

The Search for Margaret Ball: Building Steps over a Brick-wall Research Problem

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A thirty-year search for Margaret Ball has presented her followers with most of the worst genealogical problems a researcher could ever dread to encounter. The landless Margaret emerged in the “burned” county of Madison, Texas, in 1856, an allegedly widowed female—husband unknown, origins unknown, parents unknown. Before this challenge was resolved, researchers had to cope with the additional problems of two other “burned” counties, repeated name changes, two generations of illegitimacy, and a zig-zag pattern of migration through several counties in several states.

In retrospect, however, Margaret Ball was typical of the indomitable women of generations past, in all societies, who persevered in a world where nature, social mores, laws, and economics all conspired to make survival difficult for females without fathers or husbands to support and protect them. While her case involves some naming patterns peculiar to her society, the more serious research problems posed by the lifestyles uncovered in this study are by no means restricted to any one culture.² It is hoped that a presentation of the means used to backtrack this one woman will help other researchers who face analogous situations in other societies—where they may not recognize the nature of the problems involved, their prevalence in society, or the methodology that can be effectively used to dissolve such stalemates.

When this writer was introduced to the problem, concrete information on Margaret was as meager as the local records. She was known to be the mother of one son, Ferdinand James Ball, to whom she was fiercely devoted—although she was also said to be just as fiercely independent of him, of any man, or any family to whom researchers could connect her. No trace of other contemporary Balls could be found in Madison County’s extant resources, which consisted primarily of three record groups: decennial censuses maintained by the National Archives, grants and patents preserved by the State Land Office (in which neither Margaret nor Ferdinand appeared), and tax rolls in the custody of the State Archives. Although Margaret was known to be a member of the Sand Prairie Baptist Church of northern Madison County (near the community of George), the records of that church have burned also.³ Her Bible or prayer book, which older family members recall, allegedly suffered the same fate. The extant resources provided this basic information on the mother and the son:

Margaret Ball

Believed to have been born 25 November 1803 in Louisiana, she reported having a father of foreign birth, \$1070 in personal property in 1860, and no personal or real estate in 1870.

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Margaret died in northeastern Madison County, Larrison's Creek area, on 21 January 1874—allegedly of grief over the death of her son ten days earlier.⁴

Ferdinand James Ball

Born 18 December 1824 in Louisiana, he married 22 June 1852 in Grimes County, Texas. (Madison County was created in 1853 from Grimes and two other countries, Leon and Walker; but Ferdinand's known residence in Madison was in the part that formerly had been in Leon, not Grimes.) A search of extant records of Grimes and Leon revealed only his poll listing on the 1852 Grimes tax roll.⁵ His wife was Sarah Curtis, born 1828 in Saint Landry Parish, Louisiana, daughter of James and Zilpha (Byrd) Curtis and great-granddaughter of the Reverend Richard Curtis, who had surreptitiously established the Baptist faith in Mississippi about 1791 while that area was part of Spanish West Florida.⁶ A teamster in 1860 (with \$1000 in personal property) and a farmer in 1870 (with a small operation valued at \$125), Ferdinand moved his family to nearby Harris County immediately after the Civil War, returning to Madison by 1870. He lies buried near his mother in Willow Hole Cemetery, about eight miles south of North Gulch, in Madison County.⁷ By Sarah, Ferdinand fathered the following eight children:⁸

- i. James Ferdinand Ball, born 17 February 1854, Madison County; died 29 October 1931, Houston, Texas.
- ii. Samuel Hook Ball, born 4 September 1855, Madison County; died 27 July 1935, Goliad County, Texas.
- iii. Ezra Ball, born 24 June 1859, Madison County; died 26 December 1921, Victoria, Texas.
- iv. William Riley Ball, born 4 August 1860, Madison County; died 13 January 1913, Brazos County, Texas.
- v. Margaret Ball, born 11 April 1862, Madison County; died there at a young age.
- vi. Nancy Anne Frances Ball, born 1 March 1866, Harris County, Texas; died 26 June 1949, Corpus Christi, Texas.
- vii. Robert Ball, born 7 April 1868, Madison County; died 6 May 1908, Houston, Texas.
- viii. Belle Zora Ball, born 4 August 1870, Madison County; died 26 June 1950, Beeville, Texas.

Descendants also reported that the son William Riley was named for Sarah's nephew—Dr. William Riley Curtis (born 29 May 1832)⁹—but they could not explain why the apparent “family name” *Hook* was given to the second son, Samuel. All Hook research had proved fruitless.

Family tradition was tantalizing but perplexing. It was said that Margaret was a French-speaking, Catholic Creole by birth, although she died a Baptist. A suspicion existed that she was not actually married to Ferdinand's father. It was said that when Ferdinand was small his father left one day on business and never returned, after which Margaret supposedly went to live with her family—in New York. Tradition could not explain why the family of a French-speaking, Catholic, Louisiana-born Creole resided in that distant state. When and how Margaret migrated to Texas were also questions that could not be answered by family accounts. Finally, it was said that she supported herself and her son as a midwife and doctor—making herbal medicine, tending the sick, and setting broken bones.¹⁰

RESULTS OF PRIOR RESEARCH EFFORTS

For some three decades, Margaret and Ferdinand's descendants had searched for their ancestral origins. They had investigated almost all identifiable Ball families from Texas to Vermont, without success. The present writer was asked to retrace this research and did so with equally negative results. In past years, a family researcher from another Ball line had produced a photocopy of a purported Bible record that identified Margaret as one Margaret *Ferdinand* of New Orleans and her husband as Edward Marshall Ball of coastal Mississippi.¹¹ While this "Bible record" contained a birth entry for the son Ferdinand (one that agreed with the family data provided by Ferdinand's descendants) and a marriage date for Edward's "second marriage," it contained no specific date for his reported marriage to Margaret.

The alleged Bible information was accompanied by a "family tradition" offered by the other Balls. Supposedly, Edward had married Margaret in New Orleans, she spoke no English and did not get along with his mother, and the mother had persuaded Ball to leave Margaret and marry "the girl next door." No record could be found of such a marriage in either Louisiana or Mississippi, and no record of the divorce appeared in the legislative files of either state; likewise, nothing emerged that connected Margaret and Ferdinand in any way to the Mississippi line of Balls.¹²

An exhaustive search of New Orleans records for all evidence relating to individuals surnamed Ferdinand and Ball proved equally futile. That search also attempted to document or negate another proposed origin for Margaret—that this French-speaking, Catholic Creole of Louisiana had family in New York because she came from a refugee family of Saint Domingue, part of which migrated to New Orleans and part to New York. Since the term *Creole* was applied in Latin society to any individual born in a French, Spanish, or Portugese colony, regardless of that individual's racial composition, the search for "Margaret Ferdinand" and Margaret Ball included individuals of all ethnicities. Again, all results were negative.

STEP ONE: ESTABLISHING AN EFFECTIVE RESEARCH STRATEGY

One rule of thumb exists in genealogical research: the best clues to a person's origins and birth family exist in the earliest *proven* place of residence. That principle applies even when the only known locale is a "burned" county, as in the present case. The popular "shotgun approach," searching everywhere the surname appears in hopes of finding an individual of the right given name, is seldom effective. In regard to the problem at hand, Margaret and Ferdinand's descendants reported having combed the existing resources for Madison County (likewise for Grimes, Leon, and Harris) on many occasions; they felt that all references to the mother and son had been extracted already. However, when the present writer completed the requested re-examination of records in other locales and reported that no trace of Margaret or Ferdinand could be found among any of the other known Balls, the family authorized a new study

of the Texas records. At this point, research began “from scratch” in those same basic resources that genealogists first consult: censuses and tax rolls.

STEP TWO: INITIAL CENSUS SURVEY

All information from the population schedules of the federal censuses, relating to Margaret and Ferdinand, had indeed been extracted already and was found to be copied correctly; the first objective of the new search was to place the mother and son into community perspective via the population, agricultural, and slave schedules. Since individuals and families seldom migrated alone, it could be reasonably hypothesized that *somewhere* in the Ball neighborhood in Madison County there should appear relatives, in-laws, or friends from their prior place of residence. While the family names of those associated individuals were unknown, clues to their identity should exist in the form of given names, birthplaces, and economic data.

Isolating potential connections was especially important to the problem at hand, since no Margaret or Ferdinand Ball could be found, via the indexes available, in the 1850 census of any county or state—the census immediately preceding the appearance of Margaret and Ferdinand in Texas. As most such indexes are flawed and names are frequently omitted or garbled, the possibility existed that Margaret and Ferdinand might be found in 1850 by backtracking their Texas neighbors, identifying the applicable censuses of 1850, and reading the entire community-enumeration in 1850 for each of those 1860 neighbors—reading for *given* names. The value of such a search in the present case was even more significant in view of the suspicion that Margaret may not have been married to Ferdinand’s father. Prior to their emergence in Texas as Balls, they may have appeared elsewhere under Margaret’s unknown maiden name or under a married name—if she had been a widow at the time of her alliance with Ball.

