

INTRODUCTION

The central concept of this book is basically an examination of the life of one man who has become a mythical folk hero to people of Acadian decent, both in Acadia and in south Louisiana: Joseph *dit Beausoleil* Broussard. *Beausoleil* was a man of French descent who was born in 1702 in Acadie, an area that is now the Canadian Province of Nova Scotia. Coming down to us through the pages of history, as well as in folklore and oral tradition, he appears to have been a colorful, enigmatic and charismatic man, a revolutionary whom the British characterized as a rogue and an outlaw. As a young man, *Beausoleil* consorted with the aboriginal Mi'Kmaq of the area, with whom he was on good terms, although forbidden by British law to do so. In his early twenties he was accused of having fathered a child out of wedlock and was involved in various other civil disputes. Later, he engaged in physical fights with neighbors over ownership of a certain parcel of land.

To the Acadians then and now, however, *Beausoleil* is revered as a patriot. Unlike many other Acadians who chose to accept their fate, that of forcible exile by the British, *Beausoleil*, who had learned much about aboriginal warfare tactics from his good friends the Mi'Kmaq, decided to fight. In 1763, after the majority of the Acadians had already been deported, Governor Wilmot offered the Acadians still remaining in Nova Scotia, including *Beausoleil* and his troublesome rag-tag band of guerilla fighters, the opportunity to stay and become "good British subjects," provided they took the Oath of Allegiance to the British Crown. Many accepted the offer, however, *Beausoleil* refused to do so. Why? Perhaps it was due in part to his obstreperous personality or to his training with the Mi'Kmaq, but more likely it was due to his passion for his Acadian heritage. *Beausoleil* was a descendant of the first Europeans who had left feudalism and oppression behind to forge a newfound freedom and identity in this place called Acadie. That identity, inherited from his ancestors, represented the years of struggle that they had experienced in order to give *Beausoleil* and his children the opportunity to live in a land free of servitude to tyrannical governments where they could live in peace and practice their own religion. We can never know for sure what motivated him, but we do know that the result of his efforts allowed the Acadian culture to continue developing in a new environment. After he ended his fight with the British, *Beausoleil* led many of his people to

Louisiana's bayou country, allowing those Acadians to live in peace and community once again and to maintain their cultural identity. This identity continued to evolve as a vibrant part of the American mosaic.

Likewise, my husband and *Beausoleil* descendant, Warren Perrin, is a man blessed with his ancestor's enduring tenacity and passion for protecting his Acadian community. Using his pen and legal training as his rifle, Perrin decided to bring the work that *Beausoleil* started two centuries before to a final conclusion. His Petition to correct misconceptions about Acadian history – and to clear *Beausoleil*'s name – resulted in a Royal Proclamation, an acknowledgement by Queen Elizabeth II of the wrongs committed against the Acadian people during their deportation. The Proclamation stands as a redemption for all Acadian people, and for *Beausoleil* in particular.

Both Warren and *Beausoleil* were presented with opportunities and challenges that they chose to accept: *Beausoleil* to wage a battle against the British to protect his community of Acadians with all the cunning and strength he could muster; Warren to wage a legal battle with the British with all of the intelligence and diplomacy he possessed to correct history's misconceptions about the Acadian people, and to put an end at last to the exile.

After studying Acadian history, Warren came to the realization that there were legal procedures he could use to correct the historical record concerning his ancestors. He was not an artist, writer, musician, or military person – he was a lawyer. Therefore, he used those skills and life's training to attack, some would say with great militancy, those historical perspectives concerning the Acadians that have come to be referred to as “dead certainties.” By taking this risk of challenging history, Warren did not miss the opportunity to do as *Beausoleil* had done to grant to his own descendants the opportunity to be proud to be part of this hard-won legacy called Acadian culture.

At the beginning of this undertaking, I asked my husband why he wanted to write this book. Why a book on *Beausoleil*? His answer was that he questioned the accuracy of the pro-British historian's conclusion that the Acadians as a whole were a rebellious, belligerent, and quarrelsome people during the pre-dispersal period at which time they were considered British subjects. If the British declared the Acadians “rebels,” or enemies of the state, they could be subjected under British law to loss of their rights and thence to deportation. With

this in mind, Warren decided to take a critical, detailed, and objective look at Acadian history to see if the official interpretations justifying the Acadian deportation would stand up to scrutiny. He also wanted to research the life of *Beausoleil*, the man always held up to have been the leader or scoundrel of the insurrection to see what part he played in these events. Although we know he was extremely anti-British and had a contentious, militant character, one must conclude by the sheer number of Acadian descendants in Louisiana today that his life's ultimate struggle did, in the end, merit him the distinction of being the foremost champion of the Acadian culture. Still, one also learns that, as with all human beings, *Beausoleil* was not a perfect individual. Moreover, like many other significant historical icons, he set out to accomplish one thing and ended up accomplishing something far more positive. This book examines both the positive and negative actions of *Beausoleil* and concludes that his true character lies somewhere in between; that is, he was not necessarily always a righteous, upstanding pillar of the Acadian community, but neither was he the murderous blackguard the British made him out to be.

The next question I remember thinking was this: from our vantage point in the twenty-first century, what did *Beausoleil* actually accomplish? At what cost? And how and why did he become such a folk hero? Knowing the bits and pieces of his life's story, it is apparent that *Beausoleil* was capable of making harmful life decisions. It appears that revenge was his motivation in the beginning for leading the resistance against the British. Revenge may, at times, be a natural human response to certain situations, but it is not a positive motivation. Because of his tenacity, many of his decisions resulted in the tragic loss of the lives of family members and fellow insurgents. Toward the end of his military efforts against the British, when he must have finally realized the fruitlessness of continuing his resistance – after even France itself gave up the fight – only then did he set about uniting Acadian families and preparing to depart from his beloved homeland to what he hoped would be a better life in a new Acadia.

Both *Beausoleil* and Warren Perrin were searching for resolution – and perhaps both men finally found it: *Beausoleil* in his new homeland in Louisiana, Warren in Canada with the Royal Proclamation. *Beausoleil* would have been proud.

The first part of this book defines the society into which *Beausoleil*

was born and speaks of his early life events and his militant struggles with the British who had for years wanted to lay claim to the Acadians' rich and profitable lands. Subsequent chapters discuss his epic odyssey during which *Beausoleil* led a group of one hundred ninety-three Acadians to Louisiana, the New Acadia, with the hope that his beloved Acadian culture would survive. The last half of the book discusses the repercussions of his life that ultimately led an eighth generation descendant of *Beausoleil*, Warren Perrin, to begin a legal action called the Petition. This petition was resolved by the signing of the Royal Proclamation on December 9, 2003.

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