

## The Story of L.E. Patterson

Carlton Dubois McClain



The paternal grandfather of my mother, Mrs. Evalin Elaine McClain (née Yarber (Clariette)), M.S., MPA, was L. E. Patterson (24 September 1914 – 20 June 1993). L.E. was one of eight children born in Randolph, Louisiana to Albert Alford Patterson and Harriet (Hattie) Patterson (née Walker), who was herself the daughter of Allace Walker, who was, in turn, born in 1854 in Winn Parish (*Paroisse de Winn*), Louisiana. Albert, my maternal great-great-grandfather (whose middle name was recorded as “Alfred” in some sources), was a Creole of color of French, Choctaw, and African Negro extraction who had been born to a well-to-do French- and Louisiana Creole-speaking family in Vermilion Parish (*Paroisse de Vermilion*), Louisiana in the year 1888. Over the previous centuries, some branches of the family had migrated to East Texas and Southern Arkansas,

including the town of Mount Holly, Union County, Arkansas, near the Louisiana-Arkansas border. Shortly after the birth of his son, my great-great-grandfather, Albert, anglicized the original French family name of “Patenaude” to “Patterson” under increased pressures to Americanize in an increasingly Anglo-dominated Louisiana in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The French surname “Patenaude,” from which the name “Patterson” is derived, transliterates as “our father,” and ultimately comes from the Latin, “Paternoster,” and this name was historically found all throughout French Louisiana (including Québec and the Maritime Provinces in Canada). The name originates in the historical county of Champagne, France, and was initially used as an identifier for the vocation of the original bearer, which was typically religious. The historical county of Champagne was governed by the Counts of Vermandois. It is not certain whether or not the family of my great-great-grandfather, Albert, is descended from Frankish nobility such as the Counts of Vermandois; however, it has been confirmed and documented through descent from antiquity, nonetheless, that my mother is in fact descended from the Counts of Vermandois (including Hugh the Great, his daughter, Lady Alice (or Adelaide), and his son-in-law Hubert (or Herbert), 4<sup>th</sup> Count of Vermandois), by way of my mother’s mother, Marilou Yarber (27 January 1940 – 9 June 1997), and my maternal great-grandmother, Ruth Ann Levison (26 January 1921 – 9 July 1987).

Although the initials of his son, “L. E.” officially stood for nothing, my maternal great-great-grandfather, Albert Patterson, intended for his son to inherit the French name “Louis Édouard.”

However, he was discouraged to give his son this name, because of the increasing repression of French-based Creole culture in Louisiana during this time. Around the period of the birth of my great-grandfather, L. E., the state legislature of Louisiana had made English the sole official language statewide, and made volatile attempts to repress any remnants of French- and Louisiana Creole-speaking communities across the state—including the requisite to teach English exclusively in schools throughout the state. At any rate, the family of my great-grandfather, did, in many ways, retain their cultural affiliations through the practicing of Catholicism, the use of Creole idioms in the home, and through cuisine and classical music.

After growing into manhood, my maternal great-grandfather, L. E. Patterson, who joined Freemasonry as a youth and became a highly-skilled mechanic, also went on to enlist into the United States Army and was honorably discharged in 1945 following the conclusion of World War II. Shortly before entering the military, my great-grandfather, L. E. wed Ivy Mae Williams in Winn Parish, Louisiana on September 14, 1942. Ivy Mae Patterson (née Williams) (3 March 1915 – 9 September 1996), my maternal great-grandmother, was born to a mulatto-identified planter, Cleveland Williams, who was born in 1880 in Ruston, Lincoln Parish, Louisiana and his wife Winnie Williams (née Amos) of Bethany, Caddo Parish, Louisiana. My great-great-grandparents, Cleveland and Winnie Williams, later emigrated to Greater New Orleans, Louisiana, where my great-great-grandfather, Cleveland, established a plantation in St. Charles Parish, Louisiana in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Ola Williams Turner, the sister of Cleveland, married Minger Bennie Turner, Sr., with whom she bore several children, including St. Rest, Louisiana-born Winzer Turner (May 10, 1923 – December 2, 2008). Winzer, an avid fisherman, hunter, American football and basketball coach, went on to proudly serve in the United States Marine Corps during the Second World War, and later received a Bachelor of Science in Biological Sciences from Grambling Normal Negro College (now Grambling State University). Ensuing his marriage to Ruthie L. Brown at New Rocky Valley Baptist Church in North Louisiana, he would ultimately go on to receive a Master of Science from Indiana University Bloomington.

