seems anxious that we should state that the "Samuel Moody" who owns some fast horses, and is something of a sporting character who is also a resident of our city is not "Samuel N. Moody" (or any connection of his.)"³⁷ Lastly,

³⁴ "Learn About Our Company History," accessed March 12, 2020, <https://www.dnb.com/about-us/company/history.html>.

³⁵ R.G. Dun & Company, "R.G. Dun & Company Credit Report Volumes" volume Louisiana 11 (n.d.) 272 & 334.

³⁶ S.A. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* (Harvard University Press, 2005) 233.

³⁷ R.G. Dun & Company, "R.G. Dun & Company Credit Report Volumes" volume Louisiana 11 (n.d.) 195.

Moody maintained a private life of gentility and refinement. He purchased a grand mansion at 1411 Canal Street—a few blocks away from his store—where he threw Christmas, New Years, and Twelfth-Night balls³⁸. He hosted the cream of the city’s society, as well as many national and international notables, dignitaries, and royalty. Moody’s personality and prosperity matched his wares; elegant, refined, and deliberately high-class.



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³⁸ Friends of the Cabildo et al., *New Orleans Architecture: Faubourg Tremé and the Bayou Road*, New Orleans Architecture (Pelican Publishing Company, 1971) 80. Lillian L. Campbell, Moody’s granddaughter, credits Moody for importing from Europe to New Orleans the Twelfth Night/Epiphany celebrations, including the hiding of a bean in a cake—the precursor to the modern Mardi Gras King Cake celebration.

³⁹ Theodore Lillenthal, *S. N. Moody Residence*, (New Orleans, 1867) reproduced from author’s personal collection.

⁴⁰ JMS Rogan, *Moody Residence Today* (New Orleans, 2020)

Moody rented and eventually purchased, an impressive building on the corner of Canal and Royal—a highly conspicuous commercial location—from the venerable Creole patrician Germain Musson, the grandfather of impressionist painter Edgar Degas.⁴¹ Much of the continued success in Moody’s career can be attributed to this imposing granite edifice. Moody called the building “his palace” where he—the self-titled— “Shirt King” reigned. (Note the prominent lettering on the photograph of the building, pictured below.) This building and its location played no small role in Moody’s success and deserve consideration.



42



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In the decade prior to the Civil War, New Orleans reigned as the commercial center of the American South, and one of the most economically thriving cities in the U.S. The nation's second-largest port, New Orleans connected the United States to the markets of the 1850's economic world. Situated between the Mississippi River Valley and the vast, diverse, and

⁴¹ Jean S. Boggs, *Degas and New Orleans: A French Impressionist in America*, (New Orleans, New Orleans Museum of Art, 1999) 106.

⁴² Theodore Lillenthal, *Canal St.*, (New Orleans, 1867) reproduced from author’s personal collection.

⁴³ TRB Rogan, *Canal & Royal Streets*. (New Orleans, 2020) Note the copious use of off-site advertisements. Moody would approve—if the ads were posted on any building other than his!

profitable markets of the Atlantic world, New Orleans emerged as the pivot point for millions of dollars in maritime trade. The influence of the Mississippi River on New Orleans is undeniable. The River shaped all aspects of life in New Orleans, its history, culture, demographics, politics, and of course, economics. Canal Street served as the commercial retail center of the city.⁴⁴

Moody's Shirts was located at this interior United States/Atlantic World nexus a few blocks from the River on the corner of Canal and Royal Streets. Despite having one toe on the French side of the city, Moody's Shirts served a decidedly Angelo-American clientele. All the city's foot-traffic passing to and from the River passed Moody's Shirts.⁴⁵

