

Invitation  
for  
*Andrew Newman & Guest*  
An Evening of Fine Dining

~ **DUNLEITH** ~

December 21, 1857  
Seven O'Clock  
*Formal Attire*

*Extending Our Warmest Greetings  
of the Christmas Season  
Charles & Mary Dahlgren*

---

Step Back into Time . . .  
157 Years . . .  
When Cotton was King . . .  
Planter Barons Ruled the World . . .  
and Southern Culture Defined Elegance . . .  
4 Years before it was Gone with the Wind . . .  
for an Unforgettable Experience  
at One of the Grandest Estates of the South

My Dearest Olivia,

Forgive my boldness, but I have taken the liberty of affixing the invitation I just received from the Dahlgrens of Dunleith here in Natchez. They have invited me and a guest to join them and others for an exquisite evening of fine dining at their estate.

I shall not go unless you are my honored guest.

... Travel with me back in time as we imagine what it would be like to arrive at Dunleith for dinner on December 21, 1857 ... *for that is the experience that envelops patrons when they enter upon the grounds of this magnificent property, even to this day:*

It's a cold, clear evening. We bundle warmly in our finest dress. Our carriage, drawn by a fine thoroughbred, departs my residence on Washington Street for the short trip to Dunleith. Gas lanterns flicker on porches we pass ...

Signs of the season abound – Christmas wreaths gracing doors ... windows aglow and framed with bows and holly ... laughter and merriment drifting onto the street from gatherings of friends and family within every home ...

We see the glow before we see Dunleith. We pause to allow another carriage to enter through the front gate of the estate. Before us looms a Greek revival structure of immense size and perfect proportions. A hundred gas lanterns beckon from the main and upper porches – framed by 26 massive Tuscan columns built of brick and stucco.

Quiet excitement fills the air. Our carriage is third in line for the steps to exit. Two carriages trail us. The horses step and paw at the ground. Puffs of vapor float in faint light as the horses exhale in the cold air ...

We ascend the broad entrance stairs. The enormous door opens just as we approach it. Scents of cinnamon and cider stir the senses. Candles, lanterns, and decorations compete for attention ...

Ten couples, and our host and hostess, mingle in the grand hall. A low mix of conversation, laughter, and glass-on-silver fills the air.

Charles Dahlgren taps a fork on his crystal wine glass. A hush falls over the small group.

“My dear friends, Mary and I are delighted you could join us for an evening of good food, good conversation, and good drink. Merry Christmas to you all! Our chef, Pierre Latour, will share our menu. Pierre ...”

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen ...

“Your first course will be Crawfish Gumbo with Louisiana Long Grain Rice, served with a Pinot Noir ...

“The second course will be Roasted Corn and Crawfish Bisque Soup, served with a very nice Chardonnay ... as you might surmise, we have a bountiful harvest of crawfish ...

“The third course will be our own Dunleith Spinach Salad, with Toasted Walnuts, Blueberries, Feta Cheese, and Honey Poppyseed Vinaigrette ...

“The main course will be your choice of Wild Venison or Redfish Courtbouillon ... the venison is fresh from a kill this morning, and the redfish was delivered this afternoon on ice from New Orleans ... we will serve a bold Cabernet Sauvignon or an Italian Sparkling Wine as you

desire . . . our side dishes will be Creamy Stone Grits, Sorghum Sweet Potatoes, and Bacon Braised Brussel Sprouts . . .

“For dessert, a Vanilla Bean Crème Brulee with Fresh Berries, or Double Shot Chocolate Cake with Anglaise.”

“Thank you, Pierre,” Charles said. “After our dinner – if anyone can muster the strength to stand – the men will gather in the library to talk politics over bottles of Martell Cordon Bleu Cognac and Jameson Irish Whiskey, while the ladies gather in the parlor where hot tea will be served, with a touch of Amaretto DiSaronno for the more daring . . .”

“Now everyone, please, follow us into the Ball Room, where you will find your place marked by a name slip.”

You and I make our way into the Ball Room. We laugh, converse, eat, and drink among friends, beside a dancing fire. The tall windows are frosted, nearly opaque. The outside world ceases to exist for the next three hours. Our little group, safely ensconced within Dunleith, is the center of the universe.

At long last we say our goodbyes and clatter in our carriage back toward home, holding each other against the chill . . . the last stanza of “Silent Night, Holy Night” drifts faintly over our carriage as we pass by Trinity Episcopal Church. A young couple walking hand-in-hand calls out to us, “Merry Christmas!” We return the greeting as we make the last turn . . .

