

LEONCE P. BORDELON DIARIES

Mss. 4952

Inventory

Compiled by
Luana Henderson

Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections
Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library
Louisiana State University Libraries
Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University

2006
2014

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SUMMARY

Size	15 v.
Geographic Locations	Avoyelles Parish, La., New Orleans, La.
Inclusive Dates	1876-1931, 2005, 2007
Bulk Dates	1888-1900,
Languages	English, French.
Summary	Diaries reflect Louisiana plantation life in Avoyelles Parish during the late 19 th and early 20 th centuries.
Arrangement	Volumes retained in original order, there is no chronological or sequential order.
Access Restrictions	None
Copyright	Physical rights and copyright are retained by the LSU Libraries
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BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE

Leonce Paul Bordelon, a prominent planter of Avoyelles Parish, La., was born on March 15, 1860, the youngest of ten children, to Leandre Bordelon and Celanire Rabalais of Avoyelles Parish, La. At the age of 17 years, he enrolled at Saint Vincent College at Cape Girardeau, Mo., and after two years received a degree in Commerce. As an active member in the community, he served on the Board of Trustees of the local school and ran for public office. In 1891, he married Amanda Coco, and together they had eight children: Jules, Grace, Basil, Leonce, Jr. Yvette, Mary Dae, Arthemise and James. Basil died as an infant. The family resided at Long Bridge on Bayou des Glaises, La., where he operated a cotton and corn plantation. Amanda died in 1906 at the age of 39, leaving Leonce with seven children. Members of Amanda's family raised the youngest two, Arthemise, age two and James, three months; the other children remained with Leonce. He never remarried and died April 12, 1932; he was buried at Moreauville Cemetery, Moreauville, La. Leonce Paul Bordelon, III, a resident of Houma, La. and grandson of Leonce and Amanda, organized and edited his grandfather's diaries. He has also researched the genealogy of the Bordelon family of Avoyelles Parish.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

Diaries of Leonce P. Bordelon reflect Louisiana plantation life in rural Avoyelles Parish during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Entries pertain to plantation operations, the effects of climate on those operations, social activities, personal relationships, illness, and political elections. Leonce Paul Bordelon, III organized the diaries chronologically and provided photocopies of selected entries, letters and poems in his compilation, *The Leonce Project*.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

Series I. Diaries, 1876-1932.

Most diaries entries [some in French] are brief, and some are lengthy with detailed descriptions of flooding and illnesses. These notations relate primarily to the production of cotton and corn, weather conditions, flooding, cotton prices and general plantation operations. They also report on social activities, illnesses and political elections, as well as illustrate Leonce Bordelon's love his family and his interest in his community. Included in the diaries are drafts of correspondence and poems, some signed by Leonce P. Bordelon.

Note: Diaries were not kept chronologically. Diaries are described by subject matter, and the location of entries is indicated by the volume and page number, ie. 9.26 is volume 9, page 26.

