Acadians problem for French

By Truman Stacey

By the end of the Seven Years War, the Acadians had become a problem for the French government. The Acadians still looked to the French king to come to their assistance by giving them arable lands. There were none to give them.

They were further disgruntled when the government, in debt from its assistance to the United States during the American Revolution, discontinued its daily subsidy, and was now furnishing only provisions and clothing.

The Acadians had resisted assimilation into the rest of the French populace, and now found themselves marked as a separate people. They had become strangers in their own land, and they were not really wanted.

Into the picture at this time came Peyroux de la Coudreniere, a druggist of Nantes, who had spent seven years in Louisiana during the term of Luis de Unzaga y Amezaga as governor.

He became acquainted with some of the Acadians, and in telling them about Louisiana, he seized the idea of sending the Acadians to that Spanish colony. He realized that the Acadians already in Louisiana would welcome their kinsmen and would assist them in finding new homes.

He then approached the one man most responsible for rescuing the Acadians: Don Pedro Pablo Abarca de Bolea, Count de Aranda, the Spanish ambassador in Paris. Count de Aranda at once realized the possibilities the idea possessed for strengthening Spain in the colony, and he authorized Peyroux to sound out the Acadians on the idea, after obtaining the permission of the French government.

Through the efforts of Peyroux, French officials agreed to allow him to canvass the Acadians to get their reactions to the idea.

Peyroux then obtained the assistance of Oliver Terrio, who agreed to see if he could work up enthusiasm among the Acadians for the project. Terrio approached a large number of the exiles, but he found only four who were willing to sign a petition to the King of Spain, asking for refuge in Louisiana. Those four were Simon Mastolle, Marin Gatreaux, Pierre Jamlo and Etienne Terrier.

Thus, the petition was written and signed, and sent to King Charles III of Spain. The petitioners stated that after 20 years of exile, the Acadians were still stranded in Brittany and Normandy, with no lands to farm and no fixed livelihoods.

The arguments of Aranda and Peyroux were cogent: Spain needed colonists to strengthen Louisiana. Heretofore, Spanish authorities had been spending unskilled colonists to Louisiana, people who didn't know how to farm.

With well trained farmers like the Acadians, Spain could dispense with the purchase of slaves, which all agreed corrupted the blood and morals of the colonists, and destroyed their purity of language, patriotism and desire to work. Louisiana was vast and fertile, and Spain should be reaping great wealth from it.

King Charles III was reluctant at first. He felt that the project would cost too much money, and money was hard to come by for governments which had been at war for so many years.

Then there appeared on the scene one of Spain's authentic heroes, the Captain General of Louisiana, Don Bernardo de Galvez. As his uncle, Don Jose de Galvez, the Spanish minister of the Indies wrote, the captain general "just happened to arrive for a short time and wished to give the king his opinion in regard to the petition of the Acadians."

Galvez, who had wiped out English armies in the Southern Colonies during the American Revolution, and who had never lost a battle, had a great deal of influence at court.

On Oct. 22, 1783, therefore, King Charles III issued a royal order accepting the plan of Aranda and Peyroux for removing those Acadians to Louisiana who wished to go. He also assumed the expense of transporting and settling them.

In the long history of politics, seldom has money been so wisely spent.

The next step was to gain permission of the French government. Spanish officials wrote to Charles Gravler, Count de Vergennes, asking permission of the French government to settle the Acadians in Louisiana.

On March 31, 1784, Vergennes notified the Marshal de Castries that the King of France had granted permission to the Acadians to leave the kingdom, in deference to the request of the King of Spain.

The summer of 1784 was spent by Terrio and Peyroux in canvassing the Acadians in Brittany to determine who wished to migrate. They found a total of about 2,300 Acadians in France, out of the 8,000 or so that had been repatriated from England.

Some of them had gone to French Guiana, others to Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. Still others had abandoned France altogether. Others had wandered to Santo Domingo, the Leeward Islands, the Falkland Islands, Nicaragua and British Honduras, a few prospering but most living as outcasts and finally dying of malaria.

Now, there was a renewal of home. The Acadians assembled in the French ports of Boulogne, St. Malo, Rochefort, Morlaix, Lorient, Belle Ile-en-Mer, LaHavre, Cherbourg, LaRochelle and Bordeaux were, at long last, to find a haven.

(Editors note: Part three will be published Wednesday, Aug. 28.)