
Mother, Thy Name is *Mystery!* Finding the Slave Who Bore Philomene Daurat

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Research on slave women involves a number of particular problems, the worst of which can center upon NAME. Rarely are these problems solved by “look ups” or index searches that focus on the specific name of a freedman, slave, or master. Success in tracing slave females requires the researcher to think far more broadly and dig much more deeply.

Mothers. White, black, or Indian. Slave or free. Whatever their race or legal status, whatever the name given for them in the public record or the family story, their identities often remain a mystery. Surnames, if and when known in most of the western world, are likely to point to male connections—husbands, fathers, and owners—rather than to mothers. Small wonder it is that every genealogical chart has so many Mary Does, Elisabeth Blanks, or counterparts of no name at all.

How does a researcher lift the veil of modesty, disregard, neglect, secrecy, or shame behind which history hides so many mothers? Every case is truly unique, but the genealogist who voraciously studies the techniques others have found successful, who reconstructs the stage on which the enigmatic woman played out her role, and seeks out the details of not just her life but those of all the characters in her drama will likely have a sporting chance of someday placing her, as a girl-child, in her own mother's arms. But then, of course, the search begins again.

For researchers whose families speak or hint of slavery in their distant past, Philomene and her mother should offer hope. For those of any culture, they offer methods. For others who seek a better understanding of America's heritage, they represent a tale that is often told in stereotype but too-seldom documented in raw, specific detail.

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THE MEMORY

Within the Billes family of central Louisiana, the legendary mother had no name. She was maybe white, maybe mulatto,¹ maybe Creole,² maybe slave. Descendants in the twentieth century had heard only that “before the war” she cooked for a rich man named Narcisse Fredieu and had two girls. One was Elizabeth, known as “Aunt Bet.” The other was their grandmother whose name was something of a problem in and of itself—*Phelman* (or *Fellerman*) *Door Rod*, phonetically rendered. When the girls were young, the elders reported, a smallpox epidemic struck. When young Phelman recovered, Old Fredieu told her that her mother and her sister were dead. A slave man wanted to marry her, but Fredieu sold him off “because he wanted her for himself.” And he got her. Even though he had a wife and a “white lady friend” already—so went the family story—Phelman bore his children. Six of them. Then, “after he used up most of her life, he bought land and moved her and the children on it.” There at her new site near Aloha Landing, on the Red River in present Grant Parish, she found her sister and her mother living nearby. Aunt Bet and her children (Albert, Jeron, and others), the family remembered. The mother’s name, no one recalled.³

THE VERIFICATION

Despite the creative spelling of the name, Philomene Daurat was easy enough to follow in the censuses of adjacent Grant and Natchitoches Parishes from 1910

1. The term *mulatto* has both precise and generic meanings that often are misdefined today. The French of Louisiana historically used it in the same sense that it was coined by Spanish and Portuguese in the Americas, to represent a person who was exactly one-half Negro and one-half white. All three of these New World empires had other terms that denoted different percentages of racial admixture. In Anglo-America, the term was used in a generic sense to mean anyone of visibly mixed black-white ancestry. (The directive issued by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in 1870 expresses the Anglo-American definition: “The word [mulatto] is here generic, and includes quadroons, octoroons, and all persons having any perceptible trace of African blood.” See *Twenty Censuses: Population and Housing Questions, 1790–1980* [Washington: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1979], 18.) Several genealogical dictionaries, online and in print, unfortunately misdefine the term as someone with one white parent and one black parent. To the contrary, historians who study the issue have concluded that most mulattoes encountered in historic records had parents who were mulattoes themselves and were generations removed from the actual black-white union. For the most technical study of mulatto slaves, see Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), particularly 132–33, and *Time on the Cross: Evidence and Methods—A Supplement* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1974). For free mulattoes, see Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), particularly 33. For contrasting studies on the origins of mulattoes in French Louisiana and Anglo-American culture, see Gary B. Mills, *The Forgotten People: Cane River’s Creoles of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), and Mills, “Miscegenation and the Free Negro in Antebellum ‘Anglo’ Alabama: A Reexamination of Southern Race Relations,” *Journal of American History* 68 (June 1981): 16–34.

2. The term *Creole*, in French, Spanish, and Portuguese society, referred to anyone born in the colonies of Old World ancestry. It did not denote any specific race or ethnic mixture. Historically in Louisiana, a creole of mixed race was called a *Creole de couleur* or *Creole of color*. Late in the twentieth century, that distinction was more or less abandoned.

3. As told to Lalita Tademy by older relatives. Elizabeth’s (Aunt Bet’s) children were said to be Albert Jewery (by first husband); and Jeron, Clifton, Wilmor, Luevenia, and Mary (by a later husband, “Mr. Napoleon.”) Albert and Jeron are mentioned above because they will figure into Philomene’s identification. For privacy, other living members of the family will not be named herein.

(which gives her age as seventy) back through 1870 (which cites it as twenty-eight). In every year, one or more of her known children shared her home, providing continuum to the identification. From the four surviving enumerations, basic family details could be reconstructed:⁴

Daurat, Philomene: mulatto,⁵ born in Louisiana, November 1838 (var. 1840, 1842)
 mother of ten children; six children living in 1900
 father born in France or Louisiana; mother born in Louisiana

Children:

Fredieu, Emelie:	mulatto, born in Louisiana, May 1861 (var. 1860, 1862)
" Eugene	" " " April 1866
" Nicolas	" " " April 1872
" Henry	" " " [—?] 1875
" Joseph	" " " Oct. 1875 (var. Dec. 1877)
" Matthew	" " " Nov. 1880

for all: father born in Louisiana; mother born in Louisiana

“Mother” living with Philomene in 1900:

DeNegre, Suzette: black, born in Louisiana, March 1816
 three children born; two children living in 1900
 father born in Georgia; mother born in Louisiana

NAME ANALYSIS

DeNegre

A mother and a name, easily “discovered” but meaning little in and of itself. The area in which they resided—rural plantation land sprawling across the Red River that divided the old parish of Natchitoches from the postwar parish of Grant—never had a DeNegre family. The surname Suzette had taken for herself was merely French for *black*. As a phonetic possibility or a red herring: a relatively

4. 1870 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, population schedule, Ward 9, Cloutierville Post Office, p. 13, dwelling and family 4; National Archives and Records Administration [NARA] micropublication M593, roll 513. 1880 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, population schedule, p. 691A, Ward 10, Supervisor’s District [SD] 2, Enumeration District [ED] 36, sheet 35, unnumbered families; NARA T9, roll 453. 1900 U.S. census, Grant Parish, population schedule, p. 209A, Ward 6, SD 4, ED 66, sheet 9A, dwelling 161, family 165; NARA T623, roll 565. 1910 U.S. census, Grant Parish, population schedule, p. 139A, Ward 6, SD 3, ED 63, sheet 10, dwelling and family 102; NARA T624, roll 515. The 1900 and 1910 census readings were provided by Annette Womack, a professional genealogist of Winnfield, Louisiana.

5. The 1870 and 1910 censuses cite Philomene and her children as “mulatto.” In 1880 and 1900, the censuses cite them as “black.” A photograph exists of Philomene’s eldest daughter, Emelie Fredieu, and Emelie’s Billes children (whom the 1900 census also calls “black”); all appear white. The ambiguity of the census data lies in the instructions given to census marshals and the prejudices that some harbored. In 1870, enumerators were given three options: white, black, or mulatto, with the latter to include “all persons having any perceptible trace of African blood,” who were not visibly black. In 1880 the same instructions applied; but the enumerator of Philomene’s ward, an Anglo American, ignored the mulatto option and labeled everyone black or white. In 1900, the Census Bureau’s instructions were to use “black” for every one of Negro descent; but in 1910, “mulatto” was again allowed. See *Twenty Censuses*, 18, 22, 33, 42.

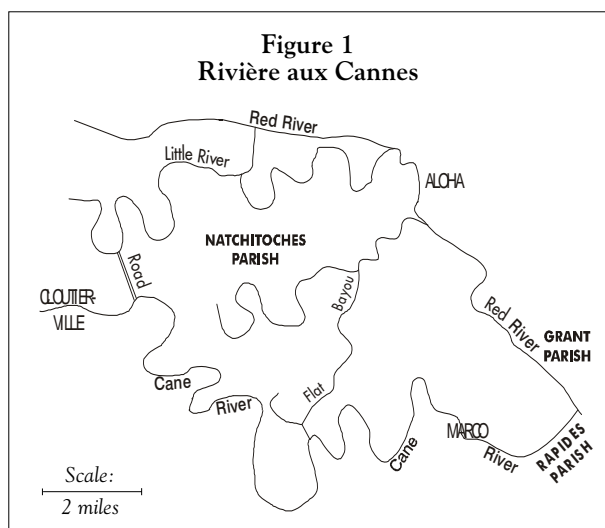
Weighing the census instructions, the photographic evidence, and the fact that Philomene’s father is given a birthplace of “France” in 1900, research proceeded on the assumption that her father was indeed white and she was a mulatto.

common given name among females in colonial and antebellum Natchitoches was *Marie des Neiges*, which translates as Mary of the Snows—a reference to a miracle attributed to the Virgin Mary. Some emancipated slaves did take their mother or father’s given name as their surname, but they rarely took *Des Neiges*.

