

**Presentation given by Dr. Barbara Le Blanc and Dr. Sally Ross
at the KAQA'NATA Multicultural & Diversity Summit 2018 - Wagmatcook**

The History of the Acadians in Nova Scotia

This is a huge topic for two people to treat in less than 45 minutes. In an effort to be brief and to personalize the Acadian story, this is what we have decided to do: I (Sally) will ask and answer some basic historical questions and Barbara will show a number of illustrations and provide back-up with facts from her own family history.

1) Where was Acadie? First let us recognize and honour the original inhabitants of this land who were here for at least 10,000 years before the arrival of the first European fishermen and European explorers in the 1400s and 1500s. The borders of Acadie shifted and changed over the years, but essentially it covered part of Mi'kma'ki. In the 1600s, in today's terms, it covered the Maritime Provinces and part of the State of Maine.

→ *The ancestors of most Acadians were born and lived in France. We do not yet know the name of the community where my direct Le Blanc ancestor was born and lived as a child and young man. From certain studies, we are told that approximately 51% of French people who settled in Acadie in the 1600s were from the province of Poitou. Others came the provinces of Saintonge and Aunis. Smaller numbers came from other provinces of France. However, there was no place called Acadie in France.*

2) Where does the name Acadie come from? Perhaps from the land of plenty in ancient Greece called *Arcadie*, a name used by Verrazzano, one of the very early explorers. But more probably from the Mi'kmaw word **Cadie** (which I think means place). Champlain uses Cadie and later Acadie. (Acadia is the anglicized form).

3) When did colonization of Acadie by the French start? The first successful attempt to establish a French settlement in this part of the world took place in 1604. Henri IV, the king of France, granted Pierre Dugas de Monts a monopoly for the lands situated between the 40th and 46th parallels – as if it were his property to grant.

4) What were the consequences of this expedition? The best known person in this 1604 expedition led by du Monts was Samuel de Champlain, an accomplished navigator and cartographer. Thanks to his maps and his diaries, we learn a great deal about the coast of Acadie. Many of the names Champlain gave to bays, coves, and inlets survive today – often in their anglicized form. Obviously Champlain was not aware or it did not occur to him that the Mi'kmaq had already had their own place names.

There is no question that the two main goals of the Du Monts and other French expeditions were:

to obtain furs and to recruit new converts to Christianity (or more precisely to Catholicism). After a rather disastrous winter spent on Saint Croix Island, the expedition moved to a place Champlain called **Port Royal**. It was at Port-Royal that Champlain met **Membertou** and fraternized with his group of Mi'kmaq. Champlain stayed in Port Royal for two winters. In the course of his travels along the coast he had numerous encounters with the Mi'kmaq whom he referred to as the Souriquois. All the men at Port Royal were forced to return to France in 1607 because de Mons' monopoly in Acadie was revoked by the King. **The relationship that Champlain and his men established with the Mi'kmaq laid the groundwork for the religious, political, and military alliance between the French and the Mi'kmaq that lasted until France lost her colonies in 1763.**

→ *I remember wondering why we had lost that strong alliance when watching Mi'kmaw interpreters sharing aspects of their history and culture with visitors to 21st century Port Royal National Historic Site. I try to imagine the exchanges my Acadian ancestors had with their Mi'kmaw neighbours – exchanges of all kinds that helped these French-speaking immigrants survive in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.*

5) When did serious efforts to colonize Acadie begin? Immigration to Acadie was extremely limited both in time and in numbers. Only about **50** families came from France and settled permanently in Acadie. Most of them arrived between 1632 and 1650. Very few arrived after that. It is amazing to realize that those 50 families form the foundation of the Acadian people.

→ *My direct male ancestor, Daniel Le Blanc, is believed to have been born in 1626; to have arrived in Port Royal in the mid-1600s; and to have married Françoise Gaudet around 1650. Daniel and Françoise are the ancestors of most of the Le Blancs in North America. The Le Blanc family was the largest in pre-deportation Acadie and remains to this day the most wide-spread of Acadian families in North America. One of their sons, René, my ancestor, married Anne Bourgeois in Port Royal. I can image the Mi'kmaq helping my ancestors survive in the villages, for example, by showing them fishing and hunting techniques – for example, the fishing weir, and spruce gum to prevent diseases such as scurvy.*

6) Why did so few French colonists settle in Acadie? Acadie was a strategic, and therefore vulnerable, territory because it lay on the main trade routes in the North Atlantic and near the rich fishing grounds. It was located between New France (present-day Quebec) and the British colonies to the south. Acadie was tossed back and forth between France and Britain about nine times before 1710. That instability meant that France concentrated her colonizing efforts, such as they were, on New France, not on Acadie.

