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Portraits of the Past

On the Cover:
Marie Zéline LeCourt
(1825–about 1915)

Marie Zéline LeCourt (1825–about 1915) was a quadroon whose genetics reflect the nuances of slavery in French-Spanish Louisiana. Zéline's father, Barthélemy LeCourt, was a French Créole *blanc*. His father, a French officer of minor nobility, had not wed Barthélemy's Créole *blanc* mother because she was of plebian stock. Zéline's own mother, Adelaïde Mariotte, was a Créole *mulâtresse* born enslaved as the daughter of a Swiss-French Créole *blanc* by a Créole *noire* (Black) woman whom his mother owned.

Zéline's enslaved grandmother, Marie Louise Mariotte, eventually purchased freedom under the Spanish law of *coartación*—the right of slaves to buy themselves. As a *médecine* (herbal doctor), she did laundry for a Créole *blanc* bachelor for two years, in exchange for title to a small homestead.

As a teen, Zéline's mother Adelaïde became the *placée* (unofficial wife) of a wealthy young neighbor of French, Spanish, and Native ancestry. His 1810 death left her with three children. His will bequeathed most of his estate to those children but his White stepfather contested the will, triggering a twenty-year legal battle. The new American regime's more-racialized laws benefitted the stepfather; Adelaïde's children's Créole *blanc* friends argued the children's cause.

Amid that legal drama that the children ultimately won, Adelaïde began her relationship with Barthélemy LeCourt, a widowed father of nine children by his own *placée*, a *métive* (French and Native), whose story appears in this issue. Marie Zéline was the third of Adelaïde and Barthélemy's four children—and the only one of the thirteen LeCourt siblings for whom a photograph survives.

At twenty-one, Zéline wed a neighboring Créole *de couleur* (Créole of color) of similar heritage, Louis Casimir Rachal. Beginning their married life as sharecroppers, they purchased several farms over six decades of marriage and reared a large family—some of whom left home to live as White (*passé blanc*) in regions where their ancestry was not known.

Credits: Photo courtesy of Joseph Balthazar Milon. For the elder Mariotte's life, see Elizabeth Shown Mills, "Which Marie Louise Is Mariotte?" in the September 2006 issue of *NGSQ*.

Identifying Ursule, the Métive Barthélemy LeCourt “Took as His Wife”

By Elizabeth Shown Mills, CG, CGL, FASG, FNGS, FUGA

“Name’s the same” does not mean the person is. Identifying individuals requires a holistic approach to research that rebuilds the context of a person’s life and the community that defines them. Understanding ethnicity, race, origin, and parentage requires thorough use of surviving records, careful correlation of the evidence, a sound resolution of conflicting evidence, and a full study of siblings.¹

Between 1791 and 1811, in the lower reaches of the colonial Louisiana district of Natchitoches a woman named Ursule bore nine children. Each was baptized when a priest happened by on the river. Surviving baptismal records identify Ursule as either *métive* (half Native, half European) or *mulâtresse* (half African, half European).² Ursule’s relationship with her children’s father, Barthélemy LeCourt, a colonial-born French planter, lasted two decades—ending at her death. They never wed, so no marriage record names her parents.

© Elizabeth Shown Mills. Ms. Mills is a former editor of *NGSQ*, a former president of the American Society of Genealogists and the Board for Certification of Genealogists, the author of *Evidence Explained*, and the architect and editor of the two-volume set *Professional Genealogy*. Websites cited in this paper were last accessed on 17 Jan 2025.

1. The term *holistic* embodies all the research, collection, and reasoning standards set forth by the Board for Certification of Genealogists in *Genealogy Standards*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Ancestry Imprint, Turner, 2021), standards 9–50.

2. Native Americans held an ambiguous status in Louisiana. Black-white marriages were illegal under both colonial and antebellum US laws. Natives might legally marry any person, after which they assumed the status of their spouse as this paper demonstrates. For the prohibition against black-white marriage in colonial Louisiana, see B. F. French, *Historical Collections of Louisiana, Embracing Translations of Many Rare and Valuable Documents* (New York: D. Appleton, 1851), 89–95, “Black Code of Louisiana,” particularly Section 6; imaged, *Internet Archive* (<https://archive.org/details/historicalcolle00frenngoog/>). Autosomal DNA tests taken by Ursule’s descendants carry small percentages of Native ancestry. Tested descendants with African DNA descend from Ursule’s sons Valery, Neuville, and Eloi who married French-African sisters. No proved descendants with an all-female line to Ursule have accepted an offer to test their mitochondria.

THE PROBLEM

A university-press history about slavery in colonial Natchitoches asserts Ursule's parentage. It presents her as the daughter of Jeanne Lisette, supposedly enslaved by

two French soldiers who became workers in the Indian trade, Claude Bertrand dit Dauphine and Pierre Haraud. . . . Lisette became Bertrand's concubine, and the couple had five métis children. . . . When Bertrand passed away around 1760, Lisette remained Haraud's slave, but she struck up a new relationship with a Breton officer and trader named Jean Louis Matthias LeCourt de Prelle, with whom she had two more daughters. . . . Her fourth child, Ursule, became the concubine of LeCourt's French Creole son Barthélemy.³

The authors err in genealogical reconstructions and in personal identifications. Two *métive* females named Ursule were born in the Natchitoches jurisdiction—in different locales and generations—and they led radically different lives. Lisette's Ursule was not Claude Bertrand's daughter; Lisette did not bear children to the Breton LeCourt de Prelle; and her daughter Ursule did not become Barthélemy LeCourt's concubine.

When writers garble or fuse obscure women's identities, how does a genealogist separate them? This study emphasizes two methodologies and two standards:

- Follow the men in each female's life. While colonial Louisiana granted more legal rights to women than did British-American colonies, most colonial records were, nonetheless, created by and about men.
- Conduct exhaustive research in all known records (Genealogical Standard 19). A failure to do so led to misidentifying the two Ursules.
- Create detailed timelines for each life and each family. Examine every activity to spotlight problematic overlaps in actions and relationships.
- Analyze each life in cultural, legal, political, and religious context (Genealogical Standard 38).

URSULE NO. 1: DAUGHTER OF LISETTE

The Native woman variously called Jeanne Elisabeth "Lisette" de l'Isle first appears on record at Natchitoches in March 1750, as the enslaved servant of infantry sergeant—not trader—Claude Bertrand *dit* Dauphine. See table 1. At Bertrand's

3. H. Sophie Burton and F. Todd Smith, *Colonial Natchitoches: A Creole Community on the Louisiana-Texas Frontier* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Univ. Press, 2008), 59. *Metis* and *métive* were terms used by the colonial French for those who were part-European and part-Native.

