

GREEN HOUSE REPORT

By
Tom Watson

Alexandre Hebert was born on February 5, 1800, to Louis Hebert and Francoise Broussard, a granddaughter of Alexandre Broussard, one of the legendary Acadian brothers popularly called "Beausoleil."¹ The Broussards led a group of Acadian exiles that sailed from Halifax in 1764 seeking homes in a place to begin life anew. In the following year their quest ended in the Attakapas country of Spanish Louisiana. The newcomers set down deep roots along its bayous and on its prairies. Today the locale is known as Acadiana, and their descendants regard it as their spiritual and cultural heartland.

Louis Hebert's parents, Joseph and Francoise Hebert, also began their journey to Louisiana in Halifax. They, however, arrived at New Orleans behind the group that accompanied the Broussard brothers. Francoise gave birth to Louis in Halifax in 1764, and perhaps her confinement delayed their departure. The late arrival meant they would be unable to unite with their kin in the Attakapas country. The newly arrived Spanish governor, Antonio de Ulloa, embraced a policy of placing Acadian exiles where as militiamen they could defend against British encroachment from neighboring British West Florida. Accordingly Louis began life in Louisiana along the Acadian Coast of the Mississippi River.

Joseph Hebert's Spanish grant lay along the east bank of the river across from where Bayou Lafourche des Chetimachas forks away from the main channel and follows its own leisurely course to the sea. His family occupied a plot containing six arpents of water frontage near the Alabama Indian village of Cabannocé. They remained there at least through January 1770; Joseph appears on a Spanish militia muster roll of that date.² When and how the family relocated in the jurisdiction of the Attakapas Post is uncertain. Although such moves were contrary to established Spanish policy, many nonetheless occurred. The urge among Acadians to reunite with relatives impelled them to find ways around bureaucratic obstacles.³ At any rate, the Joseph Hebert family appears on a Spanish census of the Attakapas district taken in 1774.⁴

Louis Hebert wed Francoise Broussard on October 6, 1789, in the Parish of St. Martin de Tours. Although her precise date of birth cannot be given, Francoise was born at Cabannocé no earlier than August, 1770.⁵ The couple settled in on the Vermilion about two miles below where the Pinhook Bridge crossed the stream at the point marking its upper limits of navigation.

The landscape along the Vermilion became rather heavily settled during the first decades of the early nineteenth century. "Long lot" farms jutted outward contiguously along both its banks within a mile-wide strip of fertile alluvial soil. William Darby, surveyor, cartographer and early geographer of Louisiana remarked in 1817 that the Vermilion contained "[s]ome of the most beautiful settlements yet made" in the entire Attakapas District.⁶ The Louis Hebert household by all indications fit Darby's description.

A census taken in 1803 located the household on the west side of the stream. The land comprised of ten arpents water frontage in two lots, each five arpents in width and facing one another across the waterway. He was forty and Francoise, thirty-two. Their offspring included Eloise, twelve, Alexandre, three, and Louis, two. A slave, Andre, thirty-five, was enumerated as belonging in the household. The livestock included eighty head of horned cattle and thirty-five horses. Not included, perhaps, was the livestock that ran "*au large*," the Acadians term for open

range grazing, on the extensive prairies of Attakapas.⁷ Four other children died in infancy or in early childhood. A second daughter, Margaret Aspasia, born later, survived her mother's demise.

In 1817, the holdings of Louis and the late Francoise Broussard appraised at \$16,140.43. Items listed in the inventory included eighty-four superficial arpents (about 70 acres), ten slaves, 130 barrels of rough rice—an unusually large quantity for the time, three barrels of hulled rice, three barrels of salt, a spinning wheel and a loom. Livestock accounted for about \$3,100 of the appraisal. In 1817 the four surviving children each inherited slightly over \$2,000 from their late mother's one-half share of the community property.⁸

Withal, the Louis Hebert household would have been considered quite well to do by the standards of the times.⁹ Moreover, Louis held stature in the community. He served in 1823 on a five-member site selection committee created by the state legislature to decide on the location of a court house and other public buildings for the newly created Lafayette Parish.¹⁰

In 1820 Alexandre married a neighborhood girl, thirteen-year-old Clarisse Broussard. With a growing family to support, by the middle of the decade the young father sought out "greener pastures." The urge to "hive off," or relocate in a less crowded locale where one's married children could set up housekeeping nearby, had affected the spread of hamlets throughout much of "old" Acadia. Population grew at a rapid pace in Attakapas, from around 3,750 in 1803 to some 15,000 in 1825.¹¹ At the same time commercial cotton planting along the Vermilion made steady inroads into the established livestock and subsistence farming regime. Grazing more cattle on the nearby open range became highly impracticable.

Finding places suitable for establishing new *vacheries* posed something of a challenge to young Acadians of Alexandre's generation. Spanish land grants tied up the most desirable sites along the bayous that flowed westward into Bayou Nezpique and the Mermentau. West of the Mermentau, however, the southern part of the spacious, unclaimed Prairie of Lacassine beckoned. Of this area, Darby wrote:

The west margin of the upper lake [*i.e.* Lake Arthur] in the Mermentau is a most beautiful slope. . . . Some handsome situations are found there. The lake upwards of a mile wide and six long, spreading under the eye, diversified with one or two small islands covered with trees, the interminable expanse bounding the view on all sides, except limited by the woods of the Mermentau on the north, or the small clumps of wood scattered in pleasing confusion in every other direction.¹²

The desirability of the lake and its environs had attracted the attention others long before Darby arrived on the scene. Influential members of the colonial military/political elites held Spanish grants in the vicinity. The children of French-born Alexandre DeClouet, a former commandant of the Attakapas and Opelousas posts in the Spanish era, held four large contiguous "long lot" tracts along the upper western shoreline of the lake. Josef Piernas, son of a Spanish army officer with long and varied service in the colony, held claim to the so-called Pellerin grant, a vast tract spanning both banks of the Mermentau northward from where it entered the lake.¹³

Fortunately for Alexandre, in 1816, Athanase Hebert, an uncle who lived at Fausse Pointe, acquired one of the DeClouet tracts through an estate sale. In 1825, according to family tradition, twenty-one year old Placide Hebert, a newlywed son of Athanase, and his cousin, Alexandre crossed the Mermentau and began grazing cattle on the Lacassine Prairie.¹⁴

The range offered everything the young cattlemen could wish for. Below the lake, according to Darby, "a very narrow bank of shells" bordered the treeless west bank of the river as it moved through "an impassable morass" where "[a]ll possibility for settlement" ceased. North of this marsh, however, "[b]etween the Lacassine and the pinelands on the north and the Mermentau river on the east, the face of the earth exhibits an expanse of grass, interrupted only by an occasional clump of oak or pine trees, that resemble isolated savages, trembling alone from age to age."¹⁵ A location along the Mermentau offered the added advantage of navigable access to the Gulf of Mexico.



The match of the refugees from the "meadows of l'Acadie" to new homes on the prairies of Southwest Louisiana seems to have been providential. Experienced at raising beef cattle on reclaimed marshlands along Chipoudy Bay, they took up raising cattle from the outset.¹⁶ Spanish officers inspecting the Opelousas and Attakapas post settlements in 1770 reported finding cattle of "admirable size [and] appearance."¹⁷ The boundless prairies "covered with fine, clean grass of a remarkable height" held promise of the development of a thriving open range cattle industry, and Spanish policy did much to encourage it. The coastal settlements along the Mississippi and the city of New Orleans provided a ready market for beef, and streams such as the Atchafalaya posed no impediment to driving steers overland long distances.

