

THE SAPELO COMPANY: FIVE FRENCHMEN ON THE GEORGIA COAST, 1789-1794

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Creation of the Sapelo Company

From Savannah to St. Marys, Georgia, the coast is sheltered by eight large barrier islands and several smaller ones. Fully documented accounts of the histories of these islands or even part of their history have only recently begun to appear, and many are in very limited-issue publications or reports.¹ Before this new series of publications, all previously published information dealing with Georgia's coastal islands, and especially the French involvement there, was found mostly in literature written for general audiences and especially tourists.² A case can be made for the idea that the story of the French in Georgia was always garbled and often given far greater emphasis in these coastal histories and especially the oral traditions than it actually deserved, especially in the more recent publications. This paper, in part, is presented to examine this possibility and in so doing to place events in better perspective by evaluating the actual effect, if any, of the French experiment upon the coastal islands and Georgia history.

The three islands with which Frenchmen would be involved, St. Catherines, Sapelo and Jekyll, are located approximately in the middle of Georgia's coast. Since today only Jekyll has a bridge connecting it to the mainland, much mystery and isolation still surround the other two. All three islands had already been thriving, slave-based plantations long before 1789.³ They were all occupied by the Spanish from the late 1500s until the late 1600s. While the native Indians regained ownership and possession after the Spanish left, the English arrival in Savannah in 1733 marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the islands.⁴

In 1789, St. Catherines, after being owned and lost to creditors by Button Gwinnett, had come into the joint ownership of several Georgia and South Carolina investors, one of whom was John McQueen.⁵ Jekyll was owned by the deceased grantee Clement Martin's son-in-law, Richard Leake (the future father-in-law of Thomas Spalding), and Sapelo had been purchased from the estate of Patrick Mackay at a tax sale by John McQueen.⁶ McQueen (1751-1807) was heavily involved in many land transactions in Georgia and his debts eventually forced him by July 1791 to move permanently to East Florida.⁷

After just over four years of ownership, on 1 February 1789, John McQueen sold the entire island of Sapelo (which included Blackbeard Island and consisted of some "9,520" acres) for 10,000 pounds sterling to a Frenchman, Francois-Maria Loys Dumoussay de la Vauve.⁸ While Dumoussay

and Julien-Joseph Hyacinthe de Chappedelaine, who had witnessed the Sapelo deed and was one of his future French copartners, had been in the United States for some time before the former purchased Sapelo Island, the other as yet unselected copartners remained in France⁹

The historical beginnings of the French Revolution were well underway at the time of the Sapelo purchase. That upheaval eventually forced many to leave France and some of her colonies for fear of their lives. These emigres stood to lose all their landholdings in France if they did not return. However, the danger in the mother country forced those members of the Sapelo Company who came to Georgia to remain, even though they may have wanted to return to France.¹⁰

Dumoussay returned to France to seek financial support for his Georgia venture in June 1790. Upon arrival, he immediately contacted his friend, Chappedelaine. Dumoussay used Chappedelaine to find French investors who might need a secure place for their money, or at some point, a safe haven.¹¹

While Dumoussay's initial letter to Chappedelaine concerning Sapelo does not mention that his immediate need for money was to pay the unrecorded mortgage on the island, he does discuss his desire for other investors. After only a few written communications, to which Chappedelaine responded enthusiastically indicating that he wanted to be a part-owner/investor, did Dumoussay begin discussing the idea that perhaps, rather than seeking loans, he might sell shares in the island. In this fashion, and through Chappedelaine, Dumoussay secured the other investors and officially established a copartnership for the ownership of the island that was to remain undivided.¹²

Chappedelaine, who lived at Saint-Brieuc, in Brittany, eventually located three other investors besides himself: his uncle, Picot de Boisfeillet; Poulain Dubignon; and Grandclos Mesle.¹³ Dumoussay, Chappedelaine, and the other three new investors held their first meeting in the late summer or early fall of 1790 at Saint-Brieuc, Chappedelaine's hometown. By securing other investors so quickly, Dumoussay achieved his goal of getting money in time to leave France while the weather still permitted him to make the long voyage to be back in Georgia by early January of 1791.

A month or so later, on 5 October 1790, the agreement defining the Frenchmen's plans for Sapelo was signed at Saint-Brieuc. It established a copartnership, the Sapelo Company, or "Societe de Sapelo," "for the settling, selling, and managing of the islands of Sapelo and Blackbeard," the only islands then owned by Dumoussay.¹⁴

The agreement primarily stressed the undivided and jointly-owned nature of the land, slaves, and livestock. An administrator or overseer for Sapelo was, if possible, to be chosen first from among the copartners. If this did not work out, someone from outside would be hired. Each copartner could live

anywhere on the island he chose, having the right to select approximately 500 acres for his specific use. He could enclose part of the island for his own use, have one servant paid for by the company, and draw supplies from a common store. The agreement also provided for four oarsmen in common service to those on the island, and stipulated how much money any one of the copartners should be allowed to loan the company. The copartners also agreed that an annual accounting and inventory be kept so that each could establish their interest. An outside auditor would be hired, if need be, to make sure these accounts were in order. The partners were allowed to hunt hogs and deer on the island, but admonished each other not to endanger the cattle and horses.¹⁵

It should be noted that this 1790 Copartnership Agreement was made before Dumoussay acquired Jekyll Island, the southern half of St. Catherines, and two houses and a lot in Savannah. Thus, these additional properties are not mentioned in the document.

With the new financial security which resulted from the 1790 Copartnership Agreement, Dumoussay was able to buy even more Georgia soil shortly after his return. On 14 February 1791, he purchased all of Jekyll Island and on 21 May half of St. Catherines Island.¹⁶ In addition, he purchased one of the house lots in Savannah on 2 June 1791.¹⁷ Eventually some, but not all, of the other four Sapelo copartners shared in these purchases. It is apparent from the quick acquisition of these other properties and the mention of Jekyll in the letters from 1789 and 1790, that Dumoussay, and perhaps Chappedelaine, had planned all along to become further involved in the Georgia coast. It is also probable that Dumoussay had contracted for the purchase of Jekyll and even St. Catherines before he left Georgia in 1790.¹⁸

It remains unclear if the original agreement of 1790 was extended either in spirit or in writing to include all of the copartners' eventual joint possessions. Their letters indicate that they at least operated Jekyll on a similar basis as Sapelo¹⁹, but only four of the original five from Sapelo were copartners/co-owners on Jekyll.²⁰ The situation regarding St. Catherines, which involved only two of the Sapelo copartners, is even more hazy.²¹

Who were the Sapelo copartners and what were their respective roles in the Georgia venture? Dumoussay (1754- 1794), as has been mentioned, was the original purchaser of Sapelo who sold the shares to create the copartnership. He had been in the United States for some time before he purchased Sapelo.²² Dumoussay's relatives, who included his mother, a brother, a sister, and a brother-in-law, lived in Paris. Apparently only the latter, Jean-Etienne Trubert, was interested in the Sapelo investment and was willing to be his financial contact.²³

Dumoussay, about 34 years old when he purchased Sapelo, was not married. Besides Chappedelaine, Dumoussay's closest affiliation among the

French men and women who joined the Sapelo copartners on Sapelo or in Savannah was with Bernard Robert LeFils, who had accompanied Dumoussay to Georgia in 1791, and with the latter's brother-in-law, Thomas Decheneaux (1767-1814). LeFils and Decheneaux were merchants in Savannah until LeFils died on Sapelo in the fall of 1793. Dumoussay left bequests to LeFils's widow and children and to members of the Decheneaux family in his will.²⁴ Decheneaux, whom Dumoussay named as one of his executors, and who became a prominent Savannahian, eventually ended up with the records of the Sapelo Company and the duty of defending Dumoussay's memory in several lengthy lawsuits lasting nearly twenty years.²⁵ Because Dumoussay made the decision to secure the other investors, he was chosen administrator and manager, and thus became the official spokesman for the company's activities on Sapelo, even after the other three resident partners arrived. He kept the company's books and distributed dividends. Several of the lawsuits brought after his death were based on accusations of financial mismanagement, as well as questionable overpayments and procedures.²⁶

