

Working Paper on

INTERPRETATION

Maine Acadian Culture Preservation Commission
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~~Maine~~ Acadian Culture Preservation Working Group, January, 1996

INTRODUCTION

The National Park Service (NPS) is consulting with the Maine Acadian Culture Preservation Commission to prepare an interpretive plan, as proposed in the document *Implementing the Maine Acadian Culture Preservation Act: Draft Conceptual Framework/Environmental Assessment*. The interpretive plan will be an *action plan* that will contain specific strategies for carrying out the broad conceptual framework adopted by NPS in 1994.

Developing an interpretive program is one of the prime mandates of the Maine Acadian Culture Preservation Act. But, *interpretation* is a term unfamiliar to those not involved in managing parks and historic sites.

WHAT IS INTERPRETATION?

The following descriptions of interpretation are adapted from: Grant W. Sharpe, *Interpreting The Environment*, John Wiley & Sons, 1976.

Interpretation has been defined in several ways. Freeman Tilden describes interpretation in his book *Interpreting Our Heritage* [University of North Carolina Press, 1967] as: "An educational activity which aims to reveal meaning and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information."

Harold Wallin, Chief Naturalist for the Cleveland Metropolitan Parks, tells us [in *Interpretation: A Manual and Survey on Establishing a Naturalist Program*, National recreation and Park Association, 1965] interpretation is . . . "The helping of the visitor to feel something that the interpreter feels—a sensitivity to the beauty, complexity, variety and interrelatedness of the environment; a sense of wonder; a desire to know. It should help the visitor develop a feeling of being at home in the environment. It should help the visitor develop perception."

Yorke Edwards, of Canada, describes interpretation [in "Park Interpretation," *Park News* 1:1, 1965] as being a combination, in different amounts, of at least six things: "It is an information service . . . a guiding service . . . an educational service . . . an entertainment service . . . a propaganda service . . . an inspirational service."

Interpretation aims at giving people new understanding, new insights, new enthusiasms, new interests. . . A good interpreter is a sort of Pied Piper, leading people easily into new and fascinating worlds that their senses never really penetrated before. He needs three basic attributes: knowledge, enthusiasm, and a bit of the common touch.

Don Aldridge, of Scotland, at the Second World Park Conference in Grand Teton National Park [1972] defined interpretation as ". . . the art of explaining the place of man in his environment, to increase visitor or public awareness of the importance of this relationship, and to awaken a desire to contribute to environmental conservation."

According to The Countryside Recreation Glossary [Countryside Commission, London, England, 1970], interpretation is "The process of developing a visitor's interest in and enjoyment and understanding of, an area, or part of an area, by describing and explaining its characteristics and their inter-relationships."

For the purposes of implementing the Maine Acadian Culture Preservation Act, *interpretation* is taken to mean a broad range of public programming that seeks to reveal meaning to program participants.

CONSTITUENCIES

First the matter of Who. There are many groups in the public that would benefit from learning about Acadians in Maine. The interpretive plan will identify the primary constituencies or audience for public programming.

EXISTING CONSTITUENCIES

No Upper St. John Valley institution has conducted formal user surveys of existing audiences. They report that their constituents are varied but weighted toward two groups—older people and local school children. School groups often are given special tours geared to their interests and ages. Individually the sites in the Valley receive between 300 and 2,000 visitors annually. In addition, thousands of residents and visitors participate in annual celebrations, festivals, and reunions each year. Most of the people attending these events from outside the Valley tend to be older, usually over 50 years of age. Aggregate statistics are not available regarding visitors and tourism in the Valley.

PLANNED CONSTITUENCIES

Interpretation efforts in the Upper St. John Valley developed in cooperation with NPS will require an approach that encourages the maintenance, transmission, and public presentation of the regionally-based culture. Cultural preservation and interpretation components will be structured to operate as a cohesive self-discovery and self-expression process for residents of, and those culturally connected to, the Upper St. John Valley, such as those who return for festivals and family gatherings. That is not to say that outsiders will not play an important role in program implementation. Interest in the culture expressed by tourists and others (including NPS) can be affirming. For example, exhibits often give value to everyday objects from a culture. Facilities and programs will serve the general public of all ages, community scholars, and academics. However, program activities will be designed to attract residents while inviting visitors from away to listen in on a *community conversation*, rather than be spectators of a presentation directed towards them as outsiders. Such interpretation can open up the heritage of the Valley to both visitors and residents.

Interpreting the very process of preserving expressive culture can tell important stories about the culture. Interpretation—revealing the meaning of resources—can also aid the preservation process by leading to understanding and appreciation of targeted cultural resources. The potential for mutual reinforcement of interpretation and preservation will be exploited.

