
Which Marie Louise Is “Mariotte”? Sorting Slaves with Common Names

By Elizabeth Shown Mills, CG, CGL, FASG, FNGS

Every newfound document subjects old conclusions to critical reevaluation, particularly when biographical detail from published works is involved. Narrative accounts of history can meld multiple individuals into one so seamlessly that the blurring of identities is undetectable. Genealogical research requires exhausting all relevant records and painstaking analysis of each detail. Experience teaches that documents left unexamined are time bombs waiting to explode premature conclusions.

Slave research is notoriously difficult—a test of diligence, perception, and analytical skills. Like their white or free counterparts, Southern slave families typically drew from a small pool of names used repeatedly, honoring loved ones or the master’s family. Unlike free people, however, most slaves were known *only* by their given names or nicknames; few created records differentiating same-name people within a household. Add to this even a little record loss, and the task becomes formidable—especially when family members were sold to and from unknown owners by documents that no longer survive.

Research on slaves in Catholic areas of early America might seem more promising, given that denomination’s sacramental records. Such promise falls short, however. Although slave baptism was the norm in French or Spanish cultures, and church burial was fairly common among slaves living near a church, recorded marriages and confirmations were not the rule. They exist only for households with particularly pious masters in old Louisiana. What is given with one hand is taken away with the other; few Catholic Creole planters kept the kind of plantation records that Anglo-American planters did. Even in areas where a parish or diocese has begun to publish abstracts, nonwhite entries are frequently excluded because identification of historic people who lacked surnames is, after all, “impossible.”

© Elizabeth Shown Mills, CG, CGL, FASG, FNGS. Ms. Mills, a past president of both the American Society of Genealogists and the Board for Certification of Genealogists, is the author of two reference works that are standards in the field (*Evidence! Citation and Analysis for the Family Historian* and *Professional Genealogy: A Manual for Researchers, Writers, Editors, Lecturers, and Librarians*). She also has published in numerous historical, sociological, and literary journals. Her 2004 historical novel, *Isle of Canes*, explores the human side of the Cane River community treated in the present paper.

Despite these hamstrings, researchers often *can* sort identities and establish parentage for slaves of common name. The process is not one of fortuitous “finds.” It requires thoroughly studying each same-name contemporary and all known associates. It may involve reading every extant record for the time and place. Eventually, if the research is sufficiently deep and broad, enough shards of evidence may be gathered to build an enduring case.

A CASE AT POINT

Historians have written tidbits about a colonial Louisiana slave named Marie Louise, *dit* (nicknamed) Mariotte. They represent her as an infant baptized in 1759 as “Marie Louise,” eldest daughter of the legendary slave Marie Thérèse *dit* Coincoin. Accounts leap to her middle and final years—the 1790s and early 1800s—when an aging black freedwoman called Marie Louise *dit* Mariotte executed legal documents while struggling for economic survival.

No known manumission record links the freedwoman Marie Louise *dit* Mariotte directly to her slave origin. Making that link is difficult because most females in her society also bore her first name, Marie. For distinction, most used their second name or a double given-name. Mariotte’s double given-name is not much help. No fewer than 113 contemporary slaves named Marie Louise are documented in the small Cane River area where she lived.¹

Three decades ago the first identification of this Marie Louise was based on a time-honored principle: scrutinize records known for the subject, identify associates, and search their families for a same-name person not otherwise eliminated. That process failed here mainly because the magnitude of records created by her associates had discouraged exhaustive research.

Marie Louise *dit* Mariotte could not be Coincoin’s daughter of that name, born in 1759. Rather, evidence suggests she was Coincoin’s *sister* Marie Louise, born in 1747. Both were daughters of African captives François and Marie Françoise, a legally married couple enslaved by the colony’s politically powerful St. Denis family. This paper amplifies brief sketches of both Marie Louises presented in a 1982 genealogy of the family.²

HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS, INTERNAL PROBLEMS

Published fragments of Mariotte’s life reflect how little is known about most slave women. Yet the accounts weave a seamless narrative that lulls researchers into accepting the published word. A recent study explores the financial

1. Calculated from the surviving (but unprocessed) civil records of the Natchitoches post and from Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803: Abstracts of the Catholic Church Registers of the French and Spanish Post of St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches in Louisiana* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1976). Unlike most published colonial church records for Louisiana, this work includes full details from records of slaves, Indians, and other free people of color.

2. Elizabeth S. Mills and Gary B. Mills, “Slaves and Masters: The Louisiana Metoyers,” *NGS Quarterly* 70 (September 1982): 163–89.

activities of freed Cane River slave women. The discussion of Coincoin includes a new nugget about her alleged daughter:

After emancipating Marie Louise *dit* Marriot, one of her *morena* [dark-skinned] daughters, Coincoin invested some money with Bertrand Mailloche, but sued her partner for 50 *piastres* in October 1794. Marriot later signed a contract with Frenchman Antoine Bergeron, obliging herself to do his laundry for a year in exchange for land.³

In the style of academic history, a single footnote citing diverse sources supports the long paragraph containing these two sentences. The details in the last sentence are easily substantiated in the cited records, but not so the “partnership” with Mailloche. The cited suit and volume are not in the cited series. Eventually found, the document neither referred to Coincoin nor identified Mariotte’s mother.⁴

A university collection assembled in the twentieth century contains a related document. In it Mailloche informs local authorities that Mariotte had arranged to ship her tobacco to market using the services of Edward Murphy and his Cane River agent, Richard Syms, but she misunderstood the English-language negotiations.⁵ *It does not mention Coincoin and does not identify Mariotte’s mother.*

The 2004 identification apparently relies on a 1974 dissertation by the late historian, Gary B. Mills, who introduced the two Marie Louises to historical literature with detailed accounts of them:

The first of her children whom Marie Thérèse [Coincoin] purchased was her eldest daughter, Marie Louise. In the fall of 1786, Marie Thérèse entered into an agreement with ... Sieur Pierre Dolet, for the purchase of this daughter. Inasmuch as Marie

3. H. Sophie Burton, “Free People of Color in Spanish Colonial Natchitoches: Manumission and Dependency on the Louisiana-Texas Frontier,” *Louisiana History* 45 (Spring 2004): 173–97, quoting from p. 192.

4. The article, as published, cites “Contract, Bertrand Mailloche and Marie Louise *dit* Marriot, free black woman, October 11, 1794, NPCR [Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Records], Book M.” The author privately explains her source more precisely as “Miscellaneous Archive Records, 1726–1835, FHL microfilm 0,279,104.” The Family History Library’s cataloging does erroneously classify that film as “Books/Monographs (on Film),” but the film itself carries no book label—and no “Book M” exists in the colonial notarial archives. The film offers *loose, original papers* from the colonial notarial archive, papers overlooked when the series was bound in the twentieth century into numbered volumes labeled “Archive Conveyance Records.” The original loose papers, kept in the office of the Clerk of Court, are referred to herein as “Miscellaneous Series, Archive Conveyance Records.” The Family History Library (FHL) microfilm dated “1726–1836” is the same set of records offered by the state archives under a slightly different label: “Miscellaneous Archive Records, 1733–1820, FT. 565.” The Mailloche-Mariotte document (a protest by Mariotte against Mailloche, rather than a contract) appears on frames 486–87 of both film offerings.

5. Petition of Bertrand Mailloche, 10 October 1794, folder 710, Melrose Collection, Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches. The outcome of the dispute is not shown on either document. At least one other record should exist in the case. All notarial records of that colonial post carry an act number and a descriptive label on the reverse of one of their sheets, but neither the folder 710 document nor the one held within the Miscellaneous Series in the clerk’s office carries the numbered label.

