



The History of the Huguenots



John Calvin (1509 - 1564)
religious reformer.

The Huguenots were *French Protestants* who were members of the *Reformed Church* which was established in 1550 by the reformer John Calvin.

The origin of the name *Huguenot* is uncertain, but dates from approximately 1550 when it was used in court cases against "heretics" (dissenters from the Roman Catholic Church). There is a theory that it is derived from the personal name of Besançon Hugues, the leader of the "Confederate Party" in Geneva, in combination with a Frankish corruption of the German word for *conspirator* or *confederate*: *eidgenosse*.

Thus, *Hugues* plus *eidgenot* becomes *Huguenot*, with the intention of associating the Protestant cause with some very unpopular politics.

O.I.A. Roche, in his book *The Days of the Upright, a History of the Huguenots*, writes that "*Huguenot*" is "*a combination of a Flemish and a German word. In the Flemish corner of France, Bible students who gathered in each other's houses to study secretly were called Huisgenooten, or "house fellows," while on the Swiss and German borders they were termed Eidgenossen, or "oath fellows," that is, persons bound to each other by an oath. Gallicized into "Huguenot," often used deprecatingly, the word became, during two and a half centuries of terror and triumph, a badge of enduring honor and courage.*"

As nickname and even abusive name its use was banned in the regulations of the Edict of Nantes which Henry IV (Henry of Navarre, who himself earlier was a Huguenot) issued in 1598. The French Protestants themselves preferred to refer to themselves as "réformees" (reformers) rather than "Huguenots".

It was much later that the name "Huguenot" became an honorary one of which their descendants are proud.

A general edict which encouraged the extermination of the Huguenots was issued on January 29th, 1536 in France. On March 1st, 1562 some 1200 Huguenots were slain at Vassy, France. This ignited the Wars of Religion which would rip apart, devastate, and bankrupt France for the next three decades.



St. Bartholomew's night massacre, 1572

During the infamous *St Bartholomew Massacre* of the night of 23/24 August, 1572 more than 8 000 Huguenots, including Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, Governor of Picardy and leader and spokesman of the Huguenots, were murdered in Paris.



Catharina de Medici

It happened during the wedding of Henry of Navarre, a Huguenot, to Marguerite de Valois (daughter of Catherine de Medici), when thousands of Huguenots converged on Paris for the wedding celebrations. It was Catherine de Medici who persuaded her weakling son Charles IX to order the mass murder, which lasted three days and spread to the countryside. On Sunday morning August 24th, 1572 she personally walked through the streets of Paris to inspect the carnage. Henry of Navarre's life was spared when he pretended to support the Roman Catholic faith. In 1593 he made his "perilous leap" and abjured his faith in July 1593, and 5 years later he was the undisputed monarch as King Henry IV (*le bon Henri*, the good Henry) of France.

When the first rumours of the massacre reached the Vatican in Rome on 2 September 1572, pope Gregory XIII was jubilant and wanted bonfires to be lit in Rome. He was persuaded to wait for the official communication.

The very morning of the day that he received the confirmed news, the pope held a consistory and announced that "God had been pleased to be merciful". Then with all the cardinals he repaired to the Church of St. Mark for the Te Deum, and prayed and ordered prayers that the Most Christian King might rid and purge his entire kingdom (of France) of the Huguenot plague.

On 8 September 1572 a procession of thanksgiving took place in Rome, and the pope, in a prayer after mass, thanked God for having "granted the Catholic people a glorious triumph over a perfidious race" (*gloriosam de perfidis gentibus populo catholico loetitiam tribuisti*).

Gregory XIII engaged Vasari to paint scenes in one of the Vatican apartments of the triumph of the "Most Christian King" over the Huguenots. He had a medal struck representing an exterminating angel smiting the Huguenots with his sword, the inscription reading: *Hugonottorium strages* (Huguenot conspirators).



In France itself, the French magistracy ordered the admiral to be burned in effigy and prayers and processions of thanksgiving henceforth on each recurring 24th August, out of gratitude to God for the victory over the Huguenots.



Henry of Navarre, former Huguenot, later Henry IV

The Edict of Nantes was signed by Henry IV on April 13th, 1598, which brought an end to the Wars of Religion. The Huguenots were allowed to practice their faith in 20 specified French "free" cities. France became united and a decade of peace followed. After Henry IV was murdered in 1610, however, the persecution of the "dissenters" resumed in all earnestness under the guidance of Cardinal Richelieu, whose favourite project was the extermination of the Huguenots.



Richelieu, who persecuted the Huguenots with fervour

Henry IV's weakling son, Louis the Thirteenth, refused them the privileges which had been granted to them by the Edict of Nantes; and, when reminded of the claims they had, if the promises of Henry the Third and Henry the Fourth were to be regarded, he answered that "*the first-named monarch feared them, and the latter loved them; but I neither fear nor love them.*"

The Huguenot free cities were lost one after the other after they were conquered by the forces of Cardinal Richelieu, and the last and most important stronghold, *La Rochelle*, fell in 1629 after a siege lasting a month.



