

History of the Natchitoches Tribe of Louisiana

Compiled by Chief Fred D. Simon

Who are the Natchitoches American Indians?

Today the name Caddo is applied by the U. S. government collectively to a people that they call a single Tribe, but when they were first known to Europeans, consisted of about 25 Tribes forming 3 or more confederated groups and held themselves entirely separate. The Hasinai, often called tejas, now called Texas, was the largest of these, they occupied northeast Texas. The Kadohadacho, where the name Caddo comes from, occupied the big bend of the Red River, now in the state of Arkansas. The Natchitoches lived in Natchitoches Parish, the Parish and town is named after them.

(1) Found in "Source Material on the History and Ethnology of the Caddo Indians, by J. R. Swanton", pg. 3 & 7.

And found in Handbook of Texas Online; before the middle of the nineteenth century the term "Caddo" denoted only one of at least twenty-five distinct, but closely affiliated groups centered around the Red River in Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. The term derives from the French abbreviation of "Kadohadacho", a word meaning "real chief" or "real Caddo" in the Kadohadacho dialect. European chroniclers referred to the Caddo groups as the Hasinai, Kadohadacho, and Natchitoches confederacies. They developed long-distance trade networks in prehistoric times. Important items of trade were bison hides, salt, bois d'arc bows, and other finished items. They traded for turquoise from New Mexico, copper from the Great Lakes, and marine shell from the Gulf Coast.

(2) Can be read at; www.tshaonline.org/handbook.

Again, the term Caddo has no real meaning. Each of the groups had its own political existence, and both the Spanish and French realized that. Their approach to Indian affairs has left us much better information than that of the Americans. The American policy increasingly obscured tribal groups. At the signing of the Caddo Treaty, in 1835, the U.S. government called all these Tribes Caddo, none of the Chiefs were identified by Tribe; this was a purely political machination by the U.S. Government.

(3) Found on Louisiana State website; www.crt.la.us/dataprojects/archaeology.

In a report from Indian Agent Dr. John Sibley which is included in President Thomas Jefferson's message to Congress on February 19, 1806, on page 58, Dr Sibley calls the Natchitoches a Nation and that they are living near a lake that the French call Lac de Moiré (Black Lake). Also called Lac Noir.

(4) This can be found online titled "MESSAGE from the PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATE communicating DISCOVERIES made in exploring the MISSOURI, RED RIVER, AND WASHITA, by Captains Lewis and Clark, Doctor Sibley, and Mr. Dunbar; with A STATISTICAL ACCOUNT of the countries adjacent".

In a US Census report dated 1853 the Natchitoches Tribe is listed separate from the Caddo.

(5) This can be found online titled "Report on Indians Taxed and Not Taxed".

From another article, Before the French, Spanish, and ultimately, the Americans controlled the town of Natchitoches, Native Americans known as the "Natchitoches" hunted, fished, and farmed in the vicinity of the contemporary parish. Together with their larger federation of Caddoan Native Americans, including the Doustioni, Ouachita, and Yatasi, the Natchitoches and their allies controlled vast areas of territory in what is now northwest Central-Louisiana.

(6) Found in; Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, HABS No. LA-1319.

John R. Swanton interviewed in 1912 an American Indian named Caddo Jake, he stated that the Natchitoches and Yatasi Languages were the same.

(See 1: pg.15)

This language was different from the Caddo.

(See 1: pg. 75 & 3.0 pg. 50)

In my opinion this group that the U.S. Government called the Caddo Nation was a group of 4 Indian Nations in an alliance working together for protection and prosperity, just like NATO. The fourth was the Bidai Nation. Each of these Nations was a combination of many smaller Tribes.

How large was the Natchitoches Nation?

The newest anthropological estimates are that in the Western Hemisphere there were about 90 million people before Columbus, (12.5 million in what is now the continental United States) and in the first 130 years after Columbus 95% of these people died. The largest amount of these deaths was caused by European diseases which these people had no immunity, but they also died by slavery and wars caused by Europeans.

(See 1: pg 16 to 25) &

(7) From; American Indian Holocaust and Survival, by Russell Thornton &

(8) Do All Indians Live in Tipis, Questions & Answers from the National Museum of American Indian, by the Smithsonian, pg 27.

In 1700 Bienville's expedition reported 200 men of the Natchitoches and 50 of the Doustioni. If you allow 4 persons for each family, which is very conservative, there would be about 1000 souls at that time; if this is only 5% then there would have been about 20,000 in these 2 villages before Columbus.

(See 1 & 7)

In Dr. Sibley's 1805 report to Thomas Jefferson it is stated that at one time the Natchitoches was 600 men strong, which would make the Tribe about 48,000 before contact with Europeans.

(See 4)

When was first contact with the French?

In 1686 La Salle made contact with the Hasinai Nation when he was searching for the Mississippi River, a year later he tried again to find the Mississippi River, after they reached some of the Hasinai Nation, he was murdered by some of his men. His men continued on to the northeast, lead by Sieur Cavelier, they met the Kadohadacho, and then continued north to New France, now Canada.