Table 1
Piecing Together the Identity of Jeanne Elisabeth "Lisette" de l'Isle

NAME	DATE	DOCUMENT	IDENTIFYING DETAILS
Jeanne	Mar 1750	Baptism (<i>Natchitoches 1729–1803</i> , no. 315)	"Jeanne, adult <i>sauvagesse</i> belonging to Mr. [Claude Pierre Bertrand <i>dit</i>] Dauphine, sergeant"
	1750–1754	Baptisms of children Marie Louise, Claude [Pierre], and Jean Louis (<i>Natch. 1729–1803</i> , nos. 325, 540, 583)	Children's mother identified only as " <i>sauvagesse</i> belonging to Mr. Dauphine"
Jeanne	1755	Manumission (NCNA doc. 478)	Bertrand & partner Hauraud agree to free "Jeanne & her children Marie Louise, Pierre & Jean Louis" at death of last survivor
	Oct 1756	Death of Claude Bertrand <i>dit</i> Dauphine (<i>Natch. 1729–1803</i> , no. 797)	
Lisette	Jan 1758	Baptism of dau. Marie Ursulle (St. François Bk 2, 1757: no entry no.)	Child's mother called "Lisette, <i>sauvagesse</i> of Sieur Harot." Lisette is short for Elisabeth.
Lisette	Jul 1760	Baptism of dau. Marie Emire (St. François Bk 1, 1760: no entry no.)	Child's mother called "Lisette, <i>sauvagesse</i> of Sieur Harot"
	Jan 1762	Haraud left money in hands of Sieur LeCourt, for "Louise, Pierre & Louis" (affidavit filed with NCNA doc. 480)	"children of a <i>sauvagesse</i> to whom Haraud had given liberty"
Luisetta, India	May 1766	Spanish Census (Leg. 2585, Audencia de Santo Domingo)	"Luisetta" (Sp. for Lisette) is the only free Native head of family. Data compatible with Lisette.
Marie Elisabeth de l'Isle	Aug 1766	Marriage of daughter "Marie Louise Bertrand" to Étienne Gagné (NCNA doc. 429 & <i>Natch. 1729–1803</i> , no. 989)	Bride's parents said to be "Claude Bertrand, dec'd, and Marie Elisabeth de l'Isle." [The name "Marie" was an honorific used in this society for females whether baptized as Marie or not.]
Jeanne	Sep 1768	Succession inventory and appraisal, included land on "the Isle" (NCNA doc. 480)	"Jeanne, free <i>sauvagesse</i> formerly belonging to dec'd Claude Bertrand & Pierre Haraud." 5 minors: Pierre 15, Louis 13, Marie Ursulle 10, Marie Emere 8, Marie Marguerite 6; cites older daughter Marie Louise married to Étienne Gagné
Lisette	Oct 1768	Succession sale (NCNA doc. 480)	Held at "home of deceased Lisette, <i>sauvagesse</i> "
Lisette	Nov 1770	Succession settlement	Étienne Gagnier "relative of deceased Lisette, a free <i>sauvagesse</i> ," filed account
Jeanne	Sep 1778	Petition, Marie Louise Bertrand, wife of Étienne Gagné (NCNA doc. 483)	Re sum of 500 livres due her from "the succession of her mother, named Jeanne"
Juana	Oct 1781	Marriage of son Louis (<i>Natch. 1729–1803</i> , no. 1062)	Son of "Pedro Dauphine and an <i>india</i> named Juana." [Spanish language document.]
Juana	Oct 1786	Marriage of dau. Ursulle at N.O. (St. Louis Cathedral Marr Bk 5:49)	"daughter of Juana Dauphine" [Spanish language document.]
Juana	Dec 1792	Burial of dau. Ursulle at N.O. (St. Louis Cathedral Funeral Bk 2:62)	"daughter of Juana" [Spanish language document.]

See text for documentation.

death, his farming partner⁴—not trading partner—Corporal Pierre Haraud kept Lisette enslaved. She bore children by both men. See table 2.

Claude Bertrand dit Dauphine,⁵ born about 1703 in St. Laurent, Grenoble, France, arrived in Louisiana in 1720 as a seventeen-year-old soldier.⁶ He was buried at Natchitoches on 28 October 1756,⁷ not 1760. The 1726 census of the Natchitoches Post enumerates “Dauphine and Accaux, associates [partners],” as single men with four arpents of land, and no hirelings, slaves, or animals.⁸ Before 8 January 1736 he entered into a marriage that would be childless.⁹ On that day, he and “Marie, his wife” were godparents and marriage witnesses for enslaved Africans.¹⁰ The record gives no maiden name for Marie, as was common for Native wives. On 12 June 1749, as “Marie, wife of Dauphine, sergeant of the guards,” she was buried in the parish cemetery.¹¹

Marie’s replacement was another Native female—one Bertrand could not marry because she was enslaved. Contemporary documents variously call her Jeanne Elisabeth “Lisette” de L’Isle but cite no place or tribe of origin. “Jeanne, adult Indian belonging to Mr. Dauphine, sergeant,” was baptized on 28 March 1750,¹² at which

4. Soldiers at the fort were encouraged to farm, for subsistence and to build the economy, and were given land to settle. The grant records do not survive, but the grants are documented by censuses and land sales.

5. A French *dit* was a nickname used in lieu of or in addition to a surname. Most originated as a soldier’s *nom de guerre*. When children were born outside of marriage, the father’s surname or mother’s given name was often treated as the children’s *dit*.

6. “List of Persons for the Law Concession, Officers and Troops, Embarked on the Marie,” 15 Jul 1720; Colonies G1 464; Archives Nationales d’Outre Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France.

7. Registers from Natchitoches’s St. François church are archived in its replacement church, Immaculate Conception. Entries from manuscript registers 1–5 cannot be logically cited to specific pages or entries due to the haphazard manner of creation. Translated abstracts of the surviving 6,392 entries have been published in original sequence, numbered and indexed. This paper cites the publications and their entry numbers, which can be used as a road map for the original registers. For Bertrand’s burial entry, see Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803: Abstracts of the Catholic Church Registers of the French and Spanish Post of St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches in Louisiana* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1977), entry 797.

8. “General Census of the Inhabitants & Concessions of the Colony of Louisiana . . . Natchitoches,” 1 Jan 1726, Colonies G1 464:17–18. Published as Elizabeth Shown Mills and Ellie Lennon, *Natchitoches Colonials—A Source Book: Censuses, Military Rolls & Tax Lists, 1722–1803* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 2017), 16–17. A French *arpent* was roughly two-thirds of an American acre.

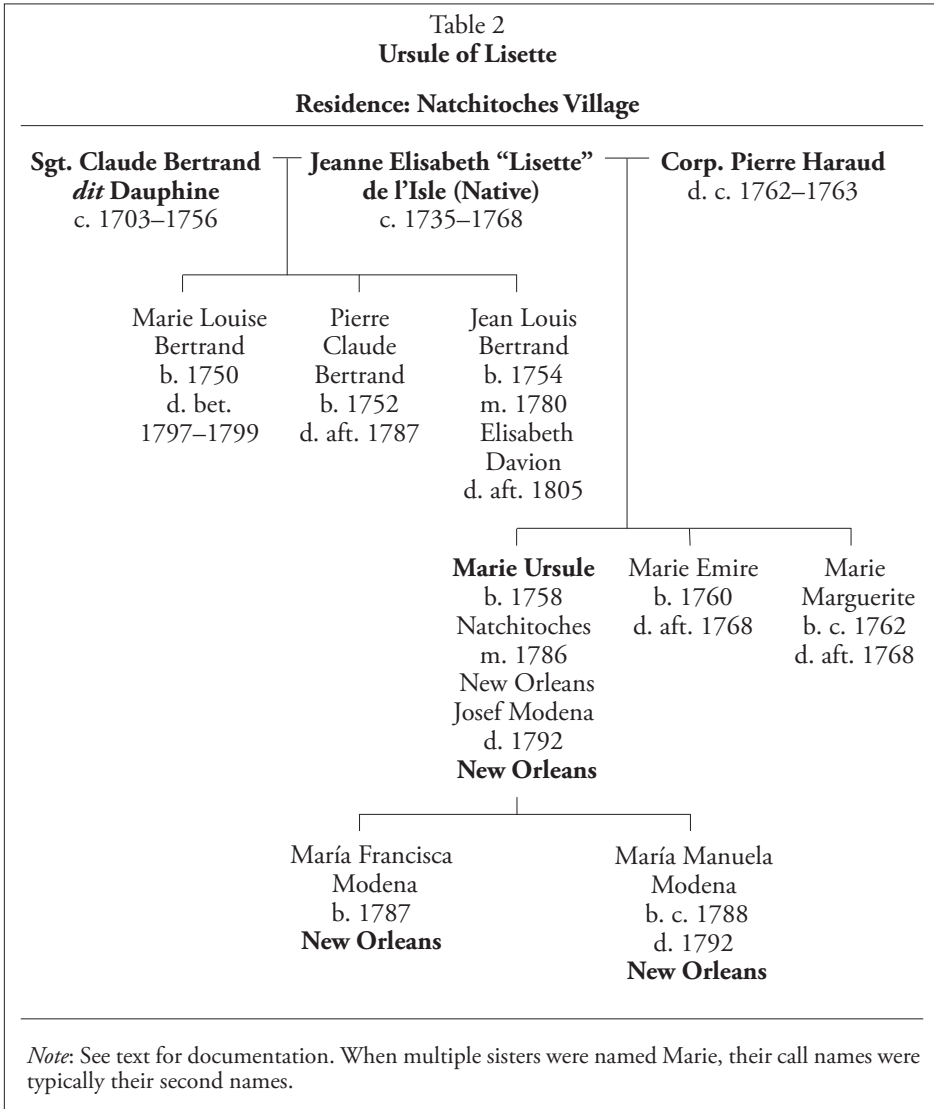
9. No record of the marriage has been found. Colonial Louisiana marriages occurred only within the Church. When no priest was in residence at Natchitoches, missionaries from the nearby Spanish Texas mission at Los Adaïes occasionally visited, but recorded their acts in their own registers that are not known to survive. Civilly, marriage *contracts* were sometimes executed in anticipation of marriage, to dictate financial terms. No contracts exist for French-Indian marriages entered into by soldiers.

10. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 36.

11. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 396.

12. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 315.

time she was pregnant with Bertrand's first child. In December 1755, before their superior officer LeCourt, Bertrand and his then-partner Haraud agreed the surviving partner would manumit Lisette and her three children.¹³ On 28 October 1756, Bertrand was buried.¹⁴ Lisette remained with Haraud, bearing three additional daughters.¹⁵



13. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 478; Clerk of Court's Office, Natchitoches, La.

14. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 797.

15. Natchitoches officials created no church, civil, or military record of Haraud's death. Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 480, the 28 September 1768 inventory and appraisal of the succession of Jeanne Lisette, states that Haraud had died.

In January 1762, in his last recorded action, Haraud placed three thousand piasters with his officer, LeCourt, stating that Bertrand had left the sum for the three children—not five—Bertrand fathered by Lisette. LeCourt agreed to pay the children their inheritance as they came of age, with annual interest to Lisette.¹⁶ She received the Bertrand-Haraud home and furnishings without a recorded sale or donation.¹⁷ A January 1766 post census does not cite her as a household head. She and her family appear to be in the household of the commandant (who had just fathered a child by her eldest daughter). The household had one free female Indian, three free male “halfbreeds,” and three free female “halfbreeds.”¹⁸ That composition matches Lisette’s family, including that infant grandson. Four months later, after the transfer of the post from France to Spain, a new census credits Lisette with three enslaved people, six children, no cattle, two hogs or sheep, and one gun.¹⁹

At Lisette’s death in September 1768, officials inventoried two pieces of real estate for her: “an old house” about thirty feet long by sixteen feet wide . . . situated on the “mound of the fort” between homes of the post surgeon and the officer Antoine Fazende; and an “isle” of about two arpents frontage on the opposite bank from the settlement, likely the land Bertrand and Haraud had farmed. The inventoried personal and household goods were extensive for a female of her time and place.²⁰ Her ownership of that “isle” is probably the source of the surname given for her in her eldest daughter’s marriage contract, “Elisabeth de L’Isle.”²¹

By Claude Bertrand, Lisette bore three children, Bertrand’s heirs:

1. Marie Louise Bertrand, baptized 8 August 1750.²² At thirteen, she was impregnated by the post commandant, Capt. Louis George Monjonan de la Perrière, who acknowledged his paternity of the child at its baptism on 2 October 1765.²³ Before his transfer from Natchitoches, the bachelor

16. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 482, LeCourt affidavit, 3 Nov 1764, reporting 1762 agreement.

17. Under the civil code in Louisiana, a donation may be a voluntary transfer of property with no consideration.

18. Census of Natchitoches, 27 Jan 1766, Ramo de Historia: vol. 91, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City; imaged as Archivo General de la Nación microfilm collection, reel 57, Archives, Univ. of Texas, Austin. Published as Mills and Lennon, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 46–53. For the daughter’s child by the commandant, see Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 845.

19. “Census and List of Militiamen and Inhabitants of the Post of Natchitoches According to the Review Made on 5 May 1766,” legajo [packet] 2585, Audiencia de Santo Domingo, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain; microfilmed within Spanish Colonial Records reels 1201–1211, Colonial Records Collection, Center for Louisiana Studies, Univ. of Louisiana at Lafayette. A translation is published in Mills and Lennon, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 54–63.

20. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 480.

21. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 429.

22. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 325. Surviving baptismal records show that children born at the post in this period were baptized within one or two days of birth.

23. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 845.

Perrière arranged a marriage for Marie Louise with Étienne Gagné, a young joiner from Canada. Perrière represented her *in loco parentis*—even though her mother was present—at the draft of the marriage contract. The two thousand silver livres said therein to be due to the bride at marriage from the succession of “Bertrand, her father, and from Pierre Haraud, his associate,” was a significant stake for the new couple. It also raises questions. Her father had left three thousand livres to be divided equally among three heirs. Apparently Perrière, in arranging this marriage for the mother of his son, contributed another thousand to her patrimony.²⁴

No death, burial, or succession record exists for Marie Louise. She last appears in records on 4 May 1797, when Étienne’s succession was opened.²⁵ She likely died before 20 August 1799, when her daughter Rose Bertrand executed a marriage contract wherein her brother Basile, not her mother, represented her.²⁶ Marie Louise and Étienne’s eleven baptized children left numerous offspring in the *northern* half of the Natchitoches jurisdiction. Her child born to the commandant either died young or was taken by his father when he left Natchitoches. No burial record exists.

2. Claude Pierre “Pierrot” Bertrand, baptized 14 July 1752.²⁷ Although baptized as *Claude*, all his manumission documents, his mother’s estate, and his inheritance from Bertrand cite him as *Pierre*. At twelve, “Pierrot, free *sauvage* belonging formerly to deceased Dauphine and Haraud,” hired himself for four hundred *livres* to hunter Joseph Gallien for ten months of service. He signed with his mark—an oversized circle.²⁸ He likely spent much of his life in that pursuit. The post militia rolls do not include him, although service was mandatory for able male residents of age. No known church or other civil record names him. His last known recorded appearance is in the 1787 post census: he is single and propertyless, aged thirty-five, living with his married brother Louis.²⁹ No offspring have been discovered.
3. Jean Louis Bertrand, baptized August 1754.³⁰ On 12 October 1780, Louis married the French Créole Elisabeth Davion.³¹ Throughout adulthood he lived as White; no known record calls him *sauvage*. After his mother died,

24. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 429, Aug 1766.

25. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 2783.

26. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 2910.

27. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 583.

28. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 356, 28 Mar 1764.

29. “General Census of the Residents and Sieurs at the Post of Natchitoches and its Dependencies,” 17 Aug 1787; legajo 201, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba; Archivo General de Indias, Seville (hereinafter PPC-AGI). Published in Mills and Lennon, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 99–119, esp. 114.

30. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 583.

31. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 1062. The Bertrand-Davion marriage contract, Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 1566, is missing; only the index entry survives locally.

he—not his older brother Pierre—became titular head of the family. As a young militiaman, he was appointed to the 1779 honor guard that accompanied Commandant Athanase de Mézières to Spanish Texas to assume the governorship there.³² Louis served in the Natchitoches militia for the Gálvez Campaigns of the American Revolution.³³ The 1787 census places his family at the Grande Écore settlement above Natchitoches (see figure 1),³⁴ where he expanded his landholdings and Black labor force.³⁵ Later he moved his family west of Bayou Pierre into the hinterlands between Natchitoches and Spanish Texas.³⁶ An 1805 census of the Nacogdoches district of Texas enumerates his household and two others formed by his sister Marie Louise's children.³⁷ No Natchitoches or Nacogdoches records place them with the LeCourts.

During Lisette's years with Haraud, she bore three daughters. Her childbearing stopped with his death or departure. The pattern and brevity of her childbearing—six children in twelve years—suggests she would have been fertile for some time thereafter.

4. Marie Ursule, baptized 5 January 1758.³⁸ No birth date is stated, but when priests were in residence at the post, they baptized infants one to two days after birth.³⁹ As an adult, Ursule left for New Orleans. There, in October 1786, she wed the Italian Josef Modena; the Spanish-language record calls her “Maria Ursula Dauphin of Natchitoches,” daughter of “Beltran and Juana [Jeanne] Daufine.”⁴⁰ When their daughter Maria Francisca was

32. Herbert Eugene Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières and the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1768–1780: Documents . . . from the Original Spanish and French Manuscripts, Chiefly in the Archives of Mexico and Spain*, 2 vols. (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1914), 2:285–86.

33. The 1780 and 1782 Natchitoches rolls accepted by lineage societies for Revolutionary War service are translated and published in Mills and Lennon, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 80–83, 86–88.

34. “General Census of the Residents . . .,” 17 Aug 1787; Mills and Lennon, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 115.

35. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, docs. 2167, 2405, 2651, 3067, 4193.

36. Registration/Oath of Louis “Beltran,” 31 Jul 1809, Bayou Pierre; reel 42, frame 435, Bexar Archives, Univ. of Texas, Austin.

37. 1805 Census, “Nacogdoches, Homes Situated on the East Side of the Sabine River,” no. 3 Louis “Beltran,” no. 16 “Jacinta Gañe,” and no. 18 “Basilio Gañe”; imaged, *Translations [and Images] of Statistical & Census Reports of Texas, 1782–1836 . . .* (San Antonio: Institute of Texan Culture, 1979), roll 1, frames 1656–57.

38. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 670.

39. Mills, “Family and Social Patterns of the Colonial Louisiana Frontier: A Quantitative Analysis” (New College thesis, Univ. of Alabama 1981), p. 163, n. 9; archived at Mills, *Historic Pathways* (<https://www.historicpathways.com/download/famsocpat.pdf>).

40. St. Louis Cathedral (New Orleans), Marriage Book 5:49.

baptized in August 1787, Ursule used no surname.⁴¹ When daughter Maria Manuela, aged four, was buried from New Orleans' Charity Hospital on 25 October 1792, Ursule was called "Maria Ursula du bertien Dufine."⁴² Ursule herself was buried from Charity on 30 December 1792, as "Maria Ursula Dofine," native of the post of Aquithoche (Natchitoches), wife of Joseph "Moden," daughter of [blank] and Juana.⁴³

Although Ursule used her mother's first owner's *dit* name as a surname, consistent evidence shows she was not Bertrand *dit* Dauphine's child. She was born two years after his death, was not named as one of the three children he freed, and was not one of the three children who shared in his estate. Moreover, she died in New Orleans shortly after Barthélemy LeCourt began his relationship with a different Ursule.

5. Marie Emire, baptized 17 July 1760,⁴⁴ not found after her mother's 1768 estate settlement.
6. Marie Marguerite, born about 1762, cited as "about six" in her mother's 1768 succession.⁴⁵ Like Emire, she disappears from records after 1768.

URSULE NO. 2: DAUGHTER OF LUISON

Actions of Louis Mathias LeCourt de Prelle, Barthélemy LeCourt's father, identify Barthélemy's Ursule. See table 3. Assigned to Natchitoches in the 1740s as a young marine officer from minor nobility, Louis Mathias chose the frontier over career advancement. He married reluctantly and retired from military service after Spain took over the colony in 1762. For years thereafter he was Spain's official trader in the Caddo Nation—some five hundred miles above Natchitoches. Meanwhile, he settled the wife he tardily married, their children, and an assortment of enslaved Natives and Créole Africans on a remote land grant some fifty miles below the post of Natchitoches. See figure 1.

41. St. Louis Cathedral, Baptismal Book 11:35.

42. St. Louis Cathedral, Funeral Book 2:58.

43. St. Louis Cathedral, Funeral Book 2:62.

44. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 417; the spelling of this daughter's name is variously interpreted as Emire and Anore.

45. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 480. Natchitoches baptisms have a gap from late 1761 to 1764.

Table 3
Ursule of Luison

Residence: Rivière aux Cannes, Lower Natchitoches

Lt. Louis Matthias LeCourt de Presle

1717–c. 1785

m. 1765

Jeanne LeRoy

1735–1778

Barthélemy LeCourt

b. 1763, Rivière aux Cannes

d. 1833, Rivière aux Cannes

Luison (Native)

c. 1754–aft. 1813

Marie Ursule

b. c. 1774, Rivière aux Cannes

d. c. 1811, Rivière aux Cannes

Louis Césaire LeCourt, b. 1791, Rivière aux Cannes
 Marie Louise LeCourt, b. 1792, Rivière aux Cannes
 Marie Barbe LeCourt, b. 1795, Rivière aux Cannes
 Joseph Valery LeCourt, b. 1797, Rivière aux Cannes
 Jean-Baptiste Athanase Barthélemy LeCourt, b. 1799, Rivière aux Cannes
 Jean-Baptiste Neuville LeCourt, b. 1801, Rivière aux Cannes
 Marie Arsène LeCourt, b. 1804, Rivière aux Cannes
 Jacques Eloi LeCourt, b. 1806, Rivière aux Cannes
 Marie Tranquelline LeCourt, b. 1811, Rivière aux Cannes

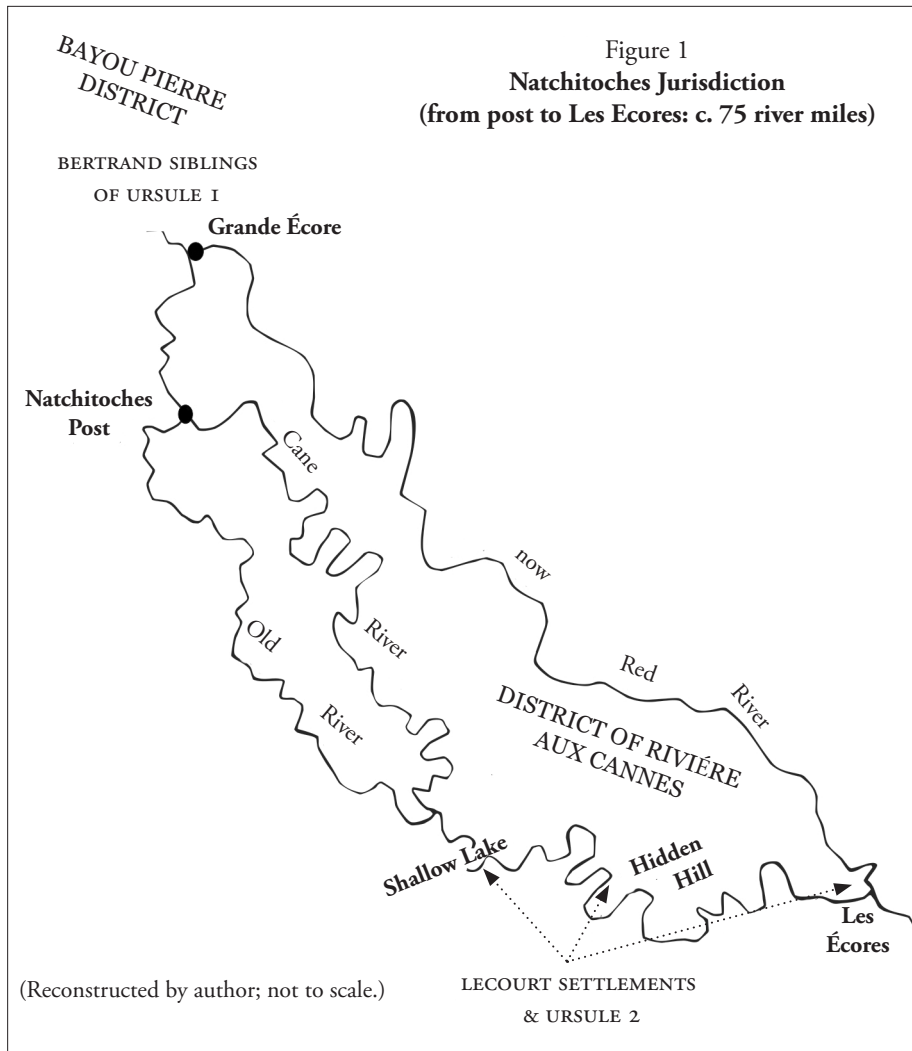
Note: See text for documentation. When multiple siblings carried the names Marie or Jean-Baptiste, their call name was typically their second or third given name.

Louis Mathias LeCourt de Prelle, was born 24 February 1717 in Camaret-sur-Mer, a French port.⁴⁶ After his father died on 24 October 1720, his estate remained intact until 1743, when the younger son entered religious orders.⁴⁷ Louis Mathias

46. Camaret, France, Baptêmes, mariages, sépultures, 1702–1728, 1730, Louis Mathias LeCourt baptism (1717), unnumbered entries in chronological sequence; *Archives départementales: Département du Finistère* (https://recherche.archives.finistere.fr/viewer/series/medias/collections/E/03E/3E035/3E035_0001), image 70; citing État civil, Cotes extremes 3E 35/1–2. That same register records the marriage of his parents on 21 Nov 1714 as “Ensign Joseph de Court, son of Sieur Philippe decourt and Dame Marie Elisabeth Pelerin, seigneur et dame de prelle of this parish of St. Finistère, bishopric of Lisieux in Normandy” and “Jeanne [de lay] Haye, Dame de Cantiny, daughter of Sieur Jean de la Haye and Dame Git_? [given name bound into crack of book] Gouvray of this parish of Cameret,” with banns published “in the parish of St. Louis at Brest, where the said de court has been established for several years.” *Ibid.*, image 60.

