

FOCUS

THE ACADIAN HERITAGE OF GRAND CHÂTELLERAULT



VILLES
& PAYS
D'ART &
D'HISTOIRE



Grand Châtelleraut is one of the few regions in France able to bear testimony to the French colonization of North America, a period of our past of which we still know little about.

In Archigny, the farms on the Acadian Line tell of the abandonment of the American colony, the exodus of its citizens and their unsuccessful acceptance in France, which had not implemented the resources necessary for them to settle in mainland France. For these reasons, and despite their modest construction, some of the 38 structures on the Acadian Line are now protected as Historic Monuments. They were also recognized in the New France heritage inventory as one of the four key sites illustrating the story of Acadia in France.

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Front page:

© Renaud Pennelle, view showing the construction technique of a house from the “Acadian colony”, designed by the Marquis de Pérusse des Cars, according to latest research carried out in 2023

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Jean de Bry, Samuel Argall making peace with the Chickahominy tribe in 1614, 1618

HISTORY OF THE COLONIZATION OF ACADIA

1534	Discovery of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence by Jacques Cartier, who establishes trade relations with the Micmac tribe.	
1588	Henry III of France begins granting monopolies for the fur trade in order to finance the colonization of Acadia.	
1604	Pierre Dugua de Mons, a merchant from La Rochelle, obtains a 10-year monopoly. He sets off on an expedition with 80 settlers, including Samuel de Champlain, who would found the city of Quebec in 1608, and Jean de Poutrincourt, who would become the first seigneur of Port-Royal.	
1613	First attack on the colony from Virginia by Samuel Argall, an English smuggler.	
1632	Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye establishing Acadia as a French possession.	
1654	The British conquer part of Acadia, but do not settle there. The French settlers remain.	

1667	Treaty of Breda which confirms Acadia as a French possession.	
1690	William Phips, governor of Massachusetts, conquers Acadia again, for the British crown.	
1697	Treaty of Ryswick, putting an end to the war of the League of Augsburg and once again ceding Acadia to France.	
1713	Treaty of Utrecht, ending the War of Succession in Spain and giving Acadia to the English. The territory is renamed Nova Scotia.	
1720	Start of the construction of the Fortress of Louisbourg, later captured by the English in 1745.	
1748	Aachen Treaty, returning Acadia to the French and also handing them back Louisbourg.	
1755	Start of the "Grand Dérangement", a period of deportation of the Acadian population by the British. The Acadians are sent by force to the American colonies, Louisiana, the United Kingdom, Spain and France.	
1763	Treaty of Paris, which definitively gives Acadia to the British.	



1. Map of Acadia in 2023

FRENCH ACADIA

WHAT IS ACADIA?

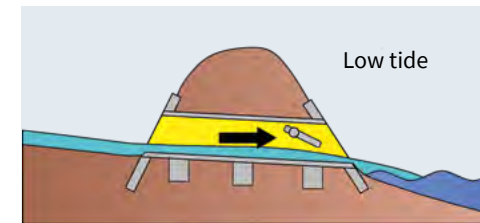
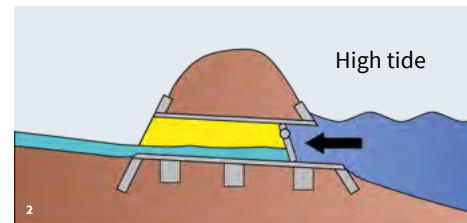
The name Acadia comes from the word Arcadia, used for the first time by Giovanni da Verrazzano, an Italian explorer in the service of King Francis I of France, who visited the North American coast in 1524. It referred to an idyllic region in Ancient Greece.

Today, Acadia is the French-speaking part of three Canadian provinces to the east of Quebec, where the French colony settled from the 16th century. The term also refers to a nation without explicit recognition

from the UN and which does not have a dedicated country. This nation consists of around 300,000 people in North America. They are linked by a heritage which includes speaking French.