The beef market at New Orleans and environs attracted sellers from locations much farther west than the Lacassine Prairie. A transplanted Louisiana rancher, James Taylor White, in 1827 drove his longhorns westward from Vermilion Bayou to a new range alongside Turtle Bayou in present day Chambers County, Texas. Within a decade he was driving steers eastward along the Asascosita-Opelousas Trail to the Mississippi. By the 1850's around 50,000 market bound Texas longhorns crossed the Calcasieu north of Lake Charles every year. Arsene LeBleu, a third generation cattleman on the Calcasieu Prairie, frequented Trinity Bay and dealt in cattle with White. LeBleu's stock, numbering in the thousands, grazed southward below his home located on the upper reaches of English Bayou.¹⁸



The census of 1830 places the Alexandre Hebert household in Lafayette Parish, which then included present day Vermilion Parish. By 1840 he had become a resident of newly formed Calcasieu Parish and also an appointee to its original six-member Police Jury. The household's westward shift of domicile at some point in time during the 830's. Alexandre, however, could easily have begun grazing cattle on the Lacassine prairie years before his family actually relocated west of the Mermentau. A "cow camp" could have been built for little or nothing somewhere near his kinsmen. According to local tradition Placide and his father Athanase were among the earliest lakeside residents. Or Alexandre could have built a crude shelter and pens near where he eventually built the Green House. Tending open range cattle was hardly time consuming. He could have spent much of his time at home on the Vermilion and journeyed on horse to inspect and tend to his herd. Placing a caretaker in charge of the cattle during his absences would have sufficed. The hardy, semi-wild longhorns mostly fended for themselves year in and year out. The major work came with the annual roundup and the branding of the new calf crop.



The state legislature in 1840 created "Imperial" Calcasieu Parish out of some 5,000 square miles of near wilderness in the extreme southwest corner of the state. Formerly part of St. Landry parish, its population barely exceeded 2,000 souls. Governor Andre Bienvenu Roman, a

staunch member of the Whig Party, named Alexandre Hebert to represent the police jury's sprawling second ward on the six-member parish governing body.

The jury held its first meeting on August 24, 1840, in the home of Arsene LeBleu with Alexander Hebert sitting as ad interim president.¹⁹ Selecting a permanent seat of government topped the agenda, and President Hebert cast the tie breaking vote in favor of a site known as Marion on Old Town Bay. His brief tenure as president ended within a month with his resignation from that office. Michel Pithon of Lake Charles replaced him as president. The following June, the jury members drew lots to determine which three members would step down pending elections in their respective wards. Hebert's seat was one of the three scheduled to become elective. He won the election and served out one full four-year term. In 1843 he apparently decided against seeking reelection, and his cousin Placide Hebert replaced him on the jury. He served several terms consecutive terms and also became jury president in 1851. Meanwhile, the police jury from time to time appointed Alexandre to serve as an election supervisor and as overseer of public roads. His son, Aladin, and Napoleon Broussard, a son-in-law, also served as election supervisors in Ward Two. From all indications Alexandre Hebert was a prominent and influential figure in the southeastern precincts of Imperial Calcasieu.



In June, 1854, Alexandre Hebert purchased the quarter section occupied by his homestead from the state. Louisiana received its title to the land from the federal government under the provisions of the Swamplands acts of 1849 and 1850. Around ten million acres of so-called "overflow" lands (wetlands in modern parlance) passed into state ownership through these laws. Official federal approval of the transfer of the township (T-12-S, R-4-W, Southwestern District) containing the Hebert homestead (southwest quarter of Section 3) to state ownership came no earlier than 1852, around two years before Hebert bought it.²⁰

One may ask whether Hebert built the Green House before he owned the land on which it sat. Direct evidence provides no answer on what year it was constructed. Indirect evidence, however, strongly suggests the house was built much earlier than 1854, probably somewhere between 1835 and 1845.²¹ A fifteen-month lapse occurred between the birth of a son, Desire, on October 31, 1836, and his baptismal date.²² The sacrament was administered in St. John the Evangelist church in Vermilionville. Although considerable delays between birthdays and baptism were not uncommon in that era, none of Desire's seven older siblings had awaited baptism any comparable length of time.

Desire himself revealed in the biographical sketch William Henry Perrin published in 1891 that he was born "near where he resides."²³ The article, however, tantalizingly leaves unmentioned whether he resided in the Green House, as he definitely had according to the census rolls for 1870 and 1880, at the time the Perrin book came off the press (March, 1891). However, the demise of his mother, Clarisse (on December 11, 1890) and Desire's subsequent marriage to his second wife, Osite LeDoux, are mentioned. This indicates that Perrin received the information included in the entry on Desire quite close to when it went to the printer. This opens a two-month or so window of time wherein the newlyweds could have moved into a new residence in the incipient town of Lake Arthur. If this did occur, then Desire may have been born in the Green House, which means it could have been occupied as early as 1836.

Desire's statement proves conclusively that the family had relocated west of the Mermen-tau by that year. He could have been born, of course, in an earlier family residence. Wherever his birth transpired, Desire's arrival attests to the need of a growing family for more living space.

Clemence, the eldest daughter, was fifteen, unmarried and had at least three younger sisters and two younger brothers.²⁴ The house, although by no means ostentatious, is relatively spacious for an antebellum Acadian structure of its genre. In the mid 1830's the family's need for living space was greater than at any time thereafter.

According to the Benoist Laurents family tradition, eighteen-year-old Carmelite Hebert lived in the Green House before she married Gustave Laurents in 1849, which indicates its existence at least by that year. The federal census of 1850 places the Alexandre Hebert household somewhere along the "Lementon River" in Calcasieu Parish, some four years before he acquired title to the land the Green House occupies. For Alexandre Hebert to have waited until the tail end of the 1840's built on land he didn't own seems nonsensical when his family's need for room came much earlier on.

The uniform dimensions of the home's cypress weatherboarding indicate it was cut with a steam powered radial saw. While cypress abounded along the Mermentau and its tributaries in the early nineteenth century, the earliest date when mills began sawing lumber that far west remains unclear. Rezin Bowie, the father of the legendary James Bowie, reportedly built a mill in 1817 in partnership with Robert Rogers on a tributary of Bayou Nezpique about seven miles below present day Basile.²⁵ When or whether this mill actually produced any lumber is uncertain. Francois Corso, a French émigré and a resident of Opelousas, definitely set up a cypress mill at Shell Beach on the northeast shore of Lake Arthur in 1840.²⁶ Lumber could have been either floated down or brought in by schooner before then. The north chimney of the old home is fashioned from kiln fired, reddish-yellow clay brick which probably came up the Mermentau as ballast in a schooner from some outside supply source.

Alexandre Hebert had little need for concern over building on any untitled or unoccupied land along the Mermentau at any rate. "Squatting" in frontier regions had become so widespread that in 1830 Congress passed the first of two nationally applicable preemption laws. Under these measures anyone who actually settled on and improved any quarter section in the public domain before the government officially offered it for public sale had first option to buy it at \$1.25 per acre. Preemption became permanent in 1841.²⁷ Moreover, nobody else could have bought the Hebert homestead tract before 1852. The United States had not opened that part of the public domain to prospective buyers before it came into state possession.



Alexander and Clarisse Broussard Hebert had lived through a fruitful forty years of marriage by 1860, albeit a union not without its share of trials and heartbreaks. They suffered through the loss of three daughters, none of whom reached adulthood. The youngest, Eloisa, may have been the victim of an accidental drowning in the Mermentau. Their elder son, Aladin, succumbed to some unidentified illness in 1854 before reaching his thirtieth birthday. He left behind a widow, Euphemie, and three small children. Like his father, Aladin had been a cattleman. His estate included a homestead of 160 arpents with a four-arpent frontage along the lakeshore in a locale that later became part of the town of Lake Arthur.²⁸

Desire, a single man, lived with his parents in the Green House, and two married daughters lived nearby. Aspasia, the twin sister of Aladin, lived with her husband, Napoleon Broussard, to the immediate south of the Green House. Carmelite and her husband, Gustave Laurents, who was born in 1826 in the Arsene LeBleu home along English Bayou, owned a farm along the northeastern shore of Lake Arthur. Gustave's father, Benoist Laurents, well educated and French-born, came to Louisiana after the fall of Napoleon. The elder Laurents was a well edu-

cated and fascinating personality. He became a staunch supporter and political ally of Governor Alexandre Mouton.²⁹ Clemence, the first-born, lived with her husband, Edouard Auguste Broussard, somewhere in the west part of Vermilion Parish.³⁰ Belzire and her husband, Sevene Broussard, had moved to Jefferson County in southeast Texas by 1850.³¹

The seasonal routine of the Alexandre Hebert household began in the spring with the planting of corn, sweet potatoes, peas and, by 1860, a small cotton crop. According to the agricultural census of 1860³² the farmstead included forty improved acres which were in all likelihood enclosed with a cypress "*pieux*" fence. Rice wasn't included among the crops listed in either the 1850 or the 1860 census. A small enclosed green garden, plus the aforementioned crops, provided for the household's subsistence. Hogs and perhaps poultry also added to the larder. An abundance of fish, waterfowl, prairie chickens, venison and small game could be easily harvested in the summer and fall.

