

# **Anne Rossignol, Madame Dumont, and Dr. John Schmidt Junior: Community and Accommodation in Charleston, South Carolina, 1790 – 1840**

**Suzanne Krebsbach**

**Independent Scholar**



In 1857 physician John Schmidt Jr. of East 12<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, added a codicil to his will and testament in Charleston, South Carolina. Providing for his wife and children, he bequeathed his great-grandmother's gold shot beads to his niece Ursule Arnold, his gold watch to his son Charles Henry Dodge Schmidt, and his father's watch to his daughter Ella.<sup>1</sup> Why did Schmidt file his will in Charleston, and who were his family? The history of the extended Rossignol-Dumont-Schmidt family, with its questioning of racial identities, offers a case study in the evolution of Charleston's attitudes toward its mixed-race denizens. Wealth, professional standing, and in their case, Francophone emigration and Catholicism, gave the family at least two generations of stability and acceptance. But by the 1820s and 1830s that stability was challenged in law courts and in the court of public opinion.

Schmidt's great-grandmother Anne Rossignol was born in Senegal and lived in Saint-Domingue before moving to Charleston, South Carolina, in the 1790s. She was known to be of mixed race, a circumstance of little note within the racial hierarchy of the French Caribbean but a circumstance fraught with complexities in Charleston. Historians emphasize different aspects of Rossignol's history, making her life and career a leitmotif for an independent, free French citizen of African origin who made her own fortune. For example, Dominique Rogers portrays Rossignol as the paradigm of Saint-Domingue's wealthy free women. Stewart R. King sees Rossignol as an example of social advancement as well as a woman of extraordinary means. Rogers and King combined their research to explore the agency of free women of color in Saint-Domingue's port cities. They find Rossignol a paradigm of business sense and wealth. For Lorelle Semley, Rossignol exemplifies issues of race, color, status, citizenship, and gender in the eighteenth century.

Pierre Force and Susan Dick Hoffius decide that Rossignol and her daughter Marie-Adélaïde Rossignol Dumont were rare but not the only Senegalese woman in Charleston. They attribute the family's downfall to a growing awareness of scientific racism. Susan M. Socolow, on the other hand, investigates Rossignol's slave-trading enterprise.<sup>2</sup>

In this essay I explore Rossignol and her family's life in Charleston which was modulated by numerous neighbors and business associates in the Saint-Domingue exile community of South Carolina's cosmopolitan city of wealth, luxury, and pleasure. Her daughter Madame Dumont, however, had fewer ties to the Francophone exile community, and Dumont's children and grandchildren were, for all purposes, thoroughly anglicized. If Rossignol's family initially settled well, the community itself changed over three generations. By the 1830s, the descendants of a proud, mixed-race women of note no longer had a reliable, nurturing community. In fact, that community had moved beyond accommodation to rejection of mixed-race identity, and Rossignol's family paid the price.<sup>3</sup>

Rossignol was the matriarch of a multicultural, multigenerational kinship network. From the 1790s she and her family lived amicably in Charleston with former neighbors from Saint-Domingue, new acquaintances from France, and Anglophone Charlestonians. In the 1830s, however, inquiries regarding her racial status revealed hardening lines of race and class. Young Doctor Schmidt's grandmother was Anne's daughter Marie-Adelaide Rossignol Dumont; his mother was Ursule Dumont Schmidt. The Rossignol family included Dumont's physician husband Guillaume Dumont,<sup>4</sup> son Blaise, and daughter Ursule. Dr. John William Schmidt joined the clan when he married Ursule Dumont in Charleston in 1810. Their son John William Schmidt Jr was born in 1811. Although Schmidt Jr lived in New York after 1833, he still had property and connections in Charleston nearly fifty years after his forebears had arrived there. Anne Rossignol, Madame and Dr. Dumont, and the Schmidts, senior and junior, left wills and other public documents which illustrate effects of migration: refugee status, loss of property, enduring bonds of family and friends, and, most importantly for this essay the place of free people of color in antebellum southern culture.<sup>5</sup>

Reared in eighteenth-century cosmopolitan culture, francophone émigrés experienced varying degrees of difficulty assimilating in the American South. New Orleans society was more welcoming to émigrés, for example, than Charleston because language, manners, the civil code, and racial conventions of Louisiana were recognizably French.<sup>6</sup> French assimilation into South Carolina was similar to Louisiana, particularly in reconstructing social and family ties, and organizing cultural institutions such as music, theatres, schools, benevolent societies, and churches. But South Carolina differed from Louisiana in fundamental ways. The French Catholics, mixed-race women, and enslaved people who were part of a strong cultural milieu in Louisiana had no counterparts in South Carolina's common-law, Protestant, English-speaking society. French revolutionary era émigrés introduced an exotic third social tier to South Carolina which was Catholic, black, free, and cosmopolitan.<sup>7</sup> The Rossignol women had resources which allowed them to

negotiate their status, while other free women of color -- native born and émigré -- had different experiences. Free blacks were required to register as 'black' for taxation purposes, without regard to public perceptions or variation of skin color. Some became 'white'. Despite strenuous efforts to maintain local barriers to the Catholic assimilation and growing discrimination against free and enslaved people of color, francophone Charlestonians found ways to survive and even thrive in South Carolina's chief port city.

When Rossignol and her extended family arrived Charleston, South Carolina, was near the zenith of its power and influence. The city's civil and military leaders had been instrumental in the overthrow of British rule in the War of Independence and in shaping the political economy of the independent United States. In the war's aftermath the city's flourishing commercial success and intellectual life attracted European immigrants, particularly French, who brought new ideas of fashion, social life, entertainment, and education to one of the most polyglot cities in America.<sup>8</sup> Beneath all this, however, generations of enslaved peoples' labor fueled the society which Charleston's privileged classes enjoyed.

