Beginning in 1755, nearly 10,000 French inhabitants of Nova Scotia, also known as the Acadians, had their homes and property confiscated and were forcibly deported to other British colonies in America.

Of these, some 2000 found themselves bound for Massachusetts. Destitute and among foreigners of a different religion and language, these Acadian families were distributed among many Massachusetts towns, where they were forced to rely on local residents for basic support.

Having been under British rule since 1713, the Acadians were removed by authorities at the outset of the French and Indian War because of their refusal to take an unqualified oath of allegiance to the British crown. Since they preferred to remain neutral, they were referred to as the “French Neutrals” by British authorities and their Massachusetts “hosts.” This exhibit tells the story of the Acadian experience in Massachusetts, where they were compelled to remain until the end of the war in 1763.

In 1763 many Acadians began to petition the Massachusetts General Court for permission to leave the province, preferring to return to Nova Scotia or relocate to France, St. Domingue (Haiti), or Quebec, areas populated by those who shared their language and religion. Many Acadians eventually made their way to Louisiana. Their descendants today are known as the Cajuns. A few remained in their new homes in Massachusetts.

THIS EXHIBIT MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH A GRANT FROM THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES
**The French & British Presence in Acadia**

Once encompassing present-day Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and parts of southern Quebec, Acadia was a region of persistent conflict.

Claims by John Cabot for the English in 1498 and Jacques Cartier for the French in 1534 served as the basis for continued struggle over this territory. Possession of the area, primarily settled by the French, shifted regularly, being ceded to the French in the Treaty of Breda (1667) and the English in the Treaty of Utrecht (1713). Although Louisbourg was captured by the English in 1745, it was returned to the French in the Treaty of Aix-La-Chapelle (1748), while the English maintained control of the colony overall, which they called Nova Scotia.

"Also, That the said King of Great Britain do likewise restore unto the said Most Christian King, or unto such as to that purpose shall receive his Command duly passed under the Great Seal of France, the Country which is called Acadia, lying in North-America, which the said Most Christian King did formerly enjoy. And to that end the said King of Great Britain shall immediately upon the Ratification of this Agreement, deliver or cause to be delivered unto the said Most Christian King, or such Ministers of his as shall be thereunto appointed, all Instruments and Orders duly dispatched, which shall be necessary to the said Restitution."

—Treaty of Breda, 1667

This treaty guaranteed France dominion over Acadia following the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665–1667).
The most Christian King shall take care to have delivered to the Queen of Great Britain, on the same day that the ratifications of this treaty shall be exchanged, solemn and authentic letters, or instruments, by virtue whereof it shall appear, that the island of St. Christopher’s is to be possessed alone hereafter by British subjects, likewise all Nova Scotia or Acadia, with its ancient boundaries, as also the city of Port Royal, now called Annapolis Royal, and all other things in those parts, which depend on the said lands and islands, together with the dominion, propriety, and possession of the said island, lands, and places, and all right whatsoever, by treaties, or by any other way obtained, which the most Christian King, the crown of France, or any subjects thereof, have hitherto had to the said island, lands, and places, and the inhabitants of the same, are yielded and made over to the Queen of Great Britain, and to her crown for ever, as the most Christian King does at present yield and make over all the particulars abovesaid…

—Treaty of Utrecht, 1713

The article shown here ceded possession of Acadia or Nova Scotia to Great Britain as a result of Queen Anne’s War (1702-1713). Cape Breton Island, originally part of Acadia, was left to the French.
Prelude to War

The boundaries of Acadia or Nova Scotia had long been at contest, the presence of the French in supposed British territory increasing the apprehension of many.

Acadians had remained in the colony following the assumption of British control in 1713. Their refusal to take an unqualified oath of allegiance earned them the title “French Neutrals” and the contempt of British authorities. Massachusetts had always taken an interest in the affairs of Nova Scotia and feared that the French presence there threatened its safety, and perhaps that of all the British North American colonies. Governor William Shirley began voicing such an opinion in 1749.

In 1750 he entered into uneasy negotiations with the French when they established Fort Beausejour on the Chignecto Peninsula. These having proved unsuccessful, Shirley began recruiting forces in 1755 to expel the French from Nova Scotia, appointing Colonel John Winslow as second in command. Troops left Boston Harbor in May. By June, they had captured Fort Beausejour.

