

The Dimitry Family of Fabled New Orleans

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The Dimitry Family of New Orleans is one of the oldest and most distinguished families not only of Louisiana, but also the Old South. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, world attention has been directed to this fabled city. It is no exaggeration to say that perhaps no other family in the history of Greek immigration to the New World has had as much documented and written about it as the Dimitry Family. Recalling some of this distinguished family's accomplishments can only underscore

New Orleans' international renown.

The Dragon family in Louisiana began with Michael Dragon's arrival to the French Colony. Dragon was a native of Athens, born there in 1739. All that's recalled of his family is that his mother's name was Clino Helen. This man's original Greek surname seems to have been akin to Dracos. The exact date of Michael Dragon's arrival to North America is not known. The first mention of Dragon appears in 1763 at the end of the French and Indiana Wars when Spain obtained Louisiana. The young Greek arrived prior to

that date, since a surviving warrant dated 1764 identifies him as a French militia officer.

The warrant appears to have done Dragon no real service, however. He entered the Spanish colonial militia as a private in an artillery company attached to the regiment of Colonel Antonio Guilberto Maxent. As a private Dragon participated in the victorious campaign of Don Fernando de Galvez, Governor of Louisiana, against the English in west Florida during the American Revolutionary War. Dragon served in three campaigns as second sergeant of his company, and was

subsequently promoted to first sergeant, eventually being appointed lieutenant by Baron de Carondelet. Dragon's appointment was subsequently confirmed by commission of King Charles III of Spain.

In many historical accounts Michael Dragon is referred to as "Don Miguel Dragon." This title is derived from his military service and from the family-held portrait which shows Dragon in full-dress Spanish uniform with sword. Dragon married Françoise Chauvin Beaulieu de Monplaisir

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The couple had one daughter, Marianne Celeste Dragon, born in New Orleans on March 1, 1777.

Astounding as it may sound, portraits of both Michael Dragon and his daughter Marianne Celeste can still be seen by anyone.

"The earliest identified professional artist residing and working in Louisiana was José Salazar. Originally from Mérida on the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, Salazar and his family moved to Spanish-ruled New Orleans around 1782. Already an accomplished artist, he received numerous commissions to paint the portraits of prominent families and community leaders... The Louisiana State Museum has a notable selection of Salazar's portraits, consisting of the group portrait of the Family of Doctor Joseph Montegut; the life-size signed portrait of Andrés Almonester y Roxas; a pair of portraits from the school of Salazar of Michel Dragon and his daughter Marianne Celeste Dragon; and a pendant pair of portraits of Ignacio de Balderes and Senora Ignacio de Balderes and Child from the school of Salazar. The museum organized and exhibition of Salazar's paintings, 'José Salazar: Louisiana's Eighteenth Century Portrait Artist, in 1981' (lsm.crt.state.la.us)."

Andrea Dimitry was born on the island of Hydra in 1775. Andrea was the son of Nicolas Dimitry and Ephrosine Antonia. In existing documentation, Andreas' last name is said to be alternately "Demetrios" and in other source material, "Drussakis." Andrea Dimitry is also said to have been originally named "Andrea Drussakis Demetrios Apolocorum." All accounts agree that Andreas Dimitry's ancestors were of Macedonian origin, having been among the leaders of a colony of Albanians and Macedonians. In the 17th Century, this colony settled on the Acropolis of Hydra, seeking refuge from the invading Ottoman Turks.

Andrea immigrated to Louisiana in the spring of 1799, when it was still a Spanish Crown colony. At some point, Dimitry met his compatriot, Dragon. How many other Greek immigrants or merchants were in New Orleans at this time is unclear. What is most obvious is that these two men struck nearly an instant friendship. This can best be judged by the fact that on October 29, 1799 Andrea Dimitry married Marianne Céleste Dragon (d. April 22, 1856), and it is from their ten children that the extended family line springs. Noting the names of these children (and their order of birth) helps to understand later choices of names for several generations of descendants. The following names are recorded:



Don Miguel Dragon

Ephrosine Dimitry (1800-1822)
Manuella Aimee Dimitry (1802-1826)
Alexander Dimitry (1805-1883); Constar
tine Andrea Dimitry (b. 1807); J.B. Migua
Dragon Dimitry (1809-1873); Angelinc
Cline Dimitry (1811-1882); Mari
Grancoise Athenais Dimitry (b. 1813)
Mathilde Isabelle Theophanie Dimitry (1

κ to the Revolutionary War

1816); Nicholas Dimitry (b. 1815); and Antonie Marie Dimitry (b. 1820).

While Marianne Céleste Dragon's mother's side of the family is always referred to as French Canadian, the actual genealogy, interestingly, was more complex. Published accounts only offer the vague observation that a remote de Monplaisir ancestor "had taken for a wife an Indian." Having said that, this does not explain why the ancestry of the Dimitry/Dragon union is referred to in later sources as being of "Greek and Alabama Indian ancestry (politicalgraveyard.com)."

In 1800, Napoleon controlled Spain, and in a secret treaty, he forced Spain to cede Louisiana back to France. The Louisiana Purchase took place in 1803. When the colony was transferred to the United States, Andrea Dimitry became an ardent Republican. Enlisting on December 16, he served two years and 25 days in the War of 1812 and fought with distinction during the battle of New Orleans. United States War Department Records show Dimitry was a private in Captain Frio Delabastris' companies (Second Cavaliers, Louisiana Militia).

By all accounts, he also became a highly prosperous businessman. At the time of Andrea Dimitry's death (March 1, 1852), the Times Delta of New Orleans ran a long obituary, which describes some of the even-

ts leading up to his burial in the Dimitry tomb at New Orleans' St. Louis Cemetery I:

"A detachment of the Washington Artillery appeared at the cottage, with a number of officers of other commands. The cannon's roar, and volleys of musketry announced the entombing of the veteran, the rites of which were solemnized by several clergymen. The officers and crew of the Greek vessel in port attended the funeral in a body, and the flags of the vessel were suspended at half-mast during the day. The United States Government awarded Andrea Dimitry 1,000 acres of land for his valiant services rendered during the War of 1812. The land was situated on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi in Harrison County. Andrea Dimitry built a villa and called the place Dimitry Point. It stands today as one of the show places on the Gulf Coast."

Andrea Dimitry had lived to see his large family honored for their public service and cultural achievements. Given the complexity of the extended Dimitry family in the history of the United States, we will only focus on one branch of that elusive clan for our purposes here.

The above is the first of a two-part story. Readers interested in contacting Mr. Frangos can e-mail him at greekwite@yahoo.com.