THE FRENCH COLONIZATION OF NORTH AMERICA

In the first half of the 16th century, the French set off to discover and colonize America, exploring the northern lands. From 1588, trading posts were established, but until the treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, in 1632, the population was very small. Then, emigrants from the French Atlantic coast came to expand the colony. Some of them knew how to build



2. Aboiteau farming

earthen basins to collect salt, others had taken part in building dikes to protect the flood plains of Poitou and Saintonge. Using this experience, they managed to contain the marshes of the Acadian coast and invented the **aboiteau** system. Soon, meadows and farmland appeared and encouraged the establishment of large herds and the production of wheat. Acadia became a rich land.

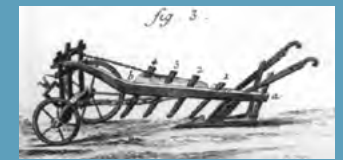
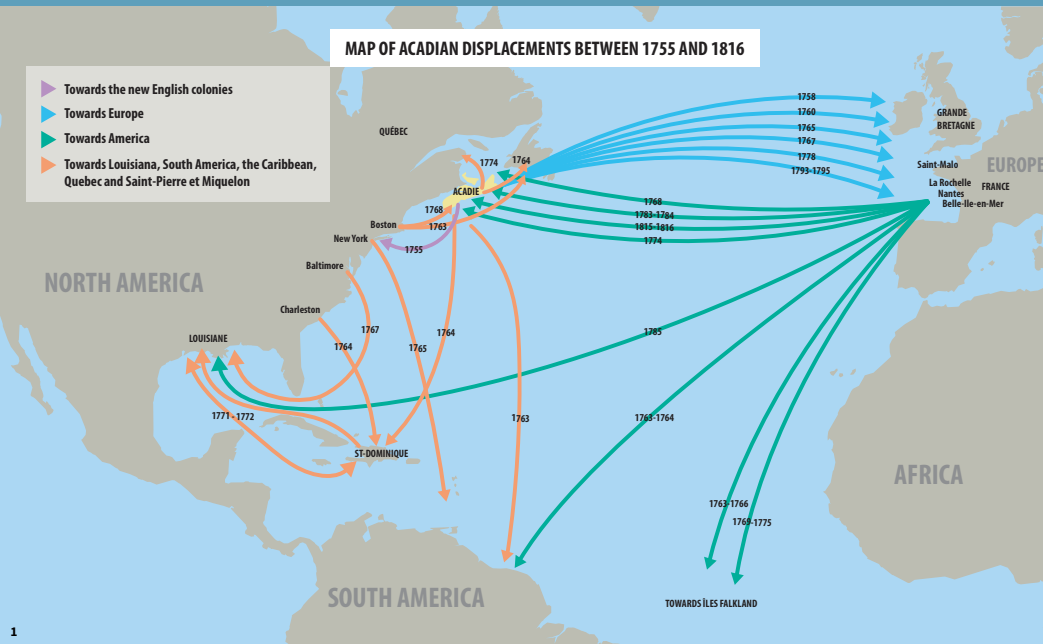
However, Acadia was still a French zone on the maritime route between London and Boston. In the eyes of the British authorities, it represented a danger for their trade with the American colonies. Due to this particular geopolitical situation, the Acadians suffered numerous attacks from 1670 and until the treaty of Utrecht in 1713.

THE LOSS OF THE COLONIES AND DRIFTING REFUGEES

After the Treaty of Utrecht, keeping the Acadian population on former French land became an issue between the two nations. Initially, France tried to attract its citizens to the islands of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, while the United Kingdom could not do without these farmers. Then, the British demanded that the Acadians become subjects of the Crown or leave, while the French were in support of them staying in order to curb the arrival of British settlers during this

period. The Acadians refused to take up arms against the French and to sign an oath of allegiance to King George II of Great Britain. The crisis reached its climax in 1755 when the governor, Charles Lawrence, expelled the Acadian population, thus ridding himself of potentially dangerous inhabitants while monopolizing their rich lands.

