

Prologue: *Journeys*

Acadian Journeys

Early on Labour Day morning 2005, I marched with forty other people across the back roads of Nova Scotia in a 250th anniversary procession that marked the reading of the order that would lead to the deportation of Acadians living in the vicinity of Grand-Pré. In 1713 the British had taken control of the French colony of *Acadie*, whose roots stretched back to 1604. The Acadians had professed their neutrality for decades, trying to avoid being embroiled in the battle for supremacy in North America between the French and British empires, but in 1755 the British decided that the neutral Acadians posed a threat, and ordered their deportation. Until the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763, a succession of expulsions resulted in the uprooting of the vast majority of the Acadians, in what has been described as the first modern example of ethnic cleansing.¹

We marched on the edges of fields that were in the process of being cleared of their last crops by farmers whose mother tongue was English, itself a testament to the clearance of the Acadians. However, while *Acadie* was destroyed, the Acadian people lived on, and nearly everyone who walked with me that day had Acadian roots, made clear for all to see by the banners with their families' names that they carried. They had been scattered across three continents and on both sides of the Atlantic, but a significant number of them, including most of those with whom I spent Labour Day, ended up in communities that stretched along the eastern coast of what became New Brunswick, having escaped the grasp of the British, often with the aid of their Mi'kmaq allies. These were survivors who had achieved sufficient political power by the 1960s that they were able to achieve equality for their language in New Brunswick, currently the only officially bilingual province in Canada.


The Acadians' presence in this procession was a further manifestation of a people's rise from the ashes. While their ancestors in 1755 had walked from the parish church where the deportation order was read to the ships that awaited them three kilometres away, we walked in the opposite direction, reaffirming the survival of the Acadians who, in a sense, were reversing the process of deportation. At our starting point, there was a large cross that had originally been erected elsewhere in the vicinity of Grand-Pré in 1924 by tourist promoters eager to attract visitors who found something romantic about the story of the Acadians, popularized by the Longfellow poem *Evangeline*, which told the tragic tale of Evangeline and Gabriel. Separated by the deportation at Grand-Pré, the heroine wandered across North America to find her lover, only to have him die in her arms.² On the occasion of this anniversary of the deportation, Acadian leaders successfully lobbied to have the cross moved to the site where we began our march, so that it spoke directly to the Acadian experience and not to that of tourists. Our destination was a church reconstructed at the same location where one had stood in 1755, now part of a historic site managed by the Acadians so that their story might be told.

This story, as it was presented that day, mostly had to do with the deportation. Upon our arrival at the church, the leader of the procession, Jean Gaudet, a city councillor from Dieppe, the largely Acadian suburb of Moncton, read a proclamation. However, the words he read were not those that had been proclaimed in 1755, but rather much more recent ones, from a royal proclamation issued by the Canadian government in 2003, which recognized that the Acadians had been wronged. Some of the marchers grumbled a bit on the reading of these words, which did not indicate that anyone had been particularly responsible for the deportation; lawyers had sweated over the details of this document, which was by no means an apology. Others felt some sense of satisfaction that there had finally been, however tardy and however insufficient, some recognition of the deportation, and by extension of the Acadians as a people who had survived.

In addition, there were also other stories that were told that day that touched upon an *Acadie* that had just celebrated its quadricentenary. As we made our way through the fields, overlooking the Minas Basin from which the ships bearing the Acadians had once departed for sites far away, we stopped from time to time so that Jean Gaudet could read various texts about an *Acadie* whose roots stretched back to the early seventeenth century. There were fourteen stops along the route as Gaudet's procession imitated the Stations of the Cross, the Catholic devotional

procession that recreates the last hours of Christ: from his being sentenced to death, to his crucifixion, and finally to his body being placed in its tomb.³ Given the unmistakably Catholic form of the procession, some observers viewed us as objects of curiosity. After all, such a procession had become an oddity by the early twenty-first century, inspired as it was by certain traditions of public commemoration of the past that had largely disappeared from view. However, Gaudet wanted to stage an event that would allow Acadians to be active participants in their remembrance of the past, and not passive observers at carefully choreographed official ceremonies.

