

FAMILY AND SOCIAL PATTERNS OF THE COLONIAL LOUISIANA FRONTIER:

A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS, 1714-1803

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Over a dozen years have elapsed since I was first lured into studying the Natchitoches frontier and the pioneers who settled it -- and a legion of debts have accumulated in that time. Research of this nature is all but impossible without the cooperation of local civil, church, and university archivists, and in my Natchitoches work I have been blessed. Archivists there, over the years, have not merely cooperated, they have often assisted enthusiastically. As this present study also shows, it is equally impossible to study the migrant population of the frontier outpost of St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches without a broader and comprehensive study of the records generated in all of the colonial Louisiana settlements, records now scattered in a host of archives throughout America and abroad. In the five volumes published to-date in my Cane River Creole Series on Natchitoches, I have attempted to express the measure of appreciation that I owe to this legion of archivists, friends, and fellow family historians who have assisted me with my explorations of the Natchitoches frontier. Their cumulative numbers are too great to include in this present paper, but the gratitude I owe them still remains.

In the course of this current study, special debts have accrued which I must specifically acknowledge. I have been fortunate, indeed, to have as my advisor Professor Grady McWhiney, Director and Distinguished Senior Fellow of the Center for the Study of Southern History and Culture at the University of Alabama. There could have been no more receptive "sounding board" for my evolving thoughts and ideas, and his perceptive critiques -- stemming from his own highly developed understanding of the Southern mind

-- have been invaluable. Perhaps this present paper will repay him in a small way by helping him to better know his personal "roots" -- since, in the course of this study it was discovered that several of the individuals I have discussed in this paper, for the significant impact which they had upon the frontier's development, were Professor McWhiney's previously-unknown ancestors.

Totally indispensable to this project has been the assistance and cooperation of Gary B. Mills, Associate Professor of History, University of Alabama -- another descendant of Old Natchitoches. It was he who was responsible in the first place for introducing me to his ancestral home, and over the years I have been fortunate enough to have him as my occasional colleague and regular (even eager) critic. It was also his suggestion that I acknowledge him as "Aaaw Honnnnn....," "--But, Darn It," or "Why Don't You Understand....?" Equal thanks are due to my errand-boy, my house-maid and my yard-boy, Clayton, Donna, and Danny Mills -- together with my apologies for serving them so many frozen pizzas in return, and my sincere hope that they understand it all.

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this mass is an extended process -- particularly for one whose family and career responsibilities must be given priority. As a consequence of these factors, I must also express my very personal appreciation to the New College Program itself, and to the educators and administrators who conceived and developed the concept of permitting the adult student to pursue his own academic development at whatever pace his personal responsibilities permit.

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INTRODUCTION

Women's rights. Ethnic awareness. Birth control. Sexual freedom. Alternate family styles. Job mobility. The Social Revolution of twentieth-century America has focused public attention upon a litany of cultural and moral issues that past societies cared not -- or dared not -- to address. Since the turbulent sixties, America has "let it all hang out," and now Americans cannot agree on solutions to each newly-visible problem. Calls for government action are met by complaints of too much intervention in private lives. Any rally for a government-sponsored "return to traditional morality" is countered with the invocation of those magic words: *separation of church and state*, as though the mere utterance of those eight syllables should clearly settle any social issue.

A crux of the problem is that the American public lacks the requisite historical perspective to deal realistically with many such issues. Half the adult population of this nation attended public school in an era when many historians believed it their sacred duty to present the past in a manner that would inspire and uplift the new generations. Frank studies of illegitimacy and wife-beating had no place in their rose-garden sagas of humanity. Despite scholarly advances of recent decades, history textbooks remain unpurged of many of the stereotypes, clichés, and misconceptions which are so generally accepted that few people have felt the need to document or even to question them.

As contemporary society struggles to redefine such social foundations as the family and the roles, responsibilities, and rights of its varied

members, a new breed of historical demographer, in America and abroad, has begun to wrestle with many of the questions left by their predecessors. Exactly what is "traditional morality" -- if it can be defined at all? How much individuality have various governments permitted their citizens in the past? To what extent has the state, or the public sector, concerned itself with such supposedly private matters as sexuality and reproduction?

The exploration of these questions has created a new and vital field of historical inquiry, the history of the family - an academic pursuit far different from age-old "family history" long dominated by genealogists. While the family historian seeks to reconstruct his own lineage in an effort to discover his personal history, the historian of the family seeks to reconstitute *all* families within a given community and time-frame in order to analyze the behavioral patterns of society and the fluctuations of those patterns over a period of generations in response to various religious, political, geographic, economic, and even climatic factors.

From pioneering studies initiated in many varied societies, intriguing patterns have emerged that promise to revolutionize concepts of social history worldwide. Within America, predictably, the emphasis of this new study has been upon the colonial settlements, the so-called "Anglo" American colonies -- predictably so, since traditional textbooks have emphasized (and quite possibly overemphasized¹) the "Anglo" heritage of the American nation. Neither is it a surprise to find that these often highly-sophisticated studies of colonial America draw innumerable parallels between their own conclusions and newly-uncovered patterns in "Mother England." Yet, on

¹For an interesting discussion of the "Anglo" versus Celtic heritage of the Southern United States, see Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The South from Self-Sufficiency to Peonage: An Interpretation," *American Historical Review*, 85 (December, 1980), 1095-1118.

occasion, for contrast or curiosity, an equally fascinating comparison is drawn between the environment of Puritan New England and the *ancien regime* of France, where a host of similarly-rich studies are being conducted.

It is unfortunate, given the state of American historiography, that Latin cultures and Latin influences must still be approached as elements foreign to these United States. Almost no comparable studies² are available for the colonial French and Spanish settlements which coexisted with the Anglos and other ethnic groups settling the present borders of this nation. This historical void is particularly significant for modern social history, since much of the ethnic and cultural influence of the original Latin colonists still distinctly mark the regions that these families settled.

This paper addresses a portion of that void: the settlement first known as Poste St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches, situated in present northwest Louisiana. It is a region exceptionally favorable for analysis for several reasons. Founded in 1714, it is the oldest permanent settlement in the vast reaches of the Louisiana Purchase. Its historical archives are, for the most part, intact; and a wealth of material on the settlement additionally exists in numerous other archives from New Orleans to Paris to Seville, and from Montreal to Mexico City. In the course of its settlement, Natchitoches was governed, and populated, by both the French and the Spanish, yet its citizenry represented a host of diverse cultures from German to African, Indian to Italian. Above all, Natchitoches was the frontier of colonial Louisiana, the barrier against enemy aggression, the fringe of European-American

²One notable exception is Antonio Acosta Rodríguez, *La Población de Luisiana Española, 1763-1803* (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 1979). Unfortunately, this study is limited to an analysis of censuses only, a tool that is at best highly limited and extremely flawed. No effort was made at family reconstitution, the usual means by which census limitations are transcended.

civilization. All factors combine to offer unique glimpses into ethnic homogenization or cultural distinctiveness, into political and economic adaptation, and social acculturation.

The same questions which are currently being addressed by social historians working in colonial New Haven, Connecticut, or early Charles County, Maryland, can be posed at Natchitoches -- perhaps even to better advantage, given the nature of many of the records. Additionally, the historical demographer working on the Louisiana frontier can pose other social questions for which no answers yet exist in the historiography of the Atlantic colonies.

Such issues as family size, structure, and organization; the relationships that existed between men and women, parent and child, church and state; the influence of society upon the family or the home upon society; all are intricate concepts that are gradually being defined each time another American colony is analyzed. Yet, the ethnic similarity between most studied American societies preordain that certain basic patterns must emerge. Can these patterns still be expected among French, Spanish, German, Italian, or other peoples who came to America's colonial shores? To what extent did American offshoots of the various European nations propagate their ethnic seeds? Did each shape their frontier differently, or did each display distinctive responses to the influences of their particular frontier? Will the current crop of intimate studies, when extended into the lives of the varied ethnic groups in America, help to resolve some of the heretofore unreconcilable conflicts between adherents to Turner's frontier thesis and those who just as staunchly believe in the potency of European cultural germs?

Certainly, Natchitoches does not hold all the answers; but it does suggest a few of them. In many ways, the experiences of this "settlement,"

which eventually spread itself thinly over some ten thousand square miles of the Louisiana-Texas frontier, offer insight into the frontier experience that could never be gleaned from the close, compacted villages of New England or the plantation regime of the lower Atlantic colonies. An intimate glimpse into the lives of its people, all nominally Catholic, would seem also to provide contrast to similar studies of Puritan or Anglican colonies. Yet, in many ways the analysis underscores the basic similarities to be found in most Western cultures and warrants some interpretations that go counter-grain to traditional views of French and Spanish Catholic society.

Moreover, current studies of family life in Colonial America are prone to treat their subject populations in social isolation. Each community appears to have been founded by settlers who possessed the same basic cultural germs prior to their arrival in the New World. Once they committed their fates to a given community in which they planted these germs, they nurtured them there for the remainder of their lifetimes. As new generations grew to maturity, occasional offspring strayed from their society, never to be heard from again -- at least not in these studies. Occasionally, too, migrants or other immigrants injected themselves into these closed societies but seemingly did little to alter the structure of community or family life. By contrast, the fluid frontier of colonial Louisiana cannot be isolated in this manner. Whether the Natchitoches post was culturally typical or atypical in its settlement patterns is still undeterminable, and will remain so until more extensive studies are made of personal and family migrations in America.

For this study of Poste St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches, a reconstitution has been made of the lives and families of 2,631 men, women, and children who are known to have resided (permanently or temporarily) in the jurisdiction of the post between its founding in 1714 and its transfer to the new

United States in December 1803. Such a reconstitution is possible through the utilization of a variety of colonial records. Some 4,000 registrations of births, marriages, and burials are to be found in the parish church, St. François, representing relatively complete registrations of the first two categories after the year 1733, with sporadic registrations of the latter. These are available for study in translated, abstracted, and published form.³ Another core group of approximately 4,000 civil (notarial) records which exist locally, untranslated and unpublished, richly augment ecclesiastical registrations.

Since a large percentage of the subject population was found to reside at other Louisiana-Texas posts, a thorough study of similar sacramental and notarial records in those communities (ranging from Illinois to New Orleans, Mobile to San Antonio) has filled in many of the family "gaps" left by the Natchitoches records. Additionally, the extant records of the Bishop of the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas, of the various governors, and a host of miscellaneous records from American and foreign archives, including some

³Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729-1803: Abstracts of the Catholic Church Registers of the French and Spanish Post of St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches in Louisiana*, Cane River Creole Series, vol. 2 (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1977), contains the bulk of the colonial registrations which appear in Registers 1 through 4-B of the parish. Additional colonial registrations can be found in Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800-1826: Translated Abstracts of Register Number Five of the Catholic Church Parish of St. François des Natchitoches in Louisiana*, Cane River Creole Series, vol. 4 (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1980), and in Elizabeth Shown Mills, "Burials at Natchitoches, 1793-1796," *The Natchitoches Genealogist*, 5 (October, 1980), 1-12. All census reports extant for the Natchitoches post have been published in Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials: Censuses, Military Rolls and Tax Lists, 1722-1803*, Cane River Creole Series, vol. 5 (Chicago: Adams Press, 1980).

Within this study, no citations of sources will ordinarily be made for the multitudinous births, marriages, and deaths that occurred at Natchitoches or for the census rolls of the Natchitoches post. Unless an alternate source is cited, the event can be easily located in one of the above-cited publications. Specific citation will be made of the ecclesiastical registrations and census rolls of the other posts which include Natchitochians.

one hundred colonial censuses, have been vital to the reconstitution process.

Some limitations have been placed upon the subject group. This study focuses upon families of European (that is, "white") origins and upon those Native Americans (both pure-blood and mixed-blood) who left their original environment and settled as free citizens in the European-oriented society of Louisiana. Black families, who were almost entirely of slave status in this period, have been excluded; hopefully they will be analyzed in a separate and future study. For the purposes of the present analysis, it will suffice to point out that no blacks of colonial Natchitoches crossed into white society. Occasionally, however, references are made to blacks in this present analysis, since it is impossible to segregate entirely two groups of people who daily lived close and intimate lives.

In any study of Louisiana's myriad population, various terms must be employed that are not generally understood by the English-speaking public. In the case of certain of these terms, etymologists and varied cultural groups still have not reached a consensus as to exact meaning. Within this study, usage will conform to that which prevailed in colonial Louisiana, as follows:

CREOLE: an individual born in the colony of at least partial European ancestry. Some degree of Indian or black ancestry may or may not be present also.

FRENCH-CANADIAN: An individual born in Canada of French origins.

ACADIAN: An individual of French ancestral origins born on the Isle of Acadia, or a descendant of such who is born in any other nation or colony.

METIVE (*masc.*, or METISSE, *fem.*, *Fr.*): An individual of half-Indian, half-European parentage. On the frontier this designation was usually restricted to those of mixed blood who lived as Indian rather than white. Racial

designations were seldom used for those of mixed-blood who legally married whites and were integrated into white society. Similarly in this society, individuals of half-Indian, half-African parentage were seldom given a special racial label, but merely assumed the ethnic identity of the dominant parent. No separate racial categories existed for those of one-quarter, one-eighth, or less Indian blood.

MESTIZO (*masc.*, or MESTIZA, *fem.*, *Sp.*): A variant of METIVE and METISSE used in the Spanish period.

MULATTO: An individual of half-African, half-European parentage.

QUADROON: An individual of one-quarter African and three-quarters European parentage.

OCTOROON: An individual of one-eighth African and seven-eighths European parentage.

Throughout the colonial era, the development of the Louisiana frontier was influenced by an ever-changing array of political and social factors. For the purposes of this analysis, these will be very broadly summarized into three time-frames that roughly correspond to the major political alterations occurring in the colony: 1)1714-1733; the period in which Natchitoches, and the Louisiana colony, was under private management; 2)1734-1767, the period of French royal control; 3)1768-1803, the period of Spanish royal control.⁴ Each phase wrought significant changes in the character of Louisiana's immigrant population, in the livelihoods they pursued, and in the religious and cultural forces that shaped their day-to-day existence. At Natchitoches, perhaps more

⁴The given dates are generalized ones, since the transition from each form of management to the other was usually an extended process. Reins of administration did not change the same day or even year that a charter was revoked or a treaty of cession was signed. These time frames also parallel other factors significant to this study, such as the dates upon which certain categories of records began to be kept.

than anywhere in the colony, the impact of these political forces was profound, since it was politics that ultimately forced the civilization of the Louisiana frontier.

CHAPTER I
SEEDING THE FRONTIER:
PATTERNS OF SETTLEMENT AND MIGRATION

Consider the pleasing climate in which it [Louisiana] is situated, the fertility of its lands, the choices available throughout its vast extent, the soft manners of its natural-inhabitants, the number of plantations that rich individuals and companies establish daily. . . .¹

The lure of Louisiana should have been irresistible. As the reign of Louis XIV, the once-illustrious "Sun King" of France, burned itself out with the turn of the seventeenth century into the eighteenth, his people were devastated by wars, demoralized by high rates of unemployment, and wasted by famine. The Atlantic shores, for a century already, had enticed the tired and poor of the British Isles, the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free," as Emma Lazarus would eventually describe them.² For more than a century, too, the northeastern reaches of the North American continent had entrapped the heartier Gauls, willing to trade-off the risks of the frozen wilderness for the rewards of a fur industry whose potential knew no bounds. When, in 1698, the French-Canadian brothers, Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville and Jean Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville claimed for Louis the sultry shores of the Gulf of Mexico, the lure of a land whose natural resources were lush, whose soil was

¹Mémoire instructif des profits et avantages des intéressez dans la Compagnie des Indes & de Mississippi, Rosemonde E. and Emile Kuntz Collection, Manuscript Division, Tulane University Library, New Orleans.

²From the immortal lines of "The New Colossus," emblazoned on the pedestal of New York Harbor's Statue of Liberty.

fertile, and whose climate was temperate, should have seduced with hope the wretched refuse of France's teeming shores.

Yet, it did not -- to any significant extent. The colony of Louisiana was destined to be sparsely populated and under-exploited, victimized by French and Spanish politics and eventually dominated by hordes of frontiersmen from the British colonies to the east. Still, the meager few who did commit their lives to the Gulf colony (or had the commitment forced upon them) left an indelible imprint upon the cultural character of the region, one that nearly two centuries of Anglicization have not totally erased. Curiously, the Natchitoches frontier, which in the colonial era marked the border between European and aboriginal cultures, was destined to mark as well the fringe of old Louisiana, where Latin and Anglo cultures would meet and blend.

In 1714, when the foundations of the Natchitoches post were laid, Louisiana was governed by a commercial monopoly acting under the authority of a Crown whose resources had been depleted by the War of the Spanish Succession. The holder of this monopoly, the merchant Antoine Crozat, envisioned the profitable development of the colony through fur trade and mining; and the development of commercial relations with Mexico was a prime element in his plans. It was during the course of one attempted trade expedition to the Rio Grande that temporary storehouses were thrown up near the settlement of the Natchitoches Indians on the Red River, and a small and informal contingent of men were left behind.

This expedition, led by the French-Canadian Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, failed. Still, colonial officials recognized the strategic geographical and political importance of Natchitoches as a bulwark against Spanish aggression eastward from Texas into the region France now claimed. In 1716,

a small military force was sent to join the traders St. Denis left behind, and by January 1718 the construction of Poste St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches had been completed and at least one settler-family had arrived.³

The character of the post's first known family was of extreme political import; moreover, it was almost prophetically symbolic of the society that would eventually develop on that frontier. This family's head, François Guyon dit Dion Despres Derbanne, was in 1714 a 43-year old French-Canadian who had enjoyed a distinguished, albeit unpretentious, career since his arrival in the colony with the second voyage of its founders in 1699. As master of the boat *La Voyageur*, he had ferried vitally-needed supplies to the colony from St. Domingue. He had explored the Missouri farther than any man before him or any man for a half-century thereafter. His private trade activities were almost inseparable from those of the colony's officials; in the course of these adventures, he had represented the interests of the colony (and his own) in both Mexico and La Rochelle. For a number of years he had served as *garde-magasin* of the colony's strategic supply-house on Isle Dauphine, at which time he was lauded by his superiors as "a man reliable, faithful and necessary for the trade in the things that we need among the Indians."⁴

³ Marcel Giraud, *Histoire de la Louisiane française*, Tome second, *Années de transition, 1715-1717* (Paris: Presses Universitaires des France, 1958), 181-183; Copie d'une lettre ou memoir de M. derbanne au sujet du canton des Natchitoches dattée ala nouvelle orleans le 22 8 bre 1723, Paris, Archives Nationales (hereinafter AN), Colonies C¹³, c4.

⁴ Dunbar Rowland, *History of Mississippi, the Heart of the South* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke, 1925), 151-164. Jay Higginbotham, *Old Mobile: Fort Louis de la Louisiane, 1702-1711* (Mobile: Museum of the City of Mobile, 1977), 149, 151, 392, 397, 402, 412, 441, 444-446, 448, 467, erroneously reports the death of Guyon dit Dion Despres Derbanne "about 1701." Abbé Cyprien Tanguay, *Dictionnaire généalogique des familles Canadiennes*, 7 vols. (Quebec: Eusebé Senécal, Imprimeur-Editeur, 1871-1890), I, 294-296. Elizabeth Shown Mills, "François (Guyon) Dion Despres Derbanne: Premier Citoyen, Poste St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches," *The Natchitoches Genealogist*, 6 (October, 1981), 1-10; Elizabeth Shown Mills and Gary B. Mills, *Tales of Old Natchitoches*,

These qualities, undoubtedly, prompted Derbanne's appointment as *garde-magasin* and *subdélégué* of the new outpost of Natchitoches where successful trade was highly desired and the maintenance of good Indian relations was an absolute necessity, particularly so since the neighboring tribes of Texas enjoyed a far greater reputation for ferocity than did the so-called civilized tribes surrounding Mobile.

The rapport which this French Canadian enjoyed with the Native Americans of the Gulf region was of even greater significance to the ethnic and social structure of Natchitoches. Like many of his fellow French Canadians, Derbanne believed that the varied life-styles of the aborigines and the European newcomers were compatible and that the two peoples could coexist successfully in North America. As did many French-Canadians of that era when the colony experienced a shortage of European-born females, Derbanne took an Indian wife and fathered by her a family that would contribute significantly to the civilization of the Louisiana frontier. In short, Derbanne set the pattern of Indian-white relations that would prevail at Natchitoches throughout the colonial period: the Native American was neither ejected nor exterminated; he was assimilated, at his own pace, into the dominant culture established by the Europeans.

In the same year that Derbanne settled at Natchitoches, New Orleans was established as the political capital and trade center of the new Mississippi Company which replaced Crozat's monopoly. Louisiana was to remain under private control only for the next decade and a half, but the bulk of the colonial migration to Louisiana would occur in this era, and it was the

Cane River Creole Series, vol. 3 (Natchitoches: Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches, 1978), 11-14. Duclos to Pontchartrain, 12 October 1713, AN, Colonies C¹³ G.C. Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana*, vol. 1, *The Reign of Louis XIV, 1698-1715*, Joseph C. Lambert, trans. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 68, 222.

characteristics of these settlers that would dominate the cultural life of Louisiana at large, and of Natchitoches specifically, for the remainder of the colonial era.

The populating of Louisiana was a specific requisite in the charter of the Mississippi Company, but it was an inherent condition of success for this company which emphasized land utilization as much as the exploitation of minerals and furs. Vast concessions were made to the company's directors and other financial investors who had no desire to emigrate from France but anticipated the settlement of their lands by hordes of French peasants. Persuading the peasantry to leave family and home behind and relocate in the New World proved to be far more difficult than anticipated. In a desperate attempt to fill their annual quotas, the company resorted to forced emigration. Of the 7,000 new colonists who arrived on Louisiana's shores between 1717 and 1721, a great percentage issued from the prisons, poor houses, and foundling hospitals of France.

Problems resulting from this forced emigration prompted a prohibition of the practice in 1720, but throughout the rest of the period in which Louisiana remained under private control, the bulk of the emigrants were still drawn from the peasant classes, brought to the colony as rank-and-file soldiers or as workers for the various great concessions. Ethnically, they represented a number of European nations, but by far the greatest representation was from France, with the German Palitinate running a somewhat distant second. In sum, even the French were a diverse lot who brought with them the myriad cultural germs already distinguishing the various regions of their births.⁵

⁵Walter Prichard's *Outline of Louisiana History*, Sue Eakin, ed. (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Co., 1974), 17-20. For identification of, and

After the transfer of the colony to French royal control in 1731 (which did not effectively take place until the arrival of the royal governor, Jean Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, in 1733) immigration into Louisiana stagnated. Throughout the French royal period the bulk of identified immigrants at Natchitoches and elsewhere in the colony were soldiers, military dependents, company officials, or random bourgeoisie who had emigrated in apparent hopes of making a fortune in trade. The situation changed but slightly after the transfer of Louisiana to the ailing Spanish colonial empire in 1763 (which did not effectively take place until Juan Joseph Loyola, as Minister of Finance, relieved France of financial responsibility for the colony on 1 January 1768). Emigrating military and civil personnel were now of Iberian ethnicity, but their numbers remained small. Perhaps even more significantly, the steady trickle of French bourgeoisie into the colony was to continue throughout the Spanish era.⁶

It is not surprising that relatively few of these colonists migrated to the frontier outpost of Natchitoches, particularly in the early years before any semblance of civilization existed on that frontier. The first census taken of Natchitoches, in 1722, describes the boundless potential of the region but enumerates a mere handful of settlers or settler-families. The 34 tabulated whites included wives and children of soldiers, but excluded the active military. All of the fourteen men, with only two exceptions, were identified

personal detail on the origins of, the bulk of these settlers, see especially the colonial ship rolls and censuses available in Glenn R. Conrad, *First Families of Louisiana*, 2 vols. (Baton Rouge: Claiborne's Publishing Division, 1970), and the marriage contracts to be found in Winston De Ville, *The New Orleans French, 1720-1733* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1973). Additional detail is available in a host of other publications focusing upon colonial Louisiana.

⁶Prichard's *Outline of Louisiana History*, 22-23, 38-41.

as "former soldiers who have been discharged and who have established themselves here."⁷

Insignificant in number, the enumerated settlers were nonetheless indicative of the colony's immigrant population and its newly-emerging character. Half of its ten children were of mixed Indian-white parentage, sired by three French-Canadians. All were accepted by the community as a part of "white" society. Undoubtedly, other such offspring existed in the indigenous population, given the number of unmarried soldiers and traders who had been in the region at least since 1714, but their miscegenous issue are quantifiable only when they formed an integral part of "white" social and family life, as did the enumerated issue of Derbanne, St. Denis, and the latter's employee, Charles Dumont.

Also included in the 34 enumerated whites were one German settler and eight "wives of soldiers." At least four of the latter were newly-married *femmes de force* sent to the colony under one or more convictions for prostitution, debauchery or theft.⁸ Heretofore, historians have treaded delicately upon this subject, expressing the general consensus that most such females who arrived in the colony were either unjustly charged or else they led such dissolute lives after deportation that they died young and without progeny. The former conclusion has yet to be adequately substantiated or disproven, and the general assumption that these females left no issue may well be due

⁷AC, G1, 464, Colonial Records Collection, Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette.

⁸Personnes renfermées en la maison de force de la Salpêtrière, bonnés pour les isles, 27 juin 1719, Ms. 12692, Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Archives de la Bastille; see also: Noms des filles de la Maison de St. Louis de la Salpêtrière . . . embarquées pour la Louisiane [en la flustre *La Baleine*] 12 Juin 1720, AN, Colonies F⁵ B:54. "List of Private Passengers and Girls embarked on the *Mutine* . . ." in Conrad, *First Families of Louisiana*, I, 26-28.

to the past reluctance of Louisiana families to trace their lines of ascent to an ancestress so charged.

On the contrary, an analysis of the colonial records at Natchitoches specifically, and in the colony as a whole, clearly proves that the *femmes de force* or *filles de joie*, as they are variously called, were both worthy and fertile citizens. None of the ladies enumerated on that first census of the Natchitoches post in 1722 had any hint of scandal attached to her name after her settlement at Natchitoches. Generally speaking, the same appears to be true of many of their fellow shipmates who settled with new husbands at other colonial posts and whose descendants periodically wound their way upriver to settle on the Natchitoches frontier.

An analysis of the population existing within the Natchitoches jurisdiction on the eve of the Louisiana Purchase, 1803, indicates that at least 22 percent (Anglo newcomers excluded) were known to descend from one or more of the *femmes de force* who arrived in Louisiana aboard the *La Mutine* and the *La Baleine* in 1719. No attempt has yet been made to trace descendants of any of the forced-emigrant males (who are, likewise, represented in the frontier population) nor has any systematic study of all descendants of Louisiana's *femmes de force* been attempted. Since unknown elements exist in the lineages of a certain number of Creole-born frontiersmen as the colonial era drew to a close, it may be expected that some portion of their lineages would also trace to those definitely prolific female colonists. It is also important to note that 1803 descendants of these females are not limited to any one social or economic level. Rather, they represent a cross-section of all stratas of frontier society.

Of the 2,631 colonials identified on the Natchitoches frontier, 359 (13 percent) were known immigrants. The greatest rate of influx occurred in the

first fourteen years, when Louisiana was still under the control of private companies. The 119 immigrants (39 percent of the total) who settled Natchitoches in this period arrived at a rate of 8.5 per year. By contrast, in the 37 years of French royal control, the immigrant population boosted itself only 3.8 per year, for a total of 140 immigrants. Under the Spanish regime, the rate of immigration fell to 2.9 per year.

The sex ratio of this immigrant population further illustrates the character of French and Spanish colonial migration in general. Of the 119 immigrants who arrived at Natchitoches between 1718 and 1731, 75 were male and 44 were female. As already indicated, the female immigrant population of early Louisiana primarily consisted of prospective wives for single male colonists and of dependents of male workers or soldiers. Under royal control, both French and Spanish, no shipments of single females are known to have been made, and whole-family emigration from Europe was relatively rare -- an occurrence noted in almost none of the Anglo colonies outside Maryland.⁹ Of the 140 immigrants to settle at Natchitoches between 1732 and 1768, only 8 were female. Among the 100 who arrived there between 1769 and 1803, only 2 women appear.

In many other respects, the Natchitoches population differed drastically from other studied populations along the Atlantic coast. One study of the colony of Maryland in the first century of its existence, for example, found that "for most of the period the *great majority* of inhabitants had been born in what we now call Britain. Population increase in Maryland [settled 1634] did not result primarily from births in the colony before the late 1680s and

⁹Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "The Planter's Wife: The Experience of White Women in Seventeenth-Century Maryland," in Michael Gordon, ed., *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 263.

did not produce a predominantly native population of adults before the first decade of the 18th century."¹⁰ By contrast, at Natchitoches the shift in population balance occurred between 1735 and 1740, a mere two decades after the first settler-family arrived. By 1745 the native population was twice that of the foreign-born; by 1755 it had risen to three times the number; and by the early Spanish regime, immigrants represented only one-sixth of the frontier's population. (See TABLE 1.)

TABLE I
FOREIGN-NATIVE POPULATION RATIOS, 1725-1790

Year	Native		Foreign-Born		Total Number
	#	%	#	%	
1725	26	25.5	76	74.5	102
1730	34	39.5	52	60.5	86
1735	50	43.1	66	56.9	116
1740	85	60.7	55	39.3	140
1745	105	68.6	48	31.4	153
1750	125	68.3	58	31.7	183
1755	153	73.2	53	26.8	206
1760	228	83.8	44	16.2	272
1770	357	81.5	81	18.5	438
1780	523	86.9	79	13.1	602
1790	717	87.7	101	12.3	818

NOTE: Adequate census figures do not exist to provide such an analysis of the frontier population's nativity and growth. The cited figures are based upon a reconstitution of the community at periodic intervals, using known births, deaths, and residences for each member of the subject population.

No less than fourteen separate national identities appear among those 359 male and female immigrants: France, Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, Luxembourg, Italy, England, Ireland, Mexico, Cuba, the Canary Islands,

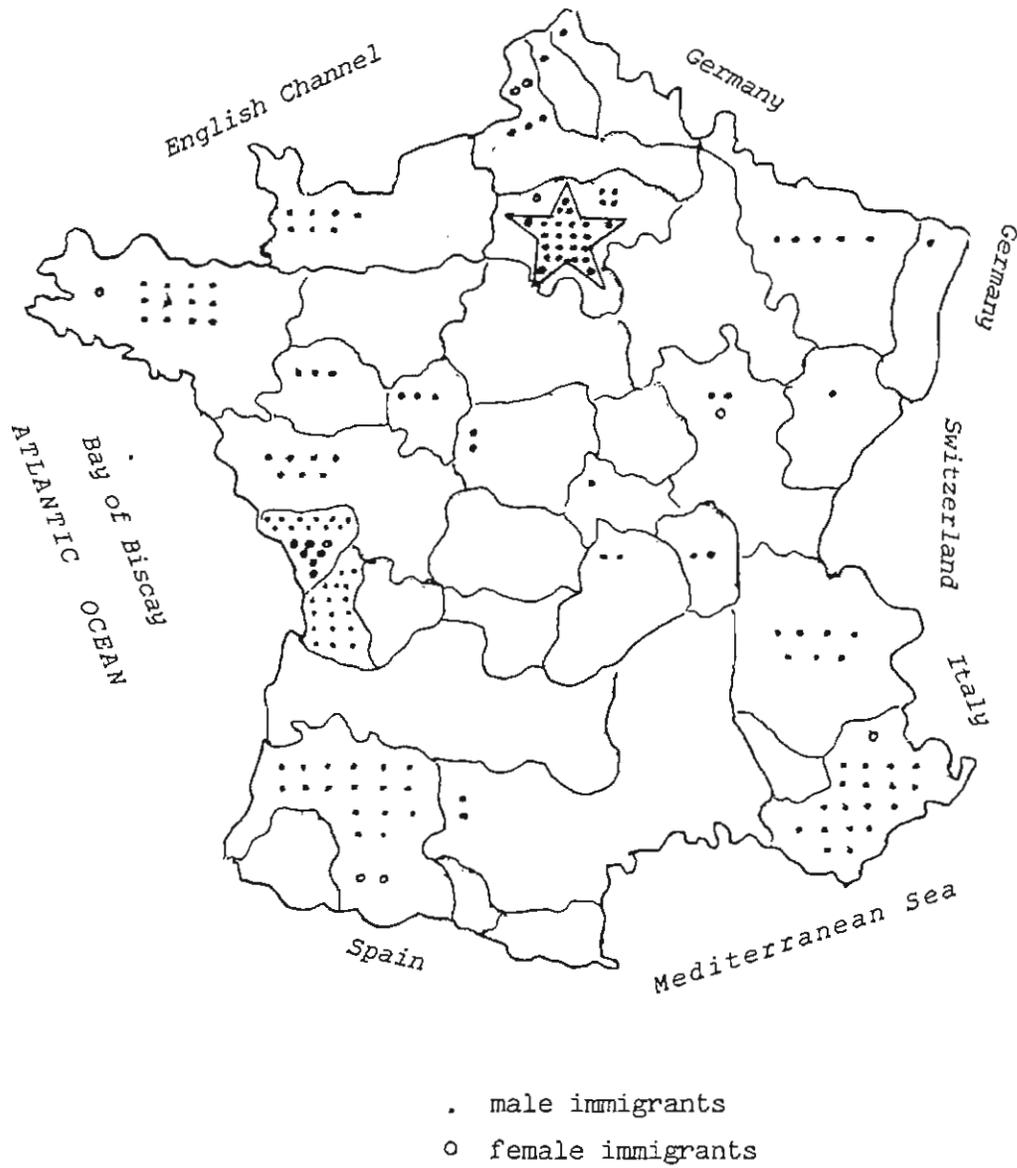
¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Canada, Acadia, and the new United States of America. Additionally, there also appeared one cluster-family loosely termed *Bohemes* by the French and "Gypsies" by the Anglos, whose point of origin remains uncertain. Clearly, the cultural germs with which this frontier was seeded were exceedingly broad. A variety of languages appear in the colonial records left by this population. Even in their profession of faiths they did not always conform to state religion.

Moreover, immigrants from several of the individual countries originated in areas with such divergent cultures that it is impossible to speak in general terms of a "French influence," or an "Italian influence," which they may have contributed to Louisiana society. Natives of Brittany in northern Gaul do not display the same social characteristics as inhabitants of the Basses-Pyrénées on the southern border of France; and families of Alsace-Lorraine, Franche-Comté and Burgundy probably share more cultural traits with the Palatinates who were labelled "German" than with the more cosmopolitan French of Saintonge. The diverse immigrants from each of the regions of France would have brought with them attitudes toward law, family structure, and sexual morality that would often have been at odds with the views of their "fellow Frenchmen" from other regions. Nevertheless, certain patterns of immigration are evident, particularly among the French who represent the largest national group; and the families spawned by immigrants from certain regions came to display in Louisiana some distinct characteristics that will be discussed in the course of this study.

In general terms, and not surprisingly, French immigrants stemmed predominantly from the coastal areas and from the congested Paris Basin. (See Figure 1). Over the course of the century certain variations did appear. Emigration from the German areas (including the French provinces along the

FIGURE 1
PROVINCIAL ORIGINS OF FRENCH IMMIGRANTS
to 1803



Germanic border) was strongest in the early years; none, in fact, is known to have occurred during the Spanish regime. Emigration from the northern provinces of France (Brittany, Normandy, and Flanders) was likewise strongest in the French regime, while immigration into Spanish Louisiana came chiefly from Southern France and Italy, a phenomenon that emphasizes the more Latin culture of Southern France as opposed to the Germanic influences strong in that country's Northern provinces.

Throughout all of the colonial era, significant emigration occurred from the La Rochelle region of coastal France, particularly among the merchant class. Evidence further indicates that social or blood relationships existed between certain of these families (as for example, the various Pavie, Metoyer and Marcolly emigrants) prior to their arrival on the frontier, although the various members arrived throughout a period of two to three generations. Aside from these La Rochelle area families, however, little evidence exists that emigration to Louisiana occurred in family groups or that individual emigration may have been encouraged by family members already settled in the colonies, as is known to be the case with other ethnic groups settling the Atlantic coast.

Another significant aspect of colonial emigration to Louisiana is the degree of fluidity which settlers displayed prior to emigration. Among both the single-males and the family-groups who came to Natchitoches from France, at least two and as many as four continental residences have been identified for a significant number. Various documents, for example, indicate that Pierre Brosset resided in Bienvenut, Fondcouvert, Taillebourg, La Rochelle, and Saintes prior to his arrival in Louisiana about 1771, and traces of Brosset's residences there can be found in all five locales. The surgeon-botanist Claude-François Mercier is identified as a native of Grenoble, born 1720; his

daughter Charlotte was born in Carcassone 1751-1754, while his son François was born in Leon, 1756.¹¹

Varying economic factors in France, principally, contributed to the fluidity of colonial migration and emigration. Cessation of hostilities after the War of the Spanish Succession, 1713, created significant unemployment and depression, particularly among the military and among those whose crafts were closely associated with the navy,¹² a fact that explains the prevalence of large numbers of immigrants from coastal France, as well as a predominance of craftsmen and laborers among the civilian population on the Natchitoches frontier. The deportation of convicted or accused felons, principally from the Salpetrière and the Bastille, contributed heavily to initial emigration from the region of Paris, while the necessity of policing the colony mandated the shipment of the high percentage of soldiers. Moreover, the finding that few of these soldiers possessed any skill or trade reflects the not-surprising fact that France did not waste her best military units on a colony she was already neglecting in almost every other way.

As was true of most American colonies (and contrary to the fanciful postures of traditional family historians) few immigrants of colonial Louisiana came from the upper echelons of European society. Ironically, the few who were attracted to the colonial frontier gained little personal profit from the

¹¹Identification of Brosset's various European residences can be found in Documents 741 and 1241, Colonial Archives, Office of the Clerk of Court, Natchitoches Court House (hereinafter cited as NCH); Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729-1803*, No. 1040; Winston De Ville, *Marriage Contracts of Natchitoches*, Vol. 2, Colonial Louisiana Marriage Contracts (Easton, Louisiana: privately printed, 1961), No. 56; and La Rochelle, Archives Départementales de la Charente-Maritime, Registres Paroissiales de Fondcouverte, January 1743-December 1744. For identification of the origins of the Merciers, see Doc. 652, Colonial Archives, NCH; Mills, *Natchitoches 1729-1803*, No. 3404; Mills, *Natchitoches, 1800-1826*, No. 837; and Recensement General du Poste des Natchitoches . . . 1787, Seville, Archivo General de Indias, Papeles Pro-cedentes de Cuba (herein-after cited as AGI-PPC), Legajo 201.

¹²Giraud, *History of French Louisiana*, I, 257.

experience, by and large, they contributed little to the development of a class-structure in frontier society or to an economic or social elite, and they left little of their noble blood behind. All those Natchitoches immigrants with traceable noble ancestry came to the frontier only because they had received civil or military appointments there. Most did not remain, and at least one of those who did live out his life on that frontier (the post's founder, Juchereau de St. Denis) did not do so by choice. Of *nouvelle noblesse* origins himself, St. Denis' original design was to settle in Guatemala with his young Mexican-born wife,¹³ but his ambition was thwarted and the French government refused him permission to leave the colony and its service. Late in his career, the embittered commandant wrote to a niece in Canada:¹⁴

. . . I do not advise any of [our family] to come, for I can assure you that it is a very worthless country; happy he who can get out of it and infinitely happier is he who has never come to it, and no matter how old I should be I would wish with all my heart to be out of it. . . .

Of the four other known noblemen who settled for any length of time at Natchitoches, three were sons-in-law of St. Denis. César de Blanc, a native of Marseilles and son of the noble Captain Charles de Blanc by his wife Marguerite d'Espagnet,¹⁵ came to the colony as a middle-aged lieutenant and died at Natchitoches as its commander without having made any significant imprint upon Louisiana or being significantly altered by it. A brother-in-law, Jean

¹³Breve compendio de los sucesos ocurridos en la Provincia de Texas, Mexico City, Archivo General de la Nación, Ramo de Historia, Provincias Internas (hereinafter cited as AGN-PI), Tomo 27, 9-10.

¹⁴Ross Phares, *Cavalier in the Wilderness: The Story of the Explorer and Trader Louis Juchereau de St. Denis* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952; reprinted Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Co., 1976), 261.

¹⁵For biographical data on de Blanc see Mills, *Natchitoches 1729-1803*, No. 557; De Ville, *New Orleans French*, 28; "Records of the Superior Council of Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, VI (April, 1923), 290, and VIII (July, 1925), 480-481.

Jacques de la Chaise (also married to a St. Denis daughter), was son of the former director of affairs in Louisiana for the Company of the Indies; young de la Chaise saw little prospects for advancement on the Natchitoches frontier, past his minor post of *subdélégué* and *garde-magasin*, and he left the frontier entirely.¹⁶

By contrast, the third St. Denis son-in-law arrived in Louisiana under less auspicious circumstances, having been banished from France under a *lettre de cachet* requested by his own mother who had found him ungovernable. Whatever character deficiencies the young Athanase Christophe Fortunat Manguet de Mézières may have initially displayed were soon ameliorated on the savage frontier of Louisiana. While a sister lived royally at court, as the wife of the Duke of Orleans, de Mézières raised his own large family in a mud-walled frontier cabin, using much of his personal fortune to maintain peace and economic stability on the Louisiana frontier. In a long and illustrious career that spanned almost a half-century, he shaped the development of the frontiers of both Louisiana and Texas as no other single man did; and his talents did not go unappreciated by the often short-sighted colonial crowns. Not only was he appointed commandant of the frontier outpost of Natchitoches by Spanish officials upon their arrival in the colony, but he was also promoted to the governorship of Spanish Texas shortly before his death.¹⁷

¹⁶Biographical data on de la Chaise is gleaned from such sources as Mills, *Natchitoches, 1729-1803*, Nos. 144, 178, 193; "Records of the Superior Council," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XVIII (April, 1935), 451-452; Laura L. Porteous, trans., "Index to the Spanish Judicial Records of Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, VI (April 1923), 316-317.

