

CHAPTER VII.

THE CADDO OLD TOWNS AND FORT ST. LOUIS DE CARLORETTE.

In his "Historical Sketches of the Several Indian Tribes in Louisiana south of the Arkansas River and between the Mississippi and the River Grand," communicated to Gen. Henry Dearborn, Secretary of War, under date of April 5, 1805, Dr. John Sibley, United States Indian Agent at Natchitoches, described the Cadodaquious, called by him the "Caddoques," as then living on Sodo bayou, about 120 miles northwest of Natchitoches ; and he wrote as to their more ancient habitat and history at the Caddo Old Towns, as follows:

"They formerly lived on the south bank of the [Red] river,

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by the course of the river 375 miles higher up, at a beautiful prairie [Long Prairie], which has a clear lake of good water in the middle of it, surrounded by a pleasant and fertile country which had been the residence of their ancestors from time immemorial.

"They have a traditionary tale which not only the Caddos, but half a dozen other smaller nations believe in, who claim the honor of being descendants of the same family; they say, when all the world was drowned by a flood that inundated the whole country, the Great Spirit placed on an eminence near the lake, one family of Caddoques, who alone were saved; from that family all the Indians originated.

"The French, for many years before Louisiana was transferred to Spain, had at this place a fort and some soldiers; several French families were likewise settled in the vicinity, where they ^{had} erected a good flour mill with burr stones brought from France. These French ~~families~~ ~~continued there till about 25 years ago~~ ^{incorrect - see below} ~~when they moved down and settled at Campiti, on Red river, above Natchitoches, where they now live; and the Indians left it about 14 years ago~~ [i.e., about 1791], on account of a dreadful sickness that visited them. They settled on the river, nearly opposite where they now live, on a low place, but were driven thence on account of its overflowing, occasioned by a jam of timber ^{add} choking the river at a point below them".

Of this primitive home of the Caddo Indians ~~port there~~ ^{again} ~~Caddoques, and of the French colony and~~ ~~that were there prior to 1780, Dr. Sibley wrote from Natchitoches, on the 10th of April, 1805, in describing Red river, as follows:~~ ^{an upward exploration of}

"You now arrive at the mouth of the Little river of the right.* This

*That Little river which rises in the southeastern part of the Choctaw Nation and enters Red river from the north, or left bank of the latter (called "right" bank by Dr. Sibley), a ^{short distance} ~~short distance~~ above the present town of Fulton, Arkansas. - F.W.C.

river is about 150 yards wide, the water clear as crystal, the bottom of the river stony, and is boatable at high water up to the Great Prairies, nearly 200 miles by the course of the river, the low grounds generally from 10 to 15 miles wide, abounding with the most luxuriant growth of rich timber, but subject to partial inundation at particularly rainy seasons. After leaving this river, both banks of

Red river are cane, as before, for about 20 miles, when you come to the Round Prairie, right side, about 5 miles in circumference. At this place Red river is fordable at low water, hard, stony bottom, and is the first place from its mouth where it can be forded. This Round Prairie is high and pleasant, surrounded by handsome oak and hickory uplands, left side cane as before, and then the same both sides for 20 miles to the Long Prairie, left [i.e., south] side, 40 miles long; opposite side cane, as before. Near the middle of this prairie there is a lake of about 5 miles in circumference, in an oval form, neither tree nor shrub near it nor stream of water running either in or out of it. It is very deep and the water so limpid that a fish may be seen 15 feet from the surface. By the side of this lake the Caddoquies have lived from time immemorial. About one mile from the lake, is the hill on which, they say, the Great Spirit placed one Caddo family, who were saved when by a general deluge all the world were drowned, from which family all the Indians have originated. For this little natural eminence, all the Indian tribes, as well as the Caddoquies, for a great distance, pay a devout and sacred homage. Here the French, for many years before Louisiana was ceded to Spain, had erected a small fort*, kept some soldiers to guard a factory for the

*Post of the Caddoquies. — F.W.C.

