The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

"THAT THE FUTURE MAY LEARN FROM THE PAST"

Episode 364: Matthew Powell, "Road Trip 2023: An Early History of the Mississippi Coast"

[00:00:00] Announcer: You're listening to an AirWave Media podcast.

[00:00:04] Liz Covart: *Ben Franklin's World* is a production of Colonial Williamsburg Innovation Studios.

Hello and welcome to episode 364 of *Ben Franklin's World*, the podcast dedicated to helping you learn more about how the people and events of our early American past have shaped the present-day world we live in. And I'm your host, Liz Covart. Welcome back to our summer 2023 road trip, or really our water trip. We're on our way to the second stop in our three-stop trip. From Ste. Geneviève National Historical Park in Missouri, we're going to sail down the Mississippi River, approximately 620 miles to the port of New Orleans. At New Orleans, we'll probably stop and pick up supplies, but then we're going to sail out of the Mississippi River, into the Gulf of Mexico, where we're going to head east approximately 125 miles or so to the Port of Pascagoula, Mississippi, and this is where we're going to stop so that we can tour the LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum.

Now, the Mississippi Gulf Coast was home to many different cultures and empires during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. This has led some historians to argue that the Gulf Coast region may have been the most diverse region in all of early North America, given that it did host many different Native American, European, and African peoples. The LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum is really a place where we can stop and investigate and come to better understand the Gulf Coast region's great diversity. Founded around 1718, the LaPointe-Krebs House served as the home of a prominent Gulf Coast family. Our tour guide for this site will be Matthew Powell, a historian of slavery and southern history and the executive director of the LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum. During our tour of this site Matthew reveals information about the different Indigenous and European peoples who lived along the Mississippi Gulf Coast during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; details about the LaPointe-Krebs family, the house they built, and the plantation they operated throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and what small historic sites and museums like the LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum can add to our knowledge about early America.

But first, we have some big news. Public historian Katie Schinabeck has joined the *Ben Franklin's World* team as our brand-new associate podcast producer. Katie will be taking over for

Holly White, who has since moved on to a new role within Colonial Williamsburg Innovation Studios. Now, Katie has research expertise in the American Revolution and how it's remembered, and she's finishing her dissertation about loyalists from the American Revolution. Behind the scenes, Katie will be helping me research and prepare for interviews, and she'll also be helping edit episodes, as well. So please join me in welcoming Katie Schinabeck to our team. You can meet her and ask her questions in our listener community on Facebook, which you can join at benfranklinsworld.com/facebook.

And with that, allow me to reintroduce you to our guest historian. Our guest is the executive director of the LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum in Pascagoula, Mississippi. Prior to working at the LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum, he worked as a National Park Service Ranger at the Shiloh National Military Park in Savannah, Tennessee and at Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area in Fort Smith, Montana. In 2020, he was awarded the John W.

Odom Memorial Prize in Southern History for his research and study of slavery in the antebellum South. Welcome to *Ben Franklin's World*, Matthew Powell.

[00:03:52] Matthew Powell: Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

[00:03:54] Liz Covart: Well, Matthew, as we're here to talk about the history of the LaPoint-Krebs House and Museum, I wonder if we could start with the description of the LaPoint-Krebs House and its historical significance. So why is the LaPointe-Krebs House in Pascagoula, Mississippi a historic site and a museum?

[00:04:11] Matthew Powell: Sure. So the LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum is historically significant because the home itself was built in 1757 and expansions were made in 1762, 1790, and 1820. And it is the oldest home in the state of Mississippi and the oldest existing structure in the entire Mississippi Valley. The construction materials, methods, and alterations to the house contain useful information about the earliest non-Native inhabitants of the Mississippi Valley. The house was constructed using tabby walls and floors, bousillage and timber framing. And you know, while these are all pretty common historical materials on the southeast coast, tabby construction is really particularly rare on the Gulf Coast and in fact the LaPointe Krebs home is the only existing tabby structure on the entire Gulf Coast.

[00:05:07] Liz Covart: What constitutes tabby construction? Could you tell us more about tabby construction and what it looks like?

[00:05:14] Matthew Powell: Tabby is actually a concrete-like substance. What makes it unique to this area is that it's actually made using a product that is in abundance here, oyster shells. They made it by mixing crushed and whole oyster shells, sand, lime, and water. And what really is unique is that these oyster shells were mined from middens, which are essentially old dumps created by Native Americans. So due to this many prehistoric artifacts are actually found in the house's walls and floors. So after they mix all of those components together, it's poured into a wooden form called a lift. And the boards of the lift were actually held together by wooden pins at the bottom and wooden stays at the top because they didn't have nails back in that time. So once it's hardened, the pins are removed and the lift was moved up, and then the pins are reinserted. So the process kind of continued until the wall or the floor was complete, and then the holes left by the pins were actually filled with plaster or stucco. So essentially they're taking an organic substance and creating concrete blocks in sections to complete the walls and floors.

