

The Acadians, Their Culture and Their Influence on Mount Desert

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Origins of Acadia

There are two theories regarding the origin of the name "Acadie" or "Acadia." One attributes it to the explorer Verrazano, who in 1524 named the coastline of the present-day Middle Atlantic states "Arcadie," in remembrance of a land of beauty and innocence celebrated in classical Greek poetry. The name "Arcadie" (with an "r") appears on various sixteenth-century maps of the east coast of North America and has been accepted by many historians as being the origin of the name "Acadie." The romantic associations of the term "Arcadie" likely explain why this theory has been widely published and is even found in recent scholarly works. The more plausible theory is that "Acadie" derives from a Micmac word rendered in French as "cadie," meaning a piece of land, generally with a favorable connotation.² The word "-cadie" is found in many present-day place names such as Tracadie and Shubenacadie in the Canadian Maritimes and Passamaquoddy, an English corruption of Passamacadie. Virtually all French references to Acadia from the time of the first significant contacts with the Micmacs use the form without the "r," "Acadie." The cartographic use of "Arcadie" for various parts of the east of eastern North America may have prepared the way for the acceptance of "cadie" from its Micmac source.³

Maine Acadian identity has evolved over several hundred years in response to changing political, economic, and social circumstances. While some aspects of their heritage are shared with other Acadian groups in North America, Maine Acadians maintain a distinctive ethnic culture of their own.

The early history of "Acadie" was dominated by 150 years of conflict between French and British colonial forces, and by interaction with native peoples. As the colonial battles began to unfold, the Micmacs occupied presentday Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, the Gaspé peninsula of Québec, and eastern New Brunswick. The watershed of the St. John River was occupied by the Maliseet, while the Passamaquoddy people inhabited the area around the St. Croix River.

The date of the arrival of the first Europeans in the Micmac homeland is unknown. Throughout the sixteenth century, hundreds of small fishing vessels

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came to the coast of Newfoundland and to the Gulf of St. Lawrence in search of cod. They not only fished offshore but gradually established fishing stations where they cured their catch.⁴ Consequently, the northeast coast of North America was well known in the seaports of France, Spain, the Basque country, Portugal, and West Country England long before the founding of the colony of Acadia in "New France." The French claim to North American lands dates from three voyages of Jacques Cartier (1534-1542), particularly the raising of a cross with the royal arms on the Gaspé peninsula in 1534.⁵

The King of France, Henry IV of Navarre, began to grant North American fur trade monopolies in 1588 to finance colonization.⁶ Pierre du Gua de Mons (a.k.a. Sieur de Monts), a Huguenot and friend of the king, received a trade monopoly over territory between the 40th and 60th parallels with the understanding that he establish a colony. On April 7, 1604, Pierre du Gua sailed from Havre-de-Grace in France with 120 men and settled on a small island near the mouth of the St. Croix River in present-day Maine. They named it Ile Sainte-Croix (holy cross). In August, Pierre du Gua sent his main fleet back to France and began preparations for the winter with the remaining 78 members of the expedition, including the explorer and navigator Samuel Champlain. Nearly half of the men died of illnesses during the first winter, and many more became dangerously sick. Consequently the colony was moved to a more favorable site at Port Royal on the Bay of Fundy, in present-day Nova Scotia. There the settlers cleared and cultivated land and appeared to be making progress. However, Pierre du Gua's monopoly was revoked in 1607 for religious reasons following the assassination of Henry IV. The colony was abandoned, and the settlers returned to France. A new attempt to settle at Port Royal was launched in 1610, and a rival colony was established in 1613 in present-day Maine at St. Sauveur on Mount Desert Island. Later that year, both settlements were destroyed by British colonists from Virginia.

The conflict between the British and the French over St. Sauveur and Port Royal was merely one of a long series of encounters. As Jean Daigle has observed, "Acadia, within the colonial context of North America, was a border colony. Positioned between the two rival settlements (New France in the north and New England in the south), the area around the Bay of Fundy was repeatedly the subject of dispute and the scene of military engagements."

