

# The Blacksmith Shop

## The origin of the blacksmith shop at Grand-Pré

The installation of the old blacksmith shop at Grand-Pré in **1967** was an initiative of the late **Gordon LeBlanc**, superintendent of the park from 1957 to 1979. Originally, he had hoped to obtain several old Acadian buildings in order to create a small historic village. However, Parks Canada decided to put an end to that project.

Gordon LeBlanc knew that there was an old blacksmith shop in good condition in his native village of **Wedgeport**, in southwest Nova Scotia. Located on the main street, the blacksmith shop in question had played an important role in the life of the village (SEE PHOTOS). En 1966, it belonged to Alfred (Alferd) LeBlanc (1906-1981) who had inherited it from his cousin, **FRANÇOIS LEBLANC** (1860-1956) who did not have any children.

Thanks to research done by Cyrille LeBlanc (journalist and resident of Wedgeport), we know that Alfred LeBlanc sold the blacksmith shop, the equipment, and all the tools for \$325 on July 8, 1966 (SEE the original receipt found by Marie Crosby, adopted daughter of Alfred and Catherine LeBlanc). Several men, including Donnie Babin and the brothers Bob and Sam Pothier, were hired to demolish the building, a board at a time, so that it could be transported to Grand-Pré. Donnie told Cyrille that he was “very proud to have helped save François LeBlanc’s blacksmith shop.”

Cyrille LeBlanc spoke recently with Monsignor Gérald LeBlanc (born in Wedgeport in 1935) who grew up near the blacksmith shop and who visited it frequently when he was a boy. If the blacksmith was “in a good mood,” he would let the young Gérald LeBlanc operate the bellows. But on other occasions he would chase him out of the shop, along with all the other little boys in the neighbourhood!

## Who was François LeBlanc ?

Thanks to genealogical information provided by Cyrille LeBlanc and Roger Héту, we can confirm that François LeBlanc was a direct descendant of **PIERRE LEBLANC** who was born in Grand-Pré around 1719 and who died in Church Point, Nova Scotia, in 1799. Two of Pierre’s uncles and one of his aunts are known to be buried in the old Saint-Charles-des-Mines cemetery in Grand-Pré. As the registers for Saint-Charles-des-Mines church indicate, Pierre LeBlanc’s marriage to Marie Madeleine Babin took place on October 4, 1745. Their eldest son, **JOSEPH** (1752-1812), was born in Rivière-aux-Canards (Canard) before the Deportation. Pierre and his wife and children were deported to Massachusetts in 1755 and lived in the Boston area for 17 years. Other children were born while Pierre and Marie Madeline were living in exile. Pierre and his family returned to Nova Scotia to settle in Church Point in 1772. They were one of the founding families of the township of Clare.

**JOSEPH** LeBlanc married Marie Madeleine Amirault and moved to Bas-de-Tousquet (**Wedgeport**) around 1778. Joseph was the first LeBlanc to settle in Wedgeport. He and his wife had several children, including **ANSELME** (1788-1875). **ANSELME** married Marie Anne d’Entremont. They had numerous children, including **CYRIAQUE** (1828-1898). **CYRIAQUE** married Rosalie Stéphanie Pothier. Stéphanie and Cyriaque had 10 children, including **FRANÇOIS** (1860-1956). Around 1850, Cyriaque

built a house and a blacksmith shop on the land he inherited from his father Anselme. Cyriaque earned his living as a fisherman, farmer and blacksmith. François inherited the house and blacksmith shop from his father. The shop and the house were located on either side of the main road that goes through the village of Wedgeport (SEE PHOTO).

**FRANÇOIS was a blacksmith and a stone cutter.** In Nova Scotia, especially along the coast where the ground is rocky and uneven, oxen were used as drafts animals on farms and in the woods. Consequently, like many other blacksmiths, François shod oxen and not horses. Since the fisheries have always formed the mainstay of the economy of Wedgeport, François made and repaired objects that were used in the fishing industry. According to the men that Cyrille LeBlanc interviewed, François made anchors and basket-frames for boat propellers. He also made spikes. There were other blacksmiths in Wedgeport, but François was the only one who earned his living as a blacksmith. He was considered the best one in the entire region and won numerous prizes for his work.

