

The Seven Acadian Expeditions to Louisiana

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(Submitted by Earline Pitre)

Following an exchange of notes between French and Spanish governments, Louis XVI of France, in a decree dated March 31, 1781, finally gave his assent to the departure of the Acadians in France to depart for Louisiana. To facilitate operations, the French government agreed to pay all Acadian debts contracted while they were in France.

At long last, the refugees were allowed to begin signing up for the emigration to Louisiana. Peyroux de la Condreniere, a druggist from Nantes who had spent 7 years in Louisiana, recruited Olivier Theriot, a shoemaker from Nantes, to act as liaison with the Acadians that were to be transported to Louisiana. The Acadians were recruited in Saint Malo, Morlaix, Cherbourg, Havre de Grace, Brest, Bordeaux, Rochefort and Belle-Isle-en-mer. In Saint Malo and Morlaix, they ran into many who were reluctant to join the expedition and those that were independent financially refused to join the trip to America. Unluckily, other poor families who wished to go could not sign up due to the fact that the heads of their families were at sea, either as fishermen or sailors.

There was some delay because the Spanish government, who was paying for the relocation, could not find suitable ships at a reasonable price. During this period, many of the Acadian families had left for the islands of Saint Pierre and Miquelon. Some later returned to France and joined the expedition just prior to sailing. As a direct result of negotiations by Manuel d'Aspres, the Spanish Consul in Saint Malo, the French ship owners agreed to a rate and seven ships were fitted out for the journey. These vessels traveled independently, not as a group. On May 10, 1785, Le Bon Papa, the first expeditionary ship, departed Paimbouef, France, for the journey to America. Thirty-four families arrived at New Orleans on July 29, 1785. Some of the these families were sent to Manchac and Saint Gabriel, but most were sent to the Lafourche area. Anselme Blanchard, an Acadian who was already in Louisiana, was appointed commissioner by the Spanish authorities in New Orleans to supervise the arrival and settlement of the refugees. The names of the passengers were registered as they disembarked from the ships.

The second and somewhat larger expedition was on the ship Le Bergere under the command of Captain Alexandre Deslandes of Nantes and Second Captain Ree Brechard of Sables d'Olonne. Olivier Theriot, Peyroux's right-hand man, was on board with his family and 72 families of 273 persons in all. They had departed Paimbouef, France, on May 12, 1785 and arrived at New Orleans, Louisiana, on August 15, 1785. On October 4, 1785, some of these passengers boarded the schooner San Jose bound for Valenzuela (near present-day Napoleonville on Bayou Lafourche). On November 13, 1785, the same schooner took one family to Manchac.

The third group of 46 families boarded the Le Beaumont at Nantes, France, on June 11, 1785 and arrived at New Orleans on August 19, 1785. On September 9, 1785, these families left New Orleans aboard the San Jose, most of whom went to the Baton Rouge area (Bayou Ecores), with three families dropped off at Bayou Lafourche and 5 families settled at the Attakapas. On September 5, while still in New Orleans, three couples were married. Francois Betancourt married Victoire La Vergne, Joseph Acosta married Marguerite Trahan and Juan Garcia married Francoise Courtin.

On June 20, 1785, the Saint Remi departed Paimbouef, France, with 57 families and stopped at Morlaix to pick up an additional 25 families on June 24, 1785. They arrived in New Orleans on November 9, 1785. They left New Orleans aboard the schooner San Jose on December 16, 1785 with most of the families being dropped off at Valenzuela on Bayou Lafourche and others at Attakapas, Opelousas and Baton Rouge.

The fifth expedition left Saint Malo, France, on August 12, 1785 with 270 passengers. The L'Amitie arrived at New Orleans on November 7, 1785. It is of interest to note that 23 marriages between passengers took place between November 20, 1785 and December 19, 1785. All passengers left New Orleans aboard the San Jose on January 15, 1786, most of whom were dropped off at Valenzuela, with others to Bayou Ecores, the Attakapas and New Galvez.

La Villa de Archangel made the penultimate voyage with 59 families aboard. They departed Saint Malo on August 15, 1785 and arrived at New Orleans on December 3, 1785. On January 17, 1786, they all departed for Bayou Ecores where 53 families disembarked, 6 families stayed at Valenzuela and 1 family remained in New Orleans.

The seventh, and last, ship La Carolina departed from Nantes, France, with 28 families on October 15, 1785 and arrived at Balize on December 12, 1785. They finally got to New Orleans on December 17, 1785. Early in January 1786, eight of the families were taken to New Galvez. On January 17, 1786, 18 families were sent to Valenzuela with 2 families sent to Bayou Ecores. A total of 1596 Acadians were thus transported from France to Louisiana. To this official figure must be added a number of French sailors who had met the young Acadian girls, either in France or during the voyages, and had married. Any Acadian that had married while in exile was permitted to make the voyages whatever the nationality of their spouse. Remaining behind in France were hundreds of frustrated Acadians whose request to emigrate to Louisiana were turned down because the quota of departees had been exceeded as agreed upon by the governments of France and Spain.