

# *Lives of Quiet Desperation*

## *The Ancestry of a Louisiana Frenchman*

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Privately Published by the Author  
Cedar Park, Texas



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# THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION

## Amnesty for Eugene Lavergne

The Civil War was an American nightmare. The single Battle of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania killed more Americans than some of America's wars. For many, Reconstruction, or the rebuilding of the American infrastructure, was even more traumatic than the war itself. It reached all parts of the South, even those remote areas barely scarred by military clashes. Action in the Opelousas area, for example, was pretty much limited to the Battles of Buzzard's Prairie, near the Chreitian Plantation, on 15 October 1863; Opelousas, on 21 October 1863; and Bayou Borbeaux, on 3 November 1863, in a rural area between present day Church Point and Sunset, Louisiana. The clash of the forces of Union General Nathaniel Banks and small, but effective bands of mounted Texas and Louisiana guerillas made life extremely uncomfortable for the residents of the area. While the battles were little more than large skirmishes, at least when compared to Antietam and Gettysburg, the presence of Union forces brought fear and even terror. Federal and Confederate troops needed supplies and were determined to get it from area stores and farms. As Union forces approached Opelousas an exhausted Confederate rider in tattered clothes, in much the same tradition as the Revolutionary Patriot Paul Revere, dashed through the streets of Opelousas shouting the ominous message: "*Les Federaux sont sur le Carencro!*" ("The Yankees are on the Carencro [River]").

David C. Edmonds, author of *Yankee Autumn in Acadiana*, points out that few places suffered more from invasion, occupation, and confiscation than Opelousas. Colonel Thomas E. Chickering of the 41st Massachusetts Infantry and General Nathaniel Bank's military governor, spent almost two months in Opelousas area "collecting the valuable products of the country." Every house, farm and store in Imperial St. Landry Parish (St. Landry, Acadia and Evangeline Parishes) from Plaquemine Brulee (Church Point) to Barre's Landing (Port Barre) had been "virtually denuded by Chickering's efficient foraging teams." Foreigners, Confederates, free men of color, Acadians and other Frenchmen saw their valuables taken, including cotton, sugar, fodder, corn, livestock, implements, wagons, slaves and anything else of value. The wanton confiscation and senseless destruction of valuable property inflicted upon civilians by undisciplined Union soldiers motivated the area's young men and their families to attempt behaviors and display signs of neutrality. It was all for naught; the jayhawking and marauding continued unabated.

Unlike the Civil War itself, the war in Louisiana was relatively quick and decisive. Once Admiral David Farragut captured New Orleans, Confederate Louisiana was no more. For the Union Army (and the Confederates) the subsequent "Battles of the Bayou Country" were more attempts to determine the future of Texas than a defense of the Bayou State. By living in between Texas and New Orleans, Cajuns and other French Louisianans were caught in the middle: geo-politics brought the Civil War to Acadiana. As we shall see, geo-politics, unfortunately, has always determined the fate of the Louisiana French.

The Lavergnes were never wealthy owners of vast tracts of land, and not likely to ever have owned more than a few slaves. They were simple tenant farmers and never part of the opulence of the Antebellum South. Eugene Lavergne had witnessed the Civil War as an adolescent, and as a 19-year-old he volunteered into Confederate service as a private in Company D of Weatherly's 15<sup>th</sup> Sharpshooters Battalion. According to the Website *Acadians in Gray*, "This battalion was organized about July, 1864, probably at Pineville, from men of Miles' Louisiana Legion on parole west of the Mississippi River and from new recruits. The battalion was assigned to General Allen Thomas' brigade at Pineville and did

guard duty there during most of its service. Some of the men appear to have served as pickets along the upper Atchafalaya River early in 1865. Thomas' brigade moved across Red River to Bayou Cotile in April, 1865, and soon marched to Natchitoches. On May 19, the brigade was disbanded at Mansfield in anticipation of the surrender of the Trans-Mississippi Department."<sup>1</sup>

U.S., Headstone Applications for Military Veterans, 1925-1963 for Eugene Lavergne  
1925-1941 > La Tour, Eugene Victor - Lehman, John A

EVA

**WAR DEPARTMENT**  
O. Q. M. G. Form No. 638  
Approved Aug. 12, 1913  
Revised May 18, 1931

**APPLICATION FOR HEADSTONE**  
(PLEASE MAKE OUT AND RETURN IN DUPLICATE)

Enlistment Dates \_\_\_\_\_  
Discharge Dates June 19th. 1865 *15 (Weatherly's)* **ORIGINAL**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Name <u>Lavergne, Eugene</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rank <u>Pvt.</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Company <u>D</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> U. S. Regiment, State Organization, <i>Sharpshooters</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Date of Birth <u>Dec. 6, 1891.</u>	
Name of Cemetery <u>"Catholic Graveyard"</u>		Located in or near City <u>Opelousas</u> State <u>La.</u>		If World War Veteran Division _____ State _____ Emblem _____	

To be shipped to Joseph Anslem at Opelousas, La. St. Landry Parish  
(Name of consignee) (Give R. R. station, county, and State)

Whose post-office address is Opelousas, Louisiana.