Starting in the mid-19th century Maine Acadians migrated from the Valley to other locales in Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and elsewhere. Members of these groups with cultural connections to the Valley return regularly and would form the major constituency along with Valley residents.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH

Once the issue of who will be told the story of Maine Acadians is addressed, the next concern is, how will the story be told? There are many ways to communicate with those groups. The interpretive plan will deal with the interpretive approach and media to be employed by NPS and its partners.

EXISTING INTERPRETATION

Interpretive methods and media used in the Valley range from exhibits in locally significant buildings, to displays at fund-raising breakfasts, to narrated video-tapes incorporating historical photographs of the community and its families. The quality of interpretation varies. Interpretation in the Valley is conducted primarily by volunteers.

Most Valley historical societies present historic buildings and sites to the public as their major interpretive effort. The reasons for focusing on a building or site are numerous, but in response to a 1993 NPS survey about public programming, almost all historical society spokespersons indicated that their properties reflect their communities and therefore are appropriate focal points. Key structures symbolizing these communities are the focus of local efforts to preserve and interpret Maine Acadian culture through such structures as a church in Lille, a railroad station and blockhouse in Fort Kent, a railroad water tower in Frenchville, and a school in Cyr Plantation. In erecting a cross at the Acadian Landing Site, the Madawaska Historical Society very consciously chose to continue a tradition that began at least as long as 70 years ago. Anne Parent Roy, president of Notre Héritage Vivant/Our Living Heritage, spoke of their efforts to preserve and interpret a collection of buildings at the Acadian Village as a way to make personal history concrete.

Several historical society spokespersons expressed the opinion that their historic properties, usually accompanied by artifact displays, are their most effective interpretive efforts. Moreover, they felt that stewardship of the properties, while a challenge because of preservation and maintenance costs, serves as a strong point of their organization's work and role in the community. Many noted the importance of historic buildings or sites in engaging and serving their locally-based constituencies. For example, David Raymond, president of the St. Agatha Historical Society, related that their historic house had helped build local interest in the society due to the house's very visible location in the community. Claude *Blackie* Cyr, president of the Madawaska Historical Society, spoke of people who had returned to the Valley during family reunions and felt a strong relationship to the cross site because they could touch and feel a place where they personally had a historical connection.

Nearly every Valley historical society exhibits artifact collections, that evoke reactions and build bridges to audiences, stir memories, and fulfill expectations of what a museum or historic site *should be*. When a historic building is involved, the artifacts generally receive their primary interpretive treatment from the environments in which they are housed. Such a setting, while providing a ready interpretive framework for related artifacts, can place limits on the types of materials an institution can collect or exhibit. This creates a tension when the historic building also serves as the community's only museum and unrelated materials are donated to the society (particularly with exhibit and storage space at a premium).

Almost all historical societies in the Upper St. John Valley present special events. These include an annual breakfast with exhibits in St. Agatha, parish anniversary celebrations, commemoration of historical events (such as the signing of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty in Fort Kent), and family reunions (such as those associated with the Acadian Festival in Madawaska). These and similar events can provide the dynamic element in local historical society work by

highlighting new historical interpretive themes, combining social and recreational activities and educational efforts, broadening the local constituencies, and bringing new sources of financial and moral support to historical society work. David Raymond cites the annual St. Agatha Historical Society harvest breakfast as one of the most effective interpretive efforts used by the society because it reaches so many people in the community.

Members of the Madawaska Historical Society feel that the annual family reunion also reaches into the community and beyond. Claude *Blackie* Cyr relates that people with a keen desire for knowledge about their Maine Acadian ancestry come to the Valley from throughout the country to absorb the local culture and *find their place in history*. In 1992 the organizers of the Côté family reunion mailed 23,000 invitations across the United States and Canada. Nearly 1,800 people came (one from Brazil) to celebrate the Côté family's French-Canadian and Acadian heritage. The Acadian reunion committee maintains regular contact with thousands of people throughout North America.

Personal services is the method currently preferred for interpreting historical buildings, exhibits, or events to the visiting public. Guides are generally volunteers, temporary summer employees, or workers from youth or senior citizen employment programs. Additional volunteers from the historical societies assist the core group to conduct guided tours or answer questions if large groups, such as school groups, are scheduled.

Members of most Valley historical societies make themselves available to give talks to groups upon request. In St. Agatha, the historical society sponsors an annual historical exhibit at the school. Don Cyr of L'Association culturelle et historique du Mont-Carmel has given workshops to schools upon request regarding Valley history, culture, and folklore. In 1992 he reached 3,500 elementary and junior high students at five schools. According to Cyr, these programs were the most significant interpretive efforts made by his institution because they reached students at a young age and provided a means to expose them to a variety of historical and cultural information.

