History of the Acadians
by
Carl Corley
THE AUTHOR'S NOTE:

The hush of the spinning-wheel has ceased in the Cajun parlours. No
longer is there the treadles of the loom, the swift, silken noise of the flung
shuttle, the intermittent thud of the batten. But the imagination hears
them, and their sounds, fluttering into a montage of postcard images, is the
melody of romance.

When antique things are also country things, they are easier to paint and write about.

For there is a permanence, a continuity to country life which makes the lapse of centuries
seem of little moment.

The Teche is such a country, where the dignity and beauty of ancient things linger long,
like the weather worn and muted tones of rustic hues which take an indescribable beauty
beneath the level rays of dawn and sunset, as though it radiates the very light that touches
it. Cajun country is never colorless. It still keeps, when every magnolia and water-lily has
withered, in its large mysterious expanses of moss and water, a bloom like the spirit of the
blossom. Against this background, mile on sombre mile, lies grandeur and tradition and legends
that are legion along the road to our forebears.

I have been fortunate in making my own home in this magical atmosphere, and having many
friends in farm and cottage who, by talk and reminiscence have fired my imagination. Minds
stored with old tales and legends that do not come from books, rich with the abiding love for
the beauty of the bayous, and in no other outlet to find a medium for expression.

About a year ago I had the pleasure of being
a guest in one of these quaint cottages. The
owners were newly-weds from another section of the
country, French, and with Acadian family heritage.
On their weather-vane, written in iron were the
words: "Wild goose on the wing." Recently I went
back for a second visit and I noticed that the
lettering had been changed. This time to:
"Wunderer no more!"

It is this nostalgic and haunting essence of
people and place that I have fastened in my memory,
and have fashioned for you with the eye of the
artist's brush this little legacy to art.

Carl Corley
THE ACADIANS

"WHO ARE THE ACADIANS? NO ONE KNOWS EXACTLY WHERE THE NAME CAME FROM. IT WAS APPLIED TO THE EASTERN COAST OF CANADA NOW KNOWN AS NOVA SCOTIA. IT MAY HAVE BEEN AN INDIAN WORD, OR EVOLVED FROM ACADIA. BUT THE ACADIANS WERE FRENCH PEOPLE WHO SETTLED IN CANADA IN 1605—THE FIRST WHITE PEOPLE TO SETTLE ON THE NORTH AMERICAN CONTINENT.

ACTUALLY, THE FIRST ACADIANS ARRIVED IN LOUISIANA ON APRIL 6, 1764. THEY CONSISTED OF ONLY FOUR FAMILIES, MAKING THEIR WAY SOUTH FROM NEW YORK. IT WAS RECORDED THAT LEIF ERICSON LANDED AT YARMOUTH, THE SOUTHERN COAST OF NOVA SCOTIA, IN 1001. JOHN CABOT WENT AShORE ON CAPE BRETON ISLAND ON JUNE 24, 1497, PLANTING THE ENGLISH FLAG, GIVING BRITAIN CLAIM TO THE NORTH AMERICAN CONTINENT.

BUT, THE FRENCH WERE THERE CATCHING AND CURING FISH IN THE 16th CENTURY—99 YEARS BEFORE THE PILGRIM FATHERS STEPPED ONTO PLYMOUTH ROCK.

"THE FIRST FRENCHMEN... FROM BRITAIN... TO SETTLE IN NOVA SCOTIA, IN ANnapolis Valley, WERE MOSTLY FARMERS, ON THE BAY OF FUNDY THEY BUILT DIKES, RECLAIMING FERTILE LAND FROM THE FUNDY TIDES, AND CREATED WHAT REMAINS THE LOVELIEST AND MOST PRODUCTIVE LAND IN NOVA SCOTIA. FROM THIS RICH SOURCE THEY ATTAINED WEALTH, A SOCIETY FROM THEIR OWN CUNNING, THEIR INDEPENDENCE FROM PATIENT PLANNING AND HARD LABOR. THEY WERE A HAPPY AN contented people.

