ANGELINA AND THE CADDO INFLUENCE ON EARLY SPANISH MISSIONARIES

A series of introductory essays inspired by the stories told at Brush Square Museums.
By Katie Bender

INTRO

Over the last year, these essays have served as an introduction to the survivors of the battle of the Alamo and a re-orientation of the myths of Texas toward a more inclusive and accurate historical record. In getting to know Susanna, Ana, Juana, Joe, Sarah, and Angelina, we have explored the various motivations of the diverse peoples who found themselves in Mexico's northern frontier in the 19th century, as well as the geopolitical forces vying for the potential resources of what would one day become Texas. No historical exploration of Texas is complete without spending time on the Indigenous peoples who lived off the lands that would one day be claimed by the Spanish, French, Republic of Texas, Confederacy, and United States. Indigenous people have made their home here for thousands of years, their languages, religious practices, and socio-economic foundations evolving over time in response to such massive changes as the end of an ice age, the introduction of corn, and exposure to epidemics brought by missionaries and explorers in the 1500s. This article focuses on an Indigenous woman known as Angelina of the Caddo people. The written record of Angelina comes from Spanish and French colonizers--the documents are sparse and their veracity uncertain. Still, Angelina has become a Texas legend, our very own Pocahontas or Sacagawea. Supposedly, Angelina is the only woman to have a river and county named after her in Texas. Popular history paints her as a translator and guide eagerly helping the Spanish build a series of missions across present-day Texas including the Alamo. Who Angelina really was remains a mystery. We do know that, like the survivors of the battle of the Alamo, she faced a quickly changing sociopolitical climate in which she worked to shape the life she wanted for herself and her people. She is the historical and cultural godmother to the survivors we've gotten to know over the last year.

PREHISTORY

Unlike the historical records of the Spanish or French in Texas, Indigenous peoples do not have a definitive landing date. The earliest peoples to have lived here arrived between forty thousand and twelve thousand years ago.

Think about what a huge span of time that is.

Recent discoveries suggest that approximately twenty thousand years ago, peoples of northern Asia settled on the Bering Strait, a land mass exposed when glaciers lowered sea levels. These peoples then, over many generations, migrated south and east. Evidence suggests peoples went south by boat, travelling along the coast, going as far south as present-day Chile. Other groups cut south on land along the coast, and travelled south and east along interior corridors deglaciated by warming weather. (1) The earliest peoples of Texas, known as Paleoindians, are the descendants of these migratory groups. They were hunter gatherers who used stone tools such as spears and scrapers to hunt and break down large game such as buffalo, bear, and deer. The Paleoindians were nomadic, their movement based on the migratory patterns of game and wild, edible harvests. They lived in an extended family unit and found and made shelter as they could, relying on natural structures such as caves or rocky overhangs. (2)

Between 8,000 B.P. and 800 C.E., a natural and technological shift took place among the Indigenous people, resulting in what is today known as the Archaic era. Warming weather made large game less prevalent, and Indigenous tribes adapted by developing new tools such as nets and traps to hunt small game. They also began to harvest a wider range of flora and fauna. The new variety of food sources created population growth, and sites of Archaic settlements have been found all across the Americas. When thinking of this time, it is important to think outside of present-day borders. A Mesoamerican empire spread throughout the Americas stretching from North to South America. Cities like Cahokia in present-day St. Louis, Chaco, and the pyramids of Teotihuacan boasted populations that were larger than London at the time. (3) Trade and exploration between these cities made for an abundance of goods like chocolate and cotton, as well as sophisticated alliances. While the Indigenous peoples of Texas didn't necessarily live in villages or settled geographies at this time, they certainly did participate in wide-ranging trade.

Early Mesoamerican Trade Routes stretched across South, Central and North America. Sutori.com.https://www.sutori.com/item/mesoamerican-aztec-trade-networks

The domestication of plants and animals opened the door for the next revolution in the way Indigenous peoples lived. By 700 A.D. women were planting sunflowers, goosefoot, sumpweed, squash, and barley. Eventually, corn, squash, and beans made their way into their diet as well. Groups of people tied together through bonds of kinship began to form villages, often along the major rivers. There was a far reaching and well organized series of trade routes that brought turquoise from as far west as New Mexico, cotton from Mississippi, chocolate from southern Mexico, and even crystals from the Caribbean. (4). Not all Indigenous peoples of Texas turned to agriculture. In fact, many tribes continued to live as hunter gatherers into the 18th century. Prevalent tribes in Texas in the 1500s included, from east to west: the Caddos, Atakapas, Karankawas, Coahuiltecans, Wichitas, Apaches, Jumanos, and Pueblos. (2). Each group evolved their own systems of beliefs, means of subsistence, and languages. It should be noted that there is still much we do not know about Indigenous peoples of Texas. Much of the written record is imperfect as it comes from colonizers with specific intentions for the region, and many of the anthropological and ethnographic studies carry their own modern biases.

