The Acadians were among the first Europeans to settle in North America — before the settlement at Jamestown, before the Mayflower, before most of the settlements that we read about in the history books.

Their exile from Nova Scotia, wanderings throughout the world, and eventual settlement in Louisiana form the formative cultural memory of the Cajuns of Acadiana, and of the adoptive culture of many others who have come here to stay.

City Editor Jim Bradshaw tells the story of that history, dispersion, and settlement in this special edition in The Daily Advertiser.

THE FIRST ACADIANS

Modern historians have pretty well shot down the idea that Frenchmen were the first white men to set foot in America, and that one of them led the way for Columbus. But it could have happened.

According to the discredited story, a French navigator from Dieppe named Cousin was sailing off the coast of Africa in 1488, four years before Columbus' voyage, when he was forced westward by winds and tides until he reached an unknown shore. On board the ship was a mutinous seaman named Pinzon who, after the voyage, was thrown out of the French Navy. Pinzon went to Spain, met Columbus, told him of his discovery, and sailed with him in 1492.

There is not much evidence to make us think the story is true, but who knows? We do know of other instances when ships were blown far to the west and onto strange shores.

There is, however, good evidence that the first Europeans to establish a permanent settlement in North America were Frenchmen. They were our ancestral Acadians. And they, like many of us, were fishermen.

We think that Norman, Breton, and Basque fishermen were fishing Newfoundland's Grand Banks as early as 1497. After John and Sebastian Cabot explored the area in that year, they swore that cod were so plentiful that the vast schools sometimes halted the progress of their ships. There was no need for hook, line or bait. It was enough to dip them up with baskets, they said.

The first reliable records of any French ship on the Grand Banks are those of Jean Denys of Honfleur, who fished there in 1504, and of Thomas Aubert of Dieppe, who was there two years later. In 1507 a Norman fisherman returned to Rouen with an extra cargo of seven savages, mostly likely Beothuk Indians. We know of an early Breton fishing voyage by La Jacquette of Dahouet because of a shipboard brawl. The master, Guillaume Dobel, alleged that the ship was carrying too much sail. He called the skipper, a man named Picart, an idiot, and the quartermaster, named Garrouche, a vell, apparently a serious insult.

Garrouche dropped the tiller, roared up to the quarterdeck, and collected himself a punch in the jaw from Dobel — who then drew a knife and chased him overboard. The crew tried to rescue Garrouche, but he drowned. Dobel made the best restitution he could to the widow. He married her.

The early fishermen who visited the Grand Banks made two trips each year. The first was in late January or early February, and braving winter westerlies in the North Atlantic, they returned to France as soon as their holds were full. They sailed again in April or May and went home in September.

At first, these fishermen cleaned the cod aboard ship and stored them between thick layers of salt. But it was not long before they found that cod could be sun-dried on land, and that cured cod tasted better and was easier to store. The fishermen began to go ashore each summer, to build makeshift villages for themselves and drying stands for their fish. By 1519, the French, the Portuguese and the English had set up depots on Newfoundland, on the Acadian peninsula on Cape Breton Island, and on the St. Lawrence River.

Salt fish became big business, and they were sold wholesale in France by the thousands. In 1616 Michel Le Bail of Breton sold more than 17,000 codfish to local merchants at Rouen. By 1529 the Normans were shipping Newfoundland codfish to England. On just one day in 1542, no fewer than 60 ships departed from Rouen.
alone for the Grand Bank. In 1578 there were 250 French vessels there, and 300 from other nations.

But, except for the temporary villages, the French made no attempt at settlement. For one thing, they were being kept busy with wars on the continent.

Jacques Cartier, lured by Indian tales of gold and of a Northwest Passage to the riches of Cathay, made voyages to the Canadian wilds in 1534 and 1535, and attempted a short-lived settlement. But a bitter winter and equally bitter Indians ended that. The Sieur de Bekeval tried to revive that colony, but met even less success. Then official France got itself involved in another war, and forgot about North America for awhile.

But the fishermen kept coming. By the middle 1600's, the fishermen, still drying their cod ashore, had begun trading with the Indians for a rich harvest of furs. The furs found a ready market back home, and official interest in the New World picked up in direct relation to the value of the fur and fish trade.