Between 1755 and 1758, 12,000 to 18,000 Acadians were arrested and exiled. Their property was seized and burnt. The first deportees were sent to the American colonies, which rejected them. They were then sent to New Brunswick, Louisiana, Spain, England and France. 7,500 to 9,000 Acadians perished during this period, considered by some as the “first ethnic cleansing carried out in a North American State”. Since then, this period has been known as the “Grand Dérangement”.



1. Map of the displacement of the Acadians between 1755 and 1866

2. Different labor techniques - plate from Encyclopédie de Diderot et d'Alembert, 1751-1780

THE TURBULENT JOURNEY OF THE ACADIANS IN FRANCE

THE ARRIVAL OF THE ACADIANS IN POITOU

The first refugees arrived in France in September 1758. They were taken care of by the Secretary of State for the Navy, who dealt with all matters related to the colonies. Around 4,000 people were scattered across the ports on the Atlantic coast, without knowing whether they would be displaced again or whether they would be able to settle. They survived in very precarious conditions. In 1763, the Treaty of Paris confirmed the loss of Acadia for France.

The Acadians, who had still hoped to return home, had to settle on the **mainland**.

Known for being excellent, hard-working farmers, the Acadians were also considered as cheap agricultural labor, at a time when slavery was starting to be challenged. A variety of settlement projects were proposed: French Guyana, but climate conditions derailed the idea; Belle-Île-en-Mer, where a dozen Acadian families settled; Islas Malvinas (now the Falkland Islands); Martinique, where 400 Acadians attempted to settle, before leaving again for America.

The state also examined a number of land clearing plans put forward by lords to make the most of unproductive properties. The one put forward by the Marquis de Pérusse des Cars, who for several years had wanted to develop his land in the Poitou region, was supported.

THE WELCOME PROJECT BY PÉRUSSE DES CARS

Louis Nicolas, the Marquis de Pérusse des Cars, originated from the Limousin region. In 1753, he obtained the castellany of Monthoiron thanks to his wife's fortune and became passionate about this property, which he managed himself. He was influenced by physiocrats, philosophers and economists who advocated "government by nature". The physiocrats considered that every person had a right to what they freely acquired through work and trade. They theorized the foundations of economic liberalism and free trade: "*Let people do it, let goods through*".

Considering, like them, that the land was the most valuable resource and the most precious commodity from which all other forms of productions flowed, the Marquis

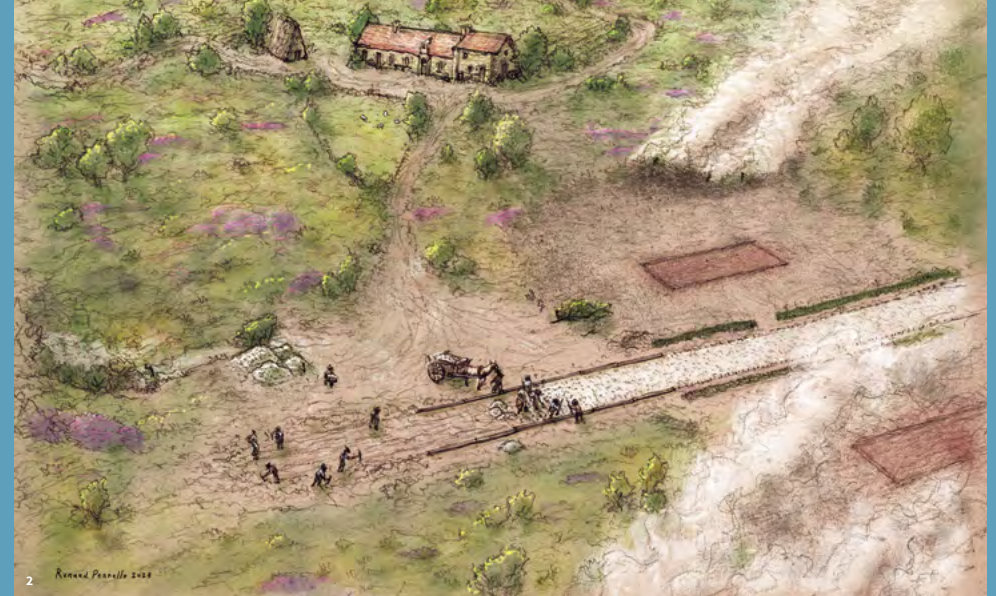
de Pérusse researched the possibilities for improving his land. He tried growing clover and planned to clear the moorland that occupied a large part of his estate and fertilize it with marl: he needed to generate winter fodder for the herds in order to improve agricultural yields and feed an ever-growing population.