In 1790 South Carolina's total population was 249,073, of which 107,094 were enslaved and 1801 were free. By 1800 those figures rose to a total of 345,591, of which 146,151 were enslaved and 3,185 were free people of color. Critical numbers rose in 1810 the total population was 415,115, of whom enslaved people were 196,365, and free blacks were 4,554. By 1820 the numbers rose again: 258,475 enslaved people, and 6,826 free people. In 1830 enslaved people numbered 315,401 free people numbered 7,921. By the 1860 census South Carolina's enslaved population topped at 402,406 and free people were 9,914 out of a total population of 703,708, which left the minority white population of 291,388.<sup>9</sup>

Within Charleston in the 1790 census free blacks totaled 586 and enslaved people were 7,684. By 1800 the city census noted 1,024 free blacks and 9,819 slaves lived within the city's limits. White Charlestonians' numbers in these records increased from 8,089 to 9,630 in the two census records. While the white population rose 19% in this decade, the free black population rose 74% due to the influx of free black émigrés. By 1810 census the free black total rose 151% over the 1790 figure.<sup>10</sup> I argue that free black French émigrés from the Caribbean colonies contributed to this increase.

French colonial Saint-Domingue resembled South Carolina in that both were slave societies that depended upon staple crop production. In fact, during the colonial era British officials had often identified South Carolina with Barbados, Jamaica, and the Bahamas as a Caribbean colony rather than a mainland one. Saint-Domingue was home to a large, wealthy, and self-confident free population of African descent. In contrast, Anglophone Charleston's free people of color were comparatively few and largely submerged between whites and enslaved blacks. Free blacks on the French island held offices in the colonial administration, especially the militia.<sup>11</sup> Mixed-race families married their well-dowered daughters to whites, thereby strengthening interracial bonds.<sup>12</sup> Historians estimate that 60%

of the population of colonial Le Cap, Haiti, were free people of color who had strong personal and business ties to whites.<sup>13</sup> Island society was considered indifferent to piety but families acknowledged the island's religious heritage by baptizing their children in the Catholic Church and emphasizing the role of godparents in their children's lives.<sup>14</sup>

Free women of color had distinct and active roles in island society. Notarial records reveal entrepreneurial women -- among them Anne Rossignol -- making contracts, trading on their own account, and owning property.<sup>15</sup> Free women of color displayed other social status markers, for example, travel to France and public consumption of high-status goods such as clothing and furnishings.<sup>16</sup>

When the Haitian Revolution devastated the old regime Saint-Domingue white and mixed-race refugees fled to Atlantic ports. As many as five or six hundred had settled in Charleston by the early 1790s. Although no conclusive list of refugees' names survives in official sources, there were enough French émigrés from both the Caribbean and the Continent interested in forming a Catholic congregation in 1790 to elect Louis Chupein, of Nantes, France, a warden for the Francophone community.<sup>17</sup> Both émigré streams met descendants of French Huguenots in the Lowcountry, but the three groups harbored more differences than similarities. Huguenots, French Calvinists who had emigrated to the New World in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, had quickly assimilated into South Carolina society by adopting the English language and the anti-Catholic rhetoric of the dominant Anglican denomination. They married into the planter class and, as part of the elite, played a prominent part in Carolina for generations. In many aspects of society Huguenots were no longer French, but British and American.<sup>18</sup>

The two later waves of French émigrés diverged from Huguenots and from one another, forming robust communities which were at cross purposes with each other. They comprised Jacobins, nonbelievers, Catholics, monarchists, enslaved, free, and mixed race people who found refuge and professions in Charleston. Using membership lists of the Republican Society of South Carolina, the French Patriotic Society, and the subscribers' list of St. Mary's Catholic Church there was obvious cross-membership. At least six members of the Republican Society were mixed race as evidence from the Brown Fellowship Society list. Ten members of the French Patriotic Society were members of the Society of the Cincinnati. Louis Chupein (barber), Gayetan Aiguier (tinsmith), Andre Audin (painter), and Marceline Paris (baker) were subscribers of St. Mary's Catholic Church and members of the French Patriotic Society. Jean-Paul Coste, minister, French Huguenot Church, joined Jewish merchants Abraham Sasportas and Moses Spitzer, in the French Club.<sup>19</sup>

Émigré French brought the city livelier forms of entertainment and a more robust cultural life.<sup>20</sup> By 1794 the city boasted a French coffee house, confectioners, hairdressers, printers, a dancing academy, and a dancing master, as well as music masters and female academies. By 1801 there were three dancing masters, a fencing master, a musical instrument maker, five musicians, and a drawing master.<sup>21</sup> The violinist brothers-in-law

Peter Fayolle and John James Heulon of Saint-Domingue were among many French musicians in the city. There were so many émigré instrumentalists that Fayolle established the Philharmonic Society, a benevolent and cultural enterprise.<sup>22</sup> This was the sort of culture that Rossignol knew in Saint-Domingue and which traveled with her to Charleston.

By 1810 the city had a large Catholic presence. A dozen or more Francophone men, including Jean Charles De Norroy, Antoine Barbot, Peter Esnard, Joseph Jahan, and Peter Fayolle emerged as community leaders. They witnessed wills and Catholic sacraments of baptism, marriage, and religious interments. They were executors of estates and headed civic organizations. Although de Norroy, a French native by way of Saint Domingue, kept a tobacco shop in Charleston, he had higher status on the island.<sup>23</sup> At his death Joseph Assalit, formerly captain of the Royal Artillery on Saint-Domingue, instructed his daughter to obey Antoine Barbot, native of Bordeaux.<sup>24</sup> Peter Laurans served on St. Mary's vestry and acted frequently as a legal witness.<sup>25</sup> Joseph Jahan, another French native by way of Saint Domingue, worked as an architect and builder. He led the French charitable society, served on the St. Mary's vestry, and inventoried and appraised émigrés' estates.<sup>26</sup> John James Heulon of Saint-Domingue, was related to the Belony, Fayolle, Tavel, and Lecompte families, all of whom left Heulon an interest in their estrayed estates on the island. To safeguard his interests in these estates and secure possible indemnity, Heulon registered his titles in France and in the French consulate in Charleston.<sup>27</sup> Jean Baptiste Chapeau of Saint-Domingue also left deeds for safe keeping in the French consulate.<sup>28</sup> When Achille LePrince wrote his will in 1862 he carefully noted his decades-old claim to French indemnity through his late mother-in-law.<sup>29</sup> When she died Madame Dumont was buried in St. Mary's, among her successful fellow émigrés.

