

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format

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By Damon Veach

FAMILY RESEARCH: Several years ago, I wrote an article about my cousin Jim Reeves, known to country music fans as Gentleman Jim. His mother and my grandmother were sisters. I recently read the article again and did some revisions to bring it up to date. In the process, I learned that some member of the Reeves family paid a professional researcher to do a complete family history. I can assure you now that after seeing what this researcher compiled, it is not only incorrect in many cases but put into a format that is definitely difficult to understand.

It is for this reason that I have always discouraged my readers from hiring professional researchers. This is not to say that professional researchers are not qualified to do this. There is a time and a place for this. It is more of my way to encourage individuals to do their own research, to find the joy that this can bring.

I know many people don't have the time, but this is such a great way to learn about your own family and the part they have played in the development of a great nation. It is a job that is ongoing, even never ending. Learning where to uncover clues, facts, documents, and even distant cousins will bring about a better understanding of this. It is all lost if you are handed a document compiled by someone else on your heritage.

Family research is personal. It is time consuming. It is something that continues to grow and expand into work not only on direct lines but also on allied lines. It is a giant mystery that is always leading to new clues, outstanding discoveries, and learning about connections that you never knew had a direct influence on your direct line of descent. It is like a ladder where you begin at the base and then work your way up, or in the case of ancestries, you work your way from the present to the past. The top of the ladder is difficult to reach, but it is better to make that climb yourself instead of having someone else do it for you.

There are many different ways to get started in family research. Each person has to decide what the best way to pursue this may be so as to produce the best results. Once the decision has been made, the journey begins.

I have always advised anyone beginning their research to start with older family members first. Find out all you can about what is known on individual surnames. See if there are records already available on the family. Be prepared to take notes, and start organizing the material into a file that will be easily accessed later on.

There are family record forms available, or they can be designed to fit your own personal needs. Finding and utilizing that base form is important, and it can be

altered or revised. Most of the time, this is not necessary. After all, you are dealing with people who have worked out the basics. All you need to do is to make up your mind to begin this project and stick with it. I even tell people in the beginning to never give up. Whenever the going gets to the point of being very discouraging, stop for a period of time, take a look at where you have been and how far you have progressed. At this time, you may want to alter your schedule, but only you will be able to determine this.

The difference in you and a professional researcher is in the learning process. You have never been down this road before whereas those professionals have made it by studying what is available, how to get to records easily, where these records are stored, how the various archival facilities fit into the picture, what is available in state, regional, and world facilities, but once you understand all this, you can then decide your best approach at conducting your research.

Start small. Don't jump it over your head in the beginning. Many family researchers are overwhelmed at first, and many give up, but the rewards are there if you stick with the program you designed for yourself. It is all in the planning and the desire to achieve the proper and most accurate results you can uncover.

There have been many times where I would reach the point of almost giving up, but I knew that somewhere out there was a solution to whatever roadblock I might encounter. Life itself is that way. When you fall down, you get up, brush yourself off, and get back into tackling the problem until you reach a successful conclusion. I have even found that when I am completely at what seems to be a dead end in a research problem, it is time for a break. There are other problems and other surnames to research, and you can always return to that dead end and often come up with a way to overcome and continue on your way to a logical and accurate conclusion.

With each new discovery, there is a sense of accomplishment and pride that gives you that extra energy to continue. It has happened to me so many times. The only thing you have to do is make up your mind and understand that failure is not a part of this equation. With a positive attitude and strong determination, you will find the strength to continue until you have reached a point where you are satisfied with what you have done to reach this point. I truthfully have never found a situation where I would want to hire a professional. Over the years, I figured out that I could attain the best results only if I did it myself. I learned the name of the game by playing it the right way. I studied by the rules, and I observed those rules and adapted them to my own schedule and desires to succeed.

This again is the way we do things in our job assignments. It is at this point that we definitely can appreciate the importance of what a hobby of this type means to us. Along the way, many friendships have been made, new discoveries have increased our knowledge of our ancestry, and we are, for the most part, satisfied with our accomplishments. I don't think one ever completely finishes the research process.

It is as if one thing leads to another – and it does. An elusive clue sends you in another direction to another clue that brings on some other interesting fact that needs to be studied.

I gave you an example of this in my last column format. While searching out books on the internet, I came across that book about early nurseries that had a direct connection to my family lineage. Those individuals in the book are not my own ancestors, but they definitely descend from the same common ancestor back in Scotland. There will always be cases where you see the connections come together. This is another of those fascinating points that makes genealogy so rewarding. Every now and then, I get an e-mail from a distant cousin, and another line of descent falls into place as another piece of the puzzle comes together.

Excitement always makes research even more interesting. It is this continued enthusiasm that really sparks that continuation factor and pushes you onward to more conclusions. Unless you make up your mind to become totally immersed in your research, you will not truly understand the joy that can come with this endeavor. This is what is missed when a professional is asked to help in achieving one's goal in learning about family history. When you do it yourself, you document and continue to check that documentation to make sure you have everything correct or at least as correct as you can possibly determine it to be.

I encourage you to start your journey with this determination to succeed. It is your story. You deserve to live it again through the lives and achievements of your ancestors. No one else can do this for you. It is your story. It is your life.

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MEETING SCHEDULED: The Edward Livingston Historical Association will hold their monthly meeting on Thursday, August 19th at 6 p.m. in the Livingston Parish Library in Livingston, Louisiana. This will be a combined business meeting and a general information exchange meeting. Clark Forrest heads up this group and has been a leader and top historian in the area for many years. His periodic notices are always filled with highlights of the activities in the Livingston Parish area and updates on the work being done by their society members.

You can learn more about their group by visiting their web site or corresponding with them directly. On the web, check them out at <http://members.cox.net/only1ce/>. You can join their group for only \$5 per member, or \$10 per family. Contact them at P.O. Box 67, Livingston, LA 70754-0067.

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FREE SERVICE: Correspondence to this column should be directed to Damon Veach, Cajuns, Creoles, Pirates and Planters, 709 Bungalow Lane, Baton Rouge, LA 70802-5337. The e-mail address is ancestorslaveach@cox.net. Queries and book

reviews are printed as space permits, and you are encouraged to take advantage of this free service. 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 excellent service.