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NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

LOUISE MARGUERITE: ST. DENIS' *OTHER* DAUGHTER

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Biographers of Louis Antoine Juchereau de St. Denis, Louisiana's fabled "Cavalier in the Wilderness" have all suffered from the same handicap and displayed the same shortcoming in their efforts to reconstruct the family that St. Denis produced. Henry E. Chambers, in his 1925 attempt to "correct the errors" that Pierre-George Roy first made in 1903¹, very appropriately observed: "The dates and the order of birth of St. Denis' children are so obscure that it is easy to fall into error about them."² Chambers then proceeded, in good faith, to fall into error.

The crux of the problem for most such historians has been the identification of St. Denis' first *known* child, the infant born and baptized at the Presidio del Norte on the Rio Grande. The word *known* is emphasized because the failure of biographers to recognize the heretofore *unknown* and their attempts to make deviant records conform to the *known* pattern have created the basic problem in reconstructing St. Denis' family. They have also obscured an interesting and potentially significant aspect of this cavalier's character.

In all accounts of the St. Denis family, Louise Marguerite Juchereau de St. Denis has been the family enigma. More than one biographer have recognized her uniqueness and have misinterpreted it similarly. In his reconstruction of the family, Chambers noted that "of the five daughters of St. Denis, four were given at baptism 'Marie' as a part of their full name . . . a markedly French custom. Only one of St. Denis' daughters was left out of this scheme of naming,—Louise Marguerite."³ And then Chambers proceeds to speculate:⁴

St. Denis' first child was born after his departure from the Presidio for Louisiana. What more natural than for it to be named for its absent father. Hence Louisa (Luisa) for father Louis Juchereau and Margerita a favorite name in Spanish families of those days.

A more recent biographer echoes this conclusion in his sentimental description of St. Denis' return to Mexico:⁵

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1. Pierre-Georges Roy, *La Famille Juchereau Duchesny* (Paris, 1903).
 2. Henry E. Chambers, *A History of Louisiana*, 3 vols. (New York, 1925), I: 221.
 3. *Ibid.*, 222.
 4. *Ibid.*
 5. Ross Phares, *Cavalier in the Wilderness*, 3d edition (Gretna, La., 1976), 116.

It was a joyous reunion . . . St. Denis thought Emanuelle⁶ more beautiful than ever. And the baby was named after her father. St. Denis was expansive in his pride. "Luisa Margarita" was a typically Spanish name, but the French father had been remembered in the supreme manner, and he was intrigued to find his name made both Spanish and feminine.

It is a romantic portrayal of Louise Marguerite's birth—but *it is totally inaccurate. This daughter of St. Denis was neither Spanish nor was she the daughter of Emanuela.*

Biographers *have* been correct in speculating that Louise Marguerite was the first-born of Juchereau de St. Denis. Both Chambers and Phares point out that she served as godmother at a "ceremonious baptism" in 1729 and conclude that she, obviously, was the eldest child—or else she would have been too young to serve in such a capacity. Although their reasoning is fallacious⁷ both Chambers and Phares reached the right conclusion. Louise Marguerite's status as elder daughter is obvious—not because she served as godmother in 1729 but because she was already married by that year.

In their perusals of the 1729 (and subsequent) church records of Natchitoches, St. Denis' biographers have failed to note this marriage, and have thereby failed to discern the most important clue to Louise Marguerite's identity. Although the actual marriage record is not extant in the Natchitoches registers, the *existence* of the marriage is clearly shown by those same 1729 entries that have been so frequently cited:⁸

(1)

I, the undersigned priest and Capucin Missionary have solemnly baptized Louise, a little Negro girl born the twelfth of April 1729, daughter of Jasmin and Marie, Negroes belonging to Mr. Darbanne. Godfather has been Mr. Darbanne; godmother, *Mlle. Louise Mar-*

6. Emanuela Maria Stephania Sanches y Navarro was the Spanish *criolla* whom St. Denis married during his first stay in Mexico.

7. An examination of the colonial Catholic registers of Natchitoches reveal many instances in which small children served as godparents. For example, in December 1738 St. Denis' *four year old daughter*, Marie des Neiges, was named as godmother in a baptismal record. See Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729-1803, Abstracts of the Catholic Registers of the French and Spanish Post of Natchitoches in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1977), No. 112.