Louise was a cripple, the result of a gun accident, Dolet agreed to a price of only three hundred piasters, a very small sum for a twenty-seven-year-old female slave.... He also stated that he was freeing Marie Louise at that time. Apparently, some technicality or legal difficulty subsequently arose, since nine years later Marie Thérèse appeared before the commandant and again declared Marie Louise to be free.”⁶

The account, up to this point, is accurate. The cited records substantiate the details. However, the author went astray, continuing:

As a free woman ... Marie Louise *dit Mariotte* is often mentioned in the church records as godmother to Metoyer nieces and nephews [i.e., the children of Coincoin’s children by the Frenchman Pierre Metoyer].⁷

The 1802 baptism cited at this point names “Marie Louise” as the god-mother and “aunt of the infant,” but the name “Mariotte” does not appear in the original record.⁸

The continuing narrative switches to Mariotte in this passage:

In addition to [the successful land claims] by the children of *Marie Thérèse Coincoin*, [her] *eldest black daughter, Marie Louise Mariotte*, claimed a tract of only 2 arpents frontage by a depth of 40 on each side of Red River [current Cane River] ... contending that she had purchased the land from Antoine Bergeron. Since she was not able to produce any “document of title, or proof of occupancy,” her claim was not confirmed. Marie Louise’s lack of proof of title is puzzling, since she did, indeed, legally purchase the claimed tract in 1798, and the deed of conveyance executed at that time has been preserved in the notarial records of the parish.⁹

The Dupres *de couleur* [another Cane River family] bore a relationship to the Metoyers before their intermarriage. Their maternal grandmother was *Marie Louise Mariotte, the eldest daughter of Marie Thérèse*. Their mother, Marie Adelaïde, who was her own mother’s slave, had become the common-law wife of a young white

6. The 1974 dissertation was published unchanged as Gary B. Mills, *The Forgotten People: Cane River’s Creoles of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 34–35, citing “Pierre Dolet to Marie Thérèse Coincoin (MS in Cammie G. Henry Collection ... Old Natchitoches Data, II, 289).”

7. *Ibid.*, 35, citing “Baptism of Marie Susanne, daughter of Dominique and Marguerite (Metoyer), June 6, 1802, in Natchitoches Registers, Book 5.” Italics added for emphasis.

8. The present writer also perpetuated the error. In her 1982 volume of translated abstracts from the Natchitoches church—a series editorially annotated to help researchers identify individuals—she drew upon the published identification of the godmother as Mariotte and, in editorial brackets after Marie Louise’s name, added that identifier. See Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800–1826: Translated Abstracts of Register Number Five of the Catholic Church Parish of St. François des Natchitoches in Louisiana* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1980), entry 23. The error is corrected in the 1982 genealogy coauthored with the late Dr. Mills. A concurrent request by Dr. Mills to revise the text of his published book to remove the misidentification was rejected by the publisher, and other historical journals were not interested in an article correcting “merely a genealogical issue.” The 2004 perpetuation of the error in a leading historical journal prompts the present article.

9. Mills, *Forgotten People*, 59, citing “*American State Papers: Public Lands*, III, 78, 84” and “Antoine Bergeron to Marie Louise *dite* Mariotte, in Natchitoches Parish Records, Doc. 2877.” Italics added.

Rivière aux Canes planter named Joseph Dupre.... In 1810 Dupre became ill [and] bequeathed [his estate] to his three natural children [by] Adelaïde.... After Dupre's death ... a suit was filed ... by Dupre's stepfather, Alexis Cloutier ... to have the will declared null and void.... One of the points of controversy in this suit had been the slave status of the legatees. In an effort to remove this obstacle, Marie Louise Mariotte first freed her Dupre grandchildren and then her daughter Adelaïde.¹⁰

Again, the facts of each cited record are reported correctly—except for the crucial identification of Marie Louise *dit* Mariotte as Marie Louise, daughter of Coincoin. Alert readers will spot in the author's footnotes the dilemma regarding Mariotte's identity:

The document whereby Mariotte [first] freed her daughter Marie Adelaïde is not extant; however, it is referred to in a second document, Mariotte to Marie Adelaïde, Donation, in Natchitoches Parish Records, Notarial Book 3, pp. 302–304.¹¹

The problem of sorting one Marie Louise from the others stems from the absence of a needed document. However, like many records of historic persons, it is not missing but “hiding.” Only the deep research invoked at the start of this paper, beginning with the study of all records created by all known associates, will find it.

FINDING THE MISSING DOCUMENT

One associate, Alexis Cloutier—stepfather of the man who took Mariotte's daughter as his concubine—was a litigious schemer. In addition to the District Court suit cited in 1976 from accessible record books, Cloutier had previously filed a relevant suit in the *Parish Court*, whose records were, in the 1970s, available but uncataloged.¹²

The case file for that suit, *Cloutier v. Lecomte, Executor of Dupré*, contains the missing manumission of Adelaïde by her mother Marie Louise *dit* Mariotte, effective at Mariotte's death. An accompanying affidavit from 1812 contains a crucial detail pointing to Mariotte's identity. In it the white Creole planter Denis Buard testified that he had sold “the *mulâtresse* Adelaïde, aged sixteen” to “her mother, Marie Louise Mariotte, free *négresse*,” on 24 December 1797, and that *he had acquired Adelaïde by inheritance from his own mother*.¹³

Buard's testimony shatters prior assumptions about Mariotte's identity. If his details are accurate, Mariotte bore Adelaïde between 25 December 1780 and 24 December 1781. However, when Coincoin bought her daughter Marie Louise

10. Mills, *Forgotten People*, 91–92, citing “Philippe Valsain v. Cloutier, in Natchitoches Parish Records, District Court Record Book 3, pp. 118–26.” Italics added.

11. Mills, *Forgotten People*, 92, n. 44.

12. Alexis Cloutier v. Ambrose Lecomte, Executor, Parish Court Files, roll PC10 (1812), Office of the Clerk of Court, Natchitoches.

13. Affidavit of Denis Buard, 24 December 1797, *ibid*. This article uses the *exact* color or race terms appearing in each original document. These terms are important personal “identifiers.” Changing the language of original records destroys crucial evidence of identity.

from Dolet in 1786, the sale document mentioned no child born to her. The point is significant. Louisiana's *Code Noir* forbade the separation of slave children under ten from their slave mothers.¹⁴ If Marie Louise *dit* Mariotte, was indeed the Marie Louise purchased from Dolet in 1786 but not legally manumitted until 1795, then two and possibly three illegal circumstances occurred:

- the sale of Marie Louise without a child (and potentially the sale of the child Adelaïde from Dolet to the Buards, who owned her in 1797); and
- the repeated taxation of Marie Louise *dit* Mariotte as a free woman of color, before the 1795 document by which Coincoin's daughter was legally free.¹⁵

The taxation issue was evident in the previously known facts but was not pursued. It cannot be ignored, in light of the new evidence of Adelaïde's birth.

THE BUARD SLAVES

Denis Buard's 1812 testimony that he had inherited the sixteen-year-old Adelaïde from his mother is verifiable. Documents relating to the succession (probate) of his mother's estate name her heirs but identify no slaves and offer no distribution.¹⁶ Parish baptismal records, however, document the birth of "Marie Delaïde" into the Buard household. The birth date given—28 December 1780—fits Denis Buard's assertion sixteen years later. The mother is identified (in Spanish) as "Maria Luisa, slave of the Widow Buart."¹⁷

As a Buard slave, the Marie Louise who became Mariotte appears consistently identified from 1767 through 1781. All legal and church records of that period identify her only as "Marie Louise." They document four children for her: Marie Louise, Marie Françoise *dit* Cha Cha, Andres, and the Marie Adelaïde who later adopted her mother's nickname as her surname. The genealogical summary to follow provides detail on each child and chronicles associations and intermarriages among Mariotte's and Coincoin's offspring.

Considering those associations, it is easy to see how earlier writers assumed Mariotte to be Coincoin's Marie Louise. Without a genealogical reconstruction of Mariotte's family, previous writers missed their flaw: Coincoin's daughter Marie Louise, baptized an infant in 1759 as a St. Denis slave,¹⁸ could not be the Buard slave Marie Louise, who bore her first child on 20 December 1767.¹⁹

A major issue remains unresolved. If Mariotte was Coincoin's sister, Marie Louise, born into the St. Denis household about 1747, how and when did she pass from St. Denis to Buard possession?

14. *Code Noir ou Loi Municipale Servant de Reglement* (New Orleans: A Boudousquié, 1778), Article XLIII.

15. For the 1793 and 1794 tax rolls see folders 703 and 705, Melrose Collection.

16. Succession of Widow Gabriel Buard, doc. 2506, Archive Conveyance Records.

17. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, entry 2388. In preparing these abstracts, the writer had difficulty discerning whether the original Spanish entry should be read as "Maria Delaïda" or "Maria Deleïsa." It appears in the published book as "Maria Deleisa."

18. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, entry 920.

19. *Ibid.*, entry 713.

ST. DENIS SLAVES

French-Canadian adventurer Louis Juchereau de St. Denis founded the Natchitoches outpost and governed it for thirty years. He died in 1744, but his fifty or more slaves were not separated until his youngest child's majority. An inventory dated September 1756 followed the common pattern of grouping slaves into family units. The widow chose two families for dower; the others were divided among her adult children. When the widow died in 1758, the slaves she had kept were again inventoried and partitioned among her heirs.²⁰

A 1982 article in the *NGS Quarterly* presents the genealogy of one of those slave families kept by the widow. The following briefly summarizes the first two generations from that account:²¹

François and Marie Françoise, Africans, married on 26 December 1735; died together on 18 April 1758, victims of an epidemic that also claimed their mistress.

1. MARIE GERTURDE *dit* DGIMBY, baptized 18 November 1736. Inherited in 1758 by St. Denis' son-in-law and political successor, Commandant César de Blanc.
2. FRANÇOIS *dit* CHOERA, born about 1738; first assigned in 1758 to the youngest son Pierre, possibly ended up in the possession of the older son, Louis, sometime after the 1758 distribution.
3. JEAN BAPTISTE [*dit* CHOCRA],²² born about 1740, inherited in 1758 by the older son, Louis.
4. MARIE THÉRÈSE *dit* COINCOIN, baptized 24 August 1742; inherited in 1758 by Louis, who privately conveyed her to his sister and brother-in-law, Marie and Manuel Bermudes y de Soto.
5. BARNABÉ, born 9 September 1744; buried 20 September 1748.
6. MARIE JEANNE *dit* JEANNETON, baptized 25 June 1746, inherited in 1758 by the son-in-law and later commandant, Athanase de Mézières.
7. MARIE LOUISE, born 1747; inventoried in her parental unit in 1756. Her name is not among the slaves distributed in 1758.
8. MARGUERITE *dit* YANCOSE, born about 1749, identified in 1768 as a slave of the de Sotos.
9. BONAVENTURE, baptized 8 April 1751, inherited in 1758 by de Mézières.

20. The 1758 St. Denis documents are mostly in the bound Archive Conveyance Records. The 1756 documents are mostly in the Miscellaneous Series. On FHL microfilm 0,279,104 they appear mostly between frames 232 and 250, but frame numbers are blurred and unreadable.

21. Unless otherwise stated, the genealogical data in this summary is drawn from Mills and Mills, "Slaves and Masters."

22. The African name used as a *dit* by Jean Baptiste (the fourth African name found for the children in this family) was not discovered at the time the genealogy was published. For documentation of the name, see the two partition lists dividing slaves into six numbered lots, filmed between frames 240 and 245, "Miscellaneous Archive Records, 1726–1833." He appears as "Jean Baptiste" in a parcel of three on one list and "Chocra" in the same parcel on the other list. When Louis Juchereau de St. Denis Jr. died in 1778, Chocra was named as part of that estate; see "Intestate Succession of Mr. St. Denis," in translated abstracts of the colony's Superior Court records provided by Laura Porteous's misnamed series, "*Index to Spanish Judicial Records of Louisiana, Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 13 (January 1930): 177–93, particularly 183. The *dit*s used by Marie Jeanne ("Jeanneton") and by Marie Louise ("Mariotte") were conventional French nicknames.

10. ANNE HYACINTHE, baptized 13 September 1753, inherited in 1758 by the children of the deceased Rose Juchereau de St. Denis, wife of Louis Antoine de la Chaise.
11. FRANÇOISE, born on her mother's deathbed; inherited by the de Sotos.

The evidence strongly suggests that the seventh child, Marie Louise born in 1747, is Mariotte. The 1982 genealogy notes Marie Louise's absence in the 1758 partition and speculates that she may have died. However, later research—particularly the effort to track all St. Denis slaves throughout their lives—negates that possibility. Several considerations weigh into this conclusion:

- Numerous partition lists drafted amid those 1756 and 1758 estate divisions are scattered in multiple locations. Most are scribbled drafts reflecting diverse attempts to divide slaves into equal shares.
- The 1756 division's goal to keep slave families together, as Louisiana's Code Noir dictated, was reasonable. Nearly sixty slaves were divided among four adult heirs and the widow. The 1758 partition, in contrast, divided only twenty slaves among six adult heirs. Mothers and children were indeed separated.
- The 8 September 1756 inventory properly places "Marie Louise" within the family of François and Marie Françoise.²³ By a December 1756 document, the widow chose to keep this family (and another "lot"), letting the rest be divided among the adult heirs. However, that December document omits Marie Louise from the list of François and Marie Françoise's children kept by the widow.²⁴
- Missing civil records also obscure Marie Louise's trail. The 1758 division contains a full set of receipts signed by heirs acknowledging receipt of specific slaves. Several comparable receipts are missing for the 1756 division.
- Death would not appear to account for Marie Louise's absence from the family lists between September and December 1756. In that era, all settlers lived tightly around the post. When a priest resided there even slaves were promptly baptized and buried. The church records, originally recorded in folios, were bound into volumes a century ago, with some out of order. However, when the pages are sequenced chronologically, no registrations appear to be missing for September to December 1756.
- An undated list, compiled after 28 September 1756, divides the slaves into five parcels and includes "Luisse" in the family of François and "Marie Francisque," in the position where Marie Louise previously appeared. The name is crossed out and is added at the end of the family of César and Marianne, where she is priced separately from the rest of César's family.²⁵

All points considered, the evidence suggests that the nine-year-old Marie Louise was separated from her family in the 1756 partition and assigned to a different parcel to effect an even distribution. However, the separation would have been

23. Doc. 178, Miscellaneous Series, Archive Conveyance Records.

24. Unnumbered, unlabeled document filmed between frames 240 and 250, *ibid.*

25. Doc. 176, *ibid.* The document can be dated after 28 September because it includes a slave who was born that day and baptized on 29 September; see Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, entry 637.

a “paper transaction” only. All the St. Denis heirs lived in a family cluster at that very small outpost, with the exception of the remarried son-in-law de la Chaise who moved to the New Orleans area. The main breakup of St. Denis families occurred after the 1758 death of the widow, when the land was subdivided and bachelor sons sold off their inheritance. Documents that subsequently disposed of some of their slaves no longer exist. However, deeds chronicle sales of the two sons’ lands on 13 August 1763 and 15 October 1764.²⁶

Gabriel Buard purchased both tracts—the same Gabriel Buard who owned Marie Louise *dit* Mariotte by 1767. (His 1770 succession inventory also shows him in possession of another St. Denis slave from the 1756 partition, Micodon.)²⁷ From 1763 on, Buard, and later his widow, made the St. Denis land their principal residence. There, Mariotte bore her children. Next door lay the land inherited by the St. Denis daughter and son-in-law, Marie and Manuel de Soto. On that St. Denis–de Soto land the slave Coincoin bore most of her children, including the daughter Marie Louise in 1759.²⁸

What then happened to Coincoin’s Marie Louise?

MARIE LOUISE, DAUGHTER OF COINCOIN

Coincoin’s mistress left Natchitoches in 1780 for the post of Opelousas, taking with her Coincoin’s two eldest daughters, Marie Louise and Marie Thérèse.²⁹ On 1 October 1784 she sold a tract of Opelousas land and a “*négresse* named Marie Louise, Creole of Natchitoches,” to Antoine Boisdoré.³⁰ The transfer of Marie Louise from Boisdoré to Pierre Dolet Jr., who sold Marie Louise to Coincoin in 1786, is left murky by extant records. The Natchitoches “Index to Archive Conveyance Records” catalogs Document 1541 (now missing) as “Antoine Boisdoré to Widow Pierre Dolet [Sr.], Receipt.” Meanwhile Mme. de Soto launched a protracted suit against Boisdoré.³¹

However sketchy the details, they help separate the two Marie Louises. The Dolet plantation where Marie Louise was dispatched was on Bayou Pierre, some forty miles northwest of Natchitoches.³² Meanwhile, Marie Louise *dit* Mariotte

26. Docs. 345 and 365, Miscellaneous Series, Archives Conveyance Records.

27. Succession inventory of Gabriel Buard, Doc. 660, *ibid.* For Micodon as a St. Denis slave, see the unnumbered partition and estimation lists for the St. Denis estate that are scattered throughout the Miscellaneous Series, Archive Conveyance Records, and Doc. 261 by which the de Sotos sold him on 4 March 1760, age twenty-five, to the militia officer Jean Louis Bormé.

