

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format

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By Damon Veach

INTERVIEWING FAMILY: I've touched on this subject of family interviews before, but I think it is really one of the most important aspects of family history research, and it needs to be done immediately. I recall a book I reviewed several years ago, and the subject brought back memories of how I went about this. Simon and Schuster released a book called "Touching Tomorrow: How to Interview Your Loved Ones to Capture a Lifetime of Memories on Video or Audio." Mary LoVerde is an acclaimed speaker on matters of personal and spiritual connections. She offers her ideas on how to make this all come together.

This Fireside Book at the time of my review was only \$10, and it can be ordered now by way of the internet (Amazon) or local bookstores. LoVerde offers creative ideas, expert tips and practical pointers on every component of the interview project. She details how to overcome an elder's anxiety about being videotaped and how to get these loved ones to open up and let the wit and wisdom flow.

Whether completed one-on-one or with the whole family, celebrating a loved one on tape has many benefits, including giving a family's youngest members different perspectives on love, work, community and other vital issues. The overall gift of this is to preserve genealogical data for future generations. If you haven't recorded family data by way of tapes or just handwritten notes, do so now. Tomorrow may be too late. Memories cannot be replaced. They must be preserved.

I've interviewed a number of my relatives, but one of the questions asked in this book seemed trivial at the time, and I didn't write it down. The importance of this and other questions made me realize that I still have lots of work to do on my immediate and personal family history. This one question hit close to home, and I had not even thought about it, although I may have mentioned it to my children. The two-phase question is: Were you named after someone? Does your name have its own story? Here is how I would answer this.

The name my parents had chosen for me was Billy Dwayne, and I have no idea how they came up with this. For some reason, the family doctor suggested that they consider Damon because of his interest in the friendship of Damon and Pythias, dating back to early Sicily. He was somehow impressed by the story of how Damon was willing to give up his life to save Pythias. So they decided to name me Damon and gave me my father's middle name of Andrew.

Several years ago when I was browsing through an old bookstore in San Francisco, I came across "The Story of Damon and Pythias," by Albert Payson Terhune, (c)1915, Grosset & Dunlap and the Universal Film Manufacturing Company. The

book has long been out of print, but this copy has a choice spot in my book collection. I now have the complete story of this friendship. A play by John Banim became a hit and was the result of the formation of the Knights of Pythias in Washington on February 19, 1864. The Sicilian scene is so human and so filled with lessons that are aimed at universal good that the devotees of this order gladly encouraged every effort to disseminate its lessons.

Do you really know your family? Be sure to record things now. I have many notebooks of phrases, stories, names from the past and old pictures, and each time I go through these items, I seem to learn even more about my ancestors. I have descriptions, color of hair, eyes, heights, names of friends and so many other items that mean a lot to my own understanding of how and where my family members lived, worked and died.

I made it a point several years ago to take my own children to Brandywine, Pennsylvania, so that they could see and be in a spot where one of our ancestors fought in the American Revolution. This brought about another question or two. How are your children like you? How are they different? Well, I really wanted to touch that crack in the Liberty Bell and feel history first hand, but it took the quick action of my youngest son to crawl under the rope and put his little hand on this historic relic. He was only 3, but he remembers it. That's what an impression this event made on his life.

I also pondered another question. Who would you most like to see again from your past? I would have to say to Jean de Melet (John Mellett), "how proud I am of your contribution to the freedom we know today," and thank him for his courage and his participation in the American Revolution. I suppose I would also ask him why he did it, but I believe I know what his answer would be.

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DOCUMENTATION IMPORTANT: Something I feel that is of great importance and that I wish to impress and pass on to all genealogists is the documentation factor. When you find records, make certain they are correct. I found something just this past week on the Internet that upset me quite a bit, and there's really nothing I can do about it except to submit my own data and hope they will somehow find their place in future records.

My great-grandfather was married twice. I am descended from the first marriage, but there were children by the second marriage. One of the descendants of the second marriage has submitted data on both sides of the family. I saw misspellings of family names, incorrect family names, and other items that are now out there for all to see and accept as fact. Well, it is incorrect, and now I have to try to see if I can fix the errors. My own brother's name is wrong! I have all the family Bible records, and my grandmother's name is misspelled. This goes on and on. I sent an e-mail to

the company that made the CD for the individual and told them of the errors. Thus far, I haven't received a response.

