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## Louis Victor de la Vergne (1938-2017)

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**LOUIS VICTOR DE LA VERGNE**  
**(1938-2017)**

“Well, hello my friend!” That was the way Louis V. de la Vergne would answer a phone call or react when meeting an acquaintance. Indeed, Louis had many friends, and their common passion was the legal history of the Bayou State. Louis may be deemed the guardian of the *Digest of the Civil Laws now in force in the territory of Orleans* (Digest of 1808), since he owned and protected the de la Vergne copy of that text. Ancestry and the Digest of 1808 were eternal sources of research for Louis.

The Guardian of the Digest was born on September 21, 1938, in his beloved New Orleans, and died in that same city on September 15, 2017. Mr. de la Vergne graduated from New Orleans Academy and received an undergraduate degree from Tulane University. Louis was a graduate of the 1965 Class of Tulane University School of Law, and was a member of the Louisiana State Bar Association.<sup>1</sup> Louis was an advocate for Louisiana legal history and helped build bridges with other civil law jurisdictions from across the globe.

Ancestry was a constant source of fascination for Louis. His ancestors included prominent figures of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Louisiana; and it is possible to mention, amongst others, Hugues Lavergne, Gustavus Schmidt, and Jacques Villeré.<sup>2</sup> Each of these Louisiana actors offered an opportunity for Louis to engage in academic projects. He was well known for seeding interest in scholars, offering the first stepping stones towards the realization of multiple projects. Scholars from Argentina, France, Mexico, Russia, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, and naturally, the US, to name a few jurisdictions, were enchanted by Louis and his passion.

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1. See *Obituary, Louis V. de la Vergne*, THE NEW ORLEANS ADVOCATE, Sept. 18, 2018, available at <https://perma.cc/2SJY-LXSH> (last visited Jan. 22, 2018).

2. *Id.*

Louis was indeed the Guardian of the Digest of 1808. That 1808 text did not include an *exposé des motifs* explaining its sources. Nevertheless, an uncertain number of copies contain interleaves with manuscript notes dictated by Louis Moreau-Lislet, or in some cases, even written by him.<sup>3</sup> One of these manuscripts, the de la Vergne copy, includes references to Roman and Spanish materials linked to titles and articles. The manuscript also includes references to French texts of Roman grounding, such as the works of Robert J. Pothier and Jean Domat. The content of that copy triggered an academic debate between Rodolfo Batiza and Robert A. Pascal during the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> That debate reflected that whether French, Spanish, or Roman, the laws were mainly taken from the continental European system, and that the Digest of 1808 was not a mere copy of the *Code Napoléon* or of a single text.<sup>5</sup>

Louis was close to the LSU Law Center, mainly due to his lifelong friendship with Robert A. Pascal. Louis also found a friend in Alain A. Levasseur, and their interest in the life and work of Moreau-Lislet joined their paths during decades. Further, the Center of Civil Law Studies (CCLS) at the LSU Law Center, especially during the term of Olivier Moréteau, also built a strong bond with Louis.<sup>6</sup> The CCLS developed the *Digest Online*, which made the text and manuscript notes of the de la Vergne copy—due to the generosity of Louis—freely available to readers across the globe.<sup>7</sup>

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3. John W. Cairns, *The de la Vergne Volume and the Digest of 1808*, 24 TUL. EUR. & CIV. L.F. 31, 74 (2009).

4. See Rodolfo Batiza, *The Louisiana Civil Code of 1808: Its Actual Sources and Present Relevance*, 46 TUL. L. REV. 4 (1971) and Robert A. Pascal, *Sources of the Digest of 1808: A Reply to Professor Batiza*, 46 TUL. L. REV. 603 (1972).

5. SHAEL HERMAN, *THE LOUISIANA CIVIL CODE: A EUROPEAN LEGACY FOR THE UNITED STATES* 32 (1993). See also Agustín Parise, *A Brief on Codification in Louisiana (1803-1830)*, in *EUROPEAN TRADITIONS: INTEGRATION OR DIS-INTEGRATION?* 85, 86-88 (J. Oosterhuis & E. van Dongen eds. 2013).

6. See note by Olivier Moréteau, *Louis de la Vergne (1938-2017)*, LSU LAW WORLDWIDE, Sept. 2017, available at <https://perma.cc/6F4K-VD36> (last visited Jan. 22, 2018).

7. See *Digest Online*, available at <https://perma.cc/27VQ-A7HU> (last visited Jan 22, 2018). For additional information on the *Digest Online*, see The Russell Long Chair and CCLS Newsletter, No. 7, May 2008, at 1, <https://perma.cc/4QG2-B9FA>. See also Agustín Parise, *Golden Jubilee of the*

Louis will be missed; yet he is now an important actor within the legal history of the state he very much loved.

Agustín Parise

