

The Acadian Migrations

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Article abstract

Acadia from its initial settlement in 1604 until 1713 was a part of the French colonial empire in North America. By the Treaty of Utrecht most of Acadia and its French population was ceded to the British. The political instability generated by the anomalous position of the Acadians eventually led to their expulsion in 1755. During the following 50 years their efforts at repatriation were thwarted and only toward the end of the period were they finally settled in places offering a measure of security. The trends of their migrations over the period are illustrated, as well as their final settlement pattern in 1800.

THE ACADIAN MIGRATIONS *

par

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INTRODUCTION

The cultural diversity of people and shifting national boundaries have often led to political instability by the creation of enclaves and exclaves of minority groups. One measure by which such problems may be resolved is the forced migrations of peoples across international boundaries. Perhaps the most recent and well-known example of this were the measures taken in the Central European «Shatter Belt» following World War II to eliminate the minority problems that existed there before the War. The colonial history of North America provides a comparable situation. During the course of the Anglo-French struggle for control of North America, a new boundary was placed on the political map of the continent. The Acadians, French and Catholic, formerly within the French colonial empire suddenly found themselves political members of the English empire. The political instability generated by this new status eventually led to their expulsion in 1755, on the eve of the culminating struggle between the English and the French. For many years thereafter, the Acadian exiles sought either repatriation or a new homeland. They moved across the map always seeking but seldom finding a permanent home. Their efforts toward repatriation were ultimately frustrated. Not until 1800 did the Acadians finally achieve some measure of locational stability. This paper will concern itself with the Acadian migrations, their ephemeral homes and their final settlement pattern.

THE SITUATION OF ACADIA

Acadia was settled by French colonists early in the 17th century. Its location along the littoral of the Baie Française (Bay of Fundy) is important to an understanding of its history (See Map 1). First, Acadia was isolated from the major French settlement in the St. Lawrence Valley. There was little contact between the two and there gradually emerged a cultural distinctiveness despite the common antecedents of both groups. Acadian contact with France was at a minimum. There was little increment to the Acadian population via immigration from France after 1671 (RICHARD, 1895 : 32).

* This is a revision of an article which originally appeared in the *Proceedings of the Minnesota Academy of Science*, vol. 30, No. 1, 1962.

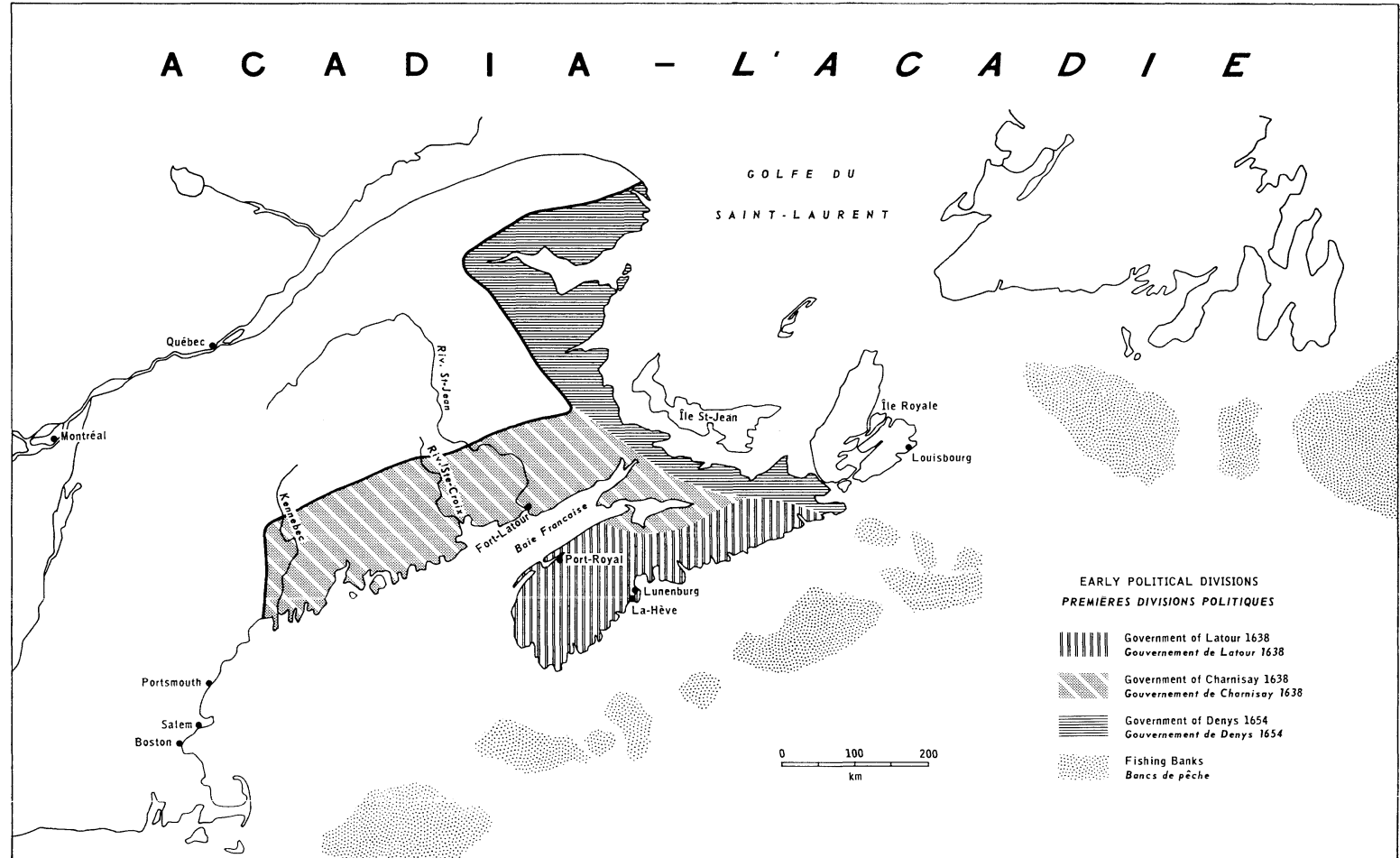
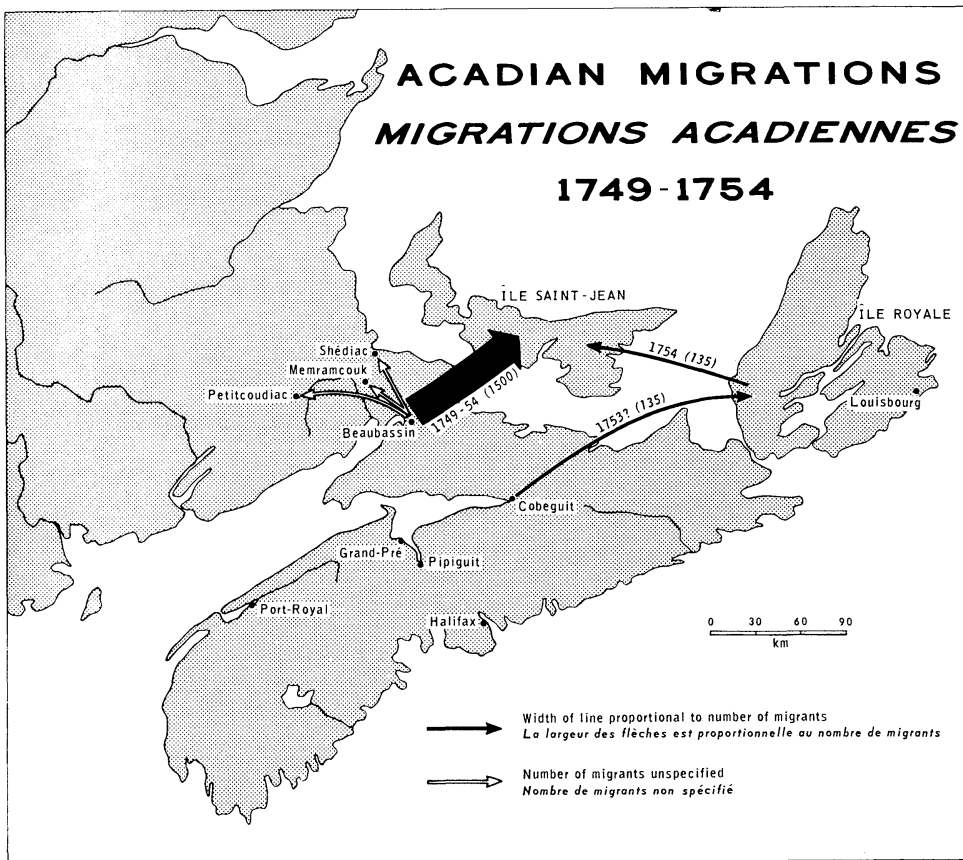