Francophone women of color appear in various partnerships with white men, but both were constrained by local racial laws. Free women of color dominated Catholic sacramental records, a primary source that further identified individuals and family affiliations among the local French population. The earliest baptismal record dates from 1792. It lists names of mothers and children, sponsors, husbands, wives, and their relationships to others in the community. In the first thirty years 1,882 people were baptized. French named entries were 39% of the total. Of these 600 were white and 284 were black. Those with French names, regardless of origin, numbered 342. The total number of free mothers and children with identifiable spouses were 243. Of these, 72 individuals had surnames. Those with no surnames (slave or free) were 240. There were 64 identified enslaved mothers with children. The remaining 542 baptized individuals were primarily Irish. Madame Dumont acted as godmother to two children in the congregation.

Black Catholics, free or enslaved, were 62% of total entries. The total number of French and total number of blacks do not equal because not all entries of baptized blacks had surnames. In a racially divided society blacks were always identified as such by clergy, whether or not they were accorded the dignity of full identification. From this evidence we know the names, family affiliations and nominal religious preferences of a significant

segment of Charleston's French community.<sup>30</sup> In addition to religious sources, evidence from legal sources, tax assessments, and wills illuminate this population of free and mixed-race women.<sup>31</sup> For example, Josephine Ferret was a free widow of some means who sponsored her niece Mary Antoinette, daughter of her brother John Francis Ferret, a free man of color. The child's godfather was John William Daniel De Michel, a white physician.<sup>32</sup> Madame Ferret's brother Charles, a baker, was also free. Both men paid the eponymous "free negro" capitation taxes in 1819.<sup>33</sup> When white French native Francis Duc died he left his estate to Belsie Antoine, his housekeeper. At Belsie's death his estate would devolve to their children.<sup>34</sup>

Free people of color remade their fortunes in Charleston. Mary Constance Rey and Michel Langlois of Saint Domingue arrived in Charleston before 1806 when they ran a boarding house on Tradd Street.<sup>35</sup> When he died in 1832, he left his unmarried free daughter Marie Antoinette Langlois a modest estate which included an annual payment of forty francs from the French compensation fund. She paid a capitation tax in 1822 and the inventory of her estate consisted of two houses and slaves in the city.<sup>36</sup> In Saint-Domingue, the Belanton family had means and connections but in Charleston they lived a more modest life.<sup>37</sup> The seamstresses Emilie and Fillette Belanton, free women of color, baptized their children at St. Mary's.

Wills and inventory evaluations also show patterns of responsibility and influence with the French community. The Rossignol-Dumont-Schmidt family for example, maintained their assets as well as their circle of acquaintances. Jean Prebarte, Jean Charles de Norroy, Joseph Jahan, for example who were often executors and legal witnesses, performed the same service for Anne Rossignol. In her 1806 will Rossignol named executors from among her family and Charleston's prominent and trustworthy Frenchmen: Jean Prebarte, a former Saint-Dominguan planter, Jean Charles de Norroy, a former officer in the Battalion de L'île de Ré, French wine merchant Peter Laurans, and her daughter, Marie-Adelaide Rossignol Dumont. She likely had known Prebarte and de Norroy in Saint-Domingue.<sup>38</sup>

Rossignol prudently secured assets and reinvested them in property, human and real, including structures on Crafts Wharf, Wall Street, and Gadsden Green which she gave to her daughter and two minor grandchildren. She was particularly careful with the disposition of twenty-five enslaved people who may have accompanied her from the island. For example, she emancipated Marianne, a 'griffone,' and Marianne's two children Charlotte and Brutus.<sup>39</sup> This suggests Rossignol valued the enslaved woman beyond the monetary value of her enforced servitude. She provided Paul, father of Marianne's other children, an opportunity to purchase these children for cash, payable to Rossignol's daughter Marie-Adelaide Dumont.<sup>40</sup> Rossignol also noted the loss of her property on St. Catherine Street, Cap Français, Saint-Domingue, and the enslaved people there. She regretted the loss of real estate but did not express written regret at the loss of her enslaved people. The Dumont grandchildren would inherit that property if it could be regained.<sup>41</sup> In

their Rossignol inventory de Norroy, Prebarte, and Charles Rotereau estimated her slaves and personal property in Charleston at \$5,852. Cash on hand was \$2,194.53. She could not write and signed her will with a mark.<sup>42</sup>

Rossignol allied her daughter in 1786 in Saint-Domingue to the French physician Guillaume Dumont, native of Mont d'Astarac, France.<sup>43</sup> By 1806 he was involved in money-lending and educational schemes in Charleston.<sup>44</sup> His will demonstrated concern for his children Blaise and Ursule to whom he gave property on Crafts Wharf and Federal Street, although, according to Widow Rossignol's will the property rightly belonged to her daughter Madame Dumont.<sup>45</sup> He directed his daughter to live obediently with her mother or forfeit her inheritance. Madame Dumont's annuity would be reduced if she remarried.<sup>46</sup>

After distributing his real property Guillaume Dumont detailed the disposition of at least ten enslaved people. He gave Arsenne and her four children to his wife on the condition that she not sell the woman. In addition, Madame Dumont was directed to pay the enslaved woman an annuity of \$48 during the mistress' lifetime. Arsenne would be freed at Madame Dumont's death and then could purchase her own children. The enslaved woman Clarisse and her children, he directed, would not be included in his estate. It is clear from Dumont's instructions he had a close connection with the two enslaved women.<sup>47</sup> Dumont wrote that he acted toward his wife in greatest friendship although his bequests to his wife of his likely concubines might be rife with tension.

