

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format

Volume 1, Number 19

By Damon Veach

REGIONAL ARCHIVES: Many researchers are still unaware of the importance of regional archives. The thought is usually directed at National Archives, but the regional divisions are a part of the National Archives system. It is difficult to imagine the size and scope of the materials stored in these facilities. I don't know how many of you watch "Warehouse 13" on the Syfy channel, but if you do, then think of this on a smaller scale. The shelving just goes on and on and on.

The National Archives work closely with federal agencies to preserve and make valuable records available to the public. The Southwest Regional Archives, which is located in Fort Worth, Texas, is the only one I've visited, but just walking into this warehouse of endless boxes of data is just overwhelming. Here are found extensive records from Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. It is situated about five miles from the downtown area and with the new interstate system, the location is actually now near the intersection of I-20 and I-35, at 501 W. Felix Street, Building 1. I lived just three blocks away while attending Texas Christian University, and my interest here was especially the massive amount of Indian records.

This Fort Worth facility has extensive microfilm holdings of value for genealogy research. These include federal population censuses for all states from 1790, military service records, pension and bounty land warrant applications, passenger arrival records, and Dawes census cards and enrollment jackets for the Five Tribes of Oklahoma. Self-service microfilm readers are available without appointment, but I always recommend calling first.



Main Building in Fort Worth

Among the subjects covered here are regional and national history from the early 1800s with emphasis on westward expansion to the Southwest and the settlement of Native Americans, particularly Cherokees, Choctaws Chickasaws, Creeks, and Seminoles in Indian Territory. Also found in the collection of data are records from the Civil War, slavery, Chinese exclusion, repatriation, segregation, World Wars I and II, economic development, oil, and the space program.

There are lots of recognizable names with all their records housed in this facility, including Jackson Burnett, Bonnie and Clyde, the Blue Angels, the Dalton Gang, Wyatt Earp, Billie Sol Estes, Henry O. Flipper, the Green Corn Rebellion, O. Henry, Andrew Jackson, Machine Gun Kelly, Jean Lafitte, Madalyn Murray O'Hair, Isaac Parker, Belle Starr, and the Texas City disaster.

Before using archival holdings, every researcher must obtain a researcher identification card. An applicant must show identification that includes a photograph, such as a driver's license, passport, business card, or school identification card. Completion of a short form is also necessary.

Archival holdings are arranged by record group (RG), a body of records from an agency or bureau, identified by an RG number. A comprehensive guide to the archival holdings is available by mail and online. Research can be initiated in person, by telephone, mail, fax, or electronic mail at ftworth.archives@nara.gov. Individuals who wish to use archival holdings on-site will facilitate their research by calling before visiting.

The mailing address is P.O. Box 6216, Fort Worth, TX 76115-1216.

XXX

NATIONAL ARCHIVES: The National Archives in Washington, D.C. offers insight into the lives of people, their families, and our history. Because the records here come from every branch of the Federal government, almost all Americans can find themselves, their ancestors, or their community in the archives. Knowing how a person interacted with the government is the key to a successful search. Being able to trace early family lineages is what makes this such a personal place for genealogists.

When I was given a personal guided tour of this unbelievable building, I suppose I must have been overwhelmed with what I saw. It is a maze of floors and corridors and records of outstanding value to researchers and historians. Archives I houses textual and microfilm records relating to genealogy, American Indians, pre-World War II military and naval-maritime matters, the New Deal, the District of Columbia, the Federal courts, and Congress. Some very rare books are hidden away here too as well as old family Bibles, documents, and pictures. I never expected to be given this one on one tour, but it happened, and I definitely appreciated this rare opportunity to see this up close.



National Archives in Washington, D.C.

Related special media and non-textual records, such as cartographic and architectural records, motion pictures, audio recordings, videocassettes, still pictures, and electronic records are located at Archives II, located at College Park, Maryland.

Because the records at the National Archives are unique and irreplaceable, each requires careful handling to preserve it for future generations. In order to provide proper protection, archival records cannot be borrowed, and entry into closed stack areas is not permitted. If you visit the facility for research purposes, records are brought to you for examination in supervised research rooms, and detailed information is provided about handling of original records.

One of the best services offered by the National Archives is the card files in the main research area. It is amazing to be able to search out individual family names, see them in print, and then be allowed to see the source material for perusal. I had never been able to locate anything on one of my ancestors, namely Jean de Melet, who fought in the American Revolution, but it only took one card to connect me to John Mellet, my ancestor with both French and American data that I needed for my research files. Because of this amazing find, I made it a point to take my family to Brandywine so we could all experience a link to one of our first ancestors to fight for our country. Living in the area at the time was also nice since so many of the Veach (Veitch, Veatch, Veech), Mellet, Gakerlin, Ford, Stewart, and other allied lines had also lived in the general areas of Maryland, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Virginia.

One of the most popular research documents used at the National Archives is the census records. The first Federal Population Census was taken in 1790 and has been taken every ten years since that time. There is a 72-year restriction on access to these records, but many can now be found through various sources. Most researchers begin with the early census records of the 1900s or late 1800s because of the amount of data that can be gleaned from them. Just knowing the name of the ancestor and the state of residence is enough to get anyone started searching these records.

Records from 1850 and up can give you the names of family members, their ages at a certain point in time, their state or country of birth, their parent's birthplaces, the

year of immigration, occupations, and even value of possessions. More current records show even the types of crops grown, marriage status and years of marriage, and street addresses. Before the 1850 census, few of these details were recorded. From 1790 to 1840, only the head of household is listed and the number of household members in selected age groups. When I first started my research, I used the 1880 census and traced my lineages back from there.

Military records are also popular means of research. They can often provide valuable information on the veteran, as well as on all members of the family. Compiled service records consist of an envelope containing card abstracts taken from muster rolls, returns, pay vouchers, and other records. They provide you with your ancestor's rank, unit, date mustered in and mustered out, basic biographical information, medical information, and military information. There is a fee to obtain these, but they are well worth the price.

Pension applications are also included in this research area. There are records of pension payments for veterans, their widows, and other heirs. The pension records in the National Archives are based on service in the armed forces of the United States between 1775 and up. These files usually provide the most genealogical information. They contain files and supporting documents such as narratives of events during service, marriage certificates, birth records, death certificates, pages from family Bibles, family letters, depositions of witnesses, affidavits, discharge papers and other supporting papers.

Bounty land warrant application files are also here and relate to claims based on wartime service. These records are especially important if your ancestor was in the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Civil War, early Indian Wars, and the Mexican War. Bounty land records often contain documents similar to those in pension files with lots of genealogical information. Many of the bounty land application files relating to the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 service have been combined with the pension files.

Other records frequently used are immigration and naturalization records, passport applications, land records, and bankruptcy records. All contain lots of genealogical information.

A visit to the National Archives may not be possible for you, but if you do get the chance, check it out. It is an experience that you will never forget.

XXX

COLUMN INFORMATION: Correspondence to this column should be directed to Damon Veach, 709 Bungalow Lane, Baton Rouge, LA 70802-5337. Books and society publications are reviewed if sample copies are submitted with each request, and queries are published free of charge. These queries can be any length but should have a Louisiana connection by heritage or residence of researchers working

on lines in other states or countries. Dated notices should be submitted several weeks prior to the scheduled event. The e-mail address is ancestorslaveach@cox.net.