IT'S BEEN TWO AND A HALF CENTURIES SINCE THE ACADIENS SET FOOT IN LOUISIANA. TODAY, THAT EVENT WILL BE REMEMBERED AS PART OF LE GRAND RÉVEIL ACADIEN.

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An early salvo in the celebration of Le Grand Réveil Acadien – The Great Acadian Awakening – begins today at the U.S. Mint in New Orleans with a commemoration of the arrival of the Joseph Broussard dit Beausoleil-led Acadians.

And it's called: From Acadie to Louisiana in 1765: The Birth of Cajun Culture 250 Years Ago.

Some 250 years ago, Beausoleil arrived in New Orleans sometime just before Feb. 19, 1765. That and other related historical events will be celebrated by descendants of the early Acadians who will read from historic documents in a program pertaining to the arrival and a life attained afterward.

"I'm surrounded by about 15 people and we are all direct descendants of some of the people on that boat," said Warren Perrin, curator of the Acadian Museum in Erath, which sponsors the event. "And we're at a park service building right there where they would've disembarked."

Perrin and his wife, Mary Broussard Perrin, with Phil Comeau put together the book, "Acadie Then and Now." They

Brenda Trahan, former director of The Acadian Memorial in St. Martinville, will read from The Dauterive Compact, the foundation of the Acadian cattle industry, at today's event.

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decided that the anniversary should be celebrated more so by just publishing a book.

“We had been figuring out ways of making it known that this 250th anniversary was coming, so we started figuring the best ways to do it,” said Perrin. “First it was just going to be a book presentation, but we said, ‘No. It’s bigger than that.’”

And bigger it became with a 26-hour program that includes music, dance, oral history and food.

It also involves familiar names in the caretaking of the Cajun culture like Glen Pitre, Bruce Daigrepont, Barry Anciault, Michael Vincent, Earlene Brousard, Mark Babineaux, Brenda Trahan, Renaissance Cadienne, and third-grade French Immersion students are involved.

Part of the program includes readings from some of the only known documents from that era.

“Probably the most powerful thing is that (Jean-Baptiste) Semeretter, said Perrin. ‘It’s the only letter written by a 19-year old Acadian to his father in France where he describes the voyage and arrival.”

Trahan’s role will have her reading from The Daughter Compact, which is the foundation of the Acadian cattle industry. It hits close to home.

“I felt very humbled that I could have one little part to be able to read something that is the original document,” said Trahan. “My father was a cattle farmer and my husband’s father was a cattle farmer in Vermilion Parish.”

“I remember my dad loving what he did — it was in his blood — because that’s what we did in Nova Scotia, our ancestors, and we were able to do it here,” she said.

The Daughter Compact allowed the new arrivals to have some livestock. “So these Acadiens make a living and survive here,” Trahan said. “I feel almost tearful almost thinking about it.”

“I see that in the program there’s going to be a violin playing behind me,” said Trahan. “I hope I can do it without tears.”

“It’s not like a legal document anymore,” she said. “It’s almost like a story. It’s a living document now.”

Ancelie will emcee the program.

“It’s just a reminder of one of the major influences on the cultural makeup of our society,” said Ancelie. “The Acadiens weren’t the only ones by any stretch, but they were an important one.

“They eventually arrived here in large enough numbers to have some critical mass,” he said. “So a lot of their cultural identity was preserved and contributed to the things we eat and the way we sing and the way we dance and the way we build and a lot of other things.”

Ancelie said up until 1785, that overall about 3,000 to 4,000 Acadians made it to what’s called now called Acadia.

“Especially relative to the colonial times and the population then, that was a significant number,” he said. “They had a very strong sense of identity and shared cultural baggage so it turned out to be important.”