



LaSalle



John Law



Darenbourg

Robert de La Salle, John Law, and Karl Darenbourg. *Drawings by Raymond Calvert.*

The German Coast of Louisiana

THE FRENCH COLONIAL PERIOD

The Côte des Allemands under the Compagnie des Indes

For decades France neglected Louisiana, that huge area between the Great Lakes and the Gulf Coast, which Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle claimed for France in 1682. France had been almost continually at war since La Salle's claim and had no means at its disposal to retain the vast territory of its newly acquired colony. In addition Louis XIV was opposed to sending his citizens to French possessions overseas. He valued his population, if for no other reason than as a source for taxation. In hopes of discouraging England and Spain from encroaching on his possession, in 1712 the king granted a fifteen-year trade monopoly for the development of Louisiana to Antoine Crozat. Crozat at that time was perhaps the wealthiest man in France, easily in a position to finance this great enterprise. However, after losing more than two million *livres* in prospecting for precious metals and gems in Louisiana, in 1717 he returned his charter to France. From 1682 until the king's death in 1715 fewer than four hundred emigrants were permitted to settle in Louisiana, partly explaining the failure of Crozat to develop the colony.

Louis XIV's successor, the regent duc d'Orleans, faced empty royal coffers, drained by constant warfare and the extravagances of the Sun King and his court. In desperation the duke seized upon a scheme developed by the professional gambler John Law, a Scotsman who had fled murder charges in his homeland. Law first created a private bank that issued paper money, a novelty at that time. The next year Law saw a great opportunity in the charter just returned by Crozat to the crown. He persuaded the regent that the development of Louisiana was far too large an undertaking for any individual and should be entrusted to a company owned by stockholders.

So the Company of the West was born, headed by none other than John Law. The company received a trade monopoly for twenty-five

years with the right to lease and sell the land, to control the forts, ships, and weapons already existing in Louisiana, to conscript soldiers, and to appoint officers and officials. The contract obligated the company to bring 6,000 whites and 3,000 blacks into Louisiana within ten years. Law could issue virtually unlimited amounts of stock in the Company of the West. Through this leverage he promised the French government the liquidation of state debt. Because of the clever salesmanship of the company, large population segments wanted to buy stock in Louisiana. A true craze of speculation ensued, stemming from shameless descriptions of the many riches to be found in Louisiana. In a short time the stock rose to astronomic values. Two years later Law issued 100,000 more shares of stock when he merged the Company of the West with the East Indies and China companies to become the *Compagnie des Indes*. Frantic buying of the stock by French investors continued, all expecting to share in the mineral riches of Louisiana. The regent was so pleased with Law's financial successes that he made Law's private bank the official Bank of France, with Law as director general.

Meanwhile colonization was pushed by the company. If Louisiana was going to develop, it needed people, white settlers and black slaves. It became the policy of the *Compagnie des Indes* to give large land grants to wealthy Frenchmen. The concessionaires were themselves responsible for acquiring settlers to farm the land as *engagés*, indentured workers who legally stood between being free men and slaves. In 1718, 300 concessionaires agreed to leave France to develop the riches on the Louisiana plantation sites granted to them. Another hundred were to come the next year. It was obvious, however, that voluntary immigration would never produce the 6,000 white *engagés* required of the *Compagnie des Indes*. So the company turned to the unwanted elements of French society as a population source. Well over a thousand of the dregs of society were rounded up the next year. Criminals, drunks, prostitutes, the penniless, even the mentally ill and infirm were enlisted by force, put under special guard, and shipped to Louisiana.

As could be expected, these immigrants comprised just as undesirable a workforce in Louisiana as they had in France. Gov. Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville complained so bitterly to the company that the practice was stopped within a year. Consequently a new policy for populating Louisiana was developed, borrowed by Law from another director of the *Compagnie des Indes*. This person was Jean-Pierre Purry, a Swiss businessman who proposed recruiting Germans and German-speaking Swiss for Louisiana. These people would have

just the qualities needed for settlers in a new colony, being of sturdy stock, honest, and hardworking. Although the regent had reservations about importing foreigners who might challenge French control of Louisiana, he reluctantly agreed to Law's plan.

Purry was put in charge of recruitment, which was to reach to the far corners of the German states and German-speaking Switzerland. Much of Europe at this time was still in economic ruin caused by the Thirty Years War and Louis XIV's wars for the Rhineland. Peasant farmers had little hope of more than scraping together a meager living in their homeland. Agents of the *Compagnie des Indes* circulated recruitment brochures in these areas, promising a tropical paradise filled with gold, silver, copper, and lead deposits. The German recruits, all of whom expected to become workers indentured to John Law, signed up in droves. Law had obtained three land grants, one in New Biloxi, another on the east bank of the Mississippi at English Turn, and a third, elevated to a principality, on the Arkansas River near its juncture with the Mississippi. The recruitment efforts of the *Compagnie des Indes* were far more successful than had been expected. Caravans made up of entire villages led by the mayor left their homeland. Estimates vary from 4,000 to 10,000, including those headed for the Louisiana Swiss regiment and workers assigned to the army. The number of emigrants recruited for Louisiana was probably somewhere in between these two figures. Many were discouraged by the long journey to the French ports, while others were stopped at the border by the threat of having their property confiscated and losing their citizenship. Some settled in France rather than await uncertain embarkation, while others returned to their homeland.

Embarkation at Lorient

When these emigrants began to arrive at the port of embarkation in July of 1720, the transport ships to take them to Louisiana were not yet ready. No provision had been made by the *Compagnie des Indes* for the unexpected thousands who continued to arrive in Lorient, the French port where they were to embark. On the outskirts a makeshift camp was set up around a fountain to supply water. Of the 3,991 emigrants known to have arrived in Lorient, up to 2,000 died in an epidemic, thought to be cholera, which broke out in this crowded and unsanitary holding pen.

The first ship to depart for Louisiana, the *Deux Frères*, sailed in mid-November of 1720 after a five-month delay. But the contagion of

the camp was carried aboard by the passengers, and half died in transit, with only 130 Germans and about 30 Swiss reaching Louisiana. Also that month 141 Swiss soldiers of the Merveilleux Company departed on the *Mutiné* and arrived in Old Biloxi, luckily without mishap. The next ship to sail, the *Garonne*, departed two months later, again with ill passengers. First it stopped in Brest so that the Germans on board could be treated. After three months at sea, the ship was captured by pirates in Santo Domingo and the passengers held captive for six weeks. When finally released and transported to Louisiana by the *Durance*, only 50 Germans had survived. The fourth ship, the *Charente*, sailed in early February of 1721 but, proving un-seaworthy, had to return to port, where it was later auctioned. Its passengers were probably loaded onto the *Portefaix*, which sailed in early March and brought the 300 on board safely to Old Biloxi.

Of note was the passenger Karl Friedrich Darensbourg, who later was to serve for forty-eight years as the commander of the German Coast of Louisiana. Darensbourg had been born in the German section of Stockholm, Sweden. His parents were of noble lineage, originating from Arensborg on the Swedish island of Oesel. As a young man he entered a military academy and was commissioned as an officer in the Swedish military. In 1721 he enlisted with John Law's *Compagnie des Indes* as a captain-at-half-pay and sailed to Louisiana. There he was made commandant of the German Coast, a position that had both military and civil duties. In this capacity he served as commander of the militia as well as civil judge and mediator for the grievances of the colonists.

