

230th anniversary of the Edict of Toleration-November 1787

On November 19, 1787, Louis XVI., attended by the princes and peers of the kingdom of France, came to the court of parliament to present the Edict on the Civic Rights of Protestants, which had been prepared by Baron de Breteuil and Lamoignon de Malesherbes for which General LaFayette had lobbied for on his return to France in 1785. Better known as the Edict of Toleration, it had 33 articles. The first article stated that Roman Catholicism would remain the religion of France, but certain concessions were allowed to the Calvinists or Huguenots but not to Lutherans or Jews.

(1) Huguenots were permitted to live in France and to practice trades or industries, without being troubled for the sake of their religion. Certain professions were still excluded including all offices relating to the judiciary whether controlled by the crown or local nobles, and any municipal judicial position. Huguenots were excluded from serving on municipal councils. Protestants were not allowed to teach in public.

(2) Huguenots were allowed to celebrate legal marriages with notification of a king's judge or the Roman Catholic priest of the local parish.

(3) The births of Huguenot children must be registered by the royal judges, and therefore were legitimate children when it came to property rights and inheritance.

(4) Measures were taken for the burial of those who could not be buried according to the Roman Catholic rite.

There were other regulations in the Act that regulated the dress of ministers and pastors in public.

Huguenots were denied the ability to assemble and gather together to make collective demands of the King in person or in writing. Gathering in groups or associations for political reasons was illegal and punishable.

With this Edict, being a Huguenot was no longer illegal. But the Huguenots had to suppress their joy. Pastor Rabaut St. Etienne, superintendent of the "Churches of the Desert," thought it necessary to send a circular letter to eighty ministers or elders in the Languedoc, advising them to refrain from public signs of rejoicing lest they offend the Catholic majority.

ADDED NOTE: Pastor Rabaut St. Etienne was guillotined in 1789 because he took advantage of even newer rights to serve in Parliament. He continued his advocacy of rights for Huguenots but was considered a Girondist and not radical enough.