Figure 1

**Figure 2**

More important was the location of Acadia relative to the New England colonies. In a sense the French and the English faced each other from the opposite sides of a lake (the Gulf of Maine) which provided easy accessibility. Some relatively peaceful contacts generally of a commercial nature were made. Although the Acadians were primarily agriculturalists, they carried on some fishing activities and as a result contact and sometimes conflicts occurred with the New Englanders on the fishing banks. Increasingly, Acadia became a battlefield for the English and French. The French garrison at Louisbourg was often the military objective but the vulnerable position of Port-Royal, the major Acadian settlement in the 17th century, made it the object of plunder by New Englanders on several different occasions. By the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 Acadia was ceded to the English, and the Acadians were made nominal subjects of the British Crown.

With the peace there began a period of prosperity for the Acadians. Their number increased from 2,000 in 1710 to 8,000 in 1739 (RAMEAU, 1877: 354). New settlements were formed at the northernmost extremities of the Baie

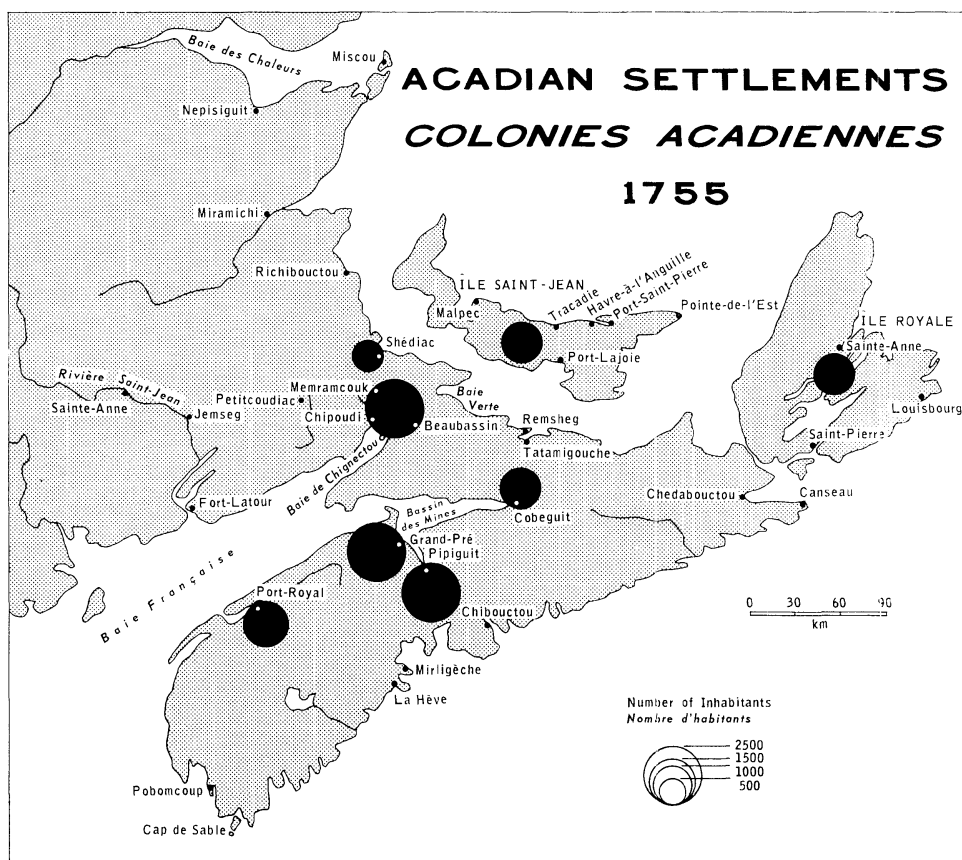


Figure 3

Française. As the Acadian population grew, so did the anxiety of the English. The tenuous English control of Acadia was highlighted by the potential threat of renewed hostilities with the French and the fact that their recalcitrant French subjects refused to take an oath of allegiance to the English crown. The events leading up to the expulsion became increasingly complex and cannot be dealt with here. Suffice it to say that Governor Lawrence made the decision without the approval of the English government.¹ In late summer and fall of 1755 the exile was carried out.

THE MIGRATIONS 1755-1757

Of the total of 16,000 Acadians in 1755 only 50% were under English jurisdiction (LEBLANC, 1961, see Map 2). Île Royale (Cape Breton), Île Saint-

¹ Some authors have not accepted political expediency as the cause for the expulsion but rather point to the greed of Governor Lawrence. See, for example, RICHARD, 1895: 60-63.

