

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format

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Genealogical research has changed so much over the years, and the main reason for this is the internet. Genealogists now can stay at home and do most of their research. Of course, you have to know where to look for your information, but that has come a long way too.

One of the first things I did when I started my research was to go to the card files in the genealogy section of the Fort Worth Public Library. That was my way to find out what had already been done in way of research on my family lineage. With my Veach lineage, this was rather easy because I immediately discovered that someone had done extensive research dating back to the 1920s.

My reasoning for checking out the card files was to learn exactly what had been done and who might be working on the family lineage. This researcher had since passed away, so it was my immediate undertaking to find out what happened to his work, and this meant contacting lots of people whose names I uncovered not only in the card files but in a copy of "The Genealogical Helper," which was on display in the library.

You have to realize that the internet was not available at the time, and most of my research was done in the local library. It was time consuming but rewarding. The microfilm readers were those old versions which meant that I literally had to crawl up into the machine to see what I was looking at. That may sound strange to those who can pick up printed copies of census records or just go on line and check them out.

In genealogy as in real life, you have to crawl before you walk, but once the pieces of this magical puzzle fell into place, I was off and running. It became easier and easier to locate the information but still time consuming especially with a full-time job and a growing family. I found that in my own experience that I was the only one in my family that really wanted to spend any time at doing this kind of research. It became my job to record all this information. With most families, a lot of relatives want to see the results, but they do very little to help find the information to complete the family history.

Now that I'm older, I have come to learn that I am very much appreciated not only by my immediate family but by distant cousins and just those individuals looking for connections to the many surnames I've uncovered. I don't mind sharing my information and do so frequently, but I have met those people who are so selfish that they keep everything secret. It happens in many cases that this information ends up with descendants who care nothing about these records, and in many cases, the individual's work is just discarded. Some researchers do manage to locate

records of this type in genealogical libraries or with societies that can use the material in their quarterlies or periodicals.

Something else I've noticed over the years is the way family groups or surname organizations just fade away for lack of interest. I had a friend who worked with me in the beginning stages of my research who compiled an annual listing of these surname groups and had complete knowledge of the publications, annual meetings, and general information on their activities. I uncovered one of these publications recently, but it was so outdated that I fear contacting most of them would find no such addresses available. Again – this was before the internet.

Today you have bigger societies, stronger societies, and they do a great job in the area of promoting these smaller groups. Of course, you now have “Cindi’s List,” which tells you just about anything you would want to know about what is available on the internet, but she also has a compilation of the different surname groups. It is as if she has pulled all of this information together and expanded on that surname grouping that I first used so many years ago.

You also have the Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS), and they provide a lot of information by way of the internet, and they also offer a lot of help to the numerous genealogical societies. I have to also say here that a lot of the genealogical societies that I recall from my early years of research are no longer active. The only records you have of some of these are the quarterlies or newsletters filed away in genealogical collections. Some have been microfilmed, but many are long forgotten. All of the ones that I had on file have now been added to the Veach-Foshee Memorial Library Collection in Mansfield, Louisiana, located in the Mansfield Female College Museum.

There are other major groups that you may want to check out, but a lot of these smaller individual groups are just nowhere to be found. This means you are left with what little you know from past experience, and you must rely primarily on the internet to help you in locating a lot of the data. There are still researchers who don't use computers, but I always encourage those who write me letters to at least go to the local libraries or even to become involved in the genealogical societies that are located within driving distance. I realize that snail-mail was good before the internet, but let's face it, you just can't continue to use this outdated means of doing family research.

I don't mean to sound negative here, but the computer age is here – and it has been for quite some time. If you don't continue to learn, you are left behind to use antiquated systems, and this becomes more difficult with time. If you were to look at my many family notebooks, you would find many, many letters, all handwritten and, to me personally, they contain treasures I could never find in libraries. They are from older relatives and friends that I located over the years, and I filed them all away by date but in notebooks so I can turn a page, open up these letters, and sometimes discover points of interest that I had long forgotten.

This is why in my research that I have always stressed the importance of interviewing older relatives and recording the information. Once gone, it can never be recovered. It is the same with so much information that is gathered and never copied or donated to libraries. I had a friend in Ohio, a distant Veach cousin, and we made a pact many years ago. We made copies of all our files, and we exchanged this material. It was also decided that we would donate our material to a library or interested individual who would carry on the work or at least see that it was preserved in some collection, personal or public.

I have made it a point to do this with the collection I have in Mansfield. I have also copied the pictures I have and given them to my nephew who has done a masterful job at building a beautiful story about our family lines. I still have a long way to go and many more pictures to copy. In fact, I sometimes think I will never be finished, but that is the way it is with genealogy. It seems to never end. When you think you are near the finishing point in a given research situation, another door opens, and you continue.

I have a friend who ends all his e-mails with “So Much to Do, So Little Time.” This is why I keep encouraging everyone interested in genealogy to follow my way of doing things. I care. I share. And my work continues. I’m sure your work continues too.

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