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## ***The Acadians 1***

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### **Settlement**

During the 17th century settlers came from different parts of France to a region of the New World they called l'Acadie. As time went on the Acadians developed a unique way of life which found expression in their own language, customs and beliefs.

In the early 1600s France was determined to strengthen her political and economic position in the New World through colonization. Men of influence in the court were given commissions to establish settlements in exchange for the rights to profit from the fishery and the fur trade.

In 1630 the Sieur Isaac de Razilly received such a commission to found a settlement on the southern shore of Acadia at La Hève (now LaHave, in Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia). Among the people he bought over from France were tenant farmers from inland agricultural areas like Poitou and others from places on the coast of France such as Saint-Onge and Aunis. The settlers numbered about 300 men and 12 to 15 women.

La Hève, with its natural harbour and sheltered inlets, was a very good base for the fishing industry. But in order to survive, the new settlers had to farm as well and La Hève was not nearly as ideal a setting for agriculture as it was for the fishery. Following de Razilly's death in 1635, his successor moved the La Hève settlers to the area around Port Royal on the Bay of Fundy side of Nova Scotia.



Unlike the rocky Atlantic coast, the shoreline of the Annapolis Basin and along the Annapolis River had many tidal marshes. You can get a sense of just how extensive these were from the map above. These marshlands were large, treeless, stone-free plains that were well suited to farming, once dykes had been built to prevent the high Fundy tides from flooding them twice daily.

By the early part of the 1700s, Acadian settlements had spread to similar marshlands around the rest of the Bay of Fundy.

## Trading

Although the Acadians were remarkably self-sufficient there were some things they could not make or grow themselves, and for these needs they established trading links with New England and with other French settlements. Molasses, cooking pots, board axes, clay pipes, gunpowder, fabrics, and rum came through New England. Through Louisbourg they obtained cottons, thread, lace, firearms and religious items from France. The Acadians were fond of smoking (both men and women smoked): their clay pipes came mostly from England, although at times



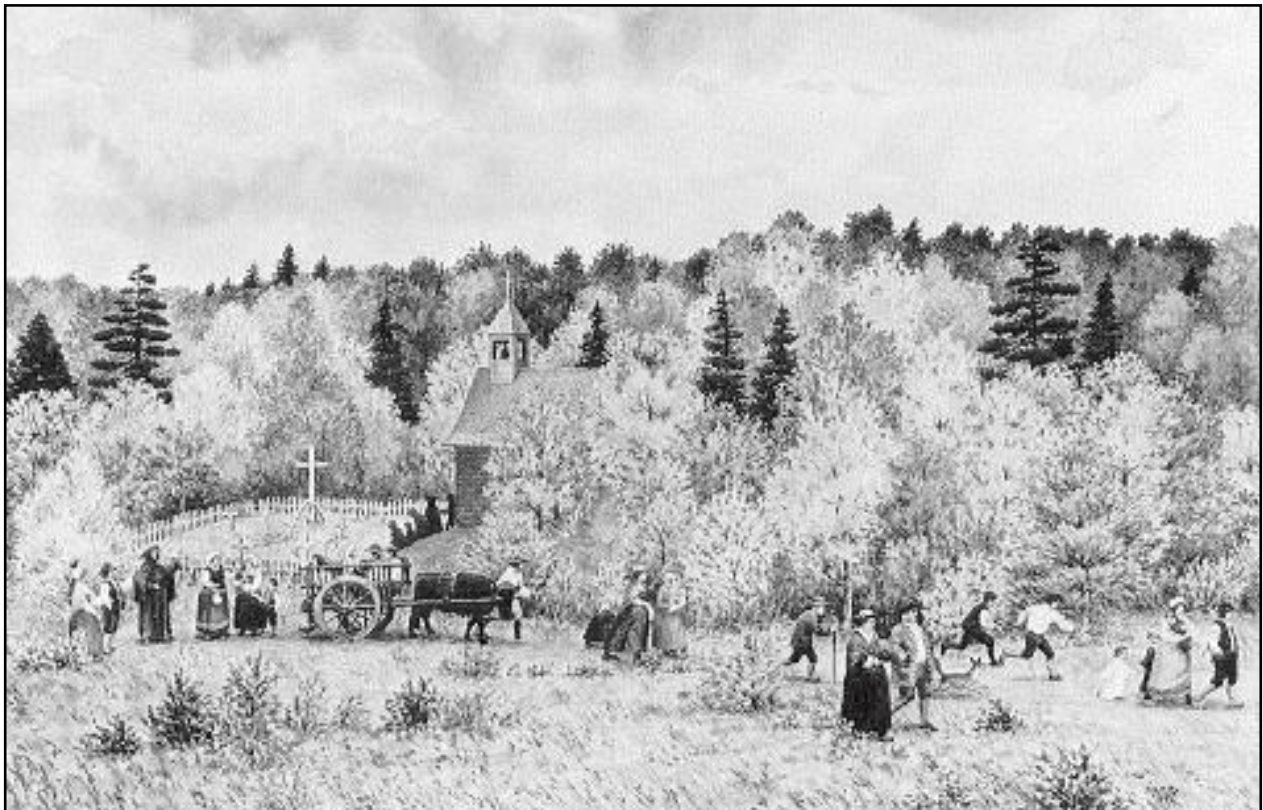
they did make their own, using local red clay. In return for these items, the Acadians traded grain from the fertile marshlands, cattle well-fed on salt-marsh hay, and furs they had obtained from trapping and trade with the Mi'kmaq. The objects illustrated in this painting represent artifacts recovered from Acadian archaeological sites or listed in the inventories of ships that actually traded with the Acadians.

## Community Life

Like many people isolated by circumstances, the Acadians had a strong sense of community and performed many tasks together. One of the most important of these was the regular maintenance of the dykes. Another, which was much enjoyed, occurred when a young couple married. The whole village would gather to help clear land and to build a house for them. It became an occasion for work, fun, food and celebration. Music on these occasions was often provided by fiddles and jaw harps.

For more than a hundred years the Acadians were able to maintain their self-contained lifestyle, enjoying their large families and peaceful communities, strengthened by a firm sense of religion. They lived on friendly terms with their immediate neighbours, the Mi'kmaq Indians, and profited from their trading links with New England and other French settlements. By preference, they had no strong ties with either France or England, and tried to avoid confrontation with them.

In some sense, it was their very isolation from the influence of these major colonial powers, coupled with the impact of the marshland landscape which was their home, which helped the Acadians to establish and maintain their unique way of life.



The illustrations in the INFO were painted by Azor Vienneau for use in the production of an educational film series on pre-expulsion Acadian life called Premières Terres Acadiennes. Very careful attention was paid to detail in these paintings; they are based largely on both historical research and on the results of an archaeological dig which the Nova Scotia Museum conducted at a pre-expulsion Acadian farm-site at Belleisle, N.S. in 1983.

Some of the illustrations painted for Premières Terres Acadiennes are available at the Museum as full-colour posters.

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