Marie-Adelaide Rossignol and Peter Laurans were Dumont's executors. Witnesses were de Norroy, Charles Rotereau, and Jean Prebarte. Joseph Jahan was guardian for his children. The inventory of Dumont's estate included slaves, expensive furniture, medical books and instruments, silver spoons and forks, clothing, and mosquito nets for the beds. In codicils he stipulated further that he wanted to establish a school for poor children in Mont d'Astarac, France, but the dislocations of the French Revolution had deprived him of his fortune in Saint-Domingue.<sup>48</sup>

Marie-Adelaide Rossignol Dumont maintained a formal, perhaps even pugnacious persona: she was "Madame Dumont." Even in death she was known as "Madame," possibly to deflect any public or private discussion of her racial mix. She died in Charleston in 1833 at age 83 and was buried in St. Mary's churchyard.<sup>49</sup>

Although she was undoubtedly of mixed race, Madame Dumont was accepted as white while she lived in Charleston. The racial fluidity she embodied seems later to have threatened social conventions and clouded her family's prospects as white Charleston citizens. The language of her will reflects more than conventional Catholic piety. She was baptismal sponsor to at least two free children at St. Mary's Church. She left her estate to her grandchildren, the three children of her son-in-law Dr. John W. Schmidt Sr and daughter Ursule Dumont Schmidt. Like her mother Anne Rossignol, "Madame" was a businesswoman, directing her executors to invest funds from her estate, to buy and sell property for profit, including twenty-one enslaved people, during the lifetime of Dr. John Schmidt Sr.<sup>50</sup> The witnesses, Samuel Cromwell, James Kelsman, and George Jacoby were

not French and had no obvious French connections, unlike the witnesses of her mother's will. Doctors Schmidt Sr and Schmidt Jr qualified as executors of the estate which included Rossignol's property on King Street, Crafts Wharf, and Wall Street, gold watches and coins, slaves, and cash. Her estate was valued at \$27,168.<sup>51</sup>

Dr. Vincent LeSeigneur was also a refugee from Saint-Domingue whose community of acquaintances did not overlap with that of Madame Dumont, although they lived near each other. An obscure conflict between the two sparked legal proceedings which illuminated the interdependence of laws, customs, and conventions governing race, class, and gender in antebellum Charleston. LeSeigneur, originally known as a veterinarian, had practiced medicine for decades in Charleston but only secured membership in the Medical Society of South Carolina in December 1830. A month later, January 1831, he alleged in public that Anne Rossignol, mother of Madame Dumont, was "an African Negro and nurse in the hospital in Goree and the Governor of Goree got Mrs. Rossignol with child and that child was Mrs. Dumont."<sup>52</sup>

The allegation publicly challenged Madame Dumont's racial identity, thus her family's identity and their established place in Charleston society.<sup>53</sup> If Madame Dumont were found to be stained with negro blood all her descendants would be stained as well. On 6 January 1831 the Medical Society of South Carolina revoked her grandson Dr. John Schmidt Jr's medical license.<sup>54</sup> Dr. Schmidt Sr approached the Medical Society on his son's behalf, and Schmidt's attorney James Louis Petigru (1789 - 1863) presented documents regarding the younger man's lineage.<sup>55</sup> The committee denied their petition, saying that the documents "spoke for themselves."<sup>56</sup> The situation continued to absorb the Medical Society which sought additional legal advice on the law of race and slander.<sup>57</sup>

Madame Dumont and John Schmidt Jr retained Thomas Smith Grimké (1786 - 1834) and his brother Henry Grimké (1803 - 1852) as their attorneys in their suits for defamation against LeSeigneur. This was a prudent choice since the Grimkés were Lowcountry elites who epitomized through three generations the tangle of intimacy and legal proscription that governed relations between black and white, enslaved and free, in antebellum Charleston. The Grimké brothers and sisters were anti-slavery and anti-war advocates. Henry Grimké also had a slave mistress Nancy Weston who bore him three mixed-race sons. His white son Montague Grimké later sold his enslaved half-brothers out of the family.<sup>58</sup> That family's lived experience mirrored that of the Rossignol-Dumont-Schmidt family.

The plaintiffs alleged LeSeigneur had 'maliciously' and directly defamed Madame Dumont and indirectly defamed young Dr. Schmidt in a way that put them on the level of the "colored people of the City of Charleston." As legally defined mulattos in South Carolina, for example, none of the family could demand a jury trial; they could be arrested and confined to the Guard House if they could not produce a pass after curfew; and would "suffer corporeal punishment" for a host of misdemeanors and breaches of social conventions. In addition to the "scandal and infamy" of the imputation of Negro blood,

young Dr. Schmidt lost the right to practice medicine in South Carolina. He and Madame Dumont stated they each had been injured in the amount of \$10,000.<sup>59</sup>

The Dumont-Schmidt slander cases were filed against Dr. LeSeigneur in 1832 and a jury trial convened in June 1833.<sup>60</sup> Since Madame Dumont insisted she was Paris-born, the Charleston court sent Peter Fayolle to verify her claims, even though her birthplace had nothing to do with her racial identification.<sup>61</sup> The move may have been a legal tactic to ‘run out the clock’ on the case. In her suit, Madame Dumont alleged she was a:

good true faithful and honest white woman....and as such always carried governed and demeaned herself and had always been taken held and reputed by all her friends and neighbors dealers and other good and worthy citizens....to be a white woman of good name, fame and reputation<sup>62</sup>

