WHO ARE THE CAJUNS?

The Cajun people were easier to define when they were isolated from the rest of the United States, when their forebears' simple lifestyle of farming and fishing still flourished across the 22 parishes that make up Acadia. Centuries ago, Cajuns arrived as refugees, adapted to their new home and helped tame it. Today, Cajuns remain bound by language, culture, music and shared heritage.

Language

One of the strangest ways the Cajuns express their identity is through music. "Cajun" is not only their language, it's also their identity. Cajun music is characterized by a distinctive rhythm and use of instruments like the accordion, fiddle, and triangle. The Cajuns believe in preserving their musical heritage, and they often pass it down orally from generation to generation. Cajun music is an important part of the Cajun identity and helps maintain their cultural heritage.

Ties to the land

The Acadians' former homelands in Canada hardly could have been more different from South Louisiana — a hot, muggy land of swamps and bayous, grassy prairies and coastal marshes. But the Acadians adapted and thrived as farmers, fishers and trappers as successive generations stayed close together on the farms or along the waterfronts. Today, the nature of farming and fishing has changed: Rice farms double as crawfish ponds, sugar canefields are giving way to subdivisions, some commercial fishermen are finding other work and only in the water for fun. But the ties to the land and the water remain strong bonds for the Cajuns, just like their hard work punctuated with time for play, their hospitality, their values of family and faith.

Music

Few, if any, Acadians brought musical instruments with them to Louisiana, but they introduced them from Europe, South America and the Caribbean. They played the accordion, fiddle, triangle and banjo, and they brought in the accordion with the late 1930s through the 1940s at the expense of country and western influences. Subsequently, musicians such as I. LeJeune and Nathan Rob made the accordion popular in the Cajun repertoire.

Cuisine

As the displaced Acadians arrived in these Louisiana parishes and adapted to their new environment, their cooking traditions evolved and were influenced by the availability of local food. The abundance of seafood and the home cookery of Cajun families helped turn what was an ingredient into a primary signal of Cajun cooking. The Acadians brought over their own ingredients and influenced the local cuisine with the introduction of corn and gumbos. Today, the Acadians' influence can be seen in the diverse range of foods that make up Cajun cuisine, from the popular crawfish boil to the less common seafood dishes such as oyster cakes and chowder.

Home in Louisiana

Many years of wandering, separations from relatives, involuntary servitude and slavery, many displaced Acadians began finding their way to Louisiana. Some settled inland from New Orleans, others in Mobile, Lake Charles and Rayne. Others, by the thousands, settled in Louisiana beyond the Atchafalaya Basin.

LEAVING LOUISIANA

Job opportunities have drawn many Cajuns to other states, especially those who were discovered. High-tech jobs have become a significant number in California as well. Today, about two-thirds of the people who lived themselves as Cajun on their censuses lived in Louisiana.

WHERE THEY LIVE

In 1950, nearly a half million people identified themselves as Cajuns in Acadia. Large populations of Cajuns were also found in Texas and Mississippi, as well as in its neighboring Arkansas. Percent of parish populations with primary Cajun ancestry:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Cajun Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Peter</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Martin</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mary</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. James</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parishes</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How they got here

The history of Louisiana's Cajuns began in 1755 with the grand experiment, the expulsion of French-speaking Catholics from Acadia, the present-day Canadian province of Nova Scotia, after they refused to swear allegiance to the British crown and the Church of England. Thousands either fled to neighboring regions or were rounded up, only to land — often unwillingly — in the American colonies, Europe, South America and the Caribbean.