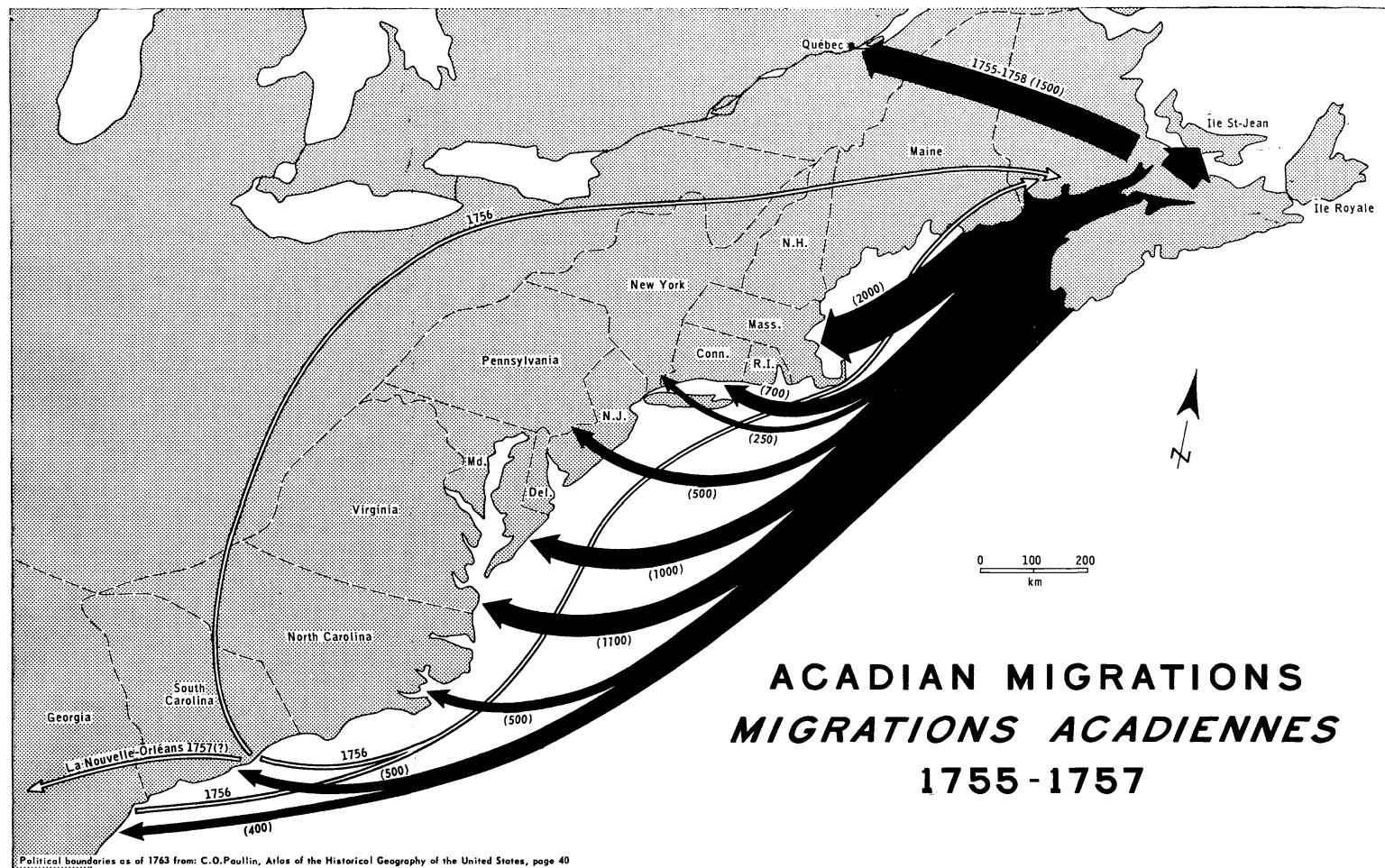


Figure 4

Jean (Prince Edward Island), and present day New Brunswick were retained by the French in 1713. These were not the major areas of Acadian settlement but served as a refuge for many who fled the large settlements in anticipation, especially in the period 1749-1754 (HARVEY, 1926: 133-34). Approximately 7,000 Acadians were exiled; the remaining 1,000 fled to safety. Map 3 shows the salient features which characterized the migrations of this period. First, peninsular Acadia was depopulated. Those who were forcibly removed were distributed throughout the American colonies where they were not as a general rule given a very cordial welcome. The Virginia colony «at public expense» soon shipped off to England its allotment of 1,100 exiles. South Carolina and Georgia made no effort to prevent (and in some cases aided) the Acadians in their attempts to return to Acadia by sea. Some few exiles were able to escape and made their way overland to the St. John River (New Brunswick). Otherwise most of the exiles were scattered throughout the colonies, dispersed in small group in many towns.

During this period nearly 2,000 Acadians removed themselves to the refuge area of Île Saint-Jean. Another 1,500 sought refuge in the Québec City area. With the exception of this latter group which was soon established on the seigneuries of the St. Lawrence, the Acadians were in places which would not provide a permanent home. To the fear and distrust of the English colonists for the Acadians we must add the ambition of the exiles to leave their prison-like homes. For those who sought peace on Île Saint-Jean it was to be but a temporary home.

THE MIGRATIONS 1758-1762

The major migrations during the period 1758-1762 are illustrated on Map 4. Most of the movements took place in Acadia and French Canada. Political and military events were rapidly reaching the culminating point in the Anglo-French struggle for North America.

In July of 1758, the fort at Louisbourg fell to the English and with it fell the hopes of the nearly 5,000 Acadian refugees on Île Saint-Jean and Île Royale. By the end of the year, the English had embarked 3,500 of the Acadians for transport to France. Of these, 700 perished when two ships sank in an Atlantic storm.

The capitulation of the French forces at Québec, in September of 1759 gave encouragement to some of the refugees in that city who sheltered the hope of returning to their homeland. More than 100 took the prescribed oath of allegiance to the English king and were given permission by the British authorities to return to Acadia. Upon arrival in Acadia they were imprisoned by Governor Lawrence. Most of these Acadians as well as others who had been captured by British raids at Cap de Sable and Baie des Chaleurs were sent to France in 1760.

This apparently arbitrary action on the part of Governor Lawrence was not without its reason. It had long been his plan to resettle the vacated Acadian lands with New Englanders. He was determined to keep the Acadians away from their original homes until his scheme had been achieved. The deportation