To succeed, he called on German farmers, whose excellence he had noticed during the military campaigns of his youth. The Marquis offered very favorable terms to those who would accept to come and join him in Poitou. In 1763, between 250 and 300 hectares of clover and artificial meadows were successfully exploited. Horse and cattle breeding were developed: potatoes and turnips were introduced to **vegetable gardens**. While this project is a recognized example of enhancing unproductive land, it was also a source of ruin for the Marquis.



1. Abbaye de l'Étoile

2. Reconstructed view of the construction of the main road between Châtellerault and Saint-Savin, quickly named the Acadian Line
According to the latest research carried out in 2023, © Renaud Pennelle



2 Renaud Pennelle 2023

However, he continued to believe that it was possible to save his land.

In 1771, he wrote a paper in which he set out his wish to attract more foreign workers to his lands. It is possible that he had heard about the "problem" of resettling the Acadians.

In 1772, King Louis XV suggested sending 1,500 Acadians to Poitou. The State decided to pay them a daily wage and their settlement expenses, and asked that the Acadians become the owners of the land entrusted to them, in return for the payment of an annual seigneurial rent.

Pérusse des Cars offered to build 150 farms to welcome this population. He calculated the cost of building each house at 3,000 pounds "*complete with all the necessary, a stable and a small barn*". He also offered to provide each home with two oxen, two cows, a cart, a plow, a harrow, shovels, picks and other clearing and cultivation instruments. This was completed with 58 bushels of

oats to sow, and two years' worth of food for families and their cattle. The estimate drawn up for the installation of each household was 7,360 pounds. This was initially accepted, but then reviewed downwards to not exceed 800 pounds per "house". In the end, it was decided that the Marquis alone would bear the costs for settling the Acadians, such as their pay and food, until 1775. The State, however, promised him a sum of 600,000 pounds to avoid plunging the project into huge deficit.

This project was not well accepted by the Acadians, who deemed that the Marquis' lands were "*drowned in winter and without a drop of water in the summer*". However, in October 1773, the first Acadians — women, children and elderly people unfit for farm work — arrived before the farmhouses were finished. They were built by local farmers during their working hours while the season allowed it. The 497 exiles were lodged in the Châteauneuf area in Châtellerault

and in Archigny, at Marsujeau castle and **Abbaye de l'Étoile**.

A few months later, 1,472 Acadians arrived. Few had ever farmed and the Marquis de Pérusse tried to give them the means to survive. He employed some to help the locals clear the moorland or to transport construction materials for housing. He put others to work as servants; he gave the women spinning wheels to spin wool. By 1774, the discontent of the Acadians was growing daily. They worked hard and the poor harvest did not allow them to live decently.

In 1775, 21 structures were occupied, 18 were nearly completed and 19 had barely begun. The Acadians, buffeted for more than 20 years between various French ports and territories, rebelled and decided to leave. From August, convoys were organized to allow dissidents to reach Nantes. In 1776, the Acadian Line had just 157 inhabitants consisting of 25 households, although 57 houses

had been built. In 1784, the vacant houses were allocated to local families.