¹⁷See Herbert Eugene Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières and the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1768-1780*, 2 vols. (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1914), I, 79-122; Docs. 2163, 2165, Colonial Archives, NCH; *La grande encyclopédie, inventaire raisonné des sciences, des lettres et des arts* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1899), XXIV, 233; and *Nouvelle biographie générale* (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1865), XXXVI, 203-206.

Ironically, the noblemen who had cause to come to Natchitoches did not infuse their blood into the native population to any significant extent. While 22 percent (n = 252) of the *ancien population* of Natchitoches in 1803 descended from *femmes de force*, only 1.7 percent (n = 21) of that same white population could claim any modicum of noble ancestry. Most descendants of both St. Denis and de Blanc had left the area, and the numerous progeny of de Mézières did not wed at all, although at least two of his sons found celibacy impossible. Almost exclusively, the frontier nobility of this 1803 population descended from the former Lieutenant Louis Mathias Le Court de Presle, son of the noble naval lieutenant Joseph Le Court, Seigneur of Presle in Normandy; but in an ironic commentary upon social justice, it must be noted that a far greater amount of "noble blood" flowing in the veins of old Natchitoches families is to be found among the descendants of the nonwhite population excluded from this study.

In spite of the slow rate of immigration into Natchitoches, the community's growth throughout the colonial period continued at a significant rate. Census statistics available from 1722 to 1802 (see Table 2) indicate a population development that ranged from an overall 8.1 percent per annum in the first fifteen years for which figures are available to a low of 1.4 percent in the last fifteen years of the colonial era. However, the average rate of 4.1 percent compares very favorably with similar statistics available for three neighboring frontier villages in present Franklin County, Massachusetts (Deerfield, Greenfield, and Shelburne) where the growth rate peaked at an "extremely high 5.8 percent" in the first 35 years for which statistics are available (1765-1800) and slowed to a low of .30 percent between 1800 and 1815 before climbing once more to a "moderate .59 percent" in the 1850-1900 period. A similar study of population growth in frontier Connecticut reports

TABLE 2
POPULATION GROWTH (CENSUS STATISTICS) 1722-1802

Census Year	Total Population		Percent of Annual Fluctuation Since Last Census	
	White	Nonwhite	White	Nonwhite
1722	34	28	-	-
1726	102	35	46.0	7.0
1737	112	121	1.0	12.0
1766	402	284	4.5	3.3
1769	453	311	4.0	3.0
1787	661	-	2.1	-
1795	728	937	1.3	4.2
1796	769	945	5.6	.8
1798	777	958	1.0	1.4
1799	786	935	1.2	-2.4
1800	775	949	-1.4	1.5
1801	804	984	3.7	3.7
1802	792	986	-1.5	.2

SOURCE: Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials: Censuses, Military Rolls, and Tax Lists, 1722-1803*, Cane River Creole Series, vol. 5 (Chicago: Adams Press, 1981).

comparable findings: "Up to 1765, and for most towns even after, an increase of from one to five percent a year was a normal condition of life."¹⁸

While census statistics for various areas are useful for comparison's sake, any quantification done on the basis of such statistics are doomed to error. The most sophisticated formula yet devised for quantifying that

¹⁸H. Temkin-Greener and A. C. Swedlund, "Fertility Transition in the Connecticut Valley: 1740-1850," *Population Studies*, 32 (March, 1978), 28; Kenneth Lockridge, "Land, Population and the Evolution of New England Society, 1630-1790," in Stephen Salisbury, ed., *Essays on the History of the American West* (Hinsdale, Ill.: The Dryden Press, 1975), 63. Similarly, Philip J. Greven, Jr., reports "almost stagnant" population growth in Andover, Massachusetts, during this same period, ranging from a high of 2.9 percent in the quarter-century 1675-1700 to a low of 1.0 in 1775-1799; see *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), 180.

margin of error still remains merely an "educated guess," since human error cannot be standardized. Reconstitution of the Natchitoches frontier for specific years does yield some measure of the error which is inherent in each census, although it would be presumptuous to assume that all transients can be identified even through this method.

The most significant errors in enumerating the population have been found in the crucial censuses of 1766 and 1787. In actuality, two censuses exist for the former year, an apparent rough draft and a final copy.¹⁹ While

¹⁹In his generally excellent demographic study of Spanish colonial Louisiana, Acosta Rodríguez erroneously describes these two censuses as being taken a year apart and reaches various conclusions based upon this assumption. According to his presentation, the first census (which actually bears the date 27 January 1766) is a census of the population of the just-completed year 1765, while the second census (dated 6 May 1766) enumerates the official 1766 population.

Actually, the two 1766 censuses, dated only 4 months and 9 days apart, represent a rough draft in French and a final, revised, and more complete copy in Spanish, which had in the interval become the official language. Although it was not uncommon for Spanish censuses taken in January of a given year (usually early in January) to reflect the population of the previous year, it was customarily indicated on those documents that the census was for the preceding rather than the present year. The January, 1766, enumeration of Natchitoches contains no such statement. Moreover, this enumeration dated 27 January includes individuals who were not yet born in 1765: for example, a female child born to Jacques Rachal and wife on 10 January 1766 and another female child born to Pierre Baillio and wife on 15 January 1766. Neither would have been included on a 1765 enumeration.

It must also be noted that, in seeking to explain differing figures on these two census drafts, Acosta Rodríguez identifies fifteen men listed at the end of the May enumeration as "*recien llegados*" -- that is, "new arrivals." The actual words used by the enumerator were "*solteros que se han establecido nuevamente y aun no posseron cosa alguna*" -- that is, they were bachelors who had recently gone out on their own and did not yet possess anything. This semantic technicality does make a difference since several of the individuals in question were natives of the Natchitoches post, were enumerated on the previous census, and therefore would not account for the increase which that May census showed over the previous draft.

Similarly, in seeking to explain population differences between Natchitoches in 1766, 1769, and 1770 (as shown on the various enumerations), Acosta Rodríguez notes that the 1769 census includes the post of Rapides and concludes that the 1766 figures must have included Rapides as well. To the contrary, the Rapides post did not exist in 1766. Two of the families which settled Rapides in 1767 (the households of Widow Barranco and Robert Dupré) do appear on the 1766 enumeration of Natchitoches as residents of the Coté

The first of these two enumerations shows a white population of 308,²⁰ the revision makes a more complete count of 402. Yet, the revised enumeration overlooked five adult male settlers with nine dependents who can be found in other records of the post in these months.

Some of the omissions and corrections made on the enumerations of 1766 are understandable -- as, for example, the inclusion in May (after the close of the fur-trapping season) of 13 hunters and their dependents who would have still been in the woods when the population was first counted in January. However, given the relatively small number of inhabitants at the post, it is difficult to understand how other errors could have occurred -- as, for example, the January omission of the seven-member household of Jean Baptiste Prudhomme, a Natchitoches native who was the post surgeon and the captain of its infantry, as well as an established planter who never resided in any other locale.

The most serious margin of error made on any of the Natchitoches enumerations is to be found on the 1787 census for which only one draft is known to exist. The compiler tabulated 660 "whites," a figure that actually included 11 free people of color. A detailed comparison of the enumerated individuals with all families and individuals known to reside at the post at that time reveals a serious accumulation of errors ranging from whole families to the occasional illegitimate offspring of young daughters in certain families

Joyeuse, just below the village, but none of the other Rapides families of 1769 are to be found on any prior census of Natchitoches.

See Acosta Rodríguez, *La Poblacion*, 37. Copies of the two 1766 censuses can be found in AGN-PI, Tomo 91, and PPC-AGI, Leg. 2585. Transcripts are more easily available in Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 9-20.

²⁰The January, 1766, census also contains one erroneously-added column. The number of "boys" enumerated was 115, not 125, as cited in the manuscript totals and as used by Acosta Rodriguez in his analysis.

who probably preferred not to call attention to the existence of a bastard even though other records prove the child was very much alive. In all, 56 whites are known to have been overlooked -- some 9 percent of the community's population.²¹

All points considered, a significant rate of growth did occur at Natchitoches in the colonial era. Two factors are primarily responsible: natural increase (to be discussed at length in Chapter IV) and migration from other posts within the colony. Current studies of colonial society have not adequately addressed this latter issue; yet twentieth-century concerns over the disruptive influence that "excess mobility" exerts upon family stability emphasizes the need for studying the migration experiences of specific families in past societies.

An analysis of the families who populated the Natchitoches frontier reveals an exceedingly high mobility rate. Of all identified colonials at this post (2,631) 872 were known to reside for a period of time at one or more other Louisiana posts. This number represents 49 percent of the total population that reached adulthood prior to 1803. Of this migratory group, the bulk (82.5 percent) have been found residing in two settlements within Louisiana or along the Louisiana-Texas frontier; 15 percent have been found in three communities; 3 percent have been found thus far in four distant settlements; and .3 percent (n = 3) have been found residing in *five* colonial communities. The twenty-one other settlements in which the Natchitoches

²¹Acosta Rodríguez' analysis of the 1787 census (p. 157) does not include these adjusted figures, of course. Nevertheless, he expressed considerable surprise at the increase in population which even the underenumeration revealed, and he questions whether the increase over the two previous censuses might not be the result of the inclusion of two new "dependencies" in the Natchitoches jurisdiction: Lac Noir and Bayou aux Pierre. Since his study is based upon mass figures rather than individual personalities, he would not be aware that both these "dependencies" were overwhelmingly populated by individuals who were enumerated on the previous Natchitoches lists.

migrants have been found range from the extreme posts of upper Louisiana (present Illinois) to Mobile on the eastern French-Spanish frontier, to Los Adaes and San Antonio, on the western Spanish-French frontier. The greatest number in any one single community outside of Natchitoches, not surprisingly, were to be found in the colony's commercial center, New Orleans -- known to all colonists simply as *la ville*, the city.

The question of migration between settlements within a given colony touches upon a contemporary concept of individual freedom versus government control that history also has not adequately treated. In this "land of opportunity," founded on the "principle of freedom," (as the patriotic public tends to express the idea) how much freedom did the individual actually have to live where he thought opportunity might exist?

Lockridge's study of colonial Dedham suggests that the right to move²² where one pleased was not a basic right in early Massachusetts. In discussing the rise of a pauper class, he notes that in the first three decades of the eighteenth century the number of newcomers "warned out of town" increased sixfold, "reaching the point where three strangers had to be moved along in the typical year." Lockridge also notes comparable situations in Watertown and Rehoboth, where the "warnings-out increased steadily" to 6.25 individuals per year in the 1750s. By the mid-eighteenth century, he concludes, "the wandering poor had become a part of the landscape in this part of New England."²²

Colonial Louisiana shared the eighteenth-century idea that individual mobility was a public as well as a private matter. At Natchitoches (and elsewhere in Louisiana) official permission was required before any individual or family left one post for another, regardless of whether the departure was

²²Lockridge, "Land, Population," 64.

to be temporary or permanent; however, no evidence has been found to indicate that the landless poor were denied permission to settle on the frontier, and it is a known fact that the Natchitoches jurisdiction attracted sizable numbers of vagabonds. Under ordinary circumstances, permission to relocate seems to have been routinely granted, but in certain known cases, officials adamantly refused permission on the basis that their departure from the frontier would be detrimental to the welfare of the community.

In 1781, for example, the settler Jean Baptiste Malbert requested permission for his family of ten or so members to move downriver from Natchitoches to the post of St. Landry of Opelousas. The permission was routinely given. Later that same year, as a new commandant took office, he was informed by another settler, Antonio Manuel de Soto y Bermudez, that the old commandant had likewise granted permission to leave to the Soto family. Shortly after Soto's departure with his thirteen-member household, together with a family in his employ that contained another nine individuals, the new commandant, Étienne de Vaugine, learned he had been hoodwinked and that the Sotos had left the frontier without permission. By January, yet another family requested authorization to move and went so far as to sell their plantation in expectation of their relocation. Alarmed by the prospect of losing still more of his frontiersmen, Vaugine denied permission and wrote his superiors in New Orleans of his dilemma:²³

The one called Brosset, presently the porter for the citizens of this post (by whom I have the honor of writing you) has presented for sale his concession, but I have disapproved the sale because Brosset wants to move to Opelousas. . . . Likewise Sauterelle [Brosset's father-in-law] has been looking for a buyer for his own land for two years. This is a sizable family, and if they are permitted to remove themselves it will have serious consequences for the post.

²³Leg. 195, PPC-AGI; Reel 5, Jack D. L. Holmes Collection, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches.

As justification for the desired move, Pierre Brosset had complained of a lack of religious freedom at Natchitoches, placing the blame on the excessive zeal of the parish priest who required attendance at church so often that one did not have adequate time left to tend one's crops -- or so Brosset asserted. By contrast, the pastor of the Opelousas post was reputed to be more understanding of temporal needs. Commandant de Vaugine rejected Brosset's reasoning, as well as his request to move; but the family left for Opelousas anyway. By February, Governor Estevan de Miró had sent official permission for Vaugine to "reclaim" Brosset from the Opelousas commandant. As Miró curtly opined: "It is not reasonable that the settlers should change their domicile at their own volition and according to their caprices."²⁴

The governor's orders notwithstanding, Brosset still declined to return to Natchitoches. In August, Commandant de Vaugine renewed his complaint to the governor, and there the records of this problem end. However, the 1786 census of the Opelousas post includes the Brosset family (but not his in-laws) and the notarial and church records of that lower post indicate Brosset's continued presence there at least through January 1788.²⁵ Eventually, the governor and the commandant won their battle, or else Brosset tired of Opelousas and decided of his own volition and caprice that he would like to return to Natchitoches. Baptismal records of the frontier church document

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵For example, see: Pierre Brosset v. Widow Laurent Dupre *dit* Terrebonne, Opel: 1786, June 3, Opelousas Notarial Records Collection, Louisiana State Archives and Records Service, Baton Rouge; and Gladys de Villiers, *The Opelousas Post, A Compendium of Church Records Relating to the First Families of Southwest Louisiana, 1776-1806* (Cottonport, Louisiana: Polyanthos, 1972), 22.

the family's return prior to 29 December 1789.

Philip Greven's study of colonial Andover treats to a limited degree the question of voluntary out-migration. While the initial population of his community is portrayed as more-or-less permanent, Greven records some measure of out-migration in each generation. The pattern which emerges in that community is exactly reverse of the pattern found on the Natchitoches frontier. Four-fifths of Andover's second-generation remained "permanently settled in the town which their fathers had established [and] thirty nine of the third-generation either are definitely known to have moved away or can be reasonably assumed to have moved."²⁶ Conversely, at Natchitoches considerable mobility occurred among the first generation and peaked in the second generation which showed a definite proclivity toward abandoning (at least temporarily) the frontier upon which their parents settled. Among those who remained past the second generation, the rate of departure was increasingly smaller. (See Figure 2.)

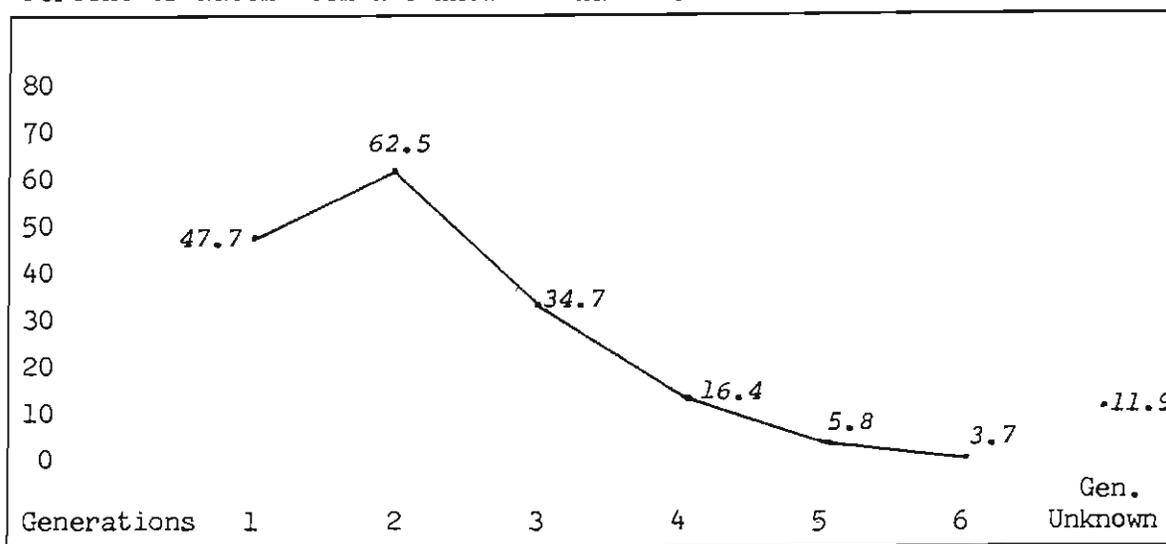
To some extent, the noticeably smaller tendency of later Natchitoches generations to leave their community (as contrasted to the pattern shown in Andover and similar New England villages) may be due to a different concept and organization of the community itself. Colonial New England towns tended to be compact communities in which limited acreage was divided among original settlers -- a division that, in general, concentrated dwelling sites into an urban cluster surrounded by small agricultural plots within convenient distance of the proprietors who resided in the towns. This system, which was also to be found in Canada and to a significant extent in Europe, provided the frontiersman with maximum protection against hostile Indians, but it created an inherent lack of room for new generations to expand.

²⁶Greven, *Four Generations*, 39, 123.

FIGURE 2

COLONIAL MIGRATION BY GENERATION

Percent of Natchitochians Known to Have Resided at Other Louisiana Posts



By contrast, the figuratively-walled town did not exist on the Louisiana frontier.²⁷ The first map of Natchitoches, drawn by Ignace François Broutin in 1732, indicates that such a community may have been planned initially.²⁸ The houses of the settlers are clustered around the walls of the fort, with *vacheries* and other agricultural landholdings indicated for various settlers

²⁷On this point evidence disagrees strongly with the interpretation offered in one classic history of Louisiana which contends: "French settlers, unlike British and later American settlers who preferred to establish scattered farms . . . , generally settled in compact little villages. . . . Houses were built close together for protection. . . . If possible, they were located close to both forested and open lands, so that building material and firewood and ground for grazing and tillage would not be too far distant. . . . In many cases, settlements were replicas of villages in France." See Edwin Adams Davis, *Louisiana: A Narrative History* (Baton Rouge: Claitor's Book Store, 1961), 85.

²⁸Paris, Service Hydrographique de la Marine, Atlas 4044-C, f.50. A readily accessible, but not very legible, copy has been published as part of Samuel Wilson, Jr.'s study, "Ignace François Broutin," in John Francis McDermott, *Frenchmen and French Ways in the Mississippi Valley* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 272.

along the perimeter of the community. Past 1732, however, there is no evidence of the retention of this settlement pattern. Those agricultural lands which the *habitants* transferred by extant notarial acts include, invariably, their respective *maisons*; and these lands are of too large an extent to have been accommodated within the confines of the urban community.

Two factors seem primarily responsible for the deviance of the Natchitoches population from the settlement pattern that had proven efficacious throughout colonial North America and which existed to a great degree in Europe. First, the site of Poste St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches was militarily strategic, being situated upon an "island" of land formed by the multitudinous branches of Red River at that point. However, the soil was not suitable for farming. One contemporary observer described the island as:²⁹

. . . nothing but sand, and that so fine that the wind drives it like dust . . . so that the tobacco attempted to be cultivated there at first was loaded with it. . . no more tobacco is raised in this island, but provisions only, as maize, potatoes, pompions &c., which cannot be damaged by the sands.

A second reason for the diffusion of the settlers at this frontier post may well be the extremely good relations with area and western Indians that was established and maintained by Derbanne, St. Denis, and the latter's sons-in-law who succeeded him in office.

Regardless of reasons, the decentralization of the Natchitoches settlers into a thinly-scattered, predominantly-rural frontier population, loosely bound together by the fort, the church, and the very few shops that existed at the post, accommodated the absorption of numerous new generations into the economic life of the community. Once the rudiments of civilization were

²⁹ Antoine-Simon le Page du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana or of the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina* (trans. from the French, London: T. Becket, 1774; reprinted, Baton Rouge: Claitor's Publishing Division, 1972), 150.

evident on the frontier, once the newly-maturing youth recognized that permanent potential did exist at Natchitoches, out-migration became relatively uncommon in the colonial era. There was continually evident a steady radiation of settlers outward from the central island, a steady pushing back of the frontier on a very local basis, as each new generation took up land on the fringe of the settled area (or, as small farmers sold their plots to more ambitious neighbors and obtained new concessions on the fringes of civilization). However, in this expansion process, almost all settlers remained within the jurisdiction of the Natchitoches fort and of the parish church.

One aspect of colonial migration which remains especially in need of study is that which genealogists have long called the "ping-pong pattern," that is, migration that bounces back and forth between a number of regions and often results in the bouncer returning to his original location, as in the previously-cited Brosset case. At Natchitoches, this pattern is particularly obvious. A significant number of those who left Natchitoches for more alluring prospects elsewhere eventually returned, a pattern that is noticeable among both male and female out-migrants.

For example, in 1752 the Creole Marie Louise Rachal, a second-generation Natchitochian, married the French-Canadian Pierre Noel Gallien; shortly thereafter the couple left the post. In 1767 the Widow Gallien is found at the more southern post of Pointe Coupée where she marries another French-Canadian, Jean Baptiste Alexis Cloutier. From there, the lady's migration can be traced even farther southward to the German Coast where several children were born to her in the 1770s; but, by 1778, Marie Louise had returned to Natchitoches with her second husband, where the family located in

the newly emerging settlement of Rivière aux Cannes among her siblings and cousins.³⁰

Similarly, a whole generation or even two have been found to leave the Natchitoches frontier and establish homes elsewhere; yet, in a varying number of years, the family reappears in the community as permanent settlers. The Bossier family provides an excellent example of this migration pattern. The initial settler, Jean-Baptiste, is known to have resided at Natchitoches as early as 1726, at which time he took a bride from the German Coast of Louisiana and filed his contract of marriage with her at nearby New Orleans. Through 1739 he appears in colonial records as a "settler at Natchitoches." In the 1740s and 1750s the family is not to be found at the post at all; but in 1772 it resurfaces when François, his son, came back upriver from the German Coast and located at Natchitoches near a married stepsister. By 1777, François also left the area, resettling at the Opelousas post where he is enumerated next door to his wife's brother. Three years later, his own eldest son (the third generation Bossier in Louisiana) reappeared at Natchitoches where he, François-Paul, married a Natchitoches Creole and permanently located at the frontier post. Shortly thereafter, François-Paul was joined by several siblings who, for the most part, became permanent settlers at Natchitoches and contributed much to its development over the next several decades.³¹

³⁰*Diocese of Baton Rouge, Catholic Church Records: Vol. I, 1707-1769* (Baton Rouge: Diocese of Baton Rouge, 1978), 152-153; see also Mills, *Natchitoches 1729-1803*, Nos. 3378 and 3419.

³¹De Ville, *New Orleans French*, 13; Correspondence of Fermin de Ybericu, Los Adaes, 1739, AGN-PI, Vol. 524, 158-151; "Records of the Superior Council," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, VII (July, 1924), 509, 696; Recensement generale des postes Attakapas et Oppeloussas, du 4^e May 1777, Leg. 2358, PPC-AGI.

Such migration patterns as these exhibited by the Natchitoches settlers raise a crucial question which must be addressed by those currently engaged in demographic studies based upon family reconstitution. Was the mobility of the settlers of this frontier typical or atypical? Might not this phenomenon be one cause of many of the family gaps that researchers report in other geographical areas -- of the excessively long intervals between births of known children, for example? Evidence clearly indicates that in Colonial Louisiana family reconstitution at any one post is not possible without study of the records generated at all the other posts -- and the strength of the evidence would seem to suggest that the geographical isolation in which other communities have generally been studied might artificially alter the patterns that are reported.

Given the diverse origins of the Natchitoches colonists, it is inevitable that a great degree of ethnic homogenization occurred. By 1803 there existed only a modicum of settlers, mostly foreign-born, who might lay any claim to ethnic "purity" -- and when one considers the circumstances existing abroad, that uprooted generations of Europeans in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern periods, any likelihood of a given emigrant bringing an unadulterated ethnic strain to the New World is questionable.

By far the most obvious result of ethnic interaction at Natchitoches was the degree to which the dominant population had absorbed the native Indian. Vestiges of most Red River tribes still remained, but far more of their legacy was indelibly stamped upon the features of the whites and blacks who settled among them. At least 51 percent of the native-born white population in 1803 possessed some degree of Indian blood. If foreign-born settlers are included in this calculation, the percentage drops only slightly, to 48 percent of all the frontier whites. By far the largest number of

those with Indian heritage were already several generations removed from the Indian environment: 42.6 percent had one Indian great-grandparent (that is, were of one-eighth Indian ancestry) and 18.7 percent had one Indian great-great-grandparent (one-sixteenth Indian ancestry). A sizable number, however, inherited their Indian ancestry through more than one line thereby making their cumulative blood-count far greater -- so great, in fact, that settlers of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, whose likenesses have been recorded by photographic processes not available to their ancestors, still displayed prominent Indian features, even though their closest Indian progenitor died in the 1730s or 1740s.



MARIE AURORE RACHAL CHARLEVILLE
ca1860

One-eighth Caddo Indian
through descent from
Anne des Cadeaux (d. ^c1739)
wife of Jean Baptiste Brevel, Sr.

Original in possession of
Mrs. Jack Lloyd
Woodlawn, Texas

J. Leitch Wright, Jr., an authority on the Southeastern Indians and their displacement by whites, argues that "one of the greatest myths in American history concerning the Southern Indians is that little intermarriage occurred between them and whites." It is a myth, he believes, that the "Anglo"

colonist deluded himself into believing. "Governor Spotswood of Virginia asserted in 1717 that he did not know of a single mixed marriage, and William Byrd II and the historian Robert Beverley made similar comments." Wright, himself, has found innumerable examples that Spotswood and others preferred not to see.³²

Officials of colonial Louisiana, especially in the earliest years, were not quite so blind, though none seems to have held any higher an opinion of amalgamation. François Derbanne, prior to his removal to the Natchitoches frontier, faced considerable political and ecclesiastical opposition to his alliance with the Chitimachas, Jeanne de la Grande Terre, although the officials did appreciate and exploit the good Indian relations that Derbanne's own lack of bias created. The curate of the Mobile parish in which he then resided saw no blessings at all in such unholy amalgamation of the races and refused to sanctify any such alliance as the one between Derbanne and Jeanne. At Natchitoches, however, the couple succeeded in finding a priest to sanctify their union, which had, by that time, endured fifteen years of opposition.³³

In 1735 the eldest Derbanne son, Jean-Baptiste Despres, almost precipitated an international crisis when he eloped with the daughter of the commanding officer of the garrison at the nearby Spanish presidio of Los

³²J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *The Only Land They Knew: The Tragic Story of the American Indians in the Old South* (New York: The Free Press, 1981), 234-235.

³³Peter J. Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile*, Southern Historical Publications No. 20 (reprinted, University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1976), 79; Baptismal Book 1, p. 13, Archives of the Diocese of Mobile, Mobile, Alabama; Marriage Contract of François Derbanne and Jeanne de la Grande Terre, 14 January 1726, itemized in (but not appended to) Succession of François Dion Derbanne, Inventory, Box 1, Folder 2, Natchitoches Parish Records Collection, Archives Department, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

Adaes. Whether the young lady's parents objected to young Derbanne on the basis that he was a Frenchman or a *metive* is not clear. Inter-marriage with Indians certainly was widespread at the Spanish-Texas posts, and the official report of the incident filed by the bride's father described the unwanted son-in-law only as a "Frenchman" with no reference to any Indian admixture. Whether his omission of fact was generated by bias toward the Native American or a greater antipathy for the French enemy can only be a subject of speculation.³⁴

At Natchitoches itself, there is almost no suggestion of racial prejudice against the Native American. A second Derbanne son, Gaspard, was for a number of years churchwarden of the parish, a position of considerable respect as well as one that would probably have scandalized the long-deceased priest who had refused to bless his parents' marriage. Yet another Derbanne son, Pierre, became one of the leading planters of the settlement, ranking consistently in the top 5 percentile (and often the top 1 to 1½ percentile) on every tax roll and property census. The only Derbanne daughter who remained at Natchitoches was wed in second nuptials to Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, Junior -- a marriage which made her the sister-in-law of the brother-in-law of the Duke of Orleans.

The marriage of François Derbanne and Jeanne de la Grande Terre was one of at least three legitimate French-Indian unions occurring at Natchitoches during the earliest years of the French regime. By 1803, descendants of

³⁴Lieutenant Governor José González to Governor Manuel de Sandoval, 29 August 1736, AGN-IP, Tomo 524, parte 3, 915. See also Carlos E. Castañeda, *Our Catholic Heritage in Texas, 1519-1936*, vol. III, *The Mission Era: The Missions at Work, 1731-1761*, 7 vols. (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones Co., 1938; reprinted, New York: Arno Press, 1976), 83-84. Some degree of prejudice on the part of the bride's irate father does appear to be present in his considerably exaggerated statement: "I do not deny that he [the *metive* son-in-law] may be of *unquestioned nobility*, but even if he were the noblest of Frenchmen, I still would object. . . ." Italics are added.

these unions were to be found in all stratas of Natchitoches society. Additionally, other French-Indian unions were formed outside the bonds of Christian matrimony throughout the century; and during the Spanish era a small number of legitimate Indian-white marriages were also recorded. These other unions, however, displayed somewhat different patterns. Some, such as the alliance of Sergeant Claude Bertrand with the Indian slave Marie Jeanne Elisabeth "Lisette" de l'Isle were open and long-term relationships that were never legitimized; in this instance, most (but not all) of the offspring chose white society in preference to tribal affiliation. Others, such as the alliances of Juchereau de St. Denis, Sr., and Jr., with unidentified Natchitoches Indians were apparently of short duration and produced a single offspring each -- a child that was recognized and cared for by the father, despite the impermanence of the relationship, and who grew to maturity as an accepted part of white society.

By far the greatest degree of sexual relations between whites and Indians was casual. If offspring resulted, few were ever recognized or even baptized into the religious faith to which the white father at least gave lip service. The 1774 enumeration of Natchitoches slaveholders spotlights this problem. A full 12 percent of the masters were unmarried woodsmen who owned only one slave -- a female Indian. In only one case has there been found supplementary records from a later period to indicate that the slaveowner and his Indian female had a permanent relationship; and in only one case (a different one) can a baptismal record be found for any offspring of these men by the female slave who (according to common report of the time) shared, as well as made, their beds.

Legal marriages between whites and Indians did continue to occur, on occasion, throughout the century. It is perhaps significant to note that,

almost without exception, every man who married an Indian of full-blood late in the era, or those marrying mixed-blood Indians who had only minimal contact with their white fathers, were French-Canadian. Indeed, the only exceptions were two native-born brothers who possessed a strong Indian heritage of their own. It is also interesting to note throughout the era that only one recorded marriage existed between a white female and a male of apparently pure Indian extraction, with one additional white female-Indian male liaison being also noted in the records. The background of these two females contained some similarities and some contrasts: both were born to poor families, both lived on the fringe-area of Natchitoches "civilization," and both entered the relationship without the blessings of the church. In one case, however, both the girl and her family were well-known for their unconventional lifestyle, while in the other case no hint of scandal or unorthodoxy had previously touched the family.

The ambiguous legal and social status of the Indian was not unique in colonial America. While prohibitions often, but not always,³⁵ existed between blacks and whites, barriers to Indian-white marriage generally seem to have been more social than legal. Traditional Anglo-American writers have tended to sensationalize French-Indian mixing while ignoring that which occurred in their own society, as Wright has well shown. If he is correct in his opinion that Indian-white mixing occurred in the Anglo South "perhaps on a larger scale than in New France,"³⁶ and if Natchitoches society can be taken as a measure of Indian amalgamation in the French colonies, then the

³⁵Gary B. Mills, "Miscegenation and the Free Negro in Antebellum 'Anglo' Alabama: A Reexamination of Southern Race Relations," *The Journal of American History*, 68 (June 1981), 18, provides an excellent overview of interracial marriage laws in the Old South.

³⁶Wright, *The Only Land They Knew*, 235.

degree of racial intermixture in Anglo-America must indeed be overwhelmingly significant.

One even more startling fact emerges from an analysis of the Indian heritage of Natchitoches' colonial families -- and it reflects one of the most overlooked aspects of the "white" American cultural heritage: *Fully 23.8 percent of the native-born white population of Natchitoches in 1803 had a SLAVE heritage bequeathed to them by one or more Indian ancestors!*

For the majority of this number, that slave heritage was well within memory. Six members of the studied "white" population were mixed-bloods, married to whites, who had themselves been born into slavery -- even after Indian slavery was theoretically abolished in the colony. Another 43 were only one generation removed from the slave experience, that is: one or both of their mixed-blood parents were born in slavery. The largest number, 101, were two generations removed -- although, in most cases, the ex-slave grandparent was still living or was only recently deceased. Another 46 were three-generations removed from the slave experience, an equal number were four generations removed, and a final 10 were so far removed (five generations) as to make improbable any knowledge at all of that slave experience.

Again, the question is unavoidable: how typical was the frontier population at Natchitoches? Was the racial balance of the Creole frontier characteristic of other American frontiers? If not, would the Natchitoches pattern fall on the high or low side of Wright's expectations? To what extent did "white" settlers of other frontier communities descend from victims of, as well as perpetrators of, the institution of slavery in America?

There can be no doubt that the frontier environment of Louisiana biologically altered the European germs imported by the original settlers. Yet, it is debatable whether the frontier created a more nomadic society, whether it

fostered a greater sense of impermanence, or weakened family ties. European society, itself, was in the throes of a social upheaval that uprooted generations of Gallic families and tossed them from village to village, from farm to city, as patterns of livelihood, mortality, and morality underwent one of the greatest periods of mutation in Western Civilization. Emigration, immigration, and migration were rampant not only on the frontiers of Louisiana and the other American colonies, but also in the civilizations that the colonists left behind. Inevitably, all would alter certain basic characteristics of home, family, and social life in the Western world, but the degree to which the elusive frontier contributed to these alterations on the American continent has yet to be defined.

CHAPTER II
CULTIVATING A SOCIETY:
PATTERNS OF LIVELIHOOD, EDUCATION, AND MORTALITY

The establishment of Natchitoches as a trading post by Juchereau de St. Denis was prophetic. Crozat and other officials agreed with him that Red River would "open the way to the mining riches of the Spanish colonies;¹ but their successors in office frequently had occasion to curse the very thought. Once established, the Natchitoches trade proved almost ungovernable.

Le Page du Pratz, who came early (albeit briefly) to exploit Red River's potential, castigated his fellow Frenchmen who were seduced into association with the nearby Spanish post of Los Adaes. They were, in his estimation, "doubtless imagining, that the rains which come from Mexico, rolled and brought gold along with them which would cost nothing but the trouble of picking it up."² His contemporary, Derbanne, saw other potential in the region:³

The land of Natchitoches produces everything we sow. The big drought does not hinder the growth of anything we sow. This is a quality that all the land of the Mississippi does not have. The big drought and high water kill everything we plant on the Mississippi, something that never happens here where the land is sandy and wholesome in contrast to the lowlands, but which are not flooded.

I have not seen land in Louisiana which can be worked with more certainty (of profit) than in this place.

Still, the allure of gold and furs was far stronger than the appeal of the

¹Giraud, *History of French Louisiana*, I, 364.

²Le Page du Pratz, *History of Louisiana*, 150.

³Katherine Bridges and Winston De Ville, "Natchitoches and the Trail to the Rio Grande: Two Early Eighteenth-Century Accounts by the Sieur Derbanne," *Louisiana History*, 8 (Summer 1967), 252.

soil to most colonials who chose to brave the hazards of the Natchitoches frontier.

If would-be traders and merchants needed any impetus at all to settle at Natchitoches, they soon found it in the Royal Decree of April 15, 1721, which set fixed prices for goods marketed within Louisiana: coastal towns were permitted to sell at 50 percent above the standard prices in France; but at Natchitoches, those engaged in trade could impose a legal markup of 80 percent!⁴ Thus, the Natchitoches trade offered twice the appeal: first, a merchant was guaranteed far greater profit for goods sold in the Natchitoches post than he could get at New Orleans or Mobile. Secondly, although trade with the Spanish, in many goods, was prohibited, the very proximity of Natchitoches to the Spanish and its great distance from authorities in New Orleans were almost certain guarantees that the prohibitions would be difficult to enforce. Every colonial census of Natchitoches, which indicated occupations, revealed a disproportionate number of traders; still, even these censuses did not begin to document the actual numbers of men involved. In reconstituting the frontier community throughout the colonial period, utilizing all available notarial records, correspondence, ecclesiastical files, and a plethora of other documents, the number of traders, wholesale merchants, hunters, woodsmen, and voyageurs involved in transferring goods assumes overwhelming proportions.

The conduct of trade on the Natchitoches frontier was politically, as well as economically, important. The bulk of the trade that developed, even in the French era, was an exchange of goods with the Indian nations rather than an exchange of French goods for Spanish silver. The furs, horses, and

⁴Charles E. O'Neill, *Church and State in French Colonial Louisiana: Policy and Politics to 1732* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), 127-128.

other extremely valuable commodities obtained from the Indian nations were then marketed at New Orleans where they were converted into *livres* with which a trader might buy more goods to take into the Indian nations for exchange into even more priceless furs. International crises were frequently precipitated during the French period by the fact that the bulk of the Indian nations with whom the French trader dealt were located within territory claimed by Spain. Not only were the French reaping financial gain from the exploitation of Spanish dominions, but it was a well-acknowledged fact that the trader was an unofficial (and sometimes very official) ambassador. Mutually satisfactory trade relations between the French and the Indian nations of Texas swayed those nations to French allegiance and undermined Spanish control.

An equally troublesome problem with the Natchitoches trade also stemmed from the ambassadorial functions of the trader. White men of good character and proper allegiance to the government made excellent ambassadors to the Indian nations, while undesirables among the trader ranks could do perhaps even greater harm. Indeed, any one of them who created hostility could pose a threat to the safety of all colonists on that frontier.⁵ For these and other reasons, particularly in the Spanish era, there was a great expenditure of government effort to enforce the licensing and regulation of trade. Not all of it was successful.

The almost unlimited potential offered by Indian trade at Natchitoches influenced to a great extent the character of its settlers. It also altered, to a great degree, the lifestyles of the nontraders who settled there for

⁵The case of the renegade trader, Nicolas Chef, who assaulted and killed an Indian woman and her child in 1775, provides an excellent case at point. See Mills, *Tales of Old Natchitoches*, 31-33; Bolton, *Athanase De Mézières*, I, 92-93, 102, 108-109, 325; II, 117-119.

other reasons. It greatly influenced the cultural shape of the community that developed and, ironically, it laid the foundations for the tremendous agricultural wealth that Natchitoches Parish would enjoy during the antebellum era.

Few of the immigrants (19 percent) who settled at Natchitoches possessed a skill by which they could earn their livelihood (i.e.: smithing, carpentering, etc.). Among the rank-and-file soldiers, who represented roughly one-fourth of all immigrant males, the skilled ranks fell to only 8 percent. However meager the number of skilled males of the first generation, they nevertheless represented, overwhelmingly, the bulk of all males at Natchitoches who engaged in any skilled trade at all. Even more significantly, few of these men transmitted their skills to their sons; and the apprenticing of youth to learn a trade was almost unheard of at Natchitoches. Only two cases have been found among the Latin population throughout all the colonial period.⁶ Consequently, each successive generation at Natchitoches saw a tremendous drop in the number of males who had a skilled craft to contribute to the development of the community. While 76 percent of all skilled craftsmen belonged to the first generation, only 14 percent belonged to the second, 6 percent to the third, 2 percent to the fourth, and a minimal 1 percent to the fifth generation on that frontier.

It is equally significant to note the rate of attrition that existed at

⁶Jean Dartes and Jacques Naigle, Articles of Apprenticeship, and Ignace Anty with Alexis Grappe and Pierre Besson, Articles of Apprenticeship, 1761-1766, Docs. 445, 456, NCH. Late in the colonial era, there were also a few apprenticeships entered into by the newly-arrived Anglo families.

By contrast, in the Anglo colonies, skilled trades were emphasized. Frederick Jackson Turner's classic study of the frontier points out that Governor John Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay Colony regulated the division of lands in Boston in such a manner as "to prevent the neglect of trades." See *The Frontier in American History* (reprint, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 62.

Natchitoches among those who brought a skilled trade to that frontier. Some 30 percent (n = 17) of the known craftsmen who chose to settle at Natchitoches abandoned their craft at some point after arriving. Six went into agriculture, three each into commerce or into a government/military job, another three chose to move to the latter field but eventually ended up in agriculture. A final two switched to another, and sometimes unrelated, skilled trade entirely. In the attrition process, certain distinctions are evident. Blacksmiths seldom went to another trade; no shoemakers did. More diversity was shown by tailors, carpenters, wheelwrights or those in trades of such limited demand as parakeet trainers and ropemakers.

A full 40 percent of the first generation males who arrived at Natchitoches were in the military. Of this number, one-third were commissioned officers, a tenth were non-commissioned officers, and slightly more than half were rank-and-file soldiers. Again, a high attrition rate is found in this group. The bulk of common soldiers who can be identified in local land records are, necessarily, those who retired from the military and remained at Natchitoches (on the other hand the garrisons at Natchitoches, for which almost no enumerations exist, were so small by report that the ex-soldiers who are known to have remained probably represent most of the troops.) Few of the sons of common soldiers (n = 5) chose the military for a career, although 64 percent of the native-born males served in the colonial militia and 40 percent participated in one or more campaigns during the American Revolutionary War.⁷

It is among the military officers and civil officials that the most

⁷For an account of the contributions of Natchitoches Creoles to the Anglo struggle for independence, see Mills, *Tales of Old Natchitoches*, 34-36; for military rosters of the Natchitoches participants, see Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 37-39, 42-44.

