

History Detectives on the Case in New Orleans

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A crew from the popular PBS series "History Detectives" visited the Tulane uptown campus and other sites in New Orleans April 12-14. Host Elyse Luray, a Tulane graduate, wanted to know why Louisiana Gov. Bernardo de Galvez signed the emancipation papers of a female slave in 1779.



Elyse Luray, (right) host of the PBS show "History Detectives" and a Tulane graduate, talks with Leon Miller (center) in the archives of the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, while Bill Petrick, producer of the segment, gets ready for a shoot. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Based in New York, Luray also attended a meeting of the Newcomb-Tulane Dean's Council while in New Orleans.

The "History Detective" segment, which will air at an undetermined future date, examines why the governor of Spanish colonial Louisiana certified Agnes Mathieu's emancipation from slavery. What was so special about Agnes that a governor signed off on her release? Most freedom papers from the time bear only the signature of the former slaveholder notarized by a local clerk.

Luray interviewed [Emily Clark](#), Benenson Professor in American Colonial History and associate professor of history, at the Calbildo Louisiana State Museum.

"I know exactly what they've got, but the show wants to build the suspense," says Clark, who is working on a book about quadroons, New Orleanians of mixed race. She says the document that Luray showed her was "something I recognized right away" but can't reveal prior to the airing of the show.

What Clark can say is that the show will have a happy ending ? Agnes Mathieu was successful in obtaining her freedom.

Clark says she is glad that the TV show is examining manumission and the right slaves had to purchase their own freedom. "I guess a lot of people don't know about it."

Luray also visited the archives of the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library on the uptown campus, the New Orleans Notarial Archives and the Historic New Orleans Collection.

["History Detectives"](#) is a PBS series in which investigators delve into legends, folklore and personal histories to discover potentially extraordinary objects in everyday American homes and cities.