

PREFACE



In July, 1993, the editors of this work first saw and read the only manuscript of Memories of the Old Plantation Home, written by Laura Locoul Gore. With this unexpected discovery, a window into Louisiana's Creole past was opened. Before her death in St. Louis, Missouri in 1963, Mrs. Gore handed her writings over to her two daughters. And, when the Gore daughters themselves became aged and feeble, they, likewise, gave the manuscripts to a trusted friend, telling him to safeguard their family stories and that, some day, someone would surely contact him from Louisiana in search of their mother's writings. For 14 more years Mrs. Gore's writings were kept by the Gore's friend, until the editors of this book happened upon them in search of photographs of an old, abandoned sugar plantation in Louisiana called "Laura."

The manuscript, which Laura Locoul Gore completed in 1936, recounts the daily life and major events in the lives of her parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, as well as that of workers, slaves and children, all of whom resided or influenced life on the sugar plantation that today bears the name: Laura Plantation. Laura's Memories give readers an in-depth, insider's look into a Creole household. Hers is a story of French aristocrats, Creole colonials, war heroes, astute business women, stoic slaves and bored childhoods. Her Memories span four generations of love and greed, of heroism and pettiness, of pride and betrayal, violence and excess, each generation dealing differently with a disintegrating culture. Moreover, it is a story written by Laura to explain to her children why she would, even at an early age, reject the traditional, immoderate and extended familial confines of the Creole world. Laura's personal choice was in favor of what she saw as her own individual future: life as a modern, liberated American woman, in the new and changing 20th Century.

The life that Laura gave up to marry a Protestant from St. Louis, Missouri, was one that is quite alien to the early 21st Century American. The Creole way of life, long established before Louisiana became a part of the United States in 1803 and, for two hundred years the dominant lifestyle in south Louisiana, has all but vanished. Creole Louisiana was not so much a biological phenomenon

as it was a cultural milieu. Laura's family, wholly of French and French-Canadian blood, shared a history and value system more closely aligned with that of the slaves and tenant farmers on her family plantation than that of the neighboring Anglo plantation owners of the same upper economic class.

Born out of the desperation of French colonial policy and influenced greatly by other European, French-Canadian, West-African and native Indian inhabitants, a Creole World was born in Louisiana by the early 18th Century. Strikingly similar to other Creole cultures across the globe, Louisiana's was a thorough blending of disparate cultures, creating a lifestyle that was new and different. It was greatly influenced and affiliated with its parent cultures, all the while having little of the contributing cultures predominate.

Though French in language and administration, and later Spanish in official manifestation, this hybrid culture initiated a novel way of thinking and living. From the first decades of European settlement, Louisiana's children quickly adapted, economically, socially and politically, to the harsh realities of survival in the isolated backwater of Louisiana. It was these mutations which became the visible icons of the Louisiana Creole well into the 20th Century. The children of these various ethnic groups and nationalities, that is, to say, the first Creole generation in Louisiana, shared a common value system, quite distinct from that of the white-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant ethic which would, from 1803 onward, aggressively impose itself upon and subvert the local Creole.

While the Creole was, with justification, labeled elitist and undemocratic by American neighbors, no descriptive image suited the Creoles better than that they were, first and foremost, family-centered. Early Louisiana history taught her first immigrants the irrelevancy of the European necessities of religion, race, gender and national origin and, in their places, posited the family as the principal determinant of survival and fulfillment.

By the 1780s, the plantation economy was beginning to overpower subsistence farming and the Creole family network was already playing the kingmaker role in the economy, society and politics of Louisiana. From early on, the Creole families were linked in business relationships throughout the state and their business was conducted, for the most part, within the family. Everyone in the family, young included, was considered a member of the family enterprise and the plantation became the corporate headquarters for the family business.

By the time Laura's great-grandmother became the president of the family plantation enterprise in 1808, there had long existed the Creole tradition of women as plantation owners and managers. Laura's grandmother followed the tradition as well, running the plantation for almost 47 years. When Laura's father named the plantation for her, Laura was only 13 years old. She found herself confronted with the reality that she, one day, would be thrust into the same, demanding Creole roles as her female predecessors.

The images Laura gives us of her family range wildly from the sensitive to the brutal, traits that reappear in each succeeding generation, a truly frightening prospect for a teenage girl who was expected to accept responsibility for it all. Laura's decision to escape the heavy burdens of family history seems, to the American mind, a natural, suitable and inevitable one for her. For modern readers, her decision will be seen as a classic model of psychological maturity.