In April the *Venus* departed with 65 Swiss, the rest of the Merveilleux Company, and reached Old Biloxi safely. Two more ships sailed in early May, the *Saint-André* and the *Durance*. On the *Saint-André* 53 of the 158 Germans died of contagion before reaching Louisiana. The *Durance* fared better, losing only 8 passengers and bringing 100 Germans to Old Biloxi. The last ship to sail, the *Saône*, was delayed for seven months and probably did not transport any Germans. In May of 1721 about 400 Germans, still waiting in the ill-fated tent city at Lorient, were finally given a small travel stipend and sent back to their homeland. These Germans were probably those who were to have sailed on the *Saône*. Six hundred Germans in Lorient remain unaccounted for. No doubt they were among those who settled elsewhere in France or returned to their homeland before May of 1721. This date marks the end of the *Compagnie des Indes*' attempts to bring

German settlers to Louisiana, an effort that can only be characterized as a disaster. Of the 4,000 Germans known to have arrived in Lorient with the purpose of emigrating to Louisiana as workers or soldiers, only about 1,000 reached their destination.

In Old Biloxi, east of the Mississippi, no provisions had been made for the care of the arriving immigrants. Bienville ordered the Swiss worker/soldiers to go inland and find food and shelter on their own. But of those would-be *engagés* left on the beaches, half died from sunstroke, thirst, or starvation or from eating poisonous weeds or spoiled oysters, which had washed up on the sand. The local Indians, hearing of their plight from the Swiss, could save only some of them by supplying corn and deer meat. One group of Germans was transferred by Bienville to Law's concession in New Biloxi on the north shore of the gulf, where conditions were better. Those Germans still alive, who had arrived on board the *Deux Frères*, were transported to Law's large Arkansas concession. This group was comprised of about fifty German and a larger number of French *engagés*. The perilous voyage up the Mississippi against the strong current of the river took several months. Upon arrival in early August of 1721 they began clearing and planting the land and building shelter for the winter. Within two months, however, they were informed by a group of Swiss soldiers that John Law had gone bankrupt and fled from France.

Already in May of 1720 the price of the stock issued by the *Compagnie des Indes* had begun to tumble. By December it had become virtually worthless, destroying the Bank of France and bankrupting thousands of French investors. France immediately confiscated Law's French property but let matters drift concerning Louisiana. Those German *engagés* on Law's Arkansas property, originally recruited by the *Compagnie des Indes*, were now uncertain of their status. Most of them abandoned the settlement and floated downstream to New Orleans, where they hoped to be repatriated or at least resettled in a less remote area. However, the governor and the administrators in Louisiana as well as the directors of the *Compagnie des Indes* in France were indecisive about the future of Louisiana. No one seemed to know what to do with the settlers.

In the meantime more Germans had arrived in Old Biloxi on the *Durance*, *Saint-André*, and *Portefaix*. Passengers on the *Portefaix* confirmed the news of John Law's bankruptcy. However, the paralysis of the administration again left this large group of Germans stranded on the inhospitable beaches of Old Biloxi. By the end of 1721 the majority of

these approximately five hundred Germans had died of disease, exposure, or starvation. With the return of the Arkansas Germans to New Orleans, Bienville realized that he must act. First he consulted with Darensbourg, a former captain in the Swedish army who had been put in charge of the German immigrants. Then he resolved to take inland all the surviving Germans plus the few Swiss from the *Deux Frères*. Longboats were requisitioned to transport these survivors to the west bank of the Mississippi, about thirty miles above New Orleans. The transfer was completed by February of 1722.

Settlement on the German Coast

This area, already consigned but neglected by its French owner, was granted by Bienville to the new arrivals. The land extended between present-day Lucy and Hahnville and covered a large area, which was not known ever to have flooded. It was choice land, described as beautiful and fertile, and had already been partially cleared and cultivated by two Indian tribes. The settlers were located on the inner (west) bank of the Bonnet Carré bend, which was connected by a bayou to *Lac des Ouachas*. This large lake, located approximately five miles southwest of the German colony, was later named *Lac des Allemands* and the colony itself *Aux Ouacha* or *le Village des Allemands*.

The settlers were no longer *engagés* for Law's large concessions but now had the status of *habitants*, that is, concessionaires of the company in their own right. Penniless as they were, the Germans received only small land grants, which they did not yet fully own. The Superior Council, which had been created by the *Compagnie des Indes* as the ruling body in Louisiana, now controlled the developing economy. The new arrivals were forced to sell their products to the company and, in turn, would receive the necessities of life, such as food and tools, all at fixed prices.

Preparations for settlement of these German colonists were begun in late 1721. By the next year the Germans had established three villages, Hoffen, Marienthal, and Augsburg. Together there were 69 men, 79 women, and 99 children for a total of 247 persons. An earlier census had estimated 330 settlers but had incorrectly included about 80 temporary workers sent by the *Compagnie des Indes* to assist the newcomers. Within a year they had already planted rice, corn, and other vegetables. Tobacco was also to be grown at the insistence of the *Compagnie des Indes*, to which the crop was pledged.

The five-acre concession where Karl Darensbourg, the *Kommandant des Allemands*, lived was named Karlstein in his honor (now Killona

on the river's west bank). Both Karlstein and Hoffen were located directly on the Mississippi. The two other settlements, Marienthal and Augsburg, were located on the former Indian fields, which were easy to cultivate. One was established by fourteen families about seven-tenths of a mile away from the river, the second by twenty-one families about a mile and a half distant from the Mississippi. A graveyard lay on the common ground between the two neighboring villages. It bordered the rear portion of Darensbourg's grant, which stretched about half a mile along the river but was shallow in depth. This homestead was the largest land grant on the coast, befitting the newly appointed commandant of the Germans.

Since the plots on the Mississippi were assigned according to the contour of the river, the size of each plot was determined by the river frontage. The depth of the plots was always the same, namely forty linear *arpents*, an old French land measurement equaling about a mile and a half. Therefore a plot of five *arpents*, approximately the size of most of the land grants allotted to the German settlers, contained somewhat less than five acres in the form of a narrow rectangle. The term *côte* or *anse*, hence *Côte des Allemands*, designated the concave bank of the river bend. Those land grants on the concave bank had the advantage of their shorelines being built up by the river, while the grants on the convex banks, which were given the term *île* or *pointe*, lost land through erosion. The extension of the German colony to the East Bank, directly across the river from the *Côte des Allemands*, was delayed by this phenomenon.

The Germans immediately set about building homes and clearing and planting the land, assisted by workers supplied by the *Compagnie des Indes*. The necessary lumber, tools, and seeds were also supplied by the company, showing how much faith Bienville had in the future of the German settlement. Perhaps he had foreseen its productivity when he located these Germans just upriver from the future capital of the Louisiana colony.

In September of 1722 a devastating hurricane inundated the area, destroyed the crops, and drowned a number of the colonists. The hurricane drove masses of water from *Lac des Allemands* over the Germans' fields and into their villages. After the flood most of the citizens of Augsburg and Marienthal moved to high ground in Hoffen. It was a bitter experience to learn that only those areas that lay directly on the river could be safely farmed.

