ACADIAN MUSEUM FULFILLS 40-YEAR DREAM

By John Porteous

Moncton, New Brunswick, is the cultural and business center for more than 275,000 Acadians living in Canada's three Maritime Provinces.

Descendants of the original French settlers who came to this part of North America in the 1600's 'Les Acadiens' are a proud people with a rich heritage. In 1755, the British conquerors of Acadia drove the French farmers and fishermen out of what was then the colony of Nova Scotia. This expulsion is documented in the famous Longfellow poem 'Evangeline' and was at the time thought to spell the end to the French faction in the British North American colonies. But many Acadians quietly returned to the land of their birth over the years.

Some of the Acadians who were expelled moved down the eastern seaboard of what was soon to become the United States, and there they found more friendly English settlers who accepted them. Many settled in Louisiana, where their descendants are today's 'Cajuns' and where their contributions to culture and business were sizeable. Many others found homes in New England, where even today French is spoken in scattered pockets of original Acadian settlements.

Now, the fabled culture of old Acadie has been brought together in an exciting new museum and art gallery in Moncton, and next summer's visitors to the Maritime Provinces will be able to see first hand a priceless collection of artifacts collected with love and dedication over more than four decades.

Although many leaders in the Maritime's Acadian community have played a part in this new museum's creation, the facility is the long-time dream of a devoted Catholic priest, Dr. Clement Cormier of Moncton. Back in the early 1940's, then-Father Cormier began collecting artifacts and everyday Acadian historical objects with the view to putting them together in one museum which would celebrate the Acadian history.

In those days, public funding for new museums was non-existent in Canada, and some observers thought Father Cormier's dream would continue to be just that... a dream. But in the mid-sixties when the French language University of Moncton was being built, Clement Cormier believed he was on the way to having a permanent museum for his people. The formal opening of the museum and art gallery, which took place last October was the culmination of Dr. Cormier's 40 years of work, and from 100 rural barns and other places of storage came the artifacts he had so painstakingly preserved.

Appropriately named The Clement Cormier Museum and Art Gallery, the modern, 20,000 square foot edifice is located on the grounds of the University of Moncton, within easy driving from the Trans Canada highway which passes by Moncton on the route between Maine and Nova Scotia. Opening day ceremonies were conducted by Rector Gilbert Finn of the University, who noted the museum will be a place filled with rare, precious and beautiful objects and that the new Clement Cormier museum would be an addition to both the university and the population at large.

Fully equipped with climate-controlled display rooms and showcases, the new museum also has a workshop of ample size for major restoration works, and in this regard will be visited regularly by restorers from the Canadian Conservation Institute. Objects of interest to visitors include early household artifacts and tools with which the pioneer Acadian settlers built their unique homes and agricultural out-buildings. All summer prior to the opening, special teams of workers aided by Canada Manpower grants worked to frame and catalog thousands of such artifacts gathered from all over the three Maritime Provinces.

The adjacent art gallery already has a permanent collection of more than 170 works, mainly creations of Maritime Acadian artists of the present day. But as time goes on, it's expected this collection will expand greatly, with many more artists coming forth to display their art. Museum curator is Deborah Robichaud, while the art gallery director is Marc Pitre. Both these officials worked with Dr. Cormier over the past several years to plan and bring to fruition the final structure.

At 70, Dr. Clement Cormier is understandably pleased with the museum and art gallery which bear his name. Far from feeling his work to be over, the man who showed such determination now wants to see a two-fold growth for the museum. His first wish is that more artifacts and art objects will be donated to the museum by individuals and groups, not only in the Maritime Provinces, but in other Acadian communities in North America. Secondly, Dr. Cormier expresses the hope that Acadian-descended people will make an effort to visit Moncton to see first hand how the early Acadians lived.

As tourist volumes grow at the museum, it's hoped that small concerts and musical presentations can be held in the art gallery, which has the capacity for small theatrical presentations. This feature is hoped, will add another dimension to the total historical picture the Cormier Museum offers. Further information on the Clement Cormier Museum can be obtained by writing M. Allyn Noel, Taillon Building, University of Moncton, Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada.

Opening Day Visitors Pore Over Items of the Acadian Pioneers

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