

Jean Baptiste Bourgeois stood on the deck of the Marie, a passenger sailing ship filled with Louisiana colonial officials, soldiers, and concessionaires like himself, as they glided into the harbor surrounding Dauphin Island, just off the coast of Mobile, Alabama. The ship had left La Rochelle, France, three months earlier on May 23, 1718, with two other Company ships, the Duchesse and the Victoire. As Jean Baptiste made out the island's thirty-plus houses belonging to the Company of the Indies, the French company responsible for settling Louisiana, he slowly made out their meager gardens, the battery of twelve cannons and the army barracks falling into disrepair.

Jean Baptiste was still many miles and several days journey of his final destination. Gazing out at the primitive conditions of Dauphin Island, where all Company ships landed before moving on to colonial posts such as Mobile and Natchitoches, Jean Baptiste Bourgeois must have quietly prayed that New Orleans would prove to be a more hospitable, more adaptable place to live.

Leaving from Palisseau, an area outside of Paris in the department of Seine-et-Oise, Jean Baptiste joined the Company of the Indies and hundreds of ambitious settlers hoping to carve a life out of the frontier of the New World. Jean Baptiste was to receive a piece of land upriver from New Orleans, land to farm.

The Company of the Indies (formerly the Company of the West) enjoyed authority of the Louisiana colony and encouraged French citizens to emigrate. The president was Scottish financier John Law, private advisor to Philippe, the Duc D'Orleans, the man for which New Orleans is named.

Many historians paint Law as a ruthless, scheming entrepreneur. Certainly, the innovative man was beyond his years in his knowledge for manipulating stock; his actions would amaze modern Wall Street bankers. Law convinced

France's aristocrats to buy shares of stock in the Company while encouraging Europe's poor workers to emigrate to the land of gold mines, friendly natives and a delightful climate. With Philippe's help, Law established a private bank in 1716 and received credit for the company, and he named Jean Baptiste LeMoyne, Sieur de Bienville, as the colony's governor.

Company stocks soared, but the people needed more enticement to settle Louisiana. Paris prisoners, prostitutes and inmates were kidnapped and shipped to Louisiana to help populate the new colony.

"The company even kept a whole regiment of archers which cleaned Paris of its rabble and adventurers, and received for this a fixed salary and 100 livres a head ... Five thousand people are said to have disappeared from Paris in April, 1721, alone," writes Franz in "Kolonisation des Mississippitaies."

The practice was discontinued when discovered, but Law continued to seek emigrants. He encouraged Germans, particularly Germans of the Alsatian region who had recently fallen under French rule, and the Swiss to emigrate. In 1720, Law's great financial bubble finally burst, but thousands of French, Germans and Swiss had migrated to Louisiana from his efforts, most of them settling in New Orleans and upriver along the "German Coast" of St. Charles Parish and later St. John the Baptist Parish.

At the time of Jean Baptiste Bourgeois' sailing in 1718, Bienville was clearing an area of land he discovered on an earlier trip to Louisiana with his brother, Pierre LeMoyne, Sieur d'Iberville, the site of an Indian portage on a crescent of the Mississippi River. There, along what is now Esplanade Avenue, Bienville ordered the construction of New Orleans, a town half-way to Natchez and "safe from Hurricanes and Tidal Waves," Bienville wrote.

Many of the Company's men and women arriving to settle the Crescent City had more illustrious ideas than merely building a city in the wilderness; they wanted to make fortunes promised in Law's posters and handbills.

"The plan of this great shipment of settlers is incontestably the finest in the world and the most advantageous of the colony, but by the memoir that I have already sent to France...the general directors...will see by the result that it would have been very advisable to make a more careful selection of the people whom we needed," Bienville wrote in a letter to the Navy Council on Sept. 25, 1718. "Doubtless they would then have sent up a large number of workmen, especially farmers, carpenters, and joiners and they would not have tolerated so many useless mouths."

Regardless of his reasons for joining the Company of the Indies, Jean Baptiste Bourgeois was not a "useless mouth." He, and many other concessionaires, slaves and indentured workers, settled upstream, providing the Company with needed food supplies and virtually keeping the city of New Orleans alive with the fruits of their labor in the swampy Louisiana soil during the early days of the colony.

