

## “The Battle of Grand Pré”: The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and the Commemoration of Acadian History

Roger Marsters

Volume 36, Number 1, Autumn 2006

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad36\\_1art02](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad36_1art02)

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

### ISSN

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Marsters, R. (2006). “The Battle of Grand Pré”: The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and the Commemoration of Acadian History. *Acadiensis*, 36(1), 29–50.

### Article abstract

In the 1920s and 1930s members of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) debated how best to represent the past’s ethnic and linguistic diversity. Some board members espoused a “bicultural” view of Canadian history that aimed to subsume francophone and anglophone experience in a unified civic history, posited as a corrective to the linguistic strife then vexing Canada. The HSMBC’s commemorative projects at Grand Pré, Nova Scotia, forced members to confront entrenched ethnic and linguistic rivalries — conflict that challenged and finally undermined their commitment to this incipient biculturalism.

# “The Battle of Grand Pré”: The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and the Commemoration of Acadian History

ROGER MARSTERS

*Dans les années 1920 et 1930, les membres de la Commission des lieux et monuments historiques du Canada (CLMHC) discutèrent de la meilleure façon de représenter la diversité ethnique et linguistique de ce passé. Certains membres de la Commission adoptèrent une vision « biculturelle » de l’histoire du Canada qui visait à subsumer l’expérience francophone et anglophone dans une histoire civique unifiée, présentée comme un remède au conflit linguistique qui affligeait alors le Canada. Les projets commémoratifs de la CLMHC à Grand-Pré, en Nouvelle-Écosse, forcèrent ses membres à faire face aux rivalités ethniques et linguistiques solidement ancrées, qui remirent en question et finalement minèrent leur engagement envers ce biculturalisme naissant.*

*In the 1920s and 1930s members of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) debated how best to represent the past’s ethnic and linguistic diversity. Some board members espoused a “bicultural” view of Canadian history that aimed to subsume francophone and anglophone experience in a unified civic history, posited as a corrective to the linguistic strife then vexing Canada. The HSMBC’s commemorative projects at Grand Pré, Nova Scotia, forced members to confront entrenched ethnic and linguistic rivalries — conflict that challenged and finally undermined their commitment to this incipient biculturalism.*

THE YEAR 2005 MARKED THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY of the beginning of the forced deportation of three-quarters of the Acadian population of Nova Scotia. Thirteen thousand men, women and children were driven from homes and farms cultivated by their ancestors over several generations. The anniversary was observed with due solemnity at Grand Pré, the symbolic heart of Acadia on 28 July, a date proclaimed by Canada’s governor general in 2003 as an annual “Day of Commemoration of the Great Upheaval” in recognition of the tragic centrality of the Grand Dérangement to the history and culture of the Acadian people.<sup>1</sup> The anniversary

1 The contentious reaction to this proclamation in Parliament demonstrates the continuing vitality of debates over culpability for the Grand Dérangement. See Canada, *House of Commons Debates* (11 February 2004), pp. 1755-1850. I offer my thanks to David Sutherland, Jerry Bannister and Shirley

was accompanied by an outpouring of scholarly and popular writing on the Acadian past, exemplified by John Mack Faragher's substantial 2005 synthesis *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from their American Homeland*.<sup>2</sup> It is significant that Faragher is a Yale University professor of colonial American history and not a historian of Canada or of the Atlantic Provinces: as P.D. Clarke contends in his provocative response to the Atlantic Canada Studies Conference XIII in 2000, Acadian history has been largely and conspicuously absent from the work of the "Acadiensis generation" of regional scholars writing in English from the 1970s onward.<sup>3</sup> In Clarke's view, the dominant historiographical framework of that generation is a thoroughly materialist one concerned with analyzing the Maritime Provinces' subordinate position in the Canadian political economy. Seeking to redress myths of Maritime conservatism with evidence of the region's embrace of economic modernism, these scholars were unable to come to terms with Acadian culture's perceived "backward, monolithic, Catholic, and corporatist" character.<sup>4</sup> Asserting a unified regionalism developed in the face of central Canadian economic and political predation, they were unable to accommodate Acadia's radical difference and to envision the region, and by extension the nation, as fundamentally bicultural.

This apparent neglect of Acadian history by English-language historians in Canada from the 1970s onwards must be seen as something of a novelty. As Peter Pope has recently noted, Acadian history generally and that of the Grand Dérangement in particular had been a dominant consideration of Nova Scotia's pre-Confederation historiography.<sup>5</sup> Brook Taylor illustrated in 1989 how debates over the Acadian past

Tillotson for their responses to earlier drafts of this paper and to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful suggestions, particularly those regarding additional readings and references.

- 2 John Mack Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from their American Homeland* (New York, 2005).
- 3 While Clarke's thesis – that English-language Atlantic Canadian studies have, since the 1970s, been dominated by a "cadre" of scholars staking political claims based on the limited identity "Maritimer" and who privilege materialist analysis over considerations of culture and so exclude Acadian experience from their work – is an elegant one, it requires qualification. Contemporary scholars of the region writing in English, including many whose work has appeared in *Acadiensis*, address Acadian history (pre- and post-Expulsion) extensively in their studies. Distinguished recent examples include N.E.S. Griffiths, *From Migrant to Acadian: A North American Border People, 1604-1755* (Montreal, 2005) and John Reid et al., *The "Conquest" of Acadia, 1710: Imperial, Colonial, and Aboriginal Constructions* (Toronto, 2004). A brief sampling of this extensive literature includes Sheila Andrew, *The Development of Elites in Acadian New Brunswick, 1861-1881* (Montreal, 1996); Brenda Dunn, Sally Ross and Birgitta Wallace, *Looking Into Acadia: Three Illustrated Studies* (Halifax, 1998); A.J.B. Johnston, *Control and Order in French Colonial Louisbourg, 1713-1758* (East Lansing, Michigan, 2001); George Rawlyk, *Nova Scotia's Massachusetts: A Study of Massachusetts-Nova Scotia Relations, 1630 to 1784* (Montreal, 1973); Sally Ross, *Les écoles acadiennes en Nouvelle-Ecosse, 1758-2000* (Moncton, 2001); George F.G. Stanley, "The Flowering of the Acadian Renaissance", in David Bercuson and Phillip Buckner, eds., *Eastern and Western Perspectives: Papers from the Joint Atlantic Canada/Western Canadian Studies Conference* (Toronto, 1981); and M. Brook Taylor, "The Poetry and Prose of History: Evangeline and the Historians of Nova Scotia", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 23, 1-2 (1988), pp. 46-67. For a recent bilingual collection, see René-Gilles LeBlanc, *Du Grand Dérangement à la déportation: Nouvelles perspectives Historiques* (Moncton, 2005).
- 4 P.D. Clarke, "L'Acadie perdue; Or, Maritime History's Other", *Acadiensis* XXX, 1 (2000), p. 75.
- 5 Peter Pope, "Comparisons: Atlantic Canada", in Daniel Vickers, ed., *A Companion to Colonial America* (Malden, MA, 2003).

were central to the emergence of a distinctive tradition of English-language historical writing in late-19th-century Nova Scotia and to the development of cultural institutions founded to support it.<sup>6</sup> Acadian history was also central to the works of the first generation of professional historians to examine the region's past, most evident in Columbia University historian John Bartlett Brebner's 1927 *New England's Outpost: Acadia before the Conquest of Canada*.<sup>7</sup> Much of this earlier work, though, prefigured the "othering" of Acadian culture that Clarke sees in the more recent historiographical tradition as it was either indifferent or actively hostile to contemporary Acadian aspirations. A lesser-known tendency, embodied in the writings and commemorative activities of a number of Anglo-Canadian historians and heritage activists in the first decades of the 20th century was, however, much more sympathetic to the history and aspirations of Franco-Canadians generally and of Acadians in particular. These intellectuals – William Douw Lighthall, Adam Shortt and Arthur Doughty among others – espoused a bicultural vision of Canadian nationhood and sought to ground it in a reading of history that, they hoped, gave due attention to both French and English cultural legacies. In the 1920s and 1930s this avowedly bicultural view of the Canadian past encountered both an earlier British imperialist historical perspective and an emerging Acadian nationalist one on the historically troubled ground of Grand Pré.