St. Sauveur--Mount Desert

The Acadian toehold on Mount Desert was brief, one might almost say premature, and indeed came well before the development of a distinct Acadian culture farther north in the Port Royal area. According to George Street in his history of Mount Desert, published in 1905, the story of the St. Sauveur settlement is the following. Most of the territory of what came to be known as Acadia,

after Des Monts' removal, was in the possession of a French lady, the Marquise de Guercheville, who supported the Jesuits. She sponsored the missionary expedition that was to establish the short-lived, but storied, colony of St. Sauveur on what is now called Fernald Point.

The new expedition, launched by the Marquise, arrived in 1613 in La Have on the ship *Jonas* and soon set out to explore the waters further south. Led by Sieur de la Saussaye, it included the ship's master, Charles Flory, three Jesuits, Fathers Quentin, Biard and Masse enlisted to bring salvation to the savages, along with the lay brother Gilbert du Thet, and forty-eight settlers, artisans and laborers. Departing from Port Royal, they were soon enveloped in fog, which lasted two days and two nights, and when their confusion lifted found themselves in a beautiful harbor in what is now Frenchman's Bay, which they named initially St. Sauveur, although when they made final landfall a couple of days later they transported that name with them. A party of Indians invited the Frenchmen shortly after to Somes Sound, where their chief, Asticou, ensconced in his summer camp on Manchester Point, was feeling so ill he thought he was dying. This turned out to be a ruse to lure the party of visitors nearby.

Fernald Point appeared, even then, to be an ideal and beautiful "grassy" area in which to settle down, with fresh spring water nearby. Father Biard recorded a detailed description of the site. The French explorers first planted the Cross and then disputed what to do next. Their leader, Saussaye, wished them to attend immediately to agriculture, whereas the others wanted to erect dwellings and fortifications. Thus the stage was set for a surprise attack by the English, which came about all too soon.

An English vessel from Jamestown, Virginia, under the command of Captain Samuel Argall, had made its way to the outer islands, and a party of Indians fishing from canoes approached them to announce that fellow white men were encamped at Somes Sound, thinking they would be pleased to receive the information. Not so! Argall, although ostensibly on a fishing expedition, was in truth on a mission to seek out and expel interlopers from the territory, also claimed by King James of England.

The French were taken totally by surprise and quickly overcome on the *Jonas*. Those on shore fled up Flying Mountain, and this party included Saussaye, who left his papers (his commission and reason for exploring these waters) below in the partially finished fortifications. Argall quickly seized these valuable papers, so that when the French came down the mountain and surrendered, Saussaye could not prove the legality of his expedition. Sassauye and thirteen others were given an open "barque," which they rowed along the coast until they found two vessels near Nova Scotia belonging to their

countrymen. Argall took charge of the captured *Jonas*, with her captain, two of the Jesuits, and the remainder of the company, and returned to Virginia. Later accounts from the captives speak well of their treatment overall.

The duration of the French colony on Fernald Point has often been disputed. Some have claimed years, but it seems far more likely that the colony lasted but a few weeks, or even only a few days, sometime between May and November 1613.8

Acadian Culture Becomes a Distinct Entity

Port Royal was occupied by the British throughout the 1620s, but the colony was returned to France by treaty in 1632. The French established several small settlements over the next few years, including a number of tiny outposts along the Gulf of St. Lawrence and in the Lower St. John River area. By 1650, Acadia had over 400 French inhabitants, including 45-50 families in the Port Royal and La Have areas. These families are considered to be the founders of the Acadian population.⁹

There has been much speculation as to the possible origins in France of the founding families of Acadia. Since the publication of *Les parles français d'Acadie linguistique*, ¹⁹ most authors have accepted the hypothesis that a great number of families were drawn from Charles D'Aulnay's estate at La Chaussée near Loudun in the province of Poitou. D'Aulnay had recruited families for colonization as lieutenant general of Acadia. While it does seem likely that a sizable proportion of Acadia's seventeenth-century immigrants were natives of the western provinces of Poitou, Aunis, Angoumois, and Saintonge, recent research also indicates that many came from the northern provinces. ¹¹ They were therefore not a homogeneous group at the outset.

