



Entering the Revolutionary War on the American Colonies' side in 1779, Bernardo de Gálvez's Spanish troops conquered British forces in British West Florida.

OUR  
PATRIOTS

# JOSEPH DECUIR, Multinational Patriot

By [Ingrid R. Stanley](#)

**I**n the late 18th century, Joseph Antoine Decuir became one of the wealthiest planters in Louisiana's Pointe Coupee Parish. But that's not why his name deserves to live on: The son of French immigrants to Louisiana, Joseph served in the Spanish army that aided the Colonies in their fight for independence and earned status as a Revolutionary Patriot.

## Marching on Baton Rouge

Joseph's father was Jean Francois Decuir, a native of Merth, France (now Merzig, Germany). Jean Francois lived in present-day Belgium before making the journey to the Louisiana colony sometime around 1720. Though the population of Louisiana at that time was largely French Creoles, or people of French ancestry, the colony was ruled by the Spanish.

Jean Francois married Genevieve Mayeux of New Orleans on November 5, 1743. Jean Francois and Genevieve had a total of 12 children and raised them all in Pointe Coupee Parish, La., on the west side of the Mississippi River, now part of the Baton Rouge metropolitan area. Joseph was their fourth child, born on August 30, 1752.

Around 1777, Joseph joined the Pointe Coupee Parish militia along with two of his brothers, Pierre and Jean Paul. The militia served under Bernardo de Gálvez, the colonial governor of Spanish Louisiana. After Spain, an ally of France, declared war on Great Britain on May 8, 1779, in retaliation for the losses incurred during the Seven Years' War, Gálvez made plans to take British West Florida. In late August of that year, he gathered his recruits—militiamen such as Joseph and his brothers, Creoles (including free Creoles of color), American Indians, U.S. volunteers and his own Spanish regulars—and marched to the far western border of the British-held land. First he captured Fort Bute, about 115 miles up the Mississippi River from New Orleans, after a brief skirmish, then he traveled 15 miles to Fort New Richmond in Baton Rouge, La., on the east side of the Mississippi River. For hours his soldiers shelled the fort in the British colony until Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Dickson surrendered.

Spain's endeavors in the military action at Baton Rouge and other British-held posts in the south diluted its enemy's strength in British West Florida. It was this military might, along with Spain's contributions of finances, supplies and munitions, that aided the American cause.

"Most Americans think of the Revolutionary War as happening in the original 13 Colonies," writes Randy Paul Decuir, a descendant and author of *Pointe Coupee's Patriots: 1777 Pointe Coupee Militia: Louisiana's Forgotten Soldiers of the American Revolution* (2016). "But Louisiana's French Creoles played a key role in the war, which captured the control of the Mississippi River from the British, blocking the British Army from this vital access route."

Joseph honorably served in the militia for 26 years. In honor of the U.S. Bicentennial in 1976, Point Coupee DAR Chapter honored Joseph and other members of the militia with a plaque that still hangs in the lobby of the Point Coupee Parish Courthouse.

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## Domestic Relationships

Though Joseph never legally married (Louisiana law forbade interracial marriages), he had a long relationship with Françoise Beaulieu, a free woman of color and one of the wealthiest free persons of color in the parish. Beaulieu was the daughter of Louis Chauvin Beaulieu II and Marianne, a free woman of color whose heritage traces back to grandparents from Senegal.

In 1804 Joseph sold Beaulieu a plantation downriver from his, but by 1810 they were living next to each other, according to that year's Pointe Coupee Parish census. Together they had five children: Eugenie, Antoine, Claire, Celeste and Leufroy.

After Beaulieu died in 1812, Joseph spent the rest of his life with another free woman of color, Claire Quevain. They had a daughter, Heloise. Pointe Coupee Parish civil records show that on October 31, 1818, Joseph acknowledged all six of his living children by Beaulieu and Quevain.

## Land and Legacy

In 1783 Joseph purchased around 1,800 acres along Fausse Riviere (or False River) in Pointe Coupee Parish. According to surveyor's notes found in the Pointe Coupee Clerk of Court office, Joseph bought the land from two American Indian chiefs named Champagne and Nicolas. No home was built on the land until after his death.

Just before his death Joseph was visited by the parish judge, Peter Dormenon, to assist him in the writing of his last will and testament. Joseph left as much of his estate as the law would allow—one half—to Eugenie, Antoine, Claire, Celeste, Leufroy and Heloise. Each of the children received more than \$30,000. He left the other half of his estate to his nieces and nephews. Joseph died in February 1822 at age 72 according to some records, or 70 according to the date of birth in his baptismal record.

Joseph's son, Antoine, built a house on his father's False River land around 1832–1835. According to the Library of Congress, the house was reportedly designed by a builder from Santo Domingo (now the Dominican Republic), who was thought to have provided a scale model of the house. However, neither the model nor documentation of the builder has been found. The French Creole-style plantation was named Austerlitz in honor of Napoleon's victory at Austerlitz in 1805. The house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991. The privately owned home still exists in the present-day town of Oscar, La. 🌟

*Ingrid R. Stanley is a member of General Daniel Newnan DAR Chapter, Newnan, Ga. Joseph Decuir is her 5th great-grandfather.*