- TABLE 3
 OCCUPATIONS - BY DECADE
 With Ratio to Population-at-Large

Occupation	---1733	1734-43	1744-53	1754-63	1764-73	1774-83	1784-93
Government:	(41%)	(26%)	(5%)	(17%)	(8%)	(4%)	(3%)
Regular Military	32	35	8	40	28	21	17
Civil Officials	4	2	2	5	5	2	2
Government Interpreters	-	-	1	2	2	2	2
Gov't Porters-Coureurs	-	-	-	-	-	2	1
Agriculture:	(9%)	(5%)	(8%)	(11%)	(12%)	(14%)	(17%)
Farmers-Ranchers	7	7	13	28	52	81	128
Farm Laborers (free)	1	-	1	1	2	2	13
Commerce:	(10%)	(9%)	(9%)	(12%)	(15%)	(12%)	(7%)
Merchants	1	1	1	2	11	8	18
Traders	6	9	13	25	44	26	16
Woodsmen	2	3	2	5	11	33	19
Barge Captains	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Clothiers:	(2%)	(2%)	(2%)	(.4%)	(.4%)	(.3%)	(.3%)
Tailors	1	1	2	1	1	-	2
Dressmakers	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Shoemakers	1	2	2	-	1	2	-
Smiths (Metal Workers, etc.)	(1%)	(1%)	(1%)	(.7%)	(1%)	(.8%)	(.7%)
Blacksmiths	-	1	2	2	4	3	3
Gunsmiths	1	1	-	-	1	1	1
Silver-goldsmiths	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Wheelwrights	-	-	-	-	1	1	1
Building Trades:	(5%)	(4%)	(2%)	(1%)	(1%)	(.7%)	(1%)
Carpenters-Joiners	4	5	4	3	4	4	9
Contractors	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Stonecutters	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Surgeons-Doctors:	(1%)	(.7%)	(1.6%)	(.7%)	(1%)	(.6%)	(.4%)
(Actual Number of above)	1	1	3	2	5	4	4
Miscellaneous:	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Butchers	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Teachers	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Ropemakers	-	-	-	1	1	1	1
Surveyors	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Pool Hall Owners	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Wet-nurse	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Servants (White)	2	-	-	-	2	1	1
Various Arts	-	-	-	-	2	2	1

*Less than 1% engaged in each of these occupations. Population Statistics for each decade are based upon diennial reconstitutions of the post, 1730-1790.

TABLE 4
OCCUPATIONS - BY GENERATION

Occupation	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Farmer-Planter	77	44	66	25	2	214
Regular Military	135	12	3	-	-	150
Trader	56	13	5	-	-	74
Woodsman	26	19	10	1	-	56
Merchant	30	5	1	-	-	36
(Total involved in exchange of goods)	(112)	(37)	(16)	(1)	-	(166)
Civil Official	20	3	4	-	-	27
Free Laborer	12	7	5	-	-	24
Carpenter	15	4	-	-	-	19
Surgeon	12	1	-	-	-	13
Blacksmith	6	1	1	-	-	8
Religious	8	-	-	-	-	8
Servant (free)	6	-	-	-	-	6
Shoemaker	4	1	-	-	-	5
Interpreter	1	1	-	1	1	4
Barge Captain	4	-	-	-	-	4
Porter-Courier	1	2	-	-	-	3
Tailor	2	-	1	-	-	3
Gunsmith	1	1	-	-	-	2
Pool Hall Owner	2	-	-	-	-	2
Chanter (Church)	2	-	-	-	-	2
Surveyor	2	-	-	-	-	2
Ferry Operator	1	1	-	-	-	2
Bailiff	2	-	-	-	-	2
Contractor	1	-	1	-	-	2
Wheelwright	1	-	-	-	-	1
Ropemaker	1	-	-	-	-	1
Stonecutter	1	-	-	-	-	1
Butcher	-	1	-	-	-	1
Gold/silversmith	-	-	1	-	-	1
Sculptor	1	-	-	-	-	1
Teacher	1	-	-	-	-	1
Parakeet Trainer	1	-	-	-	-	1
Violinist	-	-	1	-	-	1
Wet-nurse	-	-	-	1	-	1
Seamstress	-	-	1	-	-	1
Bookbinder	1	-	-	-	-	1

interesting career patterns are found. A full 40 percent of this group were actively engaged in commerce with the Indians or the Spanish at the same time that they were on the military or civil payroll. An officer's pay was admittedly small, yet the right to engage in commerce was a fringe benefit that was important not only to his personal fortunes but also to the political aims and military defense of the colony.

Most officers appear to have profitted well from trade. Jean Jacques de la Chaise, for example, spent less than a decade at Natchitoches before returning to France to reside temporarily at L'Orient as a Captain of the Ships of the Company of the Indies. When his father died shortly thereafter (1741) young de la Chaise renounced the succession as "more onerous than profitable." Despite the fact that his father had been a key official and investor in the Company, his financial affairs had not been successful. By contrast, the younger de la Chaise was described as "a young man in the service of the Company of the Indies [who] is very rich. . . . He has decided to abandon all pretensions to these successions [of his parents] and keep his own fortune."⁸ The younger de la Chaise, like most of the military officers, did not prefer to remain on the frontier; prospects for advancement there were exceedingly slim; but most profitted financially from their tour of duty at this outpost.

The combination of officer-trader was so profitable, in fact, that a large portion of the limited number of sons fathered by these first-generation officers decided to follow their father's profession -- a situation that contrasts greatly with that of the rank-and-file soldiers. A significant number of the Creole officer-traders also broadened their economic activities to

⁸"Records of the Superior Council," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XVIII (April, 1935), 451-452.

include planting operations that were usually managed by hired employees. This group was to establish an elite cluster of military-commercial-planter families that would dominate much of Louisiana life throughout the colonial era.

Twelve (4.5 percent) of the first generation settlers for whom occupations are known came to the colony as a physician or surgeon. They, too, displayed a high attrition rate: 83.3 percent either left the profession entirely, in favor of another, or else engaged in another activity on the side. Again, commerce was the preferred choice. To some extent, the rate of attrition among physicians and surgeons did not always reflect free choice, as was the case, for example, of the one native-born surgeon, Jean Baptiste Prudhomme, who apparently acquired his skills locally understudying the surgeon Daniel Pain in the early 1750s and was denied the right to practice after Spanish officials initiated the licensing of physicians and surgeons as a quality-control measure.

Thirty-three percent of the first generation settlers appear to have come to Natchitoches specifically to engage in commerce; 50 percent of the second generation chose commerce as their initial profession. Among the third generation the figure drastically fell to 16 percent, and then plummeted to 3 percent in the fourth generation. The pattern is more significant (and even more complex) than it appears on the surface.

Indisputably, commerce offered the greatest potential for financial advancement on the frontier. It also offered several levels of activity. The local *marchand* (shopkeeper), like the local craftsman, was rare; even he usually did not confine his activities to the little village that sprang up adjacent to Fort St. Jean Baptiste. More prevalent was the *commerçant*, who in this society was a wholesale merchant, bringing goods from New Orleans

for resale to the *traiteur* (trader) who actually packed them into the Indian villages of Texas and Arkansas for exchange into pelts, hides, and horses.

In addition, there existed a variety of support personnel within this system, as well as a sizable number of independents. The *marchand*, the *commerçant* and the *traiteur* seldom cared to man the oars that brought their *pirogues* of goods upriver (or the barges that replaced them late in the colonial period). For this purpose, a number of *voyageurs* (men who made their livelihood travelling the frontier for any of various reasons) or *patrons* (barge-captains) were necessary. Similarly, the *traiteur* dared not go into the woods alone; some regularly employed servants (white or black), some entered into temporary contracts with *voyageurs* or other woodsmen whose services were for hire, but who did not consider themselves to be anyone's servant.

The network of individuals engaged in frontier trade also included a host of trappers and hunters -- young men (and not so young ones) of little or no means who enjoyed working alone or with Indian companions. If means permitted, a settler-family might finance its sons' initial expeditions; if means did not exist, there was usually no shortage of entrepreneurial traders, shopkeepers, craftsmen, or planters who were willing to invest a few *livres* in return for a share of the commodities the hunter would bring back. A typical contract between one such woodsman and his financier was executed in May, 1764, between the French-Canadian Joseph Gallien and the French-born tailor André Ramin, in which it was agreed that Gallien would make an expedition to the Ouachitas with one Negro male slave and one female Indian servant to hunt buffalo and horses until February 1765. Ramin supplied Gallien with, among other things: 25 pounds of powder and 50 pounds of ball, a gun, a cask of salt, a copper cauldron of about $9\frac{1}{2}$ pounds, 2 butcher knives, 50 flints

2 hatchets, a large adze, 50 pounds of grain, 12 pounds of sugar, 12 pounds of rice, 3 barrels of shelled corn, 8 pots of bear oil, 300 livres of silver to pay the hired slave's wages, and 15 pots of tafia. In return, Gallien obligated himself to pay "one half of all untanned hides, bear oil, tallow, beef-tongue and salt meat" that he brought back with him from the Ouachitas.⁹

Many first-generation colonists such as Gallien, with no skilled trade or resources, took up the life of a woodsman, as did many Natchitoches-born youth in search of fortune. Those who were frugal, industrious, ingenuous, and hardy enough to withstand the dangers inherent in this life, accumulated enough capital to go into trade on their own. With the greater profits this afforded them, they were prone to invest in slaves. Then, with two or three strong blacks at their disposal, they quite often petitioned the Crown for a grant of land and, sooner or later, settled down to the life of a prospering planter.

Tighter government control over traders from 1767 onward¹⁰ did limit the number of youth who were able to move into the more economically advantageous rank of trader. Occupational graphs drawn for the colonial era indicate a steady reduction in the number of traders in the last four decades and a slow but steady increase in the number of individuals identified as local merchants or shopkeepers. Meanwhile, the ranks of the woodsman swelled tremendously under governmental restrictions of the 1770s and 1780s, but as the colonial youth recognized that they now stood little chance of advancing from the lower ranks into that of the trader, the life of the woodsman lost much of its appeal. Indeed, all trade dwindled considerably during this

⁹Doc. 352, NCH.

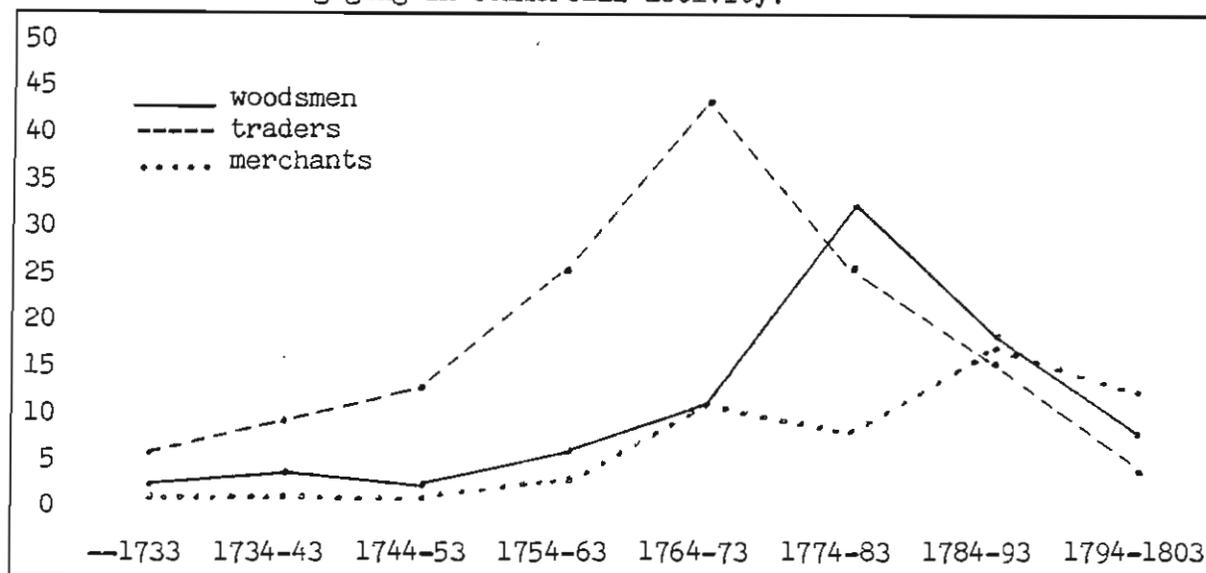
¹⁰Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières*, I, 88-94.

last decade, as society lost many of its frontier qualities, as the number of fur-bearing animals, buffalo and horses decreased, and as agriculture became increasingly attractive (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY BY DECADE

Number of males engaging in commercial activity:



As a sideline, hunting was never entirely abandoned, and those who engaged in it on a part-time basis included a significant number that already had made substantial economic headway. The 1787 census, for example, shows young Pierre Dolet as one of the more prosperous youth at the post, with 130 cows and 20 horses ranging on his concession of 800 arpents (20 arpents frontage on the river by a depth of 40); yet when the cavalry company of the Natchitoches militia was mustered in that December, he was marked absent on the roll call, with the notation "hunting with permission." The same comment

appears for Ambroise Le Comte, a 37-year old newlywed who, together with his widowed mother, shared a wealth that included over 2,000 superficial arpents, 18 slaves, 75 cows and 24 horses.¹¹

Only 22 percent of immigrant settlers at Natchitoches went into agriculture.¹² Of their number, 61 percent began in another occupation: half in commerce, a third in the military, and less than a fifth in a skilled craft or other business. The bulk of immigrants who began in agriculture were those who had no skill, capital, or other means by which to earn their living and had already a growing family who would have required support and protection had the menfolk taken to the woods. Few of the initial farmers prospered to any significant extent. Land was free by Crown grant, but without capital to buy slaves, the farmer lacked manpower to accomplish much. The legendary "large family of sons" that all pioneer families supposedly had in order to provide this manpower was more fable than fact -- as indicated in a later discussion of reproduction and family life.

By contrast, a larger percentage of second-generation sons (59 percent) went into agriculture. Again, approximately half of these did not settle on their land until a financial stake had been made in some other occupation, principally trade. Third generation sons, on the whole, came to maturity during the period that heavy restrictions began to be imposed upon commercial

¹¹Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 56, 62, 66.

¹²The comparative unpopularity of agriculture, as opposed to trade, is well-illustrated by Commandant de Mézières' comments appended to his 1776 census of the post. According to de Mézières, in the previous year the post had exported over 1,000 horses, about 100 mules, 120 dressed buffalo skins, 36,000 deerskins, 5,000 *azumbres* of bear oil, 5,000 pounds of tallow, and varying quantities of salted or dried meat -- as compared to agricultural exports of about 30,000 bundles of tobacco, 15 *fanegas* of indigo seed and 9 *quintals* of indigo. This census year appears to have marked the turning point in economic activity at Natchitoches. See Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières*, II, 122. While Commandant de Mézières' correspondence provides statistical totals from this 1776 census, the original enumeration has not been found.

activities; of this generation, 68.7 percent turned to the land while only 9 percent of their number engaged in commerce first. The small number of fourth generation sons who came to maturity in the colonial era almost consistently (83.3 percent) went into farming, and both of the two fifth-generation males farmed, although one was occasionally employed as an Indian interpreter and guide.

Another significant factor responsible for the shift from trade to agriculture, particularly after the Spanish imposition of restrictions upon trade, was the concurrent emphasis of the Spanish Crown upon the development of agriculture in Louisiana. Spanish grants of land were, in general, far more liberal than that which the common man in other North American colonies could hope to acquire. Lockridge's discussion of land allotment policies in Dedham, Massachusetts, for example, reveals limited concessions of small parcels, made only periodically. Those men "who lived long and prominent lives were granted public lands *up to a total of 400 acres.*"¹³ By contrast, in Spanish Louisiana almost any free adult male, or female head of household, regardless of race, could receive a concession of 800 *arpents* (roughly 667 acres) for the asking, and double-concessions were possible.¹⁴

An overview of economic activity at Natchitoches indicates one dominant pattern. Regardless of the skill or occupation which a man practiced upon his initial arrival on the frontier, a significant number would turn to commerce as the surest means of economic advancement. Those with financial

¹³Lockridge, "Land, Population," 61-63. Italics added.

¹⁴Upon receipt of these grants, the Louisiana concessionaire was expected to fulfill certain obligations such as clearing, fencing, etc. See C. Richard Arena, "Landholding and Political Power in Spanish Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarter*, XXXVIII (October, 1955), 39-54; and Francis P. Burns, "The Spanish Land Laws of Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XI (April, 1928), 237-240.

capital to invest generally turned a very good profit. Those who began at the lowest level (woodsman or *voyageuz*) may or may not have accumulated enough savings to invest in another enterprise. A few who did, mostly native-born, went directly from woodsman to farmer. More of the foreign-born, particularly in the French regime, moved up to the rank of trader, increasing their profits even more. Returns from this trade activity were invested in slaves and farm animals with which to stock the generous land concessions that the Crown (particularly the Spanish Crown) offered.

Almost no colonial families enjoyed sustained wealth throughout this century into the next, yet an economic graph of all families drawn from the tax lists and property censuses that are extant does indicate certain patterns. A very few families who began in agriculture (i.e., Rachal and Buard) managed to achieve some degree of wealth and by the last half of the century ranked in the top economic percentiles. For the former family, wealth was achieved only in the latter fifteen years of the colony and was not generally sustained (a few individuals excluded) far into the nineteenth century, due to their marital and reproductive patterns and a tendency to relocate periodically on the outside fringes of settled land where educational opportunities were generally nonexistent. The latter family, which was relatively small after the second generation, achieved its wealth mid-century of the 1700s and was to sustain it throughout the antebellum period through selective marriage, limited numbers of children, and other similar factors.

By far the larger number of those who climbed into the upper economic percentiles in this century were those who began in commerce and invested the proceeds in agriculture. Some, such as Henri Trichel and the Derbannes, were among the earliest settlers of the post; and their families did sustain wealth throughout the century although they would lose considerable ground in the

next. Others such as the Lambre brothers (Jean and Jacques), Jean Baptiste La Berry, and Pierre Metoyer arrived mid-century yet managed to climb to the economic pinnacles before the colonial period was over. Metoyer, for example, arrived about 1765 and is shown on the 1774 tax list with no slave property except for his own miscegenous offspring whom he had purchased from the owner of his concubine. Despite paying hefty sums, eventually, for his mistress and seven of their children, by 1795 Metoyer was the largest slaveholder at the post, with 50 negroes and mulattoes on his plantation. His closest competitors were Remy Lambre at 39, Emanuel Prudhomme at 38 (most of whom his wife had inherited from the Lambre estate) and Pierre Derbanne at 33. Even these numbers do not qualify the colonial slaveowner-planter of Natchitoches for membership in the ranks of the most affluent eighteenth-century American planters. However, the not-inconsiderable fortunes of most of these cited families would be sustained and built upon in the coming century, and immense fortunes would be developed from them before the end of the antebellum era. Two facts remain clear throughout: almost without exception, the bulk of these nineteenth century fortunes can be traced back to economic foundations built upon frontier trade; and, almost without exception, the men who amassed the largest fortunes were either of Germanic origins or stemmed from one of the French provinces along the German border.

Far less is known about the economic activities of the women who shared the frontier, its dangers, and its hardships with these men. Legally, there were very limited economic options open to a woman of this era, in Louisiana or elsewhere. Various articles of *Las Siete Partidas*, the traditional Spanish law that remained in force in Louisiana, to a great extent, for a number of years after the colony's transfer to the United States, provided that a woman could not legally make a contract and that a married woman had no right

to manage the affairs of any property she might have inherited or otherwise acquired on her own. It was clearly stated that her estate was "to supply [her husband's] wants, when he stood in need, on condition to furnish her with what was necessary, according to her fortune and rank." No woman could appear in court to act for others, unless those others were infirm, bore specified relationships to her, and had "no other person to whom they can confide the management of their cause." No woman could witness a will (although she could execute one), nor could she stand as surety for another person "for it is not becoming that women should be engaged in litigation . . . or go into public assemblies of men, where things take place repugnant to the chastity and good morals which women ought to observe." In further defining a husband's authority over his wife's estate, the Spanish code did limit his authority to cases in which the wife "does not exercise a trade or profession by which she could have honestly acquired the property she possesses," but the code does not stipulate what trades or professions were appropriate for "honest" women.¹⁵

At Natchitoches there is very little evidence to document the specific types of activities in which a female might engage, although there is some degree of evidence that certain restrictions of *Las Siete Partidas* were not enforced. Unmarried females apparently did engage in some occupational

¹⁵L. Moreau Lislet and Henry Carleton, trans., *The Laws of Las Siete Partidas which are Still in Force in the State of Louisiana*, 2 vols. (New Orleans: James M'Karaheer, printer, 1820), I, 29, 113, 131-132, 175; II, 822, 964, 1126-28.

Colonial Anglo-American thought had its parallels. As late as 1816, Thomas Jefferson wrote to a friend that "women . . . to prevent depravation of morals and ambiguity of issue [should] not mix promiscuously in the public assemblies of men;" see Mary Sumner Benson, *Women in Eighteenth-Century America: A Study of Opinion and Social Usage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935; reprinted Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1966), 246.

activity aside from merely assisting in the family home. Marriage contracts of the era, for example, usually specified the property owned by the future spouses and the manner in which they acquired it (i.e., by inheritance, by dowry, by labors); in at least one case in 1763 the bride's "2,000 *livres* minted in Tours," is said to have been acquired "by her gains and savings as a young girl." Presumably this sum was acquired through some type of work since she is not known to have received any type of inheritance which might have been invested for her. Five other references in these marriage contracts to lesser "savings," include other individuals who are known not to have had an inheritance or to have inherited far less than the amount they took into the marriage.¹⁶ The only document on record which specifies any occupation for an unmarried female, ironically, identifies her as a wet-nurse!¹⁷

Other records exist which indicate, not surprisingly, that widows took in single-male boarders to augment whatever estate their husbands left them. The widow of Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, Jr., in the 1770s, provided room and board to the brothers of the Order of St. Antoine -- much to the scandal of her dead husband's sister who saw impropriety in the arrangement.¹⁸ When the hunter Jacques Ridé made his will in 1778, during one of his periodic stays at Natchitoches, it was drawn up "at the home of Widow Jean Ris."¹⁹ When, in 1795, José Piernas was sent upriver from New Orleans to investigate a Jacobin revolt on the Natchitoches frontier, he reported lodging one night

¹⁶ De Ville, *Marriage Contracts of Natchitoches*, Nos. 57, 70, 73, 82-83, 150.

¹⁷ Rex v. Babet Varange et al, Doc. 1308, NCH.

¹⁸ Rex v. de Soto, Doc.1227, NCH.

¹⁹ Doc.1270, NCH.

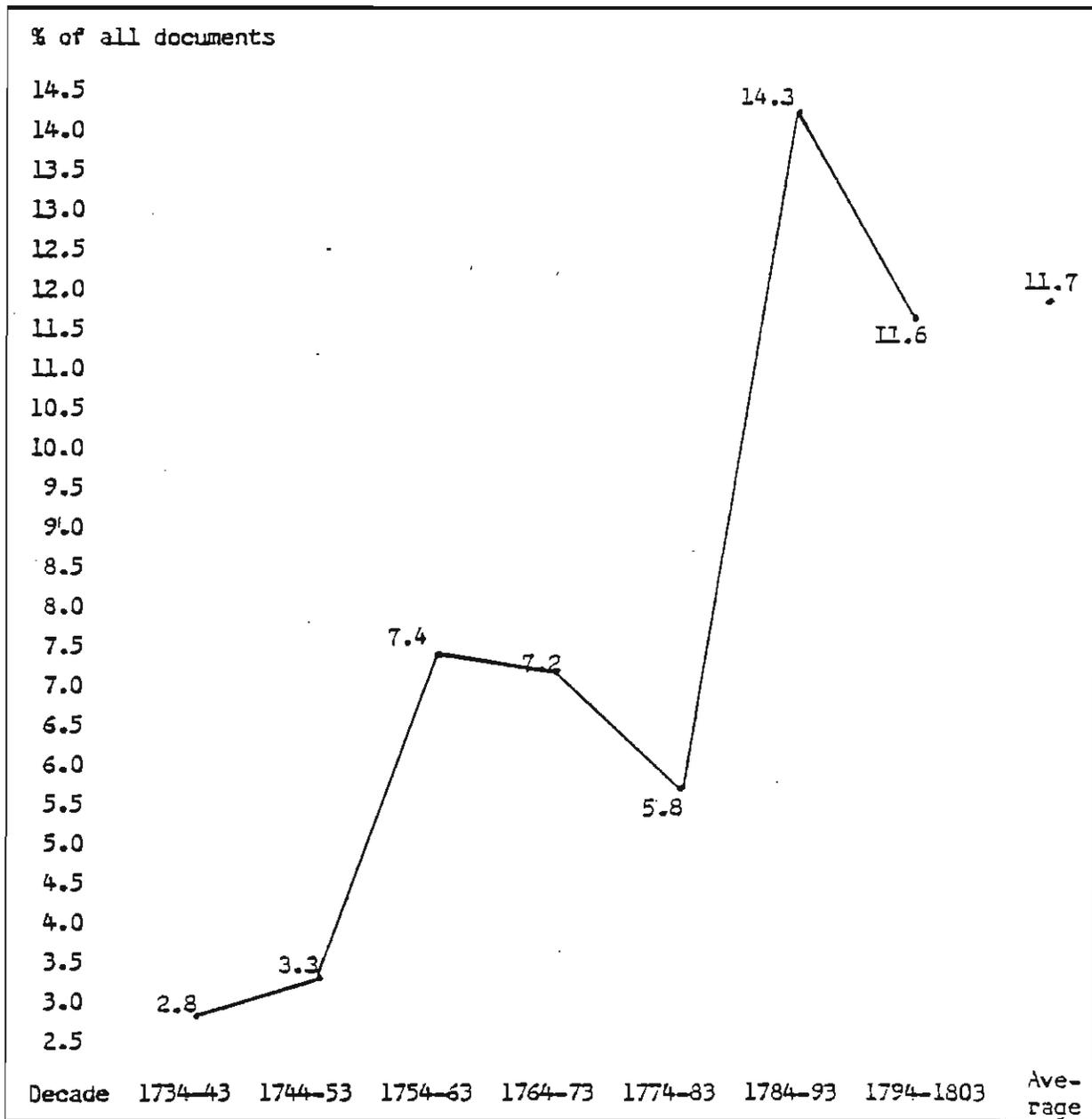
at the home of the widow of Gaspar Fiol, where Father Jean Delvaux, Joseph Capuran, Paul Bouët La Fitte, Jean André Verdalay and other insurrectionists had taken supper. After retiring to his room, Piernas gave his pants to be washed before morning, presumably by one of the widow's slaves and not by the widow herself. The official's report went on to say that the insurrectionists did not go to bed although they did stay the night there, playing cards, singing, talking, and drinking. From his description of the activity that took place at Widow Fiol's, it would appear that she operated some form of public inn.²⁰ The 1787 Census of Natchitoches additionally shows unmarried males living in the households of widows with families, presumably in a boarding capacity.

The notarial records of the post offer the best, albeit very limited, insight into the economic activities of, and restrictions upon, colonial females along the Natchitoches frontier. Some 11.7 percent of all notarial documents executed at Natchitoches involved at least one principal party who was a female. (See Figure 4.) Of this group, 17.5 percent involved the settlement of an estate that was not their own; 17.9 percent involved transactions with other family members; 25.9 percent represented incidences in which females acted for themselves in dealings with non-relatives; 12.4 percent of the documents represented court cases in which females were involved; and the remaining 26.3 percent represented marriage contracts, wills, petitions for land, and sundry other types of activities.

In considering the scope of the notarial documents, it would appear that the legal views of a female's role which *Las Siete Partidas* expressed

²⁰University of Notre Dame, *Records of the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas, 1756-1803*, 12 rolls (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Archives, 1967), Roll 1, 1796: Cards 97-122.

FIGURE 4
FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN NOTARIAL ACTIVITIES - BY DECADE



were not found to be practical on the frontier. Certainly women seem to have had limited reservations about involving themselves in litigation with men, and numerous husbands gave power of attorney to wives to transact business dealings in their absence. Elizabeth Denis, widow of the late commandant Jean Louis César Bormé, profitably operated the plantation that her husband left to her and periodically filed contracts with male citizens who were to oversee her farm or furnish her with lumber. In one interesting twist, she also arranged a "planting partnership" with the Widow Louis Toutain. The Widow St. Denis, in 1791, purchased from her late husband's nephew, Commandant Louis de Blanc, the right to operate the post ferry; again it is presumed that the actual labor was performed by one of her male slaves. Yet another *sole femme*, apparently separated from her husband, managed to eake out a living as a dressmaker, although it seems that she may have trimmed her expenses somewhat by sharing her lodging with the post carpenter.²¹

While the overall activities of females on the frontier seem to have shown a degree of disregard for the guidelines of *Las Siete Partidas*, there does exist evidence of an extralegal attempt to curb female activities. From the earliest years of the frontier's settlement, female participation in notarial activities had increased steadily -- from 2.8 percent in the first decade of recorded notarial records to 7.2 percent in the decade ending 1773. The subsequent decade marked the tenure at the post of the ultra-conservative priest Luis de Quintanilla, and under his moral leadership, female representaion in notarial documents dipped to 5.8 percent. Quintanilla left the post in 1783 and in the next ten years the percentage of notarial records involving females soared to 14.3 percent, as an apparent backlog of

²¹Docs. 1962, 1974, 2271, and 2460, NCH.

activity occurred.

This enigmatic pastor left a great deal of written evidence on the view of morality and community responsibility that he sought to impress upon his flock; lamentably, there has been found no reference in his writings to the proper role of women. In at least three of his private crusades (which parishioners labelled "intrusions upon state affairs that don't concern him") Quintanilla came to verbal blows with a female personality as forceful as his own, and he prompted the lady's further complaint that he had increased taxes in order to provide doles to widows too lazy to work.²² Quite possibly, the crusading pastor may have also exhorted his female flock not to engage in economic activity which would bring them into those demoralizing "assemblages of men," but, if so, his exhortations did not seem to have permanent effect.

The educational status of individual men and women seems to have had minimal correlation to their economic success during the colonial era, although it did have some degree of bearing upon their occupation. Of the military officers and civil officials (excluding interpreters), all were literate with only one exception. The performance of, and example set by, this unconforming individual in 1725 was so demoralizing that colonial officials never repeated the mistake. (It is difficult to see how the situation could have occurred in the first place. Political patronage was to be expected, but it is hard to comprehend the appointment of a young profligate, who could neither read nor write but had a penchant for gambling, to keep the books of this strategic frontier outpost!)²³ Not only were all commissioned officers literate, but all except one of the eight sergeants identified at the post

²²Rex v. de Soto, Doc. 1227, NCH.

²³Bridges and De Ville, "Natchitoches and the Trail to the Rio Grande," 252.

could read and write. Among corporals and common soldiers, the literacy rate was only 40 percent, with a greater degree of literacy being found among the European-born soldiers than among the native ones. Literacy, apparently, was a desired quality even for the home militia officers, as indicated in the 1782 commissions which recommended for promotion "Remy Lambre, a large, well-made young man, knows how to write [and should] be promoted to cornet of the cavalry company."²⁴

Similar literacy requisites seem to have existed within other trades. While surgeons and doctors of eighteenth-century Louisiana were not particularly held in high esteem, all such men at the post of Natchitoches could read and write -- but not necessarily well. The bulk (76 percent) of the foreign-born craftsmen were also literate, even though their skill in many cases did not require literacy. Among the few native-born craftsmen, only half could at least sign their name.²⁵

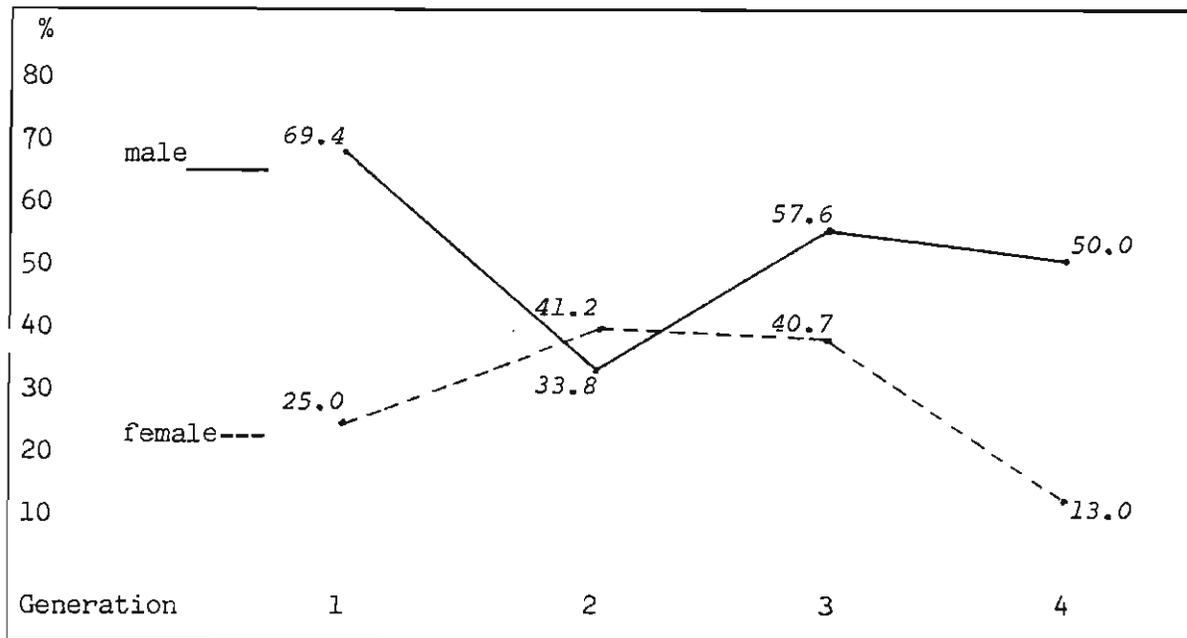
In general, immigrants in Louisiana were far more likely to exhibit some quantifiable measure of literacy than were their Creole offspring. (See Figure 5.) Of the adult immigrants at the post, 33 percent at least could sign their name; 15 percent could not; and data is not available for the remainder. When available data is analyzed by sex, 69.3 percent of the males for whom literacy status is known could at least sign, while only 25 percent of the comparable female immigrant population exhibited any degree of formal education.

Teachers on the Louisiana frontier were exceedingly rare. Indeed, only

²⁴Leg. 195, PPC-AGI.

²⁵Comparable figures are noted in the Massachusetts Bay Colony during its first century. When Salisbury divided and the town of Amesbury was created, half the signers of the agreement made their mark; see Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 56.

FIGURE 5
MALE-FEMALE LITERACY -- BY GENERATION



one teacher has been identified by name at the post during all of the colonial era, and that one appeared only briefly in the decade 1764-1773. It also seems that the unidentified brothers of St. Antoine, who were there in the mid-to-late 1770s, may have served that function also. The lack of formal schoolmasters does not seem to have been caused by parental unconcern, however. There is at least one document on record which indicates otherwise: the 28 October 1777 letter of Governor Bernardo de Gálvez to Commandant de Mézières in which the Natchitoches request for a teacher is denied on the basis that "those living in the city [New Orleans] ought not to leave it, according to the contract which they have made with His Majesty."²⁶

The lack of educators on the frontier left a marked impact upon the generations of youth born there. A few, such as the offspring of the noble

²⁶Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières*, II, 138-139.

de Mézières and de Blanc, were sent back to France for their education, but other families apparently could not afford such luxury. Of the native-born population that reached adulthood prior to 1803, no literacy data is available for 51 percent, 23.4 percent could at least sign their name, and 25.6 percent could not.

When broken down by generations, the literacy ratios among Creoles are even more indicative of the economic and social vagaries of the frontier. Of those for whom data is available, only 38 percent of the second-generation Natchitochians were literate; 47.5 percent of the third generation were, but only 36 percent of the fourth and 20 percent of the fifth generation that grew to maturity in the colonial period could sign their name. The peak generation, the third, was born during an appropriate period to have come under the tutelage of the one identified teacher and of the brothers of St. Antoine. It is also probable in this period that statistics are weighted in favor of literacy, since the literate man or woman would be far more likely to volunteer to add his or her signature to the registers of social events or to serve as official witnesses to legal affairs than would an illiterate settler who had to make his "mark of a cross."

When available data is analyzed by sex, still other nuances are suggested. Among the second generation, curiously, there was a greater literacy rate among females than males (41.2 percent as opposed to 33.8 percent). Third generation females lost this edge (54.6 percent male to 40.7 percent female) while in the fourth generation the gap widened drastically, with males outranking females 50 percent to 13 percent. Again, the only explanation, the only variant community attitude, that presents itself is the reactionary posture of Father Quintanilla in the 1775-1783 period at which time most of the third and fourth-generation females were maturing.

In attempting to quantify literacy for the colonial period it has to be emphasized that statistics are very imprecise. Many could read but not write, apparently -- or sign their name but not read. Several incidences of the latter are quite obvious in the Natchitoches records -- as, for example, the case of the immigrant soldier-farmer, Joseph Lattier, who initially x'd the records on which he occasionally appeared at Natchitoches, then began to sign in a childish block-scrrawl: JOSEPH. Apparently, he soon forgot even some of the rudiments of learning he had acquired because his signature developed into JO2PH, in which manner it continued to appear until his death. Other adults displayed similar patterns, all of whom appear to have acquired the ability to crudely block-print their names during the brief stay of the religious brothers.

In many cases it is impossible to make a judgement as to a given man's literacy, especially when there is no evidence but an occasional signature -- or in such cases as that of Guillaume Chever who arrived at Natchitoches as an adult and thereafter placed a reasonably good signature on eighteen documents and his mark of a cross on five. In some cases, the only records of an individual's literacy are found in the entries recorded by one priest or another in the parish registers. Occasionally sponsors were given the opportunity to sign these registers, sometimes they were not. On occasion the entry actually stated that the sponsor had signed the register with the priest, yet the signature did not appear. In other cases, the priest seems to have routinely written that the sponsor could not sign, without checking to be certain, because this statement occasionally appears for people who definitely were literate.

One of the most interesting aspects of colonial literacy appears when parent-child patterns are analyzed. Among those families in which at least

one parent was known to be literate and when literacy status is known for all children, in 26.4 percent of the cases, some children were literate and some were not. In 36.8 percent of the cases, all of the children were literate, but in an equal 36.8 percent, none of the children were! In short, a literate parent was as likely to let his offspring grow up illiterate as he was to teach him letters -- and it further appears that the choice may have been based upon the preference of individual children. Among the literate natives for whom data is available on parental literacy, the child was twice as likely to have a literate father as an illiterate one. The odds of having both parents literate, or in having a literate mother, were even. In the case of the illiterate native-born, odds were 3 to 7 that the father would be illiterate also, 4 to 1 that the mother was illiterate, and 5 to 1 that both parents would be.

All points considered, there would appear to be a basis for the conclusion that a father's state of literacy was relatively more crucial to the education of a child than was the literacy of the mother. In the absence of community schoolmasters, this would suggest that the father was more likely to assume the role of teacher in the home environment. At the same time, it is difficult to reason why, in some families that had been literate for generations in Europe and in which the immigrant father enjoyed a position of considerable rank in both his social and professional standing at Natchitoches, the children still grew to maturity illiterate. The families of the lieutenants Remy Poissot (whose father had been a royal notary in Strasbourg) and Louis Mathias Le Court de Presle (whose noble father had been a career naval officer) are notable examples. Indeed, the Le Court case is even more perplexing when the fact is considered that he married a girl whose family was entirely illiterate and he appears to have been the one who taught her

to at least sign her name -- yet he taught none of their children.

A comparison of literacy to economic positions enjoyed by the colonial settlers leads to the conclusion that a man's state of literacy was not nearly so important in the eighteenth century as was his industry and his frugality. An analysis of those in the top 10 percentile in 1766 indicates that 38 percent were functionally illiterate. By 1774 the balance had shifted, and 63.6 percent of the upper financial bracket could not sign their name. By 1787, six out of ten in the upper 5 percentile were illiterate. Indeed, the bulk of the men who built the greatest fortunes during the colonial era (i.e., Pierre Derbanne, Gabriel Buard, Alexis Cloutier, Ambroise Le Comte, Jacob and Jean Lambre) could not sign their names to the multitudinous official records they generated. As the colonial era drew to a close, however, education was to assume a role of far greater importance.

Three factors remain which had a significant impact upon the economic development of specific families. Two of these, age at marriage and rate of fecundity, are such complex factors that they demand separate treatment in considerable detail (see Chapters III and IV). Somewhat less complex, but no less important, are mortality rates and patterns.

It is not surprising that the families which enjoyed the greatest degree of financial success, by and large, were headed by men who lived the longest lives. A correlating conclusion that is often reached for various societies is that economic status also affects mortality rates -- although there seems to be curiously different opinions, in various locales, as to the relative benefits of being poor or well-to-do. Joseph F. Kett's mortality studies of early North America, for example, broadly conclude that "the ravages of mortality fell heaviest on the poor," while Jean-Louis Flandrin's analysis of France tends to disagree, at least in respect to maternal deaths:

"The few demographers who have tried to evaluate this risk suggest that . . . slightly fewer [mothers died in childbirth] among the peasantry, slightly more among the bourgeoisie."²⁷

At Natchitoches there has been found no discernable difference in mortality rates among the financially advantaged or depressed, either through a study of church burial records (which are seriously incomplete for the pre-1800 period) or the civil succession files (which are quite complete and augment gaps in the burial records). One reason for the apparent lack of correlation between economic status and infant or maternal mortality may be inherent in the limitations of the records that historians have to use: when an individual died, the scribe who recorded the death did not bother to record for posterity the relative economic status of the family, and the best efforts at family reconstitution do not surmount this deficiency. It simply is not possible, every time a mother died in childbirth or a young child succumbed, to assign an economic standing for the nuclear family to which that person belonged. Family fortunes fluctuated too widely, and it is a rare community for which a tax roll or property census exists for every year. A tax list compiled when a given man has been married for fifteen years may place him in the top economic percentile -- yet his contract of marriage may indicate that he had no financial resources at all. What then was his financial status four years after marriage when his first infant died, or eight years after marriage when his first wife also passed away?

