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# The Acadian Migrations

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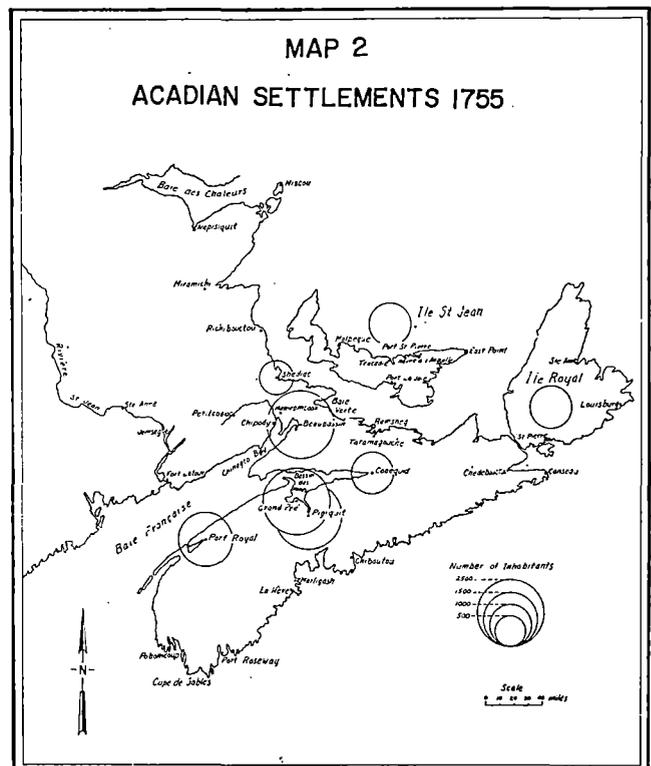
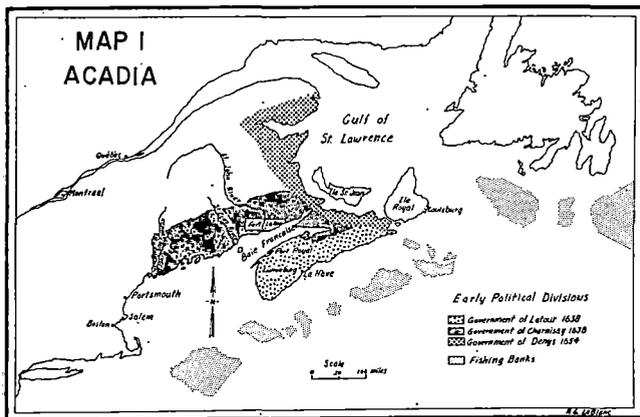
INTRODUCTION: The cultural diversity of people and shifting national boundaries have often led to political instability by the creation of enclaves and exclaves of minority groups. One means by which such situations may be rectified is the forced migrations of peoples across international boundaries. Perhaps the most recent example of this was the measures taken in the Central European "shatter zone" following World War II to eliminate the minority problems that existed there before the War. The colonial history of North America provides a comparable situation. During the course of the Anglo-French struggle for control of North America a new boundary was placed on the political map of the continent. The Acadians, French and Catholic, and formerly within the French colonial empire suddenly found themselves political members of the English empire. The political instability generated by this new status eventually led to their expulsion in 1755, on the eve of the culminating struggle between the English and the French. For many years after, the Acadian exiles sought either repatriation or a new homeland. They moved across the map always seeking but seldom finding a home. Their efforts toward repatriation were frustrated. Not until 1800 did the Acadians finally achieve some measure of locational stability. This paper will concern itself with the Acadian migrations, their ephemeral homes and their final settlement pattern.

THE SITUATION IN ACADIA: Acadia was settled by French colonists early in the 17th century. Its location along the littoral of the Baie Française (Bay of Fundy) is important to an understanding of its history (see Map 1). First, Acadia was isolated from the major French settlement in the St. Lawrence Valley. There was little con-

tact between the two and there gradually emerged a cultural distinctiveness despite the common antecedents of both groups. Acadian contact with France was at a minimum. There was little increment to the Acadian population via immigration from France after 1671 (Richard 1895:32).

More important was the location of Acadia relative to the New England colonies. In a sense the French and the English faced each other from the opposite sides of a lake (the Gulf of Maine) which provided easy accessibility. Some relatively peaceful contacts generally of a commercial nature were made. Although the Acadians were primarily agriculturalists, they carried on some fishing activities and as a result contact and sometimes conflict occurred with the New Englanders on the fishing banks. Increasingly, Acadia became a battlefield for the English and French. The French garrison at Louisbourg was often the military objective but the vulnerable position of Port Royal, the major Acadian settlement in the 17th century, made it the object of plunder by New Englanders on several different occasions. By the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 Acadia was ceded to the English and the Acadians were made nominal subjects of the British Crown.