It was in the spring, April 7, 1604, that Pierre de Gua, Sieur de Monts, set off with Samuel Champlain and a tiny fleet to sail around the southern tip of the Acadian peninsula. He discovered the Annapolis Valley, charted the Bay of Fundy, and, on a miniscule Saint Croix Island, near the mouth of the river that today divides New Brunswick from Maine, put down a colony of 7 men.

The rock-fenced islet was covered with cedars, and when the tide was out the shoals were dark with the swash of sea-weed ... (Here), in their leisure moments, the Frenchmen, we are told, amused themselves with detaching the limpets from the stones, as a sanitary addition to their fare. But there was little leisure at St. Croix. Soldiers, sailors and artisans betook themselves to their task. Before the winter closed in, the northern end of the island was covered with buildings, surrounding a square, where a solitary tree had been left standing. On the right was a spacious home, well built, and surrounded by one of those enormous roofs characteristic of the time. This was the lodging of DeMonts. Behind it, and near the water, was a long, covered gallery, for labor or amusement in foul weather. Champlain and the Sieur d'Orrville ... built a house for themselves nearby opposite that of DeMonts; and the remainder of the square was occupied by storehouses, a magazine, workshops, lodgings for gentlemen and artisans, and a barrack for the soldiers, the whole enclosed with a palisade. Adjacent there was an attempt at a garden ... but nothing would grow in the sandy soil. There was a cemetery, too, and a small rustic chapel on a projecting point of rock.

In the summertime, the island was very pretty and cozy. But winter there was something entirely different.

Vegetables would not grow in the sandy soil, even in summer, so the colonists had to plant their garden and sow their wheat on the mainland. Their spring went dry, so fresh water had to be brought from the mainland as well. So also with freezing. The first snow fell on October 6. By December 3 ice floes began to cut off the Frenchmen from the mainland garden, woodlots and water. A bitter wind blew constantly from the northeast, making it impossible to keep warm. Food froze hard, then rotted. Scarcity began to take its toll.

Thirty-five of the 79 men were dead by the following spring. When DeMonts decided to move his colony across the Bay of Fundy to a place he named Port Royal. It would become one of the first permanent settlements in North America.

All of the buildings on Saint Croix Island were taken down and freighted, plank by plank, across the Bay of Fundy. There, at a place later named Lower Greenwich, the same materials were used to build a single habitation in the form of a hollow square.

This time, the habitation was well sited, fronting on the Annapolis Basin, its back protected from winter Northers by a range of 500-foot hills. The Acadians had settled in to stay, and that was a first. As another historian, J.A. Doyle, put it: "For the first time there was to be seen in America a colony of Europeans, not as a band of adventurers or explorers, but as a settled community subsisting by their own labor."

These colonists would call the place L'Acadie a name derived from the work of the ancient Virgil who gave it to an idyllic - if imaginary - land inhabited by simple, virtuous people. The name had been popularized in the 1400's in a novel by Jacopo Sanazzaro, which opens with a tribute to a grove of "uncommon and extreme beauty" in a place called Arcadia.

There is another theory about the name - that it was derived from the Micmac Indian word quoddy or codice, which meant "ferile" or "beautiful landscape." But folks who believe Micmacs on the land over an ancient Greek's imagination have no romance in their souls.

Acadians deported to the Philadelphia area were banished to Ship Island, where they were forced to remain while smallpox, hunger and exposure decimated their ranks. This Robert Dafford painting is titled "Acadians in Philadelphia Harbor."

They would not starve. When all of the buildings were in place, the Sieur de Monts sailed in the fall for France, to find more backing and to bring souvenirs to the king (including a live caribou, a live moose calf, and bright bird feathers). He also brought back a shipload of furs - something much more intriguing to the court than salt fish.

As an example of how the Frenchmen made themselves at home in this cozy valley, Samuel Champlain created a little garden near the habitation, complete with a gazebo, where he could go to relax. He made a fresh-water pond for live trout and, on the harbor's edge, he created a "little reservoir" of salt water to keep sea perch and rock cod alive.

"We often went there," he would write, "to pass time, and it seemed to please the little birds of the neighborhood; for they assembled there in great numbers and made such a pleasant warbling and twittering of which I have never heard the like."