To aggravate the problem, the *given* name stated for Philomene’s mother, a diminutive of *Susanne*, was the sixth-most-common name given to Catholic girls in the Natchitoches region during the era of Suzette’s birth and childhood.⁶ Moreover, any hopes for finding her baptism on the basis of the precise month and year of birth stated in the 1900 census could be quickly squelched. Presuming that she was a native of the region, no *Susanne* or *Suzette* with corresponding birth data appears among the contemporary registrations.⁷

Daurat, Dauriat, Derat, Dorald

Spelling variants are to be expected in all historic records—especially censuses. They are exceedingly common in an area such as this one, in which the politically appointed census marshals were likely to be of Anglo stock while much of the population was rooted in another culture. Of the four variants, odds seem to favor *Daurat*, the version found in 1870. Not only is that census the earliest known for Philomene, but its enumerator was a well-educated young notary of the same age, born and reared in her neighborhood, who knew all the families and spoke French as his native tongue. That census places “Philomene Daurat” in Ward 9, amid a stretch of families who had settled below Cloutierville in the south-eastern corner of the parish. There was a watery “island” of land between Red River and Cane River — which was, itself, an old bed of the Red. To the native French, the whole area was loosely called *Rivière aux Cannes*. (See figure 1.) There *neighborhood context* would set the first major stepping stone in the path to identifying Philomene’s mother.



6. Statistics are calculated from 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), index pages 405–81. This set of records represents all the surviving baptismal records for that time and place. By far the most-common name given to Catholic females of all races was, of course, *Marie*. The next five, in order of popularity, were *Louise*, *Jeanne*, *Françoise*, *Rose*, and *Susanne*.

7. *Ibid.*

STEP 1:

Place ancestor in neighborhood context.

As a rule, the best clues to a person's identity are to be found in the earliest known place of residence. The first exercise in Philomene's case—a comparison of the 1870 and 1880 census data—upholds the tradition that she moved from one neighborhood to another after her childbearing years. Those two returns place her in the same part of Rivière aux Cannes; even though ward lines had been redrawn, her neighbors remained constant. Her last known child was born in November 1880. The next surviving census (1900) and the last enumeration made in her lifetime (1910), place her in Grant Parish, Ward 6. The parish lines had not changed; Philomene had moved. Also, the 1870 census places her just two pages from one Narcisse Fredieu—the name of the man said to have fathered her children and the 1880 return (on which Narcisse does not appear) identifies her children as Fredieus. However, Narcisse was not the only white Fredieu male in the neighborhood.

Putting a troublesome ancestor into neighborhood context, however, requires more than simply searching for names already known to be connected. The neighbors of an ancestor, in that earliest place of residence, frequently include kin *not yet known*; and those unfamiliar surnames provide evidence and clues to follow. For Philomene, the 1880 data was intriguing but frustrating. Not only did the enumerator ignore the “mulatto” color category, and not only did he make rampant errors obvious to those who know the community, but he also omitted all dwelling and family numbers. His return makes absolutely no demarcation between households. On table 1, which extracts the census data for the immediate neighborhood, five points are particularly notable about individuals whose surnames were of no known connection at this point:

1. On both sides of the Dorald-Fredieu cluster appear individuals named *Jackson*—Suzette, 66; John, 72; and John's wife *Doralisse*, 71.
2. *Suzette* was the given name of the mother who lived with Philomene in 1900—although the name appears there as *Suzette DeNegre*, rather than *Suzette Jackson*. Whether the 1880 *Suzette* shared Philomene's dwelling or lived next door is indeterminable from the data.
3. Philomene's sister Elizabeth is said to have had a son named *Albert*, her first born. Just one name from *Suzette* is an *Elizabet* and son *Albert*.
4. Philomene's neighbors named *Pauché* and *Brosset*, all farmers, serve as convenient “place markers” for her. Luc Pauché (var. Poché) was a well-connected farmer prior to the Civil War, who wed Azelie Brosset and settled amid her family.⁸
5. The surnames *Derbanne* and *Rachal* should also be kept in mind.

8. Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches Church Marriages, 1818–1850: Translated Abstracts from the Registers of St. François des Natchitoches* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Mills Historical Press, 1985), no. 475. For more on Poché and this community, see Edwin C. Bearss, ed., and Eugene Watson Somdall, trans., *A Louisiana Confederate: Diary of Felix Pierre Poché* (Natchitoches: Louisiana Studies Institute, 1972).

Table 1
1880 Neighborhood of Philomene Daurat (Ward 10)

* Grant, R., white, male, 60, father, married, farmer, can't read or write,[†] La., La., La. [*and family*]
[*Skip approximately 10 families of non-landowning laborers*]

Guoyrie [Guillory], Louis, black, male, 28, father, married, laborer, La., La., La.
" Roselia, black, female, 24, wife, married, laborer, La., La., La.
" Abraham, black, male, 8, son, single, La., La., La.
" Rosa, black, female, 3, daughter, single, La., La., La.
Smith, Henry, black, male, 30, [no marital status], laborer, La., La., La.
Morton, Lily, black, female, 22, divorced, laborer, La., La., La.
" Idolph, black, male, 5, son, single, La., La., La.
" Henry, black, male, 3, son, single, La., La., La.
" Adolphe, black, male, 1, son, single, La., La., La.
Jones, James, black, male, 70, father, married, blacksmith, La., La., La.
" Henriette, black, female, 80, wife, married, La., La., La.
Purnell, Isaac, black, male, 23, father, married, laborer, La., La., La.
" Elisabet, black, female, 22, wife, married, La., La., La.
" Albert, black, male, 7, son, single, La., La., La.
Hubner, Alfred, white, male, 76, widowed, laborer, can't read or write,[†] France, France, France
Jackson, Suzette, black, female, 66, widowed, laborer, La., La., La.
DORALD, PHILOMENU, black, female, 40, married, laborer, La., La., La.
FREDIEU, EMELIE, black, female, 20, daughter, married, laborer, La., La., La.
" ANGELIQUE, black, female, 1, daughter, single, La., La., La.
FREDIEU, EUGENE, black, male, 14, son, single, laborer, can't read or write,[†] La., La., La.
" NICOLAS, black, male, 8, son, single, La., La., La.
" HENRY, black, male, 5, son, single, La., La., La.
" JOSEPH, black, male, 2, son, single, La., La., La.
Jackson, John, black, male, 72, father, laborer, Virginia, Virginia, Virginia
" Doralisse, black, female, 71, wife, Virginia, Virginia, Virginia
Guirri [Guillory], Atenase, black, male, 54, widowed, La., La., La.
" Adeline, black, female, 24, married, La., La., La.
Lacour, Marzelite, white, female, 26, married, laborer, La., La., La.
" Utah, white, male, 1, son, single, La., La., La.
" Caspari, white, male, 10/12, son, single, La., La., La.
Vercher, Edmond, white, male, 18, single, laborer, La., La., La.
Rachall, Lestage, white, male, 26, single, laborer, La., La., La.
Derbanne, Marguerite, white, female, 55, widowed, laborer, La., La., La.
Garcie, Louisa, white, female, 22, widowed, laborer, La., La., La.
" Joseph, white, male, 2, single, La., La., La.
Pauché, Ceasar, white, male, 20, father, married, laborer, La., La., La.
" Zelina, white, female, 22, wife, married, laborer, can't read or write,[†] La., La., La.
" Luc, white, male, 2/12, son, single, La., La., La.
" Marie, white, female, 2/12, daughter, single, La., La., La.
Gallien, Jana, white, female, 40, divorced, La., La., La.
Pauché, Luc, white, male, 60, father, married, farmer, blind, can't read or write,[†] La., La., La.
" Edward, white, male, 35, father, married, laborer, can't read or write,[†] La., La., La.
Brosset, Albert, white, male, 18, single, laborer, La., La., La.
Brown, Elias, white, male, 30, father, married, laborer, can't read or write,[†] La., La., La.
" Martha, white, female, 30, wife, married, laborer, La., La., La.
" Alfred, white, male, 6, son, single, La., La., La.
" Jennie, white, female, 4, daughter, single, La., La., La.
Brosset, Elutterre, white, male, 72, married, laborer, can't read or write,[†] La., La., La.

* Grant's plantation lay in the "point" between Grant, Natchitoches, and Rapides parishes. On figure 2, it appears as the small, white triangle immediately adjacent to N. Fredieu's land.

† The enumerator asserted illiteracy for all who could not read or write *English*. Hubner, in 1870, was actually a schoolteacher in this same neighborhood. Grant, too, was literate; in fact, his eldest daughter had already wed the son of Louisiana's reconstruction-era Gov. James Madison Wells. See Kingstone Eversull et al, *Descendants of Richard Grant of Louisiana, 1818–1885* (Baton Rouge: P.p., 1993), 5, 7.

Playing devil's advocate with this evidence seems to discredit one family tradition: the story that (a) Narcisse lied to Philomene about the death of her mother and sister; and (b) she "discovered" them after Narcisse ended their relationship, bought her land in Grant Parish, and moved her to their neighborhood. If Suzette Jackson and Elisabet Purnell—who are listed with Philomene in 1880—are indeed her mother and sister, then Philomene lived by or with them in Fredieu's own neighborhood there at Rivière aux Cannes.