In the 1724 Census of the German Village located north of New Orleans along the Mississippi River (presently the west bank of St. Charles Parish between Edgard and Killona near the town of Lucy), Jean Baptiste Bourgeois is farming three arpents of land along the riverfront. Almost a next-door neighbor resides Mathias Frederic, possible born Diederich, a native of Wingersheim in the Bas-Rhin region of France (from MadVintner's Web site, with footnotes from the "German Coast Families" by Albert Robichaux, Hebert Publications, 1997).¹ Mathias, born about February, 1696, is the son of Johann Frederic (died July 4, 1704 in Wingersheim) and Maria Debes (born about 1658 in Wingersheim, daughter of Joannis Debes).²

Johann Wilhelm Frederic, son of Nicolai Diederich, first married Margaretha Rist on April 29, 1680 in St. Nicolas Catholic Church in Wingersheim, Bas Rhin, France. They had one child, Eva Frederic, born about July 1683. Her baptism was July 15, 1683, at St. Nicolas Catholic Church in Wingersheim, with sponsors Nicolaus Crib (sp?) and Anna, daughter of Hans Miller. Margaretha Rist died Dec. 18, 1692.³

Children of Johann Frederic and Maria Debesin (b. June, 1693 in Wingersheim, Bas Rhin, France (St. Nicolas Catholic Church, Bas Rhin, France, p. 30), daughter of Joannis Debes, are:

1. Nicolaus Frederic, born about July 1694, Wingersheim, died May 18, 1704.

2. Mathias I. Frederic, born about Feb. 1696, Wingersheim, Bas Rhin, France. His baptism was Feb. 13, 1696, in St. Nicholas Catholic Church, Wingersheim, with sponsors Nicolaus Reiststeck and Anna Hencker, wife of

¹ <http://www.freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~madvintner/RomeWeb/Diederich.htm>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Jacob Hencker. Mathias first married Anne Marie Knehl in July 8, 1720, in St. Martin Catholic Church, Wingerheim, Bas Rhin, France. She died between 1720–1723. He later married Agnes Keime (1709–1764) of Bas Rhin, France, or Wurttemberg, Germany, about 1723 in the German Coast, Louisiana. Mathias died Feb. 26, 1764, German Coast, St. Charles Parish, Louisiana (Succession Record No. 1338).

3. Eva Frederic, born about Sept. 1699, baptism Sept. 3, 1699, St. Nicolas Catholic Church, Wingersheim, sponsors Nicolaus Reiststeck and Catharina Reiststeck.⁴

In 1724, Mathias Frederic is listed as living on six arpents wide of land in Louisiana with his wife, Agnes Keime, an infant son and an orphan girl of 15.

“The First German Coast, St. Charles Parish, was one of the earliest settled areas of Louisiana,” writes Glenn R. Conrad in his “Abstracts of the Civil Records of St. John the Baptist Parish.”

“The settlers were German farmers who contracted with John Law and his Company of the West to undertake the cultivation of farms in the lush wilderness of Louisiana. These colonists had come from all regions of Germany, from Bohemia, from Switzerland and even from Hungary. Mainly, however, they were natives of Alsace, the Palatinate and Baden. They came to Louisiana in family units, including parents, children, brothers, sisters and other relatives. Having voluntarily contracted to go to Louisiana, once they departed their European homes they never looked back; they never openly yearned to return to their homeland even when faced with unbelievable hardship in Louisiana.

⁴ Ibid.

“Being yeoman farmers, these Germans avoided life in the struggling communities of the colony and sought instead the potentially rich farmlands along the Mississippi River,” writes Conrad.

The Census of 1721 states that “the German families are located 12 lieues above New Orleans to the left heading upstream on very good terrain, which formerly had been Indian fields and which is easy to clear.”

Estimates put the four small German settlements between present-day Lucy and Hahnville. The original towns were named Mariental, Karlstein, Augsburg and Hoffen. Bourgeois and Frederic were most likely living in Mariental, located farther back from the river than the other villages.

The Census of 1724 states that they planted rice, corn, beans, peas and other vegetables and tobacco. “Since these people are very industrious, it is to be hoped that they will produce a bountiful crop this year, and that they will use it for the best interests of the colony,” the Census reports.