The winter of 1605-1606 was not as severe as the preceding one. Snow fell first on December 20. Scarcity took its toll. Twelve of the 45 men died - including the first black man known to have come to New France. His name was Mathieu de Costa or d'Acosta. He had been to Acadie before in a Portuguese ship and had learned the Micmac language. A Rouen merchant had kidnapped him in Portugal or the East Indies and sold or leased him to de Monts as an interpreter.

But things were better despite the hardships. Membertou's men brought meat and the French had enough wheat to make bread. Only the wine gave out.

Champlain makes it clear in his journals that conditions were much easier. They seemed to have plenty of food, and even dined together like veritable gourmets, in the Ordre de Bona Temp (Order of Good Cheer), which Champlain

At the time of the exile of the Acadians in 1755, some 2,000 were sent to England, and later to France, to stay in Europe for 30 years before they eventually made their way to Louisiana. This Robert Dafford painting portrays their arrival in Liverpool, England.
created. In the Order, each man was chief steward for the day and was expected to fill the table with the finest fare he could come up with. As a result, the long refectory table in the Great Hall at Port Royal always had fresh fish and a variety of game, even rich desserts.

On January 14, 1606, all hands had a picnic in the open air. Pretty soon, trout and smelt began running up the brooks. Kitchen gardens were prepared in March for May planting. A water-powered grist mill was built on the little river that flows into the Annapolis Basin. But, even so, in 1605, the colony had barely begun. European cultivation of the land had not yet started, and even after a much milder winter, the spring of 1606 brought no more than a steady harvest. The ship sailed back from France. The pioneers still needed more people and new materials if their settlement was to become more than just a tiny trading center.

And, still, too, the colony's leaders were not entirely certain that this was the place that would be their permanent home. Neither, apparently, was the French crown.

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Religious rivalries in France — as eventually, did all European rivalries — would now spill into North America.

On January 26, 1611, Biencourt finally raised anchor in Dieppe, aboard the Grace de Dieu, bound for Acadie. His mother, Jeanne de Salazar, was also aboard ship, and would become one of the first women to travel to North America. The Poutrincourts, Fathers Masse and Biard, would become Poutrincourt's business partners.

Young Charles de Biencourt, caught in this business-religious-political tug-of-war while his family waited for supplies, turned in desperation to Antoinette de Pons, Marquess of Guercheville, who had influence at the court. She paid off the Huguenots and bought their Acadian rights, which she promptly turned over to the Jesuits. In addition to their religious influence, the two would now become Poutrincourt's business partners.

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lished Pennsylvania in 1681. The Spanish still claimed much of North America, but the Atlantic Seaboard was being preempted by English settlement.

Spanish power had declined rapidly after 1550. Her armies were defeated by the French, and a revolt by the Netherlands—secretly aided by England—had drained Spain of strength. By the late 1560s English "sea dogs" such as John Hawkins and Francis Drake were seizing Spanish ships wherever they met them.

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and other provisions. In 1616 he was able to ship some 25,000 pelts back to France from trading posts at Port Royal, Cape Sable, Penobscot and the St. John River.

Port Royal thus became temporarily more of a trading post than an agricultural colony. Cut off from investment capital in France, Biencourt and his lieutenant, Charles de la Tour, found that their tiny band of about 20 men could ek out a living in Acadie.

Claude de la Tour, Charles' father, went back to France to try to recruit new colonists for the Acadian colony. But, in 1619, before de la Tour could return, the Virginians sent Samuel Argoll on yet another raid against the French. He burned Saint-Sauveur, then sailed for Saint Croix Island, where he once again burned all of the buildings and destroyed the fort.

At Port Royal he found the fort undefended, since the Acadians were working in the fields a few miles away. The smoke of their burning houses and fort gave the first warning that strangers were nearby. Along with their buildings, they lost all of their provisions.

But, once again they began to rebuild.

Biencourt died in 1624 at the age of 31. Charles de la Tour, then 27, took over Biencourt's estate as Seigneur at Port Royal by claiming that Biencourt had bequeathed it to him - a claim that would later be disputed. But, for now, la Tour moved the colonists' headquarters to Cape Sable on the Atlantic Coast, so that it would be more accessible to the fishing craft that were their primary link to Europe and to trade goods. From there, he and his band of "coureurs de bois" (woods runners), as they would come to be called, continued to eke out what existence they could.