8. These translations were made directly from the originals which appear in Book 2, Registers of the Parish of St. François des Natchitoches (Archives of the Immaculate Conception Church, Natchitoches), unnumbered pages. This source hereinafter cited as Natchitoches Registers. Abstracts of these records also appear in Mills, Nos. 514, 519, 520, and 522.

guerite De Jucheraux. In testimony of which I have signed. F. Maximin, Capucin Priest at Natchitoches, the 15th of May.⁸

(2)

The year 1729. This day, the fifteenth of May, I, the undersigned priest and Capucin Missionary, have solemnly baptized Marguerite, a little Negro girl born the fourteenth of May and property of Sieurs Duplessis and Tourangeaux, inhabitants of Natchitoches, the legitimate daughter of Janot and Fanchone, Negroes, her father and mother. The godfather has been Pierre Fossé [*dit* Tourangeau]; the godmother *Louise Marguerite de Jucheraux de St. Denis*. In testimony of which I have signed. F. Maximin, priest and Capucin Missionary at Natchitoches. ♡

(3)

I, the undersigned priest and Capucin missionary at Natchitoches, in the year one thousand seven hundred twenty-nine, this twenty-second of May, have solemnly baptized Marie Louise, Indian of the Osage nation, aged about twenty years and property of François Viard, inhabitant of Natchitoches. The godfather has been Pierre Fosse; the godmother, *Louise Marguerite de Juchero*, wife of the said Duplessis and inhabitant of this same place. In testimony of which I have signed. F. Maximin, Priest and Capucin Missionary. ♡

(4)

sept The year one thousand seven hundred thirty, the thirtieth day of [illegible], I, the undersigned priest and Spanish missionary, apostolic cure of the Adailles, have baptized—since there is no priest at Natchitoches—Louise, born the twenty-ninth of the same month, of the legitimate marriage of Jean Lage and of Françoise Buard, her father and mother, habitants of this place. The godfather has been Jean Mader and the godmother *Louise Duplecis*, who have declared they do not know how to sign and have made their ordinary marks. In testimony of which I have signed the day first given above. Perre Campe, cure des Adailles. ♡

“The said Duplessis”, husband of Louise Marguerite, is further identified in the church and civil records of Natchitoches as one Pierre Coutoleau *dit* Duplessis, who served the Natchitoches post as notary throughout most of its earliest years.⁹ Duplessis appears

⁹ See documents of this period from the French Archives of the Office of the Clerk

among the sixteen male colonists and officials itemized on the census of May 1722¹⁰ and is included again on the January 1727 enumeration as a partner of Pierre Fosse *dit* Tourangest [*sic*].¹¹ Since neither of these census rolls enumerates a wife for the Sieur Duplessis, the indication is that he married Louise Marguerite between January of 1727, when the last census was taken, and May of 1729, when the above four baptisms were recorded.

Moreover, the various identifications of Louise Marguerite in the four entries above provide further (although not inarguable) indication of the time frame in which she married. Entry (1), dated May 15, identifies this daughter as "Mlle." while entry (3), dated May 22, states unequivocally that she was "wife" of the said Duplessis." Assuming that Father Maximin did not use the word *mademoiselle* in error within Entry (1), which sometimes but only rarely happened in the Catholic colonial registers of Natchitoches, then the date of marriage can be narrowed to the week of May 15-May 22, 1729. It might also be assumed that the marriage was performed by the same Father Maximin who would have recorded that marriage, and any others, in a separate folio from that in which he recorded baptisms; apparently only the baptismal folio has survived.

Approximation of the marriage date for Louise Marguerite also enables approximation of the period in which she reached marriageable age (at Natchitoches this was frequently as early as thirteen, although more usually between thirteen and sixteen) and also makes possible the calculation of an approximate period of her birth: 1711-1716. Using the latter date as the extreme limit it might still seem possible that Louise Marguerite was that child born at the Presidio del Norte—however, subsequent records identify this daughter as a *native of Natchitoches*.¹²

The most conclusive evidence that Louise Marguerite was not the legitimate daughter of St. Denis or the daughter of his wife Emanuela is provided by two additional factors evidenced in the records: 1) Louise Marguerite is not included among the legitimate heirs of St.

of Court, Natchitoches. The last record which exists on Duplessis is dated February 1741 and appears in Book I, Natchitoches Registers, unnumbered page, and is abstracted in Mills, No. 27.