“All of these German families plant a lot of grain,” the Census continues. “Thus they are also able to feed their cattle, of which they have quite a lot. In addition they are working on building levees on the river front of their properties. If all of these small farmers lived in the vicinity of New Orleans they could raise vegetables and poultry. They could find a good livelihood and add greatly to the beauty of the city. Their houses are built so close together along the narrow river frontage of their properties with gardens behind, that their settlement has the character of a village. But such pleasant relationships do not exist in New Orleans because of the greed for land of those who demand large concessions not to cultivate, but to resell. If these German families, the survivors of a far greater number, are not helped by Negroes in their work, gradually they will perish. For what can a man and his wife achieve with a piece of land if they must go to the grist-mill instead of being able to eat their dinner

and rest after their day of strenuous labor. This work (in the grist/grinding mill) is hard and dangerous for both men and women. Many get hurt; especially the women suffer serious injury. If one of the two gets sick, the other has to do all the work alone, and so both finally die. There are a number of examples of this. The soil is so unrelenting in the lower portion of the colony that one must always have a hoe ready. The weeds grow so fast and so thick that, after a short time, it looks as if no work has been accomplished,” concludes the Census.

“But they, and the French who joined them later, persevered; the semi-tropical jungle of St. Charles Parish was gradually pushed back from the banks of the Mississippi to be replaced by cultivated fields; crude huts were slowly transformed into livable houses and, generally speaking, life became tolerable,” writes Conrad.

In 1724, there were no slaves and only six cattle among the German Coast settlers. Many had pigs. In 1726, Frederic owns one cow — given to him by the Company — one calf and one pig. By 1731, when some colonists had moved to the right bank or upriver in present-day St. John the Baptist Parish, Frederic still neighbors Bourgeois, and has three children. Both men now own their land.

“...they were granted title by nature of working the land assigned to them in lieu of their passage back to France (especially the Germans formerly of the Law Arkansas concession). This last would be equivalent to ‘squatter’s rights’,” states the 1731 Census.

Jean Baptiste Bourgeois married Marianne Chevalier (Cavallier) and they had six children:

1. Marie–Anne (Marianne) Bourgeois, who marries first Jean–Baptiste Lanclos of Picardy, France, (born Oct. 9, 1740 in St. Charles Parish – parraine Daniel Popff, marraine Marianne Chevalier), then Jean–Jacques (Hantz Jacob) Mayer (son of Martin Mayer and Marguerite Hoffman of the German town of Gemingen in the Palatinate) on Feb. 11, 1749 (St. John Parish, LRC, P. 54), and finally Francois Lambert;

2. Jacques Bourgeois, who married Mariane Sauvagin and died in 1772;

3. Joseph Bourgeois, who married Marie Oubre (Oubert) and bears a son, Joseph, who serves in the German Coast Militia with Spanish Governor Bernardo Galvez successfully defeating the British in the American Revolutionary battle of Baton Rouge;

4. Dominique Bourgeois, who married Genevieve Euvalle (Huval) and died in 1777;

5. Jean Louis Bourgeois, born Dec. 25, 1740, (parraine Daniel Popff, marraine Jean Boucherant) who probably died young since he is not listed in his mother’s succession; and

6. Marie Barbe Bourgeois, who married Joseph Tassin on April 30, 1743, and later Paul LaPerinne.

In “An Atlas of Louisiana Surnames,” Jean Baptiste Bourgeois is listed as one of the two original Bourgeois to arrive in early colonial Louisiana. The reference explains that Jean Baptiste Bourgeois’ “...three sons, Dominique, Joseph, and Jacques, became important planters during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Joseph acquiring a farm of some four hundred acres; he and his brothers purchased other properties in adjacent St. John the Baptist Parish, where some of their descendants may still live, whereas others migrated to Bayou Lafourche and the Attakapas in the late 1790s and early 1800s.”

Mathias Frederic's children are:

1. André–Mathias Frederic, 1729–1773 (more on him later);
2. Mathias Frederic, who married Marie Ann Berenhart (Bernard) on Jan. 29, 1754, and later became one of, if not the first, settler of Vacherie, the highest point of the German Coast in St. James Parish;
3. Philippe Frederic, who married Catherine Antony on May 26, 1750; and
4. Marie Catherine Frederic, who married Jean–Jacques (Hantz Jacob) Mayer on April 26, 1740 (St. Charles Borromeo, SCB B1, p. 6), and died on Jan. 8, 1748 (St. Charles Borromeo SCB B1, p. 48).

During the middle of the 18th century, “While many German colonists had achieved a certain well-being, these reports showed that destitute conditions quite often still prevailed, without Negroes, without horses and without plows,” writes Helmut Blume in “The German Coast During the Colonial Era.” “The importance of the simplest tools needed to clear and cultivate was shown in the inventory of what was left on these small farms. Another example was the marriage contract of Jean Jacques Mayer and Marianne Bourgeois. Here specifically listed were hoes, axes, saws, cutting knives and other things. But there was no mention of a plow.”

