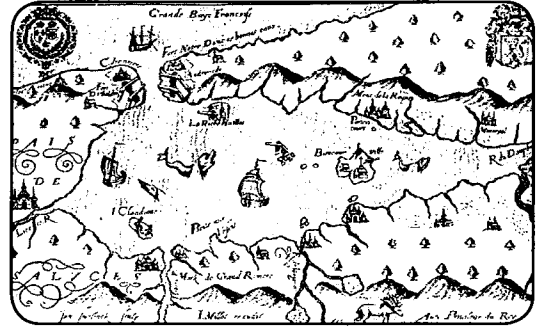


The Acadians: Part 1

Before you read: On the right is an old map of the Acadian settlement on the Bay of Fundy. Samuel de Champlain, a mapmaker, was on the first French expedition to Acadia. Why do you think maps were so important to the first colonists in the Americas?



Part 1– Acadia: An Introduction

The term “Acadian” (*Acadien* in French) often refers to an early French settler of Atlantic Canada and the Gaspé Peninsula of Quebec. In 1604, even before the founding of the main settlements of New France (many miles to the east on the St. Lawrence River), an expedition made up of two ships from France wintered in what we now call Nova Scotia. The expedition was headed by Sieur Pierre Dugua de Mons, and one of his captains was explorer and mapmaker Samuel de Champlain. De Mons had been granted the fur trading monopoly for the region.

France had not been eager to establish settlements in North America, despite Jacques Cartier’s successfully claiming the northeastern Atlantic coast region for his nation seventy years earlier. Colonizing North America was seen as a daunting task – the climate was hostile, there were no obvious riches (such as gold), and the wilderness was vast. It wasn’t until the early seventeenth century that European powers considered the northern part of the Americas as a potential area of settlement.

Sieur de Mons and his crew brought less than a hundred settlers with them; a small hardy group of people either brave or desperate enough to attempt a life in the New World. They arrived in what we now call the Bay of Fundy and settled down for the winter on a small island near the mouth of the St. Croix River.

The first winter almost destroyed the first French colony in Canada. Thirty-five settlers died of starvation and scurvy. The decision was made to move the settlement across the bay, to the mainland of the western peninsula of Nova Scotia. They named it Port Royal and it became the first successful French-Canadian settlement. The small group of settlers carried on against incredible odds, learning how to hunt and trap from the Mi’kmaq, the local First Nations peoples. The Mi’kmaq also traded furs with the settlers.

Port Royal would struggle along for decades with only a few hundred people eking out an existence in a harsh land. Every step of the way they had to learn how to get by. In time Acadia would grow but it would always be caught in the middle of two political powers: France and Britain.

The Acadians: Part 2

Before you read: On the right is a modern photo of Port Royal, which has been rebuilt in modern times. A well and a pile of wood with an ax are pictured. Why would a well, wood, and tools have been essential to the Port Royal settlers?



Part 2 – Acadia's Early Years

Port Royal was created two years before the British founded a settlement at Jamestown, Virginia. It was a small community, really just a fortified group of buildings made of logs, but it had church services, a Bible study group, an apothecary, a library, and a social club called *l'Ordre de Bon Temps*. The Port Royal structures were built in the style of French farmhouses. They were built of wood, which was plentiful.

Port Royal, after a shaky start, seemed to be thriving, but when the King of France decided to extend the fur trading rights to other Frenchmen, Sieur de Mons became discouraged. He did not believe it was feasible for more fur traders to compete in the region so he decided to give up the Port Royal colony.

Port Royal was deserted for four years. In 1610 one of the original settlers, Jean de Biencourt (who was a French aristocrat) returned to Port Royal with his young adult son Charles and together they revived the settlement. They planted crops and resumed trade with the Mi'kmaq. In 1613 the settlers escaped with their lives when shiploads of men from the British Virginia colony of Jamestown to the south arrived in the Bay of Fundy. Jamestown had been founded in 1607. The Acadians hid in the woods while the Virginians set fire to the buildings and destroyed the crops. After they left, the Port Royal settlers emerged from the forest and began building once again.

Another twenty-five years went by before Port Royal saw substantial growth. After 1635, a small number of settlers, probably less than fifty a year, arrived in Acadia. Very few of them had any farming experience; most of them had left France because they were desperate to improve their lives. Their lives did improve, thanks to the good farming land around Port Royal. Once the settlers learned what they need to know to succeed, agriculture thrived. They and their children were healthier than they would have been in France. Even so, the population was only about two hundred in 1650 though it almost doubled within the next twenty years.