As P.D. Clarke's allegations against contemporary scholarship demonstrate, these questions remain vital for regional and national historians in the 21st century. Accordingly, this article traces the course of early-20th century attempts by certain Anglo-Canadian intellectuals to imagine a bicultural nationalism and examines the commemoration of Acadian history at Grand Pré as an arena of historiographical contention within which the perils and limitations of a bicultural approach become apparent. Beginning with a sketch of contemporary anglophone biculturalism, the article examines the ambiguous status of Acadian history generally, and of the Grand Dérangement in particular, in English-language historiography of the late-19th and early-20th centuries as well as the role of the Historical Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) in promulgating an official Canadian public history in the first decades of the 20th century. It then examines debates over commemoration of Grand Pré's past engaged in by the board's chief Maritime Provinces' representatives John Clarence Webster and D.C. Harvey. In the course of attempting to forge a consensus on the appropriate means of commemorating the bitter legacy of the Grand Dérangement, Webster, the Maritime Provinces' chief proponent of bicultural nationalism, was ultimately forced to recognize both the incommensurability of contemporary historical perspectives and the difficulty of framing a bicultural history of both a region and a nation born in inter-ethnic conflict.

Attempts by Anglo-Canadian intellectuals to forge a coherent account of the national past sufficiently broad to comprehend both anglophone and francophone experience, as well as one that might serve as an agent of national unity, is the subject

6 M. Brook Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans: Historiography in Nineteenth-Century English Canada* (Toronto, 1989), pp. 186-204.

7 John Bartlett Brebner, *New England's Outpost: Acadia before the Conquest of Canada* (New York, 1927).

of a well-established and persistent historiography. Ian E. Wilson's study of scholar Adam Shortt and archivist Arthur Doughty examines the substance of their proposed binational or bicultural history, one which its authors felt had clear political implications for the development of the Canadian nation. They hoped, Wilson notes, that a "common historiography and historical tradition would do much to give Canadians a unity and common approach to national issues. But above all, historical study, in its broadest sense encompassing all aspects of the life of society, provided a suitable education for informed citizens, enabling each to take his rightful place in national life".<sup>8</sup> Shortt's and Doughty's views are examined in closer detail by Carl Berger, who likewise documents George Wrong's contemporary admiration for the apparent stability of Quebec society and identifies Wrong with contemporaries who sought to create an *entente cordiale* between Quebec and English Canada: "Wrong wrote within a tradition of English-Canadian literature on Quebec that endeavoured to reconcile differences and promote a better understanding through sympathetic interpretations of its history and culture".<sup>9</sup> The histories of Shortt, Doughty and Wrong were explicitly intended to serve larger civic goals.

Alan Gordon offers a more recent examination of the efforts of anglophone intellectuals, particularly those centred in Montreal, to appropriate the French Canadian past for patriotic purposes. Gordon traces the late-19th- and early-20th-century commemorative work of heritage activists such as William Douw Lighthall, individuals who admired an idealized vision of French Canadian society and who sought to incorporate it into a "bicultural interpretation of modern Canada". Gordon traces the parallel emergence of a distinct francophone commemorative movement in Quebec in the first decades of the 20th century and its connection to the contemporary formulation of French Canadian nationalisms. Analysing the encounter between this Québécois commemorative tradition and the civic history promulgated by anglophone enthusiasts and Anglo-dominated agencies including the HSMBC, Gordon concludes that francophone activists' perspectives did not accord with anglophones' teleological "national narrative", which maintained "Native peoples were gradually overcome by the settlers and soldiers of French absolutism, who themselves eventually succumbed to Great Britain's superior civilization".<sup>10</sup>

The pervasiveness of this view must be qualified by an awareness that the board failed to sustain a coherent definition of "national history", a failure that Gordon himself recognizes.<sup>11</sup> C.J. Taylor, for his part, demonstrates that the diverse regional nature of Canada prevented the HSMBC from developing a single, unified definition of

8 I.E. Wilson, "Shortt and Doughty: The Cultural Role of the Public Archives of Canada, 1904-1935", *The Canadian Archivist/L'Archiviste canadien*, 2, 4 (1973), pp. 10-11.

9 Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing since 1900* (Toronto, 1986), p. 17.

10 Alan Gordon, *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montréal's Public Memories, 1891-1930* (Montreal, 2001), pp. 52-3, 63. The literature on historical memory and commemoration in Quebec, like its counterparts in the rest of Canada, is both extensive and growing. For introductions to this work see also Jocelyn Létourneau, *A History for the Future: Rewriting Memory and Identity in Quebec* (Montreal, 2004); Ronald Rudin, *Founding Fathers: The Celebration of Champlain and Laval in the Streets of Quebec, 1878-1908* (Toronto, 2003); and Jacques Mathieu and Jacques Lacoursière, *Les mémoires québécoises* (Sainte-Foy, QC, 1991).

11 Gordon, *Making Public Pasts*, p. 70.

“national significance” as embodied in its commemorative activity.<sup>12</sup> Board members lobbied for recognition of sites in the regions they represented, often with little regard for the broader significance of the site, event or person commemorated. In the first years of the board’s existence this meant a preponderance of Ontario and Quebec sites were marked, as powerful members from these provinces dominated HSMBC deliberations.<sup>13</sup> From the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s, however, Quebec influence on the board waned as anglophone members banded together to thwart the efforts of a succession of francophone members drawn from that province’s well-developed heritage community. Canada’s regional and especially its linguistic diversity ensured that this process of historical identification and commemoration was contentious.

Given persistent ethnic and linguistic conflict, assertions of the nation’s bicultural origins were accordingly tentative and fluid. As H.V. Nelles’s wide-ranging examination of the 1908 Quebec Tercentenary celebration demonstrates, anglophone admirers of French Canadian colonial history sought to embody a vision of Canada’s bicultural history in a series of public spectacles that were altered significantly in response to French Canadians’ very different readings of historical events.<sup>14</sup> The experience of the Quebec Tercentenary demonstrated the difficulties of joining the contentious pasts of France and Britain in Canada into a single, unified historical tradition: no matter how much each population admired the other’s record of martial prowess and accomplishment, the historical actors would always remain enemies. This paradox – the attempt to “foster national consciousness by reviving sectional interests”<sup>15</sup> – repeatedly vexed attempts to celebrate Canada’s past publicly during the first half of the 20th century. Nelles’s demonstration of the problematic character of bicultural formulations of Canadian history, and his close attention to the manifold political and cultural forces shaping these formulations, offer an illuminating context for Anglo-Canadian intellectuals’ idealistic vision of French-English biculturalism as a conciliatory tool with which to forge a unified Canadian citizenry.

The efforts of Earl Grey, Doughty, Lighthall and others to reconcile Franco- and Anglo-Canadians’ histories became increasingly urgent in the second decade of the 20th century as social and political events worked to drive the communities farther apart. The Ontario Schools Question became, after 1912, a rallying point for Orange Order extremists and francophone nationalists alike. The poisonous ethnic politics surrounding recruitment during the First World War, culminating in the 1917 Conscription Crisis, further complicated the situation. Elite elements of both communities attempted to promote conciliation, organizing intercultural gatherings as a means of bridging the growing linguistic and cultural divide (i.e., the *Bonne Entente*

12 C.J. Taylor, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada’s National Historic Parks and Sites* (Montreal, 1990), p. 44. See also Shannon Ricketts, “Cultural Selection and National Identity: Establishing Historic Sites in a National Framework, 1920-1939”, *The Public Historian*, 18, 3 (1996), pp. 23-41.

13 Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, p. 47.

14 H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec’s Tercentenary* (Toronto, 1999). Earl Grey’s pairing of the English victory at the Plains of Abraham and the French victory at Ste-Foy in the commemorative events is an excellent example of the necessary malleability of bicultural formulations of the Canadian past. See pp. 78-86.

15 D.C. Harvey, “National Historic Sites in Nova Scotia”, *Dalhousie Review*, 18 (1939), p. 436.



movement), but to little avail.<sup>16</sup> In 1917 the country split deeply over the Borden government's move to institute compulsory military service, which anglophone Canada preponderantly supported and francophone Canada preponderantly opposed. The formation of the Union Government and its ratification in a divisive election created a House of Commons similarly polarized along ethnic and linguistic lines. As a result, an Anglo-Canadian majority effectively imposed conscription on Franco-Canadians, an act that profoundly unsettled ethnic and linguistic relations in the country. Historiographically, it gave tremendous impetus to French Canadian clerical nationalism, embodied in Lionel Groulx and the Action française movement. It also undermined the bicultural nationalists' claim that the traditions of Canada's founding peoples – francophones and anglophones – were equally valid.<sup>17</sup>

It is a measure of the breadth of cultural divide between francophone and anglophone Canada in the years following the First World War that the catastrophic effects of the Conscription Crisis were not widely apparent to the country's English-speaking elites. Indeed, the wave of patriotic feeling created by the war underlay the creation of a number of nominally national historical organizations, including the HSMBC in 1919 and the Canadian Historical Association (CHA) in 1922.<sup>18</sup> Neither the board nor the CHA would prove amenable to Québécois historiographical perspectives in the first decades of their existence.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, Anglo-Canadian expressions of biculturalism continued to be heard during this period. Doughty oversaw the publication of the highly regarded *Canada and Its Provinces* series during the war years and after the war continued to expand the Dominion Archives' collection and to promote it to professional historians as the basis on which "ultimate" history might still be written.<sup>20</sup>

This tentative Anglo-Canadian biculturalism was embodied within the HSMBC by New Brunswick representative John Clarence Webster, a retired Edinburgh-educated surgeon, collector and amateur historian of 18th-century North America.<sup>21</sup> Following a distinguished medical career in Europe and the United States, Webster returned to his native province in 1919 and became active in Canadian historical and heritage organizations. During his tenure from 1923 to 1950 as senior Maritime member and

16 Susan Mann, *The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec* (Montreal, 2002), pp. 203-8. See also Gordon, *Making Public Pasts*, pp. 86-7 and Berger, *Writing of Canadian History*, p. 18.