28. For Coincoin’s life, see Mills, *Forgotten People*, and Gary B. Mills, “Coincoin, An Eighteenth Century ‘Liberated’ Woman,” in *Black Women in United States History*, Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990). She is also the central character of an epic novel based on numerous documents and traditions not used in Dr. Mills’s studies. See Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Isle of Canes* (Provo: Ancestry, 2004).

29. Marie de Soto to Joseph Marie Armant, procurator to represent her in the succession of her brother Louis de St. Denis, 25 November 1780, Doc. 1513; and Marie de Soto to Jean Baptiste Brevelle, sale of inherited land, 28 November 1780, Doc. 1514; both in Archive Conveyance Records.

30. Doc. 364, Opelousas Notarial Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

31. Docs. 390–391, *ibid.*

32. Succession of Pierre Dolet Sr., Doc. 1808, Archive Conveyance Records.

was bearing children on the Buard plantation one-quarter league south of the village. In 1786, young Dolet released Coincoin's Marie Louise to her mother. However, Coincoin's Marie Louise was not legally free until 1795. In contrast, Mariotte first appears a free woman on the 1793 Natchitoches tax roll. The two women clearly are not the same.

GENEALOGICAL SUMMARY

MARIE LOUISE DIT MARIOTTE AND HER OFFSPRING

1. Marie Louise dit Mariotte² (François¹ and Marie Françoise¹ of Africa) was born into slavery about 9 or 10 December 1747 at the Natchitoches, Louisiana, outpost on Cane River.³³ She died, unmarried, on 3 May 1815.³⁴

At baptism on 11 December 1747, Marie Louise became the godchild of a young nobleman, Louis Mathias Le Court de Prelle, and Jeanne Chever, daughter of Guillaume Chever, Chevalier de St. Aigrette.³⁵ Those token connections would earn her no favors in life, although her daughter would later bear children to Le Court's son. While her baptismal record does not name her parents—it states only that her mother belonged to the widow St. Denis—the 1756 inventory of property left by her deceased master names her as the seventh child of François and his wife Marie Françoise.³⁶

At the 1756 division of the slave property left by Commandant St. Denis, the widow kept the family of the legally married François and Marie Françoise,³⁷ but that family would soon be separated. The enslaved couple and their mistress died in an epidemic in April 1758 on St. Denis Hill that spared the rest of the village.³⁸ Their children were then dispersed among the households of the grown St. Denis heirs.

When records next name Marie Louise, on 8 January 1768, she is called the slave of a man who had bought two large tracts of the St. Denis land: the Swiss settler, Gabriel Buard. That record chronicles a newborn daughter's baptism.³⁹

No record identifies the fathers of Marie Louise's children. At least the first and last daughters were half white. The baptismal record of Marie Louise "Jr."

33. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, entry 287; Book 2, St. François. That record omits her date of birth; but all town-dwelling infants in this period, when a priest was in residence, were baptized within two days.

34. *Lecomte v. Cloutier*, 3 La. 170–77.

35. The record also assigns her the first name of her godmother, Jeanne, as her third name, one she never personally used.

36. Doc. 178, Miscellaneous Series, Archive Conveyance Records. This phase of Mariotte's life is extensively explored in Part One, *Isle of Canes*.

37. Unnumbered, unlabeled document filmed between frames 240 and 250, "Miscellaneous Archive Records, 1726–1835."

38. For the rash of eleven deaths that occurred between 16 April and 17 May, see Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, entries 817–28.

39. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, entry 920. For Buard origins, see Elizabeth Shown Mills, "European Origins of the Early French Families of Natchitoches, Louisiana," *Papers of the Sixth Grand Reunion of the Descendants of the Founders of Natchitoches* (Natchitoches: Founders of Natchitoches, 1986), 27–45.

in 1768 states no race for her or her mother. However, the 1770 inventory of Buard's estate (where mother and child were appraised together at two thousand livres), and the 1779 marriage contract of the Buard daughter who inherited the younger Marie Louise, label the girl-child *mulâtresse*.⁴⁰ The second child, whose baptismal record no longer exists, is consistently called a *négresse* in her adult records. The baptismal records of Mariotte's last two known children, born in September 1776 and December 1780 are equally nondescriptive, but every other record for the 1780 child, Adelaïde, labels her *mulâtresse*.

Sometime between 1785 and 1792, Marie Louise earned her freedom and began legally using the nickname "Mariotte." The two surviving documents bracketing this period provide insight into her talent, industry, and residences, as well as the economic plight that freedom would bring. In 1785, she was still living on the outskirts of town, apparently with the Buards. Next door lay the plantation of Mme. Jean Varangue, whose late husband, Joseph Dupré I, had purchased Marie Louise's sister Jeanneton and a male named François who may be Mariotte's brother Choera.⁴¹ Both farms were within walking distance of Commandant Étienne de Vaugine's farm. That fall, de Vaugine hired a Spaniard to make repairs on his home, then accused him of stealing goods from his storehouse. The man admitted the theft, saying he had drunk the rum, used the tobacco, and taken the clothes and linens to various female slaves in the neighborhood. Creatively, he claimed a medicinal defense: he was not merely drunk but ill and acting under the influence of the "draught" prepared by "the Negress, Marote," which the commandant had ordered him to take.⁴²

Mariotte was not called to testify. François and his wife Fanchon gave depositions, saying that the Spaniard had brought stolen goods to their home and that Fanchon had promptly reported the matter to her mistress. Even without Mariotte's testimony, the records of the local and provincial proceedings speak indirectly to Mariotte's status: references to every other nonwhite in the case state their owners. Only for the pharmacist Mariotte was no owner named.

The widow Buard died in 1792. Colonial law prescribed specific proceedings routinely followed at the post that should have transpired. However, the extant notarial acts include just one document relating to her estate: a notice of death and the identification of her heirs.⁴³ No inventory of her property has been found. Within months, Mariotte was first recorded as a free woman. The nature of the document that first named her, a delinquent tax list dated only with the

40. Succession of Gabriel Buard, Doc. 660, and Pavie-Buard marriage contract, Doc. 1450, Archive Conveyance Records.

41. For the sale of Jeanneton from the St. Denis son-in-law who inherited her to Joseph Dupré I in 1777, see Doc. 1499, Archive Conveyance Records.

42. Doc. 1788, *ibid.*; see also the continuation of this case at New Orleans, for which a translation of the higher court records appear in Laura Porteous, "Index to Spanish Judicial Records of Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 26 (December 1943): 897–906.

43. Doc. 2431, Archive Conveyance Records.

year 1793, would foretell the circumstances under which she lived as a free woman.⁴⁴

That 1793 document, the post's first extant tax roll, also suggests that Mariotte was free before the death of the widow Buard. Contemporary tax lists, compiled early in the year, were applied to the preceding year. That 1793 list, with no text, was repeated on 17 January 1794, when an added note explained these were "various debtors to the *old* public tax ... payable at the time tobacco was marketed in 1792."⁴⁵ Because tobacco was planted in the spring, Mariotte would have had to be free at least before spring 1792 to have produced a taxable crop in 1792.

As a free woman, Mariotte was still a rarity on that frontier. The 1795 statistical census of the post tallies only eight free black females above age fifteen.⁴⁶ (Four of the other seven were her sister Coincoin, Coincoin's daughter Marie Louise, and Coincoin's two daughters-in-law.) The tax rolls, compiled geographically as the assessor visited the river plantations, consistently place Mariotte from 1792 forward about twenty-four miles from the town and the parish church. The isolated rural area, then called *Rivière aux Canes*, stretched southward from the foot of Cane River's fabled isle. Mariotte settled at the point of the isle, where Coincoin's newly freed children had begun to establish their nineteenth-century agricultural empire. Mariotte would enjoy little of their prosperity.

