BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ACADIANA AND THEIR FAMILY LIFE IN LOUISIANA

The beautiful moss covered trees in and around Lafayette in spite of the urban and business atmosphere still give it a touch of the "forest primer" as depicted in Longfellow's Brancding.

The Acadians who celebrated the 200th anniversary of their expulsion from Acadia in 1955 have multiplied and prospered in the Southwest Louisiana bayou country which has become famous the world over as the "Majun Country."

With many of the descendants of these Acadians become wealthy planters and leaders in every profession. Many have won their way to high positions in the state. Two of them, Alexandre Moton and Jacques Dupre have been governors of the state; three, Alexandre Moton, Robert Broussard and Blain Broussard have been U. S. Senators. Three have held the office of Lieutenant Governor; one has been Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court; Four have been United States Congressmen from Louisiana and one represented a Louisiana district in the Confederate Congress. One has been a judge of the state supreme court, one a judge of the court of appeals and several have held district judgeships. (This estimation was made in 1952 by Harry Lewis Griffin, Dean Emeritus of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette.)

The story of the expulsion of the Acadian forefathers is an important date in the history book. With the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, in which Acadia was ceded to England, conditions became intolerable. Under English law, all her subjects had to swear allegiance to the Crown. Since the Catholic Church was then banned by England, the Acadians were forbidden to follow it. And in 1755, England demanded unconditional obedience and some 6,000 French who refused, began an exodus called Le Grande Dérangement. Their homes were burned, livestock and crops destroyed and as a final punishment for "disloyalty", families were separated. The men and boys were herded aboard transports and sent to unknown destinations; women and children were loaded on other ships. Some reached England, the British colonies in America, France and even the West Indies. Many died on the way. Others, unable to find haven among people hostile to their nationality and religion, returned to Nova Scotia, only to be exiled again in 1762.

It was these latter exiles who reached New Orleans about 1763. Received with generous hospitality by the French of the region, they were given grants of land along the river north of the German coast, near today's Houmaeville. As more of the refugees arrived they settled along Bayou Lafourche, Bayou Plaquemine, the Atchafalaya and gradually moved up Bayou Teche, the False River section.

Little had been done toward settling the Teche region because of the fierceness of the Atakapas, only semi-nomadic Indian tribe in the territory. Poste des Atakapas, now St. Martinville, was the only settlement along the banks of the Teche. But the hardy Acadians rapidly assimilated themselves and began to cultivate the wilderness.

From 1765 to 1780 and especially from 1788 there was a steady influx of these Acadians coming from San Domingo, Canada, the ports of New England and from France where many of them had found temporary refuge. By 1786 they numbered 2,500; by 1790 4,000, and by 1800 between 40,000 and 50,000. Here in their new homes they engaged in farming and cattle raising on a large scale as they had done in Acadia; and diligently preserved their customs, traditions and language with the greatest fidelity.
The Acadians of today (called Cajuns by everyone in the state, including themselves) are a thrifty, hardworking, fun-loving, but devoutly religious folk. One day in 1893 they worked hard, and made love with equal enthusiasm, many young, and cheerfully demonstrated extreme fecundity. Families are large and the aunts, uncles, and cousins are legion. One spot lady in a Cajun parish counted 800 liquid descendants, blood relatives all! The Cajuns also have a tremendous passion for nicknames such as Tidi, Mandou, Laa, Nemoon, Boutale, Boutale, Oon, Coon and Bov. In fact there was a colored family on a Cajun farm who called their offspring (all boys) Oon, and Mannon, Pierre and Dondoute, Te-Tew, Tj-Pierre and Ti-Djouce.

Love of race and family is a fetish with the Cajuns. No other people can so accurately relate just who is their cousin, perhaps practically everyone is Tantes, renalines, and pouraines (aunts, godmothers, godfathers) are treated with great respect.

Until the First World War most Cajun families displayed little interest in English. In fact, there are Negroes in the Tche country who can speak no English having been brought up by French-speaking Acadians. In the more remote districts a French-English patchwork is spoken and is as big but impossible for the stranger to understand. Altogether, their use of language is amusing and picturesque. Sometimes it is intentionally exaggerated, as in the time worn but often need request: "You see me one down by de bayou you push beehive, yes. He been gone three day now—yesterday today and to-morrow? No. He well known, but as amusing is the lament of a youthful married: "It ain't much fun being married twice as old as yourself to a man, no."

The Cajuns pleasure-loving nature expresses itself in the community gatherings, dances and peculiar sports that are integral parts of bayou life. Particularly popular are the big Saturday night dances, the fake-doos, literally "go to sleep", possibly because the dancers stay up all night and sometimes fall asleep while still dancing.

Ring bands, radios, and automatic phonographs have penetrated the Cajun country, but at the genuine fake-doos the music of the fiddle, the accordion and triangle, sometimes called the "wing-a-lings" is always featured; for the Acadian retains his love for these instruments and often possesses rare skill in playing them. A full orchestra includes also the guitar and harmonica.

The whole aim and substance of the Cajun ought to be summed up in the character of Walter Coquilte, self-styled Mayor of Bayou Pu-Pu-Pu, a purely imaginary municipality, who evokes much amusement with his combination of Cajun dialect and native wit and has become something of a public personality. Typical of his anecdotes is the one about the two Cajuns fishing for crabs in a prairie:

"What fo' you scratchin' under that shirt, me friend, you got one nose (a flass)?"

"No, ma'm! I got one nose (a long)! You think it's a dog, nay?"

Much of this history is taken from an article on Cajun Country by B.C. Wanninger.

COMPLIMENTS OF THE MARINE LAFAYETTE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA