

The Acadians

FEW STORIES SURROUNDING the settlement of the New World evoke as many feelings of tragedy and triumph as the tale of the Acadians. Colonizing Nova Scotia's fertile Annapolis Valley in the 1600s, 500 French settlers adopted the name Acadie, hoping to establish an ideal pastoral land. They prospered and, by 1750, numbered 14,000, becoming the dominant culture. The threat of this enclave proved too much for a province run by the British, and in 1755 the Acadians were expelled overseas, many to the US. When England and France made peace in 1763, the Acadians slowly returned. Today their French-speaking culture still thrives in coastal villages.



Ile Sainte-Croix was the earliest Acadian settlement, established by the French in New Brunswick in 1604. The neat, spacious layout of the village is typical.

ACADIAN FARMING

As hardworking farmers, Acadians cleared the land of the Annapolis Valley, built villages, and developed an extensive system of dikes to reclaim the rich farmland from tidal waters. Summer crops were carefully harvested for the winter; potatoes and vegetables were put in cellars, and hay stored to feed cattle and goats. By the 19th century, Acadian farmers had expanded their crop range to include tobacco and flax.



Acadian women play a part in summer festivals, displaying local woolcraft and linen textiles.



The Acadian people maintained a traditional farming and fishing lifestyle for centuries, re-created today at the Village Historique Acadien (see p75).



An important crop, hay was raked into "chafauds," spoked haystacks that dried in the fields for use as winter animal feed.

The Embarkation of the Acadians took place in August 1755. British troops brutally rounded up the Acadians for enforced deportation. Over 6,000 Acadians were put on boats, some bound for the US, where they became the Cajuns of today. Others returned in later years, and today their descendants live in villages throughout Atlantic Canada.



The Church of Saint Anne in Sainte-Anne-du-Ruisseau represents Acadian style in its fresh simplicity and elegance. Catholicism was very important to the Acadians, who turned to their priests for succour during the 1755 diaspora.



Acadian musicians have reflected their culture since the 17th century. Playing lively violin and guitar folk music, they are known for their upbeat tunes and ballads of unrequited love and social dispossession.

Acadian life revolved around the farmsteads in each community. Men tilled the fields and fished while women helped with the annual harvest.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

One of the most popular poets of the 19th century, both in the US and Europe, the American Henry Longfellow (1807–82) is best known for his long, bittersweet narrative poems. Based on the trials and injustices of the Acadian civilization, *Evangeline*, published in 1847, traces the paths of a young Acadian couple. The poem, now regarded as a classic, stirring records Evangeline's tragic loss in this land intended as an idyll when their love was destroyed through the upheavals and expulsion of the 18th century: "Loud from its rocky caverns, the deep-faced neighbouring ocean [sings], List to the mournful tradition sung by the pines of the Forest, ... List to a Tale of Love in Acadie, home of the happy."

