Archives may have the answers to ancestral queries

By GUY COATES
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What did your great-great grand pappy do in the war? Did he turn out to be a horse thief or a hero? You may be surprised at just what you can find by just a telephone call or a visit to the Louisiana State Archives — even if you're a Yankee.

"We got a letter from a baron the other day seeking information on the Baron de la Carondelet," said Al Graham, one of the archives researchers. "He was tracing kinship with Carondelet, who was a governor when France ruled the state. We sent him some information."

You don't need a blue-blooded ancestor to find help at the archives, the depository of all state official documents dating back to the early 18th Century. There's a wealth of information on residents who served the Confederacy in the Civil War. A large number of the survivors, struggling financially for the rest of their lives, applied for pensions from the state. Those records are preserved.

If someone in your direct line made application, you can get background information written — in many cases — in his own hand: date and place of birth, war record, including injury or wound, number of children and their ages, and so on. We get probably 10 or 12 calls a day and no telling how many letters from people tracing ancestors," Graham said. "We try to help. We can also give them the phone number and addresses of archives in other states for further traces. In the 19th Century a lot of people moved frequently from state to state. Some came here from the north after the Civil War."

"We've had them on display. Also in the safe are the records of the fourth extra legislative session of 1935, which was underway when Long was shot to death near the House chamber.

Some researchers now argue whether the assassin was Dr. Carl Weiss or one of Long's bodyguards who accidentally hit the governor while pumping bullets into the physician. Weiss supposedly was angry because Long was planning to gerrymander the doctor's relative out of a judge's seat in Opelousas.

"It's interesting reading about that session," Morris said. "The first act of business was to eulogize Long. The second was to pick his burial site. The third act of business was to gerrymander the judge out of his job."

Probably the most mysterious document in the safe is the 1790 Treaty of New York signed by George Washington. The treaty is some kind of agreement between the City of New York and the Creek Indian Nation, Morris said. The parchment is difficult to read.

"It came to us through litigation of some sort," Morris said. "It belongs to the Louisiana Supreme Court and is on loan to us."