

Acadians in Exile: the Experiences of the Acadian in the British Seaports

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Acadians in Exile: the Experiences of the Acadians in the British Seaports.

The story of how a number of Acadians, held in English sea-ports during the Seven Years' war, were shipped to France in 1763 reveals a great deal about the characteristics of Acadian society and about European perceptions of these characteristics. This particular crossing from England to France was the continuation of a voyage into exile which had begun eight years earlier. Although it involved only part of the total number of Acadians deported in 1755, this episode illustrates clearly many of the ways in which Acadians were more than just a fragment of French society.

At the time of the events which resulted in their dispersal, there were more than nine thousand Acadians within the boundaries of the then British colony of Nova Scotia.¹ Their ancestors had been the first settlers of the lands which today form New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and part of the state of Maine. Their economy was based on a mixture of farming, fishing, hunting and smuggling and flourished sufficiently to support a population expansion that saw the numbers of the Acadians quadruple between 1710 and 1748.² By the mid-eighteenth century the Acadians were very definitely a separate people. They were accustomed to living on their lands according to traditions of political action which they had developed during the seventeenth century, when English influence upon their society had been as important as French authority. In 1755 there was once more open warfare between English and French in North America and the Acadian lands were part of the border, claimed by England and coveted by France.

To both sides the Acadians appeared as a possible military force. The French were convinced that Acadians would support their efforts and the English were dubious about Acadian promises of neutrality. The lieutenant

1 Estimates vary. This is based upon a comparison of the numbers reported as exiled and the numbers discovered within the colony in 1764 when they were once more allowed to own land in Nova Scotia. N. Griffiths, *The Acadians: Creation of a People* (Toronto, 1973), p. 66.

2 A.H. Clark, *Acadia: The Geography of Early Nova Scotia to 1760* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1968), p. 201.

governor of Nova Scotia, Colonel Charles Lawrence, and his advisers, decided to nullify this force by expelling it from the battle zone. On the 11th of August, 1755, Charles Lawrence wrote to his fellow governors on the continent to explain that this expulsion entailed the division of the Acadians "among the Colonies where they may be of some use, as most of them are healthy strong people; and as they cannot easily collect themselves together again it will be out of their power to do any mischief and they may become profitable and it is possible, in time, faithful subjects".³ As summer gave way to fall, the transports left the shores of Nova Scotia and with them went the Acadian people bound for one or other of the thirteen colonies. The stated object of this exercise, the fragmentation of Acadian strength, was abundantly achieved. Eight years later the Acadians were to be found, a divided people, scattered from the shores of the Saint Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico, and in the ports of England and France. Barely a thousand remained within Nova Scotia by the end of 1763.

The particular exiles who were in England in that same year had arrived there in 1756 by way of Virginia. In his plans for the redistribution of the Acadians Lawrence worked on the principle of act first, explain later; as a result there had been no prior consultation with his fellow colonial administrators. The circular, which contained Lawrence's justification of his action on grounds of military necessity, was sent to the governors on the same ships that carried the Acadians into exile. As the Acadians were landed, from Massachusetts to Georgia, each colony coped as best it might. Whether the exiles were in Massachusetts or further south, the problems they posed for the colonial authorities were fundamentally the same and foreshadowed those with which the metropolitan authorities were to be confronted. How were the immediate physical needs of the Acadians to be met? Were they to be treated as prisoners of war? How was their claim to be considered as British subjects to be met?

Varying answers were given by the colonial administrations. Massachusetts, for example, on the 16th of November, 1755, passed an act to cope with "divers of the Inhabitants and Familys in [sic] Nova Scotia". It placed the Acadians in the hands of the Justices of the Peace and Overseers of the Poor "to deal with them as by Law they would have been empowered to do were they inhabitants of the Province".⁴ The lead given by the Commonwealth was followed, to a greater or lesser degree, by Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Maryland. But Virginia adopted a more complex method of dealing with these unexpected arrivals. On the 15th of November, 1755, Robert Dinwiddie, governor of that colony, wrote to the Board of Trade to report that more

3 Circular from Lawrence to the Governors on the Continent, Halifax, 11 August 1755, printed in the *Report of the Public Archives of Canada*, 1905, II, App. B, pp. 15-16.

4 Printed in *Acts and Resolves Public and Private of the Province of Massachusetts Bay*, Vol. III (Boston 1878), p. 951.

than a thousand of the French Neutrals from Nova Scotia had arrived and that as they “have refus’d to swear Allegiance to His Majesty, so we can have but a very poor Prospect of their being either good Subjects or useful People”.⁵ Two days later, he wrote to Sir Thomas Robinson, the Secretary of the Board, that “it is very disagreeable to the People to have imported to rest among us a No. of French People, w’n many of y’t Nat’n joined with Ind’s are now muder’g and scalp’g our Frontier Settlers”.⁶ The Acadians were French, they were Catholics, and Dinwiddie considered them “intestine Enemies”.⁷ Nevertheless, he was quickly brought to admit that he was confronted with something more than a number of enemy captives. This becomes clear in letters written by him on November 24th, 1755. After complaining that the Council were much against the Acadians and that a “great Drought” meant that he was short of Troops, Dinwiddie summarized a conversation he had had with the Acadians. His inquiries as to whether they would settle down as peaceable subjects according to the laws of the colony had brought the Acadian reply that they had already sworn allegiance to his Majesty and would not swear it again; that they had forfeited their rights through the faults of others; and that they desired the free exercise of their religion.⁸ In his second letter Dinwiddie declared that the Acadians were “to be maintain’d till next Spring, w’n they shall have lands assigned to settle on”.⁹ In fact, next spring the Acadians were not assigned lands but put on board ships, and, at the cost of £ 5,000, sent to Britain.¹⁰ If Lawrence could solve the problem of Acadian loyalty in Nova Scotia by re-locating the Acadians, Virginia, in a similar situation, could do likewise.

