

## **Louisiana's First Acadian Religious - A Sequel Genealogy of a Breaux Family Line and the Breaux Sisters in the Ursuline Academy**

**By Harold J. Breaux**

Thanks to Stanley LeBlanc for his Web Posting<sup>1</sup> of an article titled "Louisiana's First Acadian Religious". But for that posting this thread of Acadian history might have remained obscured in the archives of the Attakapas Gazette. On reading the article I was struck immediately to the connection it made to my Breaux family genealogy - a connection I describe in this article.

Geraghty begins by describing Longfellow's casting of Evangeline as a Sister of Mercy, "*nursing the sick and wounded, comforting the bereaved, and engaged in other humanitarian works during the twilight of her long and frustrating search for Gabriel*". This contemplation over the mythical Evangeline led to his query to the Ursuline Nuns of New Orleans as to the history of any Acadian girls who might have become nuns during Louisiana's colonial period. As Geraghty notes, the Ursuline Convent's response was negative with indication that whatever records might have existed were lost in catastrophic floods and fires. Geraghty notes that several months after this initial response he received a follow up letter from Sister Jane Frances Heaney, O.S.U. Archivist. In the interim, Sister Heaney had found a large French manuscript volume that provided information on four Acadian girls that had entered the Ursuline Convent seeking a religious vocation. The manuscript lists the four as Rose LeBlanc, Marguerite Bourg, and the two sisters Anne Gertrude Braud and Elizabeth Bro(sic). Rose and Anne Gertrude were the only two to successfully receive the religious habit, Rose being first, serving the Ursulines from 1766 to her death at the age of 38 in 1773. Anne Gertrude, received the name of Sister Marie Joseph and received the religious habit in April 1770. The French manuscript described Sister Marie Joseph "*She had great charity seeking to be of service to everyone. She died at the age of 72, having past 47 in religion.*"

In her correspondence to Geraghty, Sister Heaney writes:

*"On page 21 there is a very short entry: August 6, 1768, Elizabeth Bro [sic], sister of Gertrude, asked to be received at the novitiate and was accepted. Her health became always worse and she died [on] May 12, 1771 after having received the last sacraments. She has been buried in our cemetery.*

Sister Heaney then added this comment: *Note: I found the case of this Sister very puzzling. In every other case where a novice was found not to have the health necessary to function as an Ursuline, she was returned to her family. I wonder what was so exceptional about this sister that they kept her at the novitiate for nearly three years even though her health was becoming steadily worse.*"

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<sup>1</sup> <http://thecajuns.com/acadnuns.htm>

"Louisiana's First Acadian Religious", by James F. Geraghty, Attakapas Gazette, Volume X11, No. 4, Winter of 1977

In reading the article, I realized immediately that the two Breaux sisters were my great aunts, five generations removed. I had traced the travails of my Breaux forebears from Le Grande Derangement of 1755, the deportation from Pisiquid, Acadia (Nova Scotia), on October 28, 1755, packed like sardines in the hold of the ship Dolphin, the treacherous seas forcing a stopover in Boston on November 5, with final debarkation on November 30<sup>th</sup> at Annapolis, Maryland, and the 14 year exile in Port Tobacco, Md. before eventual destination to Louisiana. In knowing through genealogical research the momentous events affecting the family's circumstances in Louisiana it dawned on me that there was a logical historical explanation to why Elizabeth was allowed to remain with the Ursulines - an explanation I put forth in this article.

