

Material Culture of Socially Mobile Acadians in Ascension Parish Louisiana 1840-1860:

Landry Family Case Studies of Evolution into Landownership and Comfortable Wealth

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Introduction

Mark A. Rees examined South Louisiana identity and its relationship to the *le Grand Derangement*. In his investigation of the Armand Broussard homesite he concludes that there is a tangible connection of the built historical landscape of Acadiana to the cultural impacts of displacement (Rees 2008, 252). He also suggests that Acadian culture should be seen in a context of assimilation or acculturation versus resistance and persistence is misguided (Rees 2008, 254). The following quote from this article both puts Rees's article in to context and encourages the study conducted here:

Landscapes in particular offer an opportunity for historical analysis and critique. The present study represents preliminary research into an understudied and as yet virtually untapped source of information on the landscape of Acadiana. Combined with architectural, archival, and ethnographic sources, there is an obvious potential for launching a truly multidisciplinary study of Acadian settlement in the region.(Rees 2008, 252-3)

This study takes this charge and examines the archival record of a segment of the landscape of Acadia – the upwardly mobile settlers along the Mississippi River of Ascension Parish, Louisiana. Specifically examined are the activities and events that reflect a unique Acadian material culture in and surrounding the property of a Mr. E. Landry during the time period spanning 1840-1860.

Topic of Study

The cultural distinctiveness of the Acadian¹ people in Louisiana (commonly termed 'Cajuns') is a generally well-accepted academic position. Often debated, though, are the foundations and specific expressions of this distinctiveness. Some scholars support theories that relate this distinctiveness to the legacy of the forced expulsion of Acadians from the area of the New World now known as Nova Scotia in Canada.² Others claim that the isolation of a people due to linguistic and geographical barriers created a particular communal worldview. Finally, some scholars (perhaps the largest group) argue that the cultural distinctiveness of the Louisiana Acadians is the result of a collision of all of these factors. Regardless of position, there is general agreement that the establishment of an

Acadian culture was completed by 1800 and continued until the Civil War. By 1865, the modern homogenization of Louisiana had begun.³

If this specific cultural identity exists, there must be a set of distinguishable material artifacts and habitation design manifestation that will support these arguments. The purpose of this research is to identify these manifestations and make systematic connections to the theories posited by Acadian scholars. Through this investigation a clearer identification of the manifestation of Acadian material culture⁴ will be defined.

It is accepted that the Acadian People of Louisiana underwent a process of social stratification from the turn of the nineteenth century through the Civil War; with this stratification a class of wealthy landowners emerged whose position as plantation and slave owners on the Mississippi River put them at the crest of the region's social classes. These Acadian plantation owners were becoming peers with white Anglo-American⁵ and Creole⁶ plantation owners. How did they develop their material culture to maintain their individual cultural identities and aspire to imitate the wealthier non-Acadian upper class? With which of the many established landowning cultural groups did they most associate?

The Reconstruction era is not considered to have been kind to most of the Creole or Acadian landowners in Louisiana. With the end of the Civil War, the homogenization of Louisiana and the establishment of a dominant White Anglo-

American culture are seen in political and the economic power of industrial production. Many wealthy Acadians integrated into this new culture, while the poorer segment of the culture soldiered on and became what is now called 'Cajun.' The white Anglo-American hegemony in Louisiana resulted from the conditions of the nineteenth century.

Finally, this paper will consider what part of Acadian material culture has been lost in the mythology of contemporary Cajun culture. Conversely, what aspects of contemporary Cajun material culture have been influenced by these lost upwardly socially mobile Acadians?

Definition of the Geographical Area of Study

It is apparent that in order to study the upwardly mobile Acadian in the context of Louisiana, it is critical to define a specific geographical area to examine. The obvious choice is to locate Acadian ascendancy along the Mississippi River. Brasseaux identifies one area known as the Acadian Coast, the area of Ascension Parish where Bayou Lafourche meets the Mississippi River. This is now the area within and surrounding Donaldsonville, Louisiana (Brasseaux 1993, 47).

An important set of historical facts supports the concept of the establishment of the Acadian Coast. When the United States took possession of Louisiana, the new Governor Claiborne, under direction of the American authorities to include the French speaking population in his government, appointed the Ascension Parish Acadian

Joseph Landry to be Commandant of the Lafourche District; Landry and two other Ascension Parish landowners were the only Acadians elected to Louisiana's first territorial legislature. Although the alliance fizzled and only one of the twenty-six French-speaking members of the state constitutional convention was Acadian, the establishment of this region as the center for Acadian social mobility is clear (Brasseaux 1993, 47).

Critical Secondary Sources

Four important texts exist from the first half of the twentieth century that chronicle the Acadian History of Ascension Parish. Written by the amateur historian Sidney Albert Marchand (1917-1956), three are general and entertaining histories of the parish focused on the original Acadian settlements. A fourth, *An Attempt to Re-Assemble the Old Settlers in Family Groups*, from 1965, is a publication of his translation of the legible notarial archives of Ascension Parish between 1770 and 1805. In addition, he isolates descriptions of home construction, identifies five hundred citizens by birth date and parentage, and lists Spanish land grants for this period in his 1943 book *Acadian Exiles in the Golden Coast of Louisiana*. This information paints a picture of who was establishing a foothold in the area as landowners, and also the significance and scale of their impact.

As described in the historical background, the period between 1805 and 1860 saw significant expansion in the plantation establishment along the Mississippi River; tracts of land became

defined as areas of industrial level sugar production. In 1858 Adrien Persac drew and published a map known as the Norman Chart. This cartographical representation of the Mississippi River from the Mississippi state line to New Orleans delineates each plantation with accuracy and names each plantation owner. The mix of names nearer New Orleans reflects a mix of Creole and American owners; as one moves up the river, the proportion of Anglo-American names increases. In the area of Ascension Parish, though, there is an even distribution of owners among Creole, American, and Acadian. Five Acadian names are distinctly represented: Landry, Dugas, LeBlanc, Melançon, and Hébert. All these surnames are represented in the list of structures after 1800 described by Marchand. All but Dugas and Hébert received Spanish land grants in 1775 (Marchand 1943, 68,91).

The Revelations of Travel Journals

Many travel journals address visits to the city of New Orleans, but fewer describe moving up the Mississippi River and the specifics of the Acadian condition in the area of study. There are a few exceptions. Between 1796 and 1802 James Pitot described his journey around the state and included descriptions of Acadian settlers in the region of study. He remarks specifically regarding the squalor and the scavenger existence of the people, but makes this revealing hypothesis:

This Parish⁷ has fewer sugar plantations than the preceding one,

and there are none further up; but on the other hand, cotton has snatched misery and despair from a large number of Acadian families that had been relegated there, and who hardly have any slaves. Several wealthy persons in that connection exercise a kind of vassalage over them by means they have of buying their early fruits and vegetables but soon the Acadians will enjoy all the advantages of increased wealth and will enrich themselves by a cultivation, even more advantageous, that does not require the setting up of slave quarters nor owning slaves (Pitot 1979, 116).

And although history bears out this prediction in term of enrichment, though not without slaves, the sentiment of a possible upward social mobility for Acadians in this region is established as early as 1800.