Upon returning from his service in the United States Army in 1945, my maternal great-grandfather, L. E. Patterson, began to experience tense racial animosity from Anglo-Americans within the community in rural northwest Louisiana. This hostility from Whites culminated in L. E. having to flee Louisiana in fear of his family's safety when terror from the local Ku Klux Klan chapter reached an unbearable breaking point. According to University of Nebraska at Omaha alumnus and my grand-uncle, James Patterson, A.B. (the son of L. E. and the younger brother of my late maternal grandfather, Alonzo Lee Patterson (30 March 1937 – 9 April 2011)), the sons of L. E. were not accustomed to acquiesce to the Anglo-Americans' alleged expectations of etiquette. When a white shopkeeper confronted my great-grandfather, L. E., with the notion that his sons did not address the white storekeepers with "Yes, sir and no, sir," L. E. wittingly responded to the white storeowner by proudly stating, "My sons do not even address me with such etiquette customs; so, why in the world would they even feel the slightest necessity to do so with you?!"

Ensuing L. E.'s altercation with the white storeowner, Anglo-American terror began to be inflicted upon L. E. and his family there in rural northwest Louisiana in the middle-to-late 1940s.

This Klansmen terror, which included firebombs on L. E.'s home and, later, a fiery cross being thrown on L. E.'s property, eventually culminated in L. E. uprooting he and his family from Louisiana in the year 1947. However, L. E. could not allow the Anglo-Americans to become aware of his exact whereabouts. Therefore, L. E. initially fled town alone and settled with some relatives in Houston, Texas, earning income as a construction worker before being contacted via postal letters from a brother, Alfred, who lived in Omaha, Nebraska. Meanwhile, my maternal great-grandmother, Ivy Mae Patterson, supported the young family as a farm laborer until being notified that her husband, L. E. had settled in with her brother-in-law, Alfred, in Omaha, Nebraska.

When it was eventually secure enough to do so, Ivy Mae moved her five young children (including my late maternal grandfather, Alonzo Lee Patterson, and my grand-uncle, James Patterson, A.B.), to Omaha, where she was reunited with her husband—my maternal great-grandfather—L. E., in 1949, and there, the family settled and henceforth continued to reside. Though born in Dodson, Louisiana, my grandfather, Alonzo, spent his formative years in Omaha, where he met and fell in love with a woman by the name of Marilou Yarber; though they never married, they eventually welcomed a daughter—my mother, Mrs. Evalin Élaïne McClain (née Yarber (Clariette)), M.S., MPA, there in Omaha, Nebraska, in the year 1957.

My mother acquired her maiden name—the Creole surname “Clariette” (a variation of the French “Clairette”)—due to the fact that a local Louisiana Creole family (with whom she shared no biological relation), had played a considerable role in her upbringing there in Omaha, Nebraska—where she would eventually earn, similar to her Criminal Justice-major paternal uncle, James Patterson, a Bachelor's from the University of Nebraska at Omaha in Communications, and, later, a Master of Science in Urban Studies from that same institution in 1982. My mother later went on to earn a Master in Public Administration from the University of Missouri – Kansas City in 1999 in addition to completing coursework towards a Ph.D. there during the 2000s decade.

I have paid homage on several occasions to my mother's centuries-old Louisiana roots, including the French-language composition, “Encore Une Fois” (which I single-handedly wrote, composed, orchestrated, sung, and produced), the Louisiana Creole-language “Zwazo Paradi” (which I co-wrote with Charles Jean-Baptiste, and single-handedly composed, orchestrated, sung, and produced), and my cover of the legendary Édith Piaf chanson standard, “Hymne À l'Amour.”