A second 1793 tax list (a land roll compiled in February 1794) states that Mariotte owned no land,⁴⁷ although contemporary records show that she continued to produce tobacco for market. In early October 1794 she journeyed twenty-four miles to the post to lodge a complaint with the commandant (a St. Denis grandson). Unable to personally take her crop to the New Orleans market, she had contracted with the entrepreneur Edouard Murphy, through his agent at *Rivière aux Canes*, Richard Syms [Sims], to ship the goods on Murphy's *bateau*. However, a town merchant, Bertrand Mailloche, claimed to have an arrangement that gave him half of her proceeds. Mariotte vigorously rebutted his claim, swore they had no contract, accused him of trying to miscast an *episode romanesque*, and demanded that he present written evidence.⁴⁸ Mailloche offered none, explaining that Murphy and Sims were Englishmen whose language Mariotte did not understand when she agreed to their terms. In

44. Folder 735, Melrose Collection; a translated transcription appears in Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials: Censuses, Military Rolls and Tax Lists, 1722–1803* (Chicago: Adams Press, 1981), 80–82.

45. Folder 705, Melrose Collection; and Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 98.

46. "Census of the Inhabitants of the Parish of Natchitoches, 1795," *Records of the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas*, microfilm, 12 rolls (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Archives, 1967), roll 5, unpaginated, undated; statistics only. A translation appears in Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 115.

47. Folder 703, Melrose Collection; translated transcription in Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 88–97.

48. Frames 486–87, "Miscellaneous Archive Records, 1726–1835."

the last record Commandant de Blanc directs that Mariotte be given a copy of Mailloche's rebuttal.⁴⁹

Almost all records relating to Mariotte between 1793 until 1799 couple her with a white illiterate Cane River farmer, Antoine Bergeron, who obviously was unhelpful in negotiations with the Englishmen. Mariotte, who owned no land but had to have land to farm, is named adjacent to the landholding "Berjon" on the delinquent tax roll of 1793, the January 1794 tax roll, the January 1794 list of delinquent taxes imposed on 1792 tobacco, and the August 1795 delinquent tax roll.⁵⁰ Neither of the pair, however, appears on the 1792–94 public-works roster of citizens who labored to build roads, bridges, and ditches, and maintain the parish church and cemetery. Their omission is not surprising, given their distance from town.⁵¹

The relationship between Mariotte and Bergeron may have been a sexual liaison. On 6 October 1798 the French bachelor "donated" to her one hundred and sixty acres—a tract he described as four arpents fronting on Cane River (half on either side of the river), bounded on the lower by the Englishman John Horn. No payment was required. Three months later Bergeron and Mariotte appeared before the notary to create a second document to confirm her title to the land in a legal system that discouraged white males from making valuable gifts to their concubines. Bergeron said he was "ratifying a gift" he had previously made to her, of two arpents of land fronting on each side of the river, to whatever depth it was able to carry. He described the property as bounded on the upper by lands of Sieur Louis Derbanne, but did not identify the lower neighbor. He added a "consideration": the "donation" was conditioned upon Mariotte's washing his clothes for a year. Both parties made their marks on the document. Its two witnesses were men who had inherited Gabriel Buard's slaves: his son Jean Baptiste and his son-in-law, the merchant François Rouquier.⁵²

Mariotte apparently remained on this land until her death. She was there in 1809, when her wealthy neighbor Louis Derbanne⁵³ sold the lower side of his plantation, naming Mariotte as the adjacent neighbor.⁵⁴ When the new owner mortgaged the property in June 1811, she was again named as neighbor.⁵⁵

49. Folder 710, Melrose Collection.

50. Folders 703, 705, 716, *ibid.*; translated transcriptions in Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 88–98, 108–09.

51. "1794 Public Works Roster of Natchitoches," Natchitoches Parish Records Collection, Louisiana State University Archives; translated transcription in Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 99–105.

52. Docs. 2877 and 2878, Archive Conveyance Records. The 1798 document phonetically spells Antoine Bergeron's name as Antoine "Bresson." He X'd both records.

53. The French-Indian Louis Derbanne and his slave household are explored in *Isle of Canes*, in Lalita Tademy's Oprah Book Club selection, *Cane River* (New York: Warner Books, 2002), and the article that details the search for Tademy's forebears: Rachal Mills Lennon and Elizabeth Shown Mills, "Mother, Thy Name is Mystery! Finding the Slave Who Bore Philomene Daurat," in *Finding Females: A Special Issue of the National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 88 (September 2000): 201–24.

54. Natchitoches Parish Conveyances, Book 1:146, Office of the Clerk of Court, Natchitoches.

55. *Ibid.*, Book 2:144–45.

However, land tenure did not translate into economic stability. When an Anglo-American newcomer, William Owens, sued a number of locals in 1810, apparently for debt, she was included.⁵⁶ Beyond such concerns, the greatest threat to her landholding came from the American government.

After the transfer of Louisiana in December 1803, the new regime decreed that all who occupied land under colonial titles must present proof of ownership. These “claims” to public land now “owned” by the United States would be evaluated by federally appointed commissioners. After a federal land office opened in Opelousas in 1806, Mariotte either journeyed there or sent a representative to deposit her proofs—the 1798–99 deeds from Antoine Bergeron. More than ten years passed with a cloud hanging over the land that she had worked for nearly a quarter century. Perhaps her problem lay again in her difficulty communicating in English. In any case, her “claim” was rejected. On 19 January 1816, eight months after her death, the U.S. Land Office reported its decision to Congress:

MARIA LOUISA MARIOTTE, free negress, claims two acres front on each side of Red [Cane] river, with a depth of forty arpents, if so much may be found, by deed of conveyance from Antoine Bergeron, with occupancy, &c. No document of title [from the colonial government to Bergeron], or proof of occupancy, has been adduced; consequently, the claim ... ought not to be confirmed.⁵⁷

Mariotte left only one child with a claim to freedom, the daughter Adelaïde, whom she had purchased from her former master on Christmas Eve 1797, when she declared the daughter would be freed at her (Mariotte’s) death.⁵⁸ Reasons for the delay went unstated. Four months after Mariotte moved that daughter downriver Adelaïde delivered the first of eleven children she would bear to at least five white fathers. Those offspring would be the center of Mariotte’s life, but they would also remain slaves because children followed the status of their mothers in slave regimes.

Concerned for their future but apparently ignorant of the law, Mariotte went next door to Cane River’s notary, Louis Derbanne, to draft a will on 15 November 1804. All her possessions—“goods, farm, cows, horses, and gold” should be put immediately after her death into Adelaïde’s hands. Adelaïde’s daughter Marie, having been “baptized as Mariotte’s slave,” would be free from that moment forward. Adelaïde and her other children were said to be free already, although later records would dispute that. Two white Creoles, Alexis Cloutier and Antoine Coindet,⁵⁹ who fathered their own mixed-race children

56. William Owens v. [various individuals], Parish Court files, roll PC.7 (1810).

57. *American State Papers: Documents Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States*, Class 8, *Public Lands*, vol. 3 (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1834), 84; also see the accompanying table on p. 78, which cites the total size of the tract as 160 acres—that is, 2 acres by 40 acres on each side of the river.

58. As later reported in *Lecomte v. Cloutier*, 3 La. 170–77.

59. Unnumbered document between docs. 3077 and 3078, Archive Conveyance Records.

across many years, witnessed the document. If Mariotte believed their liaisons with women of color made them likely to defend her offspring in future legal contests, that trust would be ruthlessly violated by Cloutier.