In 1689, Henri de Tonti went to find the murderers and bring them back to New France. He went down the Mississippi till he came to the Taensa Nation, he then went west to the Natchitoches, this was the first contact with the French, February 17, 1690. He then went on to the Hasinai Nation.

(See 1, pg. 38 to 44)

The next encounter was in 1700 when Le Moyne d'Iberville sent his brother Bienville and Louis Juchereau de St. Denis into the Caddo country. They traveled up the Mississippi River to the Taensa towns on Lake St. Joseph, then west to the

Ouachita village at the Ouachita River, then they continued west to the Doustioni on the Red River, called Colorado by the Spanish, They then went north to the Kadohadacho before returning to Iberville's vessels on the Mississippi River. St. Denis was then sent back, with 25 men to watch for Spaniards, where he met the Natchitoches and then the Kadohadacho, they told him they had not seen a Spaniard in more than two years. St. Denis then returned to the French fort near the mouth of the Mississippi River. He retired in 1705 and began to trade with various tribes, including the Natchitoches and the Hasinai.

(See 1, pg. 50 & 51)

In 1711 Friar Francois Hidalgo, of Spain, sent a letter to Lamothe Cadillac, Governor of Louisiana, asking for help in founding a mission among the Hasinai. Governor Cadillac saw this as an opportunity to push trade by the French into territory claimed by Spain, he selected St. Denis to carry this project through.

(See 1, pg. 52)

St. Denis left on August 23, 1714 with 24 Canadians and 30 men of the Natchitoches Nation that had been living with the Acolapissa tribe on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain. When they arrived at the old village of the Natchitoches, they built two buildings to store some of the merchandise that he had brought and left 10 men to guard them, this was the start of Fort Jean Baptiste. The Natchitoches men stayed and rebuilt their village on the island now called the Island of Brevelle. St. Denis went on to the Hasinai Villages and made a profitable trade. He then returned to Governor Cadillac to report on his mission.

(See 1, Pg. 53)

On St. Denis's next trading mission, he went to the Natchitoches village then to the Hasinai. At the Hasinai village he found that Friar Hidalgo had returned to the Spanish settlements on the Rio Grande. The Hasinai Chief, Bernadino, asked St. Denis to go to Coahuila, Mexico, to request Friar Hidalgo's return to the Hasinai Village. At the Presidio of San Juan Bautista, Captain Don Diego Ramon sent them on to Mexico City. At Mexico City the Spanish officials decided to reestablish their old abandoned missions in northeastern Texas and they asked St. Denis to be second in command, Don Diego Ramon was appointed leader of the expedition. They left Mexico City on October 26, 1715, they stopped at San Juan Bautista, where St. Denis married Dona Maria Ramon, Granddaughter of Don Diego Ramon. They left there on April 27, 1716. They chose sites for the missions and St. Denis went on to Mobile, now in Alabama.

(See 1, pg. 53 & 54)

At Mobile St. Denis organized another trading company to return to Mexico with a large quantity of merchandise, they left in October 1716. They went through the Natchitoches village then the Hasinai village, when they got to San Juan Bautista all the merchandise was seized, St. Denis went on to Mexico City to secure its release, the Spanish imprisoned him. He escaped September of 1718, and was at Dauphin Island on March 24, 1719, located south of Mobile.

(See 1, pg. 54 & 55)

On December 17, 1718 Bernard de la Harpe was sent to establish a fort in the country of the Kadohadacho and to explore the lands of that area.

(See 1, pg. 56)

On July 1, 1720, St. Denis was appointed Commandant of the Natchitoches Post.

(See 1, pg. 59)

In a newspaper article dated August 20, 1915 of the Natchitoches Times there is the following entry: "Deed of Donation of Land to Natchitoches Indians, signed by Baron de Carondelet, Lieutenant of LaSalle, 1758 - Land Office. (Land Office is no longer in Natchitoches)."

With the 7-Years War raging (now known as the French and Indian War by Americans, 1756 - 1763) the French may have felt that Natchitoches Indians living in town among the French was more of a liability than an asset. My research of land and census records shows our Ancestors living around Black Lake with the largest group living at the Black Lake Community. This was considered marginal land by the French and the English as it was mostly swamp and hills, the type of land that was always set aside for American Indians. I have also located three other communities that survived through the years also located in our Ancestral lands.

The Indian settlements were in the swamps, pine woods, and marshes and their closest non-Indian neighbors most often were white yeoman farmers.

(9) The Historic Indians Tribes of Louisiana, co-authored by H. F. Gregory, pg. 93 and ecological niches pg. 96 and 211.

The "coureurs de bois", the first Indian traders from Canada, many of whom were Métis with Canadian Indian blood lines, had an affinity for living with Indians and had Indian wives or concubines. Their children usually spoke only Indian languages.

(See 9, pg. 128)

In my research I have found that many of the farmers living near the Natchitoches were "metis" (this term was used by Europeans to describe people that had American Indian blood mixed with white or black or both) most of these farmers had Natchitoches blood lines and were kin. I have also found that none of the English researchers were able to penetrate the silence of the Black Lake Community.