The neighborhood study conducted for Margaret and Ferdinand in Texas spotlighted one clear relation and two potential families:

1. *Ezra Curtis*, born about 1805 in Louisiana, resided next door to the combined household of Ferdinand and Margaret in 1870. He could be immediately identified as Sarah (Curtis) Ball’s older brother.¹³ However, because Ferdinand and Sarah married after the Balls moved to Texas, Curtis’s presence next door did not necessarily have any bearing upon the Ball migration.
2. *Charles Bundick*, born about 1813 in Louisiana, who resided in the second house from Ferdinand and Margaret in 1870. All of Bundick’s children were born in Texas, the eldest in 1853.¹⁴
3. *James Vasbinder*, born about 1810 in Louisiana, resided next door to Ferdinand Ball in 1860. While their 1870 entries are numbered some one hundred households apart, Vasbinder’s 1870 neighbor (Thomas Gustavus) was the brother of Micajah Gustavus who lived adjacent to Margaret’s separate household in 1860.¹⁵ The implication is that Vasbinder and Ball were still in the same neighborhood in 1870, arbitrarily separated by the path of the census taker. The repetition of Vasbinder’s name in the Ball neighborhoods of 1860 and 1870 is made even more significant by the fact that the Balls had removed from the county, briefly, after the Civil War.

Although they did not return to the same exact place of residence, their new residence—like their former one—was near the Vasbinders and Gustavuses.

Efforts to connect the Balls to the Gustavus family (or other neighbors) proved fruitless, but the Vasbinders and Bundicks offered more rewarding leads. When Ball descendants were questioned about all of these potentially connected families, only one of the names generated a positive response. The Vasbinders, according to tradition, were “open house kin;” but no present family members could say what the relationship between their families might have been.

Since the composition of Vasbinder’s 1860 household is important to this research problem, it is given in full below:

Federal Census, Population Schedule
1860 Madison County, Texas
p. 14 (440-A); 18 June 1860
Post office: William Hale

90/90 Vasbinder, James, 50, white, male, farmer, \$3000/2000, La.
" Caroline, 37, white, female, La.
Hazelet, E.S., 20, white, female, La.
" Matilda, 17, white, female, La.
" Mary, 15, white, female, La.
" Charles, 11, white, male, Texas
Vasbinder, Lucretia, 28, white, female, La.
" Leopard [Leopold], 22, white, male, laborer, La.
" Lemuel, 21, white, male, La.
" Virgil, 17, white, male, La.
" Eugene, 15, white, male, La.
" Susan, 13, white, female, La.
" Margaret, 11, white, female, La.

From the above data, it might reasonably be hypothesized that James and Caroline married after the 1850 enumeration—in which case the 1850 census search should treat the Vasbinders and Hazelets individually. Vasbinder (whose name has since been found under numerous variant spellings) could not be located in 1850. The Hazelets were easily located in a nearby county, where the probability of a relationship between these families became even more apparent.

Federal Census, Population Schedule¹⁶
1850 Polk County, Texas
pp. 187(387)-190(393); 18 and 20 November 1850

160/160 Curtis, James, 42, white, male, blk. smith, \$60, Miss.
" Ann, 41, white, female, Miss.
" Lucretia, 22, white, female, La.
" Fanny, 16, white, female, La.
" Adaline, 14, white, female, La.
" Martha, 11, white, female, La.
" Mary, 8, white, female, La.
" James, 7, white, male, Tex.
" ?Denard, 6, white, male, Tex.
" Joseph, 1, white, male, Tex.

- " Asa, 18, white, male, blk. smith, La. [brother of James]
 " Sarah, 22, white, female, La. [sister of James]
- 171/171 Bundick, Chas., 58, white, male, farmer, \$920, La.
 " Eliza, 50, white, female, S.C.
 " Leonard, 17, white, male, att. sch., La.
 " Matilda, 8, white, female, La.
- 172/172 Haslet, Carline, 29, white, female, widow, La.
 " Eliza, 11, white, female, La.
 " Matilda, 11, white, female, La.
 " Mary, 6, white, female, La.
 " Charles, 3, white, male, Tex.
- 207/207 Curtis, Ella [Elle], 25, white, male, farmer, La., can't read or write
 [brother of Sarah, Asa, and James]
 " Mary, 23, white, female, La.
 " Columbus, 3, white, male, La.
 " Henry, 6/12, white, male, La.

Tracing the Bundicks from Texas backward into Louisiana was easily accomplished via census indexes. Prior enumerations placed them in the Louisiana parish of Saint Landry, the birthplace of Sarah Curtis—a potentially disturbing find. With both the Bundicks and Curtises “originating” in the same parish, both settling in the same neighborhood in Polk County, and their offspring relocating together in Madison County, it would appear possible that whatever relationship existed between the Balls and the Vasbinder and Bundick families might be traceable to the Curtis lineage rather than that of Ball.

STEP THREE: LITERATURE SURVEY (SAINT LANDRY PARISH)

The ultimate solution of difficult research problems usually rests upon an examination of *original* resources—not merely those materials conveniently available on a library shelf; however, an initial survey of published primary and secondary works is still in order as an introduction to area records and families. In the case of Saint Landry Parish, formerly the colonial post (district) of Opelousas, a considerable amount of genealogical material is available in print—including abstracts of church and civil marriage records, church baptisms and burials, and civil successions (estate settlements). A study of this material yielded no Ball records and nothing that appeared to connect the Curtises to the Bundicks or the Vasbinders. The Curtis residence in the parish seemed to be brief; and no instance was found of their appearing in the Catholic records, a factor not surprising in light of their strong Baptist heritage and the fact that they moved into Louisiana after Catholicism ceased to be the mandated religion. Meanwhile, the Bundicks were clearly Catholic. Two important marriage records also emerged, as follows:

- 24 July 1830 marriage license James Vasbinder and Caroline Bime [Bihm]
 19 July 1837 marriage license Caroline Bundick and John S. Hezlet¹⁷

While both of these records promised to be useful, the literature survey yielded nothing to suggest that a research trip to Saint Landry Parish could be justified—unless something more could be found elsewhere to connect Margaret and Ferdinand Ball to that region. That evidence did emerge; and again it came from those basic and already-consulted records of the “burned” county of Madison, Texas.

STEP FOUR: TAX-ROLL SURVEY (MADISON COUNTY)

The tax rolls of Madison exist annually since its creation in 1853.¹⁸ Abstracts from these tax rolls, made by prior researchers, indicated that Ferdinand Ball first appeared on the rolls in 1855 and Margaret Ball was first listed in 1856. Both were landless; thus it was impossible to pinpoint precisely their place of residence via a legal description of their landholdings. As with many counties, the rolls are semi-alphabetized by the first letter of the surname—again making it impossible to identify with certainty the *closest* neighbors, so that their landholdings might be used to bracket the site of the Ball residence. However, an approximation of that residence—as well as a further clue to associated families—could be made by identifying (in Ferdinand’s case) the closest individual with a surname beginning with *B*. The following consecutive listings appeared on the first tax roll of Madison which included the Ball name (1855):

Ball, Ferdinand	1 poll
Bundick, L. J.	264 acres from Isaac Votaw's headright

Bundick has already been introduced in this paper as young Leonard of the 1850 Polk household of Charles Bundick [Sr.] and as brother of the Charles Bundick [Jr.] who was Ferdinand’s 1870 neighbor. Leonard also proved to be the son-in-law, as well as the brother-in-law, of James Vasbinder.¹⁹

As reported by prior researchers, Margaret Ball did not emerge on the tax rolls of Madison until the year after the appearance of her son—at least not under the name Margaret Ball. Among the several other angles from which these rolls were studied, a reading was made of *given* names for any female taxpayers named Margaret. A curious coincidence was noted; in each of several years following Ferdinand’s first appearance in the county there existed only one such female taxpayer. Beginning in 1856, the surname of that lone Margaret was *Ball*. However, the 1855 Margaret appeared under a different name, as shown by the following consecutive listings:

Hook, Margaret	[cattle and miscellaneous property]
Hamilton, J. J. T.	750 acres from Isaac Votaw's headright

The “coincidence” is significant. Margaret *Hook* and Ferdinand Ball (who named a son Samuel *Hook* and who was the son of one Margaret) are both living near men who occupy portions of the same original grant. The fact that Margaret Hook first appears on the county tax rolls in the same year that Ferdinand Ball makes his first appearance in the county and the fact that

Margaret Hook is dropped from the county rolls in the year that Margaret Ball is added are similar "coincidences" that are heightened by a comparison of the taxable property attached to each of these two names:

Category	1855: Margaret Hook	1856: Margaret Ball
Slaves	0	0
Land	0	0
Horses	0	1
Cattle	15 (value, \$105)	20 (value, \$140)
Miscellaneous (Including cash)	\$275	\$250
Total value	\$380	\$390

If it can be legitimately hypothesized that the two Margarets are the same woman, then it would appear that between 1855 and 1856 she used part of her "miscellaneous" estate to purchase a horse, while her livestock probably increased naturally—thereby producing a slight increase in her estate from the first year to the second. The continued study of subsequent tax rolls indicated that this was a consistent pattern, as follows:

Year	Total Worth
1855	\$ 380
1856	390
1857	*
1858	870
1859	1000
1860	1050

*Margaret was not found under any surname in 1857.

