



Report Number: JR0020
GMP Ancestor: n/a
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Related Codes: n/a

Purpose: To present a history of Marengo Plantation

Introduction:

Marengo Plantation was one of two plantations on which Henry Johnson placed a large number of the GU272. It was located on the west side of Bayou Maringouin directly above Jesse Batey's plantation, later called West Oak. In the latter part of 1843, Johnson relocated most of the Marengo enslaved to his plantation in Ascension, later called Chatham, leaving a few of the GU272 on Marengo. Additionally, Johnson purchased four of the GU272 belonging to the estate of Jesse Batey and relocated them from Terrebonne Parish to Marengo. The presence of the GU272 on Marengo Plantation, therefore, makes it an important part of the history of the GU272.

Discussion:

The genesis of Marengo Plantation can be traced back to a partnership entered into by Lemuel Tanner, Henry Michel Thibodaux, Jesse Batey, and Henry Claiborne Thibodaux through which they acquired public lands under the Preemption Act of 1834. This was an act that allowed persons who possessed and cultivated lands as of 1833 to purchase that land from the federal government at a nominal price.¹ After individuals filed a claim swearing that they possessed and cultivated the land, they were allowed to purchase it (up to 160 acres) at \$1.25 per acre. In some instances, speculators would purchase those sections from the claimants, and likely give them a little extra for their efforts. Under this scheme, the five men acquired vast acreage of mostly unimproved lands in Terrebonne, Pointe Coupee, and Iberville Parishes.

In 1835, the five partners agreed to sell their holdings and distribute the net proceeds among themselves. Three years later, however, they still held the land in common.² In another attempt to dissolve the partnership, they drew up an agreement to partition the sections among themselves. Henry Michel Thibodaux was allocated Sections 69 to 75 in Township 7 South, Range 9 East, in Iberville Parish, and Sections 11, 12, and 52 to 55 in Township 5 South, Range 8 East, in Pointe Coupee Parish. A few months later, in September of 1838, Thibodaux sold these 13

sections, which contained a total of 2,214 superficial acres, to Henry Johnson, who was then residing on his plantation in St. James Parish. The sales price was \$11,070.³ The seven sections in Iberville Parish would form Marengo Plantation.

Henry Johnson was serving in Congress in Washington, D.C., at the time he purchased the land from Thibodaux. When the session ended, his return to Louisiana was delayed. In a letter to his brother, William Johnson, in Mississippi, he wrote from New Orleans that he had not yet visited his plantation on Bayou Maringouin where he had placed a number of “hands” in early December of 1838.⁴

Those hands were 61 of the 130 enslaved passengers on board the *Katharine Jackson*, which arrived in New Orleans on the 6th of December 1838.⁵ They comprised roughly half of the 272 enslaved persons purchased by Johnson and Jesse Batey from the Maryland Jesuits in June of 1838. They were the second group to arrive in Louisiana, the first having been sent to Batey’s plantation in Terrebonne Parish. The remaining 69 passengers belonged to Batey and all but three were sent to his plantation on Bayou Maringouin adjoining Henry Johnson’s plantation.

Prior to Johnson’s return from Washington, D.C., Batey along with W.J. Bogan and Johnson’s overseer, who is not named, visited the land on Bayou Maringouin to ascertain the correct boundaries. In an 1850 lawsuit over a boundary dispute, Bogan described what the area looked like in 1839:

*The whole Plantation of Dr. Beattie & of Gov. Johnson, the Deft., was in the woods, with the exception of a road in front, this road was a mere riding path on horse back through the cane break in front of the place. . . . All the clearing & improvements on the lot in dispute, & on the other parts of the plantation was made by Deft.*⁶

That lawsuit was over two tracts of land located above Johnson’s plantation. Much of what is known about the early history of Marengo is found in this lawsuit along with information provided by Johnson in four letters written to his brother between 1839 and 1843. In the above-mentioned 1839 letter, Johnson wrote:

I am informed, however, that on that place, that I now have in cultivation more cotton, corn[,] pumpkin etc. than the hands there can save. All who have [seen?] the place speak in high terms of it, and consider my prospects there very flattering.

