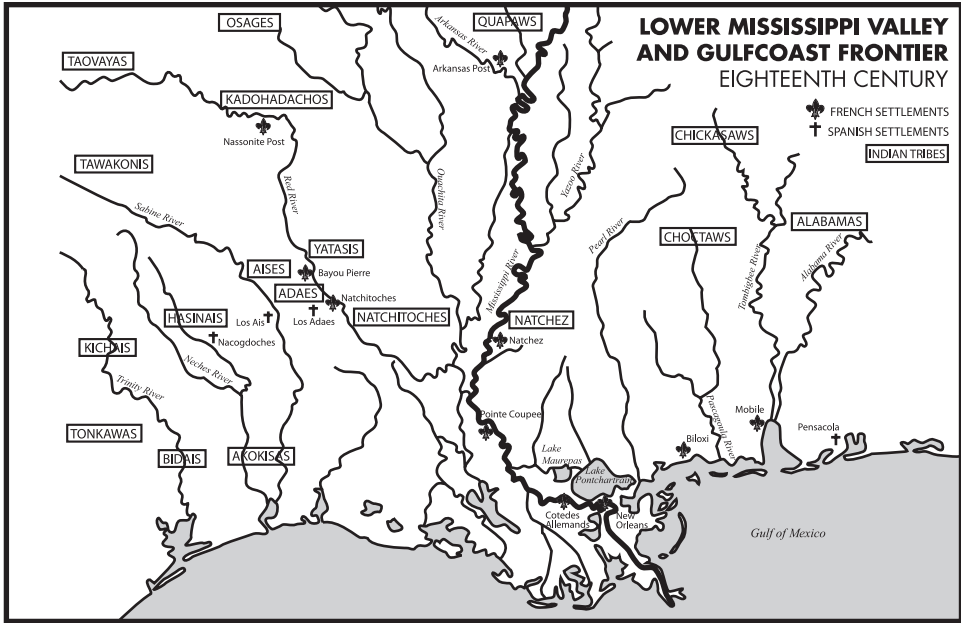


## CHAPTER ONE

### *An Overview of Colonial Natchitoches*

THE ESTABLISHMENT of Natchitoches in 1714 grew out of a three-decade struggle between France, Spain, and Great Britain for control of the Mississippi River Valley. In the late seventeenth century, France, with colonies in the West Indies and Canada, began to challenge Spanish control over productive American possessions, especially New Spain. In the 1680s, the French Crown decided to colonize the Mississippi Valley to discourage English occupation of the region and to serve as a base of attack on New Spain's rich silver mines. French policy makers also hoped to profit by trading with the region's Indians for furs and by establishing some type of cash crop. René Robert Cavalier, Sieur de la Salle, headed the first colonization effort that left France in the summer of 1684. La Salle, however, accidentally sailed past the mouth of the Mississippi River, and his expedition instead landed on the Texas coast near Matagorda Bay. Within five years, all but a handful of the two hundred or so French settlers had perished, including La Salle, terminating this initial colonization attempt.<sup>1</sup>

During this short period, however, Frenchmen from La Salle's colony were able to establish friendly relations with the Caddo Indians, one of the most important tribes in the region. The Caddos lived on the western edge of the Eastern Woodlands in permanent villages and had originally occupied the vast region from the Trinity River in Texas north to the Arkansas River. Their forest homeland encouraged these Caddoan speakers to become the most productive farmers in Texas, and the surplus food they raised in the fields allowed them to develop a hereditary elite that dominated a sophisticated political and religious society. Though men and women planted corn, beans, squash, and watermelon together in the spring, during the summer Caddo men hunted for deer, bear, and small game in the surrounding forest, while women collected wild fruits and nuts. Following the fall harvest, the men went on extensive winter hunts, sometimes heading west to stalk buffalo. Skilled craftsmen fashioned quality bows made of the pliable wood of the Osage orange tree and formed some of the finest pottery in North America. The Caddos exchanged these items, in addition to salt



and food products, with the great mound-building chiefdom and population center at Cahokia to the north and to the west with the Pueblo villages of New Mexico. Residing at the crossroads of four major trails where the Eastern Woodlands met the Great Plains, the Caddos profited from extensive trade.<sup>2</sup>

An extreme drought, which began around 1350, and the introduction of European diseases two centuries later, combined to reduce the Caddo population and drive them to abandon the Arkansas River Valley in favor of relocation to the south. By the late seventeenth century, the Caddo population dropped from perhaps as many as 250,000 to as low as 15,000 people. In consequence, the remaining Caddos formed three loose confederacies, ruled as before by a political religious elite. The Kadohadacho confederacy, located near the bend of the Red River, consisted of four tribes. Further downstream, three tribes composed the least populous of the confederacies, called the Natchitoches. To the west, along the upper reaches of the Neches and Angelina rivers in East Texas, the Hasinai were the largest confederacy, consisting of nine major tribes. Two independent Caddoan-speaking tribes, the Ais and the Adaes, lived between the Hasinai and the Natchitoches.<sup>3</sup>