BUT THEY WERE CONSTANTLY AT ODDS WITH THOSE IN CANADA WHO SPOKE ENGLISH, TOO. THEY WERE OF CATHOLIC FAITH, AND MORE FRENCHMEN CONTINUED FROM TIME TO TIME TO FLOW INTO ENGLAND HELD CANADA FROM NORMANDY AND TOURNAINE. THEIR NUMBER INCREASED TO 10,000 OR MORE, ENGLAND OBJECTED TO THE THREATENING INFILTRATION, AND CALLED THEM FRENCH NEUTRALS—PRISONERS OF WAR. TO SPEAK, THEY TRIED TO FORCE THE STUBBORN ACADIANS TO TAKE AN OATH OF LOYALTY TO ENGLAND, NOT FRANCE. THE ACADIANS REFUSED TO TAKE THE OATH..."
FINALLY, THE ENGLISH GOVERNOR, LAWRENCE, DECIDED THAT, IF THE FRENCH ACADIANS WOULD NOT SWEAR TO THE OATH OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE ENGLISH KING THEY WOULD HAVE TO BE DEPORTED. DURING SEPTEMBER OF 1755, THE MEN WERE HERDED INTO THEIR VILLAGE CHURCHES AND ARRESTED. SOLDIERS BURNED THEIR HOMES, TOOK AWAY THEIR LIVESTOCK, AND DESTROYED THEIR ORCHARDS AND FARM CROPS. A GREAT NUMBER OF ACADIANS, STRICKEN WITH GRIEF AND DESPAIR, LOADED WHAT THEY COULD SALVAGE ONTO WAGONS AND CARTS AND MADE RECKLESS MANEUVERS IN AN ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE.

"THE ACADIANS, ARRESTED AND CAPTURED, BROUGHT IN OR DRAGGED IN BY PHYSICAL FORCE FROM SMALL VILLAGES AND OUTING FARMS, WERE LOADED ABOARD SHIPS WAITING IN THE OFFING. NUMEROUS FAMILIES WERE SEPARATED. THE MEN AND BOYS WERE LOADED ON ONE SHIP, THE WOMEN AND GIRLS ON ANOTHER. HUSBANDS AND WIVES NEVER SAW EACH OTHER AGAIN. BROTHERS AND SISTERS WOULD NEVER ENJOY FAMILY TIES, THE BOND OF CLOSE KINSHIP. SWEETHEARTS AND LOVERS WOULD NEVER AGAIN REJOIN ONE ANOTHER AND CONSECRATE THEIR LOVE. THE ONLY KINSHIP THAT REMAINED FOR THEM MOMENTARILY WAS MOTHER AND DAUGHTER, FATHER AND SON. BETWEEN THEM, ALL THE WORLDLY POSSESSIONS THEY OWNED WERE GONE, EITHER BURNED OR SACKED BY THE ENGLISH SOLDIERS. SO, THEY SET SAIL TO UNKNOWN LANDS, A DESTINATION KEPT SECRET FROM THEM UNTIL THEY WERE PUT ASHORE A FEW AT A TIME AND SCATTERED ALONG THE ATLANTIC COASTLINE."
7,000 ACADIANS WERE DEPOSITED FROM NOVA SCOTIA IN THE FALL OF 1755 AND THE NEXT TWO YEARS TO FOLLOW. MANY WERE DROPPED OFF AT COLONIES ALONG AMERICA'S EASTERN SHORELINE. LATER, MANY FOUND THEIR WAY BACK TOnardious sections of Canada. Some were lost at sea, others died from malnutrition and disease. On April 4, 1764 Twenty Acadians set foot on Louisiana soil. After this breakthrough, and word was sent back to northern colonies, they continued to arrive in larger numbers.

THOSE WHO MADE IT SUCCESSFULLY HAD TO COME BY SMALL BOAT, FOR ENGLAND WAS AT WAR WITH FRANCE, AND MOST OF THE SOUTHERN colonies were under siege. THEY COULD NOT HAVE MADE IT OVERLAND, FOR THE INDIANS WERE ON THE WARPATH DURING THAT TIME, AND TRAVEL BY LAND IN THOSE DAYS WAS PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE.
THE ACADIANS DISCOVERED, DESPAIRINGLY, THAT THE LOUISIANA TERRITORY TO WHICH THEY HAD STRUGGLED SO FRANTICALLY TO REACH, WAS IN NO WAY SIMILAR TO THEIR BELOVED NOVA SCOTIA. THEIR DIFFERENCE, IN PHYSICAL ASPECT, WAS TO THE EXTREME. THE CLIMATE WAS TERRIBLE BY COMPARISON. THE DAYS AND NIGHTS WERE HOT. THE STEAMING VEGETATION WAS RANK WITH MOLD AND MILDEW. THE SWAMPS WERE IMPASSABLE. THE PATHLESS FLATLANDS AND INLETS, SO UNRELATED TO CANADIAN SNOW-CAPPED MOUNTAINS, WERE TREACHEROUSLY RIGGED WITH BOGS, QUAGMires, AND DECAYED TREES. AND THE LURKING BEASTS WERE AWESOME, EVEN TO LOOK UPON. THEY LONGED TO TURN BACK, BUT THEY KEPT THEIR FAITH.

