

Broussard Story

(from Acadians in Grey)

By 1755, descendants of François **Brossard** and Catherine **Richard** of the *haute rivière* could be found at Annapolis Royal; Grand-Pré and Ste.-Famille, Piguit, in the Minas Basin; Village-des-Beausoleils on the upper Petitcoudiac in the *trois-rivières* area; Port-Toulouse on Île Royale; and Rivière-du-Nord-Est on Île St.-Jean. *Le Grand Dérangement* of the 1750s scattered this large family even farther.

After yet another war erupted between Britain and France in 1754, the Acadians were again caught in the middle of it. When British and New England forces attacked Fort Beauséjour at Chignecto in June 1755, **Broussards** from the upper Petitcoudiac were among the area Acadians who were serving in the fort as militia, though they may have left the fort a few days before it surrendered on June 16. Governor Lawrence was so incensed to find so-called French Neutrals fighting with French *troupes de la marine* at Beauséjour that he ordered his officers to deport the Chignecto Acadians to the southernmost British colonies on the Atlantic seaboard. In mid-October 1755, the British transported Alexandre *dit* Beausoleil and his nephew Victor to South Carolina aboard the British warship HMS *Syren*. They were transported in chains, under heavy guard, along with other Acadian "troublemakers." They reached Charles Town in late November and were held in close confinement on Sullivan's Island outside of the city.

Before the deportation ships arrived at Chignecto, some of the Acadians being held at Fort Lawrence managed to escape, Joseph *dit* Beausoleil among them. He rejoined his wife and younger children at Petitcoudiac, and they headed into the wilderness north of their home, not only hiding from the British patrols sent out to capture them, but also engaging in what today is called guerrilla warfare, including privateering in the Bay of Fundy to harass British shipping. For a time, Beausoleil's "headquarters" was at Shediac on the Gulf of St. Lawrence shore, where he coordinated his resistance activities with Canadian Lieutenant Charles Deschamps de Boishébert, who had commanded French forces on Rivière St.-Jean.

Although at first held in close confinement in South Carolina, Alexandre and Victor had been allowed to go to the workhouse in Charles Town, from which they escaped with seven companions. They made their way through the coastal swamps and marshes of the Santee River valley into the Carolina backcountry. After months of avoiding British settlers and colonial militia, assisted no doubt by Indians friendly to the French, they made their way to French Fort Duquesne on the upper Ohio, from there to Canada, and then down the Rivière St.-Jean portage back to L'Acadie. According to Carl Brasseaux, "Only two Acadians are

known to have completed the trek"--Alexandre and Victor **Broussard**. Amazingly, Alexandre was in his late 50s at the time, but the rigors of advancing old age could not stop him from rejoining his family. He and Victor appeared at the Acadian settlement on Rivière St.-Jean in June 1756, about the time that 50 or so other Chignecto Acadians deported to the southern colonies returned to the St.-Jean valley by open boat after a harrowing ordeal of their own. Alexandre and Victor did not remain on Rivière St.-Jean but moved on to Shediac, where they reunited with their family and re-joined the Acadian resistance.

British forces deported the Acadians at Minas in late October 1755, sending them to Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and New England. The **Broussards** at Minas went to Maryland. Claude **Broussard** of Ste.-Famille, Pigiguit, who had remarried at Annapolis Royal in November 1754, in his late 50s, died in Maryland. Claude's son Jean and his wife Anne **Landry** were deported to Maryland with son Firmin, age 3. Jean and Anne had at least one more son in Maryland--Jean, *fils*, born in c1760. Jean, *père* died in Maryland in c1766 on the eve of the family's movement to Louisiana. Wife Anne was pregnant at the time of his death. Augustin, son of perhaps Charles **Broussard** of Grand-Pré, was only 7 years old when he landed in Maryland in 1755. He soon became an orphan.