The census taken in 1724 counted 56 German families in the German settlement, altogether 169 people. Almost a third of the original settlers

had been dispersed or drowned. Because of this catastrophe some of the German colonists acquired new concessions farther downriver. Thirteen families became *engagés* on Governor Bienville's land, and a few may have returned to Europe. Most of the Germans now lived on the river in the village of Hoffen. One of the other two villages was now only half-populated with fourteen families, while the second village retained only three hardy settlers.

The 1724 census noted that all of the German families had planted vegetables and grain and were able to feed their cattle. In addition they were building levees on the river frontage of their properties. Although the German farmers were supposed to sell their products at fixed prices only to the *Compagnie des Indes*, by 1724 they were bringing their excess to market in the capital. From the beginning of the settlement the Germans began providing a dependable source of food for the population center in New Orleans.

However, the commentary to this same census recognized the endangered position of these colonists (*Archives Nationales, Ministère des Colonies, Series C 13 C*):

If these German families, the survivors of a far greater number, are not helped by Negroes in their work, gradually they will perish. For what can a man and his wife achieve with a piece of land if they must go to the grist [grinding] mill instead of being able to eat their dinner and rest after their day of strenuous labor. This work [grinding rice into flour] is hard and dangerous for both men and women. Many get hurt; especially the women suffer serious injury. If one of the two gets sick, the other has to do all the work alone, and so both finally die. The soil is unrelenting in the lower portion of the colony. The weeds grow so fast and so thick that, after a short time, it looks as if no work has been accomplished. The land is covered with tree trunks and stumps, but these people have no draft animals so they cannot work with a plow, only with hoes or pick-axes. This, plus the hard labor of grinding rice, destroys these poor people who are good and willing workers. They want nothing more than to be able to remain in a country where they are free from the high taxes imposed on the farmers in Germany. They would consider themselves very lucky if they could obtain one or two Negroes. . . . The German colonists could feed their Negroes well from the grain they plant. They also could sell a great amount of foodstuffs to the large concessions, which, when regularly supplied, could devote themselves to growing indigo, lumbering and other activities useful for export to France and Santo Domingo.

Because the German colony had been so badly stricken by the catastrophic flood of 1722, it developed slowly. By 1724 most of the inhabitants in Hoffen had prepared only about an acre for planting. Nevertheless, together they had managed to clear well over a hundred acres. On their small plots of land the Germans planted primarily corn and rice, which had to be protected from pests. To frighten away these predators the colonists beat on pots and pans during the day and kept fires burning at night. The size of the crops, however, was quite small because of the spring floods and the damage done by birds and rodents. Hulling and grinding rice was a very laborious task requiring a whole day to produce enough flour for bread for two days at the most. Additionally there was the strenuous work of building levees to prevent the repeated flooding.

Nevertheless the German settlers assumed the function of supplying the market of New Orleans during the early years of hardship. The distance to the capital, about thirty miles, was not too far for them to bring their produce in their *pirogues* (a type of canoe) on weekends. Early on, a decree by the Superior Council was needed to protect their products from seizure on the river by hungry soldiers. With their limited number of dray animals and lack of slaves the German colonists could produce only grain and vegetables rather than commercial crops. However, it took only several years until they could contribute to the supplies for New Orleans.

As early as 1725 there was conflict with the Catholic Church over the presence of Protestants in the colony. Father Raphael, the Capuchin Superior of Missions in Louisiana, strongly objected to the commander of the German Coast being a Lutheran. He accused Darensbourg of having a concubine and several illegitimate children and demanded his removal. These allegations were, no doubt, a distortion of the facts by Father Raphael in order to expel a Protestant from a position of command. The census of 1724 had listed an orphan boy as the only inhabitant of Karlstein other than Darensbourg himself. The concubine was probably Marguerite Metzger, a girl of twenty-one who had arrived with her family in 1721 on the *Saint André*. The "illegitimate children" may have been several of the two sons and six daughters born of her union with Darensbourg, solemnized by marriage in 1725. Continued complaints by Raphael finally resulted in an official inquiry, but whatever happened had no consequences for Darensbourg. Bienville had appointed him as commandant of the German Coast and had nothing but respect for his governance. This appointment was perpetuated by

all of the French governors. Darensbourg held the position for forty-eight years, until his removal at the beginning of Spanish rule.

Father Raphael also claimed that Darensbourg had been an obstacle to conversion among the Germans, although there were only ten Protestant families on the entire *Côte des Allemands*. Nevertheless this priest was relentless in his propagation of the Catholic faith. Because of his continued agitation the *Compagnie des Indes* finally agreed to assign a Capuchin priest to the German Coast so that the residents no longer had to journey to the capital to participate in Catholic rites.

The census of 1726 showed that whatever property remained in the two villages set back from the river had been given up and that those colonists had moved to the riverbanks. Only three settlers had a few field workers or cattle; none had slaves or horses. Apparently nothing had been done by the *Compagnie des Indes* to help the German colonists, who still were able to clear sizeable amounts of land on their own. It was most remarkable that Darensbourg had already planted over eight acres and the other German colonists two to five acres. This census showed that the *Village des Allemands* had 152 settlers, a loss of only 17 settlers, who may have moved elsewhere.

The censuses taken in the first ten years of German colonization on the lower Mississippi showed that most of the Germans from Bienville's concession had again resettled upriver with their countrymen. By this time all the land from below New Orleans to the German Coast had been assigned to concessions, although much was not cultivated. Darensbourg wanted more families from the German states to come to Louisiana since they made such good citizens. He thought it would be desirable for the coast to be cultivated as far as Tchoupitoulas, about eleven miles upstream from the city. During the 1720s many colonists had moved to the east bank of the river. On the coast the houses were now built on both sides of the Mississippi and marked the end of the settled area.

The Designation *Côte des Allemands*

The many complaints about the company's neglect of the German farmers in the assignment of slaves apparently finally found an ear. By 1731 there were fifteen land grants on the East Bank, all but one possessing slaves. For the East Bank settlement the place name *Allemands ou Anse aux Outardes* was used. The German settlement on the West Bank had originally been named the *Village des Allemands*. Both were now referred to as the *Côte des Allemands*, which in 1731 had a total

population of 267 *habitants*. This was only a few more than the original number of Germans settling a decade earlier. The west-bank settlement stretched about twelve miles along the river, while the East Bank covered approximately seven miles. Of the fifty-three concessions on the West Bank more than half had slaves. The inventory of cattle had also grown noticeably, but the German colonists still had no horses.

A report made in the spring of 1731 noted that the German settlers were very hardworking and alone furnished the market of New Orleans. With their increased resources the German farmers continued to supply the capital, now with an abundance of vegetables, herbs, butter, eggs, poultry, and other commodities in addition to the staple crops of corn and rice.

Despite the 400 concessions issued to the French nobility in 1718 and 1719 by the *Compagnie des Indes*, almost no development had taken place in Louisiana. Until 1720 there were fewer than 10 functioning concessions on the Mississippi River. Those Frenchmen who had demanded and received large concessions were motivated not by the potential wealth to be earned from developing the land but by the hope of resale profits. After ten years, in 1728, the *Compagnie des Indes* officially invalidated the old concessions between Bayou Manchac and the Gulf of Mexico. Most of the concessionaires had remained in France as absentee landlords and had done nothing to develop their land grants. However, those few concessionaires who had cultivated at least one-third of their land could retain this cultivated portion. The remaining land had to be returned to the company to be given to other settlers in the colony.

