

# PROPOSED BATISTE LAVALAIS SAMPSON (BLS) RESTORATION FOUNDATION, A NONPROFIT FOUNDATION

July 22, 2016

## OBJECTIVE

That this 2016 family reunion provide the platform needed to launch the BLS Restoration Foundation, a nonprofit, dedicated to preserving its members multi-racial and multicultural identity by promoting and supporting integrated research; identifying, restoring and systematically documenting our multi-racial lineage and multicultural identity and commensurate inheritance; and establishing a BLS Family Endowment Fund.

## DISCUSSION

It is increasingly difficult to research and document our multi-racial lineage and multicultural identity as the last generation born in Avoyelles Parish joins our deceased ancestors. Gertrude (Trudi), considered among our family historians, began nearly ten years ago in association with the Genealogical Society, collecting information towards the Goal. I'm certain many others similarly tried and have been rewarded with varying and puzzling degrees of success. For example, as late as two years ago, three family members had traced our Indian ancestry with varying degrees of reliable evidence, yet much to our amazement a recent DNA paternal test provided scarce evidence. Yet many of our oral traditions reinforce that our ancestors were indigenous people of Avoyelles Parish. At least one of which is said to be buried in Marksville mounds.<sup>(2)</sup> As early as the 1950's and 60's several members of the family attempted to trace the family lineage, e.g. Lillian Batiste, the oldest daughter of Lena Lavalais and Jules Batiste. That effort aborted because research traced back to the time of Spanish rule and further suggested connection to Cuba, a communist country. Our research produces these results due in part because our identity is more than scientific evidence. The DNA testing may be compromised, if the basis of such testing is DNA of primarily Anglo-Indians admitted to the Dawes Indian Rolls commissioned in the late 1800's. There is census evidence that some of our ancestors are among those admitted to the rolls. The Dawes Rolls also contain a list of those not admitted who also claimed indigenous lineage. Some of our ancestors may be among those. Research is further compromised by a plethora of other historic factors not to mention our family's diaspora throughout the United States and possibly abroad.

## HISTORIC FACTORS

Documenting our lineage and cultural identity will continue to be difficult because of the long term effect of historic overlapping/overlaid migration patterns in and out of what is now called Avoyelles Parish and surrounding areas. Historians document reports of early American and French explorers supportive of our oral traditions even when not evident from DNA, and ordinary church and government records.<sup>(1)</sup> The take way is that to validate our oral traditions we may need to look to history, archeology - BLS ancestral burial sites, certified documents, and Dawes Indian Rolls (those admitted and not admitted). Similarly claims that our ancestors were of French descent requires more than DNA testing. Are we descendants of French colonization of New Orleans and the Louisiana Purchase, and/or

migrations of French ancestry from Caribbean nations, New Orleans, and out of French Canada? Our oral tradition says, “Yes! Our ancestors were required to change surnames; federal census takers recorded multiple misspellings of surnames; and local governments imposed ethnic identities through color laws. The French colonials waged war against an indigenous tribe nearly wiping them out forcing what may have been our ancestors into hiding and assimilation. The French colonials compounded this travesty by re-populating Avoyelles Parish with its mullattos descendants born in New Orleans, and giving them large swatches of the land.” It is said that this is how Clarice Gaspard, our matriarch, acquired her land. Moreover, the population migrating from Avoyelles Parish after the Civil War, World War I and II dispersed throughout the United States taking with them our rich oral history along with misspelled or altered surnames. The result has been a compromising of our multi-racial lineage and imposition of a cultural identity that is not our own. Without more, our generations may be, and in some cases have been, chided as not Indian (excluded from Indian Rolls which could offer increased prosperity<sup>(3)</sup>), or not Creole or of French descent. Yes, memorial records (birth, marriage and death, and the federal census) Avoyelles Parish as the birth place of our ancestors, but often frustrates establishing our family’s multi-racial lineage and multicultural identity, and commensurate inheritance. We only speculate we are meeting family when we encounter someone with the last name Rabelais, Lavalais, Lavalee, Lavallais, or Lavallas, or Batiste and Baptiste.

## **CONCLUSION**

It’s through this historic maze of cultural revisionism, governments’ restrictions, and Spanish, French and English colonialism and practices that any member of the BLS family labors to identify our multi-racial lineage and multicultural identity.

In totality, the evidence is that there is still much research ahead to document our ancestors, as late as the generation before the Avoyelles Parish diaspora of the 1940’s and 50’s, as multi-racial and multicultural people of indigenous, French, and French Canadian with European<sup>(4)</sup> and African ancestry. To quote my mom, Mercedes (Dez) Prier, third oldest of Lena Lavalais and Jules Batiste, born 1924, “We were never slaves.”

## **RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS**

Let’s develop a comprehensive inclusive approach through a recognizable nonprofit.