War loomed ahead.
Prelude to War

Some Points Stated Concerning the Settlement of the Boundary of Nova Scotia, 1749
Addressing the legislature, Governor Shirley warned that French encroachments in Nova Scotia threatened the safety of the British colonies and the profitability of New England industry.

Massachusetts Archives

Petition to the King, 1751
Likely fearing support of French encroachments in Nova Scotia on the part of the Acadians, the Massachusetts legislature headed by Lieutenant Governor Spencer Phipps petitioned the King for their complete removal.

Massachusetts Archives
Colonel John Winslow (1703-1774)
Resident of Marshfield, Winslow served as commander to the provincial troops enlisted for the expedition to Nova Scotia. He was instrumental in the capture of Fort Beausejour and played a major role in the detention and physical removal of the Acadians in the Grand Pré region.

Purportedly to protect British interests in Nova Scotia, Governor Charles Lawrence had decided that the Acadians should be removed and dispersed throughout the American colonies. They were held under guard until hired ships arrived to transport them and what few items they could carry. Their homes and farms were burned to prevent those who escaped from supporting themselves if they remained.

Forced to wait until October, many were in danger of starving.

Upon arrival of the ships, the Acadians were herded on board, in many instances being separated from friends and family, despite assurances to the contrary. Initial transports were bound for Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina. Later ships delivered Acadians to Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and Georgia.

The Deportation

On September 5, 1755, John Winslow, under orders from Nova Scotia Governor Charles Lawrence, announced to the Acadians that their homes and property were forfeit to the Crown and that they were to be removed from the colony.
List of Acadians confined by Col. John Winslow, September 15, 1755
Following the deportation order, Acadian men were confined to prevent their escape. This detailed list enumerates each man’s family size and livestock holdings as well as listing his home village.
Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society

Proclamation read at the church at Grand Pré, September 5, 1755
Although required to announce to the Acadians plans for their deportation, John Winslow found it “very disagreeable to [his] natural make & temper.”

Memorandum for Capt. Murray, 1755
This is a transcript of a letter from Nova Scotia Governor Charles Lawrence to Captain Alexander Murray directing him to “take an eye for an eye ... in short a life for a life” in cases where Acadians molested the troops or caused “mischief” while awaiting deportation.

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Oct 8th – began to Embark the Inhabitants who went verry solently and Unwillingly. the women in Great Distress Carrying Their Children In their arms. Other[s], Carrying their Decrept parents in their Cartes and all their Goods in Great Confusion & appeard a scene of woe & Distress.
—Journal of John Winslow.
Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society

Eighteenth-Century Ships
Taken from a contemporary map of Bermuda, these images depict two different styles of ships that were used to transport the Acadians to the American colonies. Generally mercantile in nature, they are (top & bottom) a snow and a sloop.

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The Deportation
In November 1755, the first ships packed with Acadians arrived in Boston Harbor.

Although the vessels were bound elsewhere, poor conditions on board prompted investigation by a joint committee of the Massachusetts General Court. A number of passengers were allowed to disembark. They were soon followed by nearly 2000 others for whom Massachusetts would be their final destination.

Having arrived destitute, the Acadians’ appearance prompted action by the provincial legislature to provide for their support. As they were dispersed among various towns, the overseers of the poor and selectmen were directed to provide for them at the province’s expense. Further legislation was passed when it became apparent that the Acadians’ stay would be extended. Legislators attempted to secure assurances of reimbursement from the government of Nova Scotia, but to little avail.

Being both French and Roman Catholic, the Acadians were not especially welcome in their new setting. Many townspeople feared they would escape or seek retribution under cover of darkness. Others simply balked at the expense of their support. There were some, though, who took pity on them and assisted them during their sojourn.
The intent of this report was to reveal conditions on board the first series of transports laden with Acadians and bound for Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania.

Bostonian were wary of their Acadian prisoners. The author of this letter feared their escape in stolen ships under cover of darkness or worse, their destruction of the town or powder house, "heated with Passion and Popish Zeal."

As a member of Council and later Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts, Hutchinson acted as a friend to the exiled Acadians, making attempts to keep families together that were threatened with separation and writing petitions for several illiterate Acadians wishing to address the General Court.