Several German families took advantage of this new land apportionment and acquired property on the East Bank below the German colony. They had to abide by the land regulations of the company, i.e., cultivate their river frontage to a depth of about thirteen acres and maintain the levee on the river. No doubt the conditions of the company were hard for the colonists to meet but, on the other hand, were necessary if the colony was to survive.

The development of Louisiana progressed slowly. One observer noted that, of all the colonies founded in America, Louisiana had the hardest beginning and the most problems to overcome. This slow pace was only partially rooted in the difficulties of taming the land. The colonists were also victimized by the trade policies of the *Compagnie des Indes*. It sold them tools and other necessities at high prices and bought their products as cheaply as possible. Much more important to

France was the profit from trade with the West Indies. So Louisiana was not supplied sufficiently either with the workers or the tools needed for development.

Since the *Compagnie des Indes* possessed a tobacco monopoly it demanded that the large concessionaires exclusively plant tobacco. The small farmers on the German Coast, however, continued to concentrate on corn and rice, crops that provided them with income and were best suited to Louisiana's climate. In 1730, however, the exportation of Louisiana tobacco to France was prohibited when the *Compagnie des Indes* released its tobacco rights. The next year the company went bankrupt after seventeen years of heavy investing in Louisiana. Although the assets of the company were sold to pay off the debt, there was a shortfall of millions of *livres*, which the French king had to assume. No doubt this heavy debt was instrumental in his later decision to transfer Louisiana to his cousin Charles III on the throne of Spain.

The loss of France as a tobacco market and the bankruptcy of the *Compagnie des Indes* did not affect the German settlers severely. They had cultivated a mixed economy based on supplying New Orleans rather than the export trade. The failure of the company actually benefited the German farmers by releasing them from all obligations. It also gave them full ownership of their land so that they could become self-sufficient farmers.

The Côte des Allemands under the French Crown

After the demise of the *Compagnie des Indes* in 1731, Louisiana became a crown colony. It was governed directly by France for more than thirty years. During this time France required the large concessions below the *Côte des Allemands* to cultivate indigo as the primary export crop of the colony. Tobacco was to be grown farther up in the Mississippi valley.

Under French rule the German colonists continued to cultivate mainly grain and produce. Corn was raised to feed the chickens, livestock, and slaves, while rice, fruit, and vegetables were reserved for the white population. As before, the excess was sold in the markets of the capital. A notation made in 1744 mentioned that the German colonists also brought apples, plums, pears, figs, sweet potatoes, melons, artichokes, cabbage, and various greens to New Orleans. In the travel descriptions of this period, the following observations were made (M. Bossu, *Nouveaux Voyages aux Indes orientales*, vol. 1, p. 39):

These people are very diligent; they are regarded as the purveyors of the capital . . . Friday evenings they load their boats and travel down-stream, two to a pirogue. They offer their wares on the river bank in New Orleans from early Saturday morning on. When they finally have finished their own purchases they row back and meet again in the evening on their farms.

The years following 1731 showed growth continuing at a moderate pace on the *Côte des Allemands*. During this period, cattle raising was developed as an industry. Once again the object of this new commercial venture was to supply New Orleans, now with meat and dairy products. By 1737 the number of cattle held by the German colonists rose to more than five hundred head. The German Coast itself had increased in population to more than 12 percent of the province. It now comprised about a hundred concessions and small farms.

Within the next decade the *Côte des Allemands* developed into the second largest settlement, after New Orleans, in the province. The 1746 census counted 3,700 white colonists and 4,730 slaves in the colony, with the population center located in the capital. Although France now wanted rice also to be cultivated for export, the colony consumed the supply it produced. The excess grain crop of the small German farmers was purchased by the colonial government and stored for future needs.

Poor harvests on the *Côte des Allemands* had disastrous effects on the New Orleans market. The great floods of 1734 and 1737 resulted in a rise in the price of grain in the city. The prolonged drought two years later made the price of rice and corn again go up appreciably. The bad weather of the summer of 1750 again did considerable damage to the grain crops. The sharp decline in the food supply from the *Côte des Allemands* caused a disruption all through the delta region. The solution seemed to be to bring more Germans to Louisiana to ensure a steady supply of provisions for the capital.

The reports to France requested good (German) peasant laborers in addition to the usual demands for more slaves for field work and soldiers for protection. Forty-seven German-speaking Alsatians were recruited who were willing to go to Louisiana. These were Lutherans who chose emigration rather than the religious persecution and imprisonment threatening them in their homeland. In 1753 they sailed to Louisiana and settled in the German Coast area. More families, mostly relatives of the first group, joined the colony in 1756 and 1759. To

assist these new colonists in establishing farms the French government provided them with oxen, chickens, seed grain, and farming tools. By 1754 the newcomers were able to help supply the market in New Orleans. This strengthening of the German settlement was praised by the officials in the colony. In 1754 the governor, Louis Billouart de Kerlérec, wrote (*Archives Nationales, Ministère des Colonies, C 13 A, vol. 38, fol. 12 f*):

We have seen these new colonists satisfied with their lot, working with commendable spirit and ambition to prepare their lands for planting; and we have the daily satisfaction of seeing them furnish the city with supplies of poultry, eggs and vegetables while they easily meet their own small needs. Since they are accustomed in their own country to working to exhaustion and to a hard life, they voluntarily take on the trouble and care which tilling the land requires. Besides they are assured of receiving all the profits of their labor since they are not charged any taxes as in Europe.

The census of the German Coast taken just before the end of French rule gave the following statistics: The population had risen to 1,268 *habitants* with 535 slaves living on 186 farms. The cattle count was almost a thousand head; sheep and hogs numbered over two thousand. The small farmers' concessions had assumed extraordinary importance since their products assured the food supply for the capital of the colony.

THE SPANISH COLONIAL PERIOD

The Côte des Allemands under Spanish Rule

In 1756 the Seven Years War between England and France had begun, sending English warships into the gulf to blockade Louisiana. In the colony the French and Indian War, the counterpart to the European conflict, had already broken out. To protect the Louisiana Territory from English encroachment and Indian attacks Governor Kerlérec desperately needed military support. Unable to receive men or ammunition from France, the governor was forced to turn to the Spanish for assistance, a portent of things to come. When the war in Europe ended with an English victory, the two Bourbon cousins on the thrones of France and Spain had already determined the destiny of Louisiana.

France had recognized that no precious metals were to be found in

the colony, and an adequate profit could not be obtained through the development of agricultural exports. At the end of French rule the colony was viewed as being of little use to France. Its main export products were less easily cultivated in Louisiana than in the West Indian colonies and, therefore, less profitable. Through the secret Treaty of Fontainebleau in 1762, France divested itself of this burden, unwanted ever since John Law's stock scheme had collapsed. Fearing the expansion of English dominance southward toward the rich mines of Mexico, Spain reluctantly agreed to accept Louisiana as a buffer zone.

When the terms of this arrangement were made public by the Treaty of Paris in the spring of 1764, the citizens of Louisiana were dismayed. Jean Jacques Blaise D'Abbadie, who had replaced Kerlérec as governor the previous year, remained as a French appointee despite Louisiana's cession to Spain. He encouraged the citizenry to appeal to the French king not to relinquish Louisiana. The delegate sent to the French court, however, was not even allowed an audience with Louis XV to discuss his mission. The next year Governor D'Abbadie died but was replaced by the ranking French officer in Louisiana, Capt. Charles Philippe Aubry. With no Spanish governor being dispatched to Louisiana, the citizenry became more and more confident that the cession was merely a political maneuver between European powers, with no consequences for Louisiana.