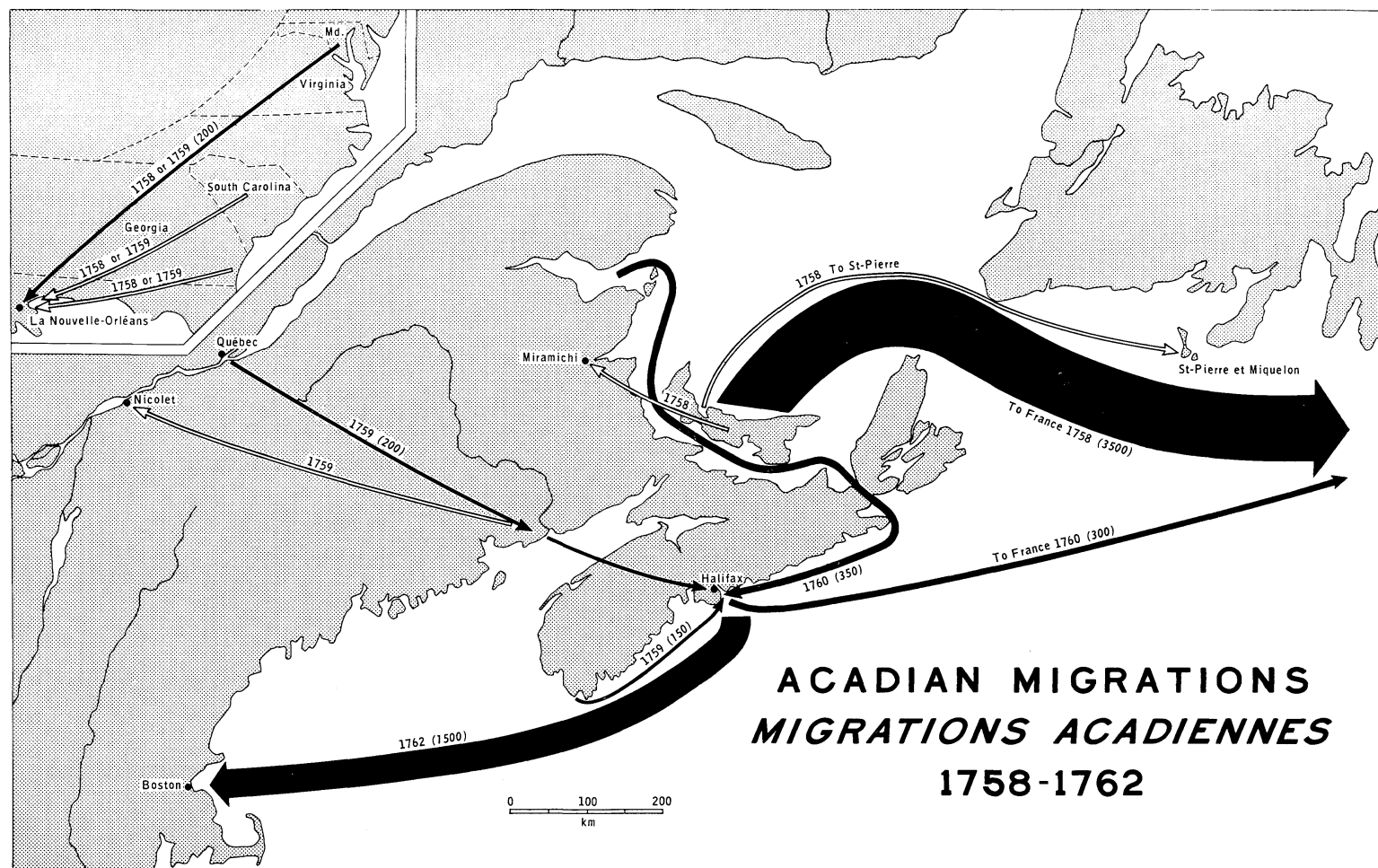


Figure 5

of the Acadians in January of 1760 was in fact on the very eve of the fruition of his plans. In June of 1760 the first contingent of 650 families from Boston and Rhode Island arrived to take up the vacated Acadian lands (BREBNER, 1937). By 1763, 12,500 New Englanders had been successfully settled in old Acadia.

Despite the resettlement of their homeland or perhaps out of ignorance of this fact, the Acadians were continually turning up in Acadia. Their growing numbers aroused an anxiety in English officialdom. Lt. Governor Belcher, Lawrence's successor, wrote in asking permission to expel the returning Acadians:

« there are many of the Acadians in this Province who, although they have surrendered themselves, are yet ever ready and watchful for an opportunity ... to disturb and distress the new settlements lately made and those now forming; and I am perfectly well convinced from the whole course of their behavior and disposition, that they cannot with any safety to this province become again the inhabitants of it » (cf. AKINS, 1869 : 321).

Once again the decision was made to remove the Acadians. In August 1762, 1,500 left Halifax on five transports bound for Boston. The Massachusetts legislature which had continually objected to the dumping of exiles in their colony, now refused to allow the new arrivals to disembark. They subsequently were returned to Halifax.

It was during this period that Acadian refugees coming from the St. John River established settlements in the Trois-Rivières district of Québec. This same area was to eventually attract numerous refugees from New England in 1767. This period also marks the establishment of Acadians in Louisiana. The prospect of joining with their French brethren proved attractive to many of the exiles, especially those in the southern American colonies.

THE MIGRATIONS 1763-1767

The location of the Acadians in 1763 is shown in Table 1. It has been compiled from a variety of sources and includes some estimates of this writer wherever figures were not available.

With the exception of the Acadians in Québec and Louisiana, nearly all were in localities where forces were operating to dictate their removal. This is reflected on Maps 5 and 6. As concerns the numbers involved, the migrations of this period were second only in importance to the original expulsion in 1755. The spatial dislocation was even greater.

Table 1 *Location of Acadians in 1763*

<i>Place</i>	<i>Number</i>
Massachusetts	1,043
Connecticut	666
New York	249
Maryland	810
Pennsylvania	383
South Carolina	280
Georgia	185
Nova Scotia	1,249
St. John River	87
Louisiana	300
England	866
France	3,400
Québec	2,000
Prince Edward Island	300
Baie des Chaleurs	700
TOTAL	12,618

