Introduction

FRANÇOIS LAGARDE

The French presence in Texas began more than three centuries ago, and that migration has continued ever since. But unlike German migration to the area, the French presence in Texas has been nearly invisible, so small that it takes a "Frog" to notice it. And except for Six Flags, the pirate Lafite, the Pig War, and perhaps Schlumberger or Alcatel, the history of French people in Texas is not well known today. This book tells that history.

The boundaries of Texas were not well defined before the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819, and equally ill-defined is the notion of who and what is "French." French may refer to nationality, nativity, ethnicity, education, language, culture, parentage, allegiance, ownership, naturalization, and ancestry. An eighteenth-century, first-generation French explorer from Quebec, a 1910 Cajun from Beaumont, Texas, a black French citizen from Martinique, or a Parisian engineer of the past decade can all be called French, or francophone, but with quite different meanings. Today, one can encounter French citizens born in Texas from French nationals who have never been to France and do not speak a word of French, as well as people who have spent most of their lives in France but who are not French citizens. To be scientific, or even nationalistic, would reduce the definition of "French" to those only born and raised in France, but such a restriction would eliminate those who are not French by birth but by parentage, language, or culture. And since one does not wish to argue about illusory degrees of Frenchness, this book employs a broad interpretation, to include the French from France as well as their North American counterparts from Quebec to Louisiana and Texas.

For the 1968 Hemisfair in San Antonio, the Institute of Texan Cultures published brochures on Texas "ethnic groups" (a somehow frightening expression), including a fine one entitled "The French Texans." *French Texan* was better than *Franco-Texan*, considering that the institute had to match Hemisfair's international flair with a multicultural, multi-ethnic history of Texas. The book included some individuals who were native-born first or second generation and therefore culturally American or Canadian and not French, as well as some French-born historical figures who had lived in Texas for only a few weeks. Some French Texans were rediscovered later, such as sculptors Raoul Josset and Emile Bourdelle or

El Paso's consular correspondent Jean-Marie Romagny. But the book brought together for the first time the French people who had left their imprint on Texas.¹

In 1995, the remains of La Salle's ship *La Belle* were found by archaeologists of the Texas Historical Commission, and the following year its cannons were uncovered, signs that a French past was being rediscovered. In March 2001, a symposium entitled "French in Texas: History, Migration, Culture" took place in Austin. There, "French" was related to everything French in Texas or about Texas, from the dreams and wrecks of La Salle, Champ d'Asile, and Reunion to the 1920s French pulp fiction on Texas cowboys and Indians, Alcatel's growth in Dallas, Alliances Françaises, and the French campaign against the death penalty in Texas.

In this book on the French in Texas we endeavor to offer a complete view of what some might think to be a minor note in the state's history. But in truth, the French presence is woven deeply if subtly into the tapestry of Texas life and lore. It deserves further research, in particular on immigration during the twentieth century.

The state seal of Texas displays each of the six national flags that have flown over the region during its history. The French flag is the second of the six, after Spain and before Mexico, and it recognizes La Salle's landing at Matagorda Bay in 1685. Texas was French until La Salle died in 1687, and it became French for a second brief period—this time not represented on the fleur-de-lis flag—when Louisiana was returned to France in 1801 in the Treaty of Aranjuez and sold in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. These French claims on Texas were diplomatic and quite symbolic. But they bore important consequences on the history of Texas. After La Salle's landing, the Spanish built missions and *presidios* in east Texas to stop the French from entering, and their actions had the effect of bringing Texas even more under Spanish control.

Cavelier de La Salle became the first French official to reach Texas when in 1685 he led about 280 colonists. The extraordinary failure of this first French attempt to colonize Texas became a sort of Alamo in the historiography of La Salle and his companions, a defeat turned into a battle of heroes and martyrs. In the book's overture, Robert S. Weddle portrays a dark and unflattering picture of La Salle, far removed from the legend and closer to the realities of Louis XIV's century.

The French continued trying to enter Texas by way of the Gulf coast but had little success, as Weddle and Patricia R. Lemée show in their precise histories of the explorers Bellisle, Béranger, and La Harpe. Many pioneers came at first from Nouvelle France, and the French entered Texas by land, from Natchitoches and the Red River. And as Lemée shows about Juchereau de St. Denis and F. Todd Smith about Athanase de Méz-

ières, the French and the Spanish collaborated more often than they fought when the latter controlled Louisiana after the Treaty of Paris. Unless war prevented it, trade and cultural exchange took place between these two European colonial powers and with some Indians during the eighteenth century.

The French explorers and traders of colonial times were followed in Texas by adventurers seeking their fortunes in a land where force, rather than law, still ruled. R. Dale Olson offers an insightful portrait of the French pirates and privateers in Galveston during the 1810s. He does away with Laffite's forged *Journal* and legend and follows the tortuous history of pirates Aury, Pierre and Jean Laffite, Lafon, Humbert, and You. Betje Blake Klier analyzes the tumultuous history of the exiled Bonapartists in east Texas in the light of diplomacy and world affairs and shows how opposition politics transformed Champ d'Asile into a French myth.

France was the first country to recognize the independence of the Republic of Texas in 1839, yet the Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation did not bring an exchange of goods but instead a wave of immigration. Wayne M. Ahr shows that Alsatian-French migration to Texas began with the founding of Castroville in 1844 by Henri Castro's colonists and that a cultural heritage has been preserved there until this day. The French ethnohistorian of Castroville, Janine Erny, outlines the living conditions in early-nineteenth-century Alsace that were grounds for out-migration.