THE ACADIAN LINE IN ARCHIGNY

BUILD FIVE VILLAGES OF THIRTY HOUSES

On May 14, 1773, Pérusse des Cars and the general inspector agreed to build five "villages", each with 30 houses, to welcome 1,500 Acadians. This project, designed by the Ponts et Chaussées (Roads Authority) department, organized a highly regular network of roads linking hamlets and dwellings along the **trajectories**. These new road routes were named after protagonists of the enterprise: Chemin de Roi, Chemin de la Reine, Chemin de la Motte, Chemin de Blossac, Chemin de Saint-Ambroise, Chemin de Pérusse, etc. The plan took various recommendations into account concerning the separation of houses to avoid fire spreading to the entire village, the installation of vegetable gardens while avoiding rights-of-way, and



the possibility of enlarging these farms “either by making gables, or by extending the rafters to build a half-roof behind the house”.

This new layout reproduced the local dispersed habitat of small hamlets and remote farms. It was also the opportunity to design orthogonal micro-urbanizations: the hamlet of Huit-Maisons was organized symmetrically around a central circle (well or pond), from which four lanes branched off. This project gave engineers from Ponts et Chaussées the rare, and perhaps only, opportunity in France to design consistent, orderly urban planning in a rural environment. This canvas provided a regular framework to later increase the density of the sites in the event that the colony had been a success.

At the time of implementation, the Marquis strayed from the original plan in favor of houses sited along the main road instead of creating small **hamlets**.

EARTHEN HOUSES

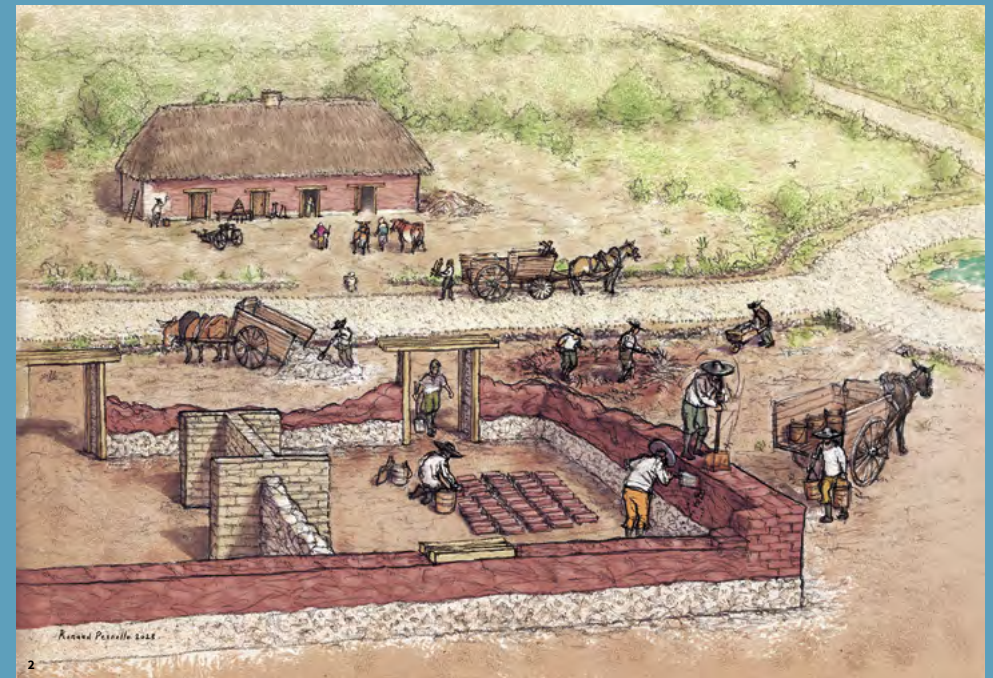
In his first paper, the Marquis de Pérusse suggested building houses with two bedrooms, a dairy, a cellar, a stable for two oxen and two cows, and a barn. He

did not specify the nature of the materials to be used. It wasn't until spring 1773 that the idea of using wood and cob emerged, a theory supported by Lemoyne, Navy commissioner in charge of monitoring the project. He recalled that the Acadians were “nearly all carpenters” and could therefore help to finish the farmhouses more quickly.

