

FIRST PEOPLE OF THE PASS

BLACK HERITAGE

Free Persons of Color

Many citizens of Pass Christian originated from descendants of the first settlers, most of whom were Black. Through cohabitation and inter-marriages with French settlers and native Indians, mixed blood strains were produced. Contrary to other sections of the South and Eastern seaboard states, significant numbers of Blacks residing in Louisiana, and coastal Alabama and Mississippi were not slaves, but *freemen*. In Pass Christian, this resulted in a number of Black citizens owning beach-shore and center of town property as well as owning slaves themselves. Many of these early Black residents, besides owning homes and small dairy farms, were financially comfortable by reason of having a dynamic and visible real estate domain. For the most part, prior to the Civil War, White residents of the "Pass" were not filled with the turbulent prejudices as had erupted in other parts of the South. Instead, most White residents exhibited a high regard for the Black population, which had strong blood connections with many of the original French throughout the Pass, including their neighbors at the Wolf and DeLisle waterways.

For this and many more reasons, Pass Christian is quite unique among Mississippi and Gulf Coast communities.

Some reporters of history reflected that the DeLisle and Wolf River area was a marshaling ground for the slave trade industry. Because the torturous voyage across the Atlantic Ocean greatly reduced slave sales values – supposedly, Lafitte's pirate band and the elder Sauciers of DeLisle were in cooperative endeavor to reconstitute the illegally imported slaves to good health. Reports were that the light colored slaves were placed into domestic chores while their dark skinned brothers were used to perform field work.

Some of the free Black population was contributed to during the 1790s and early 1800s by the resettlement of free Black families that had migrated from South Carolina and New Orleans. Added to these were refugees who fled from Martinique and other French speaking Caribbean islands, which were undergoing political unrest and racial uprisings. The wealthier free Black families sought refuge along the coasts of Louisiana and Mississippi, thereby becoming new land holders.

As indicated by some documents and accounts, a substantial number of the first Black slaves in Pass Christian were given their freedom upon the death of their slave owners. One reason for this practice was that Pass Christian did not conform to the Southern plantation economy which was reliant upon slavery for its workforce; — and a second reason was the mixed blood lines created by masters over their slaves resulted in many of them being freed. However, as throughout the South, as well as the Nation, slavery continued as an institution and a way of life. Even many of the freed former slaves, became slave holders themselves.

The First "First Lady" -- The Widow Asmard *White owner of the Pass Christian Peninsula*

The Widow Asmard, a French Caucasian, was the owner of 17,884 arpents of land, representing approximately 16,200 acres of prime coastal properties. This vast area encompassed all of the peninsula of Pass Christian including much of Long Beach. Having dual residences, one in New Orleans as well as a milk dairy and home in the Pass, the Widow had a penchant for purchasing slaves, which, with the passage of time, she would free those whom she favored.

The Widow Asmard, referred to herself as Julia de la Brosse. She was a native of Rennes in the providence of Brittany, France. She was the daughter of Don Gil Callavera de la Brosse and Maria Juana Pussin. The widow was married thrice, first to Francois (Francisco) Grandpre, then to Jean Louis Asmard, and third to Francois Carriere. She survived all three, however, historical documents usually refer to her as the Widow Asmard.

Pass Christian was the Widow's second residence during her marriage with Carriere. The first recorded petition for property, or recertification of it, in Pass Christian, was on June 25, 1781 by Francois Carriere who claimed habitation for six years prior to, or since 1774. He maintained grazing lands for cattle and conducted a dairy farm. As described, the property had six cabins, a storage building, and a raised residential home.

Even though there were unrecorded French Settlers inhabiting the Pass Christian peninsula, they were considered illegal homesteaders or interlopers. Spanish land titles were honored providing that appropriate evidence of habitation and cultivation were presented. All Spanish Land Grant measurements were calculated in Arpent measurements. Usually, the grants were doled in allotments of 10 or 20 Arpent frontages by 40 Arpents in depth. An Arpent is a French measurement which runs a linear length of 198 feet. One square arpent has sometimes been simplified to equal one acre, however, an acre = 90.5 arpent.

The commissioned Surveyor General, Charles Trudeau, described the Carriere Grant as including all of the peninsula from the Mississippi Sound to Bayou Portage and from the Bay of St. Louis to Bear Point, which is located presently within the USM Gulf Park campus at Long Beach. This was an unusually large tract of ground.

It appears that Carriere died in 1796, resulting in the aging widow making her last Will and Testament on November 19, 1796, while at New Orleans. She described the disposition of 12 slaves named: Cirilo, age 50; Senegal, 30; Barbara, 45; Isabel, 30; Pognon or Pinon, 25, Margaret, 12; Alexis, 5; Rosalie, 6; Rose Aime, 8; Eugenie, 7; Vincent, 7; and Augustus.

She also, described 8 slaves whom she had previously freed. Carlos and his woman Madelaine, little Carlos, Francois, Lineta, Viton, Venus and Catis. By her Will, she bequeathed property, cattle, and personal items to designated slaves and to her friends in the DeLisle area.