At the time of the first census of Acadia in 1671, the population of the colony was reported to be 392 and may have been slightly greater. ¹² The number rose by 2,500 by 1714, less than 50 years later. From the first seat of population at Port Royal, settlers spread along the shores of the Bay of Fundy and in surrounding river valleys. Outlying trading posts and Atlantic seaports such as La Have remained sparsely inhabited, while settlements round the Bay of Fundy grew rapidly. This settlement pattern is explained by the fact that the Acadians concentrated their agricultural activities on tidal flats, which they diked by adapting techniques brought from Poitou. From 1670 onward, Acadians were attracted in large numbers to the vast expanses of marshland found in the Minas Basin and at Beaubassin, at the head of Shepody Bay. ¹³

In 1654 British forces seized Port Royal and held Acadia for the next 13 years, until France regained the territory by treaty. Port Royal fell to the British

for the final time in 1710, and Acadia became a permanent British possession as a result of the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht. As the colony had no fixed boundaries, the French developed a strategy aimed at giving up as little territory as possible. They claimed Acadia consisted only of what is now peninsular Nova Scotia, and they began to erect fortifications on Ile Royale (Cape Breton Island), Ile Saint-Jean (Prince Edward Island), and in present-day New Brunswick.

The French settlers who remained in the British territory had learned to adapt to changing political conditions and had become accustomed to coexistence with the English. They had adapted their French agrarian lifestyle to the local environment and had become a people separate from the French in the mother country.

The British established a military government at Port Royal, which they renamed Annapolis Royal. Rather than putting the Acadians under military rule, they established a system of representation by delegates, by which any request from British officials at Annapolis Royal was transmitted to the inhabitants through men chosen by their villages as representatives.¹⁴

The Golden Age and Its End

Following the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, the Acadians enjoyed a 30-year period of peace, the longest since the founding of the colony. Due to a very high birth rate and a low death rate, the population rose to over 10,000 by the late 1740s. The renewal of hostilities between the British and French in 1744 marked the end of what has been called the "golden age" of Acadia. While the War of the Austrian Succession was fought on both European and North American fronts, the Acadians' desire to remain neutral did not keep them out of the conflict. The war was brought to their doorstep first by the taking of the French fortress of Louisbourg on Ile Royale by a British force sent by Governor William Shirley of Massachusetts, and then by the 1747 French victory over a Nova Scotia garrison at Minas, in the heartland of Acadia.

Peace was restored by treaty in 1748, but life did not return to normal for the Acadians. Both the British and French increased their military presence in the area, the former establishing the fortified town of Halifax, and the latter founding Forts Beauséjour and Gaspereau in what is now New Brunswick. The governor of Massachusetts was infuriated when the fortress of Louisbourg was restored to the French as the outcome of the peace negotiations. The rich farmlands of the Bay of Fundy region had long been coveted by New Englanders who wished to expand their settlements to the north. British colonial administrators in London, wishing to appease the New Englanders, changed their policy toward Acadians and began to insist upon the latter signing an

unconditional oath of loyalty. Some Acadians responded by moving from Nova Scotia into territories held by the French, but the majority remained in their original settlements, maintaining that the conditional oaths they had signed earlier were still valid. The renewal of hostilities in 1754 hastened the end of the standoff. What followed was the tragic deportation that effectively destroyed Acadian society as it had existed until then.

The Tragedy of the Acadian People

The agriculturally prosperous Acadians had developed self-protectively over many years into a peace-loving and tolerant culture while being shunted back and forth between French and British rule, during years of colonization and settlement. They also maintained peaceful co-existence with Indian tribes in the region for the most part. However, the Indians at times continued to side with the French, even while the British were in power, and occasionally threatened or attacked the Acadians. To avoid conflict, the Acadians adapted to whatever regime existed, and, eventually, it was only persistent pressure from the British on the Acadians to swear an oath of loyalty that was a source of discord.

Historians disagree as to who bears responsibility for the great tragedy suffered by the Acadian people. What is known for sure is that the decision to proceed with deportation was approved by the council of Nova Scotia and that officials in New England supported and facilitated the process. The first step was to take Forts Beauséjour and Gaspereau, and to ship New England settlers to the area.¹⁷ An expeditionary force of 2,000 New England militiamen and a small force of British troops sailed from Boston and successfully took both forts in mid-June 1755.