Assemble volunteers to meet as the BLS Research Committee (Committee) preferably to include representatives of all branches of the BLS Family and empowered to:

- Act as temporary Board of Directors to establish the legal entity: BLS Restoration Foundation,
- Propose strategic goals consistent with the Objective, and
- Plan a 2017/18 Foundation Summit to elect officers, develop a national organization structure, and approve strategic goals
- Solicit funds necessary to implement these recommendations.

## NOTES & RECOMMENDED READINGS

### NOTES:

(1) Mark Twain's Mississippi: A pictorial history of America's greatest river. American West Publishing Company, T. H. Watkins, 1974; pg. 35

(2) The Centennial Edition of the History of the United States: from the discovery of America, to the end of the first one hundred years of independence. Hartford: Thomas Belknap, Scammell and Company, St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Chicago; W.E. Bliss, Toledo; H. W. Kelley, Philadelphia, 1876; pg. 29

(3) The application process for obtaining federal certification as an Indian Tribe often requires highly specialized costly legal services. The alternative, a government sanctioned application process which allows individuals or groups to petition directly for enrollment with one of the Recognized Five Civilized Tribes (Tribes), usually fails. Even though less costly, the applications are **rarely** successful because of the great financial disincentives for Recognized Tribes.

(4) The Centennial Edition of the History of the United States: from the discovery of America, to the end of the first one hundred years of independence. Hartford: Thomas Belknap, Scammell and Company, St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Chicago; W.E. Bliss, Toledo; H. W. Kelley, Philadelphia, 1876; Ch. I. "The Aborigines." (Reference Avogel Tribal discussion re: aboriginal roots) Partial results of DNA testing for Jules Batiste – Europe 26% as follows:

- **Scandinavia**8%
- **Great Britain**7%
- Trace Regions11%
- **Europe West**3%
- **Ireland**3%
- **Italy/Greece**2%
- **European Jewish**1%
- **Finland/Northwest Russia**1%
- **Iberian Peninsula**< 1%

### SOME RECOMMENDED READINGS FOR RESEARCH:

1. The Avogel Tribe of Louisiana, Vol. 1, John Sitting Bear, Authorhouse 1663 Liberty Drive, Suite 200, Bloomington, Indiana 47403, [www.AuthorHouse.com](http://www.AuthorHouse.com), 1999
2. A People's History of the United States , Howard Zinn, First Published 1980, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2003, Harper Collins Publishers Inc. 10 East 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York, NY 10022
3. CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS *Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format*; Volume 3, Number 39
4. *A History of Pointe Coupée Parish and Its Families*, edited by Judy Riffel, p 12, Le Comitee des Archives de la Louisiane, Baton Rouge Louisiana, 1983.
5. *Early Surveys and Plats of Pointe Coupée Parish*, Volume 2, 1822-1827,(bound plats and surveyor's notes by Pierre L'Hermite), p 6, Pointe Coupée Parish Clerk of Court, New Roads, Louisiana.
6. Kniffen, Fred B., Hiram F. Gregory and George A. Stokes, *The Historic Indian Tribes of Louisiana*, pp 21-22, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge and London, 1987.

## PARTIAL EXTRACTS

### **EXTRACT FOR RESEARCHERS FROM:** **CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS**

*Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format*

Volume 3, Number 39

**BOOKS FOR RESEARCHERS:** Claitor's Publishing came up with a treasure trove of information when they agreed to re-publish all the publications from Winston De Ville. Under his banner. Provincial Press, he presented researchers with a wealth of information on early Louisiana records, residents, and even books containing data from other states and countries.

Overall, I've tried to present these to you over the period of the last year, but there are a few that I don't think I touched on. If I did, the information here will only show that they are of extreme importance and should stay in print. If you see a duplicate note on any of these from past columns, just move on to the next one. I believe that this completes the collection, and hopefully other genealogical researchers will come forward to have their books returned to active status. This is an important part of the work being done by Claitor's Publishing.

Let me start by mentioning *St. Domingue, Census Records and Military Lists, 1688-1720*, one of the few publications covering this period of Caribbean history. This is one of those rare finding-aids that don't come along that often. This is a look at the first permanent settlers in the New World and contains information that touches not only on Louisiana but even for those early settlers coming through such cities as Baltimore, Charleston, and Philadelphia. It only contains 50 pages, but they are definitely important ones. The reprint from Claitor's is selling for \$26.00.

De Ville did three important books on the early records of Pointe Coupee. There are a number of good research books for this area of Louisiana, but De Ville's works stand out among them.

The first one is *Slaves and Masters of Pointe Coupee, Louisiana: A Calendar of Civil Records, 1762 – 1823*. This book is based on ancient court documents and relates to people of African descent, both slave and free. At the same time, it provides a guide to all Europeans, Creoles, and others who had anything to do with slaves, freedmen, and their descendants. As one of the oldest settlements in the entire Mississippi River Valley, Pointe Coupee's African-American history is rich, and the colonists who created that legacy enriched the state of Louisiana.