She executed a special *Deed of Gift* dated November 5, 1799, which conveyed 800 square arpents of land to Carlos (Charles/Charlot), a former Negro slave who had been given freedom earlier, along with his wife Madeline and their children. The Deed of Gift, verified that the property was inhabited and cultivated from 1794 to 1814. Carlos was awarded the

prime property on the highest elevation, constituting what is designated as the oldest commercial district in Pass Christian. The area roughly covered a short distance west of Market Street to roughly a hundred feet east of Seal Avenue; and from the sand beach of the Gulf to the marshes of Bayou Portage.

The Deed of Gift consisted of 20 Arpents by 40 Arpents to Charles and his wife, Madeline, and their children. The gift, included a dwelling house, that was given in exchange for services rendered.

The Widow Asmard, a Caucasian, had only one child, a daughter by Francois Grandpre by the name of Maria who married a Frenchman named Theodore Benoit. In this marriage, they had a daughter by the name of Isabel who later married a Frenchman named Voisin. Benoit, however, also produced a son with a Mulatto slave. Before leaving the area, he left his holdings to his son, whom he granted "*Freeman*" status. This, Bernard Benoit and his offspring will be discussed later.

The Widow Asmard must have been a remarkable lady. According to a local genealogist/historian, census records from Mobile show that the Widow was 33 years older than her third husband, Carriere. Her age may also account for having only one child, the one from her first husband. This also may support her statement in her Will of 1797 that "Francois Carriere did not contribute any capital and I contributed more than today exists." And also in her Deed of Gift to Charles and Madeline in 1799, she stated that she "acquired the same (Pass Christian) at the time of the English Domination, by virtue of a grant issued from his Excellency Alderman Governor General of the Town of Pensacola, at that period, the titles of which property were burned in the office of Mobile, when the Spaniards conquered the Town of Mobile".

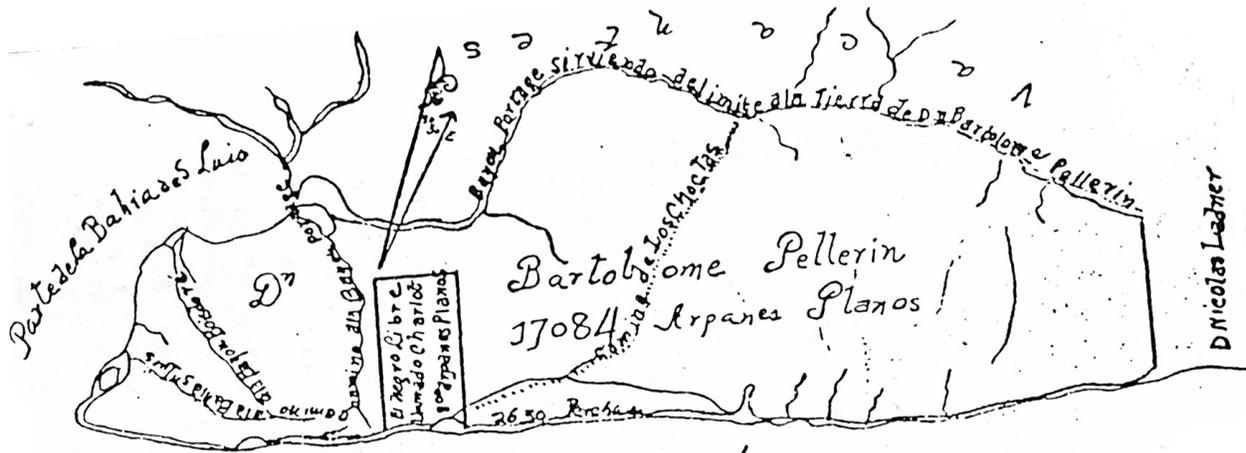
Even though Carriere had the Pass Christian tract of land awarded in his name by the Spanish in 1781, the Widow Asmard was still the original grant recipient from the British in 1774, and had outlived this third husband. The Widow Asmard was greatly respected both in New Orleans and at her pastoral estate in the Pass.

Charles Asmard and Madeline *Freed African Slaves*

The Charles Asmar property also known as the Charlot property is presently the mid-town commercial district of Pass Christian from the Mississippi Sound north toward Bayou Portage and from a short distance West of Market Street to 100 yards East of Seal Avenue. This property is described in the Widow Asmard Will and designated on the Geodetic Survey map of Henry Washington in the year 1812 approximate. It consisted of 20 Arpents fronting on the Gulf extending to Bayou Portage by 40 Arpents.

As freed Negro slaves, following the death of Widow Asmard on January 6, 1802, the property, Charles and Madeline had received by Deed of Gift, was honored and accepted legally as their true property by all succeeding governments to follow.

