

Acadians, the British Crown, Irish Americans, and the American Revolution

Union of Saints

Acadians and the British Crown

After the Treaty of Paris in 1763, Acadians who returned to Nova Scotia and the Maritime colonies generally lived under British authority. Some accepted the required allegiance to the Crown, while others settled elsewhere, including Louisiana. Joseph Broussard dit Beausoleil, for example, continued to refuse allegiance and eventually left with Acadian families for Saint-Domingue and Louisiana.

By the 19th century, the relationship had become considerably less military. Acadian communities expanded again in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. French-speaking communities also developed elsewhere in Canada during the 19th and 20th centuries.

A major development was the emergence of Acadian nationalism and organized cultural preservation. Acadians increasingly sought recognition of their French language, Catholic institutions, education, history, and cultural identity while living within the British colonial system.

The Crown Itself Was Changing

There is an important constitutional distinction.

During much of the 1700s and 1800s, the British Crown was the sovereign authority over the colonies. In 1867, the Dominion of Canada was created through Confederation.

The relationship gradually shifted:

British Crown → British colonial government → Canadian Dominion → increasingly autonomous Canadian government

Canada remained within the British Empire, and the monarch remained Canada's sovereign, but Canadian political institutions increasingly controlled domestic affairs.

Acadians in the 1900s

The relationship continued into the 20th century through citizenship, military service, government institutions, education, and political life.

At the same time, Acadians continued to organize around their own cultural and linguistic identity. Being loyal to the Crown or Canadian state did not necessarily mean abandoning Acadian identity.

French-speaking communities expanded considerably across Canada during the 19th and 20th centuries. Acadians and other French-speaking Canadians established Francophone communities during these centuries.

The Mi'kmaq and the British Crown

Another important relationship is the relationship between the Mi'kmaq, other Wabanaki peoples, and the British Crown.

The Mi'kmaq and other Wabanaki peoples had their own treaty relationship with the British Crown beginning with the Peace and Friendship treaties of the 18th century. These treaties were not land-cession treaties.

By the 1800s and 1900s, there were therefore multiple overlapping historical relationships:

- Acadians and the British Crown
- Mi'kmaq/Wabanaki peoples and the British Crown
- Acadians and Mi'kmaq
- Acadians and French cultural and religious institutions
- Acadians and the emerging Canadian government
- Acadians and the French-American/Acadian diaspora in New England and Louisiana

These relationships should not be treated as one continuous political alliance. They changed considerably after 1755–1763.

Acadians in the United States

In the United States, the relationship continued in a different form, particularly through the Acadian diaspora in New England and Louisiana.

Louisiana

After the Grand Dérangement, thousands of Acadians eventually settled in Louisiana, where they became known as Cajuns. Their political relationship was with the governments of France, Spain, and eventually the United States rather than directly with the British Crown.

New England

Acadians settled and worked throughout Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and other New England communities, particularly during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Some communities maintained French Catholic institutions, family networks, and cultural connections with Maritime Canada.

British America to the United States

Some Acadian families were displaced into the British colonies during the deportation and subsequently became part of the population that became American after the Revolution. Others migrated into New England later.

After the American Revolution, the U.S. relationship with Britain became a separate political issue. Acadian Americans could have cultural or family connections to British North America while being American citizens.

During the 1800s and 1900s, Acadian identity increasingly operated through French-American Catholic parishes, fraternal organizations, newspapers, schools, family associations, and cross-border relationships rather than through allegiance to the British Crown.

Ireland and the British Crown

For centuries, Ireland was under varying degrees of English and later British rule.

By 1801, the relationship became much more direct. The Acts of Union 1800 abolished the Irish Parliament and united Great Britain and Ireland into the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland**. Irish representatives then sat in the Westminster Parliament.

From 1801 to 1922, people in Ireland were legally subjects of the British monarch and citizens or subjects of the United Kingdom, although their political and religious rights were highly contested.

Irish Identity and British Rule

Irish people were not necessarily supporters of British rule simply because they were British subjects.

A large portion of Ireland's population was Catholic, and Catholics experienced significant legal and political restrictions. Catholic Emancipation in 1829 restored the right of Catholics to vote and sit in Parliament after a major political campaign led by figures such as Daniel O'Connell.

There were repeated movements seeking greater Irish independence or political autonomy:

- 1798 — United Irishmen rebellion
- 1801 — Parliamentary Union
- 1820s–1830s — Catholic emancipation and repeal movements
- 1840s — Daniel O'Connell's Repeal movement
- 1860s — Fenian movement
- 1880s–1910s — Home Rule movement
- 1916 — Easter Rising
- 1919–1921 — Irish War of Independence
- 1920 — Government of Ireland Act and partition
- 1922 — Irish Free State established

Ireland After 1922

The Irish Free State was established in 1922 following the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Northern Ireland remained within the United Kingdom.

