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## Henry Louis Rey, Spiritualism, and Creoles of Color in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans

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Henry Louis Rey, Spiritualism, and Creoles of Color in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
History

by

Melissa Daggett

B.A. Louisiana State University, 1971  
M.Ed. University of New Orleans, 1975

December 2009

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I dedicate this thesis to René Grandjean.



René Grandjean ca. 1920. René Grandjean Collection. Photo Courtesy of Special Collections, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a biography of Henry Louis Rey (1831-1894), a member of one of New Orleans' most prominent Creole of Color families. During the Civil War, Rey was a captain in both the Confederate and Union Native Guards. In postbellum years, he served as a member of the Louisiana House of Representative and in appointed city offices. Rey became heavily involved with spiritualism in the 1850s and established séance circles in New Orleans during the early 1870s. The voluminous transcripts of these séance circles have survived into the twenty-first century; however, scholarly use of these sources has been limited because most of the transcripts and all marginal annotations later written by René Grandjean are in French. The author's translations of the spirit communications through their entire run reveal insight into the spiritual and material realms negotiated by New Orleans Black Creoles as they weathered declining political and economic fortunes.

Keywords: Henry Louis Rey, Grandjean, Dubuclet, Valmour, New Orleans, Spiritualism, Creoles, Crocker, Reconstruction.

Ils ne sont pas morts. Parlez-leur, il vous répondront.  
They are not dead. Talk to them, they will answer.  
*Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans, 1857*

## Introduction

The Afro-Creoles in antebellum New Orleans lived during an era of conflicts and dilemmas. Most were mixed-race and caught between two worlds: a white world of freedom, opportunity and education; and a black world of slavery, oppression and ignorance. Generally, *les gens de couleur libre*<sup>1</sup> were too white in complexion and upbringing to identify themselves with slaves, and their legal designation of “free people of color” rendered them too black to associate freely with the white population. The free black community managed to survive and flourish in spite of the social ostracism and the draconian legislation of the mid-nineteenth century that severely limited their civil rights. Their story of survival speaks well of their solidarity in the face of adversity during the antebellum years, Reconstruction and the succeeding decades which brought to an end their dreams of social and civil equality.

New Orleans was unique among urban areas in the antebellum South. Not only was it a city with a large Gallic community; but it was also a city, which hosted the largest population of free people of color in the South, many of whom descended from St. Domingue immigrants. Among the elite of this middle tier in New Orleans’ tripartite society were outstanding leaders in business, education, literature, the arts, religion and medicine. One such leader was Henry Louis Rey. Born into a wealthy and prominent

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, I use the following terms interchangeably: Black Creoles, free people of color, Afro-Creoles, Creoles of Color and *les gens de couleur libre*.

Creole family with St. Domingue roots, Rey's leadership qualities blossomed during the Civil War and Reconstruction. His leadership roles were played out in both the material realm and the spiritual realm.

The Union Army under General Benjamin Butler occupied New Orleans in the 1862, which proved to be a watershed year for the Black Creoles. Freed from the constraints of city ordinances and state laws that restricted their freedom, the now former free people of color formed political alliances with radical and socialist whites as well as Anglo-American black Protestant leaders.<sup>2</sup> The elitist, insular Afro-Creoles recognized that the freedpeople's battle for civil rights was a struggle, which affected their social caste as well. Early Afro-Creole agitators used the black radical newspaper, *L'Union*, as a forum for their political opinions. The founders of *L'Union* - Dr. Louis Roudanez, Jean-Baptiste Roudanez and Paul Trévigne - published editorials, essays, and literary works which had their roots in French Revolutionary thought and the ideals of the St. Domingue Revolution. The premier issue of *L'Union* on September 27, 1862, launched a front-page condemnation of slavery, signaling the beginning of a protracted fight for the rights of all African-Americans and led by the Creoles of color. Subsequent issues continued their radical agenda for restructuring American society, and some of the Black Creoles, such as Henry Louis Rey, were regular contributors of letters to the editor and poems with politically charged themes.<sup>3</sup>

Rey was one of the Black Creoles who stood in the vanguard of those fighting to secure social and political rights for all African-Americans. He was a leader in many

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Logsdon and Lawrence Powell, "Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes: Forgotten Organizer of the Plessy Protest," 42-70. *The Sunbelt Revolution: The Historical Progression of the Civil Rights Struggle in the Gulf South, 1866-2000*. (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2003), 48.

<sup>3</sup> Caryn Cossé Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana 1718-1868* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 3, 223-224 and 227.

diverse areas: as captain in the Confederate Louisiana Native Guard and later in the Union Army; as a member of the Louisiana State House of Representatives; as a city assessor in New Orleans' Third District, as a director of La Société Catholique pour l'instruction des orphelins dans l'indigence and as a board member of the Orleans Parish School Board; and as secretary of both the Masonic Fraternité #29 and La Société d'Economie de l'Aide et d'Assistance Mutuelle (Economy Society). But Rey's most intriguing and historically significant leadership role was played out among séance circles, which proliferated in New Orleans from the early 1850s until the 1870s. After some early encounters with spiritualists from his neighborhood and from the North, Rey formed his own séance circles with prominent Afro-Creoles as participants and mediums.

The historical record on Henry Louis Rey begins with Rodophe Lucien Desdunes' *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits*,<sup>4</sup> which chronicled the lives and history of Creoles of Color in nineteenth-century New Orleans. Desdunes included in his homage to the Creole people three Reys. Henry Rey's father, Barthélemy Rey, was profiled as a leader of the La Société Catholique pour l'instruction des orphelins dans l'indigence, usually known as the Catholic Institution among English speakers. Octave Rey received more attention from Desdunes as the New Orleans Captain of the Metropolitan Police, and Henry Rey was recognized for his part in surrendering the Confederate Native Guard weapons to General Benjamin Butler after the federal occupation of New Orleans on May 1, 1862. The Rey brothers were praised for their pivotal roles and their later enlistment in the Union army. James Parton, General Butler's

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<sup>4</sup>Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes. *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits*. Translated and edited by Sister Dorothea Olga McCants (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973). Desdunes' book was originally published in French and entitled *Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire: Notices biographiques accompagnées de réflexions et de souvenirs personnels* (Montreal: Arbour & Dupont, 1911).

contemporary biographer, acknowledged the incident as well as the ensuing loyalty of the Afro-Creoles to the Union Army.<sup>5</sup>

James G. Hollandsworth in his monograph, *The Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience during the Civil War*, documents the Desdunes' version of the Native Guards' surrender of arms to Butler and provides additional insight into Rey's personality and philosophy by quoting two letters to the editor that Rey has written to *L'Union*. In one letter an articulate and enthusiastic Rey sings the praises of a diverse army coalescing to form one united front with the common aim of racial equality. "In parade, you will see a thousand white bayonets gleaming in the sun, held by black, yellow, and white hands. Be informed that we have no prejudice."<sup>6</sup>

*Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*<sup>7</sup> broke historical ground in 1992 by exploring the unique ethnic and cultural composition of the Crescent City in a series of six articles. Joseph Logsdon and Caryn Cossé Bell in "The Americanization of Black New Orleans, 1850-1900" described Creole leaders as "active agents of liberation" who had previously been depicted as acquiescent, docile, free people of color. The Logsdon and Bell article presents the Creoles of Color as assertive, intelligent, and independent people who courageously challenged the rigid American racial order.<sup>8</sup> Henry and Octave

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<sup>5</sup> James Parton, *General Butler in New Orleans* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1864), 517. Parton failed to specifically name the Native Guard officers. He simply identified them as "several of the most influential of this class."

<sup>6</sup> James G. Hollandsworth, Jr. *The Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience During the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 6 and 29. Rey's letter had previously been quoted in Joseph Logsdon and Caryn Cossé Bell. "The Americanization of Black New Orleans, 1850-1900," *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, eds. *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> David Rankin in "The Impact of the Civil War on the Free Colored Community of New Orleans" depicts the free people of color as elitist and insular people who identified with whites and sought to preserve their special status during antebellum days as well as during the Civil War

Rey were included in this group of dissidents who refused to be controlled by the despotic oligarchy of planters and wealthy New Orleans businessmen. In addition, Logsdon and Bell explored the widening ideological chasm between the Catholic Church and the Creoles of color resulting in some seeking anticlerical outlets such as Masonic lodges and spiritualist societies.<sup>9</sup>

This brief mention of spiritualism in the Logsdon and Bell article in *Creole New Orleans* expanded five years later into a fuller discussion in Caryn Bell's monograph, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana 1718-1868*. Chapter 6, "Spiritualism's Dissident Visionaries," analyses the roots and visions of mid-nineteenth-century spiritualism in New Orleans. The last half of the chapter is devoted to Rey's early forays into spiritualism and his formation of a séance circle of Black Creole radicals, which included many of their intelligentsia, such as Joanni Questy, Nelson Desbrosses, and Joseph Lavigne. Other séance circle members were family members and local mediums such as Soeur Louise and the celebrated Valmour. Caryn Bell explored the antebellum world that Rey's family lived in by researching family connections, a rich Gallic literary tradition, and by examining the social, religious and political environments of those tumultuous times. Bell's use of the Grandjean Séance Registers as primary

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and Reconstruction. Rankin is of the opinion that "historians have exaggerated the unity of the Afro-American population" (379) and asserts that "legal, economic, cultural and biological ties" distanced the Black Creoles from the freedpeople (386). *Perspectives in American History Vol. XI-1977-1978*, ed. Donald Fleming (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1978), 379-416. Interestingly, Rankin acknowledges Henry Rey as an exception to the elitist free people of color and praises him for providing energetic leadership (388 and 408). Rankin argues that Logsdon and Bell in "The Americanization of Black New Orleans" ignore or excuse evidence that does not fit their argument, and that the historical record does not substantiate their celebration of Creole radicalism. Review of *Creole New Orleans*, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 80, No. 3 (Dec., 1993), 1058-1059.

<sup>9</sup> Logsdon and Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans," *Creole New Orleans*, eds. Hirsch and Logsdon, 201-261.

sources marks the first time that a historian has used the Registers as a window into the lives of Creoles of color.<sup>10</sup>

In the following chapter, “War, Reconstruction, and the Politics of Radicalism,” Bell includes the now familiar story of the Rey brothers’ meeting with General Butler as well as additional information concerning Henry Rey’s military service in the Union Army.<sup>11</sup> One of the chapter’s foci is the use of poems and letters to *L’Union* as a way to voice radical views. Bell quotes from two of Rey’s letters to the editor and reprints a poem, “L’Ignorance,” to illustrate another form of protest that Black Creoles employed now that the legal barrier against anti-white writing had been lifted. Bell reveals another aspect of Henry Rey’s life -- that of an aspiring Romantic writer. Bell quotes a spirit communication from a Grandjean Séance Register, which honored André Cailloux, his friend, and compatriot, who was killed at Port Hudson, Louisiana, while engaged in battle against the Confederate Army. Cailloux’s heroic death insured him a place as a martyr-hero for the next generation of Afro-Creoles.

The Grandjean Séance Registers consist of thirty-five volumes of transcriptions of séances conducted by Henry Louis Rey and his fellow Creole mediums beginning in the early 1860s and ending in 1877. The first register contains an autobiographical essay written in 1858, in which Rey describes his early encounters with spiritualism and his strong anti-clerical feelings. Rey himself transcribed most of the séances, and most of the communications are in French. François Dubuclet, better known by his nickname “Petit,” became Rey’s life-long friend, faithful member of the *Cercle Harmonique* and fellow medium who was entrusted with holding the séance registers. He retained his position as

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<sup>10</sup> Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana*, 187-221.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 222-275.

curator of the registers for over half a century. Sometime during the early 1920s Dubuclet gave the registers to his son-in-law, French-born René Grandjean, who then kept the registers for another fifty years before donating them to the Earl K. Long Library at the University of New Orleans in 1976. Francis Dubuclet related to Grandjean during the early 1920s the fascinating and accurate details of the séance circles, Henry Rey's personal life, and historical information concerning the stormy political history of Reconstruction in Louisiana. Grandjean recorded Dubuclet's accounts in the margins of the registers, on note cards, scraps of paper, bank announcements of holidays, and on envelops. Grandjean's copious margin notes are all written in French, and his notes are often difficult to read because of the small writing. Historians, who have used the spirit communications as evidence of the Afro-Creole radical political agenda during Reconstruction, have overlooked the historically significant Grandjean notes. I have personally translated the French into English. The occasional communication written in English is noted in a footnote as being in English.<sup>12</sup>

Stephen Ochs later uses Bell's research and the two translated quotations from the Grandjean Séance Registers in his monograph, *A Black Patriot and a White Priest: André Cailloux and Claude Paschal Maistre in Civil War New Orleans*.<sup>13</sup> Ochs use of Bell's research reveals a trend that other historians have followed. Instead of personally undertaking research into the Grandjean Séance Registers, historians quote *Revolution*,

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<sup>12</sup> Grandjean Registers 85-31 – 85-65. Special Collections, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans. Grandjean recorded Dubuclet's oral history more than sixty years after the events had occurred; yet, Dubuclet's recollections can be deemed highly reliable. I have carefully researched many of the details (dates, names, and incidents), and Dubuclet's accounts in all cases can be substantiated by primary sources. "Grandjean Margin Notes" refer to Grandjean's notes that he wrote in the registers; "Grandjean Notes" are additional historical notes that Grandjean wrote on note cards and other paper and not included in the Registers.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen J. Ochs, *A Black Patriot and a White Priest: André Cailloux and Claude Paschal Maistre in Civil War New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).



*Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana 1718-1868* as a popular secondary source. The failure to use the Registers as a primary source is probably because of a linguistic barrier.

The literary merits of Rey's spirit communications have since 2004 received attention from French scholars in Louisiana, most notably Chris Michaelides in *Paroles d'honneur: Ecrits de Créoles de couleur néo-orléanais 1837-1872*.<sup>14</sup> This anthology of Black Creole intelligentsia writings includes a final chapter devoted to selected communications from eight of Grandjean's registers.<sup>15</sup> Michaelides considers Henry Rey to be a *poète visionnaire* and likens him to French Romantic writers such as Lamennais, Lamartine, and Béranger and, closer to home, Charles Testut, a white French émigré and an early convert to spiritualism. French Romantic writers sometimes appeared as spirit guides at Rey's séances.<sup>16</sup>

Historians of American spiritualism have also chronicled Rey's *Cercle Harmonique*. Robert Cox in *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism*<sup>17</sup> devotes a chapter, "Invisible World," to documenting the history and beliefs of Afro-Creole spiritualism within the framework of the changing social climate and the volatile politics of the era. Cox looks at New Orleans spiritualism as part of the national obsession with séances and includes information about northern mediums such as Emma Hardinge who visited New Orleans during the 1850s and 1860s. Cox's rendering of Rey's séance circle gives to date the most balanced and complete history of

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<sup>14</sup> Chris Michaelides, ed. *Paroles d'honneur: Ecrits de Créoles de couleur néo-orléanais 1837-1872* (Shreveport, LA: Editions Tintamarre, Centenary College, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Henry Louis Rey, "Communications spiritualists," *Paroles d'honneur*. Michaelides, ed., 188-210. The editor included spirit messages from the following Grandjean Registers: 85-31, 85-32, 85-34, 85-35, 85-38, 85-39 and 85-40.

<sup>16</sup> Michaelides, *Paroles d'honneur*, 43 and n.64, 217.

<sup>17</sup> Robert S. Cox. *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 162-188.

his spiritualistic society. Cox, like Michaelides, goes beyond the first two Grandjean séance registers (85-30 and 85-31) in *Body and Soul*. Cox used the same seven Grandjean Registers that Michaelides researched, plus two addition registers: 85-36 and 85-57.

This thesis will significantly add to the historiography of Creoles of color in New Orleans by being the first complete biography of a man from the elite free people of color in antebellum New Orleans. Caryn Bell was the first historian to write about Rey's early spiritualist encounters in the 1850s and his subsequent formation of his own séance circle in the early postbellum days; but the story doesn't stop at 1868. There is much to learn about Rey's family background, his political beliefs, his aspirations for Afro-Creoles, and his educational activism and, have course, his spiritualistic beliefs. A systematic reading of the Grandjean Séance Registers beyond the first two registers as well as Grandjean's notes will result in a more complete picture of New Orleans society in the late 1860s and the 1870s.

The voices of the dead were reflections of the contemporary political situation in Louisiana. Denied access to the traditional outlets of free speech and free press, Black Creoles articulated their hopes and dreams at séances safely ensconced in their homes and businesses. The late antebellum years and Reconstruction in New Orleans were troubled times set against a grand panorama of war, destruction, oppression, and unfulfilled dreams. The Registers are the only existing historical records of the Black Creoles' political philosophy during those years. This study documents the history of a black radical spiritualist society led by Henry Louis Rey using these previously untapped manuscript sources.

“Henry Louis Rey, Spiritualism, and Creoles of Color in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans” can be considered as a microhistory, which is a biography of a hitherto obscure

historical person who has been relegated to footnotes and brief mentions in monographs. According to Jill Lepore in “Reflection on Microhistory and Biography,” the value of examining such people is not in their uniqueness, but in using the individual’s life as an allegory for broader issues affecting the culture as a whole.<sup>18</sup> Instead of examining the Afro-Creoles as a group, this thesis will examine an individual as he encountered dramatic changes in his social, political, economic and religious worlds. Henry Louis Rey has much to teach us about the Afro-Creoles of New Orleans, not just as intellectuals or as political leaders or as spiritualists, but as social reformers.

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<sup>18</sup> Jill Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory,” *The Journal of American History*, June 2001, 131.

## 1 -- The Father, Barthélemy Louis Rey

On July 1, 1829, a bride and a groom, together with family members, appeared before New Orleans notary, Carlile Pollock, to legally affirm their intentions to share future property as man and wife; and perhaps, more importantly, to legalize their three-month-old daughter, Elizabeth. The bride was Rose Agnès Sacriste, daughter of Jean Marie Sacriste and Rositte Frère; the groom was Barthélemy Louis Rey, son of Joseph Rey and Elizabeth Mickline.<sup>19</sup> The notary duly inscribed the letters H.C.L. (*homme de couleur libre*) for Barthélemy and F.C.L (*femme de couleur libre*) for his future wife, thereby conforming to the Louisiana law, which required all legal documents to identify free people of color.

The union of the Sacriste and Rey families represented in one small way the cohesiveness and strength of émigrés from St. Domingue. Barthélemy and Rose were first generation immigrants from the war-ravaged former French colony. Barthélemy listed his birthplace as the city of Santiago de Cuba, which had been the initial destination for many refugees fleeing the chaos and destruction of the Saint Domingue Revolution in 1803. Rose was originally from St. Domingue.<sup>20</sup> Both families more than likely entered Louisiana in 1809-1810 as part of the massive expulsion from Cuba of French colonials who had originally sought asylum in Cuba. According to Paul Lachance, Louisiana was a

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<sup>19</sup> New Orleans Notarial Archives (hereafter NONA), Carlile Pollock, Vol. 27, 43-44, July 1, 1829.

<sup>20</sup> Succession papers of Henry Rey note that his mother was born in St. Domingue. Succession of Henry Louis Rey, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library (hereafter NOPL).

popular secondary destination because of its relative proximity and because of a similar Gallic community.<sup>21</sup> The addition of 3,102 free people of color more than doubled the population of that caste in New Orleans, another former French colony and now a territory of the United States. The percentage of the total population formed by the free people of color mushroomed from 19% in 1805 to 28.7% in 1810,<sup>22</sup> forever changing the cultural and political landscape of New Orleans.



Free people of color émigrés often settled in the southeastern part of Cuba in 1803 and then later moved to New Orleans as part of the Second Wave of Emigration (1809-1810).

<sup>21</sup> Paul Lachance, "The 1809 Immigration of Saint-Domingue Refugee to New Orleans: Reception, Integration and Impact," *Louisiana History*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Spring, 1988), 111.

<sup>22</sup> Logsdon and Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans," *Creole New Orleans*, Table 1, 206.

On the marriage contract, the Barthélemy Rey listed his residence as rue Condé and his occupation as tailor.<sup>23</sup> City directories in the early 1830s identify Rey as a tailor on Bourbon Street. But Rey's days as a modest tailor were numbered. During the 1830s Rey embarked upon a new career as a real estate broker in the booming markets of New Orleans, the suburbs and even across Lake Ponchartrain in St. Tammany Parish. His business partners were typically free people of color with St. Domingue roots, but sellers and buyers were often Creole whites who stood at the pinnacle of their social class. The New Orleans Notarial Archives contain numerous records of Rey's real estate dealings beginning in the early 1830s, and continuing until his death in 1852. Louis Bouligny and Pierre Soulé occasionally appear in the Notarial records as sellers or buyers involved in Rey's real estate transactions, especially in the mid-1830s.<sup>24</sup> Soulé at this time was a young lawyer who was later to become a United States Senator, ambassador to Spain, and Confederate official. Henri Herz in *My Travels in America* described Pierre Soulé as "the most eloquent lawyer in New Orleans," and his home as "the meeting place of the distinguished people in the region." Herz' New Orleans sojourn was spoiled by an incident in which a talented lady was unable to attend his piano concerts because according to Mrs. Soulé, "she has been accused of having Negro blood in her veins, although her skin is of striking purity and whiteness." Herz later agonized over this ostracism saying it was odious and women suspected of color were never admitted into White Creoles families.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Rue Condé was a section of Chartres Street and named for the powerful Prince of Condé, father of the Duke of Bourbon. John Chase, *Frenchmen, Desire, Good Children and Other Street of New Orleans* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Press, 2004), 25.

<sup>24</sup> NONA, Louis Caire, Vol. 51, Act. 816, August 24, 1834 and Louis Caire, Vol. 53A, Act. 846, September 23, 1836.

<sup>25</sup> Henri Herz, *My Travels in America* (State Historical Society of Wisconsin for the Department of History: University of Wisconsin, 1963), 89-93.

The Herz episode reveals the antebellum dichotomy between the social and business world of the Black Creoles and the White Creoles. Creoles who were suspected of black ancestry were generally ostracized from White Creole society; yet, business transactions between the races were often amicable, professional and profitable.

The career path chosen by Barthélemy Rey proved to be a lucrative one, rewarding him and his family with not only wealth, but also the prestige accorded to the Black Creole upper echelon. The Rey family counted among their close friends the wealthiest of this group, including Bazile Crocker, Drausin Macarty, Pierre Casanave, François Boisdoré and François Lacroix.<sup>26</sup> The Reys were pew holders at St. Augustine's Church in Tremé and financed a stained-glass window. Like many other wealthy free people of color, Barthélemy Rey was a slaveholder. According to an 1850 Schedule of Slaves, Rey owned eight slaves ranging in age from fifty years old to two months.<sup>27</sup>

Barthélemy Rey's business savvy together with other enterprising free people of color helped to build New Orleans, first suburb, Tremé. In 1812, the Faubourg Tremé was incorporated and developed into a neighborhood for free people of color. It was named after Claude Tremé, a French planter who married a Black Creole named Julie Moreau (Moró) and subdivided the plantation land she owned along with other land he acquired. The influx of Domingans in 1810 ensured the economic viability of this first suburb.<sup>28</sup> But Rey's lasting legacy owes to his prominent role in founding, organizing,

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<sup>26</sup> Succession of Rose Gignac Crocker, April 6, 1861. City Archives, NOPL. A family meeting of friends was summoned to determine the guardianship of Rose's minor child, Myrtille Raphaël Crocker. The meeting decided that Henry Louis Rey, Myrtille's brother-in-law, should act as guardian. François Lacroix was a frequent participant at Rey's séance circles.

<sup>27</sup> 1850 Slave Schedule of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ward, 3<sup>rd</sup> Municipality in the Parish of Orleans. The slaves are not identified by name. Some or all of the eight slaves could have been Rey's relatives that he bought from white owners. Accessed from Ancestry.com.

<sup>28</sup> Ned Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2008), 255.

and leading La Société Catholique pour l’instruction des orphelins dans l’indigence, the Catholic Institution.

Rodolphe Desdunes recounts in *Our People and Our History* how Madame Justine Fervin Couvent, a wealthy free woman of color and the widow of Gabriel Bernard Couvent, willed several small houses and land for founding a school for Catholic orphans of the Third District. The school was first incorporated by the state in 1847, ten years after her death. Mr. Fletcher, the executor of the will, failed to fulfill the conditions of Mme Couvent’s will, kept the legacy a secret and misappropriated some of the funds. Father Constantine Manehault of St. Louis Cathedral, the second executor of Madame Couvent’s will, informed François Lacroix, who activated the community to legally direct the remaining funds to establish a school.<sup>29</sup> There is some evidence in the René Grandjean collection recognizing Barthélemy Rey as the true founder.<sup>30</sup>

In any case, Barthélemy Rey played a prominent role in the history of the Catholic Institution, a school recognized as the “nursery school for revolution in Louisiana.”<sup>31</sup> Mary Mitchell credits the school’s directors and teachers as being some of the leading French-speaking free black intellectuals and writers in Louisiana. “The Catholic Institution was the cornerstone of the Afro-Creoles’ political work.”<sup>32</sup> The list of directors and teachers included such notables as Paul Trévigne, Armand Lanusse,

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<sup>29</sup> Desdunes, *Our People and Our History*, 101-104 and Ochs, *A Black Patriot and a White Priest*, 53.

<sup>30</sup> According to an exchange of letters between René Grandjean and Rodolphe Desdunes, an interview with Eugène Rapp on July 17, 1921 divulged that Barthélemy Rey was the first to realize that there was something wrong. Rapp, a colleague and life-long friend of Rey, stated that Barthélemy Rey researched the legalities, discovered the Couvent legacy, and disclosed its existence to the community. Letterbook, 85-83, René Grandjean Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

<sup>31</sup> Donald E. DeVore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans, 1841-1991* (Lafayette, LA: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1991), 42.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom’s Child: Black Children and Visions of the Future after Slavery* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 16.