### **The blacksmith and the blacksmith shop**

Until the 1940s or 1950s, the blacksmith shop played a crucial role in the economic and social life of most villages. The blacksmith shop (also known as the “smithy”) was always an important **meeting place**. The blacksmith was respected and admired for his skills and know-how. He made and repaired iron tools and objects that were essential to the local economy. It is probably not a coincidence that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow chose to place a blacksmith at the heart of the Acadian village in his famous poem *Evangeline*. Gabriel’s father, Basile Lajeunesse, was the blacksmith in Grand-Pré.

As the Quebec ethnologist Jean-Claude Dupont shows in his book *L’artisan forgeron*, blacksmithing evolved considerably over the centuries. Today there are still blacksmiths, but they tend only to make decorative objects.

Further research would be necessary in order to determine how many blacksmiths worked in François LeBlanc’s shop after it was moved to Grand-Pré. We know that there was a pair of oxen at Grand-Pré from 1968 until about 1989. Their pasture was located beside the blacksmith shop, in the triangular piece of land that has just been cleared of brush and trees. Over the years, a number of professional blacksmiths and Parks Canada guides put on demonstrations, especially during Acadian Days in July.

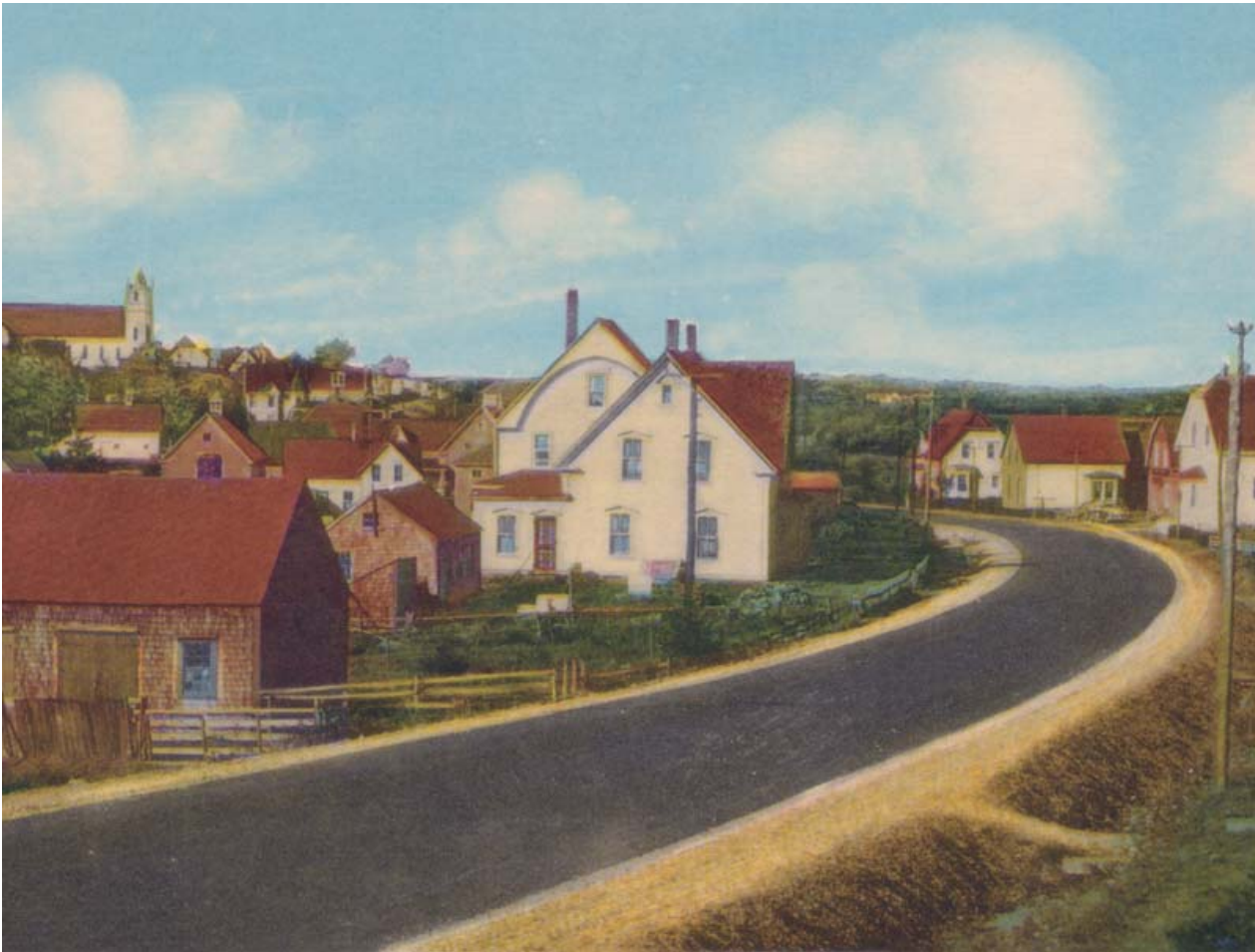
\* \* \*

### **SOURCES:**

- Jean-Claude Dupont, *L’artisan forgeron*, Presses de l’Université Laval, 1979 (see photo of the bellows at Grand-Pré, p. 31)
- Cyrille LeBlanc – all photos and details regarding François LeBlanc’s shop when it was in Wedgeport were provided by Cyrille LeBlanc.
- Calixte Thibodeau, Ronnie-Gilles LeBlanc – former Parks Canada guides who worked in the blacksmith shop at Grand-Pré

Text by Sally Ross, 2010

## Photos



1) François LeBlanc's blacksmith shop in Wedgeport

The shop is in the lefthand corner. St. Michael's Church can be seen in the distance. François LeBlanc's house was on the other side of the road. The original photo, taken in the 1950s, was in black and white (photo provided by Cyrille LeBlanc of Wedgeport).



