

Les Ami(e)s de Grand-Pré

The Colours of Old Acadie - Grand-Pré in the Fall

Grand-Pré, September 22, 2008 –

Like elsewhere in the Valley, it is apple time at Grand-Pré National Historic Site. For generations, visitors have been able to taste the apples from the orchard next to the memorial church. This miniature orchard was established by Acadians and the Dominion Atlantic Railway in the early 1930s to commemorate the French origin of the apple in Nova Scotia.

The introduction of the apple goes back to the first Acadian settlements in the 17th century. It is not a coincidence that in 1932 Eugène Girault, President of the Fruit Growers Union in France, donated an apple tree to the park at Grand-Pré. Mr. Girault was living in a town in France not far from where the seigneurie of Charles Menou d'Aulnay was once located. It so happens that d'Aulnay left France with Isaac de Razilly in 1632 and founded the settlement of La Hève (LaHave) which served as the capital of Acadie for several years.



There is written proof indicating that the settlers who arrived in LaHève under the command of Razilly planted apple trees. In 1701, Simon-Pierre de Bonnaventure made the following observation: “The majority of the apple trees that were planted in the days of Commander Razilly are still alive and bear fruit every year. In fact, I drank cider made from them this year.”

After Razilly’s death in 1636, d’Aulnay moved most of the settlers from LaHève to Port-Royal which became the real cradle of Acadie. Numerous historic documents indicate that most of the Acadian farms in Port-Royal had fruit trees. Writing in 1698, Governor Villebon states that the Acadians grew pears and cherries, but mainly apples. Villebon observed at least six different varieties of apples, including the Calville, the Rambour and the Reinette. One can assume that the young couples who left Port-Royal to found Grand-Pré in 1686 planted the same varieties of French apples.

Today, there are 51 apple trees and 19 varieties of apples in the commemorative orchard at Grand-Pré National Historic Site. Since the trees are old, they only produce an abundance of apples every second year.

In the fall, many families and schools organize trips to the Annapolis Valley to pick apples. The Société Promotion Grand-Pré encourages them to include a visit to Grand-Pré National Historic Site so they can learn more about the tradition of the apple in Old Acadie. The Société is offering a special program this year for elementary schools called “Acadians, Apple Orchards and Old Willows.”

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