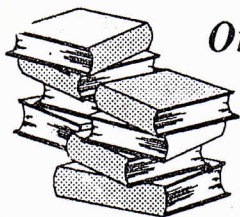
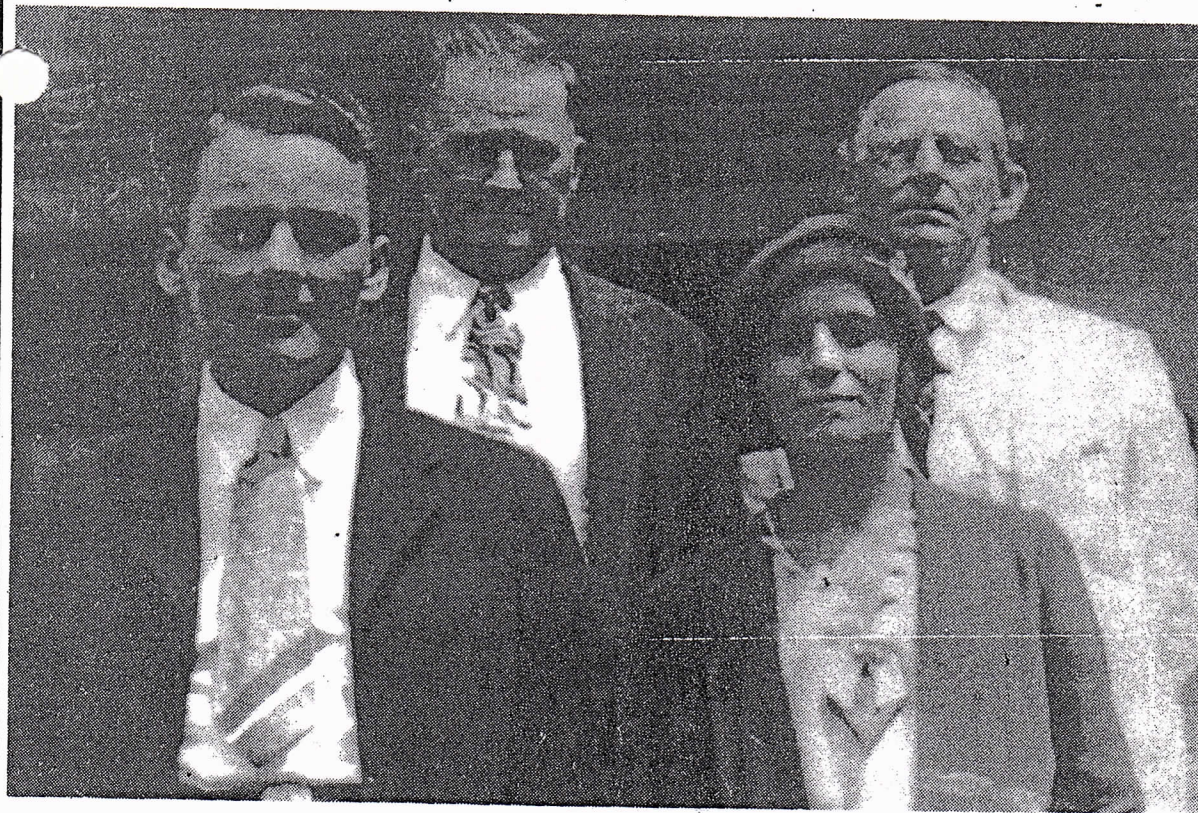


## Lafayette History



*One  
Moment  
in  
Time*

S.P. Landry and Wilma Thibodeaux, front row, and Pierre S. Landry and Clay F. Thibodeaux, are shown in this photo taken in 1940s.

No other information about this photo is available.

It is part of the permanent collection on display at the Lafayette Parish Clerk of Court office in the Parish Courthouse. Clerk of Court O.C. "Dan" Guillot has compiled 650 photographs from the collection into a hardbound book, "Images de Lafayette." It is on sale at local bookstores.

