

The **Acadians** (French: *Acadiens*) are the descendants of the seventeenth-century French colonists who settled in Acadia, located in the Canadian Maritime provinces — Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and in the US state of Maine. Although today most of the Acadians and Québécois are francophone Canadians, Acadia was founded in a region geographically and administratively separate from Quebec, which led to their developing two rather distinct histories and cultures.

In the Great Expulsion of 1755-1763, mostly during the Seven Years' War, British colonial officers and New England legislators and militia deported more than 14,000 Acadians from the maritime region. Approximately one third perished. Many later settled in Louisiana, where they became known as Cajuns. Others were transported to France. Later on many Acadians returned to the Maritime provinces of Canada, most specifically New Brunswick. During the British conquest of New France, they renamed the French colony of Acadia as Nova Scotia.

Early history

Arriving in 1604, French settlers [led by Pierre du Gua and Samuel de Champlain] built a fort at the mouth of the St. Croix River, which separates present-day New Brunswick and Maine, on a small island named Île-Ste-Croix. The following spring, the settlers sailed across the bay to Port-Royal (Annapolis Royal) in present day Nova Scotia. Acadia was the first permanent French settlement in North America, established at Port-Royal in 1607. In 1607 Henry IV, the King of France, granted Pierre Dugua, Sieur de Monts the right to colonize lands in North America between 40° and 60° north latitude..

During the seventeenth century, about sixty French families were established in Acadia. They developed friendly relations with the aboriginal Mi'kmaq, learning their hunting and fishing techniques. The Acadians lived mainly in the coastal regions, farming land reclaimed from the sea through diking. Living on the frontier between French and British territories, the Acadians found themselves on the front lines in each conflict between the powers. Acadia was passed repeatedly from one side to the other, and the Acadians learned to

survive through an attitude of studied neutrality, refusing to take up arms for either side, and thus came to be referred to as the "French neutrals."

In the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, France ceded the portion of Acadia that is now Nova Scotia (minus Cape Breton Island) to the British for the last time. In 1730, the Acadians signed an oath swearing allegiance to the British Crown, but stipulating that Acadians would not have to take up arms against the French or Indians. But, in 1754 with the outbreak of tensions with France, the British government, no longer accepting the neutrality previously granted, demanded that the Acadians take an absolute oath of allegiance to the British monarch, which would require their taking up arms. Not wanting to take up arms against family members in French territory, and believing that the oath would compromise their Roman Catholic faith, the Acadians refused. Colonel Charles Lawrence ordered the mass deportation of the Acadians. Contemporary historian John Mack Faragher has used the late 20th century term, "ethnic cleansing", to describe the British actions.

In what is known as the Great Expulsion (*le Grand Dérangement*) of 1755-1763, during the Seven Years' War between England and France, more than 14,000 Acadians (three-quarters of the Acadian population in Nova Scotia) were expelled, their homes burned and their lands confiscated. Families were split up, and the Acadians were dispersed throughout the British lands in North America; thousands were transported to France. Gradually, some managed to make their way to Louisiana, creating the Cajun population and culture after mixing with others there.

Other Acadians returned to British North America, settling in coastal villages and in northern New Brunswick. Some settled in the region of Fort Sainte-Anne, now Fredericton, but were later displaced by the arrival of the United Empire Loyalists after the American Revolution. Mail carriers who helped Halifax and Quebec stay in contact became knowledgeable about the St. John River area.^[5] In 1785 the mail carriers organized a group of 24 families and led them to the Upper Saint John River valley, above Grand Falls which the British ships could not pass.

Culture

Today Acadians are a vibrant minority, particularly in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Louisiana (Cajuns), and northern Maine. Since 1994, *Le Congrès Mondial Acadien* has united Acadians of the Maritimes, New England, and Louisiana.

August 15, the feast of the Assumption, was adopted as the national feast day of the Acadians at the First Acadian National Convention, held in Memramcook, New Brunswick in 1881. On that day, the Acadians celebrate by having the *tintamarre* which consists mainly of a big parade where people can dress up with the colours of Acadia and make a lot of noise.

Acadians speak a dialect of French called Acadian French. Many of those in the Moncton, New Brunswick area speak Chiac and English. The Louisiana Cajun descendants mostly speak English but some still speak Cajun French, a French dialect they diversified in Louisiana.

In 1847, American writer Henry Wadsworth Longfellow published *Evangeline*, an epic poem loosely based on the events surrounding the 1755 deportation. The poem became an American classic, and contributed to a rebirth of Acadian identity in both Maritime Canada and in Louisiana.