Having at his command a large army and transport fleet, Governor Lawrence of Nova Scotia had all the resources needed to deport the Acadians. After a final series of meetings in Halifax, where Acadian representatives again refused to alter the wording of their oath of allegiance, the Nova Scotia council resolved to expel the Acadians from the colony on July 28, 1755. The New England troops stationed at Fort Beauséjour began deporting Acadians living on the Isthmus of Chignecto on August 11, and those of the Minas Basin and at Annapolis Royal were deported during the following months.

At the time of the deportation the population of Acadia was approximately 13,000. Over 6,000 people were banished during the second half of 1755, 19 and the deportation continued until the Treaty of Paris put an end to hostilities between Britain and France in 1763. During the intervening twelve years, the Acadians were reduced to being either captives or fugitives.

Acadians deported from Nova Scotia were spread among various colonies on the Atlantic coast from Massachusetts to Georgia. There they lived in miserable conditions, suffering from disease and starvation.²⁰ The 1,100 Acadians sent to Virginia were refused entry and were eventually sent on to England, where they were held for years as prisoners of war. Approximately 3,000 of the 5,000 Acadians living on Ile Saint-Jean (Prince Edward Island)-half of whom were refugees from Nova Scotia--were deported in 1758, following the final capture of Louisbourg and the end of French military presence in Acadia. The deportees were shipped to France and England, while the remainder of the Acadian island population evaded capture and fled to the mainland.

During the next four years, about 2,000 of the Acadians who had escaped expulsion by fleeing through the woods had been captured and were held as prisoners in Halifax and in various other military forts. Most of the others had either fled to Québec, where 2,000-3,000 Acadians had resettled, or died in hiding.²¹ When peace was finally restored by the Treaty of Paris, Acadians were free to settle where they wished, but their communities had been destroyed, their fertile farmlands taken over by thousands of settlers from New England, and the close-knit groups they had formed over the years broken into fragments. The challenge facing them over the next thirty years would be to obtain lands where they could begin to rebuild their shattered communities.

Among the Acadians who had been deported to England and France, the largest group subsequently went to Louisiana in 1785, despite having been guaranteed lands in France. The heavily populated countryside of France was not appealing to people who were accustomed to a very different environment in North America. Most of the Acadians who had been living in destitute conditions in the English colonies eventually made their way to either Québec or Louisiana. Those who had remained in Nova Scotia during the years of banishment were set free in 1763 and began to search for lands where they could re-create the life they had known in Acadia. They settled on the coasts of southwestern and eastern Nova Scotia, on the north shore of Prince Edward Island, on the shores of Northumberland Strait and Chaleur Bay, and in the St. John and Memramcook valleys in New Brunswick. These settlers were joined by small groups of Acadians returning from France, Québec, or the English colonies. With the exception of the St. John and Memramcook valleys, the land in most of the areas where the Acadians settled was not nearly as fertile as the marshlands of the Bay of Fundy, and they were forced to combine fishing and farming for their livelihood, when farming had previously been the dominant occupation.

By the 1780s, the Acadians had recovered some of their former numbers and had fast-growing communities in both Nova Scotia and Louisiana. According to Naomi Griffiths, "their sense of themselves as a people was undiminished. As far as it lay in their power, they attempted to re-create the same self-contained and independent life they had before 1755."²² The Acadian community continued to grow through the 1800s, mainly in eastern and northern New Brunswick, but with pockets of settlement in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and what became northern Maine. A place called Acadia no longer existed, but it was still possible to be an Acadian in North America.

Today St. Croix Island is recognized as the first European settlement in northern North America and as the cradle of Acadian presence on the continent. Due to its importance in the histories of Canada and the United States, it is now the Saint Croix Island International Historic Site, a unit of the National Park Service.

With the passing of two centuries the history of the first Acadians, *le grand dérangement* is retold as part of oral tradition among Maine Acadians, aided in many cases by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's romantic poem "Evangeline." As one Maine Acadian expressed it during a 1993 focus group, "I've always considered Evangeline as a legendary character. I learned that way in school." Local historian Guy Dubay²³ contends that the popular acceptance of Longfellow's poem by St. John Valley residents obscures the historical facts. Most of Maine Acadians' ancestors escaped to present-day Québec during the deportation of Acadians by the British. "Our ancestors then," says Dubay, "were not deportees; they were refugees." "The more famous story (of Evangeline), however, has taken over the collective memory of our people." Today the Acadian pioneers of the region are all remembered as though they had all experienced the *grand dérangement*. On the New Brunswick side of the St. John River Valley, far less importance is given to historical links with early Acadia.²⁴