In *Genealogie Breau*, Clarence Breaux of Metairie, Louisiana and Robert Brault of Quebec, Canada describe how the Breaux's, Braud's, Breau, Bro, Brow.... of North America are all one family line -- descendants of Vincent Breaux and Marie Bourg. This monumental work won the first prize in the 2001 *Best Family Monography* of the Canadian Societe Genealogique Canadienne-Francais. The British deportation of Acadians in Pisiquid in October 1755 swept up portions of three generations of descendants of Vincent Breaux. In the Maryland census of 1763, listed by Gregory Wood, *Acadians in Maryland*, Charles and Claire Trahan Breaux are listed in Port Tobacco along with their children Marie, Margarite, Elizabeth, Anne, Madeline, Pierre and a young orphan named Anne. From *Genealogy Breau*, we find that Charles' and Claire's married children, also in Port Tobacco include Antoine, Jean Charles, Joseph Charles and Janvier. In one of the few historical items of the Acadians presence in Port Tobacco, Wood lists notes from the Daybook Memoranda of the Reverend George Hunter who served St. Thomas Manor, a Jesuit plantation. The notes include reference to investments in Education and payments to Acadians including " 10 October 1765 *French Seamstresses (sic) account "to Clare Braux an order to Mr. Mundell for (unclear) crop fl:4:0"*. From this association with the Jesuits, one can conclude that the Breaux's (while in Port Tobacco) reinforced their original Acadian Catholic faith-exemplified by Charles' and Claire's two daughters Elizabeth and Anne later entering the Ursuline Convent in New Orleans.

Charles Brault was my fifth great grandfather, 12B in the Henry numbering system used by the authors in "Genealogie Breau". The two sisters Elizabeth and Anne Gertrude in the Ursuline convent are my great aunts - five generations removed. Charles had died in Port Tobacco before the Breaux's took the voyage from Maryland to New Orleans aboard the ship Guinea. His widow, my fifth great-grandmother, Claire Trahan Brault, was one of the Braults who were shipped to Natchez as was Jean Charles, my fourth great-grandfather and his brother Joseph. The Breaux's traveling from Maryland to New Orleans aboard the ship Guinea were prevented from settling in St. James where earlier Breauxs and other Acadians had settled several years earlier. As Brasseaux, author of the book *Founding of New Acadia* describes, the Spanish Governor Ulloa wanted these new settlers to form an outer defense perimeter against hostile British and Indian forces. The Breauxs were more than reluctant to settle in the Natchez territory, it would break up the close family ties which they hoped to reestablish in St James. Furthermore the Natchez

Post (current day Vidalia, Louisiana), was isolated and remote (250 miles upriver) from the other Acadian communities having recently been established on the lower Mississippi. The water was bad and the lands infertile and there was the problem of the English and their Indian allies. Lillian Bourgeois, in her book "*Cabanocey - The History, Customs and Folklore of St. James Parish*" indicates that the founder of St. James, Jacque Cantrelle, 40 years earlier, was one of the few survivors of an Indian massacre of settlers in the Natchez Colony. Jacque Cantrelle lived until his late seventy's dying in October of 1777 and was thus a pillar of Saint James at the time the Breaux's were being forbidden to settle at St. James in 1768. As the Breaux clan stopped at St. James as they headed upriver, the earlier Indian massacres surely became part of the general conversation and undoubtedly furthered their concerns and discontent.

Claire died in Natchez in June, 1768, about four months after the February 1768 arrival in Louisiana. According to "Breau Genealogie" "*the widow Claire and children Isabel (Elizabeth) 25, Anne 23, Magdelaine 21 and Pierre 17 were sent up to the Natchez Post..*"

Jean Charles 12B2, was the second son of Charles and Claire and brother of Joseph 12B3, and the Breaux sisters to later enter the Ursuline convent, Elizabeth 12B7 and Anne Gertrude 12B8, and first cousin of Honore and Alexis whose role in this saga is described below. We know that by 1777, nine years after arrival in Louisiana most of the Breaux's are in Manchac, St. Gabriel or St. James, the result of protests and unrelenting entreaties by the Breaux brothers Honore 1252 and Alexis 1253, and first cousin Joseph, 12B3. Brasseaux, in two of his books, "*Founding of New Acadia*" and "*The New Orleans Rebellion of 1768*" recounts how the St. James Acadian community was so riled by Governor Ulloa's actions sending the Maryland arrivals<sup>2</sup> to Natchez that 200 Acadians and German Coast residents became participants with French Creole militia forces in a bloodless coup overthrowing the Spanish governor who boarded a ship and returned to Spain. The Breaux's protests and entreaties against settlement in Natchez are memorialized in a deposition given by Honore Breaux to the Louisiana Superior Council<sup>3</sup> in November of 1768.