In a footnote to Johnson’s letter of November 1840, he wrote:

*I expect to plant from two to three hundred acres of cotton on Maringouin next year, and you will do me a particular favor by forwarding to me to the care of Messrs. A.T. & J. Leftwich, Merchants, Plaquemine, Parish Iberville, who will pay the freight, as much good cotton seed, in due time, as may be convenient for you & necessary for me.*⁷

During the time the GU272 were laboring in the cotton fields on Marengo, Johnson was residing on his new plantation in Ascension Parish. He wrote from there in October of 1842:

John N. Dillahunty proposed a few months ago to place his hands on my plantation on Maringouin, with the view of making a crop with me next year, but has not written me for upwards of three months. When did you see, or hear from him, and what is he doing? I had a splendid prospect for an abundant crop of cotton on Maringouin, until three or four weeks ago, when it was much injured by a storm, which was confined to the immediate neighborhood. The storm & rainy season which followed it, will probably shorten my crop there 100 Bales. I shall send a few additional hands from here to-morrow, to aid in pressing cotton on that place.⁸

By July of 1843, Johnson had soured on his Bayou Maringouin plantation. In consequence of the low price of cotton, he decided to switch to sugar on his Ascension Parish plantation. He had purchased a sugar mill and engine and was constructing a sugar house. His expenses, he lamented, would be “considerable.” As a result, he was considering withdrawing all his hands from his cotton plantation on Bayou Maringouin the next year. He wrote his brother, “I now regret that I ever established that place.”⁹ Precisely when the transfer of Johnson’s enslaved from Maringouin to Ascension took place is not known, but it was likely around the end of 1843, as discussed below.

W.J. Bogan, who had been living on the disputed tracts above Johnson’s Maringouin plantation since 1839, provides the earliest details about the plantation’s operations. He testified in 1855 that the gin was built in 1840 or 1841, a corn mill was there in 1842 or 1843, and a rail fence was put around the plantation in 1842 or 1843. The rails were made of oak and cottonwood.¹⁰ All of these improvements were made at the time the GU272 were living on the plantation.

After the GU272 were relocated, Dr. F.M. Hereford lived on the plantation from about 1846 to 1848. According to Bogan, he repaired the fence in front of the plantation, but when he left, the fence was in bad condition and cattle would cross the bayou when the water was high.¹¹

Johnson’s nephew, Joseph Johnson, served as his uncle’s agent on the plantation. He testified that in 1848 he was approached by Stokes Pennington Ivy, the plaintiff in the suit, to rent the plantation. They signed an agreement and discussed terms. Ivy failed on all of them, according to Joseph, and when Ivy delivered the place in January of 1849, it was in a much worse condition than when he took possession of it. Part of the gin house had fallen and one negro cabin was burned. Ivy had torn down fences allowing the cattle to roam loose and destroy the cane. Ivy did not plant the quantity of the crops he agreed to plant and he laid down canes in mats improperly, causing them to spoil. Joseph estimated the damages at about \$5,000. He testified that at the end of 1848, he allowed Ivy to remain on the property because he said he had no where to move his family. Ivy was planning on building a house on his land next to Johnson’s plantation.¹²

Another of Johnson’s nephews, Isaac J. Stockett, testified that he first went on the place in August of 1849. The reason for his visit was that he had previously rented it and wanted to see the condition. He had a contract from Henry and Joseph Johnson. Ivy asked to remain until Stockett

moved in, which occurred in October of 1849. Stockett testified that he found everything on the plantation in very bad order. The dwelling house was not fit to live in and the cotton press was down. Stockett had the mill repaired and hired Irishmen to clean the ditches. He had a view of cultivating cane, but there was no sugar house and no means of taking off a crop of sugar. Early in 1850, Stockett said he made the negroes clean the boards and the old shed around the gin house, which was built of hewn timber posts put in the ground. It was getting old and was very much decayed, the screw of the press having rotted down. Stockett had no overseer.¹³

Also testifying about the plantation were J.G. Harrell and John F. Jackson. Harrell said that he resided on the plantation for two months in 1848. He left at the beginning of 1849, but visited frequently in 1849. Jackson testified that the cattle usually stayed on the west side of Bayou Maringouin, but Ivy would drive them on the east side because they gave him trouble. Some drowned in crossing during the high water.¹⁴

After being evicted in 1850, Ivy filed the above-mentioned suit later that year. Ivy won his case, but Johnson appealed to the State Supreme Court. No further record could be found and Ivy was deceased by 1855.

