

THERIOT FAMILIES IN LOUISIANA

by Karen Theriot Reader

Today in the U.S. state of Louisiana there are thousands of individuals with the surname Theriot. That is the usual spelling there, although it is also much less commonly spelled Terrio. Despite the variations, the Theriots are related, descendants of the single French immigrant couple who settled in Acadia in 1636. Spelled Jehan Terriau on the 1671 census at Port Royal, this first settler was then age 70 and his wife Perrine Rau was 60. For four generations his descendants continued to live in Acadia, until the *Grand dérangement* forced them to flee or to be deported.

In 1755 the British controlled the land they called Nova Scotia, and the French and Indian (or Seven Years') War was imminent, although not yet declared. It would be fought between France and Britain for control of the territories in North America. Estimates are that of the 14,000 Acadians living in the area known to them as *l'Acadie*, 7,000 were forcibly deported by the British in the decade after 1755. More than half of these deportees perished of disease, malnutrition, and even ship wreck.

The first exiles were sent in 1755 to the British colonial states along the Atlantic seacoast, from Massachusetts to Georgia. For example, several Theriot families were among the 913 exiles shipped to Maryland on four badly overcrowded transports. Provisions aboard were exhausted before they arrived. To make matters worse, the local authorities had not been warned, and were not prepared to accept them. Four of the female Theriots among them survived to immigrate with their families to Louisiana in 1766 and 1767.

The colonial territory of Virginia, however, flatly refused to accept the unwelcome foreigners sent there, and after some delays several shiploads containing 1,150 persons from the Grand Pré and Rivière-aux-canards region of Nova Scotia were sent to England. These miserable exiles included some Theriots, who languished in seaport detention centers until war's end in 1763. Among them, some Theriot families lived at Penryn, near the English port of Falmouth. After that brief but unhappy stay in Virginia, and their miserable transatlantic passage, many died. The cemetery register of the local Anglican churchyard enumerates the burial of 16 Theriots among the 70 detainees who died in just over a year after arrival. Even allowing for births, by war's end there were only 157 Acadians left of the initial 200 arrivals. Thirty of these survivors were Theriots.

Bristol, Liverpool and Southampton were the other English ports where Acadians were detained. At the end of the war in 1763, the remnants of all four of these groups embarked from Virginia totaled only 753 persons, amounting to just half of the original deportees. These survivors were then shipped off to France, where they were dumped in

coastal cities, and lived precariously on a small dole provided by the French crown. They were forced to live a marginal and miserable life in nearly serf-like conditions, which contrasted strongly with their former lives in Acadia as independent yeoman farmers.

Those Theriot families in Acadia who fled to French-controlled Île Saint-Jean around 1750 fared no better. Eventually the 1758 fall of the French fortress at Louisbourg allowed the British to round up these unlucky families for deportation as well. Sent directly to France aboard crowded ships, they often arrived sick and weakened. At least two of the ships sending these refugees to France were shipwrecked, with tremendous loss of life, among them more Theriots.

Although women named Theriot were of course present in the early settlement of Louisiana, this article will concentrate on the male immigrants, who left behind the continuing legacy of the Theriot surname. I will spell the surname as it is usually done in Louisiana, after spelling became fairly consistent following the American Civil War. A total of only 42 individuals born with the surname Theriot came to Louisiana in the eighteenth century, sixteen of them male.

I will give Roman numerals to those first male Theriots in Louisiana, and list their male ancestors back to Jehan. Each Arabic number in parentheses after a name refers to that number assigned by Stephen A. White in his monumental *Dictionnaire généalogique des familles acadiennes* and in its as yet unpublished sequel. They are listed chronologically in the order in which they arrived in Louisiana.