In New Orleans, merchants bought and sold everything; stocks, bonds, shares, cotton, rice, sugar, ore, tobacco, molasses, wheat, timber, wine, paper, produce, furniture, carriages, cloth, instruments, machines, clocks, goods from the Caribbean or South America, horses, cattle. Services were also sold; architects, doctors, investors, bankers, hoteliers, customs agents, entertainers, printers, photographers, shipbuilders, dock workers, laborers, and sailors all plied their trade along Canal Street. Antebellum New Orleans was also the South's largest slave market. In fact, one of the largest slave exchanges in the world sat just above Canal Street at the elegant St. Charles Hotel—where Texan Mr. Ovide of the *Harper's* story stayed—and another

⁴⁴ P.S. Laborde and J.T. Magill, *Canal Street: New Orleans' Great Wide Way* (Pelican Publishing Company, 2006) 23. Canal Street is New Orleans' main street. In 1807, French administrator Joseph Antoine Vinache identified a 171-foot-wide swath of land starting at the Mississippi River and running tangentially to the French Quarter for about four miles northwest. Vinache intended this to be a canal, linking the River to Lake Pontchartrain via Bayou St. John.⁴⁴ The project was never undertaken, and the land was sequestered as a street but kept the project's—Canal—name. And it was no ordinary street. Retaining the massive width, Canal Street was, and is even today, one of the widest city streets in North America. It was a grand boulevard, a central processing hub for all maritime trading at its foot—at the River—dividing the old-world French Creole denizens of the *Vieux Carré*, on the downriver side, from the *nouveau riche* Angelo-Americans uptown. Stores, hotels, businesses, and government offices lined the first dozen blocks of Canal Street, leaving ample room in the middle form a “neutral ground”, or unofficial divisor of the two cultural groups, the term later being adopted in New Orleans vernacular for any median in the city.

⁴⁵ Richard Campanella, *Geographies of New Orleans: Urban Fabrics before the Storm* (Center for Louisiana Studies, 2006).

exchange sat a few blocks below Canal Street at the St. Louis Hotel.⁴⁶ Enslaved women, men, and children powered the engine behind this economic environment, and slavers, farmers, merchants made vast fortunes off the brutal exploitation of African Americans.⁴⁷ The awful legacy of slavery notwithstanding, Canal Street at the River afforded a vibrant and fashionable location, perfect for opening a business.

All this economic cacophony was the nexus of the market revolution and men such as Moody, its foot soldiers. The cotton harvested by enslaved people on massive mono-crop proto-agribusiness plantations made the textile base of Moody's shirts. Merchants shipped this cotton worldwide on increasingly improving shipping platforms. The textile mills operated by impoverished poor in England spun the cotton into cloth. Irish immigrants in New York and New Orleans sweatshops cut and assembled the fabric into clothing, shirts included. Moody sold the shirts to tourists—like our Texan—and other high-end customers, many of whom had only recently acquired their wealth by profiting off managing or investing in the various steps of this process. As to the theory of abandonment of American founding principles, proposed by Sellers, Moody immigrated to New Orleans at the very end of this process. He did not know the pre-market revolution ethos, nor was he required to naturalize in order to participate in the economic spree. In fact, he exploited his status as a foreigner to his financial benefit. In 1862, early in the Civil War, Union General Benjamin Butler captured and occupied New Orleans. Lillian L. Campbell, Moody's granddaughter wrote in her biography of Moody, that Gen. Butler tried to confiscate Moody's property. But as Moody "had been very careful to retain his British

⁴⁶ Maurie D. McInnis, "Mapping the Slave Trade in Richmond and New Orleans," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 20, no. 2 (2013): 102–25, <https://doi.org/10.5749/buildland.20.2.0102>.

⁴⁷ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999) 2.

citizenship, Butler could do nothing with a Queen's subject."⁴⁸ Exercised only by wealthy and savvy men such as Moody, this loophole was certainly not afforded to the rest of the immigrant community of New Orleans. All others fell under the democratic mechanism of Union martial law—a legal process that failed to keep pace with the legalistic market revolution technicalities. Guile trumping the law of the land encapsulates the very pinnacle of the changing values of the market revolution bemoaned by Sellers. Moody's legal maneuvering evokes Lepore's imported kudzu strangling the native pine.

