

Historical Sketch of Towns in South Louisiana

from *The Albert(s) of Lafourche: A Profile of Acadian Heritage* by Linzy D. Albert,
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In early 1765, there landed on the river front at New Orleans 20 Acadians (the first of the migration). The influx began in earnest on February 8, 1765 with the arrival of 230 more destitute people who were helped by many local groups and societies. For example, there is record of an aid contract drawn up between a Captain Danterive and 9 Chiefs of the Acadians, the Captain obligating himself to furnish each family for six successive years, one bull and five cows with calves. All risk of loss was the Captain's for the first year. At the end of 6 years, he was to receive back the same number of cattle of the same age and kind, all increase and profits to be divided equally between him and the signers. The 9 Chiefs were:

Joseph Broussard Joseph Guillebeau Jean Baptiste Broussard Jean Duga
Victor Broussard Olivier Thibodeau Alexander Broussard Pierre Arcenaud
Joseph Beausoleil

Possibly of greater interest here is the general layout of those Acadians arriving by ship through the New Orleans area. It appears that the best route for "sail" ships during that period was through what was called the Balize, a station on what is now the Southeast pass at the mouth of the Mississippi River located below a sand bar that had to be manipulated at high tide. A British Captain Pittman, also an engineer, who spent some 5 years between 1763 and 1768 in the area and recorded what he did and saw, had this to say about the Balize:

*"The **Balize**, a small fort, erected by the French on a little island, was, in the year 1734, at the mouth of the river; it is now two miles up. In the year 1767, Don Antonio D'Ulloa erected some barracks on a small island (to which he gave the name of Saint Carlos) for the convenience of pilots, and other purposes, being near the fourth-east entrance of the river, and a more dry and higher situation than any thereabouts. There was not the least appearance of this island twenty years ago."*

Sailing from the Balize up to New Orleans took about 5 days. Most of the ships stopped at New Orleans and from there Acadians made their way further up-river by smaller flat boats that were pole-pushed, following closely one or the other bank of the river where the current was "counter" or minimal. There was no levee of any consequence at that time to contain the river although there is indication that some attempts were made all along to build and maintain small levees (largely ineffective) with regard to protection against flooding. The first levee built on the River by the French engineer De la Tour was only three feet high at New Orleans to protect the City. This was 1718. It was not until 1882, the year of a great flood, and thereafter, that the states and the Federal government appropriated funds to build the levees and protective works that are in place today.

Pittman's description of New Orleans in the late 1760's (all on the left bank of the River) is worth noting.

"The town is secured from the inundations of the river by a raised bank, generally called the Levee; and this extends from the Detour des Anglois, to the upper settlement of the Germans, which is a

distance of more than fifty miles, and a good coachroad all the way. The levee before the town is repaired at the public expense, and each inhabitant keeps that part in repair which is opposite to his own plantation.

"The square is open to the river, and on that side are twenty-one pieces of ordinance, en barbette, which are fired on public rejoicings. All the streets are perfectly straight, and cross each other at right angles, and they divide the town into fifty-six squares, eleven in length by the river's side, and six in depth; the sides of these squares are one hundred yards each, and are divided into twelve lots, for the establishment of the inhabitants.

"The general plan of building in the town, is with timber frames filled up with brick; and most of the houses are but of one floor, raised about eight feet from the ground, with large galleries round them, and the cellars under the floors level with the ground; it is impossible to have any subterraneous buildings, as they would be constantly full of water."

Best estimates indicate that the population of **New Orleans** in 1785 was about 5,000. The city plan or layout was generally a grid pattern of streets. This part of New Orleans is today known and referred to as the French Quarters and the Vieux Carre (the old square).

From New Orleans, Acadians moved up-river to settle amongst the German villages of **Chapitoulas** and **Cannes Brulees** (at **Kenner**), and further up in St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, and St. James Parishes, referred to as **Cotes des Allemands**. Many went to Ascension Parish at **Donaldsonville** and then south all along Bayou Lafourche which was then an outlet to the Gulf. The "country of La Fourche" during those days was referred to variously as **Valenzuela** (a Spanish connotation) in Assumption Parish at **Plattenville**, and La Fourche de Chetimachas (an Indian reference to the bayou as a river) near Donaldsonville in Ascension Parish. The Town and part of St. James Parish was referred to as the "**Houmas**". As late as 1810, Lafourche Parish included also Terrebonne Parish. Sidney A. Marchand of Donaldsonville in 1843 divides the Acadian settlements into the first, in St. James Parish; and the second, in Ascension Parish, near Donaldsonville. The first is also referred to as **Cabanocey** (an Indian name for a stream in the region). **Chapitoulas** (now Tchoupitoulas) was a reference to villages up-stream from New Orleans where Germans first settled, then Acadians. The villages began at a gate at **Carrollton** at the great bend of the river and extended to **Cannes Brulees (Kenner)** on the left bank. The town of **Lucy** in St. John the Baptist Parish is where John Law's Alsations first settled (1719-1722). **Terre-au-Boeuf** is a reference to **Galveztown** in St. Bernard Parish. **Bayougoula** is up-stream from Donaldsonville. All of these places, of course, can be identified on any modern and detailed map of the state. **Manchac** is the first large bend of the River south of Baton Rouge (in West Baton Rouge Parish). Up from Baton Rouge is the town of **New Roads** in Pointe Coupe Parish where Acadians settled. Some settled as far up as Avoyelles Parish.