Rodolphe Desdunes, Joanni Questy, and Barthélemy eldest son, Henry Louis Rey. In February 1851, Barthélemy Rey's name appeared as "President" in a notarized copy of amendments to the incorporation.<sup>33</sup> Two months later the first entry in the Séance Register for the Catholic Institute named Rey as the president and François Lacroix as a director.<sup>34</sup> A little more than a year later on May 29, 1852, Barthélemy Rey died.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> NONA, Octave De Armas, Vol. 49, Act 110, February 1, 1851.

<sup>34</sup> *Journal des Séances de la direction de l'institution Catholique pour l'instruction des Orphelins dans l'indigence, Vol. I*, April 26, 1851, 1 (hereafter Séance Book), AANO.

<sup>35</sup> Grandjean Register, 85-30. Date of death given in entry on November 28, 1858, 34. René Grandjean Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans (hereafter Grandjean Collection).

## 2 – The Son, Henry Louis Rey

On October 26, 1858, Henry Louis Rey composed an autobiographical essay in his first séance register in which he recounted his initial experience with the spiritual world as a bereaved young man of twenty-one. On May 29, 1852, just one hour after his father had passed away, Henry Rey was alone at his house on 126, rue de Craps<sup>36</sup> when he saw his spirit. The younger Rey attempted to embrace his father, but the fleeting apparition vanished as quickly as it had appeared.<sup>37</sup> This incident marked Rey's first experience with spiritualism.

One week later, a letter from Henry Rey was read to the board meeting of the Catholic Institution inviting the Board of Directors to attend a memorial mass on June 8, 1852, for Barthélemy Rey, ex-director and president. The Board urged all directors and students to attend the mass, which was to be celebrated by Father Joseph Morisot at Annunciation Church.<sup>38</sup> The elaborate and lavish funeral and memorial mass resulted in the impoverishment of the large Rey family.<sup>39</sup> Years later, in an 1858 séance, Rey

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<sup>36</sup> Bernard Marigny named rue Craps for the dice game, which contributed to his financial ruin. After Craps Street became an important thoroughfare with three churches located on it. The priests objected to the street name, and the City Council in 1850 changed the name to Burgundy. Residents, however, continued to call the street "Craps." Chase, *Frenchmen, Desire, Good Children*, 96-99.

<sup>37</sup> Grandjean Register, 85-30, October 26, 1858, 34. Grandjean Collection.

<sup>38</sup> Séance Book I, AANO, June 7, 1852, 89.

<sup>39</sup> The children of Barthélemy Rey and Rose Sacriste were Elizabeth Rey (b. March 31, 1829), Henry Louis Rey (b. February 20, 1831, d. April 19, 1894), Henry Hippolyte Rey (b. March 22, 1833), Josephine "Octavie" Antoinette Rey (b. April 3, 1835), Felix Octave Rey (b. June 26, 1837, d. 1908), Georgine Scholastique Louise Rey (b. April 23, 1839), and Henriette Philomene Alphonsine Rey (b. November 13, 1842). Information accessed from Ancestry.com.

communicated with his father who related to his son how Father Morisot cajoled the elder Rey's wife for his entire fortune. "The next day, there wasn't a *sou* to feed the large family ... you [Rose] gave him everything." The loss of his father's inheritance had a lasting and profound effect on Henry Rey. Not only did he abandon the Catholic Church, but he also severely criticized the Church for what Rey considered to be the Church's avarice and limitless money demands beginning with birth and ending with death.<sup>40</sup>

The younger Rey chose a different career path from his father. Perhaps because of the family's reduced financial condition, Henry Rey worked as a clerk at Eugène Hacker's Hardware Store located on Orleans Street, opposite Tremé Market and St. Peter, between Villere and Marais. Hacker conducted a thriving business in Tremé until his death on May 13, 1871. Hacker committed suicide, and his business was initially taken over by his wife and then by another hardware store, Pitard's.<sup>41</sup> Spiritual communications from Hacker during the 1870s affirmed a close personal as well as a professional relationship between the white Hacker and the Black Creole Rey. Perhaps the older Hacker represented a father figure for Rey after the passing of Barthélemy Rey.

The 1850s witnessed a barrage of increasingly harsh legislation and ordinances against the free people of color. *Les gens de couleur libre* had already suffered for decades under state laws and city ordinances, which severely restricted their civil liberties. New laws sparked by the national debate on abolition and emancipation were promulgated beginning with the 1856 city ordinance closing the fabled Congo Square and banning street parties, marches and music in public places. Congo Square had for decades been a popular rendezvous for slaves, free people of color and whites.

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<sup>40</sup> Grandjean Register 85-30, November 28, 1858, 36-37.

<sup>41</sup> Grandjean Margin Notes in 85-65, 330 and information obtained from NOPL: <http://www.nutrias.org/~nopl/exhibits/lacroix/hacker.htm>.

The following year, the Louisiana Legislature prohibited all emancipation or manumission of slaves. In 1858, city ordinances prohibited freedoms of speech, assembly and religion to free people of color. All religious meetings had to be conducted with a white person in authority. On the eve of the Civil War the Louisiana Legislature passed one last draconian measure: all free people of color were to pick a master and voluntarily enslave themselves.<sup>42</sup>

The response to the increasingly rigid polarization of races in American society had already resulted in some Afro-Creoles immigrating from their beloved city and community. In 1848, the French Revolution and the emancipation of slaves encouraged Afro-Creole intellectuals like Victor Séjour and Dalcour to immigrate to Paris where they lived the rest of their lives as free people.

Another response was the establishment of Afro-Creole colonies in Mexico. In 1857 Louis-Nelson Fouché established a colony named Eureka outside Tampico, Mexico.<sup>43</sup> Fouché had been a business partner of Barthélemy Rey and a mathematics teacher at the Catholic Institution. Octave Rey visited Tampico in 1856, and there are occasional passing references in the Grandjean Registers to “our brothers of Tampico.”

The racial polarization in the growing New Orleans metropolis pushed the former free people of color inward, and this subculture looked within their caste for social, religious and family connections. When Henry Rey chose his bride, he picked a lady who came from a similar family background and who also lived in Tremé. His bride and wife

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<sup>42</sup> Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana*, 84 and Judith K. Schafer, *Becoming Free, Remaining Free: Manumission and Enslavement in New Orleans, 1846-1862*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 150.

<sup>43</sup> Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana*, 85-86. For more information about the Afro-Creole colonies in Mexico and their present day descendents, see Mary Gehman, “The Mexico Louisiana Creole Connection,” *Louisiana Cultural Vistas*, Winter 2001-2002, 68-76.

of thirty-three years was Adèle Crocker, daughter of Pierre Crocker and Rose Adèle Gignac.

Pierre Crocker and Barthélemy Rey shared many similarities. Pierre was just one year older than Barthélemy; they were both involved in the booming real estate markets of the Faubourgs and city; they both married someone named Rose only two years apart; they were both active in the Catholic Institution in its early days; they both had large families – Pierre with ten children and Barthélemy with seven; and they were both parishioners of St. Augustine Church. Pierre Crocker was a founding member of the Economy Society which was established in 1836 and his cousin was Henriette Delille, founder of the Sisters of the Holy Family.<sup>44</sup>

There was one significant difference between Barthélemy Rey and Pierre Crocker, and that involved Marie Laveau, the voodoo queen of New Orleans, and her sixteen-year-old daughter, Marie Heloise Euchariste Glapion. Her daughter established a long stable relationship with Crocker, a married man twenty-four years older than her. The relationship would last until his death on July 9, 1857.<sup>45</sup>

Pierre Crocker's second family never was specifically mentioned in the Grandjean Registers, although there are some hints in spirit messages that Pierre was guilty of some unnamed moral weakness.<sup>46</sup> His funeral notices did not acknowledge his second Laveau

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<sup>44</sup> Email from Fatima Shaik, March 25, 2009. Ms. Shaik holds most of the minute books of the Economy Society. Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition*, 216.

<sup>45</sup> Carolyn Morrow Long, *A New Orleans Voodoo Priestess: The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 66, 167 and n52 on 239-240. Four children were born during this time. Only two lived to adulthood: Adelai Aldina Crocker and Victor Pierre Crocker.

<sup>46</sup> In a spirit message Pierre Crocker laments his past saying that he “succumbed to a weakness that took away life.... I cry in this hour of doubt of weakness and ... yes, of the fall.” Grandjean Register 85-34, November 30, 1871, 104. Grandjean Collection.

family, and nowhere in the succession papers of Rose Gignac is there any mention of her husband's other minor children.<sup>47</sup>

Less than two months after the death of Pierre Crocker, Adèle Crocker and Henry Rey were joined in holy matrimony at St. Augustine Church on September 3, 1857. Witnesses included Adèle's older brother, Pierre Jr.<sup>48</sup> Soon afterwards they moved to a Creole cottage in Faubourg Tremé at 95 Columbus Street (today 1419 Columbus) near Claiborne Avenue.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *L'Abeille*, July 10, 1857 and Succession Papers of Rose Gignac Crocker, April 6, 1861. City Archives, NOPL.

<sup>48</sup> AANO, Marriage PC Vol. 2, 1843-1869, 76.

<sup>49</sup> The Reys welcomed their first child, Lucia Rose Rey, on February 7, 1859. On June 1861, a second child, Henry Joseph Rey, was born. On November 28, 1864, Albert Louis Rey was born and a fourth child, Placide Augustin Rey, was born on their anniversary in 1866. Placide died on March 7, 1868. Information about births and death accessed from Ancestry.com.

### **3 – Early Forays into Spiritualism**

The upheaval and radical changes in New Orleans' demographics, politics, economy and society created an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear among the Creoles of color in the 1850s. The deteriorating racial climate was exacerbated by changes within the Catholic Church. For decades after the Louisiana Purchase, Creole clergy and laymen had controlled the Church. The Catholic Church was viewed as a shelter from the American marginalization of their class. Literally from birth to death, Black Creoles had the support of the Catholic Church: their babies were christened in the Church, they worshipped in integrated congregations, they received the sacraments, they were married with the Church's blessings; and when they departed from the world, the priests officiated at their funerals.

The Americanization of the Catholic Church brought significant changes in the Creoles of Color's religious lives. By the late 1830s, control had shifted to Anglo-Americans who were committed to slavery and limited manumission. Great waves of Irish and German immigrants beginning in the 1830s had changed the complexion of the city's population, and the Gallic community found itself a minority in a city where it had formerly been the majority during the early days of statehood. The Church was no longer the Black Creoles' haven in times of trouble; and its influence in the black community suffered a slow, but steady decline. Rejection of the new Americanization pushed them

toward embracing Protestant religions, Freemasonry and a new religious sect from the North, spiritualism.<sup>50</sup>

Spiritualism originated in the small town of Hydesville, New York, when the young Fox sisters, Kate and Maggie, reported mysterious rappings in their home on March 31, 1848. Western New York by the mid-nineteenth century had developed into a storm center of numerous religious activities and radical social movements that arose and spread quickly, and then quietly disappeared from the American scene. Revivalism, new sects, and social reforms occurred so frequently that western New York became known as the “Burned-over district,” an epithet alluding to fires of the forest and fires of the human spirit.<sup>51</sup>

The Fox sisters’ encounters with spirits from the Great Beyond engendered a new religious cult in the 1850s which spread like a contagion through New York to the Northeast and Midwest and from there south to New Orleans. The earliest written reports of spiritualism in Louisiana relate to the séance circles and the leadership of Joseph Barthelet, a French émigré. Barthelet was one of the “foreign French” who immigrated to Louisiana because of political upheavals in France. The foreign French “provided not only crucial skilled, literate, and experienced reinforcement of the local Creole elite, but also shored up French and Franco-African society in New Orleans from top to bottom.”<sup>52</sup> French-speaking immigrants like Joseph Barthelet were instrumental in the persistence of an active and political powerful Gallic community for decades after the Louisiana Purchase.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana*, 7-8.

<sup>51</sup> Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 3.

<sup>52</sup> Hirsch and Logsdon, eds. *Creole New Orleans*, 92.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, Paul Lachance, “The Foreign French,” 130.



In April 1845, Barthes organized a mesmerist society, La Société du Magnétisme de La Nouvelle-Orléans, which counted seventy-one members from the Gallic community. The French connection was further strengthened by direct correspondence with mesmeric societies in Paris.<sup>54</sup> Like the North, in the early 1850s mesmerism evolved into American spiritualism with Joseph Barthes as its leading advocate in New Orleans.

In 1857, Barthes launched a spiritualist newspaper, *Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans* -- the only French-language newspaper devoted exclusively to spiritualism in the Americas. Joseph Barthes used his monthly journal as a forum to explain the spiritualist philosophy, report on séances in other states, and publish articles from other spiritualist publications. In addition, the newspaper passed on information about conventions, speakers, traveling mediums, and public séances scheduled for New Orleans. Spirit communications formed the major portion of *Le Spiritualiste*, and these communications had a distinctive Francophile flavor to them. Most of the French-speaking spirit guides were leaders of the Enlightenment such as Rousseau and Descartes or favorite deceased Catholic figures like Père Antoine and St. Vincent de Paule. Articles from French publications such as *Mystères de Paris* and *Journal du Magnétisme* were summarized.<sup>55</sup>

Joseph Barthes also used his journal to chastise the increasingly conservative Catholic Church. Barthes's acerbic criticism targeted its diocesan publication, *Le Propagateur Catholique*, and its editor, Abbé Napoléon Joseph Perché. The acrimonious debate raged for two years. The radical challenge to the Catholic Church and the persistent lampooning of Abbé Perché doomed *Le Spiritualiste*, especially when the

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<sup>54</sup> Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana*, 198.