Many of the local historical societies produce general information or orientation brochures. Several historical societies work on more substantive, locally focused publications such as annual newsletters or commemorative publications for parish or town anniversaries. The Madawaska Historical Society has a publications program of long standing and now distributes over 30 publications; of these, more than half are published by the society. This is the most extensive publications-related effort of the Valley historical societies. Through the range of titles offered, the society interprets the entire Upper St. John Valley area in both Maine and New Brunswick.

Locally made audio-visual productions are part of the interpretive programming for several Valley historical societies. The Frenchville and Fort Kent historical societies were involved in innovative projects in which they gathered historical photographs and interpretive information about their towns. These historical materials were then produced as narrated videotapes. Karen Levesque, president of the Frenchville Historical Society, reports that this effort has been the society's most effective effort (over 200 videotapes have been sold) for two reasons: they appeal to young and old alike, and the society can present the community's history at a low cost. The Madawaska Historical Society produced a video of a historical tour of both sides of the Upper St. John Valley.

PLANNED APPROACH

Interpretation efforts in the Upper St. John Valley require an approach that encourages the maintenance, transmission, and public presentation of its regionally-based culture. The history of the Upper St. John Valley and the French-speaking people who settled there provides an

important key to our understanding of the settling of North America and the historical development of the United States. Often, however, interpretation programs present *culture* simply by offering objects or buildings from a specific time in the past. Rather than focusing on any particular historical period, the Maine Acadian Culture Preservation Act dictates the interpretation of the Maine Acadian story from early settlement through the present day. Moreover, history and historic preservation are two of four academic disciplines specified in the Act: history, historic preservation, anthropology, and folklore. The insight of many disciplines, along with the insight of Maine Acadians themselves, will be essential to successfully implementing the Maine Acadian Culture Preservation Act. An interdisciplinary approach is fundamental to NPS actions relating to Maine Acadian culture.

The National Park Service proposes reinforcing and improving existing interpretive efforts. Interpretation will be provided year-round, though there will likely be more activity during seasons of higher tourist visitation. A wide range of interpretive media would be used including the following:

- demonstrations
- electronic media
- educational programming
- exhibits
- interpreters/guides
- mobile vans
- outreach
- performance
- publications and audio-visual
- self-guided tours
- special events
- trails and greenways

Some specific suggestions to enhance existing interpretation follow. More "brainstorming" ideas are presented in the appendix.

Electronic Media

Interactive computers and other electronic media would present the Maine Acadian story. For example, a genealogical data base could address the theme of family ties by helping visitors to trace their own lineage, when appropriate and with adequate protection of privacy.

Educational Programming

School programs would be developed throughout the Valley in cooperation with local teachers that could include the design of curriculum materials and field trips to sites of cultural significance.

Exhibits

Exhibits would convey the story elements and provide orientation to the Valley. Interpretive planners would help develop the exhibits in consultation with local communities. Closely associated with exhibits would be a cohesive graphic system for signs related with the project.

Interpreters/Guides

Personal services provided at existing facilities would be enhanced through a training program for volunteer interpreters.

Outreach

To increase effectiveness, project activities would be outreach-oriented or *portable*. This

would allow Acadian groups outside the Upper St. John Valley also to benefit directly from project activities such as educational programs or traveling exhibits. In turn, such outreach efforts could generate interest in the Upper St. John valley among visitors to other sites, such as Acadia National Park or Saint Croix Island International Historic Site.

Publications and Audio-visual

Publications, such as maps, guidebooks and brochures, would be used to present the story elements and describe the resources of the Valley. One major purpose would be to pull together existing sites in the Valley under a unified approach. Audio-visual presentations would likewise be integrated between the story elements and local sites. In addition, other Acadian sites in North America could be approached about jointly producing publications and audio-visual presentations.

Self-guided Tours

The above media would be used to inform visitors about sites and resources that they could experience on their own. These could be walking tours, auto tours, or perhaps bicycle or hiking tours if appropriate facilities were developed.

Special Events

The importance of community-wide activities has increased as social and economic changes have reduced opportunities for inter-generational family gatherings, religious celebrations, and other occasions when stories, songs, rituals, and other traditional forms of Maine Acadian expression are shared. Events such as the Acadian Week and Family Reunion in Madawaska, *Festival des deux rives* in Van Buren, *Chez Nous*/Homecoming in Grand Isle, and various other community homecomings publicly reinforce Maine Acadian identity. Supporting these successful public events would garner considerable local publicity, and in turn, may affect private behavior and values. Reunions, weddings, and anniversary celebrations are often scheduled to coincide with summer vacation when relatives *from away* visit the Valley and provide a ready audience. NPS would support these successful community events.

