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**François Lagarde, Ed.**, *The French in Texas: History, Migration, Culture*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003. ix + 330pp. Illustrations, selected bibliography, and index. \$55.00 U.S.(cl.), \$24.95 U.S.(pb.) ISBN 0-292-70528-X.

Review by Kay Goldman, Texas A&M University.

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Students usually study Texas history as a distinct subject, although Texas was originally part of Mexico and historians now consider Texas part of the American South. However, Texas is different from other southern states because it shares a border with a non-Anglo culture, and because Texas has attracted a sizeable immigrant population. These waves of immigrants have greatly influenced Texas culture and history. Additionally, Texas did not and does not exist alone and isolated from the territories around it nor from the European powers that fought over its land. Customarily, historians and cultural geographers envision that non-Anglo culture as Hispanic or Spanish-descendant of citizens who inhabited Texas on the eve of the Texas revolution. However, that description is only true of the area south of San Antonio. After the Texas revolution, other immigrants searching for cheap land and financial opportunity found acceptance in frontier Texas. Thus, Spanish, Germans, French, Irish, and many other Europeans seeking the open society found in America and fleeing European oppression were drawn to Texas.[1]

François Lagarde and the authors of the essays included in *The French in Texas* accepted a challenge to document the influence of one of these immigrant groups, namely the French, a group usually missing in books about Texas. In this thoughtful and thorough study, Lagarde explained that the authors wanted to “offer a complete view of what some might think to be a minor note in the state’s history.” He continues, “[b]ut in truth the French presence is woven deeply if subtly into the tapestry of Texas life and lore”(p. x). Even to the casual student of Texas history, the latter statement is nearer the truth than the former. The French presence in Texas is lasting and strong. Evidence of French influences can be found throughout the history of European exploration of Texas, beginning in 1685 and seen in the businesses that flourish today in the Lone Star State.

Lagarde arranged the essays primarily in chronological order, beginning with the French exploration of the Gulf coast. The first four essays deal with the exploration, adventures, and misadventures of La Salle and other French explorers. These essays explain how the French aimed to scout around Texas and place a colony on the Texas Gulf coast near territory claimed by Spain. Patricia Lemée’s essay clearly and concisely provides the student of Texas history with information about the involvement of the early French in Texas. Whereas most histories depict Texas as only an appendage of Mexico, Lemée not only grounds Texas geographically between Mexico and Louisiana and shows connections to both, she also explains the political importance of Texas to two warring European powers, Spain and France. As Lemée documents the slow minuet acted out by France and Spain, as first one and then the other advanced into and then withdrew from Texas, she also points out the colossal mistakes made by each country. The French continually made navigational errors, but they became experts at dealing with Native Americans. The Spanish never learned how to deal successfully with the Native Americans and often left Texas without adequate defense, but did create successful colonies.

Finally Lemée’s work depicts the fluidity of the border between Texas and Louisiana. Often students of American history imagine that borders are static and stable, but this essay paints the area of western Louisiana and eastern Texas as the opposite. In fact, the fourth essay, “Athanasie de Mézières and the French in Texas 1750-1803,” effectively illustrates two of these points. F. Todd Smith documents the

relationship between several Indian tribes and the French traders and settlers showing the importance of Natchitoches, Louisiana as a home base for the French. Thus, what is now northwest Louisiana is firmly connected with French adventures in Texas, and this essay provides evidence that Texas was part of the dynamic trading area that stretched from the Mississippi River into Texas.

The next several chapters add to the myths and legends of Texas. Dale Olson documents how the Laffite brothers moved across the gulf from the islands in the Caribbean to eventually settle on Galveston Island. By distinguishing between pirate and privateer, Olson sets the stage for the readers to understand how these flamboyant men fit into the diplomacy and trade of the day. Olson describes Laffite's brilliant use of his men and his settlement on Galveston Island. Olson then argues that, when Laffite left Galveston, he knew that "the pursuit of his chosen profession would no longer be tolerated", suggesting that Laffite and all privateers no longer had a place in nineteenth-century society (p. 75). By documenting the deaths of both Jean and Pierre Laffite, Olson also tries to debunk many of the fables that grew around Laffite's later life. Betje Black Klier also contributes to our understanding of the Texan myths and legends with her essay about Bonapartists seeking a homeland in Texas. Klier also addresses the most famous icon in Texas--the Alamo--and explains the French connections to the Alamo in her discussion of Davy Crockett and Louis "Moses" Rose.