At this point, it was felt that a working hypothesis could be justified: *Margaret Ball and Margaret Hook might well be one and the same person.*

STEP FIVE: RE-EXAMINATION OF CENSUSES FOR HOOK ENTRIES

The surname Hook was rare in the states under study. Less than a half dozen were found in either Texas or Louisiana. No obvious parallel with any Texas family could be made (other than the name of one head of household, Samuel); but one of the Louisiana listings would have to be described as particularly coincidental—especially when one considers the parish in which the entry appears and the identity of the adjacent householder.

Federal Census, Population Schedule
1850 Saint Landry Parish, Louisiana
p. 7; 5 October 1850

134/154 La Combe, Marguerite, 60, white, female, \$300, La.

135/155 Hook, Samuel, 28, male, white, laborer, La.

" Ferdinand, 22, male, white, laborer, La.

In conjecturing whether Marguerite (supposedly living alone) and her "neighbor" Ferdinand might be Margaret and Ferdinand Ball, there are both negative and positive factors to consider.

Negative

1. The surname La Combe has not been previously found in connection to the Balls.
2. The age of the above Marguerite is not compatible with that of Margaret Ball (allegedly born about 1803). Likewise, the age of this Ferdinand Hook differs from the age of Ferdinand Ball as given in his wife's Bible record (i.e., born 1824).
3. If Marguerite La Combe was the mother of Ferdinand Hook, why is she shown as living in a separate household?

Positive

1. Margaret Ball is said to have been a Creole by birth. The surname La Combe should be a Creole name.
2. The assets of Margaret La Combe, Margaret Hook, and Margaret Ball are strikingly compatible, as the following comparative table shows:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Amount</i>
1850	Marguerite La Combe	\$300
1855	Margaret Hook	380
1856	Margaret Ball	390

A further study of the Saint Landry neighborhood in which the La Combe and Hook households appear yielded further evidence that reduced the significance of negative factors two and three above. Other unmarried females were listed as living alone, even though proven family members were shown in "separate" households "next door." The ages shown for numerous other neighbors also differed from their actual ages, as calculated from their baptismal records. More directly significant, however, was the identity of several of those neighbors. The highly abbreviated census data that follows, amplified by other data [in brackets], illustrates these points.

Federal Census, Population Schedule
 1850 Saint Landry Parish, Louisiana
 pp. 7ff; 5 October 1850

122/139	Beam [<i>Bihm</i>], Jacob	40	[his sister married Vasbinder] ²⁰
	" Mathilda	40	[nee Bundick] ²¹
122/140	Beam, Luceta	25	[sister of Jacob; listed alone] ²²
123/141	Beam, John	30	[brother of Jacob and Luceta] ²³
128/146	Beam, Jacob	60	[father of Jacob, John, and Luceta; wife was nee Le Jeune] ²⁴
132/152	dela Morandier, Etienne	52	[son of Marg't, below] ²⁵
133/153	de La Morandier, Marg't	70	[nee Gradenigo; listed alone] ²⁶
134/154	La Combe, Marguerite	60	
135/155	Hook, Samuel	28	
	" Ferdinand	22	

In short, the presence of this Marguerite, together with a Ferdinand and Samuel Hook, living amid the first in-laws of the Vasbinder who was Margaret and Ferdinand Ball's neighbor in Texas, appeared too coincidental to ignore.

STEP SIX: RE-EXAMINATION OF PUBLISHED LITERATURE FOR LA COMBE

A subsequent search of the published resources of Saint Landry yielded much on the surname La Combe but nothing more on any La Combe bearing the given name *Marguerite* or *Margaret*. Here again, a curious coincidence emerged when the La Combe family of Saint Landry was reconstructed. The family originated in central Louisiana with the appearance, about 1800, of a female named Sarah (or Sally) "Celeste" Voorhies²⁷—a lady of many marital adventures. She first wed one Solomon Link, possibly in Illinois where the one son of this union was born about 1788–1790.²⁸ By the mid-1790s she was in the vicinity of Saint Louis, as the wife (legal or common-law) of one Pierre François La Combe "of Montreal," by whom she had five sons.²⁹ In May 1802, in the Plaquemine Brulé area of the Opelousas District, Sarah became the "housekeeper" of one Jean Doucet, with whom she lived until his death some eighteen months later.³⁰ In the interim she bore a daughter Marguerite, a daughter baptized on 22 January 1803 ("aged two months"—i.e., born November, as was Margaret Ball) who was identified at baptism as Doucet's daughter.³¹ Seven months after Jean's death, Sarah again took a legal husband, one Oliver Clark, who had been widowed only fourteen weeks earlier from his bride of three months.³² By Clark, Sarah appears to have had no children—although it will be subsequently seen that she was still fertile and later bore at least one other son (one very important to this case study). No further trace of Oliver Clark has been found.³³

Again, the facts reconstructed for this La Combe family present a curious "coincidence." To recapitulate:

1. Marguerite Ball, mother of Ferdinand and grandmother of Samuel Hook Ball, was the Texas neighbor of one James Vasbinder from Saint Landry.
2. Marguerite La Combe of Saint Landry resided next door to Samuel and Ferdinand Hook and as a near neighbor of Vasbinder's in-laws, the Bihms and Bundicks.
3. Marguerite Doucet of Saint Landry (whose birthdate is compatible with that of Margaret Ball) had several half-brothers surnamed La Combe, as well as two half-brothers who married Bihms.

However, any hypothesis that Marguerite Doucet may have been the same as Marguerite La Combe of 1850 or Margaret Ball of 1856 has to rest upon two factors: an understanding of cultural patterns within this society and a compatible reconstruction of the life of Marguerite Doucet.

The use of the name *La Combe* by Marguerite Doucet is to be expected under both the law and the culture of French Louisiana. As already shown, Marguerite's parents were not legally married. While she was recognized as Doucet's child at baptism, her father did not initiate legal proceedings for acknowledgement or adoption in the months before his death. Without such action, the legal name of an illegitimate child would have been the name of that child's mother. Within this society also (as is traditional in Catholic countries) a married female's legal name did not change to that of her husband; rather,

she continued to be identified in both church and civil records by her maiden name, with (commonly) an appended statement of her marital status and spouse's name. This custom was still followed by many of Louisiana's Creole scribes as late as the mid-nineteenth century, although the state's Anglo-American scribes were less prone to do so. Moreover, in a society in which families often lived in clusters, females were frequently identified by the surname of the core family around which the cluster was built.³⁴ In this case, the community identification was clearly La Combe, as shown by the following table of name-usage for Margaret's mother:

Year	Event	Name under which She Appears
1804	Marriage (civil license) ³⁵	Sally La Combe
1804	Marriage (church entry) ³⁶	Sarah Bores [Voorhies]
1807	Deed from Reuben Sackett ³⁷	Sarah Lacombe
1810	Federal census ³⁸	Widow Lacombe
1812	Mortgage to William Morrison ³⁹	Sarah Lacombe
1813	Parish census ⁴⁰	Mde. v. [veuve, or widow] Sara Lacombe
1816	Legal emancipation of son ⁴¹	Sarah Lacombe
1820	Federal census ⁴²	Ve. [Widow] Sarah Lacombe

Tracing Marguerite La Combe *dite* [called] Doucet as an adult was not difficult. At the age of fourteen, she married, as shown by the following record:⁴³

21 May 1816. Marriage of Marguerite Doucet, daughter of Jean Doucet and Sarah Borays [Voorhies], native of this parish, to Jacob Hook, native of Beardstown [Bardstown], Kentucky, son of Benoit [Barnet] Hook and Julianna Izador [Schroeder]. Witness: Gregoire La Combe.

Jacob and his widowed mother had arrived in Saint Landry Parish by 1808.⁴⁴ In January 1816, four months prior to his marriage to Marguerite, Jacob purchased a tract of land in Grand Prairie (some ten miles north of the town of Opelousas) that adjoined Margaret's paternal uncle, Pierre Doucet, and his new stepfather, Dr. John Sappington.⁴⁵ After the birth of one daughter, who died as an infant, Jacob sold his farm and moved with his wife and again-widowed mother to the upstate parish of Ouachita.⁴⁶ There, he and Margaret settled on the plantation of his older half-brother, George Hook—a former sheriff of the parish who was married to the second of the two surviving widows of Abraham Morehouse (the celebrated northeastern land entrepreneur and bigamist for whom the civil parish of Morehouse is named).⁴⁷ Subsequent work in the unpublished courthouse records of Ouachita and Saint Landry reveals that Jacob died soon after (apparently between January and April 1821), leaving only one child by his eighteen-year-old widow—a son (apparently born posthumously) who was identified as Samuel in 1823 when Jacob's brothers settled upon the boy and his mother one slave woman in lieu of probating Jacob's estate.⁴⁸ Margaret subsequently sold this slave (September 1824) in her home parish of Saint Landry, a deed executed by her under the name "Margaret Lacombe, widow of Jacob Hook."⁴⁹

This much of the reconstruction of the life of Marguerite (La Combe *dite* Doucet) Hook is entirely compatible with the hypotheses that have been made; but one subsequent record—on the surface—presents a serious problem. On 6

March 1826, Judge George King of Saint Landry certified that he married one Michel Miller to "Marguerite Doucet, widow of Jacob Hook."⁵⁰ While it might be argued that the Widow Hook, who used the name *Lacomb* in her 1824 deed, was the same Marguerite La Combe who lived adjacent to Samuel Hook in 1850, it would be more difficult to explain how *Mrs. Miller* could be this person. That explanation became clear as research digressed into a study of the Millers and proceeded into the unpublished records of the various parishes involved.