Trails and Greenways

Due to the linear nature of the Valley, alternative access, along with land conservation corridors, could be developed that would facilitate interpretation.

STORY ELEMENTS

The *story* is the basic message of interpretation. The following basic threads of the Maine Acadian story provide a framework from which public interpretation will be developed in the action plan.

EXISTING STORY ELEMENTS

Historic structures and artifact collections offer a range of opportunities to interpret Maine Acadian culture. The story elements presented by the local institutions of the Valley are community oriented, centering on the history and material culture of the immediate locales. For the most part, interpretation has grown out of local collections and interpretive themes have neither been systematically developed nor written. There are no stated themes unifying interpretation throughout the Valley.

PLANNED STORY ELEMENTS

Five primary story elements will guide NPS implementation of the Maine Acadian Culture Preservation Act. These story elements, and other elements, will be developed more fully in the interpretive plan. The themes described in *History and Prehistory in the National Park System and the National Historic Landmarks Program* (1987) will be consulted for guidance in assessing the relation of historic properties to the other aspects of a varied Maine Acadian story.

Primary Story Elements

The following five primary story elements will be evaluated during the preparation of the interpretive plan:

- association with the French Language
- sense of family and home
- sense of place rooted in the Valley and its natural resources
- role of religion in everyday life, specifically Catholicism
- early settlement and history of the Valley

French Language. Maine Acadians have historically used the French language to transmit cultural knowledge, particularly oral traditions. The French language is in everyday use from Fort Kent to Van Buren and in the back settlements of the Valley. French and English typically flow together during conversations, often in the same sentence. *Valley French* is principally spoken rather than written. Opinions vary about the uniqueness of the variety of French spoken in the Valley. The only in-depth study of the French language in the Valley was published by Massignon in 1962. It found that the speechways of the Upper St. John Valley reflected a blend of Acadian and Québécois vocabulary and phonetics, and exhibited a predominantly Quebec morphology.

Being able to communicate effectively in both French and English is valued in the Valley. Still, a large number of young people in the Valley are receptive bilinguals; they understand the language, but some cannot speak it while others feel self-conscious about using it. Language stigma is frequently cited as a reason for the decline in the use of French.

Family. According to many Maine Acadians, *home and family is everything*. According to

this view, the family remains the primary source of personal and cultural identity. Despite erosion of the traditional gender-based division of labor in which women are responsible for the domestic sphere (including socialization and identity formation) and men dominate in external activities (such as wage labor, trade, and politics), the effects of the mother's ethnic identity and role in imparting cultural identity are still considered substantial.

Strong associations with the Valley and its people persist among Maine Acadians who leave the area, even for long periods of time. Family reunions, both on a community-wide and more individual scale, manifest strong ties among extended families in the Valley and between individuals *from away* and residents of the Valley. Some ties have persisted over several generations from earlier periods of outmigration from the Valley to the industrial towns of New England. Many former residents maintain their connection through periodic visits *home*. Returning retirees who have lived away make up a growing segment of the Valley population.

A relatively small number of family names are shared by a great many Maine Acadians and continue to predominate in the communities of the Upper St. John Valley. (Surnames with the most listings within the Valley telephone exchanges are: Albert, Cyr, Bouchard, Daigle, Martin, Michaud, Ouellette, Pelletier, and Thibodeau.) Interest in genealogy is widespread and the practice of producing commemorative volumes featuring old photographs, documents, and oral history is popular among families, as well as community institutions.

Place. Closely allied with a sense family and *home* in the Maine Acadian story is a strong sense of place. Attachment to the St. John River and the surrounding farmlands and woodlands of the Valley is expressed in many forms, from place names to oral poetry, from shrines to public hearings on water quality. Despite dwindling potato production and a sharp decrease in the number of family farms, Maine Acadians think of themselves as cultivators. In addition, work in the woods has always been closely allied with farming in the Valley. After crops were put away during the fall, many men moved to *les chantiers* (lumber camps), where they worked until it was time to prepare for planting. This seasonal pattern continued well into the 20th century. Today, residents work in the woods year-round harvesting and hauling logs to area mills where the largest work force in the Valley processes them into paper and lumber. Hunting, fishing, and river crossings figure prominently as group identifiers.

The Valley was divided between two countries in 1842 when the St. John River became the boundary between the United States and Canada. Today Maine Acadians generally ignore the international boundary with regard to family and social ties and there is a *French* identity associated with both sides of the river. Yet, the St. John River has formed a portion of the northern border of the United States for 150 years; Maine Acadian identity has come to embrace being both *American* and *Acadian*.

The St. John River is a major feature of the Valley landscape, and on a larger scale, of the state of Maine. It drains approximately 21,500 square miles of Maine, Québec, and New Brunswick (the greater St. John basin covers one-quarter of Maine). Its rivers, streams, ponds, and lakes were critically important in the settling and development of the Upper St. John Valley. Floodplains of the St. John were settled first, and then developed for farming and industry. Settlement spread up the tributaries to surrounding lakes. Most tributaries supported grist and saw mills.

Rivers provided the primary transportation link to and in the Valley until railroads and, later, motor roads were built. The St. John River's 75-foot/23 meter plunge at Grand Falls blocked boat traffic, but once goods were above the falls traffic moved up and down, and across the river freely. A variety of craft—canoes, small flat-bottomed boats, steamboats, and hand-powered ferries, among others—plied the waters of the Valley well into the 20th century. Logs and pulpwood moved from the river's upper reaches to mills as far downstream as Van Buren.

During the latter half of the 20th century Maine Acadians turned increasingly away from

the river. For instance, today boating is generally limited to recreational use of area lakes. During the past few years there has been a growing concern for the future of the river and the surrounding environment. There are proposals to develop riverfront parks and to increase public access to the water. A local land trust was formed in Fort Kent in 1991 and another in Van Buren in 1993. Local schools have implemented a river awareness program focused on the natural history and environmental quality of the St. John River.

Religion. Maine Acadians remain strongly connected to their French Catholic heritage. Catholic parishes have historically defined community boundaries, their civic and social functions intermingling with their spiritual mission. In recent decades, secularization has significantly affected many spheres of public and private activity, from education to economics, politics to family life, yet it does not appear to have substantially reduced Maine Acadians' expressions of loyalty to the religion of their ancestors. For example, following a special mass held at the St. David Catholic Church during past Acadian Festivals, descendants of the Valley's founding and pioneer families have led parishioners from the church to the Acadian Landing Site in a procession of the Blessed Sacrament. Many other public events and symbols, some introduced or reinvigorated relatively recently, link Catholicism with Maine Acadian identity. The re-enactment of the first settlers' erecting the cross at St. David, also during the annual festival in Madawaska, publicly reaffirms Catholicism while linking Maine Acadian identity specifically with the St. John River.

History. History is an integral component of the preceding story elements. Understanding Maine Acadians' association with the French language, their sense of family and home, their sense of place rooted in the Valley and its natural resources, and the role of religion in their everyday lives requires looking to the past. The 18th-century settlement of the Valley is a watershed event in the Maine Acadian story.

The arrival of Maine Acadians imposed a new order on the land of the Upper St. John Valley. Initial land ownership in the Valley was granted by the British Crown. In 1790, Joseph Mazerolle and 49 others received 74 lots, 53 of which were occupied. A second grant was issued to Joseph Soucy and 23 others in 1794. The early grants followed a long-lot pattern: each farm was approximately 1,000 feet wide (60 rods), a mile and a half long, and perpendicular to the river. Such a pattern gave access to the major transportation link—the river—and to fertile floodplain lands.

After settlement of lots in the *premier rang*, the first row of lots fronting the river, the *deuxième rang* (second row) lots were developed. On the north side of the river, settlement continued to at least six tiers in some places. Because of the curves in the river, these *rangs* became oddly juxtaposed, producing an irregular pattern of land ownership.

On the south side of the river, in what is now Maine, settlement expanded in this manner in some places until a *quatrième rang* (fourth row) was established. After the United States acquired jurisdiction over the south side in 1842, land there ceased to be granted according to the long-lot pattern. Subsequent land holdings, granted usually to the descendants of the original settlers or occasionally to new settlers arriving in the Valley, consisted of generally square lots of 180 acres each. The square lots represent the American practice of subdividing square townships. Under the terms of the Homestead Act of the State of Maine, homesites could be secured fairly cheaply, but the new owners were required to settle duties and perform road labor before land certificates were issued. Each certificate or grant was called *une concession* by local French-speakers. These grants became known as *les concessions*, and the neighborhoods associated with them became known as "back settlements." Though the land parcels in the back settlements are shaped differently from the initial tiers, neighborhoods continued to develop in the dispersed linear form. Their orientation may have been toward the shore of one of several

large lakes or toward a road. Like the initial *rang* communities, the small back settlements consisted almost entirely of multi-generational, extended-family groupings.