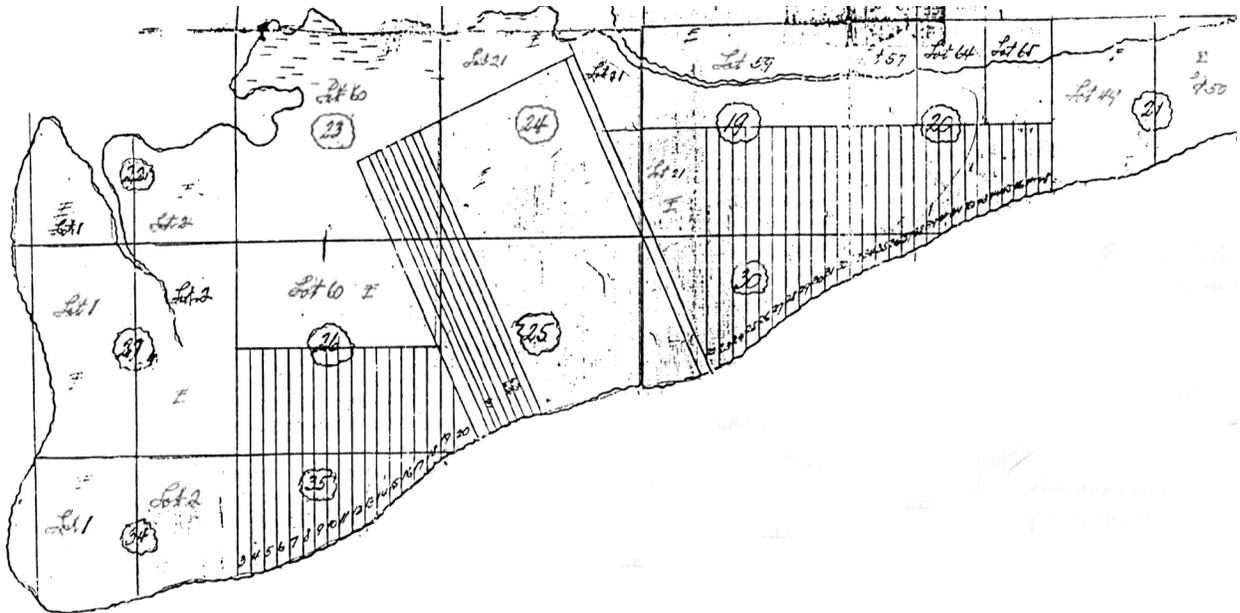
This was not the case for the other freed slaves and friends who had been awarded properties by the Asmard Will. Even though the Widow had appointed her friend and neighbor, Marie Theresa Krebs Labat, Executrix to distribute personal affects and properties,



Parte del Seno Mexicano
Vulgaramente Para Christian

1809 Map showing Charles Asmar Claim at center.

the land, a few years later, was to become a Spanish Grant to Bartholomew Pellerin.



1837 Map showing Charles Asmar Claim at center.

Marie Theresa Krebs Labat *A Caucasian Widow from Mobile*

Other than the earliest settlements which had established forts to protect themselves, the woodland coasts were not inhabited by many. The few French families around the Bay St. Louis area including Pass Christian were unprotected from Indian incursions. Fortunately the Choctaw Indians were friendly to the French, but following the Treaty of Paris of 1763, the vengeful Choctaws who disliked the British, roamed the coast in marauding bands. They pillaged live stock and in 1767 drove the few families around the Bay of St. Louis out to Cat Island for safety. Other coastal families moved to the farther barrier islands. However, following the devastation of a Hurricane in 1772, those families were forced to flee the barrier islands and established new homesteads on the mainland. Because the Mobile and Pascagoula areas were so hard hit, some of them found new home sites at the Bay of St. Louis. Following the death of Joseph Labat, Sr., the Widow Labat and her three children, Joseph, Jr., Jean Baptiste, and Isabel (Elizabeth) joined other French settlers who had moved from the Mobile area and settled in the DeLisle area. These persons were Bartheleme Grelot in 1790, Philippe Saucier in 1794, followed by Joseph Nicaise, who resettled from Shieldsboro and Pierre Morin (Moran), who resettled from Cat Island. Grelot and Saucier married sisters of Joseph Nicaise, making them brothers-in-law. Joseph Nicaise had married a daughter of Mathurin Christian Ladner while at Mobile, and Morin (Moran) married one of the daughters of Nicholas Christian Ladner at Cat Island. Therefore, the two Ladner girls were cousins. It is quite likely that Pierre Morin became the first arriving settler at the DeLisle area as a result of the 1772 hurricane which had caused several families to abandon the island.

The same Philippe Saucier, Bartheleme Grelot, and Joseph and Jean Baptiste Martial Nicaise had first settled along the shores of the bay at Bay St. Louis in the late 1770s. Philippe Saucier had claimed title to that land by issue of a Spanish Grant which he later transferred to Joseph and Jean Baptiste Martial Nicaise, his brothers-in-law. First Grelot, later Saucier, and then Joseph Nicaise, moved their families across the bay to the DeLisle and Wolf River areas now called DeLisle.

It is unclear exactly when Marie Theresa Krebs brought her children to the area to live, but by the time they arrived, the Widow Asmard and her husband, Francois Carriere, had already been established on the Pass Christian peninsula since 1774, backed by a reaffirming Spanish land grant in 1781.

