

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format

Volume 4, Number 26

FORGOTTEN JEWS: Carol Mills-Nichol of Madisonville, Louisiana, is happy to report that her book *The Forgotten Jews of Avoyelles Parish* is being published in November by Janaway Publications. The publisher has recently taken an ad in the Journal of Southern Jewish History, which will appear in October. Below is a longer version which will appear in the publisher's catalogue, and when the book is published, I'll be able to mention it again with the pricing and availability information.

Containing an index, 45 illustrations, and 610 pages of data, this is the first ever book written about the Jewish men and women who came to Central Louisiana to settle as early as the 1830s in Avoyelles Parish. Far more than a genealogy, the author takes the reader on a journey through time from the parishes earliest beginnings, through the Civil War, and two World Wars, finally, to the last man standing who practices Judaism today in this mostly agrarian section of the state.

These families, their triumphs and tragedies, are treated within the context of the development of Avoyelles, as well as, to a lesser degree, Winn, Rapides, St. Landry, Evangeline, and Grant Parishes where some moved on to find better opportunities. Formerly from Alsace, Bavaria, and later, Poland, Russia, and Austria-Hungary, these Jews were merchants and farmers, slave owners and Confederate soldiers, jayhawkers and prisoners of war, mayors, constables, aldermen, and builders and owners of short line railroads. They founded towns, ran sawmills, discovered oil, and ginned cotton.

For the earliest Jewish residents who often married out of their faith, this was a story of assimilation and loss of their religious identity. For the post-Civil War arrivals who, more often than not, came with wives and children, this was a story of the constant struggle to remain Jewish.

The lives of the earliest immigrants: Maurice Fortlouis, Adolph and Charles Frank, Abe Felsenthal, Sam and Alex Haas, Simon, Leopold and David Siess, Isaac Lehmann and Leopold and Lazard Goudchaux, who intermarried with the Porché, Bordelon, Gaspard, Aymond, Guillot, Marshall, Cole, Blount, Chatelain, and Cochrane pioneer families of Avoyelles Parish, are analyzed in the context of the external forces of history which shaped their lives, the major event being the Civil War. The conflicts between Union sympathizers and Confederate loyalists in Avoyelles Parish, the catastrophic consequences of the Red River campaign, the fall of Fort DeRussy, and the Union army's final march through Marksville and Mansura, may now be seen through the eyes of the immigrants who lived through them.

These first Jewish men were followed by numerous post-bellum arrivals including the Levy, Karpe, Wolf, Weill, Weil, Moch, Hiller, Kahn, Bauer, Weiss, Gross, Anker, Rich, Warshauer, Elster, Goldring, Rosenberg, Schreiber, Schlessinger, and Abramson families who, along with the sons and daughters of the first Jewish immigrants, continued to shape

the destiny of the parish during the difficult years of Reconstruction, which brought with it the brief specter of anti-Semitism.

These Jewish families continued to prosper well into the twentieth century. Their leadership in the development of Louisiana's lumber and petroleum resources, their contributions as physicians, dentists, and politicians, as well as their innovations in the retail ready-to-wear clothing industry, have given them a place of importance in the development of Central Louisiana, which can, no longer be forgotten.

This book has great promise for those doing research in this part of the state, and it will be very important to all those individuals who are descended from these early residents of Louisiana. I will tell you more about this book in November. By the way, anyone who reads this book will be able to find out Lieutenant Governor Jay Dardenne's Jewish ancestry. His family background should prove to be interesting.

XXX

MARRIAGE RECORDS: In a previous column format, a review was given of Alice Daly Forsyth's book of New Orleans marriage records. Another one that is excellent and very valuable for researchers is *New Orleans Marriage Contracts, 1804-1820*, abstracted from the Notarial Archives by Charles R. Maduell Jr. and published by Polyanthos in 1977, a company owned by Winston De Ville.

Marriage contracts were formal legal agreements between two people intending to become husband and wife and necessary practices when property was involved. These agreements were usually performed before a priest or official of the Roman Catholic Church in a religious ceremony.

Later on, marriages were allowed if the agreements were made before a court official which was usually a judge of the civil court. Neither the clergyman or the justice ever demanded any formal agreement concerning the property. There were few differences in these contracts between the customs of Spain and those of France.

One of the important aspects of these contracts involved the division of the property when one of the partners died. Contracts to cover this were also made before the church or in a civil ceremony. It is here that a lot of genealogical information can be found such as the parentage of both individuals, the places of birth, and in case of minors information on each set of parents or guardians.

Changes in the laws came about between 1804 to 1820. The marriage contracts inherited from the laws of Spain and France continued to prevail, and only those who did not have property allowed themselves to marry without the contract made before a notary.

The extracts in this book show many marriage contracts between persons whose family origins were from France and Saint Domingue (now Haiti) as well as third and fourth generations of Louisianians. There are also some contracts between Americans who were

migrating to Louisiana in great numbers as well as Frenchmen trying to escape after the downfall of Napoleon. Also included were refugees from Saint Domingue who had lost their plantations during the slave revolt. The population of New Orleans more than doubled during this period.

XXX

MORTALITY RECORDS: Another nice reference that has been re-discovered is *East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, Mortality Schedules, 1850-1860-1870-1880*, transcriptions that were made by Claude Bowman Slaton and Gloria Lambert Kerns.

This particular publication was the second in a series on the Florida Parishes and presented as a genealogical aid in the area of East Baton Rouge Parish. This soft-cover book contains a surname listing for easy reference by researchers.

The material (with the exception of the medical terms) was transcribed from microfilm located at the Louisiana State Library. Great care was taken to copy this material correctly, but reading documents of this type are subject to spelling errors.

The mortality schedules for these periods of time were compiled along with the regular census reports. The quality of the information varies with both the census year and the individual enumerator.

Slaton and Kerns added editorial notes throughout these records. This was done to clarify the information and are self-explanatory. The medical terms were added to help and to make the data more interesting.

XXX

MORE MARRIAGES: Another book of marriages that can also prove useful to researchers is *Marriages, Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, 1833-1912*. This compilation was done by Bartley A. Bowers.

Bowers noted that the records were copied using the spellings as they were listed in the documents. When researching lineages in the various Louisiana parishes, check with local genealogical librarians to see if these books are located in their research sections.

Never give up. There are always books, microfilm, magazines, and miscellaneous materials containing genealogical data, and with the internet, there is a tendency to stray away from all the material that is possibly available in local collections.

XXX

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.