The Grimké brothers called witnesses to affirm Madame Dumont’s reputation as a white woman. Among them were the émigrés Peter Fayolle, Louis Chupein, and Charles Rotereau. More importantly, the attorneys called leading men of the city: William Robinson, attorney, Solomon Moses, city marshal, John W. Mitchell, magistrate, Dr. Samuel H. Dickson, and Dr. Joseph Glover. In addition, William Clark, a free person of color, was instructed to present the minutes of the Brown Fellowship Society to attest to the race of society-sponsored interments for the preceding twenty-five years.<sup>63</sup>

Although the cause of action occurred in January 1831, the case came to trial in 1833. In the intervening two years the court heard additional testimony regarding Madame Dumont’s lineage. As a result of these delays, the statute of limitations had run out when the court reconvened, and the jury found for the plaintiffs.<sup>64</sup> Neither of the plaintiffs recovered damages and Madame Dumont had to pay the court costs of seventy-four dollars.

The Dumont-Schmidt cases are examples of tort by defamation by racial misidentification. This definition includes publication of a false statement which degrades an individual in the eyes of the community and deters others from dealing with them. Defamation of slander is a spoken false statement and libel is a written false statement.<sup>65</sup> The South Carolina Slave Law of 1740 guided the courts in this matter rather than case law as was common in other states.<sup>66</sup>

In 1848 South Carolina jurist John Belton O’Neill recapitulated South Carolina racial law. He held that if one were received in society as white then a jury may find the party to be white. There were no legal definitions in the 1740 law of African and Caucasian identity, but O’Neill thought that less than one-eighth African heritage would qualify one for Caucasian identity. If Dr. LeSeigneur, the defendant in the Dumont-Schmidt cases, had good reason to suspect the plaintiffs, Madame Dumont and John Schmidt Jr were in fact of Negro blood, then the jury could find nominal damages. This disposition did not preclude the plaintiffs from proving their ‘whiteness’.<sup>67</sup>

The case had little actual effect on Madame Dumont who died a few months later. Despite the court's decision, the imputation of mixed race ruined young Schmidt's career in Charleston. He soon settled in New York City where a controversy about racial identity had less resonance than in South Carolina.<sup>68</sup> Despite the scandal, young Dr. Schmidt had high regard for his mother's family. He bequeathed treasured mementos from his great-grandmother, grandmother, and grandfather to family members, all with strict instructions to cherish them in the family.<sup>69</sup>

The extended Rossignol family's racial circumstances illustrate the dissonance between Charleston's comparatively easy conventions about race and race - mixing circa 1800 and the state's repressive laws against African Americans after the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy of 1822. The ambiguous resolution pointed to a harder future, not an affirmation, of long-held status quo. Ambiguity also shielded the young doctor and his aged grandmother (and well-known great-grandmother) within an earlier tradition of acceptance of race-mixing among some levels of society. The family was unique, but their connections mirrored those of other mixed-race people in all ranks of the city's society.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Dr. John W. Schmidt, Jr., WPA transcripts, Charleston County Will Book 49 (1856 – 62): 654 – 672, Charleston County Public Library, hereinafter CCPL.

<sup>2</sup> See Dominique Rogers, "Les libres de couleur dans les capitales de Saint-Domingue: fortune, mentalités et intégration à la fin de l'Ancien Régime (1776 – 1789)," (Université Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux III, 1999), and also Rogers, "De l'origine du préjugé de couleur en Haïti" *Outre-mers revue d'histoire* 90 no. 340): 83 - 101. See Stewart R. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint-Domingue* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001). See Dominique Rogers and Stewart King, "Housekeepers, Merchants, Rentières: Free Women of Color in the Port Cities of Colonial Saint-Domingue, 1750 – 1790," in *Women in Port: Gendering Communities, Economies, and Social Networks in Atlantic Port Cities, 1500 – 1800*, ed. Douglas Catterall and Jodi Campbell (Leiden: Brill, 2012). See Susan M. Socolow, "Economic Roles of the Free Women of Color of Cap Français," in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Bloomington: Illinois University Press, 1996): 279 – 297. See Pierre Force and Susan Dick Hoffius, "Negotiating Race and Status in Senegal, Saint-Domingue, and South Carolina: Marie-Adélaïde Rossignol and Her Descendants," *Early American Studies* 16:1 (Winter 2018): 124 – 150. See Lorelle Semley, *To Be Free and French: Citizenship in France's Atlantic Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). See Susan M. Socolow, "Economic Roles of the Free Women of Color of Cap Français," in *More Than Chattel*, 279 - 297.

<sup>3</sup> For community see Jennifer Palmer, "Creating and Belonging to Community: Race and Gender in Eighteenth-Century La Rochelle," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, 34 (2006): 27-43. See also R. Darrell Meadows, "Engineering Exile: Social Networks and the French Atlantic Community, 1789 – 1809," *French Historical Studies* 23:1 (Winter 2000): 67 – 101.

<sup>4</sup> Marie-Adélaïde Rossignol brought assets of 78,907 livres to the marriage and Dumont brought 29,386 livres. See Pierre Force and Susan Dick Hoffius, "Negotiating Race and Status in Senegal, Saint-Domingue, and South Carolina," *Early American Studies* 16:1 (Winter 2018): 124-150.

<sup>5</sup> Rogers and King, 357 – 408. For discussion of mixed-race women and their place in society see Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> See Nathalie Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences* (Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2007):169.

<sup>7</sup> See Suzanne Krebsbach, “Black Catholics in Antebellum Charleston,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 108: 2 (April 2007):143 – 159.

<sup>8</sup> See George C. Rogers, Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969).

<sup>9</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States: Earliest Times to the Present, Millennial Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) Series Aa5607-5707; Series Bb1-98.