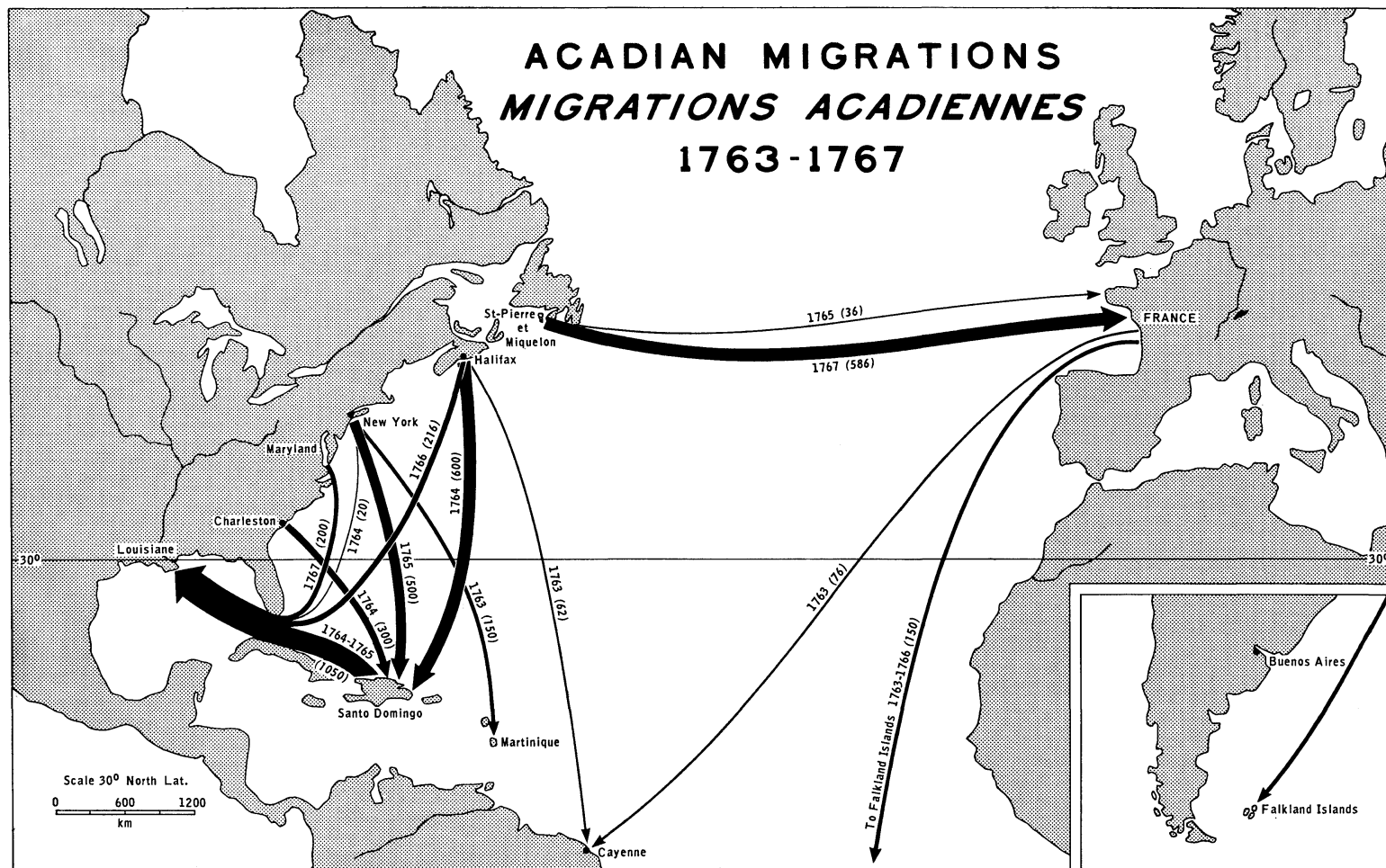


Figure 6

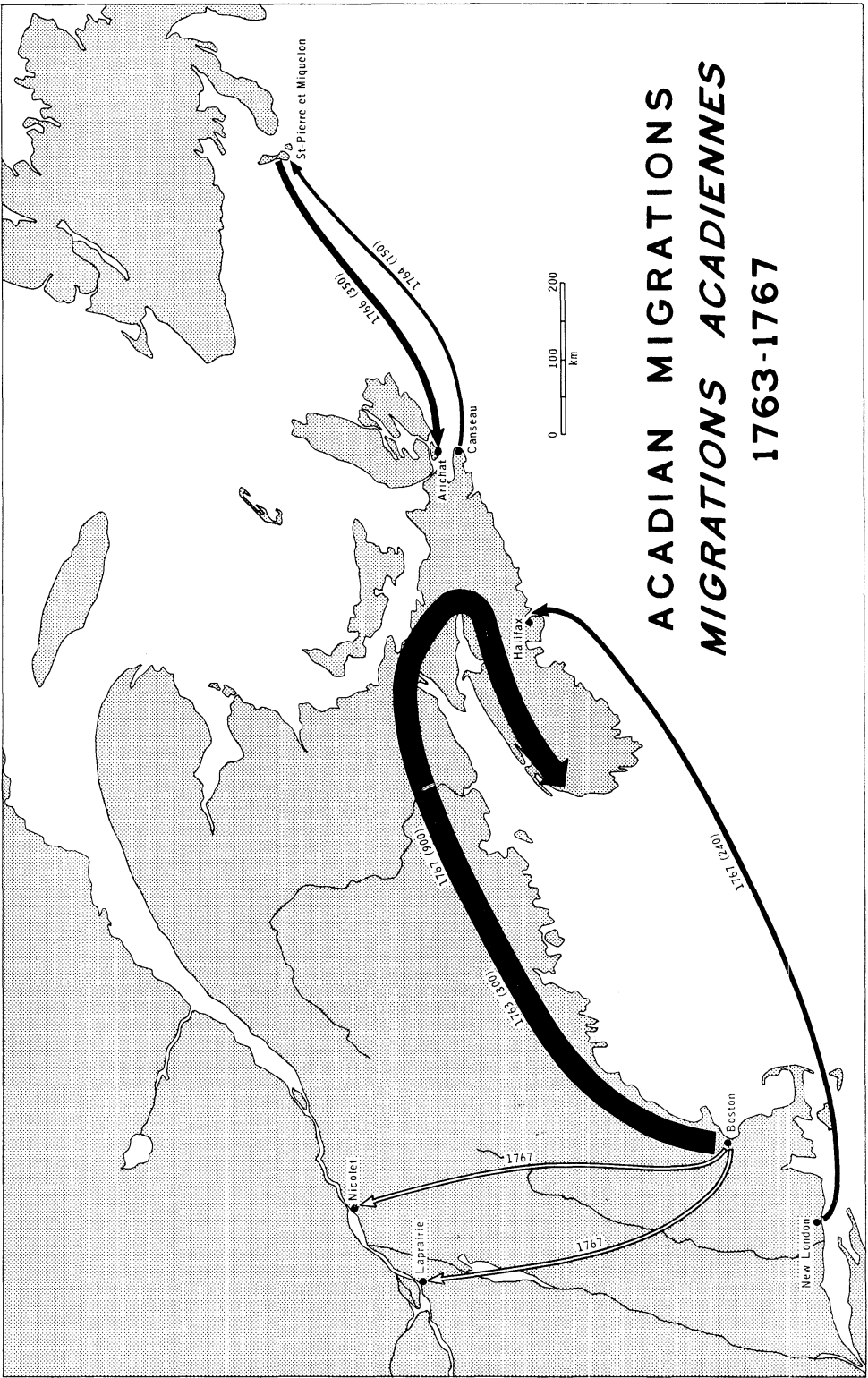


Figure 7

Acadian movements during this period fall into three general categories. First there was a continued exodus of Acadians out of Nova Scotia. Paradoxically this occurred at the same time that many of the refugees were returning to Acadia in large numbers, primarily from the American colonies. Finally, the Caribbean area became increasingly a focus of Acadian movements.

Most of the 3,600 exiles remaining in the American colonies left during this period. The attempts made by local authorities to disperse them in many communities were not successful, as the Acadians continually turned up in major port cities. Boston, New York, New London and Charleston served as such gathering points. Large groups left Boston overland for Acadia or the St. Lawrence Valley. From the middle and southern colonies the movement was to the Caribbean area, either directly to Louisiana or to that refugee haven via Santo Domingo. By this time news of favorable treatment and prosperity of the first arrivals in Louisiana had reached nearly all Acadians.

The Treaty of Paris in 1763 ended the hostilities between England and France in North America. If there was some semblance of a return to political stability, the treaty meant little to the circumstances of the Acadians in Nova Scotia and of the many others returning in this period. Lt. Governor Wilmot genuinely feared the Acadians. He sought permission of his superiors to send the exiles to the West Indies but was refused. The Lords of Trade insisted instead that they be given land agreeable to themselves. Of course the only land falling into this category would have been their old lands on the Bay of Fundy, lands which were now occupied by thousands of New Englanders. Attempts to resettle the Acadians generally failed. The inferior lands allotted to them and the restrictions placed upon their grouping led eventually to their dissatisfaction and voluntary migration to the West Indies, Louisiana, and Saint-Pierre and Miquelon (retained by France in 1763).

The 900 exiles returning from New England did, however, establish themselves successfully and permanently along the shores of St. Mary's Bay, south of old Port-Royal.

THE MIGRATIONS 1768-1785

In 1768 there remained only two major areas of Acadian instability (Map 7). By 1767 the facilities of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon were so strained by the stream of refugee Acadians that some were encouraged to leave for France. (See Map 5). It was not long after their arrival in the French ports that many expressed the desire to return to the tiny archipelago in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. 285 made the return journey in 1768. By 1775 the population of the islands numbered 1,500, again placing a strain on local resources (most of the exiles had to be supported by the government). A new turn of political events provided a temporary solution to this problem.