Alexandre kept an unusually large number of draft oxen, around eighteen in all. Either he bred and trained them for sale to others, or perhaps he used or farmed them out for dragging timber. His real property included stands of cypress he may have cut for posts and fence rails during the winter months. The demand for fencing on the prairies widespread enough that it in some locales it became a medium of exchange in what was largely a barter economy. Hauling small Acadian style dwellings built on the Mermentau to homesteads as far east as Opelousas was another local enterprise calling for oxen.³³

The Hebert farm also maintained an unusually large number of milk cows, around thirty, for a country where local cattle produced little milk. The census reports reveal the farm made small quantities of butter and cheese, but no more than fifty pounds per year of either. The surplus milk, if any, may have been used for feeding orphaned calves or, more likely, fattening shoats for *cochon du lait*. He also may have sold milk cows on the local market, such as it was.

For whatever reason, Alexandre Hebert seems to have shied away from orange growing, an enterprise that spread extensively throughout Imperial Calcasieu during the antebellum era. Thomas Bilbo, who in 1832 settled at the former Cantonment Atkinson on the northeast shore of Lake Charles, planted oranges early on, as did several families on the coastal chenieres that in 1870 became part of Cameron Parish. The Laurents family maintained a large and profitable citrus grove that dated from the 1840's. The fruit found a ready market in Galveston, and Gustave, a schooner captain, had the wherewithal to deliver.³⁴

Beef cattle driven to market on the Mississippi provided the lion's share of the \$38,700.00 in combined worth in real and personal property Alexandre had amassed by 1860.³⁵ Ten years beforehand his herds grazing on the open range of Lacassine Prairie had already grown to around 3,000 head of cattle and 1,200 Creole ponies.³⁶ Two readily accessible cattle trails led to the lucrative New Orleans market. The main route, the Opelousas Trail, which began in Texas, crossed the Mermentau a short distance below its point of origin where bayous Nezpique, Cannes and Plaquemine Brule come together. Jean Baptiste Mouton, a son-in-law of cattleman James Andrus, operated the ferry there in the 1830's.³⁷ A closer ferry crossed the Mermentau just above Lake Arthur. It was definitely in service by the 1860's and probably earlier. The trail from there led eastward to the Vermilion at Perry's Bridge. From there it approached the Teche near New Iberia and then turned southeastward toward the Atchafalaya, the last major waterway to traverse. A typical drive from the Mermentau to the Mississippi would last between ten and fourteen days.



The Civil War adversely affected the lives of virtually all Louisianans, some more than others. In 1860 Louisiana ranked second in the nation in per capita wealth and first among southern states. Twenty years later the state ranked seventeenth in the nation and last in the south. Over half the state's livestock was either killed or confiscated during the war years.³⁸

The Green House came through the great conflict largely unscathed. Its remote location shielded it from the extensive destruction and plundering that occurred along the Teche and Vermilion in 1863 and 1864 during three Union Army incursions. In all likelihood, Hebert horses and cattle also escaped the wholesale confiscation resorted to by both Union and Confederate forces east of the Mermentau. On the other hand, disunion followed by the fall of New Orleans in 1862 closed the all important market on which Alexandre Hebert's prosperity had been built. The war cost him the loss of an undetermined number of slaves. He owned eighteen at the time of the 1860 census.³⁹ The Confederate quartermaster corps may have moved droves of Hebert beeves across the Mississippi River until Union campaigns against Vicksburg and Port Hudson in 1863 succeeded in sealing off that important supply route. At any rate, whatever compensation Hebert may have received in Confederate notes ultimately became worthless.

At times events brought the war to the doorsteps of the Green House. Confederate mounted infantry stationed at Niblets Bluff scouted the banks of the Mermentau in the second half of 1863 for weeks on end. An anticipated Union invasion of Texas across the prairies of southwest Louisiana, however, never came. Military intelligence from both sides reported the presence in that year of four shallow draft blockade runners on the river. Rebel soldiers removed gunpowder from one of these blockade runners from an anchorage along Lacassine Bayou and hauled it to the quartermaster depot at Niblets Bluff. There had been concern that anti-Confederate brigands, reportedly well organized and numerous along the Mermentau, would attempt to seize the cargo as soon as it was unloaded.

The Confederate cause, never exceedingly popular with the ordinary Cajun folk of southwest Louisiana, became much less so when military conscription began in 1862. Allegiance to the Confederacy plummeted farther during three Union military incursions west of the Atchafalaya in 1863-64. Desertions from Louisiana regiments became endemic as they retreated up the Teche and through Opelousas ahead of Union troops. These military movements devastated the countryside and deprived the populace of much of its sustenance. Disgruntled and reluctant to serve any longer a seemingly futile cause, many a soldier made for home to help a destitute families struggle to survive on neglected farmsteads slipping into complete rack and ruin.

Confederate draft evaders and deserters congregated in bands scattered throughout the sparsely populated backwater swamps, thickets and marshes of southwest Louisiana. In the latter half of 1863 some became emboldened enough to organize armed guerilla units known as jayhawkers. These groups justified their acts of brigandage under the guise of Unionism. Weakening the Confederacy, they declared, would hasten the restoration of the federal union. Travel between the Sabine and the Mermentau, where bandits waylaid small parties with impunity, became quite hazardous.

The Confederate military in western Louisiana was incapable of moving against the jayhawker menace until mid 1864 when the Union forces withdrew to the east of the Atchafalaya basin after the Red River campaign against Shreveport collapsed. At this juncture General Richard Taylor, commanding officer of the meager Confederate forces defending the state, formed the

7th (later designated the 4th) Louisiana Cavalry Regiment. He filled its ranks mostly with pardoned deserters and paroled former Union prisoners of war. He assigned it the duty of dealing with the jayhawker menace, and the unit remained in southwest Louisiana most of the time until hostilities ceased in 1865.

Louisiana cavalry units engaged jayhawkers in bloody encounters along the Mermentau on at least two occasions in 1864 while Texan units operating out of Niblets Bluff and Sabine Pass also deployed eastward to curb the menace. The greatest effort launched from Texas occurred in May 1864 when rebel units surprised two federal gunboats anchored on the Calcasieu near Leesburg (present day Cameron). Rebel artillery and sharpshooters succeeded in forcing the boats, whose mission was to procure beef from jayhawkers, into surrendering. Beforehand, federal ships assigned blockade duty off Sabine Pass and Galveston Island had used Leesburg as a source of provisions with impunity, a matter that had long rankled Texan rebels.

We can only surmise on how Alexandre Hebert's sympathies lay with respect to the Confederate cause, or whether they changed over the course of four years of hostilities. One resident on the Vermilion Parish side of the Mermentau, lumberman Francois Corso, refused to accept Confederate bills in payment of debt, and Governor John Overton Moore in 1862 issued orders for his arrest.⁴⁰ According to local lore, the Lake Arthur-Mermentau area was a hotbed of jayhawker activity.⁴¹ In 1875, a group of unidentified persons dug up a cache of between fifteen- and twenty thousand dollars in silver and gold coins somewhere along the Mermentau. Since the most recent date of coinage was 1862, the report presumed it had been loot accumulated through jayhawker trade with the United States Navy.⁴²

Desire Hebert served in the Confederate army, but his military record is ambiguous. Between late 1862 and the middle of 1864 he may have taken "French leave" and in this interlude may have been somehow involved in jayhawker activities.⁴³ Inasmuch as the Green House emerged unscathed, the Hebert family apparently behaved with sufficient circumspection toward jayhawkers to circumvent wholesale property destruction. Brigands may have been satisfied with helping themselves to fresh beef, horses, provisions and such household items and implements deemed useful.