These last essays contribute to the image of Texas as a place of opportunity and adventure, and they depict Texas as a territory with strong ties to Louisiana and the rest of the North American continent. Not only did Laffite and the other privateers have important business connections with the French and Anglo settlers in New Orleans, but David Crockett heeded the call of Texas, leaving his home in Tennessee to fight at the Alamo, and Rose is said to have fought in Napoleon's army. Some connections are tenuous, as Klier herself admits, when she explains that Crockett had no idea that he was of French extraction and declared in his autobiography that he was Irish (p. 98). This last fact raises questions of identity politics, causing the reader to pause and wonder what it means to "be" French.

One essay, however, surely rings with a note of familiarity to most students of Texas history: the story of Henri Castro and his sponsorship of Alsatian colonists immigrating to Castroville, Texas. In the essay "Grounds for Emigration," Janine Erny describes why, during a time of peace and stability, Alsatians willingly left their homeland for the uncertainty of life in America and the rugged, sparsely settled Texas frontier. The French "were taxed on transportation, land, doors, and windows, and items such as playing cards, domestic salt, and sugar, as well as meat butchered for consumption. . . . Movement was supervised within the country as well as at the borders" (p. 124). For those of us steeped in the freedoms of America, that these men and women left their homeland and this oppression should not be surprising. Wayne Ahr describes Castro's dedication to bringing immigrants to Texas and documents his connection with famous Texans such as Sam Houston. Castro never succeeded in introducing the number of Alsatians immigrants into Texas that he planned, but he did create a lasting French enclave on the western fringes of Anglo settlement. Even today, Castroville and the other small communities in Medina County retain French culture and traditions. Here in the story of Castroville is solid evidence of the French presence in Texas.[2]

Several chapters highlight French artists in Texas. They describe painters and sculptors, and one chapter asks if there is such a thing as French architecture in Texas. These chapters cannot do justice to the French artists since this is not an art book, but they provide visual information for history students. For example, the paintings done by Theodore Gentilz document the life of early Texas and give the reader a glimpse of the variety of work completed by French immigrants. It is hard, however, to interpret an artist adequately or document artistic contributions with such a short essay or only one or two works.

The thread of a strong catholic faith runs through many of the chapters, and several dwell on the religious convictions of the French immigrants. Lagarde and Marie Caldwell emphasize the catholic

connections in “French Catholic Missions in Texas 1840-1880” and “The Enduring Legacy of the French in Texas Education.” Lagarde points out that many French clerics left civilized France to settle in Texas. He points out that although the Spanish had held Texas for centuries, they had not opened catholic seminaries nor established catholic schools or hospitals. It was the French who worked to educate all Texas citizens and to strengthen the catholic church in Texas. Lagarde ends with the statement that “the most important French legacy in Texas is Catholicism restored, if not founded, by French nuns, priests, and bishops” (p. 153). Perhaps to the catholics in Texas it is a valid argument, but to the non-catholics, perhaps this statement is a little overstated.

The final essay, “Global Culture,” discusses twentieth-century French-owned or French-influenced industry. The earlier essay “Birth, Stock, and Work” also described French businessmen who immigrated to Texas during the nineteenth century. Together these essays exemplify the evolution of Texas businesses. The earlier immigrants such as Abraham Levi, Léon Blum, and Emanuel Kahn participated in typical nineteenth-century businesses, merchandising, and banking. They all succeeded and became market leaders in either their territories or the entire state. Moreover, both Abraham Levi and Mayer Halff also participated in the mythic Texas cattle industry, in addition to owning and operating mercantile businesses. These immigrants brought business expertise to Texas and grew wealthy in the expanding Texas economy. At the turn of the twentieth century, Suhlumberger entered another mythic Texas industry—oil. Despite the fact that this corporation was founded in Houston, it was always known as a French firm to those who grew up in the oil industry. Today, French firms continue to be involved in newly emerging fields, such as technology, media, and petrochemicals. Perhaps if Lagarde investigated the early French merchants in Texas he might have reconsidered his statement that “[a] handful of [French] emigrants settling in nineteenth-century Texas had a small economic impact,” (293) and instead argued that (in a relative way) these men had a large impact on the development of Texas commerce. They not only enhanced their own wealth, but they invested in the railroads, wharves, and import and export businesses in Texas, thus influencing the state and setting the stage for Texas to play an important role in the country’s twentieth-century economic growth.[3]

