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immigration, influence, integration and identity**

Olivier Schouteden

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FRENCH-BORN SETTLERS IN THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY,  
1821-1900: IMMIGRATION, INFLUENCE, INTEGRATION AND  
IDENTITY

BY

OLIVIER SCHOUTEDEN

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF THE  
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN THE FIELD OF HISTORY

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MAY 2011

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MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY

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In memory of Dr. Gerhard Grytz

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis analyzes the French-born people who settled in the Lower Rio Grande Valley between 1821 and 1900. It focuses on four key elements which are inter-related: Immigration, influence, integration and identity.

This study answers two complex questions: what was the influence exerted by the French-born settlers on the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and what was the influence of the area on their settlement, integration, and identity? Such an investigation aims to fill the gap in knowledge on the French and European presence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lower Rio Grande society, and to broaden our understanding of the immigration process in the North American borderlands.

This thesis relies primarily on the Lower Rio Grande Valley Population Schedules which compile the data used to elaborate the U.S. censuses. Information drawn from these sources is gathered in sixteen tables which illuminate the different characteristics of the French-born population. The Population Schedules were complemented by narrative sources.

This study demonstrates that, in spite of the fact that French-born settlers were few in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, their influence as a group and as individuals was determinant on the socio-economic and cultural evolutions of the area. They were also transformed by their immigration as they were compelled to adapt to the realities of this borderland area. Their re-settlements turned them into Valley immigrants whose identities became complex and inclusive.



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## Introduction

In March 1991, an article published in *The Economist* declared that “uniquely among Europeans, the French have never emigrated to the United States in large numbers.”<sup>1</sup> Despite a tendency to simplify the French immigration and to produce generalizations by grouping nationalities whose emigration patterns have followed different periods and have been numerically unequal, this statement draws attention to the limited increase of the number of French settlers since the United States gained independence. Indeed, although the number of French-born in the United States increased for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in 1870, when this number reached a peak for the century, there were only 116,402 French on American soil as compared to 1,855,827 Irish, 1,690, 533 Germans and 625,457 English and Welsh.<sup>2</sup> The small representation of French-born among the whole American population is reinforced by the fact that the French presence was particularly localized in Louisiana and New York.

A similar pattern can be observed for the 19<sup>th</sup> century French emigration to Texas. From the late 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards and René Robert Cavelier de La Salle’s ill-fated attempt to establish a colony in Texas, the French presence in this area had been noticeable but marginal. As François Lagarde puts it, “unlike German immigration to the area, the French presence in Texas has been nearly invisible, so small that it takes a ‘Frog’ to notice it.”<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, studies focused on the French-born Texans

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1. “French-American Relations: Rapprochement,” *The Economist*, 16 March 1991, 20.

2. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census 1880* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1883), Statistics of Place of Birth, 463.

3. François Lagarde, ed., *The French in Texas, History, Migration, Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 1.

are sparse. Noticing the lack of attention to the “French effort” in Texas by earlier historians, Marcel Moraud was in 1957 one of the first to manifest an interest in the topic.<sup>4</sup> However, his study on the various undertakings of Frenchmen in Texas focuses on some notable men, or using Moraud’s terminology, on some “noble minds” who, from 1682 to 1860, brought their “vision to earth” in Texas and acted for the “happiness of mankind.”<sup>5</sup>

Although less laudatory, the study entitled *The French Texans*, published sixteen years after Moraud’s article, offers a similar perspective.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, this book lists a handful of French-born whose impact on the area is not connected to the reality of the French presence in Texas, its patterns and global impact. The first study to consider the whole group of French Texan settlers is to be found in *The French in Texas*, a recently published compilation of articles which proves to be the most comprehensive understanding of the French presence in Texas between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>7</sup> Each theme tackled in this study focuses on the French-born presence in a limited number of settlements, namely Austin, San Antonio, Galveston, and in the French-founded townships of Champ D’Asile, La Réunion, Icarie and Castroville. Thus, the French presence in the Lower Rio Grande Valley’s settlements has been relatively neglected in general studies on the French-born Texans.

More surprisingly, studies of the Lower Rio Grande Valley in the 19<sup>th</sup> century have also marginalized the local French-born settlers. The first explanation for this situation is related to the Valley’s historiography. Indeed, Lower Rio Grande Valley

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4. Marcel Moraud, "French Explorers, Pioneers and Social Reformers in Texas: 1682-1860," in *American Society Legion of Honor Magazine* 28 (Summer 1957), 117.

5. *Ibid.*, 133.

6. University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio, *The French Texans* (San Antonio: The Institute, 1973).

7. Lagarde, ed., *The French in Texas*.

studies were for a long time little interested in social analysis of the area. In 1956, Bernard Doyon assessed the predominance of the Valley's military history.<sup>8</sup> Linked to military topics, economic perspectives had also been a primary choice for local scholars, leading in 1942 to Leroy P. Graf's "The Economic History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley: 1820-1875," the most exhaustive study to be written on the 19<sup>th</sup> century Valley.<sup>9</sup>

The second reason for the lack of attention to French settlers is the composition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lower Rio Grande Valley societies. The predominance of Hispanic elements and their interaction with the growing number of Anglo-Americans has been, from Jovita Gonzáles<sup>10</sup> to James Heaven Thompson,<sup>11</sup> the most important social thematic for obvious reasons. Indeed, the small number of French-born settlers in the area, reaching its peak in 1870 with 126 people, looks insignificant in comparison to the 10,704 Mexican-born and 5,885 American-born settled in the Valley the same year (see table 2 and table 8).<sup>12</sup> In any case, many local studies that generally mention French-born settlers do so only as part of broader categories that bypass the notion of nationality. Thus, Thompson's history of 19<sup>th</sup> century Cameron County refers to Frenchmen as either part of the trading category or the local elite. In *The Cavalry of Christ*, Doyon amalgamates French priests' and nuns' nationality with the religious duty they had to perform, preventing any

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8. Bernard Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ on the Rio Grande, 1849-1883* (Milwaukee: Bruce Press, 1956), vii.

9. Leroy P. Graf, "The Economic History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley: 1820-1875," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1942).

10. Gonzáles's master thesis was submitted in 1930 but has been recently published: Jovita Gonzáles and Maria Eugenia Cotera, *Life Along the Border: A Landmark Tejana Thesis*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006).

11. James Heaven Thompson, "A Nineteenth Century History of Cameron County, Texas" (master's thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1965).

12. See Superintendent of Census, *Ninth Census-Volume I: The Statistics of the Population of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872). Microfilm, Table VII.

connection between these particular French-born and the larger French population settled in the area.<sup>13</sup>

Milo Kearney was the first and only scholar to deal directly with the French presence in the Valley. This endeavor is part of a local movement born in the late 1980s which aimed at clarifying certain points of the Lower Rio Grande Valley history, notably from a social perspective. Kearney's insightful "Historical Sketch of Brownsville's Franco-Americans" connects French-born who had an influence in the Valley to the various transformations of the local society and to the international changes occurring.<sup>14</sup> In this sketch, he infers that the small number of French-born should not obscure the role they played in the local history and suggests that "the often made observation that Brownsville's history is somewhat distinct from the national norm" can be seen in the idiosyncratic pattern of the Lower Rio Grande French community.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Kearney tackles the French-born as a particular group and acknowledges their influence on, and integration in, the local society. However, probably in order to emphasize the influence of the French-born on local history, his analysis focuses exclusively on some notable men whose particular role and high social position are not truly representative of the French presence in the area. Moreover, these Frenchmen are not connected to the evolution of the French immigration in the area over time and to the patterns of settlement adopted by them; in other words, Kearney studies exceptions to the rule without clear understanding of this rule. Additionally, he is primarily interested in the influence the French-born exerted

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13. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*.

14. Milo Kearney, "A Historical Sketch of Brownsville's Franco-Americans" in *Still More Studies in Brownsville History*, ed. Milo Kearney (Brownsville: The University of Texas at Brownsville, 1991), 85-102.

15. *Ibid.*, 85.

on the area, and therefore touches only lightly on the equally interesting question of the influence the area exerted on these foreigners.

The present study aims at broadening our understanding of the French presence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lower Rio Grande Valley by exploring the immigration patterns, integration process and identity retention of the entire French-born group, and then of its most notable elements in relation to the larger population. To do so, this thesis answers two complex questions: what was the influence exerted by the French-born settlers on the Lower Rio Grande Valley society, economy and culture, and what was the impact of the area on the French-born settlers' choices of integration and identity?

This study infers that this reciprocal influence is crucial to understand the complexity of the French-born settlement in the area. As a group, but also as individuals, French people settled in the Valley, tried to make a living or fulfill a mission, and eventually left their imprint on the local society and culture, and on the townships' topography. In spite of the fact that few came to the area and even less stayed there permanently, every French-born naturally had to adapt to the borderland atmosphere of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. It is hard not to consider that this re-settlement transformed them, their identity becoming more complex and fluid, their character more fitted to the frontier life.

A number of concepts that guide this study deserve clarification. First, this study does not tackle French travelers whose passage in the area was too short to make them experience a process of integration. Even if most of the French-born settled in the Lower Rio Grande Valley only for a short period, they became part of the local society and, as such, made choices travelers did not have to make. This study is also guided by the definition of identity as a complex and dynamic process whose

constant transformations reflect the various experiences of individuals. Related to this idea, the concept of “Frenchness,” which is at the core of this study, refers more to the willingness and long-term efforts put into the preservation of a French identity than to a permanent state of mind provided by the French nationality. The integration into a new society had some important consequences on the way the French-born perceived themselves and their inherited culture. Thus, if a tension between integration in the local society and retention of French identity is one of the main angles of analysis in this study, the plasticity of identity makes the two attitudes compatible. This idea stems from empirical observations on the French-born life in the Valley that this study will progressively uncover.

This study is divided into four parts which correspond to four different scales of analysis. The first scale is the general picture of French immigration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lower Rio Grande Valley. Thus, the first chapter frames and triggers the study by giving points of reference, defining the subject of the study and analyzing the waves of French immigrants in relation to the attracting or repulsing potential of the area. It will look at how these waves of French migrants contributed to the transformation of the local society and were also greatly influenced by the Valley’s socio-economic and military conditions. The material covered in this chapter was drawn exclusively from the Lower Rio Grande Valley Population Schedules, used for the elaboration of U.S. censuses. These sources are essential to assess the immigration of a people in a given area, but have so far only been used to assess the German presence in the Valley.<sup>16</sup>

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16. Gerhard Grytz, “German Immigrants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1850-1920: A Demographic Overview” in *Further Studies in Rio Grande Valley History*, ed. Milo Kearney, Anthony K. Knopp, and Antonio Zavateła (Brownsville: University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, 2006), 145-65.

The second chapter focuses on the integration of the French-born and their patterns of settlement in the Valley. A general analysis of their socio-economic conditions will test the validity of the uniform picture of an educated and exclusively trade-oriented group. As François Lagarde contends concerning the French immigrants in Texas, “a few [are] remembered for their fortunes and achievements and most only as names on tombstones or registers.”<sup>17</sup> Fortunately, these faceless French-born are not nameless, and the Population Schedules can be used to uncover their socio-economic conditions with unexpected accuracy. In relation to their integration in the society, the question of French-born identity will be tackled in this chapter. The relationship Valley French-born maintained with their Frenchness, and the correlation between socio-economic levels and preservation of a French identity, have to be studied in light of the effects of a re-settlement on foreigners’ identity.

The information given by the Population Schedules used extensively in chapters one and two needs to be complemented by other primary sources, such as newspapers and personal narratives. However, the latter sources exclude the economically unsuccessful and uneducated people and thus change the focus to individual notable French-born. Chapter three is an analysis of selected prominent French-born, but it attempts to link them with the larger French population. An emphasis on pragmatic choices is doubtlessly a component of the notability. However, given the general porosity of French-born Valley settlers’ identities, the conciliation of full immersion into the local society and simultaneous preservation of a sense of Frenchness is to be anticipated concerning the French notable men.

The last chapter of this thesis deals with a particular kind of French-born settlers, namely the soldiers and religious men and women who were sent to the area

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17. François Lagarde, “Birth, Stock and Work: French Immigration in Texas,” in *The French in Texas, History, Migration, Culture*, ed. François Lagarde (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 158.



to fulfill a specific mission. These French-born members of the army and Church had an especially strong influence on the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lower Rio Grande Valley because of the official aspect of their duties. Moreover, as members of these institutions, their pattern of integration and relationship to French nationality and identity differed from laymen's. Indeed, they tended to form communities apart which had their own organization. The particularity of their settlement and the predominance of their mission over any other considerations raise the question of the specific relationship these French-born maintained with their French roots, inherited representations and original culture.

Thus, the different chapters of this thesis should offer insights that contribute to understanding both foreign immigrants' experience in the nation, state and borderlands. They will also provide new perspectives on the local history of the Lower Rio Grande Valley in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Chapter 1: French Immigration in the Lower Rio Grande Valley**

### **Defining French Immigration through a Discussion of the Concept of “Frenchness”**

A study of the immigration pattern of the French population in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lower Rio Grande Valley compels in the first place a definition of its actors or subjects. This attempt summons the notion of “Frenchness” which bears the idea of both French nationality and a feeling and willingness to be French. In other words, “Frenchness” amalgamates the concepts of ethnicity, nationality, identity and culture, and because these political situations and individual or communitarian feelings sometimes overlap, but sometimes not, the concept of “Frenchness” is very fluid and hard to grasp. The idea of fluidity of identity is particularly important and emphasized concerning the Lower Rio Grande Valley French settlers because the ideal profile of a French population, born in France, feeling French and displaying distinctive French cultural features appears almost as a mirage in a distant American borderland. Moreover, the way each 19<sup>th</sup> century French settler related to his identity was also shaped by his particular socio-economic level and cultural background, adding even more fluidity to the notion of “Frenchness.” Gerhard Grytz, writing about the German immigration in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, mentions, on a similar note, that “a major problem in studying German immigration is how to define German. Being of German origin is a vague and imprecise concept. German immigrants were an extraordinarily heterogeneous group—they were people from a variety of provinces with linguistic, religious, political, and socio-economic distinctions.” “Moreover,” Grytz adds, “Germany as a nation state did not come into existence until 1871.”<sup>18</sup> At

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18. Grytz, “German Immigrants,” 146.

least, this was not the case for France, whose national unity was never an issue in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In an article on French immigration to Texas, François Lagarde mentions the difficulties that arise from the categories drawn by the U.S. Census Bureau, which, on the one hand, do not cover the potentiality of what being French means, but on the other hand, are the only reliable sources concerning immigration in the state of Texas for the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> Census categories, not recognizing the different realities embraced by the concept of “Frenchness,” establish three groups which actually overlap: the French-born immigrants; the French stock—French-born, second and even third generation U.S. born—; and the francophones, that is the French and French Creole speakers. Thus, the most logical relationship, the one linking French-birth and “Frenchness,” is not always obvious. For example, the Alsatians, people born in Eastern France, possessed profound relations with their German neighbors. Does nationality equal culture, or more precisely did Alsatians, an immigrant population that came in large numbers to Texas, notably in Castroville, consider themselves French?<sup>20</sup> Historians disagree on this matter. Indeed, in his study of the German population in the Rio Grande Valley, Gerhard Grytz wrestles with the disjuncture between ethnicity and nationality and explains that the problem with the U.S. census stems from the fact that it “excludes some individuals who were ethnically German but were born outside those borders, such as Austria-Hungary, and includes some who considered themselves being of a different ethnicity but were born

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19. François Lagarde, “Birth, Stock and Work,” 157.

20. Castroville was established in 1844 by the French entrepreneur Henri Castro. It attracted around 1,120 Alsatian-born immigrants from 1843 to 1869. The colony has preserved an idiosyncratic Alsatian culture up to today. See Wayne M. Ahr, “Henri Castro and Castroville: Alsatian History and Heritage” in *The French in Texas: History, Migration, Culture*, ed. François Lagarde (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 128-141.

within Germany, such as the French of Alsace-Lorraine.”<sup>21</sup> Grytz defines Alsatians, whose ethnicity is not German and whose inclusion in the German population is therefore not justified, as “French of Alsace-Lorraine.” This idea is interestingly echoed in the June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1894 edition of *The Brownsville Herald*, which mentions the willingness of the German government to suppress the French language in Alsace and the resistance of the Alsatian population against this move.<sup>22</sup> Historian Milo Kearney diverges from Grytz’s view, replacing the idea of exclusion with double inclusion: “The Alsatians,” according to Kearney, “are so bilingual in their heritage as to be able to identify themselves as either French or Germans.”<sup>23</sup> Finally, like Grytz, Lagarde seems more one-way oriented on that point, but as opposed to the former, he defines Alsatians as essentially German, claiming that “Alsations are more German by language if not by culture and, after 1871, by annexation.”<sup>24</sup> The “Alsatian case”—people whose nationality was French until 1870, German until 1918, and then French again—is a good representation of the fact that identity goes beyond diplomatic relations, and that nationality is not always a relevant referent to assess people’s identity. Concerning Alsatians, Lagarde also states that “census takers seem to have always registered *Alsations* as *Germans*.”<sup>25</sup> This is true for the U.S. Federal censuses, but not for the Texas Population Schedules which, from 1870 onward, list them as *Alsations*. Besides, considering Alsatians as primarily Alsatians, before any other nationality, is probably the best and most respectful choice. This doesn’t mean Alsatians should not be taken into account in this study, only that their inclusion will

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21. Grytz, “German Immigrants,” 146.

22. *The Brownsville Herald*, June 5, 1894.

23. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 90.

24. Lagarde, “Birth, Stock and Work,” 158.

25. *Ibid.*, 158.

be done on a case by case approach, and especially when it comes to Alsatians' relations with French-born or French stock.

Another difficulty occurs concerning the immigration of French Canadians and Louisianans to 19<sup>th</sup> century Texas. These settlers were not French-born people, but, as French-speakers or French Creole speakers who could be quite easily understood by any French native, they shared some cultural roots with French-born immigrants. The immigration of Cajuns was already important in Texas in the 1820s, when the region was still part of Mexico, due in part to the common willingness of fleeing Anglo-American domination triggered by the inclusion of Louisiana in the United States in 1803.<sup>26</sup> However, the denomination "Cajun" is absent from the Federal censuses and the Texas Population Schedules, and Canadians are only defined as "Quebecois" in the Population Schedules starting from 1880.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the main difficulty for the 19<sup>th</sup> century is to discern who among these settlers shared some French cultural features or was of French descent, and who was not. Up to 1880, when these settlers appear exclusively on registers, the only possible method to reveal their culture is to study their last names. The approximation and deceiving character of this approach appears in the example of a man born in Louisiana and referred to as J.L Hector in the register of internments of the City of Brownsville.<sup>28</sup> His last name, well spread in France, can lead to some suppositions about his French origins, but this expectation is refuted by the Population Schedules which shows that, despite his name and place of birth, John Hector was a black laborer whose parents were born in the U.S. The possibility of any

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26. University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio, *The French Texans*, 1.

27. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas*. Microfilm.

28. Chula T. Griffin and Sam S. Griffin, *Records of Interments in the City Cemetery ... And a Brief History of Brownsville, Texas* (Brownsville: The Griffins, 1987), 19.

French cultural background is therefore very low.<sup>29</sup> The case of John Hector, a free black man who was successful in making a living in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lower Rio Grande Valley, is very interesting for the social history of the southern United States in the post Civil War period. It also exemplifies the difficulties which arise in the present study.

Moreover, recent studies on creolization, defined as a complex process of cultural transformation, prevent any amalgam between French culture and French Creole culture.<sup>30</sup> So as to avoid such an unfortunate confusion, this study only includes systematically French Louisianans and French Canadians in two particular cases: first, when Louisianans and Canadians were second generation French people, a familial situation which can be revealed through censuses from 1880 onward. While this method reduces the risks, it unavoidably excludes some Cajuns or people of French culture from this study. The second case refers to a situation in which French-born or second generation French people and settlers from Louisiana and Canada are mixed in the same household or family. Immigrants coming from regions bordering French territory, mainly the Swiss and Belgians, must also be studied in detail in the two cases mentioned above. Indeed, Switzerland was divided between three cultural areas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Italian, German and French. Similarly, Belgians born in Wallonia were francophones. However, it is very hard to know when Belgians or Swiss were related to French culture or identity. A last name of French consonance,

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29. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas, Cameron County*, 221. Microfilm.

30. As shown by scholars like Richard Price and Sidney Mintz, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

like the ones the Swiss Fritz Montondon<sup>31</sup> or the Belgian Julian Reye<sup>32</sup> bear, is not reliable enough to be considered a mirror of a settler's French culture. In his study, Grytz seems to deny the Swiss any link with French culture or identity by mixing them with Austrians in a table representing the ethnicity of the foreigners in the Valley.<sup>33</sup> Such an amalgam is equally contestable. Thus, out of practicality and respect of nationalities and identities, this study focuses on population born in France. It includes Alsatians, but always refers to them as such. People from Quebec, Belgium, Switzerland and Louisiana are only included in the two cases mentioned earlier.

Finally, the problem of second-generation French immigrants—namely the sons or daughters of French parents, or simply of a French father or mother, who were born in the Lower Rio Grande Valley or in Mexico—needs to be tackled. First, the lack of data on the settlers' origin creates difficulties. Indeed, when they were living by themselves, settlers were only clearly indicated as second generation as late as 1880, when the U.S. censuses started revealing the nationality of the father and mother of each settler. This problem is not a huge handicap in this study, because French immigration started in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in the 1830s-1840s, and therefore second-generation settlers old enough to live alone were not numerous before the 1870s-1880s. The biggest difficulties when tackling the second (and third) generation of French settlers are again related to culture and identities. We can indeed wonder if these settlers kept some links with French culture, or if their country of birth turned them into Rio Grande Valley inhabitants devoid of any features pertaining to the idea

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31. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas, Cameron County*, 281. Microfilm.

32. *Ibid.*, 79.

33. Grytz, "German Immigrants," Table 10, 160.

of “Frenchness.” The vagueness of the concept of “Frenchness” highlighted earlier is thus complicated by questioning of its resistance and permeability to foreign influences. Thus, the idea of fluid identities is an important element to consider concerning French immigration and settlement in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

### **Patterns of French Immigration to the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Quantifying the Phenomenon.**

French-born came to the area as early as in the 1820s-1830s, especially in Matamoros. From 1850 to 1900, the number of French-born settlers who emigrated to the left bank of the Lower Rio Grande Valley ranged from 35 to 126 (see table 2). During this period, they never represented more than 0.72% of the total Lower Rio Grande Valley population. However, French people were proportionally more numerous in the Valley than in the United States or in Texas in general, even after 1880, which is not the case for Irish and Germans who settled in the area. French people who came to the Valley did so individually, usually for a short period, and settled mainly in Brownsville. From 1870 to 1900, except for Starr County, the number of French-born settled in the Lower Rio Grande Valley progressively decreased, but many second-generation French people stayed in the area and outnumbered the number of French-born by 1880.

Before 1850, it is hard to know with certainty the number and proportion of French immigrants to Texas. Indeed, the first comprehensive statistical data of the population was gathered in the first Texas census in 1850, five years after the annexation of the state to the Union. Grytz says that, despite the lack of sources, “it is evident that several Germans had settled in the area during the 1830s and 1840s.”<sup>34</sup> A

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34. Ibid., 146.



similar statement can be made concerning the French presence. Kearney even suggests that the initial influx of people of French culture in the area can be documented in the 1820s.<sup>35</sup> This early immigration is indeed confirmed by some fragmentary sources which can be found in the Matamoros archives. This city was then the biggest settlement of the Rio Grande region and was part of the state of Coahuila and Texas. French immigrants are included in reports of passenger arrivals, which list the number of passengers and their nationality, and the (incomplete) lists of applications for “Cartas de Seguridad” (letters of security) which were required for any foreigners who wanted to engage in commerce in the area.<sup>36</sup>

According to these two documents, French-born population was among the most numerically important foreign elements of Matamoros. Referring to the reports of passenger arrivals, from December 4, 1830, to April 8, 1831, 13 vessels arrived in Matamoros, bringing 67 passengers, of which four were French. If Spaniards were at that time the most numerous European passengers, they fell far behind French population in the passenger arrivals from September 19, 1831, to June 20, 1832. At this period, out of the 85 passengers listed, eight were Frenchmen, far behind Americans but in third position after the nine Irish passengers. This data is representative of the progressive increase of the French migration in the area which reached a peak in the late 1830s. Indeed, from December 11, 1837, to April 28, 1838, eight vessels brought a total of 35 passengers of which eight were French. Among the European-born who reached Matamoros at that time, the French were the more important numerically, whether it was to settle there or simply to travel, a point which

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35. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 85.

36. Graf, “Economic History,” 46.

cannot be determined with certainty.<sup>37</sup> The number of Frenchmen in Matamoros is still important in the 1850s. This can be analyzed through a study of the requests for “Carta de Seguridad,” letters which permitted the recipient to conduct business without too much restriction in exchange for a fee.<sup>38</sup> In 1851, out of the 94 applications for the acquisition of a “Carta de Seguridad,” 39 were made by Frenchmen, i.e. 41% of all the requests.<sup>39</sup>

The nature of the French presence in Matamoros cannot be determined through these documents. It is possible that some, if not most of the French-born, could have been simply passing visitors with commercial purposes. Moreover, whatever their strong proportion among other foreigners, the French constituted a numerical minority of the people in the region. Indeed, as Leroy P. Graf says: “Foreigners constituted only a small percentage of the entire population, the bulk of the people being Mexicans—a few of them Creoles, but most of them *mestizos* or Indians.”<sup>40</sup> Eventually, in the early 1850s, the French presence in the Valley, still proportionally important in Matamoros, was not concentrated in the Mexican city any more. The integration of Texas in the U.S. led to the creation or development of settlements north of the Rio Grande where French people or settlers of French culture immigrated. As opposed to the French immigration in Northern Mexico, this flow of French immigrants who settled on American soil can be accurately measured. Thus, Gerhard Grytz’s statement that “no conclusive statistical data can be gathered for German

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37. Ibid., Table IV.

38. Ibid., 48.

39. Ibid., Table V.

40. Ibid., 49.

immigrants in Texas, and for this matter the Lower Rio Grande region, before 1850” is also true for the French immigrants.<sup>41</sup>

The integration of Texas in the United States in 1845 led to the first real compilation of names, sex, handicaps, occupations and educational framings of the people settled in the region. This was made under the form of the 1850 U.S. Federal Census which for the first time included Texas. Subsequent Texas censuses, carried out at the beginning of every new decade, are useful tools to assess the French presence in the state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the information contained in these primary sources raises many problems. In the 1850 U.S. Federal Census, French origin is attributed to settlers bearing “French surnames,” a vague and unreliable criterion.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, at the county level, the 1850 and 1860 U.S. Federal censuses only give the number of people listed and the number of foreigners, but not their country of birth. However, this problem can be overcome through the U.S. Censuses’ Population Schedules. These primary sources are “the manuscript schedules of the census, the original form on which the enumerators recorded the census information.”<sup>43</sup> These sources give detailed information on each settler recorded in a given area, and as such are more accurate and reliable than the U.S. Federal Censuses. The 1890 Lower Rio Grande Valley Population Schedules are, however, lacking. In fact, the 1890 U.S. Population Schedules were entirely destroyed in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: in 1921, an accidental fire burnt down 25% of the 1890 schedules,

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41. Grytz, “German Immigrants,” 146.

42. Terry G. Jordan, “Population Origins in Texas, 1850,” *Geographical Review* 59, no. 2 (Jan. 1969), 85.

43. *Ibid.*, 84.

and in 1933, the remaining 75% were declared useless for historical research and subsequently destroyed.<sup>44</sup>

The U.S Federal Censuses confirm the general statement that the French, as opposed to other Europeans, have never emigrated in mass to the United States.<sup>45</sup> From 1821 to 1870, the number of French-born settlers increased, creating “a small but constant flow of immigration” (see table 1).<sup>46</sup> One of the main particularities of the French immigration in the United States is its precocity. From 1821 to 1830, French-born population in the United States reached 8,407 elements and ranked third for European immigrants, after Irish and English but before the German population, an impressive position which did not last long. During the following decade, French immigration increased by more than five times, reaching a total of 45,575 French immigrants landing on the U.S. shores from 1831 to 1840. In 1851, 20,120 French people immigrated to the United States, seemingly the biggest annual figure for the 19<sup>th</sup> century French immigration.<sup>47</sup> French population reached a peak for the century in 1870 and started decreasing in absolute numbers thereafter. The decrease of the French representation among other foreigners and the U.S. population as a whole had, however, already started during the 1860s (see table 3).

When the immigration of French-born population in the United States is compared with the immigration of the French-born population in Texas, some

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44. Kellee Blake, “First in the Path of the Firemen: The Fate of the 1890 Population Census,” in *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives and Records Administration* 28, no. 1 (Spring 1996), 64-81.

45. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 85.

46. Lagarde “Birth, Stock and Work,” 160.

47. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of Place of Birth of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census, 1880* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1883). Microfilm.

similarities appear (see table 2). Indeed, as François Lagarde states, “French immigration in Texas has always been very small.”<sup>48</sup> The fact that the French population in Texas ranges from 0.07 to 0.3% of the state population for the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century makes it easily comparable to the French population in the United States at the same period, which ranged from 0.14 to 0.35%. The slight difference between the United States and the Texas French-born immigration can be explained by the absence of large urban areas in Texas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these latter being magnets for French people bound for the United States during that period. Indeed, the U.S. Federal Censuses mention that in 1880, 38.29% of the French immigrants were concentrated in the U.S. largest cities. The biggest French community on American soil was to be found in New York. This was not an idiosyncratic situation; 38.78% of German-born also settled in the largest cities, and Irish and Spanish people, with respectively 45.26% and 52.49%, formed an even more urban type of immigrants.<sup>49</sup> Thus, French immigration in Texas seems to make no particular exception to the big picture, but the details reveal some interesting facts.

First, French immigrants were more durably attracted by Texas than by the United States as a whole. Absolute numbers stress a steady French-born immigration up to 1890 for Texas, and only 1870 for the United States. On a similar note, the proportion of French-born reached its peak in 1870 for Texas, but in 1860 for the United States. Second, the fact that the proportion of French-born was only more important in Texas than in the United States in 1850 proves that French immigration followed very quickly the expansion of the U.S. territory. Third, the proportion of

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48. Lagarde, “Birth, Stock and Work,” 158.

49. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of Place of Birth of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census, 1880*.

French-born among other foreigners was higher in Texas than in the United States. This might be due in part to the fact that French settlers, more than any other Europeans, attempted to organize colonies on Texas soil. This gave birth to Champ d'Asile, founded in 1818,<sup>50</sup> Castroville in 1844,<sup>51</sup> Icarie in 1848,<sup>52</sup> and La Réunion in 1855.<sup>53</sup> Except for Castroville, these settlements were short-lived, and few of the settlers remained in Texas after the failure of each endeavor. However, they attracted settlers, most of whom were French and/or Alsatians, who had a significant impact on the global foreign immigration in the state. Among these immigrants are the 1,800 Alsatians who followed Henry Castro to Texas between 1843 and 1869<sup>54</sup> and the 150 French, Swiss and Belgian who joined La Réunion in the winter of 1855.<sup>55</sup> The

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50. Betje Black Klier, "Champ D'Asile, Texas," in *The French in Texas: History, Migration, Culture*, ed. François Lagarde (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 79. Champ d'Asile was founded in March 1818 in southeastern Texas, on the Lower Trinity River, by former General Charles Lallemand to welcome members of Napoleon Bonaparte's defeated army. In August 1818, the colony was disbanded and in October of the same year, its fortifications were destroyed. Thus, nine months after the creation of Champ d'Asile, every single imperial veteran had left Texas.

51. Lorenzo Castro, *Immigration from Alsace and Lorraine: A Brief Sketch of the History of Castro's Colony in Western Texas* (New York: G.W. Wheat, Printers, 1970), 2. In 1844, with a colonization contract from the Republic of Texas, Henri Castro established the colony of Castroville on the Medina River, about twenty-five miles west of San Antonio. Although Henri Castro was French-born, the colony he founded is better defined as specifically Alsatian, at least concerning the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, he brought 1,120 emigrants from Alsace to Texas. Castroville survived Henri Castro's death. Since the 1970s, Castroville's inhabitants are engaged in various efforts to revive the settlement's Alsatian heritage.

52. Jonathan Beecher, "Building Utopia in the Promised Land: Icarians and Fourierists in Texas," in *The French in Texas: History, Migration, Culture*, ed. François Lagarde (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2003), 197. In 1848, Etienne Cabet, accompanied by 69 members of the Icarian Society of France, founded the colony of Icarie about ten miles southwest of present Denton. These settlers, mostly writers and journalists, planned on establishing a socialist state which would respect the ideals of perfect democracy and universal suffrage. The Icarians faced famine and disease and eventually relocated to Illinois in 1849.

53. *Ibid.*, 210. La Réunion was founded in 1855 by the French socialist Victor Considerant. Located west of Dallas, this colony was organized along the utopian ideas developed by the French intellectual Charles Fourier. By mid-July 1855, La Réunion reached 130 people, all French, Belgians and Swiss. The settlers however suffered from the dry weather, and experienced shortage of water and food. By spring 1856, Considerant had given up on La Réunion but some settlers remained in the area. By 1860, half the original colonists had made their way back to Europe, the other half being established around Dallas.

54. Ahr, "Henry Castro and Castroville," 128.

55. Beecher, "Building Utopia," 208.

Frenchmen and women who settled in these places constituted a very particular type of immigrants, they were all indoctrinated by capitalist, socialist or Catholic ideology,” and had therefore an unusual faith in their immigration.<sup>56</sup>

As opposed to these organized settlements, the French immigration in the Lower Rio Grande Valley was based on “an individual enterprise,” the usual pattern for the French immigration all over the United States.<sup>57</sup> Despite this fact, an exceptional proportion of French settled there during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see table 2). Indeed, the proportion of French people in the Valley was globally double that of the French-born in Texas from 1850 to 1900 (see table 2). The pattern of French-born immigration in the Lower Rio Grande Valley seems at first glance more similar to the Texan one than to the U.S. one. Indeed, French immigration in the Valley reached a peak both in absolute and relative numbers in 1870 with 126 settlers, not in 1860. Soon after the annexation of Texas to the United States, 647 French-born were already settled in the state, a good proportion of which could be found living in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Indeed, with 61 French-born in 1850, the Lower Rio Grande Valley, a frontier region devoid of any consistent urban centers in the mid-nineteenth century, accounted for 9.32% of the whole French-born population in Texas.