Julien-Joseph Hyacinthe de Chappedelaine (1757-1794) was the youngest of the copartners, being only 33 at the time of the agreement.²⁷ He had travelled in the United States during 1787-1789 before returning from France to Sapelo in 1791. During his earlier travels in America, he had purchased a mill in Morristown, New Jersey, and land from the Ohio Company.²⁸ In 1788 he had visited Mount Vernon where he was a guest of the soon-to-be president, George Washington.²⁹ Chappedelaine often left the impression that he was a marquis as he certainly did with Washington.³⁰ It was said that he had a fortune, mostly under the control of his mother. Regardless, it had not been very difficult in the summer of 1790 for him to obtain the money needed to become a copartner in Sapelo. He was extremely excited about returning to Georgia with Dumoussay, and it was no doubt this enthusiasm which helped him quickly locate the other investors.³¹ The young Frenchman was described as someone with great promise who essentially believed everything Dumoussay told him and carried out Dumoussay's wishes. He served as the deputy manager of Sapelo and the other islands during Dumoussay's frequent absences and acted on behalf of his uncle, Picot de Boisfeillet, until the latter's arrival, two years after his own.³²

Chappedelaine, as the youngest and most enthusiastic partner, was the one who attempted to smooth over the troubled affairs which eventually characterized the Sapelo Company. He was a dreamer who viewed Sapelo as his paradise and styled himself in letters as the "first Chief savage of Sapelo, Blackbeard, and St. Catherines."³³ Chappedelaine continued his dream of Sapelo as an Eden in the New World with elaborate plans for his own burial, as if he

really were a nobleman and lord of the isle. These arrangements were never fully carried out.³⁴

Charles-Pierre-Cesar Picot de Boisfeillet (1744-1800), maternal uncle of Chappedelaine, born in 1744 in Saint-Malo,³⁵ was living in Bergerac, near Bordeaux, when his nephew wrote him in the summer of 1790.³⁶ Having retired early from a military career, he was 46 at the time of the Copartnership Agreement of 1790.³⁷ His move to Georgia was delayed by the escalation of the French Revolution and its effect on men of his social class. He finally reached Georgia in January 1793, two years after his nephew.³⁸ The retired military man arrived with his second wife, Marie de Larmandie, and their children.³⁹ Although Boisfeillet quickly settled into life as a planter on Sapelo, he seemed more often than not at odds with the other partners, especially his nephew. Ironically, despite his continuous ill will, Boisfeillet was the copartner who lived the longest on Sapelo.⁴⁰

Christophe Poulain Dubignon (1739-1825) was a native of Lamballe, Brittany, near Saint-Brieuc.⁴¹ Aged 51 at the time of the 1790 agreement, he had served in the French India Company and in the merchant marine, often in the East Indies, and had retired in 1785, having "amassed a small fortune."⁴² He first arrived in Georgia in January, 1791, along with Dumoussay and Chappedelaine, but went back to France that summer. When he returned to live permanently in Georgia during the early summer of 1792,⁴³ he brought his wife, Marguerite Anne Lossieux (1748-1825), and their three sons.⁴⁴ Dubignon seemed to be more practical, logically minded, and less temperamental than the other resident copartners.⁴⁵

Pierre-Jacques Mesle, sieur de Grandclos (1728-1806), known in Georgia records only as Grandclos Mesle, apparently never came to Georgia. He was born, married, and died at Saint-Malo. Ennobled in 1768, he was, at 62, the oldest of the original copartners.⁴⁶ After 1792, he shared his interest in the Sapelo Company jointly with another Breton, Nicolas-Francois Magon de la Villehuchet.⁴⁷

Villehuchet (1727-1794), who had arrived in Georgia in early 1791 and had been working on Sapelo, at age 65 became a Sapelo copartner in May, 1792.⁴⁸ A native of Saint-Malo, neither his wife nor his children accompanied him to Georgia.⁴⁹ It was Villehuchet who was instrumental in having the Sapelo title cleared through a sale for taxes and the accounts of the company settled at that time. He left Georgia shortly thereafter in the summer of 1792, never to return. Chappedelaine did not like him, referring to him alternately as "the old man", or "the codfish."⁵⁰

With regard to the brief period of time the Sapelo Company actually existed and managed operations on the islands of Sapelo and Jekyll, various details are known about the partners' activities. The four who came to Sapelo

did so at different times from the first arrivals in January, 1791, of Dumoussay, Chappedelaine, and Dubignon,⁵¹ until that of Boisfeillet two years later, in January, 1793.⁵² Since the latter arrived after Villehuchet had already left, only four of the five shares were represented by resident partners at any one time. The partners owned in common the land, the livestock, some slaves, furniture, houses, a boat, and other items.⁵³

There were certainly more people on the island during this time than the small number of partners. Besides Dumoussay as manager and Chappedelaine as his deputy, present also were separate plantation overseers for Sapelo and Jekyll, a number of hired workmen from France, a doctor, family members when Boisfeillet and Dubignon were in residence on the island, and the families of some of the Frenchmen who worked for the company.⁵⁴ The hired Frenchmen were considered, at times, extremely difficult to manage. Because of that, the French workforce was not greatly increased.⁵⁵

Slaves also lived and worked on both the islands. On Sapelo, Dumoussay initially had the loan of the slaves of John McQueen, the previous owner, during 1790.⁵⁶ After Dumoussay's return in early 1791, he purchased additional slaves who were jointly-owned by the company, and some just for himself.⁵⁷ At the time of the division of the community property in September, 1793, the company jointly-owned fifteen slaves.⁵⁸ A year later, at the time of Dumoussay's death, his estate included fifty-one slaves.⁵⁹ Chappedelaine's estate included only three slaves, the same three he had obtained at the division of the slaves belonging to the company.⁶⁰ The slaves owned by the company included field workers, carpenters, hunters, and others who tended the livestock. The Frenchmen had a difficult time managing the slaves, many of whom ran away, and others who were unruly and therefore sold.⁶¹

The living accommodations were meager on Sapelo and Jekyll. On Jekyll, the Horton House, which still survives, was uninhabitable in the fall of 1791 and was being reconditioned for use. There was also another house on Jekyll for the overseer.⁶² Each of the three partners who had actually visited Sapelo by 1791 selected a place where he wanted to live: Blackbeard Island, or, on Sapelo, the South End for Chappedelaine; Spanish Fort (now Shell Ring) for Dumoussay; and "Bel Air" on the ocean side of the island for Dubignon.⁶³ Thomas Sterling, who was possibly an overseer and who had lived in the country and perhaps even on the island under previous owners, lived in a house on the South End of Sapelo.⁶⁴ There was a community residence at the North End of the island, High Point, where various combinations of partners and their families lived.⁶⁵ There were also a number of frame slave houses on the island.⁶⁶

Dumoussay built another house, a half-mile distant from the community one at High Point, where he moved after attempting to live in the community house after Boisfeillet arrived. Within a few more months,

Chappedelaine also moved, and, again, resumed rooming with Dumoussay, an arrangement which continued until their deaths in September 1794.⁶⁷

The partners, who often discussed the difficulty in building proper frame houses on Sapelo due to a lack of lumber and material for brick chimneys, contemplated having prefabricated houses shipped to the island from Savannah.⁶⁸ In Savannah, the company built two brick houses on Broughton Street, and also owned one vacant lot.⁶⁹

Chappedelaine was interested in gardening and set aside a plot where he grew imported plants and fruit trees. He was always seeking more species to plant in his garden, asking any of the partners who were travelling to send or bring him seeds or samples. At the writing of his will, he made elaborate arrangements for special plantings around his proposed burial site, on the South End at Hang Bull.⁷⁰

The various house sites discussed relative to the years 1791-1792 confirm that Sapelo Island today retains most all of the placenames which were in use during the French era, if not before. These include "High Point," "McKay's Old Field," "Chocolate Field/Plantation," "Raccoon Bluff," "South End" and "Hang Bull." A few placenames like "Bel Air" and "Hermitage," which were used briefly by the French for their house sites or plantations, were short-lived and their use did not survive.⁷¹ In the attempt to obtain investors, Sapelo was promoted by Chappedelaine as an "Eden," a land where most anything could grow and money could be made.⁷² The truth of the matter as revealed by time was that the farm or plantation operated on Sapelo revolved primarily around cattle-raising, as had been the case during the colonial era, and as would continue to be the case off and on into the 1920s.⁷³ Others grew Irish potatoes, hay, and thought the island was capable of producing rice, indigo, coffee, orange trees, olive trees, grapes and peaches. On the Jekyll plantation, the partners raised corn and cotton.⁷⁴ Besides these activities, some islanders on Sapelo raised horses, mules, goats, sheep, and hogs. The creation of the "great fence" and the "lesser fence" in which to corral these animals was one of the major building projects during the company's existence. The necessary stable and hay barn were also constructed.⁷⁵ The importance of the livestock is shown by the fact that when the partners divided the company's assets in the fall of 1793, there was a separate agreement to divide the animals and sell most at a public sale.⁷⁶