Colonel Lawrence had not seen fit to warn Virginia of his plans, and the British were likewise not notified in advance of this new deportation. News of Dinwiddie’s action first came to the attention of British authorities via a firm of Bristol merchants, Messrs. Lidderdale Harmer and Farrell, who were advised by one of their ships returning from Virginia that they could expect the imminent arrival of another of their ships with a large number of “Neutral French on board”.¹¹ On the 14th of June, 1756, these merchants wrote to the Secretary of State, Charles James Fox, “praying his orders for the disposal” of these people and were directed on the 18th of June to apply

5 Printed in R. Brooks, ed., *Dinwiddie Papers* (Richmond, Virginia Historical Collections, 1899), II, pp. 269-72.

6 17 November 1755, *ibid.*, p. 268.

7 Dinwiddie to Shirley, 28 April 1756, *ibid.*, pp. 394.

8 24 November 1755, *ibid.*, p. 284.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 281.

10 Dinwiddie to Dobbs, 11 June 1756, *ibid.*, pp. 442-443.

11 L.G. and H.T. to Hon. John Cleveland, 24 November 1756, Medical Board Out-Letters, Admiralty 98/5, Public Record Office, London. This letter is a summary of the events that occurred when the Acadians arrived in England made by clerks in the Medical Board, which at this time was part of the Sick and Hurt Board of the Admiralty.

to the Medical Department of the Sick and Hurt Board of the Admiralty, the authority generally responsible for prisoners of war in England, who, it was stated, would have received in the interim orders "to take care of the said Neutrals".¹² On the 22nd of June there was a meeting of this body with the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, and one of its members, Mr. Guiguer, set out that same night for Bristol. His instructions were "to make Provision for, and to cause them [the Neutral French] to be paid sixpence per day for their Subsistence, and to give to each what may be reasonable for Lodging or to provide the same as shall appear most for the service".¹³ By the time Mr. Guiguer reached Bristol, the *Virginia Packet* with 289 Acadians aboard was already there.¹⁴ As a result of his actions, they were landed on the 24th of June and housed in "Warehouses".¹⁵ By the end of the month Falmouth had reported the arrival of 220 French Neutrals,¹⁶ and Liverpool, 242.¹⁷ Finally, in the first week of July, there was a report from Southampton of the arrival of 293 French neutrals.¹⁸ Thus as summer opened families of Leblancs and Landrys, Boudraults and Melansons, born and bred in Nova Scotia, whose ancestors had first settled there in the seventeenth century, set about surviving internment in eighteenth-century England.

The Acadians were to remain in England for nearly seven years, but the most severe test of their capacity for survival was to come that first summer. An epidemic of small-pox attacked all four groups in the month of July, 1756. By the 9th of August the Medical Department computed that upwards of two hundred were ill.¹⁹ So great was the death toll, removing approximately a quarter of their number,²⁰ that the Medical Department was called upon to defend its treatment of the Acadians. Rumour of the disaster had reached France and Louis XV's government protested to Fox that the Acadians had been inadequately housed and inhumanely neglected.²¹ The Medical Department rebutted the charges vigorously, calling them "False, Indecent and Absurd".²² They contended that the mortality suffered by the Neutrals, "great as it has been, really had not exceeded the common Computation at large

12 *Ibid.*

13 J.M. and J.B. to John Cleveland, 28 June 1756, *ibid.*

14 Minutes of the Medical Board, 21 June 1756, Admiralty 19/30.

15 J.M. and J.B. to John Cleveland, 28 June 1756, Admiralty 98/5.

16 J.M. and J.B. to John Cleveland, 23 June 1756, *ibid.*

17 Minutes of the Medical Board, 29 June 1756, Admiralty, 99/30.

18 *Ibid.*, July 1756.

19 J.M. and J.B. to John Cleveland, 9 August 1756, Admiralty 98/5.

20 The numbers reported as landed in 1756 were: Southampton 293; Bristol 289; Liverpool 242; Falmouth 250; total 1054. Numbers for these same towns in 1762 were: Southampton 220; Bristol 152; Liverpool 215; Falmouth 153; total 741. Of these last 149 were less than seven years old. L.G. and J.B. to John Cleveland, 23 November 1762, Admiralty 93/9.

21 J.B. and J.J. to John Cleveland, 17 September 1756, Admiralty 98/5.

22 J.B. and J.H. to John Cleveland, 30 September 1756, *ibid.*

so much as might reasonably have been expected". The root cause of the severity of the epidemic lay in the "Circumstances . . . of the People, their long Voyage, their Change of Climate, their Habits of Body, their other disorders and their irregularity and Obstinacy". They went on to affirm that "not only the Laws of nations and the principles of Justice have been Strictly Observed but that even the most imperfect right of Humanity have been scrupulously complied with", and that "such Representations and Complaints" as had been made by the French were "very Dishonourable to the Nation and if causelessly made, matter ought to be set in a just light to Foreign States, to remove as much as possible the prejudices conceived upon the spreading such Complaints".²³

Once past the small-pox disaster, the Acadians made the best of their situation. As a community they were extraordinarily well equipped to survive in exile. By 1755 there had been more than a hundred and fifty years of separate Acadian existence. Their history provided them with a traditional pattern of life to remember, something that could be recalled during their wanderings as a reality to be fought for and recovered. During the seventeenth century their political fate, to be ruled at times by France and at times by England, had encouraged Acadian settlers to have a strong sense of identification with their own communities. Their sense of loyalty to any particular European power was a matter of enthusiasms tempered by common sense. At no time did the majority of the Acadian community rise in support of either France or England, and, although the official control of their lands changed hands, the lands remained Acadian. By the middle of the eighteenth century Acadia was their natural homeland, a country created along the shores of the Bay of Fundy, spreading farms and settlements not only north and west but along the Atlantic coast northeast of the Chignecto isthmus. Comparatively isolated from the main stream of European settlement in North America, the Acadians had developed their own patterns of political action and government. Their expulsion did not expunge this country from their minds, but by depriving them of it made the Acadians remember it with desperate longing. Indeed, it was the remembrance of things past that was to enable the Acadians to resist the spiritual fragmentation which is frequently the lot of deported communities.