With the peace began a period of prosperity for the



<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Prof. Fred Lukermann of the University of Minnesota for his critical reading of this manuscript.



tion of his plans. In June of 1760 the first contingent of 650 families from Boston and Rhode Island arrived to take up the vacated Acadian lands (Brebner, 1937). By 1763, 12,500 New Englanders had been successfully settled.

Despite the resettlement of their homeland or perhaps out of ignorance of this fact, the Acadians were continually turning up in Acadia. Their growing numbers aroused an anxiety in English officialdom:

"there are many of the Acadians in this Province who altho' they have surrendered themselves, are yet ever ready and watchful for an opportunity . . . to disturb and distress the new settlements lately made and those now forming; and I am perfectly well convinced from the whole course of their behavior and disposition, that they cannot with any safety to this province become again the inhabitants of it" (cf. Akins, 1869:321).

Once again the decision was made to remove the Acadians. In August 1762, 1,500 left Halifax on five transports bound for Boston. The Massachusetts legislature which had continually objected to the dumping of exiles in their colony, now refused to allow the new arrivals to disembark. They subsequently were returned to Halifax.

It was during this period that Acadian refugees coming from the St. John River, established settlements in the Three Rivers district of Quebec. This same area was to eventually attract numerous refugees from New England in 1767. This period also marks the establishment of Acadians in Louisiana. The prospect of joining with their French brethren proved attractive to many of the exiles especially from the southern American colonies.

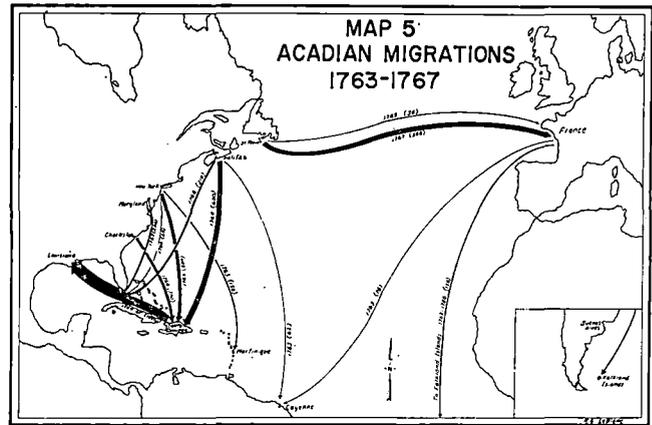
THE MIGRATIONS 1763-1767: The location of the Acadians in 1763 is shown in Table I. It has been compiled from a variety of sources and includes some estimates of this writer wherever figures were not available.

TABLE 1. Location of Acadians in 1763.

Place	Number	Place	Number
Massachusetts	1043	Louisiana	300
Connecticut	666	England	866
New York	249	France	3500
Maryland	810	Quebec	2000
Pennsylvania	383	Prince Edward	
S. Carolina	280	Island	300
Georgia	185	Baie des	
Nova Scotia	1249	Chaleurs	700
St. John River	87		
		TOTAL	12,618

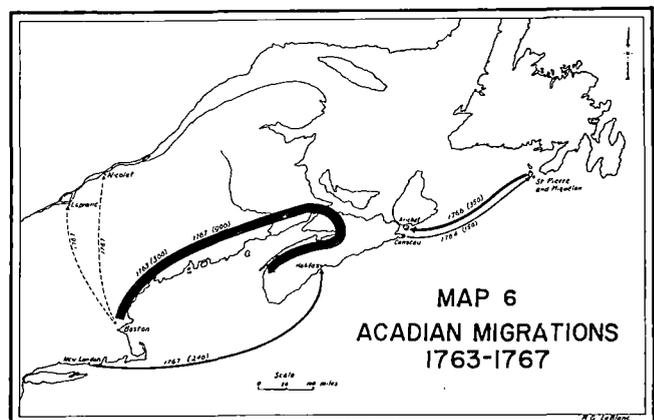
With the exception of the Acadians in Quebec and Louisiana, nearly all were in localities where forces were operating to dictate their removal. This is reflected in Maps 5 and 6. As concerns the numbers involved, the migrations of this period were second only in importance to the original expulsion in 1755. The spatial dislocation was even greater.

