

The Acadian Resettlement of St-Mary's Bay in Nova Scotia

[Editor's Note : This is a translation of an article published April 2010 in 'Le Terriot', a publication of the Association des familles Thériault d'Amérique (www.genealogie.org/famille/theriault/). The translation is by J.R. Theriault, Terriot Acadian Family Society. We are grateful to the author, M. Gérard Thériault and to the Association des familles Thériault d'Amérique for their permission to use the original article.]

Members of the association¹ who attended the 2004 World Acadian Congress will remember this beautiful area of Nova Scotia by its Acadian personality that is so distinguished and so welcoming. It is the region of Saint Mary's Bay or, as it is officially called, the District Municipality of Clare, established in 1768 and incorporated in 1879. It is the only municipality in Nova Scotia that conducts its business in French and English. The municipality has about 9,000 inhabitants, of which more than 75% are French-speaking Acadians. I thought you might find it interesting to learn how this Acadian resettlement began.

At the end of the war between France and England in 1763, there were still 1,019 Acadians in Nova Scotia which encompassed all the territory of the three oldest existing Maritimes (NS, NB, and PEI). The British Government's assessment was based on a letter to the Board of Halifax dated August 18, 1763 by Beausoleil Broussard, an Acadian hero who would eventually found the Acadian settlement in Louisiana. The letter provided a list of Acadians who wished to emigrate to the French area. However, the UK authorities in that time had decided that it was no longer politically correct to deport the Acadians. They could remain in the province and receive certificates of ownership, provided they make the oath of allegiance. If some refused to take the oath and left, others decided instead to stay and took initiatives to find a place to settle again. Thus, the Acadians settled in the area of



¹ The author addresses himself to the members of the Association des familles Thériault d'Amérique.

Isle Madame in Cape Breton and other regions in Cocagne, Bouctouche, Richibucto, and Shediac, in New Brunswick.

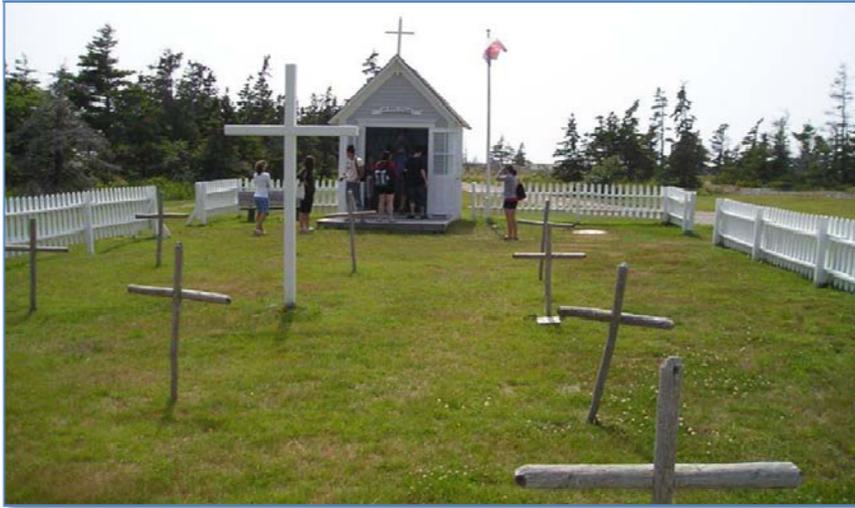
Elsewhere, peace was restored and other Acadian refugees from New England, including some 800 of the "Caravan of Massachusetts" from Salem, around the year 1766 started to return to Nova Scotia with hopes of re-occupying their former lands, their houses, their cattle, their orchards and sluices in the regions of Pisiquid, Grand-Pré and Port Royal. Unfortunately, these hopes were dashed.

Upon arrival, they found that all their lands were now occupied by the 'Planters' of New England who did not look kindly on these ghosts of the past. The Acadians were forced to seek temporary refuge in Windsor where they made a petition to the Governor for a priest in Quebec and a surveyor to identify the boundaries of the new lands they wanted. Governor Michael Franklin acceded to the two requests. Father Charles Bailly was sent as a missionary and a warrant of survey dated 1 July 1768 allowed John Morrison, deputy surveyor, to survey the future of County Clare from the Sissiboo River to Cape St. Mary. This area was divided into subgroups on the basis of 80 acres for a family head and 20 additional acres for each additional family member.