But Moody also resembled Howe's compost. Moody felt secure in his palace. He controlled his image. He offered low prices, a high-quality product, and excellent customer service. He enjoyed wealth and stood well in his community. Most importantly, Moody revolutionized advertising. Moody transitioned from being a participant and beneficiary of capitalism to a contributor. Moody understood creative advertising as a low-cost endeavor reliant on creativity over capital, imagination over investment, and exploited this comprehension. Moody's imaginative embellishments to the medium democratized it by leveling the playing field. Moody demonstrated that, for the same price, the strictly formulaic "who-what-where-how-much" newspaper advertisement might be enhanced with an enticing story. Moody added low-cost, enriched advertising to Howe's canonical elements of capitalism: canal projects, telegraphs, and faster steamships. He paved the way for the low-cost and ubiquitous slogan, logo, and brand that dominates the medium to this day. Moody introduced a fertile nutrient into the loam feeding the garden of democracy.

Moody pioneered advertising in three ways. First, he created stories out of advertisements. Secondly, he posted the first permanent billboards in New Orleans, if not the

⁴⁸ Friends of the Cabildo et al., *New Orleans Architecture: Faubourg Tremé and the Bayou Road*, New Orleans Architecture (Pelican Publishing Company, 1971) 80.

country. Lastly, Moody saturated the city with his ads. Each aspect of Moody's innovation is remarkable and deserving of individual consideration.

Moody engineered *The Daily Picayune* biopic about the trio of merchants as well as the entry in *Jewell's*. Moody planted advertisements masquerading as biographies and persistently sold and self-promoted throughout the biographies. Not content with these innovations, Moody augmented all his newspaper advertisements. Historian Gary Van Zante writes in *New Orleans 1867: Photographs by Theodore Lilienthal*, "[Moody] published poems, satirical dialogues, and sarcastic letters in local papers addressed to "other monarchs" and the "starchy bosoms" of "fellow aristocrats," including Emperor Napoléon III."⁴⁹ Although not lyrical *tours de force*, Moody's poems managed to convey all the standard information as any advertisement, yet in a fanciful fashion. One poem, "The Song of the Shirt"—penned by "An Anonymous Admirer of S. N. Moody's Shirt"—concludes;

Bachelors, take my advice—
Married men, listen as well:
If your sweethearts you'd please, and wives you
would ease,
Let MOODY his shirts to you sell!
For they're stitched, stitched, stitched
So well, and so strong, and so neat.
On the Shirt King, the call—buy your shirts,
one and all,
At MOODY'S Shirt Store, Canal street.⁵⁰

Another poem, "Christmas is Coming," finds a wife at a loss as to what to get her husband for Christmas. With time running out, the wife became desperate, and prayed for inspiration. "When, suddenly bright'ning, a voice from above..."⁵¹ encouraged her to find gifts—

⁴⁹ Gary Van Zante and T. Lilienthal, *New Orleans 1867: Photographs by Theodore Lilienthal* (Merrell, 2008), 103.

⁵⁰ "The Song of the Shirt." *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), May 28, 1857: 2. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*. All of Moody's poems remain unattributed to an author—but the poems exhibit a strong smattering of Moody's wit.

⁵¹ "Christmas is Coming" *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), December 21, 1865: [4]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

not just shirts, but a morning coat or a scarf—at Moody’s Shirts. Fanciful poetic license notwithstanding, Moody assumed a heavenly endorsement, so confident was he about his products.