These convictions were shattered when a dispatch to the Superior Council arrived from Havana in July of 1765. It had been issued by Don Antonio de Ulloa, announcing his appointment as governor. However, Ulloa, an eminent scientist and captain in the Spanish navy, delayed arriving in New Orleans for another eight months, again engendering hope in the remaining French citizenry. When he did arrive with a small entourage, the populace was not impressed. Spain had underestimated the need for a large show of force, expecting the French militia in Louisiana to switch loyalties and enlist under its flag. With Ulloa in this weakened position many of his Spanish troops deserted, leaving the would-be governor virtually powerless. Ulloa, refusing to take official possession of Louisiana for fear of insurrection, sailed to Balize at the mouth of the Mississippi, where he remained for seven more months. There he waited for the arrival of his Peruvian fiancée, whom he married while still in Balize rather than returning to New Orleans for an official ceremony at St. Louis Cathedral. This act offended the people of rank in the capital, who had expected to attend an elegant wedding and become members of the governor's social circle.

Ulloa's recourse was to work through the ranking French officer, Captain Aubry, who became more or less acting governor. This was a delaying tactic for Ulloa while he waited for the arrival of sufficient Spanish troops to garrison the posts, suppress the French Superior Council, and control the seditious population.

During the turmoil of the transition from French to Spanish rule, the economy of Louisiana suffered. French paper money lost half its value, while Ulloa was chronically short of Spanish pesos. Perhaps his greatest mistake was to issue commercial edicts through Aubry, which were intended to stabilize the economy and bring Louisiana into the orbit of Spain and its colonial empire. These edicts, issued during the two years after his arrival, sowed the seeds of rebellion in the citizenry. First he refused to pay the salaries and administrative costs of the colony prior to 1766. Next he forbade trade with the neighboring English colonies and closed two of the three mouths of the Mississippi to commercial traffic. All exports from the colony had to be carried in Spanish vessels with Spanish crews. He then limited trade to selected Spanish ports and specifically banned commerce with the French West Indies. This last edict was Ulloa's undoing, for it threatened the economic viability of the colony. Trade being forbidden with Santo Domingo and Martinique jeopardized the financial survival of the merchants and plantation owners of the colony.

The O'Reilly Revolution

Open rebellion broke out in the capital in October of 1768, led by twelve conspirators, whose wealth was threatened by Ulloa's policies. Since Darenbourg was related by marriage to all but one of the conspirators, he was involved from the beginning in planning and supporting this insurrection. On the coast the French-Canadian refugees, who had recently arrived, were brought into the rebellion by the suspicion that Ulloa intended to sell them as slaves. The Germans were enlisted through the false rumor that they would not be paid for the grain Ulloa had confiscated to feed these Acadians. In the meantime Ulloa attempted to head off the German rebels by dispatching a representative to the coast with the money in question. Commandant Darenbourg, however, refused this gesture and had the representative arrested. Furthermore the German planters had been thoroughly antagonized by Ulloa's arrogance in establishing economic policies that threatened to destroy their plans to develop an export trade.

One night in late October Darenbourg ordered the mobilization of

the German militia, which marched toward New Orleans and took the Tchoupitoulas gate above the city. Upon entering the capital this militia of 400 men was joined by several hundred more Germans and Acadians, other militias, and a number of residents of the city and its outskirts. This mass of almost a thousand people gathered in the city center, awaiting developments. Members of the German militia and other participants patrolled the streets to keep order while the Superior Council deliberated over the petition to oust Governor Ulloa. Under pressure from the mob and swayed by the oratory of the conspirators, the Superior Council voted for the expulsion of the Spanish governor, giving Ulloa three days to leave the city.

Ulloa and his wife, protected by a small force, boarded the Spanish frigate *Volante*, which temporarily anchored in midriver for safety. Inexplicably the vessel did not reach Havana for six months, during which time the momentum of the rebellion began to weaken. Another petition to Louis XV to return the Louisiana colony to French rule was again ignored in Paris. Assistance was also denied by the English, who now governed Pensacola. No agreement about forming an independent government with a viable economic system could be reached by the conspirators. Fear of retribution from Spain began to grow, with some of the rebellion leaders even considering flight from the city to safer havens.

These fears were realized when a Spanish armada appeared at the mouth of the river at the end of July. Gen. Alexander O'Reilly, an extremely capable officer of Irish origin, had orders to restore Spanish authority in the colony, set up a new government, and punish the conspirators who had expelled the Spanish governor. In the meantime Ulloa had reached Havana, where he reported in detail the treasonous acts of the principal rebels. Armed with this information O'Reilly, still anchored at the river mouth, received delegates sent by the revolutionaries to negotiate clemency for themselves and the citizenry.

In the city the call for armed resistance to the Spanish was answered only by the Germans. About a hundred again marched to the capital but found no support among the citizens. Once they assessed the situation, they discretely returned to the German Coast while the Spanish fleet sailed up the river to occupy New Orleans. Twenty-four ships with 2,600 armed troops landed at the port and immediately took over the main square. Without resistance Aubry, still acting governor, handed over to O'Reilly the keys to the city gates. The Spanish flag was raised, and the transfer of the colony to Spain was effected without challenge.

O'Reilly did not lose time in carrying out his orders to punish the leading insurrectionists. All twelve were tried on the evidence given by Ulloa and information collected by O'Reilly. Joseph Villeré, the leader of the German Coast militia under Darenbourg, abandoned the idea of requesting protection from the English at Bayou Manchac and decided to negotiate with O'Reilly. Upon entering the city, however, he was arrested and imprisoned on one of the Spanish frigates, where he died in a scuffle on board. Six other insurrectionists were executed by firing squad and the rest given jail sentences, which were later commuted. O'Reilly then issued a proclamation giving amnesty to all who had signed the petition to expel Ulloa.

The fate of Darenbourg was another matter. O'Reilly harbored no doubt that the commandant of the German Coast was guilty of treasonous acts. But because of his age he was treated with leniency. O'Reilly forced him to release his holdings on the German Coast and move to the city, where he could no longer wield the power and influence he had enjoyed while living among his constituents. His two sons were also removed from the coast and sent into exile in Opelousas, far from their father. This clemency toward Darenbourg was extended to the citizens of the German Coast. Although they had been the principal group involved in the rebellion, they were required only to take an oath of allegiance to the Spanish crown, as were all the citizens in the colony. No doubt O'Reilly's clemency reflected the economic importance of the German Coast to the colony, which O'Reilly did not want to disturb.

Although O'Reilly remained in the colony only seven months, he established Spanish rule with a firm hand. His reputation as "Bloody O'Reilly" was probably undeserved, for the bloodshed was limited to the execution of half a dozen conspirators. While unwavering but just in handling the aftermath of the rebellion, he ably dealt with the affairs of the colony and brought stability. What became known as the O'Reilly Revolution, although a failure, had the distinction of being the first revolution against a European colonial power on what was to become American soil.