STEP SEVEN: ON-SITE RESEARCH—MILLER, DOUCET, LACOMBE, LINK, VASBINDER, BALL

Marguerite's second husband, Michel Miller, appears on the next federal census (1830) with a female of appropriate age but only one child—a male aged 0–5.⁵¹ The household does not include the eight-to-nine year old Samuel Hook who was definitely the child of Marguerite (La Combe *dite* Doucet) Hook, nor does it include a six-to-eight year-old Ferdinand. The parish church records reveal the reason. On 23 May 1830 there was born (and shortly thereafter baptized) the first of at least seven children whom Miller fathered by Hyacinthe Le Jeune, a young woman with whom he established a residence amid their parental neighborhood.⁵² A marriage between Michel and Hyacinthe was impossible (and there is none of record). Not only did a civil marriage exist between Michel and Marguerite, for which no divorce was granted, but Hyacinthe was the estranged wife of one Nathaniel West of Kentucky, whom she had married six days prior to her thirteenth birthday and who had left her (and the parish) soon after their 1821 church marriage. West was known to have been alive as late as 1839 when he briefly reappeared in the parish to attend his interest in the succession of his brother.⁵³

Records of Marguerite, during her own estrangement from Miller, are meager. No trace of her or her children emerged during the decade of the 1830s. Nor does she appear as a head-of-household on the 1830 and 1840 censuses of Saint Landry, Ouachita, Rapides (yet another "burned" county or parish—in this instance, one in which Marguerite's mother had owned some property), or Avoyelles (where various in-laws resided). It appears probable that she shared the Saint Landry home of one of her Link or La Combe siblings who, by this time, were enjoying some prominence in parish affairs.⁵⁴ As Margaret's older son came to adulthood, however, she surfaced again in Saint Landry's civil records—assisting him in the assertion of his rights to his parental estate and in the acquisition of a small farm. At their first appearance in 1842 (24 September), she is identified as "Margaret Doucet, widow of the late Jacob Hook." Together with her son Samuel J. Hook, "sole heir of his father Jacob Hook," she gave power of attorney to one of her La Combe half-brothers to sell a tract that had been in Jacob's possession when he died; *James Vasbinder served as witness to this document*. Then, on 23 December 1845, she and Samuel executed a new power of attorney—this time to Bryant Stapleton of Saint Landry, for the same purpose. Finally, in August 1850, she

served as security for the young Samuel to purchase 50.62 acres on a credit of \$350.⁵⁵

STEP EIGHT: TESTING TRADITION

The foregoing reconstruction of the origins of Margaret Ball leaves untested two pieces of the originally “known” information that fall into the category of family tradition. *First*, in 1870 the census taker was told that Margaret’s father was of foreign birth. *Second*, Margaret’s descendants recount the story that the abandoned Margaret went to live with her family—in New York.

The antecedents and origins of the father of Marguerite La Combe *dite* Doucet were relatively easy to identify. Her father’s succession identifies his brother Pierre, and the marriage and succession records of that brother supply both his birth year and the names of their parents. Pierre was born in 1752 at “Miramichy en Acadeie” [presently in New Brunswick, Canada], the son of Michel Doucet and his wife Marie Marguerite Martin.⁵⁶ Similarly, an extant militia roll of Poste Saint Landry des Opelousas, identifying militiamen who would have seen service in the Gálvez campaigns of the American Revolution, provides an age for Jean—placing his birth year about 1760.⁵⁷ Finally, the 25 April 1766 “Census and List of Militiamen and Acadian Householders Recently Established at Atakapas” includes the parental family among those displaced Acadians who had just arrived in the colony and had been dispatched to the unsettled region of the Attakapas Indians, immediately south of the Opelousas District.⁵⁸ In short, Jean Doucet was born some six years before his family’s arrival in Louisiana; he was of foreign birth.

The tradition that Margaret went to live with family and that her family was in New York is also supported by extant records—although in somewhat altered fashion. As previously seen, the twenty-two-year-old widow Margaret (some two months short of giving birth to Ferdinand James Ball) left Ouachita for Saint Landry Parish (but not New York)⁵⁹ to live amid her kin. The maternal side of her family, however, had come to Louisiana from that very state identified in the family’s tradition. The registers of Saint Martin of Tours Church at Saint Martinville in the adjacent civil parish of Saint Martin yield the following marriage for Margaret’s mother:⁶⁰

25 May 1804

Marriage of Oliver Clark of New York, widower of Juliane Prudhomme, son of Thomas Clark of Ireland and Anne Brooks of America . . . to Sarah Bores, widow of Solomon Ling, daughter of William Bores and Marie Simon of Long Island.

STEP NINE: FINAL IDENTIFICATION OF OTHER KEY PARTIES

Three individuals who emerged early as the associates of Margaret Ball and Marguerite La Combe still remain to be identified: James Vasbinder, the Ball neighbor in Texas who intermarried with the Bundicks and the Bihms; and Marguerite and Étienne de La Morandière, who resided next door to Marguer-

ite La Combe in Saint Landry Parish. All of these neighbors proved to be related, by blood or marriage.

As previously mentioned, the neighboring Marguerite de La Morandière was by birth a Gradenigo. By the time the 1850 census taker found her living next door to Marguerite La Combe, she was long since the widow of Captain Étienne Robert de La Morandière, to whom British forces had surrendered Fort Panmure of Natchez during the American Revolution. Her in-law relationship to the Voorhies-La Combe family was a double one. In 1803 her sister Agata Amata Gradenigo had married Cornelius Voorhies, who was soon to be appointed parish clerk of adjacent Attakapas and then sheriff of Opelousas. (Agata and Cornelius subsequently became the grandparents of the noted justice of Louisiana's supreme court, Albert Voorhies.) In 1825 Marguerite and Agata's niece, Azelie Gradenigo, married Bennet P. Voorhies, another kinsman of Cornelius and Sarah.⁶¹ The association between the De La Morandière-Voorhies family and the Vasbinders dates back at least to 1809, when Cornelius Voorhies and James Vasbinder [Sr.] served as witnesses to each other's deeds for property, including a tract adjacent to the De La Morandières;⁶² and the association of the latter family with the Ouachita Hooks dates at least to 1803 when Jacob's brother George of Ouachita both bought and sold slaves with the Opelousas Gradenigos.⁶³ A neighborhood analysis of the various parish censuses further revealed that Marguerite de La Morandière was not only the next-door neighbor of Marguerite La Combe in 1850, but she was similarly the 1820 neighbor of Marguerite's mother Sarah Voorhies, Widow La Combe.⁶⁴

The identity of the James Vasbinder who came to adulthood about 1830, and subsequently migrated to Texas, proved even more significant—albeit more difficult to determine due to the nature of existing records. As previously noted, Saint Landry's church registers have been published in abstracted form; however, the abstracts are severely abbreviated, some detail is edited out "for privacy," the original order has been destroyed by entries being rearranged in alphabetical sequence under the name of one principal party, and the publications carry no index by which "buried" names can be easily retrieved. Users are also at the mercy of the various individuals who compiled the card index from which the publication was produced, because access to the unedited originals is not available and erroneous readings are a problem. Under these conditions, a word-by-word reading was made of the five volumes (3,417 pages) covering Marguerite's years in Saint Landry Parish; in the process the baptism and first marriage (church ceremony) of James Vasbinder were located in three entries, as follows:

WERBAINER, Jims (Jims & Celeste BORES) b[orn] 9 Sept. 1809

HARBINDER, James of Opel. (James & Sarah BORES) m. [church marriage] 10 Aug. 1830, Caroline BIM

BIHM, Caroline (Jacob) m. [marriage license] 24 July 1830, James *HASBINDER*⁶⁵

In short, James Vasbinder resided next door to the Balls in Texas for a logical reason: he was Margaret's half-brother. The circuitous route that had been used to backtrack Margaret (Hook) Ball from Texas to her Louisiana

birthplace—via Vasbinder, the Bundicks, and their Bihm in-laws—had now clearly led to Margaret’s birth family.

GENEALOGICAL SUMMARY

Sarah (Voorhies) (Link) (La Combe) Clark

Born on Long Island in the colony of New York, apparently between 1760 and 1774,⁶⁶ Sarah (“Sally”) was the daughter of William Voorhies (of the early Dutch family, van Voorhies) and his wife Marie Simons [Mary Simmons]. In the wake of the American Revolution, apparently, she moved westward to Illinois where she and her first husband, Solomon Link, produced a son William about 1788. Soon widowed, Sarah became the wife of the Montreal-born François La Combe. Records disagree as to whether their union was legal or common-law; regardless, it had ended by 1802, leaving Sarah with five sons by La Combe to support, as well as the son by Link.

