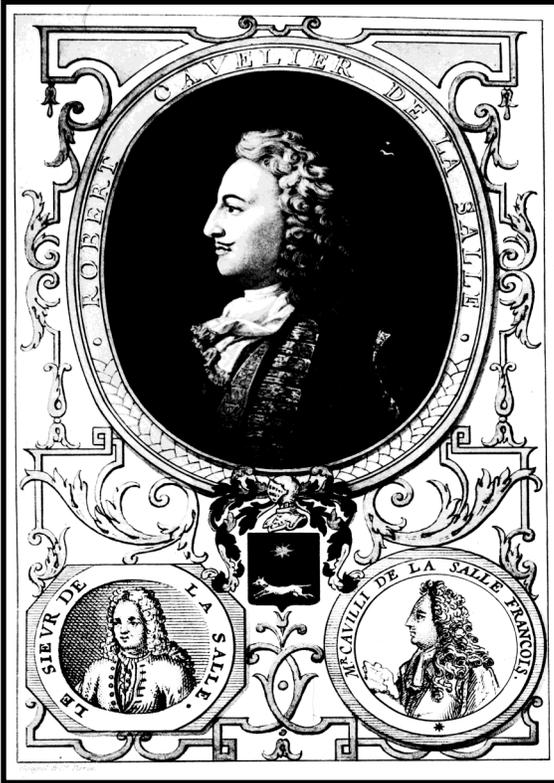


# The French Texans



*Rene-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle*

Although a French flag of some sort is represented in “six flags over Texas” displays, France never—in any sense of political control or official claims—flew a flag over Texas and never gave her own citizens strong reasons for emigration.

However, René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, did make one foray west of the drainage of the Mississippi, and General Charles Lallemand did lead a short-lived military colony into East Texas.

France, in the New World, was more interested in trade than settlement and was often distracted by continental European problems. The nation was neither equipped for colonial ventures nor had that much interest in the western Gulf of Mexico.

Nevertheless, in 1685 the young Sieur de La Salle landed at Matagorda Bay, Texas, some 600 miles west of his target: the Mississippi River. The few colonists he brought were to found a colony at the mouth of the Mississippi, to which France did have a claim, and thus tie down France's claims that, for a time, stretched from Canada to the Gulf—in theory.

Encountering storms and perhaps suffering from bad navigation, the ships found the Spanish coast. Navigation in those days could determine, with an exactness of perhaps 30 miles on a good day, position north and south. But the day was not good, and the northern shore of the Gulf of Mexico stretches more east and west. In those days,

east and west positions on a rotating globe were hard to determine.

Thus, scholars still argue whether the French landfall was a mistake or a deliberate measure to test Spain. In any case, Sieur de La Salle's group built a stockade named Fort St. Louis. In a short time, the fort was ransacked by natives and the colonists killed or dispersed. The effort, which Spain soon knew about, had the effect of drawing Spanish exploration and mission-founding efforts into the eastern parts of the province.

More than a century later, in 1818, General Lallemand led a group of Emperor Napoleon's former officers and soldiers into Spanish lands near present day Liberty. The area, nearly vacant then, seemed a likely place for the group. Baron Charles François Antoine Lallemand, general in the service of and friend to the emperor, could have made his motives clear but did not. The baron claimed the settlement was agricultural; rumor called it a military colony from which an effort could be launched to rescue Napoleon and reinstate his empire. But the skills of soldiers proved inadequate for a frontier, and the Spanish army threatened an assault. The group struck camp, never to return. However, as with La Salle, the French presence, however ephemeral, roused Spain to secure the Texas borderland. In fact, the attention called to the area by the “colony”—called Champ d'Asile—helped define the Sabine River as the border of Louisiana and Texas.

But the Republic of Texas, some years later, was faced with the problems of a population too small for a nation, so in 1841 laws were established allowing for colonization efforts. This was the empresario system, begun for Texas by Spain, under which a grant was made to an organizer, the empresario, who would bring in colonists for a large land bonus.

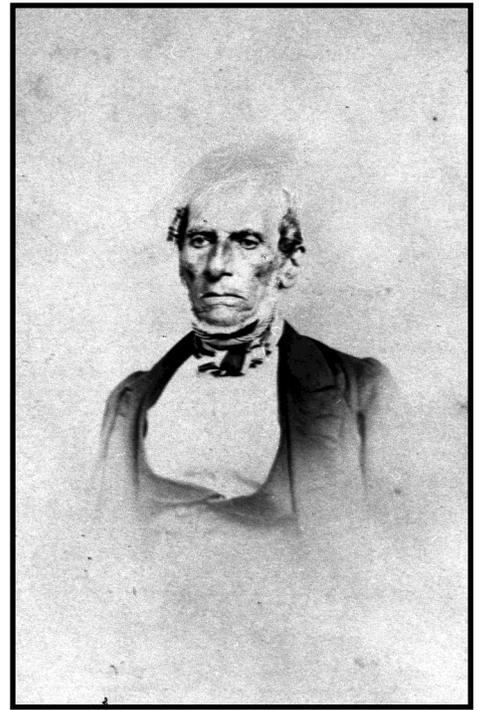
In 1842 Henri Castro was one of several who took advantage of the law. Castro was a fairly wealthy French banker who had a taste for adventure. In two years his efforts resulted in the founding of Castroville west of San Antonio, and in three years more than 2,000 French Alsatians had made it their home.

