

Genealogy

Genealogy has always been part of Creole culture. So, while race was not discussed very much, kinship was, and is, an important thing. Since Creoles value Creole and Creole marriages highly, identity is important. Endogamy, usually to the third degree of removal, is not only common but smiled upon. First-cousin marriages, while not as acceptable because of Roman Catholic strictures, are not common, although people know of some such unions. These marriages, if church marriages, require dispensation by the Bishop.

Gary Mills (1977:9-15) has concentrated on the first and second generations of the family of Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer and the slave woman, Marie Thérèse Coin-Coin. Further, he points out how other Creoles join the Isle Brevelle-Cane River community.

Community oral traditions differ from Mills's documentary version at various points, but, in general, the community seems comfortable with the Mills presentation, the first to "name names." Sister Jerome Woods created pseudonyms for the people and places of her work, a standard method in the sociological study of a community. People from the communities now wish they knew exactly who she was mentioning. There are also historical deviations between her versions of community history and Gary Mills's work. Mills (1977), for example, worked to show a letter written from New Orleans was not a valid source. Creoles still cite that letter and have little or no doubt about its validity.

Non-Creoles often point out, as did Sister Jerome, that Marie Thérèse Coin-Coin's grave is not marked, and in the Woods work, one is given the impression that she was a secondary person, one to be almost denied or at least not an ancestor to brag about. Even noting the radical changes in the region since the Civil Rights acts passed, this seems an extreme interpretation. Numbers of people proudly point to her as their progenitress. Neither have Claude Thomas Pierre's children by Marie Thérèse, Suzanne, and her twin brother, Nicholas Augustin, ever been denied. Nicholas Augustin Metoyer clearly has become the traditional patriarch of the Cane River Creoles (Figure 3). Stories about him have passed from generation to generation. He is most often referred to as Grandpère 'Gustin or Grandpère Augustin. He, like his father, apparently had much to say about the nature of his family. Mills (1977) suggested that Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer had more or less arranged an advantageous union for at least his daughter, Suzanne.

Augustin's influence reached to his children and their children. This familial model closely resembles the rural French mezier, where the grandfather becomes the head of the extended family (Levi-Strauss 1983). This French family form clearly dominated the population on Isle Brevelle. Mills's discussion of the genealogical additions merely reinforces the fact that contemporary Creoles have a marked preference for marriage between Creoles (Mills 1977: Chap. 4). His observations about the development of endogamy ("in-breeding" is Mills's term, 1977: 104) and Augustin's failure to "reduce"

it seem questionable. What seems more obvious is his effort to maintain or raise the socio-economic status of his children. A non-Creole French descendant from Cane River once commented on his family's preference for cousin marriages, to keep the land in the family, has bearing here. That is precisely the function of the *mezier* in France, a management tool. Today over thirty-six family names (surnames) are found in the Creole community. While some of these were admitted after the Civil War - Jones, Neal, and Clifton being the most notable there is obviously more diversity than when Isle Brevelle was isolated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The Free People of Color married in after the Civil War. Carroll Jones did receive a little attention from Mills (1977: 215), but likely deserves a lot more attention here. Not only did he move to Cane River, but he brought with him his wife, Catherine Clifton. Both Free People of Color - local tradition holds that Catherine was Native American - they moved to Cane River from the hills west of Bayou Boeuf in Rapides Parish. Cane River Creoles today point to a community known today as Clifton or "Siepers" which grew out of early Clifton-Smith-Neal family interactions with Indian families: Austin, Thomas, Baptiste, and Brandy. Numbers of Cane River Creole families have intermarried with these mixed-blood people. For example, the daughter of Carrie Clifton, whose mother was a LaCour, married a Sarpy. Numbers of other connections to this upland community exist as well. Gregory (1995) has suggested that although Louisiana law forbade both Indian-white and Indian-

black unions, little attention was paid to Indian-Creole marriages, both groups being seen as non-white. Both groups were culturally distinct from African-American communities, and the Clifton or Siepers connection seems logical, especially after the Jones family began extension in the Creole community.

This connection is interesting in that it is yet another, though later, source of Native American connections on Cane River. :Mills (1977) has discussed the connections with the LeCompte/LaCour lines, and also the Dupre lineage, but his work seems to focus on the early antebellum community and does not include the Jones-Clifton-Neal-Smith connections. His one reference to Jesse Smith shows him, in 1841, as a white man. Actually, he appears to have been more likely a full-blood Indian, most likely Choctaw. The Clifton Choctaw genealogist, Teresa Sarpy, points out the tradition that he was adopted by a white preacher and was, in reality, an Indian.

Clifton community members intermarried with Cane River Creoles, a by-product of socioeconomic interactions. Mrs. Amos Tyler clearly recalls, as does Alvin Metoyer and others, that in the 1930s and 40s Clifton people attended dances at Wood's Hall and Kirk's Hall on Cane River. Those dances were more or less segregated, reserved for Creoles.

A Haitian visiting Cane River wanted to help at a dance and was instructed to turn blacks away. He explained to two young black men that the dance was "reserved for Creole people." They asked him what a Creole was, and he responded, "If you don't know, then you're not one." The young men left.

That situation prevailed until the end of the 1940s. Even in the 1950s, dances tended, on Isle Brevelle, to be for Creoles.

Still, Creoles sometimes interacted with blacks on a different level than with whites. One younger Creole opined that Cane River was a good place for blacks because Creoles did not accept abuse from whites and tended to protect blacks, knowing whatever happened to blacks would happen to Creoles.

Creoles who married blacks moved to more nearly black communities. Family and Church are linked, of course, but some younger people have recalled the early conflict between Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer and the Spanish priest, Father Quintanilla. The priest protested so vehemently against Metoyer's cohabitation with Marie Thérèse Coin-Coin that Metoyer was forbidden by law to live with her. As in most of the *Mondiale Française*, an *affaire d'amour* sometimes took precedence even over the rules of the Church. Even so, Claude Thomas Pierre is said to have taken his son by Marie Thérèse, Augustin, to France to visit his family there, and there he saw the Church as the center of the family and community. It is pointed out that later Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer made arrangements for his children by Marie Thérèse, and maps and documents pertinent to his French family and his Creole family are carefully curated. The clock he brought his daughter Suzanne from France still adorns the home of Mrs. Bernadine Conant Delphin, her great-granddaughter, on Cane River. In its handmade cypress case, it still runs - a powerful metaphor for the continuity of the Creole family and its origin.

Modern Creole genealogists are busy trying to tie the

family (-ies) tree together, and there is always much interest in that (see Appendix IT). Mrs. Janet Colson, Mrs. Kathleen Balthazar Heitzman, Mrs. Teresa Demery, Donald Gallien, Mickey Moran, Charles Roque, Mrs. Judy Moran, Terrel Delphin and others are actively researching Cane River families and their connections to other Creole "colonies" in Louisiana and elsewhere.¹

1. We Know Who We Are: . . . by H. F. Gregory and J. Moran
pp. 28-36