

Guest column

The grist of Acadian history

by Guy Dubay
Madawaska

The foundations of our modern history of the St. John Valley were set between 1910 and 1929 when the two-party system in Maine was reborn, when the hydro-power complexes of the area took nearly their present form, and the paper industry, as we know it, came into being.

When the Rev. Thomas Albert published his *Histoire de Madawaska*, each of these developments was too current to be "history". Accordingly, the succeeding generations which have relied on Albert's work in casting its definition of *Le Madawaska* or the St. John Valley have relied on a definition that is increasingly out of date.

Albert does not use the words "Republican" and "Democrat" in his history of the people of the St. John Valley, yet the southern shore residents of "Madawaska" had acted as "Republicans" and "Democrats" for nearly three generations by the time his work was published.

The Acadians in Maine had in fact become American. Albert recognized this in his review of the land settlement claims that took place where in the last quarter of the 19th century, yet nowhere do we get reference to political party postures on the issue. Yet, the issue contributed to the political stance taken by the Acadians which would set them off politically from party associations in the rest of the county.

The Acadians of the St. John Valley cannot be said to possess their own history if their actions and reactions to the political realities in which they lived are not studied, related and made to be understood.

The problem with history and historians is that most historians spend their time reading and quoting each other, but a people like the Acadians of the St. John Valley go on to plow new ground.

This is what they did when, upon the arrival of American rail lines, they went on to organize banks, insurance companies, power companies, telephone companies, farm cooperatives, newspapers, and to develop relationships between themselves and the newly emerging industries. The Acadians, in adopting the services of newly established governmental agencies like the Federal Land Bank which encouraged farmers to develop farm credit agencies like the Northern Production Credit Association (NPCA), structured their lives in an American mold.

As early as 1913 we read of local businessmen wintering in

Miami, Fl. The community leaders of this century lived in a world far different from the 19th century illustration of Acadians which come to us from the hallowed words of the New England poet who gave us *Evangeline*.

Building on the 19th century works of Rameau de St. Pere and Henri Casgrain, ethnic leaders of the late 19th century gave us the definition of Acadian which Rev. Thomas Albert settled on in his *Histoire de Madawaska* - but the residents were already moving beyond those definitions as they cast their lives around the new social, political, and economic structures that we have inherited from that period, from 1910 to 1929, upon which our 20th century institutions have been cast.

In the Violette family alone, we now have six generations of American political heritage. First was Belonie Violette who served as County Commissioner in 1856 and State Legislator in 1867; Frederic Violette, his son, who

represented Van Buren in August in 1897; Neil Violette, his grandson, who after serving a term in the legislature in 1913, went on to become Maine's Forest Commissioner.

Then, in 1939, we have Vital Violette who preceded his son Elmer Violette in State politics and his grandson, Paul Violette, now in state government. However, this American-Acadian history cannot be found in the basic reference work which is still the authoritative source around which history courses of the St. John Valley are structured, namely Thomas Albert's 70-year-old *Histoire de Madawaska*.

The people of the St. John Valley have plowed new ground. Perhaps our historians are faced with the old aphorism: "*Tu pouras pas harasser tous ce que j'ai labouré.*"

The historians and teachers whose responsibility it is to develop workable models upon which students can test their wings in their effort at developing their cultural

identity will have to follow the furrow already plowed by the experience of the people of this valley in the 20th century.

The historians will need to go beyond quoting just each other and go on to create new and original work based on a massive record of documentation that is just waiting to be tapped, studied and analyzed.

Unless this work is done, no matter how many Acadian flags we wave, no matter how many parades we conduct in costume, our children will not discover for themselves a workable definition of Acadians that will meet their needs.

In explaining his rationale for working through the Allagash

Wilderness Waterway Legislation, Hon. Elmer Violette once said to me, "What is good for Maine is good for the people of the St. John Valley. When you go to Augusta and work to help Maine, you can't help but help the people of the Valley."

Our children, I believe, have a right to such role models whose record now provides us the grist of our own history.