**BRITISH DESIGNS**

Ever since John Cabot and his son had sailed on Columbus' heels to North America, the English had laid vague claims to the land of Acadie and most of the Atlantic Coast. Now, in 1620, James I took advantage of the civil war in France to decree that Massachusetts, where the Pilgrims had just landed, included not only Acadie, but all of Canada.

James I was the son of Mary Queen of Scots and succeeded to the throne in England on the death of Elizabeth in 1603. He had already won for himself a reputation as "the wisest fool in Christendom." When he ascended the British throne he brought with him a train of Scotsmen as eager as he was to escape the poverty of Scotland.

One of them was William Alexander of Menstrie, who was tutor to Prince Henry, the oldest of the King's children. William was a poet, and this endeared him to the king, who thought that he, too, had a way with words.

But Alexander wanted to do more with his life than write poetry. He wanted to lord over lands of his own. And the best chance he had for that was in North America. It was largely at Alexander's urging that King James decided to claim the Canadian lands.

On Sept. 10, 1626, King James granted Acadie and Canada to Alexander. The poet was given the authority to "erect cities, appoint fairs, hold courts, grant lands and coin money." All Alexander had to do was to find the wherewithal to take possession of the lands the king had granted him. The way to do it, he decided, was to divide the spoils with men who already had money.

A new order was created, the Company of Merchant Adventurers to take control of the Canadian lands, or who would put 150 sterling pounds into the pot, would get his title and a grant of land six miles by three. He would also have the right to wear "an orange tawny ribbon from which shall hang pendant in an escutcheon argent a saltire azure with the arms of Scotland."

Nothing much came of this immediately, except the settling of small groups here and there around the Bay of Fundy and the creation of much ill feeling between the newcomers and the French at Port Royal. But, after the death of King James, and with the beginning of yet another war with France (Protestant vs. Catholic, what else?), Alexander began to take the enterprise a bit more seriously. He enlisted merchants and financiers in London into the Company of Merchant Adventurers to take control of the Canadian lands.

As a part of the war effort, the merchant company raised 60,000 pounds to equip an expedition against the French in Canada. Three ships set out early in 1628 under the command of David, Lewis and Thomas Kirke, the sons of Gervase Kirke, who was a member of the company.
Charles de la Tour and his coureurs de bois hid themselves in the woods while Charles' father, Claude de la Tour, tried to get to France to ask for help. But Claude was captured by the Kirkes and taken to London - where he decided to try to make the best out of a bad deal.

Clausé somehow managed to fingle British baronnetcies for himself and his son, and since Charles had already been commissioned Lieutenant-General of Acadie by the French king, Clausé reckoned - be okay no matter who ended up in charge. And it worked.

The Treaty of Saint Gemain-en-Laye in 1632 would give the Acadians control over Acadie, but later in the century, when the French would once again lose Acadie to the British, Charles de la Tour would be recognized as its legal governor.

REAL BEGINNINGS

When Acadie was returned to France in 1632 under the Treaty of Saint Gemain-en-Laye, Cardinal Armand Jean du Plessis, Duc de Richelieu, had come down in force. He would prove himself one of the ablest of French statesmen. He would hold strong influence over King Louis XIII. and, would, in fact, become the actual ruler of France for more than 15 years.

Richelieu saw the coming struggle for supremacy in North America, and saw that France would have to strengthen its colonies there. But it was apparent that the French were not powerful enough to be able to militarily stand up to the English. And he was deeply involved in its own internal problems.

The French were forced to limit their trade from within the French ranks, and they had to pay for the British to come to power in France. He would do so in the face of conflict, both from within the French ranks, and from the British traders.

In 1633 English traders from Massachusetts set up a post at Machias, on the coast of Maine, to trade with the Indians there. La Tour, afraid that the competition would hurt his Jesmeg profits, attacked the English. He killed two guards, captured three others, and brought them and a passel of captured furs and provisions to Cape Sable.

The English in Boston called la Tour's attack piracy and decided to do something about it. In 1634, a Boston merchant named Allerton who owned an interest in the Machias post, sailed to Acadie to reclaim the booty and bring back la Tour's prisoners. La Tour answered that Machias was now French territory and that he had acted in the name of France. At the same time, although by then, Richelieu had died and was succeeded by a hard-line to protect the Acadians, the French, and New England authorities to limit their trading with the Indians and the French also recognized the rights of the English.