The **Broussards** at Annapolis Royal escaped the British round up there in the fall of 1755, spent a terrible winter in the woods and along the Fundy shore, crossed the bay to the French-controlled side in March 1756, and made their way north to the Rivière St.-Jean settlements before joining their kinsmen at Shediac and Miramichi on the Gulf of St. Lawrence shore, where they fought starvation, hard winters, and British raiding parties. Jean-Baptiste fought with older brothers Alexandre and Joseph *dit* Beausoleil in the Acadian resistance. When his brothers "surrendered" to British forces at Fort Cumberland, formerly French Fort Beauséjour, in late 1759, Jean-Baptiste refused to join them and took his family to Québec. One account says that his wife, two children, and his mother-in-law died on the way to Canada. One of his daughters by his first wife remarried at Île Jesus, near Montréal, in June 1761. Jean-Baptiste died at Mascouche near Montréal in July 1770, in his late 60s--five years after his older brothers had died in faraway Louisiana.

The **Broussards** on Île Royale and Île St.-Jean, living in territory controlled by France, escaped the British roundups in Nova Scotia during the fall of 1755. Their respite from British oppression was short-lived, however. After the fall of the French fortress at Louisbourg in July 1758, the victorious British swooped down on the islands and deported most of the Acadians there to France. The crossing to the mother country devastated the family. Marie **Broussard** crossed with husband Honoré **Préjean** and nine children aboard the British transport *Queen of Spain*, which left the Maritimes in September and reached St.-Malo in mid-November. Every one of the family died at sea. Jean-Baptiste, age 37, son of Claude **Broussard** of Pigiguit, wife Osite **Landry**, age 28, sons Joseph,

age 7, Grégoire, age 2, and daughters Madeleine, age 9, Marguerite, age 5, and Rosalie, age 3, crossed on one of the five British transports that left the Gut of Canso in late November and reached St.-Malo in late January 1759. The death toll among the 1,033 passengers aboard those vessels reached nearly 50 percent, a number of them **Broussards**. Jean-Baptiste's son Jean-Baptiste-Paul was born aboard ship in December. Only wife Osite and two of her children--Madeleine and newborn Jean-Baptiste-Paul--survived the crossing. Marguerite, Rosalie, and Grégoire died at sea. Jean-Baptiste, *père* died in a St.-Malo hospital a month after they reached the port, and son Joseph died a month after that. Osite remarried to fellow Acadian Augustin **Boudrot** at Pleudihen near St.-Malo in August 1760 and gave him at least nine children. Jean-Baptiste **Broussard**'s unmarried younger brothers Charles, age 26, and Firmin, age 21, also crossed to St.-Malo on one of the Five Ships. Firmin and Charles survived the crossing, but the ordeal proved to be too much for Firmin, who died at Buet near St.-Malo in late April 1759 and was buried at nearby Pleudihen. Brother Pierre-Paul **Broussard dit** Courtiche, age 32, crossed on one of the Five Ships with wife Madeleine **Landry**, age 31, sons Jean-Baptiste, age 8, and Pierre, age 1, and daughters Isabelle, age 6, and Marie-Marguerite, age 4. Pierre-Paul, Madeleine, and two of their children survived the crossing, but two of the children--Jean-Baptiste and Marie-Marguerite--died at Pleudihen in April 1759 no doubt from the rigors of the crossing. Pierre-Paul's younger unmarried brother François, age 22, also crossed with them and died at the hospital in St.-Malo in February 1759. Pierre-Paul and Marguerite settled at Pleudihen and had more children in the area--Joseph-Osithé was born at Buet in March 1760 but died at Pleudihen in August 1761, Charles-Jean was born at Bas Champs in June 1763, Jean-Joseph at La Coquenais in March 1766, and Marie-Josèphe at Bas Champs in August 1768. Charles settled at Pleudihen and married Anne, daughter of fellow Acadians Joseph **Aucoin** and Anne **Trahan**, at nearby Plouër in October 1764. They settled at La Coquenais near Pleudihen, where at least three children were born to them--Marie-Isabelle in March 1766, Joseph-Charles in November 1767, and Madeleine-Josèphe in December 1769.