To the force of such a vision the Acadians added another strength: a powerful family structure. Large families connected to each other by intermarriage formed the basis of Acadian demography. Not only was each village a group of related families, but kinship lines linked the various settlements with one another²⁴ When sent into exile each group of Acadians was more than an assembly of individuals or of nuclear families concerned for a very

23 J.B. and J.H. to John Cleveland, 17 September 1756, *ibid.*

24 Griffiths, *The Acadians*, p. 18; G. Massignon, *Les Parlers français d'Acadie* (Paris, 1955), I, pp. 42-75.

small circle of people; it was an assembly of relatives. The traditions of the Acadian community had formed a social structure which automatically looked after weaker brethren. A lively interest on the part of every individual in the affairs of everyone else was an Acadian norm. Their emotions embraced the generations. Exile both tore at the heart of Acadian families and revealed the tenacity of Acadian emotions. Daniel Leblanc died in Philadelphia in 1756, protesting to the end his loyalty to the British and weeping because there were only sixteen of his descendants at his bedside instead of the gathering of sixteen children and a hundred and two grand-children to whom he wished to say good-bye.²⁵ Later records of Acadian experiences during the twenty-five years they remained in France, show both an extraordinary knowledge of where sisters, parents and other relatives were and a continuing concern for their welfare.²⁶ Although divided into widely separated groups, the Acadians confronted their exile as a community.

Further, this community had traditions of political action which were well suited to battle for Acadian interests in exile. The great American historian, J.B. Brebner, pointed the way to understanding Acadian history when he wrote that "There were in effect, two Acadies, each important in its own way. The one was the Acadie of the international conflict, the other the land settled and developed by the Acadians".²⁷ The Acadians not only managed the affairs of their villages with far less reference to outside authorities than might be imagined, but also learned to confront outside officialdom with a semblance of unity. These traditions originated in the seventeenth century when garrison and officials, the transient signs of European metropolitan government, were often located a considerable distance from the settlements. During British rule of the Acadians between 1710 and 1755 a number of Acadians acted as representatives of their villages, travelling to another locality to present the views of their communities about political matters. The Acadians took with them into exile habits of political organization which made them capable of reacting to what was happening to them instead of merely being a number of passive victims. They were accustomed to organizing their communities to present a particular point and to argue this viewpoint with officials representing more powerful authorities.

If the Acadians had strengths within their community which would help them to survive in exile, occasionally the very terms of that exile contributed to their needs. The Acadian claim to be British, to be "subjects of the King",²⁸

25 Petition to the King of Great Britain, c. 1760, printed in P.H. Smith, *Acadia: A Lost Chapter in American History* (Boston, 1884), p. 236.

26 Commentary in miscellaneous papers, dated 1765, IF 2158, Archives Départementales [hereafter AD], Ille et Vilaine. None of the Acadian material in France has been catalogued. This particular collection is made up of eighteenth-century notes, brought together by the commissioners of the marine who were responsible for the Acadians.

27 J.B. Brebner, *New England's Outpost* (New York, 1927), p. 45.

28 J.M. and J.B. to John Cleveland, 28 June 1756, Admiralty 98/5.

was accepted by the authorities. As a result, they were provided with quarters that militated against social fragmentation, and with a reasonable standard of living. Whether established in Liverpool, Bristol, Southampton, or Penryn, the Acadians were kept together. In Liverpool a section of the town was set aside for them.²⁹ In Bristol warehouses were transformed for their use.³⁰ Whatever the pattern, the Acadians were grouped in communities of between 150 and 250 persons, large enough to give the individual some point of reference in an alien land. The separation of these communities from the surrounding population was further marked by regulations governing the Acadians' right to work and by the government pensions provided for them. The Admiralty generally ruled that "all the Neutrals were restrained from working to prevent the Clamor of the labouring People in the towns where they resided".³¹ This embargo was by no means rigidly enforced, especially in Penryn and Southampton,³² but it was sufficient to mark out the Acadians as a group from the working world that surrounded them.

Even more than this regulation, the Admiralty pension set them apart from the working people in the neighbourhood. The allowance which was given to them was sixpence per day per adult and threepence a day for those under seven years of age, for a total of £ 9.2.6 per annum per adult and £ 4.4.3. per annum per child.³³ A family of six, a size that was median for these communities in 1763,³⁴ received £ 36.10.0 per annum, considerably more than the average British labourer earned.³⁵ Further, this allowance was for subsistence; shelter, some clothing and other necessities were also provided.³⁶ While the standard of living was well below that experienced by the exiles before 1755, it did not affect seriously the Acadian birth-rate.³⁷ Infant mortality controlled the growth of the community until the end of 1757, but after that year the children born lived. An Admiralty survey made of the communities in November 1762 revealed a population with a quarter of its number

29 Nivernois à Prasline, Londres 17 fevrier, 1763, Archives des Affaires Etrangères [hereafter AAE], correspondance d'Angleterre, 449, f. 345, Archives Nationales.

30 J.M. and J.B. to John Cleveland, 28 June 1756, Admiralty 98/5.

31 J.M., J.B. and H.G. to John Cleveland, 21 May 1761, Admiralty 98/8.

32 L.G., J.B. and H.G. to John Cleveland, 19 July 1758, Admiralty 98/7.

33 J.M. and J.B. to John Cleveland, 28 June 1756, Admiralty 98/5; Minutes of the Medical Board, 6 and 7 July 1756, Admiralty 99/30.

34 Shipping lists of Acadian embarked for France, 1763, printed in M.P. and N.G. Reider, *The Acadians in France* (Louisiana, 1972), pp. 86-121.