17 Mann, *Dream of Nation*, pp. 218-32. See also Gordon, *Making Public Pasts*, p. 171, summing up the consequences of 1917: "The Great War's conscription crisis compelled French Canadians to accept a fundamental opposition between their interests and those of English-speaking Canadians and the British Empire. . . . Conscription shattered [Henri] Bourassa's balanced notion of liberalism combined with an expansive bicultural nationalism and cleared the path for Groulx's more Québec-centred reformulation of French-Canadian nationalism".

18 The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada was overseen at this time by the Dominion Parks Branch of the Department of the Interior. See Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, p. 39. An account of the development of the CHA is provided in Donald Wright, *The Canadian Historical Association: A History* (Ottawa, 2003). See also Donald Wright, *The Professionalization of History in English Canada* (Toronto, 2005).

19 Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, pp. 9-11; Gordon, *Making Public Pasts*, pp. 60-3.

20 Wilson, "Shortt and Doughty", p. 14.

21 For analysis of Webster's career as a historian and heritage activist, see Roger Marsters, "John Clarence Webster and Bicultural Nationalism: Language, Ethnicity and the Politics of

later chair of the HSMBC, Webster showed himself to be one of the board's dominant members, with a well-developed and articulated conception of national history resting largely on his view of francophone-anglophone relations in Canadian society, past and present. These views, directly influenced by the formulations of Shortt and Doughty, were characterized both by members of Webster's generation and by later commentators as "bicultural". This early-20th-century Anglo-Canadian biculturalism, unlike its later namesake, was neither consistently defined nor embodied in a program of legislative action. It served, rather, to identify a tendency to emphasize the joint contributions of the francophone and anglophone communities to the development of Canada as a modern nation – often in a conscious attempt to improve the tone of civic relations poisoned by linguistic strife and discrimination.

From the 1920s onward, Webster was presented with an unparalleled opportunity to put an activist historiography of a bicultural Canada into practice. Growing up in New Brunswick, he was familiar with the Acadian communities there and was personally acquainted with prominent Acadian cultural figures, including Senator Pascal Poirier and historian and genealogist Placide Gaudet. Webster's own historical studies and the long accumulation of his Canadiana collection gave him detailed knowledge of the brutalities and injustices that dominated Acadian history. He was, therefore, aware of the difficulties of publicly commemorating the horrors inherent in the Expulsion of the Acadians while at the same time trying to promote a view of history that sought to bridge the distance between Canada's English- and French-speaking populations.<sup>22</sup>

That the consequences of the Expulsion still vitally affected the experiences of Acadians in the Maritime Provinces in the interwar period was plainly evident. When refugee Acadians emerged from the forests or returned from exile in France or the British American colonies after the 1763 Treaty of Paris, they were forced to resettle in widely dispersed communities in marginal areas of the region. These communities existed in isolation from one another and from the dominant, anglophone society for a century, and it was not until the 1860s that Acadian institutions were established to assist in the development of Acadian professionals and of an Acadian identity.<sup>23</sup> Despite gains in the decades before and after the turn of the 20th century, Acadians remained subject to educational and economic discrimination in the 1930s and beyond. The fate of P.J. Veniot, Acadian premier of New Brunswick from 1923 to

Commemoration in Early Twentieth-Century Canada", MA thesis, Dalhousie University, 2004. See also George Stanley, "John Clarence Webster: The Laird of Shediac", *Acadiensis*, III, 1 (1973) and Gerald A. Thomas, "John Clarence Webster: The Evolution and Motivation of an Historian", MA thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1990. A full list of Webster's literary and historical works can be found in John Clarence Webster, *Those Crowded Years 1863-1944: An Octogenarian's Record of Work* (Shediac, NB, 1944), pp. 49-51. This latter work informs most biographical treatments of Webster; it was written for Webster's daughter Janet Roche, who was later interned (and died) in a Nazi concentration camp for activities with the French underground. See J.C. Webster to D.C. Harvey, 23 August 1949, Correspondence of the Public Archives, RG 53, vol. 13, Nova Scotia Archives and Record Management (NSARM).

22 An introduction to the extensive historiography of the Expulsion is provided in N.E.S. Griffiths, ed., *The Acadian Deportation: Deliberate Perfidy or Cruel Necessity?* (Toronto, 1969). A full recent treatment is provided in Geoffrey Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign Against the Peoples of Acadia* (Philadelphia, 2001); see also Faragher, *Great and Noble Scheme*.

23 Léon Thériault, "Acadia from 1763 to 1990: An Historical Synthesis", in Jean Daigle, ed., *Acadia of the Maritimes: Thematic Studies from the Beginning to the Present* (Moncton, 1995), pp. 49, 58-65.



1925, is indicative of the community's precarious position: his 1925 defeat in a provincial election divided the province along ethnic lines amidst claims of Ku Klux Klan intimidation.<sup>24</sup>

In September 1921 Webster was contacted by Father A.D. Cormier, president of the Comité de l'église-souvenir de Grand-Pré.<sup>25</sup> The Comité had been formed under the auspices of the Acadian Société Mutuelle l'Assomption for the purpose of erecting a church on lands donated by the Dominion Atlantic Railway (DAR) at Grand Pré, Nova Scotia, to serve as a permanent memorial to the Expulsion and to mark the survival of Acadian culture in the face of catastrophic disruption.<sup>26</sup> Cormier's appeal presented Acadians' contemporary accommodation with their anglophone co-citizens as the consequence of a long struggle for survival, and invited the board to participate in the commemoration of this effort to mingle "the names of our compatriots of other races . . . with those of French Acadians" inscribed on the church's walls.<sup>27</sup> Webster's response was prompt, his sentiments liberal. He assured Cormier that the region's "citizens of British ancestry" would be glad to contribute to this worthy project. The Expulsion, he asserted, stood with France's St. Bartholomew Massacre, Spain's reconquista and the United States's destruction of Indian nations as an example of signal historical injustice; only a "narrow-minded bigot or an ignoramus" could conclude otherwise. Webster welcomed the establishment of the memorial church as an opportunity to turn the historical "crimes" of the English and "provocations" of the French into "stepping-stones" on the path to a "dual nationality" based on "mutual forbearance and good-will".<sup>28</sup>

The Comité embraced the support of this distinguished English-speaking Maritimer and invited him to speak at the unveiling of the memorial church's cornerstone on 16 August 1922.<sup>29</sup> Webster's address, reported verbatim in the region's English-language newspapers, was an eloquent and impassioned plea that the rancour of the past not be perpetuated, but rather that it serve as a warning that ethnic and linguistic difference need be accommodated in order to avoid political disaster. Seeking to transcend the partisan biases that vexed assessment of Acadian history, Webster appealed to his scientific training that, he asserted, allowed him to "establish facts in an impartial and unprejudiced spirit, keeping in restraint all emotionalism". Pre-Expulsion Acadians were "peaceable by nature" and "honest, sober, industrious

24 David Frank, "The 1920s: Class and Region, Resistance and Accommodation", in E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto and Fredericton, 1993), p. 268.

25 While Webster was not yet a member of the HSMBC at this time, his reputation as a collector of Canadiana and increasingly as an amateur historian, along with his relationship to prominent Acadians, probably recommended him to Cormier and the Comité de l'église-souvenir.

26 Barbara Le Blanc, *Postcards from Acadie: Grand Pré, Evangeline & the Acadian Identity* (Kentville, NS, 2003), pp. 118-21. The DAR's goal was to promote tourist traffic on its line through the Annapolis Valley and the connecting steamship service to New England.