1. *Agriculture:* Diaries pertain primarily to plantation operations, focusing on the production of cotton, corn and hay, with a few entries on the sugarcane crop, Nov. 1911 [8.8-10], Nov. 2, 1911 [9.137]. Bordelon tells of raising livestock, buying seed, planting and harvesting crops. He reports on the condition of his crops, work done by laborers, and cotton bales sold. He provides lists of livestock July 2, 1890 [12.7], Oct. 1, 1903 [7-backcover] and farmhands working his fields in 1878 [1.1], 1911 [8.9]. He also notes the wage arrangements with a farm worker, ca. 1876 [1-18], an agreement for leasing land to tenant farmers, 1876 [1.9], 1881 [2.1], a list of tenants for 1904 [9.11], and farmhands leaving to work in sugarcane fields, Nov. 1, 1908 [9.172]. Bordelon gives frequent updates to the condition of his crops, particularly cotton, discussing the effects of the weather and insect damage. The yearly appearance of the boll weevil is well documented throughout the diaries, as is the extensive use of the pesticide Paris Green to control infestation [5.161, 5.110, 7.158, 7.134, 7.141-142, 8.41]. Diaries also record the selling price of cotton over several years, 1896 [5.77, 5.122-126, 128-130] 1897 [7.144-146, 7.148] 1898 [7.162, 7.149-150, 7.158, 7.160-161], 1899 [7.173-176] 1900 [4.159, 7.184, 7.116] 1901 [7.121-122] 1902 [7.123, 7.126] 1903 [7.128] 1904 [7.134] 1904 [7.135, 9.12] 1905 [7.135, 7.138-139, 7.141-142] 1906 [9.154, 9.156-157] 1907 [9.162] 1908 [9.171] 1909 [9.178] 910 [9.121] 1911 [9.79, 9.135-136, 9.138] 1912 [9.141], 1913 [9.146] 1915 [9.149] 1917 [8.2c] 1919 [9.12] 1924 [9.26, 9.104] 1926 [8.41] 1929 [8.62] 1930 [7.104]. The fluctuating cotton prices and the effects of weather shaped his economic situation on an annual basis. He regularly reports on climate and rainfall and tells of his financial losses due to seven years of flooding, March 14, 1928 [9.29]. Other business entries refer to a dissolved partnership between A. Coco and J. A. Tassin Feb. 3, 1879 [1.33], and the transactions of the soda and ice company 1915 [8.96, 13.53, 9.85, 9.87, 9.91], 1917 [13.53, 2.4].

Concern over the weather is discussed throughout the diaries. Entries record year around weather conditions and the weather's effect on crop production. Bordelon reports on damage to crops, livestock and buildings caused by storms and floods. He tells of Bayou

Des Glaises flooding his fields numerous times over the years [2.8, 2.12, 2.85, 2.133, 4.4, 4.6, 6.14, 13.1, 12.25, 12.1-3, 6.33, 6.88, 4.24, 12.8, 12.9, 4.103, 12.10-12, 12.14-17, 7.180-181, 9.10a], breeched and damaged levees March 25, 1882 [2.85], [6.33,] May-June 1893 [12.12, 12.15-16] [5.134-138, 5.42, 4.7a, 12.26], repair March 20, 1882 [2.12] and constructing levees, Oct. 8, 1912 [9.143, 9.80, 9.145], Dec. 16, 1917 [9.186]. He talks about high water levels and flooding of the Red River [4.4, 12.14, 9.167-168], Mississippi River [4.92, 4.93, 4.front cover, 6.19, 4.12, 12.12, 12.14, 12.15-16, 9.168], Mississippi River tributaries [7.150, 7.154, 4.8, 9.150, 9.33] and the Ohio River, April 2, 1913 [9.144-145]. He claims the highest water levels ever recorded occurred in April 1912, followed by a drought, Oct. 8, 1912 [9.143], and mentions how the Great Flood of 1927 affected his property [19.16, 8.48, 9.23, 9.36, 9.24, 9.50]. He also mentions the Galveston hurricane of Sept. 8, 1900 [7.184] 1905 [7.138-139], rumors of possible cave-ins at Choctaw Bayou, July 11, 1908 [9.169], and sleet and snow covering the ground for days with ice floes up the Mississippi River up to the Red River, Jan. 25, 1918 [9.98]. He describes damage caused by wind and water in April-June of 1922 [9.185, 9.62, 9.6a, 8.32, 8.30] and the drought during the summer and fall of 1924 [9.28, 10.59, 9.82, 9.3].

