

## **William Harley's Report on the Acadians**

William Harley et Dale Cogswell

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# William Harley's Report on the Acadians

The following document was unearthed at the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick during the completion of Volume III of the *Calendar of the Papers of the House of Assembly 1828 - 1832* (Fredericton, 1977). Still tied with nineteenth-century red tape, the bundle of papers in which it was found had obviously not been opened for at least a hundred years. The author of the document was William Harley, who emigrated from Ireland to the Miramichi in 1817. By 1822, when he petitioned the Government for land on the north side of the Richibucto River, he was already a Deputy-Surveyor of Lands.<sup>1</sup> The letter quoted here *verbatim* (except for the occasional addition of punctuation) is a report, dated 20 July 1829, submitted by Harley to Samuel Proudfoot Hurd, Surveyor-General of New Brunswick from 1825 to 1829. The importance of the document lies in its detailed description by a contemporary observer of the Acadians inhabiting the peninsula of north-eastern New Brunswick. Little needs to be said about Harley's subjectivity which is evident throughout his report. The report will be filed in the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick with the Records of the Executive Council (Record Group 2) under "Surveyor-General" (Record Series 8).

DALE COGSWELL

In obedience to your Instructions addressed to me bearing date 24th of March 1828 accompanied by Minutes of Council directing an enquiry to be made respecting certain applicants for Lands at Carraquet &c and others located there without Authority, I lost no time in furnishing the Persons in question with a notification of the intended examination of their claims &c, and as the expences were to be borne by these parties it was not until the end of last Winter that I could make an arrangement with them for the execution of the Service entrusted to me. As soon in the latter part of the Winter as the weather would permit, I commenced operations at Carraquet and proceeding round Pokesuedie Island St Simon's Inlet &c Shippegan Harbour and Grand Amac finished at point Au Canoe, the Map of which I have now the Honor to present and on which I have noted all the Circumstances my Instructions desired.

1 Petition of William Harley for land in Northumberland County, 1822, RG 10, RS 108, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick. William's brother, John, arrived in 1823. For his career, see Louise Manny, "John Harley", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, X (Toronto, 1972), pp. 332-3.

In the progress of my enquiries the Chief difficulty which presented itself consisted in the numerous contentions which arose between parties who had purchased small portions of Land from the original possessors and between others who were the Heirs of the first occupants and which explains the circumstance of so many Buildings appearing on one Small Lot as represented in the Map.

In order to obviate the difficulties which would arise from so many intricate and petty Claims being brought before His Majesty's Council, I proposed to them that where several were concerned in one Lot they should select a proper person from among themselves who should come forward to acquire the Patent but who should execute Bonds sufficient to guarantee that he would convey to the several Parties their Actual Share as soon as he became a Grantee. They readily acquiesced with this proposal and I saw the Bonds regularly executed. Where there were only two concerned I left the Bond with the party concerned but in the case of Thomas Maillie and Associates I deemed it my duty to retain the Bonds which now accompany my return.

During the long period in which this district has been inhabited and that without legal Authority, It must be expected that much confusion must have ensued from encroachments, exchanges and occupants frequently abandoning particular Spots and where these cases have occurred to me I have taken the party's written relinquishment or agreement of exchange and these documents also accompany my return. I have also invariably respected the old Boundaries wherever I could find them which Boundaries are carefully laid down in the accompanying Map.

To render the matter as clear as lay in my power I have only placed the names of such persons on the respective Lots in the plan as are by agreement and general Consent those who should become the Grantees.

It may be necessary to mention with regard to several Petitions which I have brought Over for Lands in the rere of the Grant to Francis Gionet and Others generally called the Carraquet Great Grant that opposition has been offered to them by some persons who think it the exclusive right of those who possess the Lots fronting on the Bay to draw the Lands in their rere. I also beg to mention that the above Old Grant is very thickly settled and a Church built near its centre which as far as regards said Grant serves in a great measure as a line of distinction between two opposite parties which exist there those living below it being the descendants of European French while the others with a few exceptions are from Canadians or Acadians but from their appearance and habits seem to be nearly allied to the Indians.