By or during that same year, 1802, Sarah moved her growing family southward to the colony of Louisiana, following two married sisters to the district of Opelousas that had been heavily settled by Anglo-Americans for nearly a quarter-century. There she found employment in a position common to propertyless females—that of housekeeper. As did many such females, she bore a child to her employer, Jean Doucet—a daughter Margaret, whom Doucet’s family, as well as the community, recognized as his. The child’s birth was soon followed by Doucet’s death and then by Sarah’s remarriage to a fellow New Yorker, Oliver Clark—another shortlived union. Whether Clarke died or left the parish is unknown, but by mid-1807 the *feme sole* Sarah La Combe had accumulated a small sum of cash to purchase a tract of rural land in the nearby parish of Rapides. The burning of Rapides’s legal and church records in the course of the Civil War makes it impossible to determine whether she removed there temporarily with her large family—or even to track the disposal of that small plot of land.

In one parish or the other during this period when her oldest sons were coming of age, Sarah formed one last attachment. James Vasbinder, Sr., was an associate of her affluent kinsman, Cornelius Voorhies—but the association did not lead him to marry Sarah. Vasbinder’s stay in the parish was brief. Identified by his descendants as a native of Canada who had come down the Mississippi River,⁶⁷ the tradesman Vasbinder first bought a lot in the town of Opelousas—then sold it⁶⁸ and relocated in other, unidentifiable, quarters at the time Sarah was three months pregnant with his son (i.e., James Vasbinder, Jr., of Texas, whose family was first identified in this problem as “open house kin” of Margaret Ball). Vasbinder last appears in Opelousas-area records in 1811—when he served as bondsman for Benjamin Andrews, who had taken out a license to marry Sarah’s widowed sister, Mary (Voorhies) (Robertson) Harmon.⁶⁹ Within months Sarah was alone again, struggling to pay off a debt of \$60 for which she was forced to mortgage her family’s meager household goods. Like propertyless females everywhere, once they cease childbearing, Sarah appears in almost no later records. The census enumerators found her household in 1813 and 1820, and recorded her name. Beyond that point, her

life has not been traceable. The scribes who recorded the subsequent marriages of her sons did not bother to note whether she was then dead or alive.

Margaret (La Combe dite Doucet) (Hook) (Miller) Ball

Born in November 1802 at Plaquemine Brulé, in the Opelousas District, Margaret was the “natural”—and soon fatherless—child of Sarah (Voorhies) (Link) La Combe by Jean Doucet, an Acadian who had employed her as his housekeeper. As the next-to-youngest child of a large family whose poverty contrasted starkly with the lifestyle of their more-affluent, nearby relatives, Margaret married early—at fourteen—to Jacob Hook, a young Kentuckian whose family typified the active role that Anglo-Americans were now assuming in the government of Louisiana.

At sixteen, Margaret bore and buried her first child. At eighteen, she was a pregnant, propertyless, and unskilled widow—alone in the upstate parish of Ouachita where, at twenty-one, she was wooed and abandoned by the legendary “Mr. Ball.” Returning to her home and family in Saint Landry, with her infant Samuel Hook, she bore Ball’s son Ferdinand in December 1824—then married again, briefly and disastrously in 1826, to Michael Miller. Left once more, this time to fend for two sons as well as herself, Margaret found herself not really married and yet unmarriageable under Louisiana law and custom. At twenty-four, when many females are just embarking upon wedded life, Margaret appears to have eschewed any further romantic attachments and focused her existence upon the role of mother and care-giver for which tradition remembers her. It is clear that this life she chose was not an easy one, for the 1850 census estimated the age of the forty-seven-year-old Margaret as sixty.

As her eldest son Samuel came to adulthood, Margaret helped him to acquire a small farm on which he could settle his new bride. It was then that she did as so many Americans did in the mid-1800s, left family and memories behind her and began a new life in Texas—following her half-brother Vasbinder and the son Ferdinand who now preferred to be known by the name of his own father, Ball. And it was there, in the new county of Madison, in the new state of Texas, that Margaret (perhaps to match community expectations that she should carry the same name as her son) assumed her new identity as Margaret Ball.

CONCLUSION

There has not yet been found—and there may never be found—a document which explicitly states the parentage and origins of Margaret Ball of Madison County, Texas. This lack of a conveniently worded record is one familiar to all researchers; and it is, almost certainly, the primary cause of most genealogical stalemates. One point is clear from the case at hand: when the “typical” search fails to yield the desired answers, or when one confronts the remains of a burned courthouse, it cannot be concluded that there is little more research to be done or no evidence left to be found. Quite to the contrary. Even the most

elusive ancestor had neighbors and associates, most of whom created at least some records—and some of whom may be easier to backtrack than the problem ancestor.

Genealogists therefore use whatever resources are available—meager though they may be—to identify associates with common elements in their lives or lifestyles. They must locate and scrutinize all records created by those auxiliary individuals. And they must be acutely alert to subtle as well as obvious clues. In short, genealogists do not merely search for a specific name—names can change. Researchers search for *clusters* of people with certain characteristics and *clusters* of names—given names as well as surnames, in their various combinations. In the present case, this was clearly an effective strategy.

Even when—as in the present case—the resulting mass of records does not explicitly state the desired “proof,” one may still acceptably “establish” identity, origins, and parentage upon the basis of the *preponderance of the evidence*. To do so justifiably, however, the researcher must be scrupulously certain that all possible resources have been examined, that all evidence has been correctly analyzed and interpreted, that there exists no contradictory evidence of substance, and that within the valid evidence that does exist all elements point toward the same conclusion. Acknowledging the fact that absolute proof of parentage can never exist in the study of genealogy, this writer does feel that adequate evidence has been marshalled to support one conclusion: Margaret Ball of Madison County, Texas, is one and the same as Marguerite La Combe dite Doucet (Widow Hook) of Saint Landry and Ouachita parishes, Louisiana.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The present article is adapted from a broader paper presented at the National Genealogical Society's 1987 annual conference in Raleigh, North Carolina. Entitled “The Preponderance of the Evidence Principle: How to Build a Case when There's No One Document to ‘Prove’ Your Point,” the prior paper is available as Cassette Tape No. RNC-23, from Triad, Post Office Box 120, Toulon, IL 61483.

Ms. Mills (107 Woodridge, Tuscaloosa, AL 35406) is a Certified Genealogist and Fellow of the American Society of Genealogists. As editor of the *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, she wishes to acknowledge the contributions of two of the journal's advisors who judged the unsigned manuscript (William Thorndale, C.G., 150 North 200 West—No. 31, Salt Lake City, UT 84103; and Dr. William B. Saxbe, Jr., C.G., 346 Reamer Place, Oberlin, OH 44074) and the colleagues who critiqued earlier drafts (Winston De Ville, C.G., F.A.S.G., Route 5, Box E-21, Ville Platte, LA 70586; Sharon Sholars Brown, C.G., 105 Gum Street, Jonesboro, LA 71251; and Ruth Land Hatten, 3323 Highland Drive, Vicksburg, MS 39180), as well as Mr. Anderson, who assumed responsibility for editing the revised manuscript for publication. Additional appreciation is due to the client who commissioned the research, R. C. Ball, 1307 Imogene, Houston, TX 77096, for his perseverance, assistance, and permission to publish this case study. Mr. Ball is the great-grandson of Ferdinand James Ball.

2. A failure to recognize, and frankly treat, “unconventional” social behavior is one of the main reasons why genealogists experience great difficulties in identifying parents of “elusive ancestors.” Behavioral patterns such as those involved in the present study are not unknown, insofar as Margaret's birth state is concerned—casual researchers conducting genealogical work in Louisiana (and other French and Spanish societies in North America) often comment upon the extent to which illegitimacies are documentable there—but genealogists of families in “Anglo-America” are inclined to conclude that such social patterns do not prevail in their own societies. Two factors are primarily responsible for this casual (and erroneous) impression: (1) the nature of the records created in Latin societies makes it easier to document precise dates of marriages and births, and the earlier, published records of these societies have more frankly identified

aberrant behavior than customary in the few Anglo-American areas where vital registrations exist in some form; and (2) since vital records were not created in most of Anglo-America, the efforts necessary to pinpoint "unconventional" lifestyles there often require extremely complex and time-consuming methods that few genealogists are willing to expend.

However, contemporary observers of the past and social historians of the present have provided documentation that upsets stereotyped views of many North American societies. The most comprehensive study which has been done on social mores in Latin Louisiana, for example, finds a 4.5 percent illegitimacy rate among French and Spanish females in Louisiana during the decade of Margaret's birth and an overall 4 percent for the colonial era. Meanwhile, the Reverend Charles Woodmason, who ministered in South Carolina on the eve of the Revolution, estimated that "94 per cent of the young women he married were already pregnant" and stated that "many hundreds [of couples] lived in Concubinage—swopping their Wives as Cattel. . . . This is as Common with the Germans on [the] other side of the River, as among [our Anglicans] on this Side." A study of Sturbridge, Massachusetts, between 1730 and 1799 found that 25 to 33 percent of all first-born children arrived within seven months of the parental marriage. Another study, this one in Kingston Parish, Gloucester County, Virginia, between 1749 and 1780, found that "from one fourth to one third of all brides . . . were pregnant on the day of their first marriage;" and historians of Charles County, Maryland, report that at least 20 percent of the county's female immigrant population between 1658 and 1705 were "presented to the county court" for bearing an illegitimate child—as were thirty-three percent of their daughters in the second generation.