LIST OF IMMIGRANTS (SAW #)

DESCENDANCE FROM JEHAN

I. Joseph (47)	Jehan (1)
II. Thomas (61)	Jehan (1)
III. Ambroise (71)	Jehan (1)
IV. Paul (Hippolyte)	Jehan (1)
V. François-Xavier	Jehan (1)
VI. Olivier (73)	Jehan (1)
VII. Olivier-Marie	Jehan (1)
VIII. Jean-Toussaint	Jehan (1)
IX. Jean-Charles	Jehan (1)
X. Jacques-Félix	Jehan (1)
XI. Pierre (56)	Jehan (1)
XII. Pierre-Marie	Jehan (1)
XIII. Jean-Jacques	Jehan (1)
XIV. Jean-Baptiste (66)	Jehan (1)
XV. Jean-Baptiste	Jehan (1)
XVI. Joseph	Jehan (1)

There were two distinct waves of Acadian immigrants to Louisiana—a first group of around 1,500 persons arrived from different locations in the 1760s, including five Theriot males. Another group of 1,500 came in a large immigration project from France in 1785. Eleven Theriot males were in that group. They were all finally to become known as “Cadiens” or today as “Cajuns.”

THE FIRST WAVE OF IMMIGRATION

After the war ended in 1763, the first groups of Acadians left Nova Scotia, arriving in Louisiana in 1765 and 1766. By then, it was clear that their rich and fertile lands in the territories conquered by the British would never be restored to them, for they had been given to newly-arrived British and Scots. The Acadians probably emigrated as soon as they could afford to hire ships to transport them and their families.

My own ancestor Joseph (47) Theriot left with his wife and two surviving daughters on one of the first ships. They may have traveled directly to the port of New Orleans, unlike the initial group of Acadian immigrants led by Broussard dit Beausoleil, who first made a stop in Saint Domingue (today's Haiti). Joseph (47) was born in Grand Pré and baptized at the church of Saint-Charles-des-Mines in 1732. He married Madeleine Bourgeois from Beaubassin around 1758, after the *Grand dérangement* had begun. The family was imprisoned at the British Fort Edward in 1761 and 1762, and may have been moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia by 1763. During this time one of their children apparently died. The first Theriot native-born in Louisiana may have been Pierre, son of Joseph, born around 1767 along the first Acadian Coast, in what is today St. James Parish. Pierre and his wife Anastasie Michel had 15 children. By the 1810 census, he owned sixteen slaves and a large sugar plantation. When Pierre died in 1853 during a severe yellow fever epidemic he owned 132 slaves and was a very wealthy man. He was buried in a grandiose crypt at Convent, St. James Parish, Louisiana.

One of Pierre's sons was Michel Eloi Theriot, who moved south onto land in today's Terrebonne Parish that he was granted for service in the War of 1812. There he had fourteen children, who all married. He created a profitable plantation, which also relied on slave labor. He gave his name to the small community still called Theriot, Louisiana.

My ancestor Charles was the youngest child in the family of Joseph (47) Theriot and Madeleine Bourgeois, and so a brother of Pierre. He left at the time of his marriage in 1804 to settle in the Attakapas district on the prairies of southwest Louisiana, situated west of the Mississippi river settlements called the First and Second Acadian Coasts. No doubt all the good land was already taken up along the Mississippi river, and he sought to join other Cajuns establishing ranches on the western prairies. He probably raised cattle and horses for the New Orleans market. Like his brother and nephew, he did well

economically. At his death his estate was appraised at \$12,500 in 1840 dollars, and he owned twelve slaves.

Another Joseph (19) Theriot was a generation older than my Joseph (47) and had married Françoise Melanson at Grand Pré in 1725. They had twelve children before the deportations began, and their fate is peculiarly representative of the Acadian diaspora. The family moved to Île Saint-Jean with the seven unmarried children around 1750, fleeing the British encroachments. The eldest son Alexis (35) eventually went to New Brunswick, and his children settled in various places in Canada. The second son, another Joseph (40), sometimes confused with my ancestor, was caught up in the 1758 deportations. His wife died at sea on the way to France, along with their three children, and he himself died in Cherbourg, France, in 1759. The third son Étienne (44) had a son who ended up in the French Caribbean colony of Saint Domingue, where three children were born to him, and he probably died there as well. The fourth and fifth children were Françoise and Euphrosine, who fled with their husbands to Île Saint-Jean, and were deported from there, and died in France. The sixth child was Jacques (49), who married, and was imprisoned at Halifax. But somehow after war's end he managed to remain in Nova Scotia, and was on the 1770 census there. The seventh child, Marguerite-Susanne, died in 1817 in Carleton, Quebec Province. The ninth child, Madeleine, disappears after the 1752 census. After the war ended the mother of this Joseph (19) Theriot family, the widow Françoise Melanson, left Nova Scotia by ship bound for Louisiana with her four youngest sons. They were Thomas (II on my chart), Ambroise (III), Paul (Hippolyte) (IV) and François-Xavier (V).