[00:06:24] Liz Covart: That's really interesting. And you mentioned that the people who built the LaPointe-Krebs House were mining these oyster shells from middens, essentially Native American trash heaps. So I wonder, do we know how early colonists learn to make tabby, this oyster shell–based cement, and use it in the construction of their buildings?

[00:06:44] Matthew Powell: As far as how they used it and how they found about it, we're not necessarily sure. But what's interesting is when they take the oyster shells and mix it with water, it breaks down. And then once it rehardens, it rehardens like a concrete. But we don't necessarily know where they found this from. But like I was saying, it is the only existing tabby structure on the entire Gulf Coast. And while it's pretty common on the southeast coast, it's not very common here.

[00:07:12] Liz Covart: Now speaking about the early history of the Gulf Coast, could you tell us about the earliest known history of the area that is now occupied by the LaPointe-Krebs House? You know, who were and are the Native American peoples who lived and live in this area known as Pascagoula, Mississippi.

[00:07:29] Matthew Powell: The Pascagoula were the smaller of the Native American tribes in what is now Mississippi, comparable in size would be the Natchez. With the large nations that everybody associates in this area being the Chickasaw and the Choctaw. By the time of French

colonization settler accounts state the Pascagoula nation consisted only of one village of about thirty huts, and all accounts say that the Pascagoula reacted peaceably to French arrival. The Pascagoula were actually waiting on the French when they landed on the Gulf Coast and d'Iberville, who was the explorer in charge of the French expedition, immediately drew a peace pipe and three ships to showcase that he came in peace. And the French gave the Pascagoula gifts of tools, beads, weapons, and glass. And in return, the Pascagoula gave gifts of food and animal hides. And these people had already interacted with the Spanish and the English prior to this. So interaction with Europeans was not all that peculiar for them by the time of French arrival.

Unfortunately, the only written sources we have of the Pascagoula are the settlers themselves, and even those are pretty few in number. The best is coming from Le Page du Pratz, who managed a tobacco plantation, and he was actually the one that gave the account of the Pascagoula tribe's size. But recent digs of this land have unearthed material cultures of clay pottery, and these were dated, the artifacts were, and they showed that the Pascagoula lived in this area well into the mid 1700s. But due to their small size and lack of written record, we don't exactly know what happened to the Pascagoula. The prominent theory is that they assimilated into one of the larger Native American tribes like maybe the Chickasaw or the Choctaw.

[00:09:24] Liz Covart: It sounds from your description that both the Pascagoula and the French had experiences interacting with Europeans and Native Americans before they actually interacted with each other, and it also sounds like both the French and the Pascagoula were unsurprised and ready for their encounters with each other. So could you tell us a bit more about when the French came to meet the Pascagoula and about the experiences they had with encountering different Native American peoples in the Gulf Coast region?

[00:09:54] Matthew Powell: Yeah. When the French arrived here, they met the Pascagoula. The two explorers were Bienville and d'Iberville. When they immediately made peace with the Pascagoula and the Pascagoula actually showed them what they called "a large river," which of course was the Mississippi River, and that's what they were actually looking for was that river, to get a justification that they were in the correct area that had been claimed for France. So when they did that, they knew they were in the right area. And then settlement came really a lot later on. But they still peacefully interacted with Pascagoula. And like I said, Pascagoula, were in this area well into the mid-1700s.

[00:10:34] Liz Covart: Do we know the date when the French arrived in the Gulf Coast?

[00:10:37] Matthew Powell: The whole story of the history of the Gulf Coast is actually really interesting. So in order to kind of answer that question I have to go back a little bit. African, English, and Spanish cultures really all play a part in creating the unique identity down here. But like you said, the French were actually the strongest cultural influence here, and there's no real reason as to why that is. But from what I'm able to deduce, it's because the French were really the first to settle in this area. So in 1682, French explorer, Sieur de La Salle made his way down the Mississippi River from French colonial Canada and claimed the entire Mississippi Valley for France. He named the whole area Louisianne after Louis XIV.

Previous claims and expeditions in this area had taken place, like I said earlier, by the French and the English, and had already interacted with the nations like the Pascagoula. But the French actually took it a step further by sending French Canadian explorers, trappers, and actually brothers, Bienville and d'Iberville, to settle the area that La Salle had claimed for the French crown. And it was on January 27, 1699, that Iberville's ships encountered the Spanish within Pensacola Bay. So they were actually going to land in Pensacola Bay, but because of the fact that the Spanish were already in that area, they had to keep sailing west. And so when they did that, they actually anchored at one of the barrier islands here off of the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, which actually became known as Ship Island for them landing in that area. And of course, they went ashore and encountered the Pascagoula Native Americans, they befriended them, like I said earlier, they took Bienville and d'Iberville to the mouth of what they called a great river. And so then they knew that they were actually in the area that La Salle had claimed for France, and then they set out in search of a site to build a fort. And they made their way actually to a town called Ocean Springs now, which was about twenty miles west of Pascagoula. And there they erected Fort Maurepas, which they named after the French Minister of Marine and Colonies, and a town they actually named Biloxi after another Native American tribe that actually lived in that area.

