

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format

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Photo by Judy Riffel

Adrian Zeno, Dr. Leon Tarver, and Kenneth Kleinpeter spoke at the African Special Interest Group Seminar on April 14, 2012.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP: With nearly 600 members, Le Comité is one of the largest genealogical groups in the state today. Its African American Genealogy Special Interest Group (SIG) was formed in 2006 to help people doing African American research in Louisiana have a place to communicate and help one another.

The group currently consists of mostly Le Comité members who have begun holding meetings and seminars. They have also created a Yahoo Groups site for members to share information and help each other with their research. All current members of Le Comité are eligible to join the SIG at no additional cost. Any member wishing to join should send an e-mail to Third Vice President, Cherryl Forbes Montgomery (CherrylM@aol.com) and an invitation to join the Yahoo group will be extended.

For more information on Le Comité, e-mail Judy Riffel (riffelj@bellsouth.net), or visit the group's website (www.lecomite.org).

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GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH: Questions often arise about how to do genealogical research. Genealogy continues to be an important part of our lives, and many individuals are just getting started. It is perhaps one of the most rewarding hobbies you can have especially with all the interesting things that can be learned about all family connections.

In the beginning, you have to record what you know. If that means interviewing your parents or grandparents as I did, then get started before it is too late and these older members are no longer around. Find out as many family surnames as possible because this is the major means of beginning your journey – names of couples, children, locations, and even church affiliations.

Compile as many historical facts about your background as you possibly can, and keep accurate records as you go along. Even in you own background, record those early years of birthplace, where you attended grade school and high school, then note college details, military service, and make sure information about your spouse is included. This is your starting point – personal data and that info you get from other living relatives.

Of course, once you do this for yourself, you do the same for all members of your immediate family, and if there are any old pictures in the family files, make sure you identify all persons in the picture. Even these pictures sometimes can give you locations of where these relatives lived and the kinds of activities they were engaged in. For instance, in my files, I have pictures from church gatherings, cemetery headstones, school classmates, articles of interest relating to family members or surroundings, and even old letters between relatives. We didn't always have the internet, so those letters can be extremely important. You might be surprised at what you would find there.

Now that you have compiled all this known data and documented it properly, you need to become acquainted with what is available in local, even national, libraries. A visit to a local genealogical library can open your eyes to all the wonderful data that is available there. However, you don't have to stop with the local library, you may want to go to libraries in locations where your relatives lived or try to obtain data and materials through inter-library loans. From Salt Lake City to New York City, these places are there, and the amount of data available is limitless.

One of the best places for you to begin on a local basis is the parish or county courthouse. This is where you will find an abundance of personal information. Once you have done the local, you branch out to every location where your ancestors lived. Eventually, you will end up at the National Archives, but in between, you will run into a number of other ways to obtain early records. Much of

this is online now, but if you want the first-hand experience of exploring data, then do vacations around family research.

The next step is to try other means of research through public records including town/city records, birth, marriage, and death records, church records of baptisms, marriages, and burials, cemetery records, military records, court records, and land records. It seems endless, but it isn't. It just takes determination and a sense of great pride in what you are doing. And don't overlook genealogical society publications. These contain material that should help you in your research.

The National Archives in Washington, D.C., has many records of interest. Military records, pension records, immigration lists, ship passenger lists, and land records are housed here. Of course, the federal census records are of extreme importance, so don't ever overlook these, which you can also find in local library research areas. Many have been copied and are available in book form.

Another important source is the microfilm collection of vital records from throughout the world by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These are found in Salt Lake City, and if you can't visit there, you can obtain research data through local branch libraries.

The main thing about doing research is to just be aware of how important your work is and what it will mean to future generations. Preservation of important records is something that everyone should do. You can't depend on others to do this completely. It takes efforts from everyone. Do your part even if it is only a record from an old family Bible. Think about it. Those Bible records are probably the only ones in existence. Once gone, they are permanently lost.

Preservation. Genealogy. History. They are all important. Do your part to help in saving all this important material. Document it accurately, and know that you have done your best to provide this data for others to use somewhere along the way.

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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.