In the end, to save money, the Marquis Pérusse des Cars decided to use the clay soil of Archigny, called “bornais”, and developed his project further: the houses were built in cob on a stone flashing.

Cob (or *bauge* in French) is a wall-building technique using thick mud made from raw earth mixed with straw. This mud forms lumps piled up on each other by hand to create beds; they are then compacted and can be consolidated with lime bases. In Archigny, the composition includes branches from moorland plants (broom heather, broom, etc.) which act as a bonding agent for the plaster.

Although rare, there is evidence that cob was used locally from the 12th century, in particular in the region of Loudun, where examples can be seen



1. Land register map – Map of the Acadian Colony in Poitou, Vincent Amirault, 1793

© Communauté d'Agglomération de Grand Châtelleraut

2. View showing the construction technique of a house from the “Acadian colony”, designed by Marquis de Pérusse des Cars.

According to the latest research carried out in 2023, © Renaud Pennelle

3. Views of the rear and front of farmhouse no. 10



1. Details of the cob ceiling in farmhouse no. 10 on the Acadian Line

2. Fireplace in the bedroom of Acadian farmhouse no. 10

in Ouzilly-Vignoles. In the 18th century, this technique was the subject of many books promoting the “art of earthen construction”, with the aim of spreading and perfecting a method known to offer many advantages: economy, durability, thermal insulation, healthiness and non-combustibility. The first papers were published in 1772. It is therefore conceivable that the Marquis de Pérusse, who was passionate about agronomy, was convinced by these studies which provided a suitable response to his construction issue.

According to local tradition, the required earth was taken from the plots, but while the earth extracted from the foundations may have been used as an aggregate, it is also possible that the clay taken from

the Archigny quarries helped bind the mixture.

Additionally, letter exchanges between Pérusse and Lemoyne bear witness to the fact that in spring 1773, the Marquis had gone back to his original idea for a tiled roof: he explained to commissioner Lemoyne that financial imperatives obliged him to cover the buildings in heather or thatch. Heather had been used locally to cover buildings since Neolithic times.

Built on flint flashings, the walls of farmhouse no. 10 in Archigny are 50 cm thick. They are erected in several layers from 60 cm to 1 m high, after partial drying and sometimes with the addition of a layer of branches. Once complete, the walls are covered with 2 to 3 cm of lime-enriched earth plaster,

held in place by small rods planted perpendicular to the wall. They are then painted white with whitewash.

The relatively low ceilings of the rooms are formed by a succession of joists spaced around 20 to 30 cm apart, between which are spindles of straw wrapped around an oak bar, dipped in earth plaster and laid perpendicular to the beams. On the underside, this material is covered with a cob, called “*bousillis*”, made of earth mixed with fine branches or leaves. In the attic, the floor is strong enough to support terracotta tiles. The long-sloped roofs do not have sprockets or gutters to allow water to penetrate to the foot of the walls and avoid damage caused by clay shrinkage. Dormer windows open onto the attics used as granaries and accessed by an outside ladder. The doors have an oak wood frame, along with the small windows that light up each room. The living rooms and bedrooms have a fireplace.

Like farmhouse no. 10, the farmhouses on the *Acadian Line* have been transformed in their 250 years of existence. For example, Pérusse never mentioned an attic in his descriptions; they must have been installed to make up for the absence of a barn, which was too costly to build when the Acadians settled here. The installation of attics above houses is very frequent in French vernacular architecture, but here it is difficult to date precisely. Some

buildings were also extended with living rooms or converted entirely into residences following the construction of agricultural annexes. Tuffeau stone jambs and lintels have replaced the wooden framework of openings, and repairs in brick or in stone have been made on the cob. Finally, local tradition says that each house had either an oven or a well, used by two families. The truth of this is not proven, however: the 1809 land register does not list any farm buildings around the Acadian houses and the few examples that exist today date from the 19th century.



AN ECHO OF THE PAST THAT RESONATES TODAY

For two centuries, the memory of the colonization and the subsequent loss of Acadia has been experienced differently on both sides of the Atlantic. But, after many decades of scientific studies, a shared memory can now be established.

