Scanning the Past
Creating the “Free People of Color in Louisiana” Collaborative Digital Collection

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Free People of Color in Louisiana: Revealing an Unknown Past

An Overview

Tara Laver, MLS, CA
Curator of Manuscripts and Co-Project Director
Free People of Color in Louisiana: Revealing and Unknown Past

- 5 repositories
- Grant period: May 2013-April 2015
- $330,192 total cost ($194,152 award; $136,040 match)
- Estimated 25,000 pages minimum and 1965 metadata records
## Collections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Estimated in Grant</th>
<th>Actual # or Revised Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LSU</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11,250 scans; 190 records</td>
<td>11,415 scans; 182 records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HNOC</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6634 scans; 93 records</td>
<td>5198 scans; 63 records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOPL</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5918; 1490 records</td>
<td>6762; 1501 records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulane</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2300 scans; 160 records</td>
<td>8108; 248 records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSM</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1022 scans; 32 records</td>
<td>776 scans; 13 records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>27, 124 scans; 1965 records</td>
<td>32,259 scans; 2007 records</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Memran les President et
Directeur de la Thraise Bayou
De l'Union et ble, Nourmington.

Meurice, 26 April 1823.

Sur l'Acclamen de la mer, 1823.

Je vous suis solliciter de me accorder un emprunt
De $800. Sur M. M. M. Venus, et Mournin, 1832 June 20.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Meullion Family Papers. Folder 01-02, 1831-1906.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creator</td>
<td>Meullion family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributors</td>
<td>Meullion, Baptiste, 1763 or 4-1840.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meullion, Bellazaire, active 1796?-1871.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meullion, Antoine Donato, 1801-1890.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meullion, Antoine Alphonse, active approximately 1835-1899.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vidal, Michel, born 1824.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Donato, Gustave Meullion, 1832-1877.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1831 - 1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Description</td>
<td>40 items.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jean Baptiste Meullion (also spelled “Juan Bautista”), a free man of color known as “Baptiste” was born in 1763 or 1764 on the German Coast of Louisiana to Maria Juana (born about 1736 and died approximately 1793, also called “Mariana Meullion”), a slave belonging to Luis Augustin Meullion. Baptiste cites Francois Cheval of St. Jean Baptiste Meullion (also spelled “Juan Beutista”), a free man of color known as “Baptiste” was born in 1763 or 1764 on the German Coast of Louisiana to Maria Juana (born about 1736 and died approximately 1793, also called “Mariana Meullion”), a slave belonging to Luis Augustin Meullion. Baptiste cites Francois Cheval of St. Charles Parish as his father in the record of his marriage. In 1777, Luis Augustin Meullion freed Baptiste and Maria Juana, whom he inherited from the estate of his father Antonio. Maria Juana is described as a mulatto, and Baptiste as a griotte.; In 1796, Baptiste Meullion married Marie Celèste Suzanne Donato (Bello) (1764-1842), the daughter of Donato Bello, an Italian-born Opelousas militia officer, and Marie-Jeanne Taillefer, a free woman of color from New Orleans. Their marriage contract was executed in St. Charles Parish, La., one of the parishes that comprise the German Coast. Baptiste became a proprietor slaveholder in Saint Landry Parish and operated a sugar and cotton plantation at Prairie Laurent on Bayou Teche, where he died in 1840. The couple had at least four children, Francois Cheval (born between 1795 and 1806 and active through at least 1846). Antoine Donato ”Donot” (1801-1890), Marie Denise (b. about 1800), and Suzanne Bellazaire (active 1796?-1871), commonly known as “Belasir” “Belazaire” and other permutations of the same. She never married but operated a plantation at Prairie Laurent. Most of them seem to have gone by their middle names. In 1827, Marie Denise Meullion married Auguste Donato (b. about 1798). Their son, Gustave Meullion (1832-1877), was a plenier in St. Landry Parish then a grocer in New Orleans. He was active in Reconstruction-era politics, serving as a delegate to the 1868 Louisiana Constitutional Convention and on the Executive Committee of the St. Landry Parish Republican Party. Francois Cheval Meullion wed Marie Françoise ”Ison” Lemelle in 1831. That same year Antoine Donato married Eliza Donato, the sister of Marie Denise Meullion’s husband Auguste Donato. Their son, Antoine Alphonse Meullion (active approximately 1835-1890), who went by “Alphonse” married his cousin, Marie Meullion, a free woman of color, and was a planter in St. Landry Parish active in Reconstruction politics after the Civil War.

