

# **CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS**

*Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format*

Volume 1, Number 42

By Damon Veach

**IN THE BEGINNING:** Several readers have inquired about back issues of this column format before it became associated with Claitor's Publishing and if any were available in book form. I have several folders and notebooks of original columns, articles, and book reviews, but none have ever appeared in book form. The column actually dates back to Thanksgiving week of 1966 when the first format appeared in the Daily Iberian in New Iberia. I believe it was called The Iberian-Enterprise and covered New Iberia and Jeanerette. I'll have to check with my historian friend Morris Raphael about this. The opening topic was the 1870 Iberia Parish census which I copied and published along with queries and other topics of interest. This was spread out over several columns until the listing was completed.

I met with Morris and his wife Helen back in November of 2009, and we discussed this, but when I returned home I couldn't find the notebook containing that first Louisiana column. Morris was surprised to learn that my Louisiana column started in the very newspaper in which he still writes. At the time, I was also writing "Your Texas Ancestors" in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram (which I also have all clippings of), but I wanted to get back to my Louisiana heritage and sought out a publisher in Louisiana who might like to publish my column format. I became interested in the New Iberia area when I was asked by Gladys Calhoun Case to speak at a writing conference in Lafayette back in the mid-60s. I'm not sure if I met Red Wolcott at that time or not, and I can't recall how I approached him on the subject, but he was editor of the newspaper at that time. He liked the idea, and he gave me that start that I had wanted for so long. He even allowed me to write another column that I called "Your Acadian Heritage," which started on November 14, 1968 in the New Iberia newspaper.

It is definitely to the credit of Red Wolcott that I got my start writing in Louisiana, and after moving to Pennsylvania, losing my contacts, and then returning to Louisiana, I managed to have the column published in New Orleans in The Times-Picayune. Being out of state for so long, I had lost my columns in both Louisiana and Texas, and I was anxious to start over again.

As a Louisiana book collector, I spent many great times searching in all the old stores in New Orleans for rare books by Louisianians, set in Louisiana, or about the state in some way. This collection really became the subject of searches even when I was in other cities on business or on vacation. It has now grown into a very sizable and rare collection of novels.

On a visit to Shan's Antique Store on Chartres one Saturday, I ran into Mabel Simmons, who was there looking for Blue Willow dishes. I had been reading her

book reviews and travel features in the New Orleans newspaper, and I told her I would like to review books for her if she would allow me to do so. Not only did she agree to that, but she mentioned my genealogy column to her editor, and “Cajuns, Creoles, Pirates and Planters” came back to life on Sunday, February 13, 1977 in The Times-Picayune. From here, it was sold to the Morning Advocate for addition to their Sunday editions and later to the Monroe News-Star World. What I lost by being assigned for a year to a job in Pennsylvania resulted in this new effort at promoting my work, both the genealogy columns and the fiction writing, which I also have filed away.

All my editors at this time decided to change the name to “Ancestors” to make it seem more widespread than just Louisiana although most of the information still pertained to this state. It did allow me to pick up a lot of publisher contacts that wanted their books promoted, so it worked out for all concerned. I still loved that original title, and when I left the newspapers and went to online column formats with Claitor’s, I returned to that original title. Now it can be said that “Cajuns, Creoles, Pirates and Planters” is the oldest genealogy column in the United States, and I have all these older formats on file.

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**ANCESTOR ADVENTURES:** Ancestor research is a great adventure. Each individual has to schedule his time around the major research facilities, but the internet and e-mail have simplified this to an extent. Probably the most time consuming aspect involves correspondence and keeping an orderly filing system. This is extremely important in the beginning when you are searching out family members interested in saving family materials. Then after all the libraries and research centers have closed for the day, all of the notes from the various references must be placed in some type of logical order. Here again, laptop computers have helped tremendously along with digital cameras that have saved a lot of time copying down materials. Therefore, it can be said with certainty that a genealogist is not only a family historian but an avid reader and expert file clerk. Later on, even becoming a publisher may enter the picture.

Quite often genealogy is the joy of finding the unexpected, and it is for this reason many researchers depend on their own efforts as opposed to hiring a professional to do the work. A professional simply takes the suspense out of research, and in many cases, the material is not documented properly, leaving voids in a lineage. Paying a professional has never been recommended in any of my column formats unless all sources appear to have been exhausted. Now with all the material available online, it is possible for researchers to continue learning even more without involving a professional.

Take the surname Smith as an example, and I have one in my Foshee lineage. The first federal census of 1790 lists this surname as number one, followed by Brown, Johnson, Jones, and Davis. Today, these names are still out front along with all the

Williams lineages. Therefore, when someone buys a coat-of-arms or even a family crest, there is no way of knowing if the correct version for a given family has been obtained unless proper research has been done. That is why a direct lineage is important. There are ways to find out the correct crest or coat-of-arms, but with the Smith name alone, there are quite a few so proper research is needed if you expect to locate and purchase the correct one in your own personal lineage.

The practice of using surnames was not adopted in western countries until about 1000 A.D., and then each family had to pick up an identity. Surnames were first used by noblemen of Venice, and from there the practice spread to France, England, Germany, and the remainder of Europe.

Going back to Smith, one finds so many variations. How do you translate to other nationalities? For Germany, it would be Schmidt; Kuzetzov, in Russia; and Ferraro, in Italy. Other surnames work the same way. America is a giant conglomerate of many people sharing the same freedoms. Accuracy in research is a priority which should not be taken lightly.

If you have a name that is uncommon, research becomes much easier. Veach, most definitely, cannot be classified with the Smiths and Johnsons. Tracing the origin was still a challenge, but much work had already been done which made my own research a lot easier. Finding all the branches and meeting distant cousins was perhaps the most rewarding of all experiences. Now letters or e-mails can be started with "Dear Cousin" instead of "Dear Sir" or "Dear Mrs. Smith."

Veach is an Americanized form of the Scottish spelling which was originally French. The four major spellings for descendants of James "the Sheriff" Veitch of Maryland are Veitch, Veatch, Veach, and Veech. Going back into Scottish records, the original ancestor was found to be William le Vache, dating to an original signature in 1296 with all indications leading to the Norman Invasion of 1066.

Genealogy is probably the most rewarding of all hobbies, and it continues to grow in numbers. A wealth of data is available if one knows where to look. Patience and perseverance lead to happy conclusions, so get started.

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**GENEALOGY SEMINAR:** Le Comite des Archives de la Louisiane's African American Special Interest Group has scheduled its second African American Genealogy Seminar for Saturday, February 13, 2010, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., so mark your calendars now for this event. The main speaker will be Reginald Washington, Archivist for the Research Support Branch, National Archives and Records Administration, and African American Genealogy Specialist. He will present two lectures entitled "The Dawn of Freedom: Records of the Freedmen's Bureau" and "The Records of Southern Claims Commission: A Source for African American Genealogy."

**Registration fee for members of Le Comite prior to February 6, 2010 is only \$10. Registration for non-members and all others after February 6, 2010 will be \$20. Membership in Le Comite is only \$15 per year, so this would be an ideal time to join the group and to begin receiving discounts on the seminar and on their bargain books. Lunch is not included in the registration fee.**

**The seminar will take place at the Delta Sigma Theta Life Development Center, 688 Harding Blvd., in Baton Rouge. Registration or more information can be obtained from Le Comite, P.O. Box 1547, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-1547.**

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**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](mailto:ancestorslaveach@cox.net). Claitor's Publishing can serve as a distributor for self-published genealogy titles. Go to their homepage for details on how you can obtain this service.**