Archival Manuscripts – The E. Landry Papers

The Louisiana State Archive in Baton Rouge, the Louisiana State University Archives, and the archives at the Center for Louisiana Studies at the University of Louisiana – Lafayette contain many period manuscripts in both French and English. These manuscripts include personal letters, plantation and business receipts, and miscellaneous legal documents; the bulk, overwhelmingly, were plantation diaries and ledgers. When selecting specific manuscripts to examine in depth, the study period (1840-1860), the study area

(Ascension Parish), and the study group (Acadians) limited all sources to a single document. This document located in the Louisiana State University Archive is the ‘Plantation Ledger and Diary of the Estate of Eloi Joseph Landry, 1841-1851.’⁸ Recorded on microfilm in 1977, there is no reference to the owner or the contemporary depository of the original document. The total record is 147 pages and is broken down into the following sections:

- Pages 1-29: Ledger of the managed estate account from July 1848- January 1851.
- Pages 30-59: Daily logs September 1849- April 1850.
- Pages 60-51: A list of unpaid bills May-August 1848.
- Pages 60-62: Blank pages with doodles and calculations.
- Page 63: A poem in French.
- Page 64-70 Blank pages with doodles and calculations.
- Page 71: A list of dates and times for a list of individuals 1870-1891.
- Pages 72- 79: Blank pages and doodles.
- Pages 80-89: Ledger of orders September 1848- November 1849.
- Pages 90-92: Log of hours worked by various tradesman and overseers 1848-1850.
- Pages 93-143: Plantation Log July 1848-September 1859.

The ledger and plantation diaries (numbers 1-3 and 9-11 above) appear to be in the hand of a single individual. This individual is Eloi’s son, who is unnamed in

the manuscript. The first log on July 26, 1848 of the plantation diary states “Inventory and appraisal of the property of succession of my father Eloi Landry...” and in the log of August 16th he references his father with the phrase “Eloi Landry my father died.”⁹ It is of note that the letter “d” in *died* is broken from the consistent cursive of the rest of the text, as if the correct conjugation of the verb is difficult for him.

This ledger and diary being in the hand of the plantation owner reveals a level of sophistication that is consistent with the concepts of social mobility. As land ownership would have been new to the Acadians, their complexity of management would not yet require a literate plantation overseer. Only two pages of miscellaneous overseer’s working hours are recorded on pages 90-92.

This vision of this record representing an ascendant, but not yet arrived, Acadian planter is reinforced by other plantation records in archives. Other ledgers reflect much greater values and scale of production. The Eloi Joseph Landry documents never mention more than twenty-eight (typically twenty-two) slaves while other larger plantations dealt with slaves in the hundreds.

The issue of language is also relevant in this case. The writer is using English; this in itself reflects a deviation from his cultural past and heritage. It is also apparent that the use of English is not totally comfortable for the author. Other examples like the one referenced earlier of grammatical errors are evident in early portions of the log. On page 103 he writes, “Bought for cash of Hickey’s

negro 5 baskets for gathers my corn at 37p a pieces.” This not only reflects a naive use of English, but also the use of French syntax. In the beginning portions of the accounts ledger, the author frequently, but not always, substitutes *pour* for *for*.

In another example of the use of French grammatical rules with English vocabulary is the use of the term *furniture*s. In a few occasions when cataloging the purchasing of furniture, *furniture*s is used. As the term *meuble(s)* is pluralized in French, while it is a collective noun in English, this is consistent with many of the colloquialisms attributed to twentieth century Cajuns, e.g., “Gotta go get my hairs cut.”

The narrative of the logs flows towards a more sophisticated use of language. The simplest example is the description of the typical plantation practice of distributing provisions to slaves. In the early portion of the manuscript the practice is not mentioned; later the author simply states “Distributing weekly rations to the slaves,” while at the end of the manuscript, the types of rations are given in detail. And the sentence structure also becomes more complicated with the use of the terms “following week” and “ensuing week.”

The diary is typically matter of fact, but on a few occasions the author discusses personal feelings. Most notable is a passage from February 24, 1849, where he is in the middle of dealing with a levee break and having to call on neighbors and hired help to repair the damage. He states¹⁰:

Total hands at work ----50 [350?] – (250 from Iberville) – at dark pretty fortifying in my minds eyes – After mental agreement decided that the hands should rest on Sunday – Iberville friends ----ly promising to come back on Monday the 26th with refreshly hands to help ... by the fatigue of the day – after writing todays journal – and feeling unwell.

This section of the manuscript is rife with the stresses caused by flooding, and this is a rare personal comment by the author. Other personal moments of the expression of opinion deal with confronting strangers and the death of a slave's child.¹¹ Otherwise the tone of the manuscript is business-like and matter of fact – a true log of daily activities.

Most of the manuscript deals with the daily activities of the plantation, and the script is about 95% legible. Information relevant to the study undertaken here is throughout the manuscript and can be categorized into three main categories:

- Human material value
- Construction and fabrication of new property and improvements.
- Assumption and release of material property.

The Notarial Records

The Ascension Parish courthouse records are extensive. Although use of the archival records reveals some inaccuracies in cross referencing and indexing documents by the parish officials from 1820 to 1860, a

significant number of materials are available for review, providing detailed insight.

Beginning with the index to all conveyances, the name E. Landry was searched. In the period up to 1848 two Landrys with the first initial E were active in the records of the parish. They included an Elie Landry and an Eloi Joseph Landry. Due to sparse activity for Elie Landry and the scope of activity related to Eloi Joseph Landry, beginning in 1829 and ending in 1850¹², this study reconstructs Eloi Joseph Landry and his immediate family business activities. Because of a lack of significant precise factual correlation, linking the notarial record and the plantation cannot be confirmed unconditionally, but an assumption of direct correlation is made. The narrative uncovered of the life of Eloi Landry, and that of the manuscript, parallel each other in terms of social mobility regardless of their specific verifiable connection.

The court archive structures its catalogue as described in the methodology section. Each of the following categories reveals a set of relevant documents. Appendix C contains a catalog of all relevant reviewed archival documents. The categories and the number of relevant records are as follows:

- Conveyance records: 22 Records
- Original Acts: 11 Records
- Marriage Contracts: 3 Records
- Mortgages: 23 Records
- Successions (probate): 3 Records

The narrative of the social mobility of Eloi Landry begins in 1829 with the first record of personal business activity, the release of a mortgage of a slave. Following 1829 through 1834, Eloi Landry appears to be in the business of mortgaging slaves in New Orleans and reselling them in Ascension Parish for a profit. Eloi would have made trips to New Orleans and arranged short term financing for slaves purchased at the New Orleans Slave Trade and then sold them in Ascension Parish at a higher price to Ascension locals; to use a modern term, Eloi was flipping slaves. It also appears, from the mortgage records, that he is doing these dealing consistently but not as a primary business. His personal financial gain in this business would have to have been supplemented by another form of income.

Although there is no marriage record for Eloi Landry, he is listed as the son-in-law of Alexandre Eusebe Babin in the notarial record of Babin's succession in August 1829. From the set of notarial records surrounding this succession it can be concluded that at this time Eloi Landry was not a landowner, while his two brothers-in-law Paul O. Landry and Auguste Hychthe Landry were. Although all three men married into the Babin family, it appears that only Eloi was not a landowner at the time of his father-in-law's death. Whether this is a circumstance of social standing or his being younger than his relations cannot be determined.