*in Daily Advertiser Laf., La., Mar. 28, 1993*





“THE FINAL FIVE”

ca. 1958?

Clay Felicien

Wiltz David “Tavise”

Tilton Paul “Jim”

Ida Thibodaux Fuhrer

Virginia Celeste “Bougie”



# Saga of Hard Times Plantation Is a Story of the New

By F. J. GUTKNECHT III

ca. 1962

Stephen Foster's melancholy ballads gave testimony to a truth many a Southerner chose to ignore at the time—that the South had reached its antebellum-day zenith.

Change was in the offing, and, bloodshed, and Foster's prediction that by and by hard times would come knocking at the door was to come to pass not only in Kentucky, but throughout the land he loved.

The trials of the great war and its aftermath were a tempering force as well, for if the South's metal could be held by a great hand and hammered on an anvil, its steel could be hardened and sharpened.

This toughened steel was to carve new life from a ravaged land, one which would make it second again to none in strength, development and maturity.

U.S. HIGHWAY 90 winding west from Houma glides along Bayou Black, lefts sharply at Gibson and plunges through lush swampland toward Morgan City.

Dozing bayou settlements, moss-hung cypress and turtles sunning themselves on canal logs flash past your car's windows.

Bayou Boeuf sneaks up on you. Almost before you realize it your car is streaking up a spanking new high-arch bridge over it which affords you a sweeping view of a scene not in character.

Spread along the east bank of this sluggish stream, a multi-million dollar industrial complex smacks the eye. Acre upon acre of structural steel grow where cypress stood. Welders' electrodes compete with a bright sun.

In a sense, this bustling business scene along a bayou Jean Lafitte once

sculled is a story of the new South. It is a story as well of one of its builders.

For Charles Melance and Felix Thibodaux, the year 1878 was one of decision. The brothers' extensive lumber property in the Coteau Folse area of Lafourche Parish—near present-day Raceland—was languishing.

RECONSTRUCTION was only another tired word for their vocabulary, and since there was little action in their commodity, they began scouting for buyers of their land so that they might enter a new field—sugar cane, a business on the upswing.

Descendants of one of the very first Acadian families to come to Louisiana from Santo Domingo in 1765, the Thibodauxs were restless of spirit and eager for change.

An opportunity was quick to present itself. The daughter of a sizeable landholder at Bayou Boeuf had recently married—and to a man not accepted by her family.

Rather than fight the problems of cane growing—and suffer the barbs of her relatives—she was willing to sell her inheritance at the right price.

With money in their pocket from the sale of their land, the Thibodaux brothers quickly closed the deal. They purchased 2,550 acres fronting on the east bank of the bayou.

Developed prior to 1831, the land along Bayou Boeuf seemed prime for sugar growing. First planter in the area was Etienne Pennison, as one story had it, formerly of the company of Jean Lafitte. A version tells that Lafitte, fleeing along the bayou, left Pennison behind, and Pennison was to do better with cane than cutlass.

The C. M. Thibodauxs moved into temporary quarters at first, but their eyes were on a stately antebellum home adjoining their tract.

Built of brick and cypress hand cut from the nearby swamp, the home was crafted by slave labor in 1832. With its wide galleries front and back, tall columns and cypress shutters, it was typical of many a plantation home of the period. First owned by George Schwing, a Kentuckian, it later passed into the hands of Newell Tilton, a New Orleans merchant.

THE THIBODAUXS were able to move into the home as caretakers on March 19, 1880, purchasing the home from Tilton in 1896.

Four remaining children of the 10 born to C. M. and his wife still live in what they and their neighbors respectfully call the "big house."

Virginia, 84; Tilton Paul (Jim), 83; Wiltz, 81, and Mrs. Ida Fuhrer, 79, a widow, are still active. The women clean, cook and look after their brothers. Wiltz and Tilton Paul raise a few vegetables, spend the rest of the time overseeing their property and reminiscing about the past.

