

Prelude to War: Acadia

The Acadians were the descendants of the French colonists who had first farmed the shores of the Bay of Fundy in the 1600s. Acadia had changed hands many times in the seventeenth century. First the English captured it. Then the French did. Back and forth it went.

By 1710, most of Acadia was firmly under British control. Acadians had developed a unique identity because they had been cut off from the rest of New France for so long. Britain changed the colony's name to Nova Scotia. It allowed the Acadians to live their lives in

peace. It seemed that the Acadians' troubles were over. As you will see in this section, however, the Acadians became victims of a war they did not want.

An Acadian is a Francophone citizen of Acadia.

Focus

Why did the English expel the Acadians from their land in Nova Scotia?

Tech Link

To see a re-enactment of Acadians preserving fish, open Chapter 5 on your *Voices and Visions* CD-ROM.

Reading STRATEGY

To better remember what you're reading, try identifying the main idea in every paragraph as you read.

The Acadian Way of Life

By 1750, more than 10 000 Acadians lived on small farms and in villages nestled along the shores of the Bay of Fundy. Many had intermarried with their Mi'kmaq trading partners. They were mainly French-speaking Catholics. Over the years, they created their own way of life. It was based on fishing and their unique methods of farming.

Caught in the Middle

Britain had always wanted to populate Nova Scotia with people who spoke English. As tensions between England and France grew, the governor of Nova Scotia, Charles Lawrence, began to wonder if the Acadians might side with the French. The Mi'kmaq and Maliseet had trade and family ties with the Acadians. Over the years, they had captured hundreds of English ships. The Acadians had always refused to swear loyalty to the British Crown.

In 1755, Lawrence gave the Acadians an ultimatum (a threat of serious penalties): swear your loyalty or lose your land. The Acadians did not want to fight. They wanted to remain **neutral**. They promised not to take up arms against the English, but they refused to take the oath. That set the stage for *le Grand Dérangement*—the Great Upheaval.

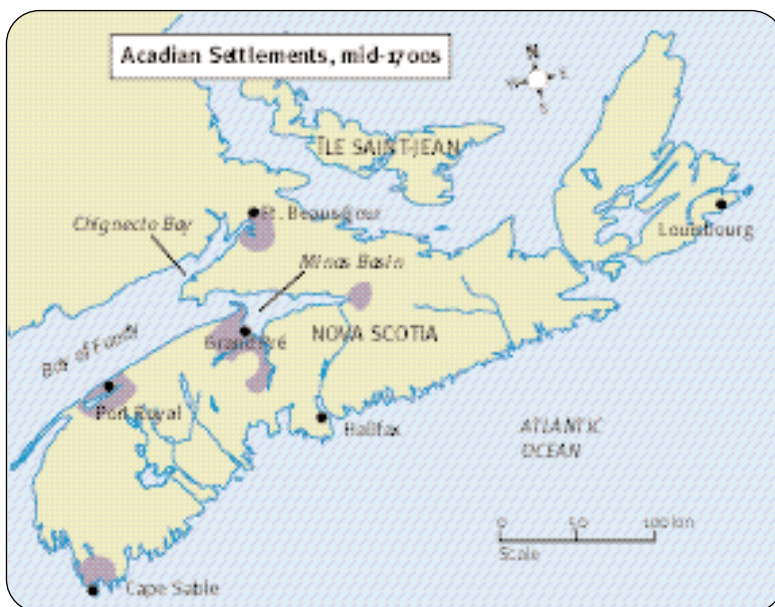


Figure 5.7 The main Acadian settlements around 1750. Think about Acadia's location. Why did both Britain and France want to control the colony?

CASE STUDY

The Expulsion of the Acadians: Was There Any Other Way?

In modern Canada, we believe that people have certain human rights. For example, Canadian citizens have a right to live in Canada. We have the right not to be torn from our families and shipped off to foreign lands. Our government has the responsibility to protect those rights.

It has not always been this way. Just consider what happened to the Acadians in 1755.

The Great Deportation—Le Grand Dérangement

Governor Lawrence was convinced that the British newcomers in Nova Scotia would not be safe with the Acadians living among them. He thought he found proof of this when British troops captured Fort Beauséjour from the French in 1755. Inside, they found 300 armed Acadians defending the fort. To Lawrence, this meant that all Acadians were disloyal.

The governor gave the order: “The French inhabitants of the province shall be removed out of the country as soon as possible.” British soldiers fell upon the Acadian villages. They rounded up the people at gunpoint. They broke up families and forced them to board ships bound for distant lands. They burned homes and churches. They destroyed farms and drove off animals.