35 Asa Briggs, *How they lived* (Oxford, 1969), III, p. 143. In the north of England in Cumberland, a housekeeper cook earned £5 per year; the Acadian allowance was £ 9. 7s 6d. See E. Hughes, *North Country Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1865), II, p. 116.

36 L.G., J.M., J.B. and H.T. to John Cleveland, 8 February 1757, Admiralty 98/6.

37 For the effect of nutrition on fertility, see P. Goubert, *Cent Mille Provinciaux au XVII^e siècle: Beauvais et Beauvais de 1600 à 1700* (Paris, 1968), pp. 49-106.

aged less than seven.³⁸ While such figures hint at the appalling impact of the small-pox epidemic of 1756, they also indicate the vitality of the Acadian communities.

This vitality showed itself unmistakably when in 1763 an enquiry was made of the Acadians as to “what manner they would chuse to be disposed of” when hostilities ceased. The summary of the replies from the Neutral French at Bristol made by the Admiralty reads as follows:

- 1 We hope We shall be sent into Our own Countries and that our Effects etc., which We have been dispossessed of (not withstanding the faithful neutrality which We have always observed) will be restored to Us.
- 2 If the first Article is allowed Us, it draws with it the free exercise of our Religion, which We shall not think we enjoy if the Priests that may be permitted to instruct Us are not sent by way of France.
- 3 We humbly beg His Majesty will grant Us all our Ancient Rights and Privileges which We enjoyed before, obediently consenting to pay the customary duties of the Country, and as proof of our integrity we will bind ourselves by an Oath of fidelity and neutrality, not to bear Arms against any warlike Nation whatsoever.
- 4 After His Majesty may have been pleased to indemnify us for our losses. We hope from his Goodness that he will please to provide Us with the necessary Provisions.
- 5 We earnestly desire that in case any fault would be laid to our Charge or that the Commander should complain of Us to the Court, that we may be permitted to chuse among us some persons whom We may depute to justify Us before those who are to judge.
- 6 If we could be exempted from having any fort among our habitations We should look upon that as an essential Point of happiness.
- 7 If another War should happen, We desire, in case we should be forced to declare Ourselves, that we may be permitted to retire where we may think proper.

The Admiralty noted that “the Neutrals at Southampton had at Liverpool desire to be on the same footing as those at Bristol”, but that those at Penryn asked for time to form their address.³⁹ This summary concludes with the remark that “A letter from Liverpool from some of the Neutral French, but which is not signed, desires that they may be under the French Government again, and that they may have what has been taken from them returned again if possible”. After eight years in exile the majority of the Acadian communities asserted their right to be considered a neutral people. They demanded compensation for the troubles they had endured and asked that the provision

38 L.G. and J.B. to John Cleveland, 23 November 1762, Admiralty 98/9.

39 L.G. and J.B. to John Cleveland, 4 January 1763, *ibid.*

for their future should be a restoration of their past, changed only to ensure that no new deportation could trouble their lives.

Their actual fate, however, was to be closer to the desires expressed in the unsigned letter from Liverpool than to the vision outlined with such care by the Acadians of Bristol. This letter was sent by some Liverpool Acadians in September 1762 to one of the chief negotiators of the Peace of Paris, Louis Jules Barbon Mancini Mazarini, duc de Nivernois, Grandee of Spain, Knight of the King, Peer of France, who had recently arrived in London.⁴⁰ Nivernois was something very close to a "career diplomat", previously posted in Rome and Berlin, and was well known at Court, where he had played in Voltaire's *Enfant Prodigue* with Madame de Pompadour.⁴¹ It is difficult to determine exactly what he knew about the Acadians when he received this letter. Nivernois' instructions had emphasized "the importance of hastening the signature of the preliminaries in order to ensure the cessation of hostilities and the conclusion of peace".⁴² Since such preliminaries included Anglo-French disputes over most of the globe, it was obviously a task which would relegate the Acadians to a side-line. Nonetheless, Nivernois would be aware of Nova Scotia as a result of the negotiations of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, when the precise boundaries of the colony had raised much debate.⁴³ Further, over the last four years Acadians had landed in France itself, at Boulogne, Brest, Cherbourg and St. Malo in 1758; at Boulogne, Dunkerque and St. Malo in 1759; Cherbourg in 1760; and at Rochefort in 1761.⁴⁴

Whatever Nivernois' knowledge of Acadian matters prior to September 1762, his reaction to the letter he received from Liverpool was a memoir to his superiors, in which he pointed out how valuable such subjects would be, if re-established in the French colonies.⁴⁵ Nivernois viewed the Acadian people at this time as unquestioningly loyal to France. Nor did he come to consider the Acadian people in any very different light during the months ahead. Indeed, the attitude of most of the French officials who dealt with the Acadians before the mid-1760's was based far more on French vision than on Acadian realities. It was a vision born from a marriage of political aim and philosophical belief. The surrender of "Acadie or Nova Scotia" by the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht, 1713, was never considered by the French

40 The report is published in the Report of the Public Archives of Canada, 1905, II, App. G, p. 150 *et seq.*

41 Jean Orieux, *Voltaire ou la Royauté de l'Esprit* (Paris, 1966), p. 325.

42 Z.E. Rashed, *The Peace of Paris, 1763* (London, 1951), p. 165.

43 There had been a number of publications since then on the subject, among them M.F. Pidanzet de Mairobert's *Lettres sur les Véritables limites des possessions Anglaises et Françaises en Amérique* (Paris, 1755) and J.N. Moreau's *Mémoire contenant le précis des Faits, avec leurs Pièces Justificatives sur les limites d'Acadie* (Paris, 1756).