"One might have thought we were rich people when we came to this place," remembers Virginia. "I guess Papa had some money, but we all worked. We had a wilderness to make something out of when we came and it was terrible work."

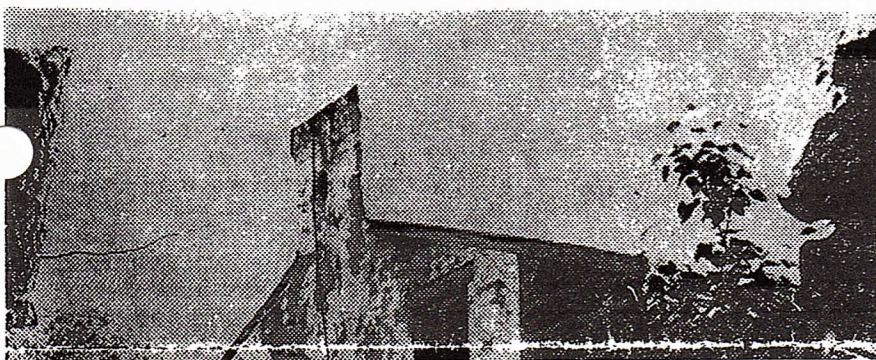
The Thibodauxs had harvested only a couple of crops when they discovered one of the hazards of living along the Boeuf.

In 1882 the normally quiet bayou surged over its banks, pouring water over their cane and forcing the family into the upstairs rooms of their home.

FOR SIX WEEKS only the men left the house—and then by boat. As the family surveyed its ruined cane when the water finally receded, C. M. Thibodaux no doubt wondered whether he hadn't made a terrible mistake bringing his family to this wasted land.

The Thibodauxs, perhaps nodding to Foster's sorrowful melody, began calling their property Hard Times plantation.

"We re-planted," Virginia recalls, "and brought up many another crop. It was never easy; even the girls pulled on the heavy winches and moved the cane onto barges."





# plantation South

The company had rough sledding in its formative years, barely able to declare quarterly dividends. As the 30s dawned, things became progressively worse.

"The sugar people were taking our cane and not paying us for it," family historian Virginia remembers. "They told us it was in the warehouse. Well, that warehouse — wherever it was — and the bank we had a few dollars in, the old Bank of Morgan City, went under in the crash and we were left with not much more than the land and the big house."

The Thibodauxs would never sell either.

"JUST BEFORE MY mother, Celeste, died," says Virginia, "she called me in to her and told me, 'Virginia, do what you can do. What you can't do, don't worry about. I am going away never to return, but I am happy because I know that you will take my place here and keep the house.'"

Asserts Virginia Thibodaux: "This house will stay for a long time after we have passed on. We will make certain before then that it will remain in the family and not be torn down."

In the years that followed the Thibodauxs obtained such small funds as they could by renting the land to trappers, moss pickers and tenant farmers. Clay opened a grocery; at least they would not go hungry.

Then a new industry, rice, moved in to give the family firm a much-needed shot in the arm. One planter leased 600 acres. Oil companies began searching along the bayous for new fields, leasing still more land and continuing the flow of money into the tills.

In 1951 J. Ray McDermott, Inc. decided on the Thibodauxs' bayou site for its offshore fabricating yard.

Since then, McDermott has more than tripled its investment, with the multi-million dollar operation currently having an annual payroll of some \$3.5 million.