2. *Social life and customs:* Diaries reflect plantation life and the culture of rural Louisiana during the late 19th and early 20th century. They illustrate the close personal relationships of Leonce P. Bordelon to his family and friends. Early entries contain several comments concerning social gatherings, encounters with young women, as well as drafts of personal letters, general correspondence, and poetry. Throughout the diaries, Bordelon tells of frequent visits by family members and friends, holiday gatherings, outings, parties, and he marks the births, deaths, and marriages of his children, relatives and members of the community. Social events include balls, concerts, fairs and festivals, mentioning Mardi Gras several times [2.65, 6.43-45, 7.151, 2.65, 7.117, 7.128, 9.150, 9.142, 10.56, 9.7, 9.16]. Other events include Bastille Day, 1897 [5.119] baseball games [4.15, 4.88, 13.27, 4.63, 9.13a, 8.27] and Ringling Bros. Circus (Nov. 15, 1902) [7.126]. He records his marriage to Amanda Coco 1891 [4.37, 4.90, 9.83], and the birth of his children, Jules, 1892 [4.46], Grace, 1894 [12.18], Basil, 1896 [5.149], Leonce, Jr., 1897 [5.112], Yvette, 1900 [7.182], Mary Day, 1902, Arthemise, 1904 [7.134], and James, 1906 [9.155]. He notes the death of his mother Feb. 27, 1902 [7.123], his wife, March 21, 1907 [9.158] and his daughter, Grace, June 26, 1928 [9.53]. He mentions his oldest son, Jules, leaving for military service, Dec. 1, 1917 [9.94, 9.186], sending cracklings and sausage to Jules at camp, Jan. 9, 1918 [8.3c], and taking Leonce, Jr. back to Camp Martin, Nov. 11, 1918 [9.86]. He comments that the year was prosperous, but the war put a gloom on things, Jan. 1, 1918 [9.98], and he looks forward to Jules returning home after serving in France June 3, July 13, 1919 [9.62, 9.9a]. In addition, he gives a short update on himself and his children, March 14, 1928 [9.29].

Other topics include the construction of his house [5.141, 6.43, 4.92, 5.143-145, 6.40, 6.43, 6.49, 6.72-74, 7.162, 7.156-157, 2.26], a person jailed for stealing chickens, Oct. 15, 1902 [7.126], the Avoyelles Corn Club meetings, Feb. 29, 1908 [9.166], March 5, 1911 [9.127], fire damage to the Catholic Church on Christmas Day, and the use of a local store as a temporary chapel, Feb. 3, 1909 [9.173]. He tells of working together with

others to repair an automobile, Dec. 9, 1910 [9.124] and buying Ford automobiles, June 1919 [9.7a, 8.2c, 9.102], June 23, 1923 [9.1].

References to African Americans relate mostly to farmhands, farm work and social activities. Bordelon lists workers and wages, 1878 [1.1], Nov. 1911 [8.8-9], mentions hiring a hand to work on a monthly basis, Aug. 9, 1899 [7.172] and remarks on African Americans hauling wood, Sept. 8, 1890 [12.4], Aug. 10, 1911 [9.134], planting potato vines June 10, 1895 [5.154], collecting timber Dec. 3, 1897 [7.146], Jan. 15, 1910 [9.113]. He tells of minstrels performing in Hamburg, La., Sept. 5, 1880 [13.34] and at a party Sept. 12, 1898 [7.159], and he comments that African Americans attended a revival meeting in Moreauville, Oct. 24, 1896 [5.123], a fair for a priest in Moreauville, Oct 11, 1896 [5.126], local July 4th activities, July 5, 1907 [9.159] and their annual "Association" meetings Aug. 19, 1908 [9.170], Aug. 24, 1910 [9.120]. Other notes relate to his friend, Frank Beyt, having killed an African American in his store, Aug. 7, 1905 [7.140] and a boxing match in Reno, Nev., between James L. Jeffries and Jack Johnson, July 4, 1910 [9.118].

3. *Politics and government:* Diaries contain short notations on elections and politicians. Among those mentioned are the Avoyelles Parish Democratic [1.15] and Republican conventions, Oct. 2, 1878 [1.back cover], parish elections Jan. 5, 1888 [4.69], April 21, 1896 [4.148], congressional election, Oct. 7, 1894 [4.9] and election of delegates Oct. 20, 1879 [3.112], Dec. 9, 1897 [7.147]. Bordelon states that Judge L. E. Hall leads in the gubernatorial race, R. F. Broussard and J. E. Ransdell in the U. S. Senate race, Jan. 26, 1912 [9.140], the election of Ignatius B. Lemoine as elected Clerk of Court, March 2, 1912 [9.4a], Ben Gremillion elected sheriff, March 1, 1928 [9.55], and McKinley mostly likely to win the presidency [4.89]. He comments on a 5 mil tax for railroad construction [4.45], the defeat of a school tax, July 21, 1911 [9.133], meeting of school's trustees, Nov. 2, 1911 [9.137], dedication in 1928 of the new Marksville court house [9.60], and scheduled speeches by Gov. J. Y. Sanders, Sept. 2, 1907 [9.162] and Congressman Pujoe, Aug. 19, 1910 [9.120], Jan.11, 1912 [9.140]. Leonce Bordelon also discusses his own political involvement. He consents to run for sheriff of Avoyelles Parish [1.36] and he discusses his own campaign for clerk of court [5.151-155, 5.157, 5.163, 12.24, 5.140-141].