2) From left to right: Alfred LeBlanc, his wife Catherine (Bourque) LeBlanc, and François LeBlanc

François and his wife Marie-Louise Stoddard did not have any children. In 1943, probably after the death of his wife, François deeded his house and blacksmith shop to his young cousin Alfred LeBlanc, in exchange for room and board (photo provided by Cyrille LeBlanc of Wedgeport).





3) François LeBlanc and Catherine (Bourque) LeBlanc, Alfred's wife (photo provided by Cyrille LeBlanc of Wedgeport).

4) Catherine (Bourque) LeBlanc, Marie Jacquard, and François LeBlanc.

This photo was taken at the time of Marie's first communion (1949). Since they didn't have children, Alfred and Catherine adopted her sister's daughter, Marie Jacquard. Marie thus grew up in the house where François was living (photo provided by Cyrille LeBlanc of Wedgeport).





5) Marie (Jacquard) Crosby holding a portrait of François LeBlanc (photo taken in 2010 by Cyrille LeBlanc)

DEPARTMENT OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL RESOURCES  
**LOCAL PURCHASE ORDER**

TO: Alfred J. LeBlanc,  
 Manager,  
 Yarmouth Co., N. S.

DATE: July 8/66  
 ISSUING OFFICE: Halifax, N.S.

111617 L

PLEASE FURNISH THE FOLLOWING MATERIALS AS SPECIFIED HEREIN AND CHANGE TO THE DEPARTMENT OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL RESOURCES

TO: Superintendent,  
 Grand Pré National Historic Park,  
 Grand Pré, Nova Scotia.

FROM: Regional Director, Atlantic Region,  
 Dept Northern Affairs & National Resources,  
 Natural and Historic Resources Branch,  
 P. O. Box 2207, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

RENDER SEPARATE INVOICE FOR EACH ORDER AND SEND WITH COPIES INCLUDING ORIGINAL WITH SHIPMENT

DELIVERED BY: Immediately

QUANTITY	TENDER	DESCRIPTION	UNIT	TOTAL
		Old Blacksmith Shop Building, Tools, Equipment and contents		\$325.00
		Building (16 x 30)		

Authority telcon T. Fuller, Masson Station

152 000 15 01 008 000 229 325.00 F.S. 21008  
 R. P. Walker, Regional Director,  
 Atlantic Region

REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE WILL BE EXPEDITED IF THE PURCHASE ORDER INDICATED  
 THIS ORDER IS SUBJECT TO THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS ON BOTH SIDES HEREOF