Description
Primarily papers of Baptiste Meullion, Francois Cheval Meullion, Bellazaire Meullion, and Alphonse Meullion. One group of papers relates to Baptiste Meullion’s 1833 application for a mortgage of $5000, including correspondence, application and supporting documentation of assets and collateral comprised of confirmation of his previous land purchases and extracts of the acts of sale in which he bought slaves. These records contain the name of the slaves and from whom they were bought. A few accounts of Francois Cheval Meullion with local merchants and a letter appointing him commissioner of roads for a part of Saint Landry Parish are found. Bellazaire Meullion papers comprise a stock certificate in New Orleans, Opelousas, and Great Western Railroad Co., financial correspondence from Bellroc, Noblon and Co. (a New Orleans cotton broker firm) about her cotton and purchases, a few personal letters from friends and relatives (Louise Lemelle, Alice Dessemer, and unidentified authors) that relate family news, and her amnesty oath after the Civil War, and a petition (ca. 1890) filed by her nephew Alphonse Meullion to the U.S. court of Claims on behalf of her estate for livestock and provisions taken during the Civil War. Also present is a list of list of the property of the widow of Francois Cheval Meullion confiscated by the U.S. Army in April 1865; it appears to be related to her succession as well; Alphonse Meullion papers are primarily personal and business correspondence including from Cornelius Corbette, his in-laws, relatives of Meullion, and Civil War infrastructure papers of land. The 1851 Federal Census with the ability to sort by owner or occupant is on the page.
Variation across institutions in level of existing description.

Variation across institutions in physical arrangement of collection.

Assigning document titles.

Underestimated metadata creation time.
Other Lessons Learned

- Consistency—many hands in the pot
- Language
- Grant-writing process
Enhancing Discovery of Free People of Color

Implementation of Workflow and Documentation of Metadata Decisions

Jessica Mlotkowski, MLS
Project Librarian

Rosemarie Aldometer Mather Turnbull photographic portrait, approximately 1899
Creating FPoC Metadata Guidelines

- Guidelines customized from LSU Libraries Digital Services’ metadata guidelines
- Metadata scheme=unqualified Dublin Core
- Metadata standard=DACS (Describing Archives: a Content Standard)
- Controlled vocabularies used=Library of Congress Subject Headings, Name Authority File, and Art & Architecture Thesaurus
Metadata Structure

Descriptive Metadata Fields used:
- Title (DC <title>)
- Creator (DC <creator>)
- Contributors (DC <creator>, repeated)
- Date (DC <date>)
- Physical Description (DC <format>)
- Biographical Information (DC <description>)
- Description (DC <description>, repeated)
- Language (DC <language>)
- Type (DC <type>)
- Subjects (DC <subject>)
- Geographic Focus (DC <coverage>)
- Occupation (DC <subject>, repeated)
- Digital Collection (DC <relation>)
- Repository (DC <source>)
- Part Of (DC <relation>, repeated)
- Repository Collection Guide (public, local note field)
- Related Collections (DC <relation>, repeated)
- Call Number/Shelving Location (public, local note field)
- Cite As (DC <source>, repeated)
- Restrictions (DC <rights>)
- Contact and Ordering Information (public, local note field)
- Item URL (DC <identifier>)
- Collection URL (DC <relation>, repeated)
Uploading Metadata Using Tab-Delimited Files: 
*Metadata Creation*

1. Metadata is structured in Microsoft Excel 2013 spreadsheets
2. The spreadsheet is saved as a tab-delimited text file.
3. From there, the .txt file is uploaded with the images as a compound object.
Example of metadata spreadsheet at *folder level* used for “Free People of Color in Louisiana”

