Faith and family

Descendants of Acadiens deported from Canada to France in the 1750s posed Wednesday inside the Notre Dame Des Marais Church in Marans, France, where their forefather, Pierre Thibodeaux, attended Mass. PHOTOS BY CLAIRE TAYLOR, THE ADVERTISER

Cajun travelers find church where ancestors worshipped

By Claire Taylor
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MARANS, France — For several Acadian residents, their journey to discover their Acadian roots ended in tears Wednesday inside the Notre Dame Des Marais Catholic Church in southwestern France.

The church was locked when the group arrived. But the elderly Rev. Jean Brasseaux, stooped and walking slowly, obliged the visitors and allowed them inside.

Doris Thibodeaux of Morse in Acadia Parish already was crying as she entered the massive structure. The church, built in the 1600s, is where her forefather, Pierre Thibodeaux, worshipped and probably was baptized.

Pierre Thibodeaux went to Nova Scotia in the 1600s as one of its original

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Follow Cajun travelers as they explore their roots in France at Le Cajun Voyaguer blog by Claire Taylor, a reporter for The Daily Advertiser who is on the trip, at blogs.theadvertiser.com/cajuntraveler.
The Rev. Jean Brasseaux of Marans, France, unlocked the Notre Dame Des Marais Church on Wednesday so Thibodeauxs from Louisiana could visit the church where their forefather, Pierre Thibodeaux, was probably baptized. CLAIRE TAYLOR, THE ADVERTISER

Family

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settlers. In the 1700s, when the area known as Acadie fell into the hands of the British, the Acadiens refused to swear allegiance to the British crown. The British rounded them up, burned their homes and shipped them to places along the U.S. east coast, England and France. Many made their way to Louisiana where they built new lives.

For Doris Thibodeaux and other descendants of Pierre Thibodeaux, standing inside the church was the culmination of hours of research and the fulfillment of a dream.

“It’s very, very touching for me,” said Myrtis Burleigh of Lake Charles, one of Pierre Thibodeaux’s descendants. “My great-grandfather, eight times removed, was here. I never thought, never in my lifetime.”

Irving Thibodeaux of Morse thought of his mother, who died in February. She did most of the genealogical research that brought him on the trip to France and led him to the church. He said his mother would be filled with joy to know he made the discovery.

“We knew something like this was going to happen,” he said.

Mary Harris of Orange, Texas, was surprised at the discovery.

“Even when you do your genealogy, you never really think you can go back to your roots, to the beginning,” she said.

The group of nearly 50 Cajun travelers from Louisiana, Canada and elsewhere in the U.S. is exploring their roots with a 17-day trip to France. They have found homes built by their ancestors, found documents and other signs of their forefathers’ presence there and have visited museums dedicated to telling the story of the Acadiens’ expulsion from Nova Scotia, known as the Grand De-rangement.