Farming has been the principal occupation of the Upper St. John Valley since its early settlement. The clearing and cultivation of the flats along the river was the primary focus during the first decades of settlement. Yet, agricultural yield was far from stable in those early years. By the 1820s, the *premier rangs* of Acadian farmers were well established and prepared to supply the developing needs of the timber industry. Local farm produce during the 19th century supplied most of the needs of the Valley population—vegetables, potatoes, buckwheat, oats, hay, sheep, hogs, and dairy products. There were sizable surpluses left after the Valley residents met their own needs. Established farms tended to be very productive, more productive than average New England farms.

The nineteenth-century development of *les concessions* for agriculture was limited by the fact that the State of Maine had sold most of the remaining uncleared land during the 1860s and 1870s to large landowners for the timber. While the supply of agricultural land shrank, a flourishing lumber industry developed, providing an economic alternative to sons who did not inherit land from their parents and who otherwise would have had to leave the Valley to earn their livelihood.

The primary response of Acadian farmers to the development of the forest industry was to supply food to lumber camps. But farming is a part-time occupation in this northern climate and, because winter was the most favorable season for working in the woods, a seasonal pattern of farming and forestry developed. After crops were put away during the fall, many men moved to *les chantiers* (lumber camps), where they worked until it was time to prepare for planting. This seasonal pattern continued well into the 20th century.

The opening of the Bangor & Aroostook Railroad in 1899 finally gave residents of the Maine portion of the Valley the opportunity to ship their lumber directly to American markets. A second rail link was established in 1902 when the Fish River Railroad linked Fort Kent to the Bangor & Aroostook Railroad (Dubay 1983: 49-51). The railroads also prompted the establishment of starch mills to utilize culls and surpluses.

The milling of lumber has been a vital occupation in the Valley since the turn of the 19th century. Lumber mills are not the only mills that have been part of life in the St. John Valley. There were gristmills, too, mentioned as early as 1790. The milling of buckwheat has considerable importance with regard to Acadian cultural identity. Locally grown and milled buckwheat is the main ingredient in *ployes*, a variety of thin pancake or crêpe which is a local food specialty.

Other Story Elements

In addition to the five primary story elements, other threads in the tapestry of the Maine Acadian story have emerged during planning. These include:

- cultural diversity and adaptation
- early Acadians in North America
- American/Canadian boundary dispute
- connections to other Acadian groups and sites

Cultural Diversity and Adaptation. While cultural outsiders and visitors to the Valley often mistakenly view Valley residents as an homogenous ethnic group, Maine Acadians recognize significant differences among themselves. They attribute the differences to variations in their communities and families of origin, as well as to individual life experiences. The story of Maine Acadians, like their cultural identity, is complex. The way in which Upper St. John Valley residents express their understanding of their cultural identity is shaped by many factors. For instance, discussion of Maine Acadian worldview is always influenced by who is asking about

the subject and of whom; the respective age, gender, and educational and economic status of each person involved in the discussion; what community each is from; whether they have experienced stigmatization based on ethnic, religious, or linguistic affiliation; and the context and language in which the discussion is conducted. In developing interpretive programming, NPS would work to present the diversity of Maine Acadian experience.

Connections between Maine Acadians and less culturally similar groups in northern Maine are not widely acknowledged in the Valley. Scots-Irish, English, Yankees, and Swedes are considered by Maine Acadians to be collectively *English*. Connections with these neighboring groups are discouraged by the local conviction, particularly prevalent among older Maine Acadians, that *English* and *French* cultures are fundamentally incompatible. Disdain for these neighboring groups arose during the long period of their political and economic domination over Maine Acadians, and is sustained by the continuing prejudice encountered by the French outside the Valley. When contact with Native Americans comes up in public expressions of Maine Acadian identity, the belief is commonly expressed that Maine Acadians have consistently enjoyed good relations with the Maliseet and Micmac, but have been little influenced by Native American cultures.

Responsible cultural presentation requires proper acknowledgment of all the cultural strands that have created the fabric of a culture. Interpretation would recognize the varied cultural traditions that have influenced Acadians in Maine, as well as the traditions of the Valley shared by communities scattered throughout Maine and New England to which Acadians from the Valley have migrated.