Alexandre Hebert expired on August 25, 1865 at roughly sixty-five and one-half years of age. His widow Clarisse served as administrator of the estate, which received final adjudication on November 18, 1869.⁴⁴ Only four out of nine (perhaps ten) children, Aspasia, Belzire, Carmelite and Desire were left to mourn his passing.

Real property listed in the inventory of his estate consisted of four items. The quarter section on which the Green House sits, described as the "last residence" of the deceased, appraised at \$1,500.00. One thousand acres of swampland situated west of the Mermentau appraised at \$2,000.00. This property apparently made up the lion's share of 1,200 acres of cypress timber Desire advertised for sale in 1891. A one-half undivided interest in a "long lot" forty arpents deep with six arpents fronting the west bank of the Mermentau, also likely containing cypress timber, appraised at \$120.00. A combined parcel of twelve contiguous tracts immediately adjacent to and lying to the west of the Hebert homestead and obtained during the 1850's with either state issued school warrants or federal military bounty warrants and totaling slightly over 4,297 acres appraised at \$2,148.00. Neither livestock nor other form of personal property of any kind was listed among his assets; nor were some 640 acres he had bought in 1859 from the federal government identified separa

Given the prostrate condition of the state's economy in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, real property located in a remote, undeveloped area valued at \$5,768.00 was by no means a trifling estate. The improvements to the quarter-section farmstead, some of which then and now lies submerged under the waters of the Mermentau, aside from the residence itself, such as outbuildings, fences, corrals, etc. must have been extensive given its relatively high appraisal at \$9.37 per acre. Moreover, the separate property of Clarisse, mentioned in passing in her husband's succession, was from all indications not inconsiderable. Nor was it commonplace for an Acadian family inhabiting a veritable wilderness to accumulate so much real estate in that era. Very few individuals of whatever ethnic background bothered with acquiring large land holdings in Imperial Calcasieu Parish before the completion of through rail service between New Orleans and Texas in 1881. The enormous purchases made by Michigan timber barons, Jabez B. Watkins and the North American Land and Timber Company began afterwards.

Alexandre Hebert bought most of the open prairie land he owned in 1857 from acreage Louisiana obtained under the provisions of the Swampland acts. Federal approval of the cession of these tracts to the state came about only some five years before he made his purchases. He paid for each parcel of state land with state-issued school warrants. He also acquired several parcels of federal land. Two tracts came through Hypolite Cormier, the recipient of a grant provided under the Mexican War military bounty legislation enacted in 1847. In 1859 he bought through the federal land office in Opelousas another three tracts totaling over 640 acres for which he paid the going rate of \$1.25 per acre in cash.⁴⁵

The buying and selling of state warrants at a discount was commonplace in nineteenth century Louisiana. The shortage of public funds for meeting ordinary expenses such as teachers pay was endemic, and treasury warrants were used in lieu of cash. Teachers strapped for money sold warrants to speculators at a discount. Buyers redeemed them at full face value when the state treasurer "found" sufficient cash reserves on hand, a practice fraught with political favoritism. Warrants also could be used for paying state taxes or purchasing state land. Consequently, Alexandre resorted to school warrants obtained from others to buy land at a bargain price. In all likelihood he also obtained Cormier's military bounty land certificates at a discount. The North American Land and Timber Company bought comparable state-owned land in 1883 for as little as twelve and one half cents per acre.⁴⁶ With school warrants and military bounty certificates Hebert probably acquired most of his acreage in the 1850's for even less.



Desire Hebert resided with his mother in the Green House and looked after her separate property interests. He also managed the affairs of his late father's estate and continued grazing livestock for some time. Desire also bought land for himself and in his mother's name, including acreage from the State Land Office as late as 1883.⁴⁷ When his mother passed away on December 11, 1890, Desire became executor of her estate. Two sisters, Aspasia Broussard and Carmelite Laurents, were the only other living siblings.

Efforts to liquidate the estate began in 1891. A newspaper ad announced the offer of 8,000 acres of land "In One Solid Body" west of the Mermentau containing improvements costing \$7,000. Although not mentioned specifically, the Green House was included among the improvements. The ad also offered for sale a 1,200 acre stand of cypress timber "in its native state." Interested parties were invited to apply to Desire Hebert.⁴⁸



Some two years went by before Charles A. Lowry bought over 7,000 contiguous acres, including the Green House, from the Hebert estate. The terms called for a one-third down payment of \$12,000 and two promissory notes in like amounts bearing 6 percent interest. The first note became payable in 1898 and the second in 1900.⁴⁹

The Lowry purchase occurred at the height of well organized sales campaigns to promote immigration to southwest Louisiana. By the end of the 1880's these efforts emphasized the high profitability of the area's rapidly developing rice industry. Agricultural lender Jabez B. Watkins of Lawrence, Kansas, was the first and foremost developer. In 1883, Watkins, backed with English venture capital through the North American Land and Timber Company, purchased 1,200,000 acres in Cameron and lower Calcasieu parishes. His newspaper, the *American*, circulated widely in northern states, described the numerous opportunities—including cheap land and affordable financing—awaiting enterprising farm families.⁵⁰ Watkins persuaded the most renowned scientific agriculturist in Iowa, Dr. Seaman A. Knapp, president of Iowa Agricultural College, to oversee the company's development and sale of its 300,000 acres of prairie land. In time Knapp would play a leading role in shaping the development of modern rice culture.⁵¹

Sylvester L. Cary ranked second only to Watkins in promoting southwest Louisiana as a land of plenty. In 1883, Cary, mid-fiftyish, left Manchester, Iowa to take up residence on a farm situated in the midst of a bald prairie near an isolated railroad depot named Jennings Station. He wrote extensively on the many advantages the area afforded prospective farmers, and his articles appeared in a number of rural newspapers in the Hawkeye State. The Southern Pacific railroad valued his persuasiveness highly enough to retain him as a special passenger agent. In this capacity Cary returned to Iowa frequently and spoke before assemblies of prospective settlers. Many took advantage of excursion rate passenger fares to look over what the country had to offer, and many found new homes.⁵²

Transplanted mid-western farmers began experimenting in farming, dairying, horticulture, and even harvesting prairie hay for the New Orleans market. They discovered that a subsurface hard clay pan made the low lying prairies susceptible to flooding, making it well suited to growing rice. Through trial and error innovative farmers found ways to adapt machinery and methods used in northern wheat farming to rice production. They also developed a local rice milling industry and installed elaborate irrigation systems. In the formative years, the new techniques made rice farming quite profitable. Promoters pointed out that gross income from rice production more than tripled that realized from wheat while suitable rice land could be bought for less than one-third the price per acre. Newspapers reported on landowners who earned enough from one year's rice crop to pay for their investment in full.⁵³



Captain Charles A. Lowry got into rice at a critical time. Since around 1885 the modern rice industry had grown and developed in southwest Louisiana at a dizzying pace. The rice boom convinced him to leave an established wholesale drug business in Terre Haute, Indiana and take up large scale rice farming at age forty-three. With his wife Emma and their four children he moved into a new home situated in the oak grove just above the Green House. In five years Lowry had converted around 7,000 acres of prairie into rice fields and was considered "the largest rice grower in the state. . ."⁵⁴ He had completed two irrigation canals with a combined length of over twenty miles. The first canal served his personal farm, called the Live Oak Plantation, of which around 3,000 acres were planted in rice. Its pumps lifted 1,500,000 gallons of water per

hour from the Mermentau. The second canal, completed in 1898, could flood an additional 9,000 acres. Lowry held contracts to supply other farmers through this canal system.⁵⁵ Lowry also recruited northern farmers as settlers. As an inducement he created a small village and gave it his name. The community of Lowry had its own general store and one room schoolhouse. A boat delivered the mail from Lake Arthur to the landing at the Green House from where it was carried to the local post office.⁵⁶