Alexandre Eusebe Babin, in addition to having three daughters, had two sons, Milien and Traismon Vital. These five

children named Eloi as power of attorney, and he undertook the division of the estate. The property was fully mortgaged, and each inheritor used the resulting funds to support their own enterprises, although Milien was a minor at the time of his father's death and he was placed under Eloi's tutorage.¹³ Eloi almost immediately assumed the mortgage. A complex set of transactions left Eloi with the original tract of land without direct indebtedness to his in-laws.

According to the notarial acts, this tract of land is situated about 10 miles north of Donaldsonville in a section of the river that is finely divided into small lots of land forming small plantations. Consistent with the scope of the plantation diary, these tracts of land were limited to a few arpents¹⁴ across the riverfront (at most a quarter of a mile). The records suggest that each of the five Babin children and their spouses eventually owned property along this stretch of the Mississippi.

There is a defined upwardly mobile trend for each of these families. It is notable that none of the Babins were literate, executing all of their legal documents with an "x" instead of a signature. In contrast each of the Babin children's spouses, male or female, were literate and capable of writing in clear and legible script. That no marriage contract exists for Eloi Landry suggests that he married into the community from an adjacent area and the marriage was recorded elsewhere. Most Acadian settlements at this time were away from the Mississippi. Moving towards the more affluent Mississippi River is a sign of

ascendancy, which suggests a purposeful effort of social mobility by Eloi Landry.

It appears from the records that there was an intentional combination of education and land ownership in this generation. Those with the land married those with education to allow for upward social mobility. This is reinforced through the available marriage contracts, which show that the Babins had land but lesser wealth in each transaction while the literate partner brought material goods into the marriage; Louisiana's forced heirship guaranteed the eventual inheritance of the land. Also supporting this theory of the pooling of education and property is that both Eloi (apparent) and his brother-in-law Auguste (documented) both came from adjacent parishes. Even if Auguste had been a landowner in another parish, the advance towards riverfront property in Ascension was a social and economic step upward.

Throughout the 1830s each of the five siblings undertook the mortgaging of property and slaves, although the resale of slaves seems to have been the work of Eloi alone. But with the closing of the 1830s this activity waned; during this period Eloi undertook the purchasing and subsequent sale of a piece of property adjacent to Donaldsonville from which he made a profit. He flipped a piece of property, similar to his previous activities flipping slaves. A flurry of family activity in this period stopped in about 1838 and does not resume until 1848 with the succession and accumulation of the property described in the plantation log discussed above. There is no record for a succession of the estate of Eloi Landry. Perhaps this succession was conducted in a

different parish, although Eloi is recorded as being a resident of Assumption. The plantation log, though, does discuss leaving to go to Iberville parish to settle the estate.¹⁵

It is the succession documents of Eloi's in-laws that best describe the material possessions of this generation of Acadians. Available in the notarial archive were three successions. These successions (Paul O. Landry-1842, Milien Babin and Wife-1858, and Widow Traismon Babin-1865) contain inventories of personal possessions. The data from these inventories combined with inventory data from the plantation ledgers and marriage contract forms are catalogues in appendix C, and discussed in the following section.

Findings

The intention here is to put the social mobility of Acadians into context, and establish a defensible source for data on this socially mobile group. This section assesses how this group constructed their material culture.

In terms of material culture, the materials which create a sense of place (and to an extent, limited to the idea of home) are the focus here. Although there is significant data on physical property that is related to the production systems of the plantation, these are separated in this study from those that define occupied "lived in" space. The definition of "lived in" space is easily seen as the construction of buildings and the adjacent manipulated landscape as well as the furnishings and finishes of the home.

The archival record contains documentation of many material things that

relate to production such as barrels, equipment, and tools. Much of the archival record of textiles relates to issues of apparel. Although both tools and textiles are integral to any discussion of material culture, the focus of this study is on the “lived in” designed spaces and constructed sense of place, thus tools and textiles are referenced peripherally in this study.

Human Material Value

In the entry on page 138 dated Wednesday, July 25th, the author makes an unusual experimental linguistic effort. Following a few accounts of typical daily activity and reporting that a slave’s baby has taken ill, he deviates from practice by making an attempt at sophisticated language, perhaps the result of some personal reading¹⁶:

Morning rain – It is to be remarked that for the last 3 weeks the heavens, & the skies, have continually wept for the absence of the “Sol”’s reviving rays – It is capacity that – “Hopo” will soon wipe the tears of the atmosphere – and that our eyes and feet will get dry at last – Evening shivers as customary – Lick last – All betting with excepting of Rose child - not hoping to long.

This is followed by an asterisked note that the child died at age 3 months and twelve days.

This passage highlights the complex issues of slavery in antebellum Louisiana,

but the examination of slavery as an institution is not the purpose of this study. However, a discussion of the accumulation and use of material possessions and material culture of antebellum southern society cannot avoid the fact that human beings were owned objects. Evidenced by Eloi Landry’s business practices and the profits he made in the slave trade, it is apparent that the subject of slave ownership is integrated into the upwardly mobile Acadians’ system for advancement. Although the passage above reveals sympathy towards the condition of the slaves, there are numerous descriptions of slave sickness and their affliction with cholera that are treated in the same way as broken or misfiring equipment. The concern for the child and the parent as a unit does lend support to the idea that the author supported the slave family unit, a priority of Louisiana Creoles as described by Hall in *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*. Brasseaux argues in *Acadian to Cajun* that Acadians in antebellum Louisiana were clearly involved in the slave economy, and this research supports that. Brasseaux also argues that the slave owning Acadians did not have a special egalitarian approach to slavery, as is often mythologized in “Cajun” cultural views of the past. The evidence here supports either argument.

In another approach to human material value, there is the process of tutorship. Tutorship is the process by which minor children left with an inheritance from deceased parents are taken under the care of a relative. The numerous acts of tutorship, both undertaken and released after maturity, show that the Acadians followed that

tradition. What may appear as an act of family love and care is revealed as a simple financial and legal transaction; the minor could not be housed by the major family member, and often tutorships were mortgaged to raise capital by the tutor. Supplies for the minor were inventoried as part of the plantation business. Throughout the plantation manuscript there are separate line items for supplies for the family and supplies for the minors.

Although slaves and minors in tutorage are both seen as material possessions, perhaps differentiated as capital and investment respectively, they are treated differently in terms of the material treatment they received. In sharp contrast to the \$113.13 total cost of chambray for the clothing of approximately twenty-two slaves, clothing for three minors had a cost of \$137.87.

The evidence that slavery was an integral part of these Acadians' lives is important evidence that reflects social mobility and adaptability to the economic structure the Acadians found in Louisiana. Whether their attitude towards slavery was more in line with the traditions of the Anglo-Americans or of the Creoles cannot be determined. It is clear that the complexities of the issues were not lost on the Acadians, and there were some human emotions associated with slaves, though this was certainly not the norm.

It appears that slavery, like the vernacular architecture described in earlier sections, was adapted by the Acadians from a combination of both found and carried traditions. The following section examines

the evidence of such adaptation and manipulation of the built and constructed material environment.

