

/ By Jeff Walter /

JEAN BAPTISTE CHAMPAGNE II

The legacy of this New Orleans Patriot lives on through a long line of ancestors who bear his name.

In Louisiana, Champagne has been a common surname for centuries, after an influx of settlers from two families: one directly from France and the other from Nova Scotia. Among descendants of that first group, the name Jean Baptiste Champagne looms prominent. Jean Baptiste Champagne II served for many years as a local militia sergeant and most likely fought against the British in two key battles in September 1779.

Champagne Country

No birthdate is available for Jean Baptist Champagne II, but he was born circa 1742 in New Orleans and moved with his family to St. Charles Parish on the “German Coast,” the name given to a settlement north of New Orleans on the Mississippi River where large numbers of German settlers intermarried with the French.

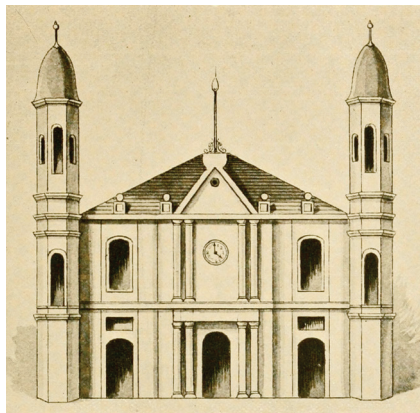
Some records list his birthdate as February 6, 1745, but that is actually when he was baptized, at what is now St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans. At that time, it was common for children to be baptized a year or more after

their birth, with priests traveling to churches throughout the year to perform various sacraments. Jean Baptiste II’s baptismal certificate lists his mother as Magdeleine Chaillier, whom his father, Jean Baptiste Champagne I, took as his second wife in 1744. His biological mother was Catherine Perine Mouton Chauff, the elder Jean Baptiste’s first wife. Chauff, who was of German descent, apparently died during childbirth or soon after. Stepmother Magdeleine raised Jean Baptiste II and his older brother, Nicolas. She and the senior Champagne also had three children of their own: two boys and a girl.

The French-born Jean Baptiste I, who was from a military family, had arrived in New Orleans around 1722 as a French marine, a corporal in the *Compagnies Franches de la Marine* (Independent Companies of the Navy). He remained in the region for the rest of his life. He owned properties, including an inn, on Bourbon and Conti Streets in the French Quarter.

Today, Charlotte Champagne, a descendant through Jean Baptiste II’s youngest son, Evariste, has done extensive

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An 1895 recreation of the Church of St. Louis of 1794, as it looked when it was under Spanish rule. Jean Baptist Champagne II was baptized there in 1745.

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genealogical research into the family history, compiling a binder of more than 1,000 pages, including documents ranging from marriage contracts to property inventories to wills. The absence of specific dates for many events can be attributed to an 1806 fire that destroyed the church building where those records were kept. That church, the second oldest ecclesiastical parish in the Archdiocese of New Orleans, is now known as St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church.

The New Orleans-based genealogist Champagne also explained the seemingly endless variations in spellings of Jean Baptiste II's birth mother's name (and that of others): "The only people who could read and write when the settlers came down here were usually the priests. When somebody would say a name, they'd phonetically spell what they heard. With French names, they did fine. With German names, like Mouton Chauff, not so well."

Protecting the German Coast, Fighting the British

Jean Baptiste II married his wife, Marie Charlotte Edelmayr about 1764, when she was 14 or 15 years old. They went on to have nine children—eight sons and a daughter—all of whom lived to adulthood and married into several of the first families living on the German Coast.

He was a member of the German Coast militia, which according to Charlotte Champagne was formed to protect coastal settlers from American Indian attacks—notably by the large Choctaw tribe—and other threats. The requirements were not



Left: Champagne served as sergeant under Bernardo de Gálvez (left), the colonial governor of Spanish Louisiana. He likely participated in the attack on Fort Bute and the Battle of Baton Rouge.

during a steady march into British West Florida. That campaign began with two engagements in which Jean Baptiste II likely participated.

First, on September 7, 1779, came the capture of the important military and trading post Fort Bute on Bayou Manchac (also known as the Iberville River), which completely surprised a

British garrison unaware that Spain had entered the war. The Battle of Baton Rouge, 14 days later, brought another Spanish victory, with minimal casualties, and paved the way for the eventual Spanish capture of Mobile, Ala., in March 1780 and Pensacola, Fla., in May 1781.

Later Years and Legacy

Outside of his military service, Jean Baptiste II owned a small plantation in St. Charles Parish where he grew cotton and indigo.

He died on May 1, 1803, in St. Charles Parish, leaving a will that indicated he had been ill for a while. The will was "very precise about everything," Charlotte Champagne said. An estate inventory taken after his death was similarly exacting in cataloging his possessions, from the house and outbuildings to their furnishings, clothing, underwear, sheets, tools, animals (each with a name) and, finally, slaves, who were listed by age, name and country of origin. "If it says 'native,' they were born on the German Coast," Charlotte Champagne said. "And the sad part is 'value,' how much they're worth. A slave family was worth \$1,200."

Jean Baptiste II was a member of the German Coast militia.

"If you had a gun, you were in the German Coast militia."

—CHARLOTTE CHAMPAGNE, A DESCENDANT OF JEAN BAPTISTE II

particularly exacting. "If you had a gun, you were in the German Coast militia," she said.

Records indicate that Jean Baptiste II was a sergeant by the age of 26 and later served in that capacity under Bernardo de Gálvez, the colonial governor of Spanish Louisiana, when the German Coast militia joined Gálvez's forces. Spain formally declared war on Britain on May 8, 1779; and Gálvez and his forces launched a series of devastating attacks on the British

Some of Jean Baptiste II's sons fought in the 1815 Battle of New Orleans, in which General Andrew Jackson led a ragtag collection of Louisiana militia, local businessmen, frontiersmen from Kentucky and Tennessee, Choctaw Indians, freed slaves, pirates, sailors and American troops to a bloody victory over the British in the War of 1812's well-known battle.

Over the centuries, the Champagne family has given birth to at least 15 generations of males named Jean Baptiste. 🌐