Resettlement

During the 1780s, Acadians moved from the Fredericton, New Brunswick, area northwest along the St. John River, settling the upper shores. They were joined by immigrants from "Lower Canada," as the St. Lawrence River Valley around Kamouraska was known at that time. Today French-speaking residents of the St. Lawrence River Valley are collectively referred to as "Québéçois," although the province of Québec had not yet been established during the initial settlement of the valley by the French. These immigrants from Lower Canada are hereinafter referred to as "French Canadians."

The governors of Québec and New Brunswick had promised land to prospective settlers of the Upper St. John Valley to strengthen the mail route between the two provinces; this was likely a motivation for some settlement.

Historians, however, do not agree on the principal cause of Acadian migration up the St. John River. Some scholars, including Muriel Roy, emphasize that the Acadians were dislodged from the lower valley of the St. John River to make room for the British Empire Loyalists, who were arriving from the former colonies to the south following the American Revolution. According to historian Mason Wade, within seven or eight years of the arrival of the British Loyalists, Acadians moved out of the lower valley, mainly to acquire more land and to secure the services of a priest. Eastrice Craig, a Canadian historian, concurs with Wade and also stresses the Acadians' desire to keep their families intact and settle their sons on nearby farms. Regardless of their motivation, the Acadians did not leave the lower valley empty-handed. Most had grants to the land they occupied and sold them to Loyalists.

As it does today, family played an important role in the life of the early French settlers of the Upper St. John Valley. The Acadians of the lower reaches of the St. John River had spent the deportation years in exile in Québec, and many of them had married French Canadians in the Kamouraska area before returning to the St. John during the 1760s and 1770s. In the 1780s, all the Acadians with French-Canadian relatives chose to relocate along the Upper St. John River, while the majority of those with no family ties to French Canadians moved instead to settlements in eastern New Brunswick.²⁷

In 1786, one of the original settlers was recognized as a land agent by the New Brunswick government and was authorized to distribute parcels of land to prospective settlers in the Upper St. John Valley. His instructions from Fredericton specified that settlers from Lower Canada be permitted to obtain land in the area. Families from Kamouraska and Riviére-Ouelle began arriving the same year. French Canadians with names such as Dubé and Soucy thus joined the Acadian settlers, such as the Cyr and Daigle families, during the first years of settlement in the valley. By 1790, according to a census taken by the governor of Lower Canada, there were 174 inhabitants in the Upper St. John Valley. According to parish tithing records for 1799, the population of the valley was 331, half of whom were under 12 years of age. Settlement spread along the river, first to the west, then to the east. By 1831, there were about 2,500 settlers along a 45-mile stretch of the valley, from the mouth of the Fish River to a few miles east of Violette Brook.

Dividing the Acadians

Although Great Britain had exercised authority over "Madawaska" since its founding in 1785 (administering it as a part of New Brunswick), jurisdiction over the entire territory was disputed due to the ambiguous wording of the 1783 Treaty of Versailles that set the boundary between the United States and British North America.³¹ In addition to the ambiguity, there was

great interest in the timber resources of the region by both Americans and Britons, and logging operations were underway on both sides of the river when the State of Maine was created in 1820. In 1826, logging licenses were suspended pending settlement of the border dispute.³² The conflict that arose during the following years was a source of hostilities between Great Britain and the United States that ranged from a brief period of armed conflict in the "Bloodless" Aroostook War, to several years of often acrimonious diplomatic disputes and negotiations in state, provincial, and national capitals.³³

John Baker, one of several Americans from the Kennebec Valley who had begun moving to the Upper St. John Valley in 1817, became one of the standard-bearers for claims to the area Maine and the United States.³⁴ On July 4, 1827, Baker organized an Independence Day celebration from his home on the north bank of the river and raised an American flag to challenge British authority.³⁵ For this rebellious activity, he was imprisoned for three months in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

