

Lafayette Genealogical Society

Meeting Minutes

July 21, 2017

The monthly meeting of the Lafayette Genealogical Society was held on Thursday, July 21, 2017 at 6:30 p.m. in the meeting room of the South Regional Library, 1601 Johnston Street. The meeting was called to order by President Brenda Fuselier. After a few words of welcome, the Pledge of Allegiance was recited followed by a moment of silence to honor our ancestors and our armed forces. Guests were asked to introduce themselves. They included: Shirley and Cecil Broussard – Shirley volunteers at the New Iberia Branch Library to help people who want to find out about genealogy.

The June minutes are on our website. Brenda Thibodeaux motioned that we dispense with the reading of the minutes. Henry Peterson seconded the motion. There was no objection. Members who cannot attend the meetings can keep up with society activity by reading the minutes on-line.

Warren LeBlanc was called upon to give the Treasurer’s Report. The June report is listed below:

Beginning Balance	\$5,127.46
Dues Collected	140.00
Books Sold/Donations	
Supplements Sold	
Acadiana Project	
Banquet	
Publication Expense	
Speaker Meals	
Banquet Expense	
Office Expense	
Other Expense/Rental	
Library Book Project	
Ending Balance	\$5,267.46

New Members for 2017:

48

Members with dues unpaid:

0 (members with unpaid dues were removed from the roll)

New members for last month include: Patricia Como, Suzanne Lasseigne, Allen Matte, Louise and Cheryl Perret, John and Gayle Smith and Rivistas Subscription.

There was no discussion on the treasurer's report and Henry Peterson motioned that we accept the report. It was seconded by Brenda Thibodeaux. A vote was taken and the treasurer's report was accepted.

President Fuselier then proceeded to make several announcements. She reminded library patrons that the Lafayette Parish Library was encouraging people to use Newsbank. It is a newspaper site that the library is considering purchasing. Since the site is rather expensive, the library is asking for feedback on whether people found it helpful. It is only accessible at the library. The New Orleans Times Picayune and the Baton Rouge Advocate are the newspapers available. She also read an email that was received from Sam Lollar complementing our Tuesday morning volunteers. He mentioned that other libraries are jealous of our participation and the assistance we give to library patrons researching their families.

President Fuselier also announced that the password on our Members Only page of our website has been changed. If you are a new member or a member who has paid their 2017 dues, you are entitled to use this section. Please see Warren LeBlanc if you have any questions.

She inquired about our Facebook page. There has not been much activity lately and no one has looked for help in restoring pictures. We have 491 members as of today.

Shera LaPointe, one of our newer members, will speak on DNA at the Ville Platte quarterly meeting on Saturday, starting at 9:30 am at the new library.

The August meeting will be held at the downtown library. The meeting room at the Johnston Street branch will not be available for the month of August only. The library will be updating the audio/visual equipment in the room. Please remember that this will be for the August meeting only. A security guard will be on duty that evening and the area is well lite. The meeting will be in the same room that the Saturday morning sessions are held.

Les Memories contributions are being accepted now until mid-September for publication in the 2017 Les Memories. Everyone is asked to contribute their family trees or any other bits of family memorabilia.

Henry Peterson is hosting a special interest group on the 3rd Saturday of each month at 1:00 pm. This month it will be on August 19 at the downtown library. The room he has reserved can hold up to 10 people. He will discuss Legacy and how to use it.

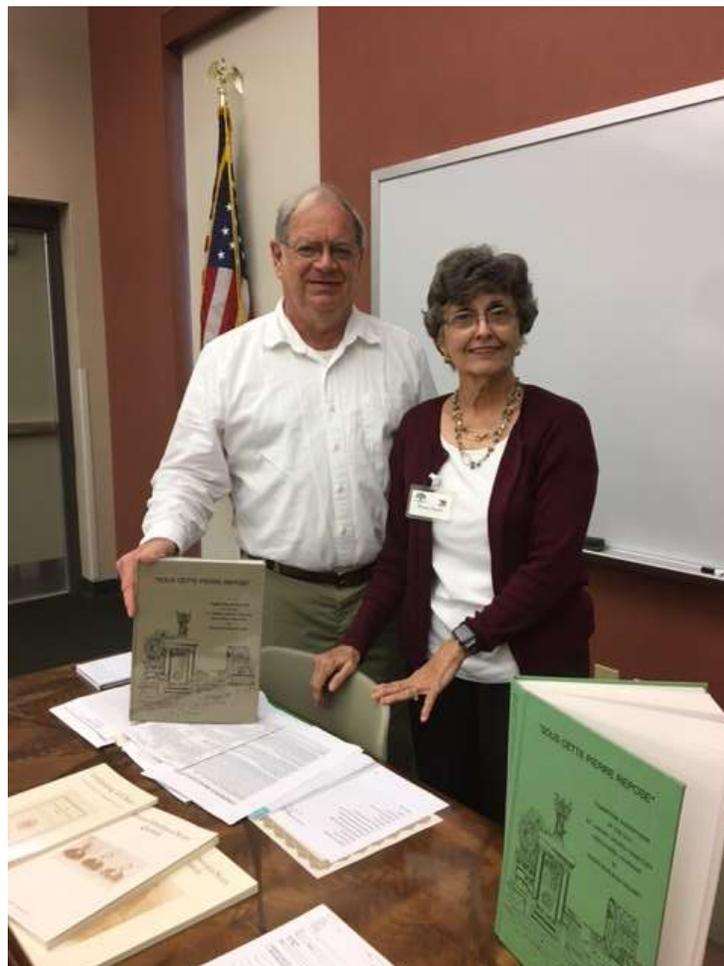
Brenda Fuselier was fortunate enough to attend last Saturday's Le Comite's African American Special Interest Group program at the library at UL Lafayette. This is becoming an annual event sponsored by LeComite. Topics for this year's conference included the use of DNA in black genealogy, the Thibodeaux massacre, finding the last slave owner using the Freedman's Bureau records and a talk using the "place" your ancestors may have lived using old land maps. Judy Riffel, a Baton Rouge genealogist, gave a talk on 270 enslaved people sold to Louisiana plantation owners by Georgetown University. She is heading the project and talked on the progress made in finding the descendants of