Yet another inherent flaw exists in tax rolls and property censuses that increases the difficulty of drawing correlations between mortality rates and

²⁷Joseph F. Kett, "The Stages of Life," in Gordon, *The American Family*, 176; Jean Louis Flandrin, *Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality in Early Modern France* (trans. to the English, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 217.

and economic standing. The 1787 census of Natchitoches, for example, enumerates François Lavespère as a forty-year-old male with absolutely no property and a wife to support. The assumption would be that he had a minimal standard of living; however, in that year Lavespère was residing on the plantation of his new father-in-law, Pierre Derbanne, who ranked in the top 1½ percentile economically. It may reasonably be assumed that the Lavespères did not live in poverty and if Mme. Lavespère had been unlucky enough to have died in childbirth that year, the cause certainly could not have been attributed to malnutrition or inability to afford adequate medical care. Moreover, a reconstitution of Lavespère's life through records of other posts indicates that he was in Mississippi River commerce, working out of Natchez and Baton Rouge, for a decade prior to his arrival at Natchitoches. While he had not yet bought property on the frontier, it is reasonable to assume he was not penniless. Similarly, the 1793 tax roll of Natchitoches includes a "propertyless" man named Joseph Conand who was assessed only a poll; yet it would again be erroneous to include him in the ranks of the poor. While extant tax lists do not so indicate, other records reveal that Conand was the post surgeon and that he had numerous financial investments at New Orleans and elsewhere, including title to an Atlantic slave-schooner, the *Navarro*.²⁸

A third probable reason for the lack of any economic correlations to death rates at the Natchitoches Post -- and perhaps the most significant

²⁸ *Index to the Archives of Spanish West Florida, 1782-1810* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1975), 205, 209; May Wilson McBee, *Natchez Court Records, 1767-1805: Abstracts of Early Records*, Vol. II (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1953), 312-313, 325; Mills, *Tales of Old Natchitoches*, 37-40; Terry Alford, *Prince among Slaves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, 1977), 36-37. The 1793 tax roll of Natchitoches may be found in Folder 703, Melrose Collection, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches; a published translation is available in Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 88-97.

reason -- may very well be the primitive lifestyle that most settlers lived on that frontier. Food was abundant throughout the era. The alluvial soil along Red River was so rich that agriculturally-oriented settlers such as Derbanne were exporting corn as early as 1719. Inspector-General Diron, in taking the 1722 census of the post reported to New Orleans officials a variety of natural resources in the area: grapes, peaches, plums, persimmons, and nut trees, as well as such varied foodstuffs grown locally as corn, beans, potatoes, and other vegetables. Dr. John Sibley, sent to explore Red River after the Louisiana Purchase, reported to President Thomas Jefferson in 1805 that wildlife was still abundant in the area, not only in the vast stretches of forest that still remained but also in the multitudinous lakes.²⁹ Surely, hunger or malnutrition would not have been characteristic of colonial Natchitoches and should not have been a cause of death among any class. In most other aspects of daily life there seems to have existed minimal difference in the standard of living of the various families, as illustrated in the subsequent discussion of home life. By the same token, medical treatment seems to have been equally primitive for all classes, and the epidemics so prevalent in Louisiana were certainly no respecter of class or wealth.

Major Amos Stoddard, who spent a brief tour of duty on the Natchitoches frontier shortly after the Louisiana Purchase and subsequently wrote his impressions of the territory to satiate the curiosity that the American public had over the "foreigners" they had recently acquired, reported that most

²⁹ *Message from the President of the United States Communicating Discoveries Made in Exploring the Missouri, Red River and Washita, by Captains Lewis and Clark, Doctor Sibley, and Mr. Dunbar* (New York: A. & G. Way, printers, 1806), 70; 1722 Census of Natchitoches, AC, Gl, 464, Colonial Records Collection, Center for Louisiana Studies, published in Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 3-4, and in Jay K. Ditchy, "Early Census Tables of Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XIII (January, 1930), 209-213; Clark, *New Orleans, 1718-1812*, 28.

Creoles were small, slender, and well proportioned, as well as:³⁰

. . . supple, and active. Their complexions are somewhat sallow, and exhibit a sickly aspect, though they experience a good degree of health, which results in a great measure from the nature of their food, (mostly of the vegetable kind) and their manner of dressing it. They usually possess a keen piercing eye, and retain their sight longer than most other people. They are almost strangers to the gout, consumption, the gravel and stone in the bladder, and in general to all the chronic complaints.

Overall life expectancies on the colonial Natchitoches frontier compare favorably to those that have been reconstructed for other colonial settlements and for eighteenth century France. Curiously, the greatest variance appears not between the "old world" and the new so much as it does between the various communities on each continent.

Infant mortality at Natchitoches appears to be far lower than that tabulated for other colonial societies and, contrary to the findings in many communities, it did not vary to any significant extent during any period in the century. (See Table 5.) Only 21.8 percent of all infants born at Natchitoches in the colonial era died before age 10 and 29.7 percent died between birth and age 20. By comparison, in colonial Plymouth, John Demos estimates a "maximum" 25 percent mortality between birth and age 21 and suggests that the real figure may have been substantially lower; while in eighteenth century Andover, Philip Greven found 30.5 percent of infants born 1730-1759 died before age 10 and an astounding 53.4 percent died before age 20. Greven also notes that death rates for Andover had risen considerably since the colony's establishment in the seventeenth century. An analysis of seventeenth century Quebec (with settlers almost entirely French as were those of Natchitoches) reveals an even more startling death rate of 64.3

³⁰Amos Stoddard, *Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of Louisiana* (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1812), 323-324.

TABLE 5
CHILD MORTALITY - BY DECADE

Birth Cohort	Percent Surviving to Adulthood					
	YES		NO		UNKNOWN	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1734-1743	70.4	58.8	25.9	14.7	3.7	26.8
1744-1753	66.6	71.7	23.5	13.0	9.9	15.3
1754-1763	68.6	71.0	20.0	16.1	11.4	12.9
1764-1773	79.6	79.5	15.1	14.8	5.3	5.7
1774-1783	66.2	75.5	19.5	17.9	14.3	6.6
1784-1793	48.8	60.4	21.5	17.0	29.7	22.6
1794-1803	55.7	50.9	12.4	6.9	31.9	42.2

percent before age 20. Studies in eighteenth century France itself shows a range as broad as that found in the Americas.³¹ (See Table 6.) The implication seems to be that frontier conditions had minimal effect upon infant mortality rates and that other factors, not yet clearly defined, created far greater variances between communities with generally similar levels of civilization.

The most curious deviance to be found among infant deaths at Natchitoches is the preponderance of those among female children. Both in the 0-10 and 11-20 age brackets, female deaths outstripped male deaths at a ratio of about 5-3. It is a phenomenon for which no plausible reason is apparent. Certainly the ratio is far out of proportion to male-female birth ratios (as shown in a later chapter), and there can be no reason to assume that greater care or attention might have been given to children of one sex than to the other.

³¹Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 66; Greven, *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, New York, and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), 189, 191; Silvio Dumas, *Les filles du roi en Nouvelle-France: Étude historique avec repertoire biographique* (Québec: La Société Historique de Québec, 1972), 121; Pierre Goubert, "Legitimate Fecundity and Infant Mortality in France During the Eighteenth Century: A Comparison," *Daedalus*, 96 (Spring, 1968), 599-600.

TABLE 6
CHILD MORTALITY RATES - COMPARATIVE TABLE

Location	Time Period	Age Groups	
		0-10	0-20
Natchitoches (male infants) (female infants)	Eighteenth Century	21.8 (18.0) (30.5)	29.7 (24.0) (42.1)
Anglo-America			
Plymouth	Seventeenth Century	*	25.0
Andover	1730-1759	30.5	53.4
Maryland	Seventeenth Century	*	40 - 55
Quebec	1621-1700	*	64.3
France			
Crulai	Eighteenth Century	32.8	*
3 Breton villages	Eighteenth Century	*	42.0-63.7

* Statistics not available

SOURCES: Greven, *Four Generations*, 189-191; Carr and Walsh, "The Planter's Wife," 269; Dumas, *Les filles du roi*, 121; Goubert, "Legitimate Fecundity," 599-600.

Yet another important glimpse into child mortality patterns appears at Natchitoches when a year-by-year chart of child deaths is drawn (see Table 7). The largest percentage to die in any given age-year occurs, not surprisingly, in the 0-1 age group. That figure (40.5 percent of all under-21 deaths) lends some support to Greven's assumption that all "children known to have died young, but whose exact age is unknown, died between birth and 1 year of age."³² When the mortality rate of children aged 3 and under is compared to age of mother, one must conclude that maternal age had very little bearing. The youngest mother known to lose a very small child was 14, the oldest 47, and the mean age was 28.5 years. Children between the age of 5 and 15 appear to have survived quite well; but again in the late teens, the death rate accelerates, particularly for females. The reason is not clear. While most studies

³² Greven, *Four Generations*, 189.

TABLE 7
CHILD MORTALITY - BY AGE

Before Age	Percent of Deaths	Cumulative Percentage	Before Age	Percent of Deaths	Cumulative Percentage
1	40.5	-	11	1.3	(78.1)
2	13.7	(54.2)	12	-	(78.1)
3	5.9	(60.1)	13	.6	(78.7)
4	5.9	(66.0)	14	3.2	(81.9)
5	.6	(66.6)	15	.6	(82.5)
6	.6	(67.2)	16	3.2	(85.7)
7	3.2	(70.4)	17	2.0	(87.7)
8	3.2	(73.6)	18	4.6	(92.3)
9	-	(73.6)	19	1.9	(94.2)
10	3.2	(76.8)	20	5.2	(99.4)

of mortality tabulate the teenaged female as a child, at Natchitoches she was more likely to be a wife and mother -- a fact which, on the surface, might suggest a high maternal death rate among those who married very young. Yet, this does not appear to be so. The majority (56 percent) of the females who died between 13 and 20 were actually single, and the ratio of single to married deaths in this age-group becomes even more significant when one considers that the majority of females were married in that same age bracket. This appears to suggest that marriage and an active sex life may have had a beneficial effect (physical or physiological) upon females in the immediate post-adolescent stage. Statistical data in other areas, to be discussed further in this study, also tends to question whether early marriage and motherhood was so hazardous.

Among the adult population (that which survived at least to age 20) life expectancy at Natchitoches compares favorably overall, but again certain significant differences are evident. The average Natchitoches male, at 21, had a life expectancy of 51.0 years. At Plymouth, by comparison, Demos has found this figure to be 48.2 years. The average female in colonial Natchitoches,

however, did not fare as well; her life expectancy was only 46.9 years, while at Plymouth the figure stood at 41.4 years. An interesting correlation develops through this comparison. It would appear that the Louisiana pioneer, both male and female, was hardier than the New England colonist who settled Plymouth; however, in both societies, the woman's prospects were significantly slimmer than that of the male. At Natchitoches, the typical adult woman lived 4.1 years less than her male counterpart. At Plymouth, the variance was even greater; there the female's expected life span was 6.8 years less than her male comparison.³³

The greatest variance in mortality rate between the Natchitoches frontier and other locales appears to be at the upper age limits. Only 7.2 percent of those who reached 21 could expect to live to age 70, at Natchitoches. Only 2.1 percent survived past 80; and only .6 percent survived past 90. One male only (Pierre Cesaire Brosset, born 1789) is known to have surpassed the century mark, dying between 1896 and 1898 at the age of 107 to 109, and barely missing the spectacular feat of living in three different centuries. However, since Brosset was born so late in the colonial era, once he survived to adulthood his experience reflects nineteenth century mortality patterns rather than those of the eighteenth. A second male, Joseph Marie Armant, died between the ages of 95 to 105 apparently; records throughout his lifetime disagree as to his age and his baptismal record has not yet been located in France to settle the question; however, the best evidence indicates that 95 is more probably the correct age at death. By contrast, Greven found that

³³Maris A. Vinovskis, "Angels' Heads and Weeping Willows: Death in Early America," in Gordon, *The American Family*, 550. Massimo Livi-Bacci, by contrast, reports an overall life expectancy in eighteenth-century Spain of only 26.8 years; see "Fertility and Population Growth in Spain in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Daedalus*, 97 (Spring, 1968), 528.

an astounding 47.2 percent of the adult population of Andover, born 1730-1759, lived past 70; 25.0 percent lived past 80; and 8.3 percent lived past 90! For those born in that community between 1700 and 1729, the figure was slightly lower.³⁴

At least two explanations exist for the tremendous variance in the elderly populations of the Anglo colonies and the colonial Louisiana frontier. Quite possibly, cultural or environmental conditions existed which cannot yet be explained. At the same time, one phenomenon exists in colonial Natchitoches which this researcher has found in all other Gulf Coast and Mississippi Valley settlements as well, and which prompts this researcher to question whether similar circumstances in New England might artificially alter statistics drawn for those communities. That is: when age at death is determined by burial record, or by censuses taken late in an individual's life, there is a significant likelihood that the age is overstated. For the Natchitoches population, extensive effort has been made to locate not only all evidence of birth or baptisms in the studied post, but also to locate the baptismal records of the immigrants (and migrants) in whatever points of origins each had, be it in America or abroad. When birth registrations are located and utilized, it is found that in 50.1 percent of the cases, an individual's age at death (as stated in burial entry or civil succession record) or his age given late in life on censuses or other records, is in error. In 56.3 percent of the cases, the age is overestimated, sometimes by fifteen to twenty years in the case of the aged.

Critical differentiations appear at Natchitoches in comparisons of male and female mortality rates. While females under puberty were far more likely

³⁴Greven, *Four Generations*, 195.

to die than males (at a rate of more than 3 to 2) and were more than twice as likely to die in their teens (10 to 4) the hazards of the feminine sex tapered off once adulthood was reached. In the age bracket most commonly called the critical child-bearing years, 21 to 47, women were more likely to survive than were males (5 to 4), and the gap widened even more (7 to 4) between the ages of 48 and 70. Past 70, however, the male's relative rate of longevity became dominant again. A significantly smaller number of women lived to advanced ages.

TABLE 8
MORTALITY RATES - BY SEX AND AGE

Age Bracket	Males (%)	Females (%)	Overall (%)
0-20	24.0	42.1	29.7
21-47	39.7	33.7	37.9
48-69	28.6	17.2	24.7
70 & Over	7.7	6.1	7.2
	(100.0)	(99.1)	(99.5)

One consequence of these mortality patterns in colonial society is at variance with a commonly accepted view of past societies: parents did not die surrounded by large numbers of children. (See Table 9.) At least 85.4 percent of all parents, for whom data is available, died leaving some issue, but the numbers are surprisingly small. More than half (52 percent) of parents left three or less children to mourn them. Less than 30 percent of these children were adults (or minor daughters who already had husbands), and males were more prone to leave minor children than were females. The disruptive influence of such a death pattern upon the economy of given families and upon society in general is inescapable.

The differences in male-female mortality rates in the various age groups

TABLE 9
CHILDREN SURVIVING AT DEATH OF PARENT

Surviving Children (#)	Sex of Parent		Overall (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
0	15.2	12.6	14.3
1	10.4	20.7	14.6
2	15.2	8.1	12.5
3	10.4	8.9	9.9
4	7.6	11.1	9.3
5	11.4	11.9	11.1
6	9.5	9.6	9.6
7	9.5	6.7	8.1
8	4.3	5.2	4.7
9	2.4	2.9	2.6
10	4.3	2.2	3.5
11	-	-	-
12	1.0	-	.5

bear a definite correlation to cause at death -- at least in the adult stages. It is also indicative of variant patterns in male-female lifestyles. By far the leading known cause of death was epidemics, a cause that should show no sex discrimination at all. In actuality, a slightly smaller percentage of women died of a contagious disease than did men (32.6 percent to 34.0 percent). It would appear that the woman's traditional role as nurse did not create a particular health hazard; possibly it even enabled her to build up some degree of immunity.

On Red River, as in much of the Gulf region, the principal epidemic was yellow fever, also called putrid fever, black vomit, or black tongue in the Natchitoches records. Customarily, it arrived in the port cities of Louisiana in early summer, and wound its way upriver; the more pronounced season at Natchitoches being, usually, late August to early October, although in warm winters the plague lingered even longer. The *aedes aegypti* which brought the fever to Red River was more or less an annual visitor, but there were

only a few years in which large-scale epidemics erupted -- principally 1745, 1777, 1782, 1787, and 1793. The 1777 epidemic, which lingered on until the following spring (as did the 1787 contagion) was particularly devastating, often taking several, and even all, members of a family. Like most such epidemics in this era, it was hardly a respecter of age, class or wealth. The noble and well-to-do de Mézières lost three family members, his wife and two children. The Gutierrez family, at the other end of the economic spectrum, lost four: husband, wife, and two of the children.

Curiously, in a Catholic community wherein pastors were expected to administer the last rites of the church, regardless of how contagious a disease the dying might have, only one colonial priest at Natchitoches is known to have died from the fever -- but the risk to which this curate exposed himself was certainly extraordinary. On 1 August 1793, Marie Madeleine de la Renaudière Fortin died in the epidemic that swept the river that year, and Padre Pedro de la Vez administered the sacrament of extreme unction. On 11 August, her goods were put up for auction, according to routine procedures in estate settlements, and Padre de la Vez bought her bed! Eleven days later he was found dead in that bed, his corpse "in a state of putrefaction."³⁵ Possibly, the priest contracted the disease from one of the others who succumbed that same month, but the almost unbelievable risk to which he exposed himself is indicative of the medical naiveté of the colonial population.

Yet another epidemic season usually struck the river in the spring, the milder (but still sometimes fatal) malaria. In some years, there appeared to be little or no respite between one epidemic and the other, as in the particularly devastating years 1777-1778 and 1787-1788.

³⁵Docs. 2467, 2469, NCH.

The second most common cause of death at Natchitoches was childbirth, a cause necessarily limited to the female population. In 87.5 percent of known cases, the victim was between the ages of 21 and 47, the age-bracket assigned to child-bearing females in most demographic studies. At Natchitoches, obviously, a significant number of maternal deaths occurred among younger females, not so much because the risk was greater but because females generally married earlier in this society than in most Anglo-American communities. In 12.5 percent of all cases of maternal death, the victim was under 20. The greatest maternal mortality rate, surprisingly, appears among the 20-24 year-old group. Some 37.5 percent of all mothers to die of childbirth fell into this bracket; yet this is the age group that one might normally consider to be the healthiest age for childbearing. The next age bracket, 25-34, experienced a drop in maternal mortalities (to 25 percent) while the figure climbed again (to 33 percent) for those over 35.

A wide range of circumstances are evident in all these maternal deaths, yet a general pattern does emerge. The typical mother to die in childbirth had been married 7.5 mean years and left a mean number of 2.2 children surviving her. Thirty-nine percent of them had already buried at least one child or suffered at least one apparent miscarriage. The most fecund mother left eight children at her death, having been married for 22 years. It was rare for a husband to lose more than one wife to childbirth (in known cases, at least), although this did occasionally occur. Jean Bapitste Anty, for example, married in 1778 and buried that wife in 1784 after she failed to survive her fourth pregnancy. In 1788 he married a second time and in 1793 the new wife died 15 days after the birth of their third child (who did not live long enough to be named). Despondent and discouraged, apparently, Anty never took another wife; instead he formed a concubinage with a *femme de couleur*

of good parentage whom he would not have to marry (and could not marry) under Louisiana law. Ironically, his third union proved exceptionally healthy, and fruitful; the couple were to live to see married the daughters that they brought into the world.

While the second leading cause of death, childbirth, was necessarily restricted to women, the third leading cause was limited to their male counterparts: death in the course of a hunting or trading expedition, usually at the hands of Indians. Of all over-21 males for whom a cause of death is known, 37.5 percent fell into this category. All but one were in the 21-47 age cohort; few woodsmen or hunters seemed to have survived, or persisted in their occupation, past this age. Of those hunters who fell victim to their occupation, 66 percent were known to have been killed by the Indians -- one by the Chickasaw very early in the colonial period, one by a local Natchitoches Indian in an apparent squabble, and the rest entirely by Osages. The latter deaths, quite probably, were not easy ones. Governmental correspondence of the 1760s to 1790s is replete with descriptions of the manner in which this tribe of Indians did away with their victims, as for example the 1777 report of Commandant de Mézières to Governor Luis de Unzaga y Amezaga:³⁶

These Osages do not stop their rapine, assassination, and other outlandish barbarity even with us. Of this I will cite, for example, although I am fearful of offending your Lordship's sensibility, the tragic fate of a young Frenchman whom they put on a spit and roasted alive, having found him alone and helpless; another whose father they beheaded, they caused to carry the head more than 200 leagues, till they reached their pueblo, where, in the presence of the unfortunate boy they performed the abominable dances which accompany such trophies.

Great were the financial rewards for the hunter and trader -- but great, too, were the risks they took.

³⁶Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières*, II, 131.

Yet another cause of mortality in which males dominated was death by drowning, a cause which represented 15.9 percent of all known cases. Male drowning victims outnumbered females 4 to 1, principally because they were far more likely to be travelling in the conduct of their economic activities. At least one other male suffered death in Red River in a slightly different manner, Jacques Du Bois, who in 1734 had an unfortunate encounter with an alligator.

Only three murders of whites were recorded at Natchitoches in all of the colonial period, aside from the aforementioned death of a hunter at the hands of a local Indian. This paucity of violent crime calls into question, at least insofar as Natchitoches is concerned, the often cited generalization that Louisiana society was "*sans religion, sans justice, sans discipline, sans ordre et sans police*,"³⁷ and certainly calls into question the generalization that the Natchitoches frontier was notoriously lawless. In 1765 the French-Canadian newcomer, Pierre Crête, fell victim to the stab of a sculptor's knife, wielded by a Parisian already infamous for his drinking and brawling -- an almost classic frontier murder. In 1787, Étienne Pavie and three of his slaves were "assassinated" at his home on Red River. Apparently, the culprit was never found, the cause of the crime unknown. It is a matter of record that Pavie treated his bondsmen somewhat harshly, and at least one committed suicide while he was being punished for an infraction of Pavie's rules; whether one or another of his slaves sought revenge, went berserk, or was otherwise responsible for the "assassination" of 1787 is debatable. In 1789, François Langlois *dit* Fifi fell victim to an ambush by an acquaintance of the

³⁷George W. Cable, *The Creoles of Louisiana* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1884), 24-25.

jurisdiction of Nacogdoches.³⁸ It would appear that if other such murders occurred they would have become a matter of record as well. Certainly, given the nature of colonial records, officials would have been far more likely to have taken note of violent crime than deaths by natural causes. It would therefore appear that, while frontier society was primitive and in many ways harsh, criminal violence was minimal.

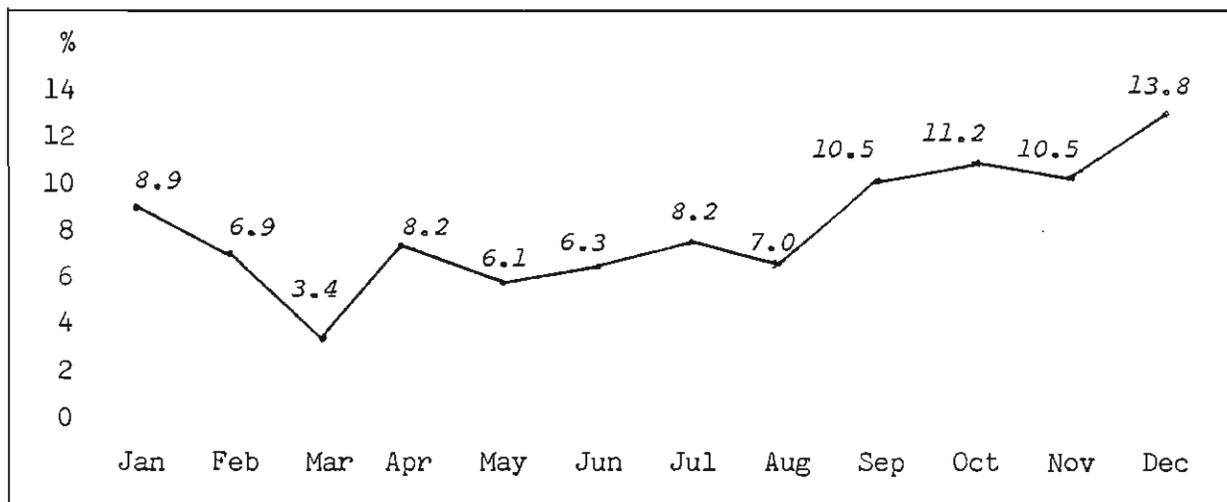
The only other causes of death specifically named in the records of this period were gout and dropsy, two diseases fairly common in eighteenth century western society, although Stoddard observed little evidence of them in Louisiana. Frontier records support his general observation. Only one reference has been found to gout, in the 1780s when the sexagenarian commandant, Bormé, became for all practical purposes disabled as a result of the disease.³⁹ The colonial references to dropsy provide the only available references to any possible hereditary diseases. Four women born in the mid-to-late colonial period were noted as sufferers from this disease: two first cousins, Marie Françoise Grillet and Marie Louise Brevel; and an aunt-neice, Marguerite Frederick and Marie Françoise Armand.

A monthly chart of all deaths occurring at Natchitoches in the colonial years suggests one other possible cause. (See Figure 15.) Deaths reached a small peak in April, during the malarial season; dropped slightly thereafter; then climbed again, peaking a great deal higher in the September-October period when yellow-fever was most prevalent; dipped again slightly in November

³⁸Succession of Pierre Crête and Inquiry into His Murder, General Conveyance Book 1, August 1, 1738-May 31, 1765, unnumbered document following No. 458, Colonial Archives, NCH: "Cabildo Archives; Case No. 4," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, III (July 1920), 294-310; Mills, *Tales of Old Natchitoches*, 23-26; Docs. 713 and 2169, Colonial Archives, NCH; Mills, *Natchitoches 1729-1803*, No. 1347.

³⁹Vaugine to Governor Miró, 20 March 1782, Leg. 195, PPC-AGI.

FIGURE 6
MORTALITIES - BY MONTH



then soared to the highest point of the year in December. Why December? The most plausible reason would seem to be offered by the weather. Perhaps there did exist increased danger from cold and exposure; although, considering that forests were abundant in the area and there were no restrictions upon its use such as those which existed in medieval Europe, it would not seem probable that the population should be without fuel. Moreover, when December deaths are charted according to age, sex, time-frame and economic percentile, there are no discernable patterns.

Undoubtedly, the frontier did impose some additional life-threatening factors. This is most clearly evident in comparisons of mortality rates between the foreign and native-born. Among immigrant males the average age at death for those who reached age 20 was 53.9; for immigrant females it was 52.8. The first generation born on the frontier experienced a significant drop -- to 46.0 for males and 50.1 for females. In the third and fourth generations, age at death for adult females would dip even lower before showing a slight improvement at the end of the century, although male

death-ages for the third and fourth generations climbed almost immediately and then stabilized near the age 51 mark.

The major causes of death for males and females in the prime adult years (childbearing for women and occupational hazards for men) were relatively comparable risks. Yet, as the frontier showed some signs of civilization, as less men took to the woods and more remained on the farm, male life expectancies began to improve. Only those mothers in the childbearing years retained their high level of risk, until social ideology later in the eighteenth century began to offer some alternatives, as will be discussed in a later chapter on fertility. Throughout this era, however, the main cause of death -- the black vomit or the putrid fever as this society called it -- would remain an inescapable fact of, and finale to, life. It would also limit considerably the financial prosperity of many families in this political and social regime in which 81.4 percent of married men died leaving minor children, in which widows had limited economic opportunity to expand the resources their husbands left, and in which primogeniture did not exist to preserve intact the beginnings of a fortune that a given man might make before his early death.

CHAPTER III

rites of passage:

PATTERNS IN COURTSHIP, MARRIAGE, AND REMARRIAGE

For centuries the English have clucked reprovably (at least in public) over the moral abomination that the staid Anglo has called the *French* kiss -- while the suave Frenchmen, in turn, have winked at pretty *demoiselles* and stole a million of those little pleasures every *bonhomme* worthy of his reputation for love knows as the *English* kiss. This curious anomaly, this contradictory interpretation of other nations and their customs of life and *l'amour*, unfortunately, was not left behind when the English Puritan boldly set sail for Massachusetts Bay and the French Catholic crossed himself and yielded his fates to the wildernesses of Canada, the Gulf Coast, or the American interior.

Some legitimate differences have existed between these two cultures, certainly. The formalities of politics and organized religion are obvious examples. Yet, the varied results of recent demographic studies of Western Europe clearly emphasize that variances existed between the individual communities of France, not to mention the incessant fluctuations that occurred within every studied community over a period of time. Similar demographic studies of Britain also reveal a number of basic similarities between the Gaul and the Anglo in the European environment. For every isolated pattern in France, a parallel can seemingly be found in England, at some place and at some time. Many differences between these studied communities seem to result not so much from inherent ideological differences as from a specific

problem which occurred in various places during different times, both within and across national lines.

But what of the colonies -- particularly the heretofore neglected Latin colonies of North America? In their rites of passage -- from childhood to adulthood, from innocence to sexuality, from a state of dependency to the obligations of marriage -- did colonial settlers differ? Did the Latin colonists transplant to America the cultural or religious patterns of their homelands, or did the frontier environment force changes? If social mutations occurred on the Latin frontier, did they parallel the changes that were taking place in other American colonies? If so, which colonies and why? Was there indeed justification for the colonial Puritan's self-satisfaction that his own insistence upon "early marriage" was a far better way to "promote virtue" than to "'ensnare' children in vows of virginity, as the Catholics did"?¹ Indeed, exactly what did constitute "early marriage" or "late marriage" in one society or the other?

Evidence seems to indicate that the variances between colonial Puritans, Anglicans, and Catholics existed more in each one's concept of the other than it does in the cold and unemotional statistics one draws from their life experiences. In all colonial American societies formed by transplanted Europeans, casual sex was viewed, officially, as deleterious to both the individual and to society. Within the colonial environment, moreover, the rights of the community to enforce standards of morality seldom were questioned. The concept of "freedom" apparently never was extended to "private acts between consenting adults." Some noticeable variances do exist in overall patterns, particularly in ages at marriage; yet the primary cause and

¹Edmund S. Morgan, "The Puritans and Sex," in Gordon, ed., *The American Family*, 369.

impact of these differences were more economic than moral or social.

Economic fluctuations also seem to create the major differences between courtship and marital patterns on the Louisiana frontier and in its "mother country," France. Yet, a frontier economy does not remain static. The very process of civilization alters the livelihood of frontiersmen. The egalitarianism of the initial state of deprivation that exists on the frontier is supplanted by social stratification as the differences in human capabilities result in varying levels of achievement; and this, also, alters the patterns of marriage within any given locale. In the process, an immigrant's family might revert to the standards of the community that he left behind in Europe; but, at the same time, changing conditions in his homeland may have altered the patterns that he recalled so that variance still existed between the colonist and the society that spawned him. All of these factors are clearly evident in the experiences of the Natchitoches frontier families.

The popular denouncement of Louisiana society as "*sans religion, sans justice, sans discipline, sans ordre, et sans police,*"² is, itself, *sans justice* in many respects. In the area of religion and discipline -- that is, morality -- the Louisiana frontier differs little from any other studied colonial society.

The most common yardstick of community morality, surely, would be rates of illegitimacy. For comparative purposes, Natchitoches is ideally suited to analysis. The wealth of existing records make family reconstitution possible to an exceptional degree, and that reconstitution indicates an exceedingly small margin of error in birth and marriage registrations. While H. Temkins-Greener and A. C. Swedlund estimate 18 to 48.5 percent under

²Cable, *The Creoles of Louisiana*, 24-25.

registration of births in the vital records of the Connecticut Valley, 1721-1800, and while P.E. Razell's evaluation of baptism as a form of birth registration in forty-five English parishes between 1761 and 1834 indicates a 27.4 to 36.0 percent under-registration,³ similar reconstitutions of the white population at Natchitoches indicates that less than 1 percent of births occurring on that frontier are not recorded in extant records. A somewhat larger, but still negligible, portion of marriages are also missing from the registers of the church; however, for more than half of these (11 of 16) an acceptable alternate form of "registration" can be found in the notarial records of the post where marriage contracts were filed prior to the wedding.

Family reconstitution identifies 1,199 white infants born at Natchitoches in the colonial era. Eighty-four of these (7.0 percent) were born outside of marriage, a number which includes the recognized offspring of white fathers and Native American mothers. When mothers of full-Indian ancestry (who presumably would have grown up in a non-Catholic, non-European culture and would have married according to her own tribal customs) are excluded, and when the three illegitimate offspring of one newly-arrived Anglo mother are similarly excluded, there remains an overall 4.0 percent illegitimacy rate among infants born to French, Spanish, Creole, or mixed-blood mothers who were baptized and reared, at least nominally, in the Catholic faith.

As illustrated in Figure 16, the illegitimacy rate peaked at 7.1 percent in the 1764-1773 period, immediately preceding the arrival at the post of the ultra-conservative and extremely dynamic Capuchin missionary, Luis de Quintanilla, who immediately launched a moral crusade on that frontier. In

³Temkin-Greener and Swedlund, "Fertility Transition," 31; P. E. Razell, "The Evaluation of Baptism as a Form of Birth Registration through Cross-Matching Census and Parish Register Data: A Study in Methodology," *Population Studies*, 26 (March, 1972), 129.

TABLE 10
 ILLEGITIMATE AND IRREGULAR BIRTHS - BY DECADE

Decade	Illegitimate Births Per Hundred	*Irregular Births Per Hundred
1734-1743	1.4	2.9
1744-1753	2.4	10.8
1754-1763	6.6	14.0
1764-1773	7.1	11.9
1774-1783	5.4	8.8
1784-1793	2.4	7.1
1794-1803	4.5	9.0

*Includes not only illegitimate births but also births occurring to wives less than 8.5 months after marriage or to widows more than 9 months after the deaths of their husbands. Full-blood Indian and Anglo mothers are excluded.

the following decade, illegitimacy fell to 5.4 percent; and in the 1784-93 decade, a period that immediately followed his departure but coincided with the sexual maturation of those females who had experienced his tutelage from infancy, the rate fell even more drastically to 2.4 percent. In the 1790s, however, a new generation of adolescents matured under a less rigid pastor, and the illegitimacy rate once more began to climb.

By comparison, a study of French Canada, where Catholic piety was more firmly entrenched than in Louisiana, reveals an overall illegitimacy rate of .68 percent in the eighteenth century, which climbed to .99 percent in the nineteenth century, and then to a current high of 3.4 percent in the more liberal twentieth-century.⁴ The most comprehensive study of reported births in all English parishes since the 1500s reveals eighteenth century fluctuations that ranged from 3.0 percent to 6.0 percent; other reported research, however, indicates a vast under-registration of births in many of

⁴Dumas, *Filles du roy*, 97. By comparison, in the United States during the past three decades, white illegitimacies have ranged from 6.1 to 13.9 percent; see *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1980* (Washington, D.C.: United States Bureau of the Census, 1980), 66.

these English parishes during that century, and it seems reasonable to assume that illegitimate births would be far more likely to go unrecorded when registration was not enforced. Similarly, Flandrin's analysis of reproduction and sexuality in Medieval and Early Modern France indicates a low, but rising, illegitimacy rate for eighteenth century French villages -- as, for example, in Tourouvre-en-Perche, where the rate rose from an all-time low of .35 percent in 1700-1730 to 1.3 in 1780-1800 up to a high of 5.7 in the first decade of the nineteenth century.⁵ (See Table 11.)

TABLE 11
PREMARITAL CONCEPTIONS - COMPARATIVE TABLE

First-Born Children Arriving within Specified Period after Marriage:			
Location	Studied Period	Number of Months	Percent Born
Natchitoches	1734-1803	8	10.8
Sturbridge, Massachusetts	1730-1799	7	25-33
Andover, Massachusetts	1700-1730	9	11.3
Bristol, Rhode Island	1740-1780	8	49-44
9 Anglo-American Towns (6 in New England)	1701-1760	9	23.3
6 Anglo-American Towns (5 in New England)	1761-1800	9	33.7
Cartmel, Lancastershire, England	1600-1675	8	13.2
Clayworth, Nottinghamshire, England	1650-1750	8	10.2
Crulai, France	1674-1742	8	9.5

SOURCES: Greven, *Four Generations*, 113; Osterud and Fulton, "Family Limitation and Age at Marriage," 487; Daniel Scott Smith, "The Dating of the American Sexual Revolution: Evidence and Interpretation," in Gordon, *The American Family*, 427.

⁵Peter Laslett and Karla Oosterveen, "Long-Term Trends in Bastardy in England: A Study of the Illegitimacy Figures in the Parish Registers and in the Reports of the Registrar General, 1561-1960," *Population Studies*, 27 (July, 1973), 267; Razzell, "Evaluation of Baptism," 255-286; Flandrin, *Families*, 183.

These figures rise drastically at Natchitoches when evaluations include children born too soon after marriage as well as births occurring to widows more than nine months after the deaths of their husbands or to wives during an extended absence of their husbands. Some irregularity in sexual behavior was displayed by at least 24 percent of all females.

Again, a similar pattern can be found in other studied colonies. Carr and Walsh's study of female servants of Charles County, Maryland, a group that constituted by far the bulk of that county's female immigrant population, shows that between 1658 and 1705 at least 20 percent "were presented to the county court" for bearing a bastard child. The pair further report that in the first generation of females born in that county, the presentment figure rose to 33 percent. Similarly, the records of one New England church, kept in a community where a "full confession of sins by the prospective bride and groom" was required, reveal that "almost half the couples admitted carnal knowledge of each other."⁶

It is difficult to generalize any distinctions in premarital sexual behavior between Latin and Anglo colonies. Both appear to have exhibited markedly higher deviations from the teachings of their moral leaders than did each colony's "mother country." Both also displayed a rising rate of illegitimacies and premarital pregnancies, throughout their colonial experience, as, for example, Greven and Demos have noted in their studies of seventeenth and eighteenth century Andover and Bristol. This increase in the colonies also parallels, to some extent, a similar rise that has been noted in Europe. Lenard R. Berlanstein observes that illegitimacy rates rose among the eighteenth-century French as a result of "greater mobility,

⁶Carr and Walsh, "The Planter's Wife," 266 - 277; Thomas Fleming, "America 1776," *Readers Digest* (July 1976), 202.

propertylessness and vulnerability for women."⁷ Still, the peak rates in a great many French villages for which eighteenth century figures are now available are no greater than the *lowest* observable rates in the American colonies.

Any comparison between the colony of Louisiana, the early Atlantic settlements, and the European parent countries must take other factors into consideration as well. The Anglo colonies of America, as least those for whom the best data is available, were established principally in the seventeenth century. By the time that Louisiana was settled in the eighteenth, the Atlantic colonists should already have mutated many of the cultural characteristics they brought from Europe, according to Turner's thesis; the newer Louisiana frontier of the eighteenth century should, thus, have been more closely akin to Europe in its moral patterns. At the same time, European society was undergoing its own evolution as industrialization resulted in mass displacements of people and values and, particularly in France, as Revolution created new moral as well as political frontiers.

Quite possibly the geographical frontier of America, and the stages of civilization through which it had to evolve, can explain the variances that emerge from studies of traditional morality within the different American colonies. It would seem to be a logical explanation for the higher eighteenth century prenuptial pregnancy rates found in the older Anglo colonies, as compared to those found in Louisiana during that same time frame. It would also seem to explain Louisiana's subsequent peak in illegitimacy rates

⁷ Greven, *Four Generations*, 113; John Demos, "Families in Colonial Bristol, Rhode Island: An Exercise in Historical Demography," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Ser. 3, Vol. 25 (January, 1968), 56; Lenard R. Berlanstein, "Illegitimacy, Concubinage, and Proletarianization in a French Rural Town, 1760-1914," *Journal of Family History*, 5 (Winter, 1980), 362-363.

in the early nineteenth century,⁸ by which time rates were already on the decline in Anglo-American societies that were beginning to show definite signs of a more rigid civilization. Each New World society, like an adolescent child, appears to have gone through a period of adjustment, a re-evaluation of inherited values, an experimentation with moral liberties that society traditionally discouraged, before eventually falling into line with more traditional attitudes. Ironically, at the time the American pendulum seems to have been swinging back toward conservatism, Europe's new wave of experimentation with sexual freedom, along its new industrial and social frontiers, was entering its own peak.

At Natchitoches, the decline in premarital chastity among those of European origins definitely seems to be attributable to one particular condition imposed by the frontier environment: less exposure to the dogmas of the Catholic faith and more exposure to other peoples (Indian and black) with differing attitudes toward sexuality. Certainly the male population which dominated immigration from the earliest years adapted itself with ease (indeed, enthusiasm) to the more liberal morality of the Native Americans. The deportation to the colony of unmarried females whose commitment to traditional female "virtue" had already been questioned in France may also have had a more liberalizing effect upon frontier morality; certainly the pious nuns who arrived in Louisiana in 1727 found much to criticize in their more secular sisters. Yet, it was assuredly the fainthearted presence of the Church itself that must take blame for the degree to which the Louisiana frontiersman

⁸When the present analysis of colonial morality is continued through the nineteenth century at Natchitoches, peak illegitimacy is found in the 1810-1820 decade (15 percent); from that point it declines steadily to 4 percent in the last half of the century. Further analysis of Natchitoches Parish illegitimacy in the 1850-1860 decade, by cultural heritage, reveals a low of .25 percent among French Catholics, a 3 percent rate among Protestants, a 9 percent rate among Indian-Spanish Catholics; and an 86 percent rate among full-blood Indians.

initially "fell away" from the teachings of his faith. *Soeur Marie-Madeleine Hachard*, after her arrival in the colony in 1727, reported to her father that "a great number" of the girls they encountered in Louisiana "had been married without even knowing that there was a God . . . but since we are here, girls are only married if they have come to our instruction."⁹

The female population to which *Soeur Hachard* referred was that of New Orleans, where the *greatest* opportunity existed for religious instruction. On the frontier of Natchitoches, the population did not have a regular priest until 1734, some sixteen years after the first family arrived at the post. Intermittently throughout the colonial period there would be other periods of deprivation for the parish flock. In truth, many of the pastors sent to guard their morals and to make certain that each new generation was properly instructed were ineffective to a great extent, either because of their own disposition or because of the increasing willfulness of the frontier flock.

