

Citizenship in a Borderland Region: Primary Documents

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Fort Kent, Maine

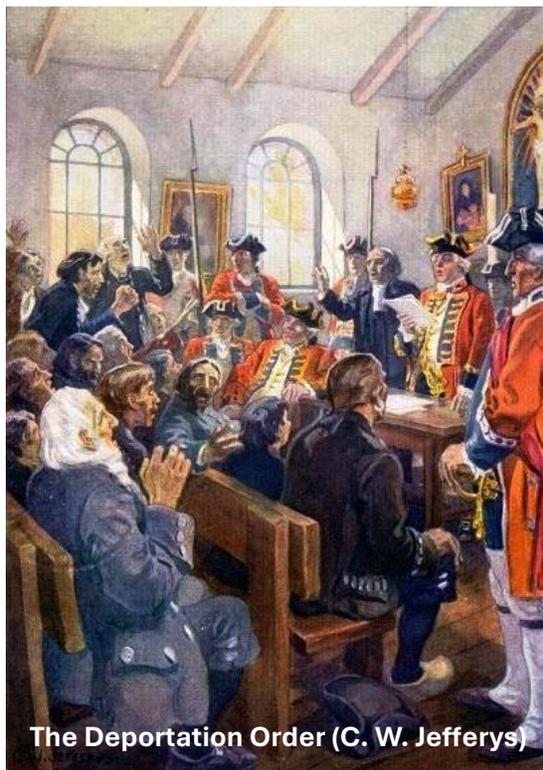
Human occupation of northern Maine dates from time immemorial. During the colonial period, the region was home to the Wəlastəkwewiyik (Maliseet) people. Their presence endures through the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians. Other bands reside just across the border, in Canada. Permanent settlement by people of European descent began in 1785. The meeting of empires and countries in the region has shaped its identity. Its character as a borderland (cultural, political, and economic) has had clear effects on the way of life, self-perceptions, definitions of citizenship—including rights and responsibilities—of residents. The documents that follow showcase the unique characteristics of northern Maine while highlighting the messiness of citizenship in the United States' peripheries.

Document 1: Mazerolle Grant Map (1790)

Predominantly, the permanent settlers who came to the St. John Valley in 1785 were Acadians. In the colonial era, Acadia corresponded to the present-day Canadian provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island and a section of northern Maine. The region was colonized by people of French descent, who eventually became known as Acadians. Mainland Nova Scotia fell to the British in 1710. In 1755, British colonial authorities began deporting the entirety of the French population, 17,000 people in all. The process took years and caused widespread hardship. The event later inspired Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's epic poem, *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* (1847).

Some Acadian refugees lived in Quebec and returned to southern New Brunswick in the late 1760s. British colonial authorities finally awarded them land grants on both banks of the Upper St. John River in the 1780s. At that time, British and American authorities disagreed over the exact location of the international boundary established by the Treaty of Paris of 1783.

The map in **Appendix A** shows the grants as surveyed in 1790 (the map dates from the 1820s). The grants stretched across the present towns of Madawaska and Grand Isle on what is today the American side of the river and from Edmundston eastward on the Canadian side. The long, narrow strips highlight the importance of the waterway. The recurrence of a small number of family names (Cere/Cyr, Daigle, Tibideau/Thibodeau) points to the tightly knit kinship network of early generations of settlers.



The Deportation Order (C. W. Jefferys)

Document 2: Dr. Jackson's Report (1839)

In the 1820s and 1830s, British and American mercantile interests began to seek control of the St. John Valley's seemingly endless timber. New Brunswick and Maine both claimed authority over the region. In the late 1830s, public officials from each side began arresting American citizens and British colonists, respectively, as proof of jurisdiction. Tensions escalated. Troops poured in and built fortifications. We know this episode as the bloodless Aroostook War. In the midst of this clash, a Maine newspaper published a report that highlighted the economic potential of Aroostook County. The Webster-Ashburton Treaty would definitively settle the boundary in 1842. Between St. Francis and Grand Falls, the St. John River would serve as the international border, thus cutting the original colony, seen in Appendix A, in half.