47. Tutelage of infants of “Joseph Le Court, écuyer, seigneur de Presles, enseigne de vaisseau” (article 1562); also 27 Jul 1743 emancipation of “Michel-Jacques-Guillaume Le Court de Presle, *filz de feu* [son of deceased] Joseph, lieutenant *de vaisseau et de feu* Jeanne de la Haye” (article 1587); and succession of Joseph LeCourt, Sr. de Presle, écuyer, officier de marine (article 1858); Series B, Archives Civiles, Archives Départementales Antérieures à 1790; Archives Départementales du Finistère, Quimper.

then left for Louisiana. On 4 January 1745 in New Orleans, by a power of attorney, he authorized a surrogate to “act for him in settlement of successions in which he may be an heir.”⁴⁸ He then journeyed up the Red River to Natchitoches where the 1745 roster of Louisiana troops cites “Sr. de Cour” as one of two junior *cadets*.⁴⁹



48. Heloise H. Cruzat, translator, “Records of the Superior Council,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 13 (Jul 1930): 491. The document, dated 4 Jan 1745, is badly charred and offers no legible information not captured in 1930; see *FamilySearch* (www.familysearch.org), Image Group Number (IGN) 8453273, image 136.

49. “Recapitulation of French Troops Stationed in Louisiana [1745],” doc. LO 299, Vaudreuil Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif. The Natchitoches section is published in Mills and Lennon, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 19–20.

The three local records LeCourt created during his first decade in the Natchitoches jurisdiction are now missing; brief descriptions appear in a surviving index.⁵⁰ The first was a 1747 “agreement” with René Gautier. The previous year Gautier had made a similar agreement with the late Commandant St. Denis’s son-in-law Athanase de Mézières.⁵¹ Likely it was a labor agreement for the Indian trade that the St. Denis clan controlled.⁵²

For the next decade LeCourt’s name appears regularly on Natchitoches military rolls. He was noticeably absent, however, from the post’s civil or church documents.⁵³ That absence suggests he was among the few sub-officers and troops at Fort St. Louis de Cadodaquios.⁵⁴ That trading outpost lay at the Red River bend where present-day Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas meet.⁵⁵ A November 1752 letter to LeCourt from the colony’s governor places him temporarily at Natchitoches, in charge of troops until a replacement arrived. It also reveals that the new commandant, another St. Denis son-in-law, had restricted LeCourt’s trading privileges with tribes in ways LeCourt deemed unjust.⁵⁶

When LeCourt turned forty in 1757, his life changed significantly. Across the next four years, documents place him in the post, acting as the commandant’s surrogate in various matters.⁵⁷ Amid the post-1758 final settlement of the St. Denis succession, he bought almost half of the estate’s principal landholding—rich farm land south of the village.⁵⁸ Located adjacent to the trader Henri Trichel, it speaks to the family LeCourt had begun, illicitly.

50. Natchitoches Parish, “Index to Archive Conveyance Records, 1738 to 1819”; Office of the Clerk of Court.

51. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 101, “Deprelle de Cour” with Gautier, 1747 agreement, and doc. 91, De Mézières with Gautier, 1746 agreement.

52. Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières*, “Historical Introduction,” 1:17–122. Also, Daniel H. Usner Jr., *Indians, Settlers & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1992).

53. Translated transcriptions of these rolls from Colonies D2c 51 and 52, Archives Nationales d’Outre Mer, appear in Mills and Lennon, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 19, 22, 26, 29, 30, 32, 36, 42, 46–47.

54. In 1805, for US Congressional hearings on the bounds of the new Louisiana Purchase, affidavits were taken from eight elderly Natchitochians who were born at Fort St. Louis or grew up there while their fathers were stationed there (1730s to 1770s): Marie Louise Brevel, François and Jean Baptiste Grappe, Louis Lamalaty, Gaspard and Louis Bodin, André Chamard, and François Robin. See *Annals of Congress*, 9th Cong., 1st Sess. (1805–6), 1211–16; archived online at Library of Congress, *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774–1875* (<https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwac.html>).

55. F. Todd Smith, *The Caddo Indians: Tribes at the Convergence of Empires, 1542–1854* (College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1995), 22, map “Caddo Country.”

56. Vaudreuil to Le Cour, 22 Nov 1752, LO 407, Vaudreuil Papers. LO 408 and 409 are also relevant.

57. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, docs. 150, 151, 152, 181, 198.

58. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 335.

In March 1761, LeCourt appeared in another document that points to his new family. Three sisters, born at the post in the 1730s, sold land they had inherited from their father, Étienne Le Roy. Jean Baptiste LeComte and Louis Rachal, husbands of the two youngest, Marguerite and Marie Louise LeRoy, joined their wives. The eldest sister, Jeanne LeRoy, acted alone—ostensibly. LeComte's and Rachal's officer, LeCourt, witnessed the document, which does not mention Jeanne's status as LeCourt's mistress.⁵⁹

Jeanne LeRoy was a French Créole of "commoner" caste, born at Natchitoches in October 1735, eldest daughter of Parisian-born carpenter-soldier Étienne LeRoy.⁶⁰ Her mother, Françoise Gillot, was one of several hundred young females nefariously swept up in France and sent to Louisiana to wed single male colonists. Françoise wed three of them.⁶¹ LeRoy was her second husband; her third was the trader Henri Trichel.⁶² With Trichel, Françoise and her daughter Jeanne lived adjacent to the land LeCourt bought.

LeCourt's liaison with Jeanne LeRoy began in mid-1756, shortly before her mother's death.⁶³ It likely prompted him to transfer in from the Caddo hinterlands. Their first child, baptized in April 1757 under the name Pierre Laurent LeRoy and the fiction "father unknown," died that September.⁶⁴ Jean Baptiste, born June 1759, and Marie Antoinette, born December 1761, were baptized under that same fiction;⁶⁵ but pretenses could not be maintained in a village with only a few dozen free inhabitants.

Caste, Culture, and Life Choices

The crux of the LeCourt-LeRoy relationship was cultural. For French officers of noble birth in Louisiana, social dictates offered no marital options outside their class; and nobility was meagerly represented in the colony—especially on the frontier LeCourt had chosen. More than a few high-ranking military officers and civil officials formed liaisons with African or Native women. An unmarried Natchitoches commandant's seduction of Lisette's daughter is one example. However, their social

59. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 317.

60. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 30.

61. For more on the LeRois, see Mills, "Louis Monet's Daughters Dorothee and Dorothee: Sorting Tri-Racial Roots of Two Same-Named, Previously Merged, Colonial-Born Freedwomen," *NGS Quarterly* 109 (Jun 2021): 85–110. For more about the females sent from France during the notorious Law Regime, see Joan DeJean, *Mutinuous Women: How French Convicts Became Founding Mothers of the Gulf Coast* (New York: Basic Books, 2022).

62. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 352.

63. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 795, 19 Jul 1756.

64. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entries 652, 810.

65. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entries 466, 707.

tenets did not condone *mésalliances*—legal marriages with spouses of inferior social caste⁶⁶—and their Church did not condone scandal.

The sale by Jeanne and her married sisters of the LeRoy estate in March 1761 heralded an exodus from the post. LeCourt, LeComte, and Rachal petitioned the governor for land in the unsettled lower reaches of the Natchitoches jurisdiction. LeCourt, as an officer, received two thousand arpents, in two tracts that strategically flanked both ends of the Red River branch called *Rivière aux Canes* (River at the Canes). See figure 1. The upper tract was at a horseshoe bend called Shallow Lake, roughly thirty river miles below the post. It adjoined the site that LeCourt's unofficial brother-in-law, LeComte, selected. The second LeCourt tract, at *Les Écores* (The Bluffs) about seventy-five river miles below the post, adjoined the site that Rachal selected.⁶⁷ A third tract, of similar size, lay midway between them at *Écore Cache* (Hidden Hill). Patented to Jeanne LeRoy, as an unmarried head of household on 22 May 1762, it became the LeCourt homestead.⁶⁸ Their son Barthélemy was born there in September 1763,⁶⁹ the first known birth in the *Rivière aux Canes* District.

In March 1765, a Capuchin missionary traveling upriver to Natchitoches sought respite at the LeCourt home. He discovered that LeCourt and Jeanne were cohabiting without marriage. Upon reaching Natchitoches, he wrote a lengthy entry

66. For the persistence of this caste ideology in Louisiana into the American era, see the explanation given by the daughter of LeCourt's friend and fellow officer, de Mézières, to Bishop William DuBourg of New Orleans in 1827, when he asked her why she and her siblings had never wed; quoted in Mary Teresa Austin Carroll, *A Catholic History of Alabama and the Floridas* (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1908), 251–52.