All three confederacies, desirous of obtaining access to European metal goods, warmly welcomed the Frenchmen from La Salle's colony

into their villages. Caddos needed arms and ammunition to defend themselves against neighboring tribes who already had European suppliers. Earlier in the century, the Lipan Apaches had established trade ties with the Hispanics settled in New Mexico. Supplied with Spanish horses and weapons, the Lipans continually raided the Texas Indian tribes, including the Caddos, capturing slaves to sell in the illegal underground market Spanish smugglers established in New Mexico. The Caddos, who also routinely obtained horses, were able to provide the French with mounts and furs in return for metal goods and weapons in order to defend themselves from the Apaches. Despite the failure of La Salle's colonization effort, the Caddos and the French established the basis of a mutually beneficial relationship that would solidify a few decades later.<sup>4</sup>

In the meantime, news of the La Salle colony reached Spanish royal officials who planned a series of large-scale searches to seek and destroy the Gallic intruders. Beginning in 1686, officials in New Spain sent out five maritime expeditions and five overland searches. The fifth overland expedition of Alonso de León, governor of Coahuila, finally pinpointed the traces of the former French colony in April 1689. In an effort to block further Gallic expansion, the Spanish established two Franciscan missions among the Hasinai in the new province of Texas. Unlike French bureaucrats, who wanted to trade with the Indians of the Mississippi Valley, Spanish officials desired to convert the Texas tribes to Christianity. Using Franciscan missionaries, the Spaniards hoped to convince the Indians to congregate around a mission in order to bring them into mission life. A presidio manned by Spanish soldiers nearby aimed at protecting priests and the local tribe from any enemies even as no use of force was legal on those wishing to convert. The Spaniards only distributed items useful for a settled and civilized way of life, with the explicit exception of guns or other tools of war because the missionaries sought to promote a Hispanic lifestyle in which natives would become productive subjects of the Spanish Crown and would serve as a loyal population against foreign invasion.<sup>5</sup>

The divergent aims of the Spaniards and the Caddos strained relations from the beginning. Though well intentioned, the Spanish prohibition on weapon sales to their prospective converts undermined Hasinai motivations for permitting the establishment of missions nearby. Moreover, their tenuous ties deteriorated further when the natives suffered from an epidemic and endured the callous efforts of a few impolitic and overly zealous Franciscans who ridiculed Caddoan religion as

part of their conversion efforts. Finally, in October 1693 the Hasinai expelled the Spanish priests and soldiers from their villages. Spanish officials, in spite of the disastrous results of this attempt, remained interested in establishing settlements among the Caddos for diplomatic and religious reasons.<sup>6</sup>

Colonists from France and Spain were finally able to settle in Louisiana and Texas in the early eighteenth century. Whereas the two countries had previously been enemies, in 1700 Philip V—the Bourbon grandson of Louis XIV, king of France—ascended the throne of Spain, and the two nations became cautious allies for the greater part of the century. France and Spain each warily allowed the other to colonize Louisiana and Texas, respectively, without military threat. At this time, British penetration into the interior of North America redoubled France's interest in the Mississippi Valley, and the French hastened their efforts to found the colony of Louisiana. In October 1698, an expedition under the direction of Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, left France and established a beachhead at Biloxi on the Gulf Coast in the spring of 1699. Three years later, the French moved their base of operations eastward to Mobile, a location better suited to farming and closer to their allies, the five hundred inhabitants of the Mobile Indian villages. This settlement near native villages helped accustom both peoples to an interdependency in which the Indians provided foodstuffs and furs in exchange for European manufactured goods. It established a pattern of urbanization for Louisiana settlers.<sup>7</sup>

In the meantime, the French sent out various reconnaissance voyages throughout the region to explore and establish trade relations with Indian groups. In March 1700, Iberville's brother, Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, traveled up the Red River and renewed ties with the Caddos. Bienville met with representatives of the three Natchitoches tribes—Doustionis, Yataxis, and Natchitoches—as well as with members of the Kadohadacho and Hasinai confederacies. Bienville's group, including Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, the twenty-six-year-old Canadian who was to become the founder of Natchitoches, inaugurated peaceful relations by smoking a peace pipe with the Natchitoches leader, Chief Blanc, at his Red River village. Soon after Bienville's return to the Gulf Coast, Iberville ordered St. Denis to return to the Natchitoches Indian town to consolidate relations with Chief Blanc and report on Spanish activities. Over the next few years, St. Denis reinforced the friendly alliance with the three Caddo confederacies by providing the tribes with some weapons and metal goods in return for horses and furs.<sup>8</sup>

Even as commercial relations increased between the French and the Indians of Louisiana, the Caddos suffered more frequent attacks from well-armed Chickasaws, based east of the Mississippi River, who kidnapped women and children to sell as slaves to British traders in South Carolina. The Natchitoches Indians, following St. Denis's advice, sought protection by moving southward to the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain to reside with another French ally, the Acolapissas. The allies reaffirmed their alliance a few years later when Natchitoches warriors joined a force led by St. Denis in a campaign against the Chitimachas, a Louisiana tribe that had recently gone to war against the French. In succeeding years, ties between the French and the Natchitoches grew after Chief Blanc fed and housed a group of Frenchmen who wintered at his village.<sup>9</sup>

Despite consistent French efforts to maintain a friendship with the Caddos and other tribes, the Louisiana colony floundered in its earliest years. Experiencing financial difficulties at home and overextended in other parts of the world, Louis XIV was unable to provide the colony with adequate supplies and reinforcements. Therefore, in September 1712 the king relinquished control of Louisiana and named Antoine Crozat as proprietor, giving him commercial control of the colony through a monopoly on imports and exports. Crozat furthermore held title to unoccupied land, a right to supervise relations with the Indians, to exploit raw materials, and to choose local governing officials. Preferring to remain in Paris, Crozat appointed Antoine de la Mothe, Sieur de Cadillac, as governor with the explicit goal of making Louisiana more economically productive.<sup>10</sup>