By her own account, Laura succeeded in living a fulfilled adult life outside the familiarity of the Creole world, just as she dreamed she could. Yet, throughout her many years, she found herself being drawn back to the old plantation, almost to the point of obsession. Having left the plantation at age 29, Laura never left her fascination with and affection for the farm, the ancient, rigid life style, *New Orleans, her countless French-speaking relatives and her childhood friends*. Laura would make one, final return to the Laura Plantation for a farewell visit in the summer of 1931. In 1936, after five years of writing, at age 74, she completed her Memories of the Old Plantation Home.

As was the custom in Creole Louisiana, Laura, like all eldest daughters, was entrusted with collecting and safeguarding the family history, photographs, heirlooms, etc. in order to pass them down to the next generation. Laura kept true to this tradition and compiled her memoirs for her children who had only a skeletal knowledge of the family and its genealogy. As a young girl, she listened to stories told to her by her mother and paternal grandmother, both of whom played major, detailed roles in her pages. Throughout her long life, Laura kept biographical notes on family members as well as vignettes on daily life in New Orleans and on the plantation. But, her Memories are neither a diary nor a journal, as she only started to write recollections of her life in Louisiana when she was elderly, living in St. Louis in the 1930s.

For more than six decades, Laura Gore filled four large family photograph albums, squeezing them full of marginal notations, scholastic report cards, love letters, legal papers, holy picture cards, newspaper articles, and fragments of communion and wedding dresses. Excerpts of these writings have been included in the Memories as well as many of the images she collected.

It seems that it was almost exclusively from oral histories and from her own experiences that Laura derived her Memories of the Old Plantation Home, and not from any outside written sources. Most probably, she did not know many of the facts which have later been uncovered about her family and their farm. Therefore, the second part of this book, A Creole Family Album, attempts to complement Laura's writings with materials gathered from sources not readily accessible to her, presenting a broader biographical and photographic description of her family and the Creole world.

Upon reading Laura's manuscripts and drafts, one finds that she re-edited her Memories over a long period of time. In some cases, she only hinted at unpleasanties and the sins of her family. In other cases, she evidently did not want her readers (her children) to clearly know what had happened. In 1947, she wrote again, this time a much abridged (only 10 pages), highly-censored, version of her Memories, done at the request of her French cousins. This second writing included no new information but did leave out whole chapters and any reference that could possibly discomfort her French cousins as it related to the lives of their parents and grandparents. Laura's Memories abruptly concludes in 1891 with her decision to marry and leave her Creole plantation and Louisiana. So, A Creole Family Album also examines, in the briefest manner, the 72 years of Laura's life following her wedding, about which, as far as we know, she left no written testimony.

Despite the limitations listed above, Laura's words still manage to convey an intimate look into the lives of real individuals, all from the same family, over a 200-year span, all living in a world apart from the American mainstream. We in the 21st Century, especially we who live in Louisiana and in the United States, owe Laura Locoul Gore a belated debt of gratitude because, what she knew, she wrote down for her children and for us, too.

Norman & Sand Marmillion

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS REMERCIEMENTS

In August of 1993, we acquired 13+ acres of a long-abandoned plantation homestead on the River Road between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Our goal was to restore its standing structures and to open it as a tourist attraction. In attempting to find whatever information existed about the site, we interviewed members of the Waguespack family. The Waguespacks had lived on-site for 90 years and were graciously forthcoming in what they knew of the farm they called "Laura" or "Waguespack plantation." But, in all our interviews, we could not find one photograph of the place that predated the 1940s, the Waguespack photographs having been lost in a fire.

Miss Elmire "Mimi" Waguespack, one of the last sisters to live on-site, invited us to her home. As we looked through her scrapbooks for an old view of the big house, she pointed out a letter dated 1967; a letter she believed was sent by someone in the first family to own "Laura." The short letter said, "We had a wonderful visit. My mother-in-law always told us it was a fine place. Here are our addresses. Thank you for your hospitality." Below were listed three addresses: one in St. Louis, Missouri, one in Morristown, New Jersey and one from Paris, France. We wrote down the addresses.

We sent letters to the three, asking if they had photos of "Laura." The St. Louis letter, addressed to a Mrs. Charles Gore, was returned, unopened, "address unknown." Morristown's reply was that "my parents have died but visited 'Laura' in 1967 along with its original owners." When the Paris letter arrived, it read, "Sorry, I do not know about what you write. My mother, to whom you wrote, just died last month, aged 98."

On a trip to the New Orleans public library we copied all the "Gores" in the St. Louis telephone directory. Once home, we started to call everyone (64 names). Each call began the same, "Hello, we're looking for photographs of a place in Louisiana called Laura Plantation. Can you help us?" On the 62nd call, we reached Stephen Gore, grandson of Laura Locoul Gore. Stephen had no photographs but offered us vital leads and information for our quest. One such lead was Myra Ancira in New Orleans.