DR. JACKSON'S REPORT. Dr. Jackson's second and final Report of his Geological Survey of the public Lands in Maine has been published, but as yet, we have not had the pleasure of seeing a copy. The editor of the Boston Traveller has been more fortunate—that paper in speaking of this report says: – The Dr. speaks of the track [*sic*] of territory claimed by Great Britain (more than 10,000 square miles,) as one of the most valuable timber and agricultural districts in the State of Maine, and asserts his belief that the moment the bounday [*sic*] line is adjusted, agreeably to our claim, the tide of emigration will begin to flow rapidly towards the Banks of the Aroostook and to the Madawaska territory, as from its forests, its fertile soils, and minerals, that section is well fitted for a great agricultural and manufacturing district. There are already about 450 inhabitants settled upon the banks of the Aroostook, and they are chiefly citizens who have emigrated from other portions of Maine. Madawaska is populated by the descendants of the ancient Acadians, who were driven from their homes in Nova Scotia in 1775 [*sic*]. They are generally unacquainted with the English language, but speak a peculiar dialect of the French language. They know but little of the geography or politics of the country, and desire to live unmolested by the dissensions of the two countries who claim jurisdiction over them.—Their habits are simple and frugal, and they live chiefly by hunting, fishing, and trapping of beaver and otter. The new road now in progress from the great military road to the Aroostook, and from thence to Madawaska, will, when completed, afford ready access to these valuable regions.

– *Bangor Daily Whig and Courier*, January 31, 1839

Documents 3-4: Henri Dionne Letter (1853) and Legislative Report (1859)

When the south bank of the St. John River officially became American in 1842, residents gained political representation in Augusta. They sent Joseph Cyr, his brother Paul Cyr, their cousin Firmin Cyr, a close relative named François Thibodeau, and Joseph Nadeau, whose wife descended from the original settlers, to the legislature. When Nadeau was unable to travel to Augusta, in 1853, Father Henri Dionne, the Catholic pastor of Frenchville, wrote to Dr. John Hubbard, who had just lost reelection as governor of Maine. Writing in French, Dionne expressed regret at Hubbard's loss. He hoped that his correspondent might use his influence in the halls of power to provide material assistance to the St. John Valley. A translated excerpt of the letter appears below.

Later in the decade, tight electoral contests led to allegations of fraud and vote-buying schemes. Some people charged that alcohol was used to bribe voters. The nativity of residents—whether they were native-born Americans and therefore citizens—added a layer of complexity. Both before and after the formalization of the border, in 1842, families went back and forth across the river to visit relatives, find work, take part in religious celebrations, etc., all without leaving a paper trail. The second document reveals some of the conclusions of a legislative investigation into the disputed election of 1858.

If I may again request some kind assistance for us, it is that of helping us obtain an appropriation of monies for an academy. I believe that two to three thousand dollars would not be too much to build and support this institution. Secondly, a sum of 200 dollars to build a road from the church to the back settlements and this for the convenience of about fifty families that are without roads . . . All of these requests were in the hands of Mr. Jos. Nadeau, but as he is at home, and as the sickness of his child may keep him longer, it would be appropriate to have these requests entered in the House [in Augusta] by Mr. Tabor and Mr. Cary. It must be said to Mr. Tabor and Mr. Cary that Mr. Joseph Nadeau is a true, honest man, and that all his requests for compensation for the Fish River bridge [in Fort Kent] are just, honest, and reasonable. Thus a sum of at least three hundred dollars would simply be an act of justice. It is too much for Mr. Jos. Nadeau to pay this amount alone. The government is richer than he is.

