Ancestors Of Cajuns Came From Territory In Canada

By HILDA GALLASSERO

The ancestors of our Louisiana Cajuns were originally from a territory in Canada variously called La
cadia, Arcadia, Acadia, or “Cadié” down through the years. An interesting aspect of the
word “Arcadia” is that the Greek proper noun for land of happiness, land of plenty and
beauty was also “Arcadia.”

The French were the first to discover, explore and take possession of the Canadian territory and the few dozen families who first settled there were called Acadians. These people spent their time farming, hunting and fishing. They spent what time was left over in the making of clothing, sails, twine, baskets and other necessary implements.

Industrious People

History tells us that the Acadians were an industrious people. It has also been said that they “had no need for locks on their doors nor bars on their windows;” that in Acadia “the richest was poor and the poorest lived in abundance.”

The Acadians divided their lands into long rectangles, 109 and 200 arpents deep by 2,000 yards frontage on the shores of the rivers. Their homes were surrounded by garden and orchard.

There was a period when Acadia enjoyed comparative peace, subject only to occasional raids of pirates. But then a more serious invasion began to take form. England, looking enviously, wanted the territory.

The war between the French and English in America began in 1690, with the Acadians suffering many bloody and ravaging attacks.

Throughout it all, the Acadians wanted only to be left alone. They considered themselves “neutrals,” and took up arms against neither France nor England. However, with the decline of the French Navy, Acadia’s fate was sealed. The war council of the victors decided to deport the people from the country — except those who would swear allegiance to the British crown and accept Protestantism. The idea was to replace the deported ones with Protestant families from Great Britain and Ireland.

Given To Enemy

The simple, hearted trusting Acadians therefore found themselves delivered to their enemies and forsaken by their mother country. Their lands were to be irrevocably given to the enemy.

The Acadians had refused to take the oath of allegiance to the British crown for various reasons. They were afraid that if they became British subjects, their mother country would lose all interest in them. They feared they would be unable to exercise their Catholic faith; and they surmised that once they became subjects of the crown they would be called upon to go to war against France.

The Acadians had left their home with provisions that would last nearly two months, with no beds. Among them were decrepit old persons all of whom were confined to the bottom of the boats in infested and foul air.

We find it hard to comprehend that these voyages sometimes lasted nearly two months, with no beds, no heat, no sanitation — all in the middle of a cold winter.

For 150 years they had cultivated their lands and had lived happily in semi-isolation. They had been given the right to leave the land, but then were prevented from doing so. And the deportation was finally set up. They were to be deprived of everything they owned; they were to be sent among strangers who despised their religion and nationality.

Britain’s greatest criminal project — the deportation of an entire people — has since become a legend of human tragedy and suffering.

And the ships sailed out of the harbor, leaving behind the dead on the shore and the villages in ruins. The crowding of so great a number of people in the holds brought great changes among the captives. Death came to many within a short time, and their bodies were thrown overboard.

On the high seas the convoy carried into exile a broken-hearted people. There was some resignation to their fate, but it was a resignation of despair. Some sat for hours gazing into space, utterly unconscious of everything around them.

In brief paragraphs of history, we find evidence of the intensity of the sufferings on the ships.

The captives could not all sleep at one time; where the exile survived on water and a small piece of smoked meat twice a week. Among them were decrepit old persons all of whom were confined to the bottom of the boats in infested and foul air.

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(NEXT: The Cajun Language)

RECEIVES SCHOLARSHIP

John Ray, New Iberia, a senior at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, was selected to receive the $250 Police Jury Association of Louisiana Scholarship a March.

Ray, the son of Mrs. John Ray, graduated in May and plans to do graduate work in Political Science and to teach in that field.

This marks the third year that the Louisiana Police Jury Association presents the scholarship at USL. Previous USL recipients of the scholarship have been Roderick Fuselier, Mamou, son of Mr. and Mrs. Rodney Fuselier and Vance R. Andrus, Opelousas, son of Mr. and Mrs. Alex Andrus.