The Widow Asmard's Will cited an indebtedness to Marie Theresa Labat of about 600 pesos, which indicates that the Widow Labat was financially within her means. Either in lieu of reimbursement, or as an added consideration, the Widow Asmard stipulated in her will that the Widow Labat was appointed Executrix and that she and her children be declared universal heirs to the remaining possessions not behest to others.

The Widow Asmard had stated that she had already given two slaves, Senegal -- age 30 and Margaret -- age 12, to young Joseph Labat, Jr. (who, at that time, was not yet 19)

"I bequeath to Marie Theresa Labat six bulls and cows, with their calves, . . . I (also) leave a complete dinner service of silver and one gold tobacco case. To Joseph Labat, Jr. I give two *cubiertos* (dish, knife, spoon, fork) like his mother's. I give 12 young female cows to Joseph Labat, Jr., the eldest, six to his brother Jean and six to his sister Isabel (Elizabeth)."

The Widow Asmard had already given a Power of Attorney to the Widow Labat prior to the Will having been drawn on February 18, 1797 at New Orleans.

However, the Widow Asmard treated her freed slaves, Carlos and Madeline to a special Deed of Gift to property in 1799, while she was ailing, bed-ridden and without vision. One may suppose that she had concern for her property distribution's following her death. Then too, she may have wished to bind Carlos and Madeline to her ailing needs with a concrete presentation of a home as a means to keep them by her side during her final days. A romanticist may even suppose that being charitable anyway, that the Widow Asmard wished to see the reality of her gift upon her respected servants while she was yet alive. Whatever her thoughts or reasons, the remaining undistributed lands were not dispersed in accordance with her Last Will and Testament.

Baptisms at Pass Christian in June 1798

! Francisca, free mulata, daughter of Ysavel Pyen of the Nation. Madrinas being Mariana Ysavel Labat.

! Rosalia, Negra slave of Madame Armond (Asmard), daughter of Maria Juana, negra slave of same. Madrinas being Mariana Ysavel Labat.

! Francisco Reggirs, free griff, son of Salineta, free negra. Padrino being Don Matheo Pausant. (**Note:** *A Griff is [3/4] dark skinned – Negra means a Black Person*)

! Alexo, griff, slave of Madame Armond (Asmard), son of Ysavel, negra slave of same. Padrino being Don Juan de Dios Valdes.

! Eugenio, free mulato, son of Salineta, free negra. Madrinas being Dona Mariana Ysavel Labat. (**Note:** *Madrinas means Godmother – Padrino means Godfather*)

! Catarina, free mulata, daughter of Maria Juana, negra slave of Madame Armond (Asmard). Madrinas being Dona Mariana Ysavel Labat.

! Amanda, free mulata, daughter of Maria Juana, negra slave of Madame Armond (Asmard). Madrinas being Dona Mariana Ysavel Labat.

! Margarita, negra slave of Madam Asmard, daughter of Ysavel, negra slave of same. Madrinas being Dona Mariana Ysavel Labat.

! Vizente, free negro, son of Ysavel, negra slave of Madame Asmard. Padrino being Don Juan de Dios Valdes.

! Augusto, free griff, son of Isabel. Padrino being Don Matheo Pausant.

Marianne Isabel Labat *Caucasian Daughter of the Widow Labat*

Marianne, like her mother, was reared Catholic and had participated in several baptisms when called on to be a God-mother for mulattoes.

Bartholomew Pellerin, a Lieutenant of the Spanish regime's Louisiana Third Infantry Regiment, wooed the young French damsel from the bayous of DeLisle and Portage. On January 19, 1801, they were joined in wedlock by proxy. For whatever reason, the Lieutenant was still at Pensacola while his "stand-in" was at New Orleans with his bride, her mother, and her brother, Joseph. From an earlier document dated in 1798, Pellerin and the young Labat girl had already been acquainted. Their first daughter was named Josephina.

On July 18, 1819, Father Sedella baptized Justina at the St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans while attended by her Godparents, Maria Theresa Labat and Jean Baptiste Labat, the younger son. Justina was the second daughter of Mariana Isabel and Bartholomew Pellerin.

On April 26, 1828, Father Sedella married Josephina, the first daughter of Mariana Isabel and Bartholomew Pellerin at the St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans.

Apparently, since the young Spanish Lieutenant Pellerin had at least been acquainted with the Labats prior to the death of the Widow Asnard, either by strong influence on his part or by some deficiency in the continued legal ownership of the Pass Christian property by the Widow Asnard, he pursued and was granted the property in his name.

On September 23, 1809, Juan Ventura Morales of the West Florida Territory had granted the Pass Christian property to, then, Captain Bartholomew Pellerin. The land was properly surveyed and certified by Vincente Sebastian Pintado, the Surveyor General with supporting statements from Jean Baptiste Martial Nicaise, Pierre Morin, and Philippe Saucier. Joseph Labat, Jr. and the freed Negro Charles (Charlot) attended the witnessing with Barthelemew's brother, Jean Pellerin. The conveying document acknowledged that the lands belonged to the deceased Widow Asnard.