As the Natchitoches community grew in number, and expanded further into the countryside (while still remaining under the jurisdiction of the one post and the one church in the heart of the original settlement) the deficiency in religious training became even more acute. In the 1790s, as illegitimacy rates were again climbing after the more repressive regime of Quintanilla, the parish priest, Pierre Pavie, wrote the bishop year after year of the "sadness" of seeing "that most of his flock were not even making their Easter duty."¹⁰ "The great distance of the inhabitants from the church makes it

⁹Myldred Masson Costa, trans., *The Letters of Marie-Madeleine Hachard, 1727-28* (New Orleans: Laborde Printing Company, 1974), 59.

¹⁰The "Easter duty" to which Father Pavie referred is one of the most fundamental obligations of the Church, requiring that practicing Catholics receive the sacraments of penance and communion at least once a year during the Easter season.

impossible [also] for fathers and mothers to send their children to instruction classes," Father Pavie further explained.¹¹

The broad sphere of behavior generally termed "premarital sexual activity" contained many variations at Natchitoches that offer insight into the cultural framework of the population. It has already been noted that a significant variance existed between the numbers of women who bore illegitimate children and the number who actually conceived prior to marriage. It must be simultaneously noted that in certain cultural regions of France from which the Natchitoches population came, there existed a shadowy line between chaste behavior for the unattached and chastity for the betrothed.

Cohabitation between engaged persons existed widely in Medieval Europe, and although the Catholic Church undertook, after the Council of Trent in 1653, to abolish the custom, it still persisted in certain regions. The pertinacity of this custom might possibly explain the persistence with which colonial priests queried betrothed couples about the possible existence of an earlier, broken, betrothal. Christian doctrine traditionally held marriage to be valid whenever two people pledged their troths and consummated the union, whether or not a priest was actually present at the exchange of vows. Therefore, a frontier bridegroom who had been previously betrothed

¹¹Annual parish census returns, 1796-1803, Reels, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, *Records of the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas*.

Again, a failure to give religious needs a higher priority than secular ones seems to have been a distinguishing feature of the American frontier. In the early Massachusetts Bay Colony there were recorded complaints over settlers "who dwell in their ceiled houses & yet say that the time is not come that the Lord's house should be built;" see Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 57. At Natchitoches, most accounts indicate that the parish church was regularly rebuilt and was even "splendid" in comparison to secular housing; the main problem was the lack of time which the parishioners seem to have had to visit the Lord's House after they built it. See, for example, the 9 May 1738 inventory of the church in Germaine Portre-Bobinski, *Natchitoches, Translations of Old French and Spanish Documents* (privately printed, 1928), unnumbered pages; Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières*, I, 237-238; II, 121.

may have privately consummated that betrothal prior to breaking it. Although he and his affianced had never obtained the church's blessing, he would still, in the eyes of the Church, not be free to take another bride.¹²

The cultural heritage of many regions of France similarly condoned other sexual activity among the courting as well as the betrothed. For example, in the Vendée region of France (an area significantly represented among both the male and female immigrants to Natchitoches) there existed as late as 1900 a traditional custom of courtship known as the *marachinage Vendéen* in which "boys and girls, from about their fifteenth year until the moment of marriage, could openly enjoy sexual pleasure by the so-called French kiss and, less openly, by mutual masturbation."¹³

Similar customs have been found in other regions of France, as well as in other European countries from which the Natchitoches settlers emigrated -- all with varying details, circumstances, and names, but all designed to afford a sexual outlet for unmarried youth without risking unwanted pregnancies. Some customs, such as the *alberge* of Savoy bore considerable resemblance to the quaintly-sensational Puritan custom of "bundling," and in the view of some observers, "keeping company with boys," as such behavior came to be called, "does not produce as much cause for repentance as in other provinces

¹²For further discussion of this point, see the host of dispensation requests scattered throughout the twelve-reel collection, *Records of the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas*, and Shirley Bourquard, *Marriage Dispensations in the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas, 1787-1803* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1980), as well as J.-L. Flandrin, "Repression and Change in the Sexual Life of Young People in Medieval and Early Modern Times," and Beatrice Gottlieb, "The Meaning of Clandestine Marriage," in Robert Wheaton and Tamara K. Hareven, eds., *Family and Sexuality in French History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), 27-83, and Noel C. Stevenson, *Genealogical Evidence: A Guide to the Standard of Proof Relating to Pedigrees, Ancestry, Heirship and Family History* (Laguna Hills, California: Aegean Park Press, 1979), 78-84.

¹³Flandrin, "Repression and Change," 32.

for which [there exists a higher] rate of illegitimacy."¹⁴

Be that as it may, none of these customs proved to be any more of a safe outlet for youthful sexuality than "bundling" did for the Anglo-Puritan. Illegitimacies still occurred, among the Puritans, in the Vendée, and in the Savoy, as explained by one observer:¹⁵

On Saturdays and holidays, which most Christians devote to rest and the service of God, it is usual for young peasants to stay up until late at night in the company of marriageable girls, and, pleading that their homes are too far away, they ask for hospitality, and seek to share the girls' beds, which is commonly called 'alberger.' Having made an agreement that their chastity will be respected, the girls do not refuse, since there is no opposition on the part of their parents they lightheartedly trust in the boys' loyalty alone in the same bed, albeit still wearing their shirts. In spite of the futile obstacle of the shirt, it very often happens that sexual furor breaks down this ridiculous compact and forces the door of virginity, and that those who shortly before had been virgins became women.

They also became pregnant in a significant number of cases. It is regrettable that the literature available for the Natchitoches frontier does not mention any such customs of courtship. However, the number of cases in which the local pastor agreed to dispense with the required announcement of bans over a period of three holy days and permitted the couples to marry with unseemingly haste does suggest unplanned, clandestine, pregnancies rather than community-approved cohabitation among those already betrothed.

In a significant number of cases at Natchitoches, the birth of an illegitimate child was followed by the marriage of its parents at a later date. Thirty-two of the eighty-eight illegitimate births at the post fell within this category. In a number of such cases, the female was an Indian

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, quoting Marius Hudry, "Relations sexuelles pré-nuptiales en Tarentaise et dans le Beaufortin d'après les documents ecclésiastiques," *Le Monde alpin et rhodanien, revue régionale d'ethnologie*, 1 (1974), 95-100.

(sometimes an Indian slave, in which event the marriage was preceded by her emancipation since Louisiana law did not permit the marriage of a free person to a slave of any color.¹⁶ At least two of the French-Indian couples from which large numbers of Natchitochians have descended (i.e., François Dion DespresDerbanne and Jeanne de la Grande Terre; Jean Baptiste Brevet and Anne des Cadeaux) legitimized one or more children at the time of their marriage in the Church. It is very likely that other Indian-white unions of the early period, for which no records of the marriages can be found, also fall into this category.

In at least one case of a tardy marriage, a weak chain of cultural continuity might link the Natchitoches frontier to France. Despite the efforts of the French Church, the widespread medieval custom of concubinage had not been eradicated completely. Among other reasons, it offered emotional options that men of certain rank could not necessarily afford in marriage. As Flandrin explains: "In contrast to marriage, which was a social institution by which *families of the same standing* entered into an alliance to perpetuate themselves, concubinage was a personal union, an affair of love, at least on the part of the man." Among the classic cases Flandrin enumerates is that of the man of position or wealth, "married or unmarried, living with a girl of lower social standing whom it would have been more scandalous to marry than to keep as a concubine."¹⁷

Social stratification at Natchitoches was extremely nebulous in the colonial period, and especially so in the early to mid-eighteenth century, yet some modicum of stratification did exist. For a male of noble blood, the

¹⁶Moreau Lislet and Carleton, *Las Siete Partidas*, I, 461.

¹⁷Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 181. Italics added.

problem was particularly acute if he were in the military (in which case he was invariably an officer) since permission for marriage had to be obtained from his superior officers who were, almost without exception, of the noble ranks themselves and were prone to protect the exclusivity of their caste. The only known case of open concubinage between two unmarried whites at Natchitoches apparently resulted from this transplanted sense of social inequality between the male (Lieutenant Jean Louis Matthias Le Court de Presle, of an ancient noble family of Normandy) and the female (Marie Jeanne Le Roy, a native-born girl whose deceased father had been a carpenter and a rank-and-file soldier and who, moreover, had died leaving his daughter with no inheritance worth mentioning). In the end, frontier *égalité* did prevail (with the assistance of a persistent priest). The couple was married, and the children legitimized.

Multiple illegitimate births to an unmarried mother of French or Spanish ethnicity were extremely rare, although in several cases the mother was pregnant with her second child at the time of her marriage. In some cases, the records identify the husband as the father of the first child as well, although there may exist cause to doubt the father's eagerness to claim paternity. On 9 September 1777, for example, the priest of the parish recorded a complete marriage entry for Jean Baptiste Derbanne and Marie Felicité Dupain. Then, without explanation, the entry is crossed through. Seven months and one day later, Marie Felicité gave birth to an illegitimate child; at his baptism in April, 1778, the child is identified as the "natural" son of Jean Baptiste Armand, not of Derbanne. In June, after the announcement of three bans, Armand finally married Marie Felicité, and seven and one-half months thereafter the new bride gave birth yet again, to a child that was by law legitimate. Young Derbanne, having narrowly escaped becoming the

legal father of another man's child, did not seriously consider marriage again for another seven years; when he did yield to the temptation, he chose a bride who was not already pregnant.

It is not known whether the tardy marriage of Armand to Dupain was a successful one; however, evidence does exist that other marriages contracted under similar circumstances were not happy. Marie Françoise de la Renaudière was similarly pregnant with her second child in January 1784 when she married her children's father, Sergeant Juan de Arze. That second child had scarcely celebrated his first birthday when the post commandant wrote to the governor:¹⁸

At the request of the . . . pastor of this post, to give a passport to the wife of Sergeant Jean de Arze (who desires to present herself before your Lord, in order to explain the reasons that prompt her to seek a separation from her husband), I have accorded her the permission to descend [the river to New Orleans]. . . . The sergeant has also presented himself for a passport to descend, which I will not write except by order of your Lord.

The settlement of the Arze-de la Renaudière marriage dispute is not known. Shortly thereafter all track of the husband is lost and the 1787 census of the post identifies the one surviving child as an orphan.

In other instances, marital problems stemming from premarital pregnancy did not become evident for a number of years, as was the case with Remy Poissot, Jr., and his wife Marie Louise Cavé. The couple wed in 1767. The baptismal record of the first child, Antoine, has not been located. Over the next twenty years, Marie Louise bore Poissot six children. In 1795 their eldest child, Antoine, married at Natchitoches, at which time the ecclesiastical registers identified him as the *legitimate* son of Remy Poissot and of Marie Louise Cavé. Apparently, the declared father retained some doubt. In

¹⁸Louise César Bormé to Señor Don Estevan de Miró, 28 February 1785, Reel 7, Jack D. L. Holmes Collection, Northwestern State University Archives, Natchitoches.

December of the following year, just three months after Marie Louise bore him another child (one that Poissot had not yet bothered to take into the post for baptizing), he called the post notary to his home some miles downriver from Natchitoches. At that time, Marie Louise "freely" declared that "the individual Antoine, ordinarily called La Grosse Tête, is a bastard conceived prior to their marriage." Mme. Poissot additionally declared her eldest son to be the child of a *père étranger* who was baptized under the name "Antoine Cavee" and as such was ineligible to inherit from the estate of her husband. Two weeks later, the elder Poissot died. In subsequently recorded documents, his sons and daughters (two of whom wed local men of prominence) repeatedly declared that they recognized the legitimacy of their brother Antoine and his rights of inheritance, in spite of the "acknowledgement" which their father had apparently coerced their mother into making.¹⁹

The most open form of premarital sex -- prostitution -- appears to have been extremely rare on the Natchitoches frontier, at least among white females. Only one alleged incidence is recorded, and existing testimony leaves some doubt as to whether the priest who filed the complaint had actual proof or whether he used that charge to reinforce his disapproval of the young woman's behavior in general.

According to Padre Quintannilla's denouncement, Babet Varangue was "a young girl of bad life," and a "prostitute," in addition to having given public scandal by living at the home of a young, unmarried merchant. The incriminated man rose immediately to both his defense and Babet's, invoking his love of God, his *parental* regard for the impoverished, fatherless, girl, and his generally low opinion of the priest himself. Likewise, Babet's brother also filed a protest, admitting that his sister may have "failed at

¹⁹Docs. 2734, 2749, 2756, Colonial Archives, Natchitoches.

her state of maidenhood" (an acknowledgement which could not have been avoided since Babet had been responsible for three illegitimate births already); but whatever shortcomings she possessed, her brother believed, was due only to her being "swept away" and not from any "delight in libertinage or for the financial rewards of prostitution." He, too, challenged the pastor to prove the charge of prostitution in open court. Witnesses were called, including the father of the previously mentioned Marie Felicité Dupain who had, prior to her own community "disgrace," served as godmother to one of Babet's illegitimate sons.²⁰ Once again, the extant civil records of the post do not indicate the outcome of the case, the accused girl shortly thereafter left the post and returned to the new settlement of Rapides where her mother and other members of their Bohemian family had recently settled.

The pronounced absence of any other references to prostitution in the community for the nine decades of its colonial existence may well be attributed to the large numbers of unmarried Indian and black females in the vicinity of the post. Miscegenation at Natchitoches never reached the degree of frank openness that one finds in the Superior Council and Cabildo records of *la ville*, wherein numerous male witnesses who were called to relate their activities of a certain night repeatedly gave as an alibi: "I was sleeping with the free Negro Jeanne" (or Marie Louise, or any number of others). However, miscegenation definitely did exist at the Natchitoches post, at least between white males and black females. This, too, the diligent Father Quintanilla attempted to eradicate, but this problem confronted him with his most dismal failure. To cover the ineffectiveness of his ministry, Quintanilla abandoned the custom of his predecessors and omitted racial descriptions

²⁰Doc. 1308, *Ibid.*

from the baptismal entries that he recorded for non-white parishioners. Consequently, any effort to quantify miscegenation at Natchitoches suffers a void in the crucial Quintanilla era.

The problem obviously was acute. By 1770, five years before Quintanilla's arrival, the commandant felt compelled to issue an ordinance setting forth specific punishment for black females found guilty of concubinage. No punishment was decreed for their white paramours, other than that which the *Code Noir* already prescribed for white males who took sexual advantage of their own female slaves.²¹ Even this ordinance proved ineffective. Indeed, there is no record of its enforcement at all until the newly-arrived Quintanilla took the problem directly to the bishop at Havana and obtained ecclesiastical permission, in 1777, to force the prosecution of the black female Coincoin, whose open concubinage with the French merchant Pierre Metoyer was providing the most "scandalous example" to others at the post. In two years of litigation, Quintanilla failed to break up this union, and there is no evidence that miscegenation dwindled overall during his tenure at the post.²²

An analysis of the ages of both males and females at the time their sexual irregularities occurred actually provides a more interesting glimpse into male sexuality than it does into that of his female cohort. The mean age at which a male fathered a child outside of marriage was 30.5 years. Only 17.5 percent of the total were under the age of 24; yet this is the age group in which the sexual urge is generally believed to be strongest among males, as well as being the age group most likely to be unmarried. Over half (50.8 percent) of males who exhibited some sexual irregularity were

²¹Doc. 652, *Ibid.*; *Code noir ou loi municipale servant de reglement* (New Orleans, 1778), Article 10, p. 3.

²²Rex v. De Soto, Doc. 1227, Colonial Archives, NCH.

between 24 and 34. The youngest male, aged fifteen, became involved with a first-cousin-once-removed, whom he could not marry without church dispensation; that dispensation was shortly granted. (Indeed, the only two dispensations from the impediment of consanguinity, on record in colonial Natchitoches, were granted to this boy and his eighteen-year-old brother, each of whom had impregnated a cousin). Males at the upper age spectrum (age 40-53) were almost invariably involved in a concubinage which was eventually legalized.

A graph of male irregularities, by age, forms a reasonably uniform "normal curve" that peaks at age 30. Curiously, ages of females form no such curve. More females experienced their irregularity at age 18 (n = 8), but an almost equal number were aged 30 (n = 7). At the upper end of the age range appeared four widows in their forties, the oldest of whom was a 47-year old well-to-do mother of thirteen, of mixed French, Spanish, and Indian heritage, who became pregnant by a thirty-four year old Bohemian of such dark coloring that he was sometimes erroneously called "a free man of color" in colonial records. The never-before-married females who became pregnant ranged from an eleven-and-a-half-year-old child (mother dead, father impoverished, who was living rather unconventionally with an older male until she was legally old enough to wed)²³ to a fourteen-year-old French and Indian girl (father dead, mother employed as a domestic by the unmarried post commandant at the time the daughter bore a child that the commandant acknowledged as his own) to a thirty-seven year old female (to whose name no hint of scandal had heretofore been attached, who quite possibly felt that youth was about to pass her by without affording her the opportunity to

²³Moreau Lislet and Carleton, *Las Siete Partidas*, I, 451, set the legal age for marriage as 14 for the male and 12 for the female.

know the joys of love and motherhood). In most such cases, the illegitimate offspring grew up to marry into respectable, if unpretentious, local families.

Incidences of irregularity in sexual behavior were clearly prone to cross all lines of wealth or social position. Two daughters of the founder of the post, the chevalier and commandant Juchereau de St. Denis, appear in the study of irregular births: the first for bearing her first child five months after a hastily arranged marriage to the even more noble Athanase de Mézières, and the second for bearing a child under the ecclesiastical epithet, "father unknown." Over the course of the century, few families escaped having at least one illegitimate child in its number, and even fewer were spared having to arrange a hasty marriage.

Occasional studies of other settlements, in seeking a social cause for illicit, premarital sex, have returned again and again to the home environment. This appears to be a non-quantifiable factor. A full 39 percent of all females who displayed some irregularity in their conduct did not have the guidance of a living father at the time; however, 51 percent of females with no known irregularities also lost their father before their marriages. Again, it is observed that 25 percent of females with behavioral irregularities did not have a living mother; by comparison, 20 percent of non-deviating females also lost their mother prior to the marriage. The difference is negligible. It might be concluded from this comparison that the role of the mother was somewhat more crucial to a daughter's development into an acceptable pattern of behavior, yet at the same time it must be noted that in 15 of the 16 cases in which more than one daughter in a family displayed irregular conduct, the daughters did not lose their mothers before reaching adulthood. Only five females who became pregnant outside of marriage were the

daughters of females who had displayed some sign of irregularity in their own sexual conduct -- and one of these females was an Anglo newcomer to Natchitoches in the late eighteenth century. Three of the other four were daughters of women who had become respected members of the community despite their one early transgression. An additional fifteen of the females (and three males) for whom irregular sexual activity has been found also had siblings who became pregnant prior to marriage or were responsible for impregnating an unmarried white female during this period.

In a miniscule number of families, it would appear that some degree of sexual laxity was transmitted across generational lines. In a somewhat larger number of families, it would appear that factors in the social or family environment created a need that youth sought to fill with illicit sex. Yet, it is difficult, if not impossible, to assign parental or community responsibility for behavioral irregularities, given the dearth of personal letters or memoirs existing for those colonial families.

The response of the community at large to the weaknesses of its members does show considerable variance, particularly when the Natchitoches frontier is compared to the Anglo colonies. Benson's study of eighteenth-century America concludes that "suits involving paternity and maintenance were fairly frequent, at least in the northern colonies."²⁴ On the Louisiana frontier, no such suits were ever recorded, nor did colonial French and Spanish law require the erring female to identify the man responsible for her plight under penalty of the law. Benson further notes a prevalent custom in the Puritan church that required prenuptial, and often public, confessions.²⁵

²⁴Benson, *Women in Eighteenth Century America*, 228

²⁵*Ibid.*

In Catholic society, confession of past transgressions was, by church law, a private matter between the individual, the pastor, and God. Colonial Maryland law prescribed a heavy fine, whipping, and an extra two years of servitude for indentured females who bore a child during their period of service (during which they were not permitted to marry).²⁶ By contrast, in the Spanish colony of Louisiana, fornication penalties applied to both males and females: a warning to discontinue their association, with threat of community banishment for the man and threat of confinement for the female.²⁷ Despite differences in prescribed punishments, it is interesting to note that neither society was more effective than the other in curbing irregular sexual conduct.

In eighteenth century France, by comparison, it was the female who was often banished, by community custom if not by law. One study of thirty-nine unmarried mothers identified in the five parishes of the Vallage (Haute-Marne) between 1681 and 1790 has discovered that 26 "had to leave their villages" (of which number 14 abandoned their children); 1 remained in her village unmarried; and the final 12 "succeeded in getting married."²⁸

At Natchitoches, community reaction to unmarried mothers was more akin to that of France, with the exception of community banishment which may or may not have occurred in a small number of cases. No white females were legally reprimanded for unconventional behavior (in contrast to the New England practice), aside from the previously cited Mlle. Varangue. Sixteen

²⁶Carr and Walsh, "The Planter's Wife," 267.

²⁷"Digest of the Laws of Louisiana," *American State Papers: Documents Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States, Miscellaneous, Volume I* (38 vols., Washington, D.C.: Gales & Seaton, 1832), 373.

²⁸Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 184.

(33 percent) later married the man who supposedly fathered their children; eleven (22 percent) later married another man (with, in one case, the father of the bastard standing as sponsor to the marriage); another thirteen (26 percent) of the females remained in the community but did not marry. The fate of the other nine is not known. Meanwhile, a total of five infants born throughout the century were baptized in the parish church as a "foundling, mother and father unknown." (It is curious that no apparent attempts were made to identify the parents; in a community as small as Natchitoches, it is difficult to comprehend how the mother's identity could have gone undetected.)

Patterns in premarital sex, to a great extent, are inseparable from marital patterns; and both, in most societies, are closely akin to the economic patterns that are found in individual communities. This theme appears consistently in reports of studied communities in the Atlantic colonies, in England, and in France. Greven, in analyzing Andover, concluded "the marriage of sons, in particular, depended upon parental, especially paternal, consent and support." He further found that when males delayed marriage until their late twenties they remained economically dependent upon their fathers, since land usually remained under parental control until the father's death.²⁹ Carr and Walsh's study of Maryland highlights the problems of the hordes of indentured servants who could not marry until they had served their time or until female servants found a prospective husband prosperous enough, and willing, to buy the remainder of their service.³⁰ Another social demographer of early American concurs that in "New England, as well as in the

²⁹Greven, *Four Generations*, 75, 98.

³⁰Carr and Walsh, "The Planter's Wife," 266-277.

preindustrial West generally, marriage was intimately linked to economic independence."³¹

Within France, the same attitude seems to have prevailed. In former times the verb *s'établir* was defined as both "to marry" and "to become economically independent," clearly indicating a relationship between the two. Flandrin's extensive study of marital patterns in France concludes that the average age at first marriage rose continuously from the late fifteenth century, "partly on account of the increase in population, which produced a fall in wages, but also because of the gradual conquest of the peasant 'inheritances' by the nobles and bourgeois. For the same reason, the proportion of the permanently unmarried increased."³²

In both the New World and the Old, a woman's age at marriage was generally tied to the economic status of her father, with daughters of men in the upper economic percentiles marrying later than those in the lower, although social whims seem to have reversed the situation at different times and locales.³³ Since a moderately-even male-female population balance appears to have existed in most studied communities, there existed little social pressure for girls to marry at very young ages in order to accommodate male needs for a wife. Colonial Somerset, Maryland, which was settled three-quarters of a century before the Natchitoches frontier opened, is

³¹Daniel Scott Smith, "Parental Power and Marriage Patterns: An Analysis of Historical Trends in Hingham, Massachusetts," in Gordon, ed., *The American Family*, 91.

³²Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 186; see also Flandrin, "Repression and Change," 31.

³³Smith, for example, reports: "For daughters born to marriages formed in Hingham between 1721 and 1780, there is a perfect inverse relationship between paternal wealth and marriage age," while this pattern "dramatically reversed" itself among daughters born in the following sixty years; see "Parental Power," 95.

a notable exception.³⁴ Moreover, in most societies, there seems to have existed significant family and community pressure for youth to choose a spouse of the same economic standing.

Traditions that prevailed generally in most of the regions of France from which the Natchitoches settlers came additionally placed an economic burden upon prospective brides that did not exist in many early-American communities. According to Flandrin, by the early-modern period in France, girls "found a husband only on condition that they provided him, as their dowry, with part of this necessary initial capital" for establishing himself in a trade or business.³⁵ Obviously, this imposed a severe economic burden upon the resources of the traditional French family. Among poorer households, in which parental resources did not provide for dowries, dotes, or bequests to daughters, young females found it necessary to go into service at meager wages and delay marriage for a number of years until they could build the necessary dowry to help establish a husband. As a consequence, the prevailing marital ages (which as early as the late fifteenth century had already exhibited a high trend of twenty-five for men and twenty to twenty-one for women) rose steadily in France through the eighteenth century. This was especially so among females.³⁶

The Natchitoches frontier often failed to conform to marital patterns

³⁴In studying Somerset, Carr and Walsh found that immigrant females, who were commonly indentured servants and had to fulfill contracts before wedding, married normally in their mid-twenties, and 68 percent married after age 24. Their native-born daughters, however, matured in a society in which "the shortage of women imposed strong pressures to marry as early as possible." Among this generation of native-born, the mean age at marriage fell to 16.5 years; see Carr and Walsh, "The Planter's Wife," 268, 276-277.

³⁵Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 185. See also Robert Wheaton, "Introduction: Recent Trends in the Historical Study of the French Family," in Wheaton and Hareven, eds., *Family and Sexuality*, 15.

³⁶Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 186.

prevalent in either the Old World or the New. Traditional French marriage customs, not surprisingly, were most pronounced among the immigrant population. In the more frequent case of mixed immigrant-native marriages, the immigrant's cultural pattern seemed to dominate -- at least prior to marriage. In the course of the union some acculturation is evident, and the process becomes more evident with successive generations. However, the marital patterns which developed among the native-born did not necessarily mirror those developed on other American frontiers.

The custom of drawing up nuptial contracts prior to the exchange of vows provides a good example of cultural transfers and alterations. Within France, the marriage contract was a firmly-entrenched legality, by means of which a couple established, prior to the marriage, the exact prenuptial assets of each and the manner in which these and all future ones would be divided or shared in the course of the coming marriage and after the decease of one or both parties. Indeed, the custom of marriage contracts was so prevalent in France that some three hundred local and regional systems governing the format of these agreements had developed by the end of the *ancien regime*.³⁷

On the Natchitoches frontier, the extant marriage contracts chronicle the erratic acculturation process which the transplanted European population displayed. The greatest prevalence of contracts were filed by first generation males. Of 110 marriages entered into by immigrant males, 53.6 per cent filed nuptial agreements; among second generation males, the percentage

³⁷For a thorough study of French marriage contracts and their relationship to Louisiana, see Hans Baade, "Marriage Contracts in French and Spanish Louisiana: A Study in 'Notarial' Jurisprudence, *Tulane Law Review*, 53 (December 1978), 1, 49-79; and Baade's excellent introduction to Alice Daly Forsyth and Ghislaine Pleasonton, *Louisiana Marriage Contracts* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1980), v-xiii.

fell to 40.8. By the third generation, only 9 percent of the marriages were preceded by a nuptial agreement. Among those who were four generations removed from the closest immigrant settler, no contracts were filed in the colonial period.

A decade-by-decade study of the prevalence of marriage contracts is more erratic; but the variance traces a clear pattern. Adequate data is not available for the pre-1733 period, but extant records suggest that a minimum 50 to 60 percent of church marriages were accompanied by a civil contract. Between 1734 and 1764, when a large number of native-born were coming to adulthood and when emigration levels were low, the percentage of marriages accompanied by antenuptial contracts fluctuated between 22.7 and 26.1 percent -- in the same time frame that a large number of immigrant males married at Natchitoches; 19 of the 26 contracts on file for the 35 marriages taking place in that decade involved an immigrant settler. In the 1770s and 1780s, the practice experienced a very heavy decline, which also coincided with a decrease in immigrant arrivals. In the late 1780s, a new wave of immigration occurred, and the subsequent rise of contracts after 1790 reflects the marriages of these males. In this decade, however, the national origins of the male immigrants changed radically, and the marriage contracts represent a cross-section of almost all of the newly arriving elements. Twenty percent of the contracts filed after 1790 involved men of Italian birth; 20 percent were drawn by French-born males; and 50 percent involved immigrants from the United States. Throughout all the colonial marriage contracts, one ethnic group is conspicuously absent: the Spanish. Not one of the Iberian males who settled at Natchitoches under the near-half century of Spanish dominion filed a marriage contract.

The appearance of the Anglo-American in the contracts of the 1790s, and

the correlating increase in the number of contracts filed by native-born spouses, marks another radical change in marital patterns that occurred in the last colonial decade (not only on the frontier, but in all of Louisiana) as a result of ethnic homogenization. Under French and Spanish law, Catholicism was the state religion, just as the Puritan and Anglican faiths were in various Protestant-American colonies, but customs of marriage differed drastically between Catholics and Protestants in both the Old World and the New.

No formal marriage ceremony existed in the Christian church prior to the reforms of Pope Innocent III in the twelfth century; at that time an optional sacrament was introduced which permitted solemnization of marriage within the church. Prior to this, the only "ceremony" that existed for non-royalty (if, indeed, such could be called a ceremony) consisted of the groom's appearance at the house of the bride, where he took possession of her and carried her to his own abode. In spite of Innocent's reforms, this custom still prevailed among the common citizenry of Christian countries, and the Christian church continued to recognize the validity and permanence of all such "common-law" marriages. Predictable abuses prompted the Council of Trent, in 1653, to revise the Roman Catholic stand on marriage. From this date onward, no Catholic could enter into a valid marriage without a priest to witness the exchange of vows. No civil marriage ceremony still existed in a Catholic country, even for dissenting Protestants. However, in Christian countries with a Protestant majority in this period, the marriage ceremony did develop as a principal function of the civil state, although various religious sects introduced ceremonies to accompany civil registration of marriage.³⁸

³⁸Stevenson, *Genealogical Evidence*, 80-81.

These respective differences were brought to the New World. In Louisiana, as in France and Spain, there existed no such event as a civil marriage. Nuptials were valid only if vows were recited in the presence of a priest as official witness. The influx of Protestants attracted to Louisiana by the generous land concessions of the Spanish government were allowed to retain their personal faiths; however, no ministers of other faiths could legally enter into the colony, and Protestants who wished to marry in Louisiana were expected to recite their vows before a minister of the state church in order for the marriage to be valid. Many, perhaps most, of the Protestants balked. The existence of marriage-contracts in Louisiana (a custom that also existed in some of their birth regions) provided an alternative to this religious and civil conflict. For the Protestant on the Louisiana frontier, the draft of the civil marriage contract often served as the only ceremony.

It was inevitable that this attitude would influence the native Creole. Various Louisiana settlements in this period had no regular priest. Anglo-Protestants who drew up marriage contracts with Catholic girls, promising to marry them before the Holy Mother Church when opportunity presented itself, often managed to escape confronting that opportunity until the end of the colonial era when the state-church system came to an end in Louisiana. On at least one Louisiana frontier (Ouachita) the post commandant witnessed so many marriage contracts, and tolerated so many subsequent cohabitations of the couples involved, that he was brought to court before the colonial government for usurping the authority of the Church and performing marriages without priestly powers. As was often the case in the fluid migratory pattern of Louisiana colonists, several of the Ouachita "marriages" involved one or

more Natchitoches settlers, both Catholics and Protestants.³⁹

Among other families of the Catholic faith, there were offspring who wished to marry a fellow Catholic but had no priest to witness the marriage. Rigid religious custom began to fall, and this circumstance accounts for a significant number of the marriage contracts filed by native couples in the last decade of the colonial era. Five of the twenty marriage contracts involving non-Europeans were mixed unions of a Protestant immigrant male and a Creole female, for which no marriage in the church ever occurred. Another six of the contracts involved unions for two Creoles in a period during which there was no priest on the frontier. Although most of these six contracts contained a "promise to be married as soon as a priest arrives at the post," the promise was not always kept. No actual marriage in the church has been found for two of the couples.

The subsequent cohabitation of these Catholic or mixed-faith couples, after contract and before ceremony, necessarily resulted in pregnancies and births prior to the religious blessing of the union. Since church policy did not recognize the legitimacy of the unblessed union in the eighteenth century, those children appear in ecclesiastical registers as illegitimate. Any study of premarital sex in the 1790s would also be artificially affected by these unions; consequently, an arbitrary decision has been reached in this present study to treat all such unions as socially legitimate.

When viewed from the standpoint of their legal purpose, the premarital settlement of past and future acquisitions and gains, the marriage contract might be expected principally among those with some degree of influence. This was not traditionally so in France, and was not initially so in Louisiana.

³⁹See Proceedings against Jean Filhiol, May 24-25, 1800 and March 4, 1802, Reels 9-10, *Records of the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas*.

Under marriage laws that existed in both societies any desired disposition of property that deviated from regional custom had to be specified in the contract drawn before marriage, or else that disposition could not be allowed. Even the poorest French peasant often had his dreams and aspirations, and while he might not have a *sous* in his purse at the time of his marriage, he still drew up that contract in order to have some measure of authority over the goods that he planned to acquire.

Of the 25 marriage contracts drawn at Natchitoches during the French regime (1739-1765) only 8 indicated that even one party had any property at all. These 8 were scattered randomly throughout the period. The 8 wealthier couples displayed a range of fortune from the 220 *livres* which the French soldier Joseph Le Duc and his French-Indian fiancée, Marianne Guedon, each brought into their marriage in 1743, to the 8,600 *livre* estate in Negroes, Indians, lands, house, and movables that the 47-year old Italian ex-soldier, Dominique Monteché, possessed at the time he married the Picardie native, Marie Françoise Bourdon (Widow Jacques Le Vasseur) who had no assets and six children who constituted a considerable financial liability.

These early marriage contracts, in addition to varying wealth, also displayed a variety of conditions and terms, dowries and donations. Typical is that filed by young Gaspard Derbanne, a 22-year old French-Indian native of Natchitoches, before his 1746 marriage to another young native of mixed ancestry, Marie Françoise Verger. The groom, assuredly, was one of the wealthiest young men at the post, owning Negroes and land valued at 1,500 *livres* silver, which he had inherited from his father. By contrast, the bride's parents were still alive and could afford no dowry for her. Under the section of the contract reserved for the bride's property, there is recorded: "The couple will be allowed to live in the house of the bride's

parents, who are obliged to give them lodging, and to assist them as much as possible.⁴⁰

Marriage contracts of the Spanish era reflect the changing attitude of the community toward the function and usefulness of these contracts. Between 1766 and 1784, 54.3 percent of the contracts were drawn by couples in which one or both owned property. Between 1785 and 1803, fully 84.8 percent of the contracts involved property. Indeed, past 1785 the only native couples who filed contracts (excluding the 6 who used the contract as a substitute for a church marriage) were those who took property into their marriage.

Clearly, over the course of the eighteenth-century development of the frontier, the function of the marriage contract was altered. Although the population was overwhelmingly of French origin, even on the eve of the Purchase of 1803, the traditional French expectation of a brighter economic future and the habitual foresight which prompted the young Gaul to consider the economic needs and problems of the future union, had both ebbed considerably on the frontier. Additionally, a more egalitarian attitude seems to have developed between the sexes during the course of the century. While various males who arranged their marriages earlier in the century included a donation to the bride, of part of his goods, as a condition of the marriage, this provision appears in only one of the 46 contracts filed after 1775.

In yet two other ways, the marriage contracts of Natchitoches, when taken in conjunction with existing church records, indicate an alteration in the traditional marriage patterns of France, as well as a diversity from practices in numerous early Anglo-American colonies: marriages were apparently arranged on the Louisiana frontier with far more haste and there was

⁴⁰Winston De Ville, *Marriage Contracts of Natchitoches, 1739-1803*, Colonial Louisiana Marriage Contracts, vol. II (Easton, La.: privately printed, 1961), Nos. 5, 6, and 11.

considerably less inclination toward (or opportunity for) a change of mind.

Under Roman Catholic Church law, marriages were celebrated only after the announcement of three bans, on separate holy days -- a posting of public notice, so to speak. If cause existed that would nullify the coming marriage, some knowledgeable person would presumably bring the matter to public attention in this interval and thereby prevent a social travesty or injustice. Traditional custom within France itself decreed that the formal marriage contract was followed (immediately or eventually) by these announcements of bans, and after a minimum of three holy days (usually three Sundays) the marriage could be celebrated.⁴¹ Very often the period of betrothal was far longer. The Puritan colonist had his counterpart of this custom; a minimum of fourteen days was to lapse between "contract" and "covenant," or between the betrothal and the wedding. In one authority's view, the engagement was often far longer -- commonly two to three months.⁴²

On the Louisiana frontier, the time lapse between contract and marriage, and the interval between the first ban and marriage, often fell far short of the requirements of church law and custom. In the pre-1765 period, four days was the median lapse between contract and marriage, in those cases for which both records can be found. Between 1765 and the close of the colonial era, 49 percent of this group of marriages were celebrated within two days of the contract.

Predictably, the shorter engagement period resulted in far less broken engagements than demographers have found in either France or in Anglo

⁴¹For a fuller discussion of church marriage laws prevailing in Louisiana, see Bishop Luis Penalver y Cardenas to Pastors, 21 December 1796, Reel 2, *Records of the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas*, which reiterates the marriage regulations in detail.

⁴²Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 162.

American colonies. Gottlieb's study of Medieval and Early Modern France, for example, reveals a long history of broken engagements in that society. Benson's analysis of women in eighteenth-century Anglo-America similarly shows that breach of promise suits frequently resulted from the formal marriage contracts of British North America.⁴³ The present writer has noticed a similar phenomenon in her own studies of the early notarial records of New Orleans and Canada. Yet, no broken engagements are recorded on the Natchitoches frontier. Most couples scarcely gave themselves time to change their minds; only 16 per cent of the formally contracted engagements lasted more than a week.

TABLE 12
THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT: CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Decade	# of Contracts *	# of Marriages Recorded *	# of Marriages Represented by Contract	% of Contracts Involving			
				Pre-nuptial Assets Groom	Bride	Both	Donations by Groom
1734-43	5	22	22.7	60.0	60.0	60.0	-
1744-53	6	23	26.1	16.6	16.6	-	-
1754-63	9	37	24.3	18.0	18.0	-	11.1
1764-73	26	35	74.0	20.0	32.0	28.0	15.4
1774-83	15	51	29.4	71.4	71.4	78.8	20.0
1784-93	21	95	9.4	72.7	90.9	72.7	-
1794-03	22	76	28.9	59.0	72.7	68.2	-
Overall	104	339	30.7	37.8	45.0	30.6	7.2

*Includes marriages of Natchitoches settlers which were performed and/or contracted at other posts.

The longest period between contract and marriage quite possibly resulted from second-thoughts on the part of the male; at least the unusual circumstances of the marriage suggest this possibility. On 29 September 1765, a son was born to young Marie Louise Bertrand, the barely-fifteen year old daughter of

⁴³Gottlieb, "The Meaning of Clandestine Marriage," 49, 83; Benson, *Women in Eighteenth Century America*, 233.

the late sergeant, Claude Bertrand, by his Indian slave-concubine, Lisette de l'Isle. After Bertrand's death, Lisette and the Bertrand children had been manumitted, ^{before (1755)} at which time the post commandant, Chevalier Louis George Monjonan de la Perriere, apparently employed Lisette as a domestic. When young Marie Louise's child was baptized in 1765, three days after its birth, Perriere appeared at the ceremony and declared himself the father. Godparents were his friends, both prominent members of the community. On the following 5 August 1766 Marie Louise appeared before the post notary to file a contract of marriage with a Canadian ² newcomer, Etienne Gagné -- at which time Perriere accompanied her to give his consent, *in loco parentis* to the marriage. The actual wedding was slow to materialize. When it finally took place, on 27 October 1766, Perriere again appeared as official witness. Obviously the marriage had his sponsorship, and some advantages should have accrued to the new bridegroom in thus accommodating the post commandant; but some reticence did seem to exist on either his part or that of the bride. No other couple at the post came anywhere near matching Gagné's record for delay between contract and marriage.⁴⁴

The ecclesiastical marriage records also indicate a deviance from marital patterns in France, as well as from the mandates of the Church. Throughout the century as a whole, only 55.9 percent of the marriages were accompanied by the required three bans. Initially, church regulations were followed almost consistently; in the first decade for which ecclesiastical books exist, 77.8 percent of marriages were preceded by all three bans. In successive decades this figure steadily dropped to an incredible low of 9.3 percent

⁴⁴Docs. 429, 478, 480, Colonial Archives, NCH. The presence of Lisette and her family in the household of Commandant Perriere in the mid 1760s is indicated by a household-by-household comparison of the 27 January and 6 May 1766 censuses; see Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 9-20.

in the decade 1764-1773. Fully 68.7 percent of the marriages in this decade were performed after only one ban, and one was celebrated with no ban at all. The situation was dramatically reversed in 1775 with the arrival of the conservative pastor, Quintanilla. Forty-six of the forty-eight white marriages (95.6 percent) that he performed between that year and 1783 were preceded by the required three bans. Neither pregnancy nor prominence persuaded him to deviate from the letter of the law -- except when those two factors happened to be combined. Never again, after the Quintanilla era, would ban regulations be so rigidly enforced. Throughout the remainder of the century, almost half the marriages would be accompanied by a dispensation for one or two of the required announcements.