The unusual proportion of French immigrants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lower Rio Grande Valley appears even more vivid when compared to other foreigners whose presence in this area was noticeable. However, this conclusion does not appear at first glance. Indeed, French people were proportionally less numerous among foreigners in the Valley than in Texas or in the United States as a whole (see table 3). This misperception arises from the fact that Mexican people, who constituted the overwhelming majority of the Valley population throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were

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56. Lagarde, “Birth, Stock and Work,” 164.

57. *Ibid.*, 164.

considered foreigners in the censuses, even if most of them were already settled in the area when the territory was under Mexican sovereignty.<sup>58</sup> The shifting boundaries blur the perspectives. Indeed, 80% of the population was Mexican at the frontier and as late as in 1870, more than 61% of the Lower Rio Grande Valley population was still Mexican-born, an impressive figure considering that most of the remaining settlers were second or third-generation Mexicans (see table 4).<sup>59</sup> The predominance of the Mexican population in both figures and historiography has overshadowed the French idiosyncratic situation in the area. Thus, the scale of comparisons needs to be changed to really assess the phenomenon. To do so, this study focuses on the one hand on the proportion of each foreign country' immigrants among the Texas population as a whole, and, on the other hand, on the proportion of the same foreign country's immigrants among the Lower Rio Grande Valley population (see table 4). This method illuminates important features. First, Germans and Irish from 1880 onwards were much less important in the Valley than in Texas as a whole. French people, on the contrary, were always more numerous proportionally in the region than in Texas or in the United States. Actually, the French are the only foreign population along with the Spanish (and obviously the Mexicans) to be proportionally more important in the Lower Rio Grande Valley than in the state up to 1900. Moreover, the general decrease in European population which can be assessed for 1880 was smaller for the French population, and this phenomenon kept extending up to 1900. Thus, from 9.78% of the non-Mexican population of the Valley in 1880, the French-born population reached 14.55% in 1890 and 17.07% in 1900 (see table 3). In 1900, the

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58. Gonzáles, *Life Along the Border*, 109. Actually, from Gonzáles's perspective, the census categories completely invert the social reality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lower Rio Grande Valley for "the counties in which these people lived were run by Mexicans, and everywhere, with the exception of Brownville, the Americans were considered foreigners."

59. Jordan, "Population Origins in Texas," 86; Grytz, "German Immigrants," 145.



proportion of French born was almost the same as Germans and even surpassed the Irish, a remarkable phenomenon considering that Germany and Ireland are immigration countries, but not France.

Until the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, French-born who settled in the Lower Rio Grande Valley concentrated in Cameron County, and more especially in Brownsville where their presence was remarkable. Population Schedules can be used independently to assess the repartition of the French immigrants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Indeed, these sources list the French-born population for each precinct and notable settlements. An analysis of these elements shows the high concentration of French-born in Cameron County among the total of French population in the Rio Grande Valley from 1860 to 1880 (see table 5). Furthermore, 81 to 88% of the French Cameron County settlers were living in Brownsville from 1860 to 1900, confirming the urban character of French-born immigration. Starr County saw the settlement of almost all the other French settlers of the Rio Grande Valley, due in part to the existence of Rio Grande City where half of the French population of the county was living between 1860 and 1880. Hidalgo, a rural area, was almost completely avoided by French-born for all the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, studying the French immigration in the Lower Rio Grande Valley is almost equivalent to studying the French implantation in Brownsville, Rio Grande City, and to a lesser extent Roma (for 1860), and the military settlements of Fort Brown and Fort Ringgold. The unusual proportion of French settlers in the two biggest towns of the area had a strong influence on the general atmosphere of these settlements. Indeed, according to Jovita Gonzáles, if Roma remained essentially a Mexican settlement,<sup>60</sup> the Americans and foreigners who came to Rio Grande City as early as in the 1850s turned it into “a cosmopolitan little

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60. Gonzáles, *Life Along the Border*, 61.

town.”<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Brownsville shared this multicultural flavor that Milo Kearney associates with the French presence, when he states that, in addition to English, Spanish, and German, the sound of French was commonly heard in the city.<sup>62</sup> In the two last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the statistics concerning the repartition of the French population in the Rio Grande region highlight a turn in French choice for settlement. Indeed, although in 1880 the French population was still primarily settled in Cameron County, things had changed in 1900 in favor of Starr County. Considering the urban character of the French immigration, this remarkable turn is doubtlessly a reflection of either the loss of opportunities offered by Brownsville or of the new attraction of Rio Grande City where French-born were by then as numerous as in the biggest settlement of the left bank of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Generally, French people immigrated to the Lower Rio Grande Valley for a short length of time. Providing settler’s names, the Population Schedules show that the evolution of French immigration was mainly based on a constant renewing of settlers, not on a strong base of French people that was expanded by newcomers up to 1870, and then progressively reduced. Population Schedules, especially regarding names, are not devoid of any flaws. In addition to inconsistencies in the spelling of names, which for example turns Egley to Egly or Mallet to Malley from one census to another, it is sometimes very hard to decipher the handwriting of those who contributed to the production of these documents. To that extent, the data concerning the length of residence for each immigrant are just estimations. Furthermore, the French population could have left the left bank of the Rio Grande to settle on the right one and were, therefore, still living in the area but not captured by the U.S. censuses.

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61. *Ibid.*, 62.

62. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 88.

Thus, out of the 61 French-born who were living in the Valley in 1850, only nine—that is, 14.8%—were still settled in the area in 1860, and two—3.3%—in 1870, including one, John Decker, a baker who was still living in Rio Grande City in 1880. Decker, Victor Egly and Father Vignolles were the only Frenchmen to stay 30 years on the left bank of the Rio Grande.<sup>63</sup> The only French settlers who were listed four times in the Population Schedules are Sister Stanislava and Sister St Pierre. However, the case of French nuns and priests has to be handled with care. Indeed, their coming into the area did not stem from a choice but from a superior assignment. In other words, they were sent to the Valley in the name of god to fulfill an evangelizing mission. To this extent, their inclusion in the big picture is inflating the average length of residence of the French population in the area and is somewhat misleading. Despite this fact, the proportion of French people who stayed in the area remains low; only 17.5% of the French-born who were settled in the Valley in 1860 were still here in 1870, and only 19% of the French-born present in the area in 1870 had not left for another place in 1880. Thus, the French population of the lower Rio Grande Valley for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was almost entirely renewed every ten years. That most of the French people settled for a short period of time in the Rio Grande Valley should not seem surprising. François Lagarde implies that this phenomenon was common in Texas, suggesting that although the permanent French settlers are those who usually attract the gaze of the historian, the “others [who] moved on or returned to France” should not be forgotten.<sup>64</sup> A comparison with the German immigration in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Lower Rio Grande Valley proves that a short period of residence is not

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63. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas, Cameron County and Starr County*. Microfilm; *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*. Microfilm; *1880 Census: Texas, Starr County*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Texas*. Microfilm.

64. Lagarde, “Birth, Stock and Work,” 165.

specific to French-born. In the words of Grytz, “very few Germans resided in the Valley for a longer period of time and a considerable impermanence in this population is observable. The majority of nineteenth-century Germans left the Valley again after a very short period of residence.”<sup>65</sup> Due mainly to the decrease of the French immigration in the Rio Grande region in the two last decades of the century, the proportion of settlers who remained in the area is inflated. Indeed, out of the 80 French-born present on the left bank of the Rio Grande Valley in 1880, nine were still here in 1900, representing only 11.25% of the total of French people settled in the area in 1880, but composing 25% of the French population 20 years later.

The lack of newcomers and the decrease of the French population after 1870 can be both tempered and illustrated through an analysis of the second-generation French people living in the Rio Grande Valley in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, when the French immigration slowed down in the area, many Rio Grande natives of French mother and/or father were old enough to found a family, prolonging the influence their parents had in the area and giving a long-lasting impact to the French immigration process in the Valley. This second generation can be measured with accuracy only from 1880 with the addition of the place of birth of the father and mother of each person listed in the Population Schedules. From 1880 onwards, these sources reveal the extensions of the French settlers’ families via their sons and daughters. In 1880, 62 French-born and 95 second-generation French were settled in Cameron County, and 18 French-born and 24 second-generation French people were living in Starr County (see table 1). In the next twenty years, many second-generation French people previously settled in Cameron County left the area, and their numbers were reduced to 44 settlers in 1900. This, however, is almost three times the number of French-born in

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65. Grytz, “German Immigrants,” 148.

the area, showing that second-generation French people were more inclined to stay in the Valley than French natives. In 1900, the second-generation French settlers were also of a different type than in 1880, at least for Cameron County. Indeed, in this county in 1880, 75.9% of them were living with their parents for only 36.4% in 1900. Moreover, Cameron County in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw an accretion in the number of third-generation French people. They probably became at this time more numerous than the second generation, but this hypothesis cannot be confirmed with the primary sources available.<sup>66</sup> Starr County did not experience the same phenomenon, mainly because an important wave of new French immigrants came there between 1880 and 1900.<sup>67</sup> Thus, French people of the second generation living at their parents' house still numbered 68.7% in 1900 in Starr County; moreover, these same settlers numbered only 16, that is less than the number of French-born settled there at this time (see table 5). Studied in relationship with the number of French-born, the number of second-generation French people shows on the one hand the dynamism of the French immigration in Starr County at the turn of the century. On the other hand, the progressive outnumbering of the French-born by the second generation, and of the second generation by the third in Cameron County is an indicator of the scaling down of French immigration there and in Brownsville specifically.

The rise of the second-generation French people and the decline of the French-born in Cameron County since 1870, like the new attraction, even if relative, of Starr County in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century deserve to be questioned. Before that, explanations needs to be found for the precocity of the French immigration in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and its unusual proportions for Texas and the U.S., two facts that

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66. *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*. Microfilm. For the third generation, we cannot rely on origins any longer but only on names; this method is thus less accurate and reliable.

67. *1900 Census: Texas, Starr 1900*. Microfilm.

combined to create an idiosyncratic situation. More generally, the different waves of French immigration in the area since the 1820s have to be examined. In other words, the causes—internal and external, local and international—which can illuminate the patterns of immigration of the French population in the Rio Grande Region need to be discussed. Thus, the next section examines the reasons why French emigrated to the Valley, or left it, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Coming to the Valley and Leaving it: Causes of Attraction and Factors of Repulsion.**

French immigration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Rio Grande Valley followed principally the economic opportunities of the area. Thus, French immigrants concentrated in the commercial centers of the Valley. From 1820 to 1848, French-born came essentially to Matamoros, benefiting from favorable immigration laws enacted by the Mexican government. From 1848 to 1900, French settlers were mostly concentrated in Matamoros and Brownsville—many of them leaving regularly one city for the other according to the economic health and security guarantees of each area—and to a lesser extent in Rio Grande City. Moreover, these urban centers offered a cosmopolitan atmosphere French people generally looked for in their new settlement, but were not safe havens. Violence and insecurity were indeed part of the frontier life, but the adventurous French people who settled in the Valley were willing to take the risk. However, the lure of a better life, promised by the creation of Brownsville in 1848 but especially by the development of commercial activities during the Civil War, did not last until the end of the century. After 1870, the economic decline of the area caused the decrease in number of French immigrants, especially in Cameron County.

The French presence in the Valley was noticeable as early as in the 1830s. In part, this was caused by the benevolent attitude of the Government of Mexico toward immigrants. Indeed, the article 1 of the Colonization Laws of the state of Coahuila and Texas, passed on March 24, 1825, stipulated the willingness of the Mexican nation to “protect the liberty, property, and civil rights of all foreigners, who profess the Roman Catholic religion, the established religion of the empire.”<sup>68</sup> The requirement was particularly favorable for Catholic French settlers. Article 4 of the same law also provided generous offers of lands for foreign settlers who had the “liberty to designate any vacant land” like any other “native of the country.”<sup>69</sup> In addition, the French, along with other Europeans, did not suffer, as opposed to Anglo-Americans, from the federal Law of April 6, 1830, which prohibited further immigration into Mexico from the United States.<sup>70</sup> Doubtlessly, the Matamoros area was directly concerned by the 1825 state Law, for, as Graf says, “the importance of increasing the relatively thin population of the Rio Grande Region was early recognized.”<sup>71</sup> Moreover, these general laws were accompanied by some acts which encouraged settlers to immigrate to the Lower Rio Grande Valley. A good example is an act dated October 19, 1833, which offered to some landless inhabitants of the Valley the opportunity to buy “as much as five leagues from the state at \$10 a league” with no possible land alienation for twenty years.<sup>72</sup> The Lower Rio Grande Valley was not, however, a particular case,

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68. Mexico, and John Dominguez, *The Constitution of the Republic of Mexico and of the State of Coahuila & Texas: Containing Also an Abridgement of the Laws of the General and State Governments . . . Documents Relating to the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company, the Grants to Messrs. Wilson and Exter and to Col. John Dominguez* (New York: Ludwig and Tolefree, 1832), 11.

69. *Ibid.*, 11.

70. Ernest Wallace, *Documents of Texas History* (Austin: Steck Co., 1963), 67.

71. Graf, “Economic History,” 95.

72. *Ibid.*, 99.

and these laws are not sufficient to explain the early attraction to French people to relocate into the region.

The colonization laws contemplated broader colonizing projects, however, as far as the French immigration in the Rio Grande region is concerned, such projects were never fulfilled. Under colonization laws, “foreigners were to be admitted to colonize if they would register as domiciled in the state and bring in one hundred families, or, if on the northern frontier, fifty families.”<sup>73</sup> If, thanks to an 1833 act, it became quite easy for a foreigner to radicate himself and subsequently get the status of denizen required to participate in a colonization endeavor, this type of enterprise always resulted in failure in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.<sup>74</sup> This doesn’t mean that attempts to establish Europeans, and even specifically French people in the area were not made. Indeed, so as to establish buffer colonies of foreigners in the Rio Grande Valley, the Independent Republic of Texas set up colonization projects with French and Belgian companies. A contract made with Alexandre Bourgeois and Armand Ducos envisioned the settlement of five hundred families along the Rio Grande, from its mouth to a point opposite Reynosa.<sup>75</sup> However, like other colonization projects in the area, it was never fulfilled. The latest organized colonizing effort involving French settlers occurred in October 1865, during the French Imperial venture in Mexico.<sup>76</sup> The Frenchman M.F. Maury, as Imperial Commissioner of Colonization, procured a

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73. Ibid., 95.

74. Ibid., 99.

75. Ibid., 106.

76. The French Intervention in Mexico lasted from January 1862 to March 1867. It was carried out by Napoleon III who, under the pretext of guaranteeing the stability of the Mexican government, established Maximilian of Austria as Emperor of Mexico. This involvement in North America failed. Maximilian was assassinated in 1867, and the French troops withdrew. For a more detailed account of the event, see Percy F. Martin, *Maximilian in Mexico, the Story of the French Intervention: 1861-1867* (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 1914).



contract to establish French and Spanish immigrants from the Basque county in the area of the Laguna Madre, near Matamoros. This colonizing enterprise had a clear geopolitical goal, the establishment of a sheltered harbor which would decrease the settler's commercial dependence to the United States. The advantages of such a settlement were again numerous for the contractor, Numa Dousdebes, and the French settlers. Among other benefits, the colony was granted free three leagues by the government, and the settlers were exempted from military service for five years; the project was, however, never carried out.<sup>77</sup> Thus, French immigration in the Valley in the 19<sup>th</sup> century remained based on individual initiatives. This situation made them inclined to look for advantages provided by the colonization laws, but considering the random character of individual settlements and the unusual number of French people in the area, it seems logical to assume that their coming into the Valley was motivated by more obvious and specific reasons.

Milo Kearney suggests two specific factors explaining the proportionally large immigration of French people in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Kearney states that "it was natural that the French would feel more at home" in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, because it was "a Spanish-speaking area."<sup>78</sup> The common Latin roots of the French and Spanish languages could have indeed facilitated the integration of French population in the local life, and, therefore, their willingness to settle there. This argument makes even more sense considering that the only other Europeans who were proportionally more numerous in the Valley than in Texas for all the 19<sup>th</sup> century were Spaniards (see table 4). Kearney then adds that French settlers or merchants must have been attracted there because they had good relations with the Hispanic population, due

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77. Graf, "Economic History," 109.

78. Kearney, "Historical Sketch," 86.

to some extent to the general diplomatic cooperation between the Spanish and the French Empire since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>79</sup> However, when the first French settlers arrived in the Rio Grande region, that is to say in the 1820s-1830s, they had to deal with the Mexican Republic and its population, not the Spanish Empire and its colonists. This amalgam makes Kearney's statement debatable to the extent that the benevolent attitude of a new and still very unstable government toward French settlers was far from being guaranteed. In the same vein, it is doubtful that Mexicans, who just gained their independence, would be inclined toward amicable relations with the French population who were trying to dominate, along with other foreigners, the commercial life of the area. An event most historians refer to today as the "Pastry War" supports this objection. This conflict between the French and the Mexican government was indeed triggered by the sack of a French pastry cook's store by Mexican officers during the military insurrection of 1828. The French who had lost property during this conflict asked the Mexican government for reimbursements, but their demands were never met. Strained relations degenerated into conflict between Mexico and France in 1838.<sup>80</sup> In November 1838, in retaliation against Mexico, the French government sent Rear Admiral Charles Baudin to capture the port of Vera Cruz. Eugène Maissin, Baudin's auxiliary during the Vera Cruz siege, wrote about the Pastry War, attributing its causes to the willingness of the Mexican government to get in conflict with a foreign country so as to unite the Mexican nation against a common enemy. Moreover, the French officer mentions that this diplomatic crisis was fueled by the Spanish Clerical Party of Mexico because it forced France to intervene and

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79. Ibid., 86.

80. Louis E. Brister, "Johann von Racknitz: German Empresario and Soldier of Fortune in Texas and Mexico, 1832-1848," in *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 99, no. 1 (July 1995), under "Pastry War," <http://www.tshaonline.org/shqonline/apager.php?vol=099&pag=073> (accessed September 18, 2010), 70-71.

therefore created the possibility of having a Bourbon faithful to the Catholic cause on the Mexican throne.<sup>81</sup> If these factors are not to be blindly accepted as true causes, it reveals the vision French officials, along, probably, with the rest of the French population, had of Mexico at the time, in other words an unstable, unreliable nation.

The instability of the Mexican government and the lack of guarantee of an easy integration were not the only problems French immigrants had to face in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Indeed, during most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a series of local revolts and rebellions plunged the area into a quasi-permanent state of violence. General Antonio Canales' revolt of 1840, leading to the short-lived republic of the Rio Grande, and José Mariá Carbajal's rebellion of 1851, aimed at the openness of trade between Mexico and its northern neighbor, were local uprisings with unfortunate material consequences for the area's inhabitants.<sup>82</sup> With the raids led by Juan N. Cortina between 1859 and 1873, insecurity in the Valley reached a peak, even if threats focused on Anglo-American properties and lives and foreigners were not directly concerned. Jovita Gonzáles argues that only with the Porfirio Díaz presidency in Mexico, that is to say in the 1870s, were international raids brought to a close in the frontier region;<sup>83</sup> nevertheless, Gonzáles continues, "the period from 1865 to 1910 is [still] characterized on the border as an age of bandit raids and cattle thief raids."<sup>84</sup> Graf notes that "these robbers were usually army deserters who roamed the country in gangs of ten to one hundred men attacking all parties which seemed to provide

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81. Eugène Maissin, *The French in Mexico and Texas, 1838-1839* (Salado, TX: A. Jones Press, 1961), 27-28.

82. Gonzáles, *Life Along the Border*, 53-55.

83. W.H. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities, Brownsville Texas, Matamoros Mexico, of the Border and the Country of the Lower Rio Grande Valley* (Brownsville: Herbert Davenport Memorial Fund, Brownsville Historical Association, 1959), 1.

84. Gonzáles, *Life Along the Border*, 66.

profitable plunder.”<sup>85</sup> Since French settlers were concentrated in large proportion in the cities, few would suffer from cattle rustling. However, violence was not confined to the countryside or highways. Town streets were often the theaters of assassination.<sup>86</sup> The register of internments in the Brownsville City Cemetery shows that the use of private violence, commonplace in 19<sup>th</sup> century American western states, did not spare French settlers. For example, Vidal Loholla, a French barber, was gunned down on March, 23, 1874, at age 48.<sup>87</sup>

If French immigrants were aware of these risks before settling in the area, a situation that seems conceivable considering the importance of such a migration, it is hard to imagine that they could have been devoid of any sense of adventure or, for some of them, of any experience of the life in a distant and wild area. This statement can hardly be submitted to a global analysis; however, some examples of French settlers who, before coming to the Valley, had experienced a settlement in distant, if not wild areas, can be found in the U.S. censuses. Their background confirms that some French settlers of the Valley sought adventure on the frontier. A good example is the Laroche family who were living in Cameron County in 1880.<sup>88</sup> The head of the family, 67 year old French-born Constant Laroche, was a sailor established in the Commissioner Precinct n°1 of Cameron County, that is outside of Brownsville city, with his German wife Elisabeth, 65 years old, his two sons, his daughter-in-law, and his two grandsons. His first son Armand, 37 years old, was born in New York and his second son, Constant, 24 years old, in Louisiana. These places of birth reveal the

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85. Graf, “Economic History” 123.

86. Ibid., 123.

87. Griffin and Griffin, *Records of Internments*, 23.

88. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas, Cameron County*. Microfilm.

itinerary of the head of the family from the East Coast to the mouth of the Mississippi. Equally interesting is the situation of his two sons, for both were sailors, reproducing their father's adventuresome and cosmopolitan character. Indeed, Constant, the youngest, was married to Catherine, 22 years old, who was born in Louisiana of Spanish and Irish origins. This adventurous spirit was even transmitted to the grandsons who can be found in the 1900 Cameron Census.<sup>89</sup> Out of the two sons of Constant (junior) present in the family household in 1880, one named Constant settled down on his own in the same area as his grandfather with a Texan woman named Lizzi, of a Spanish father and a Louisianan mother, and established himself as fly pilot. He settled next to his father who had in the meanwhile two new sons with his wife Catherine: Frank, 9 years old, and William, 18 years old. William was born in Texas and was a sailor like his father and grandfather. Equally interesting, Joseph was born in Louisiana, a fact which testifies to the migrations of the family between the Rio Grande Valley and Louisiana.

If few French immigrants who settled in the Rio Grande area traveled as much as the Laroques or reproduced such a cosmopolitan familial pattern on several generations, this fascinating family's experience exemplifies the attractive potential of the area for French-born immigrants. The fact that Constant Laroche Senior had first settled in New York, then came to Louisiana and finally to the Lower Rio Grande Valley reveals an important element. Indeed, this migration underlines what the 1880 Federal Census shows concerning the concentration of French people in New York and New Orleans. In other words, French settlers were inclined to settle in places where the French presence was quite remarkable and were primarily attracted to urban

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89. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Texas, Cameron County*. Microfilm.

areas. Matamoros, founded in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>90</sup> and reaching 7,000 inhabitants—10,000 with the surrounding country subject to its government—in 1829 was therefore a possible option of settlement for French immigrants as early as in the 1820s.<sup>91</sup>

French immigration to cities is also explained by the economic advantage provided by urban areas. As François Lagarde points out, it is legitimate to think that “immigration was always economic.”<sup>92</sup> The real reason for the boom of French immigration in the 1820s seems to be the economic opportunity offered by the openness of the Matamoros port, and subsequently of the whole area, to foreign commerce. Indeed, according to Graf, the advantages of direct trade this zone offered could be exploited as early as 1822, turning the mouth of the Rio Grande River into an economically attractive place: “The economic significance of Matamoros lies in the legal opening of the Rio Grande region to foreign waterborne traffic. This event changed the region from a grazing country on the periphery of Mexican economic life into a commercial artery of national importance.”<sup>93</sup> Of course, some Frenchmen had already ventured into this zone for commercial purposes prior to Mexican independence, but they had done so in the shadow of illegality. The most famous of them was the French pirate Jean Laffite, who established himself around Port Isabel or Laguna Vista in 1821.<sup>94</sup> However, the direct and legal trade changed everything, opening a large potential market for New Orleans, and thus for merchants of French culture based in the Louisianan area.<sup>95</sup> The connection between the Laroche’s family

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90. Gonzáles, *Life Along the Border*, 62-63.

91. Graf, “Economic History,” 46.

92. Lagarde, “Birth, Stock and Work,” 164.

93. Graf, “Economic History,” 2.

94. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 85.

95. Graf, “Economic History,” 23.

story and the whole picture of French immigration in the area appears again clearly. As mentioned above, New Orleans was the second biggest settlement for the French population who emigrated in the United States; it is also known that as late as 1803, 80% of the population of the formerly French colony could still speak French and thus shared some French cultural roots.<sup>96</sup> The link with New Orleans is an important factor, explaining in part why Frenchmen like Constant Laroche Senior decided to establish themselves in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. As noted earlier on, it is hard to know when people coming from Louisiana had French cultural roots. It can just be assumed that a reasonable portion of the numerous Louisianans who settled in the Lower Rio Grande Region throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century—representing indeed the second largest group of settlers of American birth behind inhabitants of the East coast—were of French culture.<sup>97</sup>

The cosmopolitan flavor of the Laroche family reflects another factor that led French people to settle in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Indeed, French immigrants were doubtlessly looking for a cultural mosaic in which they would feel welcome. Their concentration in the biggest settlements of the area contributed to the cosmopolitan tone of Matamoros, Brownsville, and to a lesser extent Rio Grande City, but was probably also motivated by the multicultural potential of these places. The mix between Anglo and Mexican culture might have been a guarantee of cultural openness. This could probably also explain why, out of the “many Louisiana Frenchmen [who] had moved to Texas in order to avoid living under Anglo

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96. Réginald Hamel, *La Louisiane Créole Littéraire, Politique et Sociale, 1762-1900* (Montreal: Lemeac, 1984), 85.

97. Thompson, “Nineteenth Century History,” 71.

domination after the 1803 purchase,” some came to the Lower Rio Grande region.<sup>98</sup> The censuses provide glimpse of the proportion of Frenchmen settled in the Lower Rio Grande who were previously based in Louisiana. Because previous residence can be assessed with certainty only through the place of birth of the children, single Frenchmen and women are excluded from the sample. Based on the Population Schedules for Cameron County in 1870, a year which represents a peak for French immigration in the area, it can be assessed that out of 17 French-born men settled with at least one of their children in the county, eight had at least one child born in Louisiana. In other words, at least 47.06% of the Frenchmen living with their child or children in Cameron County in 1870 had been living (or at least travelling) in Louisiana before.<sup>99</sup>

The example of the Laroche family, who emigrated to Cameron County sometime between 1871 and 1880, demonstrates the displacement of the center of gravity of the French population from the right bank to the left bank of the Rio Grande after the Mexican-American War.<sup>100</sup> As early as 1850, two years after the end of the war and the creation of Brownsville in Cameron County, 61 Frenchmen lived on the U.S. side. This phenomenon, inextricably linked with the creation of Brownsville in 1848, resulted in at least two inter-related factors. The first one is the shifting of the economic potential from the Mexican to the U.S. side. Indeed, the commercial

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98. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 86. In 1800, Spain, who had ruled over Louisiana since 1762, ceded the territory to the French government. Three years later, Napoleon I sold it to the United States for \$15,000,000.

99. *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*. Microfilm.

100. The Mexican-American War occurred between 1846 and 1848, partly as a result of the annexation of Texas to the United States in 1845 and disagreements about the common frontier. As a result, the United States invaded Mexico and obtained, in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, the western territories of the present-day United States and the confirmation of the Rio Grande as the permanent international boundary between the U.S. territory and Mexico. For a more accurate account of the American-Mexican War, see for example Ron Field, *Mexican-American War: 1846-1848* (Herndon, VA: Brassey’s, 1997).



advantages provided by the Mexican-American War in Matamoros obviously waned when the war ended, therefore, “the American merchant houses closed down and the commercial advantage shifted to the left bank.”<sup>101</sup> To benefit from similar economic advantages, French people followed the Anglo-Americans north of the river. This explains why Frenchmen were among the new Brownsville settlers who already numbered 3,000 in 1850.<sup>102</sup> Frenchmen had also, and this is the second important factor of their immigration to the southern state of Texas, the guarantee of a more secure life on the left bank of the Rio Grande. The previously mentioned Pastry War resulted in a short-lived decree of expulsion of all French nationals from Mexican soil on November 27, 1838, and greatly contributed to fueling the tensions between the French locals and the Mexican government.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, as Graf suggests, at this time “trade in Mexico ... was especially subject to unpredictable and harmful interference from the Mexican government.”<sup>104</sup> Even if the American state of Texas did not provide as many advantages for French people as the Republic of Texas did, it is doubtless that they perceived the United States as safer than Mexico for both their personal and commercial safety.<sup>105</sup> Choices of settlement in the Valley were therefore guided by pragmatic reasons and influenced primarily by the economic health of the area, secondarily by the secure atmosphere it provided (all relative considering the conditions along the border).

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101. Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1991), 67.

102. *Ibid.*, 69.

103. Maissin, *The French in Mexico and Texas, 1838-1839*, xx.

104. Graf, “Economic History,” 76.

105. Wallace, *Documents of Texas History*, 132.

As late as in 1870, at least four out of the 17 Frenchmen married and established with their children in the Brownsville area had been living in Mexico before.<sup>106</sup> However, in the meanwhile, the northern bank of the Rio Grande had experienced a decrease in French immigrants in absolute numbers during the 1850s, and a considerable increase during the 1860s, (see table 2). The decrease of the 1850s seems, at first glance, hard to explain, especially because the number of German-born on the northern bank of the river increased from 100 in 1850 to 130 in 1860.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, the increase in German-born population proves that the usually short period of residence of French-born settlers in the Valley, which is indicated by the variety of French last names from one census to another, is not enough to explain this decrease, for the majority of 19<sup>th</sup> century Germans left the area rather quickly as well.<sup>108</sup> The general increase of the French population in both the United States and Texas between 1850 and 1860 implies that the loss of four French-born people in the Valley during this decade might have been due to a local event (see table 1 and 2). Cortina's raid on Brownsville on September 28, 1859, is the most important conflict of the period; however, Frenchmen were not directly touched by the conflict, or at least were less affected than Anglo-American settlers and no more than other European foreigners.<sup>109</sup> Thus, the best explanation seems to lie again in the economic situation of the area. Indeed, in 1858, a decree was signed by the governor of Tamaulipas authorizing the establishment of a free-trade zone in Matamoros.<sup>110</sup> Subsequently, "money and

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106. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm.

107. Grytz, "German Immigrants," Table 2, 154.

108. *Ibid.*, 148.

109. Gonzáles, *Life Along the Border*, 55; Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 112.

110. *Ibid.*, 105.

business opportunities shifted back to the right bank,” and while Matamoros began a new period of expansion, its population growing from 12,000 in 1844 to 40,000 in the late 1850s, Brownsville’s economy suffered a huge blow.<sup>111</sup> Among the Brownsville merchants who transferred their businesses to Matamoros, it is highly possible that some were French. The fact that German population, as opposed to the French, kept on growing in Brownsville in the same period might be explained by the deep attachment French had with Matamoros, where they had been living in numbers since the 1820s, and with the commercial activity on the border.

The 1870 peak of French population in the Lower Rio Grande Valley seems, however, hardly understandable in economic terms at first glance. Indeed, in the five years following the end of the Civil War, the Matamoros free trade zone “continued to exert a negative influence” on the right bank and Brownsville whose population and commerce was steadily declining, and Matamoros, after the boom of the Civil war, was starting a phase of regression.<sup>112</sup> In these conditions, it is hard to conceive why French population rose by more than 121% between 1860 and 1870. A first explanation can be found in the failure of the French Imperialist endeavor in Mexico. Indeed, as François Lagarde notes, “a few French emigrated in from Mexico after Maximilian’s venture,”<sup>113</sup> and considering the proximity of Brownsville and Rio Grande City to Mexico, it is quite certain that some of them settled in the Valley in 1867.<sup>114</sup> French population was however not the only foreign population to reach a peak in the Rio Grande area in 1870 (see table 6). Considering the commercial revival

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111. Ibid., 105-107.

112. Ibid., 149-150.

113. Lagarde, “Birth, Stock and Work,” 160.

114. Gonzáles, *Life Along the Border*, 65.

on the northern side of the Rio Grande bank during the Civil War, it is highly probable that merchants of different nationalities settled in the Brownsville and Rio Grande areas to achieve commercial success within the Confederacy and stayed there after the end of the war.<sup>115</sup> Some explanations are also provided by the general increase of the number of French immigrants in Texas which rose by more than 61% between 1860 and 1870 (see table 2). In *Come to Texas: Attracting immigrants 1865-1915*, Barbara J. Rozeck explains the effort dedicated to solving the “state’s perceived labor problem” caused by the end of the Civil War through the attraction of new immigrants, mainly whites.<sup>116</sup> Subsequently, a Bureau of Immigration was created by state on May 23, 1871, to diffuse Texas advertisements principally in Europe and to try to reduce the costs of services for the newcomers, among whom some were French.<sup>117</sup>

However, the above effort, which was constant throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, did not prevent the steady decrease of French-born people in the area and in Texas in general in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (see table 2).<sup>118</sup> For Lagarde, this decrease can be explained in part by the negative impact of the U.S. legislation which started imposing immigration quotas and ceilings during Reconstruction.<sup>119</sup> However, the decrease of French settlers is much more important for the Lower Rio Grande Valley than for Texas, and explanations of the phenomenon have to be found again in

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115. Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 134.

116. Barbara J. Rozeck, *Come to Texas: Attracting Immigrants, 1865-1915* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 3-4.

117. *Ibid.*, 128.

118. Rozeck, *Come to Texas*, 157. Some railroad publications dated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century advertised lands in Brownsville area; considering the general decrease of the foreign population in the Valley at the time, the call was not heard.