"IN 1785 ABOUT 2,000 ACADIANS ARRIVED IN LOUISIANA FROM FRANCE, A VOYAGE BETTER KNOWN AS THE GREAT MIGRATION. THEY HAD BEEN SHIPPED TO ENGLAND FROM NOVA SCOTIA, THEN ON TO SAINT MALO. THE SPANISH GOVERNMENT, STILL IN REIGN OVER ALL THE LOUISIANA TERRITORY, MADE ARRANGEMENTS TO HAVE THEM TRANSPORTED. THEY SETTLED ALONG BAYOU TECHE AND ATTAKAPAS COUNTRY. THE ACADIANS HAD TO ACCEPT HOMESTEADING LAND IN THE WILDERNESS, FOR THE SPANISH DID NOT WANT SQUATTERS ON TERRITORY RECORDED UNDER SPANISH LAND GRANTS. THE ACADIANS WERE KIND, THRIFTY, INDUSTRIOUS, AND A HARD-WORKING PEOPLE. THEY REFUSED TO LOOK BACK AT THEIR TERRIBLE LOSS AND PITCHED FORWARD INTO BUILDING A NEW FUTURE WHERE THEY COULD LIVE IN PEACE AND PRACTICE THEIR CATHOLIC FAITH."
"The first homes the Acadians constructed after their arrival in the Louisiana Territory were of roughly-hewn cypress logs, and were hardly more than primitive lean-to abodes. The roofs were covered with cypress strips reinforced with thatch held down with logs and stones. The cracks between the logs that formed the walls were sealed with a thick mixture of moss and mud.

The interiors were not much better than the exteriors. The floors were dirt-carpeted with straw. The fireplaces, extremely crude, were for warmth in winter and cooking year round. The furnishings were sparse, and handmade.

The hearth became the central area around which everything about the daily Acadian life revolved. Here they prepared and ate their meals, and around and about the fire the women spun wool into thread, made cloth with homemade looms, mended old threadbare garments, and stitched new ones or altered clothes to be handed down from one child to the next. The men sharpened farm implements for the coming spring, made baskets, carved wooden shoes, and made ammunition to be used for game and to fight hostile Indians. It was around the hearth that beds, covered with straw, stood in dark tiers to be occupied during the long winter nights. But, however primitive, the Acadians did not complain. It was here, too, where the Acadian children gathered to play with their pets and handmade toys, and to learn what they could from the few books that were available to them. They were like moths drawn to amber, paying homage to the hearth as though it were a religious altar."
"THE ACADIAN DISCOVERED ONE THING ABOUT THE LOUISIANA TERRITORY THAT WAS IN THEIR FAVOR—FOOD. THERE WAS AN ABUNDANCE OF IT IN THE WILD, UNEXPLORED REGIONS ALONG BAYOU TECHÉ.

OCCASIONALLY, THEY KILLED A BUFFALO, OR A FULL-GROWN DEER. WILD TURKEYS COULD BE SHOT AT CLOSE RANGE. THERE WAS AN ASSORTMENT OF SMALLER FOWL, HUNDREDS OF EDIBLE FURRY ANIMALS, AND A VARIETY OF FISH. ALSO, BERRIES AND NUTS AND HERBS WERE FOR THE TAKING...WHEN IN SEASON.

"NO ACADIAN, DURING THOSE CRUCIAL TIMES, WAS EXEMPT FROM HARD WORK...NOT EVEN THE VERY YOUNG NOR THE VERY OLD...AND THERE WAS NEVER A TASK TOO LARGE...OR SEEMINGLY TOO IMPOSSIBLE. THAT THE EARLY ACADIAN REFUSED TO Tackle. JOBS WERE ENDLESS...JOYS FEW. EVERYTHING HAD TO BE MADE BY HAND. OUTSIDERS, EITHER TOO RELUCTANT OR TOO THOUGHT-LESS TO CONCERN THEMSELVES TO LOAN OR DONATE FARMING AND BUILDING TOOLS, TURNED DEAF EARS TO THE ACADIAN'S PLIGHT. ON RARE OCCASIONS, HOWEVER, ORIGINAL FRENCH SETTLERS IN THE TECHÉ AREA LENT A HELPING HAND.

THE ACADIAN CONTINUED THEIR FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL...UNDAUNTED.

FORGES RANG. NEEDLES CLICKED. AXES ECHOED FROM THE SWAMPS. HAMMERS, MALLETS, AND CHISELS KEPT UP A MUSICAL, EXHILARATING CADENCE FROM DAWN UNTIL TWILIGHT."