<sup>55</sup> Joseph Barthes, *Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans, Vols. I and II* (New Orleans: n.pub., 1857, 1858). Special Collections in Jones Library, Tulane University.

publication reported on public séances of a charismatic local medium, Valmour. In 1858, Barthes reported that Valmour, a free person of color, had generously given his time and energy to holding public séances and healing the sick at his blacksmith shop and home on Toulouse Street. The Abbé Perché, jealous of Valmour's popularity, sent the police to his house and forced him to discontinue the nightly public séances.<sup>56</sup>

Joseph Barthes terminated his short-lived publication in 1858. In the last issue Barthes attributed the demise of *Le Spiritualiste* to a reduced readership. But perhaps the combined presence of the fiery Abbé Perché and the police might have been too much for the French émigré.

Joseph Barthes's séance circle was the best known in antebellum New Orleans because of his journal, but spiritualism crossed linguistic and racial lines. Local newspapers of the era reported visits of well-known Northern mediums and lecturers. In 1859-60, Emma Hardinge, the famous trance lecturer and medium, visited the Crescent City and was pleasantly surprised to discover that spiritualism was thriving among the American and French communities. She had feared that the association with abolition and other radical reforms would work to kill spiritualism in the Southern city.<sup>57</sup> Conversely, some local mediums moved North. In 1857 two local Anglo-American spiritualist lecturers, Robert Squire and John Forster, moved to Boston from New Orleans to write for the premier spiritualist journal, *Banner of Light*. They returned to New Orleans periodically to lecture.<sup>58</sup>

The Francophile flavor of Barthes's séance circle and the clandestine nature of Spiritualism now that the Abbé Perché had vilified its basic tenets, appealed to the Black

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>57</sup> Cox, *Body and Soul*, 167.

<sup>58</sup> Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 211 n. 49.

Creole elite. The emphasis on family, the syncretism of its belief system, the connection with the spiritual world, the disenchantment with the Catholic Church, and the promise of social and political reforms all conspired to attract Creoles of Color to this new radical religious sect.

Henry Rey converted in the 1850s to Spiritualism. He first encountered the spiritual world on the day that his father passed away in 1852. Four years later Rey related in the first Grandjean Séance Register his second encounter with the dead. This time it involved his future wife's father, Pierre Crocker. Rey saw the spirit of Adele's father on the day he died -- July 9, 1857 -- and it quickly disappeared.<sup>59</sup>

One Sunday, Henry Rey attended a séance at a popular Spiritualist home, Soeur (Sister) Louise's house.<sup>60</sup> Rey levitated a heavy table, and then Soeur Louise presented him with a pencil and some paper. The fatigued Rey reluctantly took the pencil, and at this point an invisible hand seized his hand. Rey heard his father's voice, "Write our dictation, and then you will not be tired." Thus began Rey's vocation as a medium -- a vocation that he excelled at and was proud of.

News of a young, gifted medium spread among the elite. Rey initially conducted séances in the late 1850s at the homes of Sister Louise and other neighborhood devotees. Included in this gifted group were Joanni Questy, Samuel Snaer, Nelson Desbrosses and Aldophe Duhart.<sup>61</sup>

The first register ended abruptly in 1860. In April 1861, following several meetings held at the Couvent Institution, it was decided that the Black Creoles would

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<sup>59</sup> Grandjean Register, 85-30, October 28, 1858, 107. Grandjean Collection.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 101. The last name of Soeur Louise is never revealed either by Rey or Grandjean. Grandjean described Soeur Louise in his notes as a woman with black skin and a soul like a diamond (85-92), Grandjean Collection. She appears as a spirit on July 11, 1870.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

offer their support to the Confederacy. Governor Thomas Overton Moore accepted their offer, and on May 2, 1861, the Native Guards was authorized.<sup>62</sup> Rey, along with 1,000 other free people of color, answered the Confederate call for volunteers. He formed the Economy Unit, which was named after the Economy Society, and he himself was captain.



Line Officers of the First Louisiana Native Guard -- The second man from the left is Joseph Vignaud Lavigne, who was Rey's close personal friend, a teacher at the Catholic Institution, and a fellow medium in Rey's séance circle. *Harper's Weekly*, February 28, 1863.

Historians have advanced various explanations as to why the free people of color volunteered for military service with the Confederacy. Some of the former Native Guards later explained that they were coerced to join; some probably joined with the notion of improving and protecting their insecure civil and political status; some may have identified more with Southern whites than black slaves; and still others may have wanted

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<sup>62</sup> Ochs, *A Black Patriot and a White Priest*, 68.

to reinstitute a by-gone tradition of black military participation. Whatever the reason, the Native Guards was activated with men like Captain Henry Rey providing the leadership.<sup>63</sup>

The Economy Unit did not actively participate in any Confederate battle and remained in New Orleans. The Native Guards' interest in military engagements waned, and members of the unit expressed a growing enthusiasm for the Northern cause. In December, Captain Rey offered a toast to the staff and officers of the Regiment exclaiming, "Beautiful starry banner, the majestic folds finally extend over us! The chains of our brothers are breaking. The whips of the planters, reeking with blood are going to dry! Immense happiness! ..."<sup>64</sup>

The Native Guards' tenuous allegiance to the rebel cause transformed into an enthusiastic welcoming of the victorious Union Army in May 1862. Henry Rey, his brother Octave and two other officers offered to surrender their arms and to enlist in the Union Army. General Butler initially declined the offer of enlistment. On August 15, 1862, Henry Rey met once again with Butler and assured him of his loyalty to the Union. On August 24, Butler issued an appeal for men of color to join the Union Army, and on September 27 Rey was officially mustered in the Union Army as a captain.<sup>65</sup>

Henry Rey, now an enlisted Union officer in the first black regiment in the Union Army, displayed his intellectual support for the Union cause when he penned:

It [ignorance] is the evil of Humanity,  
It is the ever-gnawing canker which consumes it,  
That which always controls it.  
And suppresses Liberty ...  
Yes, in the political,

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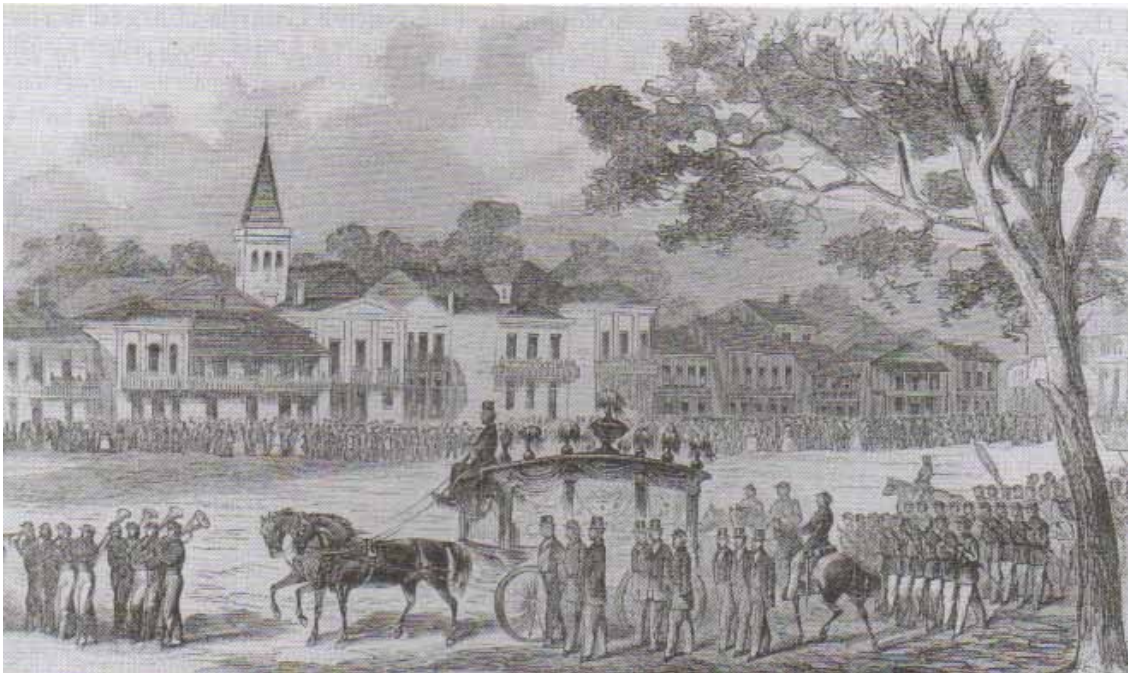
<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>64</sup> *New York Times*, November 5, 1862. The *Times* article is a reprint of an article from *L'Union* on October 15, 1862.

<sup>65</sup> Hollandsworth, *Louisiana Native Guard*, 24.

Social or religious world,  
As in the artistic world,  
Ignorance is enthroned everywhere ...<sup>66</sup>

The newly formed black Union regiment was initially relegated to non-combat duties, but was later ordered to Port Hudson, Louisiana. Henry Rey's good friend, André Cailloux, fought valiantly at Port Hudson in an effort to gain control of the Mississippi above Baton Rouge. Captain Cailloux led the charge against the Confederates on May 27, 1863, but fell on the field of battle. The Confederates refused to allow the Union Army to retrieve Cailloux's body and only relented when they could no longer endure the stench in the hot Louisiana sun. On July 29, Cailloux was laid to rest in St. Louis Cemetery No. 2 after a memorial mass and an elaborate funeral procession complete with marching units of Mutual Aid Clubs.<sup>67</sup>



The funeral of André Cailloux on July 29, 1863 was an elaborate affair. *Harper's Weekly*, August 29, 1863.

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<sup>66</sup> Poem published in *L'Union* in October 1862 and quoted in Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana*, 233-234.

<sup>67</sup> Ochs, *A Black Patriot and a White Priest*, 1-4.

Henry Rey missed the horrific Port Hudson Battle because he had been discharged on April 6, 1863 for medical reasons.”<sup>68</sup> After his military discharge Rey returned to New Orleans, and he resumed his first register which he had begun in 1858. Cailloux, now a martyr-hero, prophetically declared in a communication in July 1863 that “Equality will come later, it is true, but to construct a building the first stone must be placed there .... You will need victims to serve as stepping stones to liberty: we already have the first steps, there will be more .... The races will fuse together little by little.” Cailloux’s optimistic view of Reconstruction would later fall apart in the face of determined white intransigence. <sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Hollandsworth. *The Louisiana Native Guards*, 120.

<sup>69</sup> Grandjean Register 85-30, July 1863, 158. Grandjean Collection.

## 4 – Stormy Days in Louisiana

As the Civil War raged during the turbulent years of 1863 and 1864, the first early calls for male suffrage of the free people of color rang out at packed meetings in Economy Hall, which later earned the epithet “cradle of the equal rights party in Louisiana.”<sup>70</sup> Since New Orleans capitulated early to the North – barely one year after the firing upon Fort Sumter – the Crescent City had the earliest and most protracted equal rights campaign in the South.

One such early meeting took place on the evening on November 5, 1863 when an interracial crowd hotly debated the controversial question of franchise for men of African descent. Predictably, most of the white orators soundly quashed the radical idea of blacks voting; but a Black Creole, François Boisdoré, spoke eloquently of the rationale for black male suffrage. He observed that valiant black soldiers from Louisiana were fighting the bloody battles of the North, and could potentially give their lives for the noble cause. He reasoned that “[i]f the United States has the right to arm us, it certainly has the right to allow us the rights of suffrage.” Boisdoré’s sentiments were echoed by another black speaker, Captain Pinchback, who boldly stated that “they did not ask for social equality, and did not expect it, but they demanded political rights – they wanted to be men.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Marcus Christian Collection, Box 13, 109. Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

<sup>71</sup> *The New Orleans Times*, November 6, 1863. Capt. Pinchback would later become lieutenant governor and briefly governor of Louisiana. Grandjean described Pinchback as “very, very capable,” and a man with great oratorical skills. Grandjean Collection, 85-92. Interestingly, the following day *The New Orleans Times* apologized for misidentifying another speaker, C.C. Morgan, as colored. The reporter explained, “it would have required a connoisseur [sic] and



The end of the Civil War signaled a change in the male suffrage debate. Returning black Union soldiers joined forces with white Union supporters, such as Northern educated Thomas Durant and Dr. A.P. Dostie along with carpetbaggers, most notably Henry Clay Warmoth. New Orleans' Creoles of color were heavily represented in this new contingent of black political leaders. More than 96% had lived in New Orleans in 1860. Of these New Orleans' residents, over two-thirds lived on the downtown side of Canal Street, which included Faubourg Tremé. The typical postbellum black leader was young, fair-skinned, French-speaking, literate, and had been freed prior to 1860. Many of these men were proud of their Creole heritage and had descended from the upper echelons of the free people of color in New Orleans.<sup>72</sup> The political strength of the former elite is particularly surprising when other demographics are considered. By 1860, the percentage of free people of color in New Orleans had diminished from a high of 28.7% in 1810, which had been bolstered by the influx of refugees from St. Domingue to a low of 6.4% in 1860.<sup>73</sup> By 1865 the numerical strength of the Gallic black community had further declined with the addition of tens of thousands of Anglophone blacks who flooded New Orleans looking for opportunities and an escape from the arduous plantation life of their former slave days.