The second-most common dispensation which was normally granted in the Church, although it traditionally has been even more strongly discouraged, was dispensation from the impediment of consanguinity. By church law, no marriages are to take place between persons more closely related than the fourth degree (i.e., third cousins), although dispensations from this prohibition have been possible when extremely extenuating circumstances existed.⁴⁵ A fair number of such dispensations can be found in the records of most Louisiana posts; among the Acadians, who were almost entirely related to each other before their departure from Acadia and their subsequent migration to Louisiana, a large number of dispensations had to be granted late in the colonial period. By contrast, record of only two dispensations from the impediment of consanguinity can be found in colonial Natchitoches; and these two incidences involved two sisters, two brothers, and two pregnancies, as well

⁴⁵Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 19, gives a good overview of the kinship prohibitions in France which varied somewhat in legal interpretations over a period of time.

as the prohibitive relationship of first-cousin-once-removed. If other cousins at the post made the same mistake, they did not attempt to rectify it through marriage.

In a settlement as small as Natchitoches, it is surprising that no more cousin-marriages occurred. Numerous scholars of Early American and British societies discuss the prevalence of cousin-marriages (indeed, first-cousin marriages) and the impact which the custom had upon family economics and community structure.⁴⁶ At Natchitoches, kinship patterns through selective marriages were slow in developing. Before the last quarter of the eighteenth century, there can be found only two instances of repeated marriages between non-related members of two families. Both involved somewhat unusual relationships: In 1758, Louise Marguerite Juchereau de St. Denis (widow of Pierre Couteleau) married the Los Adaes settler Martin Gutierrez de Lana; a decade later her 19-year old *granddaughter*, Marie Françoise Renée Le Boeuf, married Gutierrez' brother Joseph Michel. The second case of cross-generational (mother-daughter) marriages to brothers involved individuals who left Natchitoches and thereby made no contribution to the development of kinship networks along that frontier.

By the 1780s and 1790s, the beginnings of kinship networks can clearly be seen. In the last quarter of the century, for example, there occurred six marriages among twelve members of the Rachal-Brevel-Derbanne families. Another six marriages involved twelve members of the Frederic-Chelette-Lattier-Gonin families, with the Lattiers and Gonins already being half-siblings. The Cloutier-Gallien half-siblings, and their first-cousins,

⁴⁶For example, see Peter Dobkin Hall, "Marital Selection and Business in Massachusetts Merchant Families, 1700-1900," in Gordon, ed., *The American Family*, 109, and Lawrence Stone, "The Rise of the Nuclear Family in Early Modern England, The Patriarchal Stage," in Charles E. Rosenberg, ed., *The Family in History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 19.

Le Court and Le Comte (ten family members) were involved in six marriages that also included two Dupres. Eight members of the Rachal-La Berry-Martineau families accounted for four complex marital patterns. Ten members of the Lambre-Prudhomme-Buard families accounted for five more marriages. From these family clusters that began taking definite shape by the 1790s, kinship networks would evolve that would characterize the parish of Natchitoches throughout the following two centuries.

Certainly one of the most classic generalizations ever made about Creole society is the one Major Amos Stoddard expressed shortly after the Louisiana Purchase: "The French are prompted to marry early in life; the climate dictates this practice; and they are usually blessed with numerous progeny."⁴⁷ Like most generalizations, Stoddard's was exceedingly simplified and, in great part, erroneous, as Acosta Rodríguez' study has shown for Louisiana in general.⁴⁸ In truth, this same generalization has been made frequently about numerous societies (as a host of demographers of Anglo-America have also shown). Curiously, the subjective commentator of yesteryear seemed more prone to recall the unusual than the orthodox. Occasional examples of very early marriages can be found at Natchitoches, as well as elsewhere, and females did exhibit a tendency (a decreasing tendency) to marry somewhat earlier than their contemporaries in France and early Anglo-America. However, Louisiana's frontier males were prone to marry considerably *later* in life than were their contemporaries in studied communities elsewhere.

At all times, there existed at Natchitoches a preponderance of males

⁴⁷Major Amos Stoddard, *Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of Louisiana* (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1812), 323.

⁴⁸Acosta Rodríguez, *Población*, 94-102, 204-210, 262-266, provides ample evidence that Creoles of Louisiana were not "usually blessed with numerous progeny." See Chapter IV for a discussion of reproductive patterns at Natchitoches.

of marriageable age,⁴⁹ due to the continual influx of male immigrants during all the century and the almost total absence of immigrant females after the initial wave of private-company immigration into Louisiana. (See Table 13.) The problem was intensified by the lure of the frontier for young men born in other, more settled, Louisiana posts. As a consequence, the sex ratio at Natchitoches showed a marked imbalance throughout the colonial period.

TABLE 13

MALE-FEMALE POPULATION RATIOS

Census Year	Adult Population		Total Population	
	% Male	% Female	% Male	% Female
1722	58.3	41.6	-	-
1726	65.6	34.4	-	-
1737	55.0	45.0	53.6	46.4
1766 (27 Jan)	55.5	44.5	55.2	44.8
1766 (6 May)	62.9	37.1	56.9	43.1
1769	62.5	37.4	58.0	42.0
1770	60.2	39.8	56.3	43.7
1787	59.3	40.7	58.2	41.8
1795	53.9	46.1	57.7	42.3
1796	54.2	45.8	58.4	41.6
1798	53.9	46.1	57.0	43.0
1799	53.5	46.5	56.5	43.5
1800	53.1	46.9	56.3	43.7
1801	54.6	45.4	57.0	43.0
1802	55.0	45.0	53.4	46.6

⁴⁹Acosta-Rodríguez provides an interesting table of adult sex balances for all Louisiana posts, drawn from the first Spanish census of Louisiana compiled in 1766. This table attributes 78 adult males and 81 adult females to the post of Natchitoches, figures which drastically differ from the totals of the first draft of the census of 1766 at Natchitoches (drawn in January) and from the second and apparently final draft (completed in May). See Figure 19 above. A reconstitution of the Natchitoches post for 1766 from all known records indicates that the May figures (127 men, 75 women) were the most nearly accurate, although even this tabulation omitted 5 adult males, 3 adult females, 1 adolescent boy, 2 younger boys, and 3 girls who were known to reside at the post at that time. See Acosta-Rodríguez, *Población*, 52.

Among the adult population this ranged from a 1726 high in which 65.6 percent of the population was male to a low of 53.1 percent male which was finally (and rather suddenly) achieved in 1800. As late as 1796 there existed 55.0 adult white males to every 45.0 adult white females in the jurisdiction of the post.

Some adjustments to these figures, however, would be necessary before a reasonable comparison could be drawn between males and females of marriageable ages. Most enumerations from which these statistics are drawn define "adult" as aged 15 or over. In actual practice, a male rarely married before the age of 18. If one excludes those males between the ages of 15 and 18, on the basis that these would not comprise part of the marriageable male population, the considerable gap of 55 males to every 45 females, in 1796, would narrow somewhat.

Acosta-Rodríguez' population analysis of Spanish Louisiana further indicates that this sex ratio imbalance prevailed at almost all of the Louisiana posts past 1766.⁵⁰ There would have been little opportunity, then, for the Natchitoches male to find a wife more easily in other Creole communities. It might be presumed that the unbalanced sex ratio would result in the marriages of very young females at a persistently high level. Yet, this was not necessarily the case at Natchitoches. Moreover, some evidence exists that the Louisiana male preferred "younger" females and that an "older," unmarried *demoiselle* might be ignored even when there was a shortage of single females from which to choose.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 52, 56, 58-61, 178-184, 220-221, 246-253.

⁵¹ For example, a 1796 marriage dispensation requested in the parish of St. Martin asked for permission for cousins to marry on several grounds, including the statement that the prospective bride had reached "the age where she would not be asked to marry." Other parish records indicate that the

Marital ages for this sexually-unbalanced population at Natchitoches differs considerably from patterns found in other studied communities and conform neither to French patterns nor early American patterns, in general. For example, one analysis of sixteen French villages for which eighteenth century data is available indicates a range in female marital ages from a low of roughly twenty-five and a half years to a high of roughly twenty-nine years! A noticeable increase occurred throughout the century. Demographers of early Anglo-America have noticed a comparable increase on a somewhat lower scale (usually aged twenty to twenty-five) for females and a decrease (usually aged twenty-seven to twenty-five) for males, although studies in French Canada indicate significantly lower ages at marriage for females (28.3 percent of women born 1650-1699 married before age 20).⁵²

Natchitoches females exhibited a similar rise in marital ages through the course of the eighteenth century, but the scale was drastically lower, with the exception of immigrant females. Ages at first marriage for those

young woman was 22.5 years. See 13 July 1796 dispensation proceedings, M. Trahan and Reyna Trahan, in Roll 1, *Records of the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas* and Donald J. Hebert, *Southwest Louisiana Records, Vol. 1 (1756-1810); Church and Civil Records of Settlers* (Eunice, Louisiana: Hebert Publications, 1974), 556, 558.

⁵²Yet another study of five French communities in the eighteenth century reveals a range in female marital ages from 24.7 to 26.2. For Sturbridge, Massachusetts, there has been reported a rise from age 20.65 in 1730-1759 to 22.46 in the period 1780-1799. In Bristol, Rhode Island, the mean age rose from 20.5 (pre-1750) to only 21.1 (post-1850). Plymouth, in the first century, married its females at 20 to 22 years and its males at 27 to 25 years. Greven reports a similar male drop from 27.1 to 25.3 for third and fourth generation men of eighteenth century Andover. See Louis Henry, "The Population of France in the Eighteenth Century," in Daniel Victor Glass and D. E. C. Eversley, *Population in History: Essays in Historiographical Demography* (Chicago: Aladine Publishing Co., 1965), 454, Table 10; Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 187; Osterud and Fulton, "Family Limitations," 484; Demos, "Families in Colonial Bristol," 45; Greven, *Four Generations*, 206; Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 151; and Alain Bideau, "A Demographic and Social Analysis of Widowhood and Remarriage: The Example of the Castellany of Thoisse-en-Dombes, 1670-1840," *Journal of Family History*, 5 (Spring 1980), 31.

first-generation women were higher than female marital ages at any point in the century. The cause is obvious: most immigrant females arrived as single women, coming from a society that has already been shown to have a pattern of high marital ages. Although Louisiana officials initially despaired of their prospects to find husbands for most of these girls,⁵³ there proved to be far less cause for worry than they feared.⁵⁴ At least two of this group of females, despite their advanced years and questionable past, were married and settled at Natchitoches within two to three years of their deportation (1722), and several more arrived with their husbands by 1726.

The first generation of native females, not surprisingly, married younger than any females in the colonial period. Sister Marie-Madeleine Hachard wrote from New Orleans in 1728: "The custom here is to marry girls of twelve to fourteen years."⁵⁵ Her exaggeration was slight. A fourth of the females to marry at Natchitoches prior to 1733 (all of whom were French-Indian) were ~~known to be~~ fourteen or under; and in half of the marriages of the next decade (1734-1743), the bride was not yet fifteen. As Figure 19 has shown, the decade centering around the census year 1737 should have been the one in which eighteenth-century male-female sex ratios were at their nearest balance; therefore, the preponderance of early marriages in this decade cannot be explained by the generalization that females were marrying very young to accommodate an excessively high number of marriageable males. It is more probable that economic conditions in that fledgling colony prompted parents to give up

⁵³Bienville and Delorme, 25 April 1721, AN, A.G., A²⁵⁹², f. 108.

⁵⁴A study in progress by this researcher has located at least one marriage in the colonies for over two-thirds of the *femmes de force* shipped in the years 1719-1721, with some women marrying from two to four times each.

⁵⁵Costa, *Letters of Marie Madeleine Hachard*, 59.

their very young daughters to single males who were in a better position to support them.

In every decade throughout the remainder of this century, the ages of females at first marriage would steadily rise (see Table 14). By the 1790s less than 10 percent would marry before the age of 15, and 45 percent would be over the age of 20. Past the very earliest years of the colony, also, neither the family's economic standing nor the extremely faint class lines in this society would influence the marital ages of its daughters. Curiously, the greatest increase which occurred in any one decade is found in the 1770s and coincides with the Quintanilla regime in which so much of Natchitoches society exhibited more conservative trends.

TABLE 14

FEMALE MARITAL AGES - BY DECADE

Decade	Percent Marrying at Age				
	--14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30--
-----1733	25	8	42	8	16
1734-1743	50	44	-	6	-
1744-1753	30	60	10	-	-
1754-1763	19	72	9	-	-
1764-1773	20	59	15	-	6
1774-1783	12	51	29	2	6
1784-1793	9	47	26	13	5
1794-1803	10	44	35	9	2

It has been suggested, and occasionally discounted, in various studies that the extremely early marriages of females might result from the absence of a father.⁵⁶ At Natchitoches, there was a slight tendency for the very young bride (under 14) to have no father, but the tendency parallels that

⁵⁶Carr and Walsh, for example, find no correlation between parental deaths and early marriages of daughters in early Somerset, Maryland. See "The Planter's Wife," 277.

found for females who married *after* 14. In both cases, 49 percent had a living father, 51 percent did not. (See Table 15.)

TABLE 15
GROOMS-BRIDES WITH LIVING PARENTS

	GROOM					BRIDE				
	# Yes	# No	# Uncertain	Total #	LIVING PARENT % of Known Cases	# Yes	# No	# Uncertain	Total #	LIVING PARENT % of Known Cases
(FIRST MARRIAGES)										
Father Living	62	97	167	159	39	132	140	31	272	49
Mother Living	94	55	172	149	63	214	55	34	269	80
Both Living	35	112	173	147	24	100	167	37	267	37
Neither Living	36	105	155	141	26	31	240	31	271	7
(SECOND MARRIAGES)										
Father Living	2	8	27	10	20	7	38	3	45	16
Mother Living	7	3	27	10	70	19	25	4	44	43
Both Living	2	8	27	10	20	4	41	3	45	9
Neither Living	3	7	27	10	30	22	23	4	45	49

A comparison of very young brides with their older counterparts also indicates a similar balance in the number with deceased mothers: 21 percent among young brides to 20 percent in the overall bridal population. The most discernable difference appears among females with both parents dead; but even this variance is slight: 12 percent incidence among young brides as compared to 7 percent among all of them. Undoubtedly, being totally orphaned did prompt some girls to a hasty marriage, such as the one which occurred in 1761 when Widow Jean Mader died leaving four minors and very little to support them. An inventory of the meager Mader estate, for example,

described their home as 16' x 30' and in very bad condition.⁵⁷ Only five days later, the oldest orphan, barely 14, married at the post to an immigrant from Marseilles, François Carles. The rawness of that frontier left little time for mourning.)

Marital age patterns among the male population of Natchitoches exhibited far greater variance during the colonial era. As in the case of females, male marital ages were highest among the first generation, regardless of the time-frame in which the immigrant arrived. (See Table 16.) The overall mean was 31.4 for the foreign-born males, and 33 for those who married in the very early years (pre-1733). All but one of the males whose first marriage occurred past the age of 43 (n = 18) were immigrants. This figure may be artificially high, however, since the possibility exists that some of these may have been previously wed. Normally, church registrations of marriages at

TABLE 16
MALE MARITAL AGES - BY GENERATION AND DECADE

Generation	Mean Age	Decade	Mean Age
1	31.4	-----1733	33.0
2	26.5	1734-1743	29.0
3	27.4	1744-1753	28.5
4	24.5	1754-1763	26.7
5	28.0	1764-1773	30.5
		1774-1783	27.5
OVERALL:		1784-1793	27.5
Foreign	(31.4)	1794-1803	27.5
Native	(26.8)	OVERALL	(27.5)

Natchitoches indicated if a bride or groom had been previously wed, but in some known cases, for native-born males, the entries fail to indicate prior nuptials. Presumably, that same deficiency may exist -- indeed, would be

⁵⁷ Docs. 287-288, Colonial Archives, NCH.

more likely to exist -- among the immigrant population.

In the remaining decades of the eighteenth century, marital ages of males seesawed between 26.7 and 30.5 (mean age) before finally settling at 27.5 for the last three decades. It is only when marital ages are grouped according to generation that a somewhat-more important pattern emerges. Second-generation males, as did their sisters, married considerably younger than did their parents -- a drop from 31.4 to 26.5 years for the males. In the third generation the mean age rose somewhat, to 27.4, corresponding to the cross-generational rise in marriage ages in the 1764-1773 decade that might possibly be due to the change in governmental administration and in economic policies in Louisiana. The Generation 3 increase, however, is not nearly so sharp as the overall increase experienced in that same decade (to 30.5), an increase primarily caused by the larger number of immigrants who came into Natchitoches and married during that period. Generation 4 males displayed the lowest marital ages of all, dropping to a mean of 24.5. Only two Generation 5 males came to adulthood and married during this period, a figure too small to give an accurate sampling. As in the rest of America, obviously, there was on the Natchitoches frontier an increasing tendency toward earlier male marriages -- one that would also set the pattern for the economic development of the various families. Not surprisingly, those males who grew to maturity in the late colonial period, and prospered greatly in the antebellum regime, were not, ordinarily, those fourth generation males who married early.

The non-prejudicial inheritance laws of colonial Louisiana, which allotted to all legitimate issue an equal share of the estate of deceased parents, was probably responsible to a great degree for the lack of a significant marital age difference between first-born sons and their younger

siblings. Unlike the patterns that Greven extensively describes, or those of Southern France,⁵⁸ firstborn sons at Natchitoches could not marry earlier on the premise that their economic future was assured. Of 120 native males at Natchitoches whose birthdates and marriage dates are both known, the 38 first-born sons married at a mean age of 26.9 while the 82 younger siblings married at a mean age of 25.8. Firstborn sons of Natchitoches were more likely, than were their younger siblings, to have a living father when they came of age; and an *expected* inheritance was of little practical value when a young man took a bride. On the other hand, the majority of younger male siblings did not have a living father at the time of their marriage and would have already received their patrimony -- possibly even their inheritances from both parents.

A fascinating, but not entirely unsuspected, pattern emerges when comparisons are drawn between the marital ages of individual couples. In 90 percent of all marriages, the male outranked the female by a mean of 11 years. Some far more extreme age gaps appeared. In three cases the variance was 28 years; in three other cases (involving three of the ten girls who married at age 11 or 12) a gap of 32 years existed between husband and wife! In one incidence each, 44 and 49 years of difference existed -- the latter case being that of the newly-widowed commandant, César de Blanc, who solidified his political influence with both French and Indian authorities by marrying the 18-year-old daughter of his powerful predecessor, Louis Juchereau de St. Denis.⁵⁹ In 4.1 percent of the marriages formed by the Natchitoches settlers

⁵⁸Greven, *Four Generations*, 37; Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 74.

⁵⁹Such May-December marriages were certainly not the exclusive prerogative of the French. Ann Head Warder of post-Revolutionary Philadelphia bemoaned the "unnecessary sacrifice" of so many girls of tender age to much older men in Anglo-American society. See Benson, *Women in Eighteenth Century America*, 293.

for whom data is available, both parties were the same age (within a 12-month span). In 5.9 percent of marital unions, the wife was older than the husband, by a mean of 4.0 years. At the upper extreme the range was 17 years. Among those males who took an older wife, some minor patterns appeared. In five of the sixteen cases in which a male chose an older woman, the situation was not new to his family. In four cases, his mother was, at the time, remarried to a significantly younger man; in the fifth case the male's brother had already married an older woman. Three men who chose older wives did marry widows, but only one of them had more than a meager estate to offer her young husband -- and even in that one remaining case in which the older bride was well-to-do, her estate already had a dozen heirs. In several of the cases, the older bride was pregnant at the time of the marriage.

No aspect of marriage, perhaps, is so crucial to the welfare of the nuclear family, or to the community as a whole, as is the longevity that a marriage experiences. With twentieth-century divorce and remarriage statistics rising at a rate alarming to social scientists, worries have been expressed over the future of the family as a unit of society and over the psychological damage that may occur in individual families that are disrupted. In truth, the disrupted family is a cultural heritage of most societies, a heritage that has been increasingly forgotten since the first significant advances were made in mortality rates. The latest statistics available for modern America indicate that of all white males born 1900-1959, and still alive in 1975, 84.2 of those who have ever been married had been wed only once. Among the comparable female population, 81.6 percent of the nation's currently-married women had only one husband.⁶⁰ These figures compare well

⁶⁰ Adapted from *Statistical Abstracts*, 84.

to the situation that prevailed on the Natchitoches frontier, as well as in other past societies which have been studied.⁶¹

The typical (mean) marriage at Natchitoches lasted just 14.0 years. A startling 3 percent of all marriages ended in death before the first anniversary was celebrated; 18 percent before five years had lapsed; 35 percent before ten years; 52 percent before twenty years; 79 percent before twenty-five years; and 87 percent were terminated before thirty years. Only 5 percent of marriages lasted as long as forty years, and none made it to the Golden Anniversary that has become quite prevalent in modern America. The longest union to survive the odds in colonial Natchitoches was that of the French-Indian Pierre Derbanne and his wife Marie Louise Le Clerc who married in 1748 and lived to celebrate 48 anniversaries. Whether Derbanne's economic standing as one of the wealthiest men at the post had any bearing upon his and Marie Louise's longevity is debatable.

The shortest marriage on this frontier -- indeed, the shortest series of marriages -- illustrates well the factors that complicated marital and family patterns in colonial Louisiana, and those which limited the prospects of the children who fell victim to the disruptive elements. On 6 August 1737, the young immigrant Catherine Le Bruë was married aboard the *Redotte* which brought her to the colony, to Jean Boisselier, a supply pilot stationed at the Balize. In November, Catherine became pregnant; by spring, Jean was dead. On 25 April 1738, the five-months-pregnant Catherine, apparently left with no support, wed a second time, at New Orleans, and came upriver to Natchitoches where her husband, François Goudeau, was post surgeon. On 11 August she gave

⁶¹For example, in Plymouth, only 64 percent of married females wed just once in their life, while the overall figure for men and women both was a very low 60 percent. See Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 67.

birth to a daughter, Marie Rose Boisselier, and then died in childbed. On 13 August, Goudeau petitioned post authorities to appoint him tutor (guardian) to his late wife's newborn by her previous husband, since the infant had no relatives in the colony to care for her. The child's survival also depended upon the finding of a wet-nurse, and the one whose services Goudeau secured was apparently Marguerite (Mme. Pierre) Gotié. It also appears that Goudeau put the child, to whom he had no emotional ties, in the permanent care of this woman.

The following April the surgeon took a second wife at New Orleans -- the third marriage within twenty months in this complicated chain. By 1741, Goudeau and his new wife had a daughter of their own, and they left Natchitoches, leaving the two-year-old Marie Rose Boisselier behind at the frontier outpost where no relatives existed to care for her. She grew up illiterate, at Natchitoches, and eventually she wed an immigrant blacksmith, living her life in meager circumstances. By contrast, her step-sister grew to maturity in New Orleans society where she wed the noble Paul de Rocheblave. But for an ill-stroke of fate, which took Marie Rose's mother from her on the day of her birth, she, too, would have grown to maturity in New Orleans, after her stepfather's transfer there, and would have enjoyed all the corresponding opportunities. At the time of her marriage, curiously, Marie Rose either did not know, or did not think it worthwhile to name, her true parents. Instead, she identified herself as the daughter of the Gotiés, although in later years she was to resume the use of her birth name.⁶²

In view of the inherent dangers of frontier existence and the lack of

⁶²Forsyth and Pleasanton, *Louisiana Marriage Contracts*, 55, 67; Doc. 19, Colonial Archives, NCH; E. Fabre Surveyer, "Rocheblaves in Colonial Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XVIII (April, 1934), 343.

economic opportunity for females, not to mention loneliness which is a trait of human nature that knows no geographical bounds, it would seem reasonable to expect a high rate of remarriage -- particularly among widows. Overall, females at Natchitoches were more inclined than males toward remarriage, but not nearly at the rate one might assume. A startling 86.6 percent of all females who married at Natchitoches wed only once! Only 12.0 percent wed just twice; 1.1 percent wed a third time, and in a single, isolated case, one female tallied four husbands.⁶³

By far the most remarriages that occurred on this frontier were unions of widows to single men. This pattern is not surprising when the environment is considered, and it parallels the pattern reported for other American frontier communities.⁶⁴ Canadian demographers Roy and Charbonneau offer an explanation that well fits the Natchitoches pattern: the younger ages at which girls tended to marry, combined with the range of years that usually existed between them and their husbands, mandated a high rate of widowhood at comparatively young ages. This population would be far more likely to find previously unmarried spouses than would older widows.⁶⁵

The male cohorts of the widowed population at Natchitoches deviated drastically from the patterns to be found in Louisiana's mother country. The usually-French widower of Natchitoches (who was principally an immigrant but sometimes a native) was even less likely to rewed. Those who did were prone

⁶³Ironically, the female colonist with four husbands was one of the *femmes de force* whom Bienville feared would never find a husband!

⁶⁴Carr and Walsh report that widows took new husbands three times more often than widowers took new wives, a rate which does exceed that found at Natchitoches. See "The Planter's Wife," 278.

⁶⁵R. Roy and H. Charbonneau, "La nuptialité en situation de déséquilibre des sexes: quelques données relatives au Canada du XVII^e siècle," Colloque international de démographie historique (October, 1975; Montreal) cited in Bideau, "A Demographic and Social Analysis," 31.

TABLE 17
SPOUSE SELECTION PATTERNS OF REMARRYING WIDOWS AND WIDOWERS

Decade	Widow to Single Male	Widower to Single Female	Widower to Widow
-----1733	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%
1734-1743	66.7%	26.7%	6.7%
1744-1753	50.0%	37.5%	12.5%
1754-1763	58.4%	33.3%	8.3%
1764-1773	81.8%	9.1%	9.1%
1774-1783	41.7%	50.0%	8.3%
1784-1793	75.0%	25.0%	-
1794-1803	50.0%	44.4%	5.6%
OVERALL -	(59.4%)	(33.3%)	(7.3%)
COMPARATIVE PATTERN:			
6 French Villages, 1680-1789*	(32.0%)	(42.0%)	(26.0%)

* SOURCE: Bideau, "Demographic and Social Analysis of Widowhood," 30.

to marry a previously-married woman, but overall this portion of the male population exhibited extreme reluctance to add a second family to the one he had already begun. Again, the prevalence of slave women in that society offered options to widowers who needed a female to care for his children as well as those who felt the need of female companionship.

The most significant deviances from the overall remarriage patterns occurred in three mid-to-late century decades, and each are apparently attributable to different factors. The 1764-1773 decade saw a significant drop in marriages of widowers to anyone. This apparently stemmed from the excess of unmarried immigrant males who came to the frontier in this period. The widower, especially the one with children, found himself nudged out of the marriage market to a great extent. Only 18 percent of remarriages occurring in that decade (n = 2) involved a widower, the lowest figure of the century.

In the following decade, 1774-1783, the figure for remarriage of widowers soared to 58.3 percent of all remarriages, with only one widower choosing a previously-wed woman. In the same decade the number of widows who remarried plunged to its lowest mark in the century. These two phenomena are not unrelated. The number of new males coming into the post had tapered off, and the sudden increase in remarriages of widowers should have augmented that decrease in marriageable males; yet the widowers chose single females. The curious reversal of patterns in this decade again appears to be the handiwork of that Spanish pastor who stood accused of intruding upon too many aspects of frontier life. His relentless efforts to replace miscegenous concubinages with legitimate marriages undoubtedly caused the sudden surge in remarriages among widowers. At the same time it is a recorded, and undenied, charge that he increased taxes in order to provide larger doles to widows. Consequently, the number of widows who might feel economically compelled to remarry would, quite possibly, have dwindled at the same time that more widowers were being encouraged to remarry.

The third radical change in remarriage patterns occurred in the 1784-1793 period, immediately following the departure of Quintanilla, when there came another dramatic reversal in the remarriage rates of widowers (from 40.0 to 25.0 percent of all remarriages). At the same time, the incidence of remarriage among widows again soared (from 41.7 percent to 75.0). This obviously represented a correction of the unnatural balances created in the previous decade by Quintanilla's personal policies.

Yet another nuance of colonial remarriage patterns appears when a study is made of the number of children whom a widow or widower had by the first marriage. Fifty-nine percent of childless widows remarried, as compared to the 13.4 percent of all widows who took new husbands. One-eighth of the remarrying

widowers had no children, a figure which also represents a disproportionate percentage of the total. Apparently, it was easier for a survivor of a marriage to find another spouse if he or she was not encumbered by offspring, but even more probably the childless widows and widowers were prone to greater loneliness in the single state and therefore felt a greater compulsion to remarry than did men and women whose previous marriage had satisfied their instinct toward self-perpetuation and had produced offspring to share their lives.

Initially, few remarrying widows had large families of children. Only 30 percent, in fact, had more than three, and 1.6 was the median number. As the century progressed, the widow was increasingly likely to have a large family. In the Quintanilla decade (1774-1783) fully 50 percent of the widows who remarried had six or more children; again it would appear that those in the most desperate financial need (who still could not survive on the increased widow's dole) were more likely to remarry. In the following two decades, the six-children-or-over group would represent only 30 percent of the remarrying widows. From these statistics, it would appear that larger-than-average families were not always a barrier to a woman's remarriage; 4 percent of remarrying widows had ten children, 5.9 percent had nine or more, and 11.8 percent had eight or more. No remarrying males had nearly so many. The largest number that any remarrying widower had was six (4.2 percent of the total number); an equal number had five. Curiously, the median number of children for remarrying fathers was somewhat higher than for remarrying mothers: 2.5 offspring as compared to 1.6 for females.

Equally revealing is the fact that [in the female cohort, widows with only two, three, or four children seldom remarried (only 27 percent did).

[Widows with one child were almost twice as likely to remarry as widows with

two, three, or four, while widows with eight or more were slightly more likely to remarry than mothers of two to four. Again, economics would seem to provide at least part of the answer. Widows with one child, or none, would be less prone to have satisfied their maternal instincts, while widows with two, three, or four offspring may well have felt this was enough -- and also a moderate number which they could support from the proceeds of their late husband's estate and from their own labor. Widows with large families, on the other hand, would be in far more need of financial assistance, as well as assistance in the management and guidance of this greater number. In at least two cases, loneliness definitely appeared to be a factor for widows with very large families, since they were both pregnant at the time of their remarriage.

One other aspect of remarital patterns is a prevailing gauge of society and its attitudes -- the length of time that elapsed between widowing and remarrying. Under Spanish law, which was based on the same Roman law still adhered to by much of Southern France, prohibitions existed against prompt remarriages by widows although none seemed to have existed for widowers. The reason was basic to humanity itself: if a woman married again within nine months of her husband's death, and if she promptly bore a child, doubt could exist over the identity of the father. To be safe *Las Siete Partidas*, Part 7, Title 6, Law 3, decreed: "If a woman . . . intermarry . . . before the expiration of a year after the death of her husband, she will become infamous in law." Part 6, Title 3, Article 5 took the penalty further (and hints, as well, of a sex-biased view that mourning was more proper for females) when it decreed that a woman who remarried in less than a year could not inherit from the estate of her deceased husband. This time, two reasons were given: first, so that confusion not exist over the paternity of a

subsequent child; and second, so that "the second husband may not entertain any suspicion against her, for wishing to marry so soon"! The civil code of Louisiana ameliorated these provisions somewhat and set the required interval at ten months to allow for the possibility of an over-term child. In France itself, there existed a customary ritual delay of nine months.⁶⁶

In neither France nor Louisiana was the law very strictly observed. In the village of Thoissey-en-Dombes, for example, French demographers have found that 15.5 percent of widows married before nine months, and 10 percent within six months. A significant percentage of remarrying widows at Natchitoches apparently felt that the loss of their husband's estate (which in many cases was nonexistent) or the loss of their reputation (if, indeed, anyone on the frontier took the infamy law seriously) was worth the rewards of remarriage. Fifteen percent of all remarrying widows were in the second marriage bed within six months, and 19.6 percent before the end of the prohibited period. Within one year, 27 percent had remarried, and within two years, 58.0 percent of the remarriages had already taken place.

A top-contender for the merry-widow prize was certainly Marianne Daublin, Widow Closot, a twenty-six year old mother of two who replaced her old husband with a new one within twenty days. Since only one ban was announced for the marriage, it may be assumed that she had not made her choice of husband too many days before! Elisabeth Rachal (Widow Monet) challenged the Widow Daublin's feat, however. On 1 January 1758, Elisabeth buried her first husband after almost ten years of marriage, and on 1 February she wed again -- after the announcement of three bans!

In certain regions of France, notably among the peasants of the Cantal,

⁶⁶Moreau Lislet and Carleton, *Las Siete Partidas*, II, 983, 1163; Bideau, "A Demographic and Social Analysis of Widowhood," 40.

widows or widowers were expected to receive proposals for marriage at the wake of the deceased spouse -- and to accept the proposals if they chose.⁶⁷ There is no evidence of a Cantal heritage for either of the two ladies just cited, or for the pair of widowers at Natchitoches who exhibited almost as much eagerness to remarry. On the whole, however, males did tend to wait longer; those who remarried did so only after a mean interval of 2.5 years as compared to 1.5 years for females. Twenty-two percent of males married before a year elapsed, but only 4.9 percent (n = 2) of the remarrying widowers found wives within six months. (See Table 18.)

TABLE 18

INTERVALS BETWEEN WIDOWING AND REMARRYING
(Excluding Widows and Widowers who did not Remarry)

Remarriages Occurring Within	Widowers (Cumulative)		Widows (Cumulative)	
	#	%	#	%
6 Months	2	4.9	9	13.4
1 Year	9	22.0	18	26.9
2 Years	16	39.0	39	58.2
3 Years	27	65.9	51	76.1
4 Years	28	68.3	55	82.1
5 Years	33	80.5	60	89.6
6 Years	35	85.4	60	89.6
7 Years	40	97.6	61	91.0
8 Years	41	100.0	62	92.5
9 Years	-	-	64	95.5
10 Years	-	-	65	97.0
13 Years	-	-	66	98.5
16 Years	-	-	67	100.0
Total Cases for Which Data is Available	(41)		(67)	

⁶⁷Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 115.

Patterns of marriage and remarriage on the Louisiana frontier were clearly distinctive in comparison to those prevailing in both France and colonial Anglo-America. On the whole, Louisianians married earlier than their European counterparts in both the male and female cohorts; the same is true of the Anglo colonist. Yet a marked difference in marital-age patterns, according to sex, appears between the Latin colonists and their Anglo contemporaries in North America. The Louisiana female was prone to marry considerably earlier than her Atlantic Coast sister, while the Louisiana male married noticeably later. Part of the variance could be due to the sex-ratio imbalance of Louisiana which placed females in short supply and necessarily forced some men to delay marriage until they could find a spouse, although this factor probably was not so great as is generally assumed. Part of the variance, too, could well be due to the proximity and apparent availability of large numbers of Native American and black females as companions for those inevitable males who preferred companionship without permanent commitment.

The closest correlaries between Louisiana and other studied North American colonies appear to exist between the Gulf Coast and Canada. This is hardly surprising. Both were settled predominantly by Frenchmen, although some other ethnic groups are represented in both colonies. Again, in both areas, male immigration predominated and family immigration was relatively unimportant, a situation not found in most Anglo colonies. Shipments of unmarried females were made to both Canada and Louisiana in order to narrow the sex-ratio imbalance. Most were unqualifiedly women of bold, individualistic, and indomitable characters, else they would neither have chosen nor been chosen to come -- nor would they have managed to survive on the frontier without both tangible and intangible family support.

The rugged individualism of settlers, and the frontier environment they encountered, clearly altered the customs of marriage and remarriage that were brought from Europe. Yet, one significant question remains: once their marital unions were formed did colonial men and women preserve the family structure and the reproductive practices of their native society -- or did these frontiersmen alter traditional life patterns to better meet New World conditions?

CHAPTER IV
MARITAL BEDS AND COMMUNAL HEARTHES:
PATTERNS IN REPRODUCTION AND FAMILY STRUCTURE

Contrary to popular thought, the so-called "sexual revolution" is hardly a modern phenomenon. "Evolution" would be a more appropriate term. Throughout recorded history, patterns in courtship, marriage, and reproduction have experienced almost continuous change in response to economic, social, religious, ethnic, climatic, and demographic factors. Many trends which historical demographers note in a given era actually had their incipience a century, or even two or three, before. Such is the case, for example, with the question of family planning, which students of the behavioral sciences have until very recent years treated as a modern phenomenon. Current scholarship, to the contrary, clearly reveals evidence of limitation practices in various societies since, at least, the sixteenth century; and this academic discovery raises important questions for the social scientist who seeks to understand the American frontier. How prevalent were these practices in the Western European countries from which the earliest American colonists were drawn? Even more importantly, how prevalent were such practices in America? Were there discernable differences in the reproductive patterns of the various ethnic groups that settled the North American continent? If so, what effect (if any) might this have had upon the development of the various American frontiers?

The economics of family limitation was already an important question when West Europeans began to spill across the Atlantic. Traditional folk-belief long has held that large numbers of offspring, particularly sons,

provided a father with extensive free labor by which family fortunes could be built. Also, in societies with high mortality rates and no social security programs, the peasant felt some compunction to produce a large family, supposedly, in order that at least one child survive to care for him should the parent live to old age.

On the other hand, the experiences of most societies have shown that the peasant who reproduced prolifically was prone to guarantee the perpetuation of his family's poverty. To a great extent the economics of family reproduction among those of limited means is related to the most recent interpretations of the economics of slavery: large numbers of infants and children are a financial burden, not an asset. It has been shown, clearly, that servile children had to be maintained for a number of years before the value of their annual services matched the cost of their annual upkeep, and that still more years of labor from them would be required to repay the cost of their maintenance during childhood as well as the support of those children who did not live to maturity. In short, it was not until a dependent reached the age of *twenty-six* that his provider began to realize a return on his investment.¹ This fundamental principle of the slave economy, only recently accepted by economic historians, was fully realized in eighteenth-century America.²

It is inconceivable, therefore, that the colonial settler of Natchitoches

¹The best discussion of the economics of slavery currently available is unquestionably Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1974). See especially 74-75, 152-153.

²For example, Nugent and Kelly's 1769 census of the Natchitoches Post divided slaves into two categories: "Useful for Work," and "Useless for Work," accompanied by the explanation: "Slaves that are put into the category 'useless' are those under the age of 12 years." Leg. 81, PPC-AGI.

(who was, more likely than not, a slaveowner) would not have seen the correlation between the support of dependent slaves and the support of his own offspring. The only means by which he might realize a return on the financial investment that he made in those offspring would be for the children to remain at home, unmarried, and contribute their labor to the family unit for a number of years after they reached the "break even" age. Few Natchitoches youth did so. As already shown, females generally married long before that "break even" point. Males married, on the average, just after it was reached -- but with horses, furs, and hides "free for the taking" in the wildernesses beyond Natchitoches, and abundant land "free for the asking" for those less adventurous youth who did not care to risk exposure to Indians and the elements, there was minimum incentive for a young man to contribute his labor to the development of his father's wealth.

What, then, was the incentive (if any existed) for the Natchitoches frontiersman to produce large families, when the beginnings of family limitation were evident in other societies? Did he, indeed, produce large families as observers such as Stoddard were wont to assert? If not, what preventative means could he have used, given the technological state of eighteenth century medicine?

The most basic means of limitation, in any non-contraceptive society, would be the postponement of marriage, particularly for females since the number of children which a given woman could produce in her life is directly related to the number of fertile years in which a woman is sexually active. As already shown, the French society which spawned colonial Louisianians had heavily committed itself to indirect family limitation by this means. By contrast, it has also been shown that the frontier environment of Louisiana encouraged the early marriage of females -- a circumstance

that should have resulted in excess fertility had other means of family limitation not been practiced.

In all studied communities, both in Western Europe and in North America, fertility rates constantly fluctuated. As Flandrin points out, a period of increase is generally accompanied by a subsequent period of decrease.³ Yet a measurement of the fertility rate at Natchitoches, regardless of the means by which the measurement is made, reveals a fecundity rate on the low side of the ranges reported for other studied American colonies. It also reveals lower fertility than French demographers have generally found in communities within that country, particularly when the wealthier levels of French society are excluded. However, the Natchitoches pattern does not necessarily fit any other known mould that has been defined.

In the typical marriage, the young mother of Natchitoches was 19.5 years old when she was delivered of her first child, a delivery that occurred most commonly within 14.9 months of the nuptials. This parallels the pattern traced by Demos at Plymouth during the first century of that colony's existence. When the variance in marital ages between these two colonies is considered (21.3-22.3 years in Plymouth compared to 17.5 years at Natchitoches for mean age at first marriage) it becomes apparent that fertility was no lower among teenaged brides than among their older counterparts.⁴

The Natchitoches pattern further supports this conclusion. Mothers who were 14 or under at the birth of their first child actually had a mean lapse of only 13 months between marriage and first birth; for brides aged 15-20 the interval rose to 15.5 months; among brides 21-34, the mean interval

³Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 197.

⁴Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 68; Greven, *Four Generations*, 33-35.

dropped again to 14 months, while the 35-or-over mother had the longest interval before reproduction, a mean of 18.5 months.

The reproductive patterns of Natchitoches colonial wives are perplexing. Pioneer demographer Louis Henry asserts: "Fertility increases rapidly with age before 18 or 20, with the result that the fertility of the 20-24 age group depends upon the average age at marriage of those women married before 20."⁵ This assumption is seemingly supported by the fact that the mother in her late teens did not reproduce as quickly as her older cohort in the prime childbearing years; yet it is contradicted by the fact that the very young teen was apparently *more* fertile than was the female who waited until the late teens to marry. This irregular position of the female in the 15-20 age cohort appears in yet other patterns traced in this paper.