Although the story told in the Stations of the Cross ends before Christ's rising from the grave, the Christ-like rebirth of *Acadie* was central to the story told by the procession in which I marched. In essence, Gaudet described an *Acadie* with two distinct moments of birth. First, there was the one that began in 1604 when an expedition led by Pierre Dugua, Sieur de Mons, established the first permanent French settlement in the Americas. Dugua's small band of men, which included Samuel de Champlain, established itself on a tiny island that Dugua named Île Ste-Croix, which sits on the current border between New Brunswick and Maine.⁴ A disastrous winter resulted in the death of half the men and their departure for Port-Royal, in present-day Nova Scotia, the following summer. It was in places such as Port-Royal and Grand-Pré that the Acadians planted deep roots, and some of Gaudet's texts spoke to that experience. Then came the deportation, followed by an Acadian rebirth, marked in the late nineteenth century by the creation of the various symbols of national identity: a flag, an anthem, and a holiday.

It was the deportation story that had drawn my fellow marchers that morning. After all, they were a part of the *nouvelle Acadie* that had been reborn. Their relationship to that first moment of birth, however, was not so clear. As I walked with those Acadians, I asked them whether they had participated in the commemorative events during the previous year, in 2004, that had marked the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Dugua and his comrades, but few had been on that journey. Some aspects of their past had been remembered, but others had been forgotten or pushed to the side. As for myself, this procession marked the end of a long journey that had begun years earlier, and Jean Gaudet recognized my perseverance by giving me a banner that bore Acadian colours and my decidedly non-Acadian name. So how did it come to pass that among the Melanson, Béliveau, Richard, and LeBlanc banners there was one that bore the name 'Rudin'? 

The Historian's Journey

Historians have written voluminously about why in the past some moments from an even earlier time were marked by spectacular celebrations while other moments were relegated to the shadows. Along the way, they have explored the different means used by commemorative organizers to bring the past to life for the public. I made my own contribution to this literature, having written about a series of commemorative events staged in Quebec City in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries to fete either Samuel de Champlain (the founder of Quebec City) or Mgr François de Laval (the first bishop of Quebec), in a sense the sacred and secular fathers of Quebec. In *Founding Fathers*, I discovered (as have other historians in other contexts) that there was nothing inevitable about which events would be thrust before the public and which would be accorded relatively little attention.⁵ Leaders invested significant amounts of time, energy, and money in order to promote some events, with others left marginalized, but only after considerable debate that also touched on how to mark those moments chosen for public remembrance. The spectacles viewed by the public may have looked as if they could not have been organized any other way, but in fact they were usually the product of intense negotiation.

In order to discuss the actions of individuals who had their own reasons for presenting the past in a particular fashion, historians have been limited by the chance survival of documentation, mostly the accounts left behind by event organizers. As for what actually transpired at those events, they have had to rely largely on newspaper accounts. In my own case, when I was studying the spectacular events staged in 1908 to mark the tercentenary of Quebec City's founding, I frequently wished that I might have had the chance to talk to Earl Grey (the governor general who was the mastermind behind the Quebec tercentenary) to ask him precisely what he had had in mind; and I wished that I might have attended those events to see them for myself and to talk to those in attendance about what they took away from them.

In a sense, my wishes came true when I learned early in the new millennium that a series of commemorative events, all linked by an Acadian theme, was being organized for 2004–5. This commemorative cycle would begin with the quadricentenary in 2004 of the founding of the settlement on Île Ste-Croix, what Acadian leaders billed as '*le 400e anniversaire de l'Acadie*,' and would end in 2005 with the 250th anniversary of the start of the deportation of the Acadians, what they often refer to as the *Grand*

Dérangement (the Great Upheaval).⁶ The procession on Labour Day 2005 was the last act in the cycle.

It was, of course, no great feat to discover commemorative events, which now occur with such regularity that one French observer has remarked that his country, and presumably other societies as well, suffer from ‘an avalanche’ of efforts to mark the past.⁷ This proliferation of commemorative events is only one element in a process that has made the past more accessible to the public than ever before. Cable history channels report healthy ratings, documentary films on historical topics have a wide audience, and the number of museums dealing with the past has mushroomed.⁸ Some have written about this process with a certain sense of scorn, bemoaning the corruption of history as it is marketed for the larger public. In this regard, David Lowenthal has remarked that such public representations of the past ‘thrive on ignorance and error.’⁹ Lowenthal placed history as practised by professionals on a pedestal, assuming that their work was somehow pure, as opposed to that of ‘ordinary’ people, which was invariably corrupted.