**MOST OF THE WORK** is fabrication of offshore oil structures and one of the plant's recent jobs was construction of Freeport Sulphur Co.'s half-mile-long offshore sulphur mine. Erection of the structure was accomplished with big McDermott derrick barges built right on the

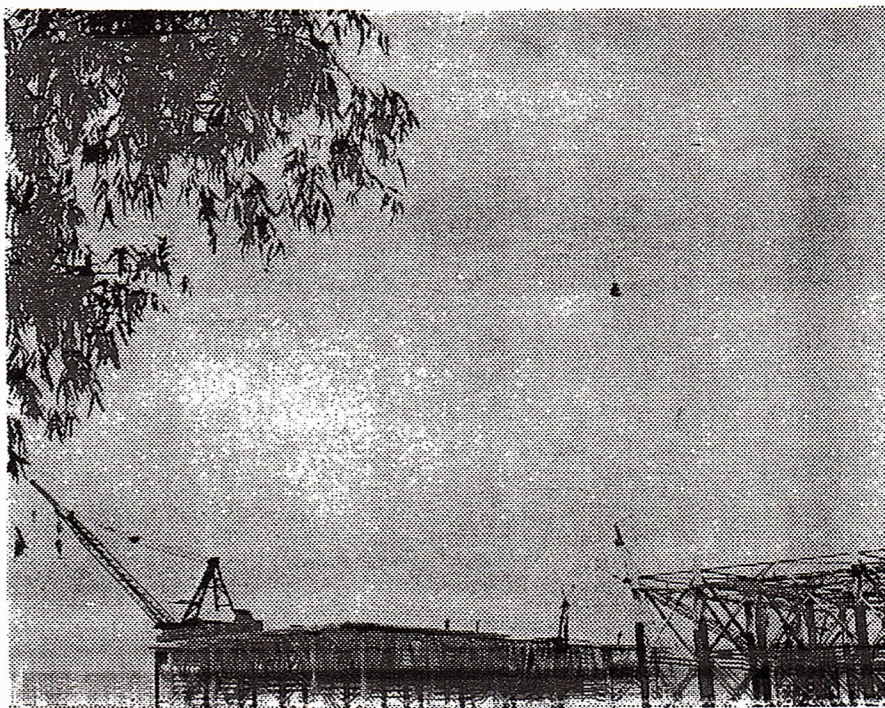


*Hard Times plantation home was erected in 1832*

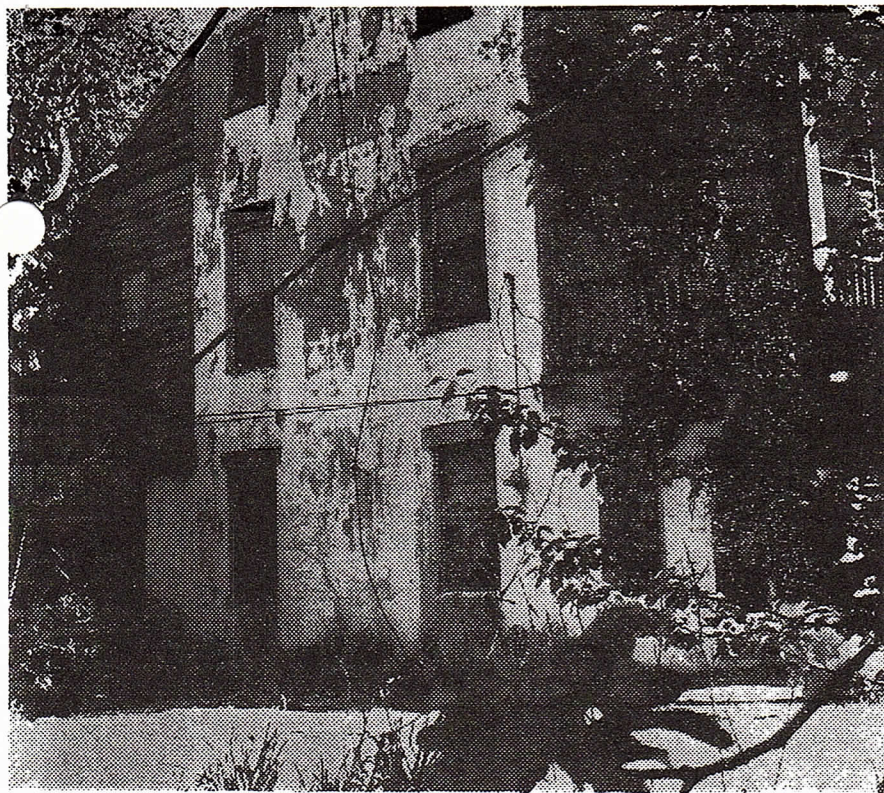
# ADVOCATE

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**The old cypress cistern is still used by the family**