FORM 23 - 12

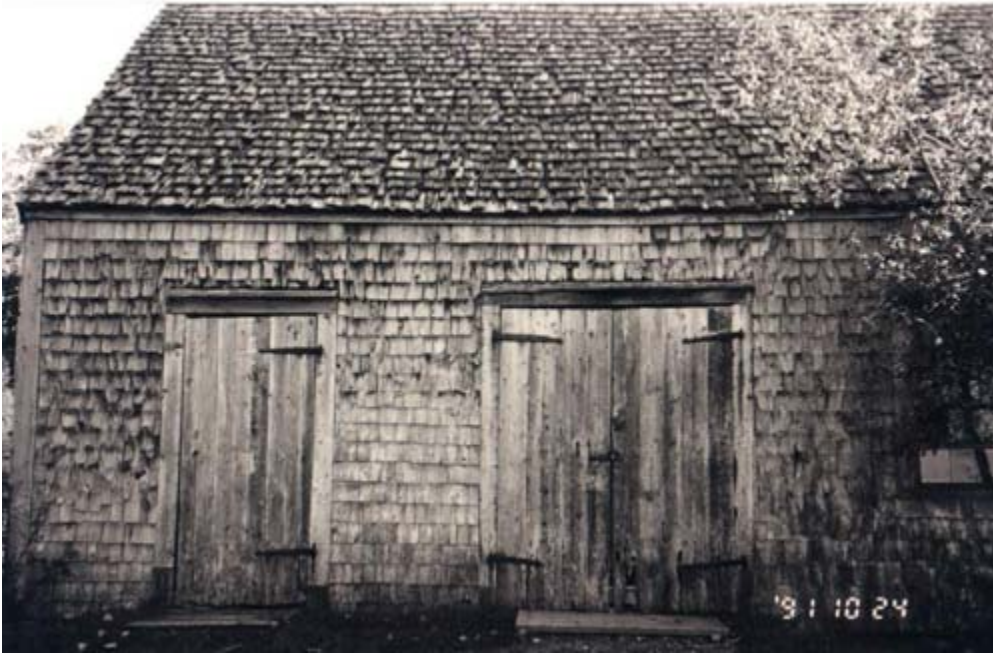
6) Receipt for the sale of the blacksmith shop in 1966 (photo by Cyrille LeBlanc)



7) The blacksmith shop before it was demolished and moved to Grand-Pré (photo provided by GPNHSC)

Several men, including Donnie Babin and the brothers Bob and Sam Pothier, were hired to demolish the building, a board at a time, so that it could be transported to Grand-Pré.





8) The blacksmith shop reconstructed at Grand-Pré in 1967 (photo taken in 1991, provided by GPNHSC)

### **Memories of a temporary blacksmith by historian Ronnie-Gilles LeBlanc:**

*I played the role of “blacksmith for a day” regularly at Grand-Pré in 1972. I would light the forge mainly on Sunday afternoons and then just for the few hours of my shift I would do some blacksmithing. In those days, the guides worked in rotation in different parts of the site: a shift at the reception desk, a shift giving guided tours (especially for buses), a shift in the memorial church, and a shift in the blacksmith shop. Nobody asked me to do any actual blacksmith work, but I wasn’t discouraged from doing it either. I would heat and beat iron bars that were in the shop. I remember making a hinge that I still have. I liked doing this work and visitors seemed to enjoy it, especially the smell of coal burning in the forge and the smoke, of course! I can assure you that I made for a rather incongruous blacksmith dressed in my guide’s uniform which consisted of a short-sleeved blue shirt, a tie, grey trousers, and dress shoes!*

Ronnie-Gilles LeBlanc is now a Parks Canada historian.



9) Félix Thibodeau working in the blacksmith shop at Grand-Pré in 1985 (photo provided by GPNHSC).

Well-known Acadian writer from Clare, Félix Thibodeau died on March 4, 2009, ten days before his hundredth birthday. His son Calixte worked as a guide at Grand-Pré and operated the forge on numerous occasions.



10) Oxen at Grand-Pré in 1976 (photo provided by Yvette LeBlanc)



11) Mud shoes for oxen  
(photo provided by Brigitte Cooney)



12) Gravestone of Francoie [François] C. Le Blanc in St. Michel cemetery Wedgeport. It is a concrete gravestone and, like many other grave markers of this style, it was made locally. (photo by Cyrille LeBlanc)