During the years that Lowry strove to establish a prosperous rice producing enclave along the extreme southern margin of tillable prairie, the industry encountered formidable challenges. The 1892 crop year enjoyed almost ideal growing conditions that resulted in a bumper crop that sent prices downward. The acreage planted in 1893 declined substantially, a time when the nation slipped into four years of severe depression. Adverse consequences fell heavily on all walks of life and all economic sectors. Moreover, a drought cycle set in over the rice belt, indicative of the imperative need of a dependable water supply for successful rice cultivation. While commodity prices spiraled downward Congress passed the Wilson-Gorman Tariff of 1894. This measure lowered import duties and opened the domestic market to imports of oriental rice.⁵⁷

Seeing rice growers threatened with ruin, Knapp spearheaded the formation of the Rice Association of America. Inasmuch as domestic rice production met only half the national demand, the organization lobbied for tariff protection for top quality head rice. It also urged growers to improve crop quality while lowering production costs through greater efficiency. Spokesmen such as Cary observed that even in hard times the "better" farmers could and did survive. With yields of ten barrels of good rough rice per acre produced at a \$15.00 per acre cost, both attainable goals, a farmer could get by at wholesale market prices of between two to three dollars hundredweight for polished rice.⁵⁸

By 1897, with economic recovery underway across the nation, conditions in the rice belt also improved. Knapp had persuaded Congress to restore moderate tariff protection, and irrigation projects, believed to be essential for ensuring consistently high yields, continued to expand. It was a good crop year, and market prices held at a level where well tended rice returned moderate profits. Canal construction, however, was costly, averaging around \$3,750 per mile.⁵⁹

By 1898 the financial picture at Live Oak Plantation, given four years of general economic malaise, low returns—if any—on rice crops, heavy cash outlays attending the conversion of prairie to rice land, and large scale canal building in particular, apparently fell below original expectations. Lowry also faced meeting the first note, a payment of \$12,000 plus six percent over five years, when it came due in April. A shortage of cash in all likelihood prompted him to sell an undivided one-fourth interest in his rice ventures to David A. Baird. With all improvements to the land and two canal systems in place, the new partner anticipated a profitable future assured in particular from revenues earned by furnishing water to farmers. Users paid canal companies one-fifth of the crop for flood water, bringing canal operators profits that could reach as high as twenty-five percent.⁶⁰

Desire Hebert and other leaders in the Lake Arthur-Jennings area apparently had confidence in Lowry's business acumen. He and Hebert became associates in several ventures. In 1896 they became directors of Citizens Bank when it opened for business in Jennings, and both invested in a rice mill Jean Castex built in 1897 on the west bank of the Mermentau. Lowry also served as vice president of the Jennings Commercial League, a businessmen's booster organization and worked alongside such local luminaries as Alba Heywood and the venerable Sylvester Cary in promoting a proposed rail line connecting Lake Arthur and the gulf to Alexandria.⁶¹

Difficulties, however, continued to plague the Live Oak Plantation. During 1898 rice farmers enjoyed near optimum weather, and the harvest promised to bring in heavy yields of grain. During harvest time, unfortunately, heavy rainfall set in before much of the shocked rice could be threshed. Forlorn farmers around Lowry watched their crops literally float away, and many left for "better places."⁶²

In 1901, two dry years set in over the southwest Louisiana rice belt. The stream levels in the watershed of the Mermentau River fell precariously low each summer as the dry spell wore on. However, irrigation pressure lowered the depth of the Mermentau and its tributaries to the danger point where gulf salt water intruded higher and higher upstream. A partial listing of canals operating along streams in the Mermentau watershed in 1898 irrigated over 81,000 acres of rice, and by 1902 this acreage had grown appreciably.⁶³ By late June that year salinity levels at Lowry became severe, and the canals stopped pumping. Farmers facing the loss of an entire crop had little recourse except to pray for rain. The drought drastically reduced both the quantity and quality of rice produced in 1902 in both Louisiana and Texas. Only the lucky few broke even.⁶⁴

The 1903 crop year began with rice farmers, motivated by the high market prices prevalent in the spring, and wishing to recoup the losses taken on the 1902 crop, planted many more acres than usual. The growing season progressed favorably under a good amount of rainfall, and forecasts for a bumper crop drove prices downward. That fall many hapless farmers, faced with precipitous price drops, unloaded their rice at prices below production costs. Two-thirds of the rice acreage planted in the Mermentau-Lacassine area during the spring of 1904 failed to germinate properly because of a late cold snap. An unknown number of acres were replanted, but the lateness of the season nonetheless affected yield potential. This setback was followed by a drought that stretched well into the summer. Lift pumps on the rice canals throughout the Mermentau watershed dropped the water level in Lake Arthur some seventeen feet to its lowest point in memory.⁶⁵ If possible, the rice market in 1904 was as dismal as growing conditions.⁶⁶ A contemporary account of crop conditions aptly sums up the problem:

...the ceaseless drain of the irrigation pumps is rapidly exhausting the water supply, which can only be replenished by the clouds. It is generally conceded that some rain is essential to the development of the rice crop in its late stages, even where the supply of water is abundant. The late planted rice is shabby and the stand very indifferent, owing to the lack of rains to make the seed germinate properly. Some fields that were irrigated with salty water two seasons since and had lain idle till this year are beginning to show the evil effect of the dry weather and are looking sickly and dying.⁶⁷



The somber description of the long term damage salt water inflicted upon rice land may have been inspired by observations of conditions at Live Oak Plantation. The locations of Lowry's two canals along the Mermentau were nearest of all to its mouth on the Gulf of Mexico and first in line for the intake of brackish water. No rice canal operator in Louisiana in 1902 could have desired to end the menace posed by salt water intrusion any stronger than he.

In December, 1902 the larger farmers and canal owners in the Mermentau watershed met in Crowley to deal with the salt water problem. The attendees formed the Rice Irrigation and Improvement Association (RIIA), and its charter members elected Charles Lowry to the office of vice president.⁶⁸ The organization resolved to construct a dam near the mouth of the Mermentau River as the best means assuring a dependable fresh water supply.

Early in 1903 the RIIA offered the public common stock at \$25.00 per share to raise capital for damming the Mermentau. Work began that year on a temporary coffer dam near the river's mouth downstream from the village of Grand Chenier. Abundant rainfall, plus progress on the coffer dam, kept salt water from rising north of Grand Lake that year, a development the RIIA claimed proved the feasibility of its dam project.

A stock subscription drive, unfortunately enough, fell short of meeting the RIIA budgetary needs for completing work on the permanent dam. When it attempted without success to secure federal funding, the organization then turned the Baton Rouge, where it succeeded. State lawmakers hurriedly created the Mermentau Levee Board and charged it with completing the dam. The board received jurisdiction over the Mermentau watershed and authority to levy a property tax for construction and maintenance purposes.

Affected residents, caught unawares by the sudden move, vented their anger. A protest movement grew into a legal challenge to the constitutionality of the state law as being class legislation. They fought a losing court battle to get the law overturned, and the permanent dam, replete with floodgates and a lock that enabled river traffic to pass through the barrier, reached completion in August, 1905.

Most people living in and around Grand Chenier strongly opposed the dam. They grew corn and cotton instead of rice and raised livestock. They clung stubbornly to the belief that the dam impeded drainage and would cause occasional flooding of the little dry land there was along the chenieres surrounded by low lying marsh. Their crops and animals, they complained, faced destruction.

The worst fears of these people seemed to materialize soon after work finished on the permanent dam. Day after day of unusually heavy rainfall filled the Mermentau and its tributaries beyond the flood stage, and overflowed streams inundated all low lying areas. The flood hit the ridges surrounding Grand Chenier particularly hard, causing severe crop and livestock losses among farmers. Speakers at mass gatherings denounced the RIIA and its dam and darkly hinted at dire consequences. Government studies absolved the dam of blame for the flood, but unconvincingly so insofar as a hard core disaffected group was concerned. On an October night when it was well known that the dam's watchman would be elsewhere, a party of unidentified men dynamited a thirty-foot breach in the dam.