The sympathy of France for the American cause in the Revolutionary War eventually led to French support of the American military effort in 1778. The English in retaliation sent an expedition to the strategic archipelago and deported to France 1,400 Acadians. By the Treaty of Versailles in 1783, Saint-

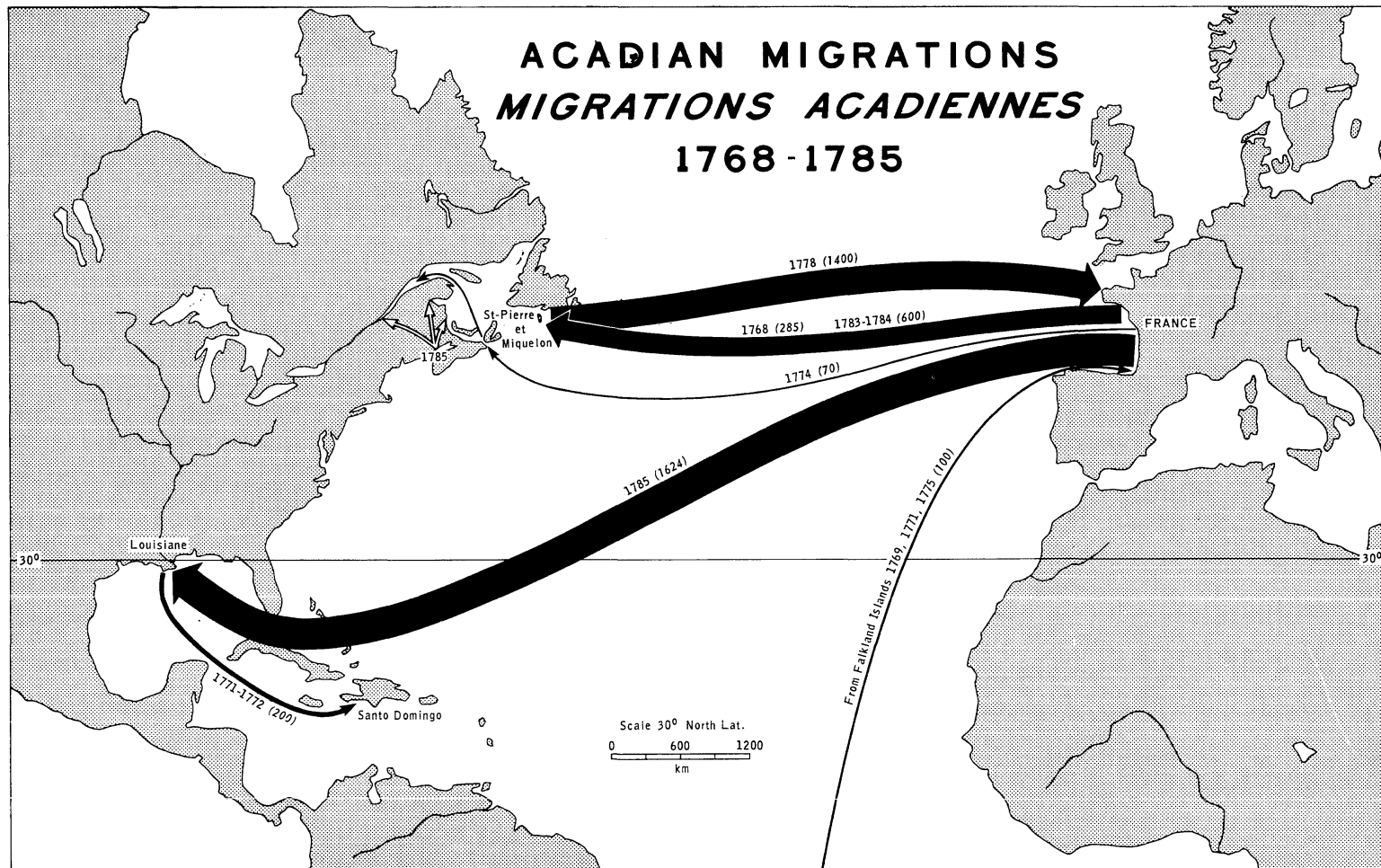


Figure 8

Pierre and Miquelon were retroceded to France and soon after 600 Acadians returned once more from France (LAUVRIÈRE, 1924: 2: 210-215).

France, surprisingly, did not serve as a permanent home for the exiles. The large number of Acadians which arrived from Île Saint-Jean in 1758 was the nucleus of an exile group which remained in France for nearly 30 years. In 1763 the Acadian group in England (of the original 1,100 from Virginia only 866 remained) was brought to France, while some of the Acadian arrivals from Saint-Pierre and Miquelon throughout this period remained behind. Various attempts to settle the Acadians in France, Corsica, the Falkland Islands and French Guiana all failed. For the greater part of this period in France, the exiles were supported at government expense. The destitution of the Acadians, the desire of the French government to solve a problem which was a severe drain on the treasury, and the eagerness of Spain to strengthen its claim to Louisiana by active colonization all lead to the last of the major Acadian migrations. In 1785 more than 1,600 were transported to Louisiana by the Spanish (WINZERLING, 1955).

THE FINAL SETTLEMENT PATTERN

By the end of the 18th century the location of the Acadians had taken on some measure of permanency. With the exception of a few subsequent moves involving small numbers, the fifty year period of migrations had come to an end. With the exception of the Acadian population of the Maritime Provinces based on an accurate ecclesiastical census in 1803, only estimates are available for the numbers of each major area (RAMEAU, 1877: 360-61). Table 2 gives an approximation of the Acadian population and its location in 1800.

More than 80% of the Acadians were located in two areas, Eastern Canada and Louisiana. Scattered elsewhere in the United States, the French ports, and the Caribbean were another 3,000.

Map 8 shows most of the places where Acadians were located in Eastern Canada in 1800. In the three areas of settlement in the St. Lawrence Valley, near the cities of Québec, Trois-Rivières and Montréal, the Acadians generally lived side by side with French Canadians. Elsewhere, along the shores of the Baie des Chaleurs, Eastern Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, the settlements are more distinctly

Acadian. One striking feature of the location of the Acadians in the maritime region is their absence from their old homeland on the shores of Baie Française.

Of the new areas of Acadian settlement following the migrations, none, in the course of time, became as distinctive as southern Louisiana (Map 9). The major areas of settlement were in the Attacappas, the Opeloussas, along the Mississippi River south of Baton Rouge and along Bayou La Fourche. The physical

Table 2 *Acadian population in 1800*

<i>Place</i>	<i>Number</i>
Maritime Provinces	8,400
Québec	8,000
Louisiana	4,000
United States	1,000
France	1,000
Not specified	1,000
TOTAL	23,400