Acadian movements during this period fall into three general categories. First there was a continued exodus of Acadians out of Nova Scotia. Paradoxically this occurred at the same time that many of the refugees were returning to Acadia in large numbers, primarily from the American colonies. Finally, the Caribbean area became increasingly a focus of Acadian movements.



Most of the 3,600 exiles remaining in the American colonies left during this period. The attempts made by local authorities to disperse them in many communities were not successful as the Acadians continually turned up in major port cities. Boston, New York, New London and Charleston served as such gathering points. Large groups left Boston overland for Acadia or the St. Lawrence Valley. From the middle and southern colonies the movement was to the Caribbean area, either directly to Louisiana or to that refugee haven via Santo Domingo. By this time news of favorable treatment and prosperity of the first arrivals in Louisiana had reached nearly all Acadians.

The Treaty of Paris in 1763 ended the hostilities between England and France in North America. If there was some semblance of a return to political stability, the treaty meant little to the circumstances of the Acadians in Nova Scotia and of the many others returning in this period. Lt. Governor Wilmot feared the Acadians. He sought permission of his superiors to send the exiles to the West Indies but was refused. The Lords of Trade insisted instead that they be given land agreeable to themselves (Richard, 1895: 2-341). Of course the only land falling into this category would have been their old lands on the Baie Française, lands which were now occupied by thousands of New Englanders. Attempts to resettle the Acadians generally failed. The inferior lands allotted to them and the restrictions placed upon their grouping led eventually to their dissatisfaction and voluntary migration to the West Indies, Louisiana, and St. Pierre and

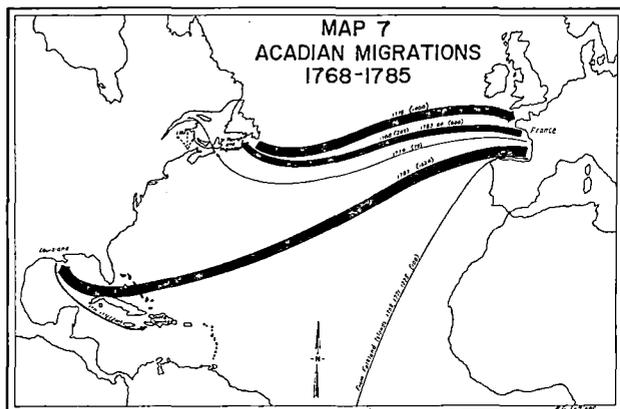


Miquelon (retained by France in 1763). The 900 exiles returning from New England did however establish themselves successfully along the shores of St. Mary's Bay, south of old Port Royal.

**THE MIGRATIONS 1768-1785:** At the beginning of this period there remained only two major areas of Acadian instability (Map 7). By 1767 the facilities of St. Pierre and Miquelon were so strained by the stream of refugee Acadians that some were encouraged to leave for France. (see Map 5). It was not long after their arrival in the French ports that many expressed the desire to return to the tiny archipelago in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. 285 made the return journey in 1768. By 1775 the population of the islands numbered 1,500 again placing a strain on local resources (most of the exiles had to be supported by the government). A new turn of political events provided a temporary solution to this problem.

The sympathy of France for the American cause in the Revolutionary War eventually led to French support of the American military effort in 1778. The English in retaliation sent an expedition to the strategic archipelago and deported to France 1,400 Acadians. By the Treaty of Versailles in 1783, the islands were retroceded to France and soon after 600 Acadians returned once more (Lauviere, 1924:2:210-215).

France surprisingly did not serve as a permanent home for the exiles. The large number of Acadians which arrived from Ile St. Jean in 1758 was the nucleus of an exile group which remained in France for nearly 30 years. In 1763 the Acadian group in England (from Virginia, 1755) was brought to France while some of the Acadian arrivals from St. Pierre and Miquelon throughout this period remained behind. Various attempts to settle the Acadians in France, Corsica, the Falkland Islands and Guiana all failed. For the greater part of this period in France, the exiles were supported at government expense. The destitution of the Acadians, the desire of the French government to solve a problem which was a severe drain on the treasury, and the eagerness of Spain to strengthen its claim to Louisiana by active colonization all lead to the last of the major Acadian migrations. In 1785 more than 1,600 were transported to Louisiana by the Spanish (Winzerling, 1955).