Cadillac hoped to reach this aim by encouraging exploration and settlement of frontier areas away from the Gulf Coast and by stimulating commerce with the Indian tribes of the interior. Cadillac also hoped to develop trade with the Spaniards in New Spain, even though he knew that Spanish law prohibited any trade with foreigners. The French governor seized on a possibility of opening trade in 1713 after receipt of a letter from a Spanish missionary, Father Francisco Hidalgo, who had been at the failed Hasinai missions of East Texas in the 1690s. Hidalgo, who was a committed Franciscan, addressed the French as fellow Catholics, asking them to help him save Hasinai souls either directly through missions of their own or indirectly by inspiring Spanish planners to rebuild their stations to prevent French occupation. Interpreting the Franciscan's religious invitation as an opening to create a market for French goods in East Texas, Cadillac ordered St. Denis,

who had recently become the commandant of the Biloxi Post, to establish a trading post on the western boundary of Louisiana along the Red River.<sup>11</sup>

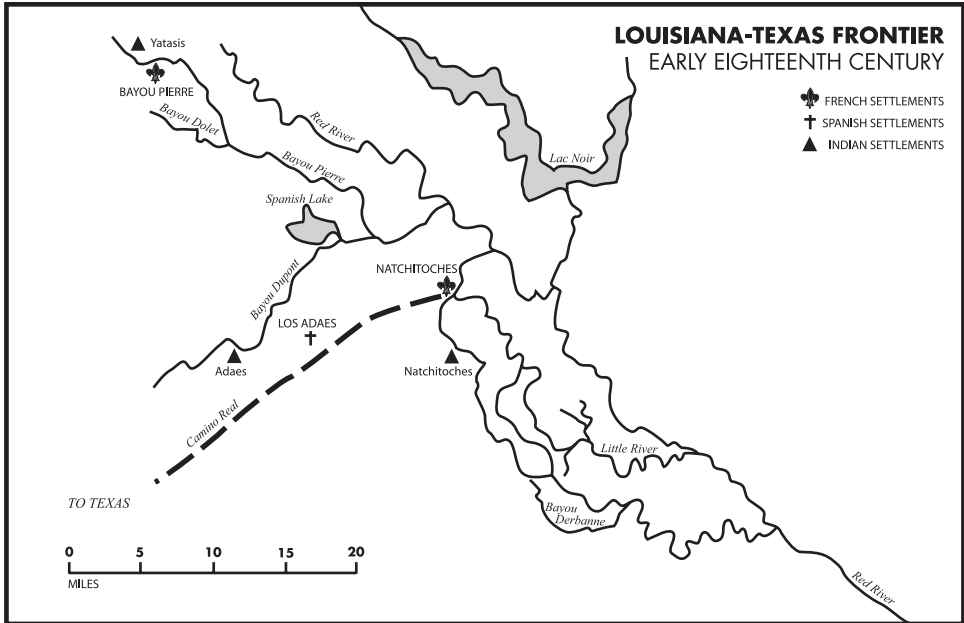
St. Denis eagerly responded, immediately dispatching a messenger to the Natchitoches Indians on Lake Pontchartrain. He proposed to them that they return to their former village site and help the French construct a fort in exchange for a steady supply of Gallic goods and weapons. The Natchitoches Indians readily embraced the offer and in late 1713 accompanied St. Denis, twenty-four Frenchmen, and five boatloads of merchandise up the Red River. When the party reached the old Natchitoches homesite in early 1714, they found it already occupied by remaining members of the Doustioni tribe. St. Denis successfully convinced the two groups to settle together and resume the planting of fields. The natives assisted St. Denis in constructing living quarters for the Frenchmen and two warehouses for the safekeeping of merchandise on an island in the middle of the Red River. Two years later, a group of Yataxis joined the Doustionis and Natchitoches Indians near the Gallic post known as Fort St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches. This French post and three nearby Indian settlements together formed the rudimentary beginning of the French village called Natchitoches.<sup>12</sup>

Having laid the town's foundations, St. Denis sought to initiate a trading avenue with New Spain by encouraging the Spanish resettlement of East Texas. He, along with three Frenchmen and a few Hasinai warriors, traveled several hundred miles southwestward to the nearest Spanish establishment at Presidio San Juan Bautista, just west of the Rio Grande. St. Denis explained to the commandant, Diego Ramón, that he was responding to Father Hidalgo's letter and sought only to assist the Spaniards in rebuilding missions among the Hasinains. Ramón placed St. Denis and his party under house arrest while awaiting instructions from the viceroy in Mexico City. In the interim, the forty-year-old St. Denis courted Ramón's seventeen-year-old stepgranddaughter Manuela Sánchez Navarro, who he married soon thereafter. In the spring of 1715, Spanish officials sent St. Denis to Mexico City for interrogation. In the end, Spanish bureaucrats answered Hidalgo's prayers by deciding to reoccupy East Texas in order to continue their conversion efforts among the Hasinains, but they thwarted St. Denis's commercial schemes by continuing to declare French trade with New Spain illegal.<sup>13</sup>