These first five male Theriots in Louisiana were not very closely related, my Joseph (47) being only third cousin to the brothers, sons of Françoise. They all married, and Thomas especially had numerous progeny in Louisiana. Ambroise and François-Xavier left no male descendants who carry the name today. These five were in the only two households which contained Theriot males in this earliest immigration. When they first arrived in Louisiana, the territory had just been transferred from France to Spain.

SECOND WAVE OF IMMIGRATION

In 1785, when the second important group of Acadians arrived, Spanish colonial power was well-established. Even the local priests were Spanish-speaking, recording the Catholic parish records in Spanish and converting the given names to Spanish versions in the registers. This second major Acadian immigration to Louisiana was of the exiles who had spent a generation in France, living precariously on government allotments, and resented by both the non-Acadian peasants and certain French nobles who tried to take advantage of them in abortive land development schemes. Some were sent to various French colonies, such as Saint-Domingue and even the Falkland Islands. After much suffering, most of the few who managed to survive were returned to France.

In 1785, some 1,500 of the 2,400 Acadian survivors in France accepted an offer from Spain to relocate them to Louisiana. Included in this number were several Theriot families totaling eleven males and twenty females. They had been encouraged by an Acadian exile named Olivier Theriot (VI on the chart). In France, Olivier made shoes to eke out a living, but he had been educated for the priesthood as a young man. He made sacrifices to travel around France promoting the Louisiana immigration plan; he wrote letters to the authorities, and spoke to other Acadians. He was never compensated for his efforts as promised, but remained a hero to the Acadians who finally found refuge in Louisiana.

The first of the seven ships funded by Spain in order for the Acadians to leave France for Louisiana was *Le Bon Papa*, which left Nantes on May 10, 1785, with no Theriots aboard. The second to get underway was *La Bergère*, which embarked on May 14, 1785, and arrived at its destination three months later. Among the Acadian passengers was Olivier Theriot (VI), with his wife, two sons—Olivier-Marie (VII) and Jean-Toussaint (VIII)—and brother Jean-Charles Theriot (IX). They were placed at the top of the manifest list as the first family aboard, in honor of Olivier's importance to the whole expedition. Another brother Jacques Theriot (X) was listed as head of the seventh family. Olivier's parents and three of his siblings had died in France.

The third ship was *Le Beaumont*, which had no Theriot passengers. The fourth ship of the seven financed by Spain was *Le Saint-Rémi*, which had only one Theriot family whose head was Pierre (XI), accompanied by his 15-year-old son Pierre-Marie Theriot (XII). Pierre had been part of the Virginia group shipped to England, and he spent the years from 1756 to 1763 in Penryn, near Falmouth. His parents died there. When the war ended, he and his three sisters were sent to France with the other exiles. His wife and their other seven children would die in France.

The fifth ship was *L'Amitié*, which counted no Theriots among the passengers. The sixth ship was *La Ville d'Archangel*, and it carried the most Theriot individuals—fourteen female and 3 male. One head of household was Jean-Jacques Theriot (XIII), widowed twice, traveling with five of his daughters. He left no male descendant to carry on the surname. The last household enumerated was that of Jean-Baptiste Theriot (XIV) with his wife and son, Jean-Baptiste Theriot (XV), age eight years. The boy seemed not to have survived the voyage, and his father left no other male offspring to carry on the name.

The last of the seven ships was *La Caroline*, which arrived in mid-December 1765. It had a single Theriot aboard, another Joseph (XVI), age 27 years. He had been born in Bristol, England to exiled Acadians. His father and three siblings died in France. None of his sons survived to perpetuate the surname.

These 1785 immigrant families received a concession of land and farm tools from the Spanish colonial government, and most settled along Bayou Lafourche, from today's Ascension Parish to Lafourche Interior. The first and second Acadian coasts along the Mississippi River had long been settled by the earliest arrivals. After 1785, there were no new Theriot immigrants. From these first two waves stem all Theriots living in Louisiana for generations.