The Acadians: Part 3

Before you read: What do you think the title below, "Caught in the Middle" refers to?



Reconstructed fortress, Louisbourg.

Part 3 – Caught in the Middle

For almost a hundred years the Acadians who lived on the shores of the Bay of Fundy (which they called *Baie de Française*) worked hard, thrived, and established a unique culture. They were not the same as the French back in their homeland and they were different from the French settlers who lived along the St. Lawrence River in what is now Quebec. Eventually Port Royal was surrounded by smaller settlements where clusters of extended families lived close to each other. The draining of marshes near the shoreline had created fertile farming land. Hard work and nutritious food produced healthy people who had many children. The total numbers were still quite small though; cousins married each other and there was much intermarriage with the Mi'kmaq. Over the years more people came over from France and the population grew in small increments.

The French had claimed the territory known as Acadia in the early decades of the 16th century. Over a hundred years later, Acadia included present day Nova Scotia (and Cape Breton Island), New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. The first Acadian winter had been spent on a small island in the St. Croix River, now part of the American state of Maine. They abandoned it and built Port Royal across the river, now in the province of Nova Scotia. The Acadians depended on the water that bordered their settlements, but it was that same water that provided a route for those who wished to attack Acadia.

France and Britain, who had been enemies for centuries, brought their antipathy to the New World. Britain had established many successful colonies to the south of Acadia and controlled Newfoundland and its fishing industry as well. As early as 1629, the British drove the French out of Port Royal. They then sent settlers to what they called Nova Scotia (named for the King's birthplace of Scotland) but three years later the area was officially returned to the French. Over time the Acadians and New Englanders built up a trade network that was beneficial to both groups. Officials in France did not want Acadians trading with British colonists but the Acadians felt independent enough to ignore France's wishes. Over the generations, ties to France weakened and the Acadians developed their own cultural identity.

In 1654 and again in 1690 troops from New England took possession of Acadia but within a few years of each raid, the area was returned to France. Over the years the raids continued and in 1710 Britain took control of Acadia once again for the last time.

The Acadians: Part 4

Before you read: How do you think the Acadians felt about coming under British rule ?

Part 4 – British Rule

For over a century, since the arrival of the first French settlers in 1604, Acadia had seen a small but steady growth in population. The colonists who lived there enjoyed a healthy lifestyle and usually got along well with the First Nations people, often intermarrying with them. There was always a feeling of apprehension that their peaceful lives could be shattered at any time. Over the century British settlers from the south had engaged in trade with the Acadians. At times though, they came to attack and raid.

The British controlled Newfoundland to the north of Acadia and many colonies along the Atlantic seaboard to the south. Acadia included what is now Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and a small part of the Gaspé, in Quebec. The British knew Acadia's location guarded the heart of New France and central North America. Cod fishing off Newfoundland was lucrative and the fur trade in New France brought profit to the French. These factors meant both powers wanted to control North America.

After the 1710 final British raid, the status of Acadia was changed when the Treaty of Utrecht was signed in 1713. This treaty meant that the British now had control over Acadia, as well as the Hudson Bay area and Newfoundland. Historians wonder why France did little to protect Acadia, so rich in resources and in such a strategic spot.

After the signing of the treaty, France still controlled Cape Breton (Ile Royale) and Prince Edward Island (Ile St-Jean) and urged the Acadians in the Bay of Fundy area to relocate to those islands. Most of the Acadians had little interest in moving and stayed where they were. Meanwhile, the French began to build a fortified port at Louisbourg on Ile Royale. French fishermen from Newfoundland were brought over to live there and a large number of French soldiers were stationed there.

At first the authorities did not force the Acadians to take an oath of allegiance to the British monarch. They decided to increase the non-Acadian population to fortify Nova Scotia. The city of Halifax was founded in 1749 as a military base and people from Britain and her colonies were encouraged to settle there. About twenty-five hundred individuals arrived in Halifax the year it was founded. Britain began a scheme of settling European Protestants in the area, many of them from Germany and Switzerland.

The French-speaking Acadians still outnumbered the newcomers due to their rapid population growth. British officials became more anxious when the French increased the fortification of Louisbourg on Ile Royale, north of Halifax. They feared that if the French tried to take back Acadia, the Acadians would be a force to be reckoned with. The Acadians naturally would side with France and the Mi'kmaq also remained loyal to the French. The time had come for the British to insist on loyalty from the Acadians.