**Cypress beams are supported by brick, plaster pillars**

"The sugar company gave us 25 cents a ton—on the barge. With what little money we made we were able to get a few groceries. By keeping a small garden we managed to scratch out a living."

In spite of the sacrifices, the family hoarded enough money to send a son, Clay Felecien, to college at Kentucky University at Lexington. The other children were educated by a tutor, along with their neighbors, in a bottom-floor room of the big house.

Clay was employed with the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad at Gulfport, Miss., when he learned in 1912 of the death of his father.

**THE OLDEST SON**, he returned home to take charge of the family's affairs. It was his decision to embark on a course unique for the time—the forming of a family corporation to administer the Thibodaux properties.

The descendants of C. M.'s brother, Felix, had subdivided their share of the original purchase, but Clay had other ideas.

His reasoning was that by pooling the resources of the heirs of C. M. Thibodaux, more ready capital would be available for investment in new land. C. M. Thibodaux Co., Ltd. was born in 1913.



**Mementos of past surrou**



bayou.

Clay Felecien, first president of the Thibodaux firm and a first citizen of the bayou community for many years, died in 1960. Always active, he died of a heart attack while inspecting one of the firm's oil properties.

The land and the company indicate no threat of turning fallow.

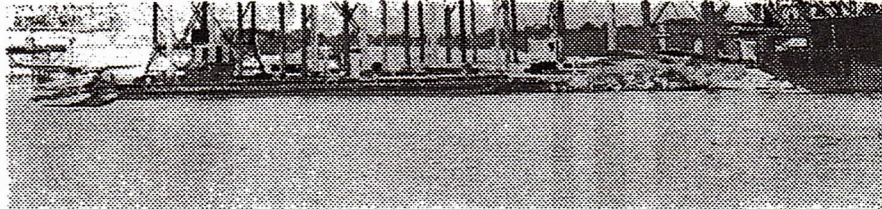
"Today, all of our acreage is being leased. We don't have any idle land," says Ford Thibodaux, new vice president and general manager of the firm his father headed.

Ford has the vigor and industry of his father and grandfather. President of the South Louisiana Electric Co-Operative, he is also a real estate broker and owns two shrimp boats.

His spanking new white brick home on Bayou Boeuf is one sign of the new opulence of the Thibodauxs — and its building was to call up memories of the past.

While excavating for the foundation, bulldozers uncovered an old sugar mill containing a number of Civil War weapons cannon balls and cooking gear.

**THE BOEUF** settlement was occupied by Union General Nathaniel Banks' forces in 1862, and one story tells that Confed-



### **Modern fabricating operation contrasts with old home**

erate troops, learning of Banks' approach, destroyed the sugar house and then burned the bridge as they escaped.

Although the comforts of modern living have come to most of the area's homes, the four elder Thibodauxs live much as they did during earlier times in the big house.

Hard Times boasts no marble mantles or ornate stairways. It was made for comfortable living — not for show. Though a new water line runs nearby, the Thibodauxs still tap an ancient cistern, and they parch and grind their own coffee.

Explains Mrs. Fuhrer: "I can't get used to that 'bought' stuff."

Until very recently, when the home got a metal roof, the Thibodauxs had their leaky cypress shingles replaced with swamp materials. Now, they say, it is

difficult to find someone who knows the right way to split and finish good shingles.

**THE NEARBY** clash of steel in McDermott's yard and night flashes from welders' torches bother the family not a bit. They know that this bustle is a part of their bread and butter and they love the clatter.