Henry Louis Rey fit perfectly into the profile of the new black political leader. He was thirty-three years old in 1865, French-speaking, a lifetime resident of Tremé, literate,

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daylight to distinguish between free color and white." *The New Orleans Times*, November 7, 1863.

<sup>72</sup> David C. Rankin. "The Origins of Black Leadership in New Orleans During Reconstruction." *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol 40, No. 3 (Aug. 1974), 417-440.

<sup>73</sup> Logsdon and Bell. "Americanization of Black New Orleans," *Creole New Orleans*. Table 1, 206.

fair-skinned<sup>74</sup> and had honed his leadership skills as captain in the Native Guards. The first evidence of Rey's political activism occurred in 1865 with the formation of the Friends of Universal Suffrage, a precursor to the national Republican Party. The Friends' platform was threefold: universal education, universal suffrage and distribution of land by the states to heads of families.<sup>75</sup> The President of the Friends of Universal Suffrage was Thomas Durant, and Henry Rey was the Recording Secretary and also on the Central Executive Committee. On the rainy evening of September 13, 1865 Rey resigned his position explaining that he was "about to leave the city for a long time."<sup>76</sup> If Rey did indeed leave the city, it was only for two months because in December 1865, he resumed his séance register in New Orleans.

The séance venue from 1865 until 1867 moved from neighbor homes to primarily the home of the charismatic blacksmith Valmour who lived on Toulouse Street between Robertson and Villere. The revered Valmour had returned to public séances, but Rey resented the intrusion of new people on a weekly basis. Valmour, whose real name was John B. Aversin, used one of his bedrooms as a healing room and had done so for fourteen years. His healing skills were legend; but it must be remembered that medical help at this time was at best mediocre and at worst fatal. So a blacksmith with knowledge of the medicinal benefits of herbs might indeed have been more successful than the typical mid-nineteenth century doctor who relied on bleeding and mercury for cures.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Pension records describe Rey as a "bright mulatto." U.S. Pension Record No. 1,127,637, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions. There are no known surviving photographs of Rey, perhaps because of the devastating fire which destroyed his home in 1875.

<sup>75</sup> Charles Vincent, *Black Legislators in Louisiana during Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 40.

<sup>76</sup> *The New Orleans Tribune*, September 14, 1865.

<sup>77</sup> Grandjean's Notes, MSS 85-92, Grandjean Collection and also margin notes in 85-31, 20. François Dubuclet informed Grandjean that Valmour's real name was John B. Aversin.

The entries in Rey's second register are sporadic during the Valmour years. This may have occurred because spiritual communications were recorded in Valmour's own register. René Grandjean explained in the second register's margin notes that Valmour kept a large register, which was full of communications from various mediums, especially those of Paulin Durel. Mrs. Valmour retained the register after the death of her husband. The register was regrettably lost many years later when it passed on to her daughter and son.<sup>78</sup>

Rey's surviving spirit messages during this time reveal an optimistic frame of mind for the Black Creoles despite the uncertainty of their evolving social, political and economic status. On December 1, 1865, August Dubuclet, brother of François Dubuclet and son of Antoine Dubuclet, acted as the medium at Valmour's house when he contacted his deceased mother, Claire Pollard. She consoled them to not occupy themselves with the past because their future was so brilliant and to always be devoted to the cause of justice. Claire Pollard predicted that the past oppressors would beg for forgiveness of their errors in the afterlife.<sup>79</sup>

The initial euphoria in the early postbellum years dissolved into disappointment and disillusionment. The much sought goal of black male suffrage remained elusive, and ex-Confederates made consistent inroads into the political area which had temporarily been blocked by a tenuous coalition of blacks, white Unionists, and carpetbaggers. Black male suffrage activists accelerated their demands and in 1866, Governor J. Madison Wells, bowing to local and national political pressures, issued a call to reconvene the Constitutional Convention of 1864 for the dual purpose of disfranchising former rebels

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Valmour's death certificate is filed under "Aversin," but in parentheses it is noted as "Also Valmour." Death Certificate, February 6, 1869, 252, City Archives, NOPL.

<sup>78</sup> Grandjean Margin Notes, 85-31, 37. Grandjean Collection.

<sup>79</sup> Grandjean Register 85-31, December 1, 1865, 15. Grandjean Collection.

and giving African Americans the right to vote. The Convention was to meet on July 30, 1866 at the Mechanics' Institute in New Orleans, which was temporarily in use as the Louisiana State Legislature. What transpired was one of the most horrific days in American History. The official Congressional Report (1867) states “[t]here has been no occasion during our national history when a riot has occurred so destitute of justifiable cause, resulting in a massacre so inhuman and fiend-like, as that which took place at New Orleans on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July last.”<sup>80</sup> There is no evidence that Henry Rey participated in the Convention, but many of his friends, relatives of friends, and champions of black suffrage did participate and suffered grievous wounds or death. July 30<sup>th</sup> became the day of Black Independence and some of the victims such as Dr. Dostie, John Henderson<sup>81</sup>, and Victor Lacroix became martyrs-heroes who frequently visited Rey’s séance table.

Victor Lacroix was the son of the wealthy real estate mogul François Lacroix. The elder Lacroix was honored as the first President of the Catholic Institute and was also a close friend of the Rey family. The younger Lacroix had been cut from head to foot, butchered and mutilated in the Mechanics’ melee.<sup>82</sup> Years later, the spirit of Victor Lacroix encouraged the Rey circle to focus on the present noting that “nothing can obscure the road of Progress” and compared the opposition to “a house of cards that would cave in under the breath of the Will of the people.” Within the same message Lacroix lamented the fate of blacks who were forced to work like a flock of sheep and who had been abandoned by their brothers of the north, and he further stated that “their

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<sup>80</sup> Emily Hazen Reed. Congressional Report as quoted in *Life of A.P. Dostie or The Conflict in New Orleans* (New York: Wm. P. Tomlinson, 1868), 348.

<sup>81</sup> Henderson was a white lawyer in New Orleans whose strong anti-slavery views earned him a stay in a Mississippi insane asylum during the war years. James G. Hollandsworth, Jr. *An Absolute Massacre: The New Orleans Race Riot of July 30, 1866* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 50-51.

<sup>82</sup> Reed, *Life of A.P. Dostie*, 338.

only crime was being black.” The message ended on an optimistic note: “Our blood flooded the streets of the Bloody City [New Orleans]. Your blood . . . that of the martyrs has not been shed in vain. Because of the tragedy Congress had responded to the atrocity.”<sup>83</sup>

The one-year anniversary was observed with a ceremony at the Mechanics’ Institute in memory of the victims. Father Claude Pascal Maistre, the priest who celebrated the funeral mass of Captain André Cailloux, offered a requiem mass. Well-known white Northern spiritualist and trance lecturer Cora L.V. Daniels (Hatch) recited with supernatural eloquence a poem that she had written to commemorate the occasion.<sup>84</sup>

Eighteen sixty-seven marked a change in political dominance for the radical Creole leaders who had steadfastly agitated for black male suffrage and equal access to public schools. According to Joseph Logsdon and Caryn Bell, the leaders “who had so brilliantly maintained their agenda of revolutionary demands found it more difficult to exert the same dominance in the more normal electoral politics. . . . [T]hey increasingly found it more difficult to win elective offices.”<sup>85</sup> Still, the former free people of color were well represented at the Constitutional Convention, which was called to order in New Orleans on November 23, 1867. By March 1868, the work of the Convention had been completed, resulting in a Constitution, which granted blacks the right to vote and participate in the political system. Three months later, the first session of the Louisiana State Legislature under the new liberal constitution was convened, and Henry Louis Rey represented his district in the House of Representatives. Antoine Dubuclet, a wealthy

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<sup>83</sup> Grandjean Register 85-31, February 21, 1869, 101-103. Grandjean Collection. Some nouns have been capitalized in the spirit messages that would have normally not been capitalized.

<sup>84</sup> *The New Orleans Tribune*, July 31, 1867.

<sup>85</sup> Logsdon and Bell, “The Americanization of Black New Orleans,” *Creole New Orleans*, 245.

black sugar plantation owner from Iberville Parish, was elected State Treasurer, and he appointed two of his sons - François and August - as his assistants. Antoine Dubuclet held onto his post for ten years, which was quite an achievement for an African American in the chaotic days of Reconstruction.

Rey's séances made another change of venue in March 1867. No longer was Valmour's home the séance site. Valmour had moved from his blacksmith shop/home from Toulouse Street to St. Louis Street between Miro and Galvez. The new residence had an octagon shaped bedroom reserved for mediumistic healing. Now Valmour was the visitor to Rey's home on St. Louis Street between Derbigny and Claiborne. Grandjean notes that the new circle achieved greater progress under the guidance of Henry Rey's closed meetings; however, interested people could still attend the séances if they received permission to attend in advance. Progress, as described by Grandjean, most likely meant a calmer atmosphere with more meaningful communications obtained without unnecessary interruptions.<sup>86</sup>

On January 8, 1869, Rey visited François Dubuclet at the Treasury, which at that time was just north of the St. Louis Hotel on the corner of Royal and Conti Streets. The St. Louis Hotel was the state legislature and the Treasury occupied the old Banque de la Louisiane across the street. Rey demanded some paper and wrote a communication addressed to Valmour. That evening Petit gave the paper to Valmour, who smiled as he read the announcement of his death. The spirit messenger was Nelson Desbrosses who became a celebrated medium after studying spiritualism with Valmour. Desbrosses was one of the contributing poets to *Les Cenelles* (1845), an anthology of poems by free people of color collected and published by Armand Lanusse. Desbrosses in his

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<sup>86</sup> Grandjean Notes, 85-92 and Grandjean Margin Notes in 85-31, 57. Grandjean Collection.

communication informed Valmour how he and Valmour's deceased friends were preparing a chariot of triumph in anticipation of his beautiful hour of Departure.<sup>87</sup>

That hour of Departure arrived on Saturday, February 6, 1869. Rey and Dubuclet were summoned to Valmour's house as he was dying. At four o'clock in the morning, the celebrated Valmour passed away and as the body lay exposed in the same room, Henry Rey conducted a séance with the deceased Valmour who comforted his bereaved family and friends saying:

Don't cry; ... my spirit is carefully being lifted towards beautiful regions ... a magnificent and grandiose panorama of the eternal life is unfolding.... Valmour is triumphant. Oh! My brothers, continue to combat the error, the injustice and the superstition, and you will have the satisfaction of the heart.<sup>88</sup>

That same day, François Dubuclet filed the death certificate and made arrangements for a civil burial. The death certificate does not give a cause of death, but Dubuclet partially attributed his death to a flood in early October 1868. The nearby canal overflowed its banks and Valmour's house was inundated with several feet of water.<sup>89</sup> On February 7<sup>th</sup>, a death notice was prominently placed on the front page of *The Tribune*.

Dead yesterday at 4 AM, VALMOUR (medium). The body is exposed at his last residence, St. Louis Street, between Galvez and Tonti. Friends and acquaintances are invited to attend the burial which will take place today at 3PM.<sup>90</sup>

The death of Valmour did not mean his disappearance at the séance table. He now appeared as a spirit guide who frequently communicated with Rey's circle giving advice, solace and encouragement for their personal, social and political problems. The circle

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<sup>87</sup> Grandjean Margin Notes in 85-31, 62 and 67; and January 8, 1869, 62. Grandjean Collection.

<sup>88</sup> Grandjean Margin Notes in 85-31 and February 6, 1869, 91. Grandjean Collection. The reference to superstition may be a reference to voodoo.

<sup>89</sup> Death Certificate of John B. Aversin, February 7, 1869, 252, City Archives, NOPL. *The New Orleans Times*, October 4, 1868 and Grandjean Notes, 85-87. Grandjean Collection.

<sup>90</sup> *The New Orleans Tribune*, February 7, 1869.

occasionally met at the Valmour residence from 1869-1871 on St. Louis Street as his wife, Dinah, continued her relationship with spiritualism.

Valmour's death coincided with an acrimonious debate in the State Legislature concerning public schools in Louisiana. Rey, as Chairman of the Education Committee, was in the vanguard of legislators advocating free integrated public schools. Universal integrated schools had actually been included in the 1868 Constitution under Article 1 which decreed that "[a]ll children of this state between the ages of 6 through 18 shall be admitted to the public schools without distinction of race, color or previous condition. There shall be no separated schools established for any race." Despite the objections of the more conservative legislators who declared that the Article was "unjust to the white people of the State," Article 135 was adopted on March 7, 1868.<sup>91</sup> Governor Henry Clay Warmoth refused to enforce the legislative mandate for integrated schools, and district boards stymied the attempt to integrate schools.