Some of the **Broussards** who were deported to France from Île St.-Jean in 1758 ended up in ports other than St.-Malo. Joseph **Broussard** of Grand-Pré and Île St.-Jean and his sons Charles, age 15, and Jean, age 13, landed at Cherbourg, where Joseph died in January 1759, age 45, probably from the rigors of the crossing. Charles married Frenchwoman Bonne-Jacqueline-Françoise **Castel** probably at Cherbourg in c1764. They had at least five sons, all born probably at Cherbourg--Jean-Charles-Joseph, François, Jacques, Pierre in March 1771, and Joseph-Dominique, called Dominique, in May 1772. Daughter Bonne-Marguerite was born at Cherbourg in September 1773. Charles's younger brother Jean married Marguerite, daughter of fellow Acadian Honoré **Comeau**, at Cherbourg in July 1773. In the early 1770s, Charles, Jean, and their families participated in a venture in the Poitou region that attempted to settle Acadians from the port cities on a nobleman's land near Châtellerault. Charles's son Louis was born near Vienne, Poitou, in February 1774. Jean's sons Jean-Baptiste

and Joseph were born near Vienne in May 1774 and November 1775. After two years of effort, the venture failed, and Charles, Jean, and dozens of other frustrated Acadians retreated with their families to the port city of Nantes in December 1775. Two years later, the **Broussards** were residing at Chantenay near Nantes, where Charles and Bonne-Jacqueline had two more sons--Guillaume-Médard, born in June 1776 but died two months later, and Jean *le jeune*, born in February 1778 but died at age 3 in September 1780. Jean and Marguerite also had at least two more children at Chantenay--twins Florence-Adélaïde and Pierre, born in October 1777, but Pierre died at age 10 months in July 1778. Charles remarried to Euphrosine, daughter of fellow Acadian Pierre **Barrieau**, at St.-Martin-de-Chantenay in June 1784. Jean-Baptiste-Paul **Broussard**, the newborn who had survived the crossing from the Maritimes to St.-Malo in 1758-59, married Marie, daughter of fellow Acadian Étienne **Melanson**, at Pleudihen in June 1784. Their son Jean-Pierre was born at La Coquenais, near Pleudihen, in March 1785.

In the early 1780s, the Spanish government offered the Acadians in France a chance for a new life in faraway Louisiana, where many of their kinsmen had settled decades before. Brothers Charles and Jean **Broussard** of Chantenay took up the offer. However, their **Broussard** cousins still at Pleudihen--brothers Pierre-Paul *dit* Courtiche and Charles, and their nephew Jean-Baptiste-Paul--chose to remain in France.

In North America, Joseph *dit* Beausoleil **Broussard** and his fellow Acadians harassed the British as best they could. In late 1756, they abandoned their "headquarters" at Shediac and moved north to a new camp at Miramichi, also on the Gulf of St. Lawrence, to put more distance between themselves and the British forces at Fort Cumberland. Their resistance exacted a terrible price. Obtaining food, clothing, and shelter for their families, especially during the winter, continually burdened the resistance fighters and limited their effectiveness against a well-fed, well-supplied, and comfortably-sheltered foe. Joseph's wife Agnès was among the many Acadians who died of sickness or starvation at Miramichi during the terrible winter of 1756-57. Some historians insist that *all* of the children at Miramichi died that winter. Son Victor's twin sons may have been among the many who perished. After the terrible ordeal at Miramichi, some of the resistance fighters retreated farther up the coast towards the French outpost at Restigouche at the head of the Baie des Chaleurs. The **Broussards** moved south, instead, to the woods north of Rivière Petitcoudiac, an area they knew intimately, and continued their forays into British Nova Scotia, on sea as privateers as well as on land as hit-and-run partisans.

By the autumn of 1759, after four years of unimaginable hardship made worse by the fall of Louisbourg and Québec, which cut them off from French assistance, the **Broussards** and their compatriots responded to a British offer of amnesty. They agreed to surrender to Colonel Joseph Frye, the commander

at Fort Cumberland, to spare their families the horror of another Acadian winter. Older brother Alexandre volunteered to be held as hostage at Fort Cumberland until Joseph and other resistance leaders surrendered the following spring. However, the British reneged on their amnesty offer, and the **Broussards** and their fellow partisans continued their struggle from Restigouche. The British attacked the French stronghold in July 1760 and captured Joseph, Alexandre, and 300 other Acadians and transported them to the prison compound on Georges Island, Halifax harbor. Joseph also spent time in confinement at Fort Edward, Pigiguit. There, he managed to communicate with Acadian partisans still on the loose in the area, so the British returned him to Georges Island, where he and his extended family spent the next few years surviving as best they could.