This became the first established European settlement in what would become Mississippi. And then, you know, growth of the French colony, like I said, didn't come really as quickly as most people would actually think. So they landed in 1699, but to help France's economy and to increase their colonization, John Law, a Scottish financier, opened a bank in France in 1716, and he began issuing paper money. And then a year later he started the Company of the Mississippi and promised stockholders large profits when the colony's economy improved. So he essentially sold this area and the Mississippi Gulf Coast of these investors as a land of like plenty and opportunity, and his plan was to send colonists and African slaves to the colony to help kind of fill the gap left by the few land claims issued by the French crown. His plan didn't work out and the population really didn't boom as he had promised his investors. So to cover the land

purchases, he issued more banknotes, which obviously dropped the value of the shares to the point where the money was really wasn't even worth the paper that was being printed on. And the collapse actually became known as the Mississippi Bubble. And by 1721, the company had completely collapsed, but Law was actually successful in increasing colonization. And you know, though the French had settled this area by 1700, it really wasn't until 1719 that colonists began arriving on the Gulf Coast at Ship Island. The only ones who really established a foothold in this area were the ones who came in 1699, and the second expedition of 1701.

[00:14:40] Liz Covart: You know, an interesting point to be made here about the arrival of the French along Mississippi's Gulf Coast in 1718–1719, is that the builder and first owner of what would become the LaPointe-Krebs House arrived in this migration. So Matthew, would you tell us about Joseph Simon de LaPointe's arrival in Mississippi in 1718, and about the land grant the governor of Louisiana granted to him?

[00:15:05] Matthew Powell: Yeah, so LaPointe was a French Canadian who was heavily involved in the fur trade alongside Bienville and d'Iberville. We were able to actually locate and transcribe just the other day, an article that listed LaPointe and his brother Ignace as recruits on Bienville and d'Iberville ships during King William's War, specifically the Battle of Hudson Bay. And soon after, LaPointe found himself on the way to the Mississippi Gulf Coast with Bienville and d'Iberville. You know, accounts are mixed. A lot of secondary sources say that he was an admiral, but I've not really been able to find anything that definitively proves that claim. In fact, we did locate some pay ledgers for the men on the expedition and LaPointe's pay didn't warrant that of someone with an admiral's rank, and until I find sources that state otherwise, I believe, based on the documentation that we have, he was just a regular recruit.

You know, after arriving, we know that LaPointe stayed in this area. He was listed in the 1700 census in Biloxi and the 1702 census at Fort Louis in present-day Mobile, Alabama, just east of here, about sixty miles. He stayed in the Mobile area until he was granted that land concession that you were talking of. And there are conflicting sources on the exact date of the concession. One source says it was 1713 and the other says it was 1715. Either way, by 1715, LaPointe had obtained his concession in this area. It is possible he was married before coming to this area, but nonetheless, LaPointe married Marie Foucault after arriving here and he had three daughters with her before Marie's death in 1722. A year later, LaPointe married a widow, Catherine Doucin and adopted her daughter.

By 1726, LaPointe had likely completed a two-story house and outbuildings on the land that many archeologists believe to be this property where the current house stands. We know the size of LaPointe's estate because of maps drawn by French engineer Dumont of the Pascagoula River Valley that he had done in 1726. The map actually closely resembles the river delta today and showcases both the LaPointe and Chaumont properties that were land concessions. His eldest daughter, Marie Josephine Simon de LaPointe, whom he had with Marie Foucault, married the German immigrant Hugo Krebs in 1741, and then in 1747 LaPointe would actually pass away.

[00:17:56] Liz Covart: Wow. Maps, shipping records, sources for land grants. It really sounds like it takes a lot of research to create and maintain a museum, Matthew.

[00:18:05] Matthew Powell: Yeah, having these records here and creating this museum, there was a lot of work that went into it with the Jackson County Historical Society here and various historical research. Personally, myself, I've actually only been on board since December of 2020, so it's a lot of personal research of previous research that's been done, but the restoration work and the creation of this museum actually began in 2010, and the museum itself was completed around 2016, and then it actually won an award in 2017. So it's fairly new here but the work being done is years and years and years of research and then taking the years and years of research of those who came before us in like the 1940s and '50s, when they did their own research of what was the old Spanish fort, to kind of pool it all together and deduce historical fact from fallacy and creating the wonderful museum that we have here.

[00:19:09] Liz Covart: You mentioned that Joseph de LaPointe spent time in Biloxi and that he spent time in Mobile during the early part of the 1700s. What exactly was the landscape and area of the Gulf Coast like during this early time period? What was the landscape and area of the land that the governor of Louisiana granted LaPointe in Pascagoula like?