The fighting brought things to a head, and in 1641, the French Court revoked la Tour's commission, called him to Paris (though he would never go), and named d'Aulnay governor.

The French were also tumultuous years within the colony. Two groups began to fight for control of the declining Acadian fur trade. Charles de la Tour continued to claim ownership of much of Acadie, and his claim was recognized by the government in France. But that same government also recognized the British as the owner of the Company of New France, now headed by d'Aulnay. The two interests were inevitably to collide.

The fight began in earnest in 1639, when la Tour expropriated a ship that d'Aulnay had sent to Peru. The next year, la Tour tried to capture Port Royal with two warships, but d'Aulnay captured him and his men.

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La Tour defied the royal decree, and, in February 1642, d'Aulnay was ordered to take him by force and bring him to France. La Tour barricaded himself in his fort at Jimmy and sent agents to seek an alliance with the English.
in Massachusetts. The Boston merchants turned him down at first. La Tour kept trying, and finally made a deal.

Here is an account attested to be eight Capuchin priests on October 20, 1643:

After harassing d'Aulnay for seven years, the English of Grande Baie (Plymouth), accompanying la Tour, mounted an assault on Port Royal with four ships and two armed frigates on August 6, 1643, wounded seven men, killed three others and took one captive. They killed a quantity of livestock and took a ship loaded with furs, powder and food.

The priests told the French Court that "of the 18,000 livres worth of furs stolen in Port Royal, the Bostonians kept two-thirds, and la Tour one-third." They sought help from the Bostonians so that he may carry out his generous plan against the enemies of the true religion and in particular against the Sieur de la Tour, a very evil Frenchman who attends Protestant services when he is in Grand Baie.

On March 6, 1644, the French government declared la Tour an outlaw. But he still refused to give in. Instead, he sent his wife, Françoise-Marie Jacquelin, to plead his case before the king's ministers, and to fetch badly needed supplies.

In early 1645, la Tour himself went to Boston to seek aid, leaving his wife, Françoise-Marie Jacquelin, to plead his case before the king's ministers, and to fetch badly needed supplies.

D'Aulnay's death left the Acadian colony with little direction and virtually no help from France. They turned to the soil, and to New England. The fertile Annapolis Basin gave them crops enough to feed themselves, with some left over for trade with the thousands of settlers now pouring into Massachusetts. For once, the French and the English needed each other.

The influx of Puritans into New England had caused a food shortage there, new colonists were coming in quicker than the crops did. By the 1640s, enterprising Yankee traders had begun to send ships to Acadie to buy cattle and garden crops. The trade, of course, was completely illegal, but hunger was a lot closer to the doorstep than were either the French or the British authorities.

The trade brought a measure of independence to the Frenchmen in Acadie. Farming, along with some fishing and hunting, gave them a good livelihood. They were finding that they could survive in the New World through their own effort, despite the neglect of official France. And there was another important realization: They were beginning to think of themselves as a distinct people. They were still allied to France, but they were now something more. They were the settlers of Acadie. They had become Acadians.

Jean Gaudet

I have a mind's-eye vision of Jean Gaudet as a crusty, old Frenchman, sunburnt, with dark, work-hardened hands, capable of doing what had to be done to wrest a simple life from the soil. He was probably an independent old cuss. He was 61 years old in 1636, when he and his brother, Aubin, migrated to L'Acadie, traveling to a colony still far from a certain thing.

Settlement in North America was still a new and risky venture. The British colony at Jamestown was less than 30 years old. The Pilgrims had landed at Plymouth but 16 years before. It would be 40 years before Marquette and Jolliette would explore the Mississippi Valley, nearly 50 before LaSalle would plant his cross at the river's mouth and claim Louisiana for France. George Washington would not be born for more than 100 years.

Jean Gaudet had come to clear forest into farmland, build dikes to reclaim tidal marshes, cut timber for his home and keep a family fed while he was doing it. He would farm his Annapolis Basin lands for more than 30 years, dying at the age of 97. He was one of my first ancestors in North America, and there was a lot of history packed into his lifetime.

Jean Gaudet and his second wife, Nicole CoUeson, were among the first families settled in Acadie. Until now, the French who had come to North America, except for the wives of one or two officials, were mostly contract workers who were employed in the fisheries or fur trade, and who returned to France once their stint was done.