Here is the actual marriage listing, dated Feb. 8, 1749:

“Jean Jacques Mayer and Marianne Bourgeois promise marriage to one another. Mayer's first wife was the late Catherine Frederic, daughter of Mathias Frederic. They had four children. The community property of Mayer and his first wife has been inventoried and appraised. Marianne Bourgeois is the widow of Jean L'Enclo (Lanclos) and mother of three children by him. Their community

property has been divided. Witnesses: Darensbourg, Jacques Mayer, Marianne Bourgeois, Mathias Frederic, Rambin, Charrier, Heidel, Portier.”

Life became easier with the importation of slaves by the Company, says Conrad, but slaves were few and conditions were unlike those of the 19th century where plantation owners reaped great wealth from the “peculiar institution.”

“From the beginning, the farmers of St. Charles and St. John parishes worked side by side with slaves in the fields,” Conrad explains. “It was indeed a strange kind of master–slave relationship in which both shared the joys and disappointments of seemingly endless days of hard work.”

“These Germans living among the French have retained their taciturn character, their language and their manners,” writes C.C. Robin in his “Voyage to Louisiana.” “They do not have that open and affectionate countenance of the French. They are stingy but well behaved. They work their own farms, without Negroes, and although originally northern they have become well acclimated. Yellow fever never bothers them because they work. This malady strikes those who in New Orleans live in inactivity or in the too active state of passion and intemperance. These Germans, who are the food suppliers of the city live well, without however having made any fortunes.”

Since Louisiana was a French colony, Germans rapidly assimilated into French culture. German names were Gallicized when French census takers and officials wrote the German names as they heard them. Schaf became Chauffe. Bade (a colonist from Baden) became Badeau. Scheckschneider and Troxler became Schnexayder and Trosclair. Jean–Jacques Mayer, the husband of Marie–Anne Bourgeois, was first listed in colonial documents as Hantz Jacob Mayer, a native of Gemingen in the Palatinate.

Many Germans retained their native tongue, but they also spoke French. Almost all of them could not read nor write. Many of the Morano ancestors have their names spelled five different ways in colonial documents, probably because they couldn't spell them for the census takers or the recorders.

The Frederics–Mayers

Andre–Mathias Frederic, son of Mathias Frederic, lived on a farm “6 arpents wide by the customary depth, located about 22.5 miles above New Orleans on the right bank of the river ascending, bounded above by the property of Labbé (Beaufin) and below by that of Christophe Troxler,” states a parish record. In 1766, André Mathias and his wife are listed as the sixth family moving downstream from the St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, known to locals as the Little Red Church, at Destrehan. André owns four horses, four cows, four young bulls, twenty sheep and two muskets. He served in the German Coast militia in a company called Boisclair's Company. He's also listed as serving in in the militia in 1770.

Dominique Bourgeois, Marie–Anne's brother, was the third family downstream from the St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church on two arpents of land. He is listed as being age 36, his wife age 23. They have one boy, age six months, and three girls.

Andre–Mathias Frederic and his wife, Marguerite Himel, have four children:

1. Françoise Frederic, born in 1761 or 62 (more on her later);
2. Marguerite Frederic, born 1763;
3. Marie–Louise Frederic, born 1765, who married Charles Toups; and
4. Otto Frederic, born 1770.

Upon André's death in 1773, his children are still very young. Years later, Françoise married Jean Mayer, son of Jean Jacques Mayer and Marie-Anne Bourgeois, who was born in 1754 in St. Charles Parish. Jean has several brothers and sisters, many of which are half sisters from his father's first marriage to Marie Catherine Frederic, his wife's aunt.

Jean Mayer has the honorable distinction of serving with Spanish Gov. Bernardo Galvez at the Battle of Baton Rouge in 1779, an American Revolutionary battle.

France had ceded all of the Louisiana territory west of the Mississippi, plus the Isle of Orleans or New Orleans to Spain in 1763 to compensate for Spain's loss of Florida in France's war with Great Britain. Louisiana's Florida Parishes, however, were ceded to Britain. Galvez, the fourth Spanish governor of Louisiana, was uneasy of the British presence at Baton Rouge, a strategic spot on the Mississippi. When American colonists declared independence from Britain in 1776 and Spain declared war on Britain on May 8, 1779, Galvez was eager to join ranks with the American colonists and push the British back from the Mississippi River.