[00:19:30] Matthew Powell: You know, contrary to popular belief, the Mississippi Gulf Coast was actually a really busy place back then. Archeological digs done here most recently in 2010 unearthed Native American artifacts that proved that they were living in this area well into the mid-eighteenth century. But still, LaPointe was not the only Frenchman in this area. His land concession was granted to him on the east side of the Pascagoula River. To the west was a land concession that was granted to Jean Baptiste Boudreau, who also came to this area with Iberville and the 1701 voyage. And then, you know, of course you've got the city of Mobile, as we said earlier, which is about sixty miles east of Pascagoula. And then you have New Orleans, which is about a hundred miles west. And all of this area was controlled by the French at that time. So

compared to the rest of the state, the Gulf Coast was a really busy place in the 1700s. The only other place comparable would be Natchez, Mississippi, and that is only necessarily because of the Natchez Trace that was used by travelers and fur trappers. While the rest of Mississippi, and really the rest of what is now present-day Alabama and Louisiana, wasn't that busy, the Gulf Coast between New Orleans, Pascagoula, and Mobile was very, very busy.

[00:20:54] Liz Covart: So we're not talking about a circumstance where LaPointe is settling in a barren wilderness. It really sounds like he's building a home in a place that had at least water connections to many different areas, peoples, and markets.

[00:21:06] Matthew Powell: Oh, very much so. I mean, he stayed in Mobile for a period of time because that was the large fort there, even though Fort Maurepas was in Biloxi, which is just, uh, about twenty miles to the west to Pascagoula, and the land concessions began to be granted by the French crown, and he was able to get a nice piece of land that is right off the waterway. Even today is a beautiful place. We're right off of what is now Krebs Lake, but it's a beautiful piece of land that he was able to carve out a really good existence.

[00:21:41] Liz Covart: Speaking of the land, we know that in the early eighteenth century, LaPointe settled on this really nice tract of land. You just described it for us. It's right along the Pascagoula River, and this is the land where LaPointe builds the LaPointe plantation. And Ariel wonders how the LaPointe plantation operated. So Matthew, would you tell us a bit about the LaPointe plantation, the crops that LaPointe grew, and how the LaPointe plantation functioned as a site of economic and cultural exchange?

[00:22:10] Matthew Powell: As far as the size of the plantation, we don't necessarily know. What we have to go off of is that map that I spoke of earlier that was done at the river valley by the engineer Dumont. And you see in there a large building in the center and then several outbuildings, as well as a fence like structure around the property. So it seemed to be very large, but he used this land primarily to grow and cultivate the indigo plant. You know, everybody probably remembers grabbing the not quite purple, but not entirely blue crayon out of the Crayola box as a kid, and that color was probably indigo. What many people don't really know is that color is one of the oldest known colors. It was used in Egypt around, I believe, 1600 BC. Well, on the Gulf Coast, indigo actually became one of the first ever cash crops on plantations. Even before rice, sugarcane, and cotton, which obviously most people think of as the king of cash crops in the antebellum South.

But indigo planting and cultivation was actually backbreaking work for LaPointe slaves. Not only was the planting and cultivation hard, but that was only actually half the work. Once the crop was brought in, they had to turn it into a dye in order to sell it. The process of turning the leaves into blue dye was really complex, and the smell from all accounts is really atrocious. First, the slaves actually cut and steeped the plant in water until the leaves actually started to ferment, and this step could last more than a day and kind of smelled like rotting vegetation. And this turned the water covering the plants blue. And second, the water was drained into a new vat and stirred in to add oxygen. And the liquid was then transferred and they added lime into it and the lime caused the indigo sediment to actually settle at the bottom of the tank. And then after draining the water, the indigo stayed behind. So finally it was dried and it was cut into cubes and then rolled into balls, and then they sold it. So this was extremely popular and lucrative until the late 1700s, when competitors outside the, uh, Gulf Coast actually became quite prevalent, and then several years of diseased plants caused the decline, and then of course, the nail in the coffin was when, in 1897, a synthetic dye was created, which obviously stopped the planting and cultivation of indigo entirely.

[00:24:52] Liz Covart: You just explained how the process of growing indigo and extracting that dye was backbreaking work. It does sound like LaPointe used enslaved people to do the work of indigo cultivation and to process these plants into the saleable dye. Could you tell us more about the origins of slavery on the LaPointe plantation?

[00:25:14] Matthew Powell: I really wish I could. We don't have, you know, a lot of records of the slaves owned by LaPointe or his future son-in-law, Hugo Krebs. Being a historian of American slavery, I do believe that identifying these people and telling their story is just as equally important as telling the story of the Anglo-Europeans in this nation. So since coming on here as executive director in December 2020, that has been a focal point of mine, and I'm actually working very closely with local genealogists to identify these individuals and their ancestors. The difficulty for both LaPointe and for Hugo, is that when the French left this area, they took the census records with them and all the other records with them, and many of these were actually lost in shipwrecks, and that's why finding historical records on the Gulf Coast is difficult, first and foremost.