The outlook is for more of the same.

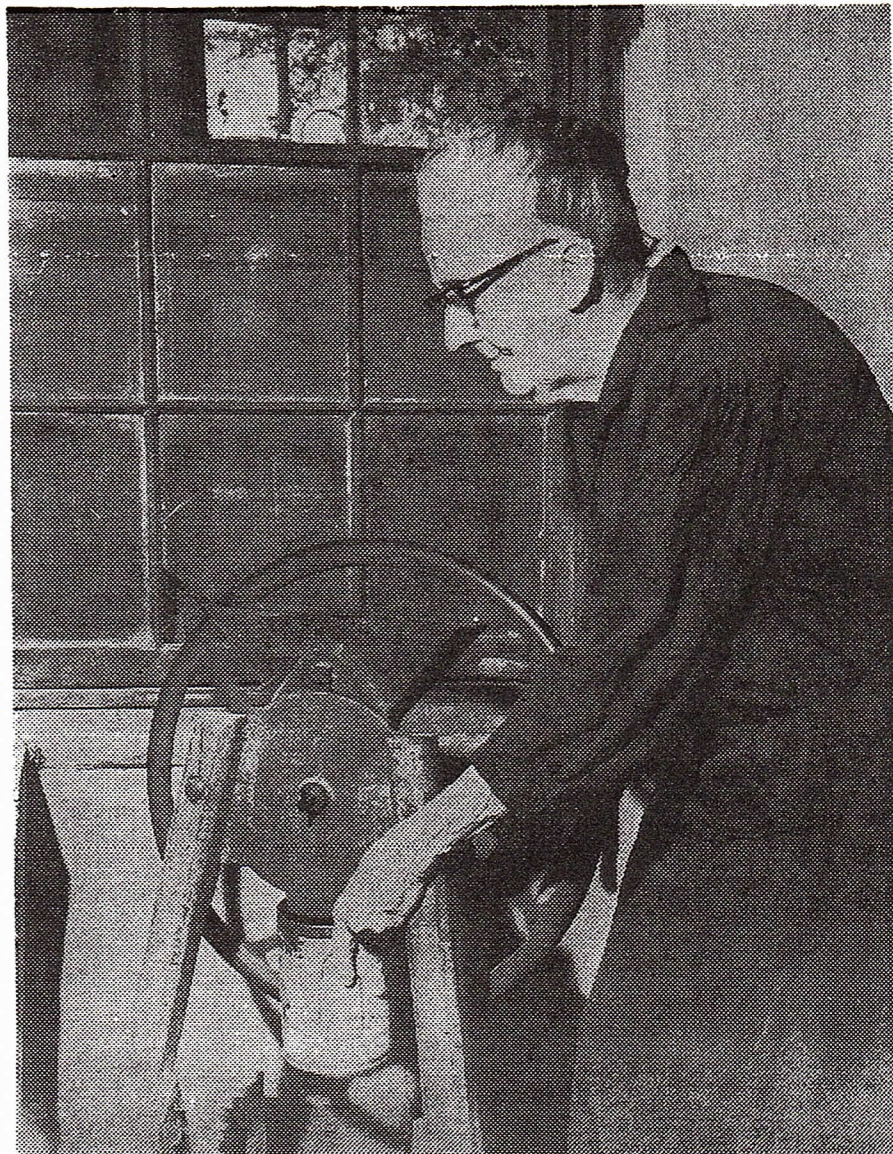
Ford Thibodaux tells that a new service road soon will slice to the rear of a portion of their properties, making more bayou frontage available for industry sites.

"We are looking for big things from this area," asserts the company's general manager.

Who knows, there may even come a day someone will suggest changing that name—Hard Times.



