

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format

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MAKING GENEALOGY PERSONAL: Several years ago, I wrote a column on the personalization of genealogical history, and with readers always wanting guidance on how to do this, I thought I would bring the subject forth again.

It isn't often that you are able to take your children to historical areas where their ancestors lived, fought in wars, and survived in wilderness areas of America. It is for this reason that I have always encouraged researchers to do their own research instead of hiring a professional to do it for them. In other words, learn by doing it yourself. A professional can help if you actually feel you have exhausted all possibilities of discovery, but only then do I recommend this method.

Let me tell you about my Mellett and Veach families. The research I've done is my own, and it was a journey that I have thoroughly enjoyed. I was fortunate in my job at the time to be assigned to an area of Pennsylvania during 1976, and it was one of the most awesome experiences I've ever had. Where else could you find such magnificent celebrations, visit such beautiful sights, and get the greatest of all feelings of pride than to be standing where your ancestor once stood? It is even nicer when you can share the experience with your family.

It was exceptionally nice for my children. They got to see where some of their ancestors lived and died, and on that 200th anniversary, with all the fireworks and celebrations going on all over America, my family stood in front of our Amish generational home, looked down on the Lebanon Valley of Pennsylvania, and viewed one of the most beautiful sights you can possibly ever see – miles and miles of fireworks and sounds emerging from the valley below and in the distance.

We had elected to stay here instead of going to New York City or Washington, D.C. because of the expected crowds, and it proved to be a good decision. The Old Tunnel Hill Road was active that day with a parade coming right by our home. What surprised us the most was the fact that we had to wear jackets on the 4th of July. It was that cool at the elevation where we lived.

My wife and I had taken the children to Washington, D.C. earlier so they could experience the sights and sounds of our nation's capital city (with the best trip being to see the cherry trees in bloom), but it was the battlegrounds that they really enjoyed the most. The one in particular that they liked was Brandywine, although there were others that they recall fondly, especially Gettysburg. Brandywine was where their ancestor fought with Lafayette. I guess I have been lucky in my research on many occasions, and the first trip I made to the National Archives proved to be the most rewarding one for me, finding an

original immigrant ancestor and getting a personal guided tour of the vast storage areas here.

One of the first names I located in the card files was Jean de Melet, a soldier who fought in the American Revolution with Lafayette. This was my ancestor, John Mellett Sr., and here I was making a discovery that really thrilled and excited me. From this point on, I documented this line and made the connection that I already had to the Veach lineage. It is surprising how you can have lots of bits and pieces of information, but the puzzle doesn't fall together until you find some elusive clue that makes it all fit together properly. It was this discovery that made the Brandywine experience so nice for me and my family.

John Mellett Sr. (ca1745-ca1790) immigrated from the Alsace-Lorraine area of France or Germany to Alexandria, Virginia. Here he married Sarah Suter (Suiter). Joshua Hickman (ca1690-1757), possibly a son of Ezekiel Hickman, lived in Frederick County, Maryland. John Mellett Jr. (1778-1838), a son of John and Sarah, married Mary Ann Hickman, a great granddaughter of Joshua. They moved from Monongalia County, Virginia to Prairie Township, Henry County, Indiana, about 1830. Descendants and relatives lived in Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, Colorado, Texas, Louisiana, and elsewhere. The surnames which have popped up in my research over the years are all related, and just seeing these names in all the research I've done shows how they followed in groups as they settled across America – Beavers, Clawson, Dragoo, Glasscock, Ice, Merchant, McVicker, Osborn, Perfect, Veach, Mellett (Melliette, Millett), and other related families.

The family connection to Lafayette is not direct by heritage, but it is when you consider that your ancestor stood with him in battle, probably rested under the shade of that giant sycamore tree at Brandywine, and maybe even shook the hand of a devoted soldier and friend. Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roch-Gilbert du Motier, formerly the Marquis de La Fayette (or Lafayette), born September 6, 1757, died May 20, 1834, was a former French aristocrat and military officer in both the American and French revolutions.

In 2002, Lafayette was posthumously made an Honorary Citizen of the United States, one of only six persons so honored. He permanently renounced the title "Marquis" before the French National Assembly in June of 1790. Lafayette served in the American War of Independence both as a general and as a diplomat, serving entirely without pay in both roles. Later, he was to prove a key figure in the early phases of the French Revolution, serving in the Estates General and the subsequent National Constituent Assembly. He was a leading figure among the Feuillants, who tried and failed to turn France into a constitutional monarchy, and commander of the French National Guard. Accused by J.P. Marat of responsibility for the massacre of Champ de Mars, he subsequently lost his leading role in the revolution.

On August 19, 1792, the Jacobin party seized control of Paris and the National Assembly, and ordered Lafayette's arrest. He fled France and was arrested by the Austrian army in Belgium. Thereafter, he spent nearly five years in various Austrian and Prussian prisons. He was released in 1797, but Napoleon Bonaparte would not allow his return to France for

several years. He continued to be active in French and European politics until his death in 1834.

Arthur Veach (1824-1900), the third child of Thomas and Ankah (Mellett) Veach, married Mary Ann Harlan, daughter of Stephen and Polly (Sparks) Harlan. Mary's sister, Sarah Harlan, married Thomas Reed, another grandson of Jesse Mellett and Judith Glasscock. It was a double wedding on June 21, 1845 in Indiana.

Arthur Veach went west in 1857 and settled in Coffey County, Kansas, as did Thomas Reed and some members of the Bowman and Beaver families. They lived at Strawn and at Ottumwa, near Burlington, Kansas. Arthur was a "Hard Shell" Baptist preacher as was his son, Joshua H. Veach, who married Harriett Adaline Wilson and later moved to DeSoto Parish, Louisiana, where he was the pastor of the Cool Springs Primitive Baptist Church. And finally, I come to Paul Andrew Veach, who married Birdie E.J. Foshee, and another research of a French heritage comes into view.

Today, at my residence in historic old Spanish Town in the downtown area of Baton Rouge is a huge stone with a date of "1879, I.R. Bond Workman." It sits in my tropical garden and gives me an insight into my heritage each day as I walk into my garden. I discovered this several years ago, and it is a treasured possession. Arthur Veach built a two-story stone house east of Old Strawn, now underwater due to the John Redmond Reservoir on the Neosho River north and west of Burlington. Luck was with me again when I wrote the mayor of Burlington, Kansas to see what I could learn about my family. I was hoping for names of historians, but to my surprise, I learned that the old stone that was above the front entrance was sitting in the mayor's back yard. It was removed when the home was demolished and was there waiting for me to claim it. I immediately headed out for Kansas.

Over the years, my children have been constantly exposed to ancestral notes, discussions, and trips to cemeteries and libraries. It isn't something that was forced on them, but it was my way of teaching them to be proud of their heritage. That is what I have always encouraged other researchers to do. Share with your children. Get them involved. It is a great way for them to learn American history and be honored to be a part of it.

And so it came to pass and at my children's encouragement that my genealogical collection was to be made available to others for research. The decision was made to donate this collection to the DeSoto Parish Historical Association in Mansfield, Louisiana. It is housed in the Mansfield Female College Museum and is open to the public. The collection continues to grow and is a memorial dedicated to the memory of my Veach and Foshee heritage, both families early residents of DeSoto Parish.

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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

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