7) What was the population of Acadie in 1645? There were about 450 settlers from France and an estimated 3,500 Mi'kmaq. Compare that with 11,000 settlers in the colony of Massachusetts Bay and about 1,000 French settlers in New France (Quebec).

8) Where did the French settle in Acadie? The first group settled in LaHave but then moved to Port Royal which became the main population centre from which the natural expansion took place. As the generations passed, young families left to establish themselves in new areas, always on the periphery of Mi'kmaw territory – so there was little encroachment (Beaubassin, Grand-Pré, Pisiquid, Cobequid...). With the exception of a few outposts like Cape Sable, the Acadians settled near the salt marshes along the tidal rivers of the Baie Française (Bay of Fundy).

→ *One of the sons of René Le Blanc and Anne Bourgeois, my direct ancestor, whose name was François, was born in Port Royal about 1682 and married Jeanne Hébert about 1703. François and Jeanne moved from Port Royal to Grand-Pré. They had eleven children. My direct ancestor, their son, Jacques, married Catherine Landry in the parish church of Saint-Charles-des-Mines in Grand-Pré on September 18, 1727. Jacques Le Blanc and Catherine Landry settled in his wife's home community in Pisiquid (today called Windsor) where they lived near her parents Pierre Landry and Marie-Madeleine Broussard. I have been told that the name Pisiquid is Mi'kmaq meaning "the place where the tidal flow forks."*

9) What are the main characteristics of the Acadian settlements? The Acadian settlement pattern was quite unique and very different from other European settlements in North America. They built dykes and aboiteaux (sluices) that enabled them to farm the marshlands. This building and maintenance of dykes involved cooperative work on the part of all the families. Basically, Acadians established an agricultural society with the main crops being wheat and cattle and other livestock which eventually became essential commodities in the trade with Louisbourg and New England. Aside from cultural exchanges, the trade between the Mi'kmaq and the Acadians was based primarily on furs and metal items.

10) What were the implications of the fall of Port Royal in 1710? The Acadians had seen Acadie change hands on numerous occasions in the past, so they had no reason to believe that the capture of Port Royal by the British in 1710 represented anything definitive. But it was. The Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 gave peninsular Acadie to Great Britain and Île Saint-Jean (PEI) and Île Royale (Cape Breton) to France. The peninsula was renamed Nova Scotia and Port Royal was renamed Annapolis Royal. France encouraged Acadians to settle on Île Royale where construction of the Fortress of Louisbourg was beginning. Although relatively few Acadian families moved to Île Royale, the majority of the ones who did settled at Port Toulouse (present-day St Peter's) near the ancient Mi'kmaw camping ground of Malagawatch at the entrance of the Bras D'Or Lakes. The Acadian population in peninsular Nova Scotia continued to grow and expand geographically. The British required the Acadians to choose men or so-called deputies to represent their communities (which corresponded roughly to parishes).

11) What were the implications of the founding of Halifax in 1749? Until the founding of Halifax, the British had made no effort to bring in settlers. The dynamics changed radically with the arrival of thousands of settlers in Halifax and then in Lunenburg a few years later. Formerly called Jipugtug or Chebucto in its anglicized form, Halifax constituted a definite encroachment on Mi'kmaw territory. Tensions grew not only between the British and the Mi'kmaq (need I mention the name Edward Cornwallis), but also between the British and the Acadians who were increasingly pressured into signing an oath of allegiance to the King of England. Without going into detail regarding the oath of allegiance, suffice to say that the Acadians did not want to take an oath of loyalty that would mean bearing arms against the French or the Mi'kmaq. The refusal to sign an unconditional oath dominated relations between the Acadians and the British authorities until the deportations began in 1755. The construction of forts, like Fort Edward in Windsor (Pisiquid), brought the military presence of the British closer to Acadian communities and resulted in hundreds of families migrating to Île Saint-Jean and Île Royale in the 1750s.

12) What were the implications of the deportations? Organized with the collaboration of British regular troops and troops from New England, the deportations began in the fall of 1755. Over 6,000 Acadians were deported from Grand-Pré and other places in Nova Scotia in 1755 and distributed to the British colonies along the Atlantic coast. No Acadians were actually deported to Louisiana because it was not a British colony. They made their way to Louisiana a number of years later by land or by sea. After the fall

of Louisbourg in 1758, the Acadians on Île Saint-Jean were rounded up and deported to France along with the inhabitants of Louisbourg. An estimated 11,000 Acadians were deported by the British between 1755 and 1762. In the case of many families, the deportation was followed by years of migrations in search of a safe haven.