119. Lagarde, “Birth, Stock and Work,” 160.

the health of the local economy. Indeed, in the 1870s, the economy of the area lost its attractive potential due mainly to “the excessively expensive and inadequate transportation.”<sup>120</sup> In addition to the poor state of the transportation infrastructure, which was hampering progress, some attempts to connect the region with the national railroad network resulted in failures.<sup>121</sup> The Rio Grande Valley also suffered from the completion of a railroad connecting central Texas and Corpus Christi to Monterey via Laredo in 1882.<sup>122</sup> This fact might also explain why the few French-born settlers present in the area in 1900 were, for the first time, more numerous in Starr County than in Cameron County, the former area being closer to Laredo and therefore to new opportunities (see table 5). Recurring hurricanes and epidemic outbreaks, like the yellow fever which ravaged Brownsville in July and August 1882, also contributed to the lack of attraction of the Rio Grande Valley.<sup>123</sup> In *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville*, Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp sum up the general situation of the area at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “the delta had grown accustomed to the isolated, backward and neglected role that the surrounding regions were quite ready to ascribe to it.”<sup>124</sup> In that case, it is not hard to guess why few French newcomers settled in the Lower Rio Grande Valley after 1880, and why so many left the area.

Thus, the economic situation of the Lower Rio Grande Valley seems to have influenced primarily French settlers and subsequently shaped each French immigration wave, much more than any question of common culture, identity and

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120. Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 157.

121. Grytz, “German Immigrants,” 150.

122. Graf “Economic History,” 3.

123. Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 175.

124. *Ibid.*, 186.

diplomatic situation. This situation implies that most of the French-born who settled in the area were engaged in some commercial activity, and similarly, that economic success was the primary goal. As Lagarde argues, “migrants came to Texas to work the land, to trade, to practice their professions, to make a fortune or just a good living.”<sup>125</sup> The constant renewing of the French population, and the decrease in absolute numbers of the French-born in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, might be explained simply by the fact that “there were, however, more middle-class, lower-middle-class, and poor French immigrants in Texas than there were French with fortunes.”<sup>126</sup> Grytz corroborates this idea when he explains that

the majority of Germans who chose the Lower Rio Grande as their destination of immigration failed and left the region again. They were, however, not alone in this fate. Most other Euro-American immigrants in the nineteenth century went through a similar process in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. What initially promised a bright future after the early settlement of the region in the aftermath of the Mexican-American War soon turned out to be a land of very limited opportunities for German residents and newcomers alike.<sup>127</sup>

The reasons why the French population remained, in proportion, more important in the Rio Grande Valley than in the rest of Texas suggests that their fate was slightly better than other foreigners’. This idea needs to be confirmed through a deeper and more global study of the French people’s life in the area. Indeed, if there is a French idiosyncratic situation, it might be more properly observed through the analysis of the occupation, family life and choices of integration of the French people settled in the Valley. Thus far, the impact the French immigrants had on the area had been observed only from a quantitative perspective and needs to be complemented by a socio-economic and cultural approach. Similarly, the idea that pragmatic choices

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125. Lagarde, “Birth, Stock and Work,” 164.

126. *Ibid.*, 167.

127. Grytz, “German Immigrants,” 150.

based on economic factors were the essential determinants of the French immigration remains a supposition which does not take into account the relationship among French identity, integration and assimilation. If most of the French settlers in Texas, as in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, “remain forever faceless,”<sup>128</sup> they are not nameless, and, therefore, especially through the Population Schedules, their integration in the local society, their choices of settlement and relationship to identity can be revealed.

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128. Lagarde “Birth, Stock and Work,” 158.

## **Chapter 2: Settling in a Borderland: The Integration of the French Population in Lower Rio Grande Valley Society**

This chapter studies the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lower Rio Grande Valley French immigrants as a group, and from this foundation, assesses the common features and differences in their patterns of integration, choices of settlement and relations to identity. This approach has been largely neglected by the local historiography. Indeed, most of the Rio Grande French settlers have been greatly overshadowed by the few successful Frenchmen whose presence and influence in the area were highlighted in a relatively abundant corpus of primary sources. In other words, the socio-economic exceptions have been studied without clear relations to the general picture, that is to the majority of French people who actually only expected to make a modest living in the area.<sup>129</sup> As a consequence, the poorest French people and the French women who settled in the Valley have never been adequately examined. However, thanks to the Population Schedules, the experience of each French Valley settler can be revealed with unexpected accuracy, and, when compiled and compared, they prove to be of great interest for the present study.

Indeed, the following analysis reveals that all French settlers influenced the area by their immigration. They integrated the local life, made various contacts in the area but formed a distinct community. They engaged in diverse activities, which sometimes enabled the diffusion of a French culture, but more globally transformed the socio-economic landscape of the Valley. On the other hand, French-born settlers were shaped by their experience in the Valley. They had to adapt to the economic fluctuations and specific conditions of the area. Moreover, their identities were molded by their prolonged settlement in this borderland. Despite these common

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129. Grytz, "German Immigrants," 150.



threads, there is no such thing as a distinctive model of the French immigrant. Indeed, all French immigrants came to the area hoping to make a living but few were successful. Of the 35 to 126 French-born who settled in the Valley in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, no more than 15% were rich French merchants. French people were spread in a broad range of categories and had a defined position within a rigid socio-economic hierarchy. In spite of the fact that the porosity of identities was experienced by each French settler, elites and successful merchants were in a more favorable position than people who had a lower socio-economic situation to preserve a sense of their “Frenchness.”

### **Commercial Attraction, Professional Choices and Economic Disparities.**

Due to the commercial potential of the Valley, most of the lay French-born settlers, except for 1870, engaged in trading activities in the area from 1820s onwards. From 1850 to 1900, the number of French-born engaged in trading activity ranged from eight to twenty-two (see table 7). However, the image of the rich French merchant trading overseas is a misrepresentation of the general socio-economic reality of the French people settled in the Valley. Indeed, most of the French Valley settlers who had occupations were only able to make a modest living. From 1850 to 1880, Between 20 and 40% of them were store clerks, craftsmen, store keepers and service providers, and most of them only achieved a decent economic situation. Moreover, laborers and servants, whose proportion among the French-born population went beyond respectively 16% and 7% during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, remained generally poor and left the area quickly.

This global picture can be revealed thanks to the Population Schedules which list each French-born settled on the left bank of the Rio Grande Valley from 1850 to 1900, regardless of their socio-economic situations or reputations. For 1850, the

Population Schedules give the name, age, color, sex, origin, profession, handicap and a clue of the economic situation—Value of Real Estate and Personal Estate—of every county inhabitant. The Population Schedules underwent significant modifications up to 1900. In 1870, indications about citizenship and literacy are added; the most important improvements of the 1880 Population Schedules for the present study are the inclusion of the marital situation and the origin of the parents for each inhabitant; in 1900, indications about ownership, number of children for each woman, mastering of English language, years of marriage and date of immigration in the United States are equally important for an accurate social study. These primary sources are, however, not devoid of flaws, and in addition to the absence of the 1890 Population Schedules, difficulties and uncertainties which arise from the handwritten inscriptions, the various erasures or blurred passages, make the research more difficult. For example, in the 1900 Cameron County Population Schedules, the bottom of each page is consistently stained, making any extraction of information almost impossible.<sup>130</sup>

In the first chapter of this study, it appeared that the pace of French migration was set by the economic and commercial health of the area. This perspective leads logically to suppose that the trading profession was the dominant activity of the French settlers. As Leroy P. Graf states, Matamoros, by the time of its recognition as a villa in the 1820s, became the major trade center of the Valley, and thus attracted Americans and Europeans who were predominantly merchants and clerks.<sup>131</sup> In this town, the “foreign element was the active element commercially”<sup>132</sup> and was composed of French people. Indeed the first merchant to register his arrival in New

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130. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Texas*. Microfilm.

131. Graf, “Economic History,” 46.

132. *Ibid.*, 45

Orleans from the Rio Bravo during this new era of legal trade was John Quéré, probably a Frenchman or a merchant of French culture.<sup>133</sup> Actually, according to the reports of passenger arrivals mentioned in chapter 1, out of the 58 people who came to the Mexican town aboard the 13 vessels registered for the period from December 4, 1830, to April 8, 1831, 37 were merchants. In other words, 64% of these passengers, “everything from a capitalist entrepreneur to an apprentice clerk,”<sup>134</sup> were engaged in trade. This proportion of merchants remains predominant as late as 1844, when out of the 15 passengers, 10 were registered as merchants.<sup>135</sup> It can be assumed, therefore, that Frenchmen who came to the area were predominantly engaged in this profession which was the most economically beneficial in this area at the time.<sup>136</sup>

The first censuses confirm that the French immigrants who settled on the left bank of the Valley in the 1850s were engaged in commercial activities (see table 7). Almost half of the French-born are listed as merchants or clerks in store in the 1850 Population Schedules, confirming Milo Kearney’s statement that in Brownsville, “most of the first-generation merchants were French if they were not Anglos.”<sup>137</sup> The two first Population Schedules (1850 and 1860) rarely specify the type of trading activities, categorizing every type of traders under the denomination “merchant.” In 1860, the proportion of merchants among French-born, though still prominent, had decreased. This is due in major part to the arrival in the 1850s of French soldiers, clergymen and nuns.<sup>138</sup> Indeed, in 1860, soldiers and members of religious order

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133. Ibid. 23-24.

134. Ibid., 45.

135. Ibid., Figure IV (cont’d).

136. Ibid. 48-49.

137. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Texas*. Microfilm; Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 88.

numbered 20 people, representing around 41% of the total of French-born who had a profession in the area. Thus, the decrease of French merchants and clerks is not necessarily to be questioned because both the French-born military men, who came to the area as result of the Mexican-American War, and the members of religious orders did not have the choice of their settlement. In other words, their numerical importance in the area somewhat attenuates the dominant engagement of French people in trading activities. A closer look also reveals that 18.8% of the French people in 1850, that is nine people, and 14.3% for 1860, that is seven people, were engaged in the transformation of food and its selling. Commercial activity was, therefore, the primary choice of French-born immigrants in the Valley up to 1870.

When French immigration reached its peak in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, that is to say in the 1860s as reflected by the 1870 Population Schedules, a change in professional orientation for the French settlers seemed to occur. The first noticeable feature is the diversification of occupations and professions in which French people were engaged, and, subsequently, a much more balanced repartition of the French elements in all the professional categories. The increase and new diversification of French craftsmen and food makers is symptomatic of this phenomenon. Even more striking is the fact that Frenchmen engaged in agricultural activities became dominant at this time. In 1870, 16 Frenchmen—accounting for more than 15% of the French-born who had an occupation—were farmers, stock raisers or laborers (see table 7). Due to the commercial decline of the area following the end of the Civil War, only 10 French-born were engaged in trading activities in 1870, representing 11.1% of the total of French professionals. The socio-professional repartition of the French population in 1870 seems particularly interesting both for re-assessing the general

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138. *Ibid.*, 91-92.

immigration of French people in the area and illuminating the local history. The diversity of French professional fields in 1870 contradicts the general picture of French settlers as essentially merchants. Previous historical contributions have tended to mention the French elements in the Valley by referring to their trading orientation, and their primary intention to exploit the commercial openness of the mouth of the Rio Grande, and the direct link with New Orleans, to make a living.<sup>139</sup> This approach is linked to the idea that French settlers were easily noticeable among the commercially active elements of the area; it tends, however, to blur the broad range of activities in which French were engaged, especially in regard to activities in which the poorest Hispanic settlers were usually engaged, and how their activities changed overtime. For example, concerning the foreign population in Matamoros, Graf affirms that, “fortunately, few came as unskilled laborers, for manual labor was performed by the Mexican masses.”<sup>140</sup> The present analysis reveals, however, that there were more French-born servants on the left bank of the Rio Grande in 1870 than any category of merchants. The simple fact that most of the lay French-born were laborers in 1870 reveals that portraying French Valley settlers as essentially merchants is misleading. It is true however that the professional diversification of the French-born settlers disappeared with the general decrease of French-born population in the 1870s. Surprisingly, it seems that the French engaged in these new professions suffered much more from the economic difficulties after 1870 than merchants. In 1900, French-born had disappeared from the food services and alimentation activities, and only one French artisan was still settled on the left bank of the Lower Rio Grande. From 1880 to 1900, French who were engaged in trade, even if less numerous than in 1850 or

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139. See for example: Kearney, “Historical Sketch;” Thompson, “Nineteenth Century History;” or for Matamoros before the Mexican-American War: Graf, “Economic History.”

140. Graf, “Economic History,” 49.

1860, became dominant again among lay French-born workers, but were this time more concentrated in Starr County than in Cameron County, probably because of the new opportunities offered by the railroad.<sup>141</sup> The high proportion of priests and nuns among French-born professionals is symptomatic of the general decrease of the French-born workers; in 1880, priests and nuns represented around 29% of the French-born workers, and 50% in 1900. In any case, the year 1870 should not be merely considered an exception to the general rule, but the reflection of the link between the increase of French population that occurred between 1850 and 1870, and the diversification of their activities and socio-economic levels. In other words, it seems that the economic opportunities offered by the area after the creation of Brownsville in 1848, and during the Civil War in the early 1860s, attracted—along with traders interested in the connection of the Valley with major ports—skilled and unskilled workers who thought they could take advantage of the subsequent internal development of the region.

A deeper analysis makes clear that the continuity of some professions among the French-born stems from their transmission from generation to generation, and not so much from a renewing of skilled immigrants. The example of the Laroche family, who produced generations of sailors and travelers, was revealed in Chapter 1. The history of the Charay family is similar. Etienne Charay appears for the first time in the Cameron County census in 1870. He was 43 years old at the time, and had settled in Brownsville with his wife Jeanette, born in France, and his four children. He was established as a boot and shoemaker. Among his four children, two were born in Alabama, and two others, Ernest, eight years old, and Louise, six years old, in Texas,

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141. See chapter 1, and Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Texas*. Microfilm.

implying that Etienne Charay might have been living in Brownsville as early as 1862, probably to take advantage of the opportunities created by the Civil War.<sup>142</sup> In 1880, the entire Charay family was still settled in Brownsville, and Jeanette and Etienne's sons were old enough to be engaged in a professional activity. Louis, the eldest, had become a shoemaker like his father and seemingly worked with him. The youngest son, Ernest, 18 years old at this time, was an apprentice shoemaker.<sup>143</sup> In 1900, Louis Charay was established with his wife Andrea Rafin as a shoemaker in Brownsville, pursuing the craftsmanship he learned from his father;<sup>144</sup> Ernest Charay, on the other hand, had apparently left the area. He might have settled as a shoemaker elsewhere to escape the economic decline of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The transmission of job from father to son(s) was apparently not uncommon among French people settled in the Valley. For example, French-born Frederick Ruby settled as a milkman in Brownsville in 1870 along with son, Emilio, 19 years old at this date, who was engaged in the same profession.<sup>145</sup> This phenomenon continued as late as 1900 in the Rousset family who produced at least two generations of barbers who established their business in the Valley.<sup>146</sup> The variety of examples uncovers a certain tendency to professional reproduction, and possibly to economic stagnation, throughout generations.

François Lagarde rightly points out that in Texas, "nineteenth century French immigrants became farmers, ranchers, merchants, and bankers. Some became rich,

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142. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm. Cameron County, 208.

143. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas*. Microfilm. Cameron County, 302.

144. *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 344.

145. *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 159.

146. *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 385.

many joined the middle class, and some remained poor.”<sup>147</sup> If a broader range of professions can be observed for the Rio Grande Valley, the same kind of economic differences are assessable for the French-born settled on the left bank of the river. However, an attempt to reveal these economic disparities is subjected to methodological problems. First, the value of each inhabitant’s real estate is only mentioned from 1850 to 1870 in the Population Schedules. Moreover, the 1850 Population Schedules only reveal the real estate value owned by each settler, whereas the 1860 and 1870 Population Schedules also mention their personal estate. Thus, general economic comparisons for the period 1850-1870 have to be based on the value of real estate possessed by each French settler (see table 8). In 1850, 54.2% of the French-born having a job in the area, that is 26 people, did not have any real estate. It was the case for only 34.5% of them, that is 10 people, in 1860. This global improvement of the French-born economic situation was probably due to the fact that unsuccessful settlers left the region in the 1850s in search of a better life. Moreover, some French-born with no real estate in 1850 might have managed to purchase real estate in the 1850s. Due probably to the opportunities offered by the Civil War, many French people came to the area in the 1860s and engaged in very diverse professional activities. With the end of the war, characterized by an economic stagnation, the global situation of the French-born worsened; in 1870, 77.9% of those who had a job did not own any real estate. Doubtlessly, one of the strongest influences exerted by the area on the French population was, therefore, of an economic nature.

These evolutions are better explained in terms of relationships between property and professional categories. Not surprisingly, French laborers, domestic servants and artisans had more difficulties than the other French settlers in making a

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147. Lagarde, “Birth, Stock and Work,” 165.



living in the Rio Grande Valley (see table 9). In 1850, none of the French laborers settled in the Lower Rio Grande Valley owned any property, and only one artisan possessed a property valued over \$500. By 1860, almost all the French-born were concentrated in trade and food-making industries, probably because these activities promised a better economic success than others. Indeed, trading activities were for the French-born the most beneficial professions in 1850; according to the Population Schedules, more than half of the French merchants, that is 8 people, had real estate valued at more than \$2,000. Only one other French settler, who was engaged in the food-making industry, could boast the same economic situation. Moreover, the only three French-born who had a property valued over \$5,000 in 1850 were merchants. Among them, G. Garnier owned a property valued at \$15,000,<sup>148</sup> a figure which remains impressive even when compared to Charles Stillman's property—the American merchant who made a fortune by the time of the Mexican-American War and eventually chose the site for the foundation of Brownsville—<sup>149</sup> which was valued at \$25,000 in 1850.<sup>150</sup> People engaged in food-making activities in 1850 were globally less successful than merchants or even clerks, but among them, bakers were able to achieve a decent economic situation in the area. Indeed, in 1850, two bakers had real estate valued over \$500. It is therefore not surprising that out of the six Frenchmen who stayed in the Lower Rio Grande Valley for all of the 1850s, four were merchants and two were bakers. These six men knew a different fortune during the 1850s: from 1850 to 1860, three of them saw a reduction of their property value, one a stagnation, and two an improvement. These evolutions are representative of the economic

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148. *1850 Census: Texas; Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr Counties*, 57.

149. Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 32, 68.

150. *1850 Census: Texas; Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr Counties*, 55.

opportunities offered to the merchants and food makers in the area at this time. Indeed, if among the less successful the losses are not spectacular, the gains for those who improved their situations are impressive. Thus, the value of Victor Haslaner's real estate jumped from \$2,000 in 1850 to \$10,000 in 1860.<sup>151</sup> Not surprisingly, the trading activity, in which this French-born was engaged, offered the potentiality of real economic improvement. The other successful Frenchman, F. Bouvard, was a baker. With his wife and two children, he settled in Brownsville—apparently soon after the founding of the town—with a relative, Limper Bouvard, 35 years old.<sup>152</sup> As opposed to Limper, a laborer without property who left the area in the 1850s, F. Bouvard stayed in Brownsville and increased his real estate value from \$400 in 1850 to \$3,000 in 1860.<sup>153</sup> This new situation seems to echo the new possibilities offered to the food-makers in 1860. Indeed, two thirds of the French-born engaged in this profession in 1860 had a real estate property valued over \$500 (see table 9). Even more striking, around 83% of the French population engaged in food transformation and selling, that is 5 people, owned at least \$2,000 of real and personal estate combined, compared to 67% of the French merchants, representing 10 people (see table 10).

Among the new French settlers who came in the 1860s, many were apparently unskilled and chose to settle as laborers or servants. As expected, they almost all remained poor. Some skilled French-born engaged in craftsmanship, and almost all failed in getting a decent economic situation. Indeed, out of the nine French artisans settled in the area in 1870, only three owned real and/or personal estate (see table 10).

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151. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas*. Microfilm. Cameron County, 581.

152. *1850 Census: Texas; Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr Counties*, 59.

153. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 562.

This might contribute to explaining why, in 1880, laborers, domestic servants and craftsmen had almost all, once again, left the area (see table 7). The impoverishment of the French-born population in the Valley was, however, general for the 1860s, proving that the French settlers were all subject to the general economic decline of the area. Many merchants had left the area, doubtlessly after the end of the Civil War, and food-makers, more numerous than before, had also more difficulties in making a living. Two occupations became more economically interesting for the Frenchmen during this period of commercial decline. First, this period saw an increase in French farmers and stock raisers, and two thirds of them owned a valued real or personal estate. The global attractiveness of farming activity is demonstrated by the example of Alexander Werbiski, a 55-year old Russian farmer who owned, in 1870, a real estate valued at \$23,000, and a personal estate valued at \$30,000.<sup>154</sup> The most successful French-born in the area in 1870 were however the restaurant, saloon and coffee house keepers. The majority of them owned a real estate valued over \$500, a unique case among French settlers in 1870. This type of profession, especially the saloon and coffee house business, was dependent on the commercial well-being of the region. The fact that the three most successful French-born in these categories were a coffee house keeper and two saloon proprietors can simply mean that these new settlers were skilled enough to overcome such difficulties.

### **The French Community between Hierarchy and Fluidity: Socio-Economic Distinctions and Gender Characterization Transposed in a Borderland.**

Due to a particular borderland atmosphere, socio-economic categories and gender categorizations were less rigid in the Lower Rio Grande Valley than in France.

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154. *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 277.

To this extent, the influence the Valley exerted on both French people of a low social level and French women was positive. However, it remained difficult for French people engaged in the food-making industry and craftsmanship to improve their social positions, and impossible for laborers to achieve social recognition. Similarly, except for widows, few French women acquired a place in the economic life of the area, a situation which favored gender solidarity.

Despite the general impoverishment of people engaged in trading activities during the 1860s, the most successful workers among French-born were always merchants from 1850 to 1870 (at least). Indeed, a few among them became extremely wealthy, like J.F. Gamrer, a French merchant who could boast \$52,000 of real estate value in 1860.<sup>155</sup> Store clerks, on the other hand, even if engaged in the same field, never became successful enough to be considered rich. Indeed, from 1850 to 1870, none of them had a real and/or a personal estate valued over \$2000 (see table 9 and 10). However, whatever their economic situation, French people who worked in trade were all literate according to the Population Schedules. The level of education provides a clue about the socio-economic classification of these Frenchmen; indeed, if the richest can be considered members of the local upper-class and notable “gentry,” the poorest traders were probably middle-class elements. In the agricultural sector, disparities were both economic and social. With very marginal exceptions, laborers were all poor and tended to leave the area after a very short period of settlement. Moreover, in 1870, the Population Schedules mention that half the French-born laborers present in the Valley could not read and write.<sup>156</sup> This combination of poverty and illiteracy seems to signify that French laborers, along with French servants, were part of a broader “popular-class” in which ethnicity and nationality had probably less

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155. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 583.

156. *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr County*.

significance. Farmers, on the other hand, were generally able to make a living, and some achieved a prosperity on which they capitalized over decades of settlement. The difference between laborers and farmers is also a socio-cultural one, for no one among the French farmers was mentioned as illiterate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lower Rio Grande Valley. For example, Louis Renaud, listed as farmer in 1860 and stock raiser in 1870, maintained a personal and real estate valued over \$4,000 up to his death in Cameron County in 1872.<sup>157</sup> Wealthy and educated, this French settler was likely a respected rancher in the local community, and his rather opulent and finely-carved white grave reflects this economic and social prestige.<sup>158</sup>

In general, professions which require “savoir-faire” are much more difficult to classify from both an economic and social perspective. As skilled workers, French craftsmen were probably more respected in the society than laborers or servants, but none of them achieved a good economic situation in the area in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, food makers and Frenchmen engaged in particular types of services could either remain poor or become very wealthy. The 1860 Population Schedules for Cameron County reveal the peculiar case of the French-born John Castaing, a gardener who owned a \$10,000 property.<sup>159</sup> This example is even more surprising considering that no other French gardener was able to get any property in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the possibility exists that Castaing was rich before settling in the Valley. Regarding food makers, a distinction can be made between cooks, who never got any property, and bakers and butchers, most of the time economically successful. In 1860, two thirds of the French bakers and butchers settled in the area owned real estate valued at \$1,000 or higher (see table 9). The same year, the French butcher

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157. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 630; *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron*, 268.

158. Brownsville City Cemetery, Line 5, right.

159. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 560.

Nicolas Chano, in particular, had a real estate valued at \$5000, and possessed a personal estate valued at \$8,000.<sup>160</sup> However, economic success alone is not a reliable indicator of social recognition. Education also provides social prestige; however, this criterion is not always met by artisans, food-makers or French-born engaged in diverse services. In 1880, one third of the French bakers and butchers settled in the Lower Valley were illiterate. On a more general level, it is very doubtful that gardeners or butchers, in particular, could be accepted in the local elites' circle. This limited social mobility might explain why the previously mentioned Nicolas Chano, after earning a lot of money as a butcher, became a merchant.<sup>161</sup> In light of this new socio-economic situation, Nicolas Chano's residence in Brownsville appears even more interesting. Indeed, in 1880, he was living on 12<sup>th</sup> Street, along with four other families of French origin which were all linked with trading activity.<sup>162</sup> The repartition of French-born in Brownsville was apparently linked with their socio-economic situation. Belden Street or 9<sup>th</sup> street, where only Frenchmen pertaining to the popular class settled, exemplifies this phenomenon for the poorest French people.<sup>163</sup> Thus, professional activities determined social levels and sometimes places of settlement, but, if these levels were clearly separated, they were not hermetic, as Nicolas Chano's case illustrates. As with the professional choices, social mobility seems less restrictive in the context of Lower Rio Grande Valley society.

The general picture of the French-born integration in the local life illustrated above overshadows the role and influence of French women on the economy and

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160. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 566.

161. *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 235. Indeed, Chano is not listed as a butcher but as a retail grocer in this source.

162. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 347.

163. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 325-338.

society of the Valley.<sup>164</sup> This is due to two factors. First, the French who settled in the Valley throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century were predominantly men. Between the 1820s—when the first French people settled in the area—and the Mexican-American War, Leroy P. Graf says that the flow of foreigners reaching Matamoros “was essentially an influx of young men trying to make their fortunes in the newly opened and economically expanded country.”<sup>165</sup> The same profile of the French immigrant is to be found on the left bank of the Rio Grande Valley. Indeed, from 1850 to 1900, among French settlers living on the U.S. side of the Rio Grande, men were always more numerous than women (see table 11). The second factor explaining why Frenchwomen do not appear automatically in a general socio-economic analysis of the French integration in the area is their lack of access to the professional fields, and, consequently, their under-representation in the economic sphere. Before 1870, almost all the French women, with the exceptions of the Sisters of the Incarnate Word, were listed in the Population Schedules without mention of any profession or occupation. From 1870 onwards, this void in the profession/occupation column is replaced by “keeping house,” a sort of timid recognition of the stereotypical role of women in their families and society. The Population Schedules reflect the gender representation and categorization of the time: on the one hand, women’s role seems to be essentially keeping children, for the number of children per couple is attributed to the woman only. On the other hand, since the personal and real estate value of the family is inscribed next to the husband’s name, it seems to be the husband’s task to provide for

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164. See Paula Mitchell Marks, “Trials, Tribulations, and Good Times: Westering Women in Frontier Texas, 1821-1870,” in Donald Willett and Stephen Curley, *Invisible Texans: Women and Minorities in Texas History*, (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 77. The author argues that the “invisibility” of women is global for the 19<sup>th</sup> century Texas; however, she does not fail to mention the lives of European women who settled there, a perspective which had been overlooked previously.

165. Graf, “Economic History,” 48.

the economic needs of his family. As other women settled in 19<sup>th</sup> century Texas—a frontier area where “gender roles remained strong”—the primary role of French women “was that of a ‘helpmate’: wife, mother or daughter.”<sup>166</sup>

Thus, French women almost never came by themselves to the area; they always followed a man—sometimes their father, but more commonly their husband—in his settlement. Indeed, with the exceptions of nuns, Frenchwomen settled in the Valley were almost all married or widowed (See table 12). In addition, most of the single lay Frenchwomen who settled in the Valley came as servants, and were, therefore, dependent on a family or an organization. The Frenchmen’s marital status was obviously different. A comparison between the proportion of Frenchmen among the French-born population and the marital status of the Frenchmen reveal some interesting elements which emphasize the dependency of French women their husbands (see table 11 and 13). Indeed, the irregularity in masculine predominance among French-born proves that each time the area was economically attractive—after the creation of Brownsville in 1848, in the 1860s during the Civil War, and in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Starr County especially—, men became more numerically important among French-born. On the other hand, whenever the area entered into an era of economic stagnation, in the 1850s and 1870s principally, the proportion of Frenchmen among French-born decreased. These waves are interestingly echoed by the changes in Frenchmen marital status, for whenever the proportion of Frenchmen among French-born decreased, the proportion of single Frenchmen became inferior to the proportion of married Frenchmen (see table 13). This phenomenon shows that married Frenchmen were much more inclined to stay in the area despite economic difficulties

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166. Marks, “Westering Women,” 78.



than single Frenchmen, probably because they had a family to support and extended familial ties in the area. Thus, if the proportion of Frenchwomen among French-born became more important in periods of economic decline, it might be because, as a large majority among them were married, they had to stay in the area with their husband and children. In other words, the immigration of French women was more regulated by their husbands' choices and the family rules than the economic situation of the area.

According to Paula Mitchell Marks, women in 19<sup>th</sup> century Texas “occupied and had power [only] in...the domestic sphere.”<sup>167</sup> However, the Population Schedules show that French women could be marginalized in their families as they were in the society. Indeed, the husband was almost always listed as the head of the family. The case of the Natus family—an exemplary one for the Natus were one of the only French families whose presence in the Lower Rio Grande Valley was constant from 1850 to 1900—shows the extent to which French settlers' wives were sometimes deprived of any preeminent position in their families through different periods of their life. The 1860 Cameron County Population Schedules list I. Natus, a 51 year-old French merchant who lived with a young German-born woman, Mary, 26 years old, and five children among whom the eldest was 11 years old. I. Natus was seemingly the head of the family.<sup>168</sup> Until 1880, the Population Schedules are silent on the relationships linking the different members of a family; thus, the questions around the relationship between the head of the family and Mary, which arise based on the difference in age between them, only find definitive answers in the 1880 Population Schedules. In 1880, Isidore Natus was not listed in the Population Schedules; a

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167. *Ibid.*, 78.

168. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 562.

research in the Brownsville City Cemetery shows that he died on August 28, 1873.<sup>169</sup> Mary Natus, however, was still alive and is mentioned in the 1880 Population Schedules as Kate Natus' mother—who in the meantime became Kate Dauboin through her marriage with Stephen Dauboin. Kate was also, doubtlessly, according to her age and complete nationality, Isidore Natus' daughter. Importantly for the present study, Mary Natus, by then 48 years old and widowed, was still denied the status of head of the family; it was attributed to 28 year-old Stephen Dauboin, her son-in-law. Not surprisingly, Mary is listed without any mention of professional activity, and is said to be simply staying “at home.”<sup>170</sup>

However, the general picture of the socio-economic marginalization of the French women is contrasted by some notable examples. As Paula Mitchell Marks notes for 19<sup>th</sup> century Texan women: “certainly, not all European and Anglo immigrant women accepted and tried to live within the dominant image of womanhood.”<sup>171</sup> Indeed, the 1860 Population Schedules uncover the case of Elmine Jaquelin, a 40 year-old French woman who was living by herself. She is mentioned as a merchant with a personal estate whose value was estimated at \$500.<sup>172</sup> This case of a self-established and successful French woman is unique for the 1850s-1860s, but finds more numerous echoes in the following decades. Indeed, the 1870 Population Schedules mention five French-born women who were settled by themselves and engaged in a professional activity, and the 1880 Population Schedules seven, in addition to the nuns.<sup>173</sup> If this evolution reflects a progressive integration of French

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169. Brownsville City Cemetery, line 12, left.

170. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 310.

171. Marks, “Westering Women,” 78.

172. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 563.

women in the professional fields and a betterment of their social status, it is clearly the direct consequence of a particular familial situation created by a difference in age and life expectancy between French women and their husbands. Indeed, the 1880 Population Schedules reveal that out of the seven French women who participated in the economic life of the area, five were widowed.

Out of these five widows, four were apparently trying to make a living out of their deceased husband's businesses, because they are listed either as dry goods merchants or as coffee house keepers. The other widow, being unable to read or write, became a laundress to survive. The two other French women who are listed with a profession in the 1880 Population Schedules were also dry goods merchants. These two women, Margaret and Angela Lober, were sisters and lived with their mother, Margaret Lober, a 74 year-old lady who had lost her husband. Due to her old age, Margaret might have not been able to work anymore, and it is highly possible that her two daughters took charge of her deceased husband's business.<sup>174</sup> Thus, the participation of women in the economic sphere appears more as the fruit of unfortunate consequences and necessities than of real social improvements.

In any case, the positive influence of the border region atmosphere on the socio-economic status of the French women cannot be denied. Isolation, regular absence of the father or husband, diseases and natural catastrophes gave them responsibilities that would probably have been out of reach if they had stayed in their country of birth. Taking care of their deceased husbands' businesses was just one side of the new roles French women acquired. In some cases, men could be considered "unreliable as husbands," leading women to replace their husbands as head of the

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173. *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr County; 1880 Census: Texas, Cameron and Starr County.*

174. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County, 302.*

family.<sup>175</sup> The 1880 Population Schedules mention, for example, the case of John Boguel, a 55 year-old Frenchman who had rheumatism. Because of this handicap, his wife, Mary, became the head of the family, taking on the role of economic provider—she is mentioned as a grocer whereas her husband does not have any profession—and of family keeper.<sup>176</sup>

French women's experience in the Lower Rio Grande Region proves also that "fluid frontier conditions called for more flexible and realistic laws regarding women's rights."<sup>177</sup> French women's access to property is an exemplary case. In Cameron County in 1900, out of the three French-born who owned a house, two were women. Augustine Lober, 64 years old and single (not widowed), is mentioned as a capitalist and owned a house free of mortgage.<sup>178</sup> The situation of Mary Natus in 1900 is equally interesting. This wife of a French-born merchant had been, as mentioned earlier, marginalized in her own family by her husband and, after the death of the latter, by her son-in-law. However, Mary was much younger than her husband; therefore, more than 25 years after Isidore Natus' death, she was still alive. In 1900, finally, she is recognized in the Population Schedules as the head of her family, despite the fact that her 28-year old son was still living with her. She also owned the house in which she lived free of mortgage.<sup>179</sup> Her longevity is, ironically, probably what allowed her to achieve this status. Doubtlessly, the particularities of the border situation changed French women, turning them into tough settlers. In parallel, French

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175. Marks, "Westering Women," 78.

176. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 318.

177. Marks, "Westering Women" 78.

178. *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 321; this woman seems to be in fact Margaret Lober, mentioned in *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 302.