One major issue regarding Philomene is left entirely unanswered by the federal census returns that name her: *where was she before 1870?* Did she live as free, under some unknown surname or in some other place? Or was she a slave—human "property" whose "owner" needs to be identified?

STEP 2:

Study the male to whom this female is attached: Fredieu

Narcisse Fredieu was born at Rivière aux Cannes on 15 April 1825 to the informal marriage of Pierre Edouard Fredieu and Marie Elisabeth *Derbanne*. The word *informal* carries an explanation crucial to understanding the region and the actions of its people. Natchitoches was the western outpost of the Louisiana colony. As a civil parish (county) of the new state of Louisiana, it comprised ten thousand square miles, most of it uninhabited. The bounds of the civil parish were also those of the religious parish—which had only one church, situated in the village of Natchitoches, and (after 1816) one mission chapel twenty-five miles away at Rivière aux Cannes. Because the Catholic Church had barely a presence in the United States when Congress purchased Louisiana in 1803, there were too few priests to assume pastoral care of the huge, newly added, Catholic population on the country's distant frontier. Not until 1817 was the diocese of Louisiana reorganized; and another dozen years would pass before there were sufficient priests to provide even one for the ten thousand square miles of Natchitoches. During these years, curates from elsewhere occasionally came into the area to administer sacraments and perform mass—often enough to leave behind some three thousand records—but their presence was spotty.⁹

In the early years of the American regime, with its new law requiring bridal couples to first purchase a civil license at the courthouse, visiting clerics performed few marriage ceremonies. A priest from Avoyelles visited Rivière aux Cannes in Spring 1825, but the young couples had no notice of his coming. None had already made the 25- to 40-mile trek to the parish courthouse, to have a license handy. That fall, Bishop Louis Dubourg and his assistant, Father Aristide Anduze, rode horseback through Rivière aux Cannes, headed for the upper reaches of the parish. In their wake (probably by pirogue) went the twenty-two-year old Edouard and the eighteen-year old Elisabeth. While the priests continued

9. See Roger Baudier, *The Catholic Church in Louisiana* (1939; reprinted n.p.: Louisiana Library Association, n.d.), 280–82, for historical background. The surviving 1800–26 records (from a fire-damaged Register 5) have been published in Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800–1826*, previously cited.

northward into settlements above Natchitoches, the couple stopped at the parish courthouse. There they bought a license and asked the judge to perform a civil ceremony that would legitimize their children under Louisiana's law. The infants were Augustin, aged two years, and Narcisse, six months. Two weeks later, when Dubourg and Anduze rode back downriver, Edouard and Elisabeth presented their babes for baptism and, presumably, themselves for the nuptial blessing.¹⁰

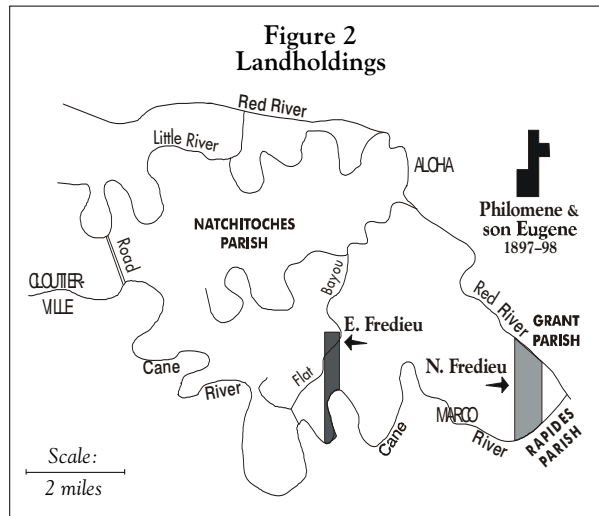
Those two infants were grown men before Rivière aux Cannes had a resident priest. Even then the new parish of St. Jean Baptiste de Cloutierville would sprawl across some 150 square miles, most of it hills and the rest of it low-lying plantations laced with bayous that often overflowed. That lowland is the area depicted in figure 1 as Rivière aux Cannes. For families who lived outside a two-mile-or-so radius of the village of Cloutierville, the formalities of religion were often replaced by "make do" situations, similar to that of Edouard and Elisabeth, until the twentieth century when modern transportation overcame nature's obstacles.

In Narcisse's youth, the Fredieus were among those who counted their blessings if they saw a minister twice or thrice a year. About the time of Edouard's marriage, he purchased 390 acres of mostly uncleared land a dozen or so miles below the village of Cloutierville, a tract legally identified as Sections 70 and 71 in Township 6 north, and adjacent Section 44 in Township 7 north, both in Range 4 west.¹¹ (See figure 3.) The modestly prosperous plantation he developed there remained the seat of the family residence. After Cloutierville earned parish status and a priest in 1849, the Fredieus periodically journeyed into the village for mass and brought their slave infants for baptism; but if Elizabeth bore other children herself, they arrived before 1849 and did not survive until the next pastoral visit. At Edouard's death in 1857, his only heirs—Elizabeth and their two sons, Augustin

10. Ibid. For the civil marriage and legitimation, see Natchitoches Parish Conveyances, 20: 21–22. The original church registrations cannot be found. A tableau of all prior baptisms compiled in 1850 (see Register 19, St. François Church) carries entries for the christening of Narcisse and Augustin Fredieu on 29 October 1825, citing entries 198 and 199 for the year 1825. The table's entries indicate that much of the original was illegible, and they misattribute the baptisms to Rev. [Jean Emile] Martin, the priest from Avoyelles who visited in April 1825. Only a few original baptismal entries from 1825 have survived (see Register 6, St. François), and these do not include the Fredieus. The pastoral rounds of Dubourg and Anduze, who baptized nearly 150 children in September and October, can be retraced by anyone familiar with where the families lived. The same can be said for the visits of Father Martin, whose records of this period are published in Alberta Rousseau Ducote, *Early Baptism Records: St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church, 1824–1844, Avoyelles Parish* (Mansura: St. Paul's Church, 1982), and are also recorded in *Registre de la Chapelle de Cloutierville, No. 1, 1825–1829; Whites, Free People of Color, and Slaves, unpaginated, date of 23 May 1825, St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Cloutierville*. The registers of St. François des Natchitoches are held by its successor church, Immaculate Conception, Natchitoches.

11. Land Entry Book 1: 6, 17, Office of the Clerk of Court, Natchitoches. This source gives no date for the purchases, but identifies 337.39 of his acres as part of the U.S. private land claim of Dorothée Monet, who settled the tract prior to 1803 and died about 1820. The parish conveyances and succession (estate) files do not include a transfer from her to Fredieu. In that society, the deed could have been drafted by a notary whose files are no longer extant. The Bureau of Land Management database <www.glorerecords.gov> does not identify Edouard as the original land entrant for these tracts. Regarding the peculiarly large section numbers in a public-land state, where each township should have only 36 sections: farms that were settled prior to U.S. acquisition of the territory had been surveyed under the metes and bounds system; hence those areas frequently have numerous irregularly shaped and numbered tracts within the rectangular-survey system.

and Narcisse—settled his affairs amicably, without hiring a lawyer to probate his succession (estate). They sold enough property to pay the debts; then Narcisse bought a tract seven to eight miles further downriver—one that would provide the family a landing on Red River’s new channel, for more convenient shipping of crops.¹² As figure 2 shows, that move also placed him just below the spot where Philomene would settle.



As for the tradition that Narcisse bought Grant Parish land for Philomene and moved her there: his involvement remains undocumented but is not improbable. The 1880 census identifies Philomene and her children as laborers in an area utterly devastated by the “late war.” Few of its laboring-class families would improve their fortunes until well into the twentieth century. Yet, she and her eldest son prospered. In April 1897 Eugene Fredieu bought 159.35 acres of public land across Red River in Grant Parish; and the following April, Philomene herself bought an adjacent tract of identical size.¹³ As figure 2 shows, they did not stray far from Narcisse—just a short horseback ride away.

The traditional account of Narcisse Fredieu’s love life is equally probable, although documentation is also sparse. The censuses of 1850–70 couple him with two different females: one Tranquilline in 1850, and Arsene Derbanne in 1860.¹⁴ No church or civil marriage record has been found for him in the parishes that line

12. 1850 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, population schedule, p. 58B, dwelling and family 1058 (Edward Fredieu, \$15,000 property); NARA M 432, roll 233. Also Natchitoches Parish Conveyances, 51: 361–62; and 53: 288–89.

13. Eugene Fredieu, Accession/Serial no. LA0850____.171, BLM Serial # LA NO S/N, Doc. no. 2753, Misc. Doc. No. 5115, for NW of Section 12, Township 7 north, Range 4 west; and Philomene Daurat, Accession/Serial no. LA0850____.298, BLM Serial no. LA NO S/N, Doc. no. 2863, Misc. Doc. no. 5271, for SE of NW, E of SW, and NW of SE, Section 1, Township 7 north, Range 4 west.