There are also a few Petitions from Persons whom I found occupying the Lands about Amac and Shippegan but who had not previously applied.

The Lands in general are very poor inter mixed with naked Barrens especially about Shippegan and destitute in a great measure of all wood except Spruce and Small white Birch any other Kind being rarely seen, the extent

of the clearings and Marshes are carefully laid down in the plan from Actual Measurement.

You will no doubt be surprised that such a dense Population could procure a livelihood on so small a quantity of Cultivated ground, but the principal source from which they derive their Support is the fishery and for which the Settlement is most peculiarly adapted.

It may not perhaps be uninteresting here to give a Sketch of the employments manners, & customs &c of the Inhabitants generally. I shall therefore commence with their occupations towards the opening of the Spring, about a fortnight before the Ice Clears away they commence Fowling and shoot a great Quantity of Black Ducks which for that season of the Year and for some time afterwards (as they salt them) is their principal food their Priests permit the People to eat them in lent and call them Fish, as soon as the Ice leaves the Shores they frequent the Place in immense flocks. I have frequently seen the Inhabitants after a few Hours shooting return with their small Boats or Flats almost loaded with them. Immediately after these and sometimes earlier the Wild Geese arrive in incredible numbers which together with the Brant Geese cause a continual din truly astounding these occupy the attention of the Inhabitants for sometime afterwards, About the first of May they prepare for the Herring Fishery, the Herrings at that season frequent Carraquet and the Strait between Shippegan and Miscou commonly called little Shippegan in immense Shoals. That fishery commonly lasts from Six to Ten Days when the Inhabitants take what quantity they want of them in a Short time loading large Schooners with them principally for the purpose of putting them on their Land they indeed being the only manure they use altho' there is plenty of Seaweed about the Shores scattered in every direction and in a State of decomposition which would answer the purpose as well if not better but such is the force of Habit that they will not be convinced, they say that if an Act of the Legislature prohibited manuring their Land with Herrings they could raise nothing. Their mode of applying them is by opening their Land into drills with one Miserable Horse or Ox and a Plough which baffles all description and along each drill plant a potatoe between two Herrings then close their drills and their Spring's farming so far as regards the male Population is finished.

They now prepare for the Codfishery in which their Harvest consists and which they generally commence about the tenth of June This is called the Summer Fishery and continues till the middle of August during which time great numbers of Boats and Schooners of different sizes are employed they return every evening with their fish and leave the curing of them entirely to the females, who also thake care of their Potatoes which almost forms their only crop and to which besides the Herrings they apply their Fish Guts and Garbage so that in Hot Weather the Stench is truly intolerable.

The Women also provide the Bait which consists of a species of Shellfish

called Clams and which are to be found here all round the different Shores in the greatest profusion I have frequently seen them turn them out of the Sand like Potatoes in a Potatoe field There is also in Grand Amac an excellent Oyster Fishery to be equalled by none in the Province There is also another in Carraquet but not so good as soon as their Summer Fishery is over they commence their Statute Labour on their roads. Afterwards their Hay which is all cut on Salt Marshes and consequently of a very indifferent coarse quality They Having no Idea whatever of cultivating upland Hay, as soon as that is over they commence their Fall or pickled Codfishery which continues till sometime in November they then convey their fish to Market where they procure their Winter Supplies and their season for toil is Over. Their Winters they spend in a state of inactivity chiefly about their large Stoves, Smoking their Pipes except when they attend a dancing frolic which often keep up for Days and Nights successively In fact their Situation is so detached and their communication so little with others that very few of them can speak or understand a word of the English Language there are certainly some exceptions to the above general Sketch particularly the descendants of the European French who are much superior to the others in every sense.

It may be here necessary to remark that the Inhabitants complain very much of the *increasing decline* of their Codfishery these few years back occasioned as they say by the Americans whose Schooners swarm in Hundreds every Summer in the Gulf of St Lawrence within sight of their Shores and injure the Fishery very materially by throwing their Fish Guts and Offal overboard.