In the end, however, this study is not about whether the past that was presented by a wide range of individuals and organizations over the course of 2004-5 was ‘good’ or ‘bad’ history. Rather, I wanted to explore the stories that were told, along the way trying to understand why some aspects of the past were remembered while others were forgotten. Assuming that remembrance was not an entirely innocent act, I wanted to reflect upon the various uses of the past in the early twenty-first century. At the same time, I was interested in examining how these events were presented to the public, given the wide array of options that exist for marking moments from the past, ranging from intimate processions, such as the one led by Jean Gaudet, to large-scale, intricately choreographed spectacles. During my time on the road, I also saw history presented through statuary, museum exhibits, theatrical performances, and historical re-enactments.

By being in attendance at these events and by having the chance to talk with others who were there as well, I had the opportunity to get a sense of how the audience responded to these presentations, quite aside from what organizers may have hoped to be their impact, although as I would learn it was not always easy to engage with people in large crowds who were often at a commemorative event either to have a good time (frequently the case with 400th anniversary celebrations) or to reflect on a tragic past (in terms of moments to remember the deportation). It was much easier to spend time with the organizers, who were invariably willing

to explain to me why they wanted to tell stories about the past and why they chose to tell them precisely as they did. Given the growing interest of historians in questions of public memory and the proliferation of commemorative events, when I began the project I expected to find other examples of historians observing the construction of such activities. However, as far as I know, this study is unique, at least in the Canadian context, for the way in which I played the role of the 'embedded' historian for several years along the Acadian commemorative trail.¹⁰

Nevertheless, no work is ever entirely original, and in this case I owe a significant debt to Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen. In their fascinating *The Presence of the Past*, they set out to explore 'how people outside [historical] circles understood and used the past,' a goal they pursued through a massive telephone survey of Americans.¹¹ This survey revealed a widespread engagement with the past, so much so that they referred to their respondents as 'popular historymakers.' Breaking down the barriers that others such as Lowenthal imagined, Rosenzweig and Thelen observed: 'Like professional historians, these popular historymakers crafted their own narratives, albeit as dinner table conversations or family trees rather than scholarly monographs. They preferred constructing their own versions of the past to digesting those prepared by others, and they viewed other sources and narratives with sharply critical eyes.'¹²

While Rosenzweig and Thelen never got close to their popular historymakers, who remained at the other end of a telephone call, I set off to spend time with individuals who had a variety of stories to tell, grounded in the Acadian past. Starting several years before the events would begin, I took to the road, meeting with community organizers, government officials, and ordinary citizens, some of whom had been hard at work since the late 1990s, at various sites in Canada, the United States, and France. In the end, the best part of the project was the opportunity to become acquainted with people who were passionately engaged with the past in a way that is difficult for professional historians, trained as we are to provide the appearance of objectivity. Of course, the evidence I collected could not be taken at face value, and so I have tried to place the testimony of these commemorative organizers within the larger social, political, and economic contexts in which they found themselves, also taking into account how such moments from the past had been remembered by other organizers on the occasion of earlier anniversaries.

I also considered my evidence from the road in the context of representations of the Acadian past produced by such creators as writers, lyricists, and film-makers. From time to time in the text, I have made reference to

how the public memory presented in 2004–5 was similar to, or departed from, the depictions presented by individuals whose work may have had a significant audience, but who were not involved with representing the past in public space. I make no claim that my treatment of literature, music, and film is in any way comprehensive, because what follows is primarily a study of the presentation of the stories of the Dugua expedition, on the one hand, and the deportation, on the other, through such means as organizing public ceremonies, constructing monuments, staging theatrical productions, and mounting museum exhibits.


Along the way, I reflected on these various public representations of the past in light of the documentation produced by event organizers, government agencies, and other interested parties including those, such as First Nations people, who had some difficulty in having their stories told. Some of this documentation was designed for public consumption, but in other cases I benefited from the kindness of organizers who allowed me to see their internal minutes, which provided glimpses into the construction of their events, with all of the twists and turns that are inevitable. In the case of the pertinent government agencies, I also benefited from various access-to-information programs that helped me to see how the ‘official mind’ viewed the various representations of the past. Even with this documentation, however, I often felt rudderless, a historian without his archival documents to lean on, left only with notebooks filled with observations, a digital camera filled with images, and cassettes of various types filled with audio and video evidence.

