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John Calvin (1509–1564)

Huguenots—French Protestants



Mission Statement: To foster a greater understanding of the rich history and heritage of French-speaking people who helped form what is now Minnesota. Website: fahfminn.org YouTube: FAHF Minn



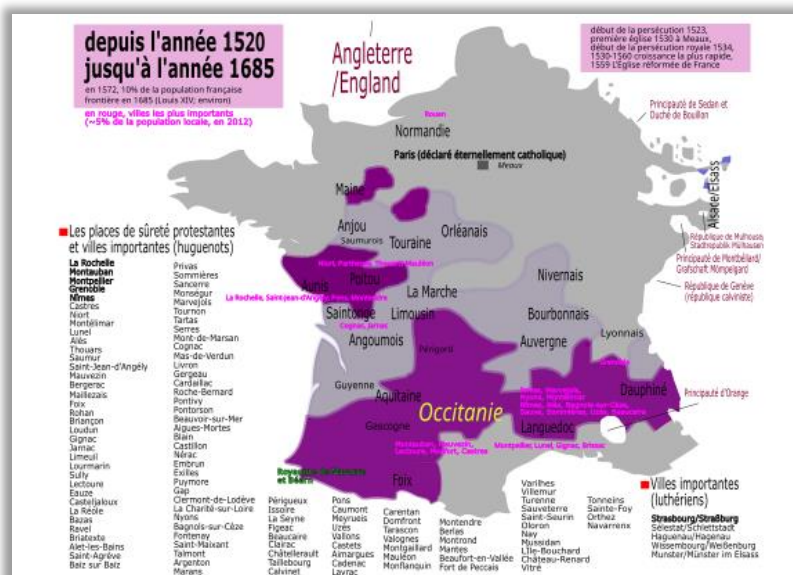
Huguenots—French Protestants

Huguenots, ethnic French from France and the French regions of Switzerland, sprouted from the 16th century Protestant Reformation. They followed the teachings of John Calvin, a French theologian, who deviated from the Church of Rome to found a new religion.

The term Huguenots doesn't mean anything except its reference to French Protestants. It's probably pejorative and could mean any number of things. Because Geneva, Switzerland, became the home to the movement, the name likely arose there from a nebulous portmanteau of the German / Dutch / French, sort of conveying a sense of roommates meeting in secret, keeping promises.

France's monarchy in the 16th century evolved from the Capetian Dynasty—House of Valois, followed by the House of Bourbon. It was synonymous with the Catholic Church of Rome. At the same time, the Reformation spread in central Europe starting with Martin Luther's 95 Theses in 1517, burgeoning into Switzerland under theologian Ulrich Zwingli, and then to France guided by John Calvin.

Too, literacy rose, and the newly hatched printing press caused the Bible to become more prevalent, and a middle class emerged in France. This middle class consisted of small industrial concerns, e.g., vintners, textile entrepreneurs, basic steel production, jewelers, and merchants. These folks along with the preexisting nobility now could read the Bible on their own without the Church manipulating the equation. The new readers interpreted Christianity 180 degrees differently than the papacy.



Map Showing Pockets of Huguenot Strength (Dark Areas)
 Wikipedia, File: Protestant France.svg

As the 16th century progressed, the battle between the French monarchy and the Huguenots accelerated with a series of civil wars—French Wars of Religion (1562–1598) pitting the House of Valois against the Protestants. Initially under Henry II there was relative calmness. He married Catherine de' Medici on October 28, 1533, in Marseille, at the Église Saint-Ferréol les Augustins. Although Henry philandered like a carnal Casanova, he refocused on Catherine when the establishment reminded him about his function to populate the Valois.

They bred eight children, three of whom became kings of France. Upon Henry's death in 1559 (speared to death by a splinter in a jousting match) his boys succeeded him, all of whom were youngsters and woefully incompetent. The French rule then became a Regency under Catherine. She became the most powerful lady in Europe and vied, too, for being the leading ruler be it either man or woman. Her vicarious reign vacillated between good news and bad news for Protestants.

Their three boys succeeded Henry, each one of them dumber than the preceding one, albeit under age 21: Francis II, Charles IX, and Henry III.



Fresco Depicting Henry and Catherine's Wedding

The Wars of Religion waged from 1562 to 1598 varying on who won and where. The Protestants, heavily outnumbered, made great stands because of their courage, organization, and help from foreign powers, most notably England. As an adjunct to the Wars, 1572 proved to be a very propitious year in France: a marriage, an assassination, and a massacre.