Indian trade, and several French families were settled in the vicinity, built a flour-mill*, and cultivated wheat successfully for several years, and it is only a few years ago that the mill irons and mill stones were brought down. It is about 25 years since those French families moved down** and 14 years since the Caddoquies left it. Here is another fording place when the river is low. On the opposite side a point of high oak, hickory, and pine lands comes bluff to the river for about a mile, after which thick cane to the upper end of the prairie; then the same on both sides for about 12 miles. At 62 miles above the upper end of Long Prairie, Dr. Sibley notes a high, oak-covered bluff, three miles in length, on the south side of the river, and above this, also on the south side, after a cane-grown interval of about the same length, a beautiful grove of Pecan, mixed with no other growth, for about a league. This latter is evidently the place shown on later maps as "Pecan Point". About 100 miles above this point, he notes, "a point of high pine woods bluff to the river for about half a mile, near 100 feet high"; 106 miles above which, he says, is the river that is "called by the Indians Kiomitchie and by the French La Rivière la Mine".

Footnote

*Continuity to geographical notes, says Dr. Sibley, "as I ascended the river, I called the highest bank the northern one and the left the southern".

Footnote

*These latter statements of Dr. Sibley are inconsistent; compare the latter with the former into which I have added below. — F.W.C.

Doctor Sibley obtained his information concerning the Caddoes and their eighteenth century home and history, from French traders formerly resident at the ~~foot and settlement near the Caddo Old Towns,~~ ^{Post of the Caddoquious} and especially from one Francis Grappe, his assistant and interpreter of Indian languages, who was born there prior to 1750, and had lived there upwards of 30 years prior to 1780 or '81, being the son of a long-time commandant ~~and~~ and Indian superintendent of that post whom I suppose to have been Corporal Alexis Grappe of Sieur Mabry's expedition of 1741-'42. ^{See Chapter V} Of Mr.

Francis Grappe, as a source of information on the Red river country, Doctor Sibley wrote as follows: "his time during which [residence at ~~Fort Carlouette and the Caddo Old Towns,~~ ^{the Post of the Caddoquious}], being occupied alternately as an assistant to his father, ~~and~~ an Indian trader and hunter, with the advantage of some learning and a very retentive memory, [he has] acquired an accurate knowledge of the river as well as the languages of all the different Indian tribes in Louisiana, which [i.e., who], with his having been an Indian interpreter for the Spanish government for many years past, and (I believe) deservedly esteemed by the Indians and all others a man of strict integrity, has for many years and does now possess their entire confidence and a very extensive influence over them, and I have invariably found that whatever information I have received from him has been confirmed by every other intelligent person having a knowledge of the same, with whom I have conversed".

Another native of the French post and village at the Caddoquious, was Mr. Brevel, after whom Isle Brevel of Red river was named, and whose interesting though somewhat vague account of his journey from the Towyash-Pani villages to the region of Santa Fe, about 1765, is given elsewhere herein. It is probable that Mr. Brevel was born in the forties, ~~not far from the birth year of Francis Grappe.~~ ^{a few years earlier than}

In September, 1805, Doctor Sibley obtained the following sworn and translated statements concerning French occupancy of the Caddo Old Towns and adjoining districts, from French witnesses most of whom had been former residents of the Old Towns settlement*:

*These statements are published in Vol. V of "State Papers and Public Documents of the United States, from the accession of George Washington to the presidency, exhibiting a complete view of our foreign relations since that time. In ten volumes"; they are here copied from ^{pages 12} the second edition, ~~thereof~~, printed in Boston, 1817.

"Cample, in the District of Natchitoches, Sept. 14, 1805.

"Personally appeared before me, John Sibley, one of the magistrates for the county of Natchitoches, Mary Pulegie Grappe Fontineau, aged 46, who being duly cautioned and sworn, deposeth and saith, That she believes she was born at the ancient Caddo village, where was an estab-

lishment of French inhabitants and some soldiers, and that she perfectly recollects descending the river with her father; she was then about six years of age; and that her mother remained behind to collect some debts, and came down about six weeks after; and that she had always understood her family had lived there for a considerable number of years, and that there were a number of French families had lived there for many years.