44 See the surveys of Acadians landing in France collected in IF. 2169, AD, Ille et Vilaine.

45 Nivernois à Etienne Francois, Duc de Choiseul, October 1762, cited in O.W. Winzerling, *Acadian Odyssey* (Louisiana, 1955), p. 26.

government officials as the final and immutable political settlement of these lands and the Acadians were looked upon by the French authorities as a people who, very probably, would one day again be ruled by France. The transmutation of Acadian loyalties was never considered, for the French saw in the existence of a common language and a common religion the foundation of nationality.⁴⁶ Though not the unique property of eighteenth-century French government officials, this belief was one which those who ruled France in the wake of Louis XIV held almost unquestioned. The unification of Breton peasant and Marseillais fisherman, Bordeaux trader and Champagne vintner, into subjects of France had led the administrators of the country to consider mere affection for land a very poor motivating force when placed besides the claims of tongue and faith. One French official, who had had some experience of the Acadians in the 1760's, asserted that their misfortunes arose from their "attachment à leur anciennes terres".⁴⁷ It was his view that such an attachment should be sacrificed to the wider claims of loyalty owed to the very embodiment of the French language and the Catholic religion, the French state. Thus, Nivernois was merely following the path taken by earlier French officials in their dealings with Acadians when he considered these newly discovered exiles solely as loyal Frenchmen, whom it was the duty of the King of France to rescue.

Such a path allowed a great deal about the Acadian people to go unperceived. Overemphasis of the fact that the first settlers to be established as Acadians were French, obscured the equally important evidence that the community, once established, had continuing and important contact with New England. The dominance of settlers of French descent hid the important evidence that the community, once established, had continuing and important contact with New England. The dominance of settlers of French descent hid the important influence of English, Irish and Scots families in the community.⁴⁸ The unbroken maintenance of French claims to "Acadie or Nova Scotia" blocked any clear view of the impact on the colony of English rule from 1654 to 1670. The overwhelming evidence that English administrators placed little or no reliance upon Acadian loyalty between 1710 and 1755 covered up the equally overwhelming evidence that the Acadian people, as a whole, never fought for France during this period. Nor was there any consideration of the possibility that any mark would have been made on the Acadian community by more than forty years of British rule. Yet this was an

46 Later when French officials had had direct experience of dealing with the Acadians, they modified their views. The records on the Acadian sojourn in France are voluminous. The most important collections are in the provincial archives of Morbihan (Vannes), Ille et Vilaine (Rennes), Loire Atlantique (Nantes), Charente-Maritime (LaRoche), Vienne (Poitiers), and the Municipal Archives in Bordeaux.

47 La Galissonnière au Evêque, Paris, 19 mai 1752, G.111.106, Archives de l'Archevêque de Québec.

48 Griffiths, *The Acadians*, chs. I and II, *passim*.

interval sufficient to ensure that the vast majority of the Acadians could have had little, if any, personal experience of French suzerainty.

Thus there was no French tradition of considering the Acadians as being a distinct entity or of having any kind of community identity separate from that of France and it is not surprising that in all his actions concerning them Nivernois always considered Acadians as basically and essentially French. His subsequent reports to the French government on Acadian matters contain the same opinions about Acadian political and religious loyalties that he expressed in his original memoir written in October 1762. He followed up this memoir by despatching his Secretary, de la Rochette, to Liverpool to make a first-hand report on the Acadian situation. Rochette not only went to Liverpool, on December 26th, 1762, but in the following weeks visited Southampton, Falmouth (Penryn) and Bristol.⁴⁹ On the 17th of February, 1763, Nivernois sent an account of his Secretary's work to France in the form of a lengthy report on the Acadian situation. The report presents Acadian history as the simple annals of the heroic peasant. After the Treaty of Utrecht, it is stated, the Acadians kept not only "leur eglises et leurs pretres" but also "l'attachement le plus profond et le plus tenace pour la France".⁵⁰ They practised their religion with a profound and unshakeable devotion. When faced with a demand by the English for an oath which "attaquoit leur religion", rather than betray their beliefs, the Acadians accepted exile.

From the general considerations the Report moves to discuss the realities of the Acadian position in England in 1763. The situation in Liverpool is first analysed. Until the question of peace had arisen the Acadians had been living unmolested, "peu inquietes",⁵¹ in a section of the town assigned to them, with Liverpool itself the limits of their prison. But the immediate effect for the Acadians of the news of the probably ending of the hostilities was an attempt by the British commissioner, Langton, whose charge they were, to persuade them to return to Nova Scotia as loyal British subjects. This man had stooped so low as to employ a Scots priest to further his designs, promising this unhappy creature his own parishes in Acadie in exchange for "des sermons scandaleux" in favour of Langton's designs.⁵² The report comments that "54, parmi lesquels sont presque tous 'les vieillards' " accepted this offer, but they refused to commit the decision to paper and had since all written to Nivernois begging for his protection. The remainder, "170 personnes, faisant 38 families", were in despair and might also have succumbed, had not an alternative plan been proposed by a Frenchman, a pilot born at Le Havre and awaiting ransom at Liverpool, who suggested that a letter be

49 Nivernois à Praslin, Londres, 17 février 1763, AAE, Correspondance d'Angleterre, 449, f.345.

50 *Ibid.*, f.343.

51 *Ibid.*, f.346.

52 *Ibid.*, f.346 verso.

written to Nivernois. An Irishman, married to an Acadian, asking for his recompense to be allowed to remain with the Acadians, wherever Fortune should lead them, took the letter to London.⁵³ The report denies the importance of the Acadian longing for their former lands and implies that Acadians could only be brought to return to their homeland by British trickery. To emphasize this, the statistical comparison of the number in the group who briefly wavered in their allegiance to France with the number that remained unswerving in their loyalty is enumerated differently; those who fell victim to British traps are counted as individuals, but those who did not are counted as men whose actions would also commit their families. No comment is made on the fact that those who worked so determinedly for the interests of French in Liverpool were not themselves of Acadian birth but two people who had never seen Nova Scotia.

