

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin
County
Historian

8-16-84



VOL. VI

LOOKING FOR ANCESTORS IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

No. 33

It is not infrequent that historians are pursued for their genealogical records and archives by anxious descendants of forgotten ancestors whose names have long since been uttered. I try to be as helpful and courteous as I can to such would be grave diggers. But I usually find myself frustrated by their often inconsequential pursuits. Some have ancestors that came over in the Mayflower, they proudly announce. Something they have never managed to live down. I guess I feel pedigrees are mainly for pups and prigs. Real aristocracy should be that of benevolence. Now I'm not knocking ancestors by any means for they can serve as something to measure up to if they were magnificent or if ordinary, we must hustle to go beyond their mediocrity. In actuality, I feel pride should be vested in personal performance rather than the grave.

I am also frustrated in helping these seekers of ancestors because I have my own philosophy on such matters. But then, who am I? Greater minds than mine have expressed to a better degree this philosophy. Here are the words of Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880): "...I have always lived! And I possess memories which go back to the Pharaohs. I see myself very clearly at different ages of history, practising different professions and in many sorts of fortune. My present personality is the result of my lost personalities... Many things would be explained if we could know our real genealogy... thus heredity is a just principle which has been badly applied."

For sure, many things would be explained if we could know our real genealogy. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) expressed it this way: "It is the secret of the world that all things subsist and do not die, but only retire a little from sight and afterwards return again... Nothing is dead; men feign themselves dead, and endure mock funerals and mournful obituaries, and there they stand looking out of the window, sound and well, in some new strange disguise. Jesus is not dead; he is very well alive; nor John, nor Paul, nor Mahomet, nor Aristotle; at times we believe we have seen them all, and could easily tell the names under which they go."

Indeed, we go looking for our ancestors in all the wrong places. Many times our general approach to genealogy is strictly dead end. We look in vain for our roots when in fact, we are the root, or more properly speaking, the soul. And this soul or individuality is incomprehensibly larger and greater than we are in this life. We are infinitely older than we ever give ourselves credit. Some people search back five or eight generations and proclaim success when in fact, real success should include the brontosaurus. When it comes to seeking ancestors the family picture is the place for them. Don't rely too heavily on the coffin. And as you pass the historian's camera, be sure you are registered as more than just a photo copy, for our purpose in this life is to create our own laurels and not to rest upon laurels from the past.

Voltaire (1694-1778) aptly put it this way: "Whoever serves his country well has no need of ancestors."