THE CADDO

The name Texas comes from the Caddo people. When French explorers stumbled upon the Caddo, ambassadors from the tribe greeted them saying “taysha” their word for “friend” or “ally,” which was translated later by the Spanish into Tejas. (5) The Caddo have been known as the Texas, Hassinai, Asinai, Kadohadacho, and Natchitoches, the latter three being confederacies within the Caddo Nation. One of the earliest and most successful peoples to turn to agriculture, the Caddo made their home in present-day East Texas, Southern Arkansas, and Louisiana. Their distinctive culture centered around the harvest. Women tended the fields and passed on their skills to their daughters. Villages, hamlets, and little towns sprung up around the fields the women worked, usually on the banks of the many small rivers throughout the area. The society was matrilineal. When a woman married, the husband came to live with her family, to ensure the knowledge of farming would be passed down through generations. (6) An excellent example of intergenerational knowledge can be found in the distinct way the Caddo women harvested corn. A woman would put a seed of corn in a small mound of dirt; as the corn grew, the women would plant beans and squash below it. The beans would use the corn as a trellis, and the squash would create a ground cover which stopped erosion and kept the roots cool. This triad digested well together too; the lysine acid in the beans helped break down difficult-to-digest proteins in the corn. Furthermore, corn depletes the soil, but the beans, rich in nitrogen, would replace the nutrients. This allowed a woman to plant two harvests of corn in a season. (2)

Caddo village, ca. 1,000 A.D. Artwork by Nola Davis/Copyright Texas Historical Commission.https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/caddo-population-decline.htm

Like the Mississippian tribes that were their neighbors, Angelina's people lived in distinctive circular structures covered in grass, large enough to hold multiple generations of a family. They built burial mounds and elevated platforms for religious ceremonies, some of which survive to this day. They were well known throughout the region for their beautiful pottery, which was essential for storing and preserving food. They also made a highly coveted bow the French referred to as a "bois d'arc". (6) They relied on diplomacy and trade and maintained a trade network with tribes that stretched throughout Mesoamerica. There is no sign that they built defenses, though it seems there were natural geographic boundaries that they respected as other tribes' hunting areas. They evolved a complex system of leaders that gave shared authority to three or four leaders, each with a specific area of expertise: trade and diplomacy, warfare, big game hunting, and religion. Their origin myth, recorded by Fray Isidro de Espinosa in 1720, tells of a mother and her two daughters, one of whom was pregnant. A demon killed the pregnant daughter, but a miracle saved her son, who avenged his mother's death with a bow built by his grandmother. The Caddo lived within a partnership model of the world and their religious ceremonies, particularly the Turkey Dance, were centered around the harvest and often initiated and performed by women. (7)

SPANISH AND FRENCH INVOLVEMENT

The first Europeans to have chronicled the Caddo were Spanish soldiers led by Luis de Moscoso de Alvarado in 1542. The force, originally part of De Soto's large entrada of 300, had landed in the Gulf Coast of Florida in 1539 and had been marching west seeking gold and silver. De Soto died, and Moscoso took over leadership. The entrada was not invested in diplomacy and when they met resistance from Indigenous tribes, whom they relied on for food and shelter, Moscoso's soldiers killed them or took hostages as they continued west. That same year, another Spanish expedition, led by Coronado, was also exploring the northeast of present-day Texas and relied heavily on the good will of the Caddo for food and shelter along the way. A scribe from Moscoso's troops noted the Caddos' sophisticated agricultural practices and extensive trade network, noting turquoise jewelry from the southwest and cotton blankets from the southeast. Moscoso's troops returned east, and in 1543, built seven boats to take down the Mississippi and into the Gulf of Mexico enroute to present day Tampico. It would be more than a hundred and forty years before Europeans would return. (2) In their wake, they left viruses entirely unknown to Indigenous populations, which would decimate populations the Spanish had

been in contact with. It is estimated ninety percent of Indigenous populations were killed by contact with diseases such as smallpox.