At the end of this war France gave control of the lands east of the Mississippi river and north of Spanish controlled Florida to Britain. Just before this war ended France had given control of the other lands west of the Mississippi and south of the Great Lakes to Spain, this was later known as the Louisiana Purchase.

The end of "French and Indian War" was the beginning of the Spanish era. Many smaller Tribes were driven from their homelands east of the Mississippi River not only by the English but also by the larger Tribes that became slavers (those that enslave others) and moved to or through what is now the State of Louisiana, many of these people stayed. This is also when many American Indians started hiding in plain sight, this happened not only in what is now the State of Louisiana but also throughout the lands that are now the eastern part of the United States.

(9: pg. 83 to 121)

Spanish laws had treated the Indians generously, a circumstance they found fortunate as empires changed. "Las Recopilaciones de los Indios" had given Indians the right to settle the king's lands and had guaranteed them a square league around their villages for tribal use.

(9: pg. 88)

Spanish Governor Carondelet freed all Louisiana Indians that were slaves in 1794, except the Natchez because of their war. But not all were set free, rich land owners did not wish to lose their free labor and called their Indian slaves Black or Mulatto and made them buy their freedom.

(9: pg. 94)

The American Revolutionary War, 1775-1783.

In June 1779, Spain formally declared War on Great Britain. Bernardo de Galvez the then governor of Spanish Louisiana learned of an impending invasion of the Mississippi River by the British to enable them to attack the “Americans” from the west. He swiftly and secretly organized Louisiana and New Orleans for war. Many Spanish, French and American Indians joined his forces. He defeated the British at Fort Bute, Baton Rouge and Natchez in 1779. The Battle of Baton Rouge, on Sept. 1779, freed the lower Mississippi Valley of British forces and relieved the threat to the capital of Louisiana, New Orleans. This can be found on Wikipedia under Bernardo de Galvez.

Members of the militia at Natchitoches, over 150, are recognized as Patriots of the American Revolution. A sampling of the names of the heroes of the American Revolution from Natchitoches, printed in the Natchitoches Genealogist dated April 2008 and published by The Natchitoches Genealogical & Historical Association, include many of **“metis”* ancestors of the Natchitoches Tribe of Louisiana.

**A mixture of European and American Indian.*

In 1705 Louis Juchereau de St. Denis led an expedition (war) against the Chitimacha Nation, the Natchitoches warriors were with him.

(See 1: pg. 51)

In 1730 the Natchez Nation revolted against the French Government; they went up the Red River killing any French people they found. When they came to the town of Natchitoches, St. Denis with the help of the natives of the Natchitoches, Assinai (Hasinai), and Attacapas Tribes, and some Spaniards defeated the Natchez Tribe.

(See 1: pg. 66)

It is only reasonable that the Natchitoches warriors would be fighting along-side their kin with Governor Galvez against the British.

Athanase de Mezieres was appointed lieutenant governor of the Natchitoches district in 1770. He met with the Kadohadacho and other Tribes to the west of their territory to acquire their alliance to Spain. In 1772 he met with the Hasinai, Tonkawa and Wichita Indians for the same reason. In this same entry the Chief of the Natchitoches in named “Sauto”.

(See 1: pg. 70)

In 1803 the French Government sold their claim on the Louisiana Territory to the United States of America. In 1830 President Andrew Jackson passed the Indian Removal Act, the US Army then started removing the remaining Tribes that were east of the Mississippi River to the west side it. In 1835 the Kadohadaho Nation was forced to sign a treaty, by threat of war, with the USA Government and forced to leave Louisiana, they thought they were signing away their lands east of the Red River but were told after they signed that they had to leave the USA. That left them only one place to go, the Country of Texas.

(This information can also be found online.)

In an article coauthored by H. F. Gregory about Natchitoches Parish History, I found a study of Indian Communities in Natchitoches Parish. It describes the many communities of American Indians, how many were removed in the 1890 in what is called the Second Removal, and how many went into hiding. This is what we call hiding in plain-sight, our ancestors stop talking about who they were and stayed apart from other peoples, although their neighbors knew who they were they didn't tell the English because they were also part American Indian.

(This article was printed by the Natchitoches Parish Planning Commission, June 1979. Copies can be found at the Natchitoches Genealogical & Historical Association, in the old Court House and at Watson Memorial Library in Northwest State University, both in Natchitoches, LA.)

And even through these men did an excellent article they were not able to get any information from the Black Lake Community or the other three Natchitoches Tribe villages about their identity.

Our tribe had been "hiding" for 180 years when a small group of cousins the G8 met with Fred D. Simon and decided it was time to reclaim our Heritage. We found the needed legal documents to prove that we are the descendants of the Natchitoches, he wrote a constitution as required by Federal laws.

Our tribe has grown to over 1,600 members with a Council of 20 members. We are in the process of requesting official acknowledgment by the Government of the United States of American.