27 A.D. Cormier to J.C. Webster, 8 September 1921, Webster Collection, F529, Nw Brunswick Museum (NBM).

28 J.C. Webster to A.D. Cormier, 13 September 1921, Webster Collection, F529, NBM. Webster personally contributed \$500 to the Comité, stipulating that the funds be used for "the procurement of any object of art or of any other material connected with Acadian history which, in his opinion, would be worthy of safe-keeping in the proposed museum". See C.D. Hébert to J.C. Webster, 27 November 1922, Webster Collection, F529, NBM.

29 C.D. Hébert to J.C. Webster, 31 July 1922, Webster Collection, F529, NBM.

and virtuous". They were, however, subject to the unwholesome designs of French imperial agents in Quebec and Louisbourg. These designs provided unscrupulous British, or more precisely New England, authorities with justification for their criminal dispossession of the Acadian people.<sup>30</sup>

It was, Webster asserted, essential to recognize these facts and to state them openly, and it was equally essential to prevent this recognition from nourishing a renewed sense of factionalism. He warned the assembled Acadians against making improper use of their tragic heritage: "Is this structure, consecrated today by the most solemn service of your church, to be a Martyr's Memorial used for the perpetuation of a spirit of rancor and hatred against your English-speaking compatriots? If so, better that it had never been built! . . . Is it not rather to be a sacred shrine commemorating the virtues as well as the sufferings of your ancestors? As you make your pilgrimage hither in the years to come, will you not . . . carry out that precept which is inculcated by your religion, viz., to pray for your enemies?" The consequences of not tailoring the need for commemoration to the goal of reconciliation were, he added, especially dire in a bicultural nation such as Canada. The history of the 19th century had proved the permanence of the French fact in America; Canada was and would remain a "dual nation" comprising francophone and anglophone peoples. For such a nation to develop harmoniously, the history of each faction had to be understood as the common heritage of both and should be taught as such to the nation's children. Failure to do so would lead inevitably to civil war, "a calamity which would terminate the development of Canada as a nation".<sup>31</sup>

The Grand Pré celebrations were widely reported in the Canadian press, and the tone of the coverage (in the English-language press at least) largely replicated the urgent biculturalism of Webster's address. The *Montreal Gazette* saw the ceremony as an instance of the "Anglo-French unity that in less than 200 years has replaced the bitter enmity" of which the Expulsion was a spectacular expression.<sup>32</sup> The *Halifax Herald* went further, seeing in the public display of reconciliation proof of a permanent fusion of sectional interests that vouchsafed the unity of both nation and empire: "At last the breach between the races had been healed and henceforth there would be but one heart and will of Acadians to the children of British descent and of British descendents to Acadians within the confines of a great Dominion and of vaster Empire".<sup>33</sup>

Such conciliatory views had not, of course, characterized French-English relations in Canada since the Conquest, nor were they conspicuous in the historiography of the Acadian Expulsion. For nearly a century after it began in 1755, the orthodox view of the Expulsion in English-speaking British North America was that the Acadians had rejected allegiance to the British Crown and were wilfully complicit in attacks on British settlements in Nova Scotia; they therefore deserved to be dispossessed of their lands and

30 John Clarence Webster, "United in Common Loyalty and Friendship. Text of the Address Delivered by Dr. J. Clarence Webster, of Shediac, N.B. at the Dedication of the Grand Pré Memorial on August 16th, 1922", *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 21 August 1922.

31 John Clarence Webster, "United in Common Loyalty and Friendship".

32 *Montreal Gazette*, 17 August 1922.

33 *Halifax Herald*, 17 August 1922. French Canadian press coverage was similarly full, if less floridly idealistic; see, for example, *Le Devoir*, 19 August 1922.

superseded by, as Brook Taylor characterizes the attitude, “a more energetic race”. The alternative view – that the Acadians were a simple peasant people unjustly removed from their lands – was espoused by the French Abbé Guillaume-Thomas-François Raynal, but this approach won few adherents among anglophones until the 1847 publication of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie*.<sup>34</sup> The tremendous international success of this poem simultaneously provided a central myth around which dispersed Acadian communities could begin to reconstruct their cultural identities and associated British Nova Scotia with the perpetration of an especially cruel atrocity.<sup>35</sup>

Nova Scotia historians mobilized to present documentary evidence refuting the views of Longfellow’s compelling fiction. T.B. Akins used the Expulsion controversy as an opportunity to establish the Commission of Public Records at Halifax and to gather relevant documents from European repositories. Beamish Murdoch, in turn, used these documents in his three-volume *A History of Nova-Scotia, Or Acadie* to support a new reading of the Expulsion. The Acadians were fallible human beings rather than bucolic peasants and, as such, were receptive to the pressure applied from Louisbourg and Quebec. Some did indeed take part in military actions against the British at Grand Pré in 1747 and Fort Beauséjour in 1755 while all refused to take an unqualified oath of allegiance to the British Crown, a refusal that amounted to treason, and so the Acadians were legitimately subject to the dispossession meted out to them – however lamentably cruel its implementation. As rehearsed in Francis Parkman’s hugely popular and influential *Montcalm and Wolfe*, this view of the Expulsion soon became the new orthodoxy in the English-speaking world.<sup>36</sup>

Expulsion historiography developed quite differently in the French-speaking world.<sup>37</sup> The elaboration of a popular historiography of Acadian martyrdom, stoked by the popularity of *Evangeline*, was further elaborated in the work of francophone historians. The foremost exponent of this view, Abbé Henri-Raymond Casgrain, author of *Un Pèlerinage au pays d’Évangéline*, undertook archival research in Britain and France to challenge the validity of Akins’s scholarship and the historiographical tradition based on it. Charges arose that Akins had deliberately suppressed evidence of British culpability; Senator Pascal Poirier, the most prominent voice of the Acadian cultural resurgence, proclaimed Akins “more odious” than the perpetrators of the Expulsion themselves for purportedly falsifying its history.<sup>38</sup> In turn, members of the Nova Scotia Historical Society (NSHS) sought to reassert the traditional, pre-Longfellow view, in part to shore up their conservative, pro-British view of their province’s development. In 1916 the two perspectives met briefly when the NSHS

34 This discussion of the 19th-century historiography of the Expulsion relies on Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans*, pp. 186-204.

35 For a full account of the role of Longfellow’s poem in the development of the Acadian “renaissance” see Le Blanc, *Postcards from Acadie*, pp. 51-76. See also Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* (Boston, 1847).

36 Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans*, pp. 197-8. See also Beamish Murdoch, *A History of Nova Scotia, or Acadie* (Halifax, 1865-1867) and Francis Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe* (Boston, 1884).

37 For nuanced analysis of this historiography, see Robert Viau, *Les visages d’Évangéline: du poème au mythe* (Beauport, QC, 1998) and Robert Viau, *Les Grands Dérangements: La déportation des Acadiens en littératures acadienne, québécoise et française* (Beauport, QC, 1997).

38 Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans*, p. 206. See also Henri-Raymond Casgrain, *Un Pèlerinage au pays d’Évangéline* (Quebec, 1887).

invited Webster's friend, the Acadian genealogist and scholar Placide Gaudet, to speak on the Expulsion in "black and white"; Gaudet launched a blistering attack on this historical "crime", referring to the indelible bloodstain left on the memory of its authors, many of whom were heroes to society members.<sup>39</sup>

As Brook Taylor notes, "*Evangeline* aroused controversy because of its symbolic importance to the contemporary French- and English-speaking communities of the Maritimes, not because of the scholastic merits of the picture it drew".<sup>40</sup> By the early-20th century the Acadian Expulsion, and in particular its "chief scene" at Grand Pré, was laden with diverse cultural associations that were independent of and, to some extent impervious to, historical argument.<sup>41</sup> When called into the fray by Father Cormier's 1921 invitation to participate in helping create a memorial site at Grand Pré commemorating the Expulsion, Webster decided to employ "impartial" and "unemotional" analysis to the facts of Acadian history in order to redeem it from the perceived partisan distortions of nationalism and bigoted imperialism as well as to enlist it in the service of a vision of biculturalism upon which, he argued, the very survival of Canada depended.

Webster's 1922 Grand Pré speech was not the first attempt to appropriate this symbolically fraught landscape for the purposes of Canadian unity. At its inaugural meeting in 1919, one of the first sites singled out for commemoration by the fledgling HSMBC was at Grand Pré. It was not the Expulsion alone that was posited as an event of national significance, but also a military encounter between a combined Canadian-Acadian-First Nations force and a garrison of New England militia billeted in the settlement during the War of Austrian Succession. In the 11 February 1747 encounter several dozen of the New Englanders were killed including their commander, Colonel Arthur Noble, with minimal casualties to the attackers.<sup>42</sup> The order in which these events appear in the minutes of the HSMBC indicate the relative importance the board attached to the history of English- and French-speaking Canadians during the early years of the board's existence: "Grand Pré. The site of Colonel Noble's death, the gathering place of the Acadians for deportation and the point of debarkation, are spots of interest and should be marked".<sup>43</sup>

The driving force behind the motion was W.C. Milner, the first Nova Scotian representative on the HSMBC. Milner was a lawyer by profession, a former journalist and newspaper owner, a prolific writer of local history, and the Dominion Archives's

39 Anselme Chiasson, "Placide Gaudet", *Revue de l'Université de Moncton*, 3, 3 (1970), p. 125.

40 Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans*, p. 204.