The letter Moody wrote to Moody’s Shirts, in the voice of French Emperor Napoléon III, is a little harder to parse. In 1866, Louisiana Governor James Wells appointed Moody Commissioner to the Paris *Exposition Universelle*. Moody took to Paris a portfolio of New Orleans photographs by Swedish photographer Theodore Lilienthal.⁵² Naturally, Moody included his shirts as part of the exhibit. News correspondents reported the quality of Moody’s shirts impressed the Emperor and Moody made the most of this endorsement, mentioning it in his advertisements thereafter. Moody titled a letter, “A Good Deed”, and published it under the *nom-de-plume* “Starchy Bosom” penned as if the Emperor himself had written it. The letter did not expressly name the Emperor; however, the letter bore the address, “*Champ de Mars*, Paris Exposition, March 1867.” Starchy Bosom expressed “profound gratitude” for “those magnificent shirts of your Highness’ manufacture” and ordered another half-dozen. The letter is addressed to, “H. R. H. [His Royal Highness] S. N. Moody, Granite Palace, corner Royal and Canal streets.”⁵³ The letter contained too many absurdities to be believed as an actual letter from Emperor Napoléon III. The Emperor did not write New Orleans merchants, in English, nor refer to himself as “Starchy Bosom,” nor refer to anyone without noble blood as a royal, nor placed his own shirt orders. The entire advertisement is presented as a joke—but with an element of truth.

⁵² G. Van Zante and T. Lilienthal, *New Orleans 1867: Photographs by Theodore Lilienthal* (Merrell, 2008), 12.

⁵³ "A Good Deed." *New Orleans Times* (New Orleans, Louisiana), May 5, 1867: Copy of [1]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

Moody received a positive reception in Paris and the Emperor did like his shirts. Thereupon, Moody utilized this endorsement with humorous advertisements.

Moody's most fantastic deviation from the usual format of goods-services-prices-hours-location is an advertisement in the *Picayune*. On March 27, 1864, in the midst of the Civil War, Moody bought a half-column of the front page of the *Picayune* wherein he wrote a story titled "S. N. Moody, Besieged and Almost Defeated." The story imagined "...a desperate storming of the granite fort, corner of Canal and Royal Streets" by besiegers, or customers, vying for his good deals on clothing, almost overran his store. Moody claimed the battle will be remembered as, "...Shirt tail Run, or the Siege of Sock-land." As the 'battle' raged and his stock is almost depleted, the siege is lifted, with the help of a consignment of clothes, sold by "Moody's forces... linen clad in bullet-proof shirts." Moody purchased a peculiar position for this story. Centered on the front page of the *Picayune*, nestled between real news of violence at a local election and a bloody engagement between Union and Confederate forces in Mississippi.⁵⁴ Gauging the efficacy of the advertisement's gallows humor—presumably, it worked—is difficult. An explanation that the tone-deaf story of the siege stood simply as an example of Moody's humor in advertisement is incomplete. A fuller picture of Moody's reasoning derived by imagining the story in terms of suffering from—and responding to—war fatigue cast by the Civil War. Moody's creative, if not slightly off-color, advertisements appeared in multiple publications, ranging from the *Picayune*, *True Delta*, *Sunday Delta*, *New-Orleans Commercial Intelligencer*, and, *New Orleans Daily Crescent*.

⁵⁴ "S. N. Moody, Besieged and Almost Defeated." "The Election on 25th of March 1864." and "The March in Mississippi" *Picayune*, March 27, 1864.

Like the newspaper advertisement, Moody did not invent the billboard, however, he changed the usage of the billboard. Moody harnessed the power of these media in new innovative ways, re-making them in the process. Billboards were the first means of mass communication other than public address.⁵⁵ Experts on the history of advertising agree that permanent, commercial outdoor advertising appeared centuries ago but was heretofore on-site. Off-premise advertising—that is, signs, bills, or notices posted away from the location of the business promoting its wares—was usually temporary, in two senses. The signage advertised an event—a religious meeting, an opera engagement, a runaway slave, a shipment of products, or a circus.⁵⁶ Once the event had transpired, advertisers abandoned the signage. Additionally, the nature of materials used rendered these billboards temporary in a physical sense. Bills were constructed from flimsy paper with water-soluble inks and deteriorated quickly. Prior historians have claimed that Barnum’s circus advertisements, beginning in 1870, marked “the dividing line between ancient and modern outdoor advertising.”⁵⁷

But Moody began posting off-premise advertisements from the time he went into business for himself in 1853, some seventeen years before Barnum organized his circus. Barnum did energetically promote his other events—his New York museum or singer Jenny Lind, for example—before 1870, but Barnum biographies contain no mention of off-premise advertisement until his traveling circus.⁵⁸ As it happens, Moody and Barnum were “warm

⁵⁵ 2. “Standardized Outdoor Advertising: History, Economics and Self-Regulation,” in *Outdoor Advertising: History and Regulation*, ed. John Houck (University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 24.