"FONTINEAU. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

"September 14, 1805, sworn before me.

"JOHN SIBLEY, J. P.

"I, John Horn, being duly sworn as interpreter, declare that the above declaration of Mary Pulegie Grappe Fontineau, is truly interpreted as above written.

"JOHN HORN.

~~XXX~~ "Natchitoches, Sept. 15, 1805.

"Personally appeared before me, John Sibley, one of the justices of the peace for the county of Natchitoches, Julian Beson, an inhabitant of Campte, in said county, aged 57, who, being duly sworn, deposes and saith, That he well recollects being carried from Natchitoches by his father to the ancient Caddo village, commonly called by the course of the river about one hundred and seventy leagues above Natchitoches, on Red river, and that at that time there were there living several French families and some soldiers; the number of soldiers he does not remember, but only that it was a serjeant's command (which serjeant was then his father) and that his father, by order of the then French governor general of Louisiana, built a small fort at that place, erected a flag staff, on which the French flag ~~was~~ occasionally hoisted; the name of the fort was called fort St. Louis de Carlorette^{used to be}; and that,

Footnote *Misprint for Carlorette.

from the appearance of the place, and everything he heard and understood about it, the establishment had been made for a considerable number of years before he went there, which is more than fifty years ago; and that he lived there fourteen or fifteen years, during all which time there were continued a detachment of French soldiers there, with a number of French families, who continued to cultivate corn, tobacco, and garden vegetables; and that he recollects two small pieces of cannon being there, and one of them bursting by firing, and he believes the other slipped into the river by an excavation of its bank, and that he recollects there being some mill stones there, but has no remembrance of seeing them in use. And at the same time he lived at

the above mentioned place, some French families were settled at the Yattasse Point, so called, being a part of what is now called Bayou Pierre settlement, and that the same place has continued to be occupied by French families ever since, and which is now under the jurisdiction of the Spanish government in the province of Texas: and that said Yattasse Point used to be a place of great deposit by Indian traders, before Louisiana was ceded to Spain; and farther, that he has knowledge that some French hunters, while Louisiana belonged to France, planted several crops of corn more than 50 leagues ^[by water say 25 by land] above the ancient Caddo village, on Red river, at or near the mouth of Hoggy river (or the Vassures Vaseuse as it is called) and that the settlement of the old Caddo village was abandoned about thirty-eight years ago, and that he believes the cause of their removal was having large families of children growing up, and after the cession of Louisiana to Spain the settlement did not appear to augment, and the inhabitants were desirous their families of children should have the benefits of a better society, but that the country is exceedingly pleasant and fertile, and is capable of becoming a rich and populous settlement; and farther the deponent saith not.

"JULIAN BESON.

"Sworn to before me at Natchitoches, Sept. 16, 1805.

JOHN SIBLEY,
Justice Peace.

"I, the subscriber, being duly sworn as an interpreter of the French language, do hereby certify that the above or foregoing description of Julian Beson is truly interpreted."

"Natchitoches, Sept. 16, 1805.

"Personally appeared before me, John Sibley, one of the justices of the peace in said county, Louis Lamalaty, of Campte, in said county, Esq. who being duly sworn, deposeth and saith, that he is now sixty-six years of age, and that he was born at the place now called Natchitoches: although he never was at the place where the ancient Caddo village was, he was in the constant habit of seeing the French inhabitants and the soldiers who were then living and stationed there, and has no more doubt of the fact than though he had seen it: he saw Mr. Grappe and his family when they returned from there. And further, that he has knowledge of the ancient French establishment at the ~~Yattasse~~ Yattasse Point in the vicinity of Bayou Pierre, and that three French families lived there before Louisiana was ceded to Spain, and that Mr.

