

# **CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS**

*Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format*

Volume 4, Number 33

**YUGOSLAV IMMIGRANTS:** Little has been written about Yugoslav immigrants and their descendants in Louisiana yet they had a part in the early history of Louisiana. Milos M. Vujnovich documented the role they played in the development in a book dating to 1974. It is called *Yugoslavs in Louisiana*.

Vujnovich traced the journey of the first Yugoslav immigrants in the early 1830s and recorded their transition from immigrants to citizens. He describes their religious, social, business, and political life in this new environment.

Many Yugoslavs settled in the bayou country of Louisiana and became established as leading figures in the state's oyster industry. Others remained in the cities, mainly New Orleans, where they made their marks as businessmen or artisans.

Vujnovich writes with authority and obvious admiration of these hardy immigrants whose contributions to the making of Louisiana generally have been overlooked by historians. *Yugoslavs in Louisiana* was the result of more than 20 years of diligent research, and the book was published in conjunction with the 100th anniversary of the founding of the United Slavonian Benevolent Association, the second oldest Yugoslav organization in the Western Hemisphere.

The author of this book is a native of Sucuraj on the island of Hvat, Yugoslavia, and he came to Louisiana in 1938. He completed his elementary education in New Orleans where he learned the English language. Like many of his predecessors to Louisiana, he worked for a time on the oyster reefs in Plaquemines Parish. He served in the United States Army from 1943 to 1945 and won five battle stars as a sergeant in the Signal Corps, Psychological Warfare Branch, in the European Theater.

Vujnovich earned degrees in physics and mathematics from three universities and for years was associated with Delgado Junior College in New Orleans where he held the rank of professor of physics and chairman of the Department of Science. In this book about the Yugoslavs in Louisiana, he presents statistical information in the form of useful tables and appendixes. He felt this was useful and important as a source of information for genealogical researchers.

Appendix II, with the names and birthplaces of the Yugoslav immigrants, should assist those Louisianians of the Yugoslav background who wish to know from which Dalmatian town their ancestors came. Vujnovich first became interested in the Yugoslavs in Louisiana in 1949 when a publicist, Vlaho S. Vlahovic, of New York asked him to write a paper on Yugoslav immigration to Louisiana for a book about the Yugoslav contribution to America. He was writing a book on the subject.

Researching for this paper aroused his interest in the subject so that during the intervening years, as information was uncovered, he compiled the data which he would use to form the basis for writing *Yugoslavs in Louisiana*. While at a Slavonian Association meeting in the late 1960s, it was suggested that a book should be written about the subject, and Vujnovich met the challenge by writing this book.

Primary sources were records of the United Slavonian Benevolent Association, Civil War records, United States census records, and personal communication with older immigrants who narrated their experiences. New Orleans newspapers dating back to the Civil War period were also helpful, especially the reports of the 1893 October hurricane. Many individuals were contacted for information, and this material was very useful in coming up with the final manuscript. Included are many pictures of early Louisiana residents.

*Yugoslavs in Louisiana* was published by Pelican Publishing Company.

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**EXCELLENT COMMENTARIES:** Another older book that was published in 1982 found its place of importance among genealogical research collections. *Commentaries on Some Avoyelles Families* was published by William Nelson Gremillion and Loucille Edwards Gremillion.

Families featured in this book are: Bordelon, Coco, Dcote, Edwards, Gauthier, Gremillion, Joffrion, Lemoine, Normand, and Rabalais. These families are traced to their European origins, except for the Edwards family, which is traced to Colonial Virginia. Emphasis is on the early generations in Louisiana.

Some families, especially the family of Valerian Gremillion and Flavie Bordelon, are brought to the present generation. The descendants of Uriah Edwards Jr. and Nancy Lewis, in some cases, are brought to the present generation.

This book was first published in 1976, and the third edition of 1982 represents considerable revision and additional information of interest to researchers. Information for the colonial period came almost entirely from primary sources, the church and civil records of the time. This included the records of the civil parishes of Avoyelles, Pointe Coupee, and St. Landry, the Catholic Church registries of St. Paul's Church, Mansura, Louisiana, St. Francis and St. Anne's churches, Pointe Coupee, Louisiana, and St. Landry's Church, Opelousas, Louisiana.

Family lists were compiled from personal knowledge, from the knowledge of friends and relatives who are members of these families, from U.S. census records, and from other primary sources. The Gremillion information from France is from official archives through the courtesy of M. Maurice Canu, Secetaire du Mairie, Courcival, Sarthe, France. Bordelon information from France was obtained from the archives of the City of Le Havre, France, and the archives of the Port of Rochefort, France.

The Canadian information came from Tanguay, l'Abbe Cyprien, *Dictionnaire Generalogique des Familles Canadiennes*, and from Institut Genealogique Droujin, *Dictionnaire National des Canadiens Francais 168-1760*. Other sources consulted, books and periodicals, are listed in the bibliography.

This book was privately printed.

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**LE COMITE ITEMS:** Anyone looking for used genealogical books and periodicals should check out the latest lists from Le Comité des Archives de la Louisiane. Members of the group can log on to the Members' Page of the society's website ([www.lecomite.org](http://www.lecomite.org)). Non-members can send an e-mail request to Judy Riffel ([riffelj@bellsouth.net](mailto:riffelj@bellsouth.net)). Supplies are limited and much of the unsold material will soon be discarded.

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**DESCENDANTS DOCUMENTED:** Balthazard Ricard DeVilliers (1727-1782) came to Louisiana as a young French army officer. When Spain took over the colony, he joined the Spanish army and served as commandant at several posts. He was married in New Orleans in 1760 to Francoise Voisin, by whom he had four children, three of whom left numerous descendants in Louisiana.

One of his descendants, Judy Riffel, has formed a Facebook page called Descendants of Balthazard Ricard DeVilliers where she has begun posting genealogical information and photographs. Descendants interested in joining the group can contact her at [riffelj@bellsouth.net](mailto:riffelj@bellsouth.net) or via Facebook.

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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](mailto: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.