<sup>10</sup> Henry DeSaussure and John L. Dawson, *Census of the City of Charleston.... 1848* (Charleston; J. B. Nixon, 1849): 3 – 6. For an analysis of this point see Bernard E. Powers Jr, *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822 – 1885* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994): 36 – 72.

<sup>11</sup> John D. Garrigus, “Catalyst or Catastrophe? Saint-Domingue’s Free Men of Color and the Battle of Savannah, 1779 – 1782,” *Revista/Review Interamericana*, 22:1-2 (1992):109 – 125, here 111 – 113.

<sup>12</sup> John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006):171 – 194.

<sup>13</sup> Mederic-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint-Mery, *A Civilization That Perished: The Last Years of White Colonial Rule in Haiti*, translated, abridged and edited by Ivor D. Spencer (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985):165; King, *Blue Coats*, xii; John D. Garrigus, “Redrawing the Color Line: Gender and the Social Construction of Race in Pre-Revolutionary Haiti,” *Journal of Caribbean History* 30:1&2 (1996): 29 – 50.

<sup>14</sup> King, *Blue Coat*, xii-xxiii; William A. Trembley, “The Status of the Church in Saint Domingue during the Last Years of the French Monarchy, 1781 – 1793,” *Caribbean Studies* 1:1 (January 1961): 11 – 18.

<sup>15</sup> David P. Geggus, “Slave and Free Women of Color in Saint Domingue,” in *More Than Chattel*, 259 – 278. Enslaved women had a significant place in island society. See also Arlette Gautier, *Les Soeurs de Solitude: La Condition Feminine dans l’Esclavage aux Antilles du XVII au XIX Siècle* (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> See Darrell Meadows, “Engineering Exile,” *French Historical Studies* 23:1 (Winter 2000): 67 – 102.

<sup>17</sup> See *South Carolina Statutes at Large*, edited by Thomas Cooper and David J. McCord (Columbia, 1836) 8:161, Number 1515: “An Act to Incorporate the Roman Catholic church in Charleston.” See Winston C. Babb, “French Refugees from Saint Domingue to the Southern United States, 1791 – 1810,” (PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 1954): 69. Statistical sources estimate that 10,000 French emigrated during the Revolution and Napoleonic era. See Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti’s Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006): 36, 38; See also Richard C. Madden, *Catholics in South Carolina: A Record* (New York: University Press of America, 1985): 21 – 24, for discussion of nationalities represented in the congregation. Also Susan S. King, *Roman Catholic Deaths in Charleston, South Carolina, 1800 – 1860* (Columbia, South Carolina: SCMAR, 2000). Each entry lists nativity where known. King notes many Catholics lived above the city line and so are not listed in the city records.

<sup>18</sup> See Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, *From New Babylon to Eden: The Huguenots and Their Migration to Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006); *Memory and Identity: The Huguenots in France and the Atlantic Diaspora*, ed. by Bertrand Van Ruymbeke and Randy J. Sparks (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Historian Robert J. Alderson Jr. identified members of the Republican Society of South Carolina in Appendix A. See Robert J. Alderson Jr., *The Bright Era of Happy Revolutions: French Consul Michel-Ange-Bernard Mangourit and International Republicanism in Charleston, 1792 – 1794* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008):185 - 188. For membership in the French Patriotic Society see Michael Kennedy, “A French Jacobin Club in Charleston,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 91:1 (January 1990):4-22. The Brown Fellowship Society was a benevolent society for mixed race men.

See “Inventory of the Brown Fellowship Society, 1794 – 1990,” Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Archives, College of Charleston. See Alexander Moore, *Fabric of Liberty: The Society of the Cincinnati of the State of South Carolina* (Charleston: Home House Press, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Charles Fraser, *Reminiscences of Charleston* (Charleston: John Russell, 1854): 40-45, 61.

<sup>21</sup> *Charleston City Directory, 1790* (Charleston County Public Library, 2012); *Directory of the District of Charleston* (Charleston: Hoff, 1809). Hereinafter *City Directory*, CCPL.

<sup>22</sup> Nicholas Butler, *Votaries of Apollo: The Saint Cecilia Society and the Patronage of Music in Charleston, South Carolina, 1766 – 1820* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> For the extent of his influence in the émigré community see South Carolina Estates Inventories and Bills of Sales, 1732 – 1872 and Inventories and Appraisement Books, 1783 – 1846, South Carolina Room, Charleston County Library, hereinafter CCPL.

<sup>24</sup> Barbot and his descendants remain prominent in Charleston civic life into the twenty-first century. See Barbot Family Papers, 1791-ca. 1965 (1005.00), 11/66-69a. South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

<sup>25</sup> Laurans is listed as a grocer in the *Charleston City Directory* which at the time meant commodity trading.

<sup>26</sup> Charleston County Will Book, Volume 34:311, CCPL; Charleston Inventories, 1826, CCPL. *Charleston City Directory* 1806, CCPL. At his naturalization Jahan described himself as a planter. For a list of member of the French benevolent society see Chapman J. Milling, *150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, La Societe Francaise in Charleston*, (Charleston: Walker, Cogswell and Evans, 1966): 43 – 45; For a list of vestry members see Mary Lucinda Morgan, “The Vestry Records of St. Mary’s Roman Catholic Church, Charleston, South Carolina, 1806 – 1823,” Transcription, 1982, Catholic Diocese of Charleston Archives. Hereinafter CDCA.

<sup>27</sup> Charleston Will Book 39 (1826 – 1834) 993 – 995, CCPL. Members of these families also emigrated to Charleston. See *Charleston City Directory* 1800 to 1850, CCPL; and Susan King, *Roman Catholic Deaths in Charleston, South Carolina, 1800 – 1860* (Columbia: SCMAR, 2000) for list of death notices.