– Henri Dionne, letter, February 4, 1853

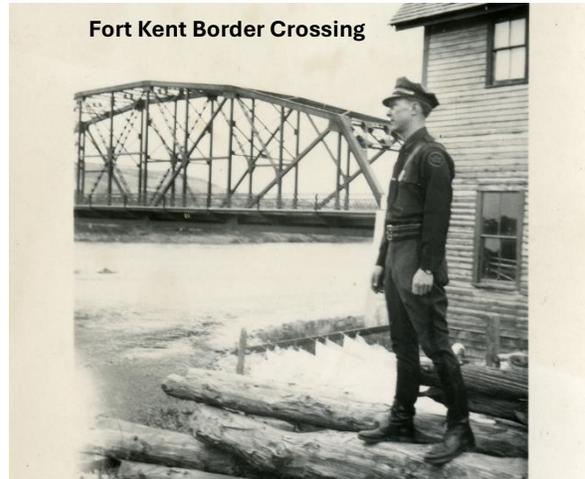
They speak no English, and do not read or write—with very few exceptions. They know not the name of the President, or of the Governor of the State. Mr. Pike repeatedly inquired—even of those who spoke English—and not one knew. In Madawaska and Van Buren, where there are 500 voters, there is but one copy of a weekly political newspaper taken. And yet these people are contented, virtuous, devout and happy. Starting from destitution and pauperism, they are already self-sustaining and prosperous. But they are the prey of designing politicians and entirely under the control of Federal office-holders. There are 800 voters of them, and they should be looked after by the government, and protected till they can understand and discharge the duties of which now they are so ignorant. They had no part in the frauds, except to be blind tools in the hands of others. Mr. Pike recommends an earnest and general system of education, under the direction of the State, so that these people can know and resist the tricks by which crafty men seek to deceive them.

– *Bangor Daily Whig and Courier*, January 26, 1859

Document 5: National Committee on Food Resources (1918)

The international boundary remained porous after the treaty of 1842. Customs officers monitored the traffic of valuable goods as best as they could; the movement of people went unchecked. The enactment of national prohibition (Maine had adopted a liquor law as early as 1851) and the construction of bridges across the St. John River led to increase scrutiny of border crossings in the early 1920s.

Limited oversight posed a problem to governments on both sides during the First World War, when they aimed to utilize as much of their resources as possible for the war effort. **Appendix B** shows official correspondence between Canada's National Committee on Food Resources and customs officer Theodore Paillard of Clair, New Brunswick, located across the St. John River from Fort Kent. The traffic of goods went on as it had for generations, with some habits or obligations perhaps taking precedence over new regulations issued in Washington and in Ottawa.



Document 6: English-Only Education Law (1919)

The United States went to war with Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1917-1918 and policymakers feared that immigrants from those empires might remain loyal to their homelands. However, suspicion extended to all other “foreign” groups. The federal government launched a campaign of censorship, surveillance, and propaganda known as One-Hundred-Percent Americanism. State governments were swept by the same concerns. In 1919, Maine’s legislature adopted a bill outlawing the teaching of subjects in any language but English. This occurred despite the protests of St. John Valley officials. There is evidence that the law was never enforced in religious schools in southern Maine; the law had a disproportionate effect on Valley communities, which relied heavily on public schools. It hampered the transmission of residents’ ancestral language and their perception of its value. The law was on the books for fifty years. The document is copied from the *Acts and Resolves as Passed by the Seventy-Ninth Legislature of the State of Maine (1919)*.

‘VII. Basic language in all public and private schools to be English; state superintendent to prescribe courses of study in private schools approved for attendance or tuition. To prescribe the studies to be taught in the public schools and in private schools approved for attendance and tuition purposes, reserving to superintending school committees, trustees or other officers in charge of such public or private schools the right to prescribe additional studies, and the course of study prescribed by the state superintendent of public schools shall be followed in all public schools and in all private schools approved by the state superintendent for attendance or tuition purposes; provided, however, that upon the approval by the state superintendent of any course arranged by the superintending school committee of any town, or by the trustees or other officers of any private school, said course shall be the authorized course for said town or private school; provided, further, that the basic language of instruction in the common school branches in all schools, public and private, shall be the English language. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit the teaching in elementary schools of any language as such.’

Approved April 1, 1919.

Document 7: Religion and Education in Fort Kent (1965)

The Acadians and French Canadians who settled in northern Maine were overwhelmingly Catholic. By the late nineteenth century, with population growth, each town in the Valley had its own Catholic parish. Then, religious orders arrived to take charge of education: the Little Franciscans of Mary in Eagle Lake and Fort Kent, the Holy Rosary Sisters in Frenchville, the Daughters of Wisdom in St. Agatha, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and Marist Brothers in Van Buren, etc. The region had convent schools; it also had ostensibly public schools where nuns were hired to teach. The piece below on local education reveals the fine, local line of separation between church and state.

