PEYTAVIN, John L.

St. James Parish, Louisiana

Submitted by Mike Miller

Peytavin, John Ludger, attorney, planter, and author, was born 1859 in St. James parish, La. at the family home where his father was born in 1828; son of Ludger Dobosque and Marceline (Melancen) Paytavin, the latter of whom was born 1832 in the same parish in which the lives of both her husband and son began. Her life closed peacefully at the same place in 1891, 6 weeks prior to the death of her husband.  The business of sugar planting claimed the attention of the husband and father throughout the active portion of his life.

John L. Peytavin was the only child born to his parents, his father being an only son. In the course of his early education young Peytavin attended Jefferson college, in his home parish, and graduated with the degree of A. B. in 1879. Following this, he entered the law department of the University of Louisiana, now Tulane university, and having completed the course and passed the required examination, was admitted to the bar before the supreme court of Louisiana in 1883.  In the same year the honorary degree of A. M. was conferred upon him by Jefferson college.  He has been engaged in legal practice since the date of his admission to the ranks of the profession, and at this time occupies the important position of Senior Federal Referee in Bankruptcy for the parishes of St. John the Baptist, St. Charles, Jefferson, St. Bernard and Plaquemines.

The Peytavin plantation in St. James parish long ago was given the name of "Ancient Domain."  Three generations of children of the family have enjoyed their sports in the shades of the wide-spreading branches afforded by the noble oak and pecan trees that adorn the grounds of the family homestead.  The fertile acres that flank this venerable site for 2 generations were practically given over to the cultivation of sugar cane, the yield and net returns being generally highly satisfactory, but some years ago, the present master of the lands became convinced, through a study of the problems involved, that the time was approaching when sugar planting would be far less remunerative than in previous years, and he therefore set about changing the character of the product of his plantation so as to avoid the unprofitable period he believed to be approaching.  This transformation began about the year 1903, and as a result, that portion of the plantation fronting on the Mississippi river and extending back about 1-1/2 miles, now bears a magnificent pecan orchard, beyond which the rice fields in gently undulating sweeps that become lost to the eye.  This pecan grove contains more than 1,500 trees, of various ages, and of these about 90 per cent are seedlings.  The oldest were planted by his grandfather, and later by his father; 1878, John L. Peytavin while yet a school-boy, during the Christmas holidays, assumed the responsibility of increasing the orchard; and every year since he has set out a large number of young trees, and hundreds of those which first claimed his attention, are now yielding a handsome revenue.  Mr. Peytavin believes that grafting will not afford satisfactory results in that vicinity, and has therefore limited it to about 10 per cent of his pecan acreage.  He produces seedlings for his own orchard, but is not in the nursery business and sells no trees of any kind, finding returns from his extensive acreage very satisfactory.

Aside from the demands of his profession, and the management of his plantation, Mr. Peytavin finds time for musical composition and literary work, toward which his tastes largely incline.  Among the best-known songs he has produced may be mentioned "The Old Church Bell,'' "My Dear Old School,'' ''Farewell, My Dear Old Home,'' ''Where is the Home of My Youth" and ''The Orphan's Prayer.''  Other songs of equal popularity have come from the versatile pen of this man of many parts, who produces prose with equal facility.  An English translation of "Albert Dufond," one of his novelettes in French, is now about ready for the publisher, while another story portraying a Louisiana romance founded upon fact is at the same time nearing completion. His literary work extending back through many years, as it does, necessarily embraces many titles that can not be mentioned within the limits of space available here.  Mr. Peytavin was also a contributor to ''Memoirs of Louisiana,'' issued in 2 volumes from the press of a Chicago publisher more than 20 years ago.  Some years ago in many rural districts of Louisiana, the schools were not up to their present grade of efficiency.  Classes were very much overcrowded and to one teacher was assigned a number of pupils that would have reasonably exacted the services of several teachers.  To this condition Mr. Peytavin was much alive, and though residing in New Orleans, he was much interested in the schools of his native parish.  Accordingly, he suggested to leading citizens of the village adjoining his plantation, the organization of a private school.  Under his direction, 2 associations were formed, the Progressive Educational association of St. James and the Ladies' Auxiliary association.  These 2 societies provided the funds which maintained a good and efficient school during several years.  Mr. Peytavin was the inspiring spirit in organizing the alumni association of Jefferson college, of which association he was president for 12 years, and which has grown to be an important organization which acts as an aid to and cooperates with the authorities of the institution.  He was a member of the Athene Louisianais for 10 years during which time he wrote a number of essays in French which would fill a good-sized volume.  One of these essays was a problem in physics which attracted much attention in Europe as well as in America.  Another of the essays was a refutation of some of the statements of George W. Cable. This essay was received with great favor and was publicly complimented.  It is not strange, indeed, that from a setting so pregnant with poetic inspiration should come a contribution to those notes of melody that call for pause amid the hurrying throng and tend toward the uplift of humanity.  Politically, Mr. Peytavin has always been allied with the reform element.

In 1893, John L. Peytavin was married to Miss Clemence Camors, daughter of J. B. Camors of New Orleans.  To them, 5 children have been born, viz.: Marceline, Ludger, Isca Marie, Camors J. B., and Clement Boisdore', all of whom are living and attending school in New Orleans.

NOTE:  Original source includes a photograph of Mr. Peytavin.

Fortier, Alcee, Lit. D. *Louisiana: Comprising Sketches of Parishes, Towns, Events, Institutions, and Persons, Arranged in Cyclopedic Form* Volume 3. Madison, Wis.: Century Historical Association, 1914. pp. 356-358.