DO NOT WRITE HERE

To A. G. O. JUL 16 1935  
COLUMBUS, MISS. AUG 14 1935  
Ordered \_\_\_\_\_  
B/L 1141660  
Shipped 10-24-35

This application is for the UNMARKED grave of a veteran. It is understood the stone will be furnished and delivered at the railroad station or steamboat landing above indicated, at Government expense, freight prepaid. I hereby agree to promptly accept the headstone at destination, remove it and properly place same at decedent's grave at my expense. NO FEE SHOULD BE PAID IN CONNECTION WITH THIS APPLICATION.

Applicant, \_\_\_\_\_  
Address Opelousas, La. Date July 12, 1935.

3-2654



Eugene Lavergne - Original Tombstone Plaque



Present day Tombstone

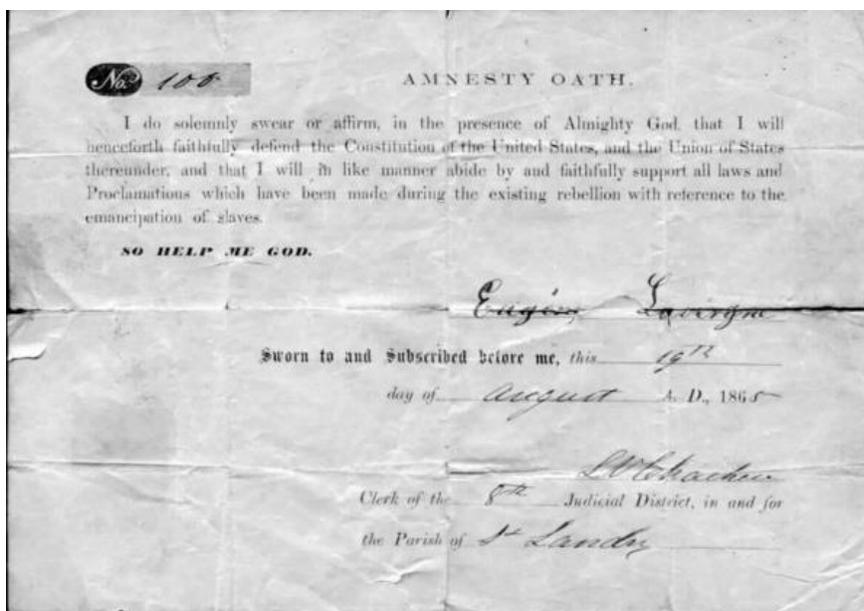
<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.acadiansingray.com/15th%20Bn.%20S.S.%20Inf.htm>

Three years earlier, in July of 1862, Congress passed an act providing for the confiscation of the property of disloyal persons. It allowed sixty days for these persons to return to their proper loyalty to the United States. Normally, this was done through a "Loyalty Oath." In September, General Benjamin Butler, the commanding Union officer in New Orleans ordered all persons who refused to take the loyalty oath to be registered as enemies and to provide a list of their property. About 4,000 people registered as enemies, but more than 61,000 swore a loyalty oath. By war's end in 1865 many young men, including Eugene Lavergne, were appearing in courthouses to receive amnesty and to solemnly swear to:

1. faithfully defend the Constitution of the United States;
2. support the Union of States; and
3. support the Proclamations and laws passed by Congress during the war.

Union officials were interested in having the men of the area renounce the institution of slavery, and more specifically, to accept Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which freed slaves in Confederate-held lands as of 1 January 1863.

On 19 August 1865, less than three months after his battalion had been disbanded, and about two weeks before his marriage to Marie Hermine Bourgeois, Eugene Lavergne appeared before L.V. Chachere, a St. Landry Parish clerk, and swore a loyalty oath. He might have done so in order to secure a marriage license, or to protect whatever property he did own, or just to get the whole messy affair over with.



Eugene Lavergne Amnesty Oath, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1865  
St. Landry Parish, Louisiana

Text reads: "I do solemnly swear or affirm, in the presence of Almighty God, that I will henceforth faithfully defend the Constitution of the United States, and the Union of States thereunder, and that I will in like manner abide by and faithfully support all laws and Proclamations which have been made during the existing rebellion with reference to the emancipation of slaves. **SO HELP ME GOD.**"

#### **About the Author**



Gary M. Lavergne is a retired Director of Admissions Research and Policy Analysis for The University of Texas at Austin. He has authored four books and is the winner of the Writers' League of Texas Award for Best Book of Non-fiction, the Carr P. Collins Award for Best Work of Non-fiction by the Texas Institute of Letters, and the Coral Horton Tullis Memorial Prize for Best Book on Texas History by the Texas State Historical Association. He has also written for the New York Times, CNN, and numerous magazines and scholarly journals. He is an elected member of the Texas Institute of Letters and has appeared on DATELINE NBC, the Today Show, Good Morning America, the History Channel, Biography, American Justice, The Discovery Channel and many other network and cable news shows.