The solution was to totally revamp the district boards, thus circumventing Warmoth's skullduggery and the recalcitrant district school boards. To many delegates, statewide integrated schools were as important as universal suffrage. This had been one of the three objectives of the 1865 Friends of Universal Suffrage. Now it was up to more assertive legislators to sidestep entrenched boards. The boards and directors were certainly not model leaders in the field of education. State Superintendent Thomas Conway described the utter worthlessness of the old system in a committee meeting on August 21, 1868:

Generally the teachers are scholastically bad and morally worse – the Directors are uneducated and consequently incompetent to judge the requirements of applicants. If you

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<sup>91</sup> *Official Journal of the Proceedings of the Convention for Framing a Constitution for the State of Louisiana* (New Orleans: J.B. Roudanez & Co., 1868), 17 and 242.



could only see who we have for Directors [Superintendents], half of whom make their crosses to signatures.<sup>92</sup>

Henry Rey's first attempt in August 1868 as Chairman of the Committee on Education to insure integrated public schools in New Orleans failed because the act gave the authority to appoint school board members to the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. Rey reasoned that a new system would "correct the glaring defects heretofore existing in the prejudice and injury of one class of citizens and to the special benefit of another."<sup>93</sup> On January 11, 1869 Rey introduced an act to abolish public school boards and to replace them with boards more amenable to integrated schools so as not to violate the spirit and intent of the Constitution of the state of Louisiana.<sup>94</sup> At every session, he vigorously promoted Article 135, Title VII. Again the act failed in its intended purpose. In 1870 Rey was no longer Chairman of the Committee on Education, but this time a stronger act managed to get rid of the old order school boards. After several legal skirmishes, the old district boards were disbanded in December 1870 and schools were ordered to integrate within one month. Thus began a six and an half year experiment in integrated schools in Orleans Parish.<sup>95</sup>

Henry Rey waged the battle for education in New Orleans on another front. This time the battle was fought at his father's beloved Catholic Institution. The school had deteriorated physically and academically after the premature death in March 1867 of its revered director, Armand Lanusse. In December 1869, a visiting committee declared the Catholic Institution to be in a state of miserable disrepair without books and everything

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<sup>92</sup> *Official Journal of the Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the State of Louisiana of 1868*, 149.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 122 and 199.

<sup>94</sup> *The New Orleans Tribune*, January 12, 1869.

<sup>95</sup> DeVore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 70.

else necessary for a school. The girls' classroom did not have windows. Enrollment had declined to 85 boys and 41 girls. In February, Rey used his influence in the Legislature to obtain operating funds, and in April 1870 the Board of Directors sent a letter to Rey thanking him for saving the school.<sup>96</sup>

The following year Rey took a more active role in the Catholic Institution. In July 1871, he attempted to wrest control from its president, Canon J. Adolphe. According to Rodolphe Desdunes, Adolphe was

guilty of many fraudulent operations in the management of the school affairs between 1870 and 1885.... [Adolphe] obtained permission from the board of directors ... to be the sole agent in all transactions relative to the school.... Mr. Adolphe could and did collect all the moneys for rent and otherwise, and could and did keep the money by him received, without rendering any account either to the board ... or to the clergy....<sup>97</sup>

The attempt to unseat the shrewd opportunist Adolphe failed as his minions continued to support him. However, Rey retained his position of board member. From 1871 to 1873 Rey was generally absent for meetings, apparently acknowledging his own powerlessness in the face of Canon Adolphe.<sup>98</sup>

The Grandjean registers contain just a few spirit messages related to education. One message received on June 10, 1871 by Eugène Sue (1804-1857), a French novelist, reveals a rather surprising modern outlook for public education. The spirit communication said that the most important question concerning public education was whether or not public schools would include high schools.<sup>99</sup> This message came after public schools were integrated in early 1871.

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<sup>96</sup> December 30, 1869 and April 14, 1870, Séance Book II, 157-8 and 163.

<sup>97</sup> Letter from Rodolph Desdunes to René Grandjean dated August 12, 1921. Letterbook 85-83, Grandjean Collection.

<sup>98</sup> Séance Book II, Attendance Rolls for 1871-1873, AANO.

<sup>99</sup> Grandjean Register 85-64, June 10, 1871, 29. Grandjean Collection.

A more popular topic of Rey's spirit world concerned the Catholic Church, which after the Louisiana Purchase brought significant changes in the religious life of the Black Creoles. Spiritualism, which had appeared dramatically during the early 1850s, challenged the Church's authority. Abbé Napoléon Perché railed against the popularity of the séances, which according to his 1854 editorial in *Le Propagateur Catholique*, had invaded empty heads because their faith in God had been taken away. He further stated that Spiritualism had given birth to a new sect which was an unfortunate addition to a thousand other religious sects dividing the United States.<sup>100</sup>

The popularity of the Catholic Church declined precipitously among the Black Creoles during the late 1850s and during the Civil War years. Abbé Perché, although of French origin, continued to defend Southern institution of slavery and white supremacy. According to Rodolphe Desdunes, Abbé Perché exhorted the slaves in his congregation each Sunday to obey their masters.<sup>101</sup> During the Civil War, the Abbé blessed Confederate flags and staunchly defended the Southern cause.

The Church's continued adherence to racism and unabated demands for money from the parishioners earned the disdain and frequent diatribes from Rey's spirit guides. The Pope was the target for many of these diatribes. "Your robe hides the vermin that covers your people in rags, suffering, while so much gold is hidden in your coffers, Oh! Miserable hypocrite!" was how one spirit guide lanced his vitriol against the Catholic leader.<sup>102</sup> At another séance, Toussaint l'Ouverture was channeled by the medium to vent, "A Pope! He's both the political and religious despot."

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<sup>100</sup> *Le Propagateur Catholique*, January 28, 1854.

<sup>101</sup> Grandjean Notes, 85-93. Grandjean Collection.

<sup>102</sup> Grandjean Register, 85-31, February 13, 1869, 123. Grandjean Collection.

Priests also were targets for spirit guides. In 1871, Joanni, a Black Creole medium and also a poet and teacher at the Catholic Institute, received a message from Père Chalon, a deceased priest at St. Louis Cathedral. The father lamented the fact that money was always demanded for baptisims, pews, masses, and marriages. He went further saying:

The Black is at the back of the church, but his money is white, his 'greenbacks' come from the Yankees that the priests hate, but they bless any and all 'greenbacks.' They blessed the Confederate flags<sup>103</sup>.

Another message from the French romantic writer Rabelais warned that the priest "wants to be your master and that of your wife's and children, who would like to know all the family secrets."<sup>104</sup>

Despite the diatribes, the most frequently channeled spirit guides were four Catholic figures. Especially popular was St. Vincent de Paule (1576-1660), a French Reformer, and known for his work with the poor and the sick. Other notable Catholic spirit guides included Père Antoine (Antonio Sédella) who led his flock in New Orleans until his death in 1829 and his successor, Aloysius Moni, who continued the Latin-European tradition in the face of growing opposition from the Anglo-American conservative faction. Lastly, Père Ambroise, a Benedictine monk and Catholic reformer of the seventeenth century, appears as a frequent visitor to the séance table. Even with all the inflammatory rhetoric aimed against the Catholic Church, the Black Creoles still could not completely sever their strong cultural, ethnic and spiritual ties to the Church. They doggedly held onto their Catholic heritage and tried to bridge the schismatic chasm which steadily widened in the postbellum years.

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<sup>103</sup> Grandjean Register, 85-34, October 30, 1871, 83. Grandjean Collection.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-31, March 11, 1869, 176.

Altered relationships with the Catholic Church were just one change in the total reorientation of the Black Creoles' society after the Civil War. Amicable business relationships with white Creoles and Anglo-Americans quickly soured, and whites distanced themselves from the Afro-Creole elite who were now the equals of former slaves. The old three-tiered racial caste system had collapsed and with each passing year it became more and more evident that the former free black population no longer had its old advantages in society and in business. The polarization of the races into simply black and white dealt a heavy blow to the Black Creoles' social status.

There must have been some satisfaction within the *Cercle Harmonique* when a white Creole died and visited the séance table to repent and beg forgiveness for his errant ways and maltreatment of the Black Creoles. Such was the case with the French-born Pierre Soulé: diplomat, ambassador, senator, orator, lawyer, Confederate cabinet member, Barthélemy Rey's business associate and former friend of the oppressed. After the Civil War Soulé returned to New Orleans; his wife had died in 1856 and his only son had become insane. His final two years were spent seated in front of a mirror having long conversations with his reflected image.<sup>105</sup> He died a broken and ruined man on March 16, 1870. Two months later the spirit of Soulé apologized:

I used to be the friend of the oppressed, my heart beat for Liberty, but soon pride and ambition took over, I forgot my sacred aspirations and I loved the lamb of gold. I sacrificed my republicanism on the altar of slavery. Forgive me, forgive me! Brothers!<sup>106</sup>

Experiencing the cataclysmic societal changes of Reconstruction, the Black Creoles by necessity sought new political alliances with black Anglo-Americans. One early leader was Oscar J. Dunn who first entered Louisiana political life in 1865 with

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<sup>105</sup> Edward Laroque Tinker, *Les Ecrits de la langue française en Louisiane au XIX siècle*, reprint from d'Evreaux, 1923 (Geneve: Shatkine, 1975), 448.

<sup>106</sup> Grandjean Register 85-31, May 22, 1870, 271, Grandjean Collection.

Henry Rey on the same executive committee of the Friends of Universal Suffrage.<sup>107</sup>

After the ratification of the 1868 liberal Louisiana Constitution, Dunn joined the Warmoth faction and was elected on his ticket as the state's first black lieutenant governor. Internecine strife developed between Dunn and Warmoth as the governor courted the Conservatives and turned his back on African-American demands for reform. By the fall of 1871, Dunn openly challenged Warmoth and actively worked to start impeachment hearings calling Warmoth the party's "first Ku Klux Governor."<sup>108</sup> Dunn's role was cut short by his sudden and suspicious death on November 22, 1871. The official cause of death was listed as "congestion of the brain," but some Afro-Creoles claimed that his political enemies had poisoned him. Interestingly, Henry Clay Warmoth was one of the pallbearers at his funeral.<sup>109</sup>

One week later Rey's twelve-year-old daughter, Lucia, requested Dunn to appear. Her grandmother, Rose Gignac, appeared instead and explained that "Dunn could come, but at the moment he is deep in thought about his past life. Later, he will understand his position and I believe he will come near your father."<sup>110</sup> The following week Dunn delivered his first communication to the circle advising them that "Dividing a house is ruinous to all. For the sake of harmony and for the freedom of all, don't shatter to pieces the great work already done. United we stand, divided we fall." Most of the communications are written in French, but Dunn's are consistently in English. The use of English indicates that Dunn only spoke English, and it also indicates that Rey's circle

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<sup>107</sup> *The New Orleans Tribune*, September 15, 1865. Dunn was born free in New Orleans in 1826. Some historical sources erroneously report that he was a slave who bought his freedom.

<sup>108</sup> As quoted in Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed 1863-1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 218.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, and 219. See Marcus B. Christian, "The Theory of the Poisoning of Oscar J. Dunn," *Phylon* Vol. 6, No. 3 (3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr., 1945), 354-266 for a more detailed account.

<sup>110</sup> Grandjean Register 85-34, November 30, 1871, 160. Grandjean Collection. Grandjean notes that at this séance Lucia and her classmates were present.

was bilingual.<sup>111</sup> In the same vein Dunn consoled Rey's *Cercle Harmonique* that their "duty is not in fighting the wrong of your opponents. You are to work in harmonizing the two elements in a solid phalanx, to be able to vanquish your real political enemies.... I did not want to divide our ranks, I was wrong."<sup>112</sup> Again, the séance table provided a forum for past political foes to repent and apologize for their mistakes.

On the anniversary of his death O. J. Dunn issued this command: "Tell the boys! Do not Despair! Hold on together. I am in the light."<sup>113</sup> Messages from Dunn appear frequently in the Grandjean Registers, mostly encouraging the circle to continue their struggle against adversity and not to give up. Nowhere in any of Dunn's numerous communications does he mention being poisoned.

After serving in the House of Representatives for two years (1868-1870) Henry Rey was appointed the lucrative position of Third District Assessor in New Orleans on April 13, 1870. The new post gave Rey increased status and a much higher salary than what he made as a hardware store clerk. Rey was now able to move from the small Creole cottage on Columbus Street to a beautiful new home at 341 Villere in Tremé. After two years as Third District Assessor Rey was dismissed on March 5, 1872.<sup>114</sup> The Registers do not indicate the reason for dismissal, but the spirits consoled Rey saying, "Your loss of employment is for your Good."<sup>115</sup>

The topics discussed by the spirit messengers covered a wide range. Most were messages from departed loved ones assuring their relatives that they had arrived at a

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, December 8, 1871, 194.

<sup>112</sup> Grandjean Register 85-35, December 26, 1871, 5. Grandjean Collection.

