Down the Bayou

Acadian 1765 La. Movement from Nova Scotia Recounted

Oppression, Trips of Groups Traced

By CLAIRE PUNEKY

Tribes of some 1900 Acadians had gathered in the church at Grand Pre, only to learn that they were prisoners of the King and were to be removed from the colony. In other villages the same scene was being enacted.

Those with family responsibilities had to sit and wait until orders came to leave their burned homeland. Others, however, eluded their captors.

SPREAD IN AREA

Some of these plunged into the wilderness where they made their home with the Indians. Still others, making the break, pushed on in flight until they reached Canada and began a new life there.

Those who came to Louisiana in February, 1765, were not the first of the Acadians to reach there. Some had come the previous year.

Between early January and mid-May in 1765, some 650 of them arrived in Louisiana and were sent upriver and into the interior to form settlements.

Donaldsonville received many of them, as did other areas of the river, and also the land down Bayou Lafourche. To the Atakapas and Opelousas country they went also.

Nova Scotia has been described as a land of severe winter and sudden summer, of great heat and dense fog. The Louisiana landscape was green and inviting to any one who could swing an axe and set up housekeeping in a sturdy cabin.

DONALDSONVILLE SITE

To what would one day be Donaldsonville came Joseph Ba-bin, Desire LeBlanc, Pierre Landry, Charles Theriot, Joseph Richard and others, and from the dense wilderness they cleared a settlement.

They utilized the river, bringing from its depth food for their tables. They went into the forest and came back with the meat that was so necessary to their welfare.

They tilled the land that the river had endowed so richly with needed minerals and other qualities to produce vegetables and fruits.

Although Louisiana was a Spanish colony in February, 1765, no Spaniard had yet come to take over the government. It was Captain Philippe Aubry, commander of the French troops in Louisiana, who had, as provisional governor, the Acadians coming in charge.

The Acadians, however, had not seen the last of the English, for that year of 1765, for Aubry, saw English vessels going up and down the river.

The Mississippi was a common means of transport for both the French and the English, and English troop transportation on the river alarmed the French.

As the English passed, in a routine military way, they fired the guns from these vessels in the nature of a salute.

SEEN AS COWARDICE

But neighboring Indians misunderstood and began to look on the French as cowards for not answering the guns.

So to alleviate matters, and because the English were contemplating construction of forts above the Spanish domain of Louisiana, Aubry placed artillery pieces in front of the barracks, and remarked that "in this way, we shall return more decently the salutes. And besides it commands respect."

That year, two centuries ago, was one of perplexity for those who held authority in Louisiana, and a year of mixed hope and sorrow for the Acadians who had brought with them a financial burden on the colony's treasury in establishing them on home sites.

But Aubry's gifts of land and utensils to the new colonists paid off. It would be Governor Bernardo Galvez' task to keep the British out of Spanish Louisiana, and later that of Andrew Jackson to remove them from American Louisiana. And Louisiana would go through many crises on its way to majority with its Acadians helping it grow.

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