Early Acadians in North America. Much of the history of Maine Acadians prior to their settling in the Upper St. John Valley is shared with Acadians throughout North America, and elsewhere. The early history of Acadia is dominated by 150 years of conflict between French and British colonial forces. In 1604 France established the founding colony of Acadia on a small island near the mouth of the St. Croix River in present-day Maine. Hostilities between Great Britain and France led both countries to increase their military presence in Acadia by the mid-1700s. At that time, the British changed their policy toward Acadians and insisted they sign an unconditional oath of loyalty. Some Acadians responded by moving into territories held by the French, but the majority remained in their settlements, maintaining that the conditional oaths they had signed earlier were still valid. What followed was the tragic deportation, *le grand d rangement*, that effectively destroyed Acadian society as it had existed until then. A place called Acadia no longer existed, but it was still possible to be an Acadian in North America.

American/Canadian Boundary. Great Britain had exercised authority over the Upper St. John area since 1785 (administering it as a part of New Brunswick). However, jurisdiction over the entire territory was disputed between the United States and British North America resulting in hostilities between Great Britain and the U.S. that ranged from a brief period of armed conflict in the *bloodless* Aroostook War, to several years of often acrimonious diplomatic disputes and negotiations in state, provincial, and national capitals. The matter was resolved in 1842 when Lord Ashburton of Great Britain and Daniel Webster of the United States negotiated a treaty that established the St. John and St. Francis rivers as the international boundary above Grand Falls. The treaty divided a compact and homogeneous population between two governments.

The Fort Kent blockhouse in Fort Kent, Maine, was built by the United States to defend its interests during the boundary dispute with British North America. Federal troops remained stationed at the fort until 1845. As the only fortification remaining from the conflict, the National Historic Landmark will be an integral part of telling the story of establishing the international boundary.

Other Acadians. Americans of French descent connected by heritage to the Upper St. John Valley, i.e. Maine Acadians, have connections to other Acadian groups and places in North America, and the world. The Maine Acadian Culture Preservation Act requires interpretive treatment of Acadians who resettled in various North American colonies, including the territory that eventually became the State of Maine. Several areas of Maine received a large number of French-speaking immigrants during the 19th and 20th centuries, as Canadians moved from the provinces of Quebec, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick to the industrial towns of New England.

In Maine these included Biddeford, Lewiston/Auburn, Saco, and Rumford/Mexico; in the case of the Rumford/Mexico area a large Acadian population migrated from Prince Edward Island. The early history of these groups is shared with Maine Acadians. Today approximately one-third of the population of Maine (336,127 people) describe themselves as being of French, French-Canadian, or Acadian ancestry (U.S. Census 1991).

Sites outside of the Valley directly relevant to the Maine Acadian story include several units administered by Parks Canada and two NPS units in Maine. One, Acadia National Park, encompasses a site of early Acadian settlement, St. Sauveur (1613). The name of the park refers to the early Micmac and European use of “-cadie” or “Acadie” for the region of coastal Maine where Acadia National Park is situated. The other NPS unit is Saint Croix Island International Historic Site, the location of the founding 1604 French Acadian settlement. (It is administered by Acadia National Park.) Other relevant NPS sites in the U.S. include three Acadian cultural centers in Louisiana at the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.

National Park Service efforts related to Maine Acadians complement and expand the interpretive stories presented at St. Croix and Jean Lafitte. The Maine Acadian story allows the NPS to follow the development of Acadian culture in North America from colonization through the present. Interpretation at St. Croix Island International Historic Site deals with the founding of Acadia in the winter of 1604. Following the deportation of the French by the British in 1755, Acadians settled throughout the Western Hemisphere; Cajun and Maine Acadian cultures diverged. The Acadian cultural centers at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve present the development of Acadian culture in Louisiana over the past 200 years.

The broader North American context of Maine Acadian culture includes Acadian groups elsewhere in the United States, such as Cajuns in Louisiana. Connections between Maine Acadians and Acadians in Canada are perhaps the strongest however, due to a common early history, a common nationality until 1842, and contemporary economic and social interactions. Adding the story of Maine Acadians provides the public with a more complete picture of Acadian culture in the United States, and the close connection between Acadians in Maine and Acadians in Canadian provinces encourages treatment of the broader North American context of Acadian culture.

APPENDIX

Interpretation Workshop Summary December 15, 1992

How might we interpret Acadian culture in the State of Maine?

