

Marie Thérèse Coincoin

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Marie Thérèse dite Coincoin, also known **Marie Thérèse Métoyer** (born **Coincoin** with no surname; August 1742 – 1816), was a planter, slave owner, and businesswoman at the colonial Louisiana outpost of Natchitoches, later known as [Natchitoches Parish](#).^{[1][2][3]}

A [Louisiana Creole of color](#), Coincoin was born into slavery. Her freedom was purchased in 1778 by Claude Thomas Pierre Métoyer, with whom she had a long liaison and ten children.^[3] She and her descendants established the historical community of [Isle Brevelle](#) of [Créoles of color](#) along the [Cane River](#), including what is said to be the first church founded by [free people of color](#) for their own use, [St. Augustine Parish Church, Natchez, Louisiana](#). The church is included as a notable site on the [Louisiana African American Heritage Trail](#).

Marie Thérèse Coincoin	
Born	Coincoin August 1742 Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, New France
Died	1816 (aged 73–74)
Other names	Coin-coin, Marie Thérèse dite Coincoin, Marie-Therese Métoyer, Marie Thérèse Métoyer, Marie Thérèse Métoyer
Partner	Claude Thomas Pierre Métoyer

Early life and family [\[edit \]](#)

Coincoin's family was enslaved by the Louisiana French Natchitoches post's founder and commandant, *Chevalier* [Louis Juchereau de St. Denis](#).^[4] She was born as Coincoin in 1742 in Natchitoches (later known as Natchitoches Parish).^[4] Her parents were François and Marie Françoise,^[5] she was the fourth of eleven children.

As children, Coincoin and her sister Marie Louise *ditte*^{[6][7]} were trained in pharmacology and nursing. By these skills the women earned a livelihood after gaining freedom through manumission as adults. Their other nine siblings would remain enslaved at various colonial posts from Natchitoches to Pensacola.^[*citation needed*]

Slavery and freedom [\[edit \]](#)



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When still young, Coincoin had five children. Some records show that Coincoin's first five children were of full African blood and others suggest they were partially Native American, fathered by Chatta. About 1765 her mistress granted Coincoin to live with the young French merchant, Claude Thomas Pierre Métoyer, Coincoin had gained the interest of Métoyer during his many visits to the St. Denis household.

The efforts of a parish priest to break up their union in 1778, by filing charges that threatened her being sold away to New Orleans, prompted Métoyer to buy and [manumit](#) her. Together they moved from the post, to outlying lands, where their liaison continued until 1788. As his mixed-race children matured and married, Métoyer [manumitted](#) the eldest five of the ten children whom he had held in slavery after he purchased Coincoin and their children.

Business activity [\[edit \]](#)



Marie Therese Carmelite Anty
Metoyer Grand-daughter of Marie
Thérèse Coincoin

As a free woman, Coincoin exploited a variety of economic enterprises. She manufactured medicine, planted [tobacco](#), and trapped wild bears and turkeys,^[5] which were sent to the local market and shipping [peltry](#) and oil along with [indigo](#) that she sourced from the bear skins to New Orleans along with her cured tobacco. She became a landowner and a taxpayer. As a pious Catholic, she volunteered labor for the upkeep of the parish church. Like many other freed slaves in colonial Louisiana, she eventually acquired slaves in order to protect them from others in the parish purchasing them. Most were related to Coincoin or close friends, she labored alongside of them until her own health began to fail.
[\[citation needed\]](#)

Some accounts state that she held one small farmstead of 67 acres.^[8] Other accounts show her as the owner of a plantation empire of 12,000 acres and a hundred slaves.^[9]

Surviving records document her ownership of somewhat over one thousand acres.^[10]

The liberal land-grant policies of the Spanish Crown provided a stake for her first farmstead on the Grand Coast of Red River (now [Cane River](#)), about ten miles below the town. That small tract of 80 arpents (67 acres), alluvial river-bottom land adjacent to Metoyer's plantation, was conceded by the local commandant in January 1787 and patented by the Crown in May 1794. It is identified on modern land maps as sections 18 and 89 of Township 8 North, Range 6 West.[\[citation needed\]](#)

On the heels of that patent, Coincoin applied for a significantly larger concession — 800 arpents of piney woods on Old River to the west of her farm — a tract identified today as section 55, Township 8 North, Range 7 West, where she established a *vacherie* (cattle range) and hired a Spaniard to operate it for her. In 1807, she bought a third tract of already developed farm land (the northern portion of sections 34 and 98, T8 North, Range 6 West).