these 270 people. Herb Scheuermann sent out an email regarding this presentation. He found out through the Opelousas group and said that we should re-establish communication with the area groups so that we exchange information about upcoming events such as this one. Le Comite des Archives de la Louisiana is an organization that supports the Louisiana State Archives.

President Fuselier announced that the December banquet will be on December 1 at the Petroleum Club beginning at 11:30 am. No speaker has been named as of this date.

This concluded the business part of the meeting.

Our guest speaker of the evening was James Douget from the Opelousas area. He is a teacher by profession and is also a local historian. He began his talk by giving us the history of the Opelousas District, its settlement patterns and the beginning of the parish cemetery. The original location of the church and cemetery was in present day Washington, Louisiana then known as Church's Landing. Constant flooding and outbreaks of yellow fever caused the communicants to look for a more suitable place in a dryer location. Michel Prudhomme agreed to donate 30/40 arpents, arpent being a French measure of land, for the new church and cemetery. Wood was also donated and a church was built. The current church at that location is the 3rd church built there since the late 1700's. Cedar trees were planted to mark the boundary.



James Douget and Brenda Fuselier next to copies of the new and old book

The cemetery originally consisted of simple graves with wooden markers, the grave sites and the name of the person buried there are now unknowable since no one is alive to tell us. At present, there are 4,000 seeable graves sites with 2 times as many actually buried at the cemetery. Mr. Douget also told us that many times people were so poor that they could not afford a coffin so they rented one for the viewing and then wrapped the person in a shroud for the actual burial. The cemetery has many War of 1812 veterans buried there along with 1 governor and 2 congressmen of the state. There is a small protestant section there because there was a small protestant population living in St. Landry Parish. They eventually built their own cemetery. Many enslaved people and servants are buried there as well. During the War Between the States, residents heard stories of Union soldiers desecrating tombs in other towns. People came to the cemetery and removed any items of value from the tombs and the cemetery survived.

The cemetery has no organized layout and it is rather hodgepodge. In many instances only an iron cross survives to let people know that someone is buried in that spot. That is one of the reasons why James' late wife Susan Burleigh Douget began to catalogue the graves found there. She and James began the painstaking work of identifying individual tombs and marking their location on a grid and naming the people in the grave. The result was the book *"Sous Cette Pierre Repose", Tombstone Inscriptions of the Old St. Landry Church Cemetery, Opelousas Louisiana.* Mentored by Fr. Donald Hebert, Susan discovered her love of genealogy and undertook the dauntless task. She and James charted all the graves, showing their location after dividing the cemetery into sections. They went through the entire cemetery and numbered each grave. They cleaned headstones in order to be able to read them and they translated the ones in French into English for ease of reading. When they finished the original work, Susan insisted that they do it a second time and correct any mistakes and add any they had overlooked. They also saw that the cemetery was in disrepair and now have a plan to restore as many of the old tombs as they can,

The book was copyrighted in 1993 and has been out of print. The original book has a green cover. Many people approached Susan and asked her to have the book reprinted. By this time Hebert Publications was no more and everything is being printed by Claitor's Publishing Company out of Baton Rouge. James worked with the new publisher and the book has been reprinted and is available for sale at \$55.00 each. It is not only a cemetery book but a history book with many stories as well. There are old funeral notices in use because the newspaper usually was a weekly publication and the news had to get out sooner. Many of the inscriptions on the headstones tell a bit about the personality of the person buried there. Michel Prudhomme, the man who donated the land, is buried inside the church floor with several of the former pastors of the church. A map of the original Opelousas District can be found inside and on page 157 there is a picture of the oldest headstone that can be read. It marks the burial site of Sarah Verlinda Smith who died on April 7, 1818. For the rest of the talk, James told us storied of some of the people buried there and how the group interested in preserving the and restoring the cemetery has a ere-enactment in the cemetery each October. Some of the participants tell about the people buried there and many dress in costumes representing the era of the deceased.



James Douget speak to Lafayette Genealogical Society of Opelousas cemetery project

This book can be found at the downtown library in Opelousas. After the talk, Mr. Douget answered questions from the audience.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Pellerin
Secretary