



Leo Raymond de Neckère, C.M., first bishop of New Orleans

From the book *History of the Catholic Church in the United States* by John Gilmary Shea

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## Early years, ordination and mission to the U.S.

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- ❖ Leo Raymond de Neckère was a native of Belgium, born at Wevelghem, June 6, 1799, and while a seminarian at Ghent was accepted by Bishop DuBourg for his diocese (territory of Louisiana and the Floridas). Completing his studies at the Seminary at the Barrens, he was ordained October 13, 1822, and began his labors as missionary and professor.



**Bishop Louis Guillaume Valentin  
DuBourg, S.S. (Sulpician) (1766-1833)**



- ❖ Sent for a time to Louisiana, he acquired the esteem and confidence of all.

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image: New Orleans in 1803. **Aquatint print by J. L. Bouqueto de Woiseri**

# Vacancy in New Orleans

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- ❖ When Rt. Rev. Joseph Rosati, C.M. was allowed to decline the see of New Orleans, and became bishop of St. Louis, he strongly recommended for the vacant bishopric the saintly and eloquent Rev. Leo Raymond de Neckère, already known and esteemed in Louisiana.

**Joseph Rosati, C.M.**



# Elected Bishop of New Orleans

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- ❖ Fr. de Neckère was then in Europe with the hope of regaining health and strength.
- ❖ Summoned to Rome he was, notwithstanding his protests, elected Bishop of New Orleans, August 4, 1829.



# Delays due to poor health

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- ❖ Deeply afflicted at this elevation he returned to Belgium, and, after a dangerous illness, having regained his health somewhat, he returned to the United States.
- ❖ After another fruitless effort to escape the dignity, he prepared for his consecration, but was again prostrated by a complication of diseases at St. Génève.



# Consecrated Bishop of New Orleans

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- ❖ Rallying, however, he reached New Orleans, and, overcome by the entreaties, appeals, and arguments of Bishop Portier, consented to accept the office he had firmly resolved to decline. He was consecrated on May 16, 1830 (some sources say **June 24, 1830**), in the St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans, by Bishop Rosati of St. Louis.



# Building the Church in Louisiana

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- ❖ Bishop de Neckère inspired his clergy with zeal which soon bore fruit. The energetic priest Rev. Anthony Blanc erected a neat and commodious church at Baton Rouge, and Rev. Mr. Lacroix was rivaling him. At New Orleans steps were taken to erect a church on Rousseau Street at the Port.

**Antoine Blanc, C.M., right, would become the fifth Bishop of New Orleans**





# Year of sickness

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- ❖ The year [1832] was one of sickness. Cholera and fevers swept many away, and the diocese lost its Vicar-General and two other priests. When winter set in the Bishop wrote: “New Orleans has been severely visited by the scourging angel, but thanks be to God, except a few cases, it has entirely subsided...”

**cemetery in Baton Rouge, LA /  
Yellow Fever mosquito**



# Epidemic of 1832

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❖ ...All our Sisters of Charity have been sick, either with the cholera or the yellow fever; none, however, have sunk under the disease. The epidemic seems now to be extending to the western district of this State.”

- Bishop de Neckère to Rev. John Timon, Nov. 30, 1832



**St. Vincent Asylum was one of several orphanages in New Orleans where the Sisters of Charity attended to the sick**

# Recurrence in 1833

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- ❖ The next year the fatal disease which had been lurking in the bayous and swamps of Louisiana again began its ravages. Yellow fever pervaded New Orleans.

**Yellow fever would continue to plague New Orleans (right: a yellow fever hospital there, some years later, after the invention of photography)**



# Self-sacrificing

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- ❖ Bishop de Neckère had retired to Saint Michel to gain some strength; but, when he heard of his people dying in his episcopal city, he returned against all advice and entreaties. He gave himself entirely to his ministry among the plague-stricken, and to measures for their relief.



# Succumbs to the fever

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- ❖ His enfeebled frame soon yielded, he was seized with the fever, and in ten days from his arrival breathed his last, on the 5th of September, 1833.



# Legacy

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- ❖ If Bishop de Neckère, from his infirm health, could not accomplish much for his diocese, he edified his flock by his holy life, and by the discharge of his duties.



# Missionary spirit

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- ❖ In one of his last letters from Saint Michel, speaking of the death of one of his priests, he said: “One more vacancy added to the many already existing: no college, no seminary, no priest in the whole State of Mississippi.”
- ❖ It was to meet such wants that he felt to multiply himself beyond measure.



- ❖ "That is how missionaries are, they are courageous...there are many, so many nuns, so many priests, and so many religious who 'burn up' their lives to announce Jesus Christ. It is beautiful to see this! It is beautiful![...] Those who are looking for something else are the ones that (proselytize). Faith is preached first through witness then with words -- but slowly." - Pope Francis, Dec. 2, 2015
- ❖ "And if someone were to question a Missioner, wouldn't it be a great honor for him to be able to say with Our Lord, Misit me evangelizare pauperibus? I'm here to catechize, instruct, hear confessions, and assist persons who are poor." - St. Vincent de Paul (XI: 98)