Rochette's experience in Southampton are recounted with the same emphasis. The lack of warmth with which he was welcomed is attributed to Acadian suspicion that he might be an English spy, sent to trick them. Therefore, their very love for France was "l'unique motif de leur defiance".⁵⁴ It is also suggested that Southampton was close enough to London to expose the Acadians to a positive barrage of blandishments: "Le général Mordaunt et même en ce dernier lieu le duc d'York n'avoient pas cru au dessous d'eux de les solliciter de renoncer à la France".⁵⁵ The Acadians of Falmouth (Penryn) proved a little more difficult to tailor into the required pattern. Although there had been some hitch in the payment of their allowance from the government and some of the Acadians were much in debt in this town, this group had made more progress than their brethren elsewhere towards integration with the people who surrounded them.⁵⁶ They had the freedom of the neighbourhood and were not confined to any special part of the town for their living quarters, while the young people were apprenticed to English workmen and had from this "contracte des inclinations peu françoises".⁵⁷ The report admits that the good-will of these Acadians could not really be trusted but makes no attempt to assess the possible importance of this evidence. Instead, this section of the document concludes with a very cursory survey of the situation in Bristol, where 180 Acadians "s'abandonnent entièrement à la protection du Roy". The whole problem of the French preconceptions of Acadian characteristics is highlighted by this summary treatment of the Acadians in Bristol, for these were the same people who had recently an-

53 *Ibid.*, f.347.

54 *Ibid.*

55 *Ibid.*, f.347 verso.

56 A local diarist considered that "During their abode here by their industry and civil deportment they have gained the esteem of all". See Felix Farley's Bristol Journal, cited in D. Vintner, "The Acadian Exiles in England 1756-1763", *Dalhousie Review*, 36 (1967), p. 352.

57 Nivernois à Praslin, 17 fevrier 1763, AAE, Correspondance d'Angleterre, 449, f.348 verso.

swered the British Admiralty most trenchantly when questioned about their wishes for their future.

The Report contains an even greater volume of evidence of French misunderstanding of the Acadian identity. It notes that “il y a une defiance generale qui prevaut plus ou moins chez tous les Acadiens”, but explanations are quickly offered for this attitude. The Acadians resident in England were aware that inadequate treatment had been accorded their kin who had already arrived in France and they had heard rumours that France intended to send them to her territories in the Caribbean, an idea which repelled them. Due basically, it is suggested, to the influence among the Acadians of priests, men who “sont Anglais ou Ecosais et que l'on a flatté de l'esperance de devenir leurs curés en Acadie”, the Acadians were constantly thinking of their former lands: “Ils se flattent toujours de retourner en Acadie et d'y jouir du libre exercice de leur religion sous la protection du Roy. Ceux même qui sont en France, en Boulogne, St. Malo et Rochefort persistent dans cette opinion et l'ont même écrit aux Acadiens en Angleterre”. Moreover, “ils craignent que le Roy n'abandonne leurs frères dispersés dans les colonies angloises du continent septentrional de l'Amerique”.⁵⁸

At no stage does the Report consider this evidence in detail. There is no comment made on the quite extraordinary level of communication which the widely scattered Acadians had maintained between themselves since their dispersal. Nothing is inferred from the evidence that a group of supposedly destitute refugees could be well-informed about policies, born in another country, affecting their future. Nor is there any discussion of the probable future behaviour of subjects who are prepared, while supposedly existing in deplorable circumstances, to query the plans of well-wishers. The statement of Acadian wishes, explicit though it is, is introduced with a verb that indicates self-deception: such wishes were in the eyes of French officials, unrealistic and therefore not worthy of serious consideration.

Instead of indulging in a commentary on the possible import of this evidence of Acadian complexity, the Report turns to a discussion of the problems of the Acadian people as a whole, the “plus de 10,000 [gens] qui meurent de faim”.⁵⁹ Their characteristics are multiplied but the result is still a stereotype. French, Catholic, to these attributes are added the virtues of a pastoral people, and the Acadians become a simple people, who had led an existence far removed from the vanities and corruptions of Europe. Hard workers, “tous laboureurs ou percheurs”, accustomed to the rigors of “un climat très rude” and “connoissent très peu de maladies”,⁶⁰ the Acadian community is made up of individuals who are industrious, “malheureux et respect-

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, f.349.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, f.349 verso.

able".⁶¹ It was obviously both politic and just to encourage such paragons.

The report concludes by calling for the gathering up of the majority of Acadians, from wherever they were to be discovered, and their establishment within the dominion of the King of France, preferably in Brittany, preferably on the estates of Nivernois, and definitely with the aid of a considerable amount of government money. It is interesting to note that it proposes that the resettlement should imitate "la pratique constamment suivie des Anglois lorsqu'il établissent des colonies", the settlement of the Acadians in villages of a hundred families, with lands distributed to them in lots, a pattern of settlement which the Acadians had never known. The support for each family should encompass "des vivres pour la première année et de la semence pour la second, des instruments de labourage et des instruments et matériaux à bâtir". Animals were also to be distributed and families to have their choice of a cow, or a mare, or two sows, or five sheep, with a stallion and a bull the common property of each village. Finally, these establishments should be "exempte de toutes impositions pendant 50 ans". Such proposals might seem an expensive solution to the problem of the Acadians but, the Report argues, it would pay considerable dividends in future years, for the Acadians, so treated, would develop into ideal French citizens.⁶²

The immediate reaction of the French government to this scheme was favourable. Choiseul agreed to the settlement of at least some of the Acadians on the island owned by Nivernois off the coast of Brittany.⁶³ Even the revelation of the Acadian debts, approximately 14,000 livres, did not dampen this first enthusiasm, partly due to the fact that Nivernois claimed that just under half the sum could be paid by the Acadians themselves, taxing the group as a whole for the benefit of the indigent.⁶⁴ On the 6th of April 1763, Nivernois was informed that the King would advance the monies to clear this hurdle and that funds were immediately available to transport the Acadians to France. He was urged to spare no effort in the work of removing the Acadians.⁶⁵

This task of moving the Acadians to France was placed in the hands of Nivernois' secretary, Rochette. He was informed that plans had been made by Choiseul for ships to go to Falmouth, Liverpool and Southampton and to return with the Acadians to St. Malo and Morlaix.⁶⁶ Writing from Bristol in the middle of May, 1763, Rochette posed a problem which, although he found the solution swiftly enough for himself, was to bedevil French

61 *Ibid.*, f.352.

