

# NARRATIVE TEXTS

## Angelina, Translator for Explorers, born 16\_\_, active 1712-1721

Angelina's life flickers briefly through the shadows of history. Mentioned in five explorers' accounts, she appears as a sage, translator, and healer among the Caddo people at the time of European contact. Sadly, we lack any record in her own words to impart her perspective or settle questions. How did she learn Spanish? Was she raised in Mexico, in a frontier mission, or in the woods of East Texas, where Europeans encountered her? Why did she translate for the newcomers?

With her wisdom and compassion, Angelina so impressed 18th century contemporaries that they named a river for her.<sup>1</sup> The Angelina River still flows through East Texas today.

### Quotations

*In this village we found a woman named Angélique, who has been baptized by Spanish priests on a mission to their village. She spoke Spanish, and as M. de St. Denis too spoke that language fairly well, he made use of her to tell the Assaias chiefs to let us have some guides for hire.*—André Pénicaut, accompanying St. Denis, 1712<sup>2</sup>

[The expedition] *had recourse to a learned Indian woman of this Assinai tribe, reared in Coahuila.*—Father Espinosa of the Ramón expedition, 1716<sup>3</sup>

*Later the governor [Alarcón] proceeded to distribute clothing to all of the family of those baptized, among whom is found the sagacious Indian interpreter who at the persuasion of the said governor came to live with her entire family near the village.*—Fray Francisco Céliz of the Alarcón expedition, 1718-1719<sup>4</sup>

[A Spanish-speaking woman] *served me all the best she had, and she had as much love for me as if I had been her child. . . . This Indian woman, called Angelica, had lived with the Spaniards since her childhood. That is why we understood each other so well.*—Simars de Belle-Isle, a Frenchman rescued by the Assinai Caddo after suffering ill-treatment on the Texas coast, 1720<sup>5</sup>

[Alongside the Caddo chief] *was Angelina. . . . She served as the interpreter because she could speak the Castilian language as well as the Texas.*—de la Peña of the Aguayo expedition, 1721<sup>6</sup>

### Graphic

Painting by Ancel Nunn. Courtesy Claude Smithheart, Lufkin.



Note: We have an 18x23" color print of the whole painting by Ancel Nunn with much symbolism. I think we should use that instead of cropping out just this portrait oval.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Angelina River is first recorded by that name in Solis's diary of 1768 and Lafora's map of 1771; see Diane H. Corbin, "Angelina," in Francis Edward Abernethy, ed., *Legendary Ladies of Texas* (Dallas: E-Heart Press, 1981), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> R.G. McWilliams, ed., *Fleur de Lys and Calumet, Being the Pénicaut Narrative of the French Adventure in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953), pp. 150-51.

<sup>3</sup> Gabriel Tous, ed. and trans., *The Ramón Expedition: Espinosa's Diary of His Expedition into Texas in 1716*, Preliminary Studies of the Texas Catholic Historical Society 2:5 (April 1933).

<sup>4</sup> Fray Francisco Céliz, *Diary of the Alarcón Expedition into Texas, 1718-19*, trans. Friz Leo Hoffman (Los Angeles: Quivira Society, 1935; rpt., New York, Arno Press, 1967).

<sup>5</sup> Henri Folmer, "De Bellisle on the Texas Coast," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 44:2 (October 1940), pp. 223-25.

<sup>6</sup> Richard G. Santos, *Aguayo Expedition into Texas, 1721: An annotated translation of the five versions of the diary kept by Br. Juan Antonio de la Peña* (Austin, Tex.: Jenkins Publishing Co., 1981), p. 54.