

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format

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By Damon Veach

HISTORICAL MENU: There are many places to obtain information of genealogical interest. One came to me recently as I dined at a New Orleans restaurant. I read the menu before me with interest, but when I turned it over to the back side, I realized that here was some important historical documentation.

Antoine's Restaurant has become as much a part of New Orleans as Jackson Square and the St. Louis Cathedral. It has been in operation since 1840 and has weathered the Civil War, World Wars I and II, the Great Depression, epidemics, and storms. It all started when Antoine Alciatore arrived in New Orleans from Marseilles, France in 1840 and became immediately a culinary notable. He was sixteen years old at the time.

Antoine had been apprenticed, since the age of eight, to the great French chef Collinet of the Hotel de Noailles in Marseilles. His parents' wavering fortunes as cloth merchants required that the young boy learn a trade and help the family himself.

By the time he left France, Antoine had served kings and royalty, and the aristocracy of that country. However, the voice of opportunity in America led him to decide to come to Louisiana. Before arriving here, the meals served at any public table were simple – boiled or roasted meat, fowl and fish. Sauces were largely non-existent and haute cuisine preparations virtually unknown here.

Antoine changed that. He took the bounty of products available in New Orleans and worked his own culinary magic, inventing constantly to develop a cuisine that was uniquely his, and this was adopted by the citizens of New Orleans as their common right. His culinary treasures are still being served in New Orleans today, and Oysters Rockefeller was invented by his son, Jules. It is a family secret that is kept secret to this day.

In 1874, Antoine was in ill-health and decided to return to Marseilles where he wanted to live during his final time and then be buried in his birthplace in France. He said his goodbyes and left the management of the restaurant to his wife and told her he did not want her to see him deteriorate. He died within the year.

Jules Alciatore served as apprentice under his mother's tutelage for six years. She then sent him to France, where he served in the great kitchens of Paris, Strassburg, and Marseilles. He returned to New Orleans and became chef of the famous Pickwick Club in 1887 before his mother summoned him to head the house of Antoine.

Jules married Althea Roy, a daughter of a planter in Youngsville in southwest Louisiana, and Marie Louise, the grand dame of the family, was born. A son, Roy Louis, was born in 1902 and headed the restaurant for almost 40 years until his death in 1972. Roy managed the restaurant through some of the nation's most difficult times. The 1840 Room, a replica of a fashionable private dining room, still contains the great silver duck press and is a museum of curios treasures including a cookbook published in Paris in 1659.

Marie Louise married William Guste, and their sons, William Jr., former attorney general of Louisiana, and Roy Sr., became the fourth generation of the family to head the restaurant. In 1975, Roy's son, Roy Jr., became proprietor and served until 1984. He was followed by William's son, Bernard "Randy" Guste.

Countless celebrities have dined at Antoine's including Franklin Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, Bob Hope, Rex Harrison, Al Jolson, Pope John Paul II, and Bing Crosby to name just a few. The one thing that has disappointed me is that there is not an appropriate display of Frances Parkinson Keyes' "Dinner at Antoine's." It may be there somewhere, but the waiter I talked with seemed to know nothing of the connection of this great writer to the restaurant. I looked at all the different rooms but perhaps this author is recognized in one of the occupied rooms that I didn't enter.

As of now, the spirit of Antoine, Jules, and Roy Alciatore lives on to greet new generations, providing hospitality, fine food, and the magic that only history can lend to such a place.

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CONFERENCE SET: "Creole Louisiana: Cultural and Family Ties Along Back Roads and Waterways" is the subject of the sixth annual conference of the Louisiana Creole Research Association set for October 16/17, 2010 at Xavier University Center, Grand Ballroom (Third Floor), Drexel Drive at Pine Street in New Orleans. Founded in 2004, this group is dedicated to preserving Creole culture through historical/genealogical research. They hold this annual conference and also publish a journal.

This year's conference will engage and encourage attendees to explore the many Creole communities that exist in Louisiana, all the way from Bayou LaCombe to Bayou Teche and from the Gulf to the Prairie Country, and many points therein. The major sessions will focus on the Creole French dialect, rural Creole music, and tracing female lineages in Creole of color families

The areas to be discussed include Pointe Coupee Parish, the River Parishes (German-Acadian Coast), Bayou Teche Region (New Iberia/St. Martinville), Bayou Lafourche Region (Donaldsonville/Napoleonville), Cane River, Plaquemines Parish,

and St. Tammany Parish. Speakers include historians Brian Costello, Christophe Landry, and Jay Schexnaydre, linguist Tom Klingler, and genealogist Elizabeth Shown-Mills. A special participant is renowned restaurateur and cultural icon Leah Chase. Attendees will also be treated to the cultural expertise and musical genius of Don Vappie, whose ancestry traces back to St. James Parish. The Sunday Jazz Brunch, always a gem in the diadem of social affairs, will feature dynamic songstress Wanda Lee Rouzan and the remarkable Pinstripe Jazz Trio. The Brunch also includes the presentation of the LA Creole Founder Award and Recognition Awards.

Registration for Saturday sessions is \$40 by September 30 and \$45 thereafter. Tickets to Sunday Brunch are \$45, which must be purchased in advance. Interested persons can download a registration form and locate more information at www.lacreole.org or contact Jari Honora at (504) 450-7107 or jch@creolegen.com or Lolita Cherrie at (504) 453-5922 lolitac454@yahoo.com.

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STORIES SOUGHT: Pamela Folse of Vacherie, Louisiana would like to find some information about her grandfather. His name was Westmore J. Folse, 1910-1973. He operated a small foot ferry between Convent and St. James, also known as the Courthouse ferry, from 1941 to 1961. I am interested in talking to people who may have crossed the ferry and can share with me their stories and experiences of crossing. We know that a newspaper article was written about him, but we don't know which paper or what year. If anyone would like to share their experiences, they can contact her at pamfolse@bellsouth.net or by phone at 225-715-0556.

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BOOK NEEDED: Dr. Charles Lee Bilberry (charlesbilberry@yahoo.com) is originally from Marion, Louisiana in Union Parish, and he has been researching his family's history in this parish. He would like to locate the book called "History of Union Parish, Louisiana: A Genealogical Profile of its Pioneer Men and Women, Slaves and Ex-slaves." The book was written by Dr. Max H. Williams.

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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.