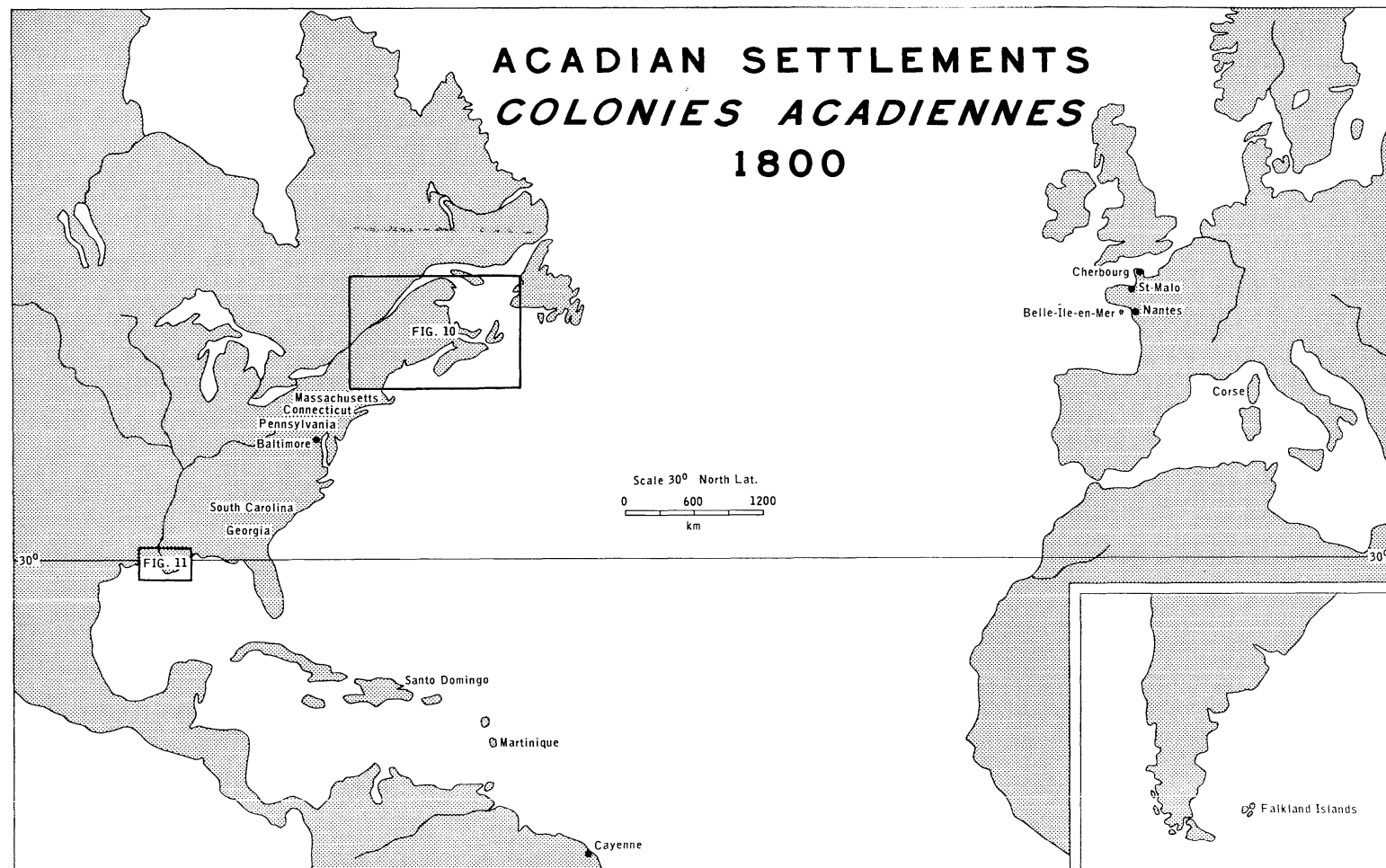


Figure 9

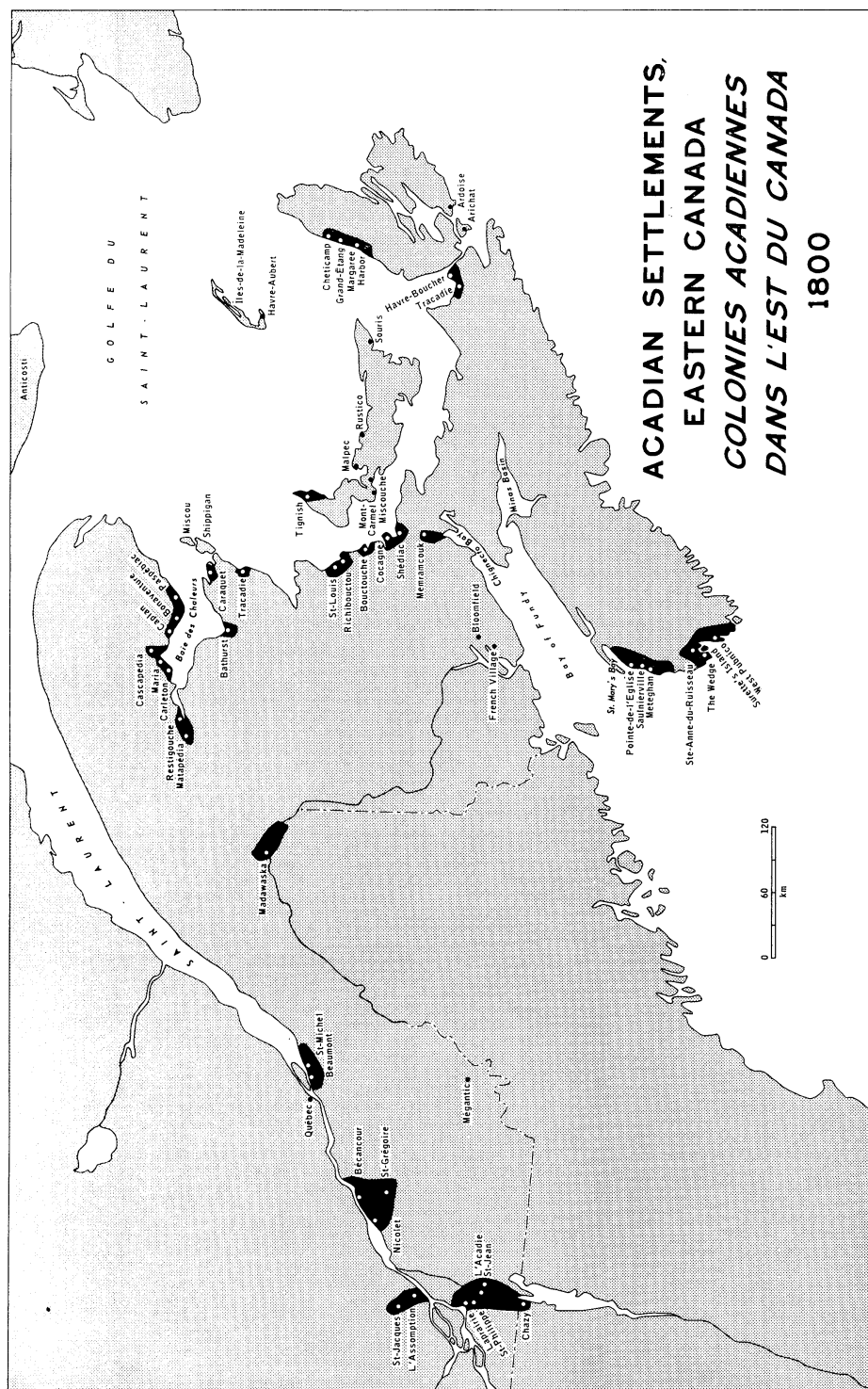


Figure 10

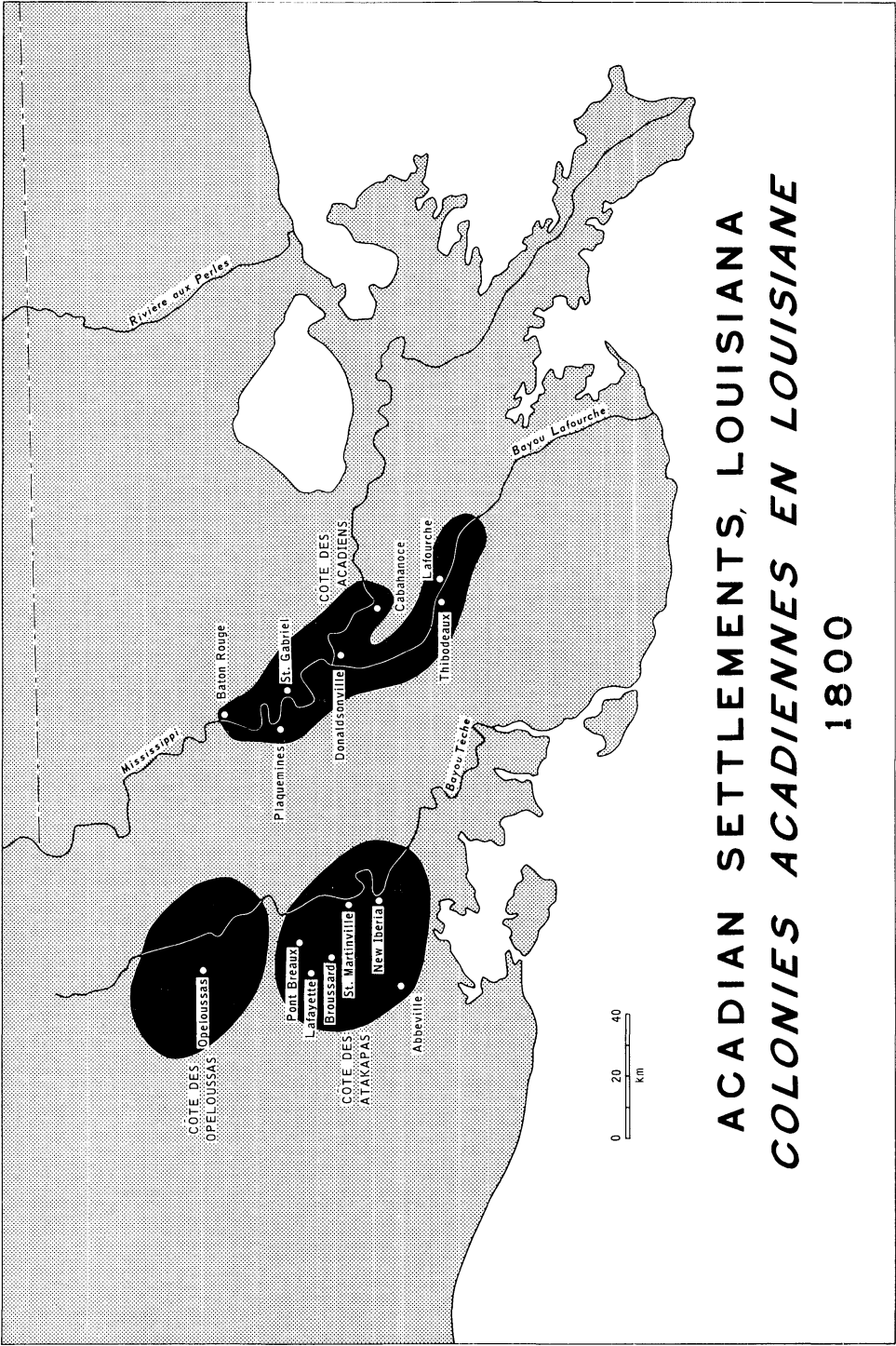


Figure 11

isolation of most of these settlements permitted a high degree of culture retention by the Acadians.

CONCLUSION

In 1800, for the first time since the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, the Acadians were located in areas where they were free to pursue their agrarian life and where there was a considerable measure of security from the vagaries of international politics, of which they had so often been the victims and of which they had been so ignorant. Their anomalous position in the first half of the 18th century, a French population in English territory at a time when England and France were struggling for supremacy in the New World, must be cited as the most important factor which precipitated their migrations. The hostile reception they received in the American colonies combined with their resignation to return to Acadia precluded from the very beginning any permanent home for them on the Atlantic seaboard. France, by virtue of the strong cultural ties which existed between the French and Acadians might have proved a permanent home for the exiles had not the treatment they received there been little better than that received in the American colonies.

The new Acadian settlements in the New World afforded the stability which had been lacking in the American colonies or France. In the maritime regions of Canada they appropriated land which was not previously settled. With land allotted to them or provided for their use in the St. Lawrence Valley they were rapidly incorporated with their French brethren. All of these Acadians were still, one might say, squatters on English territory, but by this time the Anglo-French struggle for North American had been resolved and the French settlers no longer posed a serious threat, whether real or imagined. The Acadians of Louisiana were well received by the Creoles and achieved there the peace and security which had long eluded them.

EPILOGUE

The terminal date for this study is 1800. It was selected because it was not until the end of the 18th century that the map of Acadian locations began to show some measure of stability. The half century period of their migrations had come to an end. The locational stability of the Acadians, however, was by no means permanent. The Acadian map for 1968 would find them scattered in various locations over most of the United States and Canada.