Jean Gaudet was one of the first Frenchmen who would come to Acadie to stay. Three children - Françoise, Denis and Marie - came with him. Another, Jean, was probably born in the New World.

Jean Gaudet was a farmer, and he and others who came at the time brought skills and crafts useful in building and running a colony. Germain Doucet, another of my ancestors to arrive about this time, was commandant at Port Royal under d'Aulnay. Another, Antoine Bourg, was royal notary and syndic (justice of the peace). Others, such as Rene Landry, Jean Terriot and Francois Gauterot, were probably farmers. Guillaume Blanchard was a fisherman.

By 1650 there were only 50 families in Acadie. They would estab-
ish farms and families and live a life described in 1638 by Nicolas Denys, who wrote, "there are plenty of claims, wheels, mussels and other mollusks and an abundance of lobsters ... some of which have a claw so large it will hold a pint of wine." He mentions swordfish "as large as a cow," and writes of huge flocks of wild pigeons flying over his camp. He says he was kept awake by the noise from flocks of geese and ducks nearby.

Historian Rameau de Saint-Pere, drawing from accounts by an early priest of the colony, Ignace d'Aulnay, tells us:

On Sunday, the Acadian farmers emerged from the folds of this charming valley, some in canoes, others on horseback, their wives and daughters riding behind, while long lines of Micmac, brightly painted and with colorful ornaments, mingled with them. Around the church grounds, d'Aulnay had developed extensive green areas, which were called les champs communs, where the arrivals tethered their mounts and left their belongings. After the service, the colonists relaxed on the champs communs, discussing crops, hunting, progress of clearing the land, the work undertaken by the Siegneur, a thousand and one topics about their private lives and gossipping the way it is done in all French countries.


D'Aulnay himself often mingled with them -- recounting adventures of his travels into the interior Indian country. Many oldtimers ... added their bit to the conversation, while the more venerable sages of the colony, Ignace d'Aulnay had emerged, drew from accounts by an early priest of the colony, Ignace d'Aulnay, tells us:

the Acadians were left to themselves, with little guidance or support from France, and they like it that way. The colony was once again growing in peace and prosperity when European intrigue again interrupted its life.

In 1651, when King Charles and Oliver Cromwell were battling for control of England, Parliament passed a Navigation Act, requiring that goods from Asia, Africa and America be carried to England only on English ships. The act was aimed chiefly at the Dutch, who were supporting the King in his feud with the Parliament. The British and the Dutch went to war over the issue and France (allied with the Dutch) was soon drawn into it.

So it was in 1654 that an English force from Boston headed to Acadie with orders from Cromwell to clear the French from the place. The British commander, Robert Sedgwick, had easy work. He quickly subdued the lightly defended Acadian lands, but, instead of clearing the Frenchmen out, left the coloney in control of a local council headed by Guillaume Traban.

Little changed in everyday life during the council's administration. The Acadians farmed their lands. There was no flood of new British settlers to disrupt their lives. In fact, the years of British rule passed very quietly until, in 1667, the Treaty of Breda once again returned the colony to France.

But two important things happened. The first was that the 18 years of benign English neglect had strengthened the Acadians' sense of independence. They discovered that they could get along quite well, thank you, with little help from the outside. The other thing was that the British began to think that maybe, next time, they ought to keep this place for themselves -- and ship those papist Frenchmen somewhere else.

Trouble in Paradise

In all, we believe that some 10,000 immigrants traveled to Canada -- not all of them to Acadie during the French regime (1604 to 1713) and that between 5,000 and 6,000 of them arrived before the year 1700. More than half of those who came from France before 1700 were from the old provinces of Poitou and Annio, Drouin.

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would not become Nova Scotians.

THE OATH REFUSED

Almost from the beginning of their regime (in 1713), the British governors of Acadie faced a dilemma. They needed the Acadians and their expertise, but they also mistrusted their loyalty. The English solution was to try to force the Acadians to take an oath of allegiance to Great Britain. Most Acadians steadfastly refused. The oath would become the nominal bone of contention that would, in the next generation, finally bring their exile. The fact that the Acadians owned some of the richest farmland on the Eastern seaboard, and that the English had for it, didn't help matters much, either.