St. Denis, realizing that the Franciscans and soldiers in East Texas would most likely be dependent on French trade in spite of the law,

agreed to assist the Spaniards in reestablishing missions among the Hasinai. In April 1716, the Canadian led Capt. Domingo Ramón (Diego's son), twenty-five Spanish soldiers, and two groups of Franciscan priests—one from the Colegio de la Santa Cruz de Querétaro and the other from the Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de Zacatecas—back to the Hasinai country. When they entered East Texas in late June, the Hasinai, in conformity with St. Denis's desires, allowed the Spaniards to establish four missions and one presidio in the midst of their villages. In order to halt the French at the Red River, Ramón established a mission approximately fifteen miles west of Natchitoches at the Adaes Indian village. The Franciscans founded another mission at the Ais Indian village, just west of the Sabine River. All in all, Spaniards placed six missions—split equally between the Franciscans from Querétaro and Zacatecas—in an attempt to instruct the natives in Christianity and Hispanic civilization while securing the frontier from the French. Though the Hispanic presence in East Texas checked the establishment of legal trade with New Spain, the few Frenchmen in Natchitoches were still able to employ their new post as a center from which to develop small-scale illegal trade with the ill-equipped Spaniards, as well as commerce with the three Caddo confederacies. In the fall of 1716, St. Denis formed a commercial partnership with six other Frenchmen and acquired 60,000 livres (12,000 piastres) worth of trade goods at Mobile, which he transported to the French post at Natchitoches.<sup>14</sup>

In 1717, Crozat relinquished his monopoly, and a new colonial trust called the Company of the Indies took charge of Louisiana. The experienced Bienville was named governor, and in 1718 he moved the capital from Mobile to newly established New Orleans. In the meantime, Gallic efforts to secure the Red River region intensified. Bienville ordered Philippe Blondel to take command of the fort at Natchitoches and provided him with a small increase in military personnel, including a sergeant and six soldiers. The new governor also granted a trading concession to the Brossaut brothers, merchants from Lyon, that increased the volume of French supplied commerce in the region. In 1719, Bénard de la Harpe, another recipient of a trading concession, established the "Nassonite Post" at the Kadohadacho villages, two hundred miles up the Red River from Natchitoches. From there, la Harpe cultivated contacts with the Caddoan-speaking Wichita tribes—Kichais, Tawakonis, and Taovayas—who lived in the Arkansas River Valley. He induced these sedentary agriculturalists to trade with Frenchmen working out



of Natchitoches. On July 1, 1719, St. Denis succeeded Blondel as commandant of the Natchitoches post and gained jurisdiction of the entire Red River Valley once La Harpe's concession at the Kadohadacho villages lapsed a few years later. Within half a decade of the founding of Natchitoches, the French settlement, driven by St. Denis's entrepreneurial cartel, had succeeded in making the post the center of exchange and diplomacy between the European newcomers and the natives of the Louisiana-Texas frontier.<sup>15</sup>

French trade from Natchitoches continued to undermine the Spanish effort to convert the natives of East Texas to Christianity. Over time the Spaniards became painfully aware that the East Texas missions, while designed to block Gallic expansion, only existed at the mercy of the French. The Hasinai neither congregated close to the Franciscan missions nor provided the priests with food after the livestock they brought with them from Mexico died from heat. St. Denis had to support the priests by convincing the Natchitoches Indians to sell him corn that he, in turn, donated to the Franciscans. After a second Spanish expedition resupplied the Franciscan missions in 1718, the Spaniards were never again able to attract steady supplies from the south, and the French at Natchitoches gained the trade ascendancy along the Louisiana-Texas frontier through their better supply lines. What

is more, St. Denis was not only a skillful diplomat but a shrewd propagandist who successfully cultivated the impression among both the Spaniards and the Indians that the French would be willing to “take their shirts off to give them to the Indians.”<sup>16</sup>

The commanding influence of the French in the region became even more evident in June 1719. Upon receiving word of a minor war between France and Spain, six French soldiers from Natchitoches were able to capture the mission at Los Adaes and imprison a Spanish soldier before a lay brother managed to escape and flee west to warn the other missions of the invasion. The priests, suspecting that native sympathies rested with the French, temporarily abandoned East Texas and retreated to newly founded San Antonio. Finally, in 1721, officials in New Spain decided to reoccupy the East Texas missions, and the largest of the Spanish expeditions into the area left from Mexico under the command of the Marquis of San Miguel de Aguayo. The Aguayo party reinforced San Antonio and then entered East Texas in the summer of 1721. St. Denis met with Aguayo and declared his willingness to observe a truce. The Spaniard agreed on the condition that the French evacuate Texas, retreat to Natchitoches, and refrain from impeding Spanish reoccupation. Though St. Denis had orders to keep the Spaniards from recovering Los Adaes, he complied with Aguayo’s terms after seeing the more substantial Spanish force.