**THE FINAL SETTLEMENT PATTERN:** By the end of the 18th century the location of the Acadians had taken on

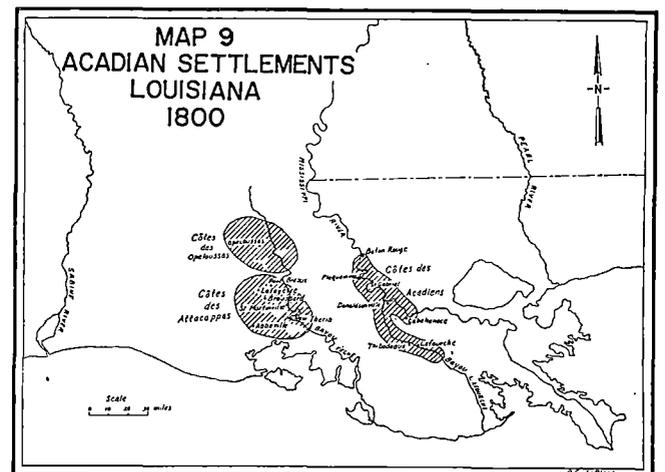
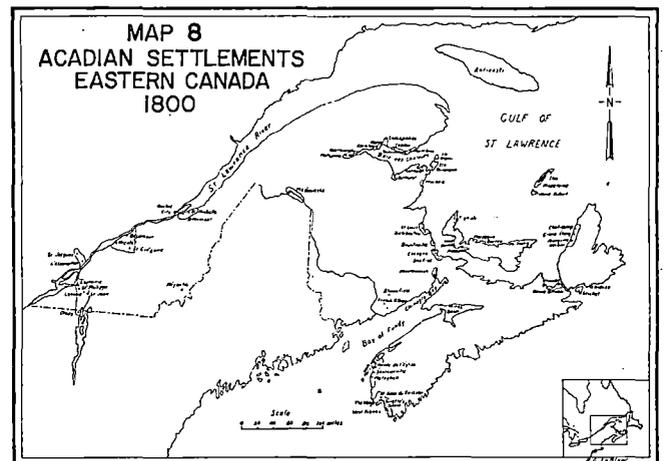
some measure of permanency. With the exception of a few subsequent moves involving small numbers, the fifty year period of migrations had come to an end. With the exception of the Acadian population of the Maritime Provinces based on an accurate ecclesiastical census in 1803 only estimates are available for the numbers of each major area (Rameau, 1877: 360-61). Table II gives an approximation of the Acadian population and its location in 1800.

TABLE B. Acadian population in 1800.

Maritime Provinces	8400
Quebec	8000
Louisiana	4000
United States	1000
France	1000
Not specified	1000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23,400</b>

More than 80% of the Acadians were located in two areas, Eastern Canada and Louisiana. Scattered elsewhere in the United States, the French ports and the Caribbean were another 3,000.

Map 8 shows most of the places where Acadians were located in Eastern Canada in 1800. In the three areas of settlement in the St. Lawrence Valley, near the cities of Quebec, Three Rivers and Montreal the Acadians generally lived side by side with French Canadians. Else-



where, along the shores of the Baie des Chaleurs, Eastern Brunswick and Nova Scotia the settlements are more distinctly Acadian. One striking feature of the location of the Acadians in the maritime region is their absence from their old homeland.

Of the new areas of Acadian settlement following the migrations none, in the course of time, became as distinctive as southern Louisiana (Map 9). The major areas of settlement were in the Attacappas, the Opeloussas, along the Mississippi River south of Baton Rouge and along Bayou La Fourche. The physical isolation of most of these settlements permitted a high degree of culture retention by the Acadians.

CONCLUSION: In 1800, for the first time since the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, the Acadians were located in areas where they were free to carry on their simple life and where there was a considerable measure of security from the vagaries of international politics, of which they had so often been the victims and of which they had been so ignorant. Their anomalous position in the first half of the 18th century, a French population in English territory at a time when England and France were struggling for supremacy in the New World, must be cited as the most important factor which precipitated their migrations. The hostile reception they received in the American colonies combined with their resignation to return to Acadia precluded from the very beginning any permanent home for them on the Atlantic seaboard. France, by virtue of the strong cultural ties which existed between the French and Acadians might have proved a permanent home for the exiles had not the treatment they received there been little better than that received in the American colonies.

The new Acadian settlements in the New World afforded the stability which had been lacking in the American colonies or France. In the maritime regions of Canada they appropriated land which was not previously settled. With land allotted to them or provided for their use in the St. Lawrence Valley they were rapidly incorporated with their French brethren. All of these Acadians were still, one might say, squatters on English territory, but by this time the Anglo French struggle for North America had been resolved and the French settlers no longer posed a serious threat, whether real or imagined. The Acadians of Louisiana were well received by the Creoles and achieved there the peace and security which had long eluded them.

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