Perhaps, due to the uncontrolled migration of many Americans crossing the Appalachians, and the Louisiana Territory sale by France to the Americans in 1803, and the imminent threat of rebellion against Spanish control of West Florida; the Spanish treated Pellerin's grant request in his favor. The population on the Gulf Coast at that time was still quite sparse.

In one account documented as the Kirby Report of May 1, 1804, it states that, "From the town of Mobile to the Pascagoula there are about 18 families settled along the shores of the Bay and at the mouth of the river; and from thence (Mobile Bay) to Pearl River, and upon the same (river) are about 30 families."

It was also reported by some writers of history, that six years after the Kirby Report, a traveler stated that, "There were 4 or 5 French Free Negroes and Mulattoes (who) were in residence and owned land. In addition, a number of wealthy New Orleanians had established summer homes at that place (Pass Christian) to escape the summer heat."

In 1811, the Americans made their move to take over the Gulf Coast as a defensive measure to protect the mouth of the Mississippi River and to relieve the Spanish from their control as well as to fortify defenses against the embroiling torrents of war with the British.

Dr. William Flood was sent by W.C.C. Claiborne to raise the American Flag and to appoint respected coastal citizens who would pledge their allegiance as Justices of the Peace for the United States government. Simon Favre, at Pearl River, and Philippe Saucier, at DeLisle, were established as representatives for those respected areas.

Shortly thereafter wards, on June 17, 1814, Bartholomew Pellerin sold his ownership of Pass Christian to Edward Livingston, a lawyer, for the sum of \$7000. This amount was the same legal fee which Livingston had charged the Pirate, Jean Lafitte, for defending him in a court trial earlier that year.

Following the successful Battle of New Orleans of 1815, the Westward Migration began to take place. New Orleans, having become famous by Jackson's military victories and his rise to the presidency, resulted in an ever increasing growth of residents. This growth occurred also at Natchez, Mississippi which became the first state capitol of Mississippi.

The Antebellum Period began in 1815 and lasted until 1861. The wealthy and the aristocrats, seeking to escape the heat and the congestion of New Orleans and Natchez, found refuge along the coastal waters where the fresh breezes and mineral springs afforded a healthy environment for their families in an unpopulated area so close to home. First the sailing schooners and then the steamboats brought numbers of people to the Coast where summer residents were built and boarding houses were established followed by majestic hotels. The new towns of Pass Christian and Bay St. Louis became the "Watering Holes" for entertainment and good living -- even surpassing the town of Biloxi. Mississippi became a state in 1817. Bay St. Louis, Pass Christian, and Biloxi were incorporated as towns by the state legislature in 1838. Harrison County was formed in 1841.

The census of 1830 reports about 200 residents with the greater number living in the DeLisle/Wolftown community. Slave census counts were not fully accounted for. The population of Pass Christian in 1850 was reported as 584 Mississippi residents and 42 Louisiana households not reflected in the census totals. According to other records, Harrison County in 1850 showed 39% of its population as being Blacks. The trend after 1830 was a population growth along the Coastal area of Pass Christian as proven by the escalation of second home construction by Louisiana residents.

Charles Asmar (*Freed Negro Slave*) His Will and Heritage

The freed Negro, Charlot Asmar, died in 1835 having left a Will dated September 19, 1834. It is apparent that his wife Madeline had already died and that Charles had taken up with one of his slaves, Winny. A record of disbursements of his personal property is not herein available, however, the disposition of his real property as claimed on March 14, 1800, is as follows. (Note: It was not unusual for slaves to take on the name of their former masters, however, often slightly misspelled, such as Asmard to Asmar)

"In consideration of many faithful services of my female slave, Winny,
I give and bequeath her freedom and emancipation from slavery and legal
charges of which to be paid by my Executor from the proceeds of my real and

personal estate. I also give and bequeath to the said Winny the lot of land on my plantation containing one French arpent in front and forty arpents in depth on which is a dwelling with a kitchen erected and occupied by Mr. Charles Sanly. It is my desire that she shall submit to the directions and control of the above mentioned August Clause in all matters concerning her future behavior and conduct."

"I give and bequeath to Calvin Bradley son of Celeste Ladner of Pass Christian aforesaid thirty head of meat cattle and one of my horses; after first choice of one horse to August Clause. I give and bequeath to Payon Asmar a lot of land containing one French Arpent front and forty arpents in depth, also two cows with calves which were willed to her by my deceased wife, Madeleine. I appoint Raymond Lizana of Wolf River as my Executor. The remaining of my estate to me equally distributed to the heirs of Joseph Labat, Jr., Jean Baptiste, Ameel and Edmoir Labat and to the son of the deceased Phrosine Labat, now at New Orleans. And also to my heirs, Eugene Ladner, Celeste Ladner, Francois Benoit, and Philansse Sandery."

Signed, sealed and delivered in the presence of M. S. Eculier, Francis B. Fleitas, Sr., Pierre Blanchard, Joseph Mathieu Cucullu, and Roger A. Hiern.