The book is an important addition to works about Texas; however, the essays do paint the French in Texas with a wide brush and fail to distinguish between them, even when dealing with the Alsatians. Lagarde himself states that “[n]ationality does not equal culture” (p. 157), and he hints that the Alsatians might have considered themselves more German than French. This situation should have been explored more deeply. For example, the Halff brothers declared themselves Alsatian on the 1880 United States census and German in 1900, and Emanuel Kahn claimed to be Prussian in 1900. Abraham Levi declared that he was French on the 1870 census and German in 1880. Moreover, Mayer and Solomon Halff sent their children to the German English Day School in San Antonio, thus participating in the German culture of San Antonio.[4] Furthermore, the authors failed to show the true diversity of the French settlers. One wonders why names such as George Levy, Léon Blum, Emanuel Kahn, Abraham Levi, and Mayer Halff did not arouse the curiosity of the authors. All these men were Jewish, a fact that is glossed over.[5] Even Henry Castro, who did not live a Jewish life, maintained contact with Jews across Texas. The only other mention of anything Jewish is the mistaken statement that Emanuel Kahn “founded a synagogue”(p 167). While Kahn was a founding member of the synagogue, there were others involved as well. Kahn served as president of Emanu El in Dallas[6] and Mayer and Solomon were members of the Temple in San Antonio and their cousin served as an officer of the temple in Galveston. Additionally, the Blum brothers were active in the Jewish community of Galveston and Abraham Levi was a founding member and president of the Jewish congregation in Victoria. By failing to recognize the diversity within the French settlers, the authors give the impression that all French were alike and christian, or perhaps even all catholic.

Despite failing to address the issue of who was French and what being French meant, Lagarde and the authors of the essays accepted a large task and fulfilled their goal. They have provided students of Texas history with an excellent reference and a work that is important to both the amateur historian interested

in Texas and to the serious student of Texas history. The essays offer new insights in several areas. By including seldom studied areas such as Reunion, the work expands knowledge about Texas and Texas culture. After reading this group of essays, readers will view the French as integral actors in early Texas history and continue to see them as actors from Texas' independence into modern times. Furthermore, the book strongly grounds Texas geographically as a part of the greater Western hemisphere rather than separated from Mexico to the south or from the rest of the United States. The authors also show how European powers dabbled in Texas as part of the larger geopolitical world. The book is necessary addition to all Texas history collections or for anyone interested in learning more about immigration history in the south.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

- François Lagarde, "Introduction"
- Robert S. Weddle, "The Wreck of Ships and Dreams: A New Look at the Explorer La Salle"
- Robert S. Weddle and Patricia R. Lemée, "Exploring the Texas Coast: Bellisle, Béranger, and La Harpe, 1719-1721"
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- Carl A. Brasseaux, "'Grand Texas': The Cajun Migration to Texas"
- François Lagarde, "Raoul Josset and the 1936 Texas Centennial"
- François Lagarde, "Global Culture: French Economic Presence in Texas, Summer 2001"
- François Lagarde, "Epilogue"

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#### NOTES

[1] D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History: Volume 2 Continental America 1800-1867* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1993): 234-235. Also see *Imperial Texas: An Interpretive Essay in Cultural Geography* by Meinig for an explanation of the diversity of Texas culture.

[2] D. W. Meinig, *Imperial Texas: An Interpretive Essay in Cultural Geography* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1969): 51. "Henry Castro recruited more than two thousand settlers from the Franco-

German borderlands and firmly implanted his Alsatian village in the valley of the Medina...Many...took root there and in neighboring valleys to give an indelible character to a whole district.”

[3] Marilyn Kay Chatham Goldman, “Jewish Fringes Texas Fabric: Nineteenth Century Jewish Merchants Living Texas Reality and Myth,” Ph.D. Diss., Texas A&M University, 2003: 104-105. Blum’s firm conducted over \$1,000,000 in business in 1870. Additionally, the authors family has been involved in the oil industry from about 1940 through the early 1990s.

[4] Patrick Dean, *Half of Texas: Merchant Rancher of the Old West* (Austin, Texas: Akin Press, 2000): Also see the records of the German English Day School, Alamo Archives, San Antonio Texas.

[5] Information about all these men except George Levy are included in the author’s dissertation.

[6] For more information about Emanuel Kahn see Gerry Bristol, *A Light in the Prairie: Temple Emanuel of Dallas 1872-1997* (Fort Worth, Texas Christian University, 1998).

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