41 J.C. Webster to A.D. Cormier, 13 September 1921, Webster Collection, F529, NBM. While one of the chief scenes of the Expulsion, Grand Pré was not the only site of mass deportation. That it became virtually synonymous with the events of 1755 is largely due to the influence of Longfellow's poem and subsequent efforts of the DAR and the Acadian national associations. See Graeme Wynn, "'Images of the Acadian Valley': The Photographs of Amos Lawson Hardy", *Acadiensis*, XV, 1 (1985), pp. 59-83.

42 A somewhat romanticized account of the encounter that nevertheless manages to avoid undue partisanship can be found in Archibald MacMechan, *Red Snow on Grand Pré* (Toronto, 1931), pp. 11-55. Numbers of casualties reported vary from source to source.

43 Minutes of the HSMBC, 28 October 1919, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

representative in the Maritime Provinces.<sup>44</sup> In 1919 and again in 1920 he pitched his proposal to mark Noble's death at the board's annual meetings in Ottawa. While not making any reference to Grand Pré's role in the Expulsion in his proposed commemoration, Milner linked the Noble monument to Acadian-related memorials at Grand Pré undertaken by the DAR and Acadian groups, stating that the "history of the place would not be complete without a suitable monument to Colonel Noble".<sup>45</sup> Milner was seeking a sort of parity between anglophone and francophone commemorations at Grand Pré and was willing to bypass the board if necessary to attain it. He had already contacted Prime Minister R.L. Borden, who had family ties to the region, about the prospect of erecting a "suitable monument" to Noble by subscription.

Ultimately, it was the board that bypassed Milner. A notoriously difficult man, he was unable to work effectively with his fellow board members and was removed from the HSMBC soon after its 1920 meeting.<sup>46</sup> Milner's insistence on the need for parity at Grand Pré, coloured by bitterness at his treatment by the board, would haunt the HSMBC for more than a decade. In the meantime, his proposal was revived in late 1921 when Ontario representative, E.A. Cruikshank, and Quebec representative, Benjamin Sulte, both recommended the "Battle of Grand Pré" be commemorated.<sup>47</sup> Their reading of events differed significantly from Milner's: no longer was the heroic death of Noble and his men the event's primary significance; instead, the gruelling overland journey made by the attacking force in the depths of winter was seen as a feat of exemplary (and distinctly Canadian) endurance, worthy of commemoration.<sup>48</sup> In 1923 negotiations to purchase a site for the proposed monument were overseen by new Nova Scotian board representative J. Plimsoll Edwards, the Halifax-based former president of the NSHS.<sup>49</sup> After consideration of several drafts, an inscription for the commemorative tablet was approved, its wording moved by the board's New Brunswick member John Clarence Webster and seconded by new Quebec member Victor Morin.<sup>50</sup> According to the approved inscription, Noble was "surprised and defeated" by a force that had traveled from Beaubassin under Canadian officer Coulon

44 Donald MacLeod, "Our Man in the Maritimes: 'Down East' with the Public Archives of Canada, 1872-1932", *Archivaria*, 17 (1983-84), p. 90.

45 Minutes of the HSMBC, 18 May 1920, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC.

46 C.J. Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, p. 46. Milner's ability to annoy was prodigious: in 1919, while acting as Dominion Archives representative, he established his office in the Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, customs house, forcibly displacing a group of Red Cross women who reportedly used the space to sew bandages for tuberculosis patients. See MacLeod, "Our Man in the Maritimes", p. 94.

47 E.A. Cruikshank to J.B. Harkin, 19 September 1921, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-6, LAC; B. Sulte to J.B. Harkin, 11 November 1921, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC. Sulte was a francophone imperialist of the "last cannon shot" variety: a one-time aide to George-Étienne Cartier who had translated "God Save the Queen" into French, Sulte's thinking was generally in accord with the board's anglophone members; at the same time, his extensive writing on Quebec history and his involvement with the St-Jean-Baptiste Society won him the respect of many francophones. See Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, pp. 41-2.

48 E.A. Cruikshank to J.B. Harkin, 19 November 1923, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC.

49 R.W. Tufts to J.P. Edwards, 11 May 1923, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC; see also Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, p. 73.

50 Minutes of the HSMBC, 1 June 1924, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC. Webster was appointed to the HSMBC in 1923, at the same time as Edwards. He soon became one of the board's most effective members, dominating commemorative activity in the Maritime region. Morin's advice on the Grand Pré commemoration was that the text be shortened, perhaps to accommodate a bilingual

de Villiers; Noble was killed and de Villiers later died of his wounds.<sup>51</sup> There was a sort of grim parity in this, but not one calculated to please W.C. Milner.

Pro-Noble forces meanwhile continued to solicit subscriptions for a “suitable” memorial and, in November 1924, one of their representatives, Annie Stuart of the Grand Pré Women’s Institute (GPWI), contacted Edwards to request that the HSMBC defer erecting its tablet until the outcome of private fund-raising efforts became known.<sup>52</sup> Aware of the explosive potential of a battle for possession of the symbolically potent landscape of Grand Pré, Edwards immediately forwarded the GPWI’s concerns to federal Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin for consideration by the entire board. Edwards’s covering letter made it clear that certain culturally British interests in the region wanted to have their history represented in an “imposing” manner and felt the HSMBC’s standard fieldstone cairn and bronze tablet were inadequate. They sought a monument to rival the Acadians’ memorial church, which was then under construction; Edwards’s stilted reference to this as the commemoration of “the supposed scene of an incident of the Acadian deportation of 1755 made famous by Longfellow’s poem of ‘Evangeline’”<sup>53</sup> indicated that the historiographical controversy over the Expulsion in Nova Scotia, never entirely extinguished, was threatening to burst into flame anew.

The terms of the debate soon shifted from a concern with the form of the proposed commemoration of the “Battle of Grand Pré” to the historical facts of the encounter itself. When the text of the HSMBC’s inscription became known, the GPWI vociferously objected to the board’s neutral portrayal of French and English actions, asserting that it was properly “a memorial to a brave officer and his men” who were “massacred” while protecting an imperial outpost. To view the encounter in any other way was to perpetrate an historical injustice.<sup>54</sup> Suspicion that the HSMBC inscription would appear in both English and French was likewise galling to the GPWI as the mere presence of the “enemy’s” language was deemed an affront to the heroic dead: “If this is to be a memorial to brave English soldiers who [died] in the discharge of their duty on British Territory, why should it not be in English only?”<sup>55</sup> Walter Crowe, the Cape Breton judge and publisher who succeeded Edwards as Nova Scotia’s HSMBC representative, worried that such a view displayed “a narrowness of mind”

inscription. HSMBC policy was to erect bilingual tablets in Quebec and unilingual English ones everywhere else; Morin saw this as an affront to the purportedly bicultural nature of the board, and he resigned soon after. See Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, pp. 72, 85-6.

51 Minutes of the HSMBC, 1 June 1924, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC.

52 A. Stuart to J.P. Edwards, 19 November 1924, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC.

53 J.P. Edwards to J.B. Harkin, 19 November 1924, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC.

54 The use of the term “massacre” seems a significant reinterpretation of the encounter. Francis Parkman himself portrayed it as a perfectly legitimate (even gallant) military encounter won through French endurance and tactical foresight. See Francis Parkman, *A Half-Century of Conflict*, vol. II (Boston, 1896), pp. 198-216. For the GPWI’s adoption of this term, see Mrs. A. Harris to W.W. Cory, 10 March 1926, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC. Harris was then president of the GPWI and Cory was deputy minister of the Department of the Interior.

55 A. Stuart to W. Duff, 10 March 1926, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC; see also *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 1 April 1926. Duff was the federal Member of Parliament representing Grand Pré; he forwarded Stuart’s concerns to the Department of the Interior with the expectation that they would be acted upon. See Harkin to R.A. Gibson, 27 March 1926, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.



he had hoped was no longer present in his province.<sup>56</sup> While the GPWI repeatedly asserted that it bore no ill will towards the Acadians and did not resent their commemorative efforts at Grand Pré,<sup>57</sup> the organization's increasingly partisan pronouncements suggested otherwise.