AN UNSUCCESSFUL WELCOME FOR DEPORTEES

Two years after arriving in Archigny, the Acadians began to rebel against their conditions. They complained about the unfulfilled promise that they would

become owners of the land they cultivated, a promise that had been made despite the fact that it was legally impossible to give seigneurial estates to commoners. Above all, their anger was fueled by the failure of the Poitou experiment. The colony did not become a homogeneous and united entity driven by agricultural success. On the contrary, the independent development of each farm reinforced differences.

The Acadian community, united by nearly 20 years of drifting and disappointment, showed this anger in letters, demands, and small disturbances. Their claims were viewed as ingratitude by the public authorities and the Marquis des Cars. In 1775, however, they were authorized to leave Archigny and go to Nantes, where they hoped to set sail for Louisiana.



1. View showing the inside of a farmhouse on the Acadian Line between 1773 and 1775, according to the latest research carried out in 2023.

© Renaud Pennelle

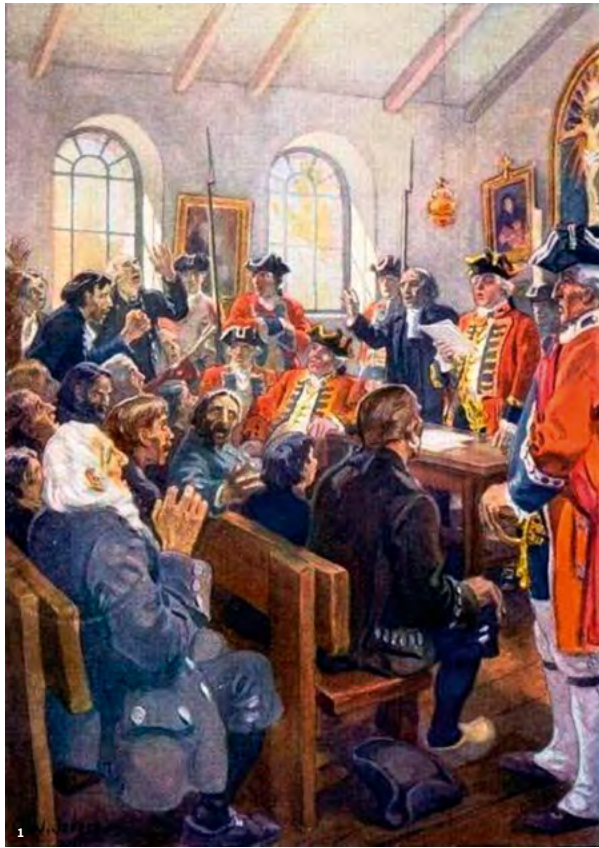
2. Evangeline, memory of the deportation of the Acadians, by Emmeline Labiche, old cemetery of Saint-Martinville, Louisiana

With our 21st-century perspective, it is possible to judge this period as one of the first receptions of deportees, perhaps the first documented in France. There are many reasons for this undeniable failure: late awareness and passivity by the government; double-dealing on the part of certain protagonists; keeping the refugees in a state of expectation that prevented them from settling down and integrating into the country's economic life; disengagement of a prescriptive government; the gradual weariness and discouragement of the various people involved; the expectation of major help on the one hand and unflinching recognition on the other, etc.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF A MOMENT IN HISTORY INTO INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

From the end of the 18th century, the memory of the *Grand Dérangement* was lost, in both France and in America. It was revived by Henry W. Longfellow, who in 1847 published an epic poem in English, *Evangeline, a Tale of Acadie*, which relates the separation of two lovers, Evangeline and Gabriel, during the *Grand Dérangement* and the young girl's quest to find her fiancé in America at the height of the **Revolutionary War**. Translated into French by Pamphyle Le May in 1865, the poem became the founding myth of the Acadian identity.

