

'Dunces' tops reading list

Novel by Toole captures city's general craziness; other books deal in flavors

A list of recommended reading for people who want to know New Orleans and New Orleanians.

Fiction

► **A Confederacy of Dunces**, by John Kennedy Toole. Probably the New Orleans novel because of the way Toole captures the dialects and the sense of neighborhoods and little features about New Orleans (like the D.H. Holmes clock), not to mention the idiosyncrasies and general craziness of it all.

► **Feast of All Saints**, by Anne Rice. A New Orleans novel set in the years before the Civil War.

► **Interview With A Vampire**, by Anne Rice. Despite what the title may connote, this is not a Gothic novel.

Instead, it's a book that gives a good indication of what life in the late 1700s must have been like in the French Quarter and on outlying plantations.

► **The Moviegoer**, by Walker Percy. Valuable for its insights into society and old-line New Orleanians, as well as its feel for places like Gentilly and Uptown.

► **A Streetcar Named Desire**, by Tennessee Williams. The characters and dialogue are haunting and memorable, as is the sensual New Orleans that Williams creates.

Non-fiction

► **Frenchmen, Desire, Good Children**, by John Chase. A delightful history of New Orleans and its amazing past. Well-researched and consistently amusing.

► **A Guide to New Orleans Architecture**, by the New



Illustration from *A Confederacy of Dunces*

Orleans chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

This pocketbook, published as part of the U.S. bicentennial, is a valuable reference for thumbnail descriptions of the most notable buildings in the New Orleans area.

► **In Old New Orleans**, by W. Kenneth Holditch. Essays on 19th-century culture in New Orleans.

► **Mardi Gras**, by Robert Tallant. The definitive book about Carnival. Even though it was published in 1948, the book's insights about the way this rite works are still valid.

► **New Orleans City Guide**. This book was a project of the Works Progress Administration, an arm of the New Deal, and it became renowned for its essays about the city.

It was reissued last year. The text was unchanged, but the Historic New Orleans Collection staff provided an essay for the new edition to analyze the changes between 1938 and 1983.

► **New Orleans Restaurant Guide**, by Richard and Rima Collin. An exhaustive, delightful guide to the area's eateries. The Collinses — he used to be The States-Item's restaurant critic, and they have written a cookbook — waste no time in letting you know where to go and what to shun. And they aren't afraid to go after sacred cows, either.

► **New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape**, by Peirce F. Lewis. This is a good, detailed — but readable — analysis of New Orleans and how it came to be, with an explanation of its geography, history and growth.

► **A Short History of New Orleans**, by Mel Leavitt. Informative, anecdotal and entertaining.