PIERRE LIZOTTE

(1769-1854)

The Legislator Who Never Legislated

ON MARCH 15, 1831, Governor Samuel Smith, approved an unusual act incorporating a township of 4,272 square miles. History now recognizes the State's ulterior motive in incorporating Madawaska as a town three and a half times larger in area than the State of Rhode Island. The motive, of course, was a legislative reaction to the decision of the King of the Netherlands in arbitrating the Northeastern Boundary Controversy on Jan. 10, 1831. The King had suggested a solution which neither party to the dispute could buy. The fact that the Madawaska settlement along the St. John River contained enough people to qualify it a town, prompted the State to use this status to bolster its claims in the disputed area.

ON SEPT. 12, 1831, Madawaska citizens met in Frenchville (at Raphael Martin's house) to elect a representative to the State Legislature. Elected was one Peter (or Pierre) Lizotte, who neither sought to serve nor did he ever qualify.

Born at Riviere Ouelle, in the Province of Quebec on Dec. 23, 1769, he was the son of Jean Baptiste Lizotte and Marie Louise Plourde. According to

Madawaska historian, Thomas Albert, Pierre Lizotte was said to have been the first White resident of the future town of Madawaska. In 1783, as a lad of fourteen, he apparently lost his way in the forests of Kamouraska, P.Q., where he had been hunting with his step-brother Pierre Duperre. Wandering into the Malecite reserve of Madouesca, the two young men wintered with the Indians there. Duperre and Lizotte then used their knowledge of the area to set up a trading post on the route, (i.e. the St. John) between the British Provinces of Quebec and Nova Scotia.

WITH ACADIAN settler coming into the area in 1785, Pierre Lizotte served as a key to engrandisement of the new colony. His Quebec link served to bring in the ensuing years, settlers from that Province to bolster the rolls of the 12 Acadian families who pioneered this area of Maine.

On Oct. 14, 1794, with Pierre Duperre, his step-brother and Louis Mercure, an early local magistrate, as witnesses, Pierre Lizotte married into the Acadian family of Marguerite Cyr (1771-1856). Rev. Francois Ciquart, a Sulpician Priest evicted from France because of the Revolution there, performed, as first missionary at St. Basile, N.B., the nuptial rites. Records reveal to us that Lizotte and wife

had seven daughters and sons, born between 1794 and 1810.

AT THE TIME of his election to the Legislature in 1831, Pierre Lizotte had come to be recognized as an elder or patriarch of sorts among this isolated Madawaska people. Many of the older pioneer settlers of 1785 had long died and Lizotte at age of sixty-two loomed as a sort of father figure among his people.

Lizotte's disqualification as a legislator came by virtue of the fact that in 1832 he wrote Governor Smith, at the opening of the Legislature, a letter declaring that he, Lizotte, was in fact a British subject and intended to remain so. Lizotte stated that he protested his election to the Maine Legislature and declared he had no intention of taking an oath of allegiance to the United States. This action perhaps reminiscent of the Acadian refusal in 1713 and 1755 to swear allegiance to his Britannic Majesty, evidences the fact that a separate republic of their own was their hope. That nascent nation, however, was engulfed by surrounding superpowers, as is the case with isolated communities throughout history. The "Republic of Madawaska" as Lizotte might have had it, became part of New Brunswick and Maine.

MADAWASKA THEN had to wait until after the Webster-Ashburton Treaty to qualify its first resident Legislator to the State of Maine. In 1846 Joseph Cyr was elected to represent the northern tier of Aroostook County, and Lizotte who lived to the Patriarchial age of 85 numbers among his descendants citizens of both countries which the large Madawaska Township blended into.

In 1869, the State Legislature, now recognizing its ulterior motives in incorporating Madawaska Township in 1831, ignored its earlier action, and incorporated Madawaska into its present township of 38,074 acres.

THE OLD Madawaska which Lizotte might have represented, became that year the several townships of Fort Kent, Dickeyville (Frenchville), and Grand Isle, as well as in 1870 the Plantations of Van Buren, Hamlin, Cyr, Eagle Lake, St. Francis, New Canada and Wallagrass.

by Guy F. Dubay

Helping to understand Acadian evolution

To the Editor,

The Saint John Valley in 1841 was distinguished by two cultural centers, an American center and an Acadian center. That's what the *Mercure Papers* published by Professor Roger Paradis reveal. The Americans of Maine, in violation of the British-American Convention of 1827, organized that year (in 1841) Hancock Plantation. Old deeds covering Fort Kent properties in the years 1845 to 1859 use the name Hancock Plantation.