Construction and Fabrication of New Property and Improvements

In the notarial record descriptions of construction, little detail is given past the simple terms such as "land with improvements" or "with all buildings." This occurs in the succession of Milien Babin, where the property is described as having a house, kitchen, cabins, coops, and a shop. The plantation manuscript contains all the other references to construction and finishing of construction. These references are rich with data that describe the material construction of place.

Among the spatial descriptions of the plantation, the author pays particular attention to the location of specific activity along the riverfront. The riverfront of the property is described as "Down", "Up," or "Home Place." Home Place refers to the front of the house itself while up and down refer to the direction along the river. This language is used in many instances in the manuscript and in some detail on pages 116 and 118 in the discussion of levee repair from January 1st through January 13th of 1849. This coordinial understanding of the levee is more consistent with the back bayou plantation layout of plantations than it is with the typical narrow and deep typology on the Mississippi.¹⁷ This suggests that the author has a working vocabulary that is result of a spatial understanding of previous plantation locations on smaller tributaries or bayous as discussed in the plantation

geography sections previously discussed in this paper (Bacot and Poesch 1997, 90-1). This reinforces concepts of social advancement and the adaptation of old systems to new landscapes. In fact, the term Home Place is the formal name of one Creole Plantation located near New Orleans (Bacot and Poesch 1997, 26).

Later in 1849, the author describes on July 28th that at the “Small House” “Upper Place” slate roofing has been damaged and the house is being “covered” (page 139). What was being used as covering is illegible, but this reveals two aspects of the physical construction and orientation of the plantation. The term small house most likely refers to a garçonnieres or an overseer’s house; both would have been seen as “smaller” versions of the “big house.” Arranging that “small” house adjacent to the river suggests a more formal plan in the American plantation tradition, but does not exclude it from a less rigid Creole standard (Bacot and Poesch 1997, 90-1). The use of slate indicates a level of prosperity, as wood shingles were less expensive, but by this period slate was a common choice (Bacot and Poesch 1997, 45).

Beyond this discussion of the orientation of the physical landscape there are passages that describe the “dwelling house.” On September 22, 1848 (page 105) work is recorded for the dwelling house that includes the framing of a back gallery and the flooring “thereto.” This strongly suggests that Edwards would classify the building as a type III Acadian House (J. D. Edwards 1988, 21).¹⁸ The front gallery was

part of the initial main house construction, and the rear gallery was a later addition. Also, on the following day, the author states that he is working on the framing and woodwork along with two specific “hands” named Sam and Lambert. Sam is a slave and no account is made of his time, while Lambert’s hours are recorded, suggesting skilled labor. A certain Narcisse Lambert is hired as an assistant overseer on January 15, 1848 (page 96) for \$300 a year. In this instance they shared a functional status as assistance to the owner (“hands”), but their social status was different. Regarding the ideas of scale of the plantation’s operations, this reinforces the idea that this was an emerging enterprise.

Later in 1848, on December 5th and 6th (page 112), the logs include two entries describing the laying of brick flooring in the “cellar.” Again the author describes himself working on the improvements; he works with all male hands on the 5th and finishes the work on the 6th with the help of Sam. This gives a strong sense of scope of the construction, since it can be assumed that a team of men could floor a standard sized two or three bay structure in a day, and the detailed trim work completed by focused craftsman the following day.¹⁹ The use of the term cellar is not consistent with the modern term “basement,” but it can be assumed that “cellar” refers to the open ground floor portion used for storage in the Creole raised cottage type from the late eighteenth century as described by Edwards (J. D. Edwards 1988, 79). The tradition of brick at this level is considered standard Creole practice for plantation home

architecture (Bacot and Poeach 1997, 25). The continuation of this traditional typology during the time period of this manuscript is considered a sign of nostalgic prosperity by Bacot (Bacot and Poesch 1997, 109). The addition of the brick in this case suggests a connection to a Creole heritage and another demonstration of prosperity, and in this case it was following the physical model of the Acadian assimilation of Creole traditions for framed rear additions (J. D. Edwards 1988, 13).

Other discussions of construction occur on page 36 and include an addition to the sugar house for storage and slave sleeping quarters on October 18th and 19th. This description does not contain any specificity to size or construction type; it merely mentions that the addition would serve as storage when the sugar house was not at its peak production. This reflects a growth in the production capacity of the plantation, as the sugar house was often the largest and most dominant structure on the sugar plantation (J. M. Vlach 1993, 127). Other sets of construction topics include fencing and levee reinforcement, both consistent issues for Mississippi River plantations.²⁰ Fencing alone could be the subject of a complete typological study, but in terms of this study, these are both categorized as concerns of the means of production of the plantation and not the construction of place.

Some specific passages in the text concern the purchase of wood and construction services for “Negro Cabins.”²¹ The Negro Cabin is described as being 16’ by 32’ on October 20th and November 31st

respectively (page 22). This is larger than the typical slave cabin described in the slave architecture section earlier in this paper, but still consistent with the two square plan typical of both the Creole and American typologies. No mention is made of a gallery, and as galleries are mentioned in the discussion of the additions to the dwelling house, it might be assumed that this cabin stood without galleries in the American tradition. This might be consistent with the large size, but these proportions also could be the older Creole cabin style that Bacot describes as being built up until the Civil War, with strict room sizes of 14’ x 16’ (Bacot and Poesch 1997, 127). In this model, a shallow gallery made for the additional 2 feet to make the 16 total. It can be more easily argued that the cabin is of typical wood framing with weatherboards as opposed to *bousillage*²²: on page 48 there is a record that board *and* lumber were purchased specifically *for* framing. This certainly suggests sided construction instead of *poteaux-en-terre*²³ with *bousillage*. Finally, any discussion of *bousillage* is lacking, and the only discussion on March 25th 1848 of mortar or grout includes the use of time which is not part of *bousillage* (page 102). It should also be noted that there is no discussion of a chimney or the purchase of the materials for a chimney or fireplace related to this cabin. the lack of a chimney seems unlikely. The size of the cabin allows for a relatively comfortable density of 5.5 people per large room. One would expect a chimney with this scale of cabin, and the lack of description of a chimney is

inconsistent with the expectations for this building type.

These informative log entries relate to construction that identifies a generally Creole set of traditions at the E. Landry plantation. There is little mention of any decorative color or ornamentation past the reference of two pieces of toile discussed later, that may or may not have been used decoratively and were most likely black. Use of colored wall treatments such as paint or wall covering was typically consistent with an American plantation tradition (Bacot and Poesch 1997, 108). There is no record of any activity of this type and the only finishing discussed is the white washing of the “quarters” and sugar house by hands on July 12th and 13th respectively on pages 136 and 137. It appears that the traditional Creole and Acadian whitewashing is in place (Bacot and Poesch 1997, 108).

The traditions revealed in the construction and finishing of buildings follow the Creole style. This is also consistent with the concept of Acadian emulation and adaption of the Creole tradition for their benefit, as is evident in the construction of the slave housing and the additions to the sugar house. There is also evidence of nostalgia for a Creole heritage in the use of brick flooring in the cellar. Vlach suggests that the sugar plantation is in itself a synthesis of various nineteenth century strategies of sugar cultivation, a fusion of French and American plantation ideals (J. M. Vlach 1993, 192).