When the Frenchman returned to Natchitoches, Aguayo began the process of reestablishing the six Franciscan missions that had been founded five years before. In addition, the Spaniards restationed a troop at a presidio among the Hasinai that included twenty five soldiers. To further support the missionaries, Aguayo established another fort near the Adaes village, only fifteen miles west of Natchitoches. One hundred soldiers manned this presidio that had six cannons. Because of its strategic position on the Louisiana-Texas frontier, Los Adaes became the Spanish capital of Texas.<sup>17</sup>

The retreat of the Aguayo expedition from East Texas in late 1721 signaled the temporary end of the series of military activities along the Louisiana-Texas frontier that had begun seven years previously with the foundation of Natchitoches. Over the next few years, the French traders and soldiers in Natchitoches, along with their wives and children, sought to reach a point of self sufficiency and made the town a regional trade center. The French settlement lay on a group of islands in the Red River, just downstream from a series of *embarras*, or logjams, sometimes referred to as the Great Raft, which would impede upstream river

traffic for more than a century. At this time, Fort St. Jean Baptiste lay on an island in the center of the Red River, while most settlers of the town initially lived on the east bank in the fertile river bottom. Hilly, forested country surrounded this narrow strip (only about ten miles wide) of rich farmland on both the east and west sides.<sup>18</sup>

During the 1720s, the free and enslaved population of Natchitoches grew as a result of the Company of the Indies' efforts to turn Louisiana into a profitable colony through the development of a cash crop. As commandant of Fort St. Jean Baptiste, St. Denis had fifty soldiers under his command early in the decade, including five officers, a storekeeper, and six troops who were stationed upstream at the Nassonite Post among the Kadohadachos. By 1726, however, French officials reduced the number of soldiers by half. Although 7,000 European settlers arrived in Louisiana between 1717 and 1721, the Natchitoches civilian population stood at only 34 in 1722, and most residents were retired soldiers and their families. Over the next four years, more French settlers came into the town, raising the free population to 102 by 1726. Between 1719 and 1723, ten ships from West Africa landed 2,083 black slaves in the colony. Only a few free Natchitoches settlers, however, brought slaves procured in New Orleans up the Red River; their numbers grew from 20 in 1722 to 32 four years later. A few French colonists also obtained Indian slaves through native suppliers and raids, but most were sold downstream to the capital. In 1722, eight Indian slaves resided in Natchitoches, while only one was in town four years later. The total population at Natchitoches (including soldiers) grew from 112 people in 1722 to 160 inhabitants in 1726.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, French commerce with the Caddos continued to stymie Franciscan efforts among the Hasinai, leading to a reduction in the Spanish population of East Texas. Brigadier General Pedro de Rivera conducted an inspection tour of northern Mexico, and upon reaching East Texas in 1727 discovered that no Indians had gathered at any of the six missions. Aware that the Hasinai maintained close ties with Natchitoches, Rivera came to recognize the futility of maintaining two presidios for the Caddos, who were already staunch French allies. Rivera helped to perpetuate the idea of almost unshakeable French ties with the Caddos by reporting that he was sure that if the French wanted, they could easily "make themselves masters of the interior of the country" by circumventing Los Adaes and crossing the Red River at the Kadohadacho villages. From there, a French force could make its way to the Hasinai and surround the Spanish troops at Los Adaes.

## II AN OVERVIEW OF COLONIAL NATCHITOCHESES

In response to Rivera's findings, in 1729 the Spanish Crown decided to abandon the presidio among the Hasinai and reduced the number of troops stationed at Los Adaes to sixty. Lacking the protection of the Spanish presidio, the Querétaran priests abandoned their missions among the Hasinai in 1731. Only the mission run by the Franciscan fathers of Zacatecas—located near the Nacogdoches village—remained among the Hasinai, along with the two missions for the Aises and the Adaes. After nearly two decades of activity, these three stations, along with the presidio at Los Adaes, remained the sole Spanish establishments in East Texas.<sup>20</sup>

Although the Spanish presence on the Louisiana-Texas frontier had been reduced, in late 1731 Natchitoches settlers experienced an immediate threat to their hegemony when members of the Natchez Indian tribe besieged the town, leading to deeper doubts about the security of all French settlements in Louisiana. In the 1720s, Company of the Indies officials had allowed large numbers of French settlers, along with their African slaves, to establish tobacco plantations near the Natchez villages along the Mississippi River, about one hundred miles east of Natchitoches. In addition to objecting to the loss of their land and the threat to their way of life caused by the French plantations, the Natchez had also lost half of their population due to European disease since the French arrival. They attacked the settlers in November 1729. The Natchez benefited from the help of the African slaves and killed over two hundred French men, women, and children. Alarmed by the Indian-African alliance, French troops wooed the Choctaw Indians and over the next two years were able to route the Natchez and recapture or kill most of the black slaves. On October 5, 1731, Natchitoches settlers had to face a renegade band of a few hundred Natchez refugees who had fled westward and attacked the town. The Natchez occupation of the area temporarily forced the Natchitoches Indians to abandon their village in order to seek safety at the French fort. A few messengers slipped away to alert the other Caddo tribes to the siege at Natchitoches, and the Hasinai and Kadohadachos sent 350 warriors. The Caddo troops, aided by 22 French soldiers and 16 Spaniards from Los Adaes, broke the siege on October 14, forcing the Natchez to bolt eastward to the Ouachita River. The Caddos pursued and killed 40 Natchez Indians, while capturing the same number.<sup>21</sup>

Although the victory over the Natchez broke the military might of the tribe once and for all, the uprising horrified French settlers throughout Louisiana, especially interior outposts such as Natchitoches. The