<sup>28</sup> Charleston County Will Book 45 (1845 – 51): 639. CCPL.

<sup>29</sup> Charleston Will Book, CCPL. LePrince recorded his residence in “The Confederate States of America,” but wrote the will in French.

<sup>30</sup> The total number of black baptisms are unequal because not all blacks had surnames. Race identification, however, was always noted.

<sup>31</sup> Carter G. Woodson, *Free Negro Owners of Slaves in the United States in 1830* (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1924): 28. Analysis shows 393 free blacks in Charleston owned enslaved people in 1830. Of these 263, or 66.9% were free women. Only 9.7% or 38, were free women with French surnames.

<sup>32</sup> St. Mary’s Baptism Register, 1792 – 1821, 13 April 1817, CDCA.

<sup>33</sup> State of South Carolina. *Capitation Tax Roll*, 1819, microfilm, CCPL. The State of South Carolina levied a head tax of \$2.00 on free blacks. Records are extant from 1811. See Herbert Aptheker, “South Carolina Poll Tax, 1737 – 1895,” *The Journal of Negro History* 31:2 (April 1946):131 – 139. No members of the Rossignol-Dumont-Schmidt are listed therein.

<sup>34</sup> Charleston Will Book 42 (1839 – 1845): 176, CCPL. In 1830 Belsie Antoine lived in Charleston’s Neck area and owned four slaves. See Woodson, 30.

<sup>35</sup> *Charleston City Directory*, 1806, 1809, CCPL. In a 1794 advertisement in the *Charleston City Gazette*, Langlois announced his business partnership with Mr. Dantignac. He may also have been a director of the French East India Company. See *Etat détaillé des liquidations opérées par la commission charge de repair l’indemnité aux ancien colons de Saint-Domingue, an execution de la loi de 30 avril 1826* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1828 – 1834), 10529.

<sup>36</sup> St Mary’s Baptism Register, 1803, CDCA; Charleston Inventories, Vol. B., 1844 – 1849, 27, CCPL, “Marie A. Langlois.” Her residual estate does not account for the enslaved person she held in Charleston. Woodson, *Free Negro Owners of Slaves*, 27 – 31.

<sup>37</sup> Stewart R. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001): 81-84.

<sup>38</sup> Charleston County Will Book E (1807-1818), 311-315, CCPL; Charleston County Will Book G (1826-1834): 22. CCPL. Witnesses of Laurans’ will were Peter Javain and Francis Follin, natives of France by way of St. Domingue. Executors of Laurans’ estate were Arnold Fourceaud, a French native, and Francis Laborde, livery stable owner. See *Charleston City Directory*, 1809, CCPL.

<sup>39</sup> Griffon or Griffe is a racial category used to describe someone with three-fourths African heritage and dark complexion. See Shirley Elizabeth Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009):63.

<sup>40</sup> Paul was probably a close family member, and so well- known to the executors that a surname was unnecessary. An attorney named Paul Rossignol lived in Savannah where he handled legal matters for French émigrés. He was born in Saint-Domingue in 1786, arrived in Philadelphia in 1792 and lived in Savannah

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from 1792. "Federal Naturalization Oaths, Savannah, Georgia, 1790 – 1860," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 51:4 (December 1967):481.

<sup>41</sup> The property on St. Catherine Street is the only Saint-Dominguan property she mentioned in her will. In 1833 Madame Dumont received from the French government an indemnity of 6,303 francs for her mother's property on Rue Picolet. *Etat détaillé des liquidations opérées pendant l'année 1832 et les six premiers mois de 1833 par la commission chargée de répartir l'indemnité attribuée aux anciens colons de Saint-Domingue, en exécution de la loi du 30 avril 1826* (Paris: Imprimerie National, 1834), 6944.

<sup>42</sup> Charleston County Wills 31 (1807 – 1818): 311, CCPL.

<sup>43</sup> This was a common practice. See Garrigus, *Before Haiti*, 63. Semley thinks this practice had become less common by the 1780s. Semeley, 31.

<sup>44</sup> Dumont is regularly listed in the *Charleston City Directory* as a physician, although the 1806 edition lists him as involved with a school at 16 King Street. *Charleston City Directory*, 1806 CCPL. His estate also consisted of notes of exchange and gold items of security.

<sup>45</sup> Blaise died in 1819. His inheritance devolved to his sister Ursule who died in 1822. See Beulah Glover, "Colleton Historical Society Seeks Information on the Schmidt Family," *Charleston News and Courier*, 18 January 1960.

<sup>46</sup> Charleston County Will Book 30 (1800 – 1807): 961; Charleston Inventory Book (1800 – 1816): Book D: 403, CCPL. Ursule Dumont's guardians were Marie-Adelaide Dumont and Peter Laurans.

<sup>47</sup> The enslaved women may have been Dumont's intimate partners. See Garrigus, *Before Haiti*, 56. For some relationship patterns on the island see Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005): 24 – 26 and *The Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South*, ed. by Catherine Clinton and Michele Gillespie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). It is unclear if the annuity to Arsenne is one-time payment or a yearly payment.

<sup>48</sup> Charleston County Will Book (1800 – 1807) 30:961; Charleston Inventory Book (1800-1816), Book D: 403, CCPL.

<sup>49</sup> King, *Deaths*, 90; Charleston County Death Cards, CCPL, lists Dumont by her honorific and her birthplace as Paris. The attending physician was her son-in-law Dr. John W. Schmidt Sr.