The Spanish, they kept really great records during their dominion of the Gulf Coast, but unfortunately they actually controlled this area after Hugo's death. So this is just a really slow process because I'm having to sift through a plethora of secondary sources that aren't really cited and in fact sometimes have claims that are a bit overzealous. Not to too terribly off course, but

for an example, I came across a secondary source the other day from the 1970s, while trying to find information on slaves that Hugo Krebs owned as well as LaPointe, and this was a source that stated that Hugo Krebs, who was the son-in-law of LaPointe, lived on these shores like a feudal lord having slaves in the hundreds and was surrounded by every luxury that a country gentleman of that day could have. So, you know, it wasn't cited, and frankly, to me it kind of sounded more like something out of a novel and not something that was actually written by a historian.

[00:27:07] Liz Covart: As a historian of slavery yourself, do you have a plan for how you intend to uncover and recover the lives of the people who were enslaved on the LaPointe plantation? Do you have an idea of where you might find this information that you can't locate in French census records because they no longer exist?

[00:27:25] Matthew Powell: It depends on for which generation of individuals you're looking for. So for like LaPointe and Hugo Krebs who were in this area during French dominion, it would have to be in the archives in France. Now, the only problem with that is the only way that you can find those records—if they exist, because like I said, a lot of the records when they were being taken back to France—a lot of those records were actually destroyed in shipwrecks. So the problem there lies, you have to actually see if they exist, (a), and then (b) if they've been digitized. Because if they haven't, then that means you have to go over to France and try and find the records yourself. So that problem there is where I'm kind of caught because I want to start with LaPointe and Hugo to find about the slaves that they owned and then trace it going down the generations. So I could start with older generations of Krebs who own this land when Mississippi was a state. But that doesn't tell me about the ones that originated here. And I want to know how many of those generations stayed enslaved versus how many were sold off and things like that. So really it's trying to get the ball rolling at the start, and once that happens, you know, it'll be fairly easy going for the most part to really trace it down. So it's more of just trying to find where to start and then keep going.

[00:28:57] Liz Covart: Well, we certainly wish you luck in your work on trying to identify the starting point and finding the information that you're looking for. Now, I would like to go back to Hugo Krebs. You mentioned earlier that Joseph de LaPointe founded the LaPointe plantation, that it was primarily an indigo plantation under LaPointe, and that LaPointe's eldest daughter married this guy named Hugo Ernestus Krebs. Would you tell us more about Krebs and about the impact he had on the LaPointe plantation?

[00:29:28] Matthew Powell: Sure. Hugo Ernestus Krebs inherited this property following the death of LaPointe in 1747. Krebs was born in 1714 in the town of Neumagen, Germany. He immigrated to the Gulf Coast area around 1730, when he was around sixteen or seventeen years old. Then in 1741, Krebs married Marie Josephine Simone de LaPointe. the eldest daughter of Simon de LaPointe and his first wife, Marie Foucault. Before LaPointe's death in 1747, he actually sold some of his property to his other two son-in-laws, but Hugo Krebs inherited most of his father-in-law's land holdings, including the current site where the museum and home is today, and that was because he was the husband of LaPointe's eldest child. So it would be Hugo Krebs that actually built the house that currently stands on this property.

Although the house today is really a large building with eight rooms, a north and south gallery, which those are essentially just porches, and *cabinets,* which are private rooms built onto the galleries, the original structure that Hugo built was actually really modest. The 1757 home actually only had two rooms. Then of course, as the family grew, so did the home and Hugo's family actually grew fairly quickly. Hugo and Marie were only married for ten years before she died in 1751, but in that time they actually had seven children, and then Hugo remarried to Marianna Chauvin in 1754, and he had seven additional children. And then his fourteen children would go on to have a total of, I believe it was around forty-two children of their own. So in fact, the descendants of Hugo Krebs would be so great that the north part of the city actually became known as Krebsville and was referred to that for many years.

But the middle portion of his life actually isn't really well known, but we do know Krebs was actually a really resourceful and skilled inventor. When Bernard Romans came down in this area in 1771, doing research for a book that he was writing on the concise history of East and West Florida, he stayed for a time on Krebs's plantation, and when he did, he noted the use of machine that removed cotton from its seed. Romans asked if the machine could actually be demonstrated. Krebs was actually kind of reluctant to show this invention to Romans, as he notes in his book, but he still did so. And this invention was actually the first ever cotton gin and was in use here on the Krebs's plantation a full two decades before Eli Whitney obtained the patent. So that's actually really, really unique.

But Krebs would go on to die in New Orleans in 1776, shortly after completing his will. But the real irony here is the circumstances of Hugo Krebs's life. And I always like to tell the story to visitors that come in to give them an idea of the vastness in cultures here. So Krebs was a German immigrant who came to French colonial North America, married the daughter of a French Canadian, then died in Spanish-controlled New Orleans after writing his will in Spanish.