Although the evidence supports that E. Landry’s plantation is conforming to Creole traditions more uniformly, there is

little specific evidence to indicate that this is a cultural choice made in conscious conformity with the past, or that deviation from norms results from aspiration rather than from opportunism and pragmatism.

Assumption and Release of Material Property

Material culture as defined by Prown and Csikszentmihalyi contains both the inherent unspoken meaning of things as well as the obvious physical attributes of objects. In order to discuss material culture from the perspective of archival research, one must view it through the lens of the intended meaning of a constructed and finished material place, as well as that of the inherent meaning that may well have been common to the time. Through archival research, better analysis can be made of these unspoken meanings which are lost on the viewer of period objects in a curatorial or archeological sense.

Two main categories of material possession are revealed in this research. The first is the description of apparel and textiles. As this study focuses on the construction of place through material culture, the textile issue is addressed tangentially and the relation of slavery and tutors is covered in the section on material human value above. In other instances there is little discussion of textiles past regular clothing purchases for slaves and minors, with the exception of the purchase of two pieces of toile noted on April 23, 1849, on page 84, coinciding with the purchase of burial materials. The text of the manuscript is smudged, but what is readable is, “Toile d’ I ----ne” or Toile d’L--

--ne. The nearest definition to what appears written is *toile de laine*, which is a soft, lightweight, plain weave French dress fabric made of merino wool, generally black. The color is appropriate for funerary clothing, the dressing of a table coffin display, or a coffin skirt. The price listed was \$20.00, a high price that supports merino wool (Tortora and Merkel 1996). Merino wool is manufactured, not homespun, and thus wool of the finest quality. Regardless of its specific use, this was an important valuable material purchase (Tortora and Merkel 1996).

Beyond this singular discussion of specialty textiles, the balance of relevant discussion on material possession is related to furniture. The records reveal a process of material furniture acquisition that does little to differentiate place from things, even though movable objects are described in many places such as marriage records and succession documents. Only two items of furniture are separated and defined as objects for individual transfer. In the plantation log of 1848, two chairs are purchased from “Eugene Hebert’s Boy” and described as “Chairs given by deceased to be finis.” This appears to be a transaction of the repair of an object completed after the death of the owner. It shows that furniture repair was an expertise that had value and exclusivity. That the chairs were repaired by an outside expert reinforces the idea that furniture was precious, not disposable. The purchase price is \$2.63½, and the amount of this relatively small sum is perhaps irrelevant, as it is impossible to quantify the amount of needed repair.

In another more significant instance, in the 1842 succession of Paul O. Landry, the estate separated out an *armoire* (along with a horse named Tom) to be included as sole property of his widow. In every other case, movable items were associated directly with property, or with a person in terms of marriage contracts. The separation of the *armoire* is significant in that this gives the object noted importance and special meaning. This is supported by the description of the *armoire acadienne* or Cajun *armoire* in Edwards’ *The Acadian Lexicon*: “Though considered ‘folksy’ by furniture collectors, they were centrally connected with the vital expression of Cajun domestic culture.” The definition continues to discuss the use of such *armoires* for the collection and transfer of textiles through some families (Edwards and du Bellay de Verton 2004, 41).

The plantation logs reveal that a system of acquisition of material positions including furniture and home furnishings was an ongoing process - evidenced by the regular transactions with W. Shea and Roth & Brothers in the plantation log. But again these items are grouped together and not distinguished; on page 4 of the plantation manuscript the term “furnitures” is used with the term “family.” Family “furnitures” are defined by the group that owned them and not distinguished as separate objects with meaningful identities. They are simply capital.

The sole distinguishing description of furniture occurs on page 18 of the plantation manuscript, where a bill for \$86.86 is recorded as paid for “plain tanum

furnitures.” Referencing Edwards’ Creole Lexicon, the term *tanum* might be associated (or a misspelling or smudging of) the term “*talon*” for foot, the Spanish term “*lata*” (rafter), or more likely, “*tenon*,” meaning a hidden construction joining method (Edwards and du Bellay de Verdon 2004, 192,123,194). It is most logical that this is a description of simple joined construction, notably consistent with Edwards’ description of the *armoie acadienne*.

Might furniture play a *minor* role in the material expression of place? Or does the archive reveal a *simple* tradition of furniture that is more associated with groups, family, and stability rather than the expression of material wealth? Although these families moved up the social ladder towards greater and greater success and financial stability, they were not in the process of deviating from standing traditions of simplicity or adopting other cultures’, Creole or Anglo-American, traditions of the expression of wealth, such as conspicuous consumption associated with the Anglo-American tradition. There is no evidence of the collection of material possessions for display and expression. It has to be noted, though, that the practice throughout the sources shows that these Acadians were in the process of accumulating possessions and not selling them.

This is reinforced in the 1829 succession of Alexandre Eusebe Babin, where all movables were sold with the estate so that their value is better put to use for the future of minor family members. In the succession, it clearly stated that extended and immediate family adults came together

in unanimous agreement to transfer the estate intact into probate so that the value could be maximized for the future benefit of the family.

Conclusions

Brasseaux suggests in *Acadian to Cajun* that the construction of a Cajun identity is the result of the cultural Anglo-Americanization and homogenization of Louisiana as a result of reconstruction following the Civil war. He also hypothesizes that what is Cajun today is disconnected from the true Acadian experience in antebellum Louisiana. The mythologized, post facto, view of antebellum Acadians as egalitarian subsistence farmers is in no way supported by the findings of this study. In fact, a clear transition from the subsistence farmer lifestyle towards a landowning and slave-owning wealthy class was well underway by the 1850s. Acadians left behind traditions of backwater gathering and farming and were joining the ranks of those who controlled the systems of production for the state; in this case, sugar.

Acadian material culture is defined by four major characteristics: an independent Acadian cultural model that does not emulate Creole or Anglo-American traditions; material ownership belonging to the family group with objects associated as part of a whole “*place*”; individual material identity held tightly in the proxemic personal sphere; and objects acting as tools for stability and safety, not representations of wealth.

The question asked here is whether or not they aspired to either a Creole tradition, or an Anglo-American tradition, or their own alternative. It can be argued from the evidence that they were more entrenched in a Creole tradition than an Anglo-American one and that thus carried through in their production of constructed place. But in terms of their approach to furnishings and the accumulation of aspirational goods and objects, they seem to follow neither model.

This study shows that Acadians were not preoccupied with the expression of social mobility as we have come to expect it in Anglo-America. Rees makes the same argument when he concludes his examination of the Broussard home site: the rules of Anglo-American social mobility simply do not apply to Acadian-Americans. It is clear that Acadians constructed a material culture that sought to *support* the safety, stability, and continuity of family, rather than express wealth and strength in the Anglo-American tradition.

The link between *le grand dérangement* and a rejection of an expressed materiality cannot be ignored. Simply put, there is significant evidence that the abstract notions of continuity are prioritized over the tangible continuity of material things. As the succession documents of Alexandre Eusebe Babin clearly express, it was decided that in the interest of protecting the various orphaned minors, the entire extended family determined that it was best to liquidate assets.