Three Peoples’ Journeys

When I set off in 2002 for my first journey to *Acadie*, I was completely unprepared for the stories I would find.¹³ In part, this was a product of my own education, or lack thereof. Quebec historians, such as myself, tend to equate the French Canadian experience with that of Quebecers, and so the Acadian past remains something of a mystery. I quickly became sensitized to the gross inaccuracy of the claim, trumpeted loudly at the Quebec tercentenary and still maintained by numerous federal and Quebec government officials whom I encountered, that Champlain’s founding of the town in 1608 had marked the beginning of French Canada, if not Canada more broadly. While I came to the project with some understanding that Champlain had been involved with the establishment of a settlement at Port-Royal, in current-day Nova Scotia, in 1605, I knew nothing about the permanent settlement that had been set

up on Île Ste-Croix a year earlier, marking the start of a permanent French presence in *Acadie*. This expedition (as well as the one to Port-Royal) included Champlain, but was led by Dugua, whose exploits have been obscured by the very large shadows cast by his cartographer.

Several years before the 400th anniversary of Dugua's arrival at Île Ste-Croix, the Société nationale de l'Acadie, the leading organization for the advancement of Acadian concerns, was busily promoting a series of activities that would draw attention to the moment at which *Acadie* had been born, in a sense to give Acadians a founding moment comparable to 1608 for the Québécois, as well as a founding father, Dugua, who might unseat Champlain. However, in the years that followed I found that this enthusiasm among Acadian leaders was not always shared by ordinary Acadians. This reticence was evident among my fellow marchers in that procession, who had not been engaged by the story of the settlement on Île Ste-Croix. The Dugua story could not compete with the story of the deportation, which had brought them out to walk three kilometres that September morning in 2005. They were far from unanimous about how to engage with the memory of the deportation, as was evident in their various reactions to Gaudet's reading of the royal proclamation. Nevertheless, there could be no escaping the fact that the memory of the deportation was far more powerful than that of their beginnings on Île Ste-Croix.

If the Acadians' attentions were not particularly focused upon Île Ste-Croix, or for that matter upon Port-Royal whose quadricentenary was marked in 2005, this was not the case for two other peoples, whose own journeys were even less known to me than those of the Acadians at the start of this project. With the deportation of the Acadians, these two sites of memory came to be occupied by English speakers. In towns such as St Stephen and St Andrews in New Brunswick, as well as Calais, Maine (in terms of Île Ste-Croix) or Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia (in the case of Port-Royal), I found people who had been passionately engaged for some time in promoting the 400th anniversaries. However, their motivations for becoming involved with the past had little to do with any connection to the French regime. Rather, these organizers were interested in developing the economic potential of sites that might speak to tourists about a distant past. Norma Stewart, the executive director of the St Croix 2004 Organizing Committee, described St Croix Island (using the English version of the name) as a 'heritage resource ... Using that resource to further improve the prosperity of this region is very, very important.'¹⁴ 

At the outset, the English-speaking leaders of those small towns innocently prepared to 'celebrate' four hundred years of history. They soon learned, however, that there were those in their midst who felt there was nothing to celebrate, but much to remember. Stories about the arrival of the first Europeans to any site in the Americas inevitably lead to the question of the role played by the aboriginal inhabitants. In terms of both the Île Ste-Croix and Port-Royal settlements, the relationships forged between Dugua and his men, on the one hand, and the First Nations people, on the other, were generally positive, at least in the short term. In the former case, the Passamaquoddy provided assistance that prevented the consequences of that disastrous winter from being even worse than they were. In the latter, the Mi'kmaq were such trusted allies that when Dugua lost the charter in 1607 that had allowed him to maintain the settlement, he left the Mi'kmaq chief Membertou in charge.