The problem with American history at this point is that it moved in two directions at once - the federal government was moving towards peace with the British, while the state government was moving towards states' rights. In 1841 you might describe that in terms of party politics, the Whigs favored a strong centralized government with centralized banking, and the Democrats favored states' rights.

The British-American Convention of 1827 had the provi-

sion that neither party, neither American nor British, would act unilaterally in the disputed territory, while the arbitration process was going on and the boundary question was unsettled.

The organization of Hancock Plantation was a unilateral action on the part of Maine, hence, it was in violation of the convention of 1827.

Federally, the Whigs had taken over the government administration, but President William Henry Harrison died a month after his inauguration. He was in office long enough to appoint Daniel Webster, a Whig, as Secretary of State.

When the Democrat John Tyler succeeded Harrison, the cabinet, all but Webster, resigned. Webster held on through the boundary negotiations and then resigned.

With the settlement on the international boundary in 1842, the state found itself in the need of establishing civil government here.

The American-organized Hancock Plantation was kept.

Then in August 1843, Van Buren Plantation was organized at the easterly end of the St. John Valley and Madawaska Plantation was set up between the two a year later.

These three plantations remained in place until the near-riotous election of 1858 which caused the State of Maine to declare election fraud here and forced the reorganization of the St. John Valley's civil government into single township plantations.

This is one of the beauties of Professor Paradis' new book. It will help us begin to understand how the Acadians of Maine evolved into their Americanism.

To do that we need to recover the distinct history of Hancock Plantation. At last, here is documentation casting light on the matter - documentation that lies beyond the ken of our own folklore and provides us real history.

Guy Dubay
Madawaska

Beyond the cross and blockhouse

To the Editor,

What I discovered for myself, if not for others, by my passing at the University of Maine at Fort Kent is a history that doesn't want to be told. I call it the history beyond the Acadian Cross and the lock House. Another name I have for it is the "Lost Century of the St. John Valley" - the century from the Aroostook War to the second world war.

I don't mean by that the century of the Civil War, the Reconstruction, the Industrial Revolution or even Pearl Harbor. I mean the century of what happened right here. We talk about our history as if it's the history of "over there". "Over there" they voted for Abraham Lincoln, but did we? The truth of the matter is that Madawaska cast 5 votes for Lincoln and 29 votes for McClellan.

The only history our kids learn is the history of the "great emancipator." There is no one to tell them that our great-grandparents voted for McClellan.

Now the formal historians are going to pooh-pooh that fact. Five votes for Lincoln, 29 votes for McClellan - it's a drop in the bucket, not worth talking about.

Well, tell me, how long has the Saint John Valley voted Democratic? Aren't our political roots relevant?

Do you know Madawaska once voted for a Whig governor of Maine but then chose to vote for the first Republican Presidential candidate, John C. Fremont? But who's there to tell our kids about that?

Is it relevant? I think it is, because it would help to fill the gap between Captain Stover Rines at the Blockhouse and the latest 437 votes cast for McKernan in Fort Kent. It's the first step in filling the gap between the Acadian Cross and the community bulletin board displaying our Desert Storm youth. But we've got to get beyond the Acadian Cross and the Blockhouse to the history that doesn't want to be told, the history of both local successes and failures.

The history of saints is not relevant without the history of the sinners. There would be no cross were it not for the sinners. Is it too irrelevant to tell our children that Madawaska voted for losers? Well, Madawaska also voted for winners like Harding and Coolidge.

I share, this week, one incident from our lost century - a letter from the era when St. John Valley's democratic party roots were being laid. N. Herrin, a Democrat and an Aroostook County sheriff sent the following letter to Louis Cormier, Registrar of Deeds at Grand Isle. I believe the letter casts light on our political roots in this valley:

Houlton, 6 Sept. 1857
Dr. Sir

Your letter is received and contents noted. I am somewhat surprised to hear that the Democrats

or any part of them should vote for McCluskey or any one of the Republican party. Does your people understand that McCluskey is Republican and are they willing to vote and elect a man to the Senate pledged to that party? If so, then I am surprised. You must go to work and have your people understand the matter rightly. I cannot believe that the Democrats of Madawaska are willing to elect Republicans and lose this county at this election.