179. *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 354.

women saw a progressive, even if limited, recognition of their efforts through laws and situations which gave to South Texas societies in general, and the Lower Rio Grande Valley in particular, their peculiar flavor.

Moreover, the common isolation and hardships some women suffered in this distant area reinforced gender solidarity. For example, Elmine Jaquelin, the only French woman who was settled without any man before 1870, was living with a 22 year-old Louisianan woman in 1860.<sup>180</sup> However, in many cases, this “sisterhood” had real familial roots, even if these roots are sometimes hard to uncover. For example, the 1900 Population Schedules reveal the interesting case of two women of a French father who were living side by side in Brownsville, and whose complete origin—born in Louisiana, but of French father and Irish mother—and similar date of birth seem to indicate that they were twin sisters. This information cannot be confirmed, because the first woman, Margaret Wallis, was married to an English man, and the other one, Josephine Johnson, was widowed. However, some elements seem to link these two women. As a laundress, Josephine, who was a single mother, was probably unable to provide for her two young children. Therefore, she might have benefited from Margaret’s family support which was established next door. In exchange, Josephine might have been working for her sister’s family which did not have any permanent domestic servant.<sup>181</sup>

In fact, solidarity among French family members went usually beyond gender relations. This solidarity is often illustrated by the integration or re-integration of French women in their son’s, daughter’s, son-in-law’s or daughter-in-law’s family after their husbands’ death. Moreover, the hardships of the border life concerned also

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180. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 583.

181. *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 387.

Frenchmen. Starting a business or settling by oneself in the area was always risky, and, as a consequence, Frenchmen, like Frenchwomen, tended to stay with their parents until a very advanced age and despite their marital or economic status. For example, in 1880, Victor and Catherine Egley's eight children were still living with their parents. Among these children, two daughters, Josephine and Margaret, both 24 years old, were married but still established with their husbands in their own parents' house. Interestingly, Victor and Catherine's sons-in-law, like two of their sons still settled with them, had jobs.<sup>182</sup> Even when the sons and daughters of French-born people decided to leave their parents' houses, they usually resettled right next to relatives, as in the case of the Abadie family.<sup>183</sup>

The only real links of solidarity which can be observed for the French population, in addition to the familial one, had national, ethnic or cultural roots. This point explains why gender cannot be seen as a satisfactory element of solidarity for French women; indeed, as Paula Mitchell Marks argues for 19<sup>th</sup> century Texas as a whole, the link between women was always blurred or erased by ethnic differences.<sup>184</sup> More importantly, the idea that French people of different families lived close to each other in the first place appears as a crucial point for the present study. Specifically, it supposes that nationality and culture could have bonded all the French settlers together, regardless of their socio-economic or gender differences. More generally, it calls for an analysis of the influence of national roots, identity and culture on the French population's life and pattern of settlements in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The influence the French population exerted on the area, and the weight of the Valley's situation on their choices of settlement, analyzed above from a socio-

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182. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 266.

183. *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 297.

184. Marks, "Westering Women," 77.

economic perspective, needs to be tackled in light of cultural and identity-related elements.

### **The Role of Nationality and Culture in the Patterns of Settlements and Choices of Integration of the French immigrants.**

This section sheds light on the relationship that French-born who settled in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in the 19<sup>th</sup> century maintained with their French nationality and cultural background. Based on the Population Schedules, at times complemented with ‘material’ sources such as the Brownsville Cemetery tombstones, this analysis answers several inter-related questions. First, did the French-born abandon their culture and identity and did they long for a local integration, even if this meant a quick acculturation? What was the relationship between socio-economic levels and French culture and identity? How did they display their national and cultural roots? Are the ideas of French identity and local integration exclusive or inclusive?

French settlers adopted a broad range of reactions—from the display of a French identity to its complete denial—which were clearly linked with socio-economic backgrounds. In short, it was much more common—and probably easier too—for French middle-class and elites to cling to their national roots. However, a common nationality gathered French-born together. Moreover, French settlers’ identity-led choices were not one-sided and univocal. Indeed, despite different attitudes toward their nationality and inherited culture, Lower Rio Grande French immigrants were all shaped by the borderland atmosphere of this area they eventually called home, leading them to adopt a plurality of identities. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, French-born became generally assimilated into the U.S. and Mexican cultures.

The idea previously mentioned that a common nationality, identity and/or culture bonded French together in the Lower Rio Grande Valley supposes a foreigner-friendly area, where the constitution of a strongly organized French community would have been possible. In *The Twin Cities*, published in 1893, Lieutenant H.W. Chatfield, in a sort of advertising-like statement, asserts the welcoming character of the Valley where, according to him, “the citizens have at all times extended the right hand of fellowship to settlers who have come among them, regardless of nationality and devoid of sectional prejudice.”<sup>185</sup> It seems, however, that Lower Rio Grande Valley cities—Rio Grande City but especially Brownsville—were the most suitable places for French settlers, because, as James Heaven Thompson argues, “the Spanish culture of the cities in Mexico was always cosmopolitan in nature.”<sup>186</sup> In addition to welcoming settlers of diverse nationalities, these urban areas offered the guarantee of a cosmopolitan atmosphere in which French-born could feel more at-ease and preserve their cultural differences. It is, therefore, not surprising to find French people gathered in the most cosmopolitan areas of 19<sup>th</sup> century Brownsville. Even in the private sphere, the mixing between French population and other foreigners, especially Europeans, was not uncommon. For example, in 1870, the Frenchman John Fries, a 45 year-old shoemaker, was living in a Brownsville boarding house with five other single men from five different nationalities.<sup>187</sup> This example is not isolated, nor is it specific to Brownsville. The 1870 Population Schedules reveal the interesting case of two single Frenchmen, Pierre Noyaux and Pierre Grossete, who are settled in Rio Grande City with a family from Louisiana, two single Louisianans and an Irish settler.<sup>188</sup> This

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185. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 3.

186. Thompson, “Nineteenth Century History,” 73.

187. *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 207-208.



latter case is particular, for it might be an illustration of the specificity of the bonds linking French people with other people of French culture. It is always hard to know whenever Louisianans were francophones or had some relationships with the French culture; in the present case, some of these settlers of Louisianan birth were probably of French culture, referring to their names: Michelle Nigieux and Louis Romain. The same kind of supposition can be drawn when French people were settled with Canadians, as in the case of the Bourboise family, a French family settled in Edinburg in 1870 with a non-related Canadian farmer bearing a seemingly French name, Bellefeule.<sup>189</sup>

Thanks to the addition of the father's and mother's origin for each settler, and of "Quebec" in the list of settlers' origins in the 1880 Population Schedules, conjectures about the specific relations between French people and people related to the French culture can be more confidently made. Indeed, without these two new elements, the particularity of the Leahy family, settled on Jefferson street in Brownsville in 1880, would not have been illuminated. This family was composed of Michael Leahy, an Irish grocer, and his wife Agnes, a woman from Quebec. They were living with Adolf Arnaud, a young store clerk born in Texas. Referring to their complete origin, it seems that Adolf and his employer's family shared more than a basic professional relationship. Indeed, Adolf had a French father and an Irish mother, a double foreign origin and inherited culture that could have linked him with Mary, brought up in a francophone country, and with Michael, of Irish birth.<sup>190</sup> The cultural bond between francophones is even more striking in the case of four nuclear families settled side by side in Cameron County in 1900. Indeed, most of these settlers were

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188. *1870 Census: Texas, Starr County*, 456-457.

189. *1870 Census: Texas, Hidalgo County*, 237.

190. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 280.

sons and daughters of a couple formed by a Louisianan woman and a French Canadian man, and all of them preserved, through their marriages and relationships with Louisianan and French people, what can be related to the concept of Frenchness.<sup>191</sup>

If the cultural link between francophones seems strong in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lower Rio Grande Valley, it is both less common and less easily assessable than the one tying French-born together. Concerning Matamoros in the pre-Mexican-American War, Leroy P. Graf comments on “the social separation of the various national groups in the Coffee and Billiard Houses where they all adjourned at the close of the day.”<sup>192</sup> Thus, in Matamoros at this time, French people apparently did not mingle with the local population, nor were they inclined toward inter-national gathering. These congregations of French people in Matamoros are echoed by the patterns of settlement of French-born in other Texan areas, like in Champ d’Asile, where, as Betje Black Klier states, “the colonists split into factions along cultural lines.”<sup>193</sup> If French people living on the left bank of the Rio Grande were sometimes inclined to settle with other Europeans, the Population Schedules show that they actually preferred contact with other French people. The almost surrealist case of two French sheep herders of different families, isolated in Starr County countryside in 1880, but living side by side, is just one striking example of this general phenomenon.<sup>194</sup> Actually, the previously mentioned concentration of French people in Brownsville’s cosmopolitan areas, as in other parts of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, was made along specifically national—and not multicultural—considerations. Indeed, if like other Europeans, French were

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191. *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 528.

192. Graf, “Economic History,” 48-49.

193. Klier, “Champ D’Asile, Texas,” 87. About Champ d’Asile, see chapter 1.

194. *1880 Census: Texas, Starr County*, 214.

primarily concentrated in Elizabeth, Washington and Levee streets in Brownsville, most of them were living side by side. Moreover, the unusual presence of Europeans who were almost all of French origin in other areas like 12<sup>th</sup> street indicates that French might have tended to gather in less cosmopolitan streets, so as to reinforce their national community.<sup>195</sup> Actually, this type of congregating seems to reveal also a strong network of solidarity between French-born. For example, in 1880, five non-related families composed of at least one member of French origin were settled side by side on Brownsville's 12<sup>th</sup> street. Interestingly, one of these families was composed of just one member, Laudina Davereda, a 51 year-old French-born widow, and it would be legitimate to assume, with this context in mind, that she benefited from the other French settlers' help and assistance.<sup>196</sup>

Needy families of French origin were thus rarely isolated because they benefited from a double support: a familial one, and when it disappeared, as in the case of widows without grown children, a support fueled by common national roots. This type of domestic support appears, for example, in the 1870 Population Schedules, through the case of Virginia Vigié, a Frenchwoman living with Dolores Perez, a Mexican servant, and Felix Bergeret, a store clerk born in Algiers. From 1830 to 1962, Algeria constituted the most important settlement colony of the French Empire, and Felix Bergeret, born in what was at this time the French department of Alger, was, therefore, of French birth and doubtlessly, considering his name, a son of colonists born in the French hexagon. In the absence of husband and job, Virginia probably had

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195. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 345-346-347.

196. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 346.

some difficulties to make a living; in this situation, Felix Bergeret's professional activity and cultural background was probably the kind of support Virginia longed for.<sup>197</sup>

Moreover, a shared French origin bonded women together, especially in hard times. Indeed, in 1880, in Brownsville's Washington street, three families of French nationality or French origin were living side by side. A widowed woman was to be found in each of these families; among them, two were single mothers living with their children, and one, older than the others, was integrated into her daughter's family.<sup>198</sup> It can be supposed that the isolation and hardships which primarily targeted widows were in this case overcome by a solidarity network based on both familial and national bonds. This type of national-based solidarity between French women is related by Marks to the particular effort put by Europeans in re-creating cultural communities on the Texas frontier. Indeed, she suggests that "because European immigrants tended to stay together, European women usually continued to have a more of a built-in female community than did their Anglo counterparts."<sup>199</sup>

The strong connections and durable bonds which tied many members of the Lower Rio Grande Valley French community together can hardly be ignored; however, they need to be discussed. First, the gathering and solidarity of people of French origin was just a general tendency which had its exceptions. The question here would consist in analyzing the reasons why some French-born people did not try to maintain connections with their fellow citizens. Second, and maybe more important, the network of solidarity some French people established between themselves is only clear evidence of their willingness to alleviate anxieties produced by a foreign

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197. *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 227.

198. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 293.

199. Marks, "Westering Women," 83.

settlement. In other words, nothing presented to this point leads to the conclusion that people of French origin tried to preserve their identity and culture, and even less that they influenced the area from a cultural standpoint, as they did from an economic and social one. However, according to observers and specialists of the Lower Rio Grande Valley history, it seems that both the preservation and display of French culture and identity was a reality in the area throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1893, Chatfield argued that foreigners, who constituted half of the Valley's population, had prevented the economic development of the area because they "clung to the traditions and customs of their native country."<sup>200</sup> For historian James Heaven Thompson, French identity and culture was not only preserved but displayed. Indeed, in addition to describing Cameron County society as "more cosmopolitan than most areas of Texas" because of its "large, mixed European influence," he suggests a direct and lasting impact of the French presence on the area when he notes the common ability of the Anglo Americans settled in the area in 1890 to speak French.<sup>201</sup>

To some extent, a revised perspective on the French-born professional activities confirms these combined assumptions on the preservation and diffusion of the French identity and culture. Indeed, it seems that many professions in which French-born were engaged both enabled a permanent contact with their national roots and opened doors to the diffusion of a French flavor in the Valley. The Population Schedules reveal from 1870 onwards the specialization of many French merchants in dry goods commerce, that is in the selling of textiles and clothing (see table 7). Actually, this field of trade was probably the most favored by local French merchants since the 1820s, for, as Graf notes, foreign dry goods transactions already played a

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200. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 3.

201. Thompson, "Nineteenth Century History," 73-74.

considerable role in the trade with the Lower Rio Grande Valley at this period.<sup>202</sup> The importance of dry goods transactions is crucial for the notion of identity because it supposes the possibility to import products coming from Louisiana and even from France. In light of this idea, it is not surprising that Frenchmen who specialized in dry goods commerce tended to gather in Brownsville's 12<sup>th</sup> street and elsewhere.<sup>203</sup> Indeed, if they were running a commerce in which French products had an important place, French merchants probably longed for association, both to become more effective and to attract attention to the particularity of their commerce. Local newspapers mention the existence of French dry good products that were available in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as French cashmere and sateen, but also of other types of products, for example French liquor.<sup>204</sup> If there is no way to be sure that French merchants were at the root of this kind of importation—even if it would be legitimate to think so—, this fact adds to the idea of the penetration of a French idiosyncrasy in the area. Moreover, it might be assumed that the three French-born saloon keepers who were established in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in 1870 had an impact on the importation of French liquor into the area. The important number of self-established French food-makers—cook, bakers, confectioners, butchers—, who doubtlessly acquired a “savoir-faire” in their country of birth, also echoes the possible French influence on the local culture. Indeed, considering the idiosyncratic French culinary traditions, it seems that these types of professions were propitious to the diffusion of French food habits in the Valley. Moreover, the impregnation of the French identity via food-making industries might have been

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202. Graf, “Economic History,” 27.

203. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 345-347.

204. *The Brownsville Daily Herald*, May 11 1893; *The Brownsville Daily Herald*, March 13 1893.

profound on the area, for the “savoir-faire” in that field was sometimes, as in the case of a baker family like the Bouvard’s, transmitted from generation to generation.<sup>205</sup>

On the other hand, it can be assumed that, if this type of activity contributed to the diffusion of a French flavor in the Valley, it also had to adapt to the needs and demands of the area. Consequently, the specificity of any required “savoir-faire” might have been considerably altered for commercial reasons. Moreover, the tendency to privilege an adaptation to the local atmosphere of the Rio Grande Valley seems actually common to many professions in which French immigrants were engaged. It is indeed not rare to see French-born employing people of American or Mexican origin, even in the food services or food-making industry. This raises questions about the degree of integration of the French population in the local society and the nature of the choices they were willing to make. The 1870 Population Schedules reveal an interesting example which illustrates this point. A French clerk, apparently single, can be found settled in Rio Grande City with a Mexican woman, her three young children, and another boarder of Mexican origin. The names of the three adults previously mentioned, if hard to decipher, are different enough to prove that they were not related to each other. This latter fact seems to illustrate the degree of integration of this French clerk in the local community, for, as the only boarder who has an occupation, he is doubtlessly using his education to the service of a single—and probably widowed—Mexican woman.<sup>206</sup> Actually, even when people of French origin did not decide willingly to work for or with people of different origins, it seems unlikely that their professional choices were made on considerations related to the preservation or diffusion of their national identity and culture. On the other hand, some French people

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205. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 562.

206. *1870 Census: Texas, Starr County*, 454.

who were engaged in trading, food services and skilled professions could diffuse a sense of French culture, whereas unskilled French workers simply did not have the means to do so and could just expect to make a living.

Outside the strictly professional field, however, the connections between socio-economic differences and French identity are much more visible. Indeed, if pragmatic choices were dominant concerning professions, in the social sphere, some French-born tried to display their identity, and, not surprisingly, it seems that only those who had reached a certain socio-economic level did so. This can be analyzed in light of the graves of French-born people buried in the Brownsville City Cemetery. Indeed, out of the ten French people's graves located there, six give the place of birth of the deceased French-born as well as bear inscriptions in the French language.<sup>207</sup> Not surprisingly, the Population Schedules show that only French-born from the middle-class or the local elites are buried in these graves. Namely, they pertain to Basile Abadie and Guillaume Daverede, respectively a tavern keeper and a dry goods merchant, J. Eugene Lugadou, unidentified, Louis Renaud, a farmer and a stock raiser, Hypolite Querenet and Alfonse Vuittonnet, both saloon keepers, and Isidore Natus, a merchant.<sup>208</sup> Interestingly, two families of French birth are gathered in two of these tombs, emphasizing again the solidarity which linked some members of the French community to each other, but implying also that such a bond was especially common inside the highest social categories. The familial link between the Querenets and the Vuittonnets, made clear by the inscriptions *Vuittonnet né Querenet du Bassin*

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207. These ten graves might not be the only French-born tombstones located in the Brownsville City Cemetery. Indeed, while doing research there, I have been "gently" advised not to come back to the place, and was therefore unable to pursue my inquiry any further. Thus, I apologize for providing here what might be only a sample of the 19<sup>th</sup> century French-born graves.

208. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 297; *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 201; *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 346; *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 630; *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 268; *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 235.



(Vuittonnet born Querenet du Bassin) on the vault, could be guessed from the Population Schedules, for the two families were settled together. However, the relation between the Daverede and the Abadie families could not be drawn from any other primary source; in this case, it suggests that some connections between French-born were also made outside the private sphere. For example, benevolent and secret societies, like the Knights of Honor or the Masonic Odd Fellows lodge, were organizations where French-born of a certain social status could meet and create friendships.<sup>209</sup>

The four other French-born tombs are more silent on matters of national roots. Indeed, only one mentions the place of birth of the deceased French-born, and none bear inscriptions in the French language. The correlation between socio-economic level and display of identity is again clear: in these four graves are buried respectively Nicolas Chano, a merchant, who, however, started his career in the Valley as a butcher,<sup>210</sup> Juan Castaing, a gardener,<sup>211</sup> Jacques Louret, a butcher, and his children,<sup>212</sup> and Louis Rousset, a barber, and his children.<sup>213</sup> Thus, these French-born, from different socio-economic categories than the ones mentioned above, did not share the same preoccupations for displaying their national roots. Actually, this difference is above all social, for these four French-born were all able to make a good living in the area. Their good economic situation can be drawn from the graves, especially through Juan Castaing's imposing marble vault and Nicolas Chano's well-crafted fences.

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209. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 30.

210. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 566; *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 235; *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 347.

211. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 560; *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 242.

212. *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 87; *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 380.

213. *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 286; *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 305; *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 385.

Interestingly, Nicolas Chano is buried in a park which is composed of a couple of graves pertaining to the Champion family members, a rich family which owned thousands of acres of lands, and with whom the Frenchman probably made alliances to improve his situation.<sup>214</sup> It can be assumed that the primary purpose of such alliances—involving relations with Anglo-Americans, as in the case of Nicolas Chano, but also with Mexican-born—was to ease the integration of French-born into the local society, and therefore implied a flexible attitude on matters of national identity and inherited culture. Only the Frenchmen who came to the Valley with a very comfortable socio-economic situation were able to spare such familial strategies, and this had direct consequences for the preservation of the French identity, as reflected by the tombstones.

It can be assumed that familial alliances, revealed through Nicolas Chano's case, were primarily performed through intermarriages, for, as Andrés Reséndez states for the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Texas, such unions “gave foreign-born arrivals a set of ready-made alliances through their in-laws.”<sup>215</sup> This type of union, still in the words of Reséndez, had therefore an “inescapable economic dimension,”<sup>216</sup> for it allowed the foreigner to enhance his socio-economic status by smoothing his integration into the local network of alliances and to acquire the Mexican or American citizenship which guaranteed economic privileges.<sup>217</sup> Thus, marriages remained a particular field where economic factors could potentially clash with identity-motivated choices. In other words, it might be supposed that in the case of a union contracted between a

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214. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 38.

215. Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 129.

216. *Ibid.*, 129.

217. *Ibid.*, 130-131.

Frenchman and a Frenchwoman in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the potentiality of a sudden betterment of the socio-economic situation was almost replaced, in a rather exclusive way, by a brighter perspective for the future preservation of their French identity. This link between the nationality of the spouse and the considerations toward national identity is corroborated by an analysis of the Lower Rio Grande French settlers' first names. Indeed, according to the collectible data from the 1860 Population Schedules, every single French man settled in the area and engaged in a union with a French woman kept his original first name, which is not the case of French men married to a German or a Mexican woman. This opposite phenomenon is actually particularly recurrent in unions linking a French husband and his Mexican wife; indeed, out of the seven Frenchmen who were married to a Mexican wife in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in 1860, four had changed their first name. Interestingly, among these four Frenchmen, two adopted a Hispanic first name, namely Pedro Miniel<sup>218</sup>—derivation of the French name Pierre—and Andrés Levrier<sup>219</sup>—derivation of the French name André—, and two adopted an English one: John Castaing<sup>220</sup> and John Decker<sup>221</sup>—both derived from the French name Jean. Changes in first names are obviously mirroring the process of transformation of identity that these settlers went through, and in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, a frontier region divided into a Mexican and an American borderland state, this process of transformation was complex and extremely fluid. Thus, John Castaing and John Decker, two French-born married to Mexican women, adopted an English first name, but gave Mexican first names to their

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218. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 550.

219. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 614.

220. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 560.

221. *1860 Census: Texas, Starr County*, 272.

children. These cases show clearly that identity was not inherited, but resulted from a choice, and as Andrés Reséndez suggests for Texas and New Mexico in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this choice was always situational: “at the frontier, choosing one’s identity could constitute an exciting business opportunity, a bold political statement, and at times it was simply a matter of survival.”<sup>222</sup>

French settlers were engaged in very diverse socio-economic situations, and this reality had a strong impact on the identity choices each of them made. Choices which were simply “a matter of survival” concerned primarily French settlers without strong socio-economic support, whereas culturally-led choices were to be more of a privilege, especially concerning a population which had no roots in the United States or Mexico. Generally, it seems that the relationship between socio-economic divides and French identity can be found also in the analysis of marriages. Indeed, socio-economic levels influenced greatly the marital choices of the French settlers, and therefore identity choices in that matter (see table 14 and 15). In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, only French merchants—most of them members of the local elites, considering the value of their personal and real estate—were consistently looking for a union with a French-born spouse, and avoiding marriages with Mexican women which could put French roots at risk. Obviously, it could be argued that marriages between French men and women were probably contracted before their settlement in the Rio Grande Valley. However, the 1860 Population Schedules indicate, through the example of the Gamrer family, that it was not always the case. J.F. Gamrer was the richest French merchant of the time; if it is likely that he came to the Valley with his future wife of French birth named Julia, interestingly, he married her in Cameron County in 1860,

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222. Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 2.

after the couple gave birth to two children on Texas soil.<sup>223</sup> Some Frenchmen pertaining to the local elite were thus apparently, because of their high social status, willing to abandon the perspective of marrying a woman of local birth which could have provided them with a better socio-economic integration.

The relationship that Frenchmen of a high social status maintained with their French roots, however, was most of the time of a much more inclusive and complex order. Besides, considerations for national identity alone can hardly explain why rich French merchants who were not married to a French-born spouse were the only ones among the Rio Grande Valley French settlers to contract marriages with Anglo-American women from various states (see table 14 and 15). Moreover, the scarcity of French women in the Valley would have naturally brought the French merchants, like other European settlers, to marry Mexican or other European women settled in the area. Thus, the reason for these unions seems to be primarily the traders' willingness to obtain U.S. citizenship and alliances, obviously beneficial for commerce. As experienced travelers, French merchants were also probably more open-minded, as they had been put in contact with different nationalities and ethnicities. Indeed, the 1860 Population Schedules reveal the two cases, unique among the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lower Rio Grande Valley French-born settlers, of J. Beauchen and Victor Haslaner, both wealthy merchants, who were married respectively to a "mulatto" from Louisiana, and to a "mulatto" born in Florida.<sup>224</sup> The complexity of the relationship maintained by French settlers of high social classes with their identity stems, however, primarily from the fact that some of them apparently harmonized commercial interests with cultural affinities. The best support for this insight is probably to be found in the

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223. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 583.

224. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 563; *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 581. Both women are mentioned as mulattos in the Population Schedules.

French-born restaurant, tavern or coffee house keepers who were settled in the Valley with a spouse of Louisianan birth in the 1870s and 1880s. In a sort of double strategy, this type of union provided the Frenchmen with the U.S. citizenship on the one hand, and a guarantee for the preservation of the French identity on the other. The relationship between Louisianan extraction and Frenchness is, at first glance, only clear for Basile Abadie and Juan Abadie who married Louisianan women of French parents.<sup>225</sup> These two men, probably brothers, seemed both, quite interestingly, to have successfully conciliated the preservation of their Frenchness and the status of American citizen. A deeper analysis of the 1870 and 1880 Population Schedules actually offers, through the case of Celestin Jagou, a French saloon keeper who later became a liquor merchant, a more striking example of this type of conciliatory attitude. Even if this man of French birth married a woman born in Louisiana of Louisianan parents, his four children, Adolphe, Michel, Albert and Christine, bore ostensible French first names. In addition to this fact, the 1870 and 1880 Population Schedules prove that Celestin Jagou tended to cultivate a sense of Frenchness by hosting different men of French birth or French descent with whom he did not appear related.<sup>226</sup> Despite the fact that he became an American citizen, Celestin Jagou probably did more to preserve and develop his French identity than any other French-born settled in the Valley at this period. This example seems to fit perfectly François Lagarde's statement that "for first-generation French immigrants, becoming a citizen is more of an administrative process than a sign of true naturalization."<sup>227</sup>

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225. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 297.

226. *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 213; *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 302.

227. Lagarde, "Birth, Stock and Work," 174.

In fact, members of the local elite like Celestin Jagou were not the only Frenchmen who maintained and transmitted their French roots despite some concessions made to a new network of cultural belongings. Indeed, even French of a lower status and married to a foreign wife could be the vectors of a sense of Frenchness, transmitting their roots through the attribution of French-based first names to their children. The 1850 Population Schedules mention, for example, a French butcher, Michel Cha[sic], who married a German woman but gave to his son, born on Texas soil, the first name Louis.<sup>228</sup> In the same document, this case is echoed by the Mauget family whose head, Prosper, a French teamster, was married to a Mexican woman with whom he had a son named Eugene.<sup>229</sup> Interestingly, in each of these two examples, the son who received a first name of French consonance had a sister whose first name could be attributed in the first case to the Anglo-American culture, and in the other to the Hispanic culture. This might suppose that both Michel Cha[sic] and Prosper Mauget had in mind to give to their sons—quite logically considering that they would bear the French family name all their lives—the responsibility to transmit the French roots of the family to the next generation. Maybe more important, the propensity to have, in the same family, children who embody the diverse cultural roots of their parents illuminates again the porosity of cultural boundaries as a defining characteristic of the area. The Lower Rio Grande Valley was indeed, still in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “a world of exceedingly fluid identities,”<sup>230</sup> implying that the frames of national identities could easily blur and melt, creating, for each French settler, a multiplicity of belongings and the possibility

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228. *1850 Census: Texas, Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr County*, 64.

229. *1850 Census: Texas, Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr County*, 126.

230. Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 1.

to choose between them according to the situation. From this perspective, it seems almost illusory to consider that French-born settlers, even from the highest social background and in favorable conditions for the preservation of their national identity, could be the keepers of a “genuine” French culture and identity. Indeed, in the context of the porosity of identities, it seems logical to assume that the elements constituting “Frenchness” might have been subsequently modified as time was passing. One of the best examples to illustrate this idea might be found through a study of the Vuittonnet and Querenet families. If these two intermingled French-born families—who cultivated their French identity through marital choices and the transmission of French first names to their children—<sup>231</sup> seem to embody the elite’s efforts to preserve their French roots, they were also, as their familial vault shows, transformed by the diverse cultural influences of the area. Indeed, their tombstones interestingly mix French and English languages, and probably due to the long-lasting settlement of the family in the Brownsville area, inscriptions written in French are riddled with grammatical and spelling mistakes.

Actually, the previous example which illustrates the experience of a French family that lived in the Valley in the 1870s and 1880s might be the reflection of a broader phenomenon which is the progressive assimilation and acculturation of the diverse national and ethnic elements settled in the Valley to the increasingly dominant Anglo-American and Hispanic features of the local society. From this perspective, the disappearance of inter-French unions and the development of intermarriages involving local women mirror the progressive decline of the French identity in the area (see table 16). Whether this phenomenon occurred naturally or was forced by a progressive rigidity of cultural boundaries cannot be answered; in any case, it seems clear that

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231. *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 235-236; *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 293.



after 1870, the preservation of French identity in the Valley became a more difficult endeavor. It should be added that in an area located at the confluence of two nations, this growing tendency to assimilation could adopt two different shapes: one which could be defined as an “Americanization,” the other as a “Mexicanization.” This idea arises indeed from the 1900 Population Schedules which mention the level of mastering of the English language by each settler. At this date, in Cameron County, all French-born, most of whom were merchants and “capitalists” (as mentioned by the primary sources), were able to speak English, except for a French farmer whose name cannot be deciphered. Interestingly, this farmer was then the only Frenchman engaged in the agricultural field who was married to a woman of Mexican origin. Thus, it is highly possible that this French settler was “Mexicanized,” which implies that he was able to speak Spanish, probably more useful than English in the rural areas of the county.<sup>232</sup> An analysis of Starr County in the 1900 Population Schedules adds insights about the differences in socio-economic levels between these two types of acculturation. Indeed, these sources reveal that the process of assimilation to the Mexican culture seemed to spread primarily to the poorest French settlers, like Louis Steven, a 73-year old Frenchmen who was unable to speak English, but, as a servant in a house composed entirely of persons of Mexican birth or origin, had doubtlessly integrated into the Hispanic culture.<sup>233</sup>

If Louis Steven was not the only French settler in Starr County who was unable to speak English, some of the other French-born in the same situation were apparently not “Mexicanized.” Indeed, the 1900 Population Schedules for this county reveal also the two interesting cases of Cle[sic] Block, a French-born woman married

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232. *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 235-236.

233. *1900 Census: Texas, Starr County*, 510.

to a French merchant,<sup>234</sup> and Eugene Mergor, a French-born clerk,<sup>235</sup> who were all unable to speak English, but were not related to any Mexican person. These cases need to be combined with the new wave of French immigrants who settled in Starr County. As Grytz states for the Germans settled in the Rio Grande in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, this could testify to the creation of a new “cocoon” of French-born where the national identity and culture could have been more easily preserved.<sup>236</sup> This could explain why, as opposed to French-born settled in Cameron County, some French settlers in Starr County were apparently unable to speak English and Spanish. However, the absence of information prevents this kind of statement, and, obviously, calls for further research on the French Rio Grande Valley settlers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Be that as it may, two elements seem to indicate that a regaining of French identity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Lower Rio Grande Valley was not likely. First, most of the secondary sources which focus on the French Texans as a whole underline that, by this period, they “were largely assimilated, with only small islands of ethnic identification still visible.”<sup>237</sup> More specifically, due to the general absence of renewing of French immigrants in the area, second, and even third-generation French men and women progressively outnumbered the French-born. And yet, for François Lagarde, if the first generation of French settlers could remain “French” through family, language and “heart,”—a possibility offered by the relative openness, at least until 1870, of cultural boundaries—this culture usually did not “cross over,” meaning that second-generation French men and women tended to assimilate almost

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234. *1900 Census: Texas, Starr County*, 503.

235. *1900 Census: Texas, Starr County*, 503.

236. Grytz, “German Immigrants,” 152.

237. University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio, *The French Texans*, 1.

automatically.<sup>238</sup> This might have started with the loss of mastery over French language, for, as Milo Kearney states, “it is very difficult to maintain a trilingual family tradition...in the bilingual Spanish-English setting of Brownsville, [so] French frequently would fall away”<sup>239</sup>

The preservation of French roots depended also on the efforts put by French-born into the transmission of French identity to their children, and some second-generation French people might have likewise cultivated this heritage and even taken a certain pride in it. This seems to be the case of Frank Natus—tragically famous in local history for being the only Brownsville settler killed during a raid which occurred in August 13, 1906, in the city—who is listed in the 1900 Population Schedules as a 17 year-old Texan of French mother and father. Indeed, this double French origin is impossible, for the only French-born in the Natus family was Isidore, probably Frank’s grandfather, who married a German woman and died in 1873. Frank Natus, moreover, was settled in Brownsville as an office clerk with a widow named Josephine Marcelie, who was born in Mexico but of a French father.<sup>240</sup> Considering the relationship Frank seemed to maintain with his (distant) French identity, he was doubtlessly living with a woman of French origin on purpose. However, the case of Frank Natus is a very isolated one. In fact, the opposite reaction was more frequent, for the Population Schedules offer more examples of denial of French roots among the second-generation French settlers than attempts in claiming them. One striking example is given by the case of Louis Charay, as revealed in the 1900 Cameron Population Schedules. This primary source mentions that the 42 year-old shoemaker

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238. Lagarde, “Birth, Stock and Work,” 175.

239. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 89.

240. *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 354.

was born in Alabama, with both his mother and father born in the same state.<sup>241</sup> However, according the 1880 Population Schedules, Louis Charay was a shoemaker born in Alabama but of French parents, Etienne and Jeanette Charay.<sup>242</sup> Of course, it could be argued that the person in charge of collecting the data for the 1900 Texas Census simply made mistakes. However, the same source offers a similar example of denial of French roots. This example seems even more interesting because it concerns a member of the Natus family, John, who, as opposed to Frank Natus (probably his nephew), refused to mention his French roots in an official document. According to the 1880 Population Schedules, John was the son of the French-born Isidore Natus and the German woman Mary Natus; however, in the 1900 Population Schedules, he was listed as the son of a Louisianan father and a Texan mother.<sup>243</sup> This example seems to be the perfect illustration of the importance of situational choices over familial heritage, for Frank and John Natus, although from the same family, adopted two very different attitudes concerning their origins. Obviously, these cases are extreme, and it can be assumed that the majority of second-generation French settlers did not live either in opposition to or in exaltation of their French roots, but rather, quite naturally, became indifferent to them. As François Lagarde argues for the second-generation French Texans, they “are more American than French, and often do not speak their mother tongue well.”<sup>244</sup>

Having mined the Population Schedules for information about the French population settled in the Rio Grande Valley in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this study can be

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241. *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 433.

242. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 302.

243. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 310; *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 347.

244. Lagarde, “Birth, Stock and Work,” 175.

continued through the analysis of a handful of notable French settlers whose unusual popularity in the local community has engendered another set of documentation. Through these particular cases, it is possible to learn more about the influence the Lower Rio Grande Valley had on the French-born, but especially about the influence these French people exerted on this borderland area. Reactions and attitudes in relation with the idea of “Frenchness” can also be illuminated through the narratives produced by and about these successful and influential French settlers. Indeed, as mirrors of their experiences, such primary sources reveal the way these Frenchman were perceived and wanted to be perceived.

### **Chapter 3: Notable French-Born Individuals and the Value of Their Personal Experiences**

An analysis of the French-born as a group revealed elements which can be explored more thoroughly by using narrative primary sources—such as newspaper articles, biographical sketches and diaries—to shift the focus to the individual case and the personal experience. Obviously, only a few French people of the Valley have produced or are the object of this kind of documentation. Thus, this chapter necessarily tackles the French-born whose presence in the Valley was notable enough to be documented, and whose actions and deeds made them particular among the French-born community.

Instead of portraying all the French-born people who played a significant role in the area—an endeavor which would tend to a listing of French-born people—this chapter focuses on five well-documented French figures so as to reveal the implications of the notability status regarding influence, integration and identity. These selected Frenchmen, who all came and lived in the area between the 1820s and the 1900s, are Jean-Louis Berlandier, Joseph Kleiber, L.N. Petitpain, Celestin Jagou and Georges Brulay. The concept of notability supposes primarily a significant reputation in a given area. All of these Frenchmen made their presence in the Lower Rio Grande Valley conspicuous through their impact on the local economy, society, and culture. To this extent, they exerted a stronger influence on the area than most French-born. To be in position of influencing the local community, these five French-born had to immerse themselves in the Lower Rio Grande Valley society and prove their attachment to the local community. Although all of these French notable men are distinguishable from other French-born people by the pragmatic and situational choices they made, their position of local elites created the possibility to emphasize

their “Frenchness” and transmit their French roots to their children. In other words, if the accession to the status of notability compelled a full integration in the community and adaptations to the particular socio-economic situation of the Valley, it also enabled the display of a French influence and identity. This apparent paradox is actually explained by the concept of porosity of identities which illustrates the compatibility of local integration and foreign culture and identity, and the possibility to put forward one of these two elements depending on the situation at any given time. Thus, this chapter demonstrates, at the scale of the individual experience, the extent to which this multiplicity of identities was integrated by the most notable French-born settlers.

### **Rediscovering the First Notable French Settler of the Valley: Jean-Louis Berlandier and his Influence and Integration in the Area.**

Established as a pharmacist and a doctor in Matamoros from 1831 until his death in 1851, Jean-Louis Berlandier was the first, the most famous and the most documented notable Frenchman who settled permanently in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although he is now remembered and mentioned primarily as a naturalist and an explorer, Berlandier was also a prominent Matamoros citizen who embodies the integration of the French-born people in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century local society and their adaptation to the frontier conditions. Thus, his personal experience sheds light on the integration process that French-born Valley settlers underwent. Moreover, Berlandier’s marks of attachment for his town and country of adoption illustrate the effects of long term settlement on the French identity.

Jean-Louis Berlandier was born around 1805 in Fort de L’Ecluse, a few miles from the Swiss frontier. Child of an impoverished family, he tried his luck in the city

of Geneva, one of the centers of the European culture at that time. He joined the Academy of Science of Geneva and became a student of botany under the patronage of the eminent naturalist Pyramus De Candolle. As one of the most competent and clever students of the Academy, Berlandier was chosen to undertake a study of the botany and zoology of Northern Mexico and Texas.<sup>245</sup> The young man sailed away from Europe on October 14, 1826, and landed near Tampico, Mexico, on December 15.

Jean-Louis Berlandier's scientific exploration of Northern Mexico was performed from 1827 to 1831 under the official Mexican program entitled the *Comision de Limites*, whose purpose was "to survey and establish the boundary between the Mexican Republic and the United States."<sup>246</sup> Berlandier's observations on natural sciences were to broaden knowledge of the "remote regions" of the Mexican Republic, that is of the northern part of the country.<sup>247</sup> His task put him in contact not only with the flora and fauna of the region, but also its topography, geology, astronomical situation and people, all of which were recorded in a journal.<sup>248</sup> Throughout the journey, Berlandier stayed several times in Matamoros which became a "home port" to which the scientific commission returned whenever they had to undertake a trip north, west or south. He compiled information about the town's latitude, longitude, altitude, distance from other settlements, resources and people (he noted a lot of foreign merchants), as well as suggesting some possible transformations

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245. Samuel Wood Geiser, *Naturalists of the Frontier*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: University Press, Southern Methodist University, 1948), 34.

246. *Ibid.*, 34.

247. Jean-Louis Berlandier, *La Comision de Limites: Diario de Viaje, 1851*, (Monterrey, MX: Archivo General del Estado, 1989), 8.

248. *Ibid.*, 4.



for economic improvement.<sup>249</sup> As an explorer and a scientist, Berlandier can be linked to another earlier Frenchman, Henry Joutel, who accompanied the La Salle expedition to Texas from 1684 to 1687. Indeed, both had a role of provider of information for future colonization, and as such, their respective journals display a neutral tone highlighting “the ‘documentary’ nature of [the] narrative while asserting intellectual and physical mastery over the foreign land and its occupants.”<sup>250</sup>

In 1831, the *Comision de Limites* was dissolved, ending Berlandier’s official task of collector of species for Geneva.<sup>251</sup> The Frenchman did not return to Europe, however, he settled in Matamoros as a pharmacist and a doctor and married a Mexican woman who gave birth to three children. Until he died by drowning near Matamoros in 1851, Berlandier pursued his collection of plants in Northern Mexico and Texas.<sup>252</sup> In all, it is said that Berlandier collected around 55,000 samples of flora species during his numerous trips in the area.<sup>253</sup> His work is “commemorated in names of animals and plants that will always awaken echoes in the minds of men of science”<sup>254</sup> Berlandier gave his name to numerous living organisms; more than forty vascular plants are named in his honor, and some well known animals in the area of

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249. Jean-Louis Berlandier, *La Comision de Limites: De Bejar a Matamoros, Segunda Part* (Monterrey: Archivo General del Estado, 1989), 148-152.

250. Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, “French Travelers in Texas: Identity, Myth and Meaning from Joutel to Butor,” in *The French in Texas: History, Migration, Culture*, ed. François Lagarde (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 255.

251. Geiser, *Naturalists of the Frontier*, 42.

252. Luis Sánchez Osuna, *Explicando a Berlandier* (Mexico City: Programa de Apoyo a las Culturas Municipales y Comunitarias, 2004), 22.

253. *Ibid.*, 22.

254. Geiser, *Naturalists of the Frontier*, 16.

Matamoros, like the Rio Grande Leopard frog and the Texas Tortoise, are respectively named *Rana berlandieri* and *Gopherus berlandieri* in the scientific jargon.<sup>255</sup>

Berlandier's intellectual influence on the Lower Rio Grande Valley goes beyond his observations as a naturalist. Indeed, the Frenchman was also a self-made geologist, volcanologist, astronomer and geographer, using his talents for example to correct some mistakes contained in previous maps of the Matamoros area.<sup>256</sup> However, the other field of knowledge in which he made the most valuable contribution is probably ethnography. Throughout his journeys, especially one undertaken in 1830 while still part of the commission, he gave a lot of information about the Texas Native American tribes, "their distributions, numbers, proclivities to friendship or hostilities, and their uses of natural resources including the pharmaceutical uses of plants."<sup>257</sup> According to the historian and ethnographer John C. Ewers, it might not be presumptuous to describe Berlandier as "one of the most enlightened amateur ethnographers of the American West during the frontier period."<sup>258</sup> Eventually, as a figure of modernity, he also demonstrated a great interest in the amelioration of the system of transportation in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, foreseeing the subsequent advantages for the local economy.<sup>259</sup>

Berlandier left an abundant production which mirrors his intellectual curiosity. The French-born was indeed extremely prolific, and in addition to the plants he

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255. James K. Baker, "Berlandier: A French Naturalist on the Texas Frontier." *Journal of South Texas* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2010), 43.

256. Osuna, *Explicando a Berlandier*, 20-22.

257. Baker, "Berlandier," 42.

258. *Ibid.*, 43.

259. Graf, "Economic History," 69-70.

collected in Northern Mexico and Texas, which can be found in seventeen herbaria in Europe and ten in the United States, Berlandier left numerous correspondences, notes, maps, sketches and drawings, as well as a voluminous diary of 1,500 pages.<sup>260</sup> Berlandier wrote most of these sources in his mother tongue, however, none were published in French; the *Diario de la Comision de Limites*, his first work, was published in Spanish in 1850, and his two most famous writings, *Journey to Mexico during the years 1826-1834* and *The Indians of Texas in 1830*, were translated into English before being published in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>261</sup> This seems to demonstrate that Berlandier became more of an American or a Mexican figure than a French one. Probably more judiciously, some historians regard Berlandier as a symbol of the cultural relations bonding Texas and the Mexican State of Tamaulipas.<sup>262</sup>

However, the context in which Berlandier came to Northern Mexico to conduct scientific research indicates that he should be seen as a transnational, and even a transcontinental figure. Indeed, his presence in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century is a remarkable evidence of the huge influence and diffusion of the European culture and knowledge in North America at this time. However, Jean-Louis Berlandier is not the only French figure to embody the scientific modernity which was brought to the American continent, nor is he the most prominent. A list of the most famous early 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalists who distinguished themselves as explorers would be composed of many French people, like Charles Alexandre Lesueur or René L. Lesson, who conducted their research on American soil.<sup>263</sup> This idea of 19<sup>th</sup> century European scientists as benefactors for the New World is still part of the discourse of

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260. Baker, "Berlandier," 44.

261. Osuna, *Explicando a Berlandier*, 13.

262. *Ibid.*, 28.

263. Geiser, *Naturalists of the Frontier*, 13.

American historians and scientists alike; in his widely praised book *Brave Companions*, David McCullough expresses this idea about the famous French naturalist Louis Agassiz—who became a professor at Harvard from 1846 to his death in 1873—in these terms: “what he became in the New World was the great proselytizer of the natural sciences, a hero, possibly the most invigorating and influential voice ever heard in American education.”<sup>264</sup>

In spite of his significant scientific and cultural contributions, the figure of Jean-Louis Berlandier was plunged into darkness for almost a century after his death. This situation was the result of two factors. First, the internationally renowned director of the Botanical Garden in Geneva and Berlandier’s professor Pyramus de Candolle, displeased with his young disciple’s limited results in Mexico, initiated a process of stigmatization of Berlandier’s work and reputation that few people were then important enough to challenge.<sup>265</sup> Only Dr John Briquet, De Candolle’s successor, raised his voice in favor of Berlandier. By then, the downplaying endeavor had already started.<sup>266</sup> Second, after Berlandier’s death, his papers were dispersed among several libraries and classified under different, non-related collections, making any attempt to recollect and combine the materials dealing with his life and work difficult.<sup>267</sup>

Early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century English and Spanish publications of some of Berlandier’s major productions were powerful factors in the rediscovery of the Frenchman’s life and work. The most important figure of this historiographic and

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264. David McCullough, *Brave Companions: Portraits in History* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1992), 22.

265. Osuna, *Explicando a Berlandier*, 25

266. Baker, “Berlandier,” 45.

267. Geiser, *Naturalists of the Frontier*, 31-32; Osuna, *Explicando a Berlandier*, 14-15.

scientific rehabilitation is probably Samuel Wood Geiser who, in 1937, included a self-explanatory chapter entitled “In Defense of Jean-Louis Berlandier” in his book *Naturalists of the Frontier*.<sup>268</sup> Geiser is actually primarily concerned with the defense of Berlandier’s scientific reputation. The author describes Berlandier as “a scapegoat in the history of botanical exploration in the Southwest,” denouncing the “conspiracy of silence entered into by latter botanists.”<sup>269</sup> Geiser does not vindicate the naturalist; he looks instead for reasons explaining his limited scientific results in Northern Mexico and Texas. As he notes himself: “our judgement in the matter must take into account the difficulties under which the collector labored, and these were clearly so great as to make it impossible for Berlandier to do all that was expected from him.”<sup>270</sup> To this extent, Geiser judges that Berlandier “fulfilled, or nearly fulfilled, his task” of scientific observer and species collector.<sup>271</sup>

Geiser’s chapter triggered a series of scientific and historical publications on Berlandier, all eulogistic of the work and the man. Recently, in 2004, Luis Sánchez Osuna wrote *Explicando a Berlandier* which focuses especially on the Frenchman’s works and the context in which they were produced. For Osuna, De Candolle’s accusation of Berlandier’s incompetency has no foundation.<sup>272</sup> James K. Baker, in another recent article on the French naturalist, supports this idea. He attacks De Candolle directly for his misjudgment and portrays him as “a late apologist” who tried “to make amends for his criticisms” by commemorating Berlandier in species’

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268. Geiser, *Naturalists of the Frontier*, 30-54.

269. *Ibid.*, 30.

270. *Ibid.*, 52.

271. *Ibid.*, 52.

272. Osuna, *Explicando a Berlandier*, 25.

names.<sup>273</sup> These studies are interesting examples of the progressive historiographic rehabilitation of Berlandier.

However, scholarly publications on Berlandier present one major problem: they talk almost exclusively of Berlandier's contributions to science, and sometimes simply skim over his experience as a Matamoros settler. In other words, the secondary sources are more interested in the scientist explorer than the influential French immigrant. In general publications on French Texans, Berlandier's scientific results seem indeed to be what catches the eye: "Jean-Louis Berlandier was a botanist whose monumental work, beginning in 1828, laid the foundation on which the future study of Texas plant life was based."<sup>274</sup> In his detailed sketch on the French naturalist, Geiser infers that "Berlandier's subsequent career is usually dismissed with a brief statement to the effect that he set up as a physician and pharmacist in Matamoros and died near there in 1851."<sup>275</sup> The common assertion to explain this fact is that "little is known of [Berlandier's] private life from the time of his birth until his untimely death."<sup>276</sup> This idea is, however, only partially valid, for the voluminous diary he kept throughout his life as a Matamoros' settler, and which contains much information on his ideas and feelings, has never been fully exploited by historians.<sup>277</sup> Doubtlessly, more about Berlandier could probably be found also in the Matamoros archives.

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273. Baker, "Berlandier," 50.

274. First sentence on the sketch about Berlandier in University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio, *The French Texans*, 11.

275. Geiser, *Naturalists of the Frontier*, 31.

276. Baker, "Berlandier," 45.

277. Journal of Louis Berlandier during 1846-7 Including the Time He Was Driven from Matamoros by the Americans, Hunter Room, University of Texas at Brownsville Library.

More important, neglecting Berlandier's settlement experience in Matamoros does not suit the historical situation, for the Frenchman spent more than twenty years of his short life in Matamoros and became one of the most notable men of the local society. In other words, although after 1831 Berlandier was ignored by European scientists, he became in contrast "a person of substance in his adopted city in Mexico, a man genuinely respected in a day when such men were conspicuously rare."<sup>278</sup> For Osuna, Berlandier's travel in Mexico turned him from a sensible young erudite to a freeman, a person more fitted to the borderland atmosphere.<sup>279</sup> On the other hand, in immersing himself in the local society, the Frenchman also contributed to the transformation of the area. This integration probably really started in 1836, when he joined la *Junta de Fomento Mercantil* (Union for Commercial Development) and became trustee of the City Council of Matamoros; however, his role in local politics became conspicuous in 1849, when he was elected *alcalde* (mayor) of Matamoros.<sup>280</sup>

The reasons why Berlandier became an integrated, eminent, widely loved and respected Matamoros inhabitant are multiple. His background, erudition and broad scientific knowledge favored relations with other notable citizens of the town who, as Osuna mentions, tended to congregate quite naturally.<sup>281</sup> Therefore, he befriended Matamoros intellectuals such as Rafael Chovell, his fellow scientist and member of the *Comision de Limites*, but also Manuel Payno, who made observations on Matamoros customs house, and Constantino de Tárnava, a Mexican colonel who

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278. Geiser, *Naturalists of the Frontier*, 54.

279. Osuna, *Explicando a Berlandier*, 17.

280. *Ibid.*, 95, 18.

281. *Ibid.*, 55.

became mayor of Matamoros in 1838.<sup>282</sup> He also became close to doctors and surgeons of the military hospital at Fort Brown.<sup>283</sup> However, the French-born was also close to the poorest citizens. As early as the mid-1830s, Berlandier was already established as a naturalist, a pharmacist and a “doctor of the poor.”<sup>284</sup> Berlandier made himself useful during the most serious sanitary crises and healed the injured soldiers in time of war.<sup>285</sup> The Frenchman also refused to charge for medical consultations or the medicines he provided for the poorest Matamorenses. Thus, when Lieutenant Darius N. Couch arrived in Matamoros two years after Berlandier’s death to bring his collections to the Smithsonian Institution, he noted that the French settler had become “universally beloved for his kind, amiable manners, and regard for the sick and poor of the city.”<sup>286</sup> This statement sums up perfectly the wide reputation Berlandier had made himself: he was both an intellectual with “amiable manners” and a doctor of the poor. Despite what secondary sources suggest, achieving notability and respectability in his city of adoption might have been one of the most important episodes in Berlandier’s life, and his most delectable success. The integration of this Frenchman in the Lower Rio Grande Valley society was a simple but enjoyable situation, and it is very likely that his untimely death in 1851 had been seen as a tragedy by his fellow citizens. Besides, even the great French naturalist Louis Agassiz wished that, after his

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282. Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 39-40.

283. Osuna, *Explicando a Berlandier*, 24.

284. *Ibid.*, 95.

285. *Ibid.*, 18-19.

286. Baker, “Berlandier,” 51.



death, it could be said of him that he was “the first naturalist of his time” but also “a good citizen and a good son, beloved of those who knew him.”<sup>287</sup>

The apparent complete immersion of Berlandier in Matamoros society suggests that he was transformed by the area and therefore raises question about his identity. In his article on the French naturalist, Baker infers that Berlandier, like any other French-born settled in Matamoros at this time, “adapted to and adopted new ways of life to eventually marry a Mexican woman, have a family, and to spend the rest of his relatively short lifetime in and around Matamoros.”<sup>288</sup> With the same idea in mind, Osuna suggests that, as Mexico was both the subject and the benefactor of his research, Berlandier should be considered Mexican.<sup>289</sup> Berlandier’s allegiance to his adoptive country seems to confirm this statement. The French naturalist despised seditious attitudes, making for example some critical comments about the ungrateful Texan rebels who tried to change the laws of the country that had welcomed them.<sup>290</sup> His loyalty to Mexico was proved during the Mexican-American War. Indeed, the Frenchman became a captain *aide-de-camp* interpreter to General Mariano Arista, the Mexican officer in charge of opposing the advance of the American troops at the beginning of the international conflict in April-May 1846. Berlandier was also assigned the task to bring Arista’s message to U.S. General Zachary Taylor demanding that American troops not cross the Arroyo Colorado.<sup>291</sup> Berlandier also acted as cartographer of the Palo Alto battlefield where the first battle of the Mexican-

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287. McCullough, *Brave Companions*, 20.

288. Baker, “Berlandier,” 51.

289. Osuna, *Explicando a Berlandier*, 28.

290. *Ibid.*, 28.

291. Geiser, *Naturalists of the Frontier*, 53.

American War took place in May 8, 1846.<sup>292</sup> Berlandier's loyalty to the Mexican cause at the beginning of the Mexican-American War caused him to be persecuted by the triumphant American troops soon after they entered Matamoros in March 1847.<sup>293</sup> In his diary, Berlandier says that the army of occupation persecuted everybody who seemed suspicious, and he himself got insulted and beaten, and his family abused.<sup>294</sup>

Berlandier never attempted any retaliation against the American Army. Actually, although he confessed his intention to fight for the Mexican cause in late 1846, he never took arms against the United States and remained pacific during the occupation of the city.<sup>295</sup> In his diary, Berlandier explained that this attitude stemmed primarily from the unwillingness to expose his young son to the vicissitudes of the war.<sup>296</sup> However, this position might be linked to a deeper, identity-related factor. Indeed, it can be supposed that Berlandier had consideration for his country of adoption, but that his concerns were primarily of a pragmatic, not a patriotic order. Osuna's ambiguous suggestion that Berlandier was a man of strong convictions but measured opinions seems to sum up this alliance of pragmatism and allegiance.<sup>297</sup> Moreover, it seems illusory to think that Berlandier was perceived as Mexican by those who knew him. Indeed, although he was well-integrated in the local society, it is likely that he remained primarily the respected French-born scientist of Matamoros for the locals.

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292. Baker, "Berlandier," 44.

293. Osuna, *Explicando a Berlandier*, 28.

294. *Ibid.*, 86-87. In these pages, Osuna reports an extract of Berlandier's diary presenting the above mentioned events.

295. *Ibid.*, 26, 28.

296. *Ibid.*, 84.

297. *Ibid.*, 27.

Jean-Louis Berlandier's influence and life in Matamoros revealed several features which can be used as a basis to define the concept of notability as well as assessing the impact of the French presence on the Valley. As an intellectual, Berlandier was a figure of modernity and acted as a vector of French culture and knowledge in the area. As a settler, he immersed himself in the local community but despite his constant loyalty to the Mexican government, he never became completely "Mexicanized." Jean-Louis Berlandier is the only early 19<sup>th</sup> century Lower Rio Grande Valley French settler whose experience can be uncovered in detail. Nevertheless, the second half of the century saw the settlement of other French-born people who left a decisive impact on the local area and integrated into the community

#### **Four Different Paths to Notability and their Common Threads**

Jean-Louis Berlandier settled as a pharmacist and a doctor. However, as mentioned in chapter 2, most of the French-born who settled in the Valley tried primarily to exploit its commercial potential. As Alexandra K. Wettlaufer states, "for the French, nineteenth century Texas represented a land of opportunity, and their capitalist vanguard initially took the form of colonial settlers seeking prosperity and political freedom in a new world."<sup>298</sup> Joseph Kleiber, L. N. Petitpain, Celestin Jagou and Georges Brulay were among the few Lower Rio Grande Valley French traders who, from 1850 to 1900, became particularly successful in such an endeavor. In spite of the fact that these four Frenchmen followed different itineraries, their experiences reveal common threads which inform the type of influence and integration process French Valley settlers could hope for. These four Frenchmen achieve a commercial success on which they capitalized to transform the local society and culture.

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298. Wettlaufer, "French Travelers," 264.

Moreover, although they immersed in the Valley community, they became notable settlers and members of the local elite and, as such, were in favorable position to diffuse a French flavor in the area and maintain a sense of their “Frenchness.”

One of the first French-born to settle on the left bank of the Lower Rio Grande Valley was Joseph Kleiber, born in Strasbourg in Alsace-Lorraine in 1833. As the 1850 Population Schedules show, Kleiber came to Point Isabel, near Brownsville, where he settled as a single clerk.<sup>299</sup> When he reached the Valley, Kleiber was only 18 but he already had an experience as a New Orleans settler, suggesting that, early in his life, the Frenchman dreamt of adventure on American soil.<sup>300</sup> His ambitions of success in the New World seemed to have been fulfilled rather quickly. In 1856, Kleiber married Emma Henrietta Butler, offspring of an influential local family who provided him with American citizenship, and in 1860, he purchased a drug store in Brownsville, on Elizabeth Street, between 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> streets.<sup>301</sup> Even if he did not have qualifications in the medical sciences—like many other pharmacists or even doctors who settled in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in the early and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century—,<sup>302</sup> Kleiber contributed to the diffusion of medical progress in the area. However, his influence on the transformation and modernization of the Lower Rio Grande Valley was especially felt in the field of transportation. The French-born was indeed the driving force behind the project to construct a railroad between Point Isabel and Brownsville, the person who, for commercial purposes essentially, was responsible for the end of the Mifflin Kenedy and Richard King charter which blocked freight

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299. Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1850: Texas. Microfilm. Cameron, Starr and Webb counties, 58.

300. John H. Hunter, "Kleiber, Joseph," in *Handbook of Texas Online*, (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fkl08>), accessed January 21, 2011.

301. *Ibid.*; Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 90.

302. Graf, “Economic History,” 49.

tariffs.<sup>303</sup> In May 1871, the Rio Grande Railroad Company was created with a capital stock of \$500,000, and Kleiber became its first secretary and auditor.<sup>304</sup> Thus, the Frenchman fulfilled his dream of seeing “the Iron Horse travel over Palo Alto Prairie.” The Rio Grande Railroad was sold in 1909, long after Kleiber left the company.<sup>305</sup> Indeed, he resigned his railroad posts in 1874 and became a realtor in Austin until his death three years later.<sup>306</sup>

Joseph Kleiber’s influence and reputation in the Lower Rio Grande Valley lasted well beyond his death. His descendants both enjoyed and pursued the work of his life, starting with his son Emile who owned a property of 15,033 acres of land in 1893 and took over his father’s store. Almost twenty years after Joseph Kleiber’s death, the *Botica De Aguila* that the French-born once founded, and its numerous and diverse items on sale—drugs, chemicals, paints, patent medicine, perfumery, toilet articles, brushes, oils and window glass—, were still advertised in the *Brownsville Daily Herald*.<sup>307</sup> In turn, Emile Kleiber himself became a notable man, as demonstrated by the mention of his name and commerce in *The Twin Cities*, a book published in 1893 by W. H. Chatfield to advertise the Lower Rio Grande Valley. In this publication, Emile is described not only as “a skillful compounder of medicines”

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303. See Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 157-159. On October 1, 1866, the two Lower Rio Grande Valley businessmen and ranchers Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy won the state charter for building a railroad connecting Point Isabel to Brownsville, but had in mind to prevent such a construction. Indeed, King and Kenedy owned a steamboat company whose success depended on the monopoly of transportation of goods from Point Isabel to Brownsville. As an alternative for steamboat commerce, the railroad was a threat to this commercial position, and was therefore fought by the two men up to 1874.

304. Jane Clements Monday and Frances Brannen Vick, *Petra's Legacy: The South Texas Ranching Empire of Petra Vela and Mifflin Kenedy* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 185; James Robert Crews, “Reconstruction in Brownsville, Texas” (master’s thesis, Texas Tech, 1969), 107.

305. Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 174.

306. Hunter, “Kleiber, Joseph.”

307. *Brownsville Daily Herald*, May 14, 1895.

but also as “a substantial and representative citizen of this community, to which he has become permanently attached.”<sup>308</sup> A perfectly integrated settler, Emile also became a benefactor of the local community. As mentioned in *The Twin Cities*, “his hearty support of the cause of education is evidenced by his being a member of the School Board.”<sup>309</sup> Joseph’s daughter Mary Emma also contributed strongly to the improvement of the local culture by being the most important donor for the construction of the Brownsville Opera House in 1881.<sup>310</sup>

In spite of his integration in the local society, Joseph Kleiber apparently remained close to his French roots.<sup>311</sup> If no such affirmation can be asserted with accuracy for his five children, it seems that, at least, Mary Emma tried to preserve the “Frenchness” she inherited from her father through her union with a Frenchman. Quite interestingly, she also kept her father’s name, being commonly known as Mary Emma Kleiber Vivier, thus displaying both her familial link with one of the first notable settlers of the Valley and her close relation to her French roots. This case is also a good example of the fact that French culture can actually cross over to the second generation of settlers.

The possible combination of local integration and preservation of French culture is embodied on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande by the merchant L. N. Petitpain. Born in New-Orleans of French-born parents, Petitpain came to Matamoros in 1865 to open a business on the corner of Abasolo and Septima.<sup>312</sup> If the *Brownsville*

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308. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 11.

309. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 11.

310. Ruby A. Wooldridge and Robert B. Vezzetti, *Brownsville, a Pictorial History* (Norfolk, VA: Donning, 1982), 52.

311. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 90.

312. *Ibid.*, 92.

*Daily Herald* advertised him as an “importer of all European goods,”<sup>313</sup> *The Legal and Mercantile Handbook of Mexico* published in 1892 listed Petitpain as a general importer of dry goods.<sup>314</sup> In 1893, L. N. Petitpain was influential enough to be mentioned in *The Twin Cities* as “one of the most enterprising merchants and genial gentlemen in the foreign coterie of Matamoros.”<sup>315</sup> Like Joseph Kleiber, his notability is primarily defined in relation to his commercial ambitions and success, but this element is here interestingly connected with an ambiguous statement concerning Petitpain’s integration in the society. Indeed, if the term “genial” emphasizes the kindness of the man, and therefore his proximity with the whole Matamoros society, the use of “gentlemen” and more importantly “foreign coterie” draws the portrait of an influential notable who carefully selected his relations and did not mingle with the Matamoros natives.

Actually, this apparent ambiguity reveals the complexity of Petitpain’s integration in the local society, as both a notable foreigner who acted as a vector of diffusion of the French influence in the area and a merchant who provided for the basic needs of the poorest settlers. These two aspects, already uncovered in the case of Jean-Louis Berlandier, are probably what made Petitpain so influential in Matamoros society. In *The Twin Cities*, they are clearly distinguished in the description of Petitpain’s store. On the one hand, Petitpain imported “exquisite fancy goods” from France, composed of “silks, fans, gloves, millinery, ribbons, laces, shoes and corsets

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313. *Brownsville Daily Herald*, January 14, 1893.

314. Alejandro K. Coney and José Francisco Godoy, *The Legal and Mercantile Handbook of Mexico* (Chicago: Pan-American Publishing Company, 1892), 440.

315. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 36.

for the delight of the ladies; and clothing, hats, shirts and cloths for the men.”<sup>316</sup> Through the commercialization of such high quality French products, Petitpain contributed to the penetration of a French influence in the Valley which doubtlessly became naturally associated with fanciness and luxury. Not surprisingly then, as local historian Richard Heaven Thompson states, in the Lower Rio Grande Valley “during the 1850 to 1860 period, French culture was represented among the elites more than Spanish.”<sup>317</sup> Indeed, Mariquitta Garesché, a French Creole settled in Brownsville and a member of the local upper-class, affirmed in January 29, 1851, that “one can obtain at Brownsville every thing requisite to arrange a very pretty toilet.”<sup>318</sup> On the other hand, if Petitpain had in stock “the finest laces and cloth for the gentry,” his stock also comprised “the coarse clothing and cheap shawls worn by the poorest classes,” putting him in contact with different classes of Matamorenses.<sup>319</sup>

Petitpain’s full integration in the Lower Rio Grande Valley community was not incompatible, once again, with his French roots. In 1893, Chatfield described Petitpain as follows: “Mr Petitpain was born a Frenchman and is still a Frenchman, although he has always been thoroughly in accord with the Mexican authorities, who regard him as a valuable acquisition to their commercial and social circles.”<sup>320</sup> Thus, Petitpain seemed to combine harmoniously the different elements which composed the notability status for French-born people. On the one hand, he achieved commercial success and immersed in the different “social circles” of the local community; on the

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316. Ibid., 36.

317. Thompson, “Nineteenth Century History,” 75.

318. Louis Garesché, *Biography of Lieutenant Colonel Julius P. Garesché, Assistant-Adjutant General* (Philadelphia: Press of J.B. Lippincott Company, 1887), 118.

319. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 36.

320. Ibid., 36.



other hand, he diffused a French influence and maintained a French identity. The only feature of notability that Petitpain's life does not clearly reveal is vector of modernization, culture and education.

Unlike Petitpain, the French-born Celestin Jagou is known as a figure of innovation in the Valley. He was also, like the other notable men previously mentioned, a successful and integrated merchant. Jagou was born in Lasseube in the Basses-Pyrénées in 1843, and departed for New Orleans between 1859 and 1861.<sup>321</sup> In 1862, he moved to Bagdad in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and then to Matamoros where he engaged in the cotton trade.<sup>322</sup> Probably right after the Civil War, the Frenchman moved to Brownsville where he soon achieved important commercial success. Indeed, the 1870 Population Schedules list Celestin Jagou as a saloon keeper with \$2,500 of real estate, and \$2,500 of personal estate. He was living with his wife, the Louisiana-born Josephine, his one year-old son and three domestic servants.<sup>323</sup> At this time, Jagou was not even thirty. His saloon, established on Elizabeth street—the commercial heart of Brownsville—integrated the French-born in the local community, attracting many people, from the usual barflies to the most notable men of the area. It is known that on his visits to Brownsville, Richard King, one of the biggest landowners of Texas, “generally stopped by the saloon of Celestin Jagou, where a crowd gathered as soon as his presence became known.”<sup>324</sup> This idea of a wide reputation appears, therefore, again as a defining characteristic of the Frenchmen's notability. Jagou had a wide variety of products in his commerce: he was an importer

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321. Daniela Massolo, *Italy Gen*, <http://www.genealitalia.com/eng/bordeaux-search.php> (accessed February, 15, 2011).

322. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 90.

323. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm. Cameron County, 213.

324. Lewis Atherton, *The Cattle Kings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), 140.

of wines, liquors, beers and cigars primarily, but also of guns, and “table luxuries of all kinds,” as an 1892 advertisement in the *Brownsville Daily Herald* reveals.<sup>325</sup> These products covered also a broad range of qualities, and if he provided people with the most affordable alcohols, Jagou also “catered to the elite in wines and liquors as well as fancy cheeses, sausages, and other seasoned condiments.”<sup>326</sup>

Celestin Jagou’s commerce and reputation as a saloon keeper were a little overshadowed by his role of pioneer in agriculture. In this domain, he indeed acted as a figure of modernization of the area through the innovations he introduced on his property known as the Esperanza Farm. These 640 acres of land, located east of Brownsville along the Resaca de la Palma, had been owned by two successive groups of Brownsville citizens before Jagou individually purchased it in 1879.<sup>327</sup> Jagou’s role of agricultural innovator is particularly emphasized in *The Twin Cities* which mentions that “his experiments in fruit culture have embraced all the sub-tropical fruits, as well as those which are grown in California, and have demonstrated that this section can easily compete with that wonderful land as soon as the necessary water supply is assured.”<sup>328</sup> The Frenchman is said to have introduced new varieties of crops in the area, namely “the delta’s first long staple Sea Island cotton,” the first commercial oranges, as well as wine, almonds, corks, bananas and tobacco. These new products were only possible through the modernization of agricultural techniques. In this domain too, the Frenchman became a pioneer in the area by introducing the

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325. *Brownsville Daily Herald*, November 3, 1892.