Further evidence of O'Reilly's wisdom and goodwill as governor was shown by his assistance to the Germans from Maryland, who arrived in late 1769. Seeking to escape the persecution they faced because of their Catholic faith, this group had made inquiries of Governor Ulloa as to conditions in Louisiana. Having received the promise of religious freedom and government support, they embarked in early 1769 on an English vessel, the *Britain*, along with a group of

Acadians. Although these fifty-seven Germans and thirty-two Acadians reached the Louisiana coast without incident, they could not find the mouth of the Mississippi and mistakenly made landfall on the coast of Texas. There they were taken captive by the Spanish, their cargo of cloth and dry goods confiscated and the captain put in the stocks. The passengers were forced to work on the nearby ranches to offset the cost of their maintenance while the Spanish commandant waited for instructions from the viceroy in Mexico City. Finally freed in August, they could not reboard their vessel, which had become unseaworthy in the meantime. A trek across land to Louisiana was the only alternative. On orders from the Spanish governor they were guided to Natchitoches, the Louisiana fort closest to the Texas border. There they immediately contacted the officials in New Orleans to ask for resettlement with their compatriots on what later became known as the German-Acadian Coast.

Governor O'Reilly, who had been sent to New Orleans to quell a rebellion supported by these two ethnic groups, was not disposed to strengthen their numbers. So he assigned the wayfarers to the Iberville Post at Bayou Manchac, which marked the border with English territory. There, about eighty miles upriver from New Orleans, they were isolated in an area that frequently flooded. Nevertheless, provided with the necessary supplies for settlement as well as firearms for protection, they soon became well established and prospered. Many of these Maryland Germans later moved to higher ground on what became known as the Dutch (*Deutsch* or German) Highlands, now located just south of Baton Rouge. Others joined the German militia, moved to the coast, and married into the families there.

The census of the year 1769 gave a detailed description of the economic prosperity on the German Coast at the time the colony was taken over by Spain. The total number of inhabitants was over two thousand, the white population having doubled within the previous twenty years. The consigned land measured about sixty miles of river frontage with a depth of a mile and a half. The number of slaves in the German settlement had quadrupled since the late 1740s. Grain production predominated on the West Bank, where cypress trade with the West Indies had also developed as a lucrative business. In contrast, indigo became the main commercial product on the lower East Bank, where almost 75 percent of the concessions held slaves. The census of 1769 showed a large increase in cattle holdings in the German settlement, tripling to over 3,000 head. Almost all of the concessions had also developed

dairies. Sufficient dray animals were kept for farm labor plus 2,500 hogs and almost 2,000 sheep.

In 1770 O'Reilly expropriated a plot of river frontage for the Germans, which was reserved for a church and cemetery. Two years later the citizens built a substantial structure there, staffed by Capuchin priests. Prior to this time the inhabitants on the West Bank worshiped in a small wooden building erected in 1745. Because this chapel was too rudimentary to merit a priest, the citizens conducted their own services or traveled across the river to worship at the Red Church built in 1740 on the East Bank. On the German Coast only the churches and an abandoned fort interrupted the row of farms with their houses, barns, and out-buildings. The rest was grazing land or land lying fallow or abandoned.

Expansion on the Coast

During the Spanish colonial period a significant expansion of the settled areas on the Mississippi had occurred through the influx of Acadians. These Canadian refugees of French descent began to arrive in 1765 and received land grants mainly above the *Côte des Allemands* and on the nearby tributaries of the river. The Acadians also received unsettled or abandoned river plots on the German Coast. Levees and river roads on both banks had to be extended upstream as the colonization of the Mississippi riverbanks was continued on the *Côte des Acadiens*.

From 1775 on, the *Côte des Allemands* was divided into two districts, the parish of St. Charles and the parish of St. John the Baptist, each named after the church located there. Later, at the end of Spanish rule, the *Côte des Acadiens* was similarly divided. The governor appointed a commandant for each district, who served both as head of the militia and local judge. The two new governmental entities of the German Coast were generally referred to as the *Première Côte des Allemands*, the first German Coast (St. Charles, downriver section), and the *Deuxième Côte des Allemands*, the Second German Coast (St. John, upriver section). The commandant of each area was required annually to carry out a comprehensive inspection of his parish to determine the condition of the levees, the river roads on both banks, the bridges, and the ditches. On the East Bank of the *Côte des Allemands* the Bonnet Carré bend of the river caused flooding again and again. At this spot, only four miles from Lake Pontchartrain, the river sometimes took this path to the lake rather than flowing into the gulf. In 1779 Robin de Logny, then commandant of the German Coast, reported (*Archivo General de Indias*, Seville, Seccion 11 A. Papeles de Cuba, legato 216 B):

Breaks in the Bonnet Carré levee mean the complete loss of the cattle and harvest for the larger portion of the inhabitants. Many have been forced to attempt to acquire land somewhere else on which they can live. If ways and means are not immediately found to dam the water in the Bonnet Carré area at least twenty-five miles of river frontage will no longer be cultivatable. I myself have fifty acres of grain fields under water in addition to a portion of my indigo fields. For my neighbors both upstream and downstream it is not any different. I can grab ducks from my window and fish in my backyard. That is the situation with my farm and also with my neighbors for a stretch of fifty miles upriver and at least fifteen miles downriver.

In the winter of 1783 the government finally advanced the money needed for the construction of an adequate levee at the Bonnet Carré bend. Nevertheless, severe levee breaks continued to occur. There were great floods during the next decade as well as unpredictable harvests. These conditions in the lower Mississippi delta caused numerous settlers to fail, making it even more remarkable that the small farmers of the German Coast prospered.

Weather conditions caused great swings in the grain harvests. The spring droughts adversely affected the crops. In 1784 the corn harvest was ruined but the rice crop was spared. Two years later, however, the river sank so low that salt water from the gulf came almost forty miles upriver. It destroyed the rice crop but spared the corn harvest. In August of 1779 the province was hit by a hurricane of such strength that almost all of the farms surrounding the capital suffered severe damage. Gov. François Louis Hector Carondelet reported (“Dispatches of the Spanish Governors of Louisiana, 1763-1789,” *Survey of Federal Archives in Louisiana*, New Orleans, 1938):

All the inhabitants of the Mississippi banks upriver are hard pressed because of the devastation caused by the recent hurricane, which drove water from *Lac des Allemands* toward the river. It rose up to a height of six feet above sea level behind their houses, flooded all their land, and flowed with remarkable speed toward the Mississippi. It dragged with it trees, houses, cattle, everything that it found in the way. Over a stretch of about sixty miles the land has been abandoned by the settlers who, until this point, cultivated rice of a quality exceeded nowhere. That is a terrible loss because the rice crop provided one of the staple foods for the population.

In a number of other years hurricanes caused equally great losses in the crops, equipment, buildings, and cattle. In the late summer of 1794

another vicious hurricane hit the *Côte des Allemands*. It followed the same path as the 1779 hurricane, which was also the path of the great storm of 1722. That early hurricane had wiped out the original German settlements on the coast.

In the meantime the Spanish economic policies had become more flexible, voiding the stringent decrees of Ulloa. This process had begun with O'Reilly's promotion of the cypress trade. In 1776 Spain again allowed trade with the French West Indies and later with France itself. Additionally the unrestricted importation of slaves to Louisiana was again permitted. Spain now wanted to strengthen its new colony as a bulwark against the encroaching power of the British and later the Americans. These new Spanish trade policies led to great increases in the productivity of the *Côte des Allemands*. Still grain, produce, and cattle remained the foremost products of the German farmers.