The first reference to the plantation's name Marengo is found in an 1851 mortgage by Henry Johnson and his wife to the Citizens Bank of Louisiana. A few days earlier, Thomas F. Mulledy, the Jesuit priest from Georgetown University who sold him and Batey the GU272, had released the mortgage on Johnson's Bayou Maringouin plantation, which had served as part of the security in Johnson's slave purchase.¹⁵ The Citizens Bank mortgage described it as a sugar plantation on the west side of Bayou Maringouin known as the "Marengo Plantation."¹⁶ Marengo was the name of the famous war horse of Napoleon Bonaparte that was named after the 1800 Battle of Marengo at Spinette Marengo in Italy. It is also a shade of gray and a dark brown fabric with white speckles. Several places in the United States are named Marengo.

Johnson held Marengo until January of 1854 when he sold it to Charles H. Davis and Joseph V. Duralde of West Baton Rouge Parish. It was then described as 33x40 arpents on the west side of Bayou Maringouin containing 1,380 superficial arpents, bounded above by William Mathews and below by Washington and John Barrow. A second tract containing 618 superficial arpents in the rear was purchased by Johnson from the State of Louisiana in June of 1852. The sales price was \$75,000.¹⁷ Three years later, in June of 1857, Johnson foreclosed on Davis and Duralde and purchased the plantation and slaves at a sheriff's sale.¹⁸ On the same day, Johnson sold the plantation to Joseph V. Duralde and Henry A. Castle.¹⁹

Two years later, in May of 1859, the sheriff seized and sold the plantation at auction once again. The buyer was William J. Bogan, who had testified in Ivy's lawsuit against Johnson.²⁰ Bogan died in 1867 and two years later, the plantation was seized and sold at auction. This time, there were no buyers. Citizens Bank, which still held the mortgage, became the owner.²¹ Douglas C. Montan purchased Marengo from the bank in 1870 and also acquired the neighboring Key Plantation. He held them until his death in 1896.²²



Marengo Plantation is depicted on this 1858 map in pink as belonging to Duralde & Castle. West Oak Plantation is marked in blue belonging to Woolfolk & Patrick. Source: Map of the parishes of Pointe Coupee, West Baton Rouge and Iberville: including parts of the parishes of St. Martins and Ascension, Louisiana, Norman B. Leventhal Map Center Collection (<https://collections.leventhalmap.org/search/commonwealth:3f463285g>)

The Enslaved

No records or lists of the enslaved on Marengo from 1838 through 1843 exist. The GU272's presence on the plantation, however, can be inferred from the previously mentioned two sources—the 1839 letter written by Henry Johnson to his brother and the arrival of the *Katharine Jackson* in New Orleans. The dates of the two events, December of 1838, coincide exactly. It is also noteworthy that Jesse Batey placed all but three of the *Katharine Jackson* passengers on his plantation immediately next to Johnson's. As a result, these GU272 families lived and worked in close proximity to each other for at least five years before Johnson moved his group to Ascension Parish.

Records further indicate that Johnson moved his slaves from one plantation to the other as needed. In October of 1842, he wrote that he would likely send some of his enslaved from Ascension to Maringouin to help with cotton pressing.

While no church records of the enslaved at Maringouin have been found, baptismal records for Ascension Parish do exist. In fact, the priest from Donaldsonville made several trips to Johnson's plantation to baptize the enslaved there. References to three potential GU272 individuals appear in the baptismal records between 1840 and 1843—Susanne/Suzanne, Brigitte, and Saly.²³ They can be identified as two sisters, Susan Butler (GMP-201) and Bridget Butler (GMP-202), and Sally Yorkshire (GMP-284). Susan and Bridget Butler had married non-GU272 men, so were likely sent to Ascension where their husbands lived and worked. Sally Yorkshire, referred to as Old Sally in some records, may have been a maternal relative of the two women.

The next appearance of one of the *Katharine Jackson* passengers in the Ascension church records is in 1844. Ferdinand, believed to be Ferdinand Hill (GMP-174), served as sponsor to three of the ten children baptized on 9 January 1844.²⁴ Two months later, Byloc, believed to be Nelly Blacklock (GMP-051), also served as a sponsor.²⁵ Subsequent baptismal records list numerous other passengers from the *Katharine Jackson*.

