French Root of Two Names Is Recalled

In the 17th and 18th centuries the family name of Bourbon led all the rest in Europe. Today in the Old South, Bourbon does not register as a family name but is a beverage of renown in Louisiana.

A few hundred years ago the King of France was the head of the House of Bourbon. There were two prominent branches of this family, the house of Conti and the House of Conde'. The latter name’s second vowel bore an accent in France, whereas in Louisiana the accented “e” has been transposed into an “ay” to read Conday, while the “i” in Conti in Louisiana has been changed to “y” to read Conty.

If you remember that magnificent canvas in oil by Jerome, you will recall Louis XIV standing on the first landing of the Grand Staircase at the Ambassador’s at Versailles. He is flanked above by exquisitely attired courtiers. Just below him the stooping figure of the Prince of Conde’ is mounting the marble steps, strewn with crowns of laurel. You can almost hear the historic conversation about to take place when the Prince of Conde apologizes to his Sovereign for his failure to stand erect while Louis XIV in response will say, “No one who has received so many laurel crowns should apologize for his stature.”

You also may remember that the status of the Conti family was greatly elevated in France when one of its members was appointed King of Poland.

On Saturday, July 27, 1974, a wedding was celebrated in the Church of the Children of Strangers of Isle Brevile at Melrose in the Cane River country. At least two names of famous 17th century families of France participated in these ceremonies. The bride was a member of the Conday family, as that name after 200 years in the Cane River country is spelled. It is an interesting fact that the Conde, or Conday, is on the mother’s side while the step-father of the bride’s father is of the Conti, or Conty, family.

Prince of Conde’

If you are interested in the careers of the 17th and 18th century Conde’s in France you will be exhilarated by accounts of the Prince of Conde’, cousin of Louis XIV. It was this prince who led the Protestant armies of France against the Catholic forces of the Crown, and even during the minority of Louis XIV, it was the Prince of Conde’ who commanded the revolutionary forces against the royal armies of his cousin, at once head of the House of Bourbon and King. Chantilly was the palatial property of the Conde’ family. That much I know, but I cannot say which descendants of the house of Conde came to Louisiana, although one finds the name frequently enough in the early records and for forty years I have claimed the friendship of the present Cane River Conday, whom we all know familiarly as “Fat Mat.”

Saxon’s Theory

I am especially sorry that Lyle Saxon did not survive into the 1970’s for I know he would have joined me with enthusiasm in casting about for invitations to the Isle Breville wedding of July 27. Although never industrious as a genealogist, Lyle was always fascinated by the presence in the Cane River country of members of one branch of the Yetoyer family whom he believed to be descendants of the Bourbon-Hapsburg family, as revealed by family portraits of the old days and the personal contours of the face of descendants still living in the lower reaches of the Cane River country.

There is another reason why Lyle and I would have especially liked to be present at the Saturday wedding and that is because of the years that Lyle and I occupied Yucca House in the garden of Melrose. Prior to Lyle’s restoration of Yucca in the early 1930’s a portion of the old colonial home had been occupied by the last two surviving slaves, Aunt Jane and Uncle Israel. At the same time, another portion of the old residence including what had been later converted into a chapel on one side and a dressing room and bath on another, had been occupied by Josephine Monnett and her children. For those who are familiar with Lyle’s novel, “Children of Strangers,” it will be recalled that it was Josephine Monnett whom Lyle used as model for the heroine of his story that turned out to be one of the best regional pieces of fiction in our time.

Now it turns out that Josephine Monnett in real life was also a kinsman of the bride of the July 27 wedding. Thus we have assembled for one single festive occasion countless descendants of early Louisiana pioneers and bearers of names of distinguished families from the colonial period down to the present.

The de Meziere Family

I am looking forward with eagerness to receipt of a list of the names of members of the respective contracting parties at the wedding as well as an enumeration of the names of other members of the community who were present at the celebration of the nuptials. I have no doubt that there may be names of relatives or friends of the contracting parties who have long lived in the Cane River country who in one way or another may also be bearers of proud names of ancient France. At the moment, for example, I am thinking of a family which may, in the present generation, spell its name as Meziere. In France under the Bourbon kings, the name Meziere was spelled de Meziere. Students of early Louisiana history will remember the bearer of such a name as having held a vital post in Natchitoches as a successor to the regime of Saint Denis. I suppose that most tourists to Natchitoches hear about or make a pilgrimage to the Old Leme House. It will be remembered that this property once had a connection with the de Meziere family in Louisiana, while it is less widely recognized that a sister of one of these de Meziere’s in Louisiana had attained a unique position in France by what is said to have been a morganatic marriage to a member of the house of Orleans, relatives of the King.

Everybody finds enchantment in Louisiana, but perhaps there is greater color in every aspect of life of yesterday and today if we pause long enough to tie in those lines in the tapestry of our lives stretching from way back yonder to now.

PARDO PROTEST

PHOENIX, Ariz. (AP) — A young city prosecutor was docked a day’s pay and suspended for three days for refusing to prosecute a drag racing charge in protest to President Ford’s pardon of Richard M. Nixon.