For Louisiana's statistics, see Elizabeth Shown Mills, "Social and Family Patterns on the Colonial Louisiana Frontier," *Sociological Spectrum* 2 (July–December 1982): 233–48. For comparative observations and statistics in Anglo-American societies, see Richard J. Hooker, ed., *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution: The Journal and Other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), xxvi, 15, 100; Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980), 139; Nancy Osterud and John Fulton, "Family Limitation and Age at Marriage: Fertility Decline in Sturbridge, Massachusetts, 1730–1850," *Population Studies* 30 (November 1976): 487; and Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "The Planter's Wife: The Experience of White Women in Seventeenth-Century Maryland," in Michael Gordon, ed., *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 266–77.

3. Letter of R. C. Ball to the author, 26 August 1986.

4. Dates of birth and death are from a transcription of family data recorded in the now-destroyed Bible of Sarah (Curtis) Ball; a copy of the original manuscript listings is currently in possession of Mr. Ball, who reports the family account that this Bible was "raked at the last moment from a burning trash pile, the fly leaf torn out and saved, and the Bible thrown back in." Mr. Ball also states that the transcription may not be entirely correct since the surviving flyleaf is "so faded that it is very hard to read." On the photocopy of the flyleaf which Mr. Ball provided, Margaret's year of birth is entirely illegible. The family believed the year to be 1803.

See also 1860 federal census, population schedule, Madison County, Texas—dwelling 73, family 73, p. 11 (439), post office district: Lookout (Leon County); 1870 federal census, population schedule, Madison County—dwelling 294, family 294, p. 43 (332), post office: Madisonville.

5. The Sarah (Curtis) Ball Bible provides the dates of Ferdinand's birth and marriage. The latter date is confirmed by the record found in Grimes County Marriage Book H:112. See also (microfilmed) Grimes County Tax Rolls, Texas State Archives—Genealogy Division, Austin.

6. Family Bible of James Curtis (1784–1838) and wife Zilpha (Byrd) Curtis (1787–1849), parents of Sarah (Curtis) Ball. Photocopy of actual Bible entries in possession of R. C. Ball. No complete and reliable account of the Reverend Curtis's family and activities is known to exist; for an overview, see May Wilson McBee, *The Natchez Court Records, 1767–1805: Abstracts of Early Records* (1953; reprinted Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1979), esp. 594–95.

7. 1860 federal census, population schedule, Madison County—dwelling 91, family 91, p. 14 (440-A), post office: William Hale; 1870 federal census, population schedule, Madison County—dwelling 294, family 297, p. 43 (332), post office: Madisonville. Letter of R. C. Ball to the author, 1 March 1987.

8. All dates from Sarah (Curtis) Ball Bible.

9. Data on William Riley Curtis is from the James Curtis Bible.

10. Letter of R. C. Ball to the author, 12 February 1986.

11. Edward Marshall Ball was the son of William Bartholomew Ball and wife Charlotte Lee who married in Richmond County, Georgia, in 1796 and migrated in October 1809 to the area that became the "burned" Mississippi county of Jackson. Researchers should be aware that some past compilers of Ball information have made a number of serious alterations in the records that they have transcribed and disseminated to others. For more on this problem, and a corrective separation of William's identity from that of William Ball

of Liberty County, Georgia (son of the Revolutionary War officer Edward Ball), see the documented manuscript by the present writer, "Summary Analysis of Research To-date: William Bartholomew Ball Family," in Documents Files (Pre-1958), Ball Family (William Bartholomew Ball, Georgia)—Elizabeth Shown Mills, at the Library of the National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution, Washington, D.C.

12. The story of the father of Margaret's son Ferdinand Ball, including the circumstances surrounding the forging of the Edward Ball-Margaret Ferdinand "Bible entry," will be specifically treated in a subsequent article.

13. 1870 federal census, population schedule, Madison County—dwelling 295, family 298, p. 43 (332), post office: Madisonville; Sarah (Curtis) Ball Bible.

14. 1870 federal census, population schedule, Madison County—dwelling 296, family 299, p. 43 (332), post office: Madisonville.

15. 1860 federal census, population schedule, Madison County—dwelling 90, family 90 (Vasbinder), p. 14 (440-A), post office: William Hale; and dwelling 74, family 74 (Gustavus), p. 11 (439), post office: Lookout (Leon County). 1870 federal census, population schedule, Madison County—dwelling 391, family 394, p. 56 (338-A) (Gustavus), and dwelling 395, family 398 (Vassbinder), p. 56 (339), post office: Madisonville. While the census data that was gleaned on Margaret and Ferdinand from Madison County's agricultural schedules was useful in reconstructing their lives, it is not central to the research summary offered in this article and will not be covered herein. Neither Margaret nor Ferdinand was found on the slave schedules of Madison County.

16. Editorial annotations are from the James Curtis Bible.

17. Rev. Donald J. Hébert, ed., *Southwest Louisiana Records*, Volume II, *Church and Civil Records, 1811-1830* (Eunice, La.: privately printed, 1976), 885 (Vasbinder); Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, Volume III, *1831-1840* (Eunice: p.p., 1976), 333.

18. These tax rolls are available on microfilm (via interlibrary loan) from the Genealogy Collection of the Texas State Library at Austin, as Reel 281 (First Series).

19. Leonard was married in 1852, in Grimes County, to James Vasbinder's daughter Sarah—about the same time that Vasbinder married Leonard's sister Caroline. A well-documented (although not complete) account of this branch of the Bundick family appears in Albert Tate, Jr., "The Children of the Two Marriages of William Bundick (ca 1743-1810): Early Anglo Settler of the Spanish Opelousas-Attakapas (La.) Area," *Louisiana Genealogical Register* 31 (March 1984): 17-34; see p. 19 especially.

20. Jacob Bihm *filis* [son of Jacob] was born in Saint Landry, 6 October 1809; see Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, I:50-51.

21. Matilda Bundick, daughter of Philip Bundick and his wife Sarah Barker, married Jacob Bihm on 4 December 1827; Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, II:75-76, 164-65.

22. Lucetta Bihm was born 21 November 1823; see Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, II:76.

23. John Bihm was born 5 April 1816; see Hébert, *ibid.*

24. Jacob Bihm, son of Jacob Bihm and his wife Marie Ritter, married 24 October 1808, Susanne Le Jeune, daughter of Joseph Le Jeune and wife Patsy "Perine" Hay. Through her (Anglo-American) Hay ancestry, Susanne was a second cousin of the previously mentioned Charles Bundick and also of Charles's brother Philip, whose daughter became Susanne's daughter-in-law. See Deed Book C: 259-60 (doc. no. 325), Saint Landry Parish courthouse; and Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, I:50, 107-08, 375; II:164-65.

25. Étienne Gabriel Robert de La Morandière was born 3 December 1797 and married 20 June 1815 to Louise "Elise" Felicité Robin, daughter of Dr. Simon Dositée François Robin of Bourg, France, and the second of his three wives, Marie Felicité Picoté de Belestre of Illinois; Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, I:163-64, 489; II:249-50, 771-73.

26. Marguerite Gradenigo, daughter of Jean Gradenigo of Venice and his wife Marguerite Krebs of Mobile and Pensacola, married 1 February 1796, Étienne de La Morandière, son of Chevalier Étienne Robert de La Morandière and his wife Mariane Soileau; Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, I:163-64, 246-47.

27. The reader will note Sarah's name given variously as Sarah and Celeste, as well as Sally (nickname for Sarah), in the documents discussed in this paper. A note should be made here with regard to a cultural peculiarity of her time and place. In Catholic society an individual's official name was the name under which he or she was baptized; and infants have been traditionally given, at baptism, the name of one or more saints. In short, their official given-names were saint names. The arrival of Protestant "Americans" in Louisiana presented a predicament for the clergymen who were being asked to administer sacraments to individuals bearing non-saint names; they often compromised by assigning to a newcomer a saint name that seemed to be of close similarity. Hence, the previously mentioned Patsy Hay (see note 24) was identified in clerical

records as Perine, by Louisiana priests who were apparently unaware that the English name *Patsy* was a nickname for the traditional saint name *Martha* (*Marthe* in French, *Marta* in Spanish). Similarly, the Protestant Sally Voorhies was assigned the name Celeste (as were various other Sarahs and Sallys of Louisiana); the name was apparently chosen because of the moderate degree of phonetic similarity between Sally and Celeste. There has emerged no evidence that Celeste was part of the birth name of Sarah "Sally" Voorhies (or any of her other Protestant counterparts thus far investigated in Louisiana).

28. Sarah's first husband, Solomon Link, appeared briefly in the lower Mississippi River post of Natchez in 1790, but apparently did not stay there. Natchez District had numerous connections with both Opelousas and Ouachita. Link appears there in conjunction with George Hook's first father-in-law, James Morrison; and Jacob Hook's mother soon after emerged in the Natchez records as wife of Captain William Thomas. See McBee, *Natchez Court Records*, 146, 168-69.

