



FRANÇOIS GAUDET (BOTH)

## HISTORY

## Remembering the Acadians

*Britain admits responsibility for 1755 expulsion*

In Grand Pré, Nova Scotia, a statue honors a woman who never existed. “Evangeline” (below) was the title character of H. W. Longfellow’s epic—and fictional—poem about cruelly separated lovers. Yet the poem’s historical context was all too real: Britain’s brutal expulsion of the region’s French Acadians.

In 1755 nearly 14,000 Acadians lived in what are now Canada’s Maritime Provinces. The British

acting governor of Nova Scotia wanted them gone. With backing from Massachusetts’s British governor, an exile decree was issued.

Acadians were rounded up by the thousands; families were split and sent away on ships bound for distant ports. Thousands died. Many later found refuge in the former French colony of Louisiana; others eventually made their way back home. But those who survived never forgot—and neither have their descendants. More than 300,000 attended last year’s World Acadian Congress in Nova Scotia to celebrate the culture with events including reunions of the old Acadian families (above).

Now there’s more to celebrate. After years of pleas by Louisiana lawyer (and Acadian descendant) Warren Perrin, Queen Elizabeth II has acknowledged Britain’s part in the exile. July 28—the decree’s 250th anniversary—will be Canada’s first annual day of Acadian commemoration. Perrin is satisfied: “It’s never too late to right a wrong.”

—Margaret G. Zackowitz

