

## WHO WERE THE HUGUENOTS?

### HISTORY

The Huguenots were French Protestants most of whom eventually came to follow the teachings of John Calvin, and who, due to religious persecution, were forced to flee France to other countries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some remained, practicing their Faith in secret.

The Protestant Reformation began by Martin Luther in Germany about 1517, spread rapidly in France, especially among those having grievances against the established order of government. As Protestantism grew and developed in France it generally abandoned the Lutheran form, and took the shape of Calvinism. The new "Reformed religion" practiced by many members of the French nobility and social middle-class, based on a belief in salvation through individual faith without the need for the intercession of a church hierarchy and on the belief in an individual's right to interpret scriptures for themselves, placed these French Protestants in direct theological conflict with both the Catholic Church and the King of France in the theocratic system which prevailed at that time. Followers of this new Protestantism were soon accused of heresy against the Catholic government and the established religion of France, and a General Edict urging extermination of these heretics (Huguenots) was issued in 1536. Nevertheless, Protestantism continued to spread and grow, and about 1555 the first Huguenot church was founded in a home in Paris based upon the teachings of John Calvin. The number and influence of the French Reformers (Huguenots) continued to increase after this event, leading to an escalation in hostility and conflict between the Catholic Church/State and the Huguenots. Finally, in 1562, some 1200 Huguenots were slain at Vassy, France, thus igniting the French Wars of Religion which would devastate France for the next thirty-five years.

The Edict of Nantes, signed by Henry IV in April, 1598, ended the Wars of Religion, and allowed the Huguenots some religious freedoms, including free exercise of their religion in 20 specified towns of France.

The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in October, 1685, began anew persecution of the Huguenots, and hundreds of thousands of Huguenots fled France to other countries. The Promulgation of the Edict of Toleration in November, 1787, partially restored the civil and religious rights of Huguenots in France.

### IMPORTANT DATES IN HUGUENOT HISTORY

1533 John Calvin flees Paris

**29 January 1536** General Edict urging extermination of heretics (Huguenots)

1536 John Calvin becomes pastor in Geneva

1550s Calvinism comes to France with thousands of converts

25 May 1559 First Synod of the French Reformed Church held in Paris, followed by persecutions and issuance of Edict prohibiting "heretical" worship

1559 Attempt to replace Catholic Guises with Huguenot Conde as regent

1560 Huguenots petition the King and threaten revolt if persecution persists

1 March 1562 Massacre at Vassy begins French religious wars; Conde assassinated

1562 Huguenots sign manifesto saying they were forced to take arms

1 May 1562 Arrival at St. John's River, in Florida, of the first pilgrimage by Huguenots to North America

1564 Death of John Calvin

1565 Huguenot colony massacred at St. John, FL

24 August 1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in which tens of thousands of Huguenots were killed

1585 Huguenots/Protestants expelled from France

13 April 1598 Edict of Nantes by Henry of Navarre which granted religious and civil liberties to the Huguenots promises protection

18 October 1685 Revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV which was published 22 October 1685, and resulted in persecution of the Huguenots; 400,000 flee France to other countries

**28 November 1787** Promulgation of the Edict of Toleration

#### SUGGESTED RESOURCES

##### ***2011 Register of Qualified Huguenot Ancestors***

This update to the Register is nearing completion and should become available by the end of the year. It has been exhaustively researched with many corrections to the previous Registers and should become the single best source for proven Huguenot genealogy in America. Watch for it on the National Huguenot website (see below).

***Huguenot Settlers in America, 1600s-1900s.*** CD-ROM for MacIntosh and IBM PC Compatibles.

Some two million Huguenots, or French Protestants, fled France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 - an edict which had originally protected them from persecution at the hands of the Catholic Church. Dispersing first to the Netherlands, then to England, Ireland, and even South Africa, and then to America and Canada, thousands of these French Protestants became the founders or early settlers of such places as Oxford, Massachusetts, Narragansett in Rhode Island, New Amsterdam, New Rochelle, and New Paltz in New York, the Santee River and the Orange Quarter in South Carolina, Manakin-Town in Virginia, and a host of other sites in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, and South Carolina - in many cases establishing permanent settlements long before the arrival of the first English colonists. (Can be ordered online from the National Huguenot Society.)

***Huguenot Lineage Research: A Bibliography Based on Migration Routes, by: Melford S. Dickerson, M.D.***

Bibliography includes general sources and references dealing with the United States, Canada, France, the West Indies, South Africa, Great Britain, the Channel Islands, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and Hungary. (Out of print but available from the Family History Library.)

#### USEFUL WEBSITES

**National Huguenot Society, Inc.:** <http://huguenot.netnation.com>

This includes many resources, links to other sites, and application forms.

**Online Bookstore of the National Society:** <http://huguenot.netnation.com/store/storebok.htm>