Natchez uprising reminded the Gallic settlers of the precariousness of their situation in the Mississippi Valley, outnumbered and surrounded by Indians and African slaves. Governor Étienne Boucher de Périer reported that “fear . . . assumed uncontrollable domination” among the French population of Louisiana. Immediately after the uprising, rumors were rampant throughout the colony; while most settlers were aware that their slaves were potentially disloyal, some went so far as to suspect that other Indian groups such as the Choctaws, who had heretofore been thought to have been loyal friends, had wanted to join the Natchez Indians. In Natchitoches, French leaders specifically manifested a heightened level of concern about the loyalty of their Caddo allies. In June 1732, the town’s commissary and notary each reported that the Natchitoches Indians had been “complaining very strongly about the fact that they think we have not recompensed them like they believe they deserve for having braved dangers for us, and having lost some people, the talk of them rising up appears to be going around among the local nations.” Another Frenchman noted that “the loyalty of the Natchitoches is tottering around us” and worried that they might join the anti-French Chickasaws if they were not rewarded adequately for their assistance against the Natchez. Although the officials at Natchitoches ultimately were able to shore up their crucial alliance with the members of the three Caddo confederacies, the minority status of the French along the Louisiana-Texas frontier, reinforced by the Natchez uprising and the subsequent attack of the town, determined settlers to redouble their efforts at diplomacy and to forge a unified town in the face of the Spaniards, Indians, and Africans who might easily overwhelm them.<sup>22</sup>

As a result of the Natchez War, in late 1731 Louis XV dissolved the charter of the Company of the Indies and converted Louisiana to a royal colony. Once the king and his ministers directly controlled Louisiana, they ushered in an era of political stability that lasted for three decades until the French transferred power to a Spanish governor in early 1766. In the eyes of the French officials, however, the commercial potential of Louisiana took a backseat to its geopolitical function as a block on Spanish and British expansion in the Mississippi Valley. In consequence, French immigration to the colony slowed to a trickle, and only one ship, with fewer than 200 slaves, arrived in Louisiana from Africa for the rest of the French regime. Nonetheless, the population of Natchitoches, both free and slave, increased slowly but steadily through natural means rather than immigration, produc-

ing a settlement that was creole by the end of the French era. While a few Natchitoches settlers engaged in commercial ventures such as the Indian trade and tobacco raising, most families raised foodstuffs and livestock on their own small farms. At the same time, the Spaniards in Texas were unable to develop their Franciscan dominated colony and thus, the French and African creole town of Natchitoches remained the most important settlement on the Louisiana-Texas frontier.<sup>23</sup>

The population of Natchitoches continued to multiply steadily during the rest of the French era. By 1737, the total population had grown to 233 people: 112 French settlers, 107 black slaves, and 14 Indian slaves. Despite the few arrivals from either Europe or Africa, by the end of 1765 Natchitoches had more than doubled its population to 592 inhabitants: 323 free people and 269 slaves, almost all of whom were creoles. Throughout the period, about 45 French troops were stationed at Fort St. Jean Baptiste. Although the 60 Spanish soldiers who manned the nearby presidio at Los Adaes outnumbered their Gallic counterparts, the Spanish civilian population stood at only about 150 by the 1760s. Another 1,000 or so Spanish citizens—soldiers and settlers—resided at the two other Euroamerican outposts in Texas, San Antonio and La Bahía. The 9,000 or so people—free and slave—who lived in the rest of French Louisiana dwarfed the tiny population of Spanish Texas by the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

As a result of the French regional dominance, the Spaniards at Los Adaes could only feebly protest when St. Denis moved the fort to the west bank of the Red River—what they considered to be Spanish territory—in 1735. St. Denis also built a stockade on the west bank, as well as fourteen houses for the garrison and the citizens. Soon thereafter, other Natchitoches settlers began establishing residences on the west side of the river. In 1741, the Spanish viceroy of New Spain ordered an investigation into the matter, but the boundary dispute ended three years later with the decision that La Gran Montaña and Arroyo Hondo, not the Red River, was the official boundary between Natchitoches and Los Adaes.<sup>25</sup>

The residents of the growing town of Natchitoches received the services of the Roman Catholic Church after the Crown took control of Louisiana in 1731. Although the head of the Louisiana Church, the Bishop of Quebec, awarded jurisdiction over all French settlements west of the Mississippi River in 1722 to the Capuchin Order, the priest assigned to Natchitoches died before he arrived in town. Therefore, throughout most of the decade, Franciscan missionaries from Los

Adaes ministered to the spiritual needs of any Natchitoches settlers and slaves who wanted to marry legitimately, baptize their young or recent converts, or bury their dead. In May 1729, Capuchin priest Father Maximin arrived and began recording the earliest extant records of the post's religious life. Because of a disagreement with St. Denis, however, Maximin left the post the following year. Due to the continuing shortage of Capuchins in Louisiana, it was not until 1734 that a Jesuit priest, Father Vitry, was able to initiate a constant Catholic presence in Natchitoches that lasted for the remainder of the century. By 1738, the Catholic parish of St. François d'Assisi des Natchitoches was an established institution with a new, albeit stark and crude, church. In the same year, a Capuchin priest, Father Jean François de Civray, replaced the Jesuit in spite of some protest. For the next several decades, a series of Capuchins ministered to the free and enslaved residents of Natchitoches.<sup>26</sup>

Most Natchitoches settlers raised various food crops for themselves, sold their surpluses to the Spaniards at Los Adaes, and increasingly began planting tobacco to sell outside of town. By 1765, Natchitoches planters raised more than 80,000 pounds of tobacco, which was the principal commercial crop of the colony. Natchitoches residents also expanded their livestock industry to supply the rest of Louisiana with horses and cattle. Between 1737 and 1765, the number of horses in Natchitoches grew from 225 to 581, while the number of cattle grew at a similar rate from 460 to 914. In addition, Natchitoches settlers owned a total of 581 hogs and 157 sheep in 1765.<sup>27</sup>

During the French period, trade with the Indian tribes of Texas and Louisiana dominated the economy of Natchitoches. Most of the horses and cattle that passed through the town came from Indians who had stolen them from Spanish ranches near San Antonio and La Bahía. In addition to the trading posts at Natchitoches and the Kadohadacho villages, the eight thousand or so remaining Caddos permitted the French to establish a third station at the Yatasi village on Bayou Pierre, about fifty miles northwest of town. Through the three Caddo villages, French traders illegally began entering Texas in order to trade with the Hasinai, as well as with the nomadic Tonkawas who roamed through the region between the Trinity and the Guadalupe Rivers.