Between 1805 and 1810 Adelaïde lived openly as the common-law wife of a wealthy young bachelor, Joseph Dupré III. On 6 July 1810, anticipating his death, Dupré left a will declaring his paternity of her last three children. To make his will more palatable to his birth family, he left \$6,400 to his half-brother Jean Baptiste Sévère Cloutier, son of Alexis. Then, he provided for his unsanctioned family. The “*mulâtresse* Adelaïde” would receive \$300 and a *négresse* named Rachel. His remaining slaves, animals, and the rest of his estate would go to “my *enfants* Philippe Valsin, Marie Doralise, and Noel.” The executor would be his mother’s brother, the prominent Rivière aux Canes planter, Ambroise Lecomte.⁶⁰

For twenty-one years Dupré’s stepfather contested the will—all the way to the state supreme court, twice. He eventually lost the suit. To bolster the children’s case, Adelaïde renounced her inheritance in their favor, but the state’s supreme court ruled against them. Lecomte petitioned to have that judgment nullified because Mariotte had never legally manumitted her daughter. Because she had only “verbally declared” that her daughter should be free at the moment of her death, Adelaïde was but a *statu liber*—one promised freedom at a future date. Therefore, because Adelaïde and her children were still Mariotte’s slaves all their inheritance from Dupré was the rightful property of their owner, Mariotte.⁶¹ After that argument was rejected, Mariotte executed a formal declaration of manumission for Adelaïde and all her children before a notary on 9 September 1814.⁶² That strategy also failed.

Not until 1830, fifteen years after Mariotte’s death, did the courts decree that her death had created legal freedom that entitled her offspring to a Dupré inheritance. In April 1830, in the case of *Lecomte v. Cloutier*, the state’s supreme court awarded Adelaïde a judgment against Cloutier for \$6,686.⁶³ Following that success, her eldest Dupré son sued Cloutier on behalf of himself and his siblings. On 28 May 1831 they won a similar judgment, plus costs of the suit, with 5 percent interest due from 3 May 1815—the date that Mariotte’s death left them free.⁶⁴

Marie Louise *dit* Mariotte bore three named children and another very probable daughter:

60. Doc. 3833, *ibid*.

61. In addition to the previously cited Parish Court and District Court records of this case, see 3 Mart. La. 481 (1814) and 3 La. 170–77 (1831) for legal summations of the Supreme Court decisions.

62. Natchitoches Parish Notarial Book 3 (May 17, 1813–April 22, 1816): 302–4.

63. *Lecomte v. Cloutier*, 3 La. 170–77

64. *Philippe Valsain v. Cloutier*, Natchitoches District Court Record Book 3:118–26; and *Lecomte v. Cloutier*, 3 La. 170–77.

- + 2 i. MARIE LOUISE³, born 20 December 1767 as a Buard slave.
- + 3 ii. MARIE FRANÇOISE *dit* CHA CHA, born 1770–72 as a Buard slave; purchased from a Buard daughter and freed in 1818–20 by her probable sister Marie Adelaïde, below.
- + 4 iii. ANDRES, born 24 August 1776 as a Buard slave; sold in 1818 from the estate of Marianne Buard Rouquier to an in-law, Germaine Paillette.
- + 5 iv. MARIE ADELAÏDE MARIOTTE, born 28 December 1780 as a Buard slave; died after the 1 June 1860 census.

2. **Marie Louise**³ (Marie Louise *dit* Mariotte², François¹ and Marie Françoise¹) was born 20 December 1767 and baptized 8 January 1768, as “Louise, daughter of Marie Louise, slave of Gabriel Buard.”⁶⁵ In 1770 she was inventoried with her mother as a “small *mulâtresse*.”⁶⁶ When Buard’s daughter Marie Thérèse executed a marriage contract with Étienne Pavie on 1 December 1779 her dowry was “one small *mulâtresse* aged twelve, named Marie Louise, Creole of this post, valued at 1250 livres, coming from the succession of her father.”⁶⁷

As a Pavie slave, young Marie Louise³ bore two children:

- 6 i. MARIE SILESIE⁴, born 27 December 1783 and baptized 5 February 1784 as the *quadroon* daughter of the *mulâtresse* Marie Louise, both slaves of Pavie.⁶⁸
- 7 ii. JEAN BAPTISTE, born 24 October 1785, racial composition unstated. His mother was identified as “Marie Louise, *mulâtresse* of Pavie.”⁶⁹

As slave of Pierre Metoyer, who had kept Coincoin as his mistress for twenty years but left her to marry Pavie’s widow, Marie Louise³ bore three children:

- 8 iii. MARIE THÉRÈSE⁴, born 15 March 1795 and baptized as *mulata* daughter of Marie Louise, the *mulata* slave of Pierre Metoyer.⁷⁰
- 9 iv. MARIE ANGLIQUE, born 30 October 1796 and baptized as a Metoyer slave.⁷¹

65. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, entry 920.

66. Doc. 660, Archive Conveyance Records.

67. Doc. 1450, *ibid.*

68. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, entry 2449. By 1804, Marie Silesie/Cilesie was bearing children as a Metoyer slave; see Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800–1826*, entry 1869. In 1850, Metoyer’s youngest son by Coincoin, Toussaint Metoyer, had a Cilese, aged about seventy, in his household, placed where wives usually appear; see 1850 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, La., population schedule, p. 49 (stamped), dwelling/family 874; National Archives microfilm publication M432, roll 233. The name Silesie and its variants were not common in contemporary Natchitoches.

69. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, entry 2522.

70. *Ibid.*, entry 2766.

71. *Ibid.*, entry 3113. As an example of the importance of noting precise color terms, Metoyer also owned a *négresse* slave named Marie Louise (aka Clarisse), born in the Congo. The color term applied to each Marie Louise in each instance is critical to separating the two. The *négresse* Marie Louise bore her first two children in June 1796 and May 1798, overlapping the above births to the *mulâtresse* Marie Louise; see *ibid.*, entries 3103 and 3198.

- 10 v. IGNACE, born 15 November 1803, *nègre* son of Marie Louise, *mulâtresse* slave of Mr. Metoyer.⁷²

Marie Louise³ drops from the records after that 1803 birthing.

3. Marie Françoise³ dit Cha Cha (Marie Louise *dit* Mariotte², François¹ and Marie Françoise¹) was born 1770–72, when local baptismal records are missing. No record specifically identifies her parents. She is believed to be the child of Mariotte, not only because of the associations developed in the following list of her children but for four other reasons. First, she belonged to Mariotte’s mistress and no purchase record has been found for her, implying that she was born to a Buard slave woman. Two, a reconstruction of all other Buard slave families, which includes others of the names Marie and Françoise, leaves no potential birth mother for this child except Mariotte. Three, onomastics suggest that Mariotte named this child for her own mother (Marie Françoise) and for her baby sister who was also their mother’s namesake. Four, Marie Françoise would, in mid-life, be purchased and freed by her proposed sister, Mariotte’s proved daughter Adelaïde.

Marie Françoise’s life as an adult is framed by three events: In 1786 the Widow Buard donated her “Créole *negresse* named Marie Françoise” to her daughter Marianne, but both would remain in the family home until the widow died and Marianne wed the merchant François Rouquier.⁷³ In February 1818, after Mariotte died, her daughter Adelaïde used \$851 of her inheritance to buy “Marie Françoise *dit* Cha Cha” at the Rouquier estate sale; on 2 June 1820 Adelaïde manumitted her.⁷⁴

While enslaved by widow Buard, Françoise bore a daughter and a probable son:

- 11 i. MARIE LOUISE⁴, born 8 June 1787 and baptized 1 July 1787, called the *negrita* daughter of “Francisca [Françoise], the *negra* slave of Widow Buard.” Her godmother was “Marie Louise”⁷⁵ (likely her mother’s sister because her grandmother Marie Louise is called Mariotte by this time). Aged five when the widow Buard died, the child passed with her mother to Marianne (Buard) Rouquier. At Marianne’s death, Marie Louise⁴ was not purchased and manumitted by Adelaïde. The account of the succession auction states: “the *negresse* named Marie Louise, daughter of Cha Cha, is adjudged to Monsieurs Ruelle & Morin [merchants] for 891 *piastres* [dollars].”⁷⁶

72. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800–1826*, entry 1868.

73. “Old Natchitoches Data,” vol. 2, p. 278, Cammie G. Henry Research Center.

74. Natchitoches Parish Successions, Book 2:349, and Conveyances, Book 8:228, Office of the Clerk of Court.

75. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, entry 2547.