62 *Ibid.*,

63 Duc de Praslin au duc le Nivernois, Versailles, 1 mars 1762, AAE, Correspondance d'Angleterre, 450, F.7 verso.

64 Nivernois à Praslin, 14 mars 1762. *ibid.*, f.83.

65 Choiseul à Nivernois, 6 avril 1763, *ibid.*, f.205 verso.

66 *Ibid.*

authorities considerably in the near future. It was the problem of who should be considered an Acadian, and in particular whether those whose North American homes had been Ile St. Jean were included in the term. Rochette decided affirmatively, adding forty more passengers to his lists, because, as he explained, "ils ont tous été réclaimés par les Acadiens euxmêmes".⁶⁷ As France attempted to assimilate her new citizens, the distinction between Acadian and Canadian was to prove a matter of importance, not merely in the distribution of pensions but also in the amount of liberty of action granted to the newcomers. On the whole, it was more advantageous to be considered Acadian than Canadian, for it meant that one would be the recipient of considerable government concern, and concerted efforts for resettlement. In 1763 it was even better to be an Acadian exile than a French officer, prisoner of war in England. On arrival at Southampton, Rochette wrote that he embarked a number of the latter on the ship provided for the Acadians, for their condition stirred his compassion.⁶⁸

Rochette made considerable efforts to see that the sea passage would be as comfortable as possible. His major problem was the large number of women and children, who needed mattresses and shelter on board, and "plus de bagages à eux seuls que quatre régiments de dragons". He provisioned the ship with "pain blanc, de veau, d'oeufs, de beurre, et de lait pour l'usage de ces malades et des enfans", but left the distribution of these provisions in the hands of two of the older Acadians. He could not restrain himself from one final comment. "Si ces bonnes gens", he wrote, "n'avoient pas une quantité prodigieuse de *butin* (c'est le mot dont ils se servent à l'imitation des sauvages leurs anciens voisins et amis pour désigner leurs effets en général) ils auroient été plus à leur aise, mais ce butin remplit presque toute la calle et une grande partie de l'entrepont".⁶⁹ The next Acadians to be transported were those of Penryn, the group that Rochette had already noted as being more adapted to English ways than he considered fit. His first problem was that the town itself was in the midst of celebrating Whit Sunday with "une exactitude singulière". "Toute l'honorable corporation de Penryn", he wrote, "n'a pas cessé durant trois jours d'être yvre de cidre et d'eau-de-vie de Nantes". Business was impossible for a full day because men and women alike were engaged in watching the "combat du taureau". When he did manage to begin assembling the Acadians for their journey to Falmouth, Rochette found his work exasperating. He commented:

Ils sone les plus opulens de les plus civilés de toute la bande, ils sont aussi les plus entêtée et les moins candides et ils m'ont donné plus de mal que je ne croyais. Cependant avec quilques grosses paroles, j'en suis venu à

67 Rochette à d'Eon, Bristol 14 mai 1762, AAE, Correspondance d'Angleterre, supp. 13, f.60.

68 Rochette à d'Eon, Southampton, 18 mai 1763, AAE, Correspondance d'Angleterre, supp. 13, f.72.

69 *Ibid.*

bout. Il y en a une leur gousset, ceux-là auroient traité volontiers d'argents dans compaignon Mr. le commissaire parce qu'il n'a point de montre. Ils n'en pourtant rien fait, grâces au ton despotique que j'ai pris. Au demarrant tout est bien, et ils sont regrettés généralement . . .⁷⁰

So the Acadians from Penryn set out on further travels. Behind them they left those who had fallen to small-pox; more than sixty are named in the church register of Saint Gluvias for 1756.⁷¹ Rochette, having parted with the Acadians from Penryn, concluded his work by supervising the Liverpool Acadians on board 'L'Esturgeon' on the 7th June.⁷² Some five or six of the young men jumped ship at the last moment, but by the end of the second week in June the French embassy in London could report that the transportation of the Acadians from the British sea-ports to destinations on the French Atlantic coast had been completed.⁷³

Writing to Choiseul on June 13th, 1763, another member of Nivernois' staff, d'Eon drew yet one more picture of the Acadian character:

Plusiers de nos prisonniers françois se sont laissés, éblouir par les promesses des Anglois et one marqué en ce point beaucoup moins de fidelité à la France et de désir de vengeance que les malheureux Acadiens qui viennent de s'embarquer pour la France après avoir étonné toute l'Angleterre par leur probité, leurs moeurs et leur attachment inviolable à la misere effrainte qu'ils ont supportée jusqu'à la fin avec une courage heroique que tous les devraient avoir encoure, s'ils eussent conse vé leurs moeurs et pas connu le luxe.⁷⁴

But events were to show that a common language and a common religion did not by themselves render the Acadians French, nor did French generosity and Acadian gratitude dissolve the distinctiveness of this tiny people, and cause them to melt imperceptibly into the great mass of French people. In part this was due to the haphazard and dilatory way in which the French plans for Acadian re-settlement were actually put into practise. No major attempt to carry out their establishment in villages, on the lines proposed originally, took place before 1766-1767, when a concerted effort was made by a number

70 Rochette à d'Eon, Penryn, 26 mai 1753, AAE, Correspondance d'Angleterre, supp. 13, f.76.

71 R.S. Brun, "Le Séjour des Acadiens en Angleterre et leurs trous dans les Archives Britanniques, 1750-1763", *La Société Historique Acadienne*, 32ème Cahier, Vol. IV (1971), pp. 65-66; M. Daligaut, "Les Acadiens prisonniers en Angleterre", *ibid.*, 34ème Cahier, Vol. IV (1972), p. 160.

