Le Grand Derangement
the
Expulsion
of the
Acadians
Nova Scotia, 1755
A “gentlemen’s agreement” in the early 1700’s allowed the Acadians the right to keep their guns, supposedly to hunt and protect themselves from any hostile Indians, in exchange for the pretense of unqualified submission to the crown. Prosperity with an uneasy peace prevailed until the middle of the century when once again international war broke out.

Charles Lawrence, a treacherous and ambitious politician, became the English governor in the 1750’s. He hated the Acadian people and what he plotted for the 20,000 settlers would become the most terribly thorough dispersion of a people in all of Western history.

Once again, added pressure was placed on the colonists to sign an absolute unconditional oath. This time property was confiscated and people deported. Defiance increased, rebellion accelerated. Open attacks were called on the settlers, warfare broke out. Lawrence proclaimed a two year deadline: sell out and get out.

In the major settlement of the Acadians, Grade Pre, a “town meeting” was called by Lawrence under the pretext of announcing new government policy in the conflict. When all possible men and boys in the village area were gathered into their church, he surrounded them with armed soldiers and held the entire group under arrest. He had secretly and without his superiors’ knowledge or consent arranged for a ragged fleet of mercenary boatmen and shippers to come up from the Boston area to several points on the Acadian coast. When he felt he had control of the village he began a mass evacuation of the populace.

The women and children were all captured and forced to march to a desolate shore a few miles away where they were herded like cattle onto the boats as they arrived. Because of poor coordination with the shippers, some were out in the October wind and rain for as long as a month without adequate food or protection.
Robert Dafford is a professional artist residing in Lafayette, Louisiana. He has done extensive mural work for Acadiana businesses and residents as well as several well-known national corporations. His paintings and prints are to be found in many private collections.

“The Expulsion of the Acadians” and “The Arrival of the Acadians” were commissioned for the Acadian Village by Bob Lowe of Central Industries, Lafayette. Mr. Dafford required eight months of research and painting to establish his personal vision of these complex events with the degree of accuracy for which he is noted.

Mr. Dafford became interested in the Acadian culture while serving as an Illustrator for the Navy in the Mediterranean. “I was fortunate not to have missed a single Mardi Gras during my years abroad, and each time I came home I saw more clearly how close the Acadians are to the Old World peoples in their appreciation of life and joy in living.”

This unique and special feeling is at the heart of Mr. Dafford’s desire to live and work with the Acadian environment.

Dafford & Associates would especially like to thank Central Industries, Inc. and Lafayette Signs, Inc. for grants which made the project possible; the staff of the Center for Louisiana Studies, Dupre Library, University of Southwestern Louisiana, for their generous assistance and suggestions for compiling the research material; Ron Stephenson for professional photographic services; Page One for editing and typing; and all the individual Cajuns who were kind enough to share their own families’ stories with us.