Catherine, in anticipation of the end of the Valois line, hooked up her daughter Margaret with Henry of Navarre, the first of the Bourbons, in order to keep her thumb in the pie. Margaret wanted nothing to do with a staid stick-in-the-mud Calvinist. Believe it or not, the 16th century Bourbons became bread-and-butter Huguenots.

The French Catholic Church would not countenance a marriage to a Protestant in Notre Dame, so a scaffold outside the Cathedral was fashioned for the ceremony. Margaret was supposed to consent to the marriage by overt response to the presiding bishop's quizzing her on taking Henry as her husband. Margaret would not and did not say a word. Her brother, King of France, Charles IX, stood behind her elbowing her viciously in her back causing her to grunt vociferously. The bishop took the grunt as assent and blessed her union with Henry launching a marriage made in Hell.

In 1572, Charles IX reigned. Admiral of France, Gaspard II de Coligny, a leading Protestant, became his trusted advisor opening up avenues of opportunities for Huguenots. Several of the Huguenot voyages to what became the U.S.'s Florida and South Carolina occurred during this time. Coligny's status bothered the Regent Mother Catherine, however, triggering her to hire a hit man to rub out the offender.

As Coligny walked along the street to his Parisian suite, the sniper nested himself in a perch perfectly aligned in sight of the victim, with an appropriate firearm. Just as the marksman squeezed the trigger, Coligny noticed his loose shoestring and bent down to tie it, so the projectile missed his head and only wounded him, although he eventually died. Charles was beside himself. He knew not what to do. Concomitantly a mass killing of Protestants ensued resulting in all kinds of deaths, two to four thousand on August 23, and 25,000 or so by the middle of September. The plurality of historians gives Catherine credit for the massacre. Although Rome and the Jesuits do not claim credit for the carnage, denying to this day they had anything to do with the bloodbath, opining that it resulted from a secular defugalty; circumstantial extrapolation points to a Catholic quasi edict. Rome and its Jesuit minions didn't like the idea that Protestants flourished in a Catholic country. Rome, through the Pope and unto the Jesuits, leaned on Catherine wondering why she had allowed a state of Huguenot coexistence and permitted Protestant fraternization. Right now, the records are sealed so we know not.



St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre
Oil on Wood Painting by French Huguenot Artist François Dubois (c. 1529–1584)

Charles IX died in 1574, propelling his brother Henry III to accede to the throne. He then met his demise in 1589, stabbed to death, giving rise to the Bourbon Kingdom with Henry of Navarre IV crowned. In a pathetic attempt to keep peace, he became Catholic, irritating all the Huguenots and increasing Catholic contempt, as a ruse to placate them.

Although, for 15 years or so, France functioned on all cylinders until Henry IV was assassinated in 1610. Before his death, he enacted the Edict of Nantes in 1598, thereby allowing Protestants to exist pretty much unscathed on a par with the Catholic majority. Upon Henry IV's death, his boy, dumb as a box of rocks, became King Louis XIII, father of the Sun King, Louis XIV. (Yes, strange as it may seem, Louis XIV, anathema to Protestants descended from French Huguenots.)

Louis XIII was born of Henry's second wife, Marie de' Medici, who was a cousin of Catherine de' Medici. The reign of Louis XIII started the final death knell for Protestants. His rule vacillated depending on advice from his mother or Cardinal Richelieu. Marie handled the king's affairs under Regency until the nefarious Richelieu took command as a super chief of staff / secretary of state. He believed not in any equality or even existence of any Protestant. He performed his own special revocation of the Edict of Nantes. His revocation made being a Huguenot illegal in North America as of 1633.

Eliminating Protestants from the French bureaucracy, and more importantly from the Army and Navy, caused the French to lose North America to France's mortal enemy, the dastardly English. You see, the Protestants comprised the commanders, officers and navigators for the Army and Navy. Without them, the bulwark of the French-Canadian forces collapsed.



The Sun King (Le Roi Soleil) King Louis XIV

Upon the death of Louis XIII, his boy, the infamous Sun King, Louis XIV, became France's king, which resulted in dealing a death blow to Huguenots. His reign remains the longest ever for a monarch—lasting 72 years and 210 days. (By comparison, England's late Queen Elizabeth II's remarkable reign of 70 years and 214 days is the second longest.)

Louis XIV's scourge of Huguenots, the abusive treatment of Protestants, was despicable and included the use of the abhorrent torture of *The Rack*, making the various torments perpetrated upon innocent men, women, and children, among the most horrific of persecutions in world history.

G. Elmore Reaman, (1889–1969), in *The Trail of the Huguenots*, opines that, even by 1963, France never recovered from Louis XIV's carnage. You are on your own to know if they ever have, or ever will.