The French came at first as groups of colonists, exiles, missionaries, and socialist visionaries. Jonathan Beecher explains the splendid and failed history of the Icarians led by Etienne Cabet and of the Fourierists led by Victor Considerant, who attempted to build Utopia in the Promised Land. But if there is a French legacy of importance in Texas, it was bequeathed by the nineteenth-century French missionaries and nuns. French missionaries restored Catholicism in Texas after 1841. They built numerous churches and hospitals in a Texas that is today 25 percent Catholic. They also built schools and academies that evolved into today's high schools and universities, and they made French instruction fashionable, as Ann Marie Caldwell shows.

La Salle, Champ d'Asile, the pirates, and the socialists ended in relative failure; the first French group to succeed was that of the missionaries and the nuns. Not again until the second half of the twentieth century, when French economic activity would affect hundreds of thousands of Texans, would the French presence have close to the same level of influence.

La Salle, St. Denis, Saligny, colonists, nineteenth-century immigrants, and engineers and entrepreneurs of today's global market have come to

Texas mainly for economic reasons. Work was, and remains, the principal pull for French migration to Texas. Texas was a land of colonization where new fortunes could be found, and Texans and Europeans often cooperated, in contrast to the French colonial enterprise in Africa and South Asia, where colonizers and colonized more often than not fell into conflict.

French migration to Texas is less understood than its history, if only because most immigrants have remained anonymous. François Lagarde traces the flow and progress of that migration over the past two centuries. As with the concept of "French," the notion of "immigration" shows different faces, whether the emigrant becomes an immigrant and whether he or she is French-born or first-generation *native*. Immigration is a *metissage*, a transitive process, the stuff for psychologists and novel writers, wrote René Rémond.² Emigration and immigration are of course related, but they tend to produce two very distinct stories. Immigrants evolve and experience change, acculturation, assimilation, and often naturalization. They were French or Alsatian or Norman and became American or Texan. To emigrate, to cut one's roots to a homeland, used to take up to three months by sea. Now, it takes a day by air. But it takes a lifetime, and even two generations, to immigrate. Today, more than before, French people *migrate*, or reside temporarily and move again, rather than immigrate, or stay and die in Texas. Carl Brasseaux maps out and explains "French- or Creole-speaking" immigration of Cajuns and Louisianians to oil- and university-rich Texas. French-born immigrants and American-born Cajuns share, in that sense, the same economic pull.

If French immigration has overwhelmingly been more economic than cultural, some French culture may nevertheless be encountered in Texas. From universities and museums and a Consulat de France in Houston to French companies, schools, restaurants, antique shops, and Bastille Days, French culture is present today in Texas. French art also can be discovered in Texas, just as an abundance of French literature and imagery on Texas is to be found in France. Dominique de Menil and John Schlumberger brought to Houston a beautiful museum and much art and culture, but their fortune made them an exception. The French collections of Sarah Campbell Blaffer and Marion Koogler McNay helped establish museums in Houston and San Antonio. There were, and are, French painters in Texas, among them Théodore Gentilz and Eugénie Lavender, as Martha Utterback explains in rich detail. There have been architects including Paul Cret, who designed the University of Texas campus in Austin in the 1930s. But acculturation erases origins, and Richard Cleary asks pertinently whether there is *French* architecture in Texas. French travelers from Théodore Pavie to Simone de Beauvoir have written about Texas, and Alexandra Wettlaufer finds how French identity invents an In-

dian or Texan *Other* that is exotic and imaginary. To conclude this march through time, François Lagarde sketches a portrait of the contemporary French economic presence in Texas and of its invisible but powerful hand.

Some French figures of Texas history or ethnohistory could have been presented here in more detail. Jean Jarry deserted La Salle and became chief of the Coahuiltecan Indians. When found by de Leon in 1688, he proclaimed his identity with a loud “Me français! Me católico!” which is exemplary. The story of the Talon children who came with La Salle and who were made prisoners and became culturally Indian is well known and need not be repeated, but others should be researched. Xavier Blanchard Debray, a graduate of Saint-Cyr Academy, emigrated in 1848 and led a popular Confederate regiment during the Civil War. He is buried a few feet away from Stephen Austin and Ashbel Smith in the Texas State Cemetery in Austin. Emmanuel Domenech wrote wonderful books about his life as a missionary and explorer in Texas and Mexico and deserves a full study. Dominique de Menil and especially Brother Marie-Alain Couturier, who initiated the Rothko Chapel in Houston, also deserve full and non-hagiographic studies. Many French immigrants’ stories, for want of their history, could be remembered and told.

The French in Texas make for an original bric-a-brac à la Menil, a collection of well-known and forgotten people, groups, events, books, works of art, and archives whose common denominators are France and immigration. France has been a powerful and colonial nation, and its interest in Texas was aroused when the country of La Salle and Saligny had a colonial empire. Texas was another potential colony for France, though not in a political sense; Texas was a place to send colonists and colonizing progressive scientists who carried out France’s so-called *mission civilisatrice*.

The French in Texas have a past, a history long enough that it guarantees them a future in Texas. They also have a present as they migrate and immigrate. Like millions of other migrants today, they experience radical environmental and cultural change. May this book bring them comfort on their voyage.

NOTES

1. *The French Texans* (San Antonio: Institute of Texan Cultures, 1973).
2. René Rémond, *Les États-Unis devant l'opinion française, 1851–1852* (Paris: Colin, 1962), 1:118.

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