⁵⁶ Association of National Advertisers Outdoor Advertising Committee, *Essentials of Outdoor Advertising* (Association of National Advertisers, 1952), 23.

⁵⁷ 2. “Standardized Outdoor Advertising: History, Economics and Self-Regulation,” in *Outdoor Advertising: History and Regulation*, ed. John Houck (University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 31.

⁵⁸, Irving Wallace, *The Fabulous Showman: The Life & Times of P.T. Barnum*, Signet Book (New American Library, 1962), 40 & 119

friends.”⁵⁹ To be sure, this friendship included the men influenced each other, but the timing indicates Moody posted the first “permanent” off-premise billboards.⁶⁰ It is possible that Moody did not receive credit for permanent off-premise advertisement because Barnum’s shows drew a national audience, as opposed to Moody’s New Orleans store that only operated regionally.

Credit in the annals of history or not, Moody posted thousands of billboards. He inundated the New Orleans advertising space with his promotions. One advertisement expanded on his tagline, "Get Your Shirts at Moody's": "These talismanic words are not only to be found conspicuously posted in every section of the country but are now repeated by every one of good sound reasoning faculties."⁶¹ Every section of the country was a stretch, the billboards were likely limited to New Orleans and the surrounding countryside, but this limitation does not carry the same impact as every section of the country. Van Zante writes, “In New Orleans, Moody’s placards seemed to everywhere, in nearly every street, nailed to telegraph poles or staked into the ground.”⁶² One of Moody’s poems/advertisements tells of a man who is out of clean shirts because his launderer, Judy (it rhymes with Moody, you see) was late returning from her vacation, or, spree, as the poem puts it. He looks out the window, “...and saw from each wire-post the Shirt King’s good sign.”⁶³

⁵⁹ Friends of the Cabildo et al., *New Orleans Architecture: Faubourg Tremé and the Bayou Road*, New Orleans Architecture (Pelican Publishing Company, 1971), 80.

⁶⁰ Permanent insomuch as the billboards were constructed of more durable materials and advertised Moody’s location, not an event.

⁶¹ "Get Your Shirts at Moody's." *New Orleans Times* (New Orleans, Louisiana), September 1, 1866: 15. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁶² G. Van Zante and T. Lilienthal, *New Orleans 1867: Photographs by Theodore Lilienthal* (Merrell, 2008), 103.

⁶³ "A Poor Wight Lay Weeping." *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), July 19, 1868: 7. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*. The remainder of the stanza is "Your shirts get at Moody's"—They're better than Judy's—For bosoms more spotless ne're hung on her line." One has to give Moody credit for trying.

Moody's blanketing of New Orleans and environs with placards was not universally welcomed. In 1857, The Common Council of Carrollton—a sleepy suburb since incorporated into the City of New Orleans—led by a Dr. Cochran, directed Moody to remove his signs from their neighborhood. Moody complied, but immediately wrote a series of good-natured advertisements lampooning the Council and Dr. Cochran. His advertisements forgave the Council, invented their apologies for committing "Treason to the Shirt King,"⁶⁴ and invited all Carrollton residents—Council and Dr. Cochran included—to shop at Moody's. Then, without missing a beat, Moody used the remaining thirds of the columns to list products and prices.⁶⁵

