Seek Link with Their Past

By Dunstan Prial
Staff Writer

The Acadians who moved to Louisiana from Canada in the mid-1700s remained isolated for generations. They farmed, and attended church together, and for the most part married their own kind. So the old saying that all Acadians are sixth cousins is probably not far from the truth.

Most Acadians who study their genealogy stay put. Generations of families attended the same church, said Pauline Boudreaux Richard of Scott, who with her husband, Eddie Richard, have traced their lineages back to Canada.

"We (Acadians) are very fortunate because most of us were Catholic," she said. "The church keeps a lot of records and the availability of those records makes it easy to study your family's history. I think that's why the most of us are so interested in this."

- Landry, for example, is a direct descendant of Joseph "Beausoleil" Broussard, a legendary resistance leader in the battle against the English in Canada, and one of the original settlers of what is now Acadiana.

"Most Acadian families can be traced back to France in the late 1600s and early 1700s," said Landry.

Descendants of the original Gensou family are an exception, he said. They have traced their lineage back to the year 1430. Through his research, Landry discovered that he is 16 generations removed from Marie Sale, who married Jean-Claude Landry in Orne, France in 1688.

Landry is not certain of the details, but according to the 1688 marriage record, Marie had made her way to North America and was living in Acadia when her son René was born. Acadians interested in tracing their genealogy have several advantages over the descendants of settlers in other regions of the country.

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- The Richard's have met other families not from this region who are also interested in genealogy, and who have had a great deal of difficulty tracing their lineage, she said.

- "In recent years, local genealogists have had the added benefit of the research of the Rev. Donald J. Herbert, of Church Point. Herbert has so far published more than 30 volumes of a reference guide entitled "Southwest Louisiana Records: Church and Civil Records of Settlers."

- Eddie Richard, a direct descendant of Michel Richard, another original settler in Louisiana, started his research before Herbert began publishing the reference guide, his wife said.

- "He used to come home with little scraps of paper stuffed in all of his pockets. They were all little bits of information he had found in churches and courthouses," she said. "He enjoyed it, he really did."

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- When the couple began tracing Pauline Richard's Broussard lineage, they used Herbert's guide. Landry said most of the Acadian members of the Lafayette Genealogical Society are related. The society, which has a total of about 80 members, meets on the last Thursday of each month.

- "It's all about knowing where you come from. I've found that I'm not just Acadian, I'm related to all kinds of cultures. Swiss, German and English," he said. "It also gives you the opportunity to meet family members you were unaware of."

- Bob Landry and Richard, who, naturally, are distant relatives, will be attending the second reunion of descendants of the original Richard settlers. The first reunion was held in Canada.

- The upcoming reunion is scheduled for the weekend of May 28th at Blackburn Coliseum in Lafayette.

- Pauline Richard said they will need the room. Two thousand Richard descendants are expected to attend the event.

- Graphics by Mary Alexander

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