As large assets are associated with the group rather than individuals, valued personal objects exist as proxemic and

personal. As described in the 1983 exhibition *L'Amour de maman*, small simplistic textiles become a material communication between generations, and the use of expensive toile for funerary dress reflects this. Personal and portable objects, like the silver watch brought into the marriage by Paul O. Landry, show value expressed to the scale of the individual.

Maygarden, like Rees, was right to suggest that the Eastern Seaboard models for the behavior of the socially mobile need to be challenged when viewing Acadian culture. Perhaps the model needs to adapt to reflect a concept of ever advancing safety as opposed to ever advancing wealth. This is clearly expressed in the manuscript passages regarding the safety of the levee and the massing of community resources to solve the problem.

This evidence supports a material culture that is created to enable safety and stability. There may be an Anglo-American desire for the material culture to overtly represent these ideals, but as Prown correctly states, this desire for stability is in the subtext of the construction of place and place identity, not in the outward expression of wealth. Perhaps it is this Anglo-American desire to create sophomorically overt statements of cultural intent that has bogged the Cajun identity down with anachronism and didactic mythologies of simplicity and purity.

A post-exile search for safety is not the only factor directing the material culture of these Acadians; there is also the issue of adaptability and assimilation. As Faragher outlines in *A Great and Noble Scheme*, the

Acadians began their cultural heritage as the result of the assimilation of and integration with the native peoples of North America. One of the questions posed by this study was, “Which culture did socially mobile Acadians trend towards, Creole or Anglo-American?” The answer suggested by this evidence is, “Both, as needed.” Their aspiration was not for the trappings of one cultural group or another, and not even the perceived success of one over the other. It was the adoption of whatever system would advance their agenda, that being actual and perceived security, not wealth.

As with every study, this one suggests more investigation. One obvious track of research would be on the issue of language as it is intertwined with material culture. This study also focused on a limited set of individuals qualitatively analyzing their cultural productions. There is a wealth of archival information that, taken out of context from individual’s stories, could reveal trends and behavior that can be quantified throughout the analysis of inventories across families and communities. This study intentionally focused on a group and social strata that left little physical record; there is, however, a wealth of archival data that might more strongly link to the existing physical record.

In conclusion, the evidence presented here suggests that antebellum Acadian material culture focused on constant simplistic construction of personal identity in immediate space, while the extended landscape and constructed “home” were a vehicle for stability. The status quo was associated with abstract concepts of

family and community, and efforts to maintain that status quo offset desires to keep a constant physical material environment. Changes in the material status quo were easily accepted, and those changes were typically the result of the adoption of apparent models as opposed to innovation. Innovation suggests risk, and while risk may result in greater wealth, it does not improve security. Perhaps the underlying question being asked in this study - “Who did these Acadians aspire to be?” is best answered with, “They were quite happy as they were.”

If one makes the association of material culture to language in terms of the symbolic meaning of things, as Acadians collected more material position, perhaps they would, as with the word “furnitures,” adjust the function of the piece to suit the need at hand within the rules they had already understood. Should they find new decorative detail, it would seem a foreign language to them, but they would manipulate the object as necessary for function. With use comes familiarity, as the language of the manuscript suggests, but a desire to acclimate or assimilate new symbols does not appear to be an item high on the Acadian agenda. “Home Place” is home first and a reflection of aspiration later, if at all.

Notes

¹The term Acadian is generally associated with the French term *l’Arcadie* which is translated from the English “Arcadia”, the title of a prose poem published in 1502 that described a pastoral non-urban ancient golden age. The common argument

is that *l'Arcadie* was corrupted to *l'Acadie* (and in English as Acadia). Another argument is that the Acadian derives from a term *akadie* of the native which means "place of abundance." Regardless of the truth of either argument, Faragher frames a history throughout his book that defines the Acadians as deeply culturally intertwined with the indigenous Mikmaq *ísimk* population. This group of uniquely identified people, who find their roots in the French new world as early as 1604, eventually become an integral part of the story of Louisiana.

²This expulsion is termed *le Grand Derangement*. The resulting Diaspora of the Acadians left peoples distributed throughout the Atlantic coastal colonies, the interior of Canada and in France. Most Acadians did not find suitable places for resettlement in either France or the other Atlantic Colonies. In the period of 1753 - 1765 most Acadians moved from place to place failing to resettle in any specific locations. With rumor, founded and un-founded, of a welcoming political environment in New Orleans, over 1000 Acadians migrated to Louisiana between 1765 and 1770 and more than three times that number has arrived by 1785. Surprising to most arrivals in New Orleans, the economic and social attitudes did not support the (often spotty) political support for Acadians. Upon arrival, Acadians were again "encouraged" to move into rural areas of Louisiana where they could reestablish their traditional rural lives left in Nova Scotia. These areas of Louisiana were referred to as "New Acadia." By 1785 two dominant areas were settled by Acadians.

The areas generally recognized as "Cajun Country" today west of the Atchafalaya River, and areas along the Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

³Although there are many books that cover the topic Acadian History before 1900, three are recognized as seminal. John Mack Faragher's *A Great and Noble Scheme* (2005) covers the establishment of the Acadian communities in Nova Scotia and their eventual expulsion. Carl A. Brasseaux's two books *The Founding of New Acadia* (1987) and *Acadian to Cajun* (1992) follow the development of Louisiana Acadian life from 1765-1803 and 1803-1877 respectively

⁴Jules David Prown's conclusion to *History from Things*, "The Sign of the Object", and the understanding of discourse by Marcel Just's *Processes in Comprehension* both argue that interpretation of the objects as a result of the user's pragmatic context. Prown discusses in his introduction to *American Artifacts* a two-part strategy for viewing historical objects: first, objects are categorized, then objects are viewed through a series of theoretical lenses. The object categorization used here will be those defined by Csikszentmihalyi based on his research of most-treasured objects in *The Meaning of Things*.

Focus on the material culture of Acadians is typically steeped in a deep but nostalgic view of the past. Most investigation supports a romantic view of the early Acadians as altruistic subsistence farmers that have few material possessions, have an egalitarian dislike of slavery and the ways of both Creole and Anglo-American

traditions. Much that has been written about the positions of early Acadians is seen through a lens of Cajun mythology and romanticism, but the journal *Material Culture* has published serious articles on the Cajun dance hall, Cajun cock pit, French Acadian vernacular homes, and rural-versus-urban French Creole architecture.

In 1991, Megan Farrell reviewed the types of French vernacular homes in *Material Culture* (vol.23 no.3) and concluded that, through a review of roof types and wall construction, “Cajun” cottages were an offspring of Creole architecture. Also in *Material Culture* (vol. 26, no. 3, 1994), Phillip Oszuscik compares the evolution of rural and urban models of the Creole cottage, and although he rarely mentions the Acadian derivative, he does clearly identify a nostalgic style of postmodern neo-Cajun that makes a connection to the past that is distinct from neo-Creole.

In “Cajun Cockpits,” (*Material Culture* vol. 2, no.2, 1993) Jon Donlon makes little connection, if any, to Acadian or Cajun identity and the cockpit. The investigation hinges on the uniqueness of the building and gaming type. In contrast, Malcolm Comeaux’s review of contemporary Cajun dance halls in *Material Culture* (vol. 32, no. 1, 2000) makes specific reference to Cajun identity through time and place. After reviewing the dance halls, he supposes in his conclusion that while music and dance may be constants in a strong and continuous Cajun identity, a relationship to place is one of adaptability and change (Comeaux 2000).