Moody was an extraordinarily prolific advertiser and the business community took note. The R.G. Dun & Company wrote an economical note explaining that Moody "Advertises largely."⁶⁶ The *Orleanian* exclaimed, "Moody is fully cognizant of the mode whereby to make himself known."⁶⁷ A quick computer search of New Orleans newspapers returns 3,686 advertisements for Moody's Shirts run over a twenty-five-year span. Back-of-envelope math makes this about two to three advertisements a day. And this number is derived from the digitized papers with keyword searchability only. The real number is certainly much higher. In addition to Moody's newspaper advertisements and thousands of billboards, Moody advertised in theater playbills and programs. Moody also took out many full-page advertisements in the flyleaves of books—strictly in inexpensive novels that would allow this promotion. And lastly,

⁶⁴ "Treason to Run Shirt King." *Sunday Delta* (New Orleans, Louisiana), May 17, 1857: [4]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁶⁵ "The Common Council of Carrollton versus S. N. Moody's Placards." *Sunday Delta* (New Orleans, Louisiana), May 17, 1857: [4]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁶⁶ R.G. Dun & Company, "R.G. Dun & Company Credit Report Volumes" volume Louisiana 11 (n.d.) 334.

⁶⁷ "Moody's," *Orleanian*, February 1, 1857.

Moody advertised directly, with “neat little envelopes” to the guests at the St. Charles Hotel.⁶⁸ *Harper’s* emphasized the stupidity of Mr. Ovide the Texan. The slogan, “Get Your Shirts At Moody’s!” was not simply directed to Mr. Ovide but rather to the city at large. The public knew this slogan, and only the hapless Texan mistook the catchphrase. In addition to creating a universal slogan, Moody also made a fortune.

Moody remained rich and successful until the end of his life. He insulated himself from the multiple economic downturns and panics of the mid-1800s by dealing only in cash and paying bills promptly.⁶⁹ Moody led a glittering social life, the guest list at his Canal St. home included the cream of New Orleans society and worldwide celebrities such as P. T. Barnum, Mark Twain, and Grand Duke Alexei, brother of Tsar Nicholas II.⁷⁰ During the Civil War, Moody financially supported the Confederacy, and he was honored with a Colonel’s commission in the CSA military for his monetary contributions, but never fought or fired a shot. During the war, New Orleans responded to a food crisis by establishing a “Free Market” or free food pantry. Moody’s name appears on the list of donors.⁷¹ Gen. Butler’s provost judge fined Moody for failing to open his store on demand, but this action appeared to be petty retribution for Moody’s English citizenship gambit.⁷² Moody and his family traveled extensively for business and recreation. They had their portraits painted by the celebrated artist George Coulon. Moody and Isabella lost their first son, Charles, to a childhood illness, and there exists no doubt this death

⁶⁸ (N.d.); *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, Harper’s New Monthly Magazine, v. 23 (Harper, 1861) 427.

⁶⁹ R.G. Dun & Company, “R.G. Dun & Company Credit Report Volumes” volume Louisiana 11 (n.d.) 334

⁷⁰ Friends of the Cabildo et al., *New Orleans Architecture: Faubourg Tremé and the Bayou Road*, New Orleans Architecture (Pelican Publishing Company, 1971), 80.

⁷¹ Marion Southwood, “*Beauty and Booty*”: *The Watchword of New Orleans* (author, 1867), 80.

⁷² “Home Department.” *Daily True Delta* (New Orleans, Louisiana), May 14, 1862: [1]. *Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers*.

wounded the family deeply. However, writers or Moody omitted any mention of the death from the auto/biographies.⁷³ The family survived this tragedy, and Moody's remaining children enjoyed a good life in New Orleans and received an education in Europe.⁷⁴ Aside from Charles's death, in virtually all respects, Moody led a charmed life, a fact which makes his demise so hard to understand.