That third holding, adjacent to her homestead, provided a stake for a younger son who had come of age after the [Louisiana Purchase](#), too late to benefit from the more-liberal land policies of the Spanish regime. Coincoin has been credited with the founding of Cane River's fabled [Melrose Plantation](#). However, this land has been documented as a grant to her son, Louis Métoyer, who built most of the surviving plantation buildings prior to his death.^{[11][12]}

Coincoin lived frugally and served others, investing all her income into the purchase of freedom for the children from the [slave marriage](#) of her youth. By the time of her death, she had [manumitted](#) three of those children and three grandchildren.^[13] Another daughter and many grandchildren remained enslaved, as their owners refused to manumit or sell them.^[citation needed]

Legacy [[edit](#)]



The Coincoin–Prudhomme House, located on dirt road off of Highway 494, about 1 mile Northwest of Bermuda

Coincoin died in 1816 and her grave is no longer marked.^[citation needed] Her eldest son Augustin Metoyer donated land for a church at Isle Brevelle, [Natchez, Louisiana](#). In 1829 he commissioned his brother Louis to build the structure, [St. Augustine Parish Church](#). It is believed to be

America's first church built by [free people of color](#) for their own use.^[14]

The *Coincoin–Prudhomme House*, or *Maison De Marie Therese*, a small [Creole-style cottage](#) constructed of [bousillage](#) and [half-timber](#) still stands on her original c.1780s–1816 farmstead, it is listed on the [National Register of Historic Places](#) since December 6, 1979.^[15] The house is now known as the, *Maison de Marie Thérèse Coincoin Museum*, and is located one mile northwest of Bermuda, the museum is privately owned and open for tours via appointment.^[4]

African origin [[edit](#)]

Tradition holds that Coincoin's African-born parents retained much of their culture, and some evidence supports that. No known document identifies the African birthplace of either parent.^[5] Coincoin and four of her siblings carried African names as *dits*.[^]^{[16][11]} One Africanist historian proposed in the 1970s that the African *Coincoin* (spelled variously in transliterations by French and Spanish scribes) was the name used for "second-born daughters" among those [Ewe](#) of coastal [Togo](#) who speak the Glidzi dialect.^[17]



Nicholas Augustin Metoyer founder of St. Augustine Catholic Church and son of Marie

Historians Gary B. and [Elizabeth Shown Mills](#) found evidence that Coincoin was the second-born daughter in her birth family. Other possible origins of the name Coincoin, together with the names of her siblings as discovered by Elizabeth Shown Mills, are being studied by Africanist Kevin C. MacDonald at the [UCL Institute of Archaeology, University College London](#).^[18]

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Notes [[edit](#)]

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- ³ [^](#) ^{[a](#)} ^{[b](#)} Hewitt, D. G. (May 17, 2018). "10 Black Slaveowners That Will Tear Apart Historical Perception" . *historycollection.com*.
- ⁴ [^](#) ^{[a](#)} ^{[b](#)} ^{[c](#)} "[Maison de Marie Therese--Cane River National Heritage Area: A National Register of Historic Places Travel Itinerary](#)" . *Cane River National Heritage Area*. National Park Service. Archived from [the original](#) on January 24, 2015. Retrieved 2021-06-24.
- ⁵ [^](#) ^{[a](#)} ^{[b](#)} ^{[c](#)} Mills, Elizabeth Shown (December 2008). "[Documenting a Slave's Birth, Parentage, and Origins \(Marie Thérèse Coincoin, 1742–1816\): A Test of "Oral History"](#)" (PDF). *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*. **96**: 245–266.
- ⁶ [^](#) In this context, *ditte* can be translated as "called". In this society, it meant a nickname used in place of a surname.
- ⁷ [^](#) Mills, "Which Marie Louise Is Mariotte?", provides a four-generation genealogy of the slave and freeborn offspring of Coincoin's sister Mariotte and additional information on Coincoin's parents.
- ⁸ [^](#) Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), in cooperation with Cane River National Heritage Area et al., "[Coincoin-Prudhomme House \(Maison de Marie Therese\)](#)", HABS No. LA1295, *National Park Service*, p. 1; [the report is undated but its content suggests it was created after 2004](#).
- ⁹ [^](#) Klier, Betje Black. *Pavie in the Borderlands* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), p. 15.
- ¹⁰ [^](#) For a detailed delineation of Coincoin's three separate land acquisitions, see Elizabeth Shown Mills, "[Demythcizing History: Marie Thérèse Coincoin, Tourism, and the National Historical Landmarks Program.](#)" *Louisiana History* 53 (Fall 2012): 402–37; [archived online at Historic Pathways](#) .
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- ## External links [[edit](#)]

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