If you and others only take hold and spend a few days, then you can hold all Democrats from the Republican camp. I hope you will be able to give a good account of Madawaska at this election and not be disgraced by electing any Republican candidates. The votes were sent to you some days since by a man who was going direct to your house.

Guy Dubay
Madawaska

Guest column

'Des innocents'

by Guy Dubay

In 1924, voters of the St. John Valley voted 10 to one against Governor Ralph O. Brewster. The Republican candidate won anyway. That much you were told in an earlier column.

In 1932, Brewster's name showed up on the ballot again, this time in the race for Congress. Nationally it was going to be a Democratic year, but the Republicans carried Maine.

Shortly before the June primary, the *Bangor Daily News* ran a piece under the headline "Land of Innocence". That land of course was the St. John Valley. Sensing that the Valley was not going to go along with the state, the paper proclaimed *us des innocents*.

Van Buren Attorney, L.V. Thibodeau attempted to write a response to the article he believed was aimed at discrediting the Valley voter. BDN refused to publish the letter. Thibodeau turned to the *Fort Fairfield Review* to make the point.

The Valley attorney, a life-long Republican, explained his adherence to that party on the basis of its stand on tariff protection. Tariffs "protected" the potato farmer and pulpwood manufacturer from Canadian imports in the 1920s. Thibodeau had attempted to forewarn the *News* about the Valley's switch to the Democratic camp should Brewster be the Congressional candidate. In Maine, the Republicans were entrenched in office, holding the governorship more than 50 years except for a couple of brief intervals during the single terms of the two Plaisteds. US Senate and Congressional seats were virtual Republican property.

The St. John Valley had sent Democrats to the Legislature through much of the 19th century. In 1895, Democrats William Dickey of Fort Kent and Peter Charles Keegan of Van Buren literally could count on the fingers of one hand all the Democrats in the House.

Had the Democrats chosen to caucus, some cynic might have offered the party the key to the men's room to do it in.

From the point of view of sheer practicality, after the turn of the century, even the Valley turned to Republicans in their choice for the legislative seats. Remie A. Daigle of Madawaska and Joseph W. Hammond of Van Buren were such candidates elected to the State House. In 1922, when women were allowed to vote, Fort Kent voters broke the gender gap in Maine and elected the Republican Dora Bradbury Pinkham to the house. She later was elected by the county to two terms in the State Senate.

In 1932, Thibodeau simply tried to forewarn his Republican friends of the changing tide. Rather than listen, the party leaders explained the Valley vote by discrediting it. "All the French want is their rum" commented Republican adherents in that prohibition era. Convictions of prohibition violations, however, had not been exclusive to the Valley. The bootlegging network, when uncovered in Maine court records, extended deep into the heart of Republican Maine, including in its sway the conviction of a county sheriff, a deputy sheriff, a relative of the attorney-general and a prominent Aroostook attorney. So there was no real foundation to the charge.

After the election, *Le Madawaska* reprinted L.V. Thibodeau's defense of the Valley voter under the headline which ran: "*Les électeurs Franco-Américains de l'Aroostook sont ils aussi simples et ignorent que pretend le 'Bangor News'?*"

After explaining that the Valley had its due proportion of professionals in medicine, law, finance, that it had its own banks, insurance agencies, educators, agri-businessmen and world war veterans, Thibodeau went on to argue along constitutional terms and the sanctity of the ballot box.

The close Congressional race between R.O. Brewster and Democratic congressman, John G. Utterback, led to a recount which, in the Valley, included yet further insult to the local electorate.

Le Madawaska explains the situation under the headline: "*L'affaire Brewster et les Francos de l'Aroostook*". The paper called the inquiry "Nothing less than a farce." Again, Republican attorney L.V. Thibodeau protested vigorously the party's back-handling of the matter. The paper dubbed the affair's tactics as "affronting the French Language electorate of the St. John Valley."

The article stated: "...if we judge by the impertinent questions, menacing insinuations and ignorant accusations and more, we have to admit this kind of treatment is not always accepted with grace.