14. 1850 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, population schedule, p. 59B, dwelling and family 1079 (Narcisse Fredieu; no property); and slave schedule, roll 244. 1860 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, population schedule, p. 493, dwelling and family 568–569 (Narcisse Fredieu; \$4,000 personal property; \$6,450 real estate); and slave schedule, roll 429. 1870 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, population schedule, p. 436B, Ward 9, dwelling and family 4 (Narcisse Fredieu; \$4,000 and \$200). The 1860 census counts Narcisse Fredieu and “Arsinel” Derbanne as individuals living alone in separate but adjacent dwellings—an extremely improbable situation in their rural area. The enumerator overstated the number of dwellings visited. Throughout his jurisdiction he separated widowed mothers and daughters and other individuals who are otherwise proved to occupy the same dwelling. Arsene was the widowed, younger sister of Narcisse’s mother; see Arsene Derbanne to Edouard Fredieu, Cane River Collection, roll 2, folder 407 (doc. 1), Historic New Orleans Collection [Museum and Archives], New Orleans.

Red River, although the 1850 census reports that he had married Tranquilline within the year and an 1868 deed refers to his late wife (and his mother's cousin) *Astasie Derbanne*, who had died childless.¹⁵ Family records also assert his marriage to one Elizabeth Penn; if so, she, too, was a cousin—daughter of his late wife's sister, Marie C. Derbanne, who wed William Penn.¹⁶

To evaluate: Narcisse Fredieu spent his life in the neighborhood in which he was born. He was prosperous, though not *rich* as tradition asserts. In a parish that documents thousands of slave transactions, he left no record of a purchase or a sale—not at the courthouse and not among local notarial records. The parish priest after 1849 baptized hundreds of area slaves, but the registers mention no slave mother, child, or godparent belonging to him; the few Fredieu slaves on the 1860 slave schedule seem to be inherited from Edouard without benefit of succession proceedings. He obviously appreciated female companionship, but he is named as the father of no infant presented at the baptismal font. The censuses place him very near Philomene's dwelling in 1870, but the conventional records recorded under his name never once place him in Philomene's company.

Assuming that tradition correctly identifies him as the father of her children, one might marvel that their twenty-year affair did not incite racial tensions during those reactionary postwar years. However, the region's long neglect by organized religion had created an unusually tolerant climate. White male concubinage with free women of color, or with unattached slave women, was not rare at Rivière aux Cannes. Most such situations were long-term, even lifelong, relationships arranged by bachelors or widowers.¹⁷ But theirs was a patriarchal society that saw little harm in a man's "living like Abraham," so long as he supported the children he begat. Those whose wives, like Sarah and the wives of Narcisse, failed to bear fruit, sometimes turned to servant women for their progeny. And some wives who had been very fruitful did not "suffer humiliation" at the thought of sharing their husbands. As one native of the region, who saw similar relationships around her during her girlhood in the early twentieth century, later explained: "Did a wife *mind*? After her insides were torn up by having too many babies too fast? No, she didn't mind at all if her husband found a nice colored lady to have those babies instead."¹⁸ It is unlikely that the thoughts of Narcisse or his wives have been recorded on this subject; but the tradition recounted by Philomene's offspring does fit the neighborhood mold.

15. Natchitoches Parish Conveyances, 59: 332, for Madame Florentine Derbanne, wife of William Clement Davis, to Narcisse Fredieu, widower of her sister A(na)stasie; relationships are stated therein.

16. Family records of Lalita Tademy; also Natchitoches Parish Successions, 10: 11–12.

17. The spot marked *Marco* on figures 1 and 2, represents two cases at point. The community's wealthy founder, the Austrian Marco Givanovich, never married but reared a family by a slave woman. His protégé, a younger Austrian immigrant named Antonio Marinovich, formed a lifelong union with Marco's mulatto daughter and they inherited the Givanovich fortune. Both unions are documented by numerous entries throughout the registers of St. John the Baptist Church, Cloutierville, including an illegal deathbed marriage for the Marinoviches on 15 January 1883 (Marriages, 1847–1890: no. 493, St. John the Baptist Church).

18. Interview conducted by Elizabeth Shown Mills in 1969; the source prefers to remain confidential.

STEP 3:

Identify likely sources of the surname Philomene used: Daurat

Other studies of family and community life along Red River have established a consistent pattern: when an ethnically mixed child was born to a black mother then grew up using a surname previously used only by whites of the region, the child's descent from that white family or white male usually can be established beyond a reasonable doubt.¹⁹ Thus, a search was launched for a white male of the surname *Daurat*, who closely associated with Auguste Fredieu's family or social circle. The man was not hard to find.

Eugène Daurat was a native of France, as census records report for Philomene's father. He left no local record naming the town of his birth; and no known ship rolls document his arrival or departure. He came and went unheralded, but he spent the years 1840–58 at Rivière aux Cannes. His first appearance in the parish prophesied the outcome of the research problem.²⁰ However—and it is invariably the case—much investigation was necessary before his “first appearance” was discovered. It was the *associations* detailed within the records labeled with his name that generated an *hypothesis* leading eventually to the discovery of his more-obscure “first appearance” in the records created by unknown others.

Daurat was about twenty-seven when he arrived at Cloutierville and went into merchandising.²¹ He found a congenial society there, with a fair number of compatriots who had come to Red River in the 1830s and 1840s as merchants, lawyers, teachers, and sometimes planters. Theirs was also a society that would be morally tested in 1848, when France forbade any citizens on foreign soil to own or purchase a slave, under penalty of losing their French citizenship.²² Confronted by that litmus test, Daurat would fail—but not because of greed.

In his eighteen years at Rivière aux Cannes, Daurat prospered; the 1850 census reports the value of his merchandising operation at \$3,000. He rarely journeyed to the parish courthouse at Natchitoches to leave records of his dealings, but he

19. In addition to the numerous cases chronicled in *The Forgotten People*, other area concubinages are documented in Gary B. Mills, “Monet-Rachal: Backtracking a Cross-Racial Heritage in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *The American Genealogist* 65 (July 1990): 129–42; Elizabeth Shown Mills, “(de) Mezières, Trichel, Grappe: A Study of Tri-Caste Lineages in the Old South,” *The Genealogist* 6 (Spring 1985): 3–84; and Gary B. Mills and Elizabeth Shown Mills, “Louise Marguerite: St. Denis' Other Daughter,” *Southern Studies* 16 (Fall 1977): 321–28. For attitudes, see Gary B. Mills, “Piety and Prejudice: A Colored Catholic Community in the Antebellum South,” in Jon L. Wakelyn and Randall M. Miller, eds., *Catholics in the Old South: Essays on Church and Culture* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1983), 171–94; 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: Essays Commemorating the Bicentennial of the Establishment of the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas*, Glenn R. Conrad, ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Historical Association, 1992), 30–47; and Elizabeth Shown Mills, “Quintanilla's Crusade, 1775–1783: 'Moral Reform' and Its Consequences on the Natchitoches Frontier,” forthcoming in *Louisiana History*, journal of the Louisiana Historical Association.

20. Inventory of the Succession of Louis Derbanne, Natchitoches Parish Successions, 13: 412–19.

21. 1850 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, population schedule, p. 56A, dwelling and family 998.

22. For more on this French decree and its application to French citizens on Red River, see *Louis Paul Cayer v. The United States*, case no. 388, French and American Claims Commission Files, Record Group 79, NARA.

regularly visited the local notary to buy, sell, and take mortgages.²³ Although his store appears to have been in Cloutierville, he left scant trace of himself in the village church, after the 1849 arrival of a full time pastor. One sole record, the following year, chronicles his appearance at the baptismal font with one Marie Adèle *Rachal*; together, they sponsored an infant daughter of Firmance Azenor Metoyer and his wife Des Neiges Elisida Dupré. All parties, except himself, were free Creoles *de couleur*.²⁴ Daurat never married, but the census taker who passed through in 1850 found the thirty-seven-year-old Daurat sharing a residence with a free woman of color named *Doralise Derbanne*, aged forty-three and a native of Louisiana.

Readers may recall both names this female bore, although those names have been separately presented in this paper.

DORALISE:

Philomene, in 1880, lived in or between households with two women of appropriate age to be her mother:

Jackson, Suzette, black, female, 66, widowed, laborer, La., La., La.

[Daurat, Philomene and family]

Jackson, John, black, male, 72, father, laborer, Virginia, Virginia, Virginia

" *Doralisse*, black, female, 71, wife, Virginia, Virginia, Virginia

Doralise, as a given name, is relatively rare along Red River in this period. Virtually every female who bore it can be attached to the Derbanne family.