The law required towns to provide Acadian exiles with houses and working tools and with general care in cases of necessity, to be reimbursed by the province. It also instructed the towns to provide them employment and authorized their induction.

Exiles in Massachusetts

1755-1766

Thomas Hutchinson (1711-1780), portrait by Walter Gilman Page, 1900

Courtesy of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Art Commission
As was the case with many Massachusetts towns, Marshfield began to receive Acadians in the fall of 1755.

As the influx of Acadians into the province grew, the legislature was forced to find places to accommodate the new visitors. Among those arriving in Marshfield was the Michel family, consisting of seven members. A later arrival, the Meuse family, although unassigned to the town by the legislature, was permitted to reside in the town in order to provide for its own support.

Petition of Joseph Michel, March 30, 1756

Unlike the Meuse family, which willingly entered into indenture, Joseph Michel's eldest sons were forcibly indentured by two of the selectmen of Marshfield. Unhappy with the circumstances, Michel sought intervention from the General Court, arguing that since the boys had found their own employment, the indenture should be considered null and void.

Massachusetts Archives

The Michel Family

Originally farmers from the area of Annapolis Royal, the Michels claimed to have been friends of the English in Nova Scotia, having provided wood and provisions to the nearby garrison. They arrived in Marshfield in the fall of 1755. Placed in a local schoolhouse, likely because of a lack of available housing, they were provided for by the selectmen of the town.

Only several months after their arrival in the town, the Michels received a visit from the selectmen, advising them that their two eldest sons had been indentured—Francis, 23, to local farmer Anthony Winslow and Paul, 15, to mariner Nathaniel Clift. Both the family and neighbor Caleb Tilden voiced their disapproval of the indenture, but to no avail. In response, the boys' father, Joseph Michel, petitioned the General Court.

With the exception of the two eldest sons, who were relocated to Plymouth in 1760, the majority of the family remained in Marshfield, Joseph Michel dying there in 1763. The rest of the family continued on and it is likely that they integrated themselves into town life.

General Court Committee Report, April 26, 1756

In response to the petition of Joseph Michel, a joint committee was appointed to investigate. Its advice, approved by the legislature, declared that forced indenture was contrary to legislative intent in cases where Acadians were willing to work and were agreeable to indenture.

Massachusetts Archives
A Case Study: Marshfield and the Acadians

The Meuse Family

Hailing from Cape Sable, the Meuse family arrived in Massachusetts sometime between the summer and fall of 1756. Residing in Plymouth, the Meuses provided for their own support, yet when this became difficult they petitioned the General Court, complaining that they were not being provided for by the town as were other Acadians.

The response of the General Court was to assign them to the town of Wareham, but while waiting for its answer the Meuses contracted with Nathaniel Ray Thomas of Marshfield in order to provide for their support. Permission was given for them to remain in Marshfield.

Complaining of mistreatment by Thomas, the family’s indenture was cancelled and the entire family was moved to Easton. Unable to support themselves, several of the sons left the town to seek employment while Charles Meuse, father of the family, complained again of a lack of support by town officials. Unhappy with Massachusetts life, the Meuses requested permission to go to France and, later, Quebec. It is assumed that they eventually left the province.
A Case Study: Marshfield and the Acadians

Petition of Charles Meuse and Paul Clement, January 12, 1758

Claiming that Nathaniel Ray Thomas had not fulfilled his end of the contract and complaining that “the women [of the family] are almost naked as also some of the men,” Charles Meuse and Paul Clement petitioned the General Court seeking their assistance in the matter.

Massachusetts Archives

Marshfield Town Meeting Records

As did other towns, Marshfield regularly voted on methods of support for the Acadians. These entries record payments made for word, firewood, and building the home of Joseph Michel in 1762.

Courtesy of the Marshfield Town Clerk's Office

Thomas Farm

This early nineteenth-century lithograph of the farm of Nathaniel Ray Thomas depicts how the farm may have appeared when Charles Meuse and family performed their indenture. The family of Joseph Michel was also cared for by Thomas for a brief time, although not under such terms.

Courtesy of the Marshfield Historical Commission
With the end of the war and the signing of the Treaty of Paris (1763), the Acadians in Massachusetts began to signify their desire to leave.