These relevant ideas are supported in a much more thorough and academic sense in Malcolm Comeaux’s examination, in the *Geographical Review*, of the evolution of the Cajun barn. He reveals that the building type associated with the descendants of French Acadiana is actually a morphing of a German typology that they would have been exposed to in the town of French Settlement, Louisiana, in the late eighteenth century (Comeaux 1989, 54). He also reveals a continuous morphing of the building type to meet the specific needs of both an evolving method of farming and the specifics of the climate and environment of South Louisiana (Comeaux 1989, 59). Comeaux concludes with this revealing comment: “many studies emphasize how cultural groups resist change when they move from one environment to another. The research presented here demonstrates the pragmatism of one folk group to material culture.” (Comeaux 1989, 61)

An unpublished thesis by Kelli Ostrom in geography and anthropology examined the material culture of the Alliet House, an Acadian home which is now a part of a museum complex in West Baton Rouge Parish. She investigated the existing material evidence of the museum site, and examined the archeological, written, and oral history of the site. As in the study here, she sought to understand the nature of the material culture of the socially ascending occupants, the Landry family. She concluded that there was a blending of the material cultures of Creoles and Anglo-Americans in order to represent an idea of a new elevated class for the building

occupants (Ostrom 2005, 105). She also concluded that during the antebellum period of the home there was a distinct differentiation made between allegiance and identity to Acadian cultural past. Although the Landrys at Alliet house materially represented their 'Acadianess,' they did not promote or outwardly present themselves as Acadian in a patriotic sense (Ostrom 2005, 106).

⁵In much literature and in this paper the term *Anglo-American* is used to make a distinction between the traditions and beliefs of anglophone Americans of English descent and those non-English speaking Americans of African, French, or Spanish ancestry. Although the term Anglo-American is used in this paper, it is commonplace in literature specific to Louisiana to simplify the term to *American*.

⁶The term Creole is used here to describe the landholding residents of south Louisiana who are of predominantly French descent and are non-English speakers. The term Creole has many, often subtly different, definitions. In the context of Louisiana, it has two primary applications: racial/cultural identity and linguistic. It is the consensus of most linguists that Louisiana Creole is one of three varieties of French that exist in Louisiana, along with the Cajun or Acadian and European Colonial French (Mosadomi 2000, 223), but the origin of the language is more complex and problematic. Although most scholars agree that the primary influences are French and the African languages that are found in the slave deportation regions of Senegambia, West Africa; the influences of Portuguese and

Spanish and the scale of the impact of Caribbean dialects is highly debated and not resolved (Mosadomi 2000, 227) (Hall 1992, 190) (Neumann-Holzschuh 2000, 13). It is also the general consensus that Louisiana Creole is a language predominantly and primarily used by new African arrivals, black slaves, and free people of color (Kein 2000, 117) that is eventually adopted by many whites (including landowners) and people of mixed race and in common usage into the early twentieth century (Hall 1992, 189).

The use of the term for defining racial and cultural identity is equally, if not more, complex than its use to define language. Virginia Domínguez covers the subject of racial and cultural identity of Creoles in her 1986 book *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana*. According to Domínguez, the legal definition of race in the original French colony of Louisiana was tripartite, divided into the categories of white, free people of color, and slaves (Domínguez 1986, 24). Initially the term was used along the Gulf Coast to distinguish those born in the colony (Creole) or born in Europe, not to define a racial boundary (Domínguez 1986, 97). Until the late eighteenth century, the term Creole appears to have little socio-political meaning and would even be used as a descriptor of slaves, as in the term *nègre créole*. But with the increased influences of Anglo-Americans in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, culminating in the Louisiana Purchase, the term and concept of a Creole identity emerges in opposition to the influences of the

Americans (Domínguez 1986, 101). In the early nineteenth century the term Creole is used by white people of European descent to identify themselves as separate from white Anglo-Americans (Domínguez 1986, 118). The historical record, though, shows a multitude of definitions of racial and cultural identities that blur at the borders such as the contradictory use, by some early nineteenth century visitors to the area, of the term Creole to define a set of mixed race free people separate from those who were French (Domínguez 1986, 113). This most probably reveals that some people who grouped themselves as Creole were of mixed race. And to compound the complexity of cultural identity, throughout the literary and historical record one can find the use of many racial and cultural terms such as *French*: a white person who is French or of French descent; *Negro*: a slave of African background; *Native*: a Native American either enslaved or free; *Mulatto*: a slave of mixed racial background; *Griffe*: a slave of mixed negro and Native American background; and *Free Person of Color*: a non-white person who was not a slave.

Domínguez clarifies that Creole identity before the Civil War is cultivated in opposition to Anglo-American influences and that it does not take on the racial connotations it carries today until the strengthening of Anglo-American power in the mid-nineteenth century (Domínguez 1986, 132). The desire to define individuals as either white or black, which increased following the Civil War, created an identity crisis for the Creole population who found themselves with diminishing political power.

Racially white Creoles begin to identify with racially white Anglo-Americans in opposition to non-whites. How many Creoles of mixed race, and slaves who would have been owned by Creoles, negotiated this complex environment is the subject of much scholarly research. But in the context of this paper the term and definition of Creole is that of the early eighteenth century – a cultural group, not strictly racially defined, finding itself in opposition to an ever more economically and politically influential Anglo-American population.

⁷He uses the name *Cantrelle* in the text, which is today's Saint James Parish, adjacent to Ascension Parish.

⁸The record of the Louisiana State Archive catalogs the manuscript as that of Elu Landry, although the research conducted here finds no reference to an Elu Landry at all in Ascension Parish. There is, however, an Eloi Joseph Landry. It is also apparent throughout the document that the name Eloi or Elu is rarely used, perhaps on four or five occasions; typically the abbreviation "E" is used.

⁹Throughout this paper, quotes taken from the plantation log are reproduced as accurately as possible with spelling, grammar, and punctuation replicated as they were originally written.

¹⁰It should be noted that the manuscript's author often used a long dash, which should not be confused with the four short dashes used to indicate that certain text was unreadable due to the nature of the script or damage to the document.

¹¹The discussion of the slave child is reviewed in the this paper's Findings section. The discussion of the drunken strangers is discussed on March 4th 1850:

*Night watch on levee – finish –
afraide of Suspicious characters –
perigrinating and laying drunk and
abussing passers by in day time –
picked up fever one in front of A live
---- on the big levee beastly drunk
and 3 at the corner of the big levee
at ---- laying and aslap on the Public
road ... an order for their arrest for
their orgies in day time and their
Suspicious Character of
Maliciousness – their presence with
danger of a crevasse – set up all
night Self on levee*

Although this is tangential to the interest of material culture of this study, this passage is worth noting as it reflects a very Anglo-American attitude towards drinking and drunkenness that is often seen as part of the Anglo-Americanization of the Acadians. (Brasseaux 1993)

¹²There is a record of a mortgage release from 1854 that seems to be a matter of succession paperwork. There is a record of an Eloi Joseph Landry inheriting \$4000 +/- from his wife in 1869, but this is included in an immense flurry of property transactions that take place at the close of 1869 that appear to deal with a change in the law of heirship and land rights resulting from Reconstruction. It seems more than

plausible that this 1869 record is entered erroneously.