DERBANNE:

The brief sketch this paper provides for Narcisse Fredieu associates him with four separate females of the surname Derbanne:

Derbanne, Elizabeth, wife of Edouard Fredieu—Narcisse's mother

Derbanne, Arsene—Narcisse's widowed aunt and housemate of 1860

Derbanne, Astasie—Narcisse's wife who died before 1868

Derbanne, Marie, sister of Astasie, mother of Elizabeth Penn—Narcisse's mother-in-law

Readers may also recall three other individuals who were Philomene's immediate neighbors in 1880 (all flagged in table 1):

Derbanne, Marguerite, white, female, 55, widowed [sister of Astasie and Marie, above]²⁵

Pauché, Luc, white, male, 60, father, married, farmer

Brosset, Albert, white male, 18, laborer; and Eluterre, white, male, 72, laborer

23. Extant notarial records from rural Louisiana are relatively rare. In 1973, a rare cache from Rivière aux Cannes and adjacent Isle Brevelle was discovered in an attic, acquired, and preserved by Robert B. DeBlieux of Natchitoches. Today they constitute the Cane River Collection at the Historic New Orleans Collection, where they are available—as unindexed, untranslated originals—on five rolls of microfilm. For Daurat, particularly see roll 2, folder 616 (docs. 1, 2); roll 3, folder 676 (doc. 1), folder 718 (doc. 2), folder 745 (doc. 1); roll 4, folder 1049 (doc. 1), folder 1052 (doc. 1), folder 1198 (doc. 1), folder 1319 (doc. 1), folder 1230, folder 1274; and roll 5, folder 1409. For records on Daurat at the parish courthouse, see Natchitoches Parish Conveyances, 43: 42; 49: 575; 52: 293; and Miscellaneous Records B: 221; C: 442; also *E. Daurat v. J. A. Metoyer*, District Court Suit 3939 (June 1847), bundle 181; all in Office of the Clerk of Court.

24. Baptisms of Free Negroes from 1847 to 1871: 14, entry 18, St. John the Baptist Church, Cloutierville.

25. Succession of Pierre Derbanne [III], Natchitoches Parish Successions, 10: 11–20.

The dwelling Eugene Daurat shared with Doralise Derbanne in 1850 was situated between, and just a few doors from, both Luc Poché and Pierre Brosset (who was father-in-law of Luc, great-grandfather of Albert, and uncle of Eluterre).²⁶ Indeed, the number of other overlapping families in these two neighborhoods—Eugene Daurat's of 1850 and Philomene Daurat's of 1880—leave no doubt that both resided at the same general spot.

In 1858, Eugene Daurat committed a deed out of the ordinary for himself. On 17 January, he apparently journeyed to the parish courthouse to file a deed by which he sold a slave. For \$1,650, he conveyed to his friend Henry Hertzog (a wealthy Cane River resident who had bought the Widow Louis Derbanne's plantation in 1851), "a negro man, age about 20, named Gerand." Daurat did not state when, where, or how he acquired this slave. Hertzog did not pay cash, the transaction merely states that he presented his note due 1 May.²⁷ At that point Daurat disappears from the parish records. Whether he stayed long enough to collect the debt is debatable. As more records materialized, it would become obvious that the transaction was a paper one only.

Daurat then left the parish and apparently the country, as well. As North-South tensions crescendoed in the late 1850s, more than a few French citizens who had sought their fortunes in Louisiana decided to return home before hostilities took their gains. Daurat likely did also—disregarding the fact that his ownership of the slave Gerand had legally cost him his French citizenship. After all, it was just one slave; who back home would know?

Daurat left many questions behind, as well as his name. Two are germane to this problem:

Where did Philomene fit into his life?

Culling the names of Daurat's associates from all his documents created a very lengthy worklist of area residents, rich and poor, white and free-nonwhite, and all with some French ancestry. Most were named *Derbanne*, *Rachal*, or *Metoyer*; or they were married to or closely related to Derbannes, Rachals, and Metoyers. Investigating them all turned up a number of Philomenes—of all ranks and shades—born within five years of the 1838–42 birth period attributed to Philomene Daurat by the censuses. But all the other Philomenes could be tracked and accounted for in extant records.

Who was Doralise Derbanne?

This question—or, rather, the search for an answer to it—would reveal much more about Eugene Daurat that would never have been discovered if the search had been limited to records conveniently indexed in his own name. Indeed, the search for Doralise, Eugene's companion, would eventually lead to Philomene herself.

26. Elizabeth Shown Mills, *From Chez Bienvenu to Cane River: Four Generations of the Pierre Brosset Family* (Gadsden, Alabama: P. p., 1981), particularly 19–20, 24–31, 46–49, 66–68.

27. Natchitoches Parish Conveyances, 51: 355–56.

STEP 4:

Identify the suspected father's female friend: Doralise Derbanne, f.c.l.

Doralise Derbanne, *femme de couleur libre*, as her name was often written to reflect her status, was herself a reflection of Cane River society. Ethnically mixed, she was moderately prosperous, a status that included having slaves of her own. She was religious, within the lifestyle that society permitted her class. But she ended her days in poverty, a consequence of the war that denuded her homeland, slaughtered its animals, and submerged the once-privileged and cultured class of free Creoles *de couleur* into the vastly larger mass of emancipated black field hands. Never, before that Anglo census taker of 1880 visited her household—and yes, she was Doralisse Jackson of that year—did any record apply the label *black* to Doralise. In their peculiarly stratified society, it was a label she would have rejected even though her yet-unknown mother may have been just that. Indeed, even a black mother there would have rejected the label *black* for her half-white child. Color did not represent *race* so much as *status*.

Doralise emerges in the records as a very young wife, mother, and co-owner of five tracts of land valued at \$3,193.34.²⁸ She was apparently just seventeen on 26 October 1824, when she and Philippe Valsin Dupré, *homme de couleur libre*, appeared before the parish judge under the same circumstances that Narcisse Fredieu's parents appeared the following fall. With no priest in the parish, she and Philippe had "cohabited," and their union had produced a daughter, Marie des Neiges Elisida, born 5 July of that year. They asked to be married civilly and to have this daughter legitimized.²⁹ The following May, when Father Martin ventured upriver from Avoyelles to administer sacraments at Rivière aux Cannes, he baptized that daughter—the same Des Neiges Elicida Dupré for whose child Eugene Daurat would be godfather in 1850.³⁰

Few couples in the parish of any ethnic background started married life with their financial advantages. Philippe was a quadroon, a child of the mulatto slave Adelaïde Mariotte by a white (but also ethnically mixed, being French, German, Indian, and Spanish) bachelor at Rivière aux Cannes, Joseph Dupré. On his deathbed in 1810, Dupré acknowledged his three children by Adelaïde, freed them all, bequeathed \$6,400 to his younger half-brother (his heir-at-law under Louisiana law), left a slave and other cash to Adelaïde, and specified that his remaining goods—plantation, slaves, livestock, etc.—should go to his three children. After his death, Adelaïde renounced her share in favor of her children and the executor proceeded to enact the terms of the will; but Dupré's stepfather filed suit to overturn it on the basis that such bequests to slaves was illegal. A local jury ruled for the children, the stepfather appealed to the state supreme court, and

28. Natchitoches Parish Conveyances, 21: 289.

29. Natchitoches Parish Conveyances, 15: 138, doc. 1.

30. Registre de la Chapelle de Cloutierville, No. 1, 1825–1829, date of 23 May 1825. For a genealogical outline of the descendants of Philippe and Doralise, as well as those of Philippe's brother Joseph Emanuel, see the Reopened Succession of Joseph Dupré [d. 1810; reopened 1900], Natchitoches Parish Succession file 2329.

the children lost. To assuage public opinion in the community, which was decidedly against him, the stepfather “generously” gave them \$5,000 and “several” slaves. But that was not the end of the matter. In 1830, when the youngest of the three children came of age, five of the most influential men of the parish—including a soon-to-be parish judge—went to court on their behalf to have the old decision overturned. This time, the outcome was drastically different. Philippe and his two siblings won an additional \$6,687, plus 5 percent interest from 3 May 1815. Compounded, the award amounted to some \$15,000.³¹

Doralise married Philippe before the case was settled, but they were not impoverished in the meanwhile. At about the time of their marriage, Philippe purchased those five tracts of land, valued at \$3,193.34, from the Cloutierville planter, Louis Derbanne.³² Whether Philippe had adequate resources of his own to finance the purchase is doubtful. The first payoff from his father’s estate, which would have had to support three children until they reached adulthood and split the leavings, could not have sufficed. (When Philippe’s more industrious brother wed shortly before the 1830 settlement, his marriage contract listed his assets as \$1,300³³—a substantial sum but less than half the value of the land young Philippe “bought.”)

What then was the source of the remaining funds? The name shared by Philippe’s wife and the deed’s grantor offers an obvious suggestion. Louis Derbanne was a well-to-do planter. Doralise Derbanne was a generation younger, not white, but free. When Doralise wed Philippe, the Sieur Derbanne was one of her three official witnesses. The 1830 census places the young couple next door to him. And a gender-age comparison of his slaves, as enumerated 1820–30, strengthens the supposition that he fathered Doralise and freed her and her mother in that decade. The 1830 slave list is missing one female of Doralise’s age and one female of a generation older, and it contains a free woman of color of corresponding age who was not free in the Derbanne household in 1820.³⁴

Doralise and Philippe’s marriage sank in the chasm that often divides wealth and happiness. They produced no other children. In 1844, she petitioned the district court for a divorce from Philippe on the grounds of cruelty. Her plea was granted. Philippe’s problems, in fact, were severe enough that the court appointed

31. *Philippe Valsain v. Cloutier*, Natchitoches Parish District Court Records, 3: 118–26.