Petitions, some with over one thousand names, were submitted by Acadians to the General Court of Massachusetts beginning in 1763. Many sought to depart the province and settle in other regions, among them France, St. Domingue (present-day Haiti), and Quebec. Having been prevented from migrating to French colonies, Acadians left the province not in a large-scale movement but in small, isolated groups. Some few, it would appear, remained in Massachusetts.
Attempts at Relocation

Address of Governor Bernard to the House of Representatives, February 13, 1766

Forwarding several Acadian petitions to the House of Representatives, Governor Bernard advised that permission be granted and funds allowed for the transport of Acadians to Quebec, believing them to be industrious British subjects, temporarily disadvantaged by circumstances.

Massachusetts Archives

Message of the House of Representatives to Governor Bernard, June 26, 1766

After consideration of additional requests by the Acadians for support during their proposed attempts at resettlement in Quebec, the House of Representatives denied them further aid and, instead, advised the Acadians to settle in small groups.

Massachusetts Archives
Attempts at Relocation

Francis Bernard, Governor of Massachusetts (1760–1769), portrait by Giovanni Battista Troccoli, 1773

Following the signing of the Treaty of Paris (1763), Governor Bernard found himself having to deal with the matter of the Acadians wishing to leave the province and return home, settle in the French colonies, or settle in the newly-established British colony of Quebec. Courtesy of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Art Commission

Proclamation of Governor Francis Bernard, November 28, 1764

Faced with the requests of nearly one thousand Acadians and their attempts to relocate to the French colony of St. Domingue (Haiti), Governor Bernard found it necessary to issue this proclamation forbidding their transport, claiming that it would tend to “strengthen the dominion of a foreign prince.” Massachusetts Archives

Circular containing the Articles of Capitulation and the Proclamation of Governor James Murray, 1766

Parts of this document, published in French, detail several articles agreed upon by French governor Pierre de Rigaud upon the surrender of Quebec, guaranteeing former French subjects freedom to practice the Roman Catholic faith. Newly appointed British governor James Murray promised land to persons of French origin wishing to settle in Quebec, a very appealing proposal to displaced Acadians. Massachusetts Archives
Evangeline & Historic Memory

In 1847, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow published his poem Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie, a fictional tale of Evangeline and Gabriel, lovers separated during the Acadian deportation.

During a conversation at his home with Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Reverend Horace Connolly in 1840 or 1841, Longfellow heard the legend of two betrothed lovers separated during the Acadian expulsion. Intrigued by the tale, he went on to read Thomas Chandler Haliburton’s History of Nova Scotia, and in 1845 began work on the poem.

Although fictional and historically inaccurate in many respects, it has served as the only glimpse of the historic event for several generations of readers. The character Evangeline herself has become representative of the Acadian removal and subsequent dispersal. An Acadian presence remains strong today in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, and in Louisiana, where they have become known as Cajuns.
Many a weary year had passed since the burning of Grand-Pré,  
When on the falling tide the freighted vessels departed,  
Bearing a nation, with all its household gods, into exile,  
Exile without an end, and without an example in story.  
Far asunder, on separate coasts, the Acadians landed;  
Scattered they were, like flakes of snow, when the wind  
From the northeast  
Strikes aslant through fogs that darken the Banks  
of Newfoundland.

Evangeline: A Tale of Acadian Life  
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Evangeline Oak, St. Martinville, Louisiana:
Evangeline Oak and Louis Arceneaux, the “true”  
Evangeline and Gabriel (from a reinvention of  
Longfellow’s poem by Felix Voorhies), are supposed to  
have met under this tree after their long separation.  
Under either pair of names, the nearly foliated  
tussock continues to symbolize the Acadian triumph over  
adversity resulting in their long presence in Louisiana  
today as Cajuns.

Statue of Evangeline, St. Martinville, Louisiana

A gift to the town from the star of the 1929 film adaptation of Longfellow’s poem, this statue serves  
memorialize the Acadian deportation and the later  
settlement of many Acadians in Louisiana.

Courtesy of the Louisiana Office of Tourism

Statue of Evangeline, Grand Pré National Historic Site, Nova Scotia

Standing outside the church at Grand Pré, the entire site stands as a  
memorial to the Acadian deportation of 1755.

Courtesy of Nova Scotia Tourism, Culture, and Heritage

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