Castroville, unlike most other French efforts, remains.

Also after 1841, French missionaries were directly responsible for the revitalization of the Catholic Church in Texas, which had been virtually rejected after the Texas Revolution as being simply a part of Mexican rule. This effort established schools and hospitals across the state.

A good number of French Acadians also made Texas their home but only after a couple of moves. Settlements of Canadian French, living in a Nova Scotia colony named Acadia, were expelled by the British in 1755. Many came to French Louisiana and became U.S. citizens when the young country bought Louisiana. They were known as Acadians, or “Cadians,” then “Cajuns.” Generations later, especially during and between the two world wars of the 20th century, some came to Texas on the wave of wartime prosperity. The war years were, in general, boom years for Texas rice production, oil refining, explosives manufacturing, and ship building in the Houston-Golden Triangle part of the state.

In particular, the Golden Triangle (Orange, Port Arthur, and Beaumont) is a modern home for the Cajun language, a French-based creole laced with idioms from English, German, Spanish, American Indian, and Black dialects. Cajun cuisine is likewise extraordinary.



Henri Castro



Today, Texas organizations such as the Alliance Française celebrate Bastille Day, preserve spoken French and French foods, and serve as reminders of the French influence in Texas as well.

*Benjamin Foulois with the No. 1 Wright Pusher airplane, Eagle Pass, 1911—He soloed in a Wright Type B at Ft. Sam Houston in 1910 and by 1915 commanded the newly formed First Aero Squadron, which was to develop into the world’s greatest air force. He was the first American to fly in combat (during Pershing’s expedition against Pancho Villa in Mexico) and was chief of the Army Air Corps from 1931 to 1935.*

## Giraud's French Gothic

François Giraud, born in South Carolina of French parents, studied engineering in Paris, then decided on Texas as a home. In 1848 he became the first surveyor for the city of San Antonio. In 1854 he convinced city officials to set aside San Pedro Springs as a park, now the second-oldest city park in the United States.

Giraud redefined the boundaries and structures of the Spanish missions and established his name as an architect by designing the buildings for the old Ursuline Academy (today's Southwest Craft Center) and the main buildings of St. Mary's University.

One of his most interesting design accomplishments is the French Gothic cathedral of San Fernando, a building enclosing the old walls of the original Spanish parish church. The cathedral opened formally in 1873, while Giraud was serving as mayor of San Antonio.



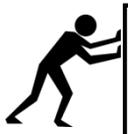
Castroville in the 1880s, the first St. Louis Catholic Church (c.1845) at far left; the second St. Louis Church in center foreground; and the most recent St. Louis Church, built 1870, on the right.



San Antonio's Ursuline Academy designed by Giraud, now the Southwest Craft Center.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ PERIOD: \_\_\_\_\_

The “push-pull” theory says that people migrate because things in their lives *push* them to leave, and things in a new place *pull* them.  
*Instructions: Decide what economic factors push and pull people. Complete the graphic organizer below using the word bank.*



Economic Push Factors

Economic Pull Factors



**WORD BANK**

Lost Job	Higher Wages
Available Work	Low Pay

## French Settlers in Texas

Many French settlers in Texas arrived here by way of Canada and Louisiana. In the early 1700s, Catholics from the French provinces of Normandy and Brittany sailed to Canada and settled in Nova Scotia, also called Acadia. The British controlled Canada at that time, and the English-speaking people there did not want the French-speaking Acadians to live there. The British drove them from their homes in 1755, and many Acadians moved to Louisiana, where other French settlements already existed.

The Acadians, or “Cadians,” then “Cajuns,” lived in Louisiana and settled along the coastline. Shortly after 1900, Cajuns came to Texas from Louisiana to find work. Many were employed in the oil, gas and fishing industries in the Golden Triangle, or the Port Arthur-Orange-Beaumont area. Others became farmers, and today there are many Cajuns in east Texas.

Other French settlements were established in central Texas. A wealthy French banker, Henri Castro, received a land grant in 1842 and was the most successful French colonizer. Within 5 years he had settled 485 families and 457 single men and helped establish the towns of Castroville, Quihi, Vandenburg and D’Hanis.

What social push factors caused French settlers to leave Canada?

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What social pull factors caused Acadians to move to Louisiana?

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What economic pull factors brought Cajuns to Texas?

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## Digging Deeper

Using **Texans One and All: The French Texans**, answer the following questions about why French immigrants moved to Texas and what their life was like in the state.

Describe early French interests in the New World and why they first came to Texas.

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How would you describe French colonization of Texas? Did the French government play a significant role in the settlement of Texas? Support your answer with evidence from the reading.

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When did many Cajuns come to Texas from Louisiana?

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What kinds of jobs did many Cajuns find in Texas?

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Describe the Cajun language.

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Now that you have learned about the French in Texas, do you think the French flag should be included in the “six flags over Texas”? Why or why not?

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## Geography Skills

Use your textbook to find the locations mentioned as significant to the French experience in Texas, and label them on the map below.



- Port Arthur
- Orange
- Beaumont
- Castroville
- Quihi
- Vandenburg
- D’Hanis
- Matagorda Bay

Where do you see French and Cajun influences in Texas today?

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### Summarize What You Learned

Write 2 sentences to summarize what you learned about French Texans and economic push and pull factors.

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