

Feast of Assumption has always been special

Day recognizes history, culture of Acadians

Jim Bradshaw

jbradshaw@theadvertiser.com

There was some debate before Aug. 15 was chosen as the National Day of Acadians at the first Acadian Convention in 1881.

There were several suggestions at that meeting in Memramcook, New Brunswick, but the debate eventually settled on the feast of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, French Canada's national holiday, which is celebrated on June 24, and the feast of Our Lady of Assumption, celebrated on Aug. 15.

Supporters of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste argued that a holiday common to all French Canadians would unite them around common objectives. They wanted to strengthen ties between Québec and the Acadian Maritime Provinces.

Supporters of the Assumption, however, wanted to recognize that the history and nationality of the Acadians was different than that of other French Canadians.

The Acadians also had long held a special devotion to Our Lady of the Assumption.

At the time that the forefathers of the Acadians were leaving France to establish themselves in Acadie, Louis XIII had just designated the Feast of the Assumption as the national feast of the French people, and the early Acadian settlers brought that tradition to the New World with them.

Many of them also regarded the ability of the Acadian people to retain their identity during the exile as a miracle that they attributed to their patroness.

The Rev. Marcel-Francois Richard, one of the Assumption's strongest supporters, said: "... It seems to me that a people who, for over a century of hardships and persecutions, was able to pre-

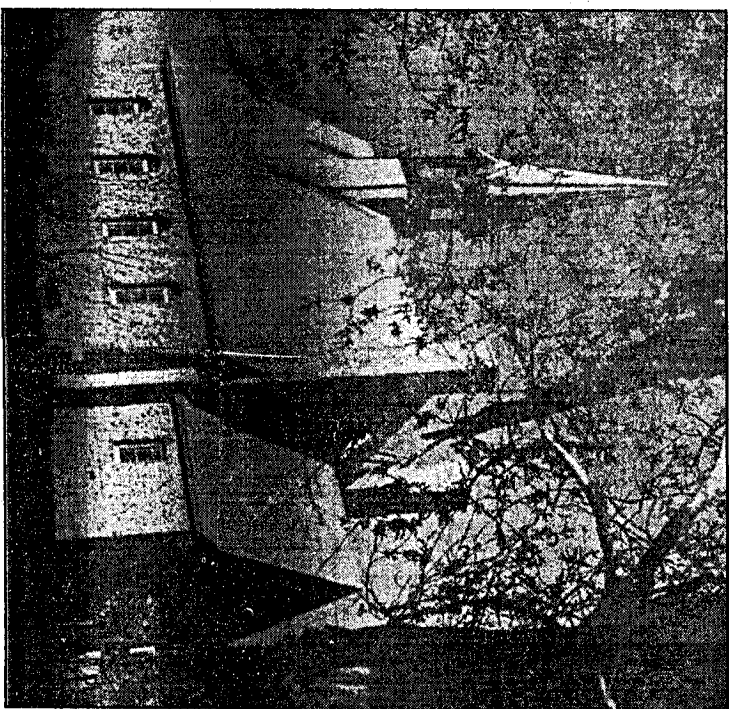


Photo by Kentville, Nova Scotia, Advertiser/Courtesy UL Archives
The St. Charles Memorial Chapel stands at Grand Pré, a place from which many Acadians were sent into exile. This photo was taken in May 1955 as part of a commemoration of the bicentennial of the expulsion.

serve its religion, language, customs and autonomy must have acquired enough importance to affirm its existence in a solemn way, and this could not be accomplished better than by being able to celebrate its own national holiday. ..."