In the prison camps of Nova Scotia--at Fort Cumberland and Fort Edward as well as on Georges Island--the **Broussards** were joined by hundreds of other Acadians whom the British had rounded up at Miramichi, Restigouche, Cap-Sable, Rivière St.-Jean, and other places of refuge in greater Acadia. Many were kin to the **Broussards** by blood or by marriage and thus were part of their extended family. They included Acadians named **Arseneau, Babineau, Bergeron, Bernard, Boudrot, Bourg, Bourgeois, Breau, Brun, Caissie dit Roger, Comeau, Cormier, Darois, Doucet, Dugas, Gautrot, Girouard, Godin, Guénard, Guédry, Guilbeau, Hébert, Hugon, Landry, LeBlanc, Léger, Martin, Michel, Pellerin, Pitre, Poirier, Prejean, Richard, Robichaud, Roy, Saulnier, Savoie, Semer, Surette, Thibodeau, Trahan, and Vincent**. The **Broussards**, still led by Joseph *dit* Beausoleil, did what they could to keep these kinsmen close.

Ironically, beginning in the summer of 1761, dozens of the young Acadians being held in Nova Scotia prisons--only men who had not been part of the partisan resistance, so none were **Broussards**--were enticed to return to their former lands and rebuild and maintain the earthen barriers that had transformed the Fundy settlements into an agricultural paradise. The New England "planters" who in 1760 had begun to occupy Acadian farmland in the Annapolis and Minas basins had no idea how to maintain the dykes and *aboiteaux* that kept the fertile fields from becoming tidal marsh again. The young Acadians worked diligently for their New England "masters" and were paid in Canadian card money. Despite their plunge from landowners to mere laborers on their former lands, many of them harbored the forlorn hope of living on their fathers' farms again.

This was not to be. Charles Lawrence, the great nemesis of all Acadians, died at Halifax in 1760 not long after his promotion to governor, but he was succeeded by Jonathan Belcher, Jr., who hated and feared the Acadians as much as Lawrence ever did. In July 1762, encouraged by Belcher, the Nova Scotia council ordered the deportation of the Acadian prisoners from the colony--600 of them, including the detainees on Georges Island as well as men held

at Fort Edward and Annapolis Royal *without* their families! In late August, five ships carried the Acadians to Boston, but the Massachusetts authorities refused to take them. In mid-October, the prisoners returned to Halifax and were escorted back to Georges Island. **Broussards** likely were among them.

The war with Britain finally ended with the Treaty of Paris of February 1763. Article 14 of the treaty gave all persons dispersed by the war 18 months to return to their respective territories. However, British authorities refused to allow any of the Acadian prisoners in the region to return to their former lands as proprietors. If Acadians chose to remain in Nova Scotia, they could live only in the interior of the peninsula in small family groups, away from their lands along the Fundy shore, or they could continue to work for low wages as laborers on their former lands, now, or soon to be, controlled by New England "planters." If the Acadians stayed, they must also take the hated oath of allegiance to the new British king, George III ... without reservation.

Most of the Acadians held in Nova Scotia during the last months of the war were still there in the autumn of 1764. Nova Scotia's new governor, Montague Wilmot, "tender'd to them" the oath of allegiance as well as "offers of a settlement in this Country." Most of the Acadians rebuffed the oath as well as the offer. British leaders in Halifax, led by former lieutenant governor and current colonial chief justice Jonathan Belcher, Jr., still felt threatened by the Acadian presence in Nova Scotia. They were especially fearful of Beausoleil **Broussard** and other resistance leaders. Belcher encouraged Governor Wilmot to remove the Acadians from the province despite orders from London to keep them in Nova Scotia and entreaties from the New England "planters" to retain them as cheap but highly skilled labor. Wilmot resisted Belcher at first, so the chief justice hatched a scheme to send the Acadians from Halifax to Baskenridge, New Jersey, to work as indentured servants on an English nobleman's land; Belcher's father just happened to be the governor of New Jersey at the time, and the nobleman was one of his father's political allies. Governor Wilmot also received a proposal to send 30 Acadian families to New York colony to work as indentured servants there. Luckily for the Acadians, neither scheme came to fruition. Infected, finally, by Belcher's fear of Acadian treachery, Wilmot proposed to his uncle, the powerful Earl of Halifax, the deportation of the Acadian "prisoners" in Nova Scotia to the British West Indies, but the earl ignored his nephew's scheme. Determined to be rid of the Acadians, Wilmot conceived a plan that he was certain would discourage them from remaining in Nova Scotia. First, he crafted a new ironclad oath for them that insulted their Roman Catholic faith. Most compellingly, and against every directive from his superiors in London, he gave the resistance leaders and their families a hard choice: either submit to deportation to the British West Indies or remain imprisoned at Georges Island.

