**Acadians**

**Introduction**

Settlers from France were the first Europeans to settle in the land they called "Acadia". These people became known as Acadians. Acadia was the name the French gave to what we now know as Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and parts of New Brunswick, the Gaspé Peninsula and Maine. Over time, this group of farming people grew into a culture with rich traditions, customs and folklore that was uniquely their own.

Acadia was in an important geographic position. Its territory controlled the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and was close to valuable fishing grounds, shipping routes and the British colonies along the Atlantic seaboard. It is not surprising that the French and British were constantly battling for control of it.

The colony was located mostly along the southeastern shore of the Baie Française (Bay of Fundy), which today is the Annapolis Valley area of Nova Scotia. Port-Royal was the first real settlement in Acadia and became the capital of the colony. Between 1755 and 1763, thousands of Acadians were forced from their homes and shipped off to other parts of the continent, and to Europe. Although they lost their land, homes and possessions, they were able to hold onto their culture. Many Acadians eventually returned, and continue to live in the Maritimes today. Acadians are now recognized as a unique cultural group. Descendants of Acadians also live in various parts of the United States.

**First Settlement**



The habitation at Île Sainte-Croix

In 1603, King Henry IV of France commissioned Sieur Pierre Du Gua de Monts as his viceroy and lieutenant-general in what was called by various names: Lacadie, La Cadie, Accadie. In 1604, Sieur de Monts and explorer and mapmaker Samuel de Champlain sailed from France with their crew to start a colony in the New World. Their ship landed at a small island in a bay they named Baie Française (later called the Bay of Fundy). They named the island Île Sainte-Croix and built some buildings to live and work in. They named the group of buildings the "habitation". The winter was very harsh, windy and cold. Gradually the colonists began to die of cold and scurvy (a disease caused by a diet without enough fruit and vegetables). By spring, only half the men were left.

**Way of Life**

The early Acadian settlers were mostly farmers. Farms were located along the banks of rivers that flowed into the Baie Française (Bay of Fundy). Grand-Pré was the great agricultural area of the colony.

**Work on the Farm**

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|  | [Painting of Acadians building dykes and aboiteaux at Grand-Pré](https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/021013/f1/nlc008883-v6.jpg) [Source](https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/settlement/kids/021013-150-e.php?uid=021013-nlc008883&uidc=recKey) |
|  | Acadians building dykes and aboiteaux at Grand-Pré |

Rather than clear the uplands, the Acadians drained the marshes along bays and rivers by building dykes (large, tall mounds of earth covered with grass) and aboiteaux (drainage systems with trap doors that let water out but not back in) to keep sea water out. Then they would wait two years for the sea salt to be wasted out by snow and rain, After this, they could plant their crops on this new, rich farmland.

In the spring, the men repaired the old dykes and built new ones to gain more land. They planted their crops. They tended and sheared their herds of sheep. In late summer and early fall they harvested their crops. Once the harvest was in, they killed some of their cattle, hogs and sheep. They salted meat for the winter and traded what they didn't need with the New Englanders who came by ship to trade. From the New Englanders, the Acadians would get household items, sugar, molasses, machinery and other things they needed. Over the winter, the men and older boys cut firewood and timber in the woods, built new homes, hunted and trapped. Men made the household's furniture. Using the wood at hand, they made simple tables, chairs, beds, cradles and sideboards. They also made the family's footwear, either wooden shoes as they wore in France or Aboriginal moccasins for the winter.

The women did household chores, cooked, preserved food, did the laundry, made the family's clothes, milked the cows, fed the chickens and tended the vegetable gardens. Sheep were kept for their wool. The women would card, spin and weave the wool for clothes and blankets. They knit socks and stockings. They also grew hemp and flax, which they wove into linen for clothes

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| **Culture**  **Language:** Because the Acadians lived for a long time in isolated communities they didn't have a lot of contact with other French-speaking people. This means that Acadian French sounds a lot different than French spoken in Quebec or France.  **Religion:** The Acadians were Roman Catholic and church was very important to them. Nuns and priests ran the schools.  **Music:** Acadians worked very hard, but they also knew how to have fun. They liked to visit with family and friends. They had parties where they would dance country dances, sing the old songs from France and play music on the fiddle. They also told stories of their ancestors. |