In July of 1769, under orders from the Spanish Crown, General Alejandro O'Reilly organized a task force of two thousand men and 24 ships to sail to Louisiana to restore

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<sup>2</sup> The Acadian families arriving from Maryland consisted of 147 individuals including ten Breaux families totaling 61 individuals. Richard E. Chandler, "Odyssey Continued: Acadians Arrive in Natchez", Louisiana History, The Journal of the Louisiana Historical association, Fall 1978, Vol XIX, No. 4.

<sup>3</sup> The Superior Council was French Louisiana's governing tribunal that served as continuing but interim government of Louisiana while waiting for the newly arrived Spanish governor Ulloa to firmly grasp the reigns of government after France had ceded Louisiana to Spain at the end of the Seven Years War. Support for the coup amongst the Council Members was mixed. After the coup the Council sought to justify its actions. In "Quest for the Promised Land, Brasseaux, Garcia and Voorhies state: "*Braud's testimony is but one of many depositions recorded by Louisiana's Superior Council in an attempt to justify the October 1768 coup d'etat which ousted Antonio Ulloa.*"

Spanish authority and punish the ringleaders. In late August, six<sup>4</sup> of the ring leaders were found guilty of treason and executed the next day by firing squad.

Honore died in 1768-1769, shortly after the events he describes in his deposition. His cousin Joseph (son of Charles and Claire) took over leadership of the Breaux clan (and continued the entreaties and petitions for more favorable settlement lower on the Mississippi.). When Honore complains in his November 1768 deposition that members of the Breaux clan are dying in Natchez, it is apparent that his Aunt Claire<sup>5</sup> (mother of Anne Gertrude and Elizabeth), is one of those he referred to. Brasseaux, in *“Founding of New Acadia”* pages 78-89, quotes Governor Ulloa as describing the Acadians propensity for working “until they died of exhaustion.” Given the distances involved between the various settlements and New Orleans, primitive traveling conditions and the many movements and travels of Honore, Alexis and Joseph during the protests, petitions and periods of hiding as fugitives, it perhaps is no wonder that Honore himself was dead within a year of arrival in Louisiana.

Elizabeth and Anne Gertrude’s parents are now both dead, brother Joseph is being threatened with deportation, first cousin Honore (head of the extended family) has died and cousin Alexis is a wanted fugitive for refusing to settle in Natchez. The subsequent Acadian role in the overthrow of Spanish governor Ulloa has been traced by historians as largely due to the St. James Acadians becoming incensed over Governor Ulloa’s decision to settle the 59 or so Breaux clan members (and other Acadians) in Natchez and his refusal to reconsider after their petitioning. In the aftermath of the quelled rebellion it was undoubtedly tenuous as to who might be swept up with treason and other charges. Three Breaux’s were viewed as agitators including Anne and Elizabeth’s brother

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<sup>4</sup> The six who were sentenced to death and executed were Attorney General Nicholas Lafreniere, militia leader Pierre Marquis, retired Captain of French Cavalry Jean Noyan, and merchants Pierre Caresse and Joseph Milhet. Carl Brasseaux Denis-Nicolas Foucault and the New Orleans Rebellion of 1768.