72 Rochette à d'Eon, Liverpool, 6-8 juin 1763, AAE, Correspondance d'Angleterre, supp. 13, f.80.

73 D'Eon au duc de Choiseul, Londres, 13 juin 1763, AAE, Correspondance d'Angleterre, 450, f.405. D'Eon was born on 5th October 1728 and died in London 21 May 1810. Another career diplomat he was despatched from Russia to England in 1762 to serve as second-in-command to Nivernois.

74 *Ibid.*

of French officials to organize the Acadians into four villages on the island of Belle Isle, off the south coast of Brittany.⁷⁵ It failed. In 1773, the Acadians were to be found scattered throughout the Atlantic ports.⁷⁶ Another attempt was made to bring together in one place all the Acadians exiled in France, this time the area near Poitiers,⁷⁷ but this experiment also failed. Finally, through the work of Acadians who had reached Louisiana via Santo Domingo,⁷⁸ seven ship loads of Acadians left France for New Orleans and Spanish rule in the summer of 1785.⁷⁹ This represented just over two thirds of the Acadians then in France.⁸⁰ Those who remained behind were mostly the old, the ill, or the orphaned young.⁸¹

In sum, the attempt to establish the Acadians within the dominions of the King of France failed. In the spring of 1763, the French hoped that in acquiring the Acadians they were acquiring a number of particularly desirable French citizens. It was a hope destined to be frustrated, due in part to the nature of the Acadians and partly to the fallacious perception of that nature by the French. The plans of the latter were based upon an idealisation of the Acadian, upon the vision of the Acadian as a peasantry whose most important characteristics were their language and their religion. Little account was taken of any other element making up the Acadian communities. French bureaucracy was baffled by the Acadian sense of family. Any attempt to prevent them roaming the French Atlantic coast to discover or re-visit relatives, always failed. Those from England had barely landed when a harried French official wrote in August 1763, that it was impossible to confine them to St.

75 The records for this are scattered. The legal business, land grants, etc., are to be found in Assiègements, Série C, 5176, 5177, 5179, 5180, 5182, 5185, 5188, 1763-1770, AD, Ille et Vilaine. The day-to-day problems are recorded in Collection Lanco, AD, La Vendée. An overview of the project is in the Extrait des Rolles de familles, Le Moyne mss, Archives Municipales [hereafter AM], Bordeaux.

76 The Acadians were distributed as follows: in Bretagne, at St. Malo 1723, at Morlaix 179, at Lorient et Quimper 22, at Belle Isle 81, at Nantes 81, at Brest 3; in Rouen, at Le Havre 159; in Caen, at Cherbourg 214; in La Rochelle, at Rochefort 74, at La Rochelle 45; in Amiens, at Boulogne 2; in Bordeaux 10; total for France 2510. "Recueil de pièces relatif aux Acadiens", f. 312, AM, Bordeaux.

77 The papers relating to this are uncatalogued correspondence, 1763-1770, in the AD, Poitiers Vienne. A number of articles about this stage of Acadian experiences have been published in the *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de l'ouest et des Musées de Poitiers*. In particular see Général A. Papuchon, "La colonie Acadienne en Poitou", Troisième Série, Tome I (1908), pp. 311-363.

78 Noticia de los accaimientos de la Luisiana en el ano de 1769, Miscelaneo, Tomo XIII, ff. 10-77, Palacio Real, Madrid.

79 Ships rolls, Marine 458, AD, Loire Atlantique, Nantes.

80 Winzerling, *Acadian Odyssey*, p. 154.

81 Their fates were various. Their lives can be traced as a separate thread through the welfare and pension activities of the various governments of the Revolution, of Napoleon and of Louis XVIII.

Malo and Morlaix.⁸² Moreover, so vigorously did the Acadians comment on the actions of the French officials, that the latter were driven to respond in kind. One Bordeaux official wrote to his superiors that the Acadian attitude showed evidence almost of a revolt and was of a kind "à faire suspecter des intelligences criminelles".⁸³

There was another factor which blocked the assimilation of the Acadians by eighteenth-century France — their inheritance from eighteenth-century Nova Scotia. A shrewd Breton lawyer remarked that the Acadians were used to a bountiful land, where the earth was not difficult to till, that they were accustomed to bread, milk and butter and meat, and looked down upon fish, cider and vegetables.⁸⁴ When the settlement of Belle Isle was founded, the Acadians had little idea of how to work in stone and demanded wood and even their methods of carpentry were much different from those practised by the French.⁸⁵ Above all, the Acadians were not used to the limitations which hedged the life of the average eighteenth-century Frenchman: the *corvée*, the restriction on travel within the country, the dominance of traditional concepts of occupations. The records of the Breton courts contain a considerable number of cases in which Acadians were on trial because they had tried to combine more than one career, farming and fishing, seaman and carpenter.⁸⁶ Acadian society in Nova Scotia had been a society in which individuals were accustomed to confront a number of tasks; eighteenth-century French society was one in which most people took up only one type of occupation. Once more the Acadians demonstrated a complexity beyond the experience of those who had to cope with them.

There had always been more to the Acadian community than a collection of expatriated French traits. In 1763, as in 1755, the Acadian identity was defined solely in terms of their language and religion. The Acadians of the British seaport found their longing for the land of their birth subordinated to an emphasis by French diplomats on their common speech and faith. During the next twenty years the French were to find that the Acadians looked upon their sea-ports as much a place of exile as had been Bristol or Liverpool. Acadian character would stand out against French society no less strongly than it had against British.

82 Unsigned report in letter book, 2 août 1763, C. 3819, f. 771, AD, Ille et Vilaine.

83 Torrey à Le noyne, 1773, Le Moyne Mss., AM, Bordeaux.

84 Lettre adressé à Guillot, Commissaire de la Marine à St. Malo, 10 mai 1759, IF 2159, AD, Ille et Vilaine.

85 *Ibid.*

86 E.G. LeLoutre à Warren 26 October 1768, Fonds Warren, Série E, AD, Morbihan.