32. The deed by which Sieur Derbanne conveyed this land to the new husband of Doralise Derbanne is problematic. It carries no date, and it was not recorded until 1835; see Natchitoches Parish Conveyances, 21: 289. However, the notary who drafted the document at Derbanne’s own home, 25 miles from the courthouse, was Emanuel Greneaux. In 1824–25, Greneaux was a Rivière aux Cannes notary; but he won the post of parish clerk in the town of Natchitoches in 1826, and became parish judge there in 1833. See *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northwest Louisiana* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Co., 1890), 299–300, whose details in this regard are supported locally by thousands of recorded documents. All points considered, Derbanne’s conveyance of the land to Dupré was far more likely done at the time of the 1824 marriage.

33. Marriage Contract of Emmanuel Dupré and Marie Marguerite Metoyer, Natchitoches Parish Miscellaneous Records, A: 48, doc. 457, Office of the Clerk of Court.

34. 1820 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, population schedule, p. 99, line 16; NARA M33, roll 31. 1830 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, p. 64, lines 6–7; NARA M 19, roll 44.

an administrator for his goods.³⁵ He would soon be dead, and Doralise would buy a small plantation of her own amid the wealthy Creole *de couleur* community at Isle Brevelle, immediately above Cloutierville.³⁶

The year 1849 began the second chapter in Doralise's life. On 30 April the Isle Brevelle notary visited her home and drew up a donation from her to her newly widowed daughter, granting Marie des Neiges Lisida all rights to Doralise's small plantation; the only named witness was Eugène Daurat.³⁷ Again on 22 May, the notary and a group of family and friends convened to draw up the daughter's contract of marriage with François Azenor Metoyer, one of Isle Brevelle's prosperous *hommes de couleur libres*. Acting on behalf of the bride were her "friends": a pair of French émigrés who had settled at Rivière aux Cannes, Dr. Jean Baptiste Chopin and "E. Daurat."³⁸ When the new couple's firstborn was presented for baptism a year later, the godfather was Eugène Daurat.³⁹

The 1 December 1850 visit made by the U.S. census marshal suggests an interpretation of these events. Doralise had given her land to her daughter and future son-in-law because she no longer planned to use it. She had moved downriver to make a new life with Daurat; but it would be one of short duration. On 7 January 1852, with the relationship still on the upswing, Doralise and Daurat visited the Cloutierville notary, where Daurat donated to her a tract of land on the left bank of Cane River, just below its juncture with Red River (i.e., just outside Cloutierville). But on 22 July 1856, they revisited the notary for Doralise to deed it back.⁴⁰ Daurat drops out of Cane River documents at that point, until his 1858 disposal of all his land and the one slave he had somehow acquired.

Chapter three of Doralise's life also mirrors that of other women of her caste whose finances were badly managed. The 1860 census places her in the village of Cloutierville, living with her minor grandson, Louis Vilaire Llorens, a shoemaker.⁴¹ She then drops from the records until her 1880 appearance as Mrs. John Jackson, when the census taker is yet again a newcomer to the parish, ill-equipped to interview French-speaking families. Thus, his return attributes to her and her parents the same birth data he gave for her ex-slave husband: Virginia, Virginia, and Virginia. It should have been *Louisiana, Louisiana, Louisiana*.

35. *Derbanne v. Dupré*, and *Woods and Middleton v. Emanuel Dupré*, Natchitoches Parish Vacant Successions (microfilmed), roll VS.10 (1844), unnumbered items, Clerk of Court's Office, Natchitoches.

36. Doralise Derbanne to daughter, Cane River Collection, roll 4, folder 1049 (doc. 1). Doralise's daughter had first wed a Metoyer cousin, Belisaire Llorens, on 19 March 1838, at age 14. See Mills, *Natchitoches Church Marriages*, no. 395.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Natchitoches Parish Conveyances, 37: 510.

39. Baptisms of Free Negroes from 1847 to 1871: 14, St. John the Baptist Church.

40. Natchitoches Parish Conveyances, 49: 608.

41. 1860 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, population schedule, Ward 10, p. 477A, dwelling and family 478–479. This census, which cites Doralise by her late husband's initials (i.e., "P. V. Dupree, widow") and her grandson as "L. V. Lorance," is the one that assigns everyone in a family unit, of a different surname, to a different dwelling. Common sense, economics, and the physical confines of that one-street village do not support the idea that a widow lived alone in one house while her 20-year-old single grandson lived in a different house next door.

Still, key questions remain unanswered. If one accepts the likelihood that (a) Philomene Daurat of 1880 is the daughter of Suzette Jackson, alias DeNegre, who was enumerated on one side of Philomene that year; while (b) Doralise (Derbanne) Jackson, the former companion of Eugène Daurat, was enumerated on her other side—then the two most obvious questions are these:

- What is the connection between Suzette and Doralise?
- Where was Philomene between her birth, 1838–42, and her emergence on the 1870 census?

The answer to the second question came from pursuing the man suspected of being the father of the companion of Philomene’s suspected father!

STEP 4:

Study slaveowners in the likely father’s social and business circle: Derbannes

The worklist of Eugène Daurat’s associates included some two dozen slaveowners of many surnames. All were researched before the project ended to eliminate possible alternatives or red herrings. But the prime candidate, once Doralise was identified, was her own suspected father, Louis Derbanne. Sieur Derbanne himself was of mixed race, albeit his was a different genetic mix. His grandfather, François Guyon *dit* Dion Despres d’Herbanne, was one of the Canadians who founded the Louisiana colony at the side of the more storied LeMoyne brothers, d’Iberville and Bienville. He was a minor official who came to Natchitoches to oversee the building of the post in 1716, possibly because his father was the partner—and his cousin, the wife—of Governor Antoine LaMothe de Cadillac (he who would be immortalized by the modern automobile). Or possibly he was sent away from Mobile because he had so scandalized church officials there during his tenure in charge of the colony’s royal storehouse on Dauphin Island. D’Herbanne’s offense was his concubinage with a young Indian girl he had purchased after a French raid on the Chitimachas tribe. Although the colonial church itself had no policy against mixed marriage, the outspoken priest at the Mobile capital deemed it an anathema. On the Natchitoches frontier, d’Herbanne eventually found a Spanish priest willing to wed him to Jeanne de la Grande Terre, as the Chitimachas girl was called. Civil officials of the colony described the Sieur d’Herbanne as a man faithful in all regards—apparently that included his church and his wife.⁴²

Prosperity came slowly on the Natchitoches frontier. Pierre Derbanne, the youngest son of Jeanne and François, belonged to the generation that made its fortune in skins—woodsmen-turned-planters who trapped, then traded furs for

42. The only documented biographies of the Sieur d’Herbanne that brings together the considerable evidence he left are the short pair by Elizabeth Shown Mills: “François (Guyon) Dion Desprès Derbanne: Premier Citoyen, Poste St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches,” *The Natchitoches Genealogist* 6 (October 1981): 1–9; and “François (Guyon) Dion Desprès Derbanne,” *A Dictionary of Louisiana Biography*, Glenn R. Conrad, ed., 2 vols. (Lafayette: Louisiana Historical Association, 1988), 1: 237–38.

slaves to help them clear and work the land the colony freely dispensed. Raw and rambunctious, they prospered but had access to few of life's luxuries. They were also the generation that moved their families out into the hinterlands, away from the daily influence of village life and parish priests. Their children, Louis's generation, came of age in the era of Eli Whitney, whose invention changed agricultural production from tobacco to cotton throughout the South and made wealth a realistic expectation for planters with a business sense.⁴³

Louis Derbanne had that gift. His brothers did not. But those brothers provided a wealth of links to cinch the identity of Philomene Daurat. A very abbreviated genealogical summary for three of the brothers, in the order of their birth, lays a framework for the remainder of this problem:

PIERRE DERBANNE JR.

Born 19 March 1753;⁴⁴ married 13 February 1783, Marie Louise Brevel, whose paternal grandmother had been a Caddo Indian.⁴⁵ The eldest of their many children, Pierre III, wed the French and Indian Marie Astasie Davion, 17 August 1807.⁴⁶ Their large family included four of the Derbanne females mentioned in connection with Philomene Daurat and Narcisse Fredieu: i.e., (1) *Marguerite Derbanne*, Philomene's neighbor of 1880; (2) *Marie Astasie Derbanne*, Narcisse's wife of the 1860s; (3) *Marie Florentine Derbanne*, wife of William C. Davis, who sold Narcisse her interest in Astasie's succession; and (4) *Marie C. Derbanne*, wife of William Penn, whose daughter Elizabeth was said to be Narcisse's last wife.⁴⁷

LOUIS DERBANNE

Born 4 August 1766 before his parents joined the exodus out to Isle Brevelle and Rivière aux Cannes; wed 9 November 1797, Marie Françoise Rachal,⁴⁸ who bore no children.

MANUEL DERBANNE

Born about 1777⁴⁹ at lower Isle Brevelle, married Marguerite Denis, 2 February 1804,

43. For Pierre Derbanne, see Elizabeth Shown Mills, "Pierre Guyon dit Derbanne," *A Dictionary of Louisiana Biography: Ten Year Supplement, 1988–1998*, Carl A. Brasseaux and James D. Wilson Jr., eds. (Lafayette: Louisiana Historical Association, 1999), 65–66.

