

Analysis of Lecomte's Ledger

This analysis is based on a series of criteria intended to focus on the Quarters, its occupants, activities, and events related to them. Among the criteria included are: mention of any of land belonging to Ambrose Lecomte I or II and/or their wives; the names of any individuals owned, purchased, and/or sold by the Lecomte or Hertzog families; and mention of any members of the Lecomte or Hertzog families. The collection consists of personal correspondence, account ledgers for Magnolia, Vienna, and Cape Hope, receipts, land survey information, personal checks from Ambrose Lecomte, plat maps and various other documents that pertain to the Lecomte/Hertzog families as well as a number of the surrounding and/or related families. Currently, the earliest date that can be derived from this set of documents is 1800 and the latest comes from the 1890s. Those early documents that were written in French are in the process of being translated.

To date, one of the more important documents that examined is an account ledger that lists the enslaved people owned by Ambrose Lecomte (Appendix A). This ledger was compiled beginning in 1845 and was updated through 1852. A number of entries as late as 1860 are also contained within the ledger, and these entries appear to have been written in pencil. Names, ages, estimations of value, location of residence, and limited information on several families were entered for his enslaved. Death dates, when within the period covered by the ledger, were

also listed. Children who were born after 1845 were recorded with their mother's name and their dates of birth. An Access database listing each enslaved individual was then created from this information. Within this document, Lecomte listed his enslaved labor force at a total of 234 people, a number that accords well with the Slave Schedule of the 1860 Federal Census.

However, while the 1860 Slave Schedule has been used to demonstrate that Lecomte had approximately 235 slaves living in seventy cabins on the Magnolia Plantation (Hahn and Wells 1991, Miri 1997, Keel 1999, Miller 2004), this ledger shows something very different. That is, the document provides a list of Lecomte's enslaved labor force as he had it divided between his plantations (Magnolia, Shallow Lake, and Vienna), his house in the City of Natchitoches, and smaller properties in and around the parish (Cape Hope, Spanish Lake, and the Lanacoucou vachery in Sabine Parish). During the time period that the Lecomte's had the twenty-four double room brick cabins built in the Magnolia Quarters, they only had a listed total of 112 enslaved individuals residing there. If this interpretation of the ledger proves accurate, and additional research into other data sources is planned, only an average of 2.33 people resided within each room. This figure is significantly below the "norm" for slave quarters on plantations across the South. For example, cabins in the Jordan Quarters community housed an average of 5.0 people in 1860.

Other documents collected and currently being analyzed include a number of receipts and pieces of correspondence that

mention Lecomte's properties and the enslaved population residing on them. One such letter is dated August 9, 1873 and represents a receipt for the construction of cisterns somewhere on the Magnolia Plantation. Several pieces of correspondence being studied are letters from several of the overseers on Lecomte's plantations. This material records activities, sick slaves and children born during a given year, as well as information on the status of crops planted and other tasks undertaken. In addition, one 1869 letter from a Mr. Bullitt to Lecomte includes an inquiry concerning Lecomte's plans to build a gin at Magnolia and Bullitt's offer to sell him machinery for this new gin.¹

1. Excavations into Quarters Community by Kenneth Brown pp. 27-28