"The Spanish governor in Louisiana was determined to keep the British force from gaining control of the Mississippi River," writes Ed Bartelme of the Louisiana Tourist Commission. "Galvez learned that the British would attempt a surprise attack on New Orleans, and he called the people of the city together for an oath of loyalty. Then with an army of 670 men, Galvez started up the river toward the British garrison in Baton Rouge."

In the summer of 1779, Galvez collected "six hundred men and one hundred and sixty Indians from the German and Acadian Coast," on his trip to Baton Rouge, states the Sons of the Revolution publication "Galvez and Other Patriots." Among them were Jean Mayer (listed in the Spanish roles as Juan

Mayer) and Joseph (listed as Josef) Bourgeois, the nephew of Marie–Anne Bourgeois.

“Galvez’s main force, after easily taking control of Fort Manchac just downriver from Baton Rouge, set up cannons behind the picket fence of an orchard next to the well-guarded Fort Baton Rouge,” writes Bartelme. “They bombarded the fort so well that by 3:30 in the afternoon of September 21, 1779, only hours after the battle had begun, the British garrison of 500 men ran up a white flag.”

The Frederics and Mayers were not the only ones who married each other twice within the family tree. Marie–Anne Bourgeois, daughter of Jean Baptiste Bourgeois and Marianne Chevallier, first married Jean Baptiste Lanclos, a native of Picardy, France. When Jean Baptiste Lanclos died on Jan. 8, 1748 (St. John records, B1, 48), he left her with four children: Jean Baptiste, Marie Jeanne, Antoine and Marguerite.

Antoine Lanclos was born Aug. 10, 1745, in St. John the Baptist Parish and married Marguerite Jullienne Castan, daughter of Francois Castan and Genevieve Borne. They had three children before her death: Genevieve Lanclos, born about 1775; Mariana Lanclos, born about 1775, who married Matheo Diori on Jan. 7, 1800 and Adelaide Lanclos, born 1771 in Iberville Parish, who died Nov. 18, 1784 in St. Martinville.⁵

Antoine Lanclos then married Magdelaine Molinot Nerault, widow of Jean Baptiste Nerault, on Feb. 27, 1778. (The Nerault–Molinot connection follows.) The two are connected in other ways. Magdelaine’s son by her first husband, Francois Nerault, married Francoise Emilee Mayer, daughter of Jean Mayer and Francoise Frederic. Also, Jean Baptiste Nerault’s first wife was sister to the wife of Dominique Bourgeois, brother of Marie–Anne.

⁵ Genealogy of Judith Lanclos

The succession of Marie–Anne Bourgeois upon her death in 1779:

Feb. 4, 1779 No. 313

“Partition of the succession of the late widow Bourgeois. In order to proceed with the partition of the succession of the late Marie–Anne Bourgeois, there came before Bellile (Francois Scimard de Bellile, the equivalent of today’s parish recorder) the following individuals: Joseph Bourgeois who was responsible for the settlement of the succession, Guillaume Badeau, representing his wife, Jeannette Lanclos, a daughter of Marie–Anne Bourgeois by her first marriage. Also present was Antoine Lanclos, a son of the decedent, and due to be present but absent in Illinois was another son, Jean–Baptiste Lanclos. Also present was Frederic Bertrand, representing his wife, Genevieve Marie (Mayer), daughter of Marie–Anne Bourgeois by her second husband. Also present are the decedent’s sons by her second marriage, Philipe and Jean Maire (Mayer). Present is Francois Leleu who is Marie–Anne Bourgeois’ son by her third marriage. Also present is Marie–Barbe Bourgeois, wife of Paul LaPerinne. Also present was Joseph Bourgeois acting for the heirs of Jacques and Dominique Bourgeois. The estate amounted to 2327 piastres...Joseph Bourgeois, Marie–Barbe Bourgeois, the heirs of Jacques Bourgeois and the heirs of Dominique Bourgeois each received 459 piastres. The remaining 459 piastres was divided equally between Jean Maire, Frederic Bertrand, Guillaume Badeau, Philippe Maire, Antoine Lanclos, Francois Leleu and Jean–Baptiste Lanclos.”

Jean Mayer and Francoise Frederic had five children:

1. Francoise Mayer, who married Francois Nerault on Jan. 7, 1805, and died March 8, 1817;
2. Charles Mayer, born Dec. 14, 1782, married Louise Delmere (Edelmer) on July 11, 1814;
3. Jean Pierre Mayer, who married Seraphine Frederic;
4. Alexi Mayer, who married Marie Ulma Frederic on April 29, 1817; and
5. Angelique Mayer, who married Paul Frederic on July 26, 1813.