So the whole mixing of cultures from one person's life shows how much of a melting pot this area is.

[00:33:11] Liz Covart: So it sounds like Krebs had a big impact on the LaPointe plantation, that he was the person responsible for transitioning the LaPointe plantation from an indigo plantation to a cotton plantation. And I also wonder if Krebs had any thought about using his plantation to grow sugar, because that was also a popular crop in the eighteenth-century Gulf Coast. And that's something that we're going to investigate right after we take a moment to talk about our episode sponsor.

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Matthew, did Joseph Simon de LaPointe's successor, Hugo Krebs, ever think about using the LaPointe plantation to grow sugar as a lot of other Gulf Coast planters did during the eighteenth century?

[00:35:14] Matthew Powell: Primarily it was cotton. He did do some indigo cultivation. We don't have records to suggest that he did sugarcane, but he actually also did rice. So those three, the indigo, the cotton and the rice, were the primary ones that he focused on, but he actually was able to find a way to make cotton profitable in that time by creating a gin to remove the cotton from its seed.

[00:35:40] Liz Covart: That's a really interesting point about the cotton and it feeds in right to the other question I was going to ask about how financially successful was the LaPointe plantation. Was the indigo and cotton grown and processed by the enslaved people who worked there enough to make the LaPointe-Krebs family wealthy?

[00:35:58] Matthew Powell: I would say so. They really increased their land holdings with Hugo and then generations onward. If you look at property holdings following Hugo's death, LaPointe was able to get that concession on the east side of the Pascagoula, and then later on with Hugo, and then following his death, you see the properties on the west side of the Pascagoula and the north of that, and you really start to see a lot of land being bought up by Krebs and his descendants. And as far as finances, you know, I can tell you that after looking at his will, Hugo Krebs listed his wealth around $12,000, which today that would be just shy of around half a million dollars. And you know, often in that time they would separate their personal property from their financial wealth to kind of give a difference there, whether it would be landholdings or slaves or such, but he actually lumped this all together. So I don't know necessarily of his $12,000 how much of that was in personal property versus human property versus land holdings and such, but he was able to create a very, very stable life for himself and become wealthy enough that his descendants were able to take it on further and, you know, own a fair amount of the property in the city.

[00:37:20] Liz Covart: Earlier you mentioned that Hugo Krebs came to the Gulf Coast as part of the German migration to the region, and when we spoke with Ibrahima Seck in episode 295, he mentioned that the Heidel family, who helped to found what is now the Whitney plantation in Louisiana, was also a family who came to the Gulf Coast during the German migration. Could you tell us more about the German migration to the Gulf Coast?

[00:37:47] Matthew Powell: Yeah. So as far as what prompted it, I'm not necessarily sure, and I don't want to speak as a whole, but for Hugo Krebs, it's kind of difficult to understand because we don't know a whole lot. And as far as speaking with the board and the others that have done research, we all agreed that we kind of did him an injustice by not trying to find out exactly what brought him here, specifically. You know, that I have accounts that state that he was a barren in Germany, but that doesn't necessarily explain why a high ranking individual would come to an area with not a whole lot. Because he didn't bring a whole lot here with him and he didn't marry his wife based on the fact that he was a very wealthy man in Germany. So, you know, we don't really know that. And as far as, you know, speaking for a whole, it took place around the time that Hugo came. He did come as part of that mass migration.

[00:38:49] Liz Covart: What I find really interesting about the Gulf Coast region is that over the course of the eighteenth century, this was a territory that changed governance four different times. It passed from French governance to British governance, from British governance to Spanish governance. all before it passed from Spanish control to the control of the United States, and all these transfers of power happened by 1798. So Matthew, could you walk us through Mississippi's territorial history and how and why this region changed imperial hands so many different times?

[00:39:24] Matthew Powell: Goodness. Yes. So it is such a long history of switching hands. Like I said earlier, the many nations that claim this area aid in the rich history that the area has today. France actually reigned in this area for nearly a century, from when they came here in 1699. Their downfall actually began in 1754 with the French and Indian War, which pitted Britain against France, along with Native American allies that they both had. When that war ended in 1763 and Britain was victorious, France ceded its territory east of the Mississippi River to England and the territory west of the river to Spain. So England would go on to divide its coastal territory into East and West Florida. And this area that the LaPointe-Krebs House is in would be in the latter, in West Florida.

So during the Revolutionary War, the British actually ceded what was then known as West Florida to Spain. And Spain would go on to rule this area from 1783 until 1810. By that time, the rest of Mississippi was a claimed territory of the United States, and this area was actually claimed by both the United States and Spain. So then in September of 1810, a small group of pro-American men living in West Florida attacked Fort San Carlos and Baton Rouge and established the Republic of West Florida. And this was kind of the culmination of American fervor that had been building in this territory since the rest of present-day Mississippi and Alabama became a territory of the United States. So the Republic of West Florida was pretty short-lived. The United States came and took over this area in December of that same year, 1810. And then two years later, three counties were created from the former Spanish West Florida, one being Jackson County, which is the county that Pascagoula is in today. So this county was actually official five years before Mississippi even became a state.