67. The original documents for these grants have not been found. The upper grant was confirmed by the United States in 1812 in two parts: Claim B1843 (for Barthélemy LeCourt, claiming under “Louis M. LeCour De Prelle”) and B1849 (for Nicolas Gallien, as son-in-law and heir of the same). The lower grant was confirmed by the United States as B1857 and B1858 (for Maria Louisa [LeComte] Porter, widow of LeCourt's ward Louis Monet, who bought the bluffs from LeCourt's estate). Imaged online at Louisiana Office of State Lands, *OSL: Search Historical Documents* (www.slodms.doa.la.gov), search terms, Northwestern District, Township 7 North, Range 6 West (LeComte, Gallien, and Barthélemy LeCourt), T6N R6W (Cloutier and LeCourt), and T6N R4W (LeCourt and Monet at Les Écores). Other documents held by the US Land Office are abstracted in *American State Papers: Documents of the Congress of the United States in Relation to the Public Lands*, 8 vols. (Washington: Gales & Seaton, 1859), 2:853.

68. Jeanne's grant file is trackable as Claims B2150 and B2151 at *OSL: Search Historical Documents* under the search terms Northwestern District T6N R5W (Jeanne LeRoy, Barthélemy Rachal, and Robert McAlpin). For the date of her grant, see imaged receipt for Robert McAlpin's submission to the land office of Jeanne LeRoy's grant, 18 Jan 1813; imaged at www.slodms.doa.la.gov > search terms Northwestern, T6N R5W > “Claim Papers N.W.D. T.2N.R.4W. & T.4N.R.1-4W. & T5N . . . (291 pages)” > image 253. Also *American State Papers . . . Public Lands*, 2: 867. Legend holds that Jeanne's Hidden Hill land under McAlpin was the prototype for Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. See D. B. Corley, *A Visit to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Chicago: Laird & Lee, 1892). A cabin from the Hidden Hill plantation was displayed as “Uncle Tom's Cabin” at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

69. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 488.

in the parish register—with the post notary as witness—stating he had given the couple a nuptial blessing, thereby legitimizing their children: Jean Baptiste, Marie Antoinette, and Barthélemy.⁷⁰ Three more LeCourt children followed: Athanase in 1766, Marie Françoise in 1769, and Cécile in 1773.⁷¹

LeCourt and Jeanne's family life remained unconventional. Documents from 1764 through 1772 chronicle his trade across nearly a thousand miles from the Caddo of current Oklahoma to the Attakapas on the Louisiana Gulf. Jeanne and their enslaved workers meanwhile cleared their lands and began a farm. The jurisdiction's January 1766 census credits LeCourt with eleven slaves—Black and Native—and twenty cleared arpents of frontage along the river. There they grew tobacco as a cash crop and corn and beans for sustenance.⁷² In 1771, Commandant de Mézières informed the governor that he had again licensed the Caddo trade to "Don Mathias le Court, retired officer now residing in Cadodachos . . . who suited the Caddo well." He added that he was "of small means and large family."⁷³

Occasionally returning to Natchitoches, LeCourt brought more Native captives to help till the LeCourt, LeComte, and Rachal farms—and, eventually, to bear children for their sons. One Native woman was Luison who bore Ursule by an unidentified man. Given subsequent descriptions of Ursule as half-Native, it is likely her father was from one of these French families.

Native Slavery on the Louisiana-Texas Frontier

Native American slavery had been practiced to an extent at Natchitoches from its establishment. The fort and settlement had been built amid the Natchitoches tribe. Adopting the Native custom of enslaving Natives from only hostile tribes helped maintain peace. Typically, those sold as slaves to the French were captives taken from rival tribes. By the 1760s, enslaved Natives at Rivière aux Cannes were almost exclusively Lipan Apache, a Texas tribe the French called Canneci. The Comanches who warred against them sold Lipan captives to the Caddo.⁷⁴ LeCourt, as liaison between the Caddo and the Natchitoches post, brought a dozen or so

70. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 984.

71. No baptismal records exist for these three children born at Rivière aux Cannes; the previously cited 1787 census states their ages. Likely, they were baptized by a priest from the Rapides post, whose records are burned.

72. Census of Natchitoches, 27 Jan 1766; also "Census and List of Militiamen . . .," 5 May 1766.

73. De Mézières to Gov. Unzaga y Amerzaga, 14 Mar and 31 Jul 1771; abstracted in Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières*, 1:91.

74. Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2007), discusses the Comanche and Caddo wars against the Lipan Apache; pp. 84–86, 160–61, touch upon Natchitoches' involvement. Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières* 1:64–65 reports that the 1757–67 Comanche wars against the Canneci-Lipan drove them down to the Río Grande, while De Mézières, as Natchitoches' commandant after 1769, sought the tribe's extermination.

captives to the sprawling riverine settlement, where kin of the three LeRoy sisters and their spouses were rapidly populating the area.⁷⁵

The new Spanish regime in Louisiana outlawed Native slavery in 1769.⁷⁶ Natchitoches, however, typically ignored governmental mandates until forced to implement them. A February 1774 inventory of those held at Natchitoches credited LeCourt with one Native man, two Native women, and four children under twelve, all unnamed.⁷⁷ However, not all were tallied and none were manumitted. When LeCourt reported his wife's death in April 1778, fifteen slaves were inventoried. Twelve were Natives, most in family units. That inventory reveals that LeCourt kept birth records for those he enslaved, absent a priest to baptize them:⁷⁸

Thérèse, *sauvagesse*, aged about thirty-six⁷⁹

Susanne, her daughter, born 10 August 1770

Dorothée, her daughter, born 27 September 1774

Rosalie, her daughter, born 27 March 1776

Gaspard, her son, born 6 January 1778

Capitaine, *sauvage*, aged about thirty-five

Magdeleine "his wife," [no race stated] aged about twenty-five

Clemens [Clemence], "their daughter" born 5 April 1770

Romain, "their son," born 18 December 1773

Isabelle, "their daughter," born 7 September 1776

Louison, *sauvagesse*, aged about twenty-four

Hélène, her daughter, born 6 June 1772

Jeanne, her daughter, born 21 November 1776

Louis, *négré*, aged fifty years

Mercure, *négré*, aged eighty years

75. The number of Canneci brought to Rivière aux Cannes is estimated by the author from censuses, estate inventories, and sales as well as the acts of baptism recorded occasionally by priests on visits through the hinterlands. LeCourt also took captured Canneci to South Louisiana settlements such as Pointe Coupée, d'Allemands, New Orleans, and Attakapas. See for example, Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 372, for LeCourt's 16 Dec 1764 agreement with Ignace Anty *dit* LaForme, to take two Canneci children southward for sale.

76. Proclamation of Gov. Alexandre O'Reilly, 7 Dec 1769; translated in Lawrence Kinnaird, ed., *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765–1794*, Part I, *The Revolutionary Period, 1765–1781* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1949), 125–26.

77. Census of Natchitoches Slaveowners, 15 Feb 1774, legajo 189-1, PPC-AGI; translated in Mills and Lennon, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 70–75.

78. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 1285.

79. For more on Thérèse's family, see Mills, "Louis Monet's Daughters, Dorothée and Dorothée," previously cited.

Not named was Louison's daughter Ursule, whose 1790 liaison with Barthélemy suggests she was born before the April 1778 inventory—and likely several years before. The gap in Louison's children between 1772 and 1776 suggests another child was likely born in that interval. The 1774 list of LeCourt's slaves tallied four children born by February of that year, while the 1778 list names only three. Ursule appears to fill that gap with a birth about 1774. Whether the scribe copying the inventory accidentally omitted her or a White father had purchased her freedom is debatable. Land and slave sales at Rivière aux Cannes in that era typically went unrecorded because of the distance from the post.⁸⁰

LeCourt did not long outlive his wife. In 1780, he gave another power of attorney to the French merchant Louis Pavie, to represent him in his family's continental estate.⁸¹ Three years later his twenty-year-old son Barthélemy went into the post to file notice of his death and opened his succession.⁸² In 1785, Barthélemy sold the homestead at Hidden Hill⁸³ and the distant *Les Écores* tract to his father's ward, Louis Monet.⁸⁴ He moved his unmarried siblings to their father's upper grant across the river from Shallow Lake. There the 1787 census enumerated them with thirty arpents frontage, a dozen enslaved Blacks, and a three-year-old. Barthélemy had fathered the child by an enslaved woman belonging to his aunt Marguerite LeRoy, Widow LeComte.⁸⁵

The elder LeCourt's enslaved Natives dispersed at his death. Thérèse and her daughters went down to the bluffs, on the new plantation established there by Monet, who had fathered Thérèse's daughter Dorothée.⁸⁶ Capitaine and his wife Magdeleine purchased a small tract of land adjacent to the LeComtes. Their children

80. On 16 Nov 1811, a nephew of Jeanne LeRoy reported to the US Land Office that "a verbal sale . . . between the parties . . . was customary" in their region under the Spanish regime; see affidavit of François Davyon, Claim Papers of Antoine Coindet, 1859, T6N R5W, NW Dist.; imaged at *OSL: Search Historical Documents* (www.slodms.doa.la.gov/WebForms/DocumentViewer.aspx?docId=510.00059&category=H#289).

81. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 1512.

82. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 1673, indexed as "Deprelle, Louis M. L., Mortuary," now missing.

83. The family homestead is identified as the Hidden Hill tract by Jeanne's succession, which placed it "about 15 leagues" [about 45–50 miles] from the post.

84. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 1848.

85. For the 22 Jul 1784 baptism of this child Pelagie, see Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 2482. For Barthélemy's 1785 purchase and manumission of Pelagie, see Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, docs. 1849, 1850.

86. Mills, "Louis Monet's Daughters, Dorothée and Dorothée," 96–97, details the move.

later intermarried with other settlers of marginal subsistence.⁸⁷ Luison and Ursule remained with the LeCourts.

Luison, Lipan Apache (aka Canneci), was born about 1754,⁸⁸ likely within the South Texas lands her tribe then occupied. She lived at Rivière aux Cannes for more than three decades after freedom. Amid the uprooting of LeCourt's household from Hidden Hill, Luison bore a fourth daughter, Felicité. When she was presented for baptism, with Barthélemy's brother Athanase and sister Cecilia as godparents, the visiting priest labeled Luison "Indian," with no tribal identity; Felicité's father was recorded as unknown.⁸⁹ As an adult, Felicité was called *Canneci*.⁹⁰

The sporadic records created for their remote community offer little more on Luison. In October 1799, as "Luison, Indian," she was godmother to an enslaved infant when a priest visited Widow LeComte's home.⁹¹ Again in 1805, as "Luison, *Canneci*," she sponsored an enslaved infant of the widow's son Ambrose.⁹² In the 1808 succession of Jean Baptiste Cloutier's widow, "Luson, *sauvagessé*" acknowledged receipt of "four *piastres* due me for caring for the suction [succession]." She signed with an X.⁹³ That document placed Luison at *Les Écores* where her daughter Felicité had served as godmother in 1804.⁹⁴

After the death of her daughter Ursule, Luison apparently helped Barthélemy LeCourt raise Ursule's children. The 1813 baptism of Ursule's last child, the two-year-old Tranquelline, identifies her mother as "Marie Ursulle, wife of Barthélemy."⁹⁵ When Tranquelline married in 1827, however, she called her mother "Luison."⁹⁶ No

87. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 2424, sale by Jean Bte Anty to Capitaine, 4 arpents frontage at Rivière aux Cannes, 5 Nov 1792. Also, "List of Inhabitants and Assessments," Aug 1795, Rivière aux Cannes, for "Capitaine *Indien civilisé habitant*"; doc. 716, Melrose Collection, Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Northwestern State Univ., Natchitoches. For their daughters Modeste and Clemence as wives of the brothers Jean Laurent (Juan Lorenzo) and Nicolas Bodin, see Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 2973 (baptism of Marie Thérèse Bodin, naming both sets of grandparents) and 1795 Nacogdoches census, unnumbered entries, "Juan Boden" and wife "Modeste, Indian," adjacent to Nicolas Boden and wife "Clementia, Indian"; *Translations [and Images] of Statistical & Census Reports of Texas, 1782–1836*, roll 1, frame 745.

88. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 1285.

89. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 2483.

90. Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches 1800–1829: Translated Abstracts of Register Number Five of the Catholic Church Parish of St. François des Natchitoches in Louisiana* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1980), entry 1936, baptism of Susanne at the "Ecords" home of Jean Baptiste Cloutier; godmother: "Felicité, a Canneci Indian."

91. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 3227.

92. Mills, *Natchitoches 1800–1829*, entry 1969.

93. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 3720, vouchers for combined successions of Jean Pierre Cloutier and his widow.

94. Mills, *Natchitoches 1800–1829*, entry 1936.

95. *Ibid.*, entry 440.

96. St. François Church, Register 11, entry 1827:16.

burial has been found for Luison. The only known grandchildren are those her daughter Ursule bore to Barthélemy LeCourt.

Barthélemy LeCourt, born in September 1763 at Hidden Hill, inherited not only his father's lands but also the French caste ideology that had plagued his father. The adult Barthélemy dutifully avoided a *mésalliance*, as defined by Continental *noblesse*. Yet, his modest means and frontier upbringing made him unsuitable for colonial women rooted in that *noblesse* tradition. He compromised, choosing partners he would not be expected to marry. The first, the enslaved *mulâtresse* Madeleine Lecomte who bore him Pelagie in 1784, was temporary. The *métive* Marie Ursule dite Luison was his life partner from 1790 until her death about 1811. Her replacement, the French and African Marie Adelaïde dite Mariotte, was a less successful choice. Barthélemy acknowledged Adelaïde's son born in 1817,⁹⁷ but none of her subsequent children who used his name; and the 1830 census places Barthélemy and Adelaïde in separate households.⁹⁸ Barthélemy donated property to his and Ursule's children, as each came of age,⁹⁹ because they could inherit nothing from him under French or American law. His considerable estate, opened in November 1833 after his death the month before, went to his siblings and their offspring. His heirs, perhaps discomfited by the inheritance laws, asked a merchant friend to handle the estate settlement. Barthélemy and Ursule's sons Césaire and Eloi attended the estate sale; the succession records mention no other children.¹⁰⁰

By Ursule—a Cannecci and French *métive* according to correlated evidence—Barthélemy fathered nine children, most of whom left a legion of offspring along Cane River:

1. Louis Césaire LeCourt, baptized 17 July 1791 when "several days old," was identified then as "Indian, father unknown, property of Le Cour."¹⁰¹ On 8 July 1814, Barthélemy cited "Mr. Louis Césaire Bmy. Lecour, my natural child" as adjacent landowner of property he was deeding to a new son-in-law.¹⁰² As "Cezaire Le Cour, natural son of Barthelemy LeCour and Marie Ursulle," this first-born son married 23 July 1829, the Hispanic Gertrude Maurin.¹⁰³ All records created by or about the adult Césaire deem him "White."

97. Mills, *Natchitoches 1800–1829*, entry 2560.

98. 1830 US census, Natchitoches Parish, pp. 58–59, line 18, "Batilma Larcoe," and (69 households later) pp. 61–62, line 9 "Adderline Marieot." For Adelaïde and her LeCourt children, see Elizabeth Shown Mills, "Which Marie Louise Is 'Mariotte'? Sorting Slaves with Common Names," *NGSQ* 94 (Sep 2006): 183–204, particularly 204.

99. For example, see Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 4332.

100. Natchitoches Parish, succession packet 204, Barthélemy LeCourt; also Succession Book 8:148–52.

101. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 2641. Césaire's baptismal description ("property of . . .") ignores the fact that Indian slavery was outlawed in Louisiana in 1769.

102. Natchitoches Colonial Notarial Archives, doc. 4332.

103. St. François Church, Register 8, entry 1825:12.

2. Marie Louise LeCourt, born about 1792, was baptized 6 July 1795, at “three and a half years.” The visiting priest identified her as “Indian, daughter of Marie Ursulle, Indian of the *Caddo* nation, father unknown.”¹⁰⁴ On 18 May 1812, in the presence of her father and her uncle Athanase LeCourt, she contracted to marry a French Créole neighbor, Pierre Césaire Brosset. Each pledged to bring one hundred dollars into the marriage—a sum that Barthélemy would have paid for her—and to wed “whenever a minister of the Gospel, properly authorized to perform the same, should come to this parish.”¹⁰⁵ On 30 October 1813, as “Maria Luisa LeCour, legitimate [*sic*] daughter of Bertelmil Lecour and Marie Suil,” she and Brosset married before a newly arrived Spanish priest.¹⁰⁶ Her 1822 succession and all other records, label or treat her as “White.”¹⁰⁷
3. Marie Barbe LeCourt, born 2 April 1795, was baptized as “daughter of Marie Ursule, a free *métive*, and a father unknown.” No known evidence shows a marriage for Barbe. Her last known record, on 15 April 1846, shows her as godparent to her brother Athanase’s child.¹⁰⁸ All records created by or about her as an adult, treat her as “White.”
4. Joseph Valery LeCourt, born February 1797, was baptized “son of Marie Ursule, free *mulâtresse* and a father unknown”; his godfather was Joseph Metoyer, a child of the post’s most scandalous French-African liaison. His godmother was his French-African cousin Marguerite LeComte, wed to Joseph’s brother Dominique.¹⁰⁹ These records consistently give that racial designation to Natives appearing before a priest in company of “free mulattoes.” As “Valery, son of Marie Ursulle,” he married, 2 February 1822, Marie Silvie Métoyer,¹¹⁰ his godmother’s daughter.¹¹¹ Valery died shortly before September 1835, leaving a widow, two children, two enslaved

104. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 2255. The “Caddo” label was apparently applied because her mother and other Canecci were brought to Natchitoches from the Caddo, where they had been held as captives.