1. brainstorming ideas selected by majority of participants
(in order of popularity)
 - book
 - educational outreach
 - culture camps for kids & adults
 - cultural heritage trail
 - x-country ski trail
 - walking trail
 - bike trail
 - people exchanges
 - performance grants
 - electronic genealogy
2. other brainstorming ideas
 - video tours
 - walking tours
 - films
 - winter festival
 - local guides
 - oral histories
 - document language
 - passport free zone
 - library
 - essay contest
 - drop off for artifacts
 - annual photo workshop
 - academic conference
 - music camp
 - travel agent education
 - dictionary of French
 - weaving
 - potato farming
 - photo contest
 - food festival
 - potato picking
 - education program for schools at site
 - canoe trips
 - crafts participation
 - performance grants

church seminars
day care programs
archives
exhibits
local products store
traveling exhibits
electronic genealogy
smugglers day
potato wine classes
voice recognition translation
official state zone
newspapers
bus tours
radio
French writing classes
trip/exchange to France
river cruises
roving storyteller
giant figures
play
potato truck races
visitors center(s)
network with other sites
exchange with other NPS sites
AAA
educators roundtable
shelter for reunions
new bridge
bed & breakfast by Acadians
potato (?) with chain saws
youth hostel
NPS site for folklore archeology
logo
national anthem
Hollywood movie
glider tours
air tours
virtual reality
exchange with France
creative writing centers
promote local historical societies
school curriculum
community links with non-Acadians
mosaic
quilt making
exchange with students

Valley French lessons
apprentices
chain saw apprentices
process for folklorists
national folk festival
cooking classes
Acadian restaurant
cook books
flour mill
elder hostel
research
family reunions
story telling
university swaps
electronic family albums
Ellis Island photo
music and story festival
north woods center
re-enactments

3. Electronic Genealogy

a. Pros

- (1) important to area people
- (2) already established
- (3) can reach all age groups

b. Cons

- (1) electronic medium could alienate people from the personal, community bonding quality of existing methods

4. Cultural Camps

a. Pros

- (1) depth
- (2) self-discovery
- (3) incorporate full range of themes
- (4) flexible ages and group sizes

b. Cons

- (1) limited public (not casual observers)
- (2) "A fish doesn't know what water is until someone pulls it out of it."

5. Books, Films

a. Pros

- (1) accurate
- (2) relatively inexpensive (for user)
- (3) portable
- (4) tangible

- (5) accessible to greater regional audience
- b. Cons--?

Suggested Pilot Programs

1. dual-purpose newsletter
 - a. NPS project background
 - b. general info articles of community, facts, etc.
2. photo contest: "What does Acadian culture mean to you?"
3. hire ranger for summer
4. tours
 - a. bike
 - b. auto
 - c. walking
 - d. historical/open house
 - (1) house/site tours
 - (2) all-day
 - (3) concerts
 - (4) food displays
 - (5) places not usually available
(mill, barrel factory)
 - (6) social activities
 - e. boat tour
5. performances/festivals
 - a. singers
 - b. dancers
 - c. storytellers in library
 - d. indoor/outdoor activities
 - e. ployes festival/contest
6. school programs
 - a. artwork
 - b. poems
 - c. Acadian culture week
7. school contest to be displayed in public places
8. apprenticeship program
9. symposium, books
10. educators roundtable, monthly
11. cultural camp
 - a. days
 - b. summer
 - c. church, Sundays
12. community walking tours by local guides,
over a weekend or week-long
13. small grants
14. historical society networking

APPENDIX

Maine Acadian Culture Preservation Commission Interpretation Working Group January 1996

IV. Possible Interpretive Projects for 1996

Several ideas have been discussed by National Park Service staff, members of the sub-committee, and the consultant as potential interpretive projects for 1996. The list of these ideas is provided here as a means of continuing these discussions.

Rating

- 1 ■ Brochure or video brochure that explains the Maine Acadian Culture Preservation Act and the work of the Maine Acadian Culture Preservation Commission and the National Park Service
- 8 ■ Traveling exhibit that explains the Maine Acadian Culture Preservation Act and illustrates some of the interpretive themes identified during the planning process
- 3 ■ Workshops for local historians, historical societies, and other interested parties regarding topics of interest such as use of primary source materials in research and collections management and care
- 2 ■ An Acadian music festival
- 9 ■ Sponsorship of an event at the Acadian Festival
- 5 ■ School curriculum development regarding Valley history and culture; a school curriculum could include activities such as how to "read" an historical document for research purposes
- 6 ■ Brochure that would serve as a guide for visitors to the Valley and include a variety of information about the Valley's geography, history, and environment
- 10 ■ Slide collection of historical images that would be available to schools throughout the Valley
- 7 ■ Series of community forums that would explore and articulate the sense of community in the Valley
- 4 ■ Column in the St. John Valley Times that would focus on what is important to people, particularly those who have moved from the Valley, about the Valley's way of life and culture
- 4 ■ Exhibit furniture, such as panels and cases, that could be lent to historical societies for use in mounting interpretive exhibits; this furniture could also include a pre-made general interpretive exhibit outline and each historical society could exhibit their own materials that would illustrate the general interpretive themes

Thank you once again for your help. We look forward to further discussions with you.