The governor of New Brunswick, Sir John Harvey, visited the disputed territory and reported in 1839, "the Acadians of Madawaska have manifested to me on numerous occasions (and again very recently) their unanimous and spontaneous desire to remain under the jurisdiction of New Brunswick." Writings from the period indicate the inhabitants feared that they might lose possession of their lands if their territory became a part of the United States. 37

Whatever the wishes of the inhabitants, the boundary dispute was settled through diplomacy and arbitration. The matter was resolved in 1842 when Lord Ashburton of Great Britain and Daniel Webster of the United States negotiated a treaty (known as the Webster-Ashburton Treaty) that established the St. John and St. Francis rivers as the international boundary above Grand Falls, New Brunswick. Following the border settlement, some settlers arriving from Lower Canada preferred to remain on the New Brunswick side rather than cross into Maine.³⁸ Due to a reduction in immigration, population increase was slower on the American side during the 1840s and 1860s. The settlement of the Maine side of the valley did, however, continue to expand.

According to another historian, William Ganong, the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, which gave approximately two-thirds of the disputed territory to the United States, was actually favorable to Great Britain because, based on the wording of the Treaty of Versailles, the State of Maine had a strong claim to the entire territory. However, the boundary settlement was unfortunate in that it divided a compact and homogeneous population between two governments and created an "unnatural" territorial boundary. Today Maine Acadians generally ignore the international boundary with regard to family and social ties. Yet the St. John River has formed a portion of the northern

border of the United States since 1842. Maine Acadian identity has come to embrace being both "American" and "Acadian." ³⁹

Influence on Mount Desert

The "French connection" on Mount Desert is significant, due to its place names as well as its early history, two of the most prominent place names being Mount Desert and Acadia, derived from the French, L'isle des Monts-déserts, and La Cadie, respectively. The link with Acadian culture and history, at root French, was reinforced in this century, when the island's national park received its third name, becoming Acadia National Park.

Thanks to the Jesuit priest Father Biard, we have a clear description of the dramatic historic event on Fernald Point that took place early in the island's history. In popular local legend, however, the brief settlement has become a full-fledged mission, dramatically torched by the British! (It is also worth mentioning that around Fernald Point important contributions to local Indian history have been made through archeological digs.)

We should keep in mind, as well, that after the American Revolution, the island was split down the middle and the eastern half given to Madame de Gregoire, a descendant of Sieur de Cadillac. De Gregoire received this bounty as part of the Americans gratitude for French assistance against the British during the Revolution.

The historic tug of war between the British and French influence continues to this day in Canada with the separatist movement of Quebec as an example. Another illustration is the Canadian (i.e., British) and American conflict over fishing rights in the recent past and the issue of sovereignty over Machias Seal Island, a wildlife refuge.

In conclusion, if the word "Acadia" is derived from the Micmac Indians, as this paper suggests, and is well rooted in both North American native and French traditions, Mount Desert islanders should welcome this unique bond with our cultural predecessors and neighbors to the north.

Notes

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- 4 Clark, 75.
- ⁵ Edgar McInnis, *Canada: A Political and Social History* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1969), 20.
- ⁶ Daigle, 18.
- ⁷ Ibid., 24.
- ⁸George E. Street, *The History of Mount Desert* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1905), 33-35.
- ⁹Muriel K. Roy, "Settlement and Population Growth in Acadia" in Daigle, ed., *The Acadians of the Maritimes*, 133.
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- 16 Daigle, 42-43.
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- 19 Roy, 152.
- ²⁰ Griffiths, 111.
- ²¹ Roy, 156.
- ²² Griffiths, 127.
- ²³ Guy F. Dubay, *Welcome Chez Nous: Homecoming 1993* (Madawaska, ME.: Saint John Valley Publishing Company, 1993), 172.
- ²⁴ André LeClerc, et al., "Connais-toi toi-même: rapport d'un sondage sur l'identité et le sentiment d'appartenance de la population du 'territoire z'," in *Revue de la société du Madawaska—Le Brayon* 7 nos. 2 and 3 (April-September, 1979), 4-138 and Adrien Bérubé, "La Marévie? Qu'estce que 'c'est?" ibid., 2-3.
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- ²⁹Craig, "Agriculture and the Lumberman's Frontier in the Upper Saint John Valley, 1800-1870."
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- 38 Dubay, 29.
- ³⁹ Albert, 116.