Besides farming, there was industry. The partners planned to erect a saw mill due to the vast amount of live oak on the islands, especially Blackbeard. Live oak was the major factor in their negotiations with both the French and U.S. Navies. At one point, millstones were delivered for a proposed corn or grist mill.⁷⁷ Although the company shipped products back to Europe, the

only ship they owned outright was a small one used solely for the short trip to Savannah.⁷⁸

Hunting, both a sport and necessity, was directed toward the wildlife on the island. This included deer, raccoons whose pelts were sold, and wild hogs. Because the islands were so isolated and had such a small population, the partners were always on constant vigil against poachers from the mainland. There was also a lot of fishing, since abundant amounts of sea life occupied areas near the islands.⁷⁹

Because there are no known diaries, little specific information is available regarding what the partners and other residents did on a day-to-day basis, other than manage their own interests and attempt to farm. We do know they ate boiled and roast beef, due to the large amount of cattle available, and considered consuming the latter very Anglo-American. They also ate venison, drank beer and homemade wine as well as wine they brought from Europe. Presumably they also ate the Irish potatoes they grew and some of the produce from their fruit trees.⁸⁰

The social environment on Sapelo was dominated by men. The few women there were the wives of either of the two married resident partners, overseers, some French workmen, or female slaves.⁸¹ If the partners left the island, they usually went to Savannah where they owned two houses. Dumoussay was frequently there on business.⁸² Since the partners owned property in Savannah, they apparently preferred transacting as much of their legal business there as possible, rather than in the more backward, coastal, county courthouses.⁸³

As far as their religious persuasion went, being French, the partners appear to have remained Catholic, the faith into which they were baptized. The names of the two with families, Boisfeillet and Dubignon, along with several of the French workers, are found in the records of the Parish of St. John the Baptist in Savannah. Some of their slaves were also baptized there. It is not known if a priest came to the island during the company's existence, but one came a few years later to baptize the overseer's children.⁸⁴ Many of Dumoussay's slaves had Arabic names indicating the Muslim, or Islamic, heritage usually found in West Africa, which was the homeland of a large number of slaves.⁸⁵

While the Sapelo Company was created by Dumoussay primarily to gain investors, it was seen by Chappedelaine as more of a social experiment and haven from the troubles in France, especially for members of his social class. When luring his uncle, Picot de Boisfeillet, to invest in the summer of 1790, he called Sapelo an agricultural "Eden." He also spoke of the political freedoms to be enjoyed in North America.⁸⁶ Yet, even he had a loftier vision for the company and its Georgia real estate. The day after he landed in

Savannah, he wrote President George Washington, recalling his visit with him in 1788 at Mount Vernon and informing the Virginian of his arrival and that of his fellow Frenchmen: "[I would like to] make you acquainted with my arrival in Savannah with the heads of these noble families of Bretagne [Brittany], who have come over with me to establish themselves ...in order that they may enjoy, in pleasing tranquility, the unspeakable advantages of a wise government....[I hope you will] look with a favorable eye upon the new Colony which we are about to found."⁸⁷

Despite this enthusiastic announcement and promotion by Chappedelaine, who remained cheerful to the end, problems arose almost from the beginning. Dumoussay had predicted this possibility when he first contemplated seeking other investors.⁸⁸ Of the five original copartners, three of the four who lived on Sapelo had met as business associates but not socially.⁸⁹

In contrast to Chappedelaine's glowing announcement, two years later the French consul at Charleston, South Carolina, had a different opinion of life on Sapelo. "At daggers drawn" was his assessment of the relationship between the Frenchmen in early 1793. His statement came after a French ship from Santo Domingo landed on Sapelo and Chappedelaine, calling himself a count, reportedly trampled the ship's flag. The consul stated that due to the company's turmoil "this establishment cannot maintain itself."⁹⁰ Judging from the extant letters, which give only a brief description of the partners' feelings for each other, this assessment was correct.

Dumoussay and Chappedelaine were the most compatible since they roomed together most of the time they were on Sapelo. Later lawsuits brought by their heirs to enhance or rectify their own inheritances under the guise of righting wrongs implied that Dumoussay had undue influence over Chappedelaine. Some of the litigants thought that Dumoussay could do no wrong in Chappedelaine's eyes.⁹¹

Dumoussay's relationship with the other partners, as well as with the other Frenchmen who worked on the island, was a different story. That Dumoussay was not popular is evident from a letter Chappedelaine wrote Boisfeillet shortly after the latter's arrival in Savannah during January 1793. He asked his uncle to try and keep an open mind when it came to Dumoussay and not to listen to the bad things he had heard.⁹² Surprisingly, after this admonition the three--Dumoussay, Chappedelaine, and Boisfeillet--tried to live together on Sapelo in the community house at High Point. This arrangement had lasted only a few weeks when Dumoussay moved out to his own house. Further ill will ensued when Chappedelaine, forsaking his uncle and aunt, moved out a few weeks later and again went to live with Dumoussay. This was just the beginning of ongoing negative feelings between uncle and nephew.⁹³

It was at this time that Boisfeillet, barely on American soil, received a letter from Dubignon, secure on Jekyll Island. This communication may have been the cause of the split between the copartners. Dubignon, once he returned to Georgia in June 1792, decided that Jekyll Island was where he wanted to live. By moving to Jekyll, he isolated himself from the various problems and infighting on Sapelo. Jekyll was some twenty miles south of Sapelo by water, not just across a channel. Dubignon became the first partner to decide it was time to end the copartnership so that each person could own separately his land and other property; primarily slaves and livestock.⁹⁴ It was in this vein that on 13 March 1793 Dubignon chastised Boisfeillet for seeing only "the rose colour in the affairs of Sapelo," and hoped he continued that way. He then expressed his opinion of Dumoussay: "all matters are to be settled on Sapelo, No, sir, it is in the place where they have been fabricated...in Savannah, where Sir Dumoussay has played the great parts, that the veil is to be torn off, and the Publick is to be informed"⁹⁵

Dubignon's main complaint was that the copartners did not have clear titles or deeds to their property, but only "rags of paper" since the land was in Dumoussay's name only--and not in that of the company. He seemed unaware or had forgotten that in May 1792, before his return and while he was back in France, the resale of Sapelo for tax purposes to clear the title had created deeds in each partner's name if they had settled their preexisting debts with the company.⁹⁶ Dubignon had not settled, but was going to Savannah to get Dumoussay to "deliver me titles of property" and "in good form, as he is bound to do it." The disgruntled Frenchman implied he would like Boisfeillet to join him there and indicated that Boisfeillet had already written that he felt "Bubbled in [his] purchase of Sapelo." Boisfeillet had offered to mediate between Dubignon and Dumoussay. Dubignon responded to the offer by saying that he would always accept conciliation, "except with people which conspire my ruin." At this point, Dubignon acted quickly, having his portion of the 1790 Copartnership Agreement recorded in a Liberty County deed book on 29 March 1793,⁹⁷ presumably in lieu of a new deed. However, no new deed was secured.

And finally, Chappedelaine did not much care for Villehuchet. Even before the latter became a partner, Chappedelaine called him an "old codfish."⁹⁸ Since Villehuchet left in May 1792, he was not on hand when the company was being dissolved.