"It seems that our American friends have an innate passion to ridicule and discredit our Nationals (the French) before the entire State: to blame them at every opportunity, to cause a people embarrassment in order to set them as an example for others which as before we have seen many times.

"In describing the investigation procedures in Van Buren, Thibodeau stated: 'The ordinary people were dealt with as if they were simple-minded and ignorant...and objective observer would have concluded that it was a farce more or less managed according to the form of law.' That is, the form of law was given due regard, but the substance suffered a need for improvement."

Perchance our political roots in the Valley lie deep, alas if only they were studied and we, the Acadians, were given our own history.

At 1904 convention

Valley Frenchmen told to 'go along. . . or go to hell!'

by Guy Dubay

It has been common in the St. John Valley for Democrats to run for legislative seats unopposed. It appears that the Republican party did itself in at a county convention in Houlton in 1904, when Valley Frenchmen were told to "go along with the Houlton aristocrats or to go to hell."

Three loud anti-French cries bellowed out of the Houlton convention that year (*Le Journal du Madawaska*, Sept. 7, 1904). The insulted delegates responded in kind.

To the statement, "It is not permitted that a French name should figure on our county ticket," the Valley delegates responded, "We shall have names on the ballots who shall appear victorious."

To the statement, "If the French do not want to join us, they can go to hell," the French responded, "We have chosen a different road. We shall send to the Legislature independent and free men who will make friends for us among county officers."

To the statement, "We want aristocratic quality (of Houlton), not French quantity," the Valley delegation responded, "We have quantity all right, and we shall use it. You want your kind of quality — keep it — it is a useless kind of quality, and we don't want it."

These sound like harsh terms in light of today's politics, and it is hard for us to believe what we read in the turn of the century print. This state of affairs, however, produced the most unusual election of 1904, where Valley candidates not only gained their party nominations, but they received the endorsements of the caucuses of both political parties.

Hon. Patrick Therriault (1875-1921), then a dry goods dealer in Grand Isle and part time superintendent of schools for Grand Isle, Madawaska, St. Agatha and Frenchville, was chosen by a Democratic caucus meeting in Peter Charles Keegan's office in Van Buren to be the party's legislative candidate.

Le Journal du Madawaska, which had begun its publication in December 1902, editorialized the attitude of the day. We must be united, the paper advocated. We are neither Republican nor Democrat, the paper said of itself, but we favor the best interest of the Valley.

Given the mood of the time, we read, "In the Van Buren, Grand Isle, etc. electoral district, the voting citizens have all given each other a hand and have concentrated their preferences on one and same candidate. First the Democratic party at its local caucus chose a legislative candidate.

Not only was Therriault to be the Democratic candidate, but his name by the above action also appeared on the Republican side of the ledger.

They say in the St. John Valley that for a Democrat the biggest test is the primary, not the election. But with nominations of both parties in a single hat, why should Therriault be concerned with final outcomes?

The Valley had its answer to the "Houlton clique." Quantity would see Therriault march into the Legislature unimpeded, and French names would be listed side by side with anglo aristocratic "quality."

True, Van Buren attorney, Levite V. Thibodeau (1868-1938),

who had sought to have his French name enscribed on the county ballots, lost his party's nomination for county commissioner to Charles Dunn, who was favored by the Houlton clique, but the call for unification of the Valley led to another dual nomination.

Perhaps in a kind of pre-arrangement of the Therriault case, the reverse occurred in the Madawaska-Frenchville electoral district. There the Republicans nominated Theodule Albert (1876-1965), who with Lizzie Daigle, ran the "Grand Ecole" (later called "L'ecole a Manuel") in St. David.

A few short days later, the Democrats responded in kind, nominating Albert as their Candidate.

Only in Fort Kent did the parties go their traditional way. There the Republicans nominated incumbent John Sweeney, who was the son-in-law of Joseph Nadeau (1810-1885), who in 1853 had been Fort Kent's first resident legislator. Given the temper of the time, the Democrats responded by nominating Joseph Alphonse Laliberte, a young lawyer who also happened to be Sweeney's brother-in-law.