Both the Passamaquoddy and the Mi'kmaq thought long and hard about the relative merits of participating in anniversaries of events that had had disastrous consequences for them over the long term. In the end, however, both agreed to participate only if the word 'celebrate' were changed to 'commemorate,' and beyond that, only if they would have an opportunity to tell their own stories. In the case of the Passamaquoddy, the story that they wanted to tell was grounded in the fact that they were a people divided by an international boundary, who lived on two reservations in Maine, but who existed in fact, if not in law, on the Canadian side of the border as far as the Canadian federal government was concerned. After much debate, the Passamaquoddy decided that the issue of securing their legal recognition in Canada trumped all other concerns, and they set out to influence the shape of the commemorative events so that their story might be told. As Donald Soctomah, the tribe's Historic Preservation Officer put it, 'We decided to become part of the event, making sure everybody realizes that this isn't a celebration for us; it's a chance for us to educate, it's a chance for us to remember.'¹⁵ As for the Mi'kmaq of the Bear River First Nation, whose reserve is not far from Annapolis Royal, the stakes were different, as they chose to participate in order to tell a story from a newly constructed cultural centre that offered the prospect of tourist dollars for the reserve and an opportunity for constructive activity for its often troubled youth.

Mi'kmaq leaders appeared from time to time as the Acadians marked the anniversary of the deportation in 2005, as was only natural given the aboriginal assistance provided to the Acadians at the time of their dispersal. By contrast, the English speakers were not to be seen, lending some

credence to the comments of Maurice Basque of the Université de Moncton. In an interview conducted just before the 400th anniversary of the settlement at Île Ste-Croix, he observed that there were anglophones 'lining up to mark the 400th anniversary of Acadie, because it is of interest, but also because there is much money available to organize these celebrations. But I don't see anybody lining up to commemorate [the deportation] in 2005.'¹⁶ Basque's remarks reflected a certain resentment both that English speakers were attempting to profit from someone else's past and that they had conveniently remembered one anniversary while forgetting another. As we will see, such resentment over the ownership of the past and evidence of forgetfulness (alongside remembrance) frequently surfaced on the commemorative trail.

In the end, this book is largely built around the various experiences of Acadians, English speakers, and First Nations people as they negotiated the anniversaries of 2004–5. While its starting point was two Acadian anniversaries, it is not exclusively about Acadians. The four chapters of Part One deal with the involvement of these parties with the events to mark the quadricentenaries of the founding of the settlements at Île Ste-Croix and Port-Royal that signalled the first efforts to establish a 'permanent' French presence in *Acadie*. After an exploration in the next chapter of twentieth-century efforts to remember these settlements, the subsequent ones turn to the engagement of the three groups, along the way taking into account the role played by various levels of government in both Canada and the United States, whose financial support was crucial to public remembrance of the past in the early twenty-first century. Leading the way in this regard was the Canadian government, whose involvement was highly controversial given that it invested much more heavily in a series of commemorative projects in France than in those in Atlantic Canada. The two chapters of Part Two then shift the focus to public memory of the deportation, starting with an exploration of previous efforts to mark this moment of trauma, most notably the bicentenary events of 1955, before turning to the dynamics of marking the 250th anniversary. On this occasion, significant debates emerged within Acadian society as to whether it was more appropriate to remember this past, as was evident in Jean Gaudet's procession, or to push it to the side, or *tourner la page*, to employ the expression widely used in 2005.

The epilogue departs from the previous chapters, which are largely focused upon the stories told during 2004–5 and the reasons that three peoples had for advancing them, in the process marginalizing other tales that might have been told. Rather, in the epilogue I have tried to step

back to reflect not only on the messages communicated, but also on the means used to tell them. While it is impossible to separate substance from form, I wondered why it was that some events seemed to have an effect on the audience and others left them cold. To put it more concretely, what was it about Jean Gaudet's procession that transfixed those who were on hand, as opposed to the reactions to the single most expensive event from this commemorative cycle, an exhibition in Paris that was generously supported by the federal government? Visitors to this exhibit had handheld devices to guide them through a labyrinth of screens that provided information about Canada. Typical of the comments written in the book reserved for visitors' feedback was one that read: 'Too much technology kills the enjoyment!'¹⁷ This is, of course, an extreme comparison, but it dramatizes the point that some public references to the past make a significant difference, while others exercise an ephemeral impact. From this perspective, then, the book ends with some reflection on the legacies from the Acadian commemorative trail, which were not at all what I would have expected when I started the journey.