So the stage was set, with tempers flaring, which pitted the two younger resident partners, Dumoussay and Chappedelaine, age 39 and 36, against the two older ones, Dubignon and Boisfeillet, age 54 and 49. Obviously, with this much dissatisfaction brewing between so few people, it was time to divide the business. And as 1793 progressed, that is exactly what happened. On 7 May 1793, four of the Sapelo partners petitioned the Superior Court of Liberty

County to divide the island into five equal shares. Dubignon was notified the same day by an officer of the court.⁹⁹ By prior-arrangement, a notice by Dubignon appeared in the Savannah newspaper, the only one serving the coast, announcing that the company was dissolving and that he was responsible for no one's debts but his own.¹⁰⁰ At the next session of the Superior Court, on 18 July 1793, the judge selected eleven local men to survey and divide Sapelo "in manner prayed for by said petitioners."¹⁰¹

On 13 September 1793, the partners signed the first document by which they dissolved the Sapelo Company. While the agreement was apparently superceded by the one for 18 November, its terms are important. In the earlier agreement, they declared the Copartnership Agreement of 5 October 1790 to be "null and void" and allowed each participant to "act on his own account, as he'll see fit." Dumoussay and Charles Haumont, one of the French workmen, were appointed administrators for the division arrangements. As such, they were to provide an inventory of all the jointly-owned furnishings, from which each copartner was to take what he needed. Furthermore, the slaves were to be divided into lots with each partner getting three who would be chosen by secret ballot. The cattle were to be appraised, grouped, and distributed with like value to each partner, and then branded. A similar appraisal was to be made of the horses, mules, and other animals. The administrators were to make a final accounting of the company's debts and accounts, and arrange a final settlement. Details to be decided later included the disposition of the great fence, the cotton plants, the nursery of fruit trees, the boat landing, providing for the cutting of wood on land "not divided," and the establishment of "a road of communication."¹⁰² Additionally, each partner was to get 2,000 acres on Sapelo, and presumably one of the island dwellings, or something of equivalent value. A plat of survey drawn by Elisha B. Hopkins and based on the partitioners' findings was the basis for this division as best as can be determined. Neither the plat nor the court order dividing the island has been located.¹⁰³

The Dissolution Agreement

In the process of severing their business arrangement, the partners eventually signed several different agreements concerning their land, buildings, slaves and livestock. The second surviving dissolution document, dated 18 November 1793, and the one which apparently was used, concerned the division of both land and cattle. It called for an absolute division of everything. This time Dumoussay alone was authorized to sell any cattle, horses, mules, or other animals necessary to pay any debts already incurred by the company as a whole, or any debts owed him as manager or otherwise. The agreement established May 1794 as a target date for all accounts to be settled. As part of this dissolution

agreement, Blackbeard Island and 400 acres on Sapelo itself were given to Dumoussay as his share of the company's land. In return, he renounced claim to any other land on Sapelo. The other partners also gave him "gratis" the house and cattle on Blackbeard, since he could not use the great pen and pasture on Sapelo once he moved to Blackbeard.

The agreement further indicated that each partner was to select 500 acres of land on Sapelo. Presumably this, when combined with their other land, would provide each partner with up to 2,000 acres. Aside from the land they chose, the rest evidently was to be distributed arbitrarily by the court-appointed partitioners. The great fence was left to the two partners "enclosed in it" and could be moved only after notice was given to the others. The buildings on the island had been appraised by the concern of Griffin and Gray and were to be equitably divided as well.

The agreement was signed on Sapelo with Charles Harris, later Mayor of Savannah, and Thomas Spalding, later owner of most of Sapelo, as witnesses. This is the first known official involvement these two men had with Sapelo, although eventually they would both be connected with it until their deaths.¹⁰⁴ The Frenchmen, in deciding to dissolve the Sapelo Company, also had to consider the division of their other joint holdings, which included all of Jekyll Island, half of St. Catherines Island, and the Savannah property. As 1794 began, they apparently headed toward a final solution. On 20 May, they held the public sale on Sapelo, at which time they sold their jointly-owned wild cattle and horses.¹⁰⁵

On 10 June, the four Sapelo partners who also owned Jekyll Island (Dubignon, Dumoussay, Chappedelaine, and Grandclos Mesle who owned jointly with Villehuchet) drew up a deed of transfer and agreement. In it Dumoussay and Chappedelaine agreed to swap Dubignon their two fourths of Jekyll in return for his one fifth of Sapelo, which they would own jointly until sold.¹⁰⁶ The last fourth of Jekyll, that owned jointly by Grandclos Mesle and Villehuchet, was to be purchased from them by Dubignon.¹⁰⁷

On 12 June 1794, Dumoussay personally sold the southern half of St. Catherines to Thomas Decheneaux for about the same small sum he had paid for it, 500 pounds. The ownership of this tract rested upon an unclear title and probably represented an undefendable claim.¹⁰⁸ The Savannah property apparently remained in the joint possession of the copartners and later their respective estates until after 1800. A notice for the sale of the two houses appeared in the Savannah newspaper in the summer of 1801.¹⁰⁹

After the Jekyll and St. Catherines solutions, Dumoussay and Chappedelaine together owned a sixty percent interest in the islands of Sapelo and Blackbeard (the company's original land), and just over fifty percent of Sapelo itself, making them owners of the largest portion of the island. The only

other resident-owner of land there was Boisfeillet, who owned about 1500 acres at the northern end of the island.¹¹⁰

Dubignon ceased to be dissatisfied once he was ensconced on Jekyll Island and had removed himself physically and legally from any more dealings with the former Sapelo partners by swapping his Sapelo land. At the same time, and despite all the efforts to amicably dissolve the company and divide its assets, Boisfeillet grew increasingly dissatisfied with his former partners. After the formal dissolution took effect and preparations were made for the cattle sale in the late spring of 1794, he publicly notified his associates that he had not been properly informed of plans for the sale. This reaction seems strange indeed since everyone involved was living on the same island!

Boisfeillet's notice appeared on 15 May. Dumoussay rebutted on 5 June, stating that he knew Boisfeillet had been notified of the cattle sale and therefore assumed his purported letter of protest was a forgery. Boisfeillet replied publicly on 19 June, and in the process mentioned the "wrongs suffered by him from the said Dumoussay," that his letter of protest was not a forgery, and that he did not think the cattle sale was appropriate. He then libelled Dumoussay by stating that the latter had usurped the authority to sell the cattle. As a final rebuttal, Dumoussay, Chappedelaine, and several of the French workmen stated in a notice published on 24 July that there had been sufficient notice concerning the cattle sale and that Boisfeillet had not come because he lacked sufficient funds. Dumoussay concluded by calling Boisfeillet a "liar," since four of the five partners, including himself, had agreed to the sale.¹¹¹

In August 1794, Dumoussay noted that Boisfeillet had heard through the translator of Chappedelaine's will that Boisfeillet's children were not included as beneficiaries. This angered Boisfeillet.¹¹² Later in court testimony he argued that he and the others had been overcharged for their shares of the island, since his nephew, Chappedelaine, had paid only half as much as the others for his share.¹¹³ Even before his arrival in Georgia, Boisfeillet had complained directly to Dumoussay that the promises made in 1790 remained unfulfilled and that he was not making as good a return on his money as he had anticipated.¹¹⁴ All of this bickering took place during a time when, had he remained in revolution-racked France, his fate would surely have been uncertain. The hapless Villehuchet, who had returned to France, was executed at about the same time that Boisfeillet was complaining about conditions on their island paradise.¹¹⁵

The summer of 1794, which began with the company being dissolved and the community property divided and sold, was the last with any harmony for the remaining former partners of the Sapelo Company. In August, while attending court in Savannah, Dumoussay wrote Chappedelaine on Sapelo about his imminent return to the island and future plans regarding their farm or plantation on the island.¹¹⁶ He had been back on the island only a short time

when, on Thursday, 11 September, he died on Sapelo "after a few days' illness," presumably from a fever.¹¹⁷

Chappedelaine, once the terms of Dumoussay's will were known to him, realized he had been left nothing. Specifically, he received neither the land nor slaves used on the island plantation he had run jointly with Dumoussay. After specific bequests, the rest of Dumoussay's estate had been left to his brother-in-law in Paris. Chappedelaine searched their house for papers to prove his claim of actually owning more of Sapelo, or their joint holdings, than he actually did. The fact that he had made large loans to Dumoussay partially explained his actions.¹¹⁸ The scene which no doubt followed closely Dumoussay's funeral on Friday¹¹⁹ suggested a man in a total panic.

On Saturday, 13 September, Chappedelaine, in a codicil to his own will, named Thomas Decheneaux, who was also Dumoussay's executor, as his executor to replace the deceased Dumoussay. He also reiterated his plans for an elaborate personal burial site at Hang Bull, on the opposite or southwest side of the island. It was almost as if he had a premonition of death even though he was only 37.¹²⁰ Once again, he made no provisions for his Boisfeillet cousins in his will, leaving his property to a very distant cousin in France who was still a minor. Since his Boisfeillet cousins were also minors, had he willed them his lands on Sapelo, the property would have come under their father's control. What happened next is not yet, even after nearly two hundred years, fully known. On Monday, 15 September, Chappedelaine met his uncle, Picot de Boisfeillet, and the two presumably had yet another disagreement. The uncle shot and killed his nephew.¹²¹ Boisfeillet was arrested by the McIntosh County sheriff and later indicted for murder.¹²² In this fashion, the "Societe de Sapelo" ended almost four years to the day after its creation. It was nearly a decade after the demise of the Sapelo Company, and the deaths of Dumoussay and Chappedelaine, before most of the island once again came under the control of a single individual and his business partner.