Over the next century, major colonizers, the Spanish, French, and English-- would claim large stretches of North America. The Spanish, in the southwest, created a mission system that was both ideological and political. They introduced Indigenous populations to Catholicism while also forcing them into serfdom style labor. The French, in Canada, focused on trade and mercantilism. In 1682, Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, reached the Gulf of Mexico from Canada and claimed the Mississippi. In 1686, trying to find the Mississippi to the northeast of his Texas coastal colony, La Salle visited the Caddo. Joutel, a scribe with his regiment, noted that the Caddo elders dressed in colored, feathered headdresses. They also had Spanish sword blades and carried large metal bells, evidence that the Spanish in the southwest had already been incorporated into their extensive trade networks. They shared tobacco smoke with the French guests in their traditional manner of greeting known as the Calumet. During their stay, Joutel noted over forty different tribes that were described by the Caddo as either allies or enemies. At that time, Joutel was introduced to a young Caddoan who had escaped slavery from the Chickasaw to the east. The child's story confirms the extensive Indian slave trade instigated by the British throughout the Southeast, sending Indian slaves captured from Indigenous populations friendly with the French to work in New England and the West Indies. (3)

In 1690, the Caddo received guests from both France and Spain, the two opposing European powers in Texas at the time. In January, La Salle's Lieutenant, Tonti, arrived at Kadohadacho where he met their leader, a woman, who welcomed them. Here is his account of the trip:

> "The next day a woman, who governed this nation, came to visit me with the principal persons of the village...We went together to their temple, and after the priests had invoked their God for a quarter of an hour they conducted me to the cabin of their Chief...All the villages of this tribe speak the same language. Their cabins are covered with straw, and they are not united in villages, but their huts are distant one from the other. Their fields are beautiful. They fish and hunt. There is plenty of game, but few cattle...I never found that they did any work, except making very fine bows, which they make a traffic with distant nations...The men and women are tattooed in the face and all over the body."

-Henri de Tonti, 30 March 1690

Tonti was expecting to find seven Frenchmen with a Caddo tribe further north. However, when he arrived, the people gave conflicting reports and no Frenchmen could be found. Tonti began to suspect that the Caddo had turned over the Frenchmen to the Spanish Governor to the west, Alonso de León. In retribution, he refused to smoke the calumet ceremony offered and deeply offended the Caddo. They did still trade four horses in exchange for hatchets and a string of large glass beads. (5). The Caddo clearly were well aware of, and played a role in, the delicate balance of regional alliances and power struggles.

In May, the Spanish Governor, Alonso de León González, visited the Caddo. Having heard much of their “Texas Kingdom" from Jumano traders, he hoped to establish a mission system that could hold the region from the encroaching French. De Leon and the priest Damian Massanet both wrote of the trip and noted the Caddo cultivated maize, beans, squash, and watermelons, and that they prepared a special dish called tamales. Massanet was impressed by the large permanent houses they lived in, the wooden benches and beds they used as furniture, and the finely decorated ceramic bowls they ate from. (5) Massanet also met Angelina, and described her as an “Indian maiden with a bright intellect and possessing striking personal appearance,” who “expressed a desire to learn the Father’s language.” (7) This is the first definitive mention of Angelina, whose Caddo name was lost when she was baptised by Massanet as Angelina. There is no reference to a surname in Massanet’s journal entry. It seems Angelina, along with other members of her family, left with De León that same year. Massanet noted that Angelina intended to travel south to the San Juan Bautista Mission, in Guerrero, Mexico, to study Spanish and learn more about the mission system. She set off with several other family members in 1690. (7) Massanet stayed behind, intent on bringing Catholicism to the Caddo. This effort failed--the Caddo had no interest in adopting the Father’s ways. In fact, though Spanish missionaries relied heavily on the Caddo for supplies, the Caddo didn’t reciprocate the same need for Spanish goods. By 1693, it was clear the mission system in Caddo lands had failed. Over the next twenty years, Spanish, French, and English forces continued to vie for access to the lands of Texas, though their inability to establish permanent settlements meant an ongoing reliance on Native peoples for basic necessities. The Caddo considered these outside forces potential trading partners, bringing them into their complex system of allies, but little more. However, epidemics brought in by the Spanish and French drastically affected Indigenous populations, weakening them for generations.