The growing prosperity of the German Coast was also made possible by a noticeable increase in slave holdings. The census taken in 1785 showed that the number of slaves in both parishes made up over half of the 3,203 inhabitants. Four years later the number of slaves on the *Côte des Allemands* had risen to more than double the white population.

The wealth of the coast was concentrated on those larger concessions in St. Charles Parish that had enough slaves to grow indigo for export. But the indigo crop varied with weather conditions. The prolonged droughts and early frosts of this period significantly depleted the harvest. But the real threat was a previously unknown insect that began to infest the indigo about this time. By 1794 it had caused so much damage that almost no indigo was harvested in either St. Charles or St. John parishes. Continuing crop failure forced the inhabitants to give up indigo completely. Most of the former indigo planters returned to cultivating corn and producing lumber. Many settlers owned their own sawmills, which operated day and night on the riverbanks during high water. The wood was transported from the cypress swamps through the canals to the river, then bound into rafts and floated downstream to New Orleans. The quantity of lumber sent from the coast to Havana and elsewhere in the West Indies was prodigious.

The *Côte des Allemands* also continued to supply the city with grain, fruit, vegetables, meat, and poultry. As from the beginning, the inhabitants transported their agricultural products by pirogue to New Orleans. When there was a shortage of food in the capital, the governor ordered the commandant of the coast to buy grain from the farmers and send it into the city. Also traders came upriver and purchased

products from individual settlers for resale or export. By the end of the Spanish period the German Coast's prosperity won it the name of the *Côte d'Or*, the Gold Coast.

The river, as before, still acted as a link to New Orleans for the *Côte des Allemands*. Both the French and the Spanish colonial governments, however, set a priority on establishing roads on both banks, which the citizens were required to build and maintain. Although transportation by land became more frequent during the Spanish period, vehicles such as wagons did not exist in any great number. Additionally, these roads were often impassable because of floods, with the result that the river itself remained the only reliable traffic route.

On the German Coast the populace still remained loyal to the colony's French founders, as did the citizens in the capital, who had never adjusted to the imposition of Spanish law. There was great rejoicing on the *Côte des Allemands* when the news was received in 1800 that Napoleon was taking Louisiana back for France. His representative, the colonial prefect Pierre Clement Laussat, was highly impressed by the welcome he received from the German populace. He consequently recommended that the French government recruit a large number of German families every year for the colony. Both the French and Spanish governors had also been impressed with the industriousness of this ethnic group. They, too, recognized the wisdom of acquiring more Germanic colonists.

During the French period a Swiss regiment, whose members were from various German-speaking areas, was always stationed in the colony. It was charged with the maintenance of order and protection of the colony from foreign invasion or Indian attack. Governor Bienville pointed out that these former soldiers should be settled on the *Côte des Allemands* at the end of their tour of duty instead of being sent back to Europe.

Succeeding French governors settled these Swiss soldiers on the *Côte des Allemands*, which helped to maintain the Germanic culture among the settlers. So did the "good peasant laborers" sent to the coast



Pierre Laussat. Drawing by Raymond Calvert.

by Governor Kerlérec. They were reported to work with ambition and spirit to furnish the city with poultry, eggs, and vegetables. In 1769 another infusion of Germanic blood was brought into the colony by the Germans from Maryland. Both of these migrations helped to preserve the culture and traditions of the old country. The census of 1769 showed that the core of the coast's population remained Germanic although a number of French concessions were interspersed among the German holdings by that time.

Through the decades the farmers of the German Coast maintained the mentality of the original pioneers. Their orientation was toward farming for their own needs and finding profit in trade with the capital. Just as in the French period, the German Coast continued to serve as the breadbasket for the colony. During the Spanish period the livestock industry developed to such an extent that the city was supplied with meat almost exclusively by the German Coast. The export trade was also lucrative for those farmers who possessed large concessions and a number of slaves. They profited from selling grain, lumber, indigo, and later sugarcane. However, these concessionaires were the exception, not the rule. Small landholders comprised the vast majority, who supported themselves through farming and bringing their products to market in the capital. As early as 1776 Chavalier de Champigny declared (*Etat-présent de la Louisiane avec toutes les particularités de cette province d'Amérique*, The Hague: n.p., p. 17):

The area that is still today occupied by the descendents of the Germans and the Canadians is the most cultivated and the most populous in the colony. I regard the Germans and the Canadians as the foundation upon which Louisiana has been established.

Since the German pioneers were brought into a totally French milieu, their language and culture in time were lost. No German schools or Protestant congregations were established in the colony, leaving the settlers on the *Côte des Allemands* unable to record their traditions for succeeding generations. The lack of language and religious instruction in German accelerated their assimilation, as did intermarriage with their French fellow citizens. Both men and women of German background were considered very desirable marriage partners. The males were known for their dedication to hard work and devotion to duty, while the women were considered diligent housewives and healthy, prolific mothers. Church registers showed that these intermarriages produced as many as twenty or more children.

Both sexes frequently married into the highest French social circles, where they readily adopted the language and Francophone culture.

Remnants of the culture were still readily discernible on the German Coast at the turn of the century. Some citizens remained bilingual throughout the colonial period. A few legal documents written in German script survived, as did several accounts of officials and other travelers to the coast. The reports by C. C. Robin and B. Duvallon from 1803 pointed out that the Germans still retained their language and were easy to recognize because of their accents and light complexions.

The Côte des Allemands under Threat

At the time of French colonization several small Indian tribes lived in the lower Mississippi delta. Governor Bienville had placed the German settlers in an area formerly cleared and cultivated by these Indians. Because of its location upriver from the fortified city, the *Côte des Allemands* was quite vulnerable to Indian attack. This problem existed for most of the century of French and Spanish rule.

The French understood how to use the Indians in reaching their military and political goals. However, their courtship of the Louisiana Indians was challenged by the British as they moved closer and closer to French-held territory. The largest Indian group in the southern part of the colony was the Choctaw tribe, which by midcentury had over three thousand Indian braves. The British became more and more successful in exerting influence over this tribe, inciting them to attack and kill the French settlers who were appropriating the Indians' land. The presence of hostile Indians, who could unexpectedly attack the colony by boat from the swamps, struck fear into the hearts of the colonists on the *Côte des Allemands*. All of the settlers owned weapons, and those able to bear arms formed their own militia. This private army was led for many years by the colony's commandant, Karl Friedrich Darensbourg, who was charged with the settlers' defense. He oversaw a militia composed of the able-bodied men of the colony, who, for the most part, were rugged pioneers and crack shots.

In 1729, shortly after the establishment of the German colony, the first Indian attack occurred. It was part of the larger massacre perpetrated by the Natchez Indians at Fort Rosalie, which had virtually annihilated the settlers there. This attack against the German villagers on the West Bank, however, was rather weak and easily repulsed. The defense put up by the settlers prevented any real damage but fed the colonists' terror of future Indian raids.

In the spring of 1748 a second Indian raid occurred. A group of Choctaws attacked the German colony on the east bank of the river, killed a colonist, and scalped his wife. The Indians took with them one of the children along with a slave, whom they expected to sell to the English. The militia members from the coast plus a contingent from New Orleans pursued the Indians, who nevertheless escaped capture. Governor Kerlérec later lamented that there were still not enough men in the colony to go into the woods to fight the Indians.