<sup>5</sup> A translation of original Spanish source documents, “Quest for the Promised Land”, by Carl Brasseaux, Emilio Garcia, and Jacqueline Voorhies depicts dramatically the struggle between the Breauxs, and the Spanish Governor and his District Commandants. The book contains extensive correspondence depicting the Breauxs resistance, their petitions, their rebellion, reference to their fleeing to British territory. In one such correspondence between St. Luis Commandant Don Pedro Piernas dated June 11, 1768 to Governor Ulloa, Piernas states:

*“My Dear Sir:*

*There are no incidents to report, except the death of Clara Bro, an Acadian 62 years old, and already sick before she left her country. She was buried at this fort on the seventh of this month....”*

The authors point out that much of the correspondence from the Commandants was self serving, and given that the Breaux’s complaints included poor living conditions and the resulting effect on the health of the St. Luis Acadians. The comment *“and already sick before she left her country”* should be viewed in that light.

Judy Riffel, in *Louisiana History*, Fall of 1978, Vol XIX, No. 4, “The Acadians at Natchez, 1768, 1769” chronicles the ultimate capitulation of the Spanish authorities, after one more petition by the Breauxs and others at Natchez. The capitulation included O’Reiley’s agreement to abandon the Fort at San Luis de Natchez and the grudging admission that the Breaux’s grievance had been just.

Joseph<sup>6</sup>. Given these family circumstances it seems logical that this is why the gravely ill Elizabeth, now in the Ursuline Convent, was allowed to stay with the Ursulines - counter to normal procedure. Both of her parents were now dead - the remaining family was in turmoil, having been shipped 250 miles upriver and was again facing another resettlement. Given the communications of the day, the 250 mile distance and the turmoil surrounding her surviving family, Sister Elizabeth simply had nowhere to go. As noted in Sister Heaney's correspondence with Geraghty, the gravely ill Elizabeth was allowed to remain with the Ursulines until her death in May of 1771.

### **Epilogue:**

Three generations later Joseph's great grandson and namesake Joseph Arsenne Breux was to become one of the most prominent citizens of Louisiana, (a true renaissance man). Early in life he volunteered and performed humanitarian assistance during a small pox epidemic, acquiring the disease from which he almost died. He was greatly involved in public education and is credited with codifying the states laws on education and was named State Superintendent of Schools. He was a very successful businessman and attorney and capped his career by serving as Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court. He was a philanthropist and benefactor of Charity Hospital (the Tuberculosis Unit was named after him) and two great Universities, Tulane and Loyola. To this day endowed scholarships at Tulane and Loyola are given as "Breux Scholarships". He was a leader of the "Accomodationists" -- those seeking through compromise to avoid the coming Civil War in opposition to the "secessionists." He was a staunch opponent of the corrupt Louisiana Lottery. He has left us with the "Breux Manuscript"<sup>7</sup> a document describing the Louisiana Acadians of his era.

Four of Charles and Claire's grandsons (nephews of Anne and Elizabeth) were later part of Governor Galvez's forces that expelled the British from the lower Mississippi during Spain's alliance with the colonies in the American Revolution. For that role they were recognized as American Revolutionary War patriots and their descendants are eligible for membership in Sons or Daughters of the American Revolution.

One can surmise that Joseph Honore and Joseph were revered for their persistent efforts in petitioning against and protesting the settlement of the Breuxs in the Natchez territory and the ultimate approval to resettle further down river. Honore and Alexis Breux are two of the Acadian's depicted in Robert Dafford's Mural, Arrival of the Acadians, the Acadian Memorial, St. Martinsville, Louisiana. The reverence for the memory of Joseph

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<sup>6</sup> Ironically another Breux, Dennis Breux, was charged with treason but found not guilty. Dennis was the Royal Printer, having been commissioned by the French Crown. In the prelude to the Rebellion, as the Royal Printer, he had printed a petition written by the coup plotters that was critical of the Spanish rule. Dennis, was not an Acadian, he had come to Louisiana directly from France in the early French colonization of Louisiana. After his acquittal he sailed to France leaving no Breux progeny. Had he remained, Acadian genealogists would undoubtedly face confusion having to make the distinction between Louisiana's Acadian Breuxs and non-Acadian Breuxs.