Folder level metadata

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folder level metadata</th>
<th>Item level metadata for folder items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miles Kelly slave bill of sale for Julia Ann, Laura, and Margaret to Harriet Battles, 1840 April 29.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles Kelly slave bill of sale for Julia Ann, Laura, and Margaret to Harriet Battles, 1840 April 29.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet Battles deed of emancipation for Julia Ann, Laura, and Margaret through Jane Bush’s power of attorney, 1846 June 11.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Bush freedom paper, 1846 June 11.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. L. Bergmann promissory note, 1846 June 2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet Battles freedom paper signed by Harriett Pigeon, 1846 June 26.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet Battles freedom paper signed by Harriett Pigeon, 1846 June 26.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin B. M. dead of conveyance to William Johnson for Bellevue property, 1849.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles L. Deblaisse testimony of Adams County notary, 1846 November 4.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Johnson receipt, 1842 April 27.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Barbiene notice to Major Henry Chetard to pay William Johnson, 1842 February 23.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Johnson receipt for clothing, 1842 April 3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Battles Johnson receipt, 1842 May 6.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Battles Johnson receipt, 1842 May 6.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Bush freedom paper signed in Indiana, 1846 June 21.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet Battles certified receipt for power of attorney transaction with Jane Bush, 1846 June 21.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet Battles certified receipt for power of attorney transaction with Jane Bush, 1846 June 21.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet Battles city tax receipt, 1842 September 3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Johnson receipt, 1843 April 8.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet Battles receipt for passage from Louisville to Cincinnati, 1843 May 15.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet Battles receipt, 1844 January 16.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Johnson receipt for sale of farm, 1844 Petersburg, 1844.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example of metadata spreadsheet for a *volume* used for “Free People of Color in Louisiana”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Creator</th>
<th>Contributors</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Physical Description</th>
<th>Biographical Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dupré, Joseph Emmanuel Noel, 1810; Metoyer, Jean Baptiste Louis Dominique Metoyer</td>
<td>Dupré, Metoyer &amp; Company</td>
<td>Dupré, Metoyer &amp; Company</td>
<td>1839 - 1873</td>
<td>1 account book.</td>
<td>Dupré, Metoyer &amp; Company was a mercantile house and general store in the Cane River community of Isle Brevelle, Natchitoches Parish, La. The firm opened in 1830 under the ownership of Joseph Emmanuel Noel Dupre and Jean Baptiste Louis Dominique Metoyer, both free Creoles of color of Cane River, cousins, and brothers-in-law. The company initially operated with Dupré and Metoyer as principals. A prominent white planter: Nicolas Gracia, a Dalmatian immigrant who operated the Red River ferry in Rapides Parish, and Charles F. Berovit, a St. Louis native who had married the daughter of Julien Rachel, a wealthy white planter. The business was met with immediate success, and in 1831, Dupré and Metoyer were in a position to buy out their two white business partners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Uploading Metadata Using Tab-Delimited Files: CONTENTdm Upload

Step 1: Click “Add Compound Objects”

Step 2: Click “Add”

Step 3: Select “Yes” to define compound object structure and metadata defined by tab-delimited text file

Step 4: Select the file locations to import tab-delimited text file and images

Step 5: Display Image Settings

Step 6: Confirm Settings
Utilize available LC Subject headings (LCSH) do not categorically represent the nuances of ethnicity and “groups of people” unique to Antebellum Louisiana.

Create subject access for terms of the historical context and other field-specific terminology through Description and Biographical Information fields.

LCGSH primarily represents present-day attitudes towards race and difference and is not an archival controlled vocabulary.

Create LC style standardized name headings for free persons of color and slaves, taking advantage of RDA elements currently exist.

A controlled vocabulary that consistently accounts for a range of historical contexts does not exist.

Use Occupations field to link persons and collections associated with a trade.

Name authority files for many free people of color and slaves do not exist.
Scanning New Orleans
A Comparison of Workflows at Three Repositories

Dena Marks, PhD candidate
Project Graduate Assistant
Overview of Duties

- Created 15,652 scans and 273 metadata records in ~1 year
- Louisiana State Museum - Louisiana Historical Center
- Tulane - Louisiana Research Collection
- The Historic New Orleans Collection - Williams Research Center
- Scanners and arrangement of materials differed at each institution.
Scanning Rates

- Epson Flatbed scanner: 8.3 scans/hour

- Flatbed + Bookeye 4 + Phase One P30+ Camera: 14.36 scans/hour

- Bookeye 3: 14.74 scans/hour

*Caveat:* Partially a matter of experience
Factors that Affected Scanning Rates

- Flatbed = slowest
- Several minutes to scan, process, and save item.
- Frequent interruptions slow research.
- Bookeye 3 and camera = fastest
- Scan, process, and save in batches
- Possible to work simultaneously on metadata and research
Structural Variations

- Items grouped into folders (Tulane)
- Documents housed in single folder (LSM and THNOC)
- Formed artificial groups to maintain “folder level” structure. *Example: Cane River Collection*
- Abundance of item-level description available: one record/item (Tulane)
Item v. Folder Level Description

- Describing single items is time consuming.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collection</th>
<th>Organizational Scheme</th>
<th>Time to Scan and Describe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kuntz (39 items)</td>
<td>39 item-level records</td>
<td>5 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cane River Folder 34 (40 items)</td>
<td>1 folder-level record</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Grouping sometimes meant loss of detail. Example: Cane River Collection.
Recommendations for an Efficient Workflow

- Book scanner over camera for all materials
- Delayed scan provides time for metadata
- More comfortable to use than camera
- Folder-level descriptions for project on a timeline
Resources

- **Project Website:**
  [lib.lsu.edu/special/fpoc/](lib.lsu.edu/special/fpoc/)

- **Digital Archive on American Slavery (UNCG):**
  [library.uncg.edu/slavery/](library.uncg.edu/slavery/)

- **Google and eBooks**

- **Creole Heritage Center:**
  [creole.nsula.edu/](creole.nsula.edu/)

- **Dictionary of Louisiana Biography:**
  [lahistory.org/site16.php](lahistory.org/site16.php)

- **KnowLA:**
  [knowla.org/entry/799/](knowla.org/entry/799/)