The school building [of St. Louis School in Fort Kent] and the land upon which it rests belong to the St. Louis Roman Catholic parish which falls under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Portland. The bishop leases the buildings to the School Administrative District #27, to which Fort Kent belongs, each year for a certain sum, presently (1965) \$8,000.00. According to the contract the town has use of the buildings only during school hours of the school year. Indeed, in the lease contract the bishop reserves to himself the use of the building from 8:20 A.M. to 8:55 A.M. for purposes of religious instruction . . . In the same town of Fort Kent, the Market Street School, a public elementary school, presents a somewhat different, yet equally peculiar situation. The land and building are publicly owned, but each year, after approval has been given by a majority of the electorate in the annual town meeting, the Superintending School Committee has leased the property to the Roman Catholic Bishop of Portland for the sum of \$1.00 for the purpose of religious instruction from 8:20 A.M. to 9:00 A.M. each day of the school year . . . Attendance at the daily religious instruction classes at both schools is optional.

– Francis Brassard, “The Origin of Certain Public Schools in the St. John Valley of Aroostook County, Maine,” 1967

Document 8: Franco-American Day (2002-2017)

Over the course of a century, the State of Maine gradually turned from efforts to assimilate people of French descent to acceptance and even celebration of ethnic diversity. A first official Acadian Day was declared in 1978, thus recognizing the cultural reawakening then occurring in northern Maine. Since that time, the legislature has periodically recognized the contributions of Acadians and French Canadians and the legitimacy of their unique culture across the state.

JOINT RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING FRANCO-AMERICAN DAY

WHEREAS, the State of Maine is named after the Province of Maine in France, and the towns of Paris and Calais owe their names to the capital city of France and the French port city of Calais, respectively; and

WHEREAS, more than 1/3 of the population of Maine is of French and Canadian descent and Franco-Americans in Maine have contributed much to the beauty and quality of this State; and

WHEREAS, French is the primary language of thousands of Maine citizens and there has been a resurgence in the use of the French language and a heightened appreciation of the Franco-American heritage throughout the State; and

WHEREAS, clubs and organizations to promote French culture and language have sprung up throughout the State, including the Francophone Caucus at the Capitol; and

WHEREAS, fluent French-English bilingual people are a cultural and economic resource to the State; and
WHEREAS, cultural tourism can be greatly enhanced by the genuine Franco-American centers throughout the State, and the large Franco-American presence in Maine can further strengthen our relationships with Canada, France and the rest of the francophone world; and

WHEREAS, the first Franco-American Day was celebrated on Wednesday, March 6, 2002 at the State Capitol; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED: That We, the Members of the One Hundred and Twenty-eighth Legislature now assembled in the First Regular Session, on behalf of the people we represent, proclaim that Wednesday, April 19, 2017 is Franco-American Day, to be celebrated at the State Capitol; and be it further

RESOLVED: That Franco-American Day be celebrated to commemorate the rich history of the French people in the State of Maine and the United States of America.

Please contact the Acadian Archives/Archives acadiennes at the University of Maine at Fort Kent for an accompanying bibliography and a set of discussion questions or any further information. Contact: Patrick Lacroix, director, (207) 834-7535 or <acadian@maine.edu>.

APPENDIX B



CANADA

National Committee on Food Resources

New Post Office Building,
Fredericton, N. B., May 7th, 1918.

Dear Sir:-

The State of Maine Representative of the United States Food Administration informs me that a great deal of flour has been or is being shipped over from this province to customers in that state, and that this matter is giving him considerable trouble. He tells me that in some cases our dealers have actually solicited orders.

You understand, I am sure, that our laws prohibit any exportation of either flour or feed into the United States. The Food Controller of Canada has asked me to call your attention to this matter. I shall appreciate it if you will give it your earnest attention.

Our new orders in Canada make it an offense for anyone to buy either flour or sugar in more than limited quantities, and certainly our export to the United States must cease at once. If you find anybody guilty of this practice kindly let us know and we will report to the Food Controller and have the license cancelled.

Sincerely yours,

Mr. Theo. Paillard,
Sub-Collector of Customs,
Clair, N. B.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "W. Keirstead".

Secretary, Provincial Committee
on Food Resources.