For a study of this economic transition on Red River, see Elizabeth Shown Mills, "Family and Social Patterns on the Colonial Louisiana Frontier: A Quantitative Analysis, 1714–1803 (New College Thesis, University of Alabama, 1981), 47–93 (chapter 2). For the economic transition of the Derbannes in particular, see Succession of François d'Herbanne, box 1, folder 2, Natchitoches Parish Records, Louisiana State University Archives, Baton Rouge; Succession of Pierre Derbanne, doc. 2729, Colonial Archives, Office of the Clerk of Court, Natchitoches; and Succession of Marie Leclair [LeClerc], widow of Pierre Derbanne, folder 726, Melrose Collection, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Natchitoches.

44. *Diocese of Baton Rouge, Catholic Church Records, 1707–1769* (Baton Rouge: The Diocese, 1978), 165.

45. 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, 1977), no. 1065; Mlle. Brevel's French, German, and Indian heritage is traceable through numerous entries in this volume.

46. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800–1826*, no. 979.

47. Succession of Pierre Derbanne [III], Natchitoches Parish Successions, 10: 11–20.

48. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729–1803*, nos. 879, 3426; marriage contract of Louis Derbanne and Françoise Rachal, doc. 2812, Colonial Archives, Natchitoches.

49. 1787 census of Natchitoches, legajo 201, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Archivo General de Indias, Seville; translated and published in Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials: Censuses, Military Rolls, and Tax Lists, 1722–1803* (Chicago: Adams Press, 1981), 51.

and fathered the large family typical of his society.⁵⁰ Included were (1) *Marie Elisabeth*, born 1807, who married Edward Fredieu and produced Narcisse; (2) *Marie Arsene*, with whom Narcisse shared a dwelling in 1860; and (3) *Marie Oreline* (var. Aureline), born 1824 and baptized 22 May 1825 at Cloutierville by Father Martin on that same trip up from Avoyelles when he baptized the daughter of Derzeline Derbanne.⁵¹ Marie Oreline would soon lay her own stone in the path to finding Philomene's past.

As for Louis Derbanne, superficially viewed he appears to be a typical planter of his time and place; but a deeper probe reveals aberrations that might well include his fathering of Doralise about 1807. Louis bought his first slave years before his marriage in 1797, he inherited and bought more, and he steadily prospered until his death in 1840. During his first eight years of marriage, he and Françoise left a trail through the records, as a *couple*; Then Françoise, who had sponsored many infants at baptism prior to her marriage, dropped from sight. Louis continued to pursue the typical male activities of his class—seemingly never in the company of Françoise. By 1819 he had become the appointed civil justice along Rivière aux Cannes. But from 1806 until 1821, he did not bring even one slave to the baptismal font. The situation then abruptly reversed itself. From 1821 until Françoise's death in 1850, she sponsored many more children at the baptismal font; and every Derbanne slave named in their successions with an age denoting a birth in 1820 or later can be accounted for in the baptismal registers.⁵²

That span of years when the *Sieur Derbanne* failed to meet his community's expectations for the religious welfare of his charges proved critical in the search for Philomene's ancestry. Whatever transpired to cause the breach might also explain two of his actions involving slave females: his unrecorded manumission of Doralise (and probably her mother) between 1820 and 1824; and his draft of a will in 1830 in which he singled out three other slaves, all females, for freedom: "Jeanne, Negress; Marie Pamela, griffe [mixed black, Indian, and white], and Marie Apoline, mulatress." By the terms of that document, his three heirs who were to inherit after the death of his widow were to be his "godchildren and niece, Marie Aimé Lavespère, Seraphin Chaler, and *Marie Oreline Derbanne*."⁵³

There on the Derbanne plantation in December 1840, Eugène Daurat made his first known appearance, as one of the official witnesses to the appraisal of Derbanne's estate. The overseer whom Derbanne had hired in the 1830s, Luc Poché (Philomene's neighbor of 1880) continued to serve the widow; and both

50. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800–1826*, no. 954.

51. *Registre de la Chapelle de Cloutierville*, No. 1, 1825–1829: unpaginated entry of 22 May.

52. For the religious acts executed by Louis and Françoise, see Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, nos. 1539, 1576, 1588; Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800–1826*, nos. 59, 80, 109, 786, 958, 970, 995, 1004, 1035, 1053, 1450, 1858, 2313, 2849; Mills, *Natchitoches Church Marriages, 1818–1850*, nos. 24, 40, 43, 83, 94, 151, 186, 222, 305, 347, 460; *Registre de la Chapelle de Cloutierville*, No. 1, 1825–1829, numerous unpaginated and/or unnumbered entries; and Register 10, Baptisms of Slaves, 1831–1846, for 1833: 56, 1835: 63, 1838: 9–10, St. François Church. Derbanne's status as the community justice is documented in many local records such as the succession of Antoine Rachal (20 September 1817), *Natchitoches Parish Successions*, 2: 143–52.

53. *Natchitoches Parish Successions*, 13: 412–19, including will, inventory, and appraisalment.

Eugène Daurat and Narcisse Fredieu would appear repeatedly in matters relating to the estate and its heirs.⁵⁴ But the key documents explaining the Derbanne connection to Suzette and Philomene would take another decade to fall into place, with the last of them coming after the 1850 death of the Widow Derbanne:⁵⁵

28 DECEMBER 1840

Inventory of slaves of the late Louis Derbanne. Twenty-six are named, excluding the three to whom he bequeathed freedom. Those who remained enslaved included

Suzette, negress, 16, with child *Gerant*, 14 months \$1000⁵⁶

14 MAY 1843

Baptism of *Phylomene*, born 1 November 1841 to Marie Louise [sic], slave of Widow L. N. [Louis P.] Derbanne. Godparents: Louis Rachal and *Marie Doralise Derbanne*.⁵⁷

14 MAY 1850

Probate of Widow Louis Derbanne's will, naming Eugène Daurat as executor. Also mentioned is *Oreline*, her husband's niece, godchild, and legatee who had become the wife of Joseph Ferrier.⁵⁸

1-3 DECEMBER 1850

Enumeration of families residing within two miles of the Fredieu plantation (see figure 2), includes the following households:

- 1051 Wm. Case(y) and wife Arsene [Arsene Derbanne; the aunt who lived with Narcisse in 1860]
- 1052 *Joseph Ferrier* [an employee of no. 1054 below] and wife *Oreline*
- 1054 Marco Givanovich [plantation community marked *Marco* on figure 2]
- 1057 Edward and Elisabeth *Fredieu*, parents of *Narcisse*
- 1078 Arthemise Massippe, niece and heir of Widow Derbanne
- 1079 *Narcisse Fredieu*
- 1091 Marguerite Derbanne, Philomene's neighbor of 1880 (table 1)

5 FEBRUARY 1851

Auction, slaves of the late Widow Derbanne (consecutive entries):

Suzette, Negress, age 26, and child *Philomene*, mulatto, age 9: to Joseph Ferrier.

Gerant, mulatto, age 11: to *E. Daurat*.⁵⁹

54. The first reference found to Poché as Derbanne's overseer appears in *Philippe Brosset v. Luc Poché*, Parish Court Suits, microfilm PC.29 (1837), Office of the Clerk of Court, Natchitoches. When Artemise Rachal (Widow Pierre Massippe), gave power of attorney to a brother to act on her behalf as an heir of her sister, Widow Derbanne, she actually did so "at the residence of Eugène Dorat." See Cane River Collection, roll 4, folder 1230; also folder 1274 for a slave sale by Mme. Massippe executed on the same day with Daurat as a witness.

55. Ecclesiastical Burials, 1847-1906, entry dated 8 April 1850, St. John the Baptist Church.

56. Natchitoches Parish Successions, 13: 412-19.

57. Baptism of Slaves, 1831-1846, unnumbered entry dated 14 May 1843, St. François Church.

58. Natchitoches Parish Successions, 21: 387-93; for the Ferrier-Derbanne marriage, see Natchitoches Parish Conveyances, 36: 121. For the Widow Derbanne's expenses in personally rearing the orphaned *Oreline*, see Natchitoches Parish Successions, 20: 4-5.

59. Natchitoches Parish Successions, 21: 387-93.

On this date, 5 February 1851, Joseph Ferrier would take Suzette and her child Philomene home with him—that home being five doors from Narcisse Fredieu’s parents. The pawns on the community chess board were moving into place. So were the forces of nature.

STEP 5:

Track the slave child through her new owners: Philomene

Winter 1851–52 and the spring that followed saw catastrophic flooding along Red River, so much that communication was actually cut off for an extended period between lower Natchitoches Parish and the courthouse town of Natchitoches.⁶⁰ The aftereffects were even worse; Rivière aux Cannes became a breeding ground that spawned one of the worst yellow fever epidemics in Red River’s history. Few families were left untouched; some were almost wiped out, and the high death rate would continue for years. No records chronicle those who fell ill but survived—as allegedly happened in Philomene’s case (although the epidemic was not smallpox, as “remembered”). One of those who succumbed was Joseph Ferrier. His death date is not recorded. By the time his widow journeyed to Natchitoches to file a petition to open the succession, she had arranged another marriage.⁶¹

The husband to be, Valery Houbre, was also newly bereaved. His small children needed female care, while Orelina and her offspring needed male support. The 1850 census, not surprisingly, places Houbre next door to Luc Poché (Pauché), the Derbanne overseer who lived eight houses from Daurat and Doralise in 1850 and about the same distance from Doralise, Suzette, and Philomene in 1880.⁶²

Following Houbre—*this man who was the new husband of the widowed heir of the planter who apparently fathered the free woman of color who lived with Philomene’s suspected father!*—would close the gap in Philomene’s youth. In 1862, the Houbres presented an infant at the baptismal font in Cloutierville:

EMELIE

2 September 1862. Baptism of Emelie, born 19 May 1861 to *Philomene*, slave of Valery Houbre. Godmother: Augustina *Fredieu* [daughter of Narcisse’s brother Auguste].⁶³

Only twice more would Philomene appear in the surviving (at least, the *legible*) parish records. On 10 August 1870, she sponsored the baptism of Francina Derbanne, the infant daughter of the freedman Pierre Derbanne and Marie

60. Newspapers typically chronicle such matters, but they do not exist for this period at Natchitoches. References can be found scattered throughout legal records, as with the petition of Marie Luce Cloutier, for a delayed succession on her late husband, M. C. Haurut; Natchitoches Parish Successions, 15: 104–10.