William Link, the son of Solomon and Sarah, married Marie Louise Bihm, daughter of Jacob Bihm père [Sr.] and his wife Marie Ritter, on 31 January 1809, by license dated 28 January (Saint Landry Catholic Church, Opelousas, Register 1:183; Saint Landry Parish courthouse, marriage license no. 2). The disparate civil and church data for this couple illustrate the point made in note 27 above—as well as another name-identification trap faced by Louisiana researchers. While the civil license identified William's mother as Sarah La Combe (the name she preferred), the church entry identified Sarah as *Celeste* and rendered her maiden surname as it sounded to the French ear—*Bereys* rather than *Voorhies*.

The various records extant in Saint Landry for Sarah Voorhies spell her surname as *Bereys*, *Biers*, *Borays*, *Borigs*, *Bores*, *Boores*, and *Bourrous*—in every case, adequate auxiliary information is included to permit the positive identification of her as Sarah *Voorhies*. Similarly, her proven sister Mary Voorhies (successively the wife of Thomas Robertson, Jacob Harmon, and Benjamin Andrews) is found under the additional spellings *Burreys* and *Burrows*. A third documentable sister, Anne (or "Nancy") Voorhies, wife of Isaac Kennison, is variously identified as *Barreys*, *Bores*, *Boreys*, *Borys*, and *Burris*. All of the above variants may be found in Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, vols. I-II, as well as in numerous unpublished records of Saint Landry.

29. Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, I:334; II:531; III:375. A genealogical summary of Sarah's children by La Combe is provided below. For documentation, see Emancipation of François Christophe Lacomb, Deed Book C:257 (doc. no. 322), Saint Landry Parish courthouse; Saint Landry Church, Register 1-B:286; Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, I:132, 334, 569; II:531, 593; III:375; IV:283; V:318; IX:543; *Louisiana Soldiers in the War of 1812*, Marion John Bennett Pierson, comp. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Genealogical and Historical Society, 1963), 67 (Christopher and Charles G. La Combe) and 75 (Sergeant William Link); and "Captain Samuel Laughlin's Company, Louisiana Militia, War of 1812," [*Louisiana*] *Genealogical Register* 6 (June 1959): 19.

- i. Louis François La Combe, born at Saint Louis about 1793, married 31 December 1811, Marie Modeste Hébert; he was killed by lightning about 1812-13.
- ii. Charles Gregoire La Combe, of age to serve as corporal of the Saint Landry militia in the War of 1812; married before 1831, Felicité Le Maitre.
- iii. François Christophe La Combe, born 1796; married 24 September 1816, Charlotte Bok; also saw service in the War of 1812, in the same company with Jacob Hook and his brother Samuel.
- iv. Jean Pierre La Combe, born 1798-99, baptized 22 January 1803 at age four; married 23 December 1822, Eugenie Le Jeune dite Young, widow of Michel Bihm.
- v. Joseph La Combe, born about 1800 (variously given as 1802 or 1805, which would be plausible only if he were not actually La Combe's son); married 6 May 1833, Arthemise Richard; he was baptized 15 December 1865 at "age sixty-three."

30. Representation of Celeste La Combe on the Succession of Jean Doucet, File OPEL: 1803 (October 28), Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge. Sarah "Celeste" swore that she had kept Doucet's house from 3 May 1802 until his death on 28 October 1803 and claimed from his estate a monthly "personal salary" of 10 piasters for a total of 173.4 piasters. Jean's brother François stood as witness to her claim. The house which she "kept" for Doucet is described in his inventory as one "on foundation, measuring nineteen feet long by sixteen wide, galleries [porches] at the front and rear, and a *cabinet* [small annex] at the gable, with a fence and a small storeroom," situated on some 800 arpents [about 530-600 acres] of land at Pointe de Plaquemine Brulé (see Succession of Jean Doucet, File OPEL: 1803—October 27, Louisiana State Archives). Among the purchasers and sureties at his estate sale was one whom the scribe identified as "Le Sieur *Woreihs*," but who signed his name as *Boorhies*, in beautiful script. The only male Voorhies thus far identified in the region this early was Cornelius—although he customarily signed his name with an initial *V* rather than *B*. This Cornelius, a kinsman of Sarah, appeared often in association with her—and will reappear in that context later in this paper.

31. Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, I:183.

32. Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, I:132, 334. For a photocopy of the Clark—"Bores" church marriage, followed sequentially by that of Sarah's sister "Marie Bores," see the appendix to Hébert's vol. IX, page 543.

33. On 29 May 1807, Sarah executed a deed in her own right at Opelousas, under the name *Sarah Lacombe*. There is no mention of Clark, either as deceased or absent. Deed Book A:137 (doc. no. 160), Saint Landry Parish Courthouse.

34. This custom has not been restricted to Creole society. The father-in-law of the present writer (Harold Garland Mills), who was born into an "Anglo" environment in eastern Texas, reports that his father (Hugh Mills) grew up being called "one of the *Hanson* boys," although Hugh was three generations removed from the Hanson name. His mother (the widow Mills) lived with her own mother (the widow Morse), who lived on the plantation of her brother (Samuel Hanson). Therefore the name of the family patriarch, Hanson, became the dominant name by which the community identified this family cluster.

35. Civil marriage record, Saint Martin Original Acts, Vol. 22, No. 151, Saint Martin Parish Courthouse.

36. See photocopy of original record from Church of Saint Martin of Tours, Saint Martinville, in Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, IX:543.

37. Deed Book A:137 (doc. no. 160), Saint Landry Parish Courthouse.

38. 1810 federal census, Opelousas County [Saint Landry Parish], p. 324.

39. Deed Book B:193 (doc. no. 294), Saint Landry Parish Courthouse. By the terms of this document, Sarah La Combe—who, at this time, had six children still at home to support—mortgaged the family's two feather beds, two mattresses "and their furniture," four bedsteads, two tables, one clothes-press, one dozen "common" chairs, and "kitchen furniture" that consisted of six pots and "a quantity" of earthenware. The record does not indicate whether she managed to pay the \$60 necessary to salvage these most-basic necessities of family survival. Meanwhile, in the prior two years, her newly married son (William Link) paid out some \$850 for a slave and livestock; see Deed Book B:50 (doc. no. 86a) and B:153 (doc. no. 254a), Saint Landry Parish Courthouse.

40. Winston DeVille, abstractor, "St. Landry Census of 1813—Territory of Louis Carriere," *Louisiana Genealogical Register* 14 (June 1967): 21–23. In this year, Sarah still had three sons and one daughter living at home.

41. Emancipation of François Christopher Lacombe [from disabilities of minority], Deed Book C:257 (doc. no. 322), Saint Landry Parish Courthouse.

42. 1820 federal census, Saint Landry Parish, p. 105. This census shows the widow Sarah La Combe living adjacent to her son William Link and his brothers-in-law, Jacob and Michel Bihm. Sarah's household is now reduced to herself and three sons; meanwhile her son William Link's estate has increased to include five slaves.

43. Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, II:277, erroneously abstracts the name of the bride as *Mary* rather than *Marguerite* and the name of her father as *Joseph* rather than *Jean*. Corrected data appears on the certificate of marriage issued by the parish archivist in lieu of a photocopy (which the archives does not supply). See Saint Landry Church, Register I:286.

44. On 17 September 1808 Juliana Thomas, "formerly Shreder," gave to George Hook [her stepson, of Ouachita Parish] power of attorney to represent her interests in the estate of her late husband Benedict [Barnet] Hook, as well as that of her deceased father, William Shreder [Schroeder]; see Deed Book A:263–64 (doc. no. 290), Saint Landry Parish Courthouse.

45. Deed Book C:193 (doc. no. 244) and 1818 Tax Roll—Sheriff's Sales, Book 3, Saint Landry Parish Courthouse. The Hook land, which is described on the tax roll as "second quality" and valued at \$700, lay in the Bayou Boeuf–Bayou Cocodrie area, about five miles north of the present village of Washington and about ten or so miles north of the town of Opelousas. Graves of Jacob Bihm and other neighbors and in-laws can still be found in the nearby Lower Waxia (or Sackett) Cemetery off Highway 103, in upper Saint Landry Parish.

46. Baptism of Marie Hook, daughter of Jacob Hook and Marguerite Dusset, born 27 July 1817; see Saint Landry Church, Register II:122. Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, II:451, alphabetizes the family name as *Hook* and then renders the mother's maiden name as *Dupet*. This daughter was not enumerated with Jacob and Margaret on the 1820 census of Ouachita Parish, p. 109; and her younger brother Samuel was subsequently named as Jacob's only surviving child.

47. Succession of Abraham Morehouse and Tutorship of Minors, (Original) File No. 731, Ouachita Parish Courthouse. When Morehouse came to Louisiana to implement his land schemes, he left behind in New York a wife Abigail and two sons whose existence was not known in Louisiana. Apparently in Kentucky, while en route to Louisiana, he married one Eleanor (allegedly Eleanor Hook)—the ward of Chevalier Charles François le Paulmier d'Annemour, who removed from Kentucky to Ouachita with Morehouse. Eleanor was recognized in Louisiana as Morehouse's legitimate wife and widow until a son of the first marriage appeared to assert his family's rights. Both widows and both sets of children ultimately shared in Morehouse's estate. The writer wishes to thank Sharon Sholars Brown, C.G., of Jonesboro, Louisiana, for her work on George Hook and Abraham Morehouse.