4. *Health:* In addition to complaints of fevers, cold, stomach and digestive problems mentioned throughout the diaries, Bordelon describes his bout with the measles March 27, April 6, 1885 [4.5, 2.134], boils on his leg [2.65, 4.16], his young son's mystery illness of fever and swollen eyes [5.163] and the illness and death of his infant son, Basil, 1896 [5.125]. He tells of his children suffering from whooping cough (March 2, 1904) and the measles, Jan. 1, 8, Feb. 29, 1908 [9.165-166]. He comments on the prevalence of yellow fever in New Orleans, Aug. 15, 1905 [7.140], and it caused the death of a friend in Shreveport, Aug. 20, 1905 [7.140]. As he ages, Leonce complains of rheumatism Jan. 1, 1912 [9.139]; he begins wearing an "electric belt", May 24, 1902, [7.125] and uses vegetable tablets for relief, April 20, 1904 [7.136] [7.131].

Series II. *The Leonce Project, 2005, 2007.*

The Leonce Project is comprised of three volumes compiled by Leonce P. Bordelon, III. *The Leonce Paul Bordelon Diaries*, v. 14, provides a paraphrased version of the diaries with editor's notes for clarification and some genealogy of the Bordelon family (2005). Diaries have been organized in chronological order; not all diary entries are included in the edited version. *Exhibits, Letters, Poems*, v. 15, contains photocopies of selected diary entries, letters and poems (2005). A compilation of the diaries as published by *The Marksville Weekly News* is also included (2007).

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CONTAINER LIST

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LEONCE P. BORDELON DIARIES

Mss. 4952

1876-1931, 2005, 2007

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- 1927 8.10, 8.44, 8.48-49, 9.8, 9.16-17, 9.19-21, 9.23-26, 9.30-31, 9.35-36, 9.38, 9.50, 9.52, 9.60, 10.52, 11.16, 11.27
- 1928 8.19, 8.23, 8.29-30, 8.48-50, 8.53, 9-front cover 9.10, 9.23-24, 9.26-29, 9.31-33, 9.35, 9.39, 9.52-53, 9.55-56, 9.60, 9.61, 9.62, 9.84, 9.859.110
- 1929 8.12, 8.52-53, 8.62, 8.88, 9-front cover, 9.28, 9.31-33, 9.38-40, 9.46, 9.53, 9.57, 9.62, 9.72, 9.82-83
- 1930 7.102, 7.104, 8.11, 8.16, 8.23-24, 8.27, 8.53, 8.63, 9.25, 9.29, 9.32-34, 9.40-41, 9.47, 9.54-55, 9.57, 9.59-60, 9.63, 10.23, 10.43-49, 11.23
- 1931 5.1c, 8.front leaf-recto, 8.3, 8.31, 8.53-54, 8.63, 8.90, 9.front leaf 1, 9.11, 9.34-35, 9.37, 9.46, 9.52, 9.56, 9.57-59, 9.61, 9.64-65, 9.93, 10.50

Diaries by volume number.

- v. 1 1877-1878
- v. 2 1877-1881
- v. 3 1877-1880
- v. 4 1887-1889
- v. 5 1890-1892, 1900
- v. 6 1886-1889
- v. 7 1900-1930
- v. 8 1907-1931 Crops sold
- v. 9 1904-1922
- v. 10 1923-1928
- v. 11 Undated
- v. 12 1900
- v. 13 1877-1883