

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format

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ON TO KANSAS: If you are researching early records in the study of ex-slave migrations in the U.S., one important book you may want to check out is *Exodusters, Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* by Nell Irvin Painter. This was the first major migration to the North of ex-slaves and contains lots of excellent data for family historians.

The Exodusters came from Tennessee, Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. They were tenant farmers, freed from slavery only to be made the victims of a new “redeemed” South that sought to return them to a more insidious and complex bondage. And so, in the spring of 1879, they fled by the thousands to the one sure promised land they knew – the Kansas of John Brown, the quintessential Free State.

For nearly a hundred years, the Kansas exodus and its participants had remained hidden from history. It is with the triumph of Nell Painter’s book that she restores to all the lives of these proud and determined people and their quest for freedom in a time and a place that seemed to offer none. She does this with great humanity and compelling insight into the situation.

Drawing almost entirely on neglected primary sources, she gives a relentlessly convincing portrait of the South after the Civil War and of the horrors and injustices it visited on the new free people of color. The vicious credit system that kept them in unending poverty is exposed, and the systematic violence of bulldozing or night riding to keep them from exercising their hard-won civil rights is told candidly. Even government efforts to deny benefits of voting, holding office, and attending schools are discussed in detail. And the rights to own land comes into play in causing this mass migration from former masters and overseers who sought to keep them in their former conditions.

Painter shows how the free people themselves and their efforts to survive made the exodus so astounding. She discusses the mutual aid societies they formed, the conventions and political meetings they called, and the interest they revived in the idea of moving to Liberia.

How these uneducated ex-slaves took on the system is amazing, and some of the outstanding leaders of this period come into the picture – Henry Adams, a shrewd and tireless organizer, and Benjamin Singleton a cabinetmaker who claimed a divine inspiration for his mission. They ignored the advice of such men as Senator Blanche K. Bruce and Frederick Douglass by taking a more direct approach on the system, and Kansas stood out as the place they needed to be.

This is a great look at this period of American history and is an impressive testimonial to the spirit of a movement that had previously been denied a place in American history. Published in 1976, it is one that should be sought out. I came across it while cataloging my collection for the DeSoto Parish Historical Society and the library set up at the Mansfield Female College Museum. It was published by Alfred A Knoff of New York.

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MEETING SCHEDULED: The April Membership Meeting of the Canary Islander Heritage Society will be held Saturday April 14th, 2012 at 11:00 a.m. at the Old St. Gabriel Church in St. Gabriel, Louisiana. The church was completed in July 1776 and is the oldest existing church building in the Mississippi Valley and one of the oldest existing buildings in Louisiana.

The visit will include a video of research of the church, displays of the construction of the church, views of the original building construction, and original settlers' land grants by the Spanish government. Eugene LeBlanc, local historian, and David Broussard will host the Society.

Information about the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana can be found on the web at www.canarvislanders.org.

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NEW FEATURE: Le Comité des Archives de la Louisiane has added a new feature to its website. *Document of the Month* debuted in April with a 1912 Governor's Proclamation commemorating the Centennial celebration of Louisiana Statehood. Inspired by the National Archives' *Today's Document*, Le Comité's *Document of the Month* will feature documents and other images from the holdings of the Louisiana State Archives. The link is found on the lower right hand side of the main page (www.lecomite.org). Another link at the end of the descriptive text will lead to a larger image of the document.

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JOINT MEETING: Again the Trahan Family Association and the Broussard "Beausoleil" Association will join in a meeting and meal. This will take place on May 26, 2012 at "Mr. Keets" in Maurice, La. starting at 10:00 a.m. until 12:30-1:00 p.m. The menu will be crawfish etouffée and drink of tea, water or coffee, and the price at the door will be \$10.00. There will be waitresses walking around to take your order for drinks from the cash bar, as some will want something a little stronger.

The owner, Gerard Baudoin, has his own crawfish ponds, so everything is fresh. The groups will need an RSVP so sufficient food will be prepared. This will be a private

party as he is not open to the public on Saturdays. This restaurant is located on the main drive, just south of the signal light at Gulf Coast Bank, on the east side of US 167, now with a turning lane.

Please email the number in your party to either Corwin at crbroussard@bellsouth.net (phone 337-984-3752) or Loubert at lgtrahan@cox.net (phone 337-893-2084).

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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.