Conclusions

The result of all of the land transactions connected with the Sapelo Company and the removal of the French from Sapelo Island was that, in less than ten years after the dissolution of the business association, by June 1804, one local planter, Thomas Spalding (1774-1851), became the owner or co-owner of seventy-five percent of Sapelo and at least eighty slaves once owned by the French. Spalding became the one person most identified with Sapelo Island until the 20th century.¹²³

Despite Spalding's purchases and his fifty-year affiliation with Sapelo, he would never be owner of the entire island, nor would anyone else. The

Sapelo Company had been the last to hold that unique position. Although brief, the period of private French ownership of Sapelo, half of St. Catherines, and Jekyll Islands on the Georgia coast had some lasting effects.

Jekyll returned to single-family ownership under Dubignon. This was in direct contrast to the multiple ownership of St. Simons Island and, by the 1880s, Sapelo and others. It was this single-family ownership, reassembled by 1885, which made it easier for northern investors to select Jekyll to purchase in 1886 for their southern haven which resulted in the creation of the Millionaires' Village there. For St. Catherines, the impact of the brief French ownership of only half of the island was minimal and apparently, due to a defect in the title, probably not legal.

On Sapelo, the results of French control were much more significant than the brief period of ownership might have warranted. The history of the current black resident landowners of Sapelo can definitely be traced to the 1830s and most of these people probably descend from the large number of slaves purchased from the Frenchmen's estates in 1801-1804. Furthermore, the Sapelo Company's French workforce and other associated French people, including the LeFils, Decheneaux, Haumont and other families, remained in Savannah and coastal Georgia. They and their descendants established an important legacy of the French era on the coast by adding another immigrant strain to Georgia. Many became important local officials both in Savannah and elsewhere.

The greatest supposed legacy of the French era has previously been more closely connected with its myth, legend, and romance than reality. Since no definitive history of Sapelo Island has been published, all previous Sapelo accounts appeared as chapters in books. If they dwelled at all on the French period, they often overlooked the significance of later events; specifically omitting many important later landowners and their contributions to the island's history. The deficiencies of these mostly brief discussions of the French involvement can be attributed to oral tradition and the works of Charles Spalding Wylly, their only real source. The origin of this information probably rested upon the fact that a great majority, if not all, of the blacks who subsequently lived on the island was related to the Frenchmen. They simply passed on the oral traditions of the earlier era as related in family legends. The near total loss of records due to the McIntosh County Courthouse fires in the 1870s left only the records of the Frenchmen found in Savannah to document the early post-Revolutionary history of Sapelo.

Wylly (1836-1923), grandson of Thomas Spalding, was a local author whose published and unpublished works were given greater accessibility when his niece, Caroline Couper (Stiles) Lovell, incorporated and elaborated upon them in her work *The Golden Isles of Georgia* (1932). She wrote more about the French era than any of the other coastal authors. She was followed closely by

Dolores Boisfeuillet Colquitt Floyd (1887-1966) of Savannah, a presumed collateral kinswoman of Picot de Boisfeillet, who collected a great deal of material on the French. Floyd's only writings to reach wide public distribution are found in *Flags of Five Nations* published by the Cloister resort between 1946-1949. Her stories of the French are highly garbled and inaccurate. The coastal authors who followed, Burnett Vanstory (1956), Betsy Fancher (1971), and Harold H. Martin (1978), devoted minimal space to the French but when they did, it was based on these earlier misrepresentations.

These authors, especially Couper and Floyd, made the French era loom greater than it was. Based primarily on Wylly, they relied to a great extent on the frequently biased tales of the original Frenchmen who disliked one another and the unreliable oral traditions of the blacks. A major part of this unstable brew were the exceedingly implausible accounts of Montalet, who even though French, was not actually part of the story of the Sapelo Company due to his being only a son-in-law of Boisfeillet, and a second generation Frenchman who did not arrive on Sapelo until after 1800. The Federal Court Cases, which have recently become available through National Archives--Atlanta Branch and on microfilm, apparently were not used by any of the published coastal writers.

In reality, the brief existence of the Sapelo Company was a financial and social disaster. At most, it was only a three-year endeavor that began unravelling in its second year as the partners began viewing each other with distrust and acrimony which eventually ended in bloodshed. The company had nothing to do with and no effect on international diplomacy and the outcome of the French Revolution. While Chappedelaine entertained thoughts of developing a colony, these Frenchmen never opened their island possessions to any great number of emigres or French workmen. It was first and foremost a business arrangement and not the social experiment that Chappedelaine envisioned. In essence, the Sapelo Company was an interesting phenomenon that intentionally had no effect beyond the Georgia coast and the people directly involved in the ill fated venture.

NOTES

¹For Cumberland Island, see Mary R. Bullard, *An Abandoned Black Settlement on Cumberland Island* (the author, 1982); *Black Liberation on Cumberland Island in 1815* (the author, 1983); and *Robert Stafford of Cumberland Island: Growth of A Planter* (the author, 1986); for Sapelo Island, see Patricia D. O'Grady, "The Occupation of Sapelo Island Since 1733," *West Georgia College Studies in the Social Sciences* 19 (June 1980): 1-8. Subtitled *Sapelo Papers*, it also includes archaeological reports about various parts of the island as well as the Spanish era. Buddy Sullivan, *Sapelo:*

A History (Darien, The Chamber of Commerce, 1988). For St. Catherines Island, see the series by David Hurst Thomas including *The Archaeology of Mission Santa Catalina De Guale: 1. Search and Discovery*, Vol. 63: Part 2, Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History (New York: 1987) and Russell Duncan, *Freedom's Shore: Tunis Campbell and the Georgia Freedmen* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

²Those still available to be purchased at major tourist centers, and which contain chapters about Sapelo Island, as well as many of the other islands, include: Margaret Davis Cate, *Our Todays and Yesterdays: A Story of Brunswick and the Coastal Islands* (1930; reprint, Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, 1979); Caroline Couper Lovell, *The Golden Isles of Georgia* (1932; reprint, Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1981); Burnette Vanstory, *Georgia's Land of the Golden Isles* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1956 and later reprints); Betsy Fancher, *The Lost Legacy of Georgia's Golden Isles* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1971); Harold H. Martin, *This Happy Isle* (Sea Island, GA: Sea Island Co., 1978).

³Roger S. Durham and David Hurst Thomas, "The History of St. Catherines Island after 1684," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, 55, Part 2 (1978), entitled *The Anthropology of St. Catherines Island I. Natural and Cultural History*, 210-223. This article does not mention the French ownership of the southern half of St. Catherines. The pre-French activity on Sapelo consisted primarily of the Patrick Mackay era, 1762-1784. At the sale of his Sapelo Island Plantation by his widow's executors (via the sheriff) in 1784, the "stock of horses, cattle, sheep and hogs running on Sapelo Island" were to be separately sold. State of Georgia, Colonial Conveyances DD, 375-376.

⁴Lewis H. Larson, "The Spanish on Sapelo," *West Georgia College Studies in the Social Sciences* 19 (June, 1980): 35-45.

⁵Durham and Thomas, "The History of St. Catherines Island after 1684," 218-222.

⁶Liberty County, Georgia, *Deed Book A*, 48 (Estate of Clement Martin to Richard Leake, 13 July 1784) and State of Georgia, *Colonial Conveyances DD*, 375-376 (Estate of Patrick Mackay to John McQueen).

⁷Eugenia Price, *Don Juan McQueen* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1974). While a novel, this work is based on historical information and does inform readers about one of the major figures in the history of the Georgia coast. Walter C. Hartridge, ed., *The Letters of Don Juan McQueen to His Family* (Columbia, S.C.: The Georgia Society of The Colonial Dames of America, 1943), pp. xxi, xxv-xxviii, 11.

⁸Liberty County, Georgia, *Deed Book B-1 (1787-1793)*, 170.