76. Natchitoches Parish Successions, Book 2:343–49; see also the inventory at 274–97.

- 12 ii. LOUIS BARNABÉ, a likely son, was born about September 1790 and baptized 25 August 1791 as “about 11 months old, *negro*, property of widow Buard.”⁷⁷ Barnabé’s mother is not named, but three factors point to his being Françoise’s child: One, he does not fit into the birth pattern of other identifiable Buard slaves; two, the name Barnabé was exceedingly rare along Cane River—a name found for only two other slaves, one being the baby brother of Marie Louise and Coincoin;⁷⁸ three, the child’s godmother was, again, “Marie Louise,” together with Dominique Metoyer, son of Coincoin. Louis Barnabé does not appear to have lived to adulthood. When the widow Rouquier died and her estate was inventoried in 1817, her paraphernal property (that which she brought with her into the marriage and its increase) was inventoried separately from that which she held in community with her husband. Louis Barnabé is not named.

As a Rouquier slave, Marie Françoise *dit* Cha Cha bore two more children:

- 13 iii. CATHERINE^f, baptized 8 April 1798 at the age of six weeks as the “*mulâtresse* daughter of Marie Françoise, slave of Mr. Rouquié.” Godparents were “the free *négre* Barnabé [the second of the two earlier Barnabés] and “the free *négresse* Marie.”⁷⁹ Catherine is not on the inventory of widow Rouquier’s paraphernal property.
- 14 iv. JEAN BAPTISTE AUGUSTIN, born 26 July 1803 and baptized as *nègre* son of Françoise, *négresse*.⁸⁰ He is not named among widow Rouquier’s paraphernal property or the slaves held in community with her husband. However, he is the only “Jean Baptiste Augustin” baptized in the parish (aside from a freeborn grandson of Coincoin and Metoyer), and one “Jean Baptiste Augustin,” free adult son of a Marie Françoise, also free, wed Marie Manon, daughter of one Catherine, on 25 July 1838.⁸¹ Possibly a kinsman purchased his freedom prior to the widow Rouquier’s death.

One additional child attributed to “Françoise, *négresse* slave of Rouquier” in this period emphasizes the importance of correlating church and civil records. Susanne, baptized 5 April 1801 as “a *mulâtresse* of three months, daughter of Françoise, slave of François Rouquier,”⁸² falls so appropriately between the births of Catherine (1798) and Jean Baptiste Augustin (1803) that she might appear to be Cha Cha’s child as well. However, the widow Rouquier’s inventory of paraphernal property lists another “Françoise, *négresse*, age 36 [in 1817],

77. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, entry 2645.

78. See Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, for the rarity of the name and entries 253 and 392 for the earlier child Barnabé, whose 1744 birth fell between that of his sisters Coincoin (1742) and Marie Louise (1747).

79. *Ibid.*, entry 3193.

80. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800–1826*, entry 1866.

81. Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches Church Marriages: 1818–1850* (1985; reprint, Bowie, Md.: Willow Bend, 2004), entry 416.

82. *Ibid.*, entry 3283.

daughter of Jeanne, *Négresse*,” as mother of Susanne, *mulâtresse*, and inventories that Françoise and Susanne separately from “Marie Françoise, *négresse* (*dit* Cha Cha)” and “Marie Louise, *négresse*, daughter of Cha Cha.”

4. **Andres**³ (Marie Louise *dit* Mariotte², François¹ and Marie Françoise¹) was born 24 August 1776 and baptized as son of “Marie Louise, slave of Widow Buart.”⁸³ Widow Rouquier’s 1817 inventory and sale of paraphernal property includes Andres, *nègre*, purchased by the nearby planter and Buard in-law, Germaine Paillette. As with other male slaves of this era, no marriage or children are recorded for him; between 1783 and 1847 the social and political climate of Cane River did not allow church marriages of slaves.⁸⁴

5. **Marie Adelaïde**³ **Mariotte** (Marie Louise *dit* Mariotte², François¹ and Marie Françoise¹) was born 28 December 1780 and baptized 4 March 1781, at which time the Spanish priest registered her as “Maria Delaïda, daughter of Maria Luisa, slave of the Widow [Gabriel] Buard”;⁸⁵ died after 1 June 1860⁸⁶—allegedly during the Civil War, after going blind.⁸⁷

Aged sixteen and six months pregnant, Adelaïde became a *statu liber* on 24 December 1797 when her mother bought her from Denis Buard and promised her freedom.⁸⁸ Over the next six decades, she would appear mostly in parish court cases, baptismal entries of her many children, and their marriage records. As the *placée* (common-law wife) of a young Frenchman who died in 1810 leaving his estate to her and her children, she battled for that inheritance across two decades—winning a judgment of \$6,686 in 1830.⁸⁹ In addition to the sister whom she bought and freed in 1820 Adelaïde would, late in life, manumit another slave, a “*grifonne*” named Marie Philomene, aged about eighteen, who merited freedom by “her good services.”⁹⁰ In Adelaïde’s final years, she lived with her daughter Marie Doralise Dupré and Marie’s husband, Jean Baptiste Dominique Metoyer II. The last record for Adelaïde, the 1860 census, identifies

83. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, entry 2296.

84. For an analysis of slave marriages at Natchitoches from 1729 into the mid-1800s, see Elizabeth Shown Mills, “Quintanilla’s Crusade, 1775–1783: ‘Moral Reform’ and Its Consequences on the Natchitoches Frontier,” *Louisiana History* 42 (Summer 2001): 277–302; and Elizabeth Shown Mills and Gary B. Mills, “Missionaries Compromised: Early Evangelization of Slaves and Free People of Color in North Louisiana,” in *Cross, Crozier, and Crucible: A Volume Celebrating the Bicentennial of a Catholic Diocese in Louisiana*, Glenn R. Conrad, ed. (New Orleans: Archdiocese of New Orleans, 1993), 40–51.

85. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, entry 2388.

86. 1860 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, La., pop. sch., p. 480 (penned), dwell. 433, fam. 434; NA microfilm M653, roll 414.

87. Lee Etta Vaccarini Coutii (Adelaïde’s great-granddaughter), interview by author, 10 April 1974.

88. Affidavit of Denis Buard, Philippe Valsain v. Cloutier.

89. Philippe Valsain v. Cloutier; and Lecomte v. Cloutier, 3 La. 170–77. Inexplicably, when Adelaïde purchased her sister in 1820 and was legally required to name a surety to guarantee she would pay the sum she had bid, the surety Adelaïde named was Alexis Cloutier—the man who was, even then, trying to take her and her children’s inheritance.

90. Natchitoches Parish Conveyances, Book 49:540–41. *Griffe* and *griffone* were used in this society for those of mixed African and Native American ancestry.

her as a “mulatto” planter, with \$1,000 in real estate and \$300 in personal property.⁹¹

Adelaïde is Mariotte’s only offspring whom twentieth-century descendants remember. In the 1970s they described her as “proud to the point of putting on airs, always insisting that she was born free—never a slave—and totally Indian.”⁹² Adelaïde’s baptismal record hints at the root of her self-image. Her godfather was the eighteen-year-old nobleman, Antoine Mauguet de Mézières, son of the late commandant and nephew of the French noblewoman Charlotte de Mézières who had married King Louis XIV’s brother, Louis Philippe I, Duc d’Orleans. While Adelaïde’s godfather and his siblings chose not to marry “beneath themselves” in the colony, the male de Mézières left numerous children for whom their siblings were the godparents.⁹³ Adelaïde could well have been another of those children.

The eleven children borne by Marie Adelaïde Mariotte were as follows:

(With an **unknown father**)

- 15 i. MARIE ANNE⁴ MARIOTTE, born 8 April 1798 and labeled a “*quaterone*” at baptism.⁹⁴ About 1815–16 she bore Philomene, who married Dominique Lange in a civil ceremony ratified by the church on 9 February 1834. There, Philomene is said to be the “minor and natural daughter of Marie Mariotte.”⁹⁵ On the 1850 census Philomene’s children by Lange are shown under the surname attributed to Philomene—Rachal.⁹⁶
- 16 ii. MARIE ADELAÏDE MARIOTTE, born about 1802; married the triracial Jean Baptiste Cécile⁹⁷ on 19 March 1832 at Natchitoches;⁹⁸ died 12 May 1834 at Isle Brevelle.⁹⁹ No known children.
- 17 iii. JEAN BAPTISTE MARIOTTE ST. VILLE, born about August 1804;¹⁰⁰ married 19 August 1833 at St. Augustin’s Chapel on the Isle, his second cousin Marie

91. 1850 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, La., pop. sch., p. 101 (penned), dwell./fam. 933; and 1860 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, La., pop. sch., p. 480 (penned), dwell. 433, fam. 434.