The first Acadian to take advantage of land grants in the district of Clare was Joseph Dugas (1738-1823) who settled in the Anse-des-LeBlanc in the parish of St. Bernard with his wife and daughter Marie Robichaud Isabelle in September 1768. His son Joseph was born 20 days later. Other Acadian families followed in the spring of 1769 and subsequent years. They were first given permits for land use, but it was not until 1775 that the official and legal land grants were issued to them. The founding families recognized are: Amirault, Babin, Belliveau, Boudreau, Comeau, Deveau, Doucet, Dugas, Gaudet, Guidry, LeBlanc, Maillet, Melanson, Robichaud, Saulnier, **Thériault**, Thibault, Thibodeau Trahan. The **Thériault** founding couple was Hilarion Charles and Marie Madeleine Belliveau. Charles was born in Grand-Pré on 21 October 1739 and died at St. Mary's Bay in 1822; Madeleine was born at the same place on September 26, 1744 and died in 1821 at St. Mary's Bay. As to myself, Gerard Theriault, I descend from this couple and the family oral history tells the story that they escaped into the woods to avoid deportation.

It was at 'Pointe-a-Major' that the first Acadian cemetery in the region was built. There is still a little chapel facing a fenced square of land on which are scattered wooden crosses bearing names of Acadian families: Belliveau, Brossard, Comeaux, Doucet, Gaudet, Guidry, LaNoue, LeBlanc, Saulnier. Long ago, this place was an island called 'Ile-a-Piau' according to Piau Belliveau, who in 1755 had escaped from Port Royal with his family and over a hundred others. They arrived on the island by boat and spent the winter. We do not have all the information to identify the dead that were buried during that winter, but we know that the place was used as a cemetery for the pioneers of St. Mary's Bay until 1790. The small chapel with a statue of Mary dates back to 1892. It replaced a chapel that was first built in 1889. Site improvements and construction of two chapels have been the work of Father Alphonse Parker, pastor of St. Bernard, who was touched by the story of the Acadians, asked that the land be respected as sacred ground.

This site now belongs to the Acadian Historical Society of St. Mary's Bay and is recognized as a historic site in Nova Scotia. On a monument near the chapel, you can read the inscription: "During the winter of 1755, Pierre (Piau) Belliveau and 120 Acadians fled here to avoid deportation. On September 8, 1769, Father Bailly, missionary, celebrated the first Mass in Clare. In 1774, the land was blessed by Father Mathurin Bourg and became the first Acadian Cemetery in Clare."



It is in the village of Grosses-Cogues that the first church of the region was built in 1774. At that time, the village was at the center of the inhabited region. The site is marked by a souvenir stone cross. In these times, there was not a resident priest at St. Mary's Bay. The Acadians were rarely visited by the missionary priests. But it was one of those missionaries, Father Joseph-Mathurin Bourg, who built this church.

Since 1772, François Doucet and Pierre LeBlanc came to settle with their families on Seraphin Island which became the village of Chicabon, then renamed Pointe-de-l'Eglise. The village primary school was called École Joseph Dugas, in honor of the first Acadian pioneer to settle in Clare. Outside the school, there is also a monument in his honor with the inscription: "This monument is erected in honor of Joseph Dugas Sr. and his wife, Marie-Joséph Robichaud, and their daughter, Isabella, who came to Anse-des-LeBlanc on September 5, 1768. They were the first Acadians to settle in the district of Clare. Twenty days after their arrival, Marie-Joséph gave birth to son Joseph, the first Acadian born in Baie Sainte-Marie. The courage of this couple who alone faced great difficulties inspired a sense of pride to all residents of the District who followed."

If some lament the high rate of assimilation in some Acadian regions, the people here are confident of maintaining and developing their culture as demonstrated by the adoption of the motto in 1980, "We came. It was to stay," during the celebration of the 375th anniversary of the founding of Port Royal.

Gerard Theriault,
descendant of an Acadian pioneer of the Baie Sainte-Marie.