Lodewyk XIV

Louis XIV (the *Sun King*, 1643-1715) began to apply his motto *l'état c'est moi* ("I am the state") and introduced the infamous *Dragonnades* - the billeting of dragoons in Huguenot households. He began with a policy of *une foi, un loi, un roi* (one faith, one law, one king) and revoked the Edict of Nantes on 22 October 1685. The large scale persecution of the Huguenots resumed. Protestant churches and the houses of "obstinate" were burned and destroyed, and their bibles and hymn books burned. Emigration was declared illegal. Many Huguenots were burned at the stake. Many Huguenots who did not find their death in local prisons or execution on the wheel of torture, were shipped to sea to serve their sentences as galley slaves, either on French galley ships, or sold to Turkey as galley slaves.

A vivid account of the life of galley-slaves in France is given in Jean Marteilhes's *Memoirs of a Protestant*, translated by Oliver Goldsmith, which describes the experiences of one of the Huguenots who suffered after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

Every Huguenot place of worship was to be destroyed; every minister who refused to conform was to be sent to the *Hôpitaux de Forçats* at Marseilles and at Valance. If he had been noted for his zeal he was to be considered "obstinate," and sent to slavery for life in such of the West-Indian islands as belonged to the French. The children of Huguenot parents were to be taken from them by force, and educated by the Roman Catholic monks or nuns.



Scenes like these were common during the persecution of the Huguenots in France during the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

At least 250 000 French Huguenots fled to countries such as Switzerland, Germany, England, America, the Netherlands, Poland and South Africa, where they could enjoy religious freedom. As many were killed in France itself. Between 1618 and 1725 between 5 000 and 7 000 Huguenots reached the shores of America. Those who came from the French speaking south of Belgium, an area known as Wallonia, are generally known as Walloons (as opposed to Huguenots) in the United States and elsewhere.

The organised large scale emigration of Huguenots to the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa occurred during 1688 - 1689. However, even before this large scale emigration individual Huguenots such as François Villion (1671) and the brothers François and Guillaume du Toit (1686) fled to the Cape of Good Hope. In 1692 a total of 201 French Huguenots had settled at the Cape of Good Hope. Most of them settled in an area now known as *Franschhoek* ("French Corner"), some 70 km outside Cape Town, where many farms still bear their original French names.

A century later the promulgation of the *Edict of Toleration* on 28 November 1787 partially restored the civil and religious rights of the Huguenots in France.

The Dutch East India Company encouraged the Huguenots to immigrate to the Cape because they shared the same religious beliefs (Protestant), and also because most Huguenots were highly trained craftsmen or experienced farmers. Huguenots were particularly experienced in viticulture and oenology (the growing of grapes and making of wine, brandy and vinegar). The Huguenots quickly proved their conscientious and industrious nature, and their efforts led to a marked increase in the improvement of the quality of Cape wines.

The Huguenots played an integral part in the stabilisation of the free burgher population of South Africa. This is because without a father-land to return to, they were forced to take root or disappear. Religious persecution had also made them more determined and more prepared to overcome obstacles. Huguenot descendants went on to establish themselves in positions of leadership in Afrikaner society, despite the fact that they comprised a minority of the population. Today, some 40 Huguenot surnames survive.

The Huguenots made a difference to South African society in another respect. Previously, the short-age of European women prompted many men to take half-caste slaves as brides or mistresses. The Huguenots were generally already married, young, and fecund. Therefore, as girls in these families matured, men's stable liaisons with non-European women declined, and a clearer pattern of endogamy was established.

Voortrekkers

French Huguenot descendants were also included in the exodus of frontier farmers that was called the Great Trek.

Voortrekker surnames who were of French Huguenot ancestry include:

(Original French spelling in brackets)

- Aucamp (Auchamp)
- Boshof (Bossau)
- Bruwer (Bruere)
- Buys (Du Buis)
- Cilliers (Cellier)
- Cronje (Cronier)
- De Klerk (Le Clercq)
- Delpont (Delporte)
- De Villiers
- Du Plessis
- Du Preez (Des Prez, Des Pres, Du Pre)
- du Randt
- du Toit
- Duvenage (Duvinage)
- Fouche (Foucher)
- Fourie
- Gouws (Gauss)
- Hugo (Hugot, Hugod)
- Jacobs? (Jacob?)
- Jordaan (Jourdan)
- Joubert (Jaubert)
- Labuschagne (la Buscagne)
- Le Roux
- Lombard (Lombaard)
- Malan (Mallan)
- Marais
- Maartens/Martins (Martin)
- Malherbe
- Minnaar (Meinard, Mesnard)
- Meyer
- Naude
- Nel (Neel, Niel)
- Nortier / Nortje (Nourtier)
- Pienaar (Pinard)
- Retief (Retif)
- Reyneke? (Reyne?)
- Riekert? (Richarde?)
- Rossouw (Rousseau)
- Roux
- Senekal (Senecal, Senechal)
- Terblanche (Terreblanque)
- Theron (Therond)
- Tredoux
- Viljoen (Villion)