Pro-Noble forces pressed their attack on a broad front, aligning their fight against the HSMBC with the contemporary Maritime Rights movement. In February 1926 an anonymous editorialist attributed losses incurred by the governing Liberal party in recent elections to a disregard of Nova Scotians' legitimate concerns, of which the inadequate commemoration of Noble was offered as a prime example. The piece's belligerent tone, coupled with its specific criticism of the HSMBC's form of monument, no doubt strongly suggested to contemporaries that the author was former HSMBC member W.C. Milner:

What suggestion of history or patriotism or art or heroic achievement would be afforded by a cartload or two of field stones, gathered in a heap and roughly mortared together? What well regulated cemetery would tolerate such a cheap monstrosity? If we lived under the heel of some German official we might expect something of boorish indifference and ignorance, but to have those historic associations that are cherished as a matter of pride in these Provinces, and are sacred and tender reminiscences to the descendents of the pioneer and Loyalist settler, treated in a cheap, rough and rude manner, as if we were under the rule of an ignorant clown, can only increase the enmity existing towards our Ottawa rulers.<sup>58</sup>

Similar sentiments were expressed rather more temperately by prominent Halifax lawyer R.V. Harris, an officer of the NSHS, who asserted that the public would not stand for "such meagre recognition if this battle had been fought in Ontario or Quebec". Harris elaborated on the importance of commemorating the distinctly imperial significance of the event, pointing out that the battle had been fought "by men who were at that time British, to keep Nova Scotia part of the British Empire". While acknowledging the importance of "the French Acadian race" and of the "Evangeline tradition", Harris also felt it necessary to engage in a sort of mnemonic competition, asserting that a monument to Noble should "compare favourably" to Acadian memorials at Grand Pré.<sup>59</sup>

Influential allies came forward to assist Milner's group in its quest to erect a monument to British imperial heroism as a complement to the Acadians' memorial church. In late 1925 R.L. Borden, retired from electoral politics, intervened in the commemorative effort, forwarding a letter from J.F. Masters of Boston to A.A. Pinard, secretary of the HSMBC.<sup>60</sup> Masters, a prominent member of the Massachusetts Society of Colonial Wars (SCW), had been corresponding with

56 W. Crowe to J.B. Harkin, 2 April 1926, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.

57 A. Stuart to W. Duff, 10 March 1926, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.

58 Undated editorial (February 1926), *Wolfville Acadian*, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC; see also *Wolfville Acadian*, 30 May 1926.

59 R.V. Harris to J.B. Harkin, 24 February 1926, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC.

60 A.A. Pinard to J.B. Harkin, 15 December 1925, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC.

members of the NSHS about the Noble memorial and proposed that the three organizations work together to erect a single, suitably impressive monument. The SCW and NSHS had jointly devised a draft inscription which, not surprisingly, viewed the 1747 encounter rather differently than did the HSMBC. In it Noble and his men were described as “Sentinels on this frontier of the British Empire”; the monument should be erected so that “their valor not be forgotten”.<sup>61</sup> Parks Commissioner Harkin politely declined to join in this effort, noting that the HSMBC tablet was ready to be cast.<sup>62</sup> By 1926 the HSMBC was prepared to erect its memorial, but deferred action in that year and again in 1927 in light of the continuing public controversy over the issue.<sup>63</sup> By November 1927 Webster was convinced that the “local excitement” had passed and that the board could safely proceed with the marking of the site without further controversy. He adamantly maintained that the approved bilingual inscription be erected without alteration, confident in the reasonableness of the board’s choice because it stated “the exact truth”.<sup>64</sup>

During the same period, and apparently under Milner’s influence, the pro-Noble faction’s interpretation of historical truth had become increasingly narrow and strident. An undated newspaper clipping read at the HSMBC’s May 1925 meeting revived the familiar theme of Acadian complicity in the Expulsion, asserting that the 1747 encounter at Grand Pré justified subsequent extreme measures by awakening British authorities to “the insecurity of their possessions in Acadia, the inhabitants being of a foreign and hostile race, who steadily refused to take the oath of allegiance and therefore such attack became the leading reason for the order given in 1755 for the entire removal of the Acadians and their dispersion among the British colonies”.<sup>65</sup> Over the following three years anonymous editorials in a distinctly abrasive style, attributed to Milner by board members, appeared with some regularity — editorials that presented the 1747 encounter as an instance of the general Acadian disloyalty and hostility that resulted in their legitimate dispossession. Responding to one such entry in the *Wolfville Acadian*, Webster judged this interpretation of Nova Scotian history “a fine specimen of Anglo-Saxon bigotry”.<sup>66</sup>

The fullest expression of anglophile militancy, however, came in 1928 when the Grand Pré Literary and Historical Society published a brochure with the innocuous title *Grand Pré, 1745-1755*. Serving as a prospectus for the proposed memorial to Colonel

61 J.F. Masters to A.A. Pinard, 25 November 1926, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC.

62 J.B. Harkin to J.F. Masters, 15 December 1925, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC.

63 W. Crowe to J.B. Harkin, 30 January 1926, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC.; Extract of the Minutes of the HSMBC, 19 May 1927, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC.

64 J.C. Webster to J.B. Harkin, 14 November 1927, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC. See also W. Crowe to J.B. Harkin, 19 November 1927, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC. Crowe attributes the calmer atmosphere to the intervention of Rhodes Scholar, Acadia University history professor and future federal Minister of Labour Norman Rogers’s interventions in regional newspapers. Rogers argued that the bicultural nature of the event be emphasized, taking Quebec’s Wolfe-Montcalm monument as his model: “Valour gave them a common death; history a common fame; posterity a common monument”. See N. Rogers to W. Crowe, 28 May 1928, Webster Collection, F216, NBM.

65 The newspaper clipping reported on the resolutions of the Grand Pré Literary Society, including motions with wording identical to those passed earlier by the Grand Pré Women’s Institute. Clearly a coordinated campaign was under way. See “The Noble Monument,” undated newspaper clipping, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC.

66 J.C. Webster to J.B. Harkin, 7 June 1926, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC.

Noble, the brochure contained a brief biography and genealogy of the man, a description of a monument erected by the Maine Historical Society in Nobleboro, Maine, a description of the proposed monument at Grand Pré, and a list of members of the committee struck to oversee fundraising for the project. The majority of the text, however, comprises an eccentric reading of mid-18th-century North American history. To heighten the drama and significance of the 1747 fight, Grand Pré is posited as “the centre of the stage” of an imperial conflict stretching from Versailles to India, whose fortunes favoured now England, now France. By the winter of 1747 Colonel Noble and his men were all that stood against France’s re-conquest of Nova Scotia and, it is implied, the conquest of Britain’s remaining North American colonies. In a twist on the traditional historiography that served to emphasize their treachery and culpability, Acadians are portrayed as industrious, peace-loving peasants who nonetheless revolted against a mild and just British rule. Not only the strategic situation, but also the demands of justice required their removal. Seeking a documentary basis for their bold hypothesis, the authors quote a single 1745 letter from New France’s governor the Marquis de Beauharnois to French Minister of Marine the Comte de Maurepas as definitive proof of Acadians’ general desire to revolt against the British. If the implications of this reading of history for the developing ethnic rivalry at Grand Pré were not clear enough, the authors closed their brochure with the observation that their monument would be erected “on the height overlooking Evangeline Memorial Park”.<sup>67</sup>

As disturbing as the brochure’s skewed reading of Acadian history was the list of committee members endorsing it, which included many prominent Nova Scotians. Moreover, the brochure makes specific mention of a prominent former politician’s support for the establishment, as part of the commemorative efforts, of a “historical museum”: “The oldest wooden house in the county, if not the Province, erected by one of the first settlers from New England . . . has been secured for the purpose, through the generosity of Sir Robert L. Borden, G.C.M.G., former Prime Minister of Canada”.<sup>68</sup> Borden’s apparent commitment to the pro-Noble forces prompted Webster to intervene in an attempt to prevent a historiographical conflict from spilling over into the already-charged public arena of French-English relations in the Maritimes. Crowe, the Nova Scotia representative on the HSMBC, seemed paralysed by the controversy and, under direct political pressure, finally advocated ceding commemoration of the event to advocates of the Noble memorial at Grand Pré.<sup>69</sup> Webster, by contrast, grew increasingly impatient with the HSMBC’s deferrals in the face of local opposition, fearing that the Acadian population would associate the board with Milner’s bigotry.<sup>70</sup>

Demonstrating the executive ability that characterized his career as a cultural activist, Webster wrote to Borden directly. He outlined his view that the agitation for a Noble monument was little more than a vindictive move by the “mischief-maker”

67 Grand Pré Literary and Historical Society, *Grand Pré, 1745-1755* (n.p., c. 1928), Webster Collection, S194, NBM.

68 Grand Pré Literary and Historical Society, *Grand Pré, 1745-1755*.

69 W. Crowe to J.B. Harkin, 1 June 1928, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC; W. Crowe to J.C. Webster, 11 June 1928, Webster Collection, F141, NBM; J.C. Webster to J.B. Harkin, 18 March 1929, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC; W. Crowe to J.B. Harkin 23 March 1929, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.

