

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Chalmette

Hurricane Katrina was devastating to St. Bernard Parish, and the recent 2010 census results show just how bad the parish was decimated. Only 35,897 residents now call St. Bernard home, down from 67,000 in the year 2000. That's a population that has plummeted to close to fifty percent of what it was just ten years before.

Chalmette, Louisiana, is the largest town in St. Bernard Parish and the location of the historic Battle of New Orleans, where United States forces under Major General Andrew Jackson faced off against the British in the final battle of the War of 1812. Forces led by brevet Lieutenant General Sir Edward Pakenham were soundly defeated that January 1815, and the battlefield is today preserved as a national monument. The military Chalmette National Cemetery is adjacent to the scene of the conflict, the Chalmette plantation.

Chalmette was named after plantation owner Ignace Martin de Lino de Chalmette, whose surname is derived from the French word "*chalmette*" for pasture land or fallow land (especially in a mountainous area). And there are few places in the world considered less mountainous than St. Bernard Parish.

Ignace Martin de Lino de Chalmette was a wealthy and respected citizen, a man of the most distinguished ancestry, whose wife was the daughter of the Marquis de Vaugine. Chalmette's great-grandfather was René-Louis Chartier de Lotbinière, a French-Canadian poet who was granted a *seigneurie* in New France in 1672, becoming Chief Councillor of the Sovereign Council of New France two years later (a post King Louis XIV of France granted him for life).

René-Louis' mother was Élisabeth d'Amours de Clignancourt, whose father was Chief Councillor to King Henri IV of France at the Grand Châtelet, Paris. In 1651, at the age of ten, René-Louis arrived with his parents in New France, and was educated there at the Jesuit's College in Québec City (founded in 1635 under Samuel de Champlain). *Porte de Clignancourt* is home to the most famous flea market in Paris, known to everyone as *Les Puces* ("The Fleas"). It covers over

seventeen acres and is the largest antique market in the world, receiving between 120,000 to 180,000 visitors each weekend.

In 1678, de Lotbinière married Marie Madeleine Lambert du Mont in Québec City. His sister married Philippe de Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil, Governor-General of New France from 1703 to 1725, making de Lotbinière the uncle of the last Governor-General of New France, Pierre François de Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil-Cavagnal.

Ignace Martin de Lino de Chalmette was born August 23, 1755, in New Orleans, the child of Louis Xavier Martin de Lino de Chalmette and Magdelaine Marguerite Broutin, daughter of Ignace François Broutin, royal engineer in the colony and commandant of the Natchez Post. Magdelaine Marguerite Broutin was also the grandmother of the celebrated Madame Pontalba.

François Martin de Lino de Chalmette, the grandfather of Ignace Martin de Lino de Chalmette, became *procureur du roi* and in 1712, married Angélique Chartier de Lotbinière, daughter of René-Louis and Marie Madeleine Lambert.

Despite his impeccable pedigree, the battle fought on his plantation's land cost Ignace Martin de Lino de Chalmette his very life. As the British drew ever and ever closer to the scene of the battle, Ignace and his family were forced to abandon their stately mansion. And there wasn't all that much time to move the contents to safety. One of his granddaughters left behind a narrative of the terror of that eventful day, when the devoted slaves hastened through Jackson's military lines carrying whatever they could of cherished family heirlooms, crystal, family plate and other belongings — only a small part, however, of the grandiose furnishings of the family home.

De Lino de Chalmette found refuge in a small house on Bourbon Street, between Conti and Bienville. Less than a month after the battle, on February 2nd, he rode down to his deserted edifice, only to discover that it had been committed to the torch. At 59 years of age, he felt he was too old to repair his shattered fortunes. His loss was simply irreparable. Within a few short days, on February 10, Ignace Martin de Lino de Chalmette died and was laid to rest in the St. Louis Cemetery.

As for Ignace's father-in-law, the Marquis de Vaugine, he had some years before established an indigo plantation to the south of St. Martinville. A 1773 inventory made of his "mansion house" revealed an incredibly luxurious lifestyle. Furnishings included silver, crystal, *faience* (a variety of Majolica ware also known as Fayenza, named after a small Italian town engaged in its manufacture) and furniture carved of walnut and mulberry. Perhaps some of these family heirlooms made their way into the Chalmette's plantation home. Some pieces were saved, and some had to be left behind.

Ignace Martin de Lino de Chalmette relinquished his treasured home as the stage setting for a significant American battle. The engagement was small compared to European contemporary conflicts, but it was exceedingly important to Americans in general and Andrew Jackson in particular. The news of victory, one recalled, "came upon the country like a clap of thunder in the clear azure vault of the firmament, and traveled with electromagnetic velocity, throughout the confines of the land." And it helped propel Andrew Jackson to the White House.

Many others made sacrifices, as well. Jacques Phillippe Villeré (who in 1784 married Jeanne Henriette de Fazende, daughter of Gabriel de Fazende, who owned a plantation seven miles downriver from New Orleans in Saint Bernard Parish) fought in the Battle of New Orleans, commanding the First Division of the Louisiana Militia. His men stood firm, assigned to the area near Lake Borgne and Bayou Dupré, as the British army approached the environs of New Orleans. The Villeré Plantation, *Conseil*, was overrun by the British troops, and his plantation home was destroyed. In 1816 Jacques Villeré went on to become the second Governor of the State of Louisiana, and the first Louisiana native to attain that office.

But as for the man who gave up his beloved residence for the strategic battlefield utilized to defend his city, we should all remember a man named Chalmette.

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