¹³Tutorage is a legal relationship where a person of adult age (a “major”) takes responsibility for an orphaned or disenfranchised child (a “minor”). This is a legal obligation taken by the major and it is discussed in more detail in the conclusion portion of this paper.

¹⁴An arpent is a traditional French unit of measure, about 192 feet as used in Louisiana. The use of arpents was typical throughout the French colonial world but was never universally standardized. Use of the arpent after French colonial rule is unusual and another signifier of Louisiana multiculturalism.

¹⁵This lack of verifiable connection is where the specific connection between the notarial narrative of Eloi Landry and the plantation diary of E. Landry cannot be conclusively shown.

¹⁶The use of quotations in this section suggests that the author is directly quoting the slaves, as this appears to have been his practice in another instance of the manuscript, or it might the case that he is quoting another text in his attempt to be poetic. Regardless, these word choices offer a glimpse into outside language influences on the author and perhaps insight into the spoken Creole of the slaves.

¹⁷There is a specific hierarchy to plantation complex layouts along the Mississippi. With limited river frontage, preference is given to buildings that reflect a higher status in the social order of the plantations such as the owner's house, or, main house. Most plantations contain a set

of buildings that include the main house, garçonnières (residence for the planter's sons and other unmarried male relatives), kitchen, privy, carriage house, overseer's house, and field slave housing. The typical plan, referred to as the linear plantation, arranges along the riverfront the main house, garçonnières, and overseer's house, with the broad sides of these houses fronting the river. Behind the main house, plantation owners arranged service buildings including the kitchen and privy. At the furthest location from the river, but still on the natural levee, thus close to the main house, are arranged the field slave quarters. These slave quarters sit in facing sets along lines that are perpendicular to the river (Bacot and Poesch 1997, 89-91). This typical lateral plan has precedent, with similar examples in the records of the first plantation settlements in 1719 by the French (Bacot and Poesch 1997, 89). It is found in most Mississippi River plantations regardless of the ethnic origin of the builder.

Two other plantation layouts exist. They are known as the lateral and the block. In the lateral plan, similar configurations exist, but they are arranged along the riverfront. In the lateral plan, lines of paired slave quarters exist, but are placed adjacent to the river with the same proxemic relationship as the main house. This gives equal availability of high ground to all residences while service buildings sit back from the river on lower ground. This lateral plan, existing mainly on smaller tributaries where riverfront was not as much at a premium, was typically executed by those of

Creole heritage (Bacot and Poesch 1997, 90-91).

The block plan is rare. Like the lateral plan, it exists mainly on secondary waterways. In the block plan, field slave housing follows a grid and remains at a distance from the main house. Operational function buildings, including the field slave housing, were usually distant from the main house and set well back from the waterway. This plan was typically completed by Anglo-American settlers (Bacot and Poesch 1997, 90). This plantation landscape mimics the Anglo-American traditions in other regions of the country; in other plantation examples in North Louisiana and the Carolinas, the block layout was employed, creating a village-like setting with rows of housing set out on a grid pattern (J. M. Vlach 1993, 12). The servant areas are offset from the formal geometry of the main house within this arrangement focused on agricultural production.

These three plan types represent responses to both geography and cultural precedent. No plantation owner sacrificed land quality or frontage presence for the sake of their slaves or service buildings. It is clear that the Creole tradition of arranging field slave housing in a linear fashion with a proxemic geometric relationship to the main house and waterway is consistent across the Creole plantation applications. This Creole tradition developed along the Mississippi River where geography might have necessitated an association between slave and owner. When Americans faced similar geographical constraints, they also constructed with a linear plan. But when

Americans were afforded greater expanses of waterfront, they chose to keep the slave housing separate from the geometry of the main house and proximity to the river, following their traditions established elsewhere in America: the block plan. In contrast, the Creole tradition of linear organization gives land of better value to the field slave housing and shares its proxemic relationship with the waterway.

¹⁸The primary sources for understanding the Acadian vernacular are focused on the definitions of types more so than the evolution or the interaction of the material object and the Acadian culture. Texts like Fred Daspit's *Louisiana Architecture 1714-1830* and *Louisiana Architecture 1840-1860* tangentially address the evolution of the Acadian cottage from that of the Creole cottage (Daspit 1996, 40). However, the remainder of the literature focuses on the specifics of construction of the existing record and the chain of ownership, and not on the evolution of the vernacular through the integration of cultural exchange or social change. Reviews of the specifics of the construction in the Acadian tradition were detailed in the background section above; the various traditional cottage types were detailed in architectural survey texts for Louisiana such as Bacot, Desmond, and Lane.

In 1988 Jay D. Edwards suggested in *Louisiana's Remarkable French Vernacular Architecture* that the Acadians arrived in Louisiana with an architectural tradition that was not dissimilar from the Creole traditions they found upon their arrival in the late eighteenth century. He hypothesizes that the

use of an exterior stair and a false gallery hipped roof extension were adapted from Creole traditions that seemed more appropriate for Acadian lifestyle in Louisiana rather than brought to Louisiana with them. Like most surveys, he then states that the evolution of the Acadian cottage follows the evolution of the Creole cottage internalizing the exterior stair, becoming more massive, and eventually a larger center hall plan with a large hipped roof rectangular mass (J. D. Edwards 1988, 18-20). He describes this evolution as a series of *generations*. *Generation one* is a single room house; *generation two* is two to four rooms, either in a square or, less commonly, in-line. *Generation three* is a center hall plan that includes a certain amount of floor space specifically used for circulation and expression of wealth and luxurious leisure.

¹⁹I make this assumption based on my personal experience as a historic preservation architect with approximately 10 years of managing restoration projects with similar building types and other Creole buildings in New Orleans.

²⁰Flooding from the river and torrential rains is a constant environmental challenge for South Louisiana. Levee maintenance is an ongoing concern for the plantation diary's author as is fence construction, which often was used to hold levees in place as well as partition livestock. Although the language and word choice are not contemporary, the concerns are eerily extant in Louisiana after Hurricanes Rita and Katrina.

²¹In contrast to the landscape of the plantation, the architecture of the field slave

housing, in that landscape, evolves in place. Over the period of activity of the plantation, it is replaced as it falls into disrepair. Unlike the main house, which is updated and modernized through interior refinishing and construction, resulting in a structure that represents all of its former owners, slave housing will reflect the construction techniques of the period and intent of the owner at the time of its construction (Bacot and Poesch 1997, 127). Field slave housing also better reflects the vernacular traditions of the owner, as slave housing is more often built at a single point in time, than a main house which is often modified over time through successive ownership.

²²*Bousillage* served as outer coating over exterior sheathing of lath; this material was a mixture of mud and moss, a tradition adapted from Native American techniques.

²³The first form of housing, for both slaves and owners, followed the post-in-ground, or *poteaux-en-terre*, tradition. Houses in this tradition were made of four posts set into the ground leaning toward each other. With roof joists pegged to the posts, the roof was sheathed with cypress boards covered with cypress bark over lath.

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