The RIIA confronted the crisis with a series of public meetings, and those attending agreed to rebuild the dam after first making emergency repairs. They also made several conciliatory overtures to the people of Grand Chenier in an effort to persuade them the dam was an innocent victim of the flood, but to no avail.⁶⁹ They warned that should repairs be made, the entire dam would be blown to smithereens. This was no hollow threat. The repaired dam was again dynamited in 1907 and never thereafter rebuilt.⁷⁰ A \$500.00 reward for information leading to the conviction of the persons responsible offered by Louisiana Governor Newt Blanchard went unclaimed.⁷¹ The names of those who participated in the dam's destruction have never been publicly disclosed.



Whatever the merits of the dam controversy, the events leading up to its construction and destruction contributed to dashing Charles Lowry's dreams of establishing a rice empire where the longhorns and ponies of Alexandre Hebert once roamed. The Live Oak Plantation's financial problems continued despite the cash brought in from the 1898 sale to Baird. On April 3, 1901,

Lowry, together with Peter K. Miller and Edward I. Hall, who had bought Baird's interest in the concern, transferred ownership of the land and all other assets to the North American Rice Company, a corporation domiciled in West Virginia. In exchange they received \$50,000 plus 7,500 shares of the company's preferred stock. In April, 1905, months before the dynamite episode, North American lost the concern through foreclosure. Ownership eventually passed through a sheriff's sale to a concern known as Guaranty Trust, the mortgagor with whom North American fell into default.

Lowry fell victim more to the unintended consequences of plunging heavily into canal building than to demolition at the hands of unidentified dynamiters. Expert opinion of that day held that adequate water for irrigation was the key to consistently high yields, and canals sprang up everywhere at once.⁷² In dry times such as 1902 irrigation pumps overly strained the capacity of the Mermentau watershed to supply fresh water, a condition that the salt water dam was incapable of remedying. The rapid expansion of rice growing into Texas in the early years of the twentieth century also tended to glut what was then a rudimentary rice marketing system. Today only the name "Lowry" on a roadside sign at the fork n of a remote byway in southwest Louisiana stands as a silent reminder of what he attempted to accomplish.

¹ Michael Conover, *Broussard: Descendants of Francois and Nicolas*, 4 vols. (Lafayette, 1995), I: 17.

² Hebert, Joseph, and Hebert, Louis in Acadian Memorial online database.

³ Carl Brasseaux, *The Founding of New Acadia, the Beginnings of Acadian Life in Louisiana, 1765-1803* (Baton Rouge, 1987), pp. 78-96, passim.

⁴ Jacqueline K. Voochries, Comp., *Some Late Eighteenth Century Louisianans* (Lafayette, 1973), p. 281.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁶ *A Geographical Description of the State of Louisiana, the Southern Part of the Mississippi and the Territory of Alabama* (Philadelphia, 1817), p. 244.

⁷ "Attakapas Census, May 1803," *Attakapas Gazette*, Vol. 22 (summer, 1997), 87-95. See entry No. 22.

⁸ Glenn Conrad, *Land Records of the Attakapas District*, vol. 2, pt.2, *Attakapas-St. Martin Estates, 1804-1818* (Lafayette, 1993), pp. 152-53.

⁹ Conrad, *Attakapas-St. Martin Estates*, p. x.

¹⁰ Harry Lewis Griffin, *The Attakapas Country* (Baton Rouge, 1959), pp. 28-30. Jean Mouton et al subsequently outmaneuvered this committee on the court house issue.

¹¹ "Historical Places of Louisiana – Attakapas," in Louisiana Encyclopedia.

<http://www.enlou/places/attakapas/htm>; William T. Shinn, "Progress of Improvements in Attakapas" *Attakapas Gazette*, vol. 19 (1994), 41.

¹² Darby, *Geographical Description*, p. 110.

¹³ Official Plat Maps, 1874, for T-11-S, R-3-W and T-11-S, R-2-W in Louisiana, Division of Administration, State Land Office. Cited hereinafter as "SLO."

¹⁴ "Heberts in the Attakapas," <http://www.acadian-cajun.com/hebla3.htm>, p. 1.

¹⁵ Darby, *Geographical Description*, pp. 110-111.

¹⁶ John Mack Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme, the Tragic Story of the French Acadians from Their American Homeland* (New York, 2005) pp. 429-30; Carl A. Brasseaux, *The Founding of New Acadia, the Beginnings of Acadian Life in Louisiana, 1765-1803* (Baton Rouge, 1987), p. 122.

¹⁷ Jack D. L. Holmes, "Joseph Piernas and the Nascent Cattle Industry of Southwest Louisiana," *McNeese Review*, Vol. 17 (1966), 13.

¹⁸ "WHITE, JAMES TAYLOR," Handbook of Texas Online.

www.thsa.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/WW; Paul Lack, ed., *The Diary of William Fairfax Gray, from Virginia to Texas, 1835-1837*, William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies, pp. 157, 163, in www.smu.edu/swcenter/Fairfax_Gray/wg_157.htm; W.T. Block, "The Opelousas Trail," in <http://vtblock.com/vtblockjr/opelousa.htm>.

¹⁹ Police Jury Minutes (typescript) in Book I, Maude Reid Scrapbooks, Archives and Special Collections Dept., Frazar Memorial Library, McNeese State University. Cited hereinafter as "MSU Archives."

²⁰ SLO, State Tract Book, Vol. 4, p.109; *Ibid.*, Official Plat Map: Original Plat 1878 of T12S, R4W, SWD, Document # 522.03016.

²¹ Fred Daspit, published authority on Louisiana's architectural history, carefully examined a highly detailed collection of photographs made of the Green House. He believes the bricks used in the original chimney date from the mid-1830's. He believes the house was built during the 1840's and the glass window panes are original. Telephone communication to author, Aug. 8, 2005.

²² For the data on births, baptisms and marriages of the family members, see Rev. Donald Hebert's multivolume *Southwest Louisiana Records; Church and Civil Records of Settlers* (Rayne, La., 1974-), *passim*.

²³ William H. Perrin, ed., *Southwest Louisiana Biographical and Historical*, Pt. II (New Orleans, 1891), p.159.

²⁴ The dates of death for three daughters, Eloisa, Melanie, and Zelmire, who was a twin sister of Belzire, are not recorded in *Southwest Louisiana Records*. The name of a tenth sibling, referred to in the Perrin work cited above, cannot be corroborated in other sources consulted.

²⁵ Sam Mims, *Trail of the Bowie Knife* (Homer, La., 1967), pp. 27-28; *American State Papers, Public Lands*, Vol. 2 (Washington, 1838-), pp. 675-76; SLO, Official Plat Map for T8S, R2W, SWD, Doc. # 522.08289.

²⁶ Calvin Dale Smith and Allen Fitzgerald, *History of Lake Arthur* (Baton Rouge, 1960?), p. 2; Eighth Census of the United States (1860), Vermilion Parish.

²⁷ Lewis Cecil Gray, *Agriculture in the Southern States to 1860*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1933), II: 634-635.

²⁸ Parish of Calcasieu, Succession of Aladin Hebert, Probate No. 99, a copy of which is in the files of Livingston Land Title Co., Inc.

²⁹ I am grateful to "Uncle Glen" Laurents, custodian of the Laurents Genealogy Collection, for permitting me to examine his notebooks; and to Caledonia Searle, a descendant, who gave me copies of three typescript letters written between 1840 and 1851 by Benoist to his son, Gustave, believed to have been in the possession of Carmelite Hebert Laurents; Jim Bradshaw, "Vermilion Parish Community," in *Lafayette Daily Advertiser*, June 27, 1997.

³⁰ Conover, comp., *Broussard*, Vol. 1, pp. 190-191; Seventh Federal Census (1850), Vermilion Parish, 1st Ward, Western Dist.

³¹ Rev. Donald Hebert, *Louisiana Families in Southeast Texas (1840s-1940s): Selected Genealogical Records of Louisiana and Acadian Families from Southeast Texas Church and Civil Archives* (Rayne, 1999), pp. 62, 63, 71, 405.

³² Copies of the federal agricultural censuses of Calcasieu Parish for 1850 and 1860 may be found in the Southwest Louisiana Genealogical and Historical Library, an entity of the Calcasieu Parish Public Library.