The Acadians had good reason to refuse the oath. They feared it would require them to give up the independence they'd begun to enjoy, and that it might one day force them to fight against France. Also, they didn't want to make promises to a government that they hoped might not be around that long. (Their fathers had lived for awhile under the British, but had seen the colony eventually returned to France.) And, most of all, they knew that, at least for now, they held the upper hand. There were more Acadians than British in the Annapolis Basin, and the British needed the Acadians to feed their tiny garrison.

The Treaty of Utrecht that ceded Acadie to England had given the Acadians certain rights and options. It provided, for example, that "in the pursuance of this treaty (the Acadians) may have liberty to remove themselves within a year to any other place as they shall think fit, with all their movable effects. But those who are willing to remain here, and to be subjects of the Kingdom of Great Britain, are to enjoy the free exercise of their religion according to the usage of the Church of Rome as far as the laws of Great Britain allow the same."

Queen Anne later agreed to relieve the Acadians from any time limit for moving. On June 28, 1713, she wrote to her governor in Acadie:

"Whereas our good brother, the Most Christian King (of France) hath, at our desire, released from imprisonment ... such of his subjects as were detained on account of their ... Protestant religion; we, being willing to show ... how kind we take his compliance herein, have therefore thought fit ... to ... permit such of them as have any lands or tenements in the places under our Government in Acadie and Newfoundland ... and are willing to continue our subjects, to retain and enjoy their said lands and tenements without molestation, as fully and freely as other subjects do ... or to sell the same, if they shall rather choose to remove elsewhere."

Thus, the Acadians who decided to stay were guaranteed freedom of religion and equal rights with other British subjects. Those who planned to leave thought they could do so at any time they wanted to. But now the struggle began for their hearts and minds, and warm bodies.

In January 1714 Pastour de Costebello, the last French governor of Newfoundland, became the first governor of Cape Breton (Île Royale) which was still French, and built the historic fort of Louisbourg. He immediately tried to convince the Acadians that they should migrate there. The English, meanwhile, wanted to keep the Acadians in Nova Scotia, at least for awhile longer.

Lt. Gov. Samuel Vetch wrote to his British superiors on November 243, 1714:

"One hundred of the Acadians who were born upon this continent, and are perfectly at home in the woods, can march upon snow-shoes and understand the use of birch canoes, are of more value and service than five times their number of raw men newly arrived from Europe."

So their skill in the fishery, as well as the cultivating of the soil must make at once of Cape Breton the most powerful colony the French have in America, and to the greatest danger and damage to all the British colonies as well as the universal trade of Great Britain.

Later he wrote to the Board of Trade in London:

"The removal of (the Acadians) and their cattle to Cape Breton would be a great addition to that new colony, so it would wholly ruin Nova Scotia unless supplied by a British colony, which could not be done in several years, so that the Acadians with their stocks of cattle remaining here is very much for the advantage of the Crown."

Most Acadians didn't want to move. Anyway. These had been their lands for generations -- and Cape Breton, though French, offered them little. A delegation visited there during the summer of 1713. The report:

"On the whole the island there is no land fit for the maintenance of our families, since there is (sic) no grass lands large enough to feed our cattle which is our principal means of livelihood ... To leave our homes and cleared lands for new uncultivated land which must be cleared without help nor credit would expose our families to perishing by famine."

Some young Acadians moved to New Brunswick, which they regarded as French soil, but most of the established families decided to stay put on the farms and homesteads they had worked long and hard to build.

Efforts to require an oath of allegiance from these families began in earnest after Queen Anne died in 1714, and colonial officials took advantage of King George's accession to require sworn fealty to the new ruler.

The Acadians of Grand Pre and Beaubassin refused to take the oath, period. They argued that France and England were still arguing over boundaries, and whether their lands had been ceded under the treaty. They said they could take no oath until the issue was decided.

"For the present," the Acadians said, "we can only answer that we shall be ready to carry into effect the demand proposed to us as soon a His Majesty shall have done us the favor of providing some means of sheltering us from the Indians, who are always ready to do all kinds of mischief ... (since) we cannot take the oath demanded without exposing ourselves to have our throats cut in our houses at any time, which they have already threatened to do."

In March 1718, Doucett threatened to cut off Acadian trade and