We asked Myra the familiar "photo question." She had no images but, since Myra's family and Laura's had been close for generations, she offered to send us a copy of her grandmother's address book, filled with names of mutual friends in New Orleans and St. Louis. We started with "A" and headed for "Z." Most were the names of deceased friends. Under "N" we called Clyde Norris, in St. Louis. Upon asking the same "photo question," Clyde paused and then said, "I have been waiting fourteen years for a phone call from Louisiana. Are you the caller I have been waiting for?" To which I replied, "I am." Without hesitation, Clyde said, "Then you must come up to St. Louis to see what I've been holding for you all these years."

At his home, Clyde had covered his dining table with an array of scrapbooks, photographs, silver and old boxes and, at the far end of the table, he had positioned a black-bound manuscript entitled Memories of the Old Plantation Home by Laura Locoul Gore. "All this is yours," he said. "I was told to keep it until you came or, in the event of my death, I was to will it to the Missouri Historical Society." On the road to New Orleans, we read and re-read the memoirs. We wrote back to the Paris address, to Sophie Maugras, now knowing that she was Laura's cousin. Sophie quickly responded by offering us access to two weighty dossiers of information relating to her family and the sugar plantation, all safeguarded in the *Archives Nationales* in Paris. Many letters from Sophie followed, each containing wonderful old portraits, mementos and, *voilà*, photographs of the old plantation.

These people, Mimi Waguespack, Stephen Gore, Myra Ancira, Sophie Maugras and, foremost, Clyde Norris deserve the greatest acknowledgement for the existence of this publication. All were kind and generous to us, who were strangers to them at the time. Both Mimi Waguespack and Clyde Norris have recently died. It is to their memory that we dedicate this book.

It would be impossible to thank everyone who helped us in this publication. Among those to whom we are particularly indebted are first, Louise Coleman. Louise worked with us, for months on end, in the earliest stages of research and drafting of the commentary. Many a night we ate at her table and computer, thrashing out A Creole Family Album. Our research relied heavily upon the efforts of Alfred Lemmon of The Historic New Orleans Collection and our work in St. Louis was successful due to the on-going research and hospitality of Emory and Jane Webre. Advice and research also came from Wilbert Waguespack, Jr., Linda Thomas, Bobbie DeBlieux, Gregory Osborne, Mrs. Lucille Prud'Homme, Clifford Burns, Lee Warren, Anthony Tassin, Madeline Axtman, Noah Robert, Shannon Dawdy, Elizabeth Shoup, Maurice Meslans, Elizabeth McMillan, Betty Hertzog, Messiane de Crouy-Chanel, Marguerite de Bellescize Paget and the Friends of *Vieilles Maisons Françaises*, Glynne Couvillion, Paul Nevski, Eugene Cizek and Warren Norris.

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DUPARC-LOCOUL FAMILY CHART

Guillaume Gilles — Elisabeth Dault

Jean-Baptiste Prud'Homme — Josephé Corentin

Guillaume Gilles Duparc

Born 1752 Caen, Normandie, Fr
Died 1808 Duparc Plantation

Nanette Prud'Homme

Born 1768 Natchitoches, LA
Died 1862 Duparc Plantation

Fanny Rücker

Born 1789
Bad Homburg
Germany
Died 1852
Duparc Plant.

Louis deMézière Duparc

Born 1789
Natchitoches, LA
Died 1850
New Orleans

Elisabeth Duparc

Born 1796
Pointe Coupée LA
Died 1884
New Orleans

Raymond Locoul

Born 1796
Bordeaux, Fr
Died 1850
New Orleans

Flagy Duparc

Born 1792
Pointe Coupée LA
Died 1863
New Orleans

Mercelite Cortez

Born 1808
Natchitoches, LA
Died 1850
Duparc Plant.

Eliza Duparc

Born 1814
Died 1831

No issue.

Désirée Archinard

Born 1836
Alexandria, LA
Died 1911
St. Louis, MO

Emile Locoul

Born 1822
Duparc Plant
Died 1879
New Orleans

Aimée Locoul

Born 1824
Duparc Plant.
Died 1889
New Orleans

Ivan Charles de Lobel de Mahy

Born 1825
Lille, Fr
Died 1884
New Orleans

George Locoul

Born 1866
Duparc Plant.
Died 1953
St. Louis, MO

Laura Locoul

Born 1861
Duparc Plant.
Died 1963
St. Louis MO

Noémie Locoul

Born 1863
Duparc Plant
Died 1944
Jackson, LA

Eugénie de Lobel

Born 1854
Paris, Fr
Died 1912
Seattle, WA

Fannie de Lobel

Born 1860
Paris, Fr
Died 1945
Paris, Fr

Raymond de Lobel

Born 1857
Paris, Fr
Died 1938
France