**Tilton Paul Thibodaux**



**Mrs. Ida Fuhrer grinds coffee in an ancient mill**





file://C:\WINDOWS\Desktop\Pictures\Durjimbo.jpg

9/17/11

Aunt Virginia "Bogie"

Uncle Jim

Durward, Sr.  
(their nephew)







## *Descendants of Charles Melance Thibodaux*

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- 1 Charles Melance Thibodaux b: August 05, 1844 in Coteau Folse, Lafourche Parish, LA d: December 30, 1911 in Bayou Boeuf, Assumption Parish, LA; i St. Mary Cemetery
- .. +Celeste Felicie Thibodaux b: February 15, 1846 in Lafourche Parish, LA m: October 07, 1865 in Lafourche Parish, LA d: January 01, 1901 in Bayou Boeuf, Assumption Parish, LA; i St. Mary Cemetery
- ..... 2 Charles Neal Thibodaux b: July 31, 1866 d: December 28, 1946
- ..... +Elda Valerie Morvant m: July 11, 1887
- ..... 2 Leon Eli Thibodaux b: October 18, 1867 in Coteau Folse, Lafourche Parish, LA d: January 18, 1938 in Morgan City, St. Mary Parish
- ..... +Fannie Coleman b: November 06, 1870 m: December 19, 1893 in Morgan City Church, St. Mary Parish, LA d: November 13, 1931
- ..... 2 Willie Paul Thibodaux b: August 1870 d: July 1957
- ..... +Ada Murray d: Bef. 1959
- ..... 2 Theoline Marie Thibodaux b: April 08, 1872 d: October 01, 1948
- ..... +Wade H. Coleman II b: December 17, 1868 m: January 08, 1896 in Amelia, LA d: October 07, 1960
- ..... 2 George Alcide Thibodaux b: January 02, 1874 d: July 29, 1931
- ..... 2 Clay Felicien Thibodaux b: October 08, 1875 in Coteau Folse, Lafourche Parish, LA d: August 21, 1960 in Bayou Boeuf, Assumption Parish, LA; i Morgan City Cemetery
- ..... +Emma Mary Penisson b: July 21, 1880 in Bayou Boeuf, Assumption Parish, LA m: June 08, 1906 in St. Andrew Church, Amelia, St. Mary Parish, LA d: May 08, 1968 in Bayou Boeuf, Assumption Parish, LA; i Morgan City Cemetery
- ..... 2 Virginia Celeste "Bougie" Thibodaux b: September 08, 1877 d: August 17, 1967
- ..... 2 Tilton Paul "Jim" Thibodaux b: April 13, 1879 in Lafourche Parish, LA d: April 17, 1971 in Morgan City, St. Mary Parish, LA
- ..... +Novey Roger b: September 01, 1890 in Lockport, Lafourche Parish, LA d: October 30, 1971 in Morgan City, St. Mary Parish, LA
- ..... 2 Wiltz David "Tavice" Thibodaux b: December 24, 1880 in Lafourche Parish, LA d: May 07, 1964 in Assumption Parish, LA
- ..... +Carrie Gonzales d: Bef. May 07, 1964
- ..... 2 Wilson Daniel Thibodaux b: December 24, 1880 in Lafourche Parish, LA d: January 01, 1905 in New Orleans, LA
- ..... 2 Ida Felicia Thibodaux b: May 30, 1883 in Coteau Folse, Lafourche Parish, LA d: April 30, 1975 in i Morgan City Cemetery, St. Mary Parish, LA
- ..... +William Burlison Fuhrer b: 1874 in Mt. Vernon, Posey County, IN m: 1912 d: April 23, 1918 in Louisiana
- ..... 2 Mary Cleona Thibodaux b: August 05, 1885 in St. Mary Parish, LA d: Abt. 1889
- ..... 2 Charles Melance "Parrain" Thibodaux II b: June 05, 1887 d: November 18, 1956 in Amelia, St. Mary Parish, LA
- \*2nd Wife of Charles Melance Thibodaux:
- .. +Laura LeJeune m: June 11, 1903 d: Aft. March 14, 1912