

Les Ami(e)s de Grand-Pré

New Minas Historic Acadian Walk August 11, 2007

On a warm August evening, our group of 20 people met at the New Minas Elementary School for a walk that promised to highlight the Acadian history of the village.



Our tour guide for the evening was local village councilor, Maynard Stevens, who met everyone in his homespun shirt, knee britches and tricorn hat. Also assisting in the presentation were Susan Surette-Draper and Yvette LeBlanc, co-presidents of Les Amis de Grand-Pré. The co-presidents were also dressed in period costumes, adding an authentic flavor to the evening.

By the time our tour ended, this outing would prove not only to have provided historical information and new insights but also a chance for people with a common interest to meet and share their knowledge and observations.

Our walk started with a right turn on Jones Road then turned right again onto Lockhart Rd. It was at this corner that Maynard pointed out the vast fertile lands and the close proximity of the Cornwallis River, formerly Rivière St Antoine or Rivière Grand-Habitant. Participants began to imagine what the former Acadian village would have

looked like with the river as its main thoroughfare instead of today's Commercial Street.

The dyked lands at the foot of today's Jones Road provided rich grazing pastures as well as fertile soil for crops. It is said that Acadians farmed the lowlands and built their houses on the uplands overlooking their land. The New Minas discoveries that we were about to be shown would soon bear that out.

Most of the participants were present residents of New Minas but the presence of the Ravine Park was a new discovery for many of them as well as for those who came from other areas.

Today it is a wooded, winding and steep trail that leads you along a pine needle path next to a slowly running stream and could eventually lead you to the New Minas Elementary School if you followed the path to the end.

Maynard lead the group to the location where an Acadian mill site has been identified. The once powerful current that flowed down from the South Mountain made it possible for grain to be milled or possibly logs to be sawed into planks in the 1700's. Mosquitoes also love a wet moist environment and the arrival of human flesh made their evening interesting...we did not stay in the ravine for long!



Emerging from the Ravine Park we walked along Lockhart Rd. Here we were told about the legend of

a church and priest's house and sites of house foundations were pointed out to us. Our group was interested to learn that a local noted historian, A.W.H. Eaton in his History of Kings County, had documented the presence of Acadian foundations here and that subsequently an official government survey had located them on a map when railway work was being planned.

As we walked, Yvette pointed out locations of Acadian house foundations where she and her friends and siblings played when they were children and told of the changes that she has seen to the stream that runs through the ravine. Development in the village has diminished the flow of the once powerful stream that Acadians and the Planters who followed them, harnessed to power their mills.

At the corner of Lockhart Rd and Cornwallis Ave, we stopped to consider what Acadian houses would have looked like and Susan gave samples of "bousillage", an Acadian mixture of clay and marsh grasses which was used to insulate their wooden houses.



Participants were invited to imagine what kinds of houses would be required by young men such as the ones who were welcomed and supported by the village founders, Pierre Teriot and his wife Cécile Landry. What size of house would they need when their wives arrived and subsequently when their families grew! Some were surprised to learn that Acadian houses were bright inside due to their use of a plaster-like finish. A large hearth and an outdoor bread oven made a comfortable and appealing picture.

We turned left on Cornwallis Avenue, following the road past the United Church and downhill as it became a dirt road that bordered a marsh to our left, until we reached the end of the road. A sharp left turn would lead us to the top of Oak Island Hill, where stories passed on for generations have told of an Acadian/Mi'kmaq graveyard.

As we stood next to acres of green marsh meadows, we spent some time considering what crops the Acadians grew in these lands and the role that cattle played in their prosperity.

Susan invited us to consider that all of these lands could not possibly have been cultivated by such a relatively small population but that cattle herds require lots of land with an abundance of hay and grass and these well irrigated lands were ideal for that. No wonder that when Colonel Winslow was documenting the inventory his troops were confiscating from the Acadians in this area at the time of the deportation, that he made particular references to oxen, cows, young cattle and sheep!

The site of the cemetery has been cleared of vines in the last few years but in this lush, fertile land, it does not take long for the vegetation to take over. Some of our group decided not to make the trek up the hill but those who did were treated to an unexpected sight...a young deer lingered a few minutes to see who was intruding in her domain before springing away into the brush!

There is a notation in the parish records of St Charles des Mines at Grand-Pré, documenting the death of St Antoine village founder, Pierre Teriot and his wife Cécile Landry. It tells of their subsequent burials at Grand-Pré.



They are not buried here, in New Minas, but stories of the Acadian/Mi'kmaq cemetery have survived.

Who is buried here, on this hill with the cemetery legend and the setting sun shining through the trees?

Susan Surette-Draper August 18, 2007