At any one time during the Protestant period in the 16th and 17th centuries, 10 percent of the population littered France; or as many as two million. Although Louis XIV repealed the Edict of Nantes in 1685 making it illegal to be a Protestant and illegal to emigrate, about a million Huguenots escaped. You can just imagine what happened to the million who stayed, albeit some pretended to revert to Roman Catholicism to save their appendages and avoid being chained to a wall for perpetuity. You've got to believe, though, a lot of bones adorn France's countryside fertilizing the vineyards. Many, though, wound up in the galleys chained to the oars until they could row no more. The dreaded King Louis XIV's minions chained the ladies to the walls, and sent kids to indoctrination gulags.

After the Sun King's demise, Louis XV, age five, great-grandson of Louis XIV, vaulted to the kingship. His reign made Louis XIV's terror look harmless. Louis XV rounded up teen virgins and defiled them with lustful vigor.

By 1787 the purge was over. Too late, the Revolution started the next year and many of the Huguenots existed not, and the remainder including the nobility got bored with the experience. By the end of the 18th century, the Protestant Reformation in France terminated. By Napoleonic times, no Huguenots remained and none into the Restoration.

Today, although sporadic Huguenot churches remain, Muslims outnumber Protestants significantly in France. One of the most famous remaining Huguenot churches is about an hour and a half from Lyon, France, which gave sanctuary to Jews to protect them from the Holocaust during World War II; it is named *The Temple*, and it is located in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon.

Diaspora Notes

Many in the U.S. refer to the exodus and immigration to the U.S. as the Huguenot-Walloon infusion. Witness below the Huguenot-Walloon tercentenary stamps and the half-dollar commemoratives issued in 1924.



Huguenot-Walloon Tercentenary Stamps



Huguenot-Walloon Half-dollar Commemorative

Walloons evolved from ancient France and, by the 16th century, they nestled in southern Belgium, interlocking with Holland in the south. They remained French speaking, populating the Dutch textile area controlled by Spain and ultimately by the dreaded Philip II, son of Charles V. They paired with French Calvinists, but referred to themselves as Reformed.

To explain Huguenot diaspora would be easier to tell where they didn't go rather than where they did. This writer's family, for example, migrated out of Geneva, then to Schleswig-Holstein that was a part of Denmark, then to the Danish West Indies, then up the Mississippi to Wisconsin, then to Terrace, Minnesota, and winding up in Hancock, Minnesota in 1870. Germany welcomed many Huguenots, ironically staffing the Prussian Army to tear apart France in the Franco-German War (1870). Many of the textile families developed the British Isles clothing industry.

Huguenots comprised a noticeable contingent in the Boer Republic of Southern Africa (Orange Free State and Transvaal) in the 19th century. They integrated with the pre-existing Dutch welcomed by Paul Kruger (State President of the South African Republic from 1893–1902) and fought the nefarious British in both Boer Wars. Huguenot soldiers made for excellent dragoons (members of cavalry regiments) because of their pony herds, adept shooting ability, and relentless determination.

The eastern coast of the U.S. is dotted with Huguenot-Walloon settlements, most notably in South Carolina, Northeast Florida, Manhattan, the Hudson River, and Boston. Huguenots ought to be given credit for the first "white-man city" in the U.S. (Fort Caroline on Johns River, Florida, 1564), but, in derogation of treaties, the treacherous Spanish wiped them out, claiming credit at St. Augustine, in 1565. Huguenots founded a settlement at Parris Island, South Carolina, now home to the U.S. Marine Corps, well before Spanish marauders blew them off (1562).



***Huguenot Monument Marking the Charlesfort French Historical Settlement Site
Parris Island, South Carolina***



French Huguenot Church, Charleston, South Carolina

The only Huguenot church in the Western Hemisphere is found in Charleston, South Carolina. Built in 1844, its name is *The Huguenot Church*, and it is also known as *The French Huguenot Church*, or *The French Protestant Church*. This well-preserved church is located in an area of Charleston designated as the French Quarter, and the church is noted on the National Register of Historic Places.

New Paltz, New York, on the Hudson, still maintains some intact Huguenot stone buildings that were erected in the 1700s. New Paltz was first settled by Walloons, followed then by the Huguenots.



Historic Huguenot Street, New Paltz, New York

No conclusion for the Huguenots exists. Their legacy lives on with the epitaph emblazoned above the doorway of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon's now over 400-year-old French Protestant church, *The Temple*, in south-central France:

Aimez-Vous Les Uns Les Autres
(Love One Another)

*~ Guest Editor Neil Simonson
Huguenot History Enthusiast*