105. Natchitoches Parish, Conveyance Book 3:144–45.

106. Mills, *Natchitoches 1800–1829*, entry 1034. The entry errs in identifying her as “legitimate.”

107. Natchitoches Parish, succession packet 15.

108. St. François Church, Register 9, entry 1846:49.

109. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 2837. For the Metoyers, see Elizabeth Shown Mills and Gary B. Mills, “Slaves and Masters: The Louisiana Metoyers,” *NGSQ* 70 (Sep 1982): 163–89. Also, Mills and Mills, *The Forgotten People: Cane River’s Creoles of Color*, rev. ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2013), 94–95.

110. St. François Church, Register 11, entry 1822:5. His marriage bond calls him “Joseph Valery [no surname], a free man of color”; Natchitoches Parish, Conveyance Book 12:60. His surety, the prominent planter Narcisse Prudhomme, was husband of the bride’s white Créole cousin Marie Thérèse Elisabeth Métoyer; Mills, *Natchitoches 1800–1829*, entry 974.

111. Mills and Mills, *Forgotten People*, 32–33.

women, and their three children, but no land.¹¹² All records created by or about him in adulthood, subsume him into his wife's culture and ethnicity and label him and his offspring "of color."

5. Jean Baptiste Athanase Barthélemy LeCourt, baptized 20 October 1799, aged eight months, as "son of Ursulle [no race stated] and a father unknown." His godfather was his father's brother, Jean Baptiste LeCourt.¹¹³ On 9 November 1838, as "Athanaze Barthelemy LeCour, major son of Barthelemy Lecour and Marie," he and the French Créole Adèle Thierry had their cohabitation blessed.¹¹⁴ Because of his choice of spouse and godparents for all his children, records created by or about Athanase in adulthood treat him as "White."
6. Jean Baptiste Neuville LeCourt, born 25 September 1801, baptized as "son of Marie Ursule, a free *métive*, father unknown."¹¹⁵ On 26 January 1830, as "Neuville LeCourt, major and natural son of Bmy. Le Court and Marie Louise [Marie Ursule *dite* Luison]," he married the French-African Marie Ositte Metoyer.¹¹⁶ In 1842, he bought land amid her family,¹¹⁷ but did not prosper. When he died in 1853, his brother-in-law's petition to administer his estate reported that Neuville left five children, a small estate, and many debts. His estate included two enslaved women and their five children. To satisfy creditors, they were sold to neighbors and kinsmen at the courthouse door.¹¹⁸ All records created by or about Neuville after his marriage label him as a man of color.
7. Marie Arsène LeCourt, born 8 February 1804, baptized as "daughter of Marie Ursulle, free *mulatresse*, father unknown"; godparents were her sister Marie Louise and "Jean Baptiste, free *mulâtre*."¹¹⁹ Again choosing a French-African godparent created an assumption that the brown mother was French-African. All subsequent records created by or about Arsène treat her as White.¹²⁰
8. Jacques Eloi LeCourt, born 1806, baptized 29 December 1809, aged three, called "free *mulâtre*, son of Barth. LeCourt and Marie Ursulle." Baptized

112. Natchitoches Parish, Succession Book 8:123–26.

113. Mills, *Natchitoches 1729–1803*, entry 2932.

114. St. François Church, Register 12, entry 1838:44. For Adèle's identity and status, see Mills, *Natchitoches 1800–1829*, entry 157; her godmother was the white Marie Thérèse Elisabeth Métoyer whose husband was surety for Valery LeCourt's marriage.

115. Mills, *Natchitoches 1800–1829*, entry 14.

116. St. François Church, Register 11, entry 1830:4.

117. Natchitoches Parish, Conveyance Book 32:256.

118. Natchitoches Parish, Succession Book 27:80–86.

119. Mills, *Natchitoches 1800–1829*, entry 85.

120. For example, see Mills, *Natchitoches 1800–1829*, entry 2319, for godparents, "Manuel Vercher and Arsene Lecour, whites."

with Eloi was a child of his half-sister Pelagie and her husband, both French-African.¹²¹ Again, Ursule's infant was assumed to be, as well. On 16 January 1836, as "Eloy LeCourt, son of Marie Ursul," he married the French-African Marie Céline Metoyer in a church ceremony that legitimized their two children.¹²² All records created by or about Eloi as an adult, through his succession in April 1855,¹²³ treat him as a man of color.

9. Marie Tranquelline LeCourt, born July 1811, baptized as White on 30 October 1813 at age two years and three months, and "legitimate daughter of Bertelmil [LeCourt] and Mda. [Madame] Suil"; her godmother was her father's French Créole sister Fanchonette LeCourt.¹²⁴ On 5 November 1827, as "minor daughter of Bmy. LeCourt and Luison" [*sic*], she married the Hispanic Tomás Basco ["Bask"].¹²⁵ This record erroneously identifies Tranquilline's grandmother Luison as her mother, suggesting that when the infant Tranquilline's mother died, the grandmother stepped in as caregiver. Tranquilline died before 1 March 1830 when Tomás wed the Hispanic Maria Procella.¹²⁶ All records created by or about Tranquelline, as an adult, treat her as White.¹²⁷

CONCLUSION

Identical given names and one common associate—LeCourt—have led historians to merge two separate women. They had different roots and radically different lives. Holistic research on all parties involved identifies at least seven clear differentiators:

- Sixteen years separated their births.
- Fifty-plus miles separated the homes where they were born.
- Ursule of Lisette, orphaned at ten, left the Natchitoches frontier as a young woman. She married at New Orleans where she is traceable until her death in 1794.
- Ursule of Luison is traceable at Rivière aux Cannes, in the remote fringes of the Natchitoches jurisdiction, from 1790 through 1811.
- The mothers of both were enslaved Natives and both were eventually freed. However, one was of unknown tribal origin, the other a Canneci *aka* Lipan Apache.

121. Mills, *Natchitoches 1800–1829*, entries 2079–80.

122. St. François Church, Register 11, entry 1836:2.

123. Natchitoches Parish, Succession 3512, Eloy LeCourt.

124. Mills, *Natchitoches 1800–1829*, entry 440.

125. St. François Church, Register 11, entry 1827:16. Marie Tranquelline's baptism occurred simultaneously with the marriage of her godfather to her sister Marie Louise.

126. St. François Church, Register 11, entry 1839:8.

127. For example, see baptism of their son Jean Baptiste Bruno, 11 Feb 1829; St. François Church, Register 6, Baptisms, Whites, 1817–1840, entry 1829:6.

- One mother died with substantial means at the post, generating a legal succession that provided details about her life. The other died in obscurity in the lower reaches of the Natchitoches jurisdiction, leaving no property and no record of her death.
- One *métive* line merged seamlessly into French Créole society in the *Grande Écore*–Bayou Pierre District north of Natchitoches. The other's offspring in the Rivière aux Cannes District south of Natchitoches, married spouses of diverse ethnicities.

In genealogical research, historical and community context is essential to establishing identity. Many people shared the same names. Even siblings might carry the same name, as this study demonstrates, but each lived distinctively different lives. Rebuilding those lives, placing individuals amid their associates, and pegging each to an exact geographic location—not just a county or parish but a residential lot or family farm—are essential to identify birth families. Ursule and Barthélemy LeCourt's family illustrates the elasticity of Native identity and social mores in Créole Louisiana, as a sparse population forged their lives within arbitrary constraints of church and civil laws.

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