<sup>50</sup> Because the enslaved people were not named they may have included children of Arsenne and Clarisse. Dr. John W. Schmidt Sr was naturalized in 1812. See Marion R. Hemperley, "Federal Naturalization Oaths, Charleston, South Carolina, 1790 – 1860," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 66:4 (October 1965): 112 – 228. Schmidt was the Vice-Consul of Hamburg, Germany, in 1822. He came from a distinguished line of medical men in Prussia and specialized in diseases of the urethra. He had extensive real estate holdings in Charleston and a plantation in Colleton District. In addition to membership in numerous civic organizations, he was an alderman. Politically he identified with the anti-nullification party. See "Schmidt, John," Pease Collection, 51849, South Carolina Historical Society; Charleston County Wills 46 (1851 – 1856): 286, CCPL; Joseph I. Waring, *A History of Medicine in South Carolina* (Charleston: South Carolina Medical Society, 1964): 390. See Robert Mills, *Atlas of the State of South Carolina, 1825* (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1980, facsimile edition) for the location of his plantation in Colleton District.

<sup>51</sup> Charleston Inventories, Book H (1834 – 1845):14; Charleston County Wills 39 (1826 – 1834):1232, CCPL.

<sup>52</sup> Charleston Court of Common Pleas, Judgement Rolls 1833, no. 114A, pts. 1, 2. South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Part 1 contains documents 114A-1 to 15 (LeSeigneur documents). Part 2 contains documents 114A 16 – 30 (Dumont documents). Hereinafter LeSeigneur or Dumont. The Schmidt case is Judgement Roll, 1833, no. 361A.

<sup>53</sup> Le Seigneur had been a veterinarian and at one time operated a slave hospital in Charleston. See "Le Seigneur," Pease Collection, 51227, South Carolina Historical Society; Minutes of the Medical Society, 13 December 1830, Waring Historical Library, Medical University of South Carolina, hereinafter MUSC.

<sup>54</sup> John Schmidt Junior graduated Rutgers Medical College in 1830. He then applied for and received a medical license in Charleston from the Medical Society of South Carolina. The Society revoked the license upon receiving the allegation.

<sup>55</sup> See William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease, *James Louis Petigru: Southern Conservative, Southern Dissenter* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995, reprint 2002). Petigru is considered the quintessential anti-nullifier.

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<sup>56</sup> MS 51, Minutes of the Medical Society 1810 – 1833, Waring Historical Library, MUSC. Whatever documents Schmidt and Petigru presented are no longer extant.

<sup>57</sup> Minutes of the Medical Society of South Carolina, 5 May 1831, Waring Historical Library, MUSC.

<sup>58</sup> In addition to their unsentimental views of race and slavery their personal history was a paradigm of conflict in southern racial identity. Mark Perry, *Lift Up Thy Voice: The Grimké Family's Journey from Slaveholders to Civil Rights Leaders* (New York: Viking, 2001). One of Henry's mixed-race sons was the Harvard-educated lawyer and diplomat Archibald Grimké. Another was Francis J. Grimké, prominent Presbyterian minister married to abolitionist Charlotte Forten. See Bruce D. Dickson, Jr. *Archibald Grimké: Portrait of a Black Independent* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993) and *The Journal of Charlotte Forten: A Free Negro in the Slave Era*, ed. Ray Billington (New York: Norton, 1981).

<sup>59</sup> Dumont, *ibid.* For a look at liability of being a mulatto in the state's legal system, see Donald J. Senese "The Free Negro and the South Carolina Courts, 1790 - 1860," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 68:2 (July 1967):141- 153.

<sup>60</sup> Dumont, *ibid.* The documents give no indication for the delay.

<sup>61</sup> Dumont, 114A-25. Lorelle Semley and other historians argue that a citizen of the French colonies was a citizen of France. See Semley:30 – 33; Sue Peabody, *There are No Slaves in France: The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Regime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>62</sup> Dumont, 114A-30.

<sup>63</sup> Dumont, 114A – 18. See *Charleston City Directory*, 1830, CCPL. Dickson and Glover were nationally-known figures in their profession. See *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of America Biography* (New York: Appleton, 1888 – 1889). Glover's plantation adjoined Schmidt's in Colleton. The Brown Fellowship Society was a benevolent society of free African American and mixed-race men affiliated with St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Charleston. See *Inventory of the Brown Fellowship Society, 1794 – 1990*, Avery Research Center Archives, College of Charleston. There were several black burial societies active in the period under discussion. The Friendly Union Society was established in 1813, the Brown Fellowship Society was established in 1790, and the Humane and Friendly Society was established in 1802. See Robert L. Harris, "Charleston's Free Afro-American Elite," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 82:4 (1981: 289 - 310); Michal P. Johnson and James L. Roark, "A Middle Ground: Free Mulattoes and the Friendly Moralistic Society of Antebellum Charleston," *Southern Studies* (Fall 1982): 246 – 265. See also Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 48 et. seq.

<sup>64</sup> The jury consisted of eight white men, none of whom were French. See Dumont, 114A – 27.

<sup>65</sup> Henry Campbell Black, *Black's Law Dictionary* (West Publishing, 1891).

<sup>66</sup> *South Carolina Statutes at Large*, Number 670, "An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing Negroes and Other Slaves in this Province," passed 10 May 1740.

<sup>67</sup> English-based legal culture differed in this regard from French-based law practiced in Saint Domingue and Louisiana. John Belton O'Neill, *The Negro Law of South Carolina*, (Columbia, SC: John G. Brown, 1848): 6-7; Samuel Brenner, "Negro Blood in His Veins: The Development and Disappearance of the Doctrine of Defamation Per Se by Racial Misidentification in the American South," *Santa Clara Law Review* 50:333. Although a nearly comprehensive look at the legal topic of defamation, Brenner does not cite the Dumont - Schmidt cases.

<sup>68</sup> Schmidt was a founding member of the New York Academy of Medicine and died in 1858 at the age of forty-eight. He is buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn. See *Constitution and Bylaws of the New-York Academy of Medicine with a List of Officers and Fellows* (New York: H. Ludwig, 1848): 19.

<sup>69</sup> Charleston County Will Book 49 (1856 – 62): 654. CCPL.