92. Lee Etta Vaccarini Coutii, letter to author, 1 February 1974.

93. For de Mézières and ancestry to the 1600s, see Elizabeth Shown Mills, “(de) Mézières-Trichel-Grappe: A Study of a Tri-caste Lineage in the Old South,” *The Genealogist* 6 (Spring 1985): 4–85.

94. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, entry 3202. The ancestry of a “quaterone” (quadroon) was one-quarter African.

95. Mills, *Natchitoches Church Marriages, 1818–1850: Translated Abstracts from the Registers of St. François des Natchitoches, Louisiana* (1985; reprint, Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 2004), entry 267.

96. 1850 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, La., pop. sch., p. 101 (penned), folio 52 (stamped), dwelling/family 929. The young husband at dwell./fam. 928, Seraphin Rachal, is likely Philomene’s oldest child.

97. Jean Baptiste’s mother, Cécile, was freed by the 1781 will of Jean Baptiste Dupré (brother of Joseph I), at which time Dupré declared Cécile’s mother to be an Indian and Cécile to be a “griffe” (mixed Indian and black, sometimes with white); see Heirs of Dupré v. Alexis Cloutier, PC.22 (1825) for Dupré’s will. Cécile’s Indian mother is itemized as “Catherine” in the marriage contract of Dupré to Louise Marguerite Lecomte on 6 September 1769, Doc. 593, Archive Conveyance Records.

98. Mills, *Natchitoches Church Marriages*, entry 213.

99. Burial, 13 May 1834, Book 6, unpaginated, St. François Parish, Natchitoches, La.; see also related documents in folder 62, Natchitoches Parish Records Collection, Louisiana State University Archives.

100. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800–1826*, entries 114, 1923.

Cephalide Metoyer, daughter of Coincoin's son Dominique.¹⁰¹ One known child: Jean Baptiste Oscar St. Ville, age sixteen in 1850.¹⁰²

(With **Joseph Dupré II**, born 18 July 1781—a wealthy bachelor of French, German, Spanish, and Indian roots who grew up next door to the Buards)¹⁰³

- 18 iv. PHILIPPE VALSAIN⁴ DUPRÉ, born 1805–06; married Marie Louise Doralise Derbanne on 26 October 1824;¹⁰⁴ separated June 1844, after he became deranged;¹⁰⁵ died before 30 April 1849, leaving a sizable estate to his one child, Marie Denèges Elisida Dupré.¹⁰⁶ She left offspring by two husbands.¹⁰⁷
- 19 v. MARIE DORALISE DUPRÉ, born about 1807;¹⁰⁸ married Antoine Lassise from whom she separated in December 1829;¹⁰⁹ by civil marriage she wed her second cousin, Jean Baptiste Dominique Metoyer—a union blessed by the church on 25 June 1860, after the death of Doralise's first husband.¹¹⁰ The couple, who shared their home with Adelaïde in 1850 and 1860, appear childless.
- 20 vi. JOSEPH EMANUEL DUPRÉ, born 1810–1811,¹¹¹ married 19 August 1830 his second cousin Marie Marguerite Metoyer, daughter of Dominique.¹¹² Owner of the prosperous Twenty-Four Mile Ferry, a stagecoach stop, and a mercantile store, Manuel died during or after Reconstruction, leaving numerous offspring by his twelve children.¹¹³

(With **Remy Victorin Levasseur**, born 9 April 1786—a bachelor of French extraction, one Caddo Indian great-grandmother excepted)¹¹⁴

- 21 vii. MARIE EMY⁴ LEVASSEUR, twin, born about May 1816.¹¹⁵
- 22 viii. MARIE FELONISE LEVASSEUR, twin, born about May 1816.¹¹⁶

101. Mills, *Natchitoches Church Marriages*, entry 251.

102. 1850 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, La., pop. sch., p. 98, dwell./fam. 903.

103. For Dupré's birth and parentage, see Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, entry 1840. For the Dupré ancestry, see Elizabeth Shown Mills, "Deliberate Fraud and Mangled Evidence: The Search for the Fictional Family of Anne Marie Philippe of Natchitoches, Louisiana," *The American Genealogist* 75 (July 1997): 353–68.

104. Natchitoches Parish Conveyance Book 15:138, doc. 1, civil marriage of Dupre and Derbanne, with legitimation of child. For a detailed sketch of this couple see Lennon and Mills, "Mother, Thy Name is Mystery! Finding the Slave Who Bore Philomene Daurat," particularly pp. 214–17.

105. M. L. D. Dupré v. her husband, Natchitoches District Court files, bundle 194, case 3485.

106. Marie Doralise Derbanne (Widow V. Dupré) to daughter Marie Denége Dupré, folder 1049, Cane River Notarial Collection, Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans.

107. For the first marriage to Belisaire Llorens, see Mills, *Natchitoches Church Marriages*, entry 395; for the second marriage to Frumance Azenor Metoyer, see Natchitoches Parish Succession 2329 (Joseph Dupré, d. 1810, succession reopened about 1900) and Succession Book 41:444–51.

108. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800–1825*, entry 2083.

109. Dupré v. Lassise, Natchitoches Parish District Court files, bundle 47, case 1111.

110. "Marriages, 1855–1905," unnumbered entries in chronological sequence, St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Cloutierville, La.

111. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800–1825*, entry 2095.

112. Mills, *Natchitoches Church Marriages*, entry 174.

113. Lee Etta Vaccarini Coutii, interview by author, 12 July 1973. Ms. Coutii's portrayal of her grandfather is borne out by numerous parish records and censuses.

114. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1725–1803*, entries 1909, 1085, 407, and 119 outline Levasseur's ancestry.

115. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800–1825*, entry 2462.

116. Ibid.

(With **Barthelemy Le Court de Prelle**, born 18 September 1763—a never-married scion of French nobility whose father had come to Louisiana as an officer and entered into a concubinage with one of the colony’s storied “casket girls”)¹¹⁷

- 23 ix. LOUIS TOUSSAINT BARTHELEMY⁴ LE COUR, born 1 November 1817;¹¹⁸ married his second cousin Marie Lise Metoyer (daughter of Dominique) on 17 May 1838 in St. Augustin’s Chapel on the Isle.¹¹⁹ The couple left numerous offspring.
- 24 x. JACQUES “JACOB” REUBEN LE COUR, born in September 1821;¹²⁰ married Marie Zelia Rachal, his second cousin once removed (granddaughter of Dominique Metoyer). Their civil union, which had occurred fourteen months earlier, was ratified by the church on 20 May 1843.¹²¹ The couple left numerous offspring.
- 25 xi. MARIE ZELINE LE COUR, born 30 April 1824;¹²² married Louis Casimir Rachal (brother of Marie Zelia, above) in a civil ceremony that the church ratified on October 1846.¹²³ They, too, left numerous offspring.

CONCLUSION

Every newly found document subjects old conclusions to reevaluation. That thought is critical when using published works for biographical detail on past lives. Narrative accounts of history can meld multiple individuals into one, so seamlessly that blurring of identities is undetectable. While genealogical research requires family historians to exhaust all relevant records and analyze every detail, such micro study may be impractical for historians who interpret events and patterns on a larger scale. For all who attempt identification of common folk—particularly slaves—the lesson is obvious: documents left unexamined are time bombs, waiting to explode premature conclusions.

117. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1725–1803*, entry 488 (baptism of Barthelemy Le Roy). A new priest forced the elder Le Court’s marriage to Jeanne Le Roy when their child Barthelemy was two; see *ibid.*, entry 984.

118. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800–1825*, entry 2560.

119. Le Court-Metoyer marriage contract, 16 May 1838, Cane River Notarial Collection; and Mills, *Natchitoches Church Marriages*, entry 406.

120. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800–1825*, entry 1656.

121. Mills, *Natchitoches Church Marriages*, entry 549.

122. St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Book 1, unpaginated entries in chronological sequence.

123. Mills, *Natchitoches Church Marriages*, entry 633.