Coming Of Acadians To Area Gives Impetus To Religion

by Marie Manoukalas

The coming of the Acadians to the Atchafalaya country, without doubt, gave great impetus to the extension of the Catholic church throughout the area.

First contact in the near neighborhood of the Atchafalaya was the French Capuchin missionary, Father Jean Francois de Cuvry, who came in with the Acadian Refugees. Father Cuvry established the mother church in the Atchafalaya region in 1761 at the Poteau.

Although the church was established early in the area, it was not until the French Revolution that the various settlements had their own shaped; churches. Missions were at first established by Father Blaise de Guerchy, Louisiana's first missionary; Father Jean de Ayonne; Father Charles; and Father Robert; and Father Bennett, de Drois and Father George immediately served the settlers along the Teche.

In 1798 a French refugee named Father Michael Martin, who came in under the name of the "people of the Teche," was appointed as pastor of St. Martin's Church. He soon took up residence in a house that was already occupied by the Catholic settlers. The missionary's efforts were successful in that they enabled him to preach the Faith among the pioneer families.

But in spite of the entire work of the early priests and others such as Father Gabriel Etienne, Father Jean Baptiste du Boulard, Father Bonnissel, Father Charles and Father Charles Brissaud, it was considered necessary to establish a mission until the various areas were visited by priests according to the laws of the See of New Orleans. And so, in 1798, Father Martin established the first mission which was built by the people, and it was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The mission was a small, one-room structure with a simple altar and a few pews. It was located in a clearing near the Teche River, which provided a good location for a church.

The first mass was celebrated by Father Martin on October 13, 1798, and the people of the Atchafalaya immediately took to the faith. The mission was soon expanded to accommodate more people, and a school was established.

The mission flourished under the guidance of the beautiful young Mother Marianne de la Croix, who had been sent from France to establish the mission. She worked tirelessly to care for the spiritual and physical needs of the people. She taught the children of the mission how to read and write in both French and Spanish, and she established a small hospital to care for the sick.

Marianne was a remarkable woman, and her contribution to the mission was invaluable. She was known for her kindness and compassion, and she was loved by all who knew her.

The mission, under the guidance of Marianne, continued to flourish until the end of her life. She passed away in 1824, but her legacy lived on through the people of the Atchafalaya. The mission was eventually closed due to declining membership, but it remains a testament to the dedication of those who came before us.