The new migrations of the Acadians were distinct from those of the 18th century because of a new motivating force. No longer were the Acadians moved about with little consideration given to their own desires. They now became willing participants in movements which had as their goals an improvement in economic conditions, the same motivation, in fact, which propelled the large migrations of European people to the United States in the latter part of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The fountainhead of the new migrations was the Acadian population of Eastern Canada. From 1850 until 1900, Acadians, principally from the Îles de la Madeleine in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, established settlements on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River east of Sept-Îles, on the island of Anticosti, in Labrador, and in Newfoundland. By far the most important of the new migrations was the large scale movement from the St. Lawrence Valley to the growing industrial centers of New England, which began around 1860. It has been most common to treat this migration as one made up entirely of French Canadians. The likely reason is that the Acadians are so similar in culture to the other French inhabitants of the St. Lawrence Valley that there seemed little point in distinguishing one from the other, assuming that researchers have been aware of the distinction at all. It seems reasonable to assume that the Acadians contributed to this migration in numbers reflecting their relative numerical strength in Québec. Of the 800,000 Franco-Americans in New England in 1923, one authority (LAUVRIÈRE, 2: 525) claims that 50,000 were Acadians. Elsewhere and in smaller numbers they are found today in much of Anglo-America.

RÉSUMÉ

L'Acadie, depuis le début du XVII^e siècle jusqu'en 1713, faisait partie de l'empire colonial français en Amérique du Nord. Le traité d'Utrecht céda la plus grande partie de l'Acadie et sa population à la Grande-Bretagne. L'instabilité politique qu'engendra la position des Acadiens par rapport aux nouvelles limites coloniales aboutit finalement à leur expulsion et à leur déportation en 1755. Durant les cinquante années qui suivirent, se développa un vaste et difficile mouvement de retour. Mais ce n'est que vers la fin de cette période que les Acadiens se fixèrent définitivement en des endroits offrant un minimum de stabilité. Ces mouvements migratoires durant cette période sont l'objet du présent article, de même que la répartition des communautés acadiennes vers 1800.

SUMMARY

Acadia from its initial settlement in 1604 until 1713 was a part of the French colonial empire in North America. By the Treaty of Utrecht most of Acadia and its French population was ceded to the British. The political instability generated by the anomalous position of the Acadians eventually led to their expulsion in 1755. During the following 50 years their efforts at repatriation were thwarted and only toward the end of the period were they finally settled in places offering a measure of security. The trends of their migrations over the period are illustrated, as well as their final settlement pattern in 1800.

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