Upon his death, Charles conveyed all of his remaining property to other black freed slaves and relatives represented by such surnames as: Asmar (Aumar, Ausmar), Bradley, Clause, Labat, Ladner, Benoit, and Sandery. This resulted in much of the current downtown business section being owned by the Negro Charlot and his progeny throughout the 19th century with some remaining lots into the 20th century and a few significant residences on Second Street.

Charles evidently had been approached by many Whites to sell his property, and in order to keep his extended family provided for on his dairy farm, he did sell some of his lands. Nevertheless, he left his declared heirs with substantial holdings which were distributed among them, before and after his death. However, they in turn, slowly loosened their hold on the land. Over an extended period of time, the property was slowly sold off in portion sales.

Bernard Benoit

The Widow Asmard had one daughter by her first marriage whose name was Maria who married Theodore Benoit. It is presumed that Theodore and Maria lived in the DeLisle-Pineville area and had acquired property there. Evidently, Theodore consorted with a Black slave girl who gave birth to a son named Bernard. Before Theodore and Maria left the area, he bought Bernard's freedom and established a Deed of Trust to him of some consequential land area north of Pass Christian. Bernard, a *Free Man of Color*, took the name of his departed French father, Benoit, and assumed control of the estate consisting of lands and slaves.

It has to be presumed that Bernard Benoit had purchased perhaps one arpent of land from Charles Asmar which fronted the Gulf, because land transaction deed books show that a lot sale was made by Bernard Benoit to George Elderkin and wife on May 9, 1831.

Bernard Benoit, Sr. died in December of 1841, leaving a son, Bernard Benoit, Jr. to lay claim to that estate consisting of land, cattle, and slaves.

A presumption can be made that a legal Will was not issued, resulting in Sheriff John Brill of Pass Christian, becoming the Administrator for the estate. He took possession of the properties, both personal and real as his own and contested Benoit's authority to hold such immense properties on the basis that the young Benoit was a slave and, therefore, part of the estate. Benoit, Jr. (perhaps then of age 45) appealed his case to the Mississippi State Legislature and received protection by a Special Legislative Act passed in February 1844.

However, even that action did not stop the persistent and scurrilous Sheriff Brill of Pass Christian from continuing his claim. Undaunted, Benoit, Jr. took his case to the Mississippi Supreme Court. He proved that Bernard Benoit, Sr., as in the case of the senior's father, Theodore, before him, had consorted with a slave of Antoine Bayard, thereby giving birth to Benoit, Jr. The Widow Bayard witnessed that Benoit, Sr. had purchased Benoit, Jr. at the age of 14 in 1808, for 400 piasters. In January 1846, the state Supreme Court ruled in the junior Benoit's favor.

To fund these legal matters, it is evident that the younger Benoit, called *Ninco*, was able to rely on trusted White neighbors to lend him money based on the security of his property as was the case in 1838, when Benoit mortgaged 80 acres for \$160.00.

Immediately after winning his case in the Supreme Court, Bernard Benoit, Jr. sold slaves that belonged to his father for \$3000. Most of them were Mulattos: they were named Eliza, 24; Julienne, 21; Washington, 18; Johnson, 17; Josephine, 11; Victor, 6; Perique, 5; Anatole, 4; and Louis, a two-week-old child.

Rosalie Benoit

It is not clear as to the relationship of the Francois Benoit named in the Charles Asmar Will, or the relationship of Bernard to Rosalie Benoit. Since Rosalie owned, probably by inheritance, the lot that adjoined the Elderkin lot mentioned above, it is quite possible that she was in some way related to the elder Bernard Benoit, or perhaps, was the wife of Bernard Benoit, Jr. Regardless, Rosalie Benoit, a Mulatto, sold a 43-foot lot fronting the Gulf on February 3, 1849, to another mulatto for only \$200. This lot is located on the corner of Hiern Avenue and Scenic Drive across from present-day City Hall. The lot reached northward to Bayou Portage. The purchaser, Madelaine Decoudreau, may have been a relative. Rosalie retained an adjoining Gulf front 40-foot lot east of the Decoudreaus.

Other persons by the name of Benoit mentioned as heirs to the Widow Isabelle Asmar (Azemard), were Marie and Pauline Benoit. In 1850, Rosalie was reported as age 55. (Possibly 5 years or more older than Bernard Benoit, Jr.)

Isabelle Asmard

It is not clear as to how Isabelle was related to Charles, nor are documents readily available to show how she obtained her ownership to land. However, one assumption may be that since she was a Free Woman of Color, that she was a freed slave of the Widow Asmar and Isabelle assumed the name Asmar from her former owner. An additional assumption can be made that Charles, who seems to have demonstrated a charitable kindness under his extended family concept, may have freely transferred an arpent size lot to Isabelle since her land entitlement was within the Charles (Charlot) claim.

Taking into account the notes made by an authenticator of the Widow Asmard's Will of 1797, it offers the name of Isabel age 30 and Vincent age 7. Consequently, Isabelle Asmard (Azemard) must have been related to Carlos.