How It Ended

Most of the Acadians were deported by ship to the New England colonies. Some were sent to the Caribbean, France, or England. A few escaped and went into hiding in the woods. Others made their way to New Orleans, Louisiana, still part of New France. Their descendants formed the Cajun community, which still thrives.



Many Acadians didn't survive the deportation, though. They died of disease, drowning, or starvation. In all, about 10 000 Acadians were driven from their homes. Seeing what happened to the Acadians, the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet abided by the wishes of the British.

Figure 5.8 British soldiers forcing Acadians from their homes. The exiles could take only what they could carry. How has Lewis Parker, who created this painting, used facts and emotions to re-create the scene?

CASE STUDY
continued

John Winslow was a British army officer who took part in the removal of the Acadians from Grand Pré. Here he tells about what he did:

The whole of the French people were drawn together in a group. I then ordered Captain Adams to lead away the young men to the ships. I ordered the prisoners to march. They all answered they would not go without their fathers. I told them that “no” was a word I did not understand.

The King’s command had to be obeyed. I told them that I did not want to use harsh means, but there was no time for talking and delay. I ordered the troops to fix their bayonets and march towards the French. The men started off, praying, singing, and crying. Along the way they were met by the women and children who were on their knees crying and praying.

Source: Colonel John Winslow, *The Journal of Colonel John Winslow* (Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections, Vol. III).

Respond

Think about this question: Did Governor Lawrence have to abuse people’s human rights? **SKILLS**

- a) With two partners, analyze the facts about the Great Upheaval.
- b) Here are three roles:
 - Col. Greenhouse, a British army officer
 - M. Arsenault, an Acadian who refused to take the oath
 - Mme LeBlanc, an Acadian who took the oath and stayed

Think about how these characters would have viewed the facts.

- c) What evidence supports your position? Record the evidence supporting each point of view in a graphic organizer.
- d) Now develop an argument to support or oppose your response to the question from your own point of view.



Figure 5.9 Acadian singer Jeanne (Doucet) Currie, dressed in traditional clothing. She is attending the World Acadian Congress at Grand Pré, Nova Scotia. She and other Acadians remember their ancestors. People take part in this type of cultural event for a feeling of connection. Explain what this means using an example from your own experience.



Figure 5.10 Destinations of the Acadian deportees in 1755. *Le Grand Dérangement* can also be translated as “the Great Bother.” What comment do you think the Acadians were making when they labelled such a tragedy with that phrase?

Identity

A Lasting Identity

Can the Acadians' identity survive in Canada? First consider what the Acadians have done over the past 250 years.

In 1763, the war between France and England was over. The Acadians were free to come home. Some returned to the shores of the Bay of Fundy. Most chose to settle in what would become New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, because their original farms in Nova Scotia had been taken.

The memories of their exile stayed with the Acadians. They were determined to preserve their culture and way of life. Today, about 300 000 French-speaking Acadians live in Atlantic Canada. In New Brunswick, about a third of the people speak French as their first language. The province is the only one in Canada that is officially bilingual. Acadians have their own schools, music, plays, and novels. They even have their own flag. It is modelled on the French flag to show the Acadians'

bond to their French heritage.

The Acadians keep their cultural identity alive in many ways. In New Brunswick, *Le Pays de La Sagouine* is a re-creation of an Acadian village. At Grand Pré, Nova Scotia, an annual festival draws 5000 Acadians. They enjoy a weekend of picnics, songs, dancing, and games. Every few years, Acadians hold a big family reunion.

In 2004, Nova Scotia hosted the World Acadian Congress. It marked the 400th anniversary of the first French settlement in North America at St. Croix Island. The event drew more than 250 000 Acadians. They came from as far away as Spain, Louisiana, and Hong Kong. Governor General Adrienne Clarkson offered apologies for the expulsion of the Acadians on behalf of the British.



Figure 5.11 Viola Léger portrays La Sagouine, an Acadian washerwoman who tells her stories of life in Acadia. Léger played this role more than 2000 times. Antonine Maillet created *La Sagouine*. Maillet is famous for her many plays and novels about Acadia. How has she helped keep the Acadian identity vibrant and alive?



Respond

What factors do you think boost a people's sense of cultural identity? What could you do to help the Acadians protect their identity?

Think It Through

Do you want to be able to identify bias? Put yourself in the time of a historical event. **SKILLS**

a) Imagine you are Édouard Arsenault, a young Acadian in 1755. Write a letter to Governor Lawrence explaining why you wish to remain neutral in the conflict between Britain and France.

b) Imagine you are Governor Lawrence. Write a letter back explaining why you have to expel the Acadians.

Alternatively, write a brief skit in which the two discuss this issue. The scene: Arsenault is assisting the governor with a broken coach wheel.