

Flying the Flag at Port-la-Joye

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Canadians observe the constant migration of refugees around the world with a certain measure of detachment. It is something that happens elsewhere, to other people, from which we have been mercifully spared. We live here in peace, free from terrorism, unaware of its real and lasting effects. We are comfortable, our families safe, and our only threat is sickness.

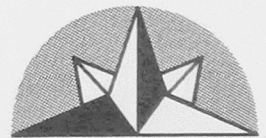
Imagine our reaction then if an army suddenly invaded us this month, because of a war in a faraway continent among people of whom we know little, speaking a language not our own. The strange soldiers order us from our homes at gunpoint, permitting us nothing of our possessions but what we can carry, and after a forced march of many miles gather us in fields near the administrative centre of the Island. All the while we protest that we have done them no harm, and indeed do not have the means to harm them. We have no army, have never been warlike, and have caused trouble to no one.

Finally assembled in a field without the least shelter from the elements, we are told that we will be transported from the Island into exile – mothers and children in one boat, fathers and single men in another. Our destination is a matter of indifference to those in charge of our expulsion, and so is our fate. As the days pass we live in terror, hoping for a change

of heart, even without knowing how we would survive the coming winter if the invaders did relent. Some of us may escape and perhaps join up with the invisible Mi'kmaq people who will accommodate us, but most of us will be shipped out, many to our deaths. Some of our families will never be reunited.

This scenario is so far-fetched it is embarrassing even to write it, yet it describes what happened to the first French settlers on PEI, 40 long years after they became established here. Upwards of 4,000 people – some say maybe 6,000 – were gathered in the fields next to the French administrative quarters at Port-la-Joye in late October, 1758 and deported from the colony they had carefully and patiently built from scratch. In due course the British who replaced them would establish a fort on the site, named after the British General responsible for the expulsion.

The site of Port-la-Joye and Fort Amherst, on a picturesque point of land across the harbour from Charlottetown, is now recognized as a National Historic Site. The breastworks for the Fort are clearly visible, but it requires imagination to recognize anything of Port-la-Joye. A nearby Interpretation Centre provides a summary of the history of the times and an account of the expulsion, but it is a lame account, without a sense of the



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