

## DISCOVERING LOCAL HISTORY THROUGH CHURCH RECORDS OF SAINT-PIERRE-DU-NORD (1724-1758)

Earle Lockerby

**S**aint-Pierre-du-Nord (centered at Havre Saint-Pierre) is one of five parishes which existed on Île Saint-Jean during the French regime, the others being Port-LaJoye (Saint-Jean-l'Évangéliste), Malpec (La Sainte-Famille), Saint-Louis-du-Nord-Est and Pointe-Prime (Saint-Paul). Only the parish registers of Saint-Pierre-du-Nord and Port-LaJoye have survived. The parish register of Saint-Pierre-du-Nord travelled to France with a shipload of deportees, aboard a British transport in the autumn of 1758, following the capture of Louisbourg by the British that year.

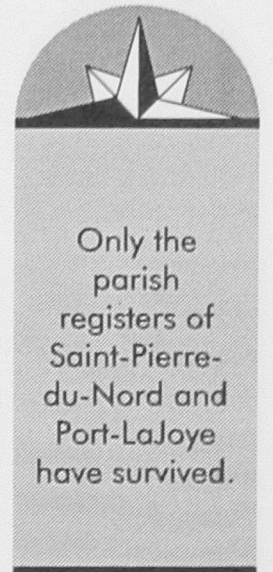
Island historians have long been aware of the parish register for Port-La Joye, but such appears not to have been the case for that of Saint-Pierre-du-Nord, the original of which resides today in an archives at St-Malo, France.<sup>1</sup> Books, or chapters of books, dealing with Island Acadian history have referred to the register of Port-LaJoye without mentioning that of Saint-Pierre-du-Nord. A relatively recent example of this is the book *The Catholic Church in Prince Edward Island 1720 - 1979* which was published in 1979.

The first entry in the register of Saint-Pierre-du-Nord is dated July 19, 1724 and records the baptism of Magdelene Briand, daughter of Bernard Briand and

Isabelle Saunier, both of whom were Mi'kmaq. The priest administering these rites was Claude-François de Brevant who described himself as "prestre approuvé desservant dans la paroisse de St-Pierre en l'isle St Jean au déffaut d'un curé." Entries by Brevant span the period July 19 to September 16, 1724.

Of the first six entries, no less than five involve Mi'kmaq people. Such entries may be found sprinkled throughout the register. These confirm what is well known from other sources, namely that the French expended considerable efforts to have the native people embrace the Roman Catholic faith. These entries not infrequently list French inhabitants as witnesses to church rites involving native people and as godparents in the case of baptisms. This confirms the considerable degree of social intercourse which existed between the French settlers and the Mi'kmaq people.

What the first entry and other early entries also tell us is that in 1724 Saint-Pierre-du-Nord was a parish in its own right, not an adjunct to the parish of Port-LaJoye. Moreover, a church existed in the settlement at this time. A burial entry of August 24, 1724 reads "inhumés dans l'église." Several marriage entries subsequently state that the people were "assemblés dans l'église." The church may have been built in 1724 or possibly a



Only the  
parish  
registers of  
Saint-Pierre-  
du-Nord and  
Port-LaJoye  
have survived.

<sup>1</sup> Transcripts of the parish register of Saint-Pierre-du-Nord are available at the Prince Edward Island Archives and Records Office, at the Centre d'études acadiennes (CEA), Université de Moncton, and at the National Archives of Canada (NAC), Ottawa. Microfilm copies of the original register are held by the CEA and NAC.