In a miniscule five cases, the interval between marriage and first birth exceeded ten years. Indeed, these five ranged from 10.6 years to 14.5 years, and the mother's age at marriage ranged from a low of 12 to a high of 18. One intriguing case -- and an extreme one in more than one respect -- reflects upon the exceptional age at which some young females matured in this society as well as the hazards they faced when their reproductive systems were put to the test too soon after maturation. Anne Marie Dupré was an eleven-year-old semi-orphan when she apparently entered into a common-law union with the thirty-five year old Jean Pomier. Marriage was not possible since Anne Marie was under the legal marital age of twelve. Nonetheless, she was old enough to become pregnant, and on 5 September 1778 she bore a child. Some three weeks later the infant's father took it from their Rapides home to Natchitoches for baptism, and the priest who apparently did not know the couple

⁵Louis Henry, "Some Data on Natural Fertility," *Eugenics Quarterly*, 8 (June, 1961), 82.

registered the child as legitimate. Apparently the infant did not live. Two years later, in October 1780, Pomier and Anne Marie were legitimately wed in the Natchitoches church. In 1782, Anne Marie became pregnant again -- and, again, the infant did not survive. Another five years would elapse before her next pregnancy. Thereafter, she produced a half-dozen children with regularity, although all suffered a high mortality rate. Only one is known to have survived to adulthood.

Over the course of the century, significant variance was shown in the interval between marriage and first birth. Wives marrying before 1733 had an average lapse of 20 months, irrespective of age, in cases for which data is available. Females who married in the next thirty years (1734-1763) narrowed the interval to 15.5 months; but in the last cohort of women tabulated (those marrying 1764-1793) the interval between marriage and first birth shrank even more dramatically -- to 12.4 months! Several reasons become apparent as the reproductive patterns are analyzed in greater detail. (See also Figure 25.)

It is commonly believed that in nursing, noncontraceptive, societies children are normally spaced about two years apart. Most demographic studies bear out the assumption, although the period fluctuates slightly in various locales and in various eras. Colonial Natchitoches was no exception. For the cohort who married before 1733, it has already been shown that a longer lapse occurred between marriage and first birth. Likewise, this cohort exhibited a tendency toward longer intervals between subsequent children. Overall, they displayed a 29.5 month mean between births while the next cohort (those married 1734-1763) spaced their children 26.8 months apart, and the last cohort (1764-1793) dropped to a low of 25.8 months.

The tendency toward longer spacing which was evident in the earliest

TABLE 19
INTERVALS BETWEEN BIRTHS - COMPARATIVE TABLE 1

Locale	Cohort	Number of Months* between Children					Overall
		--1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	
Natchitoches	-----1733 ^m	20.0	25.1	29.0	28.2	31.5	29.5
"	1734-1763 ^m	15.5	24.8	26.5	28.5	28.0	26.8
"	1764-1793 ^m	12.4	23.8	24.2	27.5	26.5	25.8
Andover, Mass.	1685-1704 ^b	15.1	-	-	-	-	-
Deerfield, Mass.	1721-1740 ^b	-	22.0	28.1	26.6	28.9	26.4
"	1741-1760 ^b	-	24.9	25.6	30.8	26.8	27.0
Charles County, Md.	17th Cent.	-	26.0	26.0	30.0	27.0	30.8

m - Cohort married during specified time frame

b - Cohort born within specified time frame

* Intervals at Natchitoches represent mean number of months
In other locales the specified intervals vary between average and mean are else the basis of calculation has not been given

SOURCES: Greven, *Four Generations*, 112; Temkin-Greener and Swedlund, "Fertility Transition," 37; Carr and Walsh, "The Planter's Wife," 284.

INTERVALS BETWEEN BIRTHS - COMPARATIVE TABLE 2

Locale	Period of Births	Percent Born at Specified Intervals* (All Children)			
		9-18 Months	19-30 Months	31-48 Months	49+ Months
Natchitoches	1734-1763	9.6	68.7	19.8	1.8
"	1764-1803	19.8	66.1	13.7	.4
Meulan, France					
" (Poor)	1660-1739	9.1	54.6	22.7	13.6
" (Rich)	"	21.6	55.8	10.0	12.6
" (Poor)	1740-1764	17.4	43.5	34.8	4.3
" (Rich)	"	16.7	44.4	18.5	20.4
" (Poor)	1765-1789	4.2	58.3	20.8	16.7
" (Rich)	"	15.0	35.0	20.0	30.0

SOURCE: Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 197

marriages could be due to several factors. These women were correspondingly older at marriage, and it has generally been shown that older women tended to space their children at greater intervals. Whether this is due to a biological reason (that is, a natural slowing-down of the reproductive system) or whether this is due to a less active sex life remains to be proven. Another plausible cause could be the more primitive existence which the first colonial wives would have endured; it has been found, for example, that the physiological fertility of French women declined toward the end of the reign of Louis XIV when famines and other extreme hardships were endured, and a recent study of the Canary Island immigration to Louisiana concludes that a similar decrease in that population's ability to reproduce occurred during the Isleños' initial crisis of subsistence.⁶ Other possible explanations also remain to be explored in this chapter.

The Natchitoches wife⁷ most commonly bore her last child between the ages of 40 and 44, with extremes ranging from 16 to 49. Indeed, the pattern of ages at which women bore their last child on the Natchitoches frontier is amazingly similar to the pattern of their eighteenth-century Anglo-American contemporary in the studied community of Sturbridge (See Table 20). The most striking variance appears among very young mothers. At Natchitoches, two percent of all wives with completed childbearing spans bore their last

⁶Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 197. Antonio Acosta Rodríguez, "Overview of the Consumption of Food and Goods by Isleño Immigrants to Louisiana," Paul E. Hoffman, trans., *Louisiana History*, 22 (Summer, 1981), 299-306.

⁷In this and all subsequent computations of children born to Natchitoches wives, statistics include only those wives who lived at least to age 45, this being the most common age used in comparable studies for the completion of the childbearing span. Women who did not live to complete their period of fertility, or whose husbands died prior to the wife's attainment of age 45 (with no subsequent remarriage on the part of the female) are excluded unless otherwise stated.

between the ages of 20 and 24, while six percent bore their penultimate child between the ages of 15 and 19.

TABLE 20
AGE OF MOTHER AT LAST BIRTH - COMPARATIVE TABLE

Age Group	Natchitoches 1733 - 1803 %	Sturbridge, Mass. 1730-1799 %
15-19	6	-
20-24	2	-
25-29	4	4
30-34	10	15
35-39	25	25
40-44	42	41
45-50	11	11

SOURCE: Osterud and Fulton, "Family Limitation," 490.

A correlating aspect of family reproduction which has received little attention in studies to-date is the age at which men fathered children. It is generally recognized that a male's fertility span is far longer than that of his female counterpart. The differences can be especially meaningful to the economic welfare of a family. Men who married much younger females, theoretically, stood a greater chance of dying while they were still actively fathering offspring, leaving large numbers of minors with insufficient means of support. Such situations would also create more widows burdened with small children and more orphans or semi-orphans for whom foster-parents might be needed.

All of these problems prevailed at Natchitoches. Still, inheritance customs on the frontier spared families one additional hardship that some societies suffered: at Natchitoches it was not customary to delay the division of an estate until the last child reached adulthood, a practice which

would thereby force older sons (who may already have begun their own families) to wait as long as twenty-one years to collect their inheritances. Shares of property left by deceased fathers at Natchitoches were customarily given to each heir as he or she reached adulthood or upon marriage, in the case of minor females. The problems of births to older fathers would also seem to be less acute in regions where widowers were not prone to take a second wife, as was the case at Natchitoches.

TABLE 21
AGES OF FATHERS AT BIRTH OF LAST CHILD

Age Cohort	Percent
---30	4.1
31-40	17.5
41-50	43.3
51-60	30.9
61-70	3.1
71---	1.0

It has already been established that on Louisiana's frontier wives tended to die earlier than elsewhere and their widowers only rarely remarried; therefore it is not surprising to find a relatively low age at last known birth for the frontier male. The mean age at which a Natchitoches male fathered his last known child was 48.5 (as compared to 41.0 for females). In a few cases ($n = 4$) a father was still in his twenties when he fathered his last offspring. (See Figure 27). Only four fathers were past the age of 60. In the most extreme case (that of Commandant and Chevalier César de Blanc), a 67-year-old childless widower remarried, choosing an eighteen year old bride by whom he fathered two children before his death; the last of these was conceived when de Blanc was 73!

One noteworthy pattern of reproduction in colonial Natchitoches -- that of multiple births -- is a phenomenon almost consistently ignored in studies of other colonial American communities. Since the onset of medical registration, multiple births have occurred in the United States at the rate of one to every ninety-two births, with a slightly lower rate being evident among whites than blacks.⁸ Among the colonial whites of Natchitoches the rate was astoundingly higher: one out of every 62.8 known, completed, pregnancies resulted in a multiple birth. All such cases involved twins; if triplets were born on that frontier, no record of the rare occurrence has been found. Circumstances also suggest an underregistration of multiple births, particularly in the last three decades of the century, as families moved further from the parish church and no longer brought children in for baptism so promptly,⁹ and when burial records became sporadic. It is possible that some individual twins, or sets of twins (whose constitutions were necessarily weaker than that of single-birth infants) died without a registered baptism.

The phenomenon of multiple births still is not understood completely by medical science, and disagreement seems to exist whether a tendency toward fraternal twinning, identical twinning, or both or neither actually is an inheritable characteristic. A folk belief not only holds that twinning is an inherited trait, but also that it skips every other generation. The multiple-birth pattern at Natchitoches definitely suggests that the trait is transmitted in certain families, but it does not support the folk-belief of

⁸For historical figures, see G. W. D. Hamliett, "Human Twinning in the United States: Racial Frequencies, Sex Ratios, and Geographical Variations," GENETICS 20 (May 1935): 250-58.

⁹In the early years, when the small number of families lived in close proximity to the church, baptisms customarily occurred on the day following birth and almost invariably within a week. In the 1773 to 1803 period, however, the mean interval between birth and baptism was 3.1 months.

regularly-skipped generations. (See Figure 28.1-28.7.)

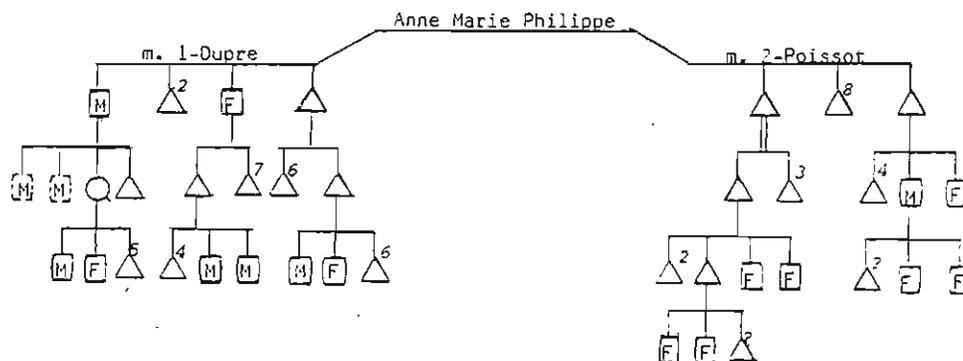
The young German immigrant, Anne Marie Philippe, provides an excellent example. She married twice and bore both Dupré and Poissot offspring. Among the Generation 2 offspring born to her, one set of fraternal twins appeared, Robert and Elizabeth Dupré. In Generation 3, two sets of twins appeared: 1) a set born to her son Remy Poissot, Jr., who was not a twin; and 2) a set of illegitimate children apparently fathered by her twin son Robert (a circumstance contradicting the folk belief that twinning skipped generations). In Generation 4, a rash of twins provides both pro and con evidence regarding the folk belief: 1) a set was born to the Generation 3 female, Marie Dupré Pomier, whose twin or non-twin status is not known and who was a daughter of the Generation 2 twin Robert; 2) a set of twins born to the Generation 3 non-twin Marie Louise Le Moine Rachal, daughter of the Generation 2 twin, Elizabeth Dupré Le Moine; 3) a set of twins born to the Generation 3 twin, Paul Poissot, whose Generation 2 father, Remy, was not a twin; finally, in this same generation, two other sets emerged in lines of descent that had shown recessive twinning traits: 4) when Marie Josephe Perot, a Generation 3 non-twin child of a Generation 2 non-twin, married Gasparite Derbanne who was a Generation 4 non-twin of an unbroken line of non-twins born to the often-twinning Verger family, the union produced a set of twins; similarly, 5) when the Generation 2 non-twin, Marie Poissot, married the Generation 2 Jacques Lambre who came from a twinning family but whose own birth status is unknown, no twins resulted from the union in Generation 3; however in Generation 4 a pair of twins was born of the Lambre-Poissot line, together with a Generation 4 non-twin who proceeded to father twins in Generation 5. Unless otherwise indicated, none of the numerous descendants of the Poissot-Dupré family married into other families with

FIGURE 28.1-28.7

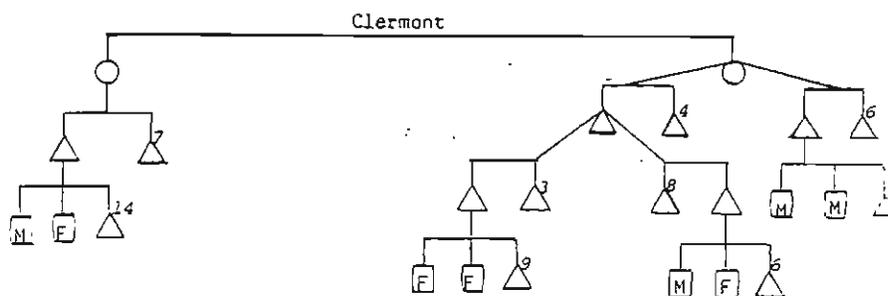
KEY

- ◻ M Male twin
- ◻ F Female twin
- △ Single-birth children from whom twins descend
- △ⁿ Denotes number of single-birth children whose immediate descendants do not include a known twin
- Birth-status uncertain - individual may or may not have been a twin
- ◻ Illegitimate children who are twins
- || Denotes issue born to a marriage in which both mother and father descend from a twinning family

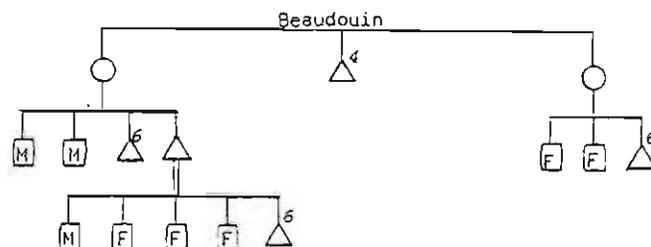
(28.1)



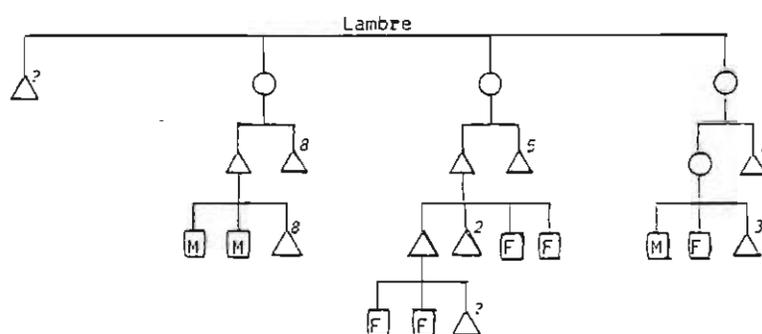
(28.2)



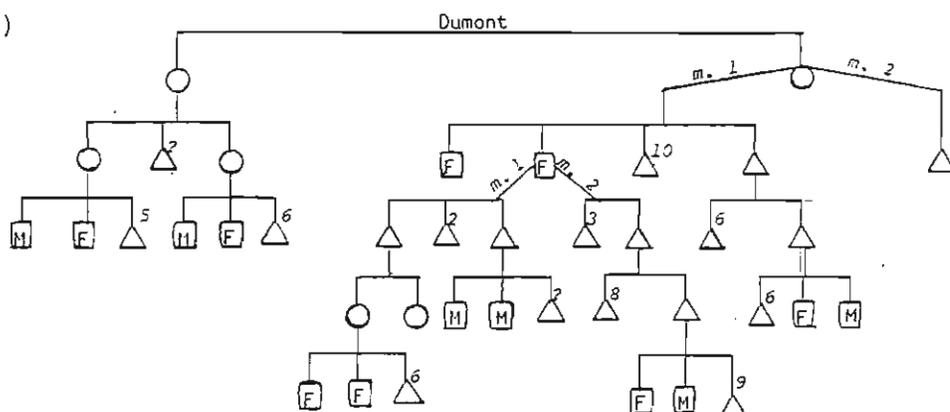
(28.3)



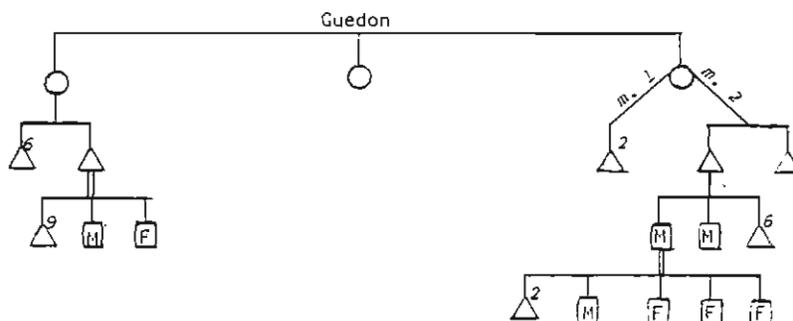
(28.4)



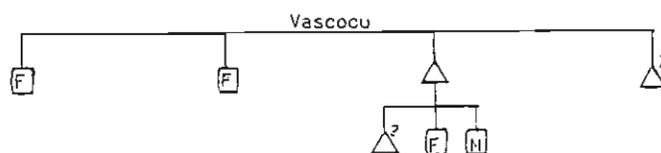
(28.5)



(28.6)



(28.7)



known twinning traits that might alter this family's pattern.

Similar twinning patterns appear among the descendants of Antoine Clermont, an immigrant sergeant to Louisiana who left two daughters at Natchitoches. Four sets of twins appear in Generations 3 and 4 descending from these females. Again, two sons of the German Coast settler Simon Lambre, as well as grandchildren of one of his daughters, settled at Natchitoches where four sets of twins appeared in Generations 3 and 4. François Beaudouin and wife had six children for whom baptismal records do not exist in five cases and, consequently, twinning status is not known. However, two sets of twins appear among their grandchildren and another two sets among their great-grandchildren. One of their grandchildren who was not a twin married a twin, and their combined recessive and dominant twinning traits produced two sets of twins in that one union.

Even more twins appear among descendants of Charles Dumont by the Natchitoches Indian Angelique, who had two daughters, birth status unknown. One of these Generation 2 females, Mme. Joseph Verger, bore twins while her sister, Mme. Henri Trichel, apparently did not. Two of the Trichel non-twins, however, each produced twins in Generation 4. In the Verger line of descent, twinning skipped from Generation 3 to Generation 5 where 2 and possibly 3 sets of twins were born. Again, in Generation 6 of the Verger line, two sets were born to Generation 5 non-twins. Jacques Guedon and his Chitimachas Indian wife, Thérèse, also spawned a family with an exceptional number of twins in this century. While birth-status of Generation 2 children is not known, and no twins occurred in Generation 3, two sets appeared in Generation 4 and two more in Generation 5 without any intermarriage of a Guedon descendant with another family that displayed twinning traits. The immigrant Antoine Vasocu, whose children grew to maturity late in the colonial period,

fathered a set of twins and also had twin grandchildren before the end of the century, the latter pair being born to Antoine's non-twin son André.

No explanation has been found for the comparatively high rate of twinning which existed in this community. Given the shortage of comparable studies in other contemporary communities, it is risky to make any generalizations as to whether Natchitoches data is high or low for its culture and locale. Certain patterns do seem apparent, when the community is analyzed in isolation. In no instance was a twin the offspring of a marriage between parents known to be related to each other in any degree. Secondly, the twinning pattern seems to cross racial lines; two of the families in which the twinning trait was dominant descended from Indians (of different tribal origins); three of the families descended from German ancestors, as well as other nationalities. The Swiss, the Italian and the Spaniard was not represented among the twinning families, but this could well be due to their low representation in the population at risk. Additional twins, not included in this study, are known to have occurred to both black and black-white unions.

The size of completed families at Natchitoches again varies from that found in other locales. (See Table 22.) Among the 1734-1763 marriage cohort, the rate was higher than that found in some contemporary Anglo-American colonies, yet lower than that found in others, suggesting normal fluctuations to be found from locale to locale in any given period. Among the 1764-1793 cohort, Natchitoches was slightly higher than other American contemporaries. Both societies exhibited a downturn in family size, although the drop was not as sharp at Natchitoches. By contrast, comparable French communities of the same era displayed an even wider variance; their family sizes were, overall, considerably larger than those of Natchitoches, although almost all studied communities in France have shown this same significant decrease in the late eighteenth century.

TABLE 22
MEAN NUMBER OF CHILDREN PER COMPLETED FAMILY - COMPARATIVE TABLE

Locale	Marriage Cohort	Mean Number		
		All Couples	Fertile Couples	Unspecified
Natchitoches	1734-1763	7.5	8.2	
"	1764-1793	6.8	7.8	
Deerfield, Mass.	1721-1740			7.2
"	1741-1760			7.8
"	1761-1780			5.6
"	1781-1800			5.0
Sturbridge, Mass.	1730-1759			8.8
"	1760-1799			7.3
Andover, Mass.	1685-1704			8.7
"	1725-1744			7.5
Hingham, Mass.	17th Century			7.8
Meulan (Paris Basin), France	1710-1739			10.6
"	"			1740-1764
"	"			1765-1789
"	"			1790-1814
Saint - Meén, Brittany, France	1720-1755			10.6
"	"			1756-1792
Sainghin, North France	1690-1739			10.4
"	"			1740-1769
"	"			1770-1789

SOURCES: Temkins-Greener and Swedlund, "Fertility Transition," 31; Osterud and Fulton, "Family Limitation," 483; Greven, *Four Generations*, 31, 202; Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 197.

TABLE 23
MEAN RATIO OF CHILDREN UNDER 10 PER 1,000 WOMEN AGED 16-49:
COMPARATIVE TABLE

Locale	Year	Children Under 10
Natchitoches	1789	1429
Deerfield, Sheffield, and Greenfield, Mass.	1800	1914
Massachusetts-at-large	1800	1477
Rhode Island	1800	1455
Ohio	1800	2550

SOURCE: Temkin-Greener and Swedlund, "Fertility Transition," 32.

The size of completed families does not necessarily give an accurate portrayal of a region's fertility, as Natchitoches well-illustrates. The mean ratio in the number of children under ten per 1,000 women aged sixteen to forty-nine at Natchitoches¹⁰ falls far short of the ratio found in studied Anglo communities. (See Figure 30.) Again, when tables are compiled showing annual birth-marriage ratios, average numbers of children per household, or mean number of children per mother, the Natchitoches pattern falls significantly shorter than most Anglo communities.¹¹ (See Tables 24-26.)

A paradox seemingly exists -- at least in comparisons between Natchitoches and Anglo-America. Natchitoches women, in general, married earlier, had their children somewhat closer together, and ended their childbearing experience at about the same time as Anglo-American mothers. Yet, overall, the total mean number of children produced at Natchitoches is comparable to that found elsewhere, while the ratio of children to females in the fertile age group and the birth to marriage ratios are both excessively low.

The explanation seems to lie in a phenomenon already mentioned, the excessively young age at which some mothers ceased childbearing -- and in another situation that other studies have not adequately covered: the percentage of married women who were infertile or else chose not to have children

¹⁰This age group does not include the full fertile-female population at Natchitoches. However, it is the one most commonly used for gauging demographic balances and is being used herein for comparative purposes.

¹¹The only locale in which similarly low birth to marriage ratios have been found to date are in the various English parishes whose patterns have been analyzed since the 1500s. However, these English registers of the eighteenth century, which reveal surprisingly low birth rates, apparently have an inherent flaw that is artificially altering those reported rates. A subsequent evaluation of the registers by another demographer indicates that 11.7 to 76.5 percent of infants born in various of those parishes during that century were not registered. See Laslett and Oosterveen, "Long-Term Trends in Bastardy in England," 267; Greven, *Four Generations*, 184-186; and Razzell, "An Evaluation of Baptism," 130.

TABLE 24

BIRTH TO MARRIAGE RATIOS - COMPARATIVE TABLE

Locale	Century	Eighteenth Century Fluctuations -- by Decade (When Known)								Range for Stated Period
		1720s	1730s	1740s	1750s	1760s	1770s	1780s	1790s	
Natchitoches	18th	-	4.0	4.6	3.3	3.5	3.2	4.2	3.0	3.0-4.8
Dedham, Massachusetts	17th	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.8
Andover, Massachusetts	18th	4.8	4.1	4.0	3.9	4.3	4.2	3.0	-	3.0-4.8
12 Parishes, Worcestershire, Eng.	18th	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.3-4.5
24 Parishes, England-at-Large	18th	3.8	3.8	3.6	3.4	3.1	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.0-3.8*
Nottinghamshire, England	18th	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.3-4.8
Beauvais, France	17th	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.4-5.8

SOURCES: Greven, *Four Generations*, 23-24, 184-185; Laslett and Oosterveen, "Long-Term Trends in Bastardy in England," 267.

* According to Razell, "Evaluation of Baptism as a Form of Birth-Registration," 129, the statistics provided for England in the eighteenth century would be artificially low due to a serious under-registration of births.

TABLE 25

MEAN NUMBER OF CHILDREN PER MOTHER - BY AGE AT MARRIAGE
(Completed and Incompleted Childbirth Spans)

COMPARATIVE TABLE

Locale	Age at Marriage				Overall
	11-14	15-19	20-24	24+	
Natchitoches					
Fertile Wives	8.0	7.2	7.5	4.0	7.2
All Wives	6.3	5.1	5.5	3.8	5.1
Colonial Higham, Mass.	-	-	-	-	7.8
Colonial Ipswich, Mass.	-	7.5	7.1	4.5	-

SOURCES: Greven, *Four Generations*, 31; Carr and Walsh, "The Planter's wife," 284.

at all. In most demographic studies this question is excluded on the premise that some degree of uncertainty exists as to whether women actually had no children or whether they moved away and bore their children elsewhere. After reconstituting the Natchitoches population from existing records of all posts in Louisiana, the remaining uncertainty is relatively nil. Almost 10 percent of married women on this frontier bore no children at all. Another 17.6

TABLE 26

AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN PER HOUSEHOLD - COMPARATIVE TABLE

Locale	Year	% of Households Without Children	Average Number of Children	
			All Households	Households With Children
Natchitoches	1726	-	.8	2.1
"	1766	(10.4)	2.7	3.0
"	1787	(5.6)	3.0	2.7
Pointe Coupee, La.	1745	(63.4)	1.5	4.3
Attakapas, La.	1777	(26.3)	1.7	2.3
"	1785	(30.2)	2.2	3.1
Opelousas, La.	1785	(34.1)	3.5	5.4
Kaskaskia (Ill.)	1752	(37.0)	1.6	2.6
Clayworth, Eng.	1676	-	2.5	-
"	1688	-	2.6	-

SOURCES: Barron, *First Census of Pointe Coupée*; Leg. 2358, 2360, PPC-AGI; Recensement General des Illinois, 1762, Huntington Library.

percent displayed an excessively low fertility rate in the course of a completed marriage. Some of these ceased childbearing after only one or two births, while others regularly spaced their children at exceedingly long intervals, usually three to seven years.

The childspacing pattern formed by these women could be crucial to a thorough analysis of marital and family patterns on the Louisiana frontier. Were there, indeed, prevailing factors which altered a female's physiological fertility? Or, did these women *choose* to limit, so drastically, their fecundity? Were there women who actually preferred the childless state? Were there even more wives (or husbands) who felt that large families were a burden the frontier economy could not bear? Is it possible that the comparatively low chance of a man or woman living past an age at which he could no longer care for himself diminished his need to produce large numbers of children in hopes that at least one would live to provide for him? Is it possible that the relatively low life-expectancy, which almost guaranteed that any given man would not live to see all his children grown, encouraged the limitation of those offspring?

All of these factors seem to interplay, to some extent, on the Louisiana frontier. Studies in French demographic history indicate that voluntary childlessness, even continence, in the marital state was not unknown to eighteenth-century France, and contraception was widespread by the middle of that century. The same drop which occurred in the level of births per thousand persons at Natchitoches occurred throughout much of contemporary France.¹²

¹²One study of the Dukes and Peers of France indicates that by the second half of the eighteenth century, 35 percent of the married women had no recorded live birth at all. Etienne Van de Walle, "Motivations and Technology in the Decline of French Fertility," in Wheaton and Hareven, eds., *Families and Sexuality*, 135, 165. Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 217-221.

The best reconstitutions of birth levels for that nation as a whole indicate that in the mid-eighteenth century the birth rate was 40 per thousand; by the close of the century it had reached roughly 30 per thousand -- as compared to an overall decline from 42.8 to 36.6 at Natchitoches (see Table 27). Demographer Etienne Van de Walle echoes the conclusion of most of his colleagues when he describes this phenomenal "change in behavior" as evidence of widespread family limitation that would not become prominent in most Western European nations for another century.¹³

TABLE 27

CRUDE BIRTH RATES PER THOUSAND

Population ¹ Year	Number of Inhabitants	Registered Births ² Decade	Number	Births per Thousand
1740	140	1734-1743	60	42.8
1750	183	1744-1753	83	45.4
1760	272	1754-1763	125	45.9
1770	438	1764-1773	151	34.5
1780	602	1774-1783	178	29.6
1790	818	1784-1793	298	36.6

¹Census statistics are not available for these years. Cited figures are drawn from a reconstitution of the post in each year indicated.

²Birth registrations are missing for October-December, 1763, from January, 1764 through March, 1765, from January, 1770, to December, 1773, and from January, 1774 through mid-June, 1776. Consequently, some degree of under-registration exists for each of the decades 1754-1763, 1764-1773, and 1774-1783. In the first decade, the 121 actual registrations are multiplied by a factor of 1.026 to account for the three months missing in that decade. For the decade 1764-1773 the 79 actual registrations are multiplied by 1.905 to replace the missing 63 months. For the decade 1774-1783 the 147 registrations are multiplied by a factor of 1.170 to replace the missing 17.5 months.

¹³Van de Walle, "Motivations and Technology in the Decline of French Fertility," 135-137. See also Louis Henry and Yves Blayo, "La population de France de 1740 à 1860," *Démographie historique*, Special Issue of *Population*, 30 (1975), 71-122.

From the Medieval Ages through the period of this present study, French literature, both secular and ecclesiastical, increasingly focused upon the issue of contraceptive practices. The Roman Catholic Church was in the midst of a sweeping moral reformation that resulted in increased contraception at the same time that theologians differed over its morality. Meanwhile, this intrinsically personal subject was not left to the concern of individual couples and their confessors; political writers predicted doom for the *state* if women did not fulfill their duties as citizens and beget as many sons for the King's army as Providence would permit.¹⁴ As the forces of Church and State battled each other as well as themselves, the French man and woman was left with no choice but to work out their own moral course.

A very basic root of the problem lay in an ancient taboo against sexual intercourse for nursing mothers. The physiological act of nursing did act as a contraceptive of sorts, but its effectiveness was unpredictable and has been shown to wear off before the end of the normal nursing period. A pregnancy during nursing dried the mother's supply of milk and, in an era when artificial feeding of infants was almost never successful, one baby often died to make room for the next member of the family -- that is, when the taboo against marital relations during nursing was broken.

As the Middle Ages drew to a close, the Roman Catholic Church opened a relentless war against the brothels that had arisen in almost every town of France and against the equally widespread medieval custom of concubinage. At the same time, Western society had evolved to the point of placing sensual pleasures from the sex act on a level with its procreative value and the taboo against relations during nursing began to fall. The Church won its

¹⁴For an excellent overview of family limitation in France see Van de Walle, "The Decline of French Fertility," 135-178, and Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 174-242.

battle against prostitution and concubinage, relatively speaking, and these sexual outlets were rapidly closed to men whose wives were nursing.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries then marked a tumultuous change in society, its reproductive practices, and its infant mortality rates. Increasingly, society turned to the use of hired wet-nurses, to guarantee the preservation of a child's life when its mother resumed the paying of her "conjugal dues." Simultaneously, as the economic woes of peasants worsened, and they flocked to the cities in increasing numbers to seek employment in the silk factories and elsewhere, wetnursing became an entrenched custom; newborn infants were regularly placed with a farm wife for nursing, the mother resumed work, as well as marital relations, and within a year she again produced another child -- at which time another wet-nurse had to be employed. Poverty-level wages and high unemployment required poor wives to work whenever possible, but at the same time the wet-nurses and the increased numbers of children became an overwhelming financial burden. Too, the mortality rates among wet-nursed infants increased shockingly.

It was these situations, and a host of other similar ones, that prompted family limitation in France. Various means were already known to exist -- potions (which were probably more abortive than contraceptive), vaginal tampons and douching (which prostitutes had long used with appreciable success) and *coitus interruptus* (which theretofore had been the almost exclusive custom of courtiers and their high-born lovers who did not wish to introduce spurious issue into a noble line) were the more common means. Infanticide was not entirely unheard of. Foundlings multiplied to the point that half the infants born in Paris, and a great many in the large towns outside the capital city, were abandoned. Continnence increased in popularity, as Angé Goudon complained in 1756: "Women of a certain station in France find they

lose too much in making children; and because of that, most of them live celibate in the very midst of marriage." He further expressed his opinion that "it was absolutely characteristic of the French bourgeoisie to have separate beds and even separate rooms for man and wife, and that this was a major cause of depopulation."¹⁵

It may be expected that the French, who primarily populated the Natchitoches frontier, brought some of this cultural evolution with them to the New World. It is possible, at the same time, that conditions on the frontier resulted in a divergent pattern of evolution after the physical split from France. It has already been previously noted that the greatest intervals between marriage and first birth, and the greatest intervals between subsequent children, appear in the families of the first-generation settlers of Natchitoches. By contrast, the native frontiersman would have had less exposure to French popular support of contraception and more exposure to the increasing opposition of the Church through the steady stream of European-trained priests who arrived on the frontier throughout the century. This, too, may well explain the more rapid production of offspring among certain native families as the century progressed.

At the same time, immigration from France did continue to occur among the laity as well. As has already been shown a trickle of immigrants from France continued to appear on the frontier through the rest of the century -- as well as from Italy where evidence of contraception on a significant scale has also been found. By and large these later immigrants were of the bourgeoisie; their families were noticeably smaller -- and it is among this class that the most suggestive evidence of contraception is found at

¹⁵*Ibid.*

Natchitoches, aside from the overall declining birth rates and the declining size of completed families.

An excellent example of the influence of immigrant males upon the reproduction patterns of the frontier can be found in the two husbands of Marie Anne Verger, a Natchitoches native. By her first husband, Jean Baptiste Boulet, Marie Anne promptly bore three children in seven years -- then an inconsistent lapse of five years occurred before her last child by this husband. The pattern fits the definition standardly accepted by demographers, that is: family limitation is present if, once a couple have had the number of children they wish to have, they take steps to avoid having more.¹⁶ This definition does not require that no more children be born, rather that there should be a noticeable effort to avoid it. In the case of Marie Anne, the pattern twice appears. Her first husband died; two of her four infants by him also died. She remarried, again choosing a French immigrant, the non-commissioned officer, Joseph Lattier, who had no children and no known previous marriage. Marie Anne also bore three children to Lattier, even more promptly than her first three arrived; this trio was born in just five years. Again, however, there was a lengthy cessation of childbearing after that third infant -- and seven years would elapse before Marie Anne again became pregnant. After the birth of this last child, she died.

This pattern was repeated by other native-born females with immigrant husbands -- as, for example, Marie Thérèse Buard who had two children in three years by her first husband, the bourgeoisie merchant from La Rochelle, Etienne Pavie. Almost four years then elapsed before Marie Thérèse bore another child. Shortly after, Pavie was killed and she remarried, again

¹⁶Osterud and Fulton, "Family Limitation," 488.

choosing an immigrant from Pavie's social circle in France. By this second husband, Pierre Metoyer, she bore two children spaced at 11 and 14 months, followed by a lapse of 44 months before the birth of their third and last child. Similarly, Marie Louise Prudhomme, wife of the immigrant merchant François Rouquier, had three children spaced 10, 23, and 21 months apart -- then a lapse of 40 months occurred before their final child was born. Marie Thérèse Vasocu, Creole wife of the immigrant Antoine Plauché, had four children spaced at 24, 24, 24, and 24 months, after which 40 months elapsed before the birth of the penultimate infant.

Such examples are numerous on the Natchitoches frontier. Yet, in one significant respect the pattern suggests a different source of motivation than that which French demographers have found. Flandrin speaks, perhaps, for the majority of his colleagues when he concludes: "it was the *women* who wanted to limit their fertility," although he does acknowledge that "the husband, it is true, might have reasons for limiting the numbers of the offspring."¹⁷ By contrast, in those Natchitoches families which displayed the strongest signs of contraceptive practices, it would appear to be the husband who would have had the most exposure to the contraceptive trends and philosophies rampant in eighteenth-century France.

Decreasing rates in fertility prevailed throughout most of the century and suggest the almost certain conclusion that some form of family limitation must have been practiced. Regrettably, no literature exists to document its form. The crusading padre Quintanilla did describe to the authorities of the post a litany of sins that he observed among his errant flock, but contraception did not appear among them. It is hardly the type of "sin" that he

¹⁷Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 222-223.

would have been exposed to, unless it was called to his attention in the confessional, and there is no evidence that Quintanilla ever betrayed the confidentiality of the confessional. To the contrary one of his chief complaints was that the Natchitoches settlers ignored completely the blessings to be earned through the sacrament of confession and penance. From the body of documents which the determined pastor did generate, however, at least one explanation of decreasing fertility among the white population is suggested: the previously-mentioned high level of concubinages which existed between white males and black or Indian females.

Some evidence suggests that frontier females were aware of, and quite possibly content with, the formation of such alliances by their husbands, brothers, and sons. For example, the 1787 census of Natchitoches shows two small children, one a *mulatresse* and one a *metive*, living in the household of the Widow Le Comte. Other records indicate that the pair were offspring of the widow's recently-married son, who also shared that household with his new wife and their legitimate infant. Next door to them a similar situation appeared in the Le Court household, which had been headed by the oldest sibling, Barthelemy, since the deaths of both parents. Living with Barthelemy, his brothers, and two sisters, was a three-year-old quadroon, Barthelemy's child, whom he had recently purchased for manumission from her mother's owner, the widow Le Comte. In both these instances, the males involved were unmarried, but that was not always the case. To draw yet another example, in 1804 the planter Louis Monet died, leaving among other "natural issue" a four-year-old quadroon son who was still his slave. Monet's wife of nineteen years was one of the childless wives at the post. Twenty years later, when that child reached adulthood, the Widow Monet petitioned the legislature of the state for permission to free this slave, now at his prime

value, whom her late husband had left her bed one night to father.¹⁸ It is difficult to see how she might have harbored any resentment over the circumstances of that slave-child's birth.¹⁹

The most obvious deviance from the pattern of declining fertility rates occurred among women in Birth Cohorts 2 and 3 (see Table 28). Both of these cohorts, by and large, were bearing children in the Quintanilla era, at which time the mean intervals between births, to women who were actively bearing children, shrank noticeably. This would seemingly suggest that the conservative pastor exhorted his female flock to abstain from "unnatural acts" or, even more probably, exhorted them to conscientiously fulfill their conjugal duties so that their husbands would not be tempted to stray.

Again, in the last decade of the 1790s, signs appear of another upward swing in fertility that cannot be adequately explained until the birth ratio pattern is followed through several additional decades and it can be determined whether the swing was a temporary fluctuation or a long-term trend. If the latter proves to be the case, it would appear to stem principally from the maturation of a new generation -- the fourth -- which was greatly removed from its cultural heritage in Europe. This generation was only thinly fertilized, culturally speaking, by new arrivals from the Old World. It was

¹⁸Gary B. Mills, *The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 89-90; *Journal of the Senate of the State of Louisiana, 1825*, pp. 25, 27, 46; *Journal of the House of the State of Louisiana, 1825*, pp. 39, 71, 75, 83; H. E. Sterkx, *The Free Negro in Ante-bellum Louisiana* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972), 119.

¹⁹The custom of miscegenous concubinages as an alternative to white-female childbearing did not die in the region with the end of slavery. One native of the parish, born early in the twentieth century, recalls several such widely-known unions in her birth area. When queried about the reaction of white wives to their husbands' "other family," the lady responded: "Ha! Why should a wife mind if he lets a nice colored woman have that child every year instead of her?"

TABLE 28
LOW FERTILITY TABLE - FEMALE COHORTS

Birth Cohort	# of Married Women*	# Childless	% Childless	# with Smaller-than-Average Completed Families**	% with Smaller-than-Average Families**	% With Low Fertility
-----1733	56	5	8.5	8	13.6	22.1
1734-1763	154	16	10.4	31	20.1	30.5
1764-1785	91	8	7.4	14	15.4	24.2
Overall	301	29	9.6	53	17.6	27.2

* Includes only women for whom complete data is available.

** Includes two categories of females: 1) those bearing one or more children, then no other; 2) those whose children were consistently spaced at exceedingly-long intervals.

also prone to marry earlier and to settle as yeoman farmer on the free land that the Spanish government liberally granted in those last years before the transfer of Louisiana.

The extensive presence of Indian and Negro slaves on the frontier²⁰ provides further bases for analyzing the cultural transfer process. The 1766 preliminary enumeration of Natchitoches, taken well before slaveholding attained its peak, indicates that exactly 24 out of 48 married females at the post had an adult Negro slave woman. Some few of these wives had passed the childbearing stage, some few of the slave women had also, but in general both the mistress and her slave were reproducing. Circumstances would seem to promote the European practice of wet-nursing, and many of the drawbacks inherent in the practice within France would have been mitigated on that frontier. Wet-nurses in France did not provide the service free, but when a frontier wife gave her child to a wet-nurse that her husband already owned,

²⁰The January 1766 census, for example, enumerates 128 female slaves to 138 white females. By 1802 the parish figures were 436 and 369 respectively.

there was no added expense except, possibly, an increased ration for the woman in order to build her milk supply. Moreover, since mistresses and their slaves lived in such close proximity, and since white mothers could care for their own children while still having access to the wet-nurse, the dangers of child neglect and infant mortality should have been reduced.