³³ Lauren C. Post, *Cajun Sketches from the Prairies of Southwest Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 1981), pp. 89-90.

³⁴ Lake Charles Echo, July 1, 1884, p. 1; Comment of Wayne Laurents, Mar. 14, 2005, in http://www.wtblock.com/wtblockjr/guest_book.htm

³⁵ Eighth Federal Census (1860), Calcasieu Parish.

³⁶ West, *Louisiana Surnames*, p. 172.

³⁷ Lucien T. and Melba M. Martin, *Remember Us*, (privately printed, 1987), pp. 168-171.

³⁸ Sources consulted on the Civil War in Louisiana include John D. Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 1961); David C. Edmonds, *Yankee Autumn in Acadiana* (Lafayette, 1979); Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun*, United States Government, *The War of the Rebellion, a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901, cited hereinafter as "OR," vol no: page no.; Donald S. Frazier, "'Out of Stinking Distance:' the Guerilla War in Louisiana," in Daniel E. Sutherland, ed., *Guerillas, Unionists and Violence on the Home Front* (Fayetteville, 1999); W.T. Block, "Some Notes on the Civil War Jayhawkers of Confederate Louisiana," and same author, "The Battle of Calcasieu Pass, Louisiana," on <http://www.wtblock.com/wtblockjr/htm>.

³⁹ Slave Schedule, Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana, Eighth Federal Census (1860).

⁴⁰ OR, 15: 772-73.

⁴¹ See item 20A, URSIN MILLER HOME, in "Passe Partout Heurissement," (typescript, ca. 1968), copy in Lake Arthur branch, Jefferson Davis Parish Library, cited hereinafter as *Passe Partout*; *Lake Arthur Sun Times*, May 22, 1997, pp. 1-2.

⁴² Lake Charles *Weekly Echo*, March 16, April 1, 1875.

⁴³ See Tom Watson, "Ambiguities Surrounding Desire Hebert's Confederate Service Record" (2005).

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- ⁴⁴ Parish of Calcasieu, Succession of Alexander Hebert, Probate No. 202, a copy of which is in the files of Livingston Land Title Co., Inc.
- ⁴⁵ SLO, U.S. Tract Book, Vol. 16A, p. 179, Certificate Nos. 6059, 6060.
- ⁴⁶ Lake Charles *Commercial*, June 3, 1883, p.1.
- ⁴⁷ SLO, State Tract Book Vol. 4 pp. 43, 109,110 (Southwestern District).
- ⁴⁸ Lake Charles *American*, April 22, 1891, p. 2.
- ⁴⁹ This transaction as well as all subsequent transactions affecting ownership of the Green House appear in an abstract of title in possession of the Lacassane Company, Inc., of Lake Charles, Louisiana.
- ⁵⁰ Henry C. Dethloff, *A History of the American Rice Industry, 1685-1985* College Station, 1988) pp. 69-80.
- ⁵¹ Joseph C. Bailey, *Seaman A. Knapp, Schoolmaster of American Agriculture* (New York, 1945) pp. 114-16.
- ⁵² Dethloff, *History of Rice*, pp. 69-80.
- ⁵³ S. L. Cary, *Southwest Louisiana up to Date* (Omaha, 1899), pp. 11-12; Lake Charles *American*, May 31, 1893, p. 1.
- ⁵⁴ Dethloff, *History of Rice*, p. 98.
- ⁵⁵ Crowley *Signal*, Prosperity Edition, May 17, 1898, p. 7.
- ⁵⁶ *Passe Partout*, items 16, 17.
- ⁵⁷ Lake Charles, *Echo*, Aug. 12, 1892; Bailey, *Knapp*, pp. 126-129.
- ⁵⁸ Dethloff, *History of Rice*, p. 110; Cary, *Southwest Louisiana*, p. GET.
- ⁵⁹ U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Bulletin No. 22, *The Present Status of Rice Culture in the United States*, by S. A. Knapp (Washington, 1899), p. 23.
- ⁶⁰ Cary, *Southwest Louisiana*, pp. 12-13.
- ⁶¹ Franklin Hildebrand, *As I Remember* (Jennings, 1977), pp. 66, 93; Crowley *Daily Signal*, Golden Jubilee ed., Oct. 4, 1937, p. 16.
- ⁶² Hildebrand, *As I Remember*, p. 31; Cary, *Southwest Louisiana*, p. 3.
- ⁶³ Cary, *Southwest Louisiana*, pp. 28-29.
- ⁶⁴ *Welsh Rice Belt Journal*, June 20, 1902; James L. Wright, "Rice and its Rise," Crowley *Daily Signal*, Dec. 16, 1905, Pt. II, p. 2.
- ⁶⁵ *Welsh Rice Belt Journal*, Apr. 22, July 1, 1904.
- ⁶⁶ J.B. Watkins collection, Box 2, Letterpress volume of H.G and T.H. Chalkley, 1904-05, in MSU Archives.
- ⁶⁷ *Welsh Rice Belt Journal*, July 1, 1904..
- ⁶⁸ Robert Benoit, "Mermentau Dam," 2 Parts, Lake Charles *American Press*, December 24, 31, 1989.
- ⁶⁹ Crowley *Daily Signal*, Nov. 16, 1905.
- ⁷⁰ Lake Charles *Weekly Press*, Nov. 30, 1913.
- ⁷¹ Lake Charles *American Press*, Jan. 22, 1917.
- ⁷² Knapp, *Rice Culture*, pp. 22-23.

Ambiguities Surrounding Desire Hebert's Confederate Service Record

By
Tom Watson

The "Moonlight and Magnolias" myth idealizing the antebellum South grew stronger after the bitter Reconstruction Era ended in 1877 as each remaining year of the nineteenth century ticked away. The demise of former Confederate President Jefferson Davis in 1889 strengthened the southern view of the "Lost Cause" and added an aura of glory and honor to Confederate military service. The United Confederate Veterans (UCV) came into existence in New Orleans during the same year President Davis died, and soon afterwards veterans of old Imperial Calcasieu Parish formed a local chapter known as UCV Camp 62.

Past Confederate service, however, was problematic for many veterans living in southwest Louisiana where draft dodging and desertion reached endemic proportions during and after the spring of 1863. Such may have been the case with Desire Hebert, scion of a pioneer Cajun family of Imperial Calcasieu Parish residing on the Mermentau immediately below Lake Arthur. His father Alexandre Hebert (1800-65) was a member of the first parish police jury and a very prosperous cattleman and farmer.¹

When the war began Desire Hebert was twenty-five, single and living with his parents.² He went into the army, but when, where and in what unit or units he served are unclear. Three published sources give conflicting statements concerning his military record. The first appeared in 1891 in a published biographical sketch stating that he was "on duty in Texas" from 1862 until the war's end.³ A membership list of UCV Camp No. 62 published in 1895 in a special edition of the *Lake Charles Daily Press* placed him in Company "I" of the 28th Louisiana Infantry Regiment.⁴ A list of veterans and widows compiled by the parish tax assessor in 1911 placed him in the 7th Louisiana Cavalry Regiment.⁵

Records confirm that a Desire Hebert indeed served in Ragsdale's (also known as Daly's) Volunteer Texas Cavalry Battalion, a unit stationed at Sabine Pass. The battalion fought May 16, 1864, in the Battle of Calcasieu Pass. The battalion's roster lists Desire Hebert as its acting sergeant major in September and October. In December he was elected as a second lieutenant in its Second Company A and remained on duty until surrender came.⁶

This unit recruited extensively in Calcasieu Parish in 1864 and also patrolled along its shoreline as far east as the Mermentau. Its roster includes the names of many individuals who formerly served in units raised in Louisiana, particularly the old Yellow Jackets battalion. Ragsdale's Battalion, however, was organized no earlier than January, 1864.⁷ If Desire Hebert's military service in Texas began as early as 1862, which appears unlikely, he served in some other unit before he joined Ragsdale's Battalion.