[00:41:44] Liz Covart: Do we know how families like the LaPointe-Krebs family may have coped with these administrative changes in Mississippi? Jeremy wonders what effects these four changes in governance may have had on people like the LaPointe-Krebs family who happened to live in Mississippi during this eighteenth-century period.

[00:42:04] Matthew Powell: To my knowledge, and based on the records we have, I don't know any of that exist, that offer an indication of how the family felt or coped with the changes in control. We can kind of use Hugo as an example though, because if you look at his life, he lived in a region controlled by France and did business in Mobile, another French holding, but also in New Orleans that had come under Spanish control prior to his death, and then his descendants lived in what would become a part of an English holding. I can say with certainty though, that this did not really adversely impact Hugo or the family or their businesses or their prosperity. We talked about earlier that it increased after Hugo's death. So you know, to answer a question like this, with the little bit of records we have, you really have to kind of infer based on those sources. So like for example, a granddaughter of Hugo Krebs married a Spanish officer. And so with that bit of information, it's safe to assume that they did not think anything ill of the Spanish, or they would not have allowed a family member to marry such an important figure in the Spanish government.

[00:43:18] Liz Covart: Okay, so we've talked about Joseph de LaPointe, we've talked about Hugo Krebs, we've talked about the land that the LaPointe-Krebs House sits on, and we've talked about the construction of the house. Now I think it's time for us to talk about the LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum. Now, Matthew, you mentioned at the start of our conversation that the LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum was a museum that was created pretty recently, in 2010. Could you tell us about the origins of your museum and how and why it was created?

[00:43:49] Matthew Powell: So the museum is actually separate of the home. So in 1940, the Jackson County Historical Society took over ownership of the LaPointe-Krebs House, then known as the old Spanish fort, and they had the museum inside of the home. Then in the '80s, they created the separate building where they implemented a museum and had the home as a separate entity, and that's the way it is today. But then of course, after Hurricane Katrina, it did extensive damage to the home as well as the museum, and that's when the whole process began of kind of coming up from the ashes, I guess you could say, where we were able to create the museum with a new interpretation and then also begin restoration on the home.

[00:44:48] Liz Covart: And what kinds of goals does museum have for its interpretation of the house and the land around it for visitors?

[00:44:56] Matthew Powell: The museum and the home are actually going to have two different types of interpretation. The interpretation that's going to be inside the home, once the restoration

is complete, is going to be based around the construction methods of the home, as well as the expansions that took place and anything to do with that. Now, the inside of the museum, which is currently open now, has been for several years, it focuses on the history of the city, the county, obviously the LaPointe and the Krebs families, and other families of this area, like the Delmas and the Boudreaus, for example. And then it tells pretty much a really concise history of this area.

[00:45:46] Liz Covart: Now, what is the process of restoring a historic home like the LaPointe-Krebs House? What exactly does an extensive restoration, like the one that's ongoing today at the LaPointe-Krebs House, what does an extensive restoration of a historic home entail?

[00:46:01] Matthew Powell: Sure. So the restoration is, you know, taking place right now. It's the most extensive in the history of the home. And this, like I said, all began in 2010 when this process started with hiring contractors and all of that such, but the actual work, began in 2016. One of the world's most premier architectural conservators, George Fore, was brought in to oversee the restoration. And you know, to restore a building like the LaPointe-Krebs home is really a long process that is equally as rewarding as it is arduous. Restoring any building, you have to stay true to the construction methods of the time. You know, a perfect example would be, right now they are putting the roof on. And it's taken a lot of time because each one of those shingles is a wood shingle that has to be hand cut. So you know, the contractors really can't just head down to the local Lowe's or Home Depot and pick up a load of lumber to restore what used to be maybe a tabby floor or a bousillage wall. So that means that these contractors really just aren't your everyday construction workers. They're really true craftsmen.

[00:47:15] Liz Covart: So, Matthew, before we move into the "Time Warp," how and why do you think small historic sites like the LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum can add to our knowledge about early American history? In fact, what do you think the history of the LaPointe-Krebs House in particular can tell us about the history of the colonial Gulf Coast?

[00:47:34] Matthew Powell: That's a really good question, because this house is a hidden treasure for the people of not only the state, but this country. The home represents and tells the story of all those Mississippians who came before, and I'm not just speaking of the families that lived here. I mean, it tells the history of the Native Americans who called this place home prior to European settlement. It tells the history of the slaves who were brought here to work in the fields and endure a hardship that at times can be hard to conceive. And it tells the story of how immigrants were able to settle in a foreign land and carve out an existence for themselves and

become quite prosperous despite the changes in imperial control. So, you know, while this house can tell us a lot about architecture in the area during the eighteenth century, it really holds within its walls the story of a people long since passed, and without its existence, I do not believe the history of this part of the Gulf Coast would be as well recorded, for the house, you know, was the luring aspect that sparked all the research and the restoration.

