



## **An Ornament to the City: Old Mobile Ironwork**

*John S. Sledge*

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
## **An Ornament to the City: Old Mobile Ironwork** John S. Sledge

The "iron lace" that graces the businesses, homes, squares, and cemeteries of Mobile, Alabama, is as vital a part of that southern port city as it is of New Orleans, Charleston, and Savannah. Until now, its story has never been fully told. In this attractive volume, John S. Sledge's rich narrative, combined with evocative historic images and Sheila Hagler's stunning contemporary photographs, eloquently conveys as never before how ornamental cast iron defines Mobile's heart and soul.

Cast iron was the wonder of the Victorian age, according to Sledge. In Mobile, the material's diverse applications were on display in hulking locomotives and boilers, flamboyant fountains, imposing fences, and endless other forms and structures. The city's ornate iron balconies, dozens of which still remain, elicited the greatest wonder, then as now. Local publications have long extolled Mobile's enchanting ironwork. Only now, however, has the subject been situated within national trends in design, industry, and consumer tastes. It is a colorful saga featuring rawboned iron founders, artisan slaves, hustling salesmen, conniving architects, willful plunderers, romantic artists, and dedicated preservationists.

Drawing on rare surviving business records and other archival sources, Sledge skillfully reconstructs how the local iron industry developed and then fiercely competed with big northern foundries. As a working preservationist, Sledge pays particular attention to how many of Mobile's most splendid ornamental iron pieces have weathered hard times, natural disasters, and misguided development to remain a delight for tourists and residents alike. Hagler's beautiful photographs provide a powerful and sometimes moody visual accompaniment to this fascinating tale.

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