Angelina, a member of the Caddo Nation. Painting by Ancel Nunn. Courtesy of Claude Smithhart, Lufkin.

ANGELINA

We cannot know whether Angelina travelled south with the Spanish of her own agency, as a representative of her people, as an exchange of goodwill, or as a slave. What seems clear is that she remained in the Bautista Mission for many years, learning Spanish and the ways of the Catholic missionaries. The next chronological reference to her appears in the memoir of a Frenchman named André Pénicaut. A carpenter by trade, Pénicaut had made his way to the New World with the trader, soldier, and explorer, Louis Juchereau de St. Denis. In a memoir Pénicaut wrote much later, he claimed that in 1712 while exploring present-day East Texas, they "found a woman named Angelique, who had been baptized by Spanish priests on a mission to their village. She spoke Spanish…" and was extremely useful in arranging guides and supplies for the French explorers as they headed West. (8) Over the next four years, tensions between the Spanish and French in the region began to rise. Each working to claim territory, and create allegiances with Indigenous populations. In 1716, Domingo Ramón led an expedition into East Texas specifically looking to establish missions and bring supplies further east. Isidro Feliz de Espinosa, a priest with the expedition, references the Caddo and specifically a young woman of their people who, based on her ability to speak Spanish was able to translate between the two parties. He wrote "having recourse to a learned Indian woman of this tribe, reared in Coahuila,

we gave them as best we could the object of our coming.” (9) Though he didn’t mention her by name, this is assumed to be Angelina, as a similar expedition, within the same year and area noted an “Angelina” who was an interpreter for her tribe.

Perhaps the most in depth depiction of Angelina comes from a Frenchman by the name of Francoise Simars de Bellisle who claimed to have spent two months being cared for by her in the winter of 1720-1721. Like Pénicaut, Bellisle wrote about Angelina in a memoir, composed many years after returning to France. Historians have questioned the veracity of his account, as it seems more adventure caper than field study, but many of the details of the land and people are accurate. Bellisle travelled from France in 1719. The ship missed the mouth of the Mississippi and became lost in the Gulf of Mexico, running aground in Galveston Bay. Several of the passengers, including Bellisle, agreed to scout ahead on land, but the ship quickly abandoned them. The four Frenchmen wandered for months, three of them died of starvation. Alone, Bellisle returned to the bay, where he survived on oysters and boiled grass, only to be captured by the Akokisa, who were part of the Attakapan tribe. Bellisle’s belongings were taken and he was used as a slave for menial labor. In his memoirs he wrote that he found paper and charcoal left in his belongings, and sent a letter out to any Europeans in the region to come and rescue him. The Akokisa sent the letter out amongst their trading partners, and somehow it found its way to the Caddo and Angelina. Two members of the Hassinai tribe of the Caddo people came and rescued him. In the Hassinai village “an Indian woman called Angelica spoke to him in Spanish" and took him into her home so he could rest and recover. While staying with her he learned that she had lived with the Spaniards since her childhood. When he was fully recovered Angelina supplied him with horses, food, and two of her own children to accompany him to Natchitoches and the French. (9)

These few references point to a woman, born of the Caddo people, sometime around the 1680s, who spent her childhood in the Spanish mission system in the south and returned to her people, serving as a translator, diplomat, and guide in the region. From Bellisle’s account, it seems she ended her life in a position of some authority among her people and with children old enough to act as guides for a several day journey. Popular history has romanticised Angelina as a kind young woman who eagerly joined the Spanish and French, aiding them in the colonization of her lands. No written history exists from her own people and so the portrayals of her must always be seen through the lens of the Spanish or French. Based on what we know of the Caddo, Angelina treated the Spanish and French as her people treated the many other

tribes in the region, as potential trading partners and allies, part of a complex system that had adapted to massive change over thousands of years.

The Caddo people would continue to play an important economic and diplomatic role in the region for the next hundred years. In 1866, the United States Government removed them to reservations in Texas and later into Oklahoma. There were additional losses in the 1900s, when reservation lands were sold off as a result of allotment. The Caddo maintain a distinctive culture to this day, preserving traditions intergenerationally as they have for thousands of years. (10)

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