Verge lived there for a number of years; and that said place was usually a place of deposit for the Indian traders, &c. And farther, that he has knowledge of Mr. Bourne, formerly commandant of Natchitoches, having had a trading house established on the southwest side of the Sabine river, and distant from the river about 6 leagues, and from Natchitoches about 50 leagues, and about north-west from it; which establishment was antecedent to the Spanish government's taking place in Louisiana: and that he has been informed that the mill stones that were at the old French establishment of the Caddos, being brought down. And that, according to the best of his recollection, it is now about 38 years since the said settlement was abandoned; and further the deponent saith not.

"LOUIS LAMALATY.

"Sworn to, the 18th September, 1805, before me,

"JOHN SIBLEY,

"Justice of the Peace.

"I, the subscriber, being duly sworn as the interpreter of the French language, do hereby certify that the foregoing declaration of Louis Lamalaty, Esq. is truly interpreted and translated.

"JOHN HORN.

"Natchitoches, Sept. 18, 1805.

"Personally appeared before me, John Sibley, one of the justices of the peace for the said county of Natchitoches, Mary Louisa Brevell, widow of Antoine Grillette, deceased, who being duly sworn, deposeth and saith, That after she married Mr. Grillette, she went with him to the ancient Caddo village, where she remained about eighteen months. At that time there were a few French inhabitants who were settled and lived there, and a French commandant who was Mr. Gnappe, and, as near as she recollects, four soldiers; that the French inhabitants cultivated everything that was common for the French inhabitants to cultivate in other parts of Louisiana, and that she does not recollect the exact number of years that has elapsed since she was there, but believes it was at least ten years before the government of Spain took place in Louisiana, and that she always understood, by her parents, she was there when a child, but she was too young to have remembrance of it. And further the deponent saith not.

"MARY LOUISA ^{her} BREVELL.
mark

"Sworn to before me, at Natchitoches, aforesaid, the day and year aforesaid.

"JOHN SIBLEY,

"Justice of the Peace.

"I, the subscriber, being duly sworn as interpreter of the French language, do hereby certify that the above deposition of Mary Louisa Brevell is truly interpreted.

"I. HORN.

"Natchitoches, Sept. 16, 1805.

"Personally appeared before me, John Sibley, one of the justices of the peace for the county of Natchitoches, John Baptiste Grappe, an inhabitant of Campte, in said county, and likewise one of the justices of the peace for the same, aged forty-two years, who being duly sworn, deposeth and saith, That thirty-five or thirty-six years ago, he went with his father from Natchitoches to the ancient Caddo village, where he remained about four months; at that time there were no families or soldiers living there, but the houses of the French families who had lived there but a few years before, together with the fort and the flag staff and the barracks, or houses occupied by the soldiers, were all standing entire, and that his father told him which of the fields and houses his family had occupied for a number of years; and likewise he remembers to have seen in the fort the embrasures [embrasures] where the cannon were placed. And that he recollects his father used to call the distance from Natchitoches to said place by water about the same as from Natchitoches to New Orleans, (viz.) about one hundred and seventy leagues. And further, that he well recollects some French families, particularly Mr. Verge and a Mr. de Coto [De Soto], living at the Yattasse Point, so called, and that he always understood they had lived there for many years before Louisiana was ceded to Spain, and that the same place has always continued to be occupied by some French inhabitants, and is situate on the western division of Red river, about twenty-five leagues above Natchitoches, and is now part of what is called the Bayou Pierre settlement, under the jurisdiction of the Spanish government in the province of Texas. And that he has been several times at a place, called the Bout, on the east bank of the Sabine river, at a prairie, and towards the head of said river, where there was an appearance of some works having been erected by the French as a trading establishment, and where his father, and many Indians, had told him the French flag had been hoisted, and the arms of the king of France buried. And farther the deponent saith not.

"BTE. GRAPPE.

"Sworn to before me at Natchitoches, the 16th day of September, 1805.

"JOHN SIBLEY, Justice Peace.