This book contains abstracts of over 1,000 documents with each providing the names of all principal parties, the date, and the nature of the act, such as sales of all sorts, leases, notices of slaves who had escaped their bondage, the all-important marriage contract, the equally

important succession record and many more similar records. The African national origin is often named, and the original documents (if they are extant) are in the Office of the Clerk of Court at the courthouse in New Roads. This reprint is priced at \$26.00.

*Pointe Coupee Families in Colonial Louisiana: Abstracts of Civil Records, 1771 – 1782* is another important research aid for this part of Louisiana. Although settlement at Pointe Coupee began decades earlier, the first civil records extant in Pointe Coupee Parish started in 1771. Here you have genealogical abstracts for all records in this subject period. The index contains over 1,000 names – French, Spanish, Anglo-American, German, African-American, Native-American, and others. Containing 118 pages, this book is \$35.00.

*Pointe Coupee Documents, 1762 – 1803: A Calendar of Civil Records for the Province of Louisiana* gives brief descriptions, names of principal parties, full dates, and covers approximately 2,000 documents. The earliest (1762 – 1765) have been missing from the local courthouse for over a century. It can be noted here that a major portion of this book – 1770-1792 – is based on archives that exist only in Spain. An appendix provides succinct, never-before-published data on some 100 Spanish land grants for the greater Pointe Coupee area, including False River, and even a few from Baton Rouge. There are over 3,000 index entries in these 121 pages. The price is \$33.50.

Another important book in this collection of works is *Saint Landry Parish Successions, 1807-1865, An Index to Probate Records in Southwest Louisiana*. As all researchers know, succession records are invaluable to any genealogical specialist or general family historian. Of extreme importance is the fact that a married woman's maiden name is almost always used. Also usually listed are relationships, names of minor children, inventories of property, and other points coming together in one location. This one is \$26.00.

One book has largely been overlooked, and it is possibly one of the most important of the entire collection. It's *Selected Papers by Winston De Ville: A Collection of Articles for Colonial Genealogy and History*. This volume contains 35 articles reflecting four decades of pioneering research and writing on the Mississippi Valley and Gulf Coast regions. The articles have been edited and expanded. This is a fairly large, soft-cover book, and it is priced at \$38.50.

I realize the listing of material is lengthy, but it will give you an idea of what De Ville has done to further research in this part of the South. Here are the items:

The 1706 census of Fort Louis de la Louisiane (Mobile)  
Anne Franchoise Rolland and Her Early Years in Paris  
Natchitoches and the Trail to the Rio Grande: Two Accounts by the Sieur Deranne  
Register of Deaths at Old Fort Biloxi: 1720-1723  
The 1721 Census of Fort Louis de la Mobile and Surrounding Villages  
The 1722 Census of Settlements Along the Lower Mississippi River  
The 1723 Census of Natchez

# **PARTIAL EXTRACT FOR RESEARCHERS FROM:**

## *A History of Pointe Coupée Parish and Its Families*

### CHAPTER ONE

## NATIVE AMERICANS

Geographical Setting; Native American Mounds; Native American Settlement and Lifestyles; Last Native Americans in Parish; Native American Place Names

Not surprisingly, most of the knowledge concerning the native American presence in Pointe Coupée Parish dates from the historic period. Journals of the first European explorers, maps and reports of the late colonial period offer testimony of the rapid demise of the Native American cultures of Pointe Coupée. Artifacts and the fruits of scientific research provide mute but tangible evidence of the prehistory of these cultures which spanned thousands of years.

#### Geographical Setting

An understanding of the geography of the area is essential in attempting to envision the setting of prehistoric Pointe Coupée. A 1963 publication by Dr. William G. Haag, noted anthropologist and resident of New Roads since 1983, describes how periodic flooding of the Mississippi River over its banks deposited sediments, thereby creating ridges along the river's edge. Over long periods of time, these natural levees became higher in elevation than the surrounding areas, and overflow collected in the lower areas away from the river became backswamps<sup>(1)</sup>.

Radiocarbon dating has suggested that the Mississippi itself shifted its course several times during the prehistoric era. During the Sale-Cypremort period, dated 5,000 to 4,500 years before the present time, the river is believed to have run through Pointe Coupée along a channel now delineated by Bayou Grosse Tête. In the St. Bernard period, dated 2,600 to 1,500 years before the present, it shifted eastward to, more or less, the position it occupies today on the eastern flank of the parish<sup>(2)</sup>.

Willow and cottonwood lined the river's edge. Farther inland, on the natural levees, were live oak, pecan, sweet gum and hickory. Wetter locales were marked by canebrakes and palmetto, while cypress and tupelo gum