In November of the same year an even more serious Choctaw attack occurred. The Indians raided a farm on the East Bank while the residents were working in the fields. All but four settlers escaped by crossing the river to the safety of the West Bank and its militia. Learning of the raid, however, a number of other residents fled, giving the Indians the opportunity to ransack their homesteads. Because Darensbourg's militia, then 130 men strong, lacked boats to cross the river, the governor, Pierre Cavagnial de Rigaud, marquis de Vaudreuil, immediately sent three detachments from New Orleans. This time the Indians were shot or captured, their loot confiscated, and the prisoners returned to their farms.

Because fear of the Indians was already ingrained in the settlers on the coast, the aftermath of this attack was profound. The governor reported that most of the Germans abandoned their houses, left their well-cultivated land and animals, and moved to the city for safety. New Orleans had temporarily lost an essential source of supplies. As a result grain, produce, and meat from the coast became both scarce and expensive in the capital.

A year later Governor Vaudreuil promised the Germans to establish a *corps de garde* on the endangered side of the river, which reassured some of the colonists enough for them to return to their farms. In 1750 he established a small military post with thirty men on the East Bank, across from Darensbourg's homestead. There this garrison could guard the mouth of the bayou, which was often used by the Indians as a transportation waterway. Other German colonists returned only then, but settled on the safer West Bank, where they began new farms. These were at first less productive than the ones they had abandoned, which continued the temporary loss of food supplies from the German colony. Governor Kerlérec reported four years later that the settlement of the Germans had not yet recovered from the unfortunate Choctaw attack. The scarcity of well-trained soldiers in the colony resulted in fewer and fewer men being assigned to the German Coast. By the time of the Spanish take-over, the post had been abandoned.

During the Spanish period the agitation of the English caused more

unrest and further Indian attacks on the white settlements. Choctaws appeared several times on the *Côte des Allemands*. A final attack in 1773, while frightening to the inhabitants, did no damage and was quickly repulsed by the coast's militia. It was general knowledge in the colony that the English were behind the Indian raids on the settlements. In revenge the citizens demanded the arrest and imprisonment of several English traders who appeared on the coast later that year.

In 1763 the Treaty of Paris ceded to England the east bank of the Mississippi from Baton Rouge upriver, so that the British sphere of influence encroached even more closely upon the main area of French settlement. The English took advantage of this proximity to continue fomenting Indian attacks on the white settlers. In 1779 Gov. Bernardo de Galvez took decisive action and marched upriver to retaliate. All of the able-bodied men of the *Côte des Allemands* joined the effort. With their help Galvez was successful by 1781 in driving the English from their military strongholds both at Bayou Manchac and Baton Rouge.

During the period of Spanish rule in Louisiana a number of assaults against British and American advances were made by the militia. In 1791 a talented military officer, Don José Pontalba, was given the command of both the German and Acadian coasts. To ward off encroachment he placed four fusilier companies on the *Côte des Allemands* and three on the *Côte des Acadiens*. Pontalba's soldiers were good scouts and riflemen and experienced in the swamps and forests. The success of Galvez's expulsion of the English from Manchac and Baton Rouge was continued by Pontalba's efficient leadership of the militia. On the *Côte des Allemands* both the Indian attacks and encroachment by the English were ended. The colony was finally in a position to enter the new century free of threats to its citizens and its territorial integrity.

The *Côte des Allemands* at the Time of the Louisiana Purchase

After the failure of the indigo crop in the 1790s the cultivation of sugarcane took over most of the lower Mississippi delta. By the turn of the century sixty sugarcane plantations had been developed on the banks of the river. The cultivation of sugarcane quickly took over in St. Charles Parish due to the number of slaves, which had increased significantly after 1782. Only a few remnants of indigo cultivation could still be found after the Louisiana Purchase. The cultivation of sugarcane was not taken up by most of the small farmers in St. John Parish. Because it demanded much more work than indigo, some farmers turned to cotton, although grain remained the main crop.

The cultivation of sugar grew steadily and spread upriver as slave holdings increased. It proved to be a great advantage for the planters, who had been badly hurt by the frequent losses of their indigo crops. The first American governor, William C. C. Claiborne, reported that there was hardly a single citizen who had not succeeded and was not solvent, even enriched. The sugarcane plantations on the banks of the Mississippi appeared to one traveler as superb beyond description. Another wrote that he had not seen such a rich and well-cultivated tract in any other part of the United States.

Farther upstream on the *Côte des Allemands* the landscape changed to a mixed economy. There sugarcane, cotton, grain, and lumber were all cultivated. Sluices in the levees were introduced to irrigate the rice fields. With high water the sawmills on the banks of the river were put to work. Also cattle raising remained important. The barnyards were reported as being full of cattle, hogs, and fowl. F. Cuming noticed that above New Orleans the river was “covered with multitudes of market boats rowing” (*Sketches of a Tour to the Western Country through the States of Ohio and Kentucky; a Voyage down the Ohio and Mississippi Territory and Part of West Florida 1807-1809*, Pittsburgh: n.p., 1810, p. 332).

The *Côte des Allemands* was pictured at the time of the Louisiana Purchase as the best-cultivated part of Louisiana. Baudry des Lozières especially emphasized the diligence of the Germans as the reason for the thriving economy (*Voyage à la Louisiane et sûr le Continent de l'Amérique Septentrionale, fait dans les Années 1794 à 1798*, Paris: Imprimeur-Librairie, Palais du Tribunat, 1802). The French colonial prefect, Pierre Clement Laussat, made the suggestion to increase the population of Louisiana primarily by bringing in Germans. In 1803 he supported this recommendation with the following words (*Archives Nationales, Ministère des Colonies, Messidor* [June 19-July 18] 6, Col., C 13 A, vol. 52, fol. 199):

This class of peasants, especially of this nationality, is just the kind we need and the only one that has always done well in this area, which is called the German Coast. It is the most industrious, the most populous, the most prosperous, the most upright, the most valuable population segment of this colony. I deem it essential that the French government adopt the policy of bringing to this area every year 1,000 to 1,200 families from the border states of Switzerland, the Rhine and Bavaria.

The transfer of the colony from France to Spain had not caused a great interruption in its economic development. France wished for no changes in the well-established sugarcane industry when the colony again came into its possession in 1800. The instructions to the colonial prefect early in 1802 reiterated that slavery was the basis of agriculture in Louisiana. Since this was well understood, the planters again began demanding permission to import slaves, which had been greatly curtailed under Spanish rule.

With the Louisiana Purchase the American government took over the land ordinances initiated by the French and continued by the Spanish. The area supervisor still controlled the work to be carried out by the concession owners. These regulations were retained until late in the twentieth century, when the state and the levee board took over these responsibilities.

The American government also took over the plantation system with its associated slave practices. At that time there were approximately 2,800 slaves on the coast. In 1812, when the name of the *Côte des Allemands* was officially changed to the "German Coast," the number of slaves had risen by a thousand. Every decade produced significant increases in the slave population, until there were well over 8,500 slaves laboring on the coast by 1850. Based on the increasing importation of slaves and the assurance of protective tariffs by the government, sugarcane cultivation fully matured on the German Coast. This prosperity continued until the economic and cultural development of Louisiana was suddenly ended by the Civil War.