By Jim Bradshaw

The Acadians had been on the land 150 years when, in July 1755, Col. John Winslow, one of the British officers in Nova Scotia, wrote this in his journal:

The transports arrived at Grand Pre on September 10. Winslow wrote:

...the inhabitants, sadly and with great sorrow, abandoned their homes. The women, in great distress, carried their newborn or their youngest children in their arms. Others pulled carts with their household effects and crippled parents. It was a scene of confusion, despair and desolation.

Winslow did make an attempt to keep families together, but he didn't have enough ships. Women were loaded onto ships other than the ones that carried their husbands and children. Entire families, believing that they were separating for only a few days, would be so widely dispersed that they would never meet again.

When all was done, some 7,000 Acadians had been gathered up, sent from their homes aboard crowded ships, and scattered along the Atlantic Seaboard and elsewhere. Some 2,000 Acadians would go to Massachusetts, 700 to Connecticut, more than 300 to New York, 500 to Pennsylvania, nearly a thousand to Maryland, 400 or more to Georgia, another thousand to the Carolinas.

On August 9, the Acadians of the Chignecto Isthmus were ordered to meet at Fort Cumberland, to hear "the reading of orders of His Excellency, the Governor." Suspicious, they refused to go. The meeting was postponed to the next day. Then, some 400 Acadians went to the fort after being assured that the gathering was only about "arrangements of the Governor of Halifax for the conservation of their farms." Every Acadian who attended was taken prisoner. Detachments of soldiers then went through the countryside to arrest the rest of the population. Nearly all of the Acadians hid in the woods and, in fact, Charles Lawrence, then the British governor, reported on July 31, 1755, that the Acadians were continuing to move away the 7,000 Acadians still in Nova Scotia.

"One hundred and forty women threw themselves hopelessly and blindly onto the English ships to rejoin their husbands," wrote the parish priest, Father Le Guerne.

Winslow, in charge of the Grand Pre region, called the Acadians together there on September 5. His proclamation ordered all men and boys over the age of ten to gather in the church to hear "His Majesty's intentions." Those who didn't show up would forfeit their goods, cattle and real estate.

Four hundred and eighteen men gathered at the church. They were apprehensive. The British now held the upper hand in the decades-old struggle between the French and English in North America, and the Acadians knew it.

When all of the men were in the church, the doors were closed and locked. The men were placed under arrest and told that their lands and goods were no longer theirs. They and their families were to be put aboard ships and sent elsewhere.

"They were greatly struck," Winslow wrote in his journal, "although I believe they did not realize that they were actually to be removed. Thus ended the memorable 4th of September, a day of great fatigue and trouble."

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stronghold at Louisbourg, a proclamation by the Nova Scotia government appeared in the Boston Gazette, offering free land grants in the once-Acadian province. A second proclamation, in 1759, described the wonderful attractions of the land and offered liberal terms to settlers.

In April 1759, a five-man committee was sent from Connecticut to "spy out the land." They met with Governor Lawrence and his council at Halifax and were assured that the lands were all that they had been advertised to be. Ships from Nova Scotia would be available to transport the New Englanders, their stock and their furniture.

To help them decide, the council sent them to visit the lands along the Bay of Fundy. When they arrived in the Minas Basin, the orchards were budding, dikes growing green and rich uplands were waiting for the plow. Compared to the rocky soil of New England, the fertile valley was very attractive.

Completely sold on the proposition, the agents agreed to settle one township at Minas and another one at Canard (today Horton and Cornwallis, respectively).

On May 21, 1760, a fleet of 22 ships set sail for the new Promised Land. The New England planters planted their feet on the soil of Acadia on June 4, 1760, five years after the Acadian dispersion.

An old ballad, Puritan Planters tells the tale:

Five years in desolation the Acadia land had lain.
Five golden Harvest Moons had wooed the fallow fields in vain.
Five times the winter snows had slept and summer sunsets smiled
On lonely clumps of willows and fruit trees growing wild.

There was silence in the forest and along the Minas shore
And not a habitation from Canard to Beausejour.
But many a blackened rafter and many a broken wall
Told the story of Acadia's prosperity and fall.