In 1949, the Irish Free State became the Republic of Ireland, and the British Crown relinquished its claim of sovereignty over it. Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom.

The simplified timeline is:

Ireland → British Crown rule

↓

1801–1922: Ireland part of the United Kingdom

↓

1922: Irish Free State + Northern Ireland remains UK

↓

1949: Republic of Ireland

↓

Northern Ireland remains under the British Crown

Acadians and Irish Under British Imperial Authority

There is a useful historical comparison between Acadians and Irish Catholics.

Both lived under British imperial authority while maintaining distinct French/Acadian or Irish identities. Their political histories, however, were different.

Group	British Crown relationship
Acadians	Became subjects of the Crown after Britain acquired Acadia
Irish	Came under English/British rule over centuries; Ireland formally joined the UK in 1801
Irish Catholics	British subjects while facing significant religious and political restrictions
Acadian Catholics	British subjects while maintaining French language, Catholic religion, and Acadian identity
Irish Americans	After immigration to the U.S., they were American citizens rather than British subjects
French-American Acadians	Similarly became Americans if they settled and became citizens of the United States

The distinction between ancestry and political allegiance is important. Being of French or Irish ancestry did not automatically determine which side a person supported during the American Revolution.

The American Revolution

The American Revolution was fundamentally a conflict between Patriot forces seeking independence from British imperial government and Loyalists who remained loyal to the Crown.

The American side included a broad coalition.

Major Groups Who Fought the British

American Colonists and Patriots

The Continental Army, state militias, and local militias formed the main American fighting force. George Washington commanded the Continental Army.

New Englanders

Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Rhode Island were heavily involved from the beginning. The fighting at Lexington and Concord began in Massachusetts in 1775.

Virginia and Other Southern Colonists

Virginia supplied major Continental forces and leaders, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

French Americans and Huguenot-Descended Americans

Some descendants of French Protestant immigrants fought for the American side. France's formal alliance with the Americans later became crucial to the Revolutionary War.

Irish Americans and Irish Immigrants

Many people of Irish origin served in the Continental forces, even though Ireland itself was under British rule at the time.

German Americans

German-speaking colonists also served extensively.

Black Americans

Thousands of Black people served the Patriot cause, while others fought for the British after Britain offered freedom to enslaved people who joined its forces.

Native American Nations

Indigenous nations divided over the conflict. Some supported the British, some supported the Americans, and some attempted neutrality.

French Forces

France formally allied with the Americans in 1778 and sent troops, naval forces, and financial assistance. French forces played a major role at Yorktown.

The American Revolution and British Subjects

An important distinction is that the early Patriots were themselves British subjects.

When fighting began in 1775, the colonies had not yet formally declared independence. The conflict therefore began as a rebellion within the British Empire before becoming a war for independence.

The **Declaration of Independence in 1776** fundamentally changed the political claim. The new United States asserted that the colonies were independent states rather than British colonies.

There were also Loyalists who remained loyal to the Crown. Estimates of the Loyalist portion of the colonial population vary, and commonly cited estimates of approximately 15–25 percent should be treated as historical estimates rather than precise census figures.

Flags of the American Revolution

The American Patriots used several flags during the Revolution.

Grand Union Flag — 1775–1777

The Grand Union Flag was one of the earliest flags used by the Continental forces.

It had:

- 13 red-and-white stripes representing the colonies
- The British Union Flag in the canton
- A design reflecting the colonies' continuing connection to Britain before independence was formally declared

George Washington's army used the flag during the early Revolutionary War.

The Grand Union Flag is especially significant because it visually represents the transition:

British Crown → colonial American identity → independent United States

Stars and Stripes — June 14, 1777

The Continental Congress established a flag with:

- 13 red-and-white stripes
- 13 white stars on a blue field
- The 13 stars representing the thirteen states/colonies

This became the principal flag of the new United States.

Gadsden Flag — 1775

The Gadsden Flag featured a yellow field with a rattlesnake and the words:

"DONT TREAD ON ME."

It was associated particularly with the Continental Marines and other Patriot causes. It was a revolutionary and political flag rather than the official national flag.

The Larger Historical Connection

The history of the Acadians, Irish, British Crown, and American Revolution shows several overlapping identities.

A person could have:

French ancestry + Acadian identity + Catholic faith + British subject status

or:

Irish ancestry + Catholic identity + British subject status

or:

French or Irish ancestry + American citizenship + opposition to British rule

These identities were not mutually exclusive.

The American Revolution eventually created a separate American political identity. Acadian and Irish communities subsequently developed within the United States while maintaining cultural, religious, family, and linguistic connections to communities in Canada, Ireland, and elsewhere.

For Acadians in particular, the history extends from French colonial Acadia, through the Grand Dérangement and British rule, into the American colonies and later the United States, while Acadian identity continued through family, Catholic, cultural, and community institutions.