



Position paper

Concerning the potential sale of PID 45049797 and PID 45049805
adjacent to Fort Edward National Historic Site

Presented to West Hants Regional Municipality

June 28, 2022

1. Founded in 1968, the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse (Fédération acadienne) is a non-profit organization with a mission to promote the growth and overall development of the Acadian and Francophone community of Nova Scotia.
2. As the official spokesperson of the Acadian and Francophone population of Nova Scotia, the Fédération acadienne is comprised 29 regional, provincial and institutional organizations.
3. Part of the Fédération acadienne's mandate is to safeguard and promote the cultural heritage of our ancestors.

Backgrounder

4. The first permanent European colony in North America was established in Nova Scotia, where, after enduring a harsh winter, French settlers founded Port-Royal in 1605. Despite an ongoing state of war between France and England and the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 that ultimately ceded the territory to Britain, the colony developed progressively along the shores of French Bay (now Bay of Fundy) and the Minas Basin through 1755, giving birth to a proud, resilient and courageous people: the Acadians.
5. By 1722, several Acadian villages stood in the area of Pisiguit (now Windsor) and the parish church of Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption was built that same year on a rise that overlooked those villages. In 1750, major Charles Lawrence forced Acadians to destroy their church so that Fort Edward could be built in its place in order to better monitor the activities of the local Mi'kmaq and French Inhabitants.
6. In 1755, British authorities, in collusion with the Governors of New England, ordered the deportation of the Acadian people, in the interest of seizing ownership of these very desirable lands. From 1755 to 1763 - the entire duration of the Seven Years' War - thousands of Acadians were captured during what is known as the Deportation, with homes, farms and belongings destroyed, families separated, and the Acadian people transported to far flung corners of the globe.
7. Acadians that managed to avoid the Deportation subsequently surrendered or were captured and held prisoner at Fort Edward. It is estimated that 1,200 Acadians were held in the prison and deportation centre. Acadian prisoners held at Fort Edward were ordered to instruct the New England Planters on how to farm and maintain the dykelands they had built. They were also used as a labor force to build the road between Windsor and Halifax and various defense structures.

8. In an article titled *A Brief History of Fort Edward*, published in the Hants Journal in 2008, Rev. David Curry describe the relation between the Acadians and Fort Edward in these words:

It was the site, too, of some of the more somber moments in the history of displaced persons that comprises so much of the Canadian story. The Acadians, who had settled here in the late 17th century and built the dykes that contribute so significantly to the landscape even to this day, became the casualties of political loyalty in the 1750s.

A threat to the English colonial enterprises, then bent on securing land for those loyal to the English crown, Acadian neutrality was deemed insufficient and they were subject to a programme of relocation, “the Expulsion of the Acadians,” romanticized and immortalized in the great American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem “Evangeline.” While we usually associate that story with Grand Pré, it has its Fort Edward moment, too. Over a thousand Acadians were deported from the area by way of Fort Edward beginning in 1755.

As such, the Fort played a defining role in the re-settlement of the area by the New England Planters whose 250th anniversary was marked in 2010. Fort Edward was the symbol and sentinel to the English control and governance of the area.

9. After the Treaty of Paris of 1763, Acadian prisoners as well as Acadians that had been deported were given permission to resettle. However, a series of repressive measures were adopted in order to discourage Acadians to settle in the province. For example, only unfertile and widely separated lands were granted; Acadians could only settle in groups of 10 people or less; their goods were confiscated and all property title deeds were nullified.
10. For the sake of peace and quiet, Acadians agreed to these conditions and resettle on the lands chosen by the authorities: Chéticamp, Richmond, Clare, Argyle as well as, to a lesser extent, Minudie, Nappan and Maccan as well as Pomquet, Tracadie, Havre-Boucher and Chezzetcook. This forced relocation to the four corners of the province made Acadians even more vulnerable. Furthermore, because their lands had been given to the New England Planters, Acadians had no choice but to turn to fishing for subsistence.
11. Other acts and policies were adopted to slow or even halt the development of Acadian communities: Acadians could not vote before 1789; from 1864, French education was forbidden and Acadians only gained access to French-only education in French-only schools in 2000.
12. It took years, even centuries, for Acadians to reach a proper understanding and knowledge of their history. Indeed, history is written by the victors and Acadians

were told the Expulsion happened because their ancestors had refused to sign the oath of allegiance. Additionally, Acadian communities, far and between, were not able to share their common history; Acadians were told to keep a low profile for fear of further repression; Acadian history was not taught in schools.

Acadians in the present-day

13. For the Fédération acadienne, Fort Edward and the adjacent lots PID 45049797 and PID 45049805 are very much part of the tragic Acadian history and are important to help Acadians better understand the true scope of the Deportation.
14. As the archeologist Jonathan Fowler indicated in his presentation to West Hants Regional Municipality Council on March 8th, 2022, Fort Edward is located on the site of the parish church of Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption and remains of this church were located under the actual blockhouse. Further archeological studies could help locate the priest's house, an Acadian cemetery and precious artefacts that would be irreparably lost should lots PID 45049797 and PID 45049805 be sold and the presence of our people on these lands simply erased.
15. Furthermore, the Windsor-Digby area of the province has a network of historic sites that tell the story of the Acadian people, from their initial settlement through the Deportation and beyond. As part of this chain of heritage locations, the unobstructed view plains, the fertile lands that once harbored Acadian homes and farms can still be imagined from Fort Edward. The sales of PID 45049797 and PID 45049805 would considerably impede this emotional experience and the ability to stitch together the traces of our past.
16. In 2024, the World Acadian Congress will be held in the southwestern part of Nova Scotia. Tens of thousands of visitors of Acadian origin will want to travel and visit the sites that have special meaning — like Grand Pré, Port Royal, Fort Anne, George's Island and Fort Edward. The economic impact of such an event has been estimated to more than 20 millions dollars.
17. As it stands right now, Fort Edward lacks the proper infrastructure to welcome the thousands of visitors that visit annually Grand-Pré, a World Heritage Site. It has no public washrooms, no boutique, no coffee shop, no museum or other facility to attract and keep the visitors in the area.
18. For the Fédération acadienne, Fort Edward, including the lots potentially for sale, represent a wonderful occasion for West Hants Regional Municipality to provide the proper amenities and mobilize heritage resources around the experience of the Acadian people and other communities.

19. We urge you to seize this opportunity to consider a community approach that would further highlight that heritage and we would be delighted to collaborate in this regard.