Inspired by this literary composition and by a renewal of historical studies,



1. C.W. Jefferys, *Deportation of Acadians order*

2. Monument commemorating the Grand Dérangement in front of George Island in Halifax

several major pictorial works transcribe this memory; the *Deportation of Acadians order* by C.W. Jefferys and *Le grand dérangement des Acadiens* by Claude Picard are among the most famous. In the first half of the 20th century, the poem was embodied in three films. Then, the destiny of Evangeline was transposed into songs: by Anna Malenfant in 1942 and by Michel Conte in 1971, which popularizes the subject of an identity built in the face of adversity: “[...] *But the English arrive/In the church they locked/All the men in your village/And women had to go/With the children crying/All night on the shore/In the morning they embarked*

with Gabriel on a Tall Ship/Without saying goodbye, without a smile...”. Today the song is a national classic. The various artistic expressions that have conveyed the tragedy of the “Grand Dérangement” for more than two centuries have helped forge the feeling of identity of the Acadian community, which has preserved the French language in English-speaking America. In 2003, a royal proclamation officially recognized the wrongdoing caused to the Acadians by the British Crown, and since 2005, the events are celebrated every year on July 28. For each commemorative anniversary, a memorial monument is

inaugurated. Thirty-eight have been designed. They will form a series named *Odyssée acadienne*.

FROM AN UNSHARED MEMORY TO A MEMORY TO SHARE

The history of Acadia and the Acadians has disappeared from the memory of French people whereas, for two and a half centuries, it has been so vivid on the other side of the ocean that it has contributed to the creation of the Acadian nation and the recognition of the prejudices suffered over History. The hiatus in the treatment of this history in France and North America reflects a difference in appreciation: for France, this history is just a moment, for the Acadians, it is THE moment. This difference has generated an unshared memory of the same historical event.

However, for more than half a century, the territory of Grand Châtellerault has brought to life, on its own scale, the human and memorial ties between France and Acadia thanks to the work of two associations: “Châtellerault-Québec-Acadie” and “Les cousins acadiens”. Their volunteers host Acadian families who, after several years of research and a journey of more than 7,000 km, come here to discover the places where their ancestors lived for a few months. These exchanges are based on two shared heritages, a history and a language, which have evolved differently on the two continents, but the permanence of which

today strengthens ties and facilitates the sharing of memories.

The links created were consolidated, between 2005 and 2008, by an inventory of the heritage of New France conducted in partnership by both sides of the Atlantic. This research, together with renewed university studies, has highlighted the role of the Poitou and Charentes populations in the history of colonization of North America. This new perspective on history has prompted the Grand Châtellerault community to initiate awareness-raising actions to help build a shared memory and a memory to share around the Acadian Line and its farmhouse no. 10.

“THE WORLD IS ALL SPACE
AND ALL TIMES.
TO TRAVEL THE WORLD
IS TO REINVENT HISTORY.”

Antonine Maillet, Acadian novelist and playwright (born in 1929)

Grand-Châtelleraut belongs to the national **towns and regions of art and history network**

The French Ministry of Culture's Heritage Department awards the Towns and Regions of Art and History label to local authorities that promote their heritage. It guarantees the competence of guides and architecture and heritage coordinators, and the quality of their work. From ancient remains to 21st-century architecture, the towns and regions spotlight the diversity of their heritage. Today, a network of 2020 towns and regions of art and history offer their knowledge in France and overseas.

Nearby

Angoulême, Cognac, Poitiers, Rochefort, Royan, Saintes, Thouars, the regions of Charente-Limousine, Confolentais, Montmorillonnais, Île de Ré, Vienne and Gartempe and Parthenay-Gâtine have the Towns and Regions of Art and History label.

And also in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region

Bayonne, Béarnes-des-Graves, Bergerac, Bordeaux, Limoges, Pau, Périgueux, La Réole, Sarlat, the regions of Grand-Villeneuvois, Hautes terres de Corrèze et Ventadour, Mont-et-Barrages, Pyrénées-Béarnaises, Saint-Jean-de-Luz and Ciboure and Vézère-Ardoise.

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