Moody took his own life on New Year's Eve, 1874. The cause of any suicide is always distressingly obscure, especially if the victim fails to leave a reason. Moody shot himself at home, leaving no note or explanation. Such a death presents a morbid and difficult puzzle whose answer provides only cold comfort to the survivors. Family lore claims Moody sought to end his suffering incurred from a carriage accident some days before. The *Picayune*—who covered the event in graphic detail suggests pain from “a neuralgic affection in the back of his head and the region of the spine,”⁷⁵ drove him to suicide. No evidence of financial insolvency existed. Even the typically indifferent R.G. Dun & Company felt compelled to furnish an explanation. After blandly stating, "SN Moody is dead. Est[ate] perfectly solvent." the agent was moved to footnote, "Sickness + long suffering, prompted self destruction."⁷⁶ Isabella and sons tried to run the business and did well, but they never matched Moody's energy. Moody's Shirts closed its doors at the turn of the twentieth century.

⁷³ This death is only reported in personal family histories kept by Moody's descendant, my aunt, Alicia Heard, of New Orleans. It is doubtful Moody desired to withhold this information—it is likely that as childhood deaths in the 1800s were sadly all too common—this event would not have been considered germane to Moody's business life.

⁷⁴ "Death Of S. N. Moody." *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), January 3, 1875: 2. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ R.G. Dun & Company, "R.G. Dun & Company Credit Report Volumes" volume Louisiana 11 (n.d.) 272 & 334.

Moody's career illustrated participation in both Seller's soulless profiteering and harnessing Howe's technological transformation. The marketplace in New Orleans two decades before the Civil War—the pre-regulatory orgiastic years of the market revolution—allowed Moody to innovate. Moody leveraged print media and signage to sell shirts. Neither Moody nor Barnum, for that matter, invented billboards and creative newspaper advertisements. Moody took advantage of a flaw or an underutilized aspect of the system. This advantage could be applied to any product—one imagines Moody behaving in precisely the same fashion if instead of shirts, Moody sold ships, shoes, or stationary. To fit Moody into Lepore's kudzu and pine metaphor, Moody sent forth tendrils reaching for an upper register of advertising saturation, stems that relied on a sturdy pine limb structure of democracy to support their journey.

Moody's legacy of advertising is immortalized in fine art. In the Spring of 1872, the New Orleans volunteer firefighters held a parade. The procession commenced at the statue of statesman Henry Clay at the corner of Canal and Royal streets, "a common rallying point."⁷⁷ Artists Victor Pierson and Paul Poincy collaborated and commemorated the event with a massive painting, over twelve feet long. The view of the assemblage is depicted as if the viewer is standing in the front of Moody's Shirts, looking into the intersection—a vantage that must have galled Moody, since he likely would have preferred his palace included in the portrait. The detail is rich and realistic, emblematic of nineteenth-century realism. Pierson and Poincy used Lilienthal's photographic portraits of various luminaries of the volunteer fire brigade and rendered these men in attitudes indicative of their characters. The scene is crowded with the colorful uniforms of the firefighters, a woman selling refreshments, children in their best

⁷⁷ Ann Dobie, "Victor Pierson," *64 Parishes* (blog) <https://64parishes.org/entry/victor-pierson>, accessed March 21, 2020.

clothing, dogs, horses, a water truck, and balconies packed with spectators. The buildings, statue, and plinth are faithfully rendered. This painting is a luscious and self-important work, set in an ornate gilt frame. *Volunteer Firemen's Parade* hangs in the reading room of the Louisiana Historical Center—in the old US. Mint, now the New Orleans Jazz Museum—an oversized reminder to researchers and graduate students of the opulence and splendor of New Orleans in the nineteenth century. A telegraph pole is painted in the middle ground of the right side of the picture. A small white placard posted under the pole's first yardarm that, under closer inspection, reads:

“GET YOUR SHIRTS AT S. N. MOODY’S”

It is the only advertisement in the whole painting.



⁷⁸ Photograph of *Volunteer Firemen's Parade* appears in Ann Dobie's, "Victor Pierson," *64 Parishes*, accessed March 21, 2020. Magnification inset photograph and graphics are the authors.

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Vita

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