Note: Beginning with the following footnote, reference will be made to various Federal court cases involving the Frenchmen who owned Sapelo from 1789-1794, and later. The case files are located at the National Archives-Atlanta Branch (Southeast Region) in East Point, Georgia, hereinafter cited as "NARA". They are in Record Group 21, U. S. Circuit Court, Southern District of Georgia, Mixed Cases, 1790-1860. Several separate case files have been arbitrarily mixed and grouped in eight folders under the case file number D23 in Box 88 as of February, 1989. The case file number as well as the heading on the eight folders refer to the last case in the grouping, *Chappedelaine, Adm. v. Decheneaux* which was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

There is also a NARA microfilm of the National Archives case file consisting of 400 or so pages (260 frames) of a transcript submitted to Washington for this U. S. Supreme Court case. This is found on Microfilm 214, Roll 10. The original of this transcript is at NARA. The material in Box 88 is a rich resource and needs to be microfilmed in its own right once the material has been rearranged into the original case file format rather than as it is now.

For purposes of this paper, all references to the above mentioned case file, D23/Box 88, will hereafter be referred to as "French Case File" followed by the appropriate folder location and microfilm frame number, if applicable. The Georgia Department of Archives and History is abbreviated "GDAH."

⁹Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, various dates, French Case File/ Folder 2/ frames 6477-6484. A series of seven letters between Dumoussay and Chappedelaine written during June-August 1790, after both returned to France, indicated that Chappedelaine was the first copartner to purchase a share of Sapelo Island and was the one who located the other copartners that summer and early fall. It is also apparent from a letter written 23 April 1789 from Dumoussay in Baltimore to Chappedelaine in Philadelphia that they had both been in the US before the 1789 purchase. (Frame 6476). Donald Jackson, ed., *The Diaries of George Washington*, V: 275-276.

¹⁰Samuel F. Scott and Barry Rothaus, ed., *Historical Dictionary of the French Revolution, 1789-1799* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985) pp. 1037-1041; Francis S. Childs, *French Refuge Life in the United States, 1790-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1940), pp. 8-13.

¹¹Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, dates as cited, French Case File/ Folder 2/ Frames 6477-6484. The series of letters between Dumoussay and Chappedelaine during the summer of 1790, while both were in France, indicate at first Dumoussay's "reluctance" to sell shares in Sapelo, and then

his limitation of the number to five shares, one of which he would keep. Chappedelaine to Dumoussay, 7 July 1790, offered to purchase one fifth, which was accepted, Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, 13 July 1790. Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, 24 July 1790, the issue of loans versus outright shares or stock is discussed after Chappedelaine has found another investor (unnamed in the letter). Dumoussay indicated that he really wanted the money rather than having to share the property with anyone. In Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, 7 August 1790, they have secured Poulain Dubignon and Picot de Boisfeillet was about ready to join. In the three letters Chappedelaine wrote Boisfeillet, his uncle, 7 July, 15 July and 3 August 1790 (Folder 2/Frames 6491,6494-6), he put on the hard-sell and stressed the freedoms to be enjoyed in America, including the fact that anyone could (theoretically) be elected to office, but mainly the purchase was discussed as an investment. Since all the other investors were secured by Chappedelaine at the behest of Dumoussay, the actual motives of Dumoussay, who had made the initial investment, are unclear. It is implied in the later court cases that he overcharged his copartners.

¹²Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, 29 June 1790, French Case File/ Folder 2/ Frames 6477-6478, indicated Dumoussay's debt for Sapelo, and his initial idea to sell ten shares, but that he would keep five, and sell the other five, which would then actually be only tenths. He also discussed his need to look for other investors. In his letter to Chappedelaine, 13 July 1790, Dumoussay first mentioned the concept of undivided shares and agreed to sell Chappedelaine one undivided fifth. By the time the copartnership agreement was signed 5 Oct 1790, the other investors had been located and the money obtained. (Folder 6) There is no indication in these letters why Dumoussay had waited nearly two years to obtain co-investors although there is a hint that he was anxious to purchase other nearby islands, as he did shortly after returning to Georgia in early 1791.

¹³"Copartnership Agreement," 5 Oct 1790, French Case File/ Folder 6.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Glynn County, Georgia. *Deed Book A*, 69 (also known as ABEF, 53) deed dated February 14, 1791. The livestock on Jekyll was also conveyed by A, 82 (ABEF, 62); Liberty County, Georgia, *Deed Book B-1* (1787-1793), 403, finalized 21 May 1791, recorded 19 July 1791.

¹⁷Chatham County, Georgia, *Deed Book H*, 833.

¹⁸Due to the fact that they were purchased so shortly after Dumoussay's return to Georgia, and due to other references, it is assumed that he had discussed the possible purchase of these islands/parcels before he

left for France in the late Spring of 1790. Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, 29 June 1790, French Case File/Folder 2 in which they discuss Jekyll; Chappedelaine to Boisfeillet, 3 Aug 1790, French Case File/Folder 2.

¹⁹Chappedelaine to Dubignon, three letters, 1 Dec 1791, 20 Dec 1791, and "May 1792 (date disputed)", Archives departementales des Cotes du Nord, Fonds Revel, St. Brieuc, France. Hereinafter cited as "1791 Letters."

²⁰Chatham County, Georgia, *Deed Book R*, 248-250 and Glynn County, Georgia, *Deed Book C-D (1765-1800)*, 300-301. The one who was not involved with Jekyll was Boisfeillet.

²¹Dumoussay sold the half of St. Catherines Island he had purchased in 1791 for 500 pounds to Thomas Decheneaux for 600 pounds on 12 June 1794. Chatham County, Georgia, *Deed Book N (1794-1795)*, 62-65. The deed is not recorded in Liberty County, Georgia where the island is located. The fact that the Sapelo Company discussed activity on St. Catherines (see 1791 Letters) and Chappedelaine mentioned owning one fourth of the island (one half of one half) in his will, Chatham County, Georgia, *Will Book A (1775-1801)*, 177, indicated that at least Chappedelaine considered himself a part-owner of St. Catherines. Chappedelaine's estate paid half the taxes for the St. Catherines share about 1795, "Accounts Current, Estate of Chappedelaine," French Case File/Folder 1.

²²Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, 23 April 1789, French Case File/Folder 2/Frame 6476. Writing from Baltimore, Dumoussay indicated activities in Newark. The Sapelo purchase, 1 Feb 1789, would indicate that he had been in the area in 1788.

²³Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, 29 June 1790 (B), French Case File/Folder 2/Frame 6477-6478. The Paris connection was verified by a telephone conversation with Dr. Martha L. Turner, 15 February 1989.

²⁴Chatham County, Georgia, *Will Book A (1775-1801)*, 189. The loose original will can be found on microfilm of the Chatham County Estates, frames 261-264, available at the courthouse and in folder 142, Microfilm 175-10, GDAH. *Georgia Gazette*, 7 Nov 1793, p. 2, col. 2.

²⁵French Case File, throughout.

²⁶"Copartnership Agreement," French Case File/ Folder 6, indicated the method by which an administrator or overseer was to be chosen. The "Agreement for the Liquidations," 18 Nov 1793, and Folder 6 indicated that Dumoussay would receive certain considerations because he had been the manager. His accounts were the basis for several lawsuits. While the original accounts appear in Folder 2, a good, legible transcript appears in Folder 8 and Frames 6645-6665.

²⁷Paul Paris-Jallobert, *Anciens Registres Paroissiaux de Bretagne: Saint-Malo...* (Rennes, 1899), III:198. His birthdate was given as 5 January 1757.

²⁸Both properties are mentioned in his will. The land in New Jersey is proven by Morris County, New Jersey, *Deed Book A*, 159, dated 14 June 1787, recorded 5 Dec 1787.

²⁹Donald Jackson, ed., *The Diaries of George Washington*, 5:275-276. He was at Mount Vernon 13 February 1788.

³⁰Notes 28, 29, and Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, 23 April 1789, French Case File/Folder 2/Frame 6476.

³¹"Interrogatories of Dubignon," 30 Nov 1805, French Case File/Folder 4/Frames 6533-6537 and "1790 Letters," French Case File/Folder 2.

³²"Interrogatories of Charles Haumont," 25 May 1804, French Case File/Folder 4/Frame 6595.

³³"1791 Letters."

³⁴Chatham County, Georgia, *Will Book A (1775-1801)*, 177-178. The original will and its several codicils can be found on microfilm of the Chatham County Estates, at the courthouse, and in folder 59, Microfilm 175-6, GDAH.

³⁵Henri Frotier de la Messeliere, *Filiations Bretonnes, 1650-1922* (1922, reprint Mayenne, 1965) 4:336, 338.

³⁶Chappedelaine to Boisfeillet, 7 July 1790, French Case File/Folder 2/Frame 6491.