The anti-French cries of the Houlton Republican convention reverberated as far north as Fort Kent. Sweeney lost to Laliberte by 57 votes.

Therriault and Albert were shoos, as the paper reported, "in each of our three electoral districts of the American Madawaska, a Frenchman was elected by overwhelming majorities over the enemical faction. The French are all victorious, and their victory is as much a shock to us as it is to the

opposition. Honor to be French! Sentiments of gratitude from our general friends of the French. To all citizens of the St. John Valley: perseverance and courage."

After a second term in the Legislature, Therriault evidenced the fact that a Frenchman could gain the respect of county wide citizenry and in 1908 became the first Acadian descendant to be elected to the Maine Senate.

Albert, on the other hand, after several terms in the House, became Northern Aroostook's registrar of deeds.

Laliberte, who also became owner of large sawmills in the Fish River valley, became the first judge of the north Aroostook municipal court, when it was formed in 1911. This court held sessions in the three large communities of the St. John Valley.

Three plantations

To the Editor,

Did our great-great-grand parents have a certain logic in mind when they organized the St. John Valley into three large plantations?

I'm referring to the years 1840 to 1859: When Van Buren Plantation covered the territory now Hamlin, Cyr, Van Buren, and half of Grand Isle; yes, when Madawaska plantation covered half of Grand Isle, all of Madawaska, Frenchville and Ste-Agathe; and when Fort Kent, Wallagrass and New Canada were in Hancock Plantation.

In 1850, what later became Lille, was in Van Buren Plantation and what became the village of Grand Isle was in Madawaska Plantation.

The change came in 1859 when the state imposed on the Valley "single township plantations."

That's when the two separate parts of Grand Isle - (The part in Van Buren and the part in

Madawaska were merged because they were both in Township 18 Range 3).

The result is what selectman, James Michaud, has called a town that's half the size of a town.

Part of the problem in the Valley is that we have never taught the people their own civic history.

We have taught them their family history, their church history and their legends and folklore, but not their civic history.

So, people are not aware of how their towns came to be.

Grand Isle came into being as a unit because Republicans were unhappy with the Democrats of the St. John Valley.

William Dickey (D) of Fort Kent tried to unseat John McCloskey (R) of Houlton in Aroostook's only State Senate seat.

His vote total was larger than McCloskey's, but the Republicans charged election fraud.

In 1858, the state sent an

investigator (a Republican, of course), who found that the problem was with the territory being divided into oversized plantations.

So, the legislature of 1859 (a Republican legislature, at that) determined that no plantation would be larger than a single Township (a rule it would violate in 1869).

Van Buren had covered Township G Range 1, Townships L & M Range 2 and half of Township 18 Range 3.

Madawaska had half of Township 18 Range 3 and all of Townships 18 Range 4 and 5.

In 1859, Paul Cyr of Lille went to Augusta as a representative of Van Buren Plantation.

When he came back, his home had moved into Grand Isle Plantation without budging an inch.

In the creation of Grand Isle from Township 18, Range 3, the Republicans hoped to get a

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Plantations

(Continued from page 6)

better handle on those crazy Frenchmen who voted Democrat - (they had voted for Dickey over McCloskey).

They minimized Van Buren and Madawaska by creating a wedge between them and creating Grand Isle Plantation (1859).

Or, if that isn't amenable, why can't the parts of Grand Isle revert to their former owners like an old municipal school lot which reverted to prior owners when municipal use ended?

Those two parts, while forced together, continued to socially function as two separate parts.

They eventually became two separate parishes - but one town.

If Fort Kent can be two townships wide (T. 18 R. 6 and T. 18

R. 7), why can't Madawaska add Township 18 Range 3 to Township Range 4?

If you would revive the old plantations of 1840-1859, you would have municipalities which look pretty much like our present SADs.

In the old solution, le village de Grand Isle would be in Madawaska; le village de Lille would be in Van Buren.

Guy Dubay
Madawaska

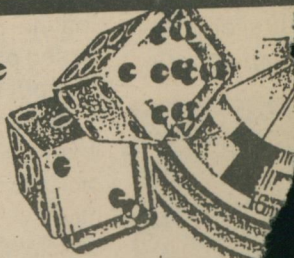
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