48. Documents filed in the succession of George Hook show his brother Jacob actively participating in affairs of the succession throughout January 1821. The next document filed, in April 1821, omits Jacob from family deliberations and he does not appear again thereafter. See Succession of George Hook, (Original) File No. A553, and Conveyance Book E:430, Ouachita Parish Courthouse. On 19 January 1824, Jacob's brother Philip deeded to Margaret, "for the use and benefit of Samuel, minor son of the said Jacob Hook, dec'd.," a forty-year-old Negro woman valued at \$275; see Conveyance Book F:293, Ouachita Parish Courthouse. There also appear in the conveyance indexes of Ouachita two documents identified as "Hook, Samuel to Heirs of George Hook, Receipt, 1822: Deed Book F: 113," and "Hook, Margaret, natural tutor [guardian] of Samuel, to Philip Hook, Deed to Interest in Estate, 1824: Deed Book F:291," which have not been found in the cited locations. No actual succession appears to have been opened for Jacob in either Ouachita or Saint Landry.

49. Deed Book F:631, Saint Landry Parish Courthouse.

50. Marriage Book A:185, and Original File 24 (Letter E), Saint Landry Parish Courthouse.

51. 1830 federal census, Saint Landry Parish, p. 42.

52. Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, II:655; III:468–69; IV:355–57; V:403. Hyacinthe was the youngest daughter of a large family born to Blaise Le Jeune *fils* and his wife Anne Adelaïde Quintero. Her parents appear to have been dead by the time she established her liaison with Miller—and possibly were at her precocious marriage to West; for an overview of the Le Jeunes, see Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, I:372–75, and II:592–96. The community acceptance of Miller's liaison with Hyacinthe is reflected, for example, by the 1830 enumeration (pp. 42–43) which shows the Mishel [*sic*] Millers living in a tight cluster of households that included his father, Jean Miller *père*; her brother, Jean Le Jeune; her uncle, Baptiste Blaise [Le Jeune]; and the uncle's son, Lessin [Onesime] Blaise [Le Jeune]. Lest a question of proper identity be raised here, with regard to the Le Jeunes, it should be noted that the community identification of a person's surname as that of his father's given name (i.e., Baptiste Blaise for Baptiste *fils* Blaise Le Jeune) was another common element of French naming patterns in Louisiana.

53. Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, II:903–04; Deed Book I–J:406, Saint Landry Parish Courthouse.

54. Marguerite's elder half-brother, William Link, served as tax assessor and justice of the peace; her half-brother Pierre La Combe and nephew Solomon Link were community constables; and her niece, Priscilla La Combe, was married to the parish notary, Frederick Kaufman. See oaths of office and related documents for each in Deed Book K:87, 176, 251, and notarial files labelled *Kaufman Acts*, Saint Landry Parish courthouse.

55. Martin Acts, no. 39 (1842) and no. 188 (1845); Kaufman Acts no. 252 (1850).

A second Samuel Hook appears in the Saint Landry records of this period. The older Samuel—another brother of Jacob, George, and Philip—married Mathilde Gardener before July 1822; see Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, II:454. On 21 May 1841, Samuel sold to his brother Philip his interest in a lot in the town of Opelousas, whereon the pair had operated a "Coffee House and Billiard Room." Philip, described as "being unwell" in this document, agreed to assume the debts of their former partnership (Felix De Jean Acts—Red Label [1839] p. 179). On 17 August 1842, Samuel sold his last property in the parish—"a certain double-log cabin and rail pen for horses, which [he] built and now owns at the Bell Cheney Springs" (Martin Acts, no. 37); and he thereafter seems to disappear from Saint Landry's records.

Philip, the last of the Hook brothers in Louisiana, apparently softened toward Margaret and her son Samuel in his remaining months of life. He died in Opelousas "on or about the 23rd day of May 1843" at the coffee-house that he then owned in partnership with Samuel Burnett (Vacant Succession 1060, Saint Landry). However, it was eight months *prior* to his death that Margaret and son Samuel authorized her brother to sell the tract of land that Jacob Hook had owned at the time of his death, but that had been taken over by Jacob's brothers Philip and Samuel to the exclusion of Jacob's rightful heirs. The older Samuel subsequently emerged on the 1850 census of Polk County, Texas—some 73 houses from Elle Curtis, brother of Sarah (Curtis) Ball (p. 194, dwelling 280, family 280). Samuel has not been followed past this point.

56. Succession of Jean Doucet, File OPEL: 1803—October 27; and succession of Pierre Doucet, File OPEL: 1807, Louisiana State Archives. Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, I:183–84.

57. "Compañía de Milicia, Urbana del Partido de Opelusas," legajo 187–B, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba (Cuban Papers), General Archives of the Indies, Seville, Spain. This roster identifies "Juan" Doucet as a bachelor, exactly five feet tall (by French measure, which would make him approximately two inches taller than five feet by English measure). See also "État de Revue de la Compagnie de Milice des oppeloussas du 8 Juin 1777," which classes Jean among the non-commissioned riflemen, also in legajo 187–B.

58. Legajo 2595, Cuban Papers.

59. Deed Book F:631, Saint Landry Parish. A search of all extant ship rolls in and out of both New Orleans and New York City during the 1820–1855 period was conducted under the surnames Ball, Doucet, Hook, Link, and La Combe; results, negative.

60. Photocopy of original record in Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, IX:543.

61. Cornelius Voorhies was a native of New Jersey and son of Daniel Voorhies by his wife Sarah Gordon. The ecclesiastical records of Saint Landry and Avoyelles parishes imply, but do not clearly state, that he was an uncle of the younger Daniel Voorhies who settled in neighboring Avoyelles and of Daniel's brother Bennet P. Voorhies who married the niece of Cornelius's wife. Bennet and Daniel of Avoyelles (where Cornelius also had extensive interests and where a branch of the La Combes settled) are identified as sons of Peter G. Voorhies and wife Marie Pombarton. Additionally, there was associated with them one William Louis Voorhies, a state legislator from Avoyelles, whose son was baptized in 1836 with Pierre Voorhies ("paternal uncle") and Elisa Voorhies ("paternal aunt") as godparents. Cornelius Voorhies is known to have had a son Louis and a daughter Elisa, of compatible age; but a full list of his children has not been reconstructed. See Alberta Rousseau Ducote, *Early Baptism Records: St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church, 1824-1844, Avoyelles Parish* (Mansura: Saint Paul the Apostle Catholic Church, 1982), 69, 157-58; Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, I:163-64, 243-47, 569; II:899-900; III:658.

For record of Cornelius's public service, see "Register of Civil Appointments, Territory of Orleans, Dec. 1804-Jan. 1806," *Louisiana Genealogical Register* 18 (June 1971): 176 (in that same term, George Hook's brother-in-law, James McLaughlin, appears as treasurer of Ouachita Parish); and Deed Book B:139, Saint Landry Parish courthouse (public sale by Sheriff Cornelius Voorhies). For identification of William Louis Voorhies as state congressman from Avoyelles, see *Louisiana Almanack: 1829*, William Collom, ed. (New Orleans: William M'Kean, Bookseller, 1829), 26-28; also serving that same year from Ouachita was Jacob and George Hook's in-law, Abraham Morehouse.

For Étienne Robert de La Morandière's service during the American Revolution see service sheet dated 31 August 1788, legajo 161-A, Cuban Papers; and Robert V. Haynes, *The Natchez District and the American Revolution* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1976), 138-40.

62. Deed Book A:294-95 (docs. nos. 322a, 323), Saint Landry Parish Courthouse.

63. Hook to Gradnego, and Gradnego to Hook, File OPEL: 1803—November 11, Louisiana State Archives.

64. 1820 federal census, Saint Landry Parish, p. 105.

65. Hébert, *Southwest Louisiana Records*, I:572; II:75, 421.

66. The period of Sarah's birth is estimated upon two bases: (1) She bore her last child in 1809—at which time it may be reasonably presumed that she was no more than 49 years old. (2) Her eldest son, already aged 21, married in 1809—i.e., he was born about 1788, at which time it may be plausibly estimated that his mother was at least fourteen.

Almost all the data in this genealogical summary of the lives of Sarah and Margaret has already been documented in this paper. Therefore, citations will be supplied only to the three pieces of new information that the summary offers.

67. Letter of R. C. Ball to the author, 24 August 1986.

68. Deed Book A:240-41 (doc. no. 164a) and 294-95 (docs. nos. 322a and 323), Saint Landry Parish Courthouse.

69. Marriage license no. 8 (Harmon-Andrews), Saint Landry Parish Courthouse.

Runaways!

Pierre de Rigaud de Vaudreuil, Governor of the French Province of Louisiana, to Lieutenant Henri, Chevalier de Louboey, Commandant at Mobile. 2 August 1744.

"I also read the earlier report which you enclosed regarding the escape of the man *Cousot*, the son of *Christianne [Ladner]*, a young orphan named *Pusot* and one named *Besson* who is about 20 years of age—who all left with a young Bohemian girl named *Cecile [Christophe]* and went to Dauphin Island for the purpose of deserting to Pensacola. You must order the sergeant of your post to stop these kinds of people who do not own a passport or who alter its proper destination. . . . I am writing to the Commandant of that place asking that he arrest them and send them back to me."

Submitted by Randall Ladnier