Frenchmen from Natchitoches also developed commerce with indigenous groups that resided upstream from the Kadohadachos. In the 1750s, the Wichita tribes moved south to the Red River Valley in order to gain constant access to French wares. The Taovayas estab-

lished the most important Wichita settlement at a place that would be one of the landmark villages of the Southern Plains for the next half century. The site was on both banks of the Red River in present Montague County, Texas, and Jefferson County, Oklahoma. French traders were drawn to the villages, which was the farthest point upstream that could be reached by boat, in order to exchange goods with the Taovayas and the Comanches, a nomadic buffalo hunting tribe that had recently arrived in Texas. These tribes, collectively known by the Spaniards as *Los Norteños* (Nations of the North), not only preyed on Spanish livestock but also raided the Lipan Apaches to gain slaves to sell to Natchitoches traders.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout the period, the St. Denis family network dominated the Indian trade and diplomacy of Natchitoches, and the death of St. Denis in June 1744 did little to disturb the business ties between the Indians and the French, as a few Spanish officials vainly hoped at the time. St. Denis's son, Louis, proved to be just as adept and influential as his father and was "so revered and obeyed" by the Indians that one Los Adaes officer was "convinced that they would be willing to give their lives for him in any crisis." Although St. Denis fils (the son) held no official position in Natchitoches, his father's replacement as commandant, Cesaire de Blanc, married his sister in 1750, perpetuating the St. Denis family's military and governmental control of the town. The military in Natchitoches was the instrument of civil government, for the commandant held in his hands the military, executive, and judicial powers of the post. The commandant signed notarial acts, passed on all sanctions, and enforced laws. Another important army officer, Athanase Christophe Fortuna de Mézières, also married one of St. Denis's daughters. Both de Blanc and de Mézières became heavily involved in the family's regional concerns, and the exchange of goods between Frenchmen from Natchitoches and Indians of the Louisiana-Texas frontier might have continued unabated into the second half of the eighteenth century had the Spanish government encouraged it.<sup>29</sup>

However, the relative freedom from outside interference that Natchitoches experienced during the three decades of stability following Louis XV's takeover of Louisiana came to an end following France's defeat in the Seven Years' War, and the Indian trade began a steady decline. France ceded Louisiana to Spain and turned over its possessions east of the Mississippi River to Great Britain. Spain's accession of Louisiana coincided with the reign of Charles III, the reform-minded Bourbon ruler who desired to implement Enlightenment methods of

government in order to transform Spanish holdings into efficiently governed and economically productive territories. These Bourbon reforms strongly affected Spanish Louisiana because the colony was administered through the Captaincy General of Havana, the crucible in which many of the changes put forth by Charles III were tested. One result was that Spanish officials convinced the Natchitoches elite to diversify from an exclusive dependency on the less lucrative Indian trade to more remunerative investments such as cash crops or ranching. As a result, Natchitoches experienced a variety of economic, demographic, and social changes over the final four decades of colonial rule.

Although Spain acquired Louisiana in November 1762, Spanish troops did not occupy the colony until March 1766. In the meantime, French planters in New Orleans drove the first Spanish governor from Louisiana. Spain was only able to seize military control of Louisiana in the summer of 1769 with the arrival of Alejandro O'Reilly and two thousand soldiers. O'Reilly invited de Mézières to New Orleans to obtain a report of the situation on the Louisiana-Texas frontier and subsequently decided to name him lieutenant governor, a position that carried roughly the same responsibilities as the French commandant. In this manner, the Spanish state was able to ease the governmental transition for the Natchitoches free people of French descent by placing one of their own in charge. De Mézières oversaw the implementation of new Spanish policies until his death in 1779. After an outsider named Étienne de Vaugine succeeded de Mézières as lieutenant governor of Natchitoches for about a decade, the important position returned to the St. Denis family with the appointment of Louis de Blanc, the founder's grandson, to the position in 1787.<sup>30</sup>

Now that Spain controlled Louisiana and Texas—even though the latter came under the jurisdiction of New Spain, not Cuba—officials undertook some adjustments along the border that deeply affected Natchitoches. In 1767, Charles III sent the Marqués de Rubí to Texas to inspect and make recommendations for improvements. In response to Rubí's report, the king issued the Regulation of 1772, a document designed to transform the way Spain administered Texas. Acknowledging the failure of the Franciscan priests to influence the Indians of Texas, the new rules mandated the adoption of France's successful system in Louisiana by dealing with the Indians through trade and gifts rather than religion. The Regulation of 1772 called for the abandonment of all missions and presidios in Texas—including the Zacatecan missions in East Texas—except those at San Antonio and La Bahía. With the