[00:48:47] Liz Covart: And now we should get into the "Time Warp." This is a fun segment of the show where we ask you a hypothetical history question about what might have happened if something had occurred differently or if someone had acted differently. In 1775, a hurricane destroyed a good portion of the original structures on the LaPointe-Krebs plantation. Matthew, had that hurricane never happened, and in turn, the original structures of LaPointe-Krebs plantation still existed in some form, how might our understanding of the LaPointe-Krebs House and historic site be different today?

[00:49:42] Matthew Powell: You know, I think we would have a much better understanding of LaPointe and his time here. To me would be really interesting to compare the construction methods and materials that he used in his buildings versus that that was used by his son-in-law.

[00:50:02] Liz Covart: Now how can we visit the LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum? And do you have any special exhibits or events coming up that we should know about?

[00:50:09] Matthew Powell: Online you can visit us at lapointekrebs.org. We also have a Facebook page, and I have just started a video series on YouTube, but of course, you know the best thing would be to make a trip to Pascagoula and see the home yourself.

[00:50:26] Liz Covart: Okay. Well say we can make it to Pascagoula. Do you have any tips or tricks for us when we tour the LaPointe-Krebs House in person?

[00:50:35] Matthew Powell: If you want to make it here and you want to see the house, I would wait until the restoration efforts are complete after the May 15, or on that day so you can get the full experience. Because currently right now, all you can come in and see is the museum and then the cemetery adjacent to the museum. Now you can see the exterior of the house while the restoration efforts are ongoing but, you know, you're not getting the full effect and you're not getting, being able to walk into the oldest home in the state of Mississippi, or the oldest standing structure in the entire Mississippi Valley.

[00:51:10] Liz Covart: Now, Matthew, we covered a lot of ground during our conversation, but if we have more questions about you, the museum, or your research on slavery, how can we get in contact with you to pose those questions?

[00:51:23] Matthew Powell: The best place would be the LaPointe-Krebs website, which is lapointekrebs.org. Personally, I have my first journal publication coming out this spring in the *University of Mississippi Research Journal*, but you can always call the museum at (228) 471-5126 [transcript corrected] or send me an email at lpkhouse1757@gmail.com.

[00:51:49] Liz Covart: Well, Matthew Powell, thank you so much for spending time with us today and for taking us through the early history of Mississippi and the LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum.

[00:51:59] Matthew Powell: You're very welcome, and I thank you for having me, and I really hope that some of your listeners, maybe even yourself, will make a trip down here and we can discuss more.

[00:52:09] Liz Covart: Small museums and historic sites like the LaPointe-Krebs House Museum offers great windows onto the early American past. Now while they'll not offer you the whole scope of history that we're accustomed to finding in large museums like the Smithsonian, they do offer us a wide and detailed view of smaller areas like the Mississippi Gulf Coast. It's through the LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum and the land they sit on that we can see the places, artifacts, and documentation left behind by many peoples from the past. Some examples: as Matthew noted, the land around the LaPointe-Krebs House has yielded much information about the Pascagoula people who lived along the Mississippi Gulf coast long before the arrival of European colonists. Through the land-grant documentation the LaPointe-Krebs House has collected, we can see how the French went about establishing colonial settlements in the Gulf Coast region. And it's through the physical building of the LaPointe-Krebs House that we can see how some early Mississippi colonists constructed their homes and the lessons they may have drawn about home construction from Native Americans and other European colonial settlements.

When we stop to think about all of the details that we can see through our local historic sites and museums, it's really no wonder that Matthew Powell sees sites like the LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum as national treasures. These are the sites that can really show us how early American places, economies, politics, cultures, and populations came to be on the ground.

They're also a great way to see how everyday people lived within the larger periods and events of early American history.

You'll find more information about Matthew, the LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum, plus notes, links, and a transcript for everything we talked about today on the show notes page, benfranklinsworld.com/364. Friends tell friends about their favorite podcasts, so if you enjoy *Ben Franklin's World*, please tell your friends and family about it. Production assistance for this podcast comes from my colleagues at Colonial Williamsburg Innovation Studios, Joseph Adelman, Katie Schinabeck, and Ian Tonat. Breakmaster Cylinder composed our custom theme music. This podcast is part of the AirWave Media podcast network. To discover and listen to their other podcasts, visit airwavemedia.com.

Finally, this was the second stop in our three-stop summer 2023 road trip series, so stay tuned to our next episode for the third and final stop in our road trip. *Ben Franklin's World* is a production of Colonial Williamsburg Innovation Studios.