10. Jay K. Ditchy, trans., "Census of Natchitoches, La., for the Year 1722," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, 13 (April 1930): 210.

11. Katherine Bridges, "Natchitoches in 1726," [*Louisiana*] *Genealogical Register*, 8 (September 1961): 39.

12. Mills, No. 744.

Denis and wife;¹³ and 2) good relations apparently did not exist between Emanuela and this daughter.

In considering the first factor, Chambers concludes: "No record of her [Louise Marguerite's] marriage or death is to be found at Natchitoches . . . she was one of St. Denis' two children that died before he did."¹⁴ The apparent basis of Chambers' conclusion that St. Denis was preceded in death by his eldest daughter is the lack of reference to Louise Marguerite in the settlement of the St. Denis estate—and the letter which the cavalier wrote to a niece in 1741. The pertinent part of this letter reads: "We have seven children. God called two of them and we have five left, two sons and three daughters."¹⁵

In actuality, the two children who preceded St. Denis in death were his daughters Marie Rose (his eldest daughter by Emanuela)¹⁶ and Marie Gertrude.¹⁷ The presence of Louise Marguerite at Natchitoches, long after St. Denis' death, is made obvious by a number of records—records which also reveal the change of status that this daughter experienced after the father's death.

For example, almost all of the documents generated by Louise Marguerite during the lifetime of St. Denis accord her the surnames of Juchereau, St. Denis, or a combination of the two. Cordial relations between her and her half-siblings may be assumed from such documents as the 1743 baptism of a slave belonging to Jacques de la Chaise, husband of Marie Rose de St. Denis. Godmother was "Marie Louise [Marguerite] de St. Denis."¹⁸ However, after the death of the old cavalier and commandant, there is on record *no* instance in which Louise Marguerite is identified by her father's surname, and there is *no* record of any further association between her and the St. Denis family.

The most revealing example of Louise Marguerite's change of

13. See Succession of St. Denys and Succession of Mme. St. Denys, French Archives, Natchitoches.

14. Chambers, 222-23.

15. Quoted in Phares, 260.

16. Marie Rose Juchereau de St. Denis, wife of Jacques de la Chaise, died at Natchitoches on April 28, 1737, at the declared age of "twenty-one and a half." This would date her birth as late 1715 or early 1716, making her the "first child" born at the Presidio. See Mills, No. 134.

17. Only one reference to Marie Gertrude exists at Natchitoches—a 1736 baptism in which she served as godmother. She is not named in the St. Denis succession of 1744. Ecclesiastical records of burials, as well as births and marriages, are not completely extant for this period at Natchitoches.

18. Mills, No. 233.

status is found in the record of her second marriage, which occurred in 1758, fourteen years after her father's death and three months *before* the death of Emanuela.¹⁹

The year one thousand seven hundred and fifty-eight, the thirtieth of January, I the undersigned certify . . . that I have received the mutual consent of Martin Goutier de Land, son of Joseph de Land and of Michele Adeveque, native of the post of Saltillas, in Spanish country, and of *Louise, widow of deceased Duplecis*, a native of this parish, and have given them the nuptial benediction in presence of the undersigned witnesses. In testimony of which I have signed the day and year above. Fr. Valentin, cure. Witnesses: Antoine Florient, Bibo, Charly, Trichele.

It should be particularly noted in this entry that the groom is fully identified and his parents are named. *Neither surname nor parentage is given for the bride*, an incidence which contrasts strongly with the recorded marriages of the other St. Denis offspring. For example, at the marriage of St. Denis' youngest daughter some five years earlier, the bride is identified as:²⁰

. . . dame Marie des Neiges de St. Denis, native of this parish, the legitimate daughter of deceased Louis Jucherot de St. Denis, Chevalier of the Royal and Military Order of St. Louis, Commandant, in his lifetime, at the said post, and of Dame Manuel Sanche Navarre, widow of deceased St. Denis, her father and mother.

Also significant is the fact that not one member of the St. Denis family appeared as a witness at the 1758 marriage of Louise Marguerite. Emanuela, who signed the marriage records of her other daughters, did not sign this one. Clearly, there was no mother-daughter bond between these two women.

