

### THE ACADIAN BICENTENNIAL

The Metropolitan Archbishop of Moncton declared the Acadian bicentennial officially opened on August the 15th, 1954. The main purpose of this bicentennial is to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the expulsion of the Acadians. Since its opening inaugural festivities have taken place in many Acadian centers. The Acadians are thus preparing themselves to commemorate the greatest anniversary of their history with all the energy that a resuscitated people can muster.

These memorial festivities are intended to be an outstanding event in Acadian history. They are planned to involve personally every Acadian, wherever he may happen to be—from the desolated coasts of Newfoundland to the lowlands of Louisiana. They will recall the miraculous survival of the Acadian race. A mighty drama of courage, perseverance and patriotism is being unfolded from the dormant pages of New World history.

Yes, this present year of 1955 marks the 200th anniversary of the Deportation of the Acadians to the New England States and along the Atlantic coast as far South as the Carolinas. Many of these exiles found their way further South to Louisiana, then a possession of France. Today their descendants number more than five hundred thousand souls.

While many of the exiled Acadians found new homes in the South, many others resolved to return to their old homes in Acadia. Soon after the peace of 1763, many made their way to these Atlantic Provinces, where they began new settlements in many parts of the country. Their descendants, according to the census of 1951 now make up more than 300,000 of the population of these Provinces by the sea.

For more than a century after their return, the Acadians remained very poor, uneducated and isolated. Penniless and friendless, their lot was by no means an easy one. In spite of many difficulties, they once more began to clear the forest and make new homes for themselves and their families. By hard work and great sacrifices in the course of time, slowly but surely, their social and economic situation improved, and they began to take an active part in the larger affairs of the country. Education was becoming available, and in due time, schools, colleges and other educational institutions began to spring up among them. In the past fifty or sixty years, their progress has been quite remarkable. In the province of New Brunswick the Acadians now possess two Universities and three classical colleges; in Nova Scotia they also can boast of a fine classical institution. To the



Church the Acadians have given two archbishops, five bishops, and several hundred priests. To these Maritime Provinces the Acadians have furnished, outstanding politicians, judges of the Supreme and County Courts, doctors, lawyers, and many other professional men.

In the commercial and industrial life of these Provinces, the Acadians are beginning to play their part. They have had considerable success in their Credit Union and Co-operative undertakings. It is also worth noting that the Acadian Assumption Mutual Assurance Society, founded in 1903, at Waltham, Massachusetts, with headquarters at Moncton, New Brunswick, had nearly 300 local branches in the Maritimes, Quebec, Ontario and the New England States, with life insurance in force of nearly \$100,000,000. This makes it one of the largest financial institutions of the Atlantic Provinces.

In Prince Edward Island the Acadians were deported in 1758, three years after those in Nova Scotia. By 1763 thirty families had managed to return, and by 1798 there were 112 families.. From those original thirty families, the Acadians have grown, through natural increase alone, to 15,477 souls as related in the 1951 census. Their population forms one-sixth of the population of this Province. They are all Roman Catholic with few exceptions. They constitute the main element of some twelve of the largest parishes in the Diocese of Charlottetown with important groups in several other parishes. It is interesting to note that in the past 75 years the Acadian Catholic population of the Island has increased by 5,000 while all other Catholics have decreased by 8,000. In the two World Wars the sons of these Acadians more than furnished their quota of volunteers, and many of them made the supreme sacrifice of their lives in defence of the principles for which they fought.

In 1919 the Acadians of this Province founded the St. Thomas Aquinas Society and reorganized it in 1937. The specific purpose of this Society was to provide means for the education of Acadian young men for the priesthood. It has had considerable success in its primary purpose and has also helped many young men and women in securing High School, Secondary and University education.

The Acadians feel proud of the comeback they have made and of the way they have progressed during the past 200 years. They also feel that they could not allow this bicentennial anniversary of the expulsion of their ancestors to pass unnoticed. They have long since laid aside feelings of resentment and bitterness which for decades embittered the lives of their ancestors. In all the bicentennial celebrations



great care is being taken that nothing which could become the cause of ill-feeling in any quarter may occur.

The object of the Acadians is a very positive one: a collective act of thanksgiving to the Almighty for having favored the Acadians with His protection; a proud tribute to the human virtues of our ancestors, which enabled them to conquer adversity; a grateful remembrance of the heroic deeds of the Europeans who were the first to attempt settling permanently in Canada.

Although the celebrations are sometimes referred to as the Acadians Bicentennial, the Expulsion of the Acadians is not the only fact they wish to commemorate. The year 1955 suggests a remarkable chain of centennials highlighting the four great phase of Acadian history. These phases will be celebrated with equal emphasis—although in reverse chronological order—as follows: on as many days as the four major celebrations:

AUGUST 11—Moncton: "The Acadians of 1955"—with special emphasis on religious thanksgiving.

AUGUST 12—Memramcook: "The Acadians of 1855"—with emphasis on the achievements of the pioneers of Modern Acadian Renaissance.

AUGUST 15—Grand Pre: "The Acadians of 1755"—a colorful pageant based on Longfellow's poem *Evangeline*.

AUGUST 16—Annapolis (Port Royal: "The Acadians of 1655"—a tribute to the early settlers (1955 marking the 350th anniversary of the first establishment at Port Royal).

Preparations are made for the reception of 25,000 people. There will be official personalities of different countries, races and creeds. It promises to be a celebration which will attract tourists from everywhere and for those taking part it will be a never forgotten memory. The celebrations are to be inspired by history, democratic ideals, religious reverence, and maintained at a high level of literary and artistic taste. The National Assumption Society (founded in 1881) is the soul of the whole organization. All Acadians are members of it by birthright and are entitled to all the rights and privileges which it may confer. This Society is not to be mistaken for the Mutual Assumption Society.

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