One other strong possibility is that Isabelle is the same person as Payon Asmar, as named in the Charles Asmar Will, who was given one arpent fronting on the Gulf by 40 arpents in depth. Particularly since Payon (or Pognon, or Pinon) is not heard of in later years, it could be the same person as Isabelle Asmard.

Isabelle's Will, dated March 23, 1842, listed the following heirs in her distribution of one arpent fronting the Gulf: Auguste Clause, Jean Baptiste Clause, Vincente Asmard, Charles (Bozes) Asmard, and the deceased Marguerite Clause. The property was divided into five equal parts, each having received 1/5 of an Arpent (38'9") by 40 Arpents deep in addition to the division of 150 head of cattle. The 1/5th portion, Lot #1, was given to Carmelite Trouillet Noel as the representative sister of Silvain Pierre Clause (*Chouchoute*) and Eulalie (Lalia) Fayard as heirs to Marguerite Clause. It appears that Isabelle Asmard was 81 when she died.

This property is located at the corner of Davis Avenue fronting the Beach, extending northward to the Bayou Portage marshlands.

Auguste Clause

Augustus was one of the slaves freed by the Last Will of the Widow Asmar. He was also singled out in the Will of Charles Asmar as being his agent counselor selected to oversee the care of Charles' freed slave Winny. The Will indicates the prior disposal of personal properties which very well could account for a separate arpent lot being given to August Clause (Close). The Will also stipulated a horse be given to August which would further indicate that August was already inhabiting some dwelling.

On his death bed in New Orleans, in 1850, Auguste Clause legalized his relationship with Laurette Mathurin with holy nuptials and named her his primary heir in his Will, declaring ownership of a lot in Pass Christian, measuring one arpent facing the Gulf and having a depth of 4 arpents, in addition to a lot in New Orleans, which was bequeathed to his God-child, Palmyre Lavigne. He also declared as legatees, his brothers; Jean Baptiste Clause, Vincente Asmard, and Charles "Bozes" Asmard; two nieces, Carmelite Trouillet and Eulalie Fayard; and a nephew, Silvain Pierre Clause, who was a child of his deceased sister, Marguerite Asmard. He named Ursin Lavigne as his Executor and honored a debt of 250

piasters to Calvin Bradley for his labors in building the house, kitchen, and out-buildings on his Pass Christian property.

Without further evidence to the contrary, it appears that the Auguste Clause lot may have been near the present athletic field on Second and Fleitas behind the Memorial Park. Not mentioned in his Will, which apparently was sold prior to his death, was his 1/5th ownership received by inheritance from Isabelle Asnard known as Lot #2, measuring 38'6" on the Gulf.

In 1849, Vincente Asnard had sold his 1/5th arpent lot to Anthony Fernandez. The 1850 Census shows that Vincente was listed as age 50 (actually, more like 60) and was living with his sister, Carmelite Noel and family. In 1850, Carmelite was 38 and had the following children: Marie, Rosalie, Margarite; and her sister, Lolie. No further mention is made of her brother, Silvain.

In 1849, Charles "Bozes" Asmar was reportedly in New Orleans and married to Helen Benoit.

In the 1850 Census, Jean Baptiste Clause was aged 53 and living on his property.

Celeste Ladner

Celeste, also known as Catalina, was born on April 23, 1793 with Momburn Carriere being her God-father. Momburn was a brother-in-law of the Widow Asnard.

As a declared heir of Charles Asmar, Celeste received property adjoining that of her brother, Eugene Ladner, each appearing to have a lot 85'6" fronting the Gulf by 40 arpents deep. At least in one case, William Lewis, acting Justice of the Peace, reported her as FWC, *Free Woman of Color*. Evidence seems to indicate that Celeste and Eugene were the offspring of Nicholas Christian Ladner of Cat Island.

She remained unmarried, or no husband was reported, and she declared to three illegitimate children classified as *Free Persons of Color*, who were the issue of the senior Benjamin Morgan and the senior Calvin Bradley. Celeste Ladner appears to have died in June 1855, and was buried at New Orleans, leaving a Will dated October 8, 1848.

To her children:

1-Benjamin Morgan received lot and house west of lot belonging to J.B. Toulme, occupied by Laurent Schultz. Also, she gave him a slave boy named Ramond, son of Celeste's slave woman, Matill.

2-Calvin Bradley received the next lot west of Virginia's, containing a new house under construction. Also, she gave him a slave boy named Robert, another son of Celeste's slave woman, Matill.

3-Virginia Bradley (married to Leon Lavigne) and her daughter, Leontine Lavigne, jointly the lot west of Benjamin Morgan's bequest. Also, she gave her the slave woman, Matill, with the provision that Virginia pay to each of her brothers a third portion to each for the added appraised value of Matill over the value of each of the two Negro boys.

Also, the one arpent Gulf front lot she acquired from Claude Ladner at Bear Point should be sold and equal shares given to each heir.

Also, her silver, furniture, and cattle be equally divided after payment of debts.

Executor: Pierre Saucier

Deed Book 2, pp 132-134, dated Feb 12, 1844

Celeste Ladnier purchased from Claude Ladnier (successor to the Widow Nicholas Ladnier Grant), a lot for \$100.

