

An Accomplished Confederate Cartographer Maps the Manassas Battlefield

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Feature Essay

Civil War Treasures

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An Accomplished Confederate Cartographer Maps the Manassas Battlefield

Léon Joseph Frémaux, noted Louisiana artist, civil engineer, and cartographer, was born as Napoleon Joseph Frémaux in Paris, France, in 1821, the son of François Etienne Frémaux, a retired non-commissioned officer of the Napoleonic army, and his wife, Aimée Adelaide Lebrun, a midwife. The family immigrated to New Orleans in 1830 where François ran a bookshop, but he sent his son back to France for an education. Napoleon Joseph Frémaux worked as a civil engineer in the Louisiana State Land Office in Donaldsonville during the 1840s and 1850s. He married Marie Céline Marion de Montilly of Natchitoches in 1846, with whom he had one son before she died of yellow fever in 1848. He married his wife's younger sister, Flore Caroline (1818-1908), about one year later after she left her job as a governess in Natchez to move to Donaldsonville to help care for his infant son. They eventually had five children together: two daughters and three sons. Frémaux became a naturalized citizen in 1855, shortening his name from Napoleon to Léon in the process. His younger brother, Justin, who was active in the Know Nothing Party in New Orleans, helped secure him an appointment as assistant state engineer, so the family moved first to New Orleans in 1853, then to Baton Rouge in 1855.¹

At the start of the Civil War, Frémaux assisted in forming the Creole Guards, a volunteer company that became incorporated as Company A of the Eighth Louisiana Infantry Regiment, in which he attained the rank of captain. The regiment was sent to Manassas, Virginia, where Captain Frémaux drew maps unofficially while keeping watch over fords in the Occoquan River.² There he composed *Map of Manassas Junction & roads to fords on Bull Run & Occoquan* [i.e., Occoquan] *River, Camp Pickens, Va., June 12th 1861*, a detailed work that reveals the challenges of drawing a dependable battlefield map based on unreliable information in the months following an engagement. Frémaux created this particular map in two stages. His first draft in June 1861 depicted the topography and infrastructure around Manassas, Virginia, and was approved and signed by General P.G.T. Beauregard. Frémaux later added the positions of the different divisions at the First Battle of Manassas, but added a caveat: "Generals Beauregard & Johnston's reports, not having been published yet, the position of the Confederate forces cannot be yet determined, those represented on this map are either obtain [sic] through hearsay or by the members of companies engaged on the 21st July 1861. Camp Pickens Sept. 15th 1861. L. Fremaux, Cap. Co A. 8th La Vol. C.S.A." The map also includes lists of Federal and Confederate brigades and regiments participating at First Manassas with the names of their commanding officers.

¹ *Leon Fremaux's New Orleans Characters*, ed. Patrick J. Geary (Gretna: Pelican, 1987), 45-46; Céline Frémaux Garcia, *Céline: Remembering Louisiana, 1850-1871*, ed. Patrick J. Geary (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), xxii-xxiii, xxvii-xxviii.

² *Leon Fremaux's New Orleans Characters*, 47; Earl B. McElfresh, *Maps and Mapmakers of the Civil War* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 75-76.

It did not take long for the Confederate army to realize Frémaux's value as a civil engineer, so he was commissioned as a captain of engineers in April 1862 and sent to Jackson, Tennessee. He participated in the fortification of Corinth, Mississippi, and mapped the battlefield at Shiloh according to Beauregard's report of the affray. Frémaux also superintended the defenses of Port Hudson, where his family lived with him before authorities ordered them to relocate to Jackson, Louisiana, at the beginning of the siege. Léon Frémaux contracted dysentery during the early part of the siege and was sent to Jackson to convalesce with his family. Union forces chose not to arrest him when the town was taken because of his severe illness, thus allowing him to escape to Mobile, Alabama, where he assisted in the repair and fortification of Mobile Bay and nearby forts until the end of the war.³

Léon Frémaux decided to settle his family in Mobile after the war, hoping to make a living restoring the city's port, but his homesick wife convinced him to return to Louisiana in 1866. They settled in New Orleans where he struggled as a surveyor and architect, but Frémaux eventually secured an appointment as assistant city engineer in the New Orleans city surveyor's office in 1869. He devoted more time to painting during the 1870s, focusing on the architecture and street characters of his adopted city. Joseph Garcia, his son-in-law and a prosperous local printer, published *New Orleans Characters*, a portfolio of Frémaux's local street life sketches, in 1876. He and his son-in-law also became increasingly involved with the White League during this time, an investment that finally paid off when Frémaux was appointed registrar of the state land office after Reconstruction ended. He was commissioned a lieutenant colonel in the Louisiana National Guard in 1880 and died in 1898.⁴

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³ *Leon Fremaux's New Orleans Characters*, 47-48; McElfresh, *Maps and Mapmakers*, 83, 106; Confederate Topographical Report of Port Hudson, Mss. 3921, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.

⁴ *Leon Fremaux's New Orleans Characters*, 48-50.