326. Sebastian S. Wilcox, “The Laredo City Election and Riot of April, 1886” in *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (July 1941), 5.

327. Raymond W. Neck, “History of Esperanza Ranch: A Significant Agricultural and Scientific Site, Brownsville, Texas” in *More Studies in Brownsville History*, ed. Milo Kearney (Brownsville: The University of Texas at Brownsville, 1989), 267-268.

328. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 41.

first wire fencing and a new, more effective irrigation system with underground pipes.<sup>329</sup> This modernization process in which Jagou engaged had an economic goal. Indeed, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was commonly thought that “there [was perhaps] no industry which [promised] a more extensive development, in nearly all parts of the State, than the fruit crop.”<sup>330</sup> Jagou was particularly successful in growing bananas. In 1890, he had 11,000 banana trees from which he sold 4,500 bunches.<sup>331</sup> He became a sort of innovative figure embodying the possibilities offered by Texas, and as such, his reputation spread as far as Galveston, as testified by an article published in *The Galveston Daily News* in 1889. In interesting parallel to *The Twin Cities*’ sketch, this article, entitled “Magnificent Bananas,” underlines what was really at play in Jagou’s agricultural venture. First, it draws a picture of Texas as a land of all possible achievements, where things can be done better than elsewhere, inferring that “each [banana] is large and well developed and in every respect superior to the fruit imported from further south and from the West Indies.” Moreover, this article also attracts the attention to the fortune promised by fruit culture for ambitious and innovative young men who were willing to modernize their country: “if Mr. Jagou can produce such fruits as this on his place, he will soon have a monopoly of the banana business of Texas”<sup>332</sup>

Jagou’s Esperanza Farm made him known in the area as an innovator, but also as a typical Frenchman. Indeed, despite his full integration in the local society, Jagou remained in close contact with his native culture. An observer commented on “the

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329. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 90.

330. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 41.

331. *Ibid.*, 41.

332. *The Galveston Daily News*, August 7, 1889.

usual large diversified garden” Jagou maintained on his land, stating that it was typical of “every French agriculturalist.”<sup>333</sup> Even more striking in this domain are the “cuttings of white, red, and blue varieties of grapes,” such as Medoc, Chasselas and Muscatel that Jagou brought from southern France. He was able to plant them and make a red Claret and white Sauterne every year.<sup>334</sup> Such information confirms the assumptions raised by the Population Schedules about Jagou’s relation to his French roots.<sup>335</sup> Thus, if integration efforts and pragmatic choices were essential components of Celestin Jagou’s success and influence in the Valley, the maintaining of a French culture was clearly a defining characteristic of the man. Moreover, other elements which could not be drawn from the Population Schedules emphasize the extent to which Jagou clearly became a frontier settler, a distinguished citizen of the Valley, but remained a Frenchman up to his death. Indeed, as mentioned in the Population Schedules, Jagou became a widower in 1880, but due to the absence of the 1890 Population Schedules and Celestin’s death in 1898, it is impossible through these sources to know what he and his family had become in the next twenty years, except through Jagou’s descendants who were still settled in the Valley in 1900. John Henry Brown discovered that, in fact, Celestin Jagou re-married as soon as in 1881, and his wife was no other than a French-born woman named Agatha Bourdet.<sup>336</sup> Celestin Jagou remained close to his French roots even in the remote area of Brownsville, and, as expected from a study of his children’s first names through the Population Schedules, he apparently transmitted this “Frenchness” to the next generation. Indeed,

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333. Neck, “History of Esperanza Ranch,” 269.

334. *Ibid.*, 270.

335. See chapter 2 of this thesis.

336. Neck, “History of Esperanza Ranch,” 271.

his only daughter Christine left the Valley area to go settle in France. She never returned to the United States.<sup>337</sup>

As one of the most eminent members of the Lower Rio Grande Valley elites, George Brulay embodies best the opportunities that such a status offered for the preservation and transmission of a French identity in the area. Born in Paris in 1839, Brulay left his native country in 1853 and headed for the American continent. After spending time in South America and in Florida, he eventually settled in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in the early 1860s. With his brother Arthur, he set up a delivery service by mule caravan between Matamoros and Monterrey and delivered goods to coastal towns through sailboats. At the same period, Brulay operated a mercantile firm in Brownsville. By 1870, after the death of his brother who was reported lost at sea, George, who had accumulated money from his previous businesses and foresaw the opportunities offered by agriculture in the area, bought 400 acres of land southeast of Brownsville for \$2,000. He named his new property Rio Grande Plantation.<sup>338</sup> Like Celestin Jagou, Brulay became both a pioneer and a very successful businessman. He planted cotton on his farm and, apparently, the first local crop of sugar cane. To produce piloncillo—solid pieces of unrefined cane sugar—, he built in 1872 the first 150-ton sugar mill of the area, and in 1896, he was the first to introduce a pumping plant to irrigate his fields. This latter modernization drew attention beyond the frontiers of the Valley. In 1898, his irrigation system was described in a national geological survey in detail: “it consists of two boilers having an aggregate capacity of 100 horsepower and a 45-horsepower Morris centrifugal pump with a maximum pumping capacity of 8,000 gallons per minute, or 17.82 second-feet. The total lift

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337. *Ibid.*, 271.

338. Grace Edman, "Brulay, George Paul," in *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbrah>), accessed January 29, 2011.

required is 22 feet, and the pump is run about fourteen hours per day when used.”<sup>339</sup> These innovations which made Brulay known in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and beyond were at the source of an ongoing commercial success, the first being in the production of sugar-cane. This enabled him to upgrade his property progressively, adding a refinery, a commissary, residences, a store, a brick kiln, a bakery, a blacksmith shop and small rail cars running from his field to his mills. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, he had hundreds of employees working for him on his property.<sup>340</sup> In 1880, he was listed in the Population Schedules as a farmer; he had a wife, three young children, a servant and a cook.<sup>341</sup> He was also able to pay for an expensive life insurance policy which assured a \$10,000 legacy for his children.<sup>342</sup>

As a new notable man and elite of the area, Brulay could act as a patron of the local culture and promoter of education in the area. He first built a schoolhouse on his property where some high school classes were conducted.<sup>343</sup> His love of music and theater brought him also to install the first private telephone line between the Brownsville Opera House and his plantation.<sup>344</sup> However, probably to get closer to other Brownsville notable men and to be more recognized in the area, Brulay and his family moved to Brownsville in 1891.<sup>345</sup> Thus, in the 1900 Population Schedules, he

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339. Department of the Interior, “Irrigation System in Texas” in *Water-Supply and Irrigation Papers of the United States Geological Survey* 13 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898), 59.

340. Edman, “Brulay, George Paul.”

341. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas*. Microfilm. Cameron County, 402.

342. *The Insurance Press, the Newspaper for Insurers and Insured* 20 (New York, June 7, 1905), 11.

343. Milo Kearney, Alfonso Gómez Arguelles, and Yolanda Z. Gonzáles, *Brief History of Education in Brownsville and Matamoros* (Brownsville: University of Texas-Pan-American-Brownsville, 1989), 9.

344. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 91.

345. Edman, “Brulay, George Paul.”

was not listed as a farmer but as a merchant.<sup>346</sup> Probably as a result of this relocation, he became known as a “cultural force” in the city.<sup>347</sup> In Brownsville, Brulay displayed his love of art, his success and his “Frenchness.” He built a three-story French château-style mansion with a ballroom and running water at 508 East Elizabeth Street, in the heart of the town. This mansion, representing the French influence Brulay stamped on the Brownsville topography, was destroyed in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>348</sup>

Like Kleiber, Petitpain and Jagou, Brulay actually never abandoned his French roots. On March 11, 1876, he married a French-Alsatian woman named Marie E. Boesch with whom he had five children who were all given first names of French consonance: George, Eugenie, Louis, Jean and Maurice.<sup>349</sup> It is known that George’s children were fluent in French, emphasizing again the idea that in French elites’ families, French identity could cross over. However, Brulay was also concerned about his children’s knowledge of Spanish and English, and this preoccupation might have been another reason for the relocation of the family to Brownsville.<sup>350</sup> Thus, from the case of George Brulay emerges again the idea of the porosity of identities, and of the combination of local integration and cultural preservation.

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346. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1900: Texas*. Microfilm. Cameron County, 293.

347. Wooldridge and Vezzetti, *Brownsville, a Pictorial History*, 83.

348. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 91.

349. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 402, and *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 293. The two censuses do not seem to match perfectly each other and present some inconsistencies, especially concerning the children’s first names. The names given above might not fit exactly the reality, but are in any case very close to it.

350. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 91.

## **The Union of Pragmatism and French Identity: Final Reflections on the French-Born Notability in the Valley**

From Kleiber, Petitpain, Jagou and Brulay cases, French influence and notability in the Valley appear as a progressive, multi-form and complex process which involves a common attitude: pragmatism. Indeed, if these French-born became notable, it is mainly due to their capacity to adapt to the different historical periods and conditions of the Valley. Thus, during the Civil War, they sided with the Confederacy which offered more commercial opportunities in the Valley than the Union. During the Reconstruction period, they contributed to the development and modernization of the Valley. However, when possible, that is especially in time of peace, pragmatic choices were replaced by identity-led decisions. Thus, French notable men were inclined to achieve success and integrate effectively the local society at any cost, but as soon as this situation was achieved, they tried to preserve their “Frenchness” throughout their life in the Valley.

In the first place, it seems that achieving commercial success was a prerequisite for getting a particular and notable place in society, but was also impossible without an acute sense of pragmatism. As a matter of fact, among the four French notable merchants mentioned above, three came to settle in the area in the midst of the American Civil War, and all four built a commercial fortune out of this conflict. This situation had nothing to do with luck, and probably no more with political loyalty. As André Resendez stresses, local, national and international troubles, by putting people on the spot, are the best indicator to assess what dictated the settlers’ choices, and in the case of the French settled in the Lower Rio Grande Valley during the crucial period of the Civil War, pragmatism was the key word.<sup>351</sup>

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351. Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 2.



Indeed, due to the Union blockade of Confederate ports during the Civil War, the Lower Rio Grande Valley, bordering the mouth of a river which according to Article VII of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 had to remain "free and common to the vessels and citizens of both countries," became the new commercial center for the Confederacy.<sup>352</sup> As a consequence, Kleiber, Petitpain, Jagou and Brulay sided with the Confederates, and because Matamoros, more than Brownsville, had become "to the Rebellion West of the Mississippi what New York [was] to the United States," all were settled in the Mexican city during the war.<sup>353</sup> Indeed, Joseph Kleiber, who was previously settled in Brownsville, relocated in Matamoros in 1863 to pursue his commerce. Celestin Jagou, previously settled in Bagdad, made the same situational choice in 1862 and engaged in trade with the Confederacy.<sup>354</sup> The true loyalty of these Frenchmen for the Confederate cause was probably faked, but their European origin protected them from the kind of suspicion that Americans not outwardly sympathetic with the South were subjected to.<sup>355</sup> Moreover, Union officers, who took control of Brownsville in July 1864, were less inclined to blame Frenchmen than their fellow citizens who sided with the Confederates.<sup>356</sup> Thus, French merchants had plenty of reasons to take advantage of the war, and they did. The exportation and speculation of cotton was the most profitable commercial activity of the Valley during wartime, and

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352. Robert W. Delaney, "Matamoros, Port for Texas during the Civil War" in *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (April 1955), 474-475.

353. Barry M. Cohen, "The Texas-Mexico Border, 1858-1867: Along the Lower Rio Grande Valley during the Decade of the American Civil War and the French Intervention in Mexico" in *More Studies in Brownsville History*, ed. Milo Kearney (Brownsville: Pan American University at Brownsville, 1989), 178.

354. Crews, "Reconstruction in Brownsville," 105.

355. Florence Johnson Scott, *Old Rough and Ready on the Rio Grande* (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1935), 99-100; Walter W. Hildebrand, "The History of Cameron County, Texas" (master's thesis, North Texas State College, 1950), 47.

356. Gonzáles, *Life Along the Border*, 65.

the success of Celestin Jagou and George Brulay in this field emphasizes this point and demonstrates the two Frenchmen's proclivity to make situational choices.<sup>357</sup>

However, Joseph Kleiber's activities and decisions during the Civil War reveal both a more acute sense of pragmatism and the enormous profit that could be gained from such an attitude. It is not surprising that Kleiber is quoted in secondary sources dealing with the possibilities offered to Valley settlers by the wartime economic boom.<sup>358</sup> Indeed, during the Civil War, the Frenchman broadened his commercial activities, dealing through his company Kleiber & Co. in large quantities of cotton and large supplies of medicines, barrels of flour, sulfur and lead among other products. Kleiber's company involved a lot of money. In November 1861, he received ammunition and guns worth \$3,834.50.<sup>359</sup> Kleiber was more integrated in the Confederate system than any other French settlers of the Valley. He even became Confederate Postmaster and broker for Confederate bonds.<sup>360</sup> In September 1862, for example, he was commissioned to sell \$50,000 in bonds.<sup>361</sup>

None of the four notable Frenchmen presented above suffered much from their Confederate sympathies in the aftermath of the Civil War. In 1865, Jagou saw his liquor store raided by Union soldiers, but this incident, far from being isolated, did not appear clearly as a retaliation for wartime activities. Moreover, the damages were later

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357. Delaney, "Matamoros," 474; David Johnston, "The Impact of the Civil War on the Rio Grande" in *More Studies in Brownsville History*, ed. Milo Kearney (Brownsville: Pan American University at Brownsville, 1989), 191.

358. Crews, "Reconstruction in Brownsville," 48.

359. *Ibid.*, 48.

360. *Ibid.*, 105.

361. *Ibid.*, 48.

covered by the United States government.<sup>362</sup> At the end of the war, Kleiber suffered a financial loss but this was due to the decline of the local economy and the Frenchman was able to recover quite quickly from it. Actually, Kleiber's economic recovery is again deeply linked with his tendency to make pragmatic decisions. Soon after the end of the conflict, he made allegiance to the Union and received an executive pardon from the new government. By 1870, he was on a friendly basis with J. B. Thomas, a Texas Unionist who had interests in new means of transportation and probably eased Kleiber's railroad venture.<sup>363</sup>

Thanks to a sharp sense of adaptation, Kleiber, Petitpain, Jagou and Brulay were able to capitalize on their success achieved during the war to improve their integration in the Valley in the aftermath of the conflict. Indeed, the Reconstruction period was for these Frenchmen the most fruitful, in part because of their willingness to both integrate into the local elites and remain close to the poorest classes. They became particularly influential through their participation in the improvement and modernization of the local society, to the point that such actions appear as an essential component of their notability. Such endeavors took multiple forms: on the one hand, they acted as innovators, modernizing the transportation, agriculture and commercial activities; on the other hand, they became patron of the arts, local culture and education. Some of these Frenchmen combined the two roles. Such efforts are to be connected to the idea of a *mission civilisatrice*, in other words an intention to transfer the French knowledge to the "benighted wilderness ripe for its positive influence."<sup>364</sup> The influence on culture and education particularly fits this concept, for, as Milo

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362. Neck, "History of Esperanza Ranch," 269.

363. Crews, "Reconstruction in Brownsville," 105; *Railway Age Gazette* (New York, 1912, Second Half), 488.

364. Wettlaufer, "French Travelers," 265.

Kearney suggests, “French commitment to education”<sup>365</sup> and “stimulus to local culture”<sup>366</sup> is typical of the French mentality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

However, even if such a statement is true, bringing culture and education is not equivalent to bringing French influence. The propagation of French roots in the area was performed in a different way by the four French notable men studied above. Petitpain and Jagou contributed to the propagation of French products in the Valley, most of them of high quality and fancy facture, and Brulay’s house became in Brownsville an architectural symbol of French influence. As mentioned in chapter 2, French elites’ tombstones are in themselves clear marks of the French influence in the area. They are also the reflections of these men’s concern for the preservation of their French identity. Kleiber, Petitpain, Jagou and Brulay were all perceived as both eminent Valley citizens and Frenchmen, and all of them, despite the concessions made to integrate into the area, successfully transmitted their national roots to their children. Such a conclusion leads to a quite paradoxical statement, namely that being notable allowed them to keep of a sense of their “Frenchness;” however, to be so influential, these Frenchmen had to become real citizens of the area, and, therefore, to integrate quickly and efficiently into the local society.

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365. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 90.

366. *Ibid.*, 91.

## **Chapter 4: The Army and the Catholic Church In the Lower Rio Grande Valley: French Men and Women with a Mission**

The French-born who settled in the Valley via the army and the Catholic Church, the two most notable institutions of the area in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, came with a particular mission to fulfill, and to that extent, had a particular situation in the social landscape of the area. Although these two institutions' implantation in the Valley has been well documented, most of the French people who contributed to its success remain in a vague mist, especially in regard to the army. An analysis of the Frenchmen and women who contributed to the success and development of these institutions in the Rio Grande Valley area brings complexity and new insights to the forms and impacts of the French presence in the area.

French religious people and soldiers distinguished themselves from other French-born people by the particular influence they exerted as members of the two powerful institutions they served. However, their impact on the area was not only of a religious or a military nature. Both transformed the society and culture of the Valley and contributed to diffuse a French influence in the area in their own fashion. The particularity of these French-born is also observed in the pattern of settlement they adopted. Indeed, even if they were in contact with the locals, they embodied primarily the institutions they served, and therefore never fully integrated into the Valley society. Moreover, except maybe for the missionaries, these French-born tended to hold apart socially.

The relation these people maintained with their identity was usually of a more complex order than other French-born Valley settlers. Indeed an emphasis on their French identity was rarely compatible with the mission to which they had dedicated their lives. In all cases, their mission was for these Frenchmen and women a primary

concern. However, although the few notable French soldiers seem to have been primarily perceived as officers, French priests and nuns were always perceived as French by their contemporaries, notably because they represented institutions whose roots were planted in French soil.

### **Loyalty in the Foreground and “Frenchness” in the Background: French-Born Soldiers’ Presence and Experiences.**

Few French soldiers were stationed in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and most of them reached only a low rank in the military hierarchy. However, the French Intervention War of 1862-1867 expanded the number of French soldiers in the Valley. As members of a powerful institution, they were able to exert a noticeable influence on the local society and culture. Moreover, more can be learned about the influence exerted by the military institution on the French Valley soldiers through the remarkable examples of Adrien Woll, a Mexican General of French birth who was stationed in Matamoros between the 1830s and the 1860s, and Julius Garesché, a French Creole who became Assistant Adjutant General in the U.S. army and came to Brownsville in the aftermath of the Mexican-American War. Indeed, both got attached to their land of adoption and its inhabitants, but their lives revolved mostly around their regiments. Moreover, as Mexican and American officers, they could not emphasize their French identity through their military duty. Woll remained close to his French roots throughout his life and refused to take arms against the French, but, except in one case, he performed his duty as any other loyal Mexican officer; along with his wife Mariquitta, Garesché emphasized his French culture at home and in society, but his loyalty to the U.S. army remained his primary concern.

Located at the confluence of two nations which had been at war from 1846 to 1848 and in tense relations for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Lower Rio Grande Valley became a strategic place for military activities. The city of Brownsville itself was a direct product of the war. It was built in the aftermath of the Mexican-American conflict, around the newly baptized Fort Brown, originally established in February-March 1846 in preparation for the war with Mexico. After 1848, the fort remained an important military establishment where some Frenchmen in the U.S. military were posted. In 1860, five soldiers of French nationality were stationed at Fort Brown, representing 11% of the 44 French people settled in Cameron County at that time (see table 5). The other important military post in the Lower Rio Grande Valley at this period was Fort Ringgold, one of the first forts to be built after the annexation of the state of Texas to the Union.<sup>367</sup> As early as 1860, two French soldiers were already stationed there. In 1870, this tendency was reversed, for four Frenchmen were now stationed in Fort Ringgold—representing half the French-born population of Starr County at this date—and only two in Fort Brown. By 1880, this already small French presence in the military posts of the area waned and totally disappeared in the two last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see table 5 and 7).

This numerical disadvantage, combined with the highly cosmopolitan character of the military institution and its propensity to assimilate soldiers, supposes that French soldiers were not able, or willing, to maintain an inherited cultural identity. Moreover, the French soldiers were not in a propitious situation to integrate into the local society and even less to exert a strong individual influence on it. Indeed, more than any other settlers in the area, soldiers were constantly removed and replaced, and none of them stayed for even an entire decade, as proven by the

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367. Gonzáles, *Life Along the Border*, 62.

Population Schedules. Another support for this idea can be found in the position these Frenchmen had in the military hierarchy. Indeed, out of the 19 French-born soldiers recorded by the Population Schedules in the area throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 17 were privates and the two remaining were sergeants (see table 7). Thus, despite the fact that Fort Brown was “far removed from other posts,” enabling the soldiers to participate “in local social and political affairs [much more] than is customary,”<sup>368</sup> the low position of the French soldiers in the military hierarchy probably hindered notable political influence or social achievements. Thus, it is probably only as marginal but active members of an institution whose role in the area was conspicuous that most French soldiers’ presence in the Valley can be considered globally notable.

The above generalization is, however, balanced by the French Intervention War in Mexico which temporarily multiplied the French military presence in the area, as noted earlier. During this event, which lasted from January 1862 to March 1867, Napoleon III, under the pretext of guaranteeing the stability of Mexico, sent troops to crush the opposition in the country and protect the sovereignty of the new Emperor of Mexico—and Napoleon’s puppet—Maximilian of Austria.<sup>369</sup> These troops eventually reached the Lower Rio Grande Valley and temporarily reinforced the French presence in the area. Indeed, most of the 2,000 Imperialist soldiers who reached Matamoros on September 26, 1864, were French or Belgians.<sup>370</sup> Almost simultaneously, 400 French soldiers landed at Bagdad to support the invasion.<sup>371</sup> The French military presence was again reinforced in December 1865, when the new contingent under Admiral de

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368. Thompson, “Nineteenth Century History,” 74.

369. Martin, *Maximilian in Mexico*, 2.

370. Cohen, “The Texas-Mexico Border, 1858-1867,” 184.

371. Hildebrand, “The History of Cameron County,” 48.



la Bedolière's command landed in the area.<sup>372</sup> Probably more than the enhancement of his prestige at home and abroad, Napoleon III sought in this Mexican venture a proper counterpoise against the growing influence of the United States in the Americas; therefore, the Imperialist troops were sympathetic to the Confederate cause and maintained a presence in Brownsville.<sup>373</sup>

Although temporary, this sudden boost given to the military presence and the number of French soldiers had a strong influence in the area, especially in Matamoros. In *Twin Cities of the Border*, Chatfield attributes a positive tone to this occupation, stating that it “improved rather than injured” Matamoros, and “obliterated any temporary traces of warfare by immediate restoration of damaged fortifications and buildings, besides adding many new works.”<sup>374</sup> The best example of this enterprise of restoration is probably the completion of the *Teatro de la Reforma*, a theater designed as a replica of the Paris Opera, by a Belgian architect during the Imperialist occupation of Matamoros.<sup>375</sup> This kind of endeavor is not directly attributable to the French nationality of some of the soldiers stationed in the Valley, but to the necessity to take control of the area and illustrate the effectiveness of the new Imperialist government. However, the presence of French soldiers also contributed to the diffusion of a French flavor in the area, for, as Betty Bay notes in *Historic Brownsville*: “one of the major influences that impressed the French culture among the

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372. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 92.

373. Clyde Augustus Duniway, “Reasons for the Withdrawal of the French from Mexico” in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1903), 316.

374. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 31.

375. Andrés F. Cuéllar, Rosaura Dávila, and Javier Dragustinovis, *Historia de Matamoros* (Matamoros: Gobierno de Matamoros, 2005), 51.

‘elite’ [was] the French occupation of Mexico.”<sup>376</sup> Actually, the diffusion of a French influence by the Imperialist troops is not a surprising fact considering that these soldiers were under French command and did not have, therefore, to adapt to the conditions of any other foreign military institution.

The Intervention War found a strong supporter in the Mexican army in the person of Adrien (Adrian) Woll. The French-born general was not present during the invasion of Matamoros by the Imperialist troops, but he had been instrumental in the decision to attack the Mexican city. This experienced Mexican officer in the past had already had close relations with Matamoros and its inhabitants who knew him as *calzón colorado* (red pants) from his military uniform.<sup>377</sup> Thus, Woll constitutes a notable exception to the French soldiers of low military rank who stayed in the Valley during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although Woll’s experience in Matamoros is not well-documented, some elements reveal his complex and even conflicting identities, illustrating a process French Valley soldiers in either the American or the Mexican army could have experienced.

Woll’s presence and role in the Rio Grande Valley cannot be understood without some knowledge about both his background as a Mexican army officer and as a Frenchman. Born in Paris, he became a lieutenant during the First Empire (1802-1815) but left his country after Napoleon Bonaparte’s defeat. He sailed for America and fought in the Mexican War of Independence under General Santa Anna to whom Woll was to remain indefectibly faithful throughout his life. Woll stayed in Mexico after the war, became a naturalized citizen and progressively climbed the military

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376. Betty Bay, *Historic Brownsville: Original Townsite Guide* (Brownsville: Brownsville Historical Association, 1980), 32.

377. Joseph Milton Nance, "Woll, Adrian" in *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fwo03>), accessed January 12, 2011.

hierarchy.<sup>378</sup> His ascension put him several times in contact with Matamoros. In 1842, as commander of the second division of the army Corps of the North and Commandant General of the Department of Coahuila,<sup>379</sup> he was sent by Santa Anna to use Matamoros as a base to retaliate against the Texans for their earlier rebellion during the Texas Revolution, and his coming to the city was apparently well appreciated by the Matamorenses.<sup>380</sup> In 1853, Woll was appointed governor and commandant general of Tamaulipas and stayed in Matamoros from May 1853 to January 1855 and from April to September 1855.<sup>381</sup> Woll became the most outstanding French-born military man to be stationed in the Valley; however, considering his ambiguous and complex identity, it is doubtful that his French nationality had any influence on the decisions he took as commandant general of Tamaulipas.

Indeed, throughout his career in the Mexican army, Woll seemed primarily to act not as a Frenchman but as a Mexican official. During the 1842 campaign against the Texans, he wrote a report which traduces this idea. In this source, written in Spanish for General Isidro Reyes, commander in chief of the army Corps of the North, Woll identifies himself as a Mexican, re-establishing in San Fernando the “glorious anniversary of *our* National Independence”<sup>382</sup> and putting a lot of effort into treating enemies well, so “the world [will] perceive that sentiments of humanity and

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378. Ibid.

379. Joseph Milton Nance trans. and ed., “Brigadier General Adrian Woll's Report of His Expedition into Texas in 1842” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (April, 1955), 523.

380. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 88.

381. Nance, “Woll, Adrian”

382. Nance, “Brigadier General Adrian Woll's Report,” 542. My emphasis.

generosity are what distinguish Mexicans.”<sup>383</sup> A similar attachment to the Mexican nation can be found in a letter Woll wrote ten years later, in a very different and highly tense context. Indeed, Woll had left Mexico in June 1845 for health reasons. He was granted a one-year leave, and then a renewing of this leave for two more years. In 1848, he did not ask for a new extension and, as he did not report back for duty, was dismissed as a deserter.<sup>384</sup> In a letter dated 1852, Woll defends himself against the charges that had prohibited his return to Mexican soil.<sup>385</sup> He blames the Mexican president D. Joaquin Herrera for not allowing him to come back to his “adopted country.”<sup>386</sup> As he explains, he might have been born French, but he became an influential Mexican citizen who could not accept the presidential decision which excluded him from the Mexican army, because it “took away the most precious thing that a man can own on earth, because it took away my honor, called into question my loyalty and my gratefulness toward the nation that put me in charge more than once of its defense, of its rights and reputation.”<sup>387</sup> Thus, Woll, who re-expresses in the 1852 letter his desire to “be able to go fight and die for Mexico,”<sup>388</sup> seems to embody the change of identity experienced by many French soldiers after years of service in the Mexican army.

However, Woll’s loyalty went more to General Santa Anna than the Mexican nation per se. In the 1842 report of the Texas campaign, Woll mentions several times his quasi-veneration for the Mexican general. Indeed, the French-born soldier named

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383. Ibid., 541.

384. Nance, "Woll, Adrian"

385. *Exposicion Presentada al Escmo. Sr. Presidente de la Republica, General Don Mariano Arista por el Ciudadano General Adrian Woll* (Mexico: Imprenta de Ignacio Cumplido, 1852), 1.

386. Ibid., 3-4.

387. Ibid., 4, my own translation.

388. Ibid., 15, my own translation.

the battalion and regiment which were to fight in the Texas campaign after Santa Anna himself, asserting: “we shall do everything possible in order that the aforesaid units may make themselves worthy of bearing so illustrious a name.”<sup>389</sup> Further, Santa Anna is referred to as an “immortal” being with “superior hands.”<sup>390</sup> Woll’s admiration for the figure of Santa Anna was doubtlessly fueled by the benevolent attitude of the Mexican leader toward him. Indeed, Santa Anna was partly responsible for Woll’s ascension in the Mexican army. Moreover, when Woll was accused of desertion, the Mexican leader facilitated his re-integration in the Mexican army and even promoted him to Division General on December 25, 1853.<sup>391</sup>

More important, Woll’s life decisions also reveal a true attachment to his country of birth. Actually, every time Santa Anna was overthrown, Woll went back to France, and after the failure of the Intervention War, he re-settled in Montauban, southern France, to die there in 1875.<sup>392</sup> The most significant reflection of this consideration for his *pais natal* is Woll’s constant refusal to take up arms against France.<sup>393</sup> During the Pastry War, which had, as seen in chapter one, some consequences on the migration of the French population stationed in Matamoros in 1838, Woll resigned his commission to avoid fighting against his countrymen, but the Mexican government rejected his request and placed him on inactive duty.<sup>394</sup> Thus, Woll was sometimes conflicted between his assignments as a Mexican officer and his

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389. Nance, “Brigadier General Adrian Woll's Report,” 527.

390. Ibid., 546, 551.

391. Nance, “Woll, Adrian”

392. Ibid.

393. *Exposicion Presentada al Escmo. Sr. Presidente de la Republica*, 4.

394. Nance, “Woll, Adrian”

attachment to his country of birth. However, he was only rarely put on the spot while performing his military duty and was therefore able throughout his career to emphasize his loyalty to the Mexican army. His experience in the Valley might have been the reflection of this reality.

The only other soldier of French culture whose presence in the Valley in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is well-documented and had notable impact is Julius Garesché. At first glance, his experience seems similar to any other French notable man who settled in Brownsville in the 1850s-1860s. Indeed, Julius and his wife Mariquitta joined the local elites, had contact with Brownsville inhabitants, and made themselves a solid local reputation. Moreover, they both emphasized their French culture. However, their social interactions were primarily performed with other officers and officers' wives and, as temporary settlers who did not participate in the economic life of the area, they never became identified with regular Brownsville citizens. Moreover, Julius' position of American officer did not enable him to act as a vector of French influence through his duty. Julius Garesché's experience gives therefore more insights on the particularity of the French soldiers' life in the Valley in the 1850s.

In Garesché's life and career, Brownsville was—like Matamoros for Woll—just a stage, but the less than six years he spent in the Valley are much more documented than Woll's stay in the area. Indeed, Julius's son Louis Garesché wrote an extensive biography of his father, composed of many letters, and dedicated entirely to the defense and praise of his father's memory, “for he truly deserved the appellation which so many who knew him have given him—the American Bayard, the American Chevalier *sans peur et sans reproche* [fearless and beyond reproach].”<sup>395</sup> This nickname, apparently adopted by some Brownsville citizens, is imbued with both

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395. Garesché, *Biography of Lieutenant Colonel Julius P. Garesché*, v.

French medieval and American references, revealing how Garesché might have been seen, but also how he wanted to be perceived. In fact, Julius was not born in France but in Cuba, but his biographer makes a particular effort in underlining his French descent, going as far as tracing the family's origin in the fantasized "epochs of the primitive Celts of Druidical memory."<sup>396</sup> Allegedly, Julius's grandfather was a French noble who emigrated to San Domingo to establish a sugar and a coffee plantation and married a woman of "French parentage and a most exemplary Catholic."<sup>397</sup> They had a son who, in turn, settled in Cuba and married a Catholic woman of French descent also. Eventually, Julius himself married a woman named Mariquitta de Coudroy de Lauréal, daughter of a French Catholic émigré from the Island of Guadeloupe.<sup>398</sup> Both Julius and his wife can therefore be considered French Creoles; besides, both cultivated their "Frenchness" to a great extent, speaking French fluently and corresponding almost exclusively in French.<sup>399</sup> They also transmitted their identity to their children, considering that Louis undertook himself the task of translating all his parents' letters from French to English for his book.<sup>400</sup>

Recently graduated from West Point, Lieutenant Julius Garesché was appointed Acting Assistant Quartermaster and Acting Commissary of Subsistence of the military Post of Point Isabel, in 1849, before being removed with his troops in February 1850, to Fort Brown.<sup>401</sup> In the context of the aftermath of the Mexican-American War, such an appointment is probably related to the fear of a Mexican

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396. *Ibid.*, 17.

397. *Ibid.*, 19.

398. *Ibid.*, 75-76.

399. *Ibid.*, 217.

400. *Ibid.*, vi.