→ *My ancestor, Jacques Le Blanc, his wife Catherine Landry and their children, Jean-Baptiste, Marie-Madeleine and my direct ancestor Bénoni, were deported from their home in Pisiquid in mid-October 1755, arriving in Boston, Massachusetts, on November 15, 1755. Bénoni was five years old in 1755, when he was placed on the 81-ton sloop, called the Seaflower, that took the Acadian human cargo to their exile to that British colony. One can read in historical documents, that they are among the deportees residing in Braintree, Massachusetts in 1757. In that year, Bénoni would have been eight years old.*

My ancestor, Bénoni, ended up on Prince Edward Island in a place called Baie de Fortune (present-day Bay Fortune) sometime between 1765 and 1768. There, about 1772, he married Marie-Joséphine Bourg (Bourque).

In the meantime, Bénoni's cousin, Félicité LeBlanc (whose mother was Françoise Thériault and whose father was of Pierre LeBlanc) was deported to Virginia. Her future husband was also one of the deportees to that colony. When their ship arrived in Virginia it was not welcomed because they were Roman Catholic. As a result, the group was then sent to England and placed in a British prison. It is while in prison that Pierre Aucoin married Félicité Le Blanc and it is also in prison where their first child, Anselme, was born in 1763. After the Peace Treaty of Paris (in 1763) the Acadian prisoners were sent (some people use the term re-patriated) to France. It is on the ship La Dorothée, transporting 208 Acadians, that we find the names of Pierre Aucoin (son of Jean Aucoin and Marguerite Pitre), Félicité Aucoin (née LeBlanc, wife of Pierre), Anselme Aucoin (son of Pierre and Félicité) and Anne LeBlanc (believed to be Félicité's sister).

Upon arrival in France, these Acadian refugees spent ten years in Plouër and St-Sevran, which is located on the outskirts of Saint-Malo. Pierre and Félicité had other children while they were in France. Life in France was very difficult for these Acadians because of the country's financial crisis which was due mostly to the many wars that had been waged. In addition, these third-generation Acadians did not fit easily into life in France. Their pioneering experience in Acadie probably had molded independent attitudes that were different from the French population. The Acadian deportees survived thanks to government welfare. However, the general French population did not accept them willingly and thus resented this additional financial burden.

On a more personal note, I would like to add that one time after giving a dance workshop to Kindergarten teachers, three Mi'kmaw participants came to me and shared a story that had been handed down in their families of how their ancestors had helped Acadians escape at the time of the Deportation.

13) Why would Acadians “return” to Nova Scotia? First of all, it should be said that hundreds of Acadian families actually managed to escape deportation by fleeing to Canada (Quebec) and by taking refuge on the Magdalen Islands and St. Pierre & Miquelon. Others went into hiding. And still others fled, but were eventually captured or forced to give themselves up. In 1761 and 1762, the majority of these

captured families were taken to Fort Edward in Windsor. We know their names, or at least the names of the husbands, because the authorities kept lists. After the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1763, they were no longer kept as prisoners but they were used for repairing dykes, fortifications, and roads. Most of the Acadians who were imprisoned stayed in Nova Scotia, thanks in large part to Michael Francklin who became lieutenant governor in 1766. Unlike his predecessors, he harbored no animosity towards the Acadians and he spoke French. In 1768, he had a large tract of land along St Mary's Bay surveyed and divided into lots that were granted to Acadians who had been imprisoned in Annapolis Royal, Windsor and Halifax. The township of Clare was the only area in Nova Scotia that was created specifically for Acadians. The majority of the first families who settled in Clare were related and were later joined by relatives who had been deported. This network of family ties is typical of the settlement pattern in all the Acadian areas.

14) Where did the Acadians settle and why? After the Deportation years, Acadians settled in EIGHT regions in Nova Scotia. The availability of land and the development of the fisheries in Cape Breton were the two main factors that explain where they settled. The re-settlement of the Acadians in Nova Scotia took place gradually between the 1760s and the 1820s, depending on the area. The survival of the French language into the 20th century in the different regions depended on the relative size and isolation of the Acadian population. It is probably important to note that the majority of Acadians today live in New Brunswick where they constitute over 33% of the population. In Nova Scotia the Acadians are scattered in distant corners of the province and they constitute less than 10% of the population.