Description: One arpent front on Gulf by 30 Arpents deep. Consisting of one of the two most western arpents. One also sold that day to Benjamin Morgan. To the west were lands owned by the heirs of Carco. To the East by Louis Saucier.

Guardianship of Celeste Ladner, Case #49 dated

Nap Cassibry notes state she was declared *non compos mentis* on July 31, 1852.

Note: according to Nap Cassibry

She lived with daughter Virginia, son Benjamin was named guardian, but resigned guardianship when he left the state. Son Calvin was appointed, but Celeste continued to live with Virginia. Calvin stated, "that none of the (Ladner) relatives wanted her, would not claim her and had renounced her."

Note: Celeste is shown as age 50 living in dwelling with the LaVignes (Virginia Bradley)

Note: Celeste owned at least 3 slaves, Matill (Matilda), Ramond and Robert.

Benjamin Morgan

Married to Adelle Morin

Find Harrison County Minute Book 1, p.64, 4/19/1845 (not on P.64)

DB-2, pp 130,31 dated Feb 12, 1844

Benjamin Morgan purchased from Claude Ladnier (successor to the Widow Nicholas Ladnier Grant), a lot for \$100. (Benjamin would have been a Black nephew of White Claude Ladner)

Description: One arpent front on Gulf by 30 Arpents deep. Consisting of one of the two most western arpents. One also sold that day to Celeste Ladnier. To the west were lands owned by the heirs of Carco. To the East by Louis Saucier.

DB-3-2, p. 297, August 20, 1846

Antoine Bayard, Sr. sold for \$400, to Benjamin Morgan, a Mulatto slave by the name of Helen, age 54, with the stipulation that she be freed by emancipation.

Note: There were two Benjamin Morgans — father and son.

Calvin Bradley
died Dec 26, 1859
Married to Victoire Lecounte (Leenit)

Will, Estate #177

Executor: **Pierre Saucier** Saucier was appointed guardian to Aurora and Letitia Bradley, who were minors in 1860. He sold their property to satisfy Calvin Bradley's debts.

! ! !

It seems apparent that since the Charles Asmar Claim was directly centered within the original boundaries of the Town of Pass Christian, as it was chartered in 1848, that the new land developers in the area and the White political control, slowly tried to wrest the lands from Black ownership, even though many were Mulattoes and lighter skinned freed Blacks. The Census of 1820 only reported the Asmar and Benoit families. The 1850 census, was taken by Louis Fourniquet, a New York lawyer in practice with John Henderson, his brother-in-law. It was in 1836, that John Henderson, David Hughes and Charles Shipman purchased the vast area of Pass Christian consisting of 15,500 acres from the Widow of Edward Livingston for \$20,000. The next year, they divided the peninsula into three equal parts, with John Henderson becoming the predominant owner to the west and north of the Charles Asmar Claim. His land promotions and aggressive sales resulted in Louisianians and many new Americans from Europe and the northern states developing interest in the prime Asmar descendance ownership located in mid-town Pass Christian.

It has already been stated that John Brill, originating from Pennsylvania to settle at Pass Christian, attempted to block Bernard Benoit, Jr. from his legal estate. Between the years of 1830 and 1850 the population tripled. The 1850 Census shows that of the nearly 600 Pass Christian residents, only 165 were born in Mississippi, and even of that number all had not originated from the Gulf Coast. The DeLisle-Wolftown inhabitants always remained very close with the Asmar descendants because many were crossed by the same blood as evidenced by their adopted names.

Reference to the 1850s period was made by writer, William Peas, in the following memorandum. "There is a Sunday evening feature to Pass Christian which I should not pass over --- it is the appearance of the colored population. They turn out in great numbers for Sunday evening devotion, and that over, they crowd the sidewalk. They dress well, but fantastically, of course. No where could you see a more self-satisfied or contented body of human beings. They behave themselves with great decorum, and are treated with much courtesy by the whites. They are allowed to pass on without sneer or reflection, and we have frequently observed the "white folks", as they pass by in numbers, give them the sidewalk."

However, the Antebellum Period was coming to its end.

The Abolitionist movement resulted in reactionism by Southern politicians who were fearful of losing their slaves in addition to fear of slave uprisings. Bleak days followed for many of the Free Persons of Color and even worse for those who remained in Slavery. Besides “Black Code” laws being enacted in state legislatures, there were many towns and cities that added on their own interpretations. Pass Christian passed the following ordinance.

Ordinance of 1858

The 1858 town ordinances regulated the free Blacks as well as slaves.

Slaves and Free Blacks could not supervise property for more than 15 days duration without full responsibility by the White owner of the property.

No unlawful assembly of Blacks allowed.

A free Black in charge of property could not own a gun or weapon without permission by the Mayor.

A night time Curfew was established with punishment of 39 lashes if disobeyed

Public worship was regulated

Private dances required a Mayor's permit

Could not gamble or drink or purchase liquor

Assault and battery against a White was punishable with up to 39 lashes

White fraternization was punishable by a fine and or jail