401. *Ibid.*, 94.

retaliation on the border. Besides, the reinforcement of the military contingent at Fort Brown is mentioned several times by Mariquitta, Julius Garesché's wife. In a letter sent to her parents on August 1853, she talks about the new arrival of 12 officers and 240 soldiers at Fort Brown, and the possible arrival of 19 more companies. In September of the same year, she refers to the state of alert in which the area was almost permanently plunged, and on the plans to build new military forts along the Rio Grande.<sup>402</sup>

Soon after his arrival in Brownsville, as a devoted Catholic, and probably as a man of French culture, Julius established very good relations with the first French missionaries who settled in the area. Garesché invited Father Telmon, the priest in charge of the Brownsville area, to have dinner at his house almost every day and actively helped to build the first Catholic Church in Brownsville.<sup>403</sup> Garesché made himself a very good reputation among the French religious. A lay Brother who accompanied the Oblate Father Telmon in 1850 wrote, for example, that

if Mr. Garesché continued his life up to the moment of his death as I knew in Brownsville, I can truly say he is a Saint. When Fathers Telmon, Soulerin and myself landed at Point Isabel in 1850, Mr. Garesché received us with open arms and conducted us to his own quarters where every possible attention was shown us.... He was so good to us, and as long as we had not the means of subsistence, he personally provided for our wants. Mr. Garesché was such an excellent Catholic that he served Mass every Sunday in full uniform, and never allowed a month to pass by without going to Communion. In a word, there are few like him either in their conducts or in their deeds.<sup>404</sup>

As noticed by Msgr. Odin, Bishop of Galveston and responsible for the success of the missions in Texas in the early 1850s, Julius Garesché acted as a strong vector of the Catholic faith, giving "great edification" to others "by his piety and regularity in his

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402. Ibid., 187.

403. Ibid., 112, 95.

404. Ibid., 94.



religious duties.”<sup>405</sup> His influence on the local community went beyond his reputation as a model of piety, for as Father Domenech, another French Catholic missionary, said about Garesché: “everybody in Brownsville appreciated him, esteemed him, loved him, and respected him.”<sup>406</sup>

The reasons for these widely laudatory feelings toward Julius Garesché are the same as those which enabled the French notable merchants mentioned previously to build a strong reputation in the area. Indeed, Julius Garesché and his wife were close to the poorest citizens of the area but also welcomed in the local elite circles. In a letter dated February 14, 1851, Mariquitta mentions the efforts she and her husband put in helping the most impoverished settlers of the local community: “there is at Brownsville a poor English family consisting of father, mother, and three little children, in whom we have greatly interested ourselves. But for Jules I do not know what would have become of them; he has already rendered them great assistance and is even now on the point of lending them again forty dollars.”<sup>407</sup> On the other hand, Julius and Mariquitta embody and inform the elite life at Brownsville in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. They played piano and went to balls almost every week, experiencing local dances like the Mexican quadrille, and socializing with some local elites.<sup>408</sup>

However, Julius and Mariquitta Garesché were mainly in contact with other military officers, even during Julius’s spare time. Indeed, the balls and receptions they went to were mostly given at Fort Brown, and they were usually invited to dinner parties attended exclusively by other military officers and their wives. The most

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405. *Ibid.*, 95.

406. *Ibid.*, 191.

407. *Ibid.*, 118-119.

408. *Ibid.*, 116-117.

interesting example illustrating this fact is probably to be found on April 1854, when Julius and Mariquitta Garesché were invited to dinner at General Adrian Woll's headquarter in Camargo. The dinner's events were reported by one of its guests, U.S. General Joseph Roberts, in his personal writings. The American military officer noted that

Lieutenant Garesché was the most conspicuous guest and was very entertaining and agreeable. He conversed fluently in French, Spanish and English with different persons at table. With General Woll who was German and did not speak Spanish very fluently, he conversed in French, with General Woll's aides in Spanish, and with others, including myself, in English. General Woll appeared highly pleased and talked of the operations during the War between Mexico and the United States, and also of a former residence in the United States when he became acquainted with General Scott and other Officers who were prominent in our War with England in 1812.<sup>409</sup>

Thus, Roberts portrays Garesché as a clever guest, well at ease with other military officers. Roberts also noted Garesché's language skills; however, he gives a similar importance to Garesché's abilities in French, Spanish and English. This might reveal Garesché's willingness to be seen as a cultured officer rather than as a person of French culture when he interacted with other military men. Moreover, Roberts identifies Woll as a German who spoke French but not Spanish well. This seems to indicate that Woll, just as Garesché, did not stress his French origin in such situations. The fact that military operations and war memories were apparently the only discussion topics tackled by Woll during the dinner emphasizes the idea that the Frenchman wanted to be perceived primarily as a military officer.

Mariquitta's experience in Brownsville was greatly influenced by her husband's military life. Indeed, she rarely left Fort Brown and her daily activities revolved around life on the military post. As she wrote: "I am daily making cakes, I may say compelled to make them, because nearly every evening one or two officers,

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409. Ibid., 198.

sometimes many, come to play cards with us, and it is the custom to offer cakes and cordials.”<sup>410</sup> Mariquitta established friendly relations almost exclusively with other officers’ wives. However, she was sometimes the only woman in the garrison, a situation which did not please her, for, as she noted: “I have cared so little for the society and the attentions of men that I value very little such a brilliant position.”<sup>411</sup> Probably to kill time, she took much interest in cooking, practicing at times a cuisine that revealed her French education.<sup>412</sup> Her role was mainly to take care of the home, and as a strong and independent woman, she achieved some respect from her husband in that matter. In a letter to her parents, she indeed stated: “I am well pleased to see I have at last made him understand that a woman is more suited than a man for domestic economy.”<sup>413</sup> However, such a situation did not alleviate her loneliness, and her constant willingness to go back to her parents’ house in Limours, or to Wellington with some members of her family. Finally, Mariquitta’s call was heard; Julius Garesché left Brownsville with his wife in November 1855, after being promoted to Assistant Adjutant General.<sup>414</sup> This “American Bayard” was killed during the American Civil War, on December 31, 1862, in a battle near Nashville while fighting for the Union.<sup>415</sup>

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410. Ibid., 121.

411. Ibid., 124.

412. Ibid., 119.

413. Ibid., 195.

414. Ibid., 219.

415. Ibid., 444.

## **The Idiosyncratic Development and Influence of the Lower Rio Grande Valley French Catholic Institutions**

Like French soldiers, French religious personnel came to the Valley with a mission which shaped their settlement. On the one hand, as members of powerful institutions they were able to exert a notable influence. Their presence and influence in the area and on local population were actually much more important, constant, widespread, diverse and visible than the French soldiers'. The Fathers and Brothers Oblates of Mary the Immaculate and the Sisters of the Incarnate Word came to the area with a global *mission civilisatrice*, in the same fashion as the French notable merchants described in chapter 3, except that for the religious this mission was the unique reason for their presence, and the idea of civilization was embodied by god. Nuns and priests worked hand-in-hand to spread the Catholic faith in the Valley, but they employed two different modalities. The missionaries were the soldiers of god, in other words active priests trained and indoctrinated to "collect souls," perform baptisms, marriages, instruction, as well as answering sick calls and burying the dead.<sup>416</sup> The Sisters of the Incarnate Word were members of a regular religious order and formed a semi-cloistered "teaching community"<sup>417</sup> whose role was first and foremost to educate the youth.<sup>418</sup> Thus, their influence was felt primarily on the local culture and mentality, but it also went beyond the purely religious domain.

On the other hand, French nuns and priests' dedication to their mission implied a particular settlement experience that distinguished them from other French people.

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416. François Lagarde, "French Catholic Missions in Texas, 1840-1880" in *The French in Texas: History, Migration, Culture*, ed. François Lagarde (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 145; Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 102.

417. Pierre Fourier Parisot, *The Reminiscences of a Texas Missionary* (San Antonio: Johnson Bros. Printing Company, 1899), 90.

418. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 10.

In the first place, it must be said that the development of the Catholic institutions in the Valley followed an idiosyncratic pattern which was not directly linked with the general socio-economic evolution of the area. The position of the French Catholic Church members in the local society was also particular. Indeed, the nuns formed a community apart which had a life on its own. The missionaries, who were put in permanent contact with the locals, became progressively accepted by the Valley population but their duty distinguished them from other settlers. Moreover, the mission the nuns and priests embodied created particular responsibilities and compromises in regard to their French identity. As with French soldiers, their mission was their primary concern; therefore, they emphasized their status of nuns and missionaries before their nationality. However, they were often perceived as French-born people, and, as a consequence, were put on the spot many times because of their nationality. Moreover, their French culture transpired, even if unconsciously, in the influence they exerted on the area as religious people. This is mainly due to the fact that both the Oblates and the Sisters of the Incarnate Word were composed of a large majority of French-born (until at least 1880 for the nuns) and embodied institutions which had their roots in French soil.

The presence of French missionaries and nuns in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Valley resulted essentially from the progression of the Catholic Church in the United States during the same period. Indeed, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the American Catholic Church was under the French clergy's control. Through the *Société de la Propagation de la Foi* (Society of the Propagation of the Faith), which was financed by donations, missionaries were recruited in France to evangelize North America. In 1841, The Texas Congress passed the Church Bill through which churches and missions of Texas were returned to the Catholic Church, giving Jean-Marie Odin, appointed first Bishop

of Galveston in 1847, and his Father Superior John Timon who had recruited him in Lyons, the green light for the founding of missions all over the state. Thus from 1841 to 1900, approximately two hundred French missionaries and nuns, regular and secular religious personnel, immigrated from France to Texas, especially from the southeastern diocese of Lyons.<sup>419</sup> In 1849, the citizens of the new city of Brownsville informed Odin of their willingness to receive the “comfort of religion.” In order to recruit missionaries who could fulfill this mission, Odin took a trip to Montreal to meet with the Oblates of Mary the Immaculate, a missionary order founded in 1816 by the Bishop of Marseilles, Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod. In keeping with their mission, the French priests accepted Odin’s proposition to evangelize the Lower Rio Grande Valley and its surrounding areas.<sup>420</sup>

The Oblates’ missionary work in the Valley started in December 1849, when they established their headquarters in Brownsville, the first permanent Oblate foundation in the United States.<sup>421</sup> At that time, the Oblates of the Valley were composed of Father Telmon—director of the mission under the authority of Bishop Odin and one of the first Oblates to land in America—, Father Soulerin, Father Gaudet, and Brothers Gélot and Menthe.<sup>422</sup> Probably due to the recentness of their settlement, they cannot be found in the 1850 Population Schedules, but their situation as members of a new French religious organization leaves little doubt concerning their origin.

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419. Lagarde, “French Catholic Missions,” 142-143.

420. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 13, 16.

421. *Ibid.*, v-vi, 22.

422. *Ibid.*, 16-17.

These missionaries' first establishment in the Valley can probably be summed up as both a failure and a traumatizing experience. The reception given by the Brownsville inhabitants to the Oblates' first arrival set the tone: The settlers proved very polite but they had little interest in religion.<sup>423</sup> As Bernard Doyon, author of *The Cavalry of Christ*, says, in attracting missionaries to the Valley, "the residents of Brownsville had but one pursuit—money;"<sup>424</sup> or, as the Oblate Robert Cooke suggests, Brownsville settlers saw in the introduction of the Catholic missionaries in the area the possibility to enhance their mercantile and social importance through their affiliation with the religion.<sup>425</sup> From the first, the French Oblates faced very difficult conditions. They were given a dirty, unfurnished hangar in which to live and they did not attract sympathy from the local settlers, partly due to their lack of mastery over the Spanish language.<sup>426</sup> They moved from one precarious lodging to another and had to say Mass in empty shops provided by local elites until an actual wooden chapel was founded in June 1850.<sup>427</sup> The Oblates finally started to be accepted in the local society. Father Telmon made a reputation as an orator, attracting crowds, and Bishop Odin came down to the Valley to confirm 11,000 people.<sup>428</sup> However, the summer of 1850 proved fatal for the missionaries who suffered from the heat, lack of food, bad sanitary conditions, and a sudden cutting off of their financial support. Facing

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423. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 87-88.

424. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 21.

425. *Ibid.*, 85.

426. *Ibid.*, 23.

427. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 88-89.

428. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 25-26.

“disappointments and mishaps, trials and persecutions, and limited success,” the missionaries completely withdrew to Canada and France in early 1851.<sup>429</sup>

Jean-Marie Odin, refusing to abandon the possibility of restoration of the Catholic faith in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, undertook a trip to France, Italy and Germany toward the end of 1851 to attract new support for the re-establishment of a mission in Brownsville.<sup>430</sup> This decision might well have been motivated by a true sense of religious zeal, but in any case, having 20,000 Catholics scattered around the Rio Grande with no priests to “collect their souls” was probably too problematic a situation for the Bishop of Texas. Moreover, as a “beachhead to launch a spiritual invasion of the promised land of Mexico,” Brownsville was undeniably a strategic place for the Catholic Church.<sup>431</sup> Mgr. Mazenod, founder of the Oblates, usually reluctant about the Texas missions, selected five of his best missionaries—Pierre Parisot, Etienne Vignolle, Pierre Keralum, Jean-Marie Gaye and Rigomer Olivier, plus their superior Father Verdet—to be sent to Texas.<sup>432</sup> In the meantime, Mother St Clare, Sister St Ang, Sister St Ephram and the lay Sister St Dominic, all French-born nuns of the convent of the Incarnate Word in Lyons, had been chosen to accompany the group and found a convent in Texas.<sup>433</sup> The Sisters were also under the authority of Father Verdet.<sup>434</sup> In March 1852, Bishop Odin left for Galveston with 38 priests,

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429. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 89; Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 29-30.

430. *Ibid.*, 32.

431. *Ibid.*, 58.

432. *Ibid.*, 34.

433. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 10.

434. Ann Marie Caldwell, “The Enduring Legacy of the French in Texas Education” in *The French in Texas: History, Migration, Culture*, ed. François Lagarde (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 245.



seminarians, Brothers and Sisters. In late 1852 and early 1853, some of them headed for Brownsville and established their orders in the area.

Both the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and the Oblates were here to stay, and their permanent presence in the area proved progressively fruitful for the spreading of the Catholic faith, as well as for the improvement of the local community. However, the hardships suffered by the two religious organizations in the area cannot be minimized. Interestingly, the nuns' arrival and first months spent in Brownsville echo what the Oblates experienced during their first unsuccessful establishment in the area. When the groups of Sisters, accompanied by two young novices recruited in Galveston, reached Brownsville in February 1853, they lodged for a while in a filthy and barely furnished place.<sup>435</sup> Moreover, probably because of the particular character of their settlement, they met little support from the population except for the French priests and an unknown "Creole lady."<sup>436</sup> In May 1853, with the help of the French Oblates, the French Sisters opened a school for girls and less than one year later laid the cornerstone of their convent.<sup>437</sup> However, the school had to be closed soon after its opening on account of yellow fever, cutting off the nuns from their only source of revenue.<sup>438</sup> Nearly all the Sisters were stricken by the disease, and between 1855 and 1857, three of them died, plunging the order into a state of despair shortly after its establishment in the area.<sup>439</sup>

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435. *Ibid.*, 245.

436. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 8.

437. *Ibid.*, 10; Kearney, "Historical Sketch," 92; Caldwell, "The Enduring Legacy," 245.

438. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 10.

439. Caldwell, "The Enduring Legacy," 245.

Like the nuns, the Oblates experienced a constant thread of diverse difficulties throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Soon after their arrival in October 1852, Fathers Verdet, Olivier, Keralum, Gaye, and lay Brother Roudet “would taste failure and persecution.”<sup>440</sup> In the first years, Mass remained almost unattended, and in 1852, out of 12,000 souls in the Brownsville district, only 25 Catholics formally observed Easter.<sup>441</sup> This situation might be explained by the long absence of religious institutions in the area, and by the individual faith or, as the priests called it “elastic conscience,”<sup>442</sup> that the local population, mostly Mexican and allegedly Catholic, had developed in consequence. Actually, poor and ignorant Catholics were for the priests the most appreciated population among the local settlers. The most feared people were probably the outlaws, men of non-religion that Father Parisot had described in particularly spiteful terms: “Many a time our mission on the Texas side was blessed by the accumulation of the wounded and the vanquished, sometimes by revolutionists, concocting their schemes and plots; by robbers, and generally by the scum of our sister Republic. Our population was demoralized and our lot was cast in that pandemonium.”<sup>443</sup> The French priest had been himself attacked at least twice by highway robbers while travelling in the region.<sup>444</sup> Moreover, in his journal, Father Domenech mentions the necessity for a priest to carry a gun during his visits.<sup>445</sup>

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440. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 57-58.

441. *Ibid.*, 60, 63.

442. *Ibid.*, 154.

443. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 101.

444. *Ibid.*, 56-57.

445. Emmanuel Henri Domenech, *Journal d'un Missionnaire au Texas et au Mexique, 1846-1852* (Paris: Librairie de Gaume Frères, 1857), 257.

More than the settlers' coldness, avidity, immorality and crudeness, the French Sisters and priests suffered from "severe physical and climatic adversities."<sup>446</sup> Yellow fever was a particularly terrible obstacle for the Oblates and nuns' labor in the area. The epidemic that caused the closing of the Sisters' school soon after its first opening was actually just the first of a long series of recurring outbreaks. In 1858, yellow fever caused the death of two Sisters and the closing of their school.<sup>447</sup> The French priests, always in movement and unfitted for the Texas climate, were almost all hit by yellow fever, and from 1853 to 1882, this "terrific monster," as referred to by Father Parisot, took the life of eight of them.<sup>448</sup> This global picture is further darkened by accidental deaths, such as Father Verdet's, who disappeared in 1856 on board the *Nautilus* while trying to reach Brownsville by the sea,<sup>449</sup> and by the terrible hurricane which swept the town of Bagdad from the map in 1867. Father Parisot recalls the damages caused by this catastrophe on the Sisters' convent, stating in the end that the hurricane left them "without a house of their own, and without the means to build one."<sup>450</sup>

The Sisters and missionaries' labor was also slowed down by the constant political turmoil that shook the area. The American Civil War prevented for a time any further development of the religion in Brownsville. Sister St Clare noted the panic which reigned at the beginning of the conflict in the Brownsville area, stating, however, that the Sisters were offered provisions "by the generals of both parties."<sup>451</sup> The Brownsville Oblates particularly suffered from the Union take over of the city in

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446. Lagarde, "French Catholic Missions," 150.

447. Ibid., 145.

448. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 156; Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 101.

449. Ibid., 27-28.

450. Ibid., 112.

451. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 10.

November 1863 and were under constant suspicion by the new authority which treated them as Confederate spies.<sup>452</sup>

The political situation proved even more critical for the Oblates performing their mission on the other side of the border at this time. The Brownsville missionaries had implanted a mission in 1857-1858 in Matamoros parish, still officially administered by a Spanish secular pastor.<sup>453</sup> The missionary labor in Matamoros proved fruitful. Despite political instabilities and a global ignorance of the Catholic dogma, the population was receptive and the overall evangelic effort more gratifying than in Brownsville.<sup>454</sup> The economic boom of Matamoros in the beginning of the Civil War greatly motivated the efforts of the Oblates who constantly crossed the river to provide material and spiritual assistance.<sup>455</sup> The arrival of the Catholic Maximilian in Mexico City in June 1864 created a general enthusiasm among the Oblates who, for the first time, “enjoyed complete liberty.”<sup>456</sup> The mission of Matamoros was therefore reinforced in December 1865 with the arrival of three new Oblates and achieved such financial and religious success that Father Gaudet thought seriously of moving the Oblates’ headquarters to the Mexican city.<sup>457</sup>

However, the huge blow was about to come. In June 1866, the Liberals—who were fighting against Emperor Maximilian’s troops and demonstrated anti-French and anti-clericalists feelings—laid siege to Matamoros, took control of the city and asked

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452. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 169-170.

453. *Ibid.*, 87, 113.

454. *Ibid.*, 102.

455. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 55.

456. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 101; Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 100. For more information on Maximilian’s venture in Mexico, see chapter 1 of this thesis.

457. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 111.

Father Olivier, Superior of the Matamoros mission, to surrender the church immediately. Refusing these directives, the three Oblates of the Matamoros mission were put in jail.<sup>458</sup> Father Parisot, who came from Brownsville to visit the Oblates in Matamoros, found the captives in deplorable conditions.<sup>459</sup> Using a trick—and his American citizenship—Father Parisot was able to obtain the liberation of the three priests and reached *in extremis* the left bank of the river.<sup>460</sup> The Oblates were never to re-establish themselves in Matamoros, as Father Clos had prophesied as early as June 1866: "The mission of Matamoros is lost to us. Complete anarchy reigns in that unhappy city."<sup>461</sup> In such conditions, it is not hard to understand the state of despair that some Oblates, like the Superior of the Rio Grande mission Father Gaudet himself, experienced: "We have nothing here at present but a succession of grief and suffering, whilst the future offers [to our view] a clouded horizon."<sup>462</sup>

However, both the Oblates and the Sisters maintained their presence in the Valley throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, despite many difficulties and the complete failure of the Matamoros mission, they saw their influence spreading in Brownsville where they gradually achieved many successes. The French nuns' tenacity was exemplary and, at last, rewarding. The two yellow fever epidemics of 1855 and 1857 were soon followed by the re-opening of the school which was the first private educational establishment in the area.<sup>463</sup> In these difficult times, they received help from the community, notably from the father of one of their pupils who advanced

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458. *Ibid.*, 114-115.

459. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 70-71.

460. *Ibid.*, 73.

461. *Ibid.*, 66.

462. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 155.

463. Gonzáles, *Life Along the Border*, 92.

three months' tuition fees.<sup>464</sup> The order of the Incarnate Word in Brownsville, which became a Congregation in the late 1850s, progressively recovered from the initial difficulties, in major part thanks to the school. Indeed, it grew from 4 members in 1852 to 14 in 1860, with the addition of 6 French-born, 3 Irish-born and 1 Mexican-born Sisters.<sup>465</sup> 15 Sisters were listed in the 1870 census.<sup>466</sup> The school became popular in the area, attracting 100 pupils in the early 1860s, enabling the Sisters to provide strong support to the French missionaries in the educational field.<sup>467</sup> The Sisters concentrated mostly on the teaching of languages, and secondarily of music. In 1860, four of them were teaching English, four others were giving French lessons, two taught Spanish, and two music.<sup>468</sup> The Sisters' influence was primarily felt in the field of education in Brownsville.

Actually, the school was the most important institution for the nuns not only because it permitted them to spread the word of god, increase the number of faithful and the Congregation's influence, but also because it was the only reliable source of revenue enabling them to survive materially and even to expand.<sup>469</sup> Indeed, the convent of the Incarnate Word was supported entirely by the revenue derived from the school's tuitions.<sup>470</sup> However, the common idea that French Catholic schools were reserved for a rich elite at a time when many settlers lacked the essentials proved to be

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464. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 10.

465. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas*. Microfilm. Cameron County, 532.

466. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm. Cameron County, 171.

467. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 79.

468. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 532.

469. Lagarde, "French Catholic Missions," 148.

470. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 11.

wrong. Indeed, the nuns of the Incarnate Word educated many children from poor families, most of them being from Mexico.<sup>471</sup> Moreover, the nuns extended their prerogatives to the nursing of the sick, especially in time of epidemics but only during the day, for their rules required them to be back in the convent at night.<sup>472</sup> The latter example characterizes well the ambiguous implantation of the Congregation of the Incarnate Word in Brownsville society. Indeed, the Sisters provided help for local settlers and their reputation among them was enduring, but, as members of a semi-cloistered order, they formed a community which had a life on its own. Actually, some Incarnate Word Sisters—in 1893, 21 out of the 33 settled in Brownsville—decided to remain permanently within the cloister of the convent, communicating with the outer world only through lay Sisters.<sup>473</sup> If this seclusion was probably intensified in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century—that is when the Congregation was well implanted enough to cut itself from society—the institution always followed a rigid hierarchy, at the bottom of which were the novices who, after three years, would lose their identity, choose the name of Saint and become Sisters under the direct control of the Mother Superior.<sup>474</sup> Thus, the Valley inhabitants who, from 1859 onwards, joined the Congregation as novices had to cut off their familial and social links and accept to follow the rules of their new life.<sup>475</sup>

The Sisters' school and convent in Brownsville symbolized both the Congregation's success in the Valley and the distinctive character of the Sisters'

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471. *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 171; Lagarde, "French Catholic Missions," 148; Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 79.

472. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 11.

473. *Ibid.*, 11

474. *Ibid.*, 11.

475. *Ibid.*, 10.

community. Accompanying the success of the school and of the Congregation, an “ample and costly addition to [the Sisters’] original convent” was erected between 1853 and 1867, but the 1867 hurricane destroyed everything.<sup>476</sup> Thanks to the efforts provided by the Bishop of Galveston, the Oblates, and the Brownsville community, the Sisters’ new convent and school was completed fourteen months after the catastrophe.<sup>477</sup> The new buildings, established closer to the center of Brownsville, and therefore more visible to the population, were even more spacious than the original ones, with thirty-three cloisters, a chapel, refectories and kitchens, reception rooms, offices, school rooms and dormitories for boarding scholars.<sup>478</sup> However, high brick walls concealed the nuns from the gaze of the citizens, and a bridge crossing over 8<sup>th</sup> street enabled the Sisters to avoid any contact with the population.<sup>479</sup>

Like the Sisters, amidst the numerous hardships, the French missionaries progressively encountered notable successes. Although the Oblates lived together and formed a distinct community, their missionary labor also put them in permanent contact with the locals. To keep up with the population’s demands of spiritual assistance, the number of Oblates increased progressively from six members in November 1852 to thirteen in 1880.<sup>480</sup> Facing the receptiveness of the population for the development of a Catholic educational system, a boys’ school opened in November 1865, and three years later, a college administered by five Brothers was placed under the patronage of Saint Joseph.<sup>481</sup> However, the real symbol of the

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476. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 111.

477. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 11.

478. *Ibid.*, 11.

479. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 112-113.

480. *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 281; *1880 Census: Texas, Starr County*, 171 and 238.



missionaries' presence was the church of the Immaculate Conception. The wooden chapel that had been built in 1850 during the first mission was too small to welcome all the Catholics settled in the area<sup>482</sup> With the support of the community, especially the "ladies of Brownsville," as they are referred to by Father Parisot,<sup>483</sup> and some notable settlers who were almost all "well disposed toward the missionaries,"<sup>484</sup> the new church was completed in 1859, and thereafter regularly embellished.<sup>485</sup> The building had cost \$31,000, in part financed by the local population, and stood, at this time and for the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as "the most perfect piece of Gothic architecture to be found in Texas."<sup>486</sup> The church of the Immaculate Conception awakened the faith of the locals and, despite the fact that it could accommodate 1,500 people, the building was crowded at several Masses—a bright contrast to the lack of attendance in the former temporary church.<sup>487</sup>

Although the French missionaries were able to achieve a certain respectability in Brownsville and mark the city with their influence, as Parisot noted, "their labors...were not confined to the population of Brownsville."<sup>488</sup> Indeed, they were in charge of evangelizing the population of a parish which was formed by eight counties, stretching far away in the interior of Texas, and representing a territory almost as big as Belgium and Holland together.<sup>489</sup> Making things even more difficult, the major part

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481. Lagarde, "French Catholic Missions," 148; Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 79.

482. *Ibid.*, 70.

483. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 113.

484. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 124.

485. *Ibid.*, 70.

486. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 29.

487. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 8; Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 90

488. *Ibid.*, 90.

of the Brownsville parish was composed of people scattered in small villages and numerous ranches which were hardly accessible. Thus, “the labor imposed on the Fathers in visiting the inhabitants of these plains and forests of their district was enormous.”<sup>490</sup> However, and this might be the reason for their particularly enduring influence in the area, the Oblates did not abandon the idea of propagating the Catholic faith in the most remote habitations of their parish. In 1854, in order to get closer to the ranches, the Oblates established a new mission at Roma.<sup>491</sup> In 1867, to some extent in compensation for the Mexican failure, Fathers Clos and Piat and lay Brother Charest took charge of this mission.<sup>492</sup> Throughout their years of labor there, they undertook constant visits of their district on horseback. As Father Verdet phrased it, “the missionary must be a good horseman.”<sup>493</sup>

This endeavor proved to be extremely difficult. During their recurring peregrinations, the missionaries suffered from many hardships and experienced a state of constant fatigue. Moreover, they lived at the favor of the inhabitants’ generosity, who provided them with food but seldom with a place decent enough to get a good rest.<sup>494</sup> The missionaries had a very busy schedule, undertaking to visit 285 ranches four times a year, and, at each place, perform a night service right after arrival, “early mass and instruction the following morning, catechizing of children at 10 o’clock, and visitation of families in the evening.” The following day, they had to move on to the

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489. Ibid., 90; Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 66.

490. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 90.

491. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 69.

492. Ibid., 119, 138.

493. Ibid., 67.

494. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 90-91.

next ranch.<sup>495</sup> People settled in these remote areas were all of Mexican origin, and if they firmly believed in god, their ignorance about the Catholic dogma complicated the priests' task even further.<sup>496</sup>

The priests' visits were well appreciated by the locals and seen as great events.<sup>497</sup> Father Parisot, in recalling a visit undertaken by the Bishop of Texas in the ranches around Brownsville, noted the triumphal ceremony which had been reserved for the clergyman.<sup>498</sup> At times, the missionaries would help the poorest people settled there by providing them with food.<sup>499</sup> As the only contact the ranch population had with the outside world, the missionaries exerted a powerful influence on them. The examples of Father Bretault, known in the area by a Spanish nickname "Don Juan de la Costa,"<sup>500</sup> and of Father Cross, a "picturesque figure" who was known as "the cowboy priest" by the locals,<sup>501</sup> prove the extent to which these itinerant Oblates were accepted by the community. Nevertheless, since they never stayed in the same ranch or village more than one day or two, the Oblates were not able to immerse themselves into the local society. They were famous among the population, but mainly as eminent visitors, not as locals. Thus, the Oblates sometimes thought that their visits in the remote areas, too infrequent and performed for a nomadic population, were made in vain.<sup>502</sup>

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495. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 8.

496. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 122.

497. *Ibid.*, 130; Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 128.

498. *Ibid.*, 130-131.

499. *Ibid.* 127.

500. *Ibid.*, 131.

501. Gonzáles, *Life Along the Border*, 66-68.

502. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 136-137.

Two notable figures among the Oblates illustrate particularly well the degree of respectability achieved by the missionaries in the Valley, their influence on the society, and the development of the Catholic effort. The figure of Pierre Yves Keralum is probably the most compelling. He is primarily remembered today for having designed the church of the Immaculate Conception, its altars and pulpit.<sup>503</sup> Born in Quimper, Brittany in March 2, 1817, Keralum had started a career as an architect and cabinetmaker during the years he spent in his native country; however, attracted by the religious life, he made his profession as an Oblate in 1851, came to Brownsville in 1852 and applied his designing skills for the expansion of the Catholic faith in Texas.<sup>504</sup> As Parisot suggests, this particular background was probably one of the main reasons explaining why the Oblates sent Keralum to Brownsville.<sup>505</sup>

Keralum's influence is not only felt on Brownsville's topography. He was also a missionary of the ranches, undertaking constant visits throughout the huge Brownsville parish and emphasizing the missionaries' values of poverty and humility to "such an extent as to be frequently rebuked by his superiors."<sup>506</sup> His zeal and generosity made him a highly respected Oblate among his fellows and, despite his shyness and lack of oratory talent, he became known as "El Santo Padre Pedrito" by the locals. For the ranch population, Keralum was a particular figure, a caring father whose visit was a notable event. The activities which originated such a reputation have been well described by Eugene George in these words: "It was said he would rush to a remote location to be at the bedside of a failing parishioner, administer last

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503. Richard Cleary, "Is There French Architecture in Texas?" in *The French in Texas: History, Migration, Culture*, ed. François Lagarde (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 231.

504. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 143.

505. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 29.

506. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 142, 146; Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 29.

rites, spend much of the night employing his cabinetmaker skills preparing a proper coffin, then observe Requiem on the following morning.”<sup>507</sup> In exchange for his services, Keralum was fed and welcomed by the population.<sup>508</sup> Not being a man of robust constitution, his health became adversely affected by his constant visits on horseback and his ascetic way of life; at the end of his life, he became very nearsighted but still pursued insatiably his labor.<sup>509</sup>

This behavior had tragic consequences. On November 9, 1872, at age fifty-six, Keralum left Brownsville for a ride in the parish and never returned. His horse was found grazing on a prairie, unfettered, but with its lariat hanging from its neck. Immediately, Father Olivier assembled search parties but all efforts were unsuccessful. Ten years later, in a forest bordering Keralum’s usual circuit, a ranchero found a saddle hanging on a tree, human bones and religious artifacts. The mysterious circumstances of his death, very likely caused by exhaustion, have been the object of many comments and even fictions.<sup>510</sup> After his death, Keralum became known as “the lost missionary,” emphasizing his reputation of martyr of the Catholic Church in Texas.<sup>511</sup>

Pierre Fourier Parisot had an equally strong influence on the success of the Catholic mission in Brownsville and on the improvement of the local community, but

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507. Eugene George, *Lost Architecture of the Rio Grande Borderlands* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 46.

508. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 146.

509. *Ibid.*, 147.

510. Paul Horgan, *The Devil in the Desert* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1952). In this fictional book, the author mentions Keralum’s encounter with a serpent in his final hours. See also George, *Lost Architecture*, 47.

511. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 30-32; George, *Lost Architecture*, 47.

would have probably refused the title of “martyr” or “saint” for the same reasons that made him so influential. It might be said that Father Parisot gave to the Catholic institution in Texas what Keralum could not offer, the reverse being true as well. Born in France and educated in Marseille, Parisot came to America in the early 1850s to teach Latin, Greek and mathematics in St Joseph College in Galveston.<sup>512</sup> In 1857, he was appointed Superior of the Brownsville parish and applied his great capacities of administration and social skills to improve the situation of the Catholic mission.<sup>513</sup> His role in the construction of the church of the Immaculate Conception and in its subsequent improvements is conspicuous. He was indeed able to raise money at several times to buy some chandeliers, an organ, and a bell to embellish the church.<sup>514</sup> In 1866, he also added to the church a vaulted roof composed of a succession of groined Gothic arches.<sup>515</sup>

From his *Reminiscences*, Parisot appears as a conservative man, expressing bitter resentment against certain types of people, but also as a man gifted with a good sense of humor and pragmatic behavior which benefited the Brownsville mission. Although he performed willingly the long visits that were necessary to control his parish, Parisot was not inclined to live an ascetic life. Indeed, in 1860, he used his capacity to raise money to improve the living conditions of the Oblates by purchasing a new building that was moved to the church grounds.<sup>516</sup> His boldness—revealed for example in the episode of the detaining of the Matamoros Oblates, or in his encounters with highway robbers—and his acute sense of pragmatism echo the lives

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512. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 8.

513. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 71.

514. *Ibid.*, 71-72.

515. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 8.

