Lecture Notes; or,
Lucky Find in the Dustbin
Michel Rateau
[Translated from the Original French by Dorothy M.D. Karlanovic]

[Editor's Note: The Laffite Society is grateful to Mr. Rateau for his permission to print the following. It was originally published in the bulletin Génalogie et Histoire de la Caraïbe, No. 82, p. 1651, May 1996. Instructions for contacting Mr. Rateau follow this article, which is a valuable bibliographical addition perhaps particularly for those interested in Champ D'Asile.]


Just Girard was born in Paris in 1792; orphaned from his mother at seven years, he left for St. Germain at 10 years and took up a commission at 17 years of age, in 1809. It is in the Spanish regiment that he is made lieutenant ... Fleurus, Mont-St-Jean ... and, on the abdication of Napoleon, he finds himself on half pay.

Returning to Paris, decorated with the Legion of Honor, he embarks for the U.S. and arrives in Baltimore in April, 1816. Over there he meets some colonists driven out of Santo Domingo (1794-1795), one of which is a Monsieur Tournel, formerly a wealthy resident of Santo Domingo, who has become a hardware merchant in Baltimore and who is a strong presence throughout this account. Tournel's family had been massacred; he had fled with his father, and was sheltered on a Spanish ship which left him in Havana, where he stayed for three years and where his father died.

Girard leaves Baltimore on a whaling ship on which he practices this profession for four years. Farther on, he is recalled because he has a wife, mother-in-law, and daughters fourteen and twelve years of age.

Chapter 2 mentions the Marshal of Grouchy; the Generals Clauzel, Vandamme, and Lefebvre-Desquennes [sic] (the organizer of the new state of Marengo, of which the chief site is Aigleville); Rigault (he, accompanied by his daughter, also an ex-colonist of Santo Domingo); the brothers Lallemant (including Dominique); Bernard; and the Colonel Galabert.

Tournel wishes to become a planter in Texas, which he explores and where he hopes to found a "New France," a project approved by the Count of Survilliers (Joseph Bonaparte), then at Philadelphia.

Further on, Monsieur Chenet, former lieutenant in the infantry of the Old Guard, is mentioned.

The affair of Champ D'Asile, which was in favor of the refugees of Santo Domingo, is retraced.

Also present is Monsieur Collin, of Santo Domingo, a relation of Tournel and for more than ten years a manager of a plantation in Louisiana. Michel Gournay, born in upper Canada, is a trapper. Girard marries Éléonore, the oldest daughter of Tournel.

Collin has an older son, and two daughters who marry the two sons of Tournel. Monsieur Girard marries and has several children; he will become aide-de-camp of Sam Houston. According to Collin, Monsieur Tournel dies some days after the declaration of independence of Texas.

In 1839, Girard finds himself in Houston for a meeting of Congress; he becomes one of the richest businessmen in the United States of that time ...

[Translator's Note: Michel Rateau has been a genealogical researcher for more than forty years and is associated with numerous genealogical organizations. For queries regarding historical research in France, particularly in the Dordogne region, and for genealogical and heraldic research in all historical periods, interested parties may contact him at 25 La Barrière, 24150 Mauzac-et-Grand-Castang, France. Telephone: (33) 05.53.22.56.08; fax: (33) 05.53.22.42.99. Please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope with your inquiries.]