61. Succession of Joseph Ferrier, Natchitoches Parish Successions, 23: 301–03.

62. For Houbre, see 1850 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, population schedule, page 55B, dwelling and family 988; for his marriage to Orelina on 19 February 1855, see Marriages, 1847–1890 [recopied registers, translated from French into Latin], entry no. 125, St. John the Baptist Church.

63. Baptisms of Slaves, 1847–1865; and Baptisms of Negroes, 1865–1871: unnumbered entry, St. John the Baptist Church. For Augustina, see household of Augustin Fredieu, 1850 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, population schedule, p. 59, dwelling and family 1059.

Sidonie [no surname]. Of the three church records found for the adult Philomene, this is the only one that accords her a surname: Daurat. Six years later, when she presented a child of her own, the priest noted no surnames at all; but the identities of the godparents she chose clearly identifies the family cluster involved:⁶⁴

HENRY

22 January 1876. Baptism of *Henry* born 7 October 1875 to *Philomene*. Godparents: *Gerant* and *Suzette*.

STEP 6:

Extending the lineage: Suzette's mother

Genealogists are never content with the solution of a problem. The addition of one ancestral name to a family history creates two new riddles—the identification of that ancestor's father and mother. In Suzette's case, the name of that father remains unknown. Considering her consistent description as black in records that differentiate colors, it is likely her father was also a black slave. The assignment of a Georgia birthplace to him on the 1900 census, which was compiled with reasonable care although it overstates her age, appears more reliable than data on the carelessly slung together 1880 return. Beyond that point, his identity remains uninvestigated.

For Suzette's mother, more details surfaced amid the hunt for Philomene—not that they should be considered lagniappe, however. True to the maxim, luck generally follows a diligent search; in this case, the effort involved a page-by-page, frame-by-frame reading of all church and notarial records created for the time and place. The 1840 appraisalment of Derbanne's twenty-six slaves and the 1851 auction of the widow's estate, both previously cited, include the following:

1840	1851
Suzette, mother of Gerant, 16	Suzette, mother of Philomene, 26
Elisabeth, negress, 38	Elisabeth, negress, 48
Palmyre, negress, deaf and dumb, 20	Palmyre, griffe, deaf and dumb [no age]
children Paul, 3; Melatine, 3 mos.	

All seven slaves can be linked into a family unit, thanks to the renewed piety of Louis and Françoise Derbanne in 1821:

MARIE PALMIRE

16 December 1821, baptism of Marie Palmire, aged 2 months, natural daughter of Elisavet, slave of Louis Derbanne. Godparents: Joseph Metoyer and Adelayde, free people of color.⁶⁵

64. Baptisms of Slaves, 1847–1865; and Baptisms of Negroes, 1865–1871: unnumbered entries, St. John the Baptist Church.

65. Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800–1826*, no. 1449.

MARIE SUZETTE

23 May 1825, baptism of several slaves of Louis Derbanne, by Father Martin of Avoyelles, including Marie Suzette, born 24 October 1824 to Elisabeth. Godparents: François, slave of the same [Louis Derbanne] and Euphrosine, slave of M[adam]e Jean Baptiste Derbanne.⁶⁶

PALMYRE [PAUL]

2 January 1839, baptism of slave of Louis Derbanne; no birth date or age given. Godparents: Belsaire Llorens and Marie de Neige Dupré [daughter of Doralise Derbanne].⁶⁷

MILITINE

25 October 1840, baptism of several slaves of Widow Derbanne, including Militine, born 15 September 1840 to Marie Palmire. Godparents: George Herriman and Marie Sylvine Metoyer.⁶⁸

PHYLOMENE

14 May 1843, baptism of child born 1 November 1841 to Marie Louise [*Elisabeth*], slave of Widow L. N. [*Louis P.*] Derbanne. Godparents: Louis Rachal and Marie Doralise Derbanne.⁶⁹

A mother (Elisabeth), two daughters (Marie Suzette and Marie Palmyre), and four grandchildren (Gerant, Philomene, Paul, and Militine)—they would make a rewarding cluster in any search for slave families. Yet issues still remain unresolved.

Doralise's relationship to Philomene, presuming one exists, evades detection. Almost certainly she was not an older daughter of Elisabeth, given that Doralise and her mother appear to have been manumitted between 1820 and 1825, while Elisabeth remained in slavery. They might be sisters, but the great gap in Derbanne records during the period of their birth leaves nothing to support that speculation. At the least, they all lived and labored on the same plantation; and Doralise's status as Philomene's godmother would have forged an even stronger bond than the "fictive relationships" commonly found among slaves who shared a master.

As for Elisabeth, her origins remain obscure. So does her fate. While most slaveowners in this community tried to keep families together, some separations commonly occurred at estate settlements such as those of the childless Widow Derbanne. When her property was divided among her siblings and the heirs of siblings, Elisabeth was sold to one Henry M. Fleury of the town of Natchitoches and "disappears" thereafter. Palmyre and her children, like Suzette and Philomene, went together to the Derbanne niece who had been raised with them in the Widow Derbanne's household. The disruption of their lives should have been somewhat less severe. There in the Ferrier-Houbre household, most likely, Suzette

66. Registre de la Chapelle de Cloutierville, No. 1, 1825–1829, unpaginated, St. John the Baptist Church.

67. Baptism of Slaves, 1831–1846, unpaginated, St. François Church.

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.* Elisabeth, Eliza, Elise, Lise, and Louise are frequently interchanged in records of this society.

would have given birth to the “Aunt Bet” whom Philomene’s grandchildren recalled—a daughter named for her own mother.⁷⁰ Gerant, who would use the surname *Rachal* as an adult,⁷¹ was already past the age of ten when the Derbanne slave household broke up; under Louisiana law, he could be sold separately from his mother. To prevent his purchase by someone who might move him elsewhere, he was bought by the man who fathered his sister Philomene. When Daurat left seven years later, he transferred Gerant “by note” to an understanding friend who would likely protect the young male’s somewhat privileged status.⁷² Theirs was another make-do situation, typical of the time and place.

OBSERVATION

Research on slave women involves a number of particular problems, the worst of which can center upon *name*. Customarily one has only a given name to work with. More often than not, it is a common name. If freedom came during the life of this woman, the surname she used after emancipation or manumission⁷³ may or may not have been the name of her master. But, as in many societies universally, the names such women chose usually linked them to one parent or the other.

Rarely are these problems solved by “look ups” or index searches that focus on the individual name of a freedman, slave, or master. Instead, success in tracing slave females requires the researcher to think far more broadly and dig much more deeply. *Follow the male* is a basic principle in tracing all females. For slave women, that rule can be extended: Follow the known male—mate, son, or brother. Follow the master or mistress. Follow the associates of the male kinsmen or the owners. Reconstruct the neighborhood. Pinpoint places of residence for every “connected” individual. Constantly analyze proximity and distance between people. Look for patterns of similarity or dissimilarity in their names, habits, or associates. Learn the conventions of the community and the provisions of the law in that specific time and place. Accept the fact that records may never provide a specific answer, *in so many words*. But never give up hope that sooner or later the marshalled evidence will create a convincing case. In the meanwhile, the research process itself will yield priceless insight into gender and racial relations that shaped modern society.

70. A record of Elizabeth’s baptism has not been found; the timing above is based on the 1880 census age given for Elizabeth Purnell; see table 1. “Aunt Bet’s” son *Jeron*, by this reconstruction, would be named for his uncle, Suzette’s *Gerant*. The name was extremely uncommon along Rivière aux Cannes.

71. As “Jeron Rachal, mulatto,” Gerant is enumerated next door to Philomene in 1870, by an enumerator whose own mother was a Rachal of the white branch of the family. See 1870 U.S. census, Natchitoches Parish, population schedule, p. 433, dwelling and family 3. Gerant never belonged to the family whose name he took. By the time of his birth, Rivière aux Cannes and Isle Brevelle had numerous Rachal males, both white and free nonwhite, of age to be his father.

72. Natchitoches Parish Conveyances, 51: 355–56.

73. *Emancipation* is a term applied to *freedmen*, i.e., those freed by government edict. *Manumission* refers to *free men*, women, or children who were given freedom (or bought it) on an individual basis while the institution of slavery existed.