<sup>113</sup> Grandjean Register 85-37, November 22, 1872, 329. Grandjean Collection. Capitals proliferate in the communications.

<sup>114</sup> The dates for Rey's tenure as Third District Assessor are taken from a plaque at the Third District Assessor's Office in New Orleans City Hall. Grandjean frequently mentioned Rey's role as assessor in his margin notes, emphasizing the increased wealth from that position.

<sup>115</sup> Grandjean Register 85-39, March 14, 1872, 300. Grandjean Collection.

better world and were no longer suffering. Other communications gave political advice or were apologies for past errors. Spirits frequently returned from the Great Beyond to give their living friends and relatives words of encouragement. “Don’t fear the Future;” “*En avant!*” “The Banner of Light is flying;” “Continue your Route;” were just a few spirit aphorisms designed to inspire Black Creoles to persist in their quest for racial equality and social reform. Other popular topics included the status of women, diatribes against the Catholic Church, the mission of Spiritualism and memorials for the fallen martyrs/heroes of Port Hudson and the Mechanics Institute Massacre of July 30, 1866.

The Ladder of Progress (*L’echelle de Progression*) was a reoccurring image. Life, according to Moni, was “ a long rocking ladder on which you climb and fall at the moment you least expect it.”<sup>116</sup> The imagery could also apply to the movement of society away from slavery and prejudice to a time of harmony between the races. The lofty goal of an egalitarian society with no racial divisions was frequently discussed in the communications. The Black Creoles still clung to this elusive goal, possibly believing Northern rhetoric that assured them of racial equality with whites. On November 18, 1871 the fallen white martyr John Henderson denied having regrets dying for a cause. “In my new world, I am satisfied to have been a victim of the cruelty of fanatical enemies of Human Rights, for it has given me Light, and I am going forward toward Eternal Progress!”<sup>117</sup>

By the early 1870s, the séance venues had changed from neighbor homes and Valmour’s home/blacksmith shop to Rey’s house and Joseph Lavigne’s small cigar shop at No. 162 Esplanade at the corner of Esplanade and St. Claude. The Bureau of the

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<sup>116</sup> Grandjean Register 85-33, June 16, 1871, 68. Grandjean Collection.

<sup>117</sup> Grandjean Register, 85-36, November 18, 1871, 153. Entry was written in English. Grandjean Collection.



Treasury was used occasionally for séances, and the séance registers were stored in François Dubuclet's office. The Bureau was located in the old Banque de la Louisiane which opened in 1820 at the corner of Royal and Conti.<sup>118</sup> The Société des Arts et Métiers was another venue for séances.

Punctuality was essential because latecomers "destroyed the already prepared harmony." Séances began at either 7pm or 8pm, depending on the season. At the appointed hour the doors were closed, and the readings of the previous séance began. After the readings, latecomers were admitted, and the doors once again closed.<sup>119</sup>

The medium was often referred to in communications as "the apostle giving the evangelic and angelic world." Questions such as "Where were you born? In what year? When did you die? And to what sphere do you belong?" were considered to be "foolishness" and "stupid questions." Rey admonished his circle to "never call any Spirit, for often he cannot come and another then, could take his name.... Have a great respect for Spirits; for you must be like them one day."<sup>120</sup>

Rey did not list the attendees at the séance circles, but the indexes of spirit guides, use of the French language, margin notes and the texts of the communications indicate that those in attendance were generally men from the Black Creole elite and to a lesser extent Black Creole women. Whites were occasionally admitted as guests. François Dubuclet (Petit) described to René Grandjean the composition of the Rey's circles. There were in fact two circles with two different regular members. On Mondays there were Joseph Alexi, a barrel maker; Romain (no other name given); Donatien Déruisé and

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<sup>118</sup> Grandjean Margin Note in Register 85-36, 409. Grandjean Collection. Additional information about La Banque de la Louisiana was obtained from John Magill. "The History of Banking in New Orleans," *Louisiana Cultural Vistas*. Spring 2007, 37 and 41.

<sup>119</sup> Grandjean Register 85-36, August 19, 1872, 409. Grandjean Collection.

<sup>120</sup> Grandjean Register 85-33, June 17, 1871, 74. Grandjean Collection.

Emilien Planchard; Joseph Lavigne, his friend from the Couvent Institution and the Native Guards; François Dubuclet who also acted as a medium; and Rey himself. On Fridays the circle included Jules Mallet, Emile Luscy, Maitre Brion; Nelson Desbrosses, the famed poet and teacher at the Catholic Institution; Lucien Lavigne, a Cuban; plus Dubuclet and Rey. The regular members numbered seven, an important number for preserving the harmony within the *Cercle Harmonique*.<sup>121</sup>

The spirit messengers were more racially diverse than the participants. Political figures, martyrs/heroes of the Black Creole world, French romantic writers, deceased Creole mediums, Catholic Church leaders who adhered to the Latin-European traditions, relatives, white friends and former business contacts and a few Native American spirit guides such as Pocahontas made their way to the séance table. Sometimes the spirits would act as if in a chorus; one would communicate a short sentence, and then another would pick up the theme and issue a brief communication only to be quickly joined by more spirits. Often five or more spirits are listed as spirit messengers at the end of a communication, as if the message would increase in importance if the many spirits acted

As a result political losses during Reconstruction, the hopes and aspirations of the Black Creoles declined. They had appointed themselves guardians of the liberties for all Blacks, Anglo-Americans as well as Gallic. However, the keystone to their special status among African Americans had disappeared. They were just like any other African American in Louisiana: second-class citizens with few political opportunities on the horizon, and competing for the dwindling leadership roles. Former slaves and former free people of color were all the same within the postbellum polarized racial caste system.

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<sup>121</sup> Grandjean Margin Notes in Register 85-36, 177. Grandjean Collection.

The crucible of Reconstruction fused Black Creoles with the freed slaves, and the cherished French ethos was eclipsed by the emerging Americanized Black ethos.

By the end of 1873 the protracted struggle over civil rights for African Americans was basically over, particularly in rural Louisiana.<sup>122</sup> White opposition had taken a tragic, violent turn with the formation of the White League, a paramilitary organization similar to the Ku Klux Klan. In March 1874, the first chapter of the White League appeared in Alexandria, and the chapters spread rapidly throughout rural Louisiana. In June 1874 a chapter was founded in New Orleans with former Confederate General Frederick N. Ogden as its president. With 4,000 federal troops stationed in New Orleans, it was not going to be an easy task to employ the scare tactics used so successfully in the countryside. Nevertheless, events culminated in another historic bloody New Orleans street battle.

On Saturday, September 12, 1874, three shipments of guns had been sent to the White League on the steamboat *Mississippi*. When the leader of the mostly black state militia, former Confederate General James Longstreet, found out about the shipment he set up a position barring the way to the waterfront on Canal Street. Incendiary newspaper articles railed against what the editors perceived to be an infringement upon one of their most basic constitutional rights, the right to bear arms. A hastily arranged meeting at the Henry Clay statue at the intersection of St. Charles and Canal on Monday morning brought a hysterical call to arms for the 5,000 men who attended the meeting. At four o'clock the two sides met, and a skirmish followed in which eleven Metropolitans died,

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<sup>122</sup> White Leaguers executed at least seventy black leaders in a confrontation over a courthouse in Colfax on Easter Sunday, April 13, 1873. LeeAnna Keith, "The Colfax Massacre," *Cultural Vistas*, Winter 2008-09, 68-79.

and twenty- one of Ogden’s forces were killed. Governor Kellogg sought refuge in the federal customhouse until President Grant could send in more troops to restore order.<sup>123</sup>

The Battle of Liberty Place was particularly challenging for Henry Rey on personal and political levels. His bother, Octave Rey, was Acting Chief of Police. Hopes for African-American civil rights faded quickly into resignation after the street battle. Broken promises, crushed hopes and failed laws lay in the wake of the catastrophe. “For Rey’s circle the frustrations of repeated political failures and the exposure to recurrent violence showed in changes in the style and content of the messages they received from their departed friends, revealing a reluctant, and forced accommodation to the new social order.”<sup>124</sup> The spirits advised the mortals on September 14th not to dwell on their sorrows and vanquished dreams of equality because the “pitiful Despots will lower their heads and kneel before you.” Those who suffered at the hands of the despots had the satisfaction of knowing that they would receive the “crown of Martyrs with patience and resignation, without hate.” The following day Vincent de Paule counseled Rey’s circle, “Fear nothing, follow your Route my brother .... You will see proclaimed the Civil Rights of each, and they will be maintained.” On September 16<sup>th</sup> Vincent de Paule urged the circle “not to worry about Political troubles that are going on at this moment, stay firm in your liberal opinions and march with the National Party ....”<sup>125</sup>

Still, some spirit messages were guardedly optimistic. Vincent de Paule lamented the loss of life in the Battle of Liberty Place:

The blood spent yesterday shows how much hate there is in the hearts of men looking to subjugate their Brothers! ... you will see Civil Rights proclaimed and they will be

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<sup>123</sup> Judith K. Schafer, “The Battle of Liberty Place: A Matter of Historical Perception,” *Cultural Vistas*, Spring 1994, 9 -17.

<sup>124</sup> Cox, *Body and Soul*, 185.

<sup>125</sup> Grandjean Register 85-57, September 14, 1874, 37; September 15, 1874, 39½; and September 16, 1874, 44. Grandjean Collection.

maintained. Fear nothing! You will see a rainbow of Peace .... Don't worry about Political troubles that are going on now, stay firm in your liberal opinions and march with the National Party....<sup>126</sup>

The insurrection was quickly quelled by Grant's troops, but the reverberations continued long past September. In December 1874, three days of school riots occurred in mixed schools. High school boys coached by White Leaguers ejected students they determined to be "colored." Some of those ejected were in reality white, and some students not ejected were light-skinned African Americans. Teachers were insulted, and the city superintendent, Charles Boothby, was threatened with hanging. Schools reopened after the Christmas holidays.<sup>127</sup>

Henry Rey in 1873 was appointed as a member of the revamped Orleans Parish School Board. Examination of school board minutes reveal a dedicated member who seldom missed meetings and volunteered on visiting school committees as well as standing committees such as School Supply Purchases and New Schools.<sup>128</sup> Black Creoles held about one-half of the seats, and other held the remaining seats Blacks and several prominent moderate white Southerners including James Longstreet. According to DeVore and Logsdon in *Crescent City Schools*, good management and substantial new funding helped the public schools prosper until 1875.<sup>129</sup>

The end of New Orleans' integrated schools coincided with the end of Reconstruction. In March 1877, Rutherford B. Hayes was inaugurated as President, and he promptly withdrew federal troops from Louisiana. In April 1877, the entire Orleans Parish School Board disbanded and was replaced with a new board. There is no

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, September 15, 1877, 39½ and 44. Grandjean Collection.

<sup>127</sup> DeVore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 76.

<sup>128</sup> Orleans Parish School Board Minutes, January 9, 1875 - February 7, 1877. Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

<sup>129</sup> DeVore and Logsdon. *Crescent City Schools*, 73.

indication from the minutes of the last meeting on February 7, 1877 that the board would be terminated. Rey was no longer a member of the Orleans Parish School Board.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Orleans Parish School Board Minutes, February 7, 1877 and April 4, 1877. Orleans Parish School Board Collection. Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.



*Echelle de Progression* – Ladder of Progress from Grandjean Register 85-40. Henry Rey’s *Cercle Harmonique* believed that individuals went up a ladder of progress to obtain perfection. The writings in blue and red are those of Rene Grandjean who wrote copious margin notes. The other writing is that of Henry Rey. The spirit Assitha was Grandjean’s mother-in-law. There were just a few drawings in the voluminous registers. René Grandjean Collection. Courtesy of Special Collections, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

Peut-il te dire, mon frère, que je  
veille sur toi!"

On me pleure et je suis heu-  
-reux, se

C'est qu'en n'a pas com-  
-pris qu'il y a un ciel pour tous  
et non pas de condamnés au feu  
éternel.

Les pichés sont des contes  
pour amuser les vieilles femmes et leur  
faire peur.

Les fautes sont suivies  
d'expiation.

Courage  
Amé!

Le médium est un médecin de l'âme,  
il doit prier et demander l'assujé-  
-tissement de ses passions et la dispa-  
-rition de ses erreurs, pour donner la  
Vérité avec ses splendeurs.

Pleurez, mes frères, sur vos  
égarements; mais combattez-les et  
soyez vainqueurs.

Les lâches succombent  
sous la lutte.

Les forts vivent, la tête!

Le pardon est la vengeance,  
c'est la plus belle vengeance de l'outroge!

Henry, I am for I am  
with Him, for Him and by  
Him powerful.  
God bless you, friends

Valmour

Page 144 from Grandjean Register 85-34. Valmour was a charismatic medium with a large following of White and Black Creoles. After his death in 1869, he frequently appears at Rey's Spiritualist Circles to console, advise, and encourage the Black Creoles. The message is partly in English, which indicates that Valmour was bilingual. René Grandjean Collection. Courtesy of Special Collections, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.