70 J.C. Webster to J.B. Harkin, 7 November 1928, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.

and “contemptible agitator” W.C. Milner, who remained bitter after his removal from the HSMBC. Webster warned Borden against aligning himself with such an “unsavoury person” and the false view of history he represented. Most importantly, Webster warned against contributing to a controversy that threatened to re-open the unhealed wounds of the Expulsion: “You must be well aware that Grand Pré has only bitter memories for the Acadians. They cannot be blamed for being aroused by this fresh irritation. Surely, no step should be taken to fan the embers into a flame of criticism which might cause a repercussion of undesirable magnitude”.<sup>71</sup> Borden replied the next day, stating imperiously that he had not aligned himself with Milner and knew nothing of the “rather tiresome disputes” outlined by Webster. He had, Borden asserted, merely donated a house to be used as a community hall. In terms of the HSMBC, he asserted that it could have been more even-handed in its treatment of the opposing forces, concluding “Pray do not forget the New Englanders and their Canadian cousins, as well as the Acadians, have their susceptibilities”.<sup>72</sup>

Undaunted, Webster replied that the views of contemporary New Englanders were immaterial to the validity of the historical facts at issue between Milner’s faction and the board, adding that some Americans (and, by implication, their supporters) had the “irritating habit of distorting history to suit their purposes”. Webster insisted that the HSMBC, in contrast, merely presented facts about events of national significance, and was especially careful to remain objective when matters of race or religion were concerned: “We are not partisans, and it is not our place to deal in superlatives”.<sup>73</sup> He noted that prominent Acadians, including A.D. Cormier and Placide Gaudet, supported the board’s actions and feared the implications of so prominent a Canadian as Borden aligning himself with a clearly prejudicial view of history.<sup>74</sup> Eventually, Borden acknowledged that he had consented to his donated house being developed as the “Noble Memorial Museum” while also admitting that Noble’s actions were not remarkable: “He was a gallant man and fought bravely but was not otherwise distinguished”. Borden likewise sought to distance himself from the excesses of the pro-Noble campaign and its leader: “W.C. Milner’s contributions to the Press on the subject are becoming rather tiresome”.<sup>75</sup>

By early 1929 the board’s inactivity contrasted sharply with ongoing efforts aimed at the erection of a privately funded memorial to Noble, now officially incorporated under the pretentious title “The Grand Pre Battle Fields Commission” (GPBC).<sup>76</sup>

71 J.C. Webster to R.B. Borden, 7 November 1928, Webster Collection, F216, NBM.

72 R.B. Borden to J.C. Webster, 9 November 1928, F216, NBM. Borden had in fact been consulted on the wording of the HSMBC inscription as early as 1926; his only suggestion then was that the word “Indiens” be replaced with “les sauvages” in the French translation. See R.B. Borden to W.W. Cory, 9 January 1926, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1194, HS6-7, LAC.

73 J.C. Webster to R.B. Borden, 13 November 1928, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.

74 J.C. Webster to R.B. Borden, 13 November 1928, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.

75 R.B. Borden to J.C. Webster, 30 July 1929, Webster Collection, F216, NBM.

76 A.B. Almon to J.C. Webster, 6 April 1929, Webster Collection, F216, NBM. This body clearly took inspiration for its title, if not its underlying philosophy, from the National Battlefields Commission, formed in association with the bi-cultural pageantry of the Quebec Tercentenary in 1908. See Nelles, *Art of Nation-Building*, p. 95; see also Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, p. 23. Nelles’s precedent in *Art of Nation-Building* has been used in the author’s references to this commission; the acronym is GPBC because Nelles shortened “Battle Fields” to “Battlefields”.

While Webster continued to maintain that adherence to documented, objective historical fact was sufficient response to controversies generated by partisan interpretations of the past, senior civil servants at the Department of the Interior were less sure. Necessarily more attuned to the political implications of a prolonged, divisive debate split along ethnic and linguistic lines, Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin advised his superiors to approach the Grand Pré question with caution. Outlining the controversy to Deputy Minister of the Interior W.W. Cory, and noting Webster's increasing impatience with further delays in proceeding with the HMSBC marker, Harkin summed up the situation and offered his recommendation: "You will observe that we have all the setting for an unfortunate fight. My own opinion is that we should do everything possible to avoid such a fight. I feel that inaction is the better policy".<sup>77</sup>

While Webster repeatedly warned the board that further delay would only incite understandable resentment, Acadian activists themselves seemed prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to effect a rapprochement with the pro-Noble forces.<sup>78</sup> In March 1930 Nova Scotia Liberal Member of Parliament J.L. Ilsley informed Minister of the Interior Charles Stewart of a remarkable proposal designed to accommodate the desire of anglophone interests to include Noble in the broader commemorative context of Grand Pré. According to François G.J. Comeau, long-time DAR employee and liaison between the railway and Acadian groups, members of the Comité de l'église-souvenir de Grand-Pré were reportedly prepared to accept the erection of a memorial to Noble inside the Evangeline Memorial Park itself.<sup>79</sup> More than this, some even considered the possibility of hanging portraits of Charles Lawrence and John Winslow – the two figures most directly responsible for the planning and execution of the Expulsion – inside the memorial church, the symbolic heart of the Acadian culture. "Monuments are erected to record historical facts", they reportedly reasoned, and as long as an inscription to Noble was not unduly provocative there would be no objection.<sup>80</sup> Such an extreme concession is a measure of the Acadian community's clear desire not to antagonize the dominant anglophone society.

While this improbable-seeming solution was not adopted, the rhetorical tone of the Grand Pré controversy cooled markedly in 1930 in deference to the approaching completion of the memorial church, its 22 August ceremonial inauguration and the patriotic, bicultural press it generated. Webster, having earlier translated Comité promotional materials into English, was invited to speak at the ceremony.<sup>81</sup> He used

77 J.B. Harkin to W.W. Cory, 1 October 1929, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.

78 J.C. Webster to J.B. Harkin, 17 November 1929, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC; J.C. Webster to J.B. Harkin, 7 December 1930, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC; Minutes of the HSMBC, 16 May 1930, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC. At the 1930 meeting Webster attributed Acadian resentment to the board's reluctance to erect its historically accurate marker rather than to the GPBC's sometimes belligerent campaign to erect a memorial to a British imperial "hero" designed to literally overshadow their memorial church. Regardless, the decision to erect the marker was again deferred.

79 For an overview of Comeau's role in the development of Acadian memorials at Grand Pré, see Le Blanc, *Postcards from Acadie*, pp. 84, 123.

80 J.L. Ilsley to C. Stewart, 11 March 1930, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.

81 F.S. Allard to J.C. Webster, 15 October 1929, Webster Collection, F529, NBM.

the opportunity of his Grand Pré trip to meet with members of the GPBC in order to gauge their receptivity to a moderate solution to the Noble controversy. Webster favoured an arrangement that would allow for the construction of a separate monument for Noble while preserving historical accuracy and refraining from reopening the historical wounds of the Expulsion. His speech at the inauguration, Webster informed Harkin beforehand, would likewise be low-key – stressing the educational aspects of the memorial church’s museum while “steer[ing] clear of the Deportation question as far as possible”.<sup>82</sup> At the event Webster did avoid direct reference to the Expulsion, but he could not resist referring to the ongoing commemorative rivalry at Grand Pré. Addressing a crowd estimated to number 5,000,<sup>83</sup> he asserted that some viewed the erection of Acadian memorials at Grand Pré as a sinister development tending towards exclusive nationalist sentiment that would destroy the social peace of the region. The proponents of such sentiment, he countered, were “but a few morbid individuals”; Maritimers had been tolerant of one another’s differences for generations as the “two races had learned to practice consideration and good will, each towards the other”. Developments such as the Grand Pré memorial church could only serve to promote this “good will”, fostering as it did “respect for traditions, love of country, pride in ancestors”.<sup>84</sup>

Webster’s meetings with members of the GPBC were similarly conciliatory. He remained firm that, as the HSMBC’s mandate was to publicize precise historical facts about persons and events of national significance, it would be inappropriate for the board’s inscription to glorify any one side in the Grand Pré encounter. He was able to satisfy them, however, that rumoured differences between the French and English inscriptions did not in fact exist. With regard to the monument itself, which Milner had repeatedly characterized as “a heap of field stones”, Webster was able to offer them the alternative of a solid, cut- and dressed-stone cairn that the board had recently begun to use to mark historical sites. At the end of Webster’s visit representatives of the Women’s Institute invited him to return in the autumn to further “explain the whole situation”. Content with the result of his efforts, Webster concluded that “Milner carries no weight any more”.<sup>85</sup> Subsequent events seemed to bear this out, as moderate members of the GPBC began to contact the board with proposals for joint unveilings and a collaborative guidebook to points of historic interest in the area.<sup>86</sup> Webster attributed this new moderation not simply to Milner’s apparently waning influence, but also to the failure of the GPBC’s subscription campaign for the Noble monument.<sup>87</sup>

By late 1931 matters had cooled to the point that Webster felt comfortable turning the sensitive Grand Pré file over to the board’s newly appointed Nova Scotian member D.C. Harvey.<sup>88</sup> Harvey was a dynamic intellectual, one of a new generation

82 J.C. Webster to J.B. Harkin, July 1930, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.

83 Le Blanc, *Postcards from Acadie*, p. 128.

84 “Racial Prejudice Deprecated”, *Montreal Gazette*, 22 August 1930.