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles\\_Essays/the\\_breux\\_manuscript.htm](http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/the_breux_manuscript.htm)

Honore Breaux and Joseph Breaux is exemplified in the trace of the genealogy of former United States Senator John Breaux. Recently Robert Braud, co-author of Breau Genealogy, posted the Senator's genealogy on the Breaux Genealogy Web Page. Examination of the data in Genealogy Breau establishes the Senator's seven generations descendants to Honore (Joseph Honore) of this saga. In those 7 generations of direct male parental ancestors, leading to the Senator, all seven male forebears have the given name Honore or Joseph (or both) namely:

1253	Joseph Honore Braud
12535	Joseph Honore Braud
125356	Joseph Marie Breaux
1253561	Joseph Honore Breaux
12535614	Honore Ernest Breaux
125356142	Gary Honore Breaux
1253561424	Ezra Honore Breaux
12535614241	John Berlinger Breaux (Senator John Breaux)

Only in his parents naming the future United States Senator, was the chain broken, the name Berlinger coming from the Senator's mother. It is worth noting that the Senator, the former Democratic Deputy Whip, was particularly known for his ability and success in facilitating compromise<sup>8</sup> on divisive and partisan U.S. Senate issues. Perhaps it comes naturally from his distant cousin, Arsenne Joseph Breaux who sought accommodation to avoid the Civil War-- but not from Joseph Honore or Joseph who were unstinting in their refusal to compromise in their efforts to have Governor Ulloa allow the Breauxs to move to St. James.

For me, having been born in Louisiana, graduate of Louisiana State University, but now a 45 year resident of Maryland, the discovery of my Maryland roots was one of great poignancy. As noted herein my fifth great grandfather Charles lies undoubtedly in an unmarked grave in my adopted Maryland soil.

**Postscript:** The study of genealogy and finding/reading about one's ancestors is a continuing endeavor, very fulfilling, and often exhilarating but also filled with sadness. After much effort in the search of my Breaux ancestry I took on the task of searching my mother's LeBlanc ancestry<sup>9</sup>. That search led to finding that my maternal seventh great grandparents were Rene LeBlanc and Anne Theriot who escaped deportation in 1755 by fleeing into the Canadian wilderness seeking refuge in Miramichi, surviving the ravage of British raids on their makeshift encampments until 1759 when they, like many others, died from exposure and starvation. To my amazement, the tracing of my LeBlanc

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<sup>8</sup> Senator John Breaux was noted for his penchant for compromise, frequently drawing the ire of liberals, as exemplified by his being the subject of a Tom Tomorrow, "The Modern World" cartoon in 2001 in which he was depicted (in a spoof of an extreme example of compromise) as failing to object to President George Bush's nomination of Satan to the Supreme Court.

<sup>9</sup> In the search of my LeBlanc genealogy I am deeply indebted to my new found cousin Paul LeBlanc of Gonzales, Louisiana.

ancestry led to the discovery that Rose LeBlanc, the first Acadian Nun described herein, was the daughter of Rene and Anne. Rose had married Raphael Broussard, one of the sons of Joseph Broussard. Joseph and Alexander Broussard, and their sons led the Acadian resistance<sup>10</sup> but ultimately surrendered to the British with their followers being imprisoned until the end of hostilities and eventually making their way to Louisiana as did Raphael's widow Rose - my sixth great-grandaunt - the first Acadian Religious.

*The author, Harold J. Breaux, was born in Raceland, Louisiana and is a 1960 graduate of Louisiana State University (BS Physics with an Army ROTC commission in the Ordnance Corps.). He is a former civil servant retiring in 1996 as Chief of the Army Research Laboratory High Performance Computing Division, Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD.*

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<sup>10</sup> The story of the Broussards' resistance and guerilla activities against the British is chronicled in a recently published book by Louisiana attorney Warren Perin, "Acadian Redemption, From Beausoleil Broussard to the Queen's Royal Proclamation." The book also chronicles Perin's successful 15 year effort in seeking a British apology for le Grande derangement.