No record has been found that indicates the continued presence of Louise Marguerite at Natchitoches after her 1758 marriage to Goutierres. In fact, aside from the records already cited, the church and civil archives of Natchitoches reveal little else about this *other* daughter of Juchereau de St. Denis. It is known that she was

19. Translated from Register 2, unnumbered page; this entry is also abstracted in Mills, No. 744. Other examples of the non-use of a surname for Louise Marguerite, after her father's death, may be found in such civil records as Docs. 116 and 169 [re-numbered series] of the French Archives, Natchitoches. In these documents, Louise Marguerite and her son Pierre Duplessis, Jr., sell a tract of land and acknowledge an inheritance made to the son by Pierre Fosse *dit* Tourangeau, former business partner of the elder Duplessis.

20. Book 2, Natchitoches Registers; see also Mills, No. 731.

illiterate²¹—unlike the legitimate children of St. Denis. It is also known that she bore a son and a daughter by Coutoleau *dit* Duplessis. The son, Pierre Louis, married at Natchitoches in 1778 to a native of the Spanish post of Los Adayes, Maria Gregoria de Santa Cruz²² and soon disappeared from the Natchitoches records. The daughter was named Emanuelle—perhaps in an attempt by Louise Marguerite to ingratiate herself to her father's wife. This daughter married at Pointe Coupée in 1744 to René Le Boeuf, at which time she was identified as a "resident on the shores of the 'grand lac des tyhou timachat(?)'."²³ Young Emanuelle returned to Natchitoches with her husband prior to 1749²⁴ and remained there after the death of Le Boeuf—at least until 1757.²⁵ Her offspring also married into the Spanish families of Los Adayes.²⁶ As with the mother during these years, there is no evidence of any association between the offspring of Emanuela and the offspring of Louise Marguerite. By contrast, there is considerable association among the legitimate descendants of St. Denis—and there is likewise considerable association between the Duplessis descendants of Louise Marguerite and the Spanish family of her second husband.

One obvious question relative to Louise Marguerite's identity still remains. Given that she was not the daughter of Emanuela, then *who* was her mother? The only clues exist in the documents which approximate the age of Louise Marguerite and identify her as a native of Natchitoches. Prior to 1716, no women of European origins are known to have lived in the Natchitoches region. It would seem probable that her mother was, instead, a native of the Natchitoches Indians, a tribe with whom St. Denis had association from the year 1700.²⁷

Biographers of St. Denis for more than two centuries—from Pénicaut²⁸ to Phares—have romanticized the charisma that this French-Canadian exerted over the Indians of Natchitoches and have attributed it to such known elements of his character as his "silent dignity" and his penchant for fine dress. Undoubtedly the Louisiana natives were duly impressed by both his style and his flair, but it

21. For example, see the previously cited baptism of Louise Lage.

22. Mills, No. 1045.

23. Winston De Ville, *First Settlers of Pointe Coupée* (New Orleans, 1974), 27. Possibly, "tyhou timachat" was a phoenetic spelling of Tchitimachas.

24. Mills, No. 300.

25. Mills, No. 643.

26. Mills, No. 994.

27. Phares, 20-21, 34, 43, 135, 208.

28. Richebourg Williams, trans. and ed., *Fleur de Lys and Calumet: Being the Pénicaut Narrative* (Baton Rouge, 1953).

would also seem that St. Denis' acceptance in the native community had a much more personal basis—a basis that Pénicaud obviously ignored in his efforts to endow St. Denis with super-human attributes. Feet of clay would have ill-suited the image this chronicler painted of a divine and glorious idol, and subsequent biographers have reproduced too closely the Pénicaud portrait.

The French-Canadians who laid the foundations of the Louisiana colony were both condemned and praised, by their contemporaries, on two particular counts: the convenient alliances which they formed within the Indian villages, and the friendship and goodwill that most of them concurrently generated between themselves and the native population. St. Denis appears to have been no exception. However, he was also in a far greater position of leadership than most of his fellow countrymen; thus the alliance—and attending goodwill—that he appears to have formed in the Natchitoches nation would also have served as a basis upon which to build a far more significant political relationship.