Nova Scotia was no longer a welcome place for the descendants of its original settlers.

Too proud to work for wages, unwilling to work as indentured servants in colonies where they could lose their religion as well as their culture, unable to return to their precious farms in the upper Fundy basins, and determined not to take the hated oath, the **Broussards** and their kinsmen had to find a suitable place to put down new roots. The St. Lawrence valley was a poor choice; they were hearing stories of how the French Canadians treated with contempt Acadian refugees who had settled among them. Besides, Canada was as much a British possession now as Nova Scotia, and settling on the St. Lawrence would require them to take the oath. Nor was it likely that Wilmot would allow the troublesome **Broussards** and their partisan compatriots to settle as close as Québec to their former lands in greater Acadia. The Illinois country on the upper Mississippi was a viable option, but the British would not let them take the shortest route there via Canada, and France had just ceded the eastern part of Illinois to Britain. Moreover, Indian uprisings, including one led by the Ottawa chief Pontiac, were ravaging the western frontier, and the fighting there could last for years.

But there were other regions of North America still controlled by France, such as the west bank of the Illinois country in today's Missouri, which they would have to reach via New Orleans. Rumors of a Spanish cession notwithstanding, the French also retained control of New Orleans and the west bank of the lower Mississippi in what was left of French Louisiana. France also controlled St.-Domingue, today's Haiti, in the Caribbean Basin, where hundreds of Acadian exiles from the British seaboard colonies recently had gone to start a new life in the French West Indies. However, letters from Acadians in St.-Domingue detailed the horrors of the climate and maltreatment there at the hands of French officials. There was always the mother country itself, where the British had deported hundreds of Acadians earlier in the war and to where the Acadians held in England had been recently repatriated. But even with permission from the French crown to repatriate to the mother country, a cross-Atlantic voyage would be difficult and expensive ... as would a voyage from Halifax to the French West Indies. There was much for the **Broussards** and their kinsmen to consider, and time was running out.

After much deliberation, the old resistance fighters and their kin chose to go to French St.-Domingue. No higher authority planned their move from Halifax to the Caribbean Basin, though Wilmot was happy to provide them with rations for the voyage. Pooling the money their sons had saved from months of labor on land their fathers once had owned, the **Broussard** party left Halifax in late November 1764 aboard a chartered English schooner--over 200 men, women, and children. They reached Cap-Français, St.-Domingue, in January and could see even in that winter month that the island's climate was unsuitable for them. They had hoped to reunite with relatives there, but many of the St.-Domingue Acadians were either dead or dying from tropical diseases, starvation, and overwork. Just as disturbing, there was little chance of acquiring productive farm land for themselves in the island's plantation-slave economy. They could see no future for their children in St.-Domingue, despite its being a French colony.

So the **Broussard** party welcomed aboard a hand full of St.-Domingue Acadians related to members of the party, sailed west through the Florida Strait into the Gulf of Mexico, and then on to the lower Mississippi River, gateway to the Illinois country. They reached Louisiana in February 1765, their arrival at La Balize, near the mouth of the river, a complete surprise to the French caretaker government still in control of the colony.

The hand full of **Broussards** in Maryland endured life among English colonists who, despite their Catholic roots, did not care much for the French "papists" who had been thrust upon them. When word reached them that the Spanish would welcome in Louisiana, where some of their relatives had gone, they pooled their meager resources to charter ships that would take them to New Orleans. **Broussards** were part of the first and second contingents from Maryland who reached Louisiana in September 1766 and July 1767.