85 J.C. Webster to A.A. Pinard, 22 August 1930, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC. Accompanying this letter was an artist’s sketch of the GPBC’s proposed Noble monument, a colossal granite obelisk on a massive base, towering over the willows of Grand Pré.

86 R.V. Harris to J.B. Harkin, 23 September 1930, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.

87 J.C. Webster to J.B. Harkin, 1 November 1930, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.

88 J.C. Webster to J.B. Harkin, 1 December 1931, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.



of Canadian professional historians, a professor at Dalhousie University and head of the recently opened Public Archives of Nova Scotia in Halifax.<sup>89</sup> An effective administrator and sharp wit, Harvey was nonetheless immediately vexed by the seemingly intractable historiographical impasse he had inherited at Grand Pré. Pressed by Harkin to recommend whether the long-deferred HSMBC monument should at last be erected, Harvey politely suggested it again be deferred, adding “If I wrote as I felt I should speak in much stronger terms but I shall not descend to their type of language but rather get on with what can be done in peace”.<sup>90</sup> What could be done, it seems, was very little. In 1932 Milner at last left the region, moving to Toronto, prompting Harvey to hope that matters would proceed.<sup>91</sup> Instead, the matter was again deferred at annual meetings of the HSMBC in 1932 and 1933 with Harvey concluding that the “controversy has dragged along now for so many years that another year does not matter”.<sup>92</sup>

However, in the summer of 1934 the GPBC started to fall apart, frustrated in its effort to raise sufficient funds for the Noble monument in a time of deepening economic crisis. Milner reappeared on the scene and tried to gain control of the failing organization by holding an illegal meeting of the GPBC with two other members and electing himself president. Several days later the full board of the organization met, re-established control, and immediately passed a motion withdrawing its objection to the HSMBC monument. The controversy that had begun so dramatically in 1924 collapsed into farce a decade later. Harvey made no attempt to conceal his delight: “Though I used to be worried about Grand Pré I am getting rather a kick out of the last moments of Milner and his following”.<sup>93</sup>

The battles waged at Grand Pré in the 1920s and 1930s profoundly influenced Webster’s career as a heritage activist and public historian. In 1923, as a new member of the HSMBC, his faith in the power of documented historical fact and his vision of biculturalism were as yet untried. He was convinced they were proof against all disagreements, even the founding controversies of Canadian nationhood: the linguistic and cultural relations of francophone and anglophone communities and the legacy of the Conquest. He was equally convinced that survival of the Canadian nation in the 20th century required explicit recognition and acceptance of the difference between the two communities. The reaction of the Acadian committee, however, suggests that many Acadians – historically marginal, impoverished and still subject to overt discrimination – were not always eager to be recognized as vociferously as well-meaning anglophones might like. Despite the political and cultural successes of the contemporary Acadian “renaissance”, the wounds of 1755 were far from healed. The events of the 1920s made this abundantly clear to Webster and like-minded supporters of a bicultural historiography. Consulted in 1928 about the possibility of an HSMBC monument to the Acadian deportations, he responded, somewhat wearily, “I would suggest that if ever a memorial is to deal with the expulsion, it should be at the place which is of most importance, viz. Grand Pré. But

89 Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, p. 93.

90 D.C. Harvey to J.B. Harkin, 23 December 1931, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.

91 D.C. Harvey to J.B. Harkin, 14 April 1932, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.

92 D.C. Harvey to J.B. Harkin, 8 February 1933, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.

93 D.C. Harvey to J.B. Harkin, 11 June 1934, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1195, HS6-7, LAC.

in view of the storm raised over the Noble fight, I believe it will be a long time before the Board will venture to do anything with the matter".<sup>94</sup>

Webster's experience at Grand Pré forced him to recognize that an empirical, "objective" historiography was of limited utility when confronted with a committed, partisan reading of the past that was maintained regardless of the documentary record. It also impressed upon him the fact that Canada's francophone and anglophone populations, particularly when viewing the country's colonial past, were as prone to division as to unity. His conception of a bicultural historiography was influenced by the late-19th-century conception of the co-existence of two linguistic communities vouchsafed by British constitutional liberty and the protection of empire, a common view among anglophones and francophones alike in the pre-First World War period. This view prized civic harmony above all, sacrificing, at times, the demands of justice to attain it.<sup>95</sup> Early-20th-century ethnic rivalries, culminating in the 1917 Conscription Crisis, largely discredited this variety of biculturalism among Canadian francophones, a development that was not immediately evident to Anglo-Canadian heritage activists. Webster was thus able to advocate Acadian rights at Grand Pré in the 1920s in the name of biculturalism (and "objective" historiography) in the face of strident, and at times bigoted, imperialist agitation.

It is indeed questionable whether the view of biculturalism formulated by Doughty, Webster and other English-Canadian activists and historians ever had much influence beyond a narrow circle of elite intellectuals. As H.V. Nelles demonstrates in his analysis of the Quebec Tercentenary, for example, no matter how precisely Earl Grey and his supporters defined the import of the celebrations they were viewed quite differently by the manifold populations that participated in them.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, the evident and growing reluctance of Webster and others to explicitly advocate biculturalism from the early 1930s onward was very much in keeping with the fragmented and delicately balanced Canadian federal political scene in this period. The Conscription Crisis and consequent division of the country's cultural and political life along linguistic lines profoundly affected all aspects of federal government intervention in Canadian life. The resistance shown by HSMBC members to strong

94 J.C. Webster to J.B. Harkin, 14 June 1928, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1206, HS 6-48, LAC. Indeed, the Grand Pré site was not "plaqued" until 1938; the monument was a bilingual one, with the English text reading "The Attack at Grand Pré: On February 11, 1747, Grand Pré was the scene of a surprise attack on Col. Arthur Noble's detachment of British troops from Massachusetts who were billeted in the houses of the inhabitants. A French and Indian force under Coulon de Villiers broke into the British quarters at 3 A.M. during a blinding snowstorm, and in the close fighting, Noble and about 70 of his men were killed. On the 12th the British capitulated on the condition that they be allowed to return to Annapolis Royal. The French departed soon after; and the British resumed their uneasy possession of mainland Nova Scotia". The French text reads substantially the same, but characterizes the event as "La Bataille de Grand-Pré".

95 An example of this is Pascal Poirier's support of the 1905 Manitoba Schools Act. While this legislation was clearly not in the interests of francophone minority rights, Poirier was willing to support it to ensure the "good will" of the majority. Acadians' political and economic marginality frequently led their leaders to make such compromises during this period. See Gerard Beaulieu, "Pascal Poirier: Premier Sénateur Acadien (1852-1933)", MA thesis, University of Ottawa, 1971, p. 63.

96 J.C. Webster to W.D. Cromarty, 28 March 1949, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 1055, FB318, LAC; see also Nelles, *Art of Nation-Building*, pp. 10-11.

Quebec representation undoubtedly reflected the fact that the board was largely irrelevant in francophone heritage circles; indeed, by the late 1930s the federal Parks Branch began to intervene directly in HSMBC operations to ensure adequate francophone representation both within Quebec and outside it,<sup>97</sup> a development that further demonstrated the feebleness of anglophone members' older formulation of biculturalism. The board's prolonged debacle at Grand Pré in the 1920s and 1930s rehearsed these fundamental tensions of Canadian national life in an especially resonant forum.

97 Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, p. 125. The appointment of the highly political future Dominion Archivist, Gustave Lanctôt, especially disturbed Webster. See also J.C. Webster to D.C. Harvey, 2 December 1937, Correspondence of the Public Archives, RG 53, vol. 7, NSARM.