Two distinct Louisiana units came to be called the 28th Louisiana Infantry Regiment. Confusion caused by the sudden and unexpected capture of New Orleans led to this bureaucratic error. One regiment, also known as Gray's Regiment, consisted of ten companies of volunteers raised in five northern parishes. The other, also known as Thomas's Regiment, consisted of companies raised in southern parishes. It eventually was officially renamed the 29th Louisiana Infantry. Captain James W. Bryan commanded its Company "I," the "Calcasieu Tigers."⁸ After the war he became the first mayor of Lake Charles and publisher of the *Weekly Echo*. Bryan figured prominently in local civic and political affairs for the remainder of his life.

The UCV Camp No. 62 membership roster of 1895 that placed Desire Hebert in Company "I" of the 28th Louisiana Infantry may be in error. His name doesn't appear on the roster of either of the two so numbered regiments. At any rate, it seems incongruous for him to have joined Gray's Regiment, a unit hurriedly raised and trained in 1862 entirely in north Louisiana. Nor does it seem reasonable that Hebert would misrepresent himself as having served in the Calcasieu Tigers of Thomas's Regiment. Local veterans such as Capt. Bryan could have challenged this claim. The official unit records for the state are, however, incomplete, and Hebert's membership in either regiment cannot be ruled out conclusively.

Another regiment, however, the 18th Louisiana Infantry includes a Private Desire Hebert on its roster. If this individual is the Desire Hebert of Calcasieu, then a typographical error in the press article of 1895 could explain his listing therein as a former Calcasieu Tiger. The 18th formed in October 1861 under the command of then Col. Alfred Mouton, a West Pointer and a son of arch secessionist Alexandre Mouton, a former governor and popular Acadian leader. This regiment contained a few Calcasieu volunteers. It received its baptism of fire in 1862 during the Shiloh campaign, the first major battle of the Civil War. Over 100,000 men participated in this bloody two-day engagement. Combined casualties exceeded 20,000, more than those suffered in all previous American wars.

The 18th Louisiana Infantry suffered heavy losses on April 6, the first day of all out fighting. As part of General Braxton Bragg's Second Corps, the regiment fought on the extreme left of a Confederate dawn onslaught against the bivouacked and unsuspecting Union soldiers. During the late afternoon Col. Mouton received poorly conceived orders to attack a Union battery protected by overwhelming infantry support. When point blank cannon blasts of grape shot and formidable volleys of rifle fire ripped holes through his regiment, Mouton halted the slaughter with a retreat. During this one brief engagement over 200 of the unit's officers and men were killed, wounded or captured.⁹

Although wounded, Desire Hebert accompanied the exhausted Confederate army on its return to its base in Corinth, Mississippi. A regimental report of April 28 included his name among those still hospitalized. His was a long convalescence; as late as the end of August 1862 he was listed as absent and sick in Jackson, Mississippi. A report dated February 1863 listed him as being absent since the Battle of Labadieville, fought on October 27, 1862.¹⁰ Although he was presumed captured during that engagement, his name is absent from the official Union prisoner list published after the fight.¹¹

Confederate General Richard Taylor formed the 7th Louisiana Cavalry Regiment in March, 1864 with the intention of deploying it against Jayhawkers in southern Louisiana. Col. Louis Bush, its first commander, drew most of its manpower from Confederate deserters, many of whom formerly served in the so-called Yellow Jacket battalion.¹² As an aid to recruiting, Taylor sanctioned a public notice to be circulated in southwest Louisiana stating that all men of military age faced a deadline of June 1, 1864 for joining a Confederate unit. Thereafter, when encountered they would be "treated as jayhawkers and shot on sight."¹³

The tax assessor's list of 1911 may also be in error. Desire Hebert isn't shown on the 7th Cavalry roster. His affiliation with this unit, however, cannot be ruled out on this basis, for the extant records for this unit are incomplete. If he indeed served with the 7th Cavalry, his tenure was quite brief. His service in Ragsdale's Battalion began in September at the latest.

The "death threat" circular warning deserters and draft dodgers to enlist or else was published on May 18, 1864. Over the two preceding years soldiers had steadily disappeared from

Taylor's under-strength ranks as he attempted to cope with Union probes west of the Atchafalaya and the Red rivers. Many, however, returned to duty before the June 1864 deadline expired.

The Desire Hebert of UCV Camp No. 62 may have returned to duty in 1864 in response to Taylor's stern admonition. Moreover, he may have been the Desire Hebert who served in the 18th Infantry. If so, he voluntarily entered the Confederate service on October 5, 1861 at Camp Moore. The wound he received at Shiloh was serious enough to keep him hospitalized for months on end. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the battle the 18th suffered greatly from exposure to inclement weather, skimpy rations and an abnormally high absentee rate from sickness.¹⁴ These privations, when combined with the stupendous battlefield horror, disabused many young veterans of their romantic notions about military glamour and glory. Many rebel soldiers later broke and ran at Labadieville that day in October and left for home. Desire Hebert may have been among those who took "French leave."

Although his service record before September 1864 remains cloudy at best, we may be certain of another aspect of his life. On November 10, 1862 he married his first wife, Euphemie DeRouen, in New Iberia.¹⁵ This wartime marriage while absent from duty suggests that he may have decided to put an end to his military career. If he returned to his former home along the Mermentau, he went to a place notorious as a hotbed of jayhawker activity.

Suspicious surrounding his Confederate loyalty returned to haunt Desire later in life. In 1912 he brought a defamation of character suit against Anatole M. Gauthier for denouncing him as a jayhawker and a bank robber in a spirited confrontation witnessed by a large crowd. The highly anticipated case ended abruptly when the presiding judge halted the proceedings in mid-trial and ruled in favor of the plaintiff. The court awarded Hebert \$100.00 in damages plus attorney fees, a sum far short of the \$61,000 asked for in the petition.¹⁶

To sum up, Desire Hebert's military service before 1864 cannot be established with certainty, a fact that he seemingly found embarrassing as he aged.

¹ Tom Watson, "Green House Report," unpublished manuscript (2005), pp 1-9.

² Seventh Census of the United States, Calcasieu Parish, Series M653, microfilm roll 409, p. 156.

³ William H. Perrin, compiler, *Southwest Louisiana Biographical and Historical* (New Orleans, 1891) pt. 2, p. 159.

⁴ *Lake Charles Daily Press*, Special Edition (1895), p. 1.

⁵ Janet Hewett, ed., *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 100 vols. (Wilmington, 1994-18) 68:410-11, cited hereinafter as OR: volume, part: page nos.:

[http://www.acadiansingray.com/Daly's-Ragsdale's %20Bn.%20TX20Cav.htm](http://www.acadiansingray.com/Daly's-Ragsdale's%20Bn.%20TX20Cav.htm), cited hereinafter as "Acadians in Gray."

⁷ *Acadians in Gray*.

⁸ Arthur W. Bergeron, Jr., *Guide to Louisiana Confederate Military Units 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge, 1989) pp. 138-140; Terry L. Jones, "The 28th Louisiana Volunteers in the Civil War," *North Louisiana Historical Association Journal*, Vol. 9 (Spring, 1978), pp. 85-95.

⁹ OR, I, 32: 516-22. A post battle casualty list includes a T. Hebert of Co F among the wounded. The list is fraught with "typos" as if the typesetter worked while hearing the report read orally. See the *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, Apr. 18, p. 1.

¹⁰ Andrew B. Booth, comp., *Records of Louisiana Confederate Soldiers and Louisiana Confederate Commands* (reprint ed.), 3 vols. (Spartanburg, 1984) 2: 246.

¹¹ *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, Nov. 1, 1862, p. 1.

¹² Bergeron, *Guide*, pp. 50-51.

¹³ OR, 34:4:28.

¹⁴ Arthur W. Bergeron, ed., *The Civil War Reminiscences of Major Silas T. Grisamore* (Baton Rouge, 1993), pp. 41-44

¹⁵ Rev. Donald J. Hebert, comp., *Southwest Louisiana Records: Church and Civil Records, 1861-1865*, Vol. 6 (1973), p. 227.

¹⁶ *Desire Hebert v. No. 9373 Anatole M. Gauthier*, Fifteenth Judicial Court of Louisiana, # 137, in records of the Jefferson Davis Parish Clerk of Court; Jennings *Daily Times-Record*, April 30, 1913, p. 1.