It should be noted that **Bayou Teche** and **St. Martinville**, because of the Longfellow poem, are known as "Evangeline" country. This is the part of Southwest Louisiana referred to then as **Attakapas** (pronounced tuck-a-paw), meaning "man eaters", and named after an Indian cannibalistic tribe. Research indicates that some Acadians moved westward from the Mississippi by way of Bayou Plaquemine, at Plaquemine, and found their way following several bayous to Bayou Teche. As will be seen later, some of the Alberts of Lafourche moved westward in this manner. Attakapas country included the present parishes of St. Martin, St. Mary, New Iberia, Lafayette, Vermillion and part of Cameron.

At intervals over a number of years, Acadians arrived to an estimated total of some 4,000. Without minimizing the importance of water courses for transportation, perusing the geography of the area on a map leads to the conclusion that much migration movement must have occurred on land from the Mississippi River areas and especially from the right bank. **Chegby** and **Choupic** in Lafourche Parish, for example, are just some 10 miles or so from the River and some 30 miles from St. Charles Parish.

Because of the confluence of the Mississippi River with Bayou Lafourche at Donaldsonville, it is accepted that the French-Spanish-German-Acadian ancestry spread southeast along Bayou Lafourche and there in the hinterland lies much of the history and archives for future study. The following profile of towns is from various sources, including the WPA writers' project previously cited:

Donaldsonville

This town is the county seat of Ascension Parish and is on the Mississippi River where once Bayou Lafourche was a tributary. Although the Bayou has been dammed from the River for flood protection, water is pumped to the Bayou on a regular basis to maintain fresh flow. The town is described more fully in the work of Marchand, previously cited. The "old" part of town (left bank of Bayou Lafourche) seems to have changed little in the past 50 years.

Paincourtville

One of the oldest villages of Assumption Parish, the area was originally settled by Spanish families, many remaining. St. Elizabeth Catholic Church is there. The name of the town is said in French to refer to or describe a village that is short of bread (pain-cour): An early traveler passing through was unable to obtain a loaf of bread.

Plattenville

A small town on Bayou Lafourche in Assumption Parish, the place where Nicolas Albert and Marie Marthe Benoit settled after arrival from France in 1785. They were married (re-married) there in Assumption Church, as was the son Nicolas and Magdeline Bourg, later on February 3, 1800.

Napoleonville

County seat of Assumption Parish, the town was named by a French settler who fought under Napoleon. It was a thriving marketplace at the beginning of the 19th century.

In the north part of town is Christ Episcopal Church built by Frank Wills of New York and consecrated by Bishop Leonidas Polk in 1853. During the Civil War, Federal troops stabled their horses in the church. At a cemetery in the rear are tombs with dates and names going back 150 years. The courthouse dates back to 1896. St. Ann's Catholic Church was built in 1908.

Labadieville

The town is thought to have been the site of the chief village of the **Washi Indians**, one of the four tribes mentioned by Bienville as coming to make an alliance with him in 1699. It was later settled by French colonists and named for Jean Louis Labadie, a pioneer. In October of 1862, when the Union army under General Weitzel (age 26) advanced down Bayou Lafourche, Labadieville was the scene of a brief but fierce battle. The Confederate Colonel Armand with some 500 men ineffectively resisted 4,000 Union troops. The General claimed to have captured as many as 208 prisoners, one of which was Joachim Albert, our great grandfather.

Labadieville was the first colonized section of the Old Lafourche Settlement. French and Spanish pioneers settling there shortly after the mid-18th century (1750's) were soon joined by Acadians and Germans and beginning about 1807, there came a considerable influx of Americans from the Atlantic Seaboard. St. Philomena Catholic Church with which the Albert family were communicants, was built in 1888, and its cemetery in the rear is almost exclusively French. Near the center is a monument and a large tomb with names of victims of the yellow fever epidemic of 1878.

South of Labadieville in Lafourche Parish is the old White Plantation house, birthplace of Edward Douglas White (1845-1921), Chief Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court from 1910 to 1921. The White family was among the first to settle Lafourche Parish. Judge White's father served as Governor of the State and as U. S. Senator.

Thibodaux

The town was the first trading post established between New Orleans and the country along the Bayou Teche. It was first called Thibodauxville, after Henry Schuyler Thibodaux (1769-1827), planter, legislator, and Governor of the State. He donated in 1820 land for the courthouse, jail and public market.

In 1807, when the Parish of the Interior was formed, it became the parish seat and remained in 1853 when the parish became Lafourche. The town was incorporated in 1838 and the name changed to Thibodaux. By the mid-1800's, the town became important to trade and politics. Henry Clay during his campaign for president visited the community. St. Joseph's Catholic Church on Canal Boulevard, the present structure dedicated in 1923, is the third building to serve the people. From 1803 to 1819, when a frame church was built, mass was celebrated in private homes. The second edifice was built in 1847 (of brick). The Very Reverend Cannon C. M. Menard was pastor for more than 50 years. The church was destroyed by fire on May 25, 1916, except for the belfry and the bell which remain in the present structure.

St. John's Episcopal Church, on Jackson Street and West 7th Street, dates from 1844. The church parish was founded by Leonidas Polk, Bishop of Louisiana.

South of Thibodaux is Acadia, a private plantation and home, built in the mid-19th century by the Key family of Maryland, relatives of Francis Scott Key, composer of the Star-Spangled Banner. It is the former home of Senator Andrew Price.

Lafourche Crossing

This is a small community where the Southern Pacific Railroad crosses Bayou Lafourche. A battle in that name was fought in the early summer of 1863. The Confederates, led by Colonel Pyron, attacked a small stockade guarding the railroad bridge. The attack was repulsed with 53 killed and 150 wounded.