Olivia, do you think I’m dreaming? I know in past conversations, you’ve dismissed our “ancient history” as irrelevant to our connected and fast-paced world, but . . .

Dunleith is real, in the here and now, December 2014. The main house, today, looks as it did when Charles and Mary lived there – still with its stately columns and 18-inch thick walls . . . walls that hold secrets and have seen both joy and tragedy.

Dunleith is a fabric of moments in time . . . people, memories, and events permanently woven into its structure . . . its grounds . . . as if each wall, each building . . . contained a hidden fresco that reveals itself to the willing guest . . . springs to life . . . surrounds her . . . and pulls her in.

Mary died in 1859 at a young age, just two years after our imagined dinner party; Charles was forced to sell the property to settle her estate. The war began shortly after, closing a monumental chapter of history. Yet we can relive it!

A 1790’s brick carriage house and stable (designed to look like a castle!) is tucked into a hillside a short distance behind Dunleith. This is the very spot where Job Routh, the original owner of these grounds, groomed fine thoroughbreds *220 years ago*. The stable is now a pub.

Above the pub sits a cozy coffee and breakfast cafe (the very same room as the old carriage house!), connected to the grounds by a broad wooden bridge over a dry moat.

We will begin our culinary adventure at the Castle Pub, and then stroll along the old brick path to Dunleith – but first pausing to sit for a moment under a giant magnolia tree planted in 1781.

Pierre Latour's menu is real, drawn from selections on the menus from which we will order. Dunleith's cuisine has won many awards. Here are just a few:

- 2012 and 2014 “Diner’s Choice” – opentable.com
- Wine Spectator “Award of Excellence”
- Trip Advisor “Certificate of Excellence” 2012

And look at recent reviews by customers:

***“Superb Restaurant!”***

“Dunleith was recommended by a local acquaintance while on a tour of Natchez's remarkable mansions this summer. That evening my cousin and I had the most delicious dinner. We have eaten in probably every major restaurant in the French Quarter and are not strangers to Creole and Southern dishes. We both felt that our meals at the Dunleith were terrific. Very fine food with excellent service. This was 7 months ago and I am still enjoying memories of that very lovely evening!”

*- Thomas Kingsbury, London, England*

***“Always Great!”***

“You can't beat the setting and atmosphere. Just being there makes you feel special. The food is always great with one of my favorite go-to dishes being the Godchaux Salad. It is piled with shrimp and crab meat over lettuce tossed in a remoulade dressing and capers. It's great for lunch by itself and makes a perfect start to dinner. The fried green tomatoes are my favorite appetizer. The lobster mac and cheese and lobster risotto are both excellent. The lamb is some of the best I've had anywhere. You'll want to pick them up and gnaw the bone. They also have the largest, most impressive wine list in town.”

*- Dan Richards, Jackson, Mississippi*

***“Excellent! Fine Dining in a Beautiful Environment.”***

“The food is excellent, and the atmosphere at Dunleith is quite inviting in a most elegant way. Try the shrimp and grits, the extraordinary salads as well as the special insert menu items. You will be quite pleased I promise you!”

*- Alex Christopher, Houston, Texas*

The *Times-Picayune's* food editor even favorably compared Dunleith's dining with the finest restaurants in New Orleans:

“... the Lobster Risotto with Crabmeat, Leeks, Wild Mushrooms, Parmesan, and Drizzled White Truffle Oil, could have been a featured entree at *Galatoires* or *Commander's Palace*... superbly prepared and presented. The authentic, Old South atmosphere of quiet elegance is the finishing touch that puts Dunleith in the top tier of culinary landmarks.”

*- Juliette Brossard*

The best recommendation I can give you is my own. The dining experience at Dunleith is one of near perfection. And that is only part of the experience . . .

. . . Dining at Dunleith is an immersion into the Antebellum South in all its grandeur. You *become* part of history.

Come time travel with me, Olivia, in what will prove to be an unforgettable experience!

But we must seize this opportunity now, before the door closes.

*Dunleith will be suspending dining in the main house the day after Christmas, until late March, for interior work.*

Our reservation is December 21<sup>st</sup> -157 years to the day after our imagined, carriage-drawn visit.

Affectionately,

*Andrew*

P.S. What if we really were there all those years ago? What memories will our return in a few short days evoke? ; )