516. *Ibid.*, 5.

of some successful lay French-born settlers of the area. Besides, Parisot's *Reminiscences* reveal a profound interest in the general progress of the Valley which is not always directly connected with the propagation of the Catholic faith. His remarks on astronomy mirror his love of science,<sup>517</sup> and his strong desire to see "the long-wished iron horse traverse the immense plains of the lower Rio Grande"<sup>518</sup> illustrates his passion for the modernization process. As Chatfield mentions in 1893 in his *Twin Cities of the Border*, Parisot's influence, culture and longevity made him "an indisputable authority and [entitled] him to the high regard in which he is held in this community"<sup>519</sup> Ironically, his enduring influence can also be perceived in his support for the aforementioned publication.<sup>520</sup> Doubtlessly, considering the priest's personality features, Parisot saw in this book a new opportunity to emphasize the success of the Catholic Church in the Valley.

Because they were endowed with the propagation of a message whose content had to be universal, the French missionaries rarely referred to their French nationality. Moreover, their personal relationship to their national roots was most of the time ambiguous. Indeed, in the first paragraph of his *Reminiscences*, Parisot mentions his difficult departure from "La Belle France" in a rather pathetic way: "My native land adieu! Adieu! I cannot always stay with you, stay with you,"<sup>521</sup> but he does not refer directly to his native country in the rest of the book. This seems to reveal that the priests' role as missionaries of god was more important than any personal

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517. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 129.

518. *Ibid.*, 134.

519. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 8.

520. *Ibid.*, 1. The author addresses indeed his "sincere thanks" to Father Parisot who provided him with "valuable information, reference books, etc."

521. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 5.

characteristics, including nationality. Moreover, the only French cultural reference that appears in the *Reminiscences* is indirect, imbued with religious considerations and used as a negative point of comparison. Indeed, Parisot mentions “Voltaire and Co. and *the Great Orient*” to blame their irreligion and contrast them, in a sort of counter-example, to the profound faith of the Mexicans.<sup>522</sup> Interestingly, in this case, Parisot emphasizes his position of priest over his French cultural background.

The way the Oblates wanted to be perceived and the way they were perceived were however different. The priests were always seen as both religious men and French-born, and this situation proved to be mainly harmful to their labor. Indeed, despite their constant willingness “to be of every part and yet belong to none,”<sup>523</sup> the French priests were put on the spot in the 1860s because of their origin. U.S. General Nathaniel P. Banks, who took Brownsville from the Confederates in 1863, kept a close watch over the priests when he learned that they were all French-born.<sup>524</sup> The Matamoros Oblates were also the first victims of the Liberal invasion which had driven Maximilian’s troops out of the city in 1866.<sup>525</sup> As Doyon says in the *Cavalry of Christ*, despite the fact that they had never interfered in politics, “the Oblates could hardly conceal that they were French like the conquerors. They were therefore in a very hazardous situation,” a situation which indeed caused them to leave Matamoros for good.<sup>526</sup> The Oblates’ French nationality proved also to be a disadvantage in their

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522. *Ibid.*, 74-75. Voltaire, the famous 18<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher, and *the Great Orient*, the largest French Masonic organization, are mentioned by Parisot because, to him, they symbolize the French anti-religion and anti-clericalism.

523. Doyon, *The Cavalry of Christ*, 169.

524. *Ibid.*, 170.

525. *Ibid.*, 114.

526. *Ibid.*, 101.



missionary labor with the Mexican population. As Father Clos remarked, “the Mexican likes the foreigner, but in his heart he prefers his own. He idolizes his own priests, even when they are unworthy.”<sup>527</sup> From its caricatural character, this comment raises also some questions around the cultural difference between the priest and his flock, and the difficulties that might have stemmed from it in the process of transmission of a “universal” message.

Actually, even if the Oblates acted primarily as members of the institution to which they had dedicated their lives, their influence was fundamentally imbued with their culture. It seems unlikely that the Oblates’ institution—whose actors were all French-born and whose roots were planted in French soil—could have been devoid of any national characteristics. Even if he did not fully realize it, Parisot became an important vector of the diffusion of a French influence in the area. Indeed, to embellish the church of the Immaculate Conception, he ordered chandeliers directly from the factory of Messrs. Poussielgues & Co. in Paris.<sup>528</sup> The Frenchman also procured a rich set of vestments coming directly from Lyons for the Brownsville parish.<sup>529</sup>

Moreover, it is likely that the lay French-born of the area, like the zealous Catholic Julius Garesché, came to Mass not only for religious reasons. As François Lagarde states for Texas as a whole, the church provided comfort for the colonists “who, in the building and its ceremonies found the elements of the culture they had left.”<sup>530</sup> This idea seems particularly fitted to Brownsville where the church is an

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527. Ibid., 108.

528. Parisot, *Reminiscences*, 114.

529. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities*, 8.

530. Lagarde, “French Catholic Missions,” 147.

example of the Gothic Revival style which has its roots in French culture and had been designed by a priest-architect trained in Paris. If some questions remain about its purely French character, some historians and architects see in the Immaculate Conception an example of “vernacular buildings,” focusing especially on the pier buttresses on the façade which seem clearly based on French models.<sup>531</sup> For historian Richard Cleary, Brownsville’s Church is probably one of the “purest expressions of an ideologically French architecture produced in Texas.”<sup>532</sup> The Sisters of the Incarnate Word acted also as driving forces for the diffusion of a French influence in Brownsville, especially through their teaching of the French language. According to Anne Marie Caldwell, this might have been the most enduring testimony of their presence and influence, for French “has remained a popular foreign language in high schools and universities in Texas.”<sup>533</sup>

Considering the progressive outnumbering of French-born Sisters by nuns of other nationalities, however, it is very likely that the French influence exerted by the Congregation on the area declined in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, whereas French-born represented 71% of the total number of Sisters in 1860, they represented only 53% of them in 1870, 39% in 1880 and only 8% in 1900.<sup>534</sup> This situation is due to two successive phenomena, namely the internationalization of the French Congregation and its localization. First, from 1860 to 1880, several Irish-born nuns joined the order, in part to replace many French-born Sisters who died. Thus, the number of Irish Sisters went from three to six between 1860 and 1880. From 1870

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531. George, *Lost Architecture*, xix; Cleary, “Is there French Architecture in Texas?” 232-233.

532. *Ibid.*, 233.

533. Caldwell, “The Enduring Legacy,” 251.

534. *1860 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 532; *1870 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 171; *1880 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 323; *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 340-341.

onward, Mexican nuns also joined the Congregation. They were only 3 in 1870, but 5 in 1880, and 13 in 1900. Similarly, the number of U.S. and Texas-born Sisters grew; in 1900, 6 Sisters were Texans and only 5 were Irish. Doubtlessly, this accretion is a consequence of the local success of the institution which saw the integration of a progressive number of novices who later became Sisters. The number of French Sisters was almost constant in the first decades of the Congregation's implantation in the area. They were 10 in 1860, 8 in 1870 and 9 in 1880. However, the number of French-born dropped to 2 in 1900, both Sisters having been already established in Brownsville in the 1850s.<sup>535</sup> Thus, these different elements seem to indicate that the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century corresponded to the end of the French presence within the Congregation and, therefore, to the end of the diffusion of a French influence by the Congregation. This period was, however, also the beginning of a new era which offered a bright perspective. The localization of the movement was in fact the goal of the religious organization and was a success. Indeed, from 14 Sisters in 1860, the Congregation could boast 26 religious in 1900.

The fate of the Oblates was different. Indeed, if in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the missionaries were still almost all of French culture, their presence was small. As a matter of fact, in 1900, there were six Catholic clergymen in Cameron County, no more than in 1853, when the Oblates established durably their mission in Brownsville.<sup>536</sup> However, the decrease of French-born priests and nuns in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century should not overshadow the lasting influence they had exerted in the area since their arrival. Indeed the most important French legacy in the Lower Rio Grande

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535. *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 340.

536. *1900 Census: Texas, Cameron County*, 368.

Valley is probably Catholicism restored, or even founded, by the French priests and nuns.<sup>537</sup>

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537. Lagarde, "French Catholic Missions," 153.

## Conclusion

On a general note, this study demonstrated that although the French presence in the Lower Rio Grande Valley was small, its influence was determinant on the local society's development. Actually, given the low number of French immigrants, their influence was all the more significant. The French-born settlers exerted an influence on the Valley as a group of foreigners who settled and therefore integrated the various spheres of the local society and economy, and for a limited number of them, as individuals whose presence in the area was particularly notable. Their influence was multiple and ranged from regular socio-economic activities to the diffusion of a distinguishable French culture and identity. On the other hand, if some French-born were able to display their "Frenchness," they were all, consciously or unconsciously, compelled to adopt specific attitudes when confronted with the historical, social and economic realities of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. In other words, the French settlers were also molded by the socio-economic conditions and cultural components of the area, turning them into American/Mexican borderland settlers whose French identity became distant and sometimes fantasized. This process is not to be considered a loss, for it contributed to form a complex mix of identities whose porosity offered multiple choices of affirmations and representations.

More specifically, it has been seen that French immigration in the Valley followed principally the economic opportunities of the area. This phenomenon was general for Texas which, after 1845, "became a land of economic opportunities" and attracted French, as well as other Europeans who were lured by a better life on American soil.<sup>538</sup> Since very few succeeded in achieving a good economic situation,

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538. Lagarde, *The French in Texas*, 309.

French-born people usually settled in the Valley for a short period of time, a situation which mirrors European immigration to 19<sup>th</sup> century Texas as a whole.<sup>539</sup> The commercial potential of the Valley explains in part why the French immigration was stronger in the area than in the United States and Texas as a whole. However, other Valley idiosyncrasies, such as the common use of Spanish language—which, as French, has Latin roots—and the proximity of the area to New Orleans, contributed also to attract French people.

The idea that “French migration to Texas has been a slow, steady trickle of people whose influence has been out of proportion to their number” is confirmed for the Lower Rio Grande Valley.<sup>540</sup> The French influence in the Valley traditionally has been measured through the contribution of a handful of notable Frenchmen; however, as part of a group which formed a community and had its own culture, every French-born contributed to the transformation of the area through their settlement and occupations. On the other hand, in a sort of reciprocal process previously largely neglected by social historians of the Valley, the French-born settlers were also transformed by their settlement. As François Lagarde mentions for Texas as a whole, the French community was cemented by both an inherited culture and a common settlement experience which had a lasting impact on the Frenchmen’s and women’s lives and identities: “Immigration defined their personal and shared history, a history of private individuals of similar origins who faced new horizons, a new language, altered identities.”<sup>541</sup> The French-born in the Valley experienced a process of integration which implied a willingness to adapt to the local society. Some were able

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539. Lagarde, “Birth, Stock and Work,” 165.

540. University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio, *The French Texans*, 32.

541. Lagarde, *The French in Texas*, 310.

to preserve a sense of their “Frenchness,” but generally, as other foreigners in the United States, they became progressively acculturated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Previous to this study, the role of French-born in international commerce has been so emphasized by local historiography that the amalgam between French-born and merchants had become common place. However, although French-born Valley settlers shared common elements, they did not form a homogenous group. Actually, with the immigration to the Valley being based on individual enterprises, the idea of a uniform model of the French settler is not tenable. French people were divided into different socio-economic categories which implied different situations, experiences, and attitudes regarding their French cultural background. Indeed, the few French settlers who joined the elites enjoyed a comfortable socio-economic situation which enabled the preservation of a French identity. The poorest French people did not have that option and therefore became quickly acculturated.

French immigrants cannot be studied without relation to general French immigration and a clear understanding of the social, economic and cultural contexts in which they lived. Indeed, it is true that French-born Valley settlers who achieved notability were distinguishable from other French-born through their particular influence and success, their capacity to adapt to the historical situation, and their emphasis on their “Frenchness.” However, like other French-born, they experienced a process of transformation of identities and became immersed in the local society. These were actually essential elements of their notability. To some extent, notable French-born, through their immersion in the society, their significant influence and their “Frenchness,” emphasized the common threads of regular French settlers to an extreme.

Similarly, French soldiers, priests and nuns who settled in the Lower Rio Grande Valley have never been studied previously in relation to the overall group of French-born settlers. However, as shown in this thesis, their influence as members of powerful institutions and their settlement in the local society is illuminated by the fact that, as opposed to other French-born settlers, they formed communities apart and had to emphasize their mission over their French nationality. This situation does not mean that their influence on the diffusion of a French influence in the area should be minimized.

While adding significantly to our knowledge on the French-born settlers in the Valley, the present thesis calls for more research on the topic. For example, the relation between French Valley settlers and slavery before the Civil War can be analyzed through the Population Schedules specifically focused on the non-free Black population. The second and third-generation French people could also be studied more thoroughly, although the endeavor might encounter many obstacles, especially a lack of primary sources. Moreover, this study would benefit from an enhanced trans-national approach that includes official documents collected in the archives of the city of Matamoros. Unfortunately, this is not currently practical given the high level of tension and sporadic violence in the cities of Northern Mexico.

This study also suggests areas of further studies on the French Valley population as a whole. A study on the French population in the Valley could encompass travelers and give new insights on the French presence through travel writings and intimate literature. Moreover, the life, identity and integration of the French-born people who settled in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in the 20<sup>th</sup> century deserve the attention of some researchers. Indeed, if, as shown in this study, the French-born population and its influence waned in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the shrimp



industry that took birth in the area in the post World War II period triggered a new wave of French immigration.<sup>542</sup> On a general note, the Lower Rio Grande Valley is in need of a scholarly-based social history which would not minimize, caricaturize or completely bypass the impact of the French population.

A broader geographic perspective would prove equally fruitful to assess the French presence. A study of the French influence in Laredo, where the French Catholic effort was also important, would be worthwhile. Moreover, a comparative history between the French community in the Valley and other French communities settled along the Mexican/American border, or elsewhere in Mexico, Texas or the United States, appears as a very exciting project. Generally, the French presence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Mexico and Western United States—with the notable exceptions of California, and to a lesser extent Texas—remains an unexploited field of knowledge.

Such studies seem all the more important considering the rising interest in the ethnic heritage of the United States which became evident some 40 years ago. As historian Wayne M. Ahr notes: “A sense of ethnic pride grew throughout the United States during the 1970s,” and Castroville, as other Texas settlements, was touched by the phenomenon, for “regular exchanges have taken place, and strong bonds have grown between *Little Alsace* and *Big Alsace*. Today’s inhabitants, especially members of the *Castro Colonies Heritage Society*, are striving to preserve the history and traditions of the Castro Colony.”<sup>543</sup> Concerning the Lower Rio Grande Valley, some attempts to revive the French heritage of the area have been made, notably through the foundation of the Club *Fleur-de-Lys* in 1987.<sup>544</sup> This type of endeavor is extremely interesting and can prove profitable for local history. However, this effort has to be

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542. Kearney, “Historical Sketch.”

543. Ahr, “Henry Castro and Castroville,” 139.

544. Kearney, “Historical Sketch,” 98.

built on solid knowledge of the French presence in the Valley, or it will turn to a blind celebration of ethnic roots and to the mere contemplation of a romanticized, de-contextualized past. As historian John Tosh notes: “We are confronted by the paradox of a society which is immersed in the past yet detached from its history.”<sup>545</sup> Hopefully, further studies on the French population and broader social histories will contribute to remove this paradox.

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545. John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 6.

## Tables

**Table 1. French-Born in the United States, 1850-1900**

<u>Year</u>	<i>U.S. population</i>	<i>Foreign population</i>	<i>French-born population</i>	<i>French-born percent of total</i>
1850	23,191,876	2,244,602	54,069	0.23
1860	31,443,321	4,138,697	109,870	0.35
1870	38,558,371	5,567,229	116,402	0.30
1880	50,155,783	6,679,943	106,971	0.21
1890	61,908,906	9,249,547	113,174	0.18
1900	76,808,887	10,460,085	104,534	0.14

Sources: Data from Superintendent of the United States Census, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D.C.: Robert Armstrong, 1853). Microfilm, table I, table XIII; Superintendent of Census, *Population of the United States in 1860. Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864). Microfilm, Recapitulation of the Tables of Population, Nativity, and Occupation; Superintendent of Census, *Ninth Census- Volume I: The Statistics of the Population of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872). Microfilm, table I; Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census 1880* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), Microfilm, Statistics of Place of Birth; Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890. Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895). Microfilm, table XX, table XXXII; United States Census Office, *Census Reports, Volume I. Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900. Population, Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901). Microfilm, table I, table XXIII.

Notes: Almost each source commenting on the U.S. population in general gives a different result. It can be, for example, noted that the 1900 U.S. Federal Census gives 62,622,250 for the number of people in the U.S. in 1890; I kept here the result given by the 1890 U.S. federal census, Table 1.

Concerning the nativity of the population from 1850 to 1880, I used the Statistics of place of birth condensed in the 1880 U.S. federal census. For the nativity in 1890, I relied on the 1890 U.S. Federal Census, table 32; for nativity in 1900, on the 1900 U.S. Federal Census, table 33.

**Table 2. French-Born in Texas and Lower Rio Grande Valley (Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr Counties), 1850-1900**

<u>Year</u>	Texas population	French-born in Texas		Lower Rio Grande Valley population*	French-born in Lower Rio Grande Valley**	
		N°	%		N°	%
1850	212,592	647	0.30	8,541	61	0.71
1860	604,215	1,383	0.23	10,226	57	0.56
1870	818,579	2,232	0.27	17,540	126	0.72
1880	1,591,749	2,653	0.17	27,610	80	0.29
1890	2,235,523	2,730	0.12	31,707	64	0.20
1900	3,048,710	2,025	0.07	34,401	35	0.10

Sources: Data from Superintendent of the United States Census, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D.C.: Robert Armstrong, 1853). Microfilm, table I, table XV; Superintendent of Census, *Population of the United States in 1860. Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864). Microfilm, Recapitulation of the Tables of Population, Nativity, and Occupation, table II, table V; Superintendent of Census, *Ninth Census- Volume I: The Statistics of the Population of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872). Microfilm, table VI, table VII; Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census 1880* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), Microfilm, table I, table II, table XIII; Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890. Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895). Microfilm, Table I, table IV, table XXXII; United States Census Office, *Census Reports, Volume I. Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900. Population, Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901). Microfilm, Table I, table IV, table XXXIII. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Texas*. Microfilm.

\* Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr combined

Notes: For 1850 and 1860, it is possible to find the number of French-born in the Lower Rio Grande Valley only through a complete analysis of the Texas Population Schedule for Cameron, Starr and Hidalgo counties. The Federal censuses do not give information about the accurate nativity of the population for each county. Even if from 1870 onwards, the federal censuses give the native country of the population for each U.S. county, I have chosen here to refer to the Population Schedules for more accuracy. Thus, the figures I give of the French population present in the Rio Grande Valley are based on my own research and can conflict with the results found in the federal censuses. More precisely, the 1870 Federal Census gives 99 French people for Cameron County instead of the 107 I found in an analysis of the Population Schedules. Thus, according to the federal census, the number of French people in 1870 would be 118. One explanation could be that the Federal Census does not take into account the eight French Catholic priests who were there in Cameron County in 1870. According to the federal censuses, there were 78 French people in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in 1880 and 37 in 1900. For the 1890 figures, I refer to the 1890 U.S. Federal Census, because the Texas' Population Schedules are not available for this year.

**Table 3. French-Born among the Foreign-Born Population in the United States, Texas and Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1850-1900**

<u>Year</u>	<i>French-born among foreigners in the U.S.</i>	<i>French-born among foreigners in Texas</i>	<i>French-born among foreigners in Lower Rio Grande Valley</i>	<i>French-born among non-Mexican population in Lower Rio Grande Valley</i>
1850	2.41%	3.66%	No data	No data
1860	2.65%	3.19%	0.96%*	No data
1870	2.09%	3.58%	1.08%	13.25%
1880	1.60%	2.31%	0.53%	9.78%
1890	1.22%	1.78%	0.47%	14.55%
1900	1%	1.13%	0.30%	17.07%

Sources: Data from Superintendent of the United States Census, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D.C.: Robert Armstrong, 1853). Microfilm, table I, table XIII, table XV; Superintendent of Census, *Population of the United States in 1860. Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864). Microfilm, table I, table IV, table V, Recapitulation of the Tables of Population, Nativity, and Occupation; Superintendent of Census, *Ninth Census-Volume I: The Statistics of the Population of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872). Microfilm, table I, table III, table IV; Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census 1880* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), Microfilm, table I, table XIII, table XIV; Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890. Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895). Microfilm, table XV, table XX, table XXXII; United States Census Office, *Census Reports, Volume I. Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900. Population, Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901). Microfilm, table I, table IX, table XVIII; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Texas*. Microfilm.

\* Due to some gaps in data, French population is here compared only to the free foreign population

**Table 4. Comparisons between French-Born Representation in Texas and Lower Rio Grande Valley Population and Other Foreigners, 1870-1900**

<u>Foreign population</u>	1870		1880		1890		1900	
	% total 1	% total 2	% total 1	% total 2	% total 1	% total 2	% total 1	% total 2
Total 1: Texas population	818,579		1,591,749		2,235,523		3,048,710	
Total 2: Lower Rio Grande Valley population	17,540		27,610		31,707		34,401	
French-born	0.27	0.72	0.17	0.29	0.12	0.20	0.07	0.10
Mexican-born	2.81	61.03	2.71	51.83	2.31	41.98	2.33	33.53
German-born	2.93	1.19	2.22	0.61	2.18	0.32	1.58	0.12
Irish-born	0.49	1.78	0.51	0.69	0.37	0.23	0.20	0.08
English-born	0.24	0.41	0.41	0.21	0.42	0.10	0.27	0.04
Spanish-born	0.02	no data	0.02	no data	0.01	0.23	0.01	0.14

Sources: Superintendent of Census, *Ninth Census-Volume I: The Statistics of the Population of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872). Microfilm, table I, table V, table VI, table VII; Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census 1880* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), Microfilm, table I, table II, table XIII, table XIV; Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890. Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895). Microfilm, table I, table IV, table XXXI, table XXXIII; United States Census Office, *Census Reports, Volume I. Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900. Population, Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901). Microfilm, table I, table IV, table XXXIII, table XXXIV; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Texas*. Microfilm.

Notes: If I refer to the Population Schedules to measure the French immigration in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, I used the federal censuses for all the other ethnicities. These sources give the numbers of foreigners for each county only since 1870, so I kept this date as the first referent. The number of Germans is slightly different in the censuses than the one found in Gerhard Grytz's article. This might be due to the fact that he used, as I did for the French population, the Texas Population Schedules to measure the German-born population.

**Table 5. Repartition of French-Born in Counties and Major Settlements of Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1850-1900**

<i>Repartition of the French population</i>	1850*		1860		1870		1880		1890***		1900	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
<b>CAMERON COUNTY</b>	-	-	44	77.2	107	84.9	62	77.5	-	-	16	45.7
<i>Brownsville City</i>	-	-	36	[82]	87	[81]	51	[82]	-	-	14	[88]
<i>Fort Brown</i>	-	-	5	[11]	2	[2]	3	[5]	-	-	-	-
<i>Point Isabel</i>	-	-	1	[2]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Rural areas</i>	-	-	2	[5]	18	[17]	8	[13]	-	-	2	[12]
<b>STARR COUNTY</b>	-	-	13	22.8	12	9.5	18	22.5	-	-	17	48.6
<i>Rio Grande City</i>	-	-	6	[46]	6	[50]	12	[67]	-	-	14	[82]
<i>Roma</i>	-	-	5	[39]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Fort Ringgold</i>	-	-	2	[15]	6	[50]	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Rural areas</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	[33]	-	-	3	[18]
<b>HIDALGO COUNTY</b>	-	-	-	-	7	5.6	-	-	-	-	2	5.7
<i>Edinburg</i>	-	-	-	-	4**	[57]	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Rural areas</i>	-	-	-	-	3	[43]	-	-	-	-	2	[100]

Sources: Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Texas*. Microfilm.

\* In the 1850 Population Schedules, Cameron, Starr and Webb counties were regrouped in the same section and were not divided into smaller divisions (only mentioned as The Rio Grande Valley).

\*\* Concerning Hidalgo in 1870, it can only be guessed that the repartition of the population follows this order because the Population Schedules are not clearly organized.

\*\*\* The repartition cannot be analyzed here because the 1890 Population Schedule is not available for this year.

**Table 6. Comparisons between French-Born and Other Foreigners in Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1870-1900**

<i>Foreign population in Lower Rio Grande Valley</i>	<i>1870</i>		<i>1880</i>		<i>1890</i>		<i>1900</i>	
	N°	% of total	N°	% of total	N°	% of total	N°	% of total
Total	11,655		15,129		13,751		11,739	
French-born	126	1.08	80	0.53	64	0.47	35	0.30
Mexican-born	10,704	91.84	14,311	94.59	13,311	96.80	11,534	98.25
German-born	208	1.78	168	1.11	100	0.73	42	0.36
Irish-born	313	2.69	191	1.26	73	0.53	29	0.25
English-born	72	0.62	59	0.39	33	0.24	13	0.11
Spanish-born	No data		No data		74	0.54	47	0.40

Sources: Superintendent of Census, *Ninth Census-Volume I: The Statistics of the Population of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872). Microfilm, table VII; Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census 1880* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), Microfilm, table XIV; Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890. Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895). Microfilm, table XXXIII; United States Census Office, *Census Reports, Volume I. Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900. Population, Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901). Microfilm, table XXXIV; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Texas*. Microfilm.



**Table 7. French-Born Men and Women's Professions and Occupations in Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1850-1900**

<u>General Categories</u>	<u>Professions and Occupations</u>	1850		1860		1870		1880		1900	
		N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
Trade	Dry goods merchant					4	3.7	6	8.3		
	Clerk in store	7	14.6	2	4.1	4	3.7			3	10.7
	Grocer	3	6.3	1	2	1	0.9	2	2.8		
	Not precised (or other)	12	25	14	28.6	1	0.9	8	11.1	5	17.9
Travelers	Sailor							1	1.4		
	Seamen/boatmen	3	6.3			3	2.8	1	1.4		
Food-making	Cook	1	2.1			6	5.6				
	Butcher	2	4.2	2	4.1	4	3.7	1	1.4		
	Baker	4	8.3	4	8.2	4	3.7	5	6.9		
	Confectioner	2	4.2								
Food services	Restaurant keeper					1	0.9	1	1.4		
	Saloon keeper			1	2	3	2.8	2	2.8		
	Bartender					1	0.9				
	Coffee House Keeper					2	1.9	1	1.4		
Other Services	Gardener			2	4.1	3	2.8				
	Barber					2	1.8	1	1.4	1	3.6
	Milkman					2	1.8				
Craftsmanship	Carpenter	3	6.3			4	3.7	1	1.4		
	Blacksmith					1	0.9			1	3.6
	Bricklayer										
	Shoemaker					3	2.8	3	4.2		
	Cutler					1	0.9				
	Gunsmith	1	2.1								
Intellectual professions	Teacher							1	1.4		
	Bookkeeper					2	1.8				
	Physician							2	2.8	1	3.6
Soldiers	Private			6	12.2	6	5.6	5	6.9		
	Sergeant			2	4.1						
Religious	Nun			10	20.4	8	7.4	9	12.5	2	17.9
	Priest			2	4.1	8	7.4	11	15.3	9	32.1
Domestic servants	No denomination					7	6.5	1	1.4	2	7.1
	Coachman							1	1.4		
	Laundress							1	1.4		
Agriculture	Farmer			2	4.1	5	4.6	1	1.4	1	3.6
	Laborer	8	16.7			10	9.3	2	2.8		
	Stock raiser/herder					1	0.9	2	2.8		
Others	Retired			1	2	3	2.8	1	1.4		
	Other profession					2	1.9	1	1.4	2	7.1
	Unidentified	2	4.2			6	5.6	1	1.4	1	3.6

Sources: Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Texas*. Microfilm.

**Table 8. Value of Real Estate Owned by French-Born Workers in Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1850-1870**

<u>US\$</u>	1850		1860		1870	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
0	26	54.2	10	34.5	67	77.9
1-499	2	4.2	2	6.9	6	7
500-1999	10	20.8	7	24.1	8	9.3
2000-4999	7	14.6	6	20.7	4	4.7
5000-9999	1	2.1	2	6.9	1	1.2
≥ 10000	2	4.2	2	6.9		

Sources: Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm.

Notes: Priests, clergymen and soldiers are obviously absent from tables 8, 9 and 10, because they did not own any property, at least not in the Rio Grande Valley where they had been sent to fulfill an order or a mission.

**Table 9. Value of Real Estate Owned by French-born in Lower Rio Grande Valley, by Professions, 1850-1870**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Real Estate Value (in US\$)</u>	<u>Merchant</u>		<u>Clerk</u>		<u>Artisan</u>		<u>Food-Maker</u>		<u>Food Services</u>		<u>Farmer / Stock Raiser</u>		<u>Laborer</u>		<u>Servant</u>	
		N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
1850	0	2	13.3	4	57.1	3	75	5	55.6					8	100		
	1-499							2	22.2								
	500-1999	5	33.3	3	42.9	1	25	1	11.1								
	2000-4999	5	33.3					1	11.1								
	5000-9999	1	6.7														
	≥ 10000	2	13.3														
1860	0	4	26.7	1	50			2	33.3	1	100	1	50				
	1-499	1	6.7														
	500-1999	5	33.3	1	50			1	16.7								
	2000-4999	3	20					2	33.3			1	50				
	5000-9999							1	16.7								
	≥ 10000	2	13.3														
1870	0	5	83.3	4	100	7	77.8	11	78.6	3	42.9	3	50	8	80	7	100
	1-499					2	22.2	1	7.1			1	16.7				
	500-1999							2	14.3	2	28.6			2	20		
	2000-4999									2	28.6	2	33.3				
	5000-9999	1	16.7														
	≥ 10000																

Sources: Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm.

**Table 10. Value of Real and Personal Estate (Combined) Owned by French-born in Lower Rio Grande Valley, by Professions, 1860-1870**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Real and Personal Estate Value (in US\$)</u>	<u>Merchant</u>		<u>Clerk</u>		<u>Artisan</u>		<u>Food-Maker</u>		<u>Food Services</u>		<u>Farmer / Stock Raiser</u>		<u>Laborer</u>		<u>Servant</u>	
		N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
1860	0	2	13.3							1	100	1	50				
	1-499							1	16.7								
	500-1999	3	20	1	100												
	2000-4999	4	26.7					4	66.7			1	50				
	5000-9999	3	20														
	≥ 10000	3	20					1	16.7								
1870	0	2	33.3	4	100	6	66.7	9	64.3	1	14.3	2	33.3	8	80	7	100
	1-499					3	33.3	3	21.4	1	14.3	1	16.7				
	500-1999	3	50					2	14.3	3	42.9	1	16.7	2	20		
	2000-4999									1	14.3	2	33.3				
	5000-9999	1	16.7							1	14.3						
	≥ 10000																

Sources: Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm.

**Table 11. Sex Ratio of First Generation French Immigrants in Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1850-1900**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>		<i>Total</i>
	N°	%	N°	%	
1850	50	82	11	18	61
1860	39	68	18	32	57
1870	93	74	33	26	126
1880	55	69	25	31	80
1900	27	77	8	23	35

Sources: Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Texas*. Microfilm.

**Table 12. Frenchwomen's Marital Status in Lower Rio Grande Valley (without Nuns), 1850-1900**

<u>Frenchwomen Marital Status (over 18 years old)</u>	1850		1860		1870		1880		1900	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
single	2	18.2	1	12.5	8	33.3	3	20	2	33.3
married	9	81.8	7	87.5	16	66.6	5	33.3	3	50
widowed	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	46.7	1	16.7
divorced	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	11	100	8	100	24	100	15	100	6	100

Sources: Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Texas*. Microfilm.

Notes: The proportion of single Frenchwomen for 1870 might be biased because of the possible importance of widows, a data which appears only in the 1880 census.

**Table 13. Frenchmen's Marital Status in Lower Rio Grande Valley (without Clergymen), 1850-1900**

<u>Frenchmen</u> <u>Marital</u> <u>Status</u>	1850		1860		1870		1880		1900	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
single	36	72	17	45.9	49	57.6	11	25	9	47.4
married	14	28	20	54.1	36	42.4	31	70.5	10	52.6
widowed	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	4.5	-	-
divorced	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	50	100	37	100	85	100	44	100	19	100

Sources: Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Texas*. Microfilm.

**Table 14. Professional Activities of Married Frenchmen in Relation with their Spouses' Nationality in Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1850**

<i>Spouse Nationality</i>	<i>Merchant</i>		<i>Clerk</i>		<i>Baker</i>		<i>Butcher</i>		<i>Carpenter</i>		<i>Teamster</i>		<i>Laborer</i>	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
French	4	80	1	100	2	50							1	100
Mexican					2	50					1	100		
American (other states)	1	20												
Germany							1	100	1	100				
Total	5	100	1	100	4	100	1	100	1	100	1	100	1	100

Sources: Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Texas*. Microfilm.

Notes: The familial relations between settlers appear in the Population Schedules only in 1880. Therefore, the present table and related analysis is based on the potentiality offered by the last name, when this one is shared by a Frenchman and a woman, when they are settled together (and most of the time without any other boarders, or only children).



**Table 15. Professional Activities of Married Frenchmen in Relation with their Spouses' Nationality in Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1860**

<i>Spouse Nationality</i>	<i>Merchant</i>		<i>Clerk</i>		<i>Baker</i>		<i>Butcher</i>		<i>Gardener</i>		<i>Farmer</i>		<i>No Profession</i>	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
French	4	44.5			1	33.3							1	100
Texan	1	11.1												
Mexican	1	11.1	1	100	2	66.7	1	33.3	1	50	1	100		
Louisianan	1	11.1												
American (other states)	1	11.1												
Germany	1	11.1					2	66.7						
Swiss									1	50				
Total	9	100	1	100	3	100	3	100	2	100	1	100	1	100

Sources: Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas*. Microfilm.

**Table 16. Nationality of Frenchmen's Spouses in Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1850-1900**

<u>Spouse Nationality</u>	1850		1860		1870		1880		1900	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
French	8	57.1	6	30	10	27.8	4	12.9	2	20
Mexican	3	21.4	7	35	11	30.6	12	38.7		
Texan			1	5			1	3.2	3	30
Louisianan			1	5	5	13.9	6	19.4	2	20
Other American State	1	7.1	1	5	2	5.6	2	6.5		
Irish					3	8.3	3	9.7	2	20
German	2	14.3	3	15	4	11.1	3	9.7	1	10
Swiss			1	5						
Spain					1	2.8				

Sources: Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas*. Microfilm; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Texas*. Microfilm.

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