³⁷Martha L. Turner to the author, 8 March 1989.

³⁸"Interrogatories of Charles Haumont," 25 May 1804, French Case File/Folder 4/Frame 6595.

³⁹*Filiations Bretonnes*, 4:336-338.

⁴⁰Parish Register of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church (1796-1816), 52, on microfilm, GDAH. He died there in August, 1800.

⁴¹Ellen W. Henson, Jekyll Island Museum, to the author, 171 April 1984.

⁴²*Savannah Republican*, 24 Sept 1825, p.3, col.5.; and Martha L. Turner, "Christophe Poulain Dubignon: The Making of an Emigre" presented in April, 1989, at the annual meeting of the Georgia Association of Historians.

⁴³"Interrogatories of DuBignon," 30 Nov 1805, French Case File/Folder 4/Frames 6533-6537; Dumoussay to Boisfeillet, 13 July 1792, French Case File/Folder 2/Frame 6488-6489, mentioned the return of Dubignon on 23 June 1792.

⁴⁴Ellen W. Henson, Jekyll Island, to the author, 17 April 1984; interview with Dr. Martha L. Turner, 15 March 1989.

⁴⁵French Case File.

⁴⁶*Filiations Bretonnes*, 1650-1922, 4:21. Grandclos Mesle was represented in the sale of his Sapelo property (the Chocolate Plantation) by his brother-in-law, Lewis Harrington, Chatham County, Georgia, *Deed Book W (1801-1802)*, 93.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸*Filiations Bretonnes*, 3:601 and "1791 Letters."

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰*Ibid.*; Dumoussay to Chappelaine, 30 April 1792, French Case File/Folder 2/Frame 6487; Liberty County, Georgia, *Deed Book C (1793-1795)*, 79-80. After Villehuchet bought Sapelo from the purchaser at the tax sale, he sold undivided fifths back to Dumoussay (80-82), Chappelaine (82-83), and eventually the others, although the other three deeds are not on record. These were probably not recorded because the men involved had not settled their debts with the company as of 30 April 1792. By the time they did settle, the land was in McIntosh County, and the deed would have been recorded there. The McIntosh County records for this period are all lost. It is obvious that Villehuchet kept an interest in the share of Grandclos Mesle due to the subsequent deed on page 108 when, after the division of the property by the court (also not of record), Dumoussay's share is deeded to him in November, 1793. If Villehuchet actually signed another version of the original copartnership, no copy is known to this writer.

⁵¹"Interrogatories of Dubignon," 30 Nov 1805, French Case File/Folder 4/Frames 6533-6537, answers to no. 3 and 4.

⁵²"Interrogatories of Charles Haumont," 25 May 1804, French Case File/Folder 4/Frame 6461. Hereinafter cited as "Haumont."

⁵³Agreement for the Liquidation, French Case File/ Folder 6; Dissolution of the Copartnership, 13 Sept 1793, *ibid.*, Folder 5, hereinafter cited as "Dissolution/Copartnership."

⁵⁴"1791 Letters" and Chappelaine to Boisfeillet, Jan 1793, French Case File/Folder 4.

⁵⁵"1791 Letters."

⁵⁶Mortgage Agreement, McQueen to Dumoussay, 1 Feb 1789, French Case File/ Folder 4. This document was not recorded with the deed to Dumoussay in 1789 in either Liberty or Chatham Counties.

⁵⁷Dissolution/ Copartnership. Many of these slaves were purchased in Dumoussay's name, but were obviously meant for the company. See Chatham County, Georgia, *Deed Book H (1790-1791)*, 524-525, 648-649, 717-718 for deeds for slaves who appear in the company accounts as joint expenses and

some later in the dissolution agreement, cited above. Dumoussay's estate included fifty one slaves which he owned individually.

⁵⁸Dissolution/Copartnership.

⁵⁹Inventory of Dumoussay's Estate, 27 Sept 1794, French Case File/ Folder 2/Frame 6502; and Chatham County, Georgia, Inventories and Appraisements (1794-1805), 23-27.

⁶⁰Inventory of Chappedelaine's Estate, ca. Sept 1794, French Case File/ Folder 2/Frame 6503; and Chatham County, Georgia, *Inventories and Appraisements (1794-1805)*, 33-34.

⁶¹"1791 Letters."

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid. and Caroline Price Wilson, comp., *Annals of Georgia... 1, Liberty County Records...* (ca.1928; reprint, Vidalia, Georgia: Georgia Genealogical Reprints, 1969), 63 (1787), 71 (1786), 84 (1784), the latter listing him as a mariner.

⁶⁵"Interrogatories of DuBignon," 10 Nov 1804, French Case File/Folder 4/Frame 6464; Haumont.

⁶⁶"1791 Letters."

⁶⁷Ibid. It is not clear when Dumoussay's house was built. It appears to be on land which he later acquired in the division, 400 acres at Mackay's Old Fields, on the northeast side of the island. This house could be the one occupied from 1762 until the 1780s by the Mackay family. According to an interview, 13 March 1989, with Dr. Morgan Ray Crook, Jr., archaeologist, who has worked extensively on Sapelo, Dumoussay's Field/Mackay's Old Field(s) has never been adequately investigated. See Clarence B. Moore, *Certain Aboriginal Mounds of the Georgia Coast* (Philadelphia: P. C. Stockhausen, 1897).

⁶⁸"1791 Letters."

⁶⁹Sapelo Company Account Books, Nos. 2 and 3, 27 July 1791 - April 1792, French Case File/ Folder 8 (the easiest one to read of the many copies including the originals which are in Folder 2) and frames 6655-6657. These entries indicate they built and furnished the houses and perhaps rented/leased the lot. One house lot was purchased 20 June 1791. See Chatham County, Georgia, *Deed Book H*, 833.

⁷⁰Ibid.; Will of Chappedelaine, 25 Oct 1793 and codicils, French Case File/ Folder 1/Frame 6504 as well as Chatham County, Georgia, *Will Book A (1775-1801)*, 177.

⁷¹"1791 Letters," for McKay's Old Fields, Raccoon Bluff; Chatham County, Georgia, *Deed Book W (1801-1802)*, 92-93 (for Chocolate and South End); High Point, Interrogatories of Dubignon, 10 Nov 1804, French Case

File/Folder 4; Will of Chappedelaine, 1793, French Case File/Folder 1, for Hang Bull; South End, "1791 Letters," 1 Dec 1791; Bel Air is mentioned in "1791 Letters," May 1792; and Hermitage as the name for Dubignon's Sapelo Plantation, bordering Tea Kettle Creek (sic), *Georgia Gazette*, 24 July 1794, p. 4, col. 3.

⁷²Chappedelaine to Boisfeillet, 7 July 1790, French Case File/ Folder 2 (the original letter), copies on Frame 6491.

⁷³Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, 29 June 1790 (A), French Case File/ Folder 2/ Frame 6477-6478; Dissolution of the Copartnership, French Case File/ Folder 5; Interview with Mrs. Effie B. Denny of Savannah, 15 July 1983, about her father's cattle raising activities on Sapelo for Howard E. Coffin about 1916. There are also many photographs of cattle on the island in the Coffin photographs. See Vanishing Georgia Collection, GDAH, for McIntosh County/Sapelo Island.

⁷⁴"1791 Letters."

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Dissolution/ Copartnership.

⁷⁷"1791 Letters"; Sapelo Company Account Books, French Case File/ Folder 8/ Frames 6645-6665; Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, 29 June 1790 (A), French Case File/ Folder 2/ Frames 6477-6478.

⁷⁸Interview with Dr. Martha L. Turner, 15 March 1989.

⁷⁹"1791 Letters."

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid.; Will of Dumoussay, 7 Dec 1793, French Case File/ Folder 1/Frame 6501. He singled out a slave, Marie, who is probably the same "Marie Dumoussay" who appears on the published list of Free Persons of Color for McIntosh County in 1819 and about the same time in the Chatham County, Georgia, Inferior Court Minutes choosing Edward Swarbreck as her guardian. She appeared to continue to have a long association with Sapelo.

⁸²Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, 30 April 1792, French Case File/Folder 2/Frame 6487; *ibid.*, __ Aug 1794, French Case File/Folder 2/Frame 6484-6485.

⁸³Several deeds recorded in the Chatham County, Georgia courthouse during this time by the Frenchmen do not relate to land in Chatham County. For example, there is the 1794 swapping of land for Jekyll Island, which was never in Chatham County. It would appear that they felt more secure having a copy recorded in Savannah, as a security measure, rather than the coastal courthouses, some of which did not have a stable facility for the first ten years or so of their existence.