Still, there is minimal evidence of wet-nursing on the Louisiana frontier. Only two cases can be documented. When Babet Varangue was charged with licentiousness in 1778, testimony revealed that she was employed as a wet-nurse by the Armand family, from whom the vicissitudes of fortune had taken their stock of adult slaves. Similarly, in 1794, Mme. Pierre Metoyer gave her last infant for wet-nursing to her husband's oldest "natural" daughter who was, legally, still a Metoyer slave.²¹

In only four other cases, almost all late in the century and almost all limited to the upper echelon of frontier society, did there exist a pattern of consistently and excessively short intervals between births of children which strongly suggest the presence of wet-nursing. The infants of Mme. Louis Tausin, for example, were spaced 13, 15, 16, 18, 20, 13, and 14 months apart (then, a final lapse of 45 months before the penultimate child arrived). At the same time, almost all of the Tausin children are known to have survived infancy. Isolated incidences also occurred in which various wives, on rare occasion, conceived again almost immediately after the birth of an infant, when the first child is known to have survived. Wet-nursing probably existed in these situations also.

In general, it appears that the frontier wives eschewed this custom which was so rampant in the society they left behind in Europe. Among the

²¹Doc. 1308, Colonial Archives, and Pierre Metoyer to Marie Suzanne, Manumission, Misc. Book 2, 210-211, NCH.

peasant class on the frontier, little economic need existed for wet-nursing. The labor of the frontier wife was oriented around her own home, making her more closely akin to the farm wives of France who rarely engaged the services of a wet-nurse unless (as seems to have been the case at Natchitoches) her husband's rising "position" in the community increased the "delicacy" of her health, a characteristic social trait of "better-bred" wives of the era.

An important corrolary to any analysis of family reproduction is a study of the home, the household structure, and the nature of its composition. It has been suggested that even within the nuclear family,²² a lack of privacy for parents might inhibit sexuality and reproduction. It has been especially suggested that this may have been the case in extended, tri-generational, and multi-family households. Indeed, eighteenth-century evidence in France suggests that when a man shared his home with older female in-laws (especially a mother-in-law) there may have existed pressure upon him to observe the nursing-period taboo or even pressure to practice continence, especially if his wife was producing children too often or if her health appeared threatened by continual childbirthing. No direct evidence of a personal nature exists at Natchitoches to document or disprove such suppositions. However, certain factors are clearly evident: housing was primitive, and it very often was not limited to the nuclear family; yet in both ways it differed little from that which most immigrants had endured in Europe.

²²In this study, "nuclear family" is defined as a simple family consisting of father, mother, and their legitimate children, or the remains of that simple family unit in the event that one or both parents have died and other members have remained a cohesive group without introducing newcomers into the household. An "extended family" is a nuclear family which has enlarged itself to include siblings or other close relatives other than parents of the husband or wife. A "tri-generational" family is one that includes children, parents, and grandparents. A "shared household" is one in which a nuclear family, or a single head-of-household, shares the dwelling with non-relatives.

Carolyn M. Wells' interesting study of domestic architecture in colonial Natchitoches does not exaggerate for effect when it concludes: "Commandant, priest, Indian, and soldier, their homes were much the same. . . ." ²³ Nor did housing vary as greatly throughout this century of development as one might expect. Wells finds the average house in 1745-1749 to be 26½' x 17', while the houses mentioned in documents of the 1795-1799 period describe the average dwelling as 30' x 18 4/7'. ²⁴

Extreme variances from the average did occasionally exist, of course. In 1770, the well-to-do and noble bachelor, Louis Antoine de la Chaise de St. Denis purchased (through his cousin, young Louis Charles de Blanc) the Daniel Pain home at Grand Ecore that was described as 58' x 22'. The Pain family, consisting of father, mother, and eight children born 1751 to 1769, would have lived well in this dwelling -- very well by local standards. The purchaser, de la Chaise de St. Denis, would not have needed so much room to accommodate himself, by contemporary standards. Apparently, the excess space was used as a warehouse for goods by this very active frontier trader. By contrast, when de la Chaise de St. Denis' grandmother (Widow Juchereau de St. Denis) died twelve years before, the family home was described as being 22' x 19'! In this home the equally noble St. Denis and his high-born Spanish wife had raised seven children. Families of lesser rank often lived in even smaller quarters; in 1791, for example, the small farm that young Antoine le Moine sold to André Valentine came with a house described as 20' x 16'. ²⁵

²³Carolyn McConnell Wells, "Domestic Architecture of Colonial Natchitoches," (M.A. Thesis, Northwestern State University of Louisiana, 1973), 22.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 26.

²⁵Docs. 362, 214, and 2321, Colonial Archives, NCH.

Few amenities existed in homes of this size. Flooring was optional. Lofts seem not to have existed, usually. In all houses, the longest dimension was its frontage; and this length, however small, was normally divided into two compartments or "rooms" by a partition, with one compartment serving as a family activity room and the other as a bedroom, according to Wells.²⁶ In multi-family households, an aspect not examined by Wells, it is probable that each family used one of the compartments for both living and sleeping purposes. If family finances permitted, small *cabinets*, or "sleeping compartments," were added at the ends of the homes to accommodate growing numbers of children. If fortunes did not permit (as more often seemed to be the case) or if lofts did not exist to provide sleeping quarters for single children, it is probable that all shared the same bedroom. Occasionally, a rare and privileged family enjoyed greater privacy, as for example the Joseph Malige household, whose six-room home is described in 1794 documents as having a parlor 22' square and a bedroom 18' x 22' (which combined to form the main body of the house, 40' x 22') with two unfloored *cabinets* added at each end of the house for sleeping quarters.²⁷

Such living arrangements bore marked similarity to descriptions of the French housing which most immigrants left behind. Through the seventeenth century (a period in which the earliest Louisiana colonists were born), housing centered around a large multi-functional room, with knock-down tables to be erected at mealtime. In many regions, the family bed (which might be as large as seven feet in width) served as a gathering place for families and their guests on cold winter nights. When all retired for the

²⁶Wells, "Domestic Architecture," 50.

²⁷Doc. 2529, Colonial Archives, NCH.

evening, parents, children, servants and visitors traditionally shared this same mammoth bed; privacy was inconceivable in such a home -- even for bathing, conjugal love, or any other activity which western society currently views as private.

As eighteenth century society developed, some modicum of privacy came to be expected. In the newer homes, of those who could afford it, partitions frequently appeared and the functions of rooms became more defined. Sleeping quarters remained communal among the common man, in the sense that all family members shared the same room; but a measure of privacy was achieved by the enclosure of individual beds with drapes. Yet, in many areas, even this modicum of privacy did not exist, and throughout the eighteenth century the synodal statutes of almost all regions of France railed against the sharing of beds with outsiders, against common beds for cross-sex siblings past the age of seven, and most especially against the custom of children sleeping in the conjugal bed.²⁸

The enclosed conjugal bed also prevailed at Natchitoches, although privacy was probably not completely responsible for the prevalence of the custom. The cloth with which a bed was draped on all sides also kept out the mosquitoes that took over Louisiana whenever the weather turned warm; and, as in France, it also warded off some of the chill in winter. An analysis of household furnishings inventoried in all of the successions filed at Natchitoches indicates that in most families each child or other unmarried member had his own "bed" although the quality of these "beds" varied greatly. In extreme cases, they were no more than a bulffalo hide. More often, "rope-slung" beds prevailed as bedding for children -- a simple, hammock-like

²⁸Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 93, 98-99, 102-103.

affair similar to that used by eighteenth century seamen. More prosperous families often possessed a complete bedstead and bedding that was inventoried separately as though it was of greater value; after which there would be grouped together two or three or, on rare occasions, as many as five, other "beds with bedding." On occasion, also, mattresses were enumerated without bedsteads. "Complete" bedding most commonly consisted of the frame, a mattress (of moss, deer hair, wool or feathers) a sheet, one or two pillows, a coverlet, and the mosquito-bar. For winter warmth, buffalo skins prevailed.

An excellent gauge of the primitiveness of housing conditions on this frontier, and the scant progress it made as the century progressed, is provided in the inventories of two men, father and son, each of whom ranked in the extreme upper economic percentile of his generation:

1. Gabriel Buard died in 1770, leaving ten living children out of a total of eleven born to him and his wife. His home was of *bousillage*,²⁹ 30' x 20' with floor and ceiling. Also on his plantation was "another old building covered in shingles," some negro houses, and a storehouse. He owned 15 slaves, and his total estate was valued at 24,142 *livres*. The furnishings of his home consisted of: 1 large cypress armoire; 6 chairs, "more good than bad;" 2 trunks, 3 old iron chests; 5 wooden bedsteads; 3 mattresses covered in cloth; 3 mosquito bars; 4 new bedsheets and 9 "very old ones;" 15 pots (13 of iron); 1 jar; 1 pair of "old silver bowls;" 21 other bowls; 3 dozen crockery dishes; 7 crockery plates; 1 crockery shaving dish; 3 copper boilers and skewers; 1 frying pan; and 1 fire shovel.

²⁹ *Bousillage* was a mixture of mud and moss or (more permanently) a mixture of mud and deer hair, which was plastered between upright posts set into the ground. The roofs of such dwellings were usually of cedar or cypress shingles, the chimney of mud or occasionally of rock.

Couches, upholstered chairs, tables, rugs, pictures, mirrors, and other amenities of life were not mentioned at all. The arrangement of items inventoried additionally suggests that equipment for farming, carpentering, etc. were also probably stored in the multi-functional "rooms" of their cramped dwelling.³⁰

2. Louis Buard, son of Gabriel, married Marie Rose Lambre, daughter of a family with even greater wealth by frontier standards. When Mme. Louis died in 1797 leaving seven children, all minors, the estate shared by her and her husband consisted of 4 plantations, each with a house, and 28 slaves. The home in which the nine-member family resided was described as a 30 x 20' *bousillage* structure the same dimensions as the home of Louis' parents 27 years earlier, with floor and ceiling, furnished with: 1 large armoire and a small one; an "old" cypress table; an "old" cypress trestle table; 11 "old" chairs covered in leather; 8 boilers "of different sizes, more good than bad;" 12 bowls and 6 plates of crockery; 1 "bad" serving spoon; 6 table knives; 1 frying pan; 1 bucket for scrubbing; 1 pair of fire-dogs; 1 set fire shovel and tongs; 1 copper candlestick holder; 1 pair of snuffers; 2 water containers, "of which one is broken," 1 oil container; 6 Indian urns; 12 demijohns; 1 kneading trough; 4 "polished" goblets; 1 "stand furnished with 12 phials;" 1 infant's bed; 1 tablecloth and 6 napkins. Curiously, there was no mention of bedsteads for the older family members; certainly these existed.³¹

³⁰Doc. 660, Colonial Archives, NCH.

³¹Doc. 2834, *Ibid.*

What type of family inhabited homes such as these? A multitude of types: there were, of course, nuclear families which limited themselves to husband, wife, and their legitimate offspring; there were extended households that included a host of other kin and sometimes were tri-generational as well. Other households, both nuclear and extended, opened their doors to non-relatives to form the "shared home" in which one nuclear family coexisted with a variety of outsiders or in which two or even more nuclear families might share the same hearth. Additionally, there were households composed of unrelated bachelors, of single-occupants (both male and female). Some households, nuclear, extended, and shared, were headed by widows rather than by males. Yet, from all this diversity, certain patterns do emerge.

If the 1722 census can be taken at face-value, every married couple and every unmarried male (bachelor soldiers excepted) occupied a separate dwelling. This is extremely improbable, especially since the census taken four years later indicated a radically different pattern. It is more probable that the 1722 census was merely a listing of inhabitants regardless of their dwelling place; therefore no effort will be made to draw a pattern from this enumeration.

The second census of the fledgling outpost, taken on 1 January 1726, clearly indicates household divisions. Less than half the households were nuclear ones, or the remains of a nuclear family if one parent was dead. By contrast, 33 percent of all households were hearths shared with non-relatives, situations in which nuclear families shared accommodations with an unmarried trading or farming partner (18 percent) or in which a pair of unrelated bachelors, usually partners also, shared the same dwelling. Another 18 percent were single-occupant households, all inhabited by males.

Several patterns are evident from this first detailed enumeration of

the frontier post. Housing was in short supply. While it is to be expected that some unmarried men would seek board in someone else's home, it may at the same time be proposed that married couples, with no kinship ties, would not choose to share the same small hut (as these first houses really were) if circumstances permitted otherwise. (See Table 26.)

By 1766, the social structure of Natchitoches families had undergone some alteration. There was a rise in nuclear family households; at 57 percent this figure reached its high point of the century. In addition, there appeared a new category, the extended family (4 percent of all households) in which a nuclear family or the remains of one, took in an unattached relative (in one case a bachelor brother; in the second a widowed mother; in the third the wife's widowed sister and her child; while in the fourth a widower with small children shared his hearth with his dead wife's two widowed sisters).

In this mid-century year, there was also evident a decline in households headed by bachelors (from 15 to 13 percent) and in households with sole occupants (18 to 13 percent). There also appears for the first time households headed by widows -- a trait that was to increase throughout the rest of the century as single females felt less compelled to marry.

It is difficult to determine, from the two drafts of the 1766 census, the actual number of households in which non-relatives were taken into a nuclear or extended or shared family. The enumeration identifies specific cases in only 9 percent of the households. However, a postscript to the final draft itemizes 15 bachelors who had recently gone out on their own and "did not yet own anything." Presumably, they were living in the households of others. If each of the 15 were given board by a different family, then the shared household rate for the year would stand at 25 percent, a figure that is more compatible with the overall pattern.

TABLE 29
HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS 1726-1787

	1722		1726		1737		1766		1776		1787	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Number of Households	-	-	33	-	-	-	82	-	111	-	126**	-
Number of Inhabitants	34	-	101	-	112	-	402	-	592	-	644	-
Number of Adults	24	-	66	-	60	-	202	-	-	-	393	-
Number of Adult Males - % of Total Population	14	(42)	43	(43)	33	(29)	127	(32)	-	-	239	(37)
Number of Adult Females - % of Total Population	10	(29)	23	(23)	27	(24)	75	(19)	-	-	154	(24)
Number of Boys - % of Total Population	-	-	-	-	27	(24)	102	(25)	-	-	132	(20)
Number of Girls - % of Total Population	-	-	-	-	25	(22)	98	(24)	-	-	121	(19)
Number of Youth, Sex Unknown	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Percent of Youth In Population at Large	-	(29)	0	(25)	0	(46)	0	(50)	-	-	-	(39)
Average Number of Individuals per Household	-	-	3.1	-	-	-	4.9	-	5.3	-	5.1	-
Number of Nuclear Families - % of All Households	-	-	16	(48)	-	-	47	(57)	-	-	61	(48)
Number of Tri-generational Families -	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	17	-
% of All Households	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	(4)	-	-	-	(6)
Number of Households shared with Non-relatives -	-	-	6	-	-	-	7*	-	-	-	33	-
% of All Households	-	-	-	(18)	-	-	-	(9)*	-	-	-	(26)
Number of Single-Occupant Households -	-	-	6	-	-	-	11	-	-	-	6	-
% of All Households	-	-	-	(18)	-	-	-	(13)	-	-	-	(5)
Number of Households Headed by Bachelors -	-	-	5	-	-	-	11	-	-	-	9	-
% of All Households	-	-	-	(15)	-	-	-	(13)	-	-	-	(7)
Number of Households Headed by Widows -	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	15	-
% of All Households	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	(7)	-	-	-	(12)

* The number of shared households is undoubtedly larger than indicated in this year. An appendix to the census identifies an additional 15 bachelors who were newly-established and did not yet own anything. Undoubtedly they were scattered throughout the various other households; 25% would be a more probable figure.

** The totals are in error on this census. Readdition shows the correct tabulation to be 644 instead of 661 as given by the numerator. An additional 57 residents of the post are known to have been omitted. No attempt has been made to include them since there is no way to determine the specific household in which they may have been residing.

The 1766 enumerations also indicate one trait at the post that heretofore had been unidentifiable. One of the bachelors found living alone in his own household, Remy Poissot, Jr., was a native son. His parents were still alive and lived near him. Yet, he had acquired his own establishment in spite of the fact that it would be years before he married. The situation could be suggestive of several factors: the increasing prosperity of certain families which would permit them the option of owning two establishments; or the independence of frontier youth who preferred to support themselves, labor for their own gain, and build their own fortune as soon as possible instead of remaining in the parental family and contributing to its economic growth. The situation could, perhaps, even suggest a rift in the Poissot family. In any event, colonial Louisiana definitely displayed a different attitude toward the citizenship and community role of unattached bachelors than that found in many contemporary societies within Anglo-America, where bachelors were "looked on with disfavor and were required to live in well ordered families" or else (if colony laws permitted) obtain the permission of the town before setting up a separate residence.³²

By 1766 another trait had appeared in frontier housing patterns which also was to become pronounced throughout the remainder of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth as well. Indeed, to a great extent it still characterizes traditional Louisiana-French society. That is: the tendency of families, once they divided generationally, to remain in a geographical cluster. Fully 30 percent of the householders in 1766 had a brother, married sister, or other close relative living next door. In several cases, a string of households were owned by various married children of one couple.

³²Benson, *Women in Eighteenth Century America*, 232-233; Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 77-78.

The year 1787 yielded another particularly good census to further the study of family structures in colonial Natchitoches. Over the previous twenty years, the number of nuclear family households had declined (from 57 percent to 48 percent) to a point that put it on the same par with the initial settlement of the colony. Both extended families (including tri-generational families) and households shared with outsiders were at their highest level ever (6 percent for the former and 26 percent for the latter). Households maintained by single occupants or shared by bachelors showed a corresponding decline to an all-time low of 5 percent and 7 percent respectively, while households headed by widows were at their peak (12 percent).

These alterations are consistent with the changing fabric of frontier society: the single-male, trader-woodsman had by and large moved on to newer frontiers. Young native-born males of this era showed a preference for agriculture, and were prone to marry earlier and to establish new nuclear households on their own government concession -- although the single, native-born males, unlike Remy Poissot and some others a generation earlier, were less in a hurry to assert their independence and leave the family hearth.

The increased rise in households headed by widows is significant. Their prevailing rate at Natchitoches in the late eighteenth century was exceptional. It also mirrors the previously cited statistics reflecting a widowed-female reluctance to remarry, as well as an improving economy that left a fair number of widows in comfortable circumstances. The proportion of widows living in the same household with their married children was small, thereby reducing the number of tri-generational families far below that to be found in most French communities. Flandrin notes that levels equally far below the French norms are to be found in early modern England, and cites the example of a dastardly cooper of Hayworth who, in accordance with English inheritance

laws, evicted his own widowed mother and unmarried sister from the family home, moved his new wife into it, and left his unfortunate female kin to public charity. Flandrin then concludes that French inheritance laws would not have permitted such an atrocity, even if a French son would have considered it.³³ The inheritance laws at Natchitoches likewise vested a widow with a share of interest in the family dwelling; and, on occasion, those who were advanced in age donated their shares to a specific child in exchange for the promise of lifetime support and maintenance. Still, such incidences are rare. It is more probable that the mortality patterns of Natchitoches were responsible for the shortage of tri-generational households. Parents simply did not live so long, by and large, as to require the support or care of married children.

The tendency of frontier widows and widowers to forego remarriage in the late eighteenth century resulted in one other noteworthy circumstance at Natchitoches: in only 8 percent of households were there to be found step-parents, step-children or step-siblings sharing the same hearth. Indeed, 73 percent of all children under age 18 were living in "normal" nuclear family households with both parents living -- an almost certain result of the increasing tendency of couples to limit their offspring to a fewer number born in the earlier years of marriage. This situation contrasts greatly with Colonial Chesapeake (whose mortality patterns were strikingly similar to those of Natchitoches as a result of prevailing diseases such as malaria and yellow-fever). In the Chesapeake, according to one authority, *most* children "grew up -- those who did grow up, that is -- as orphans, or stepchildren or with half-brothers and sisters around as the normal course of events. Although

³³Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 70-71.

the nuclear family . . . was always the desired norm, the facts of death dictated a complex, troubled and consistently shifting home environment."³⁴

Despite the somewhat limited families that characterized the Natchitoches frontier, and the relatively small number of multi-marriage families to be found there, many young children still did not escape being orphaned. A full 17 percent of all households enumerated in 1787 contained one or more orphans. Roughly three out of four of the parentless children in that year were taken in by other family members, the other quarter of that number were living with a non-relative. It is important to note at the same time that no "indenture papers" were filed at the post for orphans taken in by outsiders; apparently they did not officially occupy a position of servitude.

The shared households which are found in 1766 and 1787, in particular, raise questions about family privacy and sleeping arrangements that could, quite possibly, affect fertility rates. By this period, numerous references had begun to appear in property records to *cabinets* and even *appentises* that were being attached to original houses in order to increase their size. The two additions differed. The *cabinet*, or small sleeping room, was added to the end or ends of a house in such a manner that it could be entered from the interior. It was, in essence, an elongation of the existing structure; yet it differed in appearance since the *cabinets* were usually made of planks rather than the *bousillage* used for the main body of the house. An *appentis* on the other hand was a sloped-roof lean-to added more easily to the sides since it had only an outside entrance and no connecting doorway to the existing house. Dwellings with an *appentis*, or several of them, were relatively common; and these provided maximum privacy for the nuclear family that took

³⁴Richard Jensen, "Bicentennial Perspectives on Birth, Marriage, and Death," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, 65 (March, 1977), 17.

in outside boarders. They also served, in many cases, as living quarters for servants or slaves, as storage, a surgeon's office, or any number of other purposes. Another alternative mode of accommodating outside boarders is mentioned in the murder trial of Michel Degout, the Parisian sculptor who assassinated Pierre Crête in 1765. Transcripts of Degout's trial contain testimony that Pierre Derbanne and wife had given permission to Degout (whose reputation was already unflattering) to "sleep in a corner of their porch," although he was expressly forbidden to enter the Derbanne house when Sieur Derbanne was not at home.³⁵

Integrated households were common on this frontier. Many families who purchased one or two slaves could not consider the expense of building for them separate living quarters. As previously indicated, the *apprentis* often served as economical slave-quarters. However, the 1766 and 1787 censuses both indicate the presence of free Negroes within white households in an apparently egalitarian capacity. One such incidence appeared in the former year when the free mulatto Indian-trader Jeannot is found sharing a hearth with the newly-married Swiss immigrant Jean Baptiste Abraham Gonin and his native-born wife.

In 1787 a rash of such incidences appears on the post census. One class of shared household that year involved the previously noted Le Comte and Le Court families who manumitted and took in infants of mixed racial ancestry who were the offspring of two males in these white families. The post enumerator listed the children as regular household members, with no indication of their differing racial heritage. A different class of racially-integrated household appears three times on this same census. The merchants Joseph

³⁵Doc. 459, Colonial Archives, NCH; Henry P. Dart, "Cabildo Archives," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, III (July, 1920), 294-310.

Capuran and Pierre Metoyer shared a household in 1787. Capuran was married, but had no children, while Metoyer was a bachelor with a number of racially-mixed children by his ex-slave concubine. The census of that year enumerates these four adults (the two merchants, the white wife of one and the black concubine of the other) together with Metoyer's natural children in the same household. Moreover, the order in which the individuals are listed does not indicate that the black woman was there in a subservient position. Capuran is listed first, Metoyer second, the Negro Coincoin "and her three free infants" appeared next; and, finally, Mme. Capuran was named. Two additional concubinages are also itemized on that census, as well as two incidences in which free Negro or mulatto males shared housing with either a group of bachelors or a small nuclear family.

TABLE 30
HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS - COMPARATIVE TABLE

Locale	Year	Type of Household				
		Solitarities	No Family	Simple Family	Extended Family	Multiple Family
Natchitoches	1787	5.0%	7.0%	48.0%	6.0%	26.0%
NORTH FRANCE:						
Longuenesse	1778	1.0%	5.0%	76.0%	14.0%	3.0%
Saint-Nicais	1793	39.0%	3.8%	54.9%	2.4%	-
SOUTH FRANCE:						
Mirabeau-en-Provence	1745	6.7%	.8%	50.8%	19.2%	22.5%
Bulan	1793	3.7%	-	54.7%	32.0%	9.4%
St. Martin-de-Vesubie	1718	11.2%	-	47.4%	41.4%	-

SOURCE: Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 77-79; author's computations.

The 1787 census further delineates the overall pattern of small families at Natchitoches: Although the size of the family that shared each hearth was larger in that year than in the previous two census years discussed herein,

it was still exceedingly low (5.1 members) in comparison to a great number of other studied communities, as illustrated in Table 31.

TABLE 31
SIZE OF HOUSEHOLDS - COMPARATIVE TABLE

Locale	Census Year	Number of Households	Average Number of Occupants Per Household
Natchitoches	1726	33	3.06
"	1766	82	4.90
"	1787	126	5.11
Bresse, France	1561	-	5.67
Franche-Comté, France	1688	-	5.26
La Courtine, France	1759	-	6.74
Longuenesse, Pais-de-Calais, France	1778	66	5.05
Bristol, Rhode Island	1689	72	5.85
Across-the-Mull (Western Isles) Scotland	1779	211	5.25
Lesnica (Silesia) Poland	1720	311	5.40
Belgrade, Serbia	1733-34	273	4.95

SOURCES: Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 55; Goubert, "Family and Province," 184-185, 187; author's computations.

This census even more clearly delineates another pattern first noted in 1766: 47 percent of the households in 1787 had relatives residing next door. The significance of this situation cannot be ignored. While the nuclear family household was the most prevalent, these families were by no means isolated from the family at large. Rather, there is shown a population in which each new nuclear family is accorded a very high degree of privacy, while still maintaining close ties with the birth-family.

The formation of kinship networks in this manner was strengthened even more, and its continuance is obvious even as the families began to migrate to new regions on the fringes of the post's jurisdiction. For example, the census of 1787 enumerates for the first time the offshoot communities of

Lac Noir and Bayou Pierre. The five households who populated Lac Noir carried five different family names; yet they were one close family unit formed by the Widow Perot, her second husband Jean La Lande, her married sons François and Chrisostomé, and her two sons-in-law, Gaspard Derbanne and Jacques Christy. Also included was the orphaned sister of one of Widow Perot's daughters-in-law. Similarly, the three ranchers of Bayou Pierre (which was a settlement technically in the jurisdiction of Spanish Texas) consisted of Paul Bouët La Fitte, his brother-in-law Athanase Poissot, and Poissot's neice and nephew-in-law, the Pierre Dolets. Demographers and genealogists of Anglo-America have already established an Anglo tendency to migrate in family units. This apparently was also a trait of the French Creole who moved westward from Louisiana into Texas.

There were yet other ways in which kinship ties were strengthened among the Creole frontiersmen. Perhaps the most fundamental manner in which a nuclear family enlarged itself is the one that occurred each time a child was born: every Catholic infant, at baptism, had two sponsors: a *parraine* and a *marraine*. These godparents, technically, were spiritual surrogate-parents, chosen for each child to insure that infant's religious instruction in the event of parental death. It was often the case, when the latter occurred, that godparents took in their orphaned god-child. This was particularly the case if the godparent was childless.

The 1787 census reflects several such situations. Pelagie Baillio, a ten-year-old orphan, appears in the household of her godmother, the Widow Lambre. Geneviève Bodin and her brother Gaspard, aged 8 and 18, are living in the household of Geneviève's godparents, the Philippe Fredericks; young Gaspard's own godfather resided elsewhere in the post, but had already taken in two other orphans; consequently, the Fredericks felt responsibility not

only for their goddaughter but for her older brother as well.

Somewhat less prevalent, but still noticeable, was a tendency for more prosperous, childless *marraines* to "adopt" children born into families who already had too many children to support. For example, in 1813 when the United States government was attempting to settle pre-emptive Louisiana land claims stemming from the colonial period, testimony in support of Louis Saydeck's title stated that he had resided on the land from his earliest infancy, that the land was first settled by his godmother, with whom he resided and from whom he had received a relinquishment of her right.³⁶ Young Saydeck had been the last of ten children born (1792) into a financially-troubled family; and the family's livelihood was lost completely in 1798 when his father left the post on a journey to unspecified parts and his horse came back without him. Young Louis was fortunate indeed that his godmother, Marie Louise Le Comte Dupré Monet Porter, was childless and wealthy, as well as being one of the most magnanimous women at the post.

In yet another way the baptismal customs of the post served to strengthen the godparent-godchild relationship, at least in the early years. A study of naming practices in the various households at the post indicates that in 44.3 percent of registered baptisms, an infant was given the name of his same-sex godparent. (See Figure 39.) The trait was most pronounced in the early years of the colony; the meager records available at Natchitoches for the pre-1733 period, and supplemental registrations found for the Natchitoches population at other posts, reveals that in those initial years children were named exclusively for the godparent in all known cases. With each successive generation, the custom weakened until, by the last decade of the colonial era, it occurred in only 34 percent of known cases. As the godparental name was used less

³⁶*American State Papers, Public Lands*, III, 212.

TABLE 32
NAMING PATTERNS - BY TIME FRAME

	-----1733	1734-1743	1744-1753	1754-1763	1764-1773	1774-1783	1784-1793	1794-1803	FRENCH PERIOD	SPANISH PERIOD	OVERALL
NAMED FOR:											
Godparent	100.0	65.0	70.0	59.0	63.0	46.0	32.0	34.0	74.0	42.0	44.3
Parent	-	6.0	11.0	13.0	7.0	10.0	17.0	15.0	7.0	14.0	13.2
Both	-	6.0	15.0	11.0	20.0	18.0	16.0	17.0	9.0	17.0	15.4
Neither	-	13.0	4.0	17.0	6.0	26.0	33.0	34.0	8.0	26.0	25.4
Unknown	-	10.0	-	-	4.0	-	2.0	-	2.0	1.0	1.7
NUMBER OF BAPTISMAL NAMES:											
One	100.0	57.0	45.0	29.0	38.0	30.0	22.0	33.0	58.0	31.0	33.8
Two	-	42.0	52.0	60.0	51.0	48.0	61.0	60.0	39.0	55.0	54.1
Three	-	2.0	4.0	11.0	10.0	20.0	16.0	8.0	4.0	14.0	11.5
Four	-	.8	-	3.0	-	3.0	.3	.3	3.0	.6	.9
Five	-	-	-	-	*	-	-	-	-	-	*

*The percentage is insignificant. Only one individual had as many as five baptismal names.

frequently, it was more likely to be replaced by the parent's name. In a significant number of cases (15.4 percent for the entire period) the infant was given the name of both godparent and parent, which actually raises to 59.7 percent the number of instances in which godparental-godchild ties were maintained through the naming process.

Among the limited ranks of frontier nobility, and certain of the bourgeoisie who were more closely associated with them, there appeared one other trait in the godparental selection process that deviated from both common custom and the exhortations of the church. There was a small, but still astounding, number of instances in which the godparents could not possibly act in the surrogate parent role at all. Emanuelle Clemence Bormé, for example, first served as godmother at the age of one year and one-half month (at which time she did not sign the baptismal register!). Emanuelle de Soto assumed that responsibility at the age of four months and eighteen days! Marie Louise Euphrasie Rambin was somewhat older, but still short of five years. Celeste Matilde de Blanc, we are led to believe, took over the spiritual supervision of a slave infant at the age of two years and two months, while her brother César stood as proxy to the absent godfather of their new brother when César, himself, was only two and a half years. Such incidences often border on the ludicrous. In the baptismal rites of the church, a godparent (acting on behalf of the infant who is necessarily too young to speak for himself) acknowledges the supremacy of God and renounces the work of Lucifer. In the case of young César de Blanc, most particularly, one is faced with comprehending a situation in which this child's parent would have had to act for him in his own capacity as substitute to the godfather who would have taken solemn oaths in the stead of the infant child! This practice, in retrospect, would seem to be rooted more in social affectation, although,

kinship ties between members of extended families could still be reinforced, regardless of the age of the godparent.

Pierre Goubert may well have had a tongue in one cheek when he summarized French family life from the sixteenth through eighteenth century: "The most frequent family type in these places during the period is the *fluctuating* type."³⁷ If, indeed, such a "type" could be limited to French society, then some cultural transfer definitely took place between France and her Gulf Coast colony. In truth, the structure of the family at Natchitoches probably did not fluctuate any more or less than those in any society; the theory of evolution is not limited to just one ethnic group. Even through the fabric of these fluctuations, certain dominant threads are woven which point to the direction in which frontier society was evolving.

The frontier families of Natchitoches -- at least a significant number of them -- seem certain to have practiced some form of family limitation. The females were prone to marry earlier and initially spaced their children close together, yet a surprising number ceased childbearing at a relatively early age and the overall size of the family, by almost any gauge that can be used, reveals a unit smaller than those found in most contemporary societies. At the same time, the Creole frontier population was not an isolated example of family limitation in early America. Other such communities have been found in some Anglo colonies and, in general, when limitation began to occur in Anglo-America it seems to have outpaced the Natchitoches pattern. One possible explanation might well be that the social, economic, and physiological damages wrought by the Revolution fought on Anglo-American soil suddenly created a greater necessity for family limitation than that experienced

³⁷Goubert, "Family and Province," 186; italics added.

by the Creole frontiersman who assisted in the fight for independence but did not suffer the upheaval of a war on his own doorstep.

The smaller number of offspring produced by the Creole frontiersmen did result in smaller households than those that have been found in most contemporary societies. Yet, the concept of the "nuclear family" which twentieth-century America has placed premium value upon, was hardly the norm among the eighteenth century Louisiana colonists. Also contrary to expectations, the non-nuclear colonial household was more likely to include outsiders than aged grandparents or unmarried relatives. Still, this singular circumstance cannot be attributed to a dislocated population or to a lack of kinship ties. Extended-family interaction, both between and across generational lines, was maintained through settlement patterns, godparental relationships and, by the close of the era, through the rudiments of selective marriage.

COMMENTARY

The Louisiana frontier, geographically speaking, remained almost static throughout the colonial era. Unlike its counterparts in Anglo-America, its population did not swell past its own limitations, heave against its borders and thrust its might into the midst of weaker neighbors. Its cultural and ethnic origins, quite possibly, were more diverse than that of other contemporary American colonies. Yet, just as the Anglo dominated the Atlantic settlements, the French surely dominated colonial Louisiana.

Nowhere in the colony was traditional French *laissez-faire* stronger than on the Natchitoches frontier. The policy of non-interference, the premium placed upon letting others do as they pleased, the resistance against unwanted regulation by church and state, were fundamental concepts of their cultural heritage that the frontier does not seem to have altered one whit. It is evident in the very character of the people who settled the fledgling post: the Gaul who had dared to smuggle needed salt across France's borders in violation of Louis' restrictive policies; the young females whose quest for liberation (or survival) had likewise caused their deportation; the noble or bourgeoisie sons who had found too confining the continental life their parents envisioned for them.

It was this healthy respect for the principle of live-and-let-live that fostered exceptional frontier relations between the Natchitoches colonists and the Native American. It also created biologically new people, as the lonely Latin pioneer found companionship among the Indian and the blacks. It was this same respect for the individual's right to choose his own course of behavior which prompted Louisiana's frontiersmen to recognize and accept the

newly created races that his Anglo-contemporary in America either pretended did not exist or else condemned as hybrids without acknowledging his own role in their creation.

Traditional French *laissez-faire* was most evident in the economy of this sprawling, thinly-populated, sometimes ambitious and often lackadaisical frontier. In his economic pursuits, the Natchitoches colonial lusted not for money but for the liberty to make however much or little pleased him, in whatever manner suited him. *Laissez-faire, liberté, license*, by whatever name eighteenth century society called it, the opportunism of the Natchitoches frontier attracted a certain breed of man and woman, and the environment there was one that the colonist seems to have intensely hated or intensely loved. Even those youth who strayed away often found the primitive, unspoiled frontier an irresistible magnet too powerful to permanently withstand.

The insistence of the Creole frontiersman upon personal *liberté* -- condemned as unreasonable, capricious and whimsical -- resulted in an almost perpetual conflict between individual rights and governmental authority. It was evident from the earliest days of the colony in the clandestine border trade that was conducted between Natchitoches and the Spanish post of Los Adaes. It persisted into the Spanish era, as traders and woodsmen ignored direct orders to abandon the Indian nations and relocate on farms. It was clearly evident in the enthusiasm with which the Natchitoches militiaman, unprofessional soldier that he was, left his home to join his Anglo-American brother's struggle for independence. That sense of *liberté* continued to smolder and occasionally erupted anew, as in the Jacobin revolt of the mid-1790s, when the Natchitoches Creole sought to overthrow the Spanish Crown along the Texas-Louisiana frontier. It was to persist well into the nineteenth century and was directly responsible for the degree of material and moral aid

that the Anglo revolutionaries of pre-Republic Texas obtained along the Natchitoches frontier.

The French frontiersman's concept of economic freedom, in particular, retarded drastically the civilizing of the colonial Louisiana borderlands. Perhaps this was intentional, perhaps not; but too great a degree of individual liberty repressed the sense of "community kinship," the desire for cohesiveness, that had to be felt before random settlers from diverse parts could change a raw frontier into a thriving and permanent society capable of sustaining and perpetuating itself. Evidence of cohesiveness, of the subjection of individual self to the public good, is difficult to find in this society.

The early colonial emphasis upon trade, an endeavor valued as much for the freeness of its lifestyle as for its monetary rewards, created an economic system that was incapable of self-survival. The frontier, especially in the French regime, was scarcely more than a meeting-ground upon which the "civilized" elements of southeast Louisiana and the raw resources of the great western wilderness met in economic intercourse. Contemporary travellers commented in wonder, often in disdain, upon the exceedingly limited development of the town itself, yet the colonial Natchitochian saw little reason for dissatisfaction with it. Frontier craftsmen and shopkeepers were of little value in this society; after all, goods had to be taken to New Orleans for market and one could find there as great a variety of goods as his heart desired and his purse could afford. The hearty, lusty, uneducated pioneer, in search of relaxation, infinitely preferred a crowded wineshop and its card tables to the restaurant or the theatre. As a consequence, the craftsmen, the town merchants, the men of arts who did come to that frontier enjoyed little patronage throughout most of the colonial era. Most found adaptation essential. Yet, ironically, none cried for the enforcement of those government

regulations that would have "civilized" the frontier and forced fellow Natchitochians to support the varied skills he had to offer. With typical Gallic *laissez-faire*, the man of skilled trade or professional talent abandoned himself to a more primitive lifestyle or else he abandoned the frontier entirely.

It was Spanish rule in Louisiana which ultimately forced rudimentary accoutrements of civilization upon the Creole frontiersman. Yet, even so, the sense of community never fully developed under Spanish hegemony. No sooner had the Indian trade been curtailed, the utilization of the land encouraged, and the first commercial expansion begun within the town itself, than did the newly-settled settlers begin to radiate away from that town and its adjoining post -- although they seldom actually left the jurisdiction of the fort or the church. As nominal Catholics, at least, and as lusty and passionate people who enjoyed litigation as much as brawling, the Natchitoches colonials still wanted the symbols of church and state near enough to use them when it pleased them. Yet they preferred authority to be far enough away that it exerted only minimal restraint upon their personal lifestyle.

The *liberté* and *license* that the Natchitoches frontiersman respected did not necessarily spawn licentiousness. Almost all applicable measures of morality mark little significant difference between the *laissez-faire* religion of Natchitoches and the more restrictive faiths of many of the Anglo colonies. Both societies fell short of the ideals of their moral leaders, yet neither one more so than the other. Illegitimacy and premarital sexual activity varied not so much between communities as it did within each community at different times in response to different local factors. More clandestine sexual activity on the part of males was obvious in all societies, from the openness of Boston's houses of prostitution to the

generations, rather than to move into the barren pine hills beyond them, began to remain on the family farm; and these lands became more densely populated. It was from these family concentrations, bound each to the other by a network of kinship ties, that thriving, cohesive communities ultimately developed. Rivière aux Cannes (present Cloutierville), Isle Brevelle, and Campti were already recognized communities by the time Natchitoches was declared a "county" of the American Territory of Orleans.

The civilizing of the Natchitoches frontier was a reticent and dilatory process in comparison to that found on most studied frontiers. It was an evolution that mutated, indelibly, the character of the European trespasser who came to exploit the frontier but was not particularly eager to change it. As slow as change was in materializing, it was still inevitable. Although the frontiersman frequently ignored colonial authority, he could not escape the power of the distant Crown -- or, rather, the Crowns of France, Spain, and England, who used the colony as a political pawn and forced advances the frontiersman seldom wanted.

Yet, out of the forced immigration and troop dispatches that, to a great degree, grafted the European onto the Louisiana frontier, out of the forced political and economic policies that ultimately accomplished the frontier's civilization, a distinctive society took form; and the frontier experiences of this group of colonists were to permanently shape the development of the parish of Natchitoches and the American state of Louisiana.

The frontier's *ancien population* were genetically altered with an Indian admixture that often made them seem, to Anglo newcomers, more "Latin" in appearance than their generally Latin ancestors had ever been. The exceedingly wealthy plantation empires upon which the economy of antebellum Natchitoches was built, with their vast stretches of alluvial land and hordes of black

slaves, were almost exclusively built upon the foundations of early trade in pelts and hides -- and a certain ironic continuity still existed in this exchange of animal skin for human skin as a symbol of wealth. The kinship ties which saw their initial formation at the close of the colonial regime are still evident in the twentieth century. More importantly, the experiences of the frontiersmen, when their intimate lives are examined, provide the student of history with a clearer understanding of traditional human events and emotions and offers a better perspective from which changing American lifestyles can be observed and evaluated.

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