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ARCHAEOLOGY AND GENEALOGY: The next meeting of the Baton Rouge chapter of the Louisiana Archaeological Society will be January 27, 2010 at 7:00 p.m. at the Bluebonnet Branch of the EBR Public Library. The speaker will be Jayur Madhusudan Mehta. Jayur is a graduate student at Tulane University. His presentation will be entitled "An Epic Flood and the Genesis of a Monumental Mound Center: Geomorphological Investigations at the Carson Mounds Site (22CO505), Coahoma County, Mississippi."

Jayur is an archaeology PhD student at Tulane University. Christopher Rodning is his adviser. For his doctoral dissertation, he will study environmental dynamics at the Carson Mounds site, located near Clarksdale, MS. Once containing over 88 earthen mounds over the extent of one-mile, the site now has only 6 large mounds, 2 of which are double-conical. His research will interpret mound chronology, site occupation and labor investment, as well as define the engineering principals making occupation and construction possible in the floodplain.

Abstract - Preliminary investigations have corroborated an 1894 map of the Carson Mounds site drawn by William Henry Holmes. Depicting 88 pyramidal and small conical mounds over an extent of one mile, this site appears as grand in scale as the likes of Moundville, Etowah, and Cahokia. The main purpose of this study is to map onto the landscape Holmes' original map and discover any remaining mounds – 11 have been found to this date. Understanding the geomorphological history of this location and the sequence of mound construction is a significant and many-years long project allowing the study of the historical ecology of the people living and building mounds at this site. In addition, earth moving of this scale must be organized in some fashion. Long term studies of mounds, structures, and other deposits will provide data on social and political complexity. Two weeks of coring, trenching, and geophysical investigations are described in this study and demonstrate for a flood event underlying some of the mounds, and interrupting construction at others. While these data are yet preliminary, it should help to refine methods in geomorphological and geophysical investigation, as well as the study of mound construction. These data also suggest long term research will be necessary at the Carson Mounds, as the scale of earth moving and mound construction are significantly greater than at surrounding mound centers in the Northern Yazoo Basin.

Studies of this type have genealogical connections in the way the area was settled and those people living here through the present time.

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FEBRUARY SEMINAR: Here is another reminder for an excellent seminar scheduled for this month by Le Comite des Archives de la Louisiane. Le Comité's Second African American Genealogical Seminar schedule is complete, and Reginald Washington of the National Archives in Washington, D.C., will be the main speaker. He will present two lectures entitled "The Dawn of Freedom: Records of the Freedmen's Bureau" and "The Records of the Southern Claims Commission: A Source for African American Genealogy."

Other speakers include Cherryl Forbes Montgomery, who will discuss "Digitizing and Organizing Your Family Photographs," and Judy Riffel, who will present "Techniques for Researching Slave Ancestors" and "Online Sources for African American Genealogy." The cost of the all-day seminar is \$10 for Le Comité members who register before February 6th, and \$20 for non-members. After February 6th, the price is \$20 for all. Lunch is not included. The seminar will be held at the Delta Sigma Theta Life Development Center, 688 Harding Blvd., on the Southern University campus in Baton Rouge. For more information, contact Cherryl Montgomery at cherrylm@aol.com. Mail registration forms to Le Comité at P.O. Box 1547, Baton Rouge, LA 70821.

Reginald Washington is an archivist/genealogy specialist with the Access Programs Staff (NWC) of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). He lectures frequently on records and research procedures at the National Archives and has served as the African American Genealogy Specialist at NARA for the past 14 years. He has spoken at Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society conferences, National Genealogical Society, Federation of Genealogical Societies, National Institute on Genealogical Research, the Institute of Genealogy and Historical Research, and numerous local genealogical societies and clubs.

Washington has conducted numerous workshops on the use of Federal records for African American genealogical research, and his articles have appeared in *Prologue*, *The Record*, *Ancestry*, and the *Negro History Bulletin*. He gave congressional testimony in support of The Freedmen's Bureau Preservation Act of 2000 that authorized 3 million dollars for the preservation of more than 1000 linear feet of field office records of the Freedmen's Bureau. He is a past member of the Editorial Advisory Board for the *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*.