⁸⁴Parish Register of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Savannah, Ga., (1796-1816), 71-72, MF/GDAH. This record includes the baptism, marriages, and deaths of members of the Boisfeillet and Dubignon families and some of their slaves. Chappedelaine was baptized in the Catholic Church in Saint-Malo, see Note 27. Dumoussay's will was witnessed by the Catholic priest in Savannah.

⁸⁵Inventory of Dumoussay Estate, 27 Sept 1794, French Case File/Folder 2/Frame 6502.

⁸⁶Chappedelaine to Boisfeillet, 7 July 1790, French Case File/Folder 2/ Frame 6491.

⁸⁷Chappedelaine to George Washington, 9 Jan 1791, *Papers of George Washington*, 2:48.

⁸⁸Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, 7 Aug 1790, French Case File/Folder 2/Frames 6483-6484.

⁸⁹Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, in a series of seven letters written from 29 June 1790 through 7 August 1790, inclusive, never mentioned any of the social or political freedoms which Chappedelaine discussed in his letters. It is possible that they had already agreed on such goals or ideals, since they had known each other for several years. French Case File/Folder 2/Frames 6477-6484.

⁹⁰Richard K. Murdoch, "Correspondence of French Consuls in Charleston, South Carolina, 1793-1797, Part I," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 74(1973):6-7.

⁹¹Haumont.

⁹²Chappedelaine to Boisfeillet, ___ January 1793, French Case File/Folder 4.

⁹³

⁹⁴Dubignon to Boisfeillet, 13 March 1793, French Case File/Folder 1/ Frame 6496.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Liberty County, Georgia, *Deed Book C (1793-1795)*, 80-84.

These include separate deeds from Villehuchet to Dumoussay and Chappedelaine and, of course, Villehuchet owned part of one fifth himself by purchase. There are no deeds of record in Liberty County indicating that the share to Dubignon was recorded.

⁹⁷Even after he went to Savannah, and obviously coerced Dumoussay into doing something, the only thing they recorded was his portion of the 1790 copartnership agreement made in France, not any deeds from the 1792 tax sale and resale. Probably, the other shares were not recorded until each partner agreed to the accounting and division of the company profits and debts as of 30 April 1792. We know that those with no deeds were also the

ones who had not settled. It would stand to reason that one would not get a deed to the land until he had signed off on the division of the finances. The 1790 document, the only one recorded in Dubignon's name during this period, is found in Liberty County, Georgia, *Deed Book C (1793-1795)*, 25.⁹⁸ "1791 Letters."

⁹⁹Wilson, *Annals of Georgia*, I, 103. This petition is not of record in Liberty County, and may never have been. The original, in the "Loose Papers" in the Probate Judge's Office, indicated Dubignon was served or notified with a copy after the petition was filed.

¹⁰⁰*Georgia Gazette*, 30 May 1793, supplement, p. 2, col.2.

¹⁰¹Liberty County, Georgia, Superior Court Minutes (dates unclear, ends with July 1793 session), MF/GDAH 130-45. This was recorded during one of the only two regular meetings of the Superior Court during 1793. The volume ends five pages after the document is recorded. By the time court resumed in January, 1794, McIntosh County had been created and any further matters related to this partition order should have been recorded in McIntosh County. All antebellum records for that county were lost in courthouse fires in the 1870s. The "Loose Papers" of Liberty County did not yield this document.

¹⁰²Dissolution/ Copartnership.

¹⁰³The map/plat is mentioned in the "Inventory of the Papers" for the case, Boisfeillet v. Chappedelaine, 1797, French Case File/Folder 6, as "A Map of the Island of Sapelo, etc. copied in frame after that produced by Dumoussay," but it is not now among the case file. Hopkins's name is associated with the map/plat in a 1799 newspaper notice.

¹⁰⁴Agreement For Liquidation, 18 November 1793, French Case File Folder 6.

¹⁰⁵*Georgia Gazette*, 15 May 1794, p. 4, col. 2. They were selling 300 head of wild cattle and 50 or 60 wild horses.

¹⁰⁶Glynn County, Georgia, *Deed Book C-D (1765-1800)*, 300-301 dated 10 June 1794 and recorded 11 Jan 1800; Chatham County, Georgia, *Deed Book R (1797)*, 248-250 dated 10 June 1794 and recorded 4 Nov 1797. Both these documents are written in French.

¹⁰⁷"An Act to Relieve ..," concurred 19 Feb 1796 in Horatio Marbury and William H. Crawford, *Marbury and Crawford's Digest of the Laws of Georgia*. It is also in *Watkins Digest*, 592-593; and Folder 112, Jekyll Island, Margaret Davis Cate Collection, Georgia Historical Society. This deed, dated 14 October 1800, was not recorded in Glynn County as best as can be determined, and the original remains in a private collection.

¹⁰⁸Chatham County, Georgia, *Deed Book N (1794-1795)*, 62-65, dated 12 June 1794 and recorded 16 June 1794. He sold it for 600 pounds sterling. This was not recorded in Liberty County, Georgia.

¹⁰⁹Columbian Museum, 15 May 1801, p.4, col. 2. The sale was postponed until 1 Sept 1801 in a notice published 26 June 1801, p. 3, col. 2. No deed has been located.

¹¹⁰Analysis by the author.

¹¹¹"To The Intended Purchasers of Cattle on Sapelo," *Georgia Gazette*, 15 May 1794, p. 2, col. 1. The response of Dumoussay and others in a public notice in *Georgia Gazette*, 24 July 1794, p. 2, col. 2. Other public notices of their feud over the cattle sale appeared on 5 June (2-1) and 19 June (2-2).

¹¹²Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, __ August 1794, French Case File/Folder 2/Frame 6484.

¹¹³Bill in Equity, Complaint, Boisfeillet v. Chappedelaine, French Case File/Folder 1/Frame 6431.

¹¹⁴Dumoussay to Boisfeillet, 13 July 1792, French Case File/Folder 2/Frame 6488-6489.

¹¹⁵*Filiations Bretonnes* 3:601; interview with Martha L. Turner, 15 March 1989. Turner has corresponded with the Villehuchet descendants.

¹¹⁶Dumoussay to Chappedelaine, __ Aug 1794, French Case File/Folder 2/Frame 6484-6485.

¹¹⁷*Georgia Gazette*, 18 Sept 1794, p. 3, col. 2.

¹¹⁸"Extract of the Deposition of Col. John Cooper," about 1796-1797, French Case File/Folder 7.

¹¹⁹Since Dumoussay died on a Thursday, and Cooper is discussing the events of Saturday or Sunday, it is assumed that Dumoussay's funeral had taken place, due to the climate and necessity to bury someone quickly. As a parallel, when Boisfeillet died in 1800, he was buried the same day, or the very next day, also on Sapelo. Dumoussay's grave was later marked by a marble tombstone. This tombstone now rests in the Marine Institute exhibit area on Sapelo. For a comparable funeral, see Lefils's, *Georgia Gazette*, 7 Nov 1793, p. 2, col. 2. He was buried within 24 hours.

¹²⁰Will of Chappedelaine, 25 Oct 1793 and codicil dated 10 Nov 1793, in which he mentioned his elaborate burial plans, and his last codicil dated 13 Sept 1794, in which he reiterated his desire to be buried at Hang Bull, on the opposite end of the island from Dumoussay's burial. French Case File/Folder 1.

¹²¹*Georgia Gazette*, 25 Sept 1794, p. 3, col. 2.

¹²²Ibid. His indictment is known from *State v. Boisfeillet*, Chatham County, Georgia, *Superior Court Minutes 4(C)(1796-1799)*, 106. The court definitely called it murder.

¹²³Spalding was co-owner, with Edward Swarbreck, of the South End (1/5), and the Chocolate tract (1/5), and probably sole owner of the former Dubignon tract (1/5) which would be 60 percent of the Sapelo Company's land holdings on Sapelo. Since only 400 acres of the island of Sapelo was given to Dumoussay, Spalding's theoretical 6,000 acres out of the 18th century estimate of 7800 acres would then be 75 percent. E. Merton Coulter, *Thomas Spalding of Sapelo* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1940) is the only definitive work on Spalding.

See notes 1, 2, and Dolores Boisfeuillet Colquitt Floyd, *Flags of Five Nations* (The Cloister, 1946-1949).