## 5 – Political, Economic and Social Transitions

The sudden ouster of the interracial Orleans Parish School Board was another blow to the political fortunes of the former Free People of Color. Many Black Creoles also suffered economically. David Rankin studied economic changes from 1860 to 1870 using a group of ninety-eight Black Creoles and concluded that for “over three fourths of these people the war brought no improvement in economic status, and it spelled decline for nearly one half of them.”<sup>131</sup> The depressed local and national economies certainly did not help the elite; in addition to these economic factors, it must be remembered that the Black Creoles lost many business contacts with whites.

Initially Henry Rey was an exception to the downward economic spiral of the Afro-Creoles described by Rankin. During the early 1870s Rey greatly improved his economic status by aligning himself with the black leadership in the Louisiana Legislature. His appointment as the Third District City Assessor in 1870 provided a much higher salary. After two years Rey lost that coveted position, and he became despondent. Finally, Rey obtained a permanent position in 1877 with Pitard’s Hardware at Canal and Rampart where he was hired as “first clerk.”<sup>132</sup>

As a young man Henry Rey had entered into an apprenticeship with Eugène Hacker at his Tremé hardware store. Rey was unable to return to his former job because

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<sup>131</sup> David Rankin. “The Impact of the Civil War on the Free Colored Community of New Orleans.” *Perspectives in American History Vol. XI – 1977-1978*, ed. Donald Fleming (Cambridge: Harvard University), 397.

<sup>132</sup> Grandjean Margin Notes in 85-63, no p. n. Grandjean Collection.

Hacker committed suicide on May 13, 1871.<sup>133</sup> A spirit relative of Hacker appeared six months after Hacker's suicide and explained that Eugène wanted to visit his family at the séance table because he was worried about his former store and his struggling family.<sup>134</sup>

Two more events affected Rey's financial situation. In 1873, Rey and his wife invested their money in the Freedman Bank, and the bank failed in 1874.<sup>135</sup> On December 3, 1875, Rey's beautiful house on 341 Villere burned down, and few of his possessions were recovered. Unfortunately, Rey had let the insurance lapse just two days prior to the fire.<sup>136</sup> The family moved to a smaller house at 95 Columbus Street.

Diminished political and economic fortunes created a malaise that engulfed the Black Creole community. Clubs, Masonic orders and fraternal organizations provided a welcomed respite from the reality of everyday life. Rey became more active in La Société d'Economie et d'Assistance Mutuelle (Economy Society). Immediately after the school board take-over, Rey was elected secretary of the Economy Society on March 1, 1877.<sup>137</sup> He had been a member since at least the early 1860s. On June 11, 1861, Henry Rey had formed his Economy Company for the Confederate Native Guard and selected officers and a treasurer. The 100 member company included many Economy Society members, hence the name of the company.<sup>138</sup>

The Economy Society was founded in 1836 by Black Creoles to provide fellowship, financial assistance for its members' medical bills, and to offer leadership

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<sup>133</sup> Grandjean in his margin notes wrote that Hacker committed suicide, Grandjean Register 85-35, 16. Grandjean Collection. The New Orleans Coroner's office officially declared the cause of death to be apoplexy. Coroner's Office Rec. of Inquest, vol. 21, May 1871, City Archives, NOPL.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, December 12, 1871.

<sup>135</sup> Freedman Bank Records accessed on Ancestry.com. May 20, 1873.

<sup>136</sup> Grandjean Margin Notes in Register 85-61, 38. Grandjean Collection.

<sup>137</sup> Email from Fatima Shaik and Société d'Economie et d'Assistance Mutuelle Minute Book (Mss 267), March 1, 1877, 1. Société d'Economie et d'Assistance Mutuelle Collection. Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

<sup>138</sup> Grandjean Register 85-30. Pull out sheet inserted in the register. Grandjean Collection.

opportunities since the traditional avenues in church and in the government were blocked.<sup>139</sup> Another important function of mutual aid societies was to assist with their members' funerals. A specific protocol was followed for a departed brother's funeral. According to Article 2 in the Economy Society Constitution the secretary wrote a condolence letter to the deceased's family in the name of the Economy Society.<sup>140</sup> This last task now fell to Rey. As in the séances, Rey played the role of conveyer of messages and a portal for the after life. His task was to offer solace for the living who grieved for their departed loved ones.

On June 13, 1877, Henry Rey wrote his first condolence letter to the widow of Joseph Vignaud Lavigne, his childhood friend, Catholic Institution instructor, Native Guard comrade, medium and faithful séance circle regular. Rey commended Lavigne for being "a model son, a faithful friend, a tender husband, a patriot like his father, a person with great intelligence and an ardent propagator." Rey consoled his widow with the belief that her husband was "now in a glorious place as a result of his work for the Triumph of Good."<sup>141</sup>

The death of Lavigne meant that his tobacco shop could no longer be used for séances. Other regular séance members had either quit the circle or else had died by 1875. The fire that destroyed Rey's Villere house also adversely affected the two *Cercles Harmoniques*. The Grandjean Registers stop in November 1877; in fact, the séance circles had ended in 1875. For the last two years, Henry Rey continued the registers

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<sup>139</sup> *Constitution et Statues Organiques de la Société d'Economie et d'Assistance Mutuelle*, 1. Louisiana Vertical Files, Jones Library, Tulane University.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>141</sup> *Société d'Economie et d'Assistance Mutuelle Minute Book (Mss 267)*, March 1, 1877, 78. *Société d'Economie et d'Assistance Mutuelle Collection*. Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

alone, just like he had begun the registers, alone.<sup>142</sup> In 1877, Rey finally found fulltime employment with Pitard's Hardware Store, and the registers completely stop because of the heavy workplace demands.<sup>143</sup>

During those last two years the zealous calls for political action and the euphoria over an anticipated change in the racial structure in Louisiana were replaced with melancholy communications that urged Rey to be patient and to be content with the present. Quiet resignation reigned.

The spirit guides advised Rey that they were "happy to be able to call to your sides the luminous Spirit of glory and of Progression .... We are with you." The communications are filled with assurances that members of the circle were not alone in life. "Remember that we will be with you to protect you and to give you the force," O.J. Dunn assured Rey on the anniversary of his death, "Truth must prevail and justice will come in all its glory.... Do not fear anyone.... We are watching coming events." The last message is dated November 24, 1877 from *un ami*, a friend who reminds Rey that "we are with you for an eternity."<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Grandjean Margin Notes in 85-37, 485 and 558. Grandjean Collection.

<sup>143</sup> Grandjean Margin Notes in 85-65, 311. Grandjean Collection.

<sup>144</sup> Grandjean Register 85-63, November 22, 1877, 553; May 29, 1877, 124; July 30, 1877, 221 (in English); and November 24, 1877 (pull-out paper). Grandjean Collection

## 6 - Final Days

Since the Grandjean Registers terminate in 1877 there is nothing in the Grandjean Registers to indicate that Henry Rey was an activist in social or political reforms after 1877. Year after year Rey toiled at Pitard's Hardware Store as first clerk. Rey still lived in the family Creole cottage on 95 Columbus Street, and that is where his wife of thirty-three years, Adèle, died on July 22, 1890 of heart failure.<sup>145</sup>

In 1891 Black Creoles formed a committee to protest the beginning of legalized Jim Crow, the Separate Car Act (1890). His name does not appear among the members of the Citizens Committee. In the fall of 1892 a General Strike in New Orleans at least temporarily united the races in their demands for reforms. Rey may have sympathized, but he took no active role.

The Black Creole world was in disarray. The once proud men and women who stood apart from the enslaved blacks amalgamated with them into one undistinguishable subordinate racial caste with shattered dreams of social and political equality.

On August 27, 1892 Henry Rey filed an application with the Bureau of Pensions for an invalid pension. According to the pension file, Rey was marching in October 1862 between Bayou Desellmont and Lafourche Crossing when he fell and injured his right and left ankles. It further stated that the injury was at first "but light inconvenience, but

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<sup>145</sup> Certificate of Death of Adèle Crocker Rey, July 23, 1890. City Archives, NOPL.

with time ... [it] caused him to often fall.”<sup>146</sup> The application process proceeded at a snail’s pace for two years. There were investigations to determine the validity of his disability, but nothing was resolved at the time of death. Months later progress ended, and the papers were placed in the rejected file.

Henry Louis Rey died of anthrax on April 19, 1894 at his Columbus Street home.<sup>147</sup> René Grandjean wrote, “Rey, the noble Apostle went to the world of spirits to find the apostles that had preceded him and with whom he had communicated their instructions to all.”<sup>148</sup>

And so ends a sad, long forgotten chapter of New Orleans’ history.

The legacy of the Grandjean Séance Registers is that of a proud people seeking to maintain their unique social caste in the face of white intransigence and to fight oppression in all forms for themselves and the freedpeople. Through spiritual communications the Black Creole elite turned inward and found the strength to continue the futile fight in a dignified manner despite the violence, despite the discrimination, despite the increasingly conservative Catholic Church, and despite the loss of political power. Their survival until the twentieth century can be at least partially attributed to Henry Louis Rey, Médium.

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<sup>146</sup> U.S. Pension Record No. 1,127,637, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions. Thanks to Barthélemy Rey’s descendent, Allaina Wallace, for sharing the official records.

<sup>147</sup> Death Certificate of Henry Louis Rey, April 20, 1894. City Archives. NOPL.

<sup>148</sup> Grandjean Margin Notes in 85-63, 511. Grandjean Collection.

## Appendix

### Timeline of Henry Louis Rey

- 1791 St. Domingue Revolution
- 1802 Flux of refugees from St. Domingue to Cuba
- 1804 Birth of Barthélemy Rey in Cuba
- 1809 Second immigration from Cuba to New Orleans
- 1829 July: Barthélemy Rey marries Rose Agnès Sacriste.
- 1831 February 20: Henry Louis Rey is born.
- 1837 Birth of Adèle Crocker.
- 1848 March 31: Fox sisters report mysterious raps in Hydesville, New York.
- 1857 July 9: Pierre Crocker dies. September 3: Henry Rey marries Adèle Crocker.
- 1858 June 19: Rey begins his first séance register (85-30).
- 1859 Rey moves from St. Philip Street to 95 Columbus Street. Lucia Rose Rey is born.
- 1860 April 25: Last entry recorded at Joanni's house in Rey's first séance register before Civil War begins. December 21: Death of Rose Crocker, wife of Pierre Crocker.
- 1861 May 2: Confederate Native Guards is formed.
- 1862 May 1: General Benjamin Butler occupies New Orleans. Rey, Davis, Rapp and Octave Rey surrender weapons to Butler. September 27: First issue of *L'Union*, First Regiment of the Union Native Guard is mustered in.
- 1863 April 6: Rey resigns for medical reasons (disease). May 27: Port Hudson Battle. November 5: Meeting of Free Colored Citizens at Economy Hall.
- 1864 May 10: Séance register is resumed (85-30). November 28: Albert Louis Rey is born. December 27: National Equal Rights League Mass Meeting.
- 1865 April: Civil War ends; Lincoln is assassinated. July 5: Rey begins second séance register (85-31). Séances resume at Valmour's house. September 13: Rey resigns as secretary to the Friends of Universal Suffrage. November: Entries are recorded in the register after several months of absence.
- 1866 July 30: Mechanics' Institute Massacre. September 3: Placide Augustin Rey is born.

- 1867 March 2: Rey begins his *Cercle Harmonique* (85-31).
- 1868 March 7: Death of Placide Rey. June 29: Antoine Dubuclet becomes State Treasurer. A liberal Constitution is enacted. Rey is elected member of the Louisiana House of Representatives.
- 1869 February 6: Death of Valmour (John B. Aversin).
- 1870 January: Henry Rey is appointed director the Catholic Institution Board. April 13: Rey becomes the New Orleans Third District Assessor. July 6: End of the second séance register.
- 1872 March 5: Rey is removed as Assessor.
- 1873 Rey is appointed member of the Orleans Parish School Board.
- 1874 Freedman Bank fails. September 14: Battle of Liberty Place. December: White males eject African American pupils from integrated New Orleans Public Schools.
- 1875 End of Rey's *Cercle Harmonique*. Rey continues his séance registers alone. December 3: Rey's house at 341 Villere burns down, and he moves to 95 Columbus Street.
- 1877 Reconstruction ends. Rey employed by Pitards' Hardware Store. March 1: Rey elected secretary of Economy Society. April: Rey is replaced on the new Orleans Parish School Board.
- 1890 Separate Car Act. July 22: Adèle Rey dies.
- 1892 August 27: Rey applies for a Union Invalid Veteran pension. Fall: New Orleans General Strike.
- 1894 April 19: Rey dies. September: Rey's application for a pension is filed as "rejected."



## **Vita**

Melissa Milliner Daggett was born in New Orleans where she attended public schools. Upon graduation from John F. Kennedy High School, she attended the University of New Orleans and then transferred to Louisiana State University where she obtained a B.A. in Political Science.

Melissa Daggett returned to the University of New Orleans to become certified in Social Studies. She taught middle school Social Studies in the Jefferson Parish Public School System for several years. During this time she earned a M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of New Orleans. After becoming certified in French, Ms. Daggett taught French at the elementary level for twenty years. In 2004, Melissa Daggett began her Master's program in History with an emphasis on American History.