Replica revives history

St. Martinville cross honors Grand Pré exile

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ST. MARTINVILLE — "Merci, bon Dieu, merci," said Brenda Dominique Thibaut, as she watched a tall cross lift a huge black cross over the roof of the Acadian Memorial Building and settle it gently into a space prepared for it next to Bayou Teche.

Thibaut, director of the memorial, has been working with others for more than a year to bring to this ending point of the Acadian odyssey the replica of a cross that marks the point where it began.

"So many people have worked so hard for this," she said. "Merci, bon Dieu, merci."

The cross memorials

Coming Thursday:
The tiny cross of eight Acadian families have been installed at St. Martinville's Acadian Memorial. Read about these beautiful mosaics in Thursday's Accent section.

Want to go?
Ceremonies begin at 2 p.m. today at St. Martin de Tours church, St. Martinville.

Events of early September 1719, when transport ships began to assemble off of a shallow marshy spot of land near Grand Pré, Nova Scotia.
Fast fact:

Acadian families whose members were deported from Grand Pré include Aalin, Acuna, Boin, Beaudoin, Bernt, Bouchard, Boulet, Bourg, Brouse, Caronais, Deve, Daveler, Dermen, D بسبب, Dupuis, Dugas, Gauz, Granger, Hoibert, Linsky, Labrecque, Lerner, Mahou, Siro, Prince, Richard, Robichaud, Robin, Serret, Sonier, Tetal, Thibodeaux, Thibaudeau, Thibault, Vincent, and Vincent.

Source: Asociacion Frederic Dumais

Acadian Memorial Foundation. The replica — 20 feet tall, 20 feet wide, 100 pounds — will be formally dedicated on Sunday when descendants of the Acadian families deported from Grand Pré will gather in the St. Martin de Tours Church to witness a reenactment of the day when the Acadians heard the news that they were to be sent away.

At the same time on Sunday, Acadians will gather in the church at Grand Pré to reenact the original cross in a similar ceremony.

"Not all of the Acadians were deported from Grand Pré, and not all of the Acadian families now in Louisiana were among those who were deported there," Maruis said. "In all, several thousand Acadians were forced from old Acadia in 1755 because they continued to refuse to send allegiance to Great Britain after it took over the Acadian provinces in 1753. St. Martinville was selected as a cross site by the Acadian Odyssey Committee of the Société Nationale de l'Acadie in Canada. Others are planned for places of exile on the Atlantic Coast in both the United States and Canada, and in France, England, the Caribbean, and Quebec. "Claude DeGrave of the odyssey committee approached us about a year ago, to ask us if we would be interested," Maruis said. "We immediately said "yes" and began planning.

She said she was afraid that erecting the replica would be costly. "Instead, we were able to do it for practically nothing, because so many people donated materials or services," Maruis said.

 Lafayette metal artist Ralph Goodyear volunteered to create the replica after detailed measurements were sent from Grand Pré. Vochte Supply Co. donated the metal, and the Vochte Machine Shop welded it into the basic crucifix form. The cross that fitted into place was donated by Billy Brusseau.

The cross service and ceremony will be held on Sunday.

During the ceremony, the deportation orders read in 1755 by Lt. Col. John Winslow will be read again in the mother church of the Acadians in Louisiana.

After the church ceremonies, there will be a procession to the site of the cross, where it will be blessed by the bishop and Father Austin Leur, pastor of St. Martin de Tours.