→ *In 1786, Félicité Le Blanc and her husband, Pierre Aucoin, still deportees in St Servan, part of St Malo, France, wished to return to Acadie. A chance to leave France finally occurred when Charles Robin, a fish merchant from the Isle of Jersey, who had established a number of fishing stations in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, began recruiting Acadian deportees to work for him. He was keen on hiring them because they were familiar with the territory and good relations with the Mi'kmaq from whom he wanted furs. Many Acadians were able to get a crossing on ships owned by Robin with the job prospect of working for him once back in North America. The British Isle of Jersey is just off the coast of France not far from where the many deportees were living. Pierre AuCoin and his sons became fishermen and worked for the Robin Company in Chéticamp.*

A few years later, in 1788, my ancestor, Bénoni and his brother, Jean-Baptiste, along with Le Blanc cousins, were among the first group of Acadians to settle in what is known as East Margaree or Magré on Cape Breton Island. Bénoni and Marie-Joséphé had a son called Béloni who married Marguerite Cormier. In turn their son Bélone, who was born in 1811, married Émilie Chiasson. He is listed as a Master Seaman in the census of 1871. Bélone's and Emilie's son, Arsène, married Anne Chiasson and they gave birth to my grand-father Padé who married my grand-mother, Louise Doucet.

15) What were and are the main challenges of Acadians in Nova Scotia? By the 1850s, Evangeline, Longfellow's romantic heroine, had become a symbol of pride for Acadians everywhere. A growing sense of solidarity brought together thousands of Acadians at a series of so-called Acadian national conventions. In the days of railways, these were well attended events that always included a solemn high mass for the general public and meetings for delegates representing Acadian communities from all over the Maritimes. It was at the 1884 convention, for instance, that the Acadian flag was chosen. And at the 1921 convention,

that the decision was made to construct a memorial church at Grand-Pré. The delegates discussed the importance of preserving the French language and the necessity of instruction in French in public schools. Their opinions were well publicized in the Acadian newspapers and from the pulpits in the Acadian parishes. The early Acadian nationalist movement was spearheaded by the Société mutuelle l'Assomption that had a branch in every Acadian parish throughout the Maritimes and by the SNA that still exists today.

As the Acadian nationalist movement stressed, Catholicism and the French language were the most important cultural identifiers of the Acadian people. The Catholic Church is no longer the dominant force it used to be in Acadian communities. A century of overt discrimination against the French language resulted in the assimilation of thousands of Acadians in Nova Scotia. From the 1820s to the 1970s, for example, every effort was made by the educational authorities to eliminate the French language from public schools in the Acadian communities of Nova Scotia. However, thanks to the *Official Languages Act* (1969) and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982), the francophone minority in Nova Scotia can now receive their primary and secondary school education in French. Currently there are almost 6,000 children enrolled in the province-wide Acadian school board (called the CSAP). Since 1968, the interests of francophone Acadians have been promoted by the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse (FANE). This association now serves as the umbrella group for 28 other francophone organizations that focus on a wide variety of issues including health, youth, culture, and literacy.

→ *My parents, Arsène and Joséphine, were active in local Acadian organisations. They also taught me to love my history and my culture as well as respect my ancestors. When I was very young they told me the story of Évangéline. At my elementary school in River Bourgeois, I learned to sing the Évangéline song about the tale of her and her beloved Gabriel, separated at the time of the Deportation of the Acadians. At the early age of ten, my parents took my brother and me to Grand-Pré during its official opening as a National Historic Site. We travelled in a caravan fashion with two other Acadian families from New Waterford, the Boudreaus and the Chiassons – to honour our ancestors' homeland in the Annapolis Valley.*

I was one of the many children, who either lost or almost lost completely their mother tongue, because of the educational authorities' desire to eliminate the French Language from public schools. Perhaps because of this loss, I have needed to become what some might call "a born-again Acadian". As a result, as an adult, I have had the privilege of honouring my ancestors by learning about our culture and have at times become one of the devoted guardians of our history, for example, when I worked as director of Grand-Pré National Historic Site; by offering my services as a volunteer president of the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse (FANE), by becoming the founder and the first president of both Les Amis de Grand-Pré and La Société Promotion Grand-Pré; and by teaching at the francophone university, Université Sainte-Anne for twenty-one years. Today, I have had the added privilege of sharing snapshots with you about my beloved ancestors with my former professor, who gave courses about Acadian history and culture which I took at Dalhousie University, Dr Sally Ross. Your Mi'kmaq ancestors were friends to my Acadian ancestors in their time of deepest need. I am grateful for this and offer a heartfelt Wela'lin (I thank you), Wela'liek (We thank you!). Merci.