As previously mentioned, Johnson did not transfer all of the *Katharine Jackson* passengers from Maringouin to Ascension. He left behind three relatives of the Hawkins family, who were numerous on Batey's Maringouin plantation. Additionally, he purchased four of the GU272 slaves from Jesse Batey's estate in Terrebonne Parish and transferred them to Maringouin in 1851. Included among the 20 enslaved persons in the 1854 sale of Marengo from Johnson to Davis and Duralde are the following identifiable GU272:²⁶

Peter, age 50	Peter Adams (GMP-310)
Nelly, age 47	Nelly Hawkins (GMP-003), wife of Peter Adams
Rutha, age 23	Rutha Adams (GMP-007), daughter of Peter Adams and Nelly Hawkins
Frederick, age 19	Frederick (GMP-287)
Edward, age 19	Ned Harrison (GMP-033)
Charles, age 17	Charles Mahoney (GMP-232)
Robert, age 53	Robert Mahoney (GMP-222)

Of particular note is that Johnson purchased Bob, age 65, from Batey's estate for \$5, possibly to keep him together with his son Charles. Robert's actual age was somewhere in between. The 1857 sale of Marengo notes that Robert had died.²⁷

Peter and Nelly Adams remained in the Maringouin area after emancipation and their daughter Rutha left descendants there. Frederick, Edward or Ned Harrison, and Charles Mahoney appear in the Marengo Plantation sales through 1859, but cannot be positively identified after that date.

Endnotes:

1. Twenty-Third Congress, Sess. I, Ch. 54, p. 678, approved 19 June 1834, and Twenty-First Congress, Sess. I, Ch. 208, pp. 420-421, approved 29 May 1830.

2. Conveyance Book G, pp. 292-293, #112A/10936, Terrebonne Parish Clerk of Court, Houma, La.
3. Conveyance Book S, #289, Iberville Parish Clerk of Court, Plaquemine, La.
4. Letter dated 24 April 1839, William Johnson papers, Mississippi Department of Archives & History, Jackson, Miss.
5. 6 December 1838, Manifest of Negroes, Mulattoes, and Persons of Color, taken on board the Katharine Jackson of Georgetown, New Orleans, Louisiana, Slave Manifests, 1807-1806 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA; Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010.
6. Stokes Pennington Ivy vs. Henry Johnson, 6th Judicial District Court, Suit #399, filed 21 December 1850, Iberville Parish Clerk of Court, Plaquemine, La.
7. Letter dated 3 November 1840, William Johnson papers, Mississippi Department of Archives & History, Jackson, Miss.
8. Letter dated 2 October 1842, William Johnson papers, Mississippi Department of Archives & History, Jackson, Miss.
9. Letter dated 26 July 1843, William Johnson papers, Mississippi Department of Archives & History, Jackson, Miss.
10. Stokes Pennington Ivy vs. Henry Johnson, 6th Judicial District Court, Suit #399, filed 21 December 1850, Iberville Parish Clerk of Court, Plaquemine, La.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Conveyance Book V, #479, Iberville Parish Clerk of Court, Plaquemine, La.
16. Mortgage Book 3, entry #116, Iberville Parish Clerk of Court, Plaquemine, La.
17. Conveyance Book 3, Part 2, #291, Iberville Parish Clerk of Court, Plaquemine, La.
18. Conveyance Book 5, #71, copy book pages 70-72, Iberville Parish Clerk of Court, Plaquemine, La.
19. Conveyance Book N, p. 74, East Baton Rouge Parish Clerk of Court, Baton Rouge, La.
20. Conveyance Book 6, vol. 1, #179, Iberville Parish Clerk of Court, Plaquemine, La.

21. Conveyance Book 9, #355, Iberville Parish Clerk of Court, Plaquemine, La.
22. Conveyance Book 10, #187, copy book pp. 301-304, Iberville Parish Clerk of Court, Plaquemine, La.
23. Registre des Baptemes, Mariages, et Enterrements des Personnes de Couleur, 1832-1843, Register 9, pp. 177, 180, 205, 219, and 230, Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge Archives, Baton Rouge, La.
24. Registre des Baptemes, Mariages, et Enterrements des Personnes de Couleur, 1832-1843, Register 9, p. 230, Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge Archives, Baton Rouge, La.
25. Fabrique de l'Eglise de la Paroisse d'Ascension; Baptisms of Persons of Color, Slave and Free, 1818-1825), Register 19, p. 26, Diocese of Baton Rouge Catholic Archives, Baton Rouge, La.
26. Conveyance Book 3, Part 2, #291, Iberville Parish Clerk of Court, Plaquemine, La.
27. Conveyance Book , #71, copy book pp. 70-72, Iberville Parish Clerk of Court, Plaquemine, La.