French threat gone from Louisiana, the king saw no need to maintain a settlement at Los Adaes and moved the capital along with its few hundred settlers to San Antonio. As a result, the Spanish community of Los Adaes, with which Natchitoches had maintained such close economic and social ties for half a century, suddenly disappeared in 1773. The following year, however, Antonio Gil Ybarbo, born in 1727 in Los Adaes, became the leader of the village of Bucareli on the Trinity River and resettled many former Adaeseños. The reappearance of Los Adaeseños in East Texas was a relief to many as it brought Natchitoches traders' old partners back into close proximity. In 1779, Gil Ybarbo, fearing Comanche attacks on Bucareli, moved to the site of the abandoned Zacatecan mission among the Hasinains and founded the civil post of Nacogdoches. The Spanish government named Gil Ybarbo lieutenant governor of Nacogdoches, and soon thereafter the settlement became the official Indian trading post for the Indians of Texas.<sup>31</sup>

Due in part to the new Spanish policies, the Natchitoches Indian trade declined in importance during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Although de Mézières negotiated treaties for Spain with all Indians of Texas and Louisiana—culminating in the Comanche Treaty of 1785, six years after his death—many tribes that had formerly traded with Frenchmen from Natchitoches, including the Wichitas, began exchanging goods in Nacogdoches. Moreover, Governor O'Reilly made other significant modifications to the Louisiana Indian trade. Under the new policies, Indians could only deal with licensed traders who were closely supervised by the government instead of being free to trade any items to any French trader who presented himself at their villages. The Indians were also forbidden to deal in Indian slaves and livestock on the grounds that the former trade was illegal under Spanish law and open to abuse while the latter promoted theft from fellow Spanish subjects in Texas. These measures made the Indian trade less profitable for Natchitoches citizens, and the volume of commerce declined dramatically, especially after an epidemic swept through the region in 1777 to 1778, killing perhaps a third of the Indians on the frontier. In the wake of the sickness, which also eliminated many French settlers, the few remaining Natchitoches Indians abandoned their village near town, joined with the Adaes tribe, and relocated to the Yatasi village on Bayou Pierre. Even as each reduced group became more numerous and culturally cohesive by banding together, only about one hundred members of the three tribes lived in the village. Although the French and the Natchitoches Indians continued to live in

relative harmony, their close trade relationship came to an end after eight decades.<sup>32</sup>

The decline in the Indian trade was offset for the French by the increase in tobacco production. Unlike the French rulers of Louisiana, Spanish officials actively promoted the economic development of the colony, and in 1776 the crown ordered the governor to develop and encourage the cultivation of tobacco with the aim of supplying the *Renta* (Royal Tobacco Monopoly) of New Spain. The crown's support of the Louisiana crop had a dramatic impact on Natchitoches; whereas 49 planters had raised a little over 80,000 pounds of tobacco at the end of the French period, by 1791 the 83 planters in town harvested just over 700,000 pounds. In addition, the growth of the tobacco industry led to the physical expansion of Natchitoches as French colonists moved up the Red River and established the settlement known as *Campti*. Other residents expanded their plantations westward, raising crops and livestock along Bayou Pierre all the way to the *Yatasi* village. In order to facilitate the easy transportation of their cash crop, in 1780 *Commandant* *Vaugine* ordered the citizens of Natchitoches to pay a tax to fund an attempt to clear the Red River of debris.<sup>33</sup>

In order to support the expansion of Louisiana's plantation economy, Spanish governors opened up the colony to immigrants from the United States in the 1780s and 1790s. The free population of Natchitoches tripled during the Spanish era, reaching 900 residents by 1803, in large part due to the increasing good health of the original settlers as well as, to a lesser extent, the immigration policy. In this period, the Spanish crown removed virtually all barriers to the importation of slaves into the colony, and for the first time since the 1740s, bondsmen directly from Africa entered Louisiana. Though most Africans were sold to planters around New Orleans, those slaves who went to Natchitoches combined with the creole slaves of the post to create a dramatic rise in the unfree population, from 269 in 1765 to 948—a majority of the town—at the end of the Spanish era. In the process, pounds of tobacco and the number of slaves held became the measures of Natchitoches free people's status in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.<sup>34</sup>

These developments unsurprisingly led to unease and unrest in the town in the early 1790s, particularly after the Spanish government decided to reduce tobacco purchases, causing that cash crop to collapse in Louisiana soon thereafter. The resulting slump in the Natchitoches economy, combined with a factional dispute among the creole descen-

dants of the original French settlers, resulted in a series of violent incidents in 1795. Led by the French secular priest Jean Delvaux, a group of French creoles known as *Les Revenants* (those who come back, or ghosts) perpetuated a series of hostile acts against Commandant de Blanc and his supporters. Though the violence subsided as suddenly as it had begun, Spanish officials in Louisiana, who like many others throughout North America and the Indies feared the events were somehow linked to the French or Haitian Revolutions, responded immediately. They sent Delvaux to a monastery in Havana and reassigned de Blanc to the Spanish post at Attakapas.

On April 12, 1796, an outsider, Lieutenant Félix Trudeau, assumed command of Natchitoches, a position he held until Louisiana was transferred first to France—as a result of Napoleon Bonaparte’s acquisition of the colony in 1801—and then to the United States in December 1803. Natchitoches’s ninety-year existence as a colonial town on the Louisiana-Texas frontier had come to an end.<sup>35</sup>