

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format

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FEMALE ANCESTORS: There is always an interest in how to simplify research into the surnames of women. The best book I can recall covering this subject was called *The Hidden Half of the Family* by Christina Schaefer.

By law and by custom, women's individual identities have been subsumed by those of their husbands. For centuries, women were not allowed to own real estate in their own name, sign a deed, devise a will, or enter into contracts, or even their citizenship and their position as head of household have been in doubt. Finding women in traditional genealogical record sources, presents the researcher with a unique challenge especially for census records, wills, land records, pension records, and other records of note. All have to be reviewed in a different perspective if we are to establish the genealogical identity of our female ancestors.

Whether listed under their maiden name, married names, patronymic/metronymic surnames or some other permutation or hidden under terms such as Mrs, mistress, goodwife, wife of, or even daughter of, it is clear that women are hard to find in early records. While women may never be as easy to locate as their male counterparts, Schaefer offers some helpful pointers in her book.

She pioneers an approach to the problem that just might set genealogy on it head, and her solution is simplicity itself. Look closely at those areas where the female ancestor interacts with the government and the legal system like where laws and customs can offer clues to identities. According to her, the legal status of women at any point in time is the key to unrevealing the identity of the female ancestor, and therefore this work highlights those laws, both federal and state that indicates when a woman could own real estate in her own name, devise a will, enter into contracts, and so on.

The first part of this book is a lengthy and informative introduction and deals with the special ways women are dealt with in federal records such as immigration records, passports, naturalizations records, census enumerations, land records, military records, and records dealing with minorities. All such records are discussed with reference to their impact on women, as are a group of miscellaneous non-governmental records, including newspapers, cemetery records, city directories, church records, and state laws covering common law marriages and marriage and divorce registration.

The bulk of this absorbing reference work, however deals with the individual states, showing how their laws, records, and resources can be used in determining female identity.

Each state section begins with a timeline of events, including important dates in the state's history, following which is a detailed listing of eight key categories of information. These are: (1) marriage and divorce laws and where to find marriage and divorce records; (2) property and inheritance records; (3) suffrage information as to when any voting rights were granted prior to the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920; (4) citizenship showing dates when residents of an area became U.S. citizens; (5) census information; (6) other information on welfare and pensions; (7) bibliographies in books or articles relating to women in the state, historical and biographical sources, and publications regarding legal history and jurisprudence; and (8) selected resources for women's history.

This engrossing work is as amazing as it is informative because it shows how women have been written out of genealogical history and informative because it demonstrates how their identities can be recovered. This is a wise and promising path in genealogy suggesting fruitful avenues of research and many new possibilities.

Schaefer's book was published by the Genealogical Publishing Company of Maryland. It is still available for \$49.00, postage and handling included. The address is 3600 Clipper Mill Rd., Suite 260, Baltimore, MD 21211-1953. It is a great sourcebook for women's genealogy.

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IMPORTANT DATE: Next month will mark a special date for the Louisiana State Archives. The building on Essen Lane will be 25 years old. A reception and sneak preview of the building was held on August 23, 1987, and the dedication was held the following day. The dedication ceremony was attended by dignitaries from around the state and nation, and representatives from France, Spain, and Canada were also in attendance.

The state's archives were deemed relatively unimportant for a number of years, and the collections were moved from place to place with no central location for obtaining information important to historians, genealogists, and anyone researching Louisiana's colorful past. It was not until 1987 that the state could boast of a state of the art facility, and one that is still improving as more collections are added. Much has been done by Le Comite des Archives de la Louisiane to assist in bringing this research facility to the forefront as one of the best of its kind in the nation.

I have written up the history of this facility in the past, and I feel that with all the activities going on in 2012, the date of August 23 should not be overlooked in importance. Mark this date on your calendar now, and be sure to check out the Louisiana State Archives soon.

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QUERY: Rashid Alwadud, 3405 Deer Park Drive, Salem, OR 97310 is researching Henry Simmons and his wife Catherine. He was born in Virginia, and she was born in Louisiana

along with their 21 children. The family lived in Terrebonne Parish around 1900. They were married in Terrebonne Parish in 1881. The birth record for Catherine showed that she was born in 1849, was black, and possibly a slave. Any information on this family would be appreciated.

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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 can be any length, and book reviews are printed as space permits, and you are encouraged to take advantage of this free service. All genealogical/historical/preservation books are reviewed in this column format, but a review copy is necessary for this service. Another service is offered here too. 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. It is a way to get out-of-print books back into the system and definitely is a great assistance to genealogists who may need this information.