
THE ANCESTRAL COUPLE

JEAN MERCIER AND FRANÇOISE RADEGONDE DE MAYEUSE

The Merciers living in the United States represent 40% of all of the Merciers in North America. The majority of these Merciers are descendants of French Canadians who emigrated to New England in the second half of the 19th century and at the start of the 20th. At the time of colonization, a few Merciers emigrated from France directly to the United States. Among them was Jean Mercier, born on May 25, 1734 in Saint-André-de-Cubzac, a village located some fifteen kilometres north of the city of Bordeaux, in southwestern France.



Crédit photo : wikipedia.org

Jean was the son of Jean-Baptiste Mercier and Marie Apperd. At the age of 31, in 1765, he settled in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he became a successful merchant. At the time of his arrival, Louisiana had been a Spanish colony for three years. The population was then estimated to be around 20,000 residents. Jean married Françoise Radegonde de Mayeuse in 1773. They had three children: Juana Louisa Justina, Maria Gratiana and Jean-Baptiste. It is believed that Jean had earlier been married to Thérèse Lagarde in France. Eighteen years later (in 1791), he married Marie Gracieuse de Fontenelle, daughter of a grand Creole family who owned plantations on the left bank of the Mississippi.



Crédit photo : wikipedia.org

The Commagere-Mercier House, located at 630 Saint Peter Street in the old French Quarter, was built in 1796 by Pedro Commagere. It was sold in 1806 to Madame Gracieuse Fontenelle, wife of Jean-Baptiste Mercier.

On a plaque on the Commagere-Mercier House, located at 630 Saint Peter Street in the old French Quarter of New Orleans, one can read the names of the couple, who owned it in the early 1800s. They had two daughters, Justine and Marie Amélie, who together requested the emancipation of a female mulatto slave named Roseline in their mother's estate, in 1824. They vouch that Roseline is above the age of thirty and that she is a slave of "good moral". In a document at the Digital Library on American Slavery, they are identified as the heirs of Marie Gracieuse de Fontenelle Mercier. One can deduce from this that like other plantation owners, Jean and his wife had slaves in their service. Jean died at the age of 84 and was interred on April 18, 1818 in New Orleans.

Jean-Baptiste, the only son of Jean, perpetuated that Mercier line. He married Héloïse, daughter of Pierre Leduc

and Joséphine Lecourt, who had come from Canada after the Treaty of Paris in 1763. They had six children: Jean-Jacques, Marie-Clarisse (Adèle), Charles-Édouard, Henriette-Amandine, Placide-Jules-Armand and Charles-Alfred. It was an affluent family. They could afford to vacation in France.

Crédit photo : wikipedia.org



Alfred and Armand studied in Paris and became physicians. The daughters found well-to-do husbands: Henriette-Amandine married Pierre Soulé, a lawyer and future Senator in Washington, while Marie-Clarisse (Adèle) married Louis T. Caire, a notary.

The Old Square, or French Quarter, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Alfred (1816-1894) even though a doctor, was known mainly as a poet, novelist and playwright. He is recognized as a distinguished Mercier by the *Association des Mercier d'Amérique du Nord*. In his writings, he gave a different version of his origins. He said he was the grandson of a man named Jean, who was born in 1772 near Bordeaux, France, who arrived in New Orleans in 1793 fleeing the French Revolution and that Jean had earlier married Françoise Radegonde de Mayeuse in France. The year of his arrival in New Orleans, Jean obtained an immense land concession of several thousand acres. He made no mention of the Fontenelle family. The story seems to be closer to a novel than to reality. A dispute over the estate may explain the rewriting of his ancestors' history.

Crédit photo : wikipedia.org



The Jean Mercier and Marie Gracieuse de Fontenelle Couple lived in New Orleans, near the Saint Louis Cathedral, in the heart of the French Quarter.

When Alfred's father passed away, the estate was quite complex. Jean-Baptiste's descendants, whose mother was Françoise Radegonde de Mayeuse, launched a series of lawsuits against the descendants of Marie Gracieuse de Fontenelle and various New Orleans banks. The Louisiana Supreme Court decided in favour of Alfred's cousins and the banks, which resulted in depriving Alfred and his siblings of a huge property. The plantation produced an annual income of \$150,000 in 1830. Family reconciliation was never achieved.

Pendant la guerre de Sécession, Alfred va tenter en vain de persuader les Français de soutenir les Confédérés. Après la guerre, il rentre dans une Louisiane dévastée. La famille de Jean-Baptiste a beaucoup perdu pendant le conflit. Il pratique la médecine tout en consacrant des efforts pour préserver la langue française qu'il voit dépérir. La France le fera «**officier de la Légion d'honneur**» pour le remercier de son soutien à la langue française.

Les descendants de Jean Mercier se sont illustrés dans les domaines de la médecine, des lettres et des affaires. Ils représentent sans doute un très faible pourcentage des Mercier américains. Ils résident surtout dans le sud et l'ouest des États-Unis.



Louisiana became a State of the United States in 1803. New Orleans had a population of 8,475 in 1805. From 1806 to December 1809, the city's population more than doubled with the arrival of a total of 9159 French refugees from Saint Domingue, of whom 2731 were Whites, 3102 were free Blacks and 3326 were slaves. In 1810, the city's population was 24552, of whom only 3200 were Anglophones. (View of New Orleans in 1803).

References:

- 1- Anonymous, Alfred Mercier, physician and author 1816-1894. *Le Mercien, La voix des Mercier d'Amérique*, vol 26, numéro 1. Printemps 2010.
- 2- Digital Library on American Slavery: uncg.edu/slavery, PAR (Petition Analysis Record) Number 20882457.
- 3- Hamel, Réginald, *L'Habitation Saint-Ybars, Alfred Mercier*, Guérin Littérature, Montréal, 421 pages. 1989.
- 4- Mercier, Ernest, *Mercier depuis des siècles*, Sherbrooke 1987.
- 5- Mercier, Ernest, *Cinquième ancêtre, Jean de la Louisiane*, *Le Mercien, La voix des Mercier d'Amérique*, vol 3, numéro 1. Février 1987.
- 6- Mercier, Ernest, *Jean-Baptiste Mercier (1772-1841)*, *Le Mercien, La voix des Mercier d'Amérique*, vol 7, numéro 2. Avril 1991.
- 7- Mercier, Ernest, *Couples ancestraux Mercier implantés en Amérique du Nord*, *Le Mercien, La voix des Mercier d'Amérique*